

Manuscripts Collections Reader Guide 3

THE PLAY COLLECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Until 1968 it was necessary under the Stage Licensing Act of 1737 and the Theatres Act of 1843 for all plays intended for public performance to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's Office for examination and licensing. The plays submitted between 1824 and 1968 are now in the Manuscript Collections of the British Library and are known as the *Lord Chamberlain's Plays*. (Plays submitted between 1737 and 1824 are in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California - see section 1C below).

The Theatres Act of 1968 abolished the Lord Chamberlain's powers of censorship, but in order for the collection of new unpublished plays to be preserved, the Act provided that one copy of each new play, if not previously published, should be delivered to the Library of the British Museum – these scripts now come to the British Library and form the *Modern Playscripts* collection. The *Lord Chamberlain's Plays* and the *Modern Playscripts* therefore form one overall collection of nearly 90,000 plays. They are in many cases the unique source of texts of plays performed in Great Britain from 1824 to the present day. This guide provides information about these and some related collections.

1. HOW TO FIND A PLAY: INDEXES AND LISTS

A. Lord Chamberlain's Plays

These are the scripts submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for licensing from 1824 to 1968. They are catalogued and indexed as follows:

1. **Add. MSS 42865 - 43038.** Plays submitted for licence 1824-1851.

There is a published catalogue with author and title indexes: *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts: Plays submitted to the Lord Chamberlain 1824-1851* (London, 1964). This catalogue is online as part of the Manuscripts Online Cataloguing System (MOLCAT) for which see www.bl.uk/catalogues/manuscripts/INDEX.asp. The titles are included in the card index of play titles 1824-1899. Note that for these plays the *folio numbers* should be included as part of the MS reference. These plays are also listed by author and title in Allardyce Nicoll (see section 3 of this guide).

2. **Add. MSS 52929 - 53701.** Plays submitted for licence 1852-1899.

There is no published catalogue, but there are four volumes of typed lists in chronological order of submission. The period 1852-1863 is currently being catalogued as part of the joint British Library/ Royal Holloway / AHRC project *Buried treasures*, and as of August 2007, full descriptions for 1852-1857 are now available online on MOLCAT. For further details of this project, visit the Royal Holloway website at www.rhul.ac.uk/Drama/research/chamberlains-plays/index.html

The titles are included in the card index of play titles 1824-1899. For these plays the *capital letter* or *letters* following the Add. MS number should be included as part of the MS reference. These plays are also listed by author and title in Allardyce Nicoll (see section 3 of this guide).

3. **LC Plays 1900/1 - 1968/34.** Plays submitted for licence 1900-1968.

These are *provisional* references: these plays will eventually be re-numbered **Add. MSS. 65534 - 68881**. There is no published catalogue, but there are sixteen volumes of handwritten lists in chronological order of submission.

Readers using these lists should note that the provisional references consist of the collection name **LC Plays** followed by the **year**, which can be found at the top of each page, followed by an oblique stroke and the **box number**, which can be found in the left hand margin. There is a card index of play titles 1900-1968. The date a play was licensed can usually be found by consulting the title index to the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files, described in Section 2, part C of this guide. This index also records title changes. Selected plays 1900-1930 are also listed by *author* in Allardyce Nicoll (see section 3 of this guide).

4. **Unlicensed plays.** Plays submitted 1897-1968.

There are two lists of unlicensed plays for these years in one folder at the end of the chronological lists. Readers should note that few unlicensed plays were preserved in the period before 1897, and that those which do survive are preserved in the ordinary sequence of licensed plays. Provisional manuscript references are **Unlicensed LCP List 1** or **List 2**, followed by the **box number**.

B. **Modern Playscripts 1968 to date**

Since the passing of the Theatres Act of 1968, which became law on 26 September of that year, it has not been necessary for plays to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for licensing. In order that copies of new plays may be preserved for posterity, Section 11 of the Act states that a copy of the script of every new and hitherto unpublished play performed in public in Great Britain should be delivered within one month of first performance to the department. A handlist of these Modern Playscripts, in chronological order of date of production, can be consulted along with a card index of authors and titles. The manuscript reference is **Modern Playscript** followed by the playscript number.

Under the British Library/ University of Sheffield / AHRC "Theatre Archives" project, over 300 scripts for the period 1968 to the present which had not been sent to the Library at the time of first performance were deposited with the project in Sheffield and later transferred to the British Library. For a list of these plays, and an overview of the project, see the project website at www.bl.uk/projects/theatrchive/scrip.html. Readers wishing to read these plays should use the temporary reference **Sheffield Playscript**, and the number from the list on the project website.

