

# **An Introduction to ROH Collections**

*January 2010*

Material in the ROH Collections records the history of the three theatres that have stood on the Covent Garden site since 1732, and the performances that they have housed. The Collections are particularly comprehensive from 1946 and cover all activities including the work of the resident companies (both at Covent Garden and on tour), ROH2 and visiting companies.

The collections are divided into three categories. **ROH Collections** reflect the range of activities undertaken by the different departments working in the theatre. **Special Collections** cover the career of individuals associated with the Royal Opera House or have been assembled by individuals or organisations. **Commissioned Collections** are initiated by the Collections department to supplement and enhance the main collections.

## Royal Opera House Collections

The main collections of ROH Collections reflect the range of activities undertaken by the different departments working in the theatre. They cover performance records, production records and business records.

- **Administrative Records:** There are a very few administrative records for the 18th century. For the 19th- and early 20th- centuries, these include a series of box office returns and correspondence, in particular a collection of letters between the theatre impresario Frederick Gye and major performers of the period such as the singers Giulia Grisi and Mario. Administrative records are most comprehensive for the period since 1946 and include minutes of Board and Sub-Committee Meetings, contractual details and correspondence. There is restricted access to some of this material.
- **Artists' Files:** These files contain prints, photographs, press cuttings and other material relating to individual artists both of the Royal Opera House's resident companies and of visiting companies, of composers, conductors, choreographers, and performers from earlier periods. They provide biographical and performance information as well as illustrations.
- **Audiovisual Collection:** Material in this collection comes from a variety of sources. There are sound and video recordings of broadcast performances by the two resident companies, some of which are copies of commercial recordings. Recordings of events organized by The Friends of Covent Garden and the Education Department are held, together with interviews and features. (See Commissioned Collections for details of Oral History recordings.)
- **Choreographic Scores:** Deposited by the Ballet Notators of The Royal Ballet, these choreographic scores record the movement notation for works performed by The Royal Ballet. This is a working collection so some items may not be available for study.
- **Costumes:** This collection contains over 4000 individual items worn by artists at the Royal Opera House. There are some items from the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries, but most date from 1946 to the present. The majority are costumes, with a sizeable collection of hats, headdresses and jewellery, and a growing number of shoes, boots and wigs.
- **Designs:** This collection contains 1100 costume designs by Attilio Comelli, House-Designer at the Royal Opera House from the 1880s to the 1920s; some additional set and costume designs from the early 20th-century; and a large and varied collection of designs for productions since 1946. (See Special Collections for details of significant holdings of individual designers.)

- **Fixtures and Fittings:** A collection of furnishings, architectural features, signage and light fittings removed from the Royal Opera House before the development in 1997.
- **Furniture:** This is a collection of furniture from both the public and back-of-House areas of the Royal Opera House.
- **History of the Building:** Descriptions, prints and drawings and photographs of the three theatres that have stood on the site since 1732. This includes descriptions of the fires in 1808 and 1856, and major alterations to successive theatres in 1846, 1901, 1964 and 1997.
- **Librettos:** This collection includes 19th-century librettos sold for use in the theatre and often including translations and details of the cast. There are also a number of librettos from the 20th-century, some published by The Friends of Covent Garden and some by the Royal Opera House.
- **Lighting Equipment:** This collection contains objects, including parts of lighting machinery and bulbs, used by the Royal Opera House Lighting Department and dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- **Model Sets:** There are scale models for most of the ballets and operas performed by the resident companies since 1946. Some have been made by the designers, others by members of the model room staff.
- **Music:** There is a small collection of printed music from the 18th- and early 19th-century, some for songs performed during the plays, some for operas. The comprehensive collection of scores and parts, both vocal and orchestral, covers 19th- and early-20th-century operas and records the working practices of the Royal Opera House during that period. This collection is supplemented by deposits of scores from post-1946 by the Music Library.
- **Play-texts:** A small collection of printed play-texts from the late 18th- and early 19th-century, some with illustrations.
- **Posters:** This collection provides comprehensive coverage of performances at the Royal Opera House from 1910 to the present, by The Birmingham Royal Ballet and by the resident companies on tour. It also contains one poster from 1809 and several from the 1840s and 1850s.
- **Press Cuttings:** This collection ranges from announcements of 18th-century performances to detailed coverage of opera at Covent Garden from 1847 to the present. Ballet reviews detail performances by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes (1911–29), subsequent Russian Ballet companies,

Anna Pavlova's company, and The Royal Ballet and The Birmingham Royal Ballet companies since their early days.

