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‘Village Hall work can never be “Theatre”’: Amateur Theatre and The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1945-1956

Taryn Storey

Introduction

In 1945 the landslide election victory by the Labour party was to result in a series of profound reforms to the British state. With the promise of a ‘free, democratic, efficient, progressive, public-spirited’ and socialist Britain, Labour pledged to give its citizens full employment, good wages, a social service, and invest in schooling, housing, and health care.¹ In the immediate years after the Second World War, a series of parliamentary acts were passed to create the ‘Welfare State’: the National Insurance Act of 1946 introduced a state pension, maternity benefit, unemployment benefit and sickness benefit, and in 1948 the state began to fund free health care through the National Health Service. Prime Minister Clement Attlee’s administration believed that access to culture and cultural improvement were to be key factors in the ethics of the new Welfare State, and this was to be reflected in the mission of a new state funded, but independent organisation – the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB).² In 1946, a Royal Charter defined the aims of the ACGB: to foster ‘a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts [...] and in particular to increase the accessibility of the fine arts to the public’.³ To achieve these aims the Arts Council introduced policies that were to have complex implications for amateur theatre-making.

¹Title quotation comes from John Moody, *Policy of the Drama Department 1949-1950*, Supplementary Statement to Council, Paper 269, 20 July 1949, EL4/50, p. 2; ‘Let Us Face the Future, A Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of a Nation’ *Labour Party Manifesto 1945* <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab45.htm>. [Accessed 1 September 2016].

² David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945-1951* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 139.

³ ‘The Arts Council of Great Britain Second Annual Report 1946/7’, p. 8. <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/arts-council-great-britain-2nd-annual-report-1946-7> [Accessed 1 September 2016].

In July 1945, economist John Maynard Keynes, policy advisor to the Labour administration and first Chairman of the ACGB, set out his vision for the Arts Council as:

greatly concerned to decentralise and disperse the dramatic and musical and artistic life of the country, to build up provincial centres and to promote corporate life in these matters in every town and county. [...] We look forward to the time when the theatre, the concert hall, and the gallery will be a living element in everyone's upbringing.⁴

The state patron, explained Keynes, would be a flexible and responsive organization whose role was 'not to teach or censor but to give courage, confidence and opportunity to the artist'.⁵ Over the next five years the Arts Council struggled to define and achieve initial policy objectives, and the type of artist that the Arts Council was willing to support became the source of much internal debate. Commercial theatre managers were fearful that the state project would put them out of business and exerted considerable influence to ensure that the ACGB directed state funding towards their needs. The result was that the criteria for drama subsidy introduced in 1946 prioritised the professional status quo and excluded the huge variety of amateur activity that had flourished in the years preceding the Second World War.

Andrew Davies estimates that in 1939 'there were 30,000 amateur groups playing to approximately five million people each year'.⁶ Amateur theatre in this period encompassed a wide range of activity and the boundary between amateur and professional status was not always clearly defined. By 1944 the British Drama League – which had been founded in 1919 for 'the encouragement of the art of the Theatre, both for its own sake and as a means of intelligent recreation among all classes of the

⁴ John Maynard Keynes, quoted in Janet Minihan, *The Nationalization of Culture: The Development of State Subsidies in the Arts in Great Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977), p. 232.

⁵ John Maynard Keynes, 'The Arts Council: Its Policy and Hope by Lord Keynes', 12 July 1945, in *The Arts Council First Annual Report 1945*, p. 23.

⁶ Andrew Davies, *Other Theatres, The Development of Alternative and Experimental Theatre in Britain* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Education, 1987), p. 81.

community', had 5,000 affiliated clubs.⁷ Amateur theatre groups in towns across Britain opened Little theatres, and by 1924 Village Drama Societies were to be found in more than 2,000 villages across the country.⁸ New writing was championed by amateur 'play-producing and play-encouraging societies'.⁹ Socialist theatre groups that were linked with the Clarion Movement included the People's Theatre in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and the Workers' Theatre Movement led to the creation of Unity Theatres with their policy of presenting new plays by working-class playwrights.¹⁰ Amateur theatre-makers also played a crucial role in the development of regional theatres and Nicoll writes that regional theatre history:

cannot fully be appreciated without considering the associated work of the scores upon scores of dramatic and theatrical societies established during those years. Nor may any sharp separation be made between amateurs and professionals; even though most of the repertories belonged to the latter category, some of them did not, while almost all owed their being to preceding amateur effort.¹¹

Commenting on the complexity of amateur theatre development during this period, Claire Cochrane argues that this 'diversity' has 'tended to exacerbate an historiographic tension about how amateur theatre is to be integrated into the historical record'.¹² She writes that for the Arts Council: "'Theatre" [...] in the post-war definition meant professional provision. Amateur activity [...] didn't feature on the map.'¹³

This article, based on research in the ACGB archive in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, throws new light on the evolving relationship between the ACGB and amateur theatre in the immediate years after the Second World War.

⁷ Ibid, pp. 74-75; Claire Cochrane, *Twentieth Century British Theatre: Industry, Art and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 111.

⁸ Ibid, p. 120.

⁹ Allardyce Nicoll, *English Drama 1900-1930, The Beginnings of the Modern Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 85-93.

¹⁰ Norman Marshall, *The Other Theatre* (London: J. Lehmann, 1947), pp. 100-101.

¹¹ Allardyce Nicoll, p. 57.

¹² Claire Cochrane, p. 109.

¹³ Ibid, p. 146.

Documents from the ACGB archive show that the ACGB did not have a coherent policy for the amateur, and that inconsistent and contradictory policies introduced by different departments reflect significant differences of opinion within the organisation towards the amateur artist. The Drama Panel introduced a binary model of funding that excluded the amateur theatre-maker, yet ACGB Regional Officers supported amateur arts clubs and music clubs. Furthermore, the Art and Music departments successfully pursued models of participatory activity with amateur artists. Drawing on documents that have not previously been referenced by other academics, this article seeks to present the marginalisation of the amateur theatre-maker within the wider context of the evolution of Arts Council policy in this period, and interrogates why the Drama Panel instigated a financial policy that undermined its own egalitarian and artistic aims by directing considerable state resources towards the commercial status quo.

