

Chapter 5

Music as a Lifelong Pursuit for Bandsmen in the Southern Pennines, c. 1840–1914: Reflections on Working-Class Masculinity

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On 3 November 1886, a writer for *Musical World* noticed the attraction of brass bands to labouring people in the Southern Pennines:

Now if there is one thing in the way of music that is dear to the heart of a Lancashire artisan, it is a brass band. It is the height of ambition with a lad to play in a band ... From many a small cottage in country villages, or in the back streets of a Lancashire town, may be heard the mournful sounds of a cornet ... as the mechanic struggles to make his evenings a preparation for harmonious concerts later on, when he shall have qualified for admission to the nearest amateur band he can find.

From the beginning of the movement, a player could be a member of a band for a lifetime. The invention of the piston valve – credited with the spread of a large brass band movement – and its application to brass instruments resulted in all the valved instruments using the treble clef and same system of fingering, which meant that a player could easily move between instruments during their career.¹ This was illustrated on 19 September 1937, when *The Observer* reported on the National Brass Band Festival:

The young man in the factory town instinctively takes to the cornet ... Thence he gravitates to the local brass band, and finds that he can play almost any required instrument in it, for they are all the same ‘family’. In old age he may end up with the BB flat bass, the deepest instrument of them all, requiring the lungs of a glassblower to fill it.

Clearly, brass musicians had the opportunity to perform music throughout their lifetime. This situation provides an arena to reflect on working-class masculinity

¹ Trevor Herbert and John Wallace, ‘Aspects of Performance Practices: The Brass Band and its Influence on Other Brass Playing Styles’, in *The British Brass Band: A Musical and Social History*, ed. Trevor Herbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 292.

in a period when observers were attempting to understand the wider habits and customs of the working class.² Moreover, as Keith McClelland argues, ‘discussions of working-class life, in the media, between about 1850 and the 1870s were about the “working man” who was the representative artisan’.³ Artisans who in good trade conditions could save a little money, and through a more secure and visible trade unionism, for at least a few workers, with the expansion of friendly and co-operative societies, and other means of collective security, became people who were secure enough to bring about a new legitimacy for the working class and its institutions in state and civil society.⁴ Nevertheless, bands were present in the respectable and the rough. For the majority of middle-class observers, bandsmen were perceived as part of the respectable working class.⁵ Yet, through their use of taverns for rehearsals, playing in competitions that contained rough elements, and living and working in working-class communities, bandsmen were not immune to rough behaviour.⁶ In terms of understanding their masculinity, the question becomes how much rough or respectable masculinity was embraced; how much respectable masculinity – courtship, marriage, employment security and so on – was accepted by bandsmen as the natural progression for their lives? Were bandsmen, being practitioners of a respectable leisure pursuit, able to escape the influence of the rougher parts of working-class masculinity or did they display an amalgam of all aspects of working-class masculinity?

It is to the brass bands of the Southern Pennines I turn to examine the working class in a period when their lives and culture were under examination.⁷

² The work of the Journeyman Engineer Thomas Wright is significant here as an example of these observations. Titles such as *Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes* (1867), *The Great Unwashed* (1868) and *Our New Masters* (1873) reflected an interest in observing and understanding lives of labouring people. Wright started work with a seven-year engineering apprenticeship in Liverpool. By attending journalism classes at mechanics’ institutes he eventually became a journalist and gave the middle-class reader what was effectively an insider’s view of working-class life. See Alistair J. Reid, ‘Wright, Thomas (1839–1909)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2006), accessed 1 August 2013, <http://www.oxfordnb.com/view/article/4426>.

³ Keith McClelland, ‘Masculinity and the Representative Artisan in Britain, 1850–80’, in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, ed. Michael Roper and John Tosh (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 74.

⁴ McClelland, ‘Masculinity and the Representative Artisan’, 84.

⁵ Dave Russell argues that the popular music societies of the West Riding were conservative in nature, embracing self-respect and class collaboration. Dave Russell, ‘The Popular Music Societies of the Yorkshire Textile District: A Study of the Relationship between Music and Society’ (PhD diss., University of York, 1979), 5.

⁶ For an example of the rough and the respectable in nineteenth-century Lancashire, see Shani D’Cruze, ‘Sex, Violence and Local Courts: Working-Class Respectability in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century Lancashire Town’, *British Journal of Criminology* 39 (1999).

⁷ Patrick Joyce was emphatic that that ‘the manufacturing districts of Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire were the cradle of factory production, and it [was] to them that

As Ruth Finnegan has observed of amateur music-making traditions elsewhere, a band practice, a trip to a competition, a day in the park or an evening concert became more than just time allocated to music: they were also a social occasion.⁸ In April 1892, the *Magazine of Music* illustrated the eclectic range of events bands took part in, writing:

There is scarcely a public function of any kind at which there is not a band to dispense sweet harmonies. As one looks through the record of a month's work, one sees social gatherings of all kinds – teas, suppers, dances, cricket or football matches, presentations, festivals, demonstrations, camp meetings and anniversaries. It would seem as if nothing human were complete without a band, for this week, a band has to play at a marriage and a funeral.

