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Mapping London's amateur theatre histories

Introduction

Richard White posits that mapping should be 'a means of doing research; it generates questions that might otherwise go unasked, it reveals historical relations that might otherwise go unnoticed, and it undermines, or substantiates, stories upon which we build our own versions of the past' (White 2010). Maps can be used as a method for identifying new knowledges, with the emphasis on the *process* of mapping and what it reveals, rather than on the final product. Courtney Evans and Ben Jasnow call these new knowledges 'digital discoveries' – findings 'that would have been more difficult or impossible using traditional research methods' (Evans and Jasnow 2014: 321).

This essay turns to mapping as a tool to assist with the recovery of the neglected history of amateur theatre in London. This task follows a decade-long surge of academic interest in amateur theatrical practices, which has led Nadine Holdsworth, Jane Milling and Helen Nicholson to claim that the discipline of Theatre and Performance Studies is experiencing an 'Amateur Turn' (Holdsworth et al 2017). Nevertheless, there remains a substantial task to redress the balance of British theatre history to include the amateur – a revision that is perhaps most urgently required in the history of theatre in London, where the amateur's existence has been almost completely erased. This essay uses mapping to exploit the 'amateur turn' to look afresh, through the lens of amateur theatre, at the environment of London.

Amateur theatre: a hidden history

There are a number of factors which have contributed to the oversight of amateur theatre in London. First and foremost, scholarship has tended to privilege the study of professional performance – an issue that has affected the study of all forms of amateur theatre. Claire Cochrane has posited that although amateur theatre statistically represented 'a major experience of performance for a significant proportion of the [British] population' in the twentieth century (2001: 233), it has been repeatedly excluded from theatre histories

because it did 'not necessarily conform to the subjective value judgements of the critic-historians who had tended to produce a limited, highly selective historical record' (2003: 169).

Cochrane has argued that critic-historians have shunned amateur theatre as a field of investigation because scholarship has adopted 'a teleological view of history ... which needs evidence of progress no matter how obscure, ephemeral and ill-attended' (2001: 233). This has resulted in a preoccupation with the remarkable, the unusual, and 'with the radical and experimental' (Cochrane 2001: 233). Consequently, for the history of amateur theatre in Britain, a select number of forms that fit this brief have been examined, including aristocratic amateur theatricals in country houses (Rosenfeld 1978; Russell 2007; Haugen 2014) and dramatic entertainments onboard ships (Isbell 2013; Penny 2018). Although these histories are valuable, they are outliers; the most common forms of amateur activity, in their most common environments, have been neglected, including the widespread popularity of amateur dramatic societies in London and their performances in a wide range of venues across the city.

Secondly, amateur theatre in London has been ignored as a result of its location. Although until relatively recently British theatre history has focussed largely on London, the spotlight there has remained almost exclusively on the professional activity taking place within the famous rectangular district 'bounded by the Strand, Kingsway, Oxford Street and New Bond Street', that in the nineteenth century became known as the West End (Pick 1983: 22). Jacky Bratton suggests that certain dominant narratives of this area have been regurgitated time and time again by historians, presenting a homogenized version of what 'London theatre' looked like in this period. Apart from a select number of alternative theatre histories, such as that of the Britannia Theatre in Hoxton, in the East End of London (Davis and Davis 1991; Norwood 2010; Norwood 2009), which have been tokenized as offering a different perspective on the city, these discourses have dwarfed and marginalized others, including that of amateur theatre.

These issues also recur in the archive, presenting further problems for the historian interested in recovering amateur theatre in London. On the one hand, there is a problem of perceived quality or value. Ephemera relating to amateur theatre in London before the twentieth century is typically far less visually alluring than that which relates to the professional theatre. Developments in the sophistication of print culture which paralleled the rise of the West End saw the simple theatrical playbills of the eighteenth century evolve into

more elaborate playbills and then into multi-page programmes (Gowen 1998; Carlson 1993: 102). Hundreds of postcards and photographs were produced to propagate the images of the West End's stars and the newly emerging illustrated press directed their attention towards this district of the city and its new celebrities. Arguably, just as Bratton has suggested that people and audiences 'are drawn like moths' to the West End – 'to the music, the lights bright or dim, the show, the special occasion, the champagne, the oysters, the thrill of it all' – collectors, archivists and subsequently theatre historians, have been seduced by its exquisite and visually stimulating material traces, while other materials, with different stories to tell, have been shunned (2011: 45).