C. Plays submitted 1737 - January 1824

These plays are in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California. They are listed in D. MacMillan, *Catalogue of the Larpent Plays in the Huntington Library*, San Marino, 1939, available in the Manuscripts Reading Room. The plays may be consulted in the Reading Room on microfiche. Plays for 1727-1800 on **MS Fiche 253 / 1 - 1297** and plays 1801-1823 on **MS Fiche 254 / 1 - 1070**. There are lists of the contents of these fiche in the Register of microfiche. In the Humanities Reading Room (floor 1), *Three Centuries of English and American Plays*, Readex, 1963, pressmark Cup.901.a.11/1-24, includes microcopy cards of English plays 1500-1800 and American plays 1714-1830. For a guide to the contents of the collection, see J. M. Griffin, *Microform Research Collections in the Humanities*, British Library, 1987, pp.24-26.

D. The Lord Chamberlain's Office Day Books

These are the registers of plays received in the Lord Chamberlain's Office, Add. MSS **53702–53708**, and **61952–61970**. The mid to late 19th cent. and early 20th cent. volumes have a 'comments' column which sometimes has more detailed information about the play. Arranged as follows:

1824-1852: Add.MS. 53702	1929-1932: Add.MS. 61958
1852-1865: Add.MS. 53703	1933-1935: Add.MS. 61959
1866-1873: Add.MS. 53704	1935-1938: Add.MS. 61960
1873-1876: Add.MS. 53705	1938-1942: Add.MS. 61961
1877-1886: Add.MS. 53706	1942-1946: Add.MS. 61962
1887-1897: Add.MS. 53707	1946-1948: Add.MS. 61963
1897-1903: Add.MS. 53708	1949-1951: Add.MS. 61964
1904-1910: Add.MS. 61952	1951-1953: Add.MS. 61965
1911-1914: Add.MS. 61953	1953-1956: Add.MS. 61966
1915-1917: Add.MS. 61954	1956-1958: Add.MS. 61967
1918-1921: Add.MS. 61955	1959-1962: Add.MS. 61968
1922-1925: Add.MS. 61956	1962-1965: Add.MS. 61969
1926-1929: Add.MS. 61957	1966-1968: Add.MS. 61970

E. Lord Chamberlain's Plays Correspondence files 1900-1968

This collection consists of the papers relating to the licensing of stage plays by the Lord Chamberlain from 1900 to 1968 including Examiners' reports.

There are handwritten lists of all surviving correspondence files for (a) *Licensed plays* (in progress), (b) *Unlicensed plays* 1903-1968 and (c) *Waiting Box* plays 1913-1968. The latter two lists correspond to the Unlicensed LCP Lists 1 and 2 described above. For details of the card index to the correspondence files and method of application, see Section 2 part C of this leaflet.

F. Lord Chamberlain's Plays Theatre files, 1897 – early 1950s

This collection has been transferred as a gift from the Royal Archives in two sections. The files mostly relate to the licensing of individual London theatres, but there is a substantial amount of material relating both to wider theatrical issues such as censorship, and to individual plays (mainly from the period 1912-1914). There is some material in these files which *should* have formed part of the Lord Chamberlain's Plays Correspondence (see above) transferred to the British Library from the Lord Chamberlain's Office in the early 1990s. The final catalogue description will have full details.

As these collections are not yet catalogued or arranged, and some are in a poor state of repair, Readers wishing to consult a draft list (only available for the earlier section, dealing with the period up to the early 1930s), should contact the enquiries staff in the Manuscripts Reading Room, preferably by email on mss@bl.uk.

G. Other Collections

There are plays in many other collections in Manuscripts apart from the Lord Chamberlain's Plays collections and other collections mentioned below. Apart from searching MOLCAT, readers should also consider the following:

- (a) volume 91 'Drama' of the Class Catalogue;
- (b) the Manuscript Collections Subject Index;
- (c) the *Index of Manuscripts in the British Library*, 10 vols, Cambridge 1984-1986
- (d) the indexes to recent accessions;
- (e) *The Index of English literary manuscripts* 1450 - 1900, 4 vols in 10 parts, London and New York 1980 - 1984, and the *Location register of twentieth-century English literary manuscripts and letters*, 2 vols, London, 1988, are both available in the Manuscripts Reading Room.

