

Good Women, Mediocre Men: Hierarchy in Narrative and Digital Prosopography

Jennifer Buckley <jennifer_dot_j_dot_buckley_at_universityofgalway_dot_ie>, University of Galway  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7211-8775>

Kandice Sharren <kandice_dot_sharren_at_usask_dot_ca>, University of Saskatchewan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5759-5979>

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Abstract

Creating a prosopography of people who engaged with the Georgian theatre requires interrogating mixed media sources, including archival documents; print materials including anecdotal magazine articles, playbills, and biographies; digital authority records like those compiled by the Virtual International Authority File (VIAF); other databases; and traditional scholarship about theatre history. Embedded within this ecosystem of sources is a hierarchy of information which often privileges the cultural capital that comes with celebrity and notoriety. In this article, we use the careers of the actor Alexander Pope and his two wives, Elizabeth Younge and Maria Ann Campion, as case studies to investigate how these hierarchies are inscribed and reinscribed first in historical documents and subsequently in modern scholarship. In a period with five prominent theatrical Popes, we argue for digital prosopography as a methodology that can counter these hierarchies. When incorporated into a project like 'Theatronomics: The Business of Theatre, 1732-1809', which links people to their earnings and their box office power, digital prosopography enables us to illuminate the labour of individuals that might otherwise be concealed by the mythos of celebrity, and the institution of the theatre more generally.

Introduction

Biographical data is messy. Whether found in the prose narratives of a collective biography published in the nineteenth century or the personography of a twenty-first century digital project, the details collected about individual lives are structured according to the values of the collector's cultural moment or the needs of a specific project. As such, the terms of data collection change over time, reflecting shifting views on matters such as gender, ethnicity, class, and geography. These challenges are compounded the further removed we are in time from the original collation of the biographical data; historic datasets are often incomplete due to gaps in the surviving records. In order to develop and analyse a meaningful prosopography, scholars must first reconcile another's agenda for data collection with their own contemporary aims and sensibilities. To interrogate the challenges of marshalling historic biographical data into a relational database, this article details the difficulties of building a digital prosopography for 'Theatronomics: The Business of Theatre, 1732-1809' (2025). Our experience building a prosopography for a cultural industry fundamentally structured by ever-present hierarchies such as celebrity status and seniority raises questions about what is possible within digital prosopography and what best practices are, both for individual projects and for further developing a critical, multi-disciplinary approach to prosopographical work.

Theatronomics explores the operations of London's two leading royal theatres in the period between 1732, when Covent Garden first opened its doors to rival the more established Drury Lane, and 1809, by which point both theatres had burned to the ground. The project recovers the history of these two theatres as commercial entities, using surviving

account books and ancillary financial records to reconstruct the business of the rival theatre companies and illuminate the careers not just of actors, singers, and dancers, but of those who worked behind the scenes as box office keepers, tailors, carpenters, and concessionaires. The foundational data on which the Theatronics project draws comes from previous attempts to wrangle disparate and mixed media sources into a cohesive narrative. The first of these is the 8,000-page, eleven-volume work *The London Stage, 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments & Afterpieces, Together with Casts, Box-Receipts and Contemporary Comment. Compiled from the Playbills, Newspapers and Theatrical Diaries of the Period* (1960-1968). This has subsequently been remediated and reencoded for the digital age by the London Stage Information Bank (1970-78) and the London Stage Database (2019). Theatronics, which launched as a beta resource in fall 2025, builds upon this data legacy to develop a new relational database oriented towards illuminating the finances of London's theatres through analysing the business transactions that made cultural productions possible. To do so, developing a prosopography has been an essential first step in contextualising a long list of transactions that otherwise dissolve into a meaningless list of dates, names, and numbers. Yet building a digital prosopography, as this article explores, has media specific challenges; to piece together an individual career, the theatre historian must work across manuscript, print, digital, and visual sources created between the eighteenth century and the present day. Taking the cluster of individuals listed in surviving account books as 'Pope' as a case study, this article seeks to explore the challenges of working with historic biographical data and illuminate the narratives that underpin our attempts to build a fit-for-purpose prosopography.

Many of the challenges we encountered are rooted in the hierarchies of the eighteenth-century stage, which have been reinscribed in twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship. In grappling with these challenges, we explore a process of contextualisation that makes the hierarchies embedded in data collection and analysis visible and respond to Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein's invitation to ask, 'Which power imbalances have led to silences in the dataset or data that is missing altogether?' [D'Ignazio and Klein 2020, 72] Writing about the development of the London Stage Database, which provided our project with its initial data, Mattie Burkert notes how 'the layered history' of resources like hers contain 'assumptions about the nature of humanities data that formed the invisible foundation for humanities computing work' [Burkert 2017, ¶26]. To draw attention to the lasting effects of this 'layered history' in twenty-first century digital scholarship, we use three interconnected and high-profile actors as a case study: Elizabeth Younge (1740-1797), one of the highest paid performers of the late eighteenth century; her husband, Alexander Pope (1762-1835); and Alexander's second wife, Maria Ann Campion (1777-1803). This article scrutinises the various resources that have contributed to our records for the three Popes, including tertiary sources such as encyclopaedia entries, primary sources such as manuscript account books and published accounts of performers' lives, and authority records, revealing how each of these layers are inflected by the emergence of a celebrity culture, as well as the medium of the stage itself.

Eighteenth-century theatre was a highly regulated and hierarchical affair. The theatres in Covent Garden and Drury Lane – located just a stone's throw apart – were, for the majority of the eighteenth century, the only theatres in London licensed to stage plays during the winter season, the period between September and June when the upper classes were resident in town. During a typical evening at the theatre, patrons could expect to see at least two productions: a conventional five-act drama, known as the mainpiece, and a shorter two-act play, or afterpiece, which was usually a musical or pantomime. As the century advanced, the theatrical offering expanded, and these were increasingly supplemented with singing, dancing, interludes, or other short entertainments. The production typically changed each night, with audiences seeing the same company stage multiple productions over the course of a season. Actors, therefore, typically 'owned' a role and once a part was allocated it belonged to that performer until they left the stage; those taking a career break usually fell back into their old roles upon their return. While an individual may want to see a production of *Macbeth* or *The Constant Couple*, the real attraction was witnessing celebrity performances such as Sarah Siddons' portrayal of Lady Macbeth or Dorothea Jordan's Sir Harry Wildair. Prominent actors were synonymous with their roles and specialised in either the tragic or comic line, while more minor performers with few or no lines were considered 'utility' performers – suitable for casting in choruses, slotting into crowd scenes at short notice, and able to work across all genres. Consequently, some names loom much larger than others, casting long shadows over other employees and making the democratising efforts of prosopography all the more important.

As theatre is an ephemeral medium, in which the curtain rises and falls on a performance every night, never to be created in precisely the same way ever again, analysing historical productions relies on the anecdotal accounts printed in newspapers, recorded in manager's notebooks, found in personal correspondence, or absorbed into biographies of celebrity performers – what Diana Taylor calls 'the archive of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)' in contrast with 'the so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)' [Taylor 2003, 19]. While all archival sources can be embellished by second- and third-hand information, it is biography that is most prone to moving beyond eyewitness testimony, often relying heavily on other sources to offer a constellation of first- and second-hand information about the lives of others. Prior to the eighteenth century, biographical writing oriented towards monarchs, statesmen, saints, and key historical figures; the eighteenth century opened up the genre to include all those in the public eye. Literary biographies and lives began to emerge, including works such as Samuel Johnson's *Life of Mr Richard Savage* (1744) and Oliver Goldsmith's *Memoirs of M. De Voltaire* (1761), as well as a wealth of biographies and autobiographies about famous actors and actresses: Frances Abington, Kitty Clive, Mary Robinson, Mrs Sumbel, Charlotte Charke, Colley Cibber, and David Garrick. These biographies create a central fallacy that persists in celebrity biographical writings to this day: the subject is accessible to all, contributing to what Tom Mole calls a 'hermeneutic of intimacy' that appears to reveal 'the celebrity's authentic truth' [Mole 2007, 142], potentially enabling celebrities to correct and reclaim narratives circulated through gossip or printed in newspapers. Hence, as Cheryl Wanko suggests, a problem with thespian biographies is that they 'reflect and participate in the efforts to place performers within unstable hierarchies of cultural, literary, scientific and financial order' [Wanko 2003, 8]. Over time, the narratives established in biographical writing, whether accurate or embellished, become enmeshed with the historical record.

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Biography, however, is a singular endeavour; it takes the life of a specific, usually exceptional, individual and places them as the lead character around whom all other individuals make sporadic appearances. Prosopography, by definition, is multiple; according to Lawrence Stone, it 'is the investigation of the common background characteristics of a group of actors in history by means of a collective study of their lives' [Stone 1971, 46]. How a group is defined may vary, but it must consist of 'a population that shares one or more characteristic' and its analysis should be 'based on the whole group considered with reference to its constituent parts' [Keats-Rohan 2007, 143]. Likewise, in her history of the *ODNB*, Alison Booth describes prosopography as,

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... more than a synonym for collective biography and more than a historiographical technique where records and auto/biographies are scarce. It is the representation of a collective history through sets of names, images, and narratives, in forms that range from pantheons to databases [Booth 2005, 273].

