

Chorlton cum Hardy Brass Band 1820-1945

by Andrew Simpson

There has been a brass band of sorts here in Chorlton since 1820, the last one only ceasing to exist at the end of the last war.

Chorlton cum Hardy was a small rural community just 4½ miles south of Manchester. In 1851 there were just 761 people many working on the land. It was a place of farms and market gardens, providing food for the growing city.

The first band was formed in the 1820s by a young group of farmers and agricultural labourers many of whom were Methodists. It consisted of "*brass instruments, clarinets, and piccolos and it was made up of about 24 members, including William Chessyhre, William Moores, William Gresty, and George Lunt with John Axon as drummer.*"¹ All five men also played in the Methodist choir and it is possible that other choir members also played in the band. These included James Brundrett who played the flute, Thomas Williamson and Thomas Taylor who played clarinet. William Gresty and George Lunt played bassoon.

There is a delightful story that the drum was made by James Axon the brother of the drummer but was found to be too large to get out of the cottage. Little more is known of the band and it survived for only a few years.

A second band was formed in 1850 as a drum and fife band and this in various forms survived into the middle of the twentieth century.

It was a subscription band and in 1851 three of its leading members raised £28 towards purchasing instruments. Like the earlier band its members were engaged in agriculture. Sadly only three of the founding band members are known. These were Daniel Thomas, Thomas Chessyhre and Thomas Hill, of these Daniel Thomas was a gardener and Thomas Chessyhre a market gardener, who had been a Methodist but went on to be the respected Parish Clerk.

During its first year the band relied on a pensioner for instruction but in 1851 it turned to a Mr Kellsall who was the band master of the Stretford band who remained their instructor until a local policeman took over.

By 1860 the band was in need of new instruments and a second appeal for funds was made this time by William Renshaw, James Lunt and James Gresty. The generosity of the township allowed the band to buy a new drum and engage a new bandmaster.

The band was supported by a wealthy businessman called Sam Mendel who advanced a subscription of £20, provided a further £66 for new instruments and paid for a series of bandmasters. These were John Melling, Oliver Gaggs and Harry L Holding. Oliver Gaggs was a musician although at times he also described himself as a musician and provision dealer, for a while ran a pub and by the end of the century was a musician on account, well off enough to employ four servants for the family home.²

But the band may well have encountered financial difficulty when Medal's trading empire collapsed in 1875 and he was forced to sell up. It did however keep going and so far there are six references to them participating in contests and agricultural shows from 1880 through to 1905. At Stalybridge in October 1880 where they won 3rd prize, Lytham in July 1881, the Primrose League summer meeting at Barlow Hall in Chorlton in August 11, 1887, the Failsworth Band Contest August 17 1887 and in local agricultural shows between 1895-1905.³

But it was their appearance at Barlow Hall in 1893 which has proved to be most interesting. There are plenty of photographs recording the event but only one which includes the names of all the bandsmen. It is now possible to track the histories of all but three of the men.



Chorlton cum Hardy Brass Band - Barlow Hall 1893

Just as in the past the 1893 band reflects very much the community. So while the earlier bands were made of up farmers and agricultural labourers few in the photograph made their living from the land.

Chorlton had become a suburb of Manchester and much of the land had been sold for housing. These were the "*6 shilling a week homes*" of artisans and the "*£250 semi detached houses*" of the lower middle class.⁴ And the band reflects this change. Only 40% of the bandsmen earned a living from agriculture or related trades, and instead there are factory workers, warehousemen, and clerks. Only a third had been born in Chorlton and the band now attracted people from the neighbouring areas of Stretford and Withington.



Charles Clarke, blacksmith,
born outside Chorlton in 1857



Joseph Rogerson, 47,
warehouseman, born in
Chorlton, living in
neighbouring Stretford



James Brundrit, 18,
a clerk, born in
Chorlton



Thomas Chorlton, 40,
publican, born in
Withington

Like many brass bands the core lived very close to each other in a few roads around the old village green.

By 1900 it had become a Silver Band, and during the last war it joined the Home Guard, and enlarged to sixty continued to play as a unit until 1945. But for whatever reason it never reformed and there has not been a band since.

We did have a brief flirtation with temperance. In 1876 the Wesleyan Band of Hope Committee started up a Temperance Band bought £68 worth of instruments but it had folded by 1879.

Sources

- Alan Brown
- Census Records 1841-1901
- Ellwood, Thomas, South Manchester Gazette, 1885-1886, Manchester Local History Library

- IBEW- www.ibew.co.uk
- Manchester Guardian 1880-1905

Acknowledgements

- Alan Jones for the 1893 picture of Chorlton cum Hardy Brass Band, with names of members
- Tony Walker for the 1893 picture of Chorlton cum Hardy Brass Band

Notes:

1. Ellwood Chapter 25, Sick and Burial Societies May 8 1886, South Manchester Gazette
2. Census returns, 1871-1901
3. Stalybridge, Manchester Guardian October 4 1880, Lytham, Liverpool Mercury August 1st 1881, Primrose summer meeting, Aberdeen Weekly Journal August 13 1887 Failsworth Brass Band Contest, Aberdeen Weekly Journal August 13th 1887, Chorlton cum Hardy Horticultural Show, Manchester Guardian August 12th 1895, Chorlton cum Hardy Agricultural Show, Manchester Guardian Aug 29 1898, Chorlton cum Hardy Agricultural Show, Manchester Guardian Aug 21 1905
4. Chorlton-cum-Hardy, History of the Suburbs, Manchester Evening News September 20th 1901