

The Irvingite



The Newsletter of The Irving Society Number 42 - April 2008



Prof Shearer West of the University of Birmingham wonders whether these photos are of Ellen Terry and Sir Henry Irving taken in New York, possibly in 1899. Can anyone confirm or deny? Please email her on s.c.west@bham.ac.uk or contact the Editor.

THE IRVINGITE ONLINE

Now that two-thirds of the membership is online, it seems sensible in future for the Hon Sec to advise members by email when the latest *Irvingite* has been posted on the website rather than to continue sending hard copies by mail. Members who are not online will receive copies through the mail as usual.

If, however, you are online and still wish to receive hard copies of *The Irvingite* please inform the Editor. Our journal *First Knight* will continue to be circulated by mail to all members.

THEATRE MUSEUM

Will the V&A's Theatre and Performance Collections (as the TM is now called) find a new home in Blackpool? A £50,000 feasibility study being funded by the DCMS will report in the summer. The town is still reeling from not having a super-casino as the lynchpin of its regeneration; will a Theatre Museum do the trick? Live theatre in Blackpool has seen dramatically dwindling audiences in recent years, so a museum devoted to the performing arts seems unlikely to attract significant interest.

ODDS AND ENDS

‘With the single exception of Homer, there is no eminent writer, not even Sir Walter Scott, whom I despise so entirely as I despise Shakespeare when I measure my mind against his.’

—G. B. Shaw on Irving’s *Cymbeline*. *The Saturday Review*, 26 September 1896; repr. in George Rowell’s *Victorian Dramatic Criticism* (1971).

The following is a précis of a letter from Irving’s Aunt Sarah Penberthy, neé Behenna, to Bram Stoker. Despite his success and colossal celebrity she, like HI’s mother, never came to terms with his choice of calling. The letter is dated 15 February 1884.

She thinks of Stoker often since his visit to Cornwall. She sympathises with his separation from his wife and children for a short time. A good wife is from the Lord and he is fortunate in his choice. Heartily endorses all he says about her nephew and prays that after all the acting is over he may decide for the Lord and spend his last days in peace. She will be pleased to see the Stokers again in Cornwall. P.S. Her sight has almost gone.

Quoted with permission from the Henry Irving Correspondence site: www.henryirving.co.uk Ref. no. 2069

On 12 May, 1887 (the year she died), Sarah Penberthy wrote to H.I.. Now living in Clevedon, North Somerset, she addresses him as ‘My dearest Johnnie’. She sends thanks for the day’s proof of his love and often thinks of the happy days they enjoyed at Halsetown. She



Sarah Penberthy 1800-87

prays for him every day, hoping that God may induce him to give up his profession and spend the rest of his life in His service.

Quoted with permission from the Henry Irving Correspondence site: www.henryirving.co.uk. Ref. no. 2072.

On 26 June 2007 Bonham’s held a sale of theatrical memorabilia including ‘a lease for the Lyceum signed by Irving (1882); a power of attorney signed by Irving (1884); an assignment of rights in Pinero’s *Daisy’s Escape* to his son Lawrence (sic), signed by Irving and counter-signed by Bram Stoker (1904).’

The lease between H.I. and the US impresario Henry E. Abbey was signed by both parties on 11 July, at 19 George Street West, perhaps the office of H.I.’s solicitor, (Sir) George Lewis. It was to Lewis that H.I. gave power of attorney, to facilitate administration of the Lyceum’s finances while Irving was on his second American tour. The witnesses were Joseph Patton and G. E. Terry.

SPREADING THE WORD

If you know of any forthcoming Irving- or 19th century-related theatre events in your area please inform the Editor a.s.a.p. in order to ensure a mention in the next *Irvingite* or *First Knight*.

THE INFLUENCE OF NAMES

Israel Zangwill

‘Actors, like authors, roll their “r’s”; and if their names are pseudonyms, so much the greater proof that some occult instinct makes them elect for that virile letter. Who are our leading actors and actor-managers? The double-r’s: Henry Irving, Herbert Beerbohm Tree (two pairs), Forbes Robertson, George Alexander, Arthur Roberts, Edward S. Willard, Edward Terry, Charles Brookfield, Wilson Barrett, Fred Terry, Charles Warner, W. Terriss, George Grossmith, Charles Hawtrey, Arthur Bouchier (two pairs). Scarcely any leading actor lacks one “r”, as Charles Wyndham, Cyril Maude, Louis Waller, etc., etc. Those without any “r’s” may console themselves with the memory of Edmund Kean, though Garrick—a name almost wholly compact of “r”—is the patron saint of the stage.