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While K.S.B. Keats-Rohan has objected to Booth's use of the term 'prosopography' to describe the *ODNB*, drawing a sharp distinction between prosopography and collective biography, which 'can never be based on the uniform criteria characteristic of prosopography' [Keats-Rohan 2007, 145], the various forms Booth cites indicate that not all prosopography relies on the same methods or serves the same purpose. How names, images, and narratives are presented has implications for how the group will be conceived of, represented, and analysed.

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Prosopography typically has two stages: first, 'a biographical dictionary or lexicon is compiled, providing a set of biographical profiles of each individual in the group under investigation,' and second, 'a range of techniques is applied to the accumulated data, which are analysed according to the questions that underlie the research' [Keats-Rohan 2007, 146]. The compilation of biographical data is thus shaped by the research questions underpinning the prosopography and the tools and methods used to analyse it; as Rada Varga and Stephan Bornhofen note about network analysis, tools such as Gephi, Cytoscape, and Palladio require 'spreadsheets to be structured and the considered data has to be limited in such a manner as to answer certain predetermined research questions' [Varga and Bornhofen 2024, ¶6]. The choices involved in constructing a prosopography are equally shaped by the technologies and other resources available. Born out of nineteenth-century classical studies, prosopography historically consisted of short narratives that provide basic information about individuals identified within a group, which were published in codex books; in such resources, cross-references in indices and within entries enable analysis. In digital humanities research, prosopography has increasingly come to rely on relational databases that structure biographical data in relation to other

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types of information, allowing for more complex and less time-consuming queries. The Theatronics database, for instance, relates individual performers to their benefit nights – those events on which the beneficiary took home the profits of the evening's entertainment after covering the house charge (i.e., the theatre's operational costs); the benefit system was highly hierarchical, with the most successful performers having nights earlier in the season, while back of house staff could share nights with up to twenty others.

The prosopographical form chosen has implications beyond how data has been collected and analysed. While prose narratives can provide nuance and texture about individual lives, they require sufficient information about their subjects, often constructing an implicit hierarchy based on how well an individual's life was documented and therefore how much detail the narrative contains. By contrast, the choice to collect biographical information on all individuals identified within a network in a relational database, using standardised biographical data entered into set fields that often forms a digital prosopography 'discourages and even disallows our instinctive value judgments about who counts in a collective biography,' as Kailey Fukushima, Karen Bourrier, and Janice Parker show in relation to the TEI prosopography embedded in the Dinah Craik project [Fukushima, Bourrier, and Parker 2022, ¶15]. However, the democratising possibilities of digital prosopographies also have the potential to obscure hierarchies that shape the resources used for data collection. In the case of the eighteenth-century stage, many of these hierarchies are visible in the roles performers were cast in and the salaries paid to performers and back of house staff, information Theatronics connects to individual people via its relational database. In this article, we use the three related individuals with the surname 'Pope' as a case study to argue that historical hierarchies become encoded in the scholarly record through the repetition of biographical narratives, and that a truly inclusive digital prosopography must attend to those hierarchies, both within its data structure and in the process of collecting biographical data. As John Bradley and Harold Short assert, 'a digital prosopography must act as a kind of visible record of the analysis of the sources produced by the scholars as they try to sort out who's who from a close analysis of the extant source materials' [Bradley and Short 2005, 5]. This article acts as one such visible record, which aims to explore digital prosopography's relationship to nineteenth-century collective biography and how it conditions data collection and analysis.

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Received Popeish Narratives

At the time of writing, the Theatronics database contains over 6,400 people records which have been created through a combination of importation and manual entry. Our initial list of people working in and around London's theatres in the eighteenth century was generated from the actors tagged in the London Stage Database, which we have since supplemented with people identified in the *Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800* as being employed by either Covent Garden or Drury Lane during our period. Because the London Stage Database does not currently have a prosopography that links a particular individual to a given role or performance, searching for 'Pope' in the 'Actor' field of the advanced search will bring up every performance in which someone named Pope appeared – be it Mr, Miss, Mrs, or Master – but not performances by either of the Mrs Popes before their respective marriages. As a result, a vital piece of work in the Theatronics database has been to disambiguate people with the same name and combine records for those individuals whose names vary over the course of a career – either through marriage, or as a result of spelling inconsistencies in eighteenth-century source texts and historic OCR misreadings and misidentifications. We have also modernised names, adding first names and identifying women primarily by the first surname they used on the stage and listing any subsequent stage or married names as variants; we do not use honorifics such as 'Miss', 'Mrs', and 'Mr' unless a person's first name is unknown.

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Person Details: Alexander Pope	
ID	5787
Name	Alexander Pope
Display Name	Alexander Pope
Gender	Man
Start Date	1762
Start Type	birth
End Date	18350322
End Type	death
Notes	—
Source	—
Place of Birth: Country	Ireland
Place of Birth: Locality	Cork
Place of Birth: Latitude	52.05512715
Place of Birth: Longitude	-8.49068962
Has Bio Dictionary Entry	
Bio Dictionary Entry Page	Vol. 12: 55-64
VIAF Link	https://viaf.org/viaf/28229776/
Wikipedia Link	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Pope_(actor)
ODNB Link	https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22528
First Appeared	NULL
Last Appeared	NULL
Record Created	2022-11-02T02:39:32.000000Z
Record Last Updated	2025-05-29T11:40:16.000000Z

Figure 1. Entity record for Alexander Pope. Taken from input interface of Theatronics database.

In addition to identifying individuals and their variant names, Theatronics captures basic biographical data about them in set fields (Figure 1). These are name, gender, start date, start type (birth, or, when unknown, baptism or flourish), end date, end type (death, or, when unknown, flourish), and place of birth – country, place (village, town, or city), longitude, and latitude. To collect this information, we have cross-referenced a handful of established resources, including the *Biographical Dictionary*, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, and Wikipedia. We also look for Virtual International Authority Files (VIAF) records, which offer a standardised way to bring together data about individuals that may be dispersed across different types of resources including library catalogues, biographical dictionaries, and museum holdings. Such centralised records are particularly vital when it comes to feminist data as they 'do the urgent work of making the names and identities of people – especially women – . . . discoverable' [Leuner 2021, 17]. However, not all the subjects we have identified in Theatronics are represented by our sources or authority records, which are more likely to exist for well-known figures, especially those who left behind textual or visual (and therefore catalogue-able) traces, such as books and paintings, but far sparser for singers, carpenters, and constables who leave fewer traces in library and museum holdings. The fields we collect help us identify who might be the recipient of a payment in an account book – a Mr Smith who began to flourish in 1770 is unlikely to be the Mr Smith who received a payment in 1743 – but also analyse careers by gender, age, and nationality.

Hence, names can only tell us so much; Theatronics also looks at cast roles and assigns activities, or job roles, to people in order to help us distinguish between individuals with similar names. While about 90% of the records have been manually assigned an activity, some 500 records currently have the activity 'unknown', and many of these are likely duplicates of other records. For example, if the name 'John Graham' appears in the account book for Drury Lane without any additional information we cannot, with any certainty, determine whether this record is a new person or a rare

inclusion of a first name for one of the many Mr Grahams active around the same time occupying roles such as actor, bricklayer, renter, and doorkeeper. Thus, John Graham's activity is 'unknown'. Given the paucity of surviving information about eighteenth-century London bricklayers and doorkeepers, it is unlikely that we will ever fully disambiguate the Grahams. However, through the process of creating a digital prosopography for the eighteenth-century theatre we have been surprised to find that even the narratives surrounding relatively major performers with lengthy careers are often patchy and inconsistent.

The cluster of individuals with the surname 'Pope' offer insight into some of the complexities involved in constructing a twenty-first-century prosopography that is about historical subjects and relies on historical documents. The Theatronics database contains information about seven individuals with the surname Pope: Alexander Pope (1688-1744), Alexander Pope (1762-1835), Master Pope (fl.1755-d.1767), Elizabeth Pope née Younge (1740-1797), Maria Ann Pope née Campion (1777-1803), Jane Pope (1744-1818), and William Pope (1708-1784). The first in this list was the famous poet, translator and satirist, and the last a hairdresser and wig maker; the other five were actors who performed at Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres. Three of the five actors were connected by marriage: Elizabeth and Maria Ann were both wives of the actor Alexander, respectively from 1785-1797 and 1798-1803. While they were never referred to as 'Mrs Pope' at the same time – Alexander was not a bigamist – their shared nomenclature in playbills results in their data becoming intertwined in the London Stage Database, creating the impression that they are a single person. Thankfully, Jane Pope never married and was consistently billed as 'Miss Pope' throughout her career, meaning that her performances are always distinct from those of Elizabeth and Maria Ann.

