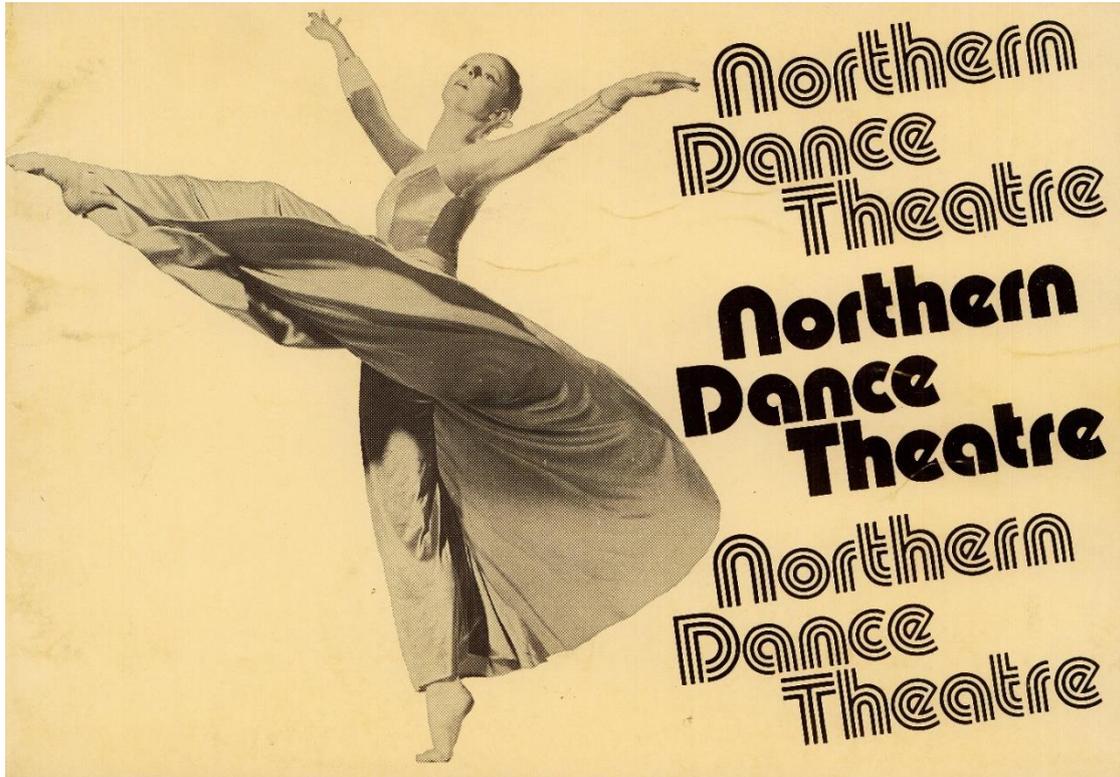


Cataloguing Northern Ballet's Governance and Administrative Records Report to the Business Archives Council



Northern Dance Theatre publication (1976)

Introduction

In 2018, Northern Ballet appointed its first professional archivist to develop the Company archive and to support and enhance the Company's 50th anniversary celebrations, taking place throughout 2020. The Archive & Records Manager is employed on a part-time contract and works in partnership with Leeds University Library Special Collections. Leeds University Library has a research strength in Theatre and Performance and have agreed to house portions of the physical collection once it is appraised, preserved and catalogued. This partnership will ensure the collection is safeguarded, has improved storage and is more visible and accessible for people both inside and outside of Northern Ballet.

The Business Archives Council 2019 Cataloguing Grant was the first application Northern Ballet made to support its Archive. Northern Ballet were thrilled to have found success with their first funding application and delighted that it would enable its Governance and Administrative records to be catalogued in detail, rather than just bare bones, which is all that would have been possible with the resources previously allocated. The records were chosen because they are the oldest, highest-level and most information rich records in the collection, covering 1969-2010s, and therefore a fantastic resource to understand the Company's journey since foundation.

