NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

ABBEY THEATRE DIGITAL ARCHIVE

Annual Project Report 2015

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Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Executive Summary 2

Digitisation 3

Metadata 4

Systems Infrastructure 4

Digital Rights Management 6

Administration 6

User Experience 7

Visitors and Visitor Engagement 8

Academic Engagement 9

Teaching 11

Recruitment of PhD Students and Postdoctoral Fellows 11

Visiting Fellows 12

Productions 12

Conference and Special Events 12

Research Funding and Networking 13

Publications 13

Internships 13

Future Plans 14

Introduction

The third annual report of the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive project covers the calendar year 2015. It provides an update on developments in the partnership between NUI Galway and the Abbey Theatre to digitize and make available the archive which is one of the world's largest theatre collections, containing more than a million pages, 500 hours of video and 2500 hours of audio. This is the largest theatre archive digitisation project ever undertaken worldwide.

The highlight of 2015 was the virtual completion of the retrospective digitisation of the archive, on time and on budget. A small amount of material, received too late for inclusion by the end date of 31 August, will be absorbed in other digitisation projects in 2016. The archive continued in 2015 to attract strong use for research and teaching and to engage international audiences, particularly those attending the *Performing the Archives* conference at NUI Galway in July.

A project group of representatives from NUI Galway, the Abbey Theatre and Mastermind Ireland Limited (engaged to manage the digitisation) has continued to meet, moving from a bimonthly to a quarterly schedule. It updated the project plan and monitored progress against it, with a focus on user experience, academic engagement, digital rights management and completion of the retrospective digitisation.

Mastermind Ireland Limited also provided written monthly progress reports to NUI Galway. The main changes of personnel during the year were a new Literary Director at the Abbey Theatre, with Jessica Traynor replacing Aideen Howard, and a vacancy pending the appointment of a Director of Marketing and Communications at NUI Galway to succeed Caroline Loughnane. The contributions of Aideen and Caroline to the early years of the project were both influential and appreciated. The final 2015 membership was:

Abbey Theatre: Jessica Traynor, Literary Director; Mairead Delaney and Pauline Swords, Archivists; Oonagh Desire, Director of Public Affairs and Development
NUI Galway: John Cox, University Librarian; Patrick Lonergan, Professor of Drama and Theatre Studies; Professor Daniel Carey, Director, Moore Institute; Barry Houlihan, Archivist
Mastermind Ireland Ltd: Martin Bradley, Archives and Records Management Consultant

This annual report details progress throughout the year and concludes with a preview of next steps.

Executive Summary

- Digitisation of the retrospective (pre-2008) content was almost entirely completed at the end of August 2015, on time and on budget.
- The small amount of material received too late for inclusion will be absorbed in a separate digitisation project in 2016.
- At the end of August 2015, 719,575 unique pages had been digitized, along with 3,068 audio recordings and 324 video recordings.
- Additions in 2015 focused on scripts, photographs, press cuttings, stage management files and audio recordings.
- The implementation of a new approach to redacting individual pages rather than whole documents has increased the percentage of material available for consultation from 54% to 66%.
- Release of more of the currently redacted material remains a priority for the Project Group.
- 3,518 searches were conducted by a range of users.
- The launch of the minute books for the period 1904-1939 made some material in the digital archive available on an open access basis for the first time and attracted significant media coverage.
- A new curriculum for Drama was launched in September 2015, and use of the archives is now included in several modules.
- Two new MA programmes, in Playwriting and Dramaturgy, and in Irish Theatre History and Archives, were launched.
- Exclusive access to this unique archive continues to have a positive impact on PhD recruitment, applications for post-doctoral research fellows and attraction of visiting fellows, particularly via the Moore Institute's visiting researcher scheme.
- To date, the combined value of research funding and student scholarships related to the Abbey archive is €685,000.
- A major international conference, Performing the Archive, attracted a global audience of academics, practitioners and research students in July 2015.
- The archive has stimulated strong publication activity, including a number of forthcoming monographs.
- A major exhibition at NUI Galway, *Yeats and the West,* featured material from the archive.
- Priorities for 2016 include: the completion of the remaining material for digitization; addition of material from 2008 onwards; further release of redacted content; an event to mark the completion of the digitization; continued academic engagement.

