

Callender's Cableworks Band

Michael Evans & information from Wikipedia, 2013

Callender's Cableworks Band (active 1898–1961) was an amateur brass band made up of members employed by and under the patronage of Erith Works at the Callender Cable & Construction Co. Ltd, later British Insulated Callender's Cables, in Belvedere, Kent, and performing in London and south-east England. They were prolific broadcasters in the early years of BBC Radio, and won 25 brass band competitions.

Its members were employed in the Erith Works of the Callender Cable & Construction Co. Ltd, later British Insulated Callender's Cables (1945–1975). This was situated in Belvedere, now part of London but previously in Kent. Between 1898 and 1961 when they were active, they played under various names and versions of those names: Belvedere Baptist Temperance; Belvedere Excelsior; BICC; British Insulated Callender's Cables; Callender's Cables A; Callender's Cables 'A'; Callenders' Cable Works; Callender's Cable Works A; Callender's Cable Works 'A'; and Callenders Cable Works A. Callender's employees included at least a hundred instrumentalists who spent their leisure time in four band groups. In 1932 the Senior Band consisted of 31 picked men: this was the band which broadcast on BBC Radio. There was also the A-band, the B-band and a learner's class of beginners from school age onwards; the A- and B-band members and the learners could all be promoted upwards as their skills developed and vacancies occurred.

The Band was started in the 1890s as a Salvation Army brass band, but because they felt limited as to the types of music which they were permitted to play, they formed their own temperance band. However this caused difficulties in purchasing their own uniforms and instruments, so their employer, Callender's, stepped in as patron. From then on they were Callender's Cableworks Band under various forms of that name. They were always an amateur band, rehearsing and performing in their leisure time.

The Senior Band had a high reputation, and in 1932 were described as the finest in the south of England. In 1929 Jim Thompson joined the band; later in 1939 he was to found the Belvedere Male Voice Choir. In 1932 the band consisted of all brass instruments, plus four saxophones. At the time they were the only brass band with saxophones. The five soloists in that year were E. Farrington and R.W. Hardy on cornet, W. Sloane on euphonium, Harold Laycock on trombone and Pat Greener on xylophone. Laycock was later principal trombone, and only ever recorded six solos. Some bandmasters such as the ex-military Tom Morgan in the 1920s could be terrifying during rehearsals, making them sweat with fear.

The "A" Band was formed in 1926. The conductor seated centre front in the image (right) is Charles Waters (d.1968). Mr Waters was Bandmaster of the Senior Band from 1924. He conducted that band at many "run of the mill" concerts, and usually played 2nd or 3rd cornet when Tom Morgan, the musical director, conducted the band. Waters was the resident conductor of the "A" Band. After Tom Morgan retired, Mr Waters became the conductor of Callender's until its demise in 1961.



Newly formed A-Band, 1926, conductor Charles Waters centre front

The Band's first broadcast was from 2LO on 27 February 1925. By 1932 the Band had twice toured all stations of BBC Radio, and they were to broadcast there twice again in April of that year, by which time they had broadcast 72 times on radio. By 16 December of that year, they had broadcast 80 times. They aspired to performing music which was "out of the rut of marches, operatic selections and other pierhead pieces."



Callender's Cableworks Band performing for BBC Radio, December 1930

They performed on 5 March 1932 at the Queen's Hall, London. On the afternoon and evening of Sunday 20 March of the same year, they performed at the opening of the new art deco frontage of the Central Bandstand, Herne Bay, Kent. On 18 December 1932 they took part in a special BBC Radio programme in which most of the music had been composed especially for them.

In competitions over the years they had 25 wins, 11 second places and 3 third places.

For some years they took part in the Elthorne Band Contest which started in 1919 at Elthorne Park. The competition had four sections with many entries, and a massed band concert. They won the competition on 20 May 1924 and 3 May 1925, and again on 7 June 1930.

Under the name of Callenders Senior Band they recorded Colonel Bogey, Entry of the Gladiators, Le Grenadier, Les Huguenots (parts 1 and 2), Three Dale Dances and Triana on 78 rpm disks. In the late 1920s they recorded A Sailor's Life (Descriptive Fantasia), parts 1 and 2, conducted by Tom Morgan, on two Broadcast Twelve disks.

Information from Michael Evans...

To say that Callender's were the best band in the south of England is really like saying that Manchester United is the best football team in the north of England!! By 1927/28, they were among a handful of brass bands, such as Foden's, Black Dyke, Brighouse and Rastrick who were (and in the case of the others mentioned, still are,) the very best in the country. Given the pre-eminence of British brass bands, that means they were among the best in the world. Indeed, some aficionados of the time thought Callender's were the very best.

