

Charles Ashby and a glimpse or two of the Rushden Temperance Silver Prize Band

Gavin Holman, 18 January 2021

Charles Ashby was born around 1869 in Higham Ferrers, and he married his wife Ellen Florence (née Crick) in 1895. They lived at 139 Queen Street, in 1901, with their son Sydney Charles (5) and daughter Ida Florence (3), and two boarders – George Burcholt and Abner Wren.

Charles was a bootmaker by trade, being recorded as a “consolidated operator for boots and shoes” in the 1911 census, when the family were still living in the same location. The family moved away from Rushden in 1914. Their destination is not known, but it was probably Lancashire, as he was noted as living there in 1939, and he died in Blackpool in 1945.

Charles had joined the Rushden Temperance Band around 1886, and became its secretary in 1893, thereafter being a significant contributor to the band’s success in the subsequent 20 years.



The 38th annual meeting of the Rushden Temperance Band was held on Wednesday 14th January 1914, in the Alfred Street schools. Mr. J Claridge, presiding over a fair attendance. He was supported by the secretary Mr. Charles Ashby. The balance sheet was read and adopted. and showed - Donations, Mr. J. Clark, £1, Mr A. E. Roadhouse 10s. 6d., members' contributions £12 2s. 6d. The Secretary gave an interesting report of the principal events of the past year, and in moving its adoption the Chairman said it was, on the whole, very satisfactory, although the year had net been a very eventful one. He hoped the new members would their best to maintain and increase the interest and the high position the hand occupied in the musical world, and also to improve the financial standing. He congratulated Mr. Fred Robinson being elected to the position of conductor. The report was adopted. Officers were elected as follows: President Mr. J. Claridge; vice-presidents Messrs. A.E. Fox, J.S. Clipson, A. Wills, W.C. Knight, A.E. Roadhouse, C.A.K. Green, L. Tysoe, B. Vorley, G.S. Mason, G. Miller, F.L. Heygate, T.C. Clarke, J. Clark, and T. Robinson. Secretary, Mr. Charles Ashby; treasurer, Mr. A. Noble; bandmaster, Mr. B. Smith; collector, Mr. Robinson; librarian, Mr. C. Shrives; auditors, Councillors J. Claridge, and J. S. Clipson; committee Messrs. C. Shrives, F. Denton, A. Robinson, jun., J. Webster, and W. Knighton. All were thanked for past services.

Later, in March 1914, Charles Ashby resigned from his position as secretary of the band, which he had held for 21 years, as he and his wife were leaving the town of Rushden.

On Monday 30 March 1914, a good company of members and friends of the Rushden Temperance Band assembled in the Alfred Street Schools to present Mr. Ashby with an address and Mrs. Ashby with a silver-mounted hairbrush and comb. Mr. John Claridge, presided and, in the course of an appropriate speech, paid high tribute to Mr. Ashby's ability. The following is a copy of the address: *"We, the members of the Rushden Temperance Silver Prize Band, beg to ask your acceptance of the accompanying presentation as a mark of our high appreciation of the excellent work you have done for the band during the last 21 years as its secretary. We feel that the high position and the great success which the band has achieved are in a very large measure the result of your devoted and enthusiastic service. On your leaving Rushden we desire to express our earnest hope for your future health and prosperity, and we associate the name of Mrs. Ashby in our good wishes. On behalf of the subscribers, John Claridge, President; Fred Robinson, Conductor; Bernard Smith, Bandmaster; William Noble, Secretary."* Others who spoke were Mr. Fox (an old member), Mr. B. Smith, Mr. Morris, Mr. T.C. Clarke and others.



Charles Ashby and his sister Ellen

Mr. Charles Ashby.



We the **M**embers of the **R**ushden **T**emperance **S**ilver **P**rize **B**and, beg to ask your acceptance of the accompanying presentation as a mark of our high appreciation of the excellent work you have done for the **B**and during the last **21** years as its **S**ecretary. **W**e feel that the high position and the great success which the **B**and has achieved are in a very large measure the result of your devoted and enthusiastic service.

On your leaving **R**ushden we desire to express our earnest hope for your future health and prosperity, and we associate the name of **M**rs **A**shby in our good wishes.

