

## Advertising in and around the theatre

Like theatregoers today, people going to the Hippodrome will have been inundated with advertising imagery on their route through town, though much different in style and medium.

We have an old photo of a gable end diagonally opposite the theatre, literally plastered with adverts. Some brands you and your children will still recognise - evidence of shopping habits of the time and reflecting what people ate and drank or used to cleanse and cure themselves. At least two of the larger posters are advertising theatrical productions: one at the Hippodrome itself and the other of a version of *East Lynne*, though it's not clear where it's being performed – perhaps at a rival theatre.

When you compare this photograph with an earlier and less distinct old photograph, taken the year the theatre opened you'll see that the products promoted are very different, suggesting that the adverts changed frequently.

However, the most illuminating sources about advertising at the time are the myriad of adverts so densely packed in the theatre's early programmes. They are essentially text with simple black and white imagery, without any photographs. The adverts use different fonts (and in different weights and sizes) for variety and visual impact. Some businesses make a point of saying that they are situated near to or opposite the Hippodrome such as Richmond's who printed the programmes – their advert is across the very bottom of many programmes.

Some adverts just wouldn't be allowed today such as tobacco and cigarette adverts. Others such as a Russian fur specialist would be frowned on, but they are indicative of attitudes of the time.

Have fun explaining Archer Rubber Co's KEEPUDRY products. Find out what Mrs Metcalfe supplied or what Mrs Aggutter's agency provided. Summarise the services offered to women by S Whittaker.

And just why did the Cricketer's Arms and the Lord Nelson Hotel make a point of stating 'Stage' and 'Era' Taken? (The Stage is a weekly newspaper covering the entertainment industry, and particularly theatre. The Era was another newspaper that became full of news, reviews, gossip, general theatrical information and adverts for the acting profession.) Why does the Cleaver Hotel promote 'Good Stabling'?

Look at health remedies on offer – from herbal to alcoholic. Explain what a bone-setter is – a trade long before the advent of the NHS and its fracture clinics.

In our Resources Folder [Adverts] you'll find scans of other early programmes. Give copies to children and let them enjoy exploring the adverts. They'll discover new words, terms and professions.

Some enterprising theatres around the country allowed local businesses to pay to advertise on their safety curtain. One of our suggested activities is to create a similar safety curtain for the Hippodrome.