Progress to Date

Digitisation

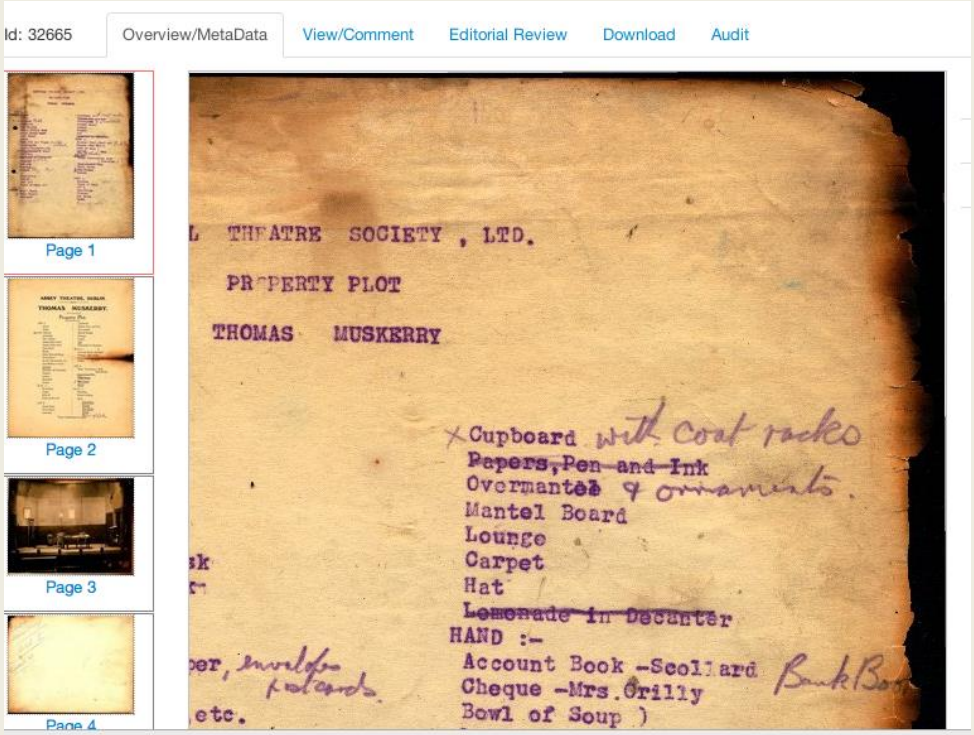
Work on digitizing the archive of the Abbey Theatre was completed on 31 August 2015, on time and within budget, apart from a small amount of material received too late for inclusion which will be absorbed in another digitization project in 2016.

As of August 2015 719,575 unique pages of information, up from 587,397 at the end of 2014, had been digitised following two processes of weeding and removal of large quantities of duplicate material – firstly by the Abbey Theatre and secondly by archivists carrying out digitisation work. Of this material 473,974 pages were available for consultation by researchers and 245,601 pages were withheld pending editorial review in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Acts (1988 & 2003), which process is continuing, or meeting minimum time restraints for release (7/15/30 years depending on category and age of document). A revised process to increase significantly the number of available pages was agreed in 2014 and implementation has resulted in 24,602 more pages being made available than the 2014 total. In terms of total percentage of material available for consultation there is a distinct improvement on 2014 when 54% of material digitised was available, whereas in 2015 that figure increased to 66%. This process is further described in the section on Systems Infrastructure. The material captured to August 2015 breaks down into the following broad categories:

	Total at End of 2015	Added in 2015
Programmes	66,628 pages	2,381 pages
Prompt Scripts	122,715 pages	6,541 pages
Set Designs	1,949 pages	297 pages
Scripts	132,147 pages	16,107 pages
Lighting Designs	334 pages	323 pages
Audio	3,068 recordings	2,364 recordings
Video	324 recordings	0 recordings
Venue Designs	98 pages	0 pages
Posters	483 items	36 items
Photographs	37,182 items	35,941 items
Press Cuttings	33,815 items	33,815 items
Stage Management Files	13,077 items	13,077 items
Administrative Files	318,691 pages	29,516 pages

Included in the available material is pre-1950 archival content from the collections of the National Library and the Programme Collection. As of 2015 26,939 pages of material comprising HR records and other data of a sensitive nature are “Closed” and will not become available during the lifetime of the agreement. In addition 3,068 audio recordings and 324 video recordings have been

digitised and are available for consultation, along with 483 posters and 37,182 photographs. Other new additions are the Press Cuttings Collections and the Early Stage Management files which were rescued from the original Abbey Theatre premises following the fire in 1951 and have visible singeing along their edges. These were previously deemed too fragile to allow access to researchers and so are a prime example of the importance of digitization in promoting research and learning.