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Disambiguating cast data to create unique profiles makes it possible to tease out the individual careers of the two Mrs Popes. To do so, we first need to know enough about the separate lives of the 'Mrs Popes'. When, for example, 'Mrs Pope' appears as Joanna in a performance of *Joanna of Montfaucon* in 1800 we know this has to be Maria Ann as Elizabeth died in March 1797 and this record can be reassigned with certainty; of the 929 cast roles initially associated with 'Mrs Pope' all those post March 1797 (some 374 records) can be assigned to Maria Ann. Such disambiguation makes it possible to identify the shape and trajectory of an individual's entire career, before and after marriage(s): performance and cast data associated with Miss Younge can be combined with the remaining 655 roles for 'Mrs Pope' to illuminate Elizabeth's career as a whole, rather than fragmenting it according to her marital status. The received narratives that we have inherited about the Popes from primary and tertiary sources are embedded in the process of building a digital prosopography. Before we analyse the challenges inherent in working with the hierarchies constructed by these sources, a brief summary of the careers of the three Popes connected by marriage merits outlining here.

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Elizabeth Younge debuted upon the London stage in 1768. Billed as 'Miss Younge', sometimes 'Miss Young', she was one of eight Miss Young(e)s to grace the London stage in the eighteenth century. Elizabeth was originally employed by David Garrick at Drury Lane for the sum of £2 a week, but her talents proved to be commensurable with a higher salary and her wage increased mid-season to £3. ^[1] Elizabeth soon established herself as one of the period's leading tragediennes, with her pay continuing to rise along with her fame; when Richard Brinsley Sheridan took over Drury Lane's management in 1776, she was earning £13 a week. Two years later, failed salary negotiations with Sheridan saw her join the rival company at Covent Garden – a move linked to the rise of Sarah Siddons, the period's most famous actress, as Elizabeth's departure left a vacancy for the tragical at Drury Lane [Ritchie 2023, 7]. While written articles detailing the terms of Elizabeth's engagement at Covent Garden do not survive, we can assume the theatre was amenable to her demands. The account books for the 1779-80 season reveal salary payments to her of £20, a benefit free from charges, and a clothing allowance. ^[2] Her new salary rate placed her foremost among the company's actresses; she earned £8 more each week than Covent Garden's next highest-paid actress, Elizabeth Billington.

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Elizabeth met Alexander in Cork in 1784 when playing in Ireland during the summer months. Alexander was a painter by training and an amateur actor with no prior history of playing upon big stages or within England. After Elizabeth used her influence and recommended him to the management at Covent Garden in 1785, the year in which the pair married, he became a regular name on the playbills. After making his debut appearance billed simply as 'A Young Gentleman', Alexander went on to have a forty-two-year career. When he was first employed at Covent Garden, he earned £8 a week – less than half the amount paid to top earner, John Henderson, whose weekly salary stood at £17 7s, but notably

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more than what Elizabeth earned when launching her career two decades earlier. During his tenure, Alexander's salary rose slowly and his wage held steady at £10 a week for nine years. Allegedly, the fact that he earned £1 less than Joseph Holman, who played similar roles, was a source of frustration and prompted his departure from Covent Garden at the end of the 1788-89 season [Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 1973-1987, 58]; Alexander stayed away for three years, returning in September 1792. He was reengaged at the same rate, not seeing a raise until 1796 when, with a salary of £12, Alexander finally became among the theatre's top male earners. Alexander remained loyal to Covent Garden until 1803, when he engaged at Drury Lane; unlike Elizabeth's move three decades earlier, this move was not primarily a financial decision, as he continued at £12 until 1806. After Drury Lane burned to the ground in 1809, he played in the provinces before returning to London in 1812 and appearing most seasons until 1827, after which he lived upon a pension from the Covent Garden Fund until his death.

Elizabeth, meanwhile, remained at Covent Garden throughout her husband's absence and performed consistently until January 1797 – six weeks before her death on 15 March. Ten months later, Alexander remarried. His new wife, Maria Ann Campion, had joined the Covent Garden company in October 1797 after a seven-year career elsewhere, initially playing in theatres across Ireland – Dublin, Cork, Galway, Belfast – before sailing to England and playing on the Yorkshire circuit in 1795, where she began to be billed as Mrs Spencer. Maria Ann's first contract in London came with remunerations of £3 a week, the same salary on which Elizabeth launched her career three decades earlier. This saw her earn below the average salary for female actors in the 1790s, but she soon began to ascend the ranks; her talents were commensurate with a higher wage, and, while salary increases were typically in the region of 10 shillings or £1, her skill for performing pathetic roles secured her a substantial raise of £5 and she earned £8 a week for the rest of her career. Yet that career was tragically short, ending upon her death just six years later at the age of twenty-eight, causing her comparably brief tenure to suggest a less successful career than Elizabeth or Alexander.

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Tertiary Sources

The above information about the three Popes is readily available in the tertiary sources drawn on by the Theatronics project, and to which the project provides external links. The *Biographical Dictionary*, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB), and even Wikipedia amalgamate information from primary and secondary sources to create prose narratives about historical figures. Tertiary sources like these represent a wider range of individuals than secondary scholarship, which generally focuses on celebrity performers while excluding lesser-known figures, both on- and backstage. The summarising function of tertiary resources is particularly useful for constructing our digital prosopography, where the primary goal is to find accurate dates, name variants, and places of birth as efficiently as possible. However, as we shall see with regard to the Popes, tertiary sources are nevertheless a product of their own cultural moment and require use in conjunction with primary and secondary materials. The limitations of using these sources for a digital prosopography are most in evidence when dealing with the minor figures whose lives are less well-documented and well-known.

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The *Biographical Dictionary* focuses on the eighteenth-century stage between 1660 and 1800 and therefore is the most consistently useful for our project, and the first one we consult. Over sixteen volumes, it provides information about more than 8,500 individuals, many of whom had not been identified prior to its publication in 1973. With entries varying in length from a short paragraph to dozens of pages, it is an extensive undertaking and a testament to the hierarchies of the stage, as well as the gendered and class-based assumptions that pervade eighteenth-century life and twentieth-century scholarship. In particular, star status plays an important role in determining how much attention the *Biographical Dictionary* pays to an individual's life; entries for major figures like David Garrick, Sarah Siddons, and John Philip Kemble take up significantly more physical space than a celebrity performer like Elizabeth Younge, who had a noteworthy and similarly long career, but who did not have the same lasting impact on the history of performance.^[3] These hierarchies are also evident in the representation of familial and marital relationships. Within the *Biographical Dictionary*, women's careers tend to be subordinated to those of their husbands, in part through patriarchal naming conventions: the heading for Elizabeth's entry is 'Pope, Mrs. Alexander the first, Elizabeth, née Younge,' despite the fact that she had a prominent career as a tragedienne for roughly seventeen years before her marriage. Maria Ann is similarly listed as 'Pope, Mrs. Alexander the second, Maria Ann née Campion, formerly Mrs. Spencer,' a choice that

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privileges her married name and not the names under which she launched her career – Campion and Spencer. Looking for Elizabeth and Maria Ann under Younge, Campion, and Spencer will direct the user to look under ‘Pope, Mrs Alexander’. The naming conventions, in which women are listed under their husband’s first name as well as his surname, ensure that Alexander is the first Pope listed, independently of other considerations, such as whose given name comes first alphabetically or chronology. As a result, Jane Pope, or ‘Miss Pope’ – the first acting Pope to be active – is listed below Maria Ann, even though her given name is alphabetically first. These naming conventions physically situate Alexander above his more talented wives, inflating his importance. In our project’s naming practices, we have deliberately chosen not to replicate this hierarchy by using Elizabeth and Maria Ann’s maiden names as their primary identifiers.

Despite its biases and limitations, the *Biographical Dictionary*’s focus on the theatre does create space for more information about minor performers and backstage employees, who would otherwise be difficult to locate. This is a welcome addition, given that general collective biographies – namely those not specifically focused on a given industry – focus on people of note. The *ODNB*, for instance, describes itself as ‘the national record of men and women who have shaped British history and culture, worldwide, from the Romans to the 21st century’ [Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)a]. To be included, one’s contribution must be exceptional. The significance of our subjects to the eighteenth-century stage is reflected by the fact that Elizabeth, Alexander, and Maria Ann each have their own *ODNB* records, and all three also appeared in the original *Dictionary of National Biography* (1855), although their *ODNB* biographies are less detailed than those in the more specialised *Biographical Dictionary*. The *ODNB* also provides information about authors and composers, who do not appear in the *Biographical Dictionary* unless they were also performers or musicians employed by the theatres.

