

# Limelight

## 1. Religious Protestor



Photographer, John Craig.

### **Protestor**

Sons and daughters, I am saddened to see you all here today. I fear you do not see in proper light, the true danger of having a playhouse licensed, how it will eclipse the good order of our dear city.

The theatre brings alarming consequences to the interest of morality. The youth of today are easily led astray. To think the theatre shall have performances through the winter, where our sons and

daughters may conceal themselves by the darkness of night is repugnant. Their morals will be irrevocably lost.

My children, a mind debauched by the theatre is held in captivity to pleasure. Turn away and leave this place and save your immortal souls. Never since the creation of the world was religion so openly affronted as upon the stage, never have holy scriptures been so abused.

Theatre is the pest of society. Destructive are the flames communicated to us by the theatre, put there to spread this infection of damnation. Just think, my child, if ever there were an enchanted spot about which the enemy of mankind was permitted to infatuate, Bristol Old Vic seems to be the place.

You have been warned of the approaching evil, it is not too late to escape and save your souls. But, if you do continue onwards, be upon your guard...

#### **Heritage bite:**

*When the plan to erect a new theatre on King Street was leaked to the press in September 1764, the response was mixed to say the least. Many people saw the proposal as a good thing, with the city's economy booming, it was a matter of civic pride that Bristol had a theatre worthy of its status as the leading provincial city in England. Others were less convinced. One particular local merchant was so horrified he immediately set to work on a pamphlet condemning the proposal.*

*In his opinion, building a new theatre would introduce a great evil into the city and the 'calamitous and direful effects of Plays' would eclipse all its 'the good Order and Government'. The artform of theatre, was the 'most dangerous that ever the avowed Enemy of Mankind could have devised for their Destruction'. It was, put simply, a 'School of Debauchery, and a Nursery of Profaneness'.*

*His opinion was in keeping with his Quaker faith. Seventeenth century Quakers were characteristic radical Puritans, in that they held theatre to be contrary to the spirit of Christianity and forbade their members from attending. Robert Barclay, the most important early Quaker intellectual, roundly condemned the theatre. He asserted: 'games, sports, plays, dancing, comedies, &c. do naturally tend to draw men from God's fear, to make them forget heaven, death, and judgment, to foster lust, vanity, and wantonness'.*

An Alarm!

To the Trading and to the Religious Part of the  
Citizens of Bristol.

My fellow Citizens,

I fear you do not see in a proper light, the great  
danger of having a Play-house licensed in this city.  
A Bill for that purpose is now before the house. If it  
should pass, the probable consequence will be, that we  
shall have performances in the winter. How that may  
affect the morals of our sons, daughters, apprentices,  
and servants, when they can conceal themselves by  
the darkness of the night, is but too apparent. There  
was a becoming and effectual opposition made to  
the former attempt to pass the Bill, and surely the  
present melancholy situation of the Nation does  
not weaken the motives to the exertion of the same now.

Let some gentlemen, then, of character and Fortune  
step forth immediately, concert a proper plan, and  
invite their Fellow Citizens concurrence, by appointing  
a place and time of public meeting on the occasion.

This endeavour, I trust, will be successful, but, if  
otherwise, they will reap the pleasing satisfaction of  
having endeavoured to stem the torrent of vice.

Feb. 7. 1778.

Given to me  
by Mr. Tyson

Anti - Theatre pamphlet. Image courtesy of Bristol Archives.



## 2. The Wannabe Theatre-Goer



Photographer, John Craig.

*(Sarah smiles with her eyes closed, listening out for the noises above her.)*

**Sarah**

If you listen carefully, you can almost hear the actors. I often shut my eyes and listen out for the applause of the crowd.

My mistress doesn't allow me in the auditorium. So I have to sneak in here. Better to be under the stage than below stairs... For little reward do I toil 17 hours a day, from before dawn until after dusk. "The maid of all work", cutting toenails and ironing shoelaces.

I can't complain much though. I have a roof over my head and regular meals... The leftovers in the kitchen. My own bedroom... In the basement. As dark and dusty as this. Sometimes I have friendly chats with my mistress on our way here. She tells me all about the theatre. About the candle-lit faces of famous actors like Sarah Siddons or William McCready. But when we get to the white house - 38 King Street - she makes sure everyone hears her as she shoves me away. "Begone now, Sarah!"

She named me Sarah. After Sarah Siddons. Only, of course, I would never be able to step on that stage. Could you imagine? Me? Playing in a panto... Like Cinderella! No, me as Aladdin!

