

ARCHIVE REFRAMED: THE BILL TONKIN COLLECTION







ARCHIVE REFRAMED

Between February and April 2026, Southbank Centre Archive invited a group of young local volunteers who were either currently out of full-time employment, or looking to explore an alternative career to explore its most recent acquisition, the Bill Tonkin Collection.

The volunteers worked alongside the Archive team and programme partners to process and interpret the Bill Tonkin Collection, learning the rules of archiving and how to reframe them. They developed new skills and gained experience in handling, ordering, marking, repackaging and cataloguing as they learned archival best practice. And then, they learned how to critique these practices by working collectively with the Archive's team and artist Ioana Simion (Artizine) to produce this zine catalogue, which presents their individually told stories of objects and items from the Bill Tonkin Collection.

As part of the Southbank Centre's 75th anniversary celebrations and its Archive's commitment to community co-curation, the programme and zine celebrates the volunteers' contribution to how the past represented by the Bill Tonkin Collection will be accessed and interpreted in the future.

The Bill Tonkin Collection

The Bill Tonkin Collection is a resource of rare print ephemera, postcards and souvenirs relating to the Festival of Britain and its legacy. Held in 1951, the Festival of Britain was a national exhibition, labelled a 'tonic for the nation' intended to celebrate the best of British design, industry and culture. The collection is on longterm loan to the Southbank Centre Archive from the Festival of Britain Society.

ABOUT OUR VOLUNTEERS

Najla Ahmed is an architecture graduate interested in archives, libraries, and curating as spaces where design quietly shapes access to knowledge, and hopes to explore this further. Alongside this, they are drawn to fiction – both on the page and on screen – with a particular interest in world-building, narrative structure, and the ways stories are preserved, revisited, and reinterpreted over time.

Chloe Badman is an English Literature and philosophy graduate. Her methods and approaches for interpreting the stories and items within the Bill Tonkin Collection are inspired by her research and practical interest in textile design.

Belita Bassa is an English and Creative Writing student who joined Archive Reframed with an interest in archiving and a dedication to uncovering hidden narratives. Intrigued by analysing the Bill Tonkin collection and inspired by zine-making, she aims to give voice to stories that are often missed, painting narratives that bridge the gap between the known and the unknown.

Victoria Dreyfus is a Londoner born in Paris, with a background working in leading contemporary art galleries. Her interests span art, digital visual culture, and technology, and the questions they share about how histories are constructed, what archives choose to keep, and whose voices get preserved.

Joe Gilbert Jalil is a History of Art student at the University of Sussex and has a keen interest in the personal stories of historical paintings and artefacts through international narratives and perspectives.

Nia Jones is a MA History of Art graduate who enjoys exploring unique art historical narratives connecting works from around the world and encouraging dynamic forms of interpretation to engage contemporary audiences with their own histories and values.

Helena Perry is an English Literature graduate and reviewer of arts and letters; her approach to the Bill Tonkin Collection comes from a long-standing research interest in language as an unstable cultural system and the archive as its double.

Anna Rice is an aspiring archivist and English Studies graduate. As a student, she was distracted from writing assignments by the marginalia she discovered in library books and Medieval manuscripts. She is particularly interested in Irish diasporic identities and collective memory.


Preesha Sanghrajka is a recent music graduate with an interest in material culture and heritage. Following her graduation from King's College London, she has volunteered at many museums and archives and has developed a strong interest in how institutions display the stories of underrepresented individuals within history.

Suada Sed I am a student of History with a strong interest in archives and speculative fiction. I find that both operate as junctures between past and future, where through creative interpretation of our histories via the use of archival materials, we can produce works that are visionary and forward looking.

Elly Simpson is a London-based interdisciplinary artist and researcher, their work explores the intersections between disability and queerness through ideas of rest and care as political tools.

Marina Warchus is a writer and filmmaker drawn to the female voice and socially grounded storytelling. She engages with the physicality of analogue forms alongside the digital, and utilises the past to interrogate how histories of representation, voice, and image continue to shape the present and inform the future.

Eliza Wright is a recent graduate interested in the practice of thinking through making. After studying graphic design at Chelsea College of Arts, she found herself drawn to analogue making techniques and has developed a deep interest in the history and heritage of making in Britain.



I was drawn to this 1951 Festival of Britain wrapping paper for its remarkable level of detail, reflecting the consideration of design at every scale from architecture to everyday materials. In response, I reinterpreted the wrapping paper as if it were created for the Southbank Centre today, retaining the tone and visual language of the original while translating it for a contemporary 2026 context.

