

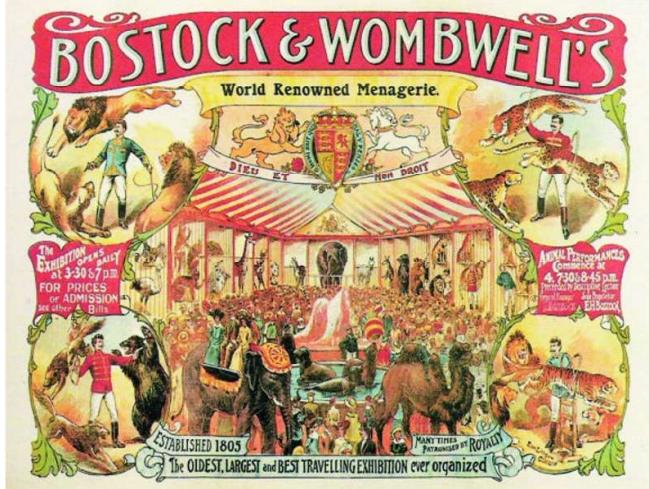
BRITISH ISLES 19th CENTURY CIRCUS BANDS

News Extracts Collected by Gavin Holman, WJU #3943 - www.ibew.co.uk

PART 3 - 1884 to 1887

The life and times of circus and menagerie bands in the British Isles in the 19th century – extracts from contemporary reports:

- **Harmston's Circus Band** had the sad duty, during the circus' visit to York in September 1884, of playing at the funeral of the clown "Little Bell" (real name James Bell) who died suddenly on his way home after a performance.
- **Sanger's Circus** performed at Sandringham in January 1885, and the Circus Band, led by Vincent C. White, entertained the crowds as they awaited the Royal party.
- **Hengler's Circus** appeared at Nottingham in February 1885, and it was noted that **Hengler's Circus Band**, led by Charles Elcock, was a pleasing exception to the rule that circus bands were generally of an inferior character and sometimes even agonising to listen to. It was regarded as being the best in the country, with a good and varied repertoire, with each performer a master of his instrument. In September 1885, the Circus Band's conductor was George Clements.
- **Bostock & Wombwell's Menagerie** visited Helensburgh in April 1885, and the Menagerie Band, set up outside the show, was a significant attraction.



• In June 1885, **Bostock & Wombwell's Menagerie** were at the far end of the country, at St Ives. They then processed from there to Penzance led by the Menagerie Band, with the "musicians in a gay uniform in an imposing band carriage, drawn by a very fine elephant."

• The **Bostock & Wombwell's Menagerie** arrived in Torquay, based at Ellacombe, in July 1885. During their stay, the local Salvation Army, with its band, passed down the side of the exhibition, musicians blowing. The Menagerie Band took this as a challenge, commencing with the air "*The Campbells are Coming*". Each band blew its strongest,

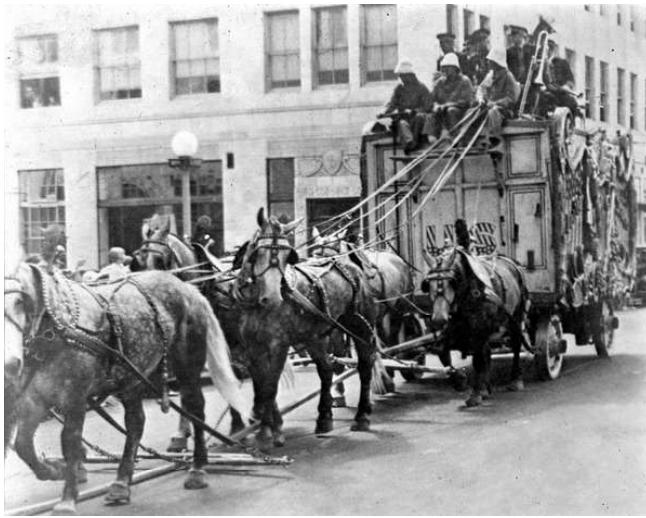
and "a fearful din was the result, but the menagerie band prevailed, and the crowd cheered its victory."

• **Bostock & Wombwell's Menagerie Band** contributed to the celebrations in Edinburgh, seeing in the New Year of 1886, performing and entertaining the throngs of people in the High Street.

• **Hengler's Circus** appeared in Huddersfield, settling in St Paul's Street, in September 1886. The Circus Band, of twelve performers, played a wide selection of music, including "*The Standard Bearer*" (Meyer), and the overture to "*The Bohemian Girl*" (Balfe).

• **Cook's Royal Circus** was appearing in Glasgow in March 1886, when the Circus Band resigned after an argument with the manager, Charles Reed, over them being required to do window billing and pass out tickets in addition to their musical duties. The band members were Mr Beckett (leader), H.M. Holding, G. Taylor, T. Oakes, W. Yetman, W. Mason, J. Nolan, H. Gresty, and Tom Burt.

• The celebrations in Falmouth for Victoria's Jubilee in June 1887 were enhanced by the use of the visiting **Wombwell's Menagerie Band**, band carriage, camels, elephants, and horses for the grand procession. This echoed the similar event for the coronation of Queen Victoria in 1838 when, coincidentally, Wombwell's Menagerie had also been in Falmouth, and played for the celebrations.



Wombwell's Menagerie Band

George Wombwell (1777-1850) was the most famous of Victorian menagerie exhibitors and showmen. It began with buying two boas from South America and exhibiting them in taverns. He rapidly added exotic animals from Africa, Australia and South America, forming his traveling menagerie in 1810. By 1839 he had fifteen wagons and a brass band.