But no... Not even as an audience member. They have these silver coins, you know... They were given to the original investors who contributed 50 pounds each to build this theatre. The silver coins give access to every performance! I often dream of owning one and coming here every night. My mistress says the audience comes in through the passages beneath Mr. Gill's widow's home, into the auditorium. Imagine me: waiting in the dark for the coming of the Stage man. As he lights the candles, one by one, I see the auditorium glow, green and gold. 1620 seats and I would be in one of them! Seeing plays, musicals and dances all on the same night - a night to remember. The actors in the limelight, and the spectators are even louder! People coming and going, heckling, talking, gambling, shouting for requested songs, singing along, clapping, stamping, whistling, banging! Some gentleman yelling at me for my great hat obstructs his view. Grimaldi is on the stage and everyone is laughing!

Thinking about theatre... It makes my life a little less solitary.

#### **Heritage bite:**

*In September 1764 a group of prominent Bristolians, including merchants, traders and doctors gathered and signed an agreement to invest in and build our theatre. As well as receiving regular dividends on their investment, each investor was issued with a 'silver ticket' which was about the size of a 10p piece. The ticket entitled the proprietor 'to the sight of every performance to be exhibited in the house'. The tickets have no expiry date on them, so if you happen to have one lying around, we'll still accept them.*

*The 50 silver ticketeers worked in a variety of trades, but most of them were merchants of some kind. As was common in the time period, many people in Bristol (and the wider Western world) made money either directly or indirectly as a result of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.*

*Our research shows that at least 6 of the original investors were slave traders; 1 shipped slaves; at least 6 owned slaves and plantations; 3 traded in sugar - farmed and picked by enslaved Africans on plantations in America; 6 were merchants participating in the Transatlantic ring; and 1 was a banker agent for various plantation. Statistically 31% of the 50 people originally approached to invest in the theatre were benefitting financially from the enslavement and forced migration of enslaved Africans.*



*Silver tokens.*

### 3. The Two Sarahs



Photographer, John Craig.

*(Silence.)*

*(Sarah Desmond and Sarah Siddons sit at dressing tables beside each other. Sometimes they are aware of each other, sometimes they are 'in their own world'.)*

*(Physical routine – beat of eight.)*

**BOTH**

I've had enough. I don't know who Sarah thinks she is.

**Sarah D**

She takes up all of my space, the stewed prune. I don't mean to be funny, but she smells. She has this horrible perfume that quite frankly makes her even more manly than she already is. You know she played Hamlet. And just because she had her one moment of fame as Lady Macbeth, the ignorant snout bound doesn't realise I was told I was infinitely more striking than Sarah Siddons as lady Macbeth.

*(Sarah S throws clothes onto the floor and waltzes around.)*

She's too much of a doorbell to realise that she's just jealous of my youthful looks. I'm twice the woman she ever was. Who does she think she is playing male roles. Siddons gives religious conspirers a reason to protest.

She waltzes around the theatre like she owns it. The dalcot only bothered to show up once we'd got our license and the theatres struggles had slowed. I've been here to make the Theatre Royal what it is today. She wants people to believe that she is the most talented actress here, but this is far from the truth...

**BOTH**

No wonder

**Sarah S**

Her demeanour and attitude is appalling considering she's just a common wench. As you are well aware, I have built up a reputation in which I have the upmost respect of audiences across the country. This gnash gab girl thinks she is a shining talent and a rival to myself. Let me tell you she is not. She fails to share my looks, talent or reputation. The only thing she does share is my name and my dressing room.

*(Sarah D swans around stage.)*

As you know I only agreed to work at this theatre once it had been licensed and was reputable, but from her behaviour she acts as if this theatre is still the unlawful shamble it once was.

Her unusual courtship with Mr Mcready also is beginning to become a problem. Mcready is a reputable fellow, I know as I have had the honour of playing side him o may occasions, but is making a mistake courting this hair brained mumble crust. She is desperate to claw her way to the top, through marriage and money.

**BOTH**

Sarah is nothing but-

**Sarah D**

A common wench who is so stuck in her ways she doesn't realise

**BOTH**

That

**Sarah S**

She is a spoilt child. I have played Desdemona, Rosalind, Ophelia and Volumnia.

**BOTH**

But what do i get for it?

**Sarah D**

There have been complaints about Geese around the theatre but the real goose we need to worry about is

**Sarah D**

*(Simultaneously)* Siddons.

**Sarah S**

*(Simultaneously)* Desmond.



