

A Bradwell Band Minute book **By Christine Skerrow**

The foolscap sized account book with an embossed blue card cover turned up when we were clearing a family home. It was kept by my great-uncle Jonathan Leslie Ashton, a member of the Band who was elected its Assistant Secretary in 1907 and later described himself as "Hon. Sec." The book starts in that year, and the entries are meticulous and detailed up to the first World War. After 1918 there is an attempt to resume, but records end in 1922.

A major part of the book is the list of engagements for 1909 to 1914, which is full of interesting references to village life. Some of the engagements were 'voluntary playings', many at Church festivals and charitable events, and the Band was also hired to play for dancing and at sporting occasions. You get the impression that nothing much of any significance happened in the village without the Band. Engagements were not restricted to Bradwell and the Band travelled widely, their mission to provide music taking them from the feasting Oddfellows of Great Hucklow to celebrating a Coronation in the now submerged villages of Ashopton and Derwent.

The book also contains minutes and accounts. At first sight these seem rather dry, but looking again shows a rich vein of social history to be mined, from the rise of motorised transport to the raffling of Mrs Walker's majestic 4lb pork pie.

ENGAGEMENTS.

The pre-war band.

It's refreshing to note, in an era when Christmas lights go up in October and seem stale and tawdry by December 25th, that the Band's Christmas Playing began on Christmas Eve and went on every day (except Sunday) till New Year's Eve, when a quartette plus a drummer played for dancing.

This Christmas Playing- a phrase reminiscent of Thomas Hardy- took place at Hazlebadge, Bamford, Hope (including Birchfield, Crabtree, Edale End and the station), Castleton, Birchinlee, Netherwater, Grindlow, Smalldale, Brough, Thornhill, Coplow Dale, Windmill, Abney and Abney Grange, Aston, Little and Great Hucklow and the "outlying farms and hamlets in the district."

My mother, JLA's niece, born Joan Mary Ashton in 1920, adds two stories about Christmas music:

One night, the Band was returning from Christmas playing, well provided with Christmas cheer in the outlying hamlets. They were suddenly brought to a halt by a cry from one of their members:

"Stop" cried the bandsman. "There's a house there and they're still up! Let's give them a tune!"

The Band willingly complied with this request, but there was no welcoming door flung open wide - all was silence. After several more verses, it was realised by one of the more sober players that the light which had attracted them was the moon, and the house was a haystack...

The other is about the choirs who used to sing carols around the village on Christmas Eve:

Seasonal goodwill ensured that they were welcome at any house, and refreshments were freely offered and accepted, greatly improving the quality of the renderings as the night wore on. Disaster struck after they visited a good Chapel family, who were teetotal and served the singers with mugs of hot cocoa. This played such havoc with the singers that they had to abandon their efforts. When they recovered, the choir members were adamant that it wasn't their previous intake, but the cocoa which had been the last straw!

Not only the cocoa was dangerous! Jonathan and Charles mother, Eliza Ann Bradwell, (Jabez Bradwell's sister) used to make her own parsnip wine, consumed in generous quantities by choir and band at times of celebration. The youngsters in the family were forbidden to touch the brew, and the reason came out many years later after Eliza Ann's death- it was fortified before bottling with a large amount of brandy.

Back to the Minute book: the Band also played at Easter –“mainly sacred music” on Good Friday and Easter Eve, and for dances on Easter Monday, in Castleton and Bradwell. At Easter 1910 they played in Castleton for the Derbyshire Medals Competition, Final round- there's no mention of the result!

Easter 1912 was recorded as “too rough weather for playing”.

At Whitsuntide 1912, there was dancing again, at the Shoulder of Mutton, but the peak of the dancing year was reached at Bradwell Wakes in July, when the Band or a small “quadrille” ensemble of band members played for dancing almost every day, each time at a different public house!