By Najla Ahmed

SC/FOB/10/4/7
Festival of Britain Postcard,
River Thames Bridge,
Signed, 1951
Southbank Centre Archive



SOUTHBANK CENTRE ARCHIVE RETRIEVAL SLIP		1651	
item description: Festival of Britain scarf Embroidery transfers		Date: 24/2/26	Ref number: CB1
purpose: <u>research</u> / display / loan / conservation / other		Location: folder 5	
Removed by: Chloe	Returned by:	Return date:	Notes: SC/FOB/10/4/22, Scarf Constructions & Transfers, 1951, Southbank Centre Archive

e b a y

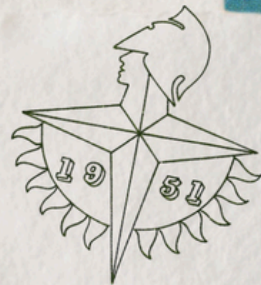
Festival of Britain Scarf ~~1951~~, 2026

Condition: Handmade and unique, intentionally imperfect, with visible marks of the making process.

Buy it now

Add to basket

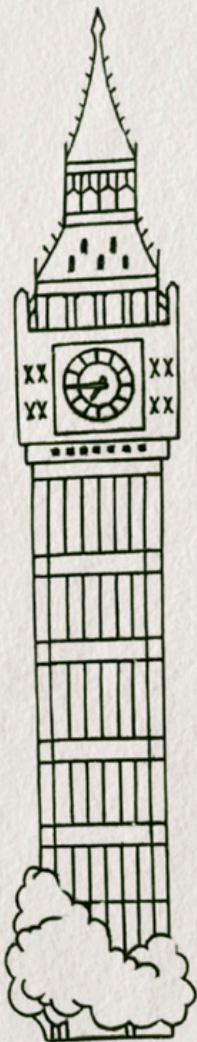
Make an offer



I selected an item from the Bill Tonkin Collection consisting of printed instructions for making an embroidered Festival of Britain scarf, accompanied by a selection of embroidery transfers. I chose this item because of its personal and participatory nature, as I liked the idea of someone purchasing it at the festival and making the scarf for themselves at home as a way of commemorating their visit.

Throughout this project I became interested in how archival collections are formed and was particularly intrigued by the fact much of the Bill Tonkin Collection was sourced and acquired through eBay. I wanted to use my zine contribution to explore the idea of online archives and how sites like eBay have become the future of collecting, using this as a narrative for interpreting my selected item. Through my zine contribution, I explored the idea of an 'archive in motion', one that is not static but continuously evolving through reinterpretation. I was interested by the idea that archival pieces can be used as a starting point for new creative work, which may in turn become part of the archive itself. I developed this through the concept of someone following the original instructions for making the scarf in their own way, producing a new and unique object that extends the life and meaning of the original archival item.

by Chloe Badman



nd social
ine ew



SC/FOB/10/4/15
Beaumaris Arrangements Sou-
venir Programme, May 1951,
Southbank Centre Archive

Friends
make the
world
beautiful!

I selected a postcard sent from the Festival of Britain site to a family in Paris XVI, signed 'Je t'embrasse. Ton Papa.'

It was postmarked 17 May 1957, six years after the Festival itself, the event already happened by the time the card was written.

I grew up in the 16ème. When I turned the card over and read the address, the archive stopped being abstract. This was my neighbourhood, my language, a father writing to his child across the Channel.

I chose collage to mirror what the postcard already does: hold official spectacle and intimate feeling in the same frame, without resolving the tension between them. The words scattered across my pages; memory, evidence, selection, home, sending, loving, are questions as much as answers. Like the postcard itself, the zine does not explain.

It keeps things open.

by Victoria Dreyfus

SC/FOB/10/4/7
Festival of Britain Postcard,
River Thames Bridge,
Signed, 1951
Southbank Centre Archive



Transport, Globalisation and Empire

*London and Beyond,
A changing Britain*

Many people travelled both locally and internationally to attend the Festival of Britain, supported by promotional campaigns abroad that encouraged global visitors. Ceremonial bus tickets were issued for travel to the Festival and around London, making it easier for visitors to navigate the city during their stay. The Festival itself focused on showcasing the accomplishments of Great Britain rather than the British Empire, presenting a renewed national identity to the world. Additionally, the distribution of foreign-language leaflets attracted tourists from Europe, America, and beyond, further enabling Britain to highlight its achievements as a modern nation.