*(The **Sarahs** help each other tighten and fasten their corsets, vindictively.)*

**Sarah D**                      Stewed prune. Horn swoggler. Jollocks.

**Sarah S**                      Gibface. Ratbag. Wagtail.

*(The **Sarahs** smile at the audience. Their smiles turn into grimaces. The **Sarahs** return to their seats.)*

#### **Heritage bite:**

*When Sarah Siddons played Hamlet on stage at the Theatre Royal Bristol in 1781 she became the first influential actress to play the Danish prince. Her willingness to take risks, and to court controversy, coupled with her incredible talent made her eighteenth-century England's leading actress.*

*Sarah performed at the Theatre Royal Bristol between 1779 and 1782, sometimes playing up to 30 different roles in a single season. Upon leaving Bristol for London she quickly became the most famous actress in the capital. In 1783 she was even appointed to teach elocution to the King's children.*

*When she gave her final performance on the 29 June 1812, the audience would not allow the play to proceed beyond her final scene. Eventually, the curtains reopened and Sarah made an emotional farewell speech to a resounding applause.*

*While Sarah Siddons is perhaps the better-known actress, her rival Sarah Desmond (or Sarah Macready to call her by her married name) had a far greater impact on our theatre.*

*Sarah Macready got her start as an actress as a member of William Macready's touring theatre company in the north of England. In 1819 William took over the management of the Theatre Royal Bristol and Sarah quickly became the Theatre's leading actress. Sarah and William also got married. In 1834, five years after William's death, Sarah became the Theatre's first female manager.*

*Sarah's acting experience taught her what audiences wanted. During her time as manager the Theatre's stage was graced by magicians, tightrope walkers, animals and acrobats. She even found performers in unexpected places. Sarah could often be found walking around the Welsh Back area of Bristol at the end of an evening trying to persuade any unsuspecting sailors she came across to come perform a merry jig for her audiences. This made the Theatre hugely popular.*

*Sarah died on the 8th March 1853 aged sixty-three. Legend has it that she still haunts the Theatre. Many people have sensed her ghostly presence, caught a whiff of her lavender perfume, heard her voice or even felt her breath on their face.*

#### 4. The Architects



Photographer, John Craig.

##### **Halfpenny**

Do come in. Come on. Fill the space people. You are about to see history made before your very eyes. Come in. Come on. Gather round.

*(Audience takes their places around a well-lit table with nothing on it.)*

In the beginning there was nothing. Well, there was something obviously... There was... King Street.

*(Halfpenny places a model of King Street onto the table.)*

A Cornish-granite cobbled road, a stone's throw from the stomping grounds of pirates and slave traders. There were four-storey houses, almshouses and the Llandoger Trow – the drinking hole of Long John Silver.

The year was 1742 and the sun was shining. I saw King Street and in my mind's eye – I saw Cooper's Hall.

*(Halfpenny places a model of the exterior of Cooper's Hall onto the table and refers to it as he describes it.)*

The exterior – four three-quarter Corinthian pillars and pedimented windows.

*(Halfpenny places the basement, then Cooper's Hall onto the table, continuing to refer to it.)*

The interior – a basement storey for the storage of barrels, so important for the trading of wine, rum, unrefined sugar. And a hall for gatherings of the Cooper's company – the Cooper's, of course, being the makers of the barrels.

This was my vision – a multi-purpose building to support the work of the barrel-makers of Bristol. Ladies and Gentlemen I give you Cooper's Hall.

*(Peter Moro enters, clapping.)*

**Moro** Brilliant. Well done old boy.

**Halfpenny** Who are you?

**Moro** My name is Peter Moro.

**Halfpenny** Hello Peter, I'm currently just doing this talk. Wh- What can I do for you?

**Moro** I'm here to talk about the renovation of Cooper's Hall.

**Halfpenny** That's sorta what I am doing now.

**Moro** It's 1970 Mr Halfpenny. A lot has changed around here.

**Halfpenny** 1970?!

**Moro** Yes, and you're long gone!

**Halfpenny** I am?

**Moro** There's a theatre next door now.

**Halfpenny** Is there?

**Moro** Yes, it's been here since 1766.

*(Moro places the Theatre Royal onto the table.)*

**Halfpenny** My goodness I didn't see that coming.

**Moro** No, you wouldn't have. You died in 11 yrs before it.

**Halfpenny** Yes. Yes, in crippling debt.

**Moro** Sorry to hear that.

**Halfpenny** Thanks.

**Moro** Your name has been remembered though. Your work has lived on.

**Halfpenny** That's something I suppose.

**Moro** The coopers were long gone by 1970. Barrels were old hat. Your beloved hall had fallen into disrepair.

*(Moro removes the model of Halfpenny's Cooper's Hall.)*

**Halfpenny** Oh dear indeed.

**Moro** It was a public assembly room then a wine warehouse and then a Baptist church. But it ended up being a storehouse for fruit and vegetables.

**Halfpenny** Oh...

**Moro** But... in your dilapidated hall, I saw an opportunity – to create a state of the art theatre-complex.

**Halfpenny** Sounds great!

**Moro** It was my mission to unite Cooper's Hall with the Theatre Royal. I built office spaces, rehearsal spaces and social spaces to link them together. I removed the floor to create a staircase and balcony.

