The poetry of brass bands

Over the years several brass bands have been immortalised in poetry. From those lauding their heroes to the ones which are critical or even insulting. From the earliest days poets have found something in the music of the bands and the people who play in them to inspire their muse. I think it is fair to say that most of the writers would not have made a career out of their works - some are certainly more William McGonagall than William Wordsworth – but nonetheless they are priceless views of the bands and bandsmen. Some examples of odes to the bands of the past are provided here for your enjoyment.

Gavin Holman
28 September 2017 (National Poetry Day) - updated June 2019

A brass band on contest platform, early 1900s
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RISHWORTH AND RYBURN VALLEY BRASS BAND

Sam Mellor, Ripponden - An example of praise celebrating their contest win in 1906

Winning the "Daily Graphic" Challenge Cup and other Prizes, at the Crystal Palace, Saturday, Sept. 29th, 1906

Up to the great, big Hall of glass,
That stands o'er the hills of Kent;
Beyond the roar of the city
Well, the Ryburn bandsmen went.

They left their homes in the village,
Two hundred miles of a ride,
To try for a cup, worth winning,
With a touch of fame beside.

They play'd, and they play'd superbly,
They play'd, and they play'd their best,
To try to carry the trophy
From the hands of all the rest.

At night, they wired the village,
"Tell, the Ryburn Band has won,"
And the lads they all felt bigger,
And the men all said "well done."

Returning, a stranger met them,
His voice, just over the din,
"These are not men, but lads!" said he,
But they're men enough to win.

CAMELON BRASS BAND

In the Falkirk Mail of 16th November 1907 a poem appeared entitled “Auld Camelon Band“, of which the first verse is:

There’s Auld Camelon Band they’re aye tae the fore;
They started wi’ flutes in the year ‘34,
If you had only heard them their music you’d adore,
For always their number was less than a score,
Their auld flutes ha’e been turned into brass
Three cheers tae the friends that gave them the cash,
For we’ve all joined together to gi’e them a hand,
and try and make good members tae the auld Camelon Band
SLAIDBURN BAND

The band’s tour of the outlying farms and hamlets above the village around Christmas 1903 is documented in the poem “Success To The Slaidburn Band”, by Ellen Cowking. It tells in 34 verses which places were visited and the names of the residents.

FRECKLETON BAND

Kate Hall lived in Freckleton at the turn of the 20th century and wrote poems on a wide range of topics. After her death, a book of her poems was unearthed which included several about the Freckleton Brass Band. The first few verses of her poem “The Cup Winners” is shown here. For the rest of the poem, and others about the band, see: Kate Hall’s Freckleton Band poetry at https://freckletonband.co.uk/the-early-twentieth-century-poems-of-kate-hall/

Here’s Good Luck to Freckleton Band
Who won the cup again;
And took some extra prizes
All honour to their name.

For they well assume their laurels
And the prizes they have won;
What other band in the Fylde can boast
Of the great things they have done.

What though some other band may sneer
And jealously snide;
They must not fear, for still they stand
The Champions of the Fylde.

They win by their own efforts
No subterfuge have they
No violating contest rules
But good straightforward play.

ROTHWELL TEMPERANCE BAND

Under the heading ‘The Temperance Band’ in the Rothwell Times of May 5th, 1882, a poem of nine verses was printed, of which the following are two examples:

Last Christmas as you all well know,
We had the one Brass Band,
Now you see we have got two,
And one ’tis said won’t stand

They say that water cannot
Blow a note so clear
But that is false!
I know a man
That’s proved it many a year
THOSE CORNETS!

(Dedicated to Barrow upon Humber Brass Band - 1897)

The basses, soft and mellow, never shrill,
With proper modulations, swell and fall,
And seldom ape the creaking of a mill,
Or the Tommy-cat's nocturnal cateraul.

But the cornet player blows
A very different sort of tone -
Discord every bit his own -
Could you listen and restrain
Language warm, or feel no pain,
Well - you're constitution's made of sterner stuff than I suppose.

Those cornets, O those cornets, how they scream
As seagulls on the startled air of night;
I hear them now, I hear them when I dream,
And I wish they were in Hull out of my sight,

O cruel cornet-blower,
Blow sweeter, gentler, lower,
Or away with your false harmony;
'Tis like that "made in Jarmany"
I'd heard so oft before.
If you really can't play better,
And I must die thus, I'll get a
German band to kill me, though it cost a copper more.
HARRGOTE BAND SONG

Cumberland Clark - 1926

Did you ever hear the Harrogate Band?
Although it's so awful they think it grand,
You can hear it as the day is dawning,
When you take your waters in the morning.

There once was a man, I understand,
Who said that he liked the Harrogate Band;
I thought him the strangest man on earth,
'Till I found out that he'd been deaf from birth.

The instruments all creak and wheeze,
They wander off into various keys,
It may suit some, but it's not my taste,
For it gives me pains below the waist.

Did you ever hear that awful Band?
There's nothing like it in all the land,
Its' strains of music are so sad,
It makes all good people feel quite bad.

Did you ever hear that curious band?
The Band and the Cure go hand in hand,
As the music is not at all too pure,
No wonder the visitors need a cure.

They played last night for a good half-hour,
'Till I turned pale, and the milk turned sour,
The lights burned dim and the air went blue,
Then the gas went out, and the cat went too.

And when they're marching through the town,
The noise that they make really wears you down,
The dogs join in, with all just cause,
And citizens wane behind locked doors.

To stand that Band you need great nerve,
If the members got what they deserve,
They'd be taken out to a quiet spot,
Where the visitors could shoot the lot.

This was set to music by Donald Avison, and recorded by the Harrogate Band on their CD “Made in Harrogate”, with soprano vocalist Laura Jackson, as part of the “Harrogate Songbook”
WHAT A DAY
Ecclesfield Silver Band – New Brighton Contest 1971

We left Stocks Hill abaht heaf past seven
In a coach at least ninety foot long
Mooast’at Band were haef asleep
An back wheel didn’t sound very strong

However we landed at Ormskirk all reight
And everyone seemed quite keen
First chap we saw w’er Jimmy Gee
An’ he said, “Whee’rs yaw monkeys been?”

We piled aht a coach an’ into Guides Hut
An quickly fixed up for a blow
In’t meantime our ladies wer starting t o mash
And soo’in’ ad meat pies on’t go

Off once again and through t’Mersey Tunne1
At yon’ end we should a turned right
But coming from t’ village we turned left a’ course
And nearly reached. Isle O’ Wight

New Brighton at last so we piled in for t’draw
An theer all us troubles begun
Desmond came running an’ shouted out loud
“LOOK sharp lads we’ve drawn number wun”

“Oh god” we all cried “We’ve done it ageean”
An fished ‘aht us copies at’ Queen
Then marched on’t stage all knocking at knees
Wi some of our faces quite green

After eight weeks a practice this wer it
As we waited for t’ whistle to blow
Every man Jack in that band of ours
Determined to give a good show

Often in’t past when folks heeard us play
They’d run far away from t’ bandstand
Nah’ we played well an even so
Poor Alex reached Switzerland

He must ‘a stopped thear while t’rest on ‘em played
Although we didn’t play werst
Not having heard the other bands play
He wer forced to put Ecclesfield first!

But whether or not this wer case
First prize wer still quite a big un
An no doubt we’ll all go contesting again
It might be next week at Wigan!
CARNWATH BRASS BAND

Carnwarth Brass Band, Carnwath Brass Band
I never saw a band like Carnwath Brass Band;
Frae Orkney to Gretna, seek thro' all the land,
Au' ye'll no fin' a band like Carnwath Brass Band.

Carnwath Brass Band, a' are strapping young men,
Some are six feet six, some are five feet ten;
Little Johnie is the crate, and Jamie wants a band,
Yet, ye'll never fin' a band like Carnwath Brass Band;

When our band gaed to Biggar, a' the lasses were surprised
To see a band o' men o' such wondrous size
In uniform so fine, and in stature so grand,
O, they never saw a Band like Carnwath Brass Band!

Their music loud and strong, re-echoed to the skies,
The very hares and foxes were filled wi' surprise;
Some little hills might dance, but auld Tintoc made a stand,
Astonished with the strains o' Carnwath Brass Band!

At Biggar and Carluke, they behaved unco weel,
Did their duty and cam' hame, without servin' the diel,
And when they were at Linton, astonished a' the land,
Wi the nimble footed powers o' Carnwath Brass Band.

But O! the last St John's day, they got an unco fa',
Altho' it was winter, it was neither frost nor snaw,
Yet they got their sells so drunk, that some could scarcely stand,
And wasna that a shame to Carnwath Brass Band.

The laddie wi' the red cap, that thumps the muckle drum,
Was so very fat, he could hardly gar't play dum;
And Johnie roared the 'Ewie' when be wasna fit to stand,
And wasna that a shame to Carnwath Brass Band.

Our Jock's, seen often ill, but never was seen worse,
Be was so doiled and swabble that he couldna clean his horse;
But lay as he'd been shot at Sebastopol so grand,
And wasna that a shame to Carnwath Brass Band.