The Southern Pennines: A Dense Social Network of Bands

On 23 May 1903 the *British Bandsman and Contest Field* (hereafter, *British Bandsman*) commentator 'Shoddythorpe' reflected on the growth of the brass band movement in the North. Shoddythorpe estimated that there were approximately 250 bands in the West Riding of Yorkshire alone. The brass band historian Arthur Taylor illustrated the density of brass bands on the Southern Pennine's Lancashire side by saying that 'the whole area of Saddleworth could almost be designated a national park for brass bands, with Dobcross as the centerpiece'.⁹ Music in the Southern Pennines was highly localised. Slaithwaite, a village in the Colne Valley, was an example of a type of musical life replicated throughout the region, and was indicative of music's popularity in the region. In 1819, Slaithwaite Old Band formed and, according to an article in the *Huddersfield Chronicle and West Yorkshire Advertiser* (14 June 1851), was active until 1822. Local publications give a picture of a thriving musical culture in the village. In the 1850s, surviving members of the Slaithwaite Old Band were playing with the Slaithwaite Union Band. Slaithwaite Victoria Band was a brass-and-reed band formed in 1840; it was active between 1856 and 1872 (*Huddersfield Chronicle and West Yorkshire Advertiser*, February 1856–11 May 1872). By 17 April 1898, the *Slaithwaite Guardian and Colne Valley News* was reporting the prominence of Upper Slaithwaite Brass Band. By 1900, Slaithwaite boasted four choral societies, a brass band and an amateur orchestra.¹⁰

posterity ... looked in seeking to discern the nature of the class structure to which the new system of manufacture gave rise'. Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (London: Methuen, 1982), xiii.

⁸ Ruth Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in An English Town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 47.

⁹ Arthur R. Taylor, *Brass Bands* (London: Hart-Davis MacGibbon, 1979), 211.

¹⁰ Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England 1840–1914: A Social History*, 2nd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 208. Russell points out that in 1901

The Southern Pennines were readily associated with choral groups and brass bands. Many reasons were given for the high quality of musicianship in this area. One argument that became popular from the late nineteenth century into the first decades of the twentieth was that because of the physical exercise involved in walking around such a hilly area, northern musicians were fitter, had better lung capacity and, therefore, a better quality of tone for singing and playing in brass bands. From 1900 onwards this argument gained currency in the brass band journals to explain why bands from the Pennines were more successful than bands from other parts of the country, in particular, London, the Midlands and the South.¹¹

However tempting it is to subscribe to these arguments – and there is indeed a substantial area of research to be undertaken around this theme to understand the similarities, differences, regional attitudes, friendships and antipathies between Pennine bands and bands in other areas, most notably London and the home counties – Dave Russell rightly argues that they were somewhat fanciful, and that the real reason the area was renowned for its musical prowess was that ‘an inter-relationship of several factors operating in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries generated a climate propitious to musical endeavour’.¹² What were these factors? First, Methodism was a powerful influence in the area, and the influence of Methodists on music is well known. Nevertheless, Methodists did not dominate local musical activity and Anglicans were also influential in the area’s early choral groups. Roman Catholic influence should also be acknowledged as, in the mid-nineteenth century St Patrick’s church was a well-known musical centre in Huddersfield.¹³ Additionally, often under the ethos of rational recreation, the local elite supported local working-class musical groups. Music was arguably the best of all rational recreations, many Victorians believing that the performance and appreciation of music could lead to social harmony and have a refining influence upon people.¹⁴ Finally, as Russell argues, the development of musical life in

Slaitwaite had a population of around 10,000. Bacup, in east Lancashire, is indicative of towns in the Southern Pennines; its population rose significantly from 10,315 in 1861 to 23,498 in 1891. Official census, cited in Jeanette Edwards, ‘Ordinary People: A Study of Factors Affecting Communication in the Provision of Services’ (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1990), 22.

¹¹ See, for example, *The Cornet*, 15 February 1900, 4; *The Cornet*, 15 June 1901, 4.

¹² Dave Russell, ‘Music in Huddersfield, c. 1820–1914’, in *Huddersfield: A Most Handsome Town: Aspects of the History and Culture of a West Yorkshire Town*, ed. Hilary A. Haigh (Huddersfield: Kirklees Metropolitan Council, Cultural Services, 1992), 655.

¹³ Russell, ‘Music in Huddersfield’, 655.

¹⁴ In its most elaborate form the notion of music as a rational recreation was developed by the High Church Theologian Hugh Reginald Haweis. His influential book *Music and Morals* was published in 1871 and by 1903 it had reached its twentieth edition. It became an important text for individuals who were interested in the relationship between music and social reform, being widely read in socialist circles. Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 98.

the Pennines was helped by the flexible working patterns of people in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Textile workers largely had control over their working environment to allow for rehearsal time. The final elements in the growth of the popularity of music were the rivalries and competition that grew between musical groups, often expressed through competitions, in an effort to match the excellence of ‘rival’ towns.¹⁵

The Membership and Training of Pennine Brass Bands

Bands were composed almost entirely of working-class members. By May 1889, *Brass Band News* was in no doubt that bands were working class, writing:

Our amateur bands are composed of horny-handed working men exclusively ... I mean factory-men, forge-men, colliers and so on. We never expect to have a man as a member who ‘gets his living with his coat on’, and this class are, as a rule (there are honourable exceptions), such ‘superior persons’ that would rather have their room than their company.