**Halfpenny** You what? You removed my floor!

**Moro** *(Referring to model)* I then raised the floor level so that people could see out of the windows!

*(Moro places a model of his 1970s foyer with staircase and balcony onto the table.)*

**Halfpenny** Great idea. Why didn't I think of that?



**Moro** So that now audiences could pass through your wonderful hall on their way into the theatre. Over time, people lounged here, sat on brown leather squishy sofas, drank coffee, and ate nibbles.

**Halfpenny** I bet that was quite an effort.

**Moro** Yes. Mostly getting planning permission to be honest. *(Beat)* But here it is. Your original ceiling design repaired and restored by moi. And I put up a couple of crystal chandeliers too. Specially made based on late Georgian design, - well early Regency really, but who cares... I had opened up the space for the people. A civic space, free flowing, functional, funnelling people from Kings Street into the theatre. *(Referring the model.)* You see, I bridged the gap, between here *(the hall)* and here *(the theatre)*.

*(Pause)*

I always say that a theatre, no matter how attractive, which does not work backstage is a nuisance. And a theatre with the correct technology, but with no magic is even worse. I believe I achieved a perfect balance.

*(Steve Tomkins enters and stands in the doorway by the light-switch.)*

**Tomkins** I agree. But there was something rather wonderful about Mr Halfpenny's original Cooper's Hall. Which is why I have re-re-purposed it.

*(Tomkins turns on the lights.)*

This is Cooper's Hall.

**Halfpenny** My goodness!

**Moro** This?!

**Tomkins** I have combined your visions gentlemen. Cooper's Hall, a meeting place for the people of Bristol, housed within a theatre complex where people can socialise at any time of the day. Functional and beautiful. Historic and modern. Maintaining the best of your designs, Mr Halfpenny, Mr Moro, and making the place fit for the twenty-first century.

**Moro** Where's my staircase gone?!

**Tomkins** Well, I've had it removed.

**Moro** But why?! All that paperwork!

**Tomkins** I believed Mr Halfpenny's original idea of an assembly hall was the best use of this space.

**Halfpenny** Thank you. It's lovely to see it so lovingly restored. Although I don't remember these chandeliers.

**Moro** I put in the chandeliers forty-six years ago. I told you that.

**Tomkins** Yes, this room is truly something of a compromise between your two designs.

**Moro** So how do people get into the theatre now?

**Tomkins** That's a very good question. They get into the theatre through your 1970s building. Or to be more precise, through the space your building used to accommodate.

**Moro** Used to accommodate?

**Tomkins** Well, yes... I've had to move it.

**Moro** Move it?

**Tomkins** Or rather... destroy it and... build a new foyer! – as well as a new studio which is directly beneath us.

**Halfpenny** Where we used to store the barrels.

**Tomkins** Exactly.

**Moro** But why?

**Tomkins** But now thanks to the new foyer you can see the original theatre wall straight from King Street. And I'm afraid to say your social spaces, your gallery with the glass balustrade, where people lounged on leather sofas, just weren't places people wanted to be anymore. The theatre was empty during the day.

**Moro** That is sad to hear.

**Tomkins** And emptied soon after performances in the evenings.

**Halfpenny** I'm supposing you did what you had to, Mr.... Sorry I didn't catch your name.

**Tomkins** Tomkins. Steve Tomkins.

**Halfpenny** Well, I must say Steve, you've done a splendid job of this place. Doesn't look too dissimilar from the one I built.

**Tomkins** I think we share the same ideals. All of us. I hope you'll be happy with what I've done too, Mr Moro. I hope that what you see beyond those doors is a continuation of your vision too. This grand guild hall connected to the Theatre Royal for the people of Bristol.

**Halfpenny** How much did it set you back then? £500.

**Moro** No don't be ridiculous – must be about 500 grand

**Tomkins** No it cost 25..

**Halfpenny** Just £25 well well done

**Tomkins** No not £25 its cost 25....

**Moro** Thousand ???

**Tompkins** NO! Twenty-five million pounds.

**Halfpenny** Sorry, how much?! I don't even know what that is.

**Tomkins** Buildings don't come cheap these days.

**Moro** Or architects.

**Halfpenny** Well I wish it'd been the same in my day.

**Moro** Well, I'd like to have a look around at the rest of the place if I may. I am certainly intrigued.

**Tomkins** Of course – we should share a bottle of wine together!

**Halfpenny** Or a whole barrel methinks.

**Tomkins** To the history of Cooper's Hall, then.

**Halfpenny** To Cooper's Hall.

**Moro** And to the Bristol Old Vic.

**ALL** The Bristol Old Vic!

**(Halfpenny, Moro and Tomkins exit towards the bar.)**



### **Heritage bite:**

*In November 1764, two of the Theatre's founders Alexander Edgar and Thomas Symons travelled to London to secure copies of the architectural plans for Drury Lane, which they then based the design for our Theatre on. The estimated cost of building the Theatre was originally around £2000 but by its completion in 1766 it had cost closer to £5000.*