H. Extant play manuscripts 975-1700

For a list of these, see Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama 975-1700*, second edition revised by S. Schoenbaum, London, 1964, pp.307-321. This book also contains a list of authors, pp.218-230, and titles, pp.231-292 and 202-4. A third edition is available in the Humanities Reading Room (floor 1).

I. Drury Lane Theatre Collection

These are late 18th and early 19th century plays intended for performance at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, and sent by their authors to Richard and Thomas Sheridan; **Add. MSS 25906 - 26036**. There is a published catalogue, or see MOLCAT. Also available on microfilm **M 952 / 1-16**.

J. Archives of the Theatres Royal, 18th to 19th century

For a list of manuscripts, see the register of microfilms for M 953 / 1 - 35.

K. Latreille Collection of Playbills, etc. 1702-1746.

Add. MSS **32249 - 32252**. For a description, see the published catalogue or MOLCAT.

L. Supplementary papers from the Lord Chamberlain's Office relating to theatre licensing, 1840-1961.

Add. MSS 71564 - 71571. See MOLCAT for descriptions.

M. Surrogates

Readex are currently publishing a microfiche edition of the Lord Chamberlain's Plays. Add. MSS. 42865-43038 can be consulted on MSS Fiche 31-205 and Add. MSS. 52929-52952 on MS Fiche 27-30, 208-217, 255-264. Consult the Register of Microfiche in the Manuscripts Reading Room for details of these and of further fiche to be produced.

N. Theatre collections in the printed book collections

The British Library's collections of *printed* plays, biographies and books on the theatre can be ordered for reading through the Integrated Catalogue online. Some special collections of theatre playbills, programmes, newspaper cuttings and ephemera etc., are conveniently listed in the

British Museum, *Register of Playbills, Programmes and Theatre Cuttings*, typescript, 1950 (kept at the Humanities Reading Room (floor 1) enquiry desk), and in Diana Howard's *Directory of Theatre Resources* (see section 3, below). Named theatre collections can be found in Alison Gould, *Named Special Collections in the Department of Printed Books, Reader Guide no. 9. 1981*, available on request in the Humanities Reading Room (floor 1).

2. HOW TO APPLY FOR AND HANDLE THE PLAYS

A. Add. MSS. 42865 - 43038

These plays are fully bound and may therefore be requested and consulted in the normal way. Please note that as each manuscript is divided into two volumes, the folio numbers of the play required must be indicated on the request slip.

B. Add. MSS. 52929 - 53701, LC Plays 1900/1-1968/34 (Add. MSS 65534 - 68881), Unlicensed Plays, and Modern Playscripts.

When applying for Add. MSS 52929 - 53701, Readers should include the letter or letters following the Add. MS number as part of the MS reference. This is especially important for Add. MSS. 52929-52979 where each volume is divided into two boxes.

Up to four boxes of plays may be ordered at a time, which may be held on reserve in the Reading Room for a maximum of three days

Some plays are not in good condition, and should be treated as unbound MSS. In general, Readers are recommended to read plays both bound and unbound **flat**, using a padded tray or book-cushion, rather than upright on a book-stand.

C. The Lord Chamberlain's Plays correspondence files.

Correspondence and papers relating to the licensing of stage plays by the Lord Chamberlain 1900-1968.

Most of the boxes of LCP correspondence still require proper sorting and arrangement. As it is not always immediately obvious when it will be difficult to retrieve particular material, we would be grateful if Readers

wishing to consult these files could give as much notice as possible. We will always try to meet Readers' requests, though it may not always be possible to deliver all the files ordered on a particular day. Readers who need to consult large numbers of files or those contained within a large chronological span should speak to a member of staff at the Issue Desk in the Manuscripts Reading Room before completing tickets, if they have not made any arrangements in advance. When you do order material, please check that each slip is completed with the full details of the file required, as described below, and please complete a separate ticket for each file, unless advised otherwise.

The files are divided into three sequences: *licensed plays*, *plays refused a licence*, and *waiting box plays*, i.e. plays under consideration for a licence. Almost all the files contain a copy of the Examiner of Plays' summary of the script in question, with his recommendation as to whether or not the play be licensed. Many of the files contain nothing except this. Readers should bear in mind that the card index to play titles was in origin the working play index of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, and that it may be inaccurate and inconsistent in places.