On behalf of the **S**ubscribers

March 30,
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<i>Dred Robinson.</i>	<i>Conductor.</i>
<i>Bernard Smith.</i>	<i>Bandmaster.</i>
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Rushden Temperance Band

The Band was formed in 1875, largely due to the initiative of the first conductor, William Skinner, who led the band for its first 20 years. A few typical engagements from its first five years are given below.

- 29 December 1876 – the band and friends sat down to tea in the Practice Room. This was followed by an entertainment by members of the company, consisting of songs, glees, duets and recitations.
- 23 May 1877 – the band led the processions for the Higham Ferrers Bands of Hope anniversary through the town.
- 26 March 1878 – the band provided music at the reception for the wedding of William Colson and Mary Lucy, in Rushden, at the Temperance Hall. The entertainment programme was: Fantasia “*Concordia*” (band), song “*Don’t judge a man by his coat*” (William Skinner), song “*Going out for shopping*” (Mr D. Crick), song “*Over the rolling sea*” (William Skinner), chorus “*Hail, Smiling Morn*” (band), song “*Oh, he kissed me when he left me*” (Mr H. Chettle), selection by the band, song “*Little Sam*” (Mr Crick), song “*True to the core*” (Mr Durham), song “*Hard times come no more*” (Mr T. White), song “*I wish mamma was here*” (Mr T. Willis), selection “*Singing Quadrille*” (band).

THE RUSHDEN TEMPERANCE BRASS BAND is now OPEN for ENGAGEMENTS during Whitsuntide and Summer Holidays.—Full particulars; apply, Mr W. SKINNER, Bandmaster, Rushden.

One of the first advertisements for the band's services – April 1878

- 11 August 1878 – the band entertained the crowds at the Stanwick Feast.
- 25 December 1878 – the band played around the town of Rushden during the Christmas Day afternoon.
- 3 June 1879 – the band led the united Bands of Hope around the town in procession.
- 22 June 1879 – the band provided musical entertainment at the anniversary celebrations of the Succoth Baptist Sunday Schools in Rushden.
- 6 July 1879 - the band led the combined Wesleyan Scholars in procession to the Irthlingborough Feast.
- 15 July 1879 – the band led the children of the Band of Hope at Sharnbrook to the annual Temperance Festival in the town.
- 21 July 1879 – the band, together with representatives of 12 other bands, making up 220 musicians in all, took part in a musical fête at the Albert grounds in Northampton, as a benefit to two aged bandsmen – Messrs Care and Spriggs. The Rushden Temperance Band played the fantasia “*On Guard*” and followed it with “*Angels, Rejoice*”. The other bands represented were the band of the

Northamptonshire and Rutland Militia, the 3rd Northamptonshire Rifle Volunteers, Harlestone Band, Hardingstone Band, the 7th Northamptonshire Rifle Volunteers, the 9th Northamptonshire Rifle Volunteers, Kettering Town Band, Rushden Town Band, Milton Brass Band, Long Buckby Town Band, Irthlingborough Band, and the band of the Bucks Yeomanry. The band's secretary, Mr Bandy, also accompanied them.

- 28 July 1879 – the band led the parade of the Riseley Ancient Order of Foresters through the village, on the occasion of the Foresters' anniversary.
- 22 September 1879 – the band entertained the crowds at the Rushden Athletic Sports, held at the Star Cricket Club on Wymington Road. Their programme included “*Queen's Slow March*” (Riviere), fantasia “*La Vallée des Roses*” (Domian), fantasia “*Hommage au Nord*” (R. Smith), chorus “*Fixed in His everlasting seat*” (Handel), selection “*Les Cloches de Cornville*” (Planquette), fantasia “*On Guard*” (Bousquier), fantasia “*Grand Honoria*” (R. Smith), and quadrille “*Vrais Amis*” (E. Newton).
- 4 November 1879 – the band gave an entertainment in the Rushden Temperance Hall, a few select members of the band gave solo and quartet performances, together with various songs and choruses.

