EARLY MUSIC HALL IN BRISTOL

by KATHLEEN BARKER

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BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
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Early Music Hall in Bristol is the forty-fourth pamphlet to be published by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association. Miss Kathleen Barker is the author of *The Theatre Royal, Bristol,* 1766-1966. She has already contributed three pamphlets to this series, one of which is now in its third edition. Her recent book *Bristol at Play* may be obtained from the Society for Theatre Research, 14 Woronzow Road, London NW8 6QE, price £2.25 post free.

The Branch regrets that owing to rising costs it is necessary to increase the cost of this pamphlet to 60p. It will be difficult to avoid a further increase in the next year. The Branch appeals to all readers to help the work by persuading others to buy the pamphlets, by placing standing orders for future productions and by making donations.

The pamphlets may be obtained from most Bristol booksellers, from the shop in the City Museum, from the Porters' Lodges in the Wills Memorial Building and the Senate House, or direct from Peter Harris, 74 Bell Barn Road, Stoke Bishop, Bristol 9. A list of pamphlets still in print will be found on the inside back cover.

Wine is a thing
That makes a body sing —
Pass round the bottle and start . . .

(*Hooray for Daisy,* Theatre Royal, 1959)

In this spirit was music hall born, in Bristol as elsewhere; in the taverns and the randier eating houses, at the Pleasure Gardens where song and dance accompanied *al fresco* refreshment. The first trace of organised entertainment in a Bristol public house comes in 1786, when the proprietor of the Old Trout Tavern in Cherry Lane off Stokes Croft advertised "Comus' Court" to be held on 6 June, when

> The Gentlemen of the original Catch-Club, Castle-Ditch, have generously offered their kind Assistance for that Night only . . .
>
> N.B. This Evening is intended to be chearful and harmonious, with Variety of SONGS by Mr. DEARLE, for his Benefit, being the last Night of his performing in Bristol. — Admittance One Shilling, at Eight o'Clock.[1]

There were also a number of attempts between about 1740 and 1778 to set up an equivalent of London's Vauxhall or Cremorne Gardens as adjuncts to the then popular spa at Hotwells. Unfortunately all such attempts foundered either on West Country weather or artistic temperament or a blend of both.[2]

With the decline of the Hotwells at the turn of the century, no more Pleasure Gardens were opened on that side of the city, but from 1813 the owner of the Three Blackbirds Tavern (on the north side of Stapleton Road, opposite the present railway station) began to let his Gardens for Grand Gala Fetes, usually to celebrate Royal birthdays. Over the next twenty years there were fetes, concerts and balloon ascents in what became known as Wellington Gardens. In 1828, Andrew Loder, of the famous Bath musical family, was in charge of the concerts, and the entertainments included tight-rope walkers.

In March 1837, when Willam Johnson took over the Three Blackbirds, he decided to discontinue the Galas, and not long afterwards the land was sold for building; but during that very summer the newly-established Clifton Zoological Society began its fund-raising fetes in the Gardens (modestly enough, with fireworks and a band).

It may be taken as certain that informal concerts, glee and

1 *Bonner & Middleton's Bristol Journal,* 3.6.1786.
2 See K. M. D. Barker: *Bristol at Play* (Bradford on Avon, 1976), pp. 9-10, 14-15; and P. T. Marcy: *Eighteenth Century Views of Bristol and Bristolians* (Historical Association Pamphlet No. 16), pp. 18-19.

catch singing and the like, continued in public houses all this while, but since private parties were concerned, there would be little or no need for publicity. The Paradise Harmonic Society advertised that it would meet at the Adam and Eve Tavern in Wine Street on 6 March 1838, and in the *Bristol Mercury* of 14 November 1840, a Mr Alford of the Olive Lodge of Free Gardeners advertised a "Serio-Comic Entertainment" at the Cat and Wheel, Castle Green, for his own benefit.

It was, however, later in the 1840s that public houses more generally began to advertise "Harmonic Meetings" and "Convivials", the more successful enlarging or building on a music room for that especial purpose. The great majority of Bristol houses confined themselves to such amateur gatherings two or three nights a week (usually those when something might still be left in a working man's pay packet). So far as can be ascertained, these Meetings proliferated initially in the "old town" centre of Bristol, expanding during the later decades into the Horsefair, the College Green area, and the growing working-class suburbs of Ashley Down, Lawrence Hill and Bedminster.

The best of these non-professional houses, according to the local impresario W. H. Morrish,[3] was the Angel at the bottom of High Street. This, he says,

> attracted a great many amateurs who thought they could sing —the piano accompaniments were played by ear by a well-known local player by the name of Potter, and he did it very cleverly, and exhibited great tact as the vocalists had a way of wandering off into different keys.

Some of these inns, of course, developed into semi-professional affairs, such as the Sedan Chair on Broad Quay, which happily has recently reverted to its Victorian name. Under Fred Kalkhoven it started with Convivials in June 1860; extending its range, in April 1861 Kalkhoven offered selections from operas which in the previous weeks had been given at the Theatre Royal; the following month "the Evans's of Bristol" (as he was pleased to nickname his Room) housed an African Opera (i.e. black-face minstrel) Troupe; and in August he was busy trying to form a Glee Club. The eccentric Joey Jones, a London comic, held a levee on Boxing Night, when

> Aristocratic amateurs, thriving tradesmen, honest artisans, each and all will meet with the warmest of welcomes. Every evening at 8. Hail! all Hail![4]

3 W. H. Morrish: *A few Memories*, p.7. Morrish was a Bristolian of great enterprise, who in 1907 wrote down in an uncompleted Ms. some scattered memories of mid-Victorian Bristol and his concert activities.
4 *Western Daily Press*. 24.12.1861.

The Era reported the Sedan Chair at this time as "nightly well patronised by the gentry of Bristol and neighbourhood," but Kalkhoven gave up at the end of 1862 and the inn passed from the records as a singing room.

In the great majority of cases, no charge, or at most a nominal one, was made; it was common gossip that innkeepers made the necessary profit by marking up their prices, or serving watered-down or inferior-quality drinks. They were not required to be licensed for singing and dancing, unlike their London counterparts, though any element which could be construed as dramatic entertainment (especially if an entrance charge were made) would have infringed the theatres' prerogative and needed a magistrates' licence. In some towns the theatre managers were so sensitive to competition that they attempted prosecutions on the mere basis of use of scenery and properties, but though concert rooms soon became widespread in Bristol, professional entertainment in them never developed on a scale ambitious enough to cause active concern to the theatre.

The pioneers of professional music hall in Bristol seem to have been the Doughty family, father and two sons, who ran the Cider House Tavern in Cider House Passage off Broad Street, where they had moved after an earlier bankruptcy at the Assembly Rooms Tavern in Prince's Street. A Concert Room was created, and by October 1844 Doughty Senior was advertising outside artists.