SC/FOB/10/4/2,
Festival of Britain Special
Edition Bus Ticket, 1951,
Southbank Centre Archive

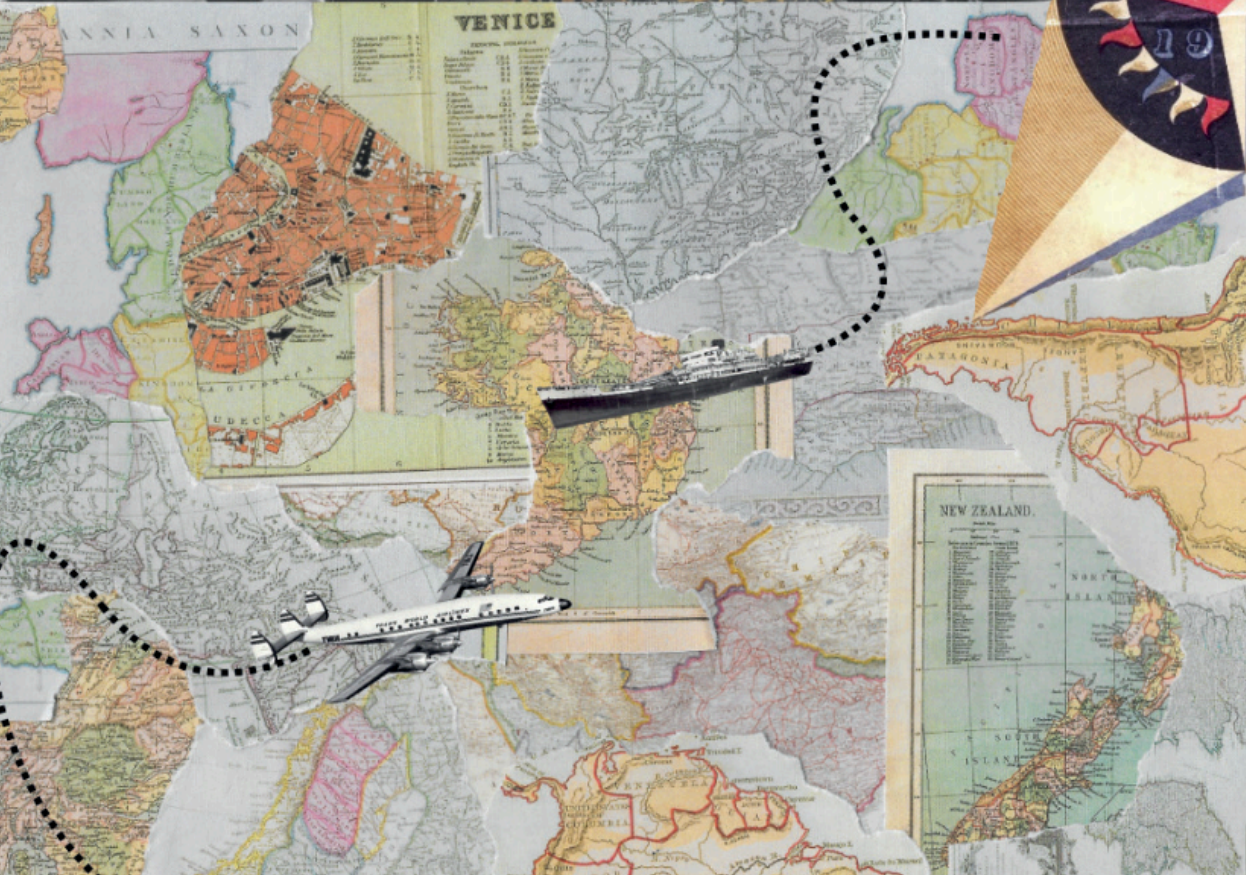
SC/FOB/10/4/6,
Dutch Festival of Britain
Leaflet, 1951,
Southbank Centre Archive



I chose two items from the Bill Tonkin Collection to interpret: the London Transport commemorative bus tickets and the Dutch travel guide. These stood out through their symbolism of transport, globalisation, and the mobility of people surrounding the Festival. The bus tickets highlight the role of local transport in bringing together people from across London and the UK, showing the mass movement that made the Festival accessible to a wide audience, including local communities. They also show how simple items have a major role in creating a Festival that brings people together, allowing them to see everything on display. The Dutch Travel Guide introduces an international aspect of the Festival and its role in encouraging people to visit internationally, demonstrating a sense of globalisation. The encouragement to bring an international audience to the Festival is something that I find incredibly intriguing as it can be seen as Britain's attempt to reshape itself in a post-colonial world as the Festival focuses only on Great Britain, not its Empire, which by 1951 is beginning to collapse. Overall my items display a sense of bringing people together for the Festival, nationally and internationally, as it lays the path of post-colonial Britain

by Joe Gilbert-Jalil

I had two relatives who attended the festival. My grandfather Marvin Gilbert who is 86, and at the time was 12, gave me his account: "I remember traveling from Surrey where my aunty lived and visiting each tent and the Skylon". My other grandfather Abdul Jalil, who had visited the Festival, had recently immigrated from Myanmar to London.



