

A Moral Weapon

The Civic Organ Tradition in the Midlands, 1834-1901

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY

School of Music

College of Arts and Law

June 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people who deserve to be thanked for their role in this project and its completion. First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors, Paul Rodmell and Matthew Riley, for their advice, their support, their help and their unfailing patience throughout these past four years. I would also like to thank the College of Arts and Law at the University of Birmingham, for granting me the College of Arts and Law Doctoral Scholarship.

Outside of the University, I would like to thank William McVicker for his invaluable help in organ-related matters, and his general interest and enthusiasm for my project.

I would also like to thank the staff and librarians of the Sandwell Community History and Archive Services, Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service, Kidderminster Library, the National Archive, the National Library, as well as the William Hill Society. A special thanks goes to Rory Powell of the Sandwell CHAS for his assistance with last-minute photo scans.

Lastly, I would like to thank my fiancé, my family and my friends, for their boundless patience, kindness and support throughout the past years.

And to Professor Bjørn Andor Drage, for setting the wheels in motion.

ABSTRACT

Following the 1834 inauguration of the William Hill organ in Birmingham Town Hall, England saw growth in the installation of organs in public buildings. These monuments to civic pride and ambition were constructed not just to entertain, but to *improve*, as local authorities sought to elevate the tastes and morals of their working-class population by providing affordable organ recitals as an alternative to other forms of leisure. This tradition, emerging amid the socio-cultural and musical tensions of the first half of the nineteenth century, was the product of a complex web of influences, rooted in the wider rational recreation movement, a secular organ tradition which had been evolving since the seventeenth century, middle-class mistrust of working-class leisure and the belief in the suggestive power of music.

In this thesis, I have examined the origins of this tradition and its development in England between 1834 and 1901 by looking at the wider trends that led to its conception, and the ways in which it manifested itself in four case study towns: Kidderminster, Worcester, Wednesbury and West Bromwich. In each of these town, civic halls and organs were constructed and organists appointed, with the aim of producing regular, moral recitals for a working-class audience, with varying outcomes.

The results of this tradition were not the broad moralising effect that its proponents intended, and its duration was limited by the march of technology and changing attitudes following the turn of the century. Instead, its lasting effects were a contribution to the

democratisation of music and concert culture, to English organ-building and organ repertoire, and the construction of a large number of instruments throughout the country.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The Birmingham Daily Post - *BDP*

The Kidderminster Shuttle - *KS*

The Midland Examiner and Times - *MET*

The Musical Opinion & Music Trade Review - *MO*

The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular - *MT*

The Musical World - *MW*

The Wednesbury Observer - *WO*

The Worcester Herald - *WH*

The Worcester Journal - *WJ*

The Worcestershire Chronicle - *WC*

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1: Introduction

Few, if any, instruments are today so intrinsically linked to a specific venue as the organ. For most, the organ is experienced only within the setting of a church, be it at a wedding or a Sunday service, or perhaps in a concert hall, serving as a backdrop to an orchestra. But it was not long ago that the organ was a popular solo instrument – a popularity further driven by its ability to mimic the orchestra, and the economic motivation of only requiring one player, as opposed to an instrumental ensemble. Looking back to the nineteenth century, the organ was not only found in places of worship or the odd concert hall. It was seemingly everywhere – in private homes and pleasure gardens and even public aquariums such as the Tynemouth Aquarium and Winter Gardens – and it also found a prominent place in public buildings, where it assumed a significant musical role in Victorian society, regularly used by local government as an agent in their efforts to control the leisure of their working-class citizens, to promote good musical taste and moral entertainment, to encourage self-education, and attempting to draw them away from other, potentially corrupting forms of amusement.

This tradition of organs in town halls and other public buildings is said to have begun with the construction of Birmingham Town Hall and its organ in 1834, and the establishment of the Monday Evening Pops in 1844, a ground-breaking series of organ recitals aimed at the working-class. This series, like the organ itself, inspired many other towns throughout England to build organs of their own and establish recital series in the hope of emulating the

success of the Birmingham Pops and provide elevating entertainment for their own working classes. As Mark Girouard states in *The English Town*, 'Birmingham Town Hall set a precedent. An organ became an essential status symbol for all similar buildings.'¹ Owing to costs, changes in taste and increasing competition from other forms of entertainment, most of these organs were removed or altered beyond recognition following the turn of the century – some sold to churches or private individuals, others destroyed altogether.

Attempts to utilise the organ to promote a particular repertoire of music perceived to be of a higher quality to the people, or promote the instrument itself, have been made over the past century with varied results, but during its heyday in the latter half of the nineteenth century, what may well be considered the golden age of the English organ, the civic organ tradition helped bring the organ to a height of popularity it has struggled to reach since, and had a significant influence on the development of English organ building and the English organ repertoire.

The roots of this project go back to a thesis completed at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in 2016 as part of my MMus in Organ Performance. While writing this, I developed an interest in the history of the English organ, which in turn led me to discover the civic organ tradition. I was fascinated by the popularity of the organ during the Victorian era, and the idea of music being used to promote morality in such a direct way. While limited in length and scope, my MMus thesis allowed me to examine repertoire performed at civic organ recitals throughout the United Kingdom between 1890 and 1910 as covered in the *Musical Times*, which revealed a wealth of unfamiliar organ music and inspired me to pursue this subject further.

¹ Mark Girouard, *The English Town: A History of Urban Life* (Yale University Press, 1995), p. 207.

I have used the term 'civic organ' in my thesis not just to separate the tradition that I am looking at from the organ in its more conventional religious context, but also from the popularity of the organ in commercial entertainment during the nineteenth century. The civic organ recitals were chiefly non-commercial ventures, with admission prices at an affordable level or free altogether to be within reach of their intended audience, although the lack of profit and the expenses associated with hosting the concerts did lead to some series being abandoned or discontinued by the organisers, typically due to concerns about losing money. Instead, the aim was to elevate the audience's musical taste through regular recitals and the careful selection of appropriate repertoire, and to provide an alternative to the 'vicious' entertainments of the time, especially drinking, gambling and blood sports. The title of the thesis is taken from the inauguration dinner at Wednesbury Town Hall, where during a toast the Chairman of the Local Board described the new organ as a 'moral weapon,' with which he and the rest of the Board intended to combat all and any vices they saw among the local working classes. Although this might seem like strong language to modern ears, it was by no means extreme for the time, and reflected a widespread belief among many involved in local government.

Within this thesis, I have explored the social role of the civic organ in selected industrial towns between 1834 and 1901, and through these examined how organ music could be used as a social and moral tool by local government. I have also examined the performers who attempted to put these great ambitions into action, and the motivations of the people who commissioned and funded the instruments, as well as the civic organ repertoire, its place in the rational recreation movement, the Victorian concept of 'high-brow' versus 'low-brow' music, and the purported moral effect of music upon the listener.

The thesis consists of two halves. The first is made up of two thematic chapters, one exploring the British musical climate of the nineteenth century, with emphasis on contemporary views on music and the various attempts made to use it as a means to educate and 'elevate' the public, thereby exerting a subtle form of social control over the labouring classes. The second delves into the development of the organ in the nineteenth century, including a survey of its history in the centuries leading up to the Victorian era, and how it came to be used as a tool of the rational recreation movement. The themes in these chapters are then further explored and illustrated in the second half of the thesis, through four West Midlands case studies divided into three chapters: Kidderminster, Worcester, and Wednesbury and West Bromwich.

1.2: Rationale

There is a definite absence in contemporary literature of a thorough, deep exploration of the civic organ in nineteenth century England, one which looks not only into the mechanical development of the instrument or the evolution of the repertoire, but which also explores the unique social role the civic organ had in the provinces; the singular position the civic organists found themselves in, caught between authority and audience; the public reception of civic organ recitals; and the impact of the tradition on later English organ culture, traces of which we can still see today.

Where town halls had organs, they were used for a variety of purposes, often serving as accompaniment in vocal and instrumental concerts, especially in places that did not have a professional orchestra. In many of these town halls, as well as being used for occasional

music, regular concert series were planned around the use of the organ. The organs themselves were often built on the initiative of local governments, and these concerts were intended to influence the morals of the local working classes, through the performance of a rational, high-class repertoire believed to be elevating and improving, but also by providing a distraction and an alternative to leisure pursuits that the local authorities considered detrimental to public health and social order.

The regular nature of these organ concerts set them apart from other philanthropic musical ventures or singular organ recitals. The organisers of these series hoped that by not only providing the working classes with elevating entertainment, but by doing so regularly, be it weekly, fortnightly or monthly, they could make the concerts a natural part of working-class leisure, displacing less elevating amusements and over time, through repeated exposure, achieving broader moral effects. A key component in the establishment of these organ series was the appointment of an official town hall organist, who ensured the regularity of the concerts and acted as both an organiser, a custodian for the instrument, and a link between the local government and the musical audience.

This conjunction between music, politics and social reform is particularly interesting, and lends itself to an analysis of the role of the town hall organ in a way not covered by existing research. My thesis focuses on these recital series and the attempts to establish such series, which I have described as ‘civic organ recitals’, as they had a particular social function not found in many other musical ventures including the organ.

1.3: Literature Review

There is at present time no literature which focuses specifically on the civic organ or on the social role and impact of the organ in the nineteenth century, but there are various works that touch on different elements of the civic organ tradition. This literature can be divided into three categories.

The first concerns general works on the English organ in the nineteenth century. The most important resource on the Victorian organ is without a doubt Nicholas Thistlethwaite's seminal *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, which examines the years 1820 to 1870, described by the author as 'the most innovative fifty years in English organ-building history.'² In this book Thistlethwaite provides a look at the evolution of English organ building, from the relatively humble organs of the early nineteenth century to the mammoth instruments of the later nineteenth century, and the transformation the instrument had undergone in the intervening decades. He illustrates this with examples from some of the most important organ-builders of the Victorian era, with Hill as a central figure in the development of the instrument. Other works on the English organ come in the form of general histories, with Stephen Bicknell's *The History of the English Organ*³ often considered a standard work on the subject. The book is true to its name, and traces the history of the organ in England, from the earliest records around 900 to the late 20th century. Besides providing general background on the developments leading up to the nineteenth century, the book also includes four chapters on the nineteenth century itself, highlighting different periods and trends. Of these the chapters on 'The German System 1840-1865' and 'The High Victorian

² Nicholas Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. xviii.

³ Stephen Bicknell, *The History of the English Organ* (Cambridge University Press, 2005)

Organ 1860-1900' have proved the most useful, particularly in providing a context for my case studies. However, the primary focus of Bicknell's and Thistlethwaite's books, as is the case with most other works on the subject, is the mechanical development of the organ, innovations in design and manufacture, specific performers and builders, and other aspects of the organ building process. There is also an emphasis on church instruments, and where the authors touch on organs in secular settings, they mainly cover the most famous civic organs, such as those in Manchester's and Birmingham's town halls. Less attention is given to the social aspects of the instrument and the complicated relationship between politics, morals and civic organs.

The second category consists of literature on music in nineteenth century Britain, encompassing a wide selection of works on the general trends and tendencies of the age, including works on musical genres; biographies of particular performers, composers, societies, or venues; music in relation to nation, class and gender, and much more. This category is by nature broader than the previous, and there is rarely much overlap to be found between the two, as organ literature tends to be something of a niche, compared to more general musical history. These works have helped provide some much-needed context to my work, enabling us for example to see the civic organ repertoire in relation to wider musical trends, or to compare the civic organ recitals with the plethora of other public concerts which were emerging in the nineteenth century.

One important source within this category has been Dave Russell's *Popular Music in England 1840-1914*.⁴ In this book, Russell looks at the development of popular music as a concept in the nineteenth century and the different forms it took, as well as the interplay between the

⁴ Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997)

classes in the growing trend of rational recreation. The two chapters on 'Music and Morals' found in Part I of the book, 'Control: music and the battle for the working-class mind' have been especially interesting as they present a wider movement of social control and moral influence in leisure aimed at the working classes, of which the civic organ concerts are part. Chapter 8, 'The emergence of a popular tradition', and chapter 11, 'Music and social change,' have also proved valuable. Another valuable book on the subject is E. D. Mackerness's *A Social History of English Music*,⁵ which straddles the barrier between musicology and sociology. Although it attempts to tackle a very broad timeframe, from the middle-ages to the 20th century, it gives a general background on musical activity in the various eras and a sense of how musicology and sociology can intertwine. It is also worth mentioning Ronald Pearsall's *Victorian Popular Music*,⁶ in which Pearsall demonstrates the ubiquity of music in Victorian society, and the myriad ways in which it was practiced, from music hall and parlour songs to outdoor music and the Tonic Sol-fa movement.

William Weber has written various works on the role of the middle-class in the creation and promotion of music, and the development of musical taste after the eighteenth century, most notably *Music and the Middle Class* and *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste*. His works are of special importance as they deal with many elements which would affect the programming of public concerts, in particular the emergence of a core classical repertoire, the increasing division of music into genres and schools, and the concept of the 'high-brow' and 'low-brow' in music.

⁵ Eric David Mackerness, *A Social History of English Music* (Greenwood Press, 1976)

⁶ Ronald Pearsall, *Victorian Popular Music* (David & Charles, 1973)

It is impossible to ignore the contributions of Asa Briggs to the field of Victorian studies, and his renowned trio of books on the subject. While *Victorian Cities* is perhaps the best known, I have found great value in a more recent work, *Victorian Music*, which deals with both provincial and metropolitan musical culture and communities, covering a broad selection of genres and venues, and examining how the Victorians themselves perceived music.

There are also various relevant articles in Routledge's series of books on music in nineteenth century Britain which have provided additional framework for musical activity and culture in England in my time period, in particular Derek B. Scott's article on rational amusement in *Music and Performance Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain*,⁷ and Rebecca Gribble's article on the social status of late-eighteenth century musicians in *The Music Profession in Britain, 1780-1920*.⁸

Rachel Milestone's work on the town hall as a musical venue has been helpful, both her 2009 PhD on the subject⁹ and her chapters in *Music in the British Provinces, 1690-1914*¹⁰ and *Music and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century Britain*.¹¹ Milestone's writing explores the town hall as an emerging concert venue in the nineteenth century, responding to an increasing demand for public concerts, and its position within the musical life and community of its

⁷ Derek B. Scott, 'Music, Morality and Rational Amusement at the Victorian Middle-Class Soirée', in *Music and Performance Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Temperley*, ed. Bennet Zon (Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), p. 83-102.

⁸ Rebecca Gribble, 'The finances, estates and social status of musicians in the late-eighteenth century', *The Music Profession in Britain 1780-1920: New Perspectives on Status and Identity*, ed. Rosemary Golding (Routledge: 2018), pp. 12-31.

⁹ Rachel Milestone, 'A New Impetus to the Love of Music': The Role of the Town Hall in Nineteenth-Century English Musical Culture' (PhD dissertation, University of Leeds, 2009).

¹⁰ Rachel Milestone, 'That monstrosity of bricks and mortar': The Town Hall as a Music Venue in Nineteenth-Century Stalybridge', *Music in the British Provinces, 1690-1914*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Peter Holman (Routledge, 2016), pp. 295-324.

¹¹ Rachel Milestone, 'A Melodious Phenomenon': The Institutional Influence on Town-Hall Music-Making', *Music and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Paul Rodmell and Bennett Zon (Routledge, 2012), pp. 55-77.

town, as well as the interplay between local authority and inhabitants through music.

Although Milestone acknowledges the important role the organ played in town hall music-making and as a symbol of civic pride, the focus of her work is on the town hall in a much broader musical context, as a general venue used in a variety of concerts appealing to a wider cross-section of society. My work deviates in that it concerns a smaller audience demographic, a smaller selection of concerts, and focuses on the analysis of the civic organs, their functions, use and moral implications.

Another recent thesis considering some elements of the nineteenth century civic organ tradition is Makiko Hayasaka's 2016 PhD thesis 'Organ Recitals as Popular Culture: The Secularisation of the Instrument and Its Repertoire in Britain, 1834-1950'.¹² Hayasaka's thesis provides a comprehensive look at secular organ culture and repertoire in Britain between 1834 and 1950, and the general development of commercial organ concerts, including cinema organs and the role of radio broadcasts in the 20th century. While there is some analysis of town hall organ concerts, which is the subject of one of the eight chapters of the thesis, Hayasaka's focus is much broader in both time and types of events compared to my project and focuses on commercial ventures and the development of what she describes as 'light-serious music'. While my work examines secular organ music within part of her timeframe, the civic concerts emerge as a separate tradition, not fully commercial and with their own distinct motivations and position in civic society. The repertoire of the civic organ concerts has different parameters, and do not fit neatly within Hayasaka's 'light-serious' categorisation. She also deals with a greater variety of venues and locations,

¹² Makiko Hayasaka, 'Organ Recitals as Popular Culture: The Secularisation of the Instrument and Its Repertoire in Britain, 1834-1950' (PhD dissertation, University of Bristol, 2016).

including resort towns and 'leisure palaces', where the organ was used to entertain a distinctly seasonal audience of visitors, compared to the rational entertainment of residents throughout the year, as is the focus of my thesis.

The third category of literature I have used consists of works on class and leisure in Victorian Britain, as well as the social role of the Victorian town hall. These usually cover music alongside other leisure pursuits found in Victorian society, but are on the whole concerned with leisure in the more general sense. A notable work on this subject is Peter Bailey's *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*.¹³ In it, Bailey examines the way leisure changed in the nineteenth century and the middle-class efforts to promote so-called 'rational recreation,' focusing mainly on sports, music hall and the Working Men's Club movement. Hugh Cunningham touches on many of the same aspects in *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*,¹⁴ particularly the fourth and fifth chapters, which deal with the evolution of leisure between 1850 and 1880, and the way class played into leisure.

Lastly, Colin Cunningham's comprehensive *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*¹⁵ must be mentioned. This has had a dual function as both a history of the town hall from 'the small market-space-and-assembly-room to the great municipal palace', their social function and position as expressions of civic pride, as well as a study of how early local government worked, but also as a guide for the choosing of case studies, due to its listing of town halls and similar public buildings constructed within the period.

¹³ Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*. (London, New York: Methuen, 1987)

¹⁴ Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c. 1780-c. 1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1980)

¹⁵ Colin Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981)

1.4: Methodology

It would be a formidable task to say exactly how many town halls there were in England in the nineteenth century. This is in part because the title itself is rather ambiguous. The character and functions of a town hall varied from town to town, depending on local requirements, needs and ambitions, and there are many buildings which are known as town halls which at no point fulfilled the public duties associated with the town hall, such as hosting public meetings and court sessions, just as there are buildings which did fulfil these duties, but which were not known as town halls. Many included a performance or meeting space to serve the local community for events such as political or religious meetings, concerts, exhibitions, or public lectures, while others simply functioned as administrative centres. Furthermore, while there was a surge in the construction of new town halls throughout the nineteenth century, not all town halls were built for that purpose. Perhaps the most famous example, and an example of a town hall which did not serve any administrative purposes, is Birmingham Town Hall, which was built and functioned as a secular concert hall. Some towns repurposed existing public buildings, including old assizes and moot halls, and in other instances, the town hall had been built as a private business, only to be purchased by the local authorities at a later stage to serve as the town hall. Many corn markets and corn exchanges in particular found new life as civic concert halls or public offices.

The common traits for town halls were their public nature, being managed by local authorities in whichever form they took in the service of municipal or other public functions.

As with the town halls, it is similarly difficult to say for certain how many civic organs there were. The number would grow rapidly during the latter half of the nineteenth century as the trend spread, reaching its apex around the 1870s and 1880s, but after the turn of the century their popularity began to wane, leading to instruments being replaced or removed, or falling into disuse. As with the buildings, the origins and purposes of the civic organs varied. Some halls were designed with an organ in mind and the organ was purpose-built for that specific space and use, while in other cases the organ was a later addition, possibly purchased in its entirety from a different venue, like a church or an exhibition hall, and in some cases requiring major alterations to the hall to fit in.

It is helpful here to give some definitions of terms used throughout the thesis. In this thesis, when the term 'civic' is used, the intended meaning is two-fold. First, the term pertains to ownership. A civic building or organ in this sense is one owned by (in the form of being in the possession of) a local government organisation or, if not formally in public ownership, owned 'on behalf of' the people of a city or town. The second part of the meaning relates to the purposes for which the building or organ was intended - that is, these buildings and organs were intended to be used in municipal or public functions, for example as municipal offices, public meeting places, and in the case of the organs, public concerts.

It is necessary for the definition to include certain organs nominally in private ownership, as certain town halls, for example those at Kidderminster and Worcester in the first few years of their existence, were funded by and owned by private entities. While being privately owned, these buildings and organs were not neatly commercial ventures, and their primary purpose seems not to have been to earn a financial return on the capital invested. Instead,

alongside a hope that the expenditures incurred would be repaid, were a series of aims concerned with the social, moral and cultural wellbeing of the local population.

Within the confines of this thesis, my definition of a 'concert' falls within a broad category of performances of a public character, performed in a public building, whose chief focus was music. Furthermore, the 'civic organ concert' is a subset of this, of a somewhat similar character to the Birmingham Pops and the 'people's concerts', which were aimed at the working (and sometimes lower-middle) classes, either explicitly or implicitly, and were of a non-commercial character, in as far as the main goal of the concert was not to make a profit, but to have a moralising effect on their intended audience. These concerts were focused on organ music, and though they could also include other forms, especially vocal music, the organ was in a central position.

Defining the term 'working class' is a more difficult matter. There are various aspects to be considered, and the Victorians' own definition of the term can be unreliable and vague at best, relying on assumptions and stereotypes of certain professions or groups. The general nature of many descriptions does not help either, wherein terms are used in the context of an unspecified understanding of their meaning, without the need for further explanation. There were many factors which could indicate social identity and class. Income and occupation were common markers, though by no means the universal indicators they were often implied to be, and as Searle describes in his book *A New England*, 'social position in Victorian England could be as much determined by how people behaved as by the scale and source of their income.'¹⁶ This is further complicated by the equally complex makeup of the middle classes, and the blurring of class divisions in provincial towns where the classes

¹⁶ G. R. Searle, *A New England?: Peace and War 1886-1918* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 99.

mingled to a greater degree. Searle provides a loose definition of the middle class as those whose income exceeded £160 a year and who had the means to employ at least one domestic servant, yet acknowledges that there were members of the middle classes whose income fell well below these markers and who instead qualified for the class through their education and non-manual employment.

Alan Bartley discusses the issue of defining the working class in his book on the People's Concert Society, where he explains that 'for the modern historian, the problem of defining the class divisions is compounded by the overlaps in those factors that might be expected to separate the classes, such as pecuniary status and education'¹⁷, something which was especially evident in the upper parts of the working class and the lower parts of the middle class. Within this thesis, the issue is compounded by the language used by the middle-class organisers behind the civic recitals. These often refer to working men and their families when discussing their ambitions for the recitals, using terms such as 'working men' or 'labouring class', but rarely provide any clear detail about these groups, giving the impression of a clear social distinction between the organisers and their intended audience.

In light of this, the simplest definition of 'working-class' is those who made their living through manual labour, with a division drawn between skilled and unskilled workers, but it was equally a matter of how one saw oneself, or who one was *not*, as demonstrated by the distinction made in the organisation of civic concerts, where the working classes are depicted as 'other' to the middle-class organisers. The source material also lacks any accounts from the supposed working-class audiences, meaning that the data is almost

¹⁷ Alan Bartley, *Far From the Fashionable Crowd: The People's Concert Society and Music in London's Suburbs* (Whimbrel Publishing, 2009), p. 7.

exclusively drawn from the side of the organisers, who clearly did not consider themselves to be part of the working class, while also presenting the working-class themselves as an alien body of people in need of their influence and guidance.

As will become apparent in later chapters, there is little concrete evidence for the social make-up of the audiences at civic organ recitals held in the case study towns, outside of the relative satisfaction expressed by the organisers regarding attendance, and certain implications made by local press, such as describing audience members as ‘those for whom the concerts were intended’. The audience themselves, whichever class they may have belonged to, remains silent and unknown, to the point where we may very well question whether the intended audience existed outside the minds of the concert organisers.

Considering these factors, the definition of ‘working class’ I have chosen to use in my thesis follows the ones laid out by Bartley and Searle, being intentionally somewhat vague and based on ‘elementary economics, since this was a major factor in deciding the demographic make-up of a concert audience’, including ‘all ‘blue collar’ (and ‘no collar’) workers, ranging from domestic servants and the labourers who relied on casual employment to the skilled workers comprising the artisan élite’ and certain ‘white collar’ workers as well.¹⁸ In several of the case studies, members of the local authorities also held prominent positions in local industries, especially in the smaller towns where one major industry, or even a single major workplace, employed a significant percentage of the local population. This overlap between local industry and authority would naturally lead us to assume that the intended working-class audience here would draw heavily from these industrial workers, with whom the organisers were familiar. The very poorest elements of the working classes were likely

¹⁸ Bartley, *Far From the Fashionable Crowds*, p. 8.

excluded from the concerts, as Dave Russell notes in his examination of music hall audiences, 'as from so much else, not simply by lack of cash for entry (...) but by lack of respectable clothing.'¹⁹

The precise nature of the town halls considered in my case studies varies. Some were purpose-built explicitly to fulfil a civic role, other were purchased by local authorities to play this role; in some cases, the primary purpose of the building was the provision of music, while in others the musical function was secondary to other civic activities. Bearing this in mind, it was clear from the very beginning of this project that it would be a task far beyond the scope of a PhD thesis to attempt a complete study of the English civic organ tradition, or at least one that would amount to anything more than broad statistics. In order to learn anything meaningful about the tradition, it would have to be explored through a selection of case studies, which would provide insight into the management of the organs and the musical activity involving them, the ambitions and efforts of the local authorities, the role and work of the civic organist, and so on.

In choosing my case studies, it quickly became evident that London, being the capital, a major port and the administrative centre for an enormous empire, would likely provide examples of a different character from those of the rest of the country. I also made the decision to exclude resort towns. While many resort towns had organs both in civic and commercial buildings, and made important contributions to the promotion and popularisation of organ music, as has been demonstrated by Hayasaka, it also catered primarily to a seasonal, transient audience of holidaymakers, chiefly in the summer months, which would have led to concerts of a different character from those aimed at residents of a

¹⁹ Russell, *Popular Music in England*, p. 92.

non-resort town, where the organisers saw the potential to use the concerts for a didactic effect.

I decided to narrow my search to town halls in the West Midlands, both for the convenience of accessing local sources, but also due to the proximity to the origin of the civic organ tradition, this being the organ in Birmingham Town Hall, although I excluded Birmingham, as much has already been written about the hall and its organ. Instead, I wanted to explore how this earliest of civic organ efforts affected surrounding towns and boroughs. This narrowing of focus also had the useful effect of adding coherence to the case studies chosen. Because the towns involved shared some geographical, cultural and economic similarities, it became easier to compare and contrast the interesting aspects of the civic organ and its use, with fewer complications in terms of social and regional context than if the thesis had examined case studies spread across the country.

An additional effect of choosing smaller towns and boroughs which became increasingly clear as the research progressed, was the potential that this provided to observe and analyse the political and social networks in operation in the musical life of the town halls. The organists, politicians and philanthropists involved often knew each other, had personal and professional relationships, and local motivations which are revealing of the social goals and role of the organ concerts.

Using the National Pipe Organ Register's online database as a guide, I ultimately narrowed the search down to four case studies: Worcester, Kidderminster, West Bromwich and Wednesbury.

These case studies have clear similarities. They are all industrial towns in the Midlands which had town halls and organs constructed in the nineteenth century, and ran series of non-commercial civic organ recitals, whose aim was to educate and improve the morals of the local working class. At the same time, there are also sufficient differences between them with regard to history, size, population, industry, musical activity and date of organ construction to explore the variations and developments in the tradition formed according to these parameters. Worcester is the largest town among the case studies, both in terms of size and population. As a cathedral town, it was a well-established centre for culture and commerce, and had a strong music presence long before the construction of its future Town Hall, in part through the Three Choirs Festival. The local economy was also the most diverse among the case studies, including various manufactures, including textile and china products. Smaller in size and population than Worcester, yet much larger than either of the Black Country sites, Kidderminster's economy was less diverse, focused almost wholly on the manufacture of carpets, and suffered many trade setbacks throughout the nineteenth century. Wednesbury and West Bromwich are both smaller towns in the Black Country and part of the general iron trades that developed in the district after the Industrial Revolution, experiencing a significant population growth in the nineteenth century and major changes to their civic structure.

The selection of case studies also provides diversity in the 'civic' nature of their town halls and organs. In the two Black Country case studies, the halls and organs were built by the local government, while in Worcester and Kidderminster, the halls and organs were initially constructed by private companies (albeit not with a purely commercial motivation), before being purchased by the local authorities at a later point.

While in relative proximity to one another and sharing certain broad similarities, the case studies also have their distinctive geographies, and illustrate how these may have affected the development of leisure in each place. One such factor is the relative isolation of Worcester and Kidderminster, compared to West Bromwich and Wednesbury, which are part of a denser network of towns. The former pair became, both due to their isolation and their positions as commercial hubs, local centres within their area, while the closeness of West Bromwich and Wednesbury naturally led to a great deal of cross-influencing between the two, and both were to a significant extent satellites of Birmingham and Wolverhampton. This led to a redirection of a portion of the recreational traffic to the larger towns, and a relative lack of investment in local recreational opportunities. The overlap between the Black Country case studies led to the decision to consider them together.

In each case study, I have tried to ascertain the process and the ambitions behind the construction of the civic organs, and to consider the musical activity that took place involving each instrument, specifically the efforts of the local authorities in utilising the organs to promote affordable rational recreation. I have also tried to examine the work and role of the civic organist, and the public response to the instrument and recitals performed on them.

Much of this work had been done through the study of local primary sources, chiefly municipal records, documents and newspapers. The municipal records and documents provide information on the planning of the buildings and instruments, and the process of commissioning and funding these, plus the appointment of organists, as well as giving some insight into the intentions and motivations of the local authorities. Local and national newspapers provide insight into the promotion and reception of the organs and the concerts

performed on them, through advertisements, reviews, reports and discourse around public events and characters.

Though some of the primary sources used in my research are available online, for the most part in the form of local and regional newspapers and other documents, a large portion consists of records only available in local archives. This is especially true with the smaller case studies, where fewer records have been digitalised, and must instead be viewed on microfilm or similar media on site.

A major hurdle in this has been the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020, which led to the indefinite closure of many local archives and libraries, most of which are still not open at the time of writing in May 2021. This has meant that I have not been able to go back to these archives to check sources or conduct further research beyond what I had managed to do in the first years of my PhD. This will be reflected in certain loose ends and unanswered questions. Where there is a gap in the available information, I have relied on what information is available, contextual information from non-local sources and made attempts to make reasonable inferences from the sources I have.

The main archives I have used are the County Archive held at the Hive in Worcester, the Community History and Archive Service at Smethwick Library (CHAS), and Kidderminster Library.

An inevitable limitation of working with local records is that many documents have been lost or discarded over time, or exist in unorganised collections.

The archive in Worcester holds the most complete set of records, including several volumes of notes from council meetings and other official documents, but is also the largest collection to work through.

Sandwell Community History and Archives Service (CHAS) in Smethwick holds the records for Wednesbury and West Bromwich, being part of the modern borough of Sandwell. These records are less complete than at Worcester, and the project of organising the local government records for either town, which has recently been moved to the centre, had only just begun at my first visit, making finding useful information difficult. They also hold a collection of local newspapers on microfilm, which has been very useful.

The collection held at Kidderminster Library is by far the least complete of the three local collections, having suffered from the upheaval of official records after merging into the Wyre Forest district in 1974, during which many records were lost or destroyed. There are very few minutes of council meetings or similar records, and so for this case study, I have relied to a great extent on local newspapers and secondary sources. An additional local resource in Kidderminster is the Hill Organ Promotion Society, which is currently responsible for the care and promotion of the organ, from which I got some useful information.

The key information provided by these archives has been about the process of the local government in constructing a town hall and obtaining an organ for it, and some discussion around what they hoped to achieve with the instrument, as well as response from the local community through newspapers and letters. Outside of these, the general documentation for the case studies is somewhat limited. For example, when it comes to the civic organists themselves, little documentary information is available, meaning that it has been necessary

to patch together a picture of any given person through newspaper advertisements, obituaries and other records. I was able to use the National Archives at Kew to obtain some information about companies associated with the town hall buildings.

The same is also true for company records, and especially organ building firms. Many firms changed hands repeatedly, merged with other firms, or were wound up entirely in the 20th century, as demand for pipe organs diminished. This often had the result of older records being discarded or displaced, in particular for instruments that no longer exist or have been relocated. Of the organ building firms involved in my case studies, Hill, Nicholson and Forster & Andrews, only one is still in existence today. Despite being some of the most important and influential organ-builders of the nineteenth century, both Hill and Forster & Andrews were wound up in the mid- to late 20th century, Hill having amalgamated with Norman & Beard in 1916. This has negatively affected the extent of their surviving records.

Very few of the existing records are digitalised, and so must be viewed in person. In the case of Nicholson and Forster & Andrews, few records of their pre-1900 instruments remain. The surviving records of the original William Hill & Son firm are held at the Cadbury Research Library, in the British Organ Archive collection. However, these records are limited, owing to the destruction of many records from before 1872 in a workshop fire.²⁰ The British Organ Archive collection also holds records from Nicholson & Co., but only after 1886, and so does not cover the construction of the town hall organs in my case studies. The records for Forster & Andrews are held at Hull History Centre, which I have been unable to visit due to the pandemic. I have examined the catalogue, although this is of limited use, and have

²⁰ British Institute of Organ Studies, 'Handlist to the British Organ Archive' (January 2021), p. 30.

obtained scanned copies of documents relating to the Wednesbury and West Bromwich instruments.

I had hoped to find in the records of the organ builders details of the construction of the instruments, possible correspondence between the builders and the commissioners of the civic organs, and other related materials. Unfortunately, this kind of information was not available, though other sources do provide some of this. The stoplists for the organs were often printed in contemporary newspapers and journals, along with discussions of the process of building the organs and other technical details, which indicate the intended use of the organ and any requests or concerns the commissioners may have had. The British Institute of Organ Studies also provides an online register of organs in the National Pipe Organ Register,²¹ which lists stoplists and limited information about a large number of British organs. However, it is not wholly reliable, and I have notified the Institute about certain discrepancies.

Besides the records of various British organ building firms, the British Organ Archives hold various collections of secondary sources on British organ history, including a back catalogue of the British Institute of Organ Studies (BIOS) Journal and various books on the subject, such as monographs on builders and performers, histories of the organ and reference texts for organists in certain years. This resource, too, has been closed for much of the pandemic.

While some contemporary newspapers are available in local archives, either as physical copies or on microfilm, many are to be found online, through the British Newspaper Archive, run by the British Library. These have proved especially useful as the pandemic has

²¹ The National Pipe Organ Register, <https://www.npor.org.uk/> (2020)

necessitated the closing of many libraries and archives. Another important source of material is the many popular music periodicals published throughout the nineteenth century. Extensive collections of many of these are available through online platforms like JStor and ProQuest, and they contain commentary on contemporary musical issues, provide updates from the musical communities in the provinces and, later in the century, separate sections on organ music. One issue with online resources such as newspapers and periodicals is that they are usually scanned, and unless you know which exact number or issue you want to look at, you have to rely on the given website's search function. This depends on optical programmes which register what is written on each scanned page, but with many older newspapers, the quality of the scan is sometimes not good enough for exact words to be registered, or excludes page numbers or other details. In comparison, non-digitalised newspapers in archives are most often on a microfilm roll, which requires methodical reading to find relevant articles.

Although the pandemic presented some difficulties in accessing documents, the combination of sources described above has enabled me to build a picture of the role the civic organ and organist played in the campaign of moral and musical improvement found in provincial England in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the ways they interacted with their communities.

CHAPTER 2 – THE PROBLEM OF LEISURE: MUSIC AND MORALS IN THE VICTORIAN MIDLANDS

2.1: The emergence of leisure and recreational reform

Prior to the nineteenth century, most of the population in England lived rurally in villages, but as the economy shifted from agriculture to manufacture, so did the population, flocking to new and growing industrial centres in search of work. Not only did this lead to a general increase in population, but also to a significant shift away from ‘traditional’ agricultural centres like Lincoln and Canterbury. Weber estimates that in 1801, 16.94 percent of the population lived in cities, which had increased to 35.0 percent by 1851 and would rise to 53.6 percent by 1891.¹ While London would remain the chief political and cultural centre of the country, new centres of manufacturing played an increasing role and developed their own cultural scenes.

This rapid urbanisation and industrialisation did not come without issues. The new provincial centres were lacking political power and sometimes also the necessary political structures to efficiently govern their own growth and expanding population. Growth was not centrally planned and regulated, and the increased population soon led to problems around space, sanitation and public health. Many members of the new urban working class found themselves living in cramped, unsanitary conditions, working in dangerous, unregulated workplaces (many characterised by predatory employment practices), and experiencing a wide range of social issues as a result.

¹ Adna Ferrin Weber, *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century: a Study in Statistics* (1899; reis., Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967.), p. 47.

Another, perhaps less tangible, but no less critical aspect of life that was changed through industrialisation was the restructuring of time. In pre-industrial working-class life, there was little distinction between work and leisure. For most people, their work was centred around their home, be it a farm or a workshop in their house. The workman was largely responsible for his own time, following the natural pace of sunrise and sunset, free to stop when he needed or wanted to, and so leisure happened whenever it could. The year followed the agricultural calendar, structured around the seasons and dotted with wakes, holidays and feasts. Only the richest, the aptly named 'leisured class,' had true leisure time and could afford to spend it on unprofitable activities.

But as more of the population found themselves employed in manufacturing, and necessary support industries such as retail and transport, a new, compartmentalised rhythm of life slowly replaced the old. Another catalyst for this transformation of the understanding of time was the development and popularisation of new forms of transport. The railways, in particular, necessitated the national standardisation of time in order to create reliable time tables, leading to the adoption of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) as the national standard in 1847, becoming known simply as 'Railway Time.'² New trades also meant the work hours were no longer season-based as they had been before, instead remaining the same throughout the year, and the rise of the mass employer created new structures within the workplace, with greater distance between the employer and his now larger workforce. At the factory or the mine, the workman was no longer in control of his work hours in the way he had been before: he worked from the time he arrived at his post to the time he was

² 'Railway Time – from natural time to clock time', *Greenwich Mean Time*, accessed 31 May 2021, <https://greenwichmeantime.com/articles/history/railway/>

released (in pre-determined shifts), but once he left his workplace, he was free to spend the remainder of his day as he pleased.

Of course, these leisure hours were often short and the day's work so hard that he could hardly do more than eat his supper and rest, especially so in the earliest days of industrial life, but they were nonetheless his to spend. Over the decades, this leisure time would expand through a series of regulatory reforms which reduced work hours, as well as reducing the prevalence of child labour. These included the Factory Acts of 1833 and 1847, which led to stricter regulations of working conditions, reducing the permissible hours children, young people and women could work, and mandating that children should receive a minimum level of education.

The majority of working-class women in the nineteenth century also worked, taking on either full or part-time paid work, but unlike their male counterparts, they had hardly any leisure time at all. Unmarried women had to provide for themselves and their families, and usually for much lower pay than their male counterparts despite working the same hours in the same trades. Domestic service was by far the most common profession for unmarried working-class girls, with more than a million female domestic workers in England in 1851, and this would remain 'the largest single employment for English women' until World War 1.³ Most domestic workers lived in the same house as their employers, and enjoyed very little personal free time, the worst off being the 'skivvy' or 'maid-of-all-work' who was solely responsible for the running of her employer's household. Their work hours, which were

³ Joan Perkin, *Victorian Women* (London: John Murray Ltd., 1993), p. 172; John Burnett, *Annals of Labour* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1974), p. 135.

unregulated, lasted most of the day, with John Burnett estimating in *Annals of Labour* that as late as 1873,

a house-maid's day extended from 6 A.M. until 10 P.M., during which she had two-and-a-half hours for meals and an hour-and-a-half in the afternoon for needlework, a total of four hours' 'rest' (...) On Saturday, when the factory hand worked two hours less than usual, the servant worked longer, and on Sunday, when the factory worker could rest completely, the servant was still required to work almost a normal day.⁴

This left essentially no time for leisure outside the house, and domestic workers' unmarried status put additional restrictions on them leaving their place of employment on their own. Once married, many working-class women continued to work out of necessity, with around a quarter of married women performing regular work outside their home in 1851.⁵ This was in addition to the countless responsibilities that came with running a household, and so even a woman in the upper levels of the working-class, who did not have to take on extra work to supplement her husband's income, had her hands full with cooking, cleaning, childrearing, and everything in between.

For these reasons, women rarely featured in discussions on working-class leisure. We can see this reflected in the overtly male-oriented focus from the organisers behind recreation aimed at the working-class; women are only brought up as part of the family union, and even then, it is usually as passive recipients of the moral influence administered to working men. The belief appears to have been that if you reformed the man, you reformed his family alongside him.

⁴ Burnett, *Annals of Labour*, p. 171.

⁵ Perkin, *Victorian Women*, p. 196.

This newfound relative freedom among the working classes became a point of concern for various members of the middle classes, such as employers, social reformers and local politicians, who questioned whether the working man could be trusted to spend these hours, removed from their supervision, in a way that was moral, constructive and healthy, or whether these hours would be spent on pursuits that were detrimental to the men themselves and others, perhaps even threatening social order through unrest and radical politics.⁶ Coloured by the middle classes' uneasy relationship with the concept of leisure, described by Peter Bailey as 'a threat to the discipline and cohesion of the bourgeois world'⁷, numerous attempts were made throughout the nineteenth century to regulate, control, or otherwise influence working-class leisure, no matter how little there was of it. These attempts came from different groups within society, and were made on different grounds, be it to serve the interests of factory owners, politicians, religious groups, civic figures, and so on. This diversity was especially prominent in industrial towns which had experienced rapid population growth during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

In Antje Pieper's work comparing the emergence of the middle classes in nineteenth-century Leipzig and Birmingham, she points to the way the rapid influx of people to industrial centres helped shape the towns and allowed the local middle-class to take a prominent position in the cultural lives of communities as they grew along with their towns. The main effects of the population influx was a diversity of trades and industry, as well as religious diversity, an increased number of voluntary associations, and a lack of a shared past leading to a focus on

⁶ Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 17-18.

⁷ Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance*, p. 21.

the present, instead of building on long-established traditions.⁸ Local characteristics had an influence on these effects, for example how a smaller town might not see a great change in trade diversity, maintaining a core industry while also experiencing significant population growth. Similarly, towns without traditional aristocratic patronage would see music being promoted by other social groups to a greater degree.

The majority of reform efforts came from the middle class, but within this there were various groups concerned with different goals, aiming their efforts at different bodies of people, and holding different forms of power over those they sought to influence. Many of these groups looked to the arts, and music in particular, in their reform attempts.

One early group to express concerns with modes of working-class leisure and a desire to reform it, comprised industrial employers in the first decades of the nineteenth century. This was at an early stage of the development of the large, industrial workplace, and there was not yet a standard model of employer-employee relations, nor any effective trade unions to campaign for workers' rights. Not only was there minimal national regulation of labour conditions, but there was also a need to train a workforce used to a less regimented system of employment to operate within the requirements set by this new form. The stereotypical idea of how these employers asserted control over their workers is mainly punitive: fines for tardiness or insufficient work, or corporal punishment for younger workers. However, there were also various 'carrots' to go with these sticks. Some employers saw exerting influence over how their lowest-ranking workers spent their leisure time as a means to control them, keep them placid, and improve them morally.

⁸ Antje Pieper, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 10-12.

The way in which these ideas took form varied greatly between employers, reflecting the personal interests of individual industrialists. This was not an organised movement, but rather a number of employers independently embarking on similar projects at the same time. Patronage of the arts by industrialists had been developing since the late eighteenth century, through funding of provincial festivals and exhibitions, and so many looked to the arts in their efforts to reform their employees. Some of the more popular ways in which this was done were through the organising of reading groups, singing classes and brass bands, with the earliest factory bands dating back to the 1820s.

Some later employers had much grander visions for their employees, going as far as creating model villages where the workers could live at a much higher standard than usual, with every amenity available within the community, provided they followed their employers' moral guidelines, such as a complete ban on alcohol within the village. In two of the most famous of these model villages, Saltaire in Bradford (founded in 1851) and Bournville in Birmingham (founded in 1853), the employers provided their residents with all amenities, including housing, schools, parks, reading rooms and bath-houses, but specifically did not permit the running of public houses within the villages.⁹¹⁰

The fact that both Titus Salt, the founder of Saltaire, and the Cadbury family, who founded Bournville, were nonconformists was not a coincidence. The emergence of various evangelical Protestant denominations in England played an important role in the formation of the rational recreation movement, and the widespread ideal of self-help and improvement. Many of the nonconformist churches shared core social values, placing great

⁹ Robert K. Dewhirst, 'Saltaire', *The Town Planning Review* 31, No. 2 (July 1960), p. 139.

¹⁰ William A. Harvey, *The Model Village and Its Cottages: Bournville* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1906), p. 5.

emphasis on charity and community duty, alongside personal values which would come to characterise the Victorian middle classes, such as sobriety, frugality, modesty, piety, charity, discipline, self-control, self-improvement, personal responsibility, and hard work.¹¹ Of the nonconformist denominations, Methodism was by far the largest and most influential, spreading rapidly following the end of the eighteenth century, particularly among the lower classes. Methodism, with its open-air evangelism and egalitarian views, stood in opposition to many of the traditional elements of English class structure, especially the paternalism and deference to landowners common in the rural parts of the country. The church also had a rich musical tradition, with congregational hymn singing central to its worship, described by David Hempton as 'an expression of individual and corporate affirmation, an aid to memory, a trigger of religious emotion, and a creator of spiritual identity.'¹² John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, himself wrote on 'the Power of Music' as early as 1779, describing 'its power to affect the hearers; to raise various passions in the human mind',¹³ and would take an active role in writing and publishing numerous Methodist hymn books along with his brother Charles.

The efforts of the early industrialists were in part possible because of the personal convictions of the employers, but also because they dealt with a limited community of workers, over whom they held significant and direct power.¹⁴ By the 1830s and 40s, many industrial workplaces had expanded far beyond their initial boundaries, and as a result many employers took on a less direct role, stepping away from the day-to-day running of their

¹¹ David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (Yale University Press, 2005), p. 42.

¹² Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, p. 74.

¹³ John Wesley, 'Thoughts on the Power of Music', *Methodist Magazine* 38 (1815), p. 866.

¹⁴ Eric D. Mackerness, *A Social History of English Music* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1964), p. 131.

business and leaving much of the interaction with the workers to managers, who did not hold the same recreational ideals and ambitions as their superiors did, nor the means with which to enforce them. But a new, larger demographic was already champing at the bit to take its place: the urban middle-class.

The urban provincial middle classes had been growing in numbers, power and confidence since the last quarter of the eighteenth century, as the Industrial Revolution had both increased their numbers and enabled them to amass wealth through manufacture and trading. They were also keen to establish their own identity within the social structure of the new industrial town, distinct from that of the nobility and the working-class. Like the industrialists, most of whom were part of the wider middle-class (despite many having ambitions to transcend it), this group often defined itself in terms of religion, with much influence from nonconformism and its values. In some provincial industrial towns, it almost appears as if the middle class made up an entirely new section of society, which had to develop its own social structure and pecking order, as it did not fit into the traditional land-owning and farming hierarchies that had existed in the towns prior to industrialisation. These would naturally take on views and values coloured by their position, such as valuing education and personal achievements over kindred connections, wealth or long family history.

2.2: Public sanitation, working-class recreation and the pub

The 1830s and 1840s were plagued by grave issues surrounding public health and social order. Living standards for the urban working classes were still poor, and the rapid

urbanisation of towns and cities had brought the working and middle classes into close proximity with one another – close enough for the middle-class to bear witness to the horrendous conditions their working-class neighbours lived in, with limited public relief in sight, yet also close enough to invite scrutiny from the middle-class regarding working-class leisure and life. Part of the overarching social debate was particularly concerned with leisure and popular recreation, and its potential improving effect on the working-class. As noted by Peter Bailey, '(...) improved recreations were an important instrument for educating the working classes in the social values of middle-class orthodoxy.'¹⁵ By improving the moral character of the working classes, it was hoped that their lives would be generally improved, and by extension, that they would not be a threat to social order.

There was also a need for change in the methods of local government, in order to cope with the many unprecedented issues that came with the rapid increase in population, public sanitation being one of the most pressing concerns. This concern for public health, further propelled by a series of cholera outbreaks in the early nineteenth century, was eventually addressed in the 1848 Public Health Act, which led to the formation of what would become one of the earliest forms of local government in Great Britain. The Act established a General Board of Health in London, which advised on matters regarding sanitation and public health, as well as sending inspectors to towns wishing to adopt the Act. Local boards of health, often simply known as local boards, were set up by the General Board in places where a minimum of one tenth of the ratepayers signed a petition for the creation of a local board, in non-corporate towns or in towns where the annual death rate 'exceeded the proportion of

¹⁵ Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, p. 47.

twenty-three to a thousand'.¹⁶ These boards functioned as local authorities for urban areas in England and Wales, superseding the previous system of improvement commissioners, and were managed by the General Board, which granted them the necessary powers to deal with sanitary matters in their area. The members of the board were elected by local ratepayers and property owners, or, in the case of incorporated towns, selected by the corporation. The requirements for potential members to be eligible for election were that they be 'resident within the District (...) or within Seven Miles thereof' and held assets of at least £500, later rising to £1,000.¹⁷ This asset requirement meant that only affluent citizens could be elected onto the local boards and take on the responsibilities, status and powers that came with this position.

As will become apparent in certain case study chapters, some local boards took on a far broader role than the 1848 Act had outlined, constructing public buildings and even attempting to influence the 'moral' health, as well as the physical health, of their citizens.

A key distinction between early industrial employers and urban middle-class recreational reformers was the scope of their efforts and their ability to directly influence those whom they sought to reform. Where the early industrialists had been concerned with a single group of employees within a workplace, the new recreational reformists were concerned with the urban working class as a whole, giving their reform attempts a more general character. However, as these reform efforts were made outside management structures which had direct influence over the workers and their time, different methods of deploying social power were necessary.

¹⁶ W. G. Lumley, *The New Sanitary Laws* (London: Shaw and Sons, 1859), p. 39.

¹⁷ The Public Health Act, 1848, 11 & 12 Vict., c. 63, p. 16.

It is here important to note that urban working-class leisure had considerable limitations in the first half of the nineteenth century, owing to various factors such as lack of space and money, and, crucially, the absence of leisure time. The new compartmentalisation of life that followed the introduction of the factory system meant that leisure was now something to be sought outside the workplace, and working-class homes, cramped and unsanitary, were often unfit for relaxation and amusement. Many contemporary forms of entertainment, such as the opera, were far beyond the working classes' cultural reach, and most had neither the resources nor time to travel in search of recreation, as the middle and upper classes could. There were not yet many free libraries or reading-rooms, and depending on the size of the town, there were few, if any, open public spaces for working-class use, most open pockets quickly becoming absorbed by the ongoing expansion of the town.

If we look to the case study towns as examples, Wednesbury did not have a public park or a free library until after the opening of its town hall and organ, although an educational institute for the workers at the Crown Tube Works was opened in 1864¹⁸, and a library for the employees of the London and North Western Railway Company was established in 1866.¹⁹ Residents of West Bromwich had libraries and reading rooms available much earlier than their neighbours in Wednesbury, dating back to the late eighteenth century, but some of these, such as the West Bromwich Literary Institution which opened in 1836, required expensive subscriptions. Similarly, a public park was opened in 1878, the same year that the West Bromwich organ was inaugurated. In Kidderminster, the Municipal Library opened

¹⁸ *Wolverhampton Chronicle and Staffordshire Advertiser* (2 November 1864)

¹⁹ *Wolverhampton Chronicle and Staffordshire Advertiser* (24 January 1866). Wednesbury Free Library was opened in 1878, and the public park in 1887.

shortly after the 1850 Public Libraries Act, but was 'reference-only until a lending library was established in 1881'²⁰, and a public park was not available until 1887.

What often remained for the majority of working-class people was the church and the pub.

The Victorian pub was not merely a place where one could eat and drink. It was more akin to a social centre – a veritable institution within its community, and perhaps the only place that offered genuine respite to the English working man at the time. Friedrich Engels observed this in 1845, as well as the social dangers that came with it, describing how

(...) all allurements combine to bring the workers to drunkenness. Liquor is almost their only source of pleasure, and all things aspire to make it accessible to them. The working-man comes from his work tired, exhausted, finds his home comfortless, damp, dirty, repulsive; he has urgent need of recreation, he *must* have something to make work worth his trouble, to make the prospect of the next day endurable. (...) His enfeebled frame, weakened by bad air and bad food, violently demands some external stimulus; his social need can be gratified only in the public-house, he has absolutely no other place where he can meet his friends.²¹

Engels was not exaggerating. A working man in the early nineteenth century might well spend more time at the pub than in his own home. At the pub, he could not only drink, but take his meals, socialise with his fellow workmen, enjoy games, read the paper for free (some pubs even held small libraries), attend political meetings, take part in friendly societies and savings associations, and far more. In many places in the late eighteenth and

²⁰ Teresa Gerrard and Alexis Weedon, 'The 'Lower Classes Are Very Hard Readers': Kidderminster Municipal Library 1855-56', *Library & Information History* 29, iss. 2 (2013), p. 81.

²¹ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845; reis. Penguin Books, 1845), p. 133.

early nineteenth centuries, the pub was an active part of working life, functioning as a labour exchange for tramping workmen,²² and was also where many workers had to collect their pay, as the pubs had easily accessible change, or alternatively, as described in the autobiography of Charles Shaw, a Staffordshire potter, where the workers were forced to go and break up the lump sum they were given by their employer.²³ Edwin Chadwick, secretary to the Poor Law commissioners from 1834 to 1847, and a passionate campaigner for social and sanitary reform, paints a clear picture of this tradition among the findings published in his 1842 *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*. In this, a Leeds employer is quoted, describing how

The effects produced by payment at the public-house are to oblige the workman to drink. He is kept waiting in the public-house during a long time, varying from two to three hours, sometimes as much as five hours. The workman cannot remain in the house without drinking, even if he were alone, as he must make some return to the landlord for the use of the room. (...) The evil is not confined to the men; the destructive habit is propagated in their families. At each public-house a proportion of the poor women, their wives, attend. (...) The poor women have no other mode of getting money to market with on the Saturday night than attending at the public-house to get it from their husbands. They may have children whom they cannot leave at home, and these they bring with them.²⁴

²² Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse, A Social history 1200-1830* (Longman Group Ltd., 1983), p. 317.

²³ Charles Shaw, *When I Was a Child* (London: Caliban Books, 1986), p. 67. 'The custom was to pay three or four men, with their helpers, in one lump sum, say a five-pound note, and some odd sovereigns. (...) The wages were fastened up in one lump sum until loosened at some public-house. Men and women and children had to go there for their wages. The publican took good care to be in no hurry in changing the money given him.' The diary deals with the years 1832-1853, the excerpt probably dating from the 1840s.

²⁴ Chadwick, *The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, pp. 247-8.

