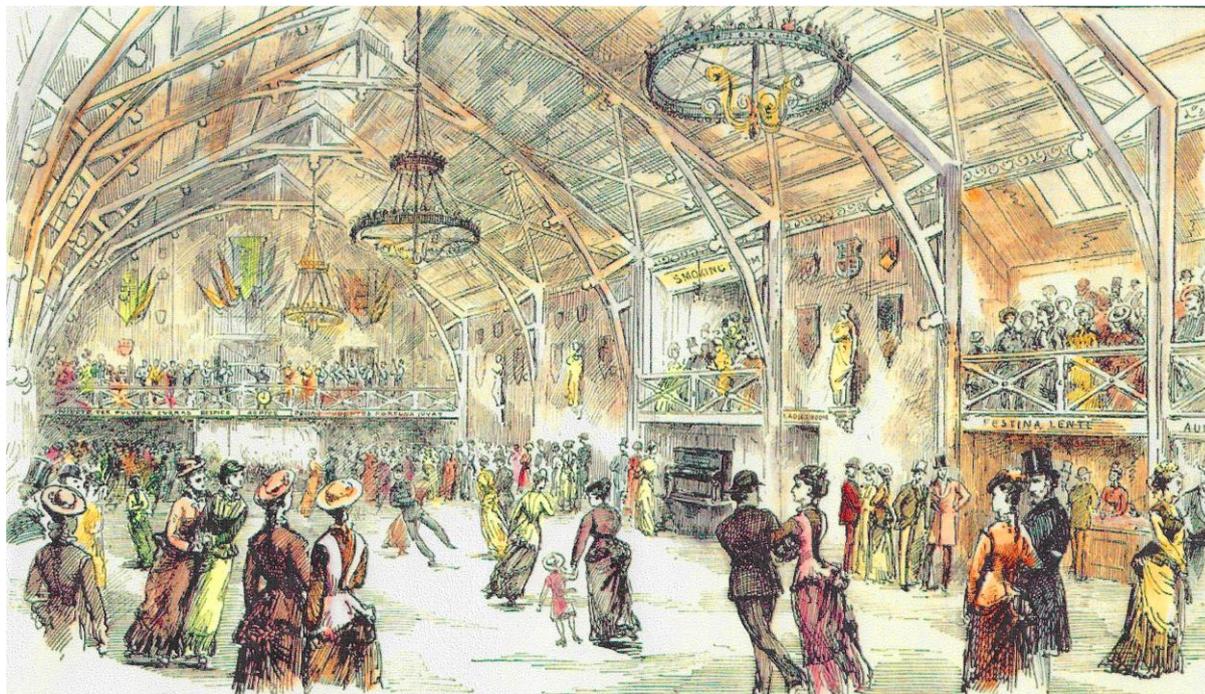


# Music to roll along by - bands that entertained the Victorian and Edwardian roller skaters

*Gavin Holman, 26 January 2021*

The first few indoor roller-skating rinks opened in London in the late 1850's. As the designs for the skates were improved, the 'sport' became more popular and by the late 1870's the modern style of four-wheeled 2 x 2 skate was introduced and there was a significant increase in the number of rinks established in towns and cities.



*Norwich Roller Skating Rink, c. 1880*

One example was the roller-skating rink, opened at The Scores, St Andrews, Fife, on Friday 20 October 1876. It had 2000 square metres of asphalt of the consistency of ice. The spectators were provided with a magnificent sloping terrace furnished with a sumptuous café. It was the rendezvous of the most select of society; ladies were not permitted, even as members unless accompanied by a cavalier; and one day a week was set aside for 'high life' at an extra admission fee.



*Roller skating in the 1880's*

Children under fourteen were provided with a separate rink. Comparisons with real ice skating, on lochs or rivers, were not complimentary, but the advantages of all-year skating and having no chance of falling through the ice did outweigh many objections.



*An Ipswich skating rink band, 1909*

The Raikes Hall Gardens, in Blackpool, a regular venue for visitors to see its displays and various entertainments, installed a skating rink in the late 1870's, and its band was advertised as playing from 10.30 am to 10.00 pm in the rink, which was enclosed by 'magnificent conservatories and ferneries'.



