Ink well

Place of origin: Great Britain (made)
Date: ca.1901 (made)
Artist/Maker: Unknown (maker)
Materials and Techniques: Moulded and painted white metal, with a clear glass inkwell
Museum number: S.14-2001
Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description
This unusual object is a souvenir inkwell in the shape of the much-loved music hall and pantomime performer Dan Leno (1860-1904). The hinged head section opens to reveal a glass ink well. Leno is dressed as Sister Anne, the role he played in the pantomime Blue Beard by J. Hickory Wood and Arthur Collins at Drury Lane Theatre, 27 December 1901. Manufactured as a souvenir, its production bears witness to Leno's enormous popularity.

Leno was born George Galvin in London, the son of the music hall singers known as Mr and Mrs Wilde. After his father's death, his mother married William Grant, whose stage name was Leno, and Dan Leno appeared at the age of four with his brother Jack and his uncle Johnny Danvers, dancing in public houses all over England. By the age of 18 Dan was a champion clog-dancer and was engaged by George Conquest with Danvers for pantomime at London's Surrey Theatre. In 1889 he went to Drury Lane Theatre where he excelled as pantomime Dame, returning for several years as Sister Anne, and Widow Twankey. He continued to appear in music hall where he specialised in long rambling anecdotes of incidents involving himself and his family. In 1901 he performed for King Edward VII at Sandringham, after which he was dubbed 'the King's Jester'.

Descriptive line
Souvenir painted metal ink well in the form of the music hall and pantomime star Dan Leno (1860-1904) dressed as Sister Anne in the 1901 Drury Lane pantomime, Blue Beard.

Physical description
Painted metal souvenir inkwell in the form of the head and shoulders of the music-hall and pantomime star, Dan Leno (George Galvin 1860-1904), dressed for the Dame role of Sister Anne. The modelled image of Leno is behind an open book, which forms the base of the ink well, upon whose open pages are painted the name Dan Leno in copperplate lettering. Leno's face is painted in an ivory tone paint, and his dress is a brown base, with a squared yellow pattern and a green ruffled collar, trimmed with an orange painted rose. His painted black hair, some of which is drawn up into a bun on the top of his head, is modelled and painted as if decorated with a green ribbon around the bun, while two plaits are modelled as if fastened together with a bow at the centre of his back. At this point there is a hinge, allowing the head section to tip backwards, revealing a hollow in which sits a small clear glass inkwell.

Dimensions
Height: 12.5 cm closed, Width: 7 cm, Depth: 8.8 cm, Height: 8 cm open

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Object history note
Dan Leno, a much-loved music hall and pantomime performer, made his name as a clog dancer in his early career, and later as a performer of Dame roles in pantomimes at the Surrey Theatre, and at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. The role of sister Anne in Blue Beard, by J. Hickory Wood and Arthur Collins, Drury Lane Theatre, 27 December 1901, became one of his most famous roles. This ink well may have been produced while Blue Beard was running the theatre, or later as a souvenir of Leno after his early death in 1904.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O56423/ink-well-unknown/