

The poetry of brass bands

Over the years several brass bands have been immortalised in poetry. From those lauding their heroes to the ones which are critical or even insulting. From the earliest days poets have found something in the music of the bands and the people who play in them to inspire their muse. I think it is fair to say that most of the writers would not have made a career out of their works - some are certainly more William McGonagall than William Wordsworth – but nonetheless they are priceless views of the bands and bandsmen. Some examples of odes to the bands of the past are provided here for your enjoyment.

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RISHWORTH AND RYBURN VALLEY BRASS BAND

Sam Mellor, Ripponden - An example of praise celebrating their contest win in 1906

Winning the "Daily Graphic" Challenge Cup and other Prizes, at the Crystal Palace, Saturday, Sept. 29th, 1906

Up to the great, big Hall of glass,
That stands o'er the hills of Kent;
Beyond the roar of the city
Well, the Ryburn bandsmen went.

They left their homes in the village,
Two hundred miles of a ride,
To try for a cup, worth winning,
With a touch of fame beside.

They play'd, and they play'd superbly,
They play'd, and they play'd their best,
To try to carry the trophy
From the hands of all the rest.

At night, they wired the village,
"Tell, the Ryburn Band has won,"
And the lads they all felt bigger,
And the men all said "well done."

Returning, a stranger met them,
His voice, just over the din,
"These are not men, but lads!" said he,
But they're men enough to win.

CAMELON BRASS BAND

In the Falkirk Mail of 16th November 1907 a poem appeared entitled "*Auld Camelon Band*", of which the first verse is:

There's Auld Camelon Band they're aye tae the fore;
They started wi' flutes in the year '34,
If you had only heard them their music you'd adore,
For always their number was less than a score,
Their auld flutes ha'e been turned into brass
Three cheers tae the friends that gave them the cash,
For we've all joined together to gi'e them a hand,
and try and make good members tae the auld Camelon Band

SLAIDBURN BAND

The band's tour of the outlying farms and hamlets above the village around Christmas 1903 is documented in the poem "*Success To The Slaidburn Band*", by Ellen Cowking. It tells in 34 verses which places were visited and the names of the residents.

FRECKLETON BAND

Kate Hall lived in Freckleton at the turn of the 20th century and wrote poems on a wide range of topics. After her death, a book of her poems was unearthed which included several about the Freckleton Brass Band. The first few verses of her poem "*The Cup Winners*" is shown here. For the rest of the poem, and others about the band, see: Kate Hall's Freckleton Band poetry at <https://freckletonband.co.uk/the-early-twentieth-century-poems-of-kate-hall/>

Here's Good Luck to Freckleton Band
Who won the cup again;
And took some extra prizes
All honour to their name.

For they well assume their laurels
And the prizes they have won;
What other band in the Fylde can boast
Of the great things they have done.

What though some other band may sneer
And jealously snide;
They must not fear, for still they stand
The Champions of the Fylde.

They win by their own efforts
No subterfuge have they
No violating contest rules
But good straightforward play.

ROTHWELL TEMPERANCE BAND

Under the heading '*The Temperance Band*' in the Rothwell Times of May 5th, 1882, a poem of nine verses was printed, of which the following are two examples:

Last Christmas as you all well know,
We had the one Brass Band,
Now you see we have got two,
And one 'tis said won't stand

They say that water cannot
Blow a note so clear
But that is false!
I know a man
That's proved it many a year

THOSE CORNETS!

(Dedicated to Barrow upon Humber Brass Band - 1897)

The basses, soft and mellow, never shrill,
With proper modulations, swell and fall,
And seldom ape the creaking of a mill,
Or the Tommy-cat's nocturnal caterwaul.

But the cornet player blows
A very different sort of tone -
Discord every bit his own -
Could you listen and restrain
Language warm, or feel no pain,
Well - you're constitution's made of sterner stuff than I suppose.

Those cornets, O those cornets, how they scream
As seagulls on the startled air of night;
I hear them now, I hear them when I dream,
And I wish they were in Hull out of my sight,

O cruel cornet-blower,
Blow sweeter, gentler, lower,
Or away with your false harmony;
'Tis like that "made in Jarmany"
I'd heard so oft before.
If you really can't play better,
And I must die thus, I'll get a
German band to kill me, though it cost a copper more.

HARROGATE BAND SONG

Cumberland Clark - 1926

Did you ever hear the Harrogate Band?
Although it's so awful they think it grand,
You can hear it as the day is dawning,
When you take your waters in the morning.

There once was a man, I understand,
Who said that he liked the Harrogate Band;
I thought him the strangest man on earth,
'Till I found out that he'd been deaf from birth.

The instruments all creak and wheeze,
They wander off into various keys,
It may suit some, but it's not my taste,
For it gives me pains below the waist.

Did you ever hear that awful Band?
There's nothing like it in all the land,
Its' strains of music are so sad,
It makes all good people feel quite bad.

Did you ever hear that curious band?
The Band and the Cure go hand in hand,
As the music is not at all too pure,
No wonder the visitors need a cure.

They played last night for a good half-hour,
'Till I turned pale, and the milk turned sour,
The lights burned dim and the air went blue,
Then the gas went out, and the cat went too.

And when they're marching through the town,
The noise that they make really wears you down,
The dogs join in, with all just cause,
And citizens wane behind locked doors.

To stand that Band you need great nerve,
If the members got what they deserve,
They'd be taken out to a quiet spot,
Where the visitors could shoot the lot.

This was set to music by Donald Avison, and recorded by the Harrogate Band on their CD "Made in Harrogate", with soprano vocalist Laura Jackson, as part of the "Harrogate Songbook"

WHAT A DAY

Ecclesfield Silver Band – New Brighton Contest 1971

We left Stocks Hill abaht heaf past seven
In a coach at least ninety foot long
Mooast'at Band were haef asleep
An back wheel didn't sound very strong

However we landed at Ormskirk all reight
And everyone seemed quite keen
First chap we saw w'er Jimmy Gee
An' he said, "Whee'rs yaw monkeys been?"

