

'THREE FOR THE POT AND ONE FOR PRESTIGE' REPERTORY AT THE ALEXANDRA THEATRE, BIRMINGHAM

by Paul Iles

In the study of repertory theatres, much attention has been paid to the history of Birmingham Repertory Theatre, but to date there has been scant critical account of the Alexandra Theatre. This paper discusses the importance of the neighbouring 'Alex' in regional theatre, for its longevity, business practices and artistic policy are attributes worthy of consideration. Now a touring house managed by the national chain Live Nation, it was once a pioneer in resident repertory companies and their circuits.

Two pioneer managements

The nearby Birmingham Rep was established – in Britain's second largest city – in the season of 1911-1912, growing out of an amateur group, The Pilgrim Players, founded in 1907 by the playwright, director, manager and stage designer, Barry (Vincent) Jackson (1879-1961). The Pilgrim Players were a peripatetic Midlands ensemble, attracting a regular audience of approximately 500 for each play. Emphasis was laid on the continuity of work, to create support for when they turned professional. The wealthy Jackson, who was born in Birmingham where he remained a life-long resident, financed the first purpose-built repertory theatre, which was built at a cost of £32,000 (only £1,750,000 in today's money) in only four months, opening at its city-centre location in Station Street on time and on budget in 1912. It remained the company's home, with only 428 seats, until the present 824-seat Birmingham Repertory Theatre was opened in 1971. Birmingham Repertory had to pay its way without subsidy for its first 23 years, but losses were exacerbated by competition arising from the second Birmingham repertory theatre at the Alexandra. From the late 1920s, when cinema began to dominate entertainment with the invention and rapid growth of 'talkies', the touring system went into decline, and many big theatres were converted to cinemas. With the prospect of diminished touring activity – additionally aggravated by the Depression from 1929 and, to a degree, the growth of BBC radio drama – the 1,550-seat Alexandra Theatre had to hold its own against these enormous contending forces and it did so firstly, by responding to the superior comforts of the cinema with an extensive refurbishment costing £40,000 (£1,628,000 in today's money).¹ Secondly, it transformed itself, for most of the year, from a touring house into a repertory theatre.

A touring house becomes a repertory theatre

The Alexandra Theatre first ventured the concept of repertory in the opening year of Birmingham Repertory, with the Raynor Repertory Company from

1911, a 'stock circuit troupe' that performed extended seasons in Birmingham. Experience of these residencies led, additionally, to on the spot repertory produced by the theatre's proprietor Leon Salberg (1875-1937). He mounted twice-nightly weekly productions, with up to 37 plays each year and a resident company of 21 actors from 1928.² Residencies reinforced continuity, for the remaining weeks in each year, at the touring houses in Wolverhampton, Hereford, Cheltenham, Kettering and Preston. The Alexandra company toured to these towns in repertoire - using the satellite theatres were nurseries for the large acting company, with an ambition to make it possible to perform every play for one week in each town, thereby easing the exertion imposed on the actors and staff by weekly repertory at the base theatre. When the company toured, perdurable lyric theatre companies such as D'Oyly Carte Opera, the Carl Rosa Opera, Ballet Rambert and Sadler's Wells Ballet occupied the Alexandra, intermittently.

Leon Salberg was succeeded by his son, Derek Salberg (1912-1997), who ran the theatre until his retirement in 1977, and its repertory company until it closed in 1975.³ The Alexandra, which some critics disdainfully referred to as a 'popular' playhouse - or, in the case of the Arts Council after 1945, more often ignored - also staged completely home-produced pantomimes. These were often seventeen-week runs, from early December to April. Hitherto, Christmas seasons in all non-profit repertory theatres had cold-shouldered children's theatre and pantomime - perhaps because the latter tended to be extravagant - but in doing so they rejected a means to mint money and entertain family audiences.

