

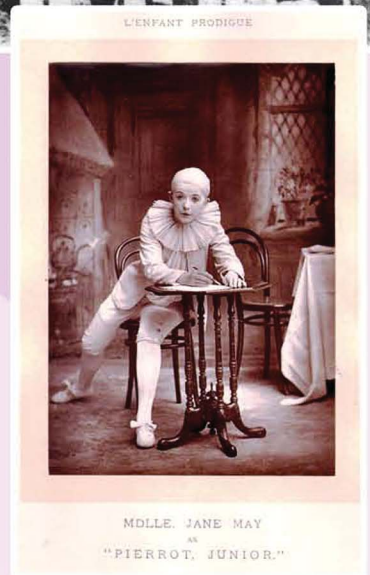
# Black-faced minstrels to white-faced pierrots



During the second half of the 19th century, the most popular and common of all beach entertainments were the so-called "Nigger Minstrels", inspired by the American vaudeville act of 'Jump Jim Crow' by the American showman TD Rice. From 1840, minstrel shows were regarded as accessible, family entertainment - featuring music, songs, sketches, dances and comic monologues.



However, in 1891, a banjo practitioner and entrepreneur called Clifford Essex saw a French production in London, called "*L'Enfant Prodigue*", which featured a family of pierrots. He was so inspired that he changed his plans from performing as blackface minstrels and instead inverted the look and 'whited-up' as pierrots. He called the act 'The Pierrot Banjo Team' and gave their first performances from a decorated punt at Henley Regatta and subsequently the Cowes Regatta on the Isle of Wight, where they performed for the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII). As a result, they changed their name to Clifford Essex's 'Royal Pierrots'.



Clifford Essex's 'Royal Pierrots', circa 1894



In the following decade, the pierrots became the predominant form at the seaside and ousted the minstrels almost entirely.