

The Friends of Highgate Library present



View of St Ann's church across the meadows in Baroness Angela Burdett Coutts' Holly Lodge estate

A pop-up play about the great 19th century philanthropist who owned the original Holly Lodge estate. Come and take a part if you wish, or simply enjoy the dramatic events of her life unfolding. The event will be led by local founders of 'domestic theatre', Beth Shaw and Martin Bould

www.dartmouthpark.org/FOHL/events

ANGELA BURDETT COUTTS, EMPRESS OF HOLLY LODGE

A pop up play for the Friends of Highgate Library, 6th June 2013
by Beth Shaw and Martin Bould, authors of *The Domestic Theatre Handbook*

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The Domestic Theatre Handbook contains an A-Z of plays ready to photocopy and use in your own home, garden or community. It is published by Just Press and is available from the publishers www.justpress.co.uk for £18 plus postage and packing (£4) or directly from the authors at a special price of £15 (email FOHL@dartmouthpark.org and we will put you in touch with them).

LIST OF PARTS

Napoleon, an emperor

Sir Francis Burdett, radical MP then Tory

London Poor

Duke of Wellington (the Iron Duke), general, prime minister

Queen Victoria, Empress of India

Thomas Coutts, banker

Susannah Coutts, first wife of Thomas, grandmother of Angela

Harriot Mellon, Irish actress, second wife of Thomas Coutts, later Duchess of St Albans

Child Angela - Angela Burdett, step grand-daughter to Harriot, Duchess of St Albans – later Angela Burdett Coutts

Hannah, **Mrs Brown**, governess then companion to Angela Burdett Coutts

Solicitor

Angela Burdett Coutts, philanthropist, heiress, and daughter of Sir Francis Burdett

Sister 1 and **Sister 2**, daughters of Sir Frances, sisters of Angela Burdett

Richard Dunn, Irish lawyer who stalked Angela Burdett Coutts

Louis Napoleon, later Napoleon III of France, nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte

Charles Dickens, novelist

David Livingstone, Scottish explorer

The White Rajah of Sarawak, Sir James Brooke, adventurer

Ashmead Bartlett, secretary then husband to Angela. Took name Ashmead Bartlett Burdett Coutts and served as MP for Westminster

General Gordon, George Gordon, British soldier and hero, suppressed rebellions in China and Sudan before returning to Sudan to put down the Mahdi rebellion, and died in the siege of Khartoum

The Mahdi, Muhammad Ahmad bin Abd Allah, religious leader who led uprising against Turco-Egyptian rule in Sudan.

Local historian

In the fight with Napoleon, audience shout 'Come on Wellington' and 'Put the boot in'. At the end, audience sing a song (adapted from an original by Linda Lee:

Angela Burdett Coutts, you have left your mark
Miss Coutts, industrious maid of Dartmouth Park
Your philanthropy always raised a cheer
Miss Coutts, never fear
Your legacy is clear.

But step in the Duke of Wellington, arch-Tory
To bring some action to our story.

Enter Wellington

Wellington In comes I to defeat Napoleon
 And enable the British Empire to carry on.
 The poor and the French make me puke –
 I'm not Nigel Farage, I'm the Iron Duke.

Napoleon It's 1815, the Battle of Waterloo –
 I was challenged by your derring-do.
 But till now I didn't meet you face to face
 So let's have a fight in this library space.

Napoleon draws sword

Wellington You're a genius but I'm not overawed.
 Venez, monsieur, unsheathe your sword.

Wellington draws sword and fights Napoleon. Audience shout 'Come on Wellington' and 'Put the boot in'.

London Poor This is better than a cockfight
 Pity it's just a mock fight.

Wellington wins the fight

Napoleon Zut! I've lost. I'm a has-been-er
 So I'll sail off to St Helena.
 When more of the nineteenth century's occurred
 You'll meet my nephew, Louis Napoleon – the Third.

Exeunt Napoleon and London Poor

Wellington Phew, exercise takes it out of me
 I'd better rest after such activity.
 As every day I'm getting older
 Celebrity's got tough for this old soldier.

