The Music Hall, 1885-1922:

The Emergence of a National Entertainment Industry in Britain

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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It is argued that the study of the growth of the music hall industry contributes to several issues of significance to cultural geography. Theoretically, the emergence of a highly commercialised leisure industry sheds light upon the relationship between economic structures and the production of culture. Substantively, the music hall was a dominant cultural form during the period of the emergence of British nationalism. It is argued that the study of music hall contributes to the debate surrounding the timing of, and the mechanisms involved in the creation of a national culture in Britain.

In analysing the transformation of the music halls this thesis draws upon the general theoretical framework of the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School - as formulated in the Culture Industry hypothesis - and integrates their insights with the more historically specific perspective provide by the theories of the organisation of capital.

Chapter 2 begins to unfold the geographical dimension to the music hall industry through the construction of an outline of the spatial distribution of music halls in England and Wales. It then focuses on the integration of the independent units which made up this distribution into a unified network largely through the emergence of music hall syndicates, which owned music halls in several locations, from the 1890s.

Subsequent chapters are focused on the factors which enabled and encouraged the development of these large, highly capitalised music hall companies. Chapter 3 is concerned with the examination of patterns of investment in the music hall business, and the profitability of music hall companies. It stresses the importance of the adoption of limited liability status as a prerequisite for the advent of investment on a scale large enough to support music hall syndicates.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine the elaboration of the complex bureaucratic hierarchies within music hall companies, which were necessary in order to ensure the efficient management of these large scale, and spatially extended, music hall companies. The chapters argue that the control of decision-making passed from the hands of proprietors with an intimate knowledge of popular culture, often gained initially as publicans, into those of directors with specialist administrative skills obtained outside of the music hall business. Lawyers and accountants were prominent in this transformation. This change in entrepreneurial personnel was reflected in changes in the policies adopted by music hall syndicates, including the development of more sophisticated planning techniques.

Chapter 6 examines the effect on the functioning of the music hall industry of the emergence of music hall syndicates. During the 1900s this led to the intensification of competition within the industry. The control of artists became central to this competitive process, and stimulated the sophistication of the 'star system'. It argues that the desire of syndicates to obtain and retain exclusive control over performers contained an imperative towards the geographical expansion of syndicates. This competition between syndicates stimulated rapid wage inflation in the industry. In order to stop this wage inflation, and as a reaction to the Variety Artists Federation strike of 1907, syndicates began to abandon their competitive policies in favour of cooperation. By 1922, the main syndicates had all become involved in an effective monopoly of the music hall industry.

This transformation facilitated the rapid flow of artists around the circuits of these companies. However, the extent to which this represents the creation of a national music hall culture is limited by the facts that these syndicates generally limited their operations to large cities, and that local and regional circuits not integrated into this national network continued to flourish.
Preface

I hereby declare that:

1. My dissertation is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at any other University.

   I further state that no part of my dissertation has already or is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification.

2. This dissertation is entirely the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

3. This dissertation does not exceed the prescribed limit of length.

Andrew John Crowhurst
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CHAPTER 1. ECONOMY, CULTURE AND THE MUSIC HALL

1-1 Introduction

The primary concern of this thesis is to chart the development of the most popular cultural form in Britain during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - the music hall. The significance of the halls lies in the fact that they were the first art form to possess a truly mass appeal. The main argument of the thesis examines the evolution of large-scale industrial organisation within the music hall business in response to the challenges created by the emergence of a mass market for entertainment.

I shall argue that the medium through which these challenges were met was the construction of music hall syndicates from the 1890s. These were companies which united a number of geographically disparate music halls under a single ownership. Syndicates, therefore, became engaged in the distribution of culture as well as its production. This thesis contends, therefore, that the increases in the scale of organisation of the music hall industry were indissolubly linked with the spatial integration of the music hall network in Britain. During the period under consideration, the music hall industry came to be organised on a national scale.

The timespan of this thesis has been defined in relation to two key moments in this transformation. 1885 witnessed the onset of a boom in the incorporation of music hall companies under limited liability legislation, which was an essential precondition
for the large-scale organisation of the industry.\textsuperscript{1} 1922 has been chosen to mark out the end of the transition as, at this date, the reorganisation of the music hall business reached its culmination in the establishment of an effective monopoly in the national music hall industry.\textsuperscript{2}

The details of the factors which enabled and encouraged this transformation will be considered closely in succeeding chapters. In the introduction, however, I intend to adopt a broader approach. I shall sketch out a variety of points of potential intersection between the studies of geography and of the music hall as an agenda for research, within the context of which the specific task undertaken here can be located. I shall argue that the academic study of the emergence of the national music hall industry between 1885 and 1922 is strategically placed to provide insights into issues of significance to cultural geography at both the theoretical and empirical levels.

The following discussion demonstrates the significant role of the study of the music hall in advancing our understanding of the nature of the processes involved in, and the periodisation of, the emergence of a national culture in Britain. This issue has provided a focus for debate amongst historical geographers during the late 1980s.

Furthermore, I shall argue that the commercialisation of leisure and the commodification of culture, in which the emerging music hall industry was implicated, provides an intriguing site

\textsuperscript{1} The relationship between limited liability organisation and the development of the music halls will be considered in chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{2} The steps leading to the construction of this monopoly are considered in chapter 6.
for the exploration of the links between cultural forms and their economic context. This involves a consideration of the attempts of the Frankfurt School Critical Theorists, and particularly of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, to tackle this issue through the elaboration of the concept of the Culture Industry. I argue that, although their theorisations are predicated upon the intention to place culture within its wider social and economic contexts, the writings of the Critical Theorists do little to illuminate the nature of the culture-economy interface due to their insistence on the total subordination of the former to the latter.

I shall also demonstrate the prominent, if implicit, role played by mass cultural theories, derived from the Frankfurt School, in the development of scholarship on the music halls. Music hall audiences, as 'consumers' of mass produced culture, have been conceived of as passive receptors for cultural meanings. The most recent literature has thrown off this mass cultural perspective, and emphasizes the active role played by audiences in the production of meaning. Nevertheless, this survey concludes that the potential of music hall studies to bridge the gap between economic and cultural issues has not been realised. My review also identifies a major imbalance in the current sophistication of our understanding of the cultural and economic aspects of the halls, and argues that attempts to synthesize the two are unlikely to be fruitful until our knowledge of certain central features of the economic organisation of the music hall industry has been expanded. It is to the redressing of this imbalance that this thesis addresses itself.
To this end, the introduction concludes with a brief consideration of the trends in industrial organisation which were characteristic of the UK economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, the changes in the structure and management of companies is examined within the theoretical framework of the organisation of capital.

However, this thesis is not conceived of as a project in business history. The aspects of the economic organisation of the music hall industry upon which this thesis dwells are those considered to be most pertinent to the advancement of a suitably contextualised cultural geography.

1-2 Music Hall and National Culture in Britain
1-2.1 Economy and culture in regional geography

The exploration of the links between economy and culture was placed firmly on the agenda of historical geography for the late 1980's by Jack Langton's seminal paper on The industrial revolution and the regional geography of England. In this paper Langton took issue with the conventional wisdom that the industrialisation of the British economy was necessarily accompanied by the cultural homogenisation of the population.³ Langton argued that, to the contrary, during the period of the industrial revolution not only did regional differences persist, but, further, that functional differentiation between regions became more pronounced, and that this was accompanied by the development of regional mentalités and the emergence of self-

³ For an historian with a similar interest in the 'nationalisation' of British culture, see K. Robbins, 1988, Nineteenth-Century Britain. Integration and diversity.
conscious regional identities. The growth of these identities, Langton argued, was actively encouraged by the instabilities and insecurities generated by the industrial revolution. With respect to regional differences, Langton declared that 'the process of industrialization both intensified them and heightened people's consciousness of their existence'.

Having painted this clear picture of the continuing cultural diversity between the regions of England, Langton endeavoured to relate this phenomenon to the 'economic basis of regionalism'. However, as Langton candidly admits, his exploration of this 'economic basis', primarily related to constraints imposed by the rudimentary transportation network, is little more than an addendum to his project. The primary objective of his article was the description of regional fragmentation, and the emergence of mentalités, rather than the explanation of these phenomena.

In focusing on the role of the transportation network, and specifically the canals, in articulating regional economies, as the basis of regionalism, Langton strays, inadvertently, into economic reductionism. He implies, as Gregory charges, that 'regional economies found expression in regional cultures'. Despite his impressive sensitivity to local variations in culture, Langton, therefore, ultimately fails to shed much light on the

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5. Ibid, p. 147.
nature of the complex relationship between economy and culture in the production of cultural geographies.

Unfortunately the widespread discussion of the processes of national integration and regional differentiation provoked by Langton similarly fails to contribute substantially to our understanding of the economy-culture relationship.

Gregory usefully shifts the focus of the debate away from cultural patterns, and towards the examination of the economic processes underlying the production of regions, by examining the regional circulation patterns of commercial intelligence and capital (in both its commodity and non-commodity forms). However, it has been justifiably argued that Gregory’s comments ‘fail to engage with what apparently provoked them’. His consideration of culture is limited to the cursory observation that during this period, London became a national centre for conspicuous consumption.

Although very different in style to Gregory’s critique, Michael Freeman’s contribution to this debate, which, in essence, takes the form of a sympathetic qualification of Langton’s analysis of the economic basis of regionalism at the empirical level, again fails to engage with the issues relating to the culture-economy interface raised by Langton’s paper. Indeed, Freeman takes the economic reductionism a stage further in his deployment of the phrase ‘economic regionalism’. Langton

10. Gregory, op. cit., p. 52. For the elaboration of this approach see I. Black, Geography, political economy and the circulation of finance capital in early industrial England, pp. 366-84.
maintains a critical distinction between regions and regionalism. Whilst any uni-dimensional system displaying spatial cohesion might be referred to as a region, regionalism conveys a sense of coherence over many aspects of life amongst different sectors of society within a single mesh of areas and a conscious identification of people with these territories.\(^{13}\)

The reductionist logic accepted by Freeman, by contrast, assumes that if the economy provides the basis for cultural identities, then it is reasonable to talk of 'economic regionalism'.\(^{14}\)

1-2.2 The integration of British culture, 1870-1920.

First, I wish to turn my attention to the consideration of the contribution of music hall studies to the substantive question of the development of a national culture in Britain.

Langton suggests casually, almost in passing, that cultural integration took place from the 1840s, when the Canal Age yielded to the Railway Age.

The railways thus inevitably set in motion, both directly through more rapid communication of people and ideas, and indirectly through the economic forces they released, powerful currents of national integration.\(^{15}\)

However, Freeman's corrective to Langton's narrative, stressing the continuance of regional frictions of distance into the railway age, shifts the timing of the emergence of integrative forces towards the end of the century. Moreover, as Freeman

\(^{13}\) Langton, 1984, op. cit., p. 150. This gives a clear indication that it was not Langton's intention to reduce spatial patterns of culture to the level of a function of economic factors alone.


\(^{15}\) Langton, 1988, op. cit., p. 164.
points out, 'railway travel did not become truly the province of
the masses until the last quarter of the nineteenth century'. This line of argument suggests that the nationalisation of culture
occurred at the same time as music halls reached their hey-day.
This, of course, is no coincidence. The development of rapid and
relatively cheap transportation was fundamental to the growth of
the national music hall industry, which depended on the
circulation of star performers around the provinces.

This reassessment of the date at which the communication
network became fully integrated at a national level brings this
géographical perspective on the cultural integration of Britain
into line with the arguments put forward by social historians, who
identify the development of a national culture, and the
strengthening of national identity in Britain between 1870 and
1914.

Historians have highlighted a wide range of factors, beyond
the improvement of transport networks, that facilitated the
diffusion of ideas and the integration of diverse social groups.
These developments included the institution of national,
compulsory education, universal (male) political enfranchisement,
and the emergence of mass circulation newspapers. The effects
of this considerable expansion in the shared experiences of
Britons, and of the improvement of information flows, were moulded
into a self-conscious nationhood by fundamental changes in
Britain's foreign relations. Britain's economic hegemony was
being threatened by Germany and the USA, whilst the fierce

17. On the transformation of the press see A. Briggs, 1968,
*Victorian Cities*, pp. 356-9. Briggs states that by the 1890s 'the
days of autonomous regional cultures were doomed' (p. 357).
competition for 'a place in the sun' brought Britain into direct conflict with other expansionist and imperialist European powers. These circumstances were reflected in the emergence of patriotism, which encouraged the active participation of socially and geographically disparate groups in shared cultural practices. In particular, this new cultural identification was reflected in, and reinforced by, the re-packaging of the monarchy between 1870 and 1914, and the 'invention' of ceremonials which served as a focus for national pride.

The simultaneous emergence of a national music hall industry placed the halls in an ideal position to play an active role in the promotion of these new cultural identities. As Bailey indicated, the fact that music hall artists were

Working the provincial halls in frequent tours...made the medium a prime agent in the construction of a national taste in entertainment.

That the halls took advantage of this opportunity is testified to by the appellation, accorded to the halls by MacQueen-Pope, of the 'fount of patriotism'. The music hall was implicated in the generation of a more positive image for British

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18. For an outstanding intertwining of these threads of British history see E.J. Hobsbawm, 1987, The Age of Empire 1875-1914. For an international perspective on the growth of nationalism during this period see the same author's (1990), Nations and Nationalism Since 1780, pp. 101-30.
19. See D. Cannadine, 1983, The context, performance and meaning of ritual: The British monarchy and the 'invention of tradition', c. 1820-1977, pp. 120-38. This argument is supported by E.J. Hobsbawm, 1983, Mass producing traditions, pp 281-2, who notes the 'discovery' of the jubilee as a public relations exercise after Queen Victoria’s jubilee of 1887. Interestingly, these ceremonial occasions appear to have had a direct effect on the profitability of music halls. The counter-attractions generated by jubilees and coronations appear to have led to reductions in music hall attendance.
royalty, and music hall songs often dwelt upon the pomp of 'invented' ceremonial events. The halls have most insistently attracted the attentions of social historians in their role as a conduit for the dissemination of imperialist ideals. Indeed, it was the music hall artist 'The Great MacDermott' who introduced the word 'jingo' to the English language.

Thus, in terms of the substantive issues raised by Langton's paper, the music hall holds a significant place in integrating the arguments of geographers and historians. The emergence of a national music hall industry was dependent upon the creation of an efficient railway network, and was implicated in the dissemination of the patriotic, imperialistic, and 'jingoistic' beliefs which formed the basis of this new national identity.

1-3 'The Taming of the Crowd': Music Hall and Mass Culture

The academic study of the music hall therefore unites a number of the issues confronting social historians and cultural and historical geographers in relation to the evolution of British

24. The chorus of his song entitled 'We Don't Want to Fight', produced in 1877, went as follows:
We don't want to fight, but by Jingo if we do
We've got the ships, we've got the men, and got the money too.
We've fought the Bear before, and while we're Britons true,
The Russians shall not have Constantinople.
On this song, see Senelick, op. cit., pp. 168-71; Summerfield, op. cit., pp. 25-6.
25. It would seem likely that the creation of national circuits of music halls from the 1890s onwards would have been instrumental in spreading these sentiments. However, the existing studies referenced above focus on the textual analysis of the ideologies purveyed, rather than on their reception by the audience. The basic geography of the music hall industry is currently too little known to assess accurately how significant the halls were in disseminating these ideologies nationwide.
culture. However, perhaps of more profound significance, the study of the music hall business is well placed to shed the light of empirical research upon one of the central concerns of modern social theory. As David Ley has recently informed his geographical audience

The problem of the masses has also been a central, perhaps the central, preoccupation of social theory for more than a century.26

The music hall industry is of particular significance in this context as the first of the mass entertainment industries to emerge in response to the growth of 'mass' markets.27 The thoroughgoing commercialisation of music hall, which was required in order for the business to expand sufficiently and to support the national circuits constructed to meet this demand, integrated the production of culture into the wider sphere of industrial organisation.28 The growth of the music hall industry therefore provides an unique window onto the origins of the inter-articulation of cultural and economic production.

As indicated, the approach of mass culture is appropriate to both the study of culture in general, and of music hall culture in particular, in its insistence that culture cannot be studied

27. For a general account of the development of mass entertainments industries, see A. Briggs, 1960, *Mass Entertainment: The origin of a modern industry*.
28. The use of the term 'commercialisation' in this context is fraught with difficulties. N. McKendrick, J. Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, 1982, *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, indicates that leisure was already a commercial enterprise in the eighteenth century. The early music halls, dating from the 1840s and 1850s were, of course, dependent upon the generation of profits for their survival. The use made of 'commercialisation' here is intended to refer to a specific phase in the ongoing involvement of business and leisure. This phase was characterised by the increase in the scale of operations occasioned by the penetration of music hall entertainments by big business, and the emergence of a more exclusively commercial ethos within the business.
outside of its social and economic contexts. However, this approach has failed to obtain the maximum benefit from its juxtaposition of the spheres of economy and culture. The overriding cultural pessimism of mass culture theory, born out of the rise of Nazism in inter-war Germany, invariably takes a negative view of the masses, depicting them as inert, and with no powers of resistance to external manipulation. Thus, whilst mass culture theory, and particularly the theory of the 'Culture Industry' put forward by Horkheimer and Adorno, raises the question of the economy-culture relationship, by insisting upon the closeness of the relationship between the two spheres, it actually acts as a barrier to the understanding of this complex relationship through the assumption of the total subordination of the cultural to the economic.

1-3.1 Music hall and the social control of the masses

This intellectual tradition has informed academic studies of music hall from the outset. Senelick took as the touchstone for his pioneering analysis of music hall culture the proposition, put forward in the 1860s, that

If a man were permitted to make all the ballads of a nation, he need not care who should make the laws.29

From this beginning, Senelick builds up an utterly pessimistic picture of the culture of the masses, depicting the music halls as an instrument of domination, through which the social elite secured its control over the lower classes. In this instance, the pessimism springs from Senelick's essentialist conceptualisation of working class consciousness. He insists upon

29. Andrew Fletcher quoted in Senelick, op. cit., p. 149.
the existence of an 'authentic' and 'innately' radical culture which belonged to the working classes. The fact that much of the content of music hall entertainments was not only conventional and conservative, but, as outlined above, actively chauvinistic and imperialist, leads Senelick to the conclusion that the halls were acting to disseminate a 'false consciousness'.

In many cases, the halls were so much out of tune with popular sympathies that they might be regarded as pernicious instruments of propaganda... It must be recognized that, if the music hall failed to speak for the people, it could be a valuable tool in molding their political temper... We regard the music hall as the instigator and not the receptor of popular opinion.

Music hall audiences, according to Senelick's interpretation, were in the manipulative grasp of the Conservative party and its allies in the brewing trade. This perspective, stressing the conscious manipulation of the masses by elites in order to attain the objective of social stability, has been adopted by other scholars of the halls.

Penelope Summerfield's analysis of the behaviour of London music hall audiences adopts a more sophisticated and empirically specific variant of this approach. She detected a transition in the nature of the audiences at London halls from an essentially

31. Ibid, p. 150. It should be noted that Senelick does not attempt to delineate empirically the contours of the radical 'popular sympathies' which he invokes.
33. During the mid-1970s the 'social control' school was thriving throughout social history. Examples of which include: R.D. Storch, 1975, The plague of blue locusts; R.D. Storch, 1976, The policeman as domestic missionary; and A.P. Donajgrodski (ed.), 1977, Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain. For a brief discussion of social control within geographical literature, see P. Jackson, 1989, Maps of Meaning, p. 78.
rowdy mode of behaviour to passivity. The crowd had been ‘tamed’. Summerfield argued that this end had been attained through the ‘deliberate selection’, and protection, of those halls which were least threatening to the existing social order by licensing authorities, which acted as agents for the social elites. She argues that the commercialisation of the music hall business was important in this process, as the large amounts of capital invested in these halls made it easy for licensing authorities to coerce capitalists into conforming to the standards of morality demanded by the authorities. As early as 1892, it was estimated that the loss of a music and dancing licence could reduce the value of a West End theatre by up to £40,000. The LCC tightened its grip on the situation between 1889 and 1891, by deliberately refusing licences to small concerns which were not open to this form of persuasion.

Whilst this approach has the merit of focusing analysis upon the relations between classes, its shortcomings have been fully exposed, in contrasting styles, by F.M.L. Thompson and Gareth Stedman Jones. The detail of their arguments is worth considering at this point, as they are of wider significance as pertinent critiques of all theories of mass culture. Thompson objected vehemently to the cultural passivity accorded to the masses. He declared that, with respect to the total rejection of ‘history from below’, it was

36. Initially licensing had been the prerogative of the Middlesex Magistrates (for halls located north of the Thames), but these powers were transferred to the newly-formed London County Council (LCC) in 1888.
37. Summerfield, op. cit., p. 223.
38. Ibid, p. 216.
39. In the case of Summerfield’s argument, the actual passivity of the audience is mirrored in their broader cultural passivity.
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Unwarrantably condescending to the humble and anonymous masses to suppose that they were incapable of cultural development except as a result of instruction or coercion from outside.40

Stedman Jones attacked the theory of social control for being functionalist and static. The deliberately engineered equilibrium which it supposed to exist allowed no scope for the historical development of culture.41

The exposure of these shortcomings did not, however, bring about a fundamental reassessment of the cultural power of the masses within the field of music hall studies, in order to account for the dynamic nature of cultural change. Rather, authors threw off the most crude trappings of the model, notably the suggestion that control was consciously engineered through class-based conspiracies, without rejecting the assumptions underlying the theory. In the more sophisticated formulations of the 'taming of the crowd' thesis the role of conscious attempts to socialise the masses into bourgeois culture is taken over by the pervasive penetration of capitalist values into the sphere of entertainment. Stedman Jones has characterised this thesis succinctly.

The greed and private vices of capitalists, unbeknownst to them, create increasingly effective mechanisms of dousing, channelling or diverting class consciousness of workers, since the most effective 40. F.M.L. Thompson, 1981, Social control in Victorian Britain, p. 190.
41. G. Stedman Jones, 1983, Class expression versus social control?, pp. 67-79. It is worth noting that, elsewhere, Stedman Jones advanced a more persuasive argument to account for the conservatism and passivity of music hall audiences. He suggested that this trend was a reflection of the de-politicisation of the working classes, consequent upon the decline of the politically active and articulate artisan-based culture. However, Stedman Jones (like others who followed him), in rescuing the culture of the masses from enslavement to outside interests, probably over-compensates in the high degree of autonomy which he grants to the cultural sphere. See G. Stedman Jones, 1983, Working-class culture and working-class politics in London, 1870-1900, pp. 460-508.
agency of social control is the capitalization of the leisure market. The case for this interpretation of the role of the music halls in cultural change was made most persuasively by Peter Bailey in his path-breaking *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*. Bailey records the notable failure of the counter-attractions provided by the Victorian middle-classes, the most blatant of which was the Coffee House Music Hall Company founded in 1880, to alter the leisure patterns of the masses. This demonstrated to Bailey’s satisfaction that ‘the authentic reproduction of a vigorous popular ritual eluded outsiders whose principal concern was control and dilution’. Nevertheless, Bailey argues that the masses exhibited considerably less fortitude in resisting the demands made on their culture by the unfolding of a capitalist rationality within the leisure industry. In the face of these powerful economic forces, the masses were helpless to prevent their ‘taming’.

The eventual success of the reformed music halls in turning its customers into disciplined consumers adumbrated a new formula for capitalist growth that was to make the mass leisure industries of the present century more formidable agents of social control than anything experienced in Victorian society.

According to Bailey, the disciplining of the clientele of the halls was a functional necessity for an emerging group of ‘entrepreneurs of leisure’ who were dedicated to the pursuit of profit maximisation.

42. G. Stedman Jones, *Class expression*, pp. 81-2.
44. Ibid, p. 188.
The maximisation of the audience capacity of halls depended upon the replacement of free-standing tables and chairs, an arrangement which was associated with an audience orientated towards conviviality and the consumption of alcohol, with fixed stalls seating which focused the attention of the audience on the stage rather than the bars. Equally, the intensification of the productivity of performers, through the turns system and twice-nightly performances, required strict time-tabloring, and, therefore, necessitated the suppression of ad-libbing and performer-audience interaction.45 This trend was epitomised, to Bailey, by the reconstruction of the London Pavilion in 1886 at the instigation of Robert Villiers, who was to become instrumental in the creation of the first music hall syndicate, the Syndicate Halls, in the following decade. Under Villiers' control the chairman, who orchestrated the merriment of the audience, and the tables, upon which alcoholic refreshments could be placed, were removed from the auditorium and replaced by tip-up seats, which patrons could reserve in advance. The internal reorganisation of the hall also facilitated greater internal segregation of the audiences.46

In this context the audience became atomised. There were no direct relations between the members of the audience, whose attention was directed towards the stage, whilst the controls

45. Ibid, pp. 173-4. In contemporary stage terminology, ad-libbing was known as 'patter' or 'business'. The maximisation of labour productivity was pursued most ruthlessly in early years of the twentieth century, which lay beyond the scope of Bailey's concerns. For the attitudes of both managers and performers to this process of intensification, see the submissions put before the Arbitrator after the 1907 Variety Artists Federation strike and recorded in Minutes of the Proceedings of an Arbitration in regard to the Music Hall Dispute.
placed on 'patter' precluded any interaction between audience and performer. By this process of individuation, the audience was shorn of any autonomous culture-building potential.

Capital prevailed and extended its disciplines to the audience, who were reduced to passive consumers of a 'wholesome' product as part of a general surrender of control of their own lives.47

Within this tradition, the physical 'taming' of the audience has, therefore, frequently been construed as symptomatic of a more profound psychological pacification of the masses. This process has been located within a more general understanding of the significance of the commercialisation of leisure for the nature of mass culture, and particularly of the importance of the reconstitution of the audience as consumers of commercially produced culture. This line of argument asserts that, as consumers, the autonomy of the masses to create their own culture was reduced to the ability to accept or reject the wares offered up to them, which had, in fact, been manufactured by capitalist entrepreneurs, professional songwriters, and performers.48 In short this perspective posits a strict dichotomy between the role of cultural production and consumption, and argues that the music hall industry, as the pioneer of mass leisure industries, was shifting its audience from the former category to the latter.

A corollary of the thesis of the passivity of the consumer is the frequently made assumption that the individuals who constituted the music hall audience were becoming increasingly indistinguishable from one another. Their removal from an active role in the generation of music hall culture is considered to have

rendered the audience helpless to resist the imposition of cultural values from above. Moreover, it is often assumed, on the basis of the analogy with the transformation to production line techniques in industrial manufacturing, that the commercialisation of the music hall industry necessarily introduced a standardisation of the cultural product of the halls. From this basis, it can be argued that the culture that the halls produced was, therefore,

In the process of becoming more and more homogenous as a result of commercialisation and the increasing subjugation of popular entertainment to the laws of the market. 49

The commercial production of culture for the mass entertainment market was actively promoting the transformation of the masses into an undifferentiated mass.

This interpretation, which has been endorsed by Russell in the most recent consideration of the halls, has significant merits. Not only does it place the economy-culture relationship onto centre-stage in the study of the halls, but it also asserts the significance of the unintended consequences of decisions made in other contexts for the development of the culture of the halls. 50 Nevertheless, the audience is still depicted as ultimately under the sway of forces entirely beyond its control.

It suggests that the creation of the culture of the masses has been largely a one-sided affair conducted by capitalism and its representatives; as if the rural and urban masses, like the newborn child in Locke's psychology, were simply a blank page upon which each successive stage of capitalism has successfully imposed its imprint. 51

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51. G. Stedman Jones, *Class expression*, p. 78.
1-3.2 The intellectual origins of mass culture theory

Thus, there is a persistent vein in the scholarly study of the halls which, whilst acknowledging the centrality of the culture-economy relationship in the context of the commercialisation of music hall entertainments, fails to enlighten this relationship significantly due to the simplistic assumptions made regarding the (lack of) cultural potential of the audience.

Therefore, in utilising the evidence provided by the music halls in advancing knowledge of the economy-culture relationship, it is crucial to evolve a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of cultural change, without losing sight of the pervasive influence of economic imperatives. Thus, I wish to argue that, in balancing these objectives, it is inappropriate to reject outright the potential contribution of theories of mass culture. Whilst the most recent studies of the culture of the halls have increased our understanding of the autonomy and the positive potential of music hall audiences, it is essential not to disregard the insistence of mass culture theories that the culture of the halls was indissolubly linked to its specific economic context.52

To this end, it is important to examine in some detail the intellectual sources which have nourished mass cultural interpretations of the halls in order not only to disclose the fallacious arguments which are at the root of the condemnation of music hall audiences to impotence, but also, more constructively, to provide guidance in the construction of an appropriate overview of the economic context within which the halls operated.

52. For this more recent development in the study of the halls, see the contributions to J.S. Bratton, 1986, Performance and Style.
The tradition of mass cultural analysis has recently received critical attention within the field of geography from David Ley. Ley's examination of the proponents of mass cultural theories covers a wide field, encompassing modernist architects, such as Le Corbusier and Gropius, novelists, represented by Orwell, Zola, and Flaubert, as well as semiological and post-structuralist social theorists such as Barthes and Baudrillard. Within this wide ranging survey, however, the writings of the Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School provide Ley with the main focus for his critique. It is their construction of the development of the consciousness industry in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and in particular the concept of the Culture Industry, which has provided the implicit, theoretical basis for much of the writing on the halls reviewed above.

The prevailing tone of the works produced by this school of German sociologists, active in the 1930s and 1940s, was one of profound cultural pessimism. The lack of faith that the Frankfurt sociologists placed in the ability of the masses to resist the forward march of technological progress and 'the absolute power of capitalism' was embedded in their experience of the rise of the National Socialist movement in inter-war Germany.

55. This perspective is set out most fully in the chapter entitled 'The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception' in M. Horkheimer, and T.W. Adorno, The Dialectic of Enlightenment, pp. 120-67.
56. Ibid, p. 120. On this issue, see ibid, pp. 159-61.

Horkheimer recorded that: 'During the National Socialist period it was already clear that totalitarian government was not an accident but a symptom of the way society was going. The perfecting of technology, the spread of commerce and communication, the growth of population all drive society towards stricter organization'. M. Horkheimer, 1972, Critical Theory, pp. vii-viii.
scepticism with which Horkheimer and Adorno viewed the process of modernisation was encapsulated in the statement that

A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself. 57

In articulating this belief Horkheimer and Adorno were, however, elaborating upon a theme that already had a common currency amongst analyses of the character of the masses, and the nature of social change in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. 58 A brief analysis of some of these antecedents of the Frankfurt School sociologists is important in understanding their position.

One of the most prominent of the precursors of the Frankfurt School was Gustave Le Bon, whose study of The Crowd, published in 1896, was a pioneering work in interpreting the psychology of the masses. 59 Le Bon considered the closing years of the nineteenth century to have been a period of social turbulence, notable primarily for the 'progressive growth of the power of the masses'. 60 Le Bon looked upon this transformation with unreserved foreboding. He was concerned that the masses exhibited a dangerous combination of political potency with cultural impotence. The political power of the masses was manifested in the shape of the labour unions which rode roughshod over the laws of economics. However, to Le Bon this power was of a 'purely destructive nature' due to the inability of a crowd to sustain an

57. Ibid, p. 121.
58. For expositions of the origins and meanings associated with the words 'mass' and 'masses', see A. Briggs, 1979, The language of 'mass' and 'masses' in nineteenth-century England, pp. 62-83; R. Williams, 1983, Keywords, pp. 192-7.
60. Ibid, p. xvi.
independent culture. In a crowd, the 'conscious personality [of individuals] vanishes', swamped by the unconscious instincts released by the crowd environment. In this respect, Le Bon clearly presaged the thinking of the Frankfurt School, in suggesting that people united as a mass were uniquely susceptible to domination by 'leaders and agitators' of 'despotic authority'. In explaining the passivity of the crowd Le Bon united the new social theory of mass culture with the traditional framework of racial theories, the hegemony of which it was challenging. Le Bon assumed that the culture of a crowd had to be constructed from common ground shared by all of its members. He considered this common ground to be located ultimately in the racial inheritance of the members of a crowd.

It is precisely these general qualities of character...possessed by the majority of the normal individuals of a race in much the same degree...that in crowds become common property. In the collective mind the intellectual aptitudes of the individuals, and in consequence their individuality, are weakened. The heterogeneous is swamped by the homogeneous.

Shorn of the unique cultural attributes obtained by members of the crowd through their socialisation, the level of sophistication of this common ground was minimal.

62. Ibid, p 2; p. v. This interpretation naturally held considerable appeal to Freud. It should be noted that in using the word 'crowd', Le Bon did not intend any distinction between the phenomenon he was considering and the 'mass'. Le Bon distinguishes between the physical crowd and the 'psychological crowds' with which his study is concerned. He, therefore, stresses that crowds 'do not always involve the simultaneous presence of a number of individuals on one spot...An entire nation, though there may be no visible agglomeration, may become a crowd'. Ibid, p. 3.
63. Ibid, p. 121.
64. Ibid, pp. 8-9.
If a crowd took on any distinguishing cultural features, therefore, they were necessarily derived from beyond the crowd, as its members are unable 'to hold any opinions other than those imposed upon them'.

Whilst Le Bon did not propound the radical and anti-monopoly capitalist views held by Horkheimer and Adorno, and did not pay much attention to the economic determinants of crowd psychology, he was, nevertheless, aware of the significance of 'modern scientific and industrial discoveries' in moulding the economic context in which these 'new conditions of existence and thought' were emerging.

In contrast to the arguments put forward by Le Bon, Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of mass culture is couched primarily in aesthetic rather than psychological terms. As such, their methodology consists, essentially, of an assault upon the (lack of) quality of the products of the culture industry, rather than a detailed consideration of the processes by which the culture industry manufactures culture. The aesthetic propounded by Horkheimer and Adorno is predicated on an elitist perspective, which reverenced 'high' culture as the repository of cultural values. The creativity and expressive powers of 'great artists' ensures that the culture which they produce is unfettered and untainted by external constraints, and, in particular, is insulated from the disfiguring influence of the profit motive.

67. For an example of this methodology, see Horkheimer and Adorno, op. cit., pp. 137-41.
68. For the similar approach employed by a third member of the Frankfurt School, see H. Marcuse, 1978, The Aesthetic Dimension. Ley, op. cit., pp. 192-3, notes that this elitist perspective is common to all proponents of mass culture theory.
This sphere of 'authentic' Culture is therefore autonomous, its products transcending their material context.

It follows logically that authentic art cannot be commodified. It is, therefore, apparent that the emergence of a thoroughly commercialised entertainment industry, such as the music hall, was necessarily responsible for the debasement of culture. The 'fusion of culture and entertainment' cannot be benign. As a result of this transformation Amusement itself becomes an ideal, taking the place of the higher things of which it completely deprives the masses.

As all cultural value inheres in these 'higher things', the masses effectively become de-cultured.

Moreover, the development of the mass entertainment industry, in which context 'art renounces its own autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumption goods', removes from the masses the ability to re-interpret the debased culture which the culture industry produces. The commodification of culture by the culture industry replaces the use value of culture with exchange values. The capitalist producer (who 'calculates' rather than 'creates'), therefore, alone has the power to construct cultural values. The masses are, therefore, supine before the dictates of the emerging corporate enterprises, 'the individual is wholly devalued in relation to the economic powers'.

70. Ibid, p. 143.
71. Ibid, p. 143.
73. Ibid, p. 128. See also Huyssen, 1983, Adorno in reverse, p. 15.
1-4 Cultural Studies and the Music Hall

Ley, in his recent critique of the Culture Industry hypothesis, concentrates his comments on the most palpable shortcoming of the mass culture tradition, the weakness of its theorisation of complex cultural issues, and their reduction to simple responses to outside forces. Ley traces this lacuna back to the consistently elitist and condescending, and hence uncomprehending, attitudes taken by intellectuals towards the masses.75

From the generally disapproving view of the masses emerged the generally disparaging view of mass culture.76

Ley rejects the base-superstructure model, that 'presents the consciousness of the masses as monolithic and unproblematic, passive, and without the potential for resistance', upon which theories of mass culture rest.77 The acceptance of this model, Ley argues, inevitably leads mass culture theorists in the direction of a 'static and hermetic' portrayal of society, which fails to 'consider culture as a process, as a form of active negotiation'.78 Ley insists that a more satisfactory understanding of the nature of cultural processes must allow greater scope for the active involvement of cultural variables, including gender, ethnicity, and religion, and for cultures in opposition to dominant ideologies, exemplified by the civil rights movement and feminism.79

75. Ley, op. cit., pp. 192-3.
77. Ibid, pp. 194-5.
78. Ibid, p. 195. For further comment on the inherently static nature of mass culture theory, see Huyssen, op. cit., p. 9.
Ley’s critique therefore emphasizes the relative autonomy of culture - its scope for resistance and opposition - from the machinations of the culture industry. This theme has recently been taken up by scholars of the halls writing in the edited collection entitled *Music Hall: Performance and Style*.

The arguments put forward in this book owe a considerable debt to the emerging field of cultural studies. Bratton, the editor of the volume, casts it within the context of the consideration of the theory of hegemony.

The analyses offered here are based upon the assumption that such performances do not only reproduce or display ideologies, but contribute to their construction and modification...The dominant ideology - the generally agreed set of assumptions by which those in power are able to maintain their position - rests always upon constant, multitudinous renegotiations about what it is right and sensible to think and to believe. The music hall, a powerful force in nineteenth and early twentieth-century culture, was bound to be an important site of these hegemonic negotiations.

The common theme of these articles, which directly contradict the contentions of Horkheimer and Adorno, is that the performances enacted on the music hall stage conveyed a multiplicity of meanings to the members of the audience. In her

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80. Bratton, op. cit.
82. J. Bratton, 1986, *Introduction*, p. xi. The theory of ‘hegemony’ is associated primarily with the works of Antonio Gramsci, see, for example his *Selections From the Prison Notebooks* (1971), and *Selections From Cultural Writings* (1985). The concept is discussed in Bennett et al., op. cit., section 4, pp. 185-260, and in Jackson, op. cit., pp. 47-75, and especially pp. 52-5.
study of the impact of the emerging lower-middle-classes on the culture of the halls, Traies, for example, illustrates that the depictions of clerks, commercial travellers, shop assistants and other similar occupational groups contained a 'complexity of appeal and response'.

The misfortunes which befell the subjects of these songs evoked both sympathy and ridicule from various elements of the audience. Moreover, these variations in the appeal of performances did not merely reflect differences between the members of the heterogeneous crowd of observers, but were actively involved in the perpetuation and reinforcement of these distinctions. In Performance and Style the halls are depicted as an agent of differentiation and not homogenisation. This represents a vital insight for the future development of academic music hall studies, and, indeed, for theories of the masses.

However, in highlighting the main weaknesses of mass culture theory, these interpretative essays tend to lose sight of its major strength, the integration of the sphere of cultural production with outside forces. Certain gestures are made in the direction of the economic context within which these meanings were encoded. Bailey, for example, touches briefly upon the impact of professionalisation on the nature of the process of songwriting. Traies, indeed, makes the intriguing argument that, pace mass culture theory, this multiplicity of meanings was a beneficial adjunct to the rationalisation of the music hall industry by capitalist interests, as it broadened the market to which songs appealed. In particular, the commercial value of a song was greatly enhanced if it could be sold in the lucrative 'drawing-

83. J. Traies, 1986, Jones and the working girl, p. 47.
room’ market in the form of song sheets, as well as being performed live in the halls. Nevertheless, in general, these essays examine text without (economic) context. This reflects the primary concern of these essays with the re-interpretation of dominant ideologies, rather than on the initial process and context of the production of dominant ideologies and their stage realisations.

The rejection of economically deterministic interpretations of the culture of the halls has stimulated a ‘culturalist’ response, which decontextualises the generation of cultural meaning, ignoring the significance of the economic structure both in enabling and constraining cultural change.

The effect of this reaction to the predominance of mass cultural interpretations of the halls has, therefore, resulted, in Performance and Style, in the inversion of the imbalance, inherent in mass cultural theory, between economy and culture, rather than an active engagement with the central issue of the relationship between the commercialisation of cultural production and the transformation of popular consciousness.

However, criticisms of the authors discussed above for the reasons outlined above should be muted. Performance and Style was published jointly with The Business of Pleasure, which, as its title suggests, was intended to ‘locate the structure and process of music hall as a dominant form of cultural production in the

85. Traies, op. cit., p. 29.
86. For critiques of the intellectual sin of ‘culturalism’, see J. Johnson, 1979, Three Problematics, pp. 214-227; and Jackson, op. cit., pp. 27-33, who contends that ‘because of the weaknesses of culturalist modes of explanation, alternative perspectives must be explored that give greater credence to the material dimensions of economy and society’. (p. 33).
context of a modernising capitalist society'. The organisation of this diptych, therefore, entrenches the division between economy and culture. As Bailey candidly admits

One of the greatest gaps is...between music hall as business and music hall as performance...the relationship between the two areas is one where some of the most necessary work has to be done.

In this I agree with Bailey’s summation of the situation. However, it is my contention that the Business of Pleasure fails to deal with a number of issues of central importance to the economic organisation of the music hall industry, the consideration of which is necessary if these gaps between economy and culture in the scholarly understanding of the halls is to be bridged.

This volume deals with a number of issues of considerable significance to the economy of the music halls. Pennybacker and Waters both examine aspects of the licensing of halls. As Waters, in particular, highlights, obtaining an appropriate licence was a crucial consideration for the success of a music hall. It has already been noted in this chapter that a licence could be worth up to £40,000 to a highly capitalised music hall company. The central roles of performers and audiences to the economy of the halls are considered by Rutherford and Hoher, respectively. However, Business of Pleasure leaves largely uncharted the fundamental issues relating to the organisation and management of
the music hall industry. The music hall syndicates, which dominated the industry, receive no sustained consideration. Crump notes 'the emergence of national chains', but is interested solely in their effects on the music hall business in a single location, Leicester, rather than with any broader consideration of the nature of the spatial or administrative organisation of the syndicates. The management of music halls is examined by Bailey, but he neatly avoids the need to stray far from his roots in social history by arguing, with regard to the economy of the halls, that

Whatever its degree of needs for capital and labour, a necessary condition of its establishment and effective conduct was an exceptionally and continuously high input of social energy and skill in the direct mediation of its personal relationships. Carrying out business was a complex and demanding social exercise.

Regardless of the appropriateness of this model of music hall management to the period 1860-1885, the statement that the music hall business was 'a socially intensive industry' is not applicable to the period after 1885 which was characterised by large-scale, and bureaucratically organised music hall syndicates. These central features of the emergent industrial organisation within the music hall industry are not dealt with in Business of Pleasure.

Elsewhere, Bailey has made an initial attempt to integrate the history of the halls into its economic context. He argued that

The Victorian music hall had been successfully assimilated to the cultural apparatus of a capitalist

society and its history can be read as an analogue of the capitalist transformation of industrial manufacture. The caterer's conversion of the pub sing-song into modern show business can thus be likened to the shift from domestic to factory production, with the same organisational imperatives to economies of scale, division of labour and the specialisation of plant. \(^93\)

However, whilst I agree with Bailey on the need to establish perspectives which tie the halls into their wider context, I shall argue below that this particular perspective is inappropriate. Whilst Bailey correctly identifies a number of the organisational changes involved in this transformation he locates these changes within the context of 'liberal capitalism' and the origins of factory production. In this respect the perspective provided by the Frankfurt School, which places the emergence of the culture industry in the context of the shift from 'liberal' to 'monopoly' capitalism is of more value.

This indicates that, rather than rejecting en bloc the flawed reasoning of the Critical Theorists, it is worthwhile examining, in greater detail than Ley attempts, their formulation of the culture industry. This task will be undertaken below.

1-5 The Frankfurt School and the 'Culture Industry'

I have argued above that their elitist aesthetic and exclusive definition of culture, led the Critical Theorists to consider the removal of agency from the masses to have been a logical consequence of the commodification of culture brought about by the emergence of a commercialised entertainment industry.

Although the proponents of the culture industry hypothesis were aware that this process of commercialisation involved fundamental changes in the production and distribution of culture, the logical necessity of the transition of the masses to a state of passivity relieved them from the need to examine in detail the manner in which the emergence of the entertainment industry altered these economic processes involved in the production and distribution of culture. Horkheimer and Adorno were content with an abstract understanding of this transition, which stressed the 'self-destruction of the enlightenment' through the spread of a technological rationale.

As the term 'Culture Industry' implies, the fundamental process involved in the commercialisation of the entertainment industry, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, was its incorporation into the sphere of industrial production. Horkheimer and Adorno saw clear parallels between the processes of industrial production in other fields and the production of culture by the culture industry. They wrote of

The assembly line character of the culture industry, the synthetic, planned method of turning out its products factory like.

They identified similarities between the alienation of the artist by the technocratic mode of production utilised in the culture industry, and the alienation and specialisation of other types of industrial labour.

94. A. Huyssen, 1976, Introduction to Adorno, p. 8, also makes this criticism.
95. Horkheimer and Adorno, op. cit., p. xiii. Adorno's avoidance of historical specificity is a consistent feature of his writings.
96. Ibid, p. 163.
However, in his 'reconsideration' of the concept, Adorno rejects the reduction of the new processes of cultural production utilised by the culture industry solely to the status of a transplanted form of factory production. Adorno accepts that the process of cultural production is sufficiently different from that of material production to invalidate the suggestion that the generation of mass culture could be explained by the imposition by capitalists of a technological rationale directly onto the process of cultural production. Adorno, instead, emphasized the importance of transformations in the institutional context within which the production of culture took place.

The expression 'industry' is not to be taken literally. It refers to the standardization of the thing itself...and to the rationalization of distribution techniques but not strictly to the production process...It is industrial more in a sociological sense, in the incorporation of industrial forms of organization even where nothing is manufactured - as in the rationalization of office work - rather than in any sense of anything really and actually produced by technological rationality.

It is, therefore, the colonisation of the music hall business by bureaucratically organised industrial capitalism that the writings of the Critical Theorists suggest would have been the central feature of the transformation. It was the 'administration of culture' which filtered out cultural meaning from entertainment produced for the masses by industrial capitalism.

In putting forward this argument, Horkheimer and Adorno are again guilty of failing to consider the process of the bureaucratisation of the culture industry in specific historical instances. They do not, therefore, take account of the potential

for the administration of culture to take on different forms between, or within, the constituent elements of the culture industry that might result in the output of the culture industry being non-uniform. The Frankfurt School justified its failure to engage with the specificities of the historical development of the administration of culture by assuming that the culture industry was a single, integrated entity.

This conviction was, in turn, informed by the Critical Theorists' interpretation of the economic transformation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the transition from liberal capitalism to monopoly capitalism. Moreover, the structure of the culture industry was appropriate for the establishment of monopoly capitalism, as

The individual branches are similar in structure or at least fit into each other, ordering themselves into a system without a gap. 100

Although the increasing scale of organisation within the culture industry did not lead to the creation of individual enterprises which controlled the mass entertainment market, Horkheimer and Adorno argued that the establishment of a monopoly was, in practice, 'made possible by economic and administrative concentration'. 101 In this new stage of capitalism, they argued,

The upper stratum is typically represented no longer by competing entrepreneurs but by managements, combines, [and] committees. 102

And, furthermore,

The people at the top in the culture agencies...work in harmony as only one manager can with another. 103

100. Ibid, p. 12.
The assumption that the concentration of control in the culture industry led to the establishment of an effective monopoly, through collusion between the representatives of big business, allowed the Frankfurt School to assert that the concentration of control ensures the homogeneity of mass cultural production, as 'under monopoly all mass culture is identical'.

The monopoly powers invested in the culture industry exacerbated the imbalance in the relationship between producers and consumers.

The stronger the positions of the culture industry become, the more summarily it can deal with customers' needs, producing them, controlling them, disciplining them.

Nevertheless, in spite of its flaws, the concept of the culture industry provides a starting point for the analysis of the emerging music hall industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in its insistence that the development of the entertainment industry was profoundly influenced by its incorporation into the rapidly evolving industrial economy. Unfortunately, the culturally elitist perspective of the Critical Theorists led them to over-simplify the nature of the relationship between the new producers of culture and its consumers. Whilst, theoretically, privileging the economy-culture relationship, the Frankfurt School in practice dissolved it, by positing the total subordination of the cultural to the economic.

The rectification of the weaknesses of the approach of the Critical Theorists, outlined above, requires the consideration of both the theoretical and empirical aspects of the Culture Industry hypothesis. Theoretically, a more complex understanding of the

104. Ibid, p. 121.
105. Ibid, p. 144.
production of culture is required, which encompasses the consideration of the tension between meanings as encoded and their reinterpretation. Further examination of the realisation of these cultural processes in specific historical instances is also required.

However, this cannot be divorced from a more detailed empirical investigation of the economic context within which the prototype mass entertainment industries were evolving, and with which the Frankfurt School dealt purely at an abstract level, ascribing them to the emergence of monopoly capitalism. It is with the illumination of this latter issue that my thesis is primarily concerned. It is, therefore, pertinent to conclude this introduction with a consideration of the changing economic context within which the music hall industry emerged.

1-6 Organised Capitalism

The Frankfurt School's understanding of the culture industry is predicated on a specific reading of the transition from 'liberal' to 'monopoly' capitalism. The main components of this transformation according to Horkheimer and Adorno were the increasing scale of industrial operations; the concentration of industrial power into the hands of a new class of captains of industry, who were more inclined towards economic strategies based on combination between corporations, rather than individualistic competitive policies; and, finally, the elaboration of bureaucratic hierarchies under the influence of the tenets of 'scientific management'. This created a situation in which culture came to be administered rather than created.
More recent analyses have accepted the broad outlines of the interpretation put forward by the Frankfurt School. Hannah, for example, characterised this 'second industrial revolution' as a transformation from a disaggregated structure of predominantly small, competing firms to a concentrated structure dominated by large, and often monopolistic, corporations.¹⁰⁶

Prominent amongst the analysts of this new phase of industrial capitalism, often referred to as 'organised capitalism', is the German economic historian Jurgen Kocka.¹⁰⁷ Kocka's formulation of organised capitalism also focuses on the expansion in the scale of industrial enterprises, both through internal growth, via vertical integration and diversification, and through a considerable increase in the propensity toward mergers between firms. This concentration of industry encouraged the growth of cartels seeking monopoly profits, and necessitated the development of 'managerial capitalism' to administer these larger units efficiently. The sophistication of administrative techniques required the separation of ownership from the control of companies, and the emergence of the salaried entrepreneur and the bureaucrat. Kocka also noted the increased role played by banks, which became major shareholders in industrial enterprises, during this phase of capitalism.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ This phase of capitalist development has attracted several different labels, including 'corporate' and 'managerial' capitalism. 'Organised capitalism', however, has the most widespread currency. For an interpretation of the position of this phase within the wider context of the development of industrial capitalism in Western Europe, see R. Torstendahl, 1984, *Technology in the development of society 1850-1980*.
¹⁰⁸ See J. Kocka, 1980, *The rise of the modern industrial enterprise in Germany*, p. 78, for a distillation of Kocka's position. A more detailed exposition of these issues can be found in J. Kocka, 1978, *Entrepreneurs and managers in German industrialization*, pp. 555-89. The pioneering study in this
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Kocka's framework, like that of the Frankfurt School, is, however, based primarily on the observation of this transformation in Germany. It is unlikely, therefore, to be directly applicable to the context of British industrial development. In Britain there was, for instance, no rapid increase in the inter-articulation of industrial and finance capital to parallel developments in Germany.\textsuperscript{109}

Indeed, Lash and Urry in their comparative study of \textit{The End of Organized Capitalism} in advanced capitalist economies, argue that whilst, unsurprisingly, Germany provides the ideal-typical example of organised capitalism, the UK economy, largely owing to its longer history of industrialisation, approximated least to the ideal of an organised capitalist economy.\textsuperscript{110} This argument, however, is based on the observation that organisation had not permeated heavy industry and the 'new' industries which emerged in the late nineteenth century, which they consider to have been 'the key organized capitalist sectors'.\textsuperscript{111}

However, given the nature of the current concern with the development of the culture industry in Britain, it is significant that the process of industrial concentration proceeded furthest in

\textsuperscript{109} See Kocka, 1978, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 565-70, on banks and industry.

\textsuperscript{110} S. Lash, and J. Urry, 1987, \textit{The End of Organized Capitalism}, p. 4; pp. 28-9. The historical legacy of Britain's pioneering industrialisation left the economy not only with ageing and inappropriate infrastructure, but also with the most efficient market mechanisms, which reduced the advantages to be gained from increasing the economic role of administrative allocation. L. Hannah, 1980, \textit{Visible and invisible hands in Great Britain}, pp. 63-4; E.J. Hobsbawm, 1968, \textit{Industry and Empire}, p. 158.

\textsuperscript{111} Lash and Urry, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 9.
Moreover, certain other features of the transition in the UK also indicate the appropriateness of this new mode of industrial organisation to the music hall business. Chandler and Daems emphasize the importance of 'large, geographically dispersed markets' in stimulating these trends in big business. Hannah points to the prominence of businesses in which advertising, marketing, and distribution of products were central, as pioneers of the 'corporate economy' in the UK. As is argued in subsequent chapters, the emergence of a nationally integrated music hall industry was necessitated by the imperative to market the product of the business (the performers) at the national scale.

Before proceeding to examine in detail the structure and functioning of the economy of the music hall industry in Britain between the 1880s and the 1920s, it is, therefore, apposite to expand briefly upon the central characteristics ascribed to the phase of organised capitalism.

1-6.1 The emergence of the large-scale company

The central features of this transition, around which the others clustered, were the concentration of capital, the increase in the scale of industrial organisation, and the consequent domination of sectors of the UK economy by large corporations. This expansion could be achieved both internally, within

112. Ibid, p. 9; See also Payne, op. cit., p. 527. The classic examples of this process included the food, brewing, and cotton industries.
113. A.D. Chandler, and H. Daems, 1980, Managerial Hierarchies, p. 3.
115. See especially chapter 6.
individual companies, and through mergers. This latter type of growth usually took the form of amalgamations between competitors within the same industrial sector seeking to establish a monopolistic control over a specific market.

This growth in the size of enterprises was dependent upon changes in the legal context within which companies operated, which were introduced by the enactment of limited liability legislation between 1844 and 1856. These changes stimulated individuals not directly involved in industrial enterprises to invest in them. However, it is clear from the time lag between the introduction of this legislation and the emergence of large scale companies, from the 1880s, that limited liability was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for this expansion. 116

A more significant causal factor in the emergence of large-scale companies was the rapid expansion of urban mass markets, especially for consumer goods, in the late nineteenth century. This greatly increased the potential benefits which could be derived from scale economies. The adoption of mass production techniques required the development of more highly capitalised and larger enterprises. The efficient exploitation of these new techniques also necessitated the sophistication of methods for the planning and organisation of production. However, the effectiveness of economic planning was undermined by the unpredictability of markets. Companies, therefore, sought to circumvent the 'invisible hand' of the market through vertical integration. This resulted in the replacement of the market

allocation of resources by internal administrative mechanisms. This commonly resulted in vertical integration within industries. This process of vertical integration occurred most frequently in industrial sectors in which sources of supply, or outlets for produce, were problematical. Economies of scale were not, though, restricted to the sphere of production, and the increases in the size of individual plants. Management, finance, advertising, marketing and distribution also provided considerable opportunities for similar economies. These opportunities were of particular significance in stimulating the 'retailing revolution' which was epitomised by the rise of Thomas Lipton and Jesse Boot.

As a result of this, it was a characteristic of this phase of economic development that the operations of large companies were not necessarily concentrated in single locations. Corporations grew through the multiplication in the number of operating units which they controlled. Increases in the scale of operations were, therefore, associated with the geographical dispersal of the interests of companies.

118. Hannah, 1980, op. cit., pp. 58-9. The 'Brewers Wars' of the 1890s provide a classic example of this process. The tightening up of magistrates' attitudes to the granting of licences made public houses scarce. This led to the emergence of the tied house system, and numerous brewery companies merged in order to secure access to retail outlets. K.H. Hawkins, and C.L. Pass, 1979, The Brewing Industry, pp. 25-35.
119. For the growth of Lipton's and other retail chains, see P. Mathias, 1967, Retailing Revolution. See also J.B. Jeffreys, 1954, Retail Trading in Britain 1850-1950, pp. 1-39. Within geography, this issue has been considered by G. Shaw, 1985, Changes in consumer demand and food supply in nineteenth-century British cities.
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\textsuperscript{117} Hannah, 1983, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.
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\textsuperscript{119} For the growth of Lipton's and other retail chains, see P. Mathias, 1967, \textit{Retailing Revolution}. See also J.B. Jeffreys, 1954, \textit{Retail Trading in Britain 1850-1950}, pp. 1-39. Within geography, this issue has been considered by G. Shaw, 1985, \textit{Changes in consumer demand and food supply in nineteenth-century British cities}.
\textsuperscript{120} Chandler and Daems, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 4. Although Hannah, 1983, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 53, argues that this was not common in the UK before the First World War.
1-6.2 The trust movement in British industry

Although there are instances of individual firms expanding greatly during this period, of which perhaps Lever and Boot's are the most well-known examples, the majority of the expansion in the scale of industrial enterprises was not attained in this traditional fashion, rather, as A.V. Dicey noted, 'combination has become the soul of modern commercial systems'.

Indeed, according to Payne, company growth during this period was 'almost without exception by amalgamation'.

This wave of mergers, which emerged in the 1880s, and reached an initial peak between 1898 and 1900, was the first which the UK economy had ever experienced. The majority of these mergers involved horizontal integration within certain industries, rather than the processes of vertical integration outlined above. Moreover, most of these mergers took place between large companies (usually several at a time), rather than through the absorption of smaller companies by larger ones. In consequence of the fact that amalgamated companies usually lacked a single administrative core, mergers seldom resulted in the creation of fully integrated combines, but rather in the construction of 'loose federations' of companies within a sector, which did little to rationalise the previously existing organisational structures of the companies involved.

The new companies seldom possessed centralised or functionally

122. Payne, op. cit., p. 519.
123. Hannah, 1974, op. cit., p. 5, estimates that 87% of mergers between 1880 and 1918 were horizontal. This article is the single most useful source of information on this merger boom.
departmentalised bureaucracies, and were, therefore, similar in character to the German cartels. They were concerned more with monopoly powers than with bureaucratic efficiency. There is considerable debate amongst scholars as to whether these mergers took place in the context of favourable or unfavourable economic circumstances. Kocka accepts the classical Marxist argument that industrial concentration would result from overproduction and declining profits. Hannah, by contrast, argues that amalgamations were most common at the peaks of trade cycles, when share prices were highest and the vendors of companies could expect to make the biggest profits from floating a new amalgamated concern.

1-6.3 The ownership and control of corporations

The expansion in firm size resulted in the demise of the traditional owner-entrepreneur, and the increasing differentiation of roles within companies. Distinct groups of 'capitalists', 'entrepreneurs', and 'managers' emerged within large enterprises.

The higher capitalisation of companies during this period meant that few individuals possessed the financial resources required to retain sole ownership of a competitive business. Entrepreneurs therefore required access to external sources of funding. This demand was met by the influx of rentier capital into industry unleashed by the enactment of limited liability

126. Indeed, Hannah, 1974, op. cit., p. 13, pronounced many of these mergers to have been 'distinct managerial failures', some of which led ultimately to 'spectacular managerial collapses.
129. Of course, this was not the case for companies which grew through internal expansion such as Lipton’s, Lever, and Boots.
This divorce of the ownership of corporations from their control passed the direction of enterprises into the hands of a new breed of entrepreneurs, dependent for their livelihood on salaries rather than on dividend payments. This new class of salaried official differed from the owner-entrepreneur in both their motivation and qualifications for business managements. Whereas previously, wealth and family connections had been the most important qualification for obtaining high-rank within companies, salaried entrepreneurs were more likely to possess specialised administrative skills, relating to technical, financial, legal, or organisational matters, rather than capital. As career bureaucrats they were more likely to be motivated by ensuring the stability and expansion of their employer, and empire building, rather than by maximising short-term returns on capital.

Alfred Chandler has sub-divided this transition into three distinct stages. He differentiates between 'personal' enterprises, which are controlled by their owners; 'entrepreneurial' enterprises, in which middle- and low-order management has been delegated to salaried managers; and 'managerial' enterprises in which the control of salaried entrepreneurs permeates all levels of decision-making.

130. On this divorce of ownership from control, see Hannah, 1983, op. cit., pp. 57-69. Hannah points out that this did not represent the democratisation of shareholding which the proponents of limited liability had hoped for. Rather, investors were still drawn entirely from the upper and middle classes.

131. Most attention has been paid to the rise of the salaried entrepreneur by Kocka. See Kocka, 1978, op. cit., pp. 557-9; 578-82; and Kocka, 1980, op. cit., pp. 42-4. Kocka stresses the limits within which salaried entrepreneurs could evolve distinctive business strategies. They were still constrained by the primary necessity for company survival in the context of a competitive capitalist economy.

Britain, as Lash and Urry point out, the rise of large scale enterprises did not lead to the extinction of the 'personal' form of industrial organisation. This lack of development was most apparent in the brewing industry, in which the ascent of the skilled salaried entrepreneur was stifled by the persistence of family ownership and nepotistic recruitment policies. This relative lack of administrative sophistication in British industry therefore reflected the limited extent to which ownership had been divorced from control. This separation was not an inevitable result of the incorporation of companies. Indeed, the 'private' limited liability company was a flourishing organisational form long before its official recognition in 1907.

1-6.4 The evolution of bureaucratic management

Equally as important as these changes in high-level decision-making, though, was the fact that 'entrepreneurship has given way to bureaucracy'.

The expansion of firm size inevitably increased the complexity of problems of company management. The maximisation of the benefits of economies of scale became dependent upon the sophistication of techniques of company administration. The lack of adequate management mechanisms was the most significant factor in inhibiting the success of the increasing number of mergers. Successful expansion depended upon the delegation of managerial functions through the elaboration of complex bureaucratic hierarchies capable of handling the day-to-day running of

133. Lash and Urry, op. cit., p. 44.
135. The growth of the private company in the music hall industry is considered in chapter 3.
There was no absolute ceiling upon the size of company which could be supported by the development of a sophisticated bureaucracy. However, an efficiently functioning hierarchy could only be evolved slowly. Management considerations, therefore, placed a limit upon the rate at which corporations could grow under organised capitalism, rather than any ultimate limits to their size.\textsuperscript{138}

The development of bureaucratic hierarchies has been considered most fully in the writings of Max Weber. Although much of his work focused on the development of state bureaucracies, Weber, nevertheless, contended that

\textit{The very large modern capitalist enterprises are themselves unequalled models of strict bureaucratic organisation.}\textsuperscript{139}

Weber considered modern business administration to have been characterised by the development of sophisticated bureaucratic hierarchies, with active supervision of those at lower levels in the hierarchy by their superiors.\textsuperscript{140} Within each strata

\textit{Bureaucratisation offers above all the optimum possibility for carrying through the principle of specializing administrative functions.}\textsuperscript{141}

These new bureaucracies were characterised by the creation of jobs with clearly defined roles, and specific powers intended to allow the fulfillment of immediate and specific tasks.\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{137} For a thorough consideration of this subject see J. Kocka, 1981, \textit{Capitalism and bureaucracy in German industrialization}.\textsuperscript{139} M. Weber, \textit{Bureaucracy}, p. 974.\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., p. 957.\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., p. 975.\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., p. 956.
Administrative hierarchies offered new opportunities to employees, who could expect a considerable degree of job security. The conjunction of this circumstance with the establishment of complex hierarchies with numerous subtle gradations of rank, facilitated the development of career paths. It opened up to employees the prospect of a steady upward progression within a single bureaucratic organisation.143

1-6.5 Organisation from below

The above discussion provides an outline of the rapidly changing economic context in which the music hall industry was emerging. However, the above analysis has considered only the changes in industrial organisation associated with organised capitalism. The development of organised capitalism also involved transformations in the social and political spheres.

Politically, this transformation was typified by the increasing number and size of state bureaucracies, the incorporation of various social categories into the national political arena; the increased representation of diverse interests in and through the state; the transformation of administration from merely 'keeping order' to the attainment of various goals and national objectives.144

Lash and Urry also point to the social changes involved in 'organisation from below'. These included

143. Ibid., p. 963.
144. Lash and Urry, op. cit., p. 3. My own research into the relationship between the local state and the music hall in London indicates that the transferral of the licensing powers of the Middlesex magistrates to the London County Council was responsible for a shift in the nature of state intervention towards a more interventionist and goal-orientated approach. However, due to constraints of space the results of this research have not been included in the thesis. I shall not therefore develop this point further.
The growth of collective organizations in the labour market, particularly of regionally and then nationally organized trade unions and of employers' associations, nationally organized professions etc.\textsuperscript{145}

In the transition to organised capitalism, workers as well as industrial enterprises became organised on an unprecedentedly large social and geographical scale during the years before the First World War.