*Opening of the Alexandra roller-skating rink, Normanton Road, Derby, in 1909*

The rinks often provided musical entertainment, particularly for special events and occasions. Many had an 'in-house' band which was usually a small brass band of perhaps up to 10 players, sometimes a wind or string band. The popularity of rinks gradually declined, as other entertainments and pastimes arose to compete with the time and money of the people, and most had largely been dismantled or repurposed into cinemas before 1914.



*Bargoed Brass Band, posing at Bargoed Skating Rink*

Rink bands were also engaged for non-rink activities. The Crystal Palace Skating Rink Band offered its services for balls and parties, and as a quadrille band, in 1881. It also offered instrumental instruction on the cornet and flute, at 15s. per lesson per week.



*1850's skate above, 1870's skate below*



On one occasion the Norwich Rink Brass Band, after the Salvation Army had hosted a big tea at the Rink, in December 1887, led the Salvationists and their guests in a procession around the city.



*The Dunfermline Skating Rink Band*



*Olympia Skating Rink staff, Dunfermline, 1910*

The Southampton Skating Rink Band was engaged in December 1891 to play at a gymnastics display in the Victoria Hall, Southampton. The Empire Skating Rink Band assisted with a service for P.S.A. members at the Eliot Lodging House, Coventry in April 1910. The Leek Skating Rink Band joined the procession of all the Sunday Schools in the town, in July 1910, leading the Primitive Methodists scholars.



*Band at a Leeds skating rink, 1909*

One skating rink band member we have a name for, is Master Dawson. He was a young boy playing cornet with the Dormer Place Skating Rink Band at Leamington Spa in May 1910. His tone and execution were described as 'grand' as the band performed "Poet and Peasant".