James Doughty junior had taken to the stage as a lad, appearing in small parts at the Theatre Royal in the 1838-39 season and making occasional subsequent guest appearances; he became a highly popular Circus and Pantomime Clown and worked up a speciality act with performing dogs, thus spanning three major fields of entertainment. Among those with whom he shared the bill at his father's Concert Room in 1845 was the young E. W. Mackney, later one of the most famous of "black-face" entertainers with his violin, banjo, and imitations. Other attractions at Doughty's ranged from a "nondescript" (i.e. contortionist), a clog dancer, and a Phantasmagoric entertainment (magic lantern ghost show). "The Doughty family were all handsome, and born showpeople," recalled W. H. Morrish, "and the father engaged the best artists that could be obtained."[5]

Simultaneously the local equivalent of the London "Song and Supper Rooms" emerged in the same area around Broad Street, which was then a honeycomb of passages and courts, extending to the notorious "red light quarter" of St. James's Back. The London Oyster Rooms, 34 High Street, advertised the engagement

5 Morrish, *op.cit.* p.16.

of "the celebrated German Siffleur, HERR VAN JOEL and SON," in September 1847:

> Gentlemen can walk on Brussels, lunch upon Sofas, with their feet under Spanish, hear the greatest talent in the world, and sup off Chop, Steak or Oysters on Damask, with a Silver Fork, for Eightpence.[6]

The Beaufort Restaurant in Broad Street emulated them and in February 1851 advertised "A splendid New Drop Scene, intended for the front of the orchestral stage", which suggests they were taking entertainment seriously. However, in June that year they closed, and Doughty bought up the fittings to bedeck his Room on the occasion of the Great Exhibition. The special entertainment he mounted as his contribution to "Arts, Science, and Novelty" including singing by a popular local tenor, W. Smith, whom we shall find on the bills of virtually every Music Hall of importance in Bristol over the next twenty years.

James Doughty junior also involved himself about this time as a performer at the Royal Cremorne (later Pear Tree) Gardens, North Street, Bedminster. He was later to manage Pleasure Gardens in Camberwell and Ipswich, but here he merely provided classical *Poses Plastiques* (Living Statues) in conjunction with M. Coli, who was appearing in the Cider House Concert Room. By this time, the Zoological Gardens Fetes were broadening in content; it was possible for the Licensed Victuallers, the Total Abstainers, or quasi-Masonic bodies like the Foresters or Shepherds, to hire the Gardens on sharing terms, and naturally they vied in presenting additional entertainment—thereby providing a useful opportunity for extra earnings to artists appearing at local Concert Rooms, Circuses and the like.

The 1850s and 1860s showed such an increase in the popularity of tavern entertainment that it had to be taken into account by those interested in how the working classes employed their leisure. One investigator, with a keen eye for the ridiculous, reported his visits to two off-Broad Street "Coal Holes" (quite possibly the Lord Raglan and Doughty's) in the *Bristol Times* of 3 February 1855, depicting vividly the improvised staging, and acts nothing if not miscellaneous:

> A gentleman with a very tall hat on the back of his head, a very large white cravat, his hair brushed off his rather long face, accompanied by a lady "all in white", and perfectly free from stage fright, "came on" from behind a narrow green baize curtain in the left corner of the stage. They sang a kind of medley-song, the moral of which was that women never liked Jerry Sneaks. A ventriloquist then appeared—after a dinner bell had been rung—who informed the loudly-talking audience that he would "do his endeavours" to amuse them with the most amusing of all amusements—ventriloquism. After him, we had some patriotic songs, in the choruses of which the assembly joined heartily. Then came a representation of "ancient statuary," such as "Ajax throwing the discus or quoit," "Indian terrified of the lightning," concluding with "The Dying Gladiator," when the performer measured his length on the stage.

6 *Bristol Mercury*. 18.9.1847.

Of the other inns which attempted to provide professional entertainment, many failed after only a short time. Harry Clifton, one of the outstanding music hall personalities of the era, and who appeared as a young man at Doughty's Cider House early in 1852, remained in Bristol to open the West of England Concert Hall on Broad Quay in April the same year.[7] He did not stay there long, for the following year one R. P. Thomas is given as manager, and no more is heard of the concern after 1853. There was a dubious Dance Hall in Broad Street, the Casino de Venise, which was briefly renamed the Philharmonic Hall, and had the noted Irish comic, Paddy Carey, on the bill. Doughty's neighbour, the Lord Raglan, lasted longer; opening some time in the 1850s, it can be traced sporadically till it was burned down in 1871. The New Apollo in Queen Street, off Castle Street, however, which promised to be a showpiece when it opened in 1856, lasted only a matter of months.

James Doughty senior died in 1856, and his pioneering Concert Hall closed, but just about this time, among the debris of failed and abandoned projects, several Music Rooms opened which eventually established themselves as centres of professional entertainment, though with many vicissitudes. These were the Ship and Castle (City Concert Hall); the Canterbury Music Hall; and the Rose Inn, later the Colosseum. Even of these, the first and third were really only extended tavern concert rooms; it is probable the number and attraction of the Singing Rooms (I have traced a good fifty between 1845 and 1870) militated against the development of fully-fledged professional halls.

Edward Williams, proprietor of the Ship and Castle, at the Clare Street end of Marsh Street, was the first in the field. He began modestly in September 1855 with "a Select Harmonic Meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays", but by the summer of 1857 he was advertising singing every night, and the *Era* reported on 20 December that he

> had introduced some improvements . . . by the erection of a

7 Clifton very nearly ended his career in Bristol too; at the close of a series of Concerts in the Broadmead Rooms at Easter 1872 he announced his intention of taking over and running the Salutation Inn, Henbury, but failing health (he died in July) prevented this.

stage and carrying out certain arrangements for perfecting the ventilation.

To mark what was effectively a change from amateur to semi-professional status, Williams engaged Kate Chatters, "the Eminent Comic Characteristic Singer and Dancer"; a notice in the *Era* of 3 January 1858 attested the popularity of her "drum-song", mentioned the "very good tenor" W. Smith, but criticised the pianist, who

> would do well to moderate his power a little. His masculine touch tells well in pieces, but it is not easy to sing against a double forte accompaniment.

This pianist was the Potter so warmly recommended by Morrish; possibly he had become habituated to the double forte in trying to keep wavering amateurs in tune.

Modest though it was, the City Concert Hall proved the most enduring of the Halls of this period. It had, of course, a splendidly central site, and was fortunate in its remarkable continuity of lesseeship: Williams stayed there till the summer of 1865; T. R. Loveless till autumn 1867; and his successor, Frederick Charles Owen, remained till his death on 1 April 1875.

Initially the size of the Hall[8] made it vulnerable to competition, and audiences noticeably fluctuated with the erratic fortunes of the other halls and the seasonal openings of the Theatre Royal, five minutes' walk away. But Williams did his best to make up for this by his ornate decorations; according to the *Era* of 19 December 1858,

> The pilasters on the side walls have been cased with plate glass, painted in the highest style of art by the principal decorator, Mr. Wm. Davis, who obtained a medal for that description of work in the Great Exhibition of 1851. The intermediate panels are fitted with landscape views of Italy, Switzerland, &c., and the statuary supporting the gas lights, the medallions surmounting the columns, and all the cornices and mouldings of the hall are richly painted and decorated in ruby, ultra-marine, and gold.