As we have seen earlier, this lack of consideration for working-class women in the discussions around recreational reform was common, wherein women are mentioned mostly as unfortunate appendages to the working-class family, as seen in Chadwick's report, or not acknowledged at all. Robert Slaney, MP and contemporary of Chadwick, had also addressed the need for recreational reform alongside improvements in public health in his 1840 'Plea to Power and Parliament', stating that

Another measure necessary for the welfare of the working class (especially those in large towns and populous districts) is the means of occasional and harmless relaxation from their constant toil (...) At present, in many districts and most great manufacturing towns, their only place of refuge and short-lived enjoyment is a public-house, or place connected with some drinking shop; and yet we too often reproach and punish them for inebriety, the natural consequence of our own neglect!²⁵

Slaney defended the much-maligned workers and their ways by placing the burden on the ruling classes, believing it was the duty of both the Government and the upper classes to take paternal action and ensure that the working-class had access to 'some innocent excitement' and occasional amusements in regulated forms. In his words, it was 'as natural and needful for them to seek some amusement and excitement as for the other classes to do so; and if not assisted and guided by the Government or the rich, they will fly to demagogues and dangerous courses.'²⁶

²⁵ Robert A. Slaney, *Report of the House of Commons on the Education and Health of the Poorer Classes – A Plea to Power and Parliament for the Working Classes* (Garland Publishing Inc., 1985), p. 132.

²⁶ Slaney, *A Plea to Power and Parliament for the Working Classes*, p. 138.

The most dangerous of these courses, as many reformers pointed out, were almost all seen as being linked to excessive drinking. At the onset of the nineteenth century, an increasing number of labouring poor lived in cities and towns, and with them, the number of pubs grew, seeking to capitalise on the emerging market of the urban poor.²⁷ This was further accelerated following the 1830 Beerhouse Act, which lessened regulations on the brewing and selling of beer, liberalising the drink trade. Where the eighteenth-century alehouse was often not much more than a room in a private home, the public house of the early nineteenth century was larger, more lavishly decorated, and increasingly purpose-built and specialised, as competition increased and pub owners adapted to secure customers for their establishments. These early decades saw the birth of the so-called 'gin palaces', as well as regular entertainments such as singing-salons and the 'free-and-easy,' an informal sing-along which would over time evolve into more formalised concerts, eventually outgrowing the pub altogether to become the 'music hall.'²⁸

Middle-class social reformers were acutely aware of the important social role the pub played in working-class life, and consequently, how much of working-class leisure was centred around a place that served alcohol, if not specifically around the consumption of it. Of course, almost everyone in England drank beer regularly at this point, even children, as water was considered unsanitary, fruit juices or cordials were comparatively expensive and less readily available, and tea had not yet reached the status it would later achieve. What reformers usually objected to was *excessive* drinking, or the consumption of strong beer or spirits, such as gin or rum, seeing these as being at the very heart of social issues of the time.

²⁷ Clark, *The English Alehouse*, p. 262.

²⁸ Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, p. 29.

Practically speaking, they led to social disturbances, violence and vulgarity, not to mention to deterioration of the health of many a working man, affecting both their personal lives and their work. It drew men away from the sanctity of their homes and threatened the family union, which the middle-class held to be vitally important. The pub itself was a stage for blood sports and 'vulgar' entertainment, and had the potential to become a breeding ground for mistrust, social discontent and political upheaval. Most working-class pubs were exclusive to their class, and therefore places where working men might discuss matters regarding their social superiors without surveillance, and often served as meeting places for unions, chartists and other radical political movements. It is also important to note that after the turn of the eighteenth century, as reformers became more vocal in their criticism of the pub, the upper and middle classes were making up an increasingly small part of its clientele, as they instead began drinking in private clubs or at home.

It is no surprise, then, that the years in question saw the birth of several influential Temperance movements, predominantly middle-class and evangelical, as well as numerous groups lobbying for pub reforms, including the Sabbatarians and, later on, the Salvation Army.²⁹ Some groups sought simply to restrict access to public houses and the consumption of alcohol by establishing earlier closing hours and stricter legislation, while others saw this as dealing with only part of the problem, and acknowledged that alternative entertainments of a healthy, moral character aimed at the working classes would have to be provided, in order to entice them away from their safe haven and reduce the position of the pub.

²⁹ Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, p. 31.

2.3: Rational recreation and local government reform

This idealised form of recreation presented by reformers with the intention of replacing certain forms of working-class leisure was summarised under the term ‘rational recreation.’ In *The Right Choice, or the Difference between Worldly Diversions and Rational Recreations* (1857), one of the earliest works to explore rational recreation as a concept, William Marsh defined morally harmful recreation as being that which aroused one’s temper; aroused the senses too much; directed one’s attention away from prayer and attending church; was of a vulgar character, and which inspired immorality, dissipation and idleness.³⁰ Marsh and a majority of the middle classes believed that, both for themselves and other classes, leisure was best spent on something that served a purpose outside of mere entertainment. Ideal recreation was *improving*, be it of an educational, moral or religious character, rooted in core middle-class values of self-help and self-improvement.

Of course, this was by no means a new school of thought. Improvement had been an important concept in English culture for many decades. Philosophers and intellectuals during the Georgian era – what some call the English Enlightenment – had considered the importance of rationality and individual improvement in a wider sense, including improvement through the consumption of art.

The roots of this school of thought stretched even further, however. By the late seventeenth century, high art and culture had ‘moved out of the narrow confines of the court (...) and into coffee houses, reading societies, debating clubs, assembly rooms, galleries and concert

³⁰ William Marsh, *The Right Choice; or, the Difference Between Worldly Diversions and Rational Recreations* (London: D. D. James Nisbet & Co., 1857), p. 18. At the time of publishing, Marsh was the honorary canon of Worcester.

halls',³¹ and the idea that cultivating an appreciation for high art was central to being an 'improved' person began to solidify among fashionable society. These 'narrow confines' had perhaps only been exchanged for some minutely less narrow, expanding to include the aristocracy and those they worked with, but it was still a step in the direction of a democratisation of public entertainment.

By the eighteenth century, art and culture were becoming commercialised and consumed at a higher rate than ever, but cultural critics were also growing increasingly vocal. Many of their objections to popular culture draw parallels to Victorian cultural criticism, although the eighteenth-century critics were pointing the majority of their criticism at the fashionable, 'leisured' upper classes, rather than the working-class. These early moralists accused fashionable recreation of being frivolous, tainted by materialism, sensuality and low morals, distracting people from their work and duties, to where 'merchants neglected the counting house for the opera, artisans their trade for a book club, aldermen their civic calling for a country house, and mothers their children and husbands for the latest play.'³² One aspect of this was the fear that the upper classes might lead the lower by a poor example, encouraging low morals in them as they attempted to imitate their superiors and blurring class distinctions. As John Brewer puts it, 'the fear that luxury and refinement were weakening the moral fibre of the nation persisted throughout the eighteenth century'.³³

Religion played a considerable part in this moral uprising. The various nonconformist congregations in England were growing in numbers and influence, not least among them

³¹ John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), p. 15.

³² Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 70.

³³ Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 77.

Methodism, and many objected to various forms of popular entertainment and traditional pastimes on moral grounds, perceiving them as idle, brutal, immoral and encouraging sexual impropriety and drunkenness. Other Evangelicals objected to popular recreation not so much because they saw it as increasingly hedonistic, but questioning whether any recreation ought to be permissible at all, believing leisure hours should be spent in quiet prayer and contemplation.

Although there were some significant differences in the drive for moral improvement seen in the eighteenth century compared to the efforts of the nineteenth century – such as it being largely limited to cities, focused on the upper class, as they were the main consumers of art and culture, and chiefly concerned with commercialism and consumerism, rather than the finer details of ‘moral’ recreation – improvement had by the late eighteenth century

emerged as the dominant cultural motif in Britain (...) [reflecting] the evolution throughout the century of a broadly defined widespread support within the ruling orders, in particular among an increasingly influential middling sort. In the evolution of this culture the foundations were laid for what was to become the ideological dynamo of Victorian Britain and its empire.³⁴

This ‘ideological dynamo’, emerging in the mounting tension between a commercialised popular culture and moral piety, and increasingly influenced by nonconformism, would be characterised by a range of values, including the ideals of self-help and self-improvement. No work perhaps exemplifies these particular values in the Victorian era more than *Self-Help*, written by the Scottish reformist Samuel Smiles, which sold over a quarter of a million

³⁴ Peter Borsay, ‘The Culture of Improvement’, in *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. Paul Langford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 209.

copies from its publishing in 1859 to the author's death in 1904.³⁵ In his book, Smiles preached a quintessentially middle-class Victorian gospel of perseverance, strength of character and upward mobility, describing how even the poor could be gentlemen through the pursuit of gentlemanly qualities, such as 'diligent self-culture, self-discipline and self-control – and above all (...) that honest and upright performance of individual duty which is the glory of manly character.'³⁶ Smiles also famously differentiated between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor: those who did not help themselves deserved no help, and too much external help made men lazy and complacent, and thus less inclined to improve their own lot in life. Those who were unable to help themselves – be it due to their degree of poverty, age, disability, illness (especially venereal diseases which often excluded them from religious charities), or single-motherhood – were at the lowest level of society and usually found themselves bound for vagrancy or the workhouse. Those who went into the workhouses did receive public help in exchange for their independence, though a bare minimum, as 'the House' was designed to deter the able-bodied poor and only accept those most desperate, the common opinion being that 'anyone who accepted relief in the repellent workhouse must be lacking the moral determination to survive outside it.'³⁷

More than anything else, Smiles emphasised education as the key to self-improvement. The rational recreation movement favoured educational pastimes, particularly reading, art and music. This marked a significant change in middle-class attitudes towards music compared to the early nineteenth century, coloured by the burgeoning idea that music could be an 'improving' and moral agent, rather than mere entertainment or an accomplishment to

³⁵ Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help, with Illustrations of Character, Conduct, and Perseverance* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. vii.

³⁶ Smiles, *Self-Help*, p. 7.

³⁷ M. A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), p. 3.

promote the marriage of daughters. Now, music was seen as reinforcing middle-class values, such as discipline and cooperation, which helped bolster the expansion of music-making among the middle class.

Mechanics' Institutes represented one aspect of this effort to educate and elevate the working class. Partially inspired by a trend for popular scientific lectures and societies that had gained popularity during the eighteenth century, they constituted a widespread movement of independently built and run Institutes, whose initial objective was 'to give artisans a modicum of specialized knowledge which would make them better workers.'³⁸ The idea behind the Institutes was to provide practical lessons and lectures with the intention to, as described in the Reverend T. Allin's 1833 *Mechanics Institutions Defended on Christian Principles*, 'detach our youthful, or, if we can, our adult population from inordinate sensual gratifications by directing them to higher and purer sources of enjoyment.'³⁹ This was to be achieved through lectures and exams, not only on practical subjects related to industrial work, but also more general topics like history, geography and even art, as well as providing a variety of facilities, such as reading rooms and laboratories. With these, the Institutes hoped to inspire an interest in science and art among their attendants, encourage the pursuit of knowledge, and provide a healthy diversion for their leisure.

The first of these institutes, the London Mechanics' Institute, was opened in 1823, and by the mid-century, they had become a natural part of the educational landscape of cities and towns all through the country, with close to 700 official Institutes, as well as scores of similar educational societies, mutual improvement societies, literary institutes, and so on. In the

³⁸ Mackerness, *A Social History of English Music*, p. 147.

³⁹ Robert D. Storch, 'The Problem of Working-Class Leisure', in *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain*, ed. A. P. Donajgradzki (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p. 150.

latter half of the nineteenth century, the Mechanics' Institutes would become a particularly valuable asset for working-class musicians, through their work with the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (later the Royal Society of Arts), which provided written and practical music exams.⁴⁰ These exams were available through various Mechanics' Institutes, and provided a platform for working-class musicians to achieve formal musical qualifications, where they otherwise had few alternatives.

Despite their many efforts, there was some dispute throughout the nineteenth century as to how closely the Institutes adhered to their original creed, and how effective they were.

While giving evidence to the Select Committee on Public Libraries in 1849, Samuel Smiles dismissed the Mechanics' Institutes as 'not institutes for the working people', and that they were 'principally supported by the middle classes, and by the higher order of skilled artisans', with the working-class often excluded through restrictive opening hours and high membership fees, sometimes as high as 3d or 4d per week.⁴¹

However, besides the efforts of the early nineteenth century industrial employer and the wider urban middle-class, it is with another group of recreational reformers that this thesis is most closely concerned. As the initial wave of private middle-class philanthropy of the 1830s and 1840s began to wane, a new social subset was emerging through a combination of municipal reform, civic pride and the emergence of the Victorian town hall.

The 1832 Reform Act sought to rectify an electoral system which had become outdated and plagued by corruption. Its key mechanism was a redistribution of voting power towards the

⁴⁰ David Wright, 'The Music Exams of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, 1859-1919', in *Music and Institution in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Paul Rodmell (Ashgate, 2012), p. 161.

⁴¹ ⁴¹ J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd* (Sutton Publishing, 1999), p. 96.

growing industrial towns, increasing the influence of the provincial middle class. This reform increased the electorate from approximately 366,000 to 650,000 voters, broadening the franchise in cities to men paying rent of at least £10 a year, thereby adding a new constituency of middle-class voters while continuing to exclude virtually the entire working class.

Three years later, the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act followed, reforming local government in 178 municipal boroughs. The new boroughs were to be governed by town councils, with the members elected by the ratepayers of the borough, and were also obliged to publish their accounts, hold open council meetings and be liable to audit. These Acts, combined with the steady growth of the urban population, 'provided not only an excuse but a genuine necessity' for the town hall.⁴² As town councils gained further powers and were required to perform additional functions, their need for space grew.

Beyond the mundane requirement for additional physical space there was, in the words of Colin Cunningham in his seminal *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, 'a genuine and widespread desire for a symbolic centre expressive of the new status'⁴³ of these towns, becoming beacons of civic pride and enterprise, and physical representations of the new identity of the town as a borough capable of governing itself.

As explored in Chapter 1, the town hall was at its core a multi-function public building, serving both the administrative needs of the council and providing space for public events. These buildings were often paid for through the local rates, giving the ratepayers a claim on the available spaces. Cunningham suggests that there were three distinguishing features of

⁴² Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p. 19.

⁴³ Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p. 12.

the Victorian town hall, these being 'a public hall and mayoral suite, council chambers and courts, and offices.'⁴⁴ The hall was particularly important, being used for all manner of public events. This could include official banquets and ceremonies, shows or exhibitions, various entertainments, and religious and political meetings – being non-denominational, the civic town hall served as a useful venue, for example, for choral societies not associated with the Church of England, and thereby being excluded from practicing and performing in Anglican churches. Many were also inspired by one of the very earliest Victorian town halls, Birmingham Town Hall – somewhat ironically, as the building never held any administrative functions - which was purpose-built for the Triennial Music Festival to house large-scale choral concerts, as is discussed further in the next chapter.

The public hall was also where councils performed their attempts at recreational reform, through the promotion of moral lectures and concerts, and the leasing of the hall to worthy organisations. In this, they were taking on a role previously performed by private philanthropists. These would come to be particularly important in the provinces, where many towns and boroughs had not previously had a public space, or had only had spaces which were exclusive to the upper classes, such as assembly rooms – a gathering place popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century where the upper and middle classes could meet for entertainments such as balls and concerts, and which were kept exclusive through subscription fees. Many of these were later repurposed as town halls.

⁴⁴ Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p. 25.

2.4: Music, class and moral reform

Music was one of the most popular leisure pursuits for all classes, and a constant presence in Victorian society. From the home to the street, the church to the public house, and the grand concert and opera halls, Victorian England was an exceedingly musical place, and even though many musical commentators of the time did not consider England to be a great musical nation on a par with Germany and Italy, there is no denying the sheer volume of music that permeated every corner of the country during the era. Music was also not just consumed, but *participated in* on a large scale, and in increasingly varied ways.

So ubiquitous was music and musical ability in Victorian society, that a person applying for the position of assistant carpenter at Gloucester County Asylum in 1868 would find that the advert specified that the carpenter ‘must be a musician and be able to play at sight’,⁴⁵ presumably in order to provide accompaniment to musical events at the asylum or assist with other musical activities. A well-known example of this curious overlap between mental health care institutes and music is found in the early career of Edward Elgar, when he was the bandmaster of the attendants’ band of the Powick Asylum in Worcester, utilised as a kind of early music therapy for the inmates and for which Elgar even composed a selection of pieces.⁴⁶

However, it is important to note that while music was an accepted, and even encouraged leisure pursuit, the musical profession was a different matter. Musicians did not hold a particularly high status in Victorian society, at least not until quite late in the century,

⁴⁵Cyril Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain Since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 52.

⁴⁶‘Edward Elgar’, *MT* (1 October 1900), pp. 643-44; Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar – A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 87. The asylum also employed a pianist and organist.

although there were exceptions whereby performers and composers gained sufficient status to amass wealth and fame. Music and public performance in general held long-standing connotations of the seedier parts of nightlife, associations which had carried over from the eighteenth century. Adam Smith famously described performance as ‘a sort of public prostitution’ in his 1776 *The Wealth of the Nations*, and noted that the high fees charged by singers, players and dancers were required ‘not only to pay for the time, labour, and expense of acquiring the talents, but for (...) the discredit of employing them in this manner.’⁴⁷

The lack of formal qualifications was another major factor behind the low status of musicians which carried over from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, as it blurred the lines between professionals and amateurs (for example, the term ‘professor’ would remain relatively unprotected into the nineteenth century)⁴⁸, and this circumstance made it difficult to measure progress compared to that of other artisans.

At the same time, the increasing demand for music led to a steep increase in those who made a living through music, an increase which had not ceased by the end of the nineteenth century. According to David Wright

In 1841 there were nearly 7,000 musicians in a population of some 16 million in England and Wales; the 1851 census showed a 12% increase in this population to 17.9 million, but the number of musicians had increased by 60% to over 11,000. The

⁴⁷ Adam Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations, volume I* (Dublin: printed by N. Kelly, for P. Wogan, Gilbert and Hodges, W. Porter, J. Moore and B. Dornig, 1801), p. 108.
http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/81055/vdc_100049538913.0x000001

⁴⁸ Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain Since the Eighteenth Century*, p. 79.

1891 census shows that the population had expanded to 29 million, with returns by individuals claiming musical employment more than trebling to 38,000.⁴⁹

While the musicians of the nineteenth century enjoyed a greater level of independence than musicians of the eighteenth century, who had even more limited social mobility and often depended on aristocratic patronage in order to make a living, they had also lost much of the financial security that came with the said patronage. This led to many Victorian musicians holding multiple jobs, some unrelated to music.

In the wake of this growing independence, the expansion of the commercial music market, and a wish to legitimise the work of musicians, the nineteenth century saw a drive towards the professionalisation of music. This led not only to the establishment of formalised music education with the opening of the Royal Academy of Music (1822) and the Royal College of Music (1883), but also a widespread culture of music exams, certificates and diplomas, such as those provided by the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (1859), and in particular the later establishment of the Trinity grade exams in the 1870s and the Associate Board of the Royal Schools of Music exams (ABRSM) in 1890.

While the musical profession was slowly becoming formalised, there was a great variety of amateur music-making taking place in Victorian society, as it was seen as a healthy, respectable and rational pastime for all classes. Musical societies, especially choral associations, flourished throughout the country, while the popularity of private music lessons grew. Although the division between the amateur and professional spheres in music would deepen over time, there were exceptions. One example was the common practice of

⁴⁹ David Wright, *The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music – A Social and Cultural History* (Boydell & Brewer, 2013), p. 29.

amateur choral associations performing with the accompaniment of a professional orchestra, which was especially prevalent due to the low number of amateur orchestral societies and the popularity of oratorio. Another was the charity concert and similar moral ventures such as 'cheap concerts' or 'concerts for the people', which will appear in the case study chapters. These types of concerts were usually performed on a volunteer basis by a mixture of professional and amateur musicians, motivated in part by the philanthropic spirit of the performers and organisers, and in part by a desire to keep the cost of the concerts to a minimum.

On a similar note, there were certainly class divides present within Victorian musical life, but these were less clearly defined than one might expect, especially when it came to repertoire. They are perhaps most starkly demonstrated in seating arrangements in concert venues. The upper classes could easily segregate themselves in expensive theatres and opera houses, attend fashionable concerts during the London concert season, as well as hosting private recitals. Middle-class and working-class music-lovers overlapped far more often, although the middle classes enjoyed the privilege of domestic music-making to a greater degree, especially before improved manufacture brought the cost of musical instruments into the reach of the working classes.

Within musical venues, be it town halls or concert halls, the classes were kept separate through ticket prices and social customs. The price of certain seats divided the venues into neat sections, with the working-class attendees relegated to the cheaper seats, often in the upper gallery or on the floor. In smaller provincial towns, where there were naturally fewer venues from which audiences could choose and the middle classes were therefore forced to

attend the same venues at a higher rate, this segregation was still present. Examples found in the case study towns show that even when there was no entrance fee (and the seats therefore were not segregated by price), working-class attendees still followed these patterns, hesitating to take a more 'expensive' seat or even standing at the back once the usual 'cheap' seats were taken, rather than to sit in the parts of the hall they were normally excluded from.

Repertoire was less clearly defined in terms of class, though there were again exceptions. The most notable one is perhaps chamber music, which for a large part of the century was the reserve of the elite, kept exclusive through location, subscription fees and strict etiquette, as in the case of the concerts organised by John Ella's Musical Union.⁵⁰ At the lower end of the spectrum, there would have been songs performed in the early days of music hall which would hardly have made welcome additions to a respectable middle-class soiree. But between the two extremes was a great middle ground which transcended class divides, just as at home in the concert hall as it was in the public house, or in the provinces as in London.

As we will see in the case studies, the main divide often found was between what was perceived as 'high-class' music and 'low-class' music. The general definition of 'high-class' music was for the majority of the nineteenth century German-Austrian classical music, chiefly by the 'great masters' such as Beethoven, Handel and Haydn. The 'low-class' repertoire can be a little more complicated to define, as it encompassed a broader repertoire than the high-class one, and it may be more useful to talk about a 'popular'

⁵⁰ Christina Bashford, *The Pursuit of High Culture – John Ella and Chamber Music in Victorian London* (Boydell Press, 2007), p. 160.

repertoire. The term 'popular' can be seen as both a social and an aesthetic term, depending on the context, either describing 'music of the lower classes or [...] music designed to entertain, no matter which social classes are involved.'⁵¹ This ambiguity can be seen in the way the term was used in the nineteenth century as well, when 'popular taste' could be used as something of a derogatory term by commentators when discussing working-class concerts, even when the repertoire in question bore many similarities to the repertoire found at middle-class promenade concerts. Within the middle ground of taste that popular music encompassed, and particularly in the case of vocal music, the 'elevating' character of a programme could often be a matter of marketing.

As the designations would imply, the popular repertoire had a wider appeal, while the canonical classical repertoire was considered the more 'high-class', intellectually demanding and elevating of the two, and was often favoured by musical critics. The programmes performed at civic organ recitals, like those at other elevating concerts, usually consisted of a mixture of high-class and popular music, designed to both attract and elevate a popular audience, wherein the popular elements typically consisted of English art songs and contemporary instrumental music, but could also extend to Italian and French operatic music, and the virtuoso music typically found in the salon concerts.⁵²

Before the days of broadcasting and recording, taste was also largely localised. Trends could travel a certain distance, but it is difficult to speak of a general nation-wide musical taste, especially among those who did not follow the fashions of London concert life.

Unfortunately, due to the sparsity of full programmes in the sources, it is also difficult to say

⁵¹ William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 36.

⁵² Weber, *Music and the Middle Class*, p. 23.

much concrete about the local taste in the case study towns. The programmes found in the appendix are several decades apart, and so what may be read as local taste could also be due to general changes in taste from the 1850s to almost the end of the century. However, keeping this in mind, the Kidderminster programmes appear more varied than the Worcester ones, with a greater focus on vocal music and less on the 'serious', classical repertoire. This could perhaps be indicative of a need to provide greater variety, in order to secure a large audience, or of a local taste which favoured lighter music. The Worcester programmes are far more serious, including a large portion of original organ works (as opposed to transcriptions), and several by the 'old masters', such as Bach, Handel, Haydn and Beethoven. The general impression one gets from the Worcester programmes is of a more 'high-class' character, with more instrumental music and fewer songs, and where there are songs included, they are usually of a serious character, with some levity included in the late December recitals, perhaps to go with the jollier Christmas mood.

Contemporary attitudes towards music and taste did not always reflect reality. Following the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, the middle classes enjoyed a higher standard of living, greater economic stability and a more prominent position within society due to a weakened aristocracy. This stability and prosperity led to a boom in domestic music-making, with sales of instruments and printed music increasing, as well as an increase in public concerts and recitals. With time, the middle classes would also take on a more active role in music, as performers, organisers and listeners.

The musical boom would reach the working classes as well, albeit at a slower pace than the middle classes, and working-class Victorians had a wealth of music which they organised,

made and performed themselves. There were several musical personalities of considerable influence who came from working-class backgrounds, one example being the conductor and arranger Alexander Owens, who was one of the most influential individuals in the British brass band tradition for much of the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁵³

Regardless of the strong presence of music in working-class life and the amount of music both consumed and performed by working-class people, it was a commonly held stereotype that the working classes did not have the ability to appreciate or enjoy 'high-class', 'serious' art music, be it due to a lack of exposure to the repertoire, a general preference for lighter popular music, or simply by nature. It was a common practice for concert organisers to sugar the proverbial pill of improving art music with lighter repertoire, in order to attract a working-class audience, on the assumption that they would not care for a purely high-class programme. Some commentators went further, painting the working classes as almost senseless in their lack of refined music appreciation, claiming that '(...) music is not to our lower orders a deep need, a means of expressing the pent-up and often oppressive emotions of the heart, but merely a noisy appendage to low pastimes.'⁵⁴

This question of classical art music and the so-called popular repertoire would remain the subject of debate throughout the century, as more nuanced views slowly gained traction among musical critics, who began to question whether the popular repertoire was a true reflection of working-class musical taste, and if perhaps reformers had been doing them a disservice by promoting these 'sugared' programmes of light, popular music with elements of 'improving' serious music, rather than to allowing them access to pure, classical concerts.

⁵³ Dave Russell, 'Owen, Alexander (1851-1920)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 14 November 2018, accessed 8 February 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/48781>

⁵⁴ Hugh Reginald Haweis, *Music and Morals* (Cambridge University Press, 1871), p. 567.

One of those who spoke up against the established notion of ‘popular taste’ was Henry Lunn. As editor of the *Musical Times* from 1863 to 1887, he wrote several articles on the issue of what he saw as an industry which consistently underestimated the working classes and as a result deprived them of well-performed, high-class music. In an 1878 article, Lunn expressed his despair at a ‘popular’ concert at the previous Leeds Festival. The musicians featured in the concert had all performed at other concerts in the festival, volunteering their services for this particular concert, meaning that they were likely professional, and Lunn describes the repertoire as being ‘made up of scraps, the great works being reserved for those who can afford to pay for such luxuries.’⁵⁵ The root of the problem, in his eyes, was a lack of interaction between the philanthropist and ‘the persons for whom he legislates’ and that there was in reality a great interest in high-class music among the lower classes; he used the ‘crowds nightly flocking to the cheap portions of the room at the “Monday Popular Concerts”’ as an example. In his personal experience, having spoken to many working-class music-lovers, ‘it was often observed to me not only that good music well done was shut out from “such as them,” but that bad music ill done was presumed to be the kind of entertainment they craved for.’⁵⁶

Turning to popular cheap concerts in London, he pointed to old, integrated patterns in the provision of entertainment for the lower classes, and questioned

why quadrilles, waltzes, selections from operas, and “Royalty” songs should be considered the only works suitable for the general public because they *were* so many years ago. It is true that in the days of Jullien’s “Promenade Concerts,” lively dances,

⁵⁵ Henry C. Lunn, ‘Popular Music’, *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* 19, no. 430 (1 December 1878), p. 660-1.

⁵⁶ Lunn, ‘Popular Music’, p. 660.

performed by an efficient band, and operatic selections were a real attraction, because the “people” knew nothing whatever of great orchestral works: and the Opera being shut out from them, they were content to hear the melodious gems from these popular lyrical compositions played instead of sung; but these times have passed away, and the persons who desire to enjoy good music should no longer be mixed up with those who merely seek the pleasure of a cheerful promenade.⁵⁷

In comparison, the brass band repertoire, which was performed by the working class for the working class, often included not only dances and popular tunes, but also ‘serious’ classical music, demonstrating a real presence of so-called ‘high-class’ music in an almost entirely working-class tradition.⁵⁸ It was Lunn’s belief that the miscellaneous repertoire was incohesive and detrimental to the people and their tastes, and that the idea that the working classes preferred what he considered to be inferior music was an outdated one, which gave them neither what they wanted nor what they needed. ‘(...) Is this not very like telling a poor working-man that he prefers beer to wine and foul air to pure air, simply because he drinks the beverage he can afford, and lives in some close and confined tenement the rent of which he can just contrive to pay out of his scanty wages?’ Lunn asked in another article printed in the *Musical Times* in 1879.⁵⁹ He also expressed the same concerns as many previous critics that many of the places where working-class persons could enjoy music, such as the music hall, were forcing them to share the space with ‘those who consider music as a secondary attraction’.

⁵⁷ Lunn, ‘Popular Music’, p. 661.

⁵⁸ Trevor Herbert, ‘Nineteenth-Century Bands: Making a Movement’ in *The British Brass Band – A Musical and Social History*, ed. Trevor Herbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Reprint 2002), p. 64.

⁵⁹ Henry C. Lunn, ‘Free and Cheap Concerts for the People’, *The Musical Times* 20, no. 436 (1 June 1879), p. 306.

Lunn's solution to combat these issues, mirroring the efforts of other reformers, was to supply regular free or moderately priced concerts of high-class music, separate from other forms of entertainment and temptations. In the same 1879 *Musical Times* article, he highlighted a series of popular recitals for 'working-men and their families' organised by the Mayor of Birmingham in the Town Hall, praising the attendance, the repertoire, which consisted of oratorio excerpts and a few overtures, and the manner in which the series had been advertised to the audience, with batches of tickets sent out to various manufacturing employers in Birmingham.⁶⁰

While Lunn's views are still rooted in the same thoughts as those of musical and educational critics in the mid-nineteenth century, with his focus on the 'humanising' effect of music on the listener and his somewhat snobbish division of music into 'bad' and 'good', he does reflect an increasing awareness of the entertainment made available to the lower classes in the later part of the century, and in attitudes towards working-class tastes.

The much-maligned miscellaneous repertoire that Lunn complained of had a long and mottled history. It had been the norm for concerts in the eighteenth century, when contrast rather than coherence was the ideal. Concerts were expected to be long, to include both vocal and instrumental pieces, with a particular emphasis on opera selections. 'Two or more examples of the same genre could not occur back-to-back, and contrast was maintained among male and female singers and soloists playing on different instruments.'⁶¹ This type of programme fell out of fashion as concert culture became more diverse, giving way to a new ideal of *homogeny*, focusing on fewer works and greater cohesion between pieces.

⁶⁰ Lunn, 'Free and Cheap Concerts for the People', p. 305.

⁶¹ Weber, *The Great Transformation of Taste*, p. 41.

Although the miscellaneous repertoire would fall out of fashion in high-class concert culture, it would remain characteristic of many concerts aimed at the working class, including the civic organ recitals, albeit in a somewhat modified form. This miscellaneous concert type was created out of necessity. Firstly, these concerts often relied on a smaller group of musicians, usually a selection of singers and an organist, the latter acting as both soloist and accompanist, sometimes with another instrumentalist added. This meant that their musical options were limited, excluding large orchestral and choral works. Secondly, they combined different classes of music in an effort both to attract their intended public with light, 'popular' entertainment, and to have the intended moral effect, through serious and middle-brow music.

To many middle-class reformers, it was essential that music was not pursued for simple amusement, but as a form of self-improvement. Music, 'full of innocent enjoyment, and pregnant with moral and social benefits,'⁶² was seen as especially well-suited for use in social reform due to its perceived ability to influence the listener's mind and emotions. Music being so readily available in Victorian society, it became all the more vital to social reformers to influence its consumption among the working classes, and to encourage them to consume music that conferred a moral benefit.

There had been early examples of similar aspirations, although they were much less common than they would become in the nineteenth century. In 1752, the composer Charles Avison wrote in his famous *Essay on Musical Expression*, considered to be the first piece of musical criticism published in England, on the ability of music to 'raise the sociable and

⁶² G. Hogarth, 'Music – Art of Singing', *Chamber's Information for the People* 2, no. 99 (1842), p. 769.

happy passions, and to subdue the contrary ones'⁶³ and even acknowledged, in similar terms to later critics, 'that the Force of Music may urge the Passions to an excess, or it may fix them on false and improper Objects, and may thus be pernicious in it's [sic] Effects'.⁶⁴ One aspect in which Avison differs from certain Victorian music critics is in his belief that although music could, as noted, excite feelings to an excess or 'fix them on false and improper objects', the feelings themselves were always 'of the benevolent and social kind'. By contrast, some later commentators believed that music could indeed give rise to ill feelings and morals, along with vile actions.

An influential work on the subject of music's moral potential was *Music and Morals*, by the Rev. H. R. Haweis, which has already been touched upon. Deeply subjective, the book outlines Haweis' views on music, music history and the role of music within society. While immensely popular, going through nineteen editions from its first publication in 1871 to Haweis' death in 1901, and last published as recently as 1934, the book did not necessarily represent the opinions of serious contemporary music critics, indeed drawing some criticism at its time of publication. Instead, it reflected some of the conflicting beliefs and views many ordinary Victorian people held about music. For example, Haweis describes professional musicians as 'less distinguished for morality than their neighbours', and their profession as one which 'admits of very little intellect, imagination, or emotion (...) because it is more mechanical it is therefore less refining and elevating.'⁶⁵ Yet he is full of praise for composers, and particularly for the perceived strength of their character. Similarly, he places great

⁶³ Charles Avison, *An Essay on Musical Expression* (London: C. Davis, 1752), p. 5.

⁶⁴ Avison, *An Essay on Musical Expression*, p. 6.

⁶⁵ Haweis, *Music and Morals*, p. 83

emphasis on music as a refining influence and a beneficial leisure pursuit for all, while bordering on cruelty in his portrayal of working-class music and music appreciation.

In Haweis' opinion, music did not hold any particular moral power in itself. Rather, the morality lay in the hands the performer and his intentions, music being

in its nature an un-moral thing, and of course it is so in the same sense in which a drug given one day as a poison and another day as a medicine is in itself perfectly un-moral. The morality lies in the administration, and comes from a quality which belongs not to the drug, but to the agent who administers it.⁶⁶

John Ruskin, along with other contemporary commentators, held similar beliefs, perceiving music as having no intellectual content on its own, being 'a mere sensual gratification', and that any value or dignity was to be found in the manner in which it expressed associated words.⁶⁷

In the eyes of writers such as Haweis, the moral value of music came not from the notes themselves, but from what was projected onto the music. This malleable quality, conscious or not, made music a much-valued tool for social reformers, who saw what they perceived as appropriate music presented in a morally improving context as a way to influence the working classes. But by the same token, however, music could also have an adverse effect on the listener. Some critics suggested that good music, like all good rational recreation, should not arouse the senses too much, nor take up too much of one's free time,⁶⁸ while others looked with despair upon the vulgar and sometimes subversive repertoire performed

⁶⁶ Haweis, *Music and Morals*, p. 40.

⁶⁷ William J. Gatens, 'John Ruskin and Music', *Victorian Studies* 30, no. 1 (Autumn 1986), p. 83.

⁶⁸ Marsh, *The Right Choice*, p. 24.

in music halls, or the increasing presence of music in pubs. There are here certain parallels to attitudes of some clergy and church musicians regarding the style of music that should be allowed in church services. The consensus was generally that music for serious worship ought to be, as William Gatens describes it, 'solemn and elevated, even severe, and above all, sublime in the sense of fixing the mind and the feelings on momentous things not of this world.'⁶⁹ Church music should also, as far as possible, be clearly separated from secular music in style and character, so as not to contaminate the sacred nature of the service with worldly associations, though secular music could also have religious themes. That being said, it should be remembered that composers made music across these boundaries of repertoire and audience, popular and sacred, according to the market.

2.5: Harnessing the power of music

One of the earliest attempts at harnessing the perceived power of music as a means of education and improvement came in the first half of the nineteenth century, with the sight-singing movement, also known as the singing-class movement. Two main schools, both based on *solfege* notation according to which each note in the scale is assigned a name, established themselves in England, one by John Pyke Hullah, and one by John Curwen.

Hullah (1812-1884) had a musical background, having studied at the Royal Academy of Music before focusing on musical education. After returning to England in 1841, having created a sight-singing system of his own based on the Wilhelm system he saw while studying in Paris, he opened a school for the training of sight-singing instructors, primarily school and Sunday

⁶⁹ William J. Gatens, *Victorian Cathedral Music in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 61.

school teachers.⁷⁰ Curwen (1816-1880), by contrast, was a Congregationalist minister, creating his sight-singing system after receiving a commission from the Congregational Church to devise a method for musical instruction in Sunday schools. Adapting a pre-existing sol-fa system invented by Sarah Ann Glover in 1812 for similar religious purposes, Curwen presented his system in a series of 1842 lessons, giving the system the name 'Tonic Sol-fa.'

The aims of the two schools were similar. Both Curwen and Hullah wanted to enable the easy instruction of music for a wide audience, especially the working classes and those who did not otherwise have the means to receive musical instruction. This was now possible at an unprecedented rate due to the general improvement in literacy, as the instruction was done with so-called 'modulators', posters to which the instructor would indicate during lessons. Both schools favoured a relatively bland repertoire, in part due to the inherent limitations of the sight-singing method, which did not allow for complex musical elements, and focused on simple, moralistic songs. The two were deeply concerned with the ethical and religious values of music and musical instruction, in providing a productive, healthy and sober alternative to other leisure pursuits, and in promoting a communal spirit through song. Curwen was particularly passionate about this side of the sight-singing movement, to the point where his system was at its core a religious and moral system far more than it was a system for musical instruction. In his biography of his father, Curwen's son outlined in no uncertain terms how the Tonic Sol-fa system was first and foremost a religious tool:

By simplifying musical notation, the art in its domestic and religious aspects entered thousands of homes which had before been without music. Thus the method was the

⁷⁰ Percy A. Scholes, *The Mirror of Music 1844-1944, Vol. I* (London: Novello, 1947), p. 11. Wilhelm's singing classes for working-class people would form the basis for the *Orphéon*, a French movement of choral societies for working men.

indirect means of aiding worship, temperance, and culture, of holding young men and women among good influences, of reforming character, of spreading Christianity. The artistic aspect of the work done by the sol-fa method is indeed less prominent than its moral and religious influence.⁷¹

Besides the moral and religious implications, the sight-singing movement was also at its core an educational movement. Through easy-to-learn notation and affordable materials (both music and instructional manuals), it provided a basic music education for many working-class people, some of whom went on to pursue further musical training, or even more formal musical qualifications, through the music exams provided by the Royal Society of Arts, or through local Mechanics' or similar institutes.⁷²

Curwen's Tonic Sol-fa quickly outpaced Hullah's method in popularity and became the de-facto sight-singing system in England in 1867, further bolstered by the Elementary Education Act of 1870, which saw an increase in the number of schoolchildren in Britain. By Curwen's death in 1880, hundreds of thousands of Britons had been trained in Tonic Sol-fa, the movement had its own magazine, and music of all genres was being published with sol-fa annotations, both for instruction and home use.⁷³ But besides achieving success in itself, the movement had also served as something of a primer for other nineteenth-century reform efforts, in demonstrating the social value of music, and in providing music and musical instruction to the working class.

⁷¹ John Spencer Curwen, *Memorials of John Curwen* (London, 1882), p. 73-74.

⁷² Wright, 'The Music Exams of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, 1859-1919', p. 173.

⁷³ B. Rainbow and C. McGuire, 'Tonic Sol-fa', *Grove Music Online*, July 1, 2014, accessed August 25, 2020 <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000028124>.

While the Tonic Sol-fa movement had highlighted the social aspects of musical instruction, the music itself was not considered to be particularly 'high class', being more of a pedagogical and religious tool than music to be enjoyed for its own sake. Some of the impetus behind the promotion of high-class music to the lower classes can be traced back to the promenade concerts of the earlier nineteenth century, such as those promoted by Louis Jullien. While these were overwhelmingly commercial ventures, reflected in the increasingly spectacular elements Jullien used to attract his audiences, they did offer the 'shilling public'⁷⁴ access to a repertoire which combined popular quadrilles and polkas with more 'serious' work, such as movements from Beethoven symphonies. Thus, though they were a by-product of a commercial effort, Jullien's promenade concerts and similar series did achieve a somewhat democratising effect, 'breaking down old barriers and letting in the crowd'.⁷⁵ Even R. Haweis, who did not hold particularly high opinions of the musical tastes and habits of the lower classes, wrote on the potential of enterprises such as Jullien's concerts that

It is a hopeful sign when the people listen to good German bands in the streets. A taste for penny ices proves that the common people have a glimmering of the strawberry creams which Mr. Gunter prepares for sixpence; and the frequent consumption of ginger-pop and calves' head broth, indicates a confirmed, though it may be helpless, passion for champagne and turtle-soup.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ The 'shilling public' is an oft-used phrase to refer to a mostly middle-class to lower-middle-class concert public. George Bernard Shaw references this demographic in an article for *The Public* in May 1889, stating that 'The musical public is the shilling public, by which I mean the people who can afford to pay not more than a shilling once a week or so for a concert without going short of more immediately necessary things.' *Shaw on Music*, ed. Eric Bentley (New York: Applause, 1995), p. 307.

⁷⁵ Erlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century*, p. 60.

⁷⁶ Haweis, *Music and Morals*, p. 500.

The sight-singing movement had demonstrated to future and contemporary reformers the multifaceted value of active participation in music, while promenade concerts had demonstrated that there was a real interest and appreciation among the lower classes for 'high-class' music, contrary to contemporary stereotypes – or at least, 'as near an approach to the loftier departments of music as the masses could appreciate.'⁷⁷ It was now only a question of time before the recreational reformists recognised and began utilising music fully in their battle against non-rational recreation. As Dave Russell states in *Popular Music in England*, 'the idea that music had a valuable social purpose was now no longer merely the belief of certain reformers and educationalists; it was a truism. From the mid-1840s a scheme of rational recreation that did not include music was no scheme at all.'⁷⁸

The difference now was that the focus had shifted from participation to *listening*. Reformers had a relatively clean slate on which to build their schemes as well, as concert admission prices rarely fell below 1s., placing them out of reach for the working class. The theatre was an affordable and popular alternative to concerts, with the cheapest tickets priced between 1s. and sixpence, and with reduced entry often available for the latter half of a show. Music was integrated into the performances, either between scenes or as part of a play, and as demand grew, impresarios would add novel and spectacular effects to secure a full house. In the eyes of many recreational reformers, however, the theatre was almost as bad as the pub in its lack of respectability and rationality. The venues were seen as cramped and rowdy, with long-standing associations with prostitution, and the entertainment itself was not much better, combining drama, music, circus acts and other effects with little regard to genre or

⁷⁷ Haweis, *Music and Morals*, p. 501.

⁷⁸ Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840-1914*, p.31-32.

character. To make matters worse, most venues also served alcohol. The inclusion of music was in part due to the 1773 Licensing Act, which banned the performance of serious drama in non-licensed theatres, forcing illegitimate theatres to bypass legislation by adding musical interludes.⁷⁹ After the Act was dropped in 1843, attitudes towards the theatre would improve, but it would take a while for reformers to consider it a viable alternative to other forms of entertainment.

Seeing a gap in the market, many social reformers sought to meet this growing demand for affordable music, and reap the social benefits at the same time. One effort in this direction was through 'people's concerts'.

The 'people's concert' is something of an umbrella term for concerts organised with a popular audience in mind, as the name would imply, usually the working classes and parts of the lower middle classes who did not have access to the full range of public recitals. These were organised for a wide variety of reasons, some with no ties to social reform efforts, but there were a few unifying characteristics, such as being intended for a popular audience and low admission fees. The repertoire tended to emphasise popular music, but concerts of high-class chamber music were also found.

Some people's concerts were purely commercial ventures, produced under the label in an effort to secure large crowds. Others were organised by charitable groups or organisations, with different motivations, often of a moral nature. Two important subsets of this were concerts organised by musical societies, where the chief aim was to bring high-class music to the public or to perform concerts for those so poor that they did not have any other means

⁷⁹ Jacky Batton, 'Theatre in the nineteenth century', *British Library*, 15 March 2014, accessed 22 May 2021, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/nineteenth-century-theatre>

of accessing similar concerts. A description from an 1881 article celebrating the second anniversary of the People's Concert Society in London summarises the intentions of these organisations well:

The very name 'people's concerts,' applied latterly to certain musical performances given at low prices, shows plainly that, till now, our concerts have not been intended for the people, and have had no reference to them. 'The people' are those who cannot afford to pay the price which high-class amusement in our cities command.⁸⁰

The Temperance movement also produced 'people's concerts', as part of their use of music as a tool against excessive drinking, composing and distributing volumes of temperance songs, organising brass bands and even building temperance music halls, as a tea-serving alternative to the mainstream music hall.⁸¹

Adjacent to the abstinence concerts were people's concerts organised with a more pragmatic moral motivation. Some of these, like the civic organ recitals, were put on by local government and presented, explicitly or not, as attacks on social and moral evils within the community, hoping to entice the working classes away from more vicious entertainments, uphold sobriety and social order, and to provide an elevating, soothing influence to the local working classes through music and the company of their 'betters.' This type of people's concert has much in common with the civic organ recitals, although these were similarly organised for a multitude of reasons.

⁸⁰ Florence A. Marshall, 'The People's Concert Society', *Macmillan's Magazine* 43, iss. 258 (April 1881), p. 433.

⁸¹ Annemarie McAllister, 'Temperance battle songs: the musical war against alcohol', *Popular Music* 35/2 (2016), p. 192

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when the first ‘people’s concert’ took place, owing in part to the many concerts organised under the banner and the ambiguity of the term. The earliest examples are of the charitable concerts, performed for the benefit of the lower classes, and for the sake of brevity, these are the ones I will focus on here, as they are most relevant to this thesis. The People’s Concert Society, which ventured to put on high-class concerts in poorer areas of the capital, was formed in the late 1870s, but there is proof that the concept was well-established decades before this. A precursor to the society came with a series of ‘Monday Popular Concerts’ at St. James’s Hall in 1859, promoted for the ‘shilling public’ by Chappell & Co.⁸², in part to sell their own publications. Russell mentions a series of popular concerts organised by the Glasgow Total Abstinence Society in 1843 as a potential first of its kind, but provides no source for this, and I have not been able to find any material corroborating its existence or motivations. Most commonly cited as the first series of people’s concerts is the Monday Evening Pops in Birmingham Town Hall, established in 1844, which I will be addressing more closely in the next chapter. These recitals were unique at the time in that they were explicitly aimed at a working-class audience, having been established at the request of local workers, and were subsequently curated to focus on a moral, educational repertoire. Similar concerts and series soon followed in Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds,⁸³ and by mid-century, the people’s concert was a firmly established part of English social life. It is noteworthy that the people’s concert was in many ways a product of the urban, industrial town rather than the capital, as was often the case with musical trends,

⁸² Bartley, *Far From the Fashionable Crowd*, p. 5.

⁸³ *Manchester Times*, 17 February 1849, p. 5; *Liverpool Daily Post*, 6 August 1858, p. 1; *Leeds Times*, 8 October 1853, p. 5.

since it originated in Birmingham and spread through the midlands and north of England long before it reached London.

The name 'people's concert' can itself be somewhat misleading, as the intention of many series of people's concerts was not to be exclusive to the working-class, as the initial Birmingham Pops had been, but to unite the classes under the same roof. This was to give a sense of community, while also maintaining traditional hierarchy – the classes sat separately, the working classes in the gallery and the middle classes in the side-galleries and reserved seats, commonly enforced through the varied prices of tickets. The moral value of the concerts did not arise solely from the music performed, although it had to be of a respectable character, but rather from the environment they provided, where the working-class could enjoy pleasant recreation in the company of their social 'betters' and learn from their example. Music would function both as a framework for the meeting of the classes, and 'could act as a social cement, a bridgehead between antagonistic social classes.'⁸⁴ In return, the working classes were expected to adhere to middle-class concert etiquette, which could lead to some friction, as we can see in a case from Halifax in 1854, when journalists took to the *Halifax Guardian* to admonish the working-class audience members at a Monday evening concert for whistling and shouting in approval, and for letting their babies cry.⁸⁵ Similarly, reports from people's concerts would also highlight the good manners and appreciation of working-class audiences, as a matter of some note.

Despite what the Halifax incident may imply, the modern culture of silent reverent listening at concert was still in its infancy at this point, and would not become the norm until late in

⁸⁴ Russell, *Popular Music in England*, p. 25.

⁸⁵ Russell, *Popular Music in England*, p. 35.

the nineteenth century. Until the middle of the century, audience etiquette in European concert halls and opera houses continued to follow the culture of the eighteenth century, in which 'people would talk to one another (both quietly and loudly), they would eat and drink, they called upon the boxes of other patrons, and they promenaded in the hall.'⁸⁶ The audience paid attention to the performances when they wished to, and rather than passively observe, they participated in the concert by showing their appreciation and scorn in equally noisy ways, whenever they saw fit.

But by mid-century, this culture was being challenged by an emerging serious classical music public, who saw musical performance as not merely the backdrop to socialising, but as a quasi-religious artform which ought to be comprehended and contemplated through silent and attentive listening. At the forefront of this was the work of John Ella, for whom silent, focused listening was requisite for the appreciation of the serious chamber music repertoire performed at Musical Union concerts. From 1846, the printed programmes at Union recitals included the aphorism 'il più grand'omaggio alla musica, è nel silenzio' – 'the greatest homage to music is in silence'.⁸⁷ Even then, the silence had to be enforced through various means, such as printed notices and vocal calls for silence during concerts, and audience members arriving late or leaving early would remain an issue while the new etiquette evolved.

This almost sacral view of music, which will be examined in more detail in the next chapter, became particularly associated with serious, often German, classical music, and with the middle classes and their ideals of intellectual recreation and self-restriction. As Müller puts

⁸⁶ Sven Oliver Müller, 'Analysing musical culture in nineteenth-century Europe: towards a musical turn?', *European Review of History* 17, no. 6 (December 2010), p. 845.

⁸⁷ Bashford, *The Pursuit of High Culture – John Ella and Chamber Music in Victorian London*, p. 139.

it, 'while the contrast in individual behaviours became more muted, the sensibility for refinement in tastes, gestures and behaviours deepened. Learning to listen quietly meant, therefore, observing the bourgeois ideal of self-discipline.'⁸⁸

Further propelling this new concert culture was the increased separation of audiences. As a greater variety of musical venues became available, the upper and middle classes sought to distance themselves from the rowdy behaviour commonly found in working-class venues such as the music hall. By the time of the civic organ recitals, the tensions between the different tastes of the public and the old and new audience etiquettes were high, and the working classes were placed under particular scrutiny in their adherence to middle-class concert behaviour.

Many 'people's concerts' were organised into seasons, typically lasting from October to March, with weekly to monthly concerts, depending on the size of the town and the popularity of the recitals, and tickets ranging from around *6d.* to nothing. The repertoire performed was usually of the 'miscellaneous' character, containing a variety of different vocal and instrumental music, 'involving a mixture of Italian, English and occasionally French opera, as well as glees, ballads and respectable comic songs (...)'.⁸⁹ The performers themselves could be both professionals and amateurs, locals and visiting, and had usually volunteered their services as a way of demonstrating their own philanthropy. The civic organ recitals would have many similarities with this tradition, such as the structure of the programmes and the intermingling of amateur and professional musicians.

⁸⁸ Müller, 'Analysing musical culture in nineteenth-century Europe', p. 846.

⁸⁹ Russell, *Popular Music in England*, p. 33.

In the next chapter I examine these civic organs and organ recitals, how the instruments were constructed and designed, the manner in which they were used, the organists who played them, and how these elements fit in with the developments in musical culture and ideas of rational recreation discussed above.

CHAPTER 3 – THE CREATION OF THE VICTORIAN CIVIC ORGAN

3.1: The pre-Victorian organ

For much of modern history, the organ was one of the most complicated machines known to man, and often closely reflected the musical, religious and political climate of its time. The development of the English organ was a particular tumultuous one, characterised by alternating periods of stagnation and innovation. After a period in abeyance following the English Civil War, during which organs were banned in churches by official decree, leading to the destruction and removal of many instruments and the emigration of several important organ builders, the English organ was developing in two different directions: first as a religious instrument, once the official ban on church organs was lifted after the end of the Puritan commonwealth; and second as a secular instrument, as public houses and private homes became a sanctuary for the English organ and organ-building tradition. By the time of the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, there were more organs in taverns than there were in churches.¹

One of the great diarists of the seventeenth century, John Evelyn, wrote in his satire *A Character of England* about the use of organs in public houses:

And that nothing may be wanting to the height of luxury and impiety of this
Abomination, they have translated the *Organs* out of the *Churches*, to set them up in

¹ Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 17.

Taverns, chanting their *Dithyrambicks*, and bestiall *Bacchanalias* to the tune of those *Instruments*, which were wont to assist them in the celebration of *Gods Praises*.²

A few years later, Samuel Pepys also described how he visited 'the musique-house, where we had paltry musique, till the master organist came (...) and he did give me a fine voluntary or two.'³ Besides public houses, organs were also to be found in private homes, sometimes known as 'house organs' or 'residence organs', where they were used for worship, musical practice and entertainment. Some with the means to even employed private organists.

Percy Scholes argues that this forced displacement of organs from churches to taverns and pubs 'led to the first real development of any sort of concert life in England',⁴ as these instruments would feature prominently in the emerging culture of public music-making which would eventually evolve into 'free and easies', song-and-supper rooms, music hall, and the public concert. It does appear that one vital driving force behind the formation of the civic organ tradition of the nineteenth century, and the wider secular organ tradition of the same period, was this dual effect of the Commonwealth ban on church organs. While the religious organ was left in limbo until the Restoration, the secular organ experienced a boost in its absence, allowing for the creation of two parallel traditions, which would continue into the ensuing centuries.

Following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the organ would slowly re-establish itself throughout the country. Despite a period of innovation and continental influences in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century - in particular the work of Renatus Harris and of

² John Evelyn, *A Character of England* (London: Crooke, 1659), p. 29-30.

³ Friday August 21 1663, <https://www.pepysdiary.com/diary/1663/08/21/>

⁴ Percy Scholes, *The Puritans and Music in England and New England* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 244.

‘Father’ Smith, as well as the invention of the swell mechanism by Abraham Jordan in 1712⁵ - the English organ of the eighteenth century remained, as Pierre Dubois put it, ‘remarkably standardized’ and would remain so well into the early years of the nineteenth century.⁶

This instrument was characterised by its relatively small size and conservative specification, with few organs having more than 20 stops. It was not particularly loud, in part due to its size and limited disposition, especially as organ concertos became a popular musical form, where the organ could not overpower the rest of the orchestra. Handel’s organ concertos, the first of the genre when they were composed in the 1730s, were not premiered in a church or chapel, as one might expect; instead, they were composed to be played as interludes in an oratorio performance in a Covent Garden theatre. This blending of the religious and the secular, which caused some uproar at the time of Handel’s concertos, is somewhat reminiscent of what the civic organs would achieve in the nineteenth century, with a quasi-religious dimension given to a secular venue through the performance of explicitly Christian works, such as oratorios.