Lazy, lien, genty Tim, got himself so clatty fou;
He was carried third the way, like a newly stickey cow,
In the smiddy lay in state, like a Satan's firebrand,
And wasna that a shame to Carnwath Brass Band.

Young men o' the band, tak ye my advice,
Beware o' whisky drinkin' if ye wad be wise;
Carry on as ye've begun, and a bairn may understand
Ye'll no very lang be Carnwath Brass Band.
Hurrah! Hurrah! It's come at last,
I really do declare;
Ye'll see them marching doon the street,
Playing the Scottish airs.
The auld folk prance, the young ane's dance,
And at each ither speer-
Oh, tell me where the band comes frae?
We'll, it comes frae Dunnikier - Aye.

It's the Dunnikier Brass Band,
It's the Dunnikier Brass Band,
As they go marching doon the street,
They're sae tidy, trim, and neat – and
That's the Dunnikier Brass Band

Come on noo boys, jist rally roond,
And aye support, yer baund;
It'll no' be very long before
It's heard on contest staund.
You've got the best men roond about,
Of that there is nae doot.
And when your baund begins to play
You'll hear the people shout – that

It's the Dunnikier Brass Band,
It's the Dunnikier Brass Band,
When you hear the public say
That's the best we heard today,
You'll feel proud o' the Dunnikier Brass Band

Enthusiastic men you've got
Tae take ye by the haund;
Stand by them - they'll staund by you
And then you'll understaund;
That when ye “pool” thegither, weel,
The battle is half won.
And when ye lift the prizes – then
The public say "Well done!"

That's the Dunnikier Brass Band,
That’s the Dunnikier Brass Band,
When you hear the the miners cry -
“Good for Reid and C Mackay!”
They've revived the Dunnikier Brass Band
THE CONTEST - A TRIBUTE TO THORNLEY BAND

They sit around in horse-shoe style
Instruments ready all the while
They watch the man in uniformed hat
With baton raised, no silly chat.
The work's all done, rehearsal gone,
It's now that they have practised for.
The bandmaster keenly scans the score,
Down comes the baton they've been waiting for.
They play their hearts out
Because they know the other bands are formidable foes.
“Beethoven’s works” - the test piece played,
Opening butterflies soon allayed.
Unison, then a great solo
A cadenza, to make the performance grow.
Loud applause at the end
Greets them wildly like 'Amen'
Of course, they won
With points in hand
No others could touch the Thornley
Our silver prize band!
THE BLANCHARDSTOWN SOUND

by Tommy Bracken, 1971

They blow and they pound  
The Blanchardstown sound  
The beat is something grand,  
And for many a year  
There's always been a cheer  
For the sound of the Blanchardstown Band

The Merseyside beat  
Would bow in defeat  
Joe Loss would be struck to the ground  
The Garda Band at the races  
Would have awe struck their faces  
If they heard the Blanchardstown sound

The bands of the Army  
Would in envy turn “barmy”  
Or even retreat underground,  
No need in denying  
And no use in trying  
To compare with the Blanchardstown sound

All of the bands  
O'er the world ever played  
There's still yet one to be found,  
Like our village brass band  
The pride of our land  
Long live the Blanchardstown sound
O come all ye fine Norfolk Dumplings and Joeys who live in this city,  
And I'll try just to tickle your fancy by reciting my sorrowful ditty.  
On Monday the place was alive, and folks to the Market did stray.  
And what did they go there to see, that wonderful thing a fine day.  
High and low, great and small were assembled, and round at each other did stare,  
To see the sun shining so bright, and wonder'd how'e'er it got there.  
Fine weather this summer is scarce and rain comes almost every day.  
So when there's a chance of sunshine, they on with their duds and away.

“To-wit to-wo” says the Owl, I'll scheme a fine sight, yet be thrifty;  
For by laying out forty-five pounds, I can manage to double my fifty.  
So a contest of brass was soon plan'd to take place on the new Cricket ground,  
And the Norwicher's glad of a change, rushed off at the very first sound.  
The schoolmaster shut up his school and sent all his boys out to play,  
But he took care to have them all come, till he pocketed all the week's pay.  
Tom French Horn has given up his shaving and intends just to live at his case,  
Because when his shop was kept open he couldn't go to such jolly sprees.

There's Dogdard who says he's a printer, who is not to be done by a trifle,  
March'd up to the ground in his plumes, but he had not to borrow a rifle.  
There was a Cockey, who wears a moustache to make him look fierce like a man,  
Was seen smoking his pipe on the ground and eying an half-gallon can.  
In the Market the bands met together, the Ipswich in light grey and red,  
The blue Cambridge chaps were all stunners; the Railway band with their head  
The Peterboroughs were no duffers. The Norwich band with their grey sacks on,  
They all of them played very well, but they had no chance with Blind Jackson.

His chaps blew so well, I heard say they did not lose a puff of their wind,  
And for fear that the wind should fiz out, they were well stuffed with cotton behind.  
Well the cup and the cornet they won, and everyone thought it quite fair,  
'Xept the band which had got a thick head, and, oh! lor, how those railway chaps swear.  
They made sure o' winning, you see, of self-conceit they have a full share,  
If they could not afford to lose, what business had they to come here.  
They said the judges were partial, I am sure I don't know if they were;  
But if they'd asked Jenny Marshall, she'd suited 'em all to a hair.

Well the day was a fine treat be sure, with such squeezing and treading on corns,  
While the girls were all highly delighted to see how they handled their horns.  
George Coe made a smell and smoke with fireworks just after dark,  
And this was the point of the joke, that each maiden might pick up a spark,  
And go billing and cooing along, and what else I'm too modest to say,  
But make yourself scarce Master James, or you'll soon have the Beadle to pay.  
There's gentleman Awl he says nothing, the Alderman's forced to fight shy,  
But Rifleman Awl, with his ramrod was seen aiming at a Bull's eye.
Then success to the old Owlets’ nest, where the shiners are laid up in store,
May he ne’er turn his noughts into nines, then the money will faster in pour!
Then success to each kind-hearted maiden, may none of them turn out forlorn,
Who taught our brave Rifleman how they can blow the short notes on their horn!
Success to each musical hero, who musical honour still seeks,
May he ne’er prove the truth of the poet, and “Blow wind and so crack his cheeks”!
Then success to friend Jackson, tho’ blind, that misfortune we all of us pity,
May he long keep thus sound in this wind, for the honour of old Norwich city.
THE BRASS BAND CONTEST - THE NORWICHER'S GRAND SPREE

20th August 1860

You may say what you like, but I think you must own,
Of all the grand sprees there ever was known,
There never was one it must be confest,
That ever exceeded the Brass Band Contest.

Why the thoughts on't alone turned the Norwicher's mad,
Though many a wild goose chase they have had;
By hundreds they thronged, at home they couldn't rest,
Their heads were so full of the Brass Band Contest.

For most of them expected as they very well might,
They should certainly have seen a most splendid sight,
For Bills were put out and by them express't,
The grand doings there'd be at this famous Contest.

The Bands were invited from all parts of the nation,
To come down to Norwich on this grand occasion,
On purpose to try each other for to best,
For a Fifteen Pound Prize at the Brass Band Contest.

And the Twentieth of August, it being the day,
That these Sons of Apollo their skill should display;
On the New Cricket Ground like talented boys,
And try who was able to make the most noise.

One o'clock being the time that the Band were to meet,
From every hole and cornet, lane, alley and street,
Away ran the Norwicher's just as though they were crazy,
Both the old and the young, the lame and the lazy.

And not only Norwicher's, but also their country cousins,
That the cheap trains had brought to the City by dozens,
Till the Market place was so crowded with women and men
But a more disappointed party there never was seen.

Why some of them got into a terrible passion,
They thought to have seen a most splendid procession,
But instead of the Bands starting off all together,
Some of them went one way and some went another.

When they got to the ground a rare fist on't they made,
Some blew till their eyes were fit to start from their head;
Some blew their lips down till they couldn't make a sound,
Their minds were so fix't on the sweet fifteen pound.
And one Cornet blower amongst the poor wretches,
Blew so hard that he actually dirtied his breeches;
So anxious was he the Silver Cornet to gain,
But he found to his cost all his blowing was in vain.

For 'twas very well known before the Contest begun,
Billy Jaxon was the chap that was fix't upon;
The Silver Cornet to win, his lungs being the strongest,
He was able to blow both the loudest and strongest.

As for the Norwich Cornet Blowers, each conceited fellow,
Found young Billy Jaxon can beat them quite hollow;
They may bounce and may swagger, and blow all they like,
They've no more chance with Jaxon than poor old Bob Dike.

But the worst job of all I really do think,
Is the extortionate charge that was made for the drink;
For when in the Booth for truth I am told,
At a shilling a bottle Mild Porter was sold.

And after the Contest came the grand Rural Sport,
Such as Bow and Arrow shooting, and things of that sort;
Hurdle jumping, Rope Dancing, which must be confess'd,
Was the best part of the Spree at this Brass Band Contest.

And to finish the Sports and wind up the day,
Of Fireworks there was a most Brilliant Display;
Get up by George Coe, in both Red, Blue and Green,
Such Fireworks before there never was seen.