In the 1889 edition of *Amateur Band Teacher’s Guide and Bandsman’s Adviser*, Wright and Round advocated the training methods in use among northern bands: theirs was ‘a synthesis of the systems on which the celebrated prize bands of Lancashire and Yorkshire [were] taught’.¹⁶ From the late 1860s onwards, the most successful ‘crack’ bands – Black Dyke Mills, Besses O’ Th’ Barn, Meltham Mills and so on – were from the manufacturing districts of the North. This period saw a national consistency of instrumental technique that was heavily influenced by the imitation of the playing styles of the championship bands, which were often conducted by the northern triumvirate of band trainers, John Gladney (1839–1911), Alexander Owen (1851–1920) and Edwin Swift (1843–1904). From 1875 to 1895, there were few major contests when one, two or all three of them did not conduct one of the winning bands.¹⁷ The working-class culture that emerged from brass bands became associated with the industrial North. By 1914, the *British Bandsman* reflected that, ‘it could not be denied that the cradle of the brass band was on the slopes of the Pennine Chain’ (18 April 1914). While the brass band was a national musical experience that was also popular in the rest of the country, most notably the industrial areas of Cornwall, Scotland and Wales, it was most readily associated with, and indeed has become a cliché of, northern working-class

¹⁵ Russell, ‘Music in Huddersfield’, 656.

¹⁶ *Wright and Round’s Amateur Band Teacher’s Guide and Bandsman’s Adviser* (Liverpool, 1889), 1.

¹⁷ J. L. Scott, ‘The Evolution of the Brass Band and its Repertoire in Northern England’ (PhD diss., University of Sheffield 1970), 248.

culture.¹⁸ Moreover, the years 1870–1914 are of fundamental importance in any study of recreation and leisure. These years saw the fruition of previous trends and the emergence of a fully formed working-class style of leisure. This period witnessed the evolution of some small public houses into fully fledged music halls, the professionalisation of sports, the emergence of the seaside holiday and the coming of the cinema.¹⁹ In short, this era saw the birth of classic working-class leisure, which created widespread working-class attitudes and experiences. Therefore, the appreciation of masculinity of bandsmen adds to the understanding of a period when both men and women were taking part in leisure activities that came to define working-class cultural identity.²⁰

Martin Francis has argued that feminists have rightly asserted there is no shortage of histories of men, histories that were principally about war, diplomacy and statecraft. Francis maintains that ‘the study of men as gendered beings has been a relatively recent departure in historiography’.²¹ Moreover, Karen Harvey and Alexander Arnold observe that that ‘the bulk of research into the history of masculinity has inevitably concentrated on culturally and commercially dominant groups of men not least because records relating to them are most prolific’.²² Michael Roper and John Tosh argue that making men visible as gendered subjects had major implications for all historians’ established themes: for family, labour and business, class and national identities, religion, education and institutional politics too.²³ Thus, an analysis of bandsmen’s social networks, in a period when working-class leisure was highly visible, answers a call to examine masculinity in this period outside the more dominant models of middle-class education, power and politics.²⁴

¹⁸ In 1892, for example, the South Wales and Monmouthshire Brass Band Association held its first annual meeting, which incorporated 26 bands and 641 members. *Magazine of Music*, 9 (April 1892): 62.

¹⁹ Martin J. Childs, *Labour’s Apprentices: Working-Class Lads in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (McGill: Queen’s University Press, 1992), 143.

²⁰ See Eric Hobsbawm, ‘The Making of the Working Class, 1870–1914’, in *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz* (London: Abacus, 1999).

²¹ Martin Francis, ‘The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity’, *Historical Journal* 45 (2002): 637.

²² Karen Harvey and Alexander Shepard, ‘What Have Historians Done with Masculinity? Reflections on Five Centuries of British History, circa 1500–1950’, *Journal of British Studies* 44 (2005): 277.

²³ Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds, *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800* (London: Routledge 1991), 1.

²⁴ See J. A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds, *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

The Novice Bandsman: Reflecting Early Industrial Experiences

When bandsmen came together to practice they transferred working-class identities found elsewhere to their practice space. Indeed these spaces became a place to continue and develop traditions labouring people had established in the early industrial period. The term ‘band room’, used as a dedicated rehearsal space, could embrace the room in a public house, the room above a restaurant, the room in a hotel and even a bedroom. In the late nineteenth century independent band rooms, such as Batley Old Band’s band room, were often nothing more than wooden sheds. More dedicated spaces, designed by architects, with extensive facilities, including catering spaces, did not emerge until the first decade of the twentieth century.²⁵

In early industrialisation, industrial centres exhibited traditionalism together with outstanding technical progress. As matrices of small workshops they developed rhythms of labour that lasted for decades and the influence of these rhythms resonated through the working class, the brass band movement being no exception to these working memories. The workplace was where a boy in a trade established essential identities associated with that trade. Responsibilities included being sent out for beer at break times, as before more efficient manufacturing methods emerged an apprentice was often expected to run errands, not only for essential items for the manufacturing of goods, but also for items for the other men in the workplace; this willingness to run errands was an essential element in gaining acceptance as an apprentice in the peer group. In addition, apprentices bonded, and reinforced acceptance, with other labouring men by engaging in chat and horseplay. In late eighteenth-century Birmingham workshops, for example, the *Birmingham Journal* (26 September 1855) reported that:

The industry of the people was considered extraordinary; their peculiarity of life remarkable. They lived like the inhabitants of Spain ... Three or four o’ clock in the morning found them at work. At noon they rested; many enjoying their siesta; others spent their time in the workshops eating and drinking, these places being often turned into taprooms and apprentices into pot boys; others again enjoyed themselves at marbles or in the skittle alley.

