

Friends of the University of Bristol Theatre Collection

Charity Registration Number 272392

Trustees' Annual Report for the period 1 January - 31 December 2025

Objectives and Activities

Introduction

Established in 1976, the Friends of the University of Bristol Theatre Collection has been active in fund raising and giving grants to the Collection for the conservation, purchase and display of artefacts.

The Theatre Collection was founded in 1951 and has grown to become one of the world's leading collections relating to the history of British theatre and live art. The Collection holds artworks, audio visual material, costumes, designs, set models, playbills and programmes of this most ephemeral of art forms. The collections are particularly strong from the late 18th century onwards and document the onstage and offstage life of theatre. It provides a unique insight into theatre and live art, their creative processes and broader cultural contexts.

It is used by students, the theatre community, both professional and amateur, academics, artists, designers and historians, as well as members of the public. The Theatre Collection has achieved both Accredited Museum and Accredited Archive Service status, and in 2020 its collections were Designated Outstanding by the Arts Council, England. The Collection's holistic approach to collecting across archives and objects, and the interconnectedness between the collections, make it an outstanding research resource. It is open to all and entrance is free.

Statement on Public Benefit

The Trustees of the Friends of the University of Bristol Theatre Collection confirm that they have complied with the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and that the public benefit requirement has informed the activities of the Friends Association in the year to date. These activities have generated funds to support the Theatre Collection; they have also promoted its work and facilities to members and the wider public.

Membership is open to all who share an interest in the Theatre Collection. The annual subscription is decided at the Annual General Meeting and is currently £15. This low subscription enables more people to join but allows higher donations from those who wish to give more financial support.

The Theatre Collection seeks to benefit the wider community by providing the public with the opportunity to gain knowledge and enjoy one of the world's largest archives of British theatre and live art. The Friends Association is fully aligned with those activities and objectives both through its events planning and grant making decisions.

2025 Under Review

As with many similar organisations operating in the voluntary sector, the Friends Association continues to struggle to recruit new trustees to run the organisation and develop a sustainable future. The trustees commissioned an Advisory Group in 2024, led by Friends' member, Alison Allden to review and bring forward practical ideas and insights to help re-invigorate the Friends Association, and, equally importantly, to identify and help recruit potential trustees.

Their work included the necessary task of reviewing the Associations' governing documents and policies to ensure that they are fit for purpose and compliant with current regulations and standards. As we have a large cash holding, our financial policy relating to investment, management, financial safeguarding and grant-giving procedures was reviewed with the assistance of a financial expert on the Advisory Group. A new *Investment and Expenditure, and Financial Controls Policy* was approved by the Council of Trustees. The cash holdings are now distributed among various banks and building society to maximise interest earnings and maintain full FSCS protection.

The Advisory Group has identified some appropriate people who could become trustees, including potential candidates to fill the Chairperson's post. Regretfully, the newly appointed treasurer had to step down at the beginning of the year due to other commitments. The former treasurer, Paul Madine, is fulfilling this role temporarily.

Achievements and Performance

The Friends were very pleased to be able to approve two requests from The Theatre Collection for funding grants. In March, the Friends gave £4,000 to engage a specialist conservator to assist with the de-framing and auditing of items in the off-site Art Store to improve the care and access to the artwork and designs. Towards the end of the year, we gave £15,000 for the commissioning and purchase of a museum-standard display case to be located in the Exhibition space in Park Row.

The Friends arranged or hosted the following events during 2024, organised by Trustee, Rosemary Silvester.

April 9,11 &12

Invitation to Theatre Collection Friends to join with Friends of Bristol Opera at Bristol Opera's production of Verdi's *Macbeth*, Redmaids' School, Bristol.

Jan 25 - April 27

Invitation to Theatre Collection Friends to visit an exhibition of artist Paule Vézelay's *Living Lines* at the Royal West of England Academy (RWA), Bristol which included two works loaned by the University of Bristol Theatre Collection: *The Bristol Hippodrome*, 1918-19 (which was acquired with funding from the Friends in 1989), and *In a Theatre*, 1918.

June 4

Invitation to Theatre Collection Friends to the Glynne Wickham Lecture: *The Playground Avant-garde: On the Role of Children in the History of Performance* given by Heike Roms, Professor in Theatre and Performance at the University of Exeter. Glynne Wickham founded the Friends Association in 1976.

