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Memorialization, Memorabilia, and the Mediated Afterlife of Ada Reeve

This paper explores the differing levels of control over representations of Ada Reeve's mediated and 'ghosted' afterlife. Confessional memoirs that strategically frame the star persona for posterity provide her with the most immediate control. However, the star can become recruited to new assertions of cultural nationalism, which desire to claim coherent genealogies, public celebration, and commemoration of a star's afterlife. This, paired with nostalgic desires for past 'golden ages', also mediates strategic interests in her imbricated identity. Similarly, the star's mediated afterlife inevitably becomes susceptible to re-positioning by theatre managements, the media, family, fans, and the public when their revisionist agendas make new assertions for the star's image after death in various immediate political and social contexts, and as communal encoded memory. Martina Lipton is Research Fellow (Australia) at the University of Warwick and Honorary Associate Lecturer at the University of Queensland. She has published several articles in *Australasian Drama Studies*, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, *New Theatre Quarterly*, and *Popular Entertainment Studies* on pantomime and popular theatre performers, and her paper 'Localism and British Modern Pantomime' is in *A World of Popular Entertainments: an Edited Volume of Critical Essays* (2012).

Key terms: theatre star, ephemera, posthumous publicity.

THEATRE STARS' posthumous lives – mediated, for example, through film, print, and audiences' memories – attest to what Joseph Roach refers to as 'uncanny staying power' in the national and cultural imaginary:

> The trace left behind by the It-Effect [which] does not exist as an object, but rather as a sensation that persists even after the external stimulation that caused it has disappeared.[1]

And Susan Stewart notes that the idealized body attempts to present a realm of transcendence and immortality that implicitly denies the possibility of death.[2]

This paper examines the differing levels of control over representations of the theatre star in mediated afterlife, using articulations of Ada Reeve's public, private, and posthumous identity as a case study. It investigates how the constructed after-image adheres or deviates from the tangible identity self-fashioned by the star performer during her lifetime (see Fig. 1), or the persona which the star seeks to define after death, coterminous with theatre management, the press, and audience desire. The star has most control over this after-image in written legacies such as memoirs; however, it inevitably becomes vulnerable to distortion, filtering, or misrepresentation in the hands of theatre managements, the media, and the public when they seek to reposition the star's persona after death in political and social contexts, as a locus of communal encoded memory.

Ada Reeve's long working life as a star of British and international theatre spanned almost every aspect of popular entertainment. She graduated from music-hall entertainment as a child, to soubrette, comedienne, and actor in variety, musical comedy, pantomime, radio, and film. She was born in London on 3 March 1874, the first of nine children, to Jewish parents, and was registered as Adelaide Mary Isaacs. Her father, Samuel Isaacs, changed his name to Charles Reeves when he left home at sixteen to pursue a career on the stage as a straight actor.[3] Her mother, Harriet Seaman, was a dancer billed as Harriet Saunders prior to her marri-

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age in 1873 to Charles Reeves. During her childhood career Reeve was billed as 'Little Ada Reeves' but she later shortened her surname. Her paternal grandmother, Madame Adèle Kauper, had in her youth been a singer in Grand Opera in Holland.[4]

Early Life and Self-Positioning

Although Ada Reeve's parents and female siblings were theatre performers, she only ever briefly shared a stage with her father. Her mother retired from performing due to the demands of parenting, and her brothers, Fred, Harry, and Jack, chose not to pursue theatre careers. Reeve's sisters Julia, Janet, Mabel, Hester, and Ruby all enjoyed some success on the stage as the Sisters Reeve before they retired to be married, but Ada never performed with them.[5]

Reeve's early experiences as a solo performer 'ghosted' her mature career, which is marked by the significant amount of work she did as a soloist in non-narrative entertainments. Even when she worked with a cast in musical comedies, such as *Winnie Brooke, Widow*, her positioning as a solo artiste is evident. Reeve first played the titular protagonist in *Winnie Brooke, Widow* in 1904 and she revived it at intervals for nearly ten years. She describes this play as an excellent vehicle for her. The second act gave her the opportunity to stage a short variety show within the framework of the play: 'The surprise turn at the party was when one of the guests asked me to give my celebrated imitation of Ada Reeve! This, of course, was a cue for several of my popular songs.'[6]

Her on-the-job apprenticeship during her formative years as a performer prepared her for her West End debut when she was twenty. The transitions she made between music hall, pantomime, melodrama, and musical comedy during her early career, and the diverse opportunities and experiences this afforded her, also attest to her versatility as a performer. This attribute later assisted her successful move from stage to film roles.

