OFFSTAGE LABOUR

*Actresses, charity work and the early twentieth-century
theatre profession*

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Though their stage performances often feature as the subjects of focused attention, early twentieth-century actresses functioned as part of a wider theatre industry that was sustained by the non-theatrical social, material, consumer and economic cultures that surrounded it. In this context, the onstage performances offered by actresses of this period were just one element of more expansive, diverse professional repertoires that also included offstage public appearances and representations. Such offstage work, performed for a range of audience demographics in diverse, non-theatrical metropolitan spaces, was the source of considerable day-to-day labour for actresses and necessitated ongoing attention and responsive action. Nonetheless, the activities involved in offstage work rarely form the subject of scholarly focus and are regularly omitted from histories of the theatre. In this chapter I consider one particular area of early twentieth-century offstage labour: the numerous and demanding public appearances made by actresses in aid of charities. Focusing on a high-profile fundraising event that took place at the London department store Harrods in 1911, I offer such occasions as ways of both extending our holistic understandings of the stage profession of the day and acknowledging the multiple professional roles that actresses performed.

Charity work can be identified as a key feature of the gradual, uneven process of improvement in the theatre industry's social status that marked the nineteenth century. The stage's charitable reputation was firmly rooted in the late eighteenth century, but the 1880s and 1890s brought a paradigm shift in the types of charity activity that theatrical performers led and contributed to. Most notably, there was a clear increase in the expectation that stage performers, a professional body previously known primarily for their industry-based charitable activity

and benevolence, would consistently contribute to large-scale public fundraising events in aid of non-theatrical charities (Hindson, 2014; 2016). The end result was a significant change in the public, and publicised, face of theatre's charity work. While leading actors and actresses continued to govern the industry's own charitable bodies – including the Actors' Benevolent Fund, the Theatrical Ladies' Guild and the Actors' Orphanage Fund – and to support other philanthropic endeavours by organising performances or attending meetings, dinners and other networking events (Richards, 2005: 68), accounts indicate that the majority of high-profile charitable public appearance work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was undertaken by well-known actresses. By the 1880s theatre's leading ladies were organising and participating in year-round, crammed, professional calendars of bazaars, tea parties, garden parties, costume balls and fundraising shows (Hindson, 2016). As the twentieth century arrived, actresses had become an anticipated feature of the fashionable charity event, populating and representing fundraising occasions and modelling Britain's much-lauded charitable spirit.

The consequent increase in time and labour that theatrical performers expended on charitable work did not pass without question within the stage profession: professional appearances that supported non-theatrical charity activities became a site of intra-industry debate. While the mainstream press consistently celebrated the amount of charity work undertaken by stage personalities, theatrical trade publications repeatedly returned to and fuelled ongoing arguments about the professional ethics and practical challenges triggered by such labour. Two key issues were foregrounded: first, that charity work required performers to give a significant amount of their time and professional skills for free, and secondly that theatrical personalities were neglecting industry-based charities in favour of their non-theatrical fundraising work. The focal point of unpaid labour around which these arguments circulated was encapsulated by F. H. Madden's opinion piece 'Charity and the Drama', published by *The Theatre* in 1897, in which he argued that the drama had done 'more than is dreamt of for Charity', yet when the question 'what has charity done for the Drama is asked', the answer is 'nil'.¹ Madden's assertion captured anxieties about the logistical difficulties that charity work created for the industry and the sense of neglect of theatre's own causes that he identified in this shift of support. It also raised a pervasive question about whether giving their time and skills for free might devalue the work of theatrical professionals, and thus potentially impact

on the reputation and status of the stage and its personnel. What it failed to account for, however, was the positive, day-to-day reputational and publicity work that charity labour offered both individual performers and the theatre industry as a whole. Non-theatrical charity work was an area of high-profile public activity that promoted and endorsed the theatre industry. While the increased number, scale and spectacle of fundraising events during the 1880s and 1890s and into the early twentieth century reconfigured understandings of the fashionable, commercial stage and placed a new set of expectations on its performers, these occasions also took stage personalities outside of theatre spaces, showcased their polished public personalities to different audiences and widely publicised the stage's generosity and kindness through a different set of interactions between performers and spectators. This arena of public, and heavily publicised, labour, which was represented and dominated by actresses, simultaneously changed and became crucial to the wider theatrical ecology of the day.

The increasing demands that charity work placed on actresses' time and energy were considerably – and deliberately – less visible outside the columns of the trade press. Well-honed promotional strategies drawn from the fashionable consumer culture that theatre formed an active part of were central to the success of large-scale public charity events. Up to the outbreak of the First World War public charity was framed by a language of leisure and pleasure more than one of duty and labour. As competition in the charity events market increased, the promise of fundraising occasions as pleasurable, unique experiences, where participants were offered spectacle and leisure in return for their donations, became of increasing importance. Any focus on the labour of those involved in staging events detracted from this key dynamic and image. Thus, while actresses promoted and celebrated the fundraising occasions they supported, they rarely spoke publicly of the effort involved. Understanding the planning and detail of charity events is challenging: the work was hidden from the public; planning documents were not designed to be kept; evidence of the extent and types of managerial, performance and financial work such occasions incurred is scant.²