When the sports were all ended and ten o'clock come,
They thought it was time to return to their home,
And retire into bed, but they could take no rest,
They were dreaming all night of the Brass Band Contest.
At the Vickey Gardens, Great Yarmouth, 21st August 1861

At the Vickey Gardens a short time ago,
A Band Contest took place of which you all know,
And great numbers of people thither did stray,
To hear the sweet music that each Band did play.

The grounds were well filled with Apollo's selection,
And eagerly waiting in every direction,
The battle of musical talent to hear,
Which after turned out decidedly queer.

Bill Ullay was first on the stage with his Band,
Which certainly made a ..............
......the beer was on board,
And the spectators said that he was sure to be floored.

Then came the Sawston of Cambridgeshire fame,
Who dashed to contest like true Britons game,
But were doomed by the judges to take the last place,
Although they deserved to be fourth in the race.

Next came the Militia Artillery to test,
Who played very well and no doubt did it their best,
We were told e'en we came they could lick the Life Guards,
That no other Band dare to approach them by yards.

There was Kegnick a dancing about like a showman,
And for a man in his place it looked very uncommon,
But like all other Germans he's full of trickery,
And being placed third made him look very shickery.

The came Jackson's Band who appeared on the stage,
And performed Handel's works which stands first on the page,
With precision and taste the Hallelujah was played,
When finished the Band were loudly hurrah'd.

Next was the Cambridge in their Jackets of Blue,
Who intended that day to die or to do,
The Lessee was Cambridge, the Judges likewise,
So there is no wonder they got the first prize.

Now my dear readers comes on the best fun,
From the Vickey Bar out flew the great gun,
With a magnificent cup of inferior tin,
For the best cornet player who had talent to win.
Says Vickey to Kegnick, “Up and do Battle,”
And for the Rich Goblet give a good rattle,
For winning my boy is out of question with you,
You know I have told you it “should be a due”.

All at once Vickey shouts “it is a walk over,”
“Oh! no,” says T. Cosgrove, not so my brave rover,
Jackson's brave band for your Tin P....... 
And if fairly judged ....... they can win.

Then Vic in a rage, cried aloud for the Bobbies!
And soon he intended to push Tom through the lobbies,
But Cos. who was leary, to the people appealed,
And Vickey's Secret he to them revealed.

Poor Vickey was done, and cleverly foiled,
He sneaked into the bar alarmingly roiled,
He looked like a ghost so white in the face,
No doubt for the future he'll keep his own place.

There's his friend Correspondence! a regular duffer,
And “Foul Play” his pal, is a shiney old buffer;
But Cosgrove's a match for all the false crew,
If they meddle with him, they will soon cry a go.
Two poems on the subject of Bramley Band

**T' BRAMLA BAND**

Who hasn't heerd o't Bramla Band
That's famous far an' near?
An wins sich honor for aar taan,
Wi' ivvery cummin year.
At Gala, Feast, an' flaar strew,
At Chris'mas, an' May-Day,
At contests tew, aar Band is suar
To carry t'prize away.

Wi' bran new clothes an instruments,
All shining bright an' clear.
An' lads an' lasses craadin' raand.
The big drum int' rear.
The men all marching breast to breast -
Wi' martial stride an' pomp -
Who can withstand thur stirrin' strains.
As daan't taan they tromp!

Naah wether t'Band chaps played too mich
(For trumpets didn't rust)
I cannot say, but suar enif
They blew em till they bust.
T'poor chaps wor almost fit to roar.
For all thur brass wor spent.
But t' Taan clubbed up an bout each man
A bran' new instrument.

Sum wor silver, an' sum wor brass.
An' nicely curled i't' middle.
An' sum they went - Trom! Trom! Born! Born!
An' sum did now't but twiddle.
An' sum hed keys, an' hoils an' lids.
An' won, a queer consarn
Wor two yards long, or theer abaat.
An' slotted up an' daan.
But when they played 'em all at wunce
An' mixed 'em weel together
An' when the chap unpon T'big drum
Thum! 'Mum! began ta leather
T'effect wor rayther startlin'
And a Captain from the Wars
Enlisted 'em as soudgers,
In the "Prince of Wales Huzzars".

Nay, sum hed nivver ridden a hoss
Except at Bramla Tide
An them wor'on't willy-gigs.
They'ed a haup'n'ny ride:
So when thur Regimentals com'
An' they began ta don,
They cuddn't tell what t'spurs wor for
Unless ta hod 'em on.

They thowt if they wor fastened right
Ta t'horse they'd somehow stick,
An' then they cuddn't be thrawn off,
If it began to kick.
So off they went full trot ta York.
Though nearly tosst ta jelly -
They stuck ta t'pummils, an' kep'thir spurs
Weel under t'horse's belly.

An' when they gat ta t'city walls
They pooll’d up in a raw.
An" 'See the conquering hero comes"
They all began ta blaw.
An' varry weel they played it tew
When t'horses did't prance.
But when they heerd a lively bit
They seemed abaat ta dance.

At last that chap wi't'slotting thing
Wi' cheeks puff'd fit ta crack
He thrust it aat sa varry far
He cuddn't pull it back.
An' t'horse bein' rayther freeten'd tew
An' feelin' summ'at prickin'
It started off a raumin' up
An' then began a kickin'.
First t'instrument flew onto t'graand
An jingled fit-ta-breck.
Then we wor fochtched all on a lump
Reight on ta t'horses neck.
But t'warst of all, a spur cam off
At t'chap being' aat a plumb
T'horse sent him flying like a shot
Heeard first into t'big drum.

They pooll'd him aat bi his coit-tail
An' sum began to chaff.
But t'chap wor suar,
He'd ne'er been thrawn
If t'spur hed nut cum off
So, reader, nivver use a thing
Ye dunnett understand
An' if yer tempted so to dew
Remember t'Bramla' Band.
The lilting tunes of Bramley Band
No longer fill the air
Their fame was here for all to see
And known both far and near
Their exploits and their exhibits
Were always in demand
They traversed far, and countrywide
To corners of the land.
The many tales that they could tell
If they were only here
But, oh, alas, their unsung songs
We now will never hear.
'Poet and Peasant' 'Hail smiling Morn'
Are just to name but two
Of many favourite pieces played
These talented men could do.
As we think back of days gone by
Of this our Bramley Band
Our minds will conjure up for us
A Spectacle, oh so grand
At Whitsuntide and Carnivals
On Sunday afternoons
With every grand occasion
We see these men anew
Who blew their horns, banged their drums
Their cymbals rang to greet
These men most famed in uniforms
With happy marching feet.
And so we now this tribute pay
As after five decades
To the memory of the Bramley Band
And hope it never fades.
But then who knows what we may see
Some day in the near future
Another Bramley Band may start
And fill us full of rapture

Mabel Birley
Hail to St Andrew’s Junior Band!
Which side by older players takes a stand;
’Tis wonderful that boys so young as these
Should play so well, as e’en to critics please.

Diligence and good tuition tell
The reason why they succeed so well;
For each lad tries to do what he is told –
The Band thus helps the character to mold.

’Twas in November, nineteen-fourteen,
In West Hull, that its humble birth was seen,
But, like the acorn by the wayside sown,
It now has to a healthy sapling grown.

Large sums for charities their help has raised,
For which they have been well and duly praised;
The widows and the orphans’ hearts are full
Of thanks towards these little boys of Hull.

No sect or section has the slightest claim,
Except the good of mankind be the aim –
For each and all the Band has freely played;
No charge, except expenses, has been made.

If of assistance you should be of need,
At times when you’re engaged in noble deed,
And helpfully you find the band could use;
Invite them. They’re not likely to refuse.
THE BANDSMAN’S PRAYER

Written by Nigel McCulloch, Bishop of Wakefield, for Songs of Praise, BBC TV, June 1996

Heavenly Father, we thank you for instruments of brass and silver and for the lungs and lips that blow them.

Bless all who play in our bands and the communities they represent - especially the former mill and mining communities of these areas.

May their music inspire us to live in deep harmony with one another - and in rhythm with the abiding presence of Christ.

AMEN.

THE MOSSLEY BAND

Aw know aw havna bin i’ th world as lung
As th’ owder foaks,
But aw’ve travelled fare to middlin un
Awve met mi share o' sorts.
Theers sum chaps good tin sum chaps mean
Un sum aw conna stand,
But awve never met a grandelier set
As th’ lads i’ th’ Mossley Band.

Thi might’nt be o angels theer, nay that
Aw wudna say,
But thi wouldna du thi deauwn like sum
Un send thi on thi way.
Theers allus a cheery "Ow art lad" un a
Friendly shake ut th' and,
Yu'll travel far afoor yu meets
Lads like i' th' Mossley Band.