Echoes of these traditions from the workplace can be found in the band room, where the ‘work’ of making music was often ignored in favour of the social interaction. In an article published in the *British Bandsman* on 15 March 1913, J. Eaton, Bandmaster of Batley Old Band, reminisced about the early practices of the late 1870s:

²⁵ See the account of the building of Hebden Bridge Band’s band room in the *Hebden Bridge District News* (3 December 1909), complete with two snooker rooms, a reading room, kitchen, cellar and a large practice room.

We used to have some pleasant hours in the old bandroom. There were plenty of cracks and holes about the place, and I remember that when it was frosty the gas meter used to be frozen. All used to sit around chaffing and telling tales until the fire burnt up; the meter ... would be placed on the fire to thaw.

Eaton does not say whether they concentrated on music afterwards. Evidence suggests that by 1900 Batley Band was using the band room as a place for chatting, smoking and drinking rather than performing music. One observer at a rehearsal wrote to the band journal *The Cornet* (15 February, 1900):

Tobacco smoke so thick one could cut cakes of smoke ... There was much larking around ... The music started late, then they only played for twenty minutes before stopping ... All hands gathered around the stove ... and the snare drummer was sent for a pail of beer, and with the beer, more stories, and beer again, until it was too late to do any work, so all went home with the idea that they had done their duty as band boys ought to.

By 1909, more dedicated band rooms had been built, often with extensive facilities. Nevertheless, on 31 January 1914, the *British Bandsman* featured a cartoon called 'Scenes in a Band Club' that saw bandsmen playing billiards, smoking, drinking and playing cards and darts. The practice space was empty, the instruments lying unused. On 21 March 1914, the same journal admonished bandsmen who used the band rooms as social clubs and who had moved away from the serious business of making music. Critics were missing an important point, which was that bandsmen used the rooms as social spaces that bonded bandsmen together. Socialisation brought players under one roof, reinforcing rules, rituals and customs that, for socialisation, had their roots in early industrialisation and apprenticeship.

As John Tosh has argued, these spaces illustrated two powerful arenas where masculinity was expressed. The first was homosocial contact, the need for men to associate with other men outside the home. Moralists argued that this was just sinful pleasure-seeking, but clubs and alehouses and indeed band rooms were areas where gender and masculine status were both recognised and assessed. An array of social groups and committees also reinforced masculine status outside the home. In moral terms these often philanthropic groups were easy to justify; nevertheless, critics accused these groups of diverting men from domestic responsibilities.²⁶ Aspirations to masculine independence were not new in this period. Keith McClelland, however, argues that the *dominance* and *visibility* of independent masculinity was new. Like middle-class institutions, the working class sustained masculine independence because of the 'building of the institutions of collective social defence'.²⁷ In other words, working-class institutions such as

²⁶ John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 6.

²⁷ McClelland, 'Masculinity and the Representative Artisan', 84.

the co-operatives, friendly societies and trade unions, and brass bands, were places where masculinity was respectable in surroundings outside domesticity.

Even though McClelland rightly argues that working-class masculinity sustained itself by building collective defence arenas, the areas where masculinity was practised outside domesticity can be traced to early industrialisation and the celebration of Saint Monday. Saint Monday was the trait of taking the first day of the week off, and this could extend into Tuesday and Wednesday. Evidence suggests it lingered longest in the North.²⁸ Skilled workers could command high wages, but they would often elect to take moderate wages in exchange for flexible leisure. Such flexible working followed not from weekend drinking but from the workers' deeply held traditional expectation of the surplus of wages. Saint Monday became associated with the lowest forms of labouring people's entertainment: cock fighting and pugilism were common on Monday afternoons up to the 1830s. The tavern was the primary venue for drinking, bar games and entertainments of various sorts in this period.²⁹

Throughout the 1840s to 1860s the tradition of Saint Monday was still being kept against the emerging rational recreation ethos. It was against this background that the Journeyman Engineer, Thomas Wright, viewed the brass band movement, not, as many Victorians viewed music, as one of the finest rational recreations, which improved the morals and soul, but as a reflection of earlier, rougher labouring traditions. Indeed, in Wright's opinion, the brass band became a vehicle that led respectable men away from the family unit of home, wife and child, into drinking and the resultant poverty which that created. In 1870 Wright wrote a sketch called *Willie Tyson's Turkey*.³⁰ It was the story of Willie Tyson, a worker who had 'good-looks, good-humour and a nice-manner'. Willie was a good singer and in general a good musician: with these skills 'he was voted good company and much sought after'. Before Willie got married, he belonged to a choral society where, even though other members were in better positions, they considered him good company, and a valuable asset. The choir members hosted many social events, and this is where Willie met, and courted, his future wife, but also where he liked to socialise with a drink. Willie's fiancée thought that every young man needed to enjoy himself and that after they were married he would not drink so much. However, after getting married, they did not attend so many parties, and Willie craved a drink, so he began going to the pub. As Wright warned, 'He was already beginning to be spoken of as what among working men is styled