Reeve positions herself as the first theatre star in her family, who as a child suffered exploitation under her father's management

Fig. 1. 'Me in 1902'. Photograph of Ada Reeve at Palace Theatre, London (author's collection).

for his financial gain.[7] She escaped from his control when she married actor Bert Gilbert (Gilbert Joseph Hazlewood) in Nottingham on 5 May 1894 and he subsequently became her manager. Reeve and Gilbert had two daughters, Goodie and Bessie, before they divorced in April 1900 as a consequence of Gilbert's womanizing.[8] Reeve married her second husband, theatre agent Alfred Wilfred Cotton, in 1902, and he became her manager when she was at the pinnacle of her career and playing to packed houses in Britain and overseas.

Her income allowed them to travel widely and funded their purchase of a coconut plantation in Portuguese East Africa (modern

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Mozambique), where Cotton eventually settled. Reeve claims that she first went into management herself in 1904 when she produced *Winnie Brooke, Widow*.[9] Her second venture into management was with the musical comedy *Butterflies,* which she brought to the Apollo Theatre, London on 13 May 1908, after a short provincial tour, beginning in Newcastle in April that year.[10]

Cotton also provided Reeve with astute financial advice that she used to her advantage in her contractual negotiations with theatre managers. However, she became increasingly dissatisfied with his management of her finances, and when the couple separated in 1917, Reeve brought an equity suit in the Australian Supreme Court against Cotton, asking for a declaration that 'her husband, the defendant, had no interest as a partner in her theatrical business, nor in the proceeds of the theatrical tour she was engaged in'.

In presenting his judgment, Mr Justice Harvey ruled that although Ada Reeve acquiesced in business arrangements made by her husband, she was always careful to get the ultimate profits into her own control in the bank, or invested in her name. Mr Justice Harvey concluded that there was no partnership between the parties and the business carried on under the name of Ada Reeve was Mrs Cotton's business and that her husband had no proprietary interest in it.[11]

Reeve performed and toured continuously. She made seven tours to Australia and New Zealand between 1897 and 1922, where she worked on Rickard's Tivoli Circuit for Hugh D. McIntosh, in pantomime for J. C. Williamson Theatres Ltd, and for Harry Musgrove's Celebrity Vaudeville. She also made five tours to South Africa between 1906 and 1921, performing in revue for the Hyman Brothers and Leonard Rayne and in musical comedies for the African Theatres Trust. In addition, she toured the USA five times between 1893 and 1928, performing in Koster and Bial's music hall and in vaudeville with B. F. Keith's Orpheum Circuit (later Keith-Albee's Orpheum Circuit). Throughout these lengthy periods overseas, her daughters remained either in the care of her in-laws[12] or at boarding schools in Europe.

In 1923, Reeve settled in Sydney, where Goodie and Bessie had by then established their own careers and families, and she lived there until 1935 when she made an apparently sudden and final relocation back to England. Goodie and Bessie remained in Australia and Reeve, estranged from her daughters for several years, never met them again.

Reeve died in London in 1966 at the age of ninety-two. Today, she appears to have been all but forgotten, and when theatre historians and aficionados do refer to this artiste the fullness of her achievements is often overlooked in favour of reviewing her early career as a singer and comedian in musical comedy. Recordings of Reeve's songs live on in digital form today, for example, on the compact discs *Musical Hall on the Radio* and *Gaiety Girls* produced by Tony Barker, but they only present a fraction of her career accomplishments.[13]

An Imbricated Identity

In order to present the public with a coherent co-presence and identity in synergy with audience expectations, theatre stars strategically managed their framing of on- and off-stage representations better to respond to modernity's challenge: 'Who goes there?' And the constructed identity of the theatre star became necessarily more complex with the advent of modernity's mass-mediated communications. By the early twentieth century the public had access to printed media, radio, and film, all with the potential to reveal selective and 'intimate' information about stars' public and private lives.

Jane Milling proposes that professional theatre critics and sundry reviewers were employed by the print media to communicate with a broad social and geographic demographic of readers. They engaged in debates about acting that had formerly been the privilege of an educated minority and actors' friends. Milling cites the struggle of musical comedy star Gertie Millar to control the circulation of her own photographic

image as an example of the processes of theatrical and other cultural industries driven by the logic of mass production.[14] Theatre stars became public role models as arbiters of fashion and as philanthropists in support of charities and social causes.

Throughout Reeve's life, in partnership with theatre management, audiences, and the media, she had attempted to interweave and sometimes conflate disparate elements comprising her star personae, such as career apprenticeship, theatrical onstage representation, offstage positioning of civic identity, and public framing of the 'veridical' self. On her death, her afterlife in the cultural imaginary passed largely to the control of newspaper editors, a coterie of theatre 'family', and fans who wrote her obituaries, dedicated plaques, and collected star-related ephemera. How then, forty-seven years later, has the life of Ada Reeve, theatre star, entrepreneur, explorer, wife, mother, the soldier's friend, and singular performer, been mediated by these agencies?