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Published in 2004, the *ODNB* is not only more up to date than the *Biographical Dictionary*, but more capacious; its present form is a series of 60 print volumes, as well as an online database that currently contains over 60,000 narrative biographies. New articles are routinely added and corrections made to existing records as new information comes to light, something that is more difficult to accomplish in print. As a result, although we use the *Biographical Dictionary* first, we prioritize data found in the *ODNB* if it conflicts with information found elsewhere. The *ODNB* has its foundations in a late nineteenth-century printed collective biography edited by Leslie Stephen until Sidney Lee took over in 1891, which ‘was published in alphabetical sequence at quarterly intervals between 1885 and 1900’, after which point it was supplemented by additional volumes [Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)b]. The biographies themselves were rewritten for the current iteration of the *ODNB*, but those individuals in the original *Dictionary*, as well as those included in the supplements published during the twentieth century, are still included. Consequently, foundational biases remain in terms of who is included. The Advanced Search function for the *ODNB* provides a filter by ‘sex,’ which identifies that it contains 65,506 results for ‘male’ subjects and 9,888 results for ‘female’ subjects, a disparity that reflects how its nineteenth-century foundations result in continued inequalities in the present day. At the same time, the *ODNB* has made a considerable attempt to widen its focus by introducing group biographies [Booth 2005, 999], though it remains the case that only prominent historical figures receive individual entries.

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However, not everyone who shaped British culture through their contributions to the eighteenth-century London theatre was British or spent enough time in Britain to be included in the *ODNB*.^[4] Theatronics currently contains c.340 authors or composers who feature in neither the *Biographical Dictionary* nor the *ODNB*, and who were almost all born outside of Britain. As a perpetually updatable resource not behind a paywall, Wikipedia fills this gap and enables future users of our database to access narrative biographies easily and for free. Although Wikipedia articles do not undergo the rigorous scholarly process of the *Biographical Dictionary* or the *ODNB*, they are more easily updated and information in each statement must be directly linked to a citation. According to Wikipedia’s ‘About’ Page:

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The content must conform with Wikipedia’s policies, including being verifiable by published sources. Editors’ opinions, beliefs, personal experiences, unreviewed research, libellous material, and copyright violations will not remain. Wikipedia’s software allows easy reversal of errors, and experienced editors watch and patrol bad edits.

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The studied neutrality of Wikipedia’s policy contrasts with Booth’s description of the *ODNB* as ‘a highly emotional affair’,

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in which the names of those included and excluded provoke responses more akin to 'a family quarrel or a rivalry among nations or lovers' [Booth 2005, 268]. Wikipedia is also very much a twenty-first century endeavour. Accordingly, it is the only tertiary source consulted to list Elizabeth and Maria Ann by their maiden, rather than their married, names, as the Theatronics database does. In contrast to the *Biographical Dictionary* and the *ODNB*, Alexander is decentralised; Elizabeth's entry only mentions him in the final paragraph, squarely putting the focus on her, rather than her husband. In addition to Alexander's limited importance in the Wikipedia pages for his wives, his own Wikipedia page offers further indications that he was the least significant of the three: two of four footnotes indicate that his article 'incorporates text from a publication now in the public domain,' in this case, both the original *Dictionary of National Biography* and the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Apparently modern Wikipedia editors do not find him sufficiently interesting to write an entry for him from scratch.

As relatively high-profile performers, our three Popes appear in all three resources to greater or lesser degrees and consequently have complete profiles within the Theatronics database. The amount of biographical detail provided in each resource offers insight into their reputations both during their lifetimes and posthumously, but also has the potential to inflate it. Alexander Pope's *Biographical Dictionary* entry is 10 pages, the same length as Elizabeth's, despite Elizabeth's more illustrious reputation, perhaps reflecting the sheer length of his career. Maria Ann's much shorter career is allotted five pages. In the *ODNB*, as in the *Biographical Dictionary*, Elizabeth and Alexander have biographies of similar length, while Maria Ann's is just over half the length; excluding the notes, Elizabeth and Alexander's *ODNB* entries are both around 1,350 words, while Maria Ann's is closer to 725 words. The Wikipedia articles for all three are significantly shorter: Elizabeth's is the longest, at approximately 700 words, while Maria Ann's is 280 words and Alexander's only 192. In some respects, the Popes' presence in Wikipedia is the most representative of their relative importance to the stage: Elizabeth's lengthy and illustrious career nets her a longer biography, Maria Ann's briefer but still notable presence on the stage is reflected in the shorter article, and Alexander's less celebrated abilities result in the briefest article of all, while the sheer length of his career is reflected in the performances listed. However, our tertiary sources are only as reliable as the sources on which they are based; their data structure hints at how eighteenth-century theatrical hierarchies continue to shape the information available in academic sources, such as the *Biographical Dictionary* and the *ODNB*, as well as public sources, such as Wikipedia. As we will discuss in the following section, Maria Ann's Wikipedia entry, for example, contains errors and elaborations that have their roots in romanticised nineteenth-century biographies, demonstrating how modern sources reiterate and reencode historical data, even when that data is unreliable. By citing and linking to these records in its prosopography, Theatronics becomes yet another resource that gestures towards these narratives, even as it levels the playing field by standardising the information collected.

26

Nineteenth-Century Biography

The entries for all three Popes in the *Biographical Dictionary*, the *ODNB*, and Wikipedia rely heavily on nineteenth-century sources. While the Popes have not figured in twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship, they were prominent in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writing about the stage, and continued to be discussed throughout the nineteenth century. However, as the editors of the *Biographical Dictionary* emphasise, these narratives are not always reliable. Its preface acknowledges some of the problems of establishing fact in theatrical biography, especially when relying on a variety of sources:

27

Like all biographers and historians, we have placed greatest reliance on firsthand factual evidence, particularly from any legal or quasi-legal *locus* . . . Nearly as credible are diaries, letters, and annotated playbills. Epitaphs are fairly trustworthy and so is necrology published in periodicals soon after the event (though occasionally we find actors indignantly correcting reports of their deaths). Somewhat murkier are the memoirs. In employing these we have had to make a careful analysis of motive and wide allowance for the vagaries of aging memory before granting credence [Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 1973-1987, 1.ix–x].

28

Despite this caution, the editors acknowledge that not all information needs to be verifiable to be included:

29

It has sometimes been necessary to report a good but fictitious story of widespread currency in order to impeach it. Separating an actor from his legends is, after all, a delicate and painful operation not only because some excellent stories may be true but because most are at least illustrative of traits of character and thus possess some inner truthfulness [Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 1973-1987, 1.viii].

30

The contrast the editors set up between a true story and a story that 'possesses some inner truthfulness' provides grounds for retelling stories that cannot be verified. However, as Diana Solomon points out, 'Anecdotes describing the lives of Restoration and eighteenth-century actresses are more likely to be sexualized than those about actors; their uncritical usage accordingly either reinscribes gendered behaviour or alludes to the sexual at the expense of professional activity' [Solomon 2016, 22–23]. By turning to the historical sources where not only anecdotes but also basic biographical data originated, this section analyses the circulation and replication of nineteenth-century biography in order to draw attention to the long histories that structure twenty-first-century data collection and preservation in digital humanities projects and traditional scholarship alike.

31

Concerns about the accuracy of biographical accounts of people connected to the theatre are not new. In an 1834 article in the *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, one critic proposed that thespian biographies were far from good or reliable instances of biographical writing:

32

The memoranda, the diaries, and private letters of several actors and actresses of great merit would almost contradict one part of this position; but, unhappily, where we have been left in possession of these *disjecta* and *disjuncta membra*, they have fallen into the hands of book-makers, either of so little judgment that they knew not how to distinguish what was keen, *recherche*, new and interesting, from what was common-place, trivial and vulgar; or who have resolved to give a crude and undigested mass of the whole, in order to produce the dual number of ponderous volumes [Campbell 1834, 471].

33

Biographical writing was designed to sell, and truth was a secondary concern. For the most prolific theatrical biographer, James Boaden, the task of writing the lives of performers is to show 'gratitude to the actor' while observing a duty to the public to perpetuate their merits. This, he suggests, 'is not, however, a task for every hand nor for all periods', but was one for people such as him whose lives overlapped with their subjects [Boaden 1827, xii]. Boaden's authority comes from his direct witnessing of his subject as well as his capacity to amass secondary material in a proprietary manner. Thus, the information in contemporary biographical works, as well as that contained within their sources, require treating with scepticism, and with heightened critical acuity when accessed from a distance of 200 years.

34

The movement between personal experience and secondary accounts sees a shift from that which is directly witnessed, and often shared via oral transmission, into a fixed printed medium that is primed for extended circulation. As a result, anecdotal snippets that 'resist formal containment and display a magnetic tendency toward accretion, collection, and performative recirculation' have permeated the factual record [Ladd and Ritchie 2022, 2]. Such fragmented source material causes problems for documenting the lives of women in particular, and as Hannah Hudson has shown, female biographies are often 'anecdotal, fictional, or merely so brief as to provide virtually no useful information' [Hudson 2018, 280]. Over time, these limited narratives are encoded in the historical record through repetition, a process that we see play out in our prosopographical research. Scrutinising the most frequently referenced nineteenth-century sources in our core resources reveals an ecology of contemporary accounts and later nineteenth-century collective biographies that together structure scholarly knowledge of long eighteenth-century theatrical persons. Our efforts to construct a digital prosopography are indebted to these efforts, but also must engage with them sceptically.