There is also an issue with quantity and volume. In the major national and international repositories for theatrical materials, such as in the UK, the V&A, the University of Bristol and the British Library, and in the US, the New York Public Library, Harvard University, and the Folger Shakespeare Library, evidence of amateur theatre in London has been buried amongst a profusion of material relating to the theatre profession and the West End in particular. In both the British Library's Playbill Collection and the V&A's Theatre Building boxes, for example, there is a wealth of ephemera relating to amateur performance, yet it is concealed in collections that are catalogued chronologically by venue or region, making it exceptionally difficult to locate with ease. A similar challenge presents itself in local libraries and record offices, where these traces have to be mined from larger collections – often of personal memorabilia. A fleeting mention of amateur theatricals in a letter amongst family papers, an odd playbill inserted into an otherwise unrelated scrapbook, or a rare diary entry mentioning an amateur theatrical event are all good examples of what Carolyn Steedman has called 'mad fragmentations' that 'no-one intended to preserve' (2001:68).

The time-consuming trawling of masses of unrelated materials, in person, in the archive, is often the only way to produce a yield. The same problems of value and priority have meant that the majority of ephemera relating to the history of amateur theatre in London has not been considered worthy of digitization, and a significant proportion is yet to be catalogued. In the Harvard Theatre Collections, for example, there are several uncatalogued collections containing materials relating to nineteenth century British amateur theatricals, such as the item which I have labelled the 'Amateur, England, Box File'. If it were not for the archivist's experiential knowledge of their holdings, this material would have been

completely overlooked and would not have been consulted as part of the research for this project.

These problems affecting the amateur's visibility in the archive are systemic. The two largest theatre collections in Britain, housed at the V&A and the University of Bristol, have historically stipulated an emphasis on collecting material relating only to *professional* British theatre. The current 'V&A Collections Development Policy' (2015) states that the Theatre and Performance Department 'is the deposit library on a de facto basis for professional performance in the UK' (44) and does not mention amateur theatre as an area of interest. The 2009 'University of Bristol Theatre Collection: Acquisition and Disposal Policy' took a similar position, stating that their collection offered 'a representative cross-section of professional theatre-based activities in Britain' (3), and only included amateur theatrical materials relating to the city of Bristol. Fortunately, the 'amateur turn' has influenced some archival policy-makers, and when the 'University of Bristol Theatre Collection: Collections Development Policy' was launched in 2016, it included 'Amateur Theatre' in its list of key collections. In addition, the policy has 'non-professional theatre and underrepresented material' as one of its themes and priorities for future collecting, specifically highlighting 'Country House and Private Theatricals' and 'Prisoner of War' theatricals as the two main areas for growth (16).¹ Although this change of stance should be applauded, it is likely to take years to have a meaningful impact on the collection's holdings - and again prioritises a particular kind of unusual amateur activity.

The last – seemingly paradoxical – reason for the neglect of amateur theatre in London as a subject of enquiry for the theatre historian returns us to the issue of location. For a decade or more there has been a concerted effort to refocus the spotlight away from London and towards Britain's neglected regions: histories of Britain's other major metropolitan centres and their leading performance venues have offered alternative narratives of Sheffield, Manchester, Birmingham and Nottingham, for example (Wilson 2014; Robinson 2016; Cochrane 1993; Robinson et al. 2011). However, in turning their backs on London, theatre historians have overlooked the richness of the capital city's theatrical past.

Using two case studies, this essay aims to start the retrieval of the history of amateur theatre in London through both the process of mapping and the production of maps as data visualizations. In the first case study, mapping disrupts the established image and narratives of the West End by revealing an abundance of amateur dramatic activity taking place inside

– or in close proximity to – this district. This proximity suggests the symbiosis of professional and amateur theatre in London – making the important role of amateur theatre in both the West End’s theatrical economy and ecology visible for the first time. In mapping the second case study, the reader’s attention is directed away from the West End to other geographical areas of the city, including its suburbs. Here, mapping and the resulting map emphasize the need for London’s theatre histories to be extended to incorporate a range of spaces and places that have otherwise evaded notice and are markedly absent in the written historical record.