The consciously hidden nature of this history aligns such offstage activity with the area of enquiry called into focus by Osborne and Woodworth's recent study of backstage and production histories, in which they argue that 'theatre has long been an art form of subterfuge, concealment and illusion, and practicing artists often actively hide the work in the wings in order to foster a sense of theatrical magic' (Osborne

and Woodworth, 2015: 2). Actresses' charity contributions drew on a range of roles and identities intrinsically connected to their professional work and skill sets, but they also demanded a separate set of strategies, abilities and gendered practices that were distinct from onstage performance, yet crucial to the ongoing public favour that nourished their professional careers. Such work has consistently taken place offstage and been characterised by a skilfully constructed illusion of effortlessness and beauty: duty disguised as spectacle. Identifying and acknowledging public charity appearances as professional work that took place outside of theatre spaces and was entwined with cognate constructions of leisure and pleasure supplies a different lens through which we can explore the range of work and public roles demanded of actresses in the early twentieth-century theatre industry. It also invites a question about the extent to which offstage work was a fundamental element of successful actresses' professional careers. The remainder of this chapter considers one case study event – the Salon of Fragrance and Fair Women – staged

7 Publicity photograph for the 'Salon of Fragrance and Fair Women', 1911.

at Harrods department store in March 1911, and seeks to foreground the significance of these activities to the wider theatre industry and to actresses' professional identities.

The Harrods Salon, March 1911

In a large and daintily-decorated apartment, amid a luxurious display of the richest blooms the British gardener can produce, a bevy of beauty offered perfume to the shopping throng.³

The Harrods Salon of Fragrance and Fair Women was a week-long fundraising event that ran from 27 March to 1 April 1911, which offered shoppers the opportunity to buy perfume from well-known London actresses. Harrods had loaned a sale-room for the Salon free of charge, the scent had been donated by the Jersey-based company Luce & Co. and the actresses volunteered their time. Collectively, the fashionable London department store, the perfume producer and the theatrical personalities raised one thousand guineas for the Middlesex Hospital Prince Francis of Teck Memorial Fund.⁴ The contributions made by Harrods and Luce are more tangible than those made by the actresses. Gifting of space and product can be accounted for. They were also relatively low-resource actions: as we will see later, Harrods and Luce gained a considerable amount of recognition and publicity for their involvement, but the transactional costs remained low. Tracing and accounting for the labour of the actresses who volunteered at the event is less straightforward. Press accounts covering the fifty actresses recorded as being involved present them as both individual celebrities and as part of a collective group. Individual offstage appearances are highlighted in relation to actresses' public identities, and distinctive contributions to the overall 'bevy of beauty' offered in the Salon are described and celebrated. With the exception of the Salon's lead actress-organiser, Gertrude Robins (1886–1917), the labour incurred by the event is, however, almost entirely attributed to the collective group of performers. The work is constructed as a collective professional act. Press advertising and coverage does not offer information about when certain performers would be present. Neither Luce's nor Harrods' archives contain any planning documentation concerning the event, and extant correspondence between the actresses involved does not cover the event's logistics. The spectacle offered by offstage actresses and the possibility of being sold perfume by them is the sole source of the press's focus; the concealment of the work that created the event mirrors the

Photo by

MISS GERTRUDE ROBINS

Arthur Marshall, F.R.P.S.

The beautiful Actress-Dramatist, now playing with Mr. Granville Barker, Miss Lillah McCarthy's Season
at The Little Theatre

Organizer of "The Salon of Fragrance and Fair Women"

March 1911

8 Photograph of Gertrude Robins.

general pattern in press accounts (noted above), demarcating the labour as backstage work that enabled the on-/offstage performance.

The wider context within which the Salon of Fragrance and Fair Women was located further emphasises the concealment of actresses' labour by spectacle. The Salon was presented as a feature of 'All British Shopping Week', a nationwide promotional celebration of British manufacturing and commerce during which London's major West End shopping streets and stores attracted the greatest attention. Bunting and Union Jacks mapped out and decorated the capital's chief shopping thoroughfares, and spectacular window displays at Peter Robinson on Oxford Street, Liberty on Regent Street, Debenham and Freebody on Wigmore Street and John Barker of Kensington (among others) promoted British-made goods. One unidentified London store used its plate glass display windows to showcase the latest styles of straw hats, with several girls seated amidst them demonstrating the art of deftly plaiting straw.⁵ Such commercialised craft performances also found a home in Harrods, where lace-making, embroidery and hand weaving were 'executed by pretty Irish colleens in their national costumes', echoing the living displays of national cultures and empire that permeated London's exhibition culture.⁶ The promotion of British products provided an overarching theme for a week of commercial activities driven by spectacle, performance, publicity and financial opportunity. Harrods' charity Salon distinguished the store within London's up-market consumer culture by offering a space in which shopping was defined as simultaneously fashionable, patriotic and altruistic.

The Harrods Salon recycled a fundraising format grounded in the high-profile, celebrity-staffed charity bazaars that had dominated the landscape of nineteenth-century fundraising events. West End actresses had acted as saleswomen throughout the Victorian period, with their skills at selling regularly showcased at fundraising bazaars and fetes in concert halls and hotels. From the dramatic fetes staged in aid of the Royal Dramatic College in the late 1860s and 1870s, to spectacular charity bazaars in the Royal Albert Hall between the 1870s and 1890s, actresses including Julia Neilson, Maud Tree and Cora Brown Potter became renowned for being able to extricate exorbitant sums of money from bazaar-goers for simple items including roses, sweets and photographs. The celebrity interaction was presented as a justification for the inflated cost, with actresses enabling an economy of encounter that sustained and salvaged many late nineteenth-century charitable organisations. Though the popularity of bazaars had peaked and troughed, the public

