

THE BRITANNIA THEATRE, HOXTON (1841-1899):
THE CREATION AND CONSUMPTION OF POPULAR CULTURE
IN AN EAST END COMMUNITY

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Leicester

by

JANICE NORWOOD M.A.
Department of English
University of Leicester

April 2006

UMI Number: U219365

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI U219365

Published by ProQuest LLC 2015. Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.



ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank my supervisor, Professor Richard Foulkes, for first suggesting the Britannia might be a fruitful subject for research and for his knowledgeable support in overseeing every stage of my thesis. I am also indebted to Professor Robert Colls for his enthusiastic encouragement and advice on matters of social history. Fellow research postgraduates in the English Department at the University of Leicester have provided welcome moral support.

My thanks also go to the staff at the many libraries and archives I have visited in the course of the research, including the University of Leicester Library, the Manuscripts and Rare Books Department of the British Library, the Newspaper Library at Colindale, Hackney Archives, the Guildhall Library, London Metropolitan Archives, Pollock's Toy Museum and the Theatre Museum. Sue Crabtree of the University of Kent Library and Beverley Cook of the Museum of London have been particularly helpful. Several other individuals have aided my research, namely George Speaight, Sandra Stevens, Barry Clarke, Helen Smith, Sonia Solicari at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Janet McLean at the Royal Academy and Hazlewood's descendant Elizabeth Kaufman. Barbara Cavanagh of Motley Books has been an invaluable source of theatrical ephemera.

I am grateful to The Society for Theatre Research for financial assistance in granting me the Kathleen Barker Award of The Society for Theatre Research in 2003.

Finally, I thank my family – Trevor, Sam, Megan and Sorrel – for putting up with my Britannia obsession for the last four-and-a-half years. Their contribution has been substantial, from uncomplainingly trailing around a windy Kensal Green Cemetery in search of Sara Lane's grave to providing photographic and computer assistance and feigning interest in the trivia of nineteenth-century theatrical history. Thank you all.

NOTE

In quoting nineteenth-century critics, I have modernised some punctuation; for example, by spacing *en dashes*. I have also followed the convention of putting stage directions into italics where they are underlined in the original handwritten manuscripts.

**THE BRITANNIA THEATRE, HOXTON (1841-1899):
THE CREATION AND CONSUMPTION OF POPULAR CULTURE
IN AN EAST END COMMUNITY**

JANICE NORWOOD

Abstract

This thesis examines the Britannia Theatre in relation to the East End community in which it was situated and explores its connection with popular culture. It traces the theatre's development from its earliest incarnation in 1841 as a tavern with a small area set aside for dramatic entertainments to its establishment as one of the most important theatrical institutions in the East End and finally to its decline at the turn of the century. Running throughout is a discussion of how the theatre interacted with its predominantly working- and lower-middle-class audience. This sustained and close relationship was one of the theatre's defining features, helped to create a sense of community and was responsible for its phenomenal success.

A detailed history of the theatre charts the architectural alterations to its various buildings, provides an overview of the people who worked there, assesses the Britannia's economic relationship with the local community and defines its audience. The significance of the impact of each of these elements on the theatre's status, its repertoire and audience composition and behaviour is evaluated. In examining the career of the actress and owner of the Britannia, Sara Lane, I suggest how her personal traits and professional talents contributed to an iconic status that resonated throughout Hoxton and beyond.

Investigation of the theatre's repertoire focuses on its melodramas, productions of Shakespeare, incidental entertainments and annual pantomimes. I explore how the Britannia's productions reflected the interests of its audience and responded to topical issues, events and society. Analysis of the work of the prolific playwright Colin Hazlewood reveals his borrowings from popular culture, but also discloses how the Britannia's productions themselves were a part of that culture. Overall, the theatre's repertoire highlights its audience's predilection for entertainments that stimulate the senses rather than the intellect.

CONTENTS

Tables & Illustrations

List of Abbreviations

Introduction		1
Chapter 1	Saloon and Theatre: History, Bricks and People	5
Chapter 2	The Audience	36
Chapter 3	Sara Lane: Actress, Manager and Queen	65
Chapter 4	The Britannia Dramatist, Colin Henry Hazlewood	107
Chapter 5	The Repertoire	142
Chapter 6	Harlequin Once More: The Britannia Pantomime	179
Conclusion		206
Bibliography		209

TABLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Map	Based on 1872 Ordnance Survey Map of Shoreditch	After p.4
Table 1	Timeline	After p.4
Table 2	Number of Hazlewood plays first performed at other theatres	After p.141
Table 3	Number of new Hazlewood plays produced at the Britannia by year	
Table 4	Hazlewood pieces premièred in 1867	
Table 5	Performances of Shakespeare by decade	After p.178
Table 6	Britannia Pantomimes 1841-1901	After p.205
Plate 1.1	Britannia management: Samuel Lane, Sara Lane aged 70, Alfred Lane Crauford and W.R. Crauford	After p.35
Plate 1.2	Painting of Britannia Saloon, c.1845; HA 11762, reproduced by permission of Hackney Archives	
Plate 1.3	Exterior of new Britannia Theatre (<i>Illustrated News of the World</i> , 25 December 1858); by permission of the British Library	
Plate 1.4	Interior of Britannia Theatre (<i>Builder</i> , 13 November 1858); City of London, London Metropolitan Archives	
Plate 1.5	Britannia performers: Charlotte Crauford, Emma Yarnold, Charlie Rice and Joseph Reynolds	
Plate 1.6	Britannia performers: Edgar Newbound in <i>Dolores</i> , J.B. Howe, George Bigwood and Algernon Syms in <i>The Harbour Lights</i>	
Plate 1.7	Engraving of Charles Green's <i>Her First Bouquet</i> (<i>Graphic</i> , 25 December 1869); University of Leicester Library	
Plate 1.8	Redington's toy theatre stage front	
Plate 1.9	Redington portrait of Sara as Jacqueline in Hazlewood's <i>The Brigand's Secret</i>	
Plate 2.1	Sunday service at Britannia Theatre (<i>Illustrated Times</i> , 10 March 1860)	After p.64
Plate 3.1	Two pages of Crauford's cuttings file of Sara's obituary notices	After p.106
Plate 3.2	Sara's funeral procession in Hoxton Street, 22 August 1899	
Plate 3.3	Illustrations of Sara's funeral from Crauford's cuttings file	
Plate 3.4	Sara as Kathleen from <i>Kathleen, The Pride of Munster</i> (<i>Theatrical Times</i> , 5 August 1848)	
Plate 3.5	Madame Celeste as Miami in Buckstone's <i>The Green Bushes</i>	
Plate 3.6	Britannia playbill for 8 December 1856 featuring <i>The Flirt</i> , in which Sara played Jack Fleam; Playbills 376, by permission of the British Library	
Plate 3.7	Sara's testimonial, presented to her on 6 October 1886	
Plate 3.8	Portraits of Sara Lane (<i>Touchstone, or the New Era</i> , 22 June 1878 and <i>Entr'acte</i> , 1 October 1887); latter by permission of the British Library	

Plate 4.1	First page of the <i>Boys of England</i> (4 December 1866) featuring the image that was realized in Hazlewood's <i>Alone in the Pirate's Lair</i> ; University of Leicester Library	After p.141
Plate 4.2	Illustration accompanying the fiction 'Wild Charley' (<i>Boys of England</i> , 27 April 1867); University of Leicester Library	
Plate 4.3	Illustration in the promptbook of Hazlewood's <i>Break But Not Bend</i> ; PETT MSS.B.81, UoK; by permission of the University of Kent Library	
Plate 5.1	Ira Aldridge as Aaron the Moor in Shakespeare's <i>Titus Andronicus</i>	After p.178
Plate 5.2	Scene from Britannia production of Hazlewood's <i>Poul a Dhoil</i> (<i>Penny Illustrated Weekly News</i> , 21 October 1865); by permission of the British Library	
Plate 5.3	Scene from Britannia production of Hazlewood's <i>Twenty Straws</i> (<i>Penny Illustrated Weekly News</i> , 11 March 1865); by permission of the British Library	
Plate 6.1	Britannia clowns: Redington portraits of Jean Louis and Tom Sayers; copyright Museum of London. Tom Lovell (<i>ISDN</i> , 17 January 1885); 792.3505 Y4916, reproduced by permission of Hackney Archives	After p.205
Plate 6.2	Pantomime performers: Ada Reeve, Arthur Lupino, Kate Vaughan, Topsy Sinden, G.H. Macdermott and Chirgwin	
Plate 6.3	Preparing for the pantomime <i>The Old Bogie of the Sea</i> (<i>Daily Graphic</i> , 25 December 1891); by permission of the British Library	
Plate 6.4	Pantomime scenes: <i>Hickory Dickory Dock</i> (<i>Penny Illustrated Paper</i> , 9 January 1864) and <i>Little Busy Bee</i> (<i>Penny Illustrated Weekly News</i> , 31 December 1864); by permission of the British Library	
Plate 6.5	Pantomime characters from <i>The Goblin Bat</i> (<i>ISDN</i> , 22 January 1887); by permission of the British Library	
Plate 6.6	Transformation scene from <i>Little Busy Bee</i> (<i>Penny Illustrated Weekly News</i> , 21 January 1865); by permission of the British Library	
Plate 6.7	Illustration of the flying ballet from the programme for <i>King Klondike</i> ; Y9857, reproduced by permission of Hackney Archives	
Plate 6.8	Scene from the pantomime <i>Turlututu</i> (<i>ISDN</i> , 6 January 1877)	

All illustrations from author's collection unless stated above.
Tables and plates follow immediately after the relevant chapter.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Diaries</i>	Jim Davis, ed., <i>The Britannia Diaries 1863-1875: Selections from the Diaries of Frederick C. Wilton</i> (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1992)
Wilton CY1136	Diaries of F.C. Wilton, microfilm of MS 1181, Reel CY1136, State Library of New South Wales (Mitchell Library)
Wilton CY1137	Diaries of F.C. Wilton, microfilm of MS 1181, Reel CY1137, State Library of New South Wales (Mitchell Library)
Playbills TM	<i>Playbills and Programmes from London Theatres 1801-1900 in the Theatre Museum, London</i> (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1983); Britannia Theatre, 13 microfiches
<i>Sam & Sallie</i>	Alfred Lane Crauford, <i>Sam and Sallie: A Romance of the Stage</i> (London: Cranley & Day, 1933)
<i>H&K Gazette</i>	<i>Hackney & Kingsland Gazette & Shoreditch Telegraph</i>
<i>ISDN</i>	<i>Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News</i>
BL	British Library
HA	Hackney Archives
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
UoK	University of Kent
1866 Report	Report from the Select Committee on Theatrical Licences and Regulations (House of Commons Papers, Session 1866, 373)
1892 Report	Report from the Select Committee on Theatres and Places of Entertainment (House of Commons Papers, Session 1892, 240)

INTRODUCTION

The Britannia Theatre came into existence in 1841 as a minor saloon theatre providing inexpensive entertainment for the local inhabitants of Hoxton. During the following sixty years the theatre was enlarged and improved but the majority of its audience continued to be drawn from the vicinity. Even though geographically this area of London was situated on the westernmost boundary of the East End, contemporary critics identified it as part of the East End because the districts exhibited similar demographics and because impoverished Hoxton was outside of the experience of most fashionable West End theatregoers. In the nineteenth century the Britannia was never regarded as an important or leading theatrical establishment and this sidelining continued in histories of Victorian theatre written in the early twentieth century.¹ This was firstly because the leading actors of the day did not perform at the Britannia. Secondly, there was a deep-rooted critical bias against the type of drama put on at the theatre, in particular its staple melodrama, and in favour of 'high' art, or what before the deregulation of theatres by the 1843 Theatre Regulation Act was described as 'legitimate' drama. Critics, such as William Archer, whose view of nineteenth-century theatrical history was one of a drama in decline until the arrival at the turn of the century of the new style epitomised by Ibsen and Shaw, did not value and therefore ignored the Britannia's adherence to more traditional drama.²

However, two works written in the early and mid-twentieth century provide accounts of the history of the Britannia. The most important of these was published in 1933: Alfred Lane Crauford's *Sam and Sallie: A Romance of the Stage*. The author was a nephew of the theatre's owner managers, Samuel and Sara Lane, and had been involved in its management from 1881 until 1902.³ In some cases his 'facts' are simply wrong, in others he was too young to know the truth of many of the things he writes about, and at times he deliberately tells an untruth or partial truth.⁴ The other account appears in A.E. Wilson's

¹ For example, Erroll Sherson's *London's Lost Theatres of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Bodley Head, 1925) devotes less than three pages to the Britannia.

² Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp.12-13.

³ Alfred L. Crauford, *Sam and Sallie: A Romance of the Stage* (London: Cranley & Day, 1933); hereafter referred to as *Sam and Sallie*. Alfred L. Crauford subsequently referred to as Crauford.

⁴ For example, he says *Cast on the Mercy of the World* is set in the Arctic when it was actually set in Italy; he reports the dialogue, feelings and motivations of people such as Mary Adams, Sam Lane's first wife, who died fifteen years before he was born; and he misrepresents the date of Sam and Sara's marriage.

1954 book, *East End Entertainment*. Its two chapters on the Britannia draw heavily on Crauford's account but give a flavour of the performances and their contemporary critical reception.⁵

Modern scholarly interest in the Britannia began in the 1970s with a series of articles by Clive Barker.⁶ These challenged the practice of ignoring theatres offering popular or working-class entertainment and argued research should be carried out on the Britannia in particular. Barker's pieces followed the rise of cultural studies and Marxist literary theory and the ensuing reassessment of popular genres and cultural activities, including Victorian drama. Work by Michael Booth, Peter Brooks and Louis James gave serious critical attention to melodrama, and some individual plays produced at the Britannia were mentioned in articles.⁷ Despite this, no in-depth discussion of the theatre occurred until Jim Davis's fortuitous discovery of twelve years of diaries written by the Britannia's stage manager, Frederick Wilton.⁸ The subsequent publication of Davis's edited version provided plenty of new material to re-evaluate the theatre. Understandably, most recent interest has focused on the Britannia's history during the period corresponding to Wilton's diaries. Of particular interest are Davis and Tracy Davis's research on the demography of the local community, examining the theatre in relation to the censuses of 1851 and 1871.⁹ Likewise, Davis and Victor Emeljanow's book investigating theatrical audiences features the Britannia as one of seven London theatres.¹⁰ Other articles related to the Britannia consider Sara Lane's role as a dramatist¹¹ and the theatre's repertoire.¹²

All of these scholarly works inform this thesis and are discussed in more detail in the relevant chapters. The aim of this study is to establish how the theatre interacted with the

⁵ A.E. Wilson, *East End Entertainment* (London: Arthur Barker, 1954) pp.163-97.

⁶ Clive Barker, 'A Theatre for the People' in Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson, eds, *Nineteenth Century British Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1971) pp.3-24; 'The Chartist, Theatre, Reform and Research', *Theatre Quarterly* 1,4 (1971) 3-10; and 'The Audiences of the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton', *Theatre Quarterly* 9,34 (1979) 24-41.

⁷ Michael Booth, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965), Louis James, 'Taking melodrama seriously: theatre, and nineteenth-century studies', *History Workshop* 3 (1977) 151-58, and Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

⁸ Jim Davis, ed., *The Britannia Diaries 1863-1875: Selections from the Diaries of Frederick C. Wilton* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1992); hereafter referred to as *Diaries*.

⁹ Jim Davis and Tracy C. Davis, 'The People of the "People's Theatre": The Social Demography of the Britannia Theatre (Hoxton)', *Theatre Survey* 32,2 (1991) 137-65.

¹⁰ Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001).

¹¹ Jim Davis, 'Sarah Lane: questions of authorship' in Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin, eds, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp.125-47 and Heidi J. Holder, 'The "lady playwrights" and the "wild tribes of the East": Female dramatists in the East End theatres, 1860-1880' in Davis and Donkin, pp.174-92.

¹² Michael R. Booth, 'East End Melodrama', *Theatre Survey* 17 (1976) 57-67 and Jim Davis, 'The Gospel of Rags: Melodrama at the Britannia, 1863-74', *New Theatre Quarterly* 7,28 (1991) 369-89.

community in the widest sense and to determine how its productions related to popular culture. To use philosopher Gilbert Ryle's terminology, it uses 'thick description' of all aspects of the theatre to place the Britannia in context.¹³

Method

In order to explore this relationship this study establishes how the theatre was run, examines the entertainments it offered, defines its audience, considers how the physical building influenced the repertoire and imagines the experience of being in the audience. Existing source material is re-examined alongside newly discovered playbills and programmes and supplemented with analysis of previously disregarded or unconsidered contemporary reviews, promptbooks and playscripts.

Playbills, programmes and Wilton's diaries provide information on the weekly repertoire for many years, but there are significant gaps, in particular before 1863 and after 1875. By tracing reviews and press adverts in contemporary newspapers and journals a reconstruction of the main items in the weekly programme of performances has been made. This fills many of the lacunae in knowledge, particularly for the later decades. These sources also expose many minor incidents and anecdotes that help to elucidate the behaviour of the audience, management and performers. Unfortunately, the early years of the theatre are still difficult to recreate because so few newspapers and journals reviewed performances at the Britannia or carried advertisements for it. Nevertheless, although it may be impossible to say with certainty exactly when and for how many weeks a particular play was performed or to determine who the author was, the existence of the licensing copy of the play in the Lord Chamberlain's collection at least confirms that the drama in question was produced there.¹⁴

This cataloguing of the Britannia's repertoire has enabled a reconsideration of one area of the repertoire that had been only superficially discussed before: Shakespearean productions. Assessing these performance records reveals which of the bard's dramas were performed most frequently and in what form they appeared.

Until now consideration of Sara Lane has concentrated on her role as a dramatist. Here, reviews and contemporary comments are used to examine the aspects for which she was most notable during her own lifetime, namely her acting talents and managerial

¹³ Gilbert Ryle, *Collected Papers* (London: Hutchinson, 1971) vol. 2, pp.480-82.

¹⁴ Allardyce Nicoll's *A History of English Drama 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955-59) vols. 4, 5 and 6 are an invaluable source.

function. In addition, personal testimonies, contemporary illustrations and obituaries throw new light on her position as a figurehead of the local community.

Very little was previously known about the dramatist Colin Hazlewood, who for twenty years was the Britannia's most prolific playwright. Information gleaned from census returns and birth, marriage and death registers is used to trace his family history, determine his social class and ascertain where he lived. This establishes Hazlewood's working-class background, which reflects the experiences of many in the Britannia audience. Playbills, adverts and reviews have been used to create a database of his acting engagements and the first comprehensive listing of his plays.

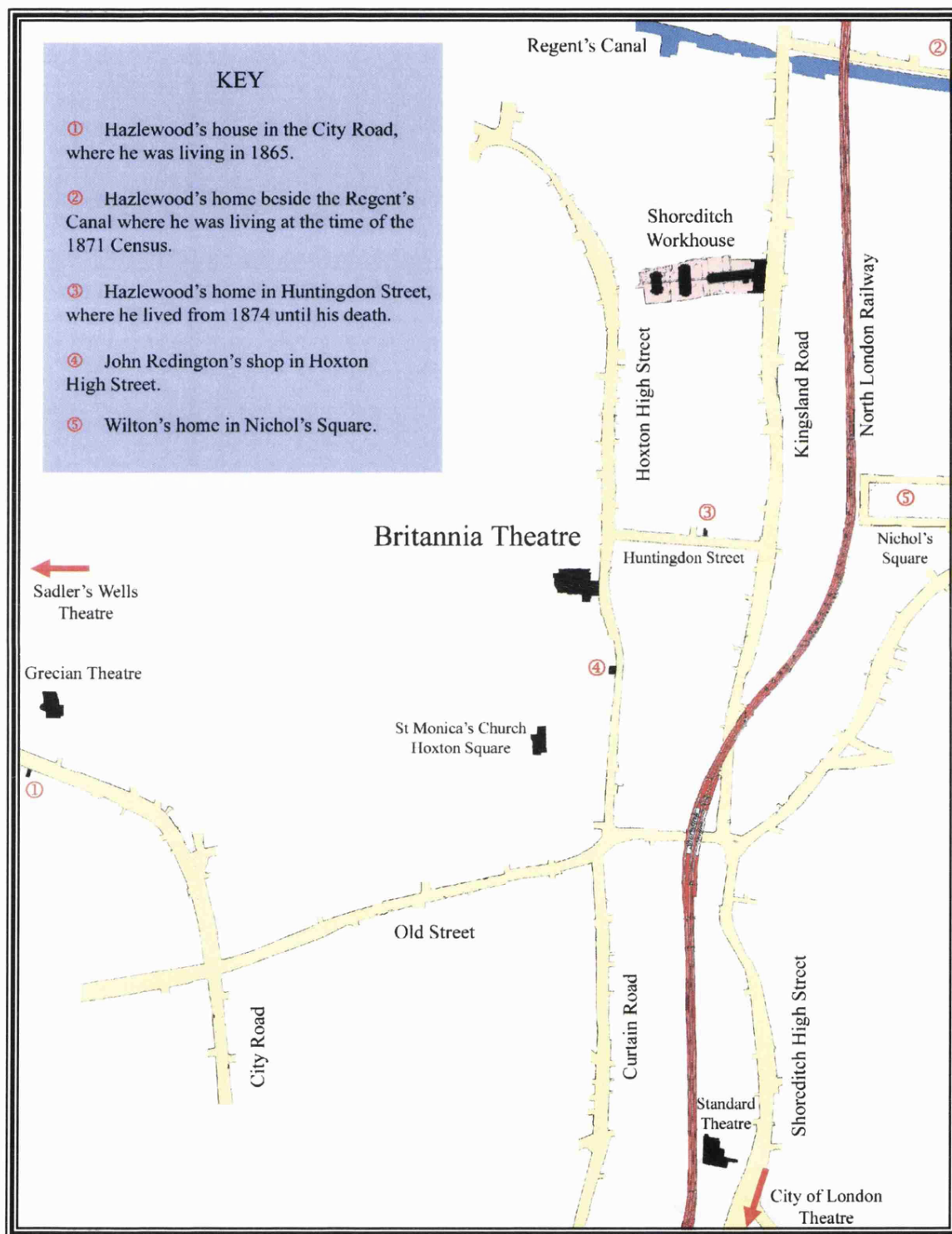
The published texts, Lord Chamberlain's playscripts and prompt copies of a cross-section of Britannia dramas are given detailed consideration. Themes and styles are related to contemporary issues and other examples of popular culture. Particular attention is paid to how productions were staged, noting if and how they differ from the practice at other theatres and therefore whether there was a house style. Reviews and contemporary illustrations are cited as evidence of the critical response to the dramas.

Special attention is directed to the annual Britannia pantomime. Conclusions are drawn about how it evolved over the years and what was unique about the form as it was performed at the Britannia.

Organisation of the thesis

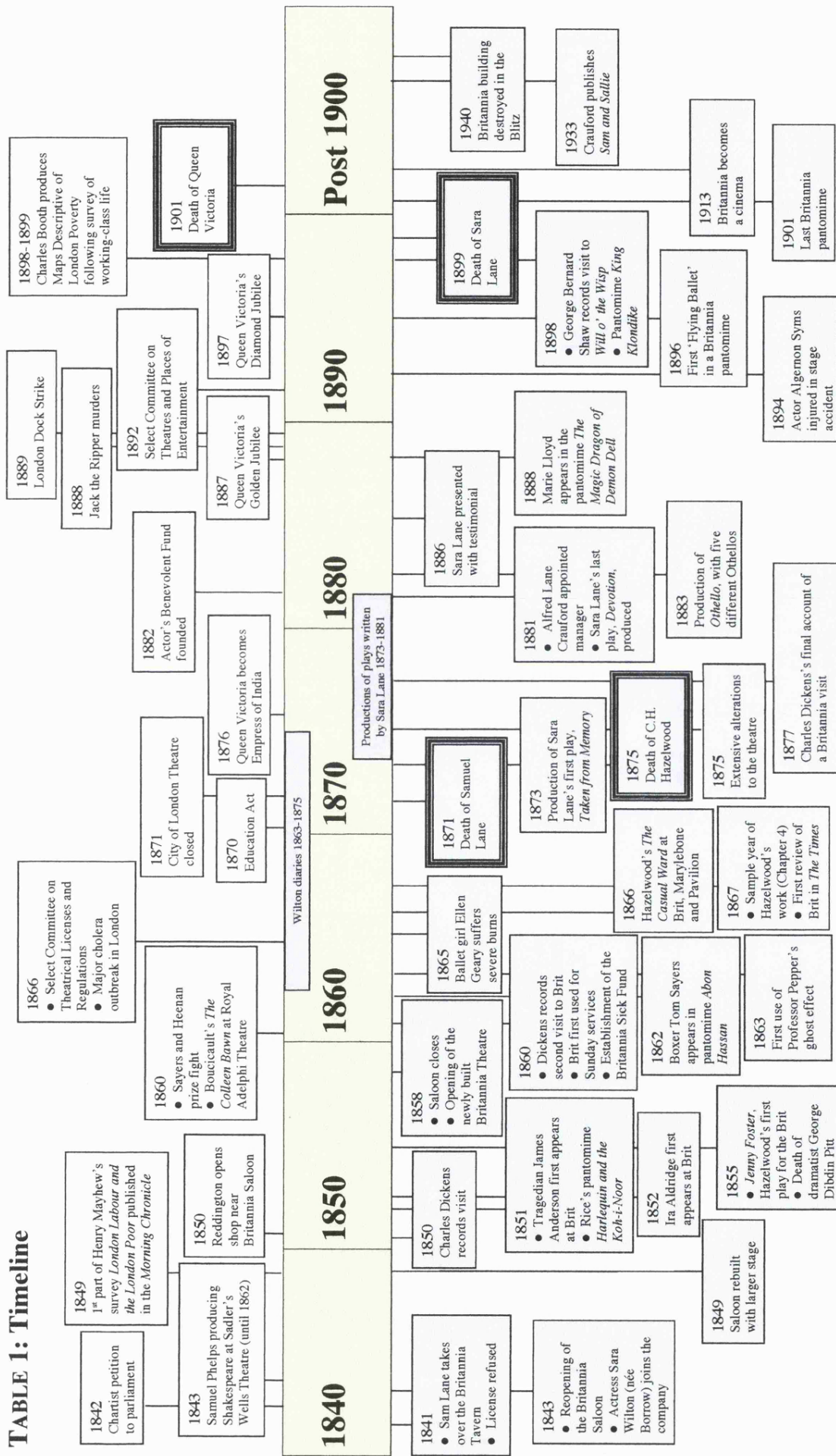
The thesis is divided into six chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter describes the history of the various theatre buildings, provides an overview of the people who worked there and charts the Britannia's economic relationship with the local community. The succeeding chapter defines the audience and investigates its behaviour. This is followed by two chapters focusing on key personalities in the life of the theatre: Sara Lane and Colin Hazlewood. Links with other forms of popular culture are further explored in the two subsequent chapters. Chapter 5 examines the repertoire, looking in detail at its productions of Shakespeare and its incidental entertainments. It identifies how the repertoire changed over the decades. The final chapter considers the annual pantomime. The conclusion summarises the main findings of the research and reiterates why understanding the context of the Britannia's history should be as central to discussions of Victorian theatrical history as any of its West End counterparts.

A timeline (Table 1) highlights important dates in the history of the Britannia and indicates where particular events and productions fit into the overall chronology.



MAP: Based on the 1872 Ordnance Survey Map of Shoreditch

TABLE 1: Timeline



1

SALOON AND THEATRE: HISTORY, BRICKS AND PEOPLE

‘The new Britannia Theatre, in the old Hoxton High Street, is the most complete and perfect structure of its kind in England.’

‘Theatrical Lounger’, *Illustrated Times*, 11 December 1858

The history of the Britannia Theatre can be traced from 1840 until its destruction during the bombing of London in World War II. This chapter provides a chronicle, concentrating on the period in which the theatre was owned and managed by Samuel and Sara Lane (1840-1899). An account of the physical buildings details how it changed over the years; highlights unusual or significant features; compares it to other buildings and theatres; and explores the implications of its design for the audience and for performance. The focus then shifts from architecture to the people who formed the Britannia company. Lastly, attention is given to the commercial relationship of the theatre with the local community and its businesses.

THE HISTORY OF THE BRITANNIA

In the 1830s the only theatres that were officially sanctioned to perform ‘legitimate’ drama (tragedy, comedy and farce) were the three patent houses – Covent Garden, Drury Lane and the Haymarket (the last named being licensed for the summer season only). The ‘minor’, or non-patent, theatres could apply for a Music and Dancing Licence from the local magistracy but were prohibited from staging dialogue. Many theatres flouted the law or sought to evade it by staging musical pieces and melodrama. In 1832 a Parliamentary Select Committee reviewed the situation and recommended the abolition of the patent monopoly.¹ However, the subsequent bill was defeated in the House of Lords and in 1839 the Metropolitan Police Act granted the police the power to raid premises and stop performances if they suspected the licensee to be contravening licensing regulations.

¹ *Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature* (House of Commons Papers, Session 1831-1832, 679).

In October 1840 John Noah Crowder successfully petitioned the magistrates for the renewal of his licence for 'Music and Dancing and other Public Entertainments of the like kind' for the Britannia Tavern on Hoxton High Street.² Later in 1840 Crowder sold the lease to Samuel Lane for the sum of £1,800.³ Lane had previously been landlord of the Union Tavern in Shoreditch High Street where he had staged entertainments in the saloon attached to the tavern. On 10 September 1839 the Union Tavern was raided during a performance, leading to the arrest of Sam, his actress wife Mary, eleven performers and approximately seventy members of the audience, which the police superintendent testified numbered between 800 and 900 (*Weekly Dispatch*, 15 September 1839). Mary was fined forty shillings, but when her husband was prosecuted separately, the case was dismissed (*Weekly Dispatch*, 22 September 1839). Nevertheless, the days of the Union Saloon were over.

In *Sam & Sallie* Crauford describes how at around this time Sam led a march to Parliament to demand a change in the law over theatrical licensing, with marchers carrying banners proclaiming "ONE LAW FOR THE RICH – ANOTHER FOR THE POOR," "WORKERS WANT THEATRES," "FREEDOM FOR THE PEOPLE'S AMUSEMENTS."⁴ Lane is also said to have addressed a crowd of Chartists and others, and influenced Tom Holmes, the Hackney M.P., to present a bill in their favour.⁵ Clive Barker proved this romanticised story to be largely fabricated.⁶ Nevertheless, it is a part of the myth of the Britannia, clearly allying the theatre's management with working people and depicting Lane as a pro-active advocate in the working-class audience's struggle against the unjust establishment.

When Lane took over the Britannia Tavern, the entertainments were presented in a small room 'not larger than 13 feet by 18 feet', the majority of which was used as the stage.⁷ Wanting to generate more profits from a larger audience, he decided to build a theatre in the gardens 'capable of accommodating about 150 in the boxes and 850 persons in the pit'. The new venue cost between £2,000 and £3,000 and opened on the evening of Easter Monday (12 March) 1841. The entertainment began with a concert of operatic selections, followed by a new melodrama by Edward Lancaster entitled *The Red Lance, or The Merrie Men of Hoxton*, an 'Intermezzo' including a nigger song and dance routine, and concluded with a farce, *The Tailor of Tamworth*. One of the actors, Joseph Cave,

² Middlesex Licensed Victuallers' Records, MR/LMD/0112, LMA.

³ *Sam & Sallie*, pp.159-60.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.152.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.152-55.

⁶ Clive Barker, 'A Theatre for the People' in Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson, eds, *Nineteenth Century British Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1971) pp.7-8.

⁷ Memorandum from Samuel Lane to Lord Chamberlain, September 1843, LC7/5, National Archives.

recalls the melodrama: 'The production was marked by the closest attention to every detail, and in the matters of scenery, costumes, and properties could not have been better presented at any West-End theatre of the day.'⁸

This mixed bill was typical of the entertainments at this period, which John Hollingshead describes as a 'variety show':

Farces were played, songs were sung, dances were danced, acrobats postured or flip-flapped according to their ability, or rope-dancers balanced themselves, and the audience had plenty of change for their money.⁹

Despite the popularity of the entertainment (*The Red Lance* ran for six weeks), Lane encountered difficulties when he unsuccessfully applied for a Music and Dancing Licence in October 1841. According to the testimony he sent to the Lord Chamberlain in 1843, he immediately disbanded the company, engaging instead a pianist and singers to provide musical entertainment.¹⁰ Without the anticipated income from his new theatre, Lane suffered a financial crisis and was bankrupt. In 1842 he was again refused a licence, a decision he blamed on the magistrates stressing his financial failure whilst refusing to recognise it was caused by the lack of a licence. In 1843 the Theatre Regulation Act was enacted, effectively ending the monopolies of the patent theatres and authorising the Lord Chamberlain to license all London theatres. They could perform all genres of drama but had to send any piece to be performed 'for hire' to the Lord Chamberlain's office along with a licensing fee. The Lord Chamberlain (in practice, his Examiner of Plays) could censor part or all of any submitted piece. Lane immediately applied for a licence for the Britannia. It was granted as a saloon theatre, meaning one in which access to the theatre was through the attached tavern.

In 1844 unfavourable police reports again threatened the license. The Britannia was alleged to be the haunt of prostitutes and thieves, water-cress girls, and hearth-stone hawkers.¹¹ In September the police counselled: 'There can be no doubt that this place is calculated to corrupt the morals of the growing youth in that low and thickly populated neighbourhood to a great extent.' Lane countered that the saloon was constantly attended by two police officers and argued that, since the Lord Chamberlain licensed all the plays,

⁸ J.A. Cave, *A Jubilee of Dramatic Life and Incident of Joseph A. Cave*, ed. Robert Souter (London: Thomas Vernon, 1892) pp.38-39.

⁹ John Hollingshead, *My Lifetime* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, 1895) vol. 1, p.31.

¹⁰ Memorandum from Samuel Lane to Lord Chamberlain, September 1843, LC7/5, National Archives.

¹¹ Police reports of 22 July and 21 September 1844, LC7/6, National Archives. Water-cress girls, like flower girls, were believed to be particularly vulnerable to prostitution.

they were unlikely to contaminate the audience's morals. He sent a letter signed by the Church Wardens, Overseers, Trustees of the Poor, Trustees of the Parish and other respectable citizens to say the Saloon had been conducted in a proper manner, plus a further memorial signed by 104 householders residing in Hoxton Street. It testified that 'on all occasions the Audience has been quiet and respectable'.¹² Somewhat unreasonably, the police responded by declaring the Britannia 'an unmitigated nuisance – The neighbourhood is altogether bad and the recommendations of the inhabitants rather tell *against* the Saloon than for it. . . . The Saloon is as great an evil as it could possibly be.'¹³ The Lord Chamberlain's officials chastised Lane for having the temerity to dispute the testimony of government officers. Nevertheless, he was granted a temporary licence, followed by the full annual one upon receiving satisfactory reports. The licence was never again in serious doubt, so from October 1843 until 1904 the Britannia was continually licensed as a legitimate theatre.

The changing status of the Britannia is reflected in its playbills. Early examples are headed 'Royal Britannia Saloon', but by 1848 the word 'Royal' has been dropped.¹⁴ In his 1850 review of the Britannia, Charles Dickens stated: 'It announces "The People's Theatre" as its second name.'¹⁵ Most of the extant playbills do not bear this out. An exception is one for 30 October 1854, which is entitled 'Royal Britannia Saloon, The People's Theatre'.¹⁶ (Some much later reviews, such as that in the *Era*, 19 December 1875, referred to it as the 'People's Theatre'.) Some playbills for 1856 are entitled simply 'Britannia', while others have 'Saloon, Hoxton' printed in much smaller type underneath. This may have been a deliberate attempt to make people think it was licensed as a theatre, not a saloon. One anomalous example from August 1856 is headed 'Britannia Theatre', which it technically could not be while access was only available through the tavern.

The first decade in the life of the theatre following the granting of the license in 1843 was one of consolidation. Slowly it earned a better reputation through the consistent standard and variety of its entertainments. By July 1847 even the police regarded it more favourably, reporting that the theatre had been better conducted for the previous two years than when it first opened.¹⁷ Dickens made the first of three recorded visits in April 1850

¹² Letters of 27, 28 and 30 September 1844, LC7/6, National Archives.

¹³ Verbal police report, 3 October 1844, LC7/6, National Archives.

¹⁴ For example, Britannia playbill 1a for 25 July 1841, and 6 for 27 September 1848, HA.

¹⁵ Charles Dickens, 'The Amusements of the People' 2, *Household Words* 1 (13 April 1850) 57.

¹⁶ Playbills TM, 1 of 13.

¹⁷ Report of 12 July 1847, LC7/7, National Archives.

and gave a positive account.¹⁸ Thus by 1856 Lane, who had made substantial profits and was optimistic about attracting a bigger audience, contemplated demolishing the existing building and replacing it with a larger theatre. After lengthy negotiations with the Lord Chamberlain's office and the architects, the old saloon shut after the evening performance on 23 June 1858. Despite being delayed by a strike of the labourers, its replacement was opened only four-and-a-half months later on 8 November 1858.

The new theatre represented a massive investment for Lane. Wilton claims it cost £22,000: 'The Gas Fittings were not included in this sum, nor the Chandeliers; – but the timber used in constructing the stage, & the Flies was included – though worked up by the Stage Carpenters'.¹⁹ The *Builder* (20 November 1858) put the total expenditure as £15,000, and by excluding £4,000 for the 'tavern and its fittings, the private residence, the theatre-entrance-ways, and the refreshment-courts' calculated 'the theatre proper' cost £11,000. Considering Lane had been bankrupt in 1841, the fact that he could finance such expenditure shows how profitable the Saloon must have been in the fifteen years from 1843.

William Bodham Donne's report on his inspection of the new structure prior to its opening concedes it 'is now rendered one of the most spacious and commodious theatres in the metropolis.'²⁰ Because the new building had separate accesses to the theatre, Lane successfully petitioned the Lord Chamberlain to change its status and license it as a theatre. Advertisements and playbills announced it as the 'New Britannia Theatre'. From November 1863 onwards all playbills were headed 'BRITANNIA The Great Theatre (Hoxton)'.

It is not clear when the theatre attracted its affectionate nickname, 'the Brit'. The first written reference to it appears in the *Saturday Programme* of 29 April 1876 and several authors testify to its usage.

Wilton's diaries reveal the profitability of the theatre. This contributed to the increasing respect in which Sam Lane was held, notwithstanding the fact that in the 1840s magistrates had declared him 'not a fit or proper person'.²¹ When the new theatre was being constructed in 1858, Donne presented a highly favourable account to the Lord Chamberlain:

¹⁸ Dickens, 'Amusements', 57-60.

¹⁹ Wilton CY1136, frame 808.

²⁰ Report of 4 November 1858, LC1/58, National Archives.

²¹ Police report, 3 October 1844, LC7/6, National Archives.

Mr. Lane himself is not only a highly respectable man, but desires also to raise the dramatic character of his house, and first and last has expended, I am informed, many thousands of pounds upon it.²²

The Britannia, however, was not just the product of one man's labour. Lane's second wife, Sara, was a leading actress in the company and responsible for much of the theatre's success. In February 1868 Lane told his stage manager that he intended giving up the Britannia '3 years from next Christmas'.²³ However, his health was poor and in the summer of 1870 he suffered a stroke that left him barely able to speak. He was never again in effective control of the theatre. His death on 28 December 1871 brought only a one-night closure of the theatre and within eight days a new license was granted to his widow. With the support of various members of her family, Sara continued as the manager until her own death on 16 August 1899 (this period is covered in Chapter 3). Thus the Britannia was unique among British theatres for being under the control of one family for six decades (see Plate 1.1).

Post-1899 history

On Sara's death in 1899, the theatre passed into the hands of her nephews, William Samuel and Alfred Lane Crauford. Almost immediately the London County Council declared that an extensive amount of work needed to be carried out to the fabric of the building to meet safety regulations. These included 'the pulling down of adjacent properties and the building of a series of dressing-rooms'.²⁴ Crauford estimated the costs at £8,000. Although this was a substantial sum, as Crauford himself admits, the theatre was still profitable and so should have been able to finance the required improvements. In 1902 the Crauford brothers sold the lease of the Britannia.²⁵ Presumably the lessee and Crauford jointly financed the alterations as in a letter of 20 September 1902 Crauford writes that all the changes have been completed for £8,000 'a sum which has plunged us deeply in debt'.²⁶

The new management lacked Sara's personnel skills and soon became embroiled in a strike. This was the beginning of the most dismal period in the theatre's history. In 1903 music-hall entrepreneur Thomas Barrasford became the new manager, changed the Britannia into a varieties theatre and introduced the 'two houses a night' plan. He reduced

²² Letter from Donne, 12 October 1858, LC1/58, National Archives.

²³ *Diaries*, p.138.

²⁴ *Sam & Sallie*, p.343.

²⁵ A letter from the architect dated 10 May 1902 refers to Mr [Clement] Hobson as 'the purchaser' but another letter of 1 December 1902 names 'the lessee, Mr. J. Woolfe', LCC/MIN 10,779, LMA.

²⁶ LCC/MIN 10,779, LMA.

the entry fees to 2d for the gallery and 6d for the stalls, the lowest prices since the days of the Britannia Saloon in 1846 (see below).²⁷ After Barrasford, a succession of managements took control, including in 1910 George Conquest, but all failed to make consistent profits. Barker contends that the decline of working-class living standards during the depression of 1900-1905 may have been instrumental in the theatre's fortunes.²⁸ Crauford notes the West End had become more accessible by tubes and buses, and suggests that the competition from Moss and Stoll's Empires and the new cinema palaces was too great to be resisted.²⁹ This theory is supported by Charles Booth's 1889 statement that 'the mass of the people' in the East End prefers music-hall entertainment to 'the drama'.³⁰ The Britannia was not the only theatre in decline. The *Daily Telegraph* (25 July 1904) claimed the demise of all the theatres that had specialised in melodrama – the Britannia, Surrey, Victoria, Grecian and Sadler's Wells – was due to changing taste in drama.

In 1913 the Britannia ceased to be a venue for dramatic performance and became a cinema. After World War I the lease passed to the Gaumont film company. A postscript to the story is that in 1934 Crauford sold the rights to *Sam & Sallie* to the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation for £750.³¹ *Tit-Bits* (23 February 1935) confirmed that a film of the story was being made with Jessie Matthews in the starring role, but it appears the film was never completed.

The theatre was finally destroyed by a land mine on 8 December 1940. A commemorative plaque on a residential building now marks its original location.

THE PHYSICAL BUILDING

A plan sent to the Lord Chamberlain along with Lane's licence petition in 1843 shows the tavern on Hoxton Old Town (later renamed Hoxton High Street, see Map). Behind it was a large area of open ground housing a yard with ladies' and gentlemen's W.C.s³² and a long rectangular building (36 ft 6 in x 90 ft) forming the saloon theatre.³³ Entry to the saloon was via a lobby at the back of the pit. Three narrow rectangles are marked on the plan, presumably corresponding to blocks of benches. At the front of the pit was the orchestra,

²⁷ Britannia playbill xxviii for 21 December 1903, HA.

²⁸ Clive Barker, 'The Audiences of the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton', *Theatre Quarterly* 9:34 (1979) 40.

²⁹ *Sam & Sallie*, p.346.

³⁰ Quoted in Russell Jackson, *Victorian Theatre* (London: A & C Black, 1989) p.67.

³¹ Agreement dated 26 February 1934, author's collection.

³² There appear to be four cubicles for men plus some urinals, but only two cubicles for women, suggesting that the majority of the audience were anticipated to be men.

³³ LC7/5, National Archives.

with the stage behind. Four lines are shown on each side of the stage, probably the grooves for the flats. Beyond the stage were two dressing rooms.

In 1845 Lane spent more than £1,000 adding private side-boxes to the stage (*Theatrical Journal*, 13 September 1845). These turned out to be a mixed blessing. The only access was via a ladder at the side of the stage where there were a number of ropes including, on the prompter's side, that for the curtain bell. A hapless climber could unintentionally ring the bell and so bring down the curtain. Hollingshead confesses to having done this one night 'and disarranged the performance for a moment.'³⁴ Even if the curtain did not descend unexpectedly, it must have been distracting for the performers and audience if someone entered or left a stage box during the dramatic action.

Hollingshead's account suggests that the outer fabric of the Saloon was insubstantial:

In the intervals of cricket we (the boys of the period) had bored holes with our stumps and through these holes we could sniff the scent of the footlights, that indescribable bouquet of stale gas, orange peel, damp playbills and mouldy scenery which suggests the playhouse and nothing else. More than this, we could hear the words of the play, the clash of swords and the shrieks of the heroines in distress.³⁵

In 1849 Lane rebuilt the saloon so that it had a larger stage and could seat 1,500.³⁶ It was constructed to a high specification (*Theatrical Journal*, 28 June 1849):

The theatre is a fine commodious structure, built on the most approved principles, and here we may remark that the commissioners appointed under the building act, on their inspecting their erection, paid Mr. Lane a high and well deserved compliment by at once expressing their perfect approval of the works, and at the same time while viewing the stone staircases bound with iron, and the number of doors for egress in case of fire, &c., hinting that he had even been somewhat lavish in his expenditure to give increased stability to the building. More than this, they immediately granted him the required certificate.

The journal also praised the interior decoration, noting that it has been painted in the Louis XIV style under the direction of Mr. Fenoulhet '(late of the Royal gardens Vauxhall) and portrait painter to H.R.H. Prince Albert'. Playbills advertised the 'splendid decorations *à la Watteau*'.³⁷

³⁴ Hollingshead, *Lifetime*, vol. 1, p.33.

³⁵ A.E. Wilson, *East End Entertainment* (London: Arthur Barker, 1954) p.165.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.173.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.165.

The new building contained a large gallery. The *News of the World* (24 August 1856) reported that the building was capable of containing 3,500 people, and on the Saturday night of the reviewer's visit more than 2,800 had paid at the doors. Dickens praised the provision made for hearing and seeing: 'Instead of being at a great disadvantage in comparison with the mass of the audience, they [the common people] were here *the* audience, for whose accommodation the place was made.'³⁸

The only known illustration of the Britannia Saloon is an anonymous watercolour painted c.1845 (see Plate 1.2). It depicts a view from the back of the saloon looking towards the stage and shows two galleries on either side of the building. Redington's toy theatre stage front (see below) predates the building of the new theatre. If accurate (and there is no way of establishing this), it gives an impression of the view from the audience and shows the stage boxes.

The Great Theatre of 1858

More is known of the new theatre constructed in 1858 (see Plate 1.3). It was a solidly built, handsome, white stone building with an attractive façade described as 'French Renaissance style' (*Building News*, 12 November 1858). The ground floor was mostly constructed in cast-iron with geometrically patterned encaustic tiles lining the faces of the dividing piers. On the upper floors projecting pilasters were decorated with moulded foliage, scrollwork and lions' heads. At the base of each pilaster was a scrollwork shield bearing the intertwined monogram of Samuel (and, indeed, Sara) Lane. Crauford suggests that this imposing building 'looked out of place in this comparatively narrow market street, among the costermongers and their barrows'.³⁹

The Britannia was not the only new building in the neighbourhood, but it was significant because it was one of the few lavish buildings to which the working class had access.⁴⁰ Thus entering the physical space of the theatre was a special occasion, a departure from normal, everyday life. For some it was a place of refuge. As Barker points out, for those living in shared, crowded rooms, spending an evening at the theatre was preferable to being confined to dismal rooms or walking the streets.⁴¹

The new theatre had separate entrances for the tavern, boxes and pit, and galleries. The entrances on either side of the tavern led into a large glass-covered corridor 'fitted up as a

³⁸ Dickens, 'Amusements', 58.

³⁹ *Sam & Sallie*, p.274.

⁴⁰ Few attended church, see Chapter 2.

⁴¹ Clive Barker, 'Audiences', 34.

conservatory and made gay by flowers and shrubs and brilliant gaslights'.⁴² It connected by wide archways to a similar space at the back of the pit in the theatre building. The *Builder* (13 November 1858) noted with satisfaction that the entrances and staircases were more spacious than was usual in theatre designs, and therefore should make the building safer. The impressive ambiance was likened to that of Kings Cross railway station (opened in 1852), thereby associating the Britannia with an important landmark of the modern metropolis (*Illustrated Times*, 11 December 1858):

Walking along the broad passages, under the lofty arches and up the substantial stone stair cases, the visitor, looking at the thick, plain walls, might fancy himself in the London terminus of the Great Northern Railway.

Contemporary construction journals commented favourably that the theatre's internal design was based on an ellipsis, rather than the 'old hackneyed horseshoe plan' (*Building News*, 12 November 1858). The main advantage of the Britannia's design was that there were fewer 'bad seats' with poor views of the stage (*Builder*, 13 November 1858). Traditionally seats in the widest part of the pit had restricted views of any action carried out deep behind the proscenium opening. To further aid visibility, the floor of the new pit was inclined and the stage floor was raked. Donne's inspection pronounced: 'The accommodation to the Public is very good especially in those parts of the House which are likely to be most frequented viz. the Pit & Galleries.'⁴³

Comparing the size of the new auditorium and stage reveals that it was virtually double the size of the 1843 structure.⁴⁴ The pit was 76 ft wide, over twice that of the original saloon's but of a similar depth. The old stage measured 36 ft 6 in wide by 30 ft deep. The proscenium opening of the new stage was virtually as wide, at 34 ft, with an overall width of 76 ft. It was 60 ft deep. These figures are significant for two reasons: they are indicative of its much larger audience capacity, and they put it on a scale comparable to any other theatre in London. In fact, the stage was only six foot less in depth and width than Drury Lane's. The capacious Britannia was not only equipped to produce legitimate drama but could also stage various spectacles. A review of the performance of Van Hare's troupe of equestrians, vaulters and jesters in 1862, compared the merits of the venue to that of Astley's, the foremost equestrian site in London:

⁴² 'The Theatres of the People 4. The Britannia', 2 November 1859, unidentified cutting, Theatre Cuttings 63, BL.

⁴³ Report of 4 November 1858, LC1/58, National Archives.

⁴⁴ Measurements of the Saloon taken from plan submitted with licence application in 1843, LC7/5, National Archives.

The stage of the Britannia is of large dimensions, and a circus is formed on it with extraordinary quickness between the first and concluding pieces – which, if we mistake not, is very nearly as large as the one at Astleys – the visitors in all parts of the house being enabled to have an interrupted [sic] view of the equestrian entertainment.⁴⁵

Whereas the 1843 Saloon had accommodated approximately one thousand spectators, the new building could seat 3,250, with 1,000 in the pit, 200 in the stalls, 600 in the lower tier and boxes, and 1,250 in the side boxes and upper gallery (*Builder*, 25 September 1858).⁴⁶ Three hundred people could stand in the pit and another fifty in the refreshment area. In fact, the number of people that attended the Brit frequently exceeded this (see Chapter 2). An appendix to the 1866 Report lists the number of persons whom the metropolitan theatres could contain as reported by the managers.⁴⁷ The Britannia's figures are 895 in the boxes, 2,151 in the pit, 877 in the gallery, giving a total of 3,923. This was the biggest capacity of any of the theatres.⁴⁸ The next largest were Drury Lane with 3,800, Astley's with 3,780, the Pavilion with 3,500 and the Standard with 3,400. In 1892 new regulations enforced by the Theatres and Music Halls Committee aimed at reducing overcrowding compelled many theatres to reduce their seating capacities.⁴⁹ The Britannia was limited to 3,450, but according to the 1892 Report, was still the largest in London.⁵⁰

In 1885 the 'Captious Critic' reported in the *ISDN* (17 January 1885) on the size of the venue and its audience capacity:

The very appearance of the house is striking to a frequenter of West-end theatres. The large and somewhat sombre auditorium, crammed to the uttermost limits of its capacity, the huge rake of the pit, extending far back into a vast and gloomy cavern under the balcony; and the enormous gallery, piled tier above tier to upper darkness with faces, seemingly packed one on the top of another, like the sloping stacks of oranges in a fruiterer's, are most impressive.

At the time West End theatres such as the Prince of Wales, St James's, Olympic and Adelphi had audience capacities of between 800 and 1,600, so for their patrons it was a significantly different experience to be one of the vast crowd at the Britannia.⁵¹ For East

⁴⁵ Unattributed cutting, 2 March 1862, Theatre Cuttings 64, BL.

⁴⁶ Confusingly, this gives a total of 3,050.

⁴⁷ 1866 Report, p.295.

⁴⁸ Although Covent Garden is credited with 6,880 for a promenade concert.

⁴⁹ Michael Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p.68.

⁵⁰ 1892 Report, p.368.

⁵¹ Figures from 1866 Report, p.295.

Enders the contrast was not as marked as the nearest competition, the Standard and the City of London, could accommodate 3,400 and 2,500 respectively.

The elegant and ornate auditorium was as impressive as the building's dimensions (see Plate 1.4). Each box division on the tiers was marked with a seated figure of Britannia with a gilt spear and shield. Sixteen small chandeliers gave spectators a better view of the stage than the previous large chandelier, which had obscured the sight lines for many sitting in the old gallery. They also diffused the light more uniformly. The *Theatrical Journal* (17 November 1858) approved: 'The prevailing colour is a beautiful pale rose tint, relieved with gold and white mouldings, ornaments, and figures, in high relief.' Another commentator noted the unconventional décor:

The audience part of the theatre is Moresque in its construction and in most of its decorations; but there is a slight admixture of Louis Quatorze ornament, which is somewhat incongruous. The walls at the back and sides of the pit and gallery are, however, most admirably treated, the brick-work being painted of a rich brown, across which run broad bands of black. The appearance of this is most striking, and an admirable effect is gained when this rich background is contrasted with the graceful columns and Moresque arches that are freely made use of in the construction of the house, and the predominant decorations of which are blue and gold. The Britannia is a triumphant proof of the success with which Moresque architecture can be employed in the construction of a theatre, while, by its novelty, it is a great relief to the usual style of decorations which are to be met with in our places of public amusement.⁵²

The act drop, painted by William Beverley, the Britannia's foremost scene painter, earned particular praise. It depicted a classical landscape complete with the ruins of a Roman temple, allegorical figures, an aqueduct, mountains and the sea (*Building News*, 12 November 1858).

The physical sumptuousness reflected the management's intention to conduct a respectable theatre. The *Builder* (13 November 1858) made the connection between the décor and behaviour explicit:

We are amongst those who believe that the mere decorative features of places of public amusement, if marked by propriety and taste, are not wholly without influence, though silent and unseen perhaps, in mollifying the manners of whatever the class, or in standing between what we are told, . . . is a brutalizing tendency to which humanity is open, . . .

⁵² Unattributed cutting, 2 November 1859, Theatre Cuttings 63, BL.

Janice Carlisle expands this argument, contending that the Britannia was a Foucauldian panopticon. Since every member of the audience can be seen, behaviour is regulated.⁵³ She describes the interior of the theatre as ‘a vast, sterile hall that might be construed as an architectural mechanism of intimidation’.⁵⁴ However, there is no evidence in all the eyewitness accounts that the audience appeared intimidated: arguably, it was empowered by being able to congregate in such an impressive building. Moreover, as Davis and Emeljanow have shown, Carlisle’s theory ignores the particular relationship between the Britannia and its audience, arguing that ‘the theatre is designed to facilitate a shared and integrated experience rather than a cold act of control’.⁵⁵

The *Era* (7 November 1858) voiced the general approval for the new building:

Equally remarkable for the solidity of its construction, the fine architectural character of its proportions, and the chasteness of design apparent in its decorations, the new theatre affords increased accommodation to the audience and is endowed, in the stage department, with all those important mechanical advantages that modern invention, ingenuity, and executive skill could furnish, and which so materially further the production of those striking theatrical effects for which this theatre has long enjoyed a marked popularity.

The ‘Theatrical Lounger’ (*Illustrated Times*, 11 December 1858) was also impressed with the facilities: ‘I paid it a visit the other night, in company with several professional friends, and we were all surprised by the size and beauty of the audience part of the building, the depth, breadth, and general capabilities of the stage, and the unusually comfortable arrangements in the front of the house.’

Dickens, who judged the new building ‘infinitely superior’ to the Royal Italian Opera for hearing in, and ‘infinitely superior’ to Her Majesty’s and the Royal Italian Opera for seeing in, praised the ventilation.⁵⁶ Unlike some places of public resort, the Brit did not offend his sense of smell: ‘The air of this Theatre was fresh, cool, and wholesome.’ He noted the ingenious building techniques combining the experience of hospitals and railways stations by, for example, laying asphalt, not wooden floors. ‘These various contrivances are as well considered in the place in question as if it were a Fever Hospital: the result is, that it is sweet and healthful.’ This emphasis on sanitation was significant because at the time many people believed in miasmatology, the conviction that an

⁵³ Janice Carlisle, ‘Spectacle as Government, Dickens and the Working-Class Audience’ in Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt, eds, *The Performance of Power: Theatrical Discourse and Politics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991) p.167.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.169.

⁵⁵ Davis and Emeljanow, p.80.

⁵⁶ Charles Dickens, ‘The Uncommercial Traveller’, *All the Year Round* 2 (25 February 1860) 417.

unwholesome atmosphere caused pestilence or disease.⁵⁷ Thus presenting a seemingly hygienic venue was especially important during outbreaks of disease, such as the cholera epidemics of 1866, which affected the East End particularly badly.⁵⁸

The construction of the new theatre in 1858 did not mark the end of improvements to the fabric of the building. A playbill for 26 December 1859 announces alterations have been made to give a better view of the stage from the private boxes and the installation of a new set of chandeliers.⁵⁹ In September 1861 a reviewer noted: 'The entrance to the pit has been decorated by Mr. John Gay, and represents an elegant vinery.'⁶⁰ In 1866 the theatre was 'Redecorated and improved throughout'.⁶¹ The same playbill refers to 'Britannia The Fire-Proof Great Theatre.' In fact for the next four years playbills carry a strap line declaring 'Fire-Proof Stairs, Passages and Entrances'. This was clearly an important issue when so many theatres burnt down; for example, the Pavilion in February 1856 and both Covent Garden and the Surrey in 1865. Percy Fitzgerald calculated that between 1785 and 1875 English theatres burnt down at a rate of approximately one every two years.⁶² There were several incidents at the Britannia that could have resulted in fatalities if prompt action had not been taken. For example, on 13 May 1868 a piece of canvass over a chandelier caught fire but was quickly extinguished.⁶³

A notice in a programme for 13 April 1874 announces: 'A New Retiring Room for Ladies (for which no charge is made) has just been added and is now open upon a level with the Boxes'.⁶⁴ In December 1875 the theatre was shut for a fortnight while extensive alterations and improvements were made. These included work on the roof, stage and dressing-rooms, new upholstery in the boxes and redecoration of the auditorium, passageways and lobbies. The costs totalled nearly £2,000. The *Era* (9 January 1876) reported:

The splendid domed ceiling is particularly deserving of observation, the four panels being filled up with allegorical paintings, executed in a style worthy of our most eminent *artistes* . . . The subjects are 'The Crowning of Shakespeare by the Muses,' 'Modern Pantomime

⁵⁷ Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the Stage 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.99.

⁵⁸ Alan Palmer, *The East End: Four Centuries of London Life* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000) pp.61-63. Wilton CY1136, frame 288.

⁵⁹ Playbill for 26 December 1859, Playbills TM, 1 of 13.

⁶⁰ Unattributed cutting, 13 September 1861, Theatre Cuttings 64, BL.

⁶¹ Britannia playbill 50 for 15 January 1866, HA.

⁶² Percy Fitzgerald, *The World Behind the Scenes* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1881) p.31.

⁶³ *Diaries*, p.142.

⁶⁴ Programme for 13 April 1874, 792.35P, Y1612, HA.

Intruding on Classical Ground,' 'Thalia Surrounded by the Thespiades,' and 'Melpomene Bewailing the Vicissitudes of Life.'⁶⁵

These classically inspired decorations were intended to create a 'high' cultural ambiance that was unlike anywhere else the working-class clientele was likely to frequent.

Refurbishment continued in the next decade. A playbill for 27 December 1886 proclaims: 'This Theatre has been re-decorated by Fritz Hurwitz.'⁶⁶

Safety

From 1855 the Britannia, like all theatres licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, was subject to an annual review of the premises. These highlighted safety issues. According to the evidence Wilton provides of the inspections carried out between 1863 and 1874, the theatre was usually charged to make only minor alterations. For example, in September 1864 he records:

Their principal suggestions were that the walls of the Gallery stairs should be lime-washed and sprinkled with chloride and lime; that the screws of the water-cistern be looked to as they were rusting.⁶⁷

From 1878 responsibility passed to the Metropolitan Board of Works and then in 1888 to the Theatres and Music Halls Committee of the London County Council (LCC).⁶⁸ In 1888 more extensive alterations, in the form of an additional staircase from the boxes, were proposed.

Correspondence in the LCC committee papers shows that Sara Lane was a fierce negotiator when she disagreed with proposals. For example, in March 1891 the Committee suggested that flap seats be permanently removed from the gangways. Sara protested that to comply with the suggestion would entail a serious financial loss 'without any compensating advantages in the point of safety to the public.'⁶⁹ She continued:

This Theatre has been under the one Management for 49 years during which periods we have had two alarms of fire (without any cause I may add) and on neither occasion did any injury result to one of the panic-stricken audience – a strong proof I maintain that the said flap seats are not a source of danger here.

⁶⁵ In Greek mythology the Thespiades are the nine muses; Thalia and Melpomene are the muses of comedy and tragedy respectively.

⁶⁶ Playbill for 27 December 1886, Playbills 342, BL.

⁶⁷ *Diaries*, p.81.

⁶⁸ Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, p.68.

⁶⁹ Letter of 20 March 1891, LCC/MIN 10,779, LMA.

Her solicitor was still arguing the case in January of the following year, pointing out that Drury Lane had similar seats.⁷⁰ The question was referred to the Lord Chamberlain and then to an arbitrator. The works were finally carried out to the satisfaction of the LCC (the gallery flap seats were removed, and those in the pit were fastened) in the summer of 1893.

Throughout the 1890s the authorities expressed concern over various safety issues. The Britannia was not an isolated offender; in 1892 it was one of 31 theatres listed by the LCC as ‘unsatisfactory’. Dangerous practices highlighted in reports included: utilizing unsafe tubing and containers for limelight (1895); storing large amounts of scenery and props on and under the stage and in the flies (1896); and permanently connecting a hydrant, intended for use in case of fire, with another pipe to provide an on-stage waterfall (1898).⁷¹ Some of these entailed considerable expense for the management. In a letter of 21 November 1896 Sara informs the Committee that they ‘have nearly filled a large new building we have recently erected in an adjacent street with scenery etc. formerly stored in the Theatre premises.’⁷² Thus the list of stipulations Crauford faced in 1900 was not unprecedented.

Implications of the physical space

The physical dimensions of a theatre predispose the production of certain types of drama. In Bulwer Lytton’s speech to the House of Commons on 31 May 1832 arguing for the establishment of a Select Committee to consider the laws affecting dramatic literature, he contended that the size of Covent Garden and Drury Lane Theatres rendered them suitable for spectacle only.⁷³ Certainly, a building on the scale of the 1858 Britannia would be inappropriate for intimate ‘studio’ work. To be seen and understood at the back of the gallery, actors typically made big gestures rather than finely nuanced movements as a review (*Era*, 3 June 1899) of Charles Young’s *Jim the Fenman* recognised:

Subtlety and delicate shades of expression are somewhat lost in such a large house as the Britannia, and Mr Clyndes wisely relies upon breadth of effect for his success, which is very marked.

Although the acoustics were praised, performers still required good voice-projection skills. Reviewers rarely mention inaudibility. An exception is a complaint that ‘Miss Vivian’s voice could have hardly penetrated the distant parts of the house on Monday

⁷⁰ Letter of 18 January 1892, LCC/MIN 10,779, LMA.

⁷¹ LCC/MIN 10,779, LMA.

⁷² LCC/MIN 10,779, LMA.

⁷³ Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.76.

evening' during a revival of Edgar Newbound's *Gemea, or What the Cards Tell* (*Era*, 28 March 1885). The actress was performing at the theatre for the first time and the critic suggested she 'will do better when she understands the acoustic qualities of the house'. Criticising another actress, Sophie Fane, on her first engagement at the Brit, the *Era* (3 November 1888) explained the problem:

It is not shouting that enables the whole of the large audience to hear every word spoken by a performer on the stage, but finished enunciation and clear and rather high-pitched delivery. This perfection of pronunciation, which was more common in the days of the great patent theatres and of blank verse plays than now, is yearly becoming more rare as the rising generation of actors replaces the old school. The necessity of first-rate delivery is very great in a vast house like Mrs Lane's, where the voice soon becomes out-worn if a habit of straining it in order to create mere noise is required.

This implies that the vastness of the theatre demanded that actors continue with a style of speech that was beginning to seem dated by frequenters of the smaller West End houses.

The size of the Britannia's stage enabled it to house the mechanical contraptions necessary to produce spectacular effects in, for example, sensation drama and pantomime. Nevertheless, it was slow to convert to electric lighting. Most theatres were using electric lighting by 1886,⁷⁴ yet a report on the Britannia by the LCC's Chief Engineer dated 1 August 1899 comments: 'The only electric light in the theatre is supplied through ten stage plugs which are only used for stage effects.'⁷⁵ It was not until the theatre re-opened in August 1903 under the new management of Messrs Barrasford and Bostock that it could boast 'complete electric light installation supplied throughout'.⁷⁶

THE COMPANY

Whatever the advantages or shortcomings of the building, the success of the theatre was critically dependent on the personnel who created, facilitated and performed in the productions. The first Britannia company included a regular dramatist, Edward Richardson Lancaster, and Henry Howard as actor and stage manager. *Oxberry's Weekly Budget* recalled the tumultuous reception Howard received on the opening night of the Britannia Saloon in 1841, at which he played the lead character in *The Red Lance*:

⁷⁴ Phyllis Hartnoll, ed., *The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) p.307.

⁷⁵ LCC Theatres and Music Halls Committee Papers: Britannia Theatre 1889-1909, LCC/MIN 10,779, LMA.

⁷⁶ Poster for August 1903, LCC/MIN 10,779, LMA.

A man, even of inferior abilities, must have stood a chance in being thus introduced, but that chance was rendered a certainty by the fire and genius of Howard, who, animated by his reception, dashed through the piece with a brilliance, and exerted his magnificent voice with an effect, that wrought the applause into a positive tumult, and when the curtain fell, the entire audience rose, and he was called for with acclamations from every mouth.⁷⁷

Howard was typical of the performers Lane engaged. In his memorandum to the Lord Chamberlain of 1843 he describes the performers he engaged in 1841 as ‘those holding respectable situations in other minor theatres’.⁷⁸ A contemporary report suggested Lane attracted good talent because ‘his terms in most instances [were] liberal; in many cases exceeding those of the Surrey’.⁷⁹ However, Lane was unhappy with the situation. When he petitioned the Lord Chamberlain to change the status of the Britannia from a saloon to a theatre in 1843, he confirmed he had engaged ‘at a heavy expense’ many talented dramatists and performers including ‘Messieurs. D.W. Osbaldiston formerly lessee of the Theatre Royal Covent Garden and at present lessee of the Royal Victoria Theatre. T.R. Scott the American Tragedian of the Princesses Theatre. T.H. Kirby, also from America. E. Saville from several provincial theatres – N.T. Hicks C. Freer and R. Shepherd of the Royal Surrey Theatre . . .’.⁸⁰ Yet he claimed to have experienced difficulties in attracting artists to a saloon because they considered accepting such engagements would ‘lessen their character and position in the Estimation of the public.’ The frequent omission of references to engagements at the Britannia in contemporary biographies and obituaries of actors supports Lane’s contention. For example, the *Era* obituary (25 February 1855) for the actor and dramatist George Dibdin Pitt failed to mention the Britannia even though he became its acting manager and prolific house dramatist in 1843.⁸¹ It is a fact that none of the acknowledged first-rate performers of the Victorian stage, such as Charles Kean, Helen Faucit, Madge Kendal, Charles Fechter or Henry Irving, ever trod the boards of Hoxton, even though a few performed at other East End venues.

Despite the myriad reviews, forming an objective assessment of the standard of acting at the Brit is difficult because the critics do not necessarily judge the performances to the same standard as they would a West End production. This is particularly true in the early

⁷⁷ *Oxberry's Weekly Budget* 2 (13 November 1843) 179.

⁷⁸ Memorandum from Samuel Lane to Lord Chamberlain, September 1843, LC7/5, National Archives.

⁷⁹ *Oxberry's Weekly Budget* 2 (23 October 1843) 150.

⁸⁰ Letter of 7 June 1848, LC7/7, National Archives.

⁸¹ Dwayne Brenna, ‘George Dibdin Pitt: Actor and Playwright’, *Theatre Notebook* 52,1 (1998) 33-35.

years. Nevertheless, the talent of some individuals was indisputable (see Plates 1.5 and 1.6). A review (*Theatrical Journal*, 15 October 1851) praised Joseph Reynolds's debut performance at the theatre in a production of Charles Rice's *Man of the Red Mansion*:

This gentleman is a valuable acquisition to the already talented company attached to this well conducted establishment; added to a fine figure, he has a most expressive face, and powerful voice. His articulation is very good, and he treads the boards in a firm and graceful manner . . .

James Anderson, who was one of the most prestigious actors to accept short-term engagements at the Britannia and was one-time manager of Drury Lane, assessed the company favourably, noting 'all my pieces were there always efficiently acted'.⁸² He portrays the actors as generally competent without being outstanding. In comparison, he is scathing of the company at the Marylebone in 1852: 'The manager had neither actors nor actresses to get through any of my plays.'⁸³

On other occasions, reviewers suggested that although the audience seemed satisfied with the acting, it would not impress more sophisticated playgoers. For example, reviewing *The Black Doctor*, the *News of the World* (24 August 1856) complained:

The worst feature in the performance was the acting of the two gentlemen who were intended to be funny, but who in reality presented a saddening and dreary spectacle. The audience, however, seemed delighted with them, so we suppose we were hypercritical.

Thomas Erle's recollections of performances at the Britannia are critical of faults he identifies in all the minor theatres. He objects to the actors' stage diction, quoting the elongation of the sounds in the widow's parting words to her son in the Britannia production of William Seaman's *Third Class and First Class, or The Career of the Widow's Son* (1859): 'Doubtless 'Eaven will smee-yeile upon ye, even though ye travel in a third class carriage.'⁸⁴ Conversely, the *News of the World* (24 August 1856) claims a great improvement in recent years at the Brit, noting particularly 'the absurd pronunciation of the actors, at one time an invariable joke for the comic writer, is modified and improved'. Erle also mocks the use of stylized gestures, such as the murder in *The Beguiled One* (1861):

⁸² James R. Anderson, *An Actor's Life* (London: Walter Scott, 1902) p.235.

⁸³ Ibid., p.208.

⁸⁴ Thomas W. Erle, *Letters From a Theatrical Scene-Painter; Being Sketches of the Minor Theatres of London as They Were Twenty Years Ago* (London: Marcus Ward, 1880) p.35.

. . . by the exigencies of accurate historical representation, in compliance with which he was skewered Britannia-fashion (i.e., not run through the chest, but subjected to the operation of having a sword of much about the length of an ordinary spit slid under his left armpit) . . .⁸⁵

Other critics blamed indifferent acting on the quality of the writing and the conditions of production. A review of *The Poor Carpenter and his Family* claimed ‘none of the actors made a strong impression, save and excepting the low comedians’.⁸⁶ The writer suggested that this was inevitable given the conventional nature of the parts:

The same moulds are used for casting the characters of all melodramas; consequently having once gained a notion of the stage business in connection with them, and the words they have to utter, the part is learnt. Hence arises all the monotony which distinguishes the acting at these houses, a monotony inevitably consequent upon the embodiment of creations which are at once absurd and unnatural, and it is useless to expect actors ever to rise above a certain level unless they are not only given parts which are really well drawn, but allowed the time requisite for them not only to learn the words, but to *study* the parts.

A much later review (*Era*, 21 July 1888) confirmed that faced with more sophisticated drama, in this case *Mr Barnes of New York* by Rutland Barrington (first performed at the Olympic Theatre), the Britannia’s actors rose to the challenge:

The piece seems not only to suit the company, but to draw out their most valuable qualities, and excite them to show themselves at their best. As is often the case when a stock company which is usually engaged in playing a round of dramas somewhat of the typical transpontine sort, are given less crude material to work upon, the members of Mrs Lane’s ‘happy family’ have seemed to be on their mettle this week.

Emma Yarnold acted at the Britannia from 1850 to March 1867.⁸⁷ She had previously won acclaim at the Theatres Royal in Dublin and Edinburgh and at the Haymarket, where she had played leading roles opposite Macready, Phelps and Benjamin Webster. One biography (*Players*, 1 September 1860) suggested that the roles she undertook at the Hoxton theatre did not fully exploit her talent:

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.38.

⁸⁶ ‘The Theatres of the People. 4. The Britannia’, unidentified clipping, 2 November 1859, Theatre Cuttings 63, BL.

⁸⁷ *Diaries*, p.121.

We cannot say that we think her as successful in the class of pieces in which she appears here as those which made the study of her early life. She is evidently best adapted for highly refined and ideal characters such as those which Miss Helen Faucit has rendered herself so famous in personating.

The repertoire was not the only factor to impact on the practice of acting; so did the structure of the organisation as a stock company. In the earlier decades of the Britannia's history, it was standard practice for theatre managements to engage actors to perform particular roles within the company, such as the low comedian, leading lady or walking gentleman, rather than being cast for a specific role in a particular play.⁸⁸ This led to predictability in performance, but had the advantage that it facilitated the rapid learning of parts from many plays. The actor could insert his usual 'business' into the new script. This was imperative given the Britannia's repertory system of frequently changing bills and the practice of mounting three or more dramas in one evening. Hence Pitt's *Tally-ho!* is said to have been 'thought of, written, rehearsed, and produced on the stage with success, in four days' (*Theatrical Journal*, 13 September 1845).

The structure of binary oppositions inherent in melodrama was reflected in the acting company itself. In 1845-1846 the Britannia's leading men were N.T. (Newton Treen) Hicks and H. Dudley. Hanley recollects that they were usually given equal parts but the actors developed a professional rivalry that was echoed in the audience:

The audience seemed divided into what may be termed the Hicksites and the Dudleyites; if Hicks was called before the curtain the audience would not be satisfied unless Dudley came also, so that neither of the actors could complain of the coldness of his admirers, for they were both vociferously cheered nightly.⁸⁹

In the 1880s and 1890s Algernon Syms and Walter Steadman had a similar partnership, with Syms usually portraying the hero opposite Steadman's villain.

To supplement this semi-permanent group of actors, some of whom were engaged for many years or decades, the Lanes stimulated interest by offering short engagements to headline performers such as Clara St Casse, Mrs Howard Paul or James Anderson. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century many of the star performers were putative or actual music-hall entertainers, such as G.H. Macdermott and Chirgwin. Such headline actors were quite separate from the ever-changing band of 'incidentals' who performed

⁸⁸ Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, p.126.

⁸⁹ P. Hanley, *Random Recollections of the Stage By An Old Playgoer*, 2nd edition (London: Diprose and Bateman, 1884) p. 34.

between the main dramas and were more akin to music-hall or variety turns (see Chapter 5).

From the 1860s when long runs became popular, many theatres abandoned the stock system, but the Lanes retained it. Wilson claims the Britannia was 'the last in London to maintain the old custom'.⁹⁰ This contributed to the end-of-the-century perception of it as a rather old-fashioned theatre. Although the stock system enabled the theatre to produce consistent, reliable entertainment, it could make it unchallenging for both performers and audiences.

In addition to the stock company, supernumeraries were hired on a temporary basis when required for individual productions, particularly the annual pantomime. All employees were treated fairly (*ISDN*, 17 January 1885):

The supers at the Britannia are, indeed, a part of the family, so much so that the managerial aegis is extended over them. Even in pantomime none are permitted to assail their persons or their dignity by blow or cuff without prior permission, which usually has to be purchased by an appropriate guerdon.

Erle is contemptuous about the capabilities of some of the supers, but it should be remembered that his criticism was intended for private circulation only and his primary objective appears to be to display his own superiority and wit. He objects to the look of some of the cast in a tragedy:

. . . from the personal appearances of the supers who 'do' the virtuous peasantry in the background, the critic must pronounce that the aborigines of Hoxton do not embody one's notion of the perfection of agricultural humanity, physiognomically viewed. There is a particular party, in dirty white trousers, whom I undertake to say . . . employs his moments of comparative retirement from the public eye in the professional pursuit of dog-stealing.⁹¹

His criticism is not confined to the male supers. He suggests that their female counterparts were chosen because of their attractive looks and used indiscriminately:

These young ladies were distinguished by the very full development of bust, and that juicy succulence, and ruddy and luscious ripeness of general effect, that are so ravishing to the Hoxton eye. . . They were dressed alternatively, as Vivandières and Swiss peasants. Exclusively ornamental effects would therefore seem to have been contemplated in their introduction, since the enjoyment of such varied and

⁹⁰ Wilson, *East End*, p.175.