Northern Ballet Background



Northern Ballet 50th Anniversary ft. Kevin Poeung, Mlindi Kulashe and Ommaira Kanga Perez. Photo Guy Farrow

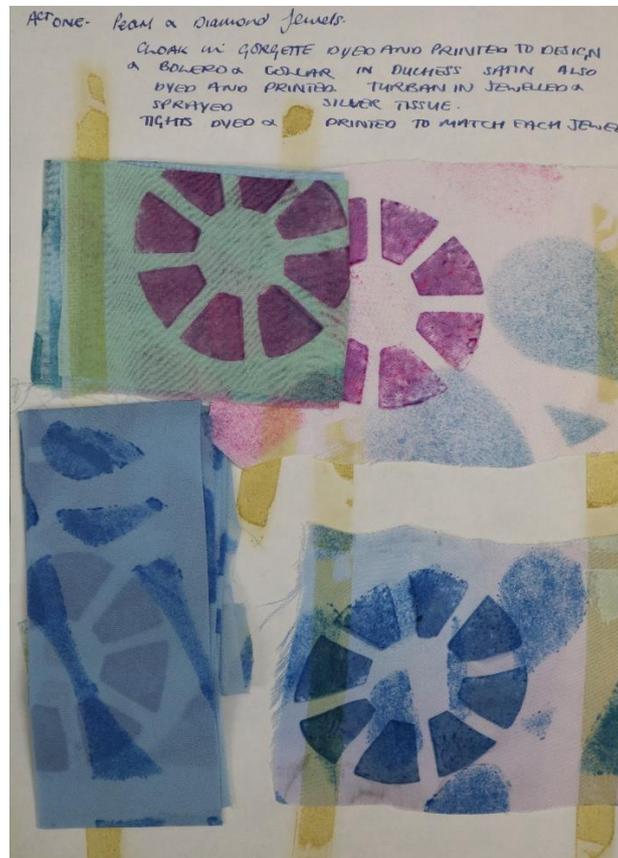
Northern Ballet was established in Manchester in 1969 and over the past 50 years has grown from humble beginnings to become a national and international leader in dance and live theatre. The Company is renowned for creating full length narrative ballets taking inspiration from an eclectic mix of classical dance, theatre and literature to develop new and original productions and to create new interpretations of popular classical ballets, to appeal to as many people as possible. Northern Ballet is the busiest touring ballet Company in the UK and last year toured eight productions to 38 different venues nationwide reaching audiences of over 136,000.

Under the leadership of current Artistic Director, David Nixon OBE, the Company moved to new purpose-built facilities in Leeds City Centre in 2010, and for ten years has also been providing world class dance facilities for the local community and a home for the Academy of Northern Ballet, the leading centre of excellence for dance in the North of England.

Northern Ballet Archive

Northern Ballet's archive comprises institutional records and personal collections of the Company. The collections tell the story of Northern Ballet from foundation to the present, covering a period of five Artistic Directors, four locations in Manchester, Halifax and Leeds and three Company names. The archive covers all aspects of the Company's activities, from its 200+ production repertoire to its dance training

Academy and Education work. There is a wealth of visual sources in photographs, posters, programmes, costume/set designs and audio-visual material. Central to the collection are the stories of the people who have worked within the Company, providing a rich history of the dancers, artists, composers, musicians, admin staff and guest artists, some of whom are icons in their own right, such as Russian dancer Rudolf Nureyev.



'Aladdin' Wardrobe file (1974)

Volunteers and Support

One of the rewarding aspects of this project has been the involvement of more volunteers than originally planned and matching their differing skills, knowledge and interests to the project. The original plan was for Northern Ballet's archive group, made up of four long-standing volunteers who have been following the Company for a combined total of over 150 years, to weed and repackage the records. However, shortly after the project began, a part-time Northern Ballet Academy Pastoral staff member, Alex, expressed an interest in gaining archive work experience.

Having one volunteer dedicated to the project was very efficient – Alex was able to work alongside the Archive and Records Manager in an existing office space with access to IT equipment. It also allowed for more flexible and frequent volunteering compared to the existing group, which had relied on pre-booking a larger space once a month.

Alex's skills and interest in ballet history and archives as a profession made her very suitable for this cataloguing project. Alex was therefore given orientation to the

project and training in archive cataloguing principles and Northern Ballet’s collection management software, Modes. Alex used existing repertoire information, such as premiere years and choreographers’ names, to add key facts about the productions to the Administration Production Files catalogue entries. This was very helpful because Northern Ballet has multiple versions of key productions, for instance, four productions of ‘Cinderella’ choreographed by successive Artistic Directors, and these versions need to be uniquely identified within the catalogue. Alex also numbered and re-boxed all the repackaged Production Files, inputted low-level data such as extents and box locations, and double-checked that data copied from existing finding aids matched up to the Modes catalogue entries.