WRIGLEYS

MADE IN BRITAIN

SUGAR & VEGETABLES

19
FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN
MAY-OCTOBER
From
The Mole, The Pier and The Quay

EMPIRE ON WHEELS

WATCH THE SUN NEVER

VENICE

GENERAL STATISTICS	
Area	45.7
Population	125,000
Water	10.0
Land	35.7
Urban	10.0
Rural	25.7
Water	10.0
Land	35.7
Urban	10.0
Rural	25.7

NEW ZEALAND

NEW ZEALAND	
Area	268,000
Population	2,000,000
Water	10.0
Land	258.0
Urban	10.0
Rural	248.0





SC/FOB/10/4/3,
 Classix Ford E83W Thames Van
 Festival of Britain Toy, 1951,
 Southbank Centre Archive

PAST

PRESENT

What does Grandad remember?

I selected this object from the collection as I recognised it as similar to the model railway parts my Grandad collects and builds. After speaking to him about this object, my Grandad mentioned his visit to the Festival in 1951 at age 7 and it sparked an interest to explore this object and its collectible nature in connection to childhood and memory. My object speaks to an inner child in all of us, in which we catch glimpses of memory and can help us connect to wider national narratives. The Festival of Britain was both a substantial cultural event as well as a fun day out in London for my Grandad as a boy. I have loved connecting research and the archival process to personal experience through a creative outlet.

by Nia Jones



Rediffusion is a
blast from the past!



Mother wasn't interested
in the Dome of Discovery
so I didn't get to go in.



We stayed
with Auntie
Con in
Battersea.
She was my
favourite.

WHISTLE


There was a treetop walk in
Battersea Park, which, of course
was the height of sophistication
in 1951.

OUR LANGUAGE AS MISSIONARY

The May 1951 issue of *Books* opens with a message from Gerald Barry, Director-General of the Festival of Britain, titled "Our Language as Missionary." The sound and the sense of the two words in that metaphor disagree. Certainly, the English language is Christian, civilising instrument in Barry's rhetoric: that particular colonial imagination is very much alive. English is doubly steward and sovereign in his note: "its glories recognised throughout the world," our contribution "to the common welfare of mankind." But language is *not* missionary. Language is unstable, adaptive, communal: language evolves through contact and cultural exchange, passes in and out of mouths and minds, its original meaning never arriving wholly intact.

The missionary impulse is its opposite: a drive to possess and disseminate a singular conviction of truth, to impose rather than negotiate meaning. The paradox of Barry's metaphor is pressed because *Books* itself embodies the contradiction, seemingly self-consciously undercutting its own "missionary" confidence on nearly every page.

Produced by the National Book League, these monthly journals were dedicated to books, their production, exhibition, and cultural value. This particular issue functions simultaneously as a membership bulletin, an exhibition guide for the Festival of Britain 1951's "Exhibition of Books", a critical review, a programme of events. It is therefore also, a kind of cultural archive of literary thought in the period: a carefully curated, selective record of which books mattered, which words counted, and whatever language meant.



SC/FOB/10/4/24

The Journal of the National
Book League, May 1951,
Southbank Centre Archive

And yet, the journal's own contents refuse that fixity. Joyce's *Ulysses* notes, reproduced inside its pages, show language cancelling itself in three colours — it's multilingual, unstable, irreducible to the single authorised text the "missionary" requires. Bowen's unblotted manuscript page exposes "meaningless" language before the archive can receive it: still in process, written in English about the violence done in English's name during the Irish War of Independence.

Sidney's *Arcadia*, the founding myth of English as naturally rooted, was itself written in political exile — a text of displacement rather than belonging. The women's literary tradition is represented not only through discourses on their writing but through a conduct manual prescribing their silence. In the advertisements, *Myths and Legends of Maoriland* appears: oral tradition bound and offered to British readers as exotic supplement. Many of the chosen example undermine Barry's own claim to linguistic order, revealing instead a record of the English language as fractured and self-questioning, reflecting the English people "in a time of violence," as Barry described it, just six years after the Second World War.



“A POET, YES, BUT AN ENGLISHMAN TOO. DO YOU KNOW WHAT IS THE PRIDE OF THE ENGLISH? DO YOU KNOW WHAT IS THE PROUDEST WORD YOU WILL EVER HEAR FROM AN ENGLISHMAN’S MOUTH? THE SEAS’ RULER. HIS SEACOLD EYES LOOKED ON THE EMPTY BAY: IT SEEMS HISTORY IS TO BLAME: ON ME AND ON MY WORDS, UNHATING. THAT ON HIS EMPIRE THE SUN NEVER SETS — THERE HAS NEVER BEEN AN EXHIBITION OF BOOKS THAT COMPARES WITH IT, WORKMEN TINKERING WITH WOOD, PLASTER, LIGHTING AND FESTOONS OF COLOURED TEXTILES BELOW A CEILING COMPOSED FROM THE ALPHABET THAT CONQUERED THE WORLD, A PIECE OF THE TOWER OF BABYLON’S CURSE, THAT A MAN SHOULD BE PUT TO SCHOOL TO LEARN HIS MOTHER TONGUE — BA! MR DEASY CRIED. THAT’S NOT ENGLISH. A FRENCH CELT SAID THAT. IT IS STRANGE THAT WORDS ARE SO INADEQUATE. YET, LIKE THE ASTHMATIC STRUGGLING FOR BREATH, SO THE LOVER MUST STRUGGLE FOR WORDS. MY JUDGMENT WAS STRONGER THAN WERE MY POWERS OF REALIZING ITS DICTATES.”