ACGB Drama Policy: Standards, Subsidy and Commercial Enterprise

Academics have previously argued that the early Arts Council lacked clear policy objectives; Robert Hewison states that in the 1940s the ACGB mainly pursued a 'reactive' policy, whilst Turnbull writes that funds were distributed on a mainly 'ad hoc' basis.¹⁴ There are several key documents in the ACGB archive that outline details of a more coherent early drama policy: two in the form of memoranda from Drama Directors Michael MacOwan (1945 and 1946), and Llewellyn Rees (1949), and two policy documents by John Moody: 'A Policy for Theatre in London' (1949), and the 'Programme for Drama' (1949, revised 1950). Alongside internal memos, letters, minutes of meetings from the Drama Panel, the Executive Committee, and the ruling Council, and a series of internal reports into the efficacy of ACGB policies, these form a rich source of documentary material from which it has been possible to gain a new insight into the factors that influenced the shape and direction of policy in the immediate years after the Second World War.

¹⁴ Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England Art and Politics since 1940* (London: Methuen, 1995), p. 80; Olivia Turnbull, *Bringing Down the House, The Crisis in Britain's Regional Theatres* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008), p. 11.

A dominant historical narrative has emerged in literature on the Arts Council of the 1940s: it is universally seen as having been ineffectual - 'a marginal effort on the fringes of the main commercial theatre system', with commercial managers 'generally interested above all in the theatre as a vehicle for star actors,' and thus resistant to innovation or structural change.¹⁵ Cochrane observes that power was 'heavily weighted towards commercial interests,' and Rebellato writes that ACGB policy in this period was predominantly a 'centralising strategy' with an 'increasing focus on London'.¹⁶ However, what the archive reveals is that the dominance of the commercial theatre and the decline of theatre outside London was due to a *failure* of funding policy and was not the *intention* of drama policy, which from the outset had identified provision to theatre in the regions as a priority.

Drama policy in this period was formed in the face of conflicting objectives from three main interested parties: commercial theatre managements who wished to exert their influence on the new state patron to safeguard their financial interests and defend the status quo; professional theatre-makers who were calling for a dramatists' theatre and structural and economic reform; and a political class keen to build on the more culturally democratic legacy of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA). A fourth party, the British Drama League, lobbied the Arts Council on behalf of amateur theatre-makers with little real effect.

In Michael MacOwan's 1945 'Memorandum' he concludes that the primary aim of drama policy should be 'the maintenance of the highest possible standards of Dramatic Art in Great Britain', and that the ACGB's most immediate task was 'to give assistance where it is most needed at present, by helping the provincial theatre to set its own house in order'.¹⁷ MacOwan lists four objectives for drama policy:

¹⁵ John Elsom, *Post-War British Theatre* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976 (revised 1979)), p. 127; John Bull, 'The Establishment of Mainstream Theatre, 1946-1979', in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Vol. 3: Since 1895*, ed. by Baz Kershaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 326-348 (p. 332).

¹⁶ Claire Cochrane, p. 151; Dan Rebellato, *1956 And All That: The Making of Modern British Drama* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 58-59.

¹⁷ Michael MacOwan, *Memorandum on Dramatic Policy by the Director*, 30 July 1945, ACGB/35/304, p. 3.

- a) ensuring that the theatre in London offers the best that can be given in the most important fields of drama;
- b) raising the standards of theatre offered in provincial towns;
- c) bringing the theatre to places which otherwise would not be able to enjoy it;
- d) seeing that the available theatrical talent in Great Britain is fully employed, to the best advantage, and given every opportunity to develop artistically.¹⁸

In an attempt to appease all interested parties MacOwan's policy aimed to uphold the metropolitan status quo and at the same time develop theatre in the regions. The objective of raising 'standards' was a clear statement that ACGB subsidy was to be directed at *professional* theatre, and in a subsequent policy document MacOwan wrote:

If this edifice is to be built on the stage of our town halls, I fear it will not be a very imposing one [...] In wartime a play in a school hall was part of the strange new life we lived. In peace it smacks of amateurishness, or 'welfare', and is unlikely to increase the public's respect for the theatre, or to increase its popularity.¹⁹

His dismissal of activity outside professional theatre buildings as smacking 'of amateurishness' and 'welfare,' would seem to be at odds with the ethics of the Atlee administration and reflected growing criticism by Labour politicians on the scope of ACGB activity outside London. Moreover, the Drama Panel's preference for activity in proper theatre buildings did not match the reality of regional activity that took place across a variety of venues. Reflecting a tension between the two key aims of the ACGB's drama policy, MacOwan asked how the Drama Panel could be expected to deliver both the artistic and egalitarian aims of the Council when 'the present theatrical industry is quite incapable of meeting the demands for social service from the theatre which are being made at present', and posed the question of whether the

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 1.

¹⁹ Michael MacOwan, *Confidential Paper on Arts Council Drama Policy*, appendix to paper no. 221, October 1946, ACGB/35/304, p. 1.

Arts Council should now consider itself ‘a Council of Social Service or an Arts Council?’²⁰

In the early years of the war a more inclusive and participatory model of arts subsidy had been initiated by CEMA. Established in 1939, CEMA aimed to support and develop participation in cultural activities as a way of maintaining morale during the war. A 1947 ACGB report into declining audience numbers enthuses almost nostalgically about the success of CEMA’s policy to deliver arts directly to the people.

In factories and factory hostels, and also in air-raid shelters and rest centres, CEMA had the opportunity of serving large, ready-made audiences. Concerts were given in canteens at meal times, without charge, and everyone heard them who did not actively wish not to. They were also provided for homeless people in rest centres where again there was little choice but to listen. Plays were given at low prices to workers in hostels who had few or no alternative forms of entertainment. Exhibitions held in factory canteens and hostels could equally claim attention from numbers of people who would not have thought of visiting a picture gallery.