²⁸ George Davis, *Saint Monday; or Scenes from a Low Life* (Birmingham, 1790), 7–8, cited in Douglas A. Reid, 'The Decline of Saint Monday 1766–1866', *Past and Present* 71 (1976), 78. The situation was never clear cut, as it is probable that some putting out work was done on Mondays as 'reckoning time' was late on Saturday and this too would encourage a day out of work.

²⁹ Reid, 'Decline of Saint Monday', 79.

³⁰ Thomas Wright, The Journeyman Engineer, 'Willie Tyson's Turkey', *Leisure Hour* 991 (24 December 1870).

a “lushington”.’ Some ten months later, the factory where Willie worked started a brass band, which he joined. ‘Now, a workman’s band was a very good thing in a general way; but to a man inclined to drink, it often afforded both excuse and opportunity for drinking’, remarked Wright. The band proved a snare to Willie, as the bandsmen often celebrated Saint Monday, and together with other outings, and the drinking that accompanied them, Willie started to have days off work. Willie lost his job, spent all his wife’s money and they had to pawn all their belongings. His reputation as a drunkard meant he could not find a job, and ‘the once bright little home became shabby and bare and comfortless’.

Extending Social Networks and Social Roles

Wright’s view was cautionary. The writer was reinforcing a view of alcohol held by other advocates of rational recreation and social improvement, most notably the temperance movement. Nevertheless, as Peter Bailey recognised, in this period the consumption of alcohol, with certain exceptions, became less of a total experience and more of a social lubricant.³¹ Drinking and making noise seemed natural accompaniments to popular recreation and bandsmen were not immune to them.³² They were not just reactions to the ennui of industrial work; these were part of the sociability and public nature of working-class recreation.³³ Throughout the 1830s the *Bolton Press* showed the wide range of activities on offer, highlighting activities that encouraged communal bonding, such as bowling, quoiting, glee clubs and free and easies, amateur and professional dramatics, fruit and vegetable shows, flower shows, sweepstake clubs and the meetings of friendly societies.³⁴ Peter Bailey has argued that ‘the pub remained a centre of warmth, light and sociability for the urban poor, a haven from the filth and meanness of inadequate and congested housing’.³⁵ Therefore, Wright’s negative view of the drinking, and disreputable, bandsman is not that clear cut. What emerged in this period was that the pub and the band room were social spaces that encouraged, developed and created nuanced relationships between bandsmen, their friends, their wives and sweethearts, and the wider community.

³¹ Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830–1885* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 174.

³² On the 5 June 1875 the *Accrington Times* reported on Church Brass Band, near Accrington, in east Lancashire, which had lost a regional competition that day, and whose members, after drinking too much, were said to have fallen into the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

³³ Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, 9.

³⁴ *Bolton Press*, cited in Peter Bailey, ‘The Victorian Middle Class and the Problem of Leisure’, in *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 21.

³⁵ Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, 9.

Brass bands affirmed the inn's place in their traditions by using it for annual suppers: these were opportunities to bring together families and other supporters to celebrate the year's achievements. The annual bonding of the supper was where the bands reaffirmed their traditions, rules, rituals and customs. Reported in the press, such events assured the band's identity within the milieu of community life. These rituals can be seen from records of Bacup Band's annual supper (1870) held at the New Inn, Bacup, in east Lancashire's Rossendale Valley (see Figure 5.1). The bandmaster, John Lord, and the trainer, George Ellis, were honoured, their skills as mentor and trainer supported by the prizes that the band had won under their leadership. Photographs of other band members showed that the band's success was a group effort and, finally, these wins had their roots in a musical tradition that had been practised by now-deceased bandsmen, highlighting the lineage of brass band custom. On 5 September 1870, the *Bacup Times* reported:

The occasion being graced with the presence of all members of the band; with their wives, sweethearts and several friends. The room was very tastefully decorated for the occasion. In the centre of the table, at the higher end of the room, stood the beautiful gilt marble timepiece, presented to John Lord, Bandmaster ... The table was adorned with a variety of prize instruments ... Above the table, and suspended against the wall, was the splendid drum won ... at Belle Vue, in 1869, it was adorned with banners etc. In front of the drum was suspended an excellent life size photograph of the old and respected tutor of the band, George Ellis ... Amongst other decorations were mottoes, banners ... photographs of members of the band, intermixed with evergreens. In one corner of the room a mourning card was suspended, bearing the following inscription: 'In memory of our deceased friends', over which hung the instruments which belonged to those friends, whose services were so highly prized; and who were so feelingly remembered after death.

This article reveals that the band had an extended network of friends and relations that were important in supporting the band. The bandsmen were heavily reliant upon a network of women who were as enthusiastic about running the band as the bandsmen themselves. It is to these women I turn to highlight more subtle relationships in the life of the bandsman.