Indeed, Lash and Urry argue that organisation from below proceeded considerably more rapidly than the administrative organisation of industry in the UK.\textsuperscript{146} Although industry had, generally, not been efficiently reorganised by 1914, the organisation of workers had been well developed since the emergence of the 'new unionism' amongst unskilled workers in the 1880s. Employers responded to this by organising themselves into pressure groups to defend their interests. Therefore, 'at a very early stage of capitalist development [the representative bodies of] social classes were thus beginning to replace the individual as the political unit of society.'\textsuperscript{147}

1-7 Conclusion

With respect to the emergence of the music hall industry in Britain, I wish to argue that the situation was, in fact, the complete reverse of the picture painted by Lash and Urry for industry as a whole. A number of features of the economy of the halls, including the problem of an inadequate supply of high quality performers, the difficulties involved in the distribution of the product to a widely dispersed mass market, and the recent

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid, p.3.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid, pp. 53-4.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid, p. 54.
emergence of the industry, combined to make industrial organisation absolutely essential to the expansion of the industry. I shall argue that, given the importance of the distribution of culture as well as its production to the music hall business, the administrative organisation of the music hall industry was indissolubly linked to the spatial integration of the music hall network.

In constructing the above arguments, I have stressed the potential contribution of the study of the music hall to the advancement of cultural geography. Before I go on to discuss the reorganisation of the music hall industry, I shall examine the current contribution of geographical thinking to the scholarly literature on the music halls.
CHAPTER 2. THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE MUSIC HALL INDUSTRY, 1885-1922

2-1. Introduction

Generally there is a need for more counting, locating and classifying. 1

Chapter 2 takes as its point of departure this assertion made by Peter Bailey with respect to the current state of scholarship on the music halls. An overview of the current geographical input into our understanding of the music hall business indicates that it is both unsystematic and insignificant. In general, little consideration has been given to the music hall phenomenon outside of London, and the few examinations which have been undertaken of the provincial music hall have taken the form of isolated local case studies.

The initial task of the current discussion is, therefore the construction of a systematic geographical framework, within which to advance our knowledge of the halls. This will indicate that by the 1880s, the music hall had already developed an extensive coverage within England and Wales. However, certain trends in music hall location, related to changes in the nature of the industrial economy and the processes of urbanisation, had altered this pattern significantly by the outbreak of the First World War.

Having established this basic geographical framework, the later sections of this chapter will be concerned with the transformation of this nationwide distribution of music halls into a national music hall industry. It will be argued that this process depended on the integration of independent music halls

into national music hall circuits. This was brought about by the emergence, in the 1890s and 1900s, of music hall syndicates. These syndicates were unified companies which controlled numerous music halls in geographically disparate locations. The final sections of this chapter will attempt to illustrate how inextricably the destiny of the music hall industry as a whole became tied up with the fortunes of these syndicates.

2-2 Geography and the Music Halls

Over the course of the last decade, the study of music hall has developed into a truly interdisciplinary pursuit involving not only social and cultural historians, but also encompassing contributions from students of theatre studies, music and architecture amongst others. This rapid development has been greatly influenced by the contemporaneous growth of 'cultural studies', a discipline dedicated to integration of the insights provided by different academic perspectives, the extension of which into the study of music hall has been championed by Peter Bailey. Through his endeavours Barthes and Bakhtin have become a part of the vocabulary of music hall.

Nevertheless, even in this open-minded context, the influence of geographical thought on the development of this field of studies has been minimal. Not only have scholars of the music hall been ignorant of the potential theoretical insights offered

2. For an indication of the diversity of approaches, see the lists of contributors to J.S. Bratton, 1986, Performance and Style, p. vii; and Bailey, 1986, op. cit., p. vii.
by a spatial perspective, but also they have been largely oblivious to geographical variations in the phenomenon of music hall at the empirical level. Indeed, the attention of scholars has been almost entirely absorbed by the music halls of London. Dagmar Hoher noted that

Since most music hall researchers have concentrated their efforts on London the term ‘London music hall’ has almost always been used as a synonym for the English music hall.5

In some instances this focus on the metropolis has been a conscious act. Bratton, for example, justified the adoption of an aspatial perspective with the declaration that ‘the music hall was, on the whole, metropolitan and proud of it, and so must we be too’.6 More frequently, though, when it is noticed, the continuing dominance of studies of London is regretted.7

It is my contention that this concentration of scholarly endeavour on a single location has had far-reaching, and detrimental, consequences for the development of the subject-area. A central argument of the following chapters is that the major transformations in the structure of the music hall industry from the 1880s to the 1920s were closely related to the spatial organisation of the industry.

Most immediately, however, I wish to examine the effects of this lack of sensitivity to spatial variations on our current perception of the music halls. In particular, it has left

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unchallenged the contemporary assumption that the British music hall was dominated by London.

This absence is of especial significance in that it tacitly supports, or at least fails to question, another of the assumptions of mass culture theory. The reduction of the relationship between the producers and consumers of culture to a simple relation of domination and subordination by mass culture theorists has been considered in chapter 1. In explaining the hypothesized spatial homogeneity of culture, mass culture theorists reduce, in a similar fashion, the spatial relations between core and periphery. The geographical 'core' produces the homogeneous culture, which is passively accepted by the 'periphery'. To the extent that mass cultures are national cultures, the capital is frequently taken to be synonymous with the core.

The advancement of our knowledge of certain aspects of the music hall has been facilitated by the concentration of scholarship upon London. It has enabled the analysis of certain complex social, cultural and political processes involved in the development of the halls to be pursued in considerably greater depth than a more geographically extensive study could have facilitated.

The detailed studies of the licensing policies adopted by the London County Council, undertaken by Summerfield and Pennybacker, exemplify this. The concerted focus on this issue

8. P. Summerfield, 1981, *The Effingham Arms and the Empire*, pp. 209-40; S. Pennybacker, 1986, 'It was not what she said, but the way in which she said it'; *The London County Council and the music halls*, pp. 120-40.
has enabled the rejection of some of the more simplistic interpretations put forward by Summerfield, who viewed the relationship between the Council and the halls as a clash between popular culture and the state, with big business a willing accomplice of the latter. Pennybacker’s more sophisticated analysis stresses the diversity of the interest groups involved in the process of music hall regulation, and the complexity of their inter-relationships. Pennybacker stresses that negotiations between councillors and proprietors took place in a context in which ‘there was no clear “establishment” whose interests local government could be said to represent’. The conduct of licensing policy by the Progressives on the LCC was complicated not only by the need to take account of the opinions of proprietors, audiences (as newly enfranchised voters), and conservative groups within and beyond the council, but was also hindered by irreconcilable differences between the Progressives and the Westminster Liberals.

More significant to the concerns of this thesis is Bailey’s fascinating deconstruction of the London music hall proprietor. Bailey examines the ‘socially intensive’ nature of the industry and the importance of face to face contacts within the business. He interprets the function of the conviviality displayed by proprietors, and the language of liberality which they used, in the light of the economic and social interests of music hall entrepreneurs.

10. Ibid, p. 121; 125.
11. P. Bailey, 1986, A community of friends, pp. 40-6. This detailed model of the entrepreneur will be examined more thoroughly in chapter 5.
The lack of a geographical perspective on these issues has, though, left students of the music hall largely devoid of information regarding the differences in the nature of halls between, and within, places, and of the relationships between music halls. Without the benefit of a spatial perspective, music halls have either been considered individually, or collectively as constituents of the music hall. This aspatial analysis has encouraged a homogenising discourse. It has enabled the label 'music hall' to impose an unwarranted (or at least unquestioned) uniformity upon the phenomenon. This has led to a situation in which observations of differences between music halls has been interpreted as evidence of contradictory conclusions, rather than as evincing a sensitivity to local variations in the nature of music hall.

This can be illustrated by the variety of interpretations of the social provenance of music hall audiences, to which Hoher has drawn attention. This, she correctly believes, to be the source of considerable confusion amongst scholars.12 Greater attention to the specific local social and economic contexts of the individual halls under study would undoubtedly be rewarded by the clearing up of much of this confusion.13

In general, therefore, an adequate knowledge of the music hall business cannot be created without reference to the

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12 Hoher sums this debate up thus. 'The composition of the pre-1890 audiences has become a subject of some confusion, being described, alternatively, as working class, lower middle-class and labour aristocracy, as working and lower middle-class, as probably not class-based at all, as purely male as well as generally mixed and, finally, as "far too mixed to be easily characterised at all"'. D. Hoher, op. cit., p. 71 and footnote 3, p. 89.

variations between places. The inherent weaknesses of a geographically uninformed depiction of the halls are, though, exacerbated considerably by the use of London as the typical site of music hall operation. For London at the end of the nineteenth century possessed an unique economic, social, and cultural context. The very features which made London the most conspicuous locus of the music hall business militate against its usefulness as a representative case study. As Waller points out 'it was the largest city in the world, a plural city which encompassed almost every type of city and was supreme in each'.14 As later sections of this chapter will indicate London's spatial extent had a significant impact on the nature of the metropolitan music halls. Moreover, London's sheer size fostered a cultural diversity unmatched by that of any other British city, but also encouraged consumption and, hence, consumer industries to an unparalleled extent.15 Its population structure was very distinctive, possessing a clearer dichotomy between skilled and unskilled classes than most of its contemporaries.16 The rapid growth of white collar occupations in London from the 1870's was also of great significance in generating an unique social and cultural milieu.17 These factors clearly provided the music halls of London not only with an unique level of demand, but also one constituted from an unique mixture of social groups.18

15. On the uniqueness of London, see A. Briggs, 1968, Victorian Cities, pp.311-61. As a whole, this monograph provides a stern warning against ignoring the specificities of place to all scholars of Victorian Britain. See also Waller, op. cit., pp. 24-67.
17. On this issue, see the contributions to G. Crossick (ed.), 1977, The Lower Middle Class in Britain 1870-1914.
18. The uniqueness of the London music hall within a national perspective will be highlighted empirically later in chapter 2 and, especially, in chapter 3.
The reinstatement of a geographical perspective insists upon the recovering of the diversity of forms subsumed under the label of 'variety entertainments' in Britain between 1885 and 1920, through the utilisation of comparative research methods. However, the role of geography in advancing our understanding of the halls is not limited to this particularism. Indeed, I shall argue that as the music hall industry came to be dominated, from the 1890s, by a number of music hall syndicates which owned spatially dispersed chains of music halls, spatial considerations, and especially the relationship between places, became central to the economics of 'big business'. The music hall industry was fundamentally concerned with the distribution of culture, as well as its production.

2-2.1 Local studies of the music hall

The task of expanding our knowledge of the music hall outside of London has already begun. The provincial studies of Robert Poole and David Harker, on Bolton and Tyneside respectively, initiated the process of broadening the geographical horizons of the study of music hall. Their studies provide a useful factual basis for the development of comparative analyses. The value of both of these studies is limited by the emphasis placed by their authors on the distinctiveness of their chosen locality. As a result of this, they remain case studies, isolated from their wider geographical relationships.

Poole indicates that the nationally constructed music hall industry was grafted uneasily, and superficially, on to a

resilient local cultural tradition in Bolton during the Victorian era.

The commercial success of the late nineteenth century music hall mirrored an economic change rather than a cultural one... Popular culture in Bolton was far longer lasting and had far deeper roots than did the passing glitter of the extravagantly unlikely variety theatres.20

These studies make a convincing case for the importance of place in understanding the social history of the halls. However, they again treat simplistically the relationships between places. In this instance though the simple relationship is inverted, with the dominance of London being replaced by an insistence on the autonomy of the provinces. Poole and Harker both take on board the essential geographical emphasis on the significance of place, but still leave unanswered the equally important issues involving the relationships between locations.

Crump, considered the 'core-periphery' relationship which existed between the music hall cultures of London and Leicester more explicitly.21 His study plays down the isolating and insulating potential of place. He argues that in the case of Leicester, the music halls 'served as a conduit for the further permeation of national standards of performance and imagery'.22 Crump does not, however, accept this as evidence of the operation of a general process of inevitable cultural domination spreading out from the metropolis. Rather the efficacy with which the halls purveyed 'a generalised working-class culture' to the inhabitants of Leicester reflected the specific cultural context of the Leicester labouring class, and their economic and social contexts,

20. Poole, op. cit., p. 73.
22. Ibid, p. 69.
which had militated against the development of a strong indigenous cultural tradition.\footnote{23}

Chris Waters takes this approach further in making the ‘core-periphery’ relationship the structuring principle for his study of the licensing history of the Palace of Varieties, Manchester, which he interprets through the dialectical tension between ‘Manchester morality’ and ‘London capital’.\footnote{24} The battle raged between provincial temperance reformers - inspired by highly negative images of both London, as a city devoted to wealth creation, unfettered by morality, and of the expanding music hall industry, represented by the well known national figures Oswald Stoll and Frank McNaghten - and the proprietors of the Manchester Palace of Varieties. The resolution of this conflict between these two geographically based interest groups depended upon the intervention of the local state, in the guise of the local Magistracy.\footnote{25}

This example highlights the necessity of taking the relationship between places into consideration in understanding the development of the music hall business in a specific locality.\footnote{26}

\section*{2-2.2 Geographical differentiation of music halls within cities}

Even less attention has been focused upon the spatial variations in the practices of the music hall at the intra-urban level. It

\footnotetext{23}{\textit{Ibid}, p. 69.}
\footnotetext{24}{C. Waters, 1986, \textit{Manchester Morality and London Capital.}}
\footnotetext{25}{C. Waters, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 143-6.}
\footnotetext{26}{This study also confirms the value of comparative data. The strong hand dealt to the temperance reformers of Manchester contrasts sharply with the situation of their counterparts in London. This contrast undoubtedly influenced the development of the halls in these locations.}
is indicative of this fact that the currently accepted model of the intra-urban differentiation of music halls was first proposed in 1891, by F. Anstey.27 Anstey's perception of the geographical structuring of the music hall industry in London was thus:

London music halls might be roughly grouped into four classes - first, the aristocratic variety theatre of the West End, chiefly found in the immediate neighbourhood of Leicester Square; then the smaller and less aristocratic West End halls; next, the large bourgeois music halls of the less fashionable parts and in the suburbs; last the minor music halls of the poor and squalid districts.28

The first two categories of hall were, in many ways, very similar, but could be distinguished, primarily, by the emphasis on 'ballet divertissement' at the more aristocratic halls.29 The 'bourgeois' halls were, by contrast, very clearly differentiated from both of the above categories in all respects. These halls were not patronised by aristocrats. Although the clientele included 'gay young clerks, the local "bloods"', Anstey believed that 'the vast majority are in easy circumstances and eminently respectable', families might even be found in the stalls.30 The halls themselves, were 'dingier and gaudier', whilst the performances were often, to Anstey's taste, rather insipid. At these halls didactic pieces were interspersed with 'dull songs, hoary jokes, stale sentiment and clap-trap patriotism'.31 To observe halls in his fourth category Anstey instructed readers to seek out 'the heart of some obscure and unsavoury

...[where]... in a narrow thoroughfare... you come upon a public-house with bills in the window'.

This fourfold division of the music halls of the metropolis constructed by Anstey has, in its essentials, survived the superficial scrutiny of social historians. However, Hoher has doubted the applicability of his schema to other cities. She believes that

In the provinces the situation was entirely different. Here despite residential segregation, there were no distinct classes of music hall in different areas of the towns. In fact almost all provincial music halls were situated in or near town centres.

However, her study is limited to the period before 1900. I shall argue elsewhere in this chapter that the intra-urban differentiation of music halls, albeit of a less sophisticated nature, began to appear during the first decade of the twentieth century.

Thus, a brief survey of the extant literature on music hall indicates the existence of a small number of case studies. These provide useful comparative data, and provide the basis for a corrective of the London-centric focus of much of the writing on the halls. However, their value has been limited by the absence of any general geographical framework within which these isolated case studies can be situated. It is the reconstruction of this

32. Ibid, p. 194. This last category is of little significance in the present context, as establishments of this kind were not involved in the spread of highly commercialised limited liability companies throughout the music hall industry, with which this chapter is concerned. Some consideration will be made of this class of halls in chapter 7.  
34. Ibid, p. 76.
broader spatial context which provides the focus of attention for the following discussion.

2-3 An Outline of the Geography of the Music Halls

As a prelude to the examination of the emergence of a national commercialised music hall network, it is important, therefore, to sketch out the basic features of the distribution of music halls in Britain, and to examine the economic, social and demographic trends which influenced these spatial patterns between the 1880s and the 1910s. In the following sections this will be attempted at both the regional and inter-urban, and at the intra-urban level.

Moreover, given the close links between urbanisation and the constitution of a mass market for leisure, it is also important to ascertain the extent to which music halls were concentrated at the higher levels of the urban hierarchy. Many of the factors involved in the creation of an effective demand for music hall entertainments, such as the existence of effective mechanisms for the distribution of cheap imported food, and of cheap and efficient means of intra-urban transportation, were, themselves, concentrated in their geographical impact in the largest Victorian urban concentrations. It is, therefore, pertinent to consider whether music halls were restricted to these higher levels of the urban hierarchy, or, to the contrary, whether they permeated down to relatively low levels of the urban system.

2-3.1 Source materials for the reconstruction of the national distribution of music halls

The reasons why this fundamental, and, apparently, simple task has not been attempted before are quite clear from the nature of the sources available for the purposes. Although the sheer volume of information that contemporaries generated concerning the music halls is often overwhelming, very little of it has pretensions to being a systematic depiction of the development of the phenomenon. The Victorian infatuation with detailed statistical studies does not seem to have extended to the observation of the music hall industry.

The records would appear, theoretically, to offer the best prospects of providing a reliable data base for the construction of an outline of the distribution of music halls in Britain between 1880 and 1920. However, in addition to the severe practical problems involved in recovering this information from local record offices throughout the country, there are also problems regarding the comprehensiveness and comparability of the data in practice. Licensing powers were devolved to a variety of local authorities, which undoubtedly interpreted their role in different ways, depending on local circumstances. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that licensing records provide as all-inclusive a record of the music halls in existence as was intended by the central authorities. There is little doubt that many establishments conducted music hall entertainments without a music and dancing licence because, as Cunningham points out, 'there
simply was no clear differentiation between a music-hall and a pub offering entertainment'.

In practice, the only potential sources for the construction of the geographical basis of music hall entertainments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are provided by numerous music hall periodicals. However, little of this material provides even the most insecure basis for a systematic analysis of the distribution of music halls in Britain from the 1880s to the 1920s. A number of periodicals included lists of extant music halls, but the ephemeral nature of much of the music hall press makes most of these sources inappropriate for the analysis of long-term changes in the distribution of music halls. Although the information which it contains is not without flaws, the Era Almanack, which throughout the period under consideration published an annual directory of music halls in Britain, is the only available source capable of providing a firm basis for the establishment of a reliable outline of the fundamental spatial and temporal patterns in the evolution of the music hall business between 1880 and 1920.

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36. Cunningham, op. cit., p. 168. The evidence presented to the 1866 Select Committee on Theatrical Licensing indicates that contemporaries were aware of the extent of this problem.
37. Bailey’s exasperated comment on this literature reads as follows: ‘The sources exist to support such work, though there are many frustrations to their use. Overall, as mentioned before, they are voluminous; but the student in pursuit of certain themes will find them diffuse, fragmented and elliptical. In few fields is one obliged to read so much that seems of stunning inconsequence.’ Bailey, 1986, Business of Pleasure, pp. xx-xxi.
38. Appendix 1 considers some of these potential sources in more detail.
39. The strengths and weaknesses of the Era Almanack data is considered in some detail in appendix 1.
2-3.2 Music hall and the urban hierarchy in England and Wales, 1882-1912

It has been argued above that the growth of a demand sufficient to sustain a highly capitalised music hall industry was dependent upon the process of urbanisation. The following analysis is intended to throw some light upon the extent to which music halls of sufficient status to be included in the Era Almanack music hall directory were concentrated in the higher levels of the urban hierarchy.

In order to address this question, the figures provided by the Era Almanack for the total number of halls in England and Wales have been disaggregated in the following analysis into three categories, namely 'cities', 'towns', and 'other' settlements.40 The results of this sub-division of the music halls listed by the Era Almanack into the different levels of the urban hierarchy are shown in figure 2-1. Although the absolute figures shown in figure 2-1 should be treated with some circumspection, for reasons outlined in appendix 1, the broad, underlying pattern disclosed by these figures is clear. Throughout the period 1882-1912, of the halls in England and Wales which were considered to be of significance in a national context by the compilers of the Era Almanack, approximately half were located in cities with a population of over 100,000. From 20-40% of the halls were located at the other end of the urban spectrum, in settlements with less than 50,000 inhabitants. Major music halls were not, therefore, the sole preserve of big cities in late Victorian Britain.

40. The basis for the definition of these three categories is discussed in appendix 1.
Figure 2-1. The distribution of music halls listed in the Era Almanack between the levels of the urban hierarchy, 1882-1912.

Figure 2-2. The distribution of the population of England and Wales between the levels of the urban hierarchy, 1882-1912.
Figure 2-1. The distribution of music halls listed in the Era Almanack between the levels of the urban hierarchy, 1882-1912.

Figure 2-2. The distribution of the population of England and Wales between the levels of the urban hierarchy, 1882-1912.
Nevertheless, as figure 2-2 highlights, in relation to the proportion of the national population encompassed by each of these categories, small settlements were considerably under-represented in the *Era Almanack* listings. Between 1882 and 1912 settlements of under 50,000 inhabitants possessed 60% of the population of England and Wales, but a maximum of 40% of the halls listed by the *Era Almanack*. By contrast, cities were invariably relatively over-provided with music halls. The most striking feature of the comparison between figures 2-1 and 2-2 is the degree to which the proportion of the halls located in towns consistently exceeded the share of the national population for which these towns accounted. The proportion of the music halls concentrated into towns was only less than double the proportion of the national population contained in these settlements in 1902.41 In 1892 towns contained under 8% of the national population, but 24% of the music halls listed by the *Era Almanack*.

Thus, the *Era Almanack* directories indicate that, at the national level, music halls were concentrated in the larger constituents of the urban system, towns of over 50,000 population appear to have been well provided with music halls relative to the size of their populations. Music halls were not, though, confined solely to these settlements.

2-3.3 **Regional variations in the concentration of music halls**

According to the above analysis, the distribution of music halls between the various levels of the urban hierarchy was relatively stable over time. However, the disaggregation of the

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41. Even in this case towns had a 91.55% higher proportion of halls than of population.
data provided by the *Era Almanack* spatially, within the framework of the administrative counties of England and Wales, indicates that there were considerably greater variations in the concentration of music halls at higher levels of the urban hierarchy between regions.\(^\text{42}\) There was, though, considerable temporal stability in this regional pattern.\(^\text{43}\)

In a number of counties the concentration of music halls into settlements at the top of the urban hierarchy was consistently greater than the national average figure between 1882 and 1912. Counties in this category included Lancashire, Warwickshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Glamorgan, Norfolk, and Sussex.\(^\text{44}\) Warwickshire, for example never had less than 85% of its halls (6 out of 7) located in towns and cities. Only in 1902 did Nottinghamshire possess a single hall listed for a settlement of less than 50,000 population. Similarly, Leicestershire only had halls listed for this lowest category of urban settlement at the time of one of the four cross-sections upon which this analysis is based. In this case the first 2 halls in 'other' settlements were listed in 1912.

The most significant members of the group of counties in which halls were consistently relatively over-represented in settlements of under 50,000 population included Staffordshire, Cheshire and County

\(^{42}\) The data used in the following discussion has been disaggregated on the basis of the administrative counties as they existed in 1912. Changes in county boundaries between 1882 and 1912 have been ignored in order to facilitate temporal comparisons.

\(^{43}\) See table 2-1.

\(^{44}\) Of course, this category also included the administrative county of London.
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<td>Wiltshire</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedfordshire</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denbighshire</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorset</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flintshire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                  |                  | 58   | 73   | 77   | 58   |

National average

Table 2-1. The percentage of music halls located in settlements with a population of greater than 50,000, by administrative county.
Durham.\textsuperscript{45} County Durham only had more than a half of its halls located in towns and cities in 1902 (at which date 6 out of 9 were thus located), and in 1882, three-quarters of the halls listed for the county were in situated in settlements of under 50,000. Although Cheshire, contained the substantial county boroughs of Birkenhead and Stockport - both of which had populations of around 100,000 by 1911 - between two-thirds and four-fifths of the halls located in the county were consistently found in small settlements.

Having established this broad geographical framework, it is worth investigating the contribution which the detailed case studies reviewed above can make in illuminating the processes underlying these patterns. Whilst Crump's study of Leicester dealt with a region which, it has been indicated above, was characterised by the concentration of music halls in settlements at the higher levels of the urban hierarchy, Harker's study of Tyneside was undertaken in an area in which music halls had more thoroughly penetrated the lower levels of the urban hierarchy.\textsuperscript{46} Their contrasting interpretations of the local music hall cultures provide a suggestive explanation for spatial variations in the extent to which halls were concentrated in large settlements. Crump found no local roots for the music hall culture in

\textsuperscript{45.} This group inevitably included Kent, which contained no county boroughs of over 50,000 population, as well as Cumbria and Derbyshire, which both contained only one county borough of over 50,000 population. This category also included a large number of primarily rural counties which have been excluded from consideration here due to the insignificant number of halls which they contained.

\textsuperscript{46.} Harker, \textit{op. cit.}; Crump, \textit{op. cit.}; Strictly speaking, Crump's study considers only Leicester. However, with the exception of 2 halls listed by the \textit{Era Almanack} for Loughborough in 1912, all of the halls named by the decennial cross-sections were situated in Leicester.
Leicester. The music halls had been imposed upon the city by outside commercial interests. Harker, by contrast, interprets the blossoming of music hall on Tyneside as the extension into the urban environment of an already flourishing musical popular culture, which had previously been propagated by itinerant performers.\(^47\) The conjunction of these findings with the more systematic analysis undertaken above might, tentatively, be interpreted as suggesting that a regional distribution of music halls characterised by the dispersal of halls throughout all levels of the urban hierarchy, was indicative of the existence of a strong indigenous popular culture into which the music halls fitted. Conversely, the concentration of halls into the higher levels of the urban hierarchy might be read as evidence of the integration of regions previously without a local music hall culture into the emerging national network of commercialised halls.\(^48\) This interpretation is consistent with the fact that dispersed patterns were typical of the early industrialised regions, which are generally considered to have been the seed-beds of the music hall.\(^49\) Thus, the combination of the patterns yielded by the systematic analysis of music hall distributions presented above, with the local case studies presented by other scholars, suggests a process of cultural evolution in which the music hall was initially rooted in the popular culture of the

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\(^48\) In some cases the explanations of these considerable regional variations in the concentration of music halls at the highest levels of the urban hierarchy are considerably more straightforward. In the instance of Warwickshire, for example, the consistently high level of concentration of halls reflected the dominant position of Birmingham within the county.  
\(^49\) The absolute figures for the combined number of music halls listed for each county at the 4 decennial cross-sections taken from the *Era Almanack* indicate the numerical dominance of London, Lancashire and Yorkshire.
industrial north and then spread outwards to encompass large areas of England. Although the music hall attained a nationwide presence, it did not permeated down to the lower levels of the urban hierarchy throughout the country. In particular, small towns in the regions more recently incorporated into the national network were less likely to possess music halls than those in which the music hall had been longer established.

2-4 Inter-urban Differences in the Distribution of Music Halls

Whilst the foregoing discussion has focused on the nature of regional differences in the location of music halls in England and Wales, it is apparent from the evidence put forward that there is a strong positive relationship between settlement size and the number of music halls. I shall, therefore, now focus my attention primarily on the distribution of music halls within these larger towns and cities. The following analysis will focus on the settlement rather than the administrative county as the unit of analysis.

2-4.1 Variations in the number of music halls in cities

The cities of England and Wales which had populations of over 100,000 in 1882 are listed in table 2-2, which indicates the changes in the number of music halls located in these cities between 1882 and 1912.

Table 2-2 indicates that it was rare for a city to be without any halls considered worthy of note by the editors of the Era Almanack. For a discussion of the reliability of this data see appendix 1.
Era Almanack. Of the 19 cities listed, only Salford, in 1882, was not mentioned in the Era Almanack music hall directories at either of these dates. Indeed, even if the analysis is extended to include all those settlements which graduated to city status during the period 1882-1912, the list of cities without music halls at any one of the 4 cross-sectional dates remains very small. Including Salford, only 5 cities were absent from the Era Almanack listing at any of the decennial cross-sections.\footnote{51}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>1882</th>
<th>1912</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>+34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheffield</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeds</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackburn</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brighton</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oldham</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolton</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradford</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portsmouth</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hull</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottingham</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunderland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leicester</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salford</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-2. Changes in the number of music halls located in the cities of England, 1882-1912.

Although practically all of the cities included in table 2-2 contained halls in both 1882 and 1912, the data in table 2-2 highlights 2 significant trends in the redistribution of music

\footnote{51}{The other cities in this category were Croydon and Blackburn, which were both unrepresented in 1892, Preston in 1892 and 1902, and, most persistently, Stoke which was not mentioned in 1892, 1902 or 1912. Stoke was in an unique situation, it was the largest centre contained in the Potteries, however the Potteries was a multi-nucleic conurbation - a 'region without a city' - and Stoke did not therefore take on high order functions for the whole urban region. See Waller, op. cit., pp. 76-7.}
halls between these cities during the period 1882 to 1912. The disparity between the number of halls in London and the provincial cities was increasing, whilst, simultaneously, the variation in the number of halls between provincial cities was on the decline. With the exception of London, for reasons which will be considered below, none of the cities for which the Era Almanack listed four or more halls in 1882 had increased their representation by 1912. Conversely, increases in the number of music halls possessed between 1882 and 1912 were confined to those cities that had contained no more than 2 halls in 1882.

This shift in the distribution of music halls between cities contained a distinct geographical dimension. The cities which possessed high concentrations of halls in 1882 were all situated in the core areas of early industrialisation. The vast majority of the expansion in the number of halls located in cities recorded by the Era Almanack took place in locations peripheral to this industrial core area, and, particularly, in the south and east of the country.\(^{52}\)

Hence, music hall had become a sufficiently national phenomenon by the 1880s for all cities of 100,000 population to sustain a major music hall, regardless of their location. Furthermore, the national coverage of the music hall network was becoming increasingly uniform between 1882 and 1912. This evidence, therefore, supports the argument put forward above that the period 1880-1920 witnessed the spread of the music hall network outwards from an initial concentration in the industrial north.

\(^{52}\) The only other exception to this generalisation is Salford.
2-4.2 The suburbanisation of music hall entertainments

Table 2-2 also demonstrates the continued, and, indeed, intensified, dominance of London over the national music hall network. In 1882 London accounted for 29 of the 87 halls located in the 19 cities under consideration here. By 1912, London's proportion of the total of 125 halls listed for these cities had risen to slightly over half.

The continued dominance of London was not, as one might have predicted, due to the expansion of the unparalleled concentration of halls in London's West End. Indeed, the number of halls located in the central districts of London, including not only the West End, but also the East End and the Surrey bank of the Thames, increased only slightly, from 27 in 1882 to 35 by 1912.\(^{53}\) This represented a rate of growth only marginally faster than that of the other cities included in the Era Almanack directories. The numerical dominance of London, in the national context, was maintained through a fundamental shift in the location pattern of metropolitan music halls. London's music halls ceased to be sited exclusively in the central business and commercial districts of the metropolis, and a more geographically dispersed pattern of music halls emerged. This transformation in the distributional pattern of metropolitan music halls reflected the growing importance of theatres sited in the more functionally mixed suburbs which London was rapidly acquiring in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\(^{54}\) In 1882 only 2 of the 29 London music halls listed in the Era Almanack directory were situated in

\(^{53}\) See table 2-3.

\(^{54}\) See Waller, op. cit., pp. 28-31 for a brief resume of this development.
suburban locations, compared to 28 halls, almost half of the total number of metropolitan halls, in 1912.55

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total No. of Halls</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>% Suburban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-3. The emergence of suburban music halls in London, 1882-1912.

Table 2-3 indicates that this transformation in the intra-urban geography of the music hall business in London took-off during the decade 1892-1902. At the beginning of this period there were only 3 suburban halls, representing slightly over 10% of London’s total, but by the end of the decade this figure had more than quadrupled to 13, or almost one-third of the music halls in London. The figure doubled again in the following decade.

This fundamental shift in the nature of the expansion of the music hall network within London was reflected in the changing nature of the objections to the licensing of new halls which were made at the London County Council licensing sessions. In the early years of the LCC’s existence opposition to the licensing of music halls had been almost entirely restricted to anti-vice campaigners, such as Ormiston Chant and Frederick Charrington, and to councillors from the Progressive party.56 Their opposition was

55. See table 2-3.
56. For a brief period Frederick Charrington was a member of this category also. For further information on 'the battle of the halls' waged by Charrington, see the biography of him by G. Thorpe, 1912, *The Great Acceptance*.
based firmly on the moral deficiencies of the halls. However, with the expansion of the music hall network into the suburbs, local residents and small businessmen became increasingly vociferous in objecting to the granting of new licences. Their grounds were pragmatic rather than principled. Mr Poley, in objecting to the projected construction of the Finsbury Park Empire in 1905, made this shift of emphasis explicit.

The opposition is not brought, if I may use the expression, in any puritan spirit, because the reverend gentleman who is opposing here objects to entertainments, but he is objecting because he thinks, and these members of the parish think with him, that the site is an undesirable one, and that the district is already well served with places of entertainment.\(^{57}\)

In this instance, local residents objected to the site on the grounds that the building and the operation of a music hall would adversely affect the ambience of the quiet residential neighbourhood. For, as John Russell explained, on behalf of the residents 'we are just a quiet residential people...who go to bed at ten o'clock at night'.\(^{58}\)

Of course, London was not alone in developing suburbs around the turn of the century. Nor was it the only city to experience a degree of decentralisation in the distribution of its music halls. Hoher, in an extremely rare example of the mapping of music hall distributions, illustrates that the concentration of Liverpool's music halls in the town centre was already breaking up by 1898.\(^{59}\)

The Era Almanack indicates that by 1912, many other large cities, including Birmingham, Bristol, and Manchester, possessed examples of major suburban music halls.

\(^{57}\) LCC/MIN/10806.

\(^{58}\) Ibid. For another similar example of this debate, with reference to the Holloway Empire, see LCC/MIN/10831.

\(^{59}\) Hoher, op. cit., pp 76-7, and especially figure 4.1.
However, this trend developed most extensively in London. In part this was simply due to the greater development of suburbs in London than in any other city. Contemporary accounts, however, also stressed the importance to the colonisation of London’s suburbs by the music hall industry of the emergence of a dense and efficient transportation network in suburban London. The accessibility of suburban music halls was invariably central to the justification of their existence. In explaining the factors which guided the choice of the site for the Finsbury Park Empire, Mr. C.F. Gill, counsel for the music hall magnate Mr. Oswald Stoll, stated that

From the point of view of the applicant...the question of access to the site was of greatest importance; this is close to the termini of the electric trams of this Council, and it is also served by the railway, so that from the point of view of access to or getting away from it there are exceptional facilities.60

In addition to these existing transport links, the building of the Finsbury Park and Piccadilly underground railway line was being planned. London’s transport network encouraged large scale capital investment in suburban locations by offering a music hall situated in Finsbury Park, for example, an estimated hinterland from which to draw its audiences of 'considerably over a quarter of a million people'.61 This estimate was based on the assumption that

The area or district which they would appeal to in connection with this licence would be Hackney, Enfield, Wood Green, Harringay, Stroud Green, Islington and parts of Stoke Newington.62

60. LCC/MIN/10806.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
Most of the prospectuses issued by companies in the process of raising capital for the erection of music halls in suburban London dwelt on the accessibility of the chosen site. The promoters of the Croydon Hippodrome, for example, claimed that 2 railway companies with 4 local stations, as well as the tram links across suburban London, would add a further 100,000 to the potential clientele of the hall, over and above the 134,000 residents of the Croydon area itself.63

Thus London maintained its position as the dominant city in the national music hall network through a process of diversifying its provision of music hall entertainments. This greater diversity, which will be examined in more detail in chapter 3, was facilitated by the growth and dispersal of population involved in suburbanisation, and the translation of this growth into effective demand by the development of an efficient system of mass transportation.

2-4.3 The distribution of music halls in towns

In contrast to cities, the Era Almanack data indicates that it was not an uncommon occurrence for towns within the population range 50-100,000 to support a major music hall. Those towns which

63. PRO BT31 18909/103739. It was not only suburban halls which maximised the potential benefits of London’s transport network. In the twentieth century, new west end halls also took account of accessibility by public transport. The prospectus for the London Palladium indicated that the proposed hall ‘occupies a commanding and valuable position, is within easy access and in direct communication with every part of the Metropolis and all the outlying districts, from which a large proportion of the patrons of high class entertainments are drawn...It would be difficult to imagine an amusement centre more felicitously placed for drawing extensively and continuously upon precisely the class of patronage which should assure its permanent prosperity’. PRO BT31 18369/97040. Barker, op. cit., p. 36, indicates that the proprietor of the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton included details of train times to and from nearby stations as early as 1867.
were not represented in the *Era Almanack* directory at the times of the 4 decennial cross-sections are included in table 2-4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1882</th>
<th>1892</th>
<th>1902</th>
<th>1912</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>York</td>
<td>York</td>
<td>York</td>
<td>York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bromwich</td>
<td>West Bromwich</td>
<td>West Bromwich</td>
<td>West Bromwich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gateshead</td>
<td>Gateshead</td>
<td>Tynemouth</td>
<td>Tynemouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ipswich</td>
<td>Ipswich</td>
<td>Ipswich</td>
<td>Oxford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birkenhead</td>
<td>Derby</td>
<td>Walsall</td>
<td>Walsall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croydon</td>
<td>Burnley</td>
<td>Rotherham</td>
<td>Rotherham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bath</td>
<td>Stockport</td>
<td>Stockport</td>
<td>Hastings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-4. Towns not listed in the *Era Almanack* directories, 1882-1912.

The majority of these towns which did not possess halls can be encompassed within two distinct groups, both of which persisted throughout the period 1882-1912. The first of these categories consisted of towns, predominantly in the south of England, which were situated in mainly rural and unindustrialised regions. This grouping was represented in 1882 by Bath and Ipswich, and by Oxford and Hastings in 1912. The other category, the larger of the two, encompasses a number of towns which were incorporated into those characteristic new features of the Late Victorian urban landscape, the conurbations.64 Examples of this type of town were to be found in most of the major conurbations of England in both 1882 and 1912. In 1882 the list included West Bromwich (a constituent of the west Midlands conurbation), Gateshead (Tyneside), and Birkenhead (Merseyside). In 1912, these same

64. Waller, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-8
conurbations contained, respectively, Walsall, Tynemouth, and Bootle - none of which were listed by the *Era Almanack*. Other towns might also be encompassed by this category, due to their proximity to larger urban centres. Rotherham, not listed in 1902 or 1912, with its proximity to Sheffield, would provide an example of this type.

The foregoing analysis therefore demonstrates that the threshold population of a settlement required to ensure that a music hall of national status could be supported was between 50,000 and 100,000. It also suggests that, although by 1882 the music hall network was national in its coverage, a number of processes were operating to inhibit the even spread of music halls through the towns of England and Wales.

First, it indicates that the national music hall network was relatively backward in integrating towns with primarily rural hinterlands, most of which were located in the southern areas of England. Secondly, the absence of music halls from a number of towns contiguous to larger urban areas suggests that the expansion of the music hall network was influenced significantly by inter-urban competition for audiences. Waters has documented a single example of this process in the Manchester area. In examining the audiences of the Manchester Palace of varieties, he found that 'the Palace was not a "local"', and, in fact, that the clientele was drawn from 'Rochdale and beyond'. The major centres of conurbations appear to have acted as cultural foci for the smaller settlements incorporated into the conurbations. This situation would, therefore, appear to be a direct contrast to the

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distribution of music halls within London, which this chapter has indicated was characterised by a process of de-centralisation of music hall entertainment. 66

Absences in the geographical distribution of music halls possessed both regional and urban components.

The above discussion has focused on those towns which were under-represented with music halls, and has uncovered a number of processes implicated in the inhibition of the expansion of the music hall network. I now wish to switch my attention to the consideration of those factors which encouraged the establishment of music halls in specific locations between 1882 and 1912. The empirical basis for this analysis is provided by table 2-5, which includes all those towns, of 50-100,000 population, which, at the time of any of the decennial cross-sections which I have abstracted from the Era Almanack, were listed as possessing at least 3 music halls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Towns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Middlesbrough 3 Grimsby 4 Swansea 5 Gt. Yarmouth 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Halifax 3 Coventry 3 Hastings 5 Rochdale 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Preston 3 St. Helens 3 Blackpool 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Walsall 3 Warrington 3 Eastbourne 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Swansea 3 Northampton 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hastings 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-5. Towns listed as possessing 3 or more halls by the Era Almanack directories, 1882-1912.

66. The reasons for this contrast are not clear. The fact that the existing West end halls in London were supported by a large local upper class population may have encouraged the differentiation of music halls, and the growth of more uniformly plebeian establishments in the suburbs. Alternatively, the decentralisation of music halls in London might have been a reflection of better non-radial transport links in the metropolis. This question, therefore, provides a suitable focus for future research.
Table 2-5 demonstrates that a fundamental transformation took place in the nature of the towns in which music halls were concentrated between 1882 and 1912. In 1882, textile towns, like Halifax and Preston, were still prominent, although the inclusion of Middlesbrough at this date hints at the emergence of the trends which were to undermine their dominance. By 1892, textile towns had ceased to be represented amongst the towns in which music halls were concentrated. They had been superceded by towns associated with sectors of the economy which were experiencing rapid growth during the Late Victorian period. These included the standard bearers of the 'second industrial revolution', amongst which were Middlesbrough (iron and steel); St. Helens and Warrington (glass and chemicals); Coventry (light engineering); and Northampton (factory production of shoes). However, from 1902, towns of this type are outnumbered in table 2-5 by others from an entirely different branch of the UK economy which was also buoyant during the period under consideration, namely, seaside resorts. The towns in this category included Blackpool, Great Yarmouth, Hastings and Eastbourne.

Whilst the emergence of new concentrations of music halls in the thriving industrial towns of the late nineteenth century undoubtedly had a significant impact on the distribution of music halls in England and Wales, this redistribution was essentially the continuation of previous processes controlling the location of music halls. The emergence of seaside resorts as a significant element in the national music hall network marked a more fundamental shift in the processes moulding the distribution of music halls, and was responsible for a profound change in their

spatial distribution. As such, this phenomenon will be considered in some detail here.

2-4.4 Music hall entertainments in seaside resorts

The rise of the seaside resort has been studied thoroughly, and with an awareness of the geographical dimensions of the process by J.K. Walton. Walton contends that the early growth of resort towns during the years preceding the period under consideration here, and especially from the 1860s onwards, was concentrated in the south east of England. This pattern of evolution appears to have been reflected in the emergence of entertainments in resort towns. Of the 17 listed halls in resort towns by the Era Almanack directory of 1882, only 3 were located outside of this region.

Nevertheless, Walton indicates that the 1890s witnessed a 'renewed surge of large-scale entertainment investment'. Again the information provided by the Era Almanack supports Walton's interpretation. Table 2-6 indicates that the period 1892-1902 witnessed the greatest decennial increase in the proportion of the

68. In examining the emergence of this new feature of the urban system, one is immediately confronted with the problem of defining exactly what constituted a resort town. Many coastal towns had some involvement in the tourist trade. However, in order to disentangle as completely as possible the effects of resorts towns on the distribution of music halls from that of other economic factors, the following analysis considers only those settlements in which the local economy was largely dependent upon holidaymakers. Thus, towns like Swansea, which functioned as both a tourist resort and an industrial centre are excluded from consideration here. For a similar resolution of this problem, see J.K. Walton, J.K., 1983, The English Seaside Resort, p. 47. Walton's other publications include, residential amenity, respectable morality and the rise of the entertainment industry, 1975; and The demand for working-class seaside holidays in Victorian England, 1981. For another perspective on the growth of the resort town, see J. Walvin, 1978, Beside the seaside.


Figure 2-3.

MUSIC HALLS IN SEASIDE RESORT TOWNS
1882

SCARBOROUGH
BLACKPOOL
FLEETWOOD

PORTSMOUTH/
SOUTHSEA

BRIGHTON

HASTINGS

EASTBOURNE

SHEERNESS
RAMSGATE
DEALS
FOLKESTONE

0 miles 40
Figure 2-4.

MUSIC HALLS IN SEASIDE RESORT TOWNS 1902

SCARBOROUGH

MORECAMBE

BRIDLINGTON

BLACKPOOL

CLEETHORPES

SOUTHEND

DEAL

SANDGATE

PORTSMOUTH/ SOUTHEA

BRIGHTON

HASTINGS

EASTBOURNE

0 miles 40
Figure 2-5.
halls listed by the *Era Almanack* which were situated in resort towns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total No. of Halls</th>
<th>No. of Halls in Resorts</th>
<th>% of Total in Resorts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>13.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-6. The concentration of music halls in resort towns, from the *Era Almanack* directories, 1882-1912.

It was indicative of this trend that William Holland, the London music hall proprietor, renowned as a pioneering entrepreneur of the business, forsook the metropolis and took over the management of the Blackpool Winter Gardens in 1887, where he remained until his death in 1895.\(^{72}\)

However, figure 2-4 indicates that this rapid growth did not progress evenly across the resorts of England and Wales before 1902, and that the halls listed by the *Era Almanack* were still concentrated in the south east of England in 1902. This appears to have reflected the slow spread of music hall entertainments amongst the resorts which catered primarily for the working classes. Table 2-7 shows that the growth in the number of halls located in a selection of working class resorts, situated outside of the south east, reached its peak in the decade following 1902.

Thus, between 1902 and 1912 the geographical pattern of music halls in resort towns became more dispersed, as predominantly working class resorts became increasingly significant in the context of the national music hall network.

\(^{72}\) For further details of the career of William Holland, see chapter 5.
Nevertheless, there was still a marked concentration of halls into two areas, the south east and Lancashire. There were considerable numbers of resort towns, most notably in Wales and the south west peninsula, which were without music halls according to the Era Almanack. Even in the north east of England the development of music halls was very limited.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1882</th>
<th>1892</th>
<th>1902</th>
<th>1912</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southend</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleethorpes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gt. Yarmouth</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarborough</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morecambe</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackpool</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-7. The number of halls in working class resort towns, 1882-1912.

Amongst the resort towns of the north west there was a clear distinction between the working class resorts, such as Blackpool and Morecambe, which had numerous music halls, and the more genteel towns, including Lytham and St. Annes, which remained outside of the music hall network. The same relationship does not appear to have existed in the resorts of the south east, where even apparently respectable resorts such as Eastbourne and Hastings possessed several halls.  

The business records of 10 music hall companies which operated in resorts indicate that there was considerable variation in the amount of capital invested in these enterprises, ranging from a nominal capital of £5,000, in the case of the Eastbourne

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73. See figure 2-5.
74. Walton, 1983, op. cit., p. 251, notes that by the end of the nineteenth century the Sussex resorts were becoming more socially mixed.
Hippodrome, to £220,000 for the Alhambra (Blackpool) Limited.  

In many of the more highly capitalised companies, the music hall was only one element of an integrated promenade entertainment centre. Those companies which owned only a music hall had relatively low nominal values, usually under £30,000. Walton argues that this growth of commercial entertainments in seaside resorts, during the 1890s and after, was fuelled by capital drawn from London. However, the lists of the shareholders for these companies contradict this conclusion. Half of the 6 companies situated on the south coast were financed primarily by London capital, but the other 7 companies drew on local sources of capital. Generally, the majority of the shareholders were residents of the town in which the hall was situated. The greater integration of the south coast music hall companies into metropolitan capital markets is probably a reflection of the fact that Londoner's constituted the main potential audience for these companies, as Colonel Rowland Hill, J.P., the Chairman of the Margate Chamber of Commerce, noted.

75. The company records are held in the Public Record Office (PRO), their use as a source will be considered further in chapter 3. The 10 companies examined here comprised all of the resort town music hall companies included in my sample of PRO records. The 10 companies are listed below, along with their PRO reference numbers. Marine Palace Co., Margate (BT31 3831/24076); Margate Palace (BT31 10460/78873); Margate Palace (BT31 12962/105620); Southend-on-Sea Tower and Marine Park Co. (BT31 7711/55090); Eastbourne Hippodrome (BT31 10871/82503); Empire Theatre of Varieties, Hastings (BT31 8843/64954); Blackpool Star Amphitheatre of Varieties (BT31 2121/9693); Blackpool Grand Theatre and Opera House (BT31 5778/40499); Alhambra (Blackpool) (BT31 7397/52489); Empire Theatre and Hippodrome Co. (BT31 12728/102316).

76. Nominal capitals should only be considered as a rough guide to the value of a company, as they ignore the amount of the total number of shares which were actually issued. They also do not take account of loan capital. This matter is considered further in chapter 3. Chapter 3 also compares the nominal capitals of halls in resort towns with those of halls located in other parts of the urban system.

The amusements at these places were of a theatrical and music hall character such as would be available to most of the visitors at their own homes, especially so far as those who came from London were concerned. 78

Given the close proximity of the resort towns along the south coast, it is probable that the processes of inter-urban competition were in operation. This was certainly the opinion of the promoters of the Margate Palace in 1903. The company's prospectus indicated that, in addition to the one million visitors received annually by Margate,

> It is believed that at least another million visit the surrounding towns of Ramsgate, Broadstairs, Westgate, & c., all of which are connected by the Electric Trams. 79

Of course, the economic context in which music halls operated in resort towns was fundamentally different from that of other music halls, due to the extreme seasonality of demand in resort towns. The summer 'season' was severely limited in its length. The promoters of the Margate Palace, in providing an estimate of its potential annual revenue to prospective shareholders, worked on the basis of a 16 week season. Presumably, this must be regarded as the most optimistic assessment of its extent. 80 Moreover, this seasonality was exacerbated by the fact that, owing to the type of work which the tourist industry provided, the resident population of resort towns, as well as being relatively small, possessed a social profile which was not conducive to the support of a music hall.

78. Reported in the Thanet Times, and reprinted in the prospectus of the Margate Palace, BT31 12962/105620. 79. BT31 10460/78873. 80. BT31 10460/78873.
Tourism primarily offered employment opportunities to women, and jobs were particularly scarce for young men. 81

However, this uneven pattern of demand was not necessarily a disincentive to outside investment in music halls in resort towns, as the tourist 'season' corresponded to the slack summer period experienced by most other halls. By incorporating seaside halls into national circuits, companies could provide engagements for famous, and expensive, acts, which were under contract to them, at times of the year when they would otherwise have been underutilised assets. 82

This analysis of the importance of, and the geographical distribution of, resort town music halls sheds light upon the tendency, discussed above, for halls outside of the industrial north, and especially amongst those located in the south east of England, to be concentrated at the higher levels of the urban hierarchy. This phenomenon was interpreted above as a reflection of the weakness of the links between local popular culture and the music halls in these regions. This argument is supported by the importance of tourist resorts as music hall centres in the south east. In the south east of England, where music halls were concentrated at the higher levels of the urban hierarchy, the halls were not primarily intended to serve the local population at

81. For a consideration of employment patterns in the tourist industry, see Walton, 1983, op. cit., p. 76.
82. This complementarity between the demand patterns for music hall entertainments of seaside resort towns and other urban centres was most notably exploited by Walter de Frece in the construction of his circuit in the first decade of the twentieth century. For details of the growth of the de Frece Circuit, see later sections of this chapter.
all, but rather to cater for the recreational demands of seasonal migrants from other places, most notably from London.  

Thus, the evidence provided by the Era Almanack music hall directories indicates that in 1882, music halls were already in existence in all the major cities of England and Wales, although, at this date, the distribution of halls was geographically concentrated in London and the established industrial regions of the north, and particularly in the cities and cotton towns of Lancashire. Nevertheless, by 1912, the spatial extent of the music hall network had been expanded, and the geographical concentration of music halls which had existed in 1882 had been dispersed.

In part, these changes in the distribution of music halls reflected the shifting industrial geography of England and Wales. The rapid growth of towns associated with the new industries of the 'second industrial revolution', which challenged the dominance of the textile industry in the late nineteenth century, accounts for the growing importance of the north east and South Wales in the national music hall network. However, the most significant changes in the distribution of music halls between 1882 and 1912, notably the increasing predominance of London and the expansion of the network to encompass East Anglia and the south east of England, resulted from the involvement of novel processes in moulding the location pattern of music halls, which were generated by fundamental transformations in the patterns of urbanisation, and the use of leisure time. The pre-eminent position of London

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83 Individual resorts, and groups of resorts, drew on different hinterlands for their visitors. 'The mass market for leisure was a series of regional ones at least so far as holiday-making was concerned'. H. Cunningham, 1985, Leisure, p. 150.
within the national music hall network was maintained by the rapid growth in the number of suburban music halls from the 1890s, whilst the emergence of seaside resorts as a significant element of the urban system were responsible for the expansion of the music hall network to incorporate the coastal areas of the east and south of England.

However, in describing the music hall network as a national phenomenon, a number of caveats must be noted. Despite this expansion in the geographical scope of the music hall network, the permeation of music halls into the lower levels of the urban hierarchy remained confined largely to those regions in which the music hall had initially been concentrated. In the regions more recently incorporated into the network, halls were concentrated into the largest settlements.

Moreover, even by 1912, the network did not provide a comprehensive coverage of England and Wales. Large areas of rural England, particularly in the south west and inland East Anglia, and the whole of upland Wales, which lacked large towns, were beyond the scope of the music hall network. Urban centres within predominantly rural regions were more likely to be without music halls than settlements of a similar size located elsewhere.

Having established this basic framework, I shall now turn my attention to the examination of the processes which moulded this

84. The following 12 counties were not listed as containing music halls by the Era Almanack at any of the 4 decennial cross-sections: Cornwall, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Middlesex, Carmarthen, Pembrokeshire, Cardigan, Brecknock, Radnor, Montgomery, and Merioneth.

85. See table 2-4.
nationwide distribution of music halls into an integrated music hall network. In particular, in the subsequent sections of this chapter, I shall focus on the role played in this process of integration by the emergence, from the 1890s, of music hall syndicates.

2-5 The Emergence of Music Hall Syndicates, 1891-1905

The foregoing discussion has indicated that by 1882 a nationwide framework of music halls was already in existence. However, I wish to argue that this did not represent a nationally integrated music hall network, and that it was only in the 1890s, with the emergence of a number of music hall syndicates which controlled several halls in disparate locations, that these geographically widespread music halls began to be integrated into a coherent network. It is on the emergence of these syndicates, and the changes in the organisational structure of the music hall industry upon which their feasibility depended, that I wish to focus now.

In making this argument it is not intended to create the impression that all of the organisational changes which were required to transform the music halls from a pub-based entertainment to a national industry were concentrated into the ten years either side of 1900. I shall examine changes in the functioning of the industry which pre-figured the transformation of the 1890s, particularly those which took place during the first music hall boom of the 1860s. However, I shall argue that before the 1890s, the economic organisation of the music hall industry was not linked to its geographical integration, but that, thereafter, changes in the organisational structure and
geographical integration of the music hall industry became indissolubly linked.

The causes of this transformation will be considered further in chapter 6, the immediate purposes of the following discussion are to provide an outline of the patterns of growth of these music hall syndicates, and the effects of their emergence on the functioning of the music hall business.

2-5.1 The first music hall boom

An initial phase of organisation in the music hall industry took place in the early 1860s. To contemporaries, the most striking feature of this first music hall boom was the erection of a number of new, and larger music halls in London between 1860 and 1862, which reflected the rapid increase in the scale of investment in the music hall business at this time. Harold Scott has argued that this boom 'brought the older music hall era to a close', and heralded the opening of 'The Great Period' of music hall history. It is undoubtedly true that this boom prefigured the developments within the music hall industry in the 1890s in a number of important ways. As the scale of the music hall industry grew, so the sophistication with which it was conducted increased, and a number of important changes took place within the business. The greater use of advertising techniques was implicated in the emergence of the 'star system' within the

86. These included the South London Palace, 1860; the Bedford, Camden Town; the London Pavilion; and the Oxford Music Hall, all erected in 1861; and Collins' Music Hall, Islington which opened in 1862.
music hall business.\textsuperscript{88} The importance that the star system had already attained by the 1860s was highlighted by the great rivalry which developed between George Leybourne and Alfred Vance.\textsuperscript{89} The rise of the star system was accompanied by a shift to more formal contractual relationships between proprietors and performers, and the emergence of agents, as the mediators between the two sides of the industry.\textsuperscript{90} The greater complexity of the business in the 1860s also generated a need for more efficient channels of communication, which was satisfied by the emergence of a trade press. The \textit{Era} became increasingly pre-occupied with music hall matters, whilst 1870 marked the first appearance of metropolitan periodicals devoted entirely to the variety business, namely the \textit{Music Hall Critic and Programme of Amusements}, and the \textit{Entr'acte}.\textsuperscript{91}

These revolutionary changes in the nature of the music hall business during the 1860s were not confined to London. Similar trends towards the increased organisation of the business were also underway in the provinces. Large music halls were a prominent feature of the urban landscape of the centres of most major cities, and by 1867 at least 4 provincial halls had already become incorporated under limited liability legislation, with substantial nominal capitalisations.\textsuperscript{92} Moreover, at the same time

\textsuperscript{88} For a detailed consideration of the development of the star system and its effect on employer-employee relationships, see chapter 6.
\textsuperscript{89} For details of their rivalry, see Bailey, 1986, \textit{Champagne Charlie}.
\textsuperscript{90} For the development of music hall agencies, see C.D. Stuart and A.J. Park, 1895, \textit{The Variety Stage}, pp. 114-43.
\textsuperscript{91} See \textit{ibid}, pp. 146-7 on the emergence of the music hall press.
\textsuperscript{92} These music halls were the Aberdeen Music Hall (Scottish Record Office (SRO) BT2/33); the Alexandra Music Hall, Liverpool (BT31 1273/3145); the South of England Music Hall, Portsmouth (BT31 1251/3005); and the Sheffield Music Hall (PRO records destroyed). These companies are considered further in chapter 3.
that Ambrose Maynard was making his name as a pioneering music hall agent in the metropolis, Henry de Frece was building up a similar reputation in the provinces. The Magnet, published in Leeds and concerned almost exclusively with the provincial music hall scene, pre-dated the foundation of the Entr’acte by 4 years.

It also became a common practice, during the 1860s, for star performers to undertake lengthy tours of the provinces. However, these early provincial tours did not represent the integration of the music hall industry at a national scale, as at this early date it was customary for provincial tours to be arranged by the artists themselves, who, rather than appearing at the recognised provincial halls, often hired their own venues and ran their show in opposition to the local halls. Moreover, although the rise of the agent was a significant step in the organisation of the music hall business, it was not an element of, indeed it acted as a substitute for, the integration of the industry. The agent was merely a middleman, who coordinated the bookings of artists made by independent music halls.

Thus, during the 1860s, organisational changes occurred within the industry without stimulating the geographical integration of the music hall network.

The transformation of this geographically dispersed pattern of music halls into an integrated national network had to await the emergence of chains of halls under the same ownership. This process, involving the concentration of the ownership of music

93. On these touring companies see W.J. MacQueen Pope, 1951, The Melodies Linger On, p. 158; K. Barker, 1979, Early music hall in Bristol, p. 13.
94. The attempts of the syndicates to make the agent redundant in the 1900s are chronicled in chapter 5.
halls and the geographical diversification of the interests of individual companies provides the central focus for this research.

I shall begin my consideration of these syndicates by outlining the temporal and spatial outlines of their evolution, from the 1890s. However, in examining the geographical distribution of these syndicates, I shall argue that the continued expansion in the number and size of syndicates, during the 1900s, inevitably brought them into competition with one another. This direct competition between powerful syndicates, especially in order to gain control of the expanding market in suburban London, induced a fundamental change in the nature of the relationships between companies. During the 1900s, competitive policies were increasingly targeted at specific rivals. As a result of the great size of these combines, and the resources at their disposal, the conflicts which this engendered within the industry proved to be very destructive.

2-5.2 The creation of Moss Empires

Moss Empires pioneered, and was the single most important company in bringing to fruition, the development of an integrated national music hall industry. The company was incorporated in December 1899, with a capitalisation of £1,400,000. However, the flotation of the company was merely the formal recognition of the existence of a circuit which had been developing throughout the 1890s, and, by 1900, controlled 20 halls, situated in all of the major cities of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. 95

95. See figure 2-6.
Figure 2-6.
Before going on to consider the implications of this revolutionary change in the organisation of music hall companies for the structure of the industry, I shall examine the considerations which motivated this significant change in business strategies within the music hall industry. Having accomplished this I shall move on to examine the development of the constituent elements of the company, and the early careers of the entrepreneurs behind the creation of Moss Empires. The similarity of their backgrounds, I argue, provides an initial basis for the construction of a model of the generation of entrepreneurs responsible for the introduction of large-scale organisation into the music hall industry.96

The Era, in its analysis of the amalgamation of the interests of H. Edward Moss, Richard Thornton, and Oswald Stoll into Moss Empires, set out clearly the perceived benefits of adopting this form of large-scale organisation within the music hall industry. It was claimed that the merger was in the interests of shareholders, managers, and performers. Shareholders were expected to benefit from the multi-hall structure of Moss Empires, which it was anticipated would iron out the large fluctuations in dividend levels to which the music hall business was susceptible.97 The amalgamation was expected to provide shareholders with a steadier rate of return by evening out the fluctuations between the economic performances of the individual halls which made up the syndicate.98 Moreover, it was

96. Debates regarding the nature of entrepreneurship during this transformation will be refined in chapter 5.
97. Chapter 3 examines the causes of this considerable volatility in music hall dividends.
98. It is impossible to examine the extent to which this expectation was fulfilled in practice, as syndicates never made public the figures regarding the profitability of individual
anticipated that the greater stability of returns would, as the Era explained, boost the capital value of shareholdings.

This steadiness would give an increased value to the shares in the eyes of those persons who bought shares, not to sell again, but as an investment. 99

Shareholders were also expected to reap the rewards of increased, as well as, more steady, profitability. The amalgamation of the independent companies into Moss Empires was intended to enhance profitability by reducing administrative costs, and especially by preventing the duplication of bureaucratic functions. In particular, the creation of the syndicate was expected to prove of considerable benefit in dealing with artists, as amalgamation allowed the company to enter into a single contract with artists, whereas, previously, the managements of the individual halls constituting the circuit had had to prepare separate contracts for each of the halls at which an artist held an engagement.

Moreover, the pooling of the resources of separate concerns was important in facilitating the future expansion of the circuit. The pooling of the resources of the independent enterprises created a firmer financial base, which enabled the company to expand without having to raise fresh capital from the public. Furthermore, the multi-hall structure of Moss Empires enabled it to construct new halls without incurring the additional costs involved in promoting a new company. 100

halls. However, chapter 3 indicates that, whilst dividend levels were clearly linked to national economic trends, the profitability of music halls was also greatly influenced by factors which were localised in their effects.

100. Ibid, p. 17.
The managements of the emerging syndicates, drawing on the established tradition of mutuality in the industrial relations within the music hall business, also argued that this increased integration and organisation of the music hall industry was of benefit to the artists, as well as to managements and shareholders. Managers reasoned that the integration of circuits under the control of a single company would provide artists with greater security of employment, whilst the greater financial resources of syndicates, coupled with their more effective control over working costs, would enable the payment of higher salaries to performers.101

The three entrepreneurs whose interests were conjoined through the creation of Moss Empires had remarkably similar backgrounds. Each of them was born into the popular entertainments business. Moss' father was 'well known throughout England and Scotland as an enterprising theatrical manager and impresario'.102 Stoll's parents were the proprietors of a small music hall, the Parthenon, in Liverpool, whilst Thornton has been used, by David Harker, as the epitome of the Tyneside 'publican-fiddler'.103

Also of considerable significance is the fact that the business empires of all three were begun in similar geographical

101. See the evidence of George Adney Payne, recorded in the Minutes of the Proceedings of an Arbitration in regard to the Music Hall Dispute, 1907, p. 611. (Hereafter referred to as Arb). The attitudes of artists to the emergence of music hall syndicates are considered in chapter 6.
contexts. Each of these entrepreneurs initially established himself in the music hall business outside of the recognised centres of the music hall business in London and the industrial cities of Yorkshire and Lancashire.\textsuperscript{104} From their bases in these peripheral, but economically dynamic regions of the late Victorian economy, they expanded into the main geographical centres of the music hall. Thornton, as has already been intimated, began his business career in the prosperous Tyneside region, whilst Moss' first hall was situated in Edinburgh. Oswald Stoll, significantly, moved away from Liverpool to the coal boom city of Cardiff in order to enhance his prospects in the music hall business.

This suggests that it was easier for music hall entrepreneurs to accumulate the capital necessary for expansion in locations in which demand was growing rapidly, and which lacked established competitors. It might also have been easier for entrepreneurs isolated from the main centres of the music hall business to break away from the ingrained conceptions of proprietorship, and adopt innovations in the conduct and organisation of their businesses.\textsuperscript{105}

Whatever the causal mechanisms at work here, the basic spatial pattern was one in which, during the 1890s, the core areas of the music hall business in London and the industrial north were assailed by dynamic entrepreneurs from more peripheral regions of

\textsuperscript{104} The 'core' status of these regions has been indicated above by the Era Almanack data on music hall distributions.\textsuperscript{105} The reasons behind the initial successes of Moss, Thornton, and Stoll remain obscure, and provide an interesting avenue for future research. However, in the present context, it is the effects rather than the origins of the innovations adopted by these entrepreneurs which are of most significance.
the music hall network. As late as 1895 none of the three entrepreneurs had gained a foothold in London, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds or Bradford. However, by the time that their interests were formally merged in 1899, as figure 2-6 indicates, the 20 halls in the Moss Empires circuit included houses in each of these cities.