Despite occasional criticisms, the City Concert Hall became an established, almost a family, affair. The engagement of a comic singer called Dunn lasted for eighteen months; W. Smith and his relations sang, danced and recited year in, year out, and audiences never seemed to tire of them. They had their engagements at many of the Bristol Halls, but their particular loyalty was to the City,

8 In 1862 it was advertised as holding "upwards of 1,000 persons," but this, like most advertised estimates of capacity of the period, is almost certainly a great exaggeration.

and when (after what sounds like a temporary breakdown) Smith returned after a period of absence, Williams specially advertised the fact.

The Hall could not support a full bill of professionals. As late as November 1861 Williams was still advertising for amateur talent, and in January 1862 he experimented with "Judge and Jury" cases—improvised trials of *causes celebres*, and the more scandalous, usually, the better. "Any person desirous of getting up a case can do so by applying to the proprietor", Williams advertised; but he did not repeat the event.

His successor, Loveless, seems to have continued the Concert side in a rather routine fashion, if we may judge from the *Era*'s comment (on 27 October 1867) that with the arrival of Frederick Owen, "a new spirit has been infused into its management." It is, however, during Loveless's management that we have our best description of the City, contained in a feature article by The Sketcher, "A Visit to a Concert Hall", in the *Western Daily Press* on 16 June 1866. Though not named, its identity is obvious, and it is amusing to contrast the *Era* puff for the redecorated premises quoted earlier with the reactions of The Sketcher:

> Walls, ceiling and cornices are all laden with a richness of pictorial ornamentation quite Oriental in character. On the panels there are picturesque scenes of a quite remarkably brilliant description: in which clouds, trees, mountains, rivers, and human beings are represented in colours directly antithetical to those which Nature generally assigns to their originals; and which are, moreover, arranged with such remarkable want of taste in composition, that the artist must have been at considerable pains before he could ever have succeeded in crowding so many features of interest into such small spaces as were at his command. A number of classically attired figures, standing on brackets, illuminate the room, by bearing in their hands lamps considerably larger than themselves.

The women, confined to the Gallery, were, according to the Sketcher, obviously prostitutes, and the "cherubic tadpoles" decorating the balcony front "considerably more moral and correct in their behaviour than are the noisy denizens of the gallery above them." Nevertheless the Sketcher had to admit that the Hall was run in an orderly manner; the waiters were civil; the programme, if mediocre, at least not obscene; and it is with a certain melancholy sympathy that he speculates on the private loneliness of "the Sisters Maccabaeus" (*recte* Michaelson), "the Modern Rubini" (our old friend W. Smith), and "the Champion Comic" (Harry Reeves).

Under Owen the Hall seems to have become more prosperous; in March 1868 he was able to advertise

> In consequence of the great success that has attended the CITY CONCERT HALL, the Proprietor has been induced to *double* the Staff of Professional Musicians heretofore engaged.

After Owen's death on 1 April 1875 his widow carried on the public house for several years, his nephew Tom Bradford managing the Concert Hall, but the site of the Ship and Castle was earmarked for demolition in connection with the plans to widen Baldwin Street, and certainly by 1880 the City Concert Hall had closed.

The Canterbury, between Maryleport and Bridge Streets, was intended as a much more ambitious project: nothing less than a purpose-built (or at least materially adapted) music hall on the lines of its famous London namesake. Its proprietor, Sidney Owen (described in a subsequent lawsuit as a speculator in theatrical entertainments and concerts), advertised it as "capable of seating 2,000 persons".[9] "Topped out" just as the Ship and Castle began its Harmonic Meetings, it opened the following month. Harry Twist, the manager, was able to offer an impressive bill whose range was typical of the period: singers (ballad, sentimental, tenor and comic); Yankee Sullivan "in his side splitting entertainment"; an acrobat; a clog, boot and pump dancer; Twist himself, "Shakespearean clown and jester"; and a solo performer on the domestic bellows. Admission to the Boxes was 6d, Pit 3d, "returned in refreshments."[10]

Twist's management was shortlived; Owen sold out to Joseph Sullivan, singer of such favourite ditties as "The Ratcatcher's Daughter", who in his managerial capacity added a new gas chandelier to the amenities, and charged 1s. for "Centre Upper Circle or reserved Compartments". Sullivan liked spectacle, and the more sensational the better. At various times he included on the bill a Panorama of the Mutiny of the Bengal Army and a Dissolving Diorama of the Ship on Fire. In September 1857 he even introduced "a Dissolving Diorama giving views of the locality and Incidents of the Recent Murder in Leigh Woods near Bristol", to the disgust of the local press.[11]

By May 1858, however, the place had closed and the lease was advertised as for sale. In July the Canterbury was reported "let to respectable parties" and it reopened on 3 August with Herr Dobler the conjuror, but was soon shut again. Indeed, despite its size and pretensions, the Canterbury had a very chequered career, and was

9 A later bill of sale described it as erected "upon 359 square yards of ground 131 feet 7 inches in depth and 30 feet in breadth." (*Era*, 9.5.1858).
10 *Era*, 30.9.1855; *Bristol Gazette*, 25.10.1855.
11 See Barker: *Bristol at Play*, p.32.

always looked on askance by the moralists. It changed hands twice in 1859, and within a month of being reopened by its original owner, Sidney Owen, as the Western Counties Concert Hall, it was burned to the ground.[12]

The site was put up for sale in October 1859, and by June 1860 the Canterbury had been rebuilt "with spacious galleries and convenient offices" and was being offered to let. It was taken by a Mr. B. Stoddard, but by the end of October he in his turn was trying to find a tenant. Run in conjunction with the Colosseum for part of 1861, the Canterbury was readvertised in August that year, and yet again in November; and only after several months' ominous silence did the *Era* of 6 July 1862 report it "being fitted out and decorated in a very splendid manner", and to be opened "with a talented Company under the management of Mr. R. W. Deighton". But no evidence has come to light that Deighton ever opened the Hall, and the next we hear of it is when it was taken for three nights in October 1862 by the rationalist Joseph Barker, who had been refused the use of the Assembly Rooms, and whose orations ended in something very near riot.

Finally in August 1863 Archibald Vickers, a local pioneer of "the cheap dining movement", opened the Canterbury as his second dining hall. The publicity for his opening gives us the fullest description we have of the hall: dingy despite its pretensions, but of good size and potential.

> The dimensions of the hall are as follows:— Length from door of entrance to the front of platform, fifty-eight feet; width, thirty-one feet; depth of platform, thirty-four feet; the width being the same as the hall; length of ladies' gallery, fourteen feet . . . The height of the floor to the underside of the dome, by means of which the room is lighted, and which also contains the sunlight gas-burner to supply illumination at night, is twenty-six feet.[13]

At first the Dining Hall was wildly successful, for there is no doubt that it met a real need; but entertainment memories die hard, and Vickers was pressed by his clients to add to their amenities (he may also have wished to add to his income, given the low prices necessarily charged for meals). In November 1865 he advertised in the *Western Daily Press* his willingness to let the Hall any evening except Saturday

> for Lectures, Concerts, Exhibitions, Panoramas, Bands of Music, Clubs, Supper and Tea Parties, but not for any such low or demoralising performances as formerly, and from which Mr. Vickers happily rescued it.

