**Ellen Terry**

**Guide to records**

**Coventry Archives** is located in the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry, CV1 5QP. Admission to both the Reading Room and Research Room is free. Documents and books can be consulted without charge, but a charge is made for photocopying or the taking of digital images. Visitors are required to make an appointment to view original documents in the Research Room. Material in the Reading Room is available without the need of an appointment.

**Opening hours:** The Coventry Archives Reading and Research Rooms are open, 10.30 am – 3.30pm, Wednesdays – Fridays; the Reading Room is open on alternate Saturdays, 10.30 am – 3.30pm. Please refer to the Coventry collections online catalogue at <http://coventrycollections.org/> or further details, or telephone on 02476 237583.

**Introduction**

Ellen Terry, world-renowned Shakespearean actor, was born on 27 February 1847 in Coventry, most probably Market Street. Her parents Benjamin Terry and Sarah Ballard were both performing actors in Coventry at the time. She made her debut aged 9 as Mamillius in *The Winter’s Tale*, produced by Charles Kean in London, the son of actor Edmund Kean. She remained as part of Kean’s company until 1859, before joining the Stock Company at the Theatre Royal, Bristol until 1864.

At 16, she left the theatre to marry the painter G.F. Watts, who she previously modelled for. The marriage ended after ten months and Terry struggled to return to the stage. In 1867, she appeared by chance with Henry Irving in a production of the *Taming of the Shrew*, and he would later become her artistic partner for almost 25 years. The next year, she left once more to marry architect and theatrical designer Edward Godwin, with whom she had two children: Edith and Edward Gordon Craig.

In 1875, Ellen Terry starred in a notable production of *The Merchant of Venice*, designed by Godwin, but the couple parted a year later. She officially divorced Watts in 1877 and married actor Charles Kelly, but this marriage was also short-lived. The following year she joined Henry Irving’s company at the Lyceum Theatre, London. At around ten years her senior, Irving was the perfect on-stage partner and Terry took on several Shakespearean leading ladies, including Juliet, Ophelia, Beatrice, and Lady Macbeth, which inspired the famous painting by John Singer Sargent (1889).

Irving and Terry toured around the country, performing overseas in New York also. Their partnership ended in 1902, 3 years before Irving’s death. Meanwhile, since the 1890s Terry had been engaging in a paper courtship, via letters, with the playwright and political activist George Bernard Shaw. This never led to a real-life union, but is considered one of the greatest literary correspondences of all time.

In 1906, Terry celebrated the Golden Jubilee of her career, joined by other theatrical personalities at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. She visited Coventry in June of this year to lay the foundation stone for the Empire Theatre, staying for a Mayoral luncheon at St Mary’s Hall. Her final marriage was in 1907 to American actor James Carew, who was 30 years her junior, and while they soon parted the pair remained friends.

Terry appeared on stage for the last time in 1925, and spent the latter part of her life touring across the UK, USA and Australia offering Shakespeare lectures and recitals. She was also made a Dame Grand Cross of the British Empire in 1925. She died on the 21 July 1928 in her cottage in Small Hythe, Kent, which was later given to the National Trust by her daughter Edith Craig.

A memorial plaque was laid in her honour in Coventry, and in 1938 her niece Phyllis Neilson-Terry, also an actor, visited the city to donate a replica of the Lady Macbeth painting. Our collections document how Ellen Terry has been remembered and appreciated in Coventry in the years since her death, such as through theatrical tributes at the Belgrade, and birthday processions along Market Street.

**Archive material**

PA19/43/3,6 – Correspondence on Controversy about location of Ellen Terry’s birthplace, Market Street

PA608/8 - 1-4 Pages from the *Alfred Herbert News*, including detail of Miss Ellen Terry visiting Coventry on 30 June 1906 to lay the foundations stone of the Empire Theatre, with illustration of Ellen Terry

PA641/21 - News-cuttings relating to Ellen Terry

PA2024 – Programme for ceremony of laying of the levelling stone to mark the inauguration of Coventry’s reconstruction and the commemoration of the birth in Market Street of Dame Ellen Terry, 1946

PA2024/5 - Invitation Card to E.A. Seaborne to attend the above event, 8/6/1906

PA2503/6 - Photographic Negative of Ellen Terry Memorial Plaque, Smithford Street

PA2684/6/3/14 - Centenary of Ellen Terry’s Birth, 3/1/1947, loose cuttings from Coventry Evening Telegraph

PA2935/3/2/1 - Coventry University: Official Opening of the Ellen Terry Building, 20/5/2003, publication including history of the building, brief history of Terry’s life, programme of events

PA 2991 – COLLECTION – ELLEN TERRY FELLOWSHIP:

PA2991/4 - Belgrade Theatre Programme - ‘Our Ellen’, May 1992 – Tina Gray impersonated Ellen Terry, written and directed by Richard Osborne

PA2991/5 - Newspaper cutting from Coventry Citizen to mark Tina Gray’s performance as Ellen Terry, around the 150th anniversary of Terry’s birth, 1997

PA2991/8- extract from The Story of My Life, by Ellen Terry

PA2991/9 - National Trust guidebook to Ellen Terry’s house at Smallhythe, Kent, 1986

PA2991/10 - National Trust flier for Ellen Terry’s house at Smallhythe, Kent, 2002

CCA/3/1/241 - File relating to visit of Ellen Terry to Coventry, and Mayoral luncheon held in her honour at St Mary’s Hall during her visit, 30/6/1906. Includes mounted escort arrangements for a procession, drafts of official welcome letter, guest lists and luncheon invitation

CCA/3/1/6923 - File relating to visit of actress Phyllis Neilson-Terry to Coventry, niece of Ellen Terry, 20/7/1938, including presentation of a life-sized oil portrait of Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth, painted by Reginald Eves and copied from John S Sargent’s painting, and a tour of the two houses in Market Street claimed to be her birthplace

CCH/8/3/2/727 - ‘Trace’ Exhibition, February – April 2002, held at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum. Exhibition of colour photographs by Ulli Ull depicting Coventry landscapes and their connection to notable women of Coventry, including Ellen Terry. File contains general correspondence, press release, and biographies of the women included

CCA/3/1/13021 - 1960 file relating to Ellen Terry memorial plaque, including document describing the exact location of Terry’s birth, press cutting from the Manchester Guardian about the Terry “birthday pilgrimage”,

**Local study material**

**Reading Room Books**

Ellen Terry and her Impersonations: An Appreciation, by Charles Hiatt (London: Bell, 1898)

Ellen Terry and her Sisters, by T. Edgar Pemberton (London: C. A Pearson, 1902)

Ellen Terry, by Christopher St John (London: Bodley Head, 1907)

The Story of My Life, by Ellen Terry (London: Hutchinson, 1908)

Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw: A Correspondence, edited by Christopher St John (London: Constable, 1931)

Four Lectures on Shakespeare, by Ellen Terry, edited with an introduction by Christopher St. John (London: Martin Hopkinson, 1932)

Ellen Terry and her Secret Self, by Edward Gordon Craig (London: Sampson Low, 1932)

Ellen Terry’s Memoirs, with prefatory notes and additional biographical chapters by Edith Craig and Christopher St John (London: Gollancz, 1933)

Ellen Terry, by Roger Manvell (London: Heinemann, 1968)

‘Lady, Wilt Thou Love Me?’ - 19 love poems for Ellen Terry attributed to George Bernard Shaw, edited by Jack Werner (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1980)

Ellen Terry: Player in her Time, by Nina Auerbach (London: Dent, 1987)