⁹¹ Erle, p.39.

picturesque society is an advantage not commonly incident to life at sea.⁹²

Erle claimed the supers lacked acting skill. Describing the matelots in *Third Class and Third Class*, he complains they displayed an ‘air of general discomfiture’ and ‘had a sort of fixed and desperate rigidity and stoniness about them which was most intensely and deplorably unnautical’.⁹³ This is likely to have been the same in other companies as the practice of using untrained supers was widespread. However, the Britannia may have been in a better position than some others because, as the company list sent to the Lord Chamberlain in 1862 revealed, a considerable number of supers were ‘constantly employed in the theatre’ and presumably therefore improved with experience.⁹⁴

Among the occasional supernumeraries were children, often family members of the company. In 1891 Sara’s great niece, Nellie Borrow, then aged eight, applied for a licence to perform in the pantomime. According to the testimony given to the police court, she was only required on stage for half-an-hour each night (*Era*, 14 and 21 November 1891). Charles Green’s 1868 painting *Her First Bouquet* (see Plate 1.7) is believed to depict backstage at the Britannia.⁹⁵ The young coryphee in the centre is clearly pre-teen, as is the boy sitting on the masks. Occasionally even younger infants appeared. The 1867 production of Hazlewood’s *The Gray Ladye of Fernlea* ‘boasts a real baby amongst its *dramatis personae* – a pretty little child, who gazes tranquilly at the chandeliers, plays with Miss Courtenay’s hair, and is afraid of nothing, not even of Meg Ludlam’s nightcap and general appearance’ (*Era*, 15 September 1867). However, with rare exceptions, such as the 1864 appearances of the child actor Percy Roselle,⁹⁶ children had only minor parts. In view of the rage for children acting in the West End (more than eighty appeared in Covent Garden’s 1873 pantomime),⁹⁷ the Britannia’s working-class audience appears not to have shared the taste of their middle-class West End counterparts.

At ten years of age, Walter Dunlo, later scenic artist at the Grand Theatre, Swansea, became an apprentice at the Britannia, where he learnt ‘every back-stage craft as well as the art of entertaining’ (*Herald of Wales*, 4 September 1948). Dunlo was one of many non-performing members of the Britannia company who received a regular salary. Others included musicians from the orchestra, stage hands, scene painters, property men, check-

⁹² Ibid., p.56.

⁹³ Ibid., p.57.

⁹⁴ *Diaries*, p.24.

⁹⁵ University of Bristol Theatre Collection. An engraving of the scene appeared in the *Graphic* (25 December 1869) entitled ‘The First Night of a New Pantomime’.

⁹⁶ *Diaries*, p.75.

⁹⁷ Wilton CY1136, frame 902.

and money-takers, door keepers, saloon-keepers, cleaners and bill deliverers. Sometimes individuals changed their role within the company. For example, Miss Claremont, who was originally employed as a ballet girl, became Sara's dresser and wig-maker.⁹⁸

The services of other tradesmen were regularly used although they were not part of the company. Costumes came from Samuel May, whose business also supplied many London theatres. In the early days as a saloon, it appears that individual playwrights were employed as house dramatists, but by the 1850s this practice was discontinued and a small fee was paid for each play (see Chapter 4). Several members of the company supplemented their salaries by writing plays for the theatre. Examples include the actor William Seaman and the actor and prompter Cecil Pitt. Scribes, such as Mr Young, were then paid to copy parts for the actors and whole manuscripts as required (for example, when the performing rights were sold to another theatrical management).⁹⁹ H. Chance Newton worked for the Brit in this capacity (*Referee*, 27 January 1924).

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LOCAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY

In addition to its primary function as a provider of entertainment, the theatre interacted with the local community in several other economic capacities; as an employer, as a customer for goods and services, and as an advertiser and agent for promotion.

The Britannia as employer

In his 1843 memorandum to the Lord Chamberlain, Lane testified that in 1841 'the performers engaged by me amounted in number generally to about 35; and persons altogether about the establishment to about 50.'¹⁰⁰ By the time Wilton sent the Lord Chamberlain a list of company members in 1862 at least 135 people were constantly engaged.¹⁰¹ Sara Lane's 1886 testimonial certificate was signed by 108 employees (see Chapter 3). Thus the Britannia became one of the biggest employers in the area. To put it into context, there were ten resident members of staff at the Shoreditch Union workhouse in 1881,¹⁰² and between 1887 and 1890 another local employer, the footwear manufacturer

⁹⁸ Davis and Davis, 147.

⁹⁹ *Diaries*, p.65.

¹⁰⁰ LC7/5, National Archives.

¹⁰¹ *Diaries*, pp.24-25. I have ignored Samuel May and the six people from the second list that Davis suggests may not have been permanently employed.

¹⁰² 1881 census; <http://www.users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Shoreditch/Shoreditch1881.html> [accessed 9 April 2003].

John Carter & Sons of Kingsland Road, employed between seventy and eighty people annually.¹⁰³

So how did the wages and working conditions of the Britannia's employees reflect on the management? One of the biggest problems that Victorian actors faced was the precariousness of their employment. Actors' journals and contemporary accounts contain numerous instances of non- or partial-payment of salary due to unscrupulous managers or unavoidable financial problems.¹⁰⁴ For members of the Britannia company this was not an issue. The continuing solvency of the theatre was exceptional, so employment was never terminated abruptly because of the closure of the theatre. Likewise there is no evidence that the management defaulted on payment. That is not to say that jobs were guaranteed. Misbehaviour, such as inebriation, could result in a fine or termination of contract, and even long-serving members were dismissed when they became too old.¹⁰⁵

Being employed or having previously been employed at the Britannia could prove fortuitous. For many it provided a regular and continuous job for many years, particularly noteworthy when so many locals could find only casual labour. Moreover, the Britannia Sick Fund, set up in 1860, provided a safety net for those who had made contributions to the scheme but subsequently encountered difficulties (see Chapter 3). In addition, the theatre frequently staged benefits to support ex-company members or their families. An example is one in aid of Edgar Newbound, a popular actor, playwright and stage manager who had been with the theatre from 1872 to 1889 prior to a lengthy illness (*Era*, 15 March 1890). Thus the management established a reputation as a compassionate employer.

Despite this, the working conditions at the theatre were no better than that at the majority of London theatres. Performers subjected to extremes of temperature on and off the stage were at risk from illness, particularly pulmonary diseases.¹⁰⁶ It is impossible to prove fatalities were directly attributable to the theatre, but cases such as that of the actress Lizzie Rayner, who played at the Brit from 1867 until 1881 and died of consumption the following year, suggest it.¹⁰⁷

Notwithstanding the safety inspections carried out on behalf of the Lord Chamberlain or Metropolitan Board of Works, there were several serious accidents. On 6 January 1865 Ellen Geary, one of the ballet girls, suffered severe burns when her costume was set on fire by a gas light in the wings as she rushed to climb a pillar for the pantomime's

¹⁰³ Wages books for John Carter & Sons, D/B/CAR 1; 33 and 34, HA.

¹⁰⁴ For example, Jerome K. Jerome, *On the Stage – And Off* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1991); first publ. 1885.

¹⁰⁵ Davis and Davis, p.152.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Baker, *The Rise of the Victorian Actor* (London: Croom Helm, 1978) p.114.

¹⁰⁷ Wilton CY1137, frame 468.

transformation scene.¹⁰⁸ An investigation by the Lord Chamberlain's office concluded the management were not responsible.¹⁰⁹ On 1 October 1869 flyman Charley Wallace fell to his death while drunk.¹¹⁰ In March 1894 the actor Algernon Syms's elbow was seriously injured in a stage explosion, leaving him unable to work for six months (*Era*, 24 March and 4 August 1894).

Other backstage accidents proved less serious. For example, in 1873 it was feared that the gas man, John Martin, would lose the sight of one eye after it was struck by a wire while he was fixing the apparatus for a trapeze artist.¹¹¹ By the next day, however, his eye was better. Similarly, on 9 April 1870 Sara Lane tripped over a piece of protruding scenery and broke her kneecap. The following month Wilton reports that the doctor believes she will never be able to dance again.¹¹² In fact she was back on stage by October and the long-term prognosis was incorrect. Considering the dangerous nature of some contemporary theatrical practices (the costumes of ballet girls put them at particular risk of injury from gas flames), the highly physical demands on performers and the large number of people in the company, accidents seem no more numerous at the Britannia than at comparative establishments.

Presumably if the working conditions had been particularly poor, the management would have had difficulty recruiting staff; there is no evidence of this. The same can be said of the salaries. Actors' wages varied from £4 for a leading member of the stock company to £1.5.0 for a utility actress. The lowest figures Wilton records are 5s for a dresser and 9s for supers, ballet dancers and the assistant property man. These were not enough to provide the company with a luxurious standard of living, but during the 1860s and 1870s wages were broadly in line with other minor theatres.¹¹³ They also compared favourably with local employment within Hoxton. Mayhew records the best-paid cabmen took home between 15 to 25s per week and a street clown could collect an average of 8s 6¹/₂d per week.¹¹⁴ In the mid to late 1860s a female telegraph clerk might earn 8s a week while a male labourer in London might receive £1 per week and an artisan 36s.¹¹⁵

At times the Lanes were prepared to pay higher rates to engage particular performers. Thus in 1851 tragedian James Anderson was initially enticed to the Britannia for a salary

¹⁰⁸ *Diaries*, p.86 and Wilton CY 1136, frame 0158.

¹⁰⁹ *Diaries*, p.223.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.164.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.213.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.172.

¹¹³ Davis and Davis, p.147.

¹¹⁴ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and The London Poor*, selected by Victor Neuburg (London: Penguin Books, 1985); first publ. 1860-1861; pp.365 and 321.

¹¹⁵ <http://www.victorianweb.org/economics/wages2.html> [accessed 9 February 2006].

of £20 a night.¹¹⁶ In July 1874 at a time when leading actors received £4 per week, Macdermott's terms astonish Wilton: 'Mr Robinson told me seriously as a fact that Mr McDermott [sic] was engaged by Mrs S.Lane for the next Pantomime at a salary of £16 per week!'¹¹⁷ Two years earlier he had been paid £6 per week.¹¹⁸

The Britannia as customer

The Hoxton theatre became an important customer for local businesses and thereby played a significant role in the local economy.¹¹⁹ It was situated in a residential area on a road full of shops. The 1851 census reveals Hoxton Street had fourteen butcher's shops, ten bakers, six grocers' shops, six cheesemongers, four corn dealers, a tea-dealer, one eating house and three coffee houses. There were also nine licensed public houses, two unlicensed and ten beershops. (Further information on the area appears in Chapter 2.) The theatre was well placed to attract passing business in this busy thoroughfare. Visitors to the Brit must have brought extra custom to the businesses on Hoxton Street and the surrounding roads so it was a mutually beneficial relationship. A review from 1885 (*ISDN*, 17 January 1885) confirmed this: 'The Hoxtonians combine business with pleasure, and, on Saturdays especially, vary their marketing with a visit to the Britannia, bringing with them a store of perishable commodities.' Barker claims people living near the theatre would have taken their shopping home before attending performances, so speculates those described must have come from farther afield.¹²⁰

An account, written in 1901, contrasting the scenes outside the theatre at the end of an evening's performance in the West and East Ends reveals that many businesses and hawkers were still trading at 11pm and gained trade from the theatre patrons.¹²¹ The East End theatre described is the Pavilion in Whitechapel, but presumably the same scenario occurred at the Britannia.

Other businesses to benefit from the presence of the Britannia were the suppliers of food (see Chapter 2) and other products and services sold or used in the theatre. In 1863 Wilton negotiated a deal with the superintendent of the Great Eastern Railway to display the boards of the railway, but this may have been for his grocer's shop rather than the

¹¹⁶ James Anderson, p.204.

¹¹⁷ Wilton CY1136, frame 958.

¹¹⁸ *Diaries*, p.207.

¹¹⁹ Davis and Davis, p.165.

¹²⁰ Clive Barker, 'Audiences', 32.

¹²¹ A. St John Adcock, quoted in Russell Jackson, pp.72-76.

theatre.¹²² In 1866 Wilton mentions an 'Advertising Curtain' that Mr J. Mitchell of Dalston hoped to rent to the theatre for £80 a year.¹²³ This particular item was rejected but other transactions must have been made.

The Britannia was a regular customer of Charles Beckett of Kingsland Road, who printed all the theatre's playbills, posters and programmes. This was a lucrative contract and, perhaps in exchange for all the business he received from the theatre, Beckett was one of two men who acted as sureties whenever the theatre's licence had to be renewed.¹²⁴ The other was Robert Boyce, an auctioneer and estate agent of 94 Hoxton Street. He carried out the legally required 'Appraisement' of the theatre needed before Sara could inherit it following her husband's death and appears to have manipulated the apportioning of the fittings to Sara's advantage.¹²⁵

Another local business that flourished close to the Britannia was that of J. Redington, a printer, bookbinder and stationer, who specialised in selling theatrical portraits and toy theatres. He began trading at 208 Hoxton Old Town in 1850 (see Map).¹²⁶ The business was later taken over by his son-in-law, Benjamin Pollock. Local resident Jaye makes the connection between the theatre and Redington's, mentioning his annual visit to the Brit pantomime, then:

There was a little shop near by which sold small model theatres and sheets of theatrical characters which attracted customers from many miles away as well as little boys who had their noses glued to the shop window.¹²⁷

Redington produced a toy theatre version of the Britannia. The stage front was sold in three sizes for a halfpenny, one penny or two pennies and would have made good souvenirs for the theatre's patrons (see Plate 1.8).¹²⁸ Surprisingly, Redington published only a few juvenile texts of Britannia plays for performing in toy theatres. However, to coincide with the opening of the Britannia Theatre in 1858 he issued portraits of Sara Lane as Jacqueline, a wandering Savoyard (see Plate 1.9) and Mr G. Clair as Matthioli in Hazlewood's *The Brigand's Secret*. Other Redington portraits of actors in productions at the Britannia include Tom Sayers as Clown in the 1862 pantomime *Abon Hassan* (see

¹²² *Diaries*, p.61.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.115.

¹²⁴ In the 1880s the role passed to his son, Edward Alfred Beckett; Application for Theatrical License, 12 September 1887, LC1/488, National Archives.

¹²⁵ *Diaries*, pp.201-02.

¹²⁶ In 1866 the premises were renumbered as 73 Hoxton Street.

¹²⁷ A. Jaye, 'Looking Back' 2, *Profile* 2,12 (September 1969) p.1.

¹²⁸ Peter Baldwin, *Toy Theatres of the World* (London: Zwemmer, 1992) p.45.

Plate 6.1), and four from *Robert la Grange* in 1861: Mr J. Reynolds, Mr Bird, Mr C. Pitt and Mr Crauford as Robert le Grange, Urban Wheeler, Caleb Crook and Count D’Courcy respectively.¹²⁹ Before the widespread introduction of *cartes de visite* this would have been the only way for fans of Britannia actors to purchase visual images of them, local papers, such as the *H&K Gazette*, not being illustrated at that time. Speaight shows they also appeared in various public spaces:

Theatrical Portraits must have been sold most readily to stage-struck youths, but we find them displayed wherever bright popular decoration was required, – in the parlours and tap-rooms of public houses, or – as sketched by Boz – in the windows of a theatrical hairdresser in the Waterloo Road, or upon the transparent lampshade of a kidney-pie stand in the New Cut.¹³⁰

The demolition of the Britannia Saloon and the construction of the new theatre in 1858 may have provided work for some local men. The architects employed to design the new complex were Finch Hill and Pararie of St Swithins Lane in the City. They put the general contracting out to tender and chose the cheapest estimate (£12,120), tendered by Holland and Hannen (*Building News*, 2 July 1858). The builders were based in Duke Street, Bloomsbury.¹³¹ Although they were not from the immediate locale, they presumably employed local men to do the labouring given the poor transport infrastructure. The other major contracts – White & Parlby of Great Marylebone Street for the carton-pierre and papier mâché, J. Defries and Sons of Houndsditch for the crystal chandeliers, and the artist W. Honnaman of Camden Town – were awarded to specialists rather than local businesses.

Advertising and the Britannia

The Britannia paid for regular advertisements in the local newspaper the *Shoreditch Observer* (renamed the *Shoreditch Observer and Borough of Hackney Express* in 1867) and in the *H&K Gazette* from 1869.¹³² Presumably it paid local shops to display its playbills. An article entitled ‘Sunday Morning in Hoxton High Street’ (*H&K Gazette*, 17 April 1872) testifies to the promotional potential of displaying coloured posters locally:

At the corner of Pimlico Walk a coloured representation was posted of the avalanche scene in the drama now being performed at the Britannia Theatre. An ‘arab’ of about the mature age of ten, was

¹²⁹ I am grateful to Barry Clarke for supplying information on Redington’s and Benjamin Pollock’s work.

¹³⁰ George Speaight, *Juvenile Drama: The History of the English Toy Theatre* (London: Studio Vista, 1946) p.151.

¹³¹ *Post Office London Directory 1870* (London: Kelly, 1869).

¹³² It also advertised in less localised journals such as the *Era* and the *ISDN*.

describing to an audience of about a dozen older boys the marvels of that very scene he saw enacted the night before; how the avalanche fell, and carried the man from off the frightful precipice.¹³³

The Britannia was slower to exploit the money-making potential of advertising other people's products and services. The programme for the 1883 pantomime *Queen Dodo* sold for one penny. It consists of four pages of tinted paper and measures 129 mm wide by 201 mm high. Typically of Britannia programmes of the period, it carries no advertising but at the end bears the legend:

*Printed and impregnated with the undying fragrance of one
thousand flowers by
E. A. Beckett, 111 and 113, Kingsland Road.*¹³⁴

Commenting on an earlier example, the *Graphic* (18 April 1874) took exception to such extravagant programmes given the cheap seat prices: 'We can only hope that this is not one of those tokens of the spread of luxury among the people which, according to the old classical prejudice, "ever presages the decline of empires."'

In 1891 the format of the programmes changed to 'a larger and more genteel sheet' (*Era*, 11 July 1891). The programme for the 1896 pantomime *The Giant and the Dwarf* still sold for one penny but is double the size of the *Queen Dodo* example.¹³⁵ The embossed decorative border has disappeared. Apart from on the title page, the details of the performance and performers are surrounded, and almost overwhelmed, by advertisements. Many are for businesses in Hoxton Street, namely a clothing store, the Hackney and Shoreditch Funeral Establishment, a purveyor of fenders and fire irons, a glass merchant, a timber merchant, The People's Provision Stores, and a shop selling new and second-hand tools. Other businesses from streets within a mile's radius of the theatre include: tailor's shops and a purveyor of linoleums and cork carpet in East Road; an outlet for Doctor Stedman's Teething Powders in New North Road; the Economic Bank of Old Broad Street; a wholesale carpet dealer in the City Road; a hat shop in Shoreditch High Street; on Kingsland Road, the purveyor of a beef drink, a tobacconist, Batey's non-alcoholic drinks, a lighting company, and the printer Beckett; a piano shop on Hackney Road; a piano tuner on De Beauvoir Square; a dealer in club badges and regalia in Clerkenwell Road; and on Balls Pond Road, a furniture shop, plus 'A Boon To the Working Man[,] Teeth Skilfully extracted at any hour at 6d. each'. The only advertised

¹³³ The play in question was Hazlewood's *The Stolen Jewess*.

¹³⁴ Author's collection.

¹³⁵ Author's collection.

concern that was situated more than a mile away (but still within walking distance) was Birkbeck Bank of Chancery Lane. Adverts for specific products rather than retailers include: Dr Locock's Pulmonic Wafers for disorders of the breath, throat and lungs; Epps's Cocoa; and Grant's Morella Cherry Brandy ('Sold at the Bars of this Establishment'). An announcement proclaims: 'THE LAVATORIES of this Theatre are supplied with the best of all Disinfectants, "SANITAS"'. Presumably there must have been a special arrangement or sponsorship deal with the manufacturer of the disinfectant as it is the only advert to appear on a playbill for the 1893 pantomime *The King o' the Castle*, where it occupies a prominent position under the theatre's title and Sara's licensing details.¹³⁶

Other programmes from the 1880s and 1890s include some illustrated versions. These are the same smaller format at the *Queen Dodo* one, but have many more pages and cost two pennies. Generally, they contain few adverts. However, the programme for the 1889 pantomime *The Bold Bad Baron* carries the name of a beverage, 'BOVRIL!', on most pages.¹³⁷ From such programmes the increased commercialisation of the theatre is self-evident. This reflects advertising's growing prominence in the metropolitan landscape during the Victorian age.¹³⁸

Just as the Britannia became a prominent landmark in Hoxton High Street, so too the theatre played a less visible but highly significant role in the commercial life of the area. It brought benefits to local businesses and individuals by providing employment, attracting potential customers, generating custom, and by purchasing and advertising goods and services. The Britannia's decline after Sara's death in 1899 may in part be attributed to the economic depression of the area, but equally must surely have contributed to that downturn in prosperity. The theatre and the community were economically entwined. To understand this relationship more fully, it is necessary to identify the theatre's audience.

¹³⁶ Undated Britannia playbill, Museum of London.

¹³⁷ Playbills TM, 8 of 13.

¹³⁸ See Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) p.58 and Lee Jackson and Eric Nathan, *Victorian London* (London: New Holland, 2004) pp.130-31.

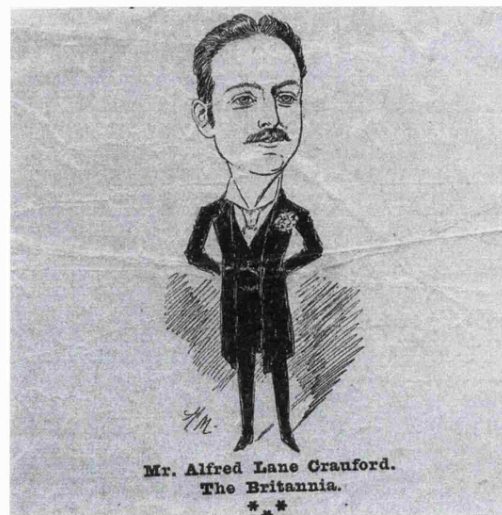
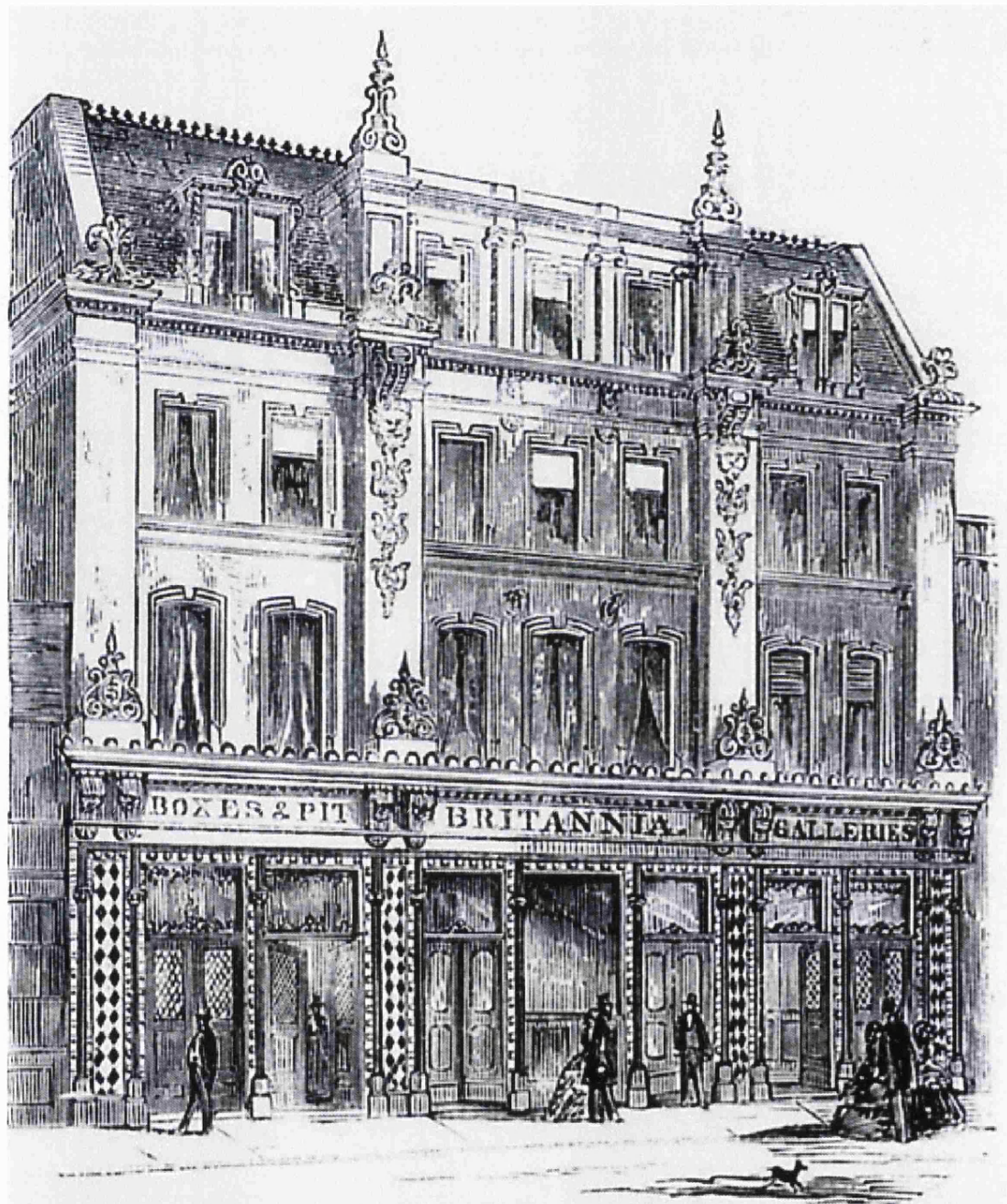


PLATE 1.1: Britannia management (clockwise from top left): Samuel Lane, Sara Lane aged 70, Alfred Lane Crauford and W.R. Crauford

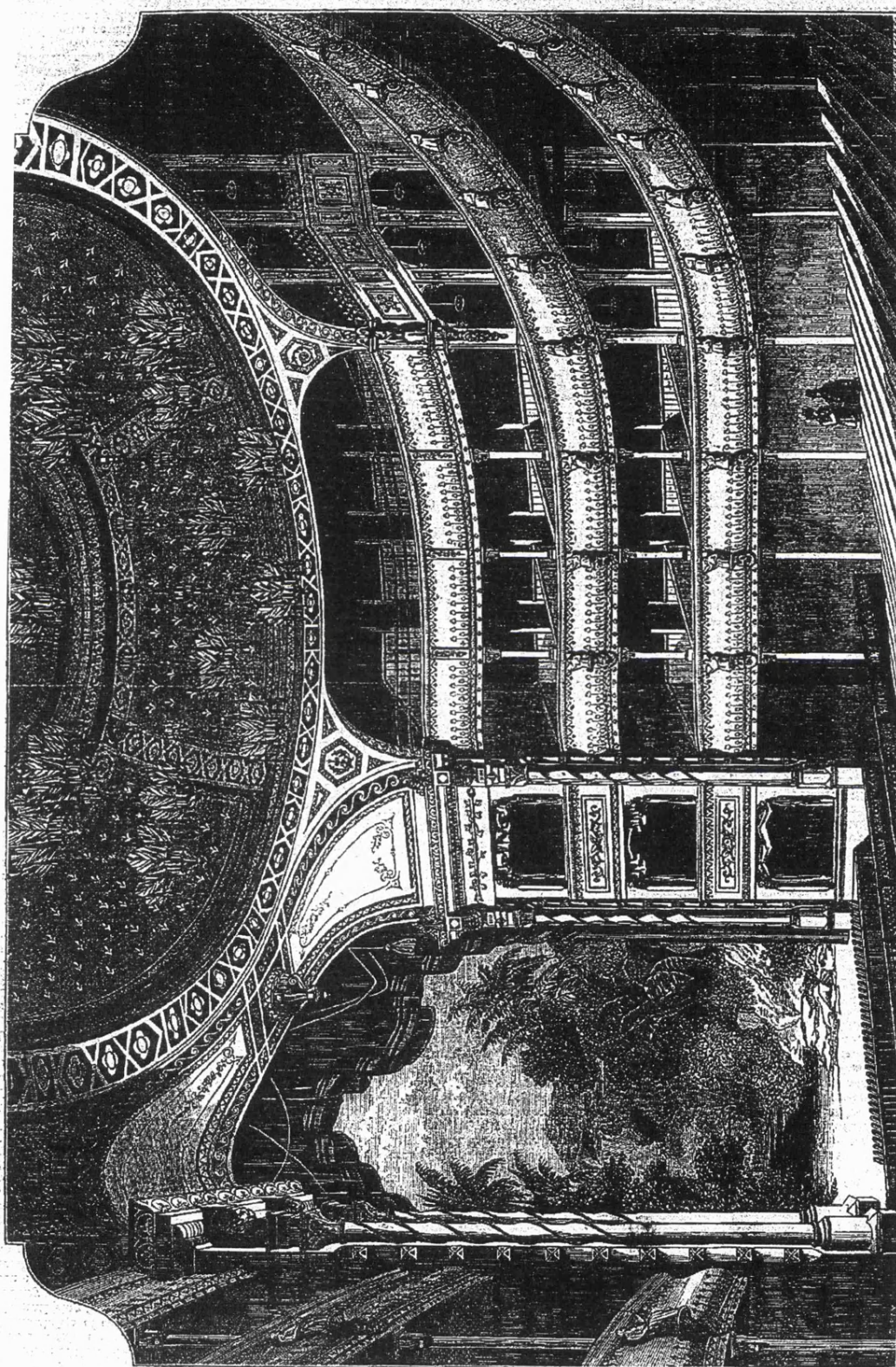


PLATE 1.2: Painting of the Britannia Saloon by an anonymous artist, c.1845



EXTERIOR-VIEW OF THE BRITANNIA THEATRE, HOXTON.
(MESSRS. FINCH, HILL, AND PARAIRE, ARCHITECTS.)

PLATE 1.3: Exterior of the new Britannia Theatre (*Illustrated News of the World*, 25 December 1858)



THE BRITANNIA THEATRE, HOXTON.—MESSRS. FINCH HILL AND PARADE, ARCHITECTS.

PLATE 1.4: Interior of the Britannia Theatre (*Builder*, 13 November 1858)

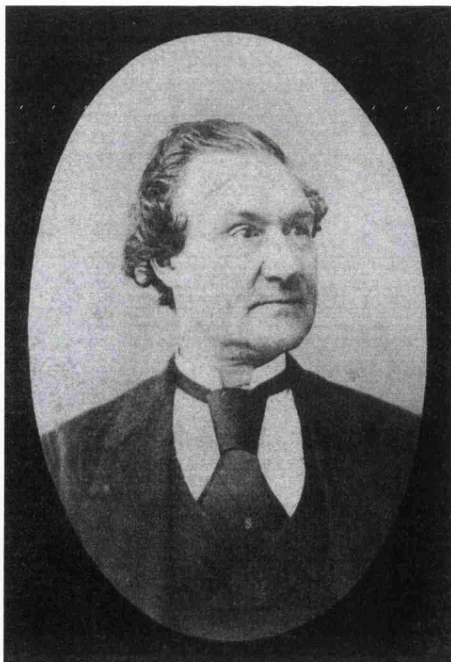


PLATE 1.5: Britannia performers (*clockwise from top left*): Sara's sister Charlotte Crauford, Emma Yarnold, Charlie Rice and Joseph Reynolds

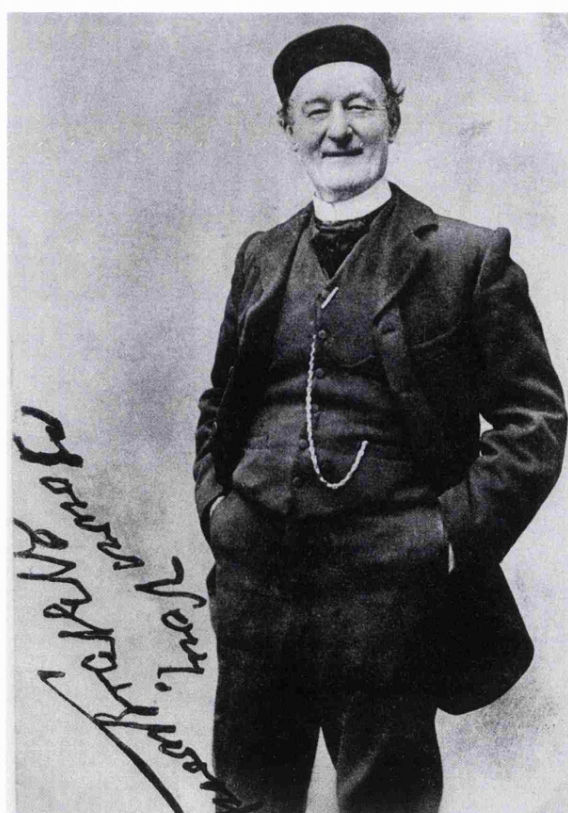
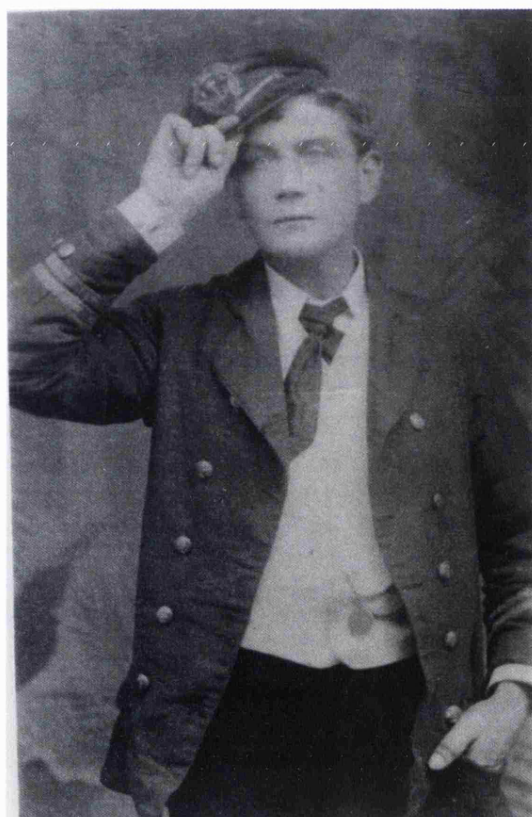


PLATE 1.6: Britannia performers (clockwise from top left): Edgar Newbound in *Dolores*, J.B. Howe, George Bigwood and Algernon Syms in *The Harbour Lights*

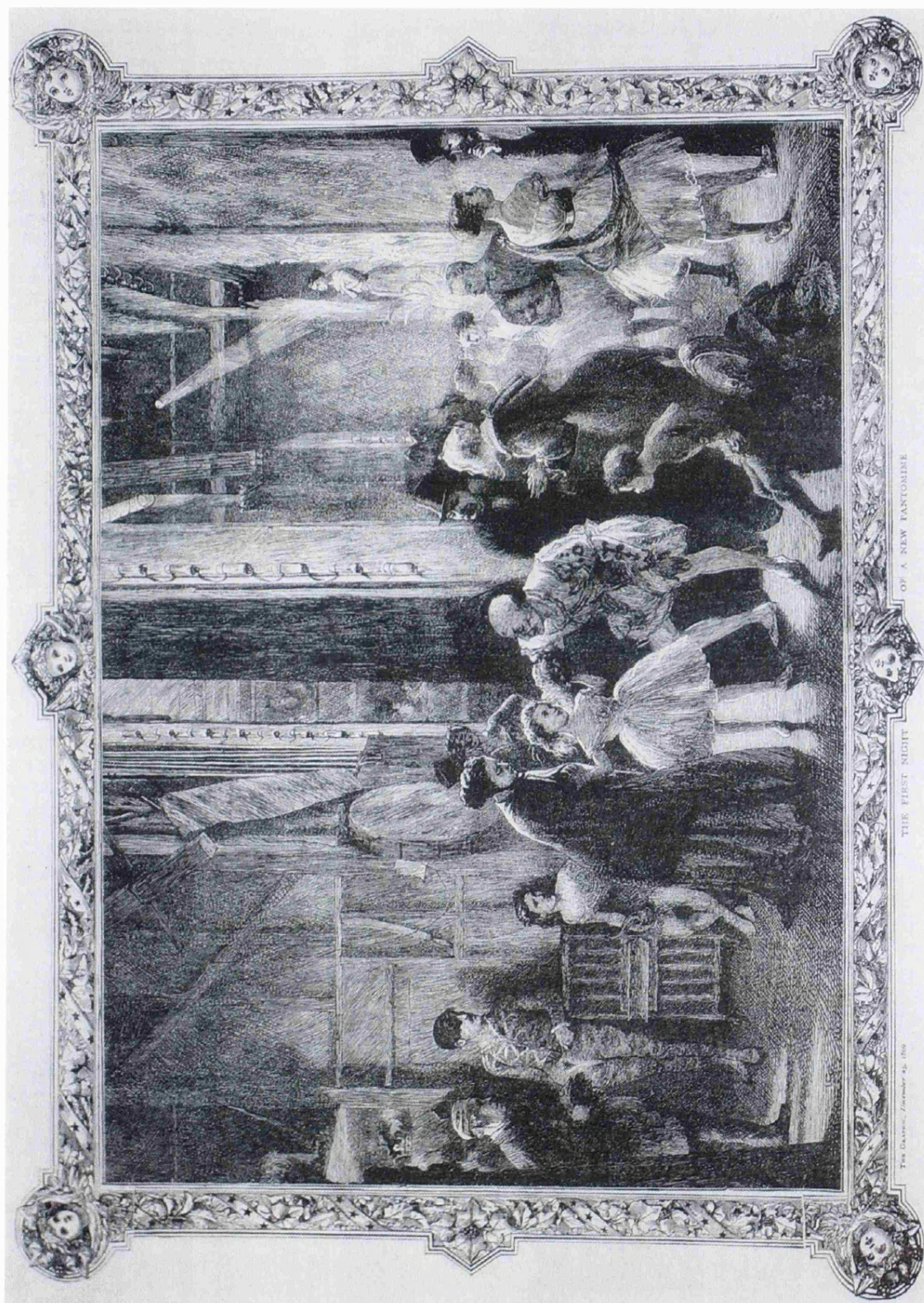


PLATE 1.7: Engraving of Charles Green's painting *Her First Bouquet* (*Graphic*, 25 December 1869)

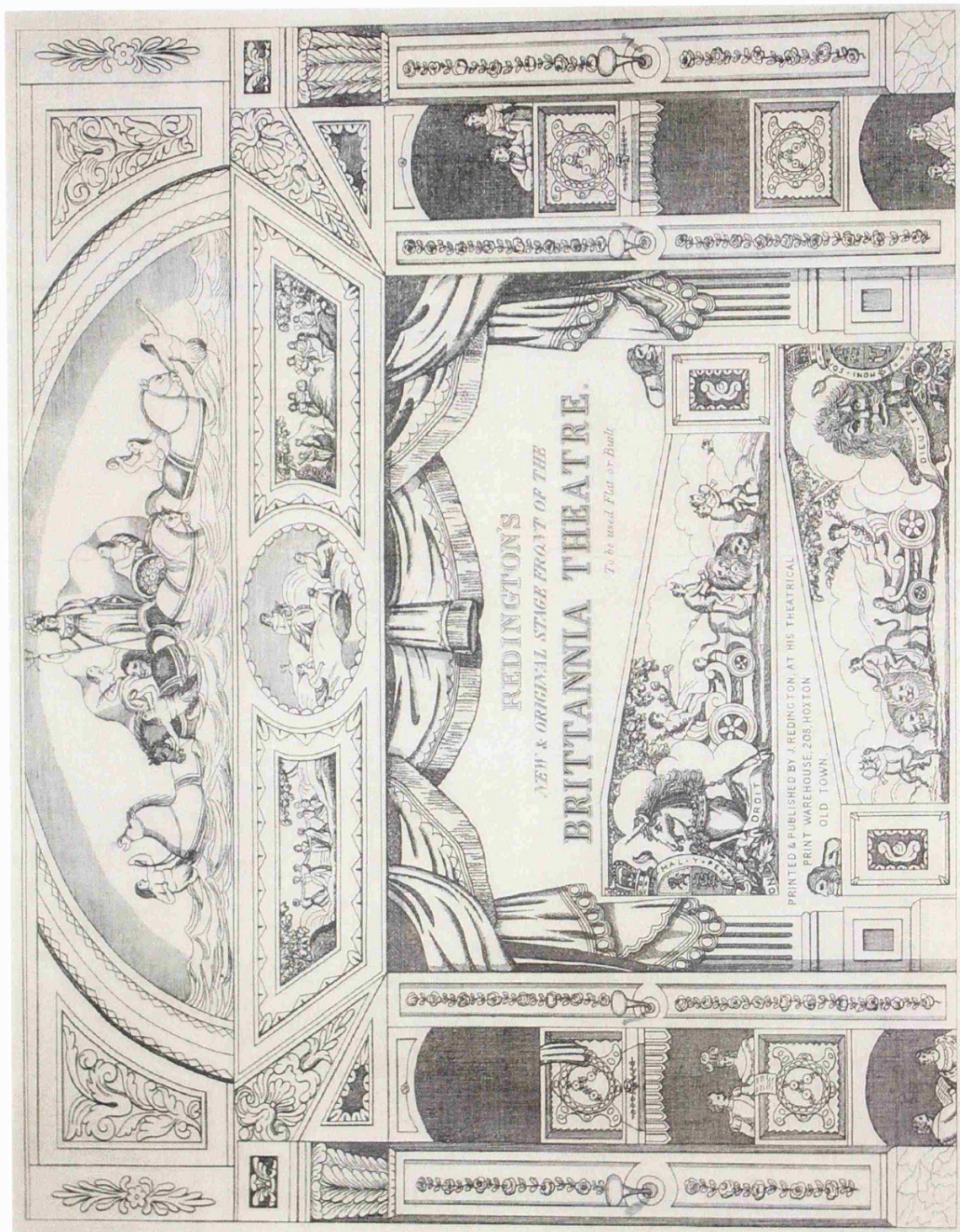


PLATE 1.8: Redington's toy theatre stage front

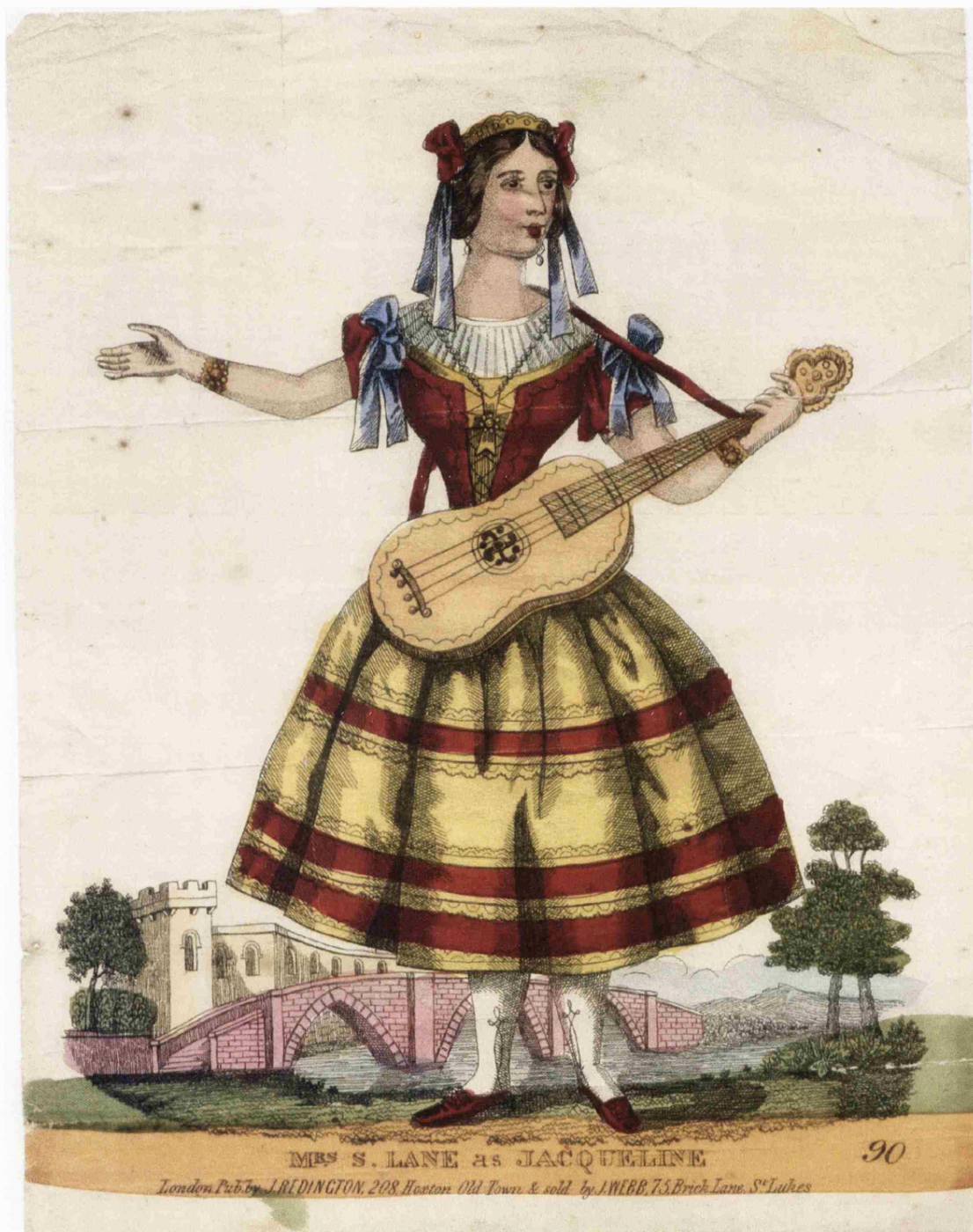


PLATE 1.9: Redington portrait of Sara Lane as Jacqueline Jaconetti, a wandering Savoyard, from Hazlewood's *The Brigand's Secret*

2

THE AUDIENCE

‘A Britannia audience differs in many respects from any other. Mrs. Lane has kept the same company round her so many years, and has herself become such a feature of Hoxton life, that the songs and dances presented for their delectation seemed, from the familiar way in which they occasionally called to the actors by name, to be a family gathering on a vast scale.’

ISDN, 29 December 1883

This chapter will first define the audience and examine any significant changes between the early days of the Saloon until Sara Lane’s death in 1899, and then consider the key features of audience behaviour, including at the annual Britannia Festival.

DEFINING THE AUDIENCE

In 1896 a reviewer in the *Sketch* (24 June 1896) quotes Crauford (then business manager) as saying ‘the audience is a local one for everything but pantomime’. H. Barton Baker concurs: ‘The Britannia, . . . is entirely supported by the inhabitants of North London, especially those of Hoxton and Kingsland.’¹ Similarly, Hollingshead writes:

It is essentially a local house. It is self-supporting and self-supported. It draws none of its attractions and none of its audience from western districts. Its audience, its actors, and its pieces are more or less of native growth, and more or less fixed and immovable.²

Further support for this theory is provided by the many reviews of performances that refer to the audience as ‘the Hoxtonians’.³ So who were these people?

Hoxton was a liberty (district) within the parish of Shoreditch, which on its southern borders abuts the City of London, Islington to the west, Stoke Newington to the north and

¹ H. Barton Baker, *The London Stage: Its History and Traditions From 1576 to 1888* (London: W.H. Allen, 1889) vol. 2, p.258.

² John Hollingshead, *My Lifetime* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, 1895) vol. 1, p.31.

³ For example, *Era*, 30 March 1856.

Bethnal Green to the east. In medieval times, it was the site of a small village and priory.⁴ During the Elizabethan period the rapid expansion of London's population led to rich citizens moving out of the city into the surrounding areas, including Hoxton. As well as many new large houses, sixteenth-century Shoreditch also saw the building of two of the first playhouses in London. The Theatre (1576-1598) and the less popular Curtain (c.1578-c.1627) were constructed in response to a prohibition on acting within the City of London.⁵ In the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries much of the open space and market gardens that had characterised Hoxton were built upon and many of the large houses were replaced with poor-quality terraced cottages.⁶ The population of Shoreditch increased rapidly from under 35,000 in 1801 to 129,364 in 1861.⁷ The building of the North London Railway, which necessitated the demolition of 650 houses, exacerbated the growing incidence of overcrowding.⁸ Most of the richest inhabitants moved out of the area, leaving behind a population that was predominantly working- and lower-middle-class. In the conclusion to his survey of London carried out between 1886 and 1903, Charles Booth divided London into fifty districts and ordered them by combining the results of four tests of social condition – poverty, crowding, birth rate and death rate.⁹ In this scheme, the district of Hoxton and Haggerston was rated the seventh most disadvantaged in London. It was placed ninth in the order of poverty.

According to a study of the 1851 and 1871 censuses the most common occupations of the residents of Hoxton Street were in the food and drink trades (butchers, grocers, bakers, barmen), the clothing industry (with a particularly high proportion of women; tailors, dressmakers, needlewomen, seamstresses, milliners etc.), and the service industries (including hairdressers and laundresses as well as those working in domestic service).¹⁰ Just south of the theatre, the area around Curtain Road was the centre for furniture making. Many Hoxton families were employed in this sweated trade, working for very long hours under poor conditions for low wages.¹¹ Another significant occupation was that of the

⁴ David Mander, *More Light, More Power: An Illustrated History of Shoreditch* (Stroud: London Borough of Hackney/Sutton Publishing, 1996) p.14.

⁵ Tony Coombs, *Tis a Mad World at Hogsdon: A Short History of Hoxton* (London: Hoxton Hall with London Borough of Hackney, 1974), pp.17-19.

⁶ Mander, pp.31, 61.

⁷ Clive Barker, 'The Audiences of the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton', *Theatre Quarterly* 9,34 (1979) 38.

⁸ Ibid., p.62. See also Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) p.170.

⁹ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, Final vol. *Notes on Social Influences and Conclusion* (London: Macmillan, 1902) p.17.

¹⁰ Bettie Knott, *The Hub of Hoxton: Hoxton Street 1851-1871, Based on a Study of the Censuses* (London: London Borough of Hackney Library Services, 1981), b-i and p.76.

¹¹ Andrew Davies, *The East End Nobody Knows* (London: Macmillan, 1990) p.98.

costermonger, who hawked fruit, vegetables, fish or other goods from barrows or carts in the street. The only other area to service more costermongers was that around New Cut, Waterloo.¹² Crauford describes the poverty of the local street traders:

Hoxton is a market street with costermonger barrows lining nearly all its length. They are usually poor men, who exist from hand to mouth, and get their living by buying at the markets the goods they sell in the streets.¹³

By the time Charles Booth carried out his survey of London, charted on his maps of 1889, much of the area was home to the poor. Describing the general character of the districts of Hoxton, part of Shoreditch, Finsbury, St Luke's, Old Street, Clerkenwell, and part of Holborn (i.e. all areas surrounding or in close proximity to the Britannia), Booth concludes: 'The character of the whole locality is now working-class. Poverty is everywhere, with a considerable admixture of the very poor and vicious.'¹⁴ He lists the poorest inhabitants as market porters, shoeblacks, newspaper runners, kerbstone merchants, ice-cream sellers, &c.'¹⁵ These are the type of people that Henry Mayhew had concentrated on in his survey, published as *London Labour and the London Poor* in 1851-1852.

Lane's licence petition of 1843 was signed by 'a local plumber, draper, dyer, coal merchant, timber merchant, surgeon-dentist, auctioneer, clothier, cabman, shoemaker, grocer, pocket book maker, cow keeper, tailor, green grocer, and pawnbroker'.¹⁶ This represents a cross-section of local tradespeople.

First-hand accounts spanning the entire existence of the Britannia support the notion that much of the audience was from the lower classes. For example, in 1858 the *Illustrated Times* (11 December 1858) reported: 'The audience are rough, but very attentive to the performance, and they have the aspect of working-people and small tradesmen.' Wilton recalls a conversation with Samuel Lane in 1846 when he suggested that 6.30pm was too early to begin the evening's performances 'as the class who chiefly supported the Saloon were working people'.¹⁷ The practice of charging half-price for admission to the boxes and stalls after 8.30pm (but not to the cheapest seats, i.e. the gallery), also implies many people were attending after they finished work. Barker suggests there may have been

¹² Clive Barker, 'The Chartists, Theatre, Reform and Research', *Theatre Quarterly* 1,4 (1971) 10.

¹³ *Sam & Sallie*, p.315.

¹⁴ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour*, Final vol., p.165.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.165.

¹⁶ Jim Davis and Tracy C. Davis, 'The People' of the "People's Theatre": The Social Demography of the Britannia Theatre (Hoxton)', *Theatre Survey* 32,2 (1991) 160.

¹⁷ *Diaries*, p.73.

two distinct audiences: one of costermongers, factory workers and other working-class folk, who started work early in the morning and finished in time to attend for 6.30pm, and another of lower-middle-class clerks and office workers from the City, who began and finished later, so were only able to reach the theatre after the first drama.¹⁸

A review (*ISDN*, 17 January 1885) of the 1885 pantomime provides evidence for the presence of costermongers:

There are some white ties in the stalls, but these take the shape of those immense white cotton bolsters wherewith gentlemen of the costermongering fraternity delight to encircle their throats.

In 1860 Dickens's account of his visit to the pantomime listed the occupations of the audience (though the author does not reveal how he determines this):

Besides prowlers and idlers we were mechanics, dock-labourers, costermongers, petty tradesmen, small clerks, milliners, stay-makers, shoe-binders, sloop workers, poor workers in a hundred highways and bye-ways.¹⁹

Seventeen years later he reported a similar mix: 'The great proportion are working-men and women, clad in their working clothes; a few are mechanics and artisans, in broad cloth and dark tweed.'²⁰ An account (*Sketch*, 24 June 1896) of an audience in 1896 singled out the gallery occupants: 'the patrons are among the poorest people in a poor neighbourhood. Coats were scanty, waistcoats few and far between, collar and neckties practically unknown, . . . '.

The focus on one section of the audience in this account should alert us to a problem inherent in such reports. Many of the writers were middle- or upper-class visitors from outside the area, who viewed attending the Britannia as a rather daring adventure. Hence they make much of the perils of travelling to the theatre 'in the wild regions' (*News of the World*, 24 August 1856). Once there, as Dickens baldly stated: 'The great point of interest for the visitor is the audience itself'.²¹ Thomas Archer advocated studying the audience almost as interesting specimens of a different race or as Darwin and contemporary scientists examined natural history species:

¹⁸ Clive Barker, 'Chartists', 5.

¹⁹ Charles Dickens, 'The Uncommercial Traveller', *All the Year Round* 2 (25 February 1860) 418.

²⁰ Charles Dickens, 'Some Theatrical Audiences', *All the Year Round* 18 (19 May 1877) 277.

²¹ Charles Dickens, *Dickens's London Guide 1879* (London: Howard Baker Press, 1972); first publ. 1879, p.24.

Those practical statesmen who desire to form unprejudiced opinions on the subject of the working-classes might profitably spend an hour or two now and then in observing 'the lower order' of the people in those places where, having no particular object before them but their own amusement, they may be taken unaware, and studied in their best as well as their worst aspects.²²

It follows therefore that such observers tend to ignore the presence of the 'ordinary' middle classes as not sufficiently eccentric to be worth mentioning. Accounts concentrate on the gallery patrons, who, because they were paying the lowest admission prices, were likely to be the poorest. Scant attention is given to the occupants of the stalls, upper circle and boxes. Yet as Patrick Joyce points out, in the music halls different seating areas and prices reflected the differing social-economic status of individual groups in the community, so the audience should be defined more justifiably as 'popular' rather than 'working class'.²³ The same can be said of the Britannia's audience.

Wilton provides evidence for the presence of some higher-class people in the audience. He records visits from Baroness Burdett-Coutts, Frederick Peel (Chief Railway Commissioner) and Lord Alfred Paget.²⁴ William Gladstone attended in 1877.²⁵ It is likely that these aristocratic or high-profile members of society were not the only ones to patronise the Britannia, but they formed a tiny minority.

Newspaper reports supply incidental information (such as occupation and home address) about some members of the Britannia audience. During a performance in December 1860 a small fire broke out at the theatre causing alarm. 'A gentleman occupying one of the private boxes' addressed the crowd and calmed them (*Players*, 8 December 1860). This confirms that more moneyed patrons did attend. However, other reports all concern people of lower status. A more distressing case was that of a young married woman from Holborn, said to have been drunk, whose baby died of asphyxiation in the large crowd at the pantomime in 1860 (*The Times*, 1 and 8 February 1860). No occupation is given for her, but her husband is identified as a hairdresser. Another fatality occurred in 1868 when an intoxicated man died after trying to retrieve his hat and falling from the balustrades of a staircase. He was a nineteen-year-old book-edge gilder lodging in Finsbury.²⁶ In 1877 a law student living in Clerkenwell claimed he had been assaulted at

²² "Rule Britannia: A "Down East" Sketch', *Porcupine*, 29 December 1866.

²³ Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class 1848-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) pp.304-06.

²⁴ *Diaries*, pp.62, 63, 118, 119 and 216. Paget was a frequent visitor. As Commodore of the Thames Yacht Club, to which Samuel Lane belonged, he was a friend of the Lanes.

²⁵ 'The Queen of Hoxton', *Evening News*, 16 September 1909.

²⁶ Unattributed cutting, 23 February 1868, Theatre Cuttings 70, BL.

the Britannia by one of the attendants. Another law student, an articled clerk and a solicitor had accompanied him.²⁷ Two years later, the victim of a fatal stabbing at the Britannia was a twenty-six-year-old cigar-box maker living in nearby Pearson Street (*The Times*, 21 May 1879). In 1886 a young blacksmith from Old Street was charged with causing a disturbance, which necessitated the stopping of the performance (*News of the World*, 5 September 1886). Finally, a young woman who worked in a fishmonger's shop in Kentish Town brought an action for a breach of promise to marry before the Queen's Bench Division in 1886 (*Manchester Guardian* and *Daily News*, 5 June 1886). The defendant was a plasterer, who had also been employed to work the limelight at the theatre. The couple had originally met in a box at the Britannia. While these cases are too isolated and random to be taken as representative of the audience as a whole, they do give a flavour of some of its members.

Most of these cases involve young adults, a group frequently referred to in the first-hand accounts. Dickens reported: 'Among the audience were a large number of boys and youths and a great many very young girls grown into bold women before they had ceased to be children.'²⁸ Many family groups attended, especially in the boxes and stalls.²⁹ Erle took exception to the presence of infants at performances: 'It is desirable that the practice adopted by Hoxton mothers of taking their babies to the theatre should be discontinued.'³⁰ In 1865 notices appeared on playbills instructing parents to take crying infants out: 'This announcement has become imperatively necessary in consequence of many recent interruptions of the Performance.'³¹ Nevertheless, there is no suggestion that babies are unwelcome. Older children were actively encouraged to attend as they were entitled to a half-price discount on tickets for the boxes and stalls.³²

A more contentious question is whether the audience included a substantial criminal element. In the early days of the Saloon the traditional argument of those opposing the licensing of theatres – that they were the haunts of prostitutes and encouraged immoral and criminal behaviour – was often articulated. For example, a police report of 22 July 1844 claimed the Albert and Britannia Saloons were frequented 'by the lowest class – prostitutes and thieves – old and young'.³³ The charge about prostitutes was repeated in another

²⁷ Newspaper cutting in 1877 diary, Wilton CY1137, frame 5.

²⁸ Charles Dickens, 'The Amusements of the People' 2, *Household Words* 1 (13 April 1850) 57.

²⁹ Dickens, 'Uncommercial Traveller', 418.

³⁰ Thomas Erle, *Letters From a Theatrical Scene-Painter* (London: Marcus Ward, 1880) p.78.

³¹ Playbill for 10 April 1855, Museum of London and Britannia playbill 46 for 17 July 1865, HA.

³² The age at which they were entitled to the discount varied: in 1846 it was for children under ten years, by 1854 it was lowered to seven years and by 1894 it was raised to under twelve years.

³³ LC7/6, National Archives.

police report three months later, but Lane categorically refuted it.³⁴ Unfavourable comments about the criminality of the Britannia's audience then died away. Wilton records that on 3 October 1874 John Parry, one of the actors, was robbed on his way home from the theatre shortly after midnight.³⁵ This was obviously an isolated incident or the stage manager's diaries would be full of similar events. In an article entitled 'The Old Britannia' (*Stage*, 2 April 1931), Erroll Sherson refuted the notion that the neighbourhood was unsafe for pedestrians at night:

But the Hoxtonites always boasted that they were not like Whitechapel and Bethnal Green, where the police *did* have to walk in couples. No extra police were engaged in connection with the theatre except to regulate the huge crowds on Saturday nights. They even boasted that Mrs. Sara Lane always walked quite undisturbed to and from the theatre. As a matter of fact, in early days she took a 'bus . . .

In the 1890s as the neighbourhood surrounding the theatre declined into poverty, reports of criminal activity around the theatre reappeared. Booth emphatically states: 'Hoxton is the leading criminal quarter of London, and indeed of all England'.³⁶ Works of fiction such as James Greenwood's *The Little Ragamuffins, or Outcast London* (published in 1892) and Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* (1896) further linked the area with criminality. The former tells the story of the son of a costermonger living in Fryingpan-alley, Clerkenwell, who runs away from a cruel stepmother and is reduced to living as a pickpocket among burglars and body snatchers. Morrison's novel is set in the squalid area off Shoreditch High Street known as the Jago, where the inhabitants survive only if they indulge in criminal behaviour.³⁷

When John East took over the theatre in 1904, he immediately purchased a revolver:

With takings averaging £150 a night, this action was born of necessity rather than cowardice, for rumour had it that more criminals lived in the square mile that surrounded the Britannia Theatre than in any comparable area in Great Britain. No well-dressed person ventured out after dusk, and even policemen walked the streets in pairs. . . . pickpockets and cosh bandits were always on the prowl. . .³⁸

³⁴ *Diaries*, p.7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.218.

³⁶ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 3rd Series, *Religious Influences*, 'London North of the Thames: The Inner Ring' (London: Macmillan, 1902) p.111.

³⁷ Hollingshead had referred to the presence of thieves, prostitutes, and 'swell-mobsmen' in the same area in *Ragged London in 1861*, ed., Anthony S. Wohl (London: Dent, 1986); first publ. 1861, p.42.

³⁸ John M. East, *'Neath the Mask* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967) p.204.

The perception that the area had become notorious is irrefutable, yet this does not prove that any but a small proportion of the Britannia's audience was involved in criminal behaviour.

Competition for audiences

Another means of defining the audience is to compare it to that of other places of entertainment within the vicinity. Arthur Harding frequented both the Britannia and the Varieties Theatre, a music hall in nearby Pitfield Street, which had opened in 1870. He claims the Britannia had a stricter control of its audience:

For anybody who wanted a lark the 'Variety' was better than the 'Brit'. The children used to do as they like there. Some of them never even used to pay. They used to dodge the pay-desk, just like bloody monkeys.³⁹

Harding also compares the Brit audience with that at the Standard Theatre:

You'd get a better class of people than at the 'Brit'. There was what you call the poor working class, those that never worked, the casual unemployed, they went to the 'Brit'. But at the 'Standard' you had the respectable poor – doorkeeper, stallkeeper or one of them jobs on the City Corporation, anything that put you a step higher up the ladder than the casual poor.⁴⁰

The Royal Standard burnt down in 1866 and the new theatre, which opened in 1867 as the New Standard was said to be London's largest at the time.⁴¹ Situated on Shoreditch High Street, close to Bishopsgate Station and about half a mile from the Britannia, it was in direct competition. Under the management of John Douglass (lessee 1848-1879 and a member of the original Britannia Saloon company in 1841) the Standard gained a favourable reputation for its pantomimes and productions of Shakespeare. Davis and Emeljanow suggest that it catered for a more sophisticated audience than the Britannia, as shown by its productions of opera (a genre the Britannia never staged).⁴² In 1853 James Anderson completed a one-hundred night engagement playing classics by Shakespeare, Schiller, Beaumont and Fletcher, and others. In his farewell speech he contrasted the

³⁹ Raphael Samuel, *East End Underworld: Chapters In The Life of Arthur Harding* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) p.41.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.49.

⁴¹ A.E. Wilson, *East End Entertainment* (London: Arthur Barker, 1954) p.120. It was later renamed the National Standard Theatre and then the Shoreditch Olympia; Diana Howard, *London Theatres and Music Halls 1850-1950* (London: The Library Association, 1970) p.222.

⁴² Davis and Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001) p.94.

Standard's audience with that of West End playhouses and flatteringly suggested the former's dramatic taste was superior:

Yes, in the East, the sun of prosperity must shine upon the drama for here both author and actor have what they cannot elsewhere find, an intellectual audience uncontaminated by the refinements of society, not *blasé*, free from prejudice, full of natural impulses, quick in appreciation, true discernment and liberal approbation.⁴³

Other theatres that vied for the same audience as the Britannia were the Grecian and the City of London. In the 1840s the Grecian put on many operas, but the theatre is best remembered for its melodramas and pantomimes, particularly under the management of George and Benjamin Conquest.⁴⁴ A police report of July 1844 compared the Grecian, Albert and Britannia Saloons and declared the Grecian as 'far superior' to the other two.⁴⁵ 'It is frequented by respectable society and conducted with great order and propriety.' The Superintendent praised the Grecian's manager, Mr Rouse, for refusing to let his saloon be hired for Chartist or other political meetings. Although he does not state that the Britannia is used for such purposes, the implication is that it might be. Dramatic productions at the Grecian ended in 1885, when the theatre was taken over by William Booth as a Salvation Army mission centre.

The City of London was approximately one mile from the Britannia. It opened in 1837, became a music hall in 1868 and was destroyed by a fire in 1871. Its most successful period was from 1848 to 1865 when Nelson Lee was manager.⁴⁶ It was noted for its pantomimes. Many Britannia actors also trod the boards at the City, including Joseph Reynolds (*Players*, 10 November 1860) and N.T. Hicks.⁴⁷ Hazlewood, for many years associated with the Britannia as a dramatist (see Chapter 4), both performed and wrote for the City.

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the Britannia no longer had to consider competition from the Grecian and the City of London as both those establishments had closed. The Standard was its main theatrical rival. However, other potential audience members may have been lost to the music halls, which by then were

⁴³ Quoted in Wilson, *East End*, p.116.

⁴⁴ Erroll Sherson, *London's Lost Theatres of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Bodley Head, 1925), pp.18-22.

⁴⁵ Letter from Superintendent J. Johnston dated 22 July 1844, LC/6, National Archives.

⁴⁶ Wilson, *East End*, pp.153-61 and Sherson, pp.37-38.

⁴⁷ City of London playbill for 18 April 1853, Playbills 168, BL.

flourishing. As well as the Varieties Theatre, neighbouring music halls included the Royal Cambridge Music Hall, the Eastern Alhambra and McDonald's (later Hoxton Hall).⁴⁸

Sunday audiences

So far consideration has been made of the audiences for dramatic performances. From January 1860 the Britannia was one of five theatres used as a venue for religious services on Sunday evenings. This was an experiment in which clergymen from the Church of England took religion into areas with low church attendance or few churches.⁴⁹ The practice was debated in the House of Lords on 24 February 1860. Viscount Dungannon, who thought using theatres was morally objectionable, suggested it 'is calculated to injure rather than advance the progress of sound religious principles in the metropolis and throughout the country.'⁵⁰ The Archbishop of Canterbury pointed out that the services were 'not for the upper or for the middles classes, but for the outcast and poor, who had no other accommodation provided for them'. The Earl of Shaftesbury said he had attended three of the venues (he did not name them) 'in which there were 3,200 people of the lowest description'. Various ministers gave their experiences of the services, including the Reverend C. Stovel of Commercial Road Chapel. His testimony stated:

'I must say that the congregations of an evening at St. James's, Curtain-road, have, since the service at the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton, fallen off greatly; . . .' He might remark that the congregations assembled at the Britannia Theatre were of a superior class, and were not composed of the low and destitute beings who flocked to the other theatres.

Dickens reported on his visit to the Britannia on the fourth Sunday of the experiment.⁵¹ An abbreviated form of his article was reprinted in the *Illustrated Times* (10 March 1860) with an accompanying illustration (see Plate 2.1).⁵² He related that a large crowd, 'chiefly people of respectable appearance', were shut out as the theatre was full; he estimates the crowd inside as 'full four thousand people'. He is surprised (and disappointed) by the congregation, which he had expected to be the same as for the Saturday night pantomime:

And now, I am brought to the fact, that the lowest part of the audience of the previous night, *was not there*. There is no doubt about

⁴⁸ Mander, pp.99-100.

⁴⁹ In 1882 the committee organising the services heard that there was only one minister to every three thousand people in East London; *H&K Gazette*, 12 June 1882.

⁵⁰ 'Parliamentary Intelligence', *The Times*, 25 February 1860.

⁵¹ Dickens, 'Uncommercial Traveller', 419-21.

⁵² Article and illustration were repeated in the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 1 November 1862.

it. There was no such thing in that building, that Sunday evening. I have been told since, that the lowest part of the audience of the Victoria Theatre has been attracted to its Sunday services. I have been very glad to hear it, but on this occasion of which I write, the lowest part of the audience of the Britannia Theatre, decidedly and unquestionably stayed away. When I first took my seat and looked at the house, my surprise at the change in its occupants was as great as my disappointment. To the most respectable class of the previous evening, was added a great number of respectable strangers attracted by curiosity, and drafts from the regular congregations of various chapels. It was impossible to fail in identifying the character of these last, and they were very numerous.

Dickens's impression is borne out by the illustration. It shows a packed house of men and women but there do not appear to be family groups (certainly no baby is visible) or clusters of youths.

The practice was obviously considered a success because by 1882 there were eleven large venues hosting the services, including the Pavilion Theatre, Whitechapel (*H&K Gazette*, 12 June 1882). Rent was paid for the use of the facilities so the theatres' managements had a financial incentive for accommodating the services.

The failure of the lowest classes to attend religious services at the Britannia is in line with a census taken on 24 October 1886, which showed that only seven or eight per cent of the population attended some kind of religious service.⁵³ Booth reports that Hoxton churches had extremely small congregations and although Sunday schools and other religious groups aimed at children, such as the Bands of Hope, attracted large numbers, the children had an 'almost complete indifference to the nature of the religious doctrine taught in them'.⁵⁴

The Britannia's Sunday services highlight the fact that the theatre was more than just a venue for entertainment; it was a community resource.

Changing audiences?

The Britannia's audience can be characterised as predominantly working and lower-middle class with large proportions of young people and family groups. Yet within this broad definition there were some variables during the six decades under consideration. The first audiences at the Britannia Saloon in the early 1840s were attending a minor theatre at a time when 'legitimate' theatre was not permitted. Lane's decision to flout the rules by performing Shakespeare and other dramas, which led to the refusal of magistrates to grant

⁵³ Walter Besant, *East London* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1901) p.37.

⁵⁴ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour*, 3rd Series, p.118.

him licences in 1841 and 1842 meant that his audience by the very act of attending his premises was being subversive. Attendees risked arrest (a threat that had been realised in 1839 when Lane was running the Royal Union Saloon, see Chapter 1). This taint of illicitness must inevitably have dissuaded some people from attending. With the change in the legal status of theatres enshrined in the 1843 Theatre Regulation Act this element disappeared. From then on the Britannia was able to market itself as a respectable venue. Even so, higher-brow newspapers and journals continued to ignore the theatre for many years, only occasionally (if at all) reviewing its productions. Hence Wilton's excitement in his diary entry of 28 December 1867: 'The first *NOTICE of BRITANNIA THEATRE* which ever appeared in TIMES NEWSPAPER appeared *yesterday* in the columns descriptive of the Pantomimes, nearly 20 lines all adulatory!'⁵⁵ He recognised that this notice validated the theatre. It is probable that this, together with the increased publicity, may have attracted a more respectable audience. The same is true of Dickens's favourable reviews of the theatre, which were partially reprinted on Britannia playbills. They gave much needed prestige.

Management policies

The Britannia's management tried to regulate its audience through its admission and advertising policies. Looking at ticket pricing across the decades reveals surprisingly little change. The earliest evidence comes from the memorandum Lane submitted to the Lord Chamberlain in 1843, in which he states admission prices were 'one shilling to the Boxes and sixpence to the Pit'.⁵⁶ A couple of playbills from 1845 give the admission price as 3d. However, this must have been the saloon price only as one bill also mentions half price to the stalls, 3d, at 8.30pm, implying the usual stalls admission fee was 6d.⁵⁷ In February 1846 prices were: boxes 1s, stalls 6d and saloon 3d. These were reduced in November and further lowered in January 1847 to boxes and lower stalls 6d, upper stalls 4d, saloon and gallery 2d.⁵⁸ On 3 December 1846 an official in the Lord Chamberlain's office wrote to the managers of the Queens, Victoria, City of London and Standard Theatres and the Bower, Britannia and Albert Saloons to inquire why they had all dropped their prices. Lane went to the office to explain that he had done so reluctantly following reductions at the Standard, Pavilion, Garrick, City of London and Victoria, but that he would revert to the

⁵⁵ *Diaries*, p.136.

⁵⁶ LC7/5, National Archives.

⁵⁷ Britannia playbill i for 13 October 1845, HA.

⁵⁸ Playbill for 11 January 1847, Playbills 376, BL.

original prices if the rest would follow suit.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Lane opportunistically advertised the price reductions by associating the name of the drama then playing (Pitt's *The Battle of Life*, a dramatisation of one of Dickens's Christmas stories) with his hard-pressed patrons, thereby ingratiating himself:

NOTICE! THE BATTLE OF LIFE! What is meant by the Battle of Life? but the struggle to keep the wolf from the door? At this present season when bread and the necessities of life are so dear and by the humbler classes so difficult of attainment. Now is the real BATTLE OF LIFE, and the Proprietor anxious to aid in the victory of the weaker party, is induced to **Lower his Prices** to accommodate the frequenters of the Theatre in the following ratio: . . .⁶⁰

Wilton had advised Lane against reducing the prices, but it proved an effective measure: 'The house was filled nightly to suffocation and the receipts never seriously again went down . . .'⁶¹

By January 1849 prices had risen to 1s for a seat in a box and 3d for the gallery.⁶² Much later, in 1890, admission charges were stage boxes 2s per person, boxes or stalls 1s, pit and box slips 6d, gallery 3d. Remarkably, the cheapest seats (in the gallery) were thus unchanged for more than forty years. This was good value for money given that the costs of mounting productions had risen during the intervening years.

The most expensive seats were in the stage boxes, but seats in the other boxes could still be bought for 1s each. From its days as a Saloon such tickets had always been sold individually and there had originally been no possibility of advance booking. However, after the new theatre was built in 1858 private boxes could be hired for one guinea or individual seats within them bought for 2s or 1s 6d each. Other box seats remained at 1s. This was a clear attempt to attract more refined audiences wary of mixing with unknown other patrons. Not only could they control who shared a box with them, but they could also avoid contact with the purchasers of the cheaper seats for, as the playbills announce:

Visitors to the Dress Circle and Boxes are respectfully informed that the New Arrangements include, what has frequently been enquired for but never before possessed at this Establishment – a Separate Entrance for their accommodation.⁶³

⁵⁹ LC7/6, National Archives.

⁶⁰ Playbill for 11 January 1847, Playbills 376, BL.

⁶¹ *Diaries*, p.74.

⁶² Playbill for 22 January 1849, Playbills 376, BL.

⁶³ Britannia playbill 29, HA.

That this was a necessary inducement to some more affluent and snobbish members of society is clearly shown by a petition the Lord Chamberlain received in 1853 campaigning for the opening of a theatre in Dalston.⁶⁴ Although the inhabitants would only have had a short journey south to visit the Britannia, they 'would not visit either the Britannia, the Standard or City of London, the class of persons visiting these places of amusement being such as your petitioners . . . would not like to mix with.'⁶⁵

The policy of enforcing a dress code was another attempt to cater for the sensibilities of a non-working-class contingent. Playbills carried warnings that 'NO PERSON ADMITTED INTO THE LOWER STALLS WITHOUT BEING SUITABLY ATTIRED.'⁶⁶ This ruling was later extended to the boxes.⁶⁷

During the 1880s a large part of the Britannia's repertoire consisted of plays that had recently been performed in the West End (Chapter 5). Comparing the 1888 admission prices of the Britannia with Drury Lane (a theatre with a similar-sized stage and audience capacity) shows a great disparity. Drury Lane fees were private boxes £1 1s to £5 5s (Britannia, £1 1s or 2s each), stalls 7s (Britannia, 1s), upper circle 4s (1s), pit 2s (6d) and gallery 6d (3d).⁶⁸ The staging of the shows was similar and sometimes identical; in 1883 Wilson Barrett's *The Romany Rye* 'was presented to the East-enders with exact replicas of the original scenery and effects' of the production at the Princess's Theatre.⁶⁹ Given that the Britannia's management was also paying a hefty author's fee, the outlay was substantial even allowing for the lower actors' salaries. Because the Hoxton runs were shorter, there was less opportunity to recoup the money. It would seem that the Britannia's audience was getting a bargain (although it is impossible to quantify how much better the acting was in the West End).