Fund-raising for hospitals, in this pre-NHS era, was also a major focus of voluntary playing. In 1912, Bradwell, Hope, Bamford, and Edale villages held hospital demonstrations, and the following year the Band played in processions for Hospital Sundays in Bradwell, Castleton and Bamford. The last was followed by tea at Derwent Hall, now submerged, which they had visited the previous year- see below.

Paid engagements were very varied, ranging from the Peak Forest Band of Hope (£1 10s), Litton scholars' procession (£2) and Bradwell Flower Show (10 shillings). A regular client was the Oddfellows' Friendly Society (Manchester Unity). Centenary celebrations were held at Castleton in September 1910 (£2), and later Oddfellows engagements included Great Hucklow Club Feast on August 29th in 1911. This was a ‘good do’, with dinner, tea and refreshments.

Strangely enough, another Oddfellows club feast on August 25th at the same venue is recorded lower down on the same page. Did the copious refreshments affect the accuracy of our Hon. Sec.? Or did the Oddfellows live up to their name, enjoying the first feast so much that they had another 4 days later? Next year, it was back to normal with just the one feast, with the comment, “very good treatment as usual”.

The hospitality at Hope Sheep Dog Trials, on the other hand, wasn't up to much, though the engagement was well paid at £4 10s. In 1911 the book notes “no refreshments or bandstand”. Next year there was some improvement- “a few refreshments, (rather better than usual.)” In 1913, for the same fee, no refreshments are mentioned, but at least it was an “easy day, very little playing to do.”

A triumphant day at Derwent Hall.

Bradwell Band was one of the bands hired for the festivities at Derwent Hall on June 22nd 1911, which marked the Coronation of King George 5th and Queen Mary. The fee was a substantial £10, and “refreshments, viz. dinner, tea, beer and mineral waters” were provided. JLA obviously considered this event to be very important and described it in detail, recording the name and composer of every piece of music played.

The Band marched out of Bradwell to the strains of the quick march “Loyal Hearts” and (presumably) once out of sight were discreetly transported to Bamford, marching through that village to the same music and pausing to play a lively schottische called “Pleasant Pastime”. The stately progress continued into Ashopton accompanied by “The Flag that Braved a Thousand Years”, and at the Ashopton Inn a polka “Brilliante” was played which must have pleased, as a donation was collected. The Band completed the journey by marching into Derwent, but was not too exhausted to then perform the Coronation Selection of 27 items: marches, waltzes, galops, polkas, lancers and quadrilles, finishing with the Bradwell Waltz and of course the National Anthem, arranged by Horace Middleton.

They must have been men of steel, and deserved every bite and sup!

The band in 1914

As the clouds gathered over Europe during 1914, the Band played on, and the villagers went on dancing. On March 14th 1914, the Band marched from headquarters to the Bridge (Inn?) for dancing, and from the Bridge to the Bowling Green Inn for more of the same. That evening at the Church School, there was a draw, prizes were presented and the money raised went to the new instruments and repairs fund.

The same year in April, there was a benefit ball at Birchinlee Recreation Hall in aid of one David Kennedy, who had broken his leg playing football. Supper and refreshments were classed as “very good” (JLA was very particular in rating the food) and a “Special Mail” was provided. This term was used again about an engagement at the same place on 23rd May, when the Hope Valley League medals and cup were presented. Could it be a form of specially chartered transport?

On July 25th, the Band was back in Birchinlee sports field to provide music in the afternoon and evening, when dancing went on from 8pm to midnight. This time, the transport is specified - by Hall’s motor each way- just as well, as it was very rough wet day. On this occasion the Band was paid £2.10s and got an extra £1 2s 6d from a collection in the hall, with tea and refreshments thrown in. No wonder the conclusion was “a very good outing!”

RUNNING THE BAND

According to the engagement list, there were up to 14 members of the Band who attended major events, less than the number of instruments available for them to play. A smaller ensemble or quadrille group played for dances. Nowhere is a full list of members given, though a few new recruits are named.