Amateur theatre in and around the West End

In the late-eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, a series of permanent venues that were known as ‘private theatres’ emerged in London. These venues provided a stage for young middle-class men – and occasionally women – to perform in amateur theatricals and were regularly attended by apprentices, bank clerks, shop workers and students of law. While each private theatre may have functioned in a slightly different way, they all secured an income from subscriptions and most charged the performers an additional fee to take a role, with the larger parts carrying a heavier tariff. By avoiding an ordinary on-the-door ticketing system and using subscriptions as a substitute income, these venues took advantage of a loophole in the law which allowed them to function without the need for a licence (‘Report from the Select Committee’ 1832: 12). This also enabled them to perform the ‘legitimate’ drama, which was otherwise restricted by law to the two patent theatres – Drury Lane and Covent Garden.² Thus, the private theatres provided an opportunity for amateurs to practice this otherwise exclusive form of theatre – a factor which was particularly important for those that were destined for the profession.

At present the private theatres are merely a footnote in theatre history, with their reputation largely shaped by Charles Dickens’s caricature in *Sketches by Boz* (1994: 120–126). In his ‘Private Theatres’ Dickens suggests that those that performed in such venues might include ‘shopboys who now and then mistake their masters’ money for their own; and a choice miscellany of idle vagabonds’; that the owner of such a venue might be ‘an ex-scene-painter, a low coffee house keeper, a disappointed eighth-rate actor, a retired smuggler, or

an uncertificated bankrupt'; and that the audiences were 'a motley group of dupes and blackguards' (1994: 122–125).

The private theatre in Dickens's sketch is fictional, though the author makes clear that his caricature is based on several real venues that were then in operation in London. His imagined private theatre 'may be in Catherine Street, Strand, the purlieus of the city, the neighbourhood of Gray's Inn Lane, or the vicinity of Sadler's Wells; or it may, perhaps, form the chief nuisance of some shabby street, on the Surrey side of Waterloo Bridge' (1994: 122). Here Dickens refers to the well-established private theatres in Catherine Street, in the West End, and in Gough Street, Gray's Inn Lane. The private theatre that he indicates as being close to Sadler's Wells was in Rawstorne Place, and the establishment on the Surrey side of Waterloo Bridge was in Lower Marsh, Lambeth, where a Miss Harriett Potter was the proprietor in November 1848, when she was charged for maintaining an unlicensed theatre. Dickens would have been familiar with these, and with numerous other private theatres in the capital, some of which will have passed forgotten into history (Dickens 1994: 120).

Aside from these fictional representations, only fragments of evidence of the private theatres' existence have survived - and in the main these come, problematically, from the police reports of newspaper columns. These sources largely uphold Dickens's caricature, supporting the notion that the private theatres were disreputable and had poor standards. For example, on 17 July 1829 *The Times* reported that a police constable found 'great noise and rioting and grossly immoral proceedings ... being carried on nightly' at one of the private theatres (4). He alleged that the scenes were 'of the greatest profligacy':

the scene beggared anything I ever saw. There were upwards of 300 persons of both sexes in the house, and the great majority of them were very young, many of them mere children. Between the acts there was romping amongst these boys and girls, and very indecent conduct on the part of many of them. At the fall of the curtain the audience left the house, and the street was in uproar for an hour afterwards. (4)

This extract captures many of the key complaints made against the private theatres. They were believed to encourage vice and immorality, they disturbed their local neighbourhoods into the early hours of the morning, and they corrupted the youth of society – particularly young men.

However, by shunning such existing narratives around London's private theatres and instead reading the surviving evidence against the grain, it is possible to view these venues in a very different light. For example, the private theatre in Gough Street, owned by Mr and Mrs Pym, was described by the journalist George Hodder as 'the best known private theatre of the time' (1870: 182). Although there are police reports recording dubious activities at this venue, three acting books containing playbills from this theatre have survived – two in archives on the other side of the Atlantic, and a third in the hands of a private collector in Scotland ('Dramatic Institution'; 'Pym's Dramatic Institution'; 'Subscription Theatre'). Together, these volumes suggest that performances took place at the venue at least once per week, with the acting book at New York Public Library accounting for scheduled events every Thursday between 3 November and 8 December 1831 ('Subscription Theatre'). Such regularity appears not to have been unusual for the private theatres: a document from 1811 proposing the opening of a new venue in London records that performances are 'to be on three Evenings in the week, from 1st November to 1st July: consisting of two unexceptionable Comedies or Tragedies, and one Musical Entertainment' ('Heads of Plan'). Many of the playbills from Pym's private theatre proudly state that the venue was 'established in 1817', with a further playbill from the V&A's Theatre and Performance Collections showing that it was still in operation in 1851 ('Dramatic Institution & Theatre'). The existence of regular amateur dramatic performances for over thirty years in the heart of the West End suggests that theatre historians have allowed a handful of police reports and a Dickensian caricature to create an unfair portrayal of such venues in the written record.