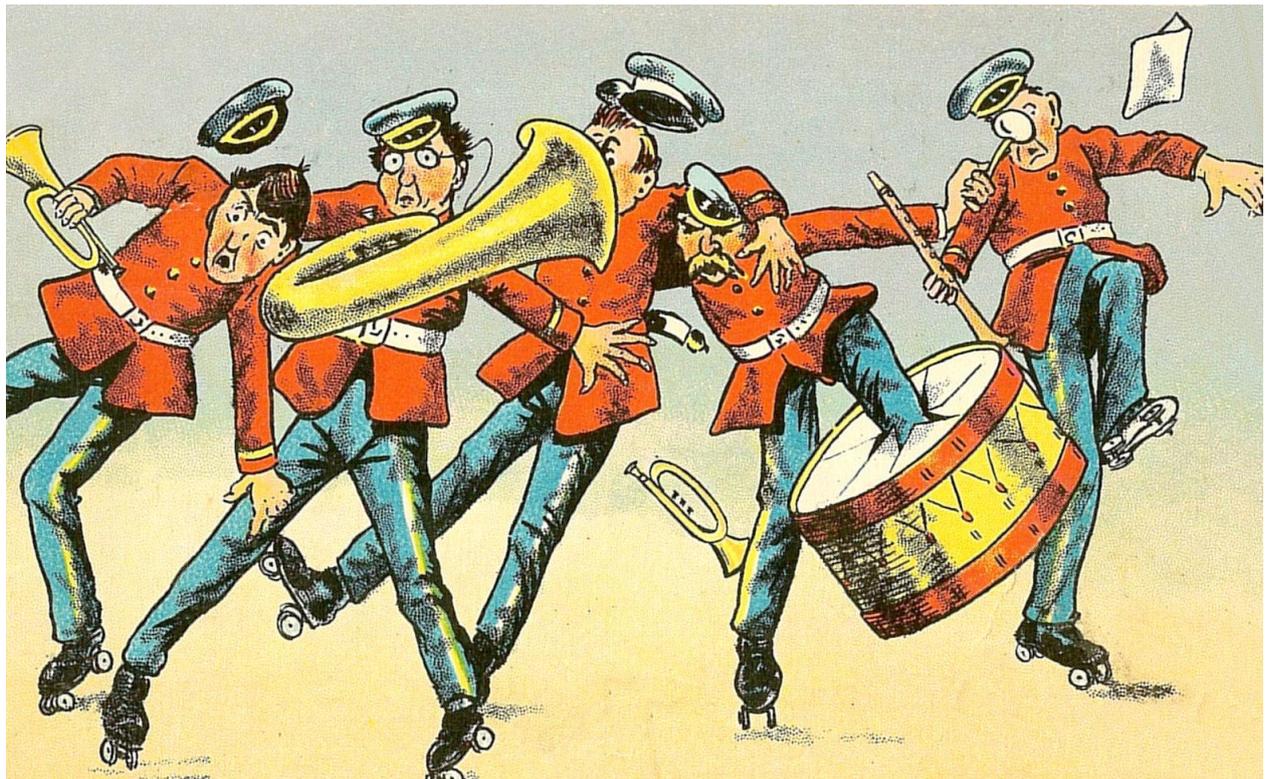
*Scarborough skating rink*

The Kendal Roller Skating Rink, at Aynam Mills, had its own brass band in 1909, performing at the afternoon and evening sessions. Admission was free for the morning session, and 6d. for the afternoon/evenings. Hire of skates was 1 shilling. Similarly the Whitehall Skating Rink at Farnworth, Bolton, had a brass band performing afternoons and evenings in 1909. Their morning skates were 6d. to hire with free admission, and 1s. to hire with 3d. admission for the other sessions. Subsequent adverts reduced the prices which might indicate the general decline of the roller skating pastime.



*Wolverhampton Roller Skating Rink staff – bandsmen?*

Something must have been in the air in 1909, for there were suddenly a number of negative reports about the bands in skating rinks.



*Skating and playing at the same time – not to be recommended!*

In August 1909, the Ilkley Skating Rink tried to renew their music licence, for their in-house brass band. However there had been complaints about the noise from the neighbourhood, and the Council granted the licence on the proviso that the brass band be done away with and replaced by a reed or string band. The existing band members were given a month's notice for the termination of their engagement with the Rink. Another rink had a similar problem around the same time - the Exhibition Hall Skating Rink, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, had their music licence rejected unless they provided a lighter form of music. The existing rink brass band and drum had annoyed 26 nearby residents, playing in the afternoons and evenings. The Newington Rink in Hull had a similar problem in November 1909, with its music licence being refused on the objection of a resident who claimed he could not hear when holding a meeting. The licence for the Holland Street Rink, also in Hull, was renewed without trouble, despite it being next door to a chapel.



*Staff at the Alexandra Roller Skating Rink, Normanton Road, Derby*

Also, in August 1909, by coincidence, several adverts appeared in a London "Era" newspaper. One from the conductor of a "Skating Rink Brass Band", with 8 professional performers, for winter engagements. The conductor, and hence probably the band, was located in Highbury. Another conductor, from Ball's Pond Road, offered his band of 8 performers - in uniform or evening dress. A third band of eight players, for a "first class rink band", was seeking employment from Liverpool. And a fourth 'Military Band of Eight', from Eastbourne, was looking for work - skating rink or any other - claiming a uniform and a good repertoire.

The musicians of Sheffield objected to the band at the Alexandra Skating Rink in the city in October 1909, as it had been supplied by a foreigner, Mr Pelligrini, and at least two of the band members were foreign, thus taking work away from local performers. Mr Pelligrini also supplied bands to the Empire Rink in Sheffield, and ones at Leeds and Batley. Another 'foreigner' Herr Otto Mey and his band were engaged at the Olympic Rink in the city.



ROLLER SKATING AT EXHIBITION HALL, NEWCASTLE.



It was not just the declining popularity that affected the rink bands - the Cosy Rink Band, from a skating rink in Leeds, found themselves out of work, and seeking new engagements in December 1909, when they were replaced by an Electrical Mechanical Band!

