

# Searching for theatrical ancestors (and more)

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The Searching for Theatrical Ancestors (STAR) website is a new freely available online resource bringing together 34,000 records. It was listed by BBC *Who Do You Think You Are* magazine as one of the top 50 websites to watch in 2017.

Launched at an event at the British Library, London (29 July 2016), the STAR website has been demonstrated to the public at the BBC *Who Do You Think You Are?* event at the NEC Birmingham (April 2017), the York Family History Fair (24 June 2017) and featured in *Family Tree* magazine (Oct 2017).

The project was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, led by Professor Katharine Cockin and supported by project partners, the British Library, the National Trust and the Federation of Family History Societies.

The STAR project has enhanced the AHRC Ellen Terry and Edith Craig Database (funded 2006-08), an online guide to one of the most significant UK theatre archives owned by the National Trust.

Ellen Terry (1847-1928) was one of the most famous performers of her day and particularly associated with her Shakespearian performances with Henry Irving and his Lyceum Theatre Company. Irving was assisted in business matters by Bram Stoker, the author known for his novel, *Dracula* (1897).

Over 20,000 documents are described in the AHRC Ellen Terry and Edith Craig database. This is a rich resource for research in many historical and cultural disciplines: theatre, art, women's suffrage and LGBTQ history. The photographs, letters, press cuttings and play programmes provide insights into nineteenth-century theatrical tours, travel and tourism as well as interwar amateur theatre, local civic pageants and Women's Institute activities.

Ellen Terry was married three times (to G. F. Watts, Charles Kelly and James Carew). She lived for nearly seven years with Edward Godwin, architect and designer, with whom she had two children: Edith Craig (1869-1947) and Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1960). Both

children became centrally involved in theatre but Edward Gordon Craig's designs and theories about the art of the theatre have achieved a place in theatre history. Edith Craig's prolific work as a director is still being rediscovered. New research findings on Craig's involvement in the women's suffrage movement and as a major figure in interwar lesbian history with her female partners, the author Christopher St John and the artist Clare (Tony) Atwood are to be found in Katharine Cockin's new biography, *Edith Craig and the Theatres of Art* (Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017).

These developments to the online resource have aimed to meet the needs of an existing and growing public community of users in the field of family history research as well as further benefiting academic communities.

Theatrical play programmes are designed to provide information for a specific event. Although some are bought as souvenirs, they will often be discarded. This kind of document usually falls into the category of 'ephemera'. However, for the family history researcher, these documents provide a rich source of data. Theatrical ancestors' names can be traced in cast lists but even ancestors who ran local businesses may be found in some play programmes which included adverts. In some cases there are so many adverts that it is hard to locate the cast list.

An attractive new interface invites users of the AHRC Ellen Terry and Edith Craig Database [www.ellenterryarchive.hull.ac.uk](http://www.ellenterryarchive.hull.ac.uk) to join the *Shakespeare Train* and take an online journey to trace the theatrical tours by Ellen Terry and the Lyceum Theatre in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Additional searchable data have been added to this online resource from digitized theatre programmes and links to relevant existing online external data sources (over 15,000 further records).

**[ellenterryarchive.hull.ac.uk/star](http://ellenterryarchive.hull.ac.uk/star)**

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