The process of mapping the locations of the private theatres onto the topography of London can in turn aid a 'digital discovery' which promotes a further shift in attitude towards these venues. Figure 1 plots the approximate site of each theatre onto a digital copy of *Reynolds's Map of London* of 1851. This map was chosen as it records London just before the last of the private theatres under investigation had disappeared from the city's landscape. Through mapping the private theatres it was possible to analyse the spatial associations between each of the various marked sites, and between the venues and the wider city. With only a few outliers, this process revealed that London's private theatres were clustered around the West End, indicating a possible relationship between amateur and commercial practices. Barney Warf and Santa Arias have suggested that '*where* things happen is critical to knowing *how* and *why* they happen' (Warf and Arias 2009: 1). The correlation between the

location of the private theatres and the West End thus raises a number of questions about the symbiosis of amateur and professional theatre in this district in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the role of amateur theatre in its ecology. These questions can then be pursued as new lines of enquiry.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

By looking beyond the banner of 'private theatres' and analysing each venue individually, paying particular attention to their names, their relationship to the profession can be further unravelled. The theatre in King's Cross was known as the 'Subscription Dramatic Establishment', the Catherine Street Theatre was known as both the 'Thespian Institution' and the 'Pantheon Amateur Theatre and Dramatic Academy' at different points in time, and both Pym's Theatre and the theatre in Rawstone Place were known as the 'Dramatic Institution' ('Subscription Theatre'; 'Unlicensed Theatres'). Collectively the names of these venues emphasize the educative role of the private theatres, which were vital training grounds and schools of dramatic art, feeding the profession with new talent.

There is evidence of theatre managers attending performances at the private theatres to view the trainees and scope out potential recruits for their professional companies - and in at least one case, a manager was also an agent. Benjamin Smythson, who managed both the Sans Souci Theatre and the private theatre in Catherine Street, was celebrated after his death as '[t]he well-known private theatrical Monarch and theatrical agent' who, in later life, had 'devoted his time and experience to rear and provide sucking honours for the "sock and buskin", at the temple of Thalia, in Catherine Street, for the various theatrical managers in the provinces' (*Morning Advertiser* 1841).

There are also multiple sources highlighting the regularity with which performers would transition from the private theatres to the public stage. On 18 September 1797, for example, *The Oracle and Public Advertiser* stated that 'The Private Theatre at Tottenham Court Road has given no less than five performers of much promise to the Winter Theatres for the present season' (3). Numerous theatrical personalities record their early stage experiences at the private theatres, including among others Edmund Kean, Samuel Phelps and the playwright James Robinson Planché, who writes in his *Recollections and Reflections* that before having his first piece performed at a public theatre in 1818, he 'murdered many

principal personages of the acting drama' in his youth at the private theatres in Berwick Street, Pancras Street, Catherine Street and Gough Street (1901: 3).

The notion - suggested through the process and product of mapping - that amateur and professional theatricals could be interdependent in the West End - is supported by evidence in the V&A's Theatre and Performance Collections. Amongst the contents of box after box of ephemera relating to the largest and most famous West End theatres, there are occasional material traces of amateur theatrical activities. The St James's Theatre boxes, for example, contain evidence that from at least the 1840s this venue played host to a number of amateur theatrical events, yet the written histories of these prestigious theatres fail to mention any such association.

