

Centre for Narrative Research conference 25th April 2018

The impact of 19th century narrative on 20th/21st century thought with regard to theatres and music halls.



**Legitimising the
Victorian Music Hall
by
Deborah Jeffries**

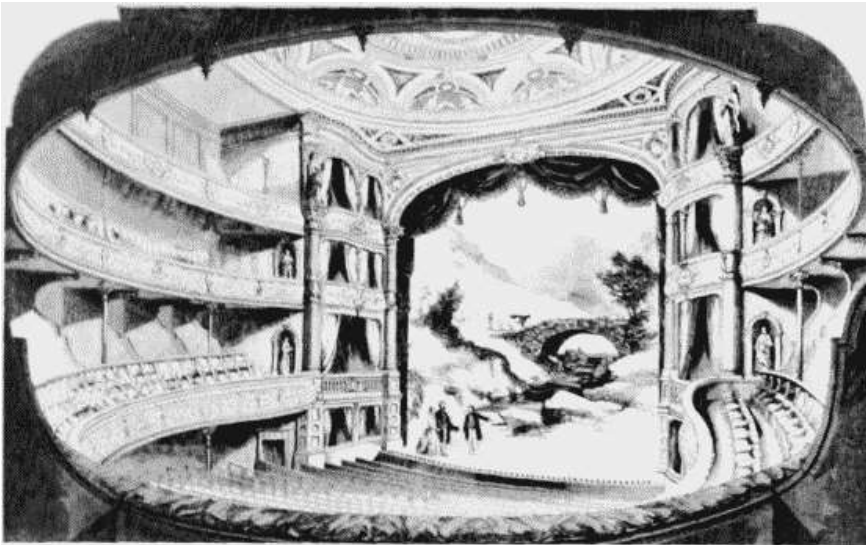


Drury Lane Theatre, John Bluck, 1808 vam.ac.uk



Auditorium and Stage of the Second Covent Garden Theatre, 1810 New York Library Digital Collections (arthurlloyd.co.uk)

1737 Licensing Act
Only two 'patent' theatres were licensed to present plays by the Lord Chamberlain. So only two '*legitimate theatres*'.



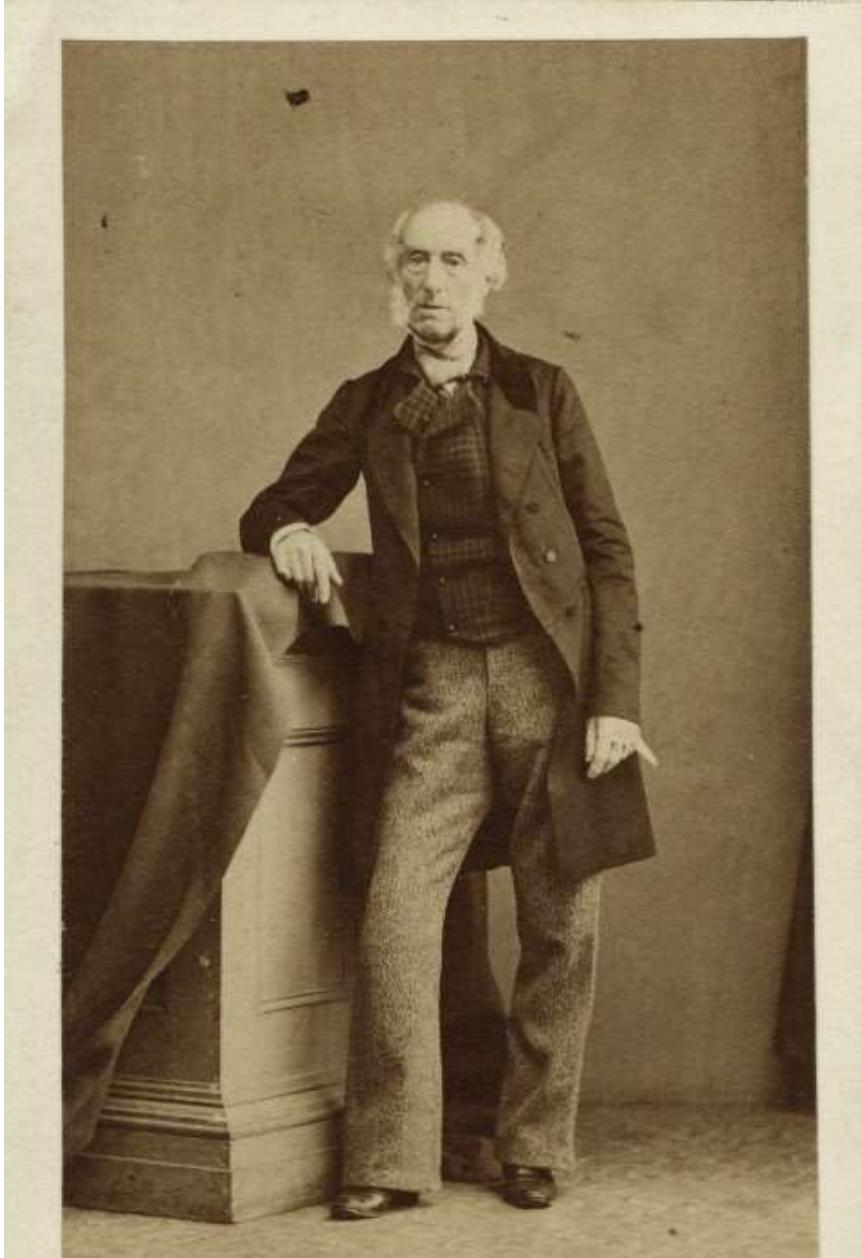
Adelphi Theatre.
Interior as rebuilt in 1858. T. H. Wyatt british-history.ac.uk