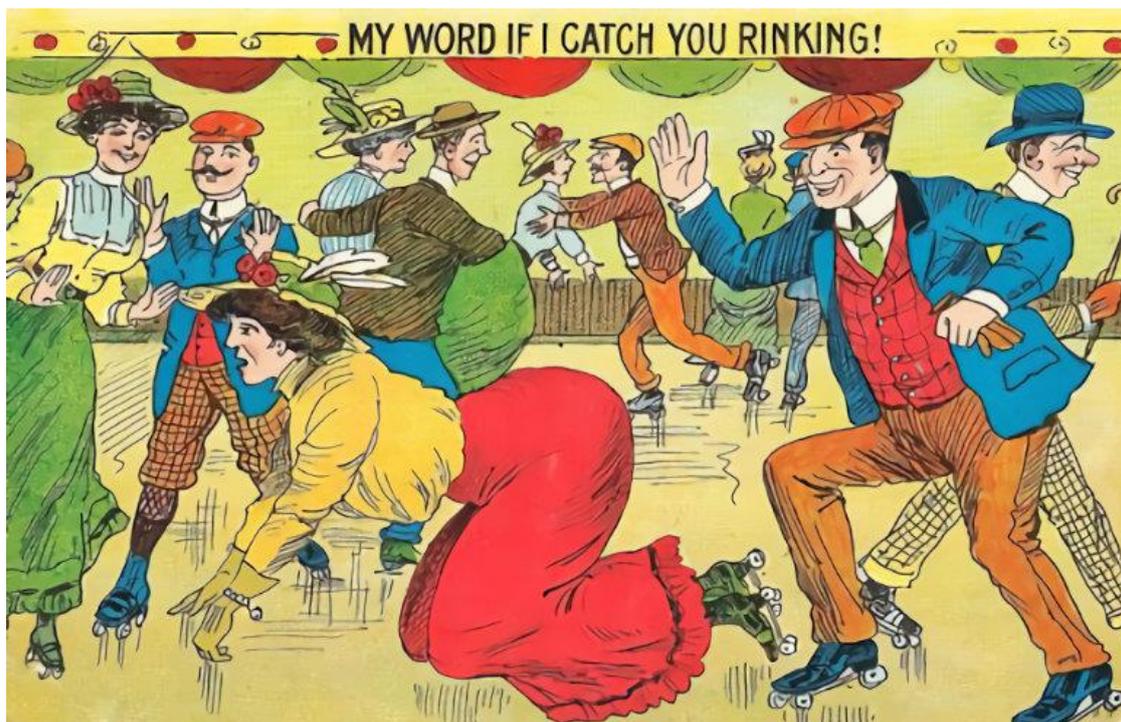
The manager of the County Skating Rink, Kingston, was prosecuted in March 1910, under an old act, for keeping the rink open and allowing a band to perform in it without a music licence.

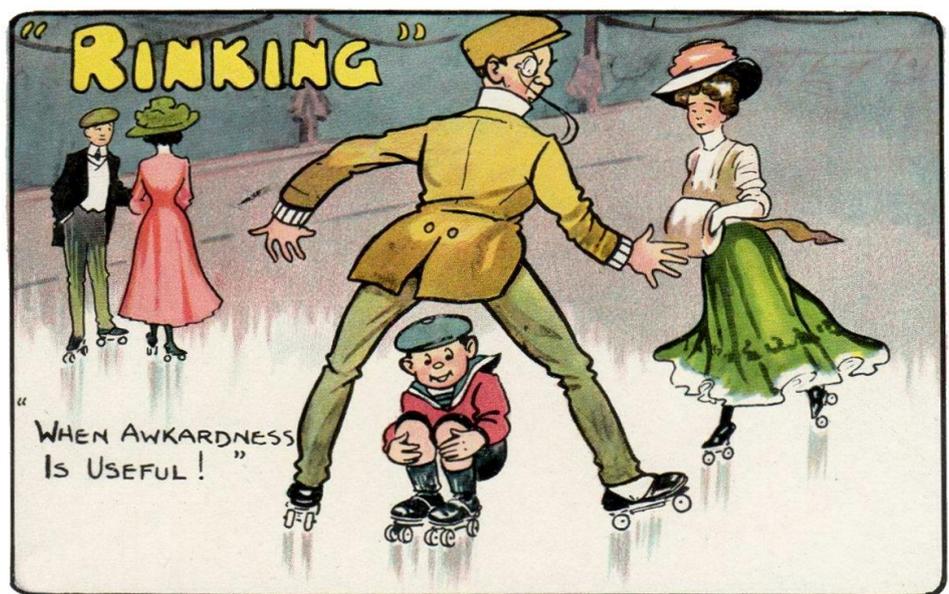
One schoolmistress in 1910 objected to the nuisance caused by the noise of the local rink band. The tunes she particularly recollected hearing were "*The Galloping Major*" and "*The Cosy Corner*". She liked the former, but did not like the latter.