And although the researcher's eye may again first be tempted by the noteworthy events - such as the performances of Dickens's company at the St James's Theatre in 1845 of Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* at the request of Prince Albert - in bypassing the ephemera from these noteworthy theatricals the boxes reveal items that document more 'commonplace' amateur pursuits, which have otherwise been overlooked (Cochrane 2003: 169-170). A playbill from April 1843 records a performance of *The Duel; or, The Days of Richelieu* by the Histrionics, an amateur dramatic club founded in 1842 by 'the better-half' of an earlier and short-lived society, known as the Shaksperians (*Era* 1842). The Histrionics had first hired the St James's Theatre in November 1842 and continued to use it for their performances for at least ten years. But although their members were all wealthy gentlemen, none were prominent enough to have made these theatricals a subject of interest for other historians.

In *The Lost Theatres of London*, however, Mander and Mitchenson suggest that amateur groups such as the Histrionics were part of the ecology and economy of the West End. Their acknowledgement of the embeddedness of the amateur within this district is perhaps a result of their particular vantage point, not as academic theatre historians but as former professional actors.³ They write that at the St James's Theatre 'amateurs were welcomed to keep the house open' (1968: 458). Similarly, they mention the presence of amateurs in the histories of a range of other West End venues, including the Queen's Theatre, the New Royalty Theatre, and the Polygraphic Hall - where one-man entertainments, lectures and amateurs made their way onto the stage when William Samuel Woodin, the manager, was not performing his own entertainments, from 1855 through until the late 1860s (1968:

534). The occupation of so many of the West End's venues by amateurs at various points in their histories suggests that the amateur had a role to play in the financial sustainability of some of the major West End venues and contributed to the economic wellbeing of the industry at large.

Further evidence of this interconnected ecology is to be found on the periphery of the West End, in the history of the Novelty Theatre, which was re-opened in 1886 by L. & H. Nathan, the theatrical costumiers, with the intention of providing 'a good West-end theatre' for amateurs, which 'would give them a better chance than the small halls and institutes in which they usually played' (Nathan 1960: 91). This was a new addition to their already-extensive offering to amateurs, which included the hire and sale of costumes, wigs, make-up, scenery, lighting, and various other accessories for theatrical production, highlighting the perceived economic potential of the growing amateur theatrical market in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century (Coates 2017: 238–255). However, although the Novelty Theatre hosted a variety of amateur dramatic entertainments, the venture failed, most likely because St George's Hall had already established a monopoly on venue hire for amateur dramatic clubs and societies close to the West End.

St George's Hall, in Langham Place, played a significant role in the development of amateur theatre in London. The venue was opened in 1867 as a dual-function concert hall and theatre. Its first recorded use as a theatre was for an amateur performance by a group known as the Wandering Thespians in December 1867, marking the venue as a home for amateurs from the outset. Under the management of Thomas, Priscilla and Alfred German Reed, along with Richard Corney Grain, from 1867 to 1895 it became a fashionable and respectable resort of entertainment for the middle classes and was advertised to them at reasonable rates. In the boxes of ephemera relating to St George's Hall, in the V&A's Theatre and Performance Collection, there are a substantial number of playbills to account for its ability to attract middle-class amateur societies to its stage between 1884 and 1901, from the Irving Amateur Dramatic Club to two companies whose names point towards other regions of the city: the St John's Wood Dramatic Musical Society, and the Lancaster Gate Dramatic Society. The inclusion of these latter groups suggests that theatrical communities were being forged in multiple regions and districts of the city, many of which were far removed from the West End. It is to these regions that our attention will now turn.

Amateur theatre in the regions of London

Thomas Francis Dillon Croker was a clerk for the P&O shipping company, as well as a writer, an antiquarian and a theatre enthusiast. He was an inveterate first-nighter, was on the committee of the Royal General Theatrical Fund and dabbled in theatre history – delivering lectures on the actor William Kemp and on the masque of *Comus* to the British Archaeological Society in 1867 and 1869. Croker was also an amateur performer. He was best-known for performing theatrical impersonations, in which he imitated celebrities from the professional stage, including Alfred Wigan, John Baldwin Buckstone, Robert Keeley, and Charles Mathews. He also regularly performed public readings and appeared in amateur theatricals.