Accounts of ladies' committees are sparse, yet the accounts are significant.³⁶ Brass bands came with a wide range of expenses and raising money was always

³⁶ One of the first accounts of women organising themselves into a group dedicated to helping a band was in the industrial North, when the Ladies' Committee of Upper Slaithwaite Brass Band arranged a cricket match between themselves and the Ladies Committee of Slaithwaite Cricket Club, where, during and after the match, the band supplied music. There was a tea, and dancing carried on late into the night (*Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 30 August 1899).

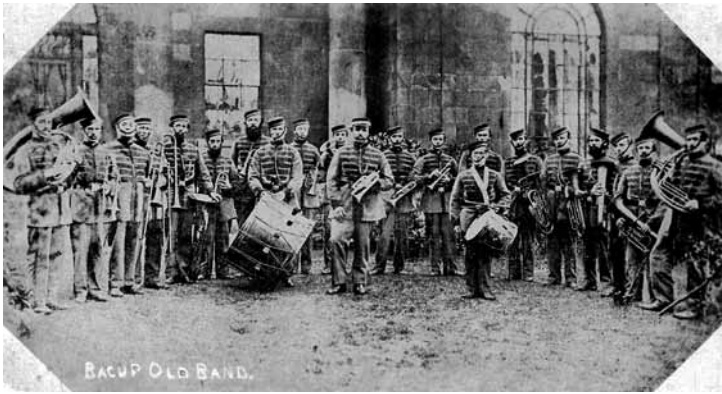


Figure 5.1 Bacup Old Band, c. 1860

one of the main activities. The *Brass Band News* recognised women as being the best at selling tickets to raise funds, reporting on 1 December 1901:

Ask the ladies to organise a tea, and they will give what they can, and beg borrow or steal (figuratively speaking) all the rest. Moreover, they can sell tickets when a man would have no chance. A grocer in a Lancashire village once told us that in one of these ladies teas he gave a ham towards the feed, and then the lady he gave it to asked him to take half-a-dozen tickets, although she knew he could not go. Get the ladies interested in the band, and in what it wants and half the battle is over. Mr H. Clegg of Birstall Old Band [in the West Riding of Yorkshire] mentions their own band in point, he says, “the ladies gave a tea ... and the funds benefited by about £5”.

In September 1901, Bacup Change Band, in Lancashire’s Rossendale Valley, held a ‘British Empire Bazaar’. The *Rossendale Free Press* reported that ‘the object of [the bazaar was] to raise about £200 with which to pay for uniforms, and to form a nucleus for tuition and instruments’. The bazaar stalls ‘were laden with a variety of useful and fancy goods, tastefully arranged’. There were at least eleven stallholders. Fundraising committees demonstrated the extent of the support shown by the wives, partners and female relatives of the band members, but also that the women had become part of the band by organising themselves into a ladies’ committee, a formal structure that represented the band outside musical performance. Ladies’ committees became essential in negotiating, arranging and supporting ways of raising finance for bands. Women, as *The Cornet* illustrated, could bring the band to the attention of the public in arenas to which bandsmen could not, or, as *The Cornet* (14 January 1899) pointed out, would not want to have access.

By 1914, it was clear that women were an important element in the social networks of brass bands, so much so that they had become the subject of columns in the *British Bandsman*, highlighting the difference in gender roles at this point in band history. In 1914, the *British Bandsman* featured a column called 'A Little Gossip: written by a bandsman's wife'. A fictional column written in a humorous style, it nevertheless shows the importance of bands' support networks. Reflecting the needs of Bacup Change Brass Band, and others, it shows the importance to these women of raising funds for instruments. The character Mrs Quickstep said in the column, dated 17 January 1914:

The band got a new set of instruments, and like everything else they could not pay for them ... The members suggested they get up a bazaar ... Twenty women promised to do all they could to make the bazaar a success. The things we made would have stocked the Co-operative store: mats, carpets, shirts, blouses, fancy cushions, tea cosies ... I couldn't tell you one quarter of the work we did.

Moreover, what emerged was that women were not content with their roles as fundraisers but wanted more recognition as organisers. On 23 May 1914, in *A Little Gossip*, Mr Jones read aloud to his wife from a newspaper report that featured him being such a fine band secretary, saying he was 'a born leader, a remarkable organizer, and was one who was untiring in his efforts on behalf of the band'. Mrs Jones replied to her husband that 'it's a good job for you that I'm not [in the band], or I'd let them in for a peep behind the scenes.' When he asked what she meant, Mrs Jones said:

I mean those who think you do all the work. How long would you keep the position if I didn't help you? You'd often be in arrears in your work, if you had to do it yourself. Who sold the most tickets for your concert? Who made the most articles for the bazaar? Who does all the work when you show your hospitality to the 'roamers' who come here? Who mends the uniforms damaged by careless bandsmen? [Raising her voice] Who takes care of the instruments when bandsmen leave the band? Who canvassed the women-folk when you wanted their help? Who did the cooking for the band supper? Not the Secretary? Oh no. He gets all the honour but where would he be without his wife?