*Major renovations were conducted in the 1880s, the early 1900s, and the 1970s. The 1970s is perhaps our most noticeable architectural change because that's when Coopers' Hall was incorporated into the Theatre complex.*

*Coopers' Hall is actually older than the Theatre. Built in 1740 by Architect William Halfpenny, it's had a variety of uses: from the home of the barrel-making guild of Hoopers, to a performance space for rival theatre company the Kennedy's Men, to a fruit and vegetable market in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1970 Artistic Director Val May and architect Peter Moro seized the opportunity to utilise the space, creating a new foyer and building the New Vic Studio among other renovations and alterations.*

*Finally, in September 2018, architects Hayworth – Tompkins completed a 2-year multi-million-pound redevelopment project which transformed our front of house space into a warm and welcoming public building for all of Bristol to enjoy, created a new studio theatre and opened up our unique theatrical heritage to the public for the first time.*



Architect's Impression of alterations by Peter Moro & Partners, Main Entrance (1972).  
Image courtesy of University of Bristol Theatre Collection.

## 5. Salad Days Director



Photographer, John Craig.

### **Director**

*(ad-lib. when audience arrive)* There you are my dear cast! After my encouragement, Dennis agreed to book us this space for a much needed rehearsal. Before we begin there are a few notes I'd like to give you. If you don't mind shuffling all the way down single file etc.

Now as I am sure you are all aware, tonight is incredibly important for our beloved theatre: some of the biggest representatives from London have heard of our splendid little musical and are now hungry for a slice of the pie. However, despite our outstanding opening night back in June receiving a tremendous 20 curtain calls, recently, I have seen you all become increasingly lazy and complacent!

*(Pick an audience member)* What was that Peter? What about the audience? Well I don't care what the audience think: I care what the producers think. And frankly if it wasn't for your contagious limp wrists we might not have had to gather here in our precious free time in the first place.

*(Fantasising)* Oh, if all goes to plan we could gain a London transfer. 'Salad Days in the West End!' At the Playhouse, or the Apollo or even the Vaudeville. London will love it and we will continue on to become the longest running musical Britain has ever seen with exactly 2,283

performances. With the profits, we could finally invest in a building for our growing theatre school! Maybe in the early 70s a surreal comedy group by the name of Monty Python will make a satirical comedy sketch of us all...maybe

*(Back to Peter)* That is of course if the disease of Peters limp wrists doesn't spread any further. *(Side note)* To assure you, I have spoken to Elizabeth and she has agreed that I can work on the choreography with you. *(To Peter)* This is what I've seen you do over the last week Peter. *(Dance)* But this is what I should see. *(Dance)* Can everyone please raise their arms like so. Not you Peter, watch and learn. Now raise your palms. You see, it really is very simple!

What else is there? Gosh, I've barely begun. I'll work chronologically through the show. I need much more life from everyone during the opening overture, Pat and Dorothy especially, please smile, it is supposed to be a beautiful day. 'The Things That Are Done By A Don' is perfect. Well done. In 'We Said We Wouldn't Look Back', John, I really need to hear you, turn up the volume, the only voice I can hear is Eleanors, don't give her another solo. I want to hear that splendid harmony. The rest of Act One is largely good until 'Out of Breath'. It appears Julian has become a magnet for poor performers, Basil, Yvonne, Eric and Christine you all seem to gravitate towards the stage right Piano. Can we please stop this and use the entire stage.

For Act 2: Eric in 'Cleopatra', you still sound very British, please push the accent and diction further. 'her moral code made the sphinx perspire, her Roman scandals set the Nile on fire' you see? We'll do some tongue-twisters in accent later. 'Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers!'

*(Pick an audience member)* And finally, Eleanor, sweet amazing Eleanor. As you know, in the saucer song, Uncle Zed arrives to save the day in his flying saucer. What does this moment mean for Timothy and Jane? They are able to find Minnie, their beloved piano. This is the real 'Deus ex Machina'. So why Dorothy did your reaction to Uncle Zeds arrival feel as though he'd simply popped over for your bi-weekly tea and biscuits meet up? Your reaction needs to increase ten-fold! Uncle Zed has magically appeared from the sky to effectively save your life! In the song you sing 'Oh isn't he clever nobody ever, saw such a saucy saucer'. I will sing it again 'Isn't he clever, nobody ever, saw such a saucy saucer'. A saucy saucer! Jane has never seen such a sublime saucer! Jane's face and entire being should be leaping with some much joy it looks as if she's swallowed the most delicious stick of dynamite, she's about to explode! But what did I see on your face Dorothy? I saw the face of woman who'd just seen Uncle Zed make a cup of tea by pouring the milk in first. Disgusting.