As an English student interested in the material culture of books, I was drawn immediately to a Festival pamphlet devoted to them. *Books* opens with a message from Gerald Barry, Director-General of the Festival of Britain, written in a formal, missionary register: English as moral and cultural unifier. The remainder of the journal, organised by the National Book League, resists that claim. Its articles address the exclusion of women writers from the canon, the earlier banning of Joyce's *Ulysses* for obscenity, and Sidney's *Arcadia*, that sublime and strange pastoral. The crossings-out, silences, and omissions visible in the manuscripts already perform this critique: they show English stumbling over itself, absorbing cultural imports and variant forms, refusing the fixity Barry's letter insists upon. But considering *Books* as a cultural archive of which contemporary fiction mattered also raises questions about curation and hierarchy: how such objects construct a canon, which texts sit at the centre, and which at the margins. English is my primary language, but perhaps not my mother tongue.

As a great-granddaughter of the Windrush generation, I carry the strange sense of speaking from within a tradition my identity is somewhat outside of. Within *Books*, Irish writers, women writers, and modernists pushing formal boundaries share a version of the same position. They write in English yet press against its constraints. The journal's contents keep contradicting its cover. I find that contradiction compelling, and not only historically. It speaks to how language organises national identity, and to what happens when such organisation fails. The collage of quotations, colour-coded fragments, and critical reflection mirrors the subject it describes. Rather than a single authoritative voice, the piece layers competing registers, so the reader encounters the tension between Barry's unifying rhetoric and the resistant, plural English the journal actually contains. The form draws on the methods of the zine and the archive, combining textual scholarship with visual composition.

by Helena Perry

FOREWORD.

This booklet has been prepared so that you will know something beforehand about our visit to the Festival of Britain Exhibition.

I therefore want you to study it carefully and make yourself acquainted with all it contains. Do not destroy it on your return, but keep it as a souvenir.

I sincerely trust that our trip to the Exhibition will be a "red letter day" in your school life, and I do hope that nothing will occur that will mar our day's pleasure.

May the weather be kind to us, so that we may all have a very enjoyable day's outing.

Remember you are a scholar of Newton Road School and please do not do anything that will let your School down.

A. S. SHERWOOD,
(Headmaster)

SC/FOB/10/4/25,
School Visit Book,
1951-07-16,
Southbank Centre Archive

SOUTH
ARCHIVE

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removed by:

mca

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS
FOR THE DAY.

1. Go to bed early the night before. REMEMBER you will have a long day ahead of you.
2. Bring a mac with you, and if it does not rain your camera might be handy to have with you.
3. Bring a packed lunch with you. Packed tea will be provided.
4. YOU MUST KEEP WITH YOUR PARTY AT THE FESTIVAL. If you should be separated from your party before lunch, be at the SKYLON at 1 o'clock, if after lunch be at RODNEY PIER at 2.30.
5. If you are lost in London during the sightseeing tour do not be afraid. Go to a policeman and ask him to show you the way to SEMLEY PLACE (see your map - it is near Victoria Bus Station.) You must be there by 6.30, when the buses leave for home.
6. BEHAVE WELL AT ALL TIMES and be proud that you have not let your School down.

St. Paul's Cathedral

Oxo

bankment

My object is a typewritten souvenir programme from a school visit to the Festival of Britain. I was immediately enamoured with it because of the evident love and care put into its craft and preservation.

It includes a hand-drawn map, typewritten information and instructions, a detailed itinerary, and reassurance for the children attending the trip. We are offered a glimpse into the values of Headmaster W.A.E. Sherwood. At the same time, I was intrigued by the notable absence of the schoolchild's voice. The pupil has preserved the item for posterity, as instructed by their teacher, implying they obeyed authority. Beyond this, however, their personal experience of the Festival—how they felt, what they noticed, what they remembered—remains unknown. It is a partial record, lacking individual perspective, which inspired me to showcase this object and respond to it emotionally seventy-five years later.

