

# National Theatre

**Creating digital archive  
projects to remember and  
catalogue performance**

**Archive Guidance**

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# Introduction

This guidance is for anyone looking to catalogue and remember performance online, which we term a digital archive project. Projects of this kind aim to share information from past performances, resources and even the records of a practitioner, group, or organisation. This guidance will explore two aspects: the first is the process of discovery (investigating information from performances in addition to planning and developing your project); and the second is the process of building digital archive projects (the creation of a digital infrastructure to house archive data, website building, project sustainability, marketing, and outreach). This work is scalable and can be undertaken at varying levels depending on time, and funding.

This guidance will detail the benefits, practicalities, and challenges of archiving and is aimed at users previously unfamiliar with archives, cataloguing, and the creation of archival records. It is assumed that those using this guidance will be from theatre-making, performing, or other creative based practices who hope to archive their own or someone else's work. This guidance uses the [Black Plays Archive \(BPA\)](#), an ongoing digital archive project from the [National Theatre](#), as a specific case study, and has been written in tandem with an [evaluation](#) of the BPA. The BPA is an online catalogue of the first professional productions of plays written by playwrights of Black British, African, and Caribbean heritage produced in the UK. The project celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2023.

In addition to the BPA, other digital archive projects cataloguing performance have been highlighted throughout. These include:

- [Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company Archive](#) (cataloguing the productions of Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company, 1975-1993)
- [Tower Theatre Archive](#) (cataloguing the productions of Tower Theatre in Stoke Newington)
- [Unfinished Histories Project](#) (remembering the works of LGBTQ+, global majority, female and disabled theatre practitioners from 1960-1980 in the UK)
- [Stages of Half Moon Project](#) (cataloguing the productions of Half Moon Theatre Company)

Additionally, further information and guidance from [The National Archives \(TNA\)](#) and the [Association of Performing Arts Collections \(APAC\)](#) has been spotlighted throughout for users to learn more. To assist in the writing of this guidance, several informal discussions took place with archivists, those working on and those hoping to pursue projects of this kind. These discussions also included those who initially worked on the BPA when the project was first developed.

Please contact the National Theatre Archive ([archive@nationaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:archive@nationaltheatre.org.uk)) for any questions or enquiries about the material within this document.

# What are digital archive projects?

Unlike traditional [archives](#), which are primarily focused on the safekeeping and long-term preservation of [records](#), digital archive projects aim to share data and information from performances. These projects then provide access to that information by displaying it online. Digital archive projects can lead to an increase in knowledge sharing, both for new users and those already familiar with an individual or organisation's practice.

Digital Archive Projects	Archives
Provide access to information	Preserve records of continuing value
Often secondary sources of information	Often primary sources of information
Created to exist online only	Collections can be physical or digital
Can share/display further resources	Focus primarily on catalogued items

The term digital archive project can be applied to a variety of projects at varying scales. Digital archive projects centring performance can include social media pages, user-built websites, databases, spreadsheets, be integrated with existing websites and even use customised user interfaces that surface records online.

## Black Plays Archive

[Back to search](#)

# Leave Taking

By [Winsome Pinnock](#)

Year staged: 1987  
Opening night: 11/11/1987  
Theatre Company: Liverpool Playhouse  
Staged in: Liverpool Playhouse  
Cast Size: 5

## National Theatre

Explore

## Synopsis

In North London, Del and Viv are soul-sick. Del doesn't want to be at home; staying out late – 3 pm-the-next-day late – is more her thing. Viv scours her schoolbooks trying to find a trace of herself between their lines. When Enid takes her daughters to the local obeah woman for some traditional Caribbean soul-healing, secrets are spilled. There's no turning back for Del, Viv and Enid as they negotiate the frictions between their countries and cultures. Two generations. Three incredible women. First produced in 1987 at Liverpool Playhouse, the play won Winsome Pinnock the George Devine Award in 1991.

[Listen to an extract of the play.](#) Users can access materials from the National Theatre's 1994 production by visiting the [National Theatre Archive](#).

## Find the script

Leave Taking

Publisher: Nick Hern Books

Year published: 2018

[Find script](#)

*A production page for 'Leave Taking' (1987) from the Black Plays Archive at the National Theatre (2025)*

The BPA aims to provide information about the first production of plays produced across the UK written by Black British, African, and Caribbean playwrights via a

[website](#). To do this, the BPA highlights casts and artistic teams for productions in addition to being a [union catalogue](#), which is a resource that pulls together information from a variety of library and archive collections (more information on archive terms can be found in this [glossary](#) from The National Archives). In addition to records of productions, the BPA also consists of [teaching resources](#) and [teaching guides](#), a [podcast](#), short [audio recordings of plays](#), [interviews](#), and [essays](#).

As a whole, digital archive projects centring performance can provide information that may otherwise be inaccessible by those searching for it. This may be because the information relating to performance is likely be scattered across a variety of places. The gathering and sharing of information is a core task at the centre of these projects, as exemplified in the other digital archive projects this guidance later explores.