appeal of the celebrity encounters they foregrounded remained a secure fundraising formula in 1911, and one that was repeatedly mined for charitable and promotional purposes. The promise that any purchase made at the Salon would be passed to the buyer by 'the hands of some of the most popular and lovely ladies of the British stage' proved a powerful draw.⁷ Writing later in the same year, the actress Marie Tempest recalled that five thousand bottles of perfume were sold over the five afternoons, while the *Evening Post's* coverage of the event recorded that most buyers went away with more bottles than they could comfortably carry.⁸ Buyers were not just purchasing for themselves, they were buying to distribute to others, performing their charity identity and participation in this fashionable fundraising event. The Salon was a complex site of cultural activity located at the intersections of theatrical, leisure, charity and consumer cultures and targeted at buyers with ample leisure time and expendable income. In return for their cash, shoppers were offered a fourfold experience: the opportunity to visibly support charity, meaningful participation in All British Shopping Week, the perfume, and the celebrity encounter.

Actresses playing shop girls

Connections between department stores, theatre and charity had been developed and strengthened during the early decades of the twentieth century, with Richard Burbidge and Gordon Selfridge, the managing directors of Harrods and Selfridges, regularly hosting charity events involving theatrical stars, and financing and dressing West End musical comedies as part of their ongoing self-promotional and strategic commercial activities (Rappaport, 2001: 179, 201). The two groups of professional women foregrounded in this hybrid activity – shop girls and actresses – came together in the act of selling as public charity duty in a space that Marlis Schweitzer has identified as the 'Department Store Theater', creating a new representational area that warrants brief consideration here (Schweitzer, 2011: 51–95). While actresses performing as charity saleswomen were a familiar sight at London's fashionable fundraising events, the shift of charity sales from concert halls and hotels to department stores was a relatively recent phenomenon. At the Harrods Salon this change in location was accompanied by a further modification to the conventions of charity sales: the perfume was sold at recommended retail price, making the celebrity experience seemingly free of charge. This decision to remove the anticipated celebrity encounter

mark-up was well received, with the *Evening Post* praising the fact that 'fancy prices' were not permitted at the event.⁹ The change had a clear impact on the roles played by the women involved. The 'actress/barterer' became the 'actress/shop girl', and the two professions were temporarily conflated on the sales floor in a new configuration of their already well-established connection in London's wider entertainment culture.

The 'shop girl' was a familiar metropolitan figure and a popular character type in the musical comedies of the mid-1890s and the Edwardian period (Bailey, 2003; Gundle and Castelli, 2006; Sanders, 2006; Rappaport, 2001). Harrods Salon, in 1911, was interwoven with this dominant imagery. The hugely successful musical comedy *Our Miss Gibbs*, which told the story of a shop girl, featured scenes at 'Garrods' department store and was part-financed by Richard Burbidge, had been staged at the Gaiety Theatre during the 1909–10 season. Actresses from its cast worked at the Salon. The charity space of the Salon thus simultaneously affirmed recent memories of the production and the women who starred in it, staging a distinct representation of actresses as shop girls in a public charity space. The hybridity of identities and role-playing here needs to be taken into account: like Garrods, the department store charity sale was a temporary, consciously constructed space that fused two sets of professional women in new ways and required that actresses perform. While Katherine Mullin's recognition that the representation of shop girls in media and the arts lays bare 'an understanding of shop-girls taking charge through capitalizing, sensibly, upon their own desirability' (Mullin, 2016: 110) can certainly be transposed on to dominant iconographic models of actresses, the appearance of actresses as shop girls in a charity context conflated, embodied and troubled current ideas about the two commercial leisure industries, as well as their personnel.

The presence of actresses in department stores as volunteer workers conjured a fluid area of visual culture and embodied practices. Women employed in both professions had triggered considerable social and moral anxieties, and as Erika Rappaport has noted, the reputation and meaning of shopping was the site of constant negotiation and remained 'by no means stable' (Rappaport, 2001: 143). Charity prompted further negotiations, as did the wider activities engaged in by both groups of professional women. One useful example can be discovered in the production of *The Suffrage Girl* at the Court Theatre in March 1911, where the cast featured Selfridges shop girls turned actresses. Actresses playing shop girls for charity presents us with a complicated and deeply unstable moment of social display and encounter that was further cemented

by the decision taken to begin charging admission to the Salon in the middle of the week in response to the event's popularity. Half way through the Salon, the economy of encounter returned. In line with London's other entertainment providers, charity event organisers had to continually respond to their market, adjusting, adapting and recasting the events they staged in dialogue with changing trends and societal conventions. Each event and individual participant must be considered within these factors.