The origin of repertory at the Alexandra was primarily a matter of survival, differing from the missionary artistic impulse of Birmingham Rep or the earlier 'artistic' companies: the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, Manchester Gaiety, Ulster Literary Theatre, Glasgow Repertory and Liverpool Playhouse. The Alexandra Theatre was, like Birmingham Repertory Theatre, a locally owned theatre, but where the Repertory Theatre became a non-profit trust company limited by guarantee, the Alexandra was a private company limited by shares. The majority of these were owned by the Salberg family, who were people with long-standing knowledge of the theatre with sound business acumen.⁴ These distinct corporate structures - a semi-public, non-profit theatre institution and a private, enterprising commercial popular-theatre - underline attitudinal differences between the working practices of the two companies, especially their bearing on audiences. Objectives of the non-profit repertory theatres were defined in their constitutions, but in many other respects they resembled their commercial counterpart at the Alexandra Theatre. In matters of governance, the non-profit 'model' was, effectively, segregated from the influence of the market. At the same time, non-profit companies were distanced from the public sector at this time, receiving no smiles of fortune from direct state or local government assistance. This intermediate and blurred status, fulgently testified in the contrast of the loss making and the

profit making results of the Birmingham repertoires, set up stronger frontiers between art and entertainment. Repertory echelons of 'for-profit' (synonymous with 'pot-boiling' companies) and 'not-for-profit' (regarded by drama critics and arts council apparatchiks as 'quality' companies) might be said to anticipate today's hierarchies of those repertory theatre managements that keep audience sovereignty to the forefront and those that focus management attention on the public sector and the politics of subsidy. The Alexandra repertory company therefore serves as the fountainhead of a stratification of the repertory movement.

Choice of plays and attendance

The Alexandra was not especially concerned with new plays: its policy was, Salberg often claimed without embarrassment, 'three for the pot and one for prestige'. Unlike most profit-seeking theatre today, it maintained *lower* admission prices than Birmingham Repertory Theatre, and by budgeting profits upon a smaller audience than did its former, hosted touring companies, the Alexandra was able to compete with the cinema, as well as the higher-priced musical and variety productions at the (then) 3,000-seat Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre. In one sense, the Alexandra was more an example of repertory 'success' than Birmingham Repertory Theatre because, when it turned to fortnightly productions, it sold between 11,000 and 18,000 tickets for each production. The other repertory company's maximum capacity was 7,000 per play and, in practice sold only 4,000 tickets on average: perhaps 60,000 annually, against an astounding one year's repertory attendance of over 300,000 at the Alexandra. The activities of the two companies were beyond each other's control, but they might be said to be in the same marketplace. The Alexandra's historian, M. F. K. Fraser, described its populist outlook, also noting dissimilarity to the self-conscious elite associated with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre:

For the first time in Birmingham stage history, many of the best current and recent plays were made available in a large, popular theatre at prices within reach of the most slender purse. Here, the habitué could form, perhaps not a close friendship, but certainly a nodding acquaintance, with a Drama hitherto unknown outside the more class-conscious Number One theatres on the one side, and the tiny, self-centred Repertory Theatre on the other.

The Alexandra, first of all the commercial theatres in Birmingham, now began to make play-going not merely an intellectual and recreative pleasure, but a gay experience, gathering everybody, on both sides of the pass-door, into one big happy family. It gave the great mass of our citizens both the opportunity and the incentive to become regular theatregoers, and to do so not because it was The Thing, but because it was an enjoyable excursion into the realm of illusion.⁵

Fraser's adumbration was that the Alexandra, because it was focused on 'head-count', could not afford to serve art for art's sake alone. By describing the other theatre as 'self-centred' – that might also be witnessed in the Repertory Theatre's 1935 mission statements – he also made one of the few contemporary references to the creeping and endemic isolation of the serious repertory theatres from the general public.⁶ Undeniably, scrutiny of choices at the Alexandra reveals that the company was indisposed to select plays far beyond the security of recent, well-heeled West End achievements. It was progressive to the extent of keeping abreast of contemporary London theatre and its tastes: a far cry, for instance, from the Glasgow Repertory Theatre's 1909 good intentions of being 'independent of London for its dramatic supplies'. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in the following table of productions staged by these two theatres in 1937 – a year chosen at random – there are unexpected similarities between the two Birmingham companies.