An astute businessman, Samuel Lane tried to market the theatre to appeal to customers from outside the area. In 1854 an announcement on a playbill read: 'Omnibusses [sic] from all parts of London, stop within Two Minutes Walk of the Britannia every Quarter of an Hour'.⁷⁰ The North London Railway was extended in the mid 1860s and included the new Shoreditch Station 'within Three Hundred Yards of the Britannia'. Lane was quick to advertise this fact noting it 'an advantage that gives to the inhabitants of Hampstead Road,

⁶⁴ Davis and Emeljanow, p.93.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Davis and Emeljanow, p.93.

⁶⁶ Playbill for 23 November 1846, Playbills 376, BL.

⁶⁷ Playbill for 19 June 1854, Playbills 376, BL.

⁶⁸ *Dickens's Dictionary of London 1888* (Moretonhampstead: Old House Books, 1993), pp.266-67. Drury Lane also had different prices for the balcony, dress circle and amphitheatre, which the Britannia did not have, while the latter also had pit stalls.

⁶⁹ *Sam & Sallie*, p.320.

⁷⁰ Playbill for 19 June 1854, Playbills 376, BL.

Chalk Farm, Kentish Town, Camden Town, Holloway, and their vicinities, easy access to and from this, the largest and most popular Theatre in the North or East of London.’⁷¹ Barker suggests that rather than bring a new audience to the Britannia, the increased public transport facilities ‘enabled the more prosperous section of the Hoxton working population to move further away from their places of work in the area and travel into work by cheap workman’s transport.’⁷² Even if this was so, the extra transport options must have been helpful in bringing in the pantomime audiences. Hence, in 1894 a programme for *The Giant of the Mountains* lists ‘the last trains and tramcars for the North London Railway from Shoreditch station ‘within 5 minutes of the Theatre’, and for the Great Eastern Railway ‘within 10 minutes of the Theatre’ as well as North Metropolitan Tramcars from Moorgate Street and Old Street.’⁷³

Size

Regardless of where the audience came from, the sheer number of people present gave the Britannia auditorium a particular ambiance. The *Theatre Journal* (28 June 1849) wrote of the Britannia Saloon that ‘the number of visitors have during the last two years averaged TEN THOUSAND WEEKLY’ (this averages out at roughly 1,670 per night). Once the new theatre was built in 1858, audience capacity was considerably greater (Chapter 1). Even excluding the many accounts that were written about visits to the pantomime, particularly in its opening week, there are numerous reviews for other productions that refer to the vast throngs of people trying to gain admittance to the theatre, crowds being turned away and the difficulty of getting a seat. Such large-capacity audiences attracted widespread attention. For example, a review of Sara Lane’s *St Bartholomew* in 1877 mentions:

A country Manager coming up to town for the holidays, actually requested to be taken to the Britannia *to see the audience*. He had been accustomed to a beggarly account of empty boxes, and the sight of a Theatre filled to the utmost limits of its capacity was a more gratifying spectacle to him than anything in the way of dramatic entertainment Mrs Lane might have to show him.⁷⁴

Exceptionally large audiences are recorded by Wilton on 7 November 1864: ‘The greatest number of people at the Britannia this evening – ever known there – 4500 in all.’⁷⁵ The Monday evening in question had included the annual performance of *Guy Fawkes* and

⁷¹ Britannia playbill 96 for February 1867, HA.

⁷² Clive Barker, ‘Audiences’, 39.

⁷³ Britannia programme for 26 December 1894, Museum of London.

⁷⁴ *Era*, 27 May 1877.

⁷⁵ *Diaries*, p.83.

the accompanying firework display. Ten years later the same event, even though held on the usually less popular Saturday evening, attracted a new record: '4,630 people paid to go into the Britannia theatre last Saturday night.'⁷⁶ Similarly, the annual benefit of Samuel and Alfred Lane Crauford, held in October each year and the occasion of Sara Lane's return to the stage after a summer away, was always full to overflowing. In 1879, for example, 4,599 tickets were sold (*Sunday Times*, 5 October 1879). A description (*Era*, 7 October 1877) of the same benefit two years earlier reveals the physical consequences of such a dense crowd:

On Wednesday evening the Britannia Theatre was crammed in every available corner. Wherever a sight could be got of the stage there was posted a visitor. Some climbed up the railings and columns of the Theatre and got an occasional peep over the heads of others, and some were perforce content to listen merely, and to judge entirely by the ear of the merits of Mr R. Dodson's new play, which was the principal attraction of the evening.

Crauford gives the record number of attendees as 4,790 but does not identify the occasion.⁷⁷ Evidently such vast crowds have implications for the ability to see and hear the performance, for safety, customer comfort (likely to be hot in summer, especially in the gallery) and for audience behaviour.

AUDIENCE BEHAVIOUR

Dickens's first account suggested the audience was self-policing: 'They were so closely packed, that they took a little time in settling down after any pause; but otherwise the general disposition was to lose nothing, and to check (in no choice language) any disturber of the business of the scene.'⁷⁸ Similarly, in 1860 he wrote: 'So we were closely attentive, and kept excellent order, and let the man or boy who did otherwise instantly get out from this place, or we would put him out with the greatest expedition.'⁷⁹ In his final recorded visit he again praised the audience's decorum: 'the patient attention and tranquillity of the huge concourse are quite admirable. . . . Nothing could be more orderly, nothing could be more decent.'⁸⁰

The *News of the World*'s critic (24 August 1858) was also impressed:

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.218,

⁷⁷ *Sam & Sallie*, p.274.

⁷⁸ Dickens, 'Amusements', 58.

⁷⁹ Dickens, 'Uncommercial Traveller', 418.

⁸⁰ Dickens, 'Some Theatrical Audiences', 277.

Even between the acts there was no excessive noise, no blackguardism, no foul language, and when the curtain rose, after occupying some short time to shake into their places – for they were packed like figs in a drum – they listened to the performance with a rapt attention which might be imitated with advantage by the audiences at more exclusive theatres. . . . and the behaviour of the audience is most orderly and praiseworthy.

If the doormen thought that someone was liable to cause a nuisance, they refused to grant admission. Hence an inebriated woman being turned away from Sara's benefit night in 1880 (*Era*, 19 December 1880):

Her money had been refused, for the best of order is ever maintained at the Britannia, and not only people who are disorderly but those who are likely to be disorderly – as, of course, are those who have drunk too deeply – are denied a passage past the barriers.

Later in the century there is a suggestion that stronger measures occasionally needed to be taken against anti-social behaviour. Crauford is reported as saying the audience was generally well behaved (*Sketch*, 24 June 1896). However, 'Sometimes a rowdy element came in, but the janitors were strong and numerous.' In exceptional cases when the theatre staff could not control the situation, police were called to remove the offender as happened in 1886 when a young man repeatedly shouted from the gallery (*News of the World*, 5 September 1886). The severity of the punishment meted out by the police court – fourteen days' hard labour – would have been sufficient deterrent to dissuade all but the most reckless from behaving in a similar manner.

Active participation

Although the majority of the audience behaved with decorum, this should not be confused with passivity. Active participation was a Britannia hallmark (*Saturday Programme*, 29 April 1876):

No one who visits the Britannia can but be struck with the extreme interest taken by the audience in what is progressing on the stage: the villain is warmly hissed, virtue is as warmly applauded, their very excitement showing how truly British is the stuff of which these sturdy sons of toil – men who like on Saturday night to take their wives and families 'to the play' – are made.

Sometimes the reactions seemed to be involuntary. For example, when Sims and Pettitt's *The Harbour Lights* played in 1891, some of the female members of the audience were carried away by the action (*Era*, 8 August 1891):

. . . when that excellent actress, Miss Oliph Webb, in the exercise of her duty as Lina Nelson, threatened to commit suicide with a revolver, women uttered little screams of terror which showed how real the situation was to them.

At other times the response was more conscious. The audience watching the 1865 pantomime *Old Daddy Longlegs* typically clapped, shouted, cheered, whistled and joined in the singing to express satisfaction, empathy or appreciation or to demand encores (*Era*, 31 December 1865):

Britannia audiences have their own manners and customs, and encouraging those performers by name whom they specially admire is one. Another is singing the words of any popular air played in the orchestra. The Hoxton public is energetic in the matter of encores, and a desire to hear anything a second time is generally expressed by shrill whistles from hundreds of strong-lunged masculines.

Anderson appreciated this liveliness when he appeared on stage:

I always had wonderful patronage at the Britannia, but this engagement was something extraordinary. The Hoxton audiences are not over refined, I am free to admit, but they are the most generous and enthusiastic in the East, and it is a great treat to have a turn with them now and then.⁸¹

It is perhaps surprising that in his diaries, Wilton rarely mentions the audience except to record its size. Because of this, the odd occasions when he does draw attention to it should be seen as exceptional. On 15 July 1869 he gives a telling account of the audience and those who could not gain attendance:

Hundreds of people last night turned away from the doors! Mr Borrow . . . looked out of his window before the Doors were opened to see the mob waiting for admission (ragged shoe-less boys). . . . During the Performance Fred Rountree saw a man in the gallery, after drinking a pint of Beer, throw the empty pot over his head behind him and as it flew through the air, the other people in the gallery did not seem at all surprised but quietly raised their eyes & watched its flight! The Gallery was filled in half an hour after the doors were open & then the doors were closed, & there was such a number of people disappointed & grumbling at not gaining admission that there were 3 Policemen appointed to pace the pavement & keep the people quiet. During the dialogue of *The School for Scandal*, the boys in the gallery

⁸¹ James R. Anderson, *An Actor's Life* (London: Walter Scott, 1902) p.312.

were singing *a rousing chorus!* & scarcely a single speech was heard from beginning to end of the piece . . .⁸²

Wilton also records two incidents when the audience expressed dissatisfaction. On 15 June 1872 he writes: 'This night (Saturday) there was some hissing during his [Mr Vivian's] songs, & he stopped & addressed the audience, who then applauded.'⁸³ Significantly, the management reacted swiftly to this negative response and immediately gave the performer notice to leave. Thus the audience was proactive in influencing the entertainment, commercial interest giving it the power to have a voice in, if not dictate, the hiring of artists. This incident demonstrates the dynamic relationship between the theatre's management and its audience. It also disproves Carlisle's argument that 'the institution offered the members of its audience the illusion of voluntary participation in a culture to which they were, in fact, subjected.'⁸⁴

Structuralist readings of popular culture have focused on the antagonistic relationship between working-class audiences and managements as representatives of a culturally dominant bourgeoisie.⁸⁵ Tony Bennett describes Gramsci's theory of negotiated hegemony:

It [popular culture] consists not of two separated compartments – a pure and spontaneously oppositional culture 'of the people' and a totally administered culture 'for the people' – but is located in the points of confluence between these opposing tendencies whose contradictory orientations shape the very organisation of the cultural forms in which they meet and interpenetrate one another.⁸⁶

This is not borne out by the evidence from the Britannia. The Lanes did not seek to impose bourgeois culture. Management and audience were not acting in opposition to each other.

Another example of audience displeasure came later the same year: 'Last night of Mr J.Plumpton; the audience *chaffing* & some *hissing* (as they have done several times during his engagement), he would only sing one song tonight.'⁸⁷ Hissing (rather than whistling, which showed satisfaction) was the most common means of expressing displeasure. A review of Hazlewood's melodrama *Laurette's Bridal, or More than Meets the Eye*

⁸² *Diaries*, p.161.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.205.

⁸⁴ Janice Carlisle, 'Spectacle as Government, Dickens and the Working-Class Audience' in Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt, eds, *The Performance of Power: Theatrical Discourse and Politics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991) pp.176-77.

⁸⁵ See Tony Bennett, 'Introduction: popular culture and 'the turn to Gramsci' in Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer and Janet Woollacott, eds, *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986) pp.xi-xix.

⁸⁶ Tony Bennett, 'The politics of "the popular" and popular culture' in Bennett, Mercer and Woollacott, p.19.

⁸⁷ *Diaries*, p.207.

recorded that the audience's sympathies were not engaged by the piece and at the end showed this with 'faint applause and some hisses'.⁸⁸ Such dramas did not play for long.

Erle writes sneeringly of the behaviour of the coat-less, whistling youths in the Britannia gallery:

They evince, too, a noble independence of bearing and sentiment towards the swells in the body of the house (who are in this case the counter-skippers of Kingsland and Dalston) by turning their backs to the chandelier, and sitting along the gallery rail like a row of sparrows on a telegraph wire. In this position they confront their friends in the back settlements, and exchange with them a light fusillade of *badinage*, principally couched in idiomatic expressions of remarkable vigour and terseness, which is sustained with much animation during the time that the curtain is down between the pieces.⁸⁹

This occurred when there was nothing happening on stage, so although Erle may have disproved of such behaviour, it was not disruptive and does not suggest that the young men were inattentive during the performances. It does, however, indicate that, for this section of the audience at least, going to the theatre was a social activity, an opportunity to engage with other people.

The Britannia also fostered another significant relationship – between its audience and the acting company. Because so many of the performers appeared at the theatre over many years (see Chapter 3), members of the audience felt that they were personally acquainted with them. Archer recorded the conversations of some of the women in the audience on the occasion of the Britannia Festival (*Porcupine*, 29 December 1866):

Their 'old favourites' are to them something more than mere public characters: they are spoken of, even when they are there visibly, as all sorts of imaginary people, in quite a domestic capacity, as real living and well-known acquaintances; and yet this duality of appreciation does not seem to diminish the relish of the audience for the drama. 'Lor, how well she do look, don't she, Jim? You wouldn't think it posble [sic], now, that she could keep her skin that clear: she's reglar [sic] lovely in that dress. I always did think so.'

S'elp me, Bob, if I don't think she gits [sic] younger, somehow; but she's a reglar good 'un, she is.'

Clearly in the minds of at least some of the audience there was a blurring of the distinction between the actors and the roles they portrayed. Three decades later Harding testifies to this confusion:

⁸⁸ Unattributed cutting, November/December 1866, Theatre Cuttings 68, BL.

⁸⁹ Erle, p.81.

When the play was over Mighty [his sister] used to lumber me round the back to watch 'em come out. My sister would follow them to where they got a tramcar or a bus to take them home – try to get near them and touch their clothes. The actors and actresses used to love it. People from the audience would follow them down the road. I've seen 'em offer 'em a drink, you know – 'Have a drink, my dear, do you good after all that hard work – bloody scoundrel, knocking you about like he did.' They would talk as if it had actually happened. 'Oh, I'm so glad you're alive. I though [sic] you was dead.' And the men used to say to the villain, you know: 'Why didn't you 'it 'im on the head with a 'ammer?''⁹⁰

There was an obvious warmth of feeling for the actors. Chirgwin, the music-hall star known as 'the White Eyed Kaffir', appeared in six Britannia pantomimes. In his autobiography he complained that he received many begging letters and at the "'class" halls and theatres' was harassed by 'stage door "ear-biters"''.⁹¹ However, he was never bothered in this way during his engagements at the Britannia. He also refers to friendly banter with one member of the audience after a show, describing him as 'a typical coster'.⁹²

The sense of closeness with the regular Britannia company was doubtless augmented by the fact that many were neighbours. Davis and Davis's investigation of the local census records for 1861 and 1871 has revealed the home addresses of many of the company. They conclude that 'the resident company followed an ancient tradition by living close enough to walk to and from work'.⁹³ This pattern is likely to have continued throughout the century. A report (*Sunday Times*, 16 February 1879) of the death of Cecil Pitt, who had been associated with the Britannia for thirty-five years as actor and prompter, mentions that his home is 'within 200 yards of the theatre'.

Algernon Syms, a popular leading actor from 1884 until 1900, was a member of the Britannia Lodge of Antediluvian Buffaloes, a Masonic order. At his benefit in 1890 fellow members of the Lodge appeared on stage 'in all the imposing ornament of orders, stars, and emblems' and he was presented with a testimonial in 'recognition of his valuable services to the order' (*Era*, 29 November 1890). The Honorary Treasurer is named as W.S. Crauford, Sara's nephew. It is probable that such largely hidden links fostered a feeling of good will and mutual assistance between the theatre and the community.

⁹⁰ Samuel, p.40.

⁹¹ George Chirgwin, *Chirgwin's Chirrup: Being the Life and Reminiscences of George Chirgwin* (London: J. & J. Bennett, 1912) p.106.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Davis and Davis, 162.

Gifts and the Britannia Festival

The audience showed their adulation for the acting company in a direct way by the presentation of gifts. Ada Reeve, who was principal boy in the 1891 pantomime *The Old Bogie of the Sea*, describes her experience of the Britannia audience's generosity:

Often we were given stockings, tied up prettily with ribbons and a little posy; and once a box containing a tea-set was carefully lowered from the gallery to me. The givers would specify for whom each present was intended, and there was keen rivalry between Amy's 'fans' and mine in different sections of the gallery.⁹⁴ . . . 'That's for Ada!' 'That's for Amy!' they would cry, one party against the other, as the shower of gifts fell on the stage.⁹⁵

George Bernard Shaw's vivid account of the last night of the pantomime in 1898 reveals how the giving of such gifts interrupted the performance:

The enthusiasm of the pit on the last night, with no stalls to cut it off from the performers, was frantic. There was a great throwing of flowers and confectionery on the stage; and it would happen occasionally that an artist would overlook one of these tributes, and walk off, leaving it unnoticed on the boards. Then a shriek of tearing anxiety would arise, as if the performer were wandering blindfold into a furnace or over a precipice. Every factory girl in the house would lacerate the air with a mad scream of 'Pick it up, Topsy!' 'Pick it up, Voylit!' followed by a gasp of relief, several thousand strong, when Miss Topsy Sinden or Miss Violet Durkin would return and annex the offering.⁹⁶

Gifts were also given at actor's benefit evenings, but without doubt the occasion upon which the audience showed the most generosity was the Britannia Festival, held as part of Sara Lane's annual benefit evening in December. This took place on the last night the theatre was open before a temporary closure to prepare the pantomime. Typically it was on the Monday preceding Boxing Day.

Crauford states that the first Britannia Festival was held in June 1858 as the old Britannia Saloon was about to be demolished.⁹⁷ In fact the Lord Chamberlain's copy of the 1848 pantomime *Old Parr and the Magic Pills, or Harlequin and the Wizard of Ashdale* shows it started with the 'Britannia Adress' [sic], which took the same form as the later

⁹⁴ Amy Lyster, who played Petula, the principal boy's lover.

⁹⁵ Ada Reeve, *Take It For A Fact (A Record of My Seventy-Five Years on the Stage)* (London: William Heinemann, 1954) p.36. Reeve's first husband, the performer Bert Gilbert, was the grandson of Britannia dramatist Colin Hazlewood.

⁹⁶ George Bernard Shaw, 'The Drama in Hoxton', *Saturday Review* (9 April 1898), reprinted in G.B. Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (London: Constable, 1954) vol. 3, p.354.

⁹⁷ *Sam & Sallie*, pp.268-70.

Festival.⁹⁸ Although Crauford's claim that the Festival 'became the most interesting theatrical annual event in the history of the stage' is not true, it *is* important because it was unique to the Britannia and attracted substantial press coverage. (It is, for example, one of only two evenings at the Britannia reviewed by the *Referee* in the whole of 1884.) The Festival was hugely popular with the audience and continued for the rest of the century. It was mentioned in histories of the Britannia for many years and, in 1924, was the subject of a rather lame doggerel aping the verses that the actors recited on the occasion.⁹⁹

Following the initial drama, the curtain rose for the Festival itself. All the members of the acting company were seated on stage wearing costumes from productions seen during the preceding year. Either Sara or the stage manager would step forward and speak a welcome in verse. The other performers followed in turn, declaiming a couplet or verse reminding the audience of a particular character they had enacted. Sara usually appeared twice. In 1890 she first spoke as Mistress Honour in *Sophia*, a drama based on Fielding's novel *Tom Jones*. She concluded the proceedings in the character of Eileen O'Dearie, encapsulating the previous year's pantomime and plugging the forthcoming attraction (*Era*, 20 December 1890):

Eileen O'Dearie: you remember me,
In last year's Christmas story, gay and free;
Of trouble lovers ever have their share,
But to protect them I was always there.
With judge and jury matters were amiss,
But, dressed as Portia, I told 'em this—
'The quality of mercy is not strain'd,'
And by that pleading I the verdict gained.
Such wonders in next pantomime there'll be
That in your thousands you'll flock here to see.
From now till then I wish you all good cheer,
A Merry Christmas and a glad New Year.

Each year the audience responded by throwing gifts to their favourite performers. These were not limited to the standard floral offerings typically given at other theatres. Archer reported (*Porcupine*, 29 December 1866):

For they have curious ways down east, and though tributes of admiration are occasionally flung on to the stage in the form of wreaths and bouquets and bead head-dresses, the number of such offerings is far exceeded by card-board boxes, embossed packages tied with ribbon, and seeming to contain French plums and

⁹⁸ ADD.MS 43015 ff.769-777, BL.

⁹⁹ J.W. Sewell, *Rhymes En Route*, quoted in *Sam & Sallie*, pp.350-52.

sweetmeats; while, more substantial still, are homely brown paper parcels, that go whirling amidst the footlights, and may be supposed to enclose anything from a leg of pork, or a packet of ham sandwiches, to a clean shirt and a dozen of linen collars.

At the 1897 Festival the range of gifts offered to two actors was impressive if eclectic:

Miss East Robertson received, amongst other things, ornaments, a set of saucepans, a pair of hand-worked candlesticks, handkerchiefs, a Belgian cheese, sweets, a fan, a petticoat and ninety-seven bouquets. Charles East was showered with a leather travelling case, a pick and shovel, a loaf of bread, a sovereign case, a joint of meat and a pair of blankets.

The audience divined by instinct the article most acceptable to the particular artist. The gifts often represented the trade of the giver, and the spirit of devotion was touching in the extreme.¹⁰⁰

Carados, who witnessed many Festivals whilst working there, later reported that Sara had requested only the simplest and cheapest gifts so she was showered with individual flowers (*Referee*, 3 February 1924).¹⁰¹ He records performers receiving assorted food items and pieces of clothing including ‘pairs of trousers (locally known as “bags” or “round the houses”)’ for the men and ‘even pairs of stays!’ for the women. Many of these items were beyond the pocket of the poorest audience members, but that did not prevent them from gift-giving:

Some of the audience – especially the sweeter sex – mostly humble shop assistants, servant girls, and artificial flower makers (very numerous in that district, would hand over the footlights cheap (and often gaudy) clocks, glass cases of wax fruits, and flowers. Sometimes they would throw at the feet of their favourite actresses beautiful sprays of artificial flowers – the work of their own deft hands.

Such generosity could be dangerous; Sherson alleges that once ‘the audience in the stalls had to put up umbrellas to avoid the showers of gifts’.¹⁰² Management too took precautions: ‘It even became necessary to remove the glass globes from the box chandeliers in consequence of this hail of parcels of all shapes and sizes.’¹⁰³

The Britannia Festival was an effective way of promoting the special, interactive relationship of the theatre company and its audience.

¹⁰⁰ East, pp.202.

¹⁰¹ Carados was the *nom de plume* of the journalist H. Chance Newton.

¹⁰² Sherson, p.364.

¹⁰³ *Sam & Sallie*, p.324.

Food

In accounts of the Britannia the only aspect of the audience's behaviour that received as much press coverage as the annual Festival was its consumption of food. Reports by first-time or infrequent visitors to the theatre seem obsessed by it. The tone of such accounts is often of excess:

For few restaurants get rid of so much solid food as the Britannia would consume during its five or six hours' dramatic debauch. Men walked to and fro incessantly with trays groaning beneath the weight of pies in infinite variety, thick slices of bread plastered with jam, chunks of cheese, slabby sandwiches, fried fish, shell-fish, jellied eels. Gallons of ale washed down mountains of food.¹⁰⁴

Dickens seemed particularly impressed with the sandwiches, which feature in all his accounts: 'Huge ham sandwiches, piled on trays like deals in a timber-yard' (1850); 'The sandwich . . . we hailed as one of our greatest institutions' (1860) and 'Brodbingnagian sandwiches, as thick as bricks, and of much the same hue' (1877).

Presumably the official selling of refreshments in the auditorium itself was confined to the periods of the curtain drop and did not interrupt the performances. Certainly when Donne, the Examiner of Plays, received a complaint about the food, he replied that he had not witnessed anything to make him 'infer discontent or disorder of any kind'.¹⁰⁵ With such vast crowds the advantage of bringing food and drink to the seated customers is obvious, and in the case of beer was ingeniously delivered:

Here they had refreshments brought to them; sandwiches, cakes, ginger-beer – and even beer! The latter brought by a barman who looked to be encased in armour; but really it was a huge tin contrivance with a tap, which fitted his body and held some dozen gallons. Those who preferred to drink at the bars usually selected the moment for the song of the Fairy Queen; very unkind and discomposing for her; directly she promised to sing there was an uproar and a general exit of the thirsty.¹⁰⁶

Although alcohol was on sale, there is no suggestion that drunkenness was a problem apart from the isolated case. A report of a meeting at the Lord Chamberlain's office in December 1846 reports:

Mr Lane says that one would be astonished to see how little liquor is drunk on a night. In a place that holds about 15 or 1600 persons he

¹⁰⁴ H.G. Hibbert, *Fifty Years of a Londoner's Life* (London: Grant Richards, 1916) p.64.

¹⁰⁵ Letter, 29 April 1864, quoted in Davis & Emeljanow, p.248.

¹⁰⁶ *Sam & Sallie*, pp.301-02.

has known, with a fair house, only 20 glasses of Grog [mixed spirits and water] sold.¹⁰⁷

Lane then sent a letter on 5 December saying that, having spoken to the vendor, he has discovered he was wrong about the amount drunk, the average being only seven glasses per night.¹⁰⁸ In a postscript he adds that ‘the Average Expenditure of my Audience . . . amount to no more than one Half Penny per head for Refreshments.’

The existence of segregated refreshment rooms serving different items provides further evidence for the presence of a mixed-income audience. These areas are appreciatively described in a review (*Penny Illustrated Weekly News*, 11 March 1865) of Hazlewood’s *Twenty Straws* in 1865. In terms that sometimes plagiarise Dickens, it emphasises how superior the fare is to that offered by other theatres:

There are three distinct refreshment-rooms, upon the railway model, divided into first, second, and third-class – gallery, pit, and boxes. Though the tavern part of the establishment is not completely divided from the theatre, it still exerts its beneficial influence upon the character of the refreshments. Instead of property vase, stony-hearted pastry, cherry-brandy like red turpentine and marbles, and inky port that has been in a dusty decanter from pantomime to pantomime, there is plenty of good wholesome beer and ale, joints of meat and loaves of bread, and sandwiches piled up like mahogany planks at a timber wharf. The spirits you get *are* spirits: the wine *is* wine. Bottled beer is confined to the first-class refreshment-room, and draught beer to the second and third. There are male and female attendants in waiting, and every want is supplied in a manner that no other theatrical builder has ever attempted.

The retail of refreshments must have been a contributing factor in the financial success of the Britannia. Anderson claims Sam Lane ‘once told me that the two pit stands for selling oranges, apples and ginger beer paid all the expenses for keeping his two yachts throughout the year.’¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, not all the food consumed was purchased at the theatre. The *Dramatic Telegram* (1 November 1865) referred to ‘the fat woman in the pit, who, ever-and-anon produces from her wicker basket, a perfect banquet of sandwiches, pork sausages and “a bottle”’. Twenty years later, food was still an important part of the Brit experience. Harding recollects visiting the Brit as a child and consuming a mixture of refreshments purchased at the theatre and brought in from outside:

¹⁰⁷ LC7/6, National Archives.

¹⁰⁸ Letter of 5 December 1846, LC7/6, National Archives.

¹⁰⁹ James Anderson, p.209.

They used to come round with cakes in the gallery, penny and halfpenny cakes or oranges; and she [his sister] used to buy me 'em – you know, them round hard cakes. . . . And she used to go with a bag-load of fruit – not monkey nuts nor nothing like that – apples and oranges. Good stuff. It was one perpetual feast all the night.¹¹⁰

Enterprising vendors, many of them children, sold refreshments outside the theatre and in the ticket queues:

Children would go selling at the theatres. At the 'Britannia' the only thing they sold was the oranges and cakes – what they could eat in there. Nuts, the management used to ruck about, the shells being on the floor and all that. The cakes came from Dean's – it was a big confectioners, a wholesale place in Brick Lane. They used to sell 'em with a basket round the queue, halfpenny a time. They were round cakes, hard as iron. In Scotland, they call them oat cakes. . . .

Another thing they sold outside was trotters. 'Penny each, trotters.' The children bought them from the stall – there was an old girl who stood outside the pub selling them, and they'd go round to the 'Brit' – 'Here's your trotters, ladies, two for 1½ d, have that big one for a penny.' They'd carry 'em round on a tray, perhaps some of 'em had a string round their neck like when they had the basket with the oranges. That was the best seller, along with the Brompton's Cough Cure.¹¹¹

Eating in public outside the home was a central part of the lives of the working and lower-middle classes. Many of them did not have cooking facilities in their rented room(s), and those who did could often afford to bake or roast only infrequently.¹¹² Jaye recollects the practice of handing in Sunday dinners at the baker's to be cooked for a fee.¹¹³ Others took advantage of the numerous street vendors to supply them with cheap takeaway food. In *London Labour and the London Poor* Mayhew details typical consumption of the 'eatables and drinkables' offered by the street sellers:

Men and women, and most especially boys, purchase their meals day after day in the streets. The coffee-stall supplies a warm breakfast; shellfish of many kinds tempt to a luncheon; hot-eels or pea-soup, flanked by a potato 'all hot', serve for a dinner; and cakes and tarts, or nuts and oranges, with many varieties of pastry, confectionary, and

¹¹⁰ Samuel, p.39.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp.49-50.

¹¹² Mrs Bernard Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor* (London: Macmillan, 1899) p.90.

¹¹³ A. Jaye, 'Looking Back', *Profile* 2,11 (August 1969) p.2. Jaye, the son of a linen draper, was born in 1889 in Hoxton.

fruit, woo to indulgence in a dessert; while for supper there is a sandwich, a meat pudding, or a 'trotter'.¹¹⁴

Whereas the upper-class patrons of the theatre would have eaten a substantial dinner at home (or possibly at a gentleman's club) before attending the theatre and therefore would not have needed refreshments, for the less well-off this was the major meal of the day. Moreover shop assistants and clerks, who worked late and then attended the Brit for half price after 8.30pm, would have gone straight from work and therefore had little opportunity to eat. Thus the Britannia's refreshment facilities catered to an obvious need and by providing easy access to good, reasonably priced food could also tempt those who had not originally intended to eat there.

The selling of food at theatres was not confined to the Britannia. Mayhew records the testimony of a ham-sandwich seller, who reckoned there were thirty-three similar vendors working at the theatres on '(the Strand) side of the water, and at Ashley's [sic Astley's], the Surrey, and the Vic.'¹¹⁵ 'Enormous piles of the thickest sandwiches, and mountains of pork pies' were also a nightly feature at the Grecian.¹¹⁶ The reason the Britannia's food attracted so much attention from upper-class critics was because it reflected the alien eating habits of the lower classes. Nevertheless, it is hard to square the abundance of food with the desperate levels of poverty in the area.

This study of the Britannia's audience shows it developed a strong sense of loyalty to the theatre, with many people attending frequently. Davis and Emeljanow calculate that between 15,000 and 30,000 people were regular visitors to the Britannia, probably attending on a monthly or fortnightly basis.¹¹⁷ In 1861 the population of Shoreditch was 129,000 so twelve to twenty-three per cent of the population may have been regular attenders.¹¹⁸ This familiarity created a communal feeling of shared experience akin to that of a family. The type of entertainment offered also contributed to this sentiment. Lynn Voskuil observes how watching sensation drama (popular at the Britannia in the 1860s and 1870s, see Chapter 5) creates a sense of community as everyone experiences the same emotional reactions to the action and observes their neighbours experiencing similar

¹¹⁴ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, selected by Victor Neuburg (London: Penguin, 1985) p.69.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.80.

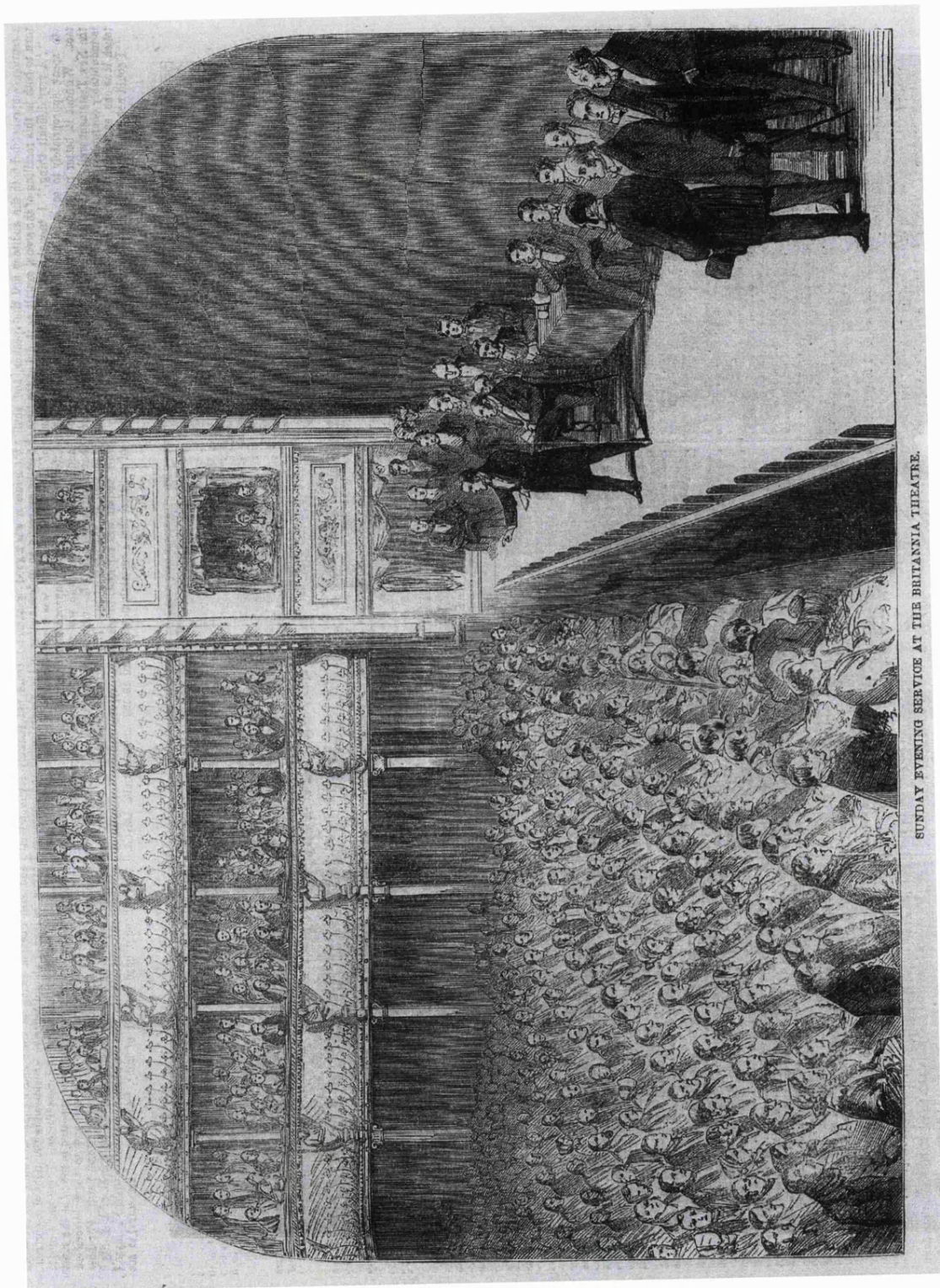
¹¹⁶ Sherson, p.10.

¹¹⁷ Davis and Emeljanow, p.87.

¹¹⁸ Knott, p.v.

sensations simultaneously.¹¹⁹ In fact this is true of all theatrical performance; sharing in the laughter at the pantomime or a burlesque, or being moved by a melodrama has equal potential to cement further the camaraderie as each audience member shares in the tensions and emotions created by the drama. It is not unreasonable therefore to envisage the Britannia as a significant agent in binding the Hoxtonians together as a community.

¹¹⁹ Lynn M. Voskuil, 'Feeling Public: Sensation Theater, Commodity Culture, and the Victorian Public Sphere', *Victorian Studies* 44:2 (2002) 269.



SUNDAY EVENING SERVICE AT THE BRITANNIA THEATRE.

PLATE 2.1: Sunday service at the Britannia Theatre (*Illustrated Times*, 10 March 1860)

3

SARA LANE: ACTRESS, MANAGER AND QUEEN

‘To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die’
(Inscribed on Sara Lane’s gravestone)

When Sara Lane died in 1899 Hoxton came to a standstill as crowds thronged the pavements fourteen-deep to watch the funeral procession pass from the theatre through the streets and on to Kensal Green Cemetery. This chapter will explore why the death of one seventy-six-year-old woman excited so much interest, and examine how she came to occupy such a prominent position in the community. It will assess her roles as an actress, dramatist and theatrical manager, and scrutinise her iconic status.

An East-End funeral

To begin at the end, Sara Lane’s death certificate records she died on 16 August 1899, of anasarea (a build up of fluid in the tissues) and coma. Her funeral took place on 22 August and she was buried alongside her husband and his first wife. Crauford subsequently collected the obituaries and accounts of her funeral and pasted them onto fifty-seven sides of A4 paper (see Plate 3.1).¹ He labelled them with the name of the newspaper or journal from which they were taken (but not the dates) and added pencil annotations pointing out factual errors. What is remarkable about these cuttings is that they show that news of Sara’s demise was not only thought to be of interest to readers of the main organs of the theatrical world (*Stage*, *Era* etc.) and the national press, but also to purchasers of regional newspapers as far afield as Leeds, Dublin and Dundee. Sara had attained national status. (It was also reported in New York, but Crauford seems unaware of this.)² The cuttings contain fascinating detailed descriptions and illustrations of the funeral day and a photograph of the scene outside the theatre.

¹ Subsequently referred to as ALC Cuttings; author’s collection.

² *Clipper* and *New York Dramatic Mirror*, both 26 August 1899.

Sara's oak coffin was taken from the Britannia covered in wreaths, including one sent by Henry Irving 'In friendship and grateful remembrance'. Another two hundred wreaths were placed in a special hearse.³ Among them was one with an inscription reading 'Contributions from the tenants in St. John's-road, Pimlico-walk, Britannia-gardens, and Canton-terrace, as a mark of sympathy and esteem.'⁴ Britannia-gardens and Canton-terrace lay directly behind the theatre and were coloured on Booth's poverty map of 1898-1899 to indicate 'Very poor, casual. Chronic want.'⁵ That some of its inhabitants suffering such dire poverty should have contributed to the wreath speaks volumes for the regard in which they held Sara.

A large crowd (the *Era* estimated ten thousand) had gathered to watch the procession (see Plate 3.2):

People stood packed fourteen deep in Hoxton-street long before twelve o'clock, when the procession left the Britannia Theatre. At every window sat a family or two, to every lamp-post clung boys who were determined to see all they could, and on nearly every roof stood men and women who could not find room in the street. Mainly one class – the poorest – was represented in the vast crowd, and they were so quiet and orderly and genuinely sorrowful that the special body of police had a very easy task in keeping a clear road for the vehicular traffic. . . . Even the boisterous youths of the district were silent and respectful, and many of them donned tokens of mourning.⁶

Shops along Hoxton Street were either closed or sported black shutters. Hawkers sold penny memorial cards bearing verses such as,

How we shall miss her, one and all,
Now she has gone beyond recall;
A friend to the poor through her life-long day,
And people in need ne'er were turned away.⁷

The ostentatious style of Sara's funeral was in keeping with the expectations of working-class East Enders. Booth cites a chaplain describing their taste:

'Funerals,' said the chaplain . . . 'are still very extravagant, especially in the case of the poorest people, flowers being one of the chief items of expenditure. Plumes on the horses are quite commonly used . . .

³ *Sun*, ALC Cuttings, p.27.

⁴ *Era*, ALC Cuttings, p.33.

⁵ Maps Descriptive of London Poverty, 1898-99, Sheet 6; reprinted by London School of Economics.

⁶ *Daily Mail*, ALC Cuttings, p.26.

⁷ *Evening News*, ALC Cuttings, p.27.

Fish and cat's meat dealers and costermongers are the people most addicted to showy funerals.⁸

The coffin was placed on a hearse borne by six plumed black horses (see Plate 3.3). Six carriages carrying the chief mourners (family and some long-serving members of the Britannia company) followed, then another four or seven (reports vary) bringing the rest of the theatre company. Many less distinguished vehicles joined the end of the procession:

. . . [Sara's] sympathies were all with the costermongers, and so, when at the rear of the mourning coaches fell in a motley collection of carts and barrow brakes and wagonnettes, drawn by donkeys, ponies and horses, the whips frequently tied with wisps of black, it was felt that the dead woman was being paid the most fitting compliment. Many a day's earning was sacrificed at her grave-side, . . .⁹

Streets were crowded for a mile from the theatre.¹⁰ Another three thousand people were waiting at Kensal Green Cemetery.¹¹ Even though the 1890s was 'the golden age of the Victorian funeral'¹² the size of the crowds watching Sara's was exceptional, especially since it was held on a Tuesday, a working day. Several obituaries mention that nothing similar to it had been witnessed in the East End since the death in 1865 of the pugilist Tom Sayers and he had been a national hero (see Chapter 4).¹³ When Samuel Lane had died in 1871 the scale of the mourning had been much less. Wilton records 'Hearse with 6 Horses & 2 Mourning coaches with 4 horses each.'¹⁴ Most of the Britannia company had attended but, according to Wilton, 'Number of people in the Cemetery guessed at about 300.'¹⁵ Samuel was respected but evidently not loved in the same way as his wife. Contemporary accounts acknowledged that Sara's funeral had been extraordinary:

One has seen many theatrical funerals, in his time, remarkable assemblies of well-known histrions [sic] often seeming quaintly incongruous to their circumstances, but never such a remarkable demonstration as this, to one who had spent the greater part of a very

⁸ Booth, *Life and Labour*, 1902, quoted in Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) p.199.

⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, ALC Cuttings, p.39.

¹⁰ *Morning Leader*, ALC Cuttings, p.36.

¹¹ *Daily Mail*, ALC Cuttings, p.26.

¹² Julian Litten, *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral Since 1450* (London: Robert Hale, 1992) p.170.

¹³ For example, *Daily Telegraph*, ALC Cuttings, p.39.

¹⁴ *Diaries*, p.200.

¹⁵ Wilton CY1136, frame 809.

long life in ministering delight and recreation to the grayest folk in this gray city.¹⁶

To understand why her death provoked such an outpouring of grief, we need to examine how she had become prominent.

SARA AS AN ACTRESS

Sarah Borrow was born on 22 September 1822 in Clerkenwell (less than two miles from where the theatre would be) to a cab driver, William Borrow, and his wife Sarah. Both parents were members of working-class families with no history of theatrical involvement. According to Crauford, Borrow's cab business was successful, but the family suffered financial difficulties when he had an accident leading to the amputation of one leg. Sara, who was the eldest child, wished to support her family so, with the assistance of an acting couple who were lodging with the Borrowes, she procured an engagement as a singer and actress at the Bedford Saloon in Camden Town. This must have been either in late 1841 or early 1842. A letter Sara wrote to her paternal Uncle Thomas, who had emigrated to Australia, reveals that some of her family regarded theatrical work as being non-respectable, so she adopted the stage name of 'Miss Wilton' to avoid causing any embarrassment.¹⁷ Sara relates that she left the Bedford because of the low salary and is currently employed at Knightsbridge [at the Sun Music Hall]. On the reverse of this page is another letter, from Sara's father to his brother. He suggests that Sara will return to the Bedford 'as they have offered to raise her Sallery [sic]'.¹⁸ Unfortunately, there are no contemporary reviews of Sara's performances at either establishment.

Some time in 1843 Sara moved to the Britannia Saloon. In May of that year Samuel Lane's wife of nearly seventeen years, Mary Maria née Adams, was pregnant. Following a fall on stage, she died.¹⁹ Crauford alleges that in the summer Sam proposed to Sara (he was then aged forty and she was twenty-one) and they were married within a month in Lympton, Devon (Sam's home village).²⁰ A biography (*Theatrical Times*, 5 August 1848) about Sara also claims she was married in September 1843. However, there is reason to doubt this. The earliest surviving playbill to refer to Sara as 'Mrs S. Lane' is for 11 January 1847.²¹ The difference of three years between the supposed marriage and the first playbill

¹⁶ *Sunday Chronicle*, ALC Cuttings, p.36.

¹⁷ Sarah Borrow to Thomas Borrow, 18 August 1842; author's collection.

¹⁸ William Borrow to Thomas Borrow, undated; author's collection.

¹⁹ Death certificate gives cause of death as 'effusion on the brain', 7 May 1843.

²⁰ *Sam & Sallie*, pp.235-52.

²¹ Playbills 376, BL. She is still listed as Miss Wilton on that of 23 November 1846.

evidence does not in itself give cause for suspicion as married actresses frequently performed under their maiden names. However, Crauford's private collection contains an original marriage certificate for Sam and Sara, for a wedding that took place on 5 May 1849 at St Michael's Parish Church, Southampton. Why then did Sam and Sara live together as man and wife for five and a half years before they were married? Could Sara have been pregnant and a false marriage concocted to hide the baby's illegitimacy?

The first major notice of the young actress was the biography in the *Theatrical Times* (5 August 1848). It was highly favourable, showing an appreciation of the actress's resourcefulness and physical attributes:

The versatility of this lady's talents is almost incredible; she sings, dances, goes ito [sic] male attire, plays dialect parts, fights set combats, and reckons among her chief triumphs, characters of the most opposite description; among them may be enumerated Jack Sheppard, Mrs. White, Sally Scraggs, Bertha, a broom girl, Clemency Newcome ('Battle of Life') Charlotte Haydon (a heroine of domestic drama) and the Female Buccaneer. Mrs. Lane certainly owes much to nature, but a great deal more to study and indefatigable attention to business. Her taste in costume is indisputable, and she is always scrupulously perfect. She is about the middle height, and looks extremely youthful on the stage, possessing that description of features which long retain their juvenility.

The critic accounts for Sara's popularity in terms which were often repeated in reviews during the next few decades: 'There is a 'naivete' and ease in her acting, and a suavity in her manners, that endears her to her brother and sister actors, and the public generally, both on and off the stage.'

From 1843 until 1899 Sara appeared at the Britannia in more than 260 different plays. This figure is calculated from surviving playbills, programmes, adverts and reviews, so is inevitably an underestimate, particularly for the earlier years when the Saloon was infrequently mentioned in newspapers and journals, and extant playbills are scarce. Throughout her career she specialised in comic parts, often portraying lowly country characters, particularly of Irish descent.

Comic roles

A typical example of Sara's comic woman parts was Nelly in *Ambition, or Poverty, Competency, and Riches*, described in the *Sunday Times* (23 April 1854) as 'a simple rustic girl, whose warmth of heart and honesty of purpose form a striking contrast to the selfish and sordid disposition of the wealthy upstart.' Likewise, of her role as Dora Duggins, 'an

untutored girl from a charity school', in *Inez Danton*, the *Era* (11 April 1858) commented: 'We never saw Mrs. Lane play better; her continuous misapplication of the Queen's English, and natural style of action for such a character, created frequent bursts of merriment and applause.' Sara played similar characters in the wonderfully alliterative roles of Dorothy Dibbles, Mary Maybush, Sally Swinton, Lucy Lock, Carraway Comfit, Betty Biddlecome, Patty Priggins, Jemima Jinks, Winny Wheeler and many more. All were working-class women, including servants of various descriptions, peasants, dressmakers, itinerant sellers and daughters of carriers and fishermen. Some roles demanded regional accents, such as West Country or Yorkshire, but the most frequently prescribed was an Irish brogue (see below).

This description of Sara's portrayal of Chloe Cranberry in Hazlewood's *Far Away Where Angels Dwell* could equally well describe many of her roles (*Era*, 17 October 1869):

She is represented as being a cheerful and courageous creature, who has a kind heart and a blunt manner, and is given to blurting out unpleasant truths about the bad people she meets with, and amuses everybody with her quaint smart sayings. Her happy, brisk, and hearty acting exerts quite an exhilarating influence upon the spectators, who testify by their laughter and clapping of hands how pleased they are to see and hear her again.

Such characters are typical examples of the lower-class comic woman, a stock figure in melodrama.²² By enacting such roles Sara allied herself with the majority of her audience. The comic woman is usually more knowing than the melodramatic heroine even when the latter is of higher social standing. Hence there is a sense of complicity with the audience, who share the joke and the wider view of reality articulated by Sara's character. Bratton argues that at non-West End theatres, the comic response was not, as Booth suggests, a sop to keep uneducated audiences amused, but a vital part of the melodrama's genre. She argues that, just as Bakhtin proposed that novels consist of a system of languages, so in these melodramas there are multiple discourses. The lower-class characters voice different responses to the dramatic situation and offer 'active ideological resistance'.²³ Certainly, on playbills Sara's roles were usually announced in bigger type than the heroine's (although another factor may have been that Sara was the Britannia's leading actress and married to the lessee). A typical example is an 1870 playbill that follows the

²² Michael Booth, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965) p.36.

²³ Jacky Bratton, 'The Contending Discourses of Melodrama' in Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook and Christine Gledhill, *Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen* (London: BFI Publishing, 1994) pp. 39-40.

usual information about the theatre, lessee and ticket prices with the announcement in large type, 'THE BRILLIANT NEW DRAMA with Mrs. S. LANE in her New Character' (Celestine Cerito in Marchant's *Wine, Woman and Gambling*).²⁴

According to Bratton the prompt copy of Pitt's *First Friendship, or A Soldier's March From the Cradle to the Grave* (first performed 1848) indicates that Sara Lane had 'soliloquies – material that we would now call stand-up comedy – and that when she was ill the running time dropped.'²⁵ Sadly we can only speculate whether Sara adlibbed these or whether Pitt had scripted them. If the latter, then why did they not appear in the prompt copy or the Lord Chamberlain's version? Whether improvised or scripted, these 'soliloquies' attest to Sara's comedic ability. A piece that Sara contributed to the *Entr'acte Annual* shows her sense of humour. It purports to be from the Society for the Diffusion and Promulgation of Applause in Theatre and takes the form of a letter to Sara offering to send 'a trained band of ladies and gentlemen of the highest education' to attend the theatre and be paid to clap, giggle, or make favourable comments about performances.²⁶ Tariffs range from two shillings for an 'Ordinary round of applause' to fifteen shillings for 'Exclamations, such as "Oh! how awfully amusing he or she is"' and, most expensive of all, £1 4s 9d for 'Slight applause from different parts, culminating in grand round – as if the audience hesitated at first. Very fine and highly recommended'.

Irish colleens

One of the first acting roles that Sara undertook at the Bedford Saloon in 1842 was that of Kate O'Brien in T.H. Bayly's *Perfection, or The Lady of Munster*. During her career she played at least a further twenty-eight Irish parts, ranging from Honor Hooligan, a wandering vendor of small wares in Hazlewood's *Evil Hands and Honest Hearts* (1864) to Ony the Omadhaun (meaning 'a fool', but actually sharp-witted) in Hazlewood's *Poul-a-Dhoil* (1865), Reddy Ryland, 'A chiropodist and phlebotomist – a regular bleeder'²⁷ in Robert Dodson's *Deoch an'Dur'Ass* (1877) to Eileen O'Dearie, 'mistress of the "Shamrock"' in the 1889 pantomime *The Bold Bad Baron* and Kathleen O'Mara in E. Leigh and C. Clare's *The Duchess of Coolgardie* (1898). The earliest known theatrical

²⁴ Britannia playbill XX for 10 October 1870, HA.

²⁵ Jacky Bratton, 'British heroism and the structure of melodrama' in J.S. Bratton, Richard Allen Cave, Breandan Gregory, Heidi J. Holder and Michael Pickering, *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991) p.32.

²⁶ First published c.1878, reprinted in *Entr'acte & Limelight*, 22 September 1888, p.4.

²⁷ ADD.MS 53191 H, f.29, BL.

portrait of Sara dates from 1848 and depicts her as the eponymous heroine of *Kathleen, the Pride of Munster*, wearing stock Irish costume (see Plate 3.4).

Most of Sara's Hibernian parts fit the description given on a playbill advertising the Britannia production of J.B. Howe's *The Shamrock of Ireland*: 'Maggie Maguire a rare [sic] specimen of a dacent, [sic] honest Irish lass'.²⁸ They are substantially the same as the English country lasses she played. One such part, Nelly O'Neil from J.B. Buckstone's *The Green Bushes*, is frequently cited in lists of her notable roles.²⁹ The play was first performed at the Adelphi in 1845 and became a staple in the repertoires of London and provincial theatres. (Hazlewood acted in a production at the Theatre Royal, Lincoln in February 1846 and Sara appeared in a revival at the Britannia in October 1882.)³⁰

In the introduction to the acting edition of his play, Buckstone wrote his main objective was 'To bring the great and opposite talents of Mrs. YATES, Mrs. FITZWILLIAM, and Madame CELESTE, before the public in one production . . .'.³¹ The three actresses played Geraldine, Nelly O'Neil and Miami respectively. Miami became one of Madame Céleste's most famous and often reprised parts, and which she included in her farewell performance at the Adelphi in 1870 (*Penny Illustrated Paper*, 24 December 1870). Céleste was directress of the Adelphi with Ben Webster, so like Sara was one of the very few women in theatrical management at that time. A comparison of the roles the two contemporaries played in this drama reveals how their respective audiences viewed them.

Miami, Madame Céleste's part, is a romantic figure, a tragic heroine. As the daughter of a (Red) Indian princess from whom she inherits her love of nature and her sense of honour, Miami appears as an exotic huntress when Connor O'Kennedy sees her in Mississippi. Ignorant of the fact that he already has a wife (Geraldine) and child back in Ireland, Miami does nothing knowingly wrong by marrying him. However, when she discovers the truth, she is consumed with jealousy and, on seeing him kiss Geraldine, fires a shot that kills Connor. She tries to commit suicide by diving into the river, but is rescued. She then dedicates the rest of her life to making reparation to the wronged wife and child. Having done so, she dies. Moody argues that the wildness and violence of Miami was that of a woman 'on the very edges of femininity'.³² Céleste, who was born in France of

²⁸ Playbill 106 for 18 May 1867, HA.

²⁹ For example, 'Women of the World, No.V. Mrs. Sara Lane', 31 May 1890, unknown publication, Britannia clippings, HA.

³⁰ Lincoln Theatre playbill 413 for 27 February 1846, Lincoln Studies Section, Central Library, Lincoln; and Britannia programme for 9 October 1882, Playbills TM, 6 of 13.

³¹ John Baldwin Buckstone, *The Green Bushes* (London: National Acting Drama Office, 1845) p.ii.

³² Jane Moody, 'Illusions of authorship' in Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin, eds, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p.113.

Spanish descendants, cut an exotic image in London. She spoke with a pronounced foreign accent, pronouncing 'prediction', for example, as 'pra-dick-say-own'.³³ The ethnic clothing she wore for the part further enhanced this 'otherness' (see Plate 3.5).

In contrast, Nelly O'Neil, the role played by Sara, is comedic rather than tragic. Nelly is Geraldine's foster sister, charged with looking after her niece when Geraldine goes in search of her husband. She is an honest Irish peasant, well able to look after herself (she is first seen fending off the unwanted advances of men, typical behaviour for stock comic women). Although Nelly grieves when she loses the beloved child, she displays pluck rather than honour. Where Céleste's role is exotic and charged with danger, Sara's is familiar and homely and incorporates singing and dancing. In fact, the song 'The Green Bushes' is the means by which she finally locates the child. Truninger describes Nelly as 'the prototypical Irish colleen' and argues this was 'a new stock figure, which was later imitated by Dion Boucicault, and ridiculed by Bernard Shaw.'³⁴

Why did Sara play so many Irish roles? Firstly, it was a means of demonstrating her oratorical skills. Secondly, the roles may have been chosen to appeal to an audience containing a substantial number of Irish immigrants. However, there was only a negligible Irish contingent in the locality of the Britannia as enumerated in the 1841 Census.³⁵ Barker suggests the number of Irish in Hoxton declined from 1,900 in 1851 to 1,200 in 1861.³⁶ Conversely, Lees calculates from census returns that the total Irish population in London grew from 75,00 in 1841 to 109,000 a decade later and suggests that the actual figures were considerably larger.³⁷ One of the biggest communities was in nearby Whitechapel. Lees notes that the 'locus of this [Catholic workers'] culture was the Catholic parish'.³⁸ The building of the Roman Catholic parish church, priory and school of St Monica's in Hoxton Square (just down the road from the theatre) between 1862 and 1866 suggests there was a significant Irish population in Shoreditch.³⁹ In his 1905 article about Hoxton, George Sims refers to Irish children at St Monica's School (along with 'the Catholic Poles, the little

³³ F. Belton, *Random Recollections of an Old Actor* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1880) p.228.

³⁴ Annelise Truninger, *Paddy and the Paycock: A Study of the Stage Irishman from Shakespeare to O'Casey* (Basle: Francke Verlag Bern, 1976).

³⁵ Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001) p.74.

³⁶ Clive Barker, 'The Audiences of the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton', *Theatre Quarterly* 9,34 (1979) 38.

³⁷ Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979) pp.41-46.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.164.

³⁹ It was the first permanent Augustinian foundation in England since the Reformation. <http://www.augustinians.org.uk/history.html> [accessed 14 January 2005].

Italians, and the French’).⁴⁰ Hollingshead mentions ‘a half-Irish colony’ in Bowl Court, Plough Yard (off Shoreditch High Street, a short walk from the theatre) in ‘Behind Shoreditch’, his account of the plight of the poor during the harsh winter of 1861.⁴¹

Whatever the true number of Irish in the vicinity, they were still a minority at the theatre, borne out by the fact that no contemporary accounts of visits to the Britannia mention a sizable Irish contingent among the audience. It is reasonable to assume therefore that plays with Irish settings and characters were well liked in Hoxton for another reason. Williams and Watt suggest that the popularity of Irish plays such as Hazlewood’s *For Honour’s Sake* (1873) was due to the affiliations ‘developed between Irish peasants and working-class men in particular.’⁴² They note that rather than featuring plots centred on female sexuality, these plays showed men struggling to feed their families. The audience sympathised with the noble peasants threatened by the brutal gentry, yet was not challenged to condemn British imperialism.⁴³ We should remember that the Examiner of Plays would not allow any endorsement of the nationalist cause; for example, in 1865 he banned Shaun the Post’s song, ‘The Wearing of the Green’, in Boucicault’s *Arrah-na-Pogue*.⁴⁴ Likewise, in 1847 Pitt’s *Terry Tyrone (the Irish Tam O’Shanter), or The Red Beggar of Ballingford* was refused a license at the Britannia because its hero was the Irish rebel Robert Emmet.⁴⁵

Censorship notwithstanding, the Britannia had always staged the occasional play set in Ireland, such as Pitt’s *Dora O’Donovan, or The Lily of Limerick* (1859), but the output was greatly increased in the 1860s as its management tried to cash in the tremendous success of Boucicault’s *The Colleen Bawn* (1860). Hence Hazlewood’s various plays set (wholly or partially) in Ireland, namely *Eily O’Connor, or The Bride of Killarney* (1860), *Kate Kearney, or A Story of Love and Trial* (1864), *Poul a Dhoil, or The Fairy Man* (1865), *The Old Cherry Tree* (1866) and *The Ballinasloe Boy, or The Fortunes of an Irish Peasant* (1867). In addition, the Britannia staged *The Shingawn, or Aillean the Rose of Killarny* by an anonymous author (1862); J.B. Howe’s *The Shamrock of Ireland, or The Flower of Erin* (1867) and *The Poor Parisheen, or The Fugitives of Derrinane* (1869); and W.H. Pitt’s

⁴⁰ George R. Sims, ‘Trips About Town VI. In the Heart of Hoxton’, *Strand Magazine* 30 (July-December 1905) 329.

⁴¹ John Hollingshead, *Ragged London in 1861*, ed., Anthony S. Wohl (London: Dent, 1986); first publ. 1861, p.45.

⁴² Julia Williams and Stephen Watt, ‘Representing a “Great Distress”: Melodrama, Gender, and the Irish Famine’ in Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, eds, *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) p.252.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.251-54.

⁴⁴ Richard Allen Cave, ‘Staging the Irishman’ in Bratton et al, *Acts of Supremacy*, p.99.

⁴⁵ John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama 1824-1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) p.56.

Biddy O'Neill, or The Daughter of Erin (1869). The 1870s saw a succession of Irish plays including another five by Hazlewood, *Erin-go-Brach, or The Wren Boys of Kerry* (1870), *Aileen Asthore, or Irish Fidelity* (1871), *Parted and Reunited* (1872), *For Honour's Sake* (1873) and *The Four Kings, or Paddy in the Moon* (1873); three plays by Barry Connor, *Gra Gal Machree* (1876), *The Sumachauan* (1878) and *Corney Rhue, or The Pilgrim's Well* (1879); William Travers's *The Emerald Queen* (1870); Robert Dodson's *Deoch and Durass, or Oonah of the Hills* (1877); *The Lucky Stone* by an anonymous author (1877); and John Levey's *An Irishman's Heart, or A Kiss o' the Blarney* (1879). By the 1880s the vogue for Irish plays was over and only an occasional one appeared at the Brit, such as H.P. Grattan's *The Irish Rebel, or The Heart of Erin* (1884), Daniel O'Connell's *Shamus O'Brien* (1897) and Fred Jarman *The Rebel's Wife* (1899).

Juvenile and pathetic roles

In addition to the resourceful women she typically delineated, Sara occasionally played more vulnerable characters, revealing her adroitness at portraying pathos. For example, as Susan in a revival of Pitt's *Ellen and Susan* she was praised for the 'natural feeling about her portraiture of the poor orphan that rendered the character highly effective. It is not one of those lively personages in which we are wont to see this lady; and consequently, spoke much of her artistic powers' (*Theatrical Journal*, 10 November 1852). Likewise, in Hazlewood's *Under a Cloud* she played Woppits, a parish foundling, 'in a style not inferior to Mrs. Keeley's never-to-be-forgotten rendering of poor Smike, in *Nicholas Nickelby*' (*Era*, 1 May 1859). The *Theatrical Journal* (4 May 1859) noted: 'Her scene with the warm-hearted beadle was a genuine and effective piece of acting, which drew down the applause of a house crowded in every part.'

Two decades later Sara's performance in Hazlewood's posthumous drama *The Sisters*, displayed 'considerable power and pathos, more especially in the scene in which Ebenezer sees his mother suddenly die out of doors' (*Era*, 16 June 1878). Another review concurs (*Touchstone*, 22 June 1878):

Nothing possibly could be finer than Mrs. Lane's rendering of Ebe Ferndale. The struggles of the poor lad against the fascinations of an evil course were portrayed with all the skill of a most able and finished artist. We have never seen Mrs. Lane to better advantage; in the serious portions there was no straining after effect, the tone from the beginning was wonderfully true to nature, while the humour and pathos of the part were so artistically combined that laughter and tears blended together almost in the same breath.

The actor J.B. ('Tommy' Burdett) Howe is accused of 'a tendency to over-do', so by implication Sara's performance must have been subtle. It is worth remembering that when she portrayed the young boy, Sara was fifty-five years old. Ironically, her first professional role at the Bedford Saloon when she was nineteen years old was playing an old woman in *The Court Fool* (*Theatrical Times*, 5 August 1848). She also enacted an old woman (Mrs. Bundle, the 'Waterman') when first engaged at the Britannia Saloon in 1843.

Multiple roles

Sara's adeptness at playing both age and youth, and male and female parts was not only capitalised on in individual dramas, but in at least seventeen productions in which she assumed multiple characters within one drama. Multiple-role playing was not a new phenomenon. Charles Matthews the elder did so to great acclaim in 1817 in George Colman's *The Actor of All Work*.⁴⁶ Discussing Tyrone Power's assumption of a number of impersonations in one drama at the Adelphi in 1838, Cave describes the play as 'another of those numerous vehicles of the period allowing a popular actor to display himself in an array of sharply contrasting roles all in the one piece'.⁴⁷ It was more unusual for an actress to assume such roles.

In Seaman's *The Devil in Six, or A Lucifer Match* (1853) Sara personated six characters: Lucifer; the Duchess of Lava 'From the low countries, where I left my subjects in a hot debate';⁴⁸ Titush Slash Slayer, a butcher's boy; the Polish Princess of Copperoff; Colonel Sabre Flesh of the King's Guard; and Lillas Mervyn, a young woman. The plot concerns a Faustian pact signed in blood by the financially ruined Lord Flowerdale in exchange for eight years of his former wealth and happiness. At the end of this period Lucifer appears to claim his side of the bargain. It is not until the final scene that the audience and the aristocrat discover that Lucifer is not a satanic figure, but a mortal, the daughter of a deceased man Flowerdale had saved some years earlier. She assumed the other characters to protect him from the self-serving opportunists (including his fiancé) by whom he had been surrounded and to save his soul.

The drama seems to have been created to showcase Sara's histrionic talent (*Theatrical Journal*, 14 December 1853):

⁴⁶ Jacky Bratton, 'The music hall' in Kerry Powell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.175.

⁴⁷ Richard Allen Cave, p.92.

⁴⁸ ADD.MS 52943 B, f.10.

The piece has, evidently, been written for the display of Mrs. Lane's acknowledged dramatic skill, and we must readily admit that the talented lady in question shines therein to perfection. Mrs. Lane appears in no less than six characters, in each of which she is perfectly at home; her 'making up' is admirable, and the gorgeous description of her dresses is the subject of much conversation 'down east.'

The Devil in Six is unusual in that the audience is not privy to the central deception from the outset. More typically playgoers appreciate that a character is assuming one or a number of disguises to unmask the villain(s). A good example of this is Hazlewood's *The Mother's Dying Child* (1864), which was one of the relatively few Hazlewood pieces to be published.⁴⁹ Sara played Florence Langton, whose sister is engaged to a man who has abandoned his legitimate wife and who murders her during the play. Florence dons a succession of disguises to discover the truth and proves more resourceful than the Bow Street runner who is trailing the villain. The various roles provided Sara with the opportunity to display contrasting mannerisms and behaviour, including a Somersetshire accent for the servant Grizzle Gutteridge, Irish brogue for the boy Barney O'Brian, broad comedy for Mrs Gammage, 'a nurse of the school of Mrs Gamp'⁵⁰ who 'did not marry her second husband from ulterior motives, but because he was the same size as her first husband, and so could wear up the latter's old clothes' (*Age*, 3 December 1864), and inebriation for Harry Racket when he investigates the card-sharpping activities of the villain and his associates. The Britannia's patrons appreciated such demonstrations of theatrical versatility, a point noted in the *Illustrated Weekly News* (21 June 1862): '... her impersonation of various and opposite characters being ever met with universal approval and applause.'

Gender issues

It might be supposed that, for the audience, part of the attraction of Sara's 'breeches roles' was the opportunity to see her legs, particularly in an era when inappropriate dressing could cause a sensation. For example, in 1864 Adah Isaacs Menken shocked London with her semi-naked appearance in *Mazeppa*,⁵¹ and there was controversy over the arrest for cross-dressing of Edward Boulton and Frederick William Park as they left the Strand

⁴⁹ Lacy's Acting Edition of Plays, vol. 64 (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.).

⁵⁰ Unidentified review, 16 October 1864, Theatre Cuttings 66, BL.

⁵¹ Michael Diamond, *Victorian Sensation or, the Spectacular, the Shocking and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Anthem Press, 2003) pp.268-71.

Theatre in 1870.⁵² However, in comparison with the clear association of prostitution surrounding Madame Vestris's transvestite roles in the early nineteenth century, there is no evidence to suggest prurience in the enthusiastic reception of Sara's male roles. H.G. Hibbert reminisces about the pantomimes of the 1890s' '. . . in which the septuagenarian Sara Lane would play principal boy, in all the bravery of tights and trunks, to the delight of the gallery boys, who worshipped her'.⁵³ Given that she was by then in her seventies, it seems unlikely that she was being objectified sexually. Moreover, the situation in the 1890s was very different from that when Madame Vestris had first donned breeches in the burlesque *Giovanni in London* in 1817, or Helen Faucit had felt uncomfortable showing her legs in Macready's 1838 production of *Cymbeline*.⁵⁴

It was common at the Brit for male actors to take female roles and vice versa in burlesques. For example, in *The New King Richard the Third* (1878) Sara took the eponymous role and wooed Fred Foster's Lady Anne. The productions in which Sara cross-dressed did not challenge notions of sexuality: the appeal was essentially fun.

A more probing exploration of gender could have occurred in Frederick Marchant's *Woman's Rights* (1876), described on the script sent to the Lord Chamberlain's office as a 'Buffonnerie Musicale'.⁵⁵ Sara played Frivolin, one of two male balloonists shot down over the 'Kingdom of Women'. They are bemused to discover that women are the dominant power on the island and actively woo men. When it looks as if the men are finally going to rise up against the women, the latter refuse to fight 'the weaker sex'. Instead the Queen, who is in love with Frivolin, abdicates. The proposed new constitution makes both sexes equal in the sight of the law, but the final speeches make clear that a benign patrician government, headed by Frivolin, will rule the island. Hence the play does not advance the campaign for women's suffrage as its title might suggest, but supports the status quo.

A playbill for 8 December 1856 advertising a revival of Pitt's *The Flirt, or First Accusation* (first performed in 1848) provides visual evidence of another of Sara's male roles.⁵⁶ Three of the four illustrations depict Jack Fleam, a simple country lad (see Plate 3.6). In the first he is shown in his usual ploughboy's attire and in the second he wears the

⁵² Jim Davis, 'Androgynous Cliques and Epicene Colleges: Gender Transgression On and Off the Victorian Stage', *Nineteenth Century Theatre* 26,1 (1998) 50-69.

⁵³ H.G. Hibbert, *Fifty Years of a Londoner's Life* (London: Grant Richards, 1916) p.64.

⁵⁴ Christopher Murray, *Robert William Elliston: Manager* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1975) and Carol Jones Carlisle, *Helen Faucit: Fire and Ice on the Victorian Stage* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 2000), pp.66-67.

⁵⁵ ADD.MS 53163 G.

⁵⁶ Playbill for 8 December 1856, Playbills 376, BL.

uniform of a coachman. Both costumes are comic, not salacious or titillating, as attested in a critique of a later revival (*Era*, 24 December 1871):

Roars of laughter were caused by her [Sara's] singular appearance in a coachman's livery, overcoat reaching almost down to her heels, and by her droll affectation of awkwardness. The vivacity and humour which she subsequently displayed when depicting the country lad as finely dressed, and still rough in manners, when mixing with fashionable people in town, excited much applause.

The third portrait, showing a full bosom and tightly nipped waist, could be viewed as more provocative, but it is clear from the script that because of the contrast between 'his' appearance and behaviour the effect is overwhelmingly comic.⁵⁷ The part would be equally funny were it played by a male actor. This supports Davis's argument: 'Indeed, the popularity of both burlesque and any other form of drama that featured cross-dressing or cross-gender casting may have depended more on the ambiguous androgyny rather than on the femininity of principal female performers.'⁵⁸

Musicality

Many reviews attest to Sara's accomplishment as a singer and dancer in pantomimes and burlesques. A private oil portrait, probably painted in the 1840s, shows Sara sitting at the piano, so it is a reasonable assumption that she could play the instrument.⁵⁹ Certainly she played an active part in the choice of music for the pantomimes. For *Cocorico and the Hen with the Golden Eggs* it was 'selected by Mrs. Lane herself from the first operas of the day . . . and adapted by Mr. Rogers' (*H&K Gazette*, 20 December 1873).⁶⁰ In May 1874 Sara withdrew from a production of *To The Green Isles Direct* because of the death of her brother Robert the night before it opened. Consequently, several of the most important songs had to be left out (*Era*, 31 May 1874). This shows that Sara's music talent was pivotal to the production.

Sara had a pleasing voice and could perform challenging compositions (*Era*, 2 January 1859): 'The music allotted to her did not consist merely of the pleasing light ballad airs of the day, but some selections, difficult of execution, from *La Traviata*, *Trovatore*, *The Rose of Castille*, and other operas, all of which she sang with great brilliancy and sweetness.' In Hazlewood's burlesque *The Dark King of the Black Mountains* she sang pieces from

⁵⁷ ADD.MS 43013 ff.185-228.

⁵⁸ Jim Davis, 'Androgynous', p.57.

⁵⁹ Private collection.

⁶⁰ J. Rogers was the conductor of the orchestra.

'*Traviata, Orphée aux Enfers, Norma* and other popular airs'.⁶¹ Cave describes her vocal quality:

She was a most popular singer, after the manner of what is now called 'serio-comic'. At present I don't see her equal, the only one I remember coming near her was poor Nelly Power, a fascinating vocalist and burlesque actress. Miss Wilton's voice was a mezzo-soprano of first quality, and the way she used it proved her to be an *artiste*.⁶²

Reviews frequently comment on Sara's skilful renditions of parodies, a genre requiring comedic and vocal dexterity.⁶³ In these parodies the Britannia appropriated 'high' culture and presented it in a form appealing to its audience. Music was an important part of the theatrical experience but opera was not part of the repertoire, unlike at the Standard.

Evaluating Sara's acting career

To assess Sara's acting, we need to consider how her contemporaries rated her. In the reviews of Britannia productions other actors and actresses receive some negative comments and there are quibbles about the quality of some of the writing, but Sara's delivery is never found wanting. The only negative remark appeared in the *Era* (15 October 1871) in a review of Hazlewood's *Cast Aside, or Loving not Wisely But Too Well*, which asserted she '... is not a great actress, but she is a favourite ...' This conflicts with the opinion of the *Sunday Times*'s evaluation of the same production (15 October 1871): 'Mrs. S. Lane's re-appearance was hailed with delight, and her acting of Madge was particularly pleasing, natural, and effective.' One acerbic comment appeared in the obituary in the *Whitehall Review*: 'She was not a great actress, but she was a successful manageress at a time when the art was in its infancy. ... Well, she has gone, and we could have better spared a better actress.' Against which Crauford pencilled a rebuttal, 'which was not easy to find.'⁶⁴

Nevertheless, Sara's range was limited. To gain recognition as a leading actress beyond the East End she would have needed to play Shakespeare. Yet she never enacted great tragic parts and chose not to appear as any Shakespearean heroine, even when the Brit employed visiting actors of renown such as James Anderson or Ira Aldridge. In fact, the only Shakespearean roles she played were in burlesques, such as Cordelia in Elton's

⁶¹ Unidentified cutting, March/April 1866, Theatre Cuttings 68, BL.

⁶² J.A. Cave, *A Jubilee of Dramatic Life and Incident of Joseph A. Cave*, ed., Robert Soutar (London: Thomas Vernon, 1892), p.43.

⁶³ For example, *Era*, 30 December 1860.

⁶⁴ ALC Cuttings, p.34.

Kynge Lear and His Three Daughters Queer (1871). Presumably she recognised the limitations of her skills and concentrated on those to which she believed she was best suited.

It is also the case that Sara never played the vamp or a morally transgressive character such as Lucy Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret*, despite Hazlewood's adaptation being the single most performed melodrama at the Brit between 1863 and 1874.⁶⁵ This could have been a deliberate policy to protect her respectable offstage image. We can only speculate how much her private persona affected her onstage performances or vice versa.