The programme illustrates how much society has changed and yet stayed the same. Mr Sherwood's advice remains sound and relevant: it is always a good idea to get enough sleep, prepare for London's rain, pack a lunch, and behave well at all times. The only key difference is the advice about what to do if you're lost in London. Given how ubiquitous digital technology is in our lives, it seems unlikely that someone would get lost today; I included a Google Maps screenshot to illustrate this idea.

My approach was to let Mr Sherwood's timeless advice speak for itself. I combined analogue and digital methods to connect 1951 and 2026 and develop my own digital creative practice. I worked with Adobe Scan and Adobe Express for the first time—an experiment that taught me a lot, including patience. I transposed pages from the programme into collages incorporating a range of materials: paper scraps from our zine workshops, scanned images from collection items, and a photograph and screenshot created with my smartphone.

by Anna Rice

Migration from Gujarat to East Africa



Migration from Kenya to London



East India Company



Preesha's life in London

I was drawn to this Festival of Britain decorative scarf because of the bright colours and symbolism. Each corner's representation of a celebrated British event made me consider how its designer wanted to represent Britain in the wake of a world war and the increasing loss of its empire. Images of 'Queen Bodicea' and 'The Battle of Trafalgar' display British strength against invasion, and it led me to think about what constituted 'British' values in 1951 and what constitutes these in the present day, and if there are any similarities.

Much of my family's history has been shaped by the British empire, so I wanted to replicate the handkerchief using collage to demonstrate how British events, and particularly British invasion, have shaped the history of my family and my identity. My family moved from Gujarat, India to East Africa due to the better opportunities provided by the building of railways by the British East Africa Company in the late nineteenth century. After almost 100 years in Kenya, they moved to London due to the political instability in the 1980s following independence in the 1960s. This has shaped the language and culture of my family, and my identity as British, Gujarati and Kenyan. I chose an analogue format so I could encapsulate how much mine and my family's identity has been fragmented across continents and cultures.

By Preesha Sanghrajka

SC/FOB/10/4/8,
Festival of Britain
Decorative Scarf, 1951,
Southbank Centre Archive

The arts centre of the future

Throughout 2026, we're celebrating 75 years of the Southbank Centre with a vibrant, inclusive programme that looks to the future.

In 1951, the Royal Festival Hall was built as part of the Festival of Britain, bringing a message of hope after World War Two. We draw inspiration from that spirit over a year packed with events for everyone to enjoy.

'We're not here just to reflect the present. We're here to help shape the future.'

— Elaine Bedell, CEO

'The Arts Centre of the Future', a digital summary of the 75th anniversary of the Southbank Centre, written in 2026.

SC/FOB/10/4/2,
'1851' Booklet, 1951,
Southbank Centre Archive

A RETROSPECT ON THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN

Within the Southbank Centre Archive's Bill Tonkin Collection, I found a piece written by the Historical Association. Titled 1851, it is a short pamphlet that was disseminated at the 1951 Festival of Britain, offering a historical context for its predecessor, the 1851 Great Exhibition. It was very interesting to me that many of the stakeholders involved in the pamphlet's production, dissemination and preservation remain extant. This longevity inspired me to think about what a future Festival of Britain would look like.

by Suada Sed

The year is 2051. The Southbank Centre is officially hosting the centurial anniversary of the Festival of Britain.

Our ongoing desire to reflect on the nation's past artistic and scientific achievements in the form of celebration has contributed to the creation of many cultural and heritage centres like the V&A after the 1851 Great Exhibition, as well as the Centre, which itself was established right after at the site of the 1951 Festival. Two centuries on from the first Exhibition, much has changed about Britain, but innovations in design, science, and technology continues and our desire to celebrate them remains.

1906: Founding of the Historical Association

With the advent of compulsory education, the Association was created to promote the teaching of history, share resources, and create a "voice for history". One example of such a resource is the work '1851', a short pamphlet produced and disseminated at the 1951 Festival of Britain, offering a historical context for its predecessor, the 1851 exhibition.



1851: The Great Exhibition

Organised by Prince Albert and civil servant Henry Cole, the Great Exhibition was a large-scale, international display of industry and technology. It featured over 100,000 international exhibits and was itself hosted inside the new and innovative Crystal Palace, the world's first large-scale cast-iron and plate-glass structure.



1945: The End of WW2 and Empire

With the decline of the British Empire, and the election of a new Labour government, there is a growing shift in interest in local industry and output.

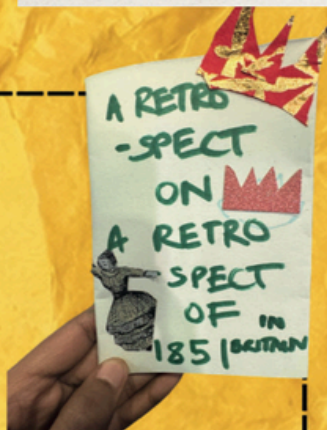
1951: The Festival of Britain

To boost morale after wartime austerity, the government along with some still existing organisations like the Arts Council and the British Film Institute devised a national exhibition to promote innovations made in science, technology, and arts, a century after the Great Exhibition.