NB REPertoire PRODUCTION		NB WORLD / COMPANY		WOR	
NUMBER	PRODUCTION NAME	PREMIERE DATE	FIRST NB PERFORMANCE VENUE, PLACE		CHOREOGRAPHER
30	Cinderella	24.1.1973	Forum Theatre, Billingham	WP	Laverne Meyer (Company founder & Artistic Director)
125	Cinderella	9.1993		WP	Christopher Gable (3rd Artistic Director); Rachel Lopez
175	Cinderella	12.2013		WP	David Nixon (5th Artistic Director)
206	Cinderella - Fireside Duet	04.01.2020	Leeds Grand Theatre, Leeds	n/a	Christopher Gable (3rd Artistic Director)
89	Cinderella (Aschenbrödel)	12.1979		WP	Robert de Warren (2nd Artistic Director)

Repertoire screenshot: 'Cinderella'

The long-standing volunteer group also received an orientation to the project but rather than repackaging the files, the archivist focussed on creating a two way dialogue: sharing her cataloguing findings, such as references to never performed or little known productions, and harnessing their detailed knowledge of ballet and the Company repertoire, to put the productions in context and allow a richer understanding and interpretation of the material. The group’s wealth of anecdotal knowledge and sharing of memories brought the records to life and helped make connections with other material in the archive. For example, we have written records regarding Northern Ballet’s response to the Arts Council’s threat of closure in the late 1980s, but the volunteers also vividly described the then Artistic Director, Christopher Gable, pleading to audiences after shows to support the Company’s campaign against this decision.

In addition, the project benefitted from cataloguing input from Northern Ballet and Leeds University Library’s shared ‘Bridging the Digital Gap’ funded archive trainee, Marco, who works at Northern Ballet one day a week. Once the archivist had appraised the material and created a catalogue structure, Marco repackaged the Board of Directors Subject Files and created their file level entries and descriptions. Taking part in this project benefitted Marco’s development, allowing him hands-on experience, under the archivist’s supervision, of catalogue arrangement and description: “As a newcomer to the archive sector, the task of repackaging and cataloguing the NB Board papers has given me the chance to learn on the job about some crucial aspects of working in a company archive,” Marco, March 2020.

Northern Ballet Threatened With Closure

Dear Ballet Lover,

If you have enjoyed any performance by Northern Ballet Theatre, *please may we ask for your help*. In 1988 the Arts Council commissioned a report to consider the future of dance in England. The completed report effectively recommends that funding should be withdrawn from Northern Ballet, which would mean the closure of the Company.

This suggestion is not made on artistic grounds. *Northern Ballet refuses to accept such a recommendation.*

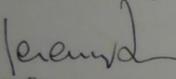
- NBT is led by Christopher Gable whose plans for the future include a collaboration with the Bolshoi Ballet, a ballet based on a scenario by Ken Russell, a new work by Gillian Lynne and a new ballet about Nijinsky filmed for the South Bank Show.
- NBT is an exciting company of young, vital artists who are developing into a unique group of actor dancers.
- NBT is the only major dance company based outside London.
- NBT performs at a dramatically lower subsidy per seat than any other leading touring dance company. The most recent available statistics reveal:

Subsidy per seat 1986/87 (Arts Council and Local Authority)

Festival Ballet	Royal Ballet	Sadlers Wells Royal Ballet	London Contemporary Dance Theatre	Ballet Rambert	NBT
£11.78	£17.16	£13.15	£10.43	£10.47	£5.55

If you want Northern Ballet to survive please tell the Arts Council by writing to Luke Rittner, the Secretary General. If you don't have the time to write, please complete the postcard below. We ask you to buy the stamp.

Northern Ballet will also shortly launch an appeal. Any donations will be much appreciated and should be sent to me at the address at the top of this sheet.



Jeremy Fry,
Board Member and Campaign Director

ROYAL PATRON:
HRH THE PRINCESS MARGARET
COUNTESS OF SNOWDON

11 ZION CRESCENT, HULME WALK
MANCHESTER, M15 5BY
TELEPHONE: 061-226 3309
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nbt
NORTHERN
BALLET
THEATRE

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR: CHRISTOPHER GABLE

'Northern Ballet Threatened with Closure' [1989]

The Project

The aims of the project were to appraise, repackage and catalogue two series of Governance and Administrative papers.

Governance

These records comprised minutes and subject file papers created by the Company's Board of Directors. The sub-series of Board minutes, beginning with the first Board meeting in 1969, would be the go-to records to save in the event of a disaster as they contain most of the Company's official history in just four boxes. A large proportion of the Board Subject Files were personal papers of two former Chairs of the Board, Sir Simon Towneley and Bernard Atha CBE.

