



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Valerie French papers

1916-1990

*T-Mss 2012-034

Compiled by Robyn Hjermsstad, 2014

Summary

Creator: French, Valerie, 1932-1990

Title: Valerie French papers

Date: 1916-1990

Size: 2.3 linear feet (7 boxes, 1 oversized folder)

Source: Unknown donor, 1991.

Abstract: Valerie French (d.1990) was a British film, television, and stage actress. The collection dates from 1916 to 1990 and documents her personal and professional life through clippings, programs, correspondence, scrapbooks, photographs, and posters.

Access: Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult:
<https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

Conditions Governing Access:

Inquiries regarding audiovisual materials in the collection may be directed to the Billy Rose Theatre Division (theatrediv@nypl.org). Audiovisual materials will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

Conditions Governing Use: The author/creator retains copyright of materials. For information on obtaining permission to publish, contact the Theatre Division at theatrediv@nypl.org.

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Processing note: Compiled by Robyn Hjermsstad, 2014

Creator History

Valerie French (d.1990) was a British film, television, and stage actress. Born Valerie Harrison in London, England, French attended Malvern Girls' College in Worcestershire. In 1951 she made her stage debut in *Treasure Hunt* at the Theatre Royal in Windsor. French's early career was marked by her popularity as a young starlet who was frequently photographed attending show premieres and parties in London during the early 1950s. In 1954, she made her film debut in *Maddalena*, and the following year she was hired as a contract actress for Columbia Pictures. After moving to the United States in 1955, French acted in several western films in Hollywood, such as *Jubal* (1956), *The Hard Man* (1957), and *Decision at Sundown* (1957).

French had roles in several television series throughout her career, appearing in over twenty shows between 1953 and 1982. During the 1950s and 1960s she acted in multiple episodes of *The Edge of Night*, *Alcoa Theatre*, and *Have Gun-Will Travel*. French's stage career took off in the 1960s; her Broadway credits include *Inadmissible Evidence* (1965), *Help Stamp Out Marriage!* (1966), and *A Taste of Honey* (1981).

Valerie French was married and divorced twice, first to playwright and screenwriter Michael Pertwee in 1952, and later to actor Thayer David. She died of leukemia in 1990.

Scope and Content Note

The Valerie French papers date from 1916 to 1990 and document her personal and professional life through clippings, programs, correspondence, scrapbooks, photographs, and posters. The majority of the collection consists of production files that hold clippings and programs from the 1960s to the 1970s, and photograph albums that document her childhood and personal life.

Correspondence is primarily composed of fan letters and opening night greetings from friends, fans, and colleagues. The letters praise her television work in *The Nurses* (1966) and *The Edge of the Night* (1974), as well as her performance in *The Mother Lover* (1969). Requests for photographs or biographical information are also present. Some letters are attached to handwritten notes on French's performances. Other correspondence relates to arbitration against the Lakewood Theatre with respect to the loss of French's personal items in a fire at the theater.

The collection holds files on French's second husband, actor Thayer David. They contain headshots, production stills, resumes, clippings documenting shows he was in, his obituary, and the couple's marriage certificate. There is one publicity file on French that holds headshots, resumes, and articles.

The production files primarily document French's stage acting career from the 1960s to the 1970s. Some productions are represented more thoroughly than others, though files usually only contain newspaper reviews and programs. Broadway shows represented include *Inadmissible Evidence* (1965), *Help Stamp Out Marriage!* (1966), and *The Mother Lover* (1969). Off-Broadway and regional productions include *Tea Party* (1968), *Trelawney of the Wells* (1970), *Sherlock Holmes* (1976), and *John Gabriel Borkman* (1977). *Jubal* is represented through a third revised draft of the script with production stills in addition to reviews and advertisements.

The majority of the photographs in the collection document French's personal life and childhood. They are compiled into photograph albums and several of the pages are labeled. Images of French with her parents and sister in casual settings at home and on family trips are numerous. Her first marriage to Michael Pertwee in 1952 is represented through wedding, honeymoon, and casual photographs of friends and family. One photograph album covers French's time at Malvern Girls' College.

Two scrapbooks are present. One documents her early success as a fashionable starlet through clippings from 1953 to 1954; and the other was created by French's mother, Muriel Smith Harrison. It contains drawings, watercolors, poems, and short stories. The collection also holds posters for plays French acted in, such as *The Time of the Barracudas* (1963), *Children! Children!* (1972), and *A Taste of Honey* (1981).

Six videocassettes and three film reels are present. Inquiries regarding audiovisual materials in the collection may be directed to the Billy Rose Theatre Division (theatrediv@nypl.org). Audiovisual materials will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged alphabetically by format or person. Production files are arranged alphabetically by title.

Key Terms

Occupations

Actresses

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Clippings (information artifacts)

Photographs

Scrapbooks

Subjects

Theater -- England

Theater -- United States

Western films

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1-7 Correspondence 1957-1989
- b. 1 f. 8-10 David, Thayer 1960-1978
 - b. 5 f. 1 David, Thayer 1961
Photograph from *Twelfth Night* in Princeton, New Jersey.
- b. 1 f. 11 French, Valerie--Publicity 1954-1990
Photographs
 - o. 1 1923
LPA C12 Dwr #19.
- b. 6 f. 1-3 1926-1937
- b. 2 f. 1-5 1935-1970
- b. 7 f. 1-2 1937-1940
- b. 5 f. 4 1951-1952
 - o. 1 Posters 1963-1981
LPA C12 Dwr #19.
Production Files
- b. 2 f. 6 *Alphabetical Order* 1976
- b. 2 f. 7 *Cockles and Champagne* 1954
- b. 2 f. 8 *Finn Mackool, the Grand Distraction* 1975
- b. 2 f. 9-10 *Help Stamp Out Marriage!* 1966, 1972
- b. 2 f. 11 *Henry V* 1976
- b. 2 f. 12 *Inadmissible Evidence* 1965
- b. 2 f. 13 *John Gabriel Borkman* 1977
Jubal
- b. 2 f. 14 1955-1956
- b. 3 f. 1 1956-1957
- b. 5 f. 2 1956-1957
- b. 3 f. 2 *The Lover* 1971
- b. 3 f. 3 Miscellaneous Productions 1958-1976
- b. 3 f. 4 *The Mother Lover* 1969
- b. 3 f. 5 *Shalako* 1968
- b. 3 f. 6 *Sherlock Holmes* 1975-1976
- b. 3 f. 7 *A Shot in the Dark* 1962
- b. 3 f. 8 *Studs Edsel* 1974
- b. 3 f. 9 *Suddenly at Home* 1973
- b. 4 f. 1 *The Tea Party* 1968
- b. 4 f. 2 *Trelawney of the Wells* 1970
- b. 4 f. 3 *The Wayward Stork* 1964
- b. 7 f. 3 Scrapbook 1916-1937
- b. 5 f. 3 Scrapbook 1953-1954