It would be an over-simplification to differentiate their play-choices by a 'high culture-low culture' assessment. For instance, the inclusion, at the Alexandra, of plays by St John Ervine (1883–1971), J. B. Priestley (1894–1984), Noël Coward (1899–1973), James Bridie, Shaw and O'Casey might be considered artistically enterprising for the Repertory Theatre, as well as for many subsidised repertory theatres today. It is noticeable that the Alexandra chose a play by the Phillipotts. They were husband-and-wife playwrights nurtured by Barry Jackson, whose work entered the play-lists of many commercial repertories after Jackson had transferred the Birmingham productions to London. Jackson's fortuitous contributions to the Alexandra programme also included a play co-written by the impresario Emile Littler (1903–1989), then general manager at Birmingham Repertory Theatre. In 1937, there were only two premieres at the Alexandra but, correspondingly, there were no more than three premieres at the other theatre. Neither theatre made any significant breach upon the long-standing British insularity towards international drama: one American play was produced at the Repertory and one from France at the Alexandra. Disparity of play choice might, therefore, lay in the preponderance of innocuous thrillers and the period phenomenon of reassuring, flimsy 'drawing-room comedies' – each with their succession of unspectacular but easily designed settings – at the Alexandra, against a concentration of eighteenth-century classics by Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816), Henry Fielding (1707–1754) and Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774) at the Repertory Theatre.

TWO BIRMINGHAM REPERTORY COMPANIES			
SPECIMEN AND COMPARATIVE PLAY SELECTION FOR 1937⁷			
BIRMINGHAM REPERTORY THEATRE (15 productions)		THE ALEXANDRA THEATRE (30 productions)	
<i>Spring Tide</i> <i>The School For Scandal</i> <i>L'Èse Majesté*</i> <i>And So To Bed</i> <i>The Anatomist</i> <i>The Courageous Sex*</i> <i>Tom Thumb the Great</i> <i>The Torchbearers</i> <i>Front of House</i> <i>Victoria, Queen and Empress*</i> <i>Judgement Day</i> <i>She Stoops To Conquer</i> <i>Widower's Houses</i> <i>Bees on the Boat Deck</i> <i>1066 And All That</i>	J.B.Priestley (1936) R.B. Sheridan (1777) John Beanes (1937) J.B. Fagan (1926) James Bridie (1930) Mary Sheridan (1937) Henry Fielding (1730) George Kelly (1922) Charles Landstone (1936) G.W. Rushton and T.S. Mack (1937) Elmer Rice (1937) Oliver Goldsmith (1773) Bernard Shaw (1892) J.B. Priestley (1936) Reginald Arkell and Alfred Reynolds (1935)	<i>Tovarich</i> <i>Busman's Honeymoon</i> <i>Cornelius</i> <i>Married in Haste*</i> <i>Storm in a Teacup</i> <i>To-Night at 8.30:</i> <i>We Were Dancing, The Astonished Heart, Red Peppers</i> <i>The Two Mrs. Carrolls</i> <i>Pygmalion</i> <i>Someone at the Door</i> <i>Anthony and Anna</i> <i>Do You Remember?</i> <i>Little Women</i> <i>The Unguarded Hour</i> <i>Miss Smith</i> <i>The Dominant Sex</i> <i>Sweet Nell of Old Drury</i> <i>Flat to Let</i> <i>Mademoiselle</i> <i>The Black Eye</i> <i>Spring Tide</i> <i>Devonshire Cream</i> <i>Juno and the Paycock</i> <i>Vickie and Albert*</i> <i>All-In Marriage</i> <i>Night Must Fall</i> <i>Winter Sunshine</i> <i>Love on the Dole</i> <i>Mrs. Warren's Profession</i> <i>To-Night at 8.30:</i> <i>Hands Across The Sea,</i> <i>Fumed Oak, Shadow Play</i> <i>Aladdin</i>	Robert Sherwood (1935) St. Clare Byrne (1936) J.B. Priestley (1935) George Berry (1937) James Bridie (1936) Noël Coward (1935) Martin Vale (1935) Bernard Shaw (1914) Dorothy & Campbell Christie (1935) St. John Ervine (1926) John Carlton and Edith Savile (1934) Marion de Forest from Louisa M. Alcott (1919) Bernard Merivale (1935) Henry Bernard (1936) Michael Egan (1934) Paul Kaster (1900) Arthur Macrae (1931) Jacques Deval (1936) James Bridie (1935) George Billam and J.B. Priestley (1936) Eden and Adelaide Phillpotts (1924) Seán O'Casey (1925) Consuelo de Reys (1937) Aurania Rouveral and Emile Littler (1935) Emlyn Williams (1935) G.A. Thomas (1935) Walter Greenwood (1935) Bernard Shaw (1902) Noël Coward (1936) Mime (1937)
* First time on any stage			