Sara's limited body of work was not unusual for a member of a stock company. Many actors in the early- and mid-Victorian era never advanced beyond playing one type, such as utility man or walking gentleman. T.W. Robertson's series of articles on theatrical types includes No.8 entitled 'Chambermaids, Soubrettes, and Burlesque Actresses' (*Illustrated Times*, 23 April 1864). It suggests that at the time of writing the first two types have virtually disappeared and are being replaced by the latter. Interestingly, Sara continued to play all three types. The same article gives some idea of the skills, besides singing, that Sara needed to succeed in burlesque roles:

She is as faultless on the piano as on the bones. She can waltz, polk [sic], dance a *pas seul* or a sailor's hornpipe, La Sylphide, or the Genu-wine Transatlantic Cape-Cod-Skedaddle, with equal grace and spirit; and as for acting, she can declaim à la Phelps or Fechter; is serious, droll; and must play farce, tragedy, opera, comedy, melodrama, pantomime, ballet, change her costume, fight a combat, make love, poison herself, die, and take one encore for a song and another for a dance, in the short space of ten minutes.⁶⁶

The *Players* (17 March 1860) alleges that 'In smart singing chambermaids she has been popularly styled the "Vestris of the East"', but this soubriquet is not repeated elsewhere. During the course of her career, Sara was compared to three other performers: Mrs Keeley, Mrs Fitzwilliam and Nelly Power. Power (1854-1887) was a serio-comic at the music halls and was particularly admired for her superior singing and energetic performances. She performed at the Britannia in 1883 singing 'Tiddly-fol-lol' and 'Johnny, don't go to sea' and dancing a hornpipe (*Era*, 14 July 1883). H. Barton Baker, discussing good East End actresses, wrote '... Mrs. Lane, at the Britannia could have held her own in

⁶⁵ Jim Davis, 'The Gospel of Rags: Melodrama at the Britannia, 1863-74', *New Theatre Quarterly* 7,28 (1991) 370.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

broad comedy against Mrs. Fitzwilliam.’⁶⁷ Fanny Fitzwilliam (1801-1854) was a noted actress at the Haymarket, Olympic and Surrey Theatres and the original Nelly O’Neil in *The Green Bushes*. George Henry Lewes described the talented and prestigious actress Mary Anne Keeley (1806-1899): ‘Mrs. Keeley was great in farce, low comedy, and melodrama, pathetic and humorous, and always closely imitative of daily life.’⁶⁸ Although she was highly praised for her Shakespearean and comic roles, she is best remembered for her Jack Sheppard, a performance to which Sara’s Basil was directly compared when she played the young boy in Pitt’s drama *Basil and Barbara, Children of the Bottle*.⁶⁹ Sara played Jack Sheppard at the Britannia Saloon in 1843.

To be compared favourably to actresses of the stature of the Mrs Keeley and Fitzwilliam, was to suggest Sara could have performed successfully at the more reputable West End theatres had she wished. This was certainly the opinion of one critic, ‘. . . pretty Mrs. Lane would shine in a far better theatre than the one she is now playing at’ (*Theatrical Journal*, 13 April 1853), and of Anderson. Although he never acted with Sara during his engagements at the Britannia, he occasionally attended the theatre as a spectator.⁷⁰ He testifies: ‘She was an amiable woman, an admirable actress, and well worthy of a position in Covent Garden or Drury Lane.’⁷¹

Another indication that Sara was held in high regard is that in 1862 the *Illustrated Weekly News* (21 June 1862) carried an illustration entitled ‘The Leading and Popular Actresses of London’. Sara features alongside twenty-four other performers including such luminaries as Mrs Charles Kean, Mrs Keeley, Miss Marie Wilton, Mrs Howard Paul and Mrs Boucicault. The accompanying text praises her versatility, her graceful appearance and elegant movements ‘. . . while her finished acting stamps her as a true artist.’ For an actress who only appeared at the Britannia, which never attained the stature of the West End theatres, to be chosen as one of this small coterie was a significant achievement.

Although favourable comments from critics and contemporary performers provide an insight into Sara’s acting, the most important indicator must surely be the Britannia’s audience. Again and again reviews refer to enthusiastic clapping as soon as she appeared on stage and calls for her to take a bow between acts. This is equally true of her later appearances as of her earlier ones. She was hugely popular.

⁶⁷ H. Barton Baker, *The London Stage: Its History and Traditions From 1576 to 1888* (London: W.H. Allen, 1889), vol. 2, p.268.

⁶⁸ George Henry Lewes, *On Actors and the Art of Acting* (London: Smith, Elder, 1875) p.87.

⁶⁹ Unidentified cutting, 2 November 1859, Theatre Cuttings 63, BL.

⁷⁰ See, for example, *Diaries*, p.216.

⁷¹ James R. Anderson, *An Actor’s Life* (London: Walter Scott, 1902) p.209.

When Sara was scheduled to be at the theatre, she was the lynchpin of the productions, but for large parts of every year she was absent from the theatre. In the 1850s and 1860s she typically performed for around seven months of the year, from late September until Easter. During the 1880s and 1890s her stage appearances became less frequent. For example, in 1888 she starred in the pantomime from Christmas until 10 March, then did not act again until her nephews' benefit on 3 September when she played Biddy Ronan in Jefferson and Shewell's *The Shadows of a Great City*. She played this part for a further two-week run until 27 October. Her next performance was at her annual benefit on 10 December, and she concluded the year by acting in the pantomime. In total she performed for thirteen weeks, one quarter of the year.⁷²

SARA AS A DRAMATIST

Between November 1873 and March 1881 Sara was identified as the author of eight plays translated from the French stage: *Taken from Memory* (1873), *Dolores* (1874), *Albert de Rosen* (1875), *The Faithless Wife* (1876), *St Bartholomew, or A Queen's Love* (1877), *The Cobbler's Daughter* (1878), *Red Josephine, or Woman's Vengeance* (1880), and *Devotion, or The Priceless Wife* (1881). Her name is prominent on the scripts sent to the Lord Chamberlain's office, on the prompt books in the Pettingell Collection, on playbills and adverts and in all the reviews. Nevertheless, there has been considerable speculation that Sara did not 'write' the plays. On 6 February 1873 Wilton suggests surprise, if not incredulity, at the idea of Sara translating from French: 'By Mrs S.Lane's desire, read 1st Act of a piece which she informed me, she had *herself* translated!!'⁷³ A year later his tone is equally disbelieving: 'Received last night of Mr Robinson, the 1st act of a Drama called *Patrie* translated from the French by Mrs S.Lane (credat judens)!!! to prepare for Easter . . .'⁷⁴ Part of the reason for Wilton's scepticism may have been that Sara had occasionally asked his daughter, Jessie, to translate some French plays for her. For example, on 3 June 1873 she gave him *Ma'me Maclou*.⁷⁵

Adaptation is not the same as translation and each act of the prompt copy of *St Bartholomew* is prefaced 'Adapted from the French by Mrs Sara Lane', so it is possible that Sara crafted the plays from a translated copy of the French originals.

⁷² This figure is calculated from weekly adverts in *Entr'acte & Limelight*; it is possible, but unlikely, that she may have appeared in some unlisted benefits.

⁷³ *Diaries*, p.211.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.216.

⁷⁵ Wilton CY1136, frame 846.

In *Sam & Sallie* Crauford never mentions Sara as an author of any play and attributes *Dolores* (1874) to Johnny Gideon's son.⁷⁶ In his cuttings file, next to the *Stage*'s obituary, which lists Sara's translations, Crauford pencilled: 'She did not translate them: they were done by Danny Gideon – son of Johnny Gideon – her knowledge of French was trifling[.]'⁷⁷ If true, this information begs the question, why did these particular plays appear with Sara's name when Danny Gideon, using the pseudonym E. Manuel, was acknowledged as the author of several other plays staged at the Britannia from February 1874? For example, the prompt copy of Manuel's *Only My Cousin, or The Blessings of Education* (1880) states 'translated from the French expressly for Mrs. S. Lane'.⁷⁸ This suggests that Sara's input into the plays attributed to her was at a different level.

Several critics have explored this issue. Moody presents a convincing argument that 'in the nineteenth-century British theatre, a form of feminine dramatic authorship existed beyond writing.'⁷⁹ However, unlike Sara Lane, the two women she discusses (Mesdames Céleste and Vestris) did not claim to be authors. In a case that has obvious parallels, Bratton, writing on the eighteenth-century dramatist Susanna Centlivre, asserts that her work has been dismissed as 'not literature' because it was collaborative and reactive to the processes of the theatre:

. . . Centlivre's plays fail to fulfil the basic requirement of art in bourgeois society, that it be the unique product of the autonomous artist, the individual 'genius' at work alone, challenging and expanding the horizons of human experience.⁸⁰

Similarly, Davis argues that this issue of authenticity is a red herring. Sara was the Britannia's 'controlling force' and made numerous decisions on the details of production that impacted on the performance:

Whether or not she was responsible for the final draft of each play attributed to her, it was her understanding of the transitional process of translating the plays from page to stage which was at the center of her achievement.⁸¹

⁷⁶ *Sam & Sallie*, p.316.

⁷⁷ ALC Cuttings, p.13.

⁷⁸ PETT MSS.R.22, UoK.

⁷⁹ Moody, 'Illusions', p.102.

⁸⁰ Jacky Bratton, 'Reading the Intertheatrical, or, The Mysterious Disappearance of Susanna Centlivre' in Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner, eds, *Women, Theatre and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) pp.8-9.

⁸¹ Jim Davis, 'Sarah Lane: questions of authorship' in Davis and Donkin, pp.130, 136 and 143.

Davis cites many examples from the prompt books in the Pettingell Collection to support this hypothesis. Sara's annotations show a consideration for all aspects of the production, including the pace at which scenes are to be performed and even the taking of a curtain call. A note at the end of *The Cobbler's Daughter* reads, 'N.B. If a call, Geneviève centre, holding a hand of each, of Madame F and Papillon'.⁸² A speech from *Taken from Memory* is marked 'Cut by Mrs S Lane 2nd night'.⁸³ Particularly telling is the detailed instruction signed by 'Sara Lane' on the last page of *Red Josephine, or A Woman's Vengeance*:

When Josephine comes on in the last scene she must be made up hollow under the eyes &c shewing she is near her death from sorrow this will account for her dying as soon as she has been revenged. The Lady who plays Madame Andrew must be made up to look the age of RocDubois mother would be.

The beam of scales must be Iron, and when Rocdubois strikes the wall – he must strike on an iron plate painted same as [tear in folio so word missing] so that its sound is heard by the audience, and when he throws the bar down (being iron) it will sound as it should.⁸⁴

The crucial question is whether these eight plays are any different from the many others about which Sara made extensive production decisions? Possibly these plays are attributed to her because she was not performing in them but behaving more as a modern theatre director would – in other words, she was responsible for the complete artistic integrity of the piece. 'Sara as director' might therefore be a more appropriate title for this section.

Holder contends that Sara's appearance as a dramatist should be seen 'in the context of contemporary anxiety over how best to "humanize" the East End . . .'.⁸⁵ She asserts Sara was presenting herself as an elevating presence in her local community, civilising the unruly working class. By writing and staging works by female dramatists she counteracted the negative stereotypes of gendered behaviour. However, there is no evidence to suggest that Sara was worried about how the East End was perceived.

Sara's name might have been used both as a marketing device to encourage more people to attend the theatre (just as her annual acting reappearance after the summer break was always publicised on playbills) and to enhance her own reputation. If so, how successful a ploy was it? Crauford maintained that the plays 'were utterly over the heads of

⁸² PETT.MSS.C.44, UoK.

⁸³ PETT.MSS.T.3, UoK, 3.1, f.7.

⁸⁴ PETT.MSS.R.14, UoK.

⁸⁵ Heidi J. Holder, 'The "lady playwrights" and the "wild tribes of the East": Female dramatists in the East End theatres, 1860-1880' in Davis and Donkin, pp.182-84.

the Hoxtonians and consequently quite unsuitable.’⁸⁶ Since he was only fourteen at the time of the first production, his testimony is particularly suspect. A review of the successful first night of *Taken from Memory* (*H&K Gazette*, 15 November 1878) refutes his assertion:

. . . without a single sensational scene, or even a comic man, [the adaptation] relies for its success upon its merits and in construction and diction, alone; and, considering that a Hoxton audience ordinarily delight in strong situations, with the action moving swiftly forward, is opposed to the verbosity of ordinary comedy, that success is worthy to be noted, as the authoress is to be complimented.

Likewise, a review (*Era*, 23 April 1876) of *The Faithless Wife* commented: ‘Mrs Lane certainly cannot be accused of writing down to her audience, for the language of the play is refined, and there is nothing to offend the most fastidious in the entire adaptation.’ Similarly, of *Dolores* the *Evening Standard* (7 April 1874) wrote: ‘. . . Mrs. S. Lane, evidently realises the fact that the masses of eastern London, in the midst of which the Britannia is situated, are able to appreciate the higher expressions of dramatic delineation.’ It continues, ‘The house was crowded in every part, and *Dolores* was a great success.’ Perhaps the play was more popular with some members of the audience than others. According to Wilton, the comic actor George Bigwood was unhappy at his benefit on 29 April 1874: ‘Mr Bigwood saying he should have had a much better “house” if he had been permitted to substitute another piece for “Dolores”.’⁸⁷ The stage manager seemed to have a different opinion for *Dolores* was the first piece at his benefit on 30 June 1875.⁸⁸

The fact that none of the plays were published would seem to support Crauford’s hypothesis, yet *Taken from Memory* and *Dolores* had successful runs.⁸⁹ Moreover, had they been disastrously received, it is unlikely that Sara would have continued to associate her name with similar plays. As Boucicault and others established increased autonomy over copyright and earnings, the status of dramatists rose from an early-nineteenth-century low, when they had been regarded as on a par with stage carpenters, so that by the mid-Victorian era Sara’s identification as a dramatist could be seen as a positive accomplishment.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *Sam & Sallie*, p.317.

⁸⁷ Wilton CY1136, frame 918.

⁸⁸ Ibid., frame 1003.

⁸⁹ Jim Davis, ‘Sara Lane’, p.128.

⁹⁰ John Russell Stephens, *The Profession of the Playwright: British Theatre 1800-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p.145.

In the 1890s the dramatist Cicely Hamilton was advised to conceal her gender as plays written by women received bad press.⁹¹ This was not the case with Sara's plays, which were critically acclaimed. The *Era* (12 April 1874) noted that *Dolores* was the first English adaptation of *La Patrie* (meaning 'the fatherland'), a play that had been extremely successful in France. Thus the Brit earned approval for staging a celebrated melodrama that had 'missed the attention of the managements of such Theatres as the Adelphi or Drury-lane.' Sara is commended for her 'careful, appreciative, and scholarly adaptation'. Similarly, of *St Bartholomew* the *Era* (27 May 1877) noted: 'But the play has considerable interest, and the manner in which it is placed upon the stage is worthy of the utmost commendation.'

As an advertising device, the use of Sara's name seems to have been successful because the plays were widely reviewed, including in publications such as the *Graphic* that otherwise largely ignored the Britannia. This then was a beneficial circle: the plays attributed to Sara were noticed because she was held in high esteem and at the same time she gained prestige by writing them.

What of the plays themselves? Davis described them as 'a group of generally nondescript plays (*Dolores* apart)'.⁹² Perhaps surprisingly, none contains the sort of role that Sara usually played; they are particularly lacking in comic parts. Yet while Sara took no acting roles, her plays contain plenty of substantial female parts. Six of the eight dramas have titles or subtitles that allude to a female character. *The Faithless Wife* seems to be a conventional melodrama in which a married woman has been seduced and become pregnant while her husband is absent at sea. However, as Holder notes, unusually it focuses on the faithful love of her sister (who selflessly takes the scandal on herself by pretending the baby is her own) rather than adopting the fallen women angle that the title implies.⁹³

Powell observes that heroines in plays by women written in the last quarter of the nineteenth century are notable for the heroine's capacity for violence, 'a violence often anchored in their intensity of feeling as wives, mothers, and sisters.'⁹⁴ He notes that in *Red Josephine*, the eponymous character is assaulted early in the play and at the end fatally stabs the villain. He identifies the 'magnetic, heroic women' who populate Sara's plays as different from those written by men. 'These dramas credited to Sara Lane often add a

⁹¹ Susan Carlson and Kerry Powell, 'Reimagining the theatre: women playwrights of the Victorian and Edwardian period' in Powell, *Cambridge Companion*, p.237.

⁹² Jim Davis, 'Sara Lane', p.144.

⁹³ Holder, 'Lady playwrights', p.181.

⁹⁴ Kerry Powell, *Women and Victorian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.130.

wife's infidelity to her appetite for violence and displays of physical heroism, thus creating a sexually raw and physically dangerous heroine of the type rarely if ever seen in West End productions at the time.'⁹⁵ *Dolores* is a case in point.

The play is set during the Dutch war of independence in Brussels, then occupied by Spanish forces. Dolores's husband, the Count de Rysoor, is a Flemish aristocrat plotting to overthrow Spanish rule. His impulsive Spanish wife cares nothing for politics and is besotted with her lover, Karloo, who is Rysoor's friend and fellow conspirator. When Rysoor discovers his wife's infidelity, she blames his patriotism: "I am a woman, my passion is love, had you bestowed one fourth of the love on me that you lavished on your country, we should not now be as we are."⁹⁶ Rysoor vows revenge on her unknown lover. Dolores betrays her husband and the rebels and they are taken prisoner. Rysoor makes Karloo swear an oath saying he will kill the traitor, and then commits suicide before he can be tortured. Dolores persuades the authorities to release Karloo, but when he realises Dolores was the betrayer, he stabs her and insists on his own execution.

The *Era* (12 April 1874) suggested that Sara 'deserved some credit for testing this question of conventionality before a most conventional audience' and noted that some had thought that the 'essentially disagreeable character of the heroine' of *Dolores* would be 'utterly unsympathetic to an English audience'. In the event, Marie Henderson's superb acting, which along with that of Edgar Newbound (Karlo) and Joseph Reynolds (Rysoor), rose 'to a power and finish which would be considered a gain at many West-end Theatres.'

Dolores is not the only aggressive female figure in the play – the countrywoman Sarah Matthison has become dehumanised through her intense suffering. She recounts how soldiers beat her husband to death, burned her son alive and 'amused' themselves with her sixteen-year-old daughter until she died of shame. Sarah avenged this terrible litany by killing ten soldiers and, in a speech full of bloodthirsty violence, recalls how she laughed as they burnt to death.⁹⁷

As is usual in melodramas of this period, the transgressing woman pays a terrible price for going beyond conventional bounds; Sarah and Josephine both die. Yet although the ending of the play does not question conventional morality, this does not entirely negate the effect of portraying such strong women. The two roles challenge feminine stereotypes.

Despite favourable reviews by contemporary critics, Sara's plays have not survived the test of time and none were published. Not unreasonably her reputation rests on her acting,

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.131.

⁹⁶ ADD.MS 53135 D, 1,2, f.30, BL.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 1.1, ff.13-14.

management and personal character rather than her skills as a dramatist. Yet reading the plays does not diminish the impression that she possessed an innate sense for creating powerful dramatic scenes.

SARA AS A THEATRICAL MANAGER

If Sara's achievement as a dramatist is contentious, the same is also true of her role as a theatrical entrepreneur. This time the difficulty arises from assessing biased or unreliable information. The account in *Sam & Sallie* is particularly problematic. Crauford portrays his aunt's managerial skills as negligible:

Thus it would appear that Sallie, our heroine, was not a great manageress and that is the simple truth. With a delightfully amiable disposition, with supreme talent as an actress, she was wanting in judgment as a manageress.⁹⁸

But, as discussed above, Crauford had a vested interest in portraying the management of the theatre as poor before he became manager so that his own period of tenure would seem comparatively good. Furthermore, Crauford's attitude was coloured by chauvinism. He is dismissive of feminine pretensions to leadership and female theatrical managers in particular:

It is often the claim of women in this twentieth century, that what man can do, woman can do. But this assertion will not bear dissection. . . . Theatrical management – the flair of the showman – would appear to be a masculine prerogative.

No woman has ever won reputation in this profession.⁹⁹

Crauford thus ignored the achievements of Madame Vestris and Marie Bancroft, both of whom were successful female theatrical managers in the Victorian era.¹⁰⁰ His reaction, however, was not atypical as female managers were still relatively few in number and not universally accepted. Bratton cites the case of Adelaide Stoll, who took over the management of the Parthenon Music Hall in Liverpool in 1880 after her husband died, yet in her dealings with outside agents was obliged to use her teenage son to convey instructions from a fictitious manager.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ *Sam & Sallie*, p.318.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.318.

¹⁰⁰ Vestris at the Olympic and Bancroft at the Prince of Wales and Haymarket.

¹⁰¹ G. Mellor, *The Northern Music Hall* (1970), quoted in J.S. Bratton, 'Jenny Hill: Sex and Sexism in the Victorian Music Hall' in J.S. Bratton, ed., *Music Hall: Performance and Style* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), p.102.

Crauford's most serious accusation of Sara's poor management during the period from 1872 to 1884 when her brother-in-law William Robinson was manager, relates to the theatre's profits: 'Business became worse and worse, and at last the surest money-maker and the most reliable and prosperous theatre in London was *losing money*.'¹⁰² He failed to recognise that during this period theatres across London experienced a downturn in profits; Drury Lane, for example, closed suddenly in February 1879 due to poor takings.¹⁰³ Holder comments '... the economic downturn of the late 1860s hit hard, and most theatres never recovered.'¹⁰⁴

Managerial responsibility

Samuel Lane was the lessee and manager of the Britannia until his death on 28 December 1871. Technically Sara's managerial role commenced then when she took over the theatre's licence. However, there is plenty of evidence to show that she adopted a hands-on approach well before this date. Wilton's diaries reveal that while Sam was responsible for all legal questions (disputes over provincial rights, negotiations with Dickens over performance fees etc.), Sara was in charge of much of the practical everyday running of the theatre. For example, on 2 January 1867 William Borrow (Sara's father and the theatre's treasurer) wanted to cancel the evening's performance because of a heavy fall of snow but was overruled by his daughter: 'Mrs S.Lane expressed herself determined to play if there should be no more than 20 people in the house. The result was, *we played* – and there was a very decent house!'¹⁰⁵ During the last two years of his life Sam Lane's health was poor (he lost his speech following a stroke) so his involvement with the theatre was even more limited and Sara's responsibility increased accordingly.

According to Tracy Davis, the inheriting of management responsibility from a spouse, rather than a father, was typical of all the nineteenth-century female lessee/entrepreneurs, 'suggesting that they had performed business-related functions all along in unacknowledged partnership.'¹⁰⁶ This was the case with the Lanes.

Sara's obituary in the *Topical Times* reads: 'I have many times heard Sir Spencer Ponsonby-Fane speak with interest of Mr. Lane, and how, in their conversations on dramatic matters, he would appeal to his wife upon all questions connected with the

¹⁰² *Sam & Sallie*, p.319.

¹⁰³ W.J. Macqueen Pope, *Theatre Royal Drury Lane* (London: W.H. Allen, n.d.) p.283.

¹⁰⁴ Heidi J. Holder, 'The East-End theatre' in Powell, *Cambridge Companion*, p.273.

¹⁰⁵ *Diaries*, p.117.

¹⁰⁶ Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.301.

theatre.’¹⁰⁷ Ponsonby-Fane was Comptroller of the Lord Chamberlain’s Office and carried out official inspections of the theatre, so was in a good position to judge who was wearing the trousers at the Brit. An early review (*Theatrical Journal*, 28 June 1849) corroborates his evidence: ‘. . . and the mode in which the pieces are “got up” reflect the highest credit on the management, and here we speak of the pretty and highly talented partner of the *entrepreneur*, Mrs. Lane, a most fascinating actress, and one of the most charming *soubrettes* on the metropolitan boards, whose taste of judgment enables her to offer many valuable suggestions.’ Hollingshead also recognised Sara’s authority: ‘By this time the present respected proprietress of the present theatre – the Miss Wilton of the former house – had become Mrs. Lane, and the direction improved accordingly. Mr. Lane took to yachting, and Mrs. Lane to theatrical management.’¹⁰⁸ These accounts call into question Crauford’s assertion that ‘During Sam’s life she had meekly submitted to his rule and guidance’,¹⁰⁹ particularly since Crauford was so young at the time (he was only twelve years old when Sam died).

After Sam’s death Sara appointed her brother-in-law William Robinson (previously an innkeeper) as manager, but was also influenced by the advice of Johnny Gideon, a former bookmaker and boxing manger who lived in France and was familiar with the Parisian stage.¹¹⁰ The *Diaries* provide proof that Sara’s authority overruled that of either man. For example, on 27 April 1874 Wilton records that Gideon wanted scene painters to show him a particular scene of a play on a specified date, but Mr Robinson ‘afterwards told me that he would not allow it unless Mrs S.Lane gave the order’.¹¹¹ Sara was also on hand during performances and capable of making snap decisions as necessary. On 1 May 1872 Wilton notes ‘(M.Cleermann, the Illusionist, with his Mystic Cabinet, a monstrous failure. Mrs S.Lane rang down the curtain in the midst of the performance!)’¹¹² Davis provides several further examples taken from the prompt books in the Pettingell Collection that show Sara’s meticulous interest in the dramatic business of the productions.¹¹³

Crauford gives the impression that he was in charge from the moment of his appointment as business manager in 1881, but a letter Sara wrote to him on New Years Day 1883 shows Sara dictating action on various matters. Her detailed instructions ranged from dealing with water in the dressing rooms, to reducing the ballet ladies from twenty-

¹⁰⁷ *Topical Times*, ALC cuttings, p.19.

¹⁰⁸ John Hollingshead, *My Lifetime*, (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, 1895) vol. 1, p.33.

¹⁰⁹ *Sam & Sallie*, p.309.

¹¹⁰ H. Chance Newton, *Cues and Curtain Calls* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1927) p.269.

¹¹¹ *Diaries*, p.217.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.204.

¹¹³ Davis in Davis and Donkin, pp.141-42.

two to nineteen, making alterations to the press adverts for the following week's performances and getting the act drop to fall quickly.¹¹⁴ She was also responsible for his level of salary. Another Christmas letter thanks Crauford for 'your attention to my business during the year' and rewards him with another two shillings and four pence per week.¹¹⁵ A further letter shows Sara had been checking the year's accounts and had noticed a mistake in the previous week's takings.¹¹⁶ These documents prove she was in command, a perception frequently iterated in the press. For all that Crauford liked to think he was the 'power behind the throne',¹¹⁷ it seems his authority was strictly secondary to his aunt's.

Managerial style

What then was Sara's style of management and how did it differ from that of her late husband? Wilton's diary entry for 4 February 1865 provides a telling insight into Samuel Lane's real motivation:

Mr S.Lane having been a long time unwell, Mrs S.Lane told Amelia last night, that his spirits had been so depressed at times, that she had seen him, without any cause, cry like a child by the hour! – This, when he has attained what it has been the whole and sole study of his life to gain – wealth! To which he has devoted all his mind, all his thoughts, all his energies! & now he sits down & cries like a child! What did Alexander the Great do, when he had conquered the world?¹¹⁸

Certainly Sam had been remarkably successful very quickly. An article in the *Theatrical Journal* of 28 June 1849 estimated that the Britannia Saloon attracted 10,000 weekly visitors and noted that Lane had amassed a handsome fortune. On his death Sam left an estate valued at £60,000, a sizeable legacy for someone who (if Crauford is to be believed) started life as a fisherman and inherited no money himself. A report of the dispute over his will (*H&K Gazette*, 8 March 1873) reveals that he was originally a carpenter by trade and had served in the merchant navy.

When Wilton's daughter Jessie wanted to become an actress, Sara was encouraging and happily sanctioned the novice to perform at the Britannia.¹¹⁹ Her husband adopted a much harder position:

¹¹⁴ Sara Lane to Crauford, 1 January 1883, author's collection.

¹¹⁵ Sara Lane to Crauford, Christmas Day (no year), author's collection.

¹¹⁶ Sara Lane to Crauford, undated, author's collection.

¹¹⁷ *Sam & Sallie*, p.318.

¹¹⁸ *Diaries*, p.87.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.131.

Told by Mrs S.Lane that *she* should have no objection to Jessie's acting the part of Rose Maylie in *Oliver Twist* next week, but that Mr Lane objected so much & had said he would not have people learning their business on his stage.¹²⁰

Although Sara appeared more approachable than Sam, she was not a pushover. The obituary in the *Sun* dubbed her a 'gentle autocrat'.¹²¹ George Bernard Shaw gave a glowing testimony to her managerial skills: 'Mrs Lane thrives on enterprise and success, and is capable, self-contained, practical, vigilant, everything that a good general should be.'¹²² She regularly liaised with her stage manager, instructing him on staffing, dramatic and publicity matters. She was involved with every detail regarding the annual pantomime. Wilton records, for example, her passing sections to him, meeting with the puppet-show man and scene painter to discuss individual scenes, approving the publicity material for the press and supervising rehearsals. A pantomime review (*Era*, 25 December 1859) reports 'Mrs S. Lane has personally superintended the whole of the spectacle'.

One of the most important responsibilities Sara exercised as manager entailed the engagement of staff and decisions to terminate contracts. The theatrical agent George Foster recalls in his autobiography: 'I took Mrs. Lane of the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton, to see her [Marie Kendall], and she immediately booked Marie for her Principal Boy in the pantomime the following Christmas.'¹²³ A.E. Wilson gives evidence of the agreements signed by actors on joining the Brit, citing that of J.B. Howe, made on 15 October 1888, which included a schedule of fines for employees failing to observe the house rules:

Being absent from call	6d.
Introducing unauthorised matter into dialogue	1s.
Quarrelling on any part of the stage	2s. 6d.
If a blow is struck	10s. 6d.
Going on the stage intoxicated	10s. 6d.
(A repeated offence entailed dismissal)	
Introducing strangers or friends without authority	2s. 6d.
Smoking in the dressing-rooms or on the stage	2s. 6d. ¹²⁴

Thus Sara imposed discipline on her company and penalised those who behaved improperly. For example, in November 1872 the actors Frank Charlton and Charles Reeves were fined for being drunk and/or fighting, and in July 1873 Bigwood had to agree to a

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.142.

¹²¹ ALC Cuttings, p.3.

¹²² George Bernard Shaw, 'The Drama in Hoxton', *Saturday Review* (9 April 1898) reprinted in G.B. Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (London: Constable, 1954) vol. 3, p.352.

¹²³ George Foster, *The Spice of Life: Sixty-five Years in the Glamour World* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1939) p.96.

¹²⁴ A.E. Wilson, *East End Entertainment* (London: Arthur Barker, 1954) pp.175-76.

reduction of salary from £4 a week to £3 because of persistent drunkenness.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, Sara's genuine concern for her company members is shown in a letter to Bigwood written after another episode when his alcoholism had interfered with his performing. She offers to reinstate him as an actor:

By the look of your handwriting, you are awfully shaky. But if you think you can keep faith with the Public, you may resume your situation with me on Monday week – Let me beg – of you, not to join my company again, unless you guarantee to me that you can and will do so faithfully – for your own sake if not for your family.¹²⁶

Anderson wrote of Sam Lane's management: 'It is a great proof of the paternal government of a theatre when a manager can keep so many clever and loyal children around him for years.'¹²⁷ Sara was equally successful at retaining performing, backstage and front-of-house staff. On 6 October 1886 she was presented with a special certificate (see Plate 3.7) signed by the members of the company and stating:

We the undersigned Ladies, Gentlemen and Employes [sic] generally of the above Establishment, which standing as it does without a rival in point of managerial duration, (it having been opened by MR. SAMUEL LANE, on Easter Monday, April the 12th 1841), feel a pleasurable pride and honour in joining hand to heart as fellow workers in subscribing the Testimonial to one whom, not only as a MISTRESS but also as a FRIEND in the hour of tribulation and sorrow, has so endeared herself to one and all,

With Love, Faith, and Truth,

We are, Dear Madam,

Yours sincerely, [followed by 108 signatures]¹²⁸

Alongside each signature on the testimonial is a figure stating the number of years that person had been in the company. Of the 108 employees, thirty-nine (i.e. over thirty-six per cent) have amassed more than fifteen years' service, and nine (i.e. over eight per cent) have served for at least thirty years. The longest-serving member, Thomas Saville, had served his forty-five years as the Lane's servant. Bigwood, who gave the address, announced that collectively the listed employees had served 1,354 years, with an average service of twelve and a half years (*Era*, 9 October 1886). The actor with the longest period of employment was Joseph Reynolds, who is listed as serving for thirty-five years on the

¹²⁵ *Diaries*, pp.209 and 213.

¹²⁶ Sara Lane to George Bigwood, 17 November 1876, UKC/BIG/LET: 0648877, UoK. Bigwood conquered his alcoholism and was employed by the Britannia for a total of thirty-six years.

¹²⁷ James R. Anderson, p.302.

¹²⁸ Testimonial to Sara Lane; photo in author's collection.

testimonial and continued for another year afterwards, ‘an engagement unprecedented in the profession.’¹²⁹ He played villains plus some more sympathetic characters. The actor Lane Crauford (Sara’s great-nephew) estimated that he played well over a thousand parts. He judged Reynolds ‘a very fine all-round actor, . . . equally good as Iago, Macduff, the Ghost in “Hamlet” or in parts such as the flamboyant parts of popular melodrama.’¹³⁰ In 1897 Fred Perry, a drummer in the orchestra, was presented with a gold watch and ‘albert chain’ in recognition of his forty-six years’ service (*Era*, 18 December 1897). When John East took over the theatre in 1904, the bill poster had been employed for fifty-five years and one of the stage hands for fifty-three.¹³¹

Edgar Newbound was another long-serving actor who was engaged by Sara (rather than Sam), joining the company in 1872. He wrote eighteen dramas for the Britannia,¹³² including *Chloris* (1876) and *Major Marie Anne* (1880), which provided Sara with the comic eponymous role. Newbound took over as stage manager in 1875 on Wilton’s retirement. As an actor he specialised in heroes and romantic lovers. His performance as Karloo in Sara’s *Dolores* (see Plate 1.6) was praised (*Era*, 12 April 1872):

The effective movements of the hands, the abandonment to the passion of the scene, the thorough grasp of most difficult situations, would lead us to imagine that Mr Newbound had either studied in France or carefully noticed the effect obtained by one of the other French actors of the character in Paris. A thoroughly praiseworthy performance, well studied, and undeniably effective, necessarily made its mark.

So powerful were Newbound’s attractions that a dressmaker committed suicide when she discovered that he was married.¹³³ Yet despite his popularity with audiences, Sara was still willing to let Newbound go when he threatened to leave for a West End theatre unless she would raise his salary to £4 10s (it was £2 15s at the time).¹³⁴ This is further proof of her astute financial management: she called the actor’s bluff by refusing to pay extra and he remained.

In comparing Sara’s management with that of other female theatrical entrepreneurs, what is most noticeable is the longevity of her managerial activity. Tracy Davis lists a number of female managers in London in the 1860s, but they all had comparatively short

¹²⁹ Clement Scott, *The Drama of Yesterday and Today* (London: Macmillan, 1899) vol. 1, p.53.

¹³⁰ Lane Crauford, *Acting: Its Theory and Practice* (London: Constable, 1930) p.133.

¹³¹ John M. East, *’Neath the Mask* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967) p.205.

¹³² The Pettingell Collection contains a further three plays for which there is no evidence of production.

¹³³ Reported in the *Standard*, Wilton CY1136, frame 1028.

¹³⁴ Wilton CY1136, frame 946.

reigns. For example, the actress Alice Marriott was in charge of Sadler's Wells from 1863 to 1871.¹³⁵ In the provinces there were some longer tenures, such as Sarah Baker of the Canterbury Circuit and Sarah Thorne of Margate Theatre Royal.¹³⁶

Marie Wilton (Mrs Bancroft) is mainly remembered for her successful relaunch of the Queen's Theatre as the Prince of Wales's Theatre. She strove to make it respectable by attracting a middle-class audience. In contrast there is no evidence to suggest that Sara attempted to change her existing audience. (Sam Lane had tried to attract a lower-middle-class audience in 1858 by advertising that customers in the boxes must be suitably attired.)¹³⁷ Instead it was Sara's presence, with her image of inviolable morality, that gave the Britannia some respectability.

Tracy Davis argues that the marital position of female manageresses was inextricably bound with their image as a whole:

... we might recognize the manageresses as iconoclasts or subalterns: publicly orientated women who claim the right to make representations – this is what theatre does, after all – yet who nevertheless in representations of them cannot be separated from either their marital state or their particular marriage partners.¹³⁸

Davis contends that the iconography of such women, particularly Vestris and Wilton, shows them as threatening, larger than life and formidable in relation to their husbands.¹³⁹ This is patently not the case with Sara: she is depicted as a benign power and, by virtue of being a widow, she is not compared to a husband.

Of course the acid test of Sara's managerial success was whether she made a profit from the business. Barker says the Britannia recorded a loss in only three years between 1841 and 1906.¹⁴⁰ This was a remarkable achievement. When Sara died she left £126,000, more than double the amount her husband had. An article praising Sara's management and other skills suggested '... it is more than probable that no theatre in London is conducted more efficiently' (*Touchstone*, 22 June 1878). The fact that Crauford was forced to sell the theatre in 1902, only three years after Sara's death (albeit that the alterations required by

¹³⁵ Tracy C. Davis, 'Female managers, lessees and proprietors of the British stage (to 1914)', *Nineteenth Century Theatre* 28,2 (2000) 115-44.

¹³⁶ Viv Gardner, 'Introduction' in Viv Gardner and Susan Rutherford, eds, *The New Woman and Her Sisters Feminism and Theatre 1850-1914* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992) p.10. Thorne acted at the Britannia in June 1857.

¹³⁷ Clive Barker, 'The Audiences of the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton', *Theatre Quarterly* 9,34 (1979) 35-36.

¹³⁸ Tracy C. Davis, *Economics*, p.286.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.288.

¹⁴⁰ Clive Barker, 'A Theatre for the People' in Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson, eds, *Nineteenth Century British Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1971) p.21.

the LCC had considerable financial implications) suggests the theatre was less stable without the image of Sara at the helm.

SARA'S ICONIC STATUS

What Hoxton would do without the 'Britannia' and without Mrs Sara Lane it is hard to imagine; and we fancy that if female M.P.'s were to become a 'regular thing,' and she put up for the district, Mrs Lane's name would be easily placed at the top of the poll.
(*Era*, 18 December 1886)

As this quote suggests, Sara was recognised as an important and popular figure in Hoxton (see Plate 3.8). She had become a conspicuously successful member of the *nouveau-riche*. Bailey's description of the typical metropolitan music-hall proprietors' style, 'capitalism with a beaming human face', could equally well define that of Samuel and Sara Lane.¹⁴¹ Their ostentatious lifestyle is typical of their music-hall counterparts' 'conspicuous consumption' in the form of 'the broughams, the estate and the yacht', all of which the Lanes owned.¹⁴² Sara's frequent sojourns in France are mentioned in the press.¹⁴³ She both represented her audience (in the parts she played in which she epitomised the inherent 'nobility' of the lower classes) and transcended them. She was not unique in having a working-class background; so did Marie Bancroft, Madge Kendal and Ellen Terry, the three leading actresses in the West End of the 1880s, but they were all from theatrical families.¹⁴⁴ Whereas with success they became disassociated from their origins, Sara maintained close contact with the impoverished East End, yet imparted the glamour of the richer, more sophisticated world beyond.

Certainly she was esteemed by the West End theatrical world, shown by the fact that she appeared at Mrs Keeley's ninetieth-birthday testimonial at the Lyceum in 1895;¹⁴⁵ Henry Irving and other leading actors including Ellen Terry, Beerbohn Tree, Ellaline Terriss and Seymour Hicks all sent wreaths to her funeral; and the theatrical manager George Conquest of the Surrey Theatre attended in person.¹⁴⁶ In the *Era*'s account (25 July 1885) of the 1885 General Theatrical Fund Dinner, Sara's name is cited, along with Mrs

¹⁴¹ Peter Bailey 'A Community of Friends: Business and Good Fellowship in London Music Hall Management c.1860-1885' in Peter Bailey, ed., *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986) p.49.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.34.

¹⁴³ For example, *Sunday Times*, 21 September 1879 and *Entra'acte & Limelight*, 30 July 1887.

¹⁴⁴ Deborah Pye, "'Irreproachable Women and Patient Workers": The Memoirs of Victorian Leading Ladies', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 45,1 (2003) 75.

¹⁴⁵ *Sam & Sallie*, p.338.

¹⁴⁶ *Daily News*, ALC Cuttings, p.37.

Bancroft's. Sara's subscription was announced as £10, the same as Mrs Langtry and only ten shillings less than Henry Irving. Such events raised her profile amongst the West End acting community. The Brit audience could not share Sara's status, but its members could take pride in the respect with which she was treated.

The matriarch

Although she had no children, Sara was surrounded by family and the Britannia was run as a family business: her sisters, Charlotte and Polly, acted alongside her; her father was the treasurer; her brother-in-law, William Crauford, was an actor and landlord of the Britannia Tavern; and both William Robinson and Alfred Lane Crauford became acting manager. The very presence of Sara's family at the theatre may have contributed to her own reputation for, as Richardson suggests: 'The flourishing of theatrical dynasties throughout the century paved the way to respectability for the actress by making possible, for the first time, a family life as stable as any that could be found in the middle classes outside the profession.'¹⁴⁷

Significantly, this close family structure reflected the local community. Sociological studies have shown how such family networks worked in working-class communities in the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁸ Victorian Hoxton had a matri-centred community, similar to that uncovered in Young and Willmott's study of 1950's Bethnal Green.¹⁴⁹ Sara's matriarchal position is alluded to in obituaries referring to her as 'Mother Lane'.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, the Britannia company can be seen as an extended family group, particularly given the length of time many of its members were employed. By operating the stock system, the Lanes were inevitably more involved with their company member's lives. Baker claims actors in such companies worked an average fifteen-hour day and this working pattern engendered a sense of family among the company.¹⁵¹ At the Brit this was further reinforced as several members of the same family were often employed simultaneously. To give just one

¹⁴⁷ Sandra Richards, *The Rise of the English Actress* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993) p.113.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Anderson, *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) and Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

¹⁴⁹ Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*, revised edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962) pp.194-95. See also Ellen Ross, "'Fierce questions and taunts": Married life in working-class London, 1870-1914' in David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones, eds, *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations Since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1989) pp.219-44.

¹⁵⁰ For example, *Reynolds'* and *Daily Chronicle*, ALC Cuttings, pp.6 and 8.

¹⁵¹ Michael Baker, *The Rise of the Victorian Actor* (London: Croom Helm, 1978) pp.133 and 65.

example, actor and pantaloon W.H. Newham, performed alongside his actress wife and several of their children.¹⁵²

Sara was associated with the Britannia for fifty-seven years and although she did not live in Hoxton (she resided in Tottenham, then from 1875 in St John's Wood), she was a familiar figure in the area. Young and Willmott argue that long residence creates communal sentiment: 'There is a sense of community, that is a feeling of solidarity between people who occupy the common territory, which springs from the fact that people and their families have lived there a long time.'¹⁵³ This was observed at the theatre at Sara's 1886 benefit night (*Era*, 18 December 1886):

There is a warmth of friendship, too, based upon 'auld acquaintance,' between the old favourites at the Britannia and their patrons 'in front' which is very pleasant to observe, if at times somewhat boisterous in its demonstrations.

Since well-run, profit-making enterprises earned the approval of society,¹⁵⁴ the Lane's obvious financial success and the longevity of their business created a sense of local stability during a period of great change in the East End.

Philanthropist extraordinaire

One aspect of this change was the increasing poverty of the area, partly as a result of the middle-class exodus from central London and the demolition of housing to make way for warehouses and factories.¹⁵⁵ In *Life and Labour of the People of London* Charles Booth, notes of Hoxton, 'the evidence shows that the downward change has been very great.'¹⁵⁶ As part of his evidence he quotes the clergy of St Monica's Church: 'The priests assert that Hoxton has steadily, and for many years, been growing poorer, and in this sense all agree that there has been degradation.'¹⁵⁷

Sara actively assisted the poor and her charitable works contributed greatly to her public image (*Era*, 2 January 1876): 'There never was a Manageress who so thoroughly secured the goodwill of her patrons, and we safely say that, next to the Baroness Burdett Coutts, Mrs S. Lane is the most popular lady in the East of London.' Angela Burdett-

¹⁵² Jim Davis and Tracy C. Davis, 'The People of the "People's Theatre": The Social Demography of the Britannia Theatre (Hoxton)', *Theatre Survey* 32,2 (1991) 153.

¹⁵³ Young and Willmott, p.113.

¹⁵⁴ Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) p.114.

¹⁵⁵ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 3rd Series, *Religious Influences*, 'London North of the Thames: The Inner Ring' (London: Macmillan, 1902) p.166.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.116.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.129.

Coutts, an aristocratic philanthropist, was particularly active in the East End. She visited the *Britannia* on 2 July 1863 and after the performance was given a private showing of the famous ghost effect.¹⁵⁸ Amongst many contributions to the area, she set up the Burdett-Coutts Working Youths' Club in Shoreditch in 1875 and had the infamous Nova Scotia Gardens in Bethnal Green cleared and rebuilt with new housing and the £200,000 Columbia Market.¹⁵⁹ Although Burdett-Coutts earned respect for her work, she was an outsider and she sometimes misjudged local feeling as in the case of Columbia Market, which was unpopular with those for whom it had been built.¹⁶⁰ By contrast, Sara administered charity from within the existing community.

Sara's philanthropy is reflected in the various soubriquets mentioned in her obituaries. They include 'The Fairy Bountiful' (*Land and Water*), 'The Benefactress of Hoxton' (*News of the World*) and 'Hoxton's kind Angel' (*Manchester City News*).¹⁶¹ In fact some of the obituaries make more of her philanthropic behaviour than her acting. Crauford claims that among the poor of East London Sara's golden reputation owed most to her benevolence and charity. Not only was she a generous contributor to public subscriptions but she also set up a scheme to give interest-free loans to the costermongers of Hoxton. He says nearly one hundred men from Hoxton and beyond took advantage of the scheme.¹⁶² The *Era* obituary claims: 'It is estimated that in Hoxton alone she gave between £1,000 and £3,000 yearly in small sums to prevent starvation or eviction to some of the poorer workers in the district.'¹⁶³ Crauford's pencilled comment reads, 'Great Exaggeration'. However, even if the figures were inflated, they reflected the public perception of her generosity.

There is no corroborating evidence to substantiate Barker's claim that Sara ran a soup kitchen.¹⁶⁴ If she did, it is surprising that it is not mentioned in any of the obituaries.

Another means of making charitable donations was through support of the bodies set up to help actors and associated theatrical practitioners in times of difficulty. The *Britannia* was the first theatre to set up a self-supporting scheme by which employees made regular contributions and could make claims in cases of illness, family death etc.¹⁶⁵ The *Britannia*

¹⁵⁸ *Diaries*, p.62.

¹⁵⁹ Jeffrey James Higley, *A study of some social, literary and dramatic aspects of the Victorian Popular Theatre, as illustrated by the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton, 1843-1870*, (University of London, unpublished PhD thesis, 1973) p.249.

¹⁶⁰ John Richardson, *The Annals of London* (London: Cassell Paperbacks, 2000) p.293.

¹⁶¹ ALC Cuttings, pp.41, 42, 28 and 10.

¹⁶² *Sam & Sallie*, pp.315-16.

¹⁶³ *Era*, ALC Cuttings, p.2.

¹⁶⁴ Clive Barker, 'Audiences', p.40.

¹⁶⁵ *Diaries*, p.226.

Sick Fund was established on 24 September 1860 with Wilton as the president.¹⁶⁶ It was so successful that by 1865 it was able to offer loans to members requiring temporary assistance.¹⁶⁷ By 1869, however, the scheme was being abused by a few who were not repaying loans or paying subscriptions. Sara's response was decisive and effective:

. . . I was told in the Treasury by Mr Borrow & Mrs S.Lane today to inform every member of the *Sick Fund* that all those who are in debt to the Fund for Loans must pay before the 'run of the Pantomime' is over or they will then be discharged. . . . Harding & Radford acquiesced – Newham, excited & passionate, said he would pay, but not on account of the menace – no! – but because he would not have his name disgraced &c &c.¹⁶⁸

Beyond the Britannia, the Actor's Benevolent Fund, founded in 1882, provided support for performers, managers and stage managers. It 'was administered entirely by managers who were male and from the West End (with the double exception of Sarah Lane).'¹⁶⁹ Crauford's account of the inaugural meeting of the Fund reveals both Sara's generosity and also a desire to see herself the equal of anyone, regardless of gender, in the theatrical world. Everyone was asked to pledge subscriptions:

The actors wrote down their guineas or more, the managers their five guineas or ten guineas, and a very select few, headed by Sir Henry Irving, announced that they would give £100 yearly, which aroused a torrent of cheers.

Then Sara Lane of the Old Brit., Hoxton, was asked what she would like to subscribe; the answer came prompt and decisive: 'I will give £100 yearly, the same as Sir Henry.' The claim to equality in charity with the leader of the profession was so unexpected as to bring forth even more applause.¹⁷⁰

A further means by which the Britannia's management supported deserving causes was through the staging of charitable benefit nights. A notice on a playbill for 13 October 1845 announces:

To Tradesman, Mechanics, and the Working Classes. - - - The Proprietor grateful for the support he has invariably received from the above, feels it his duty to state, that in order to forward their views, he will let the Britannia Saloon, for Benefit Societies, and Charitable purposes, and in all cases give an undertaking in writing, that there

¹⁶⁶ Wilton CY1136, frame 800.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., frame 169.

¹⁶⁸ *Diaries*, p.153.

¹⁶⁹ Tracy C. Davis, 'Victorian Charity and Self-Help for Women Performers', *Theatre Notebook* 41,3 (1987) 114-28.

¹⁷⁰ *Sam & Sallie*, p.341. Irving had not, in fact, been knighted at this point.

shall be no loss incurred on the charge for the house.
S. LANE, Proprietor.¹⁷¹

This practice continued throughout the life of the theatre. For example, the *Referee* (19 October 1884) noted a Benefit for the Houndsditch Bread and Coal Society that had raised £120 for the ‘necessitous poor’. Sara supported benefits for company members and their families, acting in one for the widow and eight children of Edwin Drayton, a Britannia actor since 1876, who had died suddenly (*Era*, 6 June 1885).

Britannia and the ‘Queen of Hoxton’

In addition to her image as a matriarch and philanthropist, Sara was also identified with the allegorical figure of Britannia. The first occasion was in Seaman’s *Old Friends in New Frames*, which, according to the prompt book was ‘A professional dream written for the purpose of inaugurating the opening of the New Britannia Theatre Hoxton’ in 1858.¹⁷² In this thirty-minute sketch the other actors and actresses play themselves (with the exception of the railway station manager), but Sara appears as ‘Brittannia [sic]’ complete with a trident. She both is and is not Sara Lane. Britannia was an obvious emblem to use for the theatre because of its name (derived from the original Britannia Tavern); the figure had, for example, appeared on a poster advertising performances of *Charlotte Haydon* at the Britannia Saloon.¹⁷³ However, arguably it had now become more than a visual pun. In the sketch the playing of ‘Rule Britannia’ and the concluding rendition of the national anthem reaffirm the link with national identity. Likewise, when Sara was presented with her testimonial in 1886 ‘there was so much enthusiasm that the whole audience joined in the significant “Rule Britannia”’ (*Era*, 9 October 1886).

Benedict Anderson suggests that the singing of national anthems creates ‘a special kind of contemporaneous community’: ‘Singing the Marseillaise, Waltzing Matilda, and Indonesia Raya provide occasions for unisonality, for the echoed physical realization of the imagined community.’¹⁷⁴ For the Britannia’s audience the singers were not just an imagined community but an actual one, so the sense of unity would have been even stronger. One local resident testifies to the significance of ‘Rule Britannia’ to East Enders. He claims all the costermongers were Conservative and felt a patriotic superiority to

¹⁷¹ Playbill i for 13 October 1845, Britannia Playbills, HA.

¹⁷² PETT MSS.O.18, Pettingell Collection, UoK.

¹⁷³ Undated poster, ii, Britannia Playbills, HA.

¹⁷⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991) p.145.

foreigners, so objected to the Liberal Free Trade position acknowledging the equality of foreigners:

Well the British people didn't like that because they had all been brought up on 'Rule Britannia'. I mean, even when they looted the West End in 1886, when the unemployed smashed up the jewellers' shops, trying to impress the people up West with their condition, they marched back to the East End singing 'Rule Britannia'. Now what more patriotic, more conservative song can you have than that?'¹⁷⁵

Thus the singing of 'Rule Britannia' at the Britannia Theatre was both a means of establishing local community links and a national bonding.

An interesting caricature of Sara, entitled 'Rule Britannia', depicts her as Britannia in the familiar seated position, holding a trident.¹⁷⁶ On her oversized head is a Pallas Athena-style helmet. She sits on the Britannia Theatre, smiling benignly. To her right 'HOXTON' is written above the theatre, while over her left shoulder the dome of St Paul's Cathedral is outlined. Thus she appears not only to be ruling over Hoxton but also occupying a prominent position in London as a whole.

During the nineteenth century Britannia was increasingly associated with the personification of the British Empire and hence with Queen Victoria, who became Empress of India in 1876. This identification had started with the queen's wedding cake of 1840, which had featured a sculpture of Britannia.¹⁷⁷ Thus in being identified with Britannia, Sara was also linked with the monarch. An obituary refers to her as the "'Britannia's own queen," as she has often been termed'.¹⁷⁸ The publisher William Tinsley called her 'the Queen of the East' in his book of recollections in 1900.¹⁷⁹ In a review (*ISDN*, 17 January 1885) of the pantomime *King Kookoo, or Harlequin Bonbon and the Golden Serpent* entitled 'Rule Britannia', Hollingshead wrote: 'Her Britannic Majesty – it is surely not disloyal to apply this title to Mrs. Sara Lane – continues to reign triumphant in the very appropriate part of the manageress Thespiana.' Hibbert's sardonic account of the Britannia Festival also uses the royal metaphor:

Enthroned in the centre of the stage was her Britannic majesty – the tragedy queen, Prince Pretty-pet, grand almoner and all combined, of

¹⁷⁵ Raphael Samuel, *East End Underworld: Chapters In The Life of Arthur Harding* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) p.263.

¹⁷⁶ Source and date unknown, BL; reproduced in Davis and Donkin, p.126.

¹⁷⁷ Emily Allen, 'Culinary Exhibition: Victorian Wedding Cakes and Royal Spectacle', *Victorian Studies* 45,3 (2003) 464.

¹⁷⁸ *Era*, ALC Cuttings, p.1.

¹⁷⁹ William Tinsley, *Random Recollections of An Old Publisher*, 2 vols (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1900) vol. 2, p.168.

Hoxton. . . . Around her on the occasion of the Festival were ranged the members of her company . . . a polychromatic court whose constituents came forward one by one to make dutiful obeisance to the Queen, what time a pompous old elocutionist recited an appropriate, original verse of a yard-long doggerel a presentation to Madam from her grateful servants; . . .¹⁸⁰

Crauford expresses an explicit link with the monarch:

She also purchased a smart brougham. It became well known in Hoxton, always attracting a crowd outside the theatre, and when she left after the performance it was frequently amid huzzas and shouts of 'Good night.' One might think it was royalty leaving the theatre! And to the natives of the district there was little distinction. For she was loved and honoured, challenging Victoria herself in her claims to their homage and loyalties; indeed she was often acclaimed 'Queen of Hoxton!'¹⁸¹

The recollections of the ex-criminal Arthur Harding substantiate Crauford's claim. Harding, who was born in 1886 in the 'Jago' (an area close to the theatre that was notorious for poverty and illegal activity), began to attend the Brit from 1892/3 when he was aged six or seven. He stated: 'Mrs. Lane, she looked like the Queen Victoria to me, and dressed in the same way with the high-backed dress.'¹⁸² Physically the two women shared some similarities: from middle age both were dumpy and pleasant-featured rather than beautiful. Both had lengthy widowhoods, neither remarrying after the death of their husbands. Yet although Sara frequently portrayed queens on stage, censorship forbade impersonations of the present royal family.

A review (*Sunday Times*, 5 October 1879) of a performance at the theatre concludes: 'It may not be out of place to mention here that Mrs. Lane has received from the Empress Eugénie a kindly-expressed acknowledgement of her letter of condolence with the Empress upon the occasion of the death of her son, the late ex-Prince Imperial.' The fact that this was reported in a newspaper suggests a desire for Sara to be seen to be in active communication with the royal family. Hoxtonians could bask in the reflected glory.

Sara's annual benefit and the presentation of her testimonial in 1886 are public outpourings of affection and respect similar to those shown to Victoria at her Diamond Jubilee in 1897. As part of those celebrations the Britannia put on a special programme for a week. It began with extracts from the operas *Il Trovatore* or *The Bohemian Girl*¹⁸³ and

¹⁸⁰ Hibbert, pp.64-65.

¹⁸¹ *Sam & Sallie*, p.314.

¹⁸² Samuel, p.40.

¹⁸³ The operas were sung on different nights.

concluded with 'a Grand Diamond Jubilee realistic tableau, entitled "The Empire's Homage to Victoria"' written by Algernon Syms (*Era*, 26 June 1897). Members of the company represented colonies and foreign powers, the armed forces, St George and Plenty. Miss East Robinson portrayed the Queen and Sara was Britannia.

Although there was some hostility towards royalty in the period in which Queen Victoria withdrew from public life following the death of Prince Albert in 1861, by the time of her Golden Jubilee in 1887 Londoners enthusiastically celebrated.¹⁸⁴ John Lucas contends that '... Patriotism – love of England – meant almost exclusively love of England as embodied in and by Victoria.'¹⁸⁵ The queen herself was represented by both Liberty and Britannia. Lucas sees this 'image of the single nation, unified under its loved queen' realized in Dickens's description of his 1860 visit to the pantomime at the Britannia (which Lucas incorrectly calls a music hall).¹⁸⁶ He quotes Dickens's account of the audience applauding the fact revealed by the Spirit of Liberty that there is no liberty apart from in this realm. Lucas notes 'The spirit of Liberty, was, of course, dressed as a queen.' And significantly, Sara played the queen.

Given that Britannia personified the British Empire, it is pertinent to examine working-class attitudes towards imperialism. The Victorian writer T.H.S. Escott stated that the working classes' disposition was to favour 'a big England rather than a small'.¹⁸⁷ Gareth Stedman Jones claims one of the most prominent developments in working-class life in late Victorian London was 'the largely passive acceptance of imperialism and the throne.'¹⁸⁸ Harding testifies that the working-class East End families were blindly royalist:

When Queen Victoria died in 1901, we had to wear black bands on our arms, and every place had the shutters up. People done it because they genuinely believed all the nonsense that had been printed about royalty.¹⁸⁹

Sara's soubriquets and iconography originally developed from the circumstantial fact of the theatre's name, but over time she came to symbolise a synthesis of the queen and national pride. Because she was more accessible and more closely related to the East End, she was arguably more revered than the true monarch.

¹⁸⁴ David Newsome, *The Victorian World Picture* (London: Fontana Press, 1998) p.245.

¹⁸⁵ John Lucas, 'Love of England – The Victorians and Patriotism', *Browning Society Notes* 17 (1987/88) 64.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.73.

¹⁸⁷ T.H.S. Escott, *England. Its People, Polity, and Pursuits* (1891), quoted in Newsome, p.136.

¹⁸⁸ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages*, p.215.

¹⁸⁹ Samuel, p.263.

The reasons why Sara's death excited so much interest can thus be directly ascribed to her personal attributes (outstanding acting and comic talent, astute business management and a good-humoured and compassionate personality) combined with the longevity of her involvement in the area. Undoubtedly many residents felt a strong connection to her. A journalist for the *Stage* recalls witnessing the following scene:

As she walked from the theatre to her carriage Mrs. Lane passed down a small avenue of work-girls, some of whom, not content with showering upon her verbal testimony of their esteem, actually caught up portions of her dress, which they *kissed*!¹⁹⁰

Such genuine affection was expressed at her death in, for example, the 'unpretentious, though very beautiful, little wreath . . . bearing the inscription, "A token of gratitude and love from a poor Hoxton girl."' ¹⁹¹ Given her concern for local people, it is perhaps a fitting legacy that a block of local authority flats built in the late 1960s/early 1970s close to the original theatre site and still standing, should bear her name – Sara Lane Court.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ ALC Cuttings, p.48.

¹⁹¹ *Morning Advertiser*, ALC Cuttings, p.40.

¹⁹² Actual date unknown: the building appears on a map of 1975 but not of 1960.



PLATE 3.1: Two pages of Crauford's cuttings file of Sara's obituary notices

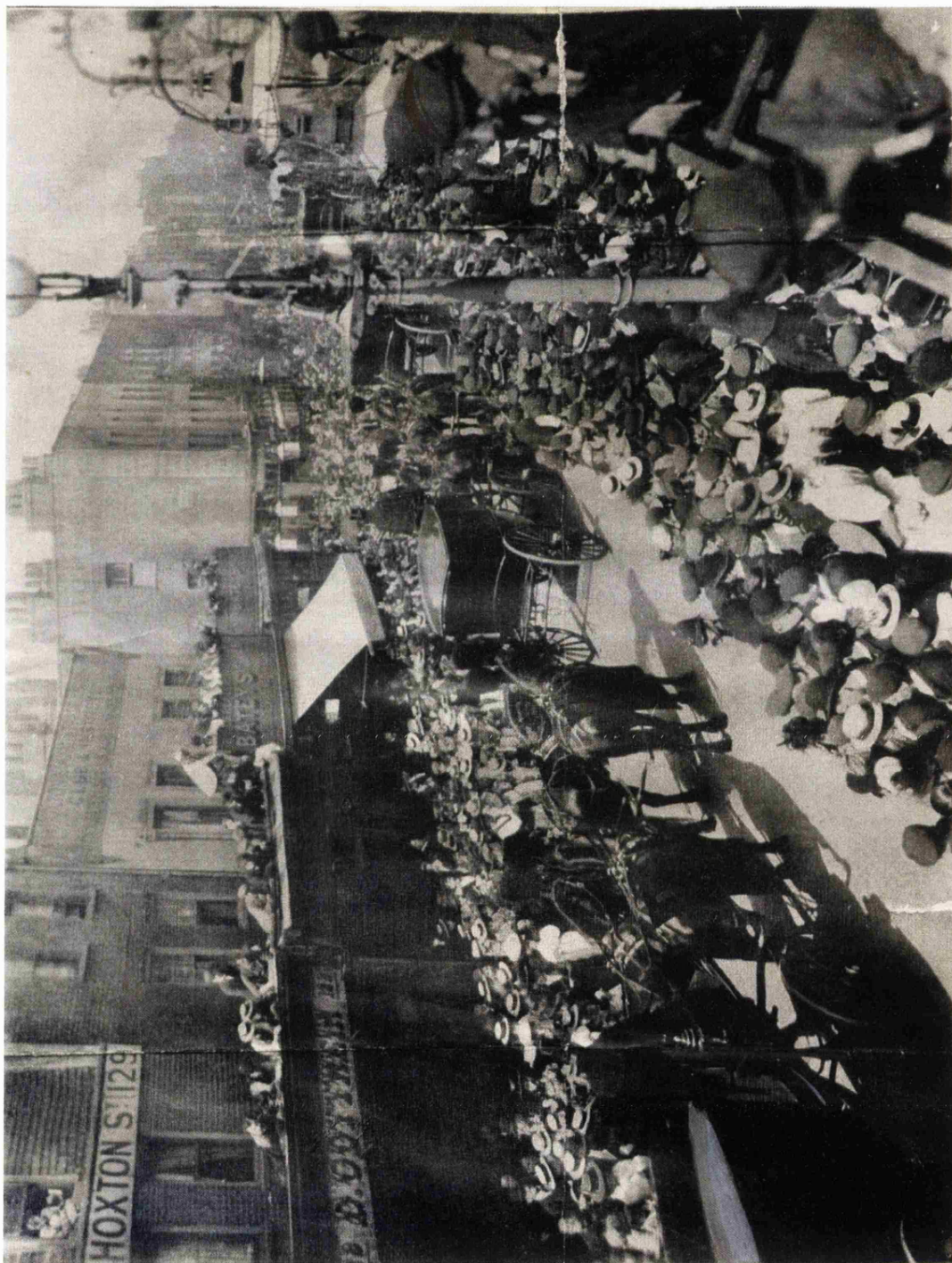


PLATE 3.2: Sara's funeral procession in Hoxton Street, 22 August 1899

Removing the body from the theatre to the hearse.



The Echo

"The Echo" Office.

WEDNESDAY, August 23rd, 1899.

The sorrow of the people of Hoxton over the death of Mrs. Sara Lane is something to be noted with genuine pride by every Londoner. Few of those who knew Mrs. Lane's name merely as that of the proprietress of the Britannia Theatre could have guessed that her body would be followed to the grave by thousands of the poorest dwellers in that unlovely neighbourhood. The theatrical profession is proud of its reputation for generosity and friendliness. Yesterday's demonstration was a remarkable tribute to the memory of an estimable woman who will not soon be forgotten by the neighbourhood and the profession.



Keeping back the crowd.

The head of the procession.

"BRITANNIA" MOURNS: MRS. SARA LANE'S FUNERAL LEAVING THE THEATRE FOR KENSAL GREEN.

PLATE 3.3: Illustrations of Sara's funeral from Crauford's cuttings file



PLATE 3.4: The earliest known portrait of Sara in one of her Irish roles, Kathleen from *Kathleen, The Pride of Munster (The Soldier's Bride)* (*Theatrical Times*, 5 August 1848)

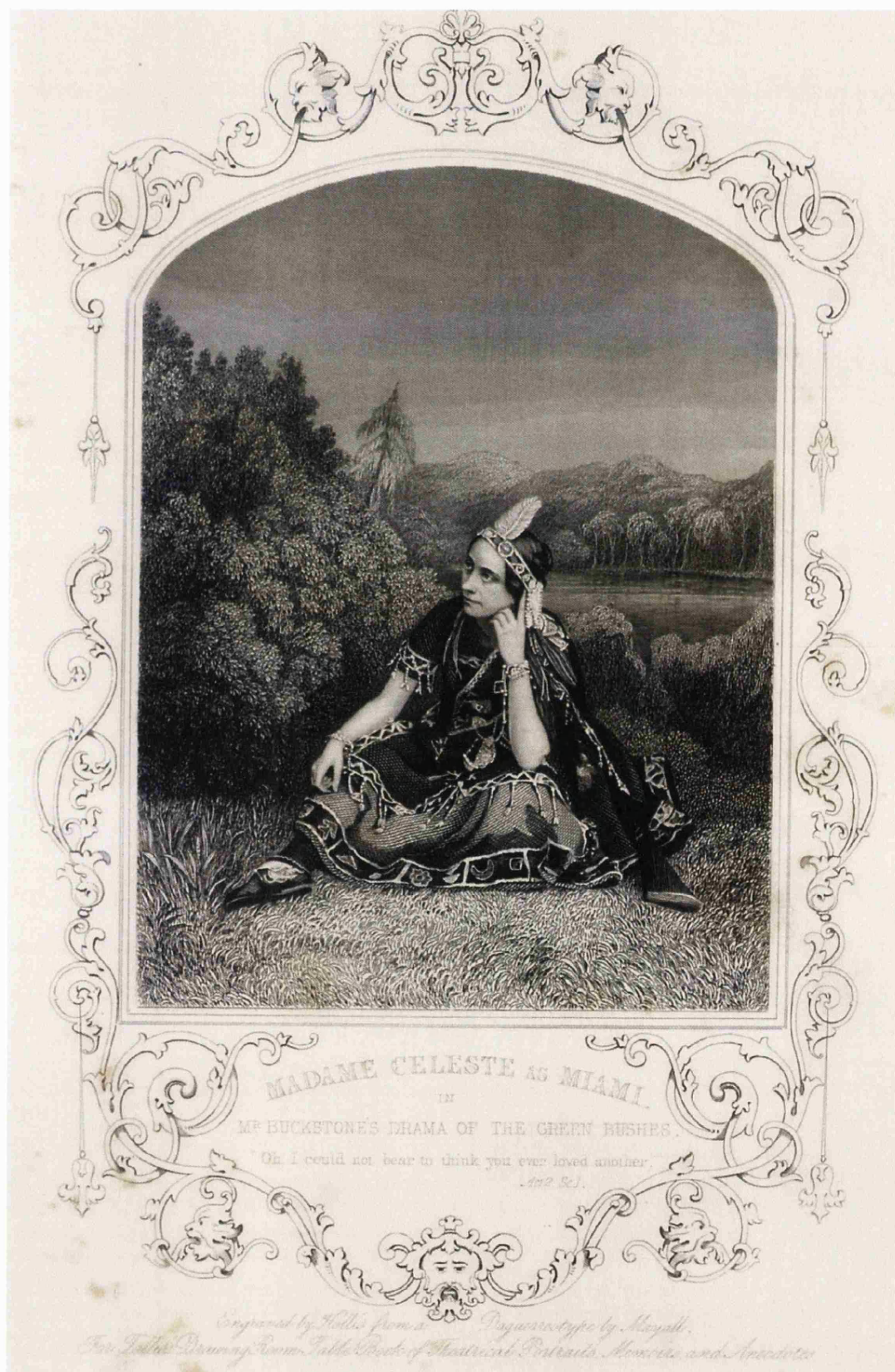


PLATE 3.5: Madame Celeste as Miami in Buckstone's *The Green Bushes*

**Revival of the Beautiful Drama of the FLIRT!
MRS. S. LANE AS "JACKIE FLEAM?"**

Have you seen the CASINO DANCING in the "DRUNKARD'S CHILDREN,"

By Edie. CELESTE STEPHAN. Miss C. Morrow, Mr. W. Smith & Mr. S. Sidney?

On MONDAY, DECEMBER 8th, 1856, and all the Week, will be presented (Wednesday excepted)

The immensely popular Domestic Village Drama, entitled the

FLIRT!

The Honourable Colonel Frederick Marchal
Ferdia Flaub... his Footman—also smitten with Fanny
Geo. Sheldorn... a young Sailor—also in love with Fanny
Capt. Biss & Co act Balcon... a young Farmer—also in love with Fanny
Toby Fleam... the Village Farmer—Father of Fanny

Jack... his Son—a simple and rather self-willed Ploughboy
In which she will sing "London's Sights or a World of Wonders"
Mr. Case... Mr. J. WILLIAMS Banker's Clerk
Mrs. Margaret Mog... Mrs. NEWHAM Mary
Fanny Fleam... Mr. WILSON Constable
Mr. Boucher... Mr. BUCHAN & JOHNSON Ladies' Gentlemen, Visitors, &c.
Miss S. THEOBALD... Mrs. R. GASTON Banker's Clerk
Miss S. THEOBALD... the Village Flirt

The Village Smithy!

The HONEST SMITH!

The Town Fashionable and his Gentleman!

THE FLIRT!

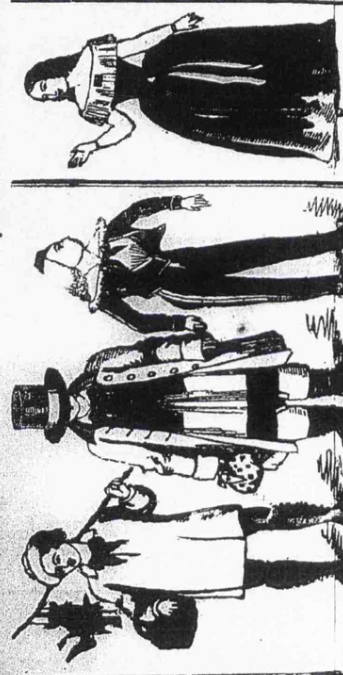
Arrival of JACKIE FLEAM!

The Transmigration of Jackie into Footman! The New Braces!

THE SAILOR & THE FLIRT

FANNY'S DESCRIPTION OF A SAILOR!

Departure for London



Belgrave Square
Jackie Fleam in London!

THE BALL

The Combat with the Military Gentlemen!

"I wish I had an umbrella, I'd poke your eye out!"

The Sailor & Gentleman's Gentleman

A DISHONEST FARMER

The Robbery

Ben Brayling charged with Theft! "Who stole the Pocket Book?"—He did!"

PUNISHMENT of the GUILTY! and the PRIDE of the VILLAGE no longer!

FLIRT!

PLATE 3.6: Britannia playbill for 8 December 1856 featuring *The Flirt*, in which Sara played Jack Fleam

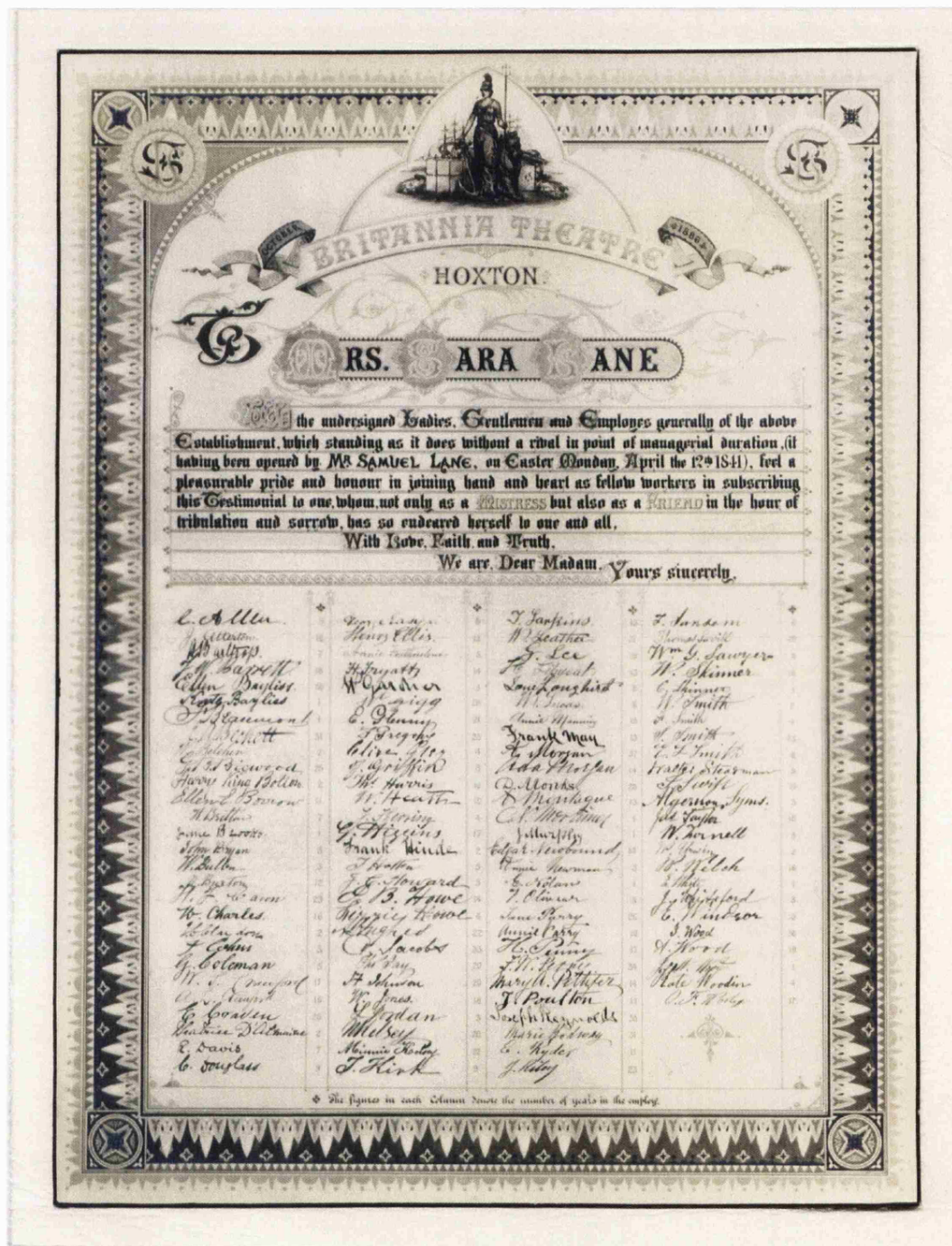


PLATE 3.7: Sara's testimonial, presented to her on 6 October 1886



PLATE 3.8: Two portraits of Sara Lane from *Touchstone, or The New Era* (22 June 1878) and *Entr'acte* (1 October 1887). Note the trident on her parasol signifying her symbolic status as Britannia

4

THE BRITANNIA DRAMATIST, COLIN HENRY HAZLEWOOD

‘Mr C. H. Hazlewood is, in truth, a kind of human conjuror’s bottle, and seems able to produce any kind of dramatic composition which the exigencies of the time may suggest.’

Era, 31 March 1867

When the Britannia first opened its doors as a saloon theatre in 1841 its repertory system of new performances intermingled with revivals was not unusual, but from the 1860s as other theatres switched to the long run the Hoxton theatre was conspicuous in continuing to operate the old system. It was therefore of paramount importance that it had a continuous supply of plays of a consistent quality likely to appeal to its audience. The management relied on a relatively small number of playwrights to produce the necessary stream of dramas. Stephens estimated that only between three and four per cent of nineteenth-century dramatists wrote more than fifteen to twenty plays.¹ Yet, at the Britannia, George Dibdin Pitt, William Seaman, Colin Henry Hazlewood, Frederick Marchant and Edgar Newbound all fell into this minority grouping.

