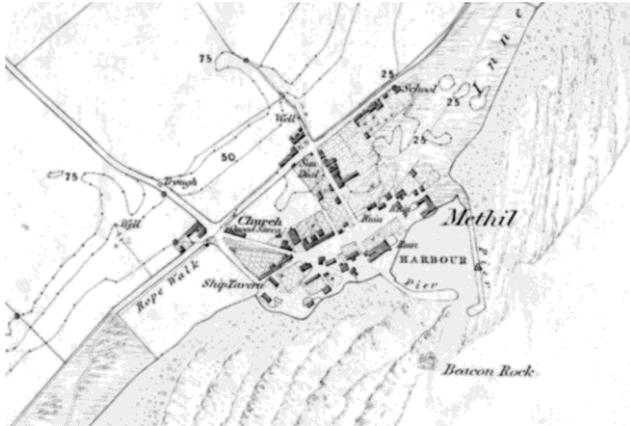


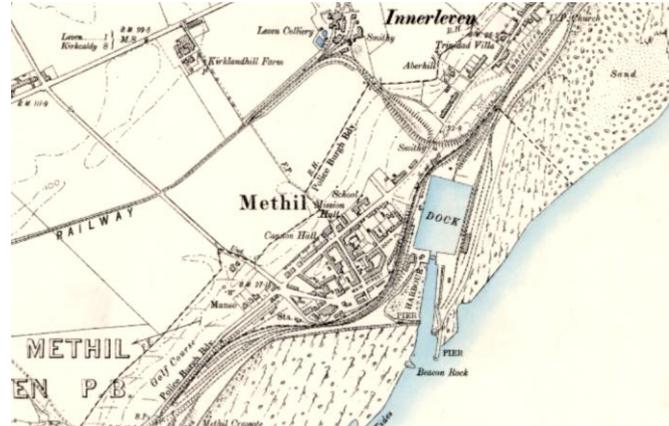
Methil Brass Band – a tenancy missive and some poetry

Gavin Holman, May 2020

Methil Brass Band was active from 1870 through to WW1. Not much is known about its activities prior to the 1890's. The town grew significantly when it was chosen for the development of new coal exportation docks in the 1870's, but the first dock was not actually completed until 1887.



