

**Accession number:** 2001/20

**Historical Background/Biographical Background:** The Pioneer Players were a theatre society founded by Edith Craig in London in May 1911. Similar to the larger Stage Society, the Pioneer Players operated by charging an annual subscription and performed plays (effectively in private) for their membership. Some plays explicitly challenged censorship of the stage - they were politically active in the early nineteenth century and supported women's suffrage. From 1915 they devoted more energy to creating an art theatre in London with productions in translation from Anton Chekhov among many others.

Dame Ellen Terry was born on 27 February 1847 and later became the leading Shakespearean actress in Britain. Terry started acting as a child, marking the beginning of a career that would last for almost seven decades. Aged only 16, she married the artist George Frederic Watts but this marriage ended in separation within the year. Soon after she began a relationship with the architect Edward William Godwin, with whom she had several children including Edith Craig. At this point she left the stage for six years but returned in 1874 to great acclaim in Shakespearean and other classical roles.

She joined Henry Irving's company in 1878 as leading lady, and for the next twenty years she was considered the top Shakespearean and comic actress in Britain. Her management of the Imperial Theatre in London, which she took over in 1903, proved to be a financial failure and so Terry returned to acting and also began lecturing. She continued acting on stage until 1920 and also appeared in a few films before 1922. Ellen Terry died on 21 July 1928.

Edith Ailsa Geraldine Craig was born on 9 December 1869, the illegitimate daughter of Ellen Terry and Edward William Godwin. She became an established theatre director, producer and costume designer. When she was younger she also acted on stage, making her first appearance in 1878. Between 1887 and 1890 she trained as a pianist under Alexis Hollander in Berlin.

Craig was also an early supporter of the women's suffrage movement in England and in 1911 founded the feminist and reform minded 'Pioneer Players', of which she was the managing director and stage director. Her mother served as president of the society and the advisory committee including George Bernard Shaw and his wife. Craig produced 150 plays for the Pioneer Players before they closed in 1920, reviving for a final production in 1925.

As well as working with the Pioneer Players, Craig was involved with several suffrage groups, directing plays, street processions and selling newspapers on their behalf, and was also a substantial figure in the British Drama League. Also from 1916 until her death, she lived in a ménage a trois with dramatist Christabel Marshall and artist Clare Atwood. Craig also appeared in a number of silent films.

After the closure of the Pioneer Players, Craig worked producing plays for the 'Little Theatre' movement, and in 1929, after her mother's death, she converted the barn adjacent to Terry's house at Smallhythe Place into a theatre. A Shakespeare play is produced every year at The Barn Theatre to commemorate Ellen Terry's death.

Edith Craig died on 27 March 1947.

**Custodial history:** The scrapbook was donated by Raymond Mason to Professor Katharine Cockin, Department of English, University of Hull, then deposited on loan with Hull University Archives, 30 March 2001. Mr Mason acquired the scrapbook from a bookseller in Bloomsbury, and there is no further information on its original provenance. The two photographs at U DX295/3 were found by Mr Mason in the mid-2000s and passed to Professor Cockin, who deposited them to be added to the collection.

**Description:** This collection comprises a scrapbook of press cuttings relating to the Pioneer Players, in particular Ellen Terry and Edith Craig, and loose photographs and cuttings. Many of these were removed from the scrapbook but others were added to the collection by the depositor, at a later date than the original accession.

**Extent:** 0.1 linear metres

**Related material:** Hull Theatre Programmes [U DX304]  
Theatre Playbills Collection [U DTP]  
Black and white autographed photograph of Ellen Terry [U DBU/2/958]

**Access conditions:** Access will be granted to any accredited reader

**Language:** English

U DX295/1	<p>Scrap album of press cuttings and other ephemera relating to Ellen Terry, Edith Craig and the Pioneer Players</p> <p>Includes posters and programmes for performances by the Pioneer Players and articles relating to performances of the plays 'Paphnutius', 'The Daughters of Ismael', 'The Patience of the Sea', 'Level Crossing', 'Idle Women', 'A Dilemma', 'Exchange', 'Godefroi and Yoland', 'Mouse', 'Pan in Ambush', 'A Merry Death', 'The Cleansing Stain', 'The Hired Girl' and 'The Girl and the Puppet'. There are also press cuttings relating to the banning of the Pioneers' performance of the Russian play 'The Theatre of the Soul'.</p> <p>83 pages, with some loose press cuttings. 1 volume</p>	1913-1918
U DX295/2	<p>Folder of miscellaneous photographs and other items relating to the Pioneer Players</p> <p>Mainly extracted from the scrapbook at U DX295/1. The photocopies and 2007 article were added to the collection by the depositor at a later date than the original accession.</p> <p>The items consist of:</p> <p>1). Packet of loose small photographs and negatives (21 photos, 3 negatives). Early-mid 20th century. The photos in this packet appear to have</p>	20th cent.-2007

been taken at different times and by different photographers, and many appear to have been taken at Smallhythe Place. Most of them are uncaptioned, and show women, children, the house, or landscape. One appears to have been taken from an upstairs window and shows a group of people in costume on a lawn. The photos which are captioned are:

a photo of a woman in a field holding a rake, captioned "Chris"

a photo of a small boy holding a cricket bat [at Smallhythe?] captioned Kit Nicholson

a photo of part of the exterior of Smallhythe Place captioned "1946 - August by Torben Knudsen".

2). Envelope labelled "Pioneers etc." Early-mid 20th century. Containing:

a printed photo of the Barn Theatre, Smallhythe, with outline directions

news cuttings relating to Ellen Terry, Gertrude Kingston, and Margaret Nybloc

further photos (6) from the set described in 1) above, showing women, children, and Smallhythe Place.

3). Envelope of press cuttings relating to Edith Craig and the Pioneer Players, and pictures of actors and actresses cut from publications. Early-mid 20th century. Pictures include Gertrude Kingston; Agnes Thomas; Mrs Cecil Raleigh; Marie Sherlock; Yvonne Fitzroy; Edyth Olive; Nigel Playfair; Ethel Levey; Margaret Hallstan; Irene Hentschel; the Washington Square Players; Elizabeth Kirby; Lilian Braithwaite; Mona Limerick.

4). Photograph of a woman inscribed "Edith from Edy".

5). Loose press cuttings (1915-1938) relating to Ellen Terry, Edith Craig, Smallhythe Place and the Pioneer Players.

6). Later material: late 20th-century copies (photocopies or prints from microfilm) of an article from the Daily Mirror, 1915, including a photo of Ellen Terry acting with a bandaged eye; photocopy of a Pioneer Players playbill (c.1915); cutting from the National Trust magazine, "Barn Theatre in the spotlight", January 2007.

1 file

Hull History Centre: U DX295

U DX295/3

Two photographs

Two small photographs. Early-mid 20th century.

1. A woman [possibly Edith Craig] in a garden.

2. Exterior view of Smallhythe Place, captioned "3 o'clock. Smallhythe Place. Taken by Guy."

2 items

Mid 20th cent.