2026: The Bill Tonkin Collection

Comprising rare print ephemera, postcards, and souvenirs related to the Festival of Britain and its legacy, the collection was donated to the Southbank Centre Archive by the estate of Bill Tonkin with support from the Festival of Britain Society. Young volunteers explored the archive and created a zine celebrating the Festival's 75th anniversary.



2051: The World Wide Centennial Anniversary

A hundred years since the Festival of Britain and two hundred since the 1851 Great Exhibition, we are once again celebrating the innovations in design, science, technology made within Britain, to be broadcast internationally, in a world wide capacity. These include the invention of the World Wide Web, the public interconnected information system that first allowed us to share such content over the internet.



I was drawn to a Festival of Britain tin teapot from the Bill Tonkin Collection because it made me think about how tea functions culturally as a way of bringing people together. Textile is a medium central to my practice both materially and conceptually, often working as a form of resistance.

This led me to create a tea cozy as part of my response to the Archive Reframed project. Traditionally, a tea cozy keeps tea warm for longer and I was interested in this idea of holding warmth and extending it. In my work, it becomes a way of thinking about sustaining conversation, connection and community. It was important to me that my contribution also felt active, so I developed a 'Tea & Chat Activity' with a set of questions to be used by others. These prompts are intended to encourage conversation and create moments of deeper connection.



TEA & CHAT

**Thank you for engaging with this activity.
This is an invite to open conversations and explore
connections with yourself and others.**

Before you begin:

Take a moment to slow down and breathe

Find a comfy place to sit and tap into how your
body is feeling

Grab a cup of tea, teas that are great for a sense of calm include:
chamomile, passion flower and lemon balm

Enter into the space with openness where this feels possible

Move at your own pace, there's no rush

Take breaks. If you feel called to stop at any point allow yourself
time and space away from the conversation.

Questions:

These are a framework to work from, feel free to adapt, change and alter these questions where it feels appropriate to the space you find yourself in!

Has there been a conversation recently where you've connected on a deeper level with yourself/someone else? What made that moment meaningful?

How are you feeling in your body today? Are there any unexpected emotions or sensations that have come up for you?

What does community mean to you? How do you currently engage with it, or how would you like to in the future?

When do you feel the most joy and hope? How might those feelings help you build stronger, more caring connections with others?

Is there a resource that's helped you gain insight into yourself that you'd like to share? Why did it stand out to you?

by Elly Simpson

SC/FOB/10/4/23,
Festival of Britain Teapot,
1951,
Southbank Centre Archive



Resources:

The resources below engage with the colonial history of tea to highlight the importance of sharing that history within this context:

Yasmin Jahan Nupur,
'Sit down for tea with artist Yasmin Jahan Nupur', Tate YouTube,
6 February 2023

Elliot Sang,
'Tea: How Britain Screwed India and China',
YouTube, 8 September 2023

Charlene Wang de Chen,
'It's Time to Decolonize Tea',
Whetstone Magazine, Online Article,
18 November 2020



SC/FOB/10/4/4,
Festival of Britain Ballet
Program, 1951,
Southbank Centre Archive

INTERVIEW

'YOU REALISE HOW MUCH OF A LIFE IS
MADE OUT OF PAPER AND MEMORY'

*Nora Pritchard on the 1951 Festival Ballet,
remembering, and dancing her way through life*

By Marina Warchus

Nora Pritchard was born just a stone's throw from the Welsh Black Mountains, in the town of Brynamman. Though rooted in a rural South Wales coal-mining family, it was dance that became her true home. At just six years old, she saw *Giselle* performed by Alicia Markova at the Stoll Theatre as part of the 1951 Festival of Britain Ballet programme – an experience that quickly impacted the course of her life. What began as a seed of wonder soon grew into an obsession and blossomed into a lifelong career in the dance form.

Now, seventy-five years later, at 81 and now a Dame, she sits down for an interview at the Southbank Centre to reflect on her life: a career shaped by discipline and artistry that led her to become one of the country's most respected prima ballerinas. Dame Nora is sat opposite me, her manicured hands folded neatly in her lap, her straight poise echoing decades of training. From the window she looks out at the street below to central London's traffic stalled in its familiar five-o'clock standstill. But inside she is somewhere else, caught between thick red curtains, cold dance studios, and a girl of six watching ballet for the first time. I peel through the ballet programme she has brought in. It's slightly yellowed with age but carefully kept. "It almost looks brand new," I begin. She turns to me. "I treasured it. It's all because of that performance that I am where I am today." Nora had come to London with her parents for a weekend away with her parents; strolling through Battersea Pleasure Gardens, the Guinness clock leisurely marking the hour. But it was that Saturday matinee that transported her to another world.