[T]here were the romantic Old Vic tours of Wales and County Durham, and the presence of the Old Vic headquarters itself at Burnley in Lancashire. [...] People of all kinds, and particularly evacuees feeling bored and isolated, flocked to hear distinguished artists play and sing.²¹

It is significant that this report celebrates *audiences* for the arts and not amateur participation: CEMA’s initial policy had focused on participation in arts activities and regional organizers had been employed to make links with amateur groups. Rebellato, Hewison, and Turnbull argue that a profound shift in CEMA policy towards professional activity in 1942 can be attributed to the appointment of John Maynard Keynes as CEMA Chairman. Rebellato describes Keynes’ vision for CEMA as

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Mary Glasgow, *Audiences for the Arts*, Council paper no. 240, 29 October 1947, EL4/47, p. 1.

‘grounded in conspicuous prestige’ and Turnbull writes that his emphasis was ‘on quality above all else, something he believed could be achieved almost exclusively by professional companies’.²² I suggest it is no coincidence that this shift in policy was to occur at the same time as commercial theatre manager Binkie Beaumont, from West End management H.M. Tennents, approached CEMA with a proposal to tour professional productions to the regions. Rebellato details how Beaumont exploited a loophole to benefit from tax exemption by creating a not-for-profit subsidiary company, Tennent Productions Ltd.²³ Between the summer of 1942 and April 1943, H.M. Tennents made a profit from the tour of £4,314.²⁴ CEMA’s Drama Panel was highly critical of Tennents’s use of this profit to further its own enterprise. But when the Drama Panel argued vociferously with the ruling Council to ensure that any subsequent profits from Tennent Productions Ltd. were pooled for redistribution, it was informed that all financial decisions were forthwith to be made by the Council and that ‘the Panels would recommend but not decide the voting of money’.²⁵

By late 1944, CEMA had opened up discussion with the Theatre Managers’ Association, offering guarantees for commercial managements to run:

special pioneer seasons of 4 to 6 weeks in backwards towns like Luton or Bedford where hitherto there had been only twice nightly variety [...] in this way good popular drama would gradually reach a wider public.²⁶

CEMA minutes reveal that it was the pursuit of ‘standards’ that was used to justify this redirection of subsidy to professional companies. By the end of the war the commercial theatre had successfully embedded itself within CEMA provision and placed itself in a strategic position to deliver the objectives of the new Arts Council of Great Britain, a position of power further cemented by the nomination of West End impresarios Bronson Albery and Binkie Beaumont to the new ACGB Drama Panel. From 1946 the efficacy of ACGB drama policy was undermined by the interests of a

²² Dan Rebellato, p. 41; Olivia Turnbull, p. 25.

²³ Dan Rebellato, p. 53.

²⁴ Robert Hewison, *Under Siege: Literary Life in London, 1939-45* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1977), p. 159.

²⁵ CEMA Drama Panel Minutes, 4 August 1943, ACGB/35/304, p. 1.

²⁶ CEMA Drama Panel Minutes, 6 December 1944, p. 2.

commercial theatre world that sought to ensure that financial resources from the state were directed to the professional status quo.

The Failure of Financial Policy

From 1945 the ACGB aimed to deliver its broader social and educational objectives through existing companies, backed up with financial support from the state in the form of small Guarantees Against Loss and exemption from Entertainments' Tax.²⁷ Secretary General Mary Glasgow was an avid proponent of this model of 'state support without state control', which clearly benefitted the status quo.²⁸ The Arts Council, keen to express its commitment to artistic freedom and avoid any suggestion that it was to function like the state propaganda machines of Stalin's Soviet Union, developed the 'arm's length principle,' designed to provide a buffer between politicians and artists and to prevent the state patron of the arts from interfering in artistic policy.²⁹ Only theatre companies *associated with* the Arts Council were eligible for subsidy and tax exemption status. Documents in the ACGB archive have revealed that it was a commercial theatre manager, Bronson Albery, who was invited to suggest the criteria for association. Albery recommended that the criteria should include an assessment of 'the financial stability of each enterprise'; and that any new enterprises must 'try to ensure an adequate standard of work' before association with the ACGB could be granted.³⁰ 'Only properly constituted, non-profit-sharing companies and bodies functioning under charitable trusts' were to be eligible for association.³¹ Such criteria clearly benefitted the larger commercial companies running

²⁷ 'According to the Finance New Duties Act of 1916: Section 1(5) (d), theatrical productions could be exempt from Entertainments' Tax, if they were of an educational or partly educational character and given by non-profit making bodies.' Jorn Weingartner, *The Arts as a Weapon of War, Britain and the Shaping of National Morale in the Second World War* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006), p. 115.

²⁸ B. Ifor Evans and Mary Glasgow, *The Arts in England* (London: Falcon Press 1949), p. 124.

²⁹ John Pick claims the 'arm's length principle' originated with the working methods of the War Office Cinematography Committee 'which gave grants to British film producers, and accepted that control of content lay with the producers themselves and with the British Board of Film Censors, a body run by industry, and which had been formed in 1913.' John Pick, (ed.), *The State and the Arts* (East Sussex: John Offord, 1980), p. 19.

³⁰ Minutes of Drama Panel, 29 May 1946, ACGB/35/304, p. 2.

³¹ *The Arts Council of Great Britain Standard Drama Agreement*, 9 October 1947, EL4/47, p. 1.

a non-profit-making subsidiary, for they were better resourced than smaller companies and, crucially, through their profit-making parent company, had the necessary financial and artistic track record. Little theatres, Club theatres, amateur theatres, and small *ad hoc* theatre companies such as Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, were excluded from any financial support from the ACGB because they did not fit these criteria for association – thus restricting the Drama Panel's ability to pursue an experimental artistic policy, and to achieve its regional objectives.³² Theatre companies *not* associated with the ACGB were subject to substantial Entertainments' Tax on all ticket sales. In effect, the Arts Council was targeting financial support to the companies that needed it least. Small touring companies, amateur theatres, and many reps in the regions paid tax to the Treasury, whilst large commercial West End companies had the benefit of tax exemption status through association with the Arts Council. Commercial managements were offered the additional carrot that their 'not-for-profit' subsidiaries could pay their parent commercial company a management fee of £40 per week.

