

“That Minutes of Last Meeting Pass as Read”: Helmshore Prize Band’s Committee Meeting Minutes, A Case Study of ‘Life as Normal’ and ‘Moral Contracts’ in the First World War

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Helmshore Prize Band, with committee and supporters, taken at Sunnybank, Helmshore, c.1906. (Permission Gavin Holman, <http://www.ibew.co.uk>)

Helmshore Prize Brass Band were formed in the 1870s and were active in East Lancashire’s Rossendale Valley in the late nineteenth century and throughout the First World War and beyond. They could not be considered a ‘crack’ band, but they were ambitious, entering the majority of local contests and employing trainers and players that would help them win.[1] This was the experience of most bands from the 1860s onwards. Like other bands in the regions surrounding Manchester Helmshore were driven by the need to raise money for the purchase and upkeep of instruments, uniforms and music. In addition, they had to maintain and run a bandroom where they could not only rehearse but also hold social events. [2]



Helmshore Prize Band, c. 1920s, with Richard Aspin, Conductor

The minute books of Helmshore Public Prize Band run from 1899-1922, and are a valuable source with which to understand the day-to-day lives of the region's brass bands.[3] The war years run from 1914-1916, and then there is a gap up to 1919. We join the band a few weeks after the outbreak of war at the end of August 1914, when the band committee was arranging to pay the bandsmens' train fares to the Leyland (Lancashire) Contest, and making arrangements for a Sunday concert in Haslingden, together with a September concert in Rawtenstall's Whitaker Park, where they would copy the custom of most bands and give the park keeper a tip.[4]

1914

3. That playing members of Band have their fare paid to Leyland. Aug. 22nd.
4. That G. Ramsden, (Solo Cornettist) comes to one rehearsal. Friday Aug. 21st.

Committee Meeting August 17th 14
Chairman Mr. J. H. Barlow

1. That minutes of last meeting pass as read.
2. That we have 1,000 programmes printed for Sunday Concert Aug. 23rd at Haslingden
3. That we engage Edwin Hyatt for concert
4. That J. R. Dearden be the person to draw at Leyland.

Committee Meeting Sept. 15th 14

Chairman Mr. J. H. Barlow

1. That minutes of last meeting pass as read.
2. That we have 1,000 small programmes printed for Whitaker Park Concert Sept 20th
3. That we give the Haslingden Park-keeper 2/6
4. That John Howorth see to hand-bills for Whitaker Park concert

The Minute Book, August-September, 1914. Note the large amount of handbills being printed for concerts in relatively small parks. This shows how many people attended park concerts in this era. (Permission: Helmsore Local History Society)

Brass band life, in other words, was continuing as normal. An examination of these minute books shows that leisure activities in the industrial communities continued throughout the war years. (I am grateful to John Simpson, of Helmshore Local History Society, for access to these records.) The minute books show evidence of fundraising activities for the war and concern over loved ones, but, also, to the reader, the phrase: 'are you forgetting there's a war on?' comes from the pages. In other words, as Gerard J. DeGroot has written, 'no matter how catastrophic and tragic the war was, the British still managed to enjoy themselves.' [5] I argue that Helmshore Band's activities were an expression of the wider belief held by editors in brass band journals that the brass band movement should survive the war and the 'rush to the colours' that took many bandsmen away from the movement. The minute books document the minutiae of brass band life in a period of vast military expansion and as such express a continuation of tradition and, moreover, a belief that the band would continue as normal. Arguably musical performance as a leisure pursuit mattered when it came to defending and continuing a well-established working-class tradition.

Fundraising for the War Effort: A Moral Duty

Outside of fundraising for money to buy instruments, uniforms and music, Helmshore Band were active in raising funds for local causes. As they were a public subscription band, and hence reliant upon the public for financial support, they had a perceived moral duty to see that they served the community by playing at public and charitable events. Algernon Rose, the author of *Talks With Bandsmen: A Popular Handbook for Brass Instrumentalists* (London, 1895), had much to say on what moral values a band should stress when asking the public funds. Top of the list was, of course, music as an improving rational recreation. Rose also argued that bandsmen should stress, when asking for funds to start a band, that '[...] the existence of such a band would be invaluable by affording help at charitable and local entertainments.' (Rose, pp. 311-312) In formal terms this moral contract had currency within the ethos of a brass band movement who policed the behavior of bandsmen with top-down editorial comment. Nevertheless, it could be argued that bandsmen and bands used the rational recreation ethos to raise funds for their own ends. [6]