Indefatigable women: actresses and hard work

While Richard Burbidge and Prince Alexander of Teck were nominally responsible for the Salon of Fragrance and Fair Women, the event was delivered by the 25-year-old, Oxford-educated actress-dramatist Gertrude Robins. Table 1 collates the names of thirty-nine of the estimated fifty actresses whom Robins recruited to support the event, alongside records of their most recent professional stage appearances and their ages (where evidence is available).¹⁰ The names of the remaining eleven or so actresses were not recorded by the press. I offer such detailed data here in the interest of generating a better understanding of the collective body of individual personalities that this – and many other – charity events offered. I will return to these other performers and questions shortly, for it is helpful to start with Robins, who was a well-known figure in the London theatrical world at the time of the Salon. Robins had come to the public's attention with her appearance as Lady Millicent Egginton in the 1907–08 Wyndham's Theatre production of Harriett Jay's comedy *When Knights Were Bold*, a leading role that followed an apprenticeship in Wilson Barrett's company.¹¹ By 1911 she was also becoming a well-known dramatist; her most recent stage play *Makeshifts* had been produced by Annie Horniman's company at the Coronet Theatre during February. Offstage Robins was a regular paid after-dinner speaker and was closely affiliated with the Actresses' Franchise League.¹² Charity work slotted into actresses' professional, offstage identities, forming part of a range of public and 'publicised-private' behaviours that attracted positive praise and interest from the press in the years around the Harrods event, and Robins supplies a clear example of this. In May 1913 the *Bystander* published a collage of images of Robins under the headline 'The Age of Versatility: One Crowded Hour in the Life of an Author-Actress'; the photographs included were labelled Mother, Airwoman, Author and Feeder of Geese.¹³ The text

accompanying a full-page image of Robins in the January 1915 edition of *Tatler* was entitled 'Variety is the Soul of Life: Actress, Playwright, Aviator, Farmer' and enthusiastically documented Robins's love of flying, farming and running the village pub that she owned, presenting these interests as evidence of an admirable predisposition for hard work.¹⁴ The image of actress as grafter is a familiar motif in the press of this period and one that was recognised by both actresses and the press as a key means of attracting and sustaining public favour. Hard work was an asset: in an interview with Robins entitled 'A Woman of the Day' published in 1911, the journalist Eleanor Armstrong concluded that the actress was 'indefatigable' and was 'not in the least spoiled by her success for she can never forget the amount of drudgery and hard work that went to make it, and she also knows that only by hard work can a hold be maintained upon the public'.¹⁵ While the specifics of the work actresses undertook at charity events were not the subject of press commentary, a common understanding that they were working hard permeated the public image of the profession created by journalists and social commentators.

Charity work might rarely have been publicly acknowledged as 'work', but it is clear that most actresses balanced regular participation in such events with their current theatrical engagements (see Table 1), and that offstage activities were recognised and treated positively in representations and reports of their professional identities. Versatility and variety were indeed both celebrated and a professional expectation. Robins juggled the coordination of the Salon with her role in a short run in the Little Theatre production of Harley Granville-Barker's dialogue *Ask No Questions and You'll Hear No Stories* (an adaptation of one of Arthur Schnitzler's Anatol series, staged between 11 and 25 March 1911), which closed two days before the Harrods event opened (Carson, 1912: 142). Such ability to multi-task appears to have been an assumed skill for early twentieth-century actresses, yet – unlike the enthusiastic attention paid to her flying and farming – the extent of Robins's charity-based managerial labour was not the subject of press commentary, signalling that this was an area of assumed, not unusual, activity. Such labour was an expectation of actresses, not a celebrity quirk that strengthened and distinguished the offstage public identity of a particular familiar stage performer. Its presence was assumed and unspoken. Nonetheless, Robins's role in organising the Salon was widely acknowledged in other contexts. Her name appears on the frontispiece page of the souvenir publication produced to mark the occasion and the majority of press

No. 604, JANUARY 22, 1913.

THE TATLER

VARIETY IS THE SOUL OF LIFE

Actress, Playwright, Aviator, Farmer.

MISS GERTRUDE ROBINS

Elwin Neame

The above charming snapshot shows Miss Gertrude Robins, the well-known actress, who played so charmingly in "Officer 666." Miss Robins while in her teens took honours in modern languages at Oxford; then she went on the stage, and achieved her first success with Mr. James Welch in "When Knights were Bold." Since that time she has played lead with Mr. Granville Barker and written many successful one-act plays. Her curtain-raiser, "Makeshifts," is shortly to be toured in America, while "Pot Luck," Miss Robins's light-hearted village comedy at the Palace, brought a breath of Buckinghamshire to Shaftesbury Avenue. When not acting or writing plays her activities range from aviation to small farming. Gliding—not à la Gaby but à la Grahame-White—is among her hobbies. She is also the owner of the Leather Bottle, a delightful old-time hostelry that for centuries

9 'Variety is the Soul of Life: Actress, Playwright, Aviator', *Tatler*,
January 1915, p. 117.

Table 1 Actresses recorded as having contributed to the 'Salon of Fragrance and Fair Women'