An acting book that once belonged to Croker survives in the Harvard Theatre Collection. The volume begins with an extensive and impressive list – four pages long – recording over 125 theatrical engagements between 1858 and 1870 ('Thomas Francis Dillon Croker'). What follows is an assortment of correspondence, playbills, tickets, prologues and other ephemera relating to each of these engagements. Figure 2 shows my mapping of the approximate location of Croker's performances onto Colton's *Environs of London* of 1869 – a map chosen for its representation of the city in the year before the final performances logged in the acting book. As each point was marked on this map, the significance of Croker's amateur theatrical career became gradually more apparent.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

On the one hand, akin to the process of mapping private theatres, the plotting of activity provided greater insight into the relationship between the amateur and the West End. Croker's acting book contains evidence of his amateur theatrical pursuits at some of the most prominent West End houses, including his participation in a performance for 'the Benefit of the Widowed Mother of the late Paul Gray' – an artist who produced illustrations for the periodical *Fun* – at the Haymarket Theatre on 6 July 1867. The previous year he had performed impressions of 'several well-known Celebrities of the Stage' in the form of 'an imaginary conversation' as part of an amateur theatrical event at the Polygraphic Hall, near Charing Cross, in aid of the Society for Establishing Sailors' Homes.

Croker's volume also comprises material traces from some of the smaller public theatres and entertainment halls where amateur dramatics were part of the regular fare. These include several venues already highlighted in this chapter, including St George's Hall, where he acted for the benefit of a Mr Warboys in May 1872, and the Cabinet Theatre in King's Cross, where an event was hosted for the benefit of the theatre's leading lady, Mrs Malcolm, in June 1865. Additionally, Croker had appeared at the New Royalty Theatre, in Dean Street, Soho, in April 1862 for the benefit of the 'celebrated polyphonist', Mr Love ('Thomas Francis Dillon Croker'). This venue was built by the actress Fanny Kelly, and first opened its doors in May 1840 as the home of her dramatic school. After the school's closure in 1849 the theatre maintained a strong association with amateurs, which is evidenced in the boxes of ephemera relating to this venue in the V&A Theatre Collections ('Royalty Theatre Building Boxes').

On the other hand, and arguably of far greater significance, the mapping of performances listed in Croker's acting book provides insights into the provision of amateur theatrical entertainments across the wider geography of London. The majority of Croker's performances take place on the outskirts of the city, including in Greenwich, Hackney, Clapton, St John's Wood, Chelsea, Peckham, Blackheath, Islington, Southwark, Fulham, Walworth and Enfield. He also performs further afield in the suburbs, including Highgate, Mitcham and Bromley, with a number of performances taking place far beyond London, including Ventnor, Ryde, Ringwood, Scarborough, Tenterden, and Cork. The acting book and its accompanying map are a stark reminder that Britain's cities are themselves made up of 'regions', many of which have not featured in existing theatre histories.

The type of venues where amateur theatricals took place in these regions are in desperate need of further scholarly attention. The volume contains material traces of performances in literary and scientific institutes, lunatic asylums, church schoolrooms, coaching inns, town halls and assembly rooms. These spaces were multi-purpose, with amateur theatricals being produced between political meetings, religious gatherings, club and society events, lectures, exhibitions, and social functions. The number of venues in the city functioning on these lines thus challenge our perceptions of where - and in what form - the majority of Londoners might have encountered performance in this period.

The map of Croker's activities also challenges our understanding of how amateur theatre may have functioned. It is all too easy to assume that amateur theatricals have always

been localized, drawing on local talent to perform and local communities to make up the audience. Croker's home at 9 Pelham Place, Brompton, to the south west of the city is marked on the map: and although he occasionally takes part in amateur theatricals close to home at the Chelsea Vestry Hall – often as part of the series of entertainments offered by the Chelsea Literary and Scientific Institution – the completed map highlights the geographical scope of his amateur theatrical career. This career takes Croker to all corners of the city, and beyond it, stressing the mobility of the amateur theatrical performer in the second half of the nineteenth century. This new knowledge, established through mapping, provides fresh understanding of those dramatic societies whose names perhaps reflect their itinerant status, such as the Romany Amateur Dramatic Club, the Strolling Players and the Wandering Thespians.

In plotting Croker's career onto Colton's map - which includes railway lines and stations in and around London - a further 'digital discovery' was made. Croker's performances in the suburbs of London take place in locations that are close to these lines, suggesting that he used the developing rail network to engage in amateur theatricals in an ever-widening geographical region. In turn, this discovery raises questions about the mobility of amateur theatrical audiences in the period. Whilst existing theatre histories frequently acknowledge the development of the railways and their ability to bring new theatre audiences into the centre of London and the West End, my mapping of Croker's amateur theatrical career gives the impression that theatrical tourism may have been two-way. On closer investigation of Croker's acting book, there is evidence to support such a claim. In 1866 he appeared in an annual entertainment in Bromley Town Hall which was produced by the Bromley Cricket Club and attracted a fashionable crowd. The annual playbills announce that in order to 'suit the convenience of Visitors from London, a SPECIAL TRAIN will leave the Bromley Station for Victoria half-an-hour after the conclusion of the Performance' (Thomas Francis Dillon Croker).