Metadata

Where items can be linked directly to an Abbey Theatre Play Code or Production Code this has been done, which allows individual items to be searched by the full production history associated with each event (cast, crew, location, writer, covering dates) and associated with items which share any points in common (e.g. shared writer, set designer, costume designer etc). This allows easy and swift retrieval of items relating to specific search queries.

Where it was impossible to link items directly to Play or Production Codes new metadata has been generated along with the ability to link to Plays or Productions that may be mentioned within the body of a file, but not the exclusive content of that file.

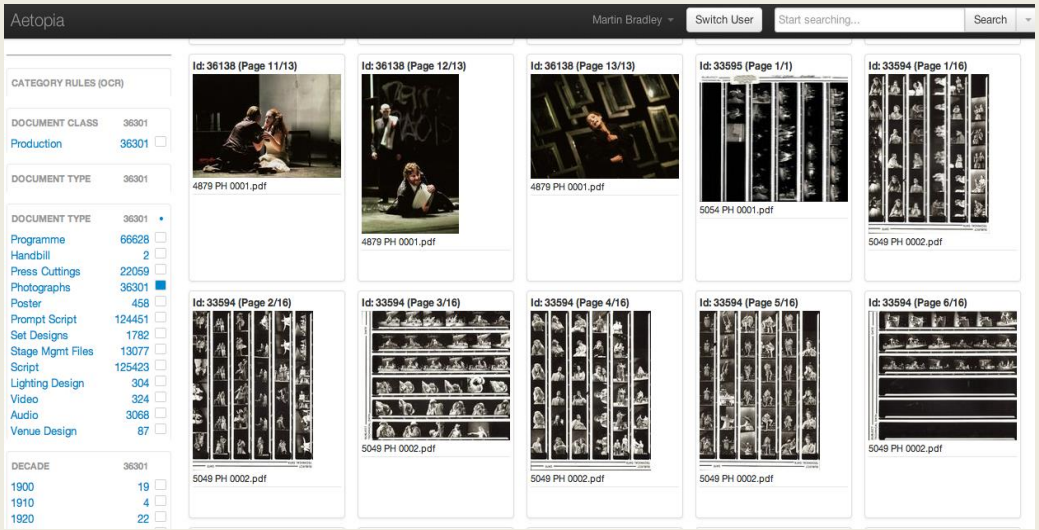
All typescript items are also subject to OCR (Optical Character Recognition) as a third layer of searchability, which allows keywords to be searched across the entire content of the archive.

Systems Infrastructure

All data are hosted on the Amazon S3 cloud storage service, as are instances of the Abbey Theatre Productions Database and the bespoke Digital Asset Management (DAM) system. This maximises system up-time as all maintenance is carried out by Amazon according to a defined service level

agreement. It also serves to minimize outlay on servers and infrastructure. The complete digital archive requires 22 terabytes of storage.

Aetopia Ltd., based in Belfast, was awarded the contract to develop the user interface for the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive following a competitive process. The bespoke DAM, which was developed following a detailed process involving NUI Galway Staff, MIL and Aetopia, is available for use by researchers in the Archives Reading Room in the Hardiman Research Building and improvements are introduced according to user feedback.



One of the key bespoke back-end systems developed was the capability to hold back material from release based on assigned categories and date ranges, and to detect and alert documents which contained 'alert phrases' and 'alert individuals' which will enable this material to be subjected to editorial review under the requirements of the Data Protection Acts (1988 & 2003) (again using bespoke systems developed for this project) before publication. This system has now been comprehensively revised to allow the majority of a document where any such alert arises to be released, with only the specific page where an alert occurs withheld. A new workflow has also been designed whereby researchers can request editorial review of these pages, an email is sent to the Abbey Theatre archivist and a response provided within an agreed timeframe. Both of these changes were implemented in 2015, resulting in an overall increase of 12% in availability of content. The process is ongoing and numbers of available pages will continue to increase.