Files may be ordered up in the following way:

Write on the manuscript request slip **LCP CORR** followed by:

1. For a *licensed play*, cite the title, followed by the year and file number, e.g. **LCP CORR** *Woman and whiskey* **1918/1348**.
2. For a *play refused a licence*, the card is written in red. Cite the title, followed by **LR** and the **year**, e.g. **LCP CORR** *The courtesan of Rome* **LR 1921**.
3. For a *waiting box play*, cite the title, followed by **WB** and the **year**, e.g. **LCP CORR** *The screens* **WB 1963**.

Please note that:

1. The Examiner's reports for the period 1911-1930 were in many cases originally bound in with the play script itself, and not removed until many years later. A small number of reports appear to have been left

in the bound volumes of scripts more or less by accident – if there is no separate file listed for a play in that period, it may be worth looking at the script itself to see if the Examiner's report at the least is still bound up there.

2. Some titles in the index were no longer in the collection at the time of its transfer to this department, and therefore cannot be supplied. No material has been weeded from these files by the British Library, and readers should note that under normal circumstances, material will only be unavailable if it is undergoing conservation treatment.
3. A summary handlist of plays in file number order is being prepared. It is complete up to 1929 at the time of writing this leaflet; draft lists for 1938-1940, and 1942 can be made available through the Superintendent's desk in the Manuscripts Reading Room.
4. The **National Archives at Kew** hold the following papers of the Lord Chamberlain's Office , chiefly relating to the licensing of theatres and plays for the years **1710 to 1902**, under the following references:

LC 1: general correspondence 1710-1902 (the theatre correspondence is specifically identified in the class lists from 1858);

LC 3: appointment books, which include some licences for entertainments, and general registers of correspondence 1858-1902 (LC 3/74-118);

LC 5 / 164, 181, 222 - 236, 242: theatrical matters,

LC 7 / 2, 3 - 8, 10 - 17, 19 - 87: contracts for performances, theatre licensing, 1810-1888, accounts, 1861-1870, theatre inspections, 1877-1901, theatre plans 1870-1900

LC 197 / 11: draft letters patent for theatre licences, 1714-1895

There is also a selective index, largely by theatre, to theatrical references, 1627-1843, on open access.

3. REFERENCE BOOKS

The books listed below are mainly those on the open shelves of the Humanities Reading Room (floor 1), but those marked with an asterisk may be consulted in the Manuscripts Reading Room.

General

** Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900*. 6 vols, Cambridge, 1923-1959:

(All but volume VI have indexes of authors)

- Volume I *Restoration drama 1660-1700*;
- Volume II *Early eighteenth century drama 1700-1750*.
- Volume III *Late eighteenth century drama 1750-1800*.
- Volume IV *Early nineteenth century drama 1800-1850*.
- Volume V *Late nineteenth century drama 1850-1900*.
- Volume VI *Short-title alphabetical catalogue of plays 1660-1900*.

** Allardyce Nicoll, *English drama 1900-1930*, Cambridge, 1973.

(Selected plays, listed by author)

J P Wearing, *The London stage: a calendar of plays & players*:

- ** *The London stage 1890-1899*. 2 vols, Metuchen, 1976.
- ** *The London stage 1900-1909*. 2 vols, Metuchen, 1981.
- ** *The London stage 1910-1919*. 2 vols, Metuchen, 1982.
- ** *The London stage 1920-1929*. 3 vols, Metuchen, 1984.
- The London stage 1930-1939*. 3 vols, Metuchen, 1990.
- The London stage 1940-1949*. 4 vols, Metuchen, 1991.
- The London stage 1950-1959*. 2 vols, Metuchen, 1993.

J. Genest, *Some account of the English stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830*. 10 vols, Bath, 1832.

Sir E. K. Chambers, *The mediaeval stage*. 2 vols, London, 1903.

Sir E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan stage*. 4 vols, Oxford, 1923.

D. E. Baker et al., *Biographia dramatica*. 3 vols, London, 1812.

P. H. Highfill et al., *A biographical dictionary of actors, actresses, musicians, dancers, managers and other stage personnel in London, 1660-1800*. Carbondale, 1973-

G. E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline stage*. 7 vols, Oxford, 1941-1968.

P. Hartnoll (editor), *The Oxford companion to the theatre*. 4th ed., Oxford, 1983.

**P. Hartnoll and P. Found (editors), *The concise Oxford companion to the theatre*. 2nd ed., Oxford, 1992.

J. F. Arnott and J. W. Robinson, *English theatrical literature 1559 - 1900: a bibliography*.

Incorporating R. W. Lowe's *A bibliographical account of English theatrical literature* published in 1888. London, 1970.