12 There is a vivid description in *Bristol Mercury*, 1.10.1859.
13 *Western Daily Press*, 15.8.1863.

The first hiring was to a Captain Hudson, who gave "Mesmeric Tea Parties" on the platform at 4 p.m., and Demonstrations every evening at 8; he occupied the Hall till the end of the year. H. Stinton briefly reopened it in February 1866 while trying to run the Assembly Rooms as a Music Hall, but silence then descends. However Vickers must have been building up the entertainment side, for in September 1866 he applied to the magistrates for a wine and spirits licence, producing a sheet of paper 91 feet long filled with supporting signatures. A counter-memorial objected particularly

> to the concert hall which Mr. Vickers had recently opened, as it was frequented for the most part by juveniles of about 17 years of age. There were often 300 or 400 there during the night, and after the entertainment was over, they came out into the street hooting and yelling, to the great detriment of the neighbourhood.[14]

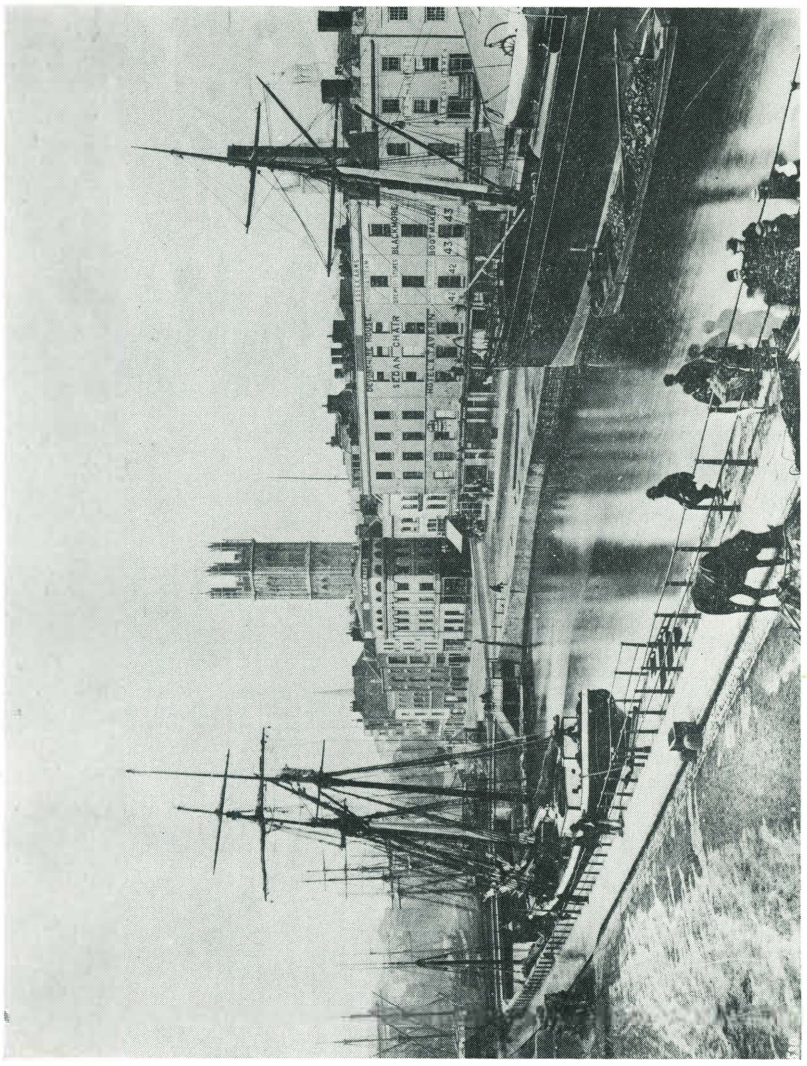
Vickers stigmatised this as a "most exaggerated statement," and evidently the magistrates believed him, for he was granted his licence (one of only ten out of forty-five applicants), and promptly opened the Hall every evening instead of the Mondays and Saturdays to which he had previously confined himself.

For some time the "Crystal Palace Dining Rooms" and the "Canterbury Music Hall" operated together, though Vickers soon turned over the entertainment side to J. McCambridge. McCambridge, like Sullivan, made something of a feature of spectacle, which could not be emulated at the small Tavern Concert Rooms: at Christmas he offered a Grand Fairy Ballet (the nearest he dared go to a Pantomime), and at other times mounted *The Gathering of the Clans* (a favourite of the more ambitious music halls), and even an offering called *Cato; or, The Slave's Revenge.* Admission charges were still nominal; only 1d, 2d., and 3d. on the impecunious days of Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday; 3d and 6d. on Friday, Saturday and Monday. The sixpenny brass checks were oval shape, one side inscribed with the name of the Hall, and on the other the figure of an Irishman dancing a jig.[15]

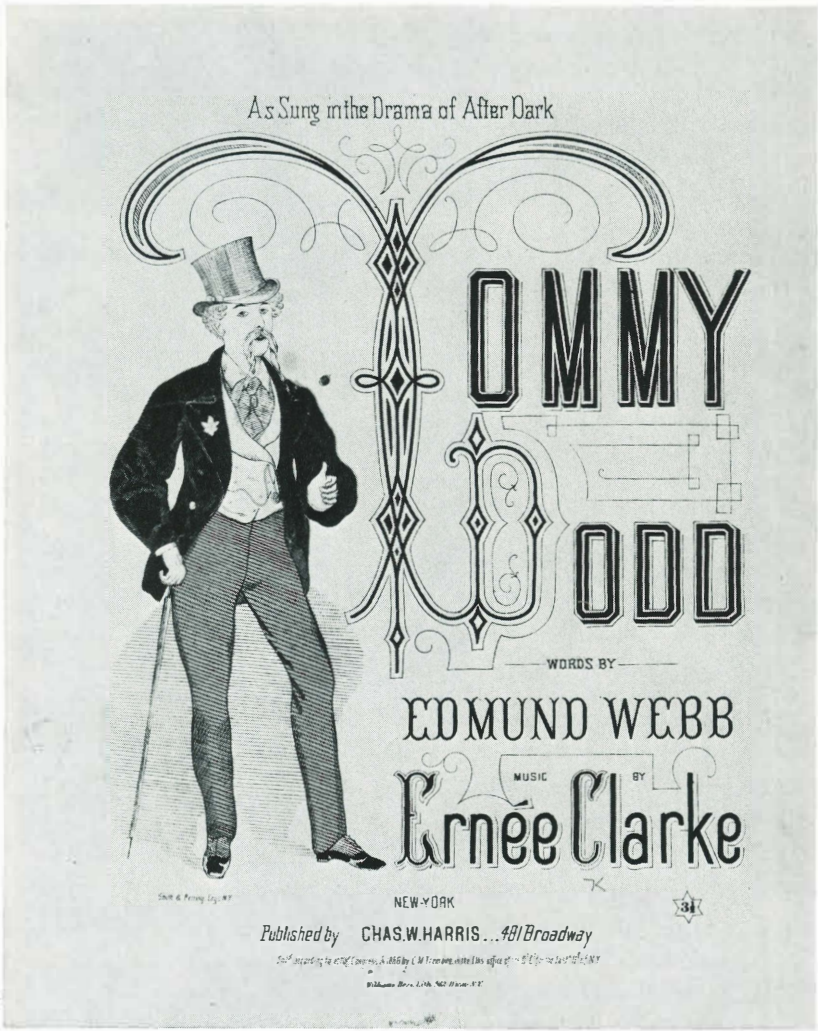
Sadly, this revival seems to have petered out after the end of 1868, and the hall reverted to being simply a refreshment room.