We piled aht a coach an' into Guides Hut
An quickly fixed up for a blow
In't meantime our ladies wer starting t o mash
And sooin' ad meat pies on't go

Off once again and through t'Mersey Tunne1
At yon' end we should a turned right
But coming from t' village we turned left a' course
And nearly reached. Isle O' Wight

New Brighton at last so we piled in for t'draw
An theer all us troubles begun
Desmond came running an' shouted out loud
"LOOK sharp lads we've drawn number wun"

"Oh god" we all cried "We've done it ageean"
An fished 'aht us copies at' Queen
Then marched on't stage all knocking at knees
Wi some of our faces quite green

After eight weeks a practice this wer it
As we waited for t' whistle to blow
Every man Jack in that band of ours
Determined to give a good show

Often in't past when folks heeard us play
They'd run far away from t' bandstand
Nah' we played well an even so
Poor Alex reached Switzerland

He must 'a stopped thear while t'rest on 'em played
Although we didn't play werst
Not having heard the other bands play
He wer forced to put Ecclesfield first !

But whether or not this wer case
First prize wer still quite a big un
An no doubt we'll all go contesting again
It might be next week at Wigan!

CARNWATH BRASS BAND

Carnwarth Brass Band, Carnwath Brass Band
I never saw a band like Carnwath Brass Band;
Frae Orkney to Gretna, seek thro' all the land,
Au' ye'll no fin' a band like Carnwath Brass Band.

Carnwath Brass Band, a' are strapping young men,
Some are six feet six, some are five feet ten;
Little Johnnie is the crate, and Jamie wants a band,
Yet, ye'll never fin' a band like Carnwath Brass Band;

When our band gaed to Biggar, a' the lasses were surprised
To see a band o' men o' such wondrous size
In uniform so fine, and in stature so grand,
O, they never saw a Band like Carnwath Brass Band!

Their music loud and strong, re-echoed to the skies,
The very hares and foxes were filled wi' surprise;
Some little hills might dance, but auld Tintoc made a stand,
Astonished with the strains o' Carnwath Brass Band!

At Biggar and Carluke, they behaved unco weel,
Did their duty and cam' hame, without servin' the diel,
And when they were at Linton, astonished a' the land,
Wi the nimble footed powers o' Carnwath Brass Band.

But O! the last St John's day, they got an unco fa',
Altho' it was winter, it was neither frost nor snaw,
Yet they got their sells so drunk, that some could scarcely stand,
And wasna that a shame to Carnwath Brass Band.

The laddie wi' the red cap, that thumps the muckle drum,
Was so very fat, he could hardly gar't play dum;
And Johnnie roared the 'Ewie' when be wasna fit to stand,
And wasna that a shame to Carnwath Brass Band.

Our Jock's, seen often ill, but never was seen worse,
Be was so doiled and swabble that he couldna clean his horse;
But lay as he'd been shot at Sebastopol so grand,
And wasna that a shame to Carnwath Brass Band.

Lazy, lien, genty Tim, got himself so clatty fou;
He was carried third the way, like a newly stickey cow,
In the smiddy lay in state, like a Satan's firebrand,
And wasna that a shame to Carnwath Brass Band

Young men o' the band, tak ye my advice,
Beware o' whisky drinkin' if ye wad be wise;
Carry on as ye've begun, and a bairn may understand
Ye'll no very lang be Carnwath Brass Band

DUNNIKIER BRASS BAND

1909

Hurrah! Hurrah! It's come at last,
I really do declare;
Ye'll see them marching doon the street,
Playing the Scottish airs.
The auld folk prance, the young ane's dance,
And at each ithers speer-
Oh, tell me where the band comes frae?
We'll, it comes frae Dunnikier - Aye.

It's the Dunnikier Brass Band,
It's the Dunnikier Brass Band,
As they go marching doon the street,
They're sae tidy, trim, and neat – and
That's the Dunnikier Brass Band

Come on noo boys, jist rally roond,
And aye support, yer baund;
It'll no' be very long before
It's heard on contest staund.
You've got the best men roond about,
Of that there is nae doot.
And when your baund begins to play
You'll hear the people shout – that

It's the Dunnikier Brass Band,
It's the Dunnikier Brass Band,
When you hear the public say
That's the best we heard today,
You'll feel proud o' the Dunnikier Brass Band

Enthusiastic men you've got
Tae take ye by the haund;
Stand by them - they'll staund by you
And then you'll understaund;
That when ye “pool” thegither, weel,
The battle is half won.
And when ye lift the prizes – then
The public say "Well done!"

That's the Dunnikier Brass Band,
That's the Dunnikier Brass Band,
When you hear the the miners cry -
“Good for Reid and C Mackay!”
They've revived the Dunnikier Brass Band

THE CONTEST - A TRIBUTE TO THORNLEY BAND

They sit around in horse-shoe style
Instruments ready all the while
They watch the man in uniformed hat
With baton raised, no silly chat.
The work's all done, rehearsal gone,
It's now that they have practised for.
The bandmaster keenly scans the score,
Down comes the baton they've been waiting for.
They play their hearts out
Because they know the other bands are formidable foes.
"Beethoven's works" - the test piece played,
Opening butterflies soon allayed.
Unison, then a great solo
A cadenza, to make the performance grow.
Loud applause at the end
Greets them wildly like 'Amen'
Of course, they won
With points in hand
No others could touch the Thornley
Our silver prize band!

THE BLANCHARDSTOWN SOUND

by Tommy Bracken, 1971

They blow and they pound
The Blanchardstown sound
The beat is something grand,
And for many a year
There's always been a cheer
For the sound of the Blanchardstown Band

The Merseyside beat
Would bow in defeat
Joe Loss would be struck to the ground
The Garda Band at the races
Would have awe struck their faces
If they heard the Blanchardstown sound

The bands of the Army
Would in envy turn "barmy"
Or even retreat underground,
No need in denying
And no use in trying
To compare with the Blanchardstown sound

All of the bands
O'er the world ever played
There's still yet one to be found,
Like our village brass band
The pride of our land
Long live the Blanchardstown sound

THE BRASS BAND CONTEST OR BLIND JACKSON FOR EVER

O come all ye fine Norfolk Dumplings and Joeys who live in this city,
And I'll try just to tickle your fancy by reciting my sorrowful ditty.
On Monday the place was alive, and folks to the Market did stray.
And what did they go there to see, that wonderful thing a fine day.
High and low, great and small were assembled, and round at each other did stare,
To see the sun shining so bright, and wonder'd howe'er it got there.
Fine weather this summer is scarce and rain comes almost every day.
So when there's a chance of sunshire, they on with their duds and away.