J. Cavanagh, *British theatre: a bibliography 1901 to 1985*. Mottisfont, 1989
Planned as a sequel to Arnott and Robinson, and therefore similar in format and classification.

L. Senelick, D. F. Cheshire and U. Schneider, *British music-hall 1840 - 1923: a bibliography and guide to sources with a supplement on European music-hall*. Hamden, Conn., 1981.

D. Howard, *Directory of theatre resources: a guide to research collections and information services*. 2nd edn., London, 1986.

D. Howard, *London theatres and music halls 1850-1950*. London, 1970.

A. Loewenberg, *The theatre of the British Isles excluding London: a bibliography*. London, 1950.

**D Macmillan, *Catalogue of the Larpent Plays in the Huntington Library*. San Marino, Cal., 1939.

**A Harbage, *Annals of English Drama 975 - 1700: an analytical record of all plays, extant or lost, chronologically arranged and indexed by authors, titles, dramatic companies etc*. 3rd edn. rev. by S. S. Wagonheim. London, 1989. (2nd edition only in the Manuscripts Reading Room.)

C. J. Stratman, *Bibliography of medieval drama*. 2nd edn. 2 vols, New York, 1972.

W. W. Greg, *A list of English plays written before 1643 and printed before 1700*. London, 1900.

The Player's Library: the catalogue of the library of the British Drama League. London, 1950. Supplements I - III, London, 1951 - 1956.

An extensive listing of plays, and of books about the theatre, with a title index of plays. The main entry gives the play setting and the number of characters. The League was subsequently renamed the British Theatre Association. Their collections including the card indexes are now mostly part of the Theatre Museum's collections.

G. M. Kahrl, *The Garrick Collection of old English plays*. London, 1982.

W. Van Lennep et al. (editors), *The London stage 1660 - 1800: a calendar of plays, entertainments and afterpieces, together with casts, box-receipts and contemporary comment*. Part 1: 1660 - 1700 - Part 5: 1776 - 1800. 11 vols plus Index. Carbondale, 1960 - 1979.

G. W. Bergquist (editors), *Three centuries of English and American plays: a checklist*. New York, 1963.

The Lord Chamberlain and censorship

S. Nicholson, *The censorship of British drama, 1900-1968*. (Exeter performance studies).

Vol. 1	1900-1932	Exeter, 2003
Vol. 2	1933-1952	Exeter, 2005

A third volume is expected late 2007.

D. Shellard, S. Nicholson, and M. Handley, *The Lord Chamberlain regrets ; British stage censorship and readers reports from 1824 to 1968*. British Library, 1968.

Richard Findlater, *Banned! A review of theatrical censorship in Britain*. London, 1967.

*John Johnston, *The Lord Chamberlain's blue pencil*. London, 1990. Includes a chronological list of the names of the Lord Chamberlains on pp. 263 - 4, and of the Examiners of plays on p. 265.

4. FURTHER INFORMATION

Details of other theatre libraries, archives and organisations can be found in Diana Howard's *Directory of theatre resources* (see previous page).

The Theatre Museum in Covent Garden closed in January 2007, and at the time of writing plans for its future were not yet in the public domain. The Library of the Theatre Museum is still open at its premises at Blythe House in Olympia. Readers should consult the relevant section of the V & A Museum website at www.vam.ac.uk/tco/collections/index.html for information on the collections and www.vam.ac.uk/tco/research/index.html for information on contacting the Library and making arrangements to visit.

The Templeman Library, University of Kent

<http://library.kent.ac.uk/library/special/html/specoll/theatre.htm>

Includes the Frank Pettingell Collection of nineteenth century drama (*circa*.7,500 pieces) and several other Victorian and Edwardian collections.

Victorian Plays Project based at the University of Worcester has created an electronic catalogue of Birmingham Central Library's complete run of the collected volumes of the series known as 'Lacy's Plays', or 'Lacy's Acting Editions'. These were published between 1848 and 1874, but include many plays written and performed before that date.

For an overview of the project, and to consult the catalogue, see the project website at www.worc.ac.uk/victorian/victorianplays/lacys.htm . The British Library run of Lacy's Plays is almost complete, and the individual plays can be ordered online through the Integrated Catalogue.