Without doubt, a wider-ranging choice at the Alexandra – that might be said to be more aligned with Granville Barker’s repertory likeness to a ‘library’ of plays than those of the Repertory Theatre – gave theatregoers an enormous range, making Jackson’s selection appear all but *recherché*.⁸ In a broad sense, distinctions between policies of play-choice may be excrescent. Both repertory theatres claimed to offer a representative range of plays at as good a standard of production, direction and acting as might be achieved under the expedience of their organisation. But the Alexandra’s broad, reputable choices might now be seen as a better fusion of popularisation and education, attracting a large and socially inclusive public and, therefore, an excellent

forebear of today's 'big idea' in subsidised theatre: the arts marketing goal of 'growing the audience'.

The Alexandra play-list also signposts another key issue in repertory management from this time: how soon the release of 'rights' by West End managements could be obtained (as well the allied subject of playwrights' royalties). London theatres held sole rights to a popular play and withheld consent for extensive presentation by repertories (or amateurs) until it suited them to do so. Repertories wanted to reproduce these successes immediately, when the play was fresh in the minds of the national newspaper-reading public. It was – and still is – only occasionally that a repertory company could obtain a licence to perform a play simultaneous to a London run. The West End managements – as well as playwrights and their agents – argued that London audiences were drawn from the provinces and that the bigger the success and the greater the national esteem of a play, so would be the drawing power for a later repertory production. At this time, lasting, revivable West End plays were the exception. During phases when West End productions went on tour, repertory companies also had to compete against further withholding of rights, until the circuit was completed. However, the near-contemporaneous authors' dating in the Alexandra play-list for 1937 vouches for the dearth of national touring then, as well as for all plays chosen being in copyright and therefore subject to royalties.

The popularity of the acting company

To modern observers, the Alexandra's repertoire was prodigious and, notwithstanding its fixations on the West End, drew few boundaries. It attempted a great deal on a shoestring, without the safeguard of private or state patronage. If production standards were considered higher in the fortnightly and three-weekly cycle of Birmingham Repertory Theatre, in most weekly repertory companies theatregoers must have found them only passable, especially as scripts often had to be cut because of short durations required in twice-nightly repertory, where performances were squeezed into four hours, with curtain up at 6.30 and 8.50 pm. At the Alexandra, actors would only have time to sketch in the background to characterisation but, as in the actor-manager system, the leading man and leading lady – who probably were sometimes miscast in Birmingham – were held in high favour, with a few bad performances easily buried in theatregoer appreciation of a majority of better ones in the long season. Many other weekly repertory companies offered only a lacklustre aftertaste of the West End, but if the Alexandra company acting lacked subtlety and imagination, the actors compensated by acquiring public affection. Derek Salberg also recalled that the company was a testing ground for future talent:

The popular repertory actors.... were idols of the Alex public who, in those days, and I believe equally today, demanded that their actors should also be

personalities; something which drama schools cannot teach and is perhaps not always appreciated by producers in our methods of apprenticeship.⁹