Name	Dates	Where performing around the time of the Salon	Age
Maud Allan	1873–1956	Palace Theatre of Varieties	38
Pearl Aufrere	1894–1940		17
Adrienne Augard	1882–1913		29
Phylliss Bedells	1893–1985	Empire Theatre Company member	18
Chrissie Bell	?	Adelphi Theatre, <i>Quaker Girl</i> , 5 November 1910–11 May 1912	
Stephanie Bell	1900–47	Duke of York's Theatre, <i>Peter Pan</i> , closed 4 February 1911	11
Lilian Braithwaite	1873–1948	Comedy Theatre, <i>Preserving Mr Panmure</i> , 19 January–15 April 1911	38
Nell Carter	1887–1965	Playhouse, <i>One of the Dukes</i> , 18–29 March 1911	24
Dolly Castles	1884–1971	Drury Lane Theatre, <i>Jack and the Beanstalk</i> , closed 8 March 1911	27
Pauline Chase	1885–1962	Duke of York's Theatre, <i>Peter Pan</i> , 26 December 1910–4 February 1911	26
Ivy Lilian Close	1890–1968		21
Laura Cowie	1892–1969	Her Majesty's Theatre Company	19
Cicely Courtneidge	1893–1980	Shaftesbury Theatre, <i>The Arcadians</i>	18
Phyllis Dare	1890–1975	Gaiety Theatre, <i>Peggy</i> , 4 March–16 December 1911	21
Constance Drever	1880–1948	Lyric Theatre, <i>A Chocolate Soldier</i> , 10 September 1910–9 December 1911	31
Clara Evelyn	1886–1980	Vaudeville Theatre, <i>The Girl in the Train</i>	25
Madge Fabian	1880–1958	Drury Lane Theatre, <i>Sins of Society</i>	31
Audrey Ford	1873–?	Touring, <i>When Knights Were Old</i>	37
Gladys Guy	1888–1968	Gaiety Theatre, <i>Peggy</i> , 4 March–16 December 1911	23
Gloria Hamilton	?		
Elvira Hardinge	?		
Iris Hoey	1885–1979	Criterion Theatre, <i>Baby Mine</i> , 22 February–13 May 1911	26
Ola Humphrey	1884–1948	Strand Theatre, <i>The Man from Mexico</i> , closed 21 January 1911	27
Marie Lohr	1890–1975	Comedy Theatre, <i>Preserving Mr Panmure</i> , 19 January–15 April 1911	21

Name	Dates	Where performing around the time of the Salon	Age
Mabel Love	1874–1953	Pavilion and Metropolitan Music Hall appearances throughout February	37
Doris Lytton	1893–1953	Prince of Wales's Theatre, <i>Inconstant George</i> , 1 October 1910–8 April 1911	18
Olive May	1886–1947	Gaiety Theatre, <i>Peggy</i> , 4 March–16 December 1911	25
Lillah McCarthy	1875–1960	Little Theatre, Manager, <i>A Farewell Supper</i> , closed 25 March 1911; <i>A Master Builder</i> , 28 March 1911	36
Nancy More	1881–1976	Gaiety Theatre, <i>Peggy</i> , 4 March–16 December 1911	30
Unity More	1894–1981	Empire Theatre, <i>Ship Ahoy!</i> (ballet), had also 'commèred' revue in February (George Grossmith)	17
Gabrielle Ray	1883–1973	Gaiety Theatre, <i>Peggy</i> , 4 March–16 December 1911	28
Gertrude Robins	1886–1917	Little Theatre, <i>Ask No Questions</i> , closed 25 March 1911	25
Dorothy Selbourne	?	Gaiety Theatre, <i>Peggy</i> , 4 March–16 December 1911	
Nina Sevening	1885–1958	Wyndhams, <i>Passers-by</i> , opened 29 March 1911	26
Lily Sheppard	?		
Connie Stuart	?	Gaiety Theatre, <i>Peggy</i> , 4 March–16 December 1911	
Madge Titherage	1887–1961	Globe, <i>Bardely the Magnificent</i> 21 February–8 April 1911	24
Rosalie Toller	1885–1960	Lyceum Theatre, <i>The Prisoner of Zenda</i> , 1 March–20 May 1911	26
Jessie Winter	1885–1971	London Hippodrome, <i>The Right Sort</i> , 20–27 February 1911	26

reports and accompanying images noted her active involvement in the management of the event (see Figure 8).

Robins did not work alone at the Harrods Salon, but was supported by a group of actresses who embodied current theatrical celebrity.

Collectively, the actresses represented a wide range of performance styles and professional backgrounds, from the fashionable music hall stage and West End musical comedy, to romantic ballet and opera. Robins was one of the few performers present who was not affiliated with musical comedy in some way, along with Lillah McCarthy, who was managing the Little Theatre and had also appeared in the recent run of her husband Harley Granville-Barker's short plays. Some onstage performance networks are clearly visible among the participants in this event. Phyllis Dare, Gladys Guy, Olive May, Nancy More, Gabrielle Ray, Dorothy Selborne and Connie Stuart were all in the cast of the Gaiety Theatre's musical comedy *Peggy*, which ran from 4 March to 16 December 1911. The show had opened just over three weeks before the Salon, but was already proving popular with reviewers and audiences, reflecting and extending the fashionable Gaiety brand and adding to the theatre's familiar programme of long-running productions. All seven actresses would have worked at the Salon on one or several afternoons, making the journey from Knightsbridge to the West End to perform in the evening. The two o'clock opening time selected for the Salon not only responded to current fashionable shopping patterns, it also enabled actresses to secure some rest before a working day that involved two separate jobs. The Salon would also have brought together women who had not performed together onstage, creating and facilitating new professional and social networks, the influence and impact of which remain untraceable and intangible, but are unlikely to have been negligible.

