

SAM COLLINS



Top o' the mornin' t'yous – Sam Collins here! That's Irish, that is, like me. Though, believe it or not, I was actually born, as Sam Vagg, in London and that's where I had my biggest successes. And failures. Altogether now: 'Aaaaaaaww'!

 If there's one thing I couldn't stand it was racism. I couldn't bear to see folk persecuted or teased just because of where they came from or the way they spoke. That often happened to us Irish so I found a clever way to make people see how wrong it was. I shuffled on stage in scruffy clothes and carrying my shillelagh over my shoulder – that's a big stick with all my worldly possessions tied up in a bundle hanging from it. Then I started waving the stick around and taunted the audience, playing the stereotype of the Irishman so many of them loved to hate.

{ WHAT DOES STEREOTYPE MEANS? }

 Then I sang songs about what Irish people were really like and the real lives they lived – the poverty, the hard work, the discrimination. Songs like 'No Irish Need Apply'. That made them think again! Then I sang them some Irish comic songs as well and that made them laugh. I like to think I taught them the error their ways but entertained them at the same time.



 It was rebuilt once and outlasted me by nearly a hundred years and all the best acts performed there – Marie Lloyd, Norman Wisdom, though that was long after I passed away. It was destroyed by fire in 1958 but the façade is still standing today – and you can see it if you go to Islington Green!

WHAT IS A FAÇADE?

 I started earning a few shillings singing in the pubs of an evening, working up chimneys as sweep by day. I got my big break from Edwin Winder, licensee of the Mogul Saloon in Covent Garden, where I had my first big hit *Paddy's Wedding*. That led to more appearances at even bigger music halls and I was on the bill for Wilton's opening night. I sang my next big hit *Limerick Races* – what a grand night it was!

WHAT DO YOU THINK LIMERICK RACES WAS ABOUT?

 Now, let me tell you, John Wilton wasn't the only one who could build a decent music hall. Not long after he built his, I built one just as good in Marylebone, as well as buying couple of pubs round there. That's where the failure comes in, I'm afraid, because I went bankrupt and lost the lot.

 I had the fighting spirit though because I got back on the stages again, in London and Birmingham, and I made enough money to buy another pub, this time in Islington. It took me a whole year to get a licence but I converted that pub into a beautiful music hall and named it after meself, I did: Collins Music Hall.



SAM COLLINS



SAM COLLINS' REAL NAME WAS SAMUEL THOMAS VAGG. Although born in London on 22nd March 1825, he became famous for performing Irish comic songs and representing the stereotypical view of the **IRISH CHARACTER ON STAGE.**

HIS STAGE DRESS WAS A BRIMLESS TOP HAT, A LONG COAT, KNEE BREECHES, THICK WOOLLEN STOCKINGS AND IRISH BROGUES (UNTANNED LEATHER SHOES), AND CARRYING A SHILLELAGH.

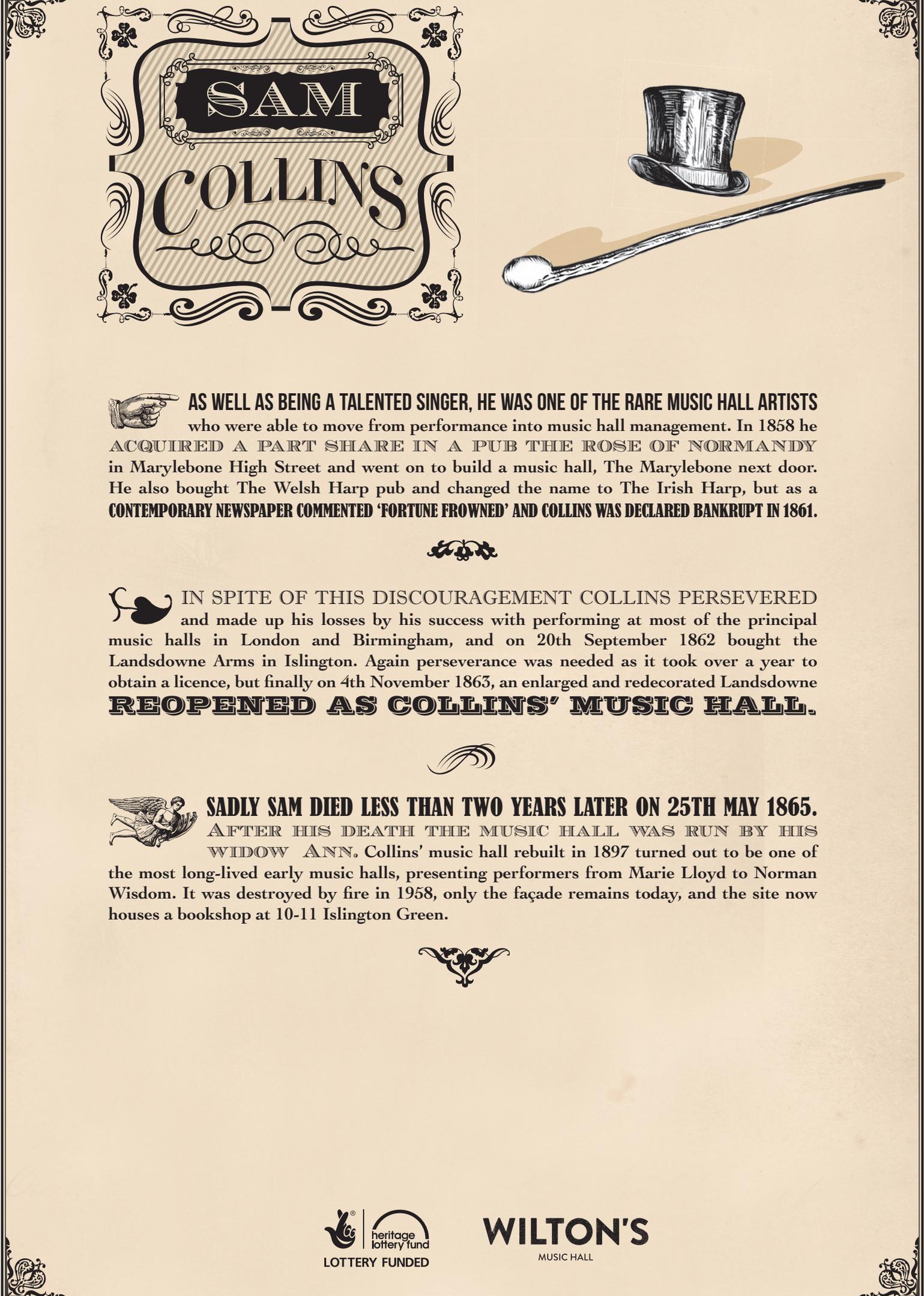
A shillelagh was a thick stick sometimes used as a weapon, but more usually carried on the shoulder as a way of carrying clothes etc. tied up in a bundle.

