

**From:** donotreply@HistoricEngland.org.uk <donotreply@historicengland.org.uk>

**To:** "apwoolfenden@yahoo.co.uk" <apwoolfenden@yahoo.co.uk>

**Sent:** Wednesday, 18 November 2020, 17:50:15 GMT

**Subject:** Listing and Designation Online Application (ref: 1473354)

Dear Mr Woolfenden,

Thank you for submitting your application ref: 1473354. This will now be considered by the Designation West Team, who will inform you about the progress of your application in due course. In the meantime, if you have any questions please email [ApplicationsWest@HistoricEngland.org.uk](mailto:ApplicationsWest@HistoricEngland.org.uk) and a member of the team will get back to you.

If you indicated that you would post any documents or photographs these should be sent to:

Historic England  
Listing Team West  
29 Queens Square  
Bristol  
BS14ND

Please quote this HE Application Reference Number in any correspondence: 1473354

Below is a summary of the application for your records. This is an automated email so please do not reply.

---

## Application Summary

### Contact Details

	<b>Mr Anthony Woolfenden</b> (apwoolfenden@yahoo.co.uk)
<b>Telephone:</b>	02086426626
<b>Alternative Telephone:</b>	
<b>Organisation:</b>	Victorian Society
<b>Job Title:</b>	Caseworker
<b>Address:</b>	18 Beresford Road Cheam Sutton SM2 6EP

### Application Type

<b>Type:</b>	New
<b>EAS Type:</b>	Free Standard Service.

## Identification

**Subject:** Vesta Tilley House, Worcester  
Listing and Designation Online application

**Primary County/Unitary Authority:** Worcestershire

## Location

**Postal Addresses:** Vesta Tilley House, Lowesmoor, Worcester, WR1 2RS, ,

## Extent

Extent saved.

## Threat

**Is this asset under threat:** Live planning application

**Details of threat:** Total demolition of this building, in spite of its historical and architectural significance, its group value with nearby listed buildings and its location in Worcester City Council's Canal Conservation Area. The demolition would be as part of a redevelopment scheme at Lowesmoor, Worcester. Vesta Tilley House has no listing protection.

**Current Planning Application/ Permission/Marine Consent:** This asset is the subject of a current planning application, permission or marine consent.

**Uploaded Planning Applications/Permissions:** [Planning\\_application\\_\\_20\\_00649\\_FUL\\_\\_\\_Worcester\\_City\\_Council.html](#)  
- Planning Application

**Planning Application URL:** <https://plan.worcester.gov.uk/Planning/Display/20/00649/FUL>

**Planning Application Ref Number:** 20/00649/FUL

**Post Planning Application:** You will **not** post a copy of the Planning Application

**Post Planning Permission:** You will **not** post a copy of the Planning Permission

## Ownership & Occupancy

**Owner:** You are **not** the owner of part or all of the subject.

**Occupier:** You are **not** the occupier of part or all of the subject.

**Owner/Occupier Details:**  
- Organisation: Redeemed Christian Church of God, Worcester  
- Telephone: 07940477060 - Occupier - Occupier, together  
Deaf Direct charity - Vesta Tilley House, Lowesmoor,  
Worcester, WR1 2RS, ,

# Reasons

## HISTORIC INTEREST

1. A rare survival of an early music hall.

The historic interest of this building is particularly important. Vesta Tilley House is an early music hall, opened in 1869 and operating until 1880, and Historic England's own listing selection guide notes that "True music halls from the mid nineteenth century are now very rare indeed", giving a listed example dating from 1877, eight years later than this Worcester one.

Music halls had developed in the 1840s and 50s from informal entertainment in public houses. Publicans added saloons or song rooms to their premises as an added attraction, serving drinks and food at tables while the performances were in progress. John Hill of the Navigation Inn at Lowesmoor went further than this. His public house was next to a wharf on the Birmingham and Worcester Canal on the eastern edge of Worcester city centre, and he had been there for over 24 years. In 1869 he entered into partnership with a Mr Brook, entirely demolished the public house and built a music hall in its place. It opened in August that year as the New Worcester Concert Hall and early admission price information shows that it had seating in the body of the hall (three pence) and also in stalls and a gallery (one shilling), with drinks and other refreshments being served continuously in all parts throughout the performances. An Oriental Lounge was a further amenity.

### Historical Interest:

The name was clearly intended to emphasise the hall's respectability and good taste. The Worcester Herald in late 1869 reported that there "is nothing in the slightest degree offensive ... Persons who do not believe in music halls should try one visit to Messrs Hill and Brook's establishment".

