

# ROYAL ACADEMY OF DANCE

## The History of the Wolfson Library

### A look back at the history of the Royal Academy of Dance Library and Archive

Earliest records show that in 1924, the Academy received a number of [rare and valuable dance books](#) from the estate of the late Rev. Stewart Headlam.

The first [‘Operatic Association’ Gazette](#), published in 1930, contained an article about the library and its availability to members.

Since then the library has received regular gifts of books from donors including Mark E. Perugini, Hylda Brown, Audrey Lloyd, Beth Weyms, Ivor Guest and Philip Richardson.

In the 1940s, following the introduction of the Teachers Training Course (TTC) and the purchase of Fairfield Lodge, books were acquired specifically for the ‘students library’.

### The Margot Fonteyn Archives

In the 1950s Margot Fonteyn and Arnold Haskell launched an appeal for archive material through the pages of the Gazette. Haskell donated his programme collection and photographic archives to the Academy as a wedding present to Fonteyn. In 1956 [Haskell’s editorial in the gazette](#) patronised the development of [‘The Margot Fonteyn Archives’](#).

In 1960, Ifan Kyrle Fletcher was commissioned to provide a complete listing and valuation of the Academy’s [“Collection of Books, Playbills, Programmes, Manuscripts, Autograph Letters, Prints, Drawings, Photographs, Relics, Etc.”](#)

Following the death of Philip Richardson in 1963, the Academy received his personal library of rare and valuable dance books. A library fund was created in 1964 and the Working Committee, in April of that year, considered it “desirable that the Academy should build up a comprehensive library which would be available to serious research students,” and a librarian would need to be appointed.

### An archive of national importance

In 1967 the Academy purchased ‘South Lodge’ in Knightsbridge and Margot Fonteyn described her plans for the new building which included:

*“...a small museum, where some of the many treasures in the way of costumes, programmes and photographs at present in the Academy’s possession could be shown to advantage. A library, where the Stewart Headlam and Philip Richardson bequests could be housed and made available to scholars from all over the world.”*

Later that year, Clement Crisp is appointed as ‘Honorary Librarian Archivist’ and expresses his hopes of building an archive of national importance at the new Knightsbridge premises, in the [Dance Gazette Spring 1969](#).

### New premises

South Lodge was sold in 1970 and new premises purchased in Battersea. The new Library at Battersea headquarters was named after [Philip Richardson](#).

During the 1970s library stocks continued to grow and an assistant Librarian was appointed. The TTC became 'The College of the RAD' and library opening hours were extended.

In 1980 the library underwent complete re-classification and continued to expand in its activities, both providing facilities for research and in its day-to-day function as a resource for students of the college.

In 1984 the [GBL Wilson bequest](#) included his photographic archive of some 50,000 images.

In 1988 the first full-time Resident Librarian was appointed and in 1989, following a major refurbishment, the Philip Richardson Library officially re-opened in a new larger space.

A new reading room and the addition of Benesh Notation scores

The 1990s saw the first library fees introduced and validation of the College's first degree course by the University of Durham. The Keith Lester Reading Room was completed and funds made available for books.

In 1997 a unique collection of [Benesh Movement Notation scores](#) was acquired, following the merger of the Benesh Institute (now [Benesh International](#)) with the Academy.

In 1999, services for distance-learners were introduced and Library Management software purchased to provide online library catalogue facilities. Some of the books from the Richardson Collection were sold.

By 2000, the College had become the 'Faculty of Education' and there were changes to degree, diploma and certificate programmes. The library extended its academic services for both staff and students on an increasing number of faculty programmes. The RAD launched its first website.

### Subscription scheme and digitisation

In 2004 the library recruited a volunteer to tackle the cataloguing of its expanding collection of theatre programmes. A new 'subscription scheme' launched in 2005, enabled books to be borrowed by external users for the first time.

Digitisation of the [GBL Wilson](#) photographic archive began in 2007, and images made available through [Arenapal](#). The contents of various archives and special collections were added to the Library webpages.

In recent years the library has continued to acquire new resources both in support of Faculty programmes and to ensure currency of the general reference collections. The Academy archives are gradually being rationalised and work continues to provide more details about the contents of collections and improve access through digitisation.

### Library renamed

Previously named after [Philip Richardson](#), the library space has been renamed in recognition of the Royal Academy of Dance receiving a grant from the [Wolfson Foundation](#). Founded by Sir Isaac and Lady Edith Wolfson who believed that the creation and sharing of knowledge are the building blocks of a healthy society, the Foundation is a great supporter of the arts and education in the UK, and we are delighted to have received their support.

*"We were delighted to be able to award a grant of £375,000 towards the Royal Academy of Dance's new headquarters in June 2021.*

*The aim of the Wolfson Foundation is to promote excellence in each area that we fund, and the awarding of a Wolfson grant is an endorsement of the Academy's long tradition*

*of excellence in dance education. We were delighted to see the Academy's brilliant new facilities, and see the way in which you are now positioned to support the next generation of dancers.*

*We are happy to be associated with the Wolfson Library – a collection that will continue to educate and inspire dancers and educators alike.”* – **Paul Ramsbottom, Chief Executive of the Wolfson Foundation**

Philip Richardson's contribution to the founding of the RAD in 1920, and to dance writing, is remembered in the new library through the Philip Richardson archive collection. This includes his typewriter\*, many rare and valuable dance books from his personal library and historic documents, press cuttings and illustrations that he collected in relation to his research on social dance in England. The new space will feature a bookcase\* which belonged to Richardson and which we are delighted to be able to display for the first time.

\*Both typewriter and bookcase were kindly gifted to the Library and Archive by the [Dancing Times](#).