The Rose Inn, which provided the third important music hall of this middle period, was a historic inn in Temple Street. Here William Green opened his "People's Concert Room", holding 200, on Whit Monday 1857, advertising Harmonic Meetings on the predictable Mondays, Tuesdays and Saturdays. An exhibition of

14 *Western Daily Press,* 10.9.1866.
15 *Western Daily Press,* 30.3.1950.



The Drawbridge c. 1870, showing, centre back, The Sedan Chair (still in existence); this was one of the semi-professional "Free and Easies" of the 1860s.
Photograph: Reece Winstone



Ernee Clarke's most famous song of "Tommy Dodd"—the archetypal Dear Old Pal. The chorus, long remembered in Bristol, ran

I'm always safe when I begin, Tommy Dodd, Tommy Dodd!
Glasses round, cigars as well, Tommy Dodd, Tommy Dodd!
Now boys let's all go in, Tommy Dodd, Tommy Dodd!
Head or tail I'm safe to win, Hurrah for Tommy Dodd!

Song-sheet, British Library

Harry Clifton "in character" for probably his best-remembered song.

Song-sheet, British Library

Bristol, August 26, 1859.

WESTERN COUNTIES MUSIC-HALL (late CANTERBURY), MARYLEPORT & BRIDGE-TREETS, Bristol—Proprietor, Mr. SIDNEY OWEN—will RE-OPEN on MONDAY Next, August 29th, with New Scenery and a splendid Act Drop by W. Williams; also, a new Sunlight, by Messrs. Defries, of London. The proprietor takes this opportunity of informing the Public that he has had the above Hall entirely re-decorated and fitted up in a most handsome manner, and he hopes, by strict attention to their comfort, and with a varied and amusing Entertainment, to meet with a liberal share of their support.

The following talented Artists are engaged to appear, viz.:—The SISTERS EVANS, Characteristic Singers and Dancers (from Holder's Concert-hall, Birmingham); their first appearance in Bristol. Monsieur DEBEUQI, and his talented pupils Masters KEMP & PRITCHARD, in their Classical Entertainment (from Vauxhall); first appearance in Bristol. NAT. EMMETT, the favourite Buffo Singer. Mr. W. H. SHARP, the world renowned Dialogue Singer, with Miss POWELL, Characteristic and Ballad Singer, in their entirely new and laughable Duets; first time in Bristol. The SISTERS DUVERNAY, the unrivalled Operatic Dancers (from Wilton's, London); first appearance in Bristol. Mr. HARRY REEVES, Characteristic Singer and Irish Comedian. Yankees MAUGHAM and SPARKS, the celebrated delineators of Negro Life and Character, will appear on Saturday next, Sept. 3rd. Miss MATILDA EVANS, the admired Sentimental Singer. The BROTHERS EMMETT, the well-known Pantomimists and Swordsmen, with Mrs. J. EMMETT, and their wonderful Performing Dogs "Dick" and "Yankee." Master KEMP, in his talented Drawing-room Entertainment. Monsieur and Madame MARTINI, the astonishing Clairvoyants, are engaged to appear on the 12th of September.

The Band will comprise the following talented Artistes:—First violin, Mr. Hildebrand; second ditto, Mr. Henechliffe; contra bass, Mr. Howell Thomas; cornet, Mr. Roades; flute, Herr Townsend; piano-forte, Miss Mansini. Leader and musical director, Mr. J. W. Ross.

Scenic artist, Mr. W. Williams; property artist, Mr. Pitman; bill inspector, Mr. Green; stage manager, Mr. J. Emmett.

Prices of Admission: Private Boxes, 8d.; Promenade, 6d.; Pit, 3d. Doors open at Seven, performance to commence at Half-past.

No boys or disorderly characters admitted. To prevent such nuisance the police will be in attendance. Refreshments of the best quality, at moderate charges. [k

CHEPSTOW FLOWER SHOW will be held in the CASTLE, on TUESDAY, Sept. 13th, 1859. Doors open at 1.30, and close at 5 p.m.

Admission at 1.30, 2s.; and at 3.30, 1s. each. Children under Twelve Years of age, Half-price.

A Military Band will perform during the *Fête*.

The *Wye* Company's Steamers will leave the Hotwells, Bristol, at 8 a.m., and return from Chepstow at 6 p.m., which will be convenient for Visitors leaving Bath by the 7.10 a.m., and returning from Bristol by the 9.30 and 11.30 p.m. Trains.

The Great Western Railway Company's Special First and Second Class Excursion Train will leave Swindon at 8.15 a.m., Purton 8.25, Cirencester 8.35, Brimscombe 9.20, Stroud 9.30, Stonehouse 9.40, Cheltenham 9.40, Gloucester 10; returning from Chepstow at 7 p.m.

The Old Passage Ferry Boat will ply as required during the day.

731] TREVOR MORRIS, M.D., Honorary Secretary.

Publications.

Fourth Edition, enlarged, price 1s. 2d., Post-free.

VACATION THOUGHTS ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENTS [and Circumstantial Evidence]. By

Advertisement for the short-lived reopening of the Canterbury, with a typical bill of fare for the period.
Bristol Mercury, 27.8.1859

pictures (quite a frequent attraction at Music Halls) was mounted in August.

Green was realistic in his advertisements.

> WANTED for a Concert Room that is respectably conducted, a Lady Pianist who can sing. The room will be opened only four nights per week, and as the engagement (if the party suits) will be for a permanency, the salary will be low.[16]

The claim of respectability, however, seems to have been well founded, at least at this time. A *Bristol Mercury* reporter spent a very pleasant evening;

> the rendering of the ballads "Good bye, sweetheart, good bye," and the Bacchanalian song from "Traviata," by a Miss Lindsey, quite took us by surprise by its refinement and correct intonation; the eccentric Holbrook was as facetious as ever; a Mr. Collins sang several songs with considerable taste, and an absence of all vulgarity of style. There is one thing in connexion with the room and house that struck us forcibly, viz., the very good order that is kept, and the absence of improper females, so injurious generally at rooms of this description.[17]

Joe Holbrook, mentioned in this notice, was originally a local amateur who made good as a comic; he also organised entertainment at the Zoo about this time, and even after he left to run his own Music Hall in South Wales he would return to Bristol from time to time, always with applause; his son was resident pianist at the Britannia in King Street.

