Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme

Burkert, Mattie, principal investigator and project dir. The London Stage Database

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Burkert, Mattie, principal investigator and project dir.
The London Stage Database.
Department of English, University of Oregon, 2019. Accessed 12 November 2020.
londonstagedatabase.uoregon.edu.

The London Stage Database is an online relational database covering performances that took place in London from 1660 until the end of the eighteenth century: these include plays, pantomimes, music, singing, and dancing, among other public performances. The venues recorded in this resource include assembly rooms, fairs, playhouses, taverns, and unknown locations identified simply with a street name or area such as Fleet Street, Greenwich, and Southwark, among others. The entries are based on diary entries, newspaper advertisements, playbills, playhouse records, published gossip, and reviews, and as such, the database presents information that reflects public life and popular culture in the long eighteenth century in London.

The data contained in this resource are based on entries that were originally published in the eleven-volume reference work, *The London Stage, 1660–1800*.[1] In the 1970s, the editors of that work commissioned a project to transform the printed version into a database called the London Stage Information Bank, a project that unfortunately became obsolete almost as soon as it was finished. The London Stage Database is based on the (since damaged) data and code left behind by the Information Bank. The project to salvage the Information Bank's damaged data and code, and create this relational database, ran from 2018 to 2019 and received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as from Utah State University and the University of Oregon.[2]

The project uses a GitHub repository to enable users to download some or all of the data, as well as access its freely available resources to "conduct exploratory analyses" ("About the Project"). The site is open source and open access. As the website itself makes clear, the origin of the project is based on incomplete/broken data and sometimes obscure editorial decisions. This has resulted in a resource that should primarily be used as a point of departure for research and teaching. It was not built, and is not intended to act, as a

1. William Van Lennep, *The London Stage, 1660–1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960–68). All volumes are now available on Hathi Trust, catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000200105.

2. The full team list, including Principal Investigator and Project Director Mattie Burkert, is available at londonstagedatabase.uoregon.edu/about.php#Funding.

comprehensive research resource: "the London Stage Database inherits not only the limitations of the archives on which the London Stage reference books were based, but all of the choices made (sometimes silently) by the editors of those books" ("About the Project"). The project team's decision to add new features and functionality, such as linking abbreviated theatre codes to the theatre names, has also "introduced new forms of error and ambiguity" ("About the Project"). As such, there are a fair number of errors and bugs in the database, but the project team is candid and open about these problems.

A comprehensive user guide provides information on key terms, dates, cast lists, authors, and how the search function and export and visualization tools work. The guide does not provide any information on copyright or licensing terms, but the image collage on the home page is covered by a CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence. The user guide includes "key terms" and provides an explanation for those terms unfamiliar to researchers not used to working with eighteenth-century theatre terminology. The guide explains some aspects that are particularly difficult for inexperienced researchers, such as dates and the theatres' accounting practices. The dates can be tricky, as England had switched to the Gregorian calendar approximately mid-way through the timespan covered by the database: "the Old Style month and day of a performance are retained, but the year is assumed to begin on January 1, as in the New Style" ("User Guide"). The theatres' account books list a bewildering array of ticket types and receipts taken, which is explained simply and plainly in the user guide. These include, for instance, "first account," "half price," and "second account" tickets that were sold, respectively, to viewers seated at curtain rise and those arriving after the conclusion of the third act.

The interface is simple and easy to use, with a basic search function on the home page and an advanced search that offers defined fields; there is no Boolean search capability within these fields, but there is on the basic search page. The left-hand side bar that appears in the results page ensures that you do not get lost in the page, but the top menu disappears once you scroll down the page. You can only return to the search results; it is not possible to move forward and backward between them.

Two sample searches were performed using the advanced search. The first used "Inner Temple" from the drop-down "Theatre" field and the second used "Trick" from the "Filter by Performance Type" field. The latter produced nil results, and all searches performed produced an odd message on the results

page which could lead to some confusion: "it looks like you're trying to access the full dataset. Please visit Data to do so."[3] The "Data" link in that message was not the search's dataset, however, but the entire dataset. The narrowed dataset ("Event Downloads") is actually presented to the left of the results screen. The results are listed by relevance, with the option to re-sort by date. Although one cannot order the results by criteria other than date, the results can be filtered by other fields such as author, performance type, and title, among others. The search result ("Event Information") provides what is in effect a transcript of the original reference work's entry, along with "Data Phases." The latter consist of a PDF of the relevant page from the original printed work,[4] the original data from the Information Bank, a cleaned version of that data, and a parsed version. It is not clear why, on the event information result, to view the title of the play and "Related Works" one has to scroll down the page, beyond the PDF, to the "Mainpiece," although the latter is at least hyperlinked on the page to save on scrolling.

The full dataset can be exported as SQL, JSON, XML, and CSV files, but search results can only be exported as JSON, XML, and CSV files. All of these are human-readable file types which can be opened in a text editor. The XML and JSON file types are better for storing relational data and would be useful for those wanting to create a subset of data, or a "mini" database.