Further development of the system was ongoing in 2015, with refinements to the browsing, searching and display options available to researchers. Additions to the system rolled out in 2015 include but are not limited to:

- Full search across all categories for 'alert words' as potentially sensitive material was appearing in unexpected documents – these have now been identified and held back;
- Where redaction alerts occur individual pages are greyed out, rather than entire documents and users can request editorial review – this ensures a larger number of pages are released in a more timely manner;

- More effective page scrolling function that allows users to 'jump' to a specific page within a document, rather than scroll through the entire item;
- Resolution of browser-specific issues. For example, JW Player (the content delivery system for audio and video) now functions properly in Internet Explorer
- Rendering of RSS Feed in Feedburner

Digital Rights Management

All copyright material presented as part of the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive is being made available solely on campus at NUI, Galway under the provisions of Section 50 of the Copyright Act (2000) - *Fair dealing with a literary, dramatic, musical or artistic work, sound recording, film, broadcast, cable programme, or non-electronic original database, for the purposes of research or private study, shall not infringe any copyright in the work.*

All users are required to agree to comprehensive Terms and Conditions at each log-in to the site, which cover acceptable usage, copyright, copying, permissions and access control. A log is maintained of every user, each search carried out, each document viewed and the times of each action. In the event of any breach it will be straightforward to pinpoint an offending user.

Administration

The establishment and ongoing progression of this project have required a range of administrative inputs, notably:

***Accommodation*:** The James Hardiman Library at NUI Galway has replaced a Postgraduate Study Room in order to provide a project office to accommodate the MIL project team, its equipment and the original archival material transferred for digitisation by the Abbey Theatre.

***Company regulation*:** In July 2012 NUI Galway set up a campus company, Lintary Ltd., in connection with the project. There was minimal company activity from September 2013 onwards and Lintary Ltd. was dissolved in 2015. The support of the Financial Accounting department at NUI Galway in administration relating to the company and its closure was invaluable.

***Finance*:** The project was jointly funded until September 2015 at NUI Galway by the Registrar's Office, the Research Office, the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies and the James Hardiman Library. The Library was accountable for managing the resultant budget. The main items of expenditure in the reporting period were monthly service payments to MIL, the development of the digital asset management system and cloud computing and storage fees. The monthly costs of cloud computing and storage increased as new data were added and will represent an ongoing monthly cost for the University.

***User support*:** The availability of the digital archive in the Archives and Special Collections Reading Room calls for an ongoing level of user support, including account administration, usage logging and user training, detailed in the next section of this report.

User Experience

Retrospective digitisation of the Abbey archive material was completed in August 2015. This enabled, for the first time, users to search comprehensively all material within the digital archive across all media and genres of material. The return of repeat users from within the University student community, postgraduate researchers and also academic staff is evidence of an embedded understanding of the system and the value placed on it. Feedback has been positive generally but issues with consistency of network speed and reliability of access to the Digital Archive were reported by some users. This resulted in slow search functionality, freezing of the system and reduced searchability. These issues have been reported to University network management teams and are being monitored to ensure a reliable and consistent delivery of the Digital Archive.

Usage data from the Digital Archive show some consolidation and concentration relative to 2014, with fewer logins and searches but more items viewed:

Year	Logins	Distinct Users	Searches	Items Viewed	Distinct items
2014	2912	91	5544	5494	2095
2015	2325	106	3518	9258	4128

User engagement in 2015 was in some cases directed towards major academic publications. Examples include the book by Dr. Fergal McGarry, *The Abbey rebels of 1916: a lost revolution.* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2015) The book offers a pictorial history as well as academic commentary on the involvement of Abbey Theatre personnel in the 1916 Rising and includes over 150 images directly from the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive and related collections at the Hardiman Library, notably the Arthur Shields papers. Among NUI Galway publications, Dr. David Clare's recent book, *Bernard Shaw's Irish Outlook* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) also cites extensive material from the Abbey Archive. PhD researchers at NUI Galway have been able to rely on the Digital Archive to research and feature prominently the work of past women playwrights as part of the season of productions under the banner of "Waking the Feminists, West".