An unspecified number of boys were taken on as learners.

The minutes and accounts show us how the Band was organised and financed. For example, at the 1907 AGM Mr Thos. Bradbury was elected bandmaster, the President was the local MP Captain Oswald Partington Esq., and Vice Presidents were Rev. George Bird, MA, Dr G. Lander, and Dr. Nadin, Mr Morton, Mr Fiske, Mr Johnstone and Mr Craig. One of the two auditors appointed had the wonderful name, reminiscent of the clients of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, of Mr Brickwood Priske!

The book goes on to list 12 rules. Prudent Rule 3 states that in the event of the secretary or treasurer resigning his position, the books shall be audited before the resignation is accepted. Rule 9 prohibits obscene language or intoxication during practice or engagements and threatens consequences "as the committee thinks fit" to offenders. Fines were imposed if anyone was late or absent. The poor drummer came in for a lot of odd jobs- rule 5 required him to act as book steward, and to paste the music.

In 1907 a uniform committee was formed and Mr Shirt, of that famous family who clothed generations of villagers, came to refit the bandsmen on March 7th. After the war, in 1922, the uniform fund in the Yorkshire Penny Bank stood at £6 18s 7d.

The balance sheet for 1909 shows that the Band had an income of £7 12s 2d with a healthy balance in hand of £4 13s 2 1/2d. The major sources of income were fees and collections at engagements, donations from 'friends' and donations from members. Selling the old bass drum yielded 2s 6d!

Items of expenditure for the same year add up to a fascinating period piece. The book itself cost a shilling, with pens and ink at 3d. Bandroom rent was the major expense at 13 shillings per quarter, and firewood coal and lamp oil was purchased. Even taking into account the difference in prices, the amount spent on fuel seems very little to ensure warm flexible fingers for the whole of a Peak District winter, and one hopes they also received donations of logs! Someone was careless with the oil lamp and it needed a new glass at 6d. Repairs to instruments, new lyres (music clips) and music bought by mail order brought the total expenditure to £2 18s 11 1/2d.

By 1912, the bandroom rent had risen to £3 5s a year but some of this was recouped by subletting part of the room to a Mr. J. Fletcher for an unspecified use. Wood and lamp oil had been replaced by gas, though the coal fire was still used. Music was still an expensive item. Concern for fellow bandsmen was shown by the present of £1 to a member ill for 6 months.

A list for this year shows the "full score of instruments" to be 20: horns, cornets, trombones, euphoniums, bombardons and 2 drums. I remember my grandfather playing the bombardon –a huge bass tuba- in a very small living room one Christmas!

In 1913, the bandroom was in the Butts and was treated to a new sweeping brush. Mr Evans the bandmaster took an expenses- paid trip to Freeton Colliery, and a new tenor trombone mouthpiece and lyre were bought from the famous instrument makers, Mahillons in London, for £6 5s. Later that year, the Band was once more on the move, to the Shoulder of Mutton Hotel, Church St., where the Band supper was held on December 27th –"a splendid supper and a very enjoyable evening".

The 1914 accounts refer to the Band as Bradwell Old Brass Band. A major fundraising event this year was a raffle, with numerous prizes donated by band members and the community. The most successful ticket seller received an incentive of 6 shillings. All the

prizes, donors and winners were recorded and the quality of the prizes seems high. There was a silver breakfast cruet from Tennants Bros. in Sheffield, a silver-mounted briar pipe from the doctor, and another from Eyres the mill-owners, a silver-mounted walking stick, and bottles of port, whisky and wine from licensees. Other shopkeepers donated appropriately- ladies' stockings from outfitter Mr B.S. Shirt, and a box of chocolates from Poyntons.

More down to earth, though doubtless equally welcome, were donated prizes of couples (not pairs) of rabbits, a 4lb pork pie from the only female donor Mrs Ralph Walker (mouth-watering - did she make it herself?), tea, groceries, ox-tongues, a roast of beef. And 2 packs of playing cards from my grandfather Mr C.B. Ashton, aged 21.