The above discussion has indicated that the benefits provided by the syndicate mode of organisation, which encouraged the creation of Moss Empires, included the fact that it facilitated further expansion. These advantages were taken advantage of by Moss Empires after its incorporation, and a further 8 halls were added to its circuit during the next 5 years. However, the incorporation of the company coincided with a fundamental shift in the nature of the expansion strategy adopted by Moss Empires. Before this date, as the previous paragraphs have indicated, the company had been rapidly expanding its geographical sphere of interest. However, thereafter, as figure 2-7 indicates, the expansion of the Moss Empires circuit after 1900 was achieved largely through the erection of additional halls in cities which were already incorporated into the Moss Empires network. Leicester was the only city added to the circuit between 1900 and 1905.106

There were a number of reasons for this dramatic change in the policy of the company. In part, it reflected the obsolescence of the original Empire Palaces. Many of these halls built during the initial phase of rapid expansion in the mid- and late-1890s

106. The Leicester Palace was not actually owned by Moss Empires. Rather it belonged to Stoll’s private circuit, which was independent of, but booked in conjunction with, Moss Empires.
THE MOSS EMPIRES CIRCUIT
1905

GLASGOW
EDINBURGH
NEWCASTLE
SOUTH SHIELDS
BELFAST
DUBLIN
LIVERPOOL
MANCHESTER
OSHEFFIELD
NOTTINGHAM
LEICESTER
BIRMINGHAM
SWANSEA
NEWPORT
CARDIFF
LONDON

O MOSS EMPIRES HALLS
□ HALLS BOOKED IN CONJUNCTION
Solid symbols, halls added since 1900

0 miles 40

Figure 2-7.
had become too small to satisfy the level of demand for commercialised music hall entertainments which had arisen by the 1900s. None of the halls of this generation were designed to facilitate the production of the aquatic spectacles and circus-orientated performances which became popular in the early 1900s.\textsuperscript{107} By 1905, halls modelled on the London Hippodrome had been erected in Liverpool and Manchester.\textsuperscript{108}

However, this adaptation in the expansion strategy of Moss Empires was primarily a response to the changing nature of the processes of urban growth in late Victorian England, discussed above. The duplication of halls within cities was intended to capture the new audiences being constituted by the emergence of suburbs. Between 1900 and 1905 the company focused primarily on the extension of its circuit into the suburbs of London.\textsuperscript{109} In Manchester, Stoll made a bid to simultaneously gain control of both the central and suburban music hall markets through the simultaneous construction of the Manchester Hippodrome, on a city centre site, and the Ardwick Empire in a working class suburb.\textsuperscript{110} The new Moss hall in Birmingham, the Bordesley Palace, was a further example of the suburb-orientated expansion of the company during the early 1900s.

\textsuperscript{107} The London Hippodrome, in which the stalls seating could be removed to uncover a circus arena which itself could be converted into a huge water tank, provided the template for this new generation of halls.
\textsuperscript{108} However, the erection of Hippodromes in provincial cities was more characteristic of the succeeding phase in the development of Moss Empires, from 1906 to 1912, during which time a number of cities, including Birmingham, Cardiff, and Glasgow, obtained their third Moss Empires hall.
\textsuperscript{109} See figure 2-7.
\textsuperscript{110} For details of these halls, which were united under the umbrella of a single limited company, see SRO BT2 5377. The expected cost of constructing the Hippodrome was £55,000. The estimated construction costs of the Ardwick Empire were £35,000.
2-5.3 The emergence of syndicates during the 1890s

Although the constituent elements of the Moss Empires syndicate pioneered the spatial integration of the music hall industry, they were not alone in experimenting with multiple-location music hall enterprises during the closing years of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the formation of the Syndicate Halls pre-dated the emergence of the chains of Moss, Thornton and Stoll.

During the 1890s the operations of the Syndicate Halls were restricted to the West End of London in which they controlled the London Pavilion, the Tivoli, and the Oxford music halls. In the provinces, the Livermore Brothers were also prominent in the construction of geographically extended circuits during the 1890s. Like that of Thornton, the success of the Livermore’s was founded initially on Tyneside. However, their strategy for expansion was very different from that employed by Moss Empires. As table 2-8 indicates, the Livermore Brothers did not attempt to expand their interests into the main urban centres of England. Instead, they continued to concentrate their energies on exploiting the markets offered by the more peripheral cities of England and Scotland.

Therefore, despite the emergence a number of syndicates within the music hall industry during the 1890s, the wide variety of markets available to these pioneers enabled them to expand their circuits without encroaching upon the geographical spheres of interest of other syndicates. Hence, there was no cause for

111. For further details of the business practices of the Syndicate Halls in the 1890s, and its geographical expansion into the suburbs at a later date, see chapter 6.
112. The Peoples Palace, Sunderland, for example, was purchased for only £13,600. This enabled the Livermore’s to retain personal control over it. BT31 15276/37726.
the generation of active rivalry between these emerging music hall chains.

Newcastle, Peoples Palace
Sunderland, Peoples Palace
Dundee, Peoples Palace
Aberdeen, Peoples Palace
Aberdeen, Alhambra
Bristol, Peoples Palace
Plymouth, Peoples Palace
Plymouth, St James’ Hall

Table 2-8. Music halls opened by the Livermore brothers, 1889-94.

2-6 Competition in the Music Hall Industry

2-6.1 The advent of inter-syndicate competition in the 1900s

During the 1900s, a number of new syndicates emerged, and the rate at which independent music halls were incorporated into integrated booking circuits increased rapidly. This proliferation of halls incorporated into circuits made it inevitable that the interests of the music hall syndicates would eventually overlap with one another. This, I shall argue, had a profound affect upon the business practices adopted by the managements of syndicates. Competition within the music hall industry was transformed into a more active process. Syndicates adopted competitive strategies which consciously, and aggressively, targeted halls under the control of rival syndicates. Although this new phenomenon manifested itself initially in the major cities of England, I shall argue that the intensity of this competition increased considerably from the mid-1900s, at which point a number of syndicates became embroiled in a struggle to dominate the new market for music hall entertainments opened up by the extension of London’s suburbs. Competition was transmuted into direct conflict
during the 1900s. Instead of allowing free market mechanisms to decide the fate of music hall companies, syndicates increasingly became involved in the active distortion of the competitive processes, in order to ensure their own success.

Prominent among the new provincial music hall syndicates of the 1900s were those controlled by the entrepreneurs Thomas Barrasford, Frank MacNaghten, and Walter de Frece.

Barrasford provides yet another example of a music hall entrepreneur with roots on Tyneside. He was born in Jarrow, in 1860, the son of a hotel proprietor. His first experience of the music hall business was as the manager of a travelling minstrel troupe during the late 1870s. Despite his travels Barrasford returned to Jarrow to begin his career as a music hall proprietor, before graduating to larger premises in Newcastle.113 By 1905, Barrasford had constructed a tour comprising 12 halls, that stretched from Glasgow to Brighton.114 The structure of the Barrasford tour was considerably different to that of the Moss Empires combine. Whereas the halls encompassed by the latter syndicate were firmly under the control of the triumvirate of Moss, Thornton and Stoll, Barrasford’s tour was a much looser federation of halls. The variety of relationships holding the tour together was outlined by the Music Hall and Theatre Review.

The Barrasford Circuit has never been vendible as a complete entity. Some of the halls belong to independent companies, claiming him [Barrasford] as a director or as managing director. In some cases the booking was leased to him. In some instances he held a share in a private enterprise.115

113. For details of the early career of Barrasford, see Green Room Book, 1906, p. 18.
114. See figure 2-8,
Figure 2-8.
A company named Barrasford Ltd., with a nominal capital of £85,040, existed. This did not, however, encompass all of the halls in the tour. Other constituent members of the circuit remained in independent hands, and linked with Barrasford solely for booking purposes. The Pavilion, Newcastle is an example of such an arrangement. The prospectus stated that

The Directors consider that the agreement entered into with Mr. Barrasford is extremely favourable to the shareholders, inasmuch as the Company obtains his valuable co-operation and assistance, and the benefits of his booking arrangements, which must result in a considerable saving to the Company, for what is, under the circumstances, a nominal sum of £500 per annum and expenses limited to £75.117

However, as figure 2-8 indicates, Barrasford targeted the same markets as Moss Empires, a policy which frequently brought the two syndicates into direct competition.118 The presence of Barrasford halls in solidly working class locations, such as Hoxton and St. Helens, indicates that Barrasford’s circuit encompassed a wider variety of types of location, and suggests that Barrasford did not necessarily share the aspirations of Moss Empires to attract middle class, as well as working class, patronage.

Like most of this generation of music hall entrepreneurs, Frank MacNaghten, whose Vaudeville Circuit incorporated 20 English theatres by 1905, was northern by origin. However, unlike his peers, MacNaghten was not born into the theatrical world. He was the product of a considerably higher social background, and had received a public school education. As figure 2-9 indicates, MacNaghten avoided competing with other syndicates by orientating

116. BT31 17280/81715.
117. BT31 10503/79277.
118. This competition will be dealt with later in chapter 2.
Figure 2-9.
his circuit towards the exploitation of the markets provided by smaller cities, and in the less prosperous eastern districts of London.

The spatial distribution of the halls in MacNaghten’s circuit was considerably less dispersed than those of Moss Empires and Barrasford. Only 3 of the halls in the tour were located neither in the East End of London, nor within 60 miles of MacNaghten’s headquarters in Sheffield. MacNaghten used these geographical concentrations of halls as the basis for the subdivision of his circuit into two regional companies. The MacNaghten Vaudeville Circuit controlled his northern interests, whilst the Music Hall Proprietary Corporation dealt with the metropolitan halls. The structure of his circuit was further complicated by MacNaghten’s diversification of his business interests into popular theatre, in the shape of the North of England Theatres Corporation. There were also considerable variations in the extent of MacNaghten’s control over the constituent elements of the Vaudeville Circuit. Of the 2082 shares issued by the Music Hall Proprietary Corporation by 1905, MacNaghten owned 1976. In contrast to this, a number of other halls, including the Burnley Palace Theatre and Hippodrome, were simply booked ‘in conjunction with’ the MacNaghten Vaudeville Circuit.

119. See fig 2-9. This distribution was mirrored by the geographical origins of the shareholders in the North of England Theatres Corporation. Of the 13,327 shares in the company issued by 1898, only 262 were held by investors not resident in London or Sheffield. BT31 7681/54829.
120. BT31 16283/63970
121. BT31 7681/54829.
122. BT31 16283/63970.
123. BT31 18087/93271.
This survey of the emergence of major provincial circuits during the early 1900s will be completed by a brief study of the de Frece Circuit. As the son of Henry de Frece, the prominent music hall agent and music hall proprietor in Liverpool, Walter, the head of the de Frece circuit, approximated closely to the social profile typical of this cohort of music hall entrepreneurs. Although de Frece's circuit was relatively small in 1906, it was expanding rapidly. His circuit is particularly worthy of note, due to the fact that it was the first to incorporate the rapidly expanding markets for music hall entertainments in seaside resorts into a national circuit. De Frece was undoubtedly aware of the benefits, considered above, of uniting the music halls in resort towns, such as Boscombe and Portsmouth, with other theatres located in cities, including Liverpool, Manchester, Belfast and Dublin.

2-6.2 The relationship between London and the provinces in the 1900s

Thus, during the opening years of the twentieth century there was a rapid development of music hall circuits, which incorporated much of provincial England, as well as the main urban centres of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. This trend in the organisation of the music hall business encompassed a variety of different urban contexts, bringing cities of all sizes, smaller industrial towns and seaside resorts, amongst others, into a national music hall network.

One of the most significant geographical consequences of this phase of expansion was the breaking down of the clear

124. See figure 2-10.
distinction which had previously existed between provincial and metropolitan circuits. By the mid-1900s a number of provincial syndicates including those headed by Barrasford, MacNaghten, and Moss, had penetrated the London market. Moreover, the influence of these provincial syndicates had permeated throughout the various different sectors of London which were identified earlier in this chapter. The battle between Stoll and Barrasford to be the first provincial music hall entrepreneur to incorporate the West End of London into their circuit will be documented shortly. By 1905, Moss and Stoll had established outposts of their business empire in several of London’s suburbs, namely, Holloway, Stratford, New Cross, Hackney and Shepherds Bush, whilst, by this date, MacNaghten controlled a number of establishments in the poorer districts of London’s East End. By the mid-1900s, therefore, London had been thoroughly colonised by provincial music hall entrepreneurs.

Nevertheless, this did not prevent the expansion of existing metropolitan syndicates, nor the emergence of new London-based chains of music halls. Indeed, the decision to expand the geographical range of interests of the Syndicate Halls, which had previously confined its activities to the West End, was taken ‘in the face of the large opposition by a powerful syndicate [Moss Empires] which was coming to London’. By the beginning of 1908, the Syndicate had expanded to accommodate the halls listed in table 2-9.

125. See the previous discussion of Anstey’s typology of music halls.
126. Era, 23 April, 1898, p. 21. This proposed change of course, advocated by George Adney Payne, was a contentious issue, and was largely responsible for the boardroom split which broke up the initial members of the Syndicate. For further details of this debate, see chapter 6.
Moreover, simultaneously, another music hall entrepreneur, Walter Gibbons, was constructing a suburban music hall circuit from scratch. Gibbons was not born into the music hall business. Rather, having begun life working in a Wolverhampton steel mill, Gibbons entered the business by marrying the daughter of George Adney Payne, the leading figure in the Syndicate, as his wife. During the mid-1900s Gibbons expanded his circuit very rapidly, largely utilising the tactic of taking over unsuccessful suburban theatres and converting them to music hall entertainments.  

2-6.3 Competition in the provinces

During the initial stages in the integration of the music hall network, the large geographical extent of the market for music hall entertainments, outlined above, ensured that direct conflict between syndicates could be avoided. Instead, the syndicates were primarily involved in an unequal competition with independent halls, which led Clemart to express the fear that the emergence of these syndicates would

Force the individual proprietor or smaller syndicates to allow themselves to be absorbed by the larger

127. This feature of the development of Gibbons’ circuit will be alluded to in subsequent sections of this chapter. The rise of Gibbons is considered further in chapter 5.
syndicates on pain of being driven out of the market altogether.128

However, I wish to argue by the mid-1900s the number and size of these syndicates was sufficient to make further expansion difficult without impinging on the interests of other syndicates. The following sections will examine the nature of the competition to which these increasingly frequent conflicts of interest gave rise. I shall that this competition gained its greatest intensity in the struggle to exploit the most lucrative new markets for music hall entertainments in suburban London. However, direct competition between syndicates was initially fostered in the provinces, and it is to these early manifestations of competition between syndicates that I shall turn first.

The considerable destructive potential of inter-syndicate competition initially became apparent in consequence of Thomas Barrasford’s decision to contest the stranglehold which Moss Empires had imposed upon the music hall market in the largest provincial cities. In 1899, Barrasford opened a hall in Leeds in direct opposition to Moss. He deliberately sought to win over custom from the Empire not only by charging lower prices, but also by flooding his bills with foreign artists.129 Liverpool provided the arena for a similar conflict between the two syndicates. Barrasford erected another Hippodrome in competition with the Liverpool Empire in 1902. In this instance Stoll responded aggressively, as figure 2-7 indicates, by opening a second Moss Empires hall, the Olympia. These halls were to be used as the ‘two sides of the lemon squeezer’ in stifling the opposition of

129. On this episode, see the testimony of Joe O’Gorman, Arb, p. 562.
Indeed, such was the intensity of this particular conflict that, according to Barrasford’s grandson, the rivalry between Barrasford and Stoll developed into a personal duel between the two entrepreneurs.

My grandfather, Tom Barrasford, was involved in a personal vendetta with Sir Oswald Stoll... The direct result of this was that my grandfather resolved to build a bigger and better music hall in every town and city in direct opposition to the existing Moss and Stoll Empires.131

This personal rivalry attained its apogee in 1904, at which point the two became embroiled in a race to be the first to open a music hall in the West End. Stoll eventually won this contest, the Coliseum opening on the 24th December, 1904, just one week before Barrasford’s reconstructed Lyceum Theatre re-opened as a music hall. This struggle proved to be a potent symbol of the destructive nature of fierce competition between powerful syndicates. Stoll’s was a Pyrrhic victory. The abject failure of the London Coliseum Ltd. will be examined in chapter 5, whilst the collapse of the Lyceum Ltd. was even more spectacular.132

Stoll appears to have been implicated in the emergence of a new oppositional language within the music hall industry during the 1900s. Mr. Doughty, counsel for the VAF during the 1907 Arbitration, for example, noted of Stoll’s attitude towards competition, that

Anybody who is playing a town where Mr. Stoll has a hall does not come to please the public, but to play against Mr. Stoll.133

130. Ibid, p. 537.
132. On the failure of the Lyceum, see ibid, pp. 164-6.
133. Arb, Doughty, p. 469.
However, in the early stages of the penetration of the music hall industry by syndicates, there were enough potential markets that were uncolonised by, and accessible to, syndicates in the provinces to make such destructive direct competition between syndicates largely unnecessary.

2-6.4 Competition in suburban London

The potential for intense conflict between the large music hall syndicates which bestrode the music hall industry, was realised in the struggle to gain control of the expanding market in suburban London in the mid-1900s.

As the discussion above has indicated, along with the growth in the importance of seaside entertainments, the growth of the suburban market was one of the most significant influences on the changing geography of the music hall network before the First World War. In consequence of this, the suburbs of London took on a central role in the expansion strategies of the emerging syndicates in the 1900s, and, therefore, emerged as a locus for the generation of conflict between circuits.

Oswald Stoll commented upon the 'substantial increase in the number of [suburban] halls, and the consequent competition to obtain audiences'. This indicates that, despite the rapid growth in the population of London's suburbs, the supply of music halls was outstripping the demand for variety entertainments.

An examination of the Era Almanack music hall listings for the years 1900 and 1908 provides some indication of the intensity

of the scramble to capture the suburban market. Between these dates the number of suburban halls listed increased from 28 to 46. By 1908, the average distance between a suburban hall and its nearest competitor was less than a mile. The Era Almanack listings also attest to the fact that this increase in the number of halls was almost entirely due to the emergence of syndicates. In 1900, 7 suburban halls, one quarter of the total, were operated under the auspices of a syndicate. By 1908 this figure had risen to 30 halls, or approximately 2/3 of the total number of suburban halls.

This increase in competition was responsible for the adoption of aggressive business practices by a number of syndicates. This led to a number of incidents which justified Clemart's characterisation of the industry as in the grip of a conflict between syndicates and the independent halls, of a 'fight between managers - for monopoly on the one hand and existence on the other'. The Putney Hippodrome, which opened in 1906, and was located less than a mile-and-a-half from the Granville, Walham Green, which was booked in conjunction with Moss Empires, was one such victim of the fiercely confrontational business practices employed by Stoll. The data provided by the Era Almanack regarding the spatial proximity of halls in suburban London suggest that this example was indicative of a more widespread policy on the part of syndicates of targeting independent suburban

135. Era Almanack, 1900, pp. 91-2; Era Almanack, 1908, pp. 102-5. See figures 2-11 and 2-12.
136. This information is drawn from a table in the Era, 4 January, 1908, p. 23, entitled 'a distance chart, compiled to settle questions connected with the barring clause' which was collated by Edward Stanford, the 'geographer to His Majesty the King'.
137. Arb, Clemart, p. 404.
138. For details of the campaign against the Putney Hippodrome, see Arb, p. 507.
Figure 2-11. The distribution of music halls in suburban London, 1900.
1908

MOSS EMPIRES
SYNDICATE HALLS
MACNAGHTEN
DE FREECE CIRCUIT
GIBBONS
INDEPENDENT HALLS

Figure 2-12. The distribution of music halls in suburban London, 1908.
halls. Although independent halls only accounted for one-third of the suburban halls extant in 1908, they provided the most spatially proximate competitor for over a half of the syndicated halls. Of the eight instances of halls belonging to a syndicate being located within a quarter of a mile of another hall, only in one case — that of the South London and Surrey halls — were the halls in question owned by rival syndicates. 139

However, although the managements of the syndicates lived up to the expectations of performers in targeting independent halls, they failed to squeeze out the independent halls, either by forcing them into bankruptcy or to become incorporated into a syndicate. Between 1900 and 1908 only 5 independent halls were forced to close, and the total number of independent halls declined by only 3 during this period. Nor were the independents forced en masse into collaboration with syndicates. Of the 16 independent halls of 1900 which were still in existence in 1908, only 7 had become conjoined with a syndicate. 140

Thus, over three-quarters of the increase in the number of establishments controlled by syndicates in suburban London came through the opening of new halls. The means by which the syndicates expanded their circuits varied. The Times commented upon the LCC licensing session of 1907 that

It was a noticeable feature of the music-hall applications that six of the buildings in respect of which the applications were made were theatres in which up to now dramatic performances had been given. 141

139. Era, 4 January, 1908, p. 23.
140. Era Almanack, 1900, pp. 91-2; Era Almanack, 1908, pp. 102-5. These halls were the Camberwell Palace; the Empress, Brixton; the Foresters' Hall; the Grand, Clapham; the Granville, Walham Green; the South London Music Hall; and the Standard Theatre, Shoreditch. 141. Times, 23 November, 1907, p. 7.
This method was particularly associated with Walter Gibbons who was responsible for the conversion of a number of theatres into music halls during 1907, including the Standard Theatre, Shoreditch; the Grand Theatre, Islington; Terriss' Theatre, Rotherhithe; the Grand Theatre and Opera House, Woolwich; and the Prince's Theatre, Poplar. Most of the syndicates, including Moss Empires and the Variety Theatres Consolidated, preferred to construct purpose-built variety theatres in the new London suburbs.

The rapid increase in the representation of syndicates in the suburbs of London made it inevitable that they would become drawn into direct conflict with one another. It was customary for the barring clauses associated with suburban halls, which reflected the perception of managements of the locations from which their potential audience was drawn, to encompass a spatial range of 2 miles. Of the 27 syndicated halls included in the 1908 Era table of distances between halls, 22 were located within a 2 mile radius of an establishment controlled by a rival syndicate. The syndicates did not limit their aggressive targeting of opposition halls to the more vulnerable independents. They were equally prepared to mount active and overtly hostile campaigns against halls incorporated into rival circuits.

The intensity which this cut-throat competition between syndicates in the suburbs of London attained was exemplified by the case of the Stoke Newington Palace, which was converted from a legitimate theatre in 1906, and operated under the auspices of Walter de Frece's booking circuit. Moss Empires reacted with

142. Times, 2 November, 1907, p. 14; Times 9 November, 1907, p. 3.
considerable hostility to the conversion of the theatre to variety entertainments. The Palace was located only one mile from Moss’ Empire at Hackney, but, probably of more significance in this instance, it also interfered with the expansion plans of Moss Empires. The syndicate had purchased a site in Finsbury Park on which it intended to erect the first of a new generation of suburban ‘Super-palaces’. However, the company had been refused a provisional music and dancing licence by the LCC, largely on the grounds that the area was already amply provided with music halls.\textsuperscript{143} Moss Empires advertisements in the \textit{Era} pointedly stated to artists contracted to the company that ‘The Alexandra Theatre, Stoke Newington is within the area absolutely barred by us’.\textsuperscript{144} The singling out of this hall was intended not only to discourage artists with contracts with Moss Empires from asking for their barring clauses to be relaxed with respect to the Palace, but also as a warning to artists not currently engaged by Moss Empires that performing at the opposition theatre would be prejudicial to their chances of obtaining future employment with Moss Empires. Joe O’Gorman, a prominent figure in the organisation of artists associations, was informed by one of Moss’ district managers that artists could ‘never have our tour while they have got Stoke

\textsuperscript{143} LCC/MIN/10806. Chapter 2 has already indicated the significant alterations in the nature of the issues considered at licensing sessions as a result of the suburbanisation of music hall entertainments. The growth of suburbs, with the consequent greater proximity of business and residential land uses, promoted locational factors to a position of considerably more importance than moral considerations in guiding the judgements of councillors. It is doubtful, though that these geographically based arguments were always put forward sincerely. Prominent puritanical campaigners appear to have made use of such locational issues once it had become apparent that their moral arguments were no longer effective in influencing the LCC.

\textsuperscript{144} Arb, Mr. Doughty, p. 412. The Palace, Stoke Newington, was previously known as the Alexandra Theatre.
Newington’. De Frece was equally aggressive in his booking policies, and it was widely accepted that no artist refusing to play at Stoke Newington, in order to placate Moss Empires, would be engaged for any of the other fifteen halls incorporated into his booking circuit.

Indeed, the limited success which the syndicates did achieve in squeezing out the independent operators could actually serve to fuel the conflict between syndicates. In the case of the Putney Hippodrome, previously referred to, the effect of the policy of aggressive competition embarked upon by Stoll was not the removal of the nearest competitor to the Granville, Walham Green, nor was the hall forced to join the Moss Empires booking circuit. Rather, as the proprietor explained to the 1907 arbitration, the opposition of Stoll

Absolutely compelled me to turn it over to a stronger syndicate...[to] Mr. Gibbons, as he would be able to fight Mr. Stoll at his own game.

This cut-throat competition was very disruptive to the economy of the music halls. The overproduction of halls led Henri Gros, a director of several suburban halls controlled by the Variety Theatres Consolidated Ltd., to complain that

There are so many halls now that I wish I had retired from it; I do not know what it will be when there are more.

The information on the typical levels of dividends declared by music hall companies that operated in suburban London, which is considered in chapter 3, lends support to Gros’ contention that

146. Arb, Pink, p. 536.
147. Arb, Mr. Grimes, p. 507.
the intensity of competition had brought about a crisis in the finances of the halls of suburban London.

The above analysis has indicated that this competition was primarily the result of aggressive expansion by music hall syndicates, who increased the number of suburban music halls under their control rapidly. The establishment of new halls was not compensated for by the disappearance of more established halls. The failure of the syndicates to force the independent halls out of business was a significant factor in stoking the fires of competition in the suburban music hall business.

In particular, though, it was the emergence of direct competition between syndicates in the suburban context which had the most adverse consequences for the music hall industry. The outlines of this conflict, and the intensity with which it came to be waged have been considered briefly above, but a more detailed consideration of the processes of inter-syndicate competition will be deferred until chapter 6, which examines the emergence of the star system. and argues that the control of star performers was central to the playing out of competitive strategies between syndicates.

2-7 Conclusion

Having briefly reviewed the extent to which geographical perspectives have been employed in the study of the music hall, this chapter has concentrated on 2 main objectives. First, on the basis of the Era Almanack music hall directories for 1882-1912, I have sought to make a reconstruction of the basic geographical distribution of music halls in England and Wales during this
period, and its evolution between these two dates. Secondly, I have attempted to sketch the outlines of the development of music hall syndicates, which employed a multi-plant structure. I have argued that the emergence of these syndicates was responsible for the integration of the music halls into a coherent network.

These 2 are not, though, discrete issues. The above discussion of the intensification of competition between syndicates in the 1900s has indicated that the emergence of syndicates was not only coincident with, but implicated in the changes in the distribution of music halls outlined above. The syndicates were, clearly, prominent in the suburbanisation of music hall entertainments. Moreover, their influence can also be invoked in the explanation of the observed reduction in the variation in the number of music halls between cities during the period 1882-1912. The absolute reduction in the number of halls in the cities in which they were concentrated in 1882 can be related to the establishment of halls controlled by major syndicates in these settlements. The competition provided by these syndicates undoubtedly affected the viability of a considerable number of independent halls.

This confirms the impression that the processes operating in London were fundamentally different to those shaping the distribution of music halls in the provinces. In London, music halls were becoming decentralised, and this was associated with a rise in the number of halls and the intensification of competition. The largest provincial cities, by contrast, appear to have increasingly become centres of entertainment for the emerging conurbations. This does not, however, appear to have
stimulated the proliferation of music halls. It seems that market domination was more easily attained in the provinces.

However, the emergence of syndicates was not central to all of the spatial transformations in the music hall network which have been identified in this chapter. Despite the dovetailing of the summer tourist season with the slack period in the music hall calendar, syndicates, with the exception of the de Frece circuit, were reluctant to invest in seaside resorts. The capital requirements of the entertainment industry in resort towns continued to be supplied from local sources.

Nevertheless, it is the contention of this chapter that the emergence of the music hall syndicates occasioned a fundamental re-organisation of the music hall industry. Chapter 6 will examine more closely the economic imperatives underlying the adoption of this large scale organisation, and the fundamental role played by spatial considerations in the emergence and evolution of these syndicates. Chapters 4 and 5 will investigate the changes in the practices of business administration, notably the professionalisation of entrepreneurship and the bureaucratisation of management functions, which enabled these syndicates to control their large and widely dispersed interests efficiently.

The following chapter will consider the institutional framework within which this transformation took place, and the sources of the capital which financed the expansion of the music hall syndicates.
CHAPTER 3: MUSIC HALL PROFITABILITY 1890-1920

3-1 Introduction

The basic social and economic preconditions for the emergence of a mass market in the UK, and especially the significance of urbanisation, have been outlined in chapter 2. These changes brought about a fundamental transformation in the organisation of a range of leisure activities, including football, horse racing, and holidaymaking. In response to these rapidly expanding market opportunities, 'Victorian sport and leisure became inextricably bound up with industry, commerce and economics'.

Within the music hall business this trend was reflected in the emergence of the larger-scale organisation of the industry into syndicates with dispersed geographical interests. In the long-term, the success of this transformation of the music hall business required the development of sophisticated organisational structures capable of successfully coordinating the expansion of music hall networks. The adequacy with which these challenges were met by music hall companies will provide a major focus for inquiry in chapters 4 and 5.

Initially, though, the expansion of the music hall industry to meet the demands of the emerging mass market for leisure was dependent upon the generation of a sufficient flow of investment

1. For studies of this process in each of these spheres, see, respectively, T. Mason, 1980, Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915, and S. Tischler, 1979, Footballers and businessmen; W. Vamplew, 1979, The sport of kings and commoners; and J. K. Walton, 1988, The English Seaside Resort.


3. See chapter 2.
capital into the business. However, as Waites acknowledges, at present,

Historians' knowledge of music-hall finance is, unfortunately, rather fragmentary, we have some useful figures for the capital and profits of the larger and better managed halls at different times but...no adequate basis for more than a sketch history of the economics of the industry.⁴

One of the primary concerns of the present discussion, therefore is to fill out this outline of the processes which financed the transformation of music hall between 1885 and 1922.

The most significant factor in fuelling this rapid increase in investment in the music hall business from the 1880s was the institutional framework of the limited liability company, which, by making a clear distinction between the investments and private wealth of investors encouraged the involvement of rentier capitalists in industrial finance. In particular, this provided music hall entrepreneurs with more ready access to the savings of the middle classes, who were accumulating capital rapidly in Victorian England.

The current chapter aims not only to chart the extent and the timing of the adoption of this form of business organisation within the industry, but, also, to consider the extent to which entrepreneurs of leisure, through the integration of the music hall industry into more general trends in business organisation, succeeded in constructing a prototype mass leisure industry capable of translating mass demand into financial success.

⁴ B. Waites, 1981, Development of Popular Culture in Britain, p. 43.
3.1.1 The volatility of music hall investment

As has previously been indicated, contemporaries interpreted the development of the music halls from the 1850s to the twentieth century, and especially the phase of commercialisation from the mid-1880s, in a Whiggish fashion. The tone of this reading of history is captured in the following quotation from the first comprehensive history of the halls, with regard to the opening of the new London Pavilion in 1885, which

Inaugurated a fresh era in music-hall history. It marked the final and complete severance of the variety stage from its old associations of the tavern and the concert saloon from the sphere of which it had, year by year, been gradually departing...[the halls now] emerged in all the splendour of their new born glory. The highest efforts of the architect, the designer, and the decorator were enlisted in their service, and the gaudy and tawdry music hall of the past gave place to the resplendent "theatre of varieties" of the present day, with its classic exterior of marble and freestone, its lavishly-appointed auditorium and its elegant and luxurious foyers and promenades brilliantly illuminated by myriad electric lights.5

The impressive architecture of this new generation of palaces of variety were considered to embody not only the moral 'improvement' of the entertainments provided therein and of the music hall audience, but also, most directly, the sound financial position of the business. This 'golden age' of expansion, 'improvement', and unbounded profitability in the music hall business was generally considered to have continued, uninterrupted until the time of the inaugural Royal Variety Command Performance, which took place at the Palace Theatre on 1st July 1912. This occasion has since come to be regarded as 'the meridian of the music hall midsummer'.6

Amongst contemporaries, this perception of the bountiful prosperity of the music hall business was fostered not only by entrepreneurs intent upon encouraging further investment in the industry, but also by the opponents of the halls, who sought to construct in the public imagination an opposition between the interests of 'capital' and 'morality'. Thus, in opposing the renewal of the music hall licence of the Empire Palace, Leicester Square, Mrs. Ormiston Chant accused the management of being 'on the side of the money-lender, the greedy capitalist, and monopolist'.

Chant described the role of the music hall entrepreneur as 'the maintenance of a place where successful vice made a large dividend', whilst the shareholders of the Empire were caricatured as 'the portly...grabbers of 75 per cent. [dividends]'. A similar confrontation, between 'Manchester morality and London capital', is discussed by Chris Waters.

Indeed, even professional investors accepted the belief that music halls were a very lucrative investment medium. In 1907, for example, 'A member of the Stock Exchange' opined that, after a careful study of theatrical finance,

I have been compelled to come to the conclusion that... in few enterprises are profits larger.

7. O. Chant, 1895, Why We Attacked the Empire, p. 13.
9. C. Waters, 1986, Manchester morality and London capital. Interestingly, in the case of Manchester this conflict achieved symbolic representation in geographical terminology. In the case of the Empire, due to the centrality of the alleged prostitution in the promenade of the hall to the opposition to the renewal of the licence, gender became the symbolic yardstick of good and evil. Chant, op. cit., p. 9, portrayed the controversy as a 'contest between the interests of a great music-hall pleaded by a man, and the interests of the public pleaded by a woman'.
However, Crouzet has warned scholars of the Victorian economy against accepting uncritically such simple portrayals of economic trends.

The mere measuring of long-term growth can never satisfy the historian. Growth does not evolve at a uniform pace and cannot be charted on a graph as a straight line.\textsuperscript{11}

Whilst this warning undoubtedly has a far wider significance, it is my contention that it is particularly apposite in the context of the emerging mass entertainments industries. Almost by definition, spending on leisure, a non-essential expenditure, is highly elastic, and leisure industries are, therefore, peculiarly vulnerable to changes in their economic context. Whilst the music hall industry might be expected to be one of the major beneficiaries of sustained periods of rising living standards, it, along with other leisure industries, would also be amongst the first to suffer from any adverse swings in the economic climate. As Oswald Stoll indicated, ‘entertainments suffer first and suffer most when the public are short of money’.\textsuperscript{12}

Moreover, the volatility of the performance of companies in the leisure market is exacerbated considerably by the impact of

The vicissitudes of fashion to which theatrical enterprise, and especially music-hall enterprise has always been subject.\textsuperscript{13}

Thus, even within the context of the almost constantly expanding leisure market, which appears to have prevailed throughout the period 1880-1914, the prosperity of individual

\textsuperscript{11} F. Crouzet, 1982, The Victorian Economy, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{12} Times, 12 March, 1920, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{13} Times, 27 February, 1914, p. 15.
leisure industries, and single companies within these industries, was not assured.\textsuperscript{14}

It is, therefore, \textit{a priori}, unlikely that the economic history of music hall from 1880 to 1920 would be one of unbroken financial success.

These considerations would seem to lend credence to the contention of the \textit{Stage Year Book} for 1916 that 'there are few more speculative forms of industrial art' than theatrical investment.\textsuperscript{15} This was an opinion shared by the \textit{Times}, which declared in 1913 that

\begin{quote}
There is, perhaps, no class of investment more sensitive to external influences than music-halls. Fine weather, national mourning, prolonged strikes, war, and trade depression are all seriously trying conditions for places which depend on the prosperity of the public and its need for indoor entertainment.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

This volatility has been commented upon, in general terms, by social historians of the halls. Rutherford has brought attention to the fact that, even in the context of overall expansion in the market for music hall entertainments, the business was still 'prey to fluctuations, insecure profitability and "scandalous liquidations"'.\textsuperscript{17} Various explanations have been advanced to account for these fluctuations in the economic fortunes of the halls. Bailey, in focusing on the importance of unique factors, passes on the received wisdom of music hall

\textsuperscript{14} This point has been made, in a twentieth century context, by S. Parker, 1973, \textit{The economics of leisure}, p. 191. 'The leisure market as a whole is a growing and fairly predictable one, but within it the markets for particular leisure goods and services are far more fickle and less predictable.'

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Stage Year Book (SYB)}, 1916, p. 65.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Times}, 18 February, 1913, p. 14. The causes of these fluctuations in profitability will be considered elsewhere in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{17} L. Rutherford, 1986, 'Managers in a small way', p. 105.
proprietors that 'fluctuations in the music hall industry tended to be personal, localised or seasonal rather than industry wide and dependent on the general economy'.\textsuperscript{18} Cunningham, by contrast prioritises more general, external features of the economy, and particularly the trade cycle. However, Cunningham complains that

Historians of leisure have scarcely begun to assess the impact of these cycles in the availability of work, indeed they have generally completely ignored them.\textsuperscript{19}

He has begun to consider the effects of the trade cycle on patterns of recreation at the micro-scale, concluding that

In individual lives, and in particular years, it could play havoc with any notion of a known, knowable and secure pattern of leisure.\textsuperscript{20}

However, no consideration has been made of the impact of these wider economic fluctuations on the music halls as a business, although Cunningham suggests speculatively that the fortunes of the music hall industry might be of a counter-cyclical nature.\textsuperscript{21}

Thus, social historians have begun to realise that the pattern of the growth in music hall profitability before the First World War was more complicated than has often been thought. More radically, they have also begun to question the assumption that the overall trend of music hall profitability during the decades before the First World War was invariably in the direction of enhanced economic performance. Bailey has argued that

There was no abrupt terminus to the music hall’s career...by 1912 music hall was well into a crisis of overproduction and reduced profits’.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18} P. Bailey, 1986, A community of friends, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{20} H. Cunningham, 1985, Leisure, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{22} P. Bailey, 1986, Business of Pleasure, p. xiii.
Bailey has found support for this contention from other scholars. Waites believes that the 'genre was in decline by 1910', whilst Rutherford pushes the crisis slightly further back in arguing that 'dividends were definitely falling in the early 1900s'. However, as Waites has acknowledged, little empirical evidence capable of supporting this impression has been gathered. Again, the available evidence is provided by single and isolated examples. In examining music hall profitability in this chapter, I shall endeavour to construct an argument on the basis of systematic data, which not only allows for the detailed analysis of temporal trends in profitability, but also facilitates the comparison of profitability between various types of location at any given time.

3-2 Music Halls and Limited Liability

3-2.1 The origins of limited liability

As the introductory remarks to this chapter have indicated, the establishment of the legal framework of limited liability through the Joint Stock Companies Act of 1856 was an essential precondition for the fundamental transformation which remoulded the music hall business between 1885 and 1922.

A brief examination of the constraints inherent in the laws of partnership which had previously governed business transactions should suffice to indicate the liberating effects which the establishment of limited liability status had on business organisation, and to highlight the potential contribution of limited liability to the organisation of the music hall industry.

at a national scale. In essence, the assumption of the previously existing laws that the ownership and management of businesses was based on the close liaison between a small number of partners, was inimical to the large scale, bureaucratic organisation of industry. In particular rentier investment was discouraged by the ruling that any person taking an interest in the profits of an enterprise was a partner in the business, and, therefore personally liable 'to his last shilling or acre' for the debts of the business.24 Whilst this legal framework remained intact, capitalists were reluctant to invest their money as 'sleeping partners' in businesses over the day-to-day conduct of which they held no control. This situation left large sources of capital untapped, including the wealth held by individuals unable to enter into the management of a business due to limitations of age, health or gender.25 Indeed, the sequence of events leading up to the enactment of the Joint Stock Companies Act was initiated and led not by ambitious entrepreneurs, nor by frustrated investors, but rather by the Christian Socialist movement, which sought to encourage thrifty habits by 'removing obstacles and giving facilities to safe investments for the savings of the middle and the working classes.'26 Limited liability theoretically came into existence via the Limited Liability Act of 1855. However the Joint Stock Companies Act of the following year was of more practical significance, as it made the attainment of limited liability status considerably easier. Under this Act the signatures of only 7 individuals, and a set of rules for the

regulation of the internal affairs of the proposed company, were sufficient to enable the registration of a limited liability company.\textsuperscript{27} Thus, a legal framework within which the commercialisation and the capitalisation of music hall at a national scale could proceed was in existence from the mid-nineteenth century.

3-2.2 The penetration of the music hall business by limited liability organisation

Contemporary opinion was clearly divided as to the extent to which the music hall industry adopted limited liability organisation. 'J.C.L.Z.', writing in 1907, subscribed to the view that as a result of 'the transformation of businesses that used to be the properties of individuals into limited liability companies...the old-fashioned proprietary music hall has almost ceased to exist'.\textsuperscript{28} However, a decade later, the \textit{Stage Year Book} expressed the contrary opinion that 'to this day many of the best known theatres are still privately owned and conducted'.\textsuperscript{29} This was attributed to the fact that the music hall was

A form which lends itself peculiarly to individual exploitation to anyone with money to lose and willing to take great chances, and, therefore the tendency is rather to exclude than to invite the participation of others.\textsuperscript{30}

Table 3-1, which indicates, at five year intervals between 1887 and 1912, the proportion of the halls listed by the \textit{Era Almanack} for London plus the ten largest cities of England which

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} Shannon, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 290.
\item \textsuperscript{28} \textit{Green Room Book}, 1907, p. 481.
\item \textsuperscript{29} \textit{Stage Year Book}, 1916, p. 65.
\item \textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid}, p. 65.
\end{itemize}
were run by limited liability companies, has been constructed to enable an initial assessment of this issue.\(^\text{31}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Non-ltd.</th>
<th>Limited</th>
<th>% Limited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>34.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>54.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>54.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>70.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-1. The spread of limited liability music halls in the eleven largest cities of England, 1887-1912.

In 1887, when limited liability was just beginning to come into vogue in the music hall business, the proportion of halls controlled by firms on the register at Companies House was only 11.11%. Thereafter the proportion of halls which had been incorporated grew rapidly. By the end of the nineteenth century over half of the halls in these 11 cities were incorporated, and by 1912, over 70% of the halls in which the Era Almanack listed for the main cities of England were run by limited liability companies. The expansion of the influence of limited liability in the music hall industry was located primarily in the periods 1897-1902 and 1907-12. The increase in the number of limited companies was responsible for the whole of the numerical expansion of the music hall industry in major cities during this period. Indeed, the number of privately owned halls in the cities under consideration actually declined from a plateau of about fifty halls between 1887 and 1897, to only thirty-one by 1912.

\(^{31}\) The cities were selected on the basis of their populations at the time of the 1911 Census. They are Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield - the larger five - and Bradford, Bristol, Hull, Newcastle, and Nottingham.
However, as table 3-2 indicates, this trend was not a uniform, nationwide phenomenon. The predominance of limited liability companies was positively correlated with settlement size. By 1912 over three-quarters of the halls in London were run by limited companies, but at the same time only just over half of those in the 7th to 11th largest cities were organised in this manner. Moreover, the temporal patterns of change were different between metropolis and provinces. Whilst in the former location the proportion of limited liability halls increased most rapidly in the five year periods 1897-1902 and 1907-12, in the provinces the intervening years 1902-1907 exhibited the most rapid growth in the representation of limited liability companies. During these years the proportion of London halls under the ownership of companies declined.32

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>London</th>
<th>5 largest cities</th>
<th>5 other cities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no. of % ltd</td>
<td>no. of % ltd</td>
<td>no. of % ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>31 19.35</td>
<td>19 0</td>
<td>4 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>32 31.25</td>
<td>23 17.39</td>
<td>9 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>35 37.14</td>
<td>28 32.14</td>
<td>12 33.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>45 64.44</td>
<td>22 40.90</td>
<td>14 42.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>54 51.85</td>
<td>31 61.29</td>
<td>10 50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>63 76.19</td>
<td>26 65.38</td>
<td>15 53.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-2. The spread of limited liability amongst London music halls, 1887-1912.

Thus the major cities were in the vanguard of the adoption of limited liability status by the music hall industry. Nevertheless, even at the outbreak of the First World War halls in

32. This decline reflects the sudden growth between these two dates of the London music hall circuit of Walter Gibbons, which in 1907 were still owned privately. In 1908 the halls under his control were incorporated as the London Theatres of Variety Ltd. Chapter 5 contains a more detailed consideration of the growth of Gibbons' business empire.
proprietorial ownership persisted in considerable numbers alongside these limited companies in the major cities of England. Moreover, this analysis suggests that limited liability status was likely to have had considerably less of an impact on, and remained a minority form of organisation in, settlements at lower levels of the urban hierarchy than those considered above.

3-2.3 The growth of limited liability music hall companies

One of the most significant features of the rise of limited liability to the historian is the fact that incorporation placed upon companies the obligation to lodge certain business records with the Companies Registrar, based at Somerset House. In order to examine in more detail the impact of the penetration of the music hall industry by limited liability organisation, as outlined above, I extracted the records of 127 music hall companies which registered under the limited liability legislation.

The date of incorporation of each of the companies examined is included in figure 3-1. This data confirms the pivotal status of the mid- to late-1880's in the evolution of the music hall business. Limited liability organisation, and by implication increased capitalisation, began to have a significant impact on the music hall business between 1886 and 1888. This new trend was rapidly picked up by the Financial News which stated in 1887 that

It would not surprise us if the development of new companies took a dramatic and musical turn. It is beginning to be realised that there is money nowadays in the theatre and music-hall business.

33. See appendix 2 for information regarding these records.
The *Financial News* considered that 'of all places of entertainment the music-hall has the greatest financial possibilities' and that its previous record indicated that 'wherever it has been decently and prudently managed it has yielded large fortunes'.\(^{35}\) Potential investors were assured that the music halls were 'safe for a 10 per cent. dividend.'\(^{36}\)

This also implies that whilst the advent of limited liability was necessary, it was not a sufficient cause of the capitalisation of the music hall industry, as there was a time lag of approximately 30 years between the enactment of the legislation and its widespread adoption by the music hall industry. The *Stage Year Book* noted in 1918 that

> The advent of theatre and music hall enterprises into the joint stock world is a comparatively modern development [as]...the Alhambra Company, which was formed in 1865, was for long the only considerable company of its kind known to investors in London, though there were a few similar ventures in the provinces.\(^{37}\)

My researches have confirmed the veracity of this contemporary assessment of the early development of limited liability companies within the music hall industry. The Aberdeen Music Hall became the first hall to take advantage of the benefits of incorporation, as early as 1858. However, prior to 1886 other halls appear to have been reluctant to follow its lead. I have been able to trace only a further 7 halls, including the Alhambra, which were registered at Companies house before 1886.\(^{38}\) Between them, these 8 companies represented a nominal capital of only £233,250.

\(^{35}\) Ibid, p. 2.
\(^{36}\) Ibid, p. 2.
\(^{37}\) *Stage Year Book*, 1918, p. 46.
\(^{38}\) See table 3-3.
### Table 3-3. Limited liability company music halls incorporated prior to 1885.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Name of company</th>
<th>nominal capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1858-1928</td>
<td>Aberdeen Music Hall</td>
<td>8000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865-1936</td>
<td>Alhambra</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>Alexandra Music Hall, Liverpool</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>South of England Music Hall, Portsmouth</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867-1920+</td>
<td>Sheffield Music Hall</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875-6</td>
<td>Blackpool Star Amphitheatre of Varieties</td>
<td>5,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882-4</td>
<td>Peoples Palace of Varieties, Wolverhampton</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Empire Theatre</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>£233,250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, the majority of these enterprises appear to have been short-lived. Two of the larger companies, the South of England Music Hall in Portsmouth, and the Alexandra Music Hall, Liverpool, were both incorporated, and collapsed, in 1866. The Empire Theatre, in Leicester Square, also ceased trading within a year of its incorporation in 1884. Although the Alhambra Company traded continuously from 1865, it did so without a music and dancing licence from 1870 until 1884.

39. For details of the South of England Music Hall Co., see BT31 1251/3005. For the Alexandra Music Hall, Liverpool Co., see BT31 1273/3145. The difficulty of ascertaining accurately the date at which music hall companies ceased to operate has complicated the compilation of this data. The South of England Music Hall Co., for example, was not officially dissolved until 1884, although no correspondence was received at Companies House after 1866. This problem, and a suggested solution, have been discussed in H.A. Shannon, 1932, *The first five thousand companies and their duration*, pp. 400-1. I have considered the date of the last correspondence from companies to represent their demise.

40. BT31 3309/19562; The company was refloated successfully in 1887. BT31 14876/24836.

41. In 1870 the Middlesex magistrates refused to renew its music and dancing licence after hearing a report on the performance of the Colonna troupe in a ballet entitled ‘Les Nations’. This included a can-can dance which the police considered to be ‘on the whole indecent’. The report also noted that ‘there was a large influx of visitors shortly before the ballet commenced, but
According to the information contained in figure 3-1 there were only three limited liability music hall companies extant in 1885. Thereafter the numbers rose rapidly, reaching a maximum of 51 in 1910. The rate at which the number of incorporated halls increased was relatively stable throughout the period, although there were periods of more rapid growth between 1896 and 1898, and from 1907 to 1910. In only two years prior to 1910, 1899 and 1901, did the number of music hall companies in my sample and on the register at Companies House decline. This graph, therefore, generally endorses the impression that the expansion of the music hall industry was both rapid and almost unbroken during the quarter of a century following the opening of the new London Pavilion in 1885. However, figure 3-1 does also support the contention that the industry was already in a state of contraction before the outbreak of the First World War.

Figure 3-2, showing the number of the companies included in my sample registered annually between 1858 and 1914, confirms that the growth in the importance of limited liability was continuous after 1886. On only 2 occasions after this date were less than two new music hall companies incorporated. It illustrates with considerable clarity the temporal variations in the establishment of limited liability companies. The initial boom in music hall investment took place between 1886 and 1888, this was followed by quantitatively more significant increases in the number of new registrations in the years 1896-8, and 1907-10.

which was decreased immediately after'. Times, 14 October, 1870, p. 12; Times, 15 October, 1870, p. 6. On the renewal of the Alhambra's licence, see Times, 10 October, 1884, p. 8. 42. The decline in 1901 can be explained by the creation of Moss Empires Ltd. in 1900. This entailed the merger of a number of nominally independent companies controlled by Moss, Thornton and Stoll into a single limited liability company.
Figure 3.1. Total number of music halls on the register, 1838-1926.

Figure 3.2. The number of music halls incorporated annually, 1865-1914.
As has already been indicated, there has been little consideration of the relationships between this expansion of the commercialised music hall industry and the trade cycles affecting the wider economy. Drawing on the work of Ford on trade cycles in the British economy, it is apparent that Cunningham's speculation regarding the counter-cyclical nature of growth in the music hall industry are inappropriate.\textsuperscript{43}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trade cycles</th>
<th>Industrial profits</th>
<th>Wages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>trough</td>
<td>peak</td>
<td>trough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>1886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>1899-1900</td>
<td>1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>1908-9</td>
<td>1904</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-4. Peaks and troughs in the trade cycle, industrial profitability, and wages in Britain 1880-1910. (source: A.G. Ford, 1981, pp. 31; 41; 30)

The first two booms in the promotion of limited liability music hall companies took place within the context of an improvement in the performance of the economy. However, the last boom followed a peak in the trade cycle in 1907. Table 3-4 also indicates that the fluctuations in other more specific economic indicators, the profitability of industry, and average wage levels, which might be considered to be especially pertinent in encouraging investment in the music hall industry, are coincided with the trade cycle. Although, in the case of the first two limited liability booms in the music hall industry, expansion began shortly after the previous trough in the trade cycle, it petered out before the trade cycle reached its peaks in 1890 and 1900. Of the factors exogenous to the music hall industry considered by Ford, that which approximates closely to the

\textsuperscript{43} A.G. Ford, 1981, The trade cycle in Britain 1860-1914.
temporal pattern of figure 3-2 is Ford's price index. 44 This indicates that, in general, prices were low during the upturns in the trade cycle, and the years 1886-8 and 1895-8 were especially so. However, this data also indicates that during both cyclical upswings under consideration here, prices increased suddenly and rapidly, immediately before the peaks of the trade cycles, in 1889 and 1899. Thus, it would appear that investment in the music hall industry was related to fluctuations in prices, which provided a significant indicator of the disposable income of potential music hall audiences. However, although of considerable significance, fluctuations in prices should not be considered the sole determinant of patterns of investment in music hall investment. Moreover, this factor cannot be used to explain the large number of incorporations in 1907, which corresponded with a peak in prices.

3-2.4 The geographical spread of music hall companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>London</th>
<th>central cities</th>
<th>resorts</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>suburban</td>
<td>towns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850-9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860-9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870-9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880-9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890-9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900-9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-5. The dates of incorporation of music hall companies at different levels of the urban hierarchy, by decade, 1850-1920.

In table 3-5, the sample of music hall limited liability companies, upon which the foregoing analysis is based, has been

44. Ibid, p. 30.
disaggregated into the elements of the urban hierarchy which were identified as geographically significant categories in chapter 2. Table 3-5 indicates that initially, during the 1880s, the limited liability boom in the music hall industry was confined to central London and the cities of provincial England. However, in the 1890s, which experienced the largest number of incorporations of any decade under consideration, the growth in the number of limited companies was fuelled by the expansion of their geographical presence to include all of the categories identified above. This indicates that although limited liability company music halls were concentrated at higher levels of the urban hierarchy, they were not absent from towns and seaside resorts. Indeed, almost a quarter of the new music hall companies incorporated in the 1900s were located in towns and seaside resorts. The downturn in the number of incorporations after 1900 was initially due to the fact that very few new companies were established in central London and provincial cities, which suggests that these locations were adequately catered for by the end of the nineteenth century.45 There was still at this time considerable growth in the number of limited companies floated elsewhere, particularly in towns and in the suburbs of London. Conversely, by the 1910s all of the categories exhibit a significant falling off in the number of new halls floated, providing further evidence of the stagnation of the industry.

Thus far, my analysis of the selected company records has considered the growth, and contraction, of the music hall industry.

45. This figure is also, undoubtedly, depressed by the growing importance of syndicates which operated numerous halls under the auspices of a single company. As chapter 2 has indicated, most of these syndicates concentrated their operations in London and the major provincial cities.
solely in terms of the raw numbers of companies floated. Of

course, one of the most significant features of limited liability

was the encouragement which it gave investors to increase the

amount of capital tied up in individual companies. The extent to

which the average size of music hall companies changed between
decades is examined in figure 3-3.46

The trends indicated by this data are again in concordance with
those outlined above. The first music hall boom of the 1860s
shows up clearly, but its magnitude is distorted by the nominal
capital of the Alhambra Co. of £100,000, and by the small number
of other companies involved at this early date. The expected
rapid rise in the average size of companies took place in the

46. In all of the analyses of company records, discussion of the
capitalisation of music hall companies has been based on the
nominal capitals of companies. Whilst this is not necessarily a
precise indication of the amount of capital actually invested in a
company, nominal capitals have been used here due to significant
gaps in the available data regarding the subscribed capital of
music hall companies.
1880s and continued into the 1890s, during which size the average nominal capital of the 48 companies incorporated was over £50,000.

However, this upward trend did not continue into the early twentieth century. Rather, the average size of companies declined along with the overall decrease in the number of companies floated. The average capitalisation of a new company in the 1900s was slightly lower than that of companies founded in the 1880s. This reversal in the trend of average company size can be related to the changing geographical growth pattern of the music hall industry indicated in chapter 2 and table 3-5 above. After 1900 the main growth took place in towns and seaside resorts, in which locations potential audiences were smaller, and, therefore less capital was required to be expended on the erection or purchase of music halls was considerably less. The expense of floating a company was therefore substantially less than in more traditional music hall locations. The fact that the level of capitalisation of music hall companies was closely related to their location within the urban hierarchy is attested to by table 3-6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>no. of halls</th>
<th>average capitalisation (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central London</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban London</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other cities</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towns</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resorts</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syndicates</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-6. The average capitalisation of music hall companies at different levels of the urban hierarchy, 1850-1920.
This indicates that the amount of capital required to establish a music hall company in central London was approximately twice that required to float a company in Manchester or Liverpool. In turn, the average cost of a music hall in these two major settlements would appear to have been approximately double that of other cities. The nominal capitalisations of music hall companies which operated in towns were lower again, averaging only £16,135. The average capitalisation of resort town music halls of almost £50,000 would appear to run counter to the argument outlined above. However, this anomaly is accounted for by the fact that a number of seaside music halls were incorporated into larger entertainment complexes. 47

Thus, the above discussion has given considerable support to the hypothesis that the late 1880s were a watershed in the development of the music hall business. From this date, large-scale business organisation was applied with increasing frequency to the music hall industry. This trend went hand-in-hand with a rapid increase in the amount of capital invested in the music hall industry. The average nominal capital of the 127 companies whose files have been examined was £43,842, whilst the nominal capitalisation of the 23 London based music hall companies which were incorporated averaged over £80,000. Moreover, there was a tendency, within the period being considered, for the size of individual companies to increase over time. There were, however,

47. Examples of this include the Southend-on-Sea Tower and Marine Park Ltd., which had a nominal capital of £100,000. BT31 7711/55090. The prospectus for the Margate Palace, BT31 12962/105620, listed 11 attractions other than the 2,000 capacity theatre of varieties. These included two promenades, with shops; a menagerie; a fair ground; a ballroom; dining rooms and a tea room; an aquarium; a roof garden and café chantant; a roller skating rink; a billiards room; a waxworks; and an ‘electric theatre’. The nominal capital of this company was also £100,000.
numerous temporal and spatial variations in the rate at which this transformation took place. The adoption of limited liability status by music hall companies in the 1880s was initially restricted to London and the large provincial English cities, and remained most heavily concentrated in these locations. Nonetheless, from the 1890s this innovation in the organisation of music halls spread throughout the urban system. Equally though, despite the rapidity with which limited liability was adopted, which peaked in the late 1890s and again in the late 1900s, older forms of business organisation continued to coexist with limited liability music hall companies in considerable numbers, even in the major urban centres.

3-3 Music Hall Profitability, 1890-1920

It should not be assumed that the continuous and rapid growth in the number of limited liability music hall companies was necessarily an indication of the prosperity of the music hall industry. Indeed, the crucial distinction between increased production and enhanced profitability lies at the heart of the paradox of the ‘Great Depression’ in the UK economy during this period. Whilst contemporaries unanimously bemoaned its impact, modern historians have often doubted its existence, as levels of production continued to rise dramatically between 1873 and 1896. This apparent paradox arises from the different perspectives adopted by economic historians and Victorian businessmen. For contemporaries ‘what was at issue was not production but its profitability’.48 The continuous and rapid expansion of the music hall industry carried the risk of outstripping the growth of

demand for commercial entertainment. Henry Tozer, a prominent figure in the Syndicate Halls combine, was of the opinion that, by 1912, the industry was in the grips of just such a crisis of overproduction. He informed the annual meeting of the Variety Theatres Consolidated Ltd. in that year that

There can be no shadow of a doubt that there are too many places of entertainment for the needs of the people. If it were not so, such existing ones as are founded on a solid basis could pay their way. It is a pitiable satisfaction to point out that there are only a few instances among the 50 variety theatres in the metropolitan area making sufficient profits to give a reasonably adequate return to the large amount of labour and capital employed.49

Size does not, therefore, necessarily equate to success. The continuous growth in the number of limited liability music halls cannot be interpreted as indicative of thriving finances in the music hall business before the First World War. Rather, it is necessary to consider in a more direct fashion the ability of the companies to provide a 'reasonably adequate return' to their shareholders between 1890 and 1920.

This dimension of the music hall business which is essential to understanding the evolution of a commercial art form, has been neglected to a remarkable extent by historians. Indeed, the sole specific reference to profitability in the scholarly literature on the halls, is Waites' note that, in the early 1890s, the London Pavilion Company paid dividends of around 16%.50

Information on profitability is not as readily available as data on dates of incorporation and the capitalisation of music halls, as companies were not required to lodge information on

50. Waites, op. cit., p. 58.
profits or dividend payments with the Registrar of Companies.\textsuperscript{51} The most accessible source of data appropriate to this task is provided by publications intended for use on the Stock Exchange, such as the \textit{Stock Exchange Yearbook} and \textit{Mathieson’s Stock Exchange Ten Year Record of Prices and Dividends}. Of course, these sources impart a particular perspective to the information conveyed. Most notably, as guides to investors, they were primarily concerned with share values and dividend payments rather than profitability \textit{per se}.\textsuperscript{52}

The following analysis, therefore necessarily focuses on dividend payments as a surrogate measure for profitability.\textsuperscript{53}

3-3.1 Dividends and profitability

Unfortunately, dividends cannot be accepted as an unproblematic expression of the profitability of music hall companies. Payments to shareholders were only one of many ways in which companies could dispose of profits. Alternative uses of surplus capital included reinvestment in the business and the creation of reserve funds.

I shall not elaborate here on the significance of reserve funds to the economy of the music halls, as this task will be undertaken in chapter 5. However, it must be pointed out here that, due to the volatility of the entertainment industry, it was

\textsuperscript{51} From 1908, companies were required to deposit annual balance sheets with the Registrar of Companies, from which profitability can sometimes be deduced.

\textsuperscript{52} The problems of this source material are considered in appendix 3.

\textsuperscript{53} For a discussion of the theoretical problems involved in using dividends as an indicator of profitability, and for an empirical consideration of the degree of coincidence between profits and dividend payments in the music hall industry, see appendix 3.
especially important for music hall companies to make provisions during profitable years, to ensure that investors received at least a 'reasonably adequate' return in poor years. As a result of this necessity, it became a common practice amongst music hall companies to create a cash reserve, which was intended to act as a contingency fund to allow payment of a dividend, or merely to keep the company afloat, during less prosperous times. The effect of this practice was to even out dividends over time. Dividends are, therefore, likely to provide a somewhat muted register of profitability.

Another alternative use for the profits of music hall companies was reinvestment in increasing or improving the assets of a company. Indeed, the nature of the music hall industry placed a particularly high demand on reinvestment of this type, and especially for reinvestment in the infrastructure of halls.

The comfort and ostentation of the interior of halls provided one of the most significant mediums for competition between halls. At the Canterbury and Paragon Ltd. annual meeting in 1891, for example, Mr. E Rawlings disclosed that the company had made a profit of over £1,500 more than in the previous year, and stated that the directors 'attributed the result of the increased profit as the effect of the great alterations which were made in the Canterbury'.

54 A selection of adverts from the Era Almanack of 1889 exemplifies the importance which managements placed on the maintenance of the interior of halls, and the intensity of the competition between halls to outdo one another in

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54. Era, 19 September, 1891, p. 17.
this respect. The advertisement for the Queens Palace of Varieties, Poplar claimed that 'having been entirely remodelled, decorated, and furnished complete [the hall was]...now one of the largest and most handsome Music Halls in London'. The South London Palace similarly boasted of a recent redecoration, but these halls were amongst the most reticent in their use of superlatives. The Trocadero, Shaftesbury Avenue, claimed to be 'the most luxurious and comfortable theatre in the metropolis', whilst the Royal Cambridge Hall of Varieties considered itself to be 'the handsomest hall in all England'. Not to be outdone the Oxford’s advertisement proclaimed itself to be 'the most elegant place of entertainment in Europe'. Needless to say, the claim to be 'the most beautiful and luxurious theatre in the world' was also made, in this case by the management of the Empire Theatre of Varieties, Leicester Square.

That a high value was still placed upon investment in maintaining the physical environment of halls at the end of the period under consideration was attested to by Mr. William Houlding, the chairman of Moss Empires, who stated in 1920 that

In my opinion, more valuable publicity is given to a place of entertainment by its position and decorative attractiveness than by any other form of advertisement.  

Moreover, given the dynamic evolution of music hall entertainments, and the ceaseless search for new novelties to place before the public, continual investment in updating the functional apparatus of music halls was equally essential. The latest stage technology was required to support and enable the

55. The following examples are taken from the 'Advertiser' section, the pages of which were unnumbered.
rapid changing of the ever more elaborate scenery used in the halls, whilst the ephemerality of public tastes, exemplified by the brief upsurge in demand for circus-style variety entertainments and aquatic performances in the early 1900s, necessitated considerable changes in the layout of theatres.57

Presumably, the expenditure involved in such improvements was more likely to have been embarked upon when the finances of a company were healthy. It might, therefore, be expected that reinvestment, like the establishment of reserve funds, would also serve to dampen out the fluctuations in profitability as they were reflected in dividend payments.58

Thus, for a number of reasons, the dividends paid by music hall companies should not be assumed to have provided an accurate reflection of their profitability. Relatively low rates of return might equally well indicate a company in financial difficulties, or one adopting a prudent long-term financial strategy.59 Dividend levels might be artificially enhanced in the short-term by short-sighted management decisions which compromised the long term prospects of a company. It is possible, therefore, that the present reliance on dividend data systematically underestimates the amplitude of fluctuations in the profitability of music hall companies.