In spite of this it is no surprise that fundraising for the war effort would be a priority for the band from 1914-1916. Volunteer recruitment brought an ordered response to the war and the same spirit of volunteerism which drove millions of men to the recruiting centers was axiomatic throughout society. In short, if something could be given freely, or by fundraising to pay for it, it was done. As DeGroot has written 'so profound was the charitable spirit (at least the enthusiasm for collecting donations), that in March 1916 established charities demanded a system of licencing.' [7] The volunteers were so prolific in the streets that the public started to complain about the nuisance of being asked for donations. It is within this volunteer spirit of charity fundraising that Helmshore Band operated.

Throughout the war years the band organised a number of concerts to raise money for the 'local relief fund.' A National Relief Fund was set up with Edward, Prince of Wales, as treasurer, on August 11, 1914, to help the families of serving men and those suffering from "industrial distress"[unemployment]. In a message in national newspapers, he said: "At such a moment we all stand by one another, and it is to the heart of the British people that I confidently make this earnest appeal." [8] Within a week donations to the

fund had reached one million pounds. On September 21st, 1914, the band committee were arranging their first charitable concert for the local relief fund to take place in Musbery National School. When we consider the role of public subscription bands in community life then the wording in the minutes fulfills the band's moral obligation to the community leaders. They wrote, 'that a silver collection be made at concert. That the proceeds of concert be handed over to Coun. J. Wilson & J. Nuttall towards the local relief fund.' In the following meeting, on the 23 September, they wanted the local notables to appear on the platform with the band Chairman, James Lord. This language used showed that the band was engaging with, and contributing to the war effort, on a local, and hence, visibly patriotic level.

Committee Meeting September 21st 1914

Chairman Mr R. Aspin

1. That minutes of last meeting pass as read.
2. That we give a concert in the Musbury National School on Saturday September 26th.
3. That a silver collection be made at concert.
4. That the proceeds of concert be handed over to Coun. J. Wilson, & J. Nuttall towards the local relief Fund.
5. That Fred Tattersall Esq., be asked to act as chairman at concert. Failing him we ask James Lord Esq.,
6. That concert commence at 7-30 p.m. prompt
7. That Mr. Albert Bentley be asked to act as accompanist at concert
8. That the following persons be asked to give Solos Miss E. C. Billington, Miss Seach & Mr. H. Simm.

Committee Meeting September 23rd 1914

Chairman Mr. J. Haslam.

1. That minutes of last meeting pass as read
2. That the following gentlemen be asked to appear on platform along with chairman James Lord, J. J. Bargeaves, J. Wilson & J. Nuttall

Another fundraising scheme that attracted the attention of the band was for the 'local sewing class'. In meetings on the meeting of January 12th, 1915 the band committee voted 'that we have a concert on Saturday Feb 21st, 1915', and, 'That we have 300 6d tickets for Concert.' In the meeting of the 19th January the committee voted 'that we divide the profits of concert to the local sewing class & band funds.' By the 2nd February the committee had decided 'that secy [sic] write to Mrs J. A. Whitham secy [sic] of sewing class to see if they are in need of funds' and 'that the proceeds of the concert go towards band fund entirely if the sewing class are not in need.' It is unknown what the reply from the sewing class was.

This, however, is another example of the band engaging with the spirit of volunteer fundraising at a local level. DeGroot has argued that even though the war was supposed to make male workers redundant. Business as usual, and, as such, normal life in the industrial towns, was gender specific: men and women would contribute to the war effort within their established spheres. Even women with undeniably valuable skills were often rejected by the patriarchal establishment. The pioneering Scottish doctor, Elsie Inglis, for example, wanted to form an ambulance unit but was declined by the authorities. Vera Brittain was a notable example amongst many women who were frustrated by this situation and became nurses in the Volunteer Aid Detachment. This still reinforced the caring role of women. On the whole women were supposed to keep the home fires burning, knit socks and send parcels to the front. The sewing class were part of a larger 'needlework mania' that gripped the country. One correspondent to the *The Times* bemoaned the fact that his wife and daughter had turned the parlour into 'a sort of factory.' [9]The band, then, was fulfilling its moral duty of war-effort fundraising for the country at a community level. Yet the fact remains that the band felt they could not give the sewing class the full amount of money raised. They had to also look after their own needs as a local working-class group to function.