With the introduction of austerity in 1948, the annual grant from the Treasury to the ACGB was frozen at £575,000 between 1948 and 1953.³³ This low level of funding (effectively a cut when inflation is taken into account) severely restricted the activities of the new Council. Archival documents reveal that tax exemption was worth a total of £500,000 a year to eligible companies - only slightly less than the total grant aid to the Arts Council.³⁴ Tax exemption thus represented a substantial form of subsidy to companies associated with the ACGB, but as a model of funding it directed considerable financial resources to the commercial sector.³⁵ Baz Kershaw has argued that Binkie Beaumont's ascendancy 'suggests a powerful systemic shift that served to draw virtually every professional company into the hegemony of West End

³² The ACGB identified support for 'new ideas and experimentation' as a priority in its first annual report and a member of the Drama Panel expressed fears that the Council's policy of support for independent companies could 'cripple experiment.' M. Browne, Arts Council Drama Panel Minutes, 29 April 1946, ACGB/35/304.

³³ *Memorandum to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the Needs of the Arts Council, 1953/4*, Council Paper 350, EL4/56.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ The ACGB also began discussions with the Inland Revenue to exempt their associated companies from Income and Excess Profits taxes. In 1950, Tennents's eligibility for income tax exemption was thrown out by the Court of Appeal who ruled that eligible companies 'must be formed for charitable purposes only'. See correspondence in EL2/33.

production values'.³⁶ Far from challenging this hegemony, the state was bankrolling it.

Arts Clubs, Arts Centres and Amateur Participation

Although amateur theatres were excluded from any financial support from the ACGB, amateur arts clubs and music clubs (overseen by the ACGB's Regional offices) were eligible for association and consequently were able to claim tax exemption status, Guarantees Against Loss and small grants. By 1949, sixty-three arts clubs were associated with the ACGB and forty-five were in receipt of small grants averaging £40 each.³⁷ In addition to this, 104 music clubs received Guarantees Against Loss. The 1950/51 ACGB Annual Report described these arts clubs as having an educational focus:

[They are] groups of men and women who come together to hear or study music or poetry, or explore problems of painting and drama and architecture [...] Many of them belong to the National Federation of Music societies; others are loosely federated by the Regional administration of the Arts Council; and all receive from the Council financial aid or guidance in planning their activities.³⁸

Furthermore, the ACGB supported some amateur theatre activity in ACGB funded arts centres. In 1945, the ACGB had set out its plans to build a series of arts centres in medium size towns across the country that were lacking other cultural amenities. These were initially designed to house existing amateur arts organisations with the hope that they would eventually become experimental centres for music and drama and could also host professional companies. In 1946, the ACGB began to fund the first arts centre in Bridgewater – a town chosen because it already had an active amateur arts club. The ACGB was in effect a landlord and the local amateur societies

³⁶ Baz Kershaw, 'British Theatre, 1940-2002: an Introduction', in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Vol. 3: Since 1895*, ed. by Baz Kershaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 291-325, (p. 296).

³⁷ *The Arts Council of Great Britain Fifth Annual Report, 1949/50*, p. 8.

³⁸ *The Arts Council of Great Britain Seventh Annual Report, 1951/52*, p. 11.

hired the rooms and were also responsible for furnishing them.³⁹ As a result of the success of this prototype the ACGB began to fund two further arts centres - Netherton in Dudley which opened in August 1947 (with local authority support), and Plymouth Arts Centre which opened in October 1947.⁴⁰ However, any support for amateur theatre-makers in ACGB funded arts centres was a mere drop in the ocean: in Plymouth alone there were twenty established amateur theatre groups that were excluded from financial support under the Drama Panel's strict criteria.⁴¹

The ongoing debate about the status of the amateur artist can be seen in a series of reports written by the ACGB between 1947 and 1950.⁴² These show that the debate about the amateur was linked to wider concerns about the social class of audiences for ACGB activities. A 1947 report, *Audience for the Arts*, reveals that just two years after CEMA had been replaced by the Arts Council of Great Britain, the new organisation had failed to attract the same level of audiences from the working-class. The author, Secretary General Mary Glasgow, observed that there was:

little doubt that large numbers of working people ceased to come to concerts and plays as soon as these were no longer brought to their doors. It would be false to pretend that the normal cross-section of an audience in town or country today is other than middle-class.⁴³

The Music and Art Directors were critical of the Drama Panel's failure to support the amateur, and put forward the case that amateur participation was of great importance when attempting to engage working-class audiences. In the report the ACGB Art Director stated that 'the best way of increasing the popular response to the visual arts is by encouraging practical work by amateur enthusiasts' and that 'the appeal of the visual arts will grow steadily provided that exhibitions are accompanied by

³⁹ *The Arts Council of Great Britain Second Annual Report, 1946/47*, pp. 8-10.

⁴⁰ *The Arts Council of Great Britain Third Annual Report, 1947/8*, p. 8.

⁴¹ *Report on Arts Centres*, Council Paper 280, 10 November 1949, EL4/52.

⁴² *Audiences for the Arts* (1947); *Entertainments Duty* (1947); *Report on Industrial Music Clubs* (1948); *Report by the Regional Directors on Arts Centres, Arts Clubs and Allied Problems* (1948); *Report by Regional Director on Theatre-less Town Tours in the North West* (1949/50); *Report on Directly Managed Companies* (1950). See EL4/47, EL4/49, EL4/52, EL4/53.

⁴³ Mary Glasgow, *Audiences for the Arts*, p. 2.

opportunities for creative work.⁴⁴ The ACGB's Music Director advocated a similar participatory policy arguing that 'the part played by the amateur' and 'the small, active audience' was 'more effective in the long run than the passive crowd assembled by mass methods'.⁴⁵ The ACGB Music Panel had employed three music organizers to help organise music clubs in many towns, providing a mix of amateur and professional activity:

They laid stress on the club rather than the concert atmosphere [...] professional concerts, alternating with informal illustrated talks by well known experts on subjects as varied as the symphony orchestra and the art of accompanying [...] Club nights consisted of members concerts, musical quizzes and gramophone record recitals.⁴⁶

In addition, the Music Panel started a library containing 5,000 gramophone records which it loaned free of charge. These clubs were extremely popular and the membership (drawn predominantly from local factories) had long waiting lists: the South West Essex Music Club had a membership of 1400, a waiting list of 300, and members were drawn from 40 factories in the area.