In Their Own Words

The theatre star might seek to memorialize her persona and revise her performance history by publishing her memoirs. Maggie B. Gale's study of Lena Ashwell (1872–1957), a contemporary of Reeve's, reveals that she strategically attempted to create and control her professional theatre and civic identity in her autobiographical writings.[15] At the age of eighty Ada Reeve also sought to memorialize her star persona and construct her performance history by publishing an autobiography, *Take It for a Fact* (1954), in which she detailed her career, travel experiences, and philanthropy in support of London's Anzac Club and Buffet during the First World War.

We may assume that this was presented mindful of how Reeve wanted her legacy to be remembered. The title *Take It for a Fact* alludes to a refrain in Reeve's popular song 'Tact', written by Paul Rubens. The title of her memoirs also challenges readers to have faith in the text's empirical grounding. Reeve confesses that she has compiled her life story from memory because she did not keep a diary. She asserts:

> The difficulty of getting exact dates for the various happenings, especially my very early performances, can be readily imagined, but with the untiring research of my dear friend, Frances Fleetwood, this has been overcome, and I am able to assure my readers that they can 'take it for a fact'.[16]

She also acknowledges assistance from the theatre archivists Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson and from Dot Hall for supplying documentary evidence that verified dates and events. In addition she draws material from her earlier publication *Pot-Pourri* (1913) in describing her tours to Africa and America between 1906 and 1913. *Pot-Pourri* can also be read as Reeve's strategic attempt to frame her theatrical legacy as a transnational star. Despite Reeve's selectivity, empirical accuracy is proclaimed a key virtue of her autobiography; for example, she corrects Walter Macqueen-Pope's *The Melodies Linger On* for erroneously referring to her as one of the Sisters Reeve.[17]

In their study of Macqueen-Pope, Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow propose, 'While Macqueen-Pope may not tell us the whole truth about his many subjects, such a "wistful remembrancer" remains significant to any investigation of a theatrical past "that must always be a melting pot of imperfect recognitions and unattainable desires".'[18] Furthermore, Davis and Emeljanow state that theatre historians should 'consider rather than dismiss the significance of memory and nostalgia' because, despite their idiosyncratic errors and personal prejudices, writers such as Macqueen-Pope provide 'new maps' with which to view and investigate theatre history.[19]

In this sense Reeve's *Take It for a Fact* is much more than a chronology of facts and figures. Like Macqueen-Pope, she has her own nostalgic vision of popular theatre history and positions herself in this narrative to augment associations between the theatre and genteel professionalism. It was common practice for leading artistes to be invited to entertain high society in private homes outside theatre hours for lavish payment,

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and Reeve's recollection of her experience performing for a peer's private entertainment is indicative of actors' nostalgic revisions of theatre history through anecdotes, as identified by Jacky Bratton, that attempt to define 'what is professional behaviour'.[20]

Creating a Posthumous Legacy

Significantly, Reeve casts herself as a champion of the acting profession, claiming that her refusal to be treated like a minion performing in aristocrats' homes for money led to improved recognition and treatment of theatre artistes, as a consequence of which they were no longer vilified as 'rogues and vagabonds'.[21] This claim entangles her personal mythology and experience with broader narratives of actors' social advance and professionalization.

In tandem with their memoirs, theatre stars could manipulate their posthumous legacy in their wills. Despite the separation from her second husband in 1917 which continued until his death in 1946, legal requirements meant that Ada Reeve's full name on her Last Will and Testament should be given as Adelaide Mary Cotton. However, she asserts her sense of self when she inserts her professional name, Ada Reeve, in brackets after her legal title, and signs the document as 'Adelaide Mary Cotton – Ada Reeve'. Significantly, the trustee of Reeve's will is not a family member but theatre-fan-turned-friend Raymond Mander.

Reeve's meagre estate of £549 reflected her reduced financial circumstances in later life. After the funeral and sundry expenses were paid, only £113 from her post office savings account was bequeathed to her surviving daughter Goodie, whom she had not seen since 1935, with her 'blessing and forgiveness for *everything*'.[22] Goodie was given none of her mother's personal effects or photographs; these were consigned to friends, with Raymond Mander receiving her writing desk and a letter from an 'Australian Soldier', which she obviously prized since it was hanging on her wall. Mander and Joe Mitchenson also received the bulk of Reeve's memorabilia, including photographs. The only other relative named in Reeve's will, her niece Doris Harris, received her sitting-room carpet and underlay.

Reeve's Last Will and Testament thus reflects her precarious relationship with her relatives and her only remaining child.[23] Furthermore, it reveals Reeve's personal narrative in her persistent and stubborn belief that Goodie was to blame for their deteriorated relationship. Theatre performer Gwen Adeler first met Ada Reeve in 1906 and their career paths intersected several times, before their friendship was cemented in the early 1940s. In a tribute to Ada Reeve on her death, 'Yes – I Remember Her Well', Adeler asserts that Reeve loathed her daughter whom she called 'the biggest bitch of all times (a mild epithet among much stronger ones)', blaming Goodie for Reeve's marriage breakdown with Wilfred Cotton.[24]

Public Perspectives

The star's afterlife necessarily falls beyond the ambit of her control, as the print media command dissemination of posthumous publicity. Journalists adhere to different agendas, such as nationalism, nostalgia, sentimentalism, or sensationalism. Typically they are not members of the star's family or friends, and indeed they might never have seen the star in performance and must rely on previous published documents, frequently the nearest to hand. Texts and narratives are thus copied and may be replicated without further corrective research until they attain the status of 'history'.

