

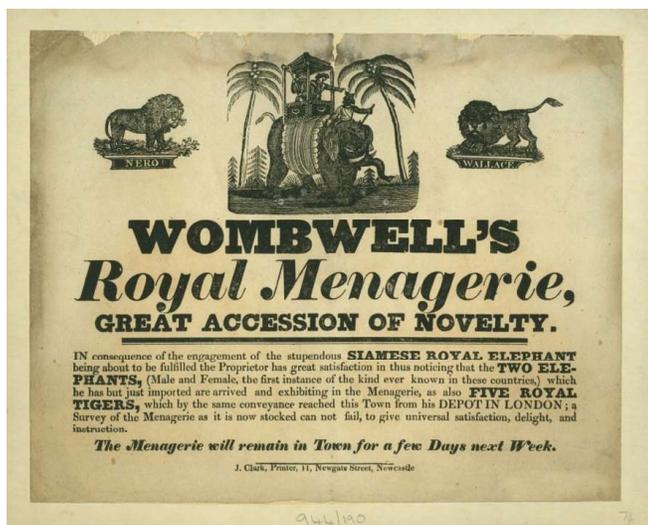
BRITISH ISLES 19th CENTURY CIRCUS BANDS

News Extracts Collected by Gavin Holman, WJU #3943 - www.ibew.co.uk

PART 1 - 1838 to 1863

The life and times of circus and menagerie bands in the British Isles in the 19th century – extracts from contemporary reports:

- At the time of the coronation of Queen Victoria, in June 1838, **Wombwell's Menagerie** was in Falmouth. The Menagerie Band played in the town's grand procession and at the celebration dinner on a grandstand erected over the entrance to the meat market. At this time, the leader of the Menagerie Band was John Bright, playing his keyed bugle.
- Mr Deane's coachbuilding firm in Southampton created a



new “superbly emblazoned” carriage for Mr Batty’s Circus Band in early 1844. Later, in October 1844, when **Batty’s Circus** visited Cork in Ireland, the wagon was described as “an elegant machine of novel structure, ornamented with several emblematical figures, and carrying the Circus Band, who looked like a group of huntsmen ready for the field.”

- **Cock’s Circus Band** attended a soirée for the local Catholics at Hartlepool Town Hall, after the circus performance had ended, in March 1848.
- **Wombwell’s Menagerie Band** was engaged to play at the Kingsbridge and Dodbrooke Races in September 1851, together with the Ermington Brass Band.
- **Macarté’s Circus Band** had a narrow escape at Oxford in August 1853 – in turning a corner, their vehicle was upset, and the musicians scattered in the road. They were all more or less bruised and the drummer received a concussion of the spine.
- In the early 1850’s Wombwell’s Menagerie had a fine band and one player was John Walker (1824-1890), from Huddersfield, originally an expert ophicleide player, and Richard Sutcliffe, of Honley, was the band leader. Walker

later played with the **Cook’s Circus Band** for a while before moving to Merthyr Tydfil and becoming instructor to the Cyfarthfa Band at the Crayshaw Ironworks.

- In January 1857 **Henry Brown’s Cirque Unique Company**, in Norwich, described itself as having “*the best band ever heard in a Circus.*” Following this boast, **Hengler’s Cirque Variété**, offered to back Charles Hengler’s Reed, Brass, or String Bands (leader W. Allen) to “*play against the one he so vaunts, for the sum of £50.*” Another band, that of **W. Cooke**, in Hackney, attempted to take up the challenge, but was rapidly rejected by Hengler on the grounds that the original challenge was to Brown’s Circus Band only. However he did state that “*in order to gratify your laudable ambition we will give you an opportunity of testing your abilities with ours on the following conditions only: The respective Bands to be equal in number, and to form, alternately, three distinct bands - viz., Reed, Brass, and String, and that each leader compose and arrange seven different and original pieces, to be played at the said trial – viz., 1st, a March; 2nd, an Air, with introductions, variations, and finale; 3rd, set of Waltzes; 4th, a Schottische; 5th, a Polka; 6th, a Pas Redouble; 7th, a Gallop. Each leader to give satisfactory proof that the various compositions are his own. If those conditions suit we shall expect to hear from you by letter, naming the sum to be competed for; if not, no further notice will be taken of the matter. The above offer is also open to all travelling Circus Bands in the United Kingdom. In addition, I shall be happy to afford Mr. Wilson, leader of Mr. W. Cooke’s band, or the leader of any Circus band travelling, an opportunity of testing his or their abilities against my own, as leader, composer, and arranger. William Allen, Leader, Hengler’s Circus Band.*” Suffice it to say, no band took up the challenge!
- **Ginnett’s Circus Band** played around Cardiff to celebrate the Princess Royal’s marriage in January 1858.
- **Wombwell’s Menagerie Band** “discoursed sweet music, to the delight of those who had an ear for such” at the Walsall Whitsuntide Fair in May 1858.
- **Brown’s Circus Band**, in a handsome carriage drawn by four cream coloured horses, provided entertainment at the Colchester Garrison Steeplechases in April 1859.
- Joseph Taylor was leader of **Macarté & Clarke’s Circus Band** in the mid-1850’s, and he went on to form his own band in 1859, based in Ipswich, available for “flower shows, regattas, anniversaries, etc.”
- In August 1859 the **Oxford Regatta** engaged a brass band, which included some of the best performers of the **Wombwell’s Menagerie Band** (which was in the city) to perform on the University Boat Club Barge.