Yu con keep yur lot o' fancy foaks
Them as thinks thi are su fine,
Gi me a chap as is a friend
He'll do me ony time.
Fer he's u' th' sort who'll stond by thee
When things aren't allus grand,
Un he's the sort o' lad yu'll meet
If yu plays in' th' Mossley Band.
BAND NIGHT

by Walter Hard

“It was band concert night.
Around the village green there were cars
Parked in double line.
In the center of the green, under bright lights,

The band, the pride of the village, sat.
Strings of colored lights stretched from the stand
To the trees at the three corners.
On the far side the Ladies’ Aid served ice cream

And Cy Henderson dispensed pop-corn.
In and out among the crowd small boys
Chased each other, yelling as they ran.
When the band finished a piece

There was a long applauding blast
From the automobile horns.
The small boys were silenced for a moment ... .”
THE BRASS BAND CONTEST

W.A Barrett – Bacup, March 21st, 1877

[Published in Huddersfield College Magazine, No. 8, Vol. 5, May 1878, pp.201-204]

Come, listen to me, and a story I'll sing
About a Band Contest which took place last spring,
And the fun and the frolic the adventure did bring,
A twelvemonth ago now come Easter.
The folks in the neighbouring town sent a bill,
With a note, "If your band wish to play, then please fill
Up the spaces in blank, just to say what you will
Concerning this contest at Cleaster."

Now Cleaster's a city some ten miles away,
A junction for Durham, Leeds, Bridlington Bay,
Through which some four hundred trains pass ev'ry day,
Of all sorts - goods, cattle, expresses.
They cultivate music of every kind,
They sing and play pieces, both coarse and refined;
In short, they're a people in no way behind
The age, as perhaps each now guesses.

Ev'ry year they give prizes of various sums,
Silver cups, plated cornets, gilt batons, and drums,
To the finest Brass Band, from wherever it comes,
Provided the playing is decent.
'We had often desired to be down on their list,
But somehow or other the chance we had missed;
They passed us, as if we did never exist,
Though we'd gained some good laurels but recent.

At last we'd received the long looked-for invite;
We filled up the form, and despatched it all right,
And at once began practising that very night,
So eager we were for the prizes.
We sent to De Lacy for all the best tunes:
We bought a new tenor sax, two bombardoons,
A slide alto trombone, that shined like full moons,
In the clear winter's sky, as each rises.

So soon as the factory bell told us to cease,
And we'd washed ourselves clear from the slubber and grease,
We met at the sign of "The Fox and the Geese",
And sat in a ring round the table.
When Bumbly-foot Harry gave word for to start,
We blew hard at Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart,
Until ev'ry man knew the lot off by heart,
And to play without music was able.
Not to weary you all with a troublesome tale,
Know, we met for improvement each night without fail;
After practice each man took his one gill of ale,
And straightway went home without staying.
The winter flew past, and the buds 'gan to burst,
And the thrush sang blithely by coppice and hurst,
And still we ground on as we had done at first,
To make sure of a good place in playing.

At last the long looked-for day opened up bright,
We’d scarce slept a wink through the whole of the night,
So eager we were to show Cleaster our might,
And to come back all loaded with laurel.
We hired a waggon, with two pair of greys,
Each one took his instrument lapped in red baize;
Our coats had red trimmings, our caps were red glaze,
Like sealing-wax melted, or coral.

We start. As our neighbours collected to cheer,
And to wish us good luck, Johnny Smart from the rear
Threw a slipper, which hit Humbly-foot on the ear,
And caused him to fly in a passion.
He soon calmed himself, and we clattered away,
With confidence singing, so happy and gay;
Ne'er doubting a bit but we should win the day,
We entered the town in good fashion.

We got to the place where the tents were set out,
And when we had time just to look round about,
Sure ne'er in your life did you see such a rout,
Or hear such a comical shindy.
There were brass bands from all the towns twenty miles round,
All blowing at once as they came on the ground,
Each trying the best who could make the most sound,
All the time full discordant and windy.

At last the bell rung, and the judge took his seat,
And the bands were set out in good order complete,
And the humming of voices alone the ears greet,
As each waited the call of the numbers.
The judge knew the bands by the figures they held,
And not by their titles or place where they dwelled;
As the tickets were drawn from the hat; then soon quell’d
All the talkers as if sent to slumbers.

Our ticket was "six", we were drawn to play first,
And we set ourselves out in the plan we'd rehearsed,
And till told to begin our impatience we nursed,
With our instruments ready for blowing.
A thundering cheer made us all feel elate,
And angered the other bands who had to wait,
And to guess by our playing what would be their fate,
If they worse than us should be showing.

We first played a Chorus from Handel's Messiah,  
And then a strange piece at the judge's desire,  
After that the bombardon performed "Obadiah",  
And other new music-hall ditties.  
Upon which our first horn made a few observations,  
Which the cornet replied to with frantic gyrations,  
And the piccolo whistled a few variations,  
Like frolicsome gambols of kitties.

How the other bands got on I can't tell you now;  
Enough that the day ended up in a row,  
For the pride of the lot had that day low to bow  
We had won the first prize in a canter.  
Our foes said our playing was nothing but fudge;  
A mistake had been made, and that they wouldn't budge  
Until the award was reversed by the judge,  
Whom they made an endeavour to banter.

But a truce was patched up, and the bands stood apart,  
To play altogether a piece off by heart,  
All waited in silence the signal to start,  
As was usually done at conclusion.  
But the anger long smothered broke out in a flame;  
And while some bands were silent at loss of their fame,  
Some played "Hallelujah", some played "Same old game",  
And all marched away in confusion.

At length to the station with fury they hie,  
And each tried his neighbour in noise to outvie,  
And from blows came to words, and in words did deny  
The right of a triumph to other.  
Soon words grew to deeds, and then cornets did clash  
Against arms, breasts, and shoulders; and now with a dash  
A mighty bass tuba comes down with a smash  
On the head of the drummer's big brother.

The fray was now fierce, and the shout and the cry  
Was mixed with wild blasts from defeated ally,  
And the blowing off steam from the engine hard by,  
And the shriek of the whistle for starting.  
Cornet bells were pulled off, curly saxhorns stretched straight,  
Drum heads were all burst, and cracked many a pate,  
When the voice of Joe Jolly cried: "Make for the gate  
And I'll set the foemen a-smarting".

Joe's coat was ripped up, and his red cap was gone,  
His shirt and his waistcoat to ribbons were torn,  
His eyes swell'n and blacken'd, yet darted forth scorn  
At our rivals, through whom he was rushing.  
"Make the gate, make the gate!" still he cried in his rage
And leave me alone with the foe to engage!
No words we could say did his fury assuage,
As we fell back, each other near crushing.

How nobly he stood, and how nobly he fought,
I cannot now tell but must leave it to thought,
Suffice it, in safety our waggon we caught,
As the enemy fled from him howling.
The slide of his trombone he lost in the fray;
He had bought a few pints of gray peas on his way,
Through the mouthpiece these missiles he'd scattered like spray
And they stung like small shots used in fowling.

Thus ended the day, and thus opened our fame,
Though 'twas won at the cost of some bruised and some lame.
All our instruments spoilt, all our clothes torn to shame,
On that memorable Monday last Easter.
The first prize we gained, and that was our pride,
And a salve for our wounds, and a solace beside.
So now you know all that to us did betide
At our first brass band contest at Cleaster.
BRAVO, SPRINGS! BRAVO!

By "Shepster" (W. Hargreaves, Bacup).

[on becoming National Champions in 1913]

BRAVO! Well done Springs! England's champion band!
On Fame's high pedestal now you take your stand;
Won fair and square, you're foremost in the race,
Merit alone has put you in that place.

Three times you've done it, thrice this trophy won,
No other band this honour boasts, not one;
To this high point all others cast their eyes,
And own you winners of this premier prize.

Accept our greetings, all throughout this vale,
From lofty hills, o'er which the clouds oft sail;
Down its deep valleys, rolling right along,
Is heard this gladsome, welcome, greeting song.

All greet you, the aged with hoary hair,
Mingle their welcomes with the young and fair;
Schoolboys and girls know what great things you've done,
And prattling infants lisp - "Our band has won."

"Labour and Love" - so was this music named,
That brought together bands renowned and famed;
You've worked and won, and now you stand above,
You had the Labour first - now take the Love.

Oft have we read upon our history's page,
Of conquests won by war's fierce lust and rage;
But this is nobler, better far are these
Grand triumphs in this victory of peace.

Music, most sacred of all Heavenly gifts,
Angels know well thy art, their voices lift
In praises to that Being throned afar,
Who called a chorus from the morning stars.

Often when lofty eloquence has failed,
With strong and weighty words the foe assailed:
Thundering around, and filling men with fear,
It is thee - Music - that can draw the tear.

Once more then greeting, strangers may have shown
Their wealth of welcome, and you may have grown
Used to their praises, as you journeyed through,
But here's a welcome, honest, homely, true.
Your welcome here is best; raised is each voice,
In loud hurrahs! both friend and foe rejoice;
From every corner of this hill-bound land,
We proudly greet you - England's Premier Band.
ASTON CONTEST – 1860

Aston Park – Musical Prize Fight: To be sung to the tune: "Will you come unto the Bower"

In Aston Park, next Monday, a Band Contest there's to be,
When Wednesbury and Oldbury, and Matlock Bands you'll see,
And Great Bridge, Wolverhampton, also Tipton, I've been told,
Will fight against the Yorkshire Bands, and carry off the gold.

CHORUS

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, and champions of the field,
Who will play up for Old England, and cause the rest to yield.