Ada Reeve's mediated afterlife is fractured with tensions between her self-identified star persona and that fashioned by media, family, and friends. This is particularly acute in framings of her legacy in British and Australian newspapers, which had different and competing national agendas to satisfy. While journalists might deviate from or erase a star's self-fashioned after-image, framings of the star after death may also be preserved in advertising images. Although engagement in the endorsement of commercial products and services was not necessarily performed with any posthumous image in mind, never-

theless advertisements such as Ada Reeve's promotion of cigarettes are still available to view and buy today and, as will be discussed later, form part of a star's mediated afterlife in the realm of ephemera and collectibles.

Taking into account that the print media relied on archived and locally situated newspaper clippings to compile obituaries, the international press had similar difficulty representing all aspects of Ada Reeve's star persona. The British press limited and promoted Reeve's constructed identity when it repeatedly remembered her as a Gaiety Girl with headlines such as 'Ada Reeve of the Gaiety is Dead', 'Ada Reeve, Gaiety Girl and Comedienne', 'The Gaiety Girl who Always said No', 'Ada Reeve, a Former Gaiety Leading Lady', and 'Miss Ada Reeve: One of the Gayest Gaiety Girls'.[25]

Similarly, the *New York Times* elected to remember 'Ada Reeve, 92' as 'Top Actress of London stage in 1890s' when she 'starred at the Gaiety Theater'.[26] Tributes to Reeve identifying her as a Gaiety Girl chose to imbue her performance history with romanticized nostalgia, aligning it with a bygone British golden era of Victorian-Edwardian theatre, when Reeve as a teenager worked for George Edwardes at the Gaiety Theatre replete with gas lighting and stage-door Johnnies.

This media positioning of Reeve as the young Gaiety Girl from a long-gone era of gallantry and exoticism is evident during her mature career. For example, *Music Hall Memories* (see Fig. 2), published in 1935, chose to represent her with a picture from the 1890s, although Reeve at the age of sixty-one had long since graduated from the music hall.

This constructed identity persisted some years after Reeve's death. For example, an advertisement for Gancia sparkling wine (see Fig. 3) employs Reeve's persona as a Gaiety Girl to endorse its product.[27]

On the basis of Ada Reeve's identification of herself as a singular star, 'the greatest comedienne in the world',[28] and a successful theatre entrepreneur, we might speculate that she would have been greatly displeased to be identified as merely one of the Gaiety Girls. Perhaps Reeve's campaign in 1964 to

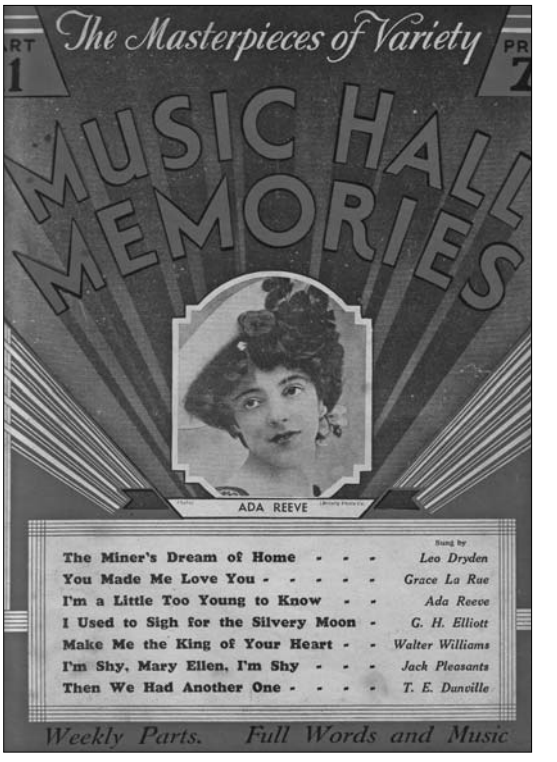

Fig. 2. *Music Hall Memories*, a songbook of 1935, featuring a photograph of Reeve as a young performer in the 1890s (author's collection).