# Why archiving performance matters

With information pertaining performance available, looked after, and preserved it can become much easier to remember as well as research. These projects also allow information relating to performance to become much more available and accessible, particularly if few people witnessed the performance or knew about it to begin with. Archiving performance in this way then allows future and current practitioners, writers, researchers, students, and interested parties to become more aware of and learn about your performance history.

By preserving documents and material with valuable information, archives allow for records to be interpreted and interrogated, giving theatre-makers and researchers alike the opportunity to delve deeper into histories of performance. With theatre, dance, and performance being inherently ephemeral by nature (as a play often 'ends' after it is performed, the run closes and the next play is pursued), archiving can help to establish a permanent record of a performance or production happening in the first place. Archiving (within a traditional archive collection) is an excellent way to remember and recollect material and information as records are catalogued and preserved with the intention of long-term preservation.

Archives and digital archive projects centring performance are also integral to the memory and longevity of current productions, as they too will eventually become past. If you are a practitioner, group, or organisation whose work primarily focuses on performance, it is in your best interest to have an archive or to consider depositing your records within one (for more information about depositing your records, please see the [guidance](#) from The National Archives). This is also true of any community group, heritage organisation, and collective with histories of performance. In most cases, the creation of a digital archive project will undoubtedly aid in the knowledge that productions and performances occurred as well as providing information that would likely sit in dispersed archives.

Historically, archives have been tools used to empower, as well as dis-empower, across time. Who and what gets remembered in the first place is often a specific political choice, and so an archive can establish records of events that might otherwise have dissolved into passing memory.

# Before you start

There are some important issues to consider before embarking on this work, which are key to the planning and successful delivery of a digital archive project.

Regardless of a project's scale, a lot of time, dedication, and resource is necessary to build and develop a digital archive project for performance. This is particularly relevant if the scope of performances is not widely known (both amongst those working on the project itself and in mainstream record keeping) and if the information being gathered for the project lies in a variety of different places (for example, in people's memories, in personal or written correspondence, or in physical materials).

In this way, building, and more importantly, maintaining a digital archive project, can be a time consuming and even costly endeavour, despite it being an excellent way to remember and document performance. Here are some of the activities required to run a digital archive project (following the project being scoped, funded and staffed):

- Cataloguing performance (making records of performance)
- Designing, building, and testing the digital platform or website
- Clearing rights and licenses for images and other media
- Reading play scripts (if available)
- Hosting and supporting the digital platform or website
- Publicising and marketing the archive
- Writing educational and contextual resources
- Planning and creating resources, podcasts, and other public-facing content
- Organising and hosting events

Just as a traditional archive can become dependent on space (such as the [National Theatre Archive](#), which has many thousands of digital and physical documents in its collections), a digital archive project can also rely on digital storage, which can be costly. A digital archive project can potentially amalgamate hundreds (or thousands) of digital assets (images, recordings, pages, etc) regarding any number of performances. This is worth being aware of at the start of pursuing projects of this kind, as in many cases the amount of material can be at times overwhelming and will likely to grow as the project progresses.

## 1) Funding and staffing

Skilled and knowledgeable people are required to deliver the above, often times with specialist expertise. Specialist knowledge can include IT and website building, cataloguing and data management experience, and subject knowledge relating to the information being gathered regarding performance. These three elements combined will facilitate in the creation of a project that is, above all, organised and accurate. However, those pursuing projects should feel empowered by their own



knowledge and experience if coming from arts-based backgrounds. Undoubtedly, having a clear understanding and awareness of the information being displayed, in addition to the performances themselves, will aid in the accuracy and success of these projects.

Since 2013, the BPA has been managed and supported by the National Theatre Archive, being updated and maintained over time by volunteers, one full or part-time staff member specifically working on the project, and the wider Archive department. This, however, does not consider the cost and labour of creating and maintaining the BPA's digital infrastructure, nor does it consider the cost of creating additional materials used to expand and develop the project (like recording podcast episodes or creating teaching resources) or the creation of any promotional materials (like leaflets or posters). As an example, the BPA was initially funded equally by the Arts Council England's (ACE) Sustainable Theatre Fund and the National Theatre back in 2009, which funded the initial research and scoping of the project. Over the past 10 years the National Theatre has been the sole funder of the BPA following its public launch in 2013.

Funding for digital archive projects can come from a variety of places, such as councils or local authorities, private funding from trusts or endowments as well as culture, arts, and heritage funded schemes. The [National Lottery's Heritage Fund \(NLHF\)](#) is the largest heritage funder in the UK, funding a wide range of projects across Britain and Ireland. Additionally, TNA offer [Research and Innovation Grants](#) aimed at addressing digital transformation, environmental sustainability, and inclusive practice in the archives sector as well as bursaries and grants through [The Community Hub](#). More advice on where to access funding can be found from the [Association of Performing Arts Collections \(APAC\)](#).

## 2) Collective and organisational buy-in

It is also beneficial to have a network of support around you when planning to build a digital archive project centring performance. For the BPA, organisational buy-in from the wider National Theatre, its Board, and the Marketing and IT departments was needed to ensure that the required support was in place for delivering the project. Digital archive projects for performance often touch on a variety of different elements and outputs so establishing a network within your community, collective, or organisation is also essential in developing your project. This helps to set agreed parameters for the project (deciding what the project is or is not) and ensure that the resulting project is accessible and relevant to its intended audience. Having a network around a project can also aid in identifying financial and developmental support as well as encouraging accountability in securing the ongoing longevity of the project.