For Wednesbary and. Metcalfe, and Mattock Bath you'll see,
Will play off for the first places, as certain as can be;
For in all that's good and tasty, the Toy-shop of the World,
Our well-earn'd district banner, has for ages been unfurled.

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &tc.

And Distin's Cornet must be won by Alexander Will,
Who at Holder's goodly Concert Hall, has nightly trained his trill;
For Birmingham it can't be beat, if her man. stands firm and true,
And keeps from tricks at Liverpool which caused him to fall through.

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &tc.

And Ryland's patent metal, the Cup of gorgeous gold,
Ought Metcalfe, the midland teacher, his merit to uphold,
For teaching the black country the humanizing art,
Of each blowing his right instrument, and playing off his part.

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &tc.

Our Gracious Queen has sent us, that day to please us all,
Her gallant Highland soldiers, who made the Russians bawl
At Alma, with poor Lord Clyde, they thrashed our northern foe
And will again, if wanted, e'en if to Poland they've to go.

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &tc.

And the Princess Alexandra, it must not be forgot
Has sent her Piper, Henderson, forget it we must not
For his skill it is so wondrous, in Scotia's music own
That it alone, unaided, aught to entirely draw the town.

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &tc.
Our gallant Corps of Volunteers. Rifle and Artillery,
Must go and take a lesson from Professor Gregory,
Who will show them all the art, to hit, cut, thrust, and slash,
His "Assault at Arms" is sure to be full of fire and dash.

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &tc.

A day's rational recreation is provided then for all,
A sensible sensation to please both great and small;
And Gen'ral Jackson shows his tact, the money is all right,
For Sixpence it admits you up to any time of night.

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &tc.

And dancing, and good humor, and English Sports so old
Will he enjoyed by thousands of whom untruths are told
And prove unto all England that it is but a sham,
That is said about the pleasures of the folks of Birmingham

Then success to the Brass Band Contest, &tc.
THE BRASS BAND CONTEST

Mary Thompson - (for the Renfrew Burgh Band)

With a tug of the jackets and shuffling of chairs and adjustments to stands that are perfectly placed, the baton is raised with a stretch and a flick and like greyhounds in traps they are off up and running, for the prize of perfection, for them, just this once!

Pony-tailed blondes and greybeards with paunches, lawyers and labourers, clerks and accountants, mothers and carers, workers and students, all shapes and sizes, when braided and cuffed they’re only the sound they make with their band.

Muted trombones wail like trains on the prairies, feverish cornets, warm flügel and horns rise above huge silver basses booming like liners. They whisper like mist when it says pianissimo, blast triple sforzando for storming finales!

The applause is for how they arrived here today from scout huts and band halls on nights after work. With stars as a backdrop on stage in the town hall the glint and the shine of colourful stage lights make dazzling reflections on their moment of fame.

When it’s over they judge – so how did they all do? The shame of split notes and poor entries forgotten they head to the bar where they all let their hair down. Not caring for prizes and medals or cups, just that their own brilliant band will march on for ever.
THE TUGGSVILLE BAND CONTEST

“Dryblower” Murphy - The Sun (Kalgoorlie), 1st January 1905

The tracks were bare and hot, and withered was the scrub,
The townsfolk loitered in the shade beneath O'Ryan's pub,
And often did they sleep within the mulga near,
A cheerful smile upon their face - the consequence of beer.
Fact! and backed
By all, who at Ryan's pub, their passing thirst have slacked.

Now days were long and hot, and willies in the bush
Were tiresome things o Jackson, and the beery Tugsville push.
So on the ground they lay, the Sabbath day all through,
And played at bridge or poker, or maybe played at loo.
Sin? Well, tin
By those who had was freely spent beneath O'Ryan's inn.

Now one day- just at noon, when all were full of ale,
A stranger rode from out the scrub, his form was small and frail;
He stopped before the pub and sauntered in the bar,
And soon was shouting all around from whisky to three star.
Pale! and frail.
'Just an easy lamb to rook,' thought each Tuggsvilllian male.

Amidst the endless talk, just near to close of day,
The Tuggsville band awoke to life and started forth to play;
Then argument grew hot about that cherished band,
The stranger swore that Doodlekine could lick them with one hand.
Bet! Don’t fret!
The men of wealth about that place planked all that they could get.

A Tuggsville Jew named Mose got up and laid the tin
That Doodlekine would lose the match and Tuggsville easy win;
He also held the stake, just twenty pound aside,
Excitement rose so high, that the women laughed and cried.
Cheers, and beers,
Were plentiful, and soon the town was helpless and in tears.

Now o'er in Doodlekine two days before the match,
That frail young man went getting all the bummers he could catch;
He hired a four in hand, and sent them them spick and span
To Tuggsville - who winked their eyes and engineered a plan:
Wine? 'Twas fine.
To see all Tuggsville pouring beer in that band from Doodlekine!

Jim Jackson with delight did dance an Irish fling,
'Me God, and faith alive,' said - he 'we Tuggsvilles know a thing.'
He glanced? where in the shade the bandsmen lay,
'They're sure to sleep a week,' he said, 'on what they've put away.'
Drunk? Head munk!
Through the band supposed from Doodlekine the town of Tuggsville stunk.
The day at last arrived, the hour was drawing near,
The Doodlekiners slept beneath their heavy load of beer.
The Tuggsville band marched proudly by, triumphant and all right;
Marched all the morning round about, playing quick steps bright.
Hot? A lot!
And Tuggsville smiled contented at the lovely thing they’d got.

But, singing in the pub, a cloud of dust was seen,
And Tuggsville stopped and wondered what that cloud of dust could mean.
For naught did they suspect - the hour had all but come,
Till they heard the banging wild of a big and booming drum.
Say? Well, yea,
They did, as they looked where twenty forms, in the pub verandah lay.

They also cursed a lot at thought of all the beer
They'd pressed upon 'those thirsty frauds, to get them on their ear.
And blissful and unconscious the happy bummers lay,
Beneath the pub verandah all the burning day.
Glare! and stare!
As the band from Doodlekine climbed out they started off to swear.

The band from Doodlekine, they looked quite fresh and nice,
And played so sweet and stead, just as calm and cool as ice;
There was no doubt at all, they easy won the day,
But when they went to look for Mose they saw him far away.
Mag?. Tongues wag?
Yes. For Mose had skipped with all the boodle in a bag.
KINGSTON MILLS BAND - 1855

From North Cheshire Herald, 23 December, 1886

Come all you lads of music now,  
And listen unto me,  
While I unfold a verse or two,  
Which you shall understand,  
It's of the love and harmony  
That dwells in Kingston Band.

Chorus:

So now my lads your glasses fill,  
And join in the toast with me,  
Prosperity to the Kingston Band  
Wherever it may be.

In October, eighteen fifty live,  
Upon the twentieth day,  
J. Higham's band it did arrive,  
And music sweet did play;  
Their strains so loud waved in the air  
As they rode through Nudger Land,  
And people all came out to shout  
Hurrah, they're bringing Kingston Band.

The Kingston lads then viewed their horns,  
And wished that they could play,  
When cornet player to th' tro bone player said  
"Ne'er mind; we hope to see the day."  
Preparations then were made with speed,  
And stands were fixed upright,  
Books were bought and music wrote,  
And all went in delight.

At Whitsuntide in '56  
They stood a test that ne'er was done before,  
Just six months old they led themselves,  
And, played eight hours or more;  
They played so nobly through Hyde fair  
The horses could not stand,  
While folks came from far and near  
To hear the Kingston Band.

Then down Church-street and Hyde-lane  
To the Market-place they came,  
With a banner waving oe’r their heads  
St. George's known by name.  
Their leader cried "Strike up, brave boys,  
See how the people stand;  
We'll show them that there's hearts of oak
In the merry Kingston Band.

In September, eighteen fifty eight,
Upon the twentieth day,
The Kingston lads to Stockport went
Their figures to display;
To lead the jolly gardeners
Of that procession grand,
At the opening of the Vernon Park,
Along with twelve more bands.

Now my song is at an end,
And I can sing no more,
Here's forty years to Kingston Band,
And may it reign five score.
If ever across the sea I roam,
Unto some foreign land,
I'll ever bless the happy days
I spent with Kingston Band.
HAWORTH BAND

Mark R. Peacock

'Now kindly pay attention
To what I have to say
About the band at Haworth
How well each man can play

It needs no introduction
Each man knows well his part
The sweetness of the music
Makes soft the hardest heart

They fill the air with music
How lovely is it's breeze
From those that round them gather
Subscriptions come with ease

Then shout 'hurrah for Haworth'
From them we get a treat
The lads then from Worth Valley
They'll find are hard to beat

When giving sacred concerts
Where crowds together meet
So great is their attraction
They use both hands and feet

In the sheets some throw silver
Which that is right to do
For in copper there is danger
It might keep falling through

Don't think that I am dreaming
For what I say I'll stand
They'll find the task not easy
That beats the Haworth Band'
WILLIAM RIMMER

Appeared in the local press in 1909 - a sonnet eulogising the bandmaster (William Rimmer) and appreciating the high standard of the band (Irwell Springs)

SAY, should we praise a man, or pass him by
Uncheered by word or smile, when day is won?
Though some it spoils to praise, he is not one;
His modest mein again would soar on high,

Inspired to greater things; his noble soul -
Of Music's realm, portrayed in Music's guise, -
Must lead; while Verdi lives, nor Weber dies,
Or Wagner's plumes raised at his fervent call.