“To-wit to-wo” says the Owl, I'll scheme a fine sight, yet be thrifty;
For by laying out forty-five pounds, I can manage to double my fifty.
So a contest of brass was soon plan'd to take place on the new Cricket ground,
And the Norwichers glad of a change, rushed off at the very first sound.
The schoolmaster shut up his school and sent all his boys out to play,
But he took care to have them all come, till he pocketed all the week's pay.
Tom French Horn has given up his shaving and intends just to live at his case,
Because when his shop was kept open he couldn't go to such jolly sprees.

There's Dogdard who says he's a printer, who is not to be done by a trifle,
March'd up to the ground in his plumes, but he had not to borrow a rifle.
There was a Cockey, who wears a moustache to make him look fierce like a man,
Was seen smoking his pipe on the ground and eying an half-gallon can.
In the Market the bands met together, the Ipswich in light grey and red,
The blue Cambridge chaps were all stunners; the Railway band with their head
The Peterboroughs were no duffers. The Norwich band with their grey sacks on,
They all of them played very well, but they had no chance with Blind Jackson.

His chaps blew so well, I heard say they did not lose a puff of their wind,
And for fear that the wind should fize out, they were well stuffed with cotton behind.
Well the cup and the cornet they won, and everyone thought it quite fair,
'Xept the band which had got a thick head, and, oh! lor, how those railway chaps
swear.
They made sure o' winning, you see, of self-conceit they have a full share,
If they could not afford to lose, what business had they to come here.
They said the judges were partial, I am sure I don't know if they were;
But if they'd asked Jenny Marshall, she'd suited em all to a hair.

Well the day was a fine treat be sure, with such squeezing and treading on corns,
While the girls were all highly delighted to see how they handled their horns.
George Coe made a smell and smoke with fireworks just after dark,
And this was the point of the joke, that each maiden might pick up a spark,
And go billing and cooing along, and what else I'm too modest to say,
But make yourself scarce Master James, or you'll soon have the Beadle to pay.
There's gentleman Awl he says nothing, the Alderman's forced to fight shy,
But Rifleman Awl, with his ramrod was seen aiming at a Bull's eye.

Then success to the old Owlets' nest, where the shiners are laid up in store,
May he ne'er turn his noughts into nines, then the money will faster in pour!
Then success to each kind-hearted maiden, may none of them turn out forlorn,
Who taught our brave Rifleman how they can blow the short notes on their horn!
Success to each musical hero, who musical honour still seeks,
May he ne'er prove the truth of the poet, and "Blow wind and so crack his cheeks"!
Then success to friend Jackson, tho' blind, that misfortune we all of us pity,
May he long keep thus sound in this wind, for the honour of old Norwich city.

THE BRASS BAND CONTEST - THE NORWICHER'S GRAND SPREE

20th August 1860

You may say what you like, but I think you must own,
Of all the grand sprees there ever was known,
There never was one it must be confest,
That ever exceeded the Brass Band Contest.

Why the thoughts on't alone turned the Norwichers mad,
Though many a wild goose chase they have had;
By hundreds they thronged, at home they couldn't rest,
Their heads were so full of the Brass Band Contest.

For most of them expected as they very well might,
They should certainly have seen a most splendid sight,
For Bills were put out and by them express't,
The grand doings there'd be at this famous Contest.

The Bands were invited from all parts of the nation,
To come down to Norwich on this grand occasion,
On purpose to try each other for to best,
For a Fifteen Pound Prize at the Brass Band Contest.

And the Twentieth of August, it being the day,
That these Sons of Apollo their skill should display;
On the New Cricket Ground like talented boys,
And try who was able to make the most noise.

One o'clock being the time that the Band were to meet,
From every hole and corner, lane, alley and street,
Away ran the Norwichers just as though they were crazy,
Both the old and the young, the lame and the lazy.

And not only Norwichers, but also their country cousins,
That the cheap trains had brought to the City by dozens,
Till the Market place was so crowded with women and men
But a more disappointed party there never was seen.

Why some of them got into a terrible passion,
They thought to have seen a most splendid procession,
But instead of the Bands starting off all together,
Some of them went one way and some went another.

When they got to the ground a rare fist on't they made,
Some blew till their eyes were fit to start from their head;
Some blew their lips down till they couldn't make a sound,
Their minds were so fix't on the sweet fifteen pound.

And one Cornet blower amongst the poor wretches,
Blew so hard that he actually dirtied his breeches;
So anxious was he the Silver Cornet to gain,
But he found to his cost all his blowing was in vain.

For 'twas very well known before the Contest begun,
Billy Jaxon was the chap that was fix't upon;
The Silver Cornet to win, his lungs being the strongest,
He was able to blow both the loudest and strongest.

As for the Norwich Cornet Blowers, each conceited fellow,
Found young Billy Jaxon can beat them quite hollow;
They may bounce and may swagger, and blow all they like,
They've no more chance with Jaxon than poor old Bob Dike.

But the worst job of all I really do think,
Is the extortionate charge that was made for the drink;
For when in the Booth for truth I am told,
At a shilling a bottle Mild Porter was sold.

And after the Contest came the grand Rural Sport,
Such as Bow and Arrow shooting, and things of that sort;
Hurdle jumping, Rope Dancing, which must be confess'd,
Was the best part of the Spree at this Brass Band Contest.

And to finish the Sports and wind up the day,
Of Fireworks there was a most Brilliant Display;
Get up by George Coe, in both Red, Blue and Green,
Such Fireworks before there never was seen.