A network of support will be able to provide feedback on and build a community around the project itself. This may help to assist in the promotion of and, depending on the capacity of the community around it, be able to aid in creating the project itself.

For established organisations looking to convince others of the importance of digital

archive projects for performance, consider that an archive aims to catalogue and preserve records in perpetuity. How has your organisation previously remembered or celebrated past performances? How does it remember performances taking place currently? Digital archive projects of this kind can create an established process to remember performance, allowing organisations and collectives to preserve their history.

### 3) Planning for sustainability

The funding of digital archive projects is often short-term, covering the planning and delivery phases but often not supporting the ongoing upkeep and maintenance of the digital platform long term. Projects of this nature can balloon over time, steering off course from their initial proposals if no structural guidelines have been put in place. Planning the sustainability of the project from the outset is a key activity and could affect the sort of digital platform you select and where it is located.

Planning for a long-term digital archive project can include making a dedicated strategy that is implemented over a period of time, which lays out what the project aims to do and how it might meet those aims. Sustainability planning might also include writing up contingency plans, should the circumstances surrounding projects change, and consider the need for additional resources or events that can be implemented later down the line. Sustainability planning ensures that forethought has gone into the future of the project and that there is space to continue running, adapting or even developing more of the project over time. Planning ahead allows for digital archive projects to avoid being one-off celebratory events and instead become more embedded in how a practitioner, collective, or organisation might interact with their performance history. In this way, digital archive projects can become embedded into artistic practice and become a part of the ongoing activities surrounding performance.

It is also necessary to create a disaster plan if project creators ever need to migrate the information at the heart of these projects. Migrating information may be the result of a change in project funding, a data breach, or the deterioration of a digital platform. Just as a traditional paper based collection within archive might have a disaster recovery plan (as exemplified in [this guidance from the Archives and Records Association](#)), projects of this kind should also consider similar preparations if information may need to be moved or shared elsewhere. The [Good Practice Guidance for digital projects](#) from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) implores digital heritage projects to commit to the three principles of availability, accessibility and openness. Whilst this is specific to projects funded by the NLHF, these core principles (creating a project with a long lifespan, making it accessible to a variety of users, sharing it under an [open license](#)) should be taken into consideration when building digital archive projects.

# Phase One: Discovery – Developing a digital archive project

When planning a project, creators should be aware that they will likely come across more relevant performances (and their associated materials and documents) as they go. With this in mind, setting flexible parameters for your project is highly encouraged.

A good place to start is by establishing what it is project users are hoping to get out of the project. Are there specific enquiries a digital archive project might be able to shed light on? Would a project like this be able to give more details about how performances and events happened? Can your digital archive project provide information that otherwise isn't easily accessible? These questions are useful to ascertain what exactly your digital archive project will be looking to capture (and in what depth or breadth), and which gaps it aims to fill in the knowledge of your project users. By framing your project as something to inform understanding and provide information, project creators can use this to help establish the project itself and to help explain or even pitch it.

Additionally, project creators may also want to consider if there are any digital or physical assets they may wish to or be able to preserve in an archive collection when gathering information for their projects. Materials and documents from performances, like programmes, stage management reports, and play scripts, may form the bulk of an individual, institution, or group's collection and so an understanding of which materials may be useful to preserve will aid establishing archive collections to be deposited or be preserved 'in house' outside of digital archive projects.

By determining the 'why' of your digital archive project (the question of what information it will provide to those using it) project creators can better understand what it is they are hoping to achieve.

A broad example like 'capturing and sharing the works of Black British, African, and Caribbean playwrights whose work has been produced in the UK' was the ambitious goal of the BPA in 2009. What this goal didn't necessarily consider was the sheer enormity of its central aim. How many plays by Black British, African, and Caribbean playwrights have been produced in Britain? How many playwrights did the project aim to cover? How did the project aim to share and cover these works and in what ways? By setting a central goal at the start of the process, further questions started to emerge which steered the direction of the project, later dictating its scale (the breadth of the project and how many performances it covered) and scope (the depth of the project and how much information is available).

## 1) Examples of digital archive projects

Digital archive projects can vary depending on the wishes of the project creators and the amount of information available. The following projects each demonstrate a variety of ways to display information, from casts, photographs, perspectives, exhibitions, business records and resources.

Finding the information that goes into creating performance or production records for digital archive projects can be found in a variety of places. Such as:

- Play scripts or manuscripts (for written performance)
- Promotional material (posters, programmes or brochures)
- Internal business records
- Memories of performance
- Personal correspondence (emails, letters, diaries)
- Recorded testimony (oral histories)
- Press cuttings/clippings
- Photographs and recorded video of performance

It is worth noting that this information may itself lie within existing archives, records offices, or libraries depending on its context and origin. Some theatres, for example, may choose to deposit their collections with an archive, records office, or library to ensure that their records are securely stored and preserved, if they themselves aren't able to ensure their safety (more information and guidance for theatres and theatre companies depositing records can be accessed via the [Association of Performing Arts Collections](#) (APAC) and from The [National Archives](#) (TNA)). Again, it should be stressed that researching this information will likely be time-consuming and may result in much more information than initially realised. During the early development phase of the Black Plays Archive, the number of productions grew much larger than initial estimates had suggested, and this will likely happen to you, depending on the remit of your project.