Profitable financial management for weekly rep

In his memoirs, Salberg quoted receipts for several productions as well as other isolated references to profits and financial dealings. These, together with information from other sources – such as the ‘Esher Standard Contract’ for repertory actors (that formalised an employment distinction from touring theatre, with lower minimum wages paid in repertory), management handbooks for large theatres, seat prices, the theatre’s audience capacity and published rail fares – enable reconstruction of an indicative profit and loss account for the Alexandra Theatre.¹⁰ The following table dissects turnover by function, synchronising categories used in pre-1945 commercial theatre with those applied by subsidised theatre managements today. In 1945, the Alexandra profit, before corporation tax and any profits from touring, was likely to be in the region of £13,000 (£285,000). Customarily, this year is acknowledged as the financial summit for the commercial repertory theatres, despite the deprivations of the Second World War. At the Alexandra, this profit could be realised with an average attendance of 1,007 seats sold at each performance, without any subsidy or relief from Entertainment Tax. Apart from the high degree of self-reliance, the account confirms the scale at which an independent weekly repertory company could operate on the funds of a sole manager, in a big theatre.

THE ALEXANDRA THEATRE (BIRMINGHAM) LIMITED¹¹				
RECONSTRUCTION OF ESTIMATED PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT 1945				
INCOME	£	£	£	Notes to estimates (included within main endnote)
1,550 seats x 300 Performances (25p, 20p, 12.5p, 7.5p, 5p)				i
Average Price Paid 12p x 55% Average Attendance				
302,250 Paid Admissions	30,690			
Less: Entertainment Tax 20%	6,138			ii
Net Repertory Box Office Receipts			24,552	
Add: Ancillary Income				
Net Programme Profit (Including Advertising)	2,250			iii
Net Bars, Chocolates, Ices, Perfumes and Tea Trays	3,778			
Cloakroom	550			
Opera Glasses	175			
Safety Curtain Advertising	250		7,003	

TOTAL EARNED INCOME			£31,555	
LESS EXPENDITURE				
PAYROLL				
Artistic Wages				
Resident Producer 52 weeks x £12	624			
Manager 52 weeks x £12	624	1,248		
Actors: (including guests/overlaps)				iv
Leading Man 3 x 42 weeks x £10	1,260			
Leading Lady 3 x 42 weeks x £10	1,260			
Character Man 3 x 42 weeks x £8	1,008			
Character Lady 3 x 42 weeks x £6	756			
Juvenile Man 3 x 42 weeks x £7	882			
Juvenile Lady 3 x 42 weeks x £5.50	693			
Second Man 2 x 42 weeks x £5	420			
Second Lady 2 x 42 weeks x £4.50	378			
Resident Repertory Orchestra (3 violins, bass, cello, clarinet, drums) 45 x £8	360	7,017		v
Stage Manager 43 weeks x £7	294			
Assistant Stage Manager 42 weeks x £4	168			
Student 2 x 42 weeks x £2.50	210			
Resident SM-Carpenter 52 weeks x £7	364			
Utility Man-Electrician 42 weeks x £7	294			
Utility Lady 42 weeks x £5	210			
Boy 42 weeks x £3	126			
Girl 42 weeks x £3	126			
Scenic Designer 41 weeks x £8	328	2,120		
Total Artistic Wages			10,385	
General Administrative Wages				
Front of House Manager 52 weeks x £8	416			
Box Office No. 1: 52 weeks x £5	260			
Box Office Clerk 52 weeks x £3	156			
Box-office Assistant 45 weeks x £1.50	68			
Cleaners 3 x 45 weeks x £1.50	203			
Ushers 12 x 30 Productions x 10 Performances x 15p	540			
Ushers' Programme Commission	180			
Barmaids 2 x 30 Productions x 10 Performances x 12.5p	75			
Night watchman 52 weeks x £3	156			
State Employer's Insurance	75			
Total Administrative Wages			2,128	