When the sports were all ended and ten o'clock come,
They thought it was time to return to their home,
And retire into bed, but they could take no rest,
They were dreaming all night of the Brass Band Contest.

THE RIGGS OF A BAND CONTEST

At the Vickey Gardens, Great Yarmouth, 21st August 1861

(some words are missing from the original)

At the Vickey Gardens a short time ago,
A Band Contest took place of which you all know,
And great numbers of people thither did stray,
To hear the sweet music that each Band did play.

The grounds were well filled with Apollo's selection,
And eagerly waiting in every direction,
The battle of musical talent to hear,
Which after turned out decidedly queer.

Bill Ullay was first on the stage with his Band,
Which certainly made a
.....the beer was on board,
And the spectators said that he was sure to be floored.

Then came the Sawston of Cambridgeshire fame,
Who dashed to contest like true Briton's game,
But were doomed by the judges to take the last place,
Although they deserved to be fourth in the race.

Next came the Militia Artillery to test,
Who played very well and no doubt did it their best,
We were told e'en we came they could lick the Life Guards,
That no other Band dare to approach them by yards.

There was Kegnick a dancing about like a showman,
And for a man in his place it looked very uncommon,
But like all other Germans he's full of trickery,
And being placed third made him look very shickery.

The came Jackson's Band who appeared on the stage,
And performed Handel's works which stands first on the page,
With precision and taste the Hallelujah was played,
When finished the Band were loudly hurrah'd.

Next was the Cambridge in their Jackets of Blue,
Who intended that day to die or to do,
The Lessee was Cambridge, the Judges likewise,
So there is no wonder they got the first prize.

Now my dear readers comes on the best fun,
From the Vickey Bar out flew the great gun,
With a magnificent cup of inferior tin,
For the best cornet player who had talent to win.

Says Vickey to Kegnick, "Up and do Battle,"
And for the Rich Goblet give a good rattle,
For winning my boy is out of question with you,
You know I have told you it "should be a due".

All at once Vickey shouts "it is a walk over,"
"Oh! no," says T. Cosgrove, not so my brave rover,
Jackson's brave band for your Tin P.....
And if fairly judged they can win.

Then Vic in a rage, cried aloud for the Bobbies!
And soon he intended to push Tom through the lobbies,
But Cos. who was leary, to the people appealed,
And Vickey's Secret he to them revealed.

Poor Vickey was done, and cleverly foiled,
He sneaked into the bar alarmingly roiled,
He looked like a ghost so white in the face,
No doubt for the future he'll keep his own place.

There's his friend Correspondence! a regular duffer,
And "Foul Play" his pal, is a shiney old buffer;
But Cosgrove's a match for all the false crew,
If they meddle with him, they will soon cry a go.

Two poems on the subject of Bramley Band

T' BRAMLA BAND

Who hesn't heerd o't' Bramla Band
That's famous far an' near?
An wins sich honor for aar taan,
Wi' ivvery cummin year.
At Gala, Feast, an' flaar strew,
At Chris'mas, an' May-Day,
At contests tew, aar Band is suar
To carry t'prize away.

Wi' bran new clothes an instruments,
All shining bright an' clear.
An' lads an' lasses craadin' raand.
The big drum int' rear.
The men all marching breast to breast -
Wi martial stride an' pomp -
Who can withstand thur stirrin' strains.
As daan't taan they tromp!

Naah wether t'Band chaps played too mich
(For trumpets didn't rust)
I cannot say, but suar enif
They blew em till they bust.
T'poor chaps wor almost fit to roar.
For all thur brass wor spent.
But t' Taan clubbed up an bout each man
A bran' new instrument.

Sum wor silver, an' sum wor brass.
An' nicely curled i't' middle.
An' sum they went - Trom! Trom! Born! Born!
An' sum did now't but twiddle.
An' sum hed keys, an' hoils an' lids.
An' won, a queer consarn
Wor two yards long, or theer abaat.
An' slotted up an' daan.

But when they played 'em all at wunce
An' mixed 'em weel together
An' when the chap unpon T'big drum
Thum! 'Mum! began ta leather
T'effect wor rayther startlin'
And a Captain from the Wars
Enlisted 'em as soudgers,
In the "Prince of Wales Huzzars".

Nay, sum hed nivver ridden a hoss
Except at Bramla Tide
An them wor'on't willy-gigs.
They'ed a haupn'ny ride:
So when thur Regimentals com'
An' they began ta don,
They cuddn't tell what t'spurs wor for
Unless ta hod 'em on.

They thowt if they wor fastened right
Ta t'horse they'd somehow stick,
An' then they cuddn't be thrawn off,
If it began to kick.
So off they went full trot ta York.
Though nearly tosst ta jelly -
They stuck ta t'pummils, an' kep'thur spurs
Weel under t'horse's belly.

An' when they gat ta t'city walls
They pooll'd up in a raw.
An' "See the conquering hero comes"
They all began ta blaw.
An' varry weel they played it tew
When t'horses did't prance.
But when they heerd a lively bit
They seemed abaat ta dance.

At last that chap wi't'slotting thing
Wi' cheeks puff'd fit ta crack
He thrust it aat sa varry far
He cuddn't pull it back.
An' t'horse bein' rayther freeten'd tew
An' feelin summat prickin'
It started off a raumin' up
An' then began a kickin'.

First t'instrument flew onto t'graand
An jingled fit-ta-breck.
Then we wor fotched all on a lump
Reight on ta t'horses neck.
But t'warst of all, a spur cam off
At t'chap being' aat a plumb
T'horse sent him flying like a shot
Heard first into t'big drum.

They poolld him aat bi his coit-tail
An' sum began to chaff.
But t'chap wor suar,
He'd ne'er been thrawn
If t'spur hed nut cum off
So, reader, nivver use a thing
Ye dunnett understand
An' if yer tempted so to dew
Remember t'Bramla' Band.