In the early days the most important dramatist was George Dibdin Pitt (1795-1855). He was stage manager of the Britannia Saloon for two years from 1842 and house dramatist from 1844 (1843 according to Brenna) until February 1851. His *Era* obituary (25 February 1855) reported that he had supposedly written ‘700 melo-dramas, farces, and extravaganzas’, though it failed to mention that any of them were written for the Britannia, let alone speculate on the number.²

Only one other Britannia playwright had an output that could challenge Pitt’s, Colin Henry Hazlewood. As with Pitt’s oeuvre, quantifying Hazlewood’s plays is problematic because of the relatively small number that were published, the arbitrary nature of playbill

¹ John Russell Stephens, *The Profession of the Playwright: British Theatre 1800-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1992) p.3.

² Brenna suggests the figure may have been an exaggeration; Dwayne Brenna, ‘George Dibdin Pitt: Actor and Playwright’, *Theatre Notebook* 52,1 (1998) 37.

survival, the proliferation of plays with the same or similar titles, the difficulty of attributing unmarked plays and the fact that not all were sent to the Lord Chamberlain's office for licensing. However, counting the manuscripts and published acting editions in the Pettingell Collection at the University of Kent and the Lord Chamberlain's collection at the British Library, together with documentary evidence provided by Wilton's diaries and playbills, adverts and reviews, 269 performed pieces can be reliably attributed to Hazlewood.³ Partial manuscripts survive for another four, for which there is no evidence of production.⁴ Doubtless some other works have disappeared. Six of the plays were collaborations with other authors/actors (Seaman, W. Reeve, D. Johnson, Arthur Williams and Edward Elton) and four were revisions of Pitt's plays.⁵ Roughly three-quarters of Hazlewood's plays premièred at the Britannia (201 out of 269) leaving 68, including some of the most popular pieces and half his published plays⁶, that were first performed elsewhere (see Table 2).

Despite being such a prolific dramatist, Hazlewood rarely features in nineteenth-century theatrical history. His plays have suffered from intellectual bias against non-literary drama and, because most were written for East End theatres, from snobbery. It is true that in the mid-Victorian period when critics frequently complained about the poor standard of the national drama, not even Hazlewood's loyal Britannia audience would have claimed he possessed exceptional artistic talent. Yet he is worthy of study as an example of a successful hack, not least because of the longevity of his plays' appeal and the number he produced. The dramas he wrote for the Britannia provide evidence about popular culture in general and the Hoxton audience in particular.

Colin Henry Fleetwood was born in Marylebone, west London on 29 January 1819.⁷ The son of a tailor, he began his working life by following the family trade, but sometime during the early 1840s he abandoned tailoring for the theatre and adopted the stage name of Hazlewood. The earliest evidence for this comes from two playbills for the Royal Kent

³ A complete listing is to be published in Janice Norwood, 'C.H. Hazlewood' in *Nineteenth-Century British Dramatists*, Dictionary of Literary Biography series (Thomson Gale, forthcoming).

⁴ Not included in this figure are nine plays attributed to Hazlewood by Nicoll, Mullin, Kavanagh or the BL, but which other evidence proves to be the work of different authors, including five by Hazlewood's son Henry. The four incomplete plays are *Peep O'Day Boys*, *The Phantoms of the Black Forest* and *Zohrab, the Star of Persia*, all in the Pettingell Collection; and *The Emerald Heart, or A Poor Man's Honour*, in the Theatre Collection of New York Public Library; see Julia Williams and Stephen Watt 'Representing a "Great Distress": Melodrama, Gender, and the Irish Famine' in Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, eds, *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) pp.251-56.

⁵ For example, *Diogenes in Search of a Contented Man*, which was advertised in 1857 as 'New, never acted before by Late Didbin Pitt with alterations by Hazlewood' (playbill for 12 October 1857, Playbills 376, BL).

⁶ Of the 31 published plays, 17 were first performed at the Brit.

⁷ The 1891 edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography* incorrectly lists 1823 as his birth date, an error repeated in several subsequent books.

Theatre, High Street Kensington,⁸ and the 1844 baptismal record of one of his sons, which states his occupation as comedian. He appeared at the Theatre Royal, Lincoln as a low comedian⁹ in 1846 and 1847, and at the Theatre Royal, Hull during the winter season of 1849/50. It is probable that he played at other theatres on the same circuits. As well as acting in a variety of supporting roles, such as Third Witch in *Macbeth*, Hazlewood was billed as a comic singer, performing solo songs and, less frequently, romantic duets. Having a good musical ear would later be important when he wrote melodrama. Booth points out the many music cues, such as '*music descriptive of warbling birds*,' '*music cautious*,' '*music to realize picture*,' and '*plaintive music continued piano*' in Hazlewood's *Taking the Veil, or the Harsh Step-Father* (Britannia, 1870).¹⁰

During the 1850s Hazlewood had acting engagements at a number of London theatres, starting with the Surrey Theatre in 1851, the City of London, the Cosmothea and the Marylebone Theatres. For Hazlewood, the most important of these was the City of London, situated in Norton Folgate, approximately one mile south of the Britannia. It provided him with frequent, though irregular, acting employment until at least 1862 and was the first theatre to stage one of his plays. The first of these, *Who's the Victim*, opened on 3 November 1851 and ran for one week. It does not seem to have attracted any critical attention, but his next play, a farce entitled *Going to Chobham, or The Petticoat Captains* (City of London, 1 August 1853), became a big hit and was subsequently performed at the Grecian, Strand and Marylebone Theatres.¹¹ Hazlewood himself performed one of the main characters in the original production. This acting apprenticeship was significant because it gave him invaluable practical knowledge of stagecraft and audience taste. Understanding from first-hand experience what would make an audience laugh, gasp or cry and, equally importantly, what would lose its attention, must surely have contributed to his success as a playwright.

By November 1855 when the first of Hazlewood's plays to premiere at the Britannia was produced (the domestic melodrama *Jenny Foster, the Sailor's Child, or The Winter Robin*), he was already an established dramatist with eleven plays to his credit. *Jenny Foster* proved popular with the Hoxton audience and attracted a short favourable review in the *Era* (18 November 1855). It must also have pleased the Britannia management (Sara

⁸ Playbills for 4 August and 27 September 1842, Playbills 376, BL.

⁹ See [T.W. Robertson] 'Theatrical Types: No.7 Low Comedians', *Illustrated Times*, 2 April 1864 and Jerome K. Jerome, *Stage-land* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1889) pp.21-26.

¹⁰ Michael R. Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) pp.151-52.

¹¹ At the Strand Theatre it was produced under the title *The Camp at Aldershot*.

Lane played Bessy Bluebell) as the play was revived many times. Hazlewood quickly became the Brit's most prolific writer. In fact, for the next two decades he supplied an average of ten new plays a year (see Table 3). The exception was 1861, when the theatre staged only four of the eleven new Hazlewood plays and even that would have been five if Dickens had not threatened an injunction causing the Britannia to postpone its production of *A Message from the Sea* (see below), unintentionally ensuring that the première took place at the Theatre Royal, Newcastle instead.

Despite the fact that Hazlewood wrote so many plays for the Britannia, he continued to offer plays to other theatres. It was not until 1872 and 1873 that the whole of his output was first performed at the Britannia. Nevertheless, he was associated with the Britannia more closely than other theatres, leading to the erroneous conclusion that he was employed as its house dramatist and earned a fixed weekly amount. Carados asserted that Hazlewood's "job" was to furnish forth a new drama, about every fortnight or so, at a salary varying from £3 to £5 per week!' (*Referee*, 27 January 1924). Davis points out there is no evidence to corroborate this assertion.¹² Significantly Hazlewood is not named in the list of members of the company sent to the Lord Chamberlain in 1862.¹³ Surviving agreements with Samuel Lane show that he was paid between £2 and £4 for the London right of representation of a single play.¹⁴ This compares with a weekly salary of £4 for a leading actor at the Brit and £2 for a stage manager.¹⁵

Hazlewood supplemented his income by selling the publishing rights and provincial acting rights of his dramas. Three adverts in the *Era* of October and November 1865 show the dramatist was canny about exploiting success to generate more income. The advert for 5 November, which appeared immediately under the week's notice for the Britannia, reads:

BRITANNIA, THE GREAT THEATRE HOXTON. – Sixth week and Triumphant Success of the Great Irish Sensation Drama of POUL-A-DHOIL, which can be played in the Provinces by application to the Author only, Mr. C. H. HAZLEWOOD, Britannia Theatre.

On at least one occasion Hazlewood must have sold the complete rights to the Britannia as the *Diaries* show Lane sold the rights to *Faith, Hope and Charity* to the provincial theatre manager Alfred Davis. For £6 Davis and his father acquired the

¹² *Diaries*, p.22.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.24-25.

¹⁴ Five agreements dating from March 1859 to January 1863, M4458, HA. cf. Pitt received £3 for *The Sailor's Progress* in 1849.

¹⁵ Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001) p.75.

entitlement to perform the piece in all the theatres they managed. A later entry mentions that Lane also sold the rights to the play in Liverpool, Hanley, Sheffield, Hull, Plymouth, all Ireland, and London; the manager of the Theatre Royal, Plymouth, for example, paying £5.¹⁶ Clearly, Lane made considerably more money from the play than its author. This may, however, have been atypical since the drama had excited an unusual amount of interest because it was the first to utilise Professor Pepper's ghost effect.

A series of letters Hazlewood wrote in the 1870s to Andrew Melville, an impresario who managed a number of provincial theatres, survive. These show he sold not only the manuscripts but also woodcuts for reproduction on playbills. One example reads:

Received £2.2 for MS and acting permission of my drama of *He Would be a Sailor* and 200 woodcuts appertaining to the same. The bills are now being done and shall be sent forthwith also M.S.¹⁷

Although there is plenty of evidence of Hazlewood's business dealings with the management of the Britannia theatre, there is nothing to suggest he had a social relationship with anyone at the Britannia, which is odd given the length of the association and the nature of the family-run stock company. For example, given the presence of virtually all the company, including check takers, gas engineers and wardrobe assistants, as well as the dramatist Faucquez, at Sam Lane's funeral in January 1872, it is surprising that Hazlewood did not attend – at least if he did, neither Wilton nor the author of the report in the *Era* (14 January 1872) deemed him worthy of mention.¹⁸ Moreover, in the *Diaries* Wilton makes no personal remarks about the dramatist, except to record his court appearance (see below). Hazlewood's death is recorded simply as 'C. H. Hazlewood died Monday May 31st',¹⁹ in contrast to other entries in which Wilton notes the cause of death and often other details such as funeral arrangements. It is also puzzling that Hazlewood never acted or sang at the Britannia given the lengthy engagements he enjoyed at the City of London. Perhaps there was a personality clash between the Lanes and the dramatist.

Exploiting the topical

Hazlewood was adept at spotting topics being discussed locally and making them the subject or inspiration for his dramas. For example, in 1860 the papers were full of stories about the bare-knuckle fight between Tom Sayers, the English champion, and his

¹⁶ *Diaries*, pp.65, 92.

¹⁷ Undated letter c.1874, Letter d, 0600078, Melville Collection, UoK.

¹⁸ *Diaries*, p.200.

¹⁹ Wilton CY1136, frame 998.

American opponent, John Heenan, known as the Benicia Boy. The fight, which took place on 17 April 1860, was a brutal affair in which both men were severely injured. It was only stopped after forty-two rounds, lasting more than two hours, when police intervened. The justification given by the *Illustrated Times* (21 April 1860) for its unaccustomed and lengthy reportage of the prize fight confirms how much comment the clash had provoked:

When, however, a contest like that which came off on Tuesday occurs – a contest which has been the subject of conversation in every circle of society for a month past, and which proved a thoroughly representative fight in everything for which the ‘noble art’ is upheld and condemned – we cannot abstain from giving an account of the affair for the edification of both parties.

Several dramatists recognized the fight’s potential as a dramatic subject. F.C. Burnand and M. Williams’s *B. B., or The Benicia Boy* was first performed at the Olympic Theatre on 22 March 1860, before the contest. Hazlewood’s *The Champion of England, or Tom and the Boy* was produced at the Britannia on 30 April and his *The Champion of the World, or The English Hero and the American Boy* at the Marylebone Theatre on 5 May.²⁰ In addition William Travers’s *The Champion’s Belt, or The Ring and Its Moral* was staged at the City of London Theatre in early May.²¹

Hazlewood’s two plays were light-hearted one-act sketches (termed a ‘fancy’ in the Britannia playbill).²² Both revolve around scams in which two men pretend to be the famous boxers. It is assumed that the audience admires the fighters and, like the characters in the plays, wishes it could have attended the fight. The dramatist adopts the same attitude towards the contest as a contemporary catchpenny, viewing the pugilists as heroes:

They both had pluck and courage,
Each proved himself a man,
None better since the days of Spring
In the British ring did stand.²³

This is in marked contrast to Travers’s two-act play, subtitled in the Lord Chamberlain’s licensing copy ‘A Drama of the times Written to discountenance the brutal practice of Prize-fighting’. It features a fictional fight similar to the Sayers/Heenan bout. Although Travers’s boxers are honourable, they lack judgement and persist in fighting

²⁰ ADD.MS 52992 L and ADD.MS 2993 B, BL.

²¹ It was not listed in the *Era* advert but was licensed for the City of London on 8 May (ADD. MS 52993 D, BL). A play with the same name was on at the Victoria Theatre from 7 May 1860 (*Era*, 6 May 1860).

²² Britannia playbill 32 for 28 May 1860, HA.

²³ ‘Sayers’ & Heenan’s Great Fight for the Championship’ reproduced in Charles Hindley, *Curiosities of Street Literature* (London: Seven Dials, 1969); first publ. 1871; vol. 2, unnumbered.

despite the imploring of the heroine (sister to the English fighter and lover of the American pugilist). The American dies as a result of injuries sustained in the fight, causing the heroine's father to conclude:

Yes – he's gone – and let those who hold up prize fighting as Noble, manly and honourable, look upon that young man cut off in the prime of life – and Read the Moral Here. (2.5; f.22)

Hazlewood's boxing plays were moderately successful: the *Britannia* one ran for six weeks to the amusement of the audience: '... the relish with which it was enjoyed was evidenced in alternate laughter and applause throughout' (*Era*, 3 June 1860). In this instance Hazlewood had successfully turned a topical event into a non-judgemental, entertaining and amusing diversion. Lane sought to further milk Sayers's popularity by engaging the pugilist as Clown in the 1862 pantomime *Abon Hassan, The Sleeper of Bagdad and the Fairy Elves of the Enchanted Mosque* (see Plate 6.1). A bill advertising his involvement suggests his contribution was somewhat bizarre:

The retired Champion of England, who will appear in the Transformation Scene wearing the Champion's Prize Belt, also in the Comic Scenes with his Two celebrated Mules, Barney & Pete.²⁴

In *The Casual Ward, or Workhouse Life* (1866) Hazlewood dealt with another topical, but much more serious issue. The play was a result of Hazlewood's collaboration with Joseph Cave, with whom he had a long-standing connection. Cave had acted at the *Britannia Saloon* on its opening night in 1841 (see Chapter 1) and subsequently became manager of the *Marylebone* (1858-1868 and 1873-1883) and *Victoria Theatres* (1867-1871). During the early 1850s Hazlewood performed in comic sketches at the *Cosmotheca*, 'a queer little place, half theatre and half music-hall, somewhere in Bayswater',²⁵ which was owned and run by Cave. He also acted for Cave at the *Marylebone* for periods of varying lengths from 1858 until 1866, often appearing in his own plays.

The Casual Ward was one of three pieces advertised on playbills as 'constructed by Mr. J. Arnold Cave, written by Mr. Hazlewood'.²⁶ These collaborative works are radically different, ranging from rural melodrama, gritty urban melodrama and bloodthirsty criminal drama. *The Casual Ward*, is typical of the urban melodramas, such as Hazlewood's *The Work Girls of London* (*Britannia*, December 1864), that were popular in the 1860s. It

²⁴ Undated playbill for New *Britannia Theatre*, Hoxton, *Britannia Playbills*, Guildhall Library.

²⁵ Erroll Sherson, *London's Lost Theatres of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Bodley Head, 1925) p.285.

²⁶ For example, playbill for 13 October 1866 advertising *The Old Toll House*, *Marylebone Theatre* playbills June-December 1866, Westminster City Archives.

dramatised an article of 1866 by the Amateur Casual (James Greenwood) in *The Pall Mall Gazette*.²⁷ This had caused considerable outrage for its graphic exposure of the degradation suffered by the ‘honest poor’ when forced to spend the night in a workhouse. Greenwood, like his readership, is middle class, and temporarily disguises himself as working class in order to infiltrate the frightening world of the underclass and expose it for shocked scrutiny to those with no personal experience of this ‘other’ London. According to Keating, Greenwood and other ‘social explorers’ ‘. . . emphasize that poverty dictates how people behave and that it is meaningless to try to bring to bear easy middle-class morality’.²⁸

The story was widely reported, including a cartoon in *Punch, or The London Charivari* (3 February 1866), and so reached a far larger readership than the original article. Hazlewood’s version was staged simultaneously at the Marylebone, the Pavilion and the Britannia in February 1866.²⁹ It interweaves a typical melodramatic story in which a villain wrongly accuses one honest man of embezzlement and plots to defraud another of an inheritance, with a naturalistic realization of the Lambeth workhouse Greenwood described. There is a fundamental difference in the relationship between the journalist and his readers and that of the dramatist and his audience. Instead of shocking the audience with an unknown world, the play reflects the reality of local life, where the workhouse was a constant threat for many struggling to survive on minimal incomes. (The new Shoreditch Workhouse, situated close to the Brit, was completed in 1866, see Map.) Moreover, by framing the workhouse depiction within a plot that shows poverty can be no excuse for wrongdoing, Hazlewood champions conventional middle-class morality.

This fits with Hoggart’s notion of working-class art as ‘a “showing” (rather than an “exploration”), a presentation of what is already known.’³⁰ Certainly, the detailed stage directions and set drawing for the workhouse scene in the Britannia prompt copy show great attention was given to realizing fully Greenwood’s original description.³¹ The audience could admire the verisimilitude of the presentation not only to the article (which most would not have read), but also to East End life. A review of the Britannia production (*Era*, 25 February 1866) suggests this was a major attraction:

²⁷ Reprinted in Peter Keating, ed., *Into Unknown England 1866-1913: Selections from the Social Explorers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976) pp.33-54.

²⁸ Keating, p.18.

²⁹ Jim Davis, ‘A Night in the Workhouse, or The Poor Laws as Sensation Drama’, *Essays in Theatre*, 7.2 (1989) 111-26.

³⁰ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992) p.120.

³¹ PETT MSS.C.20, Pettingell Collection, UoK.

... [the actors] have each and all had a hand – or rather voice – in the carrying out of the plot of the drama, which has been the means of introducing a capital local picture to the audience – ‘Shoreditch on a Saturday Night,’ the stalls of the poor vendors of fruit and vegetables, &c., as well as the vendors themselves, being represented with striking fidelity.

Not all the reviews were so favourable. An article in *All the Year Round* was vitriolic about the workhouse being embodied realistically, and in particular by the engagement of the real ‘Old Daddy’ at the Marylebone: ‘In the name of pity, decency, humanity, let every right-minded person discourage and denounce exhibitions, the essential brutality of which is not redeemed by the slightest pretext of grace or beauty.’³² A similar piece in *Punch* suggested that the next step would be to stage ‘*The Union Infirmary*, with a score of real paupers all lying really ill. Or a sensation scene of surgery perhaps might prove attractive, and a real leg or arm be amputated nightly, before a crowded house.’ The writer objects to such stage portrayals on the grounds of taste and because ‘Playgoers will thus become familiarised with horrors, which they read of with dismay; . . .’³³

Implicit in the work of social explorers such as Greenwood is the assumption that the working class is incapable of speaking for itself and must be interpreted through a ‘foreign’ intermediary. In contrast, Hazlewood was working class like his audience. Not only were his and his wife’s parents tailors, but, apart from the three who followed their father into theatrical professions,³⁴ all his children had working-class occupations, such as purse or brush maker. Despite writing so many plays, his earnings were not substantial. They were in line with the income of many who attended the Britannia, Davis and Emeljanow estimating that the span of wages across Hoxton was probably akin to that paid to the Britannia’s staff, from £4 to 9s a week.³⁵ Letters Hazlewood wrote to the publisher Thomas Hailes Lacy reveal that he was continually suffering financial difficulties.³⁶ In one he wrote ‘I have not a shilling in the world until I finish something’, and in another he requests a £2 loan as ‘I have been laid up this month with the Erysipelas – not able to do anything. . .’³⁷ The family moved frequently from one rented accommodation to another, a common practice among the working and lower-middle classes, although Hazlewood may

³² ‘Calamity-Mongering’, *All the Year Round* (3 March 1866) 188.

³³ ‘Another Drop for the Drama’, *Punch, or The London Charivari* (17 March 1866) 117.

³⁴ Henry Colin Hazlewood (1838-1897), actor, playwright and manager of theatres in Wolverhampton; Eliza Hazlewood (1839-1876), actress and playwright and from October 1868 to March 1869 manageress of Sadler’s Wells Theatre; and Sydney Hazlewood (c.1855-unknown), actor in Liverpool.

³⁵ Davis and Emeljanow, p.75

³⁶ In that he was the same as George Dibdin Pitt; see John Russell Stephens, ‘Playwright *in extremis*: George Dibdin Pitt Revisited’, *Theatre Notebook* 53,1 (1999) 41-47.

³⁷ Letters dated 25 March 1869 and 23 October 1871, M809 and M812, HA.

or may not have indulged in ‘shooting the moon’, flitting accommodation at night to avoid paying rent.³⁸ The 1871 census shows that the dramatist (long estranged from his wife³⁹ and then living with three of his sons, all of working age) had no servant. Branca calculates that in 1867 a family needed an annual income of £100-300 in order to employ a single ‘maid-of-all-work’ servant.⁴⁰ By contrast, Wilton’s diaries reveal that he and his wife Amelia, who also lived near to the Britannia, employed a live-in servant.⁴¹ Although Hazlewood’s financial situation was never so dire that he had to attend the workhouse, one of his daughters – the dancer and actress, Eliza Hazlewood – died of pulmonary tuberculosis (consumption) at the Lambeth workhouse infirmary in 1876 (ironically, the workhouse featured in her father’s play).⁴²

1867, a sample year’s work

Given Hazlewood’s writing prolificacy, it is impractical to assess his unique contribution to the Britannia by evaluating each of his plays individually. A close study of his output as seen on the London stage in one sample year, 1867, does, however, establish the dominant features of his work. In 1867 fifteen of his plays were premièred at the Brit and two at the Pavilion, Whitechapel (see Table 4). In addition, the pantomime *The Princess of the Pearl Island, or the Three Kingdoms of Pearl, Gold and Silver* that had opened at the Brit the preceding December, continued to be performed in the new year as did Hazlewood’s 1866 pantomime at the Pavilion (*Sinbad the Sailor, or Harlequin, Old Man of the Sea, the Emperor, the Ogre, the Fairy and the Princess*). Eight other Hazlewood plays were revived at the Brit during the year, and more revivals appeared at the Marylebone, Victoria and Sadler’s Wells theatres. The most important of these was the Sadler’s Wells revival of *Jeanie Deans, or the Lily of St Leonard’s*, one of several plays that Hazlewood adapted from Walter Scott’s *The Heart of Midlothian*.⁴³ It had opened at the Standard in September 1862, and its star, Alice Marriott, toured the play for many years. Newton contended that

³⁸ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) p.223.

³⁹ They were already living apart by September 1865 when he was charged with violently assaulting her (*The Times*, 9 September 1865). The charge was subsequently dropped. Ellen née Huff died in 1890.

⁴⁰ Patricia Branca, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), p.54, based on statistics in R.D. Baxter, *National Income* (London, 1975).

⁴¹ Wilton CY 1136, frames 178, 678, 953 and 1070.

⁴² Entry in the Death Register for 26 August 1876, Family Records Office.

⁴³ The other versions are *Jeannie Deans, or The Sisters of St Leonard’s* (Marylebone, 14 February 1863); *Jeannie of Midlothian, or, The Loves of Effie and Madge Wildfire* (Pavilion, 14 February 1863) and a burlesque *Jeannie Deans; or The Rival of Deerfoot* (Britannia, 16 March 1863). One version was also published by Lacy.

Hazlewood's adaptation was superior to and more popular than Boucicault's version even though the latter had 'several important stars'.⁴⁴

The 1868 *Era Almanack* contains a list of 'New pieces produced at the London Theatres in 1867' excluding pantomimes.⁴⁵ Hazlewood had scripted fourteen of the 125 titles (over eleven per cent) for the Britannia. (Only three other titles, all by the actor J.B. Howe, were listed for the Britannia.) In a letter to the Lord Chamberlain in 1868, Donne, the Examiner of Plays, notes that the number of plays sent for examination each year had been declining, particularly once adaptations of French plays are discounted. He asserts this is due neither to audiences falling off, nor the rival attractions of music hall. Instead he attributes it to the long run:

...but the particular source of the deficit is one agreeable to put on record – viz – a general improvement in the character of the more popular Plays. The long runs are not the effect of mere whim on the part of the audiences neither of mere luck on the part of the authors and managers. The public is not only a judge of what it likes, but, in the main, a good judge also of what is good.⁴⁶

The Britannia bucked this trend and Donne's figures show the number of plays the theatre submitted in a year increased from fifteen in 1861 to twenty-one in 1867.

Two of Hazlewood's 1867 pieces are burlesques, two are pantomimes and the remainder are melodramas. This is typical of his output as a whole. One melodrama, *The Old Maid in the Winding Sheet, or The Dream of a Coquette* was subject to confusion. Wilton referred to its production at the Britannia on 6 May as a revival.⁴⁷ He was correct; an advert and a review in the *Era* (11 and 18 May 1862) prove the play had been performed in May 1862. However, five years later the Examiner of Plays 'did not remember [it] having been licensed' so the play was sent to the Lord Chamberlain's office and duly licensed on 18 June. Wilton suggests Donne had a poor opinion of the playwright:

Mr W.B. Donne said he did not attach one atom of blame to the management of the Britannia Theatre, nor did he mean to put them to one penny expense – but he feared they had been imposed upon by

⁴⁴ H. Chance Newton, *Crime and the Drama, or Dark Deeds Dramatized* (London: Stanley Paul, 1927) p.267. Boucicault's version, *The Trial of Effie Deans, or The Heart of Midlothian*, opened at Astley's Amphitheatre on 26 January 1864.

⁴⁵ *Era Almanack*, 1868, 58-59.

⁴⁶ LC1/200, Document 3, National Archives.

⁴⁷ *Diaries*, p.123.

the author (Hazlewood) bringing them a M.S.S. and saying it had been licensed for, & played at a country Theatre.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the *Register of Lord Chamberlain's Plays*⁴⁹ reveals that in his role as censor Donne made few changes to Hazlewood's plays. The only work that suffered substantial censorship was *The Casual Ward* where Hazlewood's unusually strong invective against the Poor Law Guardians was completely toned down.⁵⁰ This makes an interesting contrast with George Dibdin Pitt, whom Stephens has shown to be 'the most censored playwright of the nineteenth century'.⁵¹ Either Hazlewood had no desire to write subversive material or he tailored his work knowing what was likely to cause offence to the Examiner of Plays and aware that he would not be paid for a banned play. *The Collier's Strike*, performed in June 1867 and described by Wilton as 'Hazlewood's concoction & not licensed',⁵² might have proved one of these hypotheses, but sadly there is no surviving copy or review. It was a topical subject; the *Illustrated Times* (12 January 1867) reported on a strike at Edmund's Main Colliery, Yorkshire, in which miners demanded safer working conditions, following a fatal explosion at the colliery in 1862 in which fifty-nine men had died.⁵³ Hazlewood's play must not have been brought to the attention of the Lord Chamberlain's office as no further mention is made in the *Diaries*. In contrast, on 23 September 1872 Wilton writes: 'Letter from the Lord Chamberlain demanding copies of all songs sung at the Britannia – saying he had been informed one had been sung inciting to 'strikes' & another on the 'Tichborne Case' which was also objectionable . . .'.⁵⁴

That Hazlewood was not politically motivated is suggested by the fact that none of his 1867 dramas refers to the passing of the second Reform Act, which entitled nearly a million working men to vote for the first time. The Act enfranchised urban males who owned or rented property, and who paid rates, and had been resident for at least a year.⁵⁵ It is reasonable to suppose that some of the Britannia's adult male audience members must

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.124.

⁴⁹ ADD.MS 53,703 (1852-1865) and ADD.MS 53,704 (1866-1873), BL.

⁵⁰ See Jim Davis, 'A Night in the Workhouse, or The Poor Laws as Sensation Drama', *Essays in Theatre* 7,2 (1989) 111-26.

⁵¹ Stephens, 'Playwright in extremis', 41-47.

⁵² *Diaries*, p.125.

⁵³ Explosion reported in *The Times*, 9 December 1862, 6.

⁵⁴ *Diaries*, p.209.

⁵⁵ Llewellyn Woodward, *The Age of Reform 1815-1870*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962) p.186 and Adam C. Roberts, *Victorian Culture and Society: The Essential Glossary* (London: Arnold, 2003) pp.185-87.

have been among the nearly one million new voters so enfranchised, yet Hazlewood chose to ignore this most important of contemporary issues.

Many of those who gave evidence to the Select Committee on Theatrical Licences and Regulations in 1866 claimed that theatre audiences would themselves censor politics in drama. For example, Boucicault reported that in his experience political allusions 'did not answer' on the English stage.⁵⁶ Hazlewood may have recognised this or his cautiousness may have been an acknowledgement of the Lanes' clear desire not to produce contentious or subversive material. An 1890 feature about Sara attests to her conservatism:

One of the maxims of her scheme of management has been to have nothing said or done upon the stage that shall tend to debase the minds of those who give her their support. Without lending hersel[f] to the cant that is affected by some who ever lastingly preach of Art – with a very big A – and the Elevation – with a very big E – of the Stage, she has striven diligently, patiently, and with persistent enthusiasm, to inculcate a taste among her audience for plays that teach a moral lesson, and while her first aim has been to amuse, she has not failed to instruct. Needless to say, therefore, that 'the legitimate' is always a safe draw at the Britannia.⁵⁷

Some critics assert that the melodramatic form itself is inherently not radical. Raymond Williams notes that with plots centred on property and inheritance, it is an essentially bourgeois form.⁵⁸ Hazlewood's *The Work Girls of London*, which was immensely popular both at the Britannia (with sixty-seven separate performances, Davis calculates it was the second most performed play there between 1863 and 1874)⁵⁹ and in the provinces, provides an interesting case study. Although it acknowledges the poverty and real distress of the sempstresses who have to 'toil like slaves to keep life and soul together' (2.6), it concludes with an appeal to employers to behave nobly. The hero, Edward Warden, suggests that fair and adequate payment for workers is a gift to be bestowed by reasonable employers, not something that workers can demand or achieve for themselves:

⁵⁶ Q4143, 1866 Report.

⁵⁷ 'Women of the World, No.V. Mrs. Sara Lane', 31 May 1890, unknown publication, Britannia clippings, HA.

⁵⁸ Raymond Williams, 'The popularity of melodrama', *New Society*, 24 April 1980, 171.

⁵⁹ Jim Davis, 'The Gospel of Rags: Melodrama at the Britannia, 1863-74', *New Theatre Quarterly* 7,28 (1991) 370.

Let industry prosper but be fairly and better paid
Masters and Mistresses don't cut down your work
People to undersell the trade
Live and let live do this and humanity will be your debtor
And the work girls of London will be wiser happier and better. (2.6)⁶⁰

Although he does not advocate a drastic change in society, Hazlewood's suggestion certainly did not reflect conservative thinking. In the circumstances at that time, the message can legitimately be termed radical.

With the exception of J.B. Howe, none of the actors in the Britannia company of 1867 wrote autobiographies, so there are no testimonies to show their response to Hazlewood's writing. A playbill for the Britannia Festival of 18 December 1867, however, lists the performers and the part in which they each appeared, thereby indicating which of the year's characters the actors thought were the most memorable.⁶¹ The festival words were written by actor John Parry, who chose to appear as Gonzalez from Hazlewood's *The King's Death Trap*. Sara portrayed two roles written by Hazlewood (Marguerite from the *Faust* burlesque and the eponymous heroine from *Cherry and Fair Star*). Wilton and Celeste Stephan appeared as themselves (the Stage Manager and 'La Première Danseuse du Theatre') and nine of the remaining twenty-one performers appeared as Hazlewood characters.⁶² The festival was also the occasion of the first performance of Hazlewood's *Who Did It?*

ADAPTATIONS AND REALIZATIONS

Hazlewood was an inveterate exploiter of other art forms and many of these 1867 pieces were adaptations of novels, penny publications, paintings or other plays. Plagiarism from other art forms was endemic in the mid-Victorian theatre for financial and practical reasons. Adaptations were popular with audiences and enabled the illiterate or poor to have access to a range of stories. Moreover, adaptations had ready-made publicity, so found favour with theatre managements. The advantages for the dramatist of exploiting an existing source rather than creating an original piece are obvious where demand insisted upon a quick turnover of plays.

The 1833 Dramatic Copyright Act had provided some protection to dramatists by enshrining that the author had the sole property of an unpublished work and the exclusive

⁶⁰ ADD.MS 53038 F, BL.

⁶¹ UKC/BIG/POS/LDN BRI: 0648848, UoK.

⁶² Two of those who did not, Cecil Pitt and J.B. Howe, appeared in characters from their own plays.

rights of its representation. In 1842 the Copyright Amendment Act established copyright for forty-two years, or seven years after the author's death.⁶³ Significantly neither act addressed the question of the dramatisation of novels and neither protected the work of British authors abroad. Hazlewood, like many other dramatists, benefited from this as French drama provided one of the most lucrative areas for adaptation. It was not until 1886 that the International Copyright Act secured rights for authors in the fourteen countries that had signed the Berne Convention of 1885.⁶⁴

The lack of copyright restrictions encouraged playwrights to plagiarise, though authors increasingly tried to exercise control over their material. An undated Britannia playbill from early November 1860 carries the following notice:

The Management having been called upon under a threat of injunction to suppress the performance of *Eily O'Connor*, the action of the piece having been founded on a recent successful Play of DION BOUCICAULT, Esquire, conceded at once the right of the Dramatist, and offered to withdraw the piece. The Management beg to acknowledge on his part a liberal and kind reception of that offer, by a prompt permission to continue the representation.⁶⁵

Boucicault's action could be construed as hypocritical since the play he is defending, *The Colleen Bawn* (Adelphi, 1860), was itself adapted from Gerald Griffin's novel *The Collegians*, although it is true that he substantially altered the story so that the heroine does not drown. Despite threatening an injunction, according to the evidence he gave to the Select Committee on Theatrical Licences and Regulations in 1866, he and Benjamin Webster (manager of the Adelphi) believed that the Britannia 'was so far off that it would not interfere with the attraction of the piece at the Adelphi'.⁶⁶ (He was surely correct; in the 1860s, given the expense and difficulty of using public transport to reach the West End, Britannia patrons would not have travelled to Drury Lane, the Lyceum or to Paris to see the original shows on which some of the theatre's dramatic fare was based.) Samuel Lane, as ever, seems to have wished to have avoided confrontation and bowed to Boucicault's pressure. This was probably the wisest action to have taken as Boucicault successfully prevented F.B. Egan of the Queen's Theatre, Manchester from staging the dramatic cave scene in Charles Horsman's *The Lost Bride of Garryowen, or St. Patrick's Eve*, which

⁶³ Stephens, *Profession*, pp.91-98.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.114.

⁶⁵ Playbills TM, 2 of 13.

⁶⁶ Q4422, 1866 Report.

Egan had argued was based solely on *The Collegians* and not on Boucicault's adaptation (*Era*, 11 and 25 November 1860).

A similar incident occurred in January 1861 when Dickens threatened an injunction after the Brit announced a production of Hazlewood's version of *A Message from the Sea*, the story written by Dickens and Wilkie Collins that had been published in the Christmas 1860 edition of *All the Year Round*. Dickens had registered a short dramatisation of the story at the Stationers' Company with the intention of acting against the first theatre that attempted to stage an unauthorised adaptation. By his own confession, Dickens had been reluctant to pursue the matter against the Britannia because of his admiration for Sam Lane 'a gentleman for whom I have a respect',⁶⁷ but he wanted to establish a precedent that no work of fiction could be dramatized or adapted for the stage without the author's consent. The matter was resolved when the Brit paid Dickens £50 and received his 'kind permission' to perform the piece. Hazlewood wrote to Dickens to ask permission for his adaptation to be shown in the provinces: 'I seek not permission for any but provincial theatres and if I am asking too much I trust that you will pardon an obscure individual soliciting such a favor from the consideration of genius.'⁶⁸ Unfortunately for Hazlewood's bank balance, Dickens refused. Another instance of the Britannia paying authors considerably more than adapters occurred in February 1873 when Sara Lane agreed to pay £1 per night to the author of the novel on which Hazlewood's *Mabel Lake* was founded.⁶⁹

In its adaptation of works of 'high culture' the Britannia can be seen as an agent for that culture even though it was operating in a 'low' cultural environment. Playbills show that the theatre's management enthusiastically promoted the connection between its dramas and their famous sources, treating it as a positive selling point. There was no attempt to hide the information (the reverse of normal plagiarism). Indeed, the playbill for 29 September 1856, which advertises the first production of *Dred! A Tale of the Dismal Swamp, or Poor Uncle Tiff!*, based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, suggests the Britannia is fulfilling a vital public service by adapting the novel:

At the present important crisis, when the attention of the whole civilised world is fixed on the momentous struggle going on in America the deepest interest must attend a New work from the gifted genius, which, by 'Uncle Tom' struck the heaviest blow and the greatest discouragement ever dealt to Slavery. Ever in the foremost ranks, the Britannia lends her powerful impulse to the Good Cause,

⁶⁷ Letter to the Editor of *The Times*, 8 January 1861, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed., Graham Storey, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) vol. 9, p.364.

⁶⁸ K.J. Fielding, 'Charles Reade and Dickens – A Fight Against Piracy', *Theatre Notebook* 10 (1956) 109.

⁶⁹ *Diaries*, p.211.

by hastening to bring forward a Brilliant Dramatic Adaptation of the New Transatlantic Novel of DRED! A TALE OF THE DISMAL SWAMP. The just celebrity of this Establishment for the production of all Great Novelties, is a guarantee of the style in which this Drama will be presented to the Public, and the Management congratulates itself in thus early securing this great gratification for the Patrons of the Britannia.⁷⁰

It could be argued that the Britannia had more justification than the West End theatres for staging such adaptations as a large part of its audience was only semi-literate and therefore unable (especially given the price of novels) to read the original source. (Webb estimates that across the nation two-thirds to three-quarters of the working classes were literate in the early Victorian period.)⁷¹ The theatrical experience for this audience was therefore different from that encountered by the patrons of West End productions, a large number of whom would have read the novels in question and whose focus would have been on how they were translated to the stage.

Although the theatres saw the potential of milking the publicity of established novels and plays, the dramatists themselves were sometimes sensitive when charged with being unoriginal. For example, Hazlewood wrote a letter to the *Era* (3 February 1861) complaining about its review of his nautical drama *The Staff of Diamonds*, which had opened at the Surrey Theatre on 14 January:

You say that 'the Drama, if not entirely written for this theatre, is expressly *adapted* for the Surrey boards.' If by those remarks you wish to imply that the piece is of foreign origin, I can assure you that such is not the case. I can claim originality for it, if nothing else.

Another Britannia dramatist, William Seaman, had complained in a similar vein in August 1859 and received a somewhat grudging retraction (*Era*, 21 August 1859):

In our notice of the performances at this theatre on the 7th inst, we said that the new drama of *Annie Monksworth* was taken from one of the periodicals of the day. In this, by a letter which we have received from the author, Mr. Seaman, it appears we were deceived, the piece being, in every respect but the name of one of the characters, original. This may be strictly correct, as we doubt not in the least it is, and yet a coincidence between a tale and a drama exist nevertheless, and such an [sic] one our brain is now beating on, though, as the author says, his piece is a pure invention of his own.

⁷⁰ Britannia playbill for 29 September 1856, Playbills 376, BL.

⁷¹ R.K. Webb, 'The Victorian Reading Public' in Boris Ford, ed., *The New Penguin Guide to Literature*, vol. 6 *From Dickens to Hardy*, revised edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982) p.206.

Seaman was involved in a more serious dispute over plagiarism in 1863 when he took an action against the owner of the Theatre Royal, Liverpool claiming that Boucicault's *Jessie Browne, or The Relief of Lucknow* was derived from his own 1858 Britannia play of the same name. Seaman lost the case and was imprisoned over the costs of the court case.⁷²

While it is clear that authors, dramatists and managers had conflicting views on originality, mainly defined by their own financial interests, audiences seem to have had a more relaxed response. There is no evidence to suggest they objected when Hazlewood recycled ideas and plots in his plays. *The Old Toll House, or Life's Cross Roads* (Marylebone, 1861) was, according to Cave, 'a drama . . . I have never known fail'.⁷³ This was despite the fact that its plot is remarkably similar to one of Hazlewood's most popular plays, *Waiting for the Verdict, or, Falsely Accused* (City of London, January 1859). In both, an essentially decent peasant is forced into poaching by poverty, hides in a wood, is arrested on suspicion of violent crime because of circumstantial evidence, is tried in court, and finally saved from hanging when the real criminal's identity is revealed. These characteristics could describe innumerable mid-century domestic melodramas. The lasting popularity of such dramas is proven by the fact *Waiting for the Verdict* was still being performed at the Grecian and the Brit in 1866 and 1868 respectively.⁷⁴ Nelson Lee, manager of the City of London Theatre, noted in his evidence to the 1866 Select Committee that it ran for 'nearly a whole season', was very profitable and that its audience had been 'Very attentive'.⁷⁵

For the audience the appeal of such plays was obviously not originality; it must have been the actors' individual performances and the ingenuity with which playwrights created novelty within the formulaic whole. Indeed, part of the attraction of melodrama was the reassurance of knowing what would happen, that it would conclude with good triumphing over evil. Brooks describes melodrama as the playing out of 'the essential moral universe' and argues it 'is built on an irreducible Manichaeism, the conflict of good and evil as opposites not subject to compromise'.⁷⁶ In an article first published in *Household Words* in 1858 Wilkie Collins makes a similar point about the fiction found in the 'penny-novel-Journals'. He is struck by the 'extraordinary sameness' of the serial stories he read in five randomly picked journals.

⁷² *Diaries*, pp.68 and 222, and Richard Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault* (London: Quartet Books, 1979) p.134.

⁷³ J.A. Cave, p.211.

⁷⁴ Grecian playbill 407 for 19 November 1866, HA, and *Diaries*, p.149.

⁷⁵ Q4984, 1866 Report.

⁷⁶ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) pp.14-15 and 36.

Each part of each successive story, settled down in turn, as I read it, to the same dead level of the smoothest and flattest conventionality. A combination of fierce melodrama and meek domestic sentiment; . . . descriptions and reflections for the beginning of the number, and a 'strong situation,' dragged in by the neck and shoulders, for the end – formed the common literary sources from which the five authors drew their weekly supply; all collecting it by the same means; all carrying it in the same quantities; all pouring it out before the attentive public in the same way. . . . There seems to be an intense in-dwelling respectability in their dullness.⁷⁷

Collins attributes what he identifies as a problem to the ignorance of readers, who have not yet learnt to appreciate great literature. He was making a qualitative judgement about the fiction and would presumably have viewed Hazlewood's melodramas similarly. This is perhaps to miss the point. The audience responds to the comfort of the familiar. For Booth, witnessing this type of melodrama is an escapist activity, the playing out of 'a dream world inhabited by dream people and dream justice, offering audiences the fulfilment and satisfaction found only in dreams.'⁷⁸ Goodlad challenges this analysis, arguing that the function of popular drama is more than entertainment: 'The likelihood is that they [people watching drama] are not escaping *from* their social obligations, but escaping *into* an understanding of society, which is necessary to them for their participation in society.'⁷⁹ This would have been reinforced by the fact that, in contrast to the solitary activity of reading, watching melodramas at the Britannia was a shared experience.

Adaptation technique

Hazlewood's adaptations included humorous burlesques, such as *Faust, or Marguerite's Mangle* (1867) and *The New King Richard III* (1878), in which the central stories were treated comically, and pantomimes that incorporated a single element of a plot or character, such as the *Ivanhoe* figure in the 1867 Pavilion pantomime *Robin Hood and his Merry Men, or Harlequin Ivanhoe, The Knight Templar and the Jewess*. The majority of the adaptations were treated melodramatically. Rather than adapting whole plays, Hazlewood often exploited sensational incidents from them. For example, *Jack O'Lantern, or The Blue Ribbon of the Turf*, with its plot centred on race fixing at the Derby, is the 'latest reflection' of Boucicault's *The Flying Scud* (*Era*, 14 July 1867). By June 1867 Boucicault's play had already been on at the Holborn Theatre for nine consecutive months:

⁷⁷ Wilkie Collins, 'The Unknown Public', *Household Words* 18 (21 August 1858) 221.

⁷⁸ Michael R. Booth, *English Melodrama*, (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965) p.14.

⁷⁹ J.S.R. Goodlad, *A Sociology of Popular Drama* (London: Heinemann, 1971) p.178.

Hazlewood's racing drama ran for five weeks. Likewise, the sensation scene in *The Last Link of Love* in which the heroine falls in the water at a ravine owes much to the famous cave scene in Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn*, which Hazlewood had already borrowed for the climax of his Hibernian drama *Poul a Dhoil, or The Fairy Man* (Britannia, 4 October 1865) and copied in *Eily O'Connor* (see Chapter 6).

Newton attests to Hazlewood's technique of recycling material from other sources:

He used to take in the popular periodicals of the time, such as *The London Journal*, *The London Reader*, *Reynold's Miscellany*. [sic] *The Welcome Guest*, and other such publications, alas! long since defunct. To these Hazlewood added all the 'penny bloods' of his young days, and later of mine, such as *The Boys of England*, *The Young Men of Great Britain*, and all the highwaymen stories and similar cheap books.

Hazlewood, or one of us working with him, would run through these periodicals, jotting down the main incidents in the stories thereof, and scissoring out here and there sundry aphorisms, axioms, and moral sentiments and so forth. These were docketed alphabetically, and when Colin (a dear old fellow) was engaged in writing, or in sticking down, a new play for the Brit, etc., he or his assistants would take down from the shelf sundry envelopes containing these aphorisms, such as 'Ambition is,' etc., or 'Kindness of heart.' etc., and so forth, and would pop these moral, patriotic and other reflections into the play-script then under way.⁸⁰

Given the small sums of money he received for each play, it seems surprising that Hazlewood would have employed assistants. Most likely his 'assistants' were the men paid by the Britannia's management to copy the scripts, prompt books and parts.

Although Hazlewood's formulaic method sounds a recipe for producing dry dialogue, in practice he often handled the aphorisms wittily. In numerous plays he inserted sententiae into the concluding speech as a direct commentary to the audience. Commonly they take the form of rhyming couplets. For example, at the close of *The Old Maid in the Winding Sheet*, Edith advises the audience of what she has learnt during the course of the play:

Well friends you see I cant [sic] a husband get
I suppose they think me still a vain Coquette
But they're all mistaken for now I see
Woman's best safeguard is Constancy
Ladies choose with Judgement be firm
In mind in temper sweet
And take warning by the old Maid in the Winding Sheet.
Curtain (2.2)⁸¹

⁸⁰ Newton, *Crime*, pp.203-04.

⁸¹ ADD.MS 53060 F, BL, f.28

Frequently Sara Lane was Hazlewood's mouthpiece. In *Jenny Foster* she played Bessy Bluebell, a kind-hearted country girl, who in witty and punning exchanges with her lover Jack Raddipole, the baker's boy, is given to remarks such as 'A roll in the bin of misfortune may make a man turn crusty.'⁸² Continuing the baker's shop theme, she tells him: 'But a good heart, Jack is like a good customer, it pays you with interest for your labour, and encourages you to lay in a fresh stock.' It is interesting to speculate how much Sara's offstage persona and her elevated standing in the community lent weight to her onstage utterances, or vice versa. In many cases it is possible to guess which part she played just by reading a playscript. As one reviewer noted (*Era*, 13 October 1867):

A collection of the pungent and sparkling figurative sayings which this lady is accustomed to utter in her different characters would make a considerably large and amusing book of proverbs, emblems and *repartee*.

Adapting cheap publications

Hazlewood is known to have supplemented his income by writing for cheap periodicals. A review of *Lady Jane Grey* (1874) describes it as 'Hazlewood's dramatic version of his own tale in the *Penny Miscellany*' (*Era*, 31 May 1874). Likewise, his 1871 Britannia play *The Lost Wife, or A Husband's Confession* was a dramatisation of his story, *Saxilby Manor*, which was serialised in the *Gentleman's Journal* from November 1869.⁸³ The same publication also printed Hazlewood's poem 'Abel Flint, The Miser' in its Recitation Supplement of 1 December 1869. It was a reworking of the story Hazlewood had dramatised as *Abel Flint, or the Miser's Dream* (Britannia, 1864). Since many of the stories serialised in cheap publications were published anonymously it is possible that he had other fiction published. No copies of his novel, *Splendid Misery*, appear to have survived. Its existence is only known because Summers reports that in 1880 Mary Elizabeth Braddon was forced to rename her novel, also originally called *Splendid Misery*, after John Dicks issued an injunction claiming copyright in the title since he had already published Hazlewood's work in the Dicks' English novels series.⁸⁴

Of Hazlewood's 1867 pieces, six were adaptations of stories by other authors printed in popular periodicals: *The Gray Ladye of Fernlea* and *Who Did It?* were taken from *Bow*

⁸² *Jenny Foster, The Sailor's Child, or The Winter Robin*, Lacy's Acting Edition of Plays vol. 32 (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d) p.24.

⁸³ I am grateful to Helen R. Smith for alerting me to the existence of *Saxilby Manor*.

⁸⁴ Montague Summers, *A Gothic Bibliography* (London: The Fortune Press, 1940) p.581.

Bells; *Pale Janet* from the *London Journal*; *The Old Maid in the Winding Sheet* from an unspecified 'popular Periodical';⁸⁵ and *Alone in the Pirates' Lair* and *Wild Charley* from *The Boys of England*. Creating successful adaptations was quite a skill, not least because of the speed with which the dramatist had to work. For example, the play of *The Gray Ladye of Fernlea* premièred on 9 September 1867, just two months after the serialisation of the fiction finished.

The two stories Hazlewood adapted from the *Boys of England*, 'Alone in the Pirates' Lair' and 'Wild Charley, the Link Boy of Old London', are exciting tales of bravery and derring-do, packed with sensational incident. Both were written by the journal's editor, Charles Stevens. 'Alone in the Pirates' Lair' features a young midshipman who, aided by an English ex-buccaneer, outwits villainous pirates and sustains a patriotic victory. Nautical melodramas were a staple of the stage from the 1820s and Hazlewood had already scripted several, including *Life's Trials by Sea and Land, or The Child of the Waves* (City of London, 1856) and *Ashore and Afloat* (Surrey, 1864).

Given away with each issue featuring 'Alone in the Pirates' Lair' was part of a toy theatre version ultimately 'consisting of Eight Scenes, Seven sheets of Characters, Six Wings and Foot-pieces, and a Large Stage Front.'⁸⁶ Later editions offered the set for 6d, the same price as a seat in the pit at the Brit. Juvenile dramas for performing in toy theatres were usually derived from actual stage productions,⁸⁷ but uniquely Hazlewood's stage version, *Alone in the Pirate's Lair, or Danger and Fatality*, succeeded, not preceded, the toy theatre drama. A juvenile who could afford a fourpenny or threepenny seat in the Brit's gallery could have purchased a penny journal, so local youths may have watched the stage production after enacting the toy version.

Comparing the playscript of *Alone in the Pirates' Lair* with the journal fiction and the script of the juvenile drama, it is clear that the plotting of Hazlewood's stage version was based on the fiction and not on the toy theatre version.⁸⁸ Some changes were made to conform to the usual denouements for Britannia melodramas. For example, at the end of the pirate fiction the ex-buccaneer Mark Ambrose, who has proved patriotic, valiant and trustworthy, is fatally wounded. In Hazlewood's version he is allowed to live and so too is the captain of the English ship who had been assumed dead in the original attack.

⁸⁵ Britannia playbill 104 for 6 May 1867, HA.

⁸⁶ *Boys of England*, 27 November 1866, 16.

⁸⁷ See George Speaight, *Juvenile Drama: The History of the English Toy Theatre*, (London: Macdonald, 1946).

⁸⁸ ADD.MS 53061 L, BL; *Boys of England*, 27 November 1866 – 4 March 1867 and juvenile drama from private collection of Barry Clarke.

The second *Boys of England* story that Hazlewood plundered was 'Wild Charley'. This historical tale concerns a poor boy of unknown parentage discovering his true aristocratic family in the midst of a failed Jacobite plot to bring Prince Charles to the British throne. Wilton records borrowing woodcuts lent by Brett, then editor of the magazine, for use on the playbills.⁸⁹ Clearly Brett had no objection to the theatrical adaptations.

Some woodcuts were realized in the stage productions. The illustration from the second instalment of 'Alone in the Pirates' Lair' shows Jack Rushton, the hero, trying to fend off the approaching pirates (see Plate 4.1). It is pasted into the prompt copy with the following stage directions:

Music changes to a hurry, and Pedrillo, Mark, Sancho and Azin the black rush on, they all exclaim with 'Treachery, Treachery!' Don Pablo rises with sword in his hand kneeling behind chest. Jack with his right hand levels pistol, and with one hand holds torch over barrel of gunpowder (see picture) exclaiming 'Back you hounds'. The group pause a moment to realize picture.⁹⁰

Under the picture someone has added, 'This must be realized but Mr Wilton asked black man's arms to be raised – J. Pitt'.

Examining the magazine illustrations reveals a difference between Hazlewood's treatment of women and the journal's. In the fictional 'Wild Charley' Charley's gypsy friend Lara frequently needs rescuing: three of the fourteen images show her lover Ranald Stuart risking himself to save her. In one he rescues her from prison.⁹¹ This has no counterpart in the play as, far from being captured, Lara is shown in a dominant position in the tableau that concludes Act 1:

Gipsies male and female enter and overpower soldiers. Dominic has by this time overpowered Charley – he throws him to the ground – draws his sword when Lara enters – standing over Charley with pistol prevents the advance of Dominic. Picture.⁹²

Later in the story Ranald picks up Lara and fords the river to escape the soldiers. In the play she is more proactive, leaping into the water, followed by Ranald (2.1, f.29). The illustration of this scene is one of only two from the journal that was pasted in the play's promptbook for realization (see Plate 4.2).⁹³ Again, when the fortified farm where they are

⁸⁹ *Diaries*, p.133.

⁹⁰ PETT MSS.A.35, Pettingell Collection, UoK, f.15.

⁹¹ *Boys of England*, 25 March 1867, 273.

⁹² PETT MSS.W.56, Pettingell Collection, UoK, 1.5, f.25.

⁹³ The other shows Charley and his comrades raising the standard following Ranald's capture.

being held is set ablaze, the fictional Lara swoons in Ranald's arms and is carried out by him. In the drama a conscious Lara walks out. Where the fictional Lara is loyal but feeble, a product of male adolescent fantasies about dashing heroes and helpless maidens, her theatrical counterpart is brave in her own right.

Boys of England, whose subtitle by March 1867 was 'A Young Gentlemen's Journal of Sport, Sensation, Fun and Instruction', was aimed at a juvenile, male readership. This was an important and growing market. The 1861 census showed that over forty-five per cent of the population of England and Wales was under twenty years of age.⁹⁴ The 1851 and 1871 census returns for Hoxton Street show thirty-two per cent of the residents were under fourteen years of age, with a further eight and ten per cent respectively in the 14-17 age group.⁹⁵ It is not surprising then that the Britannia audience contained large numbers of young boys. When Dickens visited the theatre in 1877 he estimated 'Some thirty per cent of the entire audience are probably boys between the ages of twelve and sixteen.'⁹⁶ However, there was also a female contingent at the theatre. Conceivably Hazlewood changed Lara's role to please this part of the audience or to suit the talents of the actress (Mary Booth). If the latter, it would fit with Mayer's identification of one of the defining features of popular drama as the privileging of the 'performers' special talents' over the structure of the drama.⁹⁷

Certainly Hazlewood wrote many parts especially for Sara Lane. She excelled at the numerous vibrant, straight-talking, witty women who save the day, such as Cicely in *Break But Not Bend* and Mrs PIPPS in *The Marriage Certificate*. Reviewing one of Hazlewood's most popular plays *Cast Aside, or Loving Not Too Wisely But Too Well*, the *Era* (15 October 1871) noted:

This lady has a style of acting peculiarly her own, and the authors who dish up the bill of fare for the house have evidently 'taken stock' of her peculiar talent. She is never gloomy; never one of the despairing ones; never sobbing, sighing, or hysterical; but always bright and intelligent, and gaining favour by the readiness with which she invariably espouses the cause of the weak and the oppressed.

⁹⁴ John Springhall, "'A Life Story for the People'": Edwin J. Brett and the London "Low-Life" Penny Dreadfuls of the 1860s', *Victorian Studies* 33,2 (1990) 230.

⁹⁵ Bettie Knott, *The Hub of Hoxton: Hoxton Street 1851-1871, Based on a Study of the Censuses* (London: London Borough of Hackney Library Service, 1981) p.67.

⁹⁶ Charles Dickens, 'Some Theatrical Audiences', *All the Year Round* (19 May 1877) 277.

⁹⁷ David Mayer, 'Towards a Definition of Popular Theatre' in David Mayer and Kenneth Richards, eds, *Western Popular Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1977) p.275.

Break But Not Bend also features a haughty villainess, played by the actress Sophie Miles. In the prompt copy, alongside a particularly contemptuous speech, someone has added 'This part was written for "Sophy" with a vengeance!'⁹⁸ indicating that Hazlewood was familiar with the foibles of the company.

As well as changing Lara's character, Hazlewood made numerous other alterations to the two *Boys of England* stories. Most were dictated by the necessity of condensing the long stories into two-act plays. Even so, at the end of the prompt copy of *Wild Charley* Hazlewood added a comment showing an awareness of its complicated nature and its implications for the production: 'This Drama being very busy in certain points of business and language requires as many rehearsals as possible.'

Analysing the type of story that Hazlewood chose to adapt for the Britannia, it is clear that he favoured domestic stories. Some, such as *The Gray Ladye of Fernlea*, had a ghostly element, but he consistently ignored the gory, bloodthirsty type. This is in marked contrast to the last play on which Cave and Hazlewood collaborated, *Man Cat, A True Tale of the Old City of York*, which was advertised as an 'Original Drama, founded upon a story of facts, published in the *London Journal*'.⁹⁹ It opened at the Victoria on 29 May 1871 and was revived at the Marylebone in August 1874. A far cry from the realism of *The Casual Ward*, it enacted the spine-chilling exploits of a bloodthirsty being, stalking and killing its victims 'for destroying sake'. This type of melodrama fed on the popular appetite for tales of crime and horror as expressed in the phenomenal interest in the Newgate Calendar, street ballads and catchpennies about murders, and 'bloods' such as *Varney, the Vampire*.

It is perhaps surprising that Hazlewood's Britannia work ignored this appetite given that one of Pitt's biggest hits for the Hoxton theatre had been his Sweeney Todd play, *The String of Pearls, or the Fiend of Fleet Street* (1847; see Chapter 5). It is true that much of Hazlewood's work for the Britannia was written after the heyday of the so-called Newgate drama and that Donne attempted to censor the East End theatres more rigorously than their West End counterparts and had banned *Jack Shepherd* and *Oliver Twist* from 1859.¹⁰⁰ This may be why in the one play where Hazlewood did dramatise the life of a criminal who had appeared in the Newgate Calendar and been hung, *Mary Edmonstone, The Victim of Circumstances* (1862), he changed the ending so that the eponymous heroine escapes

⁹⁸ *Break But Not Bend* 1.1, PETT MSS.B.81, Pettingell Collection, UoK.

⁹⁹ Marylebone Theatre playbill for 3 August 1874, Westminster City Archives.

¹⁰⁰ John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama 1824-1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) pp.68-72.

capital punishment.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the playbill for its revival on 8 October 1866 describes it as 'Founded on a Fact, which occurred in the year 1790'.¹⁰²

Realizing paintings

Whereas *Alone in the Pirates' Lair* and *Wild Charley* exploited popular culture in the form of penny publications, *Break But Not Bend, or Phantom Honour*, which premièred between these two, exploited the popular visual arts. The playbill highlights its three tableaux, all realizations (dramatic recreations) of paintings.¹⁰³ This was not the first time that Hazlewood had realized famous paintings on the stage; his *Waiting for the Verdict* took as its inspiration Abraham Solomon's painting of the same name,¹⁰⁴ and at the Britannia, Paul Delaroche's 1855 painting 'Young Christian Martyr' was realized in *The Mother's Dying Child* (1864). A number of the Britannia's plays were inspired by the satirical narrative series of the great eighteenth-century artist William Hogarth: *Hogarth's Apprentices, or Industry and Idleness* (1848, dramatist unknown), Leman Rede's *The Rake's Progress* (1847) and Hazlewood's *The Days of Hogarth, or Marriage a la Mode and the Mysteries of London* (1857). Similarly, the temperance series of George Cruikshank (known for his illustrations of Scott's novels and of Dickens's *Sketches By Boz* and *Oliver Twist*) inspired Pitt's *The Bottle Bane, or A Drunkards's Life and Fate* (1847), *Basil and Barbara, the Children of the Bottle, or The Curse Entailed* (1848) and *The Drunkard's Children* (1859).¹⁰⁵ In November 1859 Hazlewood founded his domestic drama *The Rival Fountains, or The Spring of Life and the Spring of Death* on 'Cruikshank's celebrated pictures' (advert in the *Era*, 20 November 1859). C.A. Somerset's *The Sea, or The Ocean Child* (first performed at the Queen's Theatre in 1833 but frequently played at the Britannia) was inspired by Henry Edward Dawe's paintings *My Child! My Child!* (1831) and *A Mother and Child Rescued from a Watery Grave by the Intrepidity of a British Seaman* (1832).¹⁰⁶ *Seaman's Third and First Class* (1859) realized a pair of paintings depicting the interior of railway carriages. Painted by Abraham Solomon, they had been exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1854.

¹⁰¹ Jeffrey James Higley, *A Study of some social, literary and dramatic aspects of the Victorian Popular Theatre, as illustrated by the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton, 1843-1870* (University of London, unpublished PhD Thesis, 1973) p.304.

¹⁰² Britannia playbill 84 for 6 August 1866, HA.

¹⁰³ Britannia playbill 125 for 7 October 1867, HA.

¹⁰⁴ Painted 1812, exhibited at Royal Academy in 1813, currently on display at Tate Britain, London.

¹⁰⁵ Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) pp.124-33.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.195-97.

The three paintings Hazlewood selected for realization in *Break But Not Bend* are identified in the playbill as William Collins's 'The Sale of the Pet Lamb', 'The Dishonoured Bill' by an unspecified artist and J. Phillip's 'The Prison Window'. The manuscript sent to the Lord Chamberlain's office for licensing does not make the realizations explicit and they are not mentioned in the scant stage directions.¹⁰⁷ However, the prompt copy in the Pettingell Collection gives specific instructions.¹⁰⁸ For example, the opening directions read, 'A built out cottage, the residence of Philip Raymond, set so as to realize the picture.' (1.1) Collins's popular painting had been exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1813 and had been engraved many times. In a biography of his father, Wilkie Collins estimates that 'from fourteen to fifteen thousand impressions of the smaller print alone were dispersed among the many who recollected it with admiration and delight.'¹⁰⁹ Over fifty years after it was painted, the *Illustrated Times* gave away an engraving of the picture with its 3 March 1866 issue and commented on its lasting popularity, attributing it in part to its 'homely pathos'. It is not pasted into the promptbook although the directions refer to many of its features. For example, it lists the non-speaking children's parts, such as 'Child with arm round lamb's neck – Gregory', and the foreground items 'Profile dog, wheelbarrow and group of props' are 'cut out' (1.1).

A copy of an engraving of the second picture (see Plate 4.3), showing the interior of a family home, is included in the promptbook with a couple of costume alterations written on it. The woman in the doorway wears a high-necked dress, but this is annotated 'Low necked dress' and the new neckline is marked in pen. The original painting by Thomas Brooks was entitled 'Early Struggles' and depicted a distressed poet. It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858 and later an engraving appeared in the *Penny Illustrated Weekly News* (25 March 1865).¹¹⁰ It works particularly well as a tableau because, as Meisel commented on Solomon's *Waiting for the Verdict*, it 'is arranged in the planes, groupings, and physical perspective of the stage.'¹¹¹

The third tableau is represented in the promptbook with a line drawing of Phillip's painting, which had been exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1857 and engraved by Thomas Oldham Barlow in 1860. A review in the *Art Journal* (1 June 1857) described the work as a 'direct appeal to our humanities':

¹⁰⁷ ADD.MS 56061 S, BL.

¹⁰⁸ PETT MSS.B.81, Pettingell Collection, UoK.

¹⁰⁹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins R.A.* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1848) vol. 1, p.50.; <http://www.wilkiecollins.demon.co.uk/wilkiefamily/petlambtext.htm> [accessed 19 April 2003].

¹¹⁰ I am indebted to Janet McLean of the Royal Academy for information on its exhibition.

¹¹¹ Meisel, *Realizations*, p.296.

A prisoner is seen at the window, to which his wife, on the outside, lifts their child to kiss the father, whose anxiety to meet the embrace, causes him to press eagerly against the iron bars, insomuch as to distort his features. The mother looks down weeping while holding up the child.

The artist died in February 1867 so there may well have been a revival of interest in his most famous pictures shortly before Hazlewood wrote the play.

Tableaux were a standard device in melodrama for expressing a particular moment of the action in a static, heightened encapsulation of emotion. In creating these realization tableaux there would be no point going to the trouble of copying the exact details of the paintings if a significant proportion of the audience could not recognise the original images. While it is unlikely that the Britannia's patrons would have attended Royal Academy exhibitions, popular paintings like Collins's 'The Sale of the Pet Lamb' were displayed in print shop windows and reproduced in penny publications such as *Reynold's Miscellany*.¹¹² This suggests that Hazlewood was in touch with the sensibilities and frames of reference of the audience, a point conceded by the *Era* (13 October 1867):

. . . Mr. C.H. Hazlewood, a gentleman who has had abundant opportunities of learning what kind of pieces suit the people here, and who never fails to bring forward that which is well adapted for the place.

It should be remembered that he was then living within walking distance of the theatre amongst people who may have attended the Brit. Indeed his final address (44 Huntingdon Street) was virtually opposite the theatre (see Map).

The playbills advertising *Break But Not Bend* specifically mention that the three tableaux are realizations of artwork, referring for example to 'Tableau 1 – Realisation of Collins's Great Picture **The Sale of the Pet Lamb**'. For those audience members who were unfamiliar with the original painting, this was a way of sharing in high culture. Working-class interest in art was shown in the East End with, for example, the art exhibitions of loan pictures organised by Canon Samuel Barnett held at St Jude's National School in Whitechapel from 1881.¹¹³

Another way the Britannia brought art to its audience was through the use of illustrations on some of its playbills. Often these were stock images bought in from

¹¹² Ibid., p.93.

¹¹³ Walter Besant, *East London* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1901) p.296 and Giles Waterfield, ed., *Art for the People: Culture in the Slums of Late Victorian Britain* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1994) pp.31 and 43.

theatrical printers.¹¹⁴ As stage manager Wilton was responsible for preparing the bills for the printer, so his diaries contain several references to purchasing or borrowing woodcuts. For example, for his own benefit on 19 July 1865 at which the highwayman drama *The Ride to York* was played, he records:

Borrowed 9 Woodcuts from Mr Harrison (Publisher of 'Black Bess', Merton House, Salisbury Square, Fleet Street, E.C.). Mr H also gave us 250 large cuts (printed in 4 colours) for the Posters & youth at his branch shop in Kingsland Road gave us 14 steel engravings of Dick Turpin standing holding his horse by the bridle. Had these coloured and – with a little type around them – hung up in the Tradesmens' shops. Had also 300 of the bills containing the nine woodcuts coloured by 'Chamberlain' (whilom super at the Britannia).¹¹⁵

Such illustrations would have been particularly effective at advertising the subject of the entertainment on offer to non- or semi-literate potential audience members.

On a couple of occasions there was a more direct link between the illustrated playbill and the play. The woodcut used to advertise Hazlewood's *Jessy Vere, or The Return of the Wanderer* (Britannia Saloon, 1856) was based on Henry Nelson O'Neil's painting 'The Return of the Wanderer', which had been exhibited at the 87th Royal Academy Exhibition in 1855. Apart from the fact that the image is reversed, the woodcut is a faithful (though crude) rendition of the painting. A review of the Exhibition (*Art Journal*, 1 June 1855) described the painting:

The wanderer is represented by a female figure, who has sunk before the tombstone of her mother. The parent has been hastened to her grave by the conduct of this daughter, who in passing through the churchyard on her return to her home, with her child, is overpowered on seeing this record of her mother's death. Her father and sister are approaching in the distance.

The printed edition of the play gives the stage directions for 2.5 as '*Churchyard. Wall at back, &c., as in picture.*'¹¹⁶ It does not specify which picture, but it is clear from the later directions that O'Neil's painting is being realized:

JESSY (*starting up*) My sister's voice! Oh, how those once loved tones strike a thrill upon my heart which quite overpowers me (*looks off through gate, C.*) Ha, see, my father! – he comes, he comes. Oh, heaven, grant me strength to sustain this trial, let

¹¹⁴ Derek Forbes, *Illustrated Playbills* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 2002).

¹¹⁵ *Diaries*, p.94.

¹¹⁶ *Jessy Vere, or The Return of the Wanderer*, Lacy's Acting Edition of Plays vol. 25 (London: Lacy, n.d) p.28.

me meet him and throw myself at his feet, let me plead for –
 for – no, no, I cannot meet him.
Music. – JOSHUA VERE, supported by his daughter, enters a gate –
 JESSY sinks overpowered on the grave; EMILY, after picture, leads
 VERE down. (2.5)¹¹⁷

The play was a success and was repeated on many occasions, including the opening of the new theatre in November 1858. The adverts and playbills do not mention the painting.

In 1866 Britannia playbills again featured illustrations that were directly realized on the stage. Hazlewood's drama, *Rich & Poor, or A Story of the Four Seasons*, was an adaptation of a tale serialised in four weekly parts in the *London Miscellany* starting on 10 February 1866. Four coloured pictures were given away with the first issue. Plate 1 'Playing at Charity' (subtitled 'The rich and poor children met for the first time') was reproduced on the playbill advertising the production starting on Whit-Monday, 21 May 1866.¹¹⁸ The text announces 'Realisation of Plate 1, ---"Playing at Charity!"' in Act 1 and 'Realisation of Plate 2, A Summer's Night in Belgravia' in Act 2. The other two realizations are mentioned less prominently, but the playbill for the following week is illustrated with an engraving of Plate 3 'Married Life in the Country'.¹¹⁹

This interrelationship between the visual and theatrical arts through advertising ephemera and direct realizations is important because it was a means by which the residents of Hoxton shared in a culture that reached far beyond East London and crossed class barriers. As Himmelfarb comments on the illustrations that accompanied Dickens's novels, 'The illustrations democratized the culture in yet another sense, by creating a common denominator not only between upper and lower classes but between high and low literature.'¹²⁰

House style

With three-quarters of Hazlewood's dramatic output premièred at the Britannia, the Hoxton theatre was clearly his most important customer. By comparing work produced at the Britannia with some of the pieces from other theatres, it should be possible to establish whether Hazlewood tailored his writing to suit a particular house style. It should be remembered, however, that like the Britannia, all the other theatres for which he wrote substantial numbers of plays – the City of London, Marylebone and Surrey – catered for a

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.29.

¹¹⁸ Britannia playbill 65 for 21 May 1866, HA.

¹¹⁹ Britannia playbill 68 for 28 May 1866, HA.

¹²⁰ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty* (London: faber & faber, 1984) p.419.

primarily local, working-class clientele; they were all a similar type of establishment, the old 'minors', that was disparaged or ignored by the theatrical elite. It would seem logical therefore that the theatres should stage similar dramas.

Two of Hazlewood's 1867 pieces were written for the Pavilion Theatre. Later tagged the 'Drury Lane of the East', the Pavilion was situated to the east of the Britannia, on the Whitechapel Road, Mile End. It opened in 1828, was destroyed by fire in 1856, and rebuilt in a grand style (including the largest pit of any London theatre), reopening on 30 October 1858 just days before the new Britannia Theatre opened its doors. Fortunately, the theatre was far enough away not to be in competition with the Britannia. Perhaps because of its proximity to the docks, the Pavilion's new manager, John Douglass, advertised it as 'the great nautical melodramatic theatre'.¹²¹ Davis and Emeljanow show that the Pavilion's audience consisted of working-class members alongside a smaller number of middle-class patrons.¹²² During the 1860s it was known as The East London Opera House and staged many operas as well as melodramas and pantomimes.

Hazlewood's *Pale Janet*, which opened at the Pavilion on 31 August 1867, was adapted 'from the popular Tale now publishing in the *London Journal*' (*Era*, 25 August 1867). It is centred on a murder committed to prevent Sir Percival losing his lands when the rightful heir, Richard D'Anton, returns from Australia. In part of a complicated plot, the eponymous Janet, who has witnessed the murder, becomes pale and deranged, attempts suicide, is saved by Richard, but will not speak of what she saw out of loyalty to her parents. When she learns that they are not her real parents, she calls for help, thereby bringing about the successful denouement. There is nothing in the playscript to distinguish it from the melodramas Hazlewood wrote for other theatres, in fact it could easily have been staged at the Britannia.¹²³ Likewise, comparisons of Hazlewood's two boxing dramas produced for the Britannia and the Marylebone do not reveal any substantial differences in style.

What of the two 1867 pantomimes? *Robin Hood and his Merry Men, or Harlequin Ivanhoe, The Knight Templar and the Jewess* was the last of the three pantomimes Hazlewood wrote for the Pavilion. It takes characters from Walter Scott's 1819 novel *Ivanhoe* and combines fairyland, medieval England and contemporary Whitechapel. The Jewish characters, Isaac and Rebecca, are perhaps particularly well chosen for the Pavilion

¹²¹ A.E. Wilson, *East End Entertainment* (London: Arthur Barker, 1954) p.80.

¹²² Davis and Emeljanow, pp.62-67.

¹²³ ADD.MS 53061 M, BL.

as the area housed an increasing number of Jews¹²⁴ and later in the century was to become 'the home of Jewish drama in the East End'.¹²⁵ The playscript is full of puns and word play:

REBECCA Oh, pity my maiden modesty, and relieve my poor heart's trouble,
Although you're a Christian, pray don't say to me a-Jew,
For I swear with forkitude, no knife shall cut our love in two.
IVANHOE Oh, beautiful Israelite, doubtless thy graceful form too
many hearts have broken;
But for me you were made to order, 'cos I'm bespoken.
(Scene 2)¹²⁶

There are references to popular culture. For example, Sir Cedric makes a punning mention of the weekly publications the *Family Herald* and *Bow Bells*, and Wamba explicitly refers to the latest short story written by Dickens and Wilkie Collins: 'I'll have "No Thoroughfare" written on me in future, like the Christmas number of "All the Year Round"'.¹²⁷ In addition there are allusions to more highbrow literature. Rebecca quotes from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*: 'But let concealment, like a worm in the bud, feed on my damask cheek.' Sir Cedric replies with a quotation from Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' (1751): 'The curfew 'gins to toll the knell of parting day!'¹²⁸

Hazlewood's script also contains a significant number of topical or local references. Robin Hood, for example, says: 'These Nor-man Barons think the needy should never gnaw nor thrive, Like some East End Unions who wish the poor to work at seventy-five'.¹²⁹ The Metropolitan Streets Act 1867, which had come into force on 1 November, regulated the obstruction of footways and streets by street hawkers and costermongers.¹³⁰ It is clear from the three references in the pantomime that the new law was extremely unpopular in the East End.¹³¹ At the lists at Ashby, Isaac and Rebecca try to sell food, but Cedric warns them to leave 'Or you'll find yourselves in the parish stocks, fast handcuffed by the legs.' Rebecca replies, 'Ah, I see it all! The new metropolitan street act has come in

¹²⁴ Alan Palmer, *The East End: Four Centuries of London Life* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000) p.101.

¹²⁵ Michael R. Booth et al, *The Revels History of Drama in English* (London: Methuen, 1975) vol. 6 1750-1880, p.lvii.

¹²⁶ ADD.MS 53064 L, f.8, BL.

¹²⁷ Ibid., Scene 8, f.24.