Total Payroll			12,513	
PRODUCTION EXPENDITURE				
Hire-Purchase of Stage Furniture (30 Productions)	90			vi
Stage Management Account (Props, Small Purchases)	105			
Carpenters' Account (Canvas and Screws)	45			
Designer's Account (Paint)	38			
Extra Furniture	60			
Curtains and Draperies, Sofa Covers	45			
Scripts 30 x 35p per Production	11			
Gratuities, Stage Staff	45			
Costumes (Average of Full Play and Jewellery)	90			
Authors' Royalties (Average 7.5%)	1,841			
Total Direct Production Expenditure			2,369	
THEATRE OVERHEADS				
Electricity 52 weeks x £8	416			vii
Rates 52 weeks x £4	208			
Electric Fittings 52 weeks x £2	104			
Telephone: Trunk Calls and Telegraph 52 weeks x £8	416			
Maintenance (Ropes, Lanterns etc.) 52 weeks x £4	208			
Third Class Rail Fares: London Birmingham Return. 100 x 75p	75			viii
Licences	25			
Commission on Cheques, Audit and Accountancy	175			
Cleaning Materials	225			
Insurance 52 weeks x £2.50	130			
Total Overheads			1,982	
MARKETING				
Printing (Double Crown [150], Box-office Cards [150], Circulars [1,000], Throwaways [1,000] 30 x £15)	450			ix
Newspaper Advertising	675			
Hand Painted Posters and Private Stations	300			
Ticket Printing	250			
Postage 45 weeks x 50p	23			
Total Marketing			1,698	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE			£18,562	
LESS INCOME			£31,555	
NET PROFIT			£12,993	

It is especially revealing and can be compared in useful ways to subsidised repertory today, firstly because over half of all Alexandra Theatre costs were wages, and secondly because over half of the wages bill went on actors and musicians. The account can be fashioned to contrast the main centres of expenditure by proportionality, spotlighting, in 1945, this accentuation on artistic expenditure and actors' wages in particular. The theatre is always labour intensive, but even at the big Alexandra Theatre, the amount spent on overheads and administration staff was proportionately low, especially compared to theatres today:

RATIOS	
Earned Income as % of Total Income	100%
Box-office Receipts as % of Total Income	78%
Ancillary Income as % of Total Income	22%
Total Payroll as % of Total Expenditure	67%
Actors and Musicians (Performers) Wages as % of Total Payroll	56%
Actors and Musicians (Performers) Wages as % of Total Expenditure	38%
Administrative Wages as % of Total Payroll	17%
Production Expenditure as % of Total Expenditure	13%
Theatre Overheads as % of Total Expenditure	11%
Marketing as % of Total Expenditure	9%
Overall 'Artistic' Programme as % of Total Expenditure	69%
Profit as % of Turnover	41%

Conclusion

The Alexandra Theatre formula was highly successful in replacing or competing with touring companies. By 1946, when the number of licensed theatres in Britain had declined from 600 in 1912 to 420, repertory accounted for over one half of their activity, with 179 resident companies and 51 touring repertories, outwith London.¹² The majority of these repertories might not have been theatrical pacemakers like the non-profit companies in Dublin, Belfast, Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool and the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. But they were an extensive profit-seeking repertory stratum, and they began with the influential, inspiring yet critically neglected Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham.

I am grateful to Dr Peter Tod, former Theatre Director of Birmingham Hippodrome and friend of Derek Salberg, for his alacrity in answering my questions about Birmingham theatres.

¹ See 'Curtain Down For The Old Alex - Up For the New', in Derek Salberg, *My Love Affair With a Theatre*, Luton, Cortney Publications, 1978, pp. 37-39.

² Allardyce Nicoll, *English Drama 1900-1930, The Beginnings of the Modern Period*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1973, p. 66 maintains that the Alexandra Theatre Company 'calls for due attention and praise' as an example of the way in which a touring theatre became involved with the repertory movement. Even so, it is commonplace for critics, outwith Birmingham, to ignore its achievements. For instance, George Rowell and Anthony Jackson in *The Repertory Theatre, A History of Regional Theatre in Britain*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, make no mention. The story of its early years is told in M. F. K. Fraser, *Alexandra Theatre, the Story of a Popular Playhouse*, Birmingham, Cornish Brothers, 1948. The Alexandra Theatre and its repertory company remained unsubsidised, although the corporation bought the theatre freehold in 1968.