Rushden: the Musical Shoemakers

This report appeared in “The British Workman and Home Companion for 1910”

The counties of the North, particularly Lancashire and Yorkshire, are looked upon as naturally musical. Music seems to be bred in the bone of these hardy sons of toil, and, practically speaking, every other town, to say nothing of the villages, boasts its brass band. The northerners are rightfully proud of these organisations. To maintain that the Midlands could make an equally good show would be quite wrong, yet there are some really first-class bands in the busy Midlands, and under this heading any critic would certainly class the Rushden Temperance Band.

An Example of Sturdy Independence

Had anyone, in the year 1875, when the band had its origin, ventured to prophesy that this local drum-and-fife combination would develop into a leading brass band, he would be looked upon, if not as a false prophet, undoubtedly a very sanguine one. But he would have been right, absolutely right.

When, soon afterwards, a Temperance Brass Band was decided upon, the first thing to do was, of course, to procure the necessary instruments. How were they obtained? Why, each member bought and paid for his own! This shows at once, not only that the members were possessed of that sterling English quality commonly called grit but also that the blood of independence flowed pretty freely through their veins. No sooner were the instruments obtained than practice began, both in season and out of season for, as is

a new toy to a child, so were the new instruments to the players; but the child tires of his toy, the Rushden players did not tire of their instruments. On the contrary, indeed, they were plucky enough to enter a band contest at Stanwick, where, to their own surprise, they carried off two first prizes.



Rushden Temperance Band, c. 1904

Honours in London

Pleased, but not puffed up, the Band then decided to install a professional teacher. Engagements quickly followed. The first instruments were sold and new ones obtained. Here, again, every member put his hand into his pocket to the extent of a sovereign, the balance being raised by concerts, bazaars, etc. The first really big competition in which the band took part was the Belle Vue Contest in 1886, but, in the judge's opinion there were superior bands present, and no prize was the result. About this time, however, the band was so successful in other directions that it was unanimously decided to launch out into deep waters, so to speak, and accordingly in 1890 a set of Besson instruments was purchased and these are in use at the present time.

On one occasion Rushden ran second for the championship at the famous Crystal Palace. Last year, however, it was unplaced, whereat every member was disappointed, for the performance given was the finest in the whole history of the band. A Crystal Palace success was what the band had longed for and worked for. May it yet get it! At Belle Vue, too, on September 7th, 1908 the band was placed second, losing by three points only. Some little time ago the London County Council engaged the band to play for an evening in the Victoria Embankment Gardens. An unusually large crowd was attracted, and the

musical adviser to the Council gave it as his opinion that the band was by far the best the Council had yet engaged. On three occasions visits have been paid to the Royal Estate Flower Show, Sandringham. The band make a speciality of Wagner music, and many times have the members been complimented in high quarters on their rhythm, intonation, and attention to the signs of expression, which, as every true lover of music is aware, means so much to the trained ear.

In prizes the band has won from £2,000 to £3,000, and in addition it has been the means of raising some hundreds of pounds for charitable purposes. For upwards of twenty-five years the rehearsals have averaged 150 yearly. Several members can look back on a period of twenty years' service.

The professional conductor is Mr. Gladney; the conductor, Mr. C. H. Baker; the deputy-conductor, Mr. Fred Robinson; the bandmaster, Mr. T. Robinson; the treasurer, Mr. W. Noble; and the secretary, Mr. Charles Ashby, who has been connected with the band for twenty-three years, acting as secretary for the past sixteen. "We are all employed in the shoe trade", said Mr. Ashby, in response to a general question of mine; "every one of us works for his living; we are all bona-fide amateurs, rely on our brains for success, and have never had any money at the back of us".

Story of a Barrel of Whiskey

The band was founded on strict temperance principles - principles which have ever been rigidly adhered to. In this connection a little anecdote, which has the merit of truthfulness, may be given. At a certain band contest, some years ago now, the Rushden Temperance Band was invited to compete - indeed, considerable pressure was brought to bear upon them. The band, however, hesitated somewhat. Then a letter came begging them to be present, adding, as an inducement, that a cask of whiskey would be given as an extra prize for the winning band. This promptly decided the matter and the Rushden Temperance Band were non-competitors. This was without doubt the wisest and most dignified course to take, although some think that the band ought to have competed, won the whiskey, and obtained for themselves and the temperance cause generally a thrilling advertisement by publicly knocking the bung from the whiskey barrel, thereby allowing the fiery liquid to water the earth.