Like all forms of archiving, interviews, written perspectives and testimonies have a place in remembering and cataloguing performance, particularly if the information being gathered is not widely known. Project creators may wish to create a digital archive project to share testimony from practitioners directly, in addition to highlighting and remembering their works. Further guidance specifically about conducting interviews and oral histories can be accessed by the [Oral History Society](#), which provides detailed resources on the subject.

### Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company Archive

Monstrous Regiment was a theatre company determined to put women's lives centre stage, forming in 1975 before ceasing operations in 1993. The [Monstrous Regiment Archive](#) seeks to give users as much information as possible on the productions staged by the company during that time in addition to exploring how the company was created, run and managed. This is evident through selected materials like press cuttings, biographies, programmes, correspondence with the Arts Council, play

scripts, photographs and more housed on their site, in addition to the documentation of casts and production roles for the plays the company staged. As Monstrous Regiment is no longer operating, their archive is full of material that would likely be sensitive to the management of their business if it were still running today. Due to its volume of material, the entirety of the Monstrous Regiment archive is housed at the [V&A Museum](#), where it has been deposited. The material displayed on their website helps to paint a complete and incredibly detailed picture of the company's operations and legacy following its closure, largely through the digital distribution of information and records on their website.

**SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER**  
1980 & 1982

Four brides in radiant white glide across the stage and through their domestic tasks. Exploding ovens, boxing gloves and a live cockerel also appear on stage as the brides are instructed in the wifely arts by two kindly but stern grandmothers, played by men. One bride hides in a fridge to escape their supervision and sings "someday my prince will come". A physically bold and surreal piece of theatre, inspired by Virginia Woolf's tragic fantasy figure.

Written by Theatre de l'Aquarium  
Translator Gillian Hanna

**PLACES AND DATES**

Institute of Contemporary Arts, London	02/12/1980 - 20/12/1980
Gardner Centre, Brighton	16/02/1982 - 20/02/1982
Drill Hall, London	23/02/1982 - 27/02/1982
Northampton Arts Centre	04/03/1982 - 05/03/1982
Raph Thoresby Arts Centre, Leeds	08/03/1982 - 09/03/1982
York Arts Centre, York	11/03/1982 - 13/03/1982

**CAST**

1980 PRODUCTION	I.C.A. LONDON
Chris Bowler	Performer
David Bradford	Performer
Josefina Cupido	Performer
Gillian Hanna	Performer

**PRODUCTION TEAM**

1980 PRODUCTION	I.C.A. LONDON
Hilary Westlake	Director
Gemma Jackson	Designer
Steve Whitson	Lighting Designer
Gus Garside	Administration

**PLACES AND DATES**

02/12/1980 - 20/12/1980  
16/02/1982 - 20/02/1982  
23/02/1982 - 27/02/1982  
04/03/1982 - 05/03/1982  
08/03/1982 - 09/03/1982  
11/03/1982 - 13/03/1982

**SHOW MORE**

'Superb... it is a joy to see how Monstrous Regiment exploit surrealist and expressionist techniques and give theatrical life and function. Music, song, pantomime, lighting, choral speaking and symbolism all play their part cumulative impact of Hilary Westlake's rapier-sharp production is devastating.'  
Nicholas de Jongh The Guardian Dec 1980