Sir Simon Towneley was the Company's original chairman and Bernard Atha was instrumental in bringing Northern Ballet from Halifax to Leeds in the 1990s and advocating for "The Project" (as he called it) to build a centre of excellence for dance and education in the North of England. Bernard Atha's dreams became reality in 2010 when Northern Ballet and Phoenix Dance Theatre moved into a shared headquarters and dance centre.



Capital funding application (2002)

This whole series is rich with information about the Company's original vision and subsequent adaptations and how it has time and time again evolved in response to crises such as fires, floods, Arts Council and local government funding cuts and potential mergers with larger London based companies.

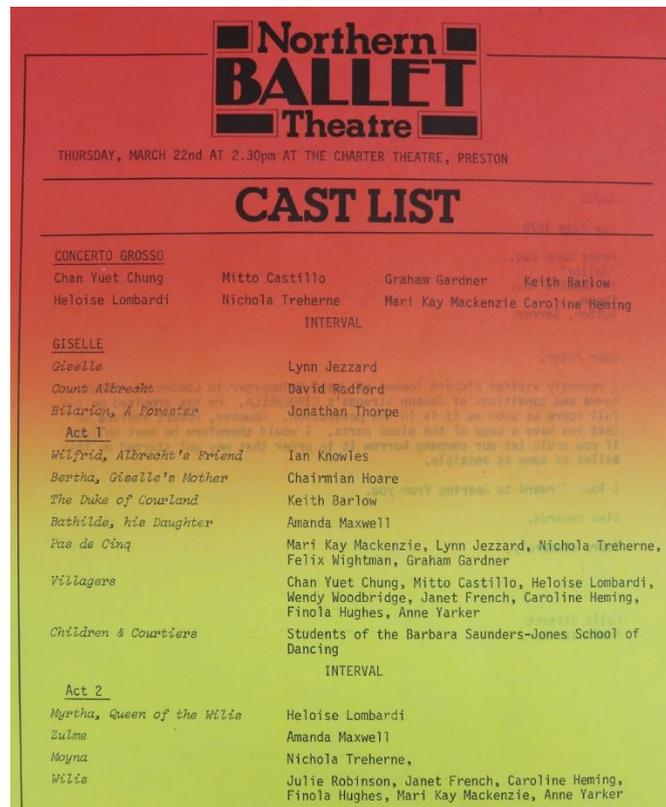
Administrative

These comprised a small number of Chief Executive's papers, with the bulk being almost one hundred Production Files, covering short-run ballets from Northern Ballet's first month of existence to internationally toured classics such as 'Romeo and Juliet'. Some files, particularly those from the Company's infancy, are minimal and consist of one information sheet, whilst others cover all elements of the production – from conception and research, to finance, design, casting as well as notes by former Artistic Directors who originally created some of the files.

QUANTITY	DESCRIPTION AND REFERENCE
✓ 3	"Alice in Wonderland" Flamingoes, rigid
✓ 1	Flamingo, very rubbery
⑧ 4	Hedgehogs
⑨ 2	Playing Card costumes
✓ 1	Spare Playing Card costume
② 1	Cheshire Cat & Pig inflatable balloons, including experimental work -
✓ 1	Gas cylinder
✓ 1	Reducing valve
① 3	To modifying Jack in Box boxes
3	Cheshire Cat Jack in Boxes } - 197.50. ←
1	March Hare Jack in Box
1	Dormouse Jack in Box
1	Knave of Hearts Jack in Box
1	Flamingo Jack in Box
1	Mad Hatter Jack in Box

'Alice in Wonderland' props order (1983)

There were unexpected surprises whilst cataloguing - as well as suggestions for and files about never made ballets ('Tom Jones'...), many of the 1970s-1980s files consist of reused paper, so you may be reading a letter about the suggested 'Aladdin' composer on the back of the job description for Northern Ballet's first Press Officer or casting for 'The Nutcracker'. In this way, we found key information about 'Fu' (1984), a production inspired by Chinese traditional drama, for which barely anything was known about or recorded.



Reused paper example

Interestingly, it was also evident from the records that from its early years the Company was consciously keeping and sometimes proactively collecting material from the public for its "archives".

In parallel with the cataloguing, data from the records was inputted into the Excel based stage and screen repertoire, detailing key production information such as the names and roles of creatives and the exact dates and locations of premieres. Interesting or unusual material, be it costume sketches or lists of working production titles, was scanned or photographed too.