Methil, c. 1850

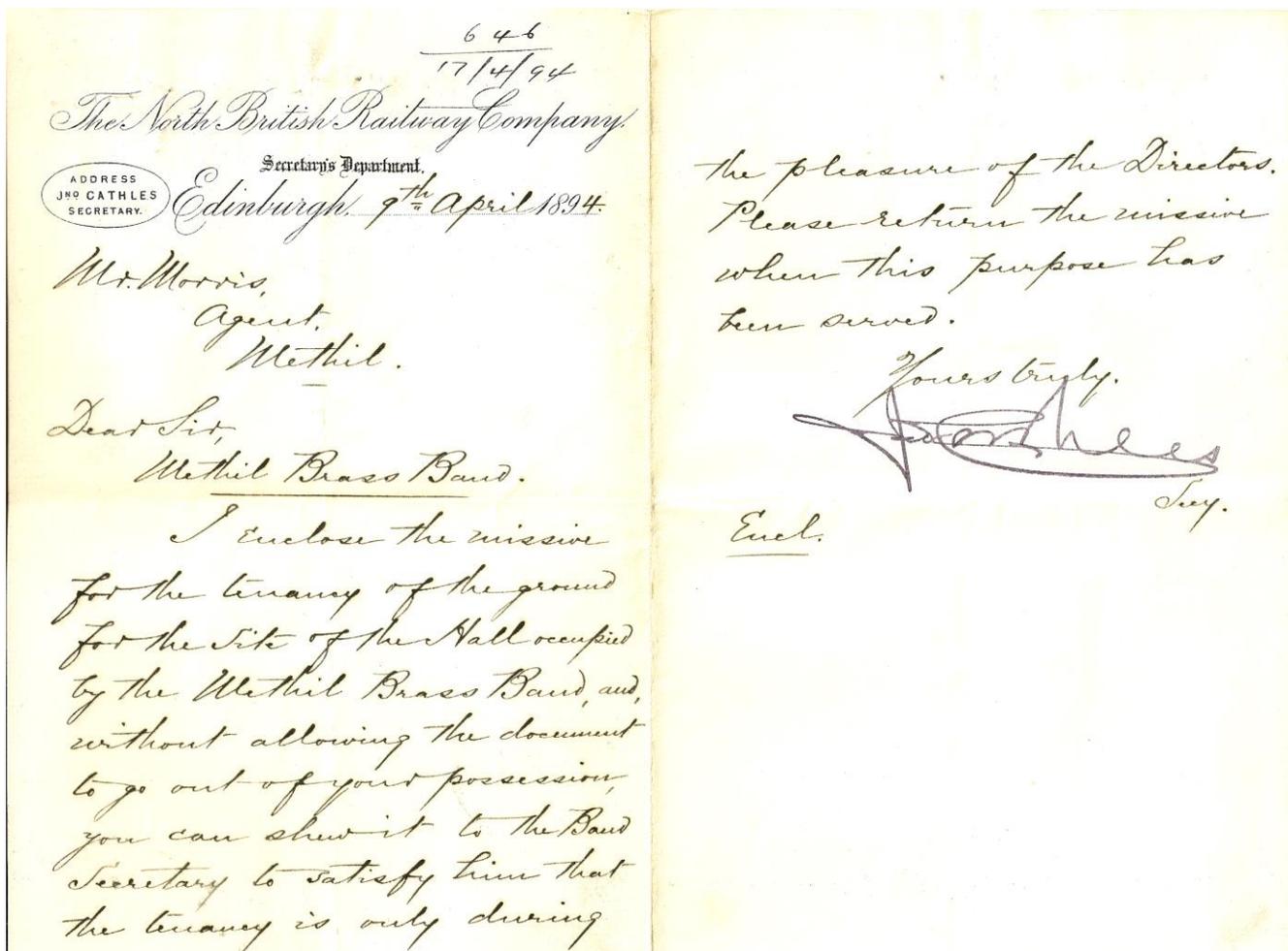


Methil, c. 1890

The band opened their new band hall on Tuesday 29 March 1892, a building 60 feet by 32, intended for concerts, theatrical entertainments, and other meetings. The town was particularly busy as the coal exports through its docks from nearby mines had increased substantially due to the railway lines and also some pits in Durham closing and their stocks declining which meant the Fife mines' order books were full. The North British Railway Company had taken over the docks, which saw 701,085 tons of coal shipped from Methil in 1891.

1893 saw the band trying to raise funds for uniforms. In April 1894 Jonathan Cathles, secretary of the North British Railway Company, wrote to the Band reminding them that the tenancy of the land upon which their band hall stood, was only "*during the pleasure of the [Railway] directors*", and supplying them with the official missive that described the agreement.

New Years Day, 1896, saw the band organising a bazaar to raise funds, prior to its opening the band paraded the streets of Methil. The band's conductor was Peter Brown in 1897 - 1898. In September 1897, one of the band members was knocked over and his instrument damaged following an altercation at a public house in Methil. He was subsequently struck about the face with a walking stick by a friend of the man who bumped into him. At the Burgh Court the friend, W. Lovatt, was fined 7s 6d, or five days. Another fund-raising effort in November 1897 saw the band operating a prize draw where the prizes included a "crisp £5 note, buns, beef, tea, and brandy".



By October 1898 the band had probably been evicted from the band hall, as it was seeking premises to rehearse for two evenings a week (being refused the use of Methil School rooms). The band's secretary was Robert Penman in 1899 when a dance was held with prizes to raise funds to clear of their debt on new instruments. By April 1900 the band had obviously been in a quiet phase as there were questions in the local press about its continued existence, even causing two residents to turn to poetry to respectively bemoan its absence and maintain its presence. [see poems, below]

In May 1900 the band called a public meeting to discuss its outstanding debts and, as nobody turned up to the meeting, the band announced that the Committee would no longer be responsible for the debts contracted by the band.

The band had a modest contesting record, entering 34 contests between 1898 and 1912, with three 1st, four 2nd, and seven 3rd prizes, being conducted by three professional conductors for those performances – James Carmichael, James Ord Hume, and Friend Farrand.

Their last contest was in August 1912, at Wemyss Castle, conducted by James Donaldson. In October 1912, the band's committee called in the instruments and intended to reorganise the band on a fresh basis, owing to "the negligence and inattention of the members of the band."

The band did not survive WW1 and was replaced in the area by the existing Buckhaven Town Band (founded in 1905, who were also conducted by Peter Brown in 1909) and the new Wellesley Colliery Band, formed in 1919. These two later merged in 1976 to form the current Buckhaven and Methil Miners' Brass Band.

Methil Band

“Bobs”, 8 May 1900

I hear thee speak of Methil Band,
Whose martial strains enhanced the land;
Mother, oh where is the musical corps,
Shall we not seek it and weep no more?
Is it where the Cairns of rubies grow,
Or down by the dock where the boaties row?
Not there, not there, my child!

Is it far away with some legion bold,
Off to the front in that land of gold,
Where Orange blossoms around Bloemfontein,
And the sapper blows up the secret mine,
And Rhodes marks time on a Chartered stand –
Is it there, sweet mother, the Methil Band?
Not there, not there, my child!

I haven't seen it for a year, my boy,
Ear hasn't heard its sweet tones of joy;
The dreamers in marble halls so fair
Think they are off on a trip with Lothair –
The Band has left you and me in the gloom,
And they've joined the cow that jumped o'er the moon –
It is there, it is there, my child!

And the answering poem...

Methil Brass Band

"Aunty Jean", 17 May 1900

Go, spread the news both far and near,
There's a poet among's, ot would appear,
Who writes our drooping hearts to cheer -
Am gled that am his aunty, O!

He's struck perfection's note at last,
And Hemans in the shade has cast -
Go, send the news both far and fast -
Am prood that am his aunty, O!

I ken oor poet's bound to shine,
The logic he can chop sae fine,
Am sure there's sense in every line -
At least, so thinks his aunty, O!

He wonders whaur the Band has been,
And hints a place ca'ed Bloemfontein;
But I didna think he was sae green
As try and gull his aunty, O!

He says a cow to the muse has gone,
Wi' Methil Band close in its train,
But when we'll see it back again,
It mystifies his aunty, O!

Now the evidence is very clear,
This is just the season o' the year
When poets a' turn kind o' queer,
And gang and see their aunty, O!

Some poets sing o' flowers and plants,
Some of beetles, bugs, and ants,
But of Methil Band oor poet chants -
That's what they tell his aunty, O!

As he wanders by the sparkling waves,
Of Methil Band he rants and raves,
But I hope he decently behaves
When he gangs far frae his aunty, O!

The members o' the band s' swear
If they get him they'll make him sair -
They say they have accounts to square -
They should square them wi' his aunty, O!

Some wad croon him wi' a corn beef can
Some throw him 'neath a loaded van;
But they're better ne' to kill the man
Before they see his aunty, O!

My advice to members o' the Band
Is never for this to lift their hand
For a blow the poet could never stand -
He'd run and tell his aunty, O!

For a' his failings, faults, and flaws,
I must support out poet's cause -
The reason of it is just because
I've signed myself his aunty, O!