However, in Scotland, the rinks were still popular enough in 1910. The Saltcoats Skating Rink appointed Alexander Beaton to be its new bandmaster, replacing Mr Caldwell. Mr Beaton was previously bandmaster of Bannockburn Colliery Band and was also solo trombonist with the Falkirk Trades Band. He was trombone champion of Scotland, 1908-1909, and also obtained the Alexandria medal and money prize; two firsts and second at Falkirk; second medal and money prize at Pleans solo contest; medal for best trombone out of fourteen bands at Buntaskin brass band contest; medal for best trombone at Chryston brass band contest; and a silver cup valued at £10 for the championship of Scotland at Waterloo Rooms, Glasgow. He also excelled on the euphonium.

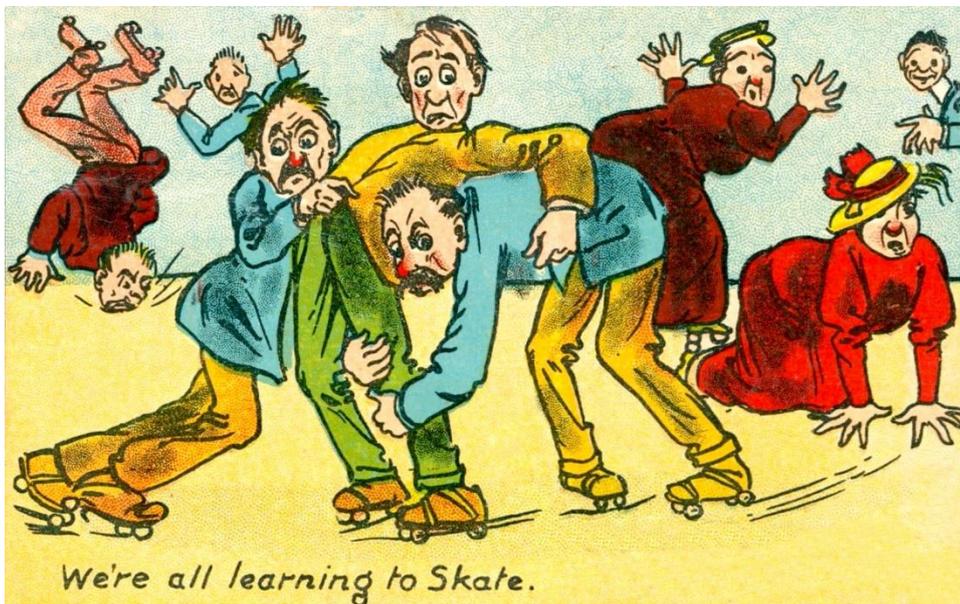
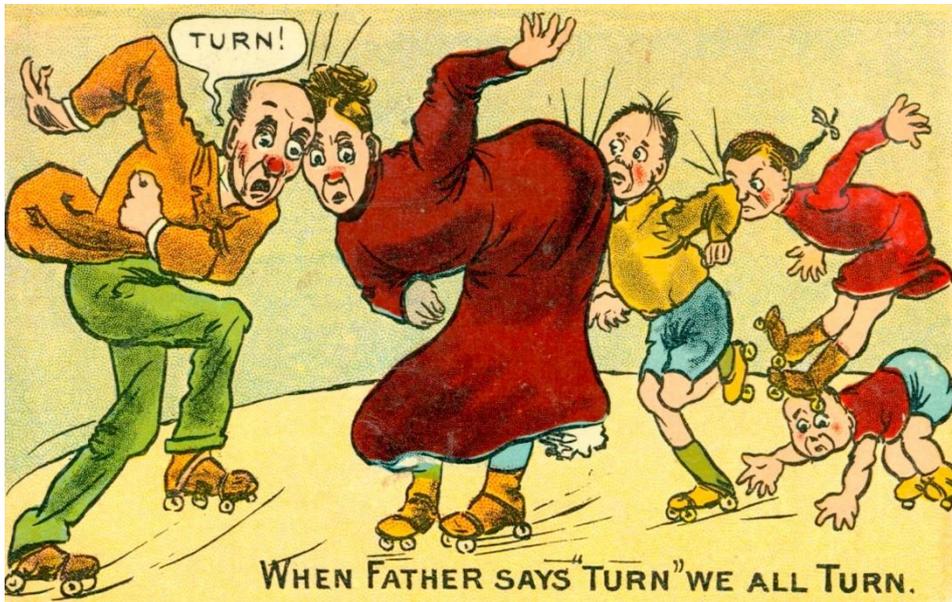
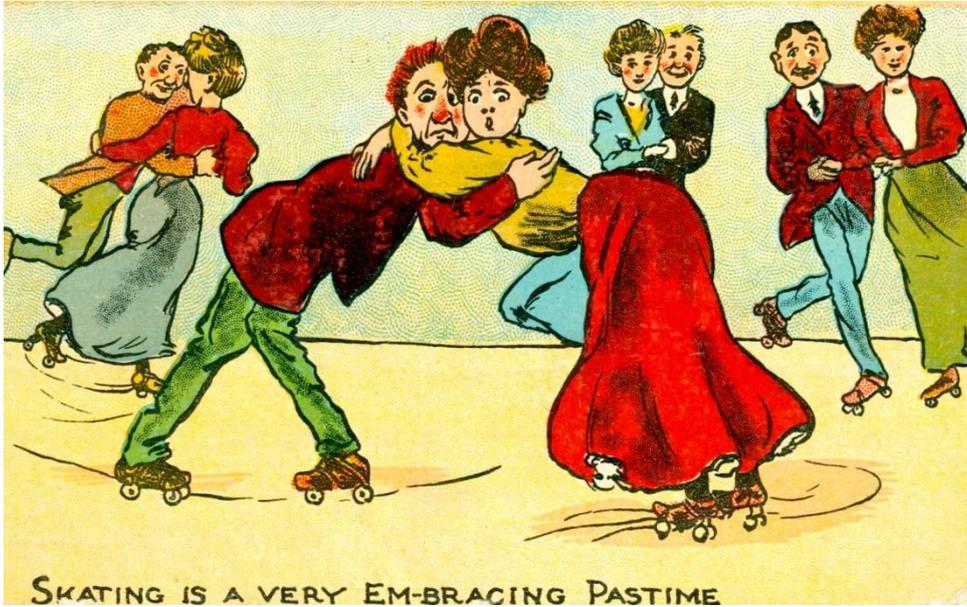
These examples from the closing years of the skating rink bands give a brief insight into a type of professional bands that provided, necessarily noisy, background music to the rattle and roll of the skates on hard surfaces, from the mid-1850's to WW1.