I'll retreat after my moment of glory
And return later in the story.
First, meet the woman that Empire has anointed
It's Queen Victoria – you won't be disappointed.

Exit Wellington. Enter Queen Victoria

Queen Victoria I come in to symbolise the century
 But for those not privileged? – it's 'No Entry'.

My life runs parallel to Angela Burdett Coutts –
So close, you'd think we're in cahoots.

But how many of you knew
Her granddad lent us money too.
He bankrolls our imperial dreams
Come in Thomas Coutts, with your banking schemes.

Enter Thomas Coutts

Thomas Coutts In comes I, a canny Scot, who made a packet
Before the banking game became a racket.
Yes, I'm Thomas Coutts, founder of Coutts Bank
Friend and creditor to the highest rank.
From my home at 59, The Strand
I serve the wealthiest in the land.

Exit Queen Victoria. Thomas Coutts remains on stage

ACT 2 THE INHERITANCE OF HOLLY LODGE (1820s and 30s)

Thomas Coutts But here we start the story of Holly Lodge
It all began as a lovers' dodge.
Long ago, scandalously, I married Susannah, my brother's maid...

Enter Susannah Coutts

Susannah Coutts He liked my fresh country manner, he said.
I bore him four sons who sadly died
But also three daughters who luckily thrived.
With such a very fertile womb
I fear I've rather lost my bloom.

Exit Susannah Coutts

Thomas Coutts The eldest, Sophia, wed Sir Francis Burdett
Who was then as radical as you can get.
Six children were their union's fruits
But which one of them would inherit Coutts?

Meanwhile I became a 'stage door Tommy':
I loved the theatrical bonhomie.
There was one whose charms I simply fell on
A young Irish actress called Harriot Mellon.
I was just an aged financier
I couldn't help but fancy her.

Enter Harriot Mellon

Harriot Mellon Yes, I'm Harriot, ending in OT
Some would say I'm OTT.
Thomas fell for my glamour and youth
But we share great affection, in truth.
To be sure there's an age gap
But he can put me on society's map.

Thomas Coutts I have an invalid wife. Marriage must wait.
For that purpose, I'll buy you a country estate
Our love may have to be out of town
But from Holly Lodge we can look down
On London, spread out like a postcard –
It's just lucky we can't see the Shard.

Harriot Mellon Though I love parties and the luxurious life
I'll still prove a devoted wife.

Thomas Coutts Yes, in 1815 my wife Susannah passes on
So I secretly marry the actress Harriot Mellon
Who had been seven years waiting in the wings
At Holly Lodge taking charge of things.

Harriot Mellon I refurbished the house and planted the park;
On the landscape I made my mark.
I put a treehouse on the lawn
Where we could go to watch the dawn.

Thomas Coutts When I die in 1822
I'll leave my fortune all to you.
I trust in your powers of observation
To pick the heir to the best bank in the nation.

Exit Thomas Coutts

Harriot Mellon For the next fifteen years
I use my eyes, I use my ears:
I watch over the Coutts inheritance
To consider who will take over its governance.
I overwhelm my step grandchildren with largesse
Here comes one, with her governess.

Enter child Angela and Mrs Brown

Child Angela I am Angela Burdett as a child
Polite and modest, never wild.

My brother's useless, father's away on business –
There's no strong male in this family mess.

Hannah, Mrs Brown I'm the governess, faithful Hannah
Who cares for you in a devoted manner.
I'm giggly and opinionated
But nobody is more dedicated.

I'll raise you in Christian piety
Even if your father doesn't know sobriety.

Exeunt child Angela and Mrs Brown

Harriot Mellon Though I've become a society lady
I never forget the poverty that made me
I do charity but of the showy kind
Which leaves a sorry muddle behind.

Meanwhile a woman must have her fun
So I marry the young Duke of St Albans.
I exit to be Duchess on the Holly Lodge Estate,
Have lots of parties, and an annual fete
On the anniversary of our marriage boon –
Every year on the sixteenth of June.

Enter Sir Francis Burdett and Queen Victoria

Sir Francis Burdett We return to take up this narration
In a momentous year for our nation:
We're in summer 1837
When Harriot dies and goes to heaven.