A TRIBUTE TO BRAMLEY BAND

The lilting tunes of Bramley Band
No longer fill the air
Their fame was here for all to see
And known both far and near
Their exploits and their exhibits
Were always in demand
They traversed far, and countrywide
To corners of the land.
The many tales that they could tell
If they were only here
But, oh, alas, their unsung songs
We now will never hear.
'Poet and Peasant' 'Hail smiling Morn'
Are just to name but two
Of many favourite pieces played
These talented men could do.
As we think back of days gone by
Of this our Bramley Band
Our minds will conjure up for us
A Spectacle, oh so grand
At Whitsuntide and Carnivals
On Sunday afternoons
With every grand occasion
We see these men anew
Who blew their horns, banged their drums
Their cymbals rang to greet
These men most famed in uniforms
With happy marching feet.
And so we now this tribute pay
As after five decades
To the memory of the Bramley Band
And hope it never fades.
But then who knows what we may see
Some day in the near future
Another Bramley Band may start
And fill us full of rapture

Mabel Birley

ST. ANDREW'S JUNIOR BAND, HULL

Hail to St Andrew's Junior Band!
Which side by older players takes a stand;
'Tis wonderful that boys so young as these
Should play so well, as e'en to critics please.

Diligence and good tuition tell
The reason why they succeed so well;
For each lad tries to do what he is told –
The Band thus helps the character to mold.

'Twas in November, nineteen-fourteen,
In West Hull, that its humble birth was seen,
But, like the acorn by the wayside sown,
It now has to a healthy sapling grown.

Large sums for charities their help has raised,
For which they have been well and duly praised;
The widows and the orphans' hearts are full
Of thanks towards these little boys of Hull.

No sect or section has the slightest claim,
Except the good of mankind be the aim –
For each and all the Band has freely played;
No charge, except expenses, has been made.

If of assistance you should be of need,
At times when you're engaged in noble deed,
And helpfully you find the band could use;
Invite them. They're not likely to refuse.

THE BANDSMAN'S PRAYER

Written by Nigel McCulloch, Bishop of Wakefield, for *Songs of Praise*, BBC TV, June 1996

Heavenly Father, we thank you for instruments of brass and silver and for the lungs and lips that blow them.

Bless all who play in our bands and the communities they represent - especially the former mill and mining communities of these areas.

May their music inspire us to live in deep harmony with one another - and in rhythm with the abiding presence of Christ.

AMEN.

THE MOSSLEY BAND

Aw know aw havna bin i' th world as lung
As th' owder foaks,
But aw've travelled fare to middlin un
Awve met mi share o' sorts.
Theers sum chaps good tin sum chaps mean
Un sum aw conna stand,
But awve never met a grandelier set
As th' lads i' th' Mossley Band.

Thi might'nt be o angels theer, nay that
Aw wudna say,
But thi wouldna du thi deauwn like sum
Un send thi on thi way.
Theers allus a cheery "Ow art lad" un a
Friendly shake ut th' and,
Yu'll travel far afoor yu meets
Lads like i' th' Mossley Band.

Yu con keep yur lot o' fancy foaks
Them as thinks thi are su fine,
Gi me a chap as is a friend
He'll do me ony time.
Fer he's u' th' sort who'll stond by thee
When things aren't allus grand,
Un he's the sort o' lad yu'll meet
If yu plays in' th' Mossley Band.

BAND NIGHT

by Walter Hard

“It was band concert night.
Around the village green there were cars
Parked in double line.
In the center of the green, under bright lights,

The band, the pride of the village, sat.
Strings of colored lights stretched from the stand
To the trees at the three corners.
On the far side the Ladies’ Aid served ice cream

And Cy Henderson dispensed pop-corn.
In and out among the crowd small boys
Chased each other, yelling as they ran.
When the band finished a piece

There was a long applauding blast
From the automobile horns.
The small boys were silenced for a moment”

THE BRASS BAND CONTEST

W.A Barrett – Bacup, March 21st, 1877

[Published in Huddersfield College Magazine, No. 8, Vol. 5, May 1878, pp.201-204]

Come, listen to me, and a story I'll sing
About a Band Contest which took place last spring,
And the fun and the frolic the adventure did bring,
A twelvemonth ago now come Easter.
The folks in the neighbouring town sent a bill,
With a note, "If your band wish to play, then please fill
Up the spaces in blank, just to say what you will
Concerning this contest at Cleaster."

Now Cleaster's a city some ten miles away,
A junction for Durham, Leeds, Bridlington Bay,
Through which some four hundred trains pass ev'ry day,
Of all sorts - goods, cattle, expresses.
They cultivate music of every kind,
They sing and play pieces, both coarse and refined;
In short, they're a people in no way behind
The age, as perhaps each now guesses.

Ev'ry year they give prizes of various sums,
Silver cups, plated cornets, gilt batons, and drums,
To the finest Brass Band, from wherever it comes,
Provided the playing is decent.
'We had often desired to be down on their list,
But somehow or other the chance we had missed;
They passed us, as if we did never exist,
Though we'd gained some good laurels but recent.

At last we'd received the long looked-for invite;
We filled up the form, and despatched it all right,
And at once began practising that very night,
So eager we were for the prizes.
We sent to De Lacy for all the best tunes:
We bought a new tenor sax, two bombardoons,
A slide alto trombone, that shined like full moons,
In the clear winter's sky, as each rises.

So soon as the factory bell told us to cease,
And we'd washed ourselves clear from the slubber and grease,
We met at the sign of "The Fox and the Geese",
And sat in a ring round the table.
When Bumbly-foot Harry gave word for to start,
We blew hard at Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart,
Until ev'ry man knew the lot off by heart,
And to play without music was able.

Not to weary you all with a troublesome tale,
Know, we met for improvement each night without fail;
After practice each man took his one gill of ale,
And straightway went home without staying.
The winter flew past, and the buds 'gan to burst,
And the throstle sang blithely by coppice and hurst,
And still we ground on as we had done at first,
To make sure of a good place in playing.

At last the long looked-for day opened up bright,
We'd scarce slept a wink through the whole of the night,
So eager we were to show Cleaster our might,
And to come back all loaded with laurel.
We hired a waggon, with two pair of greys,
Each one took his instrument lapped in red baize;
Our coats had red trimmings, our caps were red glaze,
Like sealing-wax melted, or coral.