The postwar band.

I do not know how many Band members fought in the war or were lost- only that my grandfather Charles Bradwell Ashton and his brother our Hon. Sec Jonathan Leslie Ashton came back, somewhat battered but with their life-long love of music intact. New members were recruited in 1919 (E. Dungworth), 1920 (H. Gregory and B. Andrew: tenor horns, A. Bradwell: baritone horn) and 1921 (Colin Fletcher: cornet). The general meeting in 1919 voted money for repairs to instruments and set contributions at 3d a week for members and 2d for boys, learning. New members paid an entrance fee of 2s.

Entries following 1918 are bitty, often in the form of pencilled notes. Slips of paper were found between the pages, bearing financial details not entered in the book. One such refers to the new instrument fund 1914-21, and 2 new cornets (Boosey) being bought from Cocking and Pace, Sheffield, for £1 10s. It cost the Hon Sec 5s to travel to Sheffield to collect them, on Dec 4th 1920. An attempt to create a balance sheet for the war period from Aug 4th 1914 was made in 1919, but with no figures filled in.

The last two entries describe fundraising during Wakes week in 1921, when collections were taken at the New Bath Hotel, The Bowling Green and the Newburgh Arms. Expenditure in 1922 included items for transport by "Sunderland's motor". Two journeys, costing £1: 1s, were made to bring in 3 cornet players from Hathersage to participate in the Hospital Sunday procession. Maybe this suggests that the Band was below strength at this time? The last entry, on July 24th mentions purchase of 2 dozen envelopes and sheets of foolscap paper, and postage for the dispatch of a circular letter to the Band about re-organisation. Whatever came of this, the time of JLA as secretary may have soon come to an end, as only empty pages remain in the book.

POSTSCRIPT: THE MANNERS OF A BYGONE AGE.

Two items of ephemera were found in the book.

The first is a battered postcard, postmarked 27th March 1913, addressed to my grandfather: Mr CB Ashton, Brass Band, Bradwell, Derbyshire. And it arrived! The picture shows Ellerby Cox, Bandmaster of the Lincoln Malleable Ironworks Prize Silver Band, resplendent in full uniform. The message on the reverse, written by the great man himself in purple ink in a tiny hand, reads:

Dear Sir, When you arrive at Lincoln on Saturday, go to "The Royal Oak Hotel" 2 minutes walk from the Station , I will come to you there. The landlord is on our committee so will see you alright. We have a 1st class Besson instrument for you. I hope you will suit us. I may say we will be rehearsing Emilia, Bohemian Girl and probably William Tell from

*Champion Journal so you can have a look at them. With kind regards and hoping to see you Saturday. I remain yours, E. Cox, BM. 2 Sidney Terrace, Lincoln.
Send word what train you are coming by.*

I have little idea what this was about- why was Granddad, who would have been 20 years old at the time, going to play in a Lincoln band? 1913 was the last pre-war year that the National Brass Band Championships were held at the Crystal Palace, and there is a family story that Granddad once played there- was it with this Lincoln prize ensemble? We have no information on whether he suited them or not!

The other is a letter in a tiny envelope, addressed to Mr L Ashton, Sec. Bradwell Brass Band, Bradwell, Derbyshire, and dated Sept 30th 1922. It is the latest dated item in the book.

It reads: *The Hill, Hathersage.*

Dear Sir, Thanks very much for your invitation to the band meeting. I am very sorry I cannot be present as I have an engagement on at a dance at Hathersage, but I can assure you of my heartiest support and good wishes, and also promise to do all in my power to assist you in whatever way you may think I may be of service to you. Wishing the band every success. I remain yours sincerely, H. Frost.

H. Frost may have been one of the three Hathersage cornet players who JLA hoped to bring to Bradwell to supplement the Band on Hospital Sunday- see above.

The trouble people went to in those days, to make a simple excuse!