57. For details on, and photographs of, the technology utilised at the Palace Theatre, see T. Morton, 1904, Running a great variety show, pp. 254-63.
58. Of course, not all expenditure on the physical fabric of halls was undertaken voluntarily and could, therefore, be dealt with when profits were greatest. The most notable example of involuntary improvements were the structural alterations often required to meet the safety standards of local licensing bodies. 59. Moreover, it was not always easy to distinguish between the two, as the debate surrounding the plight of Moss Empires in 1910 indicates. This issue will be dealt with in considerable detail in chapter 5.
Isolated examples exist of companies for which there is some direct evidence regarding their profitability. A comparison of the profits and dividends of these individual companies, therefore, provides a rough guide to the veracity of dividends as an indicator of financial success.

The case of the Coliseum Syndicate provides an extreme example of the evening out of fluctuations in the declaration of dividends.\(^{60}\) In this example a virtually constant dividend level between 1908 and 1925 masks considerable annual fluctuations in the level of the profit and loss account of the company. However, it is clear from the level of dividends, which ran at between 22 1/2 and 25% per annum, that this is an atypical example. A more complete set of profit figures for this period can be constructed for Moss Empires between 1900 and 1921, the results of which are illustrated in figure 3-5.\(^{61}\) This indicates a considerable correspondence between dividends and profits, a relationship which is, in general, confirmed by other similar comparisons.\(^{62}\) Thus, the dividends declared by music hall companies provide a sufficiently reliable reflection of music hall profitability to be of considerable value as a surrogate measure for profitability.

3-3.2 National trends in music hall dividends

The available data on the rates of return on capital invested in the music hall business during the 3 decades between

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60. See figure 3-4. This data, which is based on annual fluctuations in the balance of the profit and loss account of the company, is taken from BT31 37247/95197 (vol. 1).

61. This data on the annual profits of Moss Empires was gathered from, Times, 30 June, 1908, p. 17; and Times, 28 June, 1922, p. 18.

62. See for example figures for the Alhambra Co., BT31 30742/2558c.
Figure 3-4. Annual dividends and changes in the profit and loss account of the Coliseum Syndicate, 1908-25.

Figure 3-5. The profits and dividends of Moss Empires, 1900-21.
1890 and 1919 have been plotted in figure 3-6. The years around 1900-2 can be seen as a major turning point in music hall prosperity during this period. Before this date, although dividend levels fluctuated considerably, with peaks in 1896 and 1899 being preceded by troughs in 1895 and 1898, they remained consistently above 10%. After the turn of the century the average dividend paid by music hall companies declined continuously, with the exception of 1903, culminating in the deepest trough experienced by the industry in this period in 1905-6, during which average dividends in the music hall industry dipped as low as 5%. By 1909 annual returns had recovered somewhat. However, they remained below the 'safe 10%' level of return which the Financial News had predicted in the late 1880s. Thereafter, fluctuations in dividend levels became less pronounced, whilst, the overall trend was one of slow and steady decline in dividends until the outbreak of the First World War. During the war, the dividend level stabilised at around 7%, and indeed rose slightly. The end of the war brought a sharp upturn in the fortunes of the halls in 1918 and 1919.

There is no apparent relationship between these fluctuations in the rate of return on capital invested in the music hall industry, and temporal changes in the amount of new capital invested in new music hall companies outlined above in figure 3-2. The limited liability boom of 1896-8 coincided with a fall in dividends, from a peak of 15.4% in 1896. The boom of 1907-10, by contrast took place at a time of steadily growing dividends,

63. The figures used in the following discussion generally encompass the whole of the period 1890-1919. However, not too much significance should be placed on the data presented for the earliest years, particularly before 1895, due to the small number of data points upon which the averages are based.
Figure 3-6. National average music hall dividends, 1890-1919.

Figure 3-7. Percentage of music hall companies declaring no annual dividend, 1890-1919.
following the deepest trough of the period 1890-1919, which bottomed out in 1905.

Figure 3-7 strengthens the impression that music halls were not inevitably a sound investment, especially in the early twentieth century. Between 1901 and 1918 there was only a single occasion, 1909, on which three-quarters of the music hall companies examined declared a dividend. Moreover, figure 3-7 indicates with greater clarity that the temporal trend was towards the worsening of the economic performance of the halls, culminating in 1917, when approximately 40% of the companies examined were unable to make any distribution of capital to their shareholders. The significance of the large number of companies unable to make any distribution of profits to shareholders is accentuated by the fact that during the early twentieth century the practice of creating reserve funds, discussed briefly above, became increasingly common amongst music hall companies. One of the primary intentions of such actions was to insure against the need to pass on dividends in poor years.64

3-3.3 The explanation of fluctuations in profitability

Variations in the level of average dividends, as recorded in figure 3-6, exhibit a considerably closer correspondence with fluctuations in the trade cycle than do the periods of heavy investment in the music hall industry considered earlier in this chapter.65 The rapid decline in dividends between 1891 and 1895 has already been accounted for as largely reflecting the rapid

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64. The intentions guiding the establishment of reserves are analysed more fully in chapter 5.
65. It should be noted that there is inevitably a one year time lag in this correspondence. The dividends for 1901 reflected the level of profits made in 1900.
increase in the number of music hall companies. It was, though, also coincident with the downswing of the trade cycle which peaked in 1890. More significantly, the minor peak in dividends in 1899-1900, which briefly arrested the downward trend in average dividends after 1896, was also coincident with the next peak in the trade cycle. The economic trough of 1904 was reflected in 1905 by the lowest annual average dividend for music hall companies of any year under consideration, of around 5%. The ensuing upturn in music hall dividends closely mirrored the succeeding upswing in the trade cycle.

Proprietors were certainly aware of just how intimately their fortunes were related to these changes in the wider economic context. Company directors, therefore, exhibited considerable sensitivity to fluctuations in the prosperity of the UK economy. Following the deep trough of 1905, Moss Empires recorded increased profits in each quarter of 1906. The directors explained that 'the main factor in this substantial increase has been the improvement in trade throughout the country'.66 The industry was equally quick to register the end of this period of economic recovery, which peaked in late 1907. Already in early 1908 Hugh Astley warned the shareholders of the London Pavilion that they should prepare themselves for a depression in dividends.67 The Moss Empires crisis of 1910, considered in more detail in the next chapter, was blamed, by the management of the company, on the 'continuance of trade depression throughout the country'.68

66. Times, 4 February, 1907, p. 16.
67. Times, 31 January, 1908, p. 16.
68. Era, 19 February, 1910, p. 23.
Music hall managements were also aware that the effect of a 'depression of trade' on the music hall industry varied spatially. Slumps generally hit certain regions harder than others, and, even within a single region, economic slumps could have a variable effect upon different types of hall. For example, George Adney Payne, the proprietor of major halls in both the East and West Ends of London indicated that the profits of halls in the two locations were not affected in the same way by slumps. Rather, he argued, that troughs in the trade cycle were actually beneficial to East End halls.

When trade is bad there is more reason why people should seek the relief of an entertainment... But what applies to [the East End] does not apply to the West-end. A man will give one shilling for his diversion when he will not give five.69

Despite these clear links between the trade cycle and trends in music hall profitability, directors chose to emphasize the significance of more immediate and tangible factors in explaining the health of companies to their shareholders. Bad results were most commonly explained in terms of problems internal to the functioning of the music hall business. In particular, managements frequently dwelt upon the problems of escalating competition and increasing operating costs in depressing dividends.70

However, company directors also identified a range of exogenous factors which exerted a profound influence upon the profitability of music hall companies. Many of these exogenous factors

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70. Increased operating costs were generally the result of escalating wage costs. The problems of competition and wage inflation within the music hall industry provide the main foci for chapter 6.
factors were, like the trade cycle, recurrent problems. Chief amongst these was the weather. Managements considered this factor to have been a major contributor to short-term variations in the pattern of demand for leisure. They were unanimous in accepting the dictum of the *Times* that 'a wet summer is good for indoor amusements'.\(^{71}\) Conversely, the relatively slack summer season could rapidly become a serious financial liability in the face of a long, hot, dry spell. The 'abnormal' summers of 1912 and 1914 appear to have had a particularly severe effect on music hall attendances.\(^{72}\) It was not, though, solely during the summer months that music hall profitability was at the mercy of the vagaries of climatic conditions. Indeed, in the wake of the winter of 1891, Mr. E. Rawlings, chairman of the Canterbury and Paragon Ltd., expressed the opinion that

> If anything proved deleterious to the prosperity of a music hall it was fog and snow, for during the time they were prevalent persons remained in their houses and did not go to places of amusement. The effects of that disastrous ten weeks the Board considered was a loss of at least £2,000 to the company.\(^{73}\)

In many instances, however, fluctuations in profitability were ascribed to unique circumstances. The poor performance of Moss Empires in 1909, for example was alleged to have been exacerbated by a sudden, short-lived explosion in the demand for skating rinks. According to Stoll the business had suffered the consequences of 'the establishment of sixty-four skating rinks affecting twelve towns where the company had properties'.\(^{74}\)

Nevertheless, these unique events fell into a number of distinct

\(^{71}\) *Times*, 18 February, 1913, p. 14.
\(^{72}\) For examples of complaints regarding inclement weather, see *Era*, 8 June, 1912, p. 20; *Era*, 12 October, 1912; *Times*, 10 February, 1915, p. 14.
\(^{73}\) *Era*, 19 September, 1891, p. 17.
\(^{74}\) *Era*, 19 February, 1910, p. 23.
categories. Not surprisingly, the death of King Edward in 1910 and the consequent period of national mourning 'had a very prejudicial effect upon' music hall attendances. Mr. Henry Tozer disclosed the extent of the effects of this event upon the finances of the United Varieties Syndicate. During the first four months of 1910 the takings of the halls under the control of the company were down £750 on the corresponding period for 1908, whilst in the last 5 months of the year takings were actually up £300 on 1909. However, during the 3 month period of mourning for the King, takings were almost £3,000 lower than in the previous year. Perhaps somewhat more surprisingly, in view of the links which social historians have identified between music hall culture and the changes in national identity and the growth of popular support for imperialism, the national festivals that proliferated at this time, were thought to have had a similar effect on the profitability of music hall companies. Mr. H.H. Wells, speaking on behalf of the directors of the London Pavilion indicated that he 'hoped the coronation year would bring the company some advantage'. However, music hall managers appear to have been frustrated in their expectations of increased takings. Queen Victoria's jubilee in 1897 was also utilised as an explanation for decreased profits. Presumably these royal jubilees and festivals hit music hall profitability by encouraging the growth of large numbers of short-term counter-attractions to the halls. General elections might also be encompassed in this class of events which disrupted normal leisure patterns to the detriment of

77. These issues are considered in chapter 1.
music halls. Two elections added to the problems for the music hall industry in the wake of the King's death in 1910. 80

The ill-effects of 'labour unrest' was another common theme of apologies for low dividend payments. Judging from the frequency with which strikes were mentioned, this factor would appear to have attained its maximum effect on music hall profitability in the early 1910s and the immediate post-war period. 81 Strikes in a variety of industrial sectors depressed music hall profits, both by suppressing the demand for entertainments amongst striking workers, and by hindering music hall companies in the supply of entertainment. The former would appear to have been the more frequently met problem. However, strikes which interfered with the efficient supply of entertainment appear to have had the more serious consequences for music hall companies. Industrial action in the transport industry was especially bad for the music hall business, as it prevented customers from travelling to halls as well as making it difficult for artists to fulfill their engagements. Coal strikes could combine both of these problems, as the 1912 Directors' report of the Walsall Theatres Co. Ltd. indicated

The disastrous Coal Strike which occurred in the best part of our year...was a very serious factor against us, as a big portion of our patrons were cut off from us (apart from being short of money), by the fact of the train service being so disorganised and depleted. 82

The trend within the music hall industry towards the development of geographically dispersed syndicates made the

81. For examples of this complaint, see Times, 8 June, 1912, p. 20; Times, 18 February, 1913, p. 14; Times, 25 February, 1922, p. 20.
82. BT31 31670/60086.
industry even more vulnerable to this form of interruption. According to a group of proprietors, the railway dispute in the summer of 1911 caused a general 50% fall in takings, and gave rise to talk that halls would have to be closed for the duration of the dispute.83

Trade disputes were, to some extent, more localised in their effects than national celebrations, extreme weather conditions, and trade cycles. In an extreme case, the directors of the Chatham Empire complained that their first 6 months in operation had been blighted by a strike of river transport on the Medway.84 Even industry-wide trade disputes were spatially restricted in their impact on music hall profitability, to those areas in which they were major employers of labour. For example, Moss Empires reported that the coal strike of 1912 'had a prejudicial effect on music-hall receipts, especially in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea, Newark, Nottingham & c., where the company has halls'. 85 However, these losses had been more than counter-balanced by the large profits made at the other halls belonging to the syndicate on account of 'a record wet summer and autumn'.86

Due to the more occupationally mixed nature of metropolitan music hall audiences, it was generally the case that 'provincial towns...are more quickly affected by local industrial conditions than are metropolitan houses'.87 This rule was not, though,

83. Era, 26 August, 1911, p. 20.
84. Era, 12 October, 1912, p. 17.
86. Ibid, p. 14. This ability to even out local variations in profitability was one of the main justifications for the development of spatially extended syndicates. See chapter 6.
without exceptions. For example, Stoll bemoaned the fact that metropolitan halls had not benefitted from a general upturn in trade during 1912 because 'the trade boom was confined to the provinces by the London transport strike'. 88 Transport strikes, in general, had a different effect in the metropolis than in the provinces. In London the success of music halls depended upon the transport network primarily as a means of enabling audiences to attend performances. 89 In the provinces the major role of the transport network was to facilitate the circulation of stars. 90

During a number of the crises of profitability which faced the music hall industry, several of these problems arose simultaneously. In understanding the temporal locations of critical phases in the development of the music hall industry it is essential to examine the temporal conjunction of these factors. The years 1909-12, at which point the average dividends of music hall companies were declining rapidly, were marked by an intensification in the frequency of complaints regarding the deleterious effects of trade depression, strikes, inclement weather, as well as the death of King Edward, and in its aftermath, 2 general elections and a coronation.

Of course, the factors upon which directors heaped the blame for reduced profits were not necessarily those which were actually at the root of poor economic performance in the music hall industry. Industrial militancy was undoubtedly widespread during this period. However, jubilees, coronations and bad weather could

89. The close nature of the links between the development of the music hall and transport networks in London is considered in chapter 2.
90. Some of the difficulties imposed by a transport strike in the provinces are discussed in chapter 6.
provide convenient scapegoats for more deeply rooted but less tangible problems besetting the industry.

The most significant crisis in the music hall industry, which greatly accelerated the terminal decline of the culture of the halls, convulsed the industry in the immediate post-war period. In 1920, Moss Empires announced that the previous year had been one of record business for the company, 'largely due to the demobilization of so many men who had been serving in so many places abroad'\(^9^1\). However, by 1922 the shareholders of the London Pavilion were being told of a 'general slump in the entertainment world' which was responsible for 'one of the most difficult times in the history of the theatre', and had illustrated how profits 'can be swept away like chaff before the hurricane'.\(^9^2\) The impression of a crisis in the industry was reaffirmed by the directors of the London Theatres of Varieties, who berated the fact that 'every possible thing was against the entertainment business of 1921'.\(^9^3\) The main ingredients of the pre-war crises of profitability were again apparent during this slump in the fortunes of the halls. Industrial unrest resurfaced during the post-war years. The music halls were hit by a railway strike in 1919, and by industrial action in the coal industry in 1920 and 1921.\(^9^4\) In addition to the coal strike, 1921 also witnessed a 'fine summer and early autumn' and a severe economic slump.\(^9^5\) Moss Empires reported that in 1921

All centres of industrial activity in which we have properties have been similarly affected, unemployment

\(^9^2\) Times, 14 February, 1922, p. 19.
\(^9^3\) Times, 3 February, 1922, p. 8.
\(^9^5\) Times, 25 February, 1922, p. 20.
everywhere being given as the reason for the falling in business. 96

However, in addition to this traditional cocktail of complaints, a number of novel considerations exacerbated the downward pressure on profitability. The working costs of music hall companies, and particularly the amounts accounted for by rates and electricity, increased dramatically in the post-war period. The annual expenditure of Moss Empires on these 2 alone rose from £28,645 in 1917 to £60,660 by 1921. This was equivalent to a dividend of 7 1/2%. 97 A similar calculation based on the increase in the rates and electricity bills of the London Coliseum during this same period also indicated an annual loss to shareholders of profits representing a dividend of almost 7%. 98

Music hall directors attained an unparalleled degree of unanimity, and vociferousness, in their expressions of disquiet regarding the position of the music hall industry in relation to taxation. Company directors complained incessantly that the combined effects of income tax, property tax, corporation profits tax, and the entertainments tax were undermining the financial viability of the music hall industry. 99 The invective of music hall proprietors was particularly channelled towards the last of these taxes, which had been imposed upon the entertainments industry as a temporary wartime expedient. However, the conclusion of hostilities had not brought about its removal. 100

96. Ibid, p. 20.
99. For the example of the comments of Moss Empires on this issue, see Times, 25 February, 1922, p. 20.
100. The opposition to these taxes was led by Stoll. See especially Times, 9 March, 1921, p. 20; Times, 16 March, 1922, p. 19. For an alternative opinion regarding the 'incubus' of the
3-4 Geographical Variations in Profitability

The explanations of fluctuations in profitability, outlined above, indicate that a number of the factors influencing the level of dividends operated at a local or regional scale. It is therefore important to disaggregate the data garnered from the company records, which this chapter has, thus far, treated only at the national level of aggregation, on a spatial basis. Unfortunately, due to the relatively small number of provincial halls that were listed on the stock exchanges, it is not possible to create any meaningful statistics for spatial variations in dividend levels on a regional basis. Disaggregation of the data is, though, possible around the conventional music hall opposition between London and the Provinces.101

3-4.1 The metropolitan-provincial divide in profitability

The average annual dividends declared by London and Provincial companies between 1890 and 1919 are compared in figure 3-8. This indicates the striking differences which existed between the economic performances of halls in these two geographical locations, in terms of both the overall level of dividends paid, and in their trends of profitability. Virtually throughout the period, the metropolitan music halls provided a more lucrative investment than their provincial counterparts.

101. In practice, the 'Provincial' category as used here is synonymous with the 'Cities' category employed in chapter 2, as almost all of the provincial companies for which I have data on dividends operated in settlements with populations in excess of 100,000. The only halls included in the present analysis which were located in 'towns' are the Alhambra, Blackpool (data for 1900-3), the Empire, Chatham (1913-19), and the Empire Palace, Wolverhampton (1905-7 and 1910-11).
Figure 3-8. The average dividends of London and provincial music hall companies, 1890-1919.

Figure 3-9. Percentage of London and provincial music hall companies declaring no annual dividend, 1890-1919.
Indeed, in the late nineteenth century shareholders in London companies received returns on their capital at approximately twice the rate of investors in provincial halls. Only after 1909 did provincial dividends regain the modest average of 7% per annum, which level they had consistently attained in the 1890s. Of the minor peaks in 1909, 1913, 1916, and 1918 only the last mentioned rose to above 10%.

However, as a result of the slow recovery of provincial dividends from a major trough in 1906 and the general downward trend of music hall profitability in London between 1890 and 1920, this situation was reversed during the last few years under consideration. This inversion of the relationship between the two categories coincides roughly with the First World War, although it cannot be attributed solely to the profound effects of the latter event on the music hall industry as the trend was already apparent in 1913. This reversal in the fortunes of London and the provinces was noticed at the time by Stoll who remarked that

The splendid run of business we have of late enjoyed is traceable to the boom in provincial trade, created by actual war and by preparations for war. [However] the trade boom was confined to the provinces by the London transport strike of 1912.\textsuperscript{102}

Nevertheless, the economic fortunes of provincial companies do appear to have been at their zenith during the war years, whilst, simultaneously, London companies suffered acutely from the consequences of war. The massive London Theatres of Varieties combine, for example, lost £10,500 in three weeks following the outbreak of hostilities.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{102} Times, 24 January, 1913, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{103} Waites, \textit{op. cit.}, p.58.
In general, the economic fortunes of music hall companies fluctuated considerably more in London than in the provinces, with dividends varying from an average of 23% in 1896, to as low as 5% in 1905. Provincial companies appear to have offered more stable returns. Indeed, between 1895 and 1918, the average provincial dividend was within the narrow range of 5-8% on 16 occasions. However, from around 1903 the performance of metropolitan and provincial companies converged considerably in both the overall level of returns to investors, and the temporal fluctuations in, profitability.

Broadly speaking, figure 3-9, which compares the proportion of London-based companies declaring no dividend in each year with that of the provinces, suggests similar conclusions. In the late nineteenth century provincial companies were more likely to pass on the annual dividend, whereas after 1912 the reverse was invariably the case. However, during the 1900s the picture presented in figure 3-8 is consistently inverted. Although average dividends were lower in the provinces during this period, the number of companies which gave their shareholders no annual return was also lower. This again indicates the greater stability offered by investments in provincial halls. In London, during this period, economic performance was clearly polarised. The higher than average dividends declared by some companies more than compensated for the larger number of companies unable to make any distribution of profits.

3-4.2 Variations in profitability within London

Chapter 2 indicated that the spatial extension of commercialised music hall entertainments to all sections of the
British population involved two quite distinct geographical processes. Firstly, the 'nationalisation' of culture proceeded through the construction of Empires and Hippodromes in the centres of all the major towns and cities in the kingdom. Simultaneously, the music hall network was expanding at the intra-urban level, in an attempt to provide access to the music halls to all the inhabitants of these rapidly expanding settlements. Owing to its greater aggregation of population, and geographical extent, this process proceeded furthest in London.

The model of this process of intra-urban differentiation of music hall types in London proposed by F. Anstey in 1891, has been outlined in chapter 2. Anstey distinguished between 4 classes of halls, the 'aristocratic' variety theatres of Leicester Square; the other West End halls; the 'bourgeois' halls in the suburbs, and the 'minor music halls of the poor and squalid districts' of London. However, despite its usefulness, this model was constructed in 1891, and therefore requires a number of refinements in order to cope with the changes in the nature of the distribution of halls within London between this date and the First World War. The modified version of the Anstey-model to be used here is outlined in table 3-7.

In analysing the spatial variations in profitability of music hall companies at the intra-urban level, the available data on company dividends will again be reconstituted in the form of a bipolar opposition, allowing a comparison of the economic performance of the companies exploiting the economic opportunities

105. See appendix 4 for details of the reconstruction of Anstey's classification.
offered by the newly burgeoning suburbs with the profitability of those companies operating in the longer established central areas of London, including both the East and West Ends.

This comparison makes it clear that, in spite of the considerable amounts of capital channelled into the construction of suburban music halls during the first decade of the twentieth century, such investments were not as remunerative as capital invested in centrally located halls.\(^{106}\)

| COLISEUM      | London Coliseum 1902 |
|               | Coliseum Syndicate 1907 |
| LEICESTER     |                          |
| SQUARE-TYPE   |                          |
|               | Alhambra 1865            |
|               | Empire Palace 1887       |
|               | Palace Theatre 1892      |
|               | Palace Theatre 1893      |
| WEST END      |                          |
|               | London Pavilion 1887     |
|               | New Tivoli 1891          |
|               | Oxford 1892              |
|               | Lyceum 1903              |
|               | Middlesex Theatre of Varieties 1910 |
| EAST END      |                          |
|               | Canterbury and Paragon 1887 |
|               | Cambridge 1896           |
|               | Cambridge Theatre of Varieties 1898 |
|               | Cambridge Variety Theatre 1903 |
| SUBURBAN      |                          |
|               | Granville Theatre of Varieties |
|               | (Walham Green) 1897      |
|               | Camberwell Palace of Varieties 1898 |
|               | Empress Theatre of Varieties 1899 |
|               | Hackney Empire Palace 1900 |
|               | Hackney and Shepherds Bush Empire Palaces 1902 |
|               | Variety Theatres Consolidated 1904 |
|               | London Theatres of Varieties 1908 |

Table 3-7. A typology of metropolitan music hall companies, with dates of incorporation.

\(^{106}\) See figure 3-10.
Figure 3-10. Annual average dividends of central and suburban London music hall companies, 1890-1919.

Figure 3-11. Percentage of central and suburban London music hall companies declaring no annual dividend, 1890-1919.
Only in 1905 did suburban dividends, averaging 5.4%, match those of centrally based companies. Moreover, this particular instance reflected an unparalleled downturn in the economic performance of the centrally located halls.

Initially, between 1899 and 1902, the suburban companies were able to declare dividends in the range of 7.5 to 9%. However, the increase in the number of suburban based companies in the 1900s was accompanied by a rapid decline in their profitability. In 1903 average suburban dividends fell to around 5.5%, a level at which they remained for a number of years, until a further fall in profits in 1907 took average dividends below 4%. It was only during this phase, in 1902, 1905, and 1906, that suburban dividends exceeded the national average. From 1907-9 suburban halls fell in line with the overall trend towards higher dividends, with the figure doubling to 8%. However, this improvement was not as rapid as the recovery in the fortunes of the central halls, whose average dividend had climbed to 12.8% by the peak of 1911. After this date, both groups of companies experienced declining profitability, although again at contrasting rates of change. Investors in centrally located halls experienced a gradual diminution in their returns, although the average dividend level seldom fell much below 10%. Simultaneously, a major crisis of profitability appears to have engulfed the suburban companies. From the peak of 1909, average suburban dividends plummeted to 1% by 1913, and remained below 2%

107. However, these figures are based on only one or two companies and are therefore potentially misleading.
throughout the war years. Suburban companies did though share
in the brief post-war entertainment boom.

Figure 3-11 indicates that between 1913 and 1917, only one
of the four suburban companies included in my sample, the Hackney
and Shepherds Bush Empire Palaces Co., was in a position to make
any return to its shareholders. For the shareholders of the
Empress, Brixton, the experience of passing on dividend payment
was not a novel experience. The company had not made any
distribution of profits in any year since its first listing in the
Stock Exchange Yearbook in 1903. For the London Theatres of
Varieties, the largest proprietor of music halls in suburban
London, however, 1912 was the first occasion on which it had been
unable to declare a dividend. In 1913, the Granville Theatre of
Varieties (Walham Green) Ltd, was forced to follow suit, and
neither company was in a position to resume the payment of
dividends until the post-war boom of 1918.

It is possible to extend the analysis of the profitability
of centrally based companies back into the late nineteenth
century. Figure 3-10 indicates that this period, before the
advent of suburban competition, was one of high, if fluctuating
profits. Between 1890 and 1892 the average dividend for these
companies was 30% or above 25%. As the number of centrally

108. On closer examination, the significance of the year 1913 to
this crisis of profitability is exaggerated by the extent to which
the average dividend levels had previously been shored up by the
success of the Hackney and Shepherds Bush Empire Palaces Co. Ltd.,
which declared a dividend of 15-17.5% annually from 1906 until
1912. In 1913 the corresponding figure was only 5%, and did not
exceed 7.5% until after the end of the First World War.
Nevertheless, this does little to lessen the sense of a crisis
amongst suburban halls at this time.
109. Again, the small number of companies contributing to these
average figures suggests that not too much significance should be
placed upon them.
located companies increased, so average dividends decreased. In 1894 and 1895, dividends fell to 12-13%. Dividends again exceeded 20% during the ensuing boom years of 1896-7. 1898, however, marked the termination of this heady era of handsome returns and was followed by several years of continuous decline in average profits, culminating in the deep trough of 1905.

Overall, therefore, the centrally located halls, roughly coincident with Anstey’s type I and II halls, were, without exception, on average more productive investments than the suburban halls, the Anstey type III ‘bourgeois’ halls. The gap between the profitability of these two types of hall was least during the Edwardian period and far more pronounced on either side of this. In the last years of Victoria’s reign, this difference was due to the exceptional buoyancy of the finances of central halls and the embryonic state of variety entertainments in the suburbs. In the years after 1912, however, the collapse in the dividends returned by suburban halls was responsible for the reestablishment of this disparity. This crisis of profitability amongst suburban companies clearly also accounts for the main cause of the depression of the metropolitan dividend level below that of the provinces after 1913, which was observed in figure 3-8.

3-4.3 The ‘Aristocratic’ West End halls

In disaggregating the data used in this chapter still further to allow a consideration of the internal differentiation amongst the music hall companies of central London, to which Anstey also draws attention, the data upon which the analysis is based becomes rather narrow. Nevertheless, differences between
the profitability of the 'aristocratic' variety theatres of Leicester Square, and those of other centrally located halls are revealed with the utmost clarity in figure 3-12. For the whole of the period from 1890 to 1919, the 'aristocratic' variety theatres outperformed their most spatially proximate competitors. In the majority of years under consideration, the difference in average dividends between the two was very substantial. Only during the slump years of 1904-7 did the average dividends of the Leicester Square Theatres of Variety (Anstey type I) fall below 14%. By contrast, the average returns of the other central halls (Anstey type II) equalled this figure in only two years, 1893 and 1897.

Thus, there are some similarities in the patterns of dividend level between the two types of music hall company. For example, both bear witness to the effects of a downturn in the trade in the mid-1900s and after 1912. However, given their similarity in geographical location these two groups are most remarkable for the discrepancies which they exhibit in terms of their levels of profitability.

Indeed, as figure 3-13, which compares the average dividend figures for all of the geographical categories utilised in the present chapter, highlights a far stronger correlation exists between the economic performance of the non-aristocratic halls of central London and that of the suburban theatres. Both of these groups (Anstey types II and III) paid dividends at approximately 6-10% throughout the 1900s, with profits growing in the later years of this decade. Moreover, both experienced a very sharp downturn in profitability in the 1910s, and both operated at very low rates of return, under 3%, throughout the war years.
Figure 3-12. Annual average dividends of centrally located London music halls, 1890-1918.

Figure 3-13. A comparison of the annual average dividends of the various types of music hall companies, 1890-1918.
Indeed, figure 3-13 indicates a general correspondence between the levels of the average dividend paid by all non-aristocratic London music hall companies, and those of provincial companies. The patterns of fluctuations in profitability still, however, vary between the non-aristocratic London companies and their provincial counterparts. This is most notable in the case of the post-1912 period, which was a financially disastrous period for all non-aristocratic metropolitan music hall companies.

Figure 3-13, clearly highlights the extreme atypicality of the type I 'aristocratic' West End halls in terms of profitability. This has profound implications for the historiography of the halls, as it is these theatres, which the present chapter has shown to have been very different in their economic performance, both in the level of profits and in their temporal fluctuations, from the vast majority of music hall companies (including even other heavily capitalised companies which were located in London) upon which the attentions of historians are most frequently concentrated.

3.5 Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has confirmed the great significance of the mid-1880s to the development of the music hall business. This period saw the emergence of industrial organisation, in the form of the limited liability company, within the business. Thereafter, the number of music halls expanded steadily and rapidly, with further investment booms taking place in the late 1890s and late 1900s. The evidence presented here suggests, however, that this phase of expansion was over before the onset of the First World War.
Somewhat surprisingly, the information obtained from the company records does not show this expansion of the music hall industry to have been accompanied by an increase in the amount of capital invested in individual companies during the period 1880-1914. Rather, the average capitalisation of music hall companies remained relatively constant. I would argue that this finding must be placed within the context of the increasing geographical penetration by music hall companies of the lower levels of the urban hierarchy. In a period in which expansion was focused primarily on such low cost locations, the static overall figure for average company size is indicative of an increase in the average capitalisation of companies within individual geographical niches.

However, it would appear, from the consideration of the dividends paid by these music hall companies that the rate of investment in music halls was not, in general, closely correlated to the financial health of the industry. Both measures of the prosperity of the halls do, though, indicate the existence of a crisis in the industry in the 1910s, when an absolute decline in the number of music hall companies was associated with a significant fall in the profitability of the extant companies.

The analysis of the dividend data undertaken also points to the significance of the turn of the century as a turning point in the fortunes of the halls. The period of greatest prosperity within the business, during which average dividends consistently exceeded 10%, occurred before this time. After 1901, this level of annual return on capital was seldom attained.
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However, these figures for national average dividends masked significant spatial variations in the profitability of the industry. Provincial companies offered a steadier, and generally lower, rate of return than their metropolitan counterparts, commonly within the range of 5-10%, throughout the period 1890-1920. The profitability of metropolitan companies exhibited a considerably more marked long term trend, towards reduced dividends. This reflected a fundamental transformation in the geography of the metropolitan music hall industry. In the initial stages of the emergence of highly capitalised music halls in London in the early 1890s, companies were restricted to the West End, and dividends were high. The rapid growth in the number of suburban companies in the early 1900s, however, acted to depress average dividends. This was especially the case in the 1910s, when suburban halls faced a major crisis of profitability.

Extravagant dividends were, therefore, largely the preserve of West End halls. However, not all companies operating in this part of London shared this high level of profitability. The results of the West End companies that concentrated on the provision of traditional, mainstream variety entertainments, such as the constituent members of the Syndicate Halls, were consistently disappointing in comparison to the dividends paid by halls that offered more refined performances, such as ballets and dramatic sketches, to more up-market audiences. In terms of profitability this last groups of halls, which included the Empire, the Alhambra, the Palace, and the Coliseum, was exceptional. These halls, based in the Leicester Square area, often paid more than twice the normal dividend of around 10%. The contention of Golby and Purdue that 'it can be misleading to draw
evidence solely from these [aristocratic] London halls' is, therefore, amply borne out by the present chapter.\textsuperscript{110} However, the foregoing evidence equally indicates that, at least with respect to the amount of capital invested in individual companies and to profitability, their advice that these halls can be grouped together with the 'larger provincial halls' is clearly inappropriate.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{110} J.M. Golby and A.W. Purdue, 1984, \textit{The Civilisation of the Crowd}, p. 175.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, p. 175.
CHAPTER 4. FROM PROPRIETORS TO DIRECTORS: ENTREPRENEURS AND THE
OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL OF MUSIC HALL COMPANIES

4-1 Introduction

Much of the writing on the development of the music hall business by contemporaries, and, subsequently, by historians has focused on the role of individuals in generating changes in the business practices of the music halls. This approach to the evolution of the halls is exemplified by the central role often ascribed to Charles Morton in the transformation of the halls from pot-houses to palaces.¹

This interpretation of the functioning of the music hall business, in the period before the limited liability boom of the mid-1880s, has recently been supported by Peter Bailey in his consideration of the Business of Pleasure.² Bailey argues that the conduct of music hall management was indissolubly tied up with 'good fellowship'. The transaction of business within music halls revolved around the personal relations of the proprietors. This had clear implications for the conduct of the music hall business, most notably in terms of the tenor of industrial relations and the rationality of decision-making. This system was able to thrive prior to 1885 as music hall proprietors, such as Charles Morton and William Holland, usually combined the roles of owner and manager.³

3. Ibid, pp. 37-8, discusses the sources of capital used in these early music hall ventures.
However, the increase in the capital intensity of the music hall business from the mid-1880s threatened to destroy this relationship between ownership and management. The amount of capital required to construct one of the new generation of larger and more sophisticated palaces of variety was generally beyond the financial resources of individual proprietors or small partnerships. The expansion of the music hall business therefore required the raising of capital from public sources through the framework of the limited liability company.

This raises doubts as to the applicability of the approach of entrepreneurial history to the music hall industry from the 1880s, in the context of the dispersal of ownership among a large number of shareholders. The current chapter is devoted to the examination of the effects which the increasing scale of the music hall business had upon the nature of ownership within the industry, and the consequences of these changes for the control of music hall companies.

After examining the extent of this dispersal of ownership within the music hall industry, I shall argue that entrepreneurs maintained their prominent positions within music hall companies. Their retention of power was facilitated primarily by the nature of the limited liability legislation, which actively encouraged the divorcing of ownership from control by making it difficult for shareholders to exert in practice the control which they theoretically held over company directors. This situation led to a redefinition of the nature of ownership within the music hall industry which explicitly rejected the centrality of control to notions of ownership. The separation of the two was formalised
in, and further encouraged by, the growing popularity of low-risk, non-voting stocks and shares in financing music hall companies.

Although music hall entrepreneurs were able to retain their hold on power within the limited liability framework, the changes in the scale of music hall operations were reflected in the style in which power was exercised. Although individual entrepreneurs continued to dominate music hall companies, the model of the 'Big Man' proposed by Bailey for the period before 1885 had become obsolete. These changes in the style of entrepreneurs with respect to decision-making and industrial relations will be considered further in chapters 5 and 6 respectively.

4-2 The Nature of Music Hall Share Ownership

4-2.1 Constraints on share ownership in the nineteenth century

The involvement of large numbers of people in the financing of the expansion of the music hall business was dependent upon the adoption of limited liability organisation within the industry. However, as chapter 3 has indicated this form of business organisation was slow to become widely accepted within the music hall world. This was indicative of a wider conservatism exhibited by businessmen and financiers when faced with these radical changes in company law. The belief persisted that a small number of investors, each with a large stake in the company and a knowledge of the business, in essence a partnership, was fundamental to financial stability. Many businessmen feared that the broadening of ownership, and the creation of a situation in

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which all of the formal owners of a company could not be involved in its day-to-day management, would lead to lax, irresponsible and, potentially, even corrupt management.

The dispersal of ownership threatened to undermine the financial credibility of companies. Therefore, companies took steps to prevent the spread of share ownership, whilst still taking advantage of the advantages of limited liability. Businessmen particularly feared the involvement of small investors in company ownership, and the subsequent fragmentation of ownership. In order to discourage small investors, companies divided their capital into shares of large denomination. The reasoning of businessmen was succinctly summed up by the Chairman of the 1867 Select Committee on Limited Liability, who voiced the argument that 'the lower you go in the denomination of shares the more ignorant people you catch.'

The disincentive which this generated to investment by petty capitalists, was compounded by the contemporary vogue for leaving a substantial proportion of the value of each share unpaid. This, too, was intended to preserve the creditworthiness of companies, as it ensured a large reserve of uncalled capital which could be drawn upon in the event of a company running into financial difficulties. Moreover, it also partially circumvented what many considered to be the most pernicious result of limited liability legislation, by which investors were not responsible for any losses beyond the capital which they had already invested. In

essence, this again meant the transference of the practices of the partnership into the legal framework of limited liability. This discouraged small investors who could not afford the threat of the extra commitments hanging over them of what had become in effect unlimited, or at least semi-limited liability investments. The size of share denominations and the amount of unpaid capital on shares, therefore, provide rough guides to the potential which existed within the music hall industry for the dispersal of ownership in the early years of limited liability.

My research on the records of music hall companies has indicated that the expedient of establishing an effectively unlimited liability company within the legal framework of limited liability was never adopted within the music hall industry. Only two limited company music halls issued partly paid shares. In neither case was the amount of capital uncalled sufficiently large to act as a disincentive to investment. The Empire Palace called up between 10/- and 15/- on each of its £1 shares, whilst the Palace left unpaid only one shilling of every 10/- share.7

However, it was a common practice amongst early music hall companies to subdivide the capital of the company into relatively high denomination shares. Individual shares commonly had a nominal value of £5, although denominations rose as high as £30, in the case of the Sheffield Music Hall.

The first example of a music hall company issuing shares with a denomination of £1 uncovered by my researches on company records, was that of the Marine Palace Co., Margate which was

7. BT31 14876/24836; BT31 5371/36591.
registered in 1887. 8 Thereafter the practice appears to have spread rapidly through the industry. The companies which soon followed the lead of the Marine Palace included the Palace of Varieties, Poplar, the Folly Theatre of Varieties (both floated in 1888), and, in 1889, the Liverpool Empire Theatre of Varieties. 9

Thus, the £1 share denomination became common within the music hall industry during the course of the limited liability boom of the late 1880s, although in the initial years of the boom new companies adopted the traditional practice of issuing £5 shares. This suggests that the increasing competition within the music hall industry for capital during the phase of expansion in the late 1880s forced music hall companies to tap the financial resources of smaller investors.

This process is encapsulated in the early history of the Empire Palace Limited. The company initially, in 1887, issued 250 shares of £100 each to a total of eleven shareholders, comprising the theatrical impresarios George Edwardes and Augustus Harris and 9 London-based gentlemen. However, in August 1888 it was found necessary to double the capital of the company. In order to raise the extra £25,000, the company was forced to sub-divide its shares into units of £1. As a result of this the number of shareholders in the Empire Palace Ltd. had risen to 375 by 1893. 10

Although companies issuing £1 shares remained in the minority during the boom of the late 1880s, accounting for only one-third of the music hall companies registered, between 1885 and

8. BT31 3831/24076.
9. BT31 4066/25989; BT31 4091/26235; BT31 444/28931.
10. BT31 14876/24836.
1889, within a decade issues of £1 had become more common than those of all other denominations put together.

The data gathered from the company files highlights a geographical polarisation in the conventional practices of music hall companies with regard to the nominal value of shares issued.11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total no. of companies</th>
<th>£1 shares</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central London</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban London</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial cities</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial towns</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resorts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-hall cos.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total no. of companies</th>
<th>% issuing £1 shares</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central London</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban London</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial cities</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial towns</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resorts</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-hall cos.</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-1. Geographical variations in the number of music hall companies issuing shares in £1 denominations during the nineteenth century.

Companies floated to administer music halls in central London failed to create conditions favourable to small investors. Only two such companies incorporated before 1900 originally issued shares in £1 denominations. These were the Palace Theatre Co., registered in 1892, and the Cambridge Theatre of Varieties Ltd.12

The proportion of music hall companies offering shares of £1 or less was also below the national average, although to a far lesser extent, in the provincial cities of England and Wales, and in Scotland. The practice of issuing shares in £1 denominations was more common amongst music hall companies serving settlements in

11. Table 4-1.
12. BT31 5371/36591; SEYB, 1899, p. 1364. As indicated above, the Empire Palace Ltd, subdivided its shares into £1 denominations in 1888.
the lower strata of the urban hierarchy, including in suburban London, provincial towns, and seaside resorts.\textsuperscript{13}

The chronology of the geographical expansion of the commercialised music hall network, outlined in chapter 2, provides a partial explanation of this pattern. The origins of the highly capitalised music hall enterprise were located in the largest settlements. Only from the 1890s was this spatial distribution transformed with the onset of suburban growth, the rise of the seaside resort, and the development of new industrial towns related to the growth industries of the late nineteenth century. This transformation of the urban hierarchy was taking place simultaneously with the rapid increase in the popularity of the £1 share in the music hall industry.

However, it is probable that the industry was also actively adapting its share issuing strategy in response to the new and different economic opportunities and challenges which the industry faced from the mid-1890s. The formation of new companies in smaller settlements required less capital for the construction of halls. Moreover, these settlements often lacked a strong representation of residents drawn from the traditional share owning classes. The local elites were more often middle- and lower-middle-class. The issuing of £1 shares would, therefore, have been instrumental in encouraging investment from local sources of capital.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} The definition of a 'town' used in chapter 2, that is to say a settlement with a population of less than 100,000, has been adhered to here.

\textsuperscript{14} Chapter 3 has indicated the importance of local capital in financing music hall companies in resort towns. An analysis of the lists of shareholders for other types of 'town' indicate a similar localised distribution of shareholders. See for example the records of the Burnley Palace (BT31 18087/93271). Of the
The discussion thus far has dealt with the theoretical constraints placed upon the democratisation of share ownership in the music hall industry. It is clear from this survey that by the early twentieth century the issuing of large share denominations was no longer a barrier to investment in the industry by petty capitalists. It is now necessary to be consider the extent to which these opportunities led to the dispersal of music hall share ownership, and, particularly, the level of involvement of the newer elements of the middle classes in music hall investment.

The examination of these issues is again facilitated through the information obtainable from the company records housed in the PRO. 15

4-2.2 Abortive music hall companies

Of the sample of music hall companies extracted from the Public Record Office, and used in chapter 3, a significant proportion are of no use in the present context. 20 of the companies examined ceased communicating with the Registrar of Companies before having compiled an initial list of shareholders. Presumably, this reflected the failure of the promoters to float initial 30 shareholders in the Palace Theatre, Carlisle, only six resided outside of Carlisle. These included one from Keswick, another from Cockermouth, and 2 from Workington. BT31 11215/85645.

15. As chapter 3 and appendix 2 have explained, the comprehensiveness of the survey of music hall companies is limited by the lack of access to the files of some companies. However, for the present purposes, more significant gaps in the data available on shareholders in music hall companies have been created by the weeding of the company records undertaken by the authorities at Companies House, and later the Public Record Office. The files of numerous music hall companies have been completely destroyed, and in other cases only the most skeletal information has survived. For all companies, only every fifth annual return of shareholders has been kept. This makes it impossible to construct comprehensive cross-sectional data in relation to share ownership for individual years.
the company successfully.\textsuperscript{16} As companies in the process of ceasing trading, or which had never traded, seldom felt the need to communicate their circumstances to the Registrar of Companies, it is inherently difficult to uncover explanations of the circumstances surrounding the abortion of companies. In over half of these 20 cases the companies were wound up by Court Order and the company files contain no acknowledgement, or explanation of the abortion of the company concerned. Indeed, only five companies provide details of the circumstances of their abortion. Three out of these five cases were accounted for by a lack of public interest. Layton, Bennett and Co., the Solicitors of the Liverpool Empire Theatre of Varieties, for example explained the situation thus:

\begin{quote}
I beg to inform you that within two months after opening the list of subscriptions the whole of the money was returned to the subscribers it being found impossible to carry on the business with the inadequate capital subscribed.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Thus, one-fifth of the companies examined failed to complete the process of flotation, and the limited evidence available indicates that in most cases this was due to the inability to attract sufficient capital. This suggests that investors were not entirely unaware of the dangers involved in theatrical investment outlined in chapter 3. Nevertheless the level of abortive

\textsuperscript{16} Ireland points out that the lack of records might, in some cases, reflect non-compliance with the requirements of the Company Acts rather than an abortive company. P.W. Ireland, 1984, \textit{The rise of limited liability}, p. 244. Shannon was also aware of this problem, but considered it to be quantitatively insignificant. Shannon, 1932, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 401, footnote 3.

\textsuperscript{17} BT31 4444/28931. The other two companies were the Liverpool Palace of Varieties, which incurred such large initial debts that it was considered imprudent to continue with the project, and the Brighton Hippodrome which was sold to Thomas Barrasford before the company had proceeded to the allocation of shares. For details of these two companies, see respectively, BT31 7907/56667; and BT31 9872/73558.
companies in the music hall industry was comparable to, and possibly lower than the overall rate of company abortions.\textsuperscript{18}

The incidence of company abortions declined markedly during the period under consideration.\textsuperscript{19}

Of the music hall companies which were incorporated before 1885, over half proved to be abortive. This suggests that before 1885 music halls had not caught the eye of the investing classes. This rate of failure approximately halved in each succeeding decade, falling to under 10\% between 1905 and 1914.

<table>
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<th>Private no.</th>
<th>Abortive no.</th>
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</thead>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885-94</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895-1904</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905-14</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>32</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-2. Changes in the nature of ownership of music hall companies incorporated before 1914, by decade.

This presents the apparent paradox that flotations were most likely to successful in the early years of the twentieth century, at the same time that, as chapter 3 indicated, profitability was being squeezed. The declining rate of company abortion might have reflected a decrease in the number of fraudulent company flotations, or greater accuracy in the assessments of legitimate companies.

18. Shannon, 1933, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 292, calculated that 35\% of the all the companies registered between 1875 and 1883 were abortive. D.H. McGregor believed that the rate of company abortions during the 1880s was lower than this, running at about a quarter of all registrations. D.H. McGregor, cited by G. Todd, 1932, \textit{Some aspects of joint stock companies, 1844-1900}, p. 55, footnote 1.
19. Table 4-2.
company promoters in regard to the likely success of a prospective flotation, based on accumulated experience in the music hall business. Conversely, the overproduction of new music halls in the early twentieth century, remarked upon by some contemporaries, and substantiated in chapter 3, suggests that other factors were in operation, and that the small number of abortions was a reflection of an excess of demand for music hall investments rather than a decline in the supply of such investment opportunities. Investors were undoubtedly attracted by the recent record of music hall companies, which exhibited exceptionally high levels of profitability during the 1890s. Moreover, the underwriting of share issues also became widely adopted practice in the music hall industry during the early twentieth century.

4-2.3 The rise of private music hall companies

Removing these aborted concerns from consideration leaves 72 music hall companies whose records contain data of value in building up an understanding of the nature of company ownership. The arguments of those who championed the introduction of limited liability legislation were predicated on the assumption that the companies that registered as such would be financed through the issuing to the public of freely transferable shares in the company. The results of my survey of the business records of music hall companies, however, indicate that this expectation was disappointed in practice with striking regularity. Although the Private Company only obtained official recognition as a distinct form of company organisation in 1907, it is clear from the evidence provided by the PRO shareholders' lists, that the
phenomenon was common in the music hall industry long before this date.

When, at last, formally acknowledged in law, the Private Company was defined as possessing a maximum of 50 shareholders, whose holdings in the company could not be freely transferred or offered to the public. As my present interests require the identification of informal 'private' companies from the pre-1907 period, I have adopted a slightly different classification of the private company. In the following discussion, those companies in which a small number of shareholders (typically 10 or less) controlled the majority of the vote-carrying shares will be considered to have been private companies.

Applying this criterion, over half of the 72 companies which provided some details of share ownership can be considered to have functioned as private companies. This indicates that Ireland is correct in arguing that

The primary motivation to incorporation was not the desire or need of firms to raise capital from the public, but rather their desire to limit liability and to avoid the "barbaric law of partnership".

However, his further contention that 'the rise of the private company in the 1880s was probably one of the main reasons behind the increase in company registrations', is not appropriate to the music hall industry. It is not the case that the limited

20. For details of the 1907 Act, see Cottrell, op. cit., p. 74.
21. The validity of this definition was examined by the Registrar of Companies. He estimated that of the companies registered in the first six months of 1890 which he considered to have been 'more or less of a private character', 87% of them had the bulk of the shares owned by 10 or less shareholders. Ireland, op. cit., p. 247.
22. Table 4-2.
liability boom of the 1880s involved a process of converting proprietorially run music halls into limited companies, as the quantitative significance of private companies increased over time. The take-off of limited liability in the music hall business in the 1880s predated the spread of private companies within the industry. The first music hall companies, especially between 1885 and 1894, were generally reliant on outside subscriptions. However, this situation changed during the course of the period under consideration. By the decade 1905-14, roughly coincident with the formal recognition of private companies, almost three quarters (22 out of 30) of the successfully floated music hall companies were private concerns. This is almost exactly the inverse of the situation in the years before 1895.24

The prevalence of private control of music hall companies cannot, therefore, be attributed to the survival of the attitudes towards ownership engendered by the laws of partnership into the age of limited liability. These prejudices were broken down during the limited liability boom of the 1880s, when the demand for capital was high. Rather, new circumstances were actively encouraging the growth of this form of company organisation. Undoubtedly the formal recognition of private companies in 1907 was a significant consideration. The year 1907 saw the greatest number of private companies, five, registered in any one year.

24. These figures indicate that the development of the private company in the music hall industry was very similar in timing and extent to its growth in other industries. The Registrar of Companies believed that one-third of the companies registered in 1890 were private, cited in Shannon, 1933, op. cit., p. 292; p. 302. The figure provided by Cottrell that four-fifths of the companies registered in 1914 were private companies and that in 1915 46,428 out of the 63,969 companies on the register were private, also ties in very well with the evidence for music hall companies provided by the PRO files. Cottrell, op. cit., p. 163.
However, the transition to private ownership had begun well before this date. In the decade 1895-1904 the majority of the companies examined were run privately. Other institutional changes before 1907 may also have fostered this transformation in company organisation. In 1896, the Law Lords' decision on the Salomon v. Salomon and Co. case, established that, although the private company had not been recognised in law, its existence within the extant legal framework was legitimate. Moreover, the 1900 Companies Act implicitly recognised the principle of private companies by excluding companies which did not issue a prospectus to the public from a number of its provisions.

The growth of private companies in the music hall business can be related to the patterns of capital investment and accumulation which predominated within the industry. The PRO records indicate that very little of the capital utilised in the expansion of the music hall industry was provided by large-scale investors.

The majority of the music hall magnates of the late nineteenth century were self-made men drawn from the lower-middle-classes, particularly the licensed victuallers trade. Their initial successes were based on resources of entrepreneurship rather than on capital. In the early stages of the growth of a thoroughly commercialised music hall business in the late 1880s and 1890s these entrepreneurs lacked the personal capital resources to finance the establishment of the large highly capitalised enterprises, which they perceived to be essential to the effective exploitation of the emerging mass market for entertainment, without recourse to external sources of investment.
Moreover, there were, at this time, very few large outside investors willing to become involved in the music hall business. Surprisingly few brewing companies appeared as shareholders, and there is practically no evidence of the involvement of institutional investors, such as banks, in music hall share ownership. As chapter 5 demonstrates, most of the outsiders who entered the music hall industry from the 1890s onwards were professionals rather than successful industrialists. Men like Henry Newson Smith and W.S. Michie brought to the halls experience of business management and other relevant organisational skills rather than large accumulations of capital. Entrepreneurs were therefore forced to seek the finance for the initial expansion of the music halls as an industry from public sources.

The later rise in the number of private companies reflects the conjunction of the facts that successful music hall entrepreneurs had begun to generate their own accumulations of capital, whilst, as chapter 3 has indicated, the average capitalisation of new music hall companies declined in the 1900s. This, in turn, reflected the spread of the music hall network into smaller settlements in the 1890s and 1900s which was outlined in chapter 2.

4.2.4 Public companies and their shareholders

Thus, of the 97 companies examined, only 32 were both successfully floated and characterised by the wide dispersion of share ownership. The examination of the nature of share ownership amongst music hall companies is fraught with difficulty at a number of levels. The records which companies were obliged to deposit annually with the Registrar of Companies included lists of
the names, addresses, and occupations of shareholders. However, this data provides problems in terms of both its quantity and quality. In purely quantitative terms, the number of shareholders involved is too great to allow a systematic analysis of the evidence available for a large number of companies. The Palace Theatre Ltd., for example, listed approximately 1800 shareholders in its initial annual return. By 1897 the company had, according to its chairman Count Max Hollender, 'close on 3000' shareholders. This is an extreme example, nevertheless, it is illustrative of the considerable difficulties involved in doing justice to the vast amount of information available, in a systematic fashion.

Moreover, the nature of the evidence provides grounds for doubting its reliability for use in anything other than an impressionistic fashion. In particular, the list of occupations of shareholders included in the annual returns should be treated with caution as the occupations listed were self-ascribed by the shareholders. It would, therefore, seem reasonable to assume that this information probably exaggerates the social status of shareholders in music hall companies.

Bearing these limitations in mind, the following discussion will include only a few brief comments, of an exemplary nature,

25. BT31 5371/36891. This does not indicate that the company had 1800 shareholders though. Holdings of ordinary and preference shares were listed separately, and there was undoubtedly some overlap between the holders of ordinary and preference shares. This does indicate a minimum number of 900 shareholders, and the actual number was almost certainly considerably higher. 26. Era, 16 October, 1897, p. 22. 27. Killick and Thomas (1970), in Provincial stock exchanges, 1830-70, p. 99, allude to the 'enormous task' which faces academics attempting to study the backgrounds of investors in the Victorian period.
regarding the specific contents of individual lists of shareholders. The PRO records do provide instances of music hall companies in which there was a substantial lower-middle-class involvement. These include the Palace of Varieties Ltd. set up in 1888 in order 'to purchase the Queen's Palace of Varieties, poplar'.

The shareholders' list for July 1888 records that of the 23,457 £1 ordinary shares issued, 5,000 were retained by the vendors, Abraham and Michael Abrahams, approximately 3,000 more were allocated to other members of the family, and the remaining 15,000 were sold to outside interests. These shares were owned by investors spanning a wide social range. Many shareholders ascribed themselves to the upper- and middle-classes, notably as gentlemen and merchants, but a number of individuals of lower-middle-class origins are also included in the list. These included clerks, salesmen, and grocers, as well as butlers. Indeed, the largest shareholder outside of the Abrahams family, a Mr. T.F. Maltby, listed himself as a Stevedore at Millwall Docks. Like Mr. Maltby, most of the lower-middle-class investors lived locally.

The Palace of Varieties Ltd., however, represents the exception rather than the rule. In the majority of cases the annual shareholders' lists provide little evidence to suggest that limited liability legislation had been successful in encouraging the involvement of new social groups in music hall enterprises, as the legislators had anticipated. The vast majority of shareholders were still drawn from the traditional investing classes, the leisured, the professional, and, to a lesser extent, the merchant classes. In this respect the example of the Alhambra

28. BT31 4066/25989.
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\textsuperscript{28} BT31 4066/25989.
Co., considered later in this discussion, is more representative of the social profile of shareholders in music hall companies.

4-2.5 The structure of ownership of public music hall companies

The analysis of the structure of ownership in these public music hall companies offers a more significant, as well as more manageable and systematic, method of examining trends in share ownership, and their implications for the control of music hall companies. In order to ascertain the structure of ownership of music hall companies I have calculated, for each of the 32 public companies encompassed by this study, the average nominal value of a shareholding at the time of the first annual return of shareholders of each company.\(^{29}\) This provides a numerical index of the degree of concentration of share ownership, which facilitates comparisons between music hall companies over time and across space.

Combining the averages for the 32 companies examined produces a figure for the average nominal value of a shareholding in a music hall company of £168.7. This would seem to lend some support to the contention that share ownership did not filter down to the lower social classes to a significant degree.\(^{30}\) This data

29. This methodology involves a number of problems. Firstly the allocation of shares did not always take place at one time. In such instances the list used is that which is the first after the process of allotment had been substantially completed. Secondly, vendors and promoters were often paid, in part or whole, in shares of the new company. These were often broken down into smaller holdings over time. Early lists of subscribers might, therefore, systematically exaggerate the concentration of share ownership to some extent.

30. By comparison, the nominal value of an average shareholding in the Palace of Varieties Ltd., which has been identified above as a company which did attract considerable lower-middle-class investment, was almost half this figure, at £88.3. Only 8 of the other 32 companies examined had average shareholdings of lower nominal value than the Palace of Varieties.
also suggests that, amongst those music hall companies which could be considered to be public concerns, ownership became increasingly dispersed over time. The average size of holding declined from £215.5 during the period from 1885 to 1894, to almost half of that nominal value, £102.8, by the decade 1905-14.\textsuperscript{31}

<table>
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<th>b</th>
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<td>102.8</td>
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</table>

Table 4-3. The average size, and degree of dispersion of shareholdings in public music hall companies.

- a. number of companies incorporated during decade.
- b. average nominal value of shareholding (£).
- c. the average shareholding as a percentage of the total capital.

Disaggregating this data geographically also produces some clear patterns. It indicates that the average shareholding in companies operating in London was greater than for that of provincial companies, the respective averages being £206.6 and £149.8. However, equally significant variations exist within each of these categories. For companies based in central London and in provincial cities the nominal value of an average shareholding was greater than £200. The corresponding figures for smaller provincial settlements and suburban London were considerably lower.\textsuperscript{32}

In order to establish whether this pattern reflects solely the larger amounts of capital which, it has already been indicated were required to finance a music hall in big city locations, I

\textsuperscript{31} Table 4-3.
\textsuperscript{32} Table 4-4.
have calculated the proportion of the issued capital represented by the average shareholding for each of the 32 public companies. The average shareholding accounted for less than 1% of the total paid up capital of these 32 public companies. These data provide no evidence that any clear trends in the concentration of ownership of music hall companies existed between 1885 and 1914. The average size of shareholdings remained below 1% of the total capital of music hall companies throughout the period under consideration.

London - Overall 209.5 (0.41) - central 221.6 (0.37)
- suburban 100.7 (0.73)

Provincial - Overall 149.8 (1.09) - cities 207.2 (0.66)
- towns 117.2 (1.19)
- Scotland 72.1 (0.89)
- syndicate 228.4 (1.38)

Table 4-4. Geographical variations in the average nominal value of shareholdings in public companies (in £).
The figure in brackets is the percentage of the total paid up capital of a company represented by an average shareholding.

The spatial pattern again shows greater clarity, particularly in the opposition between London and the provinces. Outside of London the average shareholding accounted for slightly over 1% of the total capital, whereas the corresponding figure for music hall companies operating in the metropolis was only 0.41%. The concentration of ownership was, in general, least amongst companies operating at the higher levels of the urban hierarchy. The spatial patterning of the concentration of ownership is, therefore, coincident with the spatial variations in the average size of shareholding. However, it was the companies with the

33. Table 4-4.
smallest average shareholdings that had the greatest concentrations of ownership. It was, therefore, amongst the least heavily capitalised music hall companies that ownership was most concentrated. The spread of ownership proceeded most rapidly in those circumstances in which the music hall industry was most capital-intensive, in the large cities in which larger halls were required to cater for the greater local populations and in which construction costs, largely due to land prices, were higher. This relationship lends support to the explanation of the growth of private companies outlined above. As the expansion of the commercial music hall network into lower levels of the urban hierarchy took place, so the amount of capital required to promote a music hall company decreased. This allowed the ownership of companies to become more concentrated during the early years of the twentieth century.

4-2.6 The shareholders of the Alhambra Co. Ltd.34

The patterns in the structure of ownership of music hall companies uncovered by the foregoing discussion have been recovered through the analysis of aggregate data. This is largely due to the intractable nature of the specific details conveyed by the company records. However, in the following discussion I intend to flesh out the outlines sketched above through a detailed study of the changing composition of the shareholders of a single company, the Alhambra Co., during the period under consideration. The Alhambra Co. Ltd., was incorporated in 1865, with a nominal capitalisation made up of 6,000 shares of £10, and continued to

34. The data used in this section is drawn from the PRO file BT31 30742/2558c.
trade until 1936. In terms of the size of the average shareholding in the company, and the concentration of ownership, the Alhambra Co. approximates closely to the overall average for music hall companies based in London. Over the period 1870-1910 the average nominal value of a shareholding in the Alhambra was £204.4, which compares to a metropolis-wide average of £209.5. Each of these average holdings accounted for 0.35% of the total capital of the Alhambra. The ownership of the Alhambra was slightly more dispersed than that of London companies as a whole, for which the corresponding figure was 0.41%.

The nominal value of an average shareholding in the Alhambra did not remain constant throughout the period under consideration. Indeed, between 1870 and 1910 there was a decline in the average size of shareholdings in the company, from £231.1 to £158.7 by 1910. This dispersal of ownership was concentrated into two periods, the years between 1890 and 1895, and 1900 and 1905.

This second phase of diminution in the size of shareholdings, which saw the number of shareholders increase from 234 to 395, was particularly significant, as in 1900 the shares of the company were subdivided into £1 units. The example of the Alhambra indicates, therefore, that small share denominations could be instrumental in dispersing the ownership of music hall companies.

35. The company did not, however, trade as a music hall throughout this period. During the period 1870-85 the Alhambra operated with a theatrical licence. The circumstances surrounding this change of policy have been outlined in chapter 3.
36. Table 4-5.
37. The amount of capital issued by the company remained constant at £60,000.
Table 4-5. The average size of shareholdings, and the concentration of ownership in the Alhambra Co. Ltd., 1870-1910.

Closer examination of the changes in the shareholders of the Alhambra between 1900 and 1905 indicates that this dispersal of ownership was not reflected in any discernable alteration in the social characteristics of the shareholders of the company. To ascertain this, the shareholders for whom an occupation was listed were grouped into 6 social categories.38 The relative importance of these categories remained virtually static between 1900 and 1905. Indeed, the only category to exhibit a significant increase between the two dates was that of 'gentlemen'. This group, which already comprised the majority of the shareholders in 1900, had increased its representation by almost 6% by 1905, at which point it accounted for three-fifths of the shareholders. In both 1900 and 1905 the proportion of shareholders who were not classified as gentlemen, women, professionals, manufacturers or merchants, and were not involved in the entertainment business was under 6%.39

By 1905 the list included one jockey, a salesmen and two clerks,

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38. Methods of classifying shareholders are discussed briefly by Killick and Thomas, op. cit., p. 100.
39. The boundaries of the entertainment industry have been drawn widely here, to include publicans as well as those involved in the theatrical business.
but it is clear that the social range of shareholders in the Alhambra was neither broad nor broadening before the First World War, despite the subdivision of shares into £1 denominations and the large increase in the total number of shareholders.  

<table>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-6. The social background of shareholders in the Alhambra Co. Ltd., 1900-5.

This should not, though, be interpreted as providing conclusive evidence that there was no social democratisation of share ownership within the music hall industry, as it has again been stressed in this chapter that companies operating in London, and particularly in its central areas, were not typical of the industry as a whole. These companies, of which the Alhambra is one example, possessed the highest average size of shareholding, and were, therefore, the companies in which social democratisation was least likely to have taken place.

40. Table 4-6.
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<table>
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<td>53.46</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>59.18</td>
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40. Table 4-6.
4-2.7 Geographical influences on the concentration of ownership in the music hall industry

The foregoing discussion has indicated that by the 1880s, music hall entrepreneurs had overcome their suspicion of limited liability companies and thrown off the major impediment to the dispersal of share ownership within the industry posed by the issuing of high denomination shares. The dispersal of ownership became necessary during the limited liability boom in the music hall industry during the late 1880s, which increased the scale of music hall operations and, consequently the demand for investment capital. However, somewhat paradoxically, soon after this date a counter trend towards the concentration of ownership, in the form of private companies, emerged.