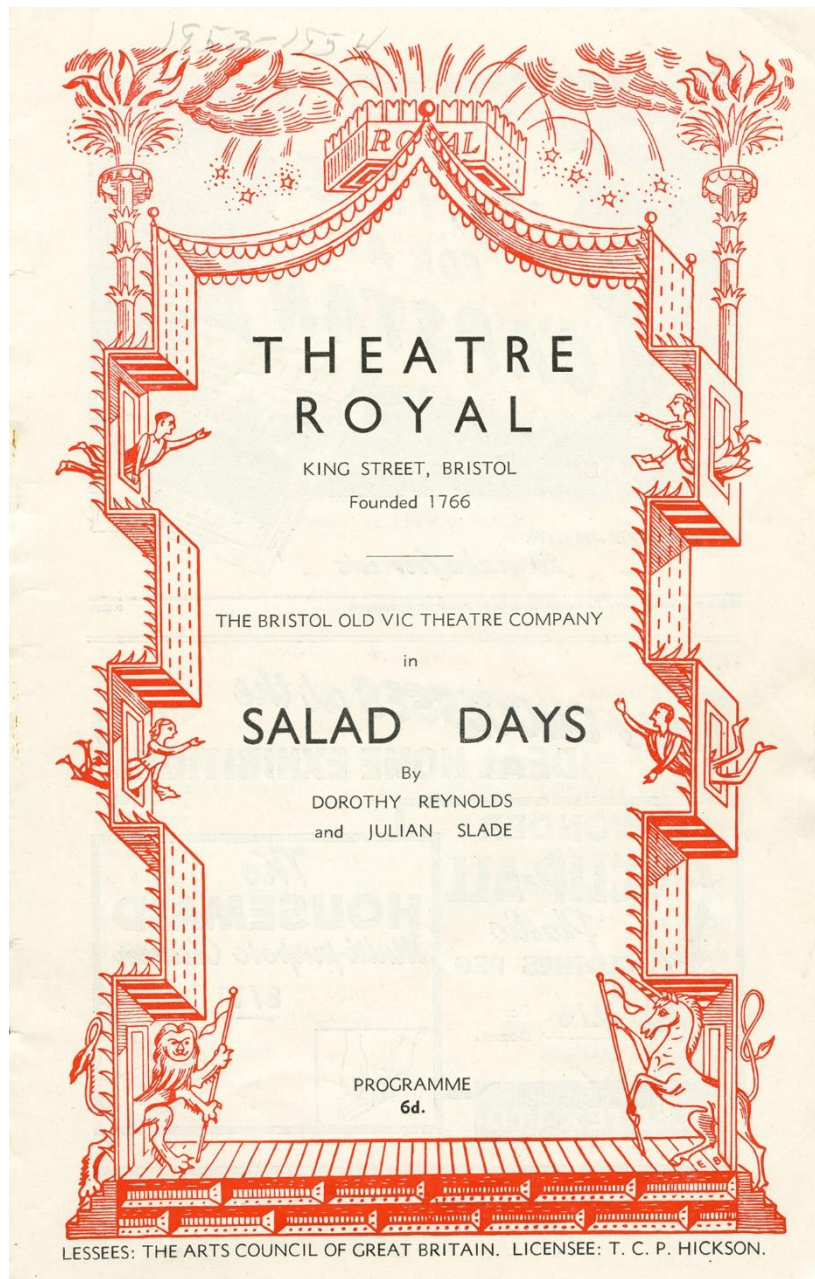
Right, those are all the notes. If you could kindly head downstairs to the changing rooms now, get into your dancing gear and when you're back we'll start from chorus dance in 'We're Looking for a Piano'. Quickly now, we don't have much time.

***Heritage bite:***

*In 1945, the London Old Vic created a repertory company in Bristol. Hugh Hunt was assigned as the first artistic director of this new company and, as they were an offshoot of the London Old Vic, it only seemed right for them to be called the Bristol Old Vic Company. On the 19<sup>th</sup> February 1946 they performed their first show: an 18th century restoration comedy in an 18th century theatre, called the Beaux Stratagem. The company's success led to the creation of the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, which opened on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1946. It was the only training school linked to a professional company in the country and, for its first 10 years, was located in a single studio above a vegetable warehouse on the quayside close to the theatre.*

*In 1952 Julian Slade and Dorothy Reynolds wrote Salad Days as a summer musical for the company in just six weeks. It later transferred to the West End where it ran for 2,283 performances, making it the longest running show of the 1950s.*

*In 1954 proceeds from Salad Days enabled Bristol Old Vic Theatre School to buy a new property on Downside Road in Clifton, and the new Theatre School opened in 1956.*



Programme, *Salad Days* (1952). Image courtesy of University of Bristol Theatre Collection.