The hall also used the name Canterbury Music Hall, possibly with reference to the successful and early London hall, and later in the 1860s it was briefly renamed the Prince of Wales Music Hall - the royal wedding was in 1863. It struggled for business however as canal-side trade and industry declined with the increasing impact of railway competition. The commercial life of Worcester moved westward to the city centre, and the music hall had closed by 1880.

The hall began a new life in 1881 when the Salvation Army took it over. They had a difficult start, with barracking at their opening meetings, but then settled to a long occupancy. General Booth, the founder of the Army, visited in 1882. In 1889 they re-seated the building, removed the stage and installed a platform, and at other times made further changes both inside and outside. They moved to new premises in Worcester in the mid-1980s and the hall was then renovated and refurbished as offices, shops and a craft and antiques centre under the name of the Vesta Tilley Centre. It is now Vesta

Tilley House, occupied by the Deaf Direct charity and the Worcester Redeemed Christian Church of God.

In spite of its refurbishments and the apparent removal of much of its original interior, Vesta Tilley House is the surviving and rare structure of an early music hall. Worcester had several of these transitional-type halls in the 1860s, midway between public house song room and theatre, but all have gone except this one. Declining canal-side commerce in the face of competition from the railways caused it to close after a relatively short life, but its change of use preserved a building which otherwise would almost certainly have needed reconstructing to comply with developing building and fire regulations for places of entertainment. Its history ensured its survival.

## 2. THE VESTA TILLEY CONNEXION

The building has a further historic interest for its links with the famous music hall singer and male impersonator Vesta Tilley, after whom it is now named. Worcester was her birthplace and the New Worcester Concert Hall the scene of some of her earliest public performances.

Born Matilda Powles in 1864 in Commandery Street, Worcester, an area of poor multi-occupied housing not far from the canal basin, Vesta Tilley was the second of 13 children. Her father was a china painter and glazer in the Worcester Royal Porcelain works but outside his working hours was a keen actor and musician performing at local places of entertainment. His daughter accompanied him and by the age of five was herself a professional performer. At an early age she was already wearing male clothing for her acts, a hallmark of her future stage career and fame. The New Worcester Concert Hall was one venue where she performed, and its local rival, the Alhambra, was another. Worcestershire County Council, who are now curators of the Vesta Tilley collection of her papers, photographs and more, say that these two music halls were "pivotal in Vesta's early development on the stage". In 1872 her father became her full-time manager and by that time her earnings were supporting her whole family. In 1874 she first performed in London and in 1878 adopted the stage name of Vesta Tilley. Her fame increased in the 1880s, when her usual stage character was that of a man-about-town or dandy, and by the 1890s she was England's highest earning woman. The care and accuracy with which she prepared her male clothing became famous - it was claimed that she set men's fashions - and she was also well known for the tone of her act and lyrics, which she intended to be fit for family entertainment. Her father died in 1888 and in 1890 she married Walter de Frece, son of a major music hall proprietor (who, at the start of his career in the 1860s had managed the Worcester Alhambra). She withdrew from the stage in her late 40s after taking part in the first Royal Variety Performance in 1912 and giving a final performance in Worcester in 1913, but she returned to it during the First World War and did much war work singing for

charities and to wounded soldiers. Her final performance was in 1920, by which time she was Lady de Frece, her husband knighted for his war effort and standing as a Member of Parliament. She lived until 1952.

Her career had been a successful and a full one and it began at Worcester and at what is now Vesta Tilley House. A wall tablet in the city now commemorates the area where she was born. A statue of her is now in the city's Cornmarket on one of five sculptural bollards in memory of famous Worcester connexions - her companions include Charles II and Shakespeare. Since 2003 Worcestershire County Council have owned and curated the Vesta Tilley Collection of her papers, scrap-books, photographs, stage clothing and more. They have recently devised a Vesta Tilley city trail which includes Vesta Tilley House.

#### ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST

The former music hall has an impressive, attractive and extended Italianate facade to Lowesmoor. Behind it the building fits tightly on to a wedge-shaped plot that comes to a point at its southern end, between the road and the former boundary of the canal wharf. The north face of the building is attached to the terrace of houses beyond and the west face is of plain brick.

The hall was constructed and opened in 1869 and continued in business through the 1870s. The Salvation Army took it over in 1881, it became an antiques and crafts centre in the 1980s and is currently a mix of charity office accommodation and a church. All these changes have resulted in major internal changes and some refurbishment of the exterior. The entire main structure of the 1869 hall remains however and is within Worcester's Canal Conservation Area, Character Area 4, where it is identified as a Key Unlisted Structure. Its architect is not known, although the Buildings of England record J W Dunford as the architect for alterations the Salvation Army made in 1889. The Army further undertook a "facelift" in 1971 which included re-plastering the exterior.