Among the actresses' names listed in Table 1 are some that are instantly familiar to those interested in this period of theatre, while others are far less so. Many of the actresses recorded here have been of little sustained interest to scholars, or are entirely absent from our considerations of the theatre industry of the day. Countering their disappearance from history are the archived biographical files in the Mander and Mitchenson Collection. Here there are some 1,500 archive boxes filled with files of clippings, programmes, photographs, postcards and correspondence connected to eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century stage performers, theatres, organisations and performance forms that were collected by Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson. Each actress listed here has a file in the collection, though their contents vary considerably – some contain three or four items, others are filled to overflowing with images, clippings and letters. It is not always the case that the performers who are the easiest to trace today are the same performers whose folders are replete with items. Pearl Aufrere is a good example of an actress

whose cultural presence has faded with history, but whose familiarity to local, national and international audiences of the day is evidenced by the number of photographic prints and postcards of her that were manufactured – in excess of 150 different images can be found in her Mander and Mitchenson file alone. Mander and Mitchenson's active collecting period began in the mid-twentieth century, three or four decades after the time at which the majority of these images were produced. The availability of this number of postcards and photographs suggests that Pearl Aufrere's reputation had a degree of longevity. Their survival is perhaps the visual equivalent of the nostalgia for the early twentieth-century London stage captured in works by star-struck stage chroniclers who were writing as Mander and Mitchenson were collecting; most prominently that most 'wistful remembrancer' Walter MacQueen Pope. As Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow have argued, while the narratives offered by MacQueen Pope, including *Gaiety: Theatre of Enchantment* (1949) and *Carriages at Eleven: The Story of the Edwardian Theatre* (1947), present historiographical challenges, they also offer a different way in to understanding the theatre industry, its personnel and its fans (Davis and Emeljanow, 2001). Different narratives concerning the actresses who had currency, familiarity and appeal during the pre-war period are similarly indicated by the Mander and Mitchenson files and events such as the Salon, a position that is further supported by the *Sketch's* publication of a 'frieze' of forty leading actresses in the month following the Harrods' event.¹⁶ Just over a quarter of those featured by the *Sketch* participated in the Salon.¹⁷ Moreover, sixteen of the actresses involved had entries in the 1912 edition of *Who's Who in the Theatre*, with a further seven gaining an entry by the 1922 edition (Parker, 1912; 1922).

The incremental number of women included in the 1922 *Who's Who* indicates the relatively young average age of the actresses involved in the Harrods Salon. By the second decade of the twentieth century the arena of public charity work was very much the domain of young and beautiful female representatives from the stage, a step change in itself from the late Victorian phase of the theatre industry's wider public charity work, when older actresses including Mrs Keeley and Mrs Bancroft led events, showcasing their more dominant matriarchal personae and managing the group of younger actresses who worked alongside them. The Salon is also notable for the considerable number of recently minted theatrical celebrities involved: many of the performers who contributed had just discovered fame. Constance Drever's vocal performance as Nadina in *The Chocolate Soldier*, which had opened at the Lyceum Theatre in

September 1910 (and closed in December 1911), was the role that her *Bulletin* obituary identified as the one that brought her 'international fame';¹⁸ Doris Lytton had 'sprung to fame' in the Prince of Wales's Theatre production of *Inconstant George* (which had opened in October 1910),¹⁹ and Olive May had stepped up to cover the musical theatre star Gertie Millar's absence from the popular musical comedy *Our Miss Gibbs* at the Gaiety in 1910, the production financed in part by Harrods and set in a department store (Rappaport, 2001: 179). By the time of Millar's return May had become so popular with audiences that instead of returning to her place in the Irish Girl chorus, she was given the role of Lady Elizabeth Thanet, and her own song, which quickly became the hit of the show.²⁰ Read together, this information indicates that high-profile charity appearances formed a part of the mechanism of pre-war celebrity culture, offering a means through which actresses could consolidate and sustain their fame that reached across a wide range of performance styles and entertainment forms. Involvement in public charity work brought a set of professional and personal returns for actresses that bear consideration within the wider commercial benefits offered by such occasions.

The tangible and intangible benefits of public charity activity and appearances

Harrods' and Luce's material and spatial contributions to the Salon brought a clear set of widely acknowledged returns in relation to publicity and brand awareness. The issue of *Chemist and Druggist* published the week before the Salon dedicated a column to the event, noting that the perfume on sale at Harrods was likely to sell quickly *and* that 'the effect upon the popularity of the perfume should be felt by retailers generally'.²¹ The contact details for Luce's London distributors were published at the end of the article, priming suppliers to place their orders and bolstering the Salon's commercial opportunity. Later in the year, the actress Marie Tempest's chatty piece for the *Daily Mail* on what she would be buying her friends and family for Christmas noted, 'I believe Luce's name has been a household synonym for Eau de Cologne for many years, but somehow I did not discover it until last Spring at Harrods's Salon of Fragrance and Fair Women.' Praise for the 'public spirited' firm followed, detailing how the perfumer had also supplied scent free of charge for the perfumed fountains at the 1911 Crystal Palace Festival of Empire and Fair of Fashions.²² By selecting this product for her Christmas gifts,

Tempest aligned Harrods, Luce, actresses and herself as an actress with charitable activity, quality products and British national identity.

Tempest is not recorded as having participated in the event: she would have been a featured participant had she been there, so it is reasonable to conclude that she was not involved. Nonetheless, through this article she weaves herself into the story of the Salon, using her own professional identity as a renowned actress. The article functions as a rich and skilled piece of celebrity construction that positions the Salon of Fragrance and Fair Women within a wider network of celebrity, fashion and consumer culture. Tempest thus benefits from the charity activity of her professional colleagues. The *Chemist and Druggist's* confident prediction that sales of Luce's perfume would increase as a result of the Harrods Salon offers a helpful way to consider the more intangible set of benefits such events brought to the theatrical profession, some of which we can trace here in Tempest's piece for the *Daily Mail*. While we cannot track supply and sales as straightforwardly in terms of the benefits charity work brought to the stage profession, the clearly established and acknowledged economics of charity signalled here, coupled with Tempest's article, allows us to conclude that public appearances in aid of charity would have brought a set of positive returns for both the industry and its personnel.