In contrast, the Drama Director argued that the problem with declining theatre audiences could be solved by 'effective organization of audiences'. He suggested an inquiry into working class audiences to ascertain:

- a) the most suitable times for performance e.g., half an hour after the workers knock off work or at a time that allows them to wash and have a meal at home;
- b) whether the provision of a crèche in the theatre would help women attend;
- c) whether parking provision for bicycles would be appreciated;
- d) whether workers will come to the theatre in their work clothes and not feel awkward if they sit next to people in evening dress and vice versa;
- e) the maximum and minimum prices that working people will pay for seats.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 3.

⁴⁶ *Report on Industrial Music Clubs 1946-1948*, Council paper no. 252, EL4/49, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Mary Glasgow, *Audiences for the Arts*, pp. 3-4.

The Drama Panel believed they could increase working-class audiences by distributing cheap tickets in factories, but the Drama Panel's attitude to factory workers was often pejorative. When audience numbers for the Midland Theatre Company fell, the ACGB approached local industries in Coventry (listed as Courtalds, Alvis Motor Company, Renold Chain Manufacturers and Modern Machine Tools) and asked to sell tickets directly to workers on the factory floor. The low success rate of this scheme was attributed by John Moody to the 'low intellectual standards' of the workers of Coventry, 'made up of the dregs of Ireland, Wales and Scotland, drawn to Coventry by the promise of high wages'.⁴⁸

In a further attempt to re-engage working-class audiences the Drama Panel resumed its tours to theatre-less towns and eight tours were mounted between autumn 1947 and Christmas 1948. The tours were popular and drew good audiences. They included a twelve week tour of *Anna Christie* and *An Inspector Calls* to South Wales which played 67 performances to 33,577 people, and a nine week tour to the North East coalfields of *Arms and The Man* and *An Inspector Calls*, which played 53 performances to 13,876 people.⁴⁹ These tours were run in association with the Miners' Welfare Association which contributed £4,257 of the total £4,504 subsidy - the Arts Council's financial commitment was a paltry £247.⁵⁰ In comparison, Arts Council funding to the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in the year 1948-9 was over £145,000.⁵¹ So whilst the rich could enjoy their heavily subsidized opera in London, the miners were paying twice for their culture: once through their taxes, and once through their union subs. The documents within the ACGB archive reveal much discussion on methods to encourage the working classes to attend ACGB activity, but the financial records reveal an alternative story – the actual distribution of state resources reflected the deep class divisions within British society.

⁴⁸ John Moody, *Minutes of the Arts Council Midland Theatre Company Management Committee*, 15 February 1952, ACGB/34/19.

⁴⁹ Charles Landstone, *Report on Directly Managed Drama Companies I: Tours to Theatre-less Towns*, 14 March 1949, EL4/50, pp. 1-2. There were 484 performances attended by 169,142 people. There were also tours to the West Riding, the Nottingham Coalfields, West Wales, the Midlands, North Wales and the market towns of East Anglia.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *The Arts Council of Great Britain Fourth Annual Report, 1948-9*, p. 26.

The tours to mining communities had been reinstated after a visit to Scotland, the North East and the Midlands by ACGB Chairman Ernest Pooley who had raised concerns that the ACGB was failing to consolidate the work of CEMA. He had reported to the Executive Committee his fear that

though the Arts Council and its activities were well known and appreciated in the upper and middle classes, it was not reaching the working-classes on a broad enough front.⁵²

Sir Kenneth Clark and W.E. Williams who sat on the Executive Committee had agreed that the ACGB ‘must not lose sight of its mandate to make the fine arts easily accessible to every section of the population.’⁵³ This focus on the working-class audience was not good news for the amateur enthusiast. In her 1947 report, Glasgow suggested that the demise of the working-class audience could, in part, be blamed on the enthusiastic middle-class amateur:

The withdrawal of the working-class may have been actually hastened by the growing interest of the middle-class, which is shown in the rapid rise of all over the country in the number of independent arts clubs and arts centres. These are vigorous and insistent and they represent whole communities, not just single enthusiasts. They depend largely for their support from local amateur societies, which are by tradition almost invariably middle-class and may, without meaning to, frighten away any would be supporters from another sphere.⁵⁴

Arts Council Chairman, Ernest Pooley, spoke critically of ‘that depressing sense of superiority, and that "preciousness", too often affected by arts clubs and arts circles’.⁵⁵ He was scathing of amateur activity in arts clubs, and wrote in his review of the year: ‘how few of them [Arts Clubs] appear to develop a constructive programme

⁵² Minutes of the ACGB Executive Committee, 18 June 1947, EL4/44.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Mary Glasgow, *Audiences for the Arts*, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Ernest Pooley, ACGB Chairman, *The Fourth Arts Council of Great Britain Annual Report, 1948/9*, p. 25.

of activity or pass beyond the dilettante stage'.⁵⁶

The Drama Panel did not consider support for middle-class amateur enthusiasts as a worthwhile use of state funding and derided the provincial tastes of many of the amateur companies. It was agreed at a November 1948 meeting of the Drama Panel that support for the vast majority of amateur theatre companies should lie with organisations outside the ACGB – notably the British Drama League (BDL) and county drama committees.⁵⁷ The Arts Council's Regional Directors were highly critical of the Panel for pursuing a policy that they argued perpetuated a tension between the amateur and the professional:

The Regional Directors have all noticed that while there is an established cooperation between professionals and amateurs in music and the visual arts, there is a good deal of suspicion between them in the theatre.⁵⁸

This antagonism was directly attributed to ACGB drama policy that 'does not at present give direct help to amateurs in the theatre – the one exception to this being in Wales where financial help has been given to enable amateurs to tour'.⁵⁹

The failure of the ACGB to introduce a coherent policy towards the amateur, was to result in the Drama Panel introducing criteria that excluded the amateur theatre-maker from financial support, whilst the ACGB's Regional offices, Music department, and Art department offered financial support to amateur activity in ACGB arts clubs, arts centres, and music clubs. To confuse the picture further some of this activity included amateur theatre.

The Amateur and the Civic Theatre

⁵⁶ *The Sixth Arts Council of Great Britain Annual Report, 1950/51*, p. 23.

⁵⁷ Minutes of the ACGB Council, 24 November 1948, EL4/51.