HE WOULD COME ON STAGE DRAGGING HIS COAT ON THE FLOOR AND WAVING HIS SHILLELAGH, and pretending to dare members of the audience to stand on it. The pretence would **BRING OUT THE ANTI-IRISH FEELING IN THE AUDIENCE,** which he would then counter with songs that drew sympathy for the way Irish people were treated, such as 'No Irish Need Apply'.

HE BEGAN EARNING A FEW SHILLINGS AS A PUB SINGER, while working as a chimney sweep, and was talent spotted by Edwin Winder the licensee of the Mogul Concert Room, where Sam had his first hit 'Paddy's Wedding'.

THIS SUCCESS LED TO ENGAGEMENTS AT EVANS'S GRAND HOTEL in Covent Garden, then to the Canterbury, Weston's and Wilton's.

HE WAS ONE OF THE STARS OF WILTON'S FIRST NIGHT in March 1859 where he sang his second big hit 'Limerick Races'.



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AS WELL AS BEING A TALENTED SINGER, HE WAS ONE OF THE RARE MUSIC HALL ARTISTS who were able to move from performance into music hall management. In 1858 he **ACQUIRED A PART SHARE IN A PUB THE ROSE OF NORMANDY** in Marylebone High Street and went on to build a music hall, The Marylebone next door. He also bought The Welsh Harp pub and changed the name to The Irish Harp, but as a **CONTEMPORARY NEWSPAPER COMMENTED 'FORTUNE FROWNED' AND COLLINS WAS DECLARED BANKRUPT IN 1861.**



 **IN SPITE OF THIS DISCOURAGEMENT COLLINS PERSEVERED** and made up his losses by his success with performing at most of the principal music halls in London and Birmingham, and on 20th September 1862 bought the Landsdowne Arms in Islington. Again perseverance was needed as it took over a year to obtain a licence, but finally on 4th November 1863, an enlarged and redecorated Landsdowne **REOPENED AS COLLINS' MUSIC HALL.**



SADLY SAM DIED LESS THAN TWO YEARS LATER ON 25TH MAY 1865. **AFTER HIS DEATH THE MUSIC HALL WAS RUN BY HIS WIDOW ANN.** Collins' music hall rebuilt in 1897 turned out to be one of the most long-lived early music halls, presenting performers from Marie Lloyd to Norman Wisdom. It was destroyed by fire in 1958, only the façade remains today, and the site now houses a bookshop at 10-11 Islington Green.



SAM COLLINS



SAM COLLINS' REAL NAME WAS SAMUEL THOMAS VAGG.

BORN IN LONDON
22nd March 1825.

ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR SINGERS OF THE 1840s AND 50s, singing in tavern concert rooms, supper rooms and large pub music halls including the Canterbury and Wilton's.

BEST-KNOWN FOR PERFORMING IRISH COMIC SONGS and portraying Irish characters.

Described as corpulent with a jovial face **AND CHEERY MANNER.**

HIS STAGE DRESS WAS A BRIMLESS TOP HAT, A LONG CAPED COAT, knee breeches, thick woollen stockings, and CARRYING A SHILLELAGH (a wooden stick) over his shoulder.

BEGAN WORKING AS A CHIMNEY SWEEP and earning extra money as a pub singer.

HAD HIS FIRST HIT 'PADDY'S WEDDING' – an old song written in the first decade of the 19th century – at the old Mogul Concert Room in Drury Lane, sometime before 1847.

HE SANG HIS SECOND BIG HIT 'LIMERICK RACES' at Wilton's opening night in March 1859.

ONE OF HIS CATCHIEST SONGS THE 'ROCKY ROAD TO DUBLIN' can still be heard in various versions on the internet.

Many of his songs describe the plight of **IRISH IMMIGRANT WORKERS** e.g. 'No Irish Need Apply'.

In 1862 he bought the Landsdowne Arms in Islington and in 1863 reopened it at **COLLINS' MUSIC HALL,** seating 1,000 people.

SAM DIED ON 25TH MAY 1865.

COLLINS' MUSIC HALL REBUILT IN 1897 SURVIVED UNTIL DESTROYED BY FIRE IN 1858. The pub façade remains, and the site has now become a bookshop at 10-11 Islington Green.