This apparent paradox can be resolved by stressing the geographical transformations which were taking place within the industry in parallel with the trend toward larger-scale and more capital intensive operations. At the same time as the purchase or construction of a music hall in a specific location was becoming increasingly expensive due to the greater size and sophistication of the halls, the network of limited liability music halls was penetrating into settlements at lower levels of the urban hierarchy in which, as chapter 3 has indicated, less capital was required to float a music hall company. It was in such locations that private companies flourished. This interpretation is verified through the comparison of the amounts of capital tied up in, and the geographical locations of, the private and public music hall companies which have provided the data for this chapter. In both categories approximately half of the companies...
were based in provincial cities, but the distribution of the remaining halls varied considerably. Whilst 9 of the remaining 14 public companies were based in central London, only 4 of the 17 private companies were similarly located. The proportion of the private companies based in towns of under 100,000 population was double that of public companies, whilst the proportion located in suburban London was treble that of public companies. These contrasting spatial occurrence patterns are reflected in the fact that the average paid up capital of the public companies examined was £52,657, whilst the nominal capital of the private companies averaged only £19,371. 41

Nevertheless, it is clear that amongst those companies which were genuinely open to public involvement the number of investors increased over time, and consequently the average size of shareholdings declined between 1885 and 1914. The example of the Alhambra, however, makes it clear that there is no necessary correlation between changes in the size of share denominations, or in the average size of shareholdings, and changes in the social class of shareholders. Equally, the direct examination of the biographical details of shareholders in music hall companies has provided evidence that, in some instances, members of the lower-middle-, and even working-classes had become involved in financing the business.

41. These figures exclude those multi-hall companies which operated in more than one of the four geographical areas identified. The averages capitalisations do not refer to the same measures. The figures for the private companies are those of nominal capital, those of the public companies represent paid up capital. The effect of this would be to reduce the difference between the two averages. These figures refer only to share capital. If loans were included as capital it would decrease the apparent gulf in capitalisations between the two types of company, as private companies had greater recourse to borrowing money.
The extent of this fragmentation of ownership of music hall companies varied spatially. Although shareholdings remained largest in provincial cities, and, in particular, in London, it was also in these locations that the fragmentation of ownership went the furthest. This fragmentation of ownership is, therefore, clearly closely related to the amount of capital invested in individual companies.

However, this clarification of the nature of the ownership of the music hall industry does not entirely resolve the paradox that this large, expanding and capital intensive industry remained under the control of a small number of entrepreneurs. This discussion has highlighted ways in which entrepreneurs could maintain their personal power over music hall businesses, primarily through the emergence of the private company. However, as chapter 2 has indicated, the major circuits, controlled by dominant entrepreneurs, were more usually located in the major cities of the United Kingdom in which the capital requirements of companies was greatest and, therefore, ownership was most dispersed. It is necessary to consider the processes by which these entrepreneurs retained their effective control over enterprises after relinquishing formal control of music hall companies.42

4-3 The Control of Music Hall Companies

The foregoing discussion has indicated that the aspirations of legislators, who saw limited liability as a means of democratising share ownership, were largely frustrated in practice. The ownership of music hall companies was often

42. See chapter 5 for further details of these entrepreneurs.
concentrated into the hands of a small number of individuals, especially in the form of private companies, who were still in a position to determine company policy in the personal and autocratic style characteristic of the proprietors who dominated music hall management prior to 1885.43 The capital requirements of many other companies, however, did necessitate the fragmentation of ownership, and it frequently became impossible for all of the formal owners of a company to be involved in its day-to-day management. Companies of this type were primarily engaged in the provision of music hall entertainments in London and the major provincial cities.

This situation necessitated the construction of mechanisms for the delegation of power to representatives of the company and for the communication of the wishes of the putative owners of companies to their chosen representatives. Consideration of the emergence of elaborate management hierarchies will be deferred to the next chapter. For the present I shall focus on the means of communication between shareholders and managers, and, in particular, the directors who sat at the pinnacle of the management hierarchy. I shall argue that the Companies Acts provided an unsatisfactory framework for the development of effective communication between music hall company directors and investors. In practice, shareholders found it difficult to wield the powers theoretically invested in them by company legislation, and, in particular, lacked the ability to maintain effective control of paid company officials. As a result of this, despite the increasing numbers of shareholders, power within music hall companies remained firmly in the hands of the executive.

The roots of this situation can be traced back to the appointment, immediately before the 1856 Companies Act, of Robert Lowe, a strong advocate of both limited liability and *laissez faire*, to the Presidency of the Board of Trade.\(^{44}\) This Act broke radically with the existing trend towards greater government regulation of company administration, indeed, 'in its newfound faith it removed some of the old checks and gave companies an almost unwise degree of freedom'.\(^{45}\) In many respects the freedoms which this Act bestowed upon companies included the freedom of company functionaries from undue interference from the shareholders of the company.

4-3.1 The politics of the General Meeting and the control of information

The legislators decreed that shareholders were to exercise their ultimate sanction over the administration of companies through the medium of the general meeting. All music hall companies incorporated under the limited liability legislation were bound to convene annually an *Ordinary General Meeting* (OGM), in addition to any *Extraordinary General Meetings* (EGM) which were deemed necessary by shareholders.

General meetings, however, failed to provide an effective platform for the articulation of the opinions of shareholders. The *Music Hall and Theatre Review* placed the responsibility for this situation on the apathy of shareholders.

We have often deplored the lack of intelligent interest on the part of music-hall shareholders, who are content to let their directors or more probably a

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\(^{45}\) Ibid, p. 291; See also Cottrell, *op.cit.*, pp. 52-4.
dominant director run the show at his own sweet will and never utter a query.46

However, I shall argue that the behaviour of shareholders reflected the fact that the OGM provided, in a number of ways, an inappropriate and inadequate forum for the assertion of the rights of shareholders in music hall companies. The range of issues which could be discussed at the statutory OGM was very limited and the shareholders were largely restricted to a passive role in proceedings. In general, shareholders were asked to give their retrospective endorsement to the conduct of the Board over the preceding twelve months, as encapsulated in the annual report of the directors. Shareholders were unable to reverse the actions taken by the directors during the preceding business year, even if they disapproved of the actions, provided that the directors had acted within the rules of the company. It was theoretically possible for shareholders to alter the rules governing the conduct of a company through a majority vote at an EGM. However, such changes were difficult to achieve in practice, and also had no retrospective effect on the actions taken by the directorate.

In practice, their power to influence the behaviour of the directors through OGMs was essentially limited to the re-election of directors which was required at these meetings. Even in this respect the power of the shareholders was severely circumscribed. Directors were invariably elected to office for a number of years at a time, typically three or four, and it was therefore unusual for more than one, or possibly two, members of the board to be seeking re-election at any one time. In respect to the appointment of directors shareholders again possessed an

essentially passive role. When seats on the board became vacant
the directors were under no obligation to elicit the opinions of
shareholders in filling them. Directors were entitled to appoint
new board members and, again, to provide shareholders with a \textit{fait accompli} for their retrospective endorsement. Newson Smith’s
entree into music hall directorship is a case in point. The
explanation which Hugh Astley, the Chairman of the London Pavilion
Board of Directors, gave to their 1891 OGM neatly summarises the
position of music hall directors, who wielded power with
considerable freedom in the name of the shareholders.

At the express wish of the remaining directors, [Newson Smith] consented to resign the auditorship and
to fill the vacancy on the Board. The directors being
of the opinion that his appointment as a director
would be of great advantage to the shareholders,
accordingly appointed him, in pursuance of the
provisions of the articles of association of the
company.\textsuperscript{47}

In view of the limited powers held by shareholders, their
‘lack of intelligent interest’ is hardly surprising, and general
meetings were, therefore, seldom contentious gatherings. From the
examination of numerous reports of the general meetings of
prominent music hall companies recorded in the contemporary press,
I have only uncovered one instance of a shareholder standing for
election at an OGM without the endorsement of the board of
directors.\textsuperscript{48} This event took place at the OGM of the Oxford Music
Hall in 1897, and was, in fact, directly triggered by the lack of
accountability of the directors to the shareholders when replacing

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Era}, 7 February, 1891, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{48} The following discussion is based primarily upon the evidence
of the types of company which the preceding discussion has
indicated to have been the most genuinely public companies, namely
the large West End companies. However, it is acknowledged that,
as chapter 3 has argued, these halls should not be considered in
any way typical.
one of their number which I have outlined above. In justifying his candidature Henry Tozer stated that he was

Asserting a principle - the principle of the right of shareholders to be directly represented on the boards of companies. It too often happened that vacancies were filled up from personal and private motives.\footnote{49}

Unsurprisingly, Tozer failed in his bid to challenge the entrenched position of the directorate, failing by 75 votes to 38 to depose the recently appointed Mr. Gover.

The Companies Acts further strengthened the position of those already in power through the regulations they laid down regarding the flow of information. Directors were provided with statutory rights of access to all the information pertaining to the conduct of a limited liability company, but had no concomitant obligation to pass this knowledge on to shareholders.\footnote{50}

Shareholders frequently exhibited concern that detailed profit and loss accounts were seldom included in annual reports. Mr. H. Sutton, Chairman of the Alhambra, excused the condensation of the company's profit and loss account in 1890

For the obvious reason that it was not desirable in these days of fierce competition to disclose to everybody all their business arrangements.\footnote{51}

This line of argument, that financial secrecy, even from shareholders, was essential to profitability was frequently rehearsed by company chairmen in similar circumstances. In 1892 Mr. Cates, a shareholder in the New Tivoli, reiterated the feeling that 'shareholders should be furnished with a profit and loss

\footnotesize{49. Era, 6 February, 1897, p. 19.}
\footnotesize{50. W.J. Reader, 1982, Versatility Unlimited: Reflections on the history and nature of the limited liability company, p. 195.}
\footnotesize{51. Era, 8 February, 1890, p. 17.}
Newson Smith's stone-walling response to this embodies the entrenched position of the Board.

As to the reason why no profit and loss account is circulated, your directors have very carefully considered the matter, and they think it highly inadvisable to show to the public and to our competitors the way in which we make our profits...I think gentlemen you must have confidence in us [the directors] when we tell you that the amounts that we have expended in order to earn your dividend have been properly expended.53

The promoters of the Companies Bill of 1896 disagreed with this opinion, and inserted a clause which required companies to deposit annual balance sheets at Companies House, on the grounds that this increase in the publicity of companies was 'in the interests of the shareholders and the creditors'.54

In the case of the Syndicate Halls, considered above, the flow of financial information to shareholders does seem to have increased in the last years of the nineteenth century. At their 1897 OGM the shareholders of the London Pavilion passed a motion calling for the publication of a profit and loss account, a request which the directors complied with at the 1898 OGM.55 In 1897 the shareholders of the Oxford had also been presented with a profit and loss account for the first time.56

Such complaints were far from restricted to the management of the Syndicate Halls or solely to the issue of the 'laconic artistry in the presentation of accounts' of which directors were

52. Era, 30 July, 1892, p. 15.
53. Era, 30 July 1892, p. 15.
54. Quoted in Ireland, op. cit., p.256. This Bill was never enacted. Its aim was though finally achieved through the 1908 Companies Act, which required the filing of annual accounts at Companies House. One of the main benefits of private status was exemption from this requirement.
55. Era, 6 February, 1897, p. 20; Era, 5 February, 1898, p. 19.
56. Era, 21 May, 1897, p. 18.
often guilty. 57 'A shareholder' alerted the directorate of the Canterbury and Paragon Ltd. to the fact that

There was a great deal of dissatisfaction - as was shown by the price of the shares - and it was due to the fact that the investing shareholders were not altogether satisfied with the directors because they persistently opposed anything proposed on the opposite side of the table. 58

The manner in which directors generally conceived their relationship to shareholders at this time is perhaps best encapsulated in the tone of J.C. Collier's response to a proposal made from the floor at an OGM 'that 100 guineas each be voted to the managers' of the Empire Palace.

He did not wish to interfere with the voice of the shareholders...and if it was the wish of the meeting that certain sums should be voted to the gentlemen who had been named he was perfectly certain that he was echoing the sentiments of the Board when he said they would cheerfully carry out that wish. He thought, however, that the proposition should come more as a suggestion than otherwise, because in that case it would not interfere with the prerogative which certainly ought to belong to the directors. 59

Clearly, the evidence adduced here regarding the flow of information within music hall companies would appear to conform to Reader's assertion that

Secrecy is always what an autocrat desires and it was very much part of the tradition of late Victorian management in the United Kingdom. 60

Despite the restricted scope for intervention of shareholders at these meetings, confrontation was not an altogether unknown phenomenon. Indeed, the most spectacular example of conflict between shareholders and the directorate, which took place at the

58. Era, 19 September, 1891, p. 17.
60. Reader, op. cit., p. 194.
Moss Empires OGM of 1910, led directly to the break up of the historic Moss-Stoll partnership. At this meeting Mr. George Grey launched a savage attack on the recent performance of the company, and, in particular questioned the loyalty of the managing director Oswald Stoll. Grey moved an amendment to the customary motion to adopt the directors’ report and accounts

That the report and balance be suspended pending a committee of investigation of shareholders to be elected by this meeting to inquire into the depreciation of the earnings of this company.\textsuperscript{61}

This amendment was seconded by Mr. R.W. Gardiner, who also doubted the wisdom of employing Stoll, on the grounds that Stoll held the position of managing director of not one but five competing companies.\textsuperscript{62} Although the original motion was accepted unamended by ‘an overwhelming majority’, Stoll still felt compelled to resign because

One thing is certain, that neither contentions nor suspicions, nor anything but mutual confidence, enable one to do one’s best, and I am really glad therefore to make room for someone else.\textsuperscript{63}

This episode can be interpreted as being indicative of the power of the informal sanction of shareholders at general meetings. However, it seems likely that this contretemps acted as no more than a trigger mechanism for Stoll to make the break from Moss Empires. In the decade since the amalgamation of his music hall interests with those of Edward Moss, Stoll had built up another independent business empire, which, following the success of the Coliseum Syndicate Ltd., was in a very healthy state in 1910.

Together with the statement announcing his resignation from the

\textsuperscript{61} Era, 19 February, 1910, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, p. 14. The prevailing attitudes towards divided loyalties amongst managers is considered further in chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{63} Era, 1 October, 1910, p. 14.
board of Moss Empires, Stoll also issued a 'Manifesto' of his 'intentions as to the future' in which he outlined ambitious plans to extend his business commitments through the erection of five new metropolitan halls including Empires at Fulham and Chiswick, the King's Cross Hippodrome, and the Kilburn Coliseum, upon which 'nearly a quarter of a million sterling will be expended'.\textsuperscript{64} It is clear that Stoll's personal ambitions were already drawing him beyond Moss Empires.

On the rare occasions on which meetings aroused controversy, the debate was almost invariably sparked off by dissension within the board of directors rather than by concerted action on the part of shareholders. This is exemplified by the spate of inharmonious meetings which the Syndicate Hall companies experienced in the late 1890s as the result of a power struggle between the directors.\textsuperscript{65} General Meetings were generally only effectively mobilised by those already in power as a means of resolving their internal squabbles, and promoting their own opinions and interests.

Between meetings the freedom of the board of directors was fettered only by the pre-defined objectives and procedures of the company, which were set out in the memorandum and articles of

\textsuperscript{64}. Era, 1 October, 1910, p. 14. This development is also indicative of the point made earlier in this chapter that by the end of the period, the industry had generated considerable accumulations of capital within the business. This statement made it clear that despite this large outlay of capital, 'there will be no public issue of shares'. Stoll's autocratic temperament, which will be examined in chapter 5, made him an inappropriate managing director of public limited companies. As the Music Hall and Theatre Review, 6 October, 1910, p. 633, commented, Stoll's 'business sympathy with useful co-operation is always tempered by a certain autocracy and consciousness of his own strength'.

\textsuperscript{65}. See, for example, the reports of meetings in, Era, 23 April 1898, p. 21; Era, 20 August, 1898, p.17.
association. These often provided the most minimal obstructions to the freedom of the directorate, for, as Shannon has noted, the memoranda of companies were notable for

The elaboration of objects to suffice, as far as legal ingenuity could ensure, for all time and for almost every conceivable purpose.66

Although, of course, the contents of these documents were theoretically decided by shareholders, in practice, the rules of music hall companies were often implicated in the concentration and maintenance of power in the hands of the directorate. This was primarily due to the ordering of the stages involved in the incorporation of a limited liability company. As a result of the 1856 Act, only seven subscribers were required in the initial stages of registration, each of whom need only agree to purchase a single share in the prospective company. It was at this stage that the memorandum and articles of association of the proposed company had to be lodged with the Companies Registrar. Thus, the promoters of a company were in a position to draft the aims and rules of a company before any invitation for the subscription of funds had been made to the public. Once registered these documents were difficult to alter. Amendments to the fundamental aims and objectives of the company, as enshrined in the memorandum of association, required the assent of the courts, whilst alterations to the articles of association, which covered the rules of management of the company, required the consent of a majority vote at a specially convened EGM, which, for reasons already discussed, was difficult to obtain. To apply for shares, even in a newly-formed music hall company was to endorse, tacitly, a pre-existing set of rules and objectives. Not infrequently, the

first board of directors was drawn from the initial subscribers to the company. Witnesses before the 1867 Select Committee on Limited Liability were already expressing doubts about the wisdom of this procedure, and suggesting that the first directors should be appointed by the shareholders and not the promoters. No action was taken on these recommendations and music hall proprietors converting their establishments into limited liability companies, or variety entrepreneurs inaugurating new ventures, remained well placed to embed their interests in the regulations of fledgling companies.

Many of the music hall magnates took full advantage of the opportunities offered to them by this situation, particularly in order to secure their personal positions within companies. The articles of association of the London Coliseum Ltd. stipulated that Stoll was to be the managing director of the company for at least the first five years of its existence, and that he was entitled to be the chairman of the board for as long as he remained a director of the company.\(^\text{67}\) The significance of such a formally secure position to Stoll is clear from his takeover of the Alhambra Co. in 1916. He immediately promulgated an entirely new set of articles of association. Prior to this, the chairman of the company had been elected by the directors for a period not exceeding one year. Clause 92 of the new articles named Stoll as the chairman for the whole of the period during which he retained a seat on the board.\(^\text{68}\) Other music hall magnates imposed their hold on power even more firmly, by securing not only their own position but by monopolising the future appointment of directors.

\(^{67}\) BT31 10030/75014.
\(^{68}\) BT31 30742/2558c. The contents of this new set of rules will be considered further in chapter 5.
The articles of the Colchester Hippodrome, for example, named Walter de Frece and Frederick Mouillot as the first directors of the company and stated that 'so long as they continue to be Directors they shall have the sole right of nominating Directors'. Walter Gibbons entrenched his control of the halls which he incorporated in the early twentieth century even more firmly. Clause 80 of the articles of association of the proposed Empire Palace (Woolwich) Ltd. stated that:

\[
\text{In the first instance Walter Gibbons shall be the sole Director. So long as he continues to be a Director he shall have the sole right of nominating Directors. The said Walter Gibbons shall remain a Director during his life, and shall not be removable or liable to retire by rotation or otherwise.}\]

The only circumstances which could occasion his removal from this autocratic position were his voluntary resignation, the bankruptcy of the company, or in the event of his becoming 'lunatic' or 'unsound of mind'. Compromises, however, had to be made when the interests of Stoll and Gibbons became linked up in 1911. Gibbons renounced his rights of total control of the London Theatres of Varieties Ltd. at an EGM held on 14th August, 1911, at which the articles of association were altered to entrench Stoll's position within the company. He was to become a director and the chairman of the company for ten years, and also obtained the right to nominate two more directors.

Thus, in practice the control of music hall companies remained in the hands of the executive, which possessed effective control over the rules of the company, the appointment of

69. BT31 17702/87918.
70. BT31 18053/92808.
71. Times, 15 August, 1911, p. 16. For further details of this agreement, see chapter 6.
directors, and the flows of information regarding the conduct of the company. As Reader points out, in stark contrast to the intentions of the original proponents of limited liability legislation,

The limited liability company...turned out to be a form of organisation well adapted to the exercise of autocratic power. 72

4-3.2 The redefinition of music hall ownership: the rise of preference shares and debenture stocks

Thus the music hall industry developed in a context in which the rights and powers theoretically invested in shareholders were not reflected in the politics of decision-making within companies. The problems created by this disjuncture between theory and practice were resolved in the last years of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries through the redefinition of music hall ownership. This took the form of new types of company finance, which acknowledged the separation of ownership from control in highly capitalised music hall companies. Capitalists were encouraged to invest in types of share which explicitly renounced the principle that share ownership entitled investors to be involved in the formation of company policy. In return these new types of share offered investors the prospect of steadier and more secure returns on their capital. The emergence of the preference share as a common form of investment was the most significant response to this redefinition of industrial ownership, and the rising demand for stable and passive forms of industrial investment.

Preference shares were shares in a company which had priority over ordinary shares in the distribution of profits, up to a certain, predetermined figure (usually 6%, and sometimes 7%). Thereafter, all shares had equal claim to any remaining profits. The attractive stability of returns on this type of share was often further enhanced by making the preferential rights cumulative. If the claims for preferential dividends could not be fully satisfied from the capital available for distribution to shareholders at the end of one financial year, the claim could be carried forward to the following year. In such cases ordinary shareholders were not entitled to any returns until the accumulated arrears of preferential dividends had been paid off.

In 1916, after a number of consecutive years of low profitability, the London Theatres of Varieties syndicate, for example, was 21% in arrears on payments to the owners of its 100,000 £1 7% cumulative preference shares. This represented a total of £23,493 in unpaid dividends.\(^73\) In return for these privileges, the holders of preference shares forfeited their right of involvement in the decision-making process, unless their interests were directly involved. The range of privileges and disqualifications which a preference shareholder could expect are illustrated in the following clause from the articles of association of the Coliseum Syndicate.

> Any Preference share which may at any time be issued by the Company shall not confer on the holders thereof the right to attend or vote either in person or by proxy at any general meeting or to have notice of such meeting unless the meeting is convened for reducing the capital of the Company or sanctioning a sale of the undertaking or altering the regulations of the company or unless the propositions to be submitted to

\(^{73}\) *Stage Year Book, 1916, p. 69.*
the meeting directly affects the rights and privileges of the holders of the Preference shares.

In other instances, preference shares obtained rights when their preferential dividends were in arrears.

This changing attitude to the role of investors in company management also encouraged capitalists to invest in stocks, and particularly debenture stock. As stocks, debentures granted no rights of involvement in the formation or prosecution of company policy. Holders of debentures were guaranteed an annual return on their capital, although this was invariably lower than that offered to preference shareholders, and was typically 4-5%. The security of this form of investment in music hall companies was greatly strengthened by the fact that the debenture holders had the first claim on the assets of a company in the event of its winding-up. Debentures might reasonably be expected to have been of particular significance to the financing of the expansion of the music hall industry, due to the fact that the economic conditions which were responsible for the emergence of a mass market for entertainment in the late nineteenth century, primarily low and declining prices, were also the circumstances in which their invulnerability to depreciation made debentures most attractive to capitalists.

The quantitative significance of these new forms of investment in supporting the expansion of the music hall industry

74. BT31 37247/95197. This clause was inserted on 27th February, 1914, as a result of the decision of the directorate to make an issue of preference shares to its ordinary shareholders 'in satisfaction of a Bonus Dividend of equal amount forming part of the undivided profits of the company'.
between 1890 and 1920 can be gauged from the evidence presented in a number of contemporary studies undertaken by the trade press.  

Strictly speaking, the capital of a company refers solely to its share capital. In the following analysis, however, the meaning of this term has been extended to encompass both the share capital and the loans raised, through mortgages and debentures. The practical significance of this broader definition was appreciated by contemporaries, including Newson Smith, a key figure in the introduction of sophisticated financial techniques into music hall management. Newson Smith made this point in the course of explaining to the shareholders of the London Pavilion in 1891 the desirability of increasing the capital of the company through the creation of 10,000 new £5 6% preference shares, in order to pay off some debentures.

The words "increase of capital" may, to some extent, be a little misleading, so I desire to point out to you that the ordinary capital of the company is £130,000, and the debentures are £60,000. Technically speaking, the debentures are not termed capital; but for all practical purposes I think that we may consider that the capital of this company is £190,000.

All the following figures, therefore, unless otherwise stated refer to the combined totals of share and loan capital.

A study of the 'shares of the shows', conducted by the *Music Hall and Theatre Review* in 1896 indicated that these new strategies for generating investment had had little impact on the music hall business by the end of the nineteenth century.

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75. The PRO files are of little value here, as for most of the period under consideration, companies were not required to submit information regarding their loan capital.
76. Era, 7 February, 1891, p.17.
23 companies examined in this survey suggest that in the initial phase of limited liability penetration of the music hall business, companies relied upon the more traditional expedient of ordinary shares in raising capital. Of the £2,198,360 invested in these 23 companies in 1896, only £382,800, or 17.41%, was issued in the form of preference shares or debenture stocks, of which the latter accounted for two-thirds.\(^{78}\)

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
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<th>Debs.</th>
<th>Mortgages</th>
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<td>65.59</td>
<td>5.57</td>
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<td>48.55</td>
<td>16.01</td>
<td>21.42</td>
<td>14.02</td>
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<td>59.64</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>21.84</td>
<td>13.80</td>
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<td>29.81</td>
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<td>43.37</td>
<td>16.02</td>
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<td>53.78</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>25.01</td>
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<td>24.32</td>
<td>12.13</td>
<td>27.81</td>
<td>35.70</td>
</tr>
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Table 4-7. The percentage of the paid up capital of public music hall companies raised through different types of share and loan issues.

\(^a\) excluding Moss Empires.
\(^b\) excluding Moss Empires and London Theatres of Varieties.

At this point in time, ordinary share capital was far more predominant in the music hall business than in most other types of industrial enterprise. In 1896 preference shares accounted for only 7.53% of the share capital of music hall companies, and debentures represented an amount equivalent to only 16% of this share capital. The corresponding figures for all limited companies in 1895 were considerably higher, at 22.46% and 40.58% respectively.\(^{79}\) The MHTR survey also highlights the pioneering role of H.E. Moss in introducing these new forms of investment to

\(^{78}\) Table 4-7.
\(^{79}\) Cottrell, op. cit, p. 164.
the music hall business. Moss was closely involved with six of the companies examined by the MHTR, the Empire Palaces in Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle and Sheffield, and the Liverpool, Leeds and Hull Empire Palaces Ltd. These six companies had raised £75,000, 20% of their capital, through the issue of debentures. This figure was a significantly larger proportion of the total capital in these companies than that of the average of the companies considered by the Music Hall and Theatre Review. The early growth of Moss' business interests would seem to have been related to a greater willingness to experiment with these new methods of financing expansion.

A decade later, according to a Green Room Book survey of 'Theatrical Finance', the proportion of the capital invested in other music hall companies which had been generated through the issue of debenture stocks had risen to the level attained by the companies under Moss' umbrella in 1896. Only three of the eighteen companies listed by the GRB, namely, the London Pavilion, the London Music Hall, and the Empire Palace of Varieties, Middlesborough had issued preference shares, and the proportion of investment accounted for by preference shares actually declined slightly after 1896, dropping to under 5% of the total capital by 1907. The proportion of capital raised through loans, both debentures and mortgages, remained constant. Thus, by 1907, debentures and preference shares still only accounted for approximately a quarter of the total amount of capital invested in

80. Green Room Book (GRB), 1907, p. 483. The following figures exclude the data for Moss Empires, which accounted for £1,591,621, or 44.97% of the total capital of the companies considered by the GRB. The financing of Moss Empires will be considered separately.
this sample of music hall limited liability companies. Almost 60% was still raised through the issuing of ordinary shares.  

The composition of the capital invested in Moss Empires contrasted strikingly with this pattern. By 1907 the 111,364 £5 ordinary shares, issued by the company accounted for only one-third of the nominal value of capital invested in the company. In contrast to 1896, though, the companies under the control of Moss no longer relied upon debentures to raise non-ordinary share capital. Indeed, between 1896 and 1907, the proportion of the capital in his companies raised by this method had remained virtually unchanged, at around 20%. By 1907 the proportion of the capital raised through loans was actually lower for Moss Empires than for the other eighteen companies examined. These, on average, met 21.84% of their capital requirements through debenture issues. Moss Empires now attracted the investment it required for expansion through the issuing of preference shares. Whilst under 5% of the capital of the other companies under consideration had been raised in this manner, the flotation of Moss Empires in 1900 was remarkable for the fact that it involved the issuing of 94,893 £5 preference shares, which constituted 30% of the total capital of the company. By 1907 preference shares and debentures together provided the majority of the capital invested in Moss Empires. In 1908 this proportion was boosted still further with the issuing of an additional £200,000 of 6% debentures.  

Thus, whilst the period 1896-1907 saw the other major limited liability music hall companies following the lead set by Moss in the early 1890s, and increasing the proportion of 

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81. See table 4-7.  
82. Times, 30 June, 1908, p. 17.
their capital accounted for by loans, Moss Empires itself had moved on and was now championing the use of preference shares in fuelling the rapid expansion of his business interests in the early years of the twentieth century.  

A further study undertaken by the *Stage Year Book* in 1916 suggests that this rapid transformation in the structure of finance of limited liability music hall companies did not persist throughout the period under consideration. Indeed, very little change appears to have taken place between 1907 and 1916. 

The *Stage Year Book* survey indicates that the trend towards greater use of preference shares and debentures amongst music hall companies continued, but at an appreciably slower pace. The proportion of capital raised through ordinary shares declined only marginally, from 60% to 54%. Slightly over a quarter of the total capital invested was now represented by debentures, but preference shares still only accounted for 7.38%. The most dynamic phase in the history of Moss Empires having passed by

83. In 1908, Moss Empires stated that it had spent £233,500 on acquiring or building properties since the company was formed in 1899. *Ibid*, p. 17.
84. *Stage Year Book*, 1916, pp. 65-73. Again, the raw data provided by this source require adjustment, as 49.36% of the capital enumerated by this survey was invested in two companies, Moss Empires and London Theatres of Varieties Ltd., founded in 1908. The data for these two companies will be considered separately.
85. The extent of the use of debentures in the music hall industry had become comparable to their use by other limited companies. Debentures in music hall companies were equivalent to 41% of the total capital. This same figure is given by Cottrell for all limited companies in 1915. However, disparities in the use of preference shares remained marked. Whilst they accounted for only 12% of the share capital of music hall companies, Cottrell states that three-quarters of all public companies had issued preference shares by 1915, and that these represented 30% of the total paid up share capital. Cottrell, *op. cit.*, p. 164.
1907, the structure of finance of this company remained equally static in the years before the First World War.

The financing of the London Theatres of Varieties exhibited a very different structure. The 200,000 £1 ordinary shares issued by the company accounted for less than a quarter (24.32%) of its capital. In total, share issues accounted for only 36.45% of the capital of the company. Whereas only 1.83% of the capital of Moss Empires in 1916 had been secured through the mortgaging of property, the respective figure for the London Theatres of Varieties was 35.7%, representing a mortgage debt of £293,875. This stark contrast reflected major differences in the history and business strategies of the two companies. From the outset, Moss utilised public subscription to finance the expansion of his business empire. 86 By contrast, Walter Gibbons, the entrepreneur behind the emergence of the London Theatres of Varieties syndicate, was loathe to sacrifice, even nominally, the absolute control of his halls. Moreover, the halls incorporated by Gibbons had often already been under his control as private enterprises. In this situation, mortgages had been the only route open to him to expand without forfeiting his personal control. Gibbons also intended that his incorporated circuit would be expanded without the dilution of control through recourse to the issuing of ordinary shares. In 1910 the London Theatres of Varieties announced that

The directors believe that the time has arrived for further extension, and the present issue of Preference shares is made to carry out this extension. 87

86. See for example the shareholders lists of the Nottingham Empire Palace, which in 1898 recorded 491 shareholdings in the company (SRO BT2/3391), and the Sheffield Empire Palace which, in 1895 possessed 359 shareholdings (SRO BT2/2707).
Thus whilst in the expansion of Moss' interests the creation of a company invariably coincided with the creation of a new hall, in Gibbons' case it was normally the conversion of an existing proprietorially operated hall into a limited company. These different expansion strategies had a clear influence on the methods of raising capital which were utilised by the respective companies.

4-4 Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has demonstrated the gulf between the theory of the power relations which existed between the directors and shareholders of early limited liability companies and the practice of the control of music hall companies. The new legal framework within which the most highly capitalised music halls operated as limited companies proved to be as efficacious in limiting the authority of shareholders over company matters as it was in limiting their liability.

Shareholders held the most tenuous control of their directors. In theory, the rules governing the behaviour of the latter could be decided upon from the floor at EGMs, but the political practicalities of mobilising opposition to the established position of directors within the structure of the limited liability company invariably proved to be an insurmountable barrier to the expression of shareholder power. To the extent that general meetings had any meaningful implications for the conduct of music hall companies, they were appropriated by the directorate for the resolution of their own internal conflicts.
As a result of the impotence of shareholders in exercising their nominal rights, a redefinition of ownership, which divorced the concept from control, took place. This resulted in the emergence of preference shares and, primarily, debenture stocks as common forms of investment within the music hall industry. These changes in the pattern of investment were concentrated into the years surrounding the turn of the century. These new methods of attracting investment into the music hall industry were not widely adopted before 1896, and changes in the structure of finance of music hall companies slowed down markedly after 1907.

Paradoxically, the process of divorcing of ownership from control may have encouraged the democratisation of the former. Ordinary shares, regardless of their denomination, were inherently less attractive to small investors as they represented a relatively high-risk investment, particularly with regard to potential returns.88 The realisation that the voting rights of ordinary shares were often little more than nominal motivated the proliferation of new types of investment which sacrificed the pretence of control for greater stability of return.

However, the greater popularity of debentures issued relative to preference shares militated against the democratisation of share ownership. In spite of their steady rate of return, debentures were less likely to appeal to smaller investors than preference shares, as they were usually issued in large denominations, typically of £50 or more.89

89. It should also be noted that for the majority of the period under consideration, companies were not required to file records of debentures issued at Companies House. Even when it became required to list all debentures, companies were only asked to provide the names of the trustees for the debenture holders,
The current discussion has provided some limited support for the thesis that the democratisation of ownership was taking place. The existence of a more widespread trend in this direction might be imputed from the fact that the average size of shareholdings in music hall companies declined between 1880 and 1920. The example of the Alhambra, however, indicates that there is no necessary relationship between an increase in the number of shareholders and the broadening of the social base of share ownership. Indeed, increasing numbers of shareholdings in individual companies did not necessarily reflect an increase in the number of individuals investing in music hall companies. The impotence of shareholders in relation to the decision-making process within companies, together with the liquidity of shares in limited liability companies, conspired to induce a transformation in the investment strategies employed by rentier capitalists. Rather than persisting with the traditional pattern of concentrating investment into a small number of enterprises, capitalists began to adopt the risk-minimising strategy of spreading their capital through a portfolio of investments. This change in investment strategies, leading to the diminution of the average size of shareholdings reinforced the impotence of shareholders. As shareholdings became increasingly divided the commitment of individuals to the companies in which they invested declined, and as the number of shareholders increased, so it became more difficult to organise concerted and effective opposition to the policies of the directorate. Power was thereby further concentrated into the hands of the executive.

rather than the holders themselves. It is, therefore, considerably more difficult to examine the ownership of, and hence the democratising impact of, the issuing of debentures.
Clear differences existed between the propensity of independent companies and music hall syndicates to adopt these new forms of investment which divorced ownership from control. The latter were far less conservative in this respect. By 1907 half of the capital invested in Moss Empires was accounted for by preference shares and debenture stocks, and in 1916 less than a quarter of the nominal value of investments in the London Theatres of Varieties took the form of ordinary shares. This pattern is undoubtedly related to differences in the mode of expansion of these two types of music hall company. Companies with a parochial interest in a single hall were much more limited in the avenues available for expansion, generally to improvements to, or the reconstruction of, their establishment. Improvements could be undertaken in a piecemeal fashion, and such small scale expenditure could generally be funded from internal sources, and seldom required recourse to capital markets. The geographical extension of the interests of a music hall syndicate into a new locality required greater amounts of capital. Such geographical expansion could seldom be financed internally, and, therefore, required new issues of capital. The slowing down in the rate of expansion of the music hall industry from the end of the 1900s can therefore be related to the fact that the importance of these types of capital to the music hall industry ceased to grow appreciably in the years immediately preceding First World War.

Thus, the adoption of means of finance that divorced ownership from control proceeded most rapidly amongst those large syndicates in which the requirement for large amounts of capital threatened to fragment control. Thus there is no contradiction in the fact that the history of the halls, even in their maturity,
continues to be intimately bound up with the fortunes of a small number of gifted 'entrepreneurs of leisure', at the same time that opportunities had opened up for the democratisation of industrial investment. The growth of the private limited liability company was significant in enabling the 'Big Men' to maintain their position within the rapidly expanding music hall industry. However, most of the leading music hall magnates in the vanguard of the organisation of the business and its integration at a national level depended upon public funds to achieve their aims. Preference shares and debentures allowed them to retain their positions of authority by decoupling ownership from control.

The declaration that Edward Moss was 'the NAPOLEON of modern music hall management' can therefore be seen to apply not merely to his role as a figurehead for the industry, nor to the apparently inexorable geographical extension of his empire, but equally to the autocratic position which he personally held within his growing empire. It is therefore to these dominant figures within the industry which attention should be turned if the nature of the economic development of the music hall industry is to be adequately understood.

CHAPTER 5. FROM PUBLICANS TO ACCOUNTANTS: THE BUREAUCRATISATION OF MUSIC HALL MANAGEMENT

5-1 Introduction

Chapter 4 has established that in the struggle for the control of music hall companies, it was almost invariably the entrepreneurs who emerged victorious at the expense of shareholders.

The economic transformation of the music halls, upon which this thesis is focused, centred around the increase in the scale of operations and the amount of capital invested in music hall enterprises. Chapter 4 has indicated that, although the capital intensive nature of the industry after the limited liability boom of the late 1880s led to a fragmentation of ownership, entrepreneurs retained their grip on power.

Nevertheless, the larger scale of the music hall business had altered radically the context within which entrepreneurs exercised this power. This chapter will outline the processes involved in the bureaucratisation of music hall administration required to manage effectively these larger companies, and to the adaptation of the style of music hall entrepreneurship to suit these new circumstances. In particular I shall examine the validity of Bailey's assertion that

The top men of the new syndicated halls were directors rather than proprietors, and more often accountants than publicans.¹

I shall begin this task with an extended consideration of the nature of entrepreneurship during the period before 1885. I shall then go on to argue that amongst the 'Big Men' of the business the transformation was not as clear-cut as Bailey suggests. Throughout much of the period under consideration, the generation of entrepreneurs controlling the music hall industry exhibited an amalgam of characteristics associated with both the publican and the accountant.

The most significant change in their status after 1885 was that entrepreneurs were increasingly forced to accept the principles of team work, as members of boards of directors. The most significant professionalisation of high level decision-making occurred through changes in the occupational backgrounds of the directorate, which increasingly included not only accountants, but also other professionally trained people, especially lawyers. However, by the end of the period under consideration, professionals had begun to graduate from the boards of directors of music hall companies to assume the most powerful positions within the music hall industry. The need for the bureaucratisation of the administration of music hall companies was greatest amongst syndicates, which had the additional problem of spatially extended lines of communication. It was, therefore, amongst these companies that the professionalisation of music hall management proceeded most rapidly.
5-2 Traditional Attitudes to Music Hall Management

5-2.1 The music hall proprietor before 1885

The only detailed consideration of the characteristic behaviour patterns of music hall entrepreneurs has been undertaken by Peter Bailey, with respect to the period before the music hall business developed into a large-scale, organised industry. I shall begin by giving some attention to his delineation of the early music hall proprietor, as a point of comparison for the substantive arguments which I shall make.

Bailey indicates that many of the ‘caterers’, as they were known at the time, including Morton, had begun their careers in entertainment as publicans. The consideration of their origins is essential to an understanding of these early impresarios of commercial mass leisure, as these men incorporated much of the cultural baggage of their previous profession into their attitudes towards the management of music halls. In particular, they had risen from similar social backgrounds to those of their performers and customers, and, therefore, in the intimate atmosphere of the small-scale, pre-limited liability music halls, were able to continue to transact their business with these groups through face-to-face contacts. ‘Good fellowship’ was the defining characteristic of the style of the publican-proprietor.

Indeed, Bailey argues that their transition to music hall proprietors intensified their quest for camaraderie with others involved in the business, as ‘good fellowship’ provided them not only with an adequate system of economic organisation, but also a means of acquiring social status. Whilst the caterer was...
invariably of the crowd, he was no longer in it. Proprietors had increased their personal wealth, but the source of their income precluded them from obtaining from 'respectable' Victorian society the prestige which was usually attached to wealth. Their status was likely to be acknowledged only within the confines of the sub-culture of the halls. The caterers' acts of liberality and extravagance were intended as much to achieve this end as to stimulate trade. Music hall entrepreneurs were willing to forego profit maximisation in order to purchase social status.

The customary business practices of the caterer were also deeply influenced by the traditionally close relationship between the public house and gambling. Together, these two features of the caterer's character combined to provide the music hall business with a set of improvidential business practices, characterised by a lack of financial caution and restraint. Whilst to the directors of music hall companies bankruptcy was unavoidable fact of life, but one to be planned against as thoroughly as possible, to the caterer, it was an accepted part of their way of life. This cavalier attitude to finances was characterised in the career of William Holland. Holland was a flamboyant proprietor who styled himself on Emperor Napoleon III, and experienced severe impecuniosity on a number of occasions throughout his career, from which he invariably bounced back. However, Bailey indicates that this system of transacting business did not survive the increases in the capital intensity of the music hall industry in the late nineteenth century.

The increasing scale and bureaucratisation of music hall... made the rituals of friendship and mutuality a

2. P. Bailey, 1982, Custom, capital and culture in the Victorian music hall, p. 188.
cosmetic rather than an essential way of doing business.³

Bailey's view of this transition is supported by Lois Rutherford who, having examined the changing nature of industrial relations within the business, considers that

In broad terms, the dominant trend amongst managers was away from the bohemian informality of the music hall operation towards a more businesslike, impersonal style of relationship based less upon familiarity than upon properly understood contracts.⁴

The economic transformation of the business generated a 'new breed of forward-looking, provincial manager who valued efficiency more than personal niceties', which Rutherford considered to have been typified by Oswald Stoll.⁵ Summerfield concurs with this assessment, describing Stoll as 'the apotheosis of the proprietor interested in variety entertainment as an investment opportunity'.⁶

The present discussion, therefore intends to examine the complexities of this transition in the nature of music hall entrepreneurs from publicans and proprietors to directors and accountants. Moreover, in seeking the complexities of this transition I intend to explore the uncharted territory occupied by the less famous amongst the directors of music halls, and beyond that to examine the development of management at lower levels of the hierarchy. In particular I wish to focus on the role of the

³. Ibid, p. 46.
⁴. L. Rutherford, 1986, 'Managers in a small way', p. 106. This aspect of the music hall industry will be considered further in chapter 6.
⁵. Ibid., p. 106.
geographical expansion of individual companies in stimulating this managerial revolution.

5-2.2 Directors and 'Enlightened Self-Interest'

The most fundamental distinction between proprietors and directors of music halls lay in their relationship to the halls which they managed. The small scale of early music halls meant not only that proprietors could get involved in all aspects of the running of a theatre, but also that individual proprietors were capable of putting up a large proportion of the capital invested in the music hall. Conversely, the growth in company size, consequent upon the limited liability boom of the mid-1880s, inevitably brought about the divorce of ownership from control, as chapter 4 has indicated.

The fears of the critics of limited liability legislation in the 1850s and 1860s had not been entirely dissipated by the 1880s. There was still considerably sympathy for Adam Smith's contention that

The directors of such companies...being the managers rather of other people's money than of their own, it cannot be well expected, that they should watch over it with the same anxious vigilance with which the partners in a private copartnery frequently watch over their own...Negligence and profusion, therefore, must always prevail, more or less, in the management of the affairs of such a company.7

The belief persisted that enlightened self-interest was an absolutely essential ingredient of responsible company management,

and that this could only be guaranteed by a significant overlap between the ownership and the control of music hall companies.

Few directors were as forward looking or, more probably, as courageous as the chairman of the Canterbury and Paragon Ltd. Mr. E.C. Rawlings, who, as early as 1891, openly challenged the belief that every director should have such a stake in the company as to make his salary a secondary consideration as compared with dividend. He knew of many companies managed by men who had no qualification for the post of director except that they held a large stake in the company. He did not think that they were always the best men to look after the business. What was required was commercial men who need not have large holdings in the company.8

Notwithstanding Rawlings' comments, the belief in the importance of 'enlightened self-interest' was still current amongst shareholders in music hall companies, and was expressed frequently, especially in the wake of poor financial results. For instance, the shareholders of the Oxford music hall were greatly disquieted by the annual report for 1894, which recommended a dividend of 3%, which compared very unfavourably with the 20% dividend declared for the previous year. At the annual meeting of the company Mr. Hugh Astley, the Chairman, announced

That it has come to the ears of my co-directors and myself that we do not hold that amount in the concern to lead the shareholders to suppose that we are very anxious for its welfare.9

Astley denied this allegation, stating that the members of the board currently had £21,000 invested in the stocks and shares of the company. Although this is a considerable sum, it still accounted for only a small proportion of the combined share and loan capital of the company, of £150,000. Conversely, directors

8. Era, 19 September, 1891, p. 17.
9. Era, 2 June, 1894, p. 16.
could use this belief to their own advantage. The declaration of a strong self-interest was a potent method of justifying their decisions to shareholders. Mr. Henry Tozer used this strategy to assure shareholders at the United Varieties Syndicate Ltd. annual meeting in 1911 that the payment of a dividend was impossible.

Your directors are the chief sufferers by non-payment of the dividend - for we are very large holders of shares and debentures; over one-third of the share capital.10

All music hall companies required their directors to hold a certain minimum stake in the companies which they directed. The size of the required holding was, however, generally very small. The minimum qualification was usually shares to the nominal value of between just £100 to £500. The level of qualification did not differ greatly with the size of companies, so, in general, the larger the company the smaller the proportion of the total capital the directors were required to possess. In the case of the Palace Theatre, directors were required to hold at least 500 £1 shares of the company. This represented only 1/4% of the nominal value of the company.11 These minimum qualifications, therefore, did not cause a significant reduction in the gap between the ownership and control of these limited liability companies.

In the changed context, companies strove to develop new strategies which simulated the close relationship between ownership and control characteristic of proprietorially run halls, and stimulated enlightened self-interest and loyalty amongst their high-ranking employees. One such strategy which music hall

10. Era, 11 February, 1911, p. 25. Even in this extreme example, therefore, the directors did not between them possess a controlling interest in the company.
11. BT31 5371/36891.
companies adopted was the prevention of the dissipation of directors' efforts by proscribing their involvement in other companies, and particularly prohibiting any interests in potential competitors.\textsuperscript{12} Clauses limiting the outside interests of directors in this way were particularly common in the articles of association of the earlier music hall companies. The contracts which underpinned the flotation of Moss' early enterprises imposed a geographical bar on Moss himself, somewhat similar to the more notorious barring clauses which managements later foisted upon the artists.\textsuperscript{13} By clause 7 of the contract promoting the Edinburgh Empire Palace Ltd. Moss undertook

\begin{quote}
That he shall not at any time after the turn of Whit Sunday eighteen hundred and ninety one be the proprietor, lessee, Manager, Managing Director or otherwise directly or indirectly interested in any music hall or any other place of entertainment which may be deemed... to be in competition with the business of the Company within the municipal boundaries of the City of Edinburgh.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

The Alhambra, amongst others, prohibited its directors from having an involvement in any other companies with which the hall transacted business.\textsuperscript{15}

This response to the divorce of ownership from control, focusing on contractual obligations, was essentially negative. It tacitly accepted the fact that directors could not be expected to possess an adequate degree of enlightened self-interest in the company, but believed that it was desirable to at least remove potential temptations to irresponsible management from the directors.

\textsuperscript{12} On the opposition of shareholders to Stoll's involvement in a number of music hall companies, see chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{13} On the topic of Barring Clauses, see chapter 6.
\textsuperscript{14} SRO BT2 2139.
\textsuperscript{15} BT31 30742/2558c.
Other companies sought, in a more positive fashion, to encourage self-interest in directors by relating their remuneration to the economic performance of the company, and specifically, to the level of dividends. This method was most frequently used to regulate the salaries of managing directors. The precise level of the incentive varied between companies. The managing director of the original Palace Theatre company, Augustus Harris, had been guaranteed an annual income of £1,200, plus 5% of the net profits of the company.\textsuperscript{16} Other contracts provided managing directors with considerably less security of earnings. Moss was only entitled to draw a salary from the Edinburgh Empire Palace Ltd. when the dividend of the company exceeded 10%.\textsuperscript{17} Stoll was to receive no reward for his labours on behalf of the Coliseum Syndicate until dividends reached 15%. Thereafter he was entitled to £25 for each 1% of dividend over and above 15%.\textsuperscript{18} In the case of the Alhambra this system of incentives was extended to encompass the whole board. Each year, according to the 1866 articles of association, the directors were to divide £500 between themselves. All were entitled to additional payments of dividends exceeded 15%.\textsuperscript{19}

Thus, although most music hall companies made some attempt to foster in their directors a degree of enlightened self-interest in the profitability of companies, it is clear that the wide gulf that had opened up between ownership and control could not be bridged.

\textsuperscript{16} BT31 5371/36891.
\textsuperscript{17} SRO BT2 2139.
\textsuperscript{18} BT31 37247/95197 (vol. 1).
\textsuperscript{19} BT31 30742/2558c. The threshold was reduced to 10% in 1868.
Despite these attempts to secure the loyalty of directors, it is clear that the relationship between strategic decision-makers and the halls over which they presided had been irrevocably altered. The Big Men of the music hall industry in their new role as salaried directors were freed from the shackles of ownership and 'enlightened self-interest'. In the following discussion I intend to examine the effect of this formal transformation of the links between ownership and control upon the nature of decision-makers involved in the music hall industry and their style of management.

It is important to note that many of the prominent figures in the development of the music hall business were active throughout the various phases of the economic transformation under consideration here. Many of the entrepreneurs whose names are indelibly linked with the post-1885 limited liability music hall industry began their involvement with the business long before that date. Horace Edward Moss made his initial entrance to the entertainment business in 1870s Edinburgh, first as the proprietor of a diorama, and then in his more famous role as proprietor of the Gaiety Theatre. Oswald Stoll became the proprietor of the Parthenon Music Hall in Liverpool in 1880, at the age of fourteen.

It would appear though that, certainly in the case of Stoll, his temperament was more suited to the newer styles of entrepreneurship. By proclivity, Stoll was an intellectual rather
than a showman. He wrote books on high finance, and a philosophical treatise entitled *The Grand Survival. A Theory of Immortality by Natural Law, Founded upon a Variation of Herbert Spencer's Definition of Evolution*, and also had an interest in, and an aptitude for, economics. R. Harry Gillespie, a prominent theatrical accountant and chairman of Moss Empires in the 1920s, once commented that

> My detractors call me a master of theatre finance, I thought I was until Stoll kept me talking about it in the street the other day.\(^\text{23}\)

Stoll was also naturally shy and aloof, and was anything but the loquacious caterer. He was, rather, noted for his

> Habitual segregation from the haunts of his fellow-men and the sociable diversions of humanity.\(^\text{24}\)

This natural taciturnity undoubtedly influenced the manner in which he conducted industrial relations. Indeed, 'he avoided contact with [artists] as far as possible'.\(^\text{25}\)

George Adney Payne is equally symbolic of this generation. Payne was a successful and respected director (usually the managing director) of the Syndicate Halls from their formation in the early 1890s until his death in 1907. He began his career in the entertainments business as a licensed victualler before graduating on to music hall proprietorship. As early as 1878, he was the joint proprietor of the Paragon Music Hall in the East End of London. He later undertook a training in accountancy, but was always noted for the personal and paternalistic way in which he

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24. Ibid., p. 112.
dealt with artists.\textsuperscript{26} It was not uncommon, therefore, for proprietors to make the transformation to directors of limited liability companies successfully, although they brought with them into the new era attitudes and habits learnt in the proprietorial school of music hall management.

Of course, those entrepreneurs, like Moss and Stoll, who bridged the gap between the two phases in the history of music hall were those who were open-minded and flexible enough to adapt their management strategies to the new demands and opportunities of the new economic context. Nevertheless, the survivors amongst this generation of music hall entrepreneurs were something of a hybrid, a transitional phase between proprietorial and bureaucratic attitudes to music hall management.

Other entrepreneurs of the pre-limited liability age were only able to come to a partial accommodation with the changing conditions. Within the management framework of the limited liability company music halls, there was still a place for old-fashioned proprietors who lacked the ability or the desire to become involved in bureaucratic activities, provided that they were exceptionally talented as music hall managers. The most notable exemplar of this was Charles Morton who continued his successful career, until his death in 1904, as a theatre manager under the auspices of several limited liability companies, including the Empire Palace and, finally, the Palace Theatre. Morton did not make the transformation to directorship, and was

\textsuperscript{26} Rutherford, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 106.
therefore involved in decision-making only in relation to the immediate matters of the production of performances. 27

Of course, if the transformation of the music hall business proved to be the ruination of some entrepreneurs, it also provided new opportunities for others to elevate themselves into the Pantheon of the music hall industry. This new generation of Big Men which began to emerge after the turn of the century was undoubtedly more aware of the tenets of rational business administration than their predecessors. This new breed of music hall entrepreneur was epitomised by Alfred Butt. 28 Butt was from a more privileged background than most of his peers in the music hall trade. He was educated at Westminster School and began his career in the business world as an accountant at Harrods, before switching his attention to the halls in 1898, and gaining a thorough grounding in the running of theatres as assistant manager to Charles Morton at the Palace. 29 Thereafter, his ascent was swift. On the death of Morton in 1904 Butt assumed the management of the theatre, before being promoted to the board as managing director in 1906. 30 From this firm foundation, Butt set about extending his influence throughout the nationwide music hall industry. 31

27. For the career of Morton, see W.H. Morton and H. Chance Newton, 1905, *Sixty Years' Stage Service.*
28. Rutherford, *op. cit.*, p. 106, also uses the terminology of the 'new breed'. However, she uses it to refer to any entrepreneur who adopted the approach of 'commercial paternalism', which Rutherford takes to signify a world view that 'valued efficiency more than personal niceties'. She considers Oswald Stoll to be the epitome of this new breed. My usage of the term is more restricted, applying only to entrepreneurs who deployed specific practices designed to achieve greater efficiency.
31. For details of the expansion of Butt's music hall empire, see chapter 6.
The rise of Alfred Butt is indicative of the fact that the more hierarchically structured limited liability music hall companies opened up a new route to the achievement of 'Big Man' status within the music hall industry, via professional training and business experience in other industries. However, this emerged in addition to, and not as a replacement for, the more traditional means of attaining positions of power within the music hall business. Not all of the new generation of music hall entrepreneurs of the early twentieth century had gained experience of big business outside of the music hall trade. Beneath the glittering new stratum of theatres of varieties, there remained a flourishing undergrowth of smaller and less highly capitalised halls.  

The proprietorial methods of ownership and management which were being banished from the theatres of varieties proved to be still appropriate in this context. It was still possible for impresarios to work themselves up from humble origins to the highest offices of the music hall industry. A famous example of this progression is provided by Walter Gibbons, of whom the Magnet commented that 'no man associated with the variety world has enjoyed a more remarkable, versatile and meteoric career.'  

Gibbons rose from a manual job in a Wolverhampton steel mill to become the managing director of the London Theatres of Varieties Ltd., in control of over 20 London music halls, and was eventually knighted. Gibbons subscribed to the more traditional autocratic model of proprietorship. Gibbons championed the private company, and the lengths to which Gibbons went to to retain his personal control over companies after their incorporation has already been chronicled in chapter 4. His proprietorial entrepreneurial style

32. See chapter 7.
33. Magnet, 22 June, 1912, p. 4.
undoubtedly owed much to the influence of his father-in-law and business partner George Adney Payne.

Gibbons was far from alone in attempting to reconcile the style of the proprietor with the responsibilities of the company director. Other entrepreneurs of this ilk included Henri Gros, who was primarily involved in the management of suburban London halls. The *Music Hall and Theatre Review* described Gros as 'a company chairman with the best characteristics of the old style accessible entrepreneur', to whom artists could speak 'sans intermediary'. He also retained an old-fashioned conception of the role of director as 'the trustee of his shareholders'.

The rise to prominence within the music hall industry of Thomas Barrasford followed a similar pattern to that of Gibbons and Gros. His provincial circuit was also made up largely of relatively small and inexpensive halls which he had owned proprietorially before adopting the use of limited liability in the first decade of the twentieth century. His character was undoubtedly imbued with the proprietorial spirit, and, on his death, the *MHTR* explicitly contrasted his style to that of the more modern music hall entrepreneurs.

By performers he was greatly beloved, for he was a generous and kindly employer; they were conscious, too, that he knew their intimate life, the difficulties of their work, and regarded both with the sympathy which is apt to be missing from the attitude of what is nowadays known as 'the music-hall magnate'... he preserved more than any other of his distinction and import that friendly intercourse with his artist-assistants.


35. *MHTR*, 3 February, 1910, p. 75.
Perhaps significantly, in view of Bailey’s comments on the character of the caterer, Barrasford’s main passion in life was horse racing, and the MHTR remarked that

He attacked the business of popular entertainment very much as he went racing - he was wont to bet in very large sums. He often won or lost thousands of pounds in a day.36

Nevertheless, as an example of the transitional nature of this generation of entrepreneurs between ‘proprietors’ and ‘directors’, it is worthy of note that he also

Made a feature of submitting all the financial details of his business to a constant and searching process of accountancy.37

There was not, therefore, a dramatic and clear-cut shift in the entrepreneurial style of the Big Men of the music hall industry between 1885 and 1920, away from that of the ever-present and sociable proprietor to rule by the absentee bureaucrat-director. A sea-change was undoubtedly under way, but the extent of the transformation was limited in a number of ways. Many of the entrepreneurs in dominant positions within the business in 1920 had accumulated managerial experience spanning the periods in which both styles of management were dominant. Moreover, the rise of bureaucratic music hall management did not bring about the extinction of halls run on the proprietorial model. Large numbers of small halls run on this system continued to exist throughout the period in which large limited liability companies dominated the music hall business. These halls continued to act as a seed bed for music hall entrepreneurs. Many, and perhaps most, of the music hall entrepreneurs of the pre-war period retained an

36. Ibid, p. 75.
37. Ibid, p. 75.
affinity for the proprietorial ethos, and the model of the entrepreneur as the 'Big Man'.

Nevertheless, although it was still possible for proprietors to become directors, in order to maintain their success, it was necessary for these entrepreneurs to adjust their style to the new and increasingly competitive business environment and adopt a more rational, efficiency-orientated attitude to their enterprises.

5-4 Directors and the Professionalisation of Decision-Making

One feature of the limited liability revolution which posed a particular threat to the continuance of the proprietorial style was that the 'Big Men' of the business, however personally prominent, became part of a team - the board of directors. Decision-making became, at least formally, a collective matter. Neither the records in existence, nor the space available in the present context justify an analysis of all directors in the same biographical detail that has been accorded the most famous entrepreneurs in the foregoing discussion. Nevertheless, it is both possible and worthwhile to examine the types of men who dominated these new decision-making committees, and in particular to assess the extent to which these bodies were penetrated by skilled business administrators from outside of the music hall fraternity, and particularly from the legal and accounting professions.

The inroads which bureaucratic organisation had made into the music hall industry by 1920 are highlighted by the prominent positions within the industry held at this date by two trained accountants, Mr. R.H. Gillespie and Mr. W.S. Gordon Michie. In
the years during which Moss and Stoll bestrode Moss Empires, both were employed at the headquarters of the company in Cranbourn Mansions. When the partnership was dissolved in 1910, Gillespie remained with Moss Empires, eventually becoming managing director on the retirement of Frank Allen in 1920. Michie chose to follow Stoll across London to the Stoll Offices in the Coliseum Buildings, where he became Stoll’s chief financial adviser and right-hand man. By 1920 he held seats on 22 Stoll companies, and was Stoll’s representative on a number of other important music hall companies including the Variety Theatres Controlling Co., Barrasford Ltd., and the Alhambra (Paris) Ltd. Indeed, his influence spread beyond the companies which he directed as

The system of accounting introduced into the business by Gordon Michie has ever since been largely used throughout the industry.

5-4.1 From ‘practical men’ to professional administrators

Initially, however, there appears to have been much scepticism regarding the efficacy of a professional training as a qualification for music hall management. When H.H. Wells put himself forward for a seat on the Board of the Canterbury and Paragon Ltd. in 1891, Mr. E.C. Rawlings opposed his appointment, arguing that

With all due respect to Mr. Wells, it was impossible for him to know much about music hall management, and, although, he was acquainted with legal matters, that was a totally different thing. They had on the Board Mr. Payne, who was brought up in the music hall profession from the time he was a boy, and they had Mr. Hollingshead, who had long been acquainted with entertainments of all descriptions.

38. For full details see the list of ‘occupations of directors’ in, for example, the PRO file of the Holborn Empire, 1920. BT31 17458/84615. See also chapter 6.
40. Era, 19 September, 1891, p. 17.
The Syndicate Halls were in the vanguard in the breaking down of this prejudice against music hall outsiders in the early 1890s. The transformation began under the auspices of Newson Smith, who was, himself, a trained accountant, and had progressed from his position as auditor for the London Pavilion to a seat on the board in 1892. The consensus within the Syndicate over the desirability of this trend did not, however, remain intact long after the retirement of Newson Smith in 1896. Champions of the old order soon emerged, goaded into action by the appointment of Mr. C.S. Gover, primarily on account of his legal skills, as one of Newson Smith’s replacements on the board of the Oxford Ltd. This decision was opposed by a group of shareholders who felt that the appointment of Mr. Henry Tozer would have been more appropriate given his greater direct experience of music hall management. The extent of the rift over this issue is indicated by the fact that one-third of the shareholders were prepared to support the opposition to Gover’s appointment. The concept of the 'practical man' was central to the ensuing power struggle, and was used in an attempt to undermine the position of the incumbent chairman of the Syndicate Halls, Mr. Hugh Astley who

Confessed that he felt that Mr. Payne had belittled him to a certain extent when he said that he was not a practical man. 42

Mr. Henry Sutton reiterated the importance of the 'practical man' at the London Pavilion general meeting in 1897, in stating that

He wished to take the sense of the meeting as to whether or not a practical man should be added to the Board, and suggested Mr. Albert Gilmer, the manager of the Princess's Theatre, who was thoroughly au fait with the music hall business. 43

41. Era, 6 February, 1897, p. 19.
42. Era, 23 April, 1898, p. 21.
43. Era, 6 Feb, 1897, p.20.
The note of moderation in the attitude of the Syndicate Halls with regard to this issue was captured in another suggestion of Sutton's, namely, that H.H. Wells be elected to the board of the New Tivoli. Sutton thought this to be a prudent course of action on account of the fact that Wells was

Not only very practical in music hall matters, but he gave them the further benefit of his legal experience, which was of great value to a company of this sort. 44

Thus, at this early stage in the professionalisation of music hall administration, a balance was maintained between directors with a detailed understanding of the music hall trade and those with a broader knowledge of business administration. The shareholders of the Syndicate Halls seem to have held the opinion that there was a very clear limit to the extent to which it was desirable to import professionals into music hall management. The boardroom was still regarded as an appropriate place for 'practical men' with direct knowledge of the music hall business, and Adney Payne remained a prominent director of the Syndicate Halls.

The influence of professional administrators within the music hall industry did not, though, spread at a constant rate from these beginnings in the 1890s until 1920. Before the turn of the century other music hall companies were slow to follow the lead provided by the Syndicate Halls. This resistance to change initially included such entrepreneurs as Stoll and Moss whose names were later to become synonymous with bureaucratic music hall

44. Era, 5 August, 1899, p. 16. It should be noted that in a previous quotation, dating from 1891, H.H. Wells had been criticised for not being a 'practical man'. It would appear therefore that the boundaries of these groups were permeable, and that 8 years was considered, by some people at least, to be a sufficiently long apprenticeship in the business.
administration. Moss originally preferred to pack the boards of his companies with 'practical men', well versed in the specifics of the music hall business. His first limited liability venture, the Edinburgh Empire Ltd., was undertaken in co-operation with John Hollingshead, the well known theatre proprietor. Soon after this he struck up his first long term partnership with Richard Thornton, a Tyneside publican turned music hall proprietor. In collaboration with a third theatre proprietor James Kirk they floated the Birmingham Empire in 1893. A further triumvirate of theatrical proprietors, Moss, Thornton, and Mr. C.E. Machin composed the initial board of the Sheffield Empire.

The flotation of the Liverpool, Leeds and Hull Empire Palaces Ltd. in 1896 marked a turning point in the development of Moss' business strategy. This enterprise was both the first of Moss' companies to control a number of halls, and also the first project which he undertook in collaboration with Oswald Stoll. More significantly in the present context, though, the board of this company also included Mr. William Houlding who offered an attractive combination of outside business interests, being involved in the Liverpool brewing industry as well as possessing a training as a barrister. Moss consolidated this policy shift towards allying theatrical experience with organisational expertise the following year with the completion of the directorial team of Moss-Thornton-Stoll-Houlding-Allen, which was to guide Moss Empires to predominance in the music hall industry. Frank Allen had gained valuable administrative experience in the

45. For Thornton's early business ventures, see Mellor, op. cit., p.33.
46. Edinburgh Empire, SRO BT2 2139; Birmingham Empire, BT31 5615/39113; Sheffield Empire, SRO BT2 2707.
47. SRO BT2 3096.
civil service before entering the employ of Thornton in 1885, as the general manager of the South Shields Variety Theatre, at the age of 34. As the General Manager of Moss Empires he was to become the key figure in the construction a hierarchy capable of the efficient management of such a large and geographically dispersed organisation.