St James's Theatre, John Gregory Crace 1835, Denver Art museum

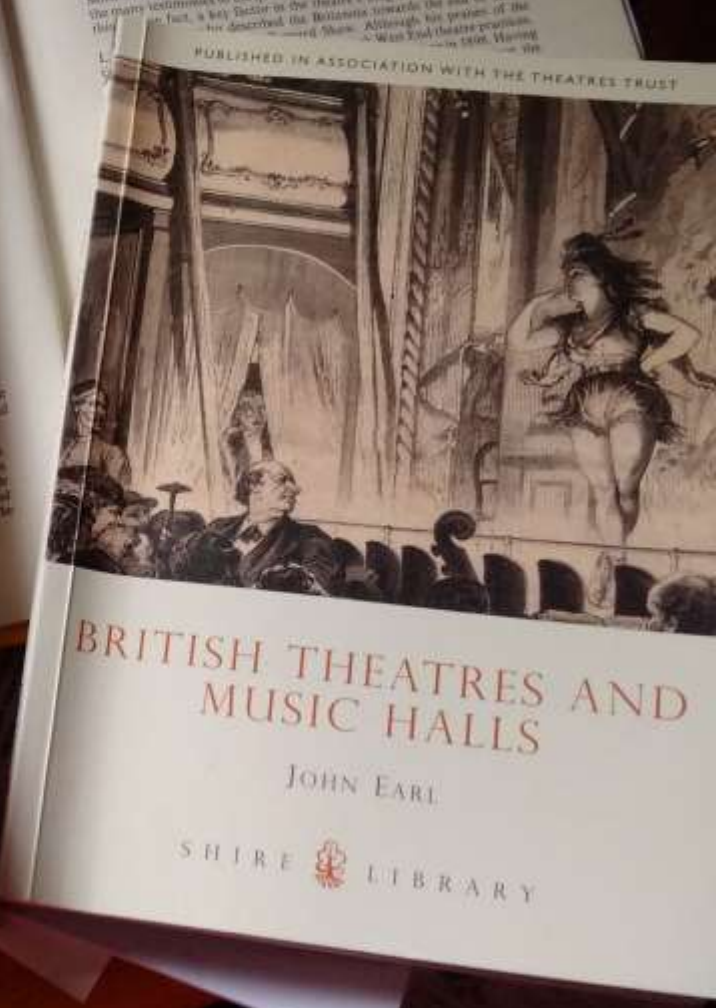
1843 Theatres Act
Other theatres could now apply to the Lord Chamberlain for a license to present plays. So it was possible for more theatres to become '*legitimate*'.

George Sackville-West, 5th Earl De La Warr.
Lord Chamberlain 1841-1846



Borough Music Hall, around 1859.

You can see that people are sitting at tables drinking, smoking and talking. They are not necessarily facing the front or watching the act on stage.