Pillar of Rimmer's Art, whose temple brings
Perfection's far horizon close to view,
And, mounting up their rough-hewn path is "Springs,"
His cherished care: their tutor, constant, true,

Whose magic wand, in harmony impels
The sounds of charm that in the mem'ry dwells.

DENBY DALE PRIZE BAND

Walter Smith

At Denby Dale there is a band,
About the best in all the land,
And they all do their very best
When they're in a good contest.

The first we hear is Harry Booth,
With tones so soft, so sweet and smooth,
His father says it is a treat
To hear him play so soft and sweet.

The next we hear is Beaumont Wood,
His friends all say he is very good,
And without him the band would fair,
No cups would come to Denby Dale.

In comes Fred Hudson with the bass,
And says the band would be a disgrace
If he did not join with those two,
And that is what he ought to do.

We now will turn to Charley Pell
Who tries to do so very well,
But sometimes Charley makes mistakes,
And then his heart it nearly breaks.
Harry Lockwood comes in next,
Looking so stern, and feeling vexed,
He says it nearly makes him yell
To hear the noise of Frederick Pell.

We now will listen to Vic. Brown,
Who makes some laugh and others frown.
He is the best at giving tone,
Playing on his old trombone.

Now on the scene comes George Gray,
He turns up always bright and gay,
It is the flugel horn you see,
And he can reach the topmost C.

Raymond Cunningham then comes up
And says “We’re going to win the cup”.
As with the euphonium in his hand
He goes to the big band stand.

In comes Dyson, followed by Cook,
Handing him a music book,
Says he, “Now do your best today
And the cup is ours without delay.”

We now will turn to their committee
Who always says it is a pity
When they return without a prize
They make such nasty shocking cries.

I think that’s all I’ve got to say
About the band that is so gay,
So now I think I will shut up,
And let them win another cup.

SLAIDBURN SILVER BAND

In their musical production ‘AIR
Anon, 1977

This Band always carries its own wind about,
Fresh air caught high on the moor,
Tons of it, stored in their ’airy chest,
Halitosised, breathalysed, pure!

And it takes a lot of mountain air
When your blasting fortissimo,
’Cos a soaring crescendo dies out innuendo
When the pound, per square inch gets low!
THE BAND

C.J. Dennis, 1921

Hey, there! Listen awhile! Listen awhile, and come.  
Down in the street there are marching feet, and I hear the beat of a drum.  
Bim! Boom!! Out of the room! Pick up your hat and fly!  
Isn't it grand? The band! The band! The band is marching by!

Oh, the clarinet is the finest yet, and the uniforms are gay.  
Tah, rah! We don't go home. Oom, pah! We won't go home.  
Oh, we shan't go home, and we can't go home when the band begins to play.  
Oh, see them swinging along, swinging along the street!  
Left, right! buttons so bright, jackets and caps so neat.

Ho, the Fire Brigade, or a dress parade of the Soldier-men is grand;  
But everyone, for regular fun, wants a Big-Brass-Band.  
The slide-trombone is a joy alone, and the drummer! He's a treat!  
So, Rackety-rumph! We don't go home. Boom, Bumph! We won't go home.  
Oh, we shan't go home, and we can't go home while the band is in the street.  
Tooral-ooral, Oom-pah! The band is in the street!

MELISSA

John Baverstock, 2018

She was the stand out girl,  
In't Steel City brass band,  
There with her Trumpet,  
And sheet music on't stand,  
Twenty two year old Melissa,  
With her rebellious sense of dress,  
Her half buttoned up blouse,  
Almost revealing her ample size breast,  
This daughter of the local butcher,  
Whose intentions were more than shocking?  
Wearing brown monkey boots,  
And black fishnet stockings,  
Ready to blow that trumpet girl,  
Said Band conductor Sid,  
By eck blow it,  
She bloody well did.
THE TROMBONE

Pete Clarke

Come on lad, get up for work, wash thee face and hands,
Tomorrow it’s Whit Friday, and we’re gonna hear yon bands.
I know tha hates it down at mill, wi’ all that cotton dust and noise,
But I can tell thee how tha can change theeself and be like Tommy Oldroyd’s boys.

They’re not working down at mill, they wear fancy shoes, not clogs.
Tha’ll see ‘em playing in bands tomorrow, wearing uniforms and jogs.
Tha’s what you wanna do, me lad, keep playing that trombone
Until tha’s stood in front of band, playing solos on thee own.

Aye, the day will come when bands march past, and thee’ll make thee father proud.
I’ll hear that trombone playing and cheering yon crowd.
I worked me guts off down that mill, breathing cotton all me life.
Your mother died and left us, a good mother and a good wife.

I know one day I’ll leave thee, lad, and tha be on thee own,
That’s why I worked job overtime, to buy thee that trombone.
Tha gonna be a good un, tha coming on alright,
One day tha’ll play for Grimethorpe, and maybe for Black Dyke.

Aye, the breakfast’s on t’table, tha’s work to do today.
Get thee sen down mill, and earn that bit of pay.
Remember lad, when t’hooter blows and t’engine starts to turn,
When tha’s finished work and tha gets home, tha’s getting that trombone to learn.

TWIXT DOWN AND SEA

Littlehampton Town Band Signature Tune
Katherine Bearn (words), A. Pullinger (tune)

There are many towns in Sussex, but one the best of all
Is Littlehampton by the sea, be sure you make a call,
There are calm seas and rough seas, and meadows drenched with dew,
So just come and visit us awhile, it’s grand the whole year through.

So let’s sing a song of Sussex, the county that I love,
Of pleasant upland and downland and clear skies above,
For it’s nearer and dearer than riches are to me,
Is this sunny little seaside town, set shoulder to the sea.

Twixt downland and sea, our hometown lies,
By river and lea, neath azure skies,
Littlehampton, Littlehampton, Littlehampton,
Twixt downland and sea
THE ENLIVENED HOUR, OR THE VILLAGE SERENADE

Dedicated to the Green Springs Cornet Band, Ohio  
Mrs G.G. Reiniger, October 1870

Not in a moonlights witching hour,  
Were we aroused by music’s power,  
But in the busy hours of day.  
The “Cornet Band” began to play.

Brilliant the gladning strains arose,  
Hushing all care to sweet repose,  
While parties near came out to see,  
And listen to the music free.

Glad little children stepped the time,  
Rejoicing at the notes’ sublime,  
Running to hear from streets around,  
So quickly they had caught the sound.

Enlivened hour! Made sweetly grand,  
Like blessing from a “better land”,  
Or like soft dew upon the flowers,  
Descending in refreshing showers.

BACK TO SOUTH STREET

Just let me go back to South Street  
For a week with the famous bands,  
And take with me others who would compete  
In Australia’s Golden City of renown.

Just let me alight at the station  
With cornet, trombone and drum,  
And meet bandsmen from all over the Nation,  
To whom South Street once more have come.

Just let me line up in the station yard  
And play through Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus,"  
Or "The Heavens Are Telling" by Haydn - just as hard,  
As hands played in the days before us.

Just let me march along Sturt Street  
With gay crowds lining the way,  
With step by step and beat by beat,  
Is South Street just the same today ?

Just let me see who is judging again,  
Is it Stead or Bentley with ears for tune?  
Short, Beswick, Sutton or Morgan - men of fame,  
Or King of them all - J. Ord Hume.
Just let me go through the Inspection
As we did when we dressed with much care;
With the gayest uniform in our section,
That made all our rivals stare.

Just let me compete in the solos again
From the grand old Coliseum stage.
With "Adelaide" or "Gipsy's Warning" - or "Pretty Jane,
"Zelda" and "Miranda" of a later age.

Just let me mount the platform
And play through "Beethoven's Works."
Or any Alexander Owen's selections
That South Street bands would not shirk.

Just let me play through the Test piece,
Be it "Mercandante," "Mozart" or "Liszt,
"Wagner," "Chopin" or "Meyerbeer,
The tests that were tests on our lips.

Just let me march in the Quickstep
With Ord Hume's "B.B. and C.F."
"The Challenge," "Cossack" or "Ravenswood,
Or was the "Twentieth Century" the best?

Just let me see the others swing past,
Code's, Prout's, Rozelle and Boulder.
Wanganui, Newcastle and Bathurst Brass,
Great names that come dear to the older.

Just let me see those fine Geelong bands,
St. Augustine's, Municipal and Harbour Trust.
Also Collingwood, Malvern, Richmond, Prahran,
Perth City - all a great power among us.

Just let me see Geelong Town again
With Sharpe Brearley at the head of affairs.
They ranked with Prout's in quickstep fame,
First in marching honours was often theirs.

Just let me see the giants of the baton,
Riley, Code, Bulch and Prout,
McMahon, Barkel, Jones and Hoffman.
Many, alas, have since gone out.