5-4.2 Resistance to professionalisation: Stoll and the Coliseum

Despite his integral role in the success of Moss Empires, Stoll retained an ambivalent attitude towards the professionalisation of boards of directors, and the development of a teamwork approach to high level decision-making. His eventual resignation from the board of Moss Empires in 1910 was probably made inevitable by his insular and autocratic temperament. As the MHTR pointed out at the time, Stoll was a man

Whose business sympathy with co-operation is always tempered by a certain autocracy and consciousness of his own strength.

Stoll found it difficult to become part of a team, to be surrounded by equals in terms of both ability and authority. Indeed, throughout the period of his partnership with Moss, Stoll had retained control of an independent music hall circuit outside of, but working in collaboration with, Moss Empires. The boards of these companies had a standard composition, comprising Mr. Selig Brukewich, a gentleman from Hampstead, and Mr. Patrick W. Carey, a long-time associate of Stoll's from Cardiff. Stoll no


49. MHTR, 6 October, 1910, p. 633.
doubt found these co-directors less threatening to his personal position, as they were neither music hall experts nor professional administrators. Thus the flotation of the Leicester Palace in 1900 appears to have been the beginning of an attempt by Stoll to halt this trend towards the professionalisation of high-level decision-making, and to retain and enhance his own autocratic powers.

Even Stoll, though, did not prove equal to stemming the tide of professionalisation. His resistance was fatally undermined by the spectacular collapse of the London Coliseum Ltd. in 1906. The Coliseum project was very much the personal brainchild of Oswald Stoll in both its conception and its instigation. Stoll was renowned for his strict personal moral code, and was

Obsessed by the idea that the music hall should be raised to the level of drawing room entertainment. 50

He envisaged that the Coliseum would be the first variety theatre in which the moral tone of the performances would match up to his own standards of morality.

It soon became very clear that under Oswald Stoll’s management the Coliseum was going to be quite unlike any other music-hall in London. It was to conform to his own fastidious tastes, assume his high standards of morality. 51

To offset the greater cost of providing the ‘improving’ entertainments of the kind he intended, Stoll was forced to make high admission charges, and it was planned that the hall would run four performances per day in order to tap the opportunities offered by the constantly shifting population of the West End. In this particular instance, Stoll’s business judgement appears to

50. Mellor, op. cit., p. 140.
51. Barker, op. cit., p. 54.
have been clouded by his earnest desire to improve the halls. Construction costs greatly exceeded estimates and the required audiences failed to materialise.\footnote{52} In April 1906 the company reported that it owed its creditors a total of £84,269, and the London Coliseum Ltd. was voluntarily wound up on 17th May.\footnote{53} Due to the considerable amount of personal effort and prestige which Stoll had invested in the project he was anxious to regain control of, and to resuscitate, the Coliseum. The committee of shareholders appointed to examine the possibilities for reconstructing the company were, however, not prepared to consider any scheme which left Stoll and his existing directorial team in unchecked control of the hall. They did, though, relent on their initial insistence that any managing director appointed should have no interests in other music hall companies, in order to allow Stoll to attempt to rescue the company.\footnote{54} Despite Stoll’s readiness to secure £30,000 of the required £65,000 of debenture stock personally, raising the extra finance proved impossible.\footnote{55}

Undeterred by this, Stoll acquired the hall from the liquidators of the London Coliseum later in 1907. He had, however, been chastened by the experience and acknowledged that fundamental changes were necessary in order to run the hall profitably. The prospectus for the Coliseum Syndicate stated that

\begin{quote}
It is proposed, in view of the experience gained by the previous working of the theatre to reopen and work it on more conventional lines than was the case
\end{quote}

\footnote{52} The projected construction costs of the building were around £100,000. The actual costs amounted to between £3-400,000. D. Jeremy, \textit{op. cit.}, vol. 5, p. 356. This was far from an uncommon fate amongst newly constructed West End halls. In many cases, including those of the Palace Theatre and the Tivoli, the company which raised the halls collapsed soon after their completion.\footnote{53} \textit{Times}, 27 April, 1906, p. 15; BT31 10030/75014.\footnote{54} \textit{Times}, 22 November, 1906, p. 5.\footnote{55} \textit{Times}, 14 January, 1907, p. 6.
formerly, and, in particular, it is intended to have only one performance each afternoon and evening.\textsuperscript{56}

This reformation of policy extended right up to the level of the boardroom. Carey survived the collapse intact but Brukewich was replaced by the successful theatrical entrepreneur F.W. Wyndham, the managing director of Howard and Wyndham Ltd. Moreover, the liquidators of the London Coliseum Ltd. would only agree to the resale of the property to Stoll if they were able to nominate two directors to the board to safeguard the interests of the owners of the defunct company.\textsuperscript{57} The nominees of the liquidators were Walter Battle and Mr. H.J. Thomas, a stockbroker with a number of other directorships in a wide variety of industrial enterprises outside of the music hall business. In 1909 Frank Allen was added to the board. Thus, a new board had been forced upon Stoll, which comprised not only other theatrical entrepreneurs, but also businessmen who had developed their administrative skills outside the music hall business. Under this new leadership the theatre flourished.\textsuperscript{58}

The disastrous failure of the Coliseum appears to have had a knock-on effect on the make-up of the strategic decision-making team of Stoll's other companies. In 1908 the managerial talents of Allen were drafted into his service. However, the death of Carey in 1910 and the appointment of Allen as managing director of Moss Empires in 1911 required Stoll to undertake a more thoroughgoing reconstruction of his directorial team. Stoll continued to favour the presence of long-time associates, and

\textsuperscript{56} Times, 12 October, 1907, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{57} This was necessary as the entire cost of the hall, except for £44,000, was paid to the liquidators not in cash but in debenture stocks of the new company. D. Jeremy, op. cit., vol 5, p. 357.
\textsuperscript{58} For details of the Coliseum Syndicate, see BT31 37247/95197.
included Dr. B.W. Broad, the Medical Superintendent to Cardiff City Corporation. He also, however, invited Battle and Thomas, who had originally been imposed upon him, to join his boards of directors.

5-4.3 The spread of professional administration in the 1900s

The chronology of this detailed case study of the transition to less proprietorial and more administratively competent directorates, is clearly related to the specific circumstances relating to the business interests of Oswald Stoll. Nevertheless, similar transformations in the organisation of several other nationally important music hall syndicates took place simultaneously.

It has already been noted that Walter Gibbons preferred to run his halls in a proprietorial style. Even after he had adopted the policy of incorporating his halls in 1905, they continued to operate, informally, as private companies, in which he was the sole director and reserved the right to appoint other directors for himself. Gibbons was forced to end his splendid isolation in 1908. The flotation of the London Theatres of Varieties and the Capital Syndicate in this year marked a significant shift in this policy, signalling Gibbons' intention to integrate and greatly expand his London based music hall empire, the latter company being primarily a contracting and building company with the stated object

To purchase, take on lease, or otherwise acquire...in particular land, buildings and hereditaments...for the

59. The Holborn Empire Ltd. was the first of these companies. BT31 17458/84615. For further details see chapter 4.
This more grandiose vision required the tapping of outside capital. In order to obtain this Gibbons was forced to sacrifice his directorial monopoly. Initially, Gibbons enlisted the aid of another theatre proprietor, George Dance; a solicitor, Mr. Arthur Copson Peake; and the auctioneer Mr. Sidney Marler. Once Gibbons had taken the first steps in this directorial revolution he was unable to prevent it running its full course. In 1912 Gibbons' intransigence in the face of severe criticisms of his directorial style from a significant group of London Theatre of Varieties shareholders led to Gibbons being bought out by a 'wealthy syndicate at a very big figure'.

As a result of this takeover Mr. Amery Parkes, another solicitor, and Mr. Charles Gulliver, the secretary of the company who had also had experience of working in a solicitors office, were added to the board. In the same year a merger of interests was agreed with Stoll, who was added to the board, along with his new henchmen Thomas and Battle, bringing the size of the board up to seven members. The transformation was completed in 1913, when Gibbons was forced off the board and replaced by Mr. R.B. Stephens a businessman with considerable experience of other branches of the leisure industry, and particularly the business of a hotelier.

Thomas Barrasford was considerably more willing than Gibbons to work with other directors as part of a team after the

62. For details of the takeover, see S.T Felstead, 1946, Stars Who Made the Halls, p. 120. For biographical details of Gulliver, see Parker, op. cit., p. 33.
63. BT31 18369/97040.
incorporation of his proprietorially run halls. He did not, however, favour the introduction of professional administrators to the boards of directors. His co-directors were generally drawn from traditional sources in the leisure trade, and particularly from amongst music hall and theatre proprietors. Of his seven co-directors of the Hippodrome Nottingham, incorporated in 1907, five were theatrical proprietors, namely, E.J.K. Savage, W. Sley, T.A. Edwardes, F. Willmott and George Dance. The remaining directors were A.L. and G.W. Parkinson, the building contractors. 64

The professionalisation of the upper echelons of the administrative hierarchy of this circuit was again initiated by the expansion of Barrasford’s interests in the music hall business. The creation of the London, Provincial and Continental Vaudeville Circuit in 1908 allied the provincial halls of Barrasford to those of Gibbons, which dominated suburban London. 65 This association was an attractive proposition due to the complementary geographical distribution of their halls, and also probably because the two entrepreneurs catered for similar audiences and shared a proprietorial management style. The original board of Barrasford Ltd., the company which Thomas Barrasford created to oversee his interests, was packed with theatrical proprietors, and included Barrasford himself, Sley, Savage, and George Dance, although after the agreement with Gibbons the solicitor Arthur Copson Peake was added to the board. 66

64. BT31 18253/95392.
65. The first reference to this combination was made in Era, 7 November, 1908, p. 35. For further details of this merger see chapter 6.
66. For details of Barrasford Ltd., see BT31 17280/81715.
The decisive event though in hastening the incursion of professional administrators into the management of the Barrasford circuit was the death of its founder. The demise of this forceful character opened the way for a more professionalised approach to the management of the circuit. He was replaced on the board of Barrasford Ltd. by the music hall entrepreneur Walter de Frece, an accountant Mr. G. Chantrey, and Alfred Butt whose blend of knowledge from both of these professions epitomises the transformation currently under consideration. The balance of power on the board shifted decisively in favour of the professional administrators in 1913 with the addition of two further accountants - Mr. W.H. Chantrey and Mr. C.H. Bould. The board of nine now contained 4 theatrical proprietors, a solicitor, 3 accountants and a music hall entrepreneur with a firm grounding in accountancy.\textsuperscript{67} This particular example highlights the continued importance of individuals in shaping the destiny of the music hall industry, and starkly contrasts the attitudes of an older generation of music hall entrepreneurs represented by Barrasford, to the new breed of which Alfred Butt was a prime example.

An examination of changes in the top-ranking decision-making personnel of another provincial circuit, controlled by Frank MacNaghten, confirms the impression it was during the first decade of the twentieth century that bureaucratic control became widely accepted and the significance of music hall proprietors in high-level decision-making began to wane. MacNaghten originally also favoured 'practical men' as directors. Of the six board members of the North of England Theatres Corporation in 1902, four were

\textsuperscript{67} BT31 17280/81715.
theatrical proprietors, the other directors being Mr. E.P. and Mr. A. Reynolds who described themselves, respectively, as a gentleman and a metallurgical engineer. By 1908 the size of the board had been halved. Both MacNaghten and A. Reynolds survived this pruning, but the other three theatrical proprietors had been removed from the board. In their stead sat Mr. W.J. Smith, a solicitor.68

This transformation was not, however, experienced equally by all types of music hall company. The companies referred to above, in which the transformation was apparent, were all companies which oversaw the operation of a number of halls, and therefore had a particular need for efficient bureaucratic management. More traditional management forms appear to have persisted in other areas of music hall enterprise. Provincial companies which remained independent of these large national circuits continued to draw their directors from more traditional sources. Directors were generally recruited from amongst music hall and theatre proprietors, and the investing classes, mainly gentlemen and businessmen. Most lived locally and the exact nature of their occupations varied in accordance with the social and economic characteristics of the settlement in which a company was based. Even amongst the most highly capitalised provincial companies which owned large halls on prime land in the centres of large cities, it was uncommon for boards to contain more than a single member with a background in business administration. The board of the Tivoli, Manchester Ltd., as constituted in 1904 provides a typical example of the mix of directors. They included the music hall manager Mr. A.B. Wilkes, and Mr. J. Keith, a London-based

68. BT31 7681/54829.
theatrical proprietors, the other directors being Mr. E.P. and Mr. A. Reynolds who described themselves, respectively, as a gentleman and a metallurgical engineer. By 1908 the size of the board had been halved. Both MacNaghten and A. Reynolds survived this pruning, but the other three theatrical proprietors had been removed from the board. In their stead sat Mr. W.J. Smith, a solicitor. 68

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68. BT31 7681/54829.
accountant, along with a licensed victualler from Tyldesley, a Manchester wine merchant, and another merchant, based in London. 69 A decade later the board had changed little. A.B. Wilkes was no longer a member of the board, whilst the licensed victualler had been replaced by a gentleman resident in Manchester. 70 The Birmingham Hippodrome exemplified a similar situation, in which organisational skills were added to a board dominated by music hall expertise. Incorporated in 1904, its original board consisted of Walter de Frece, William Sley, two other less prominent theatrical proprietors, and a diorama proprietor. 71 The first board of the New Birmingham Hippodrome in 1910 included the same personnel, with the addition of Alfred Butt. 72

Music hall companies were still commonly controlled entirely by men drawn from the music hall and allied businesses. The board of the Tivoli and Queens Theatres Ltd., which controlled 2 halls in Glasgow between 1903 and 1905 consisted of the well-known Scottish music hall entrepreneurs T.J Colquhon and B. McNamee Armstrong, in collaboration with 3 Glaswegian wine and spirit merchants. 73 Amongst music hall companies located in smaller towns it was unusual for the board to consist of anything other than local businessmen. 74

It would seem, therefore, that between 1885 and 1920, a transformation in the nature of high-level music hall management

69. The London-based merchant was also called Wilkes, and, presumably, was a relative of the manager Mr. A.B. Wilkes.
70. BT31 15573/46949.
71. BT31 17326/82515.
72. BT31 19592/111014.
73. SRO BT2/5454.
74. See for example the Wolverhampton Empire Palace, before its incorporation into the de Frece circuit, BT31 16116/60239, and the Palace Theatre, Carlisle, BT31 11215/85645.
The limited liability form, through the institution of the board of directors, fettered the Big Man to a team, and increasingly, especially in the first decade of the twentieth century, the members of this team came to be drawn from professional backgrounds which engendered administrative knowledge, to augment, or even supplant direct theatrical experience. The transition was, however, gradual and incomplete. The proprietorial spirit lived on. Many of the Big Men of the halls originally learnt their trade in the proprietorial era, whilst the flourishing undergrowth of less highly commercialised halls provided an environment in which the proprietorial ethos could continue to be nurtured.

A number of entrepreneurs sought to prevent the loss of their autonomy by being trapped into a decision-making team. These included Walter Gibbons, who took the simplest route to this end, in making himself the sole director of his companies, and Oswald Stoll who preferred to pack the boards of his companies with associates who lacked his stature and could be easily controlled. In all these instances, however, the proprietorial spirit had, ultimately, to be abandoned. Stock market investors made it clear to both entrepreneurs that, by the early twentieth century, they were no longer prepared to provide the capital for companies managed in this fashion. The directors and shareholders of the London Theatres of Varieties, indeed, eventually completely removed Gibbons from positions of power within the company. For those companies wishing to be integrated into, and to be able to compete at, the most organised levels of the industry, a more professional administration was a necessity. This does, nevertheless, mean that for the many companies that remained
independent of the formation of nationally integrated music hall networks, it was possible to take no part in this transformation. The managerial transformation was, therefore, localised in its development, being most significant in large cities, and particularly in London.

5-5 The Policy Implications of Professional Administration

The discussion of the penetration of managerial capitalism into the music hall business has so far focused on the managerial personnel themselves. It has been tacitly assumed that the rise of the salaried entrepreneur, whose qualification for high office rested on organisational skills rather than capital, had implications for the business practices of the music hall industry. This assumption has been necessitated primarily because of the paucity of historical evidence relating directly to the business practices of music hall limited liability companies. However, some assessment of the validity of this assumption is required.

Kocka has argued that the bureaucratic organisation of industry did not precipitate any fundamental changes in the basic aims of companies. These companies, as much as their predecessors which were controlled by owner-entrepreneurs, operated within the context of the capitalist system which demanded that company policy be guided by the survival instinct and the pursuit of profits and expansion.75 The divorce of ownership from control

75. J. Kocka, 1978, Entrepreneurs and managers in German industrialisation, p. 580. Hannah, op. cit., is a particularly valuable source of information on the development of 'managerial capitalism' in the UK.
did though, it is suggested, encourage a significant shift in the emphasis placed upon these competing objectives.

The economic success of the company by which they were employed remained an important consideration to the salaried entrepreneur. This ceased, however, to be an end in itself, as employees stood to gain less from profits than owner-entrepreneurs. Rather economic success acted primarily as a means of satisfying deeper desires for, amongst other things, 'fame, social status, striving for power, [and] the desire for position'. This difference of perspective generated a conflict of interests between shareholders and their top-level employees. To salaried entrepreneurs company growth became an end in itself. This generated a perspective which emphasized the importance of maintaining the stability and continuity of the company and its expansion through the re-investment of profits, rather than their distribution to shareholders.

5-5.1 The development of long-term financial planning

The relative power of shareholders and directors has been considered above. The initiative lay firmly with the latter group. One method of financial planning which was particularly efficacious in safeguarding the interests of salaried entrepreneurs, both by insuring companies against downturns in their fortunes, and by providing for the accumulation of capital for the financing of expansion, was the diversion of profits away from dividends and into reserve funds. This practice has, therefore, been taken to provide a useful guide to the strength of

77. See chapter 4.
the influence which the rise of salaried entrepreneurs exerted on the conduct business. I shall, accordingly, attempt to chart the speed of, and the extent to which, this practice was adopted within the music hall industry.

The peculiar vulnerability of music hall companies to rapid fluctuations in profitability which has been established in chapter 3, made the introduction of reserves particularly apposite to the sound financial management of music hall companies. This economic imperative of the music hall industry was keenly appreciated by contemporaries. The financial commentator of the *Times* remarked in 1913 that

> The nature of the business done by the Empires makes an adequate reserve a matter of the greatest importance. Circumstances are conceivable, without any undue strain on the imagination, that would have a gravely detrimental effect on all kinds of public amusement, and it is only by the creation of a strong and available reserve that such a crisis, if it occurred, could be weathered.\(^{78}\)

The *Times* was of the opinion that the transformation of the music hall industry had not proceeded with sufficient rapidity to greatly distance itself from its history of improvidence, nor from the belief that profits should be used to provide immediate benefit to the owners of a music hall.

One can easily put one's finger on other [music hall] enterprises whose provision against a possible rainy day it would take more than Sam Weller's double-million magnifying power optics to discover... There is but one way to tide them over when they [bad times] come, and that is by building up beforehand a strong reserve. That, rather than dividends, should be the first aim of all directors who have to do with such capricious ventures.\(^{79}\)

The *Times* specifically excluded Moss Empires from this criticism, and it would appear that its judgement was correct, and that those in positions of power within the largest of the music hall companies had come to accept the importance of sound finance. In 1910 Stoll cautioned the shareholders of Moss Empires that

> After a period of somewhat incautious liberality in regards to dividends, a period of more provident finance must ever ensue... Shareholders who take for gospel the principle that a company when paying ten per cent. is sounder than when paying five per cent. are too credulous. 80

Nevertheless, at this date there were still shareholders who retained the attitudes traditionally associated with investors, and the directors of the company were subjected to a savage attack during the 1910 general meeting. Stoll was forced to explain and defend the recent parsimony of the board.

> A five per cent. dividend might not be a satisfactory dividend, but...the profits of the company during the past five years had exceeded by nearly £70,000 the profits made in the previous five years...During the past five years a stronger financial position had been created, because there was now no enormous overdraft. Their aim had not been to pay the biggest dividend, but to strengthen the foundations of the company as opportunity offered. 81

Between 1905 and 1910 the directors of the company had created a reserve fund of £85,000.

Stoll felt obliged to resign in the wake of this assault on company policy, but this public display of disaffection, and the loss of Stoll and his financial team, which included W.S.G. Michie, did not deter the managers of Moss Empires from continuing to pursue a financial policy based on prudent long-term planning.

The Moss Empires report for 1912 stated that

The directors would have been justified in recommending a larger dividend, but they preferred to consolidate the company's financial position, keeping down the capital account and outstanding liabilities and strengthening the reserves.\(^{82}\)

By 1920 the reserve fund had been increased to £470,000.

Other music hall companies adopted similar policies, and there is even some evidence to suggest that by the end of the period under consideration shareholders had begun to accommodate themselves to this new strategy. In the case of the London Pavilion Ltd., the announcement made by Mr. H.H. Wells at the 25th annual meeting in 1922, that the reserves of the company had almost doubled since 1920, to £22,500, was greeted by cheering from the floor.\(^{83}\) Clearly, the use of reserves had become an accepted element of the financial management of the music halls by the early 1920s.

There is evidence to suggest that this awareness of the benefits which such a course offered was beginning to develop from before the turn of the century. In 1897, on the first occasion on which the Palace Theatre was in a position to declare a dividend (of 16\%), the chairman of the company, Count Max Hollender, explained that

It would have been within our power to suggest a slightly larger dividend than we have done, but we thought the policy of forming a small reserve was a wise one.\(^{84}\)

Hollender expanded upon the thinking of the board the following year.

\(^{82}\) Times, 7 February, 1913, p.14.  
\(^{83}\) Times, 14 February, 1922, p.19.  
\(^{84}\) Era, 16 October, 1897, p.22.
The directors believed in the equalisation of dividends... In this respect a large fund was a tower of strength.\textsuperscript{85}

This early initiative in the use of reserves was, therefore, something of an intermediate stage in the development of financial planning. The justification of the creation of a reserve was couched in the language of dividends and the interests of shareholders, and not in terms of the potential benefits which would accrue to the company from such a policy. The actions of another West End company, the Empire Palace Ltd., emphasizes the point already made that before the turn of the century financial planning was primarily a means of regularising dividends rather than securing the long term financial stability of a company. Instead of creating a reserve, the directors of the company, in 1893

\textit{Insured, through the marine department of one of the oldest insurances offices, six months’ profits of this undertaking, thus providing, in case of fire, that two consecutive quarterly interim dividends would be paid to the shareholders at the usual rates.}\textsuperscript{86}

Contemporaries were, though, at this early date becoming aware of the potential conflict between the interests of a company and its paid employees and those of its shareholders. This conflict surfaced in the battle for control of the Oxford Ltd. music hall in the wake of the death of Newson Smith. H.H. Wells attacked the incumbent board, which he considered was damaging the prospects of the company through its short-sighted attempts to court favour.

Altogether it seemed to be the policy of the board at present to pay the highest possible dividend, knowing

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Era,} 1 October 1898, p.18. 
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Stock Exchange Yearbook (SEYB),} 1894, p. 1066.
that nothing closed the mouths of the shareholders more than money. 87

Thus, the contemporary press provides abundant evidence that music hall entrepreneurs were becoming increasingly open to the advantages offered by long-term financial planning and that the use of reserve funds, a yardstick to the rise of the salaried entrepreneur, was already being practiced in the late nineteenth century, and had become a significant element in the financial policy of large music hall companies by 1920. However, the evidence offered so far is largely impressionistic, and provides little indication of precisely when the practice became widely adopted, nor indeed, any proof that this new business practice did, in fact, proceed beyond a small number of West End companies.

A more generalised overview of the growing importance of reserve funds to music hall limited liability companies can be garnered from the Stock Exchange Year Book, which includes such information in its company profiles. 88 Of the music hall companies listed in the SEYB, the first recorded instance of a

\[87. \text{Era, 11 June, 1898, p.16.} \]
\[88. \text{See appendix 2 for the problems involved in the use of this source. The following discussion is based upon a sample of 21 limited liability music hall companies taken from the SEYB. The companies were selected on the basis of their longevity. This approach was adopted in order to facilitate the observation of changes within the policy of individual companies over time, and also because the creation of a reserve fund was, in practice, dependent upon the survival of a company for a number of years, in order to generate the surplus capital required. This sampling method might, however, systematically exaggerate the importance to the industry of reserves if the holding of reserves is, as has been hypothesized, a significant contributor to company longevity. It should also be noted that the SEYB records include only formally held reserves. The following analysis does not, as a consequence, take account of reserves held informally in the form of large balances carried forward from one annual account to another. Nor does the SEYB provide any information regarding the significant issue of whether reserves were freely available in the form of cash, or were tied up in investments.} \]
music hall company establishing a reserve funds was that of the Alhambra Co., which put aside a sum of £9,000 in 1888. The practice did not, though, diffuse rapidly, and only a small number of the companies examined had created reserve funds by the end of the century. The Alhambra maintained its reserve almost continuously until 1916, but after 1894 it became a largely nominal resource which never exceeded £2,000. The London Pavilion was one of the few companies which held considerable reserves in the late nineteenth century. Its directors created a reserve of £12,500 in 1892, and maintained it at approximately £10,000 throughout the 1890s.

It is only after 1900 that sufficient numbers of companies held reserves to make quantification worthwhile. In the industry as a whole, the most significant increases in the use of reserve funds took place in the 1900s. By 1905 almost half of the companies examined had created a reserve fund.89

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89. See figure 5-1.
This data contains some unexpected features, most notably that Moss Empires and the Stoll companies were not amongst the pioneers of these new financial techniques in the music hall industry. The companies in this combine first introduced reserve funds in 1908. This shift in the business practice of Moss and Stoll in 1908 caused the proportion of the companies sampled which had created reserves to rise to 70%, a high point from which it fell back to around 58% by 1910. The proportion of companies with formal reserve funds remained virtually static at this level throughout the following decade.

Once the directors of the Moss-Stoll combine had accepted the principle in 1908, these companies embraced the policy rapidly and wholeheartedly. The timing of this conversion to the tenets of financial planning corresponds very closely with the fall and resurrection of the Coliseum, outlined earlier in this chapter. It would appear that this episode brought about major changes not only amongst the personnel holding the highest decision-making offices, but, in their train, triggered off a fundamental reappraisal of company policy, which thereafter placed greater stress on financial planning.

Figure 5-2 indicates that the use of reserves varied spatially, and that the utilisation of reserve funds by the music hall industry was geographically concentrated. Of the 9

90. See figure 5-1.
91. As already noted, the geographical coverage of the SEYB is, itself spatially biased. However, figure 5-3 shows that this factor alone is insufficient to account for the clarity of the pattern exposed in figure 5-2. The companies included in the sample have been divided into four geographically based groups. Those based in central and those based in suburban London, plus companies whose operations were located in provincial towns and cities. The fourth category is for constituent elements of the Stoll Circuit. Unless otherwise stated the data for Moss Empires
have been excluded from the following figures. This action was necessitated by the fact that the reserves of Moss Empires were an order of magnitude greater than those of any other company, and therefore swamped other patterns.
companies which had created a reserve by 1907 all but one, the Manchester Palace of Varieties, controlled halls located in London. 2 of the remaining 8 companies were suburban based, but the reserves of both of these companies, the Empress and Granville Theatres of Varieties, were insignificant. With the exception of the Empress in 1905, neither fund reached £1000. Of the total of £82,641 held in reserve by these 9 companies in 1907, £78,218, or 95%, was accounted for by the companies based in central London.

By 1920, the 5 suburban London companies which held reserves still accounted for only 6% of the total amount of capital held in reserves by all the music hall companies investigated. Provincial companies were responsible for even less, 2.25%, of the total. Indeed, these figures probably exaggerate the spread of the financial methods under discussion to the suburbs and the provinces, as 1920 was an exceptionally profitable year for the music hall industry, fuelled by the brief post-war consumer boom.92 A small proportion of the windfall profits of this year appear to have been diverted into reserve accounts by companies for which this was not normal practice. In 1919 the 7 provincial and suburban halls, out of a total of 18 of the sampled companies which were extant at this date, held a combined total of £445 in reserve, which represented just 0.33% of the total.

Thus, even allowing for the overrepresentation of metropolitan companies in the sample, it is indisputably the case that the use of reserve funds was almost entirely restricted to companies which owned nationwide chains of halls, or which operated in the West End of London.

92. See chapter 3 on this brief boom.
Even within central London there is a clear difference between the enthusiasm shown by syndicates and independent companies towards financial planning. The years 1903-4 are particularly significant in the growth in the use of reserves. 4 of the London-based companies introduced a reserve fund during this short period of time. These were the London Pavilion, the New Tivoli, the Oxford, and the Metropolitan. These companies, with the exception of the Metropolitan, had previously been the constituent members of the Syndicate Halls, and they retained a number of continuities with this period at the directoral level. These directors, therefore, had had a prior acquaintance with the coordination of operations between halls, and of the importance of professional administration. The Metropolitan had been incorporated in 1901 by surviving directors of the Syndicate Halls, Adney Payne and Tozer. Companies which remained resolutely aloof from this inter-hall collaboration, and continued to be run as independent and isolated concerns reacted more slowly to the change in mood amongst music hall entrepreneurs in favour of reserve funds. The Alhambra, it has already been noted, never held more than a token reserve, whilst its chief Leicester Square competitor, the Empire, only began a reserve fund in 1912. The final member of the select band of great independent halls, the Palace Theatre, did not introduce a reserve fund until 1907. It is far from coincidental that this happened shortly after the Palace Theatre obtained a new board member and managing director in the shape of the ambitious ex-accountant Alfred Butt, who rapidly integrated it into a chain of halls.93

93. For the rapid expansion of Butt's interests after 1907, see chapter 6.
Thus, there was a clear shift in the emphasis of the financial policy of music hall companies in the direction of greater long-term planning. The use of reserves increased primarily during the 1900s, which previous discussion has indicated was also the period during which professional administrators were becoming increasingly common on the boards of directors. Again, though, the use of reserves was not a general trend. Rather, it was limited to syndicates, as was the growth in the number of professional administrators. There would, therefore, appear to be close links between both of these transformations and the emergence of music hall syndicates in the 1900s.

5-6 The Bureaucratization of Music Hall Management

At the level of the entrepreneur, it is clear that a significant change took place in the nature of the personnel between 1885 and 1920. In the early years of the limited liability boom, directors were generally drawn from the ranks of music hall proprietors. Over time, and especially after the turn of the century, the individuals filling the highest strategic decision-making positions within the music hall industry, and particularly within those companies at the forefront of the organisation of the industry, were increasingly being drawn from backgrounds in law and accountancy. In the early twentieth century, a gulf was beginning to open up between theatrical management and the management of music hall companies, between managers and directors. Indeed, this separation was often institutionalised by the rules of music hall companies. The
articles of association of many companies expressly forbade their directors to hold any other position within the company.\textsuperscript{94}

The dividing line between these two spheres of activity was not impermeable. Indeed, Charles Coborn, one of the most informed stars of the music hall, considered the distinction between the two to be insufficiently clear.

In these [limited liability] companies' affairs the managers are seldom allowed to manage, fussy 'directors' having always a lot to say.\textsuperscript{95}

Whilst this quotation indicates the blurring of the line of division between the roles of the two groups, it also emphasizes the fact that this fundamental distinction was well established in the consciousness of contemporaries. The music hall industry had increased the sophistication of its management to the point that strategic decision-making and the day-to-day running of music halls had become the responsibilities of well-defined and separate groups within the management hierarchy.\textsuperscript{96} The crystallisation of this distinction is central to the process of industrial organisation, a phase of capitalist development that has also been termed 'managerial capitalism'.

Unfortunately, this new class of middle management was not considered to be particularly noteworthy by contemporary commentators. Even the trade press focused almost exclusively on the more glamorous members of the music hall profession, the magnates and the stars. The Board of Trade files which provide

\textsuperscript{94} Examples of companies limiting their directors in this way were the Alhambra Co., BT31 30742/2558c, and the Coliseum Syndicate, BT31 37247/95197 (vol. 1).


\textsuperscript{96} For a wider consideration of this distinction see S. Pollard, 1965, \textit{The Genesis of Modern Management}, chapter 1.
copious detail in regard to the directors and shareholders of companies remain silent with respect to this new and growing class of bureaucrats. The discussion below in attempting to chronicle something of the activities of this new stratum in the management hierarchy is therefore, of necessity, fragmented and uneven. The structure of the following analysis draws on the inspiration of Max Weber's writings on the growth of bureaucracy. Although much of his work focused on the development of state bureaucracies, Weber, nevertheless, contended that

The very large modern capitalist enterprises are themselves unequalled models of strict bureaucratic organisation.97

Weber considered the development of a clear managemental hierarchy, with active supervision of those at lower levels in the hierarchy by their superiors, to be the characteristic feature of a modern bureaucracy.98 Within each strata

Bureaucratisation offers above all the optimum possibility for carrying through the principle of specializing administrative functions.99

These new bureaucracies were characterised by the creation of jobs with clearly defined roles, and specific powers intended to allow the fulfillment of immediate and specific tasks.100

These developing hierarchies offered new opportunities for employees, who could usually expect a considerable degree of job security. The conjunction of this circumstance with the establishment of complex hierarchies with numerous subtle gradations of rank, facilitated the development of career paths.

98. Ibid, p. 957.
100. Ibid, p. 956.
It opened up to employees the prospect of a steady upward progression within a single bureaucratic organisation.\(^{101}\)

5-6.1 The development of complex managerial hierarchies within music halls

Within the music hall industry the specialisation of function was greatly encouraged by the increasing size of music halls and the technological sophistication of the equipment used therein.

However, before this, during the proprietorial phase of its development, the proprietors of the music hall business had not always been the polymaths depicted in the Baileyean ideal-type. The Adney Payne-Crowder partnership, for instance, had already instituted a rudimentary division of labour in the running of the Canterbury and Paragon halls in the 1880s. Mr. Crowder was assigned responsibility for dealing with the stage and other theatrical matters, whilst Adney Payne oversaw the operation of the bars and other commercial activities.\(^{102}\)

As the music hall industry grew this fundamental distinction within the operations of music hall companies was increasingly institutionalised, and job differentiation within each of these spheres proceeded rapidly. This process of elaboration can be exemplified through Turner Morton’s description of the ‘Running of a Great Variety Show’ at the Hippodrome, in *Pearson's Magazine*, September 1904.\(^{103}\) The Front of House Manager, at the head of a complex bureaucracy, held ultimate responsibility for all of the

\(^{101}\) Ibid, p. 963.


\(^{103}\) T. Morton, 1904, *Running of a great variety show*, pp. 254-63.
financial transactions taking place in the hall. He was supported by two assistants, who were themselves the immediate superiors of the heads of the box office. Beneath this were all of the operatives involved in the box office and the refreshment bars. Another separate and specialised branch of this front of house hierarchy were the 'staff of auditors who practically live on the premises'.

The other key figure in the management of the Hippodrome was the stage manager who was responsible for all of the theatrical matters, including not only dealing with the performers themselves and their performances, but also the painting of scenery and the construction of sets. The latter tasks alone requiring the services of 70 carpenters under the immediate control of a master carpenter. The stage manager also bore the ultimate responsibility for the in-house property-making department, which produced costumes, props, and such like. The chief electrical engineer and his team of electricians were also subordinates of the stage manager.

Clearly, the managers at the head of these large and complex hierarchies required considerable organisational skill. The Syndicate Halls were again to the fore in encouraging the appointment of personnel with a training in business administration at the managerial level. At the turn of the century, three of their most prominent managers had received their initial business training in Newson Smith’s accountancy office.

104. Ibid, p. 257.
106. These three were Harry Lundy, manager of the Oxford, Frank Glenister, manager of the London Pavilion, and the secretary of the Syndicate, Mr. Ilford Ibbetson. Era, 30 April, 1898, p.19.
Frank Glenister’s career path provides a particularly instructive example. As well as working for Newson Smith, he also had experience of working in a lawyers office before becoming attached to the Pavilion. His theatrical experience was, in contrast, limited. He gained his initial experience of the music hall business at Ronachers in Vienna, from which position he was immediately appointed assistant manager of the Pavilion on his return to England, before becoming manager in 1897. 107

5-6.2 The growth of centralised bureaucracies and the vertical integration of the music hall industry

Whilst it is clear that the level of managerial sophistication described above in the operation of the music halls was new to this period, and reflects the growing size of music halls, this trend is largely just the elaboration of the hierarchies which existed within music halls prior to the 1890s. A more significant feature of this phase in the development of music hall management was the creation of bureaucracies which dealt with issues beyond the immediate matters of providing a performance and ancillary services. These new bureaucracies, often centralised in a company headquarters or ‘co-operative offices’, were essential to the organisation of the music hall industry, and, in particular, to the integration of independent units into coherent circuits. As this chapter has indicated, financial planning became an increasingly important pre-occupation of these headquarters staff, especially after 1900.

Headquarters staff became particularly significant as the nature of the relationship between music hall companies and the

performers which they employed changed. The horizontal, spatial integration of the music hall industry was important in stimulating the use of long-term contracts between companies and artists, which became central to the economy of the business. 108 These, in turn, encouraged the vertical integration of the industry which I shall consider briefly here. As a result of this process, the companies which owned the halls became involved in every aspect of the industry, from the discovery of talent, through its engagement, to the production of performances.

The growth of long-term contracts was a significant element in the response of the music hall industry to the imperative of organised capitalism to limit the number of interactions between a company and the market, the vagaries of which militated against long-term planning. This transformation in the basis of employer-employee relations sought to undermine the position of the middleman, the agent. 109 As the length of contracts increased the number of agreements which needed to be made decreased. Many companies, therefore, began to build up bureaucracies within their headquarters staff which were capable of dealing with all booking matters. 110 This process of vertical integration possessed additional benefits. It increased the control that companies wielded over artists, and also provided a potential means of

108. The nature of the relationship between managements and artists, particularly in relation to contractual negotiations, and its implications for the economy of the music hall industry will be considered more fully in chapter 6.
109. Chapter 6 will chronicle the attempts of artists and managements to undermine each others position.
110. This conjunction of the roles of proprietor and agent was not unique to the syndicates. Indeed, many prominent music hall entrepreneurs, including Stoll and Walter de Frece, had acted as both agents and managers throughout their careers. However, with the involvement of syndicates the scale of this phenomenon increased greatly.
reducing labour costs, as companies which negotiated directly with artists often continued to deduct the customary 10% agents fee from the salaries of performers.111

The large music hall companies did not limit their incursions into the territory of the agent to the procuring of the services of established artists. Rather, ensnared by the voracious appetite of audiences for novelty, in the ever-escalating competition to provide fresh programmes, companies began to invest significant amounts of effort in the unearthing of new raw materials for the music hall stage.112

This particular aspect of the vertical integration of the music hall industry is relatively well chronicled, due to the fact that the 'Big Men' of the business were frequently involved in this area of the company's activities. Music hall companies extended their endeavours in this respect well beyond the limits of the UK. Entrepreneurs, prominent amongst whom were Alfred Moul and Alfred Butt, scoured the major continental cities, including Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Copenhagen, and even St. Petersburg, in the quest for new acts.113 Indeed, Europe was not the limit to their horizons. Butt considered the USA to be his most productive source of new turns.114 In 1910 Butt made an agreement with several of the most prominent circuits in the USA giving the Palace Theatre priority in introducing their stars to the British

111. This practice was very controversial. For an example of the strong reactions which it provoked, see the furore surrounding de Frece's attempts to implement this policy, Times, 2 November, 1908, p. 12.
112. The economic imperatives behind this often frenetic scramble for overseas talent are explored in chapter 6.
113. On Moul's travels, see Era, 5 September, 1909, p.22; For Butt, see P. Burton, 1907, How a variety theatre is run, p. 513; MHTR, 5 May, 1910, p. 279; and Summerfield, op. cit., p. 225.
stage. 115 Stoll immediately responded by acquiring the Cort Circuit of halls in America. 116

Moss went as far afield as India in 1904, explaining his explorations thus:

It occurred to me that there were possibilities in India, and I just ran over to see. I made a tour of the principal cities, and then I went on into the wild parts, and looked into the mysteries of all the native booths and camps that I could come across. The natives, I knew were great entertainers, and I was not disappointed in finding some of the cleverest jugglers, snake-charmers, wrestlers, and acrobats that I have ever come across. 117

This international talent spotting extended beyond the globe-trotting efforts of individual entrepreneurs. Moss Empires, for example, built up a network of special agents in the major cities of continental Europe and the USA. Barrasford, like many other entrepreneurs

Travelled extensively in search of farceurs, acrobats, singers, and dancers, and introduced many continental performers to English audiences. 118

He, though, took the unprecedented step of actually acquiring halls in Paris, Marseilles, Brussels and Barcelona in order to be able to assess the potential of local entertainers. 119

The UK music hall industry became involved in overseas countries in other ways. The Stars of the halls embarked upon tours all around the English-speaking world, notably the USA, South Africa, and Australia, where they were often remunerated

116. MHTR, 21 April, 1910, p. 249.
118. Era, 5 February, 1910, p. 25.
119. Ibid, p. 25.
even more lucratively than at home. One former employee went as far as to label Stoll the 'Minister of Entertainments for the Empire'. Nevertheless, the normal attitude of British companies to the rest of the world was almost invariably confined to their potential as a source of novel performers, rather than the scope they possessed as a market for performances. The main overseas music hall circuits were run by indigenous entrepreneurs, although, as has been indicated above, there was often a degree of co-operation with British music hall magnates.

5.6.3 Local management and the construction of spatial hierarchies

The internationalisation of the music hall business emphasizes an essential feature of the organisation of the industry, namely that the concentration of administration went hand-in-hand with the geographical expansion of interests. The immediate physical presence of directors was no longer possible at all of the halls under their control. Thus, if administrative centralisation was to be effective, multi-hall companies were required to devolve some of the more mundane aspects of decision-making to local bureaucracies and to construct effective systems of communication between these local bureaucracies and the headquarters.

That the issue of the delegation of responsibilities became increasingly important is evidenced by the frequent insertion into the articles of association of music hall companies of 'local management' clauses. As an independently run concern, the Alhambra avoided the need for such action for much of this period.

120. For details of a tour of America by Vesta Tilley, see Lady de Frece, 1934, Recollections of Vesta Tilley, pp. 171-227.
However, the new articles of 1916, occasioned by the takeover of the company by Stoll, included a clause which authorised the directors, at their discretion, to invest their powers in local bodies. This clause is typical of many such examples:

The Directors from time to time and at any time may establish any local board or agency for managing any of the affairs of the Company in any such specified locality, or may appoint any persons to be members of such local board or any managers or agents and may fix their remuneration. And the Directors from time to time and at any time delegate to any persons so appointed any of the powers, authorities, and discretions for the time being vested in the Directors, other than the power to make calls, and may authorise the members for the time being of any such local board or any of them to fill up any vacancies therein and to act notwithstanding vacancies. 122

Moss Empires’ response to the problem of creating an efficient chain of command between the central offices and individual halls was the adoption of a regional structure. The circuit of the company was sub-divided into 6 regions. Within each region one of the company’s halls took on additional bureaucratic functions under the auspices of a District Manager and acted as a conduit between individual halls and the Co-operative offices in Cranbourn Mansions, Leicester Square. 123

This division of responsibilities can be exemplified through the procedures adopted by Moss Empires in engaging artists. Their instructions to performers explain that:

All applications by either artists or their Agents must be made to head office... Vacant dates should be stated... [but] New Acts seeking Engagements, or turns not re-booked (possibly because they have played a series of dates without introducing new business),

123. Figure 5-4.
Figure 5-4. The regional structure of Moss Empires.
will facilitate matters by having their acts seen by our District Managers. 124

This geographical division of responsibilities extended to the highest levels of the bureaucratic structure of Moss Empires in the early years of the twentieth century. At this time Moss and Stoll held ultimate responsibility for different groups of halls, essentially aggregated around a north-south division of the companies interests, with Stoll being

Responsible for the management of the Cardiff, Swansea, Newport, Nottingham, New Cross, Holloway and Stratford Empires owned by that company. 125

Frank MacNaghten also adopted the expedient of dividing his interests into their northern and southern constituents, although in this case the organising principle was actually the provincial-metropolitan distinction. His organisational strategy for overcoming the spatial extension of his interests differed from that of Moss Empires in that he did not seek to unite these two distinct geographical groups under the umbrella of a single limited liability company. Instead he organised them into two separate companies, the Music Hall Proprietary Corporation, which oversaw his London halls from its headquarters in the Eastern Empire, Bow, and the MacNaghten Vaudeville Circuit, based in Sheffield. 126

5-6.4 Careers in music hall companies

The elaboration of bureaucratic hierarchies by large music hall companies, like Moss Empires, created an organisational

124. Advert in Era, 6 March, 1909, p. 36.
126. For details of MacNaghten's circuit, see chapter 2.
structure with a large number of finely differentiated strata. This provided their employees with the possibility of a career within the company offering frequent, but usually small, advances up the hierarchy in a relatively smooth career progression. This process of minute status differentiation was greatly encouraged by the incorporation of several halls within single companies, as substantively the same jobs could be invested with different amounts of status at different halls, depending on the size and the prestige of the theatre. Thus a transfer from a specific job in one theatre to a similar job in another could be seen as a promotion. Equally, the move from one level of management to the next could be accomplished gradually through a move from a less responsible job in a larger hall to a position of greater responsibility in a less prestigious setting.

Something of the complexity of the staffing of these companies can be captured in the movement of personnel within Moss Empires on a single day in 1911. 'Considerable surprise was occasioned' by the resignation of Mr. A.W. Matcham, brother of the architect Frank, from his post as manager of the Empire Birmingham, Moss Empires premiere establishment in the city. His place was filled by the promotion of Mr. W.H. Bebby whose previous experience as a manager had consisted solely of six months at the considerably less prestigious Bradford Empire. Prior to this he had been an assistant manager at the higher-profile halls, the Finsbury Park Empire and the Liverpool Olympia. Bebby was replaced as manager at Bradford by Mr. Mark Lorne, previously the manager of the Bordesley Palace, the least important of the three halls owned by Moss Empires in Birmingham.\footnote{127}

Another move made on the same day indicates how smooth and dynamic a career in music hall management could be. The defection of Mr. Edward Foster, manager of the Grand Theatre, Birmingham, to work for Alfred Butt at the Alhambra, Glasgow, provided Mr. Gordon E. Craig with his first opportunity to manage a theatre after only four years with the company, during which he had already served periods at the Empires in Glasgow, Edinburgh, New Cross, and Finsbury Park.128

This method of training personnel clearly had significant implications for the relationship between bureaucrats employed by syndicates and the halls in which they worked. Managers at the top of the hierarchy might enjoy considerable job stability as well as security. Before his resignation in 1911, Matcham had been manager of the Birmingham Empire for 17 years. Managers at lower grades, however, were less likely to develop a detailed knowledge of, or an identification with, a particular place. This also had implications for the relationship between staff of syndicate halls and their local context. Matcham, during his 17 years at the Empire, had been in a position to court local favour. The Era reported that

No person did more for Birmingham charities than Mr. Matcham during the past seventeen years, and for this work he well earned the warm hearted affection of his fellow citizens.129

For more junior managers ascending the career ladder it would appear that there was seldom time for the cultivation of links with the local community, a relationship which had often been critical to the economy of the proprietorially run hall. The

128. Era, 9 September, 1911, p. 20.
129. Era, 26 August, 1911, p. 20.
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future of junior management had become tied to a company rather than to a particular location, and managements, in consequence, became increasingly divorced from intimate contact with their local contexts.

5-6.5 Resistance to bureaucratisation.

It would, however, be something of an oversimplification to depict this trend towards the bureaucratisation of music hall administration as a unilinear or an uncontested process. Shareholders remained wary of the immediate and obvious financial burden imposed upon a company by a burgeoning bureaucracy. Opposition was particularly common during the early years of the limited liability era and was often focused upon the practice of locating company offices elsewhere than on the premises of the hall. As already indicated, Newson Smith pioneered the professionalisation of the administration of the halls, and the question of the desirability of this trend arose immediately after his resignation as a director of the Oxford Ltd. in 1897. Mr. H.H. Wells estimated that simply transferring the offices from their present location in Cockspur Street back to the Oxford would effect a saving of £200 per annum.130 In this Wells was following a lead given by the Palace Theatre in the previous year. Having failed to pay a dividend on any occasion since its incorporation in 1892, the company decided to reduce its administrative costs. The 1896 annual report noted that

The office of the company has been removed from the City to the theatre, where a room was available for the purpose, and considerable economies in various ways have been effected.131

130. Era, 6 February, 1897, p. 19.
These outbursts were not, though, the last stands of a rejected anti-bureaucratic ideology of business management. Indeed, the most notable outbreak of opposition to the administrative bureaucratization in the history of the halls took place as late as 1910. This was triggered by a run of several consecutive years of low dividends endured by the shareholders of Moss Empires. The attack was mounted at the 1910 annual meeting by Mr. George Gray. He contended

That a profit of £35,000 could be made, instead of being absolutely wasted in gross extravagance at the offices. Enormous offices had been taken... [and] they had a hundred clerks in extraordinary positions... they had a managers’ department, an accountant’s department, a stage managerial department, the publicity and Press department, the contract and booking department, the secretarial department, the legal department, and the bioscope [cinema] department.  

Gray brought particular attention to what he perceived to be the failure of the company’s spatial hierarchy to act as an adequate channel of communication between the central administration and the halls. This, he asserted, had resulted in the creation of an over-centralized and inflexible administration. The manager of each of their halls was absolutely placed in the position of an office-boy. He could do nothing. If a pound of glue was wanted he had to fill up a long schedule and await permission, and by the end of the week a pound of glue at 8d. had cost 3s. 6d.  

Gray argued that the bureaucratization of music hall management was not a necessary corollary of geographical expansion. He pointed out to the assembled shareholders that

133. Ibid, p. 23.
There was another syndicate outside their own conducted with about eight principals and six clerks.\textsuperscript{134}

Moreover, Gray's denunciation of company policy was not restricted to the lower levels of the management hierarchy. Gray extended his attack to express dissatisfaction with the lead being given to the company at the entrepreneurial level, and resurrected many of the arguments associated with the ideology of 'enlightened self-interest' previously examined in this chapter. He considered that the company exercised insufficient control over its directors.

A director was not allowed to enter into engagements which might conflict with the interests of the company, but they had given their directors power to enter any other business whatsoever.\textsuperscript{135}

On this point Gray found support from another disgruntled shareholder, Mr. R.W. Gardiner, who stated the objections of shareholders more directly. He thought that

It was not in the best interests of the company that Oswald Stoll was managing director of an opposition house.\textsuperscript{136}

Gray blamed this situation upon the pernicious influence of the 'co-operative system' of music hall organisation. Gray proceeded further with his espousal of the ideology of 'enlightened self-interest' in noting that

Many directors of companies similar to that worked upon results. If they did not show 10 per cent., they took nothing.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, p. 23.
Gray thought that this would be 'a very excellent basis upon which to engage their directors'.

This episode is instructive in a number of ways. First, it indicates the extent to which the institution of a divisionalised bureaucracy had developed in the management of Moss Empires. Beyond this, though, it reiterates the point that this process was not accepted universally or uncritically, and that as late as 1910 not all shareholders had come to identify their interests with those of the directors and managers of a company. Moreover, in Gray it is possible to see the inter-articulation of a number of the strands of the ideology of 'enlightened self-interest', which were considered in isolation above, into a single ideological system which defined itself in opposition to the modernisation of the music hall industry.

5-7 Conclusion

The above discussion has indicated that, although individual entrepreneurs remained important within the music hall industry, the style of entrepreneurship changed to suit the circumstances of the emerging organised music hall industry. Interestingly, it was not unusual for Moss, Stoll, or the other music hall magnates to be lauded as a 'Napoleon of the Halls'. This was also a title to which, it has already been noted, William Holland aspired. Significantly though, the point of reference was different. Whilst Holland sought, in the 1860s and 1870s, to emulate the flamboyant Napoleon III, by the end of the century it was considered that a more appropriate model for the theatrical

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138. Ibid, p. 23; For an additional account of this meeting, see MHTR, 17 February, 1910, p. 167.
proprietor could be provided by the empire-building founder of the
dynasty, Napoleon Bonaparte.¹³⁹

However, this did not represent the complete transformation
hypothesized from 'publicans' to 'accountants'. Indeed, due to
the rapid rise and fall of the music hall industry in the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the entrepreneurial
personnel changed very little. The rapid expansion and
organisation of the music hall business into a nationwide industry
in the late nineteenth century, and its equally dramatic collapse
in the years before the first World War foreclosed the possibility
of a gradual evolution from the one managerial form to another
being completed. The whole gamut of transformations which
revolutionised the nature of the music hall industry and created,
for a fleeting moment, a dynamic, highly capitalised and well
organised leisure industry, and eventually led it to bankruptcy,
could be subsumed within the business life-span of a single
generation. The example of the Barrasford circuit indicates most
dramatically the braking effect which the survival of
representatives of this generation of entrepreneurs, steeped in
the culture of the proprietor, could have on the rate of
managerial transformation.

More significant were the changes in the context within
which entrepreneurs operated. During the early twentieth century,
it was no longer possible to consider entrepreneurs in isolation.
Entrepreneurs were forced to submit themselves to the disciplines

¹³⁹. Interestingly, during this phase of the organisation of
capital, comparisons with Bonaparte were not restricted to
entrepreneurs involved in the entertainments industry. The
analogy had a more widespread usage. William Lever, for example,
was also known as a 'Napoleon of organization'. P.L. Payne, 1967,
The emergence of the large-scale company in Great Britain, p. 535.
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However, this did not represent the complete transformation hypothesized from 'publicans' to 'accountants'. Indeed, due to the rapid rise and fall of the music hall industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the entrepreneurial personnel changed very little. The rapid expansion and organisation of the music hall business into a nationwide industry in the late nineteenth century, and its equally dramatic collapse in the years before the first World War foreclosed the possibility of a gradual evolution from the one managerial form to another being completed. The whole gamut of transformations which revolutionised the nature of the music hall industry and created, for a fleeting moment, a dynamic, highly capitalised and well organised leisure industry, and eventually led it to bankruptcy, could be subsumed within the business life-span of a single generation. The example of the Barrasford circuit indicates most dramatically the braking effect which the survival of representatives of this generation of entrepreneurs, steeped in the culture of the proprietor, could have on the rate of managerial transformation.

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139. Interestingly, during this phase of the organisation of capital, comparisons with Bonaparte were not restricted to entrepreneurs involved in the entertainments industry. The analogy had a more widespread usage. William Lever, for example, was also known as a 'Napoleon of organization'. P.L. Payne, 1967, *The emergence of the large-scale company in Great Britain*, p. 535.
of working within the confines of a team of high level decision-makers. It was amongst these directors that the professionalisation of the music hall industry proceeded most rapidly in the music hall industry. A consideration of the timing of these changes indicates that the penetration of accountants, lawyers and other professionals into the business became significant during the 1900s. This transformation was quickly reflected in the financial policies pursued by music hall companies.

The compressed nature of the history of the halls undoubtedly encouraged the development of a professionalised music hall administration. Economic historians are agreed that the prevalence of family firms in other sectors of British industry was a major factor in inhibiting the rise of the 'brilliant salaried official', as top managerial posts were monopolised largely by family members. No such barriers existed within the music hall industry. Its rapid rise and fall precluded the development of dynasties of music hall managers.

However, the extent of this managerial revolution should not be exaggerated. It affected only a small part of the music hall industry. It was, primarily, amongst the geographically extended music hall syndicates, the complexities of managing which have been chronicled in the second half of this chapter, that these efficient new administrative techniques were widely adopted.

The bureaucratisation of music hall administration was generally confined to those companies which were actively involved in the creation of a nationally integrated music hall industry.

140. Ibid, p. 538;
Companies which remained outside of this process of organisation were largely unaffected by it. These companies were most likely to be those located in the smaller towns into which, as chapter 2 has indicated, the syndicates seldom penetrated. Others which remained outside of this transformation, however, included companies which were well established before the process of integration began. This is particularly true of the established halls of the West End, such as the Empire and the Alhambra. These halls remained independent until the First World War, and continued to be run largely by gentlemen throughout this period.141

Therefore, it is to these syndicates, as the main source of organisational transformation in the music hall industry, that I shall turn my attention in the next chapter.

141. See chapter 6 on their final incorporation into the national music hall network during the First World War.
CHAPTER 6: COMPETITION, COMBINATION AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE STAR SYSTEM

6-1 Introduction

Chapter 2 has indicated that the growth of music hall syndicates in the 1900s resulted in the intensification of competition particularly in the rapidly expanding suburbs of London, both between the syndicates and independent halls, and between the syndicates themselves. Chapter 3 has indicated that this period of intense competition within the music hall industry was associated with the years during which average dividends were at their lowest. This chapter aims to examine the response of the emerging syndicates to this crisis of profitability.

The argument put forward in this chapter suggests that initially music hall companies reacted by attempting to out-compete their rivals. These aggressive competitive policies involved the syndicates in wasteful short-term expenditure, with the aim of obtaining long-term prosperity by forcing the rival syndicates out of the market. However, the failure of this intense competition to reduce the number of competing syndicates forced a reappraisal upon the managements of the syndicates. In the 1910s, syndicates sought to reduce the harmful effects of competition by cooperating. A series of mergers took place which led, by 1920, to the establishment of an effective monopoly in the music hall industry.

I shall argue that the changing relationship between managements and artists is central to the understanding of this switch from competitive to combinatorial business practices.
During the 1900s, the syndicates used the performers as the main vector for inter-syndicate rivalry. However, this strategy fuelled the wage inflation which was endemic to the music hall industry. The discussion will focus, in particular, on the crucial role of the Variety Artists Federation strike of 1907, which highlighted the shared interests of the syndicates, and was instrumental in breaking down the traditional bond of mutuality which persisted between managers and performers.

6-2. The Evolution of the Star System

6-2.1 Music hall acts: the imbalance of supply and demand

In responding to the intensification of competition and the decline of profitability in the 1900s, the directors of the music hall syndicates chose to adopt aggressively conflictual business strategies. In attempting this, the music hall syndicates adopted the strategy used by companies in the brewing industry in the face of a harsher economic environment in the 1890s, of attempting to obtain a monopoly over the scarcest resource of the industry. In the case of the brewing industry, due to the stringent application of the licensing laws, this encouraged companies to become involved in a scramble to monopolise the supply of retail outlets, of public houses.¹

In the case of the music halls, however, the supply of premises did not constitute the main hurdle which had to be cleared in the provision of entertainments to the emergent mass market in the UK. In part, this was reflected in the less stringent controls placed upon the proliferation of music halls.

This, in turn, reflected the practice, which had become common by the 1890s, of granting music and dancing licences on the condition that no application be made for a licence to sell alcoholic refreshments. The example of the London County Council (LCC), the most important body in the regulation of the music hall industry, is illustrative of this trend. Initially, between 1889 and 1891, the LCC, under the control of the 'Puritan Party' (the Progressives), sought to limit the number of licences issued for music and dancing.² Their 'faddist' policies, however, outraged public opinion. In particular, the notorious Akkersdyk case of 1891 caused the LCC considerable embarrassment, and drove the Times to declare that

The London County Council has previously been chiefly distinguished for its absurdities; but it has now crowned them by acts of spoilation for which, as far as we can see, there is not only no justification, but even no shadow of excuse.³

Thereafter, the Progressives sought to limit the pernicious influence of the music halls by restricting the access of patrons to alcoholic refreshments, and in 1898, on the suggestion of Councillor Benn, the Theatres and Music Halls Committee adopted the policy, with respect to new music halls, that 'the licence should only be granted subject to an undertaking that no intoxicating drink was sold on the premises'.⁴ Mr. Benn added that 'the policy of not allowing drink to be sold in new premises had been adopted with great success in some of the provincial

2. For further details of this 'deliberate purge', see P. Summerfield, 1981, The Effingham Arms and the Empire, pp. 215-20.
3. Times, leader article, 24 October, 1891, p.9.
4. Times, 26 November, 1898, p. 9; S. Pennybacker, 1986, 'It was not what she said but the way in which she said it', p. 125, incorrectly dates the formulation of this policy to 1894.
cities, notably in Manchester.\footnote{5} This decision, however, made it very difficult for the 'prudes on the prowl' to justify the refusal of licences on moral grounds. Music hall entrepreneurs, therefore, suffered from relatively few institutional hindrances in ensuring that the supply of music halls kept pace with demand.

A more significant bottleneck for the music hall industry was created by the fact that the product purveyed by the halls, the performances, were not capable of being mass produced in the same way as the products of the brewing and other consumer industries.

In general, performers could only be viewed in one location on a given evening. This statement is subject to a number of minor caveats. First, it was common for little-known performers working minor halls to copy the style, and even the content, of the acts of their more illustrious peers, although this practice was seldom condoned by the stars. Secondly, the 'turns' system enabled artists performing in London to appear at several halls during the course of a single evening, and metropolitan managers greatly encouraged artists to avail themselves of the opportunity by paying performers 'turn money' which amounted to approximately one-third of their provincial salaries. It was common for artists working on the turn system to make three or four appearances per night.\footnote{6} Nevertheless, the scope for the appearances of individual artists was severely limited, and performers were almost

\footnote{5. \textit{Times}, 26 November, 1898, p. 9; For the attitude of the city justices of Manchester to the sale of alcoholic beverages at the Palace of Varieties, see C. Waters, 1986, \textit{Manchester morality and London capital}, pp. 143-6.}

\footnote{6. See \textit{Arb}, p. 407 and p. 623 for a description of the turns system and its effects on salaries.}
invariably restricted to appearing in a single town at any one
time. 7

The continuous expansion of the nationwide music hall
industry, and the fact that each bill consisted of from 15 to 30
acts, ensured a consistently strong demand for performers. In
purely quantitative terms the supply of performers was equal to
this demand. The music hall industry had no difficulty in
recruiting new artists, as the customary minimum wage within the
industry, which stood at £4-5 by the mid 1900s, was considerably
higher than the rewards offered by other working class
occupations. 8 However, managers frequently commented upon the
poor quality of many of these acts. Stoll insisted that

It is an indisputable fact that...many whose vocation
should be anything but that of public entertainers are
able to maintain a standard of living which thousands
of trade unionists would envy. 9

Managements were, therefore, constantly faced with the problem of
'the scarcity and difficulty of obtaining good artistes to keep up
the supply of good programmes'. 10

Given this major imbalance in the supply of, and the demand
for, talented and popular performers, the supply of artists was
responsible for the major bottleneck in satisfying the demands of

7. There were, however, even occasional exceptions to this. J.W.
Rowley, who was later engaged on the Moss Empires tour, for
example, held simultaneous engagements in two towns in two
consecutive weeks in December 1882. From the 2nd to the 7th he
worked the Star, Bradford and the Varieties, Leeds. The following
week he appeared again at the Star, Bradford, and also at the
Gaiety, Halifax. Magnet, music hall directories, 30 November and
7 December, 1882.
8. For details of the minimum wages paid by syndicates, see Arb,
p. 783; p. 825. This refers to the typical wage levels of the
syndicates only. On the social origins of performers see L.
10. Arb, Stoll, p. 625.
the public for entertainment. It was, therefore, on this battleground that the syndicates decided to pursue their rivalries.

6-2.2 An outline of the star system

In the following sections I shall examine how the organisation of the music hall industry was adapted to accommodate this shortage of performers of high quality.

Given the restricted supply, music hall managements were obliged to maximise the potential commercial benefits of the talented performers that were available. This, I shall argue below, was accomplished through the application of the sophisticated advertising techniques, which were being developed in the late nineteenth century, to the music hall industry. As the *Magnet* commented with respect to the music hall industry, 'the chief factor in the art of money-magnetism is advertisement'.11

This resulted in the emergence of the 'star system' in the music hall industry. This 'system' was based upon cooperation between music hall managements and artists in order to generate publicity which was beneficial to both parties. The creation of a 'star' depended initially upon the active promotion of performers by music hall companies. As Henry Tozer explained

If you know an artiste has ability you nurse that ability; we help to make stars. Stars are not made by themselves. Oh, yes, yes, they must have talent, but they are just as much made by the manager, by the manager's knowledge of how the star should be improved.12

The payment of extravagant wages to artists, which established their reputations and generated considerable publicity, was an integral element of the star system. As Hibbert asserted, ‘huge salaries’ were frequently offered ‘merely to procure an advertisement’. 13

The promotion of stars had a number of reciprocal benefits for music hall managements. Most immediately, the appearance of stars could be expected to boost attendances at the halls at which they were engaged. However, there were also considerable indirect benefits to be gain from the association of a company with a music hall star. Once established, stars generated their own publicity, as the Daily Telegraph stated in the case of Sarah Bernhardt.

No one needs to be told that Sarah Bernhardt is a great actress - as a purveyor of good ‘copy’ she is also unequalled. 14

Music hall companies were able to bask in the reflected glory of the stars under their employ.

However, in order for companies to reap the full benefit of their investments in promoting stars, it was necessary for them to encourage the identification of the star with their company in the public consciousness. Companies had to ensure the loyalty and exclusivity of star performers, the reputations of whom they were implicated in the construction and maintenance of. The Daily Telegraph conjectured, for example, that Alfred Butt’s conduct of business was guided by the motto ‘having discovered a star, keep her as long as you can’. 15

15. Daily Telegraph, 12 October, 1912, p. 15.
A number of mechanisms existed for ensuring the exclusivity of artists. Prominent amongst these was the insertion of barring clauses into the contracts of artists. These clauses limited the freedom of performers to accept engagements with rival companies. However, as this chapter will indicate, the barring clauses generated ill-will between managements and the artists whose loyalty they wished to retain. Therefore, the main alternative method of obtaining the exclusive control of artists, by offering them a sufficient number of engagements to fill their date-books, was preferred by managements as it did not alienate performers.

