

The Lord Chamberlain's Plays Project, 1852 - 1863

This AHRC-funded collaborative project with Royal Holloway and the British Library seeks to provide wider and more comprehensive access to a major collection of nineteenth-century drama. The Lord Chamberlain's Plays collection at the British Library is a rich and vast resource for scholars of theatre history of all periods covered by the collection. The period 1852-1866 is particularly strong in French dramas and comedies as well as their translations and adaptations, Crimean War dramas, adaptations of novels, domestic farce and comedy, fairy tales, and melodrama.

From 1737 to 1968, the Lord Chamberlain's office licensed and retained a copy of every play newly performed in London and later throughout the provinces as well. Due to the ephemeral nature of play scripts, particularly during the Victorian era, the collection is filled with unique manuscripts that are invaluable to our understanding of nearly the last two hundred years of theatre history. However, the abundance of scholarly interest in eighteenth century and Modern drama and the relative lack of interest in Victorian drama have resulted in an uneven documentation of the contents of the collection.

Plays licensed throughout most of the Victorian era are accessible only by a rudimentary paper list. This project will make the Lord Chamberlain's Plays licensed from 1852 to 1863 searchable via the British Library's manuscript catalogue. The catalogue descriptions will offer readers as much information as possible, including first performance dates, names of theatres and alternative published editions.

Most importantly, we will create a subject index so that the collection will be searchable electronically and by keyword for the first time.

A conference based on the collections resources will take place at Royal Holloway on 27 September 2008.