The ladies follow the gentlemen. From Ellen Terry and Winifred Emery to Ada Rehan and Mrs Patrick Campbell, from Rose Leclercq and Marie Bancroft to Marion Terry and Irene Vanbrugh, few dare dispense with the “r”.

From Without Prejudice (1896). Note that our Founder Patron, Sir John Gielgud, and a current Patron, Sir Donald Sinden, do not meet Zangwill’s criterion for a good actor’s name.—Ed. (Michael Kilgarriff).

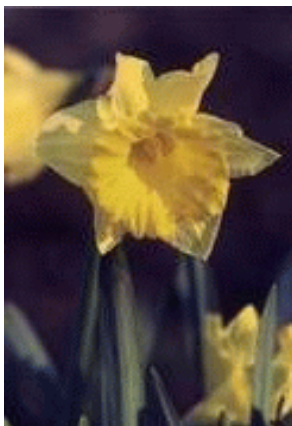
IRVING AND OLIVIER

Tom Band

In Bram Stoker’s *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving* there is a passage where Stoker and Irving are talking about a future production of *Romeo and Juliet* and are discussing the best way to carry Paris’s body into the tomb. As no entirely satisfactory method presented itself, Stoker consulted his brother, ‘who had been through all the Russo-Turkish war as a surgeon in the Turkish service’ (Bram Stoker, *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving*, London, 1907, 61 [single volume edition]), and asked him what the easiest way to carry a dead body was. The description that follows is remarkable because it is exactly the method used by Ralph Richardson’s Falstaff to carry off Laurence Olivier’s Hotspur in John Burrell’s 1945 production of *Henry IV* for the Old Vic Company at the New Theatre. Namely: legs over the shoulders with the face out and arms dragging on the ground. This method was not adopted by Irving because although it was easy ‘its picturesque quality for stage purposes was another matter.’ (*Ibid*, 62) The image of Richardson carrying Olivier in this manner has, ironically, given Irving’s comment, become quite famous. If Olivier, Richardson or Burrell arrived at this method without having read Stoker’s book, then the coincidence is in itself noteworthy, but it seems likely that at least one of the three had read this account.

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GROW YOUR OWN HENRY IRVING



Henry Irving

That HI was a hardy perennial is surely not to be doubted, but the assertion that the Henry Irving scent is 'light and sweet', and that HI is 'very good for growing wild' may give the reader pause. The

reference is, of course, not to

the actor but to a trumpet daffodil, named in his honour in 1885. This narcissus is not currently available commercially, but your Hon Sec is in touch with the only commercial source of propagation in the UK and it is hoped that bulbs may be on offer at some future date. The Henry Irving may be viewed at the RHS Gardens at Wisley (Rosewarne Collection) in the spring.

ET & EC DATABASE

Dr Katharine Cockin, Reader in English at the University of Hull, would be very interested to receive feedback on the prototype of the webpage which will provide access to the Ellen Terry and Edith Craig Database, and of which she is project leader.

This project, funded by the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council), is due to be completed in the autumn of 2008. It will provide an online database, allowing searches of the data describing the documents at the National Trust's Smallhythe Place, the former home of Ellen Terry.

If you visit the following web address you will be able to see the mock-up of the

webpage. Please leave comments on the relevant pages of the site at any time between now and 14 November. Please note that the search facility does not work (yet) and the data provided is simply to give an impression of the final layout. What I would like to know is how easy you find it and whether there are any suggested changes to make. Many thanks for your help.

<http://simple501.com/prototypes/etec/home.cfm>
AHRC Ellen Terry and Edith Craig Database Project 2006-08

FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2008

Sunday 17 February 14.30

Irving Statue

Charing Cross Road

Laying of the Birthday Wreath

Concert Artistes' Association

20 Bedford Street, London WC2

Twelfth AGM 15.15

Guest Speaker 16.00

Sir Donald Sinden CBE FRSA

Patron of The Irving Society

Cutting of the Birthday Cake 16.45

Admission for non-members £3

PERFORMING ARTS BOOK & EPHEMERA FAIR

Saturday 12 April 2008 10.30-19.15

Royal National Theatre

Olivier Stalls Foyer

**Visit Michael Sharvell-Martin
at the Irving Stall**

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