

## Music Hall Man of Broxbourne

Whilst reading recently a book on British Music Hall I was intrigued to learn that one of the pioneer singer and songwriters of the industry was born on my own patch. His name was Henry Robert Clifton (known as Harry) and he was born on 15th May 1832 in Broxbourne to Henry (a carpenter) and Harriet Clifton, and christened at St. Augustine Church, on the 20th May 1832. Although today Harry Clifton's name has all but faded into forgotten history, in his time he was a well established personality of his profession, whose work was widely enjoyed across the entire social spectrum. I must say I was rather surprised not to find his name amongst the hall of fame in local history books.

Clifton was a prolific song writer, famous for comic and so-called, motto tunes (those which told a moral tale). His most successful song was "*Paddle your own Canoe*", although his most enduring must surely be the amusing "*Pretty Little Polly Perkins of Paddington Green*", recorded in the 1970s by Music Hall master, Roy Hudd. By the time Polly Perkins was written, variety theatre entertainment, or "*music hall*" as it had become more universally known, was growing rapidly in popularity amongst the Victorian masses. It was borne out of the fad for communal singing amongst the working classes at the so called "free-and-easies" in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. These were pubs with an additional room given over to singing evenings, which were presided over by a chairman, as later immortalised by Leonard Sachs in "The Good Old Days". These evenings were raucous and bawdy affairs, providing a much needed escape from the hardships of real life. Such was the popularity of this pastime that purpose built venues – music halls – soon began to spring up and it was not long before a whole new entertainment industry was spawned. As it grew artists jostled for the limelight and so required material to develop and sustain their appeal for their audience. Harry Clifton was one of the first to recognise this need, but to make a living and a name from this work he would turn out songs at a phenomenal rate and play at a different town or city every night. He toured continuously nationwide to promote his work and in October 1864 returned to perform in his native Hertfordshire, at venues in Cheshunt, Ware, Hertford and Hoddesdon (see newspaper article).

Harry Clifton died on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1872 at Shepherds Bush, London at the young age of 41. Ironically he was the same as age as his father at death, who incidentally died in Hoddesdon on October 21st 1837, and was buried at St. Augustine on the 27th October.

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I think the following table will be found pretty accurate:—St. Alban's, 558ft.; Winchester, 553ft.; Ely, 532ft.; York, 520ft.; Westminster, 511ft.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,  
7, High-street, St. Alban's, JNO. HARRIS.  
19th October, 1864.

## CORN EXCHANGE, HERTFORD.

### HARRY CLIFTON'S COMIC ENTERTAINMENT AND CONCERT,

On Tuesday Evening, October 25, 1864,

ASSISTED BY  
MISS FORRESTER, CARL JACOBS, AND  
MR. F. ROBERTS.

*Admission—Front Seats, 2s.; Second Seats, 1s.;  
Promenade, 6d.*

Tickets to be had of Mr. Stephen Austin, Bookseller.

Mr. HARRY CLIFTON will Visit  
CHESHUNT, on MONDAY, October 24th,  
WARE, on WEDNESDAY, October 26,  
HODDESDON, on FRIDAY, October 28th.

## F O U N D.

A DOUBLE GOLD EYE GLASS was FOUND in the road close to WOODHILL CHURCH, HATFIELD, a few weeks ago. The Eye Glass is in the care of Mr. LARKMAN, Butler to W. Franks, Esq., at Woodhill, and will be delivered to the owner, on a proper description being given.

TABLE DIRECTORS of a LONDON LIFE OFFICE.

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