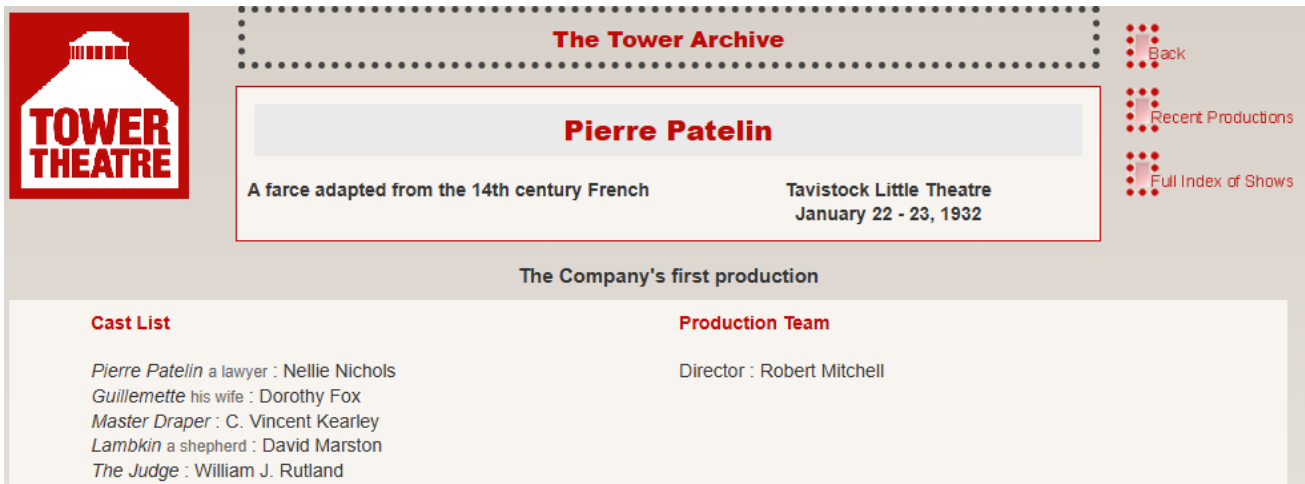
**IMAGE**

A production page for 'Shakespeare's Sister' (1980) from the Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company Archive website (2025)

## Tower Theatre Archive

[Tower Theatre](#) began operations in 1932, under the title of Tavistock Repertory Company based at Tavistock Place in London. The theatre is now based in Stoke Newington, where it moved in 2018. The Tower Theatre Archive predominantly charts information about performances, listing out cast and artistic teams for its many hundreds of productions (relying less on displaying materials like scripts or programmes). The project displays few records on how the theatre itself was previously and is currently managed and instead, their archive prioritises the long history of the theatre, notably its past productions over 90 years on various sites. The information about who performed in and worked on a play is included alongside biographies of the cast with photographs from the productions. This all helps to paint a more detailed picture of the individuals taking part and contextualise their involvement in the production. Additionally, the Tower Theatre Archive also provides a summarised history of the theatre's various sites using photographs in addition to information about how its website and archive came to be.



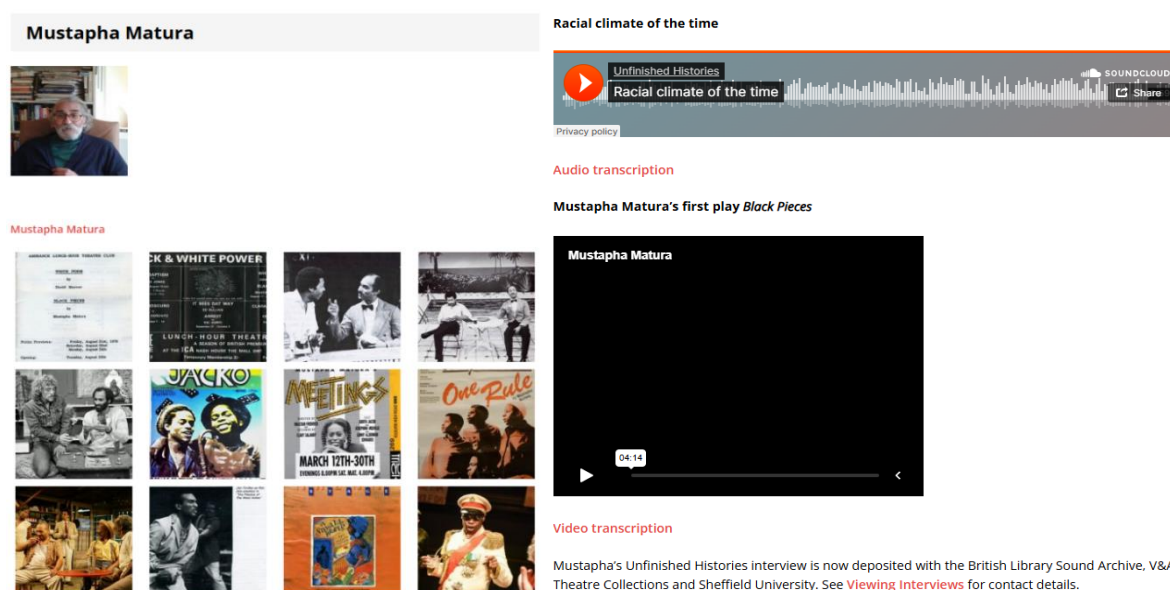


The screenshot shows the 'The Tower Archive' website. At the top left is the 'TOWER THEATRE' logo. The main header area is titled 'The Tower Archive' and features a red dotted border. Below this, the title 'Pierre Patelin' is displayed in red. Underneath the title, it says 'A farce adapted from the 14th century French' and 'Tavistock Little Theatre January 22 - 23, 1932'. To the right of the main content area, there are three red dotted buttons: 'Back', 'Recent Productions', and 'Full Index of Shows'. Below the main content area, there is a section titled 'The Company's first production'. This section is divided into two columns: 'Cast List' and 'Production Team'. The 'Cast List' includes: Pierre Patelin a lawyer : Nellie Nichols, Guillemette his wife : Dorothy Fox, Master Draper : C. Vincent Kearley, Lambkin a shepherd : David Marston, and The Judge : William J. Rutland. The 'Production Team' includes: Director : Robert Mitchell.

