

Dr Peter Sillitoe, PDRA on ShaLT

21/10/01 First monthly Collections Enhancement Report on the V&A Collections

In the opening weeks of the project a number of activities have been ongoing, and so this is merely a provisional overview of aspects of the collection, both in terms of benefits to the ShaLT project and also to the Museum's long-term use of relevant material.

- The Theatre and Performance archives at the Museum's Blythe House have been visited by PS. After a week of annual leave he will organise a second visit in terms of looking through the collections in more detail. As it appears that most of this material dates from later periods (post-Renaissance) it would seem that this may not be a key resource for ShaLT. However, it is hoped that further investigation will reveal other sources that may be used by the project (for instance, a relevant out-of-copyright theatre image). Where applicable such materials will be reported to the Museum for its future use and benefit. For instance, the initial visit allowed PS to meet with Dr Beverley Hart, Librarian, who pointed out that the collection includes ready-for-purpose photographs, possibly of early modern texts and title pages. These will be analysed in the future by PS, and it would seem that such items could be used for ShaLT and future museum events. Indeed, Blythe House has a copy of *An Apology for Actors* by Thomas Heywood (1612) and this is highly appropriate for the Museum to exhibit (for instance at the potential 2014 Shakespeare Festival). Firstly, it serves as an example of a printed work associated with the Shakespearean theatres. Secondly, it could be utilised as an example of anti-theatricalism versus a pro-theatre outlook in the 2014 exhibition as a way of illustrating 'the place of the stage' to tourists at the Museum (ie the fact that such debates were taking place is not necessarily well-known beyond academic research, yet this allows access to debates on theatrical censorship and questions of morality and performance and religion).
- It is quite clear at this early stage that the National Art Library will be a key resource for ShaLT and further projects at the V&A. PS will explore this library in great detail in the coming months (currently waiting for an email response from the library about staff access and a reader pass). For instance, the library contains the excellent Dyce collection (including many printed early modern texts) and this will be explored for the dual purpose of finding suitable images for the ShaLT deliverables, as well as pointing out potential exhibits for the museum. Dyce contains many Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean printed works, and it is envisaged that those publications that can convey a 'narrative' of an interesting event from the period will be of particular use for the general public via the V&A's initiatives (again Shakespeare 2014 is key here).
- Beyond Dyce, it has recently become apparent that the Art Library has other early modern texts that do not form part of the Dyce collection and these will be analysed and recorded in future reports. For instance, the library has a copy of the Ben Jonson Works / Folio from 1616 and this would seem ideal for use as a ShaLT image as well as future Museum purposes. The folio pre-dates

Shakespeare's folio (also in the V&A collections) by 7 years and so could be exhibited as an example of the importance of other playwrights in the early modern period. Secondly, the book is usually considered to be of immense importance in scholarly work (though not communicated to the public in any detail) as the folio effectively represents the first time a professional English writer collected together his or her 'works' for general sale in print. This links to the fact that, unlike the posthumous Shakespeare folio, Jonson put this collection of his own plays and poems through the press himself (there is clear evidence of his interest in the venture in various sources). Thus, the 1616 Folio may be said to be one of the very first occasions in which an English writer declared this new 'professional' status. It is highly likely that an image-based display based on this book would be of educational benefit to the wider community via the V&A's use of the book for display. Lastly, there are further opportunities here for narratives about 'theatre-as-industry' and 'Shakespeare's competitors', as well as narratives linking performance to print and the need to 'record' theatre via publication.