35

The most frequently cited nineteenth-century source for information about the Popes across our resources is one that the *Biographical Dictionary* describes in Maria Ann's entry as 'not always accurate in its details and with a tendency to romanticize': 'The Manager's Notebook'. Despite this assessment, the *Biographical Dictionary* entries for all three Popes draw extensively on this source, and it is cited in the Wikipedia pages for both Elizabeth and Maria Ann, resulting in a total of five citations. (None of the *ODNB* articles cite it, although they do draw on other nineteenth-century

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sources.) A column that appeared in *The New Monthly Magazine and Humourist*, 'The Manager's Notebook' provided short, intimate glimpses into the lives of well-known performers. It debuted in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1837, only a few years after the same magazine had questioned the reliability of theatrical biography. Over fourteen instalments, the column profiled over 30 actors and actresses, ranging from middle-ranking performers to the most well-known celebrities of the eighteenth-century stage, most of whom were by then long dead. According to the standards laid out in its preface, the authors of the *Biographical Dictionary* were right to treat 'The Manager's Notebook' with caution. Nevertheless, even though 'The Manager's Notebook' is just a single, somewhat belated article published in a magazine, its reach is surprisingly wide. As a freely available source, digitised on both HathiTrust and GoogleBooks, 'The Manager's Notebook' is accessible to anyone with an internet connection. As it is linked to directly from Elizabeth and Maria Ann's Wikipedia pages, it provides one of the most readily findable narratives about all three Popes.

Located somewhere between a memoir and criticism, 'The Manager's Notebook' was published over 30 years after the deaths of Alexander's first two wives but only two years after Alexander's own, and relies heavily on anecdotes to illustrate its articles. For instance, it describes how Alexander and Elizabeth's engagement was the result of their carriage being ostensibly overtaken by highwaymen while on route to Dublin for the summer season: 'Pope, the gallant, gay Lothario, drew his sword, which happened to be a stage one, and made a thrust at the highwaymen through the window. The rattling of the glass, and the other circumstances combined, caused Miss Younge to faint in Pope's arms' [Anon 1837, 100]. After reviving Elizabeth, Alexander reveals that 'the highwayman turned out to be the ostler, his pistol the stock-purse' [Anon 1837, 100], and they spend the remainder of the carriage ride 'devoted to an interchange of affectionate declaration' [Anon 1837, 100]. The humour of this anecdote positions Alexander and Elizabeth as the butt of a joke, in which their heightened theatrical expectations of a journey by carriage are at odds with the prosaic reality, although the result – a romantic relationship – is the same. Here the bathos of the supposed robbery contributes to the comic element of the union, the age gap between the two: 'on the 11th of August, 1785, they were married, the bride being forty-five, the bridegroom twenty-three' [Anon 1837, 100]. The conclusion to this anecdote exemplifies one of the article's key strategies: anecdotal detail structured around a straightforward, verifiable fact – in this case, the date of the wedding.

This strategy of combining anecdote with fact is visible throughout the articles in 'The Manager's Notebook' series. The Preface to the first instalment, which outlines the life and career of Kitty Clive, also identifies the aim of the column and hints at some of its sources:

We have been fortunate enough not only to receive some leaves from the manager's book, but the promise of many more. The devotion of the manager in question to the theatrical profession, his acknowledged activity of research, and his unquestionable resources, render the acquisition most valuable. We lay them before our readers as they reach us, without regard to any historical or biographical order, certain that they will afford our friends – at least those who have any theatrical feeling – abundance of amusement and information [Anon 1837, 320].

Without naming the manager, this passage assures us that his credentials are sterling: he has both experience in theatre and access to resources that facilitate research beyond his firsthand experience. At the very least, the column's author seems to have had access to theatrical documents, including letters and account books, as well as portraits held by the Garrick Club – presumably the 'unquestionable resources' referred to.

Almost all of the profiles contain some degree of financial information, although how much and what kind varies; Nell Gwyn's cites her will at length, while Tom King's provides the profit and loss totals from the 1782-83 Drury Lane account book because 'the theatrical reader may be amused' to see them [Anon 1838a, 524]. Although the article on Alexander Pope doesn't quite reach this level of detail, it does provide salary and benefit information for both him and Elizabeth Younge. The numbers included in this article line up with what can be found in surviving account books: Elizabeth was hired at £2 per week in 1768, which quickly increased to £3, and by the end of the season had been raised to £5 per week. The article also informs us that Alexander was hired by Covent Garden for the 1785-86 season, after a successful debut in January 1785. Of his first performance, the article tells us:

He was very successful, but Holman was engaged for three years at £10, £11, and £12 a-week, therefore Harris told him he could not engage him for that season, but if he wished to continue, he should have a benefit, which he would guarantee to produce him £200, and an engagement for the next and the two following seasons at £8, £9, and £10 a-week; this he at first refused, but, by the advice of his friends, afterwards accepted [Anon 1838b, 100].

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How much Pope earned for his debut performances and whether or not he did, in fact, clear £200 on his benefit is ambiguous in the archival record; the account book for the 1784-85 season does not survive. However, the account books for 1785-86 and 1786-87 record benefits for Alexander that brought in £255 and £207 respectively. ^[5] The only financial discrepancy in this article that we can identify arises in the description of Holman's contract, which, like Pope's, was meant to increase by a pound per week each year for three years. We do not have the financial data for the year Holman was hired, but in the next season of his employment the account books record his weekly salary as £11. However, in the 1786-87 season, his salary remained £11, suggesting that either the terms of his employment were renegotiated, or that the article's claim that actors in general, or Holman specifically, were hired on three-year contracts with annual pay raises is false. Despite this minor inconsistency, the inclusion of financial data in 'The Manager's Notebook' is useful for our prosopographical work: it enables us to link people in the prosopography to lines in the account books more easily.

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While the article's treatment of Elizabeth and Alexander uses financial facts as the bones for an article that otherwise relies heavily on anecdote, money is barely mentioned in connection with Maria Ann Campion. Given her shorter career, the article returns to anecdote to make up its dearth of fact; it focuses on attributes such as her 'slender, but finely proportioned figure' and her 'retentive memory' [Anon 1838b, 103], information that is less easily verifiable than her salary. Unlike the information about Elizabeth, which takes up nearly six of the article's 12 pages, Maria Ann's life and career occupies barely more than a page, some of which is inaccurate – it notes the year of her birth as 1777 instead of 1775, an error replicated in her Wikipedia article. Instead of rehearsing detailed anecdotes about her life, the article opts for significant silences, such as the reasons behind her choice to adopt a stage name. A few lines later, the article notes, 'By this marriage [to Maria Ann] Mr. Pope added to his income 200*l.* a-year, which had been settled on Mrs. Spencer during her residence in Ireland' [Anon 1838b, 102], the only reference in the article to Maria Ann's personal finances. The silence around why Maria Ann adopted a stage name and where her annuity came from seems to hint at some kind of scandal, absent from both her contemporaries' accounts of her life and modern-day resources like the *ODNB*, suggesting that this is, perhaps, one of the exaggerations that the *Biographical Dictionary* accuses the article of committing.

44

Although 'The Manager's Notebook' provides unusually detailed information, both factual and anecdotal, the overall structure of the narrative it offers about the Popes was established at least 30 years previously. Contemporary accounts of performers form a substantial number of the citations across all three of our tertiary resources, and include newspaper advertisements and reviews, articles in periodicals such as the *European Magazine*, and early nineteenth-century dictionaries of notable performers. These dictionaries are a precursor to the twentieth century *Biographical Dictionary*, providing short biographies of performers, in which dominant narratives are established. The first of these, *The Thespian Dictionary; or, Dramatic Biography of the Eighteenth Century* was first published anonymously in 1802, with a second, corrected and updated edition, appearing in 1805. The preface to both editions notes a curatorial strategy, stating, 'names (particularly of the *inferior* performers, now living) are PURPOSELY omitted, as unworthy of notice, especially as nothing could with justice be said of them to interest the public, or to redound their own advantage' [Anon 1802]; [Anon 1805]. All three Popes meet the criteria for inclusion, meriting biographical sketches that provide the familiar contours of all three lives. However, the respective length of the biographies suggests that, in the first decade of the nineteenth century, Maria Ann had the most substantial reputation. At about a page, her entry is almost twice the length as those for both Alexander and Elizabeth, in part because it contains a detailed and sentimental description of the 'violent hysterics' she experienced before her first appearance on stage in Dublin, a narrative replicated in the biographical notices of her throughout the nineteenth century. Across the editions, the entries for the Popes are essentially the same; the key difference in the 1805 edition is the addition, 'and died in 1803' [Anon 1805], to the final sentence of Maria Ann's entry. Together, the two editions are cited four times: Alexander's *ODNB* entry cites both

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editions, while Maria Ann's *ODNB* and Wikipedia page both cite the second edition, which was published only two years after her death.