Another typical feature is the above-mentioned swell box, virtually unknown outside England, which allowed for more nuanced, gradual dynamics, and the presence of long compasses. Pedals were still rare, pedal pipes even more so, and would remain a relative rarity until the 1830s.⁷ As a result, most English organists were not accustomed to playing with pedals, perceiving them as cumbersome nuisances more than an artistic tool, and

⁵ M. Gillingham, G. Oldham and N. Plumley, ‘Jordan (iii)’, *Grove Music Online*, 2001, accessed 9 December 2020, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000014483>

⁶ Pierre Dubois, ‘The Eighteenth-century English organ and the collective psyche: a vehicle for national ideas’, *BIOS Journal*, Vol. 20 (1996), p. 101.

⁷ Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, p. xvii.

composed music chiefly for manuals only. Another result of this was that in lieu of pedals, organs were built with the above-mentioned 'long compass' keyboards, meaning the keyboard extended below the usual low C to include additional keys which enabled the organist to play bass notes and lines with his left hand.

Together, these elements paint a picture of an instrument which favoured a precise and expressive sound, shunning many of the developments that were taking place on the continent. In fact, the perhaps most enduring characteristic of the English eighteenth century organ, alongside its 'remarkable standardization,' is its degree of isolation. This was not because of ignorance or a lack of skill: the country, London in particular, experienced an influx of foreign musicians during the century, including organists and organ-builders.

Rather, it would seem that this stemmed from a belief that the English organ was in every way superior to the continental instruments, and perfectly suited for its use. In his accounts of his travels in Germany and the Netherlands in the mid-eighteenth century, the organist Dr. Burney wrote about the deficiencies of the organs he saw, dismissing them as 'coarse' and 'noisy,' with heavy mechanics, a lack of variety in their dispositions, an absence of a swell box, and in every way inferior to the English organ.⁸ Dr. Burney's views were widely shared, so much so that even foreign-born organ-builders such as Snetzler quickly adapted to the standardised English style, without adding many aspects from their own traditions. Indeed, it was a remarkably 'national' instrument, which no doubt laid the foundation for many aspects of the nineteenth-century organ.

The Handel organ concertos also highlight a crucial aspect of the eighteenth-century organ tradition, namely the diverse venues in which organs could be heard. Organs had already

⁸ Dubois, 'The Eighteenth-century English organ', p. 104.

been present in the homes of the rich for centuries, and we have seen from Pepys's diaries that organs were to be found in public houses in the seventeenth century, although details of specific instruments are hard to find. Though it was still the preserve of the rich outside the church, the organ could now be found in theatres, such as at the Covent Garden during the Handel premieres, and would continue to diversify. An organ was installed in Marylebone Gardens as early as 1741, played at both evening concerts and 'Public Breakfasting' twice a day.⁹ James Hook, who had been appointed as Music Master at the Gardens in 1768, would later become the organist of Vauxhall Gardens, and before his appointment at either had 'played the organ to entertain customers taking tea at the White Conduit House in Clerkenwell.'¹⁰ This diversification, especially in secular venues, would only increase further in the nineteenth century, expanding to include a great variety of buildings and contexts, and a far more socially diverse audience.

3.2: A mechanical marvel – the organ in the nineteenth century

The English organ of the early nineteenth century was in many ways an extension of the organs of the late eighteenth century. Although some changes had begun to appear, showing a gradual shift away from the sound of the eighteenth century organ towards the rounder, diapason-heavy sound which would come to define the Victorian organ, most instruments built in the early nineteenth century were still fundamentally conservative, still

⁹ Mollie Sands, *The Eighteenth-Century Pleasure Gardens of Marylebone, 1737-1777* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1987), p. 14-15.

¹⁰ Derek B. Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), p. 43; Sands, *The Eighteenth-Century Pleasure Gardens of Marylebone*, p. 76.

characterised by a lack of pedals and pedal pipes, and the presence of long compasses to compensate for this.¹¹ Public organ recitals were a rarity, with the first to fit the mould (despite being performed in a religious building) believed to have been Samuel Wesley and Benjamin Jacob's Bach recital at Surrey Chapel in London on 29 November 1809.¹² And although organs had become a common sight in secular buildings, such as taverns and private homes, civic organs did not yet exist.

One notable step towards the civic tradition was an instrument known as the Apollonicon. Built by the London organ-builders Flight and Robson, under the patronage of the Prince Regent, the Apollonicon was a massive, 45-stop 'finger-and-barrel chamber organ' - a curious hybrid instrument which could be played by hand on a conventional keyboard ('finger') by upwards of five performers at the same time, using five separate keyboard consoles; or played automatically like a barrel organ, with cylinders programmed with popular works such as the overture to Weber's *Der Freischütz*.¹³ The remarkable organ was premiered in 1817 at Flight and Robson's fashionable West End showroom, and proved an immediate success. In 1818, a series of Saturday afternoon recitals was established, performed by John Purkis, organist of St. Olave, Southwark. These recitals mark one of the first series of secular organ recitals in England, as well as one of the first series of public organ recitals, making the Apollonicon 'virtually synonymous with the establishment of the public organ recital in England.'¹⁴ Eventually, the musical activity on the instrument would include concerts with self-playing music; solo organ recitals, courtesy of Purkis and Thomas

¹¹ Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, p. 3.

¹² Philip Olleson, 'Samuel Wesley and the English Bach Awakening', in *The English Bach Awakening*, ed. Michael Kassler (Routledge, 2017), p. 281.

¹³ M. C. Davy, 'The Apollonicon', *Mechanics' Magazine* 238 (15 March 1828), p. 103.

¹⁴ Rachel Cowgill, 'The London Apollonicon Recitals, 1817-32: A Case-Study in Bach, Mozart and Haydn Reception,' *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 123, iss. 2 (1998), p. 190.

Adams; concerts with five players; and recitals of vocal music with organ accompaniment. Equally important was Flight & Robson's move away from the subscription system the same year, cutting admission prices by half and relying on ticket sales on the open market rather than subscriptions, thereby making the recitals available to a more socially diverse audience.¹⁵

Not only was the Apollonicon an unprecedented, highly ambitious instrument, but through their work Flight and Robson also demonstrated ideas which would later become fundamental to Victorian organ-building, especially that of the organ emulating the orchestra, stating in their prospectus for the Apollonicon that it would 'produce the real effect of a whole orchestra of performers',¹⁶ and going as far as including two kettle drums in the organ, playable from the manuals. The various recitals which took place on the Apollonicon were also ahead of their time, differing from the few that predated them in that they were secular and explicitly commercial ventures, a way for Flight and Robson to promote themselves and draw crowds to their showrooms. Purkis's recitals at the showroom could attract audiences of up to 500 people, and the programmes he played were also very similar to the repertoire of the later civic recitals, favouring organ transcriptions, English organ music, and improvisations, usually over popular operatic themes.¹⁷

The price of attendance reveals something about the audience the various recitals were marketed towards. Whereas many of the other recitals offered on the Apollonicon, such as Adam's five-organist concerts which were originally planned as a series of ten recitals at a cost of two guineas for the season, were clearly meant for a more exclusive audience,

¹⁵ Cowgill, 'The London Apollonicon Recitals', p. 209.

¹⁶ C. E. McGuire and S. E. Plank, *Historical Dictionary of English Music* (Scarecrow Press, 2011), p. 38.

¹⁷ Cowgill, 'The London Apollonicon Recitals', p. 205.

Purkis's recitals were far more accessible. At a shilling per ticket, they cost roughly the same as upper-gallery seats at the English theatre, which put them within reach of 'many who could not afford to attend concerts of instrumental music or the Italian opera.'¹⁸ The concert of vocal music, in which the Apollonicon was used to accompany a quartet, 'anticipated the mid-nineteenth-century concert organs purpose-built for large-scale oratorio performances,'¹⁹ and the premiere example of this was soon to be built, far away from the Apollonicon showrooms.

In 1834, Birmingham Town Hall and its organ were opened. The Triennial Music Festival, founded in 1784 to raise money for Birmingham General Hospital, had outgrown its previous venues of St. Philip's Church and the Theatre Royale. Thus, the Hall was constructed to provide a new venue, and the governors of the Hospital given permission to erect an instrument within it at their own expense.

The organ, built by William Hill & Sons, was the largest in England at the time and the first specifically built for choral accompaniment. After the 1834 Festival, it continued to be the property of the Hospital governors, to utilise as they pleased. In 1844, the Trustees of the organ received a memorandum from 1,600 local workers, asking if the instrument and hall could be made available for them once a week for their recreation.²⁰ The Trustees agreed, quickly establishing a series of organ recitals specifically for the workers, performed by the then-Corporation Organist James Stimpson, which would become known as the Monday Evening Pops. The Pops were an immediate success, drawing over 1,000 listeners for each of the initial three recitals, with tickets priced at only three-pence in order to keep them within

¹⁸ Cowgill, 'The London Apollonicon Recitals', p. 204.

¹⁹ Cowgill, 'The London Apollonicon Recitals', p. 219.

²⁰ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 3 December 1855.

reach of their intended audience.²¹ The following year, vocal music was added to the Monday Evening Pops' programmes, 'it being found that the organ alone was too monotonous and too abstruse,'²² and their popularity continued. The Birmingham Pops constitutes the very first series of civic organ recitals; it was held in a secular building and explicitly motivated by a wish to 'improve' the working-class listeners, in both their musical taste and their morals, and it would go on to inspire many other towns, cities and boroughs to construct organs, employ organists and establish their own recital series.

The issue of repertoire and how to best put together programmes for a working-class audience soon became a hot topic among music critics. As described by the *Musical World* in 1844, the Pops' organ repertoire consisted of 'selections (...) of that popular class likely to prove attractive to such an audience; but, nevertheless, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, had their allotted places', highlighting the intention to simultaneously attract a working-class audience and present them with music seen as worthy and improving, while also drawing a clear divide between music by the great Classical composers and so-called 'popular music'. Once vocal music was included, it consisted of 'portions of oratorios, cantatas, glees, madrigals, duets, and soli pieces with chorus (...) from the compositions of the best writers, and framed with the desire to raise the public taste.'²³ After less than a decade, the scrutiny of the repertoire performed at the Pops increased, with some accusing the works played of being 'too high-class' for the intended audience, and having too great a focus on Italian composers. In 1855, a writer in the *Birmingham Gazette* commented on the topic, describing the original object of the Pops as providing 'a wholesome recreation for the

²¹ *The Musical World*, Vol. 19, Iss. 49 (5 December 1844), p. 396. '(...) 1143 the first night, between 17 and 1800 the second, and nearly 1500 the third and last night (...)'

²² *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 3 December 1855.

²³ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 3 December 1855.

working classes, with a view to their moral and intellectual improvement' through the use of music. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the social makeup of the audience had been shifting since their inception, the 'threepenny class of frequenters' leaving while the 'sixpenny audience' remained in fair numbers. The writer blamed this on the growth of competing (and decidedly less educational) entertainment in Birmingham, such as equestrian amusements and various cheap establishments which provided 'performances and other diversions, in combination with music and refreshments'. A clear solution to the issue seemed inconceivable. The *Gazette* author rejected the possibility of raising the ticket prices to cover costs, as raising 'the price of the galleries to nine pence or a shilling would in many cases tend to drive families into the body of the Hall', and at the suggestion that the repertoire be altered to appeal to the aforementioned 'threepenny class', he stated that it would be 'far preferable that the Monday Evening Concerts should cease than that they should be made the vehicle of contributing amusement by the introduction and performance of frivolous and trashy selections of music, which would not only degrade the art, but pervert the object aimed at, namely, the intellectual advancement and refinement of the people, at whose request and for whom the Concerts were instituted.'²⁴

It is not immediately clear if the repertoire was changed in any way following the accusations of the working-class audience leaving, but the Pops did not cease, continuing in some shape or form until the present day.

The construction of the William Hill organ in Birmingham Town Hall marks something of a turning point in English organ history, not only in its contributions to public and civic organ recitals. It was built at the cusp of one of the most fruitful periods in English organ-building,

²⁴ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 3 December 1855.

as the demand for organs was steadily increasing and organ-building technology was adapting to the changes in musical taste, allowing for larger, more expressive instruments. The Hill organ was quickly outpaced, but its impact was and is undeniable, even managing to survive relatively untouched into our own time, despite the eagerness of later Victorians' in replacing instruments from the early part of the nineteenth century. It was a decidedly *English* instrument, part of what Nicholas Thistlethwaite has dubbed the 'Insular Movement' to distinguish it from organs built in a German style, and built not for solo performance, but for the accompaniment of oratorios, one of the most popular musical forms of the Victorian era. The intention of oratorio accompaniment is a particularly important aspect of the English organ during a majority of the nineteenth century, as it would influence the use of imitative 'orchestral' stops, a core feature of the burgeoning English organ-building style and seen earlier in the Apollonicon. It also reflected a financial consciousness regarding oratorio performances, in that it was far cheaper to perform large-scale oratorios with a single organist than with an entire orchestra, enabling a broader variety of choirs to perform oratorios, requiring a smaller budget and fewer participants.

A leading factor behind the great changes that would take place in English organ-building was the adoption of the 'German System' in the 1840s, which sought to standardise the instrument, expand its size and scope, capitalise on foreign innovations and further its mechanical development.

The main motivation for this was the growing popularity of continental organ music. This had gained further impetus in the wake of Felix Mendelssohn's first visit to England in 1829 – some years after the first public performance of the music of J. S. Bach in the country, of

whom Mendelssohn was a known and eager proponent. Works by composers such as Mendelssohn and his contemporaries would become central to the repertoire of English organists, and were characterised by new orchestral ideals for composition, wherein the organ was used to emulate and evoke the sounds and textures of the orchestra, through imitative stops and virtuosic technique. The English organ of the early nineteenth century was, however, not suited for the new repertoire. It was still largely rooted in older traditions, especially evident in its lack of full pedal boards and the use of short compasses to compensate for this, as well as its smaller size, relatively limited variety of stops and lack of homogeneity. English organists were also trailing behind their continental brethren in terms of technique, and the organs they worked with did not allow them to improve in the same manner.

This dramatic shift in musical taste led English organ-builders to change their building style. After a period of experimentation in the 1820s and 1830s, a new and clear direction was needed in order to unify the outdated English organ, to modernise it and expand it into a homogenous instrument suited for contemporary repertoire. To accomplish this, English organ-builders naturally began to look to the continent, and many undertook European tours, taking a particular interest in the works of French and German organ-builders.

Eventually, the influences they brought back from their European counterparts would come to form the foundation of what we call 'the German System', which was to be implemented among organ-builders throughout Great Britain. We may look to Bicknell for a comprehensive description of the system:

Organs were now to have manuals of the same compass as each other, all starting at C; the notes below this, common on English Great organs, were to be omitted and the short-compass Swell extended. Each manual division was to have its own independent chorus structure (...) The bass was to be provided by a fully independent Pedal organ, again starting at C but at 16' pitch, so sounding an octave lower than the manuals, with its own chorus. The construction of the stops was to be varied extensively, with the help of the introduction of many new pipe-forms from Germany and France, thus avoiding the duplications of tone found in the large English organs of the 1820s and 1830s.²⁵

The most notable part of the German System was the introduction of a full, independent pedalboard, eliminating the need for the short compass or pull-down pedal stops found in older English organs. This not only allowed the organists to perform continental repertoire, but also to reach the levels of virtuosity of European organists. The larger size and varied disposition meant that English organists could expand their repertoires to include many new genres, particularly orchestral transcriptions.

Complementing the additional complexity of the organ was a repertoire of increasingly virtuosic pieces and choral accompaniment on a larger scale, leading to a demand for yet larger, more advanced and more dynamic instruments. Innovations such as the Barker lever and various forms of non-mechanical actions allowed for an improved and lighter action on the manuals, meaning that a virtuosic playing-style was possible even on very large organs. New orchestral ideals in organ music led to a greater emphasis on dynamics, emulating those of the choir and the orchestra, which was achieved through the use of dynamic pedals,

²⁵ Bicknell, *The History of the English Organ*, p. 235.

a wide variety of orchestral stops, and thumb pistons to allow for quick changes between pre-set registrations. Organs could now be built far larger, without sacrificing technique. The orchestral qualities of the Victorian organ and its reflection in organ repertoire are further explored in my analysis at the end of this chapter.

If we look to the 1851 Great Exhibition, roughly a decade after the introduction of the German System, we can see how monumental the changes brought on by the system and the emergence of the concert organ had been. The Exhibition, its full title being 'The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations', was a grand celebration of technology, innovation, and design, with an overarching aim of public education.²⁶ The event was held in the monumental Crystal Palace and lasted from 1 May to 15 October, attracting a total of six million paying visitors, meaning that a potential fifth of the population at the time attended the Exhibition.²⁷ These people thronged to the Palace not only to marvel at industrial machines and surgical instruments and the famed Koh-i-Noor diamond, but also to see radical innovations made in the field of music and instrument building.

Among the more than 100,000 objects exhibited there was a total of fourteen organs displayed at the Exhibition, the majority of them English-built. Some of these featured prominently in the architecture of the Crystal Palace, with four large concert organs placed in each 'arm' of the building, the largest being a 70-stop Willis organ; while others were displayed as musical experiments or curiosities, such as the 'enharmonic organ', designed and built by Colonel Perrnot Thompson 'to demonstrate its inventor's system of 'perfect

²⁶ Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851* (Yale University Press, 1999), p. 94.

²⁷ Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, p. 1.

intonation',²⁸ and a 'curious 4-pipe instrument by Ducci of Florence designed to reinforce the low notes of an orchestra'.²⁹ For many English organ-builders, such as Forster & Andrews, the Exhibition served as inspiration and a window into the trends and developments in continental organ-building, influencing future works. Several of the organs were used during the opening ceremony of the Great Exhibition, both to accompany a choir of nearly one thousand and, after the initial opening numbers, to accompany the Royal procession as it made its way around the building, providing continuous organ music, one organ taking over from the previous in playing the National Anthem in a sort of musical relay as the procession moved from one end to the other.³⁰

But for all the development that had taken place in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was the latter half which would see England emerge as 'perhaps the preeminent organ building nation in the world.'³¹ The adoption of the German System in the 1840s meant that a large number of English organs had to be replaced or rebuilt, and a resurgence of congregational singing and the increasingly orchestral quality of the accompaniment of choral music, as well as the construction of a growing number of civic concert halls, led to a great demand for larger organs, and instruments of a different character.

Spurred on by this flourishing market, the decades following the Great Exhibition saw a significant boost in English organ building. Notably, provincial firms saw a particularly marked growth, as the wealth of the newer industrial areas grew, shifting impetus away from the capital. While several London firms, such as Bishop, Hill, Gray & Davison, and Willis,

²⁸ George J. S. King, 'Music at the Great Exhibition', *Tempo*, no. 19 (1951), p. 8.

²⁹ Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, p. 296.

³⁰ King, 'Music at the Great Exhibition', p. 7.

³¹ Bicknell, *The History of the English Organ*, p. 257.

would remain fixtures of the English organ-building world, many provincial firms would expand in the latter half of the century, able to compete with their brothers on equal ground. In some respects, their conditions were more favourable, being less conservative than their well-established London counterparts, and in a position to offer lower prices.

One advantage was that most provincial workshops could provide their own pipework and parts, and staffs of thirty to sixty men were not unusual. In Lancashire and Yorkshire between 200 and 300 workmen were employed in the organ-building business in the 1870s, and in 1898, Harrison & Harrison declared that their workshop had produced 1,100 instruments since 1861, more than Wilhelm Sauer, perhaps the most renowned German organ-builder of the Romantic tradition, had managed to build in fifty years. By the 1870s, provincial builders were providing the majority of instruments for their regions, 'though the largest and most prestigious contracts still tended to be awarded to the Londoners.'³²

By the 1880s, a clear image of what we today might recognise as the Victorian organ was establishing itself, formed by the influential works of builders such as Hill and Willis. This was a larger, more powerful instrument than the comparatively small organs of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, appropriate both for the accompaniment of large choral concerts and for the grand solo compositions and orchestral transcriptions that were growing in popularity among organists, along with an increasingly pianistic playing style. The Victorian organ was characterised by a warm, rounded sound, achieved through the ubiquitous use of the open 8' Diapasons – something of a signature of the English Victorian organ and still an easily recognisable feature of the English organ today – though new stops had been adopted from organ-building trends on the continent. There was a greater

³² Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, p. 298.

emphasis on player-adjustable dynamics, where the ideal was now more along the lines of the gradual dynamics found in orchestral and vocal music. This, which had previously been impossible due to the limitations of older organs, was now achieved through the balanced swell pedal, becoming commonplace by the late nineteenth century. The earlier trigger swell pedal could only achieve terrace-type dynamics corresponding to the notches cut in the trigger pedal, while the new balanced pedal allowed for a smooth crescendo/decrescendo by evenly opening and closing enclosed sections of the organ. Another dynamic tool of the Victorian organ was quick, yet gradual changes in registration. This had been improved, allowing for smooth transition between pre-set registration through the use of composition pedals and thumb pistons, the latter a Willis invention wherein combinations of stops could be saved and operated through lines of buttons beneath the keys, so named as they were often pressed with the thumbs while playing.

The pedal board had grown to its full size, with many favouring the radiating and concave pedal board, also created by Willis, placed well under the keyboards to encourage a legato pedal technique. Mechanical action had been the standard, at least on smaller organs, until the 1880s, while larger organs with three manuals or more may have used a Barker lever to make the action lighter. Successful attempts at creating electric action had been made since the 1860s, but many builders found it unreliable, and favoured tubular pneumatic action in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.³³

³³ Bicknell, *The History of the English Organ*, p. 277.

3.3: The Victorian organist

Civic organists held key positions in the musical life of their towns and cities, and their duties varied, depending on the needs of their community and the ambitions of the local authorities. In larger towns with more resources to spend on civic projects, the organist could be required to play regular public recitals, as well as work with local musical societies and act as a contact person for all manners of organ-related queries, including handling the upkeep of the organ and communications with organ-builders and tuners, as well as a plethora of other minor tasks, musical or not. For example, the organist of Newcastle Town Hall, as advertised by the town council in late December 1859, would receive an annual salary of £150, and was in return required to play 'one hundred performances in the year (...) and generally take charge of the instrument.'³⁴ When discussing the matter at a prior council meeting, a council member mentioned that 'a like salary was paid in Glasgow, where it was found to answer well' and that the organist there was also required to play one hundred recitals each year, although they had seen the need to also 'engage singers and players'. He also stressed the importance of employing 'a first-class man, and (...) a first-class organist could not be obtained for less than [£150]'.³⁵ In Birmingham, the duty of the first City Organist (then known as the Corporation Organist) James Stimpson, appointed in 1842, was chiefly to be the organist to the Triennial Festival, but the duties of the organist would grow with time. When C. W. Perkins was appointed to the position in 1888, the duties of the organist had grown significantly, and he 'was expected to act as accompanist to all choral

³⁴ *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, 17 December 1859, p. 1

³⁵ *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, 3 December 1859, p. 3.

performances given in the Town Hall, and to serve the various religious bodies who made use of the hall, in addition to giving public recitals, a large number of which must be free.’³⁶

In other places, where ambitions were lower and budgets more limited, the organist might not have any regular duties whatsoever, beyond ensuring the organ was in playable condition when it was needed, and the position might not be advertised publicly.

The majority of civic organist positions were unpaid – so-called ‘honorary’ positions – outside the fees earned through non-civic engagements. For this reason, most civic organists held other employment outside their civic engagement, usually as organists in local churches, but occasionally also in other music-related professions, such as teaching, piano tuning or running music shops. Most commonly, they survived through a combination of all of the above.

Despite great overlap in the demographics of civic and church organists, there was an acknowledged difference at the time between not only the appropriate repertoire for each context, but also by extension the playing styles and techniques required to perform in either space. George Macfarren, a composer and musicologist who would succeed Sterndale Bennett as principal of the Royal Academy of Music in 1876, commented on these differences in an 1867 article, in which he claimed that

To play a pedal fugue of Bach, or an arrangement of an orchestral piece, is one of the natural exigencies of the organistship of the Town-hall (...) but florid executive displays are eminently inappropriate to a church, always because they are inaccordant with the train of feelings which the solemnities of worship induce or

³⁶ B. Padjasek, ‘Organist to the City of Birmingham’, *The Musical Times* 130, No. 1752 (February 1989), p. 111.

should induce, and often because the echoing reverberation of great cathedrals renders rapid music confused, unintelligible, and even discordant. The qualifications of a church organist, and a popular organist, are then widely different, if not utterly opposite (...)³⁷

This may be one account from a musically conservative commentator, but it gives an interesting contemporary viewpoint on the relative distinctness of the two roles. Besides this, there were other obvious, practical elements a church organist would have to consider, such as choirs and the clergy, as well as the general structure of a church service.

One might question why someone would invest so much potential time and effort in a position that paid little or nothing, while also holding other work. But there were definite perks associated with the civic organist positions. Being a civic organist provided the performer with a unique platform in their community from which they could promote themselves, be it as recitalists, accompanists, conductors or teachers. In some towns, the civic hall became the main venue for respectable musical entertainment (in contrast to the music hall or theatre), not just used for concerts and travelling shows, but also as a rehearsal venue for local choirs and orchestras, and so the civic organist could take a central position in much of the musical activity within their community. They also gained access, often exclusive, to a large, high-quality instrument, where there were few alternatives.

Sometimes, the organist would even take an active role in the planning and construction of their instrument, allowing them the opportunity to adapt the organ to fit their own personal tastes and requirements. Despite being unpaid, the position was also a clear status symbol, placing the organist in a prominent position within their community.

³⁷ G. A. Macfarren, 'The Music of the English Church (Continued)', *MT* 12, no. 288 (1 February 1867), p. 471.

Just as important as these more tangible advantages, however, the positions allowed the organists to take part in the musical education and elevation of their community, and to showcase their own good taste, in the choosing and performing of ‘good’ music. Likewise, the organist, as well as the organ, became a point of pride for the local authorities.

In the eyes of local authorities, it also made financial sense to employ an organist. While an organ was expensive to build, only one person was needed to play it, but unlike the piano, the organ came with a range large enough to play solo repertoire, and accompany soloists (vocal and instrumental) and large choral associations alike. Local authorities wanted to ensure that the public had access to affordable musical entertainment, and for one salary – or more likely, for no salary at all – they could produce full recitals with a similar repertoire to that which they could by supporting a municipal orchestra.

In order to better understand the role and responsibilities of the civic organist, it is useful to explore the careers of two of the most notable of their kind. The most celebrated and distinguished of the civic organists was without a doubt William Thomas Best, who was organist of St. George’s Hall in Liverpool for nearly forty years, from the opening of the hall in 1855 to his retirement in 1894. Best was by many considered to be not just the greatest civic organist, but the greatest British organist of his time – Stephen. S. Stratton, co-author of *British Musical Biography*, described him as ‘the greatest organist of the age’ in his obituary of Best³⁸ - and much of his reputation was owed to his work at St. George’s Hall.

Best had shown great talent from an early age, despite being largely self-taught. At the age of 14, he got his first appointment as organist of Pembroke Road Baptist Church in Liverpool,

³⁸ *The Monthly Musical Record*, 1 June 1897, p. 127.

a position which would become instrumental for his later career as the organ in the church had a CC pedal board, the first of its kind in Liverpool and still something of a rarity in the rest of the country. This allowed the young Best to hone his pedal skills beyond those of many of his contemporary organists, and to pursue his passion for the music of Bach.³⁹ Slowly, Best rose to fame, in part through an appointment with the Liverpool Philharmonic in 1848, and playing at the Royal Panopticon in London, attracting attention with his classical repertoire and his profound virtuosity. In 1851, he was hired to play the Willis organ at the Great Exhibition, an engagement which would lead not only to Willis being contracted to build the organ in St. George's Hall, but also to Best himself later being employed as the Hall's first organist.⁴⁰

In 1855, Best was appointed Organist to the Corporation of Liverpool, with an annual salary of £300, later increased to £400.⁴¹ As part of his position, Best played three weekly recitals for the public, which he carried on until his final recital on February 8, 1890, maintaining a high standard of serious organ music throughout the years. Besides his position at St. George's Hall, Best held positions at several local churches, as well as occasionally teaching, though he is alleged to have much preferred concert work to either. Praised for his virtuosity, phrasing and pedal technique, he was believed to have amassed a repertoire of 5,000 pieces through his long and illustrious career, and was frequently invited to inaugurate civic organs both at home and abroad. Most notable of these inaugurations were the organ in the Royal Albert Hall in 1871, where he was also asked to be the official organist for its first season, and the organ in Sydney Town Hall in Australia in 1890. Besides his performing,

³⁹ Orlando A. Mansfield, 'W. T. Best: His Life, Character, and Works', *The Musical Quarterly* 4, No. 2 (1918): p. 211.

⁴⁰ Mansfield, 'W. T. Best', p. 215.

⁴¹ Mansfield, 'W. T. Best', p. 216.

he was a composer, an arranger for the organ, editor of works by Handel, Mendelssohn and Bach, and author of several popular instructional works for organ students.⁴²

Another civic organist of note is Charles W. Perkins, Organist to the City of Birmingham from 1888 to 1923. Birmingham Town Hall had employed an organist to perform various duties since its opening in 1834, but Perkins would be the first to hold the official title of City Organist; his predecessor, James Stimpson, who had initiated the tradition of regular organ recitals in the Town Hall in 1844, which Perkins would carry on, had been employed under the title of 'Corporation Organist.'⁴³

The duties of the City Organist had changed leading up to Perkins' employment and would go on to change a great deal during his tenure, but one constant among these was the performance of public organ recitals, many of which were required to be free. During his 35 years as City Organist, Perkins gave nearly 700 recitals, but his duties also included accompanying all choral performances that took place in the Hall, as well as acting as organist for the Triennial Music Festival until its end in 1912. Besides his duties, the City Organist had exclusive use of the organ and the authority to decide who played it, and was free to organise his own recitals, provided the hall was available. Until the installation of electric blowers, the City Organist also had to pay for the services of bellow-blowers himself.⁴⁴ With all this in mind, and more, it might then come as something of a surprise to learn that the position was unpaid until 1894. That year, the Town Hall came close to losing

⁴² H. Davey and N. Banerji, 'Best, William Thomas (1826-1897), organist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 8 October 2020, accessed 13 December 2020
<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-2295>

⁴³ Padjasek, 'Organist to the City of Birmingham', p. 109.

⁴⁴ *Musical Opinion & Music Trade Review* (1 September 1888), p. 540.

Perkins when he was named as the favourite to take over as W. T. Best's successor at St. George's Hall. A salary was quickly installed, albeit one of only £150 per annum, and Perkins remained in the Hall for another 29 years.

Through his position, Perkins also enjoyed a social standing not usually associated with Victorian musicians. In an article following his retirement, *Musical Times* claimed he was 'a favourite in high social circles,' and he frequently visited the palaces at Blenheim and Gopsall, meeting with the King and once even meeting the German Emperor, who invited Perkins to come to Berlin and perform a programme of the Emperor's choosing.⁴⁵ Like Best, he was a popular recitalist and was invited to inaugurate many instruments around the country. As an organist, Perkins was described as having a great deal of professional pride, shunning gimmicks and 'clap-trap organ stunts' in favour of carefully optimising his programmes for their audiences, balancing 'serious' organ music with more popular works and transcriptions.

There are many similarities between the careers of Best and Perkins. The two men came from similar social backgrounds, Best being the son of a solicitor⁴⁶ and Perkins the son of a jeweller, and neither man received much formal training. They both held their engagements as civic organists for roughly the same amount of time, both worked in churches as well as civic buildings, and both enjoyed careers as notable concert organists, inaugurating several town hall organs. Much is also made of the men's good taste and character, such as Perkins' dislike of frivolous organ music and his efforts to 'help' his audience through high-class

⁴⁵ *MT* 65, No. 974 (1 April 1924), p. 347.

⁴⁶ *MT* 38, No. 652 (1 June 1897), p. 382.

music. Though at times temperamental and reclusive, Best was similarly seen as a man of 'fine character,' who commanded respect both for himself and for his art. *The Musical World* described him as 'not merely an artist of the first stamp, but a gentleman innate; and his private bearing is as much entitled to respect as his artistic merits to admiration.'⁴⁷

While they were not exact contemporaries, the responsibilities of their positions were much the same, providing affordable organ recitals of an educational and 'elevating' character. It is in the financial aspects of the two positions that we find the most obvious difference. Even though Birmingham Town Hall had a longer tradition for organ music than St. George's Hall, and had employed an organist for longer, Perkins was paid only £150 a year, when he was paid at all, compared to £400 for Best. In fact, when Perkins retired, he was in such a precarious financial position that a group of Birmingham musicians saw the need to get together and purchase a small annuity for him.⁴⁸ And while they were both publicity-shy, Perkins was much more engaged in the musical community than was Best, who famously refused any titles given to him or any attempts at involving him with the Royal College of Organists or the Academies.

Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, the role of the organist would continue to diversify. The development that had been progressing since the eighteenth century would see the organ become integrated into a broad variety of buildings, including churches and other religious buildings, civic halls, private homes, and an astonishing array of commercial venues, such as theatres, concert halls, music halls, exhibition halls, pleasure gardens and winter gardens, plus even aquariums, skating rinks

⁴⁷ *MW* 38, Iss. 44 (3 November 1860), p. 701.

⁴⁸ *MT* 65, No. 974 (1 April 1924), p. 347.

and arcades. The twentieth century would see perhaps the greatest new development in the form of the cinema organ, a descendant of the theatre organ, which was used to provide accompaniment for silent movies, prior to the introduction of sound films.

3.4: Repertoire

The matter of choosing repertoire for the civic organ recitals was a crucial one, and understandably so. It was through the choice of repertoire that the organist could implement some of the loftier social ambitions that lay behind the recitals, by emphasising music that would have an 'elevating' and 'civilising' effect on the listener. Consequently, civic organists often found themselves in a precarious position, caught between the demands of the civic authorities and the need to attract an audience. In larger towns and cities, they would also have to compete with a wide array of other forms of entertainment which threatened to draw the listeners away from the Town Hall, most commonly the theatre or the music hall.

After the establishment of the Birmingham Pops, many other Town and Civic Halls followed suit, starting recital series of their own. Although some attempted to put on pure organ recitals, most followed the Pops and included vocal music as well, in order to provide some variety. These concerts were usually split into two parts, each half bookended by solo organ pieces, and featuring two or more singers and sometimes also other instrumentalists. The civic organist would generally act as accompanist, though not necessarily on the organ.

The vocal numbers in the civic organ recitals were usually a mix of glees, madrigals, parlour songs and excerpts from oratorios and cantatas, all typical of provincial concerts. Lyrically,

they tended to be of a sentimental, patriotic or religious character, and certain favourite songs such as 'The Village Blacksmith' and Sullivan's 'The Lost Chord' appear again and again, sometimes several times over one hall's season.

For an example of this typical vocal programme, we may look to a concert performed in Kidderminster Town Hall on 7 February 1856. The programme included four glees or trios – 'Ye spotted snakes' by R. J. S. Stevens, with lyrics from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; 'Thou art beautiful, Queen of the valley' by John Wall Callcott, which appears repeatedly throughout the case study concerts, sometimes referred to just as 'Queen of the Valley'; 'Sleep, gentle lady' by Sir Henry Bishop; and 'The curfew' by Thomas Attwood, the full title being 'Hark! Hark! The curfew's solemn sound'.

The solo repertoire included 'Minnie Moore' by John Liptrot Hatton; 'I'm a roamer' by Mendelssohn, translated into English; 'A man's a man for a' that' by Brooks, a song composed specifically for the soloist singing at the concert, lyrics presumably by Robert Burns; 'On by the spur of valour goaded', presumably by William Shield; and two songs by John Parry – 'Old and young', and a comedic songs called 'A. B. C.' describing a lady teaching English to a foreign student. The lyrics of the vocal repertoire included in the concert are for the most part serious, and deal with the themes of nature and chaste love, with some variety provided by Christian songs ('On by the spur of valour goaded') and the above-mentioned comedic number. The composers are, as far as I have been able to ascertain, all contemporary or had not been dead more than a few decades by the time of the concert.

Worcester provides us with an example of a later programme, dating from 19 June 1889.

Only two songs are mentioned as part of the repertoire, but they are both by contemporary

composers, and both are of a serious character, with lyrics about heaven and the Christian afterlife: 'The Better Land' by Sir F. H. Cowen, and 'Will he come?' by Sir Arthur Sullivan, one of the five songs he produced with lyrics by Adelaide Anne Proctor, the famous of the five being the ever-popular 'The Lost Chord'.

As far as organ repertoire is concerned, we may split this into four broad categories – contemporary organ music; 'classical' organ repertoire; organ transcriptions; and improvisations.

Contemporary organ music was often by English composers, although foreign organ music also made appearances, especially French and German. Many of the English composers were also civic organists themselves, composing to meet the increasing demand for new concert music as the number of civic organists and recitals grew. Some popular composers were Chipp, Best, Perkins, Wolstenholme and Lemare.

'Classical' organ repertoire refers to organ music that fell within the taste of the classical music public, by composers whose death generally predates the civic organ tradition, and often by composers who were considered 'Old Masters', especially Bach and Handel. The music of these, along with the music of Mozart and Haydn, is often highlighted in discussions around civic organs and recreational reform as the type of repertoire that ought to be played for the working classes, though it is also regularly described as being out of reach for the 'uninitiated' working-class, and something that realistically had to be accompanied by lighter popular music in order to make it palatable.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ *MW* 19, iss. 49 (5 December 1844), p. 396.

Organ transcriptions represented a central part of the repertoire for the civic organist.

Transcriptions for both piano and organ were popular, especially of orchestral overtures, being a favourite genre in popular music, but transcriptions were made of a large variety of music, from choral works to string quartets to operatic arias. However, there was a fundamental difference between piano and organ transcriptions in their intended use which is worth emphasising. Piano transcriptions were one of the main types of music published for the burgeoning domestic market, adapting a repertoire of primarily 'virtuosic or operatic pieces for amateurs',⁵⁰ either as solos or duets. They also served a practical purpose in the study of larger orchestral works, such as symphonies.

In comparison, organ transcriptions were made for an inherently *public* use. While there were some transcriptions made for the harmonium, most organ transcriptions demanded a far larger instrument with a full pedal board, of a type which was almost unheard of in a domestic setting, and the transcriptions were not of a character that would have been appropriate for church use.⁵¹ Therefore, these transcriptions must have been composed for use in public organ concerts, as a way to play grand orchestral or vocal works on a single instrument. In the transcriptions, the organ took on the role of the orchestra, allowing the organist to utilise the full potential of the Victorian organ with its emphasis on orchestral stops and effects, likely for a public which did not otherwise have the means to hear these pieces performed. Although it was seen as preferable to experience the pieces in their original format, organ transcriptions were also seen as a viable alternative where there were

⁵⁰ Weber, *Music and the Middle Class*, p. 38.

⁵¹ Some stately homes did have larger domestic organs. Blenheim Palace, for example, had a 28 stop, three-manual organ installed in the library in 1888, but this is far from a central example of Victorian domestic setting. Walter Parratt was the personal organist to the Earl of Dudley at Witley Court, from 1861 to 1868, and C. W. Perkins was employed by the 9th duke of Marlborough after the end of his time as City Organist in Birmingham.

no other options, either due to a lack of an orchestra or tickets being too expensive. One might speculate that organists playing these transcriptions in town halls functioned as a form of transmitter of new orchestral music, from the cities where orchestras were more common and out to the provinces. In many cases, the transcriptions were arranged *by* civic organists as well, to meet the growing demand for concert pieces, and as a way to raise their profile and earn additional income.

In the matters of transcriptions, the civic organ repertoire had some similarities with the repertoire found in the British brass band tradition. While groups resembling the brass band had been around for a long time, the tradition emerged in the form we today recognise – as instrumental ensembles of brass instruments and ‘a mass activity in which working-class people engaged as players and audiences’⁵² – at the same time as the civic organ tradition, in the 1840s and 1850s. As with the civic organ tradition, the brass bands grew in popularity in part due to inventions and developments in the manufacture of instruments and printed music, and was further aided by the increasingly popular view of music as an improving activity for the working classes. Industrial employers would encourage their workers to form brass bands, supplying them with instruments and rehearsal spaces in the belief that they would provide a fruitful, sober distraction during their non-working hours.

One major difference between the two traditions was that the brass band culture, once removed from the early years of patronage, would eventually become an almost entirely *working-class* movement, wherein ‘the working classes were vital participants in what was, at the very least, a consensual partnership between organised working people and

⁵² Herbert, *The British Brass Band*, p. 5.

entrepreneurs.’⁵³ Music, often arranged by working-class musicians, was performed by working-class players for predominantly working-class audiences, and much of it organised by the working class themselves. In contrast, the civic organ tradition was never truly removed from its paternalistic roots, the recitals continuing to be shaped by the wishes of middle-class organisers and performed by organists who appear to have been largely middle class as well.

The use of transcriptions provides an interesting overlap between the two traditions. A significant portion of early brass band music was to be found in brass band journals, and ‘by the early 1860s, journals were mainly devoted to arrangements of Italian opera.’⁵⁴ Although there were regional differences in taste when it came to brass band repertoire, as there were in organ repertoire, surviving manuscripts and collections from Victorian bands show a ‘predominance of operatic transcriptions, dance music, and functional pieces such as marches, hymns, and anthems’⁵⁵ while ‘original compositions for brass band constitute a tiny proportion of the repertoire.’⁵⁶ This appears quite similar to the repertoire found in civic organ recitals, relying on transcriptions of popular classical works, both instrumental and vocal, although the degree to which transcriptions of vocal music was used varies, as civic organ recitals would come to include singers as a part of their programmes, thus eliminating the need for the same amount of vocal transcriptions.

In both traditions, the repertoire was also dictated to a large degree by middle-class taste, despite being aimed at working-class listeners. Trevor Herbert points to this in his book, *The*

⁵³ Herbert, *The British Brass Band*, p. 11.

⁵⁴ Herbert, *The British Brass Band*, p. 55.

⁵⁵ Herbert, p. 282.

⁵⁶ Herbert, p. 55-56.

British Brass Band, highlighting how many of the transcription staples of the brass band repertoire, such as choral works and ‘art music (...) particularly pot-pourris of foreign works’, were popular among the middle class, whose purchasing power influenced the music publishing market. Likewise, ‘another type of music aimed, initially at least, at the middle-class market, was piano arrangements of opera extracts [and] British publishers lost no time in making such extracts available to the wider public’⁵⁷. Where the civic organ repertoire utilised music favoured by the middle classes due to them being organised by the middle-class in the belief that this repertoire was beneficial to the working-class audiences they aimed to attract, the brass bands sought out music which was readily available and popular. Though they were influenced by middle-class patrons, especially in the earlier years of the tradition, the popularity of these transcriptions at brass band recitals do indicate that there was a genuine taste for them among working-class audiences.

The traditions also shared some of their democratising influences, in making the classical repertoire available to people who might not otherwise have access to it, although they differed in their levels of conscious effort to influence the listeners. Trevor Herbert describes how the audiences flocking to open-air brass band competitions and concerts ‘irrespective of their individual wealth, sex, or literacy, had unequivocal access to high art music’, with programmes mostly consisting of arrangements of classical works.⁵⁸ As at civic organ recitals, many attendees at the brass band events would experience ‘serious’ instrumental music for the very first time through transcriptions. The brass band and organ transcriptions also fit into a greater tradition of musical transcriptions, which functioned as the main way of

⁵⁷ Herbert, p. 56.

⁵⁸ Herbert, p. 64.

disseminating music in a time before recording and broadcasting technology, bringing repertoire such as symphonies and operas within reach to the wider population.

To illustrate the way the organ was used to achieve an orchestral effect necessary to play many transcriptions, we may examine an organ transcription of a popular work, such as Albert Lister Peace's arrangement of the overture to Weber's opera *Oberon*. Peace (1844-1912) would succeed W. T. Best as organist of St. George's Hall in Liverpool in 1897, although the transcription is likely to have been published sometime between his appointment as organist of Trinity Church, Glasgow, in 1865, and becoming the organist of Glasgow Cathedral in 1879. The overture to *Oberon* features in several recitals I have looked at, including one of the early Kidderminster 'Cheap Concerts', though this is unlikely to have been Peace's arrangement, as it was published at least a decade later.

The image shows a page from a musical score, likely an organ transcription of the overture to Weber's opera *Oberon*. The score is written for three parts: Manuale, Pedale, and a separate system for Flute and Clarinet. The tempo is marked 'ADAGIO SOSTENUTO.' and the mood is 'dolce.' The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'p' and 'pp'. The Flute and Clarinet part is marked '8 ft.'

Figure 1

From the very beginning of the transcription, the orchestral character of the overture is reflected through rapidly changing registrations (*fig. 1*), emulating the call-and-response of the original with solo cornet, violin, flute and clarinet stops, clearly indicated in the score. The lack of any 16' stops in the pedal in the opening, only added on the second page at the 'allegro con fuoco', also reflects the gentle orchestration of the piece, eschewing a more prominent bass to allow the manual stops space.

The use of gradual dynamics indicates an instrument with an effective swell box, capable of creating a dramatic crescendo or decrescendo, even on a single, sustained chord (*fig. 2*). A similar effect is seen in *fig. 3*, with a crescendo from piano to forte over only two bars. This would be easy to achieve in an orchestra, but on an organ would require the use of pre-set registrations on thumb pistons or a similar system, possibly alongside an expressive swell box, to gradually and naturally build from one dynamic to the other.



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

Fig. 4 provides a further example of the dramatic and sudden changes in dynamics which were a common feature and challenge in transcriptions. This would most definitely have required pre-set registrations in order to achieve the sudden leaps from fortissimo to pianissimo, or the *fortepiano* in the pedals, where a simple click of a button or switch, either by the organist himself or an assistant, would allow for the registration to change so dramatically, while sustaining the same note in the pedals. The 'reeds off' also supports the presence of thumb pistons or pedal pre-sets to allow for a quick change and the removal of all relevant reed stops at once.

Peace's transcription also reflects increased pedal ability, at the very least the ability of the arranger, but likely also a general trend among British organists towards more virtuosic pedal technique, unlike their reputation in the earlier parts of the nineteenth century. There are rapid scales, as seen in *fig. 5*, and parts towards the end of the piece indicate that use of the heel, a more advanced technique, was becoming more common, as it is necessary to achieve the quick move from, for example the G# and A to the E (*fig. 6*).



Figure 5

This musical score is for a piano and violin ensemble in D major. The piano part is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The violin part is written in a single staff with a treble clef and features a melodic line with many slurs and ties. The score consists of four measures. The first measure is marked with a forte (ff) dynamic. The second measure is marked with a piano (p) dynamic. The third measure is marked with a forte (ff) dynamic. The fourth measure is marked with a forte (ff) dynamic. The score ends with a double bar line.

Figure 6

Improvisations constituted another important tool of the civic organist. It was not unusual for a civic organ recital to include extempore performances over popular themes or a certain musical form, as was also found in the emerging piano recitals around the same time. Similarly, it was a common practice to have an organist provide relevant improvisations between toasts at civic dinners, such as playing a medley of shanties after the toast to the Navy. A popular sub-genre was the 'storm fantasia,' which could be either improvised or composed. These pieces utilised the various effects of the organ to depict the scene of a storm, building from the quiet pastoral moments before the storm, to monstrous thunder and lighting, before dying away. Some organs, such as the Cavaillée-Coll instrument in Manchester Town Hall,⁵⁹ even included a purpose-built stop which could create thunder-like roars by playing a cluster of bass pipes at the same time.

Although the matter of programming the recitals was largely left up to the organist himself, it did not mean the civic authorities would shy away from involving themselves in the choices he made. A case from Sydney Town Hall in 1898 sheds some light on this issue: here the City Organist was threatened with a pay-cut by his employers, as they thought his recitals were lacking in educational material. In reply, the organist included an improvisation over 'Pop goes the weasel' at his following recital, apparently in reference to the children's song being mentioned at the meeting, showing his employers exactly what he thought of their criticisms.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ 'Description of the Grand Organ in the Town Hall, Manchester, by M. Aristide Cavaille-Coll, Paris', *Musical Standard* 45, Iss. 1522 (30 September 1893), p. 271. These stops were sometimes known as 'Effet d'Orage', or by the terrific name 'Thunder Pedal.'

⁶⁰ *MT* 39, no. 664 (1 June 1898), p. 386. By the later nineteenth century, the fashion for civic organs had spread to Australia and other parts of the Commonwealth.

In a letter to the *Musical Times* in 1900, C. W. Perkins of Birmingham Town Hall provided some valuable insight into his work as City Organist. In it, he touches on many of the core elements of the civic organist role, describing his efforts to 'improve the taste of his audience,' and discussing the social impact and democratising influence of the civic organist and the makeup of his audience, highlighting the working-class element. It is worth including in its entirety:

I have been trying for some years to improve the taste of the audience by gradually increasing the proportion of serious organ music. At the same time I am of opinion that as there are a number of poor people (more than one labouring man being among the most devoted attendants), it is better for them to hear some of the great orchestral works on the organ than never to hear them at all. I am glad to say that there is now more applause after a Prelude and Fugue of Bach than there was ten years ago after an operatic overture.

The recitals, which are free, are given on Saturday afternoons, at 2.30. As a rule, the audience numbers from 500 to 700 people, and includes all classes of the community. They are always singularly attentive and appreciative.

At the last recital (in June) I always give a programme selected entirely by the audience. (...) The voting last year stood thus, with a large majority for No. I:-

1. Overture to 'Tannhäuser' ... Wagner
2. Storm Fantasia ... Lemmens
3. Variations on the Austrian Hymn ... Chipp

No. 3 was, as you are aware, composed for this instrument and is a great favourite here.⁶¹

The programme at the end of the letter even provides us with a microcosmos of the civic organ repertoire, including a transcription of a popular, yet serious operatic overture; an expressive storm fantasia by a foreign composer; and a piece by a contemporary English civic organist, using a common improvisational form of variations over a popular, recognisable tune.

A defining feature of the civic organ repertoire is the repeated discussions of morals and music, and the focus on perceived 'improving' music, by which the organisers sought to influence the listeners, contrasted to what they saw as working-class musical taste. But as we have seen when comparing the civic organ repertoire, the 'improving' classical art music and the working-class repertoire found in the brass band tradition, the great chasm between working-class and middle-class taste as imagined by recreational reformers did not really exist in any meaningful sense. Tastes overlapped greatly from class to class, differing mostly in presentation and location. As Haweis touched upon when he described a medicine given alternatively as a drug and a poison, the idea of morally improving music was also not true, as music in itself holds no inherent moral value – the morality was found in the intentions of the organiser and the performer, giving the music, which could be found in a variety of concerts, moral value and power through its presentation.

⁶¹ *MT* 41, no. 687 (1 May 1900), p. 315. This use of 'plebiscites' to allow the audience to pick their favourite repertoire to be performed at the end of a concert series was common in orchestral series, such as those by Langley and Berlioz, and were thus imitated by organ recital series.

In the next chapters, I will examine how these general changes in English organ music and the ideas about rational recreation described in the preceding chapter interacted in a series of towns that built civic organs and hosted concert series developed around them, mainly in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 4 – KIDDERMINSTER

In the following three chapters, I use case studies of four civic halls and organs to examine the motivations of the local government in using the organs for the improvement of public morals, the construction and use of the civic organs, the role of the civic organist and organ music, and the relative successes and failures of these in achieving their goals. The case studies illuminate various aspects of the efforts to use music to promote rational recreation, driven by members of the upper and middle classes to elevate the tastes and morals of a working class that they thought would benefit from this. The different case studies reveal varying levels of success, a variety in the approaches taken by local government to achieving their goals, and the importance of dynamic individuals in navigating organisational difficulties and local bureaucracy, as well as their role as intermediaries between the goals of the rational reformers and the intended audiences.

4.1: Political and economic unrest

Kidderminster had been in the cloth trade since the Middle Ages, thanks to its advantageous position on the river Stour, as well as the four main roads that passed through the town. The transition from cloth to carpet weaving came in the early eighteenth century, leading to a boom for the borough, though this change in trade and the rapid growth in population and prosperity that followed as Kidderminster moved into the nineteenth century brought certain problems. The years following the trade transition were characterised by periods of unrest – during municipal elections in the eighteenth century mobs ‘threw cabbage-stalks at

each other and respectable inhabitants were invited to pelt the bailiff-elect with apples'¹ – and the increasingly dire sanitary condition of the town. Matthew Lewis described the state of Kidderminster in an 1803 letter, with perhaps some exaggeration:

(...) for that the place is accursed of heaven is past all doubt. The roads are all sand; the hills are all brick-dust colour; the houses are all dirty; the children are all ugly; the men are all stupid; and I do verily believe in my conscience that all the women are born old (...) Had I possessed the wand of a sorcerer, I should certainly have ordered the ground to open and swallow up this detestable town.²

The matter was not helped by the local upper classes, many of whom simply settled outside the town to escape its condition, and the formation of the Paving Commissioners to combat the worst issues in 1813 only managed to scratch the surface of Kidderminster's problems. At the same time, class tensions continued to mount, with weavers' strikes in 1817 and 1828, the latter of which lasted five months without 'a single significant intervention from any impartial local person to try to settle the dispute.'³ The mechanisation of the carpet trade took much longer to establish itself than in other similar industries, and it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that power looms began to supersede the traditional hand looms in Kidderminster, and the trade suffered the consequences.⁴ A power loom shown at the 1851 Great Exhibition had initially been offered to the borough, but John Crossley & Sons of Halifax managed to secure the patent rights, and subsequently redirected

¹ 'Kidderminster: Introduction, borough and manors,' in *A History of the County of Worcester: Volume 3*, (London: Victoria County History, 1913), 158-173. *British History Online*, accessed 4 November 2019, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/worcs/vol3/pp158-173>

² Nigel Gilbert, *A History of Kidderminster* (Philmore, 2004), p.80. Also known as 'Monk' Lewis, Matthew Lewis (1775-1818) was an English writer, often associated with the 'Gothic horror' genre.

³ Gilbert, *A History of Kidderminster*, p. 93.

⁴ Bartlett, 'The Mechanisation of the Kidderminster Carpet Industry', p.49.

a great deal of business away from Kidderminster.⁵ As the years passed, the trade situation worsened progressively, with many weavers ending up unemployed or working on starvation wages, while others decided to leave the town altogether. Sanitation remained a crucial problem for Kidderminster, especially in the poorer parts of the town which lacked many basic amenities, but despite recurring cholera outbreaks and pleas from local physicians to act, the local Council did little to improve the situation, being unwilling to raise the rates. Some efforts were made to alleviate the suffering of the Kidderminster weavers, such as the provision of soup kitchens through public subscription, but by the 1850s, Kidderminster was a far cry from the prosperous town it had been before the turn of the century.