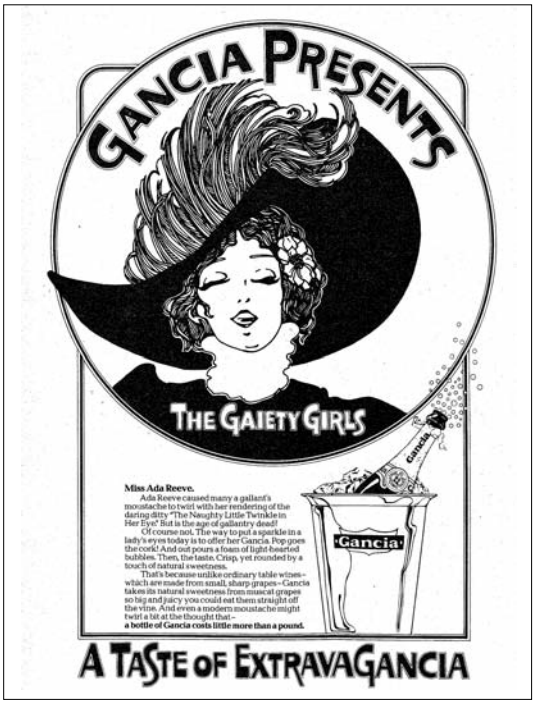

Fig. 3. Advertisement for Gancia sparkling wines (*Punch*, 18 July 1973, p. v).

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bring back London's old music halls[29] nurtured the simplistic perception that her early work was representative of her entire stage career of seventy-four years (see Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Playbill advertising Reeve's guest appearance at an exhibition and show celebrating the centenary of McDonald's Music Hall, 2 November 1963 (author's collection).

Ada Reeve's death was not covered widely in the Australian press, but reports in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Herald* set out to remember Reeve's contribution to the Australian theatre industry as a solo artiste in the early twentieth century. Reeve is identified as a British star, but she is appropriated as an honorary Australian in consequence of her seven tours to Australia beginning in 1897, and her prolonged period of residence between 1926 and 1935. Indeed, 'she was regarded by many as being an Australian herself'.[30]

Furthermore, she is celebrated 'as a firm part of the Australian theatrical scene', particularly in productions such as *Spangles* and other revues staged in Sydney and Melbourne.[31] London producer Don Ross also affirms this posthumous representation of Reeve in his tribute in the *British Music Hall Society's Magazine*: 'She was undoubtedly for many years the Queen of Australia, and I doubt if any artiste, Australian or from any other country, has ever held the position in the Australian theatre as that which was held by Ada Reeve.'[32]

Although Reeve made her first tour to Australia with her husband Bert Gilbert, appearing with him in *The French Maid* and *The Gay Parisienne*, he is significantly absent from historical revision of her career. Thus, her identification as a singular star persists in dominating media representations of her posthumous afterlife, which elides Gilbert's presence both professionally and personally. Neither of Reeve's spouses, Bert Gilbert or Wilfred Cotton, are mentioned in the *Sydney Morning Herald* article; they also remain unnamed in the *Daily Herald*, which merely states that Reeve 'survived two husbands'.[33]

Significantly, these newspapers are also conspicuously silent about Reeve's surviving family. Other papers, such as the *New York Times*, the *Evening News*, and *The Stage*, omit any reference to Reeve's husbands, children, or extended family.[34] The most that is revealed in other periodicals about Reeve's private life is that she was 'twice-married' and 'a great-grandmother'.[35] The *Daily Mail* acknowledges, 'Her first marriage, to Bert Gilbert, was dissolved and in 1902 she married London theatre manager Wilfred Cotton',[36] while the *Guardian* reports, 'She outlived both her husbands.'[37]

While Reeve's posthumous publicity reinforces her singularity as a star, it does not fully reproduce her self-fashioned imbricated identity as a successful manager and entrepreneur, and as a campaigner on behalf of Anzac troops during the First World War and the beleaguered Anzac Club and Buffet in London. Instead, Reeve is remembered for her British eccentricities: her addiction to cigars and predilection for champagne and oysters.

Don Ross celebrates Reeve as a no-nonsense star: 'a performer, a trooper, a great artiste for whom her work came before anything'.[38] His professional assessment leaves

room for Gwen Adeler's personal evaluation of Reeve as a cantankerous woman who became isolated from her family and many friends because of her sharp tongue and uncompromising, abusive personality. Certainly, Reeve was a complex character whose 'wonderful charisma until the very end of her life' continued to woo her small but loyal group of friends.[39]

'Family' and the Legacy of Remembrance

Ada Reeve's coterie of theatre friends sought to represent her legacy commensurate with the emphases in her own memoirs: as an exemplary professional, hard-working colleague, transnational star, and staunch civic campaigner on behalf of British and Anzac forces during the First World War. On her death, and later in memorial services, she was honoured by them for her contribution to British music hall, theatre, and film, in addition to her overseas success, particularly in Australasia. Her international presence in America, Asia, and Africa is less mentioned.