Fundraising for the Band: A Longer Heritage

It is worth examining the heritage of band finance to understand Helmschore Band's motivation in fundraising.(see refs 13-28) Although the cost of instruments, music, uniforms, trainers and conductors may have been met by the main sources of funding from the 1859 Volunteer Movement, the industrialists or public subscriptions, it is worth noting that this support may not have supported many bands' day-to-day expenditures. In addition, the main funding was often in the form of an unsecured loan or guarantee and it is important to stress that fully-funded support could not be assured. Indeed, as Trevor Herbert has argued, 'a number of bands were the recipients of direct patronage by industrial entrepreneurs, but it is doubtful that this type of practice was extensive.' In 1886, for example, the Cleckheaton Christian Brethren Brass Band Committee voted 'that we accept Mr Spencer's offer to lend the money for the purchase of the instruments required, and that we guarantee to him the instruments as security until the money can be refunded.' In 1888 the band had still not repaid the money and had written to Mr Spencer to 'give best thanks to Mr Spencer for his offer to allow the 6 months for the repayment of his loan.' Thus bands came with a wide range of expenses that needed to be serviced to sustain the band. Helmschore Band's 1907 Ledger Book, for example, is indicative of expenses incurred by bands. From the 28 February to the 30 March 1907 their total expenditure was £11. 30s. 1/2 d. These expenses included 6s. 1/2 d spent on bandroom window cleaning. Candles for lighting cost 5s; postage stamps cost 2s. 6d. and 1s. 8d. was spent on

instrument polish. A subscription to the Cornet, together with memos and receipts (stationary), cost £1.5s. & 7d.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth, bands had to rely upon a number of entrepreneurial schemes and subscriptions for funding. These included chocolate clubs, bazaars and fairs, knife and fork teas and meat suppers. In 1895, for example, Helmshore Band's Committee voted on the 23 February that they should hold a tea-party and entertainment together with a meat tea, consisting of beef and ham, to raise funds. In addition to public subscriptions, subscriptions came from bandsmen. As early as 1842, W.L Mariner's Band was imposing monthly subscriptions on its members. Concerts were an important method of fundraising and could support and add to bandsmen's subscriptions. From January to July 1907 Helmshore Band raised a total of £18.16s. and only £1. 5s. from subscriptions. Bands also had to raise funds for competition entry fees. On the 7 March, 1907, Helmshore Band's Committee voted 'that band play round the village on March 23rd, and collect en-route proceeds towards contest expenses.' For the 'crack' bands contests could provide a lucrative income. Besses o' th' Barn and Black Dyke measured their winning in hundreds of pounds and more. In their first thirty years of contesting Besses won prizes to the value of £3,359.17s. Prize money varied from contest to contest, dependent on size and status. Contests at Clitheroe, Middleton and Rochdale were worth between £5 and £7; larger ones were worth more. In the 1870s Belle Vue paid about £35 plus benefits to the winners. When Kingston Mills Band won the 1887 Belle Vue Contest they received a cash prize of £30, a euphonium valued at £30 and the individual band members won gold medals to the value of £78.15s. Thus, even though funds were available for larger items, such as instruments and uniforms, bands had to be self-reliant when it came to raising money to repay unsecured loans and guarantees together with assorted day-to-day expenses. Helmshore Band, then, as we can see from pre-war records had a tradition of fundraising to keep the band going. Moreover, and in spite of obvious and public fundraising for the war effort, what emerges is that these needs; this continuation of tradition continued throughout the war years.

Fundraising: A Continuation of 'Life as Normal'

Throughout the minute books the band's fundraising reflects the traditions of local bands since the beginning of the brass band movement, and especially from the 1840s onwards, when brass band contests started to become popular in the regions surrounding Manchester and at Belle Vue. Park concerts were a popular way to raise funds. On the 13th April, 1915, for example, the committee voted to accept 'two open dates for Rawtenstall Park, July 25th and September 4th.' These concerts continue throughout the summer months to raise funds for uniform repairs and fittings, a bag to carry music in, the engagement of replacement players and the payment of their travel fares, and the daily expenses of running the bandroom. (See May 4th, 1915)

Helmshore Band, then, carried out their duty as a public subscription band fully. In terms of raising money for the war effort they fulfilled their moral and social contract. In spite of this war-time identity a deeper force was driving the band and that was one of tradition. On Christmas Eve, 1914, the band had a social in the bandroom – which by this time was a social centre as well as practice spaces- where the band, the committee and the band's friends had 60 teacakes and boiling coffee as a precursor to caroling around the village. This, in the final analysis, was what held bands together,

the sociability and continuation of a working-class leisure pursuit. In other words, tradition mattered.