The syndicates, which emerged from the 1890s and controlled extensive booking circuits, were, therefore, in a better position to maintain their exclusive control over stars than independent music halls. As the Daily Telegraph contended,

> It is, of course, self-evident that a music-hall manager, controlling only one house, is in a much less favourable position than the manager able to offer artists a continuous engagement of several months.\(^1\)

For this reason, I shall argue in the following discussion, that although the star system dated back to the 1850s, it was enthusiastically adopted by, and its use intensified by, the music hall syndicates of the early twentieth century.

6-2.3 The origins of the star system

Although the star system was readily adapted to the needs of the syndicates, it was not created by these companies. The evolution of the star system considerably pre-dated the formation of the large syndicates, and their headlong scramble to sign-up star performers in the 1900s. As far back as the 1850s and 1860s,

\(^1\) Daily Telegraph, 26 February, 1910, p. 15.
music hall managers had been aware of the commercial value of the star system. Charles Morton undoubtedly owed much of his success to his flair as a publicist. Amongst his pioneering achievements was his success in being the first music hall proprietor to have an advertisement placed in the *Times.* This natural talent extended to his treatment of performers. Morton carefully nurtured the careers of promising artists, frequently rechristening them with the epithet 'the Great' in order to boost their reputations. Even at this date the perennial problem of the star system, the need of businesses to secure the loyalty of artists which they had promoted, was apparent. Morton berated the fact that stars whom he had been instrumental in creating utilised their reputations to obtain lucrative contracts with his rivals.

The increase in the amount of capital invested in the business during the first music hall boom of the 1860s encouraged the formalisation of the star system and the extension of its use. This more intensive use of the star system in the 1860s was epitomised by the struggle between George Leybourne and 'The Great' Vance for the mantle of the king of the lions comique. Their rivalry reached its apotheosis in 1868 when, in order to enhance his reputation as the authentic stage 'swell', Leybourne agreed to act out the role of his most famous stage persona, Champagne Charlie, beyond the confines of the theatre. The following is an extract from the contract which Leybourne

17. P. Bailey, 1987, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, p. 163. This same attribute is also of significance in accounting for the creation of his reputation as the 'Father of the Halls'. H. Scott, 1946, *the Early Doors*, p. 139, makes the same point, noting 'how slyly Morton assumed the character of reformist innovator' by making all his changes 'appear as violent and revolutionary as possible'.

18. The 'Great' Mackney provides an obvious example of this.
concluded with the enterprising caterer William Holland. It stated that Leybourne was expected to

Every day, and at all reasonable times and places when required so to do, appear in a carriage, drawn by four horses, driven by two postillions, and attended by his grooms; and that, on every evening (Sundays excepted) during the continuance of this engagement, he shall sing some of his popular comic songs, and produce and sing two or more new and original songs every month for the next twelve months. 19

The link between this kind of promotion and the exclusive control of stars had already been forged, as the agreement made between Holland and Leybourne contracted the talents of the latter exclusively to the former for twelve months. 20

The inherently wage-inflationary nature of the star system had also become apparent by the 1860s. The proliferation of highly capitalised halls at this time was responsible for major increases in the earnings of stars. Sam Cowell, who was already a music hall 'star' in 1860, earnt just £4 at the beginning of the decade, but the competition between halls to employ him is reputed to have increased this figure ten-fold during the decade. 21

However, at this early date this type of relationship between proprietors and artists was restricted to London. Before the advent of the syndicates it was common practice for major 'stars' of the London music hall stage who were intending to conduct a provincial tour to assemble around themselves touring parties, capable of providing a full evening's entertainment, and arranging their own engagements and venues in towns across the provinces. 22

The star system continued to mature, and to become more widespread during the 1870s and 1880s. By 1884 Henry de Frece, a music hall agent and father of Walter, considered it necessary to bring the attention of artists to the prevalence of barring clauses.

Most establishments have a rule that an artiste shall not appear within a limitable distance during an engagement...[and] that he shall not appear within that distance prior, during, or for a certain period after.23

However, it attained its greatest growth only in tandem with the emergence of the music hall syndicates from the 1890s.

6-2.4 The Syndicate Halls and the star system

The star system initially emerged, therefore, at a relatively early stage in the development of the music halls, at which time the business was characterised by independently operated halls, all in competition with one another. The formation of the first syndicates in the 1890s therefore ushered in a new phase in the refinement of the star system, which was particularly well suited to the requirements of the music hall syndicates. Their control of a number of halls enabled the emerging syndicates to overcome the problem of securing the exclusivity of artists by offering performers long-term contracts, encompassing engagements at a number of halls. The adaptation of the star system to the needs of syndicates was pioneered by the West End based Syndicate Halls. At the first AGM of the New Tivoli Ltd. Hugh Astley announced to the assembled shareholders that

All the best-known artistes have been engaged to appear at certain seasons for several years to come.

and, in Scott's words,

Henceforth the whole glittering array of late Victorian and Edwardian stars became the common property of these houses...[which presented] these stars, week after week, in full array.

The contracts which the Syndicate offered to music hall stars were attractive not only on account of their lucrativeness, but also because of the long-term guarantees which they provided for members of an inherently insecure profession. The Syndicate arranged engagements spanning periods of up to five years. However, as Astley's declaration indicates, artists were not tied exclusively to the Syndicate's halls for the whole of the period covered by their contracts. Continuous engagements seldom lasted for longer than six months to one year. The contracts issued by the Syndicate placed no limitations on the actions of artists in filling vacant dates in the provinces. Nor did they prevent stars from appearing at other metropolitan halls. The sole obligations which these agreements imposed upon artists were that they should appear at a Syndicate Hall whenever they were performing in London, and that they were barred from accepting engagements with other halls located within a radius of five miles of a Syndicate Hall. Despite the extensive spatial extent of the barring clause included in the standard contract of the Syndicate Halls, it did not prove to be a major source of friction between artists and managements, nor a cause of conflict between syndicates, as it

was possible for artists to be contracted to the Syndicate and still to accept every date on the Moss-Thornton-Stoll tour.

This experiment resulted in the creation of a virtual monopoly over the services of music hall stars in the West End of London, and, thereby, succeeded in its primary intention of ensuring good attendances at the Tivoli, the Oxford and the London Pavilion, and guaranteed that the Syndicate Halls shared in the unparalleled prosperity of the music hall in the 1890s.

Moreover, the predominant position within the music hall industry, which this policy enabled the Syndicate to attain, brought with it additional benefits. In particular, by shifting the power relations between the Syndicate and artists in favour of the former, it enabled the Syndicate to tackle effectively the rapid wage inflation, which had been triggered off by the expansion of the music hall industry during and after the limited liability boom of the mid-1880s.

During the 1890s this renewed wage inflation had become an increasingly serious problem within the business. In 1891 Mr E. Rawlings, Chairman of the Canterbury and Paragon Ltd., in explaining the considerable increase in expenses which the company had incurred since its formation in 1888, commented that

> It was well known in the music hall world, and to everyone associated with amusements of that kind, that expenses had gone up enormously in that direction. Where artistes used in the old days to be paid £10 a week they now wanted £20. 27

Henry Sutton, in his capacity as Chairman of the Alhambra, for example, admitted to the shareholders in 1890 that he now had

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27. Era, 19 September, 1891, p. 17.
'little or no control' over the escalation of entertainment expenses, and explained that

If they wanted to keep up the character of the entertainment they must have the best attraction, and for that they must pay the best price. 28

Although there is no evidence to suggest that the formation of the Syndicate was initially motivated by the desire to curb this wage inflation, its monopoly of the major West End halls placed the Syndicate in a strong position to prevent its profits from being eaten away by increased expenditure on the salaries of artists. In 1895, though, the Syndicate decided to make use of its strong bargaining position. At this date Astley declared that

Salaries have been forced up to a height from which they were bound to take a turn, and that turn must be downwards. 29

Astley also expressed his concern to the shareholders of the London Pavilion, but was able to report that progress had already been made in remedying the matter.

Their demands were becoming exorbitant, and we are determined to deal with them...We have made engagements for the future with many artists at reduced salaries, and that will guide us in future policy. 30

The ease with which the Syndicate was able to impose these wage reductions on artists reflected, in part, the value which performers placed upon long-term and stable employment which an association with the Syndicate offered to artists. However, the power of the Syndicate was also related to a number of less tangible considerations relating to status, which reflected the extent to which the stars of the halls had themselves become

28. Era, 8 February, 1890, p. 17.
29. Era, 8 June, 1895, p. 16.
30. Era, 9 February, 1895, p. 16.
dependent on the star system which had been implicated in their professional advancement. Through its policy of cornering the most prestigious performers, the halls under the control of the Syndicate had established a reputation as the halls at which names were made, and existing reputations were consolidated or enhanced, as Tozer, the Chairman of the Syndicate, was well aware.

Undoubtedly the Tivoli, Oxford, and Pavilion...Constitute a goal for the best artists to reach...[they] - being the recognised central variety halls - are considered by the star artists as their rightful home, for there they have, as a rule, created their positions. 31

Although the Syndicate controlled only a small number of halls, and there were a large number of independent halls in a position to offer artists lucrative contracts, an association with the Syndicate had become indispensible to stars. Engagements with the Syndicate provided performers with maximum public exposure, and, moreover, came to be regarded as a symbol of the seniority of an artist within the profession. An engagement with the Syndicate Halls offered long-term career benefits beyond the security of the immediate contract, and artists were therefore prepared to accept short-term reductions in their remuneration in order to secure such prestigious contracts.

Thus, the initiative of Newson Smith and his collaborators was doubly rewarded through the stimulation of takings at the door, and by facilitating the reduction of the expenses involved in running the Syndicate Halls.

Nevertheless, the modifications which the Syndicate had made to the star system were not without their critics, prominent

amongst whom was Henry Wells, a major shareholder in the Syndicate. He was of the opinion that the management of the Oxford had 'made some very unwise engagements of artistes'. In particular, he was concerned that the length of engagements required to maintain the exclusivity of artists threatened to undermine their commercial value by over-exposing them to the same audiences. Wells deplored the fact that

In several cases artistes were engaged for fifty-two consecutive [sic] weeks in three consecutive years.32

It was alleged that the outcome of this booking policy was the presentation of variety bills at the Syndicate Halls which were notable primarily for their lack of variety. Harry Randall described this experience.

When you went into one of their halls, you saw a company of artists for a couple of weeks, then they would disappear for a week...and back they would come again - the same old faces and the same old business.33

Even the managing director of the Syndicate, George Adney Payne, was critical of its booking policies. He singled out for criticism another aspect of their strategy, the practice of using the turns system to engage artists at each of the three Syndicate halls simultaneously.

I think in future the desire will be to avoid identical programmes at the Pavilion, the Tivoli, and the Oxford... [even though] it is sometimes a saving to engage an artist for the three turns.34

33. Quoted in Scott, op. cit., p. 180, footnote. For information on Randall, see his autobiography (1931), Harry Randall Old Time Comedian by Himself.
The successful adoption of the star system by the Syndicate Halls was, therefore, ultimately constrained by the spatial concentration of the halls under their control. The exclusive control of star performers by the Syndicate was not sustainable in the long-term because all of the halls under its umbrella were providing entertainment to the same market. The successful adaptation of the star system to the exclusive benefit of a single syndicate required the construction of a chain of halls which were geographically dispersed, and appealed to separate markets.

Payne was aware that the spatial concentration of the interests of the Syndicate in the West End was the Achilles heel of the booking strategy practised by the Syndicate. Although Payne had, from a relatively early date, been of the opinion that the variant of the star system which the Syndicate had adopted was ripe for reform, he felt that the issue had become more pressing by the late 1890s, due to the growth of competition between syndicates, and especially on account of the threat posed by a large opposition by a powerful syndicate which was coming to London, and which would give artists much longer engagements than they obtained at present. 35

Payne responded to the threat of competition from Moss Empires by becoming involved, in 1898, in the construction of a non-West End hall, located on the Euston Road, which he felt could significantly ease the booking problems of the Syndicate. He envisaged that

As an outlying house it might be worked jointly with the syndicate halls as regards the booking of artists, and that it would be great advantage to them all round. 36

35. Era, 23 April, 1898, p. 21.
36. Payne’s address to the Oxford AGM, reported in Era, 23 April, 1898, p. 21.
Payne's co-directors, however, were less sensitive to the limits which the spatial concentration of the interests of the Syndicate imposed upon the efficient exploitation of the star system, and the benefits to be gained from the geographical expansion of their booking circuit. The Boards of the Syndicate companies 'declined to accede to his request' that the Syndicate's standard five mile barring clause not be invoked against the Euston Music Hall. Indeed, on the grounds that 'some time ago at a meeting of the Tivoli a very strong opinion was expressed by the shareholders that their directors should not go into other schemes for running places of entertainment', Hugh Astley sought to use Payne's expansion plans as grounds for his removal from the boards of the three constituent companies. This boardroom conflict resulted in a schism in the Syndicate. Payne was forced to resign from the board of the London Pavilion, but retained his control over the Tivoli and Oxford. Payne's commitment to expanding the geographical scope of their operations resulted in the uniting of the Tivoli and Oxford music halls with Henri Gros' suburban based Variety Theatres Consolidated Ltd., and United Varieties Syndicate Ltd., into a booking circuit which encompassed a large area of the metropolis.

6-2.5. The star system in the 1900s

The equilibrium which the Syndicate Halls had established within the star system in the 1890s was upset after the turn of the century. The profound organisational changes that swept through the structure of the music hall industry represented a

fundamental change in the context within which the star system operated. It has been established in chapter 2 that the 1900s witnessed the concentration of the music hall industry into a small number of highly capitalised circuits, which increasingly found themselves in competition and conflict with one another. Prior to this, during the 1890s the emerging syndicates had been in a position to dictate terms to artists due to the lack of rival syndicates capable of competing in the provision of well paid and long-term contracts involving engagements at prestigious venues. During the 1900s the proliferation of syndicates created a situation in which several companies were in a position to offer stars lucrative engagements and job security. This shifted the balance of power in negotiations between managements and artists firmly in favour of the latter, who were now in a position to play syndicates off, one against another, in order to improve their terms of employment.

This re-casting of the process of negotiation was accentuated by the fact that syndicates considered the exclusive control of star performers as the most significant means of maintaining their competitive edge over rivals. The adoption of this competitive strategy precipitated a headlong scramble amongst managements to sign up stars, almost regardless of the costs. The intensity of this competition can be gauged from Stoll’s admission of the existence of ‘acts which we have engaged to prevent our opponents from securing them’.\textsuperscript{40} The requirements of the company in providing its audience with satisfactory entertainments was not the sole criterion which guided the booking practices of Moss Empires. The prevention of other companies from achieving this

\textsuperscript{40} Music Hall and Theatre Review (MHTR), 21 April, 1910, p. 249.
objective was considered to be an equally valid objective for company policy. Stoll considered that his success in this race to monopolise the established stars of the halls was attested to by the strenuous efforts made by his competitors, particularly Butt and Barrasford, to secure overseas talent for their halls. Stoll gloated that

Our opponents...experience difficulty in filling their programmes with competent artists, we having the pick of the profession on our books. 41

This aggressive booking strategy was not restricted to the halls under the control of Moss Empires. Indeed one of the main complaints which the VAF levelled against the managers during the 1907 Arbitration was the undue frequency with which artists were required to alter their engagements at the last minute. The VAF was in no doubt that this was the result of widespread and systematic over-booking on the part of managements in order to prevent acts falling into the clutches of their competitors. As Clemart explained to the Arbitrator

The necessity for the Transference Clause has been brought about by over-booking, by crabbing the market, trying to corner the market; and then having to sort them out afterwards. 42

This fundamental shift in the balance of power triggered off a new phase of accelerated wage inflation in the industry during the 1900s. The Daily Mail, commenting during the 1907 VAF strike, noted that the wages of artists 'have for years past advanced in leaps and bounds'. 43 This situation was acknowledged by both sides of the industry. 44 Its roots in competition between

41. Ibid, p. 249.
42. Arb, Clemart, p. 432.
44. Henri Gros made the same point, in almost identical terms, during the arbitration, see Arb, p. 812. Mr. Doughty, counsel for
syndicates were also widely accepted. 'A Comedian’s Wife’ wrote, thus, to the *Daily Telegraph*.

I would ask you who is to blame for the few high salaries. Why, the proprietors themselves. As soon as an act becomes the rage at one hall, they outdo each other to secure it for their own particular hall or halls.\(^{45}\)

To compensate for these increases in the costs associated with the procuring of star performers, managements demanded greater guarantees of loyalty from artists contracted to their syndicate. This did not require any fundamental changes in the nature of the star system, and was achieved principally through the tightening up of the existing means which the system provided for the controlling of artists. Although barring clauses had become a customary element of contracts made in the music hall industry, there remained considerable scope for increasing their use. The apparently widespread ignorance on the part of artists concerning the contents of their contracts, which Henry de Frece highlighted, was indicative of the fact that

The Barring Clauses were rarely enforced and were known by the agents and artists to be a dead letter, until this great competition arose between the managers themselves.\(^{46}\)

In the wake of this ‘great competition’ in the 1900s, existing contractual obligations were enforced with greater rigour. The syndicates did not, however, limit their endeavours to ensure the protection of their investments in performers solely to the more rigid application of the customary terms of agreement the VAF, argued that wages had not gone up, but his argument was based on the grounds that the number of performances which artists were required to perform had increased at a greater rate than remuneration. *Arb*, p. 394.

between employers and employees within the industry. Rather, especially from about 1902 onwards, the standard contracts issued by syndicates became 'year by year more stringent' in the temporal and spatial bars which they imposed upon artists.47

Thus, during the first decade of the twentieth century a vicious circle was set in motion in the industrial relations of the music hall industry. Managements sought greater safeguards of the exclusivity of their performers, as an integral part of a competitive business strategy aimed at other syndicates. Artists, in return, demanded greater remuneration in order to compensate for the increasing loss of liberty which they were being asked to accept. The higher level of capital investment in performers that this entailed made it still more imperative for syndicates to extend their control over artists. The problem was summed up accurately and succinctly by a writer to the Daily Telegraph.

The tendency of modern music-halls is to crystallise into large groups. At times these groups compete together furiously. They pay large salaries to artists in order that they may obtain a monopoly of talent, and they impose on this talent the restriction that it shall exercise itself only within their own limits, for certain fixed periods. The artists complain that this restriction operates unfairly. This is really the fountain and source of the trouble.48

This perceptive observer further noted that, as a consequence of this vicious circle, a wedge had been formed between managers and artists. 'Combination and insistence on one side has bred unity and resistance on the other'.49 It is to the responses of both sides of the industry to the crisis in the star system, and the

47. Arb, Payne, p. 395; Arb, Clemart, p. 404.
contribution of both to the industrial conflict which ultimately convulsed the industry in 1907, that I wish to turn next.

6-2.6 The management response to crisis: Novelty acts and the variety theatre.

The instability of this situation was clear to both employers and employees. The industry was incapable of sustaining the spiralling wages, increasingly draconian contracts, and, consequently, deteriorating industrial relations from which it suffered in the early 1900s. Both the performers and the managers undertook initiatives to regain control of the situation, in order to safeguard their own interests.

A number of managements sought to break out of the vicious circle, without compromising their own interests, by undermining the strength of the bargaining position which the rivalry between syndicates in the early 1900s had bestowed upon the performers. In order to achieve this end, managements adopted policies which focused on the recruitment of new acts from outside of the established music hall profession. The less capital intensive commercialisation of overseas music hall-style entertainments, and of the 'legitimate' stage in Britain, meant that performers drawn from these sources had lower wage expectations than were current amongst music hall performers. Clemart complained of the threat to the livelihoods of British artists created by the importation of 'a lot of foreign talent, and, very often, very inferior talent at that'.

50. As previously indicated, the recourse to overseas talent was also encouraged by the success of certain syndicates in monopolising the supply of British acts.
This strategy did not, however, represent a concerted attempt on the behalf of syndicates to reduce working costs by swamping the existing stratum of stars of the variety stage under a flood of cheap labour from outside of the industry. The influx of exotic performers was not limited to low-cost programme fillers. Indeed, many of the performers of the legitimate stage in which music hall impresarios showed an interest were established stars in their own field. Those who succumbed to the temptations put before them by music hall managements included Seymour Hicks and his wife Ellaline Terriss, Anna Pavlova, Sarah Bernhardt, Maud Allen, Yvette Guilbert, Irene Vanbrugh, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree and Charles Hawtrey. These individuals were feted as stars by music halls' managements after their defections to the variety stage. Indeed, they were often remunerated even more handsomely than those performers at the pinnacle of the variety profession.52

It is important to note, therefore, that this new recruitment policy was not intended to destroy, or even to modify substantially, the existing structure of the star system, but was motivated by the far more limited ambition of improving the position of syndicates within the system, in relation both to rival syndicates and to artists. Indeed, the importation of stars from the legitimate theatre actively fuelled the star system.

The engagement of theatrical stars was of considerable value to the syndicates for a number of reasons. The direct dependence of managements on the existing stars of the halls could be

52. Estimates of Sarah Bernhardt’s weekly income ranged from £850-1,000 per week, S.T. Felstead, 1946, *Stars Who Made the Halls*, p. 114; see also M. Sanderson, 1984, *From Irving to Olivier*, pp. 122-3;
circumvented without depriving managements of the advantages of the star system. Indeed, in a number of ways, the engagement of legitimate actors and actresses enabled music hall managements to optimise the benefits which they obtained from the system. Managements could afford to offer actors extravagant salaries secure in the knowledge that the engagements were of limited duration, and that actors, unlike music hall stars, would not need to be paid at this rate throughout the year in order to retain their loyalty. Moreover, managements were in a position to extract the maximum publicity value from extravagant contracts offered to actors. The great commercial value of contracts involving large salaries in promoting both parties to the contract were well acknowledged within the music hall industry. However, managements were often reticent to disclose the sums paid to star variety artists, out of a fear of causing a knock-on effect and actively fuelling wage inflation. As Alfred Butt explained

If it ever becomes known that we are paying large fees to an individual or individuals every other turn of the same kind that we thereafter engage expects to be paid at the same rate. 53

By topping their bills with theatrical performers, managements avoided setting precedents of this kind. Moreover, the publicity attendant upon a successful coup in luring a prominent figure from the legitimate theatre onto the variety stage was often of unparalleled intensity.

The practice of importing acts from abroad therefore served a dual purpose for syndicates. Not only were fresh sources of acts important in the struggle between syndicates to prevent the more powerful syndicates from controlling the supply of talented

53. *MHTR*, 5 May, 1910, p. 279.
performers, but they simultaneously served to decrease the
dependence of managements on established music hall performers,
and therefore, undermined the bargaining strength of the latter
group.\textsuperscript{54}

Thus, in the 1900s the syndicates attempted, in an
uncoordinated fashion, to limit the power of star performers by
expanding yet further the scope of music hall entertainments.
Managements simultaneously offered their audiences more variety,
and undermined the bargaining position of the established variety
performers. The continual pursuit of 'novelty' ensured a rapid
turnover of artists on the music hall stage, thereby restricting
the number of performers who were able to attain a sufficient
degree of long-term popularity from which to demand extravagant
salaries. It is no coincidence that the generation of artists
which dominated the music hall stage until the First World War,
and beyond, emerged during the 1890s. Contemporary commentators
frequently observed that the variety profession had lost its
vitality in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{55} This undoubtedly had
more to do with the lack of opportunities which the syndicates
provided for aspiring talent to establish itself, rather than to
any actual reduction in the number of talented aspirants.

\textsuperscript{54} Rutherford, op. cit., p. 101, also interprets the growing
importance of continental acts in the early twentieth century as a
strategy adopted by managements to undermine vested interests
within the music hall profession. She, however, considers the
policy to have been targeted against a specific type of domestic
act, the lions comique, whose brand of humour managements
considered to be impeding their attempts to cultivate an image of
respectability.
\textsuperscript{55} G. Le Roy, 1952, \textit{Music Hall Stars of the Nineties}, stresses
the importance of this decade in producing the best music hall
performers.
6-2.7 The artists' response to crisis: Organisation.

In their attempts to curb one element of the impending crisis within the industry - endemic wage inflation - in a manner which safeguarded their interests, managements inevitably exacerbated the second ingredient of the crisis, that of deteriorating industrial relations within the business. The attempts by managements to reduce the remuneration paid to artists in addition to the severe limitations already imposed on their freedom of contract, created the impression amongst artists that the syndicates no longer regarded the star system as a mutually beneficial arrangement. The strong negotiation position held by the syndicates had been long acknowledged. The Era commented on the emergence of Moss Empires that

The power at the disposition of the new company will indeed be immense and despotic. Any artist giving offence to the great octopus of music hall management will find his or her career suddenly blighted.\(^{56}\)

The suspicion arose increasingly during the 1900s that managements were taking advantage of the strength of their position to manipulate artists in the pursuit of their own sectional interests. Artists became increasingly concerned that they were being 'used simply as a pawn in the game between managers.'\(^{57}\) This growing distrust of the syndicates manifested itself most clearly in the suspicion that the rival syndicates were in the process of constructing a trust in order to further strengthen their negotiating position with artists. As Clemart, a prominent member of the Variety Artists Federation, stated regarding the actions of music hall managements

\(^{56}\) Era, 21 October, 1899, p. 17.  
\(^{57}\) Arb, Doughty, p. 397.
In our minds the motive of it all is the direct intention of establishing a huge monopoly.58

In response to this perceived collusion between syndicates the artists became increasingly concerned with organising themselves into a coherent professional body capable of defending the collective interests of performers.59

The existence of organisations for music hall artists was not a novel feature of the 1900s; however, this decade witnessed a significant transformation in the character of artists' organisation. Initially, the tradition of mutuality between managers and performers within the industry initially fostered the growth of organisations in which both sides of the industry participated.60 By the late 1890s, however, it was increasingly common for artists to establish organisations, which were independent of, but were not conceived of as being antagonistic towards, their employers. Most of these organisations, such as the Grand Order of the Water Rats and the Terriers Association, were established in order to arrange charitable activities, or to endow their calling with an aura of professionalism.

The most significant of the artists' organisations during the initial phase of the crisis which overtook the music hall industry in the early 1900s was the Music Hall Artists Railway Association (MHARA), which had been formed in 1896. This organisation had the primary objective of, as its name suggests,  

58. Arb, Clemart, pp. 407-8; See also Era, 16 September, 1900, p. 24.  
59. The following paragraphs draw heavily on Rutherford's outline of professional organisations within the music hall industry, see especially Rutherford, op. cit., pp. 104-8.  
60. These included the Music Hall Benevolent Fund, founded in 1888. For other associations of this type, see Rutherford, op. cit., pp 98-100.
negotiating fare reductions for artists with the various railway companies, although it was also involved in other self-help projects. The tensions which were beginning to emerge between managers and artists were reflected in the changing stance of the MHARA. In particular, the Contracts sub-committee which had direct dealings with managements in respect of contractual issues, took on a more politicised orientation. However, the MHARA was essentially unsuited to play a prominent role in the organisation of protests against the practices of managements in the more confrontational atmosphere which was emerging in the 1900s. By 1906 relations between the two sides of the industry had become strained to the point that Mr. Gerald, a key music hall activist, was speaking for many others in the profession in declaring his conviction that

> It was only by becoming trade unionists, and by adopting trade union principles, and following them up, that they could work out their own salvation.

It was in response to this growing belief amongst artists of the inappropriateness of the MHARA as an organisation for the protection of their professional interests that the Variety Artists Federation (VAF) was founded.

During the early 1900s, therefore, industrial relations within the music hall industry were transformed. The relationship between employer and employee came to be redefined in oppositional terms. Whatever the reality of the situation, artists began to perceive managements as a united and partisan body pursuing interests inimical to those of performers. The response of the performers to this perceived threat was the institutionalisation

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of this opposition in the form of the VAF. The VAF was under no illusions regarding the severity of the crisis afflicting the industry. Mr. Herbert Clark, a prominent member of the newly-formed federation, opined that

The fact of the matter is that business relations between managers and artists are in a chaotic condition, and the whole system requires to be revised and placed on a proper basis.63

The creation of the VAF brought this crisis to a head, and put artists on collision course with managers. In January 1907, only months after the formation of the VAF, the star system, long out of control, finally overheated, and plunged the industry into a bitter strike.64

6-2.8 The VAF strike and its aftermath

The direct effects of the VAF strike on the structure of industrial relations in the music hall industry was limited. After a short strike of under three weeks duration in late January and early February 1907, the dispute was referred to arbitration. The arbitrator’s award, issued in June, failed to satisfy even the VAF’s modest demands for the reform of the star system. The arbitrator, Mr. Askwith, proved to be sympathetic to the case of the managers and, in effect, sanctioned, with a few minor exceptions, the existing modus operandi of the star system.

Nevertheless, the indirect, and long-term, consequences of the conflict were to prove of fundamental significance in the reshaping of the industrial relations of the music hall business in the years immediately before, and during, the First World War.

The shock caused by the strike led the parties involved in the dispute to fundamentally re-evaluate their positions and to entrench, or modify, their ideologies. From the perspective of the artists, the conflict increased the speed with which the belief that the managements were a single undifferentiated entity disseminated through the profession. During the strike 'Down with the Music Hall Trust' became the rallying cry of striking performers.

The fact that the VAF boycott only affected a selected group of proprietors does not contradict this interpretation of the effect of the strike, which suggests that it served to strengthen the conception of the syndicates as a monolithic group. Most notable for their deliverance from the boycott were the halls under the control of Oswald Stoll. Rutherford speculates that this was a reflection of the fact that artists did not consider their grievances to be applicable to Stoll. Indeed, in spite of his impersonal and businesslike approach to industrial relations, and his autocratic temperament, Stoll was widely respected by performers. The halls under his control were exempt from many of the criticisms which the VAF levelled against the prevalent managerial practices. However, the decision to exclude Stoll's halls from the boycott was not a strategic one, based on the differentiation between acceptable and unacceptable styles of management. Stoll, in line with all the other major proprietors, was challenged by the VAF to sign its charter, and declined to do so.

65. Ibid, p. 106.
66. This situation was epitomised by Harry Randall's opinion of Stoll. Whilst he did not warm to Stoll's 'oyster-like exclusivity', he nevertheless considered Stoll to be a fair employer. H. Randall, 1931, Harry Randall Old Time Comedian by Himself, pp. 50-1.
Moss Empires was then threatened with industrial action by the VAF.

However, in this instance, the federation could not afford to carry through its threat for tactical reasons. The financing of the strike, to cover costs such as strike pay, depended upon contributions to the VAF, most of which were made by members of the organisation who were still performing at halls not affected by the boycott. The VAF could not, therefore, afford to call all of its members out on strike, and there were a number of practical reasons why Stoll's halls should be allowed to continue in operation. First, they employed more artists than any other syndicate and paid the highest wages, and therefore constituted potentially the greatest source of contributions to strike funds. Secondly, although the company controlled 38 music halls, relatively few of them were located in London, where the strike was taking place. A widespread boycott of the halls in London could, therefore, be funded through the channelling of contributions from the wages of artists employed in the provinces by Moss Empires and its associated companies to the metropolis. 67

However, although the strikers had some success in propagating the image of managements as a monolithic grouping, it was less effective in remoulding the self-perceptions of artists, and their constructions of the nature of relations between employers and employees within the industry. Performers did not come to redefine themselves in opposition to the management syndicates. Their traditional preconceptions proved hard to break down.

67. Daily Telegraph, 1 February, 1907, p. 10.
Artists continued to exhibit an adherence to the belief that industrial relations in the music hall industry, including the operation of the star system, were based upon the shared interests of both sides of the industry. The moderate tone adopted by many VAF members during the strike was indicative of their belief that the disagreements between employers and employees were differences of detail rather than of principle. Indeed, during the ensuing arbitration, Mr. Clemart indicated that this attitude even extended to the notorious barring clause.

We do not object to the use of the Barring Clause; it is to the abuse we take objection. 68

This entrenched belief in the shared interests of both sides of the music hall industry seriously undermined the official line that the unconditional acceptance by managements of the strikers’ Charter was an acceptable basis for the settlement of the dispute. Almost daily throughout the strike, the newspapers carried statements from federation members calling for the conflict to be settled through arbitration. The intensity of the strike was not, therefore, sufficient to enable artists to dissociate their interests entirely from those of music hall managements.

This inability on the part of artists to transcend their traditional ideological affinities towards managements also hindered the emergence amongst artists of a sense of common identity with other theatrical employees. In the days preceding the outbreak of the strike, the VAF had combined forces with the Amalgamated Musicians Union (AMU), and the stage hands’ organisation, the National Association of Theatrical Employees (NATE), in the formation of a ‘National Alliance’, with the

68. Arb, p. 404.
intention of presenting a united front to the supposed 'Music Hall Trust'.

Many artists, however, were suspicious of the more unionistic attitudes promoted by the AMU and NATE, and the Daily Telegraph reported that it was

No secret that a good many 'stars' as well as the managers view with suspicion the prominence that has been attained by the trade union element.

Many federationists remained ambiguous in their attitude towards their allies. Activists who had been involved in attempts to generate a 'professional' status for music hall performers were concerned that their association with unionised, working class, theatrical employees would undermine the credibility of their claim to professional status. Pat Rafferty sneered that 'we shall soon have the scene-shifter ruling the whole theatre. It is rank socialism.' Another performer, Miss. Marie Dainton, resigned from the VAF on this issue, and released a statement that

When she joined the 'VAF' she had been led to do so under a misapprehension. She had no idea when she consented to become a member that the federation included musicians and stage hands. Had that been explained to her she would certainly have declined to lend her name to it in any way.

The effectiveness of the VAF continued to be hampered by this confusion over the role which it was supposed to be fulfilling.

69. On the formation of the National Alliance, see Daily Telegraph, 23 January, 1907, p. 9.
70. Daily Telegraph, 4 February, 1907, p.7.
71. See Rutherford, op. cit., pp. 103-4, on the creation of organisations intended to project a professional image for music hall performers.
73. Daily Telegraph, 1 February, 1907, p. 10.
The course of events by which the deadlock between the parties embroiled in the dispute was eventually broken highlighted all of these tensions in the position held by artists. By the end of the second week of the strike the clamour amongst artists for a negotiated settlement convinced a number of performers, headed by Arthur Roberts and including Joe O’Gorman, the chairman of the VAF, who had previously been staunch supporters of the National Alliance, to desert their allies in AMU and NATE and to open direct negotiations with managers. The grievances of musicians and stagehands were excluded from the remit of the resultant Board of Conciliation. Although the National Alliance refused to accept the compromise reached by the Board of Conciliation, the irreparable rift which these negotiations had opened up between the VAF and the other theatrical employees left the Alliance little choice but to agree to arbitration.

The strike did not, therefore, succeed in creating a united front between artists and other theatrical employees, nor did it even create a clear and agreed self-identity for artists. The main effect of the conflict on the attitude of artists was to strengthen their belief in the existence of a secret music hall trust.

The syndicates, of course, denied the existence of any such agreement between managements. Gibbons insisted that

Trusts do not exist in the music-hall world...The leading artists receive enormous salaries in consequence of the keen competition which prevails.

Although the VAF had clearly appreciated the potential benefits which cooperation offered to managements, there is no evidence, prior to 1907, to substantiate the claims of the VAF that the syndicates were, in fact, colluding in the fixing of wage levels. Indeed, in this respect, the artists’ case was self-contradictory. The existence of a music hall trust was clearly inconsistent with the artists’ main grievance, namely, that of the excessive and aggressive use of barring clauses by managements. This paradox did not go unnoticed by contemporaries. A correspondent to the Daily Telegraph, wrote

The old bogey of Trust is again raised, possibly to excite public resentment against the proprietors. When the artists’ case is that proprietors are vying with one another to bar them appearing at rival establishments, when we know that proprietors are bidding one against the other for the services of popular artists, how can it be contended that the doctrine of the trusts has been imported into these concerns?77

Indeed, this clear-sighted correspondent predicted that, somewhat ironically, the fears and actions of VAF possessed a self-fulfilling quality.

The result of the present movement may be that the proprietors will find it necessary, in self-protection, to form something in the nature of a trust as a means of regulating the salaries of artists.78

The Daily Mail drew similar conclusions with regard to the probable response of syndicates to the financial and industrial relations problems besetting the industry.

Of course a crisis is inevitable. It will probably result in a large unification of managerial interests, a cessation of active competition, and a consequent drop in the money paid to the performers.79

77. Daily Telegraph, 1 February, 1907, p. 10.
78. Ibid, p. 10.
The initial expressions of this growing cooperation between managements became evident during the course of the strike. The institutional recognition of the shared interests of managers was provided by the expansion of the London Entertainments Protection Association (EPA), announced by its chairman, Henri Gros, on 27th January.

The London Entertainments Protection Association has decided at the request of several provincial members to enlarge its scope by including provincial members, and thus make for strength and unity in the face of the present intolerable and uncalled for crisis. 80

The immediate effect of this decision, Gros claimed, was to increase the membership of the EPA from 30 to 130 'all united for mutual protection'. 81 This growing awareness of their shared interests was fostered by the need of managements to take immediate practical actions in order to protect their mutual interests from the effects of the strike. Most significantly, the provision of entertainments at halls subject to the VAF boycott necessitated cooperation between managers over issues which had previously provided the basis for inter-syndicate competition. In particular, effective resistance to the strikers required the 'relaxation of conditions under which certain artists are bound to one music-hall or group of halls'. 82 Thus the strike was significant for reversing, however briefly, the long-term trend towards increasing hostility in the use of the barring clause against other syndicates. The conflict, therefore, brought to the surface the interests which syndicates shared in the context of the overproduction of halls and declining profitability, but which had been obscured throughout the early 1900s by the aggressive and

competitive conflict into which the rival syndicates had thrown themselves after the turn of the century.

6-3 Music Hall Amalgamations, 1908-21.

6-3.1 The origins of cooperation between syndicates, 1908-9

This heightened awareness of mutual interest did not fade away with the conclusion of the VAF strike. During the course of his retirement speech in 1912, Walter Gibbons expressed the hope that cohesion would come about between the great controlling combines...He believed that the time was ripe for this development, and he would be pleased to see it.83

That Gibbons still considered it necessary to appeal for cohesion between combines five years after the end of the strike indicates that the VAF strike had not precipitated the immediate 'cessation of active competition' between syndicates. Nevertheless, it also indicates that the strike had had a profound and long-lasting impact upon managerial attitudes towards the organisation of the music hall industry. Managements were more open to the prospect of cooperation rather than wasteful competition. However, in practice, the suppression of competition within the music hall industry proved to be very difficult, and was not achieved until the 1920s when the business was already in decline. The following sections will be concerned to chart the progress of this cooperative spirit abroad in the music hall industry.

Stoll was the first of the music hall magnates to articulate this growing realisation that competition of the kind which had existed before the VAF strike was disadvantageous to all of the

83. Wednesday Era, 26 June, 1912, p. 7.
managements engaged in it, and left them at the mercy of star performers. Explicitly drawing on the experience of the VAF strike, he reasoned that

The artists have organised themselves for the benefit of artists, both individually and generally. The managers must do likewise.\textsuperscript{84}

Whilst implicitly accusing the artists of being the first to violate the customary, unspoken bond of mutuality between artists and managements, Stoll was careful not to jettison the language of mutuality himself, in favour of the language of conflict.

Stoll laid particular emphasis on the fact that the combination of managements was not, as the VAF feared, motivated by the desire to curb the salaries of stars. He assiduously publicised his faith in free market forces as the most effective arbiter of wage levels.

The fact that real talent is rare and must be paid well...is deeply implanted in our minds...So long as we get value for the money we pay, and are thus able to give the public value for the money they pay, the amount that we are willing to pay artists is only limited by what will leave sufficient margin for a fair return to shareholders and financial stability of the owning company.\textsuperscript{85}

Stoll insisted that the syndicates were not interested in establishing a monopoly which would have the power to dictate terms to performers. Stoll justified the emergence of a merger movement in the music hall industry solely in terms of the attainment of higher levels of bureaucratic efficiency.

Our scheme is not designed towards the formation of a trust, but to apply the principle of organisation to many individual businesses.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{84} Era, 12 September, 1908, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, p. 24.
Indeed, Stoll argued that the money saved by the reduced administrative costs of combines would be reflected in increased salaries for artists, as well as higher dividends for shareholders.\textsuperscript{87} Booking arrangements between syndicates would, Stoll suggested, be of especial benefit to artists, as they would effect a considerable reduction in the need for barring clauses, against the use of which artists complained so bitterly.\textsuperscript{88}

The VAF was, however, far from convinced by Stoll’s attempt to appropriate the language of mutuality in support of his combinatory scheme, and Joe O’Gorman asked, at a VAF meeting convened to discuss the rumoured combination between Moss Empires and the de Frece Circuit,

Why has the combine been formed? What is there to gain? It is either to cut down salaries or to intimidate our members.\textsuperscript{89}

This particular music hall rumour proved to have some substance, and a union of interests between Stoll and de Frece duly came about in March 1909.\textsuperscript{90} However, whilst the protracted negotiations which preceded this combination were taking place, agreements were announced between a number of other syndicates.

The Syndicate Halls again played a pioneering role in the reorganisation of the music hall industry when announcing, in September 1908, that the Syndicate had ‘become associated in mutual bookings of artists’ with a number of London halls.\textsuperscript{91} To contemporaries, the most significant feature of these agreements

\textsuperscript{87} This justification of combination essentially echoes the arguments behind the initial creation of syndicates outlined in chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{88} Era, 12 September, 1908, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{90} Figure 6-1.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid, p. 24.
Figure 6-1. The Moss Empires/de Frece combine, 1909.
was the re-uniting of the London Pavilion with the other original West End members of the Syndicate. However, of greater long-term significance to the organisation of the music hall industry was the expansion of the Syndicate’s booking circuit to include a number of suburban halls, including the Islington Empire, the Shoreditch Empire, and the Hammersmith Palace, which were under the ownership of another syndicate, controlled by Walter Gibbons. The agreement was, therefore, significant in setting a precedent for cooperation between syndicates. This agreement between Gibbons and the Syndicate was also highly significant as the first step towards eliminating the especially severe competition which had accompanied the syndicates’ colonisation of the suburbs of London.

Moreover, the directors of the Syndicate clearly did not see this as a one-off agreement, but as presaging further concentration in the control of the music hall industry.

This association of the halls named in the bookings of artists is perhaps the first practical step towards a more general arrangement, which will probably embrace the whole of the music halls in London and the provinces.

The chairman of the Syndicate, Henry Tozer, however, was careful to deny any intention of establishing a monopoly, and insisted that ‘we are not combining with the object of securing the reduction of salaries of the artists’.

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92. For the circumstances surrounding the break up of the Syndicate, see above.
93. For the severity of the competition between music hall companies in suburban London, see chapter 2. The effects of this competition on profitability are examined in chapter 3.
The construction of this combination was followed almost immediately by the creation of another involving Gibbons, the London, Provincial, and Continental Vaudeville Combination (LPCVC), which linked his interests with those of Thomas Barrasford. This agreement was on a considerably larger scale, and of much wider geographical import. In bringing together one of the leading provincial tours with an equally prominent group of suburban halls, the combination controlled a circuit which could match the claims of Moss Empires to a truly national presence.\(^96\)

The years 1908-9, therefore, mark a turning point in the history of the music hall industry. During this period a number of syndicates adopted policies which indicated that they had an awareness of the benefits of, as well as a willingness to explore the possibilities for, inter-syndicate combination. Within two years of the VAF strike, there were in existence two rival circuits, namely Moss Empires and the LPCVC, which were capable of offering artists almost continuous employment without the concomitant risk of over-exposing them in a single location. Whatever the expressed intentions of entrepreneurs, the foundations for the establishment of a monopoly within the music hall industry were laid during these years.

Indeed, notwithstanding their own statements to the contrary, by early 1910 the possibility of creating a monopoly over booking arrangements, based on the example of the United Booking Offices of America, was being discussed openly by entrepreneurs within the industry. The Times reported that

The scheme provides for a central booking bureau in the West-end...There will be no merger of interests of

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\(^96\). Figure 6-2.
Figure 6-2. The London Provincial and Continental Vaudeville Combination, 1909.
the different companies and participants, but all the 'stars' and artists under contract will be 'pooled' in the new combination and engaged from it by the different managements and 'circuits' up and down the country. 97

The Times recorded that the establishment of this bureau 'only awaits an understanding between Mr. Walter de Frece and Mr. Oswald Stoll'. 98

6-3.2 Shifting alliances, 1910-11

A number of unforeseen circumstances, however, ensured that this agreement was not forthcoming, and the scheme was abandoned.

These negotiations, and, indeed, the entire existing structure of alliances between syndicates, were disrupted by two significant events which occurred within the industry in February 1910. The first of these events was the death of Thomas Barrasford. His demise allowed the young and ambitious entrepreneur, Alfred Butt, to assume control of Barrasford's provincial booking circuit. Butt immediately set about enlarging the existing Barrasford-Gibbons cartel by concluding booking agreements with a number of leading American vaudeville circuits. 99 Butt also persuaded de Frece to end his brief association with Moss Empires, and to merge his interests with those of Butt under the umbrella of the Variety Theatres Controlling Company (VTCC). In combination with Gibbons' interests, this much-heralded 'Triple Alliance' controlled over forty halls in the UK. This placed the combine in the position,

97. Times, 4 February, 1910, p. 18; On the US system, see MHTR, 10 March, 1910, p. 153.
98. Times, 4 February, 1910, p. 18.
as de Frece boasted, of being able to 'give an artist or act a fifty-two weeks' contract right off'.

The defection of de Frece undermined the predominance of Moss Empires within the music hall industry. However, considerably more harm was done to this syndicate by severe criticisms levelled at Stoll's performance by shareholders at the 1910 AGM, which forced him to resign as managing director of the company. The break-up of the Moss-Stoll partnership, finalised in January 1911, reversed the trend towards increased combination, and, moreover, appeared to deliver a major blow to the prospects of further concentration within the industry, and the eventual establishment of a monopoly, as the disgruntled Stoll declared 'I have done with amalgamations'.

It rapidly became apparent to Stoll, however, that in the prevailing economic conditions his circuit could not flourish without taking advantage of the economies of scale which he had outlined in 1908, and, accordingly, in August 1911, Stoll bought into Gibbons' LTV syndicate, becoming the chairman of the company, of which Gibbons was the managing director. Stoll's decision to reverse his declaration of opposition to amalgamations came as no surprise to informed contemporaries who were aware that the continuation of severe competition within the industry was

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100. Referee, 13 March, 1910, p.4. As has already been indicated, within the context of star system and the need to gain exclusive control over individual artists, this was a significant consideration.
101. This highly significant episode in the historical development of the music hall business has been considered in some detail in chapter 5.
103. Times, 1 August, 1911, p. 10; Era, 15 August, 1911, p. 18.
responsible for declining dividends. As the Daily Telegraph commented

The announcement of the Stoll-Gibbons 'combine'... will hardly have occasioned much surprise to those who are behind the scenes, as it were...For some time past it has been manifest that some such amalgamation was bound to result from the cut-throat competition from which many places of entertainment have been suffering. it will be the means, moreover, of stopping the policy, tending inevitably to disaster, of one firm building houses against the other.104

This more formal amalgamation of interests, through which Stoll purchased a major shareholding in LTV, led to a further realignment amongst the music hall syndicates. It was directly responsible for the break-up of the 'Triple Alliance', to which Gibbons was bound only loosely by a booking agreement, and, in response to this, stimulated the conclusion of an agreement between the VTCC and Moss Empires, by which, as Butt explained

These two companies had made certain artists joint offers of engagement over their respective circuits, and had very considerably reduced the bar so that artists could appear in the houses controlled by these circuits in the same town within a period of a few months.105

Despite the large number of agreements into which the main music hall entrepreneurs entered with one another during 1910 and 1911, their actions had had a negligible net effect on the degree of concentration of control within the music hall industry. Nevertheless, this flurry of activity marked a significant stage in the development of the music hall industry. The intensity of negotiations attested to the continued desire for combination amongst managers, whilst the brevity of Stoll's attempt to run his circuit as an independent concern indicated unequivocally that,

105. Era, 9 September, 1911, p. 23.
even on occasions in which the will to combine was absent, combination had become a necessity in the prevailing economic climate.

Furthermore, although the pattern of alliances had not significantly altered during these years, the cohesive forces binding the combines together had been refined, and strengthened, by the increasing use of formal mergers in place of loose booking agreements as the basis for combination.

The first wave of agreements between syndicates made in 1908-9 were of limited scope, focusing on the integration of booking policies. In some instances this course of action was dictated by the character of the constituent companies. The initial agreement between Gibbons and Barrasford, for instance, was, of necessity, restricted to booking arrangements, as the Barrasford tour itself was a loose federation of halls which existed only as a booking circuit.106 Although the two companies established a single bureaucracy in cooperative offices at the Adelphi Terrace House, London, both of the entrepreneurs retained responsibility for the halls within their original circuits. In other cases, such as that of the 1911 agreement between Moss Empires and VTCC, it was a deliberate policy decision to limit the nature of the agreement such that there was to be 'no actual alliance' between the two companies.107

However, the formation of the VTCC in 1910 marked a new departure in the organisation of the music hall industry. This combination between Butt and de Frece was the first to involve the

106. *MHTR*, 3 February, 1910, p. 75. The structure of the Barrasford tour has already been considered in chapter 2.

actual merging of the interests of two of the 'Big Men' of the industry, since the creation of Moss Empires in 1899. The speed with which this amalgamation was followed by Stoll's involvement in the LTV confirmed that managements were beginning to adopt a different approach to inter-syndicate combination, which laid stress upon binding, formal amalgamations as a more durable base for the expansion and stability of combines. It was for the continuance of this newly emergent trend which Gibbons was calling in his retirement speech of 1912.

6-3.3 The function of mergers: Competition or combination?

Thus during 1910-11 a more solid platform had been established for the construction of a unified music hall cartel. However, the path towards the construction of a monopoly was not without problems. Syndicates, which had previously been engaged in fierce competition with one another, had to become partners. This required not only the establishment of trust between partners, but also the emergence of a consensus regarding the intentions motivating the combination movement.

The rapidity with which these re-alignments within the industry took place during 1910-11 highlighted the limitations to the cohesiveness which could be imparted to a combine solely through booking agreements. The limited commitment to combination which these agreements contained did not provide managements with a suitably stable basis for the development of complete mutual trust, as an anonymous artist pointed out to the Era.

Even though more managers combine with the 'limiting' intention, there will always be that element of distrust amongst themselves that one morning they will
wake up and find the agreement broken and the spoils divided amongst the 'secessionists'.

The changes in the nature of agreements between syndicates after 1910 reduced the problems of trust between syndicates. However, confusion regarding the purposes of amalgamation, and the fact that the concentration of control within the music hall industry could, in fact, intensify competition, combined to slow down the process of cartelisation.

The ambiguities involved in the process of cartel formation can be exemplified through an examination of the discordant attitudes held by the concerned parties with regard to the creation of the VTCC combine. It has already been indicated that the VAF invariably suspected that the ability to control the wages paid to star performers was the principle which guided the combination movement. This allegation was equally insistently refuted by managements. However, the credibility of these public protestations of benevolent intent on the part of entrepreneurs was brought into severe doubt by an unguarded admission by de Frece, during the course of the negotiations between the VTCC and Moss Empires, of his monopolistic intentions. The Era reported de Frece's statement:

That there was at present in course of preparation a combine which aimed at the power to say to an artist that his maximum salary should be so much and no more... Mr. Butt, Mr. de Frece went on to say was one of the promoters of the movement to bring managers together to control artists.

108. 'An Artist', letter to the Era, 16 September, 1911, p. 21.
Butt promptly disowned the sentiments of de Frece, denied his alleged complicity, and ritually reiterated his commitment to free bargaining. Butt indicated that Mr. de Frece had given, he felt quite unintentionally, a wrong impression, particularly with regard to any working arrangement that might be arrived at between the Variety Theatres Controlling Company and any other large circuits...A man was worth whatever he could earn...He would never complain of artists each getting $1,000 a week if it left a profit to the management.110

Of course, this response of managements to the imputation to them of anti-competitive intent was well rehearsed. Nevertheless, this exchange did disclose fundamental differences in the attitudes of the partners to music hall combination. The differences between the perspectives of the two entrepreneurs reflected their existing position within the music hall hierarchy. Whilst Walter de Frece had been born into music hall proprietorship and held a prominent position within the industry, Butt was a relative newcomer to the business, who had only become the director of a music hall company, the Palace Theatre, in 1907. Butt was, however, ambitious, and he saw an alliance with de Frece as a means of entree into the circle of music hall magnates, who between them controlled the music hall trade across the whole of Britain. As the Daily Telegraph explained

Mr. Butt and the directors of the Palace have been forced to the conclusion that if they are to hold their own in the race for public favour they must enter for the contest as perfectly equipped as any of their rivals. To accomplish this they had necessarily to secure an outlet for their goods, not merely in America, but in the provinces.111

110. Era, 9 September, 1911, p. 23.
111. Daily Telegraph, 26 February, 1910, p. 15.
Whilst to de Frece the creation of the VTCC was a step in the development of a monopolistic control of the industry, to Butt the primary, or at least the immediate, purpose behind the formation of the VTCC was the strengthening of a single combine in relation to its competitors, and hence self-aggrandisement.

Therein lay the essential paradox of the evolutionary approach to the creation of a monopoly. Combination, by increasing the size of individual concerns, endowed companies with the same competitive advantages as the expansion of individual syndicates through the erection of new halls or the absorption of independent halls, considered in chapter 2. The process of combination therefore contained a competitive, as well as an anti-competitive and monopolistic, thrust. The ideology of 'expand and compete', which dominated the initial responses of managements to the newly competitive environment of the opening years of the twentieth century, could be as readily applied to the process of combination, as could the ideology of 'unite and control' which became increasingly prevalent amongst entrepreneurs in the wake of the VAF strike of 1907.

Moreover, the two ideologies were not mutually exclusive. Entrepreneurs could readily justify the combination of adherence to the long-term ideal of harmonious cooperation with protecting their own immediate business interests; although, in practice, the pursuit of the latter was generally inimical to the attainment of the former.

Thus the emergence of a number of combines with an oligopolistic position within the music hall industry did not necessarily lead to the reduction of competition within the
business.112 The gradualist approach to the formation of a trust, adopted by the magnates of the music hall industry, had the immediate effect of creating a situation in which the concentration of ownership into four main cartels, Moss Empires, VTCC, VTC, and LTV, brought these combines into increasingly frequent and direct conflict with one another, and thereby perpetuated the existence of the aggressively oppositional definition of the role of syndicates, the development of which in the early 1900s has been examined in chapter 2. Moreover, the creation of the combines gave the rival enterprises access to greater resources with which to pursue aggressively competitive policies.

6-3.4 The re-emergence of wage inflation in the 1910s

The initial stages of the cartelisation of the music hall industry therefore did not reduce the intensity of competition for star performers, nor were they effective in controlling wage inflation. In 1911 it was still the case that

Talent, like truth, will out, and the moment it shows its head there are too many prepared to bid for it to allow its going cheap.113

This continued competition for artists was reflected in a widespread renewal of concern regarding wage inflation in 1910-11. The Era, placing its faith firmly in the efficient working of the free market, denied that wage inflation constituted a problem for the industry, arguing that high wage levels were, necessarily, a reflection of healthy profitability.

112. See Hawkins and Pass, op. cit., pp. 6-7, on the relationship between oligopoly and competition in the brewing industry.
113. Daily Telegraph, 23 September, 1911, p. 15.
The enormous increase in the amount of the salaries received by first-rate performers - the ‘cock salmons’ of the market - is the result of the great prosperity in music halls within recent years, and their increase in number... Each hall must have its ‘leading attractions’. How much they are prepared to pay will depend very much on how much profit they are making at their establishments. 114

Shareholders, who suffered the consequences of rapid wage inflation, took a less sanguine view of the current state of the music hall industry. ‘A.R.W.’, in a letter to the Financial News, articulated the concern amongst shareholders occasioned by the simultaneous increase in wages and the decline of profits.

I have made a careful investigation into the question of exorbitant salaries paid to music-hall artistes and, as a shareholder in five separate concerns, I consider the dividends distributed do not warrant the payment of the extravagant salaries which are so frequently referred to in the press... something should be done on the managemental side to prevent the excess of expenditure which accounts for the present low return on music-hall investments. 115

Butt acknowledged the existence of a problem, and also that the causes of wage inflation had not changed. He declared that

There was no doubt, however, that to a large extent artists’ salaries had increased in consequence of the heavy and keen competition - he might add undesirable competition - between various managers. 116

Thus, in spite of the ructions caused by the strike of 1907, and the subsequent attempts by syndicates to import greater organisation into the management of the music hall industry, the process of combination had not had a significant impact on the operation of the star system, and, in particular, upon the

114. Era, 16 September, 1911, p. 21.
115. Financial News, 10 October, 1910, p. 6. Emphasis added. The analysis of dividend levels undertaken in chapter 3 indicates that this was the more accurate assessment of the nature of the relationship between the health of the music hall business and the salaries paid to artists.
116. Era, 9 September, 1911, p. 22.
strength of the bargaining position enjoyed by stars. As an artist pointed out to the Era, it was still the case in 1911, that 'the laws of supply and demand at the present time is [sic] on the side of the attractions'.

This continuing imbalance between the supply of, and the demand for, music hall stars was reflected in the intensification, in the years after the VAF strike, of the policy of the major music hall syndicates of drawing their headline acts from beyond the variety profession. The growth of this trend can be gauged from table 6-1, which lists the date of the first music hall appearances of some of the most famous legitimate performers to grace the stages of the halls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maud Allen</td>
<td>1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seymour Hicks and Ellaline Terriss</td>
<td>1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna Pavlova</td>
<td>1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yvette Guilbert</td>
<td>1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irene Vanburgh</td>
<td>1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree</td>
<td>1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Hawtrey</td>
<td>1912</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6-1. The dates of the first music hall appearances by famous performers of the legitimate stage.

In August and September 1911, when this renewed interest in the salaries of artists reached its zenith, music hall stages were being graced by the presence of a considerable number of internationally renowned performers. Yvette Guilbert was booked to appear at the Palace Theatre, as was Anna Pavlova, the most famous ballet dancer from the Imperial Opera House, St. Petersburg. The Coliseum's counter-attraction was another relative newcomer to the music hall stage, the great tragedienne

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117. 'An Artist', letter to the Era, 16 September, 1911, p. 21.
118. This information has been derived from J. Parker, 1916, Who's Who in the Theatre.
Sarah Bernhardt. The weekly wage bill of the Hippodrome during September 1911 stood at £2500, of which £800 was paid to Madame Rejane, and £1000 to Leoncavallo, who was personally conducting his very popular piece Pagliacci.119

These performers did not pose a direct threat to the livelihood of music hall stars. As the previous discussion has indicated, the stars of the legitimate theatre were generally engaged to appear at those West End halls which specialised in the production of programmes that did not rely on mainstream variety entertainments. However, they undermined the bargaining position of variety stars by generating publicity not only for the halls at which they were engaged but also for the circuits into which these halls were integrated.120

Celebrated European performers at the Coliseum, Hippodrome, and Palace Theatre raised the show business profiles of, respectively, the Stoll-Gibbons combine, Moss Empires, and the VTCC. Of the main syndicates, only the Syndicate Halls/VTC combine, the first of the syndicates to adopt the star system, continued to rely entirely on established music hall performers for its supply of stars.121

119. For details of their engagements, see Daily Telegraph on 19 August, 1911, p. 13; 2 September, 1911, p. 6; 23 September, 1911, p. 15.
120. The Daily Telegraph’s assessment of the advertising potential of Sarah Bernhardt has been mentioned earlier in this chapter.
121. For the continued production of ‘real’ music hall entertainments in their halls at this date see, for example, Magnet, 26 October, 1912, p. 4.
6-3.5 The maintenance of a national duopoly, 1912-18

By 1911, therefore, control of the music hall industry had become concentrated into four syndicates. These were the London Theatres of Varieties and the Syndicate Halls, both of which operated exclusively in London, and the Variety Theatres Controlling Company and Moss Empires, the interests of which were primarily provincial. A booking arrangement entered into by the latter two companies reduced the number of competing combines to three. This agreement gave Moss Empires and the VTCC a virtual monopoly over the booking of the large provincial halls.

However, in 1912 the fragility of working arrangements limited only to booking matters was again highlighted by a further realignment of the syndicates. This was occasioned by the buy out of Gibbons' interest in the LTV by a consortium led by Charles Gulliver and Arthur Copson Peake, and by the accession of Frank Allen to the position of managing director of Moss Empires. Together these changes brought about the dissolution of the short-lived combination between Moss Empires and VTCC. The similarity in the spatial distribution of the halls under their control was probably significant in the instability of the Moss Empires/VTCC alliance. Although their agreement virtually ruled out the prospect of any serious competitors for their provincial halls, their geographically coincident interests meant that the combination of the two companies did not greatly extend the length of the tour which they could offer to artists, and therefore their arrangement did not greatly enhance their competitiveness against other combines. Combinations between syndicates with
complementary distributions of music halls were fundamentally more sound.

The break up of this combine paved the way for the reconstruction of the 'Triple Alliance' which now, in fact, united the interests of four of the leading music hall magnates, namely, Butt, de Frece, Gulliver, and Stoll.122

These renewed alliances caused the reversion of the organisational pattern of the music hall industry to the position which existed in 1910, in which there were, in addition to the VTC, two combines competing with each other nationwide. As the Triple Alliance explained, its reincarnation was of Considerable benefit to the performer, inasmuch as it would be possible for the latter to book extensive London and provincial tours together, instead of separately, as had previously been the case.123

The Triple Alliance was again, however, based on an agreement of limited scope, which involved the establishment of a committee consisting of representatives of both the LTV and VTCC, to select acts appropriate to the needs of both combines, and to arrange integrated tour itineraries for the artists selected.124

Thus, by the end of 1912, a national duopoly had been created in the music hall business. Both of the combines involved in this duopoly had expanded, both in terms of the number of halls that they controlled, and of the geographical area which they served, to the point at which they were able to secure the exclusive services of individual acts by offering them full

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122. Figure 6-3. Figure 6-4 shows the distribution of halls owned by the main rival of the Triple Alliance - Moss Empires.
123. Era, 5 October, 1912, p. 20.
124. Wednesday Era, 2 October, p. 3.
Figure 6-3. The Triple Alliance, 1912.
Figure 6-4. Moss Empires, 1912.
employment throughout the year. This structure of organisation proved to have greater stability than its predecessors, and remained intact throughout the remainder of the peacetime period and the war years.

However, this stability was not a reflection of the resolution of the fundamental problems underlying the economic difficulties of the music hall industry. The duopolistic structuring of the combines provided an efficient mode of organisation for the pursuit of competitive strategies, rather than an effective means of limiting competition and preventing wage inflation.

Moreover, despite its persistence, this structure continued to manifest the potential weaknesses of combinations restricted in their scope to the alignment of booking policies. As previously indicated, the minimal commitment involved in such agreements was not a sound basis for the creation of mutual trust between partners. The limited field within which policies were coordinated under these loose agreements between companies provided ample scope for the generation of friction between the constituent elements of a combine in areas of their operations beyond those of dealings with artists. One significant cause of friction within combines was provided by conflicting plans for the expansion of the constituent syndicates. This problem was clearly illustrated by the discord generated within the LTV/VTCC combine during the First World War, over the fate of the Alhambra Theatre.

The adverse economic effects of the First World War brought into doubt the ability of the Leicester Square halls, the Alhambra and the Empire Palace, to uphold their proud histories of
independence. In 1915, Mr J.B. Cochran, the chairman of the Alhambra company indicated that, after half a century of successful independent trading, the Alhambra faced liquidation without the support of a music hall syndicate.125

Both Butt, of the VTCC, and Stoll, the chairman of LTV, were keen to take advantage of this opportunity to extend their own music hall empires into Leicester Square by acquiring the Alhambra. Butt devised a plan for the working of both the Alhambra and the Empire, which was also in financial difficulties, in conjunction with the Palace Theatre, around which his variety empire was centred, without ending their independence. Butt envisaged the establishment of a pooling scheme, whereby any profits which the individual halls made over and above an agreed figure were to be paid into a central fund, the contents of which were to be distributed equally between the halls, in order to even out fluctuations in profitability.126 Stoll, however, was convinced that there was a niche in Leicester Square for a variety theatre run along lines similar to those of the Coliseum, and desired to effect a straightforward takeover of the Alhambra Co.

The partners in the LTV/VTCC combine were therefore brought into opposition in their attempts to persuade the directors of the Alhambra of the greater merits of their conflicting proposals. Stoll's offer proved to be the more attractive and, on 26th November, 1915, it was announced 'that the company controlling the Coliseum has obtained a controlling interest in the Alhambra'.127 Butt was, though, also successful in gaining a foothold in

Leicester Square, with the incorporation of the Empire into his syndicate in 1917.