## 6. Theatre & War



Photographer, John Craig.

**Edith** I'm tired Charlie. *(pause)* I'm tired Charlie!

**Charlie** I know, so am I. This week at The Evening Post is wearing me thin.

**Edith** The girls have been asking when you're going to take them to see Eden's End.

**Charlie** I will, soon. John keeps asking me to write a feature on Spring Tide at the Little Theatre.

**Edith** You won't soon. Times are hard. It's not appropriate and It's vulgar and I don't approve.

**Charlie** What's vulgar?

**Edith** The theatre Charlie. It's self-indulgent; actors work for themselves not their community. You shouldn't have promised.

**Charlie** We need to inspire hope in them Edie. They need something to look forward to.

**Edith** We don't need the arts to do that. Priorities should be education –

**Charlie** There *is* an education in theatre –

**Edith** In fact, I think the arts funding should've been cut totally and spent where...

**Both** Our country needs it –

**Charlie** I know! And I also know our country needs to stay in good spirit, keep morale high. Bristol's Theatre Royale survived the bombings, it was nearly sold off as a bloody banana-ripening warehouse, and *still* it soldiers on.

*(Pause)*

**Edith** So I read the papers this morning. Apparently, you believe actors should have the privilege of being exempt from conscription.

**Charlie** What did you think? It wasn't too much was it dear?

**Edith** Charlie, you promised.

**Charlie** John thought it was a good article and wanted it published. I believe actors have an important role to play in the war effort. Everyone fights in different ways. Some people bake, some manufacture ammunition, some distil whisky, because we all enjoy whisky, especially this 13 year Isle of Skye single malt – *(Edith Interrupts)*

**Charlie** The point I'm trying to make is that life needs to go on. We need to stay motivated and theatre does that for people.

**Edith** Okay okay, but need you really plaster it all over the front page. It's an insult to those who day in day out use their hands, fight for their freedom, raise their children...without help.

**Charlie** That's out of line dear.

**Edith** Is it dear? Evasion of one's duty is not to be smirked at. I just can't see how, whilst one man stands on the battlefield, another stands on stage and is called a hero. I'm tired, I'm sorry.

**Charlie** What's the difference between my profession and an actors?

*Silence*

**Charlie** Children are quiet tonight. Are they –

**Edith** In bed? Yes, hours ago Charlie. They told me to tell you they love you.

**Charlie**                      And I love you all. More whisky?

**Edith**                        More whisky.

**Charlie**                      It's going to get easier, Edie.

*(Edith exits.)*

**Heritage bite:**

*Much of ancient Bristol was destroyed during World War II but our Theatre sustained only slight damage. Performances at theatres tended to start earlier to be finished by time air raid sirens started. Evening performances at entertainment venues were abolished all together in early 1941.*

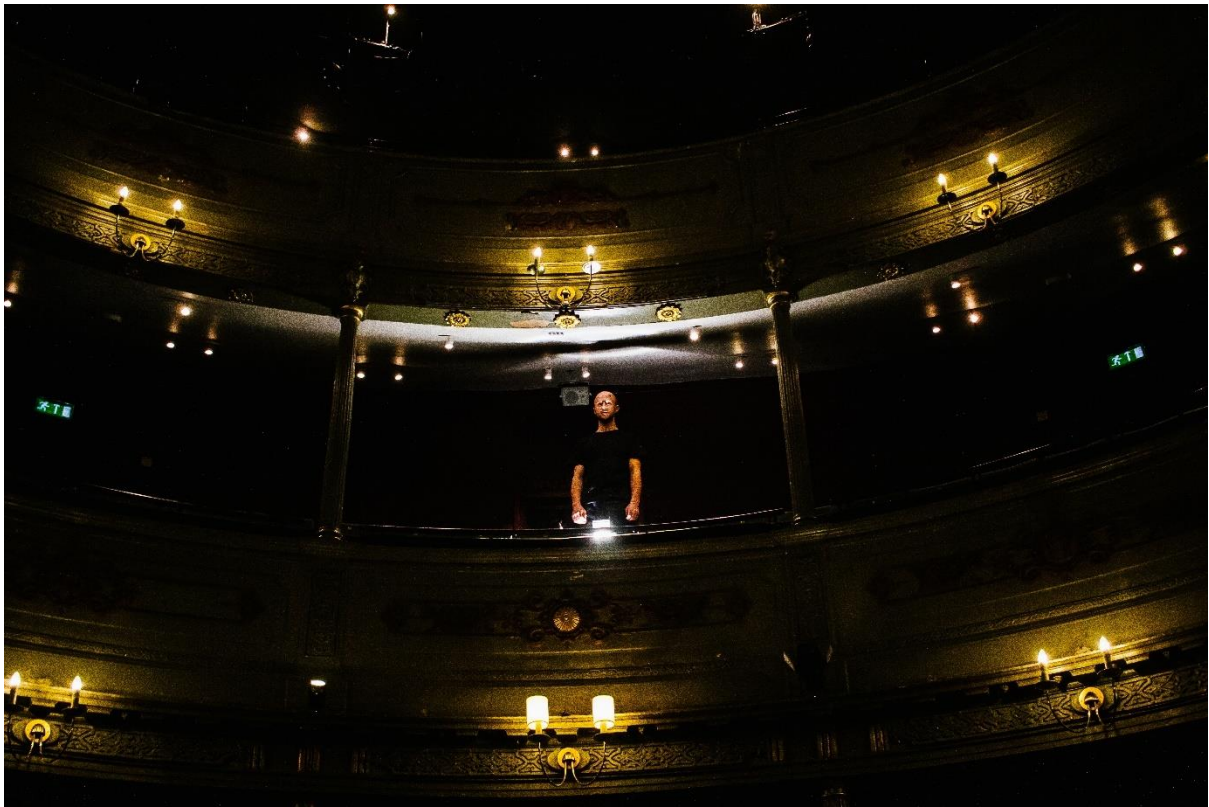
*The second world war coincided with a period of financial ruin for the Theatre. The increasing variety of forms of entertainment on offer, including film and radio, meant audiences declined over the first decades of the twentieth century. Many people considered theatre and the arts an unnecessary luxury during wartime, so in the 1940s, they declined ever further.*