June 6

Invitation to Theatre Collection Friends to the Bristol Alumni event: *Stories from the Stage: Celebrating Modern Theatre*. Sir Greg Doran, former Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company; Heidi Vaughan, Artistic Director and CEO of Tobacco Factory Theatres; and Polly Davis, Executive Director of Ad Infinitum took part in a panel discussion chaired by Dr Kirsty Sedgeman. Included display by University of Bristol Theatre Collection and The Friends Association.

June 24

Midsummer's Day visit to Theatre Collection store at Langford. Guided tour and picnic. Presentation on the conservator's work funded by the Friends.

June 26

AGM, followed by talk by Pamela King, Professor Emerita and Honorary Senior Research Fellow in the University of Glasgow: *Drama fit for the Universities: Glynne Wickham, Bristol, and Academic Respectability*.

June 27 - July 19

Theatre Collection Friends notified of production at Theatre Royal Bath: world premiere of David Hare's play *Grace Pervades* which tells the story of Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, and Ellen's children Edith Craig and Edward Gordon Craig. University of Bristol Theatre Collection holds the Irving Family Archive.

July 2-5

Theatre Collection Friends invited to visit Bristol Old Vic Theatre School Graduate Exhibition 2025 at Sparks, Bristol.

September 20

Heritage Open Day: University of Bristol Theatre Collection strongrooms tours. Two Council members helped as stewards with staff. Promoted membership of the Friends.

October 4

Trustee, Paul Madine attended the British Association of Friends of Museums Conference at MShed, Bristol.

December 15

Theatre Collection Friends invited to visit Bristol Hippodrome's Festive Archive event.

December 16

Exclusive Members' event: Seasonal refreshments followed by talk by Project Archivist Anne Lovejoy about the Welfare State International archives and the Firestarters project to catalogue, conserve and make them accessible. Included the viewing of archives and films and visiting the digitisation lab facilitated by Theatre Collection staff. Members of the Friends are also volunteers helping with cataloguing and re-packaging the archives.

Membership

The post of Membership Secretary became vacant when Claire Nabney stood down at the 2025 AGM. The role has been taken on temporarily by Rosemary Silvester until a replacement can be found.

During 2025 some of our long-standing members very sadly died, other members did not renew their subscriptions, but we were delighted to welcome six new members, some of whom had visited the Theatre Collection during the September Heritage Open Day. We currently have 66 members.

Our membership includes people with a general interest in theatre or collections, to writers, academics, designers, archivists, and links us to organisations such as the Association of British Theatre Technicians and the British Music Hall Society.

Rosemary continues to promote the Friends Association and encourages new people to join through email postings to University of Bristol staff on the University's internal network. We also encourage colleagues on our Council, the Advisory Group and Theatre Collection staff to take every opportunity to spread the word about membership which is open to everyone.

Financial Review

The Income and Expenditure Account for 2025 together with the Balance Sheet showing the Association's assets are given on the following page.

Whilst our regular income from members' subscriptions and donations remained steady, we were pleased to receive an unexpected final payment from the David Machin estate of £27,818. Our membership subscriptions have increased slightly as we have been able to welcome a few new members, partly as a result of the Heritage Open Day in September with which the Friends were involved. We continue to be grateful to those loyal members for our income and their additional donations, particularly those able to Gift Aid their contributions. With the addition of the David Machin bequest to our income, our Deposit Account interest receipts improved significantly, although interest rates are falling again.

As reported elsewhere, the Friends were pleased to make two grants to the Theatre Collection totalling £19,000. The newly adopted Investment and Expenditure policy sets out what types of grant requests will be considered by the Friends and how they will be assessed for approval. Requests will be considered for full funding, part funding and seed funding of an item, project or acquisition as at present. However, the Friends will only fund spending that meets the criterion of 'additionality' – that is, one-off, ad-hoc, project-style expenditure. The Friends will not approve spending to meet operational, on-going, revenue or business-as-usual needs, as these can, and should, be met by the University.

Following approval by the Council of Trustees, the Advisory Group commissioned a freelance theatre/performance administrator to assist with researching similar organisations and identifying best practice. A budget had been set to cover any costs incurred by the Advisory Group from which the Administrator's fee of £4,050 was paid.

Other expenditure has been kept to a minimum with Liability Insurance and postage making up the majority of the Association's recurring outgoings. The expenditure on meetings and the AGM includes printing and distribution of papers, although as much as possible is sent via email.