The significance of public appearances to actresses' careers increased as the forces of international mass celebrity accelerated during the early years of the twentieth century. Fuelled by the fast-advancing media industries, the celebrity press coverage that had characterised the late Victorian period increased, and gossip columns thrived, as public interest in, and access to, the period's favourite stars was further fuelled by the more regular use of film newsreels to circulate celebrity stories of the moment (Weiner, 2011). The position of theatre's stars as public figures of interest in their own right expanded. Textual and pictorial reports in newspapers and magazines focused on where celebrities had been, who they had been with and what they were wearing at a level of almost obsessive detail. Socialising in select fashionable circles attracted further press coverage, increasing day-to-day familiarity for their many audiences. Coverage of theatrical celebrities' offstage activities regularly equalled and frequently exceeded the attention given to their onstage professional appearances. Indeed, the amount of newsprint given over to the offstage domestic lives and social engagements of stage celebrities indicates that they were understood to be a site of unceasing interest to many early twentieth-century readers, across a wide range

of publications from the *Sketch*, the *Sphere* and the *Illustrated London News* to the *Daily Mail*, the *Penny Illustrated Paper* and the *Daily Telegraph*.

Such fame was recognised and negotiated among the profession. One typed response to a letter from Lilian Braithwaite to an unidentified Mr Jones offers a rare example of actresses' thoughts around such celebrity:

Popularity is such a desirable and gratifying asset that I think it would be, perhaps ungrateful to quality it [*sic*] by ascribing to it penalties!! Implying, as it does, appreciation, I think one should accept it when it comes! With gratitude. Yours sincerely, Lilian Braithwaite.²³

There are two areas of interest here. The first is the letter's content and particularly Braithwaite's discursive tone; she responds to a seemingly prevalent tendency to resent the outcomes of fame in her reference to the penalties that it incurs. The second is the materiality of the letter itself – the underlined words here identify Braithwaite's handwritten additions to a typed letter that might well have been produced by the actress's personal assistant, of whom there were a growing number in this period. Braithwaite's annotations stamp the formal, typed response with her own personality, giving the letter a tone and expression that creates the semblance of the personal touch, so key to the construction of celebrity/public interactions (Rojek, 2001). The letter functions as a small example, representative of a larger, more fundamental set of practices that created and nourished celebrity identity, which included actresses' public charity work.

Appearing before the public in strategically chosen offstage roles was a key element of a celebrity career. In a 1911 interview, *Salon of Fragrance* and *Fair Women* actress-seller Pauline Chase praised British audiences for their loyal quality of 'never forget[ing] you when you make good' and noted that their American counterparts understood professional success as a 'momentary flash in the pan, unless you keep playing good parts you are soon forgotten'.²⁴ Chase's carefully constructed response to British readers not only evidences her skill at self-(re)presentation, but indicates a knowledge of the need for continual presence in the public eye that most likely applied to her British career as well. Charity activities were professional acts akin to the processes of self-fashioning and self-publicity that were central to press interviews, to autobiographies and to photographic images, and they were well understood by theatrical celebrities. Looking closely at a range of publications from the first two weeks of March 1911, it is clear that, with the exception of one individual, each

of the actresses who worked at the Harrods Salon and were in the cast of *Peggy* at the Gaiety Theatre attracted more press attention for their involvement in the Salon than they did for the show. The exception was Phyllis Dare, the Gaiety's current leading lady. The Salon is representative: working at a bazaar or ball or garden party invariably resulted in a name-drop for an actress, often accompanied by a visual image. For well-known actresses who had not yet reached the ranks of the leading lady, the press coverage received through their work for charity events often exceeded that accorded in theatre reviews in the non-specialist press (Hindson, 2016). Leading ladies' ongoing contribution to such occasions signals the multiple benefits offered by public charity appearances; press coverage was valuable, but the construction and endorsement of public identity remained of significance to those who had reached the pinnacle of public favour and fame.

The offstage charity performances that Pauline Chase and others offered at the Harrods Salon and at other fashionable fundraising events are, without doubt, interwoven with questions related to autobiographical strategies, the significance of anecdotal evidence to historiography and the construction of public selves which have preoccupied feminist theatre historiographers over the past two decades (see Gale and Gardner, 2004). Photographs, interviews and gossip columns allowed theatre's stars to offer tantalising glimpses of their 'offstage' selves at closed social occasions, including dinner parties, house parties and salons, and at public events including gallery openings, bazaars and festivals. Similarly, interviews and autobiographies presented the seemingly 'personal' transmission of knowledge about the celebrity to the reader (see Maggie B. Gale's chapter in this volume). The offstage 'exclusive' moments of access to the 'authentic' performer behind her onstage roles that these celebrity charity events and products appeared to offer were, in practice, carefully choreographed, *staged* events that temporarily enabled controlled moments of interaction between the actress 'herself' and the public. Charity work built on these foundations, but was a distinct area of public appearance that offered access to the embodied star in the same space as the participant; not across the footlights, but in the room. Faye Hammil has argued that the mass-reproduced photographs of female personalities that became available in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fuelled the reader's or viewer's desire for the 'in-person' encounter with the star: the spectre of familiarity created by the ownership or sight of multiple images created an appetite for personal interaction (Hammil, 2009: 107). Public charity appearances offered a temporary space in which the possibility

of the 'in-person' encounter was increased, and created and sustained an economics of encounter grounded in the dynamics of wider celebrity culture and its products.