(Exit Harriot)

Sir Francis Burdett Young Victoria's just on the throne
And all my children now have grown.
The youngest Angela is twenty three
Plain, serious, full of energy.

Queen Victoria As we enter my era
The Coutts bequest comes ever nearer.
The family gathers to hear Harriot's will
Who will get the bank and the house on the hill?

Sir Francis Burdett As my son married abroad
It's certain he'll never get the Coutts hoard.

Exeunt Sir Francis Burdett and Queen Victoria. Enter Solicitor, Angela Burdett Coutts, Mrs Brown (her companion), Sister 1 and Sister 2,

Solicitor The Duchess, Harriot, has made a few specific bequests
 But Miss Angela gets the rest.

Miss Angela will succeed
 And so she will become rich indeed.
 If she takes the Coutts name, and does not marry a foreigner
 The Coutts bank will come to her.
 Holly Lodge will be the Duke's for his life's duration
 In recognition of his marital station.

Sister 1 This has come as a bit of a shock –
 What about the rest of the flock?

Sister 2 She's just the youngest, it's not fair!
 What about us, where's our share?

Angela Burdett Coutts Sisters, I can see you've been left with nowt
 Don't worry, I will help you out.

 This is something very new for me
 To be given such huge responsibility.
 To Burdett I must add the name of Coutts
 And consider what to do with all my loot.

Exeunt Solicitor, Sister 1, Sister 2, Angela and Mrs Brown remain on stage

ACT 3 LIFE DECISIONS (1840s and 50s)

Enter Queen Victoria

Queen Victoria You and I stand on the threshold:
 For life, we'll enjoy wealth untold.
 My destiny is never to be amused:
 You too must feel confused?

Angela Burdett Coutts The Coutts family are still a bit snotty
 And to society, I am just rich totty.
 Is there no hope for my life
 Except to become some man's wife?

 What a task the Lord has set us
 Now we get all these begging letters.
 I'll ask my companion Hannah to assist me
 In adapting to a life of luxury.

Mrs Brown Great means demand a great cause
 Art, religion, charity – the choice is yours.

Angela Burdett Coutts My parents died, I'm full of grief –
I hope philanthropy can bring relief.

Hannah, be my helpmeet
Wherever I go you'll have a seat.
Even though you're engaged to Dr Brown
I know you won't let me down.

Mrs Brown The good Dr Brown's a patient man
So I'll support you as best I can.
We'll have to keep suitors at bay
But together, we will win the day.

Angela Burdett Coutts And I'll have a stalker, a very mad one
A wild Irish barrister, Richard Dunn.

Enter Richard Dunn

Richard Dunn In comes I, to pursue her up and down:
In church, in her street and round the town.
When she goes to Harrogate, she can't escape me
For 18 years, I'll make her life a misery,
Till 1856 when she's a nervous wreck.
Then I'll transfer my obsession to Princess Mary of Teck.

Enter Queen Victoria

Queen Victoria Bothing royalty arouses my indignation:
For that, Mr Dunn, you'll suffer incarceration.

Exit Richard Dunn and Queen Victoria

Angela Burdett Coutts With suitors we must have a strategy:
I know, we'll invite them one by one to tea
You, Hannah, leave the room and he'll propose
I'll shake my head and wrinkle my nose.

Hannah When you give a discreet lady-like cough
I'll return to the room and see them off!

Enter Louis Napoleon

Louis Napoleon Ms Coutts, I must say I like your style
I am Louis Napoleon, the imperial exile,
In Leamington Spa I'm temporarily resident
Until I can raise enough funds to make me president.
In high society, I cut a dash
Looking for an alliance with some cash.

Angela Burdett Coutts I feel a cough coming on.
Mrs Brown Au revoir, would-be emperor Louis Napoleon

Exit Louis Napoleon

Angela Burdett Coutts Yes, we'll send the suitors on their way
Then it will be as clear as day
How to use this great wealth
For the public good and the public health.

But with society so Victorian
How can I manage without a man?
I need someone out of the ordinary
To do my charitable business for me.