³ Derek Salberg played a notable role in the subsidised theatre, for 21 years serving as the first representative from commercial theatre on the Arts Council's drama panel, as well as being on the first boards of the National Theatre and The Theatres Trust. In the 1960s, the Alexandra Theatre and Birmingham Repertory Theatre were on intimate terms through Salberg's membership of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre board, during which time their administrator, H. Nancy Burman, was on the board of the other theatre. They would have exchanged information within limits, but the companies were never in partnership on joint-productions.

⁴ Details of Directors and their shareholdings in The Alexandra Theatre (Birmingham) Limited are given in Gordon Sanderson, *Theatre Ownership in Britain: A Report Prepared for the Federation of Theatre Unions*, London, Federation of Theatre Unions, 1953, p.195. This report estimated that a provincial theatre involved a capital investment of between £5,000 (£72,000) and £100,000 (£1,454,000). This could be split in several ways, such as between a ground landlord and two or three lessees, or between a freeholder (as with the Salbergs) and the holders of the mortgages. In the Alexandra Companies Return filed on 6 October 1949, there was authorised capital of £50,000, of which £15,002 was issued. Derek Salberg held shares at £1,875, S.H. Salberg and other family members £8,624. Family investments in this theatre equalled £153,000 today. The theatre was an exempt private company, meaning that - as observed - they were excepted from filing accounts with their annual returns, so the profit and loss account is not shown. Revelation of these details to their competitors was considered detrimental, but the information would edify further research on commercial repertory. The Salbergs also controlled, through separate companies, the 1,200-seat County Theatre, Hereford (where the Alexandra held £14,000 and the Salbergs £2: the entire share issue) and, from 1949, the 1,131-seat Savoy Theatre, Kettering (through Clifton Cinemas (Kettering) Limited). As noted, they were two of five theatres in which the family promoted commercial repertory, emanating from Birmingham. Derek Salberg's brother, Reginald Salberg, another repertory pioneer, left the family business to run the Salisbury Playhouse from 1955 to 1977, where he became a founding father of the new profession of arts administration.

⁵ M.F.K. Fraser, *The Alexandra Theatre*, op.cit, p. 47.

⁶ Orthodox histories of single-theatres are habitually and disconcertingly discreet about matters of comparability. For instance, the scribacious J.C. Trewin (1908-1990), who was drama critic for *The Birmingham Post*, *The Observer* and *Punch*, was one of the few national critics to champion repertory and the provinces. However, he often confessed to being a 'friend at court' of Birmingham Repertory Theatre, and his adulatory history of the company is, surprisingly, less discriminating than the works by Matthews and Kemp. For a compensatory appraisal see Claire Cochrane, *The Birmingham Repertory Company, 1961-1999*, Birmingham, Sir Barry Jackson Trust, 2002.

⁷ Sources: J.C. Trewin, *The Birmingham Repertory Theatre*, op. cit., pp. 200-201; M.F.K. Fraser, *Alexandra Theatre*, op .cit, p. 119; year of first production in 'Notable Productions and Important Revivals', John Parker, (ed.), *Who's Who in Theatre*, London, Pitman, Eleventh Edition, 1952, pp. 1636-1800.

⁸ John Pick, in a discussion on weekly repertory at the Colchester Repertory Theatre for 1952-1953 – that offered 43 productions in a town with no competing theatres – argues that because of eclectic choice, audiences were likely ‘composed of different, interlocking groups rather than a complete wedge of attendees who went every week, whatever was played’. See John Pick, *The Theatre Industry, Subsidy, Profit and the Search for New Audiences*, op.cit, pp.32-33. This departs from M.F.K. Fraser or Derek Salberg’s accent on a loyal ‘family’ of theatregoers attending every play, for with more theatres and attractions to choose, the Birmingham custom might, according to Pick, be likelier to exercise a higher degree of discrimination. At any rate, both suppositions are seductive but are not wholly dependable because theatres did not keep – and had no need of – suitable demographic statistics at this time.

⁹ Derek Salberg, *My Love Affair With a Theatre*, op.cit, p.58.