⁵⁸ *Report by the Regional Directors on Arts Centres, Arts Clubs and Allied Problems*, Council paper no. 256, November 1948, EL4/49.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

In 1945, amateur theatre-makers had welcomed the new Arts Council as a potential ally. After the war municipal authorities had no legal mandate to organise entertainment, and amateur enthusiasts and local authorities keen to set up Civic theatres had approached the Arts Council for support. In Kidderminster the opera house was purchased by the local dramatic society (the 'Nonentities') and in 1945 members wrote to ACGB requesting financial and professional support to run it as a theatre that presented a mixture of amateur and professional activity. In Southampton the town council wanted to purchase a bomb-damaged theatre and wrote to the ACGB requesting help explaining that their civic society had 'very limited power and virtually no funds'. The same year Salisbury Town Council requested advice on how to rent 'an excellent theatre belonging to the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation' when it had found that as a Council it simply did not have the legislative powers to do so. The Arts Council was unsure whether it had the legal remit to underwrite the work of local municipal authorities over and above support for smaller projects.⁶⁰ New legislation was urgently needed and the Association of Municipal Corporations and the Arts Council petitioned the government to change the law.⁶¹

With the introduction of the 1948 Local Government Act, municipal authorities were for the first time empowered to use 6d in every pound raised from the local rates, on entertainment. In a 1954 pamphlet, *Civic Entertainment and its Cost*, William Robson, Professor of Public Administration at the University of London, celebrated this new investment in the arts. 'Municipal man', wrote Robson, was now no longer expected to live 'by drains alone'. The 1948 Local Government Act, he enthused, had enabled local authorities to celebrate 'the finer aspects of civic life', in contrast to 'the bleak and narrow conception of our Victorian forbearers,' whose utilitarian concerns had channelled funding to public health, roads, housing, gas and water:

a widespread appreciation of the arts and the creative use of leisure is a fundamental element of human well-being, [...] civic pride is the basis of an

⁶⁰ Mary Glasgow, *The Arts Council of Great Britain Relations with Local Authorities*, 3 July 1945, EL5/28.

⁶¹ *The Report of the General Purposes Committee of the Association of Municipal Corporations*, 4 December 1947, EL5/28.

enhanced sense of community. And this in turn is the foundation of good local government.⁶²

The government Select Committee on Estimates wrote to the Arts Council informing them that as a result of the new Act they should direct more resources to areas lacking in cultural activity in the regions and ‘turn their energies to making the Arts more accessible, being content at first if necessary, with less ambitious standards’.⁶³ In July 1948, Mary Glasgow wrote an article for *Municipal Review* to offer advice to local authorities on the new Bill. She stressed the need to support *existing* enterprises in the regions (rather than local government initiatives): ‘Independent professional bodies’ she wrote, such as ‘repertory companies and orchestras [...] could launch into a new era of confident activity if they had only a little support from the rates and the determination of their Town Councils to see them properly housed’.⁶⁴ Glasgow’s support for the status quo (and thus ACGB policy) would again seem to have been influenced by the concerns of the commercial theatre world: in March 1948, Albery (who was about to become Chair of the Drama Panel) visited the Treasury with the Theatre Managers Association to express his concern that the new Bill would result in local authorities putting theatre owners ‘out of business’.⁶⁵ In a further attempt to prevent regional theatres coming under the control of local government the ACGB actively sought out amateur enthusiasts to be involved in ACGB funded activity in the regions and made approaches to key individuals. In 1949 they contacted Arthur Blenkinsop, who was involved with the amateur People’s Theatre in Newcastle, with the suggestion of setting up regional activity in Newcastle.⁶⁶

⁶² W. A. Robson, *Civic Entertainment and its Cost, An Analysis Showing the Operation of the Entertainment Section (132) of the Local Government Act, 1948* (London: London Council of Social Service, 1954), p. 9.

⁶³ Robert Hutchison, *The Politics of the Arts Council* (London: Sinclair Browne, 1982), p. 199.

⁶⁴ Mary Glasgow, untitled and undated draft of article to be published in *The Municipal Review*, next to letter dated July 1948, EL5/28.

⁶⁵ PRO T227/57, pp. 99-100, in Dan Rebellato, p. 59.

⁶⁶ ‘Mr Blenkinsop having run a little theatre at some time or other, will be rather sympathetic towards the interpretation [of Section 132] that the Arts Council [...] may wish for in this matter. As you know some local authorities who are rather inclined to interpret Section 132 by setting up what almost amounts to Government controlled Theatres and this must be avoided at all costs.’ D. Mather, ACGB Regional Director North East, letter to Freda McLean, 20 May 1949, EL5/28.

A 1949 ACGB commissioned report shows the action taken by Municipal Authorities in the wake of the 1948 Local Government Act. Although some local authorities had failed to put on any arts activity, others had done so with great success. In areas where arts activity was thriving there was a mixed programme of amateur and professional activity across a range of *ad hoc* venues, and local authorities were attempting to seek out new spaces as arts venues.⁶⁷ Woolwich produced 71 productions over 16 weeks, with concerts, orchestral performances, ballet, dramatic shows, folk and country dancing, dancing recitals, marionettes, concert parties, and a Council-sponsored orchestra. Venues included an open-air theatre, Eltham Little Theatre, Well Hall Pleasance, the Town Hall, a school hall, and various open spaces. Their expenditure in 1948/9 was £4,400 with an income of £1,050. The following year Woolwich increased its expenditure to £5,660 (and their income doubled to £2,050). Stoke Newington, in stark contrast, spent just £2,743 in three years, and reported poor and declining audiences.⁶⁸ The general pattern to emerge from the report is that those boroughs that provided regular entertainment generated the highest audience figures, and therefore the highest income: increased access to the arts resulted in higher audience figures. Despite ACGB concern about falling audience numbers and evidence from their own research that showed that mixed billing of amateur and professional work attracted large audiences, Drama Director John Moody was to insist that a clear distinction be drawn between amateur and professional programming in Civic theatres. Moreover, he argued that professional theatre should ‘improve its own standards and prestige, so that to be sure, especially in the provinces, of setting Amateurs a standard to look up to’.⁶⁹ Moody’s vision of Arts Council funded theatre in the regions was that of a glamorous, high brow and metropolitan art-form distinct from popular ‘entertainment’:

The theatre is a social event and that must have some glamour as well as high intentions. [...] Village Hall work can never be “Theatre”, it can only be “Entertainment” [...] Theatre is essentially an artificial and sophisticated

⁶⁷ Joe Hodgkinson, Regional Director North West Counties, letter to Eric White, ACGB, 8 February 1949, EL5/70.