As Colin Cunningham puts it, it was certainly 'an extraordinary time to build a town hall' and would appear to have been 'an effort to assert the identity of the town.'⁶

There had been plans to build a new town hall ever since the old Guildhall had become insufficient, and despite the economic situation in the borough, there were still people with the means and the initiative to pursue these plans. New political impetus came in 1852, with the election as member for the borough of Robert Lowe, who would become involved in the planning and construction of the new public building. Additional support came from the Vicar of Kidderminster, Thomas Legh Cloughton, who had been presented to the vicarage in 1841. The same year as Lowe's election, the Reverend had 'bemoaned the lack of a suitable

⁵ Bartlett, 'The Mechanisation of the Kidderminster Carpet Industry', p. 53. Crossley was the largest carpet manufacturer in the world for much of the nineteenth century.

⁶ Colin Cunningham, 'A study of town halls of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the reflection of civic pride in buildings', (PhD Thesis, University of Leeds, 1974), p.349.

room for musical gatherings,⁷ perhaps betraying some ulterior motives behind the construction of the Town Hall, and more notable figures would soon add their names to the cause. These included the Mayor of Kidderminster, Joseph Kiteley, and Lord Ward, who had a close relationship with Reverend Claughton – the two would eventually become brothers-in-law⁸ - and who would go on to become the first Earl of Dudley in 1860.

A committee towards the cause was soon founded, with the aim of raising the £5,000 needed to build the hall, mostly through the sale of £10 shares. On 20 April 1853, at which point £3,210 had been raised through shares and £780 through donations, a meeting was held for subscribers and a legal company was formed: The Kidderminster Public Rooms and Corn Exchange Company.⁹ At the meeting, Lord Ward (*fig. 7*) gave an impassioned speech for the cause, in which he outlined some of the social ambitions for the construction of the Hall, expressing the wish that it be built without any party political inclinations; that it be built for all classes of the town; and the hope that it would be funded by many small donations, rather than fewer large donations. Lord Ward was an impressive figure to have at the forefront of the cause, both in terms of financial and political power. The Ward family had made their fortune through the coal and iron industries of the Black Country, buying the stately Witley Court in 1837 for £900,000.¹⁰ Ward himself was a great benefactor, having previously assisted the Kidderminster weavers during the difficult years of the early 1850s by

⁷ Gilbert, *A History of Kidderminster*, p.111.

⁸ Sutton, C. W. and H. C. G. Matthew. 'Claughton, Thomas Legh (1808-1892), bishop of St Albans', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, accessed 26 October 2020, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-5550>

⁹ *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 20 April 1853.

¹⁰ Roughly equivalent to £82m in modern currency. 'Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.K. Pound Amount, 1270 to present', *MeasuringWorth*, 2020, accessed 26 October 2020, <https://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/>

funding the construction of several power-looms,¹¹ as well as funding the 'entire refacing and restoration of Worcester Cathedral between 1859 and 1877.'¹² That Ward was keen for the hall to be funded by 'many small donations' suggests the intention that the Public Rooms would be the property of the town at large, rather than a gift from a benefactor, or at least to appear to be so. His personal contribution of £200, or 4% of the total budget, demonstrates this.

¹¹ '(...) the late Earl of Dudley came forward and by erecting a large shed and fifty looms enabled nine manufacturers to start the power-loom weaving of carpets." *WC*, 11 November 1899.

¹² J. Homery Folkes, 'The Victorian Architect and George Edmund Street, *Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society*, 3rd series, Vol. 4 (1974), p.9.



Figure 7 Carte-de-visite of Lord Ward, 1st Earl of Dudley, c. 1873¹³

¹³ 'William Ward, 1st Early of Dudley', London Stereoscopic & Photographic Company (ca. 1873), National Portrait Gallery, London.

As a result of this meeting, a company of shareholders was formed, with a successfully nonpartisan committee, and Messrs. Bidlake and Lovatt of Wolverhampton were engaged as architects. Kidderminster was not primarily an agricultural town, so the addition of the Corn Exchange may have been an attempt to stimulate a new market, creating a financial centre around the Hall and helping the new building 'pay its way.'¹⁴ It is difficult to pinpoint the exact involvement of the municipality at this stage: on one hand, the building is presented as a commercial venture, founded as a private company; on the other, there are certain aspects that point to the local government having an influence on what went on and how the money was spent. The Council appears to have intervened in the budget for an early series of concerts, and many of the borough's foremost politicians were also central figures in the building of the Hall, most notably Robert Lowe and Joseph Kiteley. This suggests that even shortly after its building, when the future Town Hall was formally a private venture, outside the ownership of the Council, it already had a 'civic' character, and was being run in the service of more complex goals than simply providing a return to its shareholders.

A shareholder register dated 1853 exists, which identifies the subscribers for 447 of the 500 shares offered by the Public Rooms Company.¹⁵ It is not clear if the fact that only 447 shares had been subscribed for implies that the Company was unable to raise the full amount of capital, or if the remaining shares were subsequently taken up. Subscriptions were concentrated in a small group of large orders. 39.1% of the shares were ordered by subscribers for ten or more shares (a substantial subscription of at least £100). That said, there was a long tail of smaller orders, with 19.5% of the shares being taken by subscribers

¹⁴ Cunningham, 'A study of town halls', p. 354.

¹⁵ Kidderminster Public Rooms and Corn Exchange Company. 6 October 1853, Schedule to the Deed of Settlement of the Kidderminster Public Rooms and Corn Exchange Company, The National Archives, BT 41/332/1925. £4,270 were subscribed or proposed to be subscribed at the date of the Deed.

for one or two. The register provides the 'Occupation, Rank, or Usual Title' of almost all of the subscribers, which provides some information on their status. The largest identifiable group was those who provided a title rather than an occupation ('Lord,' 'Esquire,' or 'Gentleman'), who accounted for 28.4% of the shares. This suggests that the local gentry was willing to support the venture; however, this is slightly complicated by the fact that Joseph Kiteley was recorded as 'Esquire,' rather than as a 'Carpet Manufacturer.' 24.4% of the shares were subscribed-for by people identified as Carpet Manufacturers or Yarn Spinners,¹⁶ demonstrating that local employers were approximately as willing to support the project as the gentry. Just under half the shares were subscribed to by people outside of the groups that identify themselves by their title or those who can be identified as carpet industry figures. Clerical professions, such as solicitors or accountants, who generally made small subscriptions (an average of four shares each), accounted for 11.2%, suggesting some level of interest among the broader middle-class. It is interesting to note that 3.4% of the shares were subscribed to by members of the clergy, including five shares for the Vicar of Kidderminster, two shares for the Minister of the Independent Chapel, two shares for a Unitarian minister, and two shares each for four men whose title was 'Reverend,' but listed their profession as 'clerk,' which might suggest a broad interest in the project across denominations, or that these members of the clergy belonged to a social circle which would be interested in this sort of venture. There were fifty-six orders for a total of eighty-seven shares (19.5% of the total) that were for one or two shares, from a variety of buyers ranging from a cabinet maker, to a hairdresser, to a foreman. While the minimum price to subscribe

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that George Butcher Lea, who subscribed to ten shares at the cost of £100, identified himself as a 'yarn spinner', which might give the impression of being an artisan, whereas he in fact owned a textile mill.

was substantial (£10 for a single share), the register as a whole implies a broad interest in the project from across the middle classes. In light of this, it seems reasonable to claim that even at this stage, the Public Rooms represented something 'civic', at least in the sense of being a co-operation between members of the local government and people likely to be the ratepayers voting for them. Through their contributions, the local authorities, gentry and employers also demonstrate a level of responsibility towards their community and sympathy towards the social aspects of the project.

On 11 December 1853, the first stone of the Public Rooms was laid. The day was marked by celebration and pageantry, with the shops in town closing around noon and a parade of dignitaries marching from the old Guildhall to the site of the new Hall through streets lined with spectators. The parade included Lord Ward, Robert Lowe, MP, Messrs. Bidlake and Lovatt, as well as local council members, shareholders, a brass band, and sixty workmen in the employ of the contractor.

At the site, Ward placed a sealed glass jar containing 'a number of coins, a list of names of the officers of the Company, and a copy of each of the three Worcester papers of the previous weeks'¹⁷ into an aperture in the first stone, before it was lowered onto its base. After the Vicar of Kidderminster had offered a few prayers, emphasising the commercial nature of the building, Robert Lowe addressed the onlookers, exclaiming that they 'were about to erect a temple to the spirit of enlightenment which characterised the age; a structure which would be an ornament to the town and a memorial to posterity of the energy and public spirit of those men who so successfully undertook to bring it into

¹⁷ WC, 14 December 1853.

existence.’¹⁸ Lowe’s use of the emotional phrase ‘spirit of enlightenment’ is significant, as it not only makes the reforming purpose of the building very explicit, and places it firmly in the context of the general trends of recreational reform and improvement of the time, but also gives a strong sense of the moral ambitions of those involved to use the Public Rooms.

At a dinner at the Lion Hotel after the laying of the foundation stone, the Vicar was less indulgent. After the Vicar’s toast had been drunk, the Rev. Claughton rose and took the opportunity to lecture the roughly 130 people present about ‘shirking measures necessary for improving the health, the morals, and the social position of the working people’, stating that ‘if many of the owners of cottage property only saw with their own eyes the condition in which their tenants were compelled to live, and be conscious of the evil results, morally and physically, of such a state of things, they would be so shocked that they would at once apply themselves, as far as they were able, to remedy it.’¹⁹ The *Chronicle* records that this direct challenge to local complacency was met with cheers from the listeners. The fact that what might seem like harsh words were met with such a positive reaction (especially at such a festive occasion) shows that those invited to the dinner, who would likely have been local dignitaries and shareholders in the company, were at least open to these ideas regarding social reform, though it might also cast some doubt on whether these ‘owners of cottage property’ were also present at the dinner.

¹⁸ WC, 14 December 1853.

¹⁹ WC, 14 December 1853.



Figure 8 Kidderminster Public Rooms, date unknown.²⁰



Figure 9 Map of Kidderminster Town Hall and immediate surroundings²¹

²⁰ 'History of Kidderminster', *Kidderminster Town Council*, accessed 31 May 2021, <https://www.kidderminstertowncouncil.gov.uk/history/>

²¹ National Library of Scotland, OS 25 Inch, 1892-1914, accessed 16 May 2021, <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/side-by-side/#zoom=17&lat=52.38733&lon=-2.24919&layers=168&right=ESRIWorld>

Disposition for Kidderminster Town Hall, William Hill (1855)

Great Organ (C to g3)		Swell Organ (C to g3)		Choir Organ (C to g3)		Pedal Organ (c to e1)	
Double Diapason	16	Double Diapason	16	Stopped Diapason	8	Open Diapason	16
Open Diapason	8	Open Diapason	8	Salicional	8	Violon	16
Stopped Diapason	8	Stopped Diapason	8	Gemshorn	8	Octave	8
Cone Gamba	4	Viol di Gamba	8	Flute	4	Trombone	16
Octave	4	Octave	4	Piccolo	2		
Wald Flute	4	Super Octave	2	Cormorne [sic]	8		
Octave Quint	2 2/3	Cornopean	8				
Super Octave	2	Hautboy	8				
Sesquialtra	III	Tremulant					
Posaune	8						
Couplers		Accessories					
Swell to Great		3 Composition Pedals					
Great to Pedal							
Swell to Pedal							

Table 1 Disposition for the organ in Kidderminster Town Hall (1855)²²

²² Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, pp. 227-228.



Figure 10 The organ of Kidderminster Town Hall, photo credit: William McVicker²³

²³ William McVicker and Nicholas Thistlethwaite, 'Kidderminster Town Hall Organ Options Appraisal' (unpublished report, 2019), p. 1.

4.2: Kidderminster Public Rooms and the Hill organ

Unfortunately, the following years saw the economic and sanitary condition of Kidderminster become progressively worse, and by the time the Public Rooms (*fig. 8, 9*) were inaugurated on 4 January 1855, the town was in a deep slump. The building itself was relatively plain and small, but as the committee had planned, it included meeting rooms, the corn exchange and a concert room. Even though musical performance had been a central factor in the planning of the Public Rooms, which would also be known as the Music Hall, the provision of an organ had not been included in the original plans, and the instrument was commissioned at a late stage in the building process, just a few weeks before the opening of the Public Rooms. The instrument was built by William Hill, a London-based firm who had previously built the organ in Birmingham Town Hall, at a cost of £826, also raised by subscription,²⁴ and was inaugurated separately after its completion with a two-day musical festival on 16 and 17 October the same year.

Like the rest of the Hall, the organ (*fig. 10*) was simply decorated, with gilded pipes and a white and gold case. It featured several stops that were considered novel in their time (see table 1), including the first appearance of the pedal violin stop in England, and the second of a 'violon' stop altogether, which would become characteristic of Hill's organs. It also included a tremulant on the swell, though public opinion was less favourable towards this than the other new stops, one journalist likening the tremolo to 'a shaking of the whole instrument'. Outside this comment, contemporary accounts of the organ were glowing, with newspapers quick to label it as one of Hill's finest instruments, and some going as far as

²⁴ Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, p. 227.

claiming it was ‘among the best in the kingdom’.²⁵ The national musical press were similarly appreciative in their coverage. The *Musical World* emphasised its appropriate size and characteristics, which ‘though not by any means a mammoth in size (...) is quite sufficient for its locality’, and the careful and economical disposition of the instrument, where ‘nothing [is] frittered away in divided or inexpensive stops; every stop it contains is costly, vitally useful, and a calculated member of the whole effect.’²⁶

The instrument was relatively conservative, combining new reeds, flutes and strings with stops such as the quint and the tierce mixture. In their 2019 report on the organ, McVicker and Thistlethwaite explain that the organ’s innovative stops ‘enable organists to provide appropriate colouring for their performance of orchestral and vocal transcriptions. Even so, the scheme is not very different from that of a contemporary church organ of similar size; only the tremulant, the compasses rising to g³, and the provision of a swell string rather than a mixture hint at the secular character of this particular instrument.’²⁷ This gives us some indication of the organ’s intended use, as transcriptions were a vital part of the civic organ repertoire and would indeed be a significant component in the programmes performed on the Hill instrument.

There does not seem to be any available explanation as to why the organ was ordered at such a late stage of construction, nor any details about the process of ordering, planning and constructing it, or indeed why it was not part of the initial plans for the Music Hall. The price of the organ was roughly a quarter of the price of the entire building, so it was no small expense, making it even stranger that the decision to commission an organ appears to have

²⁵ *WC*, 17 October 1855.

²⁶ *MW* 33, iss. 41 (13 October 1855), p. 659.

²⁷ McVicker and Thistlethwaite, ‘Kidderminster Town Hall Organ Options Appraisal’, p. 7.

been made last-minute. It is also not clear whether the money was raised through fewer large donations (which would have implied the involvement of wealthy benefactors and thus a possible sign that the organ was to be used as a paternalistic tool of public improvement), or through several smaller donations (which would have implied that there was a pervasive feeling that the organ would be an important supplement to the Hall). It is possible that Hill already had an instrument partially or completely ready, which could easily be adapted to the hall, as the Music Hall does not appear to have been built with an organ in mind. This late addition meant that a portion of the stage had to be sacrificed in order to fit the instrument, but this seems to have been a sacrifice the owners were willing to make, and it is also probable that Hill was given free rein regarding the design of the organ, as the Public Rooms committee does not appear to have made any requests. Despite its last-minute inclusion, the organ received a great deal of attention and praise at its inauguration, where it was played by James Stimpson, organist of Birmingham Town Hall and the founder of its famous weekly organ recitals.²⁸ The involvement of Stimpson is significant, as drafting in the organist of the largest and most famous town hall at the time invited for comparisons between Kidderminster and Birmingham, and presented the Hall as an important civic endeavour of the same character as Birmingham Town Hall.

The programme for the inaugural Musical Festival consisted of several oratorios, a 'grand Miscellaneous Concert' and a grand dress ball. Several famous names were engaged for the concerts, which speaks of the level of the Board's ambitions, most notable among them

²⁸ 'Birmingham City Organists', *THSH*, accessed 4 November 2019, <https://www.thsh.co.uk/town-hall/the-town-hall-organ/birmingham-city-organists>

being the world-renowned singer Clara Novello.²⁹ Reports in the *Worcestershire Chronicle* emphasised the novelty of the event, claiming that ‘a short time ago the idea of a musical festival being attempted in this place would have been received with an uncredulous shake of the head’, and explained that the festival was being held in part to inaugurate the new instrument, in part to fund it (‘a portion of the expense of erecting it’ being still unpaid), but also to raise funds for

the establishment of cheap concerts for all classes – an attempt for which great praise is due to the directors, as proving their anxiety to make this building of service to the working classes of the town, and not confine its advantages to those in more favoured circumstances. This object gave the festival a claim upon the patronage of the surrounding nobility and gentry, as the establishment of such concerts would undoubtedly tend to soften the feelings and elevate the ideas of those for whom they are intended.³⁰

The festival was well received and well attended, drawing an audience of 1,100 for the first of the two days. The first day opened with a concert of two oratorios – Haydn’s *Creation* and Spohr’s *Last Judgment* – with an interval between the two, in which Stimpson played ‘one of Hesse’s airs and variations on the organ.’ The evening miscellaneous concert was, as the name would imply, a varied affair, including both violin and concertina solos, as well as an organ concerto by Rinck. The second day consisted of a performance of Handel’s ever-popular *Messiah*, before the floor of the Music Hall was cleared in preparation for the grand

²⁹ *MT* 7, No. 152 (1 October 1855), pp. 126-7.

³⁰ *WC*, 17 October 1855.

dress ball, attended by 230 of Kidderminster and the surrounding area's most fashionable and important citizens.

Funded by the surplus from the Musical Festival, the very first civic organ recital took place on Thursday 22 November, a little over a month after the inauguration of the instrument. The recital consisted of organ solos played by William Haynes, the organist of the Abbey Church in Malvern, though the *Worcestershire Chronicle* made clear that

future concerts will include vocal and instrumental music, for which purpose a selection has been made from the Choral Society here of twelve singers, and an engagement has also been entered into with Mrs. Evans, of Worcester. We trust that the attempt thus made to provide rational entertainment for all, more especially the working classes, will meet with that encouragement which the spirited proprietors have reason to expect.³¹

Haynes would become a central figure in the early days of the 'Cheap Concerts' and the closest Kidderminster had to a Borough Organist before the establishment of the position in 1883, being described at his farewell concert in 1856 as '(...) late Solo Organist and Conductor of the Thursday Evening Concerts, Kidderminster.'³² He was already a successful and ambitious organist in his home town, and would go on to establish a music warehouse,

³¹ *WC*, 21 November 1855.

³² *WC*, 19 March 1856.

become the proprietor of William Hill & Co. (of whom he was a keen patron) in 1886,³³ and even become appointed organist to the 1878 Paris Exhibition.³⁴

These 'Cheap Concerts' continued to be played weekly until the following year. As the name of the series would imply, tickets were required to attend the concerts, and while no exact price is specified in the adverts or the reports, it would presumably have been at a rate affordable to the working-class citizens the authorities were so keen to attract. The repertoire also reflects this agenda, with an emphasis on light songs and popular orchestral transcriptions. For example, the following programme was announced for a 'Cheap Concert' on 27 December 1855:

PART I

ORGAN SOLO – Chorus, "Fixed in his everlasting seat," Mr. Haynes – *Handel*

GLEE - "From Oberon" - *Stevens*

SONG - "The Slave Girl's Love," Mrs. Evans – *Laud*

SOLO VIOLIN - "Carnival de Venice," Herr Hoffmann

ORGAN SOLO – Selection from "Norma," Mr. Haynes – *Bellini*

PART II

ORGAN SOLO – Overture, "William Tell," Mr. Haynes – *Rossini*

SONG - "The Postman's Knock," - *Wrightman*

³³ 'Great Malvern Priory', *Nicholson & Co.*, accessed 15 October 2019, <http://www.nicholsonorgans.co.uk/pf/great-malvern-priory/>

³⁴ 'Tribute to Priory organist', *Worcester News*, May 12, 2001, accessed 15 October 2019, <https://www.worcesternews.co.uk/news/7761068.tribute-to-priory-organist/>

GLEE - "Queen of the Valley," - *Calcott*

SONG - "I Ride on the Storm," Mrs. Evans – *Benedict*

GLEE - "Now is the month of Maying," - *Morley*

ORGAN SOLO – Grand March, "Prophete," Mr. Haynes – *Meyerbeer*³⁵

This presents a programme of a kind common in 'cheap concerts', consisting of vocal and instrumental works, including pieces for vocal ensembles, with each half of the recital bracketed by organ solos, and an emphasis on native composers. Another 'Cheap Concert' programme, from January 1856, features a very similar repertoire:

PART I.

Organ Solo – Prelude and Fugue – *J. S. Bach*

Madrigal – "Flora gave me" – *Wilbye*

Song – "The Captive Greek Girl" – *Hobbs*

Glee – "Where art thou, beam of light" – *Bishop*

Song – "Shells of Ocean" – *Cherry*

Organ Solo – Selection from "La Figlia" – *Donizetti*

PART II.

Organ Solo – Overture to "Oberon" – *Weber*

Glee – "When winds breathe soft" – *Webbe*

³⁵ WC, 26 December 1855.

Duett – “Let’s trip to yonder mountain” – *Jolly*

Glee – “Peace to the souls” – *Callcott*

Song – “I love the merry sunshine” – *Glover*

Chorus – “The tiger cometh” – *Bishop*.³⁶

This concert follows the same lines as the December 1855 concert, with the omission of the last organ piece to make space for a chorus. The character of the two programmes is overwhelmingly popular, with only one overtly serious, ‘classical’ piece in the Bach prelude and fugue (key not specified). It is worth noting that apart from this, the remaining organ pieces are all transcriptions, and most of them are adapted from French and Italian opera – even opera selections, which were considered especially popular. The vocal pieces are almost all light and secular in character and by English composers, as far as I have found sources to confirm, and provide some contrast to the foreign-composed instrumental music. The programme is also relatively contemporary, the majority of the pieces for which a date or an estimated date of composition can be found having been written in the nineteenth century. The clearest exceptions to this are found in the works by Bach, Morley and Wilbye. The concerts seem to have enjoyed relative success in its first months, no doubt owing to the newness of the instrument and the novelty of the concept, and they also continued to enjoy the patronage of the Kidderminster elite. In December of the same year, Pardoe and Hooman, owners of the largest carpet factory in Kidderminster and prominent members of the local council, paid for nearly 400 of their workers to attend a ‘Cheap Concert,’ ‘by way of

³⁶ *The Musical Gazette* 1, iss. 2 (2 February 1856), p. 19.

a Christmas treat'.³⁷ This kind of benevolent parochialism was not uncommon, and the fact that both Pardoe and Hooman had been central to the construction and management of the Music Hall was not a coincidence. They had also been the second-largest contributors to the sale of shares, subscribing for £250 worth, and so had yet another reason to want the concerts to be well attended.

On 6 March 1856, Haynes played what had been announced as his very last 'Cheap Concert,' followed by a formal solo farewell concert on 2 April. The *Chronicle* provides some insight into the popularity and relative economic success of the 'Cheap Concert' series in its report on Haynes' final concert, proclaiming that

the attempt to provide cheap musical entertainments for the people has hitherto been successful; and although there has been much variation of the productiveness of the different concerts in respect to revenue, on the whole the committee have been nearly able to pay their way with the receipts.³⁸

Despite an increase in the cost of printing, music and fittings, the *Chronicle* reported that the total income of the 15 concerts in the series and season tickets had been approximately £140, with the most successful concert raising £14 15s. 6d, and the least successful concert raising £3 19s. 9d., which could indicate audiences of as many as 3,000 people at a single recital, depending on the price of the tickets.³⁹ The *Chronicle* gives notice that the next concert in the series would take place on the 27th of the same month. It gives no reason for Haynes' departure, but it is possible the distance between Kidderminster and Malvern may

³⁷ *WC*, 2 January 1856.

³⁸ *WC*, 12 March 1856.

³⁹ For example, if the tickets were priced at threepence each, the most successful recital of the series would have had an attendance of 1,182 people. However, this does not take into account varying ticket prices, or the use of season tickets.

have played a part. After Haynes' farewell, a Mr. Harding took over the concerts, continuing them until May – after which there are no further mentions of the Cheap Concerts in the *Chronicle* or any other paper. Little is also known about Harding (his full name does not seem to have been recorded), although it is reasonable to assume he was a local organist.

It is difficult to say for certain exactly who the intended audience was for these early Cheap Concerts, outside of being 'working-class', as per the *Worcestershire Chronicle* report following the first recital – especially since we do not know how for certain the price of the cheapest tickets, if there were more expensive tickets available, and how many tickets were sold at each price point. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the term 'working-class' was often coloured by prejudices and assumptions, but looking at the social make-up of Kidderminster around the mid-century and the presence of local employers in the planning of the Town Hall, it is likely that the weavers were a main target, being the dominant labouring group in the town. Pardoe and Hooman paying for their workers to attend a recital could further support this assumption.

Comparing the repertoires of Haynes' and Harding's concerts (see Appendix 1), they seem to be of similar character, focusing on transcriptions of orchestral overtures and operatic selections, as well as light songs. There does, however, appear to be some repetition of certain pieces in the Harding concerts. Some are explicitly by request, such as 'The Swallows,' sung by two local boys, or 'Now tramp,' by Sir Henry Bishop, while others, such as Mendelssohn's Grand March, Spohr's Grand March,⁴⁰ and selections from Spohr's *Jessonda*, appear several times without any given explanation. This might have been done out of necessity, or a lack of time or initiative, or may simply be a sign that Harding was a more

⁴⁰ No further details are given about either march, so it has not been possible to precisely identify them.

limited organist than Haynes. It could also be indicative of the new, reduced budget Harding had to operate under, including a lack of free printed programmes.⁴¹

Following the abrupt end of the Cheap Concert series, little activity is reported on the organ in the Public Rooms, save for the odd Grand Concert. A notice in the *Chronicle* on 27 August 1856 entitled 'THE MUSICAL ART AND THE MAGICAL ART' shows that efforts had been made to establish a new series of affordable organ recitals, but laments the lack of success and that the interests of the citizens lay elsewhere, painting a bleak picture of the future of the Hill organ:

The directors of the Public Rooms have opened the Music Hall on a Saturday evening for an organ concert, at the charge of 1*d.*, thinking, no doubt, that the working people would largely avail themselves of the opportunity of listening to some grand anthems and marches upon such a splendid instrument. On the first evening, Saturday the 16th, there were 57 present, and on the 23rd, 50 only. There are seats in the hall for 450 down stairs, and the empty space has a melancholy appearance. The receipt will not quite pay for the gas, but they intend to persevere. While such lamentable apathy is being shown to the fine arts the magic arts are flourishing, for there have been troops of people going for the last fortnight to a wizard of long beard, and gipsy-like appearance, who has a telescope of destiny, into which any one who looks, and has paid the moderate sum of 2*d.*, may see 'a correct likeness of your future partner,' and receive assurances that they shall have honour, wealth, long life,

⁴¹ 'The usual printed programme will not be distributed gratis, but the visitors will be able to purchase the words of the various songs and glees for one halfpenny.' *WC*, 26 March 1856.

or other desirable gifts, and a printed paper with particulars of what has happened and shall happen to them.⁴²

Clearly, the organ was not only waning in popularity at an alarming rate, but also had tough competition in the borough from other, decidedly less elevating forms of entertainment.

There is no detailed record of the working-class reception of the organ and the organ recitals, nor who actually made up the concert audiences, but it is possible that the local working classes did not take to the overbearing moralistic paternalism with which the concerts were presented, or resented its ties to local employers and politicians, or simply did not enjoy the music. Furthermore, it is important to remember that, despite the optimism which surrounded the building of the Public Rooms and the inauguration of the Hill organ, Kidderminster was still in the midst of a deep crisis, both economically and politically.

In March 1857, a violent riot broke out when the Liberal Robert Lowe was returned as the MP for the borough of Kidderminster. His opponent, the Conservative William Boycott, was a local solicitor who held enormous support among the weavers, using his status as a 'local man' and existing tensions in the borough to his advantage against the anti-union Lowe, to the point where something of a cult of personality had formed around him, the workers calling him 'Good Mr. Boycott' and children singing songs about him.⁴³ This was further helped along by the dislike many workers had towards James Pardoe, who was co-owner of the largest carpet factory in Kidderminster, a member of the local council and an election agent for Lowe.⁴⁴ In 1857, none of the weavers and factory workers who supported Boycott

⁴² WC, 27 August 1856.

⁴³ WC, 1 April 1857.

⁴⁴ R. Groom, 'The Conduct of Parliamentary Elections in Kidderminster, 1832-1880', (partial PhD thesis, Coventry University/University of Worcester, 2010), p. 181.

had the right to vote, and as the election day crept closer, it was becoming apparent that their candidate had no chance of beating Lowe, a circumstance which would no doubt have added fuel to the growing fire.

On polling day, a mob began to gather outside the hustings as the mills and factories were closing, harassing 'every person wearing a decent coat and suspected of being about to vote for Mr. Lowe'.⁴⁵ Once the polls closed, the crowd, by now numbering somewhere between 5,000 and 8,000,⁴⁶ began pelting the building with stones, breaking windows and hitting people inside, and the attack eventually escalated to the point of a mob chasing Lowe and his entourage (which included Pardoe and Hooman) through the town, showering them with stones and bricks.

Between 1851 and 1861, roughly 6,000 hand-loom weavers emigrated from Kidderminster because of the slump, none of their strikes and struggles having yielded any results, and the hand-loom weavers' union was disbanded.⁴⁷ In 1858, two years after their generous 'Christmas Treat', Pardoe and Hooman's carpet manufacturing business went bankrupt.⁴⁸

After 1858, nothing more is to be found in the available sources about the 'Cheap Concerts,' and while it is possible that further attempts were made to establish concerts over the next 25 years, it is difficult to prove due to the lack of surviving archival evidence. Still, some efforts were being made to provide affordable rational recreation for the citizens of Kidderminster, such as at the Workmen's Club and Institute, founded in 1876, which held

⁴⁵ *WC*, 1 April 1857.

⁴⁶ Groom, 'The Conduct of Parliamentary Elections in Kidderminster, 1832-1880', p. 184.

⁴⁷ Groom, 'The Conduct of Parliamentary Elections in Kidderminster, 1832-1880', p. 36.

⁴⁸ *London Daily News*, 17 September 1858, p. 7.

‘fortnightly convivial meetings’⁴⁹ including music, songs, reading and recitation, while some manufacturers hosted reading institutes for their workers.

4.3 Kidderminster Town Hall and the borough organist

Despite a decade of modest improvements in the carpet trade, the Public Rooms and Corn Exchange Company eventually suffered a bankruptcy and was voluntarily wound up in 1874.⁵⁰ Following this, the Public Rooms and all fittings were bought by the Corporation for £8,000 – a fairly common practice in these cases.⁵¹ Three years later, a new building was built on an adjacent plot and, combined with the old Public Rooms, became known as the Town Hall.⁵² It was after the acquisition of the old Public Rooms that the state of the organ became a matter of concern, as a lack of use and proper maintenance had left it in a state of disrepair bad enough to cause issues for visiting organists. In a letter to the corporation, George Blunden, a local organist, lamented the state of the instrument, including ‘damage both from the damp of the room and the want of regular use’ and rust so bad ‘that on the few occasions when the organ has been required to be used, it has generally been found to be seriously out of order.’⁵³ Despite these concerns, little was done, and another complaint was filed in 1883. That year, W. E. Wadeley, organist of St. John’s Church, wrote a letter to the *Kidderminster Shuttle* regarding a concert he had been part of the previous week at which several ciphers in the swell organ had forced him to omit his second solo piece. In the

⁴⁹ *Kidderminster Times and Advertiser for Bewdley & Stourport*, 8 January 1876.

⁵⁰ *Kidderminster Times*, 21 November 1874.

⁵¹ Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p. 14.

⁵² ‘THE WILMINGTON JUBILEE SINGERS – This band of slave vocalists from the city of Wilmington, North Carolina, appear at the Town Hall (formerly Music Hall) tonight’, *Kidderminster Shuttle*, 27 January 1877.

⁵³ McVicker and Thistlethwaite, ‘Kidderminster Town Hall Organ Options Appraisal’, p.9.

letter, he refers to similar issues at a choir rehearsal the previous evening and concludes the letter by stating that 'such a state of things ought not to be, as it places the performer at a great disadvantage, besides laying him open to the attacks of persons who know nothing of these things. In conclusion, I would add that I have written to the proper authorities on the subject, and suggested a remedy.'⁵⁴

Finally, the Town council saw it as pertinent to act on the mounting complaints, discussing the matter in their March meeting a few weeks later:

Having received complaints of the inefficient state of the Town Hall organ for want of a periodical supervision beyond that given by a tuner, and it having been suggested that the difficulty might be remedied by the appointment of an honorary organist to the Corporation (as was the case in many boroughs) who would, in return for having the gratuitous use of the instrument for practice, see that it was kept in proper condition, the committee had communicated with Mr. W. Taylor, Mus. Bac., of St. Mary's Church, as to his acceptance of the post, which he agreed to accept.⁵⁵

William Taylor (1832- 1917) had graduated Mus. Bac. from Oxford in 1854, and was the organist of the Parish Church and a minor composer, having gained some acclaim for an oratorio called *St. John the Baptist*.⁵⁶ The way the statement regarding Taylor's appointment is phrased sheds light on how the council viewed the role of the organ and the new organist, and how this contrasted with the earlier musical activity in the Town Hall. At no point are concerts of any kind mentioned, nor the actual musical role of the Borough Organist.

⁵⁴ *Kidderminster Shuttle*, 24 February 1883.

⁵⁵ *KS*, 24 March 1883.

⁵⁶ James Brown and Stephen Stratton, *British Musical Biography: A Dictionary of Musical Artists, Authors and Composers, Born in Britain and its Colonies* (Derby: Chadfield & Son, Ltd., 1897), p. 407; 'Death of Mr. William Taylor', *Nantwich Guardian*, 21 December 1917, p. 5.

Instead, it is evident that the council's intention for the appointment of William Taylor was to have someone monitor the state of the instrument and avoid further situations such as the one described by Wadeley. Taylor was to be responsible for the organ, and in return he would have 'gratuitous use of the instrument *for practice*'. The term 'honorary,' as used by the council, meant that Taylor would not receive any compensation for his work as Borough Organist beyond free access to the instrument and the platform that came with the position.

Sadly, Taylor's appointment seems to have been a case of too little, too late. The activity on the organ does not appear to pick up in any significant way after the Borough Organist began his work, not until the end of the century, and little seems to have been spent on the instrument beyond the bare essentials. There are various plausible reasons why this might have been the case. One is that the state of the organ was already too grave and needed serious repairs, which could have hampered Taylor's initial work. Discussions among the council members in the 1890s imply that it did undergo extensive repairs, and also that Taylor may have made himself unpopular with the council simply by extent of being the bearer of bad news, explaining to them just how dire the state of the instrument was and how much would have to be spent on it to bring to a playable condition. Another possible reason could be that Taylor was not a particularly dynamic character as the Borough Organist, lacking the drive to establish an active musical life in the Town Hall after a long period of inactivity. However, due to a lack of sources, such as correspondence and bills which could bring light to the exact state of the organ following Taylor's appointment or details on Taylor's personality, this can be no more than speculation.

While there was definitely activity in the Music Hall following its purchase by the Corporation, some of it involving the organ, it was mostly of a commercial character, such as meetings or evening concerts with the local choral association, for which the Hall was rented out by the Corporation. Further attempts at creating a concert series like the 'Cheap Concerts' were made in 1883, although not by the Corporation, as the *Shuttle* announced that efforts were made 'by a number of the leading residents in the town to hold a series of cheap popular concerts in the Town Hall on Saturday evenings'⁵⁷ leading to the formation of the Saturday Evening Concerts. However, it is difficult to ascertain how long these lasted, and whether they featured the organ in any capacity.

It was not until 1896 that a new series of regular organ recitals was established. This time around, the council seems to have returned somewhat to their earlier ideals as they discussed the concerts, officially re-employing Taylor as the Borough Organist for another year at their annual meeting, with one Alderman stating that 'he hoped the Council could see their way clear to employ Mr. Taylor's services every Saturday evening in concerts for the improvement of the people'.⁵⁸ There was, however, a cautious note to the discussion, betraying a level of wariness from the Council in attempting another series of organ recitals after their previous failures, as well as alluding to financial losses. The Mayor refers to Taylor having offered his services 'for a limited number of recitals, if the town would care to hear them' and states that 'Arrangements could be made for one at any early date, and if the Town Hall was given free for the occasion, they could see how the inhabitants appreciated

⁵⁷ KS, 13 October 1883.

⁵⁸ KS, 14 November 1896.

the concerts', before adding that 'he hoped the burgesses would show their appreciation of good music by attending in large numbers, so that no loss might fall upon the borough.'

There had clearly been a shift in the Council's priorities since the early days of the Public Rooms. At the same November meeting, Alderman Perry 'remarked that the Borough Organist must undertake not to require the Council to give him a new organ or alter the present one at a cost of £359', which was followed by laughter from the rest of the council. No explanation is given for the oddly specific jibe, but it is possible that Taylor had required them to make some necessary repairs for the sum mentioned after his appointment, with which the Council were unhappy.

Any reservations the Council may have had appear to have been gone by the time of the first concert on 19 December 1896. The concert, held on a Saturday evening, possibly in a conscious effort to capitalise on the market crowds, had been advertised as a 'Grand Organ Recital' the previous week.⁵⁹ Admission was free, attracting 'about 500 people of the class for whom it was intended' including 'working men and women who had been marketing (...) and young people with a taste for music or a spirit of curiosity.'⁶⁰

The programme featured several organ pieces played by Taylor, three vocal pieces and a curious performance by a Mr. Osborne 'on the one-stringed instrument of his own manufacture, which he calls the Turkish violin.' The full programme was published the following week:

Offertoire (*Wely*) – Mr. W. Taylor

⁵⁹ KS, 12 December 1896.

⁶⁰ KS, 26 December 1896.

Song – Mr. Passey

La Dove (*Mozart*) – Mr. W. Taylor

Turkish Violin Solo – Mr. Osborne

Hero's March (*Mendelssohn*) – Mr. Taylor

Song, Sound an Alarm (*Handel*) – Mr. R. Taylor

Andante [rest of piece illegible]

March (*Smart*) – Mr. W. Taylor.⁶¹

One might have expected Taylor to play it safe when attempting to establish a new series of organ recitals, by including more light music in order to ensure popular appeal, but the programme for the Saturday organ recital leans towards a more serious, classical character with works by Mendelssohn, Mozart and Handel. The organ pieces are, as far as one can tell, all composed for the organ, avoiding the popular operatic transcriptions often found in many other civic organ recitals, and the only named song is taken from Handel's oratorio *Judas Maccabaeus*. While eccentric, the 'Turkish Violin Solo' was well-received, perhaps included simply as a novelty, but perhaps also intended to educate the audience on exotic instruments and their use. The concert was kept on the shorter side, at about an hour and a quarter including encores for every vocal piece, which may have been both for practical reasons, and to ensure the audience left wanting more.

The performers, all volunteers, included an R. Taylor, who is presumably Richard Taylor, the youngest son of William Taylor, who would succeed his father as both Borough Organist and

⁶¹ KS, 26 December 1896.

organist of the parish church. No details are given on the other performers, but they were likely local amateurs.

The intentions behind the Saturday recital are made explicit through the report published in the *Shuttle*, especially in its description of the concert as being ‘not only an agreeable and pleasant evening, but one at the same time of an intellectual and elevating character’ and how it had managed to attract listeners ‘of the class for whom it was intended.’ This was repeated in the coverage of the subsequent recital, the *Shuttle* stating that ‘the first concert was a success in that it attracted the class for which it was intended.’⁶² Who this class consisted of is not mentioned in explicit terms, but is presumably local workers, and it is likely that the recital was planned to coincide with a market day in order to draw in a large crowd of working-class market-goers, both local and from the surrounding areas.

It is worth noting that there was no shyness about the recitals being aimed at the working classes, with the newspapers freely acknowledging this fact. The article also provides some evidence of the immediate popularity of the concerts. The newspaper also highlights some interesting aspects of the inherent hierarchy found in the hall, as the audience ‘timorously left the two front seats somewhat sparsely occupied, though under the gallery many had to stand.’ This ‘timorous’ behaviour of the audience was addressed again by the press leading up to the next recital, which was held on 30 January 1897. In its promotion of the event, the *Shuttle* remarked that they ‘would recommend the audience to-night, as they enter, to make

⁶² *KS*, 30 January 1897.

as near to the front as possible, and not crowd the second seats and block the doorway as on the last occasion.’⁶³

As the initial concert had proved a success, the recitals continued on a near-monthly basis in the following year, though it is not clear whether this succession was explicitly considered to be a series, as no name is given to it. The programmes of subsequent Saturday organ recitals were not always published in detail, but appear to have stuck to the pattern established by the first recital, with a combination of vocal and instrumental music, with the organ pieces of a largely serious, classical character, avoiding transcriptions. It seems possible that Taylor recycled some of the organ pieces from concert to concert, especially the *Wely Offertoire* and some Mendelssohn marches, but this is difficult to verify due to the incomplete nature of the records. The vocal pieces are of a less clear character, but likely consisted of a mixture of serious and respectable light music, as Taylor relied on the volunteer services of local musical societies and amateurs to perform, such as the Tonic Sol-Fa Choir, who performed sections from *Judas Maccabaeus* at the March 1897 recital. The concerts also appear to have continued to be well-attended, the *Shuttle* reporting that the audience numbered around 1,000 people at the recital in April 1897, although ‘the cyphering of the organ occasionally marred the effect.’⁶⁴

There are many unanswered questions in the history of Kidderminster Town Hall and the Hill organ. This is in part due to the fragmented nature of official records in Kidderminster, as, following the merger into Wyre Forest District in 1874, many older records were either lost or discarded, and various local newspapers are today not readily available or survive only in

⁶³ *KS*, 30 January 1897.

⁶⁴ *KS*, 17 April 1897. The ‘cyphering’ here refers to faults in the wind supply of the organ leading to drones, or notes which sound constantly while certain stops are ‘out’, or drawn.

limited dates. This will naturally lead to substantial gaps in the history where it is simply not possible to say for sure what may or may not have been happening, and also explains why this particular case study is structured around episodes several years apart.

Compared to the period right after the opening of the Public Rooms and organ, there is a stark lack of direction following the Corporation's acquisition of them both. Nearly half a century had passed since the initial 'Cheap Concerts' with no recital series from the owners of the Hall, despite many initiatives by outsiders. It is difficult to point to any exact reason behind this lack of leadership, though most likely, it was a combination of many different elements. The first point seems to be Haynes' departure. After Harding took over the recital series, the concerts saw a dip in attendance, which could of course be coincidental, or stem from a reduced budget, but it is also possible that the sharp change could come from the lack of a clear driving force, like that which Haynes had provided.

A second point is the financial concerns related to a series of 'elevating' organ recitals. The relative cost of the early 'Cheap Concerts' and the failure of the Penny Organ Recitals may have weighed on the minds of the councillors and discouraged them from taking any risks with a new series. We can see this in their discussions regarding the proposed series of organ recitals in 1896, where the members appear cautious about attempting something of that character again. The remarks made by Alderman Parry at the 1896 meeting also highlight another financial concern, being the cost of the organ itself. The Council was clearly unwilling to spend more than the bare minimum on the instrument, reflected in the complaints leading up to Taylor's employment, and it is possible that the general view was that the organ consumed more than it generated, both in revenue and in attendance. There

also seems to have been a general lack of direction from the authorities when it came to the organ. There is little talk of the instrument or concerts in the minutes of the council meetings, which would imply that most of the organisation was left to the Honorary Organist, who would no doubt have been hampered by budget concerns and a persistent lack of support from the public, which in turn would not have helped him in his interactions with the Council. Kidderminster may also have suffered from the same issue as many other towns of a similar size and similar proximity to larger centres, which is that those with the means and position to do so may have preferred to travel into cities such as Birmingham to find more fashionable entertainment, rather than to support local alternatives. This removed an important source of funding and fewer resources for social, essentially unprofitable ventures like the 'Cheap Concerts.'

A third point, and perhaps the most important one, is the apparent lack of interest from the intended audience, especially after the Public Rooms were bought by the Council. It is difficult to say anything for certain about this matter, as little is known of the opinions of the working classes concerning the various 'people's concerts' organised for their specific improvement, or even the actual social makeup of the audience at given recitals, but the general state of the town speaks volumes. No proper waterworks had been attempted before 1870, and in 1875, the year after the Corporation's purchase of the Town Hall, a newspaper would describe the river Stour as 'simply an uncovered sewer.'⁶⁵ The sanitary situation would not begin to improve in any significant way until the mid-1880s, and even then, change was slow. The trade depression that plagued the borough for a large part of the organ's existence would also have been a factor. A lack of opportunities for employment

⁶⁵ Gilbert, *A History of Kidderminster*, p. 119.

and the exodus of many skilled workers was surely not conducive to workers having money or time to spend on attending concerts. There is also evidence of serious tensions between workers and both employers and the local government, which may have made the Public Rooms, a major project representing the efforts of the governing classes, less attractive. It could also be a case of the audience rejecting the moralising character of the concerts and the dawdling behaviour of the Council in matters of public health, letting their lack of attendance speak for them. Without a clearer indication of the composition of concert audiences, it is possible that the local working classes never made up the majority of the concert audiences, even at the peak of their popularity.

From the information that is available to us, an image is formed of a period of relative success and activity after the inauguration of the Hill organ, followed by a long period of decline, continuing after the Council's acquisition of the Public Rooms. After the Rooms became part of the new Town Hall, it is clear that neither public organ recitals nor the organ itself were especially high on the Council's list of priorities, despite the ambitions and expectations that surrounded the construction of the instrument, and nor was it a priority of the local working-class. The condition of the organ does appear to improve following the appointment of William Taylor as Borough Organist, but the activity level remains low until the late 1890s. There are attempts both from within and outside the council to establish series of 'improving' recitals, but with the exception of the Saturday organ recitals at the end of the century, few managed to attract their intended audience and rarely lasted very long.

CHAPTER 5 – WORCESTER

5.1: County and cathedral

Worcester was much larger than the other towns considered in this thesis, being both a county town and a cathedral city, and had an established musical life to a greater extent than the towns in the other case studies, both religious and secular. Although the use of the Public Hall organ was marred by repeated misfortune, the presence of a dynamic and persistent manager provided direction and consistency, leading to some success towards the end of the century. This is also, as we will see, perhaps the least overtly ‘moral’ of the case studies, in terms of the tone with which the recitals were presented with, and the one where the character of the audience is the least clear. Given the complexity of the history of the Public Hall and organ in Worcester, it has been necessary to structure this case study in two parts. First, an examination of the construction of the Hall and the organs, and the transformation from commercial venture to civic building; and secondly, a discussion of the management of the Hall and the various improving concert series for which it was used.

When comparing the two Worcestershire case studies, some immediate similarities between Kidderminster and Worcester are evident. They were both towns positioned advantageously on the River Severn, and they had both been in the textile industry for many centuries; whereas Kidderminster had once been a hub for carpet weaving, Worcester had prospered through the wool industry, glove making and also the manufacture of china. Here, however, the immediate similarities come to an end.

As a county town, Worcester had certain privileges, such as hosting courts and assizes, markets and fairs, and serving as the administrative centre for the county's local government. Prior to the nineteenth century, it had been an important transport point, providing for many centuries the only bridge over the River Severn between Gloucester and Bridgnorth. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the town was enjoying the continued prosperity of the previous century and new innovations in transportation, with a canal built in 1815, and the arrival of the railway in 1850.¹ These factors had all helped establish Worcester as a natural centre for political power and commerce, but it also had a longstanding reputation as a cultural town, in no small part due to its housing of one of England's ancient cathedrals, dating back to 1084. Being one of only 22 cathedral towns at the beginning of the nineteenth century gave Worcester a rare status, making it a natural centre for religion and art, and provided a sense of continuity stretching back almost a thousand years. The Cathedral had in particular been a natural centre for musical activity in Worcester for decades, both as a venue for the performance of church music, and as one of the main sources of musical education in the town. The assizes and other regular attractions throughout the year that came with being the county town also contributed to this wealth of activity, bringing in large numbers of visitors whose presence drove up the demand for entertainment.

Another central part of musical life in Worcester, despite the fact that it only occurred in the town every three years, was the Three Choirs Festival. So named because it functioned as an annual meeting of the choirs at three major cathedrals – Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester – it was (and remains to this day) the oldest non-competitive musical festival in

¹ Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England – Worcester* (Penguin Books, 1968), p. 295.

the world, with the first Festival held in 1715. It originated as a charitable event, raising funds towards widows and orphans of the clergy, a purpose it still served in the nineteenth century. The Festival moved between the three cathedral towns each year, with concerts taking place over several days, included premieres of music by well-established composers as well as new promising talents, with the Cathedral choirs at the centre. The arrival of the railway greatly increased the scope of the Festival, bringing with it both increased profits and crowds, and the issues that came with a larger, and perhaps less exclusive, audience.

5.2: Worcester Music Hall - The Building and first Organs

Much like Kidderminster, the building that would become Worcester's main public hall was initially built to house a commercial market hall. Initially known as the Cornmarket, it had been constructed in near tandem with another market building, the Corn Exchange, following disagreements between Abolitionists and Protectionists in the wake of the highly contentious 1815 and 1846 Corn Laws. The struggle between the groups resulted in a race to complete a building in which to house the local corn trade, which the Protectionist-supported Corn Exchange ultimately won, despite being finished last. As a consequence, the Cornmarket never served its original purpose, but instead became known simply as the Music Hall, and was used for a variety of public events. ²

² Clive R. Haynes, *Worcester Within the Walls* (Osborne Books, 1996), p. 105; Richard K. Morris, *The Buildings of Worcester* (Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1994), p. 70.

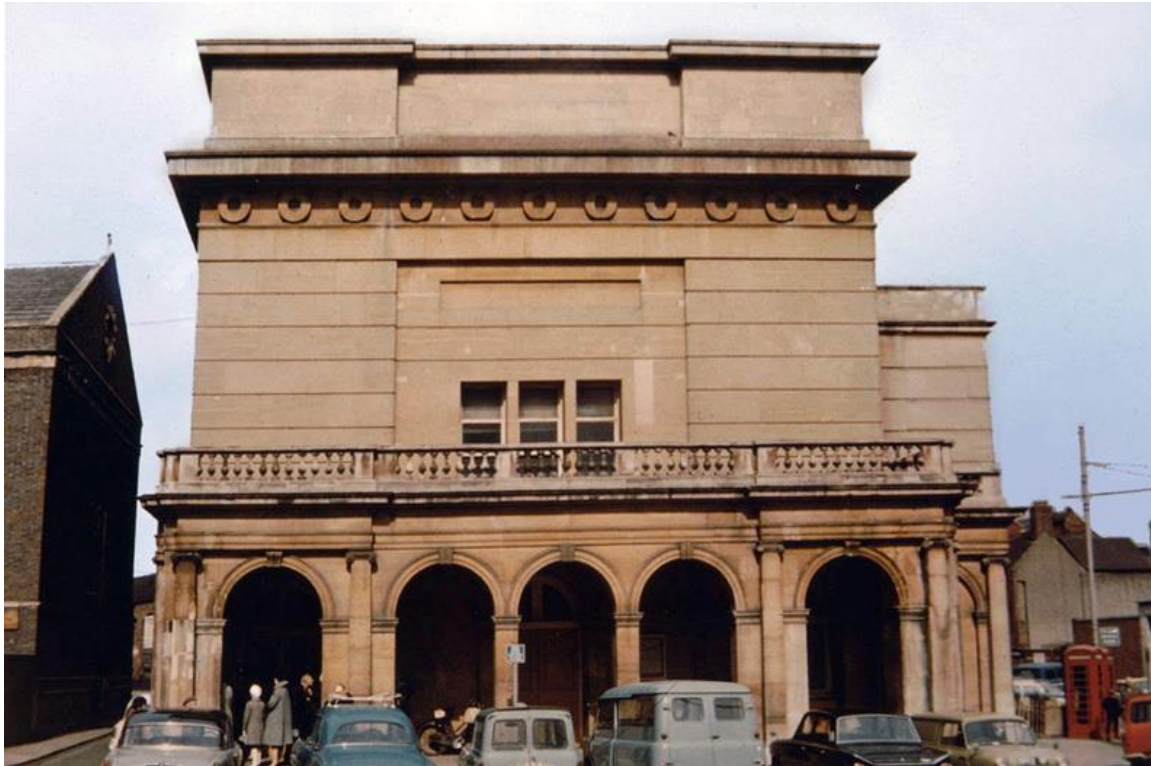


Figure 11 Exterior of Worcester Public Hall, 1965.³

³ 'The Changing Face of Worcester', *The Changing Face of Worcester*, 26 February 2017/12 October 2015, accessed 31 May 2021, <https://www.cfow.org.uk/index.php?category/118> I have not been successful in locating any nineteenth century depictions of the Music/Public Hall.



Figure 12 Map of Worcester Music/Public Hall and surrounding area (1892-1914)⁴

⁴ National Library of Scotland, OS 25 Inch, 1892-1914, accessed 16 May 2021, <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/side-by-side/#zoom=17&lat=52.19342&lon=-2.21910&layers=168&right=ESRIWorld>

The building (*fig. 11*) was at first owned and managed by the 'Corn-Market and Music-Hall Company', which described the Hall in its 1860 statement of purpose as 'also suitable for Musical Performances, Public Exhibitions, and other public purposes'.⁵ This statement also mentions an organ being present in the hall. This organ, the first of several to be placed within the Music Hall, was built by John Nicholson, an organ-builder based in Worcester. His firm was founded in 1841 and had not yet become the premier British organ building firm it would become later in the century, so it is possible that the Worcester Music Hall organ was one of its first large-scale instruments, since the opening came only a few years after the founding of the company. The location (*fig. 12*) of the Music Hall is interesting, as it appears to be in a kind of liminal space between the older parts of the town and the industrial side which developed in the nineteenth century, with large factories and new housing. It is likely that this was a practical decision based on where there was available land, as maps from the early nineteenth century show minimal development to the east of the location where the Music Hall was built, but it did place it within easy reach of industrial workplaces and workers' homes.

The Music Hall was opened to the public in January 1847, with a performance of Haydn's *Seasons*, at which point the organ was not yet finished. The room was lavishly decorated, with a domed ceiling and an orchestra 'capable of seating 150 vocalists and 35 instrumental performers.'⁶ While the detailed histories of the Corn-Market and Music-Hall Company in

⁵ The Worcester Corn Market and Music Hall Company, Limited, 16 March 1860, Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association of the Worcester Corn Market and Music Hall Company, The National Archives, BT 31/465/1798: 'The objects for which the Company is established are – to maintain in the City of Worcester a Building or Buildings suitable for a Market for the Sale of Corn, Grain, Weeds, Flour, Malt, Hops, Wool, and other Agricultural produce (...) and also suitable for Musical Performances, Public Exhibitions, and other public purposes'.