¹⁰ To signpost the financial condition at The Alexandra Theatre, I found it useful to compare current repertory theatre account formats with those in W.H. Chantry, *Theatre Accounts*, London, Gee & Co., 1915, pp. 28-30 and the details offered in A. Stewart Cruikshank, *Management Book*, Edinburgh, Howard & Wyndham Limited, 1933, together with revisions issued by memorandums to theatre managers in 1940, lodged at the Theatre Royal Newcastle.

¹¹ This is the name of the proprietary company incorporated on 1 January 1944, when the Salberg family rearranged their financial affairs. See Gordon Sanderson, *Theatre Ownership in Britain: A Report Prepared for the Federation of Theatre Unions*, op. cit, p.195.

ⁱ Capacity of The Alexandra Theatre is extracted from A. W. Tolmie, (comp.), “*The Stage*” *Guide*, London, Carson & Comerford, 1946, p. 75. Ticket prices seen on contemporary provincial handbills consistent with No. 1 theatres and A. Stewart Cruikshank, *Management Book*, op. cit, p.15. Price allocated to zone before calculating gross cash potential: stalls 658, front stalls 36, dress circle 402, upper circle 454; total 1,550, using percentage sold quoted in Derek Salberg, *My Love Affair With a Theatre*, op.cit., p.87.

ⁱⁱ Entertainment Tax rate applicable in 1945 derives from Finance (New Duties) Act 1916; see A.W. Tolmie, (comp.), “*The Stage*” *Guide*, op.cit, p. 31.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ancillary income is calculated by estimating spend per theatregoer consistent with categories and prices for these items quoted in ‘Chocolate Return Book’, ‘Cloakroom Check Book’, ‘Tea and Ices Sales Return Sample’, ‘Safety Curtain Account’, ‘Bars Return Sample’ etc., in A. Stewart Cruikshank, *Management Book*, op.cit., pp. 98-106.

^{iv} I estimated the complement of actors from specimen plays for 1937, then attributed wages consistent with trade union minimum agreements for this period; these are quoted in ‘Esher Standard Contract for Repertory’, A.W. Tolmie, (ed.), “*The Stage*” *Year Book 1949*, London Carson & Comerford, 1949, pp.39-45.

^v From the 1930s, ‘serious’ repertory theatres dispensed with live entr’acte and interval music performed by a resident orchestra, in favour of the gramophone. Often this met with protest from regular patrons. Musicians were engaged under the Music Hall Arbitrator’s Award, 1919; the wages quoted are estimated by using ‘Wages Return Form (Orchestra)’ in A. Stewart Cruikshank, *Management Book*, op.cit., p. 115, then (as throughout the reconstruction where appropriate) inflated to 1945 per ‘Cost of Living and Inflation Rates’, London, HMSO, to date, reproduced in *Whittaker’s Almanac 2000*, op.cit.

^{vi} Direct stage costs are estimated from budget samples for the Little Theatre Bournemouth (then inflated and increased to take account of the larger stage at The Alexandra Theatre), quoted in Cecil Chisholm, *Repertory: An Outline of the Modern Theatre Movement*, op.cit., pp. 252-253, those for the profit-seeking repertory

subsidiary, Howard and Wyndham Players, also referred to in A. Stewart Cruikshank, *Management Book*, op.cit., p.176 and an annual budget for a weekly repertory theatre in a pamphlet written to encourage ex-servicemen to consider a new career in repertory: Warrant Officer II Richard Leacroft, *You and the Theatre*, London, The War Office, 1945, p.6.

vii Overheads are estimated from 'Theatre Manager's Return to Head Office', A. Stewart Cruikshank, *Management Book*, op.cit, pp. 72-85.

viii Fares are calculated from *Third Class Railway Fares in the United Kingdom: Anywhere to Elsewhere by the Shortest Route*, London, Easifind, 1945, p.xi.

ix Marketing costs are estimated from those in other large theatres with a weekly change of programme: 'Newspaper Rates, Newcastle', 'Day Bill and Circular Information', 'Tickets', 'Printing Requirements, Manchester', A. Stewart Cruikshank, *Management Book*, op.cit, pp. 64, 74, 82-83 and 71.

¹² A.W. Tolmie, (comp.), *"The Stage" Guide 1946*, op.cit, pp. 196-197.