We start. As our neighbours collected to cheer,
And to wish us good luck, Johnny Smart from the rear
Threw a slipper, which hit Humbly-foot on the ear,
And caused him to fly in a passion.
He soon calmed himself, and we clattered away,
With confidence singing, so happy and gay;
Ne'er doubting a bit but we should win the day,
We entered the town in good fashion.

We got to the place where the tents were set out,
And when we had time just to look round about,
Sure ne'er in your life did you see such a rout,
Or hear such a comical shindy.
There were brass bands from all the towns twenty miles round,
All blowing at once as they came on the ground,
Each trying the best who could make the most sound,
All the time full discordant and windy.

At last the bell rung, and the judge took his seat,
And the bands were set out in good order complete,
And the humming of voices alone the ears greet,
As each waited the call of the numbers.
The judge knew the bands by the figures they held,
And not by their titles or place where they dwelled;
As the tickets were drawn from the hat; then soon quell'd
All the talkers as if sent to slumbers.

Our ticket was "six", we were drawn to play first,
And we set ourselves out in the plan we'd rehearsed,
And till told to begin our impatience we nursed,
With our instruments ready for blowing.
A thundering cheer made us all feel elate,
And angered the other bands who had to wait,
And to guess by our playing what would be their fate,

If they worse than us should be showing.

We first played a Chorus from Handel's Messiah,
And then a strange piece at the judge's desire,
After that the bombardon performed "Obadiah",
And other new music-hall ditties.
Upon which our first horn made a few observations,
Which the cornet replied to with frantic gyrations,
And the piccolo whistled a few variations,
Like frolicsome gambols of kitties.

How the other bands got on I can't tell you now;
Enough that the day ended up in a row,
For the pride of the lot had that day low to bow
We had won the first prize in a canter.
Our foes said our playing was nothing but fudge;
A mistake had been made, and that they wouldn't budge
Until the award was reversed by the judge,
Whom they made an endeavour to banter.

But a truce was patched up, and the bands stood apart,
To play altogether a piece off by heart,
All waited in silence the signal to start,
As was usually done at conclusion.
But the anger long smothered broke out in a flame;
And while some bands were silent at loss of their fame,
Some played "Hallelujah", some played "Same old game",
And all marched away in confusion.

At length to the station with fury they hie,
And each tried his neighbour in noise to outvie,
And from blows came to words, and in words did deny
The right of a triumph to other.
Soon words grew to deeds, and then cornets did clash
Against arms, breasts, and shoulders; and now with a dash
A mighty bass tuba comes down with a smash
On the head of the drummer's big brother.

The fray was now fierce, and the shout and the cry
Was mixed with wild blasts from defeated ally,
And the blowing off steam from the engine hard by,
And the shriek of the whistle for starting.
Cornet bells were pulled off, curly saxhorns stretched straight,
Drum heads were all burst, and cracked many a pate,
When the voice of Joe Jolly cried: "Make for the gate
And I'll set the foemen a-smarting".

Joe's coat was ripped up, and his red cap was gone,
His shirt and his waistcoat to ribbons were torn,
His eyes swoll'n and blacken'd, yet darted forth scorn
At our rivals, through whom he was rushing.
"Make the gate, make the gate!" still he cried in his rage

And leave me alone with the foe to engage!"
No words we could say did his fury assuage,
As we fell back, each other near crushing.

How nobly he stood, and how nobly he fought,
I cannot now tell but must leave it to thought,
Suffice it, in safety our waggon we caught,
As the enemy fled from him howling.
The slide of his trombone he lost in the fray;
He had bought a few pints of gray peas on his way,
Through the mouthpiece these missiles he'd scattered like spray
And they stung like small shots used in fowling.

Thus ended the day, and thus opened our fame,
Though 'twas won at the cost of some bruised and some lame.
All our instruments spoilt, all our clothes torn to shame,
On that memorable Monday last Easter.
The first prize we gained, and that was our pride,
And a salve for our wounds, and a solace beside.
So now you know all that to us did betide
At our first brass band contest at Cleaster.

BRAVO, SPRINGS! BRAVO!

By "Shepster" (W. Hargreaves, Bacup).

[on becoming National Champions in 1913]

BRAVO! Well done Springs! England's champion band!
On Fame's high pedestal now you take your stand;
Won fair and square, you're foremost in the race,
Merit alone has put you in that place.

Three times you've done it, thrice this trophy won,
No other band this honour boasts, not one;
To this high point all others cast their eyes,
And own you winners of this premier prize.

Accept our greetings, all throughout this vale,
From lofty hills, o'er which the clouds oft sail;
Down its deep valleys, rolling right along,
Is heard this gladsome, welcome, greeting song.

All greet you, the aged with hoary hair,
Mingle their welcomes with the young and fair;
Schoolboys and girls know what great things you've done,
And prattling infants lisp - "Our band has won."

"Labour and Love" - so was this music named,
That brought together bands renowned and famed;
You've worked and won, and now you stand above,
You had the Labour first- now take the Love.

Oft have we read upon our history's page,
Of conquests won by war's fierce lust and rage;
But this is nobler, better far are these
Grand triumphs in this victory of peace.

Music, most sacred of all Heavenly gifts,
Angels know well thy art, their voices lift
In praises to that Being throned afar,
Who called a chorus from the morning stars.

Often when lofty eloquence has failed,
With strong and weighty words the foe assailed:
Thundering around, and filling men with fear,
It is thee - Music - that can draw the tear.

Once more then greeting, strangers may have shown
Their wealth of welcome, and you may have grown
Used to their praises, as you journeyed through,
But here's a welcome, honest, homely, true.

Your welcome here is best; raised is each voice,
In loud hurrahs! both friend and foe rejoice;
From every corner of this hill-bound land,
We proudly greet you - England's Premier Band.