*A production page for 'Pierre Patelin' (1932) from the Tower Theatre Archive website (2025).*

## The Unfinished Histories Project

The [Unfinished Histories](#) Project is specifically oriented around interviews with theatre practitioners. Founded in 2006, Unfinished Histories seeks to share information about “alternative theatre”, this being theatre created outside the mainstream and made predominantly by LGBTQ, global majority, disabled and female practitioners from the 1960s through to the 1980s. Instead of providing biographical data on performances like the other digital archives projects listed previously, Unfinished Histories shares information pertaining to theatre companies and practitioners. It is largely an information sharing resource providing the names of and contexts for theatre companies, practitioners and venues across the UK, so this history is not lost or obscured. This combined with the various oral histories and interviews on the site help to paint a clearer picture of which companies and practitioners were operating when and how they worked to create performance in the first place.

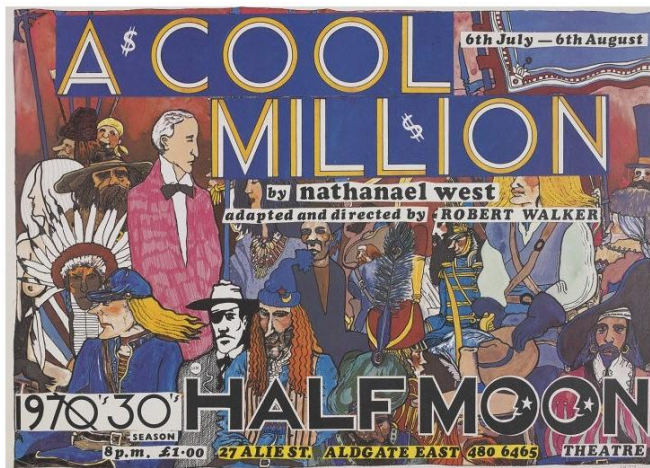


The screenshot shows the 'Unfinished Histories' website profile for Mustapha Matura. At the top left is a photo of Mustapha Matura. To the right of the photo, the title 'Mustapha Matura' is displayed. Below the photo, there is a section titled 'Racial climate of the time' which includes a SoundCloud audio player for 'Racial climate of the time' with a 'Share' button and a 'Privacy policy' link. Below this, there is a section titled 'Audio transcription' and 'Mustapha Matura's first play Black Pieces'. To the left of the video player, there is a grid of 12 small images showing various theatrical productions and posters, including 'BLACK & WHITE POWER', 'LUNCH HOUR THEATRE', 'JACKO', 'MEETINGS', 'One Rule', and 'MARCH 12TH-30TH'. To the right of the grid is a video player titled 'Mustapha Matura' showing a video of Mustapha Matura. Below the video player, there is a section titled 'Video transcription' and a paragraph stating: 'Mustapha's Unfinished Histories interview is now deposited with the British Library Sound Archive, V&A Theatre Collections and Sheffield University. See [Viewing Interviews](#) for contact details.'

*A series of oral histories with the playwright Mustapha Matura alongside information about his numerous plays (2025)*

## Half Moon Theatre's Stages of Half Moon Project

Stages of Half Moon Heritage Project seeks to celebrate and display information relating the long history of the Half Moon Theatre, pulling together production and rehearsal photography, press cuttings, set drawings, and more to give a detailed overview of the theatre's history. Similarly to the Monstrous Regiment and Tower Theatre Archives projects, Stages of Half Moon prioritises information regarding performances themselves, listing casts, artistic teams, dates and venues for performance (and uses additional archive material to provide further context). This, in conjunction with interviews, testimonials and a timeline of the theatre's founding help to create an incredibly detailed picture of the theatre's history, situating its history in context for wider events.



JULY 6, 1977

### A COOL MILLION (1977)

A musical romp based on Nathaniel West's famous satire on the rise of fascism in America in the Depression, styled as a farcical vaudeville. West's savage novel describes the terminal odyssey of Lemuel P. Pitkin, a 17 year old innocent abroad, who leaves home and insecurity in search of riches in an impoverished America which brims with crooks, dreamers and schemers, tarts down and outs brothers, corrupt Irish cops and economic emptiness. *A Cool Million* toured to Holland and Belgium and also transferred to Open Space Theatre, Euston Road. Rob Walker was awarded the Harry Beaumont Award for being the Best Young Director for *A Cool Million*.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)


An interactive timeline exploring Half Moon Theatre's history in context with historical events via the Stages of Half Moon project website (2025)

## Audience and users

Given the varying formats a digital archive project for performance can take, consider your target audiences and users. For example, are you looking to give playwrights, performers or theatre-makers information on their own or others' work or are you looking to engage young people and students? What about academic researchers, theatregoers, local historians or members of the public? Considering who the target audiences are for your project may help to identify what it is you will want to include. The needs of students studying a play will likely be different to the playwright who wrote the play or a historian writing about it. Each one of these users will be seeking something specific. Is there information you can include in your project that could apply to them all?

To find out who might be using your archive, examine the kinds of audiences and user groups coming to engage in the performances you're seeking to remember and catalogue. What might suit them and their needs? To ascertain this, project creators may wish to survey their users or directly engage with them about the creation of their digital archive projects. As the project will aim to be a useful resource for those seeking out the information within it, project creators may also want to consider

potential audiences in the testing of their eventual digital infrastructure. It is worth noting that a diverse set of audiences will have a diverse set of needs, so it is important that your project is, first and foremost, accessible to its users. An introduction to disability inclusive website design can be found via the [Web Accessibility Initiative](#). The Web Accessibility Initiative also provides [Web Content Accessibility Guidance \(WCAG\)](#) on how to create web content that is more accessible to people with disabilities.