- The following month, in September 1859, **Wombwell's Menagerie** exhibited at Salisbury. The leader of the band, John Shaft Hartwell, had been drinking hard for a week, and in a state bordering on delirium tremens, committed suicide in his room at the Saracen's Head Inn. Mr Pickup, a bandsman who shared the room with Hartwell, witnessed the death.
- Walsall - 28 April 1860 - *To Whom Does the Space Behind the Grand Stand Belong. Some time ago notices were posted in the town, intimating that the Alhambra circus would visit Walsall on Wednesday last; but on Tuesday large posters informed the natives that the above talented company were prevented carrying out their arrangements, through the avaricious demands of the lessee of the Lammas Lands, who charged £5 per day for the ground required by the company. Wednesday morning the circus band perambulated the streets, and intimated that the company would perform in Wednesbury. and would not visit Walsall again till a more conscionable person, who would let the land upon more reasonable terms, become lessee of the land. This affair might have been passed over unnoticed, but for the fact that it suggests the query by what authority does the lessee acquire the right to let the land - as he has been doing for some time past - during that period it belongs to the freeholders? This is a subject deserving the attention of the rate payers. and one it is to hoped that will not be lost sight of until fully cleared up.*
- **Jim Myers Mammoth Circus** was advertising for a circus band in July 1860. [James Washington Myers was an American equestrian and circus entrepreneur who began his career in the United States. He went on to perform in Great Britain with Howes & Cushing Circus. When that circus returned to the U.S. Meyers stayed in the U.K. His J.W. Meyer's Great American Circus toured extensively in England and France.]
- **The Foresters Court Britannia** in Croydon, as one of their charitable events for the Widows and Orphans Fund, arranged for a circus to attend the town for 20 guineas in November 1860, selling the tickets to raise money for the fund. The Foresters paraded through the town, headed by half a dozen of the brethren in full Robin Hood costumes, followed by the circus band in a carriage drawn by six horses.
- November 1860 also saw **Batthey's Menagerie** visiting Llandovery, when the Menagerie Band took part in the procession celebrating the cutting of the first sod of the third section of the Central Wales Railway – sharing the musical efforts with the Llandilo Volunteer Band, and the Llandovery Band.
- **Newsome's Circus Band** was engaged to perform at the Hurdle Races at Brighton in May 1861.
- In July 1861, **Newsome's Circus** was in Oxford, and the circus band played a small part in the suppression of the plans of the Oxford Mayor to veto the amusements of the people of Oxford – having lost support for his proposed bye-laws, the circus band turned up at his house and played "The Fine Old English Gentleman" – to the delight of the local populace.
- **Hogini's Circus Band** was engaged to take part in the procession celebrating the inauguration of the new mayor of Cork, in January 1862.
- New Year's Day, 1862, in Norwich found three bands entertaining the crowds after the chiming of the hour at midnight – **Howlett's Brass Band, Newsome's Circus Band** and **Manders' Menagerie Band**. The latter made an imposing entry – *"the performers were seated in their ornamental locomotive orchestra, which on this occasion was drawn by two young elephants and several fine camels. The bands occupied stations apart from each other and played alternatively until the new year had advanced some hour or two. Some of the pieces were well played, and the musicians were frequently applauded by their monster audience."*
- The **Alhambra Circus Band** was engaged to play at the Northamptonshire Agricultural Sheep Shearing Competition at Northampton in June 1862.
- **Sangers' Circus Brass Band** – appeared with the circus at Greenock in July 1862.
- **Hengler's Cirque Variete Band** was placed at the disposal of the Greenock Foresters when they took part in the grand procession through the town on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of the Albert Harbour in August 1862. Following this, in September, the Foresters returned the compliment by attending the Circus en masse, parading through the streets to the establishment, preceded by the circus band.
- Visitors to the Derbyshire Agricultural Society Show was entertained by **Newsome's Circus Band** and the **Alhambra Circus Band** in September 1862
- In March 1863, **Newsome's Circus Band**, in a carriage with four white horses, took part in the parade in Leicester to celebrate the marriage of Prince Edward to Princess Alexandra of Denmark. Madame Newsome was mounted on a pet white steed while members of the company rode abreast of her, holding a scroll with the inscription "Happy May They Be".
- **Howe's Circus** visited Dunfermline in September 1863, with the circus band parading the main streets on wagon tops, drawn by eight beautiful horses, sleek-skinned, long-tailed, and parti-coloured.