¹²⁸ Ibid., Scene 2, f.9.

¹²⁹ Ibid., Scene 3, f.11.

¹³⁰ *The Statutes of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland: 30 & 31 Victoria, 1837* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1867) pp.749-55.

¹³¹ Following protests, an Amendment Bill later exempted costermongers and hawkers.

force today!’¹³² A laudatory review (*Era*, 29 December 1867) draws attention to the pantomime’s topical allusions:

The dialogue throughout the Extravaganza Opening was smart and telling, especially the allusions to the new Metropolitan Street Act, the Fenians, and the Abyssinian captives. This is certainly the best Pantomime that Mr. Hazlewood has ever written, . . .

The pantomime running concurrently at the Britannia was Hazlewood’s *Don Quixote, or Sancho Panza and His Wife Tereza*.¹³³ Although loosely based on Cervantes’ picaresque novel, the pantomime opens in the cave of Merlin the Enchanter, who announces he means to cure Don Quixote of his plans to be a knight within a week. Central to the plot is Sancho Panza’s wife Teresa, played by Sara Lane, who ‘is the very soul and fire of the Burlesque, and in her arch acting and lively songs kept the audience in a perpetual state of excitement’ (*Era*, 29 December 1867). Comparing the two scripts sent to the Lord Chamberlain for licensing, the dialogue in the Britannia piece is less sophisticated than that of the Pavilion pantomime, as shown by this laboured pun:

NICOLAS Let me take some feed for I sniff the smell
Again that odour, the soup – I souppose here must be
souperior. (1.3; f.7)

The Britannia script contains few topical allusions. There is one reference to Dickens’s Christmas story and a brief one to the Reform Bill. A review in the *Era* (29 December 1867), however, suggests that more were added when the piece was performed:

The Burlesque introduction, which would be too long for any other Theatre, is smartly written, and profusely interspersed with recent events, not omitting even such dangerous themes as Fenianism and Greek fire.

It seems the actors added their own topical ad-libs (see Chapter 6).

From the scripts Hazlewood produced for the Britannia and the Pavilion in 1867, it is not possible to identify a particular house style. There is no evidence to suggest whether he offered the same play to more than one London theatre or, with the exception of the collaborations with Cave, was specially commissioned by individual managements.

¹³² ADD.MS 53064 L, Scene 6, f.18, BL.

¹³³ ADD.MS 53063 AA, BL.

Assessing Hazlewood's contribution

It has been suggested that the central anomaly of the Victorian stage was that while the drama seemed uncreative, the theatres were thriving.¹³⁴ Surveying Hazlewood's work, one is struck by its variety. Settings include lowly cottages, aristocratic mansions, foreign palaces, colonial India, rural Ireland, highland Scotland, revolutionary France, Arctic seas, and fantastical fairyland. Even just looking at adaptations, Hazlewood's output spans the whole array of literature from the high-brow novels of Dickens, Scott, Gaskell and Victor Hugo to the sensation fiction of Mary Braddon and to the less critically acclaimed but hugely popular stories in publications such as *Bow Bells*, the *London Journal* and the *Penny Miscellany*. He even produced a version of a Bellini opera, *La Somnambula*. His work may not have been intellectual, but it was certainly creative.

Judgement of Hazlewood's talent should acknowledge the fact that astute managers (Cave and the Lanes) recognised his ability to please audiences, and that so many of his dramas played for several weeks, were chosen by actors for their benefits and were revived over the years. His contribution to the healthy profits of the Britannia during the 1860s and 1870s should not be underestimated, especially when he frequently provided all three main dramas in a single evening's entertainment. For example, during the week of 28 October 1867 the bill consisted of three Hazlewood pieces – *Wild Charley*, *Break But Not Bend* and *The Harvest Storm* – plus 'Stump-orator West and Miss E. West, The Original Nigger Delineators'.¹³⁵ It is highly probable that the decline in the Britannia's fortunes during the 1870s, which Crauford blamed on his aunt's misguided reliance on Johnny Gideon's choice of French plays,¹³⁶ was in part caused by the gap left by Hazlewood's death in May 1875. There was no longer a regular supply of dramas that were almost guaranteed to suit the taste of the Hoxton audience. Even reviews that implied the inferiority of that audience's judgement, acknowledged the dramatist's skill (*Era*, 4 June 1871):

Mr. Hazlewood has written so much for this Theatre that it would be curious if he had not somewhat exactly gauged the tastes of its patrons, so, defying all charges as to improbability, or anachronism, or extravagance, he sets himself to work to devise a story which shall gain the sympathies of an audience which he knows will care very

¹³⁴ Gillian Beer, "'Coming Wonders': uses of theatre in the Victorian novel" in Maria Axton and Raymond Williams, eds, *English Drama: Forms and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) pp.164-85.

¹³⁵ Britannia playbill 129 for 28 October 1867, HA.

¹³⁶ *Sam and Sallie*, pp.316-18.

little whether what they see and hear is either improbable or impossible.¹³⁷

Mayer contends that the chief functions of popular drama are utility (in serving social needs) and amusement.¹³⁸ Hazlewood's work for the Britannia fulfilled both these criteria and he should be remembered as a skilled exponent of popular drama. His plays not only reflected and exploited popular culture but also formed an important part of that culture.

¹³⁷ Review of *Happiness at Home*.

¹³⁸ Mayer, 'Towards a Definition', p.265.

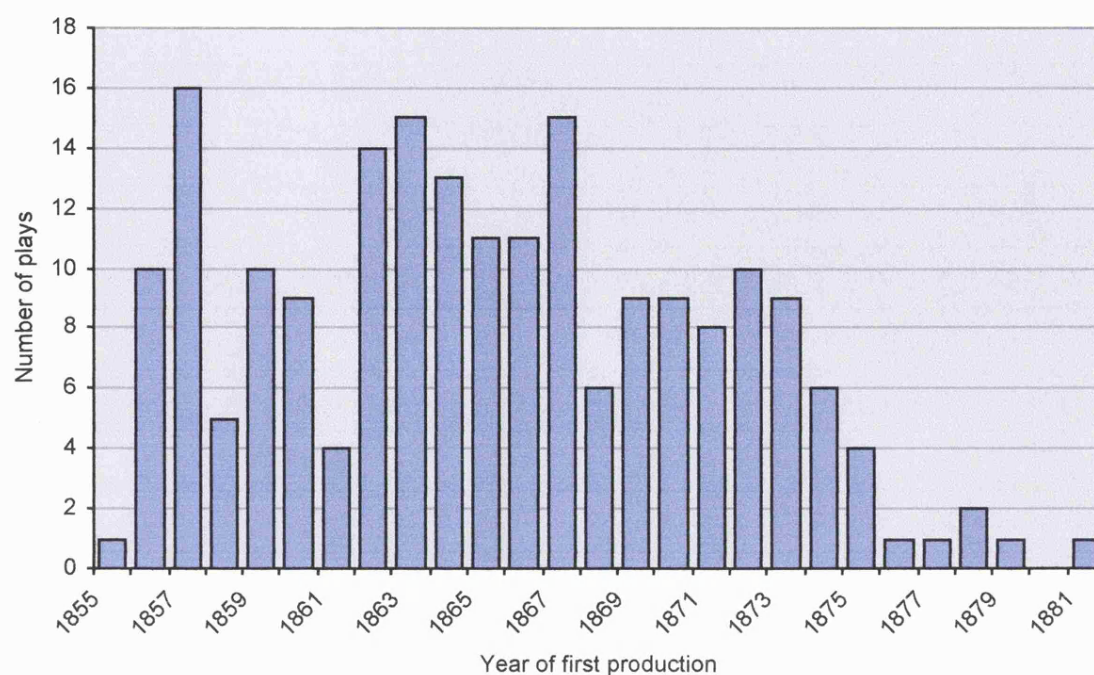
TABLE 2: NUMBER OF HAZLEWOOD PLAYS FIRST PERFORMED AT OTHER THEATRES

City of London	19
Marylebone	*10
Pavilion	* 8
Surrey	7
Victoria	7
Sadler's Wells	2
Philharmonic Theatre, Islington	2
Royal Colosseum, Liverpool	2
Grecian	1
Strand	1
Standard	1
Princess's, Edinburgh	1
Albert, Portsmouth	1
Acton	1
Sheffield	1
Gravesend	1
Queen's	1
Newcastle Theatre Royal	1
Old Theatre Royal, Bristol #	1
TOTAL	68

* Figures exclude *The Casual Ward*, which was produced simultaneously at the Marylebone, Pavilion and Britannia Theatres.

Em'ly, or The Ark on the Sands attributed to Hazlewood on a playbill for the Old Theatre Royal, Bristol, for 8 March 1886, but may have been C.R. Rennell's drama.¹

¹ UKC/POS/BRS ROYO: 0594037, UoK.

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF NEW HAZLEWOOD PLAYS PRODUCED AT THE BRITANNIA BY YEAR**TABLE 4: HAZLEWOOD PIECES PREMIERED IN 1867**

Title	First performed	Theatre
The Last Link of Love, or Stolen in Childhood	25 February	Britannia
Faust, or Marguerite's Mangle (Burlesque)	25 March	Britannia
Cherry and Fair Star (Burlesque)	22 April	Britannia
The Life Signal	22 April	Britannia
The Marriage Certificate, or A Mother's Honour	10 June	Britannia
The Ballinasloe Boy, or The Fortunes of an Irish Peasant	24 June	Britannia
The Collier's Strike	26 June	Britannia
Jack O'Lantern, or The Blue Ribbon of the Turf	8 July	Britannia
Pale Janet	31 August	Pavilion
The Gray Lady of Fernlea	9 September	Britannia
Alone in the Pirate's Lair, or Danger and Fatality	23 September	Britannia
Break But Not Bend	2 October	Britannia
Wild Charley, the Link Boy	23 October	Britannia
The King's Death Trap	25 November	Britannia
Who Did It?, or The Track of Crime	18 December	Britannia
Don Quixote, or Sancho Panza and his Wife Tereza (Pantomime)	26 December	Britannia
Robin Hood and his Merry Men, or Harlequin Ivanhoe, The Knight Templar and the Jewess (Pantomime)	24? December	Pavilion



PLATE 4.1: First page of the *Boys of England* (4 December 1866) featuring the image that was realized in Hazlewood's play *Alone in the Pirates' Lair*



"RANALD PLUNGED INTO THE WATERS, A SHOWER OF BULLETS SLASHING ABOUT HIS EARS."

PLATE 4.2: Illustration accompanying the fiction 'Wild Charley' (*Boys of England*, 27 April 1867), which Hazlewood dramatised in his melodrama of the same name

5

THE REPERTOIRE

‘The Brit. is not a great Shakespearian house. The generality of the audience
are staunch to melodrama.’

Letter from Algernon Cooper, *Era*, 9 December 1893

The Britannia was first and foremost a commercial venture and the *sine qua non* was that unpopular dramas drew small audiences and were therefore unsustainable. The theatre was profitable (Samuel Lane died in 1871 leaving £60,000 and Sara left £126,000 in 1899) because it consistently produced programmes that audiences wanted to see. This chapter considers the entertainments that filled the theatre’s bills. It reviews the Britannia’s productions of Shakespeare; it evaluates the incidental entertainments that appeared between the dramas; it examines changes in the repertoire; and it identifies how the repertoire differed from that of other contemporary London theatres.

SHAKESPEARE AT THE BRIT

The frequency with which Shakespeare’s plays were performed at the Brit has been the subject of debate. In 1971 Clive Barker repeated A.E. Wilson’s claim that its 1864 Shakespearean Festival ‘was an enormous success and ran for several months’ and implied that Shakespeare was a significant part of the repertoire.¹ However, Barker subsequently wrote:

Unfortunately, the facts reveal that the 1864 Britannia Shakespeare Festival never took place. In the whole of 1864 the only times Shakespeare found his way on to the programme was on the occasion of the actor’s benefit, and two interlude presentations of ‘Tableaux from Shakespeare’.²

¹ Clive Barker, ‘The Chartists, Theatre, Reform and Research’, *Theatre Quarterly* 1,4 (1971) 5.

² Clive Barker, ‘The Audiences of the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton’, *Theatre Quarterly* 9,34 (1979) 27.

While it is true that the festival was not the occasion that Wilson implies³ and the number of five-act productions is quite small, there was a considerable number of occasions when extracts were played, particularly on benefit nights. Tallies of Shakespearean-derived performances mentioned in the *Diaries*, playbills, adverts and reviews suggest that the majority were performed during the 1860s and 1870s (see Table 5).⁴ However, these figures may be misleading. Evidence for the repertoire of the 1840s is sketchy. Crauford claims Mary Lane (Samuel's first wife) was keen to play Shakespearean roles and did, but this is not corroborated.⁵ Many of the instances from the 1860s and 1870s were played on benefit evenings and these were frequently (but not always) detailed on the weekly playbills or in Wilton's *Diaries*. For the later decades (for which playbills and programmes are scarce) data has been gathered from advertisements and reviews. Unfortunately the programmes for benefit evenings are not usually listed in the adverts and they are seldom reviewed. Two actresses (Mary Griffiths and Ada Morgan) appeared as characters from *The Comedy of Errors* in the 1871 Britannia Festival (*Era*, 19 December 1871). It must therefore have been played during the year, yet it is not mentioned in the weekly adverts. This suggests that there may have been at least a few more undiscovered productions and the true tally for the 1880s and 1890s may be slightly higher than the figures presented.

The choice of play

The available data shows that, by a clear margin, the most frequently staged, and therefore presumably the most popular, Shakespearean dramas were the tragedies of *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Richard III* and *Macbeth* (in that order). After these, but with much fewer instances, was *The Taming of the Shrew*, mostly played as the Garrick version entitled *Katherine and Petruchio*.⁶ The only other plays that had significant numbers of productions were *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Merchant of Venice*. *King John*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear*, *A Winter's Tale*, *Henry IV* and *Titus Andronicus* had four or less instances; *Henry V* and *Coriolanus* were produced once; and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Tempest* and *As You Like It* appeared as tableaux only.

³ A.E. Wilson, *East End Entertainment* (London: Arthur Barker, 1954) p.168. The allegation was also made in H. Chance Newton, *Cues and Curtain Calls* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1927) p.209.

⁴ The figures do not tally the total number of performances; I have counted each production as one mention whether it played for one night or for several consecutive weeks.

⁵ *Sam & Sallie*, p.223.

⁶ David Garrick's *Catherine and Petruchio* was written in 1756; see George Taylor, *Players and Performances in the Victorian Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) p.177. This version was still being played at the Brit in August 1897.

Some of these choices, particularly the preference for the tragedies, correspond with accounts of other contemporary theatres. In 1838 James Grant reported that at the bottom end of the theatrical hierarchy, the penny gaffs, 'Othello is the greatest favourite of these establishments; very possibly because it is easier to assume the appearance of the Moor, than of any other of Shakspeare's [sic] heroes.'⁷ According to the German critic Theodor Fontane, *Othello*'s popularity was not confined to the lowliest London theatres:

In England this is the most popular of all Shakespeare's dramas: it is performed everywhere and often. This may be the reason why performances of it seem especially polished, being staged faultlessly in theatres where otherwise one usually sees work that is only passable or mediocre. This makes it twice as easy for actors learning their craft to feel the effect of good examples, and to model their performances on them.⁸

Fontane asserts that *Macbeth* is the next most popular Shakespearean play among English people. His description of audience reactions to productions of the Scottish play agrees with reports of the reception of Shakespearean tragedy at the Britannia (although Fontane appears never to have visited the Hoxton theatre and does not list it among the eighteen 'most notable' London theatres):⁹

One notices that the audience waits for its favourite passages, then greets them with thunderous applause. Of course this also has its less fortunate consequences. The actor is not merely encouraged but wellnigh *obliged* to perform the finest passages in a way calculated to please merely the ears of the gallery, rather than the understanding of a more discriminating minority.¹⁰

Mayhew reports on the theatre-going habits of costermongers frequenting theatres south of the Thames (the Surrey, Victoria, Bower Saloon and Astley's). One costermonger articulates their taste in drama:

Love and murder suits us best, sir; but within these few years I think there's a great deal more liking for deep tragedies among us. They set men a thinking; but then we all consider them too long. Of *Hamlet* we can make neither end nor side; and nine out of ten of us – ay, far more than that – would like it to be confined to the ghost scenes, and the funeral, and the killing off at the last. *Macbeth* would be better liked,

⁷ James Grant, *Sketches in London*, quoted in Paul Sheridan, *Penny Theatres of Victorian London* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1981) p.23.

⁸ Theodor Fontane, *Shakespeare in the London Theatre 1855-1858*, trans. and ed., Russell Jackson (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1999) p.21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.7. The list includes Astley's, Marylebone, Surrey, Standard and Pavilion Theatres.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.80.

if it was only the witches and the fighting. The high words in a tragedy we call jaw-breakers, and say we can't tumble to that barrikin. We always stay to the last, because we've paid for it all, or very few costers would see a tragedy out if any money was returned to those leaving after two or three acts.¹¹

At the Britannia, Crauford asserted that in general (not specifically for Shakespeare) the audience favoured action over speech when claiming that the dramas written by Sara were unsuitable (see Chapter 3). Likewise, in 1873 Wilton claims *Frou-Frou* was 'a complete failure' because it was '*all talkee-talkie*'.¹² The reduction of Shakespearean performances to one or two acts, particularly on benefit evenings, confirms a preference for the scenes with the most exciting action. Thus in 1861, the benefit on 15 July for the widow of Britannia actor S. Sidney included the third act of *Othello*, while on 28 July Thomas Drummond starred in the fifth act of *Richard III*, and on 31 August the third act of *Hamlet* was played. The treatment of Shakespearean tragedy at the Brit therefore seems to reflect working-class taste, but it is in the plays it did *not* produce that we see how out-of-step it was with West-End predilection.

Foulkes has calculated that *As You Like It* was the most popular of all Shakespeare's comedies during the late Victorian era.¹³ He suggests that because it was written in prose, it would have been less intimidating for actors lacking experience of Shakespearean verse.¹⁴ One might therefore have expected it to be a likely subject for the Britannia. Yet the sole instance of the comedy's presentation was as a tableau in April 1865, much earlier than the majority of the West End productions. It featured a scene from the Forest of Arden with Touchstone, William and Audrey: Rosalind does not appear.¹⁵ This is significant given Foulkes' contention that part of the attraction for West End spectators was the opportunity to see the actress playing Rosalind in tights.¹⁶ Leading actresses at the Britannia already donned tights for the pantomimes and burlesques, so Rosalind was less likely to appeal.

One might also have expected *The Tempest* to be popular at the Brit given the regularity with which it staged shipwrecks. In fact, only one scene was performed, as a

¹¹ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, selected by Victor Neuburg (London: Penguin, 1985) p.21.

¹² *Diaries*, p.211.

¹³ Richard Foulkes, 'Touchstone for the Times: Victorians in the Forest of Arden' in Gail Marshall and Adrian Poole, eds, *Victorian Shakespeare*, vol. 1 *Theatre, Drama and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) p.147.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.148.

¹⁵ Britannia playbill for 10 April 1865, Museum of London.

¹⁶ Foulkes, 'Touchstone', p.158.

tableau in 1864. Similarly, the Britannia appears never to have produced *A Midsummer Night's Dream* despite the middle-class, nineteenth-century vogue for fairies and Samuel Phelps's much-acclaimed 1853 production.¹⁷ Hoxton's only opportunity to see fairyland scenes was in the pantomime.

'Legitimate' Shakespeare

In the 1850s Samuel Lane engaged for short contacts two prestigious actors famous for their Shakespearean interpretations: James Anderson and Ira Aldridge. Shakespeare had been one of the main battlegrounds on which the war between the minor and patent theatres had been fought prior to the 1843 Theatre Regulations Act.¹⁸ By contracting these stars Lane hoped to establish his theatre as a worthy producer of legitimate drama and hence improve its reputation. He must therefore have been gratified by the comments in the *Theatrical Journal* (31 March 1852) praising the engagements of Aldridge and Charles West: 'Really Mr. Lane ought to be patronised, he has made his theatre equal to any house in the east; and the talent he engages is such that would not disgrace the first of our legitimate theatres, who cannot boast of superior talent.' Advertisements and playbills sought to gain prestige by association. In Aldridge's case, his appearances before foreign royalty were stressed:

. . . The CELEBRATED AFRICAN TRAGEDIAN
MR. IRA ALDRIDGE
The Only Actor of Color that has ever appeared on the British Stage;
and who will make his first essay on Easter Monday, since his return
from the continent, at the Britannia, in
HIS CELEBRATED CHARACTER OF OTHELLO!
as represented by him before the Royal Families of Austria, Prussia,
Denmark, Saxe Coburg Gotha, &c., &c.¹⁹

Similarly, capital was made of Anderson's West End pedigree. An advert (*Era*, 8 June 1856) trumpeted the engagement 'of the distinguished Tragedian, James Anderson (of the Theatres Royal, Covent-garden and Drury-lane), who will appear, supported by the celebrated Miss Elsworthy (of the Theatres Royal, Haymarket and St. James's)'.

Anderson was first engaged in November 1851 and he returned in 1852, 1856, 1866, 1870 and 1871. Reviewing an early performance, the condescending critic of the *Theatrical Journal* (12 November 1851) seemed surprised at the audience's behaviour:

¹⁷ George C.D. Odell, *Shakespeare – From Betterton to Irving* (London: Constable, 1963); first publ. 1920, vol. 2, p.322.

¹⁸ Katherine Newey, 'Shakespeare and the Wars of the Playbills' in Marshall and Poole, vol. 1, pp.24-25.

¹⁹ Playbill for 30 March 1857, Playbills 376, BL.

‘We were much pleased at the marked attention displayed by the audience, towards the works of Shakespeare, – shewing as it does, that even the “people” *can* appreciate the “world’s fact,” despite the innumerable invitations to “Sup full of Horrors,”.’ He also noted ‘The scenery, costumes, and “properties,” being of a superior order’, and declared the acting company were ‘admirable’.

Most of Anderson’s performances at the Brit were not reviewed. An exception is a critique of his Hamlet (*Era*, 3 December 1871), which comments on the contrast between the meditative scenes, in which ‘he was deliberate and grave’, and the ‘seasons of resolution and ardour’, where he was ‘full of life and force’. The audience responded to the former in particular:

His suitably slow and impressive manner of speaking at this time made all the more effective the loud and impetuous way in which he presently represented the Prince as exclaiming to Horatio and Marcellus ‘Hold off your hand,’ ‘My fate cries out,’ &c. Great applause was evoked by this portion of Mr. Anderson’s performances[.] Fresh cheering broke forth as he finished the first act with the pathetic utterance of the words –

The time is out of joint. O cursed spite

That ever I was born to set it right.

He had to come before the curtain to acknowledge the gratifying expressions of appreciation which the people conveyed to him.

Yet his style was not to everyone’s taste. When Wilton’s wife and daughter had attended his *Hamlet* the previous year, ‘They left at the end of the closet scene, denouncing James Anderson’s Hamlet as insupportably *prosy*’.²⁰

Anderson recollects this production in his autobiography. Even allowing for his tendency to self-aggrandisement, his account suggests one reason why major theatrical stars were not keen to play at the Britannia: the gulf between their classical acting style and that of the stock company. He writes:

The tragedy was rather roughly handled by the actors, who, being used to perform in melodramas nearly all the year round, were somewhat too loud and demonstrative for Shakespeare. I was obliged to be doubly calm and impressive the first night, in order to throw out hints to *mes confrères* that we were not playing The Bloody Brother of Bethnal Green. They caught the idea, became subdued in tone, yet earnest in manner, and the play then went satisfactorily.²¹

²⁰ *Diaries*, p.171.

²¹ James R. Anderson, *An Actor’s Life* (London: Walter Scott, 1902) p.303.

Anderson provides an amusing anecdote about the second performance of *Hamlet*, which must surely have delighted the costermongers in the audience:

I had ordered a pair of new fencing foils, of antique form and length, of Mr. Wood, theatrical armourer, Bow Street, and when I rushed upon the King, who drew his sword in self-defence, my foil, meeting his weapon, splintered into a dozen pieces, like a crystal rod. I could not kill my cruel uncle with the pommel of my broken foil, so I seized the 'bloody bawdy villain' by the throat, wrenched the sword from his grasp, and passed it twice through his detested body, waved it frantically over my head, and fell into Horatio's arms amidst thunders of applause.²²

The black American tragedian Ira Aldridge, known as 'the African Roscius', was twice engaged by the Brit, in 1852 and 1857. Although he was celebrated in Europe and played at a variety of minor theatres, he was not engaged in the West End (apart from two nights at Covent Garden in 1833).²³ It seems the Britannia and its counterparts were more ready to embrace the talent of a black actor than the mainstream London theatres. J.B. Howe's biography reveals racist attitudes informed Aldridge's reception even among his fellow actors. Howe had played a supporting role to Aldridge at the Theatre Royal Croydon and found white female theatregoers' partiality to the black actor distasteful:

That he was a clever man no one who knew him would dispute[,] his powers of tragedy and comedy alike were most marvellous, he was also an educated man, but at the same time, it shocks a sensitive nature to see a pure blonde with almost angelic features and form, putting on a most bewitching smile and using every art of feminine blandishment to win the notice and deserve the esteem of the true, bred 'African Nigger'.²⁴

Moody speculates on why, earlier in the century, Aldridge was well received at the Surrey and Pavilion but not at Covent Garden:

Perhaps because audiences at the minor theatres were more accustomed to the exhibition of race and ethnicity as spectacle, perhaps because immigrants made up a significant proportion of the local population, especially in the East End, Aldridge's performances

²² Ibid., p.303.

²³ Owen Mortimer, *Speak of Me As I Am: The Story of Ira Aldridge* (Wangaratta, Australia: Owen Mortimer, 1995) p.41.

²⁴ J.B. Howe, *A Cosmopolitan Actor* (London: Bedford Publishing, 1888) p.58.

at the minor theatres were greeted with excitement and sympathetic interest.²⁵

It should be noted, however, that the immigrants Moody refers to were not themselves black. Aldridge's engagements coincided with a vogue at London theatres for anti-slavery plays. *Dred*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *American Slavery, or The Creole of St Louis* were all staged at the Britannia and a revival of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was playing during the week when Sara Lane died in 1899. Whatever the reason, the Britannia engaged another black actor, Samuel Morgan Smith, in July 1873. He played *Othello* at his benefit.²⁶

At the Brit, Aldridge undertook the Shakespearean roles of Aaron the Moor in *Titus Andronicus* (see Plate 5.1) and *Othello*. Yet he did not play Shylock, even though it was one of his most celebrated characters (*Illustrated London News*, 3 July 1858). Fontane asserts that Aldridge's interpretation of *Othello* affected 'the development of the characterisation of *Othello* that is now generally accepted'.²⁷ The *Theatrical Journal* (17 March 1852) gave a positive review of his acting and the Britannia's *mise-en-scene*, noting: '... Mr. Aldridge has been most efficiently supported by the valuable *corps dramatique* attached to the theatre; and that great care has been taken in putting the pieces on the stage.'

Aldridge's *Titus Andronicus* had been played extensively in the provinces before coming to the Britannia Saloon, where it attracted crowded houses. The *Sunday Times* (21 March 1852) praised the acting of the main parts and the staging:

Mr. Aldridge's personation of the Moor was exceedingly clever and effective; his performance was remarkable for energy, tempered by dignity and discretion. Mr. J. Reynolds deserves commendation for his excellent personation of Titus Andronicus. Mrs. E. Yarnold played Lavinia with great taste and dramatic feeling. The other characters were adequately sustained.

However, the reviewer was unimpressed with the adaptation, describing it as 'a very common-place melodrama, having little relation to the original work, from which, in plot, structure, and incident, it differs completely. There is but little of the language of the original retained, and the characters are falsified to suit the "weak invention" of the modern dramatic cobbler.' In contrast, reviewing Aldridge's second engagement at the Britannia, the *Era* (26 April 1857) approved of the adaptation, not least because it found

²⁵ Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.136.

²⁶ *Diaries*, p.213.

²⁷ Fontane, p.21.

Shakespeare's original drama distasteful: '... the deflowerment of Lavinia, cutting out her tongue, chopping off her hands, and the numerous decapitations and gross language which occur in the original, are wholly omitted, and a play not only presentable but actually attractive is the result.'

Star performers were not the only actors to be praised for their Shakespearean interpretations; so too were the stock actors J.B. Howe and Frank Charlton. The *Era* (9 March 1873) described Howe's personation of Hamlet as 'admirable'. It approved his 'highly artistic and effective manner . . . when representing the Prince as upbraiding himself for his cowardice'. Also, 'The calm, fluent, and appropriate speaking of Hamlet's directions to the players and criticisms on acting was, to our thinking, a very excellent piece of elocution, and evidenced his superior ability quite as much as his more vehement displays of skill.' The *Sunday Times* (21 June 1874) similarly commended Charlton's portrayal of Othello:

. . . he has shown himself an actor of thought and discrimination. His tenderness for the lady of his love was finely contrasted with his revenge. In the scene wherein he doubts the truth of Iago's statement Mr. Charlton's rage and action were powerfully effective. One of his finest pieces of elocution was the last address beginning 'Soft you.'

Both Howe and Charlton appeared in what must surely have been the Brit's most bizarre Shakespearean productions, in which multiple actors played the hero in one performance. The first of these seems to have been produced for the benefit of John Parry on 3 July 1867 when three actors played Richard III. Wilton describes the process: '1st & 3rd Acts by Mr T.Drummond; 2nd Act by Mr J.Parry, in imitation of *Edmund Kean* (!!!) 4th & 5th Acts by Mr J.B.Howe.'²⁸ Several years later, on 17 March 1874, the practice was repeated at W. Forrester's benefit, for which the playbill boasted 'The Tragedy of *Richard III* (WITH FIVE RICHARDS!!!)'.²⁹ Wilton lists the performers with numbers, presumably indicating the acts in which they played the king: Joseph Reynolds 2, Frank Charlton 1, George Bigwood 3, Robert Bell 4 and W. Forrester 5.³⁰ Although the performance is mentioned in the *Sunday Times* (22 March 1874), it provides no clue as to its effectiveness. It must surely have been confusing for the audience and shows consistency of interpretation was not considered important. Inevitably some actors would have been better suited to the part than others. Reynolds and Charlton were leading actors,

²⁸ *Diaries*, p.126.

²⁹ Britannia playbill 374 for 16 March 1874, HA.

³⁰ Wilton CY1136, frame 912.

but Bigwood was the theatre's first low comedian, Forrester had come to the Britannia as a burlesque actor,³¹ and Bell usually played supporting roles, often villains.³²

In October 1883 a similar treatment of *Othello* played for a week with Howe, J.H. Slater, Edgar Newbound, Walter Steadman and Edwin Drayton playing the Moor for an act each (advert in *ISDN*, 29 September 1883). A reminiscence of a later performance at the Brit provides evidence of the rather uneven skills of the actors, to say nothing of their contrasting statures. In a letter to the *Referee* (3 February 1924) A.B. Moss of Peckham recalls:

Edgar Newbound, a short, stout, well-made, handsome little man, was the Othello of the first act; second act was Algernon Syms, a fairly tall actor; then in each subsequent act the part was impersonated by a taller man still, viz., Messrs. Crawford and Speakman [sic], until the last, which was played by a diminutive actor, not more than 5ft. 3in. or 4in., who proved himself a real tragedian, and who held the audience spellbound by the magnetic force of his personality, and the beauty and pathetic quality of his delivery of the lines – I mean the late J. B. Howe. I shall never forget his performance, because before he entered upon the scene there was a fearful noise in the house. Men were calling out 'Almond cake and ginger beer,' people were laughing and talking, but the moment little J. B. Howe entered with lantern in his hand the house was hushed into a dead silence, and you could almost have heard the proverbial pin drop.

The five-a-night practice was not confined to the Britannia. Carados mentions similar productions at the Grecian, Victoria, Standard and Sadler's Wells Theatres (*Referee*, 27 January 1924). There is also evidence of a version of *Othello* with five Moors at the Effingham Theatre in December 1861.³³ Presumably such productions were put on as novelties to attract audiences.

The Britannia also followed fashion by putting on productions of *Hamlet* with an actress taking the title role. This vogue for female Hamlets developed in the second half of the nineteenth century and included celebrated versions by Charlotte Cushman and Sarah Bernhardt.³⁴ Seemingly, they aimed to establish or enhance the reputation of the actress as a serious performer of exceptional merit.

³¹ *Diaries*, p.217n.

³² Bell wrote a play for the Brit, *The Court, The Prison and The Scaffold*, which was favourably reviewed (*Era*, 6 December 1874).

³³ Francis Edwards, *Playbills: A Collection and Some Comments* (London: Francis Edwards, 1893) p.34.

³⁴ Jill Edmonds, 'Princess Hamlet' in Viv Gardner and Susan Rutherford, eds, *The New Woman and Her Sisters: Feminism and Theatre 1850-1914* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992) p.60.

Praise for the portrayal of Hamlet by Julia Seaman, the daughter of Britannia actor and playwright William Seaman, was exploited in the publicity for her appearance at the Britannia in 1871:

The Management point attention to the fact that by the concurrent testimony of the Press in Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, Bath, and indeed in all the chief centres of intelligence throughout the Kingdom, Miss Julia Seaman's impersonation of *Hamlet* is considered superior to that of any other Lady on the Stage.³⁵

Seaman was described in the *Illustrated London News* (17 June 1899) as 'the first colloquial Hamlet'. Her interpretation was influenced by the celebrated actor Charles Fechter, and both donned a flaxen wig for the part.³⁶ Newton maintains that Fechter's own performances of *Hamlet* were directly affected by a visit he paid to the Britannia where he saw Pepper's Ghost in operation. He then bought the rights to use it and 'that illusion Fechter used in *Hamlet* to the end of his wonderful career.'³⁷

Seaman was not the only woman to portray Hamlet at the Britannia: Sophie Miles played him in 1867, Marie Henderson in 1869 and 1871, Adelaide Ross in 1869, M.A. Bellair in 1873, Maude Forrester in 1886 and Oliph Webb in 1893. Maude Forrester, who was known for her equine performances, received mixed reviews. The *Era* (9 October 1886) considered 'Shakespeare's language and conceptions are, we fear, a little beyond her scope'. Another reviewer adversely commented on her 'massive' physique, yet admitted 'her reading of Shakespeare was not lacking in dignity and intelligence'.³⁸

Some of the Brit's female Hamlets also played other Shakespearean heroes: Henderson as Richard III to Eliza Clayton's Richmond (1869 and 1870), and Ross and Bellair as Romeo (1869 and 1874 respectively). In lesser roles, Amy Roselle personated Macduff to her brother's Macbeth (1864) and Fanny Lupino played Arthur in *King John* (1875).

Shakespearean Tableaux

On 28 April 1864 the Britannia staged a special evening of 'Shaksperian [sic] Tableaux', the proceeds of which were devoted to the 'Shaksperian Monument Fund'. The evening was designed to compliment the many activities marking Shakespeare's Tercentenary.³⁹ The playbill describes the tableaux: 'Each consisting of a striking incident from one or

³⁵ Britannia playbill 297 for 11 December 1871, HA.

³⁶ Foulkes, *Performing*, p.51.

³⁷ Newton, *Cues*, pp.191-92.

³⁸ Unattributed cutting, 1886, in ALC cuttings, author's collection.

³⁹ Richard Foulkes, *The Shakespeare Tercentenary of 1864* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1984).

other of the most Popular Plays of the Immortal Bard, and illustrated by a portion of the original dialogue'.⁴⁰ The chosen plays were *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest* and *Richard III*. Following these was 'Shakspeare [played by John Parry] surrounded by a combination of tableaux'. The following week the entertainments were repeated after the opening drama, but two of the tableaux were omitted 'on account of the length of the performances'.⁴¹ The same format was repeated the next week but 'playing the Tableaux last & substituting the murder Scene in *Macbeth* for the "Meeting of the Witches"'.⁴²

The tableaux must have been well received because a similar programme was staged for Passion Week in 1865. Billed as 'Histrionic Tableaux', the Shakespearean items featured were *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry IV*, *Hamlet*, *As You Like It* and *Richard III* plus the classics *Pizarro* and *William Tell*. The evening concluded with a 'Shakesperian Combination Tableau', presumably the same as the previous year's.⁴³

These were not the only occasions on which Shakespeare appeared as a character on the Britannia stage. C.A. Somerset's drama *The Angel at Islington, or The Merrie Days of Shakespeare and Queen Bess*, was staged in July 1855 and revived after the Britannia Festival on 12 December 1887. Described in the *Theatrical Journal* (25 July 1855) as 'a new histori[c]al, traditional, and allegorical drama', the play has a traditional melodramatic plot set in Elizabethan England. It features a royal pageant celebrating the opening of the first Royal Exchange. Shakespeare asks the keeper of the Angel at Islington Tavern to play Falstaff in the pageant. One scene (1.5) depicts the procession of Queen Elizabeth, the May Queen, Shakespeare and the players arriving at the Royal Exchange. The flats then open to discover 'The Interior of the Royal Exchange decorated with the flags of all nations. Queen Elizabeth on her throne . . .' This is followed by a speech honouring Sir Thomas Gresham and the singing of the national anthem:

. . . at the end of which – a little figure personating Fame with the trumpet – will descend and place the wreath of immortality on his head, at which moment four representatives of Europe, Asia, Africa and America with Banners inscribed will group around him, forming a beautiful allegorical Tableau.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Playbills TM, 2 of 13.

⁴¹ *Diaries*, p.76.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.76.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.90-91.

⁴⁴ ADD.MS 52954 Y, f.12, BL.

Shakespeare and his players are part of this patriotic spectacle. Even though he is a minor character in the play, he delivers the final speech:

MR SHAKESPEARE The Winter of our discontent is past
 And fortunes sunshine smiles on us at last[.]
 *Grand Tableau shouts – God save Queen Elizabeth & Curtain*⁴⁵

Because the play is set locally and London apprentices help thwart the villain's plot, audience members are invited to see themselves as part of this glorious nation. Shakespeare is presented both as a participant in local life and as an iconic national figure. The popularity of tableaux reflects the dominance of the visual and emblematic in the Britannia's productions.

Burlesques

There is evidence for only five Shakespearean burlesques at the Britannia: *Kynge Lear and Hys Fayithfulle Foole* (1860), *Kynge Lear and His Daughters Queer* (1871), *Hamlet Travestie* (1874), *The New King Richard the Third* (1878) and a short duologue, 'The Ghost of Hamlet's Father' (1894). This may seem surprising given the vogue for such burlesques at other theatres in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴⁶ In fact, very few were put on at East End theatres.⁴⁷ Richard Schoch argues that burlesques are dependent on knowledge of the original Shakespeare drama and recent stagings of it.⁴⁸ They are most successful when the audience recognises the productions being ridiculed. Since it is unlikely that the Britannia's customers would have seen Charles Kean's antiquarian-based performances at the Princess's, it is understandable that the Brit was not among the six theatres putting on parodies of Kean's productions in 1853.⁴⁹ The fact that there were no burlesques of *Othello*, *Macbeth* or other Shakespearean plays performed at the Brit suggests either the management regarded Shakespeare as not sufficiently popular or that it feared the audience would not appreciate mockery of the heightened scenes it so enjoyed.

What is perhaps more surprising is that two of the Britannia burlesques should parody *King Lear*, especially since Shakespeare's tragedy was produced only three times at the theatre (by Anderson in June 1856 and at benefits in June 1869 and July 1877). Moreover, *Lear* was not a popular subject for burlesques: there is not a single one in the five volumes

⁴⁵ Ibid., f.24.

⁴⁶ Richard W. Schoch, 'Shakespeare Mad' in Marshall and Poole, eds, vol. 1, p.73.

⁴⁷ Richard W. Schoch, ed., *Victorian Theatrical Burlesques* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p.xxviii.

⁴⁸ Schoch, 'Shakespeare Mad', p.74.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.74.

of Stanley Wells's Shakespeare burlesques.⁵⁰ The scripts of the two Britannia burlesques make fun of the original drama rather than particular productions. The first, *Kynge Lear and Hys Faythefulle Foole*, was written by Britannia actor Frederick Marchant. One reviewer, while lamenting the 'injurious tendency of these burlesques, in degrading the drama', nevertheless conceded: 'We should, however, be doing injustice to the artistes engaged in the representation were we to deny them the praise they deserve for their successful exertions.'⁵¹ Like all burlesques, Marchant's script contains topical allusions, including to the pugilists Tom Sayers and the Benicia Boy in scene 4.⁵² Scene 6 is set in open county with a prize ring in which Edmund and Edgar fight. This is another reference to the Sayers-Heenan fight, which, in order to evade the police, took place in the countryside (see Chapter 4). The burlesque was produced in the week immediately following the production of Hazlewood's play about the fight. Whereas West End burlesques parody productions at other theatres, the Britannia's is self-referencing.

Kynge Lear and his Three Daughters Queer was written by another member of the Britannia company, the comic actor Edward Elton. The playbill highlights its style:

. . . an entirely new melo-dramatical, fantastical, satirical and operatical, laughter-moving and mirth-provoking, burlesque extravaganza introducing numerous lyrical travesties, parodies, and paraphrases of the most popular and delectable Melodies of the Day . . . entytuled and edytet from (and a long way from) Ye Shakespearian Tragedy . . .'⁵³

The production opened on 20 March 1871 with Elton playing Kent and Sara Lane Cordelia 'in the garb of a pretty school miss' (*Sunday Times*, 26 March 1871). Cecil Pitt and George Bigwood were her two sisters and, in a further gender reversal, Lizzie Raynor personated Edgar. Prior to its opening, Wilton records:

Answered note from Mr W.B.Donne, Examiner of Plays, assuring him there is nothing whatever objectionable in the songs of our new Burlesque . . . to be produced next Monday Week: no allusions to politics or the current topics of the day.⁵⁴

However, as Davis points out, reviews in the *Sunday Times* and the *Era* prove that in performance there were topical references to 'the Franco-Prussian War and the hardship of

⁵⁰ Stanley Wells, *Nineteenth-Century Shakespeare Burlesques*, 5 vols (London: Diploma Press, 1977).

⁵¹ Unattributed cutting, 24 June 1860, Theatre Cuttings 63, BL.

⁵² ADD.MS.52994 C, BL.

⁵³ Playbill for 20 March 1871, Playbills TM, 3 of 13.

⁵⁴ *Diaries*, p.183.

railway officials'.⁵⁵ Reviewers agreed that the burlesque was well received by the audience, but they differed in their assessment of its dramatic merits. The critic of the *H&K Gazette* (25 March 1871) approved: 'It is well written; the puns are good – though not quite understandable to the "Brit" audience – and the allusions to the topics of the day to the purpose.' The *Sunday Times* (26 March 1871) objected to the ridiculing of Shakespeare's works 'in a most ludicrous fashion'. The *Era* (26 March 1871) praised Elton's rhymes, puns and 'word-twistings' but suggested 'there are many opportunities for fun which he has missed'.

The third Britannia burlesque was John Poole's *Hamlet Travestie*, which was written in 1810. It was staged at the Britannia on 2 December 1874 for the benefit of G.H. Macdermott as one of many revivals of the piece that year. Wells claims these were 'inspired by the phenomenal success of Irving's *Hamlet*, which had a run of 200 performances from 30 October 1874 to 29 June 1875.'⁵⁶ Unfortunately, the review of the Britannia's production in the *Sunday Times* (6 December 1874) does not indicate whether Macdermott's portrayal of the title role imitated Henry Irving's. It merely comments that he 'was excessively funny as the Prince and caused hearty laughter.' Wilton's diary entry notes that the 'Audience came expecting to see the real play of *Hamlet*' (incidentally proving that Shakespeare did attract theatregoers).⁵⁷ In November 1876 *Hamlet Travestie* was revived at the Brit with Macdermott again playing the prince but 'with a selection of new songs'.⁵⁸

Hazlewood's *The New King Richard the Third* was produced posthumously in 1878. Sara Lane played the hunchback with Fred Foster as Lady Anne and Bigwood as Henry VI. Bigwood's over-the-top acting was singled out for particular notice (*Era*, 7 April 1878):

When we behold the lugubrious King Henry the Sixth in a suit of solemn black shivering and shaking in the presence of his humpbacked rival, and find this personage represented by Mr Bigwood, hearty laughter follows as a matter of course. The living monarch is funny enough, but when he receives the fatal thrust from the usurper's rapier it is worth a visit to the Britannia to see Mr Bigwood's death agonies and happy revival 'in time to catch the next train' as soon as Richard is out of sight.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.228.

⁵⁶ Wells, vol. 1, p.xxi.

⁵⁷ Wilton CY1136, frame 948.

⁵⁸ Playbill for 27 November 1876, Playbills TM, 4 of 13.

At the end of the burlesque everyone who has been killed during the course of the action is found to be well, even Richard.⁵⁹ These resurrections, scripted to provide a happy ending totally at odds with Shakespeare's original, are treated comically and no attempt is made to give a credible reason for how they have come about.

Despite its favourable reception, the burlesque does not appear to have been revived. This, and the fact that it was not produced until three years after Hazlewood's death, suggests the management did not consider Shakespearean burlesques as crowd-pullers. The final recorded example appeared in 1894 when the drama *Stage-Struck* 'introduced a new burlesque duologue entitled "The Ghost of Hamlet's Father," by Mr J. Addison' (*Era*, 31 March 1894). There is no evidence of the piece in the Lord Chamberlain's collection of plays so presumably it was not licensed.

Even in non-burlesqued Shakespearean productions, the Britannia's treatment of the bard was sometimes comic. Newton recalls that Joseph Plumpton, 'that theatre's popular singing actor', introduced at least one song into everything in which he appeared.⁶⁰ The musical offerings were not always appropriate to the drama: 'But what used to amuse me . . . was that Joe Plumpton was often compelled to drop into Mrs Lane's Shakespearean revivals sundry songs, by no means concerned with Shakespeare's original scripts!'⁶¹

Shakespeare at rival theatres

Although Shakespearean drama appeared at the Brit in both serious and burlesqued forms, we might question why it did not play a more significant role and whether the theatre's output was typical of working-class establishments? Barker notes that the Standard had a much better record of producing Shakespeare, citing as proof the longer periods for which it contracted Anderson and the engagement of Mr and Mrs Charles Kean.⁶² Moreover, when Anderson appeared there in 1853 he played nine Shakespearean heroes,⁶³ whereas at the Brit he enacted only five (Coriolanus, Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello and Richard III).

Francis Edwards comments on the many Shakespearean productions at the Pavilion, stating "'Hamlet" has been playing at the "Pav." more times in the course of one season than at all the other theatres in the whole of London, taken together'.⁶⁴ Davis and

⁵⁹ ADD.MS 53200 B, ff.38-39.

⁶⁰ Newton, *Cues*, p.211.

⁶¹ Newton, *Idols of the Halls* (Wakefield: EP Publishing, 1975); first publ. 1928, p.48.

⁶² Barker, 'Audiences', 30.

⁶³ Richard Foulkes, *Performing Shakespeare in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p.50.

⁶⁴ Edwards, p.23.

Emeljanow claim 'Shakespeare remained a constant in the repertoire'.⁶⁵ However, following the opening of the new theatre in 1858 and under the managements of John Douglass and then Morris Abrahams, the Pavilion does not appear to have been particularly known for its Shakespeare.

Between 1844 and 1862 Sadler's Wells theatre, situated about a mile to the west of the Britannia, was managed by Samuel Phelps and became renown for its Shakespearean productions.⁶⁶ The *Evening News* (16 September 1909) asserted that 'In 1865 Mr. and Mrs. Lane made a high bid for the services of Samuel Phelps, but failed to secure him.' There is no corroborating evidence, but a biography of Phelps reveals that when he gave up the management of Sadler's Wells in 1862 'he had overtures made to him from the managers of several theatres'.⁶⁷ Then again, on leaving Fechter and the Lyceum, he received four offers, including one from Drury Lane.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, the other bidders are not identified. It is tempting to speculate that the Britannia's Shakespearean profile would have been substantially raised had the Lanes been successful in contracting Phelps.

Since the Standard and Sadler's Wells were feted for their Shakespearean productions, perhaps the Lanes decided that that particular niche market was already catered for and that they therefore would not attempt to compete.

Another possible reason for the relatively few productions of Shakespeare outside of the visits of specially contracted tragedians was the difficulty of fitting sufficient rehearsal time into the repertory system. Crauford notes: 'In the later years of the Britannia theatre a Shakespearean week was given wherein six of the most popular plays of the poet were performed, consequently with only one rehearsal for each.'⁶⁹ On 17 July 1897 Algernon Syms played Hamlet for the first time for one evening only. A review (*Era*, 24 July 1897) noted he made a couple of slips and would have benefited from a few more rehearsals, but nevertheless pronounced the performance 'a success'. Even when visiting stars enacted the main roles, the lack of rehearsal time could be problematic. In December 1871 Julia Seaman was engaged to play Lady Macbeth opposite James Anderson's Macbeth. Wilton records on the Monday it opened: 'Julia Seaman did not arrive in London till 3 p.m. and

⁶⁵ Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001) p.57.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.108-25.

⁶⁷ W. May Phelps and John Forbes-Robertson, *The Life and Life-Work of Samuel Phelps* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1886) p.288.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.288.

⁶⁹ *Sam & Sallie*, p.230. Adverts do not support Crauford's contention, although in the week beginning 6 December 1880 *Macbeth* was played on Monday and Tuesday, *Hamlet* on Wednesday and Thursday, and *Richard III* on Friday and Saturday.

had no rehearsal'.⁷⁰ On the other hand, as Arthur Colby Sprague explains, because the stock companies had established traditional bits of stage business for the classics they were able to stage Shakespearean drama with scant preparation.⁷¹

Playing only single performances put particular strain on actors, as the *Era* (9 March 1873) recognised in praising Howe's Hamlet:

Mr Howe was as letter perfect, as apt and energetic, and as successful in this arduous *role* as though he had been playing it every night for the last six months, instead of a character which made infinitely less demands on his uncommon histrionic powers.

In contrast, the Princess's Theatre established long runs for its Shakespearean productions. Its *Henry VIII*, for example, played for 150 consecutive performances.⁷²

The repertory system was also incompatible with Charles Kean's archeologically accurate productions at the Princess's Theatre in the 1850s or the historically authentic performances recreating past eras that were in vogue during the 1870s and 1880s.⁷³ The Britannia simply could not undertake the copious amounts of research such productions demanded. Neither is there any reason to suggest that its audience would have particularly valued such authenticity. Similarly, the Brit could not hope to compete with the resources spent on Herbert Beerbohm Tree's spectacular performances at Her Majesty's Theatre at the end of the century.

The most likely reason for the relatively low profile of Shakespearean drama was the fear that it would fail to attract sizeable audiences and therefore would be unprofitable. This nervousness was evident when Anderson played at the Brit in 1866. Wilton comments: 'Have had very little trouble, comparatively, in 'getting up' his pieces, the management 'eschewing' the legitimate', and avoiding *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *Richard &c*, believing they would keep money out of the house.'⁷⁴ The supposition was not always well founded. At her benefit on 12 July 1871 Marie Henderson chose to play Hamlet. Wilton records: 'A capital House – Immense Pit & Gallery – filling not only the Audience part of the house, but the passages as well – to the astonishment of all the actors & the management – who had very gloomy forebodings of the prospect for some days

⁷⁰ *Diaries*, p.197.

⁷¹ Arthur Colby Sprague, *Shakespeare and the Actors: The Stage Business In His Plays (1660-1905)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948) p.xxiii.

⁷² Fontane, p.29.

⁷³ Michael R. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) p.45.

⁷⁴ *Diaries*, p.108.

previous.⁷⁵ The view that Shakespeare was a commercial liability was not confined to the East End. F.B. Chatterton, who jointly ran Drury Lane from 1863 to 1879, had a dictum ‘Shakespeare spells ruin and Byron bankruptcy’.⁷⁶

INCIDENTALS

At the opening night of the Britannia Saloon in 1841, the main drama was followed by an Intermezzo. Cave recalls that ‘I and Flexmore [a celebrated clown] “brought down the house” with “Jim along Josey” and the “Squash Hollow Hornpipe”’. These were negro song and dance routines. Thus from the very beginning ‘incidentals’ were a popular part of the Britannia’s entertainment. The programme for 6 October 1856 is a typical example. It features the main drama *Dred, A Tale of the Dismal Swamp, or Poor Uncle Tiff* (based on Harriet Beecher Stowe’s slavery novel), Cecil Pitt’s new drama *The Forger and His Victim*, the ‘comedietta’ *The Statue Lover* and the farce *How To Pay Rent Without Money*. Between them are a *Pas de Deux* danced by Celeste Stephan and Mr. W. Smith, and Miss Leonora Blanche ‘the Infant Wagner (Only 9 years old)’, singing two songs and reciting ‘The War Alphabet’.⁷⁷ This pattern of including non-dramatic entertainment continued throughout the lifetime of the theatre. The attractions for 17 March 1873, for example, featured the Oberon Choir, Mrs Klein Mordan ““The Liliputian [sic] Wonder,” (*three inches shorter than Tom Thumb!*)’, comic singer Fred Foster, and J.B. Johnson, ‘The Champion Swimmer of the World’, whose act included imitating a fish, walking like an alligator, and various underwater feats such as drinking milk, smoking a cigar and dancing upside down.⁷⁸ Such performers were typically engaged for a week or two, occasionally longer if they proved particularly popular. The exception to this was during the first few weeks of the pantomime’s run when there was no time for extra novelties. They reappeared once the pantomime was playing in a reduced format.

Although incidental acts were a feature at many of the minor theatres, the Britannia seems unusual in the prominence that it accorded them. They were a significant attraction in their own right, taking prime position on the playbills and eclipsing details of the main dramas. For example, the first lines of the Brit’s advert in the *Era* (24 June 1893) proclaim the ‘Important and Expensive Engagement, for Twelve Nights Only, of Zaeo, the World-

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.188.

⁷⁶ W.J. Macqueen Pope, *Theatre Royal Drury Lane* (London: W.H. Allen, n.d) p.283.

⁷⁷ Playbill for 6 October 1856, Playbills 376, BL.

⁷⁸ Britannia playbill 342 for 31 March 1873, HA.

famed Aerial Artist, from the Royal Aquarium.’⁷⁹ After detailing the dramas, the advert again returns to Zaeo’s engagement ‘being her First Appearance at the East-end’. This implies that she is the main attraction, yet the *Era*’s review (1 July 1893) gave a critique of the drama but fails to mention the incidentals. Middle-class critics seemed once again to be out of step with the Britannia’s audience.

The fact that some of the performers were paid more than the regular actors confirms the importance of the incidentals. Wilton lists the weekly wage of Wainratta, ‘King of the Wire’ as £6 in 1872, the same amount as paid to Geretti, the Slack Rope Dancer, the following year.⁸⁰ The two Rizareli Brothers, who performed a trapeze act, received the enormous sum of £22 between them.⁸¹ Most of the comic singers received £3 or £4 per week at a time when the leading actors were paid £4.⁸²

Types of incidental acts

The Britannia’s multifarious incidentals can be divided into broad categories: musical acts; acrobats and performers of physical feats; animal shows; topical personalities; and novelties.

The musical acts covered a range of styles. Many were comic, often combined with dance routines. For example, Mr. H. Carles performed a comic song with an ‘outrageous imitation of the “renowned Lancashire clog-dancer,” Mr. J. Crabtree’ (*Era*, 23 April 1854). There were countless serio-comics, a double-voiced artist, patter vocalists, duettists and groups. Troupes of minstrels appeared frequently; the most famous being Christy’s Minstrels.

Among the numerous acrobats and physically challenging acts were many celebrated aerial artists, including tightrope-walker Blondin (famous for performing above Niagara Falls) and trapeze artist Jules Leotard (who appeared in 1861). Blondin was engaged in 1861, 1884, 1885 and 1894 and performed many of his trademark feats, including cooking an omelette and riding a bicycle on the wire, which was stretched from the back of the stage to the gallery (*Referee*, 26 October 1884). Other acts demanding physical dexterity or agility included broadsword combatants (in 1858), champion skaters (1867), a velocipede act (1869), a canon-ball specialist (1871), strong men (1893), lady boxers (1896) and numerous jugglers and gymnasts. Some acts were more mundane, if not bizarre. In

⁷⁹ Zaeo had caused a sensation in 1890 when she appeared at the Aquarium because posters showed her armpits; Midge Gillies, *Marie Lloyd, The One and Only* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1999), p.52.

⁸⁰ *Diaries*, p.236.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.235.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp.235-36.

February 1866 playbills proclaimed the appearance of the Australian Johnny Day, 'The Champion Walker of the World! Aged Nine and a half years, who will execute the unprecedented task of walking one mile in nine minutes round a circle arranged for the occasion.' Modern audiences might suspect this act to be eight minutes too long, but it must have proved popular as Day completed a fortnight's engagement.⁸³

Animal acts included Professor Lorenzo's Miniature Circus (1892), 'Myer's Wonderful Troupe of Six Mammoth Forest Bred Lions and Four Monstre [sic] Full-grown Indian Elephants' (1882),⁸⁴ a pigeon trainer (1884) and Little Jumbo, a stunt-performing elephant who walked a tightrope and rode a tricycle (*Era*, 12 September 1885). The presence of such acts raises the question of where the animals were housed. A newspaper report of the court case about an assault on Tom Sayers reveals that, following an appearance in the Britannia pantomime, he was returning home riding on his horse and following his two performing mules.⁸⁵ Presumably other animals were also removed from the theatre each night. Even if the Britannia did not provide stabling, it sometimes had to make special provisions to accommodate the animals. For example, the stage had to be 'shored up and underpinned' for Blind Billy, one of Myer's enormous elephants.⁸⁶

Animals did not just take part in the incidentals. Horses played key roles in productions of *Mazeppa*, such as that staged for Marie Henderson's benefit in July 1870, and in *Turpin's Ride to York, or The Death of Bonny Black Bess*.⁸⁷ 'Talking' dogs starred in W.J. Thompson's drama *Signal Lights* in June 1896.

Just as Hazlewood dramatised contemporary stories of interest (see Chapter 4), so the Britannia's management further exploited current events by inviting the headline-makers to make guest appearances. On 11 January 1866 the steamship *London* was shipwrecked and 270 people died, including the well-known tragedian Gustavus Brooke. Samuel Lane engaged some of the rescued crew and passengers. A newspaper report cited the rationale for the appearance: 'having lost by the shipwreck all they possessed, they are regarded by the manager as proper objects for the generosity of his patrons, and it is attempted to enlist the sympathies of the public in their behalf'.⁸⁸ This was not received favourably in all quarters. Wilton is scathing of the way they were introduced by Thomas Drummond, the Britannia's leading villain, 'who made a long, rambling, inconsequent and very foolish

⁸³ Ibid., p.105.

⁸⁴ Playbill for 25 September 1882, Playbills TM, 6 of 13.

⁸⁵ Unattributed cutting, 31 March 1863, Theatre Cuttings 65, BL.

⁸⁶ *Sam & Sallie*, p.282.

⁸⁷ *Diaries*, pp.175 and 174.

⁸⁸ Unattributed cutting, [4 February 1866?], Theatre Cuttings 68, BL.

speech about them, saying these brave men had – with the truly great & noble courage characteristic of Englishmen, bravely _____ saved _____ *themselves*!’⁸⁹ *All the Year Round* (3 March 1866) carried a piece roundly condemning the (unnamed) theatre for degrading such a noble story.⁹⁰ The *Dramatic Telegram* (26 February 1866) criticized the City of London for its ‘rather questionable taste’ in introducing the rescued crew to its stage and lamented ‘The BRITANNIA has followed suit, we are sorry to see, with flaming pictures of a ship in distress at every corner of Hoxton.’ The audience, however, must have responded positively or Lane would not have continued to engage the men, especially at the inflated price reported by Drummond to Wilton – the coxswain earning £30 for appearing for one week.⁹¹ Lane doubtless remembered that when he had introduced seven survivors from an earlier sinking (the Confederate cruiser the *Alabama*) on 4 July 1864 ‘The audience rose, “*en masse*”, men cheering & females waving handkerchiefs.’⁹²

From 1871 to 1872 London society was transfixed by the court case involving Sir Roger Tichborne, the so-called Tichborne Claimant and self-proclaimed heir to an estate in Hampshire.⁹³ He was eventually found to be an impostor and subsequently tried and imprisoned for perjury. The Britannia’s management was quick to take advantage of his celebrity status. Wilton tried to get the Claimant to patronise his benefit in July 1871.⁹⁴ In that year’s pantomime W.H. Pitt appeared as Sir Roger de Wenn, a caricature of the Claimant, and was made up to resemble him (*Era*, 28 January 1872). In May 1873 Tichborne addressed the audience to raise funds for his defence in the perjury trial. He was paid £15 for appearing.⁹⁵ Finally, he returned in 1885 to speak ‘upon the Tichborne Trials and upon the various incidents of his Prison Life’ (*Era*, 14 March 1885). In the cases of both the shipwreck survivors and the Tichborne Claimant, the Britannia functioned as an interactive talking newspaper, providing its audience with the thrill of witnessing the protagonists of real-life dramas in the flesh.

Novelty acts varied from the quirky or eccentric, such as Walter Stanton, ‘the World’s Greatest Bird Impersonator’ (*Era*, 28 May 1892) to a lightning cartoonist (1884), Chinese necromancers (1856), numerous ventriloquists, magicians, marionette artists and impersonators. ‘Freak show’ performers made up a small proportion of the theatre’s

⁸⁹ *Diaries*, p.103.

⁹⁰ ‘Calamity-Mongering’, *All the Year Round* (3 March 1866) 187.

⁹¹ *Diaries*, p.104.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.79.

⁹³ Michael Diamond, *Victorian Sensation, or the Spectacular, the Shocking and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Anthem Press, 2003) pp.27-63.

⁹⁴ *Diaries*, p.187.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.212 and 230.

incidentals. For example, on 9 March 1869 the Siamese Twins Chang and Eng, the Nova Scotian Giantess (Anna Swan) and the Circassian Lady all graced the Britannia's stage. The first two acts had previously been exhibited by P.T. Barnum.⁹⁶ Another act featuring physical abnormality headlined in 1871, conjoined twins billed as the 'Two-Headed Nightingale'.

The appearance of the Circassian Lady raises the issue of the Britannia audience's attitude to race. The woman in question, Zobeida Leeti,⁹⁷ like the Circassian Beauties displayed in America by Barnum, had supposedly been a slave in a Turkish harem.⁹⁸ With her famed Afro-style hair, she was marketed as an exotic beauty. Despite the interest excited by the exhibition of various African tribes people following the appearance of the Hottentot Venus in 1810,⁹⁹ there is no evidence of any other individual exhibited at the Brit as a genuine example of an exotic or primitive race. (The numerous minstrels and negro delineators who appeared were blacked-up white performers and G.J. Ritz, 'the North American Indian Tambourinist', who appeared in December 1869 was advertised for his skill in playing ten tambourines simultaneously rather than for his ethnicity.)¹⁰⁰

Not all the novelties were animate. In 1885 Mason and Titus' shadowgraph was showcased and in June and July 1899 another new technology, the Matagraph, formed part of the evening's entertainment. This film projector could screen both magic-lantern slides and 35mm film. At the Brit it showed contemporary scenes, such as the Scotch Express crossing the Forth Bridge and the 1899 Derby horse race and 'some interesting pictures, amongst them being a view of Hoxton-street and the exterior of the Britannia, the photograph having been taken on Saturday, the 24th ult' (*Era*, 1 and 8 July 1899). Thus it exploited the new interest in photography and cinematography and was a harbinger of the theatre's future conversion to a cinema.

Significance of the incidentals

The practice of presenting incidental entertainments is one of the distinguishing features of the minor theatres. There is a discernible difference between the types of incidentals

⁹⁶ Irving Wallace, *The Fabulous Showman: The Life and Times of P.T. Barnum* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959) pp.115, 117.

⁹⁷ Spelling as on Britannia playbill 187 for 8 March 1869, HA.

⁹⁸ Linda Frost, 'The Circassian Beauty and the Circassian Slave: Gender, Imperialism, and American Popular Entertainment' in Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ed., *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996) pp.248-62.

⁹⁹ Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978); Bernth Lindfors, 'Ethnological Show Business: Footlighting the Dark Continent' in Thomson, pp.214-16.

¹⁰⁰ Britannia playbill 226 for 13 December 1869, HA.

produced at upmarket theatres, such as Covent Garden, and that at the Britannia. Many of the latter's acts also appeared at other entertainment venues – pleasure gardens, music halls, circuses, fairs, shows and exhibition spaces such as the Egyptian Hall or the Polytechnic Institute. These links were often exploited for marketing purposes; for example, the illusionist Colonel Stodare is billed as 'from the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly'.¹⁰¹ Some acts, such as Van Hare's troupe of equestrians, vaulters, and jesters (1862), were essentially circus performers. Many music-hall artists, including Marie Lloyd, G.H. Macdermott and J.G. (George) Forde, performed their routines at the Brit.¹⁰² The incidentals thereby occasioned the assimilation of other forms of popular culture into the Britannia's repertoire.

The acts were chosen to appeal to as wide a range of tastes as possible. Moreover, during a long evening's entertainment, they provided a variation in tempo and mood. In 1871, for example, the heightened emotional intensity of Anderson's Hamlet was juxtaposed with the athlete Adair and two vocalists. Because the concentration levels required by the pieces differed, the incidentals refreshed the audience. The social reformer Annie Besant, writing about the differences between West End and East End entertainment, rather unkindly speculated on the reason for the variety of amusements given at the Britannia:

Is it that want of education means lack of the power of attention? That a sustained story would be too great a strain on the untrained mind? Be that as it may, it is certain that in the theatres which cater especially for the poorer folk, the extreme variety of the fare provided is a most marked feature.¹⁰³

On a practical note, the incidentals offered playgoers an opportunity to visit the bars or toilets without missing the main entertainment. In addition, because some of the entertainments were associated with different types of venue, such as the music hall or circus, the audience believed it was getting bonus entertainments and therefore good value for money. This is the spirit in which the incidentals are mentioned in reviews, if at all.

There were practical benefits for the theatre's management too. The most obvious is that the incidentals gave the stock company and sometimes the orchestra (depending on the act) a much-needed period of respite between dramas. They also provided time for the mechanics of stage production. For example, flats could be changed or scenery moved in

¹⁰¹ Britannia playbill 57 for 12 March 1866, HA.

¹⁰² Forde was a patter comedian, whose daughter married Alfred Lane Crauford in 1882.

¹⁰³ Annie Besant, 'How London Amuses Itself in the East', *Our Corner* 8 (1 August 1886) 110.

readiness for the next dramatic presentation. Another consideration was financial; by introducing new incidentals the management could restage old plays without worrying that many potential customers would not attend because they had already seen the drama. Finally, the incidentals were an important element in the competition for business. The Britannia sought to provide all the entertainment local people could desire, thereby reducing their need to patronise other types of establishment. Why pay a shilling to see Blondin at the Crystal Palace, when you could witness his performance in a bill with two dramas and some other acts for less at the Brit?

CHANGING REPERTOIRE

Assumptions about the type of drama presented at the Brit were frequently made on the basis of its location and audience. The old association of the minor theatres with low culture and poor production values continued for many years. Even as late as 1874, the *Era*'s critic (31 May 1874) registered surprise when his prejudices were not confirmed:

For it is emphatically a noble sight to see such an audience attracted, not by sensational device or clap-trap effect, but by sound drama, honestly acted by faithful artists deservedly applauded and by legitimate amusements carried out in a genial spirit by those under the sway of an eminently artistic Manageress. There is little in common between the amusements at the Britannia and those which are popularly supposed to obtain at what are sneeringly stigmatised as East-end Theatres.

The theatre's position as an East End playhouse also affected the licensing of its dramas. A member of the Lord Chamberlain's staff, approving the banning of *Wrath's Whirlwind, or, The Neglected Child, the Vicious Youth and the Degraded Man* in 1853, wrote:

It is highly desirable to elevate the tone of the drama and it is specially necessary in the case of the saloons, who have a tendency to lower the morals and excite the passions of the classes who frequent these places of resort.¹⁰⁴

In 1851 Lane planned to mount a translation of a French play entitled *L'Enfant Prodigue* and 'engaged an artist of great ability for the scenery, procured many properties, &c. and after scouring all England over for animals belonging to Egypt, succeeded in finding some at Manchester, and . . . immediately engaged with their proprietor for their

¹⁰⁴ ADD.MS 53703, f.314, quoted in John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama 1824-1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) p.68.

appearance . . .' (*Theatrical Journal*, 27 February 1851). Unfortunately, the Lord Chamberlain's office refused to license the piece for the Britannia even though another translation was allowed at 'one of the "nobility's" theatres'. The Hoxton playhouse was evidently treated differently from theatres catering for a wealthier clientele. Four of Pitt's plays for the Brit were also banned between 1844 and 1851,¹⁰⁵ but there do not appear to be any examples from after his death in 1855. The Register of Lord Chamberlain's Plays for 1852-1865 shows that the Britannia was requested to omit oaths from several plays and was twice told it must not stage an execution, but otherwise few changes were required.¹⁰⁶ It seems that once the theatre had proved it was not a hotbed of sedition, successive Examiners relaxed their vigilance. Certainly, in his testimony to the Select Committee in 1866 Donne claimed 'a manuscript from the Britannia Theatre, for example, is very short, and may be read in a quarter of an hour'.¹⁰⁷ Even if he was a fast reader, it is inconceivable that he could have read the manuscripts closely in such a short space of time.

On 20 May 1865 Dickens wrote a letter to the politician Ralph Bernal Osborne in which he commented on changes at the Britannia: 'I have seen the gradual transformation of that place from a "Saloon" to a fine Theatre. That the character of the entertainments has risen as the transformation has progressed, I know beyond all doubt.'¹⁰⁸ Dickens is unequivocal about the improvement in the dramas during the first couple of decades, but the main genre of play remained unchanged.

Melodrama

As the examination of the work of Hazlewood shows, melodrama dominated the Britannia's repertoire.¹⁰⁹ With its clearly defined character parts, it was ideally suited to the stock company system. An account of the relatively poor reception of Hazlewood's *Laurette's Bridal* in 1866 reveals the prevailing taste:

A Britannia audience must have everything plain, open, palpable. Recondite plots and finesse of action are, to an extent, lost upon them. They prefer to have good and evil brought face to face in a sort of stand-up fight, the give and take to be vigorous and unmistakeable

¹⁰⁵ John Russell Stephens, 'Playwright in Extremis: George Dibdin Pitt Revisited', *Theatre Notebook* 53,1 (1999) 42-43.

¹⁰⁶ ADD.MS 53703, BL.

¹⁰⁷ Q.2233, 1866 Report.

¹⁰⁸ *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Graham Storey (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1999) vol. 11, p.44.

¹⁰⁹ See also Jim Davis, 'The Gospel of Rags: Melodrama at the Britannia, 1863-74', *New Theatre Quarterly* 7,28 (1991) 369-89.

while the combat lasts, and in the end the good to have a victory about which there can be no sort of doubt.¹¹⁰

The first melodrama played at the opening of the Britannia Saloon in March 1841 fits this description and is typical of the theatre's early output. Lancaster's *The Red Lance, or The Merrie Men of Hoxton* was published in *Oxberry's Weekly Budget* (20 November 1843) having been 'PERFORMED WITH UNPRECEDENTED SUCCESS AT THE ROYAL MARYLEBONE THEATRE, BRITANNIA, &C., &C.'¹¹¹ Cave, who appeared in the production, describes it as 'an entirely new melodrama', so it may have been specially commissioned for the occasion.¹¹² Significantly, the drama is set in Hoxton. The stage directions for the opening scene detail: 'View of the ancient Butts on the borders of Hogsden (Hoxton) Old Town, with entrance to the forest connecting Enfield Chase with the marsh lands in the vicinity.'¹¹³ The 'merrie men' of the title are a group of outlaws led by Robin Throstlethroat, a character derived from Robin Hood. The plot includes an archery contest between Robin's second-in-command and a city apprentice. The setting and plot have resonances for the local audience because for centuries Hoxton Fields was a traditional meeting-place and practice ground for archers.¹¹⁴

This predilection for staging representations of the local area continued throughout the Britannia's history. In *The Red Lance* the setting is local but historical, but later plays frequently depicted contemporary London street scenes. These were highlighted in the theatre's publicity, as has been shown for Hazlewood's *The Casual Ward* (see Chapter 4). The 1893 production of Tom Craven's *Time, The Avenger*, which had first played at the Surrey Theatre, is a later example. An advert (*Era*, 24 June 1893) boasts 'New and Realistic Local Scenery, showing the Exterior of the Britannia Theatre'. Such devices are important to a theatre serving a local community as they are another means of involving the audience, making it feel part of the dramatic experience.

The melodramas of the 1840s and 1850s were a mixture of the nautical, gothic and domestic. Pitt wrote many of them. His most famous work was *The String of Pearls, or The Fiend of Fleet Street*, which told the story of the murderous barber, Sweeney Todd. It was adapted from James Malcolm Rymer's story entitled 'The String of Pearls, or The Barber of Fleet Street' (1846), which was serialized in *The People's Periodical and Family*

¹¹⁰ Unattributed and undated cutting, Theatre Cuttings 68, BL.

¹¹¹ *Oxberry's Weekly Budget* (20 November 1843) 171.

¹¹² J.A. Cave, *A Jubilee of Dramatic Life and Incident of Joseph A. Cave*, ed., Robert Souter (London: Thomas Vernon, 1892) pp.38-39.

¹¹³ *Oxberry's Weekly Budget* (20 November 1843) 171.

¹¹⁴ Tony Coombs, *Tis a Mad World at Hogsdon: A Short History of Hoxton* (London: Hoxton Hall with London Borough of Hackney, 1974) p.9.

Library (1846-1847).¹¹⁵ It premièred on 22 February 1847 and was published by Dicks.¹¹⁶ There are several differences between the manuscript in the Lord Chamberlain's collection and the published play.¹¹⁷ The script ends in the barber's shop when a mob breaks in and Todd is shot. The Dicks version concludes in court where Todd is giving evidence implicating someone else for the murder of Mark Ingestrie. As he is doing so, Ingestrie appears and Todd, believing him to be a ghost, falls insensible to the ground having admitted his own guilt. The uncontrolled violence and instant retribution of the manuscript version is more thrilling for the audience. In later years the drama came to be associated with an unsophisticated taste because of its association with penny dreadfuls and the romanticising of criminals. Nevertheless, on 30 July 1894 the *Britannia* returned to the Sweeney Todd story. Significantly, this time it staged a version by C.A. Clarke and H.R. Silva, also entitled *The String of Pearls*.¹¹⁸ Clearly the management thought that audience taste had changed or they would have reprised Pitt's version again. Other Pitt plays were still being performed at the Brit; for example, his *Ambition* was produced for the important occasion of Samuel and Alfred Lane Crauford's benefit on 3 October 1894 and the following week. A review in the *Era* (6 October 1894) contrasts the forty-year-old play with contemporary pieces: 'The almost entire absence of sensational incidents, and the wordiness of the dialogue, proved somewhat trying to the Britanniaites, but compensation was found in the fact that in this piece Mrs Sara Lane, the popular proprietress, made one of her comparatively rare appearances . . .'

Sensation drama

An important development in the *Britannia*'s repertoire occurred in the 1860s when it began to stage sensation dramas. Such plays were so termed (often pejoratively) because they contained at least one scene of heightened tension and physical excitement in which some kind of mechanical effect was prominent. Critics frequently derided such dramas because, as in much popular drama, they made character subservient to plot and they appealed to the audience's senses rather than the intellect. In an attack on Boucicault's plays, one author reveals his distrust of the theatricality of the experience: 'Bodily peril, in fact, forms the basis of interest; and to the carpenter is entrusted the task of producing the

¹¹⁵ See Helen R. Smith, *New Light on Sweeney Todd, Thomas Peckett Prest, James Malcolm Rymer and Elizabeth Caroline Grey* (Bloomsbury, London: Jarndyce, 2002).

¹¹⁶ The published edition states it was first performed at the Brit in 1842 but the Lord Chamberlain's collection shows it was licensed in 1847.

¹¹⁷ ADD.MS 43000 ff.751-815, BL and *Sweeney Todd, The Barber of Fleet Street, or The String of Pearls*, Dicks' Standard Plays no. 499 (London: John Dicks, n.d.).

¹¹⁸ First produced in Birkenhead in 1892.

effect which we should owe solely to the dramatist.’¹¹⁹ He continues:

In his plots I fail to see moral purpose developed; there is no unfolding of character and passion; the effect he produces on an audience is the same in kind as that produced by a man who endangers his limbs and life on a trapeze; he stimulates the nerves rather than the intellectual faculties.¹²⁰

This is a good example of the snobbery around ‘low’ culture: a night at the Britannia would clearly not appeal to this critic. Conversely, knowing the audience’s preference for action over speech and the popularity of the acrobatic novelties decried here, it is not surprising that the Britannia’s audience should have enthusiastically embraced sensation drama.

