

Early Theatre

**2023 Prize for Best Theatre History Essay, Volumes 24-25
Honourable Mention**

Oliver W. Gerland III

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‘The Introduction of Admission Fees in London:
Fencing Prizes, Bearbaiting Arenas, and Speculative Origins’

Early Theatre 24.2 (2021), 9–30

<https://doi.org/10.12745/et.24.2.4177>

Gerland’s article excavates the history of admissions fees, long considered a crucial marker of differences between early English nonprofessional and professional theatres. Examining evidence for collection of entrance fees across a range of performative entertainments — fencing, animal-baiting, plays, and interludes — the essay pursues vexed questions about the origins of admission fees for performative entertainments, which Gerland locates in the pre-Reformation practices of shrine-keeping, suppressed upon the dissolution of the monasteries. The essay’s detailed account of similarities between collecting offerings at religious shrines and fees for theatrical admission raises fascinating questions about the impact of religious change upon the development of commercial theatre in early modern England.