⁶ *The Builder* 10, no. 467 (17 January 1852), p. 44.

the early decades of the building are not entirely clear, with few available records of the Company from before 1860, it is clear that the Music Hall was the main venue for 'larger-scale concerts' in Worcester, even before the installation of the organ.⁷ The architect behind the hall, a local man named W. H. Hopkins, had been careful in his design with the 'dual purposes of music and commercial transaction' in mind, installing draperies around the room to avoid echoes or poor acoustics, and utilising the glass dome to prevent shadows.⁸ Looking through the local papers of the time, one can see a wide selection of adverts for various events and entertainments taking place in the Hall, from exhibitions to concerts with local musical societies to recitals with famous musicians. However, there are signs that the company was in financial trouble from an early point. In January 1860, barely six years after the opening of the Music Hall organ, a notice in the *Worcester Herald* announced that the company was intending to sell the building, 'including the orchestra and fittings'.⁹ Despite these expressed intentions, it does appear that the company was not merely looking for someone to purchase the building so they could be rid of it, at the highest possible price. In the same *Worcester Herald* notice, the proprietors felt the need to explain that they

being most anxious to preserve the Hall for Musical and Public purposes, do not pledge themselves to accept the Highest Tender, and the Sale will be subject to conditions for the Continuance of the Organ in its present position, free from change, with power of Access and Removal by the Organ Trustees.¹⁰

⁷ Martin, Bird, 'Music in Worcester 1860-1890', *The Elgar Society Journal* 16, no. 3 (November 2009), p. 9.

⁸ *Worcester Journal*, 31 March 1866.

⁹ *Worcester Herald*, 14 January 1860.

¹⁰ *WH*, 14 January 1860.

No actions were taken at this point, and the company carried on for another few years.

Around this time, the state of the organ also became an issue. In December 1863, the *Worcester Herald* reported that the instrument

which is very much out of repair, and in its present state cannot be used, is a very serious loss to the shareholders, as it and the orchestra occupy nearly one-fourth of the entire room. We believe the directors seriously contemplate winding-up the company unless the organ is repaired and a more extended measure of public support accorded to them.¹¹

The tone of this seems to imply that the directors did not think of the organ as their responsibility, and it appears that the owners of the original Music Hall organ (*fig. 13*) were indeed not the Corn-Market and Music-Hall Company, but the Worcester Harmonic Society.¹² Few details about this ownership are available, including whether the Society was also the instigator behind the installation of the organ, besides a mention in the original statement of purpose for the Company, which explained that the instrument was to be housed in the Hall free of charge 'until the Trustees or Owners decide to move it.'

¹¹ *WH*, 10 December 1863.

¹² *WJ*, 7 July 1883.

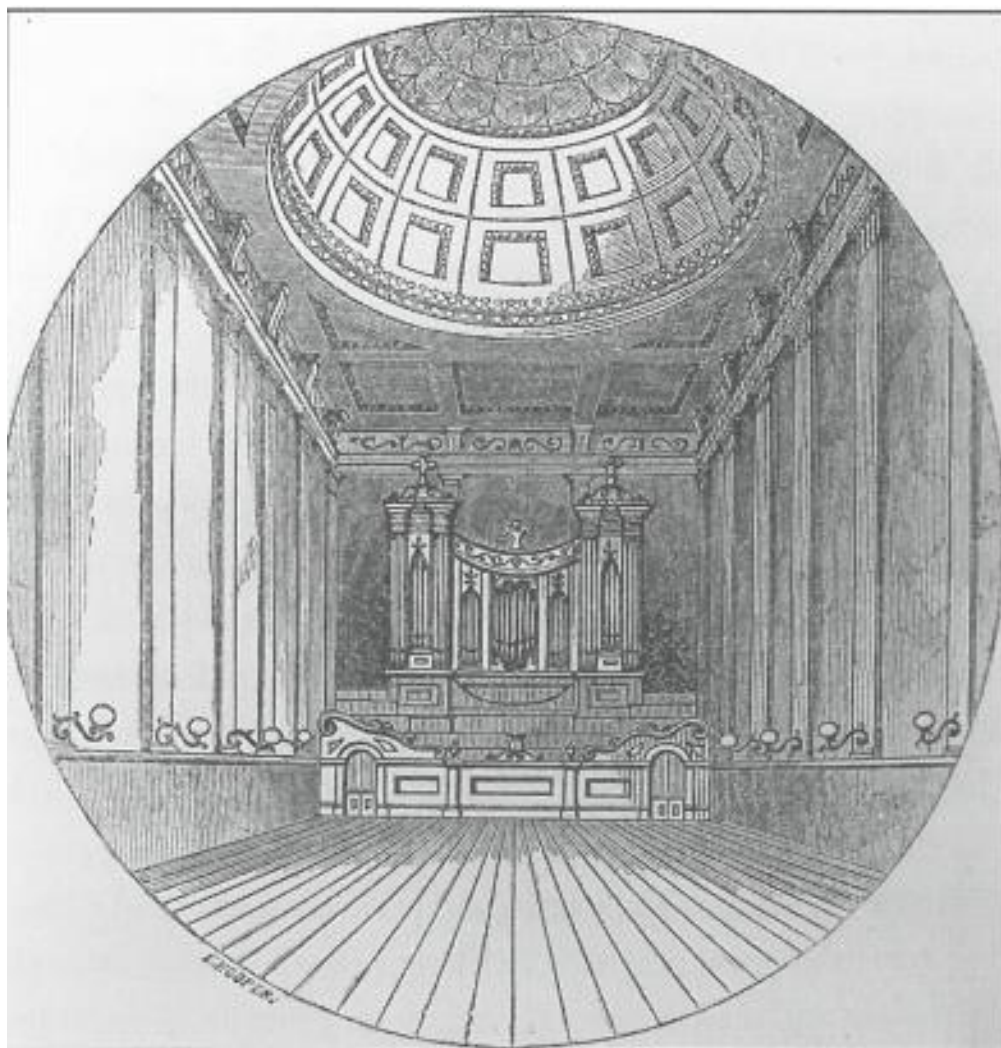


Figure 13 'The interior of the Music Hall in the Cornmarket as shown in Stanley's Worcester and Malvern Guide, c. 1853.'¹³

¹³ Tim Bridges and Charles Mundy, *Worcester – A Pictorial History* (Chichester: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 1996), fig. 78.

The organ had been inaugurated on 29 November 1854, seven years after the opening of the Cornmarket, with a grand concert.¹⁴ The details of its installation and funding are unknown, besides it at some point becoming the property of the Harmonic Society, but it does seem likely that the instrument had not been part of the initial project of the Corn-Market and Music-Hall Company. The programme for the concert included vocal pieces sung by members of the local Madrigal Society, but the main focus was the new organ itself. The instrument (see table 2), which included three manuals and fifty-two stops, was demonstrated by three organists: Jabez Jones of Tewkesbury Abbey; Mr. Uglow 'of Cheltenham'; and William Haynes, organist of Malvern Abbey and, coincidentally (as we have seen), a prominent figure in the early days of Kidderminster Public Hall. Edmund Chipp, the famous organist and composer, had been advertised as part of the programme prior to the inauguration and, although still at an early stage in his career, would have been a great draw, but he had decided to pull out shortly before the concert. After the National Anthem, the evening's programme opened with the 'Hallelujah' chorus from *Messiah*. Other organ pieces included an arrangement of a movement from Mozart's 'fifth quartet', Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March' from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, an air and variations on 'God preserve the Emperor' [composer not specified] and 'a fantasia on airs from Weber's *Oberon*,' before terminating with 'Rule Britannia.'

¹⁴ *MT* 6, No. 135 (15 December 1854), p. 247. A 'grand concert' usually appears to refer to a larger-scale, more expensive concert, often to mark a special event or occasion. No further details about the Mozart quartet are given.

Disposition for Worcester Music Hall, Cornmarket, Nicholson (1854)

Great (compass?)	Swell (compass?)	Choir (compass?)	Pedal (compass?)	
Great Diapason	16	16	8	32
Open Diapason	8	8	8	16
Diapason, small scale	8	8	8	16
Stop Diapason	8	8	8	16
Gamba	8	4	8	16
Quint	6 [sic]	2	8	12 [sic]
Octave	4	8	4	8 [sic]
Twelfth	3 [sic]	8	4	8
Fifteenth	2	4	4	4
Tierce	1 3/5	4	2	III
Mixture	V	V	V	16
Gemshorn	4	16		
Wald Flute	4	8		
Posaune	8	8		
Clarion	4	4		
Couplers	Accessories	Composition		
Swell to Great	Sforzando Pedal	Three to Great		
Swell to Choir	Tremulant to Swell	Three to Swell		
Choir to Great		Two to Choir		
Pedal to Great				
Pedal to Swell				
Pedal to Choir				
Octave Pedal				
Super Octave to Swell				

Table 2 Disposition for the organ in Worcester Music Hall (1854)¹⁵

¹⁵ James Berrow, 'John Nicholson, organ builder of Worcester: background, life and work (vol. II), (PhD thesis, University of Reading, 1996), pp. 146-147.

Not even a decade later, the organ would be in a pitiful state. The fact that the instrument was owned, and possibly also installed and financed, by an organisation separate from the owners of the hall, might explain why the proprietors did not feel the need to repair the organ once it fell into disrepair, and might also explain the pressure from some quarters to remove it altogether, given the space it took up. Alongside the general costs of maintaining the hall and the organ, some of the failure of the early Music Hall appears to have been due to poor attendance at concerts. Like the organ, the Hall itself was in dire need of repairs by 1863, and a meeting of the directors of the Company revealed that a minimum of £500 was needed to bring the building to a reasonable standard.¹⁶ It was suggested that their best hope to raise the money was to issue more shares in the Company, but to no avail. In 1864, the Worcester Corn-Market and Music-Hall Company wound up voluntarily.¹⁷

After the closure, official records indicate that the Company may have continued its management of the Hall under a new name, 'The Worcester Music Hall Company Ltd.' At the reopening on 4 April 1866, the Hall is described as being 'under fresh management' and 'the present company' is referred to, without any further explanation.¹⁸ It is possible that an altogether new company was now in control of the Hall, but it was also common for companies to reconstitute themselves in order to write off debts, which may well have been the case with the Music Hall. The Hall had undergone various renovations, including acoustic improvements and the installation of a gallery to increase capacity by 160, but despite their best efforts, by March 1869, the directors were again in financial troubles and faced with the prospect of winding the company up. The committee seemed split between those who

¹⁶ WC, 11 June 1862. This report also, interestingly, points to a lack of adequate support from either 'the musical profession or by the inhabitants generally.'

¹⁷ *The London Gazette*, 20 December 1864, p. 6664.

¹⁸ WJ, 31 March 1866.

hoped to sell the Hall to the highest bidder and those who still adhered by their initial ideals, viewing the Music Hall as a public commodity rather than a purely commercial one, and who wanted to make an offer to the Worcester Corporation.¹⁹ In the end, the Committee offered the Hall to the Corporation for £8,000, which was more than the Corporation was prepared to pay, and so it was declined.²⁰

Finally, the company was wound up in February 1870.²¹ The closure of the Music Hall was seen as a great loss to musical life in Worcester, which is evident in the many attempts that were made to save it in the face of both the 1864 and 1870 liquidations. After the latter, the Hall was offered at auction, but it proved a humbling affair, with only one £1,200 bid being made. After the auction was abandoned, the Music Hall was bought by William Laslett, a solicitor and Member of Parliament for Worcester.²² The Hall appears to have been run as usual during Laslett's ownership, managed by Edward Spark, who will be discussed later in this chapter, though further details of these years are not clear. Laslett's stewardship did not last long, and the Corporation entered the picture again, purchasing the Music Hall in 1875 with the intention of using it for the Three Choirs Festival.

1875 had proved a very tumultuous year for the Festival. This was the result of growing tensions among the clergy, especially in Worcester, regarding the morality of hosting the Festivals in the cathedral, as many believed the concerts 'could not be equated with the idea of worship'.²³ The issue of hosting the Three Choirs Festival in cathedrals had long been a

¹⁹ WC, 3 March 1869.

²⁰ Bird, 'Music in Worcester 1860-1890', p. 14.

²¹ *The London Gazette*, 25 March 1870, p. 1902.

²² Besides this, Laslett (1799-1884) was a local landowner and a well-known philanthropist. At his death in 1884, his estate was estimated to be £13,000.

²³ 'Three Choirs Festival', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, ed. Joyce Kennedy, Michael Kennedy, and Tim Rutherford-Johnson (Oxford University Press, 2012), accessed January 27, 2021,

divisive subject for many clergymen, but it had become increasingly contentious after 1870, when a symphony was performed in a cathedral for the first time in the history of the Festival. In 1874, Worcester Cathedral opened after extensive restoration, and rumours began circulating that the Dean and Chapter of Worcester would not be permitting the use of the cathedral for the Festival again. This was in part due to an unwillingness of the Dean and Chapter to leave the newly restored cathedral in the hands of other organisers, and in part due to a growing sentiment among the clergy of the three towns, who thought the Festival was becoming too secularised to be permitted to be hosted in such a religious space.²⁴ Some clergymen went as far as questioning the propriety of performing any music that was not explicitly Christian, even serious classical works such as Beethoven symphonies, or was not performed in the context of a religious service, while others objected to the behaviour of the audiences.²⁵ Some of the clergy's gripes were perhaps more rooted in reality than others, as a journalist for the *Musical Times* expressed his relief at the well-behaved crowds at the 1884 Festival, alluding to a time when such had not been the case:

We remember the time when a large number of the visitors to the Cathedral, feeling that they had come to a Concert, and consequently disregarding the nature of the building in which it took place, would complacently lunch during the interval, and sometimes during the performance, even occasionally hanging their hats upon the recumbent figures on the tombs within their reach, and adopting a manner which

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199578108.001.0001/acref-9780199578108-e-9088>

²⁴ Anthony Boden, *Three Choirs: A History of the Festival* (Alan Sutton, 1992), p. 72.

²⁵ Boden, *Three Choirs: A History of the Festival*, p. 109.

seemed to show that they had come out for a holiday and were resolved to enjoy themselves.²⁶

The increasing hostility from the Worcester clergy led to the 'reformed' Festival of 1875, soon dubbed the 'Mock Festival' by unhappy locals, which was conducted with such solemn stubbornness that 'no solo performers or orchestra were engaged, no platform was erected in the cathedral, no tickets were sold, and no secular concerts were held' and 'only about sixty people turned up for the Opening Service'.²⁷ The Hereford and Gloucester Festivals were for the most part unaffected by the conflict, and would continue as normal in the following years.

While the Festival would eventually be welcomed back into Worcester Cathedral in 1878, the situation must have given the council a fright. The Festivals brought a great deal of revenue to the town, both through patrons and the many visitors who came to attend the concerts, and it was perhaps the fear of it suddenly becoming the 'Two Choirs Festival' that motivated the council to look for an alternative venue, leading to their purchase of the Music Hall. This adds an interesting aspect to the role of the Worcester organ, and the way in which we can understand its 'civic' nature. Beyond its potential for providing elevating music, it was here also seen as helpful to the economic life of the borough, in a way that does not seem to have been the case in the other case studies.

The acquisition of the Music Hall was subject to some protest. Many citizens, who thought the Festival ought to remain in the Cathedral, objected to the rise in rates the purchase would bring with it, or claimed the Hall was in too poor a state and far too small to host the

²⁶ *MT* 25, No. 500 (1 Oct 1884), p. 584.

²⁷ Boden, *Three Choirs: A History of the Festival*, p. 75.

Festival concerts, necessitating expensive repairs and a large expansion in order to accommodate it. Others were concerned with the general use of the Hall when the Festival was not on, questioning whether an expanded Hall would be too large for the local musical associations. A series of letters written to the *Worcestershire Chronicle* in January 1875 reflect some of these complaints. One letter from 'J. Noake', presumably the alderman of the same name, was extremely critical of the proposed purchase, in large part because of the higher rates, but he also brought into question the motivation of the Corporation:

Of what use can the hall be to the corporate body? Do they seriously intend to become purveyors of music and dancing, as well as novels and newspapers, for the working classes? If so, I would advise them to leave such matters to far more proper and efficient agency of private enterprise.²⁸

These arguments fall into the familiar, well-trod Victorian battle lines of intervention vs non-intervention, whereby the need and perceived responsibility to interfere in the leisure of the lower classes to ensure public morality is pitted against the laissez-faire views common among the upper and middle classes. In the end, the corporation chose to go ahead with their plans and purchased the Hall from William Laslett on 14 May 1875 for £2,000, a fourth of what the Music Hall Company had originally asked. This marks the point at which the building is transformed into a truly municipal hall. While it had previously had a very similar function to that of a public hall from its inception, it was now an official public building, owned and regulated by the local authorities and serving the local population in their various needs.

²⁸ WC, 16 January 1875.

The repurposing of a corn market or exchange was a relatively common occurrence. A large number of markets were built around the time of the Corn Law disputes in the first half of the nineteenth century, either separately or in the same building as local public offices, with some towns even finding themselves in the possession of two separate corn markets, one from each opposing side. When the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846, some markets and exchanges were eventually integrated into larger civic complexes or used for other purposes, including as concert venues. Besides Worcester Cornmarket, some examples of this practice are to be found in Newcastle Town Hall, which was built in 1839 as the Corn Exchange and incorporated into the construction of the Town Hall in 1855, and Worksop Town Hall, which opened in 1851 as a privately funded corn exchange and was then turned into the Town Hall in 1895.²⁹

Not long after the purchase of the Music Hall was made, new problems surfaced. It became clear that the organ in the Hall had suffered irreparable water damage during a storm, leaving it 'totally inadequate to meet the musical requirements of a building in which all the principal concerts of the city were given'.³⁰ Consequently, what could be salvaged of the organ was taken out, and the remainder was removed from the building to be scrapped. A second organ was commissioned from Nicholson, but the impetus did not come from the new owners of the Hall, who seemed understandably annoyed at the prospect of having to immediately replace the organ after having just spent £2,000 on the building. While less than the original company has asked for, £2,000 was still a considerable sum at the time, and added to the £200 the council had spent on the salvageable parts of the old organ, there

²⁹ 'History of Worksop Town Hall', *Bassetlaw District Council*, November 28, 2017, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://www.bassetlaw.gov.uk/about-us/history-of-bassetlaw/history-of-worksop-town-hall/>

³⁰ *WJ*, 3 January 1880.

may have been a sense among the council that the hall was turning into a bottomless pit before they had even had the chance to reap its benefits. Instead, the impetus came from a group of independent citizens, led by a 'Mr. Isaac, of Boughton Park', who took it upon themselves to raise funds towards a new organ for the Hall through subscription. The Isaac referred to here is likely John Whitmore Isaac (1807-1884), a local banker and ardent musical patron.³¹ The sum of £500 was raised towards the cause, to which the council contributed an additional £200, on the condition that the instrument became the property of the council once installed.³²

³¹ *WC*, 19 April 1884. Boughton Park is situated just outside Worcester, approximately 1.5 miles from Worcester Cathedral, and housed several of Worcester's mayors throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was bought by the Worcester City Golf Club in 1927, and today serves as the home of Worcester Golf & Country Club.

³² *WJ*, 11 December 1875.

Disposition for Worcester Music Hall, Commarket, Nicholson (1879)

Great Organ (CC to G)	Choir Organ (CC to G)	Swell Organ (CC to G)	Pedal Organ (CCC to F)
Double Open Diapason	Open Diapason	Bourdon Bass	Open Diapason
Large Open Diapason	Dulciana	Bourdon Treble	Violon
Small Open Diapason	Keraulophon Tenor C	Open Diapason	Principal
Prep. for Gamba or Dulciana	Stop Diapason & Clarabella	Dulciana	Trombone
Stop Diapason	Harmonic Flute	Lieblich Gedact	
Principal	Gemshorn	Prep. for Horn Diapason to Tenor C	
Wald Flute	Prep. for Wald Flute	Prep. for Vox Angelica to Tenor C	
Twelfth	Piccolo	Harmonic Flute	
Fifteenth	Cremona	Fifteenth	
Mixture		Mixture	
Pausaune Bass [sic]		Cornopean	
Pausaune Tenor C		Oboe	

Composition Pedals

Three to Great
Three to Swell

Couplers

Swell to Great
Swell to Choir
Choir to Great
Great to Pedals
Swell to Pedals
Choir to Pedals
Octave Pedal

Table 3 Disposition for the organ in Worcester Music Hall (1879)³³

³³ Berrow, 'John Nicholson (vol. II), pp. 147-148.

During the planning stages, there was some resistance within the council, chiefly from members who were concerned about the possibility of the Worcester Guildhall needing to be refurbished in the near future and the potential costs of moving the organ to the Guildhall, if that were to become the main concert venue.³⁴ The Guildhall had served as the main civic building in Worcester since its completion in 1723, as had the many guildhalls that had stood on the same site since the early thirteenth century, particularly in hosting the county assizes.³⁵ No reason is to be found for the Guildhall being dismissed as a grand concert venue during the planning, but it is possible that altering its old, highly ornate interior would ultimately have proved too costly and time-consuming.

Using the funds raised by Isaac's group along with the Council's contribution and parts salvaged from the previous instrument, the organ (see table 3) was commissioned and formally presented on 27 December 1879, with a grand concert much in line with the first organ presentation, including performances by the Worcester Musical Society, and three organists: 'Mr. W. Done (Organist of Worcester Cathedral), Mr. A. R. Quarterman (Hon. Organist to the Philharmonic and Musical Societies), and Mr. A. J. Caldicott, Mus. Bac. (Hon. Organist to the Corporation).'³⁶ It is not clear when the post of Honorary Organist to the Corporation was created, though it looks to have been about the same time as the Corporation bought the Music Hall. In the absence of evidence, it is therefore hard to tell what Caldicott did as the first Honorary Organist in the early years of the Corporation's ownership of the Hall, but it does suggest that the Council had a ready interest in having someone represent the organ, be it as an active musician, with the intention to produce

³⁴ *WJ*, 20 May 1876.

³⁵ Girouard, *The English Town*, p. 52.

³⁶ *WH*, 20 December 1879.

rational organ recitals from the start, or simply to act as a manager of sorts and to mind the state of the instrument.

5.3: The third Public Hall organ

But the Council's misfortunes were far from over, and the new organ would only stand in the Hall for a little over a year. In February 1881, the Music Hall was almost completely destroyed in a fire, and the organ along with it. Luckily, the Hall had been insured, and the council quickly decided to rebuild it using the insurance pay-out. The rebuilt Music Hall opened on 26 August 1882, now rechristened the 'Worcester Public Hall' by the Council, on the grounds that 'the name "Music Hall" generally represented a low concert room.'³⁷ This name change would indicate that the council was concerned about public perception of what their intentions for the hall were, wishing to present a clearer civic and moral character for the building, perhaps to prove wrong some of the nay-sayers who had protested at the Corporation's purchase. The organ would take longer to be replaced, although it does appear that the Council always intended for a third organ to be placed in the Hall after the destruction of the second Nicholson instrument. In the minutes of a Council meeting in early July 1882, not long before the re-opening of the Public Hall, details of the Hall list the charges for leasing of an organ, presumably being leased out by the Council, despite the fact that the previous instrument had been damaged beyond repair. Actual discussion of commissioning a new organ, however, appear to have been rather limited before 1882.

³⁷ WJ, 8 July 1882.

A central figure in the commissioning of the third organ was to be Alfred James Caldicott (1842-1897, *fig. 14*), the first Honorary Organist to the Corporation of Worcester. Born in Worcester, Caldicott trained as an organist at the Cathedral, where he was the assistant to William Done. In 1863, he travelled to Leipzig to study music under Moscheles, Hauptmann, and others, returning to Worcester in 1865 to take up work as organist of St. Stephen's Church, and also, eventually, at the Public Hall.³⁸ Studying at the Leipzig Conservatory had become an aspiration for many serious musicians since its opening in 1843, with Mendelssohn as its first director. German musical academies, like German music itself, was held in high esteem among classical musicians, many of whom subscribed to the ideal of classical music as the truest, 'purest' form of music, and Leipzig Conservatory had a reputation for high artistic standards, a welcoming stance towards foreign students, and a staff of successful practicing musicians.³⁹ That Caldicott spent two years there, studying under some of the Conservatory's greatest names, gives us an idea of both his artistic abilities and his ambition.

Caldicott remained as Honorary Organist until 1882, gaining a reputation as a talented musician, a capable conductor of the Worcester Musical Society (in which several members of the Elgar family, including a young Edward, played) and as a composer of light music and operettas. In 1882 he left Worcester, first for a brief stay in Torquay, where he made his mark as organist of All Saints Church, Babbacombe, and for his promotion of 'a series of promenade concerts at the Winter Gardens',⁴⁰ before travelling to London, where he

³⁸ Brown and Stratton, *British Musical Biography*, p. 74.

³⁹ Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain Since the Eighteenth Century*, p. 84.

⁴⁰ *Torquay Times, and South Devon Advertiser*, 29 October 1897.

became Principal of the London College of Music in 1891, and conductor at the Comedy Theatre from 1893 until his death in 1897.⁴¹

Little clarity is provided by the available sources as to why or how Caldicott remained involved in the commissioning of the new Public Hall organ when he had already left Worcester, nor why he remained in his post as Honorary Organist to the Corporation after leaving. We know that Caldicott made recommendations for his successor as Honorary Organist, so it was not for a lack of another musician, but it could perhaps have been a matter of expertise and experience. By the time he left Worcester for Torquay, Caldicott was already deeply involved in the planning process for the new organ and had a good rapport with Nicholson as their middleman, so it may have been better to continue Caldicott's involvement, rather than to attempt to instruct someone new to the process.



Figure 14 Photograph of Alfred J. Caldicott, date unknown⁴²

⁴¹ H. Davey and J. Nott, 'Caldicott, Alfred James (1842-1897), organist and composer', *Oxford Dictionary and National Biography*, 23 September 2004, accessed 12 February 2021, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4378>

⁴² 'Alfred J. Caldicott', *Hymnary.org*, accessed 31 May 2021, https://hymnary.org/person/Caldicott_Alfred

Caldicott's successor at the Public Hall in 1882 was Arthur Richard Quarterman, whom Caldicott had recommended. William Haynes, the organist who had been so central in the early days of Kidderminster Town Hall, had applied for the position as well, but lost to Quarterman, his former student.⁴³ Comparatively little is known about Quarterman before his appointment as Honorary Organist to the Corporation. In 1859, he was appointed organist of St. Michael's Church in Stourport, before appearing in Worcester records in 1870, as the organist of Angel Street Congregational Chapel, a pianist and a professor of music.⁴⁴

Although he would only remain in the position until 1888, Quarterman seems to have established himself as a prominent and well-liked figure within the local musical community during his time in Worcester. Described as being 'actively associated with nearly all the musical societies of the city', Quarterman was, besides his positions at the Town Hall and Angel Street Chapel, honorary organist to both Worcester Philharmonic Society and Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society, pianist to the Worcester Glee Club, music master at Worcester Upper and Middle School, honorary organist to the local lodge of the freemasons, and frequently, with his family, heard at concerts in town, being 'most willing to give their services at concerts and entertainments in aid of any worthy subject.'⁴⁵

A farewell ceremony and concert was held for him shortly before he moved, during which Quarterman was given an address and 60 guineas by the local Council as a token of its appreciation, as well as addresses from musical unions and the freemasons.⁴⁶ In one speech

⁴³ *WJ*, 10 July 1886, p. 6.

⁴⁴ *WC*, 26 October 1859.

⁴⁵ 'A Farewell to Mr. A. R. Quarterman', *WC*, 28 April 1888, p. 7.

⁴⁶ 'A Farewell to Mr. A. R. Quarterman', *WC*, 28 April 1888, p. 7. 'On Monday evening the brethren of 529, Semper Fidelis Lodge of Freemasons, presented Brother A. R. Quarterman, their hon. organist, with a gold organist's jewel on the occasion of his leaving Worcester.'

held during the event, Quarterman's 'efforts to promote the musical culture and enjoyment of all classes' were highlighted, though it is not specified whether this was through his work as Honorary Organist or through other musical ventures in Worcester. While thanking those present, Quarterman took the opportunity to name Edward Spark, and 'my friends the Elgars, with whom I have worked for so many years'. The exact nature of his relationship with the Elgars is not immediately clear, though an article published in the *Elgar Society Journal* mentions him as being a peripheral figure in the history of the Elgar family, appearing as

(...) a member of an instrumental ensemble at a concert at the Union Workhouse, in January 1873 – a group that had included, among others, W. H. Elgar, Henry Elgar, and the young Edward himself at his first known public appearance; and as a member later in the 1870s (...) of the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society. W. H. Elgar had referred to a Quarterman in a letter to his brother Henry of 11 December 1859 from 1 Edgar Street: 'Quarterman is still with us, we don't have so much of his company as we did (...)'⁴⁷

Northrop describes Quarterman in his Elgar biography as 'the teacher who succeeded Elgar in Worcester', probably referring to him taking on some of Elgar's pupils.⁴⁸

While Quarterman was still settling into his work as Honorary Organist to the Corporation, Caldicott and the local Council were facing their first problem after the Town Hall fire, which was the insufficient insurance on the previous organ. While the organ had been bought and

⁴⁷ K. E. L. and Marion Simmons, 'A Walk Round the Elgars' Worcester', *The Elgar Society Journal* (January 1986), p. 12.

⁴⁸ Northrop, *Edward Elgar – A Creative Life*, p. 181n.

insured for £700, it had an estimated worth at least £1,000, perhaps more, and the general public opinion was that the Council ought to replace the lost instrument with one of equal or greater value. The Council were initially hesitant to spend anything beyond the sum they had received from the insurance, certain that it would net them a fine organ, but eventually caved once it became clear that £700 would not cover the cost of a complete instrument. Nicholson was again commissioned, and an initial plan was drawn up for an instrument priced at £1,000 based on specifications created by Caldicott. The planning process would unfortunately be slowed down considerably by miscommunication between the Council and Caldicott, who acted as both consultant for the Board and a middleman between them and Nicholson. The Council claimed they had been led to believe the £1,000 plan would provide them with a complete concert organ, one superior to the previous instrument, and were not pleased when Caldicott later clarified that, considering the needs of Worcester as a concert town, £1,000 would in fact give them a good, if basic, organ, which could then later be improved upon once the funds became available. In the confusion surrounding the organ planning, rumours had also begun to circulate that Caldicott stood to receive 10% of the profits from the organ built, through his role as consultant for Nicholson, and that this was the reason behind the increased price on the planned instrument. Caldicott was quick to publicly dispel the rumours, admitting that while he was to receive a fixed honorarium from Nicholson for his work, he would 'in order to avoid misunderstanding between any section of the citizens and himself, hand the amount he was to be paid over to the fund being raised for the purpose of completing the organ.'⁴⁹ It is possible that the rumours of Caldicott attempting to secure a deal for a larger organ in order to increase his share were true, and

⁴⁹ *WJ*, 5 May 1883, p. 7.

that he was trying to save face by going to the newspapers, but there is no evidence to either support or deny this.

By this point, local citizens and music lovers who had followed the case with interest since the fire began to join the discussion. Many had grand plans for the instrument, taking to the papers to express their wish that Worcester would once again have an organ in the Public Hall, and not just a pale replacement of the old for choral accompaniment, but a first-rate *solo organ*. *Worcester Journal* reported in May 1883 that a 'strong feeling existed in the city, especially among those who have taken an interest in the cultivation of music, that a more complete instrument than could be acquired for £1,000 should be erected. Moreover, it was considered that, having regard to the circumstances under which the organ was obtained by the city, and to the inadequacy of the insurance, the Town Council would be fully justified in making a larger grant from the city funds.'⁵⁰ Some made offers to the Council to help fund a larger, better concert instrument, but on the condition that the Council matched their donation, betraying a level of apprehension towards the Council and its willingness to spend beyond the sum they had received from the insurance on the lost second organ, which had been paid for in large part by the public. The fact that the organ would, once completed, be the property of the Council, may also have featured in this apprehension, with contributors wanting some assurance that the instrument would be properly maintained after its installation before they provided funding.

None of the currently available sources specify who the people campaigning for a larger organ may have been, outside of references to 'those who have taken an interest in the cultivation of music.' We can naturally assume that most were ratepayers, due to their

⁵⁰ *WJ*, 12 May 1883, p. 4.

complaints about the Council's handling of the insurance and subsequent handling of the organ matter after the fire, and that they were members of the local middle classes, probably upper-middle and above, as they would have had the means to donate towards the cause. They also held strong opinions, common among the middle class, about the 'cultivation of music,' possibly referring to the more specific provision of public recitals, and also the exact character of the organ. This is of particular interest, as it shows the local campaigners felt that the Town Hall needed an instrument which was capable of performing solo organ pieces, which would indicate that they imagined the instrument would not only be used for accompanying local musical societies and similar events, where organ music would only play a small part, but for organ recitals.

At this point, another important figure in the history of the Worcester Public Hall organ appears, namely Richard Cattley, Honorary Canon of Worcester Cathedral. The public were keen to contribute towards the instrument, and after the Council failed to reach any conclusions regarding the funding of a larger instrument, Cattley was asked by a group of people, fronted by Thomas Rowley Hill, the Member of Parliament for Worcester at the time and a known philanthropist, to lead a fundraiser for the organ.⁵¹ It was no coincidence that Cattley in particular should be entrusted with the job; prior to the Public Hall organ, he had successfully helped raise funds for the Cathedral bells, and was himself a keen lover and patron of music. This was only a few years after the 1875 controversy regarding the increasingly secular nature of the Three Choirs Festival, and its place in Worcester Cathedral. The involvement of the Honorary Canon indicates that at least part of the church hierarchy was willing to support the development of secular music in the town, and that the Public Hall

⁵¹ *WJ*, 7 July 1883, p. 7.

was seen as an appropriate venue for this, even if it was just a way to keep secular concerts out of the Cathedral.

Cattley had been involved in the fundraiser for the organ since March 1883, writing in a letter to the *Journal* about his work and stating his belief that the organ would be an invaluable asset to the town, one which was better achieved 'at *once*, rather than piece-meal', and explaining that while he was happy to undertake the work of raising funds for what he saw as a great cause, he equally hoped 'that the same generous spirit which prompted the Corporation to provide us with our much improved and universally appreciated Public Hall will prompt that body on the present occasion to take the same large-hearted view with regard to the organ'.⁵²

To argue the case for the expanded plan, Cattley pointed to the social benefits of a concert organ, using the public recitals in Leeds and Liverpool Town Halls as examples, and describing how cherished the previous organ had been, 'especially by the industrial portion of our fellow-citizens, for whose rational enjoyment, as I think, no expense within moderate bounds should be spared (...)'. This argument, used by Cattley in 1883, demonstrates the persistence of these ideas of rational recreation over several decades. The efforts to secure the third organ, and a larger instrument than initially planned, also demonstrates the resilience of the wider project, despite various setbacks, and that the desire for a civic organ was not a fad in response to initial success in Birmingham earlier in the century, or to temporary social concerns. There appears to have been an earnestly held belief among these middle-class reformers that having a civic organ was worth continued effort.

⁵² *WJ*, 24 March 1883.

Cattley also alluded to the flexibility that a concert organ could offer, saying that ‘where a public hall contains such an instrument, musical societies are encouraged to arrange better concerts than they would otherwise do, the engagement of a band being unnecessary.’⁵³ As his work progressed, Cattley put together more detailed goals for the fundraiser following consultations with musicians and other knowledgeable persons, outlining an organ with ‘sixty stops, four manuals, and pedal organ; also 2,882 sounding pipes; and the particulars of construction provide for the blowing by hydraulic power.’ An organ of this size would require another estimated £787 on top of the £1,000 the Council had already set aside for the cause, and the fundraiser hoped that a portion of this would be collected through subscriptions, while another portion would be contributed by the Council.

By June 1883, the fundraiser was going well enough that the Council at a meeting had suggested they might not need to contribute after all and instead let the subscriptions pay for the organ entirely. In response, Cattley wrote to the *Worcestershire Chronicle* to address the remarks and assert that the money raised by the organ fund were made with the understanding that the Corporation would also be contributing, and that he was still operating the fundraiser on this premise. In July the same year, Cattley’s efforts had reached £500, and so the Council were officially asked ‘to contribute the sum of £300 towards the fund now being raised by public subscription for completing the organ for the Public Hall, on condition that such sum is provided entirely out of funds in the hands of the Council for the purpose of the restoration of the Public Hall, and that no part thereof is raised out of any future rate.’⁵⁴

⁵³ *WJ*, 12 May 1883.

⁵⁴ *WJ*, 7 July 1883, p. 7.

Councillors debated the matter at length during a meeting on 3 July 1883, before voting on whether or not to accept the donation from the organ fund and the conditions with which it came. Some members praised the growing interest in music in Worcester, with steadily increasing numbers in many of the musical societies, to the point where some could no longer accept new members. The potential of the organ for use in social reform was raised, and the City Chamberlain⁵⁵ explained how ‘the object of those who had subscribed to the organ fund was to secure good music for the masses, and to make the Saturday concerts more popular and attractive’ and that ‘If they could give the people cheap and instructive enjoyment, they would do more towards promoting morality and the cause of temperance than all the teetotallers, blue ribbonists, and salvation armies combined.’⁵⁶ Some members of the Council protested against the idea of spending more on the organ, referring to Caldicott’s initial estimate of £1,000, but the majority were in favour of accepting the donation from the organ fund, stressing that the people of Worcester had made their wishes for a larger organ very clear; one Alderman Willis pointing out that if they accepted the deal offered to them, ‘they would have voted only £600 to the organ and they would have an instrument worth £1,800.’

Shortly before the vote, the Mayor spoke, clarifying that

Mr. Caldicott had always pointed out that the organ to be erected for £1,000 would not be a perfect instrument; but it might be made perfect when the funds were forthcoming. This matter had long been before the public. He (the Mayor) had not

⁵⁵ Herbert Caldicott, Esq., brother of Alfred J. Caldicott and amateur musician. He would later be Sheriff, then held Mayor of Worcester from 1887 to 1888. <https://caldicott.one-name.net/2017/09/17/herbert-caldicott-1843-1898-mayor-of-worcester/>

⁵⁶ *WJ*, 7 July 1883, p. 7.

seen in the press a comment or a letter, or heard an opinion out of doors adverse to the proposal now made. He believed they had a right to assume that public opinion decidedly approved of what was proposed to be done. They had an offer of £500 to enable them to complete their own property, if they would spend another £300 to make it complete.⁵⁷

The motion was carried 25 against 10. By December, a contract with Nicholson had been signed, and on 1 August 1884, the third – and final – organ in Worcester Public Hall (*fig. 15, 16*) was formally presented.

⁵⁷ *WJ*, 7 July 1883, p. 7.

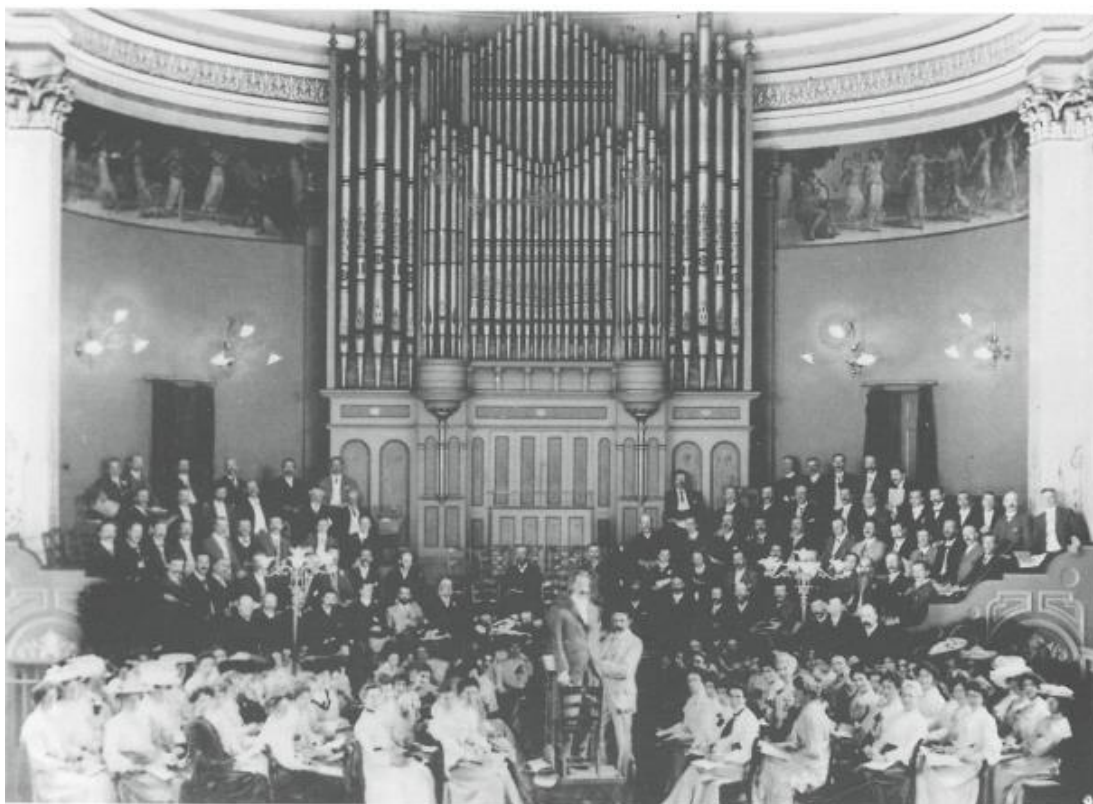


Figure 15 The Public Hall during the 1905 Three Choirs Festival, showing Sir Edward Elgar and the Festival Chorus in front of the Nicholson organ.⁵⁸



Figure 16 Group in front of the Public Hall organ, unknown occasion, 20th c.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Bridges and Mundy, *Worcester – A Pictorial History*, fig. 79.

The occasion was marked by a concert, featuring members of the Worcester Philharmonic Society, three vocalists – Hilda Coward (soprano), Ethel Winthrop (contralto) and Herbert Thorndike (baritone) – and organ performances by Mr. Wareing, Alfred Caldicott and Arthur Quarterman. The repertoire was of a miscellaneous character, the main focus obviously being on organ music, and featured several organ transcriptions to emphasise the orchestral qualities of the instrument. Caldicott's performance of 'Watson's Crescendo prelude and Melodie in G' is especially interesting, as it appears to have been selected to demonstrate the improved dynamic abilities of the organ, though the press also highlighted his rendition of a 'Fantasia pastorale' by Lefébure-Wely as 'the most brilliant organ solo of the evening'.⁶⁰

During the intermission, the Dean of Worcester, Lord Alwynne Compton, took to the stage, accompanied by the Mayor, Richard Cattley, and various dignitaries, to formally present the organ to the Council on behalf of the subscribers. The Dean took the opportunity to summarise the history of the previous organs that had stood within the Hall, and emphasised the efforts made by both Cattley and Caldicott in securing the organ they had just heard played for the first time.

In contrast to Wednesbury, discussed in the next chapter, there was a notable lack of moral or emotional content in the speeches during the inaugural performance of the organ. The 1884 Nicholson organ is the latest of the case study organs, and so this absence may indicate a diminution in the moral imperatives driving these organs, or a waning in the fashion to be so explicit about them, or that the moral elements were now implicit, and hence did not

⁵⁹ William and Michael Dowty, *Worcester in Old Photographs* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1986), p. 122.

⁶⁰ *WJ*, 2 August 1884.

need spelling out. That said, moral ambitions had been a point of discussion in the lead-up to the construction of the organ.

The organ itself (table 4) was large, described by the *Worcester Journal* as ‘the finest which even Mr. Nicholson, in his long practice, has constructed.’ The same report highlighted the orchestral qualities of the new organ:

The touch is rendered singularly light and easy by the pneumatic arrangement, and the other mechanical appliances also do much to lighten the labour of the performer. By the provision of a solo organ the instrument is especially adapted for concert purposes, and apart from the solo organ there are many stops in the choir organ that may be used in solos, either singly or in combination. The possible combination of stops, indeed, is almost unlimited. A skilful player may produce an imitation of almost any instrument required in an orchestra; and the perfection with which the tone is balanced permits of any stop being added without a discordant effect. (...) The hall may now be said to be as complete for musical and kindred purposes as possible, and is one of which any city might be proud.⁶¹

⁶¹ *WJ*, 2 August 1884.

[illegible]

The light action, the dynamic range, the size and the imitative qualities of the organ all point to an instrument meant for concert use, for the performance of solo organ repertoire, especially transcriptions, and for the accompaniment of large choral events.

The account of discussions leading up to the construction of the third Public Hall organ presents a kind of uniform optimism about the elevating power of music and the likely success of the instrument. It is also characteristic of many discussions found throughout the case studies, which seem to portray the working-class as an amorphous and malleable entity. This is especially interesting, as the ambitions laid out by Cattley and the Councillors in 1883 came in the wake of several other attempts to establish rational concert series in the Hall, with varying levels of success. In the next section, I will examine these and further such attempts made by the Council, as well as details of the management of the Public Hall, and the role of the civic organists.

5.4: The Public Hall management and concerts

In contrast to the other case studies, the musical management of Worcester Public Hall was not left up to the organist or a board or subcommittee of the council, but largely to a single, independent person: Edward J. Spark (*fig. 17*).



Figure 17 Photograph of Edward Spark, from portrait printed in *The Musical Opinion*, 1885⁶³

⁶³ *MO*, May 1 1885, p. 405.

A familiar and well-liked figure in Worcester, Spark came from a musical family, its most notable member being his older brother, Dr. William Spark, who was a composer and the organist of Leeds Town Hall from 1860 until his death in 1897.⁶⁴ He grew up in Exeter, where his father worked as a lay vicar in the cathedral, though he later branched out into the 'book and music selling, bookbinding, printing, and stationery trade', in which endeavour Edward would assist him.⁶⁵ Edward Spark himself had musical inclinations, having worked as an organist in several churches before arriving in Worcester, including as a youth in St. Lawrence, Exeter and in the parish church of Bury, Lancashire. When he came to Worcester in 1862, however, it was to work in the railway industry, as a cashier for the West Midland Company. After eight years with the company and with no promotion in sight once the West Midland Company became part of the Great Western Railway in 1863, Spark resigned and, drawing on his experiences assisting his father in Exeter, established a music shop in Worcester, the 'Music Warerooms', seeing a gap in the market as there was at the time 'only one such establishment in the city.'⁶⁶ This other music shop mentioned is clearly the one owned by W. H. Elgar, with whom Spark's shop subsequently went into competition.⁶⁷ The shop chiefly sold sheet music, pianos and harmoniums, and offered piano tuning and repairs. As was common at the time, Spark's establishment also functioned as a ticket agent for local venues, especially the Public Hall.

⁶⁴ Nicholas Temperley, 'Spark, William', *Grove Music Online*, 2001, accessed 7 February 2021, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000026364>

⁶⁵ *MO*, 1 May 1885, p. 404.

⁶⁶ *MO*, 1 May 1885, p. 404.

⁶⁷ K. E. L. and Marion Simmons, 'A Walk Round the Elgars' Worcester', *The Elgar Society Journal* 4, no. 3 (September 1985), p. 23.

Besides running the Warerooms, Spark was the organist and choirmaster of Holy Trinity Church, Worcester, and held myriad engagements in various local musical societies, most prominently as a founding member of the Worcester Musical Society, along with Alfred Caldicott, and through his involvement with local Festivals. He was also an enthusiastic amateur performer, especially famous for his renditions of humorous songs and other works of a lighter character, as in the case of an appearance at a tea party for public servants, where he conducted the 'Blooming Bigotphone Burlesque Band' – evidently a band put together for the occasion, with members including W. C. Box, future Honorary Organist to the Corporation, 'under the conductorship of the illustrious Professor Bluster Blowpipe, *alias*, Herr Czparrhque'.⁶⁸ We are assured it was 'an especially popular feature.'

Sparks was in some ways the typical middle-class Victorian man, with a keen interest in philanthropy and the promotion of public education, dating back long before his time in Worcester. While working in Ackworth, Yorkshire, he had helped establish a 'Harmonic Choir', and while in Bury, he had implemented a new method of teaching music to the boys at the Parish Church, gaining a reputation for his skill in choral instruction, and eventually publishing an octavo edition of music for church services, in which he implemented a particular system of notation to facilitate 'greater smoothness and evenness in the singing and chanting.'⁶⁹ While working for the West Midland Company, he was honorary secretary and treasurer of a Literary Institute for company workers, where he both organised lectures and entertainments, and helped make the Institute accessible to the general public, 'for whom there was then no such accommodation'.

⁶⁸ *WC*, 13 January 1894.

⁶⁹ *MO*, May 1 1885, p. 404.

In other ways, Spark was an original. Based on his appearance as Professor Bluster Blowpipe and his reputation as a performer of comedic songs, he was clearly a man with a sense of humour and perhaps less overtly moralising than some of his Worcester contemporaries. He was also 'in trade', having opened his music shop after what seems to have been a brief and ultimately unsuccessful stint in the railway business. In this aspect, his background is somewhat reminiscent of that of Edward Elgar, who was ever conscious of his relatively humble origins as a mostly self-taught musician and the son of a shopkeeper. When reading about Spark's life and career, one might even get the impression that he had wanted to make a living as a musician, like his famous brother, but for whatever reason, he did not manage to do so, despite his efforts.

Through his many ventures and his family connections, Spark cultivated a wide network of musical friends and acquaintances, and over the years, no small amount of musical power in Worcester. In the mid-1870s, he was appointed manager of Worcester Public Hall, though initially not by the Council. The exact timing of his employment is difficult to pinpoint, as it happened before the Council bought the Hall. A report from a meeting of the Town Council in 1879 states that he had been manager of the Music Hall 'for the last four years',⁷⁰ while a portrait of him published in *Musical Opinion* mentions that he had 'acted both on behalf of the late proprietor (Mr. W. Laslett) and the present owners, the Corporation of Worcester.' From these statements we can assume that Spark had been the manager of the Music Hall since 1874, or at the latest since early 1875, before the Corporation purchased the building. As the Manager, he was in charge of the letting of the Hall, and was in return paid 'a

⁷⁰ *WJ*, 9 August 1879.

commission on the amount of lettings'.⁷¹ His position also provided him with a unique platform where he could utilise his wide-reaching musical network and experience to organise 'high-class' concerts, to showcase his own good taste and philanthropic sense, and continue his efforts to provide affordable 'rational recreation' to the working classes. Perhaps his grandest effort at the Public Hall was the establishment of 'Mr. Spark's Subscription Concerts' in 1874 or 1875. These concerts were very popular, running until the 1890s at least. There does not seem, though, to have been much, if any, organ music featured in the programmes of the earlier concerts in the series, almost certainly because of the reported state of the organ at the time. The Subscription Concerts are not immediately relevant to this thesis, as the tickets, the cheapest of which cost one shilling, would have been too expensive for the majority of the working and lower-middle classes. But they do demonstrate some of Spark's hands-on approach to the musical activities he organised in the Public Hall, and his ability to use the 'brand value' his name must have held in the promotion of his concerts, and in return, the value that the concerts gave him.

This position, and the power that came with it did, however, cause some friction between Spark and the council, as well as other Worcester citizens. At a Council meeting in June 1879 the question of his management of the hall was raised, in particular the issue of 'the management of the hall being left in the hands of one member of the musical profession, who supplied the musical articles to those who used the hall', and it was claimed that there were local musicians who were also displeased with Spark's management, feeling that 'they should have a turn'.⁷² While several members of the Board agreed with the sentiment and

⁷¹ WC, 14 June 1879.

⁷² WC, 7 June 1879.

suggested the position be given to a non-musician, they conceded that the work was far too time-consuming to be done by any members of the Board, and ultimately, nothing seems to have come of the discussion, as Spark remained manager of the Hall for many years following.

Some citizens took to the papers to voice their own complaints after the Council minutes were published, accusing Spark not only of using his position at the Hall for personal gains, but also of monopolising the musical activities there and prioritising his own projects. Spark addressed these allegations publicly, writing a number of letters to the *Chronicle* in which he laid out his earnings and expenditures at the Hall, to show that his average commission (which constituted his salary as agent for the Hall), before subtracting expenses such as postage and stamps, was about £15 a year.⁷³ He also took the opportunity to provide a financial statement of what the Corporation had earned on the various entertainments organised in the Public Hall from its purchase on 14 May 1875 to 31 May 1879, totalling £797 split between five categories of events: 'balls and soirées' (£54 5s.), 'Philharmonic Society' (£3 15s.), 'Musical Society' (£39), 'Mr. Spark for own concerts and entertainments' (£69 10s.) and 'miscellaneous entertainments – dioramas, bazaars, art exhibitions, lectures, &c.' (£595 10s. 6d.).⁷⁴ It is not surprising that the majority of the Corporation's earnings came from the general letting of the Town Hall for 'miscellaneous entertainment', but it is noteworthy that Spark himself ranked second on the list, having spent nearly £70 on his own projects within the hall over four years. Others also wrote to the *Chronicle* to show their support for Spark, praising him for his helpful manners and the ease of hiring the Hall

⁷³ WC, 14 June 1879; WC, 5 July 1879.

⁷⁴ WC, 5 July 1879.

through him, and how one could trust him to make sure the entertainments put on were 'decent and respectable'. One 'ratepayer' stated that Worcester was 'much indebted to Mr. Spark for his public spirit in bringing high-class talent here, and providing the citizens with about the only *high-class* musical treats they ever get; and this, I believe, he did for a long time before he had any connection with the Music Hall.'⁷⁵

Through the disputes surrounding his work, we get a sense of the role Spark played as manager of the Public Hall. Because he worked *on behalf* of the Corporation, and not for himself, he became something of a moral arbiter of events, ensuring that the entertainments put on in the Public Hall were of a character that represented the values of the Corporation and were not detrimental in their view to the Worcester public. We can also see this balance between the moral and the commercial in the way the accusations levelled against Spark focused on his using his position as agent for the Corporation for personal gain. Any specific origin of the animosity around Spark's work is not mentioned: it could be, as the letters and discussions published in the *Chronicle* claimed, due to Spark's virtual monopoly on the Public Hall, which was the main public venue in Worcester at the time. Spark himself made credible arguments against the accusations that he was earning large commissions on his work, and I have not been able to find proof of particular events which were poorly received, nor concrete evidence of him refusing to organise particular events. There may well have been a degree of professional jealousy directed toward Spark: Worcester had a large musical community, and several of the *Chronicle* letters call for other Worcester musicians to 'have their turn' as manager of the Hall, suggesting some felt

⁷⁵ WC, 12 June 1879.

entitled to the position. Spark was also not a local, which may have played into this feeling of entitlement, in addition to the perceived profitability of the work.

The *Musical Opinion* portrait paints Spark as on one hand a humble, witty and affable man, while on the other a shrewd businessman with a talent for self-promotion: 'Enter Worcester from any direction, and you cannot miss seeing his name prominently displayed before the public eye.'⁷⁶ It is rare to see a copy of the *Worcestershire Chronicle* from the time that does not prominently feature an advert for his 'Music Warerooms', and we have already noted the way he created something akin to a personal brand with his Subscription Concerts – this was most commonly done by conductors, for example at the Hallé Concerts in Manchester and Stockley's Concerts in Birmingham, whereas Spark appears to have acted strictly as an agent. These were no doubt excellent traits for a Town Hall manager to have, paired with his wide musical network throughout the country and his personal musical talents and experiences. Curiously, Spark does not seem to have been part of the process of commissioning the third organ, despite being an organist himself and having already shown his array of musical contacts. No reason is given for his lack of involvement, though it may just be a case of Caldicott already having taken on a central role in the negotiations and design of the organ, and that the addition of another strong musical voice would only have complicated matters.