The Balance Sheet details the cash balances held in the various current and deposit accounts, some of which are administered by the Charities Aid Foundation/Flagstone whose fees are covered by them paying a very slightly lower rate of interest. A provision of £400 is held to cover any costs the Theatre Collection incurs associated with its Oral History Archives. £1,000 is held permanently as a reserve fund in accordance with our current Reserves Policy.

We are grateful to Rachael Fleetwood BA, MBA, ACMA, GCMA for inspecting and signing the accounts.

**INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED
31st DECEMBER 2025**

£		£	£
Income			
855.00	Membership subscriptions		995.00
637.00	Additional donations from members and others		497.00
300,000.00	David Machin Bequest		27,818.39
4,080.86	Interest on deposit account		7,731.86
274.94	Inland Revenue Tax refund		272.67
50.00	General Fundraising Events income (gross)		0.00
10.00	Sale of Cards		
<u>305,907.80</u>			<u>37,314.92</u>
Expenditure			
0.00	Grants to The Theatre Collection:		
	Conservator Project	4,000.00	
	Museum Standard Display Case	15,000.00	19,000.00
0.00	Oral History Project		0.00
26.90	Events costs and transaction fees		35.64
62.57	Meeting Costs incl. AGM		59.21
1.30	Stationery & Newsletter		11.49
96.00	Public Liability Insurance		178.56
0.00	Advisory Group's Admin Assistant fees		4,050.00
0.00	Misc. Expenses		95.00
40.75	Postage		27.52
<u>227.52</u>			<u>23,457.42</u>
<u>305,680.28</u>	Surplus/ Deficit for the year		<u>13,857.50</u>

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2025

	£	£
General Fund Balances as at 1 January 2025	311,277.87	
Add: Surplus/ Deficit for the year	13,857.50	
		<u>325,135.37</u>

Assets	£	£	£
Current Account		1,039.28	
Deposit Accounts			
Nat West 36 Day Notice Deposit	37,824.98		
Nat West Instant Access Deposit	20,529.48		
Cambridge & Counties Bank*	70,210.00		
UBL UK. (United Bank)*	80,248.03		
Shawbrook Bank*	80,282.60		
Dudley Building Society	<u>35,001.00</u>	324,096.09	
			<u>325,135.37</u>
Allocation of Funds			
Unrestricted	323,735.37		
Oral History Project	400.00		
Reserves	<u>1,000.00</u>		
	<u>325,135.37</u>		

* Administered by CAF/Flagstone platform, part of HSBC

AUDITOR'S REPORT

I have examined the above Financial Statements with the books and receipts of the Friends of the University of Bristol Theatre Collection and have obtained the information which I consider necessary. In my opinion they give me a true and fair view of the Income and Expenditure of the Association for the year ended 31st December 2025 and of its financial position as at that date.

R Fleetwood

Registered Charity No: 272392

R Fleetwood BA, MBA, ACMA, GCMA

Council of the Friends of the University of Bristol Theatre Collection 2025

The Council met to conduct business on four occasions during the year plus organised and hosted the Annual General Meeting in June. Each meeting was quorate. The Advisory Group members met regularly throughout the year either in plenary or sub-groups.

At the AGM in June, Claire Nabney and Peter Leppard unfortunately had to resign as Trustees due to ill health. There were no new nominations to take their places, nor to fill the existing vacancies. Paul Madine and Rosemary Silvester, both of whose terms of office expired at this time agreed to stand for a further term and were duly elected. The Constitution allows for up to ten trustees: there are currently six. The full list of Principals, Trustees and observers is listed here.

President: Stephanie Cole OBE
Vice President: Sir John Kingman FRS
Vice President: Emeritus Professor Martin White

Trustees:

Treasurer & Acting Chair: Paul Madine;
Secretary: Charlotte Monk;
Rosemary Silvester;
Claire Herford;
Martine Shackerley-Bennett;
Les Finnemore

Co-opted: (Advisory Group)

Alison Allden;
Pamela King;
Jo Avis

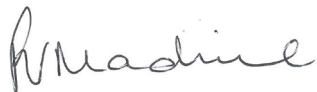
University of Bristol Observers:

Jo Elsworth, Associate Director (Culture and Collections);
Julian Warren, Head of Theatre Collection;
Lucy Powell, Keeper: Theatre Archives;
Dr Jill Sullivan, Assistant Keeper: User Services;
Professor Elaine McGirr, Professor, Department of Theatre.

The Friends are grateful to all these people for their continuing work, encouragement and support.

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees



Paul Madine, Acting Chair

Date: 24 March 2026