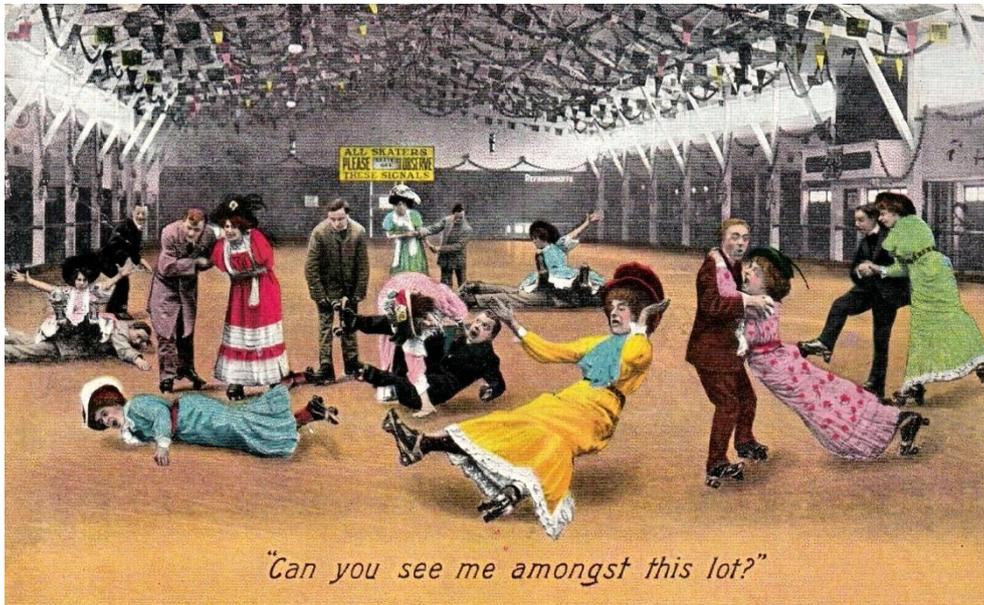
The following pictures show a few of the more humorous postcards that illustrate life in the roller rink during late Victorian and early Edwardian times.



