



Association of  
Performing Arts  
Collections

## History of APAC

The Association of Performing Arts Collections was founded in 1979 as the Theatre Information Group London, an informal network of librarians who met to exchange information about theatre resources.

In the 1980s, member meetings took place in London, usually hosted by the British Theatre Association or the Theatre Museum. Both institutions had standing agenda items at which they reported on their activities. A Chair and a Secretary were appointed for each meeting. Initiatives around theatre resources were a frequent topic in this decade, such as the Library Association's working party on theatre research and the International Theatre Bibliography.

In 1985, the group became the UK National Centre of SIBMAS, the International Association of Libraries, Museums, Archives, and Documentation Centres of the Performing Arts. The group was officially known as SIBMAS/UK, although its earlier name was still used informally. Members wanted to be affiliated with an international organisation, and their entire subscription fee went to SIBMAS.

By 1988, the group had 42 members: 16 institutions in London; 19 institutions outside the capital, including two in Scotland and one in Wales; and 7 individuals, including one in Northern Ireland.

At its ten-year anniversary, the group re-evaluated its operation. In May 1989, it changed its name to the Theatre Information Group (TIG). By the end of the year, it decided to move from being an informal network to become a formal organisation with an executive committee. The re-structuring included the aims to broaden the range of members who hosted meetings, to hold at least one meeting a year outside London, and to provide an agenda item at which all members could report on their activities. This became known as the 'newsround'.

The first Annual General Meeting was held on 5 May 1990 and a committee elected. Headed paper with a playbill-style logo was introduced, and the Theatre Museum became TIG's postal address. Membership fees were raised slightly above the SIBMAS

subscription rates to provide a small surplus for TIG's running costs. (Membership numbered around 50.)

In 1990, Glyndebourne Opera and the Shakespeare Centre, Stratford, hosted the first regional meetings. Broadening the range of venues added a popular new element to member meetings: a tour of the host institution.

Also in 1990, TIG held its first conference, Publishing for the Performing Arts. This was followed by a study day on theatrical databases (1991), a conference on video archives (1992), and a study day on charging and copyright (1993).

The group's first constitution was ratified in 1993. It stated that 'TIG operates as the UK national centre' of SIBMAS, but that 'SIBMAS has no control over TIG, which is an autonomous body'. For three decades, the UK was the largest and best organised national branch of SIBMAS. Over the years, several APAC members have served on the SIBMAS executive committee.

By 1994, membership had reached 67. It was decided to offer a conference every other year, alternating with the biennial SIBMAS conference. Conferences were subsequently held on charging and management strategies (1995), theatre and the internet (1997, held jointly with the Society for Theatre Research's Northern Group), and profile-raising (1999).

The late 1990s introduced the practice of inviting a speaker to member meetings to talk on a current issue. Talks in this period ranged across Heritage Lottery Fund applications, the Data Protection Act, the Performing Arts Data Service, the Shakespeare web portal Touchstone, and the British Library's report into retroversion of paper catalogues.

In 2001, in conjunction with the Society for Dance Research, TIG set up an email discussion forum. The listserv provided an easy means of communication among members and is still in use.

In 2002, it was decided to move away from conferences and offer an annual study day because practical workshops were more useful to members. The early 2000s saw study days on legal issues (2002), the new copyright legislation (2003), and managing multimedia collections (2004).

In 2005, the group became the UK's Subject Specialist Network (SSN) for performing arts and received the first of three SSN grants from MLA (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council). This allowed TIG to carry out a feasibility study for a national performance database. With a second grant in 2007, TIG developed a prototype of the database.

After a hiatus in the mid 2000s, the annual study day resumed on the topics of oral history (2009), photography (2010), and costumes (2011).

In 2009, TIG's first website was launched under the auspices of the Collections Trust, which offered standardised websites for SSNs. In 2010, TIG received its third SSN grant from MLA to migrate records from the defunct Backstage website into Culture Grid. The UK Theatre Collections dataset launched in 2011 (and taken offline after Culture Grid closed in 2015).

In 2012, TIG received the first of three SSN grants from Arts Council England, funding the creation of a new website. With the launch of the website, TIG changed its name to the Association of Performing Arts Collections (APAC) and extended its geographic brief to include members from the Republic of Ireland.

APAC's first event under its new name was the 2012 SIBMAS conference, 'Best Practice! Innovative Techniques for Performing Arts Collections, Libraries and Museums', held at the V&A Museum.

The second and third SSN grants from Arts Council England funded study days on theatrical prints (2013) and film/video (2014) as well as the 2015 symposium. The grants meant that APAC members could attend free of charge, and since then, free registration at APAC events has been a member benefit.

In the early 2010s, the 'newsround' at the member meetings was re-evaluated because it could be unwieldy, and in 2015, it was dropped as a standing agenda item. This coincided with the 2014 launch of APAC's bi-annual newsletter, Twitter feed, and Facebook page, all of which allow members to disseminate their news. A monthly blog, written by members, was introduced on the website in 2016.

In 2015, membership hit a high of 92. Also that year, APAC formed a working group on digital preservation to which any interested member may belong.

Since 2015, APAC has held two events annually: a symposium and a study day. Symposia have addressed collection users and researchers (2015, 2017, 2019), volunteers (2016), and new approaches to performance collections (2018). Study days have covered costumes (2015), partnerships (2016), anniversaries (2017), digitisation and born-digital materials (2018), and collections' contexts within their institutions (2019).

In the 2010s, some member meetings had a special focus, such as authorities (2014), the Shakespeare 400 anniversary (2015), copyright (2015), and theatre programmes (2019). Presentations by external speakers included Art Council England's plans for Subject Specialist Networks, Collections Trust's online projects, Archive Service Accreditation, the AusStage performance database, and Digital Drama's online museum project.

In 2016, APAC restructured its relationship with SIBMAS to offer members a choice of joining APAC only (National membership) or joining both associations (International

membership). For the first time in its history, dedicated membership fees have provided APAC with an annual budget.

In 2018, APAC became a registered charity and an Affiliate Group of the Archives & Records Association of the UK and Ireland (ARA). It also recorded its highest number of members: 95. In 2019 APAC celebrated its 40th anniversary.