ASTON CONTEST – 1860

Aston Park – Musical Prize Fight: To be sung to the tune: " Will you come unto the Bower"

In Aston Park, next Monday, a Band Contest there's to be,
When Wednesbury and Oldbury, and Matlock Bands you'll see,
And Great Bridge, Wolverhampton, also Tipton, I've been told,
Will fight against the Yorkshire Bands, and carry off the gold.

CHORUS

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, and champions of the field,
Who will play up for Old England, and cause the rest to yield.

For Wednesbury and. Metcalfe, and Mattock Bath you'll see,
Will play off for the first places, as certain as can be;
For in all that's good and tasty, the Toy-shop of the World,
Our well-earn'd district banner, has for ages been unfurled.

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &tc.

And Distin's Cornet must be won by Alexander Will,
Who at Holder's goodly Concert Hall, has nightly trained his trill;
For Birmingham it can't be beat, if her man. stands firm and true,
And keeps from tricks at Liverpool which caused him to fall through.

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &tc.

And Ryland's patent metal, the Cup of gorgeous gold,
Ought Metcalfe, the midland teacher, his merit to uphold,
For teaching the black country the humanizing art,
Of each blowing his right instrument, and playing off his part.

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &tc.

Our Gracious Queen has sent us, that day to please us all,
Her gallant Highland soldiers, who made the Russians bawl
At Alma, with poor Lord Clyde, they thrashed our northern foe
And will again, if wanted, e'en if' to Poland they've to go.

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &tc.

And the Princess Alexandra, it must not be forgot
Has sent her Piper, Henderson, forget it we must not
For his skill it is so wondrous, in Scotia's music own
That it alone, unaided, aught to entirely draw the town.

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &tc.

Our gallant Corps of Volunteers. Rifle and Artillery,
Must go and take a lesson from Professor Gregory,
Who will show them all the art, to hit, cut, thrust, and slash,
His "Assault at Arms" is sure to be full of fire and dash.

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &c.

A day's rational recreation is provided then for all,
A sensible sensation to please both great and small;
And Gen'ral Jackson shows his tact, the money is all right,
For Sixpence it admits you up to any time of night.

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &c.

And dancing, and good humor, and English Sports so old
Will be enjoyed by thousands of whom untruths are told
And prove unto all England that it is but a sham,
That is said about the pleasures of the folks of Birmingham

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &c.

THE BRASS BAND CONTEST

Mary Thompson - (for the Renfrew Burgh Band)

With a tug of the jackets and shuffling of chairs
and adjustments to stands that are perfectly placed,
the baton is raised with a stretch and a flick and
like greyhounds in traps they are off up and running,
for the prize of perfection, for them, just this once!

Pony-tailed blondes and greybeards with paunches,
lawyers and labourers, clerks and accountants,
mothers and carers, workers and students,
all shapes and sizes, when braided and cuffed
they're only the sound they make with their band.

Muted trombones wail like trains on the prairies,
feverish cornets, warm flügel and horns rise
above huge silver basses booming like liners.
They whisper like mist when it says pianissimo,
blast triple sforzando for storming finales!

The applause is for how they arrived here today
from scout huts and band halls on nights after work.
With stars as a backdrop on stage in the town hall
the glint and the shine of colourful stage lights make
dazzling reflections on their moment of fame.

When it's over they judge – so how did they all do?
The shame of split notes and poor entries forgotten
they head to the bar where they all let their hair down.
Not caring for prizes and medals or cups, just
that their own brilliant band will march on for ever.

THE TUGGSVILLE BAND CONTEST

“Dryblower” Murphy - The Sun (Kalgoorlie), 1st January 1905

The tracks were bare and hot, and withered was the scrub,
The townsfolk loitered in the shade beneath O’Ryan’s pub,
And often did they sleep within the mulga near,
A cheerful smile upon their face - the consequence of beer.
Fact! and backed
By all, who at Ryan’s pub, their passing thirst have slacked.

Now days were long and hot, and willies in the bush
Were tiresome things o Jackson, and the beery Tugsville push.
So on the ground they lay, the Sabbath day all through,
And played at bridge or poker, or maybe played at loo.
Sin? Well, tin
By those who had was freely spent beneath O’Ryan’s inn.

Now one day- just at noon, when all were full of ale,
A stranger rode from out the scrub, his form was small and frail;
He stopped before the pub and sauntered in the bar,
And soon was shouting all around from whisky to three star.
Pale! and frail.
'Just an easy lamb to rook,' thought each Tuggsvilllian male.

Amidst the endless talk, just near to close of day,
The Tugsville band awoke to life and started forth to play;
Then argument grew hot about that cherished band,
The stranger swore that Doodlekine could lick them with one hand.
Bet! Don’t fret!
The men of wealth about that place planked all that they could get.

A Tugsville Jew named Mose got up and laid the tin
That Doodlekine would lose the match and Tugsville easy win;
He also held the stake, just twenty pound aside,
Excitement rose so high, that the women laughed and cried.
Cheers, and beers,
Were plentiful, and soon the town was helpless and in tears.

Now o'er in Doodlekine two days before the match,
That frail young man went getting all the bummers he could catch;
He hired a four in hand, and sent them them spick and span
To Tugsville - who winked their eyes and engineered a plan:
Wine? 'Twas fine.
To see all Tugsville pouring beer in that band from Doodlekine!

Jim Jackson with delight did dance an Irish fling,
'Me God, and faith alive,' said - he 'we Tuggsvilles know a thing.'
He glanced? where in the shade the bandsmen lay,
'They're sure to sleep a week,' he said, 'on what they've put away.'
Drunk? Head munk!
Through the band supposed from Doodlekine the town of Tugsville stunk.

The day at last arrived, the hour was drawing near,
The Doodlekiners slept beneath their heavy load of beer.
The Tuggsville band marched proudly by, triumphant and all right;
Marched all the morning round about, playing quick steps bright.
Hot? A lot!
And Tuggsville smiled contented at the lovely thing they'd got.

But, singing in the pub, a cloud of dust was seen,
And Tuggsville stopped and wondered what that cloud of dust could mean.
For naught did they suspect - the hour had all but come,
Till they heard the banging wild of a big and booming drum.
Say? Well, yea,
They did, as they looked where twenty forms, in the pub verandah lay.