It was not by any means plain sailing at the Rose Inn. It had the disadvantage of being on the unfashionable side of the river, in an area becoming increasingly poverty-stricken and isolated from the general development of the city. When Green expanded, opening his "elegant and spacious new Hall," the Colosseum, on Easter Monday 1860, it attracted only belated and slighting notices from the local press. Nevertheless, he attracted some first-rate talent, and was successful enough to be in a position to take over the Canterbury at the beginning of 1861, running the two Halls together so that artists played both on the same night, as was common in London. The *Era* of 17 February 1861 reported "the establishment, under the judicious management of the spirited proprietor, Mr. Green, rapidly improves." Holbrook returned to play an extended engagement for him, and in May 1861 Green secured Alf Vance, later one of the great coster comedians, but at this time appearing with his brother as "refined and versatile Exponents of Negro Life and Character."

16 *Era*, 25.7.1858.
17 *Bristol Mercury*, 21.8.1858.

But the Canterbury proved a dead weight, and Green went back to the Colosseum, running it for another eighteen months, though ignored by the local press except for occasions like the escape of a monkey belonging to a troupe of Chinese jugglers. Jacko frisked about the nearby buildings, to the great delight of the neighbourhood, pursued by his "Chinese" owners, who apparently did not look particularly Oriental.[18]

In the summer of 1863, Green decided to give up the Colosseum, and advertised it to let, with

> the whole of the Gas Chandeliers, Stage Fittings, Scenery, &c. The Hall . . . will hold about Six Hundred People. To any energetic man, with the capital of One Thousand Pounds (£1,000), the above is a sure fortune.[19]

It reopened on 17 August (manager unknown), but by Christmas had been turned into a Ball Room; under Joe Bainton it briefly reverted to professional entertainment in 1866, then disappears from notice.

These three halls were the principal, indeed almost the only, professional indoor concert rooms during the 1860s. There was an attempt to turn the Assembly Rooms, Prince's Street, into The Prince of Wales Music Hall in 1866, but this seems to have lasted only a few months. By this time the Assembly Rooms was on the downward slide, and the episode is significant only as an example of the way the national Music Hall craze led speculators to attempt the conversion of any established place of entertainment.

It should not be imagined, however, that music hall artists were confined to the Concert Rooms. The 1860s saw the popularity of Pleasure Gardens at its peak, and the Zoo Fetes provided elaborate bills of fare—despite grumbles from the killjoys about their lack of elevating qualities. Naturally in the open air the accent was on the visual—animal acts, acrobats, dancers, jugglers, tightrope walkers (including Blondin), and displays of fireworks. In February 1868 there was a proposal to erect a Concert Hall in the grounds but the narrowness of the majority when the resolution was put to the Subscribers caused its withdrawal.

Vying with the Zoo for some years were the Horfield Pleasure Gardens, at St. Michael's Mount on the Gloucester Road, the ground for which was acquired in March 1862, with the backing of the Ancient Order of Foresters. Their first Gala, with Jim Doughty among the entertainers, was held on 25 August 1862, and attended by 14,000 people who paid a penny admission each. Eventually, however, the suburban site of the Gardens (and some

18 *Bristol Daily Post*, 8.7.1862.
19 *Era*, 7.6.1863.

deliberate trouble making by its rivals) caused it to run down. In March 1871 it was taken over by Charles Marston, who reopened it as the Guernsey Gardens, but seemingly he was unsuccessful, for by August the Gardens had been transferred to B. York, a Horfield builder, who had grandiose plans for a concert and dance hall to hold two or three thousand. These plans, unsurprisingly, came to nothing; no more is heard of the Gardens until in 1882 the site was reported to have been bought for the erection of the present Horfield Prison.

The Avonmouth Gardens had the advantages of being attached to a Hotel, and adjacent to the terminus of the new Port and Pier Railway. Opened at Easter 1865 to cater mainly for excursion customers, open-air sports and dancing on the green were at first the popular attractions, with some entertainment in the Dining Room in the late evening; but the initial crush persuaded the owners to build a separate Concert Hall in the grounds. This also allowed them to offer attractions late into the autumn, when other Grounds had shut down. Though the galas and entertainments were never on the scale of those at the Zoo or the Horfield Gardens, they remained a feature until well into the 1890s.

More important, both in itself and in its effect of stunting the development of professional Halls, was the emergence in the 1860s of Concert Parties touring as independent, self-contained units. Sam Cowell, Harry Clifton, Arthur Lloyd, Mackney and Maclagen, among many others, found this the most profitable way to "milk" the provincial market, for few Halls (none in Bristol) could have afforded their terms—neither size nor scale of admission charges permitted this. Sam Cowell was the first to bring this party to Bristol, visiting the Athenaeum in Corn Street in 1857; five years later Mackney appeared at the Assembly Rooms, charging seat prices of 1s. to 3s., and packing even this unfashionable building.

Principal agent in setting up these visits was W. H. Morrish, who with Joseph Phillips started by organising People's Concerts of the more conventional kind at the Broadmead Rooms, but in his own words:

> I quickly found the well known local talent was not a sufficient "draw", and determined to risk long salaries for London stars.

Accordingly he brought to the Broadmead Rooms such great figures as E. W. Mackney ("I think there never was a more amusing man on the stage"), Harry Liston and Harry Clifton ("a genial and delightful entertainer, and a great favourite everywhere"). Much of Clifton's popularity at this time was due to his talent as an improvisatore, and he used generally to end with a topical

song. At one concert in April 1867 he sang a Farewell to Bristol:

Farewell to Broadmead, and the Arcades so glorious,
(Arcades once were sylvan, we're led to suppose),
But the Arcades in Bristol are chiefly notorious
For barbers, and bookstalls, and second-hand clothes.

Farewell to Clifton, that's where the nobility
Live in great splendour—an elegant set!
Farewell to St. Philip's; that's where the gentility
Splendidly live up on—what they can get![20]

Visits from such stars were not confined to the Broadmead Rooms, but made use of the Athenaeum, the Rifle Drill Hall at the top of Park Street, and even the Theatre Royal, where at various times Jolly John Nash, Maclagen, and G. H. ("Jingo") Macdermott all appeared. The profits for the performers from these tours were such that not until the building of the large syndicated "family halls" did the great ones return to the mainstream of provincial Music Hall.