Enter Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens I'm Charles Dickens, the famous writer.
For the downtrodden, I'm a fighter.
Would you support my Ragged School
Where learning and diligence are the rule?

Angela Burdett Coutts Yes, but schools merely scratch the surface
Of the ground-down underclass.
Let's take all the poor and pathetic
And imbue them with the work ethic.
Let's found a home for fallen women
So in the colonies they can make a new beginning.

Dickens I'll advise you on every detail
With both our genius, it can't fail.
My admiration for you is so great
I'll set some of *David Copperfield* in Highgate.

Mrs Brown Despite Mr Dickens' energy and charms
I fear his reputation could now bring alarms.
His wife to whom he should be devoted
Has been cast aside for an unknown motive.

Exit Dickens

Angela Burdett Coutts Perhaps the company of an elderly gallant
Can help restore my emotional balance.
Why may not a rich lady have some pleasure?
Come in, Wellington, 77 and national treasure.

Enter Wellington

Wellington I'm out of government so my time is free
To get to know Miss Coutts aged 33.
I accompany her on cultural pursuits
And on country walks in Wellington boots.

Angela Burdett Coutts Old soldier, you have my heart and mind
Because you've been so very kind.
Will you marry me and plight our troth?
I'm sure it would be best for both.

Wellington For a young woman of such good taste
You must NOT on an old man waste
The flower of youth on weak old age:
Such matrimony would be a gilded cage.

Our friendship will survive this folly
Stay as we are: it's much more jolly,
I'll retreat home to Stratfield Saye
And we can write to each other every day.

Exit Wellington

Angela Burdett Coutts I accept he's not the man for me
But will I always unmarried be?

Enter Louis Napoleon

Louis Napoleon Greetings, Mademoiselle Coutts, hello Mrs Brown
There's trouble in France, so I'm back in town.
As I am currently a royal refugee
Is there any chance you'd marry me?
I'm on my uppers – is it any wonder
That I am casting around for a funder?

Angela Burdett Coutts points towards the door. Exit Louis Napoleon

Mrs Brown Napoleon's nephew is so elegant
I wonder where his principles went?

Angela Burdett Coutts In 1849 the Duke of St Albans passed away
I got Holly Lodge but I also like Torquay,
Where Mrs Brown and I take the sea air
And enjoy the entertainments there.
The company is quite respectable
With scientists and others who are intellectual

ACT 4 IMPERIAL ADVENTURES (1860s and 70s)

Enter Queen Victoria. Angela Burdett Coutts and Mrs Brown remain on stage

Queen Victoria You're so keen to support a good cause
Why not send funds to back my wars?

Angela Burdett Coutts I'll aid the victims and the sick
And occasionally support your military shtick.
I'm also improving the Holly Lodge landscape
Which provides me with a tranquil escape.
At Holly Village I'll build in Italian style
For prosperous folk, not rank and file.
It may seem a funny thing to do:
Truth is, it's mainly to improve the view.

Mrs Brown Your charitable output has become prodigious:
Fallen women, the Irish famine, works religious.

Enter Poor of London

Angela Burdett Coutts Some say the poor shirk and skive
But my charity gives them tools to thrive:
Education, agriculture, fresh milk from goats
Training, needlework and fishing boats...

Poor of London ...Model housing and allotment plots –
These provide dignity for us poor and have-nots.
Yes, a true lady has come among us
Hail the queen of costermongers!

Angela Burdett Coutts My commitment to education will never wilt
I'll found a school where our local Community Centre is now built.
Yes, in what's now Bertram Street, it's a haven
Which in a time of cuts is well worth saving.

Queen Victoria I'll create you the first ever female baron
So you'll have your own title from now on

Poor of London We say hooray for Baroness Burdett Coutts
Even though for Victoria we don't give two hoots.

Exit Queen Victoria and the Poor of London

Angela Burdett Coutts In Torquay, refreshed by sea breezes
My attention's drawn to overseas-es
In the 1860s the Irish famines are back
So I'll send seed potatoes by the sack.

Mrs Brown My status was uncertain after Dr Brown was dead
And now I am inclined to take to my bed:
Angela, the difference in our births means that my hypochondria
Is the only way I can show I'm fond of yer.