Conclusion: deep mapping

The design of Colton's map makes it possible to link the rapid development of the rail network with the location of amateur theatrical activity in the suburbs of London, as well as with the mobility of the amateur actor and their audiences. This almost accidental discovery,

made through the overlaying of a particular map edition with amateur theatrical data, highlights the need for this enquiry to be expanded in new directions to enhance our understanding of the history of amateur theatre in London. A possible solution might be deep (or thick) mapping, which Bodenhamer et al have proposed 'is the essential next step for humanists who are eager to take full advantage of the spatial turn' (2015: 1). Although Tiffany Earley-Spadoni has pointed out that there 'is no scholarly consensus on what a deep map is or what the process of deep mapping entails', a number of their qualities, described by some of their strongest advocates, would appear to enrich this investigation (2017: 95).

Attempting a catch-all definition, Earley-Spadoni writes that a 'deep map is a multi-layered, digital cartographic representation that allows map creators to annotate and illustrate geographical and social space in various ways, often using multi-media elements, commenting and super-imposable layers' (2017: 96). For Les Roberts 'deep mapping ... is as much a process of *archaeology* as it is cartography' (2016: 3), with Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks proposing that a deep map could encompass 'everything you might ever want to say about a place' (2001: 65). The creation of multiple layers of seemingly disparate information that can be produced through deep mapping can be digitally juxtaposed to find new meanings, and changes over time can be more easily understood. Roberts goes on to say that 'very little of what deep mappers are *doing* is in fact oriented towards the production of maps so much as immersing themselves in the warp and weft of a lived and fundamentally intersubjective spatiality' (2016: 6).

Building on the initial findings of this essay, a project that develops a deep map of a very small area of London's West End would highlight the value of this methodology to theatre historiography. Such a project could dig deeper into the construction of the West End, relating its development as theatreland to a wide variety of other histories in the same geographical area which until now have seemed unrelated. Just as Earley-Spadoni has suggested that deep maps 'allow for dissent and discussion of contested geographies, and ... permit multi-vocality' (2017: 97), a deep map of an area of the West End would complicate the dominant discourses of the region and its associations with the development of professional British theatre, revealing its multifacetedness and enabling hidden histories, such as that of amateur theatre, to be viewed on equal terms.



Figure 1. Map showing the approximate location of each of London's private theatres between 1780 and 1851. The base map is 'Reynold's Map of London' of 1851, Harvard Map Collection, Harvard Library.



Figure 2. Map showing the approximate location of each of Thomas Francis Dillon Croker's amateur theatrical performances between 1858 and 1870. Croker's house is marked on the map with a red square. The base map is Colton's 'Environs of London' of 1869, David Rumsey Map Collection, www.davidrumsey.com

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¹ These two named areas for growth were directly influenced by academic activity. On 2 March 2016, in email correspondence, Jo Elsworth, the Director of the University of Bristol Theatre Collection, wrote that the new policy would include areas that 'I feel are woefully underrepresented in UK archives and that I might try and put in in order to build up a record'. She wrote that my research had highlighted that 'apart from Country Homes and maybe Record Offices there is no logical place for collecting this material'. Kate Astbury's work on French prisoner of war theatricals was likely the influence for future collecting in this area.

² This restriction would only be relaxed with the passing of the Theatres Act of 1843, which removed the privileges of Covent Garden and Drury Lane. The Theatres Act made amendments to the Licensing Act of 1737, based on the recommendations put forward by a Select Committee on Dramatic Literature of 1832 (Swindells and Taylor year?).

³ Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson were partners and were keen collectors of theatrical ephemera. During their lifetimes they amassed an enormous theatrical collection, which they used to publish several books on British theatre history. After Mander's death in 1983, a charitable trust was established to protect the collection. The collection had a number of homes before being transferred to the University of Bristol in 2010.