⁶⁸ *Metropolitan Boroughs Standing Joint Committee General Purposes Sub-Committee*, undated (but filed with a regional report dated February 1949), EL5/70.

⁶⁹ John Moody, *Policy of the Drama Department 1949-50*, Supplementary Statement to Council Paper 269, 20 July 1949, EL4/50.

product which flourishes in cities.⁷⁰

Moody stressed the need to educate civic authorities on how to run the theatres ‘professionally’ warning that ‘Civic Theatres will grow up with an entirely amateur mentality in which it is heart-breaking and impossible for a professional director to work.’⁷¹ Raymond Williams in his 1981 critique of Arts Council Policy argues that there is a contradiction in a cultural policy that restricts its activities to the fine arts (enjoyed by a minority) yet funds itself out of the public purse (and thus is in effect a public service). He refers to the demarcation between ‘entertainer’ and ‘artist’ as a ‘confused and inherited cultural division’ and notes that Keynes himself often used the two interchangeably.⁷² Members of the Drama Panel acknowledged privately that amateur companies in the regions could be of a higher standard than many of the professional regional reps, yet in the literature of ACGB drama policy, a distinction between amateur ‘entertainment’ and professional ‘artist’ was firmly drawn.

A Policy of Risk and the Regions

In 1949 John Moody introduced his *Programme for Drama*. This was revised on 26 October 1949, and again on 1 January 1950, and states that in order for the Council to achieve the two objectives of drama policy (‘to improve the standard of execution of the fine arts’ and ‘to increase the accessibility of the fine arts to the public’), the ‘over-centralisation in the West End and Touring companies’ and ‘the Parochial isolation of the Repertory Companies’ must be ‘eradicated’.⁷³ This was a tacit acknowledgement of the failure of ACGB drama policy in the first four years. State resources had created a glittering West End, but had achieved little in the regions. Moody called for a policy of ‘extensive decentralization.’⁷⁴ To achieve this, the ACGB would need to redirect state resources to the regions by asserting a level of central planning and redistribution of resources that the main benefactors of the

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Raymond Williams, ‘The Arts Council: Politics and Policies’, *The 1981 W. E. Williams Memorial Lecture given at the National Theatre*, 3 November 1981 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1981), pp. 9-16 (pp. 11-12).

⁷³ John Moody, *The Arts Council of Great Britain Programme for Drama*, Council Paper 282 (276 revised), 1 January 1950, EL4/52.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

current system, the commercial theatre managements associated with the Arts Council, would strongly resist.⁷⁵ The catalyst for such change was a 1949 tax scandal that was to result in the ACGB distancing itself from the commercial theatre world, and introducing a policy that would define the future direction of state-subsidised theatre in Britain.

In October 1949, H. M. Tennents' mounted a production of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, through its non-profit-making subsidiary company Tennent Productions Ltd. in order to be eligible for tax exemption on ticket sales and maximize their profits. Rebellato writes that the 1949 parliamentary sub-committee set up to investigate Tennents found no evidence of tax evasion.⁷⁶ However, archival documents reveal that the ACGB were aware that Tennents *knowingly* used tax exemption to increase its substantial profit margins and had raised their ticket prices in Manchester ensuring a £2,000 profit in a two week period.⁷⁷ John Moody calculated that seven not-for-profit plays produced by Tennent Productions Ltd. in the West End (*Ring Around the Moon*, *The Heiress*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Lady's Not for Burning*, *Treasure Hunt*, *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*) were jointly worth £70, 617 in tax exemption to the company.⁷⁸ To put this figure into context, the *total* Arts Council budget for drama for that year was £119,000. Moody condemned Tennents for working in 'the opposite direction' to the policy of decentralization and the 'theatre starved' regions, writing that 'their tax exemption gives them opportunities to make the West End even more glittering and attractive to actors, but it will kill the Repertories whom tax exemption was intended to help, and from whence good actors come.'⁷⁹ Moody argued that the ACGB needed to intervene to achieve its policy objectives: 'If the Arts Council is to be the State's

⁷⁵ The ACGB had previously rejected instigating such control over companies. *Entertainments Tax, Memorandum from the Arts Council of Great Britain to the Chancellor of the Exchequer*, p. 5.

⁷⁶ Dan Rebellato, p. 56. Rebellato argues here that Landstone's objection was not to 'Tennents *per se*' - the following document would appear to contradict Rebellato's argument. Charles Landstone, *Tennent Productions Ltd.*, undated, ACGB/34/201.

⁷⁷ *Possible Anomalies and Abuses in the Workings of any non-profit distributing companies*, (undated), ACGB/34/201.

⁷⁸ John Moody, *Notes on the Association of London Theatre Companies with The Arts Council*, 6 November 1950, ACGB/34/201, p. 4.

⁷⁹ John Moody, *Memorandum from the Drama Director Re: the Council's Drama Policy and Tennent Productions Ltd.*, 12 December 1949, ACGB/34/201.

medium for the welfare of the theatre, that responsibility must carry some form of practical authority'.⁸⁰ Associate Drama Director, Charles Landstone observed that Binkie Beaumont 'has been fairly successful in chaining the Arts Council to the progress of his own chariot' and advised that 'the time has come when the Arts Council must assume control of the reins and take Mr Beaumont with them'.⁸¹

In a paper dated November 1949, Moody recommended that the ACGB adopt a new policy:

In furtherance of the general trend of the Arts Council's Drama Policy towards de-centralisation, the Council seek to be in association with managements who are building up (if possible with provincial Repertory Theatres) an artistic policy of 'partly educational' or cultural value, and are representing the kind of plays which could not be put on by a commercial management because of the unusual risk, such as the high cost of playing in repertory, etc.⁸²

In an attempt to distance the work of the Arts Council from that of commercial theatre managements, Moody was responsible for introducing a policy objective that aimed to clearly differentiate state-subsidized theatre from that of the commercial theatre world – a policy of risk. From 1949, the predominant aim of ACGB drama policy was to develop theatre as an art-form and the ACGB's commitment to access was to be met by ensuring a geographical spread of Civic theatres across the regions.