Just let me see others again,
Partington, Shugg, Johnston, Bowden.
Men who kept time in South Street's fame;
Wade and Baile must be among them.
Just let me think if I missed any.  
Yes, there was Davison, Liven, Lewins - any more!  
Hopkins, Ryder, Billy May among many,  
Not forgetting Frank Wright and J. Booth Gore.

Just let me see the best of officials  
And critics like Davey, Gartrell and Hellings,  
Humphreys and Boyce - Kings of staff and whistle,  
May march us again - well, there's no telling.

So to-day just let me go back to South Street,  
Most famous contest in the land,  
Where many old timers I will heartily greet,  
And yarn over years that were so grand.

TIM

_Blart Brother_

Tim’s a cardboard cutout  
you may have once sat near him  
always turns up faithfully  
but you never ever hear him.

Tim’s a cardboard cutout,  
his instrument’s his own,  
he tells you it’s the best there is,  
though it’s hardly ever blown.

Tim’s a cardboard cutout,  
he’s dropped off by his mother,  
and all advice goes in one ear  
and swiftly out the other.

Tim’s a cardboard cutout  
dim and unaware  
he really thinks he’s done his bit  
just by being there.

Tim’s a cardboard cutout  
and when the contest ends,  
he’s keen to show his uniform  
to lower section friends.

Tim’s a cardboard cutout  
he flits from band to band  
But all he does is fill a space  
behind a music stand.
I was looking at the census
For a relative of mine
A task I thought would be easy
Just trip down the family line.

It was Charlie I was looking for
An uncle I am told,
Who worked in the Middlesboro shipyard
Before he got too old.

He had a very special job
Was famed throughout the land
As secretary to the Cargo Fleet
Steel Works Silver Band.

I am not sure what this entailed
It sounds so very grand
Being in charge of the Cargo Fleet
Steel Works Silver Band.

Perhaps he played the trumpet
Or a cornet he did blow
And together with the other chaps
Put on an marvellous show.

By day he was a stevedore,
Ships cargo he would load
He walked there every morning,
It was only down the road.

But when the piercing whistle went
To mark the end of day
He ran home at the double
So ready then to play.

Every evening he would practise
Cornet held in his hand
Cos he was in charge of Cargo Fleet
Steel Works Silver Band.

I believe he was a grumpy man
A smile never touched his lips
But to organise a concert
He was full of useful tips!
I never found poor Charlie
Tho’ I looked on every street
He was off performing with
The Silver Band of Cargo Fleet

FOR THE WEEKEND

Matthew Tallamy

To Friary Guildford Brass Band,
You’re sure to make us proud.
Tenor Trombones will play with great finesse
And Adam WILL NOT play too loud.

On Saturday you’ll take a trip
Destination: The Albert Hall!
The cornets will be at their best,
Rich Marley to play bugger all.

“Of Distant Memories” you will perform
With horn advice from Frank.
Supporters seeing history made,
Everyone else at the Armatage Shank.

Shed builders, they will not get lost;
For once maintaining the groove.
They lugged their instruments all of this way,
Some music was left on the tube.

Chris King will tell a really bad joke
To make the nerves disappear.
The Basses, they will be cucumber cool,
They’ve already started the beer.

Fine double-tonging Euphoniums,
And Bari’s, to a lesser extent.
Perhaps not bringing any silverware home,
But definitely beating Regent!

To all my friends in Guildford Band,
I hope this weekend is magic.
Next week it’s back to Christmas Carols,
‘till then, please make sure you ‘Av’ it!

SHAKE A STICK

Paul Wareing

You can shake a stick at a Brass Band,
Though they’ll never go away,
But they’ll follow your every movement,
For they simply play that way.
THE ADJUDICATOR

WhatSharp

He sat in the box his ears at the ready
a pen in his hand all held nice and steady
He was listening out for the opening chord
the one that would tell if they’d got an award
His mind was sharp with a razor like whit
he’d write something patronising just for that bit
then something good about the entry at G
and a bit about overall tuning at C
he’d finish it up with a thank you as well
that’s when he began to notice the smell
alas when they pulled out the corpse they could tell
farting in boxes is a judges farewell......

MUTE

Jo Bell

The Walkden and Farnworth Band strike up
and yes, they are fat and balding, with beer-wet lips
and skin grown pale in club backrooms.
They’re straight-backed in their uniforms
because their wings are furled
and then they play.

This is strong music: music turned on lathes
by men who don’t lament,
who speak by fighting.
This is working music; our call to prayer,
our call to sing our ordinary story
in a fierce unasked-for jubilation.

Music made in sheds or beaten into cymbals
at the shift-end. Jerusalem and Danny Boy;
they’re borrowed songs but spoken in our tongue.
A ringing out, a clocking on, a moan
of disappointment sure as klezmer;
pit music, factory music, punching out precisely
This is us, this is. Still here.

The spotty prophets raise their clarions.
The North is clearing its throat.
GOING DOWN T’ BAND

Gareth G. Proctor

You’re going down t’ band tonight, was what I heard dad say,
You’re almost 8 years old now lad; it’s time tha’ learnt to play;
So off I went, all nervous like, not knowing what to do,
I’d like to play the tenor horn, but the cornet’s awreet too.

It doesn’t matter what you choose, just see how well ya play,
Ya might end up on’t big bass drum; if conductor lets ya stay;
I tried trombone but that we’re hard, my arms weren’t long enough,
And as for’t bass, well that didn’t work; I just don’t have the puff!

I’m playing on’t cornet just now, sittin next to a chap called Jim,
He’s really old, about 35, but I’ve learnt a lot from him;
It’s the area contest pretty soon; and I know I’ll try my best,
But the piece is really really hard, and it’s my first contest.

Up early and off t’ contest and a practice before we start,
Then here we go, we’re all on stage, I can hear my beating heart;
We won 3rd prize in Section 4, so we’re off to London now,
I’m really enjoying this bandin lark, and ya get to take a bow.

Whit Friday is the best day yet, the crowds are everywhere,
Jump off the coach, and play a March, back on, no time to spare;
We’re aiming to do seven, but we’ve only managed two,
The traffic today is really bad and there’s still loads more to do.

I’ve moved on to Soprano now and it’s really pretty good,
My dad thought I should try it, and I guess he knew I would;
At times it can be scary, cause you’re up there pretty high,
But when it’s good, it’s brilliant, you feel like you can fly.

Good friends, great times, great music and a pint or two as well,
Just speak to any bandsman; they’ll have a tale to tell;
Memories of those great days out, of contests won and lost,
Friends no longer with us, they’re the things we talk of most;

I’m glad I went t’ bandroom, years ago when I were eight,
Cause being in a good brass band, is something really great;
Of all the things I’ve ever done, of this I have no doubt,
That being called “A bandsman” is what it’s all about.
PLYMOUTH SAXHORN BAND (INDIANA, USA)

“It's good to go back in memory to the days of yore, Considerin' it's been fifty year an' more Since then! Oh dear! I see a wonderful change; And many things have happened that's new and strange; Especially at evening when yer new band fellers meet, In fancy uniforms and all and play cut on the street. What's come of old Dave Vinnedge and the sax horn fellers – say I want to hear the Old Band play.

“What’s come of Alex Thompson, an’ Mert Brown, an' where's Bert Capron at And Platt and John McDonald, Charley Reeve, Gene Hutchinson an' that Air Doe Brown who played the drum twict as big as Jim ; An' William Henry Salisbury-say, what's become o' him I make no doubt yer new band now's a compenter band An' plays their music more by note than what they play by hand, An' stylisher and grander tunes; but somehow-any way ,- I want to hear the Old Band play.

“Such tunes as' John Brown's Body' and' Sweet Alice, don't you know, And’ The Camels is A -comin ' ; and' John Anderson,. My Joe, , And a dozen others of 'em-' Number Nine' and' Number 'Leven , Was favorites that fairly made a feller dream o' heaven. And when the boys 'u'd Eerenade I've laid so still in bed I've even heerd the locus-blossoms droppin' on the shed When 'Lilly Dale,' or 'Hazel Dell' had sobbed and died away- I want to hear the Old Band play.

"Your new band ma'by beats it, but the old band's what I said- It allus 'peared to kind o' chord with sumpin' in my head ; An' whilst I'm no musicianer, when my blame eye is jes, Nigh drowned out, an' memory squares her jaws an' sort o' says She won't an' never will forgit, I want to jes' turn in An' take the light right out o' here and git back West a'gin And stay there, when I git there, where I never ha'f to say- I want to hear the Old Band play."

THE OLD BANDSTAND (BY HARDRAW FALLS)

In Wensleydale for many years, by Hardraw Falls I understand brass music has set the Dale ablaze like sunrise bursting through a haze

There is no greater sound heard there is no greater sound heard In the land as that what comes from t'awd famous bandstand
In Wensleydale both rich and poor,  
by Hardraw Falls I understand  
do hear trombones and big tubas roar  
and golden cornets, horns galore.

In Wensleydale as you pass by,  
by Hardraw Falls I understand,  
the cornets play all their notes so high  
like little larks up in the sky

**WILLIE’S GERMAN BAND**

Oh tell us have you seen or heard a wondrous German Band,  
"Twas promised us by "Willie" that it certainly should land.  
We’ve been waiting by the shore for some weeks, and even more,  
But never have we heard, or seen a vestige, of that Band.