- **Prints:** Some 18th and many 19th-century prints of performers and performances. These cover plays, pantomimes, ballet and opera productions as well as the individual contributors including ballet dancers and choreographers. Some of these prints will be found in the Artists and Production Files.
- **Production Files:** These files contain prints and photographs recording performances at the Royal Opera House and include photographs of the production process including early rehearsals in the studios, stage rehearsals without full costume and set, as well as the final performance photographs. They may include related materials such as press cuttings, designs, and other ephemera.
- **Programmes and Playbills:** This collection includes playbills from the 18th and 19th centuries, and a virtually complete run of nightly programmes from 1900. These cover all performances at the Royal Opera House: ice-shows, film shows and pantomimes, social dancing and circuses as well as drama, ballet and opera and the work of ROH2. There are also programmes for The Royal Ballet 1931–45 (as the Vic-Wells/Sadler's Wells Ballet), for the resident Companies' tours and for The Birmingham Royal Ballet, 1945–97.
- **Staff Directors' Scores:** These scores, created by the staff directors of The Royal Opera, record the stage movements, translations and music cuts for all opera productions post – 1946. Changes made during revivals are also recorded in these scores. This is a working collection so some scores may not be available for study.
- **Stage Managers' Scores:** These scores, created by the stage managers of both The Royal Ballet and The Royal Opera, record the sound and lighting cues, and stage arrangements for all productions since 1946.
- **Technical Equipment:** This collection contains objects used by the Royal Opera House Technical Department and includes scenery cue sheets and items of stage equipment.
- **Technical Files:** These files date from post-1946 and are from all the production 'making' departments. They include technical drawings for scenery and props, hanging and lighting plots, costume files with fabric samples, props lists, and costings.

## Special Collections

Special Collections are acquired by gift, bequest, loan or purchase. Some cover the life and career of individuals who have made a significant contribution to the work of the Royal Opera House and may include material for activities outside this theatre. Some have been assembled by individuals or institutions and reflect their particular tastes and passions.

### Design Collections

- **Isabel Lambert Collection:** This small collection of designs contains examples of all Isabel Lambert's work for The Royal Ballet and The Royal Opera, from 1951 to 1961. Lambert designed two ballets for Frederick Ashton, two for Alfred Rodrigues and a production of Richard Strauss's opera *Elektra*. The collection includes examples of Lambert's paintings and drawings of The Royal Ballet in rehearsal.
- **Yolanda Sonnabend Design Collection:** Sonnabend worked closely with Kenneth MacMillan on a number of his ballets, and designed the productions of *Swan Lake* and *La Bayadère* still used by The Royal Ballet. Her collection covers 1973–95 and includes designs for all her works for The Royal Ballet, The Birmingham Royal Ballet and the Royal Ballet School, notebooks, reference files and related material.
- **Ian Spurling Collection:** Spurling designed several ballets for The Royal Ballet and The Birmingham Royal Ballet, notably those of Kenneth MacMillan and David Bintley. His collection covers 1975–94 and includes designs, photographs, and press cuttings.

### Personal Collections

- **Frederick Ashton Collection:** Donated by Ashton's family, this collection contains correspondence, some music, press cuttings, photographs and awards presented to The Royal Ballet's Founder Choreographer.
- **Ninette de Valois Bequest and Papers:** This collection of awards and honours given to the founder of The Royal Ballet has been supplemented by correspondence donated by her family.
- **Leslie Edwards Bequest:** Ballet materials from the personal collection of Leslie Edwards, Principal Dancer with the Vic-Wells/Sadler's Wells/Royal Ballet from 1933 to the 1990s.

- **Margot Fonteyn Collection:** Material from the personal collection of The Royal Ballet's *prima ballerina assoluta* was purchased through the generosity of The Linbury Trust, The Friends of Covent Garden and many private benefactors. This collection includes correspondence, photographs, costumes, books and other materials.
- **Margot Fonteyn/Patrick Furse Collection:** This small collection of letters from Fonteyn to the artist Furse were written during World War II and offer a fascinating insight into Fonteyn's emotional state during a period of personal and professional difficulty.
- **Olive Grime Collection:** Olive Grime was a ballet dancer with the Thomas Beecham Opera Company in the 1920s and 30s, appearing in the first London performance of *Turandot* in 1927. This collection, donated by her son, contains programmes, contracts, correspondence, press cuttings, photographs and one costume.
- **Frederick Gye Diaries:** Frederick Gye was General Manager of the Royal Italian Opera from 1847 until his death in 1878. Deposited on loan to the Royal Opera House by current members of the Gye family, Gye's diaries offer a unique insight into the organisation of a major 19th-century opera house. The diaries date from 1825 to 1878 and are supplemented by those of his daughter Clara, who worked as her father's secretary for many years, and by two volumes by his son Ernest, who succeeded him as manager of the theatre in 1878.
- **The Harold Rosenthal Collection of Press Notices:** Donated in memory of opera critic Harold Rosenthal by his widow, Phyllis Rosenthal, this collection contains reviews of performances at the Royal Opera House from 1847 to 1937, and of opera performances at other major London theatres between 1865 and 1937. There are some reviews of regional and overseas performances as well as biographies, obituaries and illustrations of singers and composers. Cuttings relating to the Royal Opera House have been conserved through the generosity of The Friends of Covent Garden.
- **The Royal Ballet Benevolent Fund Collection:** Deposited on permanent loan, this collection contains designs, photographs, programmes and press cuttings relating to the early years of the Vic Wells/Sadler's Wells Ballet.
- **Spellman Collection of Printed Material:** Donated by Doreen and Sidney Spellman, this collection includes over 100 illustrated song-sheet covers from the mid-19th to early 20th centuries. They provide illustrations of many of the operas, ballets, pantomimes and concerts performed at Covent Garden during this period. Some covers retain the music for the songs.