They also cursed a lot at thought of all the beer
They'd pressed upon 'those thirsty frauds, to get them on their ear.
And blissful and unconscious the happy bums lay,
Beneath the pub verandah all the burning day.
Glare! and stare!
As the band from Doodlekine climbed out they started off to swear.

The band from Doodlekine, they looked quite fresh and nice,
And played so sweet and steady, just as calm and cool as ice;
There was no doubt at all, they easy won the day,
But when they went to look for Mose they saw him far away.
Mag?. Tongues wag?
Yes. For Mose had skipped with all the boodle in a bag.

KINGSTON MILLS BAND - 1855

From *North Cheshire Herald*, 23 December, 1886

Come all you lads of music now,
And listen unto me,
While I unfold a verse or two,
Which you shall understand,
It's of the love and harmony
That dwells in Kingston Band.

Chorus:

So now my lads your glasses fill,
And join in the toast with me,
Prosperity to the Kingston Band
Wherever it may be.

In October, eighteen fifty live,
Upon the twentieth day,
J. Higham's band it did arrive,
And music sweet did play;
Their strains so loud waved in the air
As they rode through Nudger Land,
And people all came out to shout
Hurrah, they're bringing Kingston Band.

The Kingston lads then viewed their horns,
And wished that they could play,
When cornet player to th' tro bone player said
"Ne'er mind; we hope to see the day."
Preparations then were made with speed,
And stands were fixed upright,
Books were bought and music wrote,
And all went in delight.

At Whitsuntide in '56
They stood a test that ne'er was done before,
Just six months old they led themselves,
And, played eight hours or more;
They played so nobly through Hyde fair
The horses could not stand,
While folks came from far and near
To hear the Kingston Band.

Then down Church-street and Hyde-lane
To the Market-place they came,
With a banner waving oe'r their heads
St. George's known by name.
Their leader cried "Strike up, brave boys,
See how the people stand;
We'll show them that there's hearts of oak

In the merry Kingston Band.

In September, eighteen fifty eight,
Upon the twentieth day,
The Kingston lads to Stockport went
Their figures to display;
To lead the jolly gardeners
Of that procession grand,
At the opening of the Vernon Park,
Along with twelve more bands.

Now my song is at an end,
And I can sing no more,
Here's forty years to Kingston Band,
And may it reign five score.
If ever across the sea I roam,
Unto some foreign land,
I'll ever bless the happy days
I spent with Kingston Band.

HAWORTH BAND

Mark R. Peacock

'Now kindly pay attention
To what I have to say
About the band at Haworth
How well each man can play

It needs no introduction
Each man knows well his part
The sweetness of the music
Makes soft the hardest heart

They fill the air with music
How lovely is it's breeze
From those that round them
gather
Subscriptions come with ease

Then shout 'hurrah for Haworth'
From them we get a treat
The lads then from Worth Valley
They'll find are hard to beat

When giving sacred concerts
Where crowds together meet
So great is their attraction
They use both hands and feet

In the sheets some throw silver
Which that is right to do
For in copper there is danger
It might keep falling through

Don't think that I am dreaming
For what I say I'll stand
They'll find the task not easy
That beats the Haworth Band'

WILLIAM RIMMER

Appeared in the local press in 1909 - a sonnet eulogising the bandmaster (William Rimmer) and appreciating the high standard of the band (Irwell Springs)

SAY, should we praise a man, or pass him by
Uncheered by word or smile, when day is won?
Though some it spoils to praise, he is not one;
His modest mein again would soar on high,

Inspired to greater things; his noble soul -
Of Music's realm, portrayed in Music's guise, -
Must lead; while Verdi lives, nor Weber dies,
Or Wagner's plumes raised at his fervent call.

Pillar of Rimmer's Art, whose temple brings
Perfection's far horizon close to view,
And, mounting up their rough-hewn path is "Springs,"
His cherished care: their tutor, constant, true,

Whose magic wand, in harmony impels
The sounds of charm that in the mem'ry dwells.

On being asked to describe a brass band in 30 words, these poems were written:

BAND PRACTICE

Duana

Power, strength and might
the brass band gives off its golden light.
Stirring, rousing, it's melody disperses
filling the room with its musical verses,
becoming polished the more it rehearses.

WHERE THERE'S MUCK THERE'S BRASS

John Curtis

Ebonised men, escaping
Bondage in the dark;
Armed with a dragon's hoard of wrought brass,
Create deep harmony and bring to pass
The liquid grace notes
Of the dulcet lark.

SERENADE

Bad Bill

The air vibrates as trumpets,
trombones and tubas turn
the grey morning into
a cornucopia of golden notes.
The brass band, bringing a smile
to the face of the day.

STRIKE UP THE BAND!

Mlou

Not to be crass
but sounding brass
shatter the crania,
bring about mania.
Alack and alas,
my innocent eardrums,
battered old heardrums,
gotta be frayed ...
'cause I love a parade!

BRASS BAND MUSIC OOP NORTH LIKE

Edna Sweetlove

Badly played hymn tunes
from hungover unemployed miners
echoing down the slum streets
barely audible
over the sounds of Coronation Street
on't telly
and the neighbours uninhibited belching
post coitally

Further reading:

Stephen Etheridge's **Brass Band Poems and Working Class Culture** -
<https://bandsupper.wordpress.com/2016/01/22/brass-band-poems-rhymes-about-working-class-culture/>

Eric Johnson - ***Follow the Tame - Collected Verse (Including Dialect)*** - Mossley Band, 1976. [The Awakening; Pots and Pans; On a Pennine Hill; A Summer Evening at Kiln Green; Mossley; Whit Friday; A Friend Remembered; Eawt O' Step; A Reet Gud Neet; The Mossley Band; Th' Belle Vue September; Taitu Pie; The Saga of Sam; Th' Gradliest Day o' th' year; Curiosity; Winter; A Neet Eawt; A Kesmus Visitor; Kesmus Eve.]