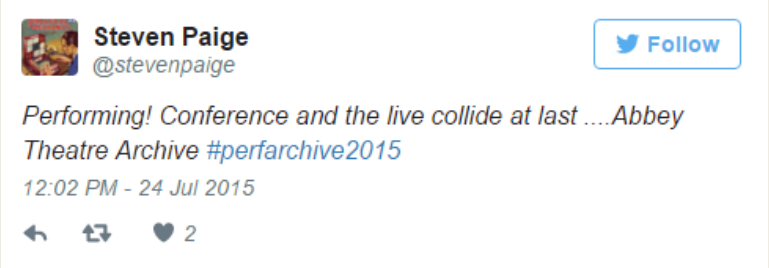
Users who had by now engaged in extended periods of research on the Abbey archive were able to present their research and findings within on-campus research seminars and external conferences. This resulted in an increasing volume of requests for digital material (photographs, script pages etc.) from the digital archive. These demands were able to be met by releasing water-marked images to users who signed declarations that the material was for academic research and in-class presentation. This workflow enables an important outreach function where users promote their findings within research and conference peer groups.

Visitors and Visitor Engagement

The Moore Institute Visiting Fellowship scheme has continued to attract international scholars to the archive. Academics and students have also visited from University of California, Berkeley, King's College, London and University of Edinburgh, among others. A group from the School of Information Science at the University of Kentucky visited the Library in June 2015 for a day workshop on archival practices at NUI Galway. Their programme featured an overview and demonstration of the archive and this was also the case for alumni groups from Princeton University and NUI Galway. Visiting student groups from Villanova University also attended sessions on the archive.

A recent exhibition, *Yeats & the West*, celebrating the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the birth of W.B. Yeats, was launched at the Hardiman Building in July 2015. Events associated with this exhibition included *Western Worlds: a day at Yeats & the West* on 27 November 2015. This exhibition was able to include material from the Abbey Digital Archive, such as play scripts by W.B. Yeats, and included panels dedicated to the history of the Abbey Theatre. The Abbey Digital Archive was also able to contextualise additional paintings held as part of the Yeats exhibition, such as those featuring the career of artist Gerard Dillon, an Abbey Theatre designer, some of whose artwork was loaned as part of the Yeats exhibition.

Other events at NUI Galway allowed new users to engage with and learn more about the Abbey Archive. The 'Performing the Archive' international conference (22-24 July 2015) featured a dedicated panel on the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive project, methodology and academic engagement. Workshops were held which focused on digital curation and management of the archive. Staged readings were also held of historic Abbey Theatre play scripts. Feedback received from across the conference audience relating to the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive was extremely positive, for example:



Academic Engagement

This year has seen a continued expansion of academic activities related to the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, as well as a significant consolidation of existing activities.

The Abbey Theatre Minute Books

Our major research and outreach achievement during the reporting period was the launch of the Abbey Theatre Minute Books project at http://www.nuigalway.ie/abbeytheatreminutebooks

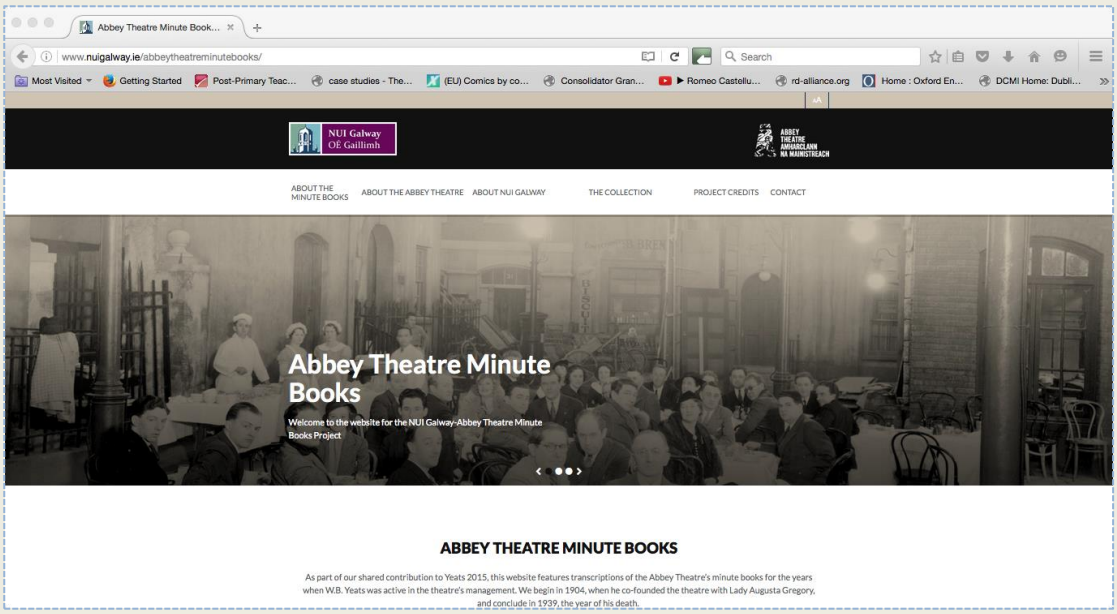
This joint project between Drama and the Hardiman Library contains notes from meetings of the theatre's Board of Directors. They offer a fascinating glimpse behind the scenes of the theatre, showing how the Abbey's managers dealt with a variety of issues, from choosing plays to determining how much to pay their actors, as well as being a fascinating resource for understanding modern Ireland with respect to censorship, gender, religion, and more. Collectively these minute books amount to nearly 1,000 pages, covering some of the Abbey's most significant events. The project is focused particularly on Yeats, publishing the books that were created during his time at the theatre (from its foundation in 1904 to his death in 1939). This project generated significant media attention, including –

