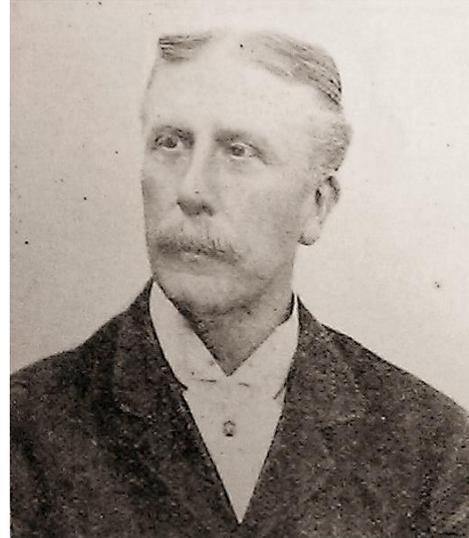


A Souvenir of Grieg – a manuscript bringing together two bands, an arranger and a professional conductor on a singular occasion

Gavin Holman, April 2020

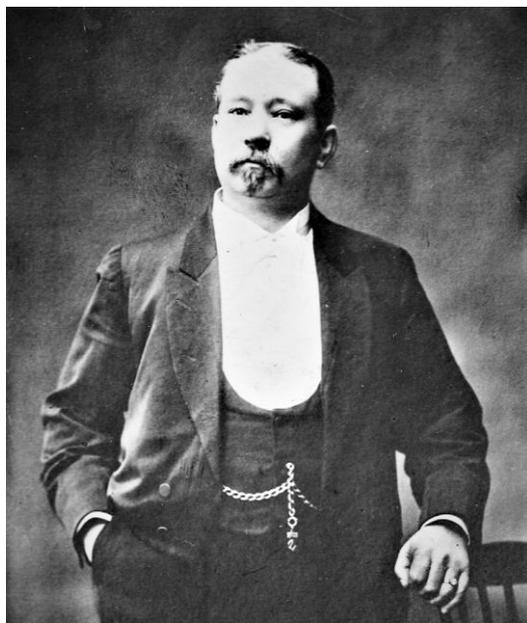
At the British Open Contest, held at Belle Vue, Manchester, on Monday 7th September 1908, the test piece for the competing bands was *Souvenir of Grieg*, arranged by Lieutenant Charles Godfrey. Godfrey was a well-known conductor, arranger and adjudicator – indeed he had arranged most of the test pieces for the British Open over the previous 36 years. This arrangement was the sixtieth that Godfrey had made for the various Belle Vue contests over that period



Charles Godfrey

The adjudicators at this contest, at which 20 bands participated, were Charles Godfrey himself, Carl Kiefert, and Joseph Owen Shepherd.

As was quite common in those days, particularly in the higher ranked contests, professional conductors were at the helm of several bands each. In this contest William Rimmer led seven bands, William Halliwell three, John Gladney three, and Alexander Owen two.



Alexander Owen

Alexander Owen was a particularly famous conductor and arranger, who had begun his career as a cornet player with Meltham Mills Band and soon began teaching other bands. He became conductor of Black Dyke Mills Band in 1880, followed by Besses o' th' Barn in 1884 – a position he held until his death in 1920. He resigned as conductor at Black Dyke in 1888 to avoid conflicts with Besses. He went on to tutor many bands and lead them professionally to contests, with many victories to his name, as well as arranging many test pieces and concert items for bands.

The two bands he conducted at this British Open contest were Stalybridge Borough and Lea Mills, both of which had a long-term relationship with him as a teacher as well as engaging him for the contest.



Alexander Owen conducting Besses in Paris

Owen had written out his own version of the score to *Souvenir of Grieg*, which he used at the contest, and was dated 31st July 1908 (the date he completed the transcription). The score also lists the three judges at the contest and the remark “Award most cruel (musically)” – perhaps a comment on the fact that neither of his bands were placed in the contest.

[the digitised version of this score is available as an addendum to this paper]

A contemporary description of the piece was given in the press at the time:

First movement is "*Morning*" in the *Peer Gynt Suite*. No. 2 is a Norwegian dance for pianoforte. After the cornet cadenza, the cornet sings the *Song of the Princess*, who tells the boy who is piping in the valley below to be still and let the sweet scene sink into his soul. The next movement, *allegro tranquillo e grazioso*, is another Norwegian dance. The next movement, *non poco andante* (euphonium solo), "*The winter may wane and the springtime may fly*," - the song of the lover who protests that, no matter what may happen, the loved one shall be loved forever. The last movement is the last number of the *Peer Gynt Suite*, and is entitled "*In the Hall of the Mountain King*," and is brimful of humour. It is really a kind of dancing march. The gnomes decide to murder the King, but cannot find courage. A few, however, venture in, then a few more, and again a few more. As they get more bold and numerous they dance the more heavily, and finally shake the whole place to pieces, and all comes tumbling about their ears.

The contest was scheduled to begin at 1.00 p.m., but the first band did not mount the stage until 1.15, and played its first note at 1.21 p.m. The last band completed its performance at 6.52 p.m. and the results were announced at 7.05 p.m.