The narratives about the Popes in *The Thespian Dictionary* act as a point of origin for biographies that circulated in subsequent years. Thomas Gilliland's *Dramatic Mirror* (1808), is cited by four of the nine entries: the *ODNB* articles on all three Popes, as well as Elizabeth's *Biographical Dictionary* entry. The first of its two volumes is a history of the British stage from Shakespeare's time, while the second volume consists of 'A Biographical and Critical Account of the principal Performers, at present belonging to the London Theatres; including a Selection of those Players who distinguished themselves in the last Century' [Gilliland 1808, 625]. As in *The Thespian Dictionary*, all three Popes are represented, and the text in their *Dramatic Mirror* entries is virtually identical to the text in *The Thespian Dictionary*, with some changes to punctuation, new information in Alexander's entry about his career up to 1808, and additional details about his skill as a portrait painter. However, the sentimental description of Maria Ann's first performance is replicated verbatim, as is the remark about Elizabeth: 'She was, in the language of a gentleman who had surveyed her journey through life, "a good child, a good wife, a good friend, and a good woman"' [Anon 1802]; [Anon 1805]; [Gilliland 1808, 901]. The replication of nearly identical biographical sketches, down to the anecdotes related, across sources like *The Thespian Dictionary* and *The Dramatic Mirror* is an extreme example of how anecdotes are encoded in theatrical history. As a result of these acts of repetition, Elizabeth is encoded in theatrical history as a 'good woman', a somewhat bland moral assessment that takes priority over her talents, while Maria Ann, with her opening-night hysterics and sudden early death, cuts a more romantic figure.

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The romance of Maria Ann's biography resulted in her life being further encoded in later nineteenth-century collective biographies that did not include Elizabeth or Alexander. Her *ODNB* entry cites three of them: Henry Gardiner Adams' *Cyclopedia of Female Biography* (1857), E. Owens Blackburne's *Illustrious Irishwomen* (1877), and Alfred Webb's *Compendium of Irish Biography* (1878). Maria Ann's Wikipedia page also cites the *Compendium of Irish Biography*. Her presence reflects some accidents of birth – her gender and her nationality – but also indicates that, well after her death, Maria Ann's life remained a compelling story. Thus, despite her comparatively short career, she is readily findable in both historical documents and more recent scholarly resources, but the information about her life tends to be less reliable than that about Elizabeth or Alexander. Examining those collective biographies in which Maria Ann appeared demonstrate both why her life continued to fascinate the Victorians and when and how errors were introduced into her biographical narrative.

47

The entries in Adams' *Cyclopedia* and Webb's *Compendium* consist of a short paragraph each. The *Cyclopedia*'s is the shortest at three sentences, describing her as, 'An actress, was the daughter of Mr. Campion, a respectable merchant of Waterford. The family being left in reduced circumstances by Mr. Campion's death, Maria went on the stage, and soon, as a tragic actress, attained great eminence, especially by her personation of Juliet. In 1798, she married Pope, the actor' [Adams 1857, 628]. Two of the three sentences relate to male relatives – her father and her husband – and the entry does not even provide basic biographical details about her birth and death. Although only a few lines longer, the entry in *The Compendium of Irish Biography* packs in a much more detailed narrative. In a short paragraph, it provides birth and death dates, the frequently cited anecdote about her opening-night hysterics, and a contemporary assessment of her face and character:

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Campion, Maria, (Mrs Pope) an actress, was born in Waterford in 1777. She early evinced a partiality for the stage, and made her first appearance in Dublin, as 'Monimia,' in *The Orphan*, 17th February 1790, when it is related that she swooned both in the green room and on the stage. She first appeared in London, in the same character, at Covent-Garden Theatre, on 13th October 1797, and shortly afterwards (24th January 1798), married Alexander Pope, the distinguished actor. She is stated to have been the authoress of two novels. Charles Mathews, who saw her perform in Dublin, where she was for some time the heroine of the stage, wrote: 'There are few such actresses to be met with. She possesses a very beautiful face, extremely elegant figure, and delightful voice, added to every advantage of nature in mental qualifications, and every accomplishment of education.' She died of apoplexy, in London, 18th July 1803, aged 26, and was buried in Westminster Abbey [Webb 1878, 70].

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In this case, the greater detail provided does not necessarily result in a more reliable narrative. Maria Ann was in fact born in 1775, making her 28 at her death, an error that also occurs in 'The Manager's Notebook' and is further replicated in her Wikipedia entry, which cites both sources. The speculation that she was 'the authoress of two novels' is also repeated in her Wikipedia article, even though no evidence for this appears in other accounts of her life. Despite these inaccuracies, it does offer insight into those elements of her life that Victorian readers might have found compelling, figuring her as 'the heroine of the stage' through references to her beauty, delicacy, and tragic early death.

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E. Owens Blackburne's *Illustrious Irishwomen* (1877), provides a much longer biography for Maria Ann; this two-volume publication of female worthies profiles women from Saint Brigit to the Ladies of Llangollen. In selecting his subjects, Blackburne uses a capacious definition of who counts as Irish, giving page space to figures such as the Bristol-born actress and poet Mary Robinson and the poet Felicia Hemans, who married an Irish army officer but spent her life in England and Wales. At six and a half pages, Maria Ann's biography is the shortest of any of the modern subjects – although by far the longest narrative of her life published in the nineteenth century. Despite the extra space, it rehearses the same narrative found in other sources, using the additional space to flesh out the narrative of Maria Ann's life with novelistic detail. Readers learn that 'an odd volume of Shakespeare was her constant companion and delight' [Blackburne 1877, 355], and that she entreated the stage-manager of the Dublin theatre where she first performed to hire her with 'intense, untutored pathos' [Blackburne 1877, 356]. As in 'The Manager's Notebook', the entry in *Illustrious Irishwomen* embellishes some of the scenes it describes, but it does so without the evidence of archival research found in the former. Overall, Blackburne provides little more than *The Compendium of Irish Biography* in the way of concrete facts about Maria Ann's life, relying instead on the anecdotes established earlier in the century as the basis for embellished scenes.

51

These later nineteenth century narratives indicate that public interest in Maria Ann's life continued well into the Victorian period. However, they provide no reliable information about her that is not available in earlier sources, making their presence in the bibliography of her *ODNB* entry perplexing. Indeed, they replicate the standard narrative about Maria Ann's life that was established in the early nineteenth century theatrical dictionaries. While these narratives vary in length and detail, their structure and content remain remarkably similar; this repetition of her hysterical debut, her physical and mental virtues, her marriage to Alexander, and her early death in narratives published throughout the nineteenth century is an extreme example of the 'magnetic tendency toward accretion, collection, and performative recirculation' that Ritchie describe as typifying anecdotes [Ladd and Ritchie 2022, 2]. In their repetition – and occasional embellishment – of the same incidents, nineteenth-century narratives about the Popes demonstrate how anecdotes and errors become encoded in the historical record. In building a digital prosopography for the eighteenth-century stage, we must remain alert to how our resources reproduce and cite the narratives contained in nineteenth-century biography, especially how verifiable facts such as birth dates and salaries legitimize anecdotes, as well as how errors are introduced and replicated. Likewise, analysing nineteenth century biography demonstrates how the hierarchies that inflect our data collection were produced and reproduced in two centuries of collective biographies. We can find basic biographical data about Maria Ann Campion, an actor with a relatively short career, because both her performances and her personal life were deemed notable; the same cannot always be said for other performers with lengthy and relatively high-profile careers.

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The Financial Record

In contrast to the anecdotal and romanticised narratives of nineteenth-century biographies, the surviving eighteenth-century account books for Covent Garden and Drury Lane provide hard evidence of an individual's career; devoid of narrative explication and personal reflections, the account books are a less subjective source of information though they reflect the idiosyncrasies of each theatre's bookkeeping practices. For the period in which the Popes were active, all but one of the season's account books survive, providing a rich tranche of information about their earnings and so their literal value to the theatre. ^[6] With no cast lists in the account books to embellish the figures and add more personal details to the lists of performances and revenues, the accounts contain three main kinds of information about an individual that are useful for our prosopographical work: salary payments; records of benefit nights; and expense payments to named individuals for items such as clothes. Together, these payments evidence the shape of a career and

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enable us to reevaluate existing narratives about performers as inherited from nineteenth-century narratives.

First, salaries. Of our nineteenth-century biographies discussed above, only 'The Manager's Notebook' makes use of this information. In the article about the Popes and throughout the column more generally, factual information such as performers' salaries is combined with the less easily evaluated narratives about romantic carriage rides and audience reactions, legitimising the anecdotes through the interweaving of cold hard financial facts. The inclusion of numbers in printed anecdotes also has a further use. Wanko notes, 'Without citing sums, readers (especially those outside of London) may not as easily discern the social worth of the player, but as soon as a sum is noted, readers can place the person, comparing him or her to their own positions and inciting inquiry into self-worth' [Wanko 2003, 169]. The inclusion of reliable financial information seems surprising for a form often linked to gossip and rumour. However, in an age in which only 6% of families had an income of over £100 per annum [Hume 2014, 377], it follows that the public were curious about the wages of top performers. There was a fascination with the theatre and its mythos as a place in which one could make it rich quick. Elizabeth would have earned £100 in just five weeks, and even Maria Ann's final salary of £8 per week gave her an annual income of over £400.

