

# KIRKCALDY TRADES BRASS BAND, THE PREMIER BAND OF SCOTLAND

Kirkcaldy, the birthplace of Adam Smith, author of "The Wealth of Nations" (1755), is the largest town in Fife, Scotland. It is famed for many things, but principally for its floorcloth and its Band, at the present time.

The Kirkcaldy Trades Brass Band was established in 1873, twenty years ago. At that time the Artillery Volunteers had what was acknowledged to be the best band in Fife, and on one occasion, from what we can learn, that band got an engagement to play at some demonstration, but the officers refused to allow the men to go. Nothing loth, however, the band went, in spite of the officers' orders, the result being that the men were dismissed from the Volunteer service, and of course they had to hand in the instruments &c., as they were government property.

The public were, as might be expected, down on the Volunteers, and a motion was set on foot for the purpose of starting a Town Band. Some of the more enthusiastic took the matter in hand, and in a very short time sufficient funds were got for starting the new band.

From what we can learn from old members the band came to be in great demand at markets, and other engagements, and by and by, came to be as good a band as it was in the old artillery days.

Our acquaintance with the band commenced in 1883. At that time it was just like most of the other Scotch bands, numbering from 16 to 18 performers, but was considered one of the best bands in the county. In 1884 an idea took possession of the members that they would like to enter the contest held at Wemyss in August of that year.

The services of Mr. H. Connel, their old teacher in the palmy days, were procured, and so well did he manage matters, that they went and took third prize, in the Fife Contest. That, I believe, was their first appearance on the contest stage.

On May 30th, 1885, a great open contest was held at Alloa, and five of the best bands in England came down, including Besses-o'-th'-Barn, &c. Kirkcaldy Trades had the courage to enter, and had good hopes of getting a prize. When the day of the contest arrived, the band went to Alloa, but lo and behold, when they heard some of their English friends play up the street, all the life seemed to go out of them. This was a kind of playing they had never heard before. I shall never forget that day to the end of my life. Suffice it to say that the English bands took all the prizes away with them. But they left something behind. They left a spark of flame that has not died out in the hearts of the Kirkcaldy men yet. And they set themselves to work accordingly.

The history of the band for the next five years, will not interest my readers. They had a very up-and-down career during that time and attended a few contests and gained a few prizes, but up to 1890 nothing of very great importance was done.

In the spring of 1890 the band was at a very low ebb indeed, having no regular teacher. A contest was advertised to take place at Wemyss in August, open to Fife bands. A few of the old hands were asked to come back, and a band of 16 performers was scratched up, and to Wemyss they went and divided 3rd and 4th prizes with another band. The most galling thing about it was, that "Dunikier Band," another Kirkcaldy Band, got the second prize. This set the men on edge, they knew they had some good

players among them, and they made a bold stroke to re-adjust matters.

A contest (open to Scotland) was advertised to take place at Dunfermline in September, just a month after Wemyss, and a meeting was called with the result that Mr. Richard Marsden, of Alloa, was engaged to give the band some lessons.

They had five lessons from him, and went to the contest with 20 performers and got third prize. That is always looked upon as one of the biggest feats they have accomplished.

During the winter of 1890-91, several new instruments were added to the band, with Mr. Marsden still teaching them, and the Band was now placed on a proper contesting footing with 24 performers.

The first contest in 1891 was held at Selkirk, and here they took second prize, beating for the first time the famed Alloa Band.

Things were looking up indeed, but lo at Boness, a fortnight after, Mr. Hamez, of Nottingham, put them down to fifth place, and this cast a gloom over the band for a day or two.

Hard practice was now the "password," and a fortnight after that again, at Alloa the band were awarded first prize, £26, open to Scotland. Since that time the history of the band has been one of continued success.

Like other bands they have had to take a back seat occasionally, but no judge has dared to put them out of the prize list at any contest which they have attended under Mr. Marsden, either open to Scotland or open to the United Kingdom. No other contesting band in Scotland can say the same.

In September, 1890, Mr. Marsden first conducted the band at a contest, and on 23rd September, 1893, the last contest for this season, he also conducted. During these three years, under his baton, they have won prizes to the value of £411/10/-.

The name of the Kirkcaldy Band is now a household word throughout Scotland, and they get some splendid engagements. Wherever they go they always meet with a hearty reception from all classes, and their fine playing attracts thousands of people.

To all bands who are struggling to get to the front, I say, take a pattern from Kirkcaldy, for it is only by hard work that they have achieved their great success. They have never been in a position to pay for players like some bands, but have had to work with the material they had.

We cannot close this sketch without reverting to the death of their esteemed president, which took place a few months ago:—Dr. J. M. Campbell, the late honorary President, was the very life of the band. Few men in Scotland took such an interest in brass band music as he did, and any difficulty which arose was always submitted to him, and he invariably brought things to a successful issue. When he took his last illness it was feared by many that he would not recover. His medical advisers sent him out to Colorado Springs to try if the bracing air would help him, but alas, he is gone, the kindly smile has for ever departed.

The night before Dr. Campbell took his departure for America, the band, under Mr. Marsden, went to his residence, and played a few pieces. Unable to restrain himself, he tried to make a short speech, but was too much overcome. He, however, bade them an affectionate farewell, his last words to the band he loved so well being, "Men, I may never see you again. Good night and God bless you all."

The Solo players, with one exception, have been trained in the band from boyhood.

The soprano player, John Clark, is an Englishman, and belongs to Staffordshire, and in following his calling as a pottery worker

came to Scotland some 13 years ago. He played many years in the famous Alloa Band, but came to Kirkcaldy some two years ago. He has always been looked upon as the best soprano player in Scotland, and in proof of this he won the silver medal for the best soprano at Alloa contest in 1892, and also took the same honour at the same contest this year.