Reeve continued to work into old age due to financial necessity, and when ill and infirm a small group of artistes and fans from the London theatrical community assisted her. Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, fans devoted to collecting theatre memorabilia and ephemera, became two of her closest friends. They procured her an annual pension of approximately £300 from the King George V Actors' Fund; she also received a smaller sum from the Actors' Benevolent Fund, about £1 a week from her agent Gordon Harboard, who was also generous in emergencies, and Muriel Box (later Lady Gardiner) paid her telephone account for many years.[40] In addition, the London theatrical community signified family support in its everyday involvement of assisting her with domestic chores and keeping her company and entertained – for example, in its celebration of milestone events in her life. The Players Theatre hosted an annual birthday dinner in her honour and 'treated her as the star she was'.[41]

Ada Reeve was remembered by her 'family' of theatre artistes in a service of thanksgiving and prayer held at the Royal Parish Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields in London on 27 October 1966.[42] In addition to organizing the arrangements for the memorial service, Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson asked for Goodie Reeve's permission to scatter her mother's ashes in the Garden of Remembrance at Golders Green. This service framed Ada Reeve's afterlife as a stalwart partisan of the theatre industry, and a generous supporter of the imperial war effort during 1914–18.

Perhaps disappointed by her own family upbringing, failed marriages, and separation from her daughters while pursuing success in her transnational career, Reeve sought to substitute for family members a broader 'family' of admirers, of whom a significant element were British and Anzac soldiers in the First World War. Reeve's positioning as a champion for the Anzacs was reinforced by the presence at her memorial service of the Agent General from the Office of the New South Wales Agent General. In London she had maintained her connection with the Anzacs, attending Australia House for the annual Anzac Day service.[43] Fred J. Dant, who had attended Reeve's performances for soldiers at the Excelsior Theatre, Bombay, in 1916, wrote to the press on 3 July 1965 reminding readers of her work on behalf of Anzac forces during the First World War. He stated that this great stage personality, once proudly called 'Anzac Ada' by the Aussies, was now living alone in her flat and he requested that readers send her a postcard 'to thrill a most gracious lady'.[44]

It is perhaps therefore not so surprising that Ada Reeve was remembered in John Betjeman's tribute at her memorial service at St Martin-in-the-Fields as 'the soldiers' friend': 'She had to the full, the generosity of theatre people. "Anzac Ada", as they called her in the 1914 war, gave her house in the Isle of Wight to Australian and New Zealand troops.' A quartet from the Players Theatre was accompanied by a choir singing 'The Long, Long Trail', for which Ada Reeve was 'famous in those Anzac days'.[45]

Reeve's theatre family also worked to frame her mediated afterlife as a theatre star and ambassador. The custodial validation of

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Reeve's carefully constructed performance legacy was entrusted to female theatrical performers: the major and greatly respected British star Dame Sybil Thorndike and the young Royal Shakespeare Company actor Judi Dench read the lessons at the service.[46]

Reeve's friends Raymond Mander, Joe Mitchenson, and Leslie Cable organized the dedication of her plaque at St Paul's, the Parish Church of Covent Garden, also known as the Actors' Church. Leslie Cable, the daughter of Joe Graham, long-time manager of the Prince of Wales Theatre in Birmingham, paid for the memorial tablet (see Fig. 5),

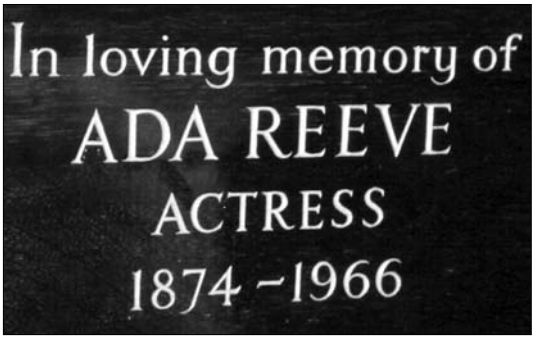

Fig. 5. Photograph of plaque in memory of Ada Reeve, St Paul's Church, Covent Garden (author's collection).

unveiled by Judi Dench on 26 July 1967 with friends, including Peter Stewart and Gwen Adeler, among the invited guests.[47] The plaque again positioned Ada Reeve's legacy as a valued star within the historical context of a national theatrical genealogy rather than as the Gaiety Girl and variety artist recorded by the popular press.

The Persistence of Ephemera

The current circulation of 'collectable' vintage theatrical ephemera such as postcards and cigarette cards attests to a strategic positioning of the theatre star in the past that continues to resonate today. The golden age of mass-produced theatre postcards was from 1901 to 1914. Viv Gardner notes that between 1906 and 1907 831,400,000 portrait postcards were posted in the United Kingdom, and this figure did not include those bought for collection only.[48] She claims:

> In the early part of the twentieth century, the picture postcard, rather than the performance in the case of the popular stage, represented the site where the point of intersection of public demand (the star as a phenomenon of consumption) and the producer initiative (the star as a phenomenon of production) met.[49]

The theatre postcard was invested with multi-agency. Prior to performance, postcards were sent ahead of the star as advance publicity to whip up interest and enthusiasm for the forthcoming production and its star actors. Theatre management was cognizant of the dual agency and currency of these images as traded and collectable objects of fans' consumerist desire to transform the public object into private possession.[50]

Fig. 6. Postcard portrait of Ada Reeve as Rhodanthe in *Butterflies*, 1908 (author's collection).