As the database's information is based on poor data, there are multiple, consistent transcription errors in the event information results, such as £ being transcribed as #, "receided" instead of "received," and a lack of paragraph breaks in the comments sections. Although the latter is a style issue, it could lead to confusion for researchers not familiar with the references being cited. The PDF helps alleviate this problem, as a quick glance will clarify the entry.

Some event information entries from the original printed volumes had a "see" reference. For example, in the entry for *The Changes Or, Love in a Maze* performed at the Inner Temple in January 1665, the comments reveal that the cast is not known for this performance but that a previous cast list was available: "see16620517" [sic] (fig.1). As the "see" reference is not hyperlinked

3. I used Firefox 82.0.2 and Chrome 86.0.4240.193 and this message was displayed in both browsers.

4. As the PDF is a scan from the relevant volume, which is organized by date, this sometimes results in two pages from the volume being shown in the result, and it becomes easy to lose one's way on the page, especially when one has to scroll to the bottom of the page to remind one's self of the title of the work being examined.

in the database, one has to return to the search page and do a keyword search for 16620517 to reveal the performance at the Theatre in Vere Street on 22 May 1662 (and of course remove the word "see" after/before copying and pasting). It is not clear what this number, 16620517, signifies: it appears in the comments and parsed data, but does not act as a unique identifier. The lack of display for such an identifier in all entries is problematic, as the only other unique reference point for each entry is through the URL and its "id," which in itself is not a searchable entry.

Figure 1. Example of an event information result (the bottom of the page showing the "mainpiece" information is not visible).

In the "Event Information" result, the comments have hyperlinked entries for cited works. Clicking on such a hyperlink simply runs a keyword search for that word or words. This can be highly problematic, since it means that the entries are not truly hyperlinked. For example, the hyperlink for "Ashmole" results in two entries citing the "Diary and Will of Elias Ashmole" [sic], but the hyperlink for Sir Francis Lloyd[5] leads to 18,580 results due to the keyword search picking up each individual word: "Sir," "Francis," AND "Lloyd." Often these hyperlinks did not lead to anything further, simply circling back to the

5. See londonstagedatabase.uoregon.edu/event.php?id=66 [add access date].

original entry. It would have been useful for the database to link to the proper citation of the referenced work, as there was no bibliography provided.[6]

The main benefit of this resource will be for theatre and performance historians making use of the PDFs of the original reference work, as the database makes it easy to search this work and provides reliable results. The project's encapsulation of "partial histories of performance" based on a variety of sources, such as diaries, newspapers, and institutional calendars, in addition to playbills and playhouse records, potentially extends its usefulness beyond theatre and performance historians, as it provides economic and social historians with additional information not easily available elsewhere. For example, using the drop-down "Theatre" field and choosing "Fleet Street" results in a performance that took place at the "Old House in Crane Court, Fleet Street"[7] for "A Society of Gentlemen, for their Diversion."[8] Was this Society one of the Inns of Court, a dining club, coffeehouse, or something else? This example reveals the possibilities of eighteenth-century sociability that extended beyond recognized performance spaces. In addition, as search result queries can be viewed in the manner that the SQL interpreted the search, this feature may be of interest to other institutions creating similar projects based on relational databases.

The project creators have stated that this is a resource best suited to the start of a research project into the long eighteenth century. If nothing else, it provides a valuable dataset and search engine for the digitized versions of *The London Stage, 1660–1800*. What would truly make this project stand out is a total clean of the data (amending mistakes such as # for £ throughout), improved display of the "Mainpiece" information on the page, improved hyperlinking and citations, and above all expansion. The integration of new and updated sources would improve this resource immensely and make it useful to a wider research audience. The addition of illustrations (even if only re-using the ones from the *The London Stage, 1660–1800*), maps, links to existing catalogue entries, and full-text versions of the reference works would make this an even

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6. A bibliography ("List of References") is provided in the original printed reference work. See for example volume 1, accessed 12 November 2020, babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uva.x000776847&view=1up&seq=21.

7. Accessed 12 November 2020, londonstagedatabase.uoregon.edu/event.php?id=15195.

8. Entries use capital letters throughout, in the manner cited here.

better resource for the study of eighteenth-century English performance and social life.

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The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple

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Introduction

Concordancing is far from novel: our early modern counterparts would have been very familiar with the concept of verbal indexes, as the popularity of biblical concordances indicates. Nevertheless, both the usability and potential applications of concordances have evidently developed enormously with their digitization. In digital formats, the speed and convenience of concordance consultation is naturally improved, meaning that much larger textual corpora become viable. Perhaps most revolutionary, however, is that concordancing software enables users to investigate and visualize their text in qualitative terms—for instance, by calculating the relative frequency of a word within a text, or a word's dispersion throughout a corpus.

AntConc and WordSmith Tools are two programs that enable users to create such enhanced concordances. AntConc, developed by Laurence Anthony, is available to download on Windows, Macintosh, and Linux; WordSmith Tools, developed by Michael Scott, is available for Windows. As corpus analysis programs, it is unsurprising that they both appear to be implicitly geared towards linguists; as the index of "Research Using WordSmith" illustrates, the tool has