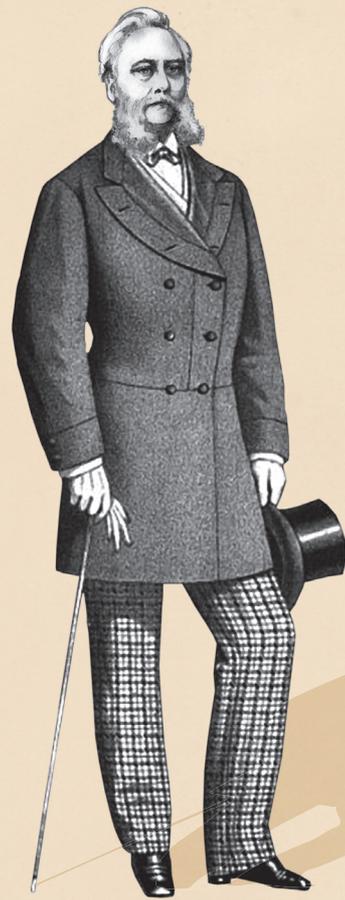


JOHN WILTON

Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is John Wilton and welcome to my Music Hall! Who would have thought, as I was growing up in bath, the son of a butcher, that I would one day preside over this glorious emporium of First Class Entertainment? Let me tell you my story...

 It began in 1850 when I bought the Prince of Denmark Pub with its cosy concert room in the back. Soon, performances were so popular that I had to turn people away - imagine! When the house next door was for sale, I saw my chance and bought it so I could build a bigger, better concert room to pack in even more punters. We opened in 1853, grew ever more popular and I had my vision for the future: my Magnificent New Music Hall! All I had to do was purchase numbers 1 to 4 Graces Alley and it would be mine, all mine.

 By April 1859, I had achieved my goal. The most spectacular auditorium, full of colour and light stood across the back gardens of the houses, adjoining the old pub, which was by now lavishly furnished with beautiful Mahogany fixtures and fittings.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT MATERIAL MAHOAGANY IS?

 The houses were joined to make welcoming and comfortable rooms for respectable tradesmen and their wives to come for supper and a show, and to encourage the sailors to drink less and behave better (never easy, unfortunately).

 Every night, I presented on stage a dazzling variety of acts, including the very best singers, comedians, acrobats and magicians in the world.

{ CAN YOU THINK OF ANY TV SHOWS THAT INCLUDE SIMILAR ENTERTAINMENT? }

 I introduced the acts, as Master of Ceremonies or MC for short, using the most exaggerated words I could think of to describe each one (and keeping an eye on the rowdier members of the audience to keep it all respectable - I insisted on keeping an orderly house).

{ CAN YOU THINK OF ANY EXAGGERATED WORDS TO DESCRIBE PERFORMERS? }

 My dear wife, Ellen, looked after the kitchen making and selling, pies, jellied eels and other delicious meals. It was jolly hard work. We lived upstairs and didn't climb the stairs to bed until very late every night, tired but happy to be running the 'Handsome pleasure room in the district' as a journalist described it.



J OHN WILTON WAS BORN ON 19TH NOVEMBER 1820 IN BATH, THE SON OF A BUTCHER.

He began his career as a solicitor's clerk, working for eight years in the magistrates' court in Bath which must have helped him when he came to deal with the magistrates who licensed Wilton's. In 1846, he married 19-year-old Ellen Hall, daughter of a haberdasher and silk merchant, also from Bath. In 1850 he bought the Prince of Denmark Pub and concert room in Graces Alley and in 1853 he rebuilt the concert room and began advertising performances at Wilton's Music Hall in the theatrical press. Five years later, he started work on his 'magnificent new music hall' built across the backyard of numbers 1-4 Grace's Alley and using part of the garden of 17 Wellclose Square. The hall was very well built and lavishly decorated at a reported cost of £20,000.



At this time, middle class business men were investing in music halls, to make money, but also to reduce drunkenness, by providing 'cheap and rational entertainment' for the working classes.

IN BUILDING HIS FIRST AND SECOND HALLS, JOHN WILTON was following the example of Charles Morton, known as 'the father of the halls' who built his first Canterbury Hall in 1852, and his second Canterbury Hall 1856, in place of the Canterbury Arms public house.



As well as sailors, John Wilton managed to attract local tradesmen and their wives **BY PROVIDING A LUXURIOUS AND GLAMOROUS HALL**, and engaging top quality acts. The local magistrates commended him each year on keeping an orderly house in a rough, portside neighbourhood.

IN 1862 HE FOUNDED THE MUSIC HALL PROTECTION SOCIETY WHICH MANAGED TO STOP A BILL BEING INTRODUCED IN PARLIAMENT to restrict music hall entertainment to music and songs without spoken material, scenery, costumes, or dramatic content.

THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER HE WORKED TO DEFEND HIS PROFESSION, as a Music Hall manager and a licenced victualler, and was highly respected by his fellow professionals.

He sold the music hall in 1868 and bought a restaurant, the St. James's near Piccadilly Circus. After selling the St. James's in 1876, he lived in Bloomsbury, where many artists, architects and actors lived.

THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER, JOHN BOUGHT, MORTGAGED AND SOLD PROPERTIES in the East End and elsewhere. He was never poor, but not extremely rich either. He died in Notting Hill on 25th August 1881 and left an estate worth £3,200.



BORN 19TH NOVEMBER 1820
IN BATH, UK.



HIS FATHER WAS A BUTCHER.



HE MARRIED ELLEN HALL IN APRIL 1846.
HE WAS 26 YEARS OLD
and she was 19 years old.



ELLEN WAS ALSO FROM BATH.
Her father was a haberdasher and silk merchant.



In the only known photograph of John, he wears fashionable extra wide lapels and **MUTTON CHOP WHISKERS**, reaching down to his collar.



IN 1850 HE BOUGHT THE PRINCE OF DENMARK PUB (MAHOGANY BAR).



HE BUILT A SMALL MUSIC HALL IN THE BACK GARDEN
of the pub in 1853.



IN 1858 HE BUILT A MUCH LARGER MUSIC HALL
across the back gardens of numbers 1-4
Graces Alley and used some of the garden of
17 WELLCLOSE SQUARE.



IT COST BETWEEN £20,000 TO BUILD AND FIT OUT,
and was one of the finest halls of its day.



JOHN WAS KNOWN FOR BRINGING TOP ACTS AND THE LATEST NOVELTIES
to his hall, and for running an orderly house
IN A VERY ROUGH NEIGHBOURHOOD.



IN 1862 HE FOUNDED THE MUSIC HALL PROTECTION SOCIETY WHICH STOPPED A BILL BEING INTRODUCED IN PARLIAMENT TO RESTRICT MUSIC HALL ENTERTAINMENT
to music and songs without spoken material, scenery, costumes, or dramatic content.



IN 1868 HE SOLD THE MUSIC HALL AND THREE YEARS LATER BOUGHT THE ST. JAMES'S RESTAURANT
NEAR PICCADILLY, WHERE HE LIVED AND WORKED UNTIL 1876.



AFTER HE RETIRED, HE MOVED TO BLOOMSBURY, WHERE MANY ARTISTS, ARCHITECTS AND ACTORS LIVED.



HE DIED ON 25TH AUGUST, 1881 AND LEFT AN ESTATE VALUED AT £3,200.