We wonder, dearest Willie, what has happened to your Band,  
Why don’t you take the "joy-ride" you so carefully had planned?  
And should the way prove weary, try good old “Tipperary”,  
'Twould be such a splendid Tonic to the spirits of your Band.

Oh, Willie! have we missed you, have we missed your German Band,  
Shall we never hear its brazen strains upon our silver strand?  
We longed so much to greet you, we sent right out to meet you,  
It must have been a "Fairy Tale" marked with your German brand.

And so, dear peaceful Willie, as we've missed your music grand,  
We are calling round to seek it in your happy Fatherland;  
Tho' it may be months or more, we are coming, slow, but sure,  
And then right soon, we'll put in tune, your highly cultured Band.

**ANOTHER GREAT CONCERT – “MUSIC HATH CHARMS” (?)**

_Timaru Herald, New Zealand, 3 July 1867, Page 3_

[Our reporter, not being supplied with a ticket of mission, was compelled to get one of the audience to supply a criticism. — Ed.]

Such a treat, we've had a concert, by the great Temuka band;  
Goodness gracious, how splendidacious, sure 'twas wonderful, 'twas grand.  
Tom the drummer, best of fellows, beat till he was almost white,  
While the others — bless their bellows — blew themselves near out of sight.

All the town was bent on singing, 'twas enough to make you roar;  
Each meant going in and winning, though he’d never sung before.  
Such a crowd came volunteering, just to show what they could do,  
That the stamping and the cheering, might be heard in Oamaru.

First the band struck up, and though they each one played a different air,  
'Twas the more, sure, for the money, which was all they wanted there.  
But friend Young got so excited, you’d have thought his cheeks would crack —  
Got so far before the others, that they had to hold him back.
Up rose K——t and told them all how, "England 'spected every man
Then would do his putty," but he broke down ere he'd well began;
F——e then killed "Lord Ullin's daughter," like some savage Highland chief,
But the people wouldn't have it, so he quickly came to grief.

Then an auctioneer so pleasant, said he'd show them how to sing,
In a voice that charm'd all present, gave them, " I'm the Gipsy King."
H——n, the learned baker, "Master of the Rolls," 'tis said,
Spouted forth — like yeast a-working, — "Tell me where is fancy bread."

S——f and W——n sang together, lines of "Hearts and heads," in praise,
With "Flow on thou shining liver," and "The lights of other days;"
Others, young and thoughtless butchers, mock'd, and thought to have a spree,
Till the gentle Sergeant Buckley, warbled, " Love, come dwell with me."

Then a young and gallant fellow sang — a regular knowing elf —
"Let me kiss her for her mother, let me kiss her for myself."
G——n "the cabbage green," kept trying, but it proved most awful work,
Young Watch J——bs managed better when he gave "the cask of pork."

Hoo——r said he was no singer — wasn't such a jolly muff —
But he'd dance upon the tight rope, if they'd find one strong enough.
One——a tradesman — then recited lines he'd wrote to Glasgow town,
But they didn't seem to like it, for they rose and hiss'd him down.

Sal——n essayed a hornpipe, but he made a quick retreat,
For the stage would not allow him proper room to more his feet.
Another forward came and sang — but what you could not hear,
For they put him in the cupboard, thinking he'd had too much beer.

Mor——n then gave "The Pilot," S——t "The Friar of orders grey."
Wea——r gave them "Billy Tailor," Hutton gave the "Poor dog Tray."
"Down among the dead men," T——r tried, but soon away was led,
For his wife came in and took him home, and past him into bed.

An——n, the jolly brewer, started forward out of breath,
First he gave them "Drops of brandy," and then, " Ale, all ale, Macbeth."
R——t R——r then tried a ditty, praising water from the creek,
But the subject didn't suit him — wanted spirit — 'twas too weak.

Twenty then all rose together, — for the time was flying now,
So each struck up independent, making such a horrid row,
That "The Force," who, in the kitchen, had been feasting on the sly,
Flew to arms and drop'd their mutton, thinking Hau-haus must be nigh.

What they sang or when they finished, few can tell, though lots have tried,
For the band, with wise discretion, went and finished off outside.
If they raise another concert, let them advertise the day,
Giving good and timely notice, that we all may — stay away.
John Burthelson of some renown,
a Rayer blacksmith came to town.
A musical man was John
worked all day at his forge and sung.
His anvil played the music bright
crickets took up the theme at night.
John’s blacksmith shop was a meeting place.

For all the boys around the place.
The Van Wert boys, Art and Ed,
Vrome Barry and Fred Witchell, led
A little bunch of village lads
to the blacksmith shop where John had planned
to organize a village band.
John Burthelseon, a city man
was made director of the band.

We met and planned to buy our horns.
sent away for uniforms.
The sleepy village of Raymertown
when the eventful night came ’round
for us to meet, about twenty four,
in the black-smith’s shop to learn the score.
And when at last the horns had come
all the neighbors set up some.

And heard strange noises the blacksmith shop close at hand,
the first headquarters of the band.
A little later on, when our uniforms had come
Even Solomon was not arrayed
in such epaulets and braid.
Every single mother’s son was dolled up
like a Mexican general in blue and grey.

Barry took his team and drove,
put on side seats enough to hold
all the horns and uniforms the whole grand
Raymertown Silver Cornet Band.
This first engagement I must say
was the Grange first annual picnic day.
We formed in line out in the road,
just before we reached the grove.

As I recall, ‘twas Charley Wagar
took the part of first drum major,
and marched ahead, so proud and loyal,
to the strains of old “Prince Royal”
And now that, we had won renown
and everyone 'round the town,
was talking about us one and all.
Calvin Dater built a hall,
a testimonial to the band.

T’would be incomplete to tell
the story of its rise and fall,
without something of its personnel.
As I have said, the Van Wert boys,
Art and Ed, Vrome Barry, Witchell
and Burthleson mentioned as we came along,
the Ford boys, Frank and Joe with their big
trombones to blow, Ab Dick was a little man.

But blew the great big tuba grand,
Johnny Wagar drove the stage,
and doubled on the brass alto.
The clarinets were kept in line
by Carpenter and Will Dearystine.
This completed all the reeds (yet)
there was Irve in his cornet
as well, Rodgers, Hydorn,
Cushman, Brownell, Dana Snyder played baritone.

Didn’t have no saxophone no
syncopated music in the score
of our ample repertoire.
The piccolo is a lively part
but held in check by Eli Carr.
Dave Hawver played the upright bass
and puffed his cheeks with downright grace
and everything went dum dum dum
with young Ross Robbins at the drum.

A few brief years, and one by one,
the boys dropped out, their race was run.
Vrome Barry and Ben Brownell led.
Then ...Van Wert boys, Art, and Ed,
a little later followed on.
the same green pathway they had gone’
the stars at night their Vigil keep,
o’er the village Church yard where they sleep.

The other boys are old men now
with hoary locks upon their brow.
And scattered far throughout the land,
the living remnants of the band.
Through the mist of years looks down
on their loved home in Raymertown.
On being asked to describe a brass band in 30 words, these poems were written:

**BAND PRACTICE**

*Duana*

Power, strength and might  
the brass band gives off its golden light.  
Stirring, rousing, it's melody disperses  
filling the room with its musical verses,  
becoming polished the more it rehearses.

**WHERE THERE'S MUCK THERE'S BRASS**

*John Curtis*

Ebonised men, escaping  
Bondage in the dark;  
Armed with a dragon's hoard of wrought brass,  
Create deep harmony and bring to pass  
The liquid grace notes of the dulcet lark.

**SERENADE**

*Bad Bill*

The air vibrates as trumpets,  
trombones and tubas turn  
the grey morning into  
a cornucopia of golden notes.  
The brass band, bringing a smile  
to the face of the day.

**STRIKE UP THE BAND!**

*Mlou*

Not to be crass  
but sounding brass  
shatter the crania,  
bring about mania.  
Alack and alas,  
my innocent eardrums,  
battered old headdrums,  
gotta be frayed ...  
'cause I love a parade!
Edna Sweetlove

Badly played hymn tunes
from hungover unemployed miners
echoing down the slum streets
barely audible
over the sounds of Coronation Street
on’t telly
and the neighbours uninhibited belching
post coitally

Further reading...

Stephen Etheridge’s Brass Band Poems and Working Class Culture -
https://bandsupper.wordpress.com/2016/01/22/brass-band-poems-rhymes-about-working-class-culture/

Eric Johnson - Follow the Tame - Collected Verse (Including Dialect) - Mossley Band, 1976. [The Awakening; Pots and Pans; On a Pennine Hill; A Summer Evening at Kiln Green; Mossley; Whit Friday; A Friend Remembered; Eawt O' Step; A Reet Gud Neet; The Mossley Band; Th' Belle Vue September; Taitu Pie; The Saga of Sam; Th' Gradliest Day o' th' year; Curiosity; Winter; A Neet Eawt; A Kemsus Visitor; Kemsus Eve.]

Emily M. Parris - Strike Up the Band!: A book of Poetry about Band Concerts -
Parris Publishing, Kansas City, Missouri, 2016