

V&A Acquires Wilton's Music Hall Archive

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The Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A) has acquired the archive of the world's oldest surviving grand Victorian music hall, dating from 1871 to the present day. Wilton's Music Hall extensive archive features an array of material including an 1871 sketch of the interior, a campaign poster to save the building from destruction and handmade tickets constructed from old beer boxes that record the history of the building and its most famous performances.

In 1853, five houses located on Grace's Alley in London's East End were combined into one venue by John Wilton, becoming a Music Hall attracting the greatest talents of the day. Over the next 100 years Wilton's Music Hall had a varied career becoming a Methodist Mission from 1888 and, surviving the Blitz, standing in as a rag sorting warehouse in 1956. The threat of destruction loomed in the 1960s and campaigners fought to protect the beloved former music hall. Amongst them, poet and comedian Spike Milligan, whose letters can be found in the archive, alongside photographs and sketches that document the campaign history. In the 1970s, the building was awarded Grade II listed status and the first trust to raise funds to buy the lease was founded.

Despite the initial repairs, the Music Hall became derelict and attracted artists due to its atmospheric space. Behind the scenes photography shows the shoot for the notorious, banned music video for Frankie Goes to Hollywood's *Relax*. In 1997, Wilton's reopened as a live performance venue with a limited run of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* directed by Deborah Warner and starring Fiona Shaw, which was hugely successful. Many critics commented on how suited Wilton's was to the desolate mood of Eliot's poem. The archive includes photos of the façade of the building during the run of the performance as well as a poster, which will join photographs captured by the V&A Department of Theatre and Performance taken of the original production.

A Heritage Lottery Funded programme of conservative repair, designed by Tim Ronalds Architects, completed building restoration in 2015 whilst maintaining Wilton's unique character.

The Wilton's Music Hall archive joins the Victoria and Albert Museum's National Collection of Performing Arts where it will be reunited with other documents already held in the Museum's collections, including the venue's first photographic survey, as well as some of its earliest depictions in early video and images. The V&A will continue to work with Wilton's Music Hall to capture performance at the historic venue by recording productions for the National Video Archive of Performance. This archive will also join the V&A's expansive archive collections documenting performing arts across the UK.

Geoffrey Marsh, Director of the V&A's Theatre and Performance Collections, said "*Wilton's Music Hall is part of the fabric of London's rich entertainment history. We are delighted to welcome the archive to the National Archive of Performance and look forward to working with Wilton's to capture their exceptional artistic programme for future generations to enjoy.*"

Holly Kendrick, Executive Director at Wilton's Music Hall, said "*Wilton's are proud to donate our archive to the V&A Department of Theatre and Performance where it will be preserved and made available for research, enabling Wilton's to further its commitment to accessible heritage.*"

The V&A will make the full archive available for research, once cataloguing has been completed, and digital records will also be available on Search the Collections, the Museum's online searchable database.

Notes to editors

About the V&A's Theatre and Performance Collection

The V&A's Theatre and Performance collections document current practice and the history of all areas of performing arts in the UK, including drama, dance, opera, circus, puppetry, comedy, musical theatre, costume, set design, pantomime, popular music and more. The collection was founded in the 1920s when private collector, Gabrielle Enthoven, donated her extensive collection of theatrical designs, memorabilia, books and photographs to the Museum. Since then the collection has continued to grow to include significant objects and works of art, books, manuscripts, audio-visual recordings and ephemera, as well as the archives of performing arts companies, performers, directors, stage designers and private collectors.

About Wilton's Music Hall

East London gem Wilton's Music Hall re-opened the doors to its Grade II listed building in 2015 after extensive refurbishment. The oldest Grand Music Hall in the world, they are fast becoming one of the country's most vibrant multi-arts venues, home to a year-round programme of live music and theatre productions which have been seen by over 40,000 people in the past year alone. It also houses two main bars which are much-loved destinations in their own right, serving a carefully selected range of beers, wines and spirits. Their delicious menu of seasonal dishes and small plates is designed by in-house caterers Gatherers and inspired by Wilton's distinctive heritage. Wilton's is not open on Bank Holidays.

This November, Wilton's will host an exhibition from the Storybox Collective, exploring Wilton's eclectic history by reinterpreting the archive. The Storybox Collective are a London-based group of creatives, exploring the potential of archival research through collaborative making, and are the first researchers to be granted access to the archive at the V&A.

<https://www.wiltons.org.uk/>

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