In 1924, the Callender's management, led by Mr Charles Pipkin, the general manager of Callender's Belvedere works, located in Crabtree Manorway, Belvedere, Kent, seemed to have made the decision to make their band a top class outfit. The band, largely made up of local talent, had won the "Grand Shield" trophy at Belle Vue in Manchester in 1924, playing the test piece, "Oliver Cromwell." In brass band terms, that was like winning promotion to the Premier League. However, they failed to capitalise on this until things changed dramatically late in 1926. Up to that time, one of, if not the best band in the country, St Hilda Colliery, from South Shields, had been pretty dominant in the realm of brass band contesting.

There were, and still are two major trophies in brass banding. The National Championship and the British Open Championship. Prior to the Second World War, the national was held at the Crystal Palace, and bands played for the 1000Guineas Trophy. The Open was held at Belle Vue in Manchester. late in 1926, with the north hard hit by depression, Harold Laycock, one of the best trombonist s in the country, joined Callenders from St Hilda Colliery because, withe colliery having closed, the brass band authorities deemed that St Hilda's had become a professional band because their members were playing for money. This effectively barred them from future contesting. Laycock was followed by a small clutch of St Hilda players. Callender's could offer them employment and company housing, although this of course was a double edged sword. If they lost their place in the band, they could, potentially lose both their employment and their home. My father recalled that he could not remember this actually happening even though Callender's, in the shape of

their somewhat martinet-like Musical Director, Tom Morgan, was not averse to dispensing with player's services if they stepped out of line. It was a very disciplinarian organisation. With the influx of new players, the band competed at the British Open, Belle Vue, in September 1927. The bands played the test piece "The Merry Wives of Windsor." The audience had been asked not to begin applauding until each band had finished its performance. This was adhered to until Callender's played, when the audience broke into spontaneous applause some bars before they finished playing. Despite the verdict of what was (and is) a very knowledgeable audience, the adjudicators placed Callender's 2nd to the Foden's Motor Works Band, who became Champions for that year.

Meanwhile, Callender's had built up quite a formidable musical organisation. In the mid 1920's they had formed the "A" Band. Made up of competent young players, by the 1930's, they were almost as good as the Senior Band. It is this band that were the winners of any contests after 1929, because not only had the Senior's stopped contesting at local level, they were far too good for the opposition, but after 1929, in an atmosphere of considerable acrimony, they ceased contesting all together. In addition to the "A" band, there was a "B" band made up of aspiring young players as well as a learner's class. Almost all brass bands would give their eye teeth for such an organisation, where money appeared to be no object.

The reason behind stopping contesting, was mainly due to the result of the 1928 British Open Championship. A little earlier, Callender's had been placed 2nd at the National Championship at the Crystal Palace, to the Carlisle St Stephens Band, the test piece being Denis Wright's composition, "The White Rider." Within a month, they competed at the British Open Championship, with the bands playing something of a brass band classic, "Lorenzo" by Thomas Keighley. Again, despite the verdict of many of the audience and the fact that that soprano cornet player for Foden's Motor Works Band making a horrid mistake in the very exposed soprano solo section, Foden's were once again proclaimed champions by the adjudicators with Callender's again placed second.

It was all too much for the Callender's management. They felt that the way in which contests were judged and the competency of the people being named as adjudicators was decidedly flawed. They sought to change the system by calling a conference of the best bands of the day. Although two conferences were actually scheduled, the other band representatives were lukewarm to making changes and the process had incurred the ire of John Henry Iles. Iles was the promoter of both the National and British Open Championships. Callender's appear to have been just as annoyed with him as he was with them. A special open meeting was called of both the Senior and "A" bands, and it was decided, that, having been placed 5th at the 1929, national Championships, the Senior band would no longer attend any contests. They continued to remain a first class band right up to the second world war and attracted some excellent players. You mentioned Jim Thompson, but in fact he only played bass for Callender's for a very short time. It was his brother, George Thompson who was one of the star Callender products. A competent euphonium player, George played E flat bass for Callender's and my father recalled him as being a terrific player. Having gained his LGSM, he later moved on to conduct the Hanwell Band, and in the late 1950's he took over the conductor ship of the Grimethorpe Colliery Band and won the British Open Championship with them in 1967. Thompson passed away in 1984, but Grimethorpe remain a top band to this day.

Despite making a huge number of broadcasts for the BBC, appearing in the 1930 Lord Mayor's Show, visiting Calais and being invited to tour Australia (why they did not is unknown) the years 1939/45 were more or less the death knell for the bands. The war saw a number of players return to the north of England, whilst some older players like Harold Laycock retired from playing. Then, in 1945, Callender's Cables were merged with the larger Merseyside based cable makers, British Insulated to become British Insulated Callenders Cables or B.I.C.C. Charles Pipkin the band's president became managing director, but by now was near retirement. The "A" band the "B" band and the learners went to the wall and although the Senior band carried on it was never again the force that it once was. In 1961, the directors of BICC made it known that they would no longer allow the band to perform under the BICC name and after a brief attempt to go it alone as the Belvedere Band, the end had come.