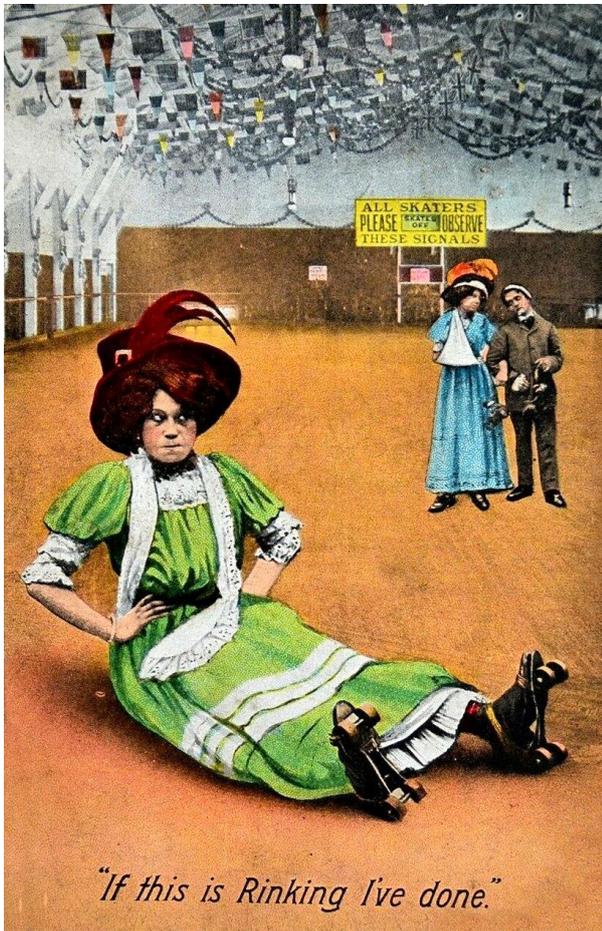




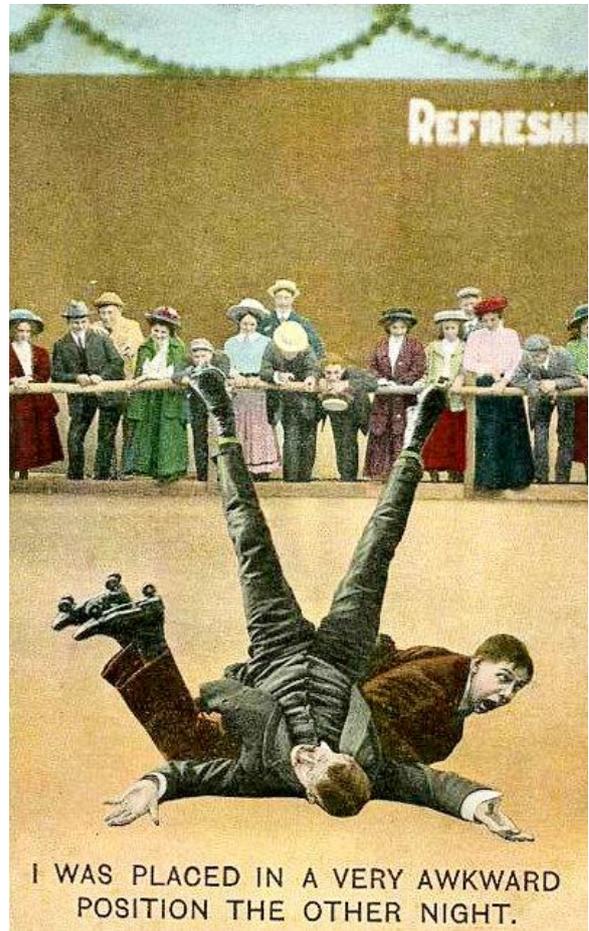




*"Can you see me amongst this lot?"*



*"If this is Rinking I've done."*



I WAS PLACED IN A VERY AWKWARD POSITION THE OTHER NIGHT.