

U DP215

Hull Theatre Royal Playbills

1796-1881

Historical Background:

The original **Theatre Royal** in Hull was built in 1768 and was most likely the second purpose built theatre in Hull. It was built by Tate Wilkinson in Finkle Street and became known as the Theatre Royal after the grant of a royal patent. This theatre was eventually replaced in 1810, after several failed attempts to alter the original theatre, by a larger Theatre Royal built by the Wilkinsons in Humber Street. It was designed by Charles Mountain the younger and was destroyed by fire in 1859.

In 1864, the Hull Theatre and Concert Co. was formed and the company purchased the site of the ruined Theatre Royal upon which a new Theatre Royal was built. The theatre opened in 1865 only to burn down four years later in 1869. By 1871, a new Theatre Royal was built on part of the site of the Queens Theatre, Paragon Street, opening that year with a capacity of 1500. Precautions against fire were a high priority, given the disastrous theatre fires in Hull over the previous years, with safety bolts to allow quick evacuation.

This Theatre Royal prospered until it finally closed its doors in 1909. The theatre was later reopened in 1912 as the Tivoli Music Hall which continued to host revues, plays and pantomimes until well after the Second World War, despite closing for a year after severe air raid damage in 1943.

Playbills developed from the medieval 'bill', a written or printed list. Initially 'handbills', small printed sheets, were used to advertise theatrical entertainments, but by the nineteenth century, playbills were being produced on larger paper. For the more prestigious plays or performances, playbills also began to be printed on coloured paper, using coloured ink and to incorporate pictures by the later nineteenth century.

Theatrical **programmes** developed later than playbills, but usually contained similar information, and as they were initially given away for free, were printed as cheaply as possible. Programmes were also initially the preserve of the larger city theatres hosting well-known productions or famous actors and were generally published by the theatre rather than the production company. In the 1870s, advertisements for local businesses also began to be included.

Custodial history:

Purchased from Alex Alec-Smith Books, August 2012

Description:

This small collection contains 10 bound volumes of printed playbills for performances held at the Theatre Royal Hull, 1796-1873, and one bound volume of programmes. The collection contains playbills for various types of plays including tragedies, comedies, operas, Shakespeare, farces, musicals, dramas and pantomime, as well as playbills for performances featuring famous actors such as Sarah Siddons, William Dowton and Charles Kemble.

The playbills generally include the following information: the date of the performance, whether the play had been chosen by a particular group or sponsor, if the play was a benefit performance and for whom, the name of the play, a short cast list, brief details of forthcoming performances, the time of the performance, the price of tickets and where the tickets could be

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purchased. Some of the later playbills also contain brief notes about the play's story or specific scenes within the play. The earlier playbills are generally printed in black and white and do not contain pictures, whilst some of the later playbills have been printed on coloured paper and/or using coloured ink. There are also some later playbills (1860s-1870s) which incorporate pictures, most of which are in black and white. Several of the volumes also contain other related material including newspaper cuttings; printed bills apologising for a change of play or actor owing to unforeseen circumstances; pictures of famous actors, and brief handwritten notes pertaining to specific performances.

There is some duplication with the playbills held by Hull City Archives.

Extent: 11 volumes

Related material:

The Theatre Royal, Paragon St [C DBHM/17/1/42]
Records relating to the Little and New Theatres, Hull [C DFBN]
Hull Theatre Programmes [U DX304]
Hull New Theatre Programmes [C DIAG]
Theatre Programmes and Souvenir booklets [C DIDA]
Various theatre playbills and programmes [L792]

Access conditions:

Access will be granted to any accredited reader. Please be aware that some of the items are in a fragile condition and must be handled with care.

U DP215/1	Hull Theatre Royal large playbills Large bound volume of approximately 256 playbills. Includes brief handwritten notes about specific performances, for instance if actors were unable to perform owing to illness; bills for other events such as lectures which were held at the Theatre Royal, and printed bills apologising for a change of play or actor owing to unforeseen circumstances. There is also a small printed copy of the painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds of Sarah Siddons; newspaper cuttings relating to performances at the Theatre Royal, and a list of actors for whose benefit the plays were performed and the amount of money they received for the season, with brief details of their career after their season in Hull. 1 volume	1796-1801
U DP215/2	Hull Theatre Royal small playbills Small bound volume of approximately 200 playbills. Includes a 'Statement of the receipts at the Benefits of the different performers for the season 1803-1804', and printed bills apologising for a change of play or actor owing to unforeseen circumstances. This volume was originally part of a group of 6 volumes dated 1803-1828, see U DP215/2-7). 1 volume	1803-1806