Besides Spark's Subscription Concerts, there were three concert series held in the Music Hall (later Public Hall) worthy of examination; each had its own character and took place at different points in the history of the Hall, but all had elements characteristic of the rational recreation movement. Two out of the three series feature the organ, though in varying

⁷⁶ *MO*, May 1 1885, p. 406.

degrees of prominence. The Monday Evening Concerts consisted of miscellaneous programs along the lines of the Birmingham Pops, with organ and vocal numbers in roughly equal measures, while the Saturday Evening Concerts do not appear to have featured any organ music in either of its iterations. This can be explained by the very light and popular character of the first iteration of the Saturday Evening Concerts, which may have focused more on vocal music and other types of entertainment, whereas the second iteration took place in a period when the hall was without an organ altogether. The Corporation Free Organ Recitals were the most organ-heavy events, consisting chiefly of solo organ music, with a few vocal pieces interspersed.

The *Monday Evening Concerts* were very similar to the early ‘Cheap Concerts’ that took place in Kidderminster Public Hall. Both series were established before the local authority became involved with them, but they still had clear moral intentions behind them, taking place weekly for the entertainment of the working classes. On 28 March 1855, the *Worcestershire Chronicle* reported on rumours that

the committee of proprietors of the new Music Hall, with the help of our spirited fellow citizen, Mr. Jabez Jones, intend commencing a series of cheap Monday evening concerts on the plan of the Birmingham concerts, which have proved so successful, and it is hoped that the first may be announced for Easter Monday. If the arrangements which we have heard proposed are carried out, we are sure they will prove immensely popular. We have long looked and hoped for some such “music for the million” in Worcester.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ WC, 28 March 1855.

As seen above, this series took direct inspiration from the Monday Evening Pops of Birmingham Town Hall, which had been running for over a decade at this point. Jones' involvement in the series is a little unclear. He is listed as 'conductor and pianiste [sic]'⁷⁸ in another preliminary notice before the first recital, Haynes is listed as organist, but at later recitals the two men seem to have split the organ duties between them. Regardless, the first of the Monday Evening Concerts took place shortly after the *Chronicle* report, not on Easter Monday as hoped, but a week later, on 16 April. The *Chronicle* reported that they

were much pleased to find that the exertions of the committee to provide rational amusement for the industrial classes of the city, met with so hearty a response.

There were upward of 400 persons present, and all seemed highly gratified. The scheme opened with one of Bach's pedal fugues, capitally played by Mr. Haynes, and was followed by a spirited rendering of Mornington's delightful glee, "Now the bright morning star." Mr. Thomas was encored in Schubert's "Wanderer," in which the honours were equally divided between himself and Mr. Jones, who accompanied the song, with very appropriate and effective stops, upon the organ. The valuable assistance of Mrs. Bull, of Birmingham, has been secured for these concerts, and her chaste and finished reading of Stevenson's Vesper Hymn, with a distant chorus, was rapturously encored; this lady's engagement must add materially to the success of the enterprize. A splendid duet of Rossini's by Messrs. Cooper and Thomas, was also encored, but owing to the lateness of the hour this was not complied with. Mr.

Haynes's selection from *Der Freyschutz* was too long, and some of the airs a little too

⁷⁸ WJ, 14 April 1855.

slow, but that was its only fault. A splendid chorus of Mendelssohn's, capitably sung, concluded the second part.⁷⁹

The programme presented at the first of the Monday Evening Concerts is very similar to those found at the Cheap Concerts in Kidderminster: two-part programmes with organ pieces at each end, or three organ pieces and a choral work at the end of the second part. It is something of a hybrid venture, not as serious as the pure organ recitals played by Best in St. George's Hall, Liverpool, but still featuring a significant number of organ solos. The repertoire is also of a hybrid nature, particularly the organ works. They present two very opposite characters, both the decidedly popular opera selections played towards the end of the recital, and the very serious classical Bach fugue at the opening. The inclusion of a pedal fugue is notable, as English organists were not generally known for their pedal virtuosity in the mid-nineteenth century. This points to a level of technical ability in Haynes, and a bit of showmanship for the opening concert, as the audience would have been able to see Haynes' feet as he played. The vocal parts of the repertoire are relatively mixed, though leaning towards the popular taste, with glees, opera arias and a few more serious pieces, such as those by Mendelssohn and Schubert. As a whole, the programme appears to reflect the intentions of the organisers in providing serious, 'improving' music alongside better known, light pieces, plus the added spectacle of opening the concert with a pedal fugue. The final Mendelssohn chorus is not specified, but may have been one the listeners could be expected to be familiar with, allowing for a satisfying conclusion and, hopefully, an audience keen to return to the next concert.

⁷⁹ WC, 18 April 1855.

Worcester and Kidderminster also share an organist as Haynes was responsible for the Kidderminster Cheap Concerts at exactly the same time. It is not clear how long he remained with the Worcester concerts, though we do know he was also the organist of Malvern Priory and that he played his last recital in Kidderminster on 6 March 1856.

The great success that the *Chronicle* envisioned when it first reported on the 'music for the millions' did not come, however, and the Monday Evening Concerts seems to have been plagued by very irregular attendance from the beginning. After the success of the initial concert, the second was a crushing defeat, and the *Chronicle* reported with some bitterness that they 'had hoped that we should be able to congratulate our readers on the success of these concerts, but regret to state that on Monday evening, instead of a more numerous audience than at the first concert, we found the attendance very scanty, indeed, so small, that we can say but little for the musical taste of those classes in the city for whose amusement these concerts were mainly intended.'⁸⁰ The failure of the second concert carries the implication that the first of the Monday Evening Concerts may not have been as well received as the press had suggested. There is no real account of how the audience reacted to the initial concert, besides the number of attendees and the assumption that they 'seemed highly gratified.' The recital on 7 May boasted an 'increased attendance (...) [showing] that these concerts are progressing in public estimation',⁸¹ while the 21 May recital was again 'very thinly attended',⁸² before the recital the following week was helped by the attendance of the All Saints' Sunday school, for whom the Mayor had paid admission. In late August 1855, the committee announced that the Monday Evening Concerts would be

⁸⁰ *WC*, 25 April 1855.

⁸¹ *WJ*, 12 May 1855.

⁸² *WJ*, 26 May 1855.

discontinued indefinitely, 'in order to effect certain repairs necessary to the entrance of the Music Hall,'⁸³ and no further mention is to be found of the series.

Despite its short life, the Monday Evening Concert series represents a beginning for moral organ recitals in the Music/Public Hall, displaying many of the typical characteristics of the rational recreation concert, such as the concerts being explicitly aimed at the working classes, in part through their affordably priced tickets, and carefully selected programmes combining popular songs with classical, 'elevating' works.

The second series, the *Saturday Evening Concerts*, existed in two distinct iterations. The first of the initial Saturday Evening Concerts was held on 9 November 1867, some years before the Corporation's purchase of the Hall, and would go on to be held on a weekly basis, with tickets costing between threepence and sixpence, placing them well within the reach of many working-class citizens.⁸⁴ While some aspects of the series show a certain level of respectability, such as it being under the patronage of the Mayor and the proceeds being given to charity,⁸⁵ the character of the programmes was of a decidedly less rational character. In fact, these were not described as concerts, but as 'concerts and popular entertainments.' A programme from 14 December 1867, the fifth concert of the initial series, 'held under distinguished patronage,' included vocal and instrumental music, a dramatic scene and a recitation of Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade.'⁸⁶

This initial series of Saturday Evening Concerts does not appear to have involved the organ, most likely due to its then poor state, and by the end of the 1860s, no further reports or

⁸³ WC, 22 August 1855.

⁸⁴ WJ, 9 November 1867.

⁸⁵ WC, 27 November 1867.

⁸⁶ WJ, 14 December 1867.

mentions of the concerts are to be found in the local press, suggesting that they may have been discontinued shortly after their inception.

Then, on 8 March 1879, a meeting was held at the Municipal Offices to discuss a proposal made to establish a new series of 'cheap Saturday evening concerts'. The Mayor presided, and amongst those present were the Rev. E. V. Hall, who had made the proposal for the concerts, Caldicott, and 'a large number of working men.'

The Mayor made his opening statement, explaining to those gathered that

the present meeting was held in order to see how far the promoters of the movement could rely upon the co-operation and assistance of working men. There could be but one opinion as to the desirability of providing more enjoyable and intellectual ways for the working man to spend his evenings, and more particularly his Saturday evenings. If a series of cheap concerts, of a good and attractive class of music, were given at a specially low rate, enabling artisans, with their wives and families, to attend, the arrangement would be productive of the best result. (...) When the Corporation resolved to restore the organ in the Music Hall, Mr. Caldicott was appointed organist for the city, and he then stated that he proposed to give recitals. These would be in harmony with the present project. If Mr. Hall's proposal could be carried out it would enable many working men to spend their Saturday evenings more pleasantly and profitably than they did at present.⁸⁷

Rev. Hall had been inspired by a concert series held in Oxford Town Hall, aimed at the town's working-class and held on Saturdays, with refreshments provided at the Hall. He believed

⁸⁷ *WJ*, 8 March 1879.

the success behind this series, which he wished to emulate in Worcester, came from the way the tickets were distributed, saying 'nearly every workshop was represented on the committee of management, some of its members taking 40 or 50 tickets each and selling them among their fellow men'. Hall also believed that for the concert series to fulfil its purpose in Worcester, the repertoire had to be serious, devoid of 'vulgar comic songs', and that appeal should have been made to the local musical societies to play at the concerts, as well as the organist. It is worth noting that the focus of the proposed concerts, according to the Mayor's statement, was not just working men, but their families. This is reflected in the focus on innocent, serious repertoire, which would be well-suited for whole families, while hosting the concerts on a Saturday took into consideration that these were generally leisure days for the labouring classes, with most people only working in the morning and hence able to stay out a little later, as there was no need to get up so early on Sundays. It also meant that the workmen and their families would not have to miss out on Sunday service, something which the Rev. Hall no doubt would have had in mind. Additionally, the timing of the concerts was a conscious way of advocating temperance, as it aimed to provide the working class with an alternative 'to those deadly influences which were so powerful on a Saturday evening',⁸⁸ filled with wholesome, elevating entertainment.

Caldicott spoke next, echoing the Mayor's opening and confirming that he would be happy to play, having previously stated that, as honorary organist, it was his intention to 'give twelve public recitals on the organ during the year.' However, going against Rev. Hall, he spoke in favour of humorous music, provided it was not of a vulgar character, adding that 'they must not begin with too high-class music.' This statement by Caldicott aligns with the

⁸⁸ WC, 15 November 1884.

manner in which many civic organ recitals were programmed. When choosing the repertoire for these recitals, it was often presumed that a predominantly working-class audience had little knowledge of and little interest in serious classical music, which was seen as holding providing the most 'moral' benefits, and therefore any 'improving' concert had to include more well-known, popular works in order to attract its intended audience. Hall also appears to imply that the ratio of high-class to lower class music could be adjusted to include more high-class music once a regular audience had been secured.

At the end of the meeting, the proposal was passed with unanimous support, and a committee was formed to organise the concerts. On 15 March the same year, the first of the Saturday Evening Concerts was held in the Music Hall. The *Journal* described it as a concert 'for Working Men' and expressed great satisfaction with an attentive audience of mostly working-class men and youths, so large that many could not get a seat, although the article also took the time to lament the fact that 'scores of hats were not removed during the whole performance (...) but perhaps the fact may be taken as convincing evidence that the concert attracted those for whom it was designed.'⁸⁹ The small number of women in the audience was attributed to 'the inevitable domestic exigencies of Saturday evening', leading one to wonder why this had not been considered earlier, or if the earlier intention to appeal to working men and their families had simply been abandoned by this point.

As per Hall's suggestion, the tickets for the concert appear to have been distributed through local workshops, factories and other employment venues, and only ticket holders were present in the Hall. The nearly two-and-a-half hour long concert consisted of two parts: the first part was played by the Rifle Volunteer Band, who performed a varied repertoire,

⁸⁹ *WJ*, 22 March 1879.

including Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March' and 'Tom Bowling', the famous sea song by Dibdin, while the second half consisted of a number of glees and solo songs performed by local musicians, as well as a reading, and finishing with the National Anthem. No refreshments were offered during the interval, as they had been at the Oxford concerts, but 'not a few oranges and buns were seen, and had not wholly disappeared when Mr. Harry Day commenced his reading.' The newspaper report of the event concluded by congratulating the committee with what they dubbed 'an important public movement'.

The first series of these Saturday Evening Concerts consisted of six weekly recitals, each with relatively similar programmes, before they took a break for the summer. None of the concerts in the 1879 series included any organ music, as the instrument was still under construction and would not be finished until late December that year. While the Saturday Evening Concerts seem to have experienced relative success in the early months, by December the attendance had dropped and the committee made the decision to cut its losses and 'intercept the series till January, when it is hoped a more congenial state of things will be inaugurated.'⁹⁰ Concerts recommenced at the end of January 1880 to better attendance, with programmes featuring the new organ. Following the 1881 fire, the series made an unsuccessful move to the Guildhall and the decision was made to put the recitals on another hold 'pending the reconstruction of the Public Hall, and the replacing of the organ, which had hitherto contributed so much to the success of these popular reunions.'⁹¹ The re-opening brought the recitals back, and they continued more or less uninterrupted until October 1886, at which point they were discontinued due to the emergence of a new

⁹⁰ WC, 13 December 1879.

⁹¹ WC, 8 November 1884.

series of similar recitals, the 'Thursday Corporation Concerts' introduced by Quarterman when he succeeded Caldicott as Honorary Organist. The decision does not seem to have been a difficult one, as the concerts had waned somewhat in popularity over the past years, 'it being found that Saturday night was not the most convenient one in the week for those for whose edification the entertainments were provided',⁹² leaving the committee in some debt. With Quarterman's new series in place, the Saturday Evening Concert committee quietly stepped aside, finishing the season with a single concert. Not much else is known about the 'Thursday Corporation Concerts,' though one would assume they featured the organ, as the series was introduced by the new Honorary Organist.

There seem to have been many attempts at establishing dedicated organ recital series in the Public Hall, both in the early years of the Corn Market and Music Hall Company, and in the years after the Corporation purchased the Hall, but it would take until the last decade of the century for a dedicated organ recital series to materialise, the *Corporation Free Organ Recitals*.

This was another of Spark's initiatives, he having approached the Town Council with the idea after he had noticed that 'there were many evenings when the hall was not engaged and the organ was not used'.⁹³ Spark had suggested this time might be used for a series of free organ recitals, with the aim of educating and elevating the public. The Council agreed, allowing Spark the Hall for the recitals free of charge.

As the name would imply, the Corporation Recitals were free to attend, with admission to the gallery at a small charge in order to cover incidental expenses, and possibly as a tacit way

⁹² WC, 16 October 1886.

⁹³ WC, 7 June 1890.

of segregating the audience by placing those willing to pay in the nicer seats. The first recital was held in May 1889, with W. C. Box, the future Honorary Organist, and a vocalist, F. Pedley. The programme, which lasted about an hour and was of a 'particularly popular' character, included:

Toccata and Fugue in D Minor (Bach);

Overture, "Maritana" (Wallace);

Song, "The Lost Chord" (Sullivan), Mr. F. Pedley;

(Encore – 'The Village Blacksmith')

Airs de danse, (a) "Noralie," (b) "Espanola" (Bérard), selection, "Dorothy" (Cellier);

Song, "True to death," Mr. F. Pedley;

Grand march, "Tannhäuser" (Wagner).⁹⁴

It is somewhat curious to see that the programme was described as being 'particularly popular', while featuring several examples of serious, high-class music, most notably the Toccata and Fugue by Bach. The rest of the repertoire which can be identified is a combination of parlour songs (including two of the most popular and ubiquitous parlour songs of their time in 'The Lost Chord' and 'The Village Blacksmith') and opera selections, which may be what the journalist was referring in his description, or he may have used the term in the sense of the music being widely enjoyed. Together, the pieces make up a typically miscellaneous programme, providing examples from very different ends of the serious-popular musical scale.

⁹⁴ *WJ*, 18 May 1889.

During the interval, Spark took the opportunity to announce the next recital, something he would do at every Corporation Recital following. Due to Spark's system of using whatever time was available in the Hall, the Corporation Recitals did not have a set day or interval at which they happened. Nor did they employ a regular organist, instead featuring a combination of visiting and local organists, alongside vocalists from Worcester and beyond.

At the conclusion of the first series in June 1890, for which Spark had secured the services of his famous brother, Dr. Spark, the Public Hall was 'filled to the utmost limits of its seating capacity'. Before the end of the concert, the younger Spark took to the stage at the invitation of the Deputy-Mayor, to share the attendance from the previous eighteen concerts. Dividing the concerts into three sections of six, the first section had had 3,386 attendants; the second 4,164; and the third 4,489, with an average attendance of 650 people per recital. The evening concluded with a 'fantasia on national airs' played by Dr. Spark, before the audience joined in to sing a verse of the National Anthem.⁹⁵ The recitals carried on into the first decade of the twentieth century, after which less is to be found about them, which may imply that the recitals were attracting less attention once the novelty of them had worn off, especially following Spark's retirement as manager of the Public Hall in 1895.⁹⁶

The truly remarkable thing about the Corporation Free Organ Recitals was just how popular they managed to remain throughout most of their existence. In 1896, seven years after the first, the recitals were still managing to attract audiences almost as large as the initial series, with the attendance after 12 recitals being 10,800, 'between 7,000 and 8,000 of whom had

⁹⁵ *WC*, 7 June 1890.

⁹⁶ *Musical Standard* 48, Iss. 55 (19 January 1895), p. 53.

free admission.⁹⁷ The repertoire stayed mostly true to Spark's original ambitions of cultivating and elevating the public's taste for good music, by leaning into the classical, 'high-class' repertoire, without losing the popular element.

An examination of the repertoire performed in the first two seasons of the Corporation Free Organ Recitals (1889, see Appendix II) demonstrates a consistency in this miscellaneous style, despite there being no regular organist for the series. The concerts all feature one organist, usually local, and one or more singers, and the repertoire has a clear emphasis on solo organ music, making up at least half of any given programme. While mostly a consistent mix of popular and serious classical works, there is some variation in the character and balance of the repertoires to reflect the different performers, such as the inclusion of a selection from *Pirates of Penzance* and a 'polka serenade' in the recital on 9 December 1889, which would seem to reflect the involvement of Spark, as he was the conductor of the Worcester Amateur Vocal Union and known for his sense of humour. But for the most part, the vocal repertoire is limited to parlour songs, classical arias and a few sacred melodies, while the organ repertoire includes a large number of transcriptions, as well as works composed for the instrument, particularly various marches.

As a whole, the music performed at the Corporation Free Organ Recitals presents a clear 'improving' vision, where the proportion of classical to popular music was kept even to ensure that the audience was both entertained (through the popular works) and elevated (through the serious classical works). While there is perhaps greater variation among the popular parts of the repertoire than one may have expected earlier in the century, reflecting a softening of the strict divide between the tastes, they are mostly of a respectable, rational

⁹⁷ WC, 25 April 1896.

character. The moral and improving elements present in earlier series seem to be rather subdued in these later recitals, where the reports only appear to focus on how entertaining the concert was and on the quality of the performance, with a review of the March 1890 concert describing the programme played as 'of the most enjoyable character.'⁹⁸ The reports also make less of the composition of the audience. The recitals remained free and there is no evidence that the composition had materially changed, but there seems to have been a shift, if not in the concerts themselves, then in the degree to which the press cared about their improving aspects.

The success of the Corporation Free Organ Recitals is reminiscent of that of the Saturday organ recitals of Kidderminster Town Hall in the late 1890s. Despite both series being relatively late in the century, they appear to have been among the more successful of the case study concert series. This could be a coincidence, but it could also reflect a change in attitudes by the later nineteenth century. As we have seen in the press coverage of the Worcester recitals, the language used to describe the concerts had begun to change, omitting discussions of the social composition of the audiences, although the programmes performed are not so different from the ones found in the typical 'improving' organ recitals of a few decades earlier. This shift in perception may have helped them become more popular in that they were seen as less patronising, and may have reflected a broader tendency in public entertainment. Another potential reason for the success of the Corporation Free Organ Recitals compared to some other case study recitals, is the involvement of Edward Spark: he brought to the role his knowledge of the music businesses, and was in a position to use his role as manager to pursue personal projects and ambitions

⁹⁸ WC, 1 March 1890.

that seem to have given the musical activities an energy and consistency not present in the other case studies.

What classes the three Worcester recital series were intended for, and who actually attended them, varies in terms of clarity and the manner in which the organisers went about achieving their aims. The Monday Evening Concerts appear to be aimed at the working classes, utilising the usual buzzwords associated with similar improving concerts, such as 'cheap' and 'popular'. Reports following the recitals also indicate that the audiences did include working-class citizens, mentioning 'the industrial classes of the city' and 'those classes (...) for whose amusement these concerts were mainly intended', but provides no further details than this. This vague character is in some ways to be expected in Worcester, being a large city with a diversity of trades, compared to a town like Kidderminster which relied heavily on one single trade, and where the improving efforts may be expected to be aimed more directly at members of this trade group. But in comparison, the organisers behind the Saturday Evening Concerts some decades later demonstrate a far more focused and active attitude in their efforts to provide music for the working classes. These concerts were proposed with the support and involvement of local workmen, and once established, maintained a direct and explicit link to their intended audience by distributing tickets through local workshops, and the ensuing concerts were accordingly attended almost entirely by working-class men, being the ticketholders. The Corporation Free Organ Recitals, are probably the vaguest of the three series in terms of who they were aimed at. The fact that the concerts were free is not as sure an indicator of working-class attendance as might be expected, as the middle classes were likely to take advantage of this as well, and while the repertoire follows the usual 'improving' template common for concerts aimed at the

working classes, this is again not a sure indicator, as the 'improving' repertoire was largely informed by middle-class taste. It is likely that the Corporation Organ Recitals were intending to attract a working-class audience through free entrance, and to subsequently exert an improving influence on them, though the real social makeup of the audience is not known. The lack of descriptions of working-class listeners or the moral content of the concert may be an indicator of a change of tone towards the end of the nineteenth century, but may also be an indication that the crowds were not chiefly working class.

The history of Worcester Public Hall and organ is complex and varied, going through several stages with varying levels of 'civiness.' The Public Hall benefited from the higher underlying level of musical activity in Worcester. A central point was the Cathedral, which was a key venue for the Three Choirs Festival until 1875, and which provided a nucleus for high-class music in the town (albeit chiefly religious). This meant that when, in 1875, the Corporation purchased the Public Hall to serve as a venue for the Festival, there was an existing context into which the Corporation's organ concerts could fit. The interaction between the musical communities of the Cathedral and the Public Hall demonstrates that there was a distinct role as a secular, civic venue that the Public Hall was able to play, with its own individual qualities. Not being directly tied to the Anglican church also made it appropriate for nonconformist concert-goers, who may not otherwise have attended the recitals.

Despite many setbacks, in particular the destruction of two organs and the complicated process of procuring a third instrument, the Hall still experienced relative success, and perhaps more importantly, there appears to have been a near constant energy and impetus behind the civic organ. This is in large part due to the involvement of Edward Spark as the

Hall's manager. He displayed a pro-active attitude throughout his tenure, both in a managerial and a creative role, and brought to it a significant amount of experience in the music business, which has few parallels in any of the other case studies. Other activity involving the Public Hall organ included high-class recitals such as Spark's subscription series, concerts with the various orchestral and choral societies, and eventually also 'improving' organ recitals aimed at the working classes. It is worth emphasising that the Public Hall was a specifically *musical* venue and remained so after its purchase by the Corporation.

The efforts made to secure the third organ also reinforced the organ's role as a machine for civic music, and that so much effort was put into a third iteration of the instrument, after disasters had struck the first two, demonstrates how important it was to those in control of the Hall. At the same time, the way in which it was presented to potential audiences was less overtly moral than one might expect from a civic instrument, and this subtler moralising effort may have proved more attractive to the population.

CHAPTER 6 – WEDNESBURY AND WEST BROMWICH

The Black Country, black by day and red by night, cannot be matched, for vast and varied production, by any other space of equal radius on the surface of the globe. It is a section of Titanic industry, kept in murky perspiration by a sturdy set of Tubal Cains and Vulcans, week in week out, and often seven days to the week.¹

6.1: The Black Country

Burritt's famous quotation from his 1869 book *Walks in the Black Country* paints an evocative picture of a region which saw some of the heaviest industrialisation in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The source of this intense industrialisation was the great 30ft-thick South Staffordshire coal seam, the thickest in Great Britain, which had provided coal for metal trades in the area since the Middle Ages. As technology evolved, the seam propelled the region to unprecedented economic prosperity, while coincidentally changing the landscape of the area in a dramatic manner.

Where the Black Country is, and how far it stretches, has been a matter of debate for many years, and one which still is not entirely agreed upon. Burritt himself suggested The Black Country stretched in a 20-mile radius from Birmingham Town Hall,² while others have

¹ Elihu Burritt, *Walks in the Black Country and its Green Border-Land* (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1869), p. 1.

² Burritt, *Walks in the Black Country and its Green Border-Land*, p. 5.

claimed it does not include any parts of Birmingham, and instead encompasses the various towns on the coal seam, including

the area where the 30ft coal seam comes to the surface – so West Bromwich, Oldbury, Blackheath, Cradley Heath, Old Hill, Bilston, Dudley, Tipton, Wednesfield and parts of Halesowen, Wednesbury and Walsall but not Wolverhampton, Stourbridge and Smethwick or what used to be known as Warley.³

Black Country History, the official website for the Black Country archives, states simply and succinctly that '[The Black Country] has no agreed borders and no two Black Country men or women will agree on where it starts or ends.'⁴ The origins of the name of the region, the Black Country, are similarly disputed, with many more-or-less apocryphal explanations. The most common is that the nickname was given due to the abundance of furnaces found in the region, belching out thick, black smoke into the surrounding landscape, as Burritt described in his writings, though others claim it was named after the aforementioned coal seam found beneath it.

Today, the Black Country is generally recognised as comprising most of the four boroughs of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, of which Sandwell is included in this case study. As in most of the Black Country, the six towns that today make up the borough of Sandwell – Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich – were a centre for iron and metal trades, especially nail making.⁵ The arrival of the canals in the eighteenth century marked the beginning of the main advancement in the borough's

³ 'What and where is the Black Country?', *BBC*, 24 September 2014, accessed 10 February 2021, http://www.bbc.co.uk/blackcountry/uncovered/what_is.shtml

⁴ 'Places', *Black Country History*, accessed 10 February 2021, <https://www.blackcountryhistory.org/places/>

⁵ Sandwell would become an official county borough at the end of the nineteenth century, and a Metropolitan borough in 1974.

industry, by allowing for the construction of numerous foundries and ironworks.⁶ This case study focuses on two of these towns: Wednesbury and West Bromwich. As will become apparent, there was considerable overlap in the history of the two towns, especially so in the history of their civic organs, and so to avoid too many repetitions, they have been combined into one larger case study, rather than being treated as two completely separate entities.

6.2: Wednesbury - background and history

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Wednesbury was still a small market town with a population of 4,160.⁷ Although it was only around a third of the size of neighbouring West Bromwich, Wednesbury still functioned as a minor centre, hosting weekly markets, petty sessions for the town and surrounding parishes, as well as two annual fairs.⁸ Gas arrived in 1828, when Wednesbury had a population of around 5,000, only one ironworks, 'and one good street in the town'.⁹ Connections to the Walsall and Birmingham Canal brought a steady flow of business to the trades in Wednesbury, which was further improved as the town joined the network of the South Staffordshire Railway in mid-century.¹⁰ By 1871, the population had grown to 25,030.¹¹

Like many other similarly sized industrial towns, Wednesbury struggled with poor sanitation in the first half of the nineteenth century, which resulted in two severe cholera epidemics. It

⁶ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (20 October 2014), 'Sandwell', accessed April 30, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sandwell>

⁷ John F. Ede, *History of Wednesbury* (Wednesbury: Wednesbury Corporation, 1962), p. 219.

⁸ William White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire* (Sheffield: 1851), p. 671.

⁹ Frederick W. Hackwood, *Religious Wednesbury: Its Creeds, Churches, & Chapels* (Dudley: Herald Press, 1900), p. 78.

¹⁰ White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire*, p. 672.

¹¹ <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/STS/Wednesbury>

was described in White's 1851 *Directory of Staffordshire* as 'irregularly built, and (...) very indifferently paved and drained, and has a very scanty supply of water, which has often to be brought from a distance in pails and barrels, at a considerable expense to the inhabitants, more than 2,200 of whom signed a memorial in March 1851, praying that the *Public Health Act* might be applied to the town, which suffered severely during the visitations of cholera in 1832 and 1849, owing to the total want of drainage (...)'.¹²

This memorial led to major changes, most notably the formation of the Wednesbury Local Board of Health at the end of 1851. This consisted of nine members, later increased to twelve, who were elected by the ratepayers (although 'at Wednesbury nomination was usually sufficient'), provided they met the property qualification for election, which at £500 capital value (and later increased to £1,000) ensured that only Wednesbury's most affluent inhabitants were eligible for nomination.¹³ The main aim of the Board was to improve the sanitation of the town, in the hope that it would improve public health and possibly lead to a decrease in poverty. To achieve this, the members of the Board held varied, yet wide-reaching powers within Wednesbury, and in order 'to perform these duties it was empowered to make by-laws and to levy a district rate.'¹⁴

In 1858, Richard Williams (1817-1909, *fig. 18*) took over as Chairman of the Board, eventually becoming the permanent chairman until its dissolution in 1886 when the borough became incorporated. It was under him that the Board would come to play a central role in the history of Wednesbury Town Hall and its organ, and by extension, of West Bromwich Town Hall and its organ. By the time Williams became Chairman, there was a need for both

¹² White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire*, p. 671.

¹³ Ede, *The History of Wednesbury*, p. 321.

¹⁴ Ede, *The History of Wednesbury*, p. 321.

public offices and a public space in the town, which, combined with the moral ambitions the Board held for the townspeople and their recreation, led to the beginnings of plans for a Town Hall. While the concern for the moral health of the borough was not within the formal remit of the Board, something which Williams would himself acknowledge at the opening of Wednesbury Town Hall, we know from his public statements that he believed that the Board ought to take responsibility for the moral health of the town's population, as well as the physical.¹⁵

¹⁵ *BDP*, 27 June 1872.

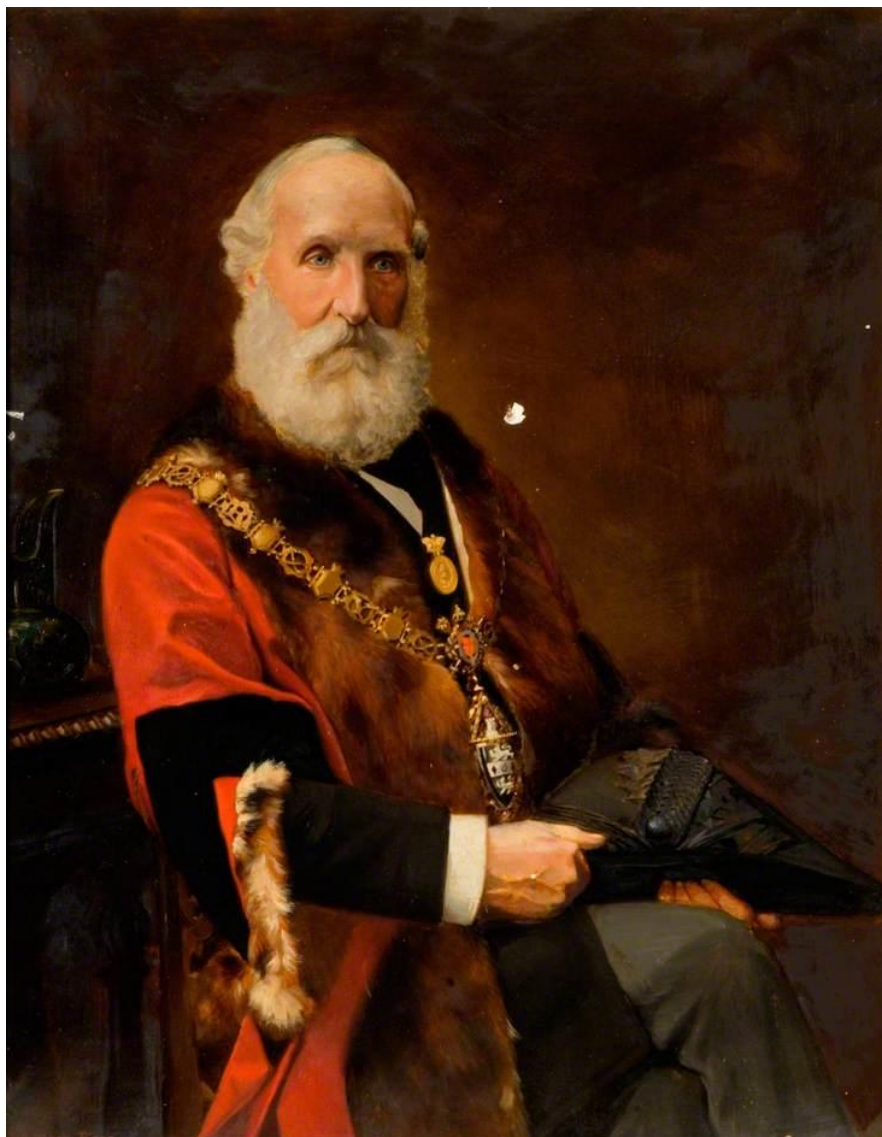


Figure 18 Portrait of Alderman Richard Williams (1899)¹⁶

This concern for local morality seems to have reflected a personal ambition of Williams, rather than a response to concrete examples of serious public immorality. Williams was a major employer in Wednesbury as manager of the Patent Shaft and Axletree Company, employing up to 4,000 people, and had spent a career in industry, starting as an apprentice

¹⁶ *Alderman Richard Williams (d.1909), JP, Honorary Freeman of the Borough of Wednesbury Corporation* by Whitlock Brothers (1899), photo credit: Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery, <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/alderman-richard-williams-d-1909-jp-honorary-freeman-of-the-borough-of-wednesbury-corporation-1899-20682#>

engineer at the age of fourteen and rising to the position of general manager.¹⁷ Considering this, it might be reasonable to see his interest in providing rational recreation as born both out of a genuine interest in the well-being of industrial workers and actual experience managing them, and a more pragmatic concern regarding the leisure activities of his workforce, though his attitudes were also typical of the responsibility felt by many middle-class councillors throughout England towards their working-class neighbours and their recreation. He may also have been a Methodist, as in 1893, he gifted some windows to a Methodist chapel in Holyhead Road, which could reflect his belonging to that denomination and following of its philanthropic ideals.¹⁸

Williams persisted in these reforming ambitions, playing a role in the establishment of a public park in 1887, and was part of a philanthropic committee which held 'some very successful Science and Art classes' at the Free Library.¹⁹ This interest in reforming the working-class extended to things that were far from well-received among the local population, the most notorious example being when he in 1874, after many years of efforts, succeeded in formally abolishing the popular Wednesbury Wake, an event he saw as 'a demoralising orgie [sic] of one week's unbridled license in every year.'²⁰ His staunch opposition to the wake may again support the theory that he was a Methodist. That said, this reforming work was a source of great personal pride for Williams, who is recorded as having boasted in 1886 that the Local Board had 'found Wednesbury a lasar house, and left

¹⁷ 'Richard Williams (1817-1909)', *Grace's Guide to British Industrial History*, 20 November 2016, accessed 27 May 2021, [https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Richard_Williams_\(1817-1909\)](https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Richard_Williams_(1817-1909))

¹⁸ W. J. Wilkinson, *The History of Methodism in the Wednesbury Circuit* (Darlston: John M. Price, 1895), p.34.

¹⁹ Frederick W. Hackwood, *Wednesbury Ancient and Modern* (Wednesbury: Ryder and Son, 1902), p. 120-121.

²⁰ Hackwood, *Wednesbury Ancient and Modern*, p. 116.

it a Black Country sanatorium.’²¹ Among the characters involved in the different case studies within this thesis, Richard Williams does appear to be one of the more committed reformers, sometimes almost zealous in his expression, although this may be an impression due to the limited availability of the sources.

Attempts at providing rational recreation had been made before the construction of the Town Hall. The most notable of these was a Mechanics’ Institute, which opened on 16 March 1838, and included a library and reading rooms. The Institute does not seem to have been particularly successful, however, especially among its intended public. Frederick Hackwood, a local teacher and journalist, noted in his book *The Wednesbury Papers* that the Institute ‘was never very popular among the labouring portion of the community, and so far as the word “Mechanics” was concerned its name was a misnomer’.²² while artisans did attend the Institute, they never made up more than a small percentage of the members. Not long after opening, the Institute fell into financial difficulties, and by March 1843

a balance of over £20 was reported due to the treasurer; in June, 1852, the funds were announced to be in a “low state,” and the same phrase occurred in the report of March, 1865; in February, 1866, the sum of £25 being again deficient it was resolved to wind up the concern (...)²³

Although this turned out not to be the end of the Institute, ultimately, its undoing seems to have been the rather authoritarian parochialism displayed by its management and its lack of

²¹ Hackwood, *Wednesbury Ancient and Modern*, p. 117. A ‘lasar house’, more commonly spelled ‘lazar house’ is another word for a leper colony or hospital.

²² Frederick W. Hackwood, *The Wednesbury Papers* (Wednesbury: R. Ryder, 1884), p. 50. Hackwood wrote more than 30 books, many of them on Black Country history, and also wrote for the *Wednesbury Herald* for twenty years.

²³ Hackwood, *The Wednesbury Papers*, p. 51.

communication with local workers. It is perhaps not particularly surprising that the intended audience did not respond positively to their efforts. In April 1858, the Theatre Royal, recently opened in Upper High Street in Wednesbury by its proprietor Edward Darbey, had offered the Institute £5 10s. from the proceeds of a benefit performance at the Theatre, which the Institute 'coldly but formally refused to accept', presumably to make a point regarding the moral status of the theatre.²⁴ Two separate offers (the latest in 1871) to merge with the Working Men's Club, which could very well have saved the Institute from destruction as the Working Men's Club was a successful rival situated in attractive premises, were similarly turned down by the Institute. Again, Hackwood questioned the motivations of the Institute, asking if

Perhaps this was owing in some degree to the narrow-minded views of its managers, and their inability to appreciate the fact that the hard-fisted labourer may occasionally take his recreation in a literary or scientific manner, but that the exclusion of all rational amusement of a lighter and less serious character would not, in an age of limited educational acquirements, suit the tastes of the average mechanic.²⁵

Despite the lack of success, the Institute seems to have survived until 1877, though it is possible that by the end of its existence, it was a Mechanics' Institute in name only, and may even have functioned more as a private club. At its closing, the Institute donated 2,000 books to the Local Board to use in their Free Library, which the Chairman of the Board was happy to accept, on the condition that the Board could 'weed out books that they thought

²⁴ Hackwood, *The Wednesbury Papers*, p. 50.

²⁵ Hackwood, *The Wednesbury Papers*, p. 50.

would be objectionable, and accept those that were suitable'.²⁶ This rather odd comment would imply that the Board thought the library and its collection was somehow morally suspect, or that the Board had particularly strict views on what books were or were not objectionable, perhaps again betraying the stubborn narrow-mindedness that Hackwood described.

6.3: Wednesbury Town Hall and the Brogden organ

The idea of building a public hall of some sort had been around since the construction of the Local Board of Health's new offices in 1867, and in early May 1870, the Board was presented with a memorial from local ratepayers in support of a public hall. The petition stressed

the need which exists for a centrally situated, adequately sized, and comfortably fitted room, in which the inhabitants may assemble for public purposes. Beside the school rooms belonging to the various religious denominations, which would be more properly reserved exclusively for church purposes, there is no building acceptable or suitable to all classes in the town. Your memorialists, therefore, urge upon the Board the necessity of a commodious Town Hall, in which the platform might be used for general purposes and would be common ground, free alike from the monopoly of sectarianism and political partisanship. As your Board have shown business capacity, taste, and economy in various other public undertakings, your memorialists would

²⁶ *MET*, 16 June 1877, p. 4.

leave the provision of a Public Hall in your hands, assured that extravagance in the outlay and errors in the management of the building would both be avoided.²⁷

Consequently, a vote was conducted among the ratepayers on the matter. By late July 1870, the Board could report on the results – 604 for the public hall, 433 against – and took immediate action at a meeting of the Local Board, the Chairman moving that the Building Committee take charge of the matter and instructing them to ‘advertise for designs for a hall capable of seating 800 people, the limit of the cost to be £2,000.’²⁸ The motion was voted on, and all apart from two Board members voted in favour of it.

Hackwood alleges in *Wednesbury Ancient and Modern* that the proposal for a Town Hall met with ‘tremendous opposition’ as ‘such a building was looked upon as a luxury quite unnecessary for the simple-minded folk of Wednesbury.’²⁹ Prior to the erection of the Town Hall, as the memorialists alluded to, people had used various other public buildings for public gatherings and concerts, from religious school-rooms to the Music Hall, ‘or not infrequently on popular occasions, as their primitive Saxon forefathers had done, in the open air.’³⁰

Minutes from the July Board meeting also allude to some public tensions which may have been related to the proposed Town Hall, though it is not discussed in any detail besides Williams’ statement that he ‘would not refer to the out-door meeting held at Wednesbury, on Tuesday, except to say that he forgave all the hard things which were then said about himself and the Board generally.’ It is possible that this unspecified opposition was not

²⁷ *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 9 May 1870.

²⁸ *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 20 July 1870, p. 8.

²⁹ Hackwood, *Wednesbury Ancient and Modern*, p. 116.

³⁰ Hackwood, *Wednesbury Ancient and Modern*, p. 116.

against the Hall itself, but of a more general political character, and no further comments are provided.

It is interesting to note that music or other forms of performance and entertainment are not mentioned in the memorial, although music would be a central theme in the Board's arguments concerning the Hall. Without exhaustive data, it is difficult to say much about the memorialists besides them being local ratepayers; but it appears from the memorial that their concerns were chiefly political, as they emphasise how a public hall would be 'free alike from the monopoly of sectarianism and political partisanship' and could be used by all classes of Wednesbury.

Once the decision to build a town hall was made, a competition for the design of the building was launched. As was common at the time, the Board received and examined a number of proposals blind, before announcing the winner; one of the members of the Board, J. Loxton, felt obliged to resign his seat, as he was a partner in the winning firm.³¹ Construction of the Town Hall commenced the following year, in 1871.

There were numerous considerations to be made during the planning and construction process, but two major restrictions presented themselves early on. The first was the site of the new hall. Many thought the Hall ought to be built in the Market Place, being the natural heart of the town, or somewhere similar, but due to legislation from the central Board of Health in London, the Hall had to be constructed in connection with the existing Local Board offices in Holyhead Road, or it could not be constructed by the Local Board at all.³² The land

³¹ Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p. 103.

³² *The Wednesbury Observer*, 29 June 1872.

on Holyhead Road was also cheap agricultural land, which was an additional motivation, due to the second restriction the Board were operating under, namely the budget.

After the initial plebiscite, the Board had intended to keep the cost of the Hall limited to £2,000, 'out of consideration of the fact that the money would come, not out of the pockets of a wealthy constituency, but from the pockets of a hard-working, wage-earning class, to whom every shilling was a consideration', but this soon became impossible and the budget was increased to £3,000, which 'would be spread over thirty years, and would not cause a rate of more than three halfpence in the pound, so that a person living in a £10 house would not have to pay more than 1s. 3d. a year.'³³ The way in which the ratepayers were expected to pay for the Town Hall themselves reinforces the civic nature of the Hall, as it was being funded by 'a hard-working, wage-earning class', distinguishing it from the halls in Kidderminster and Worcester.

It is clear that the Hall was also intended to host musical events, as the Board had announced its intentions to place an organ in the Hall long before they had managed to secure funding for the instrument. At the opening of the Town Hall in 1872, Richard Williams stated that 'When the Hall was designed they had an idea that it would never be a complete building without an organ' and that an orchestra had been included in the sketches for the Hall for this very reason. It does not appear, however, that the Board had budgeted for the provision of an organ, despite having increased the budget to £3,000, as it, at some point, made an approach to Alexander Brogden, their newly elected MP, with the suggestion that he pay for the instrument.

³³ *The WO*, 29 June 1872.

Alexander Brogden (1825-1892, *fig. 19*), a Liberal, had become the Member for the borough in 1868, when Wednesbury was elevated to a Parliamentary Borough, confirming its growing status and size, and would remain in the position for close to eighteen years, until 1885.³⁴

Born in Manchester in 1825, he was the second son of John Brogden, who had made his fortune in the iron trade, coal mines, and as a railway construction contractor. When his father retired as chairman of John Brogden and Sons around 1860, Alexander succeeded him, taking over most of the running of the family company, expanding it throughout England and Wales, though with mixed results. Politically ambitious, Brogden had previously been elected Justice of the Peace in Furness in 1860 before winning his seat in Wednesbury, and had run an unsuccessful parliamentary campaign in Yarmouth.³⁵

Descriptions in the *Illustrated London News* shortly after his election suggests a 'neatly-made, smart man, of small stature, with a smiling countenance, polite demeanour, and (...) master of a rather grand bow', but also an ambitious and shrewd politician who in a relatively short time had managed to familiarise himself with his new constituency, which in 1869 counted about 16,000 electors among their population of 68,000, 'so that altogether he was one of the new personages whom lookers-on soon came to know by sight and voice'.³⁶

Exactly when the suggestion of financing the organ was made to Brogden is not readily available, although it appears to have been early in the planning stages as a letter from Brogden read out at a Board meeting in early 1871 was written 'with reference to the presentation of an organ to the Town Hall', implying that Brogden had already agreed to pay

³⁴ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 29 November 1892, p. 8.

³⁵ Les Gilpin, 'The Bustling Alexander', *Cumbrian Railways* vol. 4, no. 6 (October 1989), p. 1.

³⁶ *Illustrated London News*, 25 September 1869, p. 310.

for an instrument by this time.³⁷ Not a great deal is known either about the details of the construction of the organ, or the correspondence between Forster & Andrews and the Wednesbury Local Board, and what relevant records do remain after the organ building company wound up in 1956 are unavailable at the present time. The disposition of the organ and other information will be discussed in further detail at the end of this chapter.

³⁷ *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 15 February 1871.



Alex Brogden

Figure 19 Portrait of Alexander Brogden (1880)³⁸

³⁸ Image from *Furness Past and Present* by Joseph Richardson (1880),
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_Brogden_19C_Industrialist.jpg

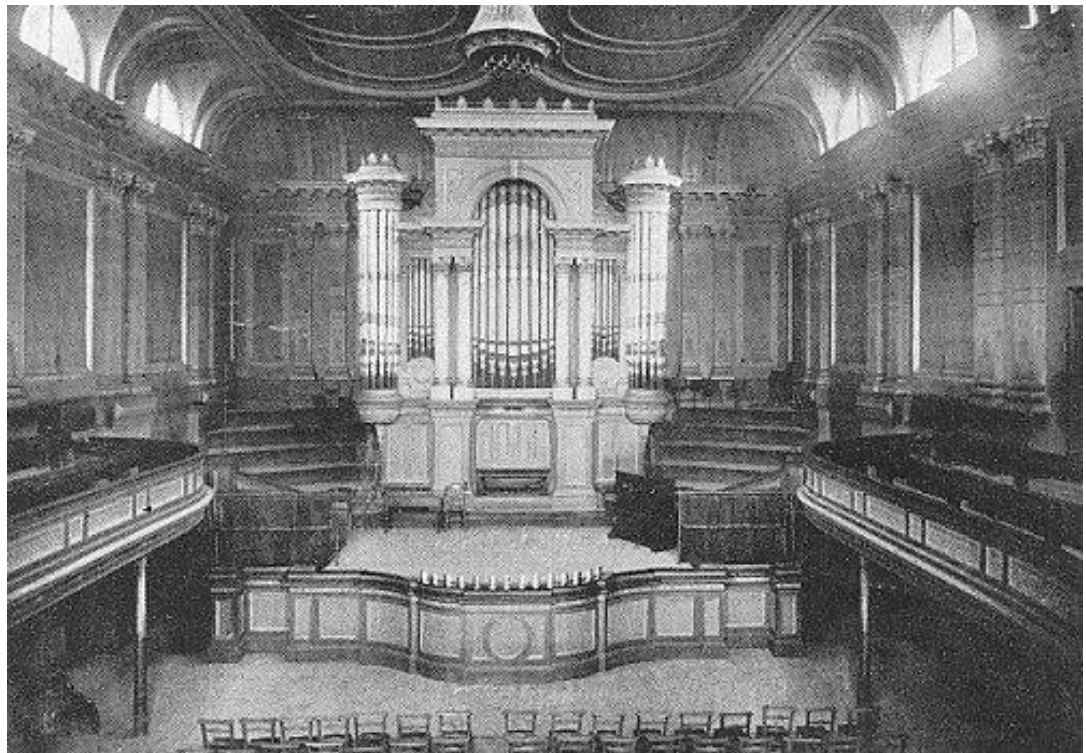


Figure 20 Exterior and interior of Wednesbury Town Hall, date unknown.³⁹

³⁹ Both images from Bev. Parker, 'The borough council and its works,' *A History of Wednesbury*, accessed 31 May 2021, <http://www.historywebsite.co.uk/articles/Wednesbury/LocalGovernment.htm>



Figure 21 Map of Wednesbury Town Hall and surrounding area (1892-1914). Red circle indicates Town Hall.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ National Library of Scotland, OS 25 Inch, 1892-1914, accessed 16 May 2021, <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/side-by-side/#zoom=18&lat=52.55045&lon=-2.02183&layers=168&right=ESRIWorld>

The Hall was situated at the rear of the Public Offices, as had been necessary to comply with legislation, and entrance was via the Offices. As can be seen in figure 21, the location of the Town Hall is quite far away from the marketplace, the natural centre of Wednesbury, which might not have been a particularly helpful location when the Board began organising recitals. Upon entering the Hall, visitors may have been relieved to see that the interior of the Town Hall had been afforded some decorations, with a moulded ceiling and several ornamental cast-iron panels adorning the orchestra. The Hall could accommodate an audience of 780, as well as a choir and band of 120 in the orchestra, and five doors, arranged so 'any part of the hall may be reserved, and the audience be distributed at will.'⁴¹ Due to the budget restrictions, the Town Hall was externally plain compared to other town halls of the time, with little in the way of unnecessary detail, resulting in what Hackwood describes as 'a factory-like structure which seems to implore the stranger: 'Please do not look at my back!''⁴² This plainness was not missed by the public either, with the *Wednesbury Observer* describing it as 'plain in the extreme' in their otherwise positive report from the opening festivities, and Richard Williams himself felt the need to express 'some amount of regret for the extreme plainness with which parochial parsimony had endowed the building' during the opening banquet.⁴³

Construction proceeded quickly and Wednesbury Town Hall and its organ (*fig. 20*) were inaugurated on 26 June 1872. The occasion was treated as a general holiday in the town, with many businesses closing early and crowds thronging the streets to observe the parade of officials on their way to the opening ceremony. In addition to the flags and banners

⁴¹ *WO*, 29 June 1872.

⁴² Hackwood, *Wednesbury Ancient and Modern*, p. 116.

⁴³ Hackwood, *Wednesbury Ancient and Modern*, p. 203.

adorning the Hall and other nearby houses, representatives from the Wednesbury Tube Works had erected two great arches of flowers and evergreens between the Board of Health offices and Brunswick House, the residence of Richard Williams.⁴⁴ Shortly after noon, the procession of dignitaries arrived at the Town Hall. The guests included Lord Wrottesley, Lord-lieutenant of the county; the Lord Bishop of the diocese, George Selwyn; Alexander Brogden, M.P. for the borough; Arthur M. Bass, Member for East Staffordshire; Richard Williams and the other members of the Local Board, as well as an array of other notable gentlemen and ladies.⁴⁵

Inside the new Town Hall, the building and the organ were officially opened with a luncheon. Curiously, the event was segregated by gender: the most important guests, such as Lord Wrottesley and Brogden were seated in the orchestra and the remaining male guests sat on the floor of the Hall, while the women were seated in the gallery.⁴⁶ The arrangement was mentioned at several points during the evening, and at least one journalist made note of it and questioned why the decision had been made, but no explanation has been traced, though it may perhaps be a reflection of local Nonconformist beliefs, as Richard Williams had ties to the Methodist church.

The luncheon banquet was opened by Richard Williams, who described the Town Hall as being 'the offspring of the will of the people'.⁴⁷ Wrottesley was given the honour of officially opening the Hall, and reinforced the position of the Board as dealing with *moral* as well as *physical* health, by drawing parallels between an increased national focus on sanitation and

⁴⁴ *WO*, Saturday, 29 June 1872.

⁴⁵ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 27 June 1872.

⁴⁶ *WO*, 29 June 1872.

⁴⁷ *BDP*, 27 June 1872.

the potential moral influence of the Town Hall, claiming that the Hall and the new organ formed 'a valuable addition to the ameliorative influences which the Board would be able to bring to bear upon the people'.⁴⁸

A significant portion of the opening event was spent discussing the organ, to the point where the organ appears to have been of greater importance to the Local Board than the Hall itself. This stands in contrast to the original 1870 memorial, in which the ratepayers made no mention of music, or any other forms of entertainment, in their appeal for the construction of a Town Hall for the borough.

After the Lord-Lieutenant, Brogden rose to formally present his gift to the Board and his borough. The MP emphasised the public nature of the organ, to be used

(...) not only for the pleasure of the audience he saw before him, but for the pleasure of the teeming population of the neighbourhood, who would use the opportunities of frequently being present in the Hall and listening to the strains of the instrument.⁴⁹

Furthermore, he expressed his hope that the instrument would come to play an important social and moral role for the people of Wednesbury, and that it would become

the means of recreation, and instruction and elevation of the tone of the whole community. (...) Knowing as he did as Mr. Williams had observed, they were all workers in that neighbourhood, he thought it might be the means, used freely by the public, of relieving that constant strain of exertion which was the necessary

⁴⁸ *BDP*, 27 June 1872.

⁴⁹ *WO*, 29 June 1872.

concomitant of their daily occupation, and, allowing people to dismiss for the moment the cares and anxieties of their daily lot, to receive solace and recreation.⁵⁰

Prior to the opening, the front of the organ console had been fitted with a commemorative plate bearing the date and Brogden's name. After the presentation, Williams thanked Brogden on behalf of the Local Board and the people of Wednesbury, saying that 'although the Local Board had mainly to deal with sanitary matters, he considered it should be a sort of moral Board of Health of the neighbourhood; and he believed the entire Board intended to strain a point in that direction.'⁵¹

Following this, Williams laid out the explicit moral intentions of the Board, and is worth quoting from extensively (full report from the opening in Appendix III):

The powers of the Local Board were, of course, limited, but they intended to strain a point in the direction of moral effort, and try a little of the effects of music and the organ in the improvement of the people (applause). Since the formation of Wednesbury and neighbouring places into a Parliamentary Borough, the people had begun to think a little more than before, and take a greater interest in various public matters, and he thought it should be the aim of the Local Board, departing a little from its ordinary sanitary work, to assist them in their advancing tendencies (applause). A great aid in that direction would be the instrument which had just been presented to the town – (applause) – for not only was it beautiful to the eye, but when its ravishing strains were poured forth, he believed the Board would have an invaluable auxiliary in dealing with the great masses of the people who needed

⁵⁰ *WO*, 29 June 1872.