1793 Saturday 12th Oct^r Bro. Total £2260 7

Paid	Leois	20	Appt. Ad.	222 7	Pf. Ad.	246 13
S	Swish	14	Adm.	18	Carke	13
Nights	Holman	12	Mathews	10	Agicelott	12
Salaries	Goldman	12	Monty	10	Amor	12
	Johnson	10	Gold	8	Wells	12
	Cher	10	Captman	6	Cotes	12
	Munden	10	Augustin	6	Leois	12
	Jagren	9	Wells	4 3	Wickman	12
	Barnebad	8	Wells	3	Cotton	12
	Fields	7	Edmond	3	Hall	12
	Faiscet	7	Thompson	4	Quiten	12
	Chitt	6-10	Morris	3	Woodson	12
	Carley	6	Stacy	2	Savory	12
	Byrnes	6	Johnson	2	Wickins	12
	Reynard	6	Faiscet	2	Young	12
	Riddellton	6	Hall	2	Doe	12
	Gull	5	Wells	2	Watson	12
	Dooris	5	Tallier	2	Strahan	12
	Wild	4	Barnet	2	Heathcote	12
	Macmurdy	4	Griff	2	Boison	12
	Byrell	3	Longford	2	Humming	12
	Hack	3	Hutchford	1 8	Shelton	12
	Williamson	3	Byggard	1 3	Ransom	12
	Thompson	2 10	Loyde	1 3	Hoberts	12
	Gray	2 10	Crowe	1 3	Porter	12
	Tallier	2 10	Canfield	1 3	Doel	12
	Leeson	2	Watson	1 3	Tashin	12
	Carley	2	Page	1 3	Worship	12
	Bluxton	2	Leeson	1 3	Brice	12
	Canfield	2	Bluxton	1 3	Gaydery	12
	Coat	2	Masters	1 3	Hackett	12
	Holland	2	Substant	1 3	Conolly	12
	Corman	2			Coleto	12
	Wick	2			Bye	12
	Hutchford	1 10			Brice	12
	King	1 10			Constable	12
	Byggard	1 10			Amley	12
	Hall	1 10			Spottis	2
	Jachman	1 10			Coones	12
	Wilde W	2			Hill	1 2
	Ross	2			Halle	1 2
	Leeson	1 10			Quade	4 4
	Byggard	1 10			Hambors	1 12
	Thompson	1 10			Wormen	12 12
	Abbot	1 5			W. Dwyer	22 10 1
	Goodman	2 2				
	Simmons	1				
		223 7				

Can. Tot. £ 2,679 2 5

Figure 2. Page from Covent Garden account book for 1793-94 showing a standard week's salary list, based on six days of performances. Alexander Pope is listed as receiving £10 in the first Column and Elizabeth Young Pope is listed as receiving £18 in the second column. Records of Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theatres. Call W.b.436, page 17. Folger Shakespeare Library.

By linking individuals in our prosopography to the salary data from the account books, we can begin to determine the standing of Alexander, Elizabeth, and Maria Ann within the company. For example, working with the salary list above reveals that a female actor at Covent Garden earned, on average, £3 18s a week in 1793-94; at £18 a week Elizabeth is not only valued much higher than her peers, but is the only woman paid on par with top male performers. Following

Elizabeth's death in 1797, Margaret Martyr, who earned £10 a week, became Covent Garden's highest paid actress. This is the same level of remuneration that Alexander was receiving, but while her salary placed Martyr foremost among Covent Garden's actresses Alexander tied joint fifth among the male actors, alongside Munden and Johnstone. This knowledge helps us disambiguate payments made to 'Pope' where there is no indication of gender in the account book (see Figure 2). By knowing the pay typically associated with male and female performers, and with a reliable prosopography, we can disambiguate these payments and assign records to 'Mr Pope', Alexander, and 'Mrs Pope', Elizabeth or Maria Ann, based on dates and the size of the sum involved. The account books are hierarchical, with male actors listed in the first column, actresses in the second, and the third documenting a mixture of dancers and back of house staff. With payments usually arranged highest to lowest, the pay lists entrench hierarchies that are driven by gender and role-type. For instance, Strahan's slightly higher wage in the right-hand column (15s versus Walkers' 12s in the line above) denotes a transition into a list of doorkeepers, while Goostree, the machinist, marks a jump to £2 and a list of skilled back of house workers; collective departmental salaries (Guards, Barbers, Dressers) are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. Such knowledge of the salary hierarchies enable us to begin to unpack and allocate group payments, such as the 62 payments made to 'Mr & Mrs Pope'. Based on what we know of relative earnings, we can impute that this was not a 50:50 split. These joint salary payments begin in 1800, and are almost all from 1802 and 1803, indicating that Covent Garden treated the Popes as a singular entity towards the end of Maria Ann's life; Elizabeth and Alexander were always kept separate in the account books, both in the salary lists and for benefit nights.

A benefit, as noted previously, was a sign of status and the earlier it was held in the season, and the fewer people it was shared with, the higher the status of the beneficiary. Beneficiaries typically chose the plays for their allocated night and were responsible for selling advance tickets. The top performers had free benefits, others paid a charge but still had a night to themselves; middle-ranked performers might share a night with up to three others; utility performers and back of house staff, by contrast, could share with up to 20 others and only received money based on their personal ticket sales – without getting a cut of sales on the door (however, they did not have to cover a charge so the lower reward was softened by the lack of risk). Elizabeth had a benefit in her own right every year from 1769 until her death, indicating her standing at Drury Lane and subsequently at Covent Garden. By the 1790s, she was selling around £400 of tickets each year, selling £495 for her final benefit. Alexander's benefits typically saw him sell around £300 of tickets, with a notable exception for his benefit in 1797 when he sold £455. While this event brought him £180 more than the previous year, this increase should be contextualised with what we know about Elizabeth: was Alexander very successful that year, or did the public want to support the man whose wife, a star actress, had passed away two months earlier? The status associated with benefit nights raises its head more starkly in relation to Maria Ann. While Elizabeth enjoyed a benefit night from the outset of her career, Maria Ann's first night was in 1799 – her second season at the theatre, following her substantial pay rise. Earning £3 a week in 1797, she did not have sufficient standing in the company to have her own night. Neither did she have a strong claim to a night in her own right, with the account books logging benefits for 'Mr and Mrs Pope' in 1802 and 1803 – a step up for Maria Ann, but a step down the ranks for Alexander whose household income would diminish as a result of having to share for the first time.

The third type of data found in the account books is the expenses. These can be more complex but, like benefit nights, can indicate a person's standing within the company. As we saw earlier, a desire for a clothing allowance was one of the factors underpinning Elizabeth's move from Drury Lane to Covent Garden; while it was common for actresses to supply their own costumes, only top performers were reimbursed for such expenses. To date, the Theatronics database has captured almost 156,000 expense items, excluding individual salaries, for the period 1766-1809. Of these, 484 items relate, in a somewhat obtuse fashion, to an individual called 'Pope'; with a reliable prosopography, we can begin to associate these items with a specific individual and determine whether an expense item is associated with 'Mr', 'Mrs', or even 'Miss'.^[7] Through doing so, we can also further interrogate the accuracy and reliability of the financial information contained in our printed biographies. The account books illuminate that Elizabeth did negotiate a new position and terms of employment in 1779-80 [Anon 1779]; the accounts that season detail her clothing allowance of £200 – some £50 more than she had been reimbursed for clothes at Drury Lane in 1777-78, where she had been paid item by item as opposed to being assigned a ready budget [Anon 1777]. Complicating the narrative, however, we see that her clothing allowance was in flux and infer that this level of allowance was not a fixed term of her employment, but more likely a sum designed to enable her to initially set up her wardrobe at the new theatre and maintain it in subsequent seasons.

Payments to Elizabeth for clothes are highest in 1785-86, standing at £250, but could be as low as £100, as was the case in 1788-89.

The account books provide bare-bones facts about the careers of our Popes, but they are not without their challenges; accounting practices vary as managerial regimes and bookkeepers change, reflecting personal and institutional views on how best to record information. Despite the challenges of inconsistency and comparability this creates, these three types of financial data from the account books serve primarily to detail the cash flows of a business on any given day. However, these payments take on meaning in light of the narratives circulating about the eighteenth-century stage; they are more readily assigned to a specific person when robust accounts of their career exist elsewhere. Yet while the account books need the biographical narratives, the narratives only become truly reliable when the accounts enable us to interrogate key 'facts'. Account books highlight the truths and deceptions contained within anecdotes and biographies. The money does not lie or exaggerate to win over the sympathies of a reader; it offers a straightforwardly fact-based position from which to contextualise a career, which through the additional information of biography and anecdote collates and rearranges into a new hierarchy within the structures of Theatronics' digital prosopography.

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Recommendations

While Theatronics' digital prosopography is a distillation of the core facts of an individual's life – birth date, death date, nationality – devoid from the colour of narrative biography, the hierarchies embedded in historic records still shape the ways in which details of an individual's life have been recorded for posterity, if they are recorded at all. Our exploration of the resources that contribute to our project's prosopography in this article has deliberately focused on performers with easily traceable careers in order to interrogate the primary and tertiary sources upon which the Theatronics database is founded. The process is far more fraught, for example, with regard to the eight performers appearing under the name 'Miss Young(e)' between 1733 and 1768. With sources such as the *Biographical Dictionary* noting that it is impossible to differentiate between them in the playbills, a reliable prosopography becomes the best means through which we can begin to unpick their careers, using marriage dates, dates of first and last appearances, and known activities to disambiguate at least some of their information.