*Faced with financial ruin the Theatre's owners had no choice but to sell. There was a real chance that the Theatre would be demolished, or turned into a warehouse, but eventually a deal was negotiated with Clarence Davey of the Metal Agencies Company, who agreed to buy the theatre for up to £12,500 and hold it whilst the city raised the money to buy it back.*

*Despite an increase in public interest in the Theatre, by autumn 1942 only £4000 had been collected. Thankfully, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (later established as Arts Council England) stepped in and offered to restore the theatre to working order. They sent a company from London Old Vic to Bristol and the theatre opened with a performance of *She Stoops to Conquer* on the 11th May 1943, starring Dame Sybil Thorndike.*



## 7. Five Hundred Chairs / The Ghost of Sarah Macready



Photographer, John Craig.

**Brook**

Why do it?  
Five hundred chairs all facing in the same direction.  
Why do it?  
One level plane on which to hold a mirror for reflection.  
But why do it?  
Two hundred and fifty two years it stood.  
*Here* it stood.  
And here it *stands*.  
Through many trials  
In many hands.  
Told tales from a thousand lands.  
Heard music swell within its walls  
Heard curtain calls.  
Been home to ghouls.

**GB**

I did not want to leave this place. It has been 190 years since I became the general manager. I believed in this fine theatre. I believed in the good it could achieve.

**Brook**

Who's lives have changed whilst sat right there?  
Or here?  
Or there?



Up here?  
Right there.  
You block your ears as crowds will rush to clamber ever near it.  
Then deathly hush will fall. You breath.  
They drop a pin. You hear it.

**GB** I, Sarah Macready, put my heart and soul into this theatre, but the roof was leaking and the cracks continued to appear. I only hoped that in years to come it could perchance be revived, and even surpass its former glory.

**Brook** Stories.  
That is what it's here to hold.  
Stories. True or fable.  
To change how history is told.  
To move our hearts.  
Enable someone else to speak.  
Give voice to those with none.  
It's here to tell our stories and it's job here isn't done.

**GB** It has needed noble and loving stewardship to ensure it survived such troubled times. And so it has, and as long as the people of this city believe in it, so it will. So perhaps my time here is done.

**Brook** Who's voice is heard?  
Who's voice is not?  
Who's curtain call is due?  
Is this a space for all to speak,  
Or only just a few?  
Why do it though? Why do it?  
If there's yet more to do.  
Perhaps the question isn't 'why?'.  
Perhaps the question's 'who?'.

### **Heritage bite:**

*Over the last 254 years, our Theatre has pretty much seen it all. The characters brought to life in Limelight only scratch the surface of our incredible building and the people who have inhabited it.*

*Limelight would not have been possible with out access to archival materials. The archives of our theatre are just as old as the building, in fact some are even older. For over 250 years the people who have owned, worked inside and visited the theatre have kept records about their activity. These are kept safe and secure at [Bristol Archives](#) and [The University of Bristol Theatre Collection](#).*

*If Limelight has inspired you, why not dive in and start researching someone new using their collections.*