The failure of the Colosseum, and, more importantly, the Canterbury, left the way open for musical hall speculators of various kinds to meet an undoubted, if not yet organised, demand. Early in the field was Ernee Clarke, a comic singer of some repute, who had played London and New York Halls. Though he also made guest appearances at various local functions, his main occupation was as mine host of the Old Globe in Christmas Street, where in May 1870 he opened a Concert Room, with carpeted Stalls, for gentlemen only. A Knowle resident, "T.S.", recalled him over fifty years later:

> The old song "Tommy Dodd" was composed by him, and became popular throughout England. Who has not tossed the penny and said, "Let's go to Tommy Dodd for it. Heads or tails you are bound to win, hurrah for Tommy Dodd"? We old ones remember it to this day.[21]

In the early years of the 70s, the Old Globe was, apparently, where the young bloods gathered.

At the other end of the social scale was the old Porter House on Broad Quay, still remembered by F. G. Lewin in 1923.

> At the back . . . there was a very large room for dancing, entertainments, and prodigal libation; the end of the hall was raised as a platform, and upon it a huge steam organ thundered out "music" in the most blatant steam roundabout style. Members of the audience volunteered songs. There was one that I remember given by a man of the Bolshie type . . .

20 Morrish, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18; *Western Daily Press*, 29.4.1867.
21 "Bristol Amusement Houses of the Past," *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 19.5.1925.

> "Oh! she was a funny old guy,
> With a double-barrelled squint in her eye,
> Her number ten feet would cover up a street,
> She'd a mouth like a crack in a pie.
> Her hair was indigo blue,
> She'd a figure like a kangaroo,
> You ought to hear her tussle
> with her patent leather bussel (sic),
> And whistle like a steamboat too."[22]

A more unexpected venture was made by G. W. Harris who on 6 October 1873 opened the old Circus in Moon Street, at the back of Stokes Croft, which had been built for James Ryan in 1837. For over a decade now it had been only occasionally used, as travelling circuses developed tenting techniques, and there were plenty of precedents in the provinces for such a change of use—at Brighton and Sheffield, for example. The Palace of Varieties was an all-professional affair, with no facilities for drink, so the charges were relatively high: 3d., 6d., 1s. and 2s., with half price to the Boxes and Promenade at 8.45[23]. The *Era* reported it generally well attended during Harris's management. Unfortunately it changed hands in January 1875, and on the reopening night the performance came to a stop after an hour, a number of the artists advertised having failed to appear.

The audience demanded their money back, and this being refused, they rushed the Manager, "many of those present arming themselves with portions of the seats, which were broken up." The Manager hastily sought police protection, and a frustrated mob

> commenced throwing stones, and broke every pane of glass in the building, and a scene of great disorder prevailed in the neighbourhood until a late hour.[24]

A fortnight later the *Era* reported the building "announced for reopening under fresh Management and a new Title": the Britannia. But the damage had been done—in every sense—and at the end of the month the new lessees had to cancel all contracts. A Derby manager called Stoner advertised that he would reopen the Britannia, but his intentions came to nothing; a further attempt early in 1877 lasted one month, and about 1880 the building was bought by the Salvation Army.

A similar effort, even more short-lived, was made in 1867, when Sam Watson, who had been a member of Sangers' Circus, took over a building in Park Row, almost opposite the Prince's Thea-

22 F. G. Lewin: "Bristol Amusement Houses of the Past", in *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 12.5.1923.
23 See *Bristol Daily Post*, 3.10.1873.
24 *Era*, 31.1.1875.

tre, which had recently been run up for circus use. This he opened on 28 March as The Circus of Varieties, after making suitable alterations to the interior. At first all went well. Watson was able to obtain some well-known names, including J. H. Milburn and Harry Freeman, and at the end of May he advertised visits from Alfred Vance's Concert Party. Whether this exhausted his treasury one cannot tell, but no more is heard of the Circus of Varieties after an advertisement of 8 June.

The most important Hall of the period, and the only one to span the gap between the last of the Tavern Concert Rooms and the building of the large syndicated Halls, was duly advertised in the *Era* of 18 September 1870:

> TO BE LET OR SOLD, in the CITY of BRISTOL, a Splendid Pile of Buildings, designed for a WINE AND SPIRIT VAULTS, CIGAR DIVAN, BILLIARD SALOON, with CONCERT HALL, Sixty-nine Feet by Twenty-seven, fitted up with Gallery, Retiring Rooms, and every convenience for carrying on a Concert Hall business.

In the end, however, the builder, R. F. Jones, kept control and put in W. H. Russell as Manager and Chairman of the Alhambra Concert Hall, which, sited on the south side of Broadmead and almost opposite the Broadmead Rooms,[25] opened on 12 December; 1s. was charged for the Gallery and Front Seats, 6d. for the Back Seats.

The new Hall was noticed with some favour in the local press, and the *Era* correspondent paid an early visit.

> Entering the iron gates, the audience pass the bar door, the foot of the billiard-room stairs, and, by a somewhat lengthy corridor (the tile floor of which was alarmingly slippery on the opening night) enter the extreme end of the Alhambra Hall . . . The interior fittings of the Hall . . . without any attempt at ornamentation, provide a platform, and what is seemingly a temporary orchestra, at the extreme end facing the entrance. A well-constructed balcony of graceful profile leaves but a small extent of the ground floor uncovered. Both above and below the space is occupied with wooden benches, with skeleton backs; and, as no drinking or smoking (sic) is to be allowed in the room, the usual little round tables of the orthodox Music Hall style are dispensed with.[26]

The bill was conventional: two lady serio-comics, a pair of Negro minstrels; two comedians; a baritone; and an equilibrist who provided the best act of the night.

25 The site is now covered by the shop of Freeman Hardy Willis and part of Marks & Spencer.
26 *Era*, 18.12.1870.

Seldom can any Hall have had a more interrupted start: no fewer than three reopenings (usually on the pretext of alterations and redecorations), with ominously reduced prices, before the end of July 1871; a closure in August, and in September ("newly decorated" yet again), a further reopening. After this things settled down, and there were numerous compliments on "the spirited manner in which the business has been conducted", with consequent improved popularity.

Perhaps hoping that the new tide of success would bring him a good return on his initial outlay of some £8,000, Jones put up the whole complex for auction the following Spring. If this was his hope, he was disappointed; the property had to be bought in at only £6,500.[27]

Jones continued to run the Alhambra successfully for a further season, but in May 1873 he sold it to the Ancient Order of Foresters for £6,300. They intended using the building as a Lodge, complete with Dispensary, but meanwhile advertised the Foresters' Hall (as it now became) for "Entertainments, Concerts, Public Meetings, &c." After inaugurating their ownership with a banquet on 6 October 1873, the Foresters reopened the Music Hall, which was run by two lively enterprising members of their Order, James Nash and Walter Fisher,[28] charging 1s. for the Stalls (half-price at 9 p.m.), 6d. for Gallery and Second Seats, and 3d for Back Seats.

Such prices were hardly sufficient to pay for major talent, but there was always a varied bill: a typical programme in January 1874 included Leroni the Man-Serpent; Harry Twist (first manager of the Canterbury, now billed as the Antipodean Wonder); Sam Redden, a popular comic; and the routine duettists, singers and dancers. Little Rollo, a child member of the Vol Becque acrobatic troupe, who appeared at the end of March, was "literally pelted with money at the conclusion of his flying leaps".[29] Despite the competition of the Palace of Varieties and the City Concert Hall, the Foresters' was more than holding its own, and in June Nash bought out Fisher and became sole lessee.