Notes and References:

- [1] See, Stephen Etheridge, 'Music as a Lifelong Pursuit for Bandsmen in the Southern Pennines, c. 1840-1914: Reflections on Working-Class Masculinity', in, Catherine Haworth and Lisa Colton (Eds.) *Gender, Age and Musical Creativity* (Ashgate, 2015), pp. 97-99. See also, brassbandresults.co.uk <<https://brassbandresults.co.uk/bands/helmshore-prize/>> accessed 12/10/16
- [2] For the importance of the bandroom in the forging of social networks see, Etheridge, pp. 92-97
- [3] I am grateful to John Simpson and Helmshore Local History Society for letting me have access to their records.
- [4] See, for example, Bury Archive Service, *Correspondence re Bury Recreation Grounds*, ref, ABU2/3/7/1 (1895 -1905)
- [5] Gerard J. DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (Longman, 1996), p. 226.
- [6] See, for example, Trevor Herbert and Helen Barlow, 'The British Military as a Musical Institution' in Paul Rodmell (Ed.), *Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Music and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Abingdon, 2012); David Russell, *The Popular Music Societies of the Yorkshire Textile District, 1850-1914: A Study of the Relationships Between Music and Society* (PhD Thesis, University of York, 1979) and Stephen Etheridge, 'Brass Bands in the Southern Pennines, 1857-1914: The Ethos of Rational Recreation and Perceptions of Working-Class Respectability' in, Anne Baldwin, Chris Ellis, Stephen Etheridge, Keith Laybourn and Neil Pye (Eds.) *Class, Culture and Community: New Perspectives in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Labour History* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 2012), pp. 37-54.
- [7] DeGroot, p. 64.
- [8] DeGroot, p. 65.
- [9] *The Times* (25 March, 1915) cited in DeGroot, p. 65.
- [10] Charities <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/1914-1918-charities-helped-win-ww1/volunteering/article/1299786> accessed 12/10/16
- [11] DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 68.
- [12] DeGroot, p. 69.
- [13] Yet the myth of *full* industrial sponsorship pervades in the popular imagination.
- [14] Trevor Herbert, 'Nineteenth-Century Bands: Making a Movement', in, Trevor Herbert (Ed.), *The British Brass Band: A Musical and Social History* (Oxford, 2000), p. 46.
- [15] *Minute Book of The Christian Brethren Brass Band, Cleckheaton* (West Yorkshire Archive Service, Calderdale), Catalogue Ref, K131 (24 February, 1886)
- [16] *Minute Book of The Christian Brethren Brass Band*, (23 January, 1888)
- [17] See also, for example, the *Minute Book of The Christian Brethren Brass Band, Cleckheaton and Todmorden Old Brass Band Ledger Books, 1900-1910*, owned by Todmorden Community Brass Band, Todmorden, West Yorkshire.
- [18] *Helmshore Brass Band Ledger Books*, 2830 February to 30 March, 1907 (n.p), Accrington Local Studies Library.
- [19] *Helmshore Brass Band Ledger Books*.
- [20] Herbert, 'Making a Movement', p. 46.

[21] See, Etheridge, 'Music as a Lifelong Pursuit for Bandsmen in the Southern Pennines, c. 1840-1914: Reflections on Working-Class Masculinity' for a discussion of the role of women in these events.

[21] See the, for example, *Minute Book of The Christian Brethren Brass Band, Cleckheaton*, 28 January 1889 and 29 December 1890.

[22] *Helmshore Brass Band Minute Book*, 16 January, 1895, (n.p.) Accrington Local Studies Library.

[23] *W. L. Marriner's Camiando Band Minute Book* (n.p.) University of Leeds Brotherton Library, cited in , Herbert, 'Making a Movement', p. 46.

[24] *Helmshore Brass Band Leger Books*, 1 January-July 13.

[25] *Helmshore Brass Band Minute Book*, 13 March, 1907.

[26] J. N. Hampson, *Besses o' th' Barn Band: Its Origin History and Achievements* (Northampton, c.1893), p. 70, cited in Herbert, 'Making a Movement' p. 47.

[27] Herbert, 'Making a Movement' p. 47.

[28] Hampson, *Besses o' th' Barn Band*, p. 117.