Fig. 7. Family postcard portraits of Ada Reeve with (left) her daughters Bessie and Goodie, and (below) her second husband Wilfred Cotton (author's collection). Neither the daughters or husband are named

During their careers, stars such as Ada Reeve worked assiduously with theatre managements to promote their on- and offstage personae via the circulation of postcards, and these framed images have survived to outlive both theatrical productions and the stars themselves. Postcards were typically studio photographs depicting stars in theatre costume, satisfying a marketing agenda to promote their latest productions (see Fig. 6).

However, the circulation of poscards that portrayed theatre stars 'at home' suggests the advent of public fascination with theatre stars as celebrities, satisfying fans' desire to 'know' their stage heroes more intimately. Photographs of the star performer offstage, whether at home or in casual attire in the photographer's studio, imbued the star with the legitimacy of domestic respectability while typically objectifying her as a fashion icon. Gardner posits that postcards which frame the theatre star as an idealized icon of femininity celebrate 'a world of the imagination, a fantasy made up of idealized scenarios and wish fulfilment as opposed to the so-called world of "reality" for the star's many fans and admirers'.[51]

The postcard portraits of Reeve with her husband and daughters (see Fig. 7) clearly associate her with the private realm, but she nonetheless remains framed as the star since

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Fig 8: Ada Reeve 'at home' with (unidentified) friends (author's collection).

her spouse and children are unnamed. Similarly, a series of postcards of Reeve which firmly position her socializing in an idealized domestic realm 'at home' do not identify her 'friends' by name (see Fig. 8).

Theatre stars also appeared on cigarette cards which were produced in huge numbers in the early twentieth century and continue to be traded and collected today (see Figs. 9a–9d). For the star, these cards provided a small supplementary source of income and publicity. For the tobacco companies, the cards were a device used to differentiate their brand and increase market share through animating the collecting impulse. In addition, the use of photographs of theatre stars may have helped to establish a link in the minds of consumers between the tobacco brand and celebrity, athleticism, beauty, sophistication, and other desirable personal qualities.

There was also cross promotional use of the same images of theatre stars endorsing consumer products. For example, Ada Reeve is featured on a trading card promoting Ogden's Guinea Gold Cigarettes in the same dress she wore for the 'at home' series.

A caricature of Ada Reeve features on a cigarette card that was produced by Cohen Weenen, a small London tobacco company, in its set of fifty cards produced in 1907 of 'Star Artistes' (see Fig. 10). It also framed her as a comedienne with a humorous image linked with a parody chorus of an unknown song, presumably from her repertoire.

Reeve's accessibility as a popular comedienne was also extended in her afterlife by the reproduction of her image as a jester on what came to be known as the Ada Reeve Joker in Australian playing cards.[52] The card, issued by Paper Products of Sydney in 1928, copied an image of Reeve's upper body in a jester's costume from the theatre programme cover for her blockbuster musical revue *Spangles* (see Fig. 11, page 144).

Fig. 9a (above). Ada Reeve as Julie Bon-Bon in *The Gay Parisienne* (Duke of York's Theatre, London, 1896), advertisement for Ogden's Guinea Gold Cigarettes (author's collection).

Fig. 9b. Example of the Ada Reeve pin badges that were attached to packs of tobacco, issued by Sweet Caporal Cigarette Company, USA, *c.* 1890–1900 (author's collection).

Fig. 9c and 9d. Trading cards acknowledging Ada Reeve as a young music-hall star (1892) while endorsing (left) Lloyd's Yacht Club and (below) Adkin & Sons' Cigarettes (author's collection). Reference in the Adkin & Sons card to the song 'I'm a Little Too Young to Know', written by T. W. Connor, affirms Reeve's status since it launched her career as a recognized star.

Fig. 10. Caricature of Ada Reeve on a Cohen Weenen tobacco card, 1907 (author's collection).