Angela Burdett Coutts Now we hear of African expeditions
To extend Victorian imperial ambitions
Exploring sounds like loads of fun
So come in to tell us more, David Livingstone.

Enter David Livingstone

David Livingstone I'm Livingstone, keen to explore the Zambezi.
Even though travel in central Africa isn't easy,
Those fertile lands have precious metals
And I'm determined to beat all obstacles
Our great empire must seize those riches
God will help us overcome the hitches.

Mrs Brown Livingstone's on an Imperial mission
But don't squander money on his ambition

Angela Burdett Coutts Good Hannah, perhaps you lack imagination
Livingstone impresses me with his determination.

Livingstone I'll have to leave my wife Mary behind
Keep an eye on her – that will be kind.

Exit David Livingstone

Mrs Brown Alas Mary begged him not to leave her
And followed till she died of fever –
Buried under a baobab tree
Far away on the banks of the Zambezi.

Angela Burdett Coutts I feel rather guilty about poor Mary
But her sad death didn't make me wary.
Instead I underwrote another imperial debenture,
Led by another romantic adventurer.
Come in the white Rajah of Sarawak
(I wonder if I'll get my money back).

Enter Rajah of Sarawak

Rajah of Sarawak I'm the White Rajah, Sir James Brooke,
Straight out of a boys' adventure book:
I'm friends with head hunting Malaysian Dayaks
And I fend off South China piratical attacks.

Mrs Brown He'll provide us ladies of refinement
With some lively entertainment.

Rajah of Sarawak I find Mrs Brown's company calming
And the Baroness's charm is quite disarming.

In order to win my kingdom more stability
I want an heir with financial ability.
Baroness, I admire your monetary acumen
Are you prepared to fill this vacuum?

Angela Burdett Coutts Dear Sir James, how you flatter me –
But living in Sarawak would surely shatter me.

Rajah of Sarawak I admit my suggestion was audacious
You decline in a way that is very gracious.
Instead I'll go and ask my nephew
Though he won't be as good as you.

Exit Rajah of Sarawak

Angela Burdett Coutts Sarawak would have been a big mistake.

Mrs Brown I think we've had a lucky escape.
I'll go and ask cook for a pot of tea
It's been too much excitement for little me.

Mrs Brown and Angela Burdett Coutts remain on stage

ACT 5 MARRIAGE AND AFTERMATH (1880s, 90s and ending)

Angela Burdett Coutts I am now in my sixties: time flies by
How sad it is to see my friends die
Dickens first, then Livingstone
And in 1878 I lose dear Mrs Brown.

Mrs Brown Alas my sight has failed me
All the cares of life assail me.

Mrs Brown dies and exits

Angela Burdett Coutts She was first my governess and then my friend
She was loyal to the very end.
I'm utterly prostrate with grief
I hope taking a cruise will bring some relief

Enter my secretary, a handsome man
Aged 28, Mr Ashmead Bartlett, an American.

t
Enter Ashmead Bartlett

Ashmead Bartlett I am handsome and rather swanky
As befits a coming Yankee.
The baroness helped my widowed mother with my education
Then time at Oxford enhanced my reputation.
This cruise gave me a chance to know her

Romance blossomed and we got closer.

Angela Burdett Coutts As I'm alone, I depend on your presence
And admire your Yankee effervescence.

Ashmead takes Angela's hand

Ashmead Bartlett Baroness, don't let your spinsterhood drag on:
Hitch yourself to a new imperial wagon.

Angela Burdett Coutts And so I've got a man at last
I've nailed my colours to his young mast.
I have his loyalty, he spends my wealth
I am sure marriage will prolong my health.

Angela Burdett Coutts Society disapproves of this rising star
Just as they frowned at step-grandmama.

Enter Queen Victoria

Queen Victoria A thirty-year age gap takes the candle!
All the court deplores this scandal.
And there's another fact that's salient:
You'll lose the bank if you wed an alien.

Exit Queen Victoria

Ashmead Bartlett Out of honour I offered to withdraw
If marrying Angela would make her poor.
But the depth of her affection
Ensured a deal with the Coutts connection.