The first major sensation drama was Boucicault’s *The Colleen Bawn*, which was produced at the Adelphi in September 1860. Two months later Hazlewood’s *Eily O’Connor, or The Bride of Killarney* appeared at the Britannia. Unlike H.J. Byron’s *Miss Eily O’Connor*, which opened at Drury Lane in November of the following year, Hazlewood’s play was not a burlesque. Admittedly it was a poor substitute for Boucicault’s original, but it treated its subject seriously. The two manuscripts in the Lord Chamberlain’s collection show the discrepancy in length: Boucicault’s three acts fill 107 folios, Hazlewood’s two acts total a mere seventeen.¹²¹ Inevitably it is a less subtle drama, especially in terms of characterisation, and the plot is pared down. However, the all-important climactic scene of thrilling physical excitement – the attempted murder and subsequent rescue of Eily at the lake – is intact. As at the Adelphi, the landscape was created with painted scenery and the water with gauze cloths. It was singled out as being ‘particularly effective’ (*Era*, 28 October 1860). In attending the same kind of spectacle as was offered by the more prestigious theatres, the audience at the Brit were partaking in the wider cultural arena.

In the 1866 Report, Nelson Lee, manager of the City of London Theatre, attested that sensation pieces were currently the most profitable. When asked ‘Have you found a difficulty in procuring pieces fit for performances for your theatre?’ he replied, ‘Recently I have. There are no fresh sensations to be got; you cannot throw a man off a rock every day.’¹²² Yet at the Britannia, the audience seems to have been unconcerned about the reintroduction of the same images in new pieces and Hazlewood reused the lake sensation

¹¹⁹ “Q” [Thomas Purnell], *Dramatists of the Present Day* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1871) p.63.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.67.

¹²¹ ADD.MSS 52995 B and 52995 T, BL.

¹²² Q4944 and 4946, 1866 Report.

in several plays. For example, Act 1 of *The Old Cherry Tree* (first performed in October 1866) closes after the villainess flings the heroine, Emily, off a rock. *Poul a Dhoil, or The Fairy Man* (October 1865) was even more derivative as its title (meaning ‘The Devil’s Pool’) is taken from the lake in Boucicault’s play. An illustration of the Britannia’s climactic scene appeared on the front page of the *Penny Illustrated Weekly News* (21 October 1865; see Plate 5.2). It shows the complex set, which closely followed the directions in the published text:

*Poul a Dhoil (the Devil’s Pool); the foreground of scene all water, and water cloth to roll down – set gauze waters, three natural arches of rock in C. of stage through which the water is seen coursing – a narrow bridge about four or five feet above this – a column of rock in the C. of stage as near down to the front as possible, rising about four or five feet out of the water – Music . . .*¹²³

The physical excitement of the scene is cumulative. Dora is forced over the side of the bridge and falls onto the arches. She bravely leaps into the water and swims to the rock, but is pursued and captured by one of the villains. Two boats move across the stage (one containing rescuers, the other carrying the villain’s henchmen) and a fight with boat hooks ensues. The curtain finally falls as Dora and her rescuers are safe in the boats and the villains are floundering in the water. Significantly, no words are spoken from the point at which one of the villains seizes Dora on the rock. The visual sense (supported by music) is the primary focus.

The sensation scenes in *Eily O’Connor* and *Poul a Dhoil* occur in plays depicting a pre-Industrial world – rural Ireland. Such rural settings, common to the domestic dramas that the Britannia had long been staging, were divorced from the daily experience of its audience though a minority of theatregoers may have previously migrated from the countryside.¹²⁴ However, the Brit also produced sensations that created a realistic impression of the modern world with scenes featuring railways, telegraph offices and technological innovations. Marchant’s *Forsaken* (1871 at the Brit) climaxed at a sawmill with the hero strapped to a bench and about to be cut in two by a circular saw. Carados witnessed the effect of the scene on audiences: ‘The women and girls shrieked – I have seen some faint and swoon – the men yelled and even hurled dreadful language at the hero-

¹²³ C.H. Hazlewood, *Poul a Dhoil, or The Fairy Man*, Lacy’s Acting Edition of Plays vol. 77 (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d), p. 45.

¹²⁴ The 1851 census revealed that over half the heads of households in Hoxton Street had been born in London (247 out of 449); Bettie Knott, *The Hub of Hoxton: Hoxton Street 1851-1871, Based on a Study of the Censuses* (London: London Borough of Hackney Library Services, 1981) p.28.

sawing fiends.’¹²⁵ Explosions and fires were common components of sensation scenes, and on a number of occasions real fire engines appeared to extinguish the conflagrations, as, for example, on 8 May 1867 for Hazlewood’s *The Work Girls of London*.¹²⁶

Another Britannia staging for which we have illustrative evidence is *Twenty Straws*, Hazlewood’s adaptation of Eliza Winstanley’s novel. ‘The great sensation scene’ depicted in the *Penny Illustrated Weekly News* (11 March 1865; see Plate 5.3) occurs after the villain has set fire to the ship and escaped taking the heroine’s baby. Flames and smoke rise from the hold as water rushes onto the deck. Not surprisingly, Wilton records a number of rehearsals, noting with satisfaction the first occasion it was perfect, twelve days before it opened.¹²⁷

The Brit was able to produce such sensation scenes because of its huge stage and the mechanical proficiency of its stage hands, but occasionally the stage wizardry failed with disastrous effect. In Hazlewood’s *Cast on the Mercy of the World, or Deserted and Deceived* (first produced in October 1862), the heroine is abandoned on breaking ice.¹²⁸ Crauford, describes the scene:

... persons in the play are shown in grave danger owing to the ice breaking up, and at the crucial moment a steamship appears from the extreme back of the stage; it carries a complete crew and, forcing its way through the melting ice, rescues those in peril, and turns broadside to the audience as the curtain falls – an effect only possible in a theatre like the Brit.¹²⁹

Percy Fitzgerald details how a similar scene was portrayed with ‘strips of whitened canvas’ to represent the ice, which were gradually drawn away.¹³⁰ The contrast with ‘sheets of perfectly *black* bombasin’ representing the water underneath, gave the illusion of ‘glaring white ice’. Wilton catalogues a stream of disasters when the play was revived in 1871 as the steam-ship variously ‘stuck against a Boat Truck on the stage midway’, broke through the stage, or ‘the wheels caught in the shaking waters & clogged & wouldn’t come down (i.e. to the front of stage).’¹³¹ On Friday he records:

Tonight it stuck at the back of the stage & would not come forward at all – at least for a very long time. A grand alteration had been made, placing two scenes of the 4th act at the end of the third, so as to leave

¹²⁵ A.E. Wilson, *East End Entertainment* (London: Arthur Baker, 1954) p.170.

¹²⁶ *Diaries*, p.123.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.87-88.

¹²⁸ A similar sensation scene had appeared in adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

¹²⁹ *Sam & Sallie*, p.280.

¹³⁰ Percy Fitzgerald, *The World Behind the Scenes* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1881) p.68.

¹³¹ *Diaries*, pp.190-91.

only the steam-ship scene for the 4th act, that the scene-shifters might be able to lay down sheathing all over the stage under the water-cloth, to strengthen the stage. This was done; but the ship could not be got to mount the sheathing for a long time. At last it was persuaded with the assistance of Herculean exertion & performed the voyage to the front without further mishap.

Finally, on Saturday, 'Tonight broke through the Vampire Trap!' The dramatic tension of the scene must surely have been dissipated as the audience waited for the hapless boat to be dislodged. The prompt copy gives the timings for the drama on its opening night (8 October 1862 for the benefit of Mrs W. Crauford); it ran for a total of two hours fifty-eight minutes with waits of twenty-five, fifteen and ten minutes between the acts.¹³² By the third week the running time had been reduced by twenty-eight minutes.

The success of the pieces must have depended to a large extent on how far the audience was prepared to suspend its disbelief. For the sophisticated Thomas Erle the effects were frequently not sufficiently convincing. Reviewing Seaman's *Third Class and First Class*, he suggests that the shipwreck in a storm, the setting of the final act in Japan, the volcanic eruption and the earthquake are included as opportunities for spectacle rather than for reasons of dramatic integrity. He insinuates that the volcano is introduced to supply 'a considerable body of red flame, the management having considered that the Japanese dresses were likely to light up particularly well.'¹³³ Of the storm, he writes:

There was no lack of lightning. It worked away indefatigably. But gleaming, as it did, through a transparent jag in the background, it necessarily seemed to be the self-same individual flash repeating itself an indefinite number of time. So that at last one almost felt inclined to exclaim 'Aha! there you are again, my friend.'¹³⁴

He is similarly scathing of the earthquake:

The knowledge that the agonised groans of nature accompanying the convulsions of the terrestrial sphere which thereupon ensued were not altogether unconnected with a small boy waggling about a sheet of some metallic substance in the immediate vicinity of the Prompter's box, prevented one's being caught up and carried away by a whirlwind of mad excitement, as must otherwise, in so electrifying a succession of stirring events, have been the case.¹³⁵

¹³² PETT.MSS.C.18, UoK. Charlotte Crauford was Sara's sister.

¹³³ Thomas W. Erle, *Letters from a Theatrical Scene Painter; Being Sketches of the Minor Theatres of London as They Were Twenty Years Ago* (London: Marcus Ward, 1880) p.62.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp.59-60.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp.61-62.

A theatrical effect for which the response seemed to be unanimously positive was Professor Pepper's Ghost illusion. The Britannia was the first theatre to use it, in Hazlewood's *Faith, Hope and Charity* in April 1863, thereby gaining plenty of publicity as an establishment at the forefront of technical innovation. By means of casting light on angled mirrors, a ghostly apparition (an offstage actor) appeared to inhabit the stage.¹³⁶ The *Era* (12 April 1863) described the effect as the murdered Faith materialised:

. . . she, as the ghost, addressed some words, the audience seemed perfectly spell-bound; and their astonishment was further increased when the baronet took his sword and made a thrust at the apparition, for the sword could be seen in its passage through the body of the illusion. This was rendered more perfect by its mouth being seen to move whilst addressing the Baron the same as it would in life. A considerable amount of applause followed, but the majority of the audience seemed too much entranced by what they had seen to give vent to their feelings.

Apart from the illusion, the play was an unremarkable domestic melodrama, albeit with 'three murders, one suicide, two conflagrations, four robberies, one virtuous lawyer, twenty-three angels and a ghost' (*Penny Illustrated Paper*, 16 May 1863). Yet the ghost effect really did cause a sensation, playing for forty-six consecutive weeks and being incorporated into a variety of other plays (such as Hazlewood's *The Demon Bracelets* in 1869 and *Hamlet*). Famous visitors, such as Angela Burdett-Coutts and Frederick Peel, the chief Railway Commissioner, attended private showings of the mechanism after the performances. Ada Reeve describes it being used as late as 1891 in the pantomime *The Old Bogie of the Sea*.¹³⁷

Repertoire in the 1880s and 1890s

For forty years the Britannia regularly produced original dramas, but during the 1880s and 1890s most of its headline dramas had already played in the West End. A small number of productions had previously been seen only in the provinces; for example, Charles Aldin's *The Slums of London*, which opened in April 1893, had previously played at the Grainger Theatre in Newcastle. Adverts flaunted the West End provenance of plays and sometimes marketed the use of the sets and scenery (and even the star players) from the original

¹³⁶ George Speaight, 'Professor Pepper's Ghost', *Theatre Notebook* 43,1 (1989) 16-24.

¹³⁷ Ada Reeve, *Take It For A Fact (A Record of My Seventy-Five Years on the Stage)* (London: William Heinemann, 1954) p.35.

production.¹³⁸ In July 1893 the Britannia advertised its enactment of the ‘great Olympic drama’ *The Pointsman* by R.C. Carton and Cecil Raleigh: ‘By Special Arrangement, Mr A.E. Percival will supply the whole of his Elaborate Scenic and Mechanical Effects (Three Tons of Scenery), including the great Railway Collision Scene’ (*Era*, 15 July 1893). On other occasions the original settings were used alongside specially produced scenes created by the Britannia’s stage craftsmen. On 1 September 1890 George Sims and Henry Pettitt’s *London Day By Day* utilised the ‘original Leicester-square and Port of London “sets,” painted by Mr Bruce Smith for the production at the Adelphi Theatre almost exactly a year ago’ supplemented by ‘masterly canvases’ painted by the Britannia’s W. Charles and C. Douglass (*Era*, 6 September 1890).

The Britannia did not always slavishly reproduce the original West End performances. Its July 1888 production of Arthur Law and Fergus Hume’s *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* was advertised on the programmes as ‘Another West-end drama at East-end prices’. However, two comic parts were added into the production that had not appeared in the original at the Princess’s Theatre earlier in the year (*Era*, 7 July 1888). Nevertheless, the fact that the Britannia did not generate much indigenous drama in the later decades (for example, during the whole of 1885 only two new dramas were premièred: Crauford’s *Home Once More, or A False Accusation* and Towner and Beaumont’s *Called to the Front*) suggests that the theatre’s creative heyday had passed.

In 1892 Sara Lane claimed ‘a great improvement in her gallery audiences since the Elementary Education Act of 1870 began to produce its results’ (*Era*, 10 Dec 1892). One might expect that the increasingly educated audience would have a more sophisticated taste. A review in the *Stage* (10 August 1888) of the Britannia’s production of Hall Caine and Wilson Barrett’s *Ben-my-Chree*, which had first been produced at the Princess’s Theatre, indicates the repertoire had developed accordingly:

... it was difficult to believe that this was the same theatre, and under the same management, where only a few years ago the staple fare consisted of *Sweeney Todd*, *Dick Turpin*, and the like, whilst now the most noteworthy plays from the Adelphi, Princess’s &c., are mounted here with so much care and liberality, and acted with such ability and ensemble that the productions fall little, if at all, short of the original productions.

Sara Lane made a similar point in remarking on the success of Henry Arthur Jones’s *The Middleman*, which first played at the Brit in 1896:

¹³⁸ For example, in July 1888 George Conquest was engaged to appear in his original role of Hoyle Snayle in the Surrey drama *Sentenced to Death* by Pettitt and Conquest.

‘I can remember the time, many years ago,’ she said, ‘when *The Middleman* wouldn’t have drawn at all after the first night. In those days we used to put on such awful rigmaroles as *Sweeny Todd, the Barber of Fleet Street*, who used to murder the people that came to be shaved, cut them up, and sell them to Mrs. Lovat, a pastrycook, to make pies of them.’¹³⁹

Yet judging by reviews of the dramas put on in the 1880s and 1890s, they are not substantially different from those of the 1860s and 1870s, at least in terms of the incidents they portray. To take just a few examples from the Britannia’s 1895 repertoire: *The Prodigal Daughter* portrayed an Aintree race with real racehorses; *The Ruling Passion* featured a real hansom cab and horse and a balloon ascent; *The Diver’s Luck* was a ‘sensational submarine drama’; and *A Big Fortune* presented the collision of a steamship with an iceberg. John Douglass’s *No Man’s Land* was a ‘tank drama’ climaxing with a dive into the water (*Era*, 10 August 1895):

The No Man’s Land scene, where the villainous leader of the mutineers has to face alone a terrible thunderstorm and typhoon, is remarkably impressive . . . As the rain falls with a splash into the huge tank, and the dreary spot is illuminated by frequent flashes of lightning, followed by deafening claps of thunder, the realism of the scene holds the audience spellbound, and when the curtain descends the applause is loud and persistent. Miss Ida Millais has been specially engaged for the part of the heroine, and her sensational dive into the water in the last act is hailed with enthusiastic plaudits, which are well deserved.

Perhaps to capitalise on the similarity of the piece to *The Colleen Bawn*, Boucicault’s original drama was played on the Saturday night of the second week of performances of *No Man’s Land*. A number of Boucicault’s other hit dramas from the 1860s and 1870s were played during the 1890s, including *Arrah-na-Pogue* (1892), *The Octoroon* (1894), *The Shaughran* (1895) and *The Streets of London* (1899). This would suggest that the audience’s appetite for sensation had not been sated.

Assessing the repertoire

Although melodrama, in various forms, predominates in the Brit’s repertoire, there were occasional surprising additions. For example, in 1873 and again in 1877 Newbound’s five-act classical tragedy *The Oracle, or The Sacrifice* was staged for the actor’s benefit. Despite its ‘poetic dialogue’ the drama held ‘the interest of the audience from the rise to

¹³⁹ H. Barton Baker, *History of the London Stage and its Famous Players (1576-1903)* (London: George Routledge, 1904) p.380.

the fall of the curtain' (*Era*, 22 July 1877). In 1890 the Britannia audience was amused and appreciative of 'high-class comedy' in the form of Robert Buchanan's play *Sophia*, which was based on Henry Fielding's picaresque novel *Tom Jones* (*Era*, 11 October 1890). The same year the Brit also produced 'a very sound and praiseworthy performance' of Goldsmith's *She Stoops To Conquer*' (*Era*, 21 June 1890). In May 1896, in a complete departure from the usual repertoire, Sara engaged H. Walsham's English opera company to perform Balfe's opera *The Bohemian Girl*. According to an announcement in the *Era* (9 May 1896), 'It is the intention of the management to have an annual season of English grand opera'. This did not materialise.

The Britannia did not always follow West End practice. It did not, for example, produce the 'cup and saucer' dramas of Tom Robertson during the 1860s. As Kent acknowledges, Robertson's dialogue required 'a fairly intimate knowledge of polite society'.¹⁴⁰ Thus the non-appearance of the plays at the Brit can be attributed to the management's awareness of its actors' capabilities and its audience's social backgrounds.

In the later decades the conservatism of the Britannia's repertoire is noticeable. Challenging and avant-garde dramas do not appear; Ibsen and Shaw are ignored. This should not necessarily be seen as a failure or missed opportunity. As Postlewait contends in relation to American drama, the development of twentieth-century realism is not the result of a process of 'cultural Darwinism'.¹⁴¹ Melodrama, he asserts, 'is not a retrograde form of popular entertainment that stands in the way of progress, liberty, true culture, and enlightenment.' Both melodrama and realism 'articulate and challenge the ideologies of the time.'¹⁴²

The decision to ignore New Women dramas can be explained in that they articulated a middle- or upper-class perspective. In the contemporary fight for women's suffrage, Sylvia Pankhurst's East London Federation adopted different policies to those of the Women's Social and Political Union in order to accommodate the different concerns of its members.¹⁴³ The New Woman dramas, however, failed to reflect the concerns and ideology of working-class women, and consequently did not appeal equally to all

¹⁴⁰ Christopher Kent, 'Image and Reality: The Actress and Society' in Martha Vicinus, ed., *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (London: Methuen, 1980) p.104.

¹⁴¹ Thomas Postlewait, 'From Melodrama to Realism: The Suspect History of American Drama' in Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, eds, *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) pp.45-56.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.56.

¹⁴³ Melanie Phillips, *The Ascent of Woman: A History of the Suffragette Movement and the Ideas Behind It* (London: Abacus, 2004) pp.253-54.

classes.¹⁴⁴ Their plots also conflicted with the Britannia audience's strong preference for stories with clear moral messages. Sara Lane testified to this in an interview given shortly before her death: "“But,” she added, “the play must have a good moral, whatever it is; our people wouldn't care for anything that hadn't a moral.””¹⁴⁵ Other East End theatregoers shared this rectitude. Edward F. Symth Pigott, the Examiner of Plays, testified to the 1892 Select Committee:

. . . I have always found this, that the equivocal, the risky, the immoral and the indecent plays are intended for West End audiences, certainly not for the East End. The further east you go the more moral your audience is; . . .¹⁴⁶

In some ways the Britannia's repertoire is typical of non-West End theatres – its emphasis on melodrama and the low profile of Shakespeare, tragedy and 'high-class' comedy is what one would expect of an East End house. Rarely was it a leader in dramatic trends. Neither did it slavishly follow what other theatres were producing. What unites much of the Britannia's repertoire, from its Shakespearian highlights to its incidental entertainments and action-packed dramas, is a preference for the physical and the visual rather than the spoken. The culture that it embodied was essentially sensory, not intellectual.

¹⁴⁴ Ellen Ross argues that the attitudes of working-class Londoners to issues of gender was strikingly different from those of the middle class; see 'Fierce questions and taunts': Married life in working-class London, 1870-1914' in David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones, eds, *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations Since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1989) pp.219.

¹⁴⁵ H. Barton Baker, 1904, p.380.

¹⁴⁶ Q5197, 1892 Report.

TABLE 5: PERFORMANCES OF SHAKESPEARE BY DECADE

Title	1840s	1850s	1860s	1870s	1880s	1890s	Total
Othello	2	5	9	13	3	4	36
Hamlet	3	3	11	10	1	7	35
Richard III	5	5	8	9	2	3	32
Macbeth	1	4	10	7	3	1	26
Taming of the Shrew	2	2	2	1	2	4	13
Romeo & Juliet	1		7	1		1	10
Merchant of Venice	1		3	4			8
King John			2	2			4
Comedy of Errors					2	2	4
Julius Caesar			1	1	1		3
King Lear		1	1	1			3
A Winter's Tale				3			3
Henry IV			2				2
Titus Andronicus		2					2
Henry V			1				1
Coriolanus		1					1
Merry Wives of Windsor			1				1
The Tempest			1				1
As You Like It			1				1
Total	15	23	60	52	14	22	186
Burlesques			1	3		1	5



PLATE 5.1: Ira Aldridge as Aaron the Moor in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*



PLATE 5.2: Scene from Britannia production of Hazlewood's *Poul a Dhoil* (*Penny Illustrated Weekly News*, 21 October 1865)



THE GREAT SENSATION SCENE, FROM THE NEW DRAMA OF "TWENTY STRAWS," AT THE BRITANNIA THEATRE.

PLATE 5.3: Scene from Britannia production of Hazlewood's *Twenty Straws*
(*Penny Illustrated Weekly News*, 11 March 1865)

6

HARLEQUIN ONCE MORE: THE BRITANNIA PANTOMIME

‘Altogether, I seriously recommend those of my readers who find a pantomime once a year good for them, to go next year to the Britannia, and leave the West End to its boredoms and all the otherdoms that make it so expensively dreary.’

George Bernard Shaw, ‘The Drama in Hoxton’, *Saturday Review*, 9 April 1898¹

The myriad attractions of the Britannia’s pantomime explain its continued popularity. Just as the mixed bill of its standard repertoire provided a variety of entertainments, both comic and tragic, so the pantomime offered a complete range of experiences in one long performance – music, dancing, spectacle, comedy, agility, fantastic costumes, lavish sets, mechanical wizardry and visual stimulation. Representations of magical kingdoms contrasted with comic treatments of reality in the harlequinade. Giants, animals and fairies were juxtaposed with allusions to contemporary people and events. Many of the same ingredients that the audience enjoyed in other genres reappeared. Like melodrama, pantomime plots were based on the dichotomy of good and evil, and exhibited the same veneration of the honest poor and censure of the tyrannous rich. The staging, particularly the transformation and chase scenes, satisfied the taste for the spectacular and the sensational that was fed by sensation drama. Moreover, because the Britannia’s pantomime retained many of the conventions that other establishments discarded, it had the attraction of the familiar. The flavour of its productions was traditional yet unique. Most importantly, because of the dynamic interaction of the audience with the performance, the pantomime created and sustained a sense of community.

Openings and harlequinades

Early nineteenth-century pantomimes consisted of an opening followed by a harlequinade. The opening set out a scenario in which two worthy young lovers were separated by the

¹ Reprinted in G.B. Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (London: Constable, 1954) vol. 3, pp.355.

machinations of a malevolent superhuman force and/or an uncaring father. A benevolent agent, often a fairy, aided the lovers. In the transformation scene (s)he turned the protagonists into the harlequinade figures of Harlequin (usually the male lover), Columbine (the female lover), Clown (one of the adversaries) and Pantaloon (the father). Clown and Pantaloon then pursued the lovers through the various scenes of the harlequinade. Along the way, Harlequin would thwack his magic bat, instantly transforming props and sets into radically different items. These were known as 'trick changes'. Finally, in the 'dark' or 'catch scene', where all seemed lost for the lovers, the benevolent agent reappeared and the pantomime ended with everyone being transported to another exotic scene.

Under the influence of Joseph Grimaldi, who played Clown at Covent Garden from 1806 to 1823, the Clown, rather than Harlequin, had become the dominant figure in the harlequinade.² This gradually became divorced from the opening and simply became a succession of fast-paced scenes set in contemporary society and mainly delivered in dumbshow. As well as the principal harlequinade figures, other members of the cast played generic parts, such as Old Woman, Policeman or Shopkeeper. George Sala described a typical anarchic harlequinade of the 1870s:

In front of these [shop fronts] Clown and Pantaloon pursue their traditional career of knavery; and there the shopkeepers are tripped up, old ladies are pushed, young girls romped with, babies sat upon or crammed into pillar letter-boxes; there vegetables, lobsters, codfish, plaster-casts, and legs of mutton are flung about the stage. There is a general row; the police make their appearance, and are duly bonneted and trampled upon . . . and the scene closes.³

To see how this format worked in practice, we shall now examine one example, the 1851 pantomime, *Harlequin and the Koh-i-noor*. It was written by Charles Rice, a comic actor then engaged at the Britannia.⁴ Two of his melodramas (*The Merchant and the Mendicant* and *The Man of the Red Mansion, a Tale of the Hundred Days*) had been produced at the Britannia earlier in the year. His portrayal of the beggar in the former was lauded as 'a natural piece of acting' (*Theatrical Journal*, 3 September 1851). Yet an article by Sylvester Clarence entitled 'A "Chapter" of Low Comedians' in the same journal (25 March 1857) decried his talent:

² David Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element: The English Pantomime, 1806-1836* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969) p.6.

³ Quoted in Samuel McKechnie, *Popular Entertainments Through the Ages* (London: Samson Low, Marston, 1931) pp.126-27.

⁴ Crauford wrongly states this was the first Britannia pantomime, *Sam and Sallie*, p.255.

At the East-end, The Britannia boasts a 'king of shreds and patches in Mr. Rice, – "Charley Rice,"' as the far too-familiar audience call him. The shouts, the shrieks of soulless laughter that greet the interpolations of this gentleman would give an intelligent foreigner a most contemptible opinion of the intellect of a British audience. No author is safe in the hands of Mr. Rice, and language of the best must give place to the veriest ribaldry that ever greeted the ears of precocious youth, which forms two-thirds of the audience at the Britannia. It is at least a comfort to find that such conduct meets its reward. The talent of the low comedian at the Britannia, is almost unknown beyond the confines of the East-end.

In 'A Defence of "Low Comedians." A Parley with Sylvester Clarence' (*Theatrical Journal*, 8 April 1857), B.W.W. concurs with this assessment: 'He is many degrees below the worst comedian I know of for vulgarity, liberty, and interpolation; he is a clever man, probably, but he has an odd way of making his cleverosity [sic] palpable.' *Harlequin and the Koh-i-noor* suggests Rice's talent as a writer was superior to these evaluations and indeed in the 1870s he became actor-manager at Covent Garden Theatre and wrote four of its pantomimes.⁵

Rice's pantomime opening consists of five scenes before the main characters are transformed into the harlequinade figures. The lead characters have names that suggest their characters, including the slave driver, Yooz-a-Khat (as in 'Use-a-cat-o'-nine-tails') and Kohm-i-cal Fellah, the Captain of Guards. These were recognisable features of the Britannia's pantomime house style. In October 1869 Wilton wrote a letter 'to Marchant, author of forthcoming Pantomime, complaining of there being no punning descriptions of characters in his opening'.⁶

The plot centres on the Princess Heermee-Singh, daughter of Killallee Khan, the King. She loves Ameer Yooth, but her father has forbidden the match because of Ameer's impecuniosity. The King decrees that whoever can bring him the biggest diamond shall marry the Princess and be heir to the throne. Ameer is assisted in the diamond mine by the Spirit of Night and finds the Koh-i-noor, but is warned that it will not sparkle in a land ruled by a despot. The scheming slave driver seizes the diamond and claims the Princess. The King, ignoring the entreaties of his daughter, consents. Upon discovering that the diamond has turned black, the King calls Yooz-a-Khat a swindler and promises to let Ameer marry his daughter if he can produce another gem. The Princess bravely swims to a grotto beneath the ocean to beg the Queen of the oysters, Mother o' Pearl, for a large pearl.

⁵ Wilton attended his *Red Riding Hood* on 10 January 1874 and praised the 'most beautiful Transformation Scene I ever saw'; Wilton CY1136, frame 902.

⁶ *Diaries*, p.165.

Koortah, an old oyster, offers the Princess that of his dead wife if she will marry him. He attempts to force his attentions on her, but she escapes and presents the pearl to her father. The Spirit of Night then transforms the stage into a brilliant cavern of jewels. Koortah reappears to reclaim the pearl, so the King, alarmed at losing it, coldly agrees to his taking the Princess in exchange. Mother o' Pearl suddenly appears and changes the lovers into Harlequin and Columbine, the tyrant King into Clown, and Koortah into Pantaloon. The Clown was W. Walbourn, the 'lean and slippered Pantaloon' was played by Mr Nash, W. Smith 'excelled himself' as Harlequin, and Celeste Stephan played Columbine for the first time, a role that she played for many subsequent years (*Theatrical Journal*, 7 January 1852).⁷

The pantomime called for elaborate staging. One scene, representing the 'Bower of Fuchsias', was praised as 'one of the most gorgeous scenic effects we ever witnessed' (*Theatrical Journal*, 7 January 1852). Rice's script gives detailed stage directions. Scene 3 takes place in a corridor of the palace and consists of 'a row of arches along the flats – each arch springing from a huge stone Head of comical expression'.⁸ These echo the big heads that the main characters traditionally wear in a pantomime opening. When the princess is dragged on by Yooz and (indirectly) threatened with rape, the ladies of the court cry. The stage directions state:

*As they cry the large faces on the wall cry also, large tears an inch in size rolling down their cheeks into their mouths – and Men with speaking trumpets roaring the chorus out of their mouths from behind Flats.*⁹

At other strategic moments, such as when the diamond becomes dull and when Yooz bumps his head on the floor, the heads laugh.¹⁰ They function as a chorus to the action.

In a later scene Rice skilfully exploits the comedic potential of the characters' big heads. Ameer and Yooz are confined in a prison cell. After a fist fight which leaves Yooz insensible, Ameer uses his adversary's unfurled turban as a rope ladder to aid his escape out of a high window. On regaining consciousness, Yooz tries to follow:

[He] puts his head out as [a]bout to escape, when Ameer closes down the portcullis so holding Yooz's head outside & his body in, he calls out murder & gradually lowers his body, his neck stretching six feet[.] The guards run on hearing his cries & seeing him escaping,

⁷ Stephan married Sara Lane's brother, William.

⁸ ADD.MS 43038 f.357, BL.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., ff.358, 360.

*they catch hold of his legs which they stretch in like manner, at last his body falls leaving his head & his legs are pull'd off – The King enters, starts at seeing what has happened, his mask has assumed an appearance of grief[.]*¹¹

The harlequinade, known at the Britannia as the comic scenes, consists of four scenes set in contemporary urban locations.¹² They are written in a different hand, possibly that of the Clown. The first scene features the interior of Clown's Exhibition Room, a visual reference to the Great Exhibition held at the Crystal Palace that year. This is made explicit by a 'Large board on flat on which is written "Clowns Pick of the Prizes from the Royal Exhibition" numerous articles printed on the same such as Cottage Piano Revolving Pistols from the United States, American Thrashing Machine'. During the scene two chests are carried on stage, one bearing the legend 'Prize Method of feeding Paupers, on the most Economical Principal', and the other marked 'Best Treatment for Convicts'. Harlequin reveals a badly clothed workhouse girl and a 'fine fat healthy convict' in prison dress. Clown and Pantaloon kick the convict off stage and present the girl with a leg of mutton and money. Thus although much of the action seems anarchic with the Clown frequently stealing, tricking or attacking people, the impact of this scene conforms to the usual Britannia preference of rewarding the deserving poor and punishing criminals. The other scenes are set on Boxing Night in 'A Snugg [sic] Apartment', outside two shops (an oil and tallow chandlers with post office, and a bloomer emporium) and finally in an equestrian tavern and cook shop.

When watching the Britannia's 1859 pantomime, *Harlequin Needles and Pins*, Dickens was struck by the contrast between the realistic portrayal of character types and sets in the comic scenes and those that featured in the opening:

I noticed that the people who kept the shops, and who represented the passengers in the thoroughfares and so forth, had no conventionality in them, but were unusually like the real thing – from which I infer that you may take that audience in (if you wish to) concerning Knights and Ladies, Fairies, Angels, or such like, but that they are not to be done as to anything in the streets. I noticed, also, that when two young men, dressed in exact imitation of the eel-and-sausage-cravated portion of the audience, were chased by policemen, and, finding themselves in danger of being caught, dropped so suddenly as to oblige the policemen to tumble over them, there was great

¹¹ Ibid., ff.371-72.

¹² Ibid., ff.378-85.

rejoicing among the caps – as though it were a delicate reference to something they had heard of before.¹³

This identification of the audience with characters evading the forces of law is an example of what Mayer terms ‘retributive comedy’.¹⁴ Chiefly occurring in the harlequinade, such episodes enact the desire to overthrow or outwit the dominant power. The appeal of these scenes is similar to that of the puppet Punch (itself the subject of the 1853 pantomime) where satire and slapstick are used to criticise authority.

Rice’s pantomime was one of sixty produced at the Britannia over six decades (see Table 6).¹⁵ Seven of the early ones have an unidentified author, while three dramatists (Hazlewood, Marchant and Addison) were responsible for another thirty-four. Until the end of the 1870s the playwrights tended to be or have been performers at the Brit (only Collier, Hazlewood and Merriam were not). In contrast, Spry, Bowyer and Addison, who between them wrote all the pantomimes between 1880 and 1899, were dramatists, not actors, and did not produce any other work for the Britannia.

None of the Britannia’s pantomimes was published and no prompt copies have survived. However, all save the 1841 and 1843 scripts are preserved in the Lord Chamberlain’s licensing collection. Fortunately, the pantomimes were widely reviewed, and the many playbills and programmes provide additional information.

Preparations for the pantomime started early. Wilton records the build up in 1866 started on 8 September:

Recd 2 Comic Scenes from Mrs Lane with a desire expressed that the plots might be got out quickly, especially for Mr Muir (Scene Painter) to model, for Rbt Rowe (Master-Carpenter) to have them by 25th Sept, that he might have 3 months to get up the Pantomime.¹⁶

That year all the scene and property plots of the three comic scenes were given out by 12 September.¹⁷ Wilton received the opening on 4 October and copied and distributed them to the scene painter and property manager.¹⁸ Rehearsals for the performers started on 27 November.¹⁹ The last night of the dramatic season was Wednesday 19 December and the theatre was then shut for a week. This was the only time in the year when there were no

¹³ Charles Dickens, ‘The Uncommercial Traveller’, *All the Year Round* 44 (25 February 1860) 418.

¹⁴ Mayer, *Harlequin*, pp.52 and 56.

¹⁵ The last of the regular pantomimes was in 1901 but John East produced *The Goblin of the Sea* in 1904 and *Beauty and the Beast* appeared in 1912.

¹⁶ *Diaries*, p.113.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.113.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.114.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.70, 71.

performances (except on Sundays and certain holy days prescribed by the Lord Chamberlain's office). Whilst the theatre was closed, activity was feverish to get everything ready for the first performances on Boxing Day.

In the early days of the saloon, the pantomime was the second attraction of the evening. For example, the 1844 pantomime, *Tom Titler's Ground*, succeeded a melodrama. The only exception to this was for the Tuesday and Friday in mid-January, which were designated 'two Juvenile Nights, when the Pantomime will be played the first piece' (advert in the *Weekly Dispatch*, 19 January 1845). Likewise, the 1843 pantomime was played first for a week in mid January. It began at 6.30pm and 'the whole of the Performances arranged so as to terminate at Eleven, or a little after' to accommodate 'our young friends'.²⁰ By the end of the decade it had become standard practice for the pantomime to be played first, a fact commended as 'a wise arrangement, which attracts numerous auditors from that department of household economy [juveniles]' (*Sunday Times*, 1 January 1854). The pantomime remained as the main attraction for many weeks; for example, the 1851 production was still the first item of the programme during the eighth week of its run (*Theatrical Journal*, 18 February 1852). Additional dramas were then added to the programme in subsequent weeks and the pantomime was eventually played in a reduced version as the concluding item on the bill.

Audiences needed stamina for the Britannia pantomime. *Rominagrobis* (1877) lasted nearly five hours, as did *The Magic Dragon of the Demon Dell* (1888), which had 'probably the most elaborate opening ever invented for a pantomime' (*Era*, 29 December 1888). Fortunately not all the pantomimes were as lengthy; *El Flambo* (1875) and *King Kookoo* (1884) lasted a mere three hours. Encores contributed to the long evenings; the finale of *The Magic Mule* had to be given five times (*Era*, 29 December 1878).

In order to attract repeat visits during the run, performances were subject to change. An advert (*Era*, 10 February 1888) refers to the 'new 2nd edition' of the pantomime and announces 'New songs, new comic business, new dances'. Individual performances were also refined. The *Era*'s second review of the 1889 pantomime (15 February 1890) comments: 'Mrs S. Lane is too experienced an actress not to have discovered many opportunities of elaborating her conception of the part of Eileen O'Dearie . . .' By making alterations the Britannia sustained interest for its regular audience.

Successful pantomimes ran for many weeks. In 1897 the *Era* published a series of letters written by G. Agwheeze and George Lupino, one of a family of performers who

²⁰ Britannia playbill iii for 15 January [1844], HA.

starred in many Britannia pantomimes, discussing the number of weeks for which Britannia pantomimes had run.²¹ Lupino asserted that Sara Lane had played in one (unnamed) pantomime for twenty weeks (*Era*, 16 January 1897). He stated that *Rominagrobis*, *The Spider and the Fly* (1890) and *The Man in the Moon* (1892) had played for over twelve weeks, and *El Flambo* and *Turlututu* (1876) for over thirteen weeks. He concluded: 'Out of thirty-five pantomimes only six have run less than eleven weeks, all the others have exceeded that' (*Era*, 30 January 1897). The Britannia pantomime's longevity was atypical; a review of *King Klondike* (*Era*, 26 March 1898) mentions it 'has out-distanced all its suburban rivals in the length of its run'.

Expenditure and profits

Pantomimes were extremely expensive to produce. An advert (*Era*, 9 March 1895) for *The Demon Oof Bird* boasts about the expenditure: 'The £500 Transformation Scene has extinguished all rivals.' Although this may have seemed an enormous amount of money to the Britannia's customers, West End theatres spent considerably more. Back in 1826 Covent Garden and Drury Lane were reported to have spent £1,000 each on producing their harlequinades.²² In 1880-1881, the same two houses expended £6,000 'upon the pantomime'.²³ In 1893 a finished transformation scene (including wigs and costumes) was reckoned to cost £800-£1,000.²⁴ Crauford commented on the rising production expenses: 'Our costs always tended to increase, particularly the salaries of the artists and the stage-hands' wages. Roughly speaking, the costs of 1900 were double those of 1880 and treble those of 1860.'²⁵

Further financial evidence for the Britannia is sparse. Memorandums in Wilton's *Diaries* itemise some expenses for the 1871 pantomime, *The Old Man and His Ass*.²⁶ Sara Lane's dress, purchased from the costumier Samuel May, cost £15 15s. A further £14 was spent on six fisherwoman's dresses and the legs of Pantaloon, Clown and Harlequin for the comic scenes. Ellena Spinola, the première danseuse and arranger of the ballet received a salary of £4 and three female performers – Kate Vaughan, Patti Goddard (who replaced

²¹ Lupino's brother, Harry, was married to Charlotte Robinson, Sara Lane's niece. Lupinos appeared in the 1874, 1875, 1876, 1877, 1888, 1890, 1891, 1892, 1893, 1894, 1896, 1897, 1898 and 1899 pantomimes. Ten members of the family featured in the 1876 version.

²² Mayer, *Harlequin*, p.17.

²³ *Johnson's Account of Pantomime: The London Pantomimes, 1883-1884* (London: H.S. Phillips, 1884) p.6.

²⁴ 'Transformation Scenes; how they are made and worked', *Strand Magazine* 6 (July to December 1893) 707.

²⁵ Quoted in A.E. Wilson, *Christmas Pantomime: The Story of an English Institution* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1934) pp.226-27.

²⁶ Wilton CY1136, frame 800.

Sara following the death of Samuel Lane) and Louie Austin – were paid £3 10s. Wilton also reported: ‘Told by Mrs Robinson that the Elephant used in the Pantomime cost 15 0 0 which Mr W. Charles confirmed and said he knew it originally cost £30 when new – & that it was made for Covent Garden Theatre.’²⁷ The supers received 9s each per week. In 1874 the nine members of the Lupino family who appeared in *The Black Statue* were paid a total of £22 per week while Macdermott received £16 a week.²⁸ Macdermott’s fee was typical of the higher wages the theatre paid to attract and retain music-hall stars.

While the costs of producing the pantomime were high, so too was the income. Reviews repeatedly stated that the house was full even many weeks into its run. The management maximised the returns in a variety of ways: by producing two performances on Boxing Day (but not in 1856 ‘as the Pantomimists find it impossible to do justice to their parts when they have to perform twice in one day’);²⁹ by putting on an extra matinee performance on Mondays; and by adopting a policy of ‘no admission under sixpence’ for the performances on Boxing Day and at least some of the following week (i.e. an increase of 2d or 3d for gallery customers). The ostensible reason for this was ‘to prevent crowding at the Entrances’.³⁰ In 1866 and 1870 (and probably other years) the same rule was also applied on some Saturday and Mondays nights in January.³¹ In 1878 entrance fees to all parts of the house were doubled for the two performances on Boxing Day (*Era*, 29 December 1878).

In February 1863 Lane stated in correspondence with the Lord Chamberlain’s office that ‘my receipts since Christmas have been on average £100 per night’.³² Wilton suggests this may have been unusually high:

Mrs Borrow told Amelia that the receipts at the Britannia have been £40 per night more this season since Xmas than they were at the same season last year, & on some nights fully double as much, all owing to Tom Sayers.³³

Wilton’s figures for the 1860s and 1870s include an estimate for the takings on Boxing Day 1866: ‘Guessed by Geo. Taylor [the stage-door keeper] at above £100. At night supposed to be above £150.’³⁴ Two years later Wilton reports that on Boxing Night

²⁷ Ibid., frame 804.

²⁸ *Diaries*, p.237.

²⁹ Playbill for 26 December 1856, Playbills 376, BL.

³⁰ Britannia playbill 47 for 26 December 1865, HA.

³¹ Britannia playbill 48 for 7 January 1866 and 258 for 2 January 1871, HA.

³² Letter from Samuel Lane, 10 March 1863, LC1/127, National Archives.

³³ *Diaries*, p.57.

³⁴ Ibid., p.117.

receipts exceeded £200 and on Monday 28 December ‘more than 3500 shillings [£175] were taken . . . before the doors were opened’.³⁵ In 1871 Taylor’s estimates were £100 for the Boxing Day morning performance and £180 for the evening.³⁶

An advert for *The Old Man and His Ass* (*H&K Gazette*, 10 February 1872) claimed that ‘upwards of 100,000 people’ had seen the pantomime. During the four weeks from Boxing Day 1881, 72,158 people are reported to have attended *The Enchanted Dove* (*H&K Gazette*, 1 February 1882). Assuming that the capacity each night corresponded with the proportions of seats available in the boxes, pit and gallery (twenty-three, fifty-five and twenty-two per cent respectively) and that visitors paid 1s in the boxes, 6d in the pit and 3d in the gallery, this would have brought in receipts of £7,577 for the four weeks, an average of £270 per performance.³⁷ Without details of the salaries and other expenditure items, it is impossible to calculate the profit; nevertheless, we can speculate that it was healthy, especially since the pantomime ran for a further eight weeks. To put it in perspective, Wilson Barrett’s successful pantomime, *Sinbad the Sailor*, ran for ten and a half weeks at the Grand Theatre, Leeds in 1886 and made a profit of £1,766.³⁸

The 1898 pantomime *King Klondike* was supposedly seen by 288,000 people (*Stage*, 9 April 1931). Crauford, who claimed it was the Britannia’s most successful pantomime, states:

It ran from Christmas until Easter, which was late that year. It took £1,100 in the first week and £185 on one particular night, and then for a long time it played to over £80 a week – a great sum, considering the low price of admission.³⁹

Judging when to terminate performances of the pantomime was a critical decision with serious financial consequences. On 19 February 1872 Wilton writes: ‘Mr Borrow said, the management lost £70 one week & £50 another week, last year, by running the pantomime too long.’⁴⁰ In general, it seems that the management expected, and did, make good profits from the pantomime. However, even that cannot explain the extraordinary announcement made on the playbill for the 1867 pantomime:

. . . MR. S. LANE launches this Great Spectacle on the Stormy Sea of Public Opinion in the hope it will prove ‘an exceeding great delight to

³⁵ Ibid., p.152.

³⁶ Ibid., p.199.

³⁷ This is a conservative estimate calculated by ignoring the additional fees on some nights and the more expensive box seats.

³⁸ Michael R. Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) pp.36-37.

³⁹ Quoted in Wilson, *Christmas Pantomime*, pp.226-27.

⁴⁰ Wilton CY 1136, frame 800.

multitudes of spectators,' not for his own emolument – he spurns all sordid motives – but because *he purposes devoting all the profits above Thirty Thousand Pounds to establishing free Oyster Beds in Battersea Reach* [my emphasis] – advocating the rights of Female Suffrage, and – converting the King of Abyssinia!⁴¹

Clearly that level of profit was completely unrealistic, as unlikely as the conversion of the King of Abyssinia, so why was such a sum mentioned? The statement appears at the end of a hyperbolic paragraph extolling the magnificence of all aspects of the pantomime and those who have produced it, including Sara 'as Directress of the first Emporium in London for Spectacle'. Thus the context of the claim is to impress upon the reader the superiority of the entertainment and the lavishness with which it has been produced and to suggest that it therefore ought to generate fantastic levels of revenue. In the event the pantomime in question, *Don Quixote*, did not live up to the hype, being, in Wilton's opinion, 'the worst we ever played at the Britannia, in my time'.⁴²

Making extravagant claims about the pantomime was not a new departure for Lane. He had advertised the 1843 pantomime, *The Giant Frost*, by pronouncing (*Weekly Dispatch*, 7 January 1844):

A glorious Hit! The superiority of the Pantomime has become a great fact! (See 'The Times' newspaper); and Notice the Proprietor will give £1,000 reward to any one who can prove, to his satisfaction, that there is a better Pantomime in London!! Do not judge unseen; come and be convinced.

Changing format

During the course of the nineteenth century other theatres gradually reduced the harlequinade until it virtually disappeared. In 1893 George Lupino delivered a lecture in which he expressed dismay at the ascendancy of the clown over the harlequin and claimed: 'Now the clown was put on to act with a few ignorant supers, who could not act at all, and it was getting too stupid even for the children' (*Era*, 16 December 1893). This perception of the general deterioration of the pantomime was frequently expressed. W. Yardley complained that the 'music-hall element is rapidly driving from our English stage the art of pantomime' (*Theatre*, 1 February 1881). He bemoaned the change from 'very little talk and a very great deal of action' to 'very little action and a very great deal too much talk'.

⁴¹ Britannia playbill 136 for 26 December 1867, HA.

⁴² *Diaries*, p.139.

Anderson, writing in 1902, recalled visits to various pantomimes in 1871 and then commented on the contemporary versions:

The Britannia and the Standard, renowned for such productions, were both better than either Drury Lane or Covent Garden. But the Christmas pantomimes everywhere are not what they used to be. They have changed, and for the worse. There is no longer a funny plot told in dumb show, and all the adventures of lovers and rivals, stubborn fathers and rustic valets, linked in a chain of reasonable resemblance to nature. Everything in the shape of fun is sacrificed to scenery, ballet, acrobats, gymnasts, and music-hall buffoonery, making the entertainment as tedious as a twice-told tale.⁴³

The Britannia was one of the last institutions to keep the old tradition going. The uniqueness of its productions was recognised by Leopold Wagner in 1881:

. . . we have still in existence a people's theatre, in the East-end of London, whose patrons are annually treated to a Pantomime of the old sort, quite different from anything to be witnessed at the other houses. Indeed, anyone who has made a study of English Dramatic Literature would not fail to recognise, in a visit to the Britannia Theatre, as near an approach to the old Morality Plays as might be expected in the present generation.⁴⁴

A review of the *The King o' the Castle* (1893) approved 'Mr George Lupino playing the clown in strict accordance with tradition' (*Era*, 30 December 1893). The Britannia's advertisements also made a virtue of the traditional format, trumpeting, for example, the 'Good Old-Fashioned Comic Scenes by George Lupino and Troupe' in *The Giant of the Mountains* (*Era*, 9 February 1895). This suggests that the Britannia's audience particularly enjoyed the anarchic humour of the comic scenes.

Looking at the scripts in the Lord Chamberlain's collection, there is a marked variation in the level of detail and indeed in the length of the opening. The harlequinade is not included until 1851. Donne, the Examiner of Plays, insisted that all the comic business of the harlequinade was sent to him for licensing.⁴⁵ However, his testimony to the 1866 Select Committee concedes that unauthorised 'gags' frequently occur:

⁴³ James R. Anderson, *An Actor's Life* (London: Walter Scott, 1902) p.300.

⁴⁴ Leopold Wagner, *The Pantomimes and All About Them: Their Origin, History, Preparation and Exponents* (London: John Heywood, 1881) p.28.

⁴⁵ Q.2124-2127, 1866 Report.

Q.2275 There is nothing to prevent a clown of pantaloons making use of words that you have never seen? – Nothing whatever.
Q.2276 That is generally done? – Yes; at least often.⁴⁶

J.R. Planché's 1872 autobiography confirms that Donne's authority was flouted as actors added extra bits of dialogue, including 'coarse allusion or personal insult to those in authority over us'. He claimed the Examiner's order 'to omit the common-place jokes upon certain members of the Cabinet . . . were never paid the slightest attention to, but continued to excite the roars and plaudits of the galleries to the last night of representation.'⁴⁷ At the Britannia, a review of *Little Busy Bee* (*Era*, 1 January 1865) mentions 'some excellent allusions to Peabody's gift, marriage for money, the Yelverton case, the German Legal Protection Society, and other topics', yet none of these are obvious in the Lord Chamberlain's licensing copy.⁴⁸ Later in the century, the attempt to police pantomime texts seems to have been largely abandoned. Pigott, as Examiner of Plays told the 1892 Select Committee inquiry:

To tell you the truth, I never interfere with them now in pantomimes. That was in former years. It was done on account of certain disloyal allusions. It was done, and there was an end to it, and the thing has never been done again.⁴⁹

Even if the dialogue passed the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain's office, the actors' delivery and gesticulations could alter the tenor of the text when played on stage. In January 1875 the Lord Chamberlain received a letter from a curate complaining about the lewd gestures and dialogue of King Machiconli, played by Macdermott, in the *The Black Statue*.⁵⁰ The *H&K Gazette* (2 January 1875) also deplored his additions: '. . . if Mr. Macdermott were to stick to his "tag," and not introduce "sallets" in his lines, which, however relishable to some of his audience, are no less disgusting, it [the pantomime] would be better still.' Yet the *Era* (3 January 1875) found nothing objectionable, praising Macdermott for his 'singing, grotesque dancing, and pantomimic whimsicalities of every kind'.

Many of the later pantomime manuscripts fail to convey productions details. Addison's *King Klondike* is typical.⁵¹ The transformation scene, entitled 'The Progress

⁴⁶ 1866 Report.

⁴⁷ Quoted in John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama 1824-1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) pp.117-18.

⁴⁸ ADD.MS 53038 C, BL.

⁴⁹ Q.5211, 1892 Report.

⁵⁰ *Diaries*, p.231.

⁵¹ ADD.MS 53675 J, BL.

from Summer to Winter' and described as 'one of the most gorgeous and effective he [William Charles] has ever designed' (*Stage*, 29 December 1898), is not mentioned. The lyrics of the many songs are not given and the stage directions are frequently non-specific. In Scene 6 Marquis Muchmeans 'parodies some well known recitation', but which is not specified. Much of the humour appears to have been the invention of the performers rather than the author. H.M. Edmunds, playing Sam Smallboys, provoked laughter by persistently singing 'four doggrel [sic] lines over and over again, notwithstanding the various means of suppressing the nuisance that are tried' (*Era*, 11 February 1899). The doggerel is not in the script so presumably was Edmunds' own coinage.

Topicality

Topical issues, such as conditions in the workhouse, were sometimes addressed in the Britannia's melodramas (see Chapter 4), but the pantomime genre provided more licence to satirise contemporary personalities and events through oblique or explicit references in the dialogue, sets and plots. For example, in *Old Daddy Long Legs* (1865) Sir Regent Circus and his valet, Little Britain, are blown up on 'a Metropolitan railway' and materialise in the Region of Clouds. The pantomime appeared in the year that the Metropolitan Line was extended to run into Moorgate and a new railway line, the North London Extension started at the end of Nichols Square (see Map), events that would have been of moment to local theatregoers.⁵² Similarly, *King Klondike* takes its inspiration from the Klondike gold rush in the Yukon (1897-1898).

The comic scenes of *Mother Shipton's Prophecy* (1855) display a more savage commentary on contemporary politics (*Era*, 30 December 1855):

Two scenes deserve special notice; one, the Ruins of Sebastopol, where Clown gets most unmercifully shelled; and another, the Rival Ratcatchers of Westminster. Here the peace-at-any-price party, the ticket-of-leave officers from the Crimea, the Aberdeen Government, and other popular subjects connected with the war, are hit off with great severity; one of the changes exhibited Aberdeen, an Old Rat, hanging. A Baby Show, with a prize for the most illused [sic] baby in England, was awarded to the baby Charles Napier; whilst to Johnny Russell the prize was given for the most deceitful and changeable. These hits were highly relished by the audience.

The hanging rat represents Lord Aberdeen, whose government was defeated in 1855 partly as a reaction to the bad organisation and poor conditions endured by the soldiers in the

⁵²John Richardson, *The Annals of London* (London: Cassell Paperbacks, 2000) p.286; Wilton CY1136, frames 206 and 220. Wilton lived in Nichols Square.

Crimean War. Lord John Russell had been a Whig Prime Minister between 1846 and 1852 and then became Leader of the House of Commons. The ‘illused baby’ probably refers to Vice Admiral Charles Napier, who as Commander of the Baltic fleet had failed to capture the Russian city of Kronstadt in 1854. The government subsequently used him as a scapegoat.⁵³

Topical allusions in the dialogue cover a diverse range of subjects and suggest a significant proportion of the audience were knowledgeable about contemporary culture. *The Magic Dragon of the Demon Dell* (1888) contains this exchange when the demon Velos declares he will marry the princess:

AZURINA Why the law would not allow it. He’s too utter – they wouldn’t perform the ceremony even at a registry office.

VELOS We can dispense with ceremony – marriage in the usual way is a failure so says the Telegraph, so I intend to follow Mrs. Mona Caird’s advice.

AZURINA That will add vice to your character which is vicious enough already.⁵⁴

The allusion to Mona Caird refers to her article ‘Marriage’, which appeared in the August 1888 issue of the *Westminster Review* and claimed wedlock was a form of sexual slavery. The *Daily Telegraph* had then asked its readers to respond to the question ‘Is Marriage a Failure?’⁵⁵

In ‘A Chat About the London Pantomimes’ (*Theatre*, 1 February 1881), Yardley mentions that in *Harlequin’s Love Dream* Pollie Randall ‘doesn’t hesitate to speak out her mind in the boldest manner against persons and institutions that have given offence to the inhabitants of Hoxton and neighbourhood’. The attacks continued in the following year’s pantomime, *The Enchanted Dove* (*H&K Gazette*, 16 January 1882):

The topical allusions in the course of the comic business by Mr. Tom Lovell, the clown, are incisive and satirical to a degree; and the Shoreditch Workhouse scandal, the vaccinations prosecution, the St. Paul’s school cruelties, and such like items come in for a full share of criticism which the well-read gods especially appreciate and applaud.

For the audience, shared laughter became a means of affirming communal values.

⁵³ Andrew Lambal, ‘Napier, Sir Charles (1786-1860)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19747> [accessed 31 December 2005].

⁵⁴ ADD.MS 53418 C, Scene 4, BL.

⁵⁵ Lyn Pykett, ‘Women writing women: nineteenth-century representations of gender and sexuality’ in Joanne Shattock, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain 1800-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.92.

Not all the topical news was treated satirically. The response to the death of Napoleon III in 1873 illustrates the speed with which the Britannia could react to events of interest to its audience. Wilton records:

Verse sung on Thursday Night, Jan^y 9th on the Stage of the Britannia Theatre in the 6th Scene of the Opening of the Pantomime by Mr Fred Foster & Mrs S. Lane.

With feelings of great sadness//Allow me now to say
That friend of France and England//Napoleon died today.
A better, truer Monarch//No Frenchman every knew
It's very sad! It's very sad!//But yet – alas! 'tis true.
By way of Symphony, at the end of the words, the Orchestra played
'Partant pour La Syrie', to which the actor and actress beat time & marched off stage.⁵⁶

Plot

The first Britannia pantomime for which there is an extant script is Pitt's *Tom Titler's Ground* (1844).⁵⁷ The opening follows the traditional style of pantomime. It depicts the unlawful attempt by the overseer of the workhouse (assisted by the beadle and a lawyer) to deprive Tom, a young parish pauper, of some land, under which is a hidden treasure-store. There are obvious echoes of Dickens's celebrated workhouse novel and in fact Sara Lane, who played Tom Titler, had performed as Oliver Twist in June of the preceding year and reprised it subsequently. Unusually, the Lord Chamberlain's script contains pen-drawings of three of the characters (the overseer, lawyer and beadle) and an illustration of the arched cavern that features in Scene 4.

One of the distinguishing features of the Britannia's pantomimes is the originality of the plot. (Hazlewood's 1873 pantomime, *Cocorico, or the Hen with the Golden Eggs*, which translated a French tale, was exceptional.) During the 1850s and 1860s some of the Britannia's subjects were derived from nursery rhymes, such as *Hush-a-by-Baby* (1856) and *Hickory Dickory Dock* (1863). Others took inspiration from historical or literary characters; such as Cleopatra in *Egypt* (1854), *Abon Hassan* (1862), which was vaguely based on the Arabian nights, and *Don Quixote* (1867). The 1848 and 1855 pantomimes were inspired by legendary figures celebrated in common memory; Old Parr, who lived to 152 years and is buried in Westminster Abbey, and the prophetess Mother Shipton. Although these pantomimes drew on popular culture for the subject matter, the plots developed new story lines. By the 1880s all the Britannia's pantomimes were original

⁵⁶ Wilton CY1136, frame 825.

⁵⁷ ADD.MS 42980 ff.220-44, BL.

inventions. A report on the 1883-1884 season (*Era*, 19 January 1884), calculated that there were only twenty-three subjects at the 104 theatres producing pantomimes across the county. *King Aboulifar*⁵⁸ and the Britannia's *Queen Dodo* were the only original contributions. Novelty was an astute marketing ploy; customers knew they could not see a better (or even different) version of the Britannia's pantomime elsewhere. Had the theatre produced versions of *Aladdin*, *Puss in Boots* and the like, it would have been in more direct competition with neighbouring theatres.

Although the plots and characters seem fantastical, some, such as Hazlewood's *Harlequin Needles and Pins*, were grounded in the experience of the audience. The inventive plot concerns the struggle between a race of Needles (supported by Liberty) and their adversaries, the Pins (aided by Atropos, the Goddess of Discord). The industry of the Needles is contrasted with the idle Pins, who are only fit for mending the garments made by the Needles. Following an unsuccessful assault by the Pin Army, the Needles are assailed by Rusty Fusty, the corroding sprite, and magnetically drawn towards the Loadstone Rock, where their fate is to become the slaves of the Pins. The audience, many of whom would have been involved in the tailoring and sewing trades, are intended to empathise with the Needles. The King of the Needles makes specific reference to the low earnings of seamstresses: 'The Needles the great instrument of the clothing trade/ And may those who live by needlework get much better paid.'⁵⁹ This identification is underlined by the fact that the Needles are championed by Liberty, played by Sara Lane, who is nominally the Spirit of Europe, but more specifically represents England. Negating Carlisle's claim that 'Christmas entertainments erased all distinctions of race, class and gender in order to emphasize the homogeneity of British patriarchal rule', the implication is that it is the honest industry of the East Enders that makes the country great.⁶⁰

Audience response

Inventive plots do not appear to have been the audience's main interest. Contemporary evidence suggests that the crowds at Boxing Day performances (to which so many of the reviews refer) were particularly boisterous. The level of noise in the theatre prohibited hearing much dialogue, as shown in this evocative description of the Boxing Night audience for *Hickory Dickory Dock* in 1863:

⁵⁸ Not in Lord Chamberlain's collection or listed in Nicoll.

⁵⁹ ADD.MS 52987 S, f.7, BL.

⁶⁰ Janice Carlisle, 'Spectacle as Government, Dickens and the Working-Class Audience' in Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt, eds, *The Performance of Power: Theatrical Discourse and Politics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991) p.173.

They whistled like a thousand locomotives, in a state of shrill expostulations, and as for the usual hum of conversation prevalent among a more subdued class of audience, the sound of many tongues from the dense mass of closely packed humanity in the Britannia was more like an incoming tide on a shingle beach than anything else.⁶¹

Hence, Wilton notes on 28 December 1864, the fourth time the pantomime had been played: 'Great House again, but quiet. The words of the Pantomime listened to by the Audience for the first time.'⁶²

The audience's animated response was not unique to the Britannia, but according to the *Saturday Programme* (29 April 1876) was 'far more hearty, if far more noisy and rough, than is boxing-night even at Drury Lane itself'. It was not that the good-humoured audience was disruptive, rather that it actively participated in the proceedings from the moment the orchestra began playing, as witnessed at the afternoon performance of *Rominagrobis* (*Era*, 30 Dec 1877):

We never remember to have heard such a tremendous chorus as that which drowned the resonant blast of the trombone, the throbbing tones of the drum, and the ear-piercing piccolo. The vibration of this terrific chorus actually made the strong walls of the Britannia tremble like the belfry of some old gothic church at a Christmas peal, 'when the ringers ring with a will.' The vast crowd did not get weary of their efforts, but persevered until the curtain went up, which it did punctually.

The audience joined in the musical numbers (*Daily Telegraph*, 27 December 1877):

Mr. Lepyeat, who conducts the large orchestra must decidedly share in the general honours achieved yesterday. It is one thing to have thousands of juvenile spectators with music in their souls, or rather on their lips and another to bring out that latent vocal power, as it was brought out at least half-a-dozen times in the course of 'Rominagrobis.' There was literally a crash of sound when now and again the chords of some familiar chorus were played, and though the music-hall melodies usually supplied the *motif*, yet a parody of the ever-prevalent 'Nancy Lee' was perhaps the most effective of all. It is plain that the Hoxtonites are not only musical, but constant.

Although audiences were undoubtedly enthusiastic, their attitude towards the pantomime was not ironic. Shaw commented on the respect with which his fellow theatregoers treated the performers of *Will o'the Wisp*: 'They are jealous for the dignity of

⁶¹ Unattributed cutting in Theatre Cuttings 65, BL.

⁶² *Diaries*, p.85.

the artist, not derisively covetous of his (or her) degradation. . . . The fairy queen, a comely prima donna who scorned all frivolity, was treated with entire respect and seriousness.⁶³

Comedy

The standard of writing displayed in the pantomime scripts is uneven. The best, mainly written in rhymed verse, is peppered with puns and verbal jokes. For example, in Frederick Bowyer's *Queen Dodo* (1883) the hero Babilo kisses Princess Merryheart, who has been turned into a statue. She wakes from the spell and sneezes, to which he says, punning on 'a-tishoo': 'She knows me then[.] I swear she said tis you.'⁶⁴ Crauford adjudged Bowyer the best of the Britannia's pantomime authors because 'His dialogue was much smarter than that of his predecessors.'⁶⁵ In Addison's *The Magic Dragon of the Demon Dell* (1888) sustained linguistic humour is provided by two of the Princess's foreign suitors; Prince Loverwisen, who has a pronounced German accent, and Prince Pattering, who uses Irish lingo.⁶⁶

In the comic scenes the humour was primarily physical, not linguistic. An early example comes from the 1853 pantomime, *Punch and Judy*. In 'The Parlour of a Sporting House', a man enters carrying a gun (*Sunday Times*, 1 January 1854):

The Clown (Boorn), to prevent an accident, takes the warlike implement from the sportsman, and whilst explaining (*a la* the Bishop of Bond-street) the cause of accidents, it goes off, and, to the consternation of the audience, the head of one of the box visitors falls on the stage. Presently the unfortunate victim thrusts his bloody neck forward, and, amid the exclamations and convulsive laughter of all, throws out a rope of handkerchiefs to recover his head. The trick was so well managed that even the persons sitting in the same box were not aware of the deception.

Clearly the individual talent of the Clown was paramount to the pantomime's success. The Britannia was fortunate in engaging a number of particularly skilful exponents, including Jean Louis, who played Clown in the sixteen pantomimes between 1854 until 1869 (see Plate 6.1). He was described as 'a very little fellow, who is funny without vulgarity, and who is most deservedly a great favourite with the audience' (*Penny Illustrated Weekly News*, 5 January 1867). Redington produced a portrait of Louis and of the 'Great Little Huline', who appeared in the 1871 and 1873 pantomimes. The latter's

⁶³ Shaw, p.355.

⁶⁴ ADD.MS 53306 B, f.20, BL.

⁶⁵ Wilson, *Christmas Pantomime*, p.227.

⁶⁶ ADD.MS 53418 C, BL.

style was fashioned on Grimaldi (*Era*, 28 January 1872): ‘Besides being a merry, quick Clown of the old-fashioned red-hot poker, hot codlins, hornpipe school, the Great Little Huline displays remarkable versatility by performing numerous feats of a peculiar, difficult, and pleasing kind.’ After Louis, the longest-serving Clown was Tom Lovell, who notched up ten performances from 1878. Crauford confirmed the management’s belief in the importance of engaging a good Clown, claiming that whereas other theatres reduced the Clown’s remuneration as the harlequinade diminished in importance, the Britannia continued to pay a good salary.⁶⁷

Aside from the Clown, each pantomime featured several comic creations. In *Queen Dodo* the king’s fat cook becomes monarch after winning a lottery.⁶⁸ Her unsophisticated speech and behaviour is humorously at odds with her elevated position. The same opening also features Dr Toln, whose false nose shrinks and grows as he breathes, and Chirgwin as Prince Tiddy-fol-fil, who provoked laughter when, on being asked to show his tongue to the Doctor, lets out ‘about a quarter of a yard of red substance from between his lips, and as quickly withdraws it’ (*Daily Telegraph*, 27 December 1883). Chirgwin, appeared in six Britannia pantomimes (see Plate 6.2). His performances included dancing, falsetto singing and playing a variety of traditional and improvised instruments, as well as hilarious ad-libs (*Entr’acte & Limelight*, 1 January 1887): ‘. . . when he thinks that matters require a little waking up, he improves the occasion by interpolating a little of his own “business.” Mr. Chirgwin is always funny, and this delinquency is condoned.’

The cross-dressing dame figure provided another source of amusement. For example, in *The Demon Oof Bird Will Crackles* played Soleana Sharpbones, ‘a lady of uncertain age and still more uncertain temper’ (*Era*, 8 February 1896):

The gushing, simpering spinster, with her giddy little ways, evokes shouts of laughter. Both gags and business are a constant source of merriment; and Will’s dancing, with a chance somersault or two, invariably brings down the house. In an important scene he, as an ancient ballerina in straw-coloured skirts, is assisted by Miss Amy Lyster; and their cachuca à deux is one of the best things in the piece.

The pantomime openings also included burlesques of other dramatic genres and performers. In *The Old Man and His Ass* (1871) Bigwood appeared on a donkey and burlesqued the renowned tragedienne Mrs Rousby in the eponymous role in Tom Taylor’s *Joan of Arc*. (The actress was at the time touring in a production of the play, which had

⁶⁷ A.E. Wilson, *Pantomime Pageant* (London: Stanley Paul, 1946) p.114.

⁶⁸ ADD.MS 53306 B, BL.

opened at the Queens Theatre in April 1871.) More performers were parodied in *El Flambo* (*Era*, 2 January 1876): ‘Mr Frederick Marchant, made up as Sir Rummefordde, was an exceedingly comic personage, always speaking in accents that recalled Mr Irving, Mr Bandmann, and other popular actors, “his lost cheoild.”’ Likewise, for his role in *The King o’ the Castle* (1894), George Lupino was made up to suggest Edmund Kean as Richard III. It was not only individuals who were sent up: *The Man in the Moon* featured a scene aping the cave incident in *The Colleen Bawn*; *Old Daddy Long Legs* gave ‘an admirable burlesque on the casino style of dancing’ (*Era*, 31 December 1865); and *Queen Dodo* lampooned the musical style of the Salvation Army. It is through these constant references to diverse aspects of contemporary life and culture that the pantomime derived its power and freshness.

Spectacle

While music and witty dialogue delighted the audience’s aural sense, spectacle provided visual entertainment. Each pantomime required numerous changes of backdrop and scenery. The opening typically featured supernatural or fairytale worlds alongside scenes depicting every kind of earthly, subterranean and underwater landscape. In contrast, the comic scenes called for representations of contemporary London. Sala’s ‘Getting Up A Pantomime’ reveals the extensive work the *mise-en-scene* demanded from the theatre’s non-performing staff, including scene painters, carpenters, wardrobe assistants, property and lighting men.⁶⁹ Similar scenes preparing for the 1891 pantomime at the Britannia were enumerated and illustrated in the *Daily Graphic* (25 December 1891; see Plate 6.3). The illustration shows, for example, the properties department, where a man is working on one of the large heads. Another image reveals the two halves of the gigantic figure of Old Bogie.

Costumes supplied an extra element of spectacle. Although Crauford claimed they were the weakest part of the Britannia’s pantomimes, many early reviews praised the beautiful costumes and make-up.⁷⁰ It was not unusual for Sara Lane to appear in six outfits during the course of one performance. Many of the pantomimes required elaborate animal or insect costumes, such as the fish and shellfish in *Harlequin and the Koh-i-noor*, the beetles in *Old Daddy Long Legs*, the cats in *Hickory Dickory Dock* (1863; see Plate 6.4) and the birds in *The Goblin Bat* (1887; see Plate 6.5). Some costumes incorporated masks,

⁶⁹ George Augustus Sala, *Gaslight and Daylight*, 2nd edition (London: Chapman & Hall, 1860) pp.19-35.

⁷⁰ Wilson, *Christmas Pantomime*, p.226.

as for example the Dutch clocks that feature in the 'Castle of I.O.U. in the Land of Bad Debts & State of Bankruptcy' in *Little Busy Bee* (see Plate 6.4).

The challenge of creating good costumes pales into insignificance besides the technical proficiency required to stage the transformation scene. For Hazlewood's *Little Busy Bee* (1864) it took fifteen minutes to develop fully and involved eight mechanical changes (see Plate 6.6). It was the first time the Britannia had introduced a waterfall of real water (though two fountains had been used in the 1861 pantomime). The effect was impressive (*Era*, 1 January 1865):

The glittering preface to the comic business develops itself through several changes, the great feature of it being a real 'cataract.' Upon this water different coloured lights are thrown, which have a very pretty effect, and bear their share of the applause bestowed. Burnished reflectors in the shape of sunflowers, having gas jets for the petals, are introduced in this scene with excellent effect, and fingers of glass drops are also applied with the most brilliant result.

Transformation and closing scenes were essentially moving tableaux whose strong visual impact was dependent on skilful lighting. A good example is the closing scene of *Needles and Pins*, entitled 'the Submarine Grotto of Phosphorescent Light, or Elysium of the Naiades' (*Era*, 1 January 1860):

Coral grottoes are at first seen covering the whole stage; a slight undulating motion takes place, and they gradually open and discover the Naiades [sic] lying about in shells, and from the back a large globe, about one-third the height of the stage, comes forward, and upon and around it are females in silver tissue robes. This globe is entirely composed of cut glass drops, and revolves. A similar revolving one is in the inside and through the centre passes a column of gas jets. The scene, when lit from the front of the stage with the Electric light, has a most gorgeous and dazzling effect.

A later example, the Banquet Hall scene in *The Man in the Moon*, was described as 'certainly the most magnificent effect ever seen in a Britannia pantomime' (*Era*, 31 December 1892).⁷¹ Although individual details are different, the overall effect is similar to those produced thirty years earlier (*Era*, 18 February 1893):

This remarkable 'set' has for its central-object a classic temple, between the Corinthian columns of which can be seen the distant sky. These columns shine with silvery radiance, and are raised on shallow steps. In the principal 'grooves' are low divisions, finely ornamented,

⁷¹ The assertion that a particular transformation or closing scene is superior to any previously produced at the theatre is a recurring feature of the Britannia's pantomime reviews.

each having a lyre at its extremity. At the sides, nearer the footlights, are entrances with pointed arches. The whole scene is illuminated by groups of pink-tinted gas globes, which shed a mellow radiance over the scene – which shines and glitters with gold, silver, crimson, and green. The general effect of the Banquet Hall is sumptuous and dazzlingly gorgeous.

Transformation scenes created a crescendo of visual excitement by introducing movement into beautiful static scenes. Many feature the entrance of the principal fairy, as in this example from *Old Daddy Longlegs and Sir Regent Circus* (*Era*, 31 December 1865):

The first part of this elaborately constructed scene represents a screen of pink bell-shaped flowers, from which rises a fairy standing on an enormous gilt butterfly. Both the insect and the lady soar gradually upwards, and disclose a lake dotted with waterlilies, and on the surface floats Queen Brilliant, in a car drawn by swans. A large framework rises at the back, and under this arched pavillion Fairies, in dresses of rich and glittering material are placed.

Three decades later, the Britannia was still producing grand fairy tableaux but in 1896 George Conquest introduced further excitement with a ‘flying ballet’ in which the fairies seemed to float through the air. The illusion was achieved by strapping the dancers to ‘irons’, which extended below the stage and were attached to platforms that were raised or lowered by a system of levers, ropes and counterpoises.⁷² A similar flying ballet was performed the following year, but the version for the 1898 pantomime, *King Klondike*, was even more spectacular (see Plate 6.7). This time the fairies had to recover a magic key from a pool. The whole stage was covered with huge mirrors and illuminated with electric lights (*Stage*, 29 December 1898):

This scene designed and produced by Mr George Conquest is a beautiful example of scenic and spectacular art and vies with anything ever seen in a Britannia pantomime. The pool is represented by an array of huge mirrors, whose surface is covered by realistic representations of water-lilies. Above the pool the Flying Ballet of Fairies takes place, and the reflection in the mirrors of their graceful aerial flights, and of the many-coloured electric lights with which the scene is lit up makes a brilliant spectacle, which reflects the greatest credit on Mr. Conquest and the management.

The successful production of such complicated, and potentially dangerous, scenes testifies to the skill and mechanical expertise of the Britannia’s backstage staff. They were

⁷² Percy Fitzgerald, *The World Behind the Scenes* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1881) pp.90-91.

also adept at working the various traps by which performers entered or left the stage. An illustration of the 1876 pantomime, *Turlututu*, depicts Pollie Randall as Il Diavolo rising through the vampire trap (see Plate 6.8). Inevitably there were occasional mechanical failures as happened on the opening night of *The Giant and the Dwarf* (*Era*, 2 January 1897):

. . . it was a great pity that the demon chase in scene ten could not be given at the first performance owing to some suddenly discovered defect in the ropes that worked the traps. Gallery and pit somewhat loudly expressed their disappointment; and were only quieted when Mr Lupino explained from the footlights the cause of the 'traps' being omitted.

George Lupino, who was responsible for creating the complicated chase scenes through the various traps in the pantomimes of the 1890s, was a talented acrobat. An example of his astonishing agility occurred in *The Spider and the Fly* (1890) in which he had to leap fifteen feet from the top of a house on to the stage. When Shaw saw him in *The Will o' the Wisp*, he was impressed not only with Lupino's skill, but also with the manner of the audience's response to it:

When a white statue which had stood for thirteen minutes in the middle of the stage turned out to be Mr Lupino, who forthwith put on a classic plasticity, and in a series of rapid poses claimed popular respect for 'the antique,' it was eagerly accorded; and his demon conflict with the powers of evil, involving a desperate broadsword combat, and the most prodigious plunges into the earth and projections therefrom by volcanic traps as aforesaid, was conducted with all the tragic dignity of Richard III and received in the true Aristotelean spirit by the audience.⁷³

Much of the continued popularity of the Britannia pantomime can be attributed to the strength of the casting. Specially engaged artists, such as Lupino, added their individual skills to those of the regular company. In addition, many supernumeraries were hired, although not on a scale to compete with the three or four hundred performers that Augustus Harris choreographed in spectacular processions for the Drury Lane pantomimes of the 1880s and 1890s.⁷⁴ The paucity of the supers in the Britannia's *King Kookoo* was noted with the suggestion that 'a few extras are certainly needed to dress the stage' (*ISDN*, 17 January 1885).