⁵¹ *BDP*, 27 June 1872.

something to utilise and brighten their spare hours – (cheers) – which, owing to recent movements, were more numerous than before. They hoped to utilise it weekly, throwing the place open at a small charge, for elevating performances - not to let it rust out, but to wear it out if possible (...) The building was beautiful, but without the instrument it would be but a dead carcase (applause). It was that which gave it vitality, and with it the Board desired and expected, not only to entertain and do good to the masses while they were there, but to send them home, better men and better women, with tempers softened, dispositions elevated, and in every way more qualified to distribute among their families the harmonious influences with which they would become imbued there (cheers). There were great difficulties, as was well known, in connection with the subject of popular amusement, and it was also well known what form it too often took in that neighbourhood (...) The want grew with the town, and it really seemed as if the instrument had been providentially put there to meet the emergency, and provide the means of supplying recreation of a more rational and elevating kind than was too often resorted to (...) ⁵²

The difficulties ‘in connection with the subject of popular amusement’ alluded to or the forms they took are not explained in any detail, even when described by Williams as an ‘emergency,’ though this type of loaded language was far from rare in these discussions. We can assume that many of the Board’s objections were directed at popular amusements that involved excessive drinking and other associated activities, such as gambling. It is clear that in Williams’ view, the leisure time of the working classes had expanded, and that this posed a challenge to public morals that he felt the local government ought to confront. Throughout

⁵² *Wednesbury Times*, 6 July 1872.

his speech, Williams lays out the plans of the Board to put on elevating organ recitals, and the moral effect he hoped they would have. Williams' speech also presents the organ as essential to the building, going as far as saying that the Town Hall would be 'but a dead carcase' without the instrument. The strong emotional wording of Williams' speeches gives a sense of urgency and gravitas to the event, but also gives an impression of a man who was perhaps attempting to justify the cost of an unpopular Hall by appealing to the moral sensibilities of those present at the opening, alluding to vague recreational 'emergencies' and stressing the responsibility of the Board and the importance of the organ in tackling these.

The opening of the Town hall and the organ was then closed with a prayer by the Lord Bishop, followed by a short performance by W. T. Best, who had been engaged for the event by Brogden, including an improvisation 'effectively displaying the various stops, and the (...) wide capabilities of the instrument'. The presence of an organist of Best's calibre at the opening of a relatively minor town hall clearly demonstrates Brogden's ambitions for the venture, choosing to hire such a high-profile figure for the launch instead of a local organist. It was possibly also a way for him to showcase not only his good taste in performers, but also his political and musical network.

Tickets for the luncheon had been sold prior to the event, at a steep 10s. 6d. per ticket, each ticket giving the buyer 'a lady's ticket for the gallery' as well. About 100 to 120 people were present at the celebration, which was dotted with numerous toasts and speeches. Best would also take to the organ several times to accompany certain toasts, for example playing 'God Save the Queen' after the Queen's toast, and 'a selection of national, military, and

naval airs' after the toast for the forces. A number of the luncheon speeches, including those by Bass and the Reverend E. J. Wrottesley, put great emphasis on the positive moral influence the Hall and the organ would come to have on the local population, with some explicitly bringing up the working class in their comments, as well as the democratic nature of the building.

Responding to a toast to 'The Health of the Chairman and the Members of the Wednesbury Local Board of Health', Richard Williams again addressed the attendees in increasingly enthusiastic terms, saying that

He apprehended they were not going beyond their duty in extending their operations beyond their own strictly defined domain, into that moral field, which in too many parts of the Black Country was but a waste, and constituting themselves, what he considered they should be, a Moral Board of Health as well as a Local Board of Health for sanitary purposes (cheers). As a Board it was their intention to use that instrument (pointing to the organ) as a moral weapon, and they were a stronger body that day with that instrument, backed as they were by the countenance of the Lord Lieutenant, than ever before (cheers). (...) He hoped that small as their powers were, and elected as they were, not from gentlemen who had acquired wealth and gone into the country to live, but from those who had plenty of work upon their hands, they should go on in the path of usefulness upon which they had entered (...) ⁵³

This was the seventh toast of the luncheon, and the most explicit recapitulation of the ideas expressed about the potential of the organ to improve its audience. As mentioned above,

⁵³ *WO*, 29 June 1872.

there is partial evidence that Williams may have been a Methodist, and so this intensified enthusiasm may well have been evidence of the depth of his belief in rational recreation, rather than the influence of the first six toasts. It also further bolsters the highly emotional tone and sense of moral urgency of the evening.

In the evening, the festivities continued with a performance of that perennial favourite of Victorian civic events, Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah*. All the vocal parts, both choir and solo, were performed by members of the Wednesbury Amateur Choral Association, an admirable feat which greatly impressed the local press. Comments made before the opening would lead one to believe that there had been a certain lack of respect for the Association (sometimes known as the Wednesbury Choral Union), or at the very least that the Association had something of a mottled reputation, being once described as 'reviled and abused' by the *Observer*, but they seem to have risen to the occasion.⁵⁴ The orchestra, led by Henry Hayward, was not local, however, and had presumably been put together for the occasion, as encores were skipped 'in order to enable many of the instrumentalists to reach their homes by train.' B. Woodward conducted and Best continued his musical contributions to the great day by presiding at the organ. After the end of the concert, Best generously remained at the organ to play an improvisation over 'God Save the Queen' for those who wished to listen.

Tickets for the performance were priced at 5s. for reserved seats and 3s. for unreserved seats, and 'the audience was, as may be inferred, the largest and most select that has ever been gathered together within any building in the town, including as it did the elite of the neighbourhood', according to the *Observer*. For those without the means to attend the

⁵⁴ *WO*, 29 June 1872.

oratorio concert, an open-air concert with the Wednesbury Rifle Corps Band was held in the Market Place from 6.30 to 9, funded by Richard Williams.

Throughout the inauguration day, several guests had expressed hopes that the Forster & Andrew organ would be used for weekly entertainments. During his acceptance speech, Williams had promised that the Board would 'do all in their power to make it useful to rich and poor, and he hoped to see weekly entertainments in it at a low cost', and at the end of the banquet, the Rev. Wrottesley, possibly a relation of Lord Wrottesley, took the opportunity to urge 'those who were blessed with a good voice to use it in that Hall for the benefit of those who were not often brought under the ameliorative influences of music (...) his hope being that there would often be concerts there, at a cheap rate, for the benefit of the masses.'

The agenda of the Board is laid out in explicit terms: to provide cheap, regular concerts to the public, to draw the masses away from detrimental leisure pursuits and ensure social stability, and most of all, to exert an unambiguous moral influence on working-class men and their families. Williams' remarks about weekly entertainments being provided 'at a low cost' highlights an important point regarding the concert plans. By charging entrance, the Board makes clear that its intentions were not for the concerts to be provided as a type of straightforward charity. Although there was an implicit subsidy in the fact that any organ concerts given in the Town Hall would be using a venue and an instrument built at the expense of Brogden and the ratepayers, it was hoped that any concert series would be at least partially self-funding. This also illustrates some nuance in the views of the Board regarding their intended audience, showing that they did not see them as being totally without agency.

Rather than being completely passive recipients of the concerts' improving influence, the audience would have to make an active choice to attend and pay admission, even if it was only a few pennies. Who the recitals were to be aimed at is less clear, as it so often is. The terms used during the opening of the Hall and the organ are somewhat vague, making repeated allusions to 'the masses' without mentioning specific groups. Williams' position as a manager of the Patent Shaft could reasonably mean that he was aiming for workers at the local tube works, and the low cost of admission would support this, but the lack of more definite detail means the intended audience in these early ideas for the organ could also include elements of the lower middle classes.

What then became of the many hopes and promises laid out throughout the opening celebration, once the initial excitement had settled? The week after the opening, at a meeting of the Local Board, Williams again brought up the notion of a public recital series, suggesting that 'as the hall would probably be in their hands this week, an endeavour should be made to arrange for a people's concert on Monday or the week after at 1s. and 6d. each. As they got into working order cheaper concerts might be arranged, but they would have to be arranged by a private committee, as in their capacity as a Local Board they had no power'.⁵⁵

It is not clear whether this proposed concert took place or not, but Williams' comment about the powers of the Local Board does highlight an interesting aspect of the management of the new Hall, as it implies that any regular musical activity would have to be organised by a separate committee. This was due not to a specific ban on local boards organising musical

⁵⁵ *Wednesbury Times*, 6 July 1872.

events or entertainment, but rather a lack of legislation permitting the boards to do so, following the 'ultra vires' principle under which local government worked.

Regardless, an official organist was appointed the same year; a man by the name of Thomas Frederick Bissell, though the exact date of his appointment is not clear. Bissell was clearly a local musician of some note: he would hold the position at the Town Hall along with the position of organist of Wednesbury Parish Church from 1872 to 1910.⁵⁶ Besides this, he was also the conductor of the Wednesbury Choral Association for some years, gave private music lessons,⁵⁷ and is listed as 'Musical Director' in a programme for an event at the Higher Grade School in 1885, although the latter may have been a temporary position.⁵⁸ Not much is known about Bissell's life outside his work at Wednesbury Town Hall, either before his appointment in 1872 or after his leaving in 1910. He is not listed in Brown and Stratton's *British Musical Biography*, nor mentioned in other musical journals, which would indicate that he was not a notable national musical personality. However, a few details can be gleaned from the sources available. Firstly, he appears to have been a coal merchant by trade before his appointment in Wednesbury, operating a business with his brother, George Simeon Bissell, under the name 'Bissell Brothers,' with its offices in Birmingham.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁶ F. W. Thornsby, *Dictionary of Organs and Organists* (Bournemouth: H. Logan & Company, 1912), p. 249

⁵⁷ *Walsall Observer, and South Staffordshire Chronicle*, 20 July 1878. 'Mr. Thomas F. Bissell (...) begs to announce that he attends Walsall, Cannock, and the neighbourhood weekly for the purpose of giving Lessons in Music, Instrumental and Vocal. For terms, address 41, Church Hill, Wednesbury.'

⁵⁸ Concert programme, 'Sixth Annual Exhibition and Entertainment of the Pupils of The Higher Grade School', Wednesbury Town Hall, 3 February 1885.

⁵⁹ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 5 December 1853.

company only appears in a few adverts in Birmingham newspapers, before suffering bankruptcy in the early 1870s.⁶⁰

Secondly, he seems to have been an amateur poet, having self-published a single volume called *Original Poems* (fig. 22) in 1871, containing twelve poems of varying lengths and forms. While these do not reveal any details of his work, either as a Town Hall organist or a coal merchant, they do give us a small, but useful glimpse into his class, education, views and character. Forming a picture of Bissell's personality and values, even if vague, is worthwhile, as the success of the civic organ ventures often depended to a large degree on the personality, initiative and moral convictions of the civic organist, as well as a good rapport with the local musical community. Comparing the themes of these poems with the lyrics of contemporary, respectable drawing-room songs can be helpful, in placing them within a context of middle-class taste and thought.

According to Derek B. Scott, the themes of drawing-room songs were often, but not necessarily, sacred in nature, and included 'songs that take children as a theme, perhaps celebrating the love of parents for children, or touching on infant death, (...) songs that deal with friendship, with pride in one's country, and with courage'.⁶¹ Love songs were rare, though Scott claims that 'songs about deceased loved ones are an exception, because the focus is on sadness rather than romantic passion'.⁶²

⁶⁰ *The London Gazette*, 8 November 1870, p. 4802. Notices naming the brothers in court proceedings over unpaid debts appear in the *Gazette* in 1872 and 1879, showing that the business was in some difficulty, although the date of a final winding up is not clear.

⁶¹ Scott, 'Music, Morality and Rational Amusement at the Victorian Middle-Class Soirée', p. 84.

⁶² Scott, 'Music, Morality and Rational Amusement at the Victorian Middle-Class Soirée', p. 91.

Original Poems.

BY

THOMAS F. BISSELL.



WEDNESBURY:
PRINTED FOR AND PUBLISHED BY A. W. WHITEHOUSE,
MARKET PLACE.

Figure 22 Title page for 'Original Poems' by Thomas F. Bissell (1871)⁶³

⁶³ Thomas F. Bissell, *Original Poems* (Wednesbury: A. W. Whitehouse, 1871)

The subject matter of Bissell's collection adheres closely to these themes, containing for the most part tributes to British nature, as well as poems about love, though these follow the exceptions laid out by Scott, dealing with matrimony, love between parents and children, and lost love. These themes, along with a poem about the royal family, go some way to outline Bissell's typical bourgeois sensibilities, placing them in the general realm of 'improving' leisure and art, and are common in amateur poetry of the time. *Original Poems* also provides us with some insight into Bissell's connections in Wednesbury and beyond, shortly before he was appointed organist of the Town Hall. The volume was funded by subscription and includes a list of subscribers who had contributed towards the printing of the book. This list contains many notable Wednesbury citizens, including Richard Williams, which demonstrate that Bissell had connections in the upper parts of Wednesbury society and the local authorities before his appointment.

As the Town Hall organist, Bissell's duties are unclear, as is whether he was paid for his services or not. Besides conducting and providing occasional accompaniment for the Choral Association for some years, he does not appear to have performed many of the musical duties or tasks that we usually see in borough organists, such as organising events in the Town Hall, providing accompaniment for local musical societies and bands, or functioning as a form of custodian for the organ. It is equally difficult to ascertain if any immediate measures were taken to organise a series of affordable organ recitals, as had been suggested both before and during the opening of the Town Hall.

Although the first 'popular concert' took place as early as 13 August 1872, Bissell does not seem to have been involved. Instead, the concert was advertised with 'Mr. Simms, of

Stourbridge' at the organ.⁶⁴ It is not clear, however, what was meant by 'popular' in this context, nor who the intended audience was.

There is some proof that a series of organ recitals was organised not much later. In an advertisement in the *Midland Advertiser* in February 1873, a concert with Bissell was announced for 19 March the same year and described as the 'second and last concert during the present season in the Town Hall, Wednesbury'. It is not specified when the previous concert was, though it is almost certain to have been the same year, if the season only included two recitals. The concert was of a fairly large scale; Bissell presided at the organ and the piano, and also directed a choir 'of about thirty trained voices', and four singers: Edith Wynne, 'Madame Poole, of the London and Oxford Concerts', Joseph Lander and Selwyn Graham, 'The new Tenor of the London Concerts'. The grand titles given to the soloists may have been exaggerated for the sake of publicity, but they do suggest that there was a level of ambition behind the concert, which had been sustained since the opening of the hall and the organ.

Edith Wynne, known as 'The Nightingale of Wales', would have been a familiar name, as she had performed extensively in the provinces since the early 1860s, sung at the Crystal Palace and even toured the United States.⁶⁵ She appears in several concerts across the case studies in this thesis. The advertisement also describes the programme as being split into a sacred half and a secular half, including what appears to have been one of Bissell's own compositions: 'The first part of the Programme will consist of Sacred Music, and will include

⁶⁴ *BDP*, 13 August 1872, p. 8

⁶⁵ Brown and Stratton, *British Musical Biography*, p. 461.

Mendelssohn's "Hear my prayer," Gounod's "Nazareth," Bissell's "Behold the Western," and "There is a land," &c. The second part will be of a Secular nature.'⁶⁶

The prices for the concert are higher than one would expect from for a concert of the 'popular' type, as the cheapest seats ('Back') are listed at 1s, and so it is unlikely that the concert was aimed at the working classes, which is further supported by the scale of the performances and the relative fame of the singers.

6.4: Attempts at civic recitals

It is not until April 1873 that there is traced evidence of the Board making good on its plans for public concerts aimed at a socially diverse audience, when another advertisement in *The Midland Advertiser* finally mentions a 'cheap concert' series. The advertisement has a note of uncertainty in it, announcing only that 'it is contemplated to give a series of cheap weekly concerts in the Town Hall, commencing either on Saturday, May 10th, or Monday, May 12th and inviting local amateurs 'willing to assist at these entertainments' to contact Bissell.⁶⁷

In the end, the cheap concerts did not occur until the end of May, with no reason given for the delay, although it may have been due to issues of recruiting volunteers. The Local Board's delay in organising any improving recitals in the Town Hall was discussed in a local paper, which reported the following:

The Board of Health contemplated, throughout the winter, we believe, a series of popular concerts at low prices. For some reason or other, the arrangements have

⁶⁶ *The Midland Advertiser*, 22 February 1873.

⁶⁷ *The Midland Advertiser*, 26 April 1873.

been delayed until the approach of summer and until the public of Wednesbury had been treated by private persons to a sufficient number of concerts for one season. This circumstance will probably account for the paucity of the attendance at the first “popular concert” given in the Town Hall under the auspices of the Board of Health last Monday.⁶⁸

As we see here, the local press hypothesised whether the delayed action of the Local Board could be the reason for a lack of attendance, as the months that had passed between their initial promises and the first cheap concert could have given private entrepreneurs and organisers time to saturate what market existed in Wednesbury. By late May, the warmer weather and lighter evenings may also have led to people preferring to spend their leisure time outside.

This concert, held on 26 May, almost a year after the opening of the Town Hall and the organ, was Wednesbury’s very first ‘cheap concert’. The performers were members of the Birmingham Glee Union, as well as ‘The Crown Tube Works & 34th Staffordshire R. V. Band’ and Bissell on the organ. The following advert, including a programme for the entire recitals, was published the week before in the *Midland Advertiser*:

Under the sanction and patronage of R. Williams, Esq., and the Members of the Local Board of Health. A cheap popular concert will be given on Monday next (...)

PROGRAMME.

Part I.

⁶⁸ *The Midland Advertiser*, 31 May 1873.

Selection – “La Belle Helene.” (*Offenbach*) – THE BAND

Part Song – “The Recruit.” – Kutchens

Song – “My sweetheart when a boy.” – Morgan

Glee – “By Celia’s Arbour.” – Horsley

Song – “The Roamer.” – Mendelssohn

Glee – “The Watchman.” – Holden

March – “Silver Trumpets.” (*Viriani*) – BAND.

Part II.

Selection – “Un Ballo in Maschera.” (*Verdi*) – BAND.

Part Song – “Banish, O Maiden.” – Lorrenz [sic]

Song – “O will thou be my bride?” – Romer

Solo Organ – Triumphant March from “Naaman.” (by desire) – Costa. Mr. T. F. Bissell

Humorous Serenade – “Maiden fair.” – Hady[..]

Song – “Once again.” – Sullivan

Glee – “Sleep, gentle lady.” – Bishop⁶⁹

This concert is much more in line with what one would expect of a civic concert aimed at the working class, with the cheapest tickets priced at 6d., and a mixed programme of songs and

⁶⁹ MA, 24 May 1873.

instrumental pieces. This type of miscellaneous repertoire, consisting largely of respectable English songs and operatic selections, is not far from what one might find at a middle-class promenade concert or other performance, but with an emphasis on the lighter parts of the middle-class repertoire, eschewing the most serious parts of classical music for light songs and the odd humorous number, in order to appeal to a perceived working-class taste.

Through the framework of the 'cheap concert', the lighter popular repertoire broadens and takes on a more 'educational' character. This programme also includes a single solo organ piece, the Triumphant March from Costa's oratorio *Naaman*, which has the additional notice of being played 'by desire'. It is not clear whether this indicates the choice of the piece, or if the inclusion of an organ piece was by request (implying that the organ was not usually featured as a solo instrument in these concerts), but it does show a level of interaction between the audience and the organisers which often appears absent in the Wednesbury concerts. It is also interesting that a piece by Costa, whose main fame was as a London-based conductor, was included in a concert in the Black Country, though the oratorio in question was written for the Birmingham Triennial Music Festival in 1864, and so it is possible that Bissell had become familiar with the piece through the Festival. As reported, the concert was well received by the local press, although they bemoaned the lack of attendance.

Due to a lack of sources, it is not clear whether this cheap concert held in May 1873 did become the first of a weekly series, as the initial announcement had suggested, or whether it was a stand-alone event. In 1875, an October edition of the *Wednesbury Herald* included a review of what was described as one of Bissell's 'annual concerts', which could possibly be

what became of the Cheap Concerts, reduced in scope, or it could be an attempt by Bissell to establish a new series, following the mixed outcome of the 1873 Cheap Concert.

But whether it was a continuation or a new effort, this 1875 concert sadly does not seem to have been a great success, with the *Herald* journalist mentioning that ‘the attendance on the floor was meagre’. The intended audience for this concert is not specified, but the language implies that working-class attendance was to some extent expected, and as those on the floor were the cheapest tickets available at most events in the Hall, this expectation was not fulfilled. The journalist goes on to express disbelief at this, speculating whether the reason for the lack of audience was ‘that the entertainment was of too high a class to suit the tastes of the general public.’⁷⁰

At this point in the history of Wednesbury Town Hall, the organisation of events in the hall becomes somewhat murky. The Local Board had made clear that they were not permitted to organise events beyond the initial opening concerts, and so while the management of the Hall itself came under a Town Hall Sub-Committee, the organisation of concerts and other events may have fallen to an independent committee or board, or Bissell may even have been left to organise organ recitals on his own. Bissell did make further attempts to establish concerts as the decade passed, but success seems to have eluded him. In August 1878, Bissell asked the Local Board for permission to use the Town Hall for free ‘for the purposes of a series of popular concerts at nominal prices’, which the Board allowed.⁷¹ This proposed series does not appear in any available sources after this date, so it is not clear what became of it, if anything. In 1881, the Local Board discussed the failure of another attempt by Bissell

⁷⁰ *WH*, 9 February 1875.

⁷¹ *BDP*, 20 August 1878, p. 8.

‘to make Mr. Brogden’s organ available for the entertainment of the masses’ with a series of organ recitals, which had only managed to attract a total of 305 listeners across fifteen Saturday evening concerts.⁷² While the details of this failed series are not available, the language used by the Board do provide some possible insight into the concerts. The report specifies that ‘only 305 persons having paid admission’ attended the series, which could imply either that the concerts were of the ‘cheap’ variety, where an admission charge was necessary but kept as low as possible, in order to accommodate the aforementioned ‘masses’; or it could imply that the concerts had a combination of free and paid admission, where a selection of the better seats could be obtained for a fee, which in effect paid for the free seats, thus enabling a larger section of society to attend while preserving a level of social segregation. One would assume with a recital series proposed ‘for the entertainment of the masses’, that the ambition was not to make a significant profit from the ticket sales, but rather to promote the organ as a rational alternative to other leisure pursuits. The description in the report does perhaps also imply that some of the failure of the series is attributed to the lack of profits, and gives the impression that the Local Board almost blames the failure on the audience for failing to attend the concerts, an attitude they would display again at a later stage in the history of the Town Hall organ.

Despite his lack of success thus far, Bissell was still re-appointed as Town Hall organist in 1884, ‘on the recommendation of the Town Hall Committee’.⁷³ In an 1886 report from a meeting of the Local Board, another series is mentioned, though this too was a failure, as the

⁷² BDP, 29 March 1881, p. 4.

⁷³ BDP, 20 May 1884.

Chairman 'lamented that Mr. Bissell's renewed attempt to attract a popular audience, or indeed any audience, by recitals on the Town Hall organ, had failed for want of support.'⁷⁴

This would seem a pretty crushing verdict for the organ and the organist, more than a decade after the opening of the Town Hall, and indicates one of the central issues in the case of Wednesbury Town Hall, which is what appears to have been a considerable disconnect between the concert organisers and their target audience, and Bissell's failure to connect with the same audience, be it through his association with the Local Board, personal shortcomings or a lack of interest from the target audience. This is even more glaring given how explicit the Board's intentions for the Hall and the organ had been at the time of the opening, by far the most aggressive of all the case studies included in this thesis. After repeated attempts at establishing the concerts they had described at the presentation of the organ, one cannot help but think that the overbearing, parochial views of the Board did not resonate well with the intended working-class recipients, who displayed an almost complete lack of interest in the concerts.

Another element which may have contributed to the lack of success is the extent of competing attractions, which had been able to establish themselves before the organisers behind the Hall had time to put together their own arrangements. Plenty of other events were organised in the Town Hall almost from the start, many of which included the organ. A concert series by the name 'Mr. Smith's Concert' appears in the local papers in the early 1870s, presumably named after the organiser, with a Dr. Belcher at the organ. An 1874 advertisement describes it as an 'annual concert', which would imply that the first took place in 1873 at the latest, and possibly beginning in the year of the opening of the hall and organ.

⁷⁴ BDP, 9 March 1886, p. 7

The 1874 programme was of a recognisable miscellaneous character, featuring four organ solos, ranging from a Bach prelude and fugue to some 'Operatic Reminiscences'.⁷⁵ There is no mention of audience numbers following the concerts, but one would assume that it attracted a sufficient audience if it had become a recurring event.

Although this particular series seems to have been aimed at an affluent audience, there is clear evidence that the labouring population of Wednesbury patronised the hall. One such example is a charitable benefit concert described in an 1886 entry in the *Diary of a Wednesbury Inhabitant*, whose author was a young, unmarried middle-class man:

To Concert at Town Hall at 8.0 pm. Damp, foggy night, malodorous – benefit of widow & children of young man died of consumption [...] essentially a working man's concert the howl of the babies at times interrupting the performers – counted six babies amongst eight women sitting together that being typical of the floor of the Hall – some, of the mothers appearing about 17 and giving the infants the breast with unblushing effrontery, undismayed by, or perhaps careless of the many faces gathered around (...) ⁷⁶

This excerpt suggests that there were concerts organised in the Town Hall which were aimed at, or at least perceived to be aimed at, particular demographics, as the diarist describes the above event as 'a working man's concert'. This means that the Bissell concerts did not fail due to the working classes avoiding the Town Hall altogether. It also demonstrates that the various classes of Wednesbury mingled to some degree, as they would have done by

⁷⁵ *MET*, 17 October 1874.

⁷⁶ *Diary of a Wednesbury Inhabitant, 1884-1887*. Diary. M49/I, Monday 25 January 1886, Sandwell Community Archive.

necessity due to a lack of other large concert venues in the town. If we are to take the opinion of the anonymous diarist as representative of the general middle-class inhabitant, there may also have been some less-than-welcoming attitudes among middle-class concertgoers towards the lower classes and their behaviour, which could have played a part in the lack of success of moral ventures such as the civic organ recitals, in which the working classes would likely have been expected to adhere to middle-class concert etiquette.

Despite the bombastic tone of the Local Board around the construction of the Town Hall and the Brogden instrument, the elevating organ recitals they had imagined may never have materialised as expected. The organ was used in a wide array of events, and we have proof that Bissell made at least two attempts to establish what appears to have been series of improving organ recitals, but these met with a stark lack of interest from the locals. Despite these failures, morality and public entertainment remained a high priority for the Local Board, though after a persistent lack of success in establishing organ recitals for the working classes, it appears that their focus shifted to other types of rational recreation.

At a meeting of the Local Board of Health on 21 February 1880, the question of whether the Board ought to apply for a theatrical license for the Hall was raised, and inspired strong feelings among the members of the Board, as well as the other citizens present at the meeting. A group of representatives from various local nonconformist churches presented the Board with a memorial 'signed by 341 persons attending the Spring Head Chapel', claiming that a theatrical license would entice their children to neglect their Sunday school lessons, and demoralise local young people. Tensions quickly rose, to the point where a member of the Board, Dr. Blackwood, feeling particularly strongly about the matter,

threatened to resign if the Board went ahead with the application. In his opinion, 'the performance of stageplays had a tendency to cause a great deal of mischief (...) for it had been the cause of many a poor mother's head being blanched, and many a father's heart broke. Tills had been robbed by youths in order to enable them to go to the theatre, and sins of a numerous kind had been the result.'⁷⁷ He also argued that the application to perform plays in the Town Hall ought to be refused on the same grounds that the Board had previously refused applications to hold religious services in the Hall. The motion was passed, permitting theatrical plays to be performed in Wednesbury Town Hall, provided those wishing to put on the plays made the appropriate applications themselves. This incident might demonstrate the Board setting their sights on providing other types of amusement besides concerts, placing drama in a different bracket from music. The attitudes of the representatives from the Spring Head Chapel would have been considered quite old-fashioned by the standards of the 1880s, and may point to the relative strength of Wednesbury's nonconformist population compared to other towns, and the conservative nature of these congregations.

As the 1890s crept closer, there continued to be activity in the Hall, even if the series of improving organ recitals envisioned by Williams and the Local Board in 1872 had yet to materialise. Wednesbury Choral Society held concerts throughout the century, and in 1888, in an advert for a 'Grand Miscellaneous Concert' held in Walsall Temperance Hall, a tenor – Jos. Jevons – is described as being 'of the Wednesbury and West Bromwich Town Hall Concerts',⁷⁸ which would indicate that a series of recitals of some nature did exist, possibly

⁷⁷ *Wednesbury Herald*, 21 February 1880.

⁷⁸ *Walsall Advertiser*, 18 November 1888.

along the lines of 'Mr. Smith's Concert'. However, we do not know anything more about these recitals or their character, who was involved in them, or even if they featured the organ, and so they can hardly be counted as being part of the civic organ recital tradition. Little more is known of the organ activity in Wednesbury Town Hall around the turn of the century, owing mostly to few and patchy records, and by the 1960s, the organ would be gone from the Hall altogether.

Before discussing the technical details of the organ at Wednesbury Town Hall, I will discuss the history of the town hall and organ of West Bromwich.

6.5: West Bromwich - background and public buildings

West Bromwich was a town of similar size to Wednesbury, with a similar population at the beginning of the nineteenth century and in close geographical proximity, the towns being within ten miles of each other. West Bromwich had also experienced a growth similar to that of much of the Black Country during the Industrial Revolution, seeing its population balloon from 5,687 in 1801 to 47,918 in 1871.⁷⁹ Physically larger than Wednesbury, stretching over approximately 6,000 acres, West Bromwich enjoyed the same industrial spoils from the great Black Country seam, chiefly through trades such as mining and iron founding.⁸⁰ The town had industrialised early and rapidly. By 1801, only 245 of the 5,687 inhabitants of West Bromwich were employed in agriculture, and the number continued to drop throughout the nineteenth century.⁸¹ By mid-century, there were about 20 iron-founding firms in the town, ten blast-furnaces, and countless other related trades, employing thousands of people and ensuring that the town remained prosperous beyond the nineteenth century, even throughout the depression of the 1870s.⁸²

With this focus on heavy industries, it is unsurprising that West Bromwich had a large working-class population, nor that some of the more well-to-do citizens attempted to establish venues both for their general entertainment and for instruction and improvement, with a variety of projects undertaken throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed, as early as the late eighteenth century, there had been the beginnings of a public library, with books

⁷⁹ <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/STS/WestBromwich/#Census>

⁸⁰ William White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire* (Sheffield: 1851), p. 681.

⁸¹ A. P. Baggs et al., 'West Bromwich: Economic history,' in *A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 17, Offlow Hundred (Part)*, ed. M. W. Greenslade (London: Victoria County History, 1976), pp. 27-43. *British History Online*, accessed 7 April 2021, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol17/pp27-43>

⁸² A. P. Baggs et al. 'West Bromwich: Economic history', pp. 27-43.

kept at the Swann Inn, and in the 1820s and 1830s several smaller libraries and newsrooms were opened, though not all were public.⁸³ In 1836, the West Bromwich Literary Institution was established, which housed a library of over 1,300 books and a reading room, and would later on host lectures and classes.⁸⁴ However, while this Institute survived at least until the middle of the century, it did not secure steady support among the locals; with a year's subscription costing £1 plus a one-time 5s. entrance fee for new members, it appears to have been aimed at middle-income citizens and, even so, suffered several financial setbacks and crises.⁸⁵

The West Bromwich Association for Working Men was formed in 1856, 'with the strong support of industrialists and the gentry'. This provided concerts and lectures alongside social intercourse for local working men, while a 'working men's club and newsroom' was established in 1876, as well as a temperance coffee house in 1878.⁸⁶ In 1886, the West Bromwich Institute and School of Art was opened, offering lectures and classes 'upon the lines of the Midland Institute at Birmingham'. This included 'a good entrance hall, a lecture theatre capable of accommodating 600 persons, a reading room, a laboratory with the most modern appliances for the teaching of chemistry and metallurgy, and a commodious range of class rooms.'⁸⁷ Musical societies were also formed, chiefly around the middle of the century, the earliest known being a choral society in 1847, with more to follow in the 1860s and 1870s. In the 1850s a series of 'Concerts for the People' was established under the

⁸³ A. P. Baggs et al., 'West Bromwich: Social life,' in *A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 17, Offlow Hundred (Part)*, pp. 70-74.

⁸⁴ White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire*, p. 682.

⁸⁵ A. P. Baggs et al. 'West Bromwich: Education, *A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 17, Offlow Hundred (Part)*, pp. 74-83.

⁸⁶ A. P. Baggs et al. 'West Bromwich: Social life', pp. 27-43.

⁸⁷ *BDP*, 7 September 1887.

patronage of James Bagnall, an important employer in West Bromwich. This provided mostly amateur performances, many by local working people, and attracted large audiences. This demonstrates that many years before the opening of the Town Hall and the musical activity therein, West Bromwich had already begun to develop something of a culture, both for public music and rational recreation, support by a variety of local benefactors.

Dedicated musical venues took a little longer to appear than libraries and reading rooms. Concerts had been held in inns in the earliest parts of the nineteenth century and, in the 1850s, Charles Udall, a publican, attached a purpose-built music hall to his inn, designed for 'free-and-easies'; this was later improved and in 1869 licensed as an official Music Hall, eventually becoming the Theatre Royal. What would be West Bromwich's first true public hall, St. George's Hall, was established in 1859 by Samuel Adams, a local music dealer. This hall was housed in a re-modelled Wesleyan chapel and provided 'a much-needed room for concerts, lectures and meetings.'⁸⁸ Although it would be replaced as the town's main meeting-place by the opening of the Town Hall in 1875, St. George's Hall still remained in some use, mostly for entertainments, until 1891. Other public amusements included several public houses, and a popular wake, though attempts were made by the local government to suppress the latter in the 1870s, perhaps influenced by similar efforts in Wednesbury.

It is worth emphasising how quickly performance spaces appeared in West Bromwich, springing up in the space of a few decades, compared to Wednesbury, where there seems to have been a stark lack of public performance spaces before the construction of the Town Hall. While the exact reasons for this discrepancy are bound to be nebulous at best, it may suggest that different cultures were embedded in the two towns, in terms of public

⁸⁸ A. P. Baggs et al. 'West Bromwich: Social life', pp. 27-43.

entertainment, philanthropy, class communication, and the involvement of the local authorities.

Still, amid the bustling activity, there remained a real need for a proper, public Town Hall in West Bromwich, to serve the various civic needs of the town. This was to be a task for the local authorities, which in West Bromwich took the form of the West Bromwich Improvement Commissioners. This body had been set up in 1854, after the town had outgrown the old vestry form of local government, and consisted of sixteen improvement commissioners, of whom thirteen were elected members and three were magistrates.⁸⁹ The Commissioners functioned as a precursor to the later Boards of Health, with many of the same powers, dealing mainly with sanitation and raising the necessary funds through the local rates.

The Improvement Commissioners had great ambitions for the town, which reached a peak in the early 1870s, when a plan to erect a series of public buildings was devised, in part because they were sorely needed in the town, but perhaps also as an expression of civic pride, in order to show that the rapidly growing borough was not to be overshadowed by Birmingham in these matters. It is also possible that the Commissioners wished to present a thoroughly modern image of West Bromwich, in the hopes of having it made a county borough.

These public buildings would appear to have been something the Improvement Commissioners had been considering for some time, as the land on which most of them were built was purchased in 1867 specifically 'for the erection of a complex of public

⁸⁹ A. P. Baggs et al. 'West Bromwich: Local government', *A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 17, Offlow Hundred (Part)*, pp. 43-46.

buildings including a town hall designed to provide accommodation for the civic business of the town, to enhance the prestige of its dignitaries and also to improve the social life of the town's population in general.'⁹⁰

In 1871 an ambitious architectural competition was launched by the Commissioners for the design of several proposed public buildings: public baths, a market hall, a free library, and a town hall with public offices. The competition drew 29 anonymous entries from all around the country and, after bringing in Ewan Christian, architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners,⁹¹ as an outside consultant, the Board of Commissioners was ready to announce its winners. The design for the Market Hall and the Free Library was won by Wellers and Proud of Wolverhampton, the design for the Baths was won by a local West Bromwich architect, Edward Pincher, while the winning Town Hall design was by Alexander and Henman of Stockton-on-Tees.⁹² The construction work for the whole public complex (*fig. 23*) seems to have been performed by one Wednesbury firm, Trow & Son and Co,⁹³ and is alleged to have cost a total of between £40,000 and £50,000, to be raised through the rates.⁹⁴

By 1874, the buildings were entering the final stages of construction. The first to open was the Market Hall, an indoor market building with an outdoor cattle market behind. This was the least successful of the public buildings, failing more or less instantly, in part because the

⁹⁰ Anne Wilkins, *West Bromwich Town Hall* (West Bromwich: West Bromwich Library User Group, 2003), p. 1

⁹¹ Martin Cherry, 'Christian, Ewan (1814-1896), architect.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, accessed 8 April 2021, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-62459> Ewan is today probably most well-known as the architect behind the National Portrait Gallery.

⁹² *Building News and Engineering Journal* 20, 23 June 1871, p. 496.

⁹³ Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, *West Bromwich Town Hall Complex & Planning Development Brief* (Sandwell: SMBC, 2005), p. 31.

⁹⁴ *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 20 August 1875.

people of West Bromwich and beyond simply seemed to prefer the old open-air market. By the end of the century, the Market Hall was discontinued and demolished.⁹⁵

The next to be completed was the Free Library, which opened bit by bit, beginning with the newsroom in September 1874. On 15 February 1875, the 'lending and reference departments' of the library were opened, with the main reading-room having been introduced at some point before this. The library seems to have been a much greater success than the Market Hall, housing a total of 9,754 books in the lending department and 1,644 books in the referencing department in 1875. Shortly after the general opening, the press bragged of the success the Free Library had already experienced, with the reading-room seeing 'an average attendance of about 250 readers per day' and with 1,200 lending applications already submitted.⁹⁶

The Public Baths were opened on 31 June 1875, only ten days before the Town Hall.⁹⁷ The movement to have these built started in earnest in 1870, with the aim of improving public health and sanitation; a comment in the *Birmingham Daily Post* of that year claimed that 'the absence of such an institution in a populous town like West Bromwich is little less than a public disgrace.'⁹⁸ Finally, the Town Hall (*fig. 24*) was formally opened on 10 August 1875, as the last in the line of the new public buildings.

⁹⁵ A. P. Baggs et al., 'West Bromwich: Economic history', pp. 27-43.

⁹⁶ *MET*, 20 February 1875.

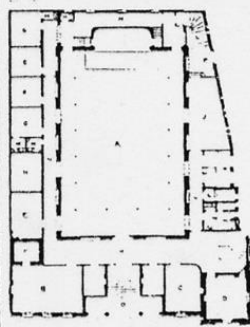
⁹⁷ *BDP*, 11 August 1875, p. 8.

⁹⁸ *BDP*, 4 July 1870.



Figure 23 Map of the public buildings in West Bromwich, including Market Hall, Public Baths, Free Library and Town Hall (1892-1914)⁹⁹

⁹⁹ National Library of Scotland, OS 25 Inch, 1892-1914, accessed 16 May 2021, <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/side-by-side/#zoom=17&lat=52.52109&lon=-1.99825&layers=168&right=ESRIWorld>



NEW TOWN HALL FOR WEST BROMWICH

THE SELECTED DESIGN

BY MESSRS ALEXANDER AND HENMAN

REFERENCE TO THE PLANS

GROUND FLOOR PLAN
A TOWN HALL
B SURVEYOR'S OFFICE
C INSPECTOR OF NUISANCES
D SIB CLERKS OFFICE
E RATE COLLECTOR
F MOVEMENT ROOM
G RETIRING ROOMS
H OPEN AREA
J WAITING ROOM
K CORRIDOR
L STAIRS TO GALLERIES
M LAVATORIES WC & ETC

N PASSAGES
O PRINCIPAL ENTRANCE
P ENTRANCES TO HALL
PLAN OF OVERPAIR FLOOR
Q UPPER PART OF HALL
R BOARD ROOM
S CLERKS OFFICE
T COMMITTEE ROOM
U SPARE ROOM V CORRIDOR
W RETIRING ROOM
X LAVATORY WC & ETC.
Y PASSAGE TO GALLERIES
Z CLOAK ROOM

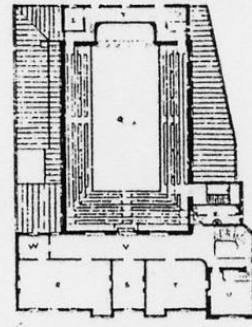


Photo-lithographed by Whitman & Burt London.

Figure 24 West Bromwich Town Hall, printed in *The Building News* (1871)¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ *The Building News*, 27 October 1871, p. 306.

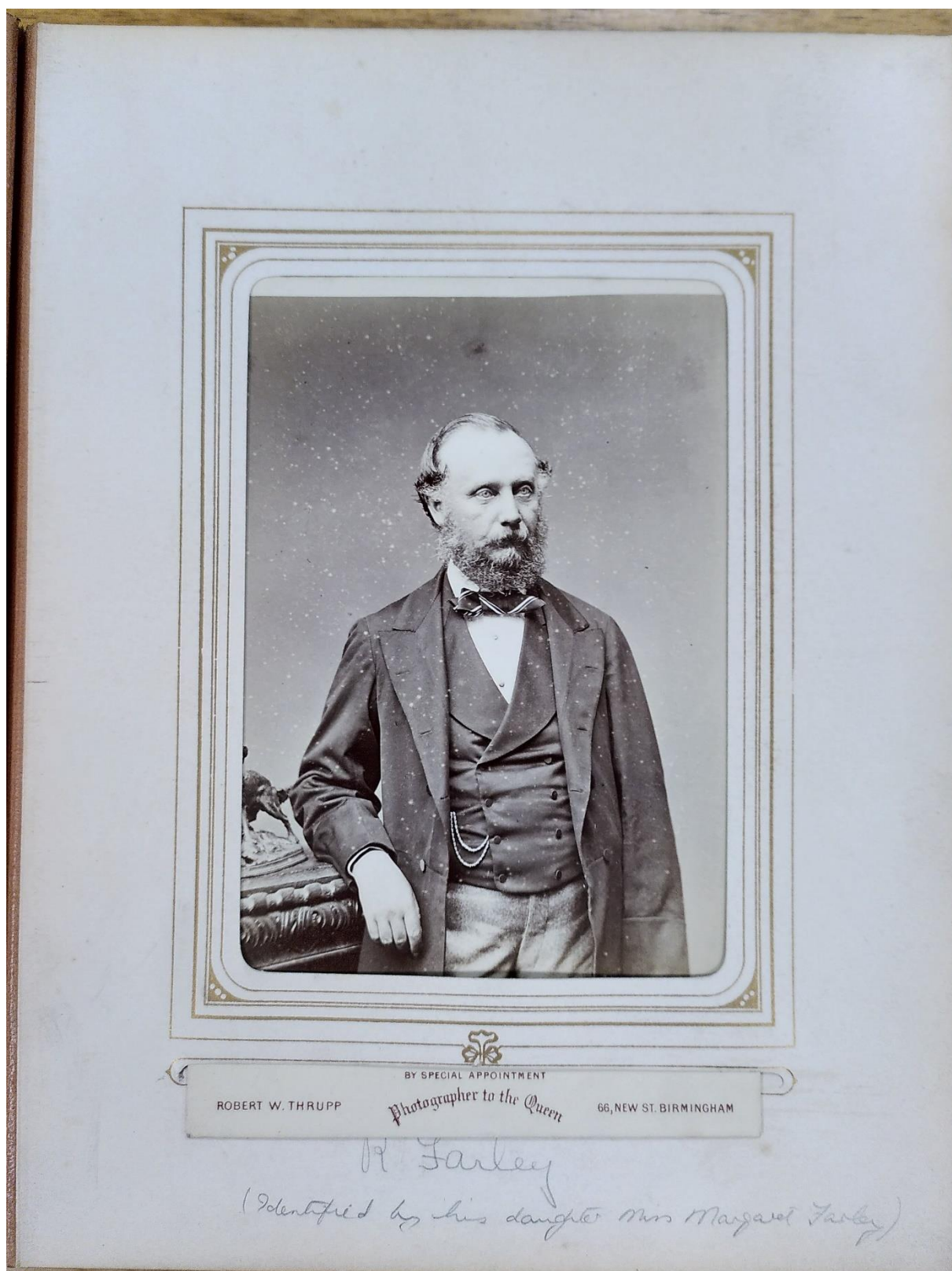


Figure 25 Portrait photograph of Reuben Farley, from a collection presented to him at the opening of Dartmouth Park in 1878¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Photograph of Reuben Farley, 1878, M 118/1, Sandwell Community History and Archives Service.

As in Wednesbury, the Hall met with some degree of opposition from members of the public who did not approve of the Commissioners spending public money on such projects, and this opposition was taken into consideration when planning the Hall: Trow, the contractor for the Hall, explained that 'As the cost of the building is limited it has been necessary to use materials of an inexpensive description to keep the design as simple as is compatible with a certain character in a Public Building.'¹⁰² Trow's remarks about the limited budget for the building may have been a bit of window-dressing, as the press praised both the external and internal decorations, citing in particular the tower positioned at one corner of the building as an eye-catching feature, and an ornament to the town.

The grand occasion was celebrated with a dinner, organised and presided over by Reuben Farley (*fig. 25*), the chairman of the Commissioners since 1872 and an important figure in the cultural and political life of West Bromwich, eventually becoming Mayor of West Bromwich a total of five times.¹⁰³ Besides Farley and the other members of the Improvement Commissioners, a selection of dignitaries were present among the guests, including the Earl of Dartmouth¹⁰⁴ and the architects behind the Hall, and several names we may recognise from the opening of Wednesbury Town Hall, such as Lord Wrottesley, A. Bass, M.P., and most importantly, Alexander Brogden., M.P. for Wednesbury, 'in which West Bromwich was then comprehended', having been transferred to Wednesbury parliamentary borough after

¹⁰² Wilkins, *West Bromwich Town Hall*, p. 2.

¹⁰³ 'Reuben Farley', *West Bromwich Local History Society*, West Bromwich Local History Society, accessed 10 April 2021, <https://www.westbromwichhistory.com/people-places/reuben-farley/> Among his achievements, Farley personally donated land to the town for a public park, as well as a sixteenth century timber house which would be turned into a museum, and took an active role in various local societies. In 1896, he would become the town's first freeman.

¹⁰⁴ William Walter, the 5th Earl of Dartmouth, was a Conservative politician connected to West Bromwich through his role as deputy lieutenant of Staffordshire and local landowner. He would later provide the land for West Bromwich's first public park, opened in 1878 and aptly named Dartmouth Park.

the 1867 Reform Act.¹⁰⁵ Incidentally, Lord Dartmouth was mentioned in Slaney's 1840 'Plea to Power and Parliament', with reference made to some 'benevolent efforts' he had made around West Bromwich 'to provide *regulated* amusements for the working classes' and that these efforts, the nature or timing of which are not specified, were both successful and well received.¹⁰⁶

Curiously, as had been the case at the opening of Wednesbury Town Hall, the guests at the opening of West Bromwich Town Hall were segregated by gender, with the women seated in the gallery. Again, as in Wednesbury, no explanation is given for this set-up, leading one to wonder whether this was a peculiar local tradition, a reflection of local political and moral attitudes, linked to local Nonconformist practices, or simply a practical solution to limited space.

During the dinner, as was custom, a variety of speeches and toasts were made, with music supplied by a local band. Farley spoke at length about the work of the Improvement Commissioners in improving the sanitation and public facilities in West Bromwich, highlighting the state of the parish before the Commissioners' work where 'in 1850, before the passing of the West Bromwich Improvement Act, there was not a single public gas-lamp in the whole length and breadth of the town, except along the turnpike road.' He also took the time to celebrate the success of the other public buildings, explaining that

There was a daily issue of 404 volumes from the lending library, and the reading-room was attended on the average by about 300 readers daily. Then they had the market hall, which was a handsome and commodious building. It had not been a

¹⁰⁵ Wilkins, *West Bromwich Town Hall*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁶ Slaney, *A Plea to Power and Parliament for the Working Classes*, p. 139.

success, but he ventured to think it would be. With reference to the baths which were opened ten days ago, he found that the average attendance of bathers had been 516 per day, and baths, therefore, in West Bromwich must be conducive to health and cleanliness. (...) With regard to that hall, there they might have concerts and lectures, whereby the tastes and culture of the inhabitants might become refined, elevated, and improved.¹⁰⁷

In his toast, the Vicar of West Bromwich, Rev. F. Willett, added an element of teetotalism in his praise for the Hall, telling the authorities to 'give them a parish fully drained, and afterwards a public park, in which their youth could indulge in healthful sports; and they would not only cause the present generation to thank them, but future generations would rise up before them blessed.'¹⁰⁸

Responding to the toast for the House of Commons, Brogden rose to spring the greatest surprise of the evening on the guests: that he was planning to donate an organ to the new hall, something that was almost becoming his signature. As reported in the *Birmingham Daily Post*,

[Brogden] recollected that not long since, in the neighbouring town of Wednesbury, a similar hall, though not so spacious, was opened, and he had the honour on that occasion of presenting an organ, which he hoped had contributed to the pleasure and advancement of the neighbourhood. He did not know whether they would consider him presumptuous on this occasion to allude to it, but he assured them, if it

¹⁰⁷ BDP, 11 August 1875.

¹⁰⁸ BDP, 11 August 1875.

would be consistent with their arrangements for him to offer, and them to accept, a similar musical gift for this locality, he should be most happy to make them the offer.

The Commissioners were quick to accept Brogden's generous offer, and preparations were made to have the organ built. Based on the descriptions given at the time of the purchase of the land on which the public buildings were constructed, the Hall was not intended primarily as a performance space. This description, outlining 'a town hall designed to provide accommodation for the civic business of the town', makes no specific mention of either music or other forms of performance, and although the final room did include an orchestra, it would seem that the hall was meant more as a meeting room and space for various civic events. Because the hall had not been designed with an organ in mind, alterations had to be made to the rear of the room to accommodate the unexpected gift before it could be presented to the public.¹⁰⁹

No records on the commissioning and building of the organ are currently available, but the case was designed by Alexander and Henman, the architects behind the Town Hall, suggesting a desire to integrate the organ into the hall and create a harmonious appearance, and the total cost of the instrument exceeded £1,200.¹¹⁰ Further details about the instrument will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

On 6 May 1878, the organ, which had been built by Forster & Andrews like the organ in Wednesbury Town Hall, was formally presented with a recital. The instrument was premiered by Roland Rogers, the organist of Bangor Cathedral, with vocal performances by Edith Wynne, Lawford Huxtable, Signor Fabrini (also known as Valentine Smith), and

¹⁰⁹ Wilkins, *West Bromwich Town Hall*, p. 36.

¹¹⁰ *BDP*, 7 May 1878.

Madame Patey, who was at this time the leading British contralto.¹¹¹ The level of soloists hired for the opening recital again conveys something about the ambition of the local authorities for the instrument, which seem to have been relatively high even though the organ had come as a surprise. Edith Wynne was a well-known name at provincial concerts, and Madame Patey even more so. Patey had toured internationally and sung at several of the larger English festivals, both alone and with her husband, the bass John Patey. In her entry in *British Musical Biography*, she is described as having sung ‘at all the important concerts in the United Kingdom’ and being ‘identified with the greatest compositions produced at the different festivals’.¹¹²

In the same year as the inauguration of the organ, 1878, a Town Hall organist was hired: William Hartland (*fig. 26*). Hartland’s father, Timothy Hartland, was the organist and choirmaster for 50 years of the Presbyterian Ebenezer Church in West Bromwich, where he was the first to adopt the Hullah sol-fa method of singing instruction, and also a composer of church music. William’s sister, Elizabeth Hartland, was similarly musically gifted as a pianist, composer and teacher, and was for some time the accompanist to the West Bromwich Choral Society.¹¹³ William himself was born in 1850 and began his musical career at an early age, primarily as a pianist. Initially, he studied under various local teachers, before moving to London to study under Franklin Taylor, who had himself studied in Leipzig and under Clara Schumann.¹¹⁴ He also studied the organ under Frederic Archer, who had succeeded Chipp at

¹¹¹ *Western Daily Press*, 10 May 1878.; R. D. Griffith, ‘Rogers, Roland (1847-1927), musician’, *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, 1959, accessed 14 April 2021, <https://biography.wales/article/s-ROGE-ROL-1847>

¹¹² Brown and Stratton, *British Musical Biography*, p. 312.

¹¹³ Brown and Stratton, *British Musical Biography*, p. 186.

¹¹⁴ Brown and Stratton, *British Musical Biography*, p. 405.

the London Panopticon.¹¹⁵ When Hartland returned from London, he took on work as organist at several local churches, but soon became an attractive teacher and gave up his church positions in order to devote himself to music teaching, eventually becoming Professor of Singing at the West Bromwich Institute. In 1875, he founded the West Bromwich Choral Society, which experienced great acclaim during its existence. This, combined with his various other musical projects and engagements would no doubt have contributed to his being hired as the Borough Organist. At its first concert in December 1875, and after barely three months of rehearsals, the Society already had around 120 members.¹¹⁶ Much of this success seems to have been due to Hartland's own efforts, as when he retired as the Society's conductor after 30 years of service, it was proposed that the Society wind up completely, though it eventually agreed to amalgamate with the West Bromwich Orchestral Society.¹¹⁷ Soon after establishing the Choral Society in 1875, Hartland launched a series of Saturday Evening Popular Concerts, presumably featuring the members of the Society, though not much more is known about this series.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Brown and Stratton, *British Musical Biography*, p. 12.

¹¹⁶ *MW* 53, iss. 52 (25 December 1875), p. 873.

¹¹⁷ *The Musical Herald*, iss. 691 (1 October 1905), p. 301.

¹¹⁸ *MW* 53, iss. 42 (16 October 1875), p. 695.



Figure 26 Portrait photograph of William Hartland, from a collection presented to Reuben Farley at the opening of Dartmouth Park in 1878¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Photograph of William Hartland, 1878, M 118/1, Sandwell Community History and Archives Service.