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For a project such as Theatronics, this disambiguation work has several scholarly implications. For theatre historians, a prosopography that contains not only prominent actors, but singers, dancers, and back of house staff creates a more holistic picture of theatrical operations by outlining the careers of those who were integral to the business of theatre but who were not lauded in the newspapers or promoted on playbills. This allows us to begin to map careers more fully, building the framework from which it could be possible to trace the lineage of a role from one actor to the next, offering new insights into evolutions in production history while also revealing the extended influences that feed into audience' expectations over time. As such, a reliable prosopography creates the foundation from which new avenues of research can be identified and enables the single digital project to expand into new areas, with data becoming accessible to those beyond the primary discipline(s) at which a project is targeted. For instance, the Theatronics data can be used by cultural economists or by economic historians to better situate the operational practices of our two theatres within the eighteenth-century London economy, and by scholars of music and dance to better understand performance and reception histories. Looking further to interdisciplinarity and interoperability, the geodata (a detailed discussion of which has lain outside the scope of this article) highlights the international dimension of London's theatre, opening up a continental perspective and providing information that is likely of interest to those working on European theatre and engaged in projects such as the *Comédie-Française* (2020).

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Such aims, to some degree, represent the ideal for Theatronics' prosopographical data. But they are not impossible or even improbable goals for digital scholarship to work towards; from our experiences developing a prosopography for the eighteenth-century theatre and undertaking initial disambiguation work, we have a few learnings that might help realise these goals and enable a more joined-up, interdisciplinary approach to prosopography going forward. As we have seen, a significant challenge is keeping the careers of known individuals straight, especially when people change their names. To combat this, the Theatronics database contains several name variants, documenting not just the different names a performer held during our time period, but also logging known spelling variations in the way their name appeared on playbills and in newspaper advertising. Thus, for example, a user can find Maria Ann within the

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Theatronics data by searching for 'Campion', 'Spencer', or 'Pope' and be directed to a single profile that contains all of her information, including links to the sources discussed above as well as a link to her VIAF. This is a notable advance for, while all three iterations of Maria Ann's name are referenced in all of her biographical records, the VIAF only captures one iteration: Pope. This means that if someone were to search for a VIAF for 'Maria Ann Campion', no results would come up. As Leuner points out, VIAFs are particularly important for women, whose names often change after marriage, yet the absence of Maria Ann's maiden name and her adopted stage name in her VIAF record render her, and her career, less findable. The creation of digital records that contain reliable information, gathered through interrogating the printed sources on which their foundational data is based, is essential to building a meaningful prosopography and this requires not just consistent and reliable data capture within individual project teams but more globally to create linked resources.

Digital prosopography, then, is an ongoing endeavour and, we suggest, an interdisciplinary one. Developing linked open data enables projects to be put in conversation with one another — something that Theatronics begins to do through its use of VIAFs. The VIAF model hints at a way to centrally deposit known information about an individual though, as discussed, its focus on print sources and archival holdings presents media-based challenges for working with historic data in particular. A prosopographical model that speaks to D'Ignazio and Klein's calls to situate data in the contexts of its collection and make hierarchies of data visible, as this article has sought to do, is vital to challenging the biases, conscious or otherwise, that historic practices embed into the twenty-first century digital resource. Such an approach, however, requires an agreed set of principles for prosopographical data collection, recognised standards for data entry, and an agreed set of go-to sources. Our choice to work with the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, for example, embeds the Anglocentric qualities of a project centred on London theatre and creates less complete records for non-British nationals. To extend the reach of our prosopography, different national equivalents, such as the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (2009) or the 100 volume *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (1960-2020), ought to be consulted; the latter, for example, would be essential for future work on the composers in the Theatronics dataset for whom Italian Wikipedia sites, for the reasons outlined above, have been a key linked source.

An ongoing prosopographical endeavour across disciplines and geographic regions would provide new avenues for research, suggesting new individuals for study either in their own right or in conjunction with a wider network, and so, by extension, creating a fuller picture of who prominent individuals were. The need for this is evident by our attempts to seek out secondary sources on our Popes. Prosopographical work makes it possible to reappraise dominant narratives about the London stage and to place the labour of individuals — both prominent and minor performers — back into the context in which they originally operated. Alexander Pope, for instance, is difficult to trace in eighteenth century scholarship due to the dominance of Alexander Pope (1688-1744). The Augustan poet, translator, and satirist looms large in all searches for 'Pope' and is also present in the Theatronics database on account of the play *Three Hours After Marriage* (1717) on which he collaborated with John Arbuthnot and John Gay. Elizabeth Young, meanwhile, is notable largely by her absence from secondary sources; her early career is difficult to disentangle from the five other 'Miss Young[e]s' working on the London stage at that time, and despite her talents as an actress, the lack of scandal in her personal life compared to figures such as Dorothea Jordan, or even Mary Robinson, results in her roles being swept up into larger narratives about the history of Shakespearean production or in relation to the reception of specific plays within the repertoire, such as with David Worrall's exploration of *Margaret of Anjou* [Worrall 2013, 183–88].

In conclusion, then, medium matters for prosopographical research. In dealing with historical prosopography we are, as this article has shown, largely reliant on anecdotes, many of which, in the case of the Popes, originate not during their lifetimes in the eighteenth century, but are fictions of the nineteenth. As we are entirely dependent on extant archival materials to determine hard facts, the modern digital prosopography has to contend with this subsequent rewriting and narrativizing of lives when striving to reinscribe data that is subject to previous centuries' prevailing biases for data collection (scholarly or otherwise). The 'best fit' approach requires a compromise between modern priorities, such as principles for data feminism, and the information encoded in historical documents. This is both a curse and a blessing; while it frustrates a straightforward translation of received narratives into a digital prosopography, it opens up opportunities to return to the archives and engage with a range of historical data that, as yet, remains to be fully explored and inscribed in ways that are meaningful for modern scholarship. It also encourages us as to the validity of

exploiting the project's core financial data to refine and correct the highly subjective earlier prose sources. For projects working on twentieth and twenty-first century materials, it is possible to develop new methodologies from the outset and work according to present-day priorities. Such resources offer a model for historic projects to aspire to, but one that is not always the best fit given the condition of extant data.

As postdoctoral researchers inheriting a long line of scholarly work on eighteenth-century London theatre – the extraordinary collective scholarship of *The London Stage, 1660-1800*, London Stage Information Bank, and London Stage Database – we have been forced to grapple with the long-standing hierarchies of data that we have been describing and their well-known shortcomings. The biases of eighteenth-century advertisements and account books have long since moved into modern print collections and digital resources, with each reimagining of the data containing within it the legacies of the foundational work that came before. Digital prosopography, we hope, is the latest intervention in this history of data production and reproduction and one that hopefully serves to remediate archival materials to make them more readily usable for modern scholars. The biographical data collected and presented as the prosopographical element of the Theatronics database is only one piece of the puzzle. Twenty-first century digital scholarship and opportunities to link projects, particularly those relational databases that readily facilitate interoperability through shared principles for data collection, represent avenues for reinventing prosopographical work, pooling resources and collaboratively sharing best practice to debunk received narratives and begin the process of reinscribing data that is not easily accessible and usable, and so do the vital work of recovering those who have previously been confined to the margins of scholarship and relegated to dusty corners of the archive.

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Notes

[1] Contracts in the theatre were usually signed for at least a season, with many prominent actors signing contracts for longer periods of time, outlining their pay and salary increases for three seasons.

[2] A free benefit night would see Elizabeth bring home the full profits for a designated night for which she chose the play; a free night functioned as a sizable annual bonus. While theatres operated wardrobe departments, it was also common practice for actors to have to provide their own costumes, and pay the costs. A clothing allowance would allow Elizabeth to buy more extravagant costumes without being personally out of pocket. For more on the benefit system see Troubridge (1967)

[3] Respectively these articles span 103 pages, 67 pages, and 51 pages. Elizabeth Younge occupies 10 pages.

[4] 'Britain' was in flux in the eighteenth century, with union with Scotland occurring in 1707 and with Ireland in 1800.

[5] No House Charge is recorded on these nights. This means that Alexander may have cleared the £200 mark with his take-home payment, or, after Charges, which were typically £105 at Covent Garden in the 1790s, brought home £140 and £102 – far below what he is supposedly promised.

[6] There is no full account book for Covent Garden for the season 1792-93. Although an alternative account book for nightly receipts does exist, this does not contain salary information.

[7] These expenses relate to our seven Popes as follows: 282 for Miss Pope; 87 for Mr Pope, which we can link to Alexander; 62 for 'Mr & Mrs Pope'; 24 for 'Pope' with no indication of gender; 16 for 'Mrs Pope'; 14 for Mr Pope the wig maker.

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