- **Eva Turner Collection:** The first British soprano of the 20th-century to gain an international reputation, Dame Eva donated her collection of costumes, headdresses, stage jewellery, photographs, press reviews of her appearances in Italy, some scores, and non-theatrical memorabilia. Further material was donated by her family following Dame Eva's death. The costume collection was conserved through the generosity of The Friends of Covent Garden.

## Photographic Collections

- **Lady de Grey Photographic Collection/Desmond Shawe Taylor Bequest:** These two albums of photographs were assembled by Lady de Grey during her time as Patron of the Royal Italian Opera (1884–1914). Many of the photographs are inscribed to Lady de Grey and have additional comments in her hand. The albums were conserved through the generosity of the Wolfson Foundation and The Friends of Covent Garden.
- **Edwin O. Sachs Photographic Collection:** This commemorative album of photographs records the installation of the new stage floor and machinery in 1901, designed by theatre engineer Edwin O. Sachs. The album also contains some photographs of the production departments, including the paint frame, where stage cloths were painted, the prop shop and wardrobe.
- **Frank Sharman Photographic Collection:** Sharman was a part-time photographer, who took photographs of the Sadler's Wells Ballet and other ballet companies performing in London between 1946 and 1950. ROH holds copyright in his prints, negatives, and colour transparencies.
- **Donald Southern Photographic Collection:** Between 1959 and 1991, Southern regularly took photographs of opera and ballet performances and other activities at the Royal Opera House. The ROH holds copyright in his extensive collection of black-and-white and colour negatives.
- **Roger Wood Photographic Collection:** Roger Wood was one of the regularly commissioned photographers working at the Royal Opera House after World War II. His large collection of black-and-white prints and negatives, and colour transparencies, covers 1946–80. The ROH holds copyright in these images.

## Commissioned Collections

The material in these collections is the result of work initiated or commissioned by ROH Collections in a variety of media, in order to supplement and enhance the main collections.

### Art Collections

- **Glynn Boyd Harte:** Glynn Boyd Harte was commissioned by Jeremy Dixon and Ed Jones, architects of the ROH development, to paint watercolours of the restoration of the theatre and of the construction site. Twenty-four of these watercolours were purchased for the Royal Opera House.
- **Toby Ward:** Toby Ward was commissioned by ROH Collections to draw areas of the theatre that would change during the development. These drawings in pencil, pen and ink, and charcoal, include views of the auditorium, orchestra pit, understage areas and fly floor.

### Oral History Projects

- **Royal Opera House Development Oral History Project:** Based around the redevelopment of the building in 1997–9, this project aimed to capture the impressions and opinions of a wide variety of people involved in the Royal Opera House development project. This included audiences and staff before the closure, specialist contractors working on the building site, and audiences and staff at the venues where The Royal Ballet and The Royal Opera appeared during the closure. The project continued after the theatre re-opened in December 1999. Copies of tapes have been deposited with the British Library National Sound Archive for additional access.
- **Royal Opera House Living Histories Oral History Project:** This joint project between ROH Collections and volunteers from the U3A (University of the Third Age) is collecting memories from people who have worked at the Royal Opera House since 1946. It includes performers, administrators, stage and production staff and aims to capture reminiscences from all departments.
- **Verdi Centenary Oral History Project:** Funded by The Friends of Covent Garden, this project recorded the memories of singers, conductors, orchestral musicians, members of the Royal Opera Chorus, language coaches, directors, and music staff who have worked on productions

of Verdi operas at the Royal Opera House since 1946. Copies of tapes have been deposited with the British Library National Sound Archive for additional access.

### **Photographic Record Projects**

- **Richard Holttum Photographic Record of the Royal Opera House:** Funded by The Friends of Covent Garden, this project recorded the auditorium, foyers and back-stage areas of the theatre prior to redevelopment. ROH holds copyright in these black-and-white and colour negatives.
- **Rob Moore Photographic Record of the Development:** This collection offers a comprehensive photographic record of all aspects of work on the building from closing night in July 1997 to reopening in December 1999 and the first performances of the opening season. It contains black-and-white contact prints and colour transparencies.
- **Schal International Construction Photographs of the Development:** Time-lapse photography by Schal, the construction company for the redevelopment, covering 1997–9. The ROH holds copyright in these images.