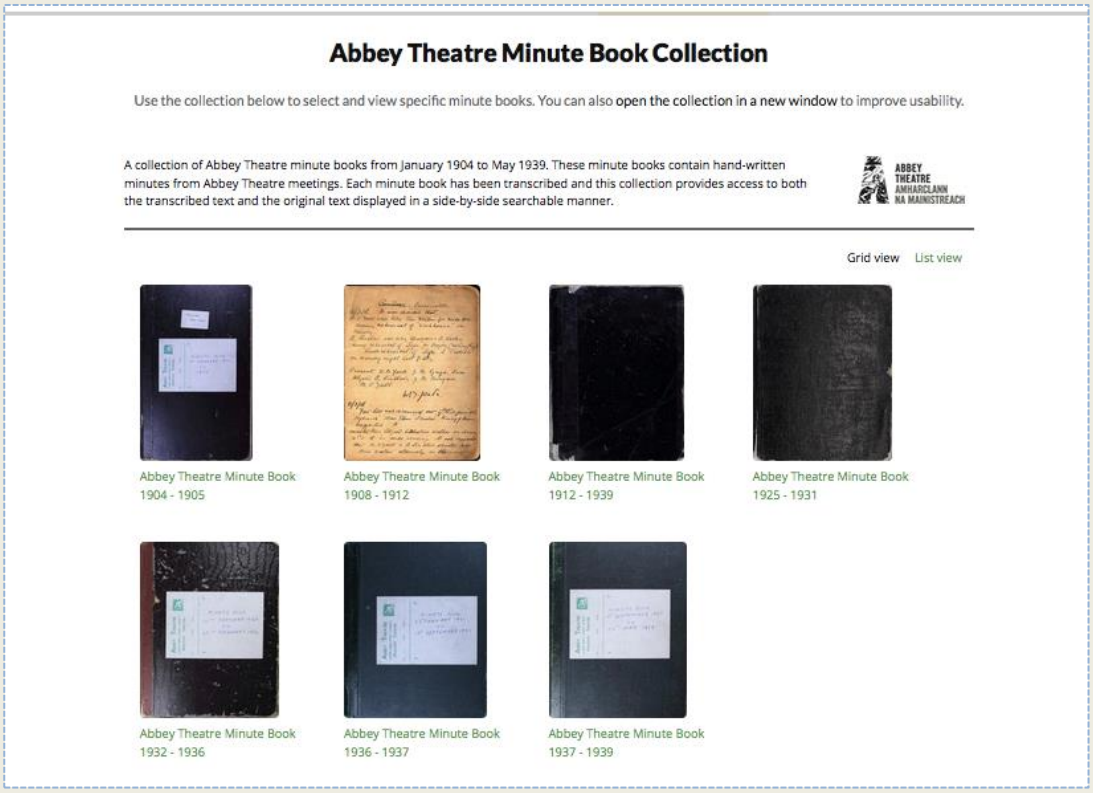
- A wide-ranging Newstalk Radio interview with project members about the Minute Books, 17 December 2015.
- The *Irish Times* highlighted the archive's prefiguring of contemporary debates about gender 15/12/2015: www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/abbey-archive-act-one-scene-one-sexism-and-censorship-1.2466253
- *Sunday Times* interview 20/12/2015: http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/ireland/News/article1647473.ece
- *Irish Times* feature by playwright Thomas Kilroy describing cultural impact of the archive then and now 27/12/2015: http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/dispatches-from-the-theatrical-front-a-look-behind-the-abbey-s-boardroom-scenes-from-1904-to-1939-1.2473962

User response was favourable too. Positive feedback was received from archivists at the Beineke Library, Yale University, and also at the Roundabout Theatre Archive, New York. Academics from Lehman University, New York, described the online minute books as "invaluable for teaching a seminar on 1916".