Angela Burdett Coutts I took a cut in income
I don't care – he's so winsome.

Ashmead Bartlett As she found she couldn't live without me
I found I enjoyed a life of luxury.

Angela Burdett Coutts For Ashmead I'll mortgage Holly Lodge estate
Coutts will offer a favourable rate.

Ashmead Bartlett While she carried on doing good
I enjoyed the Brookfield stud,
Breeding shire horses on our model farm –
Well, it kept me away from harm.

Exit Ashmead Bartlett

Angela Burdett Coutts Even though I was left with less cash
I still came across one more hero with dash
Step in General Gordon, man of daring

What are your plans and how are you faring?

Enter General Gordon

General Gordon I am off to Sudan to rescue our imperial Brits
From the hands of the rebellious Mahdi fanatics.

Angela Burdett Coutts This my final imperial cause
I'll lobby parliament to support these wars.

Exit Angela Burdett Coutts

General Gordon Now I've got to Sudan, I'll stay and fight
To a hero like me, withdrawal can't be right.

Enter the Mahdi

Mahdi I am the Mahdi of Khartoum,
Come to prefigure empire's doom.

General Gordon Military dreams are great and hardy
I say I'll defeat that Mahdi.

Mahdi About your empire I don't give tuppence

Mahdi and General Gordon fight.

General Gordon Oh no I've got my imperial come-uppance!

General Gordon loses fight.

General Gordon It was the end everyone was dreading
Death on the steps by beheading

General Gordon dies. Exit General Gordon and Mahdi. Enter Angela Burdett Coutts

Angela Burdett Coutts And so empire's lustre fades—
Soon we'll have its funeral parades.
In Holly Lodge I'll keep a quiet old age
Until it's time to quite the stage.

Enter Queen Victoria and London Poor

Queen Victoria Baroness Coutts and I lived a long time
Some unkindly say we lived past our prime.
I had nine children, she had none
But we both got a lot of good work done.
In 1901 I died and left the throne
Angela continued her good works as the lady unknown.

Exit Queen Victoria

London Poor At the Queen's funeral the cortege was escorted by her hussars
But it was Baroness Coutts who earned our hurrahs.
Come on audience, clear your throats
It was her father who campaigned for votes!

Audience cheer Angela. Enter Ashmead Bartlett

Ashmead Bartlett I took a seat in the House of Commons
Then in 1906 Angela felt death's summons.

Angela Burdett Coutts I helped the poor, I did my best
Aged 92, I go to my eternal rest.

Angela Burdett Coutts dies and exits

Ashmead Bartlett Once she had gone I could capitalise
On Holly Lodge – auctioned as my prize;
Though I sold a corner for a few cut-price pounds
So it could be donated for Highgate Library's ground.

Me? I lived on past 1920
Life was comfortable if rather empty.
As I depart, let's hear from Local History
Who can shed light on this play's mystery.

Exit Ashmead Bartlett. Enter Local Historian

Local Historian The Baroness's wealth was magnificent
But her legacy remains significant.
Now banks' profits line the dealers' pockets –
She'd have them out, like a rocket.
She showed that in a time of power and greed
We must stand up for those in need.
The nobility of spirit that she lent us
Has shaped our local schools and community centres.
Her charitable giving has a 21st century ring
Education, self-sufficiency, and that sort of thing.
Practically there's not much left: model houses and some gates
But as a woman she was one of the greats.

London Poor Queen Victoria has statues and the V & A museum
And on the Isle of Wight, a mausoleum –
But Miss Coutts has no monument, that is wrong
So let's remember her with a song:

Audience and all sing Angela Burdett Coutts, you have left your mark
Miss Coutts, industrious maid of Dartmouth Park
Your philanthropy always raised a cheer

Miss Coutts, never fear
Your legacy is clear.

Local historian

So if you enjoyed our feisty tale
Our *Domestic Theatre Handbook's* here for sale.
Such fun can be had for 15 pound
Buy one and spread some joy around.
Remember: it's theatre in your garden and home,
And the best entertainment is what's home-grown.

End

More scripts are available in