Thus, after twenty years of adverse economic conditions and poor economic performance, the entrepreneurs of the business, despite their realisation of the ruinous costs of intense competition, had been unable to remove this inter-syndicate rivalry from the industry. Indeed, the creation of ever-larger combines may have acted to intensify this competition. After 1912, a greater stability existed in the organisational structure of the industry. The first of the syndicates to coalesce, the Syndicate Halls, survived in an expanded form, in connection with the Variety Theatres Consolidated, but the national stage was dominated by two competing circuits, Moss Empires and the LTV/VTCC combine. However, due to the infrequency with which alliances were based on a merger of interests, the combines which bestrode the music hall industry remained fundamentally unstable.

6-4 Slump and Strikes in Post-war Britain. The creation of a monopoly in the music hall industry, 1919-21.

However, a further deterioration in the economic climate, and fundamental changes in the nature of industrial relations within the industry combined, in the post-war period, to heighten still further the advantages of a monopolistic cartel to the music hall syndicates.

The brief post-war boom soon subsided, leaving the economy in the grip of a slump, which, due to the industry’s extreme sensitivity to changes in real incomes, was felt particularly
sharply by the music hall business.\textsuperscript{128} The First World War created further specific causes of concern for the industry, in addition to the general economic malaise from which the industry had suffered throughout the early years of the twentieth century. During the war, parliament made a number of interventions, avowedly temporary, into the economy of the music hall industry. These interventions included a ban on sales of confectionery and sweetmeats in theatres, and, most significantly, the imposition of a tax on entertainments.\textsuperscript{129} However, after the cessation of hostilities, the Government found it expedient not to remove these impositions from the industry. Their continuance accentuated the already chronic economic problems faced by the industry, and made inter-syndicate rivalry an even more unaffordable luxury.

6-4.1 The transformation of industrial relations in the music hall industry in the post-war years

The post-war period witnessed fundamental changes in the nature of industrial relations both within, and beyond, the music hall industry, which militated in favour of the creation of a united music hall cartel. During the 1910s a status quo had existed within the star system. Although the continued competition between combines had exacerbated the problems of wage inflation, managements were relatively content to allow this situation to persist, as the outcomes of the arbitrations of 1907 and 1913 had done little to limit their ability to control artists

\textsuperscript{128} On the relationship between fluctuations in the economy and music hall profitability, see chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{129} On the imposition to the entertainment tax and the strength of the music hall industry’s opposition to it, see chapter 3.
through the use of the barring clause. Mr. G.R. Askwith, the Arbitrator in 1907 and 1913 had proved to be very sympathetic towards the arguments put forward by the music hall entrepreneurs, and the opinion was widely held, in advance of the third arbitration in 1919, that the 'previous two decisions [went] against the artistes'. Indeed, this view had been supported by the law courts, which had 'in no unmeasured terms expressed the opinion as to the one-sidedness of the present 'model' contract.132

The continued ability of managements to exercise control over stars via barring clauses, left largely unfettered by the awards of Askwith, greatly diminished the motivation of managements to seek a fundamental re-casting of industrial relations within the industry. Syndicates were willing to accept continued wage inflation, secure in the knowledge that they could insist upon the exclusivity of their artists. The appointment of Mr. A.J. Ashton, to succeed Askwith as the arbitrator, in 1919 disrupted this equilibrium by causing a radical change in the relative strength of artists and managements in contractual negotiations. The settlement which he promulgated was considerably more favourable to the interests of performers than those of his predecessor. Indeed, the 1919 Award led the Era to declare

If the artists have not yet arrived at the millennium, of one thing they can be certain, the English contract under the 1919 Award is the best in the world.133

130. On the state of play between the two sides of the industry after the 1913 Award, see 'Music Halls Award 1913: New Model Contract, Era Annual, 1914, pp. 68-71.
The most important features of the 1919 Award were the significant limitations on the spatial and, especially, temporal scope of barring clauses, and Ashton's insistence that the contract which he had drawn up be treated as binding, rather than simply as a 'model' for the guidance of managements. Immediately after the First World War, therefore, the delicate balance between the interests of managements and artists which existed within the star system was disturbed, by the placing of limitations upon the more obviously exploitative perks which the system offered to managements.

Moreover, the greater freedom of contract granted to performers took on added importance, and was made more threatening to managements, by a new wave of organisation amongst employees in the music hall industry, which had been encouraged by the prominence of corporatist sentiments and trade unionism in post-war Britain.

In March 1919 the representatives of theatrical employees initiated a Quadruple Alliance. This Alliance reunited the VAF with its partners in the 1907 strike, the Amalgamated Musicians Union (AMU), and the National Association of Theatrical Employees (NATE), and added to their united front the rejuvenated Actors' Association (AA). The stance of the Alliance was deeply influenced by the more militant tenor of industrial relations prevailing in British industry during the immediate post-war years. During 1919 and 1920, disputes involving NATE and the AA kept the theatrical business teetering almost constantly on the

134. On the formation of the Quadruple Alliance, see Era, 5 March, 1919, p. 13; On the reconstruction of the AA and its close links to the National Federation of Trades Unions, see Era Annual, 1919, p. 35-8.
brink of industrial action. This situation reached breaking point in December 1920, when, for the second year in succession, NATE threatened to disrupt the lucrative pantomime season. In response to this threat Walter Payne, on behalf of managers, issued a stern warning against

Demands for exorbitant increases in wages to their employees, which, if persisted in would compel them to consider whether they should not convert their properties to some other purpose.\(^{135}\)

Charles Gulliver became equally impatient with the demands of NATE, and, when faced with further demands for increased wages in the spring of 1921, gave all the staff of LTV two weeks notice, although all were withdrawn when NATE backed down on its claims.\(^{136}\)

As in 1907, the VAF remained ambivalent towards its involvement in this more recognisably trade union-orientated organisation, and attempted to maintain its distance from its more militant allies. The federation was vehement in its denial of allegations that it had become 'too closely linked to the Labour Movement'.\(^{137}\) These protestations of non-interest in class politics on the part of the VAF were backed up by the actions of federationists. Despite all the industrial strife around them, artists continued to follow a moderate course of action. Their restrained behaviour was undoubtedly influenced by the satisfactory outcome of the 1919 Arbitration.

Thus, although the salary level of artists remained the most significant contributor to the growth in working expenses which

\(^{135}\) Era, 1 December, 1920, p. 15.  
\(^{136}\) Era, 27 April, 1921, p. 12.  
\(^{137}\) Era, 26 January, 1921, p. 15.
continued to undermine the long-term profitability of music hall companies, it was the problematic relations with other groups of employees that came to dominate the attention of managements during the immediate post-war period. The unprecedented level of intensity of industrial militancy within the music hall business brought managements together in the pursuit of their common goal of avoiding compliance with the demands of theatrical employees for substantial wage increases at a time of low profitability. Although the stimuli for cartelisation had altered in the post-war period, the initial reaction of managements focused on the same strategies for combination, and were tempered by the same degree of circumspection, as pre-war attempts at combining syndicates. Within two months of the formation of the Quadruple Alliance, the Era, reported a revival of interest in the creation of a managerial monopoly.

So far England has been immune from managerial trusts as known across the sea, but...interested parties [are seeking] the establishment of separate booking offices through which, and by no other way, artists could be engaged for the theatres connected therewith. In fact, there is in contemplation the stabilising of the counterpart of the United Booking Office of America, through which artists and agents will have to transact their business.\textsuperscript{138}

The effect of growing industrial unrest in Britain upon the music hall industry was not limited to the immediate impact of renewed militancy amongst theatrical trade unions. Industrial action in other industries had direct consequences for both the profitability of, and for industrial relations within, the music hall industry.

\textsuperscript{138} Era, 7 May, 1919, p. 13.
The railway strike of 1919, in particular, had a major impact upon the industrial relations of the music hall industry. The immobilisation of artists by the strike highlighted to managements the fragility of the extensive and intricate spatial organisation, upon which the functioning of the music hall industry had become dependent. The rapid reorganisation of artists' schedules, in order to minimise travelling distances whilst still providing full programmes, highlighted 'the necessity of closer combination among managers', and also required closer cooperation and greater goodwill between managers and performers.\textsuperscript{139} During the course of the strike, combines were forced to dismantle the barring clauses which they had erected against their rivals. Furthermore, the railway strike served to re-establish the traditional bonds between managements and artists, and the mutual inconvenience caused them by the strike placed both in opposition to the activities of organised militant trade unionism.

A sense of this rapprochement between artists and managers, in the face of the deepening crisis which was seriously threatening the livelihoods of both groups, can be garnered from the comments made by one of the 'stars' of the halls, Wee Georgie Wood, regarding the state of industrial relations within the music hall industry. He openly accepted that the stars, by not tailoring their wage demands to the circumstances of the industry, shared the burden of responsibility for the problems besetting the industry. Wood believed that

\textsuperscript{139} This quotation was taken from Era, 8 October, 1919, p. 11; see also Era, 27 October, 1920, p. 14.
In these times...artists would find that they were really getting more money than they were bringing in to the house.140

Wood argued that the revival of the industry depended upon the improvement of relations between managements and artists. He suggested that the mutual distrust generated by pay bargaining could be avoided if the industry reverted to the system of paying stars an agreed percentage of the takings.141

An Era editorial of the following month also sought to invoke the conciliatory spirit contained in Wood's appeal for greater unity between managements and performers. Under the heading 'PULL TOGETHER' the Era suggested that

The time is not inopportune, it seems to us, for the inspiring words of the PRINCE OF WALES, addressed recently to the nation, to be applied in a special way to the theatrical profession.142

Nevertheless, despite this revivification of the traditional ideology of mutuality between performers and managers, the immediate post-war years had witnessed a weakening of the position of managements caused by a number of factors, both endogenous and exogenous. Within the industry, the more conciliatory approach to industrial relations held by artists reflected the strengthening of their bargaining position by the 1919 Arbitration Award, whilst the unity and militancy of other theatrical employees, and the constant threat of strike action, further undermined the precarious finances of the music hall industry. These changes along with the post-war slump and the entertainment tax combined to produce an unprecedented slump in the fortunes of the music

140. Era, 8 June, 1921, p. 11.
141. Ibid, p. 11.
142. Era, 13 July, 1921, p. 11.
hall syndicates. The achievement of the economies offered by the prospect of a managerial monopoly thus became an even greater imperative for managements, and an imperative encouraged by the contemporary intellectual vogue for large scale organisation.

6-4.2 Merger and monopoly in the post-war slump

The immediate response of managements to this deepening crisis in 1919 was, again, reminiscent of pre-war practices, namely, the formulation of a plan for the establishment of a United Booking Office. Again, though, this plan, the simplest route to the creation of a monopoly, failed to reach fruition.

Nevertheless, a new phase of cartel formation was initiated by Charles Gulliver, who, on 2nd October, 1919, bought out the interests of Butt and de Frece in the VTCC, thus taking the company into the same ownership as its partner the LTV.\footnote{143} Gulliver strenuously denied that this takeover was intended as a continuation of the traditional policy of aggressive mergers motivated by inter-syndicate rivalry. A spokesperson for the LTV insisted that

\begin{quote}
The report that this deal was evolved to fight Moss' Empires is untrue. The relationship between Mr. Frank Allen and Mr. Charles Gulliver is now, and has been for some time past, of a most friendly nature.\footnote{144}
\end{quote}

\footnote{143. \textit{Times}, 4 October, 1919, p. 11. This takeover reflected the growing importance of another, and frequently chronicled, threat to the music hall industry in the inter-war years. Although de Frece remained chairman of the VTCC, his decision to sell off his music hall interests was motivated by his intention to divert his capital into the cinema industry. Simultaneously to the sale of his interest in the VTCC, the Alliance Film Company, with a capital of £1 million was floated. De Frece was to be the chairman of this new company.}

\footnote{144. \textit{Era}, 8 October, 1919, p. 12.}
Nevertheless, the very fact that Gulliver felt obliged to release such a statement indicates the continued tension between the two combines. Indeed, throughout the whole of the period during which Frank Allen was the managing director of Moss Empires, the external relations of the company were characterised by an aloofness from the combinatorial policies of other syndicates. The retirement of Allen, at the end of 1919, was immediately followed by the reversal of this policy of isolation by his successor, Mr. R. Harry Gillespie, who negotiated a booking agreement with, and the acquisition of a holding in, a number of the halls with which Butt was still associated. These included the Glasgow Alhambra, the Manchester Palace, and the Victoria Palace, London.¹⁴⁵

The directorate of Moss Empires, nevertheless, remained characteristically cautious regarding their re-engagement with the web of inter-syndicate alliances. The chairman of the company, Mr. William Houlding, indicated that their business strategy regarding combination continued to be based on a preference for loose agreements, which dealt with booking issues, and which were traditional within the industry.

There have been many rumours of combinations and absorptions during the last two years. The policy of the board had been one rather of effecting working arrangements than acquisition of properties, as it gave one greater freedom of selection and involved less capital expenditure.¹⁴⁶

This renewed interest in combination in the immediate aftermath of the First World War did not disrupt the basic

¹⁴⁵. See Era, 24 December, 1919, p. 12 on Allen's retirement; On the agreement between Gillespie and Butt, see Times, 26 February, 1921, p. 20.
¹⁴⁶. Times, 26 February, 1921, p. 20.
duopolistic structure of the industry. The end of the brief post-war boom by 1920, however, brought a further deterioration in the economic climate in which music halls were operating, and in 1921 the early onset of summer weather added to the chronic problems of unemployment, industrial strife, and the entertainments tax, all of which contributed to an 'unprecedented slump in amusements'.

The Era was forced to concede that

However optimistic one may be there is no denying the fact that the entertainment industry is at its lowest ebb.

This unprecedented decline in the fortunes of the halls provided the final spur required by the large combines to bring an end to the wasteful nationwide competition between syndicates through the creation of a unified music hall cartel.

The first significant breach of the existing status quo came with the abandonment by the VTC of its policy of aloofness from national combinations, and its entrance into a 'working agreement' with the London Theatres of Varieties. The agreement reached was of a novel nature, being midway between a booking agreement and a merger in its degree of commitment to combination. Although it was not intended to affect the ownership of the two syndicates involved, the arrangement was of considerably wider scope than a simple agreement for the coordination of the booking policies of the two syndicates, and was intended to foster 'closer and more amicable co-operation in all matters relating to the several undertakings'. In order to achieve the stated intention of facilitating 'the continuous exchange of views and to ensure

147. Era, 25 May, 1921, p. 11.
148. Ibid, p. 11.
149. Era, 23 November, 1921, p. 16.
successful joint working under the agreement’, there was to be an exchange of boardroom personnel between the two syndicates. Mr. J. Davis and Walter Payne joined the board of LTV, whilst, in return, Mr. B. Stephens and Charles Gulliver were added to the directorate of the VTC.\textsuperscript{150}

Moreover, this agreement was not only significant in setting a precedent for the establishment of alliances which would be stronger than booking arrangements without threatening the separate identities of the constituent syndicates. Although it, again, left intact the duopolistic structure, the involvement of the hitherto independent VTC company meant that all of the major syndicates were now implicated in this duopolistic network of music hall combinations. The agreement was also important, as Walter Payne explained, in establishing a virtual monopoly within the industry, albeit one confined spatially to London.

The London Theatres of Varieties...has also very friendly relations with the Stoll group, this implies a community of interest among the great majority of London music hall concerns, and should tend considerably to reduce the working expenses of the individual undertakings.\textsuperscript{151}

Only the gulf between Moss Empires and the LTV/VTCC/VTC combine prevented the establishment of a complete monopoly in both London and the provinces. Within a month of the LTV/VTC accord, this gulf was finally bridged, with the announcement of

A working arrangement...for co-operation and friendly conference in matters affecting the various companies between LTV/VTCC and Moss’ Empires.\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{150. Era, 30 November, 1921, p. 20.} \textsuperscript{151. Era, 23 November, 1921, p. 16.} \textsuperscript{152. Era, 21 December, 1921, p.12.}
Again there was to be 'no financial amalgamation of the companies', but, as William Houlding explained, the relationship between the two combines was intended to be close.\textsuperscript{153}

Our principal opposition in the provinces has been the Variety Theatres Controlling Company, and in London, the London Theatres of Variety, Limited. Both these companies, of which Mr. Gulliver is the managing director, have, through negotiations carried on for some time by the managing director \cite{Gillespie} and Mr. Gulliver, come to an agreement with us whereby the closest cooperation will be effected between the respective companies and, a mutual understanding arrived at on all questions involving the expenditure of money...Mr. Gulliver has been added to the board under the terms of the agreement, and Mr. R.H. Gillespie has been appointed a director of the companies previously mentioned.\textsuperscript{154}

Thus, by the beginning of 1922 all of the 'Big Men' of the music hall industry had been drawn into a single alliance, and the boards of directors of the various major music hall syndicates had become very similar in composition.\textsuperscript{155} The effective cessation of competition between syndicates had been achieved without the actual amalgamation of the companies involved. There remained four syndicates with independent identities, namely, Moss Empires, the Stoll Circuit, VTC, and the merged LTV/VTCC combine. These syndicates were held together by bonds of varying strength, but, significantly, none of the interlinkages depended simply upon booking agreements of the type which had long dominated the process of combination in the music hall industry. All of the agreements involved, at the least, some sharing of entrepreneurial resources.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{154} Times, 25 February, 1922, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{155} Table 6-2.
6-5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the distinctive system of industrial relations which existed within the music hall industry, and have argued that a knowledge of the dynamics of this system are fundamental to the understanding of the transformations in the organisation of the music hall industry during the period 1885-1922. The operation of the star system was an important factor in stimulating the rapid geographical expansion of syndicates during the 1900s, and their combination in the following decade.

Despite adopting a number of features common to the structure of industrial enterprises in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, relations within the music hall industry did not become polarised between employers and employees. Rather, the tradition of mutuality which had typified the music hall in its earlier history persisted, in a modified form, throughout the reorganisation of the business.

This reflected the unique status of the 'workers' of the music hall industry - the performers. Not only were they the 'raw materials' of the music hall industry, but, more significantly, performers of high quality were in chronically short supply. Moreover, the specific identity of their employees was an important consideration to music hall managements. This provided popular artists with an uniquely powerful bargaining position, and managements were wary not to alienate them.

156. Of course, the presentation of music hall entertainments depended on other groups of workers, such as musicians and stage hands. This chapter has indicated that these groups were not encompassed by this tradition of mutuality.
Indeed, managements heightened their dependence upon individual performers through the use of the star system, by means of which they raised the profile of music hall 'stars' in order to generate publicity for their companies.

The operation of the star system, it is argued, is central to our understanding of the evolution of the music hall business. It was enthusiastically adopted by the initial music hall syndicates which emerged during the 1890s as they were in a position to insist upon the reduction of the salaries paid to artists in return for stable employment.

However, during the 1900s the functioning of the system changed dramatically, although its structure remained essentially the same. The control of popular music hall artists, as the most scarce resource of the industry, became a major element in the competitive strategies of syndicates. As syndicates competed for the services of artists, so the balance of bargaining power swung in favour of the latter. This was reflected in rapid wage inflation during the 1900s. This increased the need for syndicates to ensure their exclusive control over artists. Syndicates achieved this through increasing the restrictions imposed on the liberty of performers by barring clauses, and by extending their circuits spatially, in order to be able to offer star performers constant employment.

However, the increasingly extravagant wage demands of stars, and the draconian barring clauses imposed upon them caused the star system to malfunction, culminating in a strike of music hall performers in 1907. By highlighting the shared interests of music hall managements this was directly responsible for encouraging a
fundamental shift in the business strategies of the syndicates. Managements considered that, by replacing competition by cooperation, they would be able to strengthen their position in negotiations with artists.

However, as the later sections of this chapter have indicated, this did not generate a confrontational style of industrial relations within the music hall industry. The process of combination proceeded slowly on account of the persistence of the suspicions generated between managers by the cut-throat competition of the 1900s, and also because of tensions between the shared long-term goals of music hall managements and the immediate interests of individual syndicates. Equally, the artists were never able to create a united front in opposition to managements. The aspirations of music hall performers to professional status were significant in preventing the polarisation of industrial relations within the music hall industry. Artists frequently identified their interests more closely with those of managements than with those of other groups of theatrical employees, such as stage hands and musicians.

Thus, industrial relations took on an unique form within the music hall industry, and the operation of the star system played a significant role in determining the evolution of the economic organisation of the industry. This reflected the inherent strength of the negotiating position held by popular performers. Although the relative power of managers and artists varied over time, managements never succeeded in establishing a firm control over their labour force. Even the creation of a monopoly by music hall managements did not undermine the power of performers.
Indeed, the final establishment of a monopoly over the music hall industry was, in part, a reaction to the entrenching of the power of artists by the 1919 arbitration.
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

Posterity will with good reason select as one of the most remarkable features of the social history of the nineteenth century—indeed, of the later half only of the nineteenth century—the extraordinary alliance which was brought about between pastime and business.¹

It is this alliance, in one of its most dramatic forms—the penetration of the provision of music hall entertainments by industrial organisation—that the preceding chapters have sought to chronicle.

The conclusion to this study will be divided up into 3 sections, dedicated to somewhat contradictory purposes. The first section will concentrate on tying up some of the loose ends left by my analysis of the convergence of ‘pastime and business’ between 1885 and 1922. This will be followed by brief discussions of some of the issues with which this thesis has dealt with cursorily, and, more particularly, with a consideration of a number of avenues of research for which this thesis has opened up the way. The intention of this conclusion is both to complete my consideration of some issues, and to stimulate debate and research in others.

The objective of the first of these sections is not solely to recapitulate the arguments put forward in the various chapters of this thesis, but rather to link together a number of the themes developed in these discrete discussions. In particular, I shall emphasize the importance of the 1900s as a turning point in the organisational development of the halls, and especially as the period during which geographical expansion became integral to the functioning of the economy of the music hall industry. I shall also make the case that, during the early twentieth century, the

¹ Chambers Journal, 21 December, 1895, p. 801.
reorganisation of the industry was invariably undertaken as a defensive reaction to the weakening economic circumstances of the music hall.

7-1 Summary of Conclusions

The arguments put forward in the substantive chapters of this thesis indicate that, in broad outline, the actual evolution of the music hall industry in Britain between 1885 and 1922 approximated to the theoretical model of the development of a mass entertainment industry propounded by the Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School, in their consideration of the emergence of the 'Culture Industry'. Although a more exact prediction of the nature of this economic transformation is provided by the framework of organised capitalism.

The most significant elements of the transformation in the nature of the music hall business examined by this thesis were the increased level of investment in music hall enterprises, and the emergence of companies which united under their control a number of music halls in geographically dispersed locations. The efficient management of these emerging syndicates depended upon the professionalisation of the administration of music hall companies and the development of complex bureaucratic hierarchies.

Chapters 2 and 3 indicated that the reorganisation of the music hall business was initiated in the late nineteenth century. The adoption of limited liability status by music hall enterprises, a prerequisite for the inflow of capital into the industry, became common in the late 1880s, whilst the first music hall syndicates emerged in the 1890s.
Nevertheless, it was during the 1900s that many of the features characteristic of the ‘organisation’ of the music hall industry became widespread.

It was in the years after the turn of the century that, as chapter 4 has indicated, the divorce of the ownership of music hall companies from their control proceeded most rapidly, as a result of the rise of preference shares, debenture stocks, and the private company. Chapter 5 has demonstrated that the 1900s also witnessed the penetration of the higher levels of the decision-making hierarchy of music hall companies by professional men, and especially by lawyers and accountants.

The cumulative effect of these changes, it was argued in chapter 2, brought about a fundamental change in the nature of the competitive processes underlying the music hall industry during the 1900s. The emergence of a number of music hall syndicates during the early 1900s led to the displacement of a situation in which independent music halls competed with one another through free market mechanisms, to one in which companies adopted aggressive and conflictual business practices targeted against specific rivals.

It was in the pursuit of these new competitive strategies that the spatial expansion of music hall syndicates became imperative.

As chapter 6 demonstrates, control over music hall ‘stars’ became the main vector of this inter-syndicate rivalry during the 1900s. Obtaining the exclusive rights to exploit the talents and popularity of the stars of the music hall stage became a central business objective of syndicates. The inclusion of stringent barring clauses in the contracts of performers, intended to prevent them
fulfilling engagements with rival companies, was an important method of securing control over artists. However, in order to retain the goodwill and loyalty of performers, syndicates had to offer artists compensation for their loss of professional liberty. This usually took the form of increased remuneration or greater security of employment. The latter was of particular value to artists as the music hall profession provided its members with a very insecure livelihood. This method of recompensing artists for losses of liberty was also preferable to syndicates, as, unlike higher wages, long-term contracts did not add to the working costs of music hall syndicates.

However, the experience of the Syndicate Halls, which pioneered the adaptation of the star system to the needs of syndicates during the 1890s, had highlighted the problems inherent in offering performers long engagements at single, or geographically proximate, halls. This business practice threatened to undermine the commercial value of stars by over-exposing them to the same audiences. Therefore, in order to secure exclusive control over star performers through the use of long-term contracts, it was necessary for syndicates to control a sufficiently large number of halls to be in a position to virtually fill the date-book of stars by engaging them for a number of brief appearances in different locations.

Given the need for these halls to appeal to separate markets, the geographical extension of circuits was a necessary corollary of this competition between syndicates.

The comparison of the timing of the major phases in the transformation considered in this thesis with the trends in dividend levels considered in chapter 3, indicates that the widespread
reorganisation of the music hall industry was a defensive response to falling profitability.

The first of the syndicates discussed in chapter 2 emerged during the 1890s, at a time of unparalleled profits in the music hall industry. As they lacked the competitive stimuli to expansion outlined above, their growth was probably generated by the need to find suitable investment opportunities for surplus profits.

However, the proliferation of syndicates during the early 1900s took place in the context of declining levels of profitability. This suggests that the spread of large-scale organisation in the music hall business was not stimulated primarily by the existence of accumulations of surplus capital, but rather by the need for companies to take advantage of the cost-cutting potential of the syndicate mode of organisation. As chapter 2 indicated, the construction of syndicates enabled companies to reduce their expenditure on both administration, by preventing the duplication of functions, and on wages, by allowing syndicates to offer artists lower salaries in return for more secure employment. The directors of the newly-formed London Theatres of Varieties Ltd., for example, were in no doubt that during the first year of operation of the company in 1908-9

The increased profits were in great measure due to centralisation in management and the perfection of the system [of circulating stars].

However, as chapter 6 argues, the construction of syndicates did not prove to be an efficacious means of improving the long-term profitability of the music hall industry. Pace Horkheimer and Adorno, the concentration of the ownership of music halls in Britain

2. PRO BT31 18369/97040.
did not inevitably lead to a reduction in competition and the establishment of a monopoly within the industry. Indeed, the concentration of resources into a smaller number of companies initially served to fuel the intensification of competition between syndicates. The wasteful nature of this competition, and, in particular, the consequent overproduction of music halls, undermined further the profitability of the industry.

The end of this period of intense competition between syndicates, and its replacement by greater collaboration between music hall companies was associated with a second, and in many cases more severe, downturn in profitability after 1909. The new strategy of combination, which music hall managements adopted increasingly during the 1910s, offered companies not only the prospect of greater economies of scale, but also the possibility of regaining control over the level of remuneration received by stars, which had spiralled during the 1900s as a result of the intense competition between syndicates for the services of stars. The process of combination was complicated in practice by the tensions which existed between the interests of individual syndicates and the shared concerns of all music hall managements. The establishment of an effective monopoly in the music hall industry took over a decade to achieve. Its ultimate achievement depended considerably upon the effects of an unprecedented slump in music hall profits in the years immediately after the First World War.

Thus, the evidence provided by this thesis indicates that the transformation of the music hall industry, which took place primarily during the 1900s and involved the adoption of a number of features characteristic of the phase of 'organised capitalism', was driven by
the declining economic fortunes of the business in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{3}

7-2 The Demand for Music Hall Entertainment

Having drawn together some of the conclusions arrived at by this thesis, I wish to conclude with a brief consideration of the limitations of the approach adopted above to the specific issues addressed by this thesis, and the implications of the findings of my research for our understanding of the processes involved in the dissemination of a homogeneous mass or national culture discussed in chapter 1.

This thesis has taken as its focus the revolution in the organisation of the music hall industry between 1885 and 1922, which enabled the industry to supply entertainment to the national mass market. However, in exploring, and accounting for, the details of this transformation I have largely neglected to consider the nature of the demand generated by this emerging mass market for entertainment in Britain and its effect on the organisation of the music hall industry. The extension of our knowledge regarding this historically unprecedented demand, in terms of both its size, and of the specific types of entertainment which were required to satisfy it, are important to the advancement of our understanding of the development of the music hall industry.

The significant contribution that the examination of the temporal trends in the size of the market for which the music hall

\textsuperscript{3} This contrasts with the interpretation of the merger movement put forward by Hannah. L. Hannah, 1974, \textit{Mergers in British manufacturing industry 1880-1918}, pp. 7-9, argues that mergers in general were most common during periods of boom, as it was at these times that vendors could realise the greatest profits from the sale of their interests.
industry catered can make to our understanding of the evolution of the halls is clear in the context of the arguments made in this chapter regarding the decline of the music hall industry in the early twentieth century. The explanations which I have put forward to account for the declining profitability of music hall companies focus solely on changes in the supply of music hall entertainment. In particular, I have emphasized the importance of the rapid increase in the number of halls which was stimulated by the intensity of the competition between syndicates. That this represented the 'overproduction' of music halls has been inferred from the contemporaneous decline in music hall profitability, and the statements of music hall managers. Clearly, a growth in the number of halls only constitutes 'overproduction' if demand fails to expand at the same rate as supply. The failure of the establishment of a monopoly in the industry in the early 1920s to restore the economic fortunes of music hall companies indicates that wasteful competition was not the only cause of falling profitability. It would appear that, by the 1920s, the market for music hall entertainment had evaporated. The detailed delineation of the timing and extent of the growth of the mass market for music hall entertainment, and this subsequent contraction of the market would significantly enrich our understanding of the evolution of the music hall business.

Filling this gap in our knowledge requires, initially, the recovery of detailed evidence regarding the number of music hall attenders at various times and in various places. However, the enhancement of our understanding of these fluctuations in the popularity of the halls, and their relationships to wider economic, social and demographic trends in Britain is also dependent upon the
continued investigation of the social profiles of music hall audiences.

7-3 Social Interaction and Cultural Transmission: The flow of music hall performers and the construction of a national culture

In conclusion, I wish to return to some of the issues raised in chapter 1 concerning the nature of the demand provided by this mass market, and the role of the music halls in moulding it into a national culture. Initially, I shall examine the extent to which my research has shed light upon these issues. I shall then go on to make a number of suggestions as to how the approach adopted here could be extended to increase our understanding of these issues, as well as to consider the inherent limitations of this approach.

This thesis has outlined the emergence of an integrated national music hall network in Britain between 1885 and 1922. It has demonstrated, therefore, that the music halls did provide a potential conduit for the dissemination of a national culture in Britain before the 1920s. However, my research has not established the extent to which this potential was fulfilled in practice.

Although these considerations are beyond the scope of the present thesis, I should, nevertheless, like to conclude by placing a few way-markers for the guidance of scholars attempting to illuminate this significant issue in the future.

The first point to make with respect to the role of the commercialised music hall in disseminating a national culture in Britain, is to indicate the potential limits to the penetration of

4. A model for further research in this area has been provided by Dagmar Hoher, 1986, The composition of music hall audiences, 1850-1900, pp. 73-92.
commercialised music hall culture into the consciousness of the population of Britain. Although the circuits constructed by the music hall syndicates incorporated cities nationwide, their influence was necessarily largely restricted to the higher levels of the urban hierarchy. The costs involved in running these large scale organisations, and especially the high salaries paid to artists, made it uneconomic for these national networks to expand into settlements with small populations. There were, therefore, large areas of Britain which were not exposed to the culture of the music hall industry.

Furthermore, even in those locations integrated into the national music hall circuits, local populations were not without alternative forms of entertainment to the programmes offered by the music hall syndicates. Indeed, the syndicates did not even possess a monopoly over the market for music hall entertainment. As the information contained in the Magnet indicates very clearly, the spread of the syndicates did not cause the demise of establishments engaged in the provision of music hall entertainment on a smaller scale. The 'free halls' continued to flourish. Even in the 1930s, George Orwell was able to comment that 'travelling actors [were] always common in the North because most of the larger pubs hire variety artists at the weekends'. Before geographers and historians can begin to estimate with confidence the influence of the music halls in creating a nationally shared culture, considerably more must be known regarding the halls which made up this flourishing undergrowth, and especially the particular cultural forms which they promoted. Amongst the highly capitalised halls considered in this thesis the trend between the 1880s and the 1920s was towards the

5. G. Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, pp. 9-10.
presentation of more 'respectable' acts, particularly the performance of theatrical sketches, and lavish 'spectacles'. It is important to ascertain the extent to which the 'free halls' had the resources, or the will, to follow these trends in the establishment of a new music hall culture by the syndicates.6

The extent to which the culture promoted by the music hall syndicates could attain a national penetration was, therefore, limited in a number of ways. Large proportions of the population of Britain were beyond the reaches of the national music hall network. There were also numerous alternative sources of variety entertainment to those provided by syndicates. There is no evidence as yet to warrant the assumption that these alternative sources were involved in disseminating the same cultural forms as the syndicates.

Furthermore, it is necessary to consider whether the establishment of national circuits which enabled the efficient distribution of artists actually resulted in the presentation of the same performers, and uniform performances on stages across the nation. A brief consideration of these issues below indicates that performers were selectively booked by syndicates, and that they frequently altered the content of their performances in response to local variations in culture.

6. The historical records required to support the examination of these issues are undoubtedly available. The Magnet alone provides a wealth of untapped information on the 'free halls'. My own consideration of this area, which due to constraints of space has been excluded from this thesis, indicates that the free halls were probably more loyal to traditional acts, especially comic and character singers. Furthermore, the evidence provided by the Magnet also indicates the existence of a complex hierarchy within the 'free halls' which casts doubt on the validity of any universal generalisations regarding the nature of these music halls.
Walter de Frece, speaking on behalf of the 'Triple Alliance' in 1910, exhibited an awareness of the continuing spatial variation in the nature of demand for music hall entertainments. He declared that this new combine

*Could* give an artiste or act fifty-two weeks' contract right off, but that is not our policy. We intend to study each town separately, and to book accordingly. An artist may well be worth a hundred pounds a week in one town and not worth ten pounds in another...Consequently we do not intend except under exceptional circumstances to book any artist or act for the whole tour at once.\(^7\)

In order to test the general applicability of this statement to the booking policies of syndicates, I have undertaken a small-scale survey which reconstructs the provincial tours undertaken by 5 music hall of stars during 1902 and 1912 from weekly advertisements placed in the trade press.\(^8\) Table 7-1 indicates the number of occasions during a single calendar year on which these performers were engaged by Moss Empires to appear in the towns incorporated into their circuit. This analysis demonstrates that during the 1900s it became increasingly uncommon for stars to appear at halls in all of the towns in which the company was represented.

In 1902, most of the large cities received, on average, 1 appearance from each of the stars. Only 4 towns, all in Ireland and Wales, were not visited by 3 of the 5 stars. By 1912 this situation had altered dramatically. Only a small group of the largest cities, which included Leeds, Birmingham, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Nottingham and Sheffield, still received annual visits from the majority of the performers examined. 9 of the 16 towns incorporated into the Moss

\(^7\) Referee, 13 March, 1910, p. 4.

\(^8\) The 5 stars whose movements I have examined are G.H. Chirgwin, T.E. Dunville, Harry Lauder, Marie Lloyd and Vesta Tilley.
Empires circuit in 1912 were visited by no more than one of these 5 star performers.

This brief analysis has borne out the contention of de Frece that performers were not invariably engaged for all of the towns incorporated into the circuits of the major syndicates.

<table>
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<td>Nottingham</td>
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<td>Leicester</td>
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<td>-</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-1. Spatial variations in the frequency with which star performers appeared at Moss Empires halls.

However, the fact that the towns in which the stars examined were not engaged were generally the same towns, indicates that this policy of selective booking of stars was not based on the assessment of the popularity of individual performers in specific geographical locations. Rather, there appears to have been a systematic policy of not booking stars to appear at the halls located in the smaller and more peripheral towns incorporated into the Moss Empires circuit. This suggests that this policy reflected the fact that the local populations from which music hall audiences were drawn were not sufficiently large in these smaller towns to justify the engagement
of stars, whose wages, as chapter 6 indicates, rose dramatically between 1902 and 1912. Thus, as the competition between syndicates increased, so the financial viability of extensive provincial tours by star performers decreased. The policies of syndicates generated regional variations in the access of the public to star performers, but this was guided by factors other than the geographical variability in the popularity of performers.

The analysis of the movement patterns of performers might yield more direct insights into the persistence of regional variations in culture through the consideration of the spatial distribution of the engagements of artists whose acts were closely identified with a particular regional culture. Irish and 'Scotch' comedians, for example, abounded on the music hall stage. An analysis of the movements of 2 prominent 'coster comedians' provides ambiguous evidence on this matter. Performers within this genre specialised in performing, in a (usually fake) cockney accent, songs which depicted life in the East End of London. Albert Chevalier was the most eminent practitioner of this art, but he failed to reproduce his great metropolitan popularity in the provinces. My analysis of his engagements indicates that he was seldom engaged to appear outside of London. This might be interpreted as evidence of the rejection by provincial music hall audiences of a form of music hall culture manufactured in London. However, a similar study of his greatest rival within the genre, Gus Elen, indicates that he was engaged for extensive provincial tours. Further detailed studies of this type would begin to clarify the value of this approach.

Thus the extension of the approach adopted by this thesis to examining the role of the music hall in spreading a homogeneous
culture in Britain contains the potential to address, more directly than the scope of the present work has enabled me to do, the issues relating to the development of a national culture and the malleability of a mass market by the commercial entertainment industry which were discussed in chapter 1.

Nevertheless, this approach is necessarily limited, in its attempt to analyse the patterns of the circulation of performances within the music hall industry without also developing a more profound understanding of the processes involved in the transmission of cultural values. Focusing solely on the development of music hall networks as a means of producing a national culture is an analogous form of argument to that examined in chapter 1, with regard to the role of the emergence of efficient transportation networks in the development of a national identity in Britain. The integration of both the railway and music hall networks facilitated the diffusion of cultural values, neither necessitated this process.

In order to assess more accurately the role of the music hall industry as a conduit for the permeation of a national culture, the reconstruction of broad patterns of cultural flows must be undertaken in conjunction with more detailed studies of the style and content of music hall performances.

My initial researches in relation to the extent to which performers delivered the same cultural messages in all locations indicate that music hall performers circulating around Britain could serve to reinforce local cultures, as well as bring geographically diverse audiences into contact with shared cultural forms.
Artists were certainly aware of the existence of differences between the audiences to which they performed. The Era reported in 1903, for instance, that Charles Coborn had created a 'sensation' at the Ton-y-Pandy Hippodrome by including songs in the Welsh language in his repertoire. On Monday he sang the fine old ballad 'I Blas Gogerddan,' each verse being received with rapturous applause, and an encore being vociferously demanded he 'obliged' with 'Ar hyd y nos,' which met with a similar reception. 9

A similar, if more subtle, process of tailoring her performances to the nature of the audience appears to have been central to the maintenance of her unparalleled popularity by Marie Lloyd. A journalist from the Sketch, who followed her through one evening in 1895, recorded that, even within London, the songs which Miss Lloyd chose from her repertoire differed between 'turns', depending on the location of the hall in which she was performing. 10

This article also noted that the reactions of audiences to the same song differed greatly between locations. At the Varieties, Hoxton, and the Queens' Varieties, Poplar, both of which attracted a predominantly working class clientele, the audience failed to appreciate many of the allusions included in Marie Lloyd's 'Bicycle Song'. At the more socially mixed Sadler's Wells this song was 'thoroughly understood and appreciated' by the audience. However, unlike the sophisticated West End clientele of the London Pavilion, the audience at Sadler's Wells did not fully comprehend the meaning of the song 'Trilby'. 11

This observation serves to make the point that the dissemination of culture through the medium of the music hall

industry was complicated further by the reinterpretation by audiences of the cultural meanings encoded in variety performances. This was as likely to be influenced by regional variations in cultures within Britain as it was between class cultures in London. Due to the complexity of the processes involved in the transmission of culture, the provision of standard entertainments need not necessarily be reflected in emergence of a spatially undifferentiated culture.

These concluding comments are intended to highlight the complexity of the issues involved in understanding the cultural processes which were operating within music halls. I hope to have demonstrated that these issues can only be tackled through detailed interpretative studies of performers, performances, and their reception by audiences. However, to endow these detailed analyses with any general significance, it is necessary to locate them firmly within their social and economic contexts. It is in the intersection between such detailed cultural studies and more general frameworks, such as that outlined here, that insight regarding such issues as the creation of national or mass cultures can best be obtained.

Thus, having tied together some of the conclusions of this thesis, I have considered its relevance to our understanding of the emergence of a national culture in Britain. My research outlines the potential spatial limitations to the permeation of commercialised music hall culture. Whilst syndicates eased the logistical problems involved in the movement of music hall performers around Britain, they simultaneously erected economic barriers to this flow. The large-scale organisation of these companies made it uneconomic for them to expand into small towns, and not all of the settlements integrated into these national networks had sufficiently large
populations to justify the engagement of star performers at all of the venues incorporated into a circuit. Moreover, I have made a few brief comments regarding the fact that the syndicates did not possess a monopoly over the provision of music hall entertainments. Further research on the 'free halls', with which the syndicates co-existed, is one of the most pressing needs within the academic study of the music hall.

At a more general level I suggested a number of refinements to the methodology adopted here, which focuses on economic processes and the associated cultural patterns. However, I argue that this type of approach must be complemented by more direct and detailed studies of the cultural processes involved in the dissemination of culture by the music hall. Nevertheless, the cumulativity of these detailed cultural studies is dependent upon their location within the broader framework outlined in this thesis.
Appendix 1: The Use of Music Hall Directories and the Subdivision of the Urban Hierarchy.

The intention of chapter 2 is the construction of an outline of, and the temporal changes in, the geographical distribution of music halls in England and Wales between 1885 and 1922. In order to facilitate the comparison of the data over time it is important that the requisite information be derived from a single source.

An appropriate source for the task to be undertaken in chapter 2 must fulfill two criteria. First, it must have published regular music hall listings. Secondly, the relevant source must have appeared throughout a large part of the period under consideration, 1885-1922.

A large number of music hall periodicals appeared during this period. However, very few of these journals fulfill the requirements set out here. The publishing of music hall journals appears to have been a very volatile business. Periodicals aimed at the music hall business had a relatively short life-expectancy. During the second music hall press boom of the late 1880s, for example, the Artiste ran for eighteen weeks in 1887 whilst the Prompter managed only nine issues in 1889. Indeed, only three music hall publications, the Era, the Era Almanack and the Magnet survived from the 1880s through to the First World War. The Era, was the most important journal of the music hall trade, although

1. The years 1866-70 and 1887-92 appear to have been peak periods for the founding of new journals. The foundation of music hall periodicals, therefore, was clearly stimulated by the major periods of reorganisation in the music hall industry, which are identified in chapter 2.
it was originally founded as a paper for the licensed victuallers in 1838. As the music hall business grew the variety theatre gradually came to dominate the contents of this London-based newspaper. However, of more significance in the present context is the *Era Almanack*, an offshoot of the *Era*, published annually from 1867 until 1919. Along with the usual cartoons of proprietors and artistes, show business gossip, short stories, and theatrical reminiscences, and the important dates befitting an almanac, the *Era Almanack* included a list of the 'Music Halls in the United Kingdom'.

The *Magnet*, published weekly in Leeds, became 'the pioneer of the professional music hall press' when it began publication in 1866. This paper is of interest here, for, as Stuart and Park indicate, 'its principal feature throughout its existence has been a 'Professional Directory' of the variety halls in the United Kingdom, and the artistes engaged there for the current week'.

However, the difficulties inherent in constructing a definitive map of the music halls of Britain is apparent from the most superficial comparison of the evidence provided by these two sources. The *Magnet* consistently lists a considerably larger number of halls than the *Era Almanack*, and indicates a considerably less even distribution pattern of music halls. The concentration of the halls listed by the *Magnet* in the industrial north reflects the manner in which the 'professional directory' was compiled, and the nature of its audience. Published in Leeds under the editorship of W.H. Fraser, the *Magnet* enjoyed 'a large

4. Although it changed its name to the *Era Annual* in 1902, I shall refer to it as the *Era Almanack* throughout.
5. Stuart and Park, op. cit., p. 146.
circulation, almost entirely confined to the provinces’. The provincial orientation of the *Magnet* is confirmed by the amount of space devoted to the ‘Provincial Notes’, which reviewed the performances of artistes currently appearing at northern music halls. The ‘professional directory’ was not strictly a form of commercial advertising for halls, as inclusion in the listing was free, nor, however, did it claim to be a comprehensive listing. The editor did not actively seek-out music halls for inclusion in the directory. Music hall proprietors were requested to return coupons printed in the newspaper to the editor of the *Magnet*, with details of the name and address of their establishment. The contents of the directory, therefore, depended directly on its readership. The geographical spread of the readers from the *Magnet* can be inferred from the addresses given by artists advertising in the paper, which are examined in table A1-1.

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No address</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A1-1. The addresses of artists advertising in the *Magnet* in 1882 and 1912.

7. These figures are drawn from the *Magnet* for the week ending 7th January 1882, no. 795, and also from issue no. 2360, for the week ending 6th January 1912.
The Magnet, therefore, provides an uniquely detailed insight into the organisation of music halls on the local and regional scale in the industrial north, particularly the areas clustered around Leeds, and is surely a valuable, and currently underutilised, resource for future research on the operation of the halls outside of London. However, it is clear that the data it provides are too spatially inconsistent to be of much use for the present purposes of reconstructing the national framework within which the music hall industry developed.

The Magnet’s, 'professional directory' serves the useful purpose of indicating that the Era Almanack directories did not provide a comprehensive listing of all of the establishments in the United Kingdom which were offering variety entertainments to their patrons. However, the London-based Era Almanack does appear to have been a nationally rather than a regionally, or metropolitan-orientated publication. It deals only with larger halls, but its geographical coverage is less partial. 8

The Era Almanack would, therefore, appear to be the most appropriate single source for the construction of the distribution of music halls in England and Wales from the 1880s to the 1910s. However, the use of this single source is not unproblematical. Figure A1-1 indicates that there were considerable temporal fluctuations in the number of halls listed by the Era Almanack. The rapidity and amplitude of some of these fluctuations, especially in the late 1880s and the 1910s, suggest strongly that they reflect temporal variations in the comprehensiveness of the data provided by the Era Almanack, rather than an accurate

Figure A1-1. The number of music halls listed in the Era Almanack directories, 1882-1912.

Figure A1-2. Music halls listed in the Era Almanack directories, 1882-1912, by settlement size.
reflection of the number of halls extant. In particular, the data is vulnerable to inconsistencies in the practices of collecting and editing the information over time. The size of the Era Almanack, and, hence, the amount of space available for the directories, varied from year to year. The specific absolute figures for the total number of music halls in England and Wales provided by the Era Almanack should therefore be treated with considerable circumspection. The analysis in chapter 2 deals primarily with relative figures, and the analysis of broad trends rather than the specific details of the music hall distribution indicated by the Era Almanack directories.

The validity of the Era Almanack data can be gauged by comparing it with the evidence contained in the directories produced by some of its shorter-lived competitors. These included the Official Music Hall Directory, and the Green Room Book (GRB), which, between 1907 and 1909, published lists of 'provincial theatres and music halls' and also of metropolitan variety theatres. The respective figures produced by these sources are included in tables A1-2 and A1-3.  

9. There does seem to be a positive relationship between the fluctuations in the number of halls listed and the number of pages in each issue of the Era Almanack. It is not feasible to make the contrary argument that the number of halls listed in the directory affected the size of the volume, as the Era Almanack invariably contained over 100 pages of which only 2-4 were taken up by the music hall directory.

10. Voyce apparently intended this directory to be an annual publication, but it appeared only in 1899.

11. Green Room Book, 1907, pp. 678-703; A. Voyce, 1899, The Official Music Hall Directory, pp 79-81. The use of the Green Room Book figures is complicated by the fact that unlike the Era Almanack, the Green Room Book listed music halls and theatres together. The Green Room Book distinguishes between several categories of theatre. It is clear, therefore that these were not music halls. However, it is not necessarily the case that all the establishments not thus designated were used as music halls. Many of these undesigned places were town halls. Their music and dancing was of a distinctly different nature to that of music
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<td>London</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liverpool</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Newcastle</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Nottingham</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>Norwich</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oldham</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Plymouth</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Portsmouth</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preston</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salford</td>
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<td>Sheffield</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Shields</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southampton</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoke</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunderland</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>148</strong></td>
<td><strong>176</strong></td>
<td><strong>103</strong></td>
<td><strong>84</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A1-2. A comparison of the number of music halls in the cities of England and Wales, in 1899 and 1907, according to different music hall periodicals.

halls. By studying the list carefully it was possible to extract all those establishments with names which were more characteristic of music halls than of theatres. This method clearly provides only an approximate calculation of the number of halls listed. Nevertheless, the degree of congruence between the data in the Green Room Book and the Era Almanack is striking. These tables only consider the number of halls situated in towns of over 50,000 population. Settlements have been designated into two categories, those of 'towns', including all settlements with populations of 50-100,000, and 'cities' with populations of over 100,000. Population statistics are taken from the 1901 Census.
### Table Al-3.

A comparison of the number of music halls in the towns of England and Wales, in 1899 and 1907, according to different music hall periodicals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Era Almanack</th>
<th>GRB</th>
<th>Era Almanack</th>
<th>Voyce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barrow</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bath</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bootle</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bournemouth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnley</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burton</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bury</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coventry</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gt. Yarmouth</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grimsby</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hastings</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huddersfield</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ipswich</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merthyr</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middlesbrough</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>Northampton</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rochdale</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotherham</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Helens</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smethwick</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockport</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swansea</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tynemouth</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walsall</td>
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<td>Warrington</td>
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<td>West Bromwich</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>Wigan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolverhampton</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 42 46 21 15

These tables indicate that the comparable data provided by the different sources tend to corroborate the veracity of one another. Whilst Voyce lists 99 halls in 1899, the *Era Almanack* includes 124, or almost exactly 25% more. The discrepancy between the totals of the *Era Almanack* and the *Green Room Book* figures for 1907 is only 17%. More significantly, the number of settlements

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12. Half of this discrepancy is ascribable to the difference in the number of halls which the 2 sources listed for London.
for which the sources compared listed identical numbers of halls was very high. The *Green Room Book* and the *Era Almanack* recorded exactly the same number of halls in 40 out of the 62 towns listed, whilst in the case of the comparison of Voyce's *Directory* and the *Era Almanack*, the corresponding figure was 43 out of 60.

Thus, it is clear from the massive number of halls enumerated for Yorkshire and Lancashire by the *Magnet* that the directory in the *Era Almanack* does not represent a listing of all of the music halls in Britain, and indeed, probably records the existence of only a minority of the total number of extant halls. However, comparisons with other periodicals indicates that the selection of halls listed in the *Era Almanack* corresponds closely to that of other sources. This suggests the existence of a consensus amongst contemporaries as to which halls were of significance in a national context. It is this consensual view of the national music hall network which is considered in chapter 2.

One of the main tasks of chapter 2 is to examine the nature of the relationship between the distribution of music halls in England and Wales and the urban hierarchy. In particular, chapter 2 seeks to examine the extent to which the national network of commercialised music halls was concentrated at the higher levels of the urban hierarchy.

In undertaking this task I have drawn upon the framework for analysis put forward by P.J. Waller in his recent analysis of urbanisation in Britain before the First World War. Waller defined 'proper' towns as those settlements that possessed a population of at least 10,000. Accordingly, he excluded from his

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13, P.J. Waller, 1983, *Town, City and Nation*. 
analysis settlements smaller than this in size, although they accounted for approximately 10% of the urban population of England and Wales. Waller drew the population threshold between ‘proper’ and ‘large’ towns at 50,000. His category of ‘large’ towns encompassed all settlements with populations of up to 100,000, at which point settlements graduate to ‘city’ status. The great cities, for which Victorian England was renowned, are defined by Waller as containing a minimum of 200,000 inhabitants. 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>number of settlements</th>
<th>percentage of urban population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great cities</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cities</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large towns</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Proper’ towns</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other urban dwellers</td>
<td>686</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A1-4. Waller’s classification of the urban settlements of England and Wales in 1901. 15

In chapter 2, I have adopted a simplified version of this model of the urban hierarchy. Given the large numbers of settlements involved in Waller’s groups of ‘proper’ towns and ‘other urban dwellers’, and the consequent practical problem of categorising music halls, I have consolidated all those halls located in settlements of under 50,000 inhabitants into a single class. I have reserved the use of the word ‘town’ for settlements with populations of over 50,000. I have, though, accepted Waller’s upper limit for ‘towns’ of 100,000. I have also amalgamated Waller’s two sub-divisions of the ‘city’ category, due to the small number of settlements in each. Thus, the three-tiered model of the urban hierarchy which I have adopted, involves

two main categories of 'towns' and 'cities' with approximately equal numbers of settlements in each, and a residual category encompassing all other urban settlements.

A problem involved in disaggregating the figures provided by the Era Almanack according to town size, is created by the fact that urban growth caused settlements to move between categories during the period under consideration. In order to take account of these changes in settlement size, I have re-classified all of the settlements decennially, on the basis of the most recent census information. This periodic re-classification has a distorting effect on information conveying annual figures for the number of halls in each level of the urban hierarchy.

In the case of cities this re-classification invariably increased the number of settlements in this category, and therefore, increased the number of halls. Of course, the converse was true for the 'other settlements' category which always lost settlements and halls at the time of re-classification. The situation was more complex though with regard to the towns category, which both gained and lost members simultaneously. For instance, in 1901 seven towns, listed as possessing 10 music halls were re-defined as cities, whilst 8 settlements had grown over the 50,000 threshold, two of which each contained a single hall. Thus, the town category suffered a net loss of 8 halls due to this process of reclassification. This accounts for two-thirds of the total loss of 12 halls recorded for the year 1901. However, the significance of this problem to the interpretation of the data

16. In only one instance, that of Bath between 1892 and 1902, did a town actually experience a population decrease which resulted in its re-classification into a lower tier of the urban hierarchy.
used in chapter 2 is minimised, as most of the analysis is based on decennial cross-sections derived from the Era Almanack in 1882, 1892, 1902 and 1912.

Figure A1-2, constructed by disaggregating the data given in the Era Almanack music hall directories, in accordance with the definitions of the urban hierarchy outlined above, indicates that all three of the categories follow the general trends displayed by the aggregate data in figure A1-1. However, the correlation is most marked in the case of the 'other settlements' category. This suggests that the listing of halls in towns of less than 50,000 population was the most susceptible to the vagaries of editorial policy. Large numbers were included when space permitted, but when the amount of space available for the directory was constrained, halls at this level of the urban hierarchy were the most likely to be pruned from the listings. The concentration in chapter 2 on the figures for towns and cities, which appears to be more reliable, therefore, again partially negates the inadequacies of the data derived from the Era Almanack.
Appendix 2: Company Records.

Much of the detail regarding individual companies contained in this thesis was obtained from the Board of Trade Dissolved Companies files, now housed in the Public Record Office at Kew, London.

All companies which wished to take advantage of limited liability status were obliged to register at Companies House. Companies incorporated under limited liability legislation were required to deposit certain records relating to the company at Companies House. Initial applications for incorporation had to be accompanied by a statement of the nominal capital of the company and copies of the Memorandum and Articles of Association, which contained, respectively, the objects of the company, and the rules for its internal regulation. Companies were also obliged to inform the Registrar of Companies of any subsequent changes to these documents, as well as to provide annual returns of shareholders. These returns included a list of the shareholders, their addresses and occupations, and the size of their shareholdings, and the total paid up capital of the company. However, the legal obligations placed upon limited companies varied during the period under study here. The most significant change in the information required to be lodged at Companies House was made in 1908, when public limited companies became obliged to deposit annual balance sheets with the Registrar. It also became a legal requirement for companies to register their loan capital.

I have extracted a sample of 127 music hall companies from the Board of Trade files. For a number of reasons it was
impossible to undertake a study of all the music hall companies which existed during the period under consideration.

First, not all of the Board of Trade files are open to the public. The records of companies are only made available 25 years after the concern has been dissolved. Generally, the rapid decline of the halls from the 1920s has ensured that the records of relatively few music hall companies are withheld on these grounds. Unfortunately, the records of Moss Empires, the most important music hall company of the period, do fall into this category. Secondly, not all of the company records collected survive. A number of files, including that pertaining to the Manchester Palace of Varieties, have been destroyed by the Public Record Office. Finally, there are also the practical difficulties involved in tracking down the business records of a music hall company. It frequently proved impossible to ascertain the name of companies which owned music halls.

The thoroughness of my sample can be gauged through the comparison of the information which it provides with that of a number of contemporary studies of music hall companies.

The most thorough survey of music hall companies was undertaken by an anonymous contributor to the *Stage Year Book* for 1916. He was circumspect regarding the comprehensiveness of his study. He considered that

A complete catalogue would be difficult to compile, since for the reasons given the number is always fluctuating and many die within a few years of registration.1

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He records that 40 music hall companies were registered in 1915, and estimated that 'the actual number in existence is probably over two hundred'. These figures clearly deviate markedly from the evidence presented in figure 3-1, which is based on my sample of music hall companies. Figure 3-1 records the existence of only 47 companies in 1915. My sample, therefore, covers only a small proportion of the total number of music hall companies.

The reason for this discrepancy is indicated by the *Stage Year Book*

Theatre and music hall concerns fall into two groups very widely separated. There are the few reputable, successful and well known companies on the one side, and on the other there is a large host of small ventures mainly failures.

The majority of the companies which registered in 1915 were very small. The total authorised capitalisation of the 40 companies amounted to only £201,581, representing an average figure of £5,040. By comparison, on only one occasion between 1880 and 1914 did the average capitalisation of the halls from my sample registered during a given year fall below £10,000. The average capitalisation of those companies included in my sample which were registered between 1910 and 1914 was £28,000.

Thus, although my sample accounts for only about a quarter of the total number of companies which the *Stage Year Book* estimated to be in existence, many of these companies were small and, in all probability, ephemeral ventures. My sample is biased in favour of the larger concerns. It is these companies which

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dominated the industry, and are of most concern to a study of the increasing scale of music hall organisation. The *Stage Year Book* considered that it is probably a safe assertion to say that not less than £8,000,000 is now invested in theatre and music hall companies in the United Kingdom.⁴ Of this total over half of the capital was accounted for by the combined interests of Moss' Empires, the Syndicate Halls, and Oswald Stoll, which together had £4,183,214 invested in them.⁵

The *Stage Year Book* article goes on to produce a company by company list of the economic performance of the limited liability companies involved in theatre and music halls which the author considered not to be 'minor concerns'. Of the 48 companies included in this list 32 are included in my sample. Of the other 16 companies, only the Metropolitan Theatre of Varieties, was not a theatrical concern.

Thus, the *Stage Year Book* considered that there were 33 significant music hall companies in existence in 1916. My data includes the records of 46 companies which were extant at this date, including all but one of those listed in the *Stage Year Book*.

Comparisons with other contemporary accounts indicate similar conclusions. An article on theatrical finance in the *Green Room Book* for 1907, written by 'a member of the Stock Exchange' lists 28 'leading joint stock companies engaged in the theatrical and kindred business'. Of these, 21 were music hall companies and all are amongst the 45 companies included by my data

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⁴ Ibid, p. 66.
⁵ Ibid, p. 66.
for 1907. The *Music Hall and Theatre Review* provides another equivalent comparison for 1896. This feature, entitled the 'Shares of the Shows', listed 28 extant music hall companies. The corresponding number of music hall companies in my sample at this date is 29.

Thus, a comparison of the number of companies represented in my sample with figures provided by contemporaries suggests that although my data is not a comprehensive record of limited liability involvement in the music hall business. Nevertheless, it does include most of the large music hall companies, which accounted for the vast majority of the capital invested in the halls, and are of most significance in the present context.

Appendix 3: Sources of Data on Music Hall Dividends

The main source available for the reconstruction of the dividend payments of music hall companies is the Stock Exchange Yearbook (SEYB). This publication, intended as a handbook for investors on the Stock Exchange, included information on the capital and the directors of companies, as well as their recent record of dividend payments. However, this source deals only with those companies listed on the London Stock Exchange. During the period under consideration in this thesis there were a number of provincial stock exchanges.1 The information provided by the SEYB has, therefore been supplemented by data obtained from Mathieson's Stock Exchange Ten-Year Record of Prices and Dividends, and Mathieson's Provincial Highest and Lowest Prices.2 In 1893, Mathieson's included information on share prices and dividends of companies listed on the stock exchanges in Birmingham, Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield. By 1909 it also covered the stock exchanges in Bradford, Cardiff and Newcastle.

There are some problems of compatibility between the two sources. The SEYB listed the dividends declared by companies during each financial year, whilst Mathieson’s publications indicated the return on investments made by companies during each calendar year. The data used in chapter 3 does not, therefore,

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1. For an outline of the origins and workings of these provincial stock exchanges see J.R. Killick and W.A. Thomas, 1970, The provincial stock exchanges, 1830-1870, pp. 96-111.
2. The large proportion of music hall companies that were only quoted on provincial stock exchanges confirms that the capital invested in the music hall industry was often generated locally. A national capital market for music hall investment was only weakly developed.
all apply to the same time periods. I have assigned the data provided by the SEYB to the calendar year which included the majority of the financial year. For those companies on which information was obtained from both sources, I have taken the data from Mathieson’s.

The information provided by these sources is limited by the fact that both were originally produced to provide information on companies to investors on the Stock Exchange. Their concerns are, therefore, restricted to those companies which were listed on the stock exchanges of Britain, and the shares of which were actively traded. The data-set for used here is likely to reflect primarily the dividend payments made by the more highly capitalised music hall companies.
Appendix 4: The Spatial Disaggregation of the Music Hall Dividends Data-set.

Disaggregating the data on music hall dividends used in chapter 3 spatially generated a number of problems related to the process of the classification of companies, and the small number of companies included in some of the categories.

The process of assigning music hall companies to geographical categories was complicated by the existence of the music hall syndicates, which this thesis argues were of significance primarily because they united music halls from disparate geographical locations. Moss Empires provides an example of this problem. The headquarters of the company were in London, at the Hippodrome, and, as chapter 2 has indicated, its expansion in the early twentieth century was focused on the suburbs of London. Nevertheless, the dividend data for Moss Empires have been included in the averages for provincial companies, as the majority of the halls under the control of the company were located outside London throughout the period.

The same problem was also encountered in attempting to subdivide the London based companies. A number of syndicates ran properties in various parts of London. Variety Theatres Consolidated Ltd., for instance, was registered in 1904 with the intention of acquiring the South London, Ltd., in London Road, Lambeth; the Euston, at Kings Cross; the Chelsea Palace, on King’s Road; and the Walthamstow Palace. This syndicate has been classified as a suburban company, as has the London Theatres of
Varieties Ltd., despite its ownership of the Holborn Empire and the London Palladium in the West End, and the Olympia, Shoreditch.

This subdivision of the data on dividends for the various parts of London was based on the framework created by Anstey, and set out in chapter 2. However, his model was constructed in 1890, at which date the spatial transformation of the distribution of music halls by the emergent highly capitalised music hall industry chronicled in chapter 2 had not taken place. In dealing with the changed circumstances of the early twentieth century, therefore, certain refinements to his model were necessary.

Anstey's typology appears to be deficient in providing only one category for large halls located outside of the West End. Anstey recognised the diverse geographical locations from which the halls comprising this category were drawn in the 'suburbs' and the 'less fashionable parts' of town. However, whilst the appellation 'bourgeois' is appropriate to the suburban halls in this category, it fits uncomfortably on to those music halls which operated in the East End and south of the river, such as the Cambridge Theatre of Varieties, located in Commercial Street, Shoreditch, and the halls under the control of the Canterbury and Paragon Ltd., which were located in Westminster Bridge Road, Lambeth, and Mile End Road Stepney. I have preferred to treat suburban halls as a discrete category. Moreover, Anstey's typology also pre-dated the advent of the new type of music hall, typified by the Coliseum, which emerged in the West End during the first decade of the twentieth century. These halls were characterised by thoroughly 'respectable' performances which were

designed to appeal to the suburban market as well as to the aristocratic habitues of the West End. Marie Lloyd, for example, was never invited to appear at the Coliseum. Thus, in table 3-7 I have divided the music hall companies of London into 5 categories.

The number of companies in each of these intra-London categories is rather small. The small size of the sample of music hall companies which were located in central London and for which I possess data on dividends is partially offset by their longevity. There were at least 3 companies extant in this category in each year between 1893 and 1918. Moreover, as most of the centrally located halls were highly capitalised they were listed on the stock exchange. Therefore, although the number of halls is small, it represents a high proportion of the centrally located music halls.

The number of companies upon which the suburban averages were based never exceeded 4 in any one year. However, due to the prominence of syndicates in suburban London, such as the aforementioned Variety Theatres Consolidated and the London Theatres of Varieties, the dividend data for a small number of companies reflects the economic performance of a large number of suburban halls. From 1908, the 4 suburban music hall companies upon which my average suburban dividends are based controlled over 20 suburban music halls between them. The data for the suburbs are, therefore, more broadly based than might, at first glance, appear to be the case. Nevertheless, it would appear prudent to disregard the data for the years prior to 1903, at which date the number of suburban music hall companies exceeded 2 for the first time.
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