## 2) Collecting and collating data

Digital archive projects for performance primarily rely on performance records, which chronicle information about a performance. It is important to effectively collect information used to create performance records as things can quickly become confusing when disorganised.

As mentioned in the previous examples of digital archive projects, production or performance records should give users an idea of how a play or performance happened and be reflective of the event itself. Production records can include the following pieces of information:

- Title of the play/performance
- Who wrote, devised or created the play/performance
- The year the play/performance was staged
- Opening night of the play/performance
- Theatre company which produced the show
- Where the play/performance was staged
- Cast size
- Synopsis of the play/performance
- Who starred in the play (the performers)
- Who worked on the play (the artistic and technical team, the director, lighting designer, etc.).

Whilst those pursuing projects may not have all the information to hand for a performance, detailing as much information as possible from what is available is important to give accurate information. Additionally, depending on the 'why' of your archive project, including information of this kind may not be wholly relevant. Those pursuing projects may wish instead (dependent on the resources) to collect information like performance titles or information relating to specific people (i.e., biographies of playwrights). Conducting interviews may also be another way to catalogue and remember performance.

The following information can be collected and stored in a variety of ways to be used for your digital archive project, but as a baseline, it is important the information is gathered consistently in the same place (e.g., a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet). Storing information on a platform outside of the project's digital infrastructure is also suggested, to avoid information only be stored in only one place. Below is an example of how to lay out performance information within an Excel spreadsheet:

Title of	Playwright/s	Date of first	Venue	Cast	Artistic	Technical	Play
----------	--------------	---------------	-------	------	----------	-----------	------



Play		performance			Team	Team	Synopsis
------	--	-------------	--	--	------	------	----------

It is also worth establishing early on if your digital archive project is something that aims to include new performances and productions or if the archive will rely on a stable amount of information, as this will impact on the size and scale of the project (which will then affect its cost and staffing needs). You may also need to consider how you can access the information you wish to include in your project if it lies within another organisation or collection.

As previously discussed, at its most basic, a digital archive project should include information related to the essentials of performance. This includes the who, what, and where of a performance as outlined above. As in the previous digital archive project examples, many projects use additional records to provide further context to performances, included recorded testimony (interviews and oral history projects), photographs, internal memos, promotional materials and more. The inclusion of these additional materials in projects should be considered as additional given the time and resource spent recording, [digitising](#), and licensing material to be cleared online. The following section discusses copyright and risk management.

# Copyright protections and digital distribution

Copyright is an important issue to keep in mind when creating a digital archive project. This includes digitally distributing copyright protected materials such as playscripts, photographs, diaries and journals, programmes, posters, interviews and oral stories as well as video and audio recordings of performance. Considering who manages the copyright to these works and their availability to be included in your project can greatly impact on your project's scale and scope. Determining how long copyright protections might last can vary depending on what the work is, as detailed in this [short guide](#) from the UK Government.

As explained by the National Archives, [copyright](#) is a form of intellectual property rights that control how certain works can be used and distributed. Copyright is designed to prevent or restrict the copying and distribution of work without permission of the copyright owner (which may be different to the author of a work).

Copyright protects literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works, films, and sound recordings among other things. For example, the copyright of a play would likely belong to the playwright or their estate, and permission would need to be granted by the copyright owner/s to stage a performance of it.

Additionally, the photographer typically owns the copyright for photos from a performance of that play. Photos from a performance of that play would belong to the photographer (not necessarily to the people in the photos). Project creators should also be aware that copyright still applies even when photographs are in the public domain and available online.

In the UK, copyright arises when a work is created (which is not the case in other jurisdictions). In the case of theatre and performance, where works are often created by multiple individuals, copyright will likely belong to a variety of different people across a variety of works, often with multiple people holding copyright in one record, which can quickly become time consuming to track and identify when seeking permissions.

In order to digitally distribute photographs, play scripts or other copyrighted materials, project creators should first identify and seek permission from the copyright owners of a work. As copyright owners control a work's distribution (unless it is in the public domain, which is typically 70 years after the creator of a work has died), copyright owners may charge a fee to distribute their work online or wish to simply be credited for it. Work being published online should only be shared in good faith, after a copyright owner has been contacted. However, you may be wanting to include what is known as an orphan work. Orphan works have no contactable rights holder, which is determined after a reasonable search has been conducted to try and establish the copyright owner. More [information and guidance on orphan works](#)

can be accessed via [The National Archives](#).

In the case where copyright owners are unable to be contacted, it may be good practice to implement what is known as a takedown policy. A takedown policy is a dedicated plan or policy that ensures the removal of material or information from archives and digital archive projects. If someone is opposed to their work being included within your digital archive project, a takedown policy ensures a process that details how they can have their material removed. An [example takedown policy](#) can be seen from The London Archives. More information about copyright can be found, via [The National Archives](#).