#### **Architectural Interest:**

EXTERIOR. The frontage to Lowesmoor is of two stories and the entire front is stuccoed apart from the brick plinth. The main section is symmetrical with a central entrance flanked by two three-bay sections. To the south is a lower three bay wing. Pilasters define each three-bay section and additional ones, topped by a triangular pediment, flank the entrance and divide it from narrow blank recesses on each side. Raised bands articulate each floor and the whole of the main section is topped by a flat parapet, which conceals the pitched roofs. The lower section at the side has a shaped parapet. All windows are inset, the taller upper floor ones round-headed and the ground floor segment headed. Some window frames may be original.

The rear elevation, in contrast, is totally unornamented, a sheer wall of exposed red brick laid in English bond, its surface

broken by six large round-arched windows at upper level and some other square-headed ones for the ground floor. Above are the gables of the three low-pitched roofs covering the main part of the hall.

The building stands at a prominent road junction near the city centre and, although clearly much of the detailing has been simplified at some point in its long history, the total effect is impressive - lively, attractive and bold.

INTERIOR. The varied uses this hall has undergone have removed much of the original interior detailing but basic internal structure and layout survive. Most significant are the cast iron columns in the main body of the hall that support the front beam of the original gallery. Also remaining in place is the dividing wall that separated the main music hall from other parts of the building, with an access doorway with pointed arch. Parts of the entrance lobby are still in place, and the basement has a cast iron bollard fixed in the floor, purpose unknown, but also possibly original.

#### GROUP VALUE

Vesta Tilley House has group value with the listed buildings in the western stretch of Lowesmoor and continues their sequence. The street is lined with a dozen listed buildings, varied and interesting and mostly of the 18th and 19th centuries. The last in the group are the Elim Pentecostal Church and 64 Lowesmoor, a mere 60 yards or so across the road from Vesta Tilley House.

## Photographs

Vesta\_Tilley\_House\_facade\_IMG\_0452.JPG - Exterior - Main facade  
Vesta\_Tilley\_House\_from\_NE\_along\_Lowesmoor\_IMG\_0456.JPG - Exterior - View along Lowesmoor  
Vesta\_Tilley\_House\_from\_south\_P1200261.JPG - Exterior - View from south  
Vesta\_Tilley\_House\_from\_south\_P1200259.JPG - Exterior - Main facade from south  
Vesta\_Tilley\_House\_from\_south\_with\_Portmaster\_s\_house\_\_IMG\_0451.JPG - Exterior - Hall and former wharf approach  
Vesta\_Tilley\_House\_P1200251.JPG - Exterior - General view  
Vesta\_Tilley\_House\_facade\_detail\_P1200257.JPG - Exterior - Entrance detail  
Vesta\_Tilley\_House\_back\_wall.jpg - Exterior - Rear of hall  
Vesta\_Tilley\_House\_from\_Lowesmoor\_\_listed\_buildings\_beyond\_P1200256.jpg - Exterior - Group value - view past hall to listed buildings beyond  
Vesta\_Tilley\_House\_entrance\_lobby\_and\_doorways.jpg - Interior - Entrance lobby and doorways  
Vesta\_Tilley\_House\_main\_Hall\_interior\_and\_balcony\_columns.jpg - Interior - Main hall with balcony columns and front beam  
Vesta\_Tilley\_House\_main\_hall\_\_Salvation\_Army\_children\_s\_christmas\_party\_1908.jpg - Interior - Main hall, Salvation Army children's party 1908

#### Uploaded Photograph/s:

#### Other Photograph/s:

You will **not** post any photographs.

# Documents

**Uploaded Documents:**

You are **unable** to upload any Documents.

**Other Documents**

You will **not** post any documents.

**Bibliographic References:**

Book Reference - Author/s: Brooks and Pevsner, Title: Worcestershire Buildings of England, Year: 2007, Page/s: 764

Book Reference - Author/s: Wardle, Terry, Title: Historic Worcester Streets, Year: 2014, Page/s: various

Other Reference - Description: Vesta Tilley Trail leaflet, Worcestershire County Council

Web Reference - Organisation/Author: Worcester People and Places, Title: Worcester People and Places, Date Accessed: 17/11/20, URL:

<https://www.worcesterpeopleandplaces.org.uk/news/275/146/The-Music-Halls.html>

Book Reference - Author/s: Gwynedd Sudworth, Title: The Great Little Tilley - Vesta Tilley and her Times, Year: 1984, Page/s: several

# Comments

**Comments:**

We stress again the urgency of protection for this building, significant, important but unlisted and threatened with total demolition by developers.