"In earnest, I didn't fully understand the story then. I was only six," Nora laughs.

"I just knew it was unlike anything I'd seen before. I felt as though I'd stepped into another country entirely." She glances out the window, down at the street again as another memory slides over her. For birthdays and Christmases, her parents bought posters, picture books and beginner guides to positions. Soon after, Nora insisted on lessons and every Saturday morning, they would drive her to Ammanford Town Hall where a modest dance class met. "It was old, dusty and drafty, but I didn't mind."

Turning point came with her acceptance into the Birmingham Royal Ballet. "That was when it changed, when I realised dance was the only way I wanted to live." Days were structured around rigid discipline, and the romantic dream of becoming a ballerina was tempered by fatigue, injury, and harsh reality. "It forces you to grow up quickly," Nora says. "You learn how much you're willing to sacrifice." With time, confidence followed. I notice she speaks little about achievement and more humbly on the commitment to her craft. "I still feel lucky every day," she says simply. "Everyone can dance. I just managed to make a career out of it."

Nora's debut leading role came suddenly as Juliet, the principal ballerina injured mid-run. "I didn't have time to be worried," she recalls. "You just take your first leap and pray the hours of practice will pay off." They did. And from there momentum increased. Invitations arrived and before long she was performing on stages across Europe and the Americas. But one moment stands apart. Years after first watching Giselle at the Festival Ballet, Nora found herself sharing a studio with none other than Markova herself, rehearsing with the woman who had unknowingly set her life in motion. "It was surreal," she admits, shaking her head slightly. "Life's funny that way." Markova, she remembers, was austere but gracious, precise in gesture but expansive in spirit.

On impulse, she reaches for the ballet programme separating us, its edges soft with sentimentality: it's clear how attached she is to the flimsy pamphlet. "You realise how much of a life is made out of paper and memory," she says softly. When retirement arrived, it brought a period of recalibration. As a teacher, she found a new way of listening to different bodies, with familiar anxieties and ambitions, passing on her discipline and curiosity.

She pauses, returning to that first introduction. "I think about the little girl sometimes, watching that magical performance of Giselle. In a way, I'll always be chasing that feeling." Outside, the traffic below finally eases as I realise I've been speaking to Dame Nora now for well over two hours (we'd only agreed one with her manager). On cue, her stressed assistant enters the room to whisk her away, Nora gathers her coat and handbag and leaves for her next appointment, step by measured step.

I was drawn to the ballet programme on a personal level. I've always collected ephemera from performances, returning to them with a quiet sense of distance—time having moved on. They resurface like fragments of a former self; I revisit them not only to remember the performance, but to reconnect with who I was then. This sense of contained history drew me to the item. Its delicate paper and rusted staples feel fugitive and fragile—something made to be held briefly, then discarded.

Through my pages, I explore how a simple programme can hold the beginning of a life in art. Through Nora, I trace how an early encounter with dance becomes formative and enduring. A first experience of art—especially in an impressionable mind—can alter a person's direction in life. I'm drawn to the gap between what the programme presents and what it cannot capture. Ballet is fleeting, while the programme attempts to fix it in word and image. In that space, audiences make meaning and carry it forward. A fictional interview format reflects the act of looking back, where memory is shaped and revisited. It creates immediacy and distance, imagining the lived experience behind the object—something personal yet open-ended.

A SPECIMEN OF

DISPLAY LETTERS

DESIGNED FOR THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN 1951

My interest in analogue typography meant that I was immediately drawn to this Festival of Britain Type Specimen. My granddad collated folders and folders of found type from buildings, newspapers and other ephemera, and so I grew up surrounded by modernist type. This specimen shows just how much the graphic design world has changed over the past 75 years; physical type specimens don't really exist anymore, and we very rarely consume type that hasn't been digitised in some way, even in print media.

I was particularly interested in how this specimen was made for architects as well as designers. Type in architecture often feels like an afterthought nowadays, but if you look at modernist buildings from the '50s and '60s, it's clear that great care was taken to select interesting and fitting typefaces for buildings.

The specimen also states that the purpose of the book was to provide a basis for 'individual ingenuity' and 'inventiveness', encouraging users to think outside the box and not feel they have to conform to the exact typefaces on display. So, I have taken the italic typeface from this book and embellished it in 26 different ways to make a decorative alphabet. Each letter was drawn entirely by hand to emphasise the importance of analogue making techniques in a digital age.

by Eliza Wright



A B C D

E F G H I

J K L M

N O P Q

R S T U V

W X Y Z

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