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U DP215/3	Hull Theatre Royal small playbills Small bound volume of approximately 200 playbills. Includes a small picture of Mr [William] Dowton as Sir Anthony Absolute. This volume was originally part of a group of 6 volumes dated 1803-1828, see U DP215/2-7). 1 volume	1811-1812
U DP215/4	Hull Theatre Royal small playbills Small bound volume of approximately 100 playbills. Includes a small picture of Mr C[harles] Kemble as Romeo. This volume was originally part of a group of 6 volumes dated 1803-1828, see U DP215/2-7). 1 volume	1813-1814
U DP215/5	Hull Theatre Royal small playbills Small bound volume of approximately 200 playbills. Includes brief handwritten notes about specific performances, for instance if actors were unable to perform owing to illness, and printed bills apologising for a change of play or actor owing to unforeseen circumstances. This volume was originally part of a group of 6 volumes dated 1803-1828, see U DP215/2-7). 1 volume	1814-1816
U DP215/6	Hull Theatre Royal small playbills Small bound volume of approximately 200 playbills. Includes printed bills apologising for a change of play or actor owing to unforeseen circumstances and a picture from an engraving of actress Miss Wilson. This volume was originally part of a group of 6 volumes dated 1803-1828, see U DP215/2-7). 1 volume	1819-1821
U DP215/7	Hull Theatre Royal small playbills Small bound volume of approximately 200 playbills. Includes printed bills apologising for a change of play or actor owing to unforeseen circumstances, and pictures of Miss Edmiston, Mrs T. Hill as Hypolita, Mr Mathews, a scene from the play 'Memorandum Book', a copy of a group portrait scene featuring several characters portrayed by Mr Mathews, Miss Stephens as Rosetta, Miss Foote as Maria Darlington, Miss Love, Mr C[harles] Kemble as Hamlet and Miss Glover. There are also some brief handwritten notes about specific performances, such as actors' farewell addresses, related newspaper cuttings and bills for other events held at the Theatre Royal. This volume was originally part of a group of 6 volumes dated 1803-1828, see U DP215/2-7). 1 volume	1824-1828

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| U DP215/8 | <p>Hull Theatre Royal large playbills</p> <p>Large bound volume of approximately 85 playbills. Includes some related newspaper cuttings, playbills printed on coloured paper and/or with coloured ink, and playbills incorporating pictures. Some of the playbills have been folded to fit inside the volume. This volume was originally part of a group of 3 volumes dated 1866-1873, see U DP215/8-10).</p> <p>1 volume</p> | 1866-1867 |
| U DP215/9 | <p>Hull Theatre Royal large playbills</p> <p>Large bound volume of approximately 85 playbills. Includes some related newspaper cuttings, playbills printed on coloured paper and/or with coloured ink, and playbills incorporating pictures. Some of the playbills have been folded to fit inside the volume. This volume was originally part of a group of 3 volumes dated 1866-1873, see U DP215/8-10).</p> <p>1 volume</p> | 1867-1868 |
| U DP215/10 | <p>Hull Theatre Royal large playbills</p> <p>Large bound volume of approximately 85 playbills. Includes some related newspaper cuttings, playbills printed on coloured paper and/or with coloured ink, and playbills incorporating pictures. Some of the playbills have been folded to fit inside the volume. This volume was originally part of a group of 3 volumes dated 1866-1873, see U DP215/8-10).</p> <p>1 volume</p> | 1872-1873 |
| U DP215/11 | <p>Hull Theatre Royal programmes and playbills</p> <p>Large bound volume of approximately 100 programmes and playbills. Programmes are one sheet folded in half and include the date and time of the performance, the name of the play, a cast list, details of the conductor and stage manager, brief details of the story, the price of tickets, brief details of forthcoming plays and small adverts for local businesses. The playbills provide similar information although they do not include local adverts. A few of the programmes are printed on coloured paper and/or with coloured ink. Most of the programmes and playbills are not dated.</p> <p>1 volume</p> | 1872-1881 |