The Minute Books Project significantly contributes to methodologies in digital humanities. Transcribing each book transformed the Library's digital collections platform. This now allows research and library users to create and view manuscripts and other digital objects, and to upload EXtensible Stylesheet Language (XSLT) and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) to style the XML Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) schema as a Web page. Researchers found new ways to combine the use of key technologies, including Solr (search functionality); Fedora Commons (backend repository to manage unique digital material); Islandora (module functionality for different content); Drupal (front-end site access).

Transcription for the project was funded by the School of Humanities. The website was developed by Zara Sheerin of the Marketing and Communications Office. The technological elements of the project were designed and delivered by Cillian Joy from the Library.





Teaching

As mentioned in last year's report, use of the Abbey archive (and other archival resources) has been embedded in many courses in Drama and English. A new curriculum for Drama was launched in September 2015, and use of the archives is now included in several modules, including classes on Theatre History, playwriting, and Irish Drama. What is notable about these classes is that students do not just use the archive to learn about Ireland's past; they also do so to develop their own practice as makers of theatre today. This is especially evident in the area of playwriting: NUI Galway is fast developing a reputation for its students' achievements in the composition of original plays, one of its unique characteristics.

To build on these achievements, we have launched two new MA programmes with direct links to the Abbey archive:

- MA in Playwriting and Dramaturgy – students will use drafts of plays in the Abbey archive as a way of developing their own work
- MA in Irish Theatre History and Archives – this course provides students with elementary training in archival work, and also includes a specially prepared internship at the Hardiman library.

In addition, we have also launched two other new PG programmes, which – while not directly relevant to the Abbey archive – will make use of it:

- New MA in Film and Drama
- New part-time Structured PhD in Drama and Theatre Studies.

Recruitment of PhD Students and Post-Doctoral Fellows

As previously mentioned, the Abbey archive continues to operate as a significant driver of PhD recruitment: even those students who do not intend to work directly on the archive cite its existence as evidence of NUI Galway's ambition and centrality to theatre studies, and want to come here as a result. In 2015, we admitted three PhD students in Drama:

- Aisling Smith – Irish productions of plays by G.B. Shaw (direct use of the Abbey archive)
- Sarah Hoover – technology and performance (indirectly relevant, IRC funded)
- Ciara Murphy – site-specific theatre (direct use of Abbey archive, Galway Fellowship)

In 2016, we have received applications for students who want to undertake PhD work on the following topics:

- Lady Gregory
- Tom Murphy
- Martin McDonagh
- The theatre of W.B. Yeats (international applicant)
- Shakespearean performance in Ireland (international applicant)

The first three students above are graduates of our MA programmes, where they took classes on the use of the Abbey archive. While the outcome of these applications remains to be determined, it is evident from these topics that the Abbey archive is an important driver of recruitment.

The same is true for applications for post-doctoral research fellows. For 2016, we have had four applicants for IRC funding awards:

- Irish and South African Theatre – a comparative study (from graduate of Oxford)
- The Abbey Theatre and popular forms (from graduate of Yale)
- Irish Theatre and Disability (from graduate of UCD)
- James Joyce in theatre (from graduate of TCD)

While the outcome of these applications remains to be determined, the topics being explored – and the fact that the applicants come from prestigious national and international universities – demonstrates how the Abbey archive is boosting our reputation.