The solo cornet (and bandmaster) John Russell, is a native of Kirkcaldy. He has stuck to the band in all its ups and downs for over 12 years. He was never a member of any other band, and there is no doubt that the great success of his band is more due to him than any other. He is of a quiet, obliging disposition, and no man is more respected by the bandsmen than Mr. Russell. He is moreover considered to be one of the best solo cornet players in Scotland. At Alloa contest he won the plated cornet, value 11 guineas, presented by Boosey and Co., for the best cornet player in the contest. That was in May of the present year.

The sub-conductor, Harry Peckham, is also a Kirkcaldy man, and he and Mr. Russell have played together for over 10 years. He is a good first cornet player, and always very anxious to have things done right in the way of drilling the band.

The solo horn player, George Morrison, is a native of Kirriemuir, Forfarshire, and has never been in any other band. He started to play the horn at the age of ten, and is now in his sixteenth year. He is looked upon as one of the best horn players in Scotland. At Arbroath contest this year, he won the silver medal, value 25/-, for the best horn player in the contest.

The solo baritone, Harry Shiels, is a Kirkcaldy man, and has never played in any other contesting band. He is a splendid performer, and he won the silver medal as the best baritone player at Musselburgh contest this year.

The solo trombone player, Willie Morrison is a brother of the horn player, and he also started to play the horn at 10 years of age, in this band. He played solo horn for a few years, but was put on to the trombone in 1890. He is a really good player, and won the trombone, value 7 guineas, presented by Messrs. F. Besson and Co., at Musselburgh contest this year.

The solo euphoniumist, David Briggs, is also Kirkcaldy man. He started to play the Eb Bass, when quite a lad, some five years ago and showed such ability that he was put on to the euphonium in 1890. He too has never played in any other band. As a per-

former he has few equals, and can always be depended on, especially on the contest stand. He has been rather unlucky in one respect as there has not been a special prize for the euphonium, in Scotland, since he started, so that he has not had the same chance as the others to prove his ability.

Below we present an account of the band's contesting records for 1893, the prizes amounting in value to £199/5/-. This is by far the greatest value in prizes won in one season by any Scotch band. During the three years of the International Champion Contest at Kirkcaldy this is the only Scotch band that has taken a prize, thus proving the Kirkcaldy Trades Band to have been the Champion Brass Band of Scotland for the last three years in succession.

It may be said in conclusion that the best of feeling has always prevailed between Mr. Marsden and the band. In all his connections with the band, he has proved himself to be a gentleman, and the members have always treated him as such. When he came to Kirkcaldy he found a lot of young lads, and he made a band of them that is a credit both to him and to Scotland. Long may they all be spared to advance the cause of good music amongst their fellow men.

In the Public Park of Kirkcaldy on Sunday evenings, during the summer, may be heard the strains of Handel's grand chorus "Hallelujah" and other sacred pieces, played by the Trades Band, the only town in Scotland where a brass band performs on the Sabbath. And the thousands that come to hear them say "We are proud to have such a band," and to all other bands, I would say, in conclusion, "Go thou and do likewise."

VIGILANDO MUNIO.

The following is a list of the members of the band:—

Conductor, Mr. H. Marsden			
Soprano .....	J. Clark	2nd Horn .....	D. Gunn
Solo Cornet .....	J. Russell	1st Baritone .....	A. Shiels
1st " .....	H. Peckham	2nd " .....	L. Paul
1st " .....	A. McLean	Solo Euphonium .....	D. Briggs
Repiano .....	P. Hesford	2nd " .....	W. Clarke
2nd " .....	J. Rankine	1st Trombone .....	W. Morrison
3rd " .....	G. Methven	2nd " .....	H. Robertson
1st Flugel .....	G. Forrester	Bass " .....	J. Donaldson
2nd " .....	D. Simpson	Eb Bass .....	J. Forrester
3rd " .....	M. Forrester	" .....	G. Henderson
Solo Horn .....	G. Morrison	Bb Monster .....	W. Young
1st " .....	D. Morrison	" .....	D. Young

[N.B.—We should have liked to have given a portrait or two along with the above sketch but, with true Scotch modesty, the Kirkcaldy men are loth to present their features to the brass band world.—EDITOR.]

PRIZES WON BY KIRKCALDY BAND IN 1893.

DATE.	CONTEST.	PRIZE.	JUDGE.	£.	s.	d.
May 6th.	Jedburgh.	1st.	A. R. Seddon.	20	0	
" 13th.	Boness.	divide 1st and 2nd with				
		Alloa.	A. R. Seddon.	18	10	0
" 27th.	Alloa.	1st.	J. Sidney Jones.	20	0	0
		Also Cornet and Medal.		11	11	0
June 3rd.	Clydebank.	3rd.	Howard Lees.	10	0	0
" 17th.	Musselburgh.	2nd.	Thos. Valentine.	10	0	0
		Also Trombone and Medal.		8	8	0
July 29th.	Linlithgow.	2nd.	John Gladney	15	0	0
Aug. 5th.	Arbroath.	1st.	R. Stead.	20	0	0
		Also Cornet and Medal.		12	16	0
" 19th.	The Great International Contest open to Great Britain.					
		4th.	R. Stead.	15	0	0
Sept. 2nd.	Polmont.	2nd.	E. T. De Bawnie.	10	0	0
" 8th.	Uddingston.	3rd.	A. R. Seddon.	8	0	0
" 23rd.	Coatbridge.	1st.	S. Suckley.	20	0	0

Total..... £199 5 0