Actresses' offstage appearances replicated, constructed and challenged professional and culturally embedded and embodied modes of public performance. They were delivered to audiences ranging from one to hundreds, and then transmitted to numerous other audiences, including other attendees at the event in question, passers-by observing the event but not participating in it, the press whose role was to document and construct the event and its celebrities for readers and viewers, and those learning of the event through press coverage, conversation with a participant, or anecdote. Managing this area of activity and its immediate and extended reception was a complex professional task that demanded a constant process of skilled negotiation between stars and their various (extra-theatrical) audiences. Such events should caution us to look amid the multiple public roles that actresses were playing in order to understand the professional contexts that they worked within and the range of offstage identities they adopted. Charity work occupied a range of complex, public, professional spaces that required specific working practices and skills. The profile of fundraising events and the centrality of actresses to their operation signal that we need to register and address the entangled, multiple, sometimes simultaneous stagings of professional identities that actresses offered in their day-to-day working lives, and balance our considerations of their on- and offstage work. As the actress-seller at the Harrods Salon Cicely Courtneidge later recounted, when advised by a friend to deal with a public-speaking engagement by telling funny stories and being herself: 'What is myself? The character I'm portraying on stage at the moment – or the me, entertaining you here? I dunno.'²⁵ Acknowledging the range of characters created and harnessed by actresses enables a fuller understanding of the operation of the theatre industry, the skills that fostered and sustained a successful theatrical career and the multiple roles that women occupied within the profession.

Notes

- 1 F. Madden, 'Charity and the Drama', *The Theatre*, February 1897, p. 87.
- 2 Evidence of some events can be discovered in the archives of charitable organisations (see Hindson, 2016). For the event covered in this chapter

there is a small amount of material in the Harrods archives and the Luce and Company archives. Together these items amount to copies of press reports, souvenir publications, photographs and transcripts of correspondence sent to Prince Alexander of Teck that present the final sum raised.

- 3 'All-British Shopping Week: Successful Opening', *Daily Telegraph*, 28 March 1911, p. 11.
- 4 'The Increasing Vogue of the Blonde', *The English Illustrated Magazine*, August 1911, p. 480.
- 5 'All-British Shopping Week: Successful Opening', *Daily Telegraph*, 28 March 1911, p. 11.
- 6 J. May, 'The All-British Shopping Week: Features of the Display', *Observer*, 26 March 1911, p. 19.
- 7 'A Salon of Fair Women', *The English Illustrated Magazine*, March 1911, p. 86.
- 8 M. Tempest, 'My Christmas Presents', *Daily Mail*, 13 December 1911, p. 4, and *Evening Post* press clipping, Luce Company archives.
- 9 Undated clipping, Luce Company archives.
- 10 These names have been drawn from different lists of women that appeared in the *English Illustrated Magazine*, *The Times*, the *Mirror*, the *Observer*, the *Sketch* and the *Daily Telegraph*.
- 11 'The Late Miss Gertrude Robins', *Daily Mail*, 26 December 1917, p. 5.
- 12 'A Salon of Fair Women', *The English Illustrated Magazine*, March 1911, p. 634. Robins had appeared as an after-dinner speaker at the Caravan Club of Great Britain and Ireland's annual dinner on 15 February 1911; her wit and delivery were well received.
- 13 'The Age of Versatility: One Crowded Hour in the Life of an Author Actress', *Bystander*, 21 May 1913, p. 400.
- 14 'Variety is the Soul of Life: Actress, Playwright, Aviator, Farmer', *Tatler*, 23 January 1915, p. 117.
- 15 Undated clipping, Gertrude Robins File, Mander and Mitchenson (M & M) Reference Box Collection, University of Bristol Theatre Collection, MM/REF/PE/AC/1554.
- 16 'The Sketch Frieze', *The Sketch*, 10 May 1911: supplement.
- 17 The Salon contributors who also featured in the *Sketch* frieze were Pauline Chase, Laura Cowie, Phyllis Dare, Iris Hoey, Marie Lohr, Olive May, Nancy More, Gabrielle Ray, Nina Sevensing, Madge Titherage and Rosalie Toller.
- 18 *Bulletin*, undated clipping, Constance Drever File, M & M Reference Box Collection, MM/REF/PE/AC/639.
- 19 See Doris Lytton File, M & M Reference Box Collection, MM/REF/PE/AC/1238.
- 20 *New Magazine*, June 1910, p. 12.
- 21 *Chemist and Druggist*, 18 March 1911, p. 45.
- 22 M. Tempest, 'My Christmas Presents', *Daily Mail*, 13 December 1911, p. 4.

- 23 Correspondence, Lilian Braithwaite File, M & M Reference Box Collection, MM/REF/PE/AC/286.
- 24 Undated clipping, Pauline Chase File, M & M Reference Box Collection, MM/REF/PE/AC/419.
- 25 Undated clipping, Cicely Courtneidge File, M & M Reference Box Collection, MM/REF/PE/AC/507.

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- The Evening Post*, press clipping, L/A/12/D1/2
- Publicity photograph, L/A/12/D1/2
- Souvenir publication, L/A/12/E2/1

*Mander and Mitchenson Reference Box Collection, University of Bristol
Theatre Collection*

- Lilian Braithwaite File, MM/REF/PE/AC/286
- Pauline Chase File, MM/REF/PE/AC/419
- Cicely Courtneidge File, MM/REF/PE/AC/507
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