The remarks for Owen's bands were:

Band no. 3 – Stalybridge Borough; A. Owen [performance lasted 14 minutes] – 1st movement – Band began well; soprano left two passages out; band not well together; not well balanced, and not good quality of tone. 2nd – Only moderately well played; light and shade not well attended to, and inner parts not well in tune; cornet cadenza creditably played. 3rd – Solo cornet played carefully, but not enough expression; soprano again left out passages; band not well in tune. 4th – Only moderately well done; style of playing not good. 5th – Fairly good beginning; allegro not quick enough; trombone cadenza played in a forced style. 6th – Unsteady beginning by horn and flugel horn; euphonium solo has too much sameness of tone; not good style. 7th – Brass chords not well together at the finish; only moderately well played. 8th – Not enough character, too much sameness throughout, and taken too slowly; fair rendering.

Band no. 14 – Lea Mills; A. Owen [performance lasted 12½ minutes] - 1st movement – Soprano has a very forced style; missed one high note; ensemble well played; fairly good on the whole. 2nd – Well together; soprano quality still coarse on the high notes; band well balanced; well done; cornet cadenza well played. 3rd – Good opening; cornet solo quality good, but hardly enough expression; soprano forced high notes out unpleasantly; accompaniments nicely played. 4th – Well together; cornet harsh quality on high notes. 5th – Opening very well played; soprano style much better; allegro not nearly quick enough; trombone cadenza carefully played. 6th – Opening well done; euphonium solo style and quality good; very well accompanied. 7th – Also well done by all. 8th – Correct at first, but metronome marks not well observed in accel.; latter part not quick enough; band well together; a very good finish last few bars.

Bands in the contest

- 1st - Black Dyke Mills - William Rimmer [drawn no. 2]
- 2nd - Rushden Temperance - John Gladney Jnr [17]
- 3rd - Perfection Soap Works - William Halliwell [1]
- 4th - Lindley - Alfred Gray [16]
- 5th - Linthwaite - Tom Eastwood [18]
- 6th - Irwell Springs - William Rimmer [8]

Unplaced:

- Dannemora Steel Works - Robert Richford [4]
- Goodshaw - William Halliwell [6]
- Hebden Bridge - William Rimmer [11]
- King Cross - William Rimmer [19]
- Lea Mills - Alexander Owen [14]
- Lincoln Iron & Steel Works - Angus Holden [10]
- Nelson Old - William Rimmer [5]
- Pemberton Old - William Halliwell [7]
- Pendleton Old - John Gladney Jnr [12]
- Royal Oakeley - J. E. Fidler [20]
- Shaw - William Rimmer [9]
- Stalybridge Borough - Alexander Owen [3]
- Wingates Temperance - William Rimmer [13]
- Wyke Temperance - John Gladney Jnr [15]

Souvenir of Grieg

Having been performed twenty times by the bands at this contest, it seems that it was never again featured as a contest piece - at least no record of such has been found. It is possible it appeared as an own-choice piece which has not been documented.

Black Dyke Mills Band reprised their successful prize-winning performance of the piece the following Sunday, 13 September during their concert at the Stainland Musical Festival.

However, that is the last known appearance of this arrangement of Grieg's works.

Stalybridge Borough Band

Formed in March 1871 by some ex-members of the Stalybridge Old Band, holding its first rehearsals and meetings at the Moulders Arms, Grasscroft Street, Castle Hall. The band was known as the 4th Cheshire Rifleman Volunteers (Boro' Band) until 1896. The founder and first conductor was Alexander Owen who conducted the band until at least 1910, though he took more of a "professional conductor" role as time went on as he became increasingly involved with other bands. John Garlick was resident conductor for many years. Bandmaster J.E. Robinson 1871-1881. Active through to 1930's or 1940's

Lea Mills Brass Band

Founded in May 1890, when a group of employees of John Smedley Mills at Lea Bridge, near Cromford, gathered with their instruments to welcome home the young master of the Mills, John Bertram Marsden-Smedley and his new wife to the village. It very soon developed into a full band under the conductorship of C.A. Gregory and supported by J.B. Marsden-Smedley, who purchased instruments to the value of £120 from Besson. Tutored by Alexander Owen from 1893 to 1909. Secretary William Kirby in 1895. Solo cornet in 1896 was Percy Hallam. Solo euphonium in 1901 was William Foster.



C.A. Gregory

It promoted a series of contests at Lea Mills between 1893 and 1896 as a means of raising additional funds. In May 1899 the band took on the local cricket club in a game of cricket, which the band won by 70 runs to 68 – with H. Price, a band member, contributing 21 runs.

Officers in 1909 were: J.B. Marsden-Smedley (president), H.H. Middleditch & F. Broome (chairmen), Mr Butterworth (treasurer), T. Buntin (secretary), with players: Mr Fishwick (soprano); H. Holmes, H. Flint, W. Gregory, B. Taylor & A. Pearson (cornets); G. Price, A. Walker & J. Vallance (flugel horns); N. Holmes, W. Kirkby & S. Bunting (tenor horns); W. Pearson & H. Price (baritones); W. Foster & T. Pearson (euphoniums); H. Kiddy, G. Kiddy & C. Swift (trombones); J. Marshall, A. Swift, J. Biddulph & J. Kirk (basses); T. Conquest & W. Thompson (drums). The band folded following a strike at Smedley's in 1911 during which the band travelled to various nearby places to assist the strikers. The band's instruments were called in by Smedley and the band broken up. An attempt to re-establish the band was made in August 1913, but did not achieve anything. [A long list of its contest achievements can be found in the *Derbyshire Advertiser & Journal*, 12 June 1909, p. 10]