Visiting Fellows

Another area of significant impact is in our attraction of Visiting Fellows, via the Moore Institute's visiting researcher scheme. As has been noted by the Director of the Moore Institute, a very high number of applications were received from scholars who intended to work in the area of theatre. Particularly notable here is that these include artists/practitioners who intend to make use of our archives for the creation of new work. These include:

- Louise Lowe: award winning director of Anu Productions, using the archives to create a new work about the history of the Abbey.
- Paula McFetridge, former artistic director of the Lyric Theatre; now artistic director of Kabosh productions (Belfast). Using the archive to create new work on Northern Ireland and performance, using the Abbey archive together with our papers on the Lyric, Brendan Duddy, and others.
- Peter Glazer, Berkeley, Using the archives to create a new musical work about WB Yeats.

Productions

As part of its growing series of theatre productions, the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance staged a number of works during 2015/2016. This included the Waking the Feminists West series, a student and staff-led series of productions of plays by Irish women. Featured prominently were works that drew directly on the Abbey archive, namely:

- *Grania* by Lady Gregory, staged in the BOI Theatre, January 2016.
- *Mount Prospect* by Elizabeth Connor, staged in the Town Hall Theatre, February 2016.

Conferences and Special Events

The Library and Drama collaborated on a major international conference, "Performing the Archive", supported by the IRC and the American Society for Theatre Research, which was held at the Hardiman Building, 22-24 July 2015. This event attracted a global audience of academics, practitioners and research students.

Academic and Library staff continued to deliver internal papers about the archive, at events organized by the School of Humanities and the Digital Humanities Group at the Moore Institute.

Drama staff delivered invited papers about the Abbey archive at major national and international events, including the following:

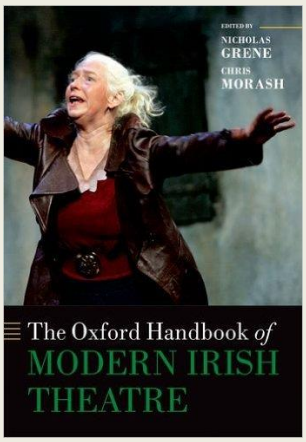
- The Walter Macken centenary conference, Wuppertal, Germany (Ian Walsh)
- Globalising the 1916 Rising, UCD (Patrick Lonergan)
- Shakespeare and Ireland Symposium, Princeton University (Patrick Lonergan)

Research Funding and Networking

As previously noted, the availability of the archive has had a major impact on our ability to attract research funding and student scholarships. In particular, IRC funding requires applicants to demonstrate the suitability of their host environment, and the availability of the Abbey archive (combined with the quality of the resources in the Hardiman building) means that our applicants are scoring very highly under this criterion. Given that most successful IRC applicants have scores of at least 90%, it is of immense value that our students are getting very high marks for suitability of host environment. To date, the combined value of research funding and student scholarships related to the Abbey archive is €685,000. We expect to build significantly on this in the coming years.

Academics involved in the Abbey project are participating in research consortia and scholarly associations that are actively pursuing research funding, with recent bids having been submitted to HERA and the IRC. Members of these networks come from UK (Central School of Drama; Reading University), Norway (Oslo University), Spain (Barcelona Theatre Institute); Holland (Radboud), Czech Republic (Charles University), France (Lille) and elsewhere. At present, members of the group are preparing two different theatre-related Horizon 2020 bids.

Publications



As noted last year, the Abbey archive has been a major research resource for published papers and books, the most prominent of which is the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, which includes contributions from Adrian Frazier, Lionel Pilkington, Patrick Lonergan, Irina Ruppo, Ian Walsh, and Shelley Troupe, all of whom are current or recent NUI Galway staff.

The Abbey archive also forms a significant part of new monographs being published by staff in Drama including Miriam Haughton (Palgrave, 2017), Charlotte McIvor and Ian Walsh (Palgrave, 2018) and Patrick Lonergan (Bloomsbury, 2018).

Internships

Two NUI Galway students (both postgraduates) were placed at the Abbey in April 2015, one in Archives and the other in the Literary Department. This is proving an attractive selling point on our BA and MA programmes.

Future Plans

During the year ahead, we plan to engage in the following activities:

1. Use of the archive to continue to recruit at undergraduate and postgraduate level
2. Use of the archive to attract research funding and post-doctoral fellows
3. Rolling out of new MA programmes on theatre archives and playwriting.
4. Continued embedding of archival resources in UG and PG teaching
5. Celebration of completion of digitization
6. Continued publication and research funding applications
7. Development of new policies for the integration of all archival resources into academic programmes
8. Completion of the remaining material for digitization
9. Addition of material from 2008 onwards
10. Further release of redacted content