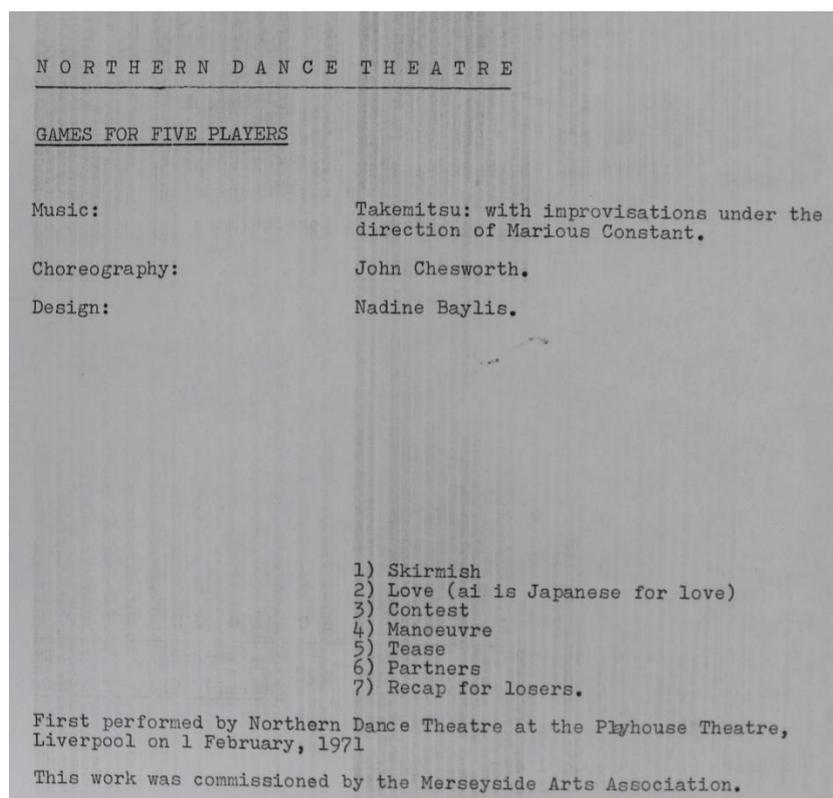
Key Outcomes and Impact

The key goal, to catalogue the Company's Governance and Administrative records in detail at file level, is complete. Conservation issues, such as damage from metal pins fastening loose textile samples to paper, have been identified and priorities made for future conservators. The detailed repertoire is already a useful internal finding aid and can be made available via the catalogue to aid research and cross-referencing. The records will be transferred to Leeds University Library imminently, marking an

exciting first step in making Northern Ballet's previously unseen history available to researchers and the public. Now that the collection is catalogued, it will complement Leeds University Library's performance archives and fill a regional and national gap in the history of dance theatre.

Knowledge gleaned from cataloguing has supported strategic sharing of archive material in 50th anniversary related press, programmes, exhibitions and events, enhancing the Company's celebrations. It has also supported twice monthly 'From the Archive' social media posts – most recently a photograph of 'Strange Meeting', after the poem by Wilfred Owen, was shared for World Poetry Day. Posts like this are generating interest in aspects of the Company's history which previously were overlooked.

Information in the records, such as the names of dancers in the 1969 salary book, was used to aid anniversary related research, notably tracing the Company's original 11 dancers, with a view to inviting them to an alumni 50th celebration in December 2020. One of the original dancers visited Northern Ballet where we filmed her with archive material talking about the Company's foundation and first season. Material for potential Education projects has been set aside; the Wardrobe and Technical records, for instance, are a rich resource for the study of changing working practices in the creative arts.



'Games for Five Players' information sheet (1971)

Next Steps

Once the transfer of the catalogue data and physical material is complete, the next step is to showcase the collection's potential, for instance, stimulating interest in its

academic research potential and exploring student learning opportunities via Leeds University Library's active Cultural Institute. Other next steps include pursuing existing academic contacts, using digitised material in Northern Ballet's social media posts and Google Arts & Culture galleries and profile raising within subject specialist networks such as APAC, the Association for Performing Arts Collections. We would once again like to express our sincere thanks to the Business Archives Council for their support and I hope this report demonstrates the full extent of what the grant has helped Northern Ballet to achieve.

Hari Jonkers
Archive & Records Manager

Northern Ballet
30 March 2020