Hardly had he done so when disaster struck: early on the morning of 23 June 1874 the Hall was totally destroyed by fire. The building and fittings were insured, but the performers lost everything. With great initiative and generosity, Nash, backed by Jones, hired the Broadmead Rooms and offered them to the company rent free for two weeks to recoup their losses. A nation-wide fund was set up, to which, regrettably, none of the Bristol Halls

27 For the auction notice see *Era*, 14.4.1872; there is a report on the sale in *Western Daily Press*, 26.4.1872.
28 See *Bristol Daily Post*, 7.10.1873 and *Era*, 26.10.1873. The best account of the organisational and financial transactions connected with the Foresters' Hall is to be found in the account of the 1874 fire in *Bristol Daily Post*, 24.6.1874.
29 *Era*, 5.4.1874,

except the little singing room at the Volunteer seems to have contributed.

The Foresters pressed forward with rebuilding, and Nash reopened on 2 November.

> The new structure is . . . in all respects more convenient and comfortable, and presents a more light and pleasing appearance. In lieu of the narrow side galleries . . . there is a single gallery at the south end of the hall which is capable of seating 300 persons, and which is so arranged as to afford to all a good view of the stage. The stage itself is considerably larger than the former one, and has been fitted with all the necessary appliances. The proscenium is very elegant, being flanked by light and graceful pillars supporting richly gilt and decorated Corinthian capitals. It is handsomely decorated on the Arabesque style . . . Lofty columns run up the side, and the ceiling is panelled and elaborately ornamented.[30]

The bills showed some enterprise: one in March 1873 included Sarina (the Boneless Wonder) and the Great Fakir of Yeddo and his Enchanted Syren—who could resist such a combination? More surprisingly, Clarence Holt, a well-established provincial theatre manager, "Tragedian, Comedian, and Mimic," was engaged in May and rendered extracts from Shakespeare and Dickens: a pioneer incursion by the "legitimate" stage. Yet despite Nash's obvious success, the Foresters leased the Hall the following year to Charles J. Strawbridge, and precipitated a period of utter confusion.

Hardly had Strawbridge taken possession than he was advertising the Hall as to let, and the *Era* of 30 January 1876 reported a forthcoming change of management. John Smith became Lessee in February, retaining the same Hall Manager, C. W. D'Lonra; yet on 30 April the *Era* carried an almost incoherent notice from Smith:

> FORESTERS' HALL, BROADMEAD. — In consequence of the above Hall about to be used for other purposes than a Music Hall, all *Artistes* holding engagements with me will considered (*sic*) them cancelled, as their services cannot be entertained. I am sorry to be compelled to close so suddenly, but unavoidably cannot be helped, and also beg to apologise for so many letters not being answered.

And immediately below this was an advertisement from the Foresters' Secretary, offering the Hall for hire. A week later, however, Smith was proclaiming himself "Sole Proprietor and Manager"—

30 *Bristol Daily Post*, 2.11.1874.

presumably he had bought out Strawbridge, whose name does not reappear—and as such he continued.[31]

One significant change was made at this time: what were tactfully advertised as "refreshments" were allowed in the Hall by the end of 1875. To be sure the Manager added "No Boys or Disorderly Persons admitted, nor Children in Arms," but from the point of view of respectability and public acceptance of Music Hall, this was a decided step backwards. In his article earlier quoted, F. G. Lewin described the Hall at this period as reminding him of a Noncomformist place of worship (it was actually sited between Wesley's Chapel and the Broadmead Baptist Church):

> An aisle ran down the centre, and there were pews upon either side with the usual shelf in each for hymn books and psalter, but instead of these latter there was only the overflow of beer and many glasses of the same liquid refreshment resting upon the boards.

The Hall reverted to the name of the Alhambra in the autumn of 1878, under J. S. Yabsley, but then went through yet another period of crisis, during which the Foresters first put it up for sale, then decided to run it themselves, and then in December 1879 offered it to let. According to Latimer, they "relinquished the property" around 1880, and it was taken by Tom Bradford, formerly manager of the City Concert Hall.

In 1889 Charles M. Rodney succeeded Bradford, and renamed the Alhambra the New Star. He was himself, like so many managers, a Music Hall artist, and seems to have had useful connections in the profession; he was able to secure Marie Loftus for April 1889, and in September 1890 he could impose prices from 6d. to 2s 6d.—little lower than the Theatre Royal at that time. Indeed, until the big "family halls" swamped him, Rodney was, by his own account, quite successful.

But it was not, clearly, the success of places like the New Star which encouraged the building of these new Halls. Rather it was the success of the allied entertainments in the city: the Concert Parties headed by London stars which crowded the Broadmead Rooms, the Athenaeum, the St. James's Hall, and even the Victoria Rooms and the Colston Hall. There were also innumerable Christy Minstrel troupes, among them Livermore's Court Minstrels (black-face entertainers unbelievably togged up in the court costume of George II), who had played profitably at the Broadmead Rooms in October 1873 and on many occasions afterwards. An-

31 Inconsistency of terminology adds to the difficulty of disentagling this managerial manoeuvring: "Proprietor" sometimes means only "Lessee", and "Manager" may imply many different degrees of practical responsibility.

other popular attraction in the city was Poole and Young's Myriorama, a semi-educative pictorial show which came almost every Christmas to the Colston Hall from 1880 onwards, interspersed with variety entertainments of an increasingly elaborate nature. In fact on the last night of the 1889-90 Myriorama, Charles W. Poole announced that he and his brothers were negotiating

> for a large piece of land in the centre of the city . . . to erect a really fine and artistic building, which he intended to open as a first-rate music hall.[32]

The Livermore Brothers opened the People's Palace (now the Gaumont Cinema) in Baldwin Street at Christmas 1892, and a Limited Company, one of whose Directors was Joseph Poole, was responsible for the building of the Empire, Old Market, which opened in November, 1893. Save for the final struggles of the Star, and a few rather disreputable performances in Castle Street "gaffs", taverns music halls in Bristol was now, to all intents and purposes, dead.

32 *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 13.2.1890.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For these early years of Bristol Music Hall, no programmes or handbills are in existence, and newspaper advertisement was sporadic; the local press seldom commented on the concert rooms; and scarcely any of the buildings remain (or even are pictorially recorded).

This account therefore has had to be pieced together from such contemporary notices as survive, locally or in the *Era* (which because it concerned itself with the licensed victuallers' trade as well as entertainment, is a very useful source); later reminiscences published in the Bristol press; and the unfinished Ms memoirs of W. H. Morrish, which his son has very kindly allowed me to quote.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to the staff of Avon Reference Library, who have patiently traced down for me the sites of many of these long-forgotten homes of amusement; and I thank Messrs. Julian Slade and Angus Mackay for permission to quote from one popular Bristol entertainment in praise of another.

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