In 1843, the Theatres Act removed the patent monopoly and allowed the Lord Chamberlain to grant a theatre license to any suitable person. This encouraged the building of new theatres, invariably by speculators seeking profit. However, the Lord Chamberlain's new licenses forbade the consumption of alcohol in the auditorium. This led to the closure of many small saloon theatres, which relied upon alcohol sales to stay in business.

Yet, the same legislation enabled magistrates to grant public houses licences to offer a variety of entertainment, which led to the creation of a new form of popular theatrical entertainment known as music hall. Very soon, concert or supper rooms were built onto public houses which could sell alcohol and serve meals during their musical productions. They were usually well-lit rooms with a flat floor and a simple open platform stage with little or no scenery. The audience would sit on benches or at tables in front of the stage, or on balconies against one or more of the walls. They could come and go freely during the evening and were not restricted to performance times.

<http://www.theatrust.org.uk/discover-theatres/theatre-faqs/172-how-has-the-design-of-theatre-buildings-changed-over-time>

Quotes from John Earl's emails

“The bit on the Trust’s website is rather too compressed. The 1843 Act did make it possible for any suitable person to be granted a theatre license, but it did not lead to the building of any new theatres for some years.

“There was nothing in the Act itself to forbid drinking in the auditorium, but the Lord Chamberlain was able to apply conditions that he thought appropriate to any license that he granted and this was a restriction he applied generally – I am inclined to say ‘always’. In fact, I know of no exception to this rule, but I can’t say that I have seen every post-1843 theatre license.

R E P O R T
FROM THE
SELECT COMMITTEE
ON
THEATRICAL LICENSES AND
REGULATIONS;
TOGETHER WITH THE
PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE,
MINUTES OF EVIDENCE,
AND APPENDIX.

“...a reference in the 1866 Select Committee Report states that ‘in the case of saloons’ (ie the establishments most affected by the new regime) ‘the entrances to the stage should not be through the bars or taprooms...(and) that no drinking or smoking should be allowed during the hours of performance and that no saloon should be open before 5pm’.

“A footnote reads: ‘Although no condition against smoking or drinking appears in the Licenses to Theatres, it was clearly understood that they were forbidden’. (Appendix 1 to the Report, described as ‘papers handed in to Mr Ponsonby’ from the Lord Chamberlain’s Office). Presumably the licensees were well aware of the LC’s rules (I don’t remember ever seeing them in print) and knew that the license would be withdrawn if they didn’t play by them.

Appendix (F.)

As there are no Saloons remaining in 1866, this Form is obsolete.

FORM OF LICENSE FOR THEATRICAL SALOONS.

I do hereby give leave and license unto _____ to
have stage plays performed at _____ during one year from
the date hereof, with the exception of the Lord's Day (commonly called Sunday), Christmas
Day, Ash Wednesday, and Good Friday, according to the Act of the 6th & 7th of Victoria,
cap. 68, for regulating theatres, provided that there be no smoking in the said saloon,
during the hours it is open for performances under the authority of this license, and that
refreshments are supplied only during the intervals between the performances, as at the
theatres, and that there be no tables or stands to place refreshments upon in the saloon, and
the said saloon shall not open for such performances on any day whatever before the hour
of five in the afternoon.

This license is granted upon the understanding that the above named actual and respon-
sible manager shall be subject to such rules and regulations as shall be made in regard to the
said saloon.

Given under my hand and seal this 29th day of September, 18____, in the
year of Her Majesty's reign.



Lord Chamberlain.

“...according to the Act of the 6th & 7th of Victoria, cap 68, for regulating theatres, provided there be no smoking in the said saloon.....and that refreshments are supplied only during the intervals between the performances, as at the theatres, and that there be no tables or stands to place refreshments upon in the saloon..”

THE VARIETY STAGE; A
HISTORY OF THE MUSIC
HALLS FROM THE
EARLIEST PERIOD TO
THE PRESENT TIME

by
Charles Douglas Stuart

Forgotten Books

“The turning point in the history of the saloons occurred soon after the passing of the Theatres Registry Act 1843, when Sir Henry Ponsonby, on behalf of the Lord Chamberlain, informed the proprietors that all saloons under his license had in future to be conducted as theatres, and to bear that description. The choice was given to them of either legitimate theatres with dramatic entertainments, but without the privilege of retailing refreshments in the auditorium, or regular music halls with drinking license, but minus the right of what the Act defined as ‘stage plays’.”

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