However, ACGB policy towards established amateur theatre companies in its Civic theatres was increasingly one of artistic apartheid. Moody's 1949-50 policy document stated that amateur activity in regional theatres should be clearly segregated:

As regards amateurs playing Civic theatres where professionals also play, the distinction in billing should be very clear (and in different coloured paper) and

⁸⁰ John Moody, *Confidential paper on Associated London Companies*, 6 December 1950, ACGB/34/201.

⁸¹ Charles Landstone, *Tennent Productions Ltd.*, undated, ACGB/34/201.

⁸² John Moody, *Arts Council Policy in London, including suggestions for prevention of any possible anomalies and abuses*, 22 November 1949, ACGB/34/201.

titled very largely ‘Amateur Week’ or the like. It is very bad for business of both to mix them haphazardly. Amateur weeks should preferably be grouped together into four or more, when the professional company could go away on tour.⁸³

By the mid-1950s the relationship between the British Drama League and the ACGB had become particularly acrimonious. At its 1956 conference the BDL passed a resolution criticising the ACGB for closing down their regional offices and centralising their activities, and asked them to ‘modify’ their ‘exclusive attitude’ in drawing a distinction between ‘art’ and ‘entertainment’. The ACGB Drama Director responded with an angry letter:

We recognise, even if the British Drama League does not, a distinct difference between ‘art’ and ‘entertainment’ and it is therefore no business of ours to protect the interests of, for example, ice shows, nude shows, variety entertainment and many other segments of the field of entertainment. [...] I am instructed to deplore the creation of a situation, by the British Drama League, in which those who should be allies in supporting the arts are made to demonstrate what seems to be common rivalries.⁸⁴

The following year the ACGB’s Secretary General, William Emrys Williams, agreed to meet the administrator of the British Drama League to discuss ‘the idea of an organisation to do for amateur groups what the Arts Council tries to do for the professional ones.’⁸⁵ This was a political gesture designed to ensure that Arts Council provision could be directed purely to the professional artist.

⁸³ John Moody, *Policy of the Drama Department 1949-50*, Supplementary Statement to Council Paper 269, 20 July 1949, EL4/50.

⁸⁴ Joe Hodgkinson, ACGB Drama Director, letter to Martin E. Brown, The British Drama League, 14 June 1956, ACGB/34/204.

⁸⁵ William Emrys Williams, letter to Peter Carpenter, The British Drama League, 17 October 1957, ACGB/34/204.

Conclusion

Between 1945 and 1952 there was no coherent Arts Council policy towards the amateur artist. Small arts clubs, music clubs and arts centres were eligible for association with the Arts Council and participatory amateur activities were seen by the Music and Art Directors as a form of audience development to draw in working-class audiences. In contrast, the ACGB Drama Panel introduced criteria for association that excluded the amateur and restricted financial support to existing professional theatre companies – directing considerable subsidy to an already wealthy commercial management. This policy drew criticism from both outside and within the organisation. It marginalised the amateur theatre-maker and did little to advance the wider egalitarian aims of the Arts Council, nor did it deliver the artistic improvements demanded by the theatre profession. The Drama Panel was willingly to engage with the amateur when it suited their purposes; the ACGB actively sought out amateur enthusiasts in helping them secure and develop a network of Civic theatre buildings in the regions, and in developing ACGB activity in theatre-less towns.

The events of 1949 were to be a watershed in the history of state subsidy for the theatre. A policy for new drama, plans for a national infrastructure of Civic theatres in the regions, investment in professional training, longer rehearsal periods, and better working conditions for actors, were all recommended by Moody's 1950 *Programme for Drama*, as a clear focus of activity for the state patron. This was agreed by the Council in 1950, and Moody worked closely with new Secretary General William Emrys Williams to implement strategic changes that were to define the future shape of the British theatre ecology. Williams's tenure as Secretary General is often criticised for its patrician policy and its centralisation of power in London.⁸⁶ Yet this critique omits to recognise that in the 1950s the ACGB was to fundamentally alter the way in which it had previously operated. 'State support without state control' was to be replaced with the concept of centralized planning in order to instigate fundamental artistic and structural reform – reform that was to be focused on artistic risk and the regional Civic theatre.

⁸⁶ Dan Rebellato, p. 66.

The ACGB ended its association with arts clubs and arts centres in April 1952 and limited funding to 'select professional undertakings'.⁸⁷ Thereby ensuring that funding for arts clubs and arts centres was focused on the professional artist supporting amateur work, rather than the work of the amateurs themselves. In the mid-1950s the ACGB shut down its regional offices and suggested that any work with amateurs in arts centres should now come under the guise of Further Education provision.⁸⁸

Moody's reforms to drama policy, and commitment to the regions, did little to help the amateur theatre-maker. Despite adopting a policy of artistic risk, the Drama Panel continued to exclude many innovative small companies and Little theatres with mixed amateur and professional status from subsidy on the grounds that they did not fit the criteria for association. With the introduction of the New Drama Scheme in 1952, some Little theatres and Club theatres became eligible for Guarantee against Loss subsidy, but by the mid-1950s, with a combination of the economic pressures of austerity and the heavy burden of the Entertainments' Tax, many Little theatres, Club theatres, small touring companies and regional theatres that owed their genesis to enthusiastic amateurs, were forced to close.⁸⁹

Notes on referencing:

ACGB and EL refer to the prefix for files located in the Arts Council of Great Britain archive in the Victoria and Albert Museum, Blythe House, London.

⁸⁷ *The Arts Council of Great Britain Eighth Annual Report, 1952/3*, p. 28.

⁸⁸ *Housing the Arts, The Arts Council of Great Britain Tenth Annual Report 1954/55*, p. 9.

⁸⁹ Entertainments' Tax continued to distort the market, furthering the economic strains on theatre, until the tax was finally abolished in 1957. The ACGB was criticised by the British Drama League for not campaigning against the tax.