Nevertheless, the essential nature of the brass band movement was to perform music and it was the band contest that was prominent in the region. Local band contests were popular from the 1840s onwards, often attracting crowds of thousands. In August 1888, the *British Bandsman* noted that, 'the northern counties were "all alive" with brass band contests'. Writing in 1901, *Good Words* reported that 'brass band contests evoked white-heat enthusiasm in local people; they were important factors in the social life of the people, thousands of people took the keenest interest in them'.³⁷

³⁷ T. W. Wilkinson, 'Brass Band Contests', *Good Words* 42 (December 1901): 593.

Naturally competitions attracted elements of the respectable, the romantic and the rough. In other words, the milieu of community life was concentrated in one relatively small space.³⁸ This aspect was illustrated by one trombone player's experience with Shipley Band, after a competition in 1882, when his trombone was stolen. Indeed, these were places not just for musical competition but where the bands' larger social networks could develop. The band wrote to *The Yorkshireman* on 7 January 1882, saying:

One of our band chaps got fresh on Saturday night, and while he wor doing a bit of sly courting, he put his trombone on a wall, and a chap wor peeping, and when he wor telling woman how hard he loved her, this other chap ran off with his play. Please warn all pop shops not to pop it.

This mixed-sex environment meant that the bandsman moved away from purely homosocial environments and, as we have seen, became reliant on partners for support. It was inevitable that these new social networks would weaken the homosocial dominance of the bands' environment. By 1914 some women were clearly expecting to be part of the contest day. One bandsman wrote to the *British Bandsman* saying: "'Missus" had been spouting again, now she wants to go to band contests – the very idea! Why the bandroom and the contest field were the only places on earth where a bandsman is comparatively safe from feminine interference' (7 March 1914). The reply from the Bandsman's Parliament in the *British Bandsman* sympathised, moreover the reply revealed not only that bands had become reliant on networks of women but that this reliance could improve the band movement's status in the eyes of the world.³⁹ What was important was that the bandsmen were seen to be moving away from being rough working-class men. The Bandsman's Parliament wrote, on 7 March 1914, that:

The member for Queensbury thought the honourable member was taking an extreme view on the matter. There was one thing he would always give the ladies credit for. He thought they were able to go to a contest and keep right in their heads, and that's what a lot of band chaps couldn't do. He thought they would keep sober, and their husbands too, probably ... He thought their influence would refine us, and some of us could do with it, and be the means of elevating our social status in the eyes of the world.

³⁸ On the morning of the 1893 Belle Vue Competition, train excursions from Bacup were packed with people and most of the mills were obliged to stop. Two special trains were run, with local bookings as follows: Bacup 1,093, Stacksteads 200, Newchurch 519, Rawtenstall 323. Isaac Leech, *Reminisces of The Bacup Old Band, Which Appeared in the Columns of the Bacup Times in 1893* (Bacup: L. J. Priestley, 1893), 59–60.

³⁹ The Bandsman's Parliament was an occasional column that ran in the *British Bandsman* from 1912. It was a space where bandsmen could write in to a group of experts asking questions about any aspect of brass band life.

From Young Novice to Responsible Bandsman

The band contest was where players could obtain one of the most defining aspects of working-class masculinity, that of independence, which relied on money, to be able to supply security, and spending money, for himself and his dependents. What came to have dominance in the working class from the 1870s onwards was a distinctly masculine interpretation of what it meant to be 'independent'. Men were often dependent on women when cyclical and seasonal employment meant they lost their jobs. London bricklayers, joiners and plasterers depended on their wives' earnings as ironers in a collar factory when out of work in the winter.⁴⁰ Dependence on wives, family and other charitable foundations only resulted in economic and psychological depression. Too little is known about how men coped with these issues, but given the central role work took in the construction of men's identities it probably led to a sense of incompleteness and shame as men coped with a loss of dignity and status that could not be contemplated when they lost a job.⁴¹

The key point of a man's employment may seem obvious; nevertheless, it was central to defining masculinity that no man would 'expect, or be expected, to leave work on marriage or at the birth of a child, seek employment because his wife's earnings were too low, or look for work that was reconcilable with his domestic duties'.⁴² Men found it difficult to ask for help when they were short of money. By playing in competitions, bandsmen could find funds to support the need for recognition as the breadwinner. Contest rules stated that all members of a band must have been a member of the competing band for at least three months prior to the day of the contest, and that they should live not more than 4 miles from the town where the band resided.⁴³ This rule was often broken, and it gave players the opportunity to earn money outside the workplace.

The minute books of Helmshore Brass Band (see Figure 5.2) showed that money was available for deputies to perform at local contests. In June 1903, they voted to enter the Rishton contest as long as they could get the same players that they had at the Ramsbottom contest.⁴⁴ In August 1903, they voted to have Hibert and Hoyle for the Goodshaw contest, and on 31 August, they voted to ask J. P. Broadwood and John Heskey to play at Crawshawbooth contest.⁴⁵ The back

⁴⁰ Gareth Steadman Jones, *Outcast London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 84, cited in McClelland, 'Masculinity and the Representative Artisan', 78.

⁴¹ McClelland, 'Masculinity and the Representative Artisan', 78–9.

⁴² McClelland, 'Masculinity and the Representative Artisan', 79.

⁴³ For example, see rules four and five of the Crystal Palace Contest, September 1902, in Trevor Herbert, ed., *The British Brass Band: A Musical and Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 317.

