

Dracula Returns To Derby – The Hidden History of Derby and the World’s Most Famous Vampire

The iconic image of Dracula was born at Derby’s Grand Theatre in 1924. His cloak, evening dress, and even his charming manner all stem from Hamilton Deane’s stage adaptation of Bram Stoker’s novel.

Hamilton Deane had a long association with Derby, first arriving in the early 1920s and building a reputation as a talented actor before establishing his own company. Deane made sure to produce a play in Derby every year, premiering it at the Grand Theatre on Babington Lane before taking it on tour across the country. In 1924, he made the bold decision to adapt *Dracula*—a feat that Bram Stoker himself had attempted, but never successfully brought to the stage.

Deane secured the theatrical rights from Florence Stoker and wrote the play in just a month. Initially, he cast himself as Dracula before deciding Van Helsing had the better lines. After its national success, Deane went on to produce *Frankenstein* and perform as Sherlock Holmes, demonstrating his uncanny ability to capture the public imagination.

As an actor, Deane performed at The Palais de Danse (formerly on The Corn Market) and The Hippodrome on Green Lane. He also raised funds for Derby Hospitals, the cenotaph in Derby Market Place, and was even invited to stand for election as a Derby MP. The local newspapers documented his every move, dubbing him ‘Derby’s Magnet’ and ‘Derby’s Favourite Actor.’

From Derby, Deane gave *Dracula* to the world. He set the play in the present day, a tradition that many later adaptations followed. The character’s 1920s evening dress and opera cloak all originate from Deane’s production, which toured nationally before enjoying a long West End run. Deane later collaborated with John L. Balderston on a Broadway adaptation, where a Hungarian actor named Bela Lugosi was cast as Dracula. Hollywood took notice, and Deane received a writing credit for Tod Browning’s hugely influential 1931 Universal Pictures production.

Hamilton Deane’s pioneering vision continues to shape the Dracula legend today, from Christopher Lee’s Hammer Horror films to Adam Sandler’s animated Dracula in *Hotel Transylvania*. Even Sesame Street’s Count Von Count—based on Bela Lugosi—owes a debt to Deane’s work. Recognising Derby’s role in Dracula’s history, Bela Lugosi made sure to visit the city in 1951, performing *Dracula* at the Derby Hippodrome in what became the best-selling nights of the UK revival tour.

Visitors to Derby can explore several sites linked to the Dracula story, including:

- The Grand Theatre on Babington Lane, once visited by Bram Stoker in 1904.
- The site of the first stage adaptation, The Derby Hippodrome, where Bela Lugosi performed the role in 1951.
- The Palais de Danse on The Corn Market.
- The War Memorial in Derby Market Place.
- Darley Fields (now Darley Park), where Hamilton Deane and his company camped during the 1924 run.

As part of [Dracula Returns to Derby](#), an AHRC-funded project exploring Derby's Dracula connections, the city will host a series of events between March and May 2025, including:

- **Dracula Returns**, a four-day conference and celebration.
- A new **Dracula exhibition at Pickford's House**, produced by Derby Museums.
- A **Dracula-themed city guide and publication**.
- A **new mural where visitors can step into Dracula's opera cloak**.

For more details, click here: [Dracula Returns to Derby](#).