

## Look Who's Back: Dracula Returns to Derby

**-This year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Count Dracula's first ever appearance on stage.**

**-Derby hosted the play's world premiere on 15 May 1924, before it moved to the West End and then on to Broadway - where Bela Lugosi made the part his own.**

**-Derby will now host a 14 month long programme of highly creative, imaginative and eye-catching events and activities.**

Derby might not be the first place you would immediately associate with Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

Yet this is the city where the first-ever theatrical adaptation of Stoker's novel was staged, and where the renowned actor Bela Lugosi finally decided to put a metaphorical stake through the heart of the Count Dracula he helped to create.

As "home" to two former theatres with major connections to one of English literature's most infamous characters, Derby is understandably keen to mark the centenary of the world premiere of the first ever licensed adaptation of *Dracula*.

Derby's Grand Theatre, which once stood on Babington Lane, was the site of the world premiere of Hamilton Deane's adaptation of *Dracula*, on 15 May 1924. Bela Lugosi, the Hungarian-American actor who played the role in the 1931 film, visited Derby in 1951 to star in a revival of the play at the Hippodrome Theatre.

The University of Derby has been awarded £100,000 funding by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), for a 14-month-long project, in partnership with Derby Museums, Sheffield Hallam University and Bournemouth University.

Dr Matthew Cheeseman, Associate Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Derby, is leading the team - which is now helping to raise awareness of Derby's connections with the world's most famous vampire - and which also includes the city's tourism office, VisitDerby.

He explains: "While Whitby has long been associated with the *Dracula* of Bram Stoker's novel, Derby is the birthplace of the character's journey from monster to international cultural superstar. When the curtain went up, the Derby *Dracula* was suave and charming, wearing evening dress and an opera cloak. This is the character that was adapted by Hollywood and took over the world."

When the play itself opened its three-night run in Derby in 1924, Bram Stoker's widow, Florence, was in the audience. The production went on to enjoy a successful tour in England after the Derby world premiere.

The original stage version of *Dracula* eventually reached the West End, in 1927, with a revised version of the play - starring Bela Lugosi in his first major English-speaking role - being staged on Broadway later that year.

The stage play returned to the UK in 1951, in the hope of once again making it to the West End. The producers had been able to persuade Lugosi to play Count *Dracula*, and the production reached Derby on 17 September at The Hippodrome. Lugosi - 68-years-old, exhausted, in low spirits - made the decision while playing at the Hippodrome in Derby to withdraw from the play. The tour ended the following month.

In this, the centenary year of the first stage performance ever of *Dracula*, Derby - already dubbed the 'dead centre of England', for having more ghosts than most other cities in the

country - is now set to “celebrate” all-things Dracula with a 14 month long programme of highly creative, imaginative and eye-catching events and activities.

Events and workshops will be taking place across the city throughout this year and into 2025, with plenty of opportunities for the public to be involved and shape the way Dracula’s connections with the city are promoted.

Among the first events will be two talks hosted by Derby Museums, on 23 and 24 May, by Dacre Stoker, great grandnephew of Bram Stoker, on the influences and legacy of the novel. Dr Cheeseman will also be delivering [a talk on 30 May](#) as part of Derby Book Festival, exploring how the charming ‘Derby Dracula’ conquered the world.

As a result, Derby is now expected to establish itself as a must-visit destination for Dracula enthusiasts, and literary tourists more generally.

For details of some of the initial events and activities scheduled for the coming months, visit <https://www.visitderby.co.uk/ideas-and-inspiration/articles/dracula-returns-to-derby>.

And further information about visiting Derby can be found at <https://www.visitderby.co.uk>.

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#### **EDITORS’ NOTES**

Dracula Returns to Derby is a research project led by the University of Derby in partnership with Derby Museums, Derby Theatre, Bournemouth University and Sheffield Hallam University, and working with The Dracula Society, Derby Book Festival, Derby City Council, Cathedral and St Peters Quarter, Derby QUAD, Thrivemind Village and Writing East Midlands.