# Phase Two: Building a digital archive project

The following section will detail aspects of what it is like to work with a website developer and will also give advice on marketing and advocating for your digital archive project. As stated previously, projects of this kind are scalable and can be made up of databases, spreadsheets and social media pages. Additionally, this section will also discuss what it's like to conduct and create additional resources for digital archive projects, like podcasts, oral histories and more.

## 1) Creating a digital infrastructure

Because digital archive projects can often rely on large amounts of information and data, not to mention the inclusion of many digital assets (such as images, videos, recordings, documents, and many others in perhaps a variety of file formats), it is in some cases advisable to work with a skilled and knowledgeable individual or organisation to build a digital infrastructure for your project. However, project creators may also wish to pursue the creation of a digital infrastructure themselves, building their digital archive projects on their current websites promoting their practice or current performances or social media.

A website developer can establish how:

- The design and layout of a digital infrastructure can best store, hold, maintain, and update the archive data being shared for projects (building the back end of a website specifically for archive data, the side that project creators will work with or update)
- To share and display the information from your archive for users (create the front end of a website, the side that users will engage with)
- To transfer large amounts of data on to a digital platform when it may exist in a variety of places or a variety of file formats
- To best employ Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) to highlight your digital archive project on websites like Google or Bing and better inform users looking for the information online that is housed in your project
- To create a digital infrastructure that is accessible and navigable for a variety of users
- To test and navigate the infrastructure of a digital archive project prior to launch
- Your digital archive project might live on a separate platform or be combined with any live and active website for your collective or organisation.

In addition to building the digital infrastructure to house a digital archive project, a website developer can be contracted to provide a support and maintenance service

to maintain and update the digital infrastructure once the project is live and available to users. This is particularly important as websites and digital assets can decay over time. A website that is not maintained will eventually deteriorate, causing projects to become faulty or even obsolete over time, which can void the longevity or sustainability of a project. This support and maintenance for the technical aspects of the project and any content updates could be managed 'in-house' to both save costs and ensure the work is done by subject experts. For organisations or collectives with ongoing and running websites, a website developer can also likely establish how the infrastructure for a digital archive project might be applied to current sites, though this may be costly.

Additionally, project creators should be aware of any processes that may allow them to retrieve the information within their digital infrastructure, should the platform cease to function. It may be wise to track the information as part of any recovery plans.

## 2) Marketing and distribution

*Just as an organisation or performance collective might advertise its performances, project creators should also factor in advertising their digital archive projects.* In addition to enabling a broader range of users being aware of the project, the creation of marketing materials for projects of this kind will likely enable more information to come to light from members of the public and those previously involved with the performances getting in touch. This can then enable more accurate information or, for projects with an ever-expanding number of performances to include, it can ensure that performances have not been left out.

You can advocate for your project by:

- Community events celebrating performance/s
- Programmes and workshops for students and young people
- Traditional print or digital advertising
- Newsletters and mailing lists
- Interviews on radio, in newspapers and magazines (local or national)
- Word of mouth
- Hosting celebratory events like project launches or play readings
- Producing and disseminating posters, leaflets and flyers
- Q&A sessions and talks
- Linking to similar projects from other organisations or groups in return for reciprocal links on their website.

## 3) Additional archive resources

In addition to cataloguing performance by the methods previously specified in this guidance, project creators may want to create additional archive projects to support, celebrate, or contextualise the work they have undertaken. Additional projects might include creating a podcast, recording oral histories, conducting interviews, organising play readings and recordings, commissioning essays or teaching

resources, talks, or creating exhibitions. Like digital archive projects, additional archive projects will also need resourcing and take a dedicated and skilled group of individuals to complete. However, these projects will likely be beneficial to get users further engaging with the material and gathering more information within your digital archive project, allowing for a deeper understanding and knowledge of an organisation's or collective's performance history. Many of the digital archive projects listed throughout this guidance employ additional archive resources to further engage their users, providing information that goes beyond the who, what, where and how of any given performance taking place. This may involve a variety of perspectives on a single performance, from those taking part in a production to those who watched a production or worked on it.

## Conclusion

Pursuing a digital archive project for performance will allow project creators to explore and share the past performances, records or practices of a collective, organisation or institution. This work is scalable and can be undertaken at varying levels depending on the size, teams and the time afforded to projects. Overall, digital archive projects will provide access to information about histories of performance and likely lead to an increase in knowledge sharing for both new users and those previously familiar with the performances.

As demonstrated in the examples referred to throughout this guidance, digital archive projects can speak to forgotten and unsung histories as well as being tools used to capture and catalogue. In this way, they are excellent opportunities for theatre and performance-based practitioners to reflect and celebrate their practice.

Please contact the National Theatre Archive ([archive@nationaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:archive@nationaltheatre.org.uk)) for any questions or enquires about the material within this document.

## Thank you

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National Theatre Archive  
Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company Archive  
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Half Moon Theatre's Stages of Half Moon Heritage Project  
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The National Archives (TNA)  
Association of Performing Arts Collections (APAC)  
[Archive Definition \(Society of American Archivists, SAA\)](#)  
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**Thank you**

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