⁷³ Shaw, p.355.

⁷⁴ Mayer, *Harlequin*, p.324.

Sara Lane, for whom pantomime provided an ideal showcase for her singing, dancing and comic skills, continued to be a significant crowd-puller. Her earliest pantomime parts were in breeches roles, such as Tom Titler and Peter Piper in *Harlequin Bluebottle* (1846), but over the decades she played a variety of princes, princesses, fairies, servants, gnomes, sorceresses and demons. The last pantomime in which she starred was *The Old Bogie of the Sea* (1892), in which she played Baroness Awlforgood.

A number of the pantomimes in which Sara appeared have a meta-theatrical element, reminding the audience that it is watching a production at the Britannia. Frequently this takes the form of puns and jokes in the dialogue, but in a couple of instances it is central to the plot. In the 1854 pantomime, *Egypt*, Sara appears as herself in the Egyptian Court of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham.⁷⁵ She falls asleep and the subsequent story, in which she impersonates Cleopatra, is interpreted as her dream. Much humour is derived from the contrast between the actress's real persona and the dramatic scene in which she finds herself. For example, when she asks after her husband, Sam, she is told that Mark Antony [sic] has been dead for 3,000 years. She replies:

Hold, stop, don't go too far –
I'd mark Mark Antony with many a scar
Unravel all, or I shall surely scream
Where's Hoxton, Shoreditch – where's the rail & steam[?]⁷⁶

The comic scenes continue the theatrical references as Scene 5 is set outside Clown's Royal Humbug Theatre and burlesques Shakespearean performances.⁷⁷

Sarah's appearance in *Egypt* and in *King Kookoo*, in which she played the theatrical manageress Thespiana, highlight the fact that the audience is simultaneously aware of both the actor and the part she is playing. A similar playing with identity can be seen in the decision to engage Marie Lloyd, the music-hall favourite, as Princess Kristina in *The Magic Dragon of the Demon Dell* (1888).⁷⁸ She first appears as a traditional chaste lover, but in Scene 6 an unsuccessful suitor steals a magic lamp representing her modesty. She then becomes sexually predatory, chasing after men until the lamp is rediscovered in the final scene. The role was particularly apt for a music-hall star whose act was known to be risqué. Pantomime is a supremely self-conscious form of theatre.

⁷⁵ ADD.MS 52951 F, BL.

⁷⁶ Ibid., f.5.

⁷⁷ Ibid., ff.18-20.

⁷⁸ Called Princess Mazina in the script, ADD.MS 53418 C, BL.

Marie Lloyd was just one of a host of music-hall entertainers to perform in the Britannia pantomimes. The practice became widespread during the second half of the nineteenth century. James Lawrence Graydon, the manager of the Middlesex Music Hall in Drury Lane, reported to the 1892 Select Committee inquiry that over a thousand music-hall artists had played in pantomimes at London and provincial theatres during the 1891/92 season.⁷⁹ Other well-known artists employed by the Brit included Marie Kendall, Charles Coburn, Little Elsie, and Topsy Sinden (see Plate 6.2). Shaw was impressed with Sinden's performance as Sylvia in *The Will o' the Wisp* even though he had previously been bored with her skirt dancing:

I was agreeably astonished by Miss Topsy Sinden's dancing. Thitherto it had been my miserable fate to see her come on, late in the second act of some unspeakably dreary inanity at the West End, to interpolate a 'skirt dance,' and spin out the unendurable by the intolerable. . . . At the Britannia Miss Sinden really danced, acted, and turned out quite a charming person.⁸⁰

The graceful choreography of the traditional ballet was an important element of the pantomimes, as described in a review of *Cocorico* (*H&K Gazette*, 31 December 1873):

A great feature is a ballet *divertissement*, in which a bewitching corps of *coryphées* go through some graceful *das* – the Carle *troupe* assisting by their elegant *poses*, pretty dancing, which muchly reminded us of the beauties of Coulon and Cerito, ere vulgar French license usurped the place of the ballet proper.

Alongside the lyrical style of the coryphées other performers created dances with contrasting moods. For example, in *The Bold Bad Baron* the energetic dancing of Will Crackles earned particular praise (*Era*, 15 February 1890): ' . . . Mr W. Crackles's final hand-spring (one hand) at the conclusion of some extraordinary gyrations is something to be seen and remembered.'

The pantomime was without doubt the single most important production in the Britannia's year. It earned almost universal critical praise and, particularly in the later years, was championed as a bastion of traditional entertainment. Yet the harlequinade is a prominent example of the potentially anarchic and it must therefore be significant that it continued to be a popular feature at the Britannia long after other theatres had omitted it

⁷⁹ Q.2895, 1892 Report.

⁸⁰ Shaw, p.354.

from their productions. The association with Sara Lane, who continued to appear when she had virtually abandoned other performances, contributed to the popularity of the Britannia pantomime. She epitomised the essence of wholesome fun. Although the pantomime demanded a substantial investment of resources and time, a box-office hit meant financial security for the rest of the year. For the audience, the pantomime's lampooning of the real world provided a means of reflecting on, laughing at and thereby temporarily negating the stresses and challenges of contemporary life. But above all else, it was entertaining: the Britannia pantomime was a good night out.

TABLE 6: BRITANNIA PANTOMIMES 1841-1901

YEAR	TITLE	OPENING AUTHOR
1841	Robinson Crusoe	
1842	(Not licensed, no panto)	
1843	The Giant Frost, King of the Snowy Regions, or Harlequin and the Fairy of the Rose	
1844	Tom Titler's Ground, or Harlequin and the Fairy of Old London Stone	G.D. Pitt
1845	Chachechichochu and Wanky Twanky Fun, or Harlequin in China	G.D. Pitt
1846	Harlequin Blue Bottle, or the Owl and Fairy Queen of the Butterfly Bower	
1847	Harlequin and the Yellow Dwarf, or the Son of the Sunflower	G.D. Pitt
1848	Old Parr and His Magic Pills, or Harlequin and the Wizard of Askedale	G.D. Pitt
1849	Old Boguey, The Terror of all Naughty Boys & Girls, or Harlequin Billy Best and the Gnome of the Enchanted Key	
1850	Big-bodied Bill, Big Belzebub's Boy, or Harlequin and the Golden Goblin	
1851	Harlequin and the Koh-i-Noor, or the Princess and the Pearl	C. Rice
1852	The Prize Pantomime, or Calaban, the Giant Zygii, and Doctor Killorcuresh *	J.W. Collier
1853	Punch and Judy, or Harlequin Shallabalah and the Dog 'Toby'	
1854	Egypt 3000 Years Ago, or Queen Cleopatra, a Dream in the Crystal Palace	W. Rogers
1855	Mother Shipton's Prophecy of Seven Women to One Man, or Don Giovanni and the Witch's Broom	
1856	Hush-a-by-baby upon the Tree Top, or the Comet of 1.8.5.6. without his Tail	C.H. Hazlewood & W. Seaman
1857	Sing a Song of Sixpence and the Star of the West, or Four-and-twenty Blackbirds Baked in a Pie	C.H. Hazlewood & W. Seaman
1858	Prince Peacock and the Queen of Spite, or the Fountains of Eternal Youth	W. Seaman
1859	The Spirit of Liberty, or Needles and Pins, and Europe, Asia, Africa and America	C.H. Hazlewood
1860	The Prince and Ogre, or Queen Grasshopper and the Glowworms of Glowworm Glade	C.H. Hazlewood
1861	King of the Cures, or the Triumph of Plenty over Monopoly	F. Marchant
1862	Abon Hassan, the Sleeper of Bagdad and the Fairy Elves of the Enchanted Mosque	F. Marchant
1863	Hickory, Dickory, Dock! The Mouse that Ran Up the Clock	C.H. Hazlewood
1864	Little Busy Bee, or the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street	C.H. Hazlewood
1865	Old Daddy Longlegs, or the Race for the Golden Apples	C.H. Hazlewood
1866	The Princess of the Pearl Island, or the Three Kingdoms of Pearl, Gold and Silver	C.H. Hazlewood
1867	Don Quixote, or Sancho Panza and his Wife Teresa	C.H. Hazlewood
1868	Blutzerranbothrumh, or the Dwarf of the Diamond Dell	F. Marchant
1869	The Giant of the Mountain, or the Savage, the Shipwrecked and the Belle of the Period	F. Marchant

* There are inconsistencies in the title of some pantomimes; that given here appears in the *Era* (26 December 1852) but the manuscript (ADD.MS 52936 V, BL) gives *Callandrack Callebando the Giant Zugii, or Doctor Killorcureoh* and the *Theatrical Journal* (22 December 1852) gives *Collandracc Collabando, or the Giant Zygii and Doctor Killandcuroh*.

1870	The Man Loaded with Mischief, or King Cricket and Polly-Put-the-Kettle-On	F. Marchant
1871	The Old Man and His Ass, or Robin Redbreast and his 11 Hungry Brothers	F. Marchant
1872	Tommy and Harry, or the Spelling Book, the Lion and the Mouse, and What Don't Care Came To	Charles Merriam
1873	Cocorico, or the Hen with the Golden Eggs	C.H. Hazlewood
1874	The Black Statue, or the Enchanted Pills and the Magic Apple Tree	C.H. Hazlewood
1875	El-Flambo, or the Waters of the Singing Well	F. Marchant
1876	Turlututu, or the Three Enchanted Hats	F. Marchant
1877	Rominagrobis, the Tail of a Cat	F. Marchant
1878	The Magic Mule, or the Ass's Skin the Princess to Win	F. Marchant
1879	The Shepherd's Star, or Capricorne and the Planet Sprite	J.B. Johnstone
1880	Harlequin's Love Dream, or the Daughter of the King of the Kingless Kingdom	H. Spry
1881	The Enchanted Dove, or the Princess, the Poodle, and the Sorceress	H. Spry
1882	The Diamond Statue, or the King of the Genii	H. Spry
1883	Queen Dodo, or Harlequin Babilo and the Three Wonders	F. Bowyer
1884	King Kookoo, or Harlequin Bonbon and the Golden Serpent	F. Bowyer
1885	Daddy Long-legs, or Harlequin Merrimac and Mother Carey's Chickens	F. Bowyer
1886	The Goblin Bat, or Harlequin Meloda and the Little Oof Bird	F. Bowyer
1887	King Trickee, or Harlequin the Demon Beetle, the Sporting Duchess, and the Golden Casket	J. Addison
1888	The Magic Dragon of the Demon Dell, or the Search for the Mystic Thyme	J. Addison
1889	The Bold Bad Baron, or The Fairy Fountain of Enchanted Waters	J. Addison
1890	The Spider and the Fly	J. Addison
1891	The Old Bogie of the Sea, or the Enchanted Well	J. Addison
1892	The Man in the Moon	J. Addison
1893	The King o' the Castle	J. Addison
1894	The Giant of the Mountains	J. Addison
1895	The Demon Oof Bird	J. Addison
1896	The Giant and the Dwarf, or Hop o' my Thumb	J. Addison
1897	The Will o' the Wisp	J. Addison
1898	King Klondike	J. Addison
1899	The Magic Moonstone	J. Addison
1900	King Doo-Dah	Charles Wilmott
1901	Hanky Panky, or the Golden Talisman	Charles Wilmott



PLATE 6.1: Britannia clowns (clockwise from top left): Redington portrait of Jean Louis, Tom Lovell (ISDN, 17 January 1885) and Redington portrait of Tom Sayers in *Abon Hassan*



PLATE 6.2: Pantomime performers (clockwise from top left): Ada Reeve, Arthur Lupino, Kate Vaughan, Topsy Sinden, G.H. Macdermott and Chirgwin (a.k.a. The White Eyed Kaffir)



PLATE 6.3: Preparing for the pantomime *The Old Bogie of the Sea* (Daily Graphic, 25 December 1891)



PLATE 6.4: Pantomime scenes (from top): *Hickory Dickory Dock* (*Penny Illustrated Paper*, 9 January 1864) and *Little Busy Bee* (*Penny Illustrated Weekly News*, 31 December 1864)



PLATE 6.5: Pantomime characters from *The Goblin Bat* (ISDN, 22 January 1887). Sara played Meloda, the bird seller (bottom left)

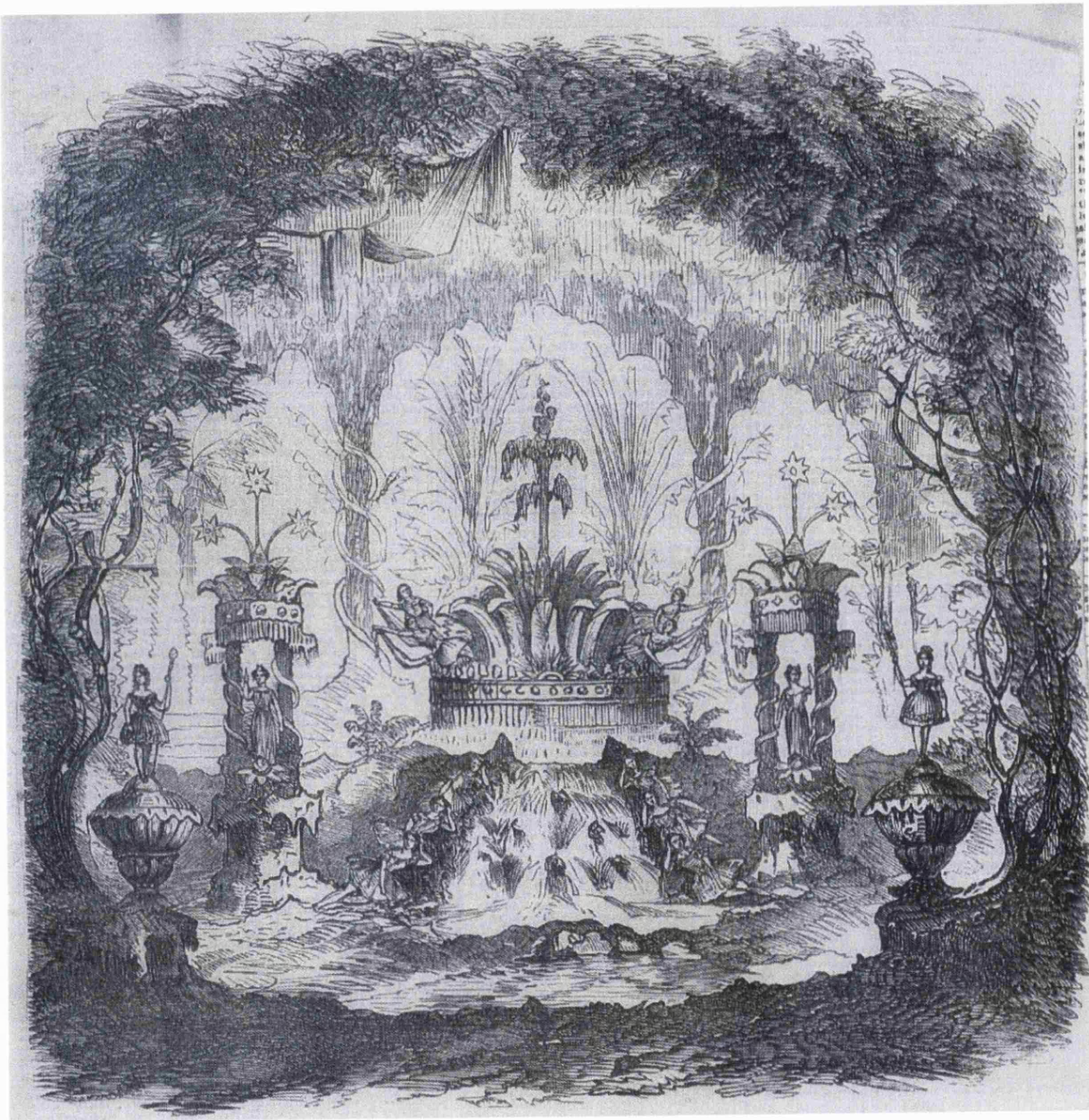
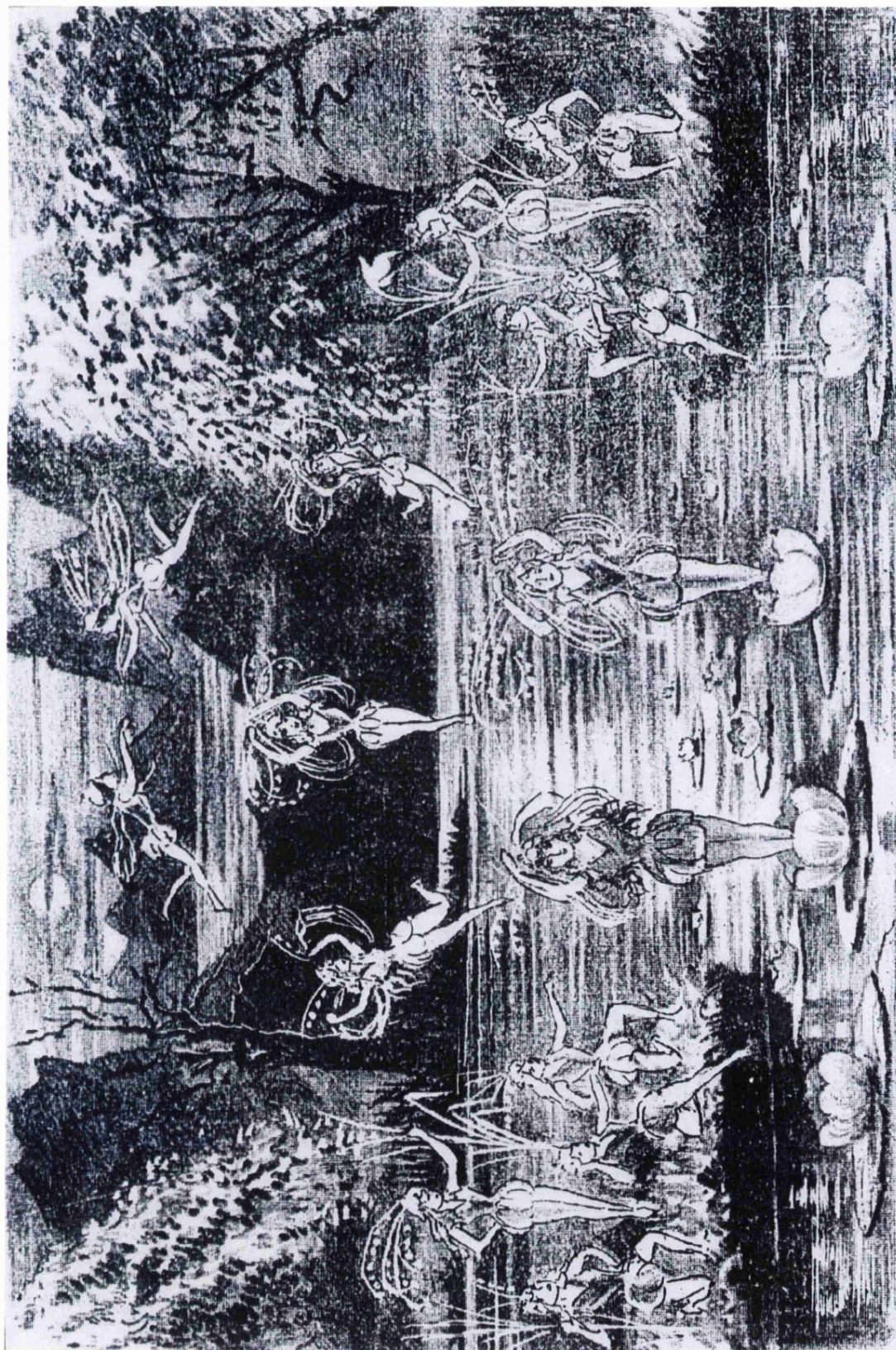


PLATE 6.6: Transformation scene from *Little Busy Bee* (*Penny Illustrated Weekly News*, 21 January 1865)



THE FLYING BALLET.

PLATE 6.7: Illustration of the Flying Ballet from the programme for *King Klondike*



PLATE 6.8: Scene from the pantomime *Turlututa* (ISDN, 6 January 1877)

CONCLUSION

The principle aim of this study has been to provide a wide-ranging history of the Britannia Theatre in order to consider its relation to the East End community in which it was situated and to evaluate its connection with popular culture. The picture that has emerged demonstrates the dynamic relationship between the theatre and its predominantly working- and lower-middle-class audience, revealing how every aspect from the subject matter of its plays to the provision of refreshments was specifically fashioned for or influenced by its customers. Examination of such details enables a new appreciation of the special characteristics and achievements of this 'minor' theatre and particularly of its owner-manager, Sara Lane.

For critics and audience alike, Sara epitomised the Britannia, even during the 1890s when her appearances on stage were limited. This study confirms her substantial contribution to the success of the theatre and examines the different facets of her personal image. Where previous research has focused on her work as a dramatist, the emphasis here has been on her many talents as a performer and manager. It was through these activities that she fostered her special relationship with the audience and created her unique status within the East End. In the lower-class characters she typically portrayed on stage, she seemed to reflect the experiences of many of her audience. This must have been in part responsible for the local community's belief that she represented and was one of them, even as she became revered as a wealthy philanthropist. The extraordinary scenes following her death testify to the significance she had for local people.

The Hoxton theatre seemed to embody the 'soul' of its audience. The generous gift-giving at the Britannia Festival and the audience's confusion of actors with their on-stage characters when encountered away from the theatre are just a couple of manifestations of the strong bond between the theatre and its customers. The oft-mentioned vociferous response and active audience participation amazed early critics and was still delighting Shaw in 1898.¹ This interactive relationship between actors and audience, together with the longevity of the theatre, the consistency of its repertoire and the pattern of repeat

¹ *Theatrical Journal*, 13 September 1846, and George Bernard Shaw, 'The Drama in Hoxton', *Saturday Review* (9 April 1898), reprinted in G.B. Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (London: Constable, 1954) vol. 3, pp.351-57.

audience attendances, enabled the Britannia to create a feeling of community. In addition, the continual exposure to different *rasa*, the shared emotional states stimulated by the drama, contributed to the sense of communality. This study argues that the Britannia's relationship with its audience was one of its defining features. It is unlikely that its West End counterparts had a comparable dynamic.

Investigation of the Britannia's repertoire, focusing particularly on the melodramas of Hazlewood, productions of Shakespeare, incidental entertainments and the annual pantomime, has produced more detailed data than previously collated. The overwhelming conclusion to be drawn from its diverse productions is that they all confirm a marked preference for performances that stimulated the senses rather than the intellect. The concept of literary merit, so beloved by middle-class critics, does not appear to have influenced the choice or popularity of the Britannia's entertainments.

One of the most important features of the Britannia as a community resource was the opportunity it offered its patrons to encounter contemporary events and personalities. It frequently reacted with astonishing speed to breaking stories that might interest its audience. Topicality was introduced through the choice of subject matter for its melodramas, the appearance on stage of noteworthy individuals between the regular dramas, and in the gentle lampooning or more satirical commentary on contemporary issues in its burlesques and pantomimes.

The first two chapters consider how the Hoxton theatre developed from a saloon venue that was regarded with suspicion by the police and licensing authorities and was largely ignored by the press, and shows how it became established as a respected establishment whose productions were regularly reviewed in newspapers and journals. It is clear that the superior architectural quality of the building constructed in 1858 played a significant part in consolidating the theatre's growing reputation. The large dimensions of the new stage also influenced the repertoire and the capacious auditorium enabled more people to attend the Britannia than any other London theatre. However, the theatre's interaction with the population of Shoreditch was not confined to those who attended its productions. In its commercial dealings as an employer, customer, advertiser and promotion agent, it developed a significant role in the economic life of the area.

By presenting 'thick description' of the Britannia Theatre from the first dramatic entertainments in 1840 until the end of the management by the Lane dynasty sixty years later, this study has provided a context for the work of the establishment, substantiated its achievements and revealed its complex and symbiotic relationship with the community in which it was situated. It suggests how the theatre simultaneously stimulated and responded

to the taste, feelings and concerns of its audience. A dominant theme has been how its playwrights drew on issues, styles and themes from other areas of popular culture, such as fiction, painting and contemporary events, and assimilated them into dramatic productions at the Britannia. Yet this was not a straightforward appropriation of culture: the Britannia was not a passive transmitter of a popular culture, but the culture itself.

Just as this research into the Britannia has built on the contributions of Jim Davis, Tracy Davis and Victor Emeljanow in particular, so it would benefit from further study of other East End theatres, in particular the City of London, the Standard and the Pavilion. A more detailed examination of the repertoires and managements of these rival establishments would confirm those attributes that were common to all the minor theatres and highlight aspects that were unique to the Britannia. Only by paying comprehensive attention to these East End venues and the less-celebrated performers who appeared on their stages can we truly understand nineteenth-century theatre as a whole.

It is fitting to end with mention of the woman whose name was synonymous with the Britannia Theatre and whose death in 1899 must surely have been a significant contributory factor in the decline of the theatre's fortunes. As the report of her funeral in the *Daily Telegraph* suggests, the death of the 'queen' created a void:

Laughter will ring within the Britannia, and tears will be shed; virtue will be cheered and villainy hooted. That strong tide of prosperity which set in fifty-eight years ago will still flow. It is the personal magnetism and sympathy of the 'old woman' that will be missed.²

This study has at least recovered some of Sara's unique achievements for posterity.

² ALC cuttings, p.39.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

State Library of New South Wales (Mitchell Library)

Diaries of F.C. Wilton, microfilm of MS 1181, CY Reels 1136 and 1137

Family Records Centre

Births, Marriages and Deaths registers

1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901 censuses

Guildhall Library

Playbills and programmes for Britannia, City of London and Surrey Theatres

Hackney Archives

Britannia Playbills microfilm

Britannia Theatre cuttings file

Britannia programmes 792.35P Y1612, Y6269 and Y9857

Britannia letters and agreements M809-814 and M4458

Wage books for John Carter & Sons, D/B/CAR 1; 33 and 34

Islington Local History Centre

Sadler's Wells Playbills

Lambeth Archives

Surrey Theatre Playbills 1851-1878

Lincoln Studies Section, Central Library, Lincoln

Lincoln Theatre Playbills 1840-1850; 413-458

London Metropolitan Archives

MR/L/MD/0112 Music and dancing licences

LCC Theatres and Music Halls Committee Papers: Britannia Theatre 1889-1909 LCC/MIN 10,779

Parish records

Mander and Mitchenson Collection

Britannia Theatre and Sara Lane files

Museum of London

Playbills for Britannia Theatre

Model of interior of Britannia Theatre

Redington portraits and juvenile dramas in Jonathan King Collection

National Archives

Lord Chamberlain's Papers LC1/58-298, 371, 384, 488, 509, 601, 639, 657, 675, 692, LC7/5-7 and LC7/53

Theatre Museum

Britannia Theatre buildings file, Sara Lane file

Playbills and Programmes from London Theatres 1801-1900 in the Theatre Museum, London (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1983); Britannia Theatre, 13 microfiches

Westminster City Archives

Playbills for Marylebone Theatre

British Library

Britannia playbills in MIC.C.13137 Playbills 342, 352, 376

City of London playbills in MIC.C.13137 Playbills 168 and 370

Marylebone Theatre playbills in MIC.C.13137 Playbills 378

Surrey Theatre playbills in MIC.C.13137 Playbills 390

Lord Chamberlain's Day Books ADD.MSS 53703-53708

Theatre Cuttings 63-74

Lord Chamberlain's Plays, British Library

ADD.MS 53675 J, J. Addison, *King Klondike*

ADD.MS 53418 C, [J. Addison], *The Magic Dragon of the Demon Dell, or the Search for the Mystic Thyme*

ADD.MS 53306 B, [Frederick Bowyer], *Queen Dodo*

ADD.MS 52936 V, [J.W. Collier], *Callandrack Callebando the Giant Zugii or Doctor Killorcureoh*

ADD.MS 53191 H, [R. Dodson], *Deoch an(d) Dur'ass, or Oonah of the Hills*

ADD.MS 53093 G, [E. Elton], *King Lear and His Three Daughters Queer*

ADD. MS 53061 L, [C.H. Hazlewood], *Alone In the Pirate's Lair, or Danger and Fatality*

ADD.MS 53060 E, [C.H. Hazlewood], *The Ballinasloe Boy, or The Fortunes of an Irish Peasant*

ADD.MS 56061 S, [C.H. Hazlewood], *Break But Not Bend*

ADD.MS 53016 P, [C.H. Hazlewood], *Cast on the Mercy of the World, or Deserted and Deceived*

ADD. MS 52992 L, C.H. Hazlewood, *The Champion of England, or Tom and the Boy*

ADD. MS 52993 B, [C.H. Hazlewood], *The Champion of the World, or The English Hero and the American Boy*

ADD.MS 53063 AA, [C.H. Hazlewood], *Don Quixote, or Sancho Panza, and His Wife Tereza*

ADD.MS 52995 T, C.H. Hazlewood, *Eily O'Connor*

ADD.MS 53058 B, [C.H. Hazlewood], *Faust, or Marguerite's Mangle*

ADD.MS 53061 D, [C.H. Hazlewood], *The Gray Ladye of Fernlea*

ADD.MS 52986 S, [C.H. Hazlewood], *Harlequin Needles and Pins, or The Spirit of Liberty and Asia, Africa and America*

ADD.MS 53060 L, [C.H. Hazlewood], *Jack O'Lantern, or The Blue Ribbon of the Turf*

ADD.MS 53063 G, [C.H. Hazlewood], *The King's Death Trap*

ADD.MS 53052 R, [C.H. Hazlewood], *The Last Link of Love, or Stolen in Childhood*

ADD.MS 53058 I, [C.H. Hazlewood], *The Life Signal*

ADD.MS 53038 C, C.H. Hazlewood, *Little Busy Bee, or The Old Woman of Threadneedle Street*

ADD.MS 53059 F, [C.H. Hazlewood], *The Marriage Certificate, or A Mother's Honour*

ADD.MS 53200 B, C.H. Hazlewood, *New King Richard the Third*

ADD.MS 53052 S, [C.H. Hazlewood], *The Old Cherry Tree, or The Orphan Cousins*

ADD.MS 53060 F, [C.H. Hazlewood], *The Old Maid in the Winding Sheet, or, The Dream of a Coquette*

ADD.MS 53011 Q, C.H. Hazlewood, *Our Lot in Life, or Brighter Days in Store*

ADD.MS 53061 M, [C.H. Hazlewood], *Pale Janet*

ADD.MS 52955 I, C.H. Hazlewood, *The Parish Boy's Progress*

ADD.MS 53064 L, C.H. Hazlewood, *Robin Hood and his Merry Men, or Harlequin Ivanhoe, The Knight Templar and the Jewess*

ADD.MS 53061 J, [C.H. Hazlewood], *Who Did It? A Mystery Unmasked, or The Track of Crime*

ADD. MS 53062 P, C.H. Hazlewood, *Wild Charley, The Link Boy*

ADD.MS 53038 F, C.H. Hazlewood, *Work Girls of London*

ADD.MS 53151 F, Sara Lane, *Albert de Rosen*

ADD.MS 53135 D, Sara Lane, *Dolores*

ADD.MS 53164 H, Sara Lane, *The Faithless Wife*

ADD.MS 53185 C, Sara Lane, *St Bartholomew, or A Queen's Love*

ADD.MS 53119 C, Sara Lane, *Taken from Memory*

ADD.MS 53018 H, [Frederick Marchant], *Abon Hassan, the Sleeper of Bagdad and the Fairy Elves of the Enchanted Mosque*

ADD.MS 52994 C, [Frederick Marchant], *Kynge Lear and Hys Faythefulle Foole*

ADD.MS 53177 A, [Frederick Marchant], *Turlututu*

ADD.MS 53163 G, [F. Marchant], *Woman's Rights*

ADD.MS 42990 ff.65-78, George Dibdin Pitt, *Chachechichochu & Wanky Twanky Fun, or Harlequin in China*

ADD.MS. 43013 ff.185-228, George Dibdin Pitt, *The Flirt, or False Accusation*

ADD.MS 43015 ff.767-800, George Dibdin Pitt, *Old Parr and the Magic Pills, or Harlequin and the Wizard of Ashdale*

ADD.MS 43000 ff.751-815, George Dibdin Pitt, *The String of Pearls, or The Fiend of Fleet Street*

ADD.MS 42980 ff.220-44, George Dibdin Pitt, *Tom Tiller's Ground, or Harlequin and the Fairey [sic] of Old London Stone*

ADD.MS 43008 ff.759-76b, George Dibdin Pitt, *The Yellow Dwarf, or Harlequin and the Son of the Sunflower*

ADD.MS 43038 ff.347-87, [Charles Rice], *Harlequin & the Koh-i-noor, or the Princess & the Pearl*

ADD.MS 52951 F, [W. Rogers], *Egypt 3000 Years Ago, or Queen Cleopatra, a Dream in the Crystal Palace*

ADD.MS 52943 B, [William Seaman], *The Devil in Six, or a Lucifer Match*

ADD.MS 52964 D, W. Seaman, *The Wreck of the Golden Mary*

ADD.MS 52954 Y, C.A. Somerset, *The Angel at Islington, or The Merrie Days of Shakespeare and Queen Bess*

ADD.MS 52993 D, [William Travers], *The Champion's Belt, or The Ring and Its Moral*

ADD.MS 43031 ff.649-70, *Big Bodied Bill Big Belzebus [sic] Boy, or Harlequin and the Golden Goblin*

ADD.MS 42998 ff.797-817, *Harlequin King Blue Bottle*

ADD.MS 43023 ff.698-717, *Old Boguey [sic] The Terror of all Naughty Boys & Girls, or Harlequin Billy Best & the Gnome of the Enchanted Key*

ADD.MS 52944 G, *Punch and Judy, or Harlequin and the Dog Toby*

University of Kent

<http://www.library.kent.ac.uk/library/special/html/specoll/theatre.htm>

Playbill collection: UKC/POS/LDN/BRI

Melville Collection: Letters UKC/MEL/PLA/ASG/1: 0600078

Bigwood collection: Playbills UKC/BIG/POS/LDN/BRI, letters UKC/BIG/LET, cuttings UKC/BIG/CUT
and miscellaneous items UKC/BIG/MISC

Frank Pettingell Collection, University of Kent

PETT MSS.A.36, C.H. Hazlewood, *Alone in The Pirate's Lair*

PETT MSS.B.3, C.H. Hazlewood, *The Ballinsaloe Boy*

PETT MSS.B.81, C.H. Hazlewood, *Break But Not Bend*

PETT MSS.C.18, C.H. Hazlewood, *Cast on the Mercy of the World*

PETT MSS.C.20, C.H. Hazlewood, *The Casual Ward, or A Night in the Workhouse*

PETT MSS.C.30, C.H. Hazlewood, *Cherry and Fair Star, or The Wicked Vizier who Stole the Children Of Cyprus*

PETT MSS.H.109, C.H. Hazlewood, *The Chevalier of the Maison Rouge*

PETT MSS.D.85, C.H. Hazlewood, *The Dustman's Treasure, or Wegg and the Boffins*

PETT MSS.J.26, C.H. Hazlewood, *Jessy Vere, or The Return of the Wanderer*

PETT MSS.O.35, C.H. Hazlewood, *The Old Toll House*

PETT MSS.W.41, C.H. Hazlewood, *Who Did It?*

PETT MSS.W.56, C.H. Hazlewood, *Wild Charley, The Link Boy*

PETT MSS.A.27, Sara Lane, *Albert de Rosen*

PETT MSS.C.44, Sara Lane, *The Cobbler's Daughter*

PETT MSS.D.45, Sara Lane, *Devotion, or The Priceless Wife*

PETT MSS.F.12, Sara Lane, *The Faithless Wife*

PETT MSS.R.14, Sara Lane, *Red Josephine, or A Woman's Vengeance*

PETT MSS.S.4, Sara Lane, *St Bartholomew*

PETT MSS.T.3, Sara Lane, *Taken from Memory*

PETT PAR.29, Sara Lane, *Taken from Memory* parts

PETT MSS.O.18, W. Seaman, *Old Friends in New Frames*

PLAYS

BUCKSTONE, JOHN BALDWIN, *The Green Bushes* (London: National Acting Drama Office, [1845])

BOUCICAULT, DION, *The Colleen Bawn* in George Rowell, ed., *Nineteenth Century Plays*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) pp.173-231

BYRON, HENRY J., *Miss Eily O'Connor*, Lacy's Acting Edition no. 781 (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d)

- HAZLEWOOD, C.H., *Ashore and Afloat*, French's Acting Edition of Plays vol. 106 (London: Samuel French, n.d.)
- — *Going to Chobham*, Lacy's Acting Edition of Plays vol. 11 (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.)
 - — *Jenny Foster, The Sailor's Child, or The Winter Robin*, Lacy's Acting Edition of Plays vol. 32 (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.)
 - — *Jessamy's Courtship*, French's Acting Edition of Plays vol. 109 (London: Samuel French, n.d.)
 - — *Jessy Vere, or The Return of the Wanderer*, Lacy's Acting Edition of Plays vol. 25 (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.)
 - — *Lady Audley's Secret* in George Rowell, ed., *Nineteenth Century Plays*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) pp.233-66
 - — *Lizzie Lyle, or The Flower Makers of Finsbury. A Tale of Trials and Temptations*, Lacy's Acting Edition of Plays vol. 87 (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.)
 - — *The Marble Bride, or The Elves of the Forest*, Lacy's Acting Edition of Plays vol. 32 (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.)
 - — *The Mother's Dying Child*, Lacy's Acting Edition of Plays vol. 64 (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.)
 - — *Poul a Dhoil, or The Fairy Man*, Lacy's Acting Edition of Plays vol. 77 (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.)
 - — *The Stolen Jewess, or Two Children of Israel*, French's Acting Edition of Plays vol. 105 (London: Samuel French, n.d.)
 - — *Taking the Veil, or The Harsh Step-Father*, French's Acting Edition of Plays vol. 106 (London: Samuel French, n.d.)
 - — *Waiting for the Verdict, or Falsely Accused*, Lacy's Acting Edition of Plays vol. 99 (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.)

HAZLEWOOD, C.H., and ARTHUR WILLIAMS, *Leave It To Me*, French's Acting Edition of Plays no. 1437 (London: Samuel French, n.d.)

LANCASTER, EDWARD, *The Red Lance, or The Merrie Men of Hoxton, Oxberry's Weekly Budget* (20 November 1843) 171-81

PITT, GEORGE DIBDIN, *Sweeney Todd, The Barber of Fleet Street, or The String of Pearls*, Dicks' Standard Plays no. 499 (London: John Dicks, n.d.)

POOLE, J., *Hamlet Travestie* in Stanley Wells, ed., *Shakespeare Burlesques* (London: Diploma Press, 1977) vol. 1, pp.1-69

PARLIAMENTARY REPORTS

Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature (House of Commons Papers, Session 1831-1832, 679)

Report from the Select Committee on Theatrical Licences and Regulations (House of Commons Papers, Session 1866, 373)

Report from the Select Committee on Theatres and Places of Entertainment (House of Commons Papers, Session 1892, 240)

NINETEENTH-CENTURY NEWSPAPERS AND JOURNALS

All the Year Round

Bow Bells

Builder

Building News

Daily Graphic

Daily Telegraph

Dramatic Telegram

Entr'acte (became *Entr'acte & Limelight*)

Era

Era Almanack

Evening Standard
Gentleman's Journal
Graphic
Hackney & Kingsland Gazette & Shoreditch Telegraph
Household Words
Illustrated London News
Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News
Illustrated Times
Illustrated Weekly News
News of the World
Our Corner
Oxberry's Weekly Budget
Penny Illustrated Paper
Penny Illustrated Weekly News
Players
Punch, or The London Charivari
Referee
Sunday Times
Theatre
Theatrical Journal
The Times
Touchstone, or The New Era
Weekly Dispatch
Weekly Theatrical Reporter

PRIMARY SOURCES

- ANDERSON, JAMES R., *An Actor's Life* (London: Walter Scott, 1902)
- BAKER, H. BARTON, *The London Stage: Its History and Traditions From 1576 to 1888*, 2 vols (London: W.H. Allen, 1889)
- — *History of the London Stage and its Famous Players (1576-1903)* (London: George Routledge, 1904)
- BELTON, F., *Random Recollections of an Old Actor* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1880)
- BESANT, ANNIE, 'How London Amuses Itself in the East', *Our Corner* 8 (1 August 1886) 107-16
- BESANT, WALTER, *East London* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1901)
- BOOTH, CHARLES, *Maps Descriptive of London Poverty, 1898-99*, Sheet 6, reprinted by London School of Economics
- — *Life and Labour of the People in London* 3rd Series, *Religious Influences*, 'London North of the Thames: The Inner Ring' (London: Macmillan, 1902)
- — *Life and Labour of the People in London*, Final vol., *Notes on Social Influences and Conclusion* (London: Macmillan, 1902)
- BOSANQUET, MRS BERNARD, *Rich and Poor* (London: Macmillan, 1899)
- CAVE, J.A., *A Jubilee of Dramatic Life and Incident of Joseph A. Cave*, ed., Robert Soutar (London: Thomas Vernon, 1892)
- CHIRGWIN, GEORGE, *Chirgwin's Chirrup: Being the Life and Reminiscences of George Chirgwin* (London: J. & J. Bennett, 1912)
- COLEMAN, JOHN, and EDWARD COLEMAN, *Memoirs of Samuel Phelps* (London: Remington, 1886)
- COLLINS, WILKIE, 'The Unknown Public', *Household Words* 18 (21 August 1858) 217-22
- CRAUFORD, ALFRED LANE, *Sam and Sallie: A Romance of the Stage* (London: Cranley & Day, 1933)

- DICKENS, CHARLES, 'The Amusements of the People' 2, *Household Words* 1 (13 April 1850) 57-60
- — 'The Uncommercial Traveller', *All The Year Round* 2 (25 Feb 1860) 416-21
- — 'Some Theatrical Audiences', *All The Year Round* 18 (19 May 1877) 273-78
- — *Dickens's London Guide 1879* (London: Howard Barker Press, 1972); first publ. 1879
- — *Dickens's Dictionary of London 1888* (Moretonhampstead: Old House Books, 1993)
- — *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, eds, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Nina Burgis, vol. 6 1850-1852 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988)
- — *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, eds, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Angus Easson, vol. 7 1853-1855 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993)
- — *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed., Graham Storey, vol. 9 1859-1861 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)
- — *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed., Graham Storey, vol. 11 1865-1867 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999)
- EDWARDS, FRANCIS, *Playbills: A Collection and Some Comments* (London: Francis Edwards, 1893)
- ERLE, THOMAS W., *Letters from a Theatrical Scene Painter; Being Sketches of the Minor Theatres of London as They Were Twenty Years Ago* (London: Marcus Ward, 1880)
- FITZGERALD, PERCY, *The World Behind the Scenes* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1881)
- FONTANE, THEODOR, *Shakespeare in the London Theatre 1855-58*, trans. and ed., Russell Jackson (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1999)
- FOSTER, GEORGE, *The Spice of Life: Sixty-five Years in the Glamour World* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1939)
- FROST, THOMAS, *Forty Years' Recollections: Literary and Political* (New York: Grand Publishing, 1986); first publ. 1880
- GREENWOOD, JAMES, 'A Night in a Workhouse' in Peter Keating, ed., *Into Unknown England 1866-1913 Selections from the Social Explorers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976) pp.33-54
- — *The Wilds of London* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1874)
- — *The Little Ragamuffins, or Outcast London* (London: Ward, Lock, Bowden, 1892)
- HANLEY, P., *Random Recollections of the Stage by an Old Playgoer*, 2nd edition (London: Diprose and Bateman, 1884)
- — *A Jubilee of Playgoing* (London: Tinkler and Hillhouse, 1887)
- HAZLEWOOD, C.H., 'Abel Flint, The Miser', *Gentleman's Journal* Recitation Supplement (1 December 1869) 6
- — 'Saxilby Manor', *Gentleman's Journal* (1 November 1869, 1 December 1869, 1 January 1870, 1 February 1870, 1 March 1870)
- HIBBERT, H.G., *Fifty Years of a Londoner's Life* (London: Grant Richards, 1916)
- HINDLEY, CHARLES, *Curiosities of Street Literature*, 2 vols (London: Seven Dials, 1969); first publ. 1871
- HOLLINSHEAD, JOHN, *Ragged London in 1861*, ed., Anthony S. Wohl (London: Dent, 1986); first publ. 1861
- — *My Lifetime*, 2 vols (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, 1895)
- HOWE, J.B., *A Cosmopolitan Actor* (London: Bedford Publishing, 1888)
- JASPER, A.S., *A Hoxton Childhood* (London: Centerprise Publications, 1969)
- JAY, REV. A. OSBORNE, *Life in Darkest London* (London: Webster & Cable, 1891)
- JAYE, A., 'Looking Back', *Profile* 2,11 (August 1969) 1-4 and 2,12 (September 1969) 1-4
- JEROME, JEROME K., *On the Stage – And Off* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1991); first publ. 1885
- — *Stage-land* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1889)

- Johnson's Account of Pantomime: The London Pantomimes, 1883-1884* (London: H.S. Phillips, 1884)
- LEWES, GEORGE HENRY, *On Actors and The Art of Acting* (London: Smith, Elder, 1875)
- LOWE, ROSE, *Daddy Burt's for Dinner* (London: Centerprise Publishing, 1976)
- MAYHEW, HENRY, *London Labour and the London Poor*, selected by Victor Neuberg (London: Penguin Books, 1985); first publ. 1860-1861
- MORLEY, HENRY, *The Journal of a London Playgoer* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1974); first publ. 1866
- MORRISON, ARTHUR, *A Child of the Jago* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946); first publ. 1896
- PASCOE, CHARLES EYRE, *The Dramatic List* (London: David Bogue, 1880)
- PHELPS, W. MAY and JOHN FORBES-ROBERTSON, *The Life and Life-Work of Samuel Phelps* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1886)
- Post Office London Directory* (London: Kelly) 1865, 1870 and 1875
- [PURNELL, THOMAS], 'Q', *Dramatists of the Present Day* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1871)
- REEVE, ADA, *Take It For A Fact (A Record of My Seventy-Five Years on the Stage)* (London: William Heinemann, 1954)
- RICHIE, J. EWING, *The Night Side of London* (London: Tinsley Bros., 1861)
- SALA, GEORGE AUGUSTUS, *Gaslight and Daylight*, 2nd edition (London: Chapman & Hall, 1860)
- SCOTT, CLEMENT, *The Drama of Yesterday & Today*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1899)
- SHAW, GEORGE BERNARD, 'The Drama in Hoxton', *Saturday Review* (9 April 1898), reprinted in G.B. Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (London: Constable, 1954) vol. 3, pp.351-57
- SIMS, GEORGE R., 'In the Heart of Hoxton', *Strand Magazine* 30 (July-Dec 1905) 325-31
- SOLDENE, EMILY, *My Theatrical and Musical Recollections* (London: Downey, 1897)
- STEVENS, CHARLES, 'Alone in the Pirates' Lair' in *Boys of England*, vol.1, 1-4, 17-19, 33-36, 49-52, 65-68, 81-84, 97-100, 113-16, 129-32, 145-48, 161-64, 177-80, 206, 222-23, 236
- — 'Wild Charley, The Link Boy of Old London' in *Boys of England*, vol.1, 193-96, 209-12, 225-28, 241-44, 257-60, 273-76, 297-99, 313-15, 329-31, 345-47, 358-60, 374-76, 390-92, 406-08
- TINSLEY, WILLIAM, *Random Recollections of An Old Publisher*, 2 vols (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1900)
- WAGNER, LEOPOLD, *The Pantomimes and All About Them: Their Origin, History, Preparation and Exponents* (London: John Heywood, 1881)
- WILTON, FREDERICK, *The Britannia Diaries 1863-1875: Selections from the Diaries of Frederick C. Wilton*, ed., Jim Davis (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1992)
- [WRIGHT, THOMAS], *Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes by a Journeyman Engineer* (London: Tinsley Bros., 1867)
- YARDLEY, W., 'A Chat About the London Pantomimes', *Theatre* (1 February 1881)

SECONDARY SOURCES

- ALLEN, EMILY, 'Culinary Exhibition: Victorian Wedding Cakes and Royal Spectacle', *Victorian Studies* 45,3 (2003) 457-84
- ALTICK, RICHARD D., *Victorian Studies in Scarlet* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970)
 — — *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978)
- ANDERSON, BENEDICT, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991)
- ANDERSON, MICHAEL, *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971)
- ANGLO, MICHAEL, *Penny Dreadfuls and Other Victorian Horrors* (London: Jupiter Books, 1977)
- ARMSTRONG, WILLIAM, 'The Art of the Minor Theatres', *Theatre Notebook* 10,3 (1956) 89-94
- ARUNDELL, DENNIS, *The Story of Sadler's Wells 1883-1977* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1978)
- AUERBACH, NINA, 'Victorian Players and Sages' in Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt, eds, *The Performance of Power: Theatrical Discourse and Politics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991) pp.183-98
- BAILEY, PETER, ed., *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986)
 — — 'A Community of Friends: Business and Good Fellowship in London Music Hall Management c.1860-1885' in Peter Bailey, ed., *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986) pp.33-52
 — — 'Conspiracies of Meaning; Music-Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture', *Past & Present* 144 (August 1994) 138-70
 — — *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- BAKER, MICHAEL, *The Rise of the Victorian Actor* (London: Croom Helm, 1978)
- BAKER, RICHARD ANTHONY, *Marie Lloyd Queen of the Music Halls* (London: Robert Hale, 1990)
- BALDWIN, PETER, *Toy Theatres of the World* (London: Zwemmer, 1992)
- BARKER, CLIVE, 'A Theatre for the People' in Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson, eds, *Nineteenth Century British Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1971) pp.3-24
 — — 'The Chartists, Theatre, Reform and Research', *Theatre Quarterly* 1,4 (1971) 3-10
 — — 'The Audiences of the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton', *Theatre Quarterly* 9,34 (1979) 27-41
- BARKER, KATHLEEN, *The Theatre Royal, Bristol 1766-1966* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1974)
- BEER, GILLIAN, "'Coming Wonders": uses of theatre in the Victorian novel' in Maria Axton and Raymond Williams, eds, *English Drama: Forms and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) pp.164-85
- BENNETT, TONY, 'Introduction: popular culture and 'the turn to Gramsci' in Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer and Janet Woollacott, eds, *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986) pp.xi-xix
 — — 'The politics of "the popular" and popular culture' in Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer and Janet Woollacott, eds, *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986) pp.6-21
- BOASE, FREDERICK, *Modern English Biography*, 6 vols (London: Frank Cass, 1965)
- BOLTON, H. PHILIP, *Dickens Dramatized* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1987)

- BOOTH, MICHAEL R., *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965)
- — 'The Metropolis on Stage' in H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, eds, *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) vol. 1, pp.211-24
 - — ed., *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 5. *Pantomimes, Extravaganzas and Burlesques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976)
 - — 'East End Melodrama', *Theatre Survey* 17 (1976) 57-67
 - — 'East End and West End: Class and Audience in Victorian London', *Theatre Research International* 2,2 (1977) 98-103
 - — *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981)
 - — 'Melodrama and the Working Class' in Carol Hanbery Mackey, ed., *Dramatic Dickens* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989) pp.96-109
 - — *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)
- BOOTH, MICHAEL R., RICHARD SOUTHERN, FREDERICK AND LISE-LONE MARKER and ROBERTSON DAVIES, *The Revels History of Drama in English* vol. 6 1750-1880 (London: Methuen, 1975)
- BRANCA, PATRICIA, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home* (London: Croom Helm, 1975)
- BRATTON, JACKY, 'The Contending Discourses of Melodrama' in Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook and Christine Gledhill, *Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen* (London: BFI Publishing, 1994) pp.38-49
- — 'Reading the Intertheatrical, or, The Mysterious Disappearance of Susanna Centlivre' in Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner, eds, *Women, Theatre and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) pp.7-24
 - — *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)
 - — 'The music hall' in Kerry Powell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp.164-82
- BRATTON, J.S., ed., *Music Hall: Performance and Style* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986)
- — 'Jenny Hill: Sex and Sexism in the Victorian Music Hall' in J.S. Bratton, ed., *Music Hall: Performance and Style* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986) pp.92-110
 - — 'British heroism and the structure of melodrama' in J.S. Bratton, Richard Allen Cave, Breandan Gregory, Heidi J. Holder & Michael Pickering, *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991) pp.18-61
- BRENNAN, DWAYNE, 'George Dibdin Pitt: Actor and Playwright', *Theatre Notebook* 52,1 (1998) 24-37
- BROOKS, PETER, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976)
- CARLISLE, CAROL JONES, *Helen Faucit: Fire and Ice on the Victorian Stage* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 2000)
- CARLISLE, JANICE, 'Spectacle as Government: Dickens and the Working-class Audience' in Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt, eds, *The Performance of Power: Theatrical Discourse and Politics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991) pp.163-80
- CARLSON, MARVIN, 'Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance' in Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie, eds, *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989) pp.82-98
- CARLSON, SUSAN and KERRY POWELL, 'Reimagining the theatre: women playwrights of the Victorian and Edwardian period' in Kerry Powell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)
- CARPENTER, K., *Penny Dreadfuls and Comics: English Periodicals for Children from Victorian times to the Present Day* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1983)
- CAVE, RICHARD ALLEN, 'Staging the Irishman' in J.S. Bratton, Richard Allen Cave, Breandan Gregory, Heidi J. Holder & Michael Pickering, *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press) pp.62-128

- COLE, G.D.H. and RAYMOND POSTGATE, *The Common People 1746-1946* (London: Methuen, 1971); first publ. 1938
- COLLS, ROBERT, 'When we lived in communities: working-class culture and its critics' in Robert Colls and Richard Rodger, eds, *Cities of Ideas: Civil Society and Urban Governance in Britain, 1800-2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) pp.283-307
- COOMBS, TONY, *Tis a Mad World at Hogsdon: A Short History of Hoxton* (London: Hoxton Hall with London Borough of Hackney, 1974)
- COX, PHILIP, *Reading Adaptations: Novels and Verse Narratives on the Stage, 1790-1840* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000)
- CRAUFORD, LANE, *Acting: Its Theory and Practice* (London: Constable, 1930)
- DALY, NICHOLAS, 'Blood on the Tracks: Sensation Drama, the Railway, and the Dark Face of Modernity', *Victorian Studies* 42,1 (1998/1999) 47-76
- DAVIES, ANDREW, *The East End Nobody Knows* (London: Macmillan, 1990)
- DAVIS, JIM, 'A Night in the Workhouse, or The Poor Laws as Sensation Drama', *Essays in Theatre* 7,2 (1989) 111-26
- — "Scandals to the Neighbourhood": Cleaning-up the East London Theatres', *New Theatre Quarterly* 6,23 (1990) 235-43
- — 'The Gospel of Rags: Melodrama at the Britannia, 1863-74', *New Theatre Quarterly* 7,28 (1991) 369-89
- — ed., *The Britannia Diaries 1863-1875: Selections from the Diaries of Frederick C. Wilton* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1992)
- — 'Reminiscences in Retirement: Theatrical References in the Post-Britannia Diaries of F.C. Wilton', *Theatre Notebook* 47,2 (1993) 106-13
- — 'Imperial Transgressions: the Ideology of Drury Lane Pantomime in the Late Nineteenth Century', *New Theatre Quarterly* 12,46 (1996) 147-55
- — 'Androgynous Cliques and Epicene Colleges: Gender Transgression On and Off the Victorian Stage', *Nineteenth Century Theatre* 26,1 (1998) 50-69
- — 'Sarah Lane: questions of authorship' in Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin, eds, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp.125-47
- DAVIS, JIM and TRACY C. DAVIS, 'The People of the "People's Theatre": The Social Demography of the Britannia Theatre (Hoxton)', *Theatre Survey* 32,2 (1991) 137-65
- DAVIS, JIM and VICTOR EMELJANOW, *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001)
- DAVIS, TRACY C., 'Victorian Charity and Self-Help for Women Performers', *Theatre Notebook* 41,3 (1987) 114-28
- — *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991)
- — *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)
- — 'Female managers, lessees and proprietors of the British stage (to 1914)', *Nineteenth Century Theatre* 28,2 (2000) 115-44
- DAVIS, TRACY C. and ELLEN DONKIN, eds, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- DAVISON, PETER, *Contemporary Drama and the Popular Dramatic Tradition in England* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982)
- DENTITH, SIMON, *Society and Cultural Forms in Nineteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998)
- DIAMOND, MICHAEL, *Victorian Sensation, or, the Spectacular, the Shocking and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Anthem Press, 2003)

- DISHER, MAURICE WILLSON, *Blood and Thunder* (London: Frederick Muller, 1949)
- DISHER, M. WILLSON, *Clowns & Pantomimes* (London: Constable, 1925)
 — — *Melodrama: Plots that Thrilled* (London: Rockliff, 1954)
- DROTNER, KIRSTEN, *English Children and Their Magazines, 1751-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988)
- DYOS, H.J. and MICHAEL WOLFF, eds, *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, 2 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973)
- EAST, JOHN M., *'Neath the Mask* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967)
- EDMONDS, JILL, 'Princess Hamlet' in Viv Gardner and Susan Rutherford, eds, *The New Woman and Her Sisters: Feminism and Theatre 1850-1914* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992) pp.59-76
- EMELJANOW, VICTOR, *Victorian Popular Dramatists* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987)
- FAWKES, RICHARD, *Dion Boucicault: A Biography* (London: Quartet Books, 1979)
- FERRIS, LESLEY, 'Cross-dressing and women's theatre' in Lizbeth Goodman with Jane de Gay, eds, *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1998) pp.165-69
- FIELDING, K.J., 'Charles Reade and Dickens – A Fight Against Piracy', *Theatre Notebook* 10 (1956) 106-11
- FINDLATER, RICHARD, *The Player Queens* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976)
- FISHMAN, WILLIAM J., *East End 1888* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1988)
- FLEETWOOD, FRANCES, *Conquest: The Story of a Theatre Family* (London: W.H. Allen, 1953)
- FLETCHER, KATHY, 'Planché, Vestris, and the Transvestite Role: Sexuality and Gender in Victorian Popular Theatre', *Nineteenth Century Theatre* 15,1 (1987) 9-33
- FORBES, DEREK, *Illustrated Playbills* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 2002)
- FOULKES, RICHARD, *The Shakespeare Tercentenary of 1864* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1984)
 — — *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)
 — — 'Touchstone for the Times: Victorians in the Forest of Arden' in Gail Marshall and Adrian Poole, eds, *Victorian Shakespeare*, vol. 1 *Theatre, Drama and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) pp.146-60
 — — *Performing Shakespeare in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- FROST, LINDA, 'The Circassian Beauty and the Circassian Slave: Gender, Imperialism, and American Popular Entertainment' in Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ed., *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996) pp.248-62
- FROW, GERALD, *"Oh, Yes It Is!" A History of Pantomime* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1985)
- GALE, MAGGIE B. and VIV GARDNER, eds, *Women, Theatre and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000)
- GARDNER, VIV and SUSAN RUTHERFORD, eds, *The New Woman and Her Sisters: Feminism and Theatre 1850-1914* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992)
- GEERTZ, CLIFFORD, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Hammersmith: Fontana Press, 1993); first publ. 1973
- GILDER, ROSAMOND, *Enter the Actress: The First Women In the Theatre* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1931)

- GILLIES, MIDGE, *Marie Lloyd, The One and Only* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1999)
- GOODLAD, J.S.R., *A Sociology of Popular Drama* (London: Heinemann, 1971)
- HAILL, CATHERINE, *Fun without Vulgarity: Victorian and Edwardian Popular Entertainment Posters* (London: The Stationery Office, 1996)
- HALL, STUART, 'Notes on Deconstructing the Popular' in Raphael Samuel, ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981)
- HARTNOLL, PHYLLIS, ed., *The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981)
- HIGLEY, JEFFREY JAMES, *A Study of some social, literary and dramatic aspects of the Victorian Popular Theatre, as illustrated by the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton, 1843-1870* (University of London, unpublished PhD Thesis, 1973)
- HILL, ERROL, *Shakespeare in Sable: A History of Black Shakespearean Actors* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984)
- HIMMELFARB, GERTRUDE, *The Idea of Poverty* (London: faber & faber, 1984)
- HOGGART, RICHARD, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992); first publ. 1957
- HOLDER, HEIDI J., 'The "lady playwrights" and the "wild tribes of the East": Female dramatists in the East End theatres, 1860-1880' in Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin, eds, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp.174-92
- — 'Other Londoners: Race and Class in Plays of Nineteenth-Century London Life' in Pamela K. Gilbert, *Imagined Londons* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002) pp.31-44
- — 'The East-End theatre' in Kerry Powell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp.257-76
- HOWARD, DIANA, *London Theatres and Music Halls 1850-1950* (London: The Library Association, 1970)
- HYSLOP, GABRIELLE, 'Deviant and Dangerous Behavior: Women in Melodrama', *Journal of Popular Culture* 19 (1985) 65-77
- JACKSON, ALLAN STUART, *The Standard Theatre of Victorian England* (London: Associated University Presses, 1993)
- JACKSON, LEE and ERIC NATHAN, *Victorian London* (London: New Holland, 2004)
- JACKSON, RUSSELL, 'Before the Shakespeare Revolution: Developments in the Study of Nineteenth-Century Shakespeare in Production', *Shakespeare Survey* 35 (1982) 1-2
- — *Victorian Theatre* (London: A & C Black, 1989)
- JALLAND, PAT, 'Victorian death and its decline: 1850-1918' in Peter C. Jupp & Clare Gittings, eds, *Death in England, An Illustrated History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999)
- JAMES, ELIZABETH and HELEN R. SMITH, *Penny Dreadfuls and Boys' Adventures* (London: The British Library, 1998)
- JAMES, LOUIS, *Fiction for the Working Man 1830-50* (Harmondsworth: Penguin University Books, 1974)
- — 'Taking melodrama seriously: theatre, and nineteenth-century studies', *History Workshop* 3 (1977) 151-58
- JENKINS, ANTHONY, *The Making of Victorian Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)
- JONES, GARETH STEDMAN, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971)
- — *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)

- JOYCE, PATRICK, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class 1848-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)
- — *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- KAVANAGH, PETER, *The Irish Theatre* (Tralee: The Kerryman, 1946)
- KEATING, PETER, ed., *Into Unknown England 1866-1913: Selections from the Social Explorers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976)
- KEATING, P.J., *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, revised edition (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979)
- KENT, CHRISTOPHER, 'Image and Reality: The Actress and Society' in Martha Vicinus, ed., *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (London: Methuen, 1980) pp.94-116
- KNIGHT, WILLIAM G., *A Major London 'Minor': the Surrey Theatre 1805-1865* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1997)
- KNOTT, BETTIE, *The Hub of Hoxton: Hoxton Street 1851-1871, Based on a Study of the Censuses* (London: London Borough of Hackney Library Services, 1981)
- LANGLAND, ELIZABETH, 'Nation and nationality: Queen Victoria in the developing narrative of Englishness' in Margaret Homans and Adrienne Munich, eds, *Remaking Queen Victoria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) pp.13-32
- LEES, LYNN HOLLEN, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979)
- LINDFORS, BERNTH, 'Ethnological Show Business: Footlighting the Dark Continent' in Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ed., *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp.214-18
- LITTEN, JULIAN, *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral Since 1450* (London: Robert Hale, 1992)
- LUCAS, JOHN, 'Love of England – The Victorians and Patriotism', *Browning Society Notes* 17 (1987/88) 63-76
- LUPINO, STANLEY, *From the Stocks to the Stars* (London: Hutchinson, 1934)
- McCONACHIE, BRUCE A., 'Using the Concept of Cultural Hegemony to Write Theatre History' in Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie, eds, *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989) pp.37-58
- McCORMICK, JOHN, *Dion Boucicault (1820-1890)* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1987)
- McKECHNIE, SAMUEL, *Popular Entertainments Through the Ages* (London: Samson Low, Marston, 1931)
- MACKENZIE, JOHN M., ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986)
- — 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures' in Andrew Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire* vol. 3. *The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) pp. 270-93
- — 'Empire and the Global Gaze' in John M. MacKenzie, ed., *The Victorian Vision: Inventing New Britain* (London: V&A Publications, 2001) pp.241-63
- MANDER, DAVID, *More Light, More Power: An Illustrated History of Shoreditch* (Stroud: London Borough of Hackney/Sutton Publishing, 1996)
- MANDER, RAYMOND and JOE MITCHENSON, *Pantomime: A Story in Pictures* (London: Peter Davies, 1973)

- MARSHALL, HERBERT and MILDRED STOCK, *Ira Aldridge, The Negro Tragedian* (London: Rockliff, 1958)
- MAYER, DAVID, *Harlequin in His Element: The English Pantomime, 1806-1836* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969)
- — 'The Sexuality of Pantomime', *Theatre Quarterly* 4,13 (1974) 55-64
- — 'Towards a Definition of Popular Theatre' in David Mayer and Kenneth Richards, eds, *Western Popular Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1977) pp.257-77
- MAYER, DAVID and KENNETH RICHARDS, eds, *Western Popular Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1977)
- MEISEL, MARTIN, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983)
- — 'Scattered Chiaroscuro: Melodrama as a Matter of Seeing' in Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook and Christine Gledhill, *Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen* (London: BFI Publishing, 1994) 65-81
- MITCH, DAVID F., *The Rise of Popular Literacy in Victorian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992)
- MOODY, JANE, 'Illusions of authorship' in Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin, eds, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp.99-124
- — *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)
- MORLEY, MALCOLM, *Royal West London Theatre* St Marylebone Society Publication, No. 6 (London: St Marylebone Society, 1962)
- MORTIMER, OWEN, *Speak of Me as I am: The Story of Ira Aldridge* (Wangaratta, Australia: Owen Mortimer, 1995)
- MORSE, WILLIAM, 'Desire and the limits of melodrama' in James Redmond, ed., *Melodrama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) pp.17-30
- MORTON, W.H. and H. CHANCE NEWTON, *Sixty Years' Stage Service, Being a Record of the Life of Charles Morton, 'The Father of the Halls'* (London: Gale & Polden, 1905)
- MULLIN, DONALD, *Victorian Plays: A Record of Significant Productions on the London Stage, 1837-1901* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1987)
- MURRAY, CHRISTOPHER, *Robert William Elliston: Manager* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1975)
- NEAD, LYNDIA, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000)
- NEUBURG, VICTOR E., 'The Literature of the Streets' in H.J. Dyos & Michael Wolff, eds, *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) vol. 1, pp.191-209
- — *Popular Literature A History and Guide* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977)
- NEWY, KATHERINE, 'Attic Windows and Street Scenes: Victorian Images of the City on the Stage', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 25,2 (1997) 253-62
- — 'Women and the theatre' in Joanne Shattock, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain 1800-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) pp.189-208
- — 'Shakespeare and the Wars of the Playbills' in Gail Marshall and Adrian Poole, eds, *Victorian Shakespeare*, vol. 1 *Theatre, Drama and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) pp.13-28
- NEWSOME, DAVID, *The Victorian World Picture* (London: Fontana Press, 1998)
- NEWTON, H. CHANCE, *Crime and the Drama, or Dark Deeds Dramatized* (London: Stanley Paul, 1927)
- — *Cues and Curtain Calls* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1927)
- — *Idols of the Halls* (Wakefield: EP Publishing, 1975); first publ. 1928

- NICOLL, ALLARDYCE, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900* vol. 4 *Early Nineteenth Century Drama* 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955)
- — *A History of English Drama 1660-1900* vol. 5 *Late Nineteenth Century Drama* 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959)
- — *A History of English Drama 1660-1900* vol. 6 *A Short-title Alphabetical Catalogue of Plays 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959)
- NIKOLOPOULOU, ANASTASIA, 'Historical Disruptions: The Walter Scott Melodramas' in Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, eds, *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999)
- ODELL, GEORGE C.D., *Shakespeare – from Betterton to Irving*, 2 vols (London: Constable, 1963); first publ. 1920
- OUGHTON, ANN, *Thanks for the Memory* (Edinburgh: The Pentland Press, 1995)
- PALMER, ALAN, *The East End: Four Centuries of London Life* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000)
- PHILLIPS, MELANIE, *The Ascent of Woman: A History of the Suffragette Movement and the Ideas Behind It* (London: Abacus Books, 2003)
- POPE, W.J. MACQUEEN, *Theatre Royal Drury Lane* (London: W.H. Allen, n.d.)
- POSTLEWAIT, THOMAS, 'From Melodrama to Realism: The Suspect History of American Drama' in Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, eds, *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) pp.39-60
- POWELL, KERRY, *Women and Victorian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)
- — ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)
- PULLING, CHRISTOPHER, *They Were Singing* (London: George G. Harrap, 1952)
- PYE, DEBORAH, '"Irreproachable Women and Patient Workers": The Memoirs of Victorian Leading Ladies', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 45,1 (2003) 73-91
- PYKETT, LYN, 'Women writing women: nineteenth-century representations of gender and sexuality' in Joanne Shattock, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain 1800-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) pp.78-98
- REES, TERENCE and DAVID WILMORE, eds, *British Theatrical Patents 1801-1900* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1996)
- RICHARDS, JEFFREY, ed., *Sir Henry Irving: Theatre, Culture and Society* (Keele: Ryburn Publishing, 1994)
- RICHARDS, SANDRA, *The Rise of the English Actress* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993)
- RICHARDSON, JOHN, *The Annals of London* (London: Cassell Paperbacks, 2001)
- ROBERTS, ADAM C., *Victorian Culture and Society: The Essential Glossary* (London: Arnold, 2003)
- ROBERTS, ELIZABETH, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984)
- ROSE, MILLICENT, *The East End of London* (London: The Cresset Press, 1951)
- ROSENBERG, MARVIN, *The Masks of Othello* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961)
- ROSS, ELLEN, '"Fierce questions and taunts": Married life in working-class London, 1870-1914' in David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones, eds, *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations Since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1989) pp.219-44

- RYLE, GILBERT, *Collected Papers*, 2 vols (London: Hutchinson, 1971)
- SALBERG, DEREK, *Once Upon a Pantomime* (Luton: Cortney Publications, 1981)
- SAMUEL, RAPHAEL, *East End Underworld: Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981)
- SCHOCH, RICHARD W., *Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry and Burlesque in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- — ‘Shakespeare Mad’ in Gail Marshall and Adrian Poole, eds, *Victorian Shakespeare*, vol. 1 *Theatre, Drama and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) pp.73-81
- — ed., *Victorian Theatrical Burlesques* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003)
- SCOTT, HAROLD, *The Early Doors: Origins of the Music Hall* (London: EP Publishing, 1977); first publ. 1946
- SENELICK, LAURENCE, ‘Boys and Girls Together: Subcultural origins of glamour drag and male impersonation on the nineteenth-century stage’ in Lesley Ferris, ed., *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing* (London: Routledge, 1993) pp.80-95
- SHARRATT, BERNARD, ‘The politics of the popular? – from melodrama to television’ in David Bradby, Louis James & Bernard Sharratt, eds, *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) pp.275-95
- SHATTOCK, JOANNE, ed., *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* vol. 4 1800-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- SHERIDAN, PAUL, *Penny Theatres of Victorian London* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1981)
- SHERSON, ERROLL, *London’s Lost Theatres of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Bodley Head, 1925)
- SMITH, HELEN R., *New Light on Sweeney Todd, Thomas Peckett Prest, James Malcolm Rymer and Elizabeth Caroline Grey* (Bloomsbury, London: Jarndyce, 2002)
- Solomon: A Family of Painters* (London: Geffrye Museum, 1985)
- SOUTHERN, RICHARD, *Changeable Scenery: Its Origin and Development in the British Theatre* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952)
- — *The Victorian Theatre: A Pictorial Survey* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1970)
- SPEAIGHT, GEORGE, *Juvenile Drama: The History of the English Toy Theatre* (London: Macdonald, 1946)
- — ‘Professor Pepper’s Ghost’ in *Theatre Notebook* 43 (1989) 16-24
- — *The Juvenile Drama: A Union Catalogue* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1999)
- SPRAGUE, ARTHUR COLBY, *Shakespeare and the Actors: The Stage Business in His Plays (1660-1905)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948)
- SPRINGHALL, JOHN, ‘“A Life story for the people”? Edwin J. Brett and the London “Low-Life” Penny Dreadfuls of the 1860s’, *Victorian Studies* 33,2 (1990) 223-46
- STEPHEN, LESLIE and SIDNEY LEE, eds, *The Dictionary of National Biography* vol. 25 (London: Smith, Elder, 1891)
- STEPHENS, JOHN RUSSELL, *The Censorship of English Drama 1824-1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980)
- — *The Profession of the Playwright: British Theatre 1800-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)
- — ‘Playwright in extremis: George Dibdin Pitt Revisited’, *Theatre Notebook* 53,1 (1999) 41-47
- STOREY, JOHN, ed., *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, 2nd edition (London: Prentice Hall, 1998)

- SUMMERFIELD, PENNY, 'Patriotism and Empire Music-hall Entertainment 1870-1914' in John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986) pp.17-48
- SUMMERS, MONTAGUE, *A Gothic Bibliography* (London: The Fortune Press, 1940)
- SWEET, MATTHEW, *Inventing the Victorians* (London: Faber, 2002)
- TAYLOR, GEORGE, *Players and Performances in the Victorian Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989)
- TRUNINGER, ANNELESE, *Paddy and the Paycock: A Study of the Stage Irishman from Shakespeare to O'Casey* (Basle: Francke Verlag Bern, 1976)
- TURNER, E.S., *Boys Will Be Boys* (London: Michael Joseph, 1975)
- VINCENT, DAVID, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)
- VOSKUIL, LYNN M., 'Feeling Public: Sensation Theater, Commodity Culture, and the Victorian Public Sphere', *Victorian Studies* 44,2 (2002) 245-75
- WALLACE, IRVING, *The Fabulous Showman: The Life and Times of P.T. Barnum* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959)
- WANDOR, MICHELENE, 'Cross-dressing, sexual representation and the sexual division of labour in theatre' in Lizbeth Goodman with Jane de Gay, eds, *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1998) pp.170-75
- WATERFIELD, GILES, ed., *Art for the People: Culture in the Slums of Late Victorian Britain* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1994)
- WEBB, R.K., 'The Victorian Reading Public' in Boris Ford, ed., *The New Penguin Guide to Literature*, vol. 6 *From Dickens to Hardy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982) pp.198-219
- WEIGHTMAN, GAVIN, *Bright Lights, Big City: London Entertained 1830-1950* (London: Collins & Brown, 1992)
- WELLS, STANLEY, *Nineteenth-Century Shakespeare Burlesques*, 5 vols (London: Diploma Press, 1977-1978)
- WHITE, JAMES DILLON, *Born to Star: The Lupino Lane Story* (Melborne: Heinemann, 1957)
- WILLIAMS, JULIA and STEPHEN WATT, 'Representing a "Great Distress": Melodrama, Gender, and the Irish Famine' in Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, eds, *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) pp.245-65
- WILLIAMS, MICHAEL, *Some London Theatres Past and Present* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1883)
- WILLIAMS, RAYMOND, 'The Popularity of Melodrama', *New Society* (24 April 1980) 170-71
- WILSON, A.E., *Christmas Pantomime: The Story of an English Institution* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1934)
- — *Pantomime Pageant* (London: Stanley Paul, 1946)
- — *The Story of Pantomime* (London: Home and Van Thal, 1949)
- — *East End Entertainment* (London: Arthur Barker, 1954)
- WILSON, A.N., *The Victorians* (London: Hutchinson, 2002)
- WOODWARD, LLEWELLYN, *The Age of Reform 1815-1870*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962)

YOUNG, MICHAEL and PETER WILLMOTT, *Family and Kinship in East London*, revised edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962)

WEBSITES

Broadbent, R.J., *A History of Pantomime*, 1901, Project Gutenberg;
<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/3/4/6/12469/12469-h/12469-h.htm> [accessed 10 October 2004]

Collins, Wilkie, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins R.A.* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1848) vol. 1, p.50; <http://www.wilkiecollins.demon.co.uk/wilkiefamily/petlambtext.htm> [accessed 19 April 2003]

Lambal, Andrew, 'Napier, Sir Charles (1786-1860)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004); <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19747> [accessed 31 December 2005]

1881 Census; <http://www.users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Shoreditch/Shoreditch1881.html> [accessed 9 April 2003]

<http://www.augustinians.org.uk/history.html> [accessed 14 January 2005]

<http://www.victorianweb.org/economics/wages2.html> [accessed 9 February 2006]