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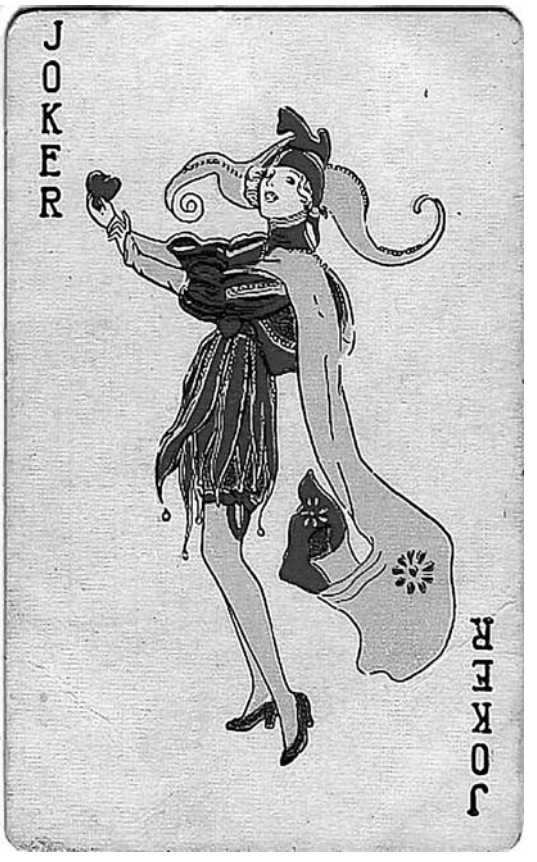
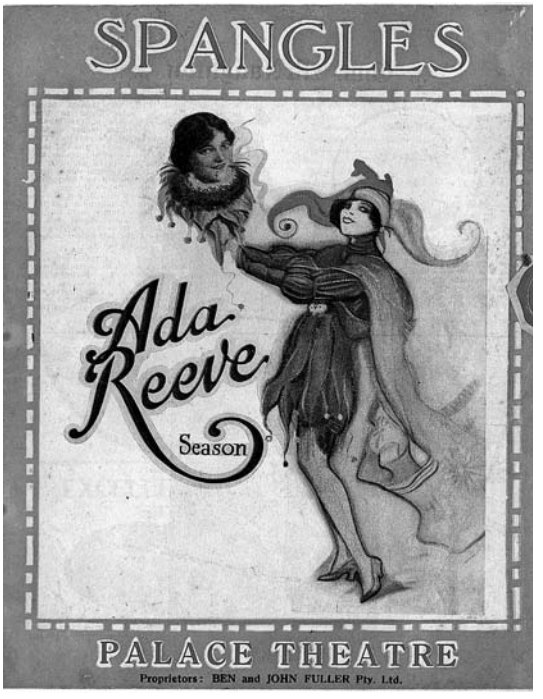


Fig. 11. Above: Reeve Joker playing cards, *c.* 1928–29 (author's collection). Below: front cover illustration for theatre programme (on which the right-hand card above was based), for *Spangles,* Palace Theatre, Melbourne, 15 April 1922 (author's collection).

The Ada Reeve Joker resonates with Roach's theorization of the dual-bodied celebrity. He states:

> Celebrities, then, like kings, have two bodies, the body natural which decays and dies, and the body cinematic, which does neither. But the immortal body of their image, even though it is preserved on celluloid, on digitized files, or in the memory of the theatregoing public, always bears a nagging reminder of the former.[53]

The decay of Reeve's physical body is mirrored by the erasure of her image from later editions of the playing card, but her comic persona continues to be immortalized in the current circulation and trade of Ada Reeve Jokers. These playing cards were included in Paper Products' higher quality colour decks, thus associating this theatre star with comedy and superior worth. Furthermore, the Ada Reeve Joker reinforces her self-enunciation as a singular performer, 'the world famous comedienne'.



This extra-theatrical framing of Reeve persisted for over fifty years. The Ada Reeve Joker was retained in production when Reed Paper Products took over Paper Products in 1959 and James Hardie Industries bought Reed Paper Products in 1978.

Death: the Final Curtain Call?

Theatre stars in the early twentieth century sought to control their legacies by framing their star personae for posterity in confessional memoirs and wills, and through a variety of documentary items, memorabilia, and ephemera produced with their consent during their lifetimes. Examination of the portrayal in the media of Ada Reeve after her death shows that the images that stars endeavoured to frame for themselves often became fragmented in sometimes surprising ways: filtered by nostalgic sentiment, nationalism, the availability of documentation, and the passage of time. Ada Reeve, whose self-framing emphasized her singularity as a performer, businesswoman, and 'world's greatest comedienne', would have been disappointed by her portrayal by the British press as 'the last of the Gaiety Girls', yet in a final surprising twist, was silently preserved for decades as the joker in popular playing cards. Perhaps she would have been satisfied after all.

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24. Gwen Adeler, 'Ada Reeve: Yes – I Remember Her Well', *Call Boy*, October 1966, p. 10.
25. *Daily Express,* 26 September 1966; *Daily Telegraph*, 26 September 1966; *Daily Mail*, 26 September 1966; *Guardian*, 26 September 1966; *Times*, 26 September 1966, p. 10.
26. *New York Times* 26 September 1966, p. 41.
27. *Punch*, 18 July 1973, p. v.
28. *Age*, 9 May 1917, p. 12; *Stage*, 4 January 1912; *Referee*, 25 April 1917, p. 14.
29. It is interesting to note that the *New York Times* of 26 September 1966 (p. 41) alludes to Reeve's involvement in starting this campaign, although this is not well documented.
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50. Susan Stewart, op. cit., p. 138.
51. Viv Gardner, op. cit., p. 112.
52. My thanks to John Daniels, a researcher of the history of Australian playing cards, who gave me these cards and provided valuable information.
53. Joseph Roach, op. cit., p. 36.