

# WEST HARTLEPOOL OLD OPERATIC BAND.

West Hartlepool Old Operatic Band, which was established in the year 1851, has had a chequered career. In the early days of West Hartlepool, as some of the oldest supporters of the band can testify, the Operatic—as it was then named—were one of the best combinations in the contest field, and took many prizes under the conductorship of the late Mr. Thomas Hogg, who was at that time a cornet player of the first water.

Many changes have naturally taken place since the inauguration of the band, and the oldest member at the present time is Mr. H. Appleby, who became a member in the year 1873. Mr. M. Squince is the next oldest member, he having been connected with it about eighteen years. Mr. Appleby recollects the then rosy days of the band with satisfaction. St. Helens band, in those days, was a close rival to the Old Operatic, and it is just 18 years ago that a match between the two bands was arranged for £50 a-side. Each band played four selections (own choice) and the contest took place on the West Hartlepool Recreation Grounds, which were at that time situated on a site where Cumberland-street now stands. The match proved a great test, and the Operatic were heralded the victors. Subsequently Mr. T. Hogg put out a challenge to play any cornet player single-handed, but the challenge was not taken up.

A few years later Mr. J. O. Shephard took up the conductorship, but only for a short period, as that gentleman left to take up a lucrative position at Leicester. Mr. Shephard is now conductor of the orchestra at the Royal Opera House, Liverpool. Mr. Wm Hogg, a brother of the gentleman of that name mentioned above, was the next conductor, and held command with ability until about the year 1887, when he was succeeded by Mr. J. R. Christon, the present bandmaster, who had previously joined as solo tenor horn player. Hard work, with determination, appears to have been Mr. Christon's motto, if we are to judge by the results since he took up office. The band has—to use a sporting phrase—"come on" by leaps and bounds, until at the present day they are classed as one of the best brass bands in England.

In the year 1891 some of the instruments were in a very bad state of repair, and Mr. Christon, assisted by several handsmen and supporters, set to work to endeavour to get a new set. Thanks to the generous response of the townspeople, the band are now in the possession of a full set of silver-plated instruments made by the celebrated Besson firm. It may be interesting to mention that it was late in the summer of 1892 before they obtained their new instruments, and the first contest they took part in that year was at West Hartlepool, "Jean of Arc" being the test-piece. Despite the fact that several of the instruments the Old Operatic bandmen were playing were bound with string, and others plastered with soap, they managed to gain first prize. Prior to this, however, Mr. Wm. Holdsworth, of Wyke, near Bradford, had been engaged as professional conductor to assist Mr. Christon, the first-named being what is termed by brass bandmen a "double-handed" man, which means that he was able to play a cornet and conduct. Much praise is due to Mr. Holdsworth for his persevering exertions on the band's behalf, and under his baton they did exceedingly well. Mr. Alex. Owen, conductor of the noted Besses-o'-th'-Baru Band, succeeded Mr. Holdsworth, as professional conductor to the Old Operatic last year, and the success of this gentleman's talented tuition has been strikingly demonstrated.

The past four years have been of a brilliant character for the members of the Old Operatic, and they will in years to come be able to look back with pride on their accomplishments. Their

winnings have been: 1892, cash and prizes valued £142 2s.; 1893, £122 17s.; 1894, £168 13s. This year they have eclipsed all previous winnings, and established a record for themselves, their winnings for the season amounting to the value of £192 4s., which includes quartette contests, instruments, and a gold medal. They have attended 12 contests, and taken 11 first prizes, four seconds, two thirds, and one fifth, the number of prizes being accounted for by the fact that there were quick-step contests held at some places. Last year they won the Northern Counties Challenge Cup, and on September 14th last again carried off that trophy when competing against 11 other bands at Newcastle. The cup carries with it the title of champions of the Northern Counties. Tanfield Lea were second, and South Derwent third. The first prize consisted of the Olympia Northern Counties Challenge Cup, valued at £25 15s.; cash prize, £10; Besson euphonium, valued at £19 19s.; and Boosey and Co's tenor slide trombone, valued £10 10s.—total value, without gold medal, £56 4s.

This is the most successful year the band has ever known and the fact that they have beaten such bands as Linthwaite, Batley, Lindley, Trawden, Cleckhenton, etc., speaks volumes for their remarkable attainments. Great praise is due to the inspiration displayed by their renowned conductor, Mr. A. Owen, while to the exertions of Mr. J. R. Christon, bandmaster and secretary, also the energetic committee must be attributed, in no small degree, the success of the famous "Operatic," the admitted Champion of the North!

MR. J. R. CHRISTON,

BANDMASTER AND SECRETARY, WEST  
HARTLEPOOL OLD OPERATIC.

Mr. J. R. Christon was born at Malton, Yorkshire, on February 23rd, 1858, and is now approaching 38 years of age. He commenced his career with the Malton Rifle Band as second Cornet in 1872, and in '73 played Horn under the tuition of Mr. J. Gibson, and being connected with bands since that date has had 23 years' experience.

After seven years on the cornet, Mr. Christon was compelled to leave his native town through bad trade, when we find him on January 7th, 1880, in West Hartlepool. At the latter part of that season he joined the Old Operatic as Solo Horn and in '83 was appointed corresponding secretary, which position he holds up to date.

Through the resignation of Mr. W. Hogg, and appointment of Mr. Holdsworth as conductor in Feb., '90, Mr. Christon was subsequently appointed Bandmaster, and conducted and played Solo Horn for a period of two years, but finding it a laborious task, got another man for the instrument, and ultimately reserved himself for conducting alone.

Mr. Christon has been the mainstay of the band for many years, and the band has been successful in many competitions under his baton, in the unavoidable absence of Mr. Owen, and last year won the Northern Counties Challenge Cup, and "L'Etoile du Nord" under his baton. He has been instrumental in bringing men from all over the country, England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales to make a good band. Straightforwardness and perseverance is his motto, and all who know him agree that he is the right man in the right place.

# PRIZES WON BY WEST HARTLEPOOL OPERATIC BAND IN 1895.

INSTRUCTOR : A. OWEN, ESQ.

BANDMASTER : MR. J. R. CHRISTON

DATE.	PLACE.	JUDGE.	SELECTION.	PRIZE.	VALUE.
					£ s d.
March 9	Belton	W. W. Lax	Quartette	2nd	2 0 0
	Middlesboro	H. Milburn		1st	2 0 0
May 11	Prosterley	R. Stead	"Rossini's Works"	3rd	6 0 0
			March	2nd	1 0 0
June 22	Hawes	Greenings	"Rossini's Works"	5th	3 0 0
			March	1st	2 0 0
June 29	Murton	R. Stead	"Rossini's Works"	1st	25 0 0
			March	3rd	1 0 0
July 27	Tanfield	J. Ord Hume	"L'Etoile du Nord"	1st and 2nd	15 0 0
				div.	
Aug. 3	Hartlepool	"	"L'Etoile du Nord"	1st	25 0 0
		"	March	2nd	1 0 0
Aug. 10	Silksworth	"	"L'Etoile du Nord"	1st	13 0 0
		"	March	1st	1 0 0
Aug. 21	Great Ayton	"	"L'Etoile de Nord"	1st	3 0 0
		"	March	1st	1 0 0
Aug. 24	Harrogate	"	"L'Etoile du Nord"	2nd	15 0 0
Sept. 5	Bedale	Jenkinson	"Rossini's Works"	1st	10 0 0
" 14	Newcastle	J. S. Jones	"England"	1st	25 10 0
"	"	"		Chall. Cup	15 15 0
"	"	"		Trombone	10 10 0
Total					192 4 0