⁴⁴ Helmshore Brass Band Minute Book (18 June 1903). Thanks to John Simpson, of Accrington Local Studies Library, for allowing access to this source in his private collection.

⁴⁵ Helmshore Brass Band Minute Book (13 and 31 August 1903).

pages of the minute books from 1889 to 1920 contain thirty-three names of players who could deputise for them, including the amount of money they charged for rehearsals and contests.⁴⁶



Figure 5.2 Helmshore Brass Band, c. 1909

Bandsmen could command economic independence from the norms of factory work. If they lost their jobs they could earn money on the contest circuit.⁴⁷ Money, and the security and status it brought, was important in defining masculinity; moreover, it was important in defining a man's ability to sustain a family life. When Black Dyke Mills toured America in 1906, it was written into the contract that the majority of their salary, which was two pounds a week, was given to their wives and partners, leaving the bandsmen with two shillings a week pocket

⁴⁶ Helmshore Brass Band Minute Book (1889–1920). Albert Lonsdale, soprano cornet, 3 Albion Street, Wingates, charged twelve shillings and sixpence for all expenses and the contest, as well as five shillings and five pence per rehearsal; E. J. Woodhead, trombone, 23 Lyon Street, Shaw, charged fifteen shillings and fares for contests; Louis Wilson, cornet, reflecting his status as a soloist, charged one pound per contest plus train fares, and seven shillings and sixpence per rehearsal.

⁴⁷ From the 1880s onwards there were a growing number of players, trainers and conductors linked with the 'crack' bands that were professional in all but name. This professionalisation should not be confused with the fact that the majority of bands were composed of working-class men who undertook 'banding' as a hobby.

money. This reflected a working-class experience for men of relying on their wives to manage the household.⁴⁸

An examination of the financial records of Todmorden Old Band, in West Yorkshire's Calder Valley, reveals that it was able to supply work to bandsman and even assist when bandsmen were in financial distress. From 1899 to 1911 the band paid R. Cunliffe a monthly salary of one pound and fifteen shillings to clean the band room and be the librarian.⁴⁹ In 1908, the committee paid ten shillings to a 'distressed bandsman'.⁵⁰ These amounts paid to bandsmen were seasonal and one-off payments, and, on occasion, altruistic. They gave bandsmen an element of security when a man's independence depended on how much spending money – or 'spends' – he had for himself. The economy of the working-class household was rooted in the collective earnings of father, mother and children. Jose Harris has highlighted the importance of the financial contribution of the wives and children to the household, for, as social surveys of the period recognised, how much the man contributed from his wages could vary wildly. Indeed, the management of the household fell to the wife, and in what were considered the more respectable households the man would hand his wages over and the wife would often give the husband his 'spends' after the essential items – food, bills and so on – had been budgeted for. In spite of observers disagreeing about the significance of the amounts the husband gave, one thing that all observers agreed on was that it was the wife's skill, or ineptitude, in making ends meet that determined the comfort or neglect of working-class homes.⁵¹

With the rise of competitions, the homosocial element of banding, although still present, declined. Bandsmen became reliant upon their networks of wives and sweethearts. Indeed, band events became arenas that reflected how bandsmen had become reliant upon women and their extended networks. Fairs, bazaars, lunches and suppers were not additions to the life of the bands but an essential part of it. Consequently, domesticity, and the social networks that grew from it, was equal to the homosocial networks developed in the inns and band rooms. Men could still have independence, most often acted out in the band room, but joint ventures, carried out in public, now implied respectability and domesticity.

The final words, however, belong to Willie Jeffrey, a flugal horn player with Black Dyke Mills Band. In 1906 the band undertook a three-month tour of Canada and the United States. In spite of the excitement and glamour of the tour, Jeffrey only wanted to get home; he wrote in his diary:

⁴⁸ Queensbury Historical Society, Legal Agreement, regarding the Canadian and American tour of 1906 (1 June 1906), 2.

⁴⁹ Todmorden Old Brass Band Ledger Books (June 1897–March 1912), held by Todmorden Community Brass Band, Wellington Street, Todmorden.

⁵⁰ Todmorden Old Brass Band Ledger Books (9 June 1908).

⁵¹ Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870–1914* (London: Penguin, 1994), 72–3.

At last, the great American tour is over, and in looking back, I can say we have seen and learnt some wonderful things. It has been a tour full of interest, a tour of education and experience which could never possibly been got in any other way, still I for one am glad that it is now over, and that we have all been spared to return to those at home we hold so dear.⁵²

Jeffrey showed that bandsmen had grown from the novice, who drank and bonded with other men, and had moved through courtship, and the bands' social events that reinforced these courtships, to maturity. In the final analysis the bandsman was a respectable working-class man, something the *British Bandsman* wanted all bandsmen to be, when, on 1 January 1915, it reported:

It is good to be a working man, whatever the sphere of work – manual or menial; but it is not good to be only a working man. Why not be a working man and a gentleman? That is the noblest combination on earth.

⁵² Queensbury Historical Society, 1906 Diary of Willie Jeffrey, cited in John H. Clay, *Black Dyke: An Inside Story* (Stockport: Jargon's, 2005), 49.