6.6: West Bromwich organ recitals

There is some evidence that Hartland began holding regular organ recitals in West Bromwich Town Hall almost immediately after the presentation of the organ in 1878, although it is difficult to ascertain how regular these were, exactly when they started or for how long they continued. The *Musical Standard* reported in 1879 that William Hartland held his 'second organ recital' in the Hall on October 13, with the programme given as

Fugue, G minor – Bach

Allegretto – Guilmant

March, Molique's "Abraham" – Arranged by W. T. Best

Andante Grazioso – H. Smart

Offertoire, B minor – Batiste

Entracte (« La Colombe ») – Gounod

Minuetto – Silas

Grand choeur – Guilmant

English Airs.¹²⁰

There are many interesting aspects to this programme. The inclusion of the Bach fugue implies that Hartland had a level of pedal technique which was not commonly found among organists at the time, though perhaps not surprising considering his educational background. Furthermore, it suggests that he may have had a special interest in serious classical organ

¹²⁰ *Musical Standard* 17, Iss. 794 (18 October 1879), p. 242.

music, as the Novello edition of the G minor fugue would not be available until the 1880s. It also presents an interesting mix of composers for the time, with the greatest emphasis on French composers (Guilmant, Gounod, Batiste) and the rest from Germany (Bach, Molique), the Netherlands (Silas) and England (Smart, Best, both of whom were organists). No composer is given for the 'English Airs', so this may have been an improvisation over some traditional themes, which would give Hartland another degree of virtuosity. The music is also overwhelmingly contemporary, the majority of the composers represented in the programme being either alive at the time of the concert or having died only a few years before, which could imply that Hartland was keeping up with new publications and compositions, and may have had a musical network outside of West Bromwich, as well as reflecting the seriousness of his musical training.

It is difficult to say who the target audience for this organ recital was. There are no ticket prices listed, which could indicate if the concert was intended to attract working-class listeners or if it was meant as a pseudo-charitable venture; nor are there descriptions of the audience or records of any intentions Hartland may have had. However, the overtly serious character of mostly music composed for the organ, with only two transcriptions, would imply that the concerts were intended for a middle-class audience who had a particular interest in classical music.

Not much more is to be found about any organ recitals in West Bromwich Town Hall until the mid-1880s. In 1882, West Bromwich was granted a Charter of Incorporation and became a municipal borough. This meant the old board of Improvement Commissioners was disbanded, having achieved many of the goals they had set for themselves, as the municipal

borough status meant that the town could now elect a town council and their first mayor in Reuben Farley.

In October 1885, a concert took place in the Town Hall described as ‘the first of the eight series of Mr. William Hartland’s organ recitals’, although the organist for the concert was James Stimpson, as Hartland was ill.¹²¹ The tickets were priced at threepence, sixpence and a shilling,¹²² and in the report of the concert it was explicitly mentioned that ‘the floor, part of which was free to the working classes, was particularly well patronised.’ It is not made clear in the description whether this ‘first of the eighth series’ recital was a continuation of the concert series established in 1879, but it is possible that it was, although the ‘second’ recital in October 1879 had not been of a character expected from a public organ recital aimed at the working classes. If the 1879 recital can be assumed to have been part of the first series, this would correlate with the 1885 series being the eighth and would also correlate with another Town Hall organ recital, given in February 1888, which was ‘in connection with the tenth series of Mr. W. Hartland’s organ recitals’, though here again, Hartland himself did not play.¹²³

No programme is listed for this 1885 recital, and so it is impossible to say whether the repertoire was of a similar character to the 1879 recital, meaning that the intention was always to present an overtly classical programme to the working classes, or whether the organisers had modified the repertoire to attract a working-class audience.

Another series of organ recitals appeared in 1891, when the *Musical Times* reported that

¹²¹ *Wolverhampton Express and Star*, 13 October 1885.

¹²² *Wolverhampton Express and Star*, 10 October 1885.

¹²³ *Smethwick Telephone*, 18 February 1888.

Mr. William Hartland commenced a series of Organ Recitals in the Town Hall, West Bromwich, on Sunday afternoons. These things are innovations here, but that their tendency is good many unhesitatingly declare, and hope they may continue and develop into a systematic effort to brighten the leisure hours of those who toil.¹²⁴

The wording of this report is a little strange, since there is proof, if sporadic, of at least one other series of organ recitals being held in the Town Hall not too long before this, as we have just seen in the case of 'Mr. William Hartland's organ recitals'; it could on the other hand be a simple case of journalistic hyperbole. It is possible that these are a continuation of the earlier series, and that whoever wrote the report in the *Musical Times* was simply not aware of this, or it could be an indication of a new genre or character of recitals. In December 1891, the series is again mentioned in the same periodical:

Mr. Hartland resumed his Sunday Evening Free Organ Recitals at the Town Hall, West Bromwich, on the 15th ult. The success of these Recitals, given fortnightly, is something phenomenal, the hall being crowded long before the time of the performance, and hundreds of persons are unavoidably turned from the doors.¹²⁵

The success of this series, now known as the Sunday Evening Free Organ Recitals, would have been an astonishing feat in a place like West Bromwich if hundreds had to be turned away at the door, especially several years after civic organ concerts in the town had started, meaning that they were by no means a novelty at this point. The social intent and target audience is also clear in the way the *Musical Times* describes it, being 'a systematic effort to brighten the leisure hours of those who toil.' But here again, it is not clear whether this

¹²⁴ *MT* 32, no. 580 (1 June 1891), p. 346.

¹²⁵ *MT* 32, no. 586 (1 December 1891), p. 730.

series marks a continuation of the original series from the late 1870s, now with a new name and a fortnightly schedule, or if it represents a new attempt at establishing a series of civic organ recitals in West Bromwich, meaning the original series had been discontinued for some reason. It has not proved possible to locate any programmes for either the original series or the Sunday Evening Free Organ Recitals, beyond the 'second organ recital' on October 13, 1879.

When the land for the public buildings was purchased in 1867, the Local Board stated that the Town Hall was to be used 'to improve the social life of the town's population in general.' Despite a relatively late start in 1878, meaning that less of the organ's history falls within the period I am considering, West Bromwich Town Hall saw significant success shortly after the presentation of its organ. Hartland's civic organ recitals managed to successfully compete with a wide array of other amusements in the town, both of a rational and a less rational character, such as the Library, the Music Hall, several musical societies, many public houses, etc. To the extent that the improvement of the population's social life can be judged in terms of attendance and longevity, Hartland's efforts on the Town Hall organ do appear to have met the goals expressed by the Local Board.

The social ambitions of the civic organ series are plain, in the offering of free or modestly priced tickets and the way in which they are described in the contemporary press, and the working classes are explicitly mentioned as part of the audience, but they also appear less overtly moralistic than other series of civic organ recitals from the same time, which may have been a contributing factor in their success.

A better rapport between the organisers and the local working classes may also have helped the concerts achieve the success they did, just as the lack of rapport between the organisers and working classes contributed to the failure of the various Wednesbury concerts.

6.7: The Wednesbury and West Bromwich Organs

The organs of Wednesbury and West Bromwich Town Halls share many similarities, having been built by the same firm a few years apart, commissioned and paid for by the same person, and have similar dispositions. For these reasons, it is helpful to discuss them together in a separate section.

The organs in both Wednesbury and West Bromwich Town Halls were built by Forster & Andrews, one of the most important northern organ building firms of the time. It had been founded in 1843 in Hull, by James Alderson Forster and Joseph King Andrews, who had both been apprentices to the organ-builder Bishop.¹²⁶

A defining feature of Forster & Andrews' style was the influence they took from German organ-builders, and specifically Schulze. Prior to 1850, Forster & Andrews had primarily built smaller instruments and barrel organs, of a classical character. Possibly inspired by the instruments they had seen at the 1851 Great Exhibition, James Forster and Joseph Andrews undertook a tour of various Continental organ-building workshops in the early 1850s, bringing back influences from French, German, Swiss and Dutch builders at their return.¹²⁷

This influence, predominantly German, was further solidified after meeting Edmund Schulze, a fifth-generation German organ-builder who had gained popularity in England after exhibiting an organ at the 1851 Great Exhibition. Forster and Andrews had visited Schulze on several occasions while he was working on the organ of Doncaster Parish Church in 1862, and this relationship, along with the experiences from their European tour, would prove

¹²⁶ G. Oldham and N. Thistlethwaite, 'Forster & Andrews', *Grove Music Online*, 20 January 2001, accessed 15 March 2021.

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000010007>

¹²⁷ Laurence Elvin, *Forster and Andrews: Organ Builders, 1843-1956* (Lincoln: Laurence Elvin, 1968), p. 14.

elemental in the development of company's style and lead to their most productive period from the 1860s onward.

This German style was, as described by Nicholas Thistlethwaite, characterised by 'strong Pedal basses, powerful but not dull diapasons, big quint mixtures, small-scale flutes and quiet strings.'¹²⁸ Forster & Andrews were some of the first English organ-builders to follow the German style, which gave them a distinctive character, and various manufacturing and construction techniques they had witnessed on the continent allowed them to produce organs at an impressive rate, with up to thirty organs built per year.

It is not clear what led Brogden to choose Forster & Andrews in particular for his organ donations, or where he may have become familiar with them and their work. There is no evidence that points to Brogden having been particularly musical, beyond what one might expect of a Victorian man of his social class and background. Forster & Andrews were among the premier provincial organ-building firms of the time, and had previously built an organ for the Hill Top Methodist Chapel in West Bromwich, though this was in 1849, long before Brogden arrived in the borough, and it is not known if Brogden saw this organ before commissioning the Town Hall instrument.¹²⁹ German-style organs were particularly well-suited for supporting community singing, which may have played into the decision as civic halls were often used for concerts with choral unions and similar associations, but again, there is no proof to say whether Brogden made this decision by himself, if he received advice, or whether he simply picked a regional organ-builder with a good reputation.

¹²⁸ Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, p. 301.

¹²⁹ Elvin, *Forster and Andrews*, p. 12.

As one would expect similarities in instruments built by the same builder for similar purposes in the same decade, it may be useful to compare the West Bromwich and Wednesbury organs to another instrument built by Forster & Andrews in the 1870s, albeit for a somewhat different purpose. For this, we can look to the organ built for the Royal Normal College for the Blind and Music Academy in Norwood.

Between the three instruments, we can see a clear emerging character of an organ aimed at flexibility and variety, adapted for the repertoire of the time, which was increasingly orchestral, and betraying the influences on Forster & Andrews as builders. The organs do increase somewhat in size over the years, but not so much as one might expect. The clearest difference is probably the technical development seen in the 'accessories' (meaning playing aids, such as thumb pistons) found in West Bromwich and Royal Normal College, and the much expanded Choir organ, or rather the combined Solo and Echo organs, in the West Bromwich instrument, which together form a large and expressive solo organ, providing stops to be used for solo melodies or similar parts.

West Bromwich is listed as a typical scheme for their larger mid-Victorian organs in their entry in *Grove Music Online*, and on a first look the two organs are almost identical. They are of a similar size, and both have the C-compasses that were typical of Forster & Andrews organs after 1850, although the West Bromwich instrument (*table 6*) has a slightly shorter compass than that of the instrument in Wednesbury (*table 5*). The 61-note compasses were probably an influence from Cavaillé-Coll, as seen, for example, in his 1873 instrument for the Music Hall in Sheffield.¹³⁰ The specifications of the three organs are also very similar, especially the Great Organs, and the Swell organs are also relatively similar, with a few more

¹³⁰ 'The New Music Hall', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 13 December 1873, p. 3.

reeds present in West Bromwich. The Echo and Solo organs in West Bromwich are combined, and together make an organ similar to the Choir on the Wednesbury instrument, sharing several similar or identical stops. Here, the influence from Schulze is particularly evident, in the delicate flute and string stops. The major difference is in the size of the combined Echo and Solo organs on the West Bromwich organ, which includes many orchestral solo stops, showing a slightly more forward-looking character than the Wednesbury organ, allowing for a wide variety of solo organ works and transcriptions. The pedal stoplists are again almost identical, being very limited, with two 16' and one 8' foundation stops, plus a 16' Trombone as the pedal reed. The limited pedal organs are indicative of the general lack of virtuoso pedal technique among English organists, but also of the musical expectations and more limited budgets of smaller towns such as Wednesbury and West Bromwich.

Of the two, the West Bromwich organ appears to be the most 'orchestral' instrument, with its many orchestral and solo stops, as well as a wider variety of effects, most noteworthy the tremulant, *sforzando* pedal, and a 'pedal to take off whole of the solo organ' – this likely a pre-set pedal connected to the solo organ, either with all the solo ranks or just the reeds and solo stops, which could then be taken away with a simple push of the foot, to great dramatic effect. These will have allowed for quick changes and great flexibility in registration, especially for more orchestral organ works, though this character can also be seen in the Wednesbury instrument. It is also worth noting the many German stops, which is another characteristic of Forster & Andrews instruments.

The organ at the Royal Normal College (*table 7*), Forster & Andrews opus 728, was built in 1877 at a cost of £900, as part of a three-instrument contract.¹³¹ Besides being a fine organ made with ‘unusually good material’, the organ is known as the instrument on which the renowned organist Alfred Hollins learned to play when he began his studies at the College in 1878, and which he would later use in his own teaching.

Comparing the Royal Normal College instrument to the two civic organs, the character is generally similar, with a few notable exceptions. All three organs show the tell-tale signs of Schulze’s influence, in the many German flutes, abundant diapasons, and small, but effective pedal basses. The Great is notably smaller than those on the civic instruments, with no 16’ stop and a slightly softer disposition, implying that the civic organs were meant for larger events, such as ceremonies or potentially to support choirs. The Swell is similar to those of the other organs, while the Choir – the manual with the most variety between the three instruments – bears a resemblance to the Choir on the Wednesbury organ, though Royal Normal only has one reed, an 8’ Corno di Bassetto. The Pedal is something of an amalgamation of the two civic organs, but the greatest difference comes in the presence of thumb pistons on the Royal Normal College organ, a feature which is not mentioned in either of the other organs and which allowed for quick changes between pre-set combinations of stops.

¹³¹ ‘Reinstatement of a Pipe Organ’, *The Wesley Centre Malton*, The Wesley Centre, accessed 27 April 2021, <https://www.maltonwesleycentre.org/the-historic-organ>

Disposition for West Bromwich Town Hall, Forster & Andrews (1878)

Great Organ (C to C)	Swell Organ (CC to C)	Solo Organ (CC to C)	Echo Organ (CC to C)	Pedal Organ (CCC to F)			
Double Open Diapason	16	Lieblich Bordun	16	Orchestral Flute	8	Open Diapason	16
Open Diapason	8	Open Diapason	8	Orchestral Oboe	8	Violon	16
Gamba	8	Salicional	8	Orchestral Clarinet	8	Quint	10 2/3
Hohl Flöte	8	Stopped Diapason	8	Bombarde	8	Principal	8
Principal	4	Voix Celeste	8			Trombone	16
Wald Flöte	4	Principal	4				
Twelfth	2 2/3	Harmonic Piccolo	2	Solo organ and Echo organ combined			
Fifteenth	2	Mixture	III				
Mixture	IV	Horn	8				
Posaune	8	Oboe	8				
		Claron	4				
Couplers							
Great to Pedals	3 double action composition pedals to Great organ						
Solo to Pedals	3 double action composition pedals to Swell organ						
Swell to Pedals	Tremulant to Swell by pedal						
Swell to Great	Sforzando by pedal						
Swell Sub-Octave	Pedal to take off whole of Solo organ						
Solo to Great	Pedal to act on Swell to Great coupler						
Pedal Octave							

Accessories

3 double action composition pedals to Great organ
 3 double action composition pedals to Swell organ
 Tremulant to Swell by pedal
 Sforzando by pedal
 Pedal to take off whole of Solo organ
 Pedal to act on Swell to Great coupler

Couplers

Great to Pedals
 Solo to Pedals
 Swell to Pedals
 Swell to Great
 Swell Sub-Octave
 Solo to Great
 Pedal Octave

Table 6 Disposition for the organ in West Bromwich Town Hall (1878)¹³³

¹³³ *The Musical Standard*, Vol. 14, Iss. 721 (25 March 1878), p. 328.

Disposition for Royal Normal College for the Blind, Upper Norwood, London, Forster & Andrews (1877)

Great Organ (C to a3)	Swell Organ (C to a3, enclosed)	Choir Organ (C to a3)	Pedal Organ (C to f1)
Open Diapason	8 Bourdon	16 Dulciana	8 Open Diapason
Stopped Diapason/Hohl Flute	8 Open Diapason	8 Lieblich Gedact	8 Bourdon
Gamba	8 Rohr Flute	8 Flauto Traverso	4 Quint
Harmonic Flute	4 Salicional	8 Flautina	2 Flute
Fifteenth	2 Voix Celeste	8 Corno di Bassetto	8
Mixture	III Principal	4	
Trumpet	8 Harmonic Piccolo	2	
	Horn	8	
	Oboe	8	
Couplers	Accessories		
Swell to Pedal	4 thumb pistons each to Great and Swell		
Swell to Great	4 toe pedals		
Swell to Choir	Great to Pedal to pedal		
Swell Octave	Blowing by gas engine		
Choir to Great			
Choir to Pedal			
Choir Suboctave			
Great to Pedal			

Table 7 The disposition for the organ of Royal Normal College for the Blind (1877)¹³⁴

¹³⁴ 'Royal Normal College for the Blind, Westow Street [N16211], *The British Institute of Organ Studies*, 2020, accessed 27 April 2021, <https://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N16211>

Despite the different outcomes and the many uncertainties that characterise the two case studies, there is a red thread running through the history of both the Wednesbury and West Bromwich organs, which is politics. Wednesbury Town Hall was built following an election, when some citizens were barred from holding meetings in a place normally used for such matters, due to their political affiliations, thus revealing the need for a neutral public space in which all manners of meetings and events could be held. The organ housed within this new Hall was then funded by their brand-new MP, Alexander Brogden, who would later go on to fund the organ in West Bromwich Town Hall as well. The overt political aspect of the Wednesbury and West Bromwich organs, which were often referred to as the 'Brogden organs,' did not go unnoticed by contemporary commentators. In an article titled 'Black Country Conservatism: Its "True Vines" and its Organ Playing', which comments on statements made at a meeting of the Wednesbury Tories and their apparent lack of local support, the unnamed author claims that

To remove Mr. Brogden from his seat, and to return "a gentleman of the true Conservative type" is the great ambition of the Wednesbury Tories. It has been gall and wormwood to them that Mr. Brogden has generously presented an organ to the township of West Bromwich, to adorn the New Town Hall. "He is going to bribe the borough with organs," is the cry. It will be the one unpardonable sin of Conservatives ever to listen to these Brogden organs. (...) Mr. Brogden's organs, say they, are intended to aid in playing him into Parliament again at the next election.¹³⁵

In spite these accusations, or perhaps in line with them, Brogden was re-elected and remained in Parliament until 1885, though in an industrial town such as Wednesbury, the

¹³⁵ *MET*, 28 August 1875.

election of a Tory candidate would have been unusual. In a rather strange turn of events, there seem to have been rumours regarding Brogden's donation to West Bromwich and whether he had actually paid for the organ or not. In a report on the restoration of the West Bromwich Town Hall organ printed in the *Sandwell Herald* in 1987, it is claimed that

Rumour has it that when the instrument was unveiled [in 1878] and the bill presented to Mr Brogden, he refused or was unable to pay, and the ratepayers of West Bromwich eventually bore the cost.¹³⁶

I have, as of writing, been unable to find any other sources mentioning this rumour, nor anything to corroborate the claims made in the *Herald* about the organ being paid for through the rates, and it should be noted that the article was printed about a century after the events themselves took place.

Controversy had followed Brogden throughout much of his professional life, and in particular in his political ventures. After his failed electoral campaign in Yarmouth in 1865, he was accused of corruption and bribery alongside his running mate Philip Vanderbyl. As per the accusations, he was said to have spent over £6,000 attempting to secure votes for himself and his colleague, and while he ultimately did not win the election, his opponent, Sir Edmund H. K. Lacon, was also accused of bribery. These accusations do appear to be true, as reports around the time mention that he had confessed in front of the Great Yarmouth Bribery Commission and expressed regret for his actions. The *Worcestershire Chronicle* was harsh in its critique of Brogden and claimed that 'this show-up will probably prevent Mr. BROGDEN from being a Parliamentary candidate again, not only for Great Yarmouth but for

¹³⁶ *Sandwell Herald*, Spring 1987.

any other constituency'. Yet, only two years later, he would be elected MP for that very borough.¹³⁷

The family business also experienced serious issues during his tenure as MP for Wednesbury. In 1884, Brogden and his brother were declared bankrupt, 'the liabilities of each being above £700,000',¹³⁸ and in 1887, he, along with other beneficiaries of his father's will, was taken to court by his younger sister for breach of trust, and Alexander was in particular accused of using money from the family investments to keep the business afloat and to support his lifestyle.¹³⁹

Another interesting aspect of the Wednesbury and West Bromwich case study is the comparative success of the two instruments. As we have seen, there were many similarities between the two towns, such as their trades and their closeness to one another. Their Town Halls were built around the same time, and the civic organs within them were built by the same firm, and to very similar specifications. With this background, one might expect the outcomes of their town halls and organs to have been roughly the same, if not better for Wednesbury, as it had the advantage of constructing its organ earlier than West Bromwich and had a strong impetus from the local authorities before the Hall and the organ were even finished. Throughout the build-up to the opening of Wednesbury Town Hall, we also get the impression of just how important the organ was to the Local Board, appearing to be almost more important than the Hall itself, when the original plans had not even mentioned music. In comparison, West Bromwich received its organ as an unexpected gift, and so had less time to put together plans for the instrument. But while the West Bromwich organ appears to

¹³⁷ WC, 29 August 1866, p. 2.

¹³⁸ *Illustrated London News*, 5 January 1884, p. 7.

¹³⁹ Gilpin, 'The Bustling Alexander', p. 2.

have enjoyed relatively quick success, Wednesbury suffered from a stark lack of interest and success, from which it never quite recovered.

The lack of success in Wednesbury could be down to a number of factors, many of which can be no more than speculation today. One factor is Wednesbury's small size, which combined with its proximity to Birmingham may have led those with the means to travel to choose the wide array of entertainment that could be found in Birmingham, rather than support the establishment of entertainment in their hometown. Clues may be found in the *Diary of a Wednesbury Inhabitant*, written in the 1880s. The anonymous author, an unmarried man in his early twenties employed in the legal trade (suggesting he belonged to the local middle class), rarely attends public concerts or the like in Wednesbury. Instead, he regularly travels to Birmingham 'on business', where he enjoys catching the latest operas and pantomimes. When back in Wednesbury, he prefers to patronise the library and the local chess club, attend church, go for brisk walks, enjoy evenings at home with friends, often centred around the performance or practice of music, or even spend an afternoon copying music by hand. It would not be too farfetched to see the habits of the young diary author and his friends as indicative of the habits of many other members of the Wednesbury middle classes. This redirection of the influential middle class would have taken a lot of the impetus out of local arrangements, not to mention the spending power. For the working class, the Town Hall concerts may not have been able to compete with other entertainments that were available, especially a series of popular wakes, which proved a point of tension between the working class and the local authorities and nonconformists.

West Bromwich, on the other hand, had the advantage of size, which could also have brought with it a clearer sense of identity compared to the smaller Wednesbury, inspiring influential citizens to focus on supporting local entertainment rather than seek it somewhere else. The fact that the organ was a surprise gift from their MP may have been a blessing in disguise, as it could have taken some of the pressure out of the planning for the instrument, thereby lowering the ambitions of the Local Board, compared with Wednesbury, where the ambitions had been laid out in no uncertain terms even before the organ was finished. The local working classes of West Bromwich may also have been more favourably disposed towards their Local Board in general, as the Board had just commissioned a series of grand public buildings for the town's inhabitants, with many intended for working-class use. Furthermore, the fact that West Bromwich had a long-established history of not only various musical societies and ventures, but public education and improvement, will have provided a solid base on which to build civic organ recitals.

The tone surrounding the moral aspects of the organ recitals also differed. The moral imperative behind the Wednesbury recitals is prominent, especially in the various statements made by Richard Williams, but gives the impression of being overbearing, and perhaps even patronising, which may have worked against the Board's intentions. In West Bromwich, there was a moral aspect to the organisation of the recitals, but it was not as heavy-handed, and there is explicit record of working-class attendance. While we have no working-class accounts from either town, it is not difficult to imagine that a less patronising proposition would have been more attractive to a working-class listener. The fact that Hartland came from a prominent local non-conformist family may also have helped in letting

him establish a rapport with the local community and giving him a keener sense of what kind of repertoire would have been effective.

The manner in which the organs were managed probably played a role in the relative success of Wednesbury and West Bromwich, but unfortunately, the details of their management are not available to me at the time of writing. We do know that the musical management of Wednesbury Town Hall had to be by an independent committee or similar group after the opening, but more is not known about it. If the case was that West Bromwich Town Hall was managed by the Local Board, that could have provided a stability and focus to the management that one might not find in an independently run hall, caught between commercial concerns and moral ambitions. One could also infer from the consistency of the organ recitals in West Bromwich that the local board there were simply more supportive, while Wednesbury's Local Board, possibly worn down by the unexpected expenses and lack of success, showed less enthusiasm for their organ, sometimes even giving the impression of hostility. Another reason could be as simple as an imbalance of sources between the two towns: Wednesbury, being the smaller town, will naturally have fewer sources, such as local newspapers or historical books, resulting in gaps in the records.

The personal qualities and presence of the borough organists could also have been an important factor. From the available sources, William Hartland appears much more active in his local musical community, both before and after the construction of the Town Hall and the presentation of the organ. Prior to his appointment as Town Hall Organist, Hartland already had an established musical profile in West Bromwich, as a performer, conductor and teacher. Coming from a musical family, he had been known in the town as a musical talent

from a young age and had studied with a reputable teacher before his return to West Bromwich. His programmes performed at the various civic organ recitals reflect a refined musical taste and a much higher level of technique, and that he may have been keeping up to date on musical trends and publications.

Less is known about Thomas Bissell, making it difficult to make strong judgments about his character or work. However, we can say that, unlike Hartland, his efforts met with repeated failure. Part of this may have been due to elements beyond his control, such as the inability of the Local Board to generate interest among the population for their 'elevating' recitals, but he also had disadvantages compared to Hartland: he was not local, does not appear to have been as active in his local community as Hartland, and had business ventures outside of Wednesbury, which may have led him to be less 'present' in the town. He also inspired much less press coverage than Hartland did in his town, suggesting that middle-class interest too was limited.

Together, Wednesbury and West Bromwich demonstrate how different the outcomes of civic organs could be, even when the towns shared many similarities, and how the results of each instrument could be influenced by circumstance and individual effort, regardless of the intentions that lay behind their use and construction.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION

7.1: Success and failure

The civic organ tradition was largely an ephemeral phenomenon, closely tied to core Victorian values and cultural aspects, such as improvement, self-help and the ideal of rational recreation. After the turn of the century, it began to slowly disappear, displaced by new attitudes and technological developments.

In Chapter 2 of this thesis, I have demonstrated middle-class perceptions of working-class leisure and its evolution, the social and moral dimension of music, and its place in Victorian society and as part of a wider culture of rational recreation. In Chapter 3, I have examined the development of the English organ leading up to the nineteenth century, its position within Victorian musical culture, the creation of the civic organ tradition and the repertoire associated with it. Through the case studies in Chapter 4, 5 and 6, I have demonstrated the complicated relationship between local government and civic music-making, the moral motivation and ambitions that lay behind the construction and use of organs, how these ideals were implemented through concerts and their reception within their communities, as well as factors in their relative success.

Before considering these major themes, it is worth reviewing the relative success and failure of the civic organ recitals in each case study. The first question in this is how we might define and measure success. What might success have looked like in the minds of those who organised the civic organ recitals? Some aspects of this would have been quantifiable, such as mass attendance by members of the intended audience, while others were more difficult

to measure, such as reduced attendance at the pubs and improved family lives.

Unfortunately, those organising the concerts do not appear to have consistently collected this data. More general information exists, but it would be difficult to convincingly argue that, for example, a decrease in crime coinciding with an organ recital series was meaningfully influenced by the musical aspect.

I have not found any sets of accounts or similar records for the case study halls, so have had to rely on council minutes, and how these were interpreted by the press, as well as reports and reviews of concerts. These are probably the best evidence available for indications of the social make-up of concert audiences and the persistence of the concerts, but the details of the make-up of any given audience can be patchy at best. Many times, we are left with vague, unsatisfying descriptions such as ‘the masses’ or ‘those for whom the concerts were intended’, without any way to know exactly what this entailed in the given place. In other instances, a little more detail is provided, describing listeners as ‘working-class’ or as members of ‘the labouring classes’ or ‘industrial classes’, but without further information, we are left to speculate how these classes were defined locally. In certain places where one industry or trade dominated the local community, we may guess that the intended audience was expected to be drawn from this demographic, but in places where the industry was more diverse, like Worcester, it becomes more difficult to draw conclusions. The case studies present a varied picture of success, though it is important to acknowledge that the available sources provide only a partial account of the musical activity within each civic hall.

Kidderminster saw two recorded attempts at establishing recital series on their organ, one shortly after the opening of the original Public Rooms, and one commencing in 1896. The

latter is the only one that occurred during the Corporation's ownership of the Hall, and was apparently quite successful, but also came 22 years after the Corporation's acquisition and 13 years after the appointment of a borough organist, as the economic and political situation in the town was improving.

Worcester saw several series, three of which came after the Corporation's purchase of the Public Hall: the second round of Saturday Evening Concerts (1879-1886), the Thursday Corporation Concerts (established 1886, little more is known about them), and the Corporation Free Organ Recitals (commencing in 1889, lasting into the twentieth century). From the available sources, these all appear to have been popular, with the latter an especial success.

Wednesbury is an interesting case, as it saw many short-lived, ultimately unsuccessful recital attempts, although the sources sometimes make it difficult to ascertain which ones were single events and which ones were series, as well as which may be related. Two attempts were made in 1873, an annual concert appears in 1875, and repeated failed attempts were made by Bissell in 1878, 1881 and 1884.

West Bromwich only saw two series of recitals, but both were resounding successes, and there is some ambiguity as to whether they were completely separate series or whether one represented the continuation of the other. The first was established in 1878, lasting at least until 1888, and the Sunday Evening Free Organ Recitals were established in 1891, and lasted into the following century.

We have already examined details contributing to the relative success and failure of each civic organ, but it is possible to look at some general trends.

The geography of each town played a part in their relative success. Kidderminster and Worcester were both relatively isolated, and so became local centres for their areas, while Wednesbury and West Bromwich were both in relative proximity to Birmingham, which may have discouraged the growth of suburban music-making. The political and local economic climates of each town also affected success. This is especially evident in Kidderminster, where the Town Hall and organ were introduced at a time of political, economic and social turmoil. After their purchase of the Public Hall in 1874, the Council appears to have had little interest in the organ. A likely reason for this is that they were preoccupied with normal council activities during a period of difficulty for the town. Many of the councillors were important local employers in the carpet trade, and the business difficulties that they must have experienced may well have also presented them with more pressing concerns than organising improving concerts. The class tensions that existed were probably not conducive to the working classes being keen to participate in moralising efforts. In comparison, the organs in Wednesbury and West Bromwich were built in a more benign political and economic climate, which at least allowed them to avoid some of the problems that Kidderminster faced.

7.2: The civic organist and the role of the individual

It is, unfortunately, difficult to say much for certain about the civic organists themselves. They were generally not especially high-profile individuals, outside of figures like W. T. Best who held positions at particularly important town halls, which presents a problem to the

historian who must rely mainly on newspapers. Little is known about their backgrounds, and even less about their personal motivations and opinions, or how they viewed their own role.

The case studies do, however, allow us to draw some broader conclusions. Here, the organists were all men with some level of musical training, and while their class can be difficult to ascertain, it appears that they came from a chiefly middle-class background.

As far as it has been possible to assess, the case study organists' positions were unpaid ('honorary') and part-time, with only incidental earnings through external engagements. The organists in Kidderminster, Worcester, Wednesbury and West Bromwich all held several positions outside their work at their town hall, mostly as church organists, but also as teachers and in other related jobs. Some even had business completely unrelated to their musical profession, such as Thomas Bissell, who ran a coal company with his brother.

Their duties as civic organists are for the most part unclear or unknown, and could vary greatly from town to town, but we can identify some general characteristics. Among these are acting as a custodian for the organ and being in charge of its upkeep and tuning; acting as an intermediary between the local government and organ-builders, as well as providing advice on organ matters; being available as the official organist for the Hall, for a variety of events; and, in some places, functioning as a manager of sorts, dealing with applications for use of the organ and organising various concerts and entertainments. Most of the organists appear to have been involved with local musical societies, such as choral and orchestral associations, though it is not clear whether this is in their capacity as civic organists. The organisation and performance of public organ recitals are natural parts of the position in

most of the case studies, though, as seen in Kidderminster, this was not necessarily the primary function of the role as seen by the local government.

When it comes to how the civic organists themselves viewed their role, we have limited evidence. We know from sources such as Perkins' 1900 letter to the *Musical Times*, that at least some people in these positions saw their role as that of bringing 'high-class' music to a greater audience and providing an improving effect, but it must be kept in mind that these are not central examples of civic organists. In the absence of accounts from the case study organists, we can only speculate on what they perceived to be their role.

There appears to be a strong correlation between individual effort or ability and the relative success of the case study organ concerts. A useful comparison can be made between Wednesbury and West Bromwich. As discussed in Chapter 6, William Hartland appears to have been central to the success of the organ recitals in West Bromwich Town Hall, and a widely respected member of his musical community. Bissell, however, appears to have been less active, perhaps lacking certain qualities necessary in such a position, and may have been distracted by outside responsibilities. We lack, however, the volume of evidence needed to make this argument in strong form.

In Worcester, much of the success of the civic organ could be attributed to not just the official organist, but also to the manager of the Public Hall, Edward Spark. While Arthur Caldicott provided valuable services both as a performer and in the construction of the third Nicholson organ, Spark appears to have been more engaged in the musical activities in the Hall and more prominent as the figurehead of the civic project.

In contrast to this, a factor in the failure of a series or an organ could be ascribed to a lack of a clear 'leader'. For example, Kidderminster did not hire an official organist until nine years after their purchase of the Public Hall, thus missing out on the energy that someone in that role could provide in establishing the organ within the musical community.

7.3: Class and politics

At its core, the civic organ tradition was about class and class relations. The groups of people involved in commissioning the organs and organising concerts were in part doing so out of a desire to mould the working classes and influence their tastes and morals, to control their leisure time, as well as a sense of responsibility towards their recreation and their moral well-being. The types of improvement the reformers hoped to achieve ranged from that which had practical benefits for the reforming classes, in terms of labour productivity (increased performance and punctuality) and public order (fewer cases of public intoxication and violence, absence of radical politics), to the more abstract, expressed as wishes to improve their standard of living, and to somehow make the working classes 'better' people.

What quickly becomes apparent when examining the case studies, particularly those which did not experience any notable success, is the almost complete lack of a working-class voice. This is especially evident in the language used by the local authorities when talking about their intended audiences. Through the various discussions seen in the case studies, the working-class are often painted as one amorphous mass, sharing the same opinions, tastes and vices, and who could all be influenced in the same way, if only the authorities could ensure their attendance at the civic organ concerts. Rarely, if ever, do the local authorities

give the impression of having discussed this with the local working-class, despite the fact that, had they wanted to, many of them had access to a large number of industrial workers through their positions as industrial employers. It is equally rare for them to acknowledge the working classes as individuals, or as more than a loose stereotype.

The disconnect is also clear in the ambiguous ways the local government would refer to working-class leisure, often resorting to vague terms or clichés, and in the assumptions they made as to what music would benefit the working classes and what would attract them to the concerts. In some instances, they give a sense that they believed the working-class could only possibly prefer to go to the pub or the music hall because they had not yet experienced serious, morally improving music. There are some exceptions in the case studies. In the second iteration of the Saturday Evening Concerts in Worcester, local workers were invited to the proposal meeting, and tickets for the concerts were distributed to the workers through local workshops, establishing a direct link with the intended audience and involving them in the process. It is no surprise that some of the series which saw the greatest success, were those in towns where there was a clear line of communication between the organisers and the local working classes.

The main way the working classes could make their opinions heard was through attendance, or lack of it. This is especially clear in the case of Wednesbury, where all the ambition of the Local Board regarding the Town Hall organ was met with resounding indifference and disinterest from their intended audience. The disconnect is also clear in Kidderminster, in a different form, where the local government made the decision to purchase the Town Hall and its organ while the town was suffering under poor sanitary conditions, trade depression,

social unrest and low wages. It can be difficult to tell for certain the social makeup of the civic organ recital audiences. We do not have any detailed records of the attendees and must instead rely on newspaper accounts of the concerts, which often provide some indication, though it can be hard to ascertain exactly who local journalists were referring to when they described attendance. These accounts tend to rely on vague terminology or definitions of 'working class' which are not explained in any detail. Between the uncertainty of working-class attendance at the civic organ recitals, and the broad, stereotyped language used by organisers when discussing their intended audience, we may well question whether the working-class audience for which the civic organ recitals were often planned truly existed outside the minds of the local councillors who organised them.

There was also a political dimension to the civic organ. Civic organs were inextricably bound to the town halls in which they were situated, and the local authorities that controlled them. In all of the case studies, even those in which the organ was originally built as part of a private enterprise, it ends up under the control of local board or other forms of local government. When a civic instrument was used for concerts, it carried with it some of the weight of its owners' authority, and in some cases, the concert series were even named after the Corporation. On some occasions, including the opening of Wednesbury Town Hall, there was a sense that the instrument represented a kind of common asset, but there was equally a sense that the instrument suffered from its unavoidable connection to unpopular figures in local politics. The heavy-handed paternalism with which many concerts were presented and promoted, likely did not do them any favours, especially so in places where the tensions between the local authorities and the working classes were high.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Town Hall was a manifestation of civic pride in growing industrial towns, and by extension, so were the organs. A good example of the political aspect of the civic organ is Alexander Brogden's donation of the instruments for Wednesbury and West Bromwich Town Halls. His political opponents argued that these donations were tantamount to bribing the electorate, as he had done some years before in Yarmouth (albeit with cash rather than organs). A prospective MP could hardly have bribed an electorate with organs if these were not something that the electorate thought important and valuable for their town. Beyond the case studies, there are a number of examples of civic organs being donations from a local politician or other notable figures, as a large, expensive, physically imposing and loud way to make their mark on the town.

7.4: The civic organ and its repertoire

Although the capital cost did usually come out of local government budgets, organs were clearly seen as *important*, to the point where the Victorian Boards and Councils were willing to spend time and money on them, without the expectation of earning a financial return: the concerts were worthwhile in themselves, through their potential for moral and social gain. It is worth noting that in many of the case studies, the interest of the local government does seem to wane after a while, when success either fails to appear or begins to dwindle, or when the cost of maintaining the organ appears to outweigh its benefits.

The organ is also presented as something of a status symbol on its own, no doubt inspired by larger cities such as Birmingham, with the smaller towns attempting to emulate these by constructing both town halls and organs, reflecting their own growing status.

While the case study organs, built between 1855 and 1885, do reflect changes in organ-building throughout the decades of the later nineteenth century, they also share many similarities, reflecting their similar intended use. The organs are of a considerable size, with a minimum of three manuals and a full pedal board, and reflect both the individual styles of their builders, and the general trends of their age.

The main unifying characteristic of the case study organs is how they are designed for concert performance, chiefly for solo organ repertoire and the accompaniment of large-scale choral events. There is a clear emphasis on size, and orchestral or imitative stops, pointing to changes in solo repertoire and the popularity of transcriptions. In the later organs, there is also a greater focus on dynamic range, stop variety and the provision of swell pedals. That said, it is difficult to argue that we can talk about a specific civic type of instrument, in terms of its construction.

As far as whether one can talk about a specific civic organ repertoire, it is difficult to pin down as it overlaps with the general organ concert repertoire at the time. In fact, the civic organ repertoire may have been related as much (if not more) to the venue and the framework of the civic organ recitals, as it was to specific musical forms.

On the one hand, the choice of repertoire was a crucial matter, as choosing the correct repertoire (most often serious, classical music) was how the organisers imparted their moral influence on the listener. We see this importance in cases such as the situation in Sydney Town Hall in 1898, and also in the reception of the programmes in the local press.

But the moral effect of the civic recitals was also achieved through the intentions that lay behind them, and through the controlled mingling of the classes within the town hall, the

labouring classes absorbing the good influence of their social betters by occupying the same space and adhering to the same social etiquette. The music found in the civic organ recitals was not much different from that found in many other concerts organised by the middle classes, which both demonstrates that the civic organ recitals were transmitting middle-class culture to the working classes, or at least the *idea* of middle-class culture, and that the repertoire was not of a character unique to the civic organ recitals. In fact, what becomes clear when comparing the civic organ repertoire to repertoire commonly found at working-class brass band concerts, is that the class divide in music as imagined by the organisers of civic organ recitals did not exist in any meaningful sense. Much of the core repertoire played and sung at civic organ concerts, representing a morally superior and beneficial middle-class repertoire, was just as likely to be found played by working-class bands. And so, just as we may question whether the working classes that local authorities were planning recitals for truly existed outside stereotypes and clichés, we may question whether the great class divide in music existed at all, leading us to a curious scenario in which local authorities were organising and promoting concerts for an imagined group, to promote a quintessentially middle-class taste which did not really exist.

The programmes that are available for the case study recital series fit well into the characteristics of the civic organ repertoire established in Chapter 3, comprising four main categories: classical organ music, contemporary organ music, transcriptions and improvisations. There is a particular emphasis on transcriptions, which were often very popular, though it is more difficult to say anything for certain about the inclusion of organ improvisations. These rarely feature in any of the available case study programmes, but it is possible that they were performed without being included in the newspaper reports. Nearly

all of the concerts are of the miscellaneous character, combining organ music and vocal performance, and a repertoire balancing serious and popular works. In the broader context of rational amusement, the civic organ recitals are similar to other concerts and musical ventures, dealing with a much vaguer sense of musical improvement and entertainment than practical ventures, such as science lectures at a Mechanics' Institute. Unlike instructional musical movements, like Tonic Sol-fa, the civic organ recitals focused on listening, with the audience absorbing the moral effect of the music passively, with minimal action needed. Indeed, passivity may have played an important part of the intended effect of the recitals, keeping the working classes quiet and docile. We may even argue that music was a secondary element of the improving effect of the civic organ recitals, with the main, unspoken aim being to physically remove the working-classes from other forms of leisure, where they could pose a threat to public order through political activity and antisocial behaviour, and to keep them under the watchful eye of their middle-class neighbours, adhering to their customs and consuming their culture.

7.5: Fate and Legacy

What then became of the case study organs? What happened to the civic organ tradition in general? Did it have any lasting effects?

There are many reasons behind the waning of the civic organ tradition following the turn of the century. These include general changes in public taste, and new forms of entertainment encroaching on the civic organ's territory, such as the invention of the electric organ,

catering to a different repertoire and demographic, but especially the introduction of broadcasting and recording.

We see a softening of the overt morality of the recitals towards the end of the nineteenth century, for example in the later recital series in Worcester and West Bromwich, where they appear to be considered more as general public entertainment than moral ventures. There is perhaps a sense that rational amusement as a concept was becoming somewhat stale by this point, reflecting developments in attitudes toward the working classes, public entertainment and recreation in general, and a view in which affordable concerts did not have to serve some grand moral purpose, but could instead simply be entertainment within reach of a larger part of the population. The diversification of music available to the working classes, with new forms such as bandstand concerts, meant that part of the role of the civic organ as a conduit between the working classes and a broader repertoire had fallen away.

The practical aspects of civic organs also presented a challenge to some towns. The organs were expensive to maintain, and with weaker prospects of financial gain through concerts, many local authorities chose to get rid of their organs or replace them with electric instruments which were cheaper to maintain and were better suited to new musical styles. The reduction in the number of recitals also meant that many organist positions were abandoned and as the years went by, maintaining a series of civic organ recitals or an organ was not at the top of anyone's list of priorities.

In the case of Kidderminster and West Bromwich, their organs are still present within their town halls and are occasionally used for recitals. The organ in Kidderminster is, however, no longer in the care of the local government, instead being managed by the Hill Organ

Promotion Society, an independent organisation. West Bromwich employed an official organist until the borough was reorganised into the Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell in 1974.

In Worcester, both the Public Hall and the Nicholson organ are gone. After falling into disuse and neglect in the first half of the 20th century, the organ was sold for only £150 to a private collector in 1959, with some pipes being sold separately to a church, as the Public Hall was being converted into a roller-skating rink.¹⁴⁰ The following year, the Hall was demolished and today, the site is a car park.

The organ in Wednesbury Town Hall was removed in 1954 and sold to St. Augustine's Church in Kensington for £300. The low price, considerably less than it was built for and less than the £450 spent on repairing and cleaning the instrument five years previously, reflects the lack of interest in the organ, both from the Council and the public. The then-Mayor, W. F. Taylor, explain in no unclear terms to the *Birmingham Daily Post* in 1954, that

We shall be glad to get rid of it. During the past few years it has been no more than an obstruction on the Town Hall stage. Wednesbury townspeople appear to have no interest whatsoever in organ music and the instrument has rarely been in use for many years past.¹⁴¹

What, then, did the civic organ tradition achieve?

It is tempting to see the middle-class reformers as naïve in thinking that exposure to serious classical music could have a profound transformative effect on working-class behaviour, or

¹⁴⁰ John Berrow, 'John Nicholson, organ builder of Worcester: background, life and work (vol. I)' (PhD Thesis, University of Reading, 1996), p. 339.

¹⁴¹ *BDP*, 7 August 1954.

as condescending and calculated in their attempts to control working-class leisure and time. And while there is truth in this, their efforts were not wholly unsuccessful, and should not be completely dismissed as stereotypical Victorian paternalism.

While it is impossible to measure any real moral effect the concerts may have had, they were popular, albeit intermittently, and did serve their function as an alternative form of recreation for their local communities, including the working classes. The moral effect generated by the concerts may not have been the one the reformers were hoping for, but in a broader sense, it could be argued that having access to additional forms of music would have generated a positive moral effect and would have been improving, at least in the sense of making working-class lives more pleasant than they would otherwise have been. The tradition also had a lasting impact on English organ culture, especially in fuelling a market for organ transcriptions and leading to the construction of a generation of instruments.

The civic organ tradition also played a crucial and underappreciated role in the democratisation of music in the nineteenth century. For many people, their main, and possibly first, encounter with professional music was at these organ recitals, and in some cases, such as the efforts described by Perkins in Birmingham, this was a conscious part of the planning of the concerts. In this way, the organs served a practical role in making a large variety of music accessible to a demographic who did not otherwise have the means to hear it, be it due to costs or lack of other options.

Alderman Williams may perhaps have been too optimistic when he declared that the organ at Wednesbury Town Hall would be a 'moral weapon,' but as we have seen, these organs could be moral tools, and in the right hands, could be successful in their own ways.

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Worcestershire Chronicle

Appendix I – Repertoire for the Kidderminster ‘Cheap Concerts’, Nov 1855 – Mar 1856

These all taken from the *Worcestershire Chronicle*, from the very first ‘cheap concert’ to the last mention the following year. The programmes given in the *Chronicle* are at times incomplete, sometimes missing entirely, which is reflected in the tables beneath, as is the spelling and any special notes.

The Haynes Concerts:

Date	Performer(s)	Repertoire (when given)
22 Nov 1855	Mr. Haynes (solo)	‘a selection of classical and Popular music’
29 Nov 1855	Mr. Haynes and vocalists	‘(...)music, selected for the entertainment’
13 Dec 1855	Mr. Haynes	‘Herold’s overture to Zampa’ (encored)
	Mrs. Bull	‘Should he upbraid?’
		Mendelssohn duet with Mr. Baker
	Mr. T. A. Baker	Phillip’s ‘Return of the Admiral’
20 Dec 1855	Mr. Haynes	‘four pieces, one of which was especially finely executed, and warmly encored’
	Mrs. Evans	‘three songs’
	-	Glee, ‘Where art thou beam of light’ and ‘The May-fly’

	Herr Hoffman	'a very good solo on the violin'
27 Dec 1855	Mr. Haynes	Chorus, 'Fixed in his everlasting seat,' Handel
	-	Glee, 'From Oberon,' Stevens
	Mrs. Evans	'The Slave Girl's Love,' Land
	Herr Hoffman	'Carnival de Venice' (solo violin)
	Mrs. Evans	'The Lost Heart'
	Mr. Haynes	Selection from <i>Norma</i> , Bellini Overture, <i>William Tell</i> , Rossini
	-	Song, 'The Postman's Knock,' Wrightman
	-	Glee, 'Queen of the Valley,' Calcott
	Mrs. Evans	'I Ride on the Storm,' Benedict
	-	Glee, 'Now is the month of Maying,' Morley
	Mr. Haynes	Grand March, 'Prophete,' Meyerbeer <i>(Mrs. Bull and Mr. Baker were also assisting at the recital)</i>
3 Jan 1856	Mr. Haynes	Pedal Fugue, Bach
	Mrs. Bull and Mr. Baker	'O'er shepherd's pipe,' Balle

-	Chorus, Lutzow's Wild Chase, Weber
Mrs. Bull	The Swallows, Abt.
-	Glee, 'Daughters of Error,' Bishop
Mr. Haynes	Flute concerto, Rink
Mr. Haynes	Overture, <i>Massanello</i> , Auber
Mrs. Bull and Mr. Baker	'The Singing Lesson,' Barnett
Mrs. Bull, Messrs. Haynes, Kent and Baker	Four-part song, 'Spring's delights', Muller
-	Song, 'Simon the Cellarer,' Hatton
Mrs. Bull	"'Twas on a Sunday Morning,' Mori
-	Chorus, 'Our native land'
Mr. Haynes	Grand March, <i>Athalie</i> , Mendelssohn
10 Jan 1856	Mr. Haynes
	Grand Chorus, 'Sing unto God,' Horsley
-	Glee, 'Awake, Aeolian lyre,' Danby
Mrs. Evans and Mr. Mason	'Oh Maritana,' Wallace
Messrs. Haynes and Torrington	Concertante Duet, pianoforte and violin, Osborne and De Beriot
Mr. Mason	'Good bye, sweetheart,' Hatton

Mr. Haynes	Selection, <i>Figaro</i> , Mozart
	Overture, <i>La Cenerentola</i> , Rossini
Mr. Mason	Song and Chorus, 'Come if you dare,' Purcell
Mrs. Evans	'As if you didn't know'
-	Glee, 'Hark, the lark!' Dr. Hooke
-	'Song, by an amateur'
-	Full Chorus, 'Partant pour a Syrie,' organ accompaniment, Novello
17 Jan 1856	
Mr. Haynes	Grand March, Rossini
-	Christmas madrigal, 'The wintry winds are blowing,' Dr. Jons
Mrs. Evans	'Oh, is it not a pleasant thing,' H. Smart
Messrs. Haynes, Torrington and Bunting	Trio, piano-forte, violin and violoncello, Haydn
Mr. Kent	'The tribute of a tear,' Loder
Mr. Haynes	Selection, <i>Robert Diavolo</i> , Meyerbeer
	Overture, <i>Tancredi</i> , Rossini
-	Glee, 'Forester's sound,' Bishop

	Mrs. Evans	Ballad, 'Over the sea,' Mrs. Groom
	Mr. Torrington	Solo violin, De Beriot
	-	Glee, 'The fairies,' Dr. Calcott
	-	Chorus, 'See the chariot at hand,' Horsley
24 Jan 1856	Mr. Haynes and Mr. Torrington	'A sonata of Steibelt's (...) pianoforte, with violin obligato'
	Mr. Beach	'Land, land!'
	Mrs. Evans	'Bonny Dundee'
	Mr. Haynes	Selection, <i>Lucrezia Borgia</i>
31 Jan 1856	Mr. Haynes	Prelude and Fugue, Seb. Bach
	-	Madrigal, 'Flora gave me,' Wilbye
	-	Song, 'The captive Greek girl,' Hobbs
	-	Glee, 'Where art thou, beam of light?' Bishop
	Mr. Rogers	'Shells of the ocean,' Cherry
	Mr. Haynes	Selection from <i>La Fille du Regiment</i> , Donizetti Overture, <i>Oberon</i> , Weber

-	Glee, 'When winds breathe soft,' Webbe	
Mrs. Evans and Mr. Kent	'Let's trip to yonder mountain,' Jolly	
-	Trio, 'Peace to the souls of the heroes,' Callcott	
Mrs. Evans	'I love the merry sunshine,' Glover	
-	Chorus, 'The tiger crouches,' Bishop	
7 Feb 1856	Mr. Haynes	Selection, <i>Le Prophete</i> , Meyerbeer
Mrs. Paget ('for whom it was expressly composed')	'A man's a man for a' that.' Brooks	
-	Glee, 'Ye spotted snakes,' Stevens	
Mr. Paget	'I'm a roamer,' Mendelssohn	
-	Trio, 'Sleep, gentle lady,' Sir H. Bishop	
Mr. and Mrs. Paget	'A. B. C.' Parry	
Mr. Haynes	Overture, <i>William Tell</i> , Rossini ('by desire')	
	Haydn's Hymn, grand variations (pedal obligato), Edm. Chipp	
Mrs. Paget	'Minnie Moore,' Hatton	
-	Glee, 'Thou art beautiful, Queen of the	

		Valley,' Callcot
	Mr. and Mrs. Paget	'Old and young,' Parry
	Mr. Paget	'On by the spur of valour goaded,' Shield
	-	Trio, 'The curfew,' Attwood
		<i>(a performance of Mendelssohn's Wedding March by Mr. Haynes is mentioned in the papers the following week, but not listed in the original programme)</i>
14 Feb 1856	Mr. Haynes	Grand Sonata no. 1, Mendelssohn
	-	Glee, 'Blow, gentle gales,' Bishop
	Mrs. Evans	'song'
	Mr. Torrington	Solo violin, Mayseder
	-	Glee, 'Where the bee sucks,' Jackson
	Mr. Haynes	Selection, <i>Lucia de Lammermoor</i> , Donizetti
		Overture, <i>Semiramide</i> , Rossini
	Mrs. Evans	'song'
	-	Glee, 'Father of heroes,' Callcot
	Mrs. Evans and Mr. Kent	Duet (possibly 'Hark! 'tis the Indian drum,' by Bishop. Otherwise, piece not listed and

		Bishop sung by someone else)
	Mr. Haynes	March, Handel
21 Feb 1856	Mr. Haynes and Mr. Torrington	'a duet concertante'
	Mr. Haynes	Selections from <i>La Favorita</i>
	Mrs. Evans	'a Scotch song'
28 Feb 1856	Mr. Haynes	'Harmonius Blacksmith,' (pedal obligato) Chipp
	-	Glee, 'Awake Aeolian lyre,' Danby
	Mr. Topham (principal tenor of the Birmingham Town-hall Concerts)	'Orythia'
	-	Chorus, 'Our native land,' Reichardt
	Mr. Topham	'There is a flower,' Wallace
	Mr. Haynes	Lieder ohne Worte, Mendelssohn Selection from <i>Oberon</i> and <i>Der Freyschutz</i> , Weber
	-	Glee, 'Hail, smiling morn'
	Mr. Topham	'Down where the blue bells grow'

6 Mar 1856	Messrs. Haynes, Torrington and Bunting	Trio, piano, violin and violoncello, Haydn
	-	Chorus, 'Now to the forest,' Bishop
	Mr. Haynes	War March, <i>Athalie</i> , Mendelssohn
	Mr. Haynes	Andante sym. in D, Beethoven
	-	Trio, 'Who comes so dark,' Callcott
	Miss Martin	'Listen, 'tis the merry skylark,' Hatton
	Mr. Haynes and Mr. Torrington	Solo, piano-forte with violin accompaniment, Mendelssohn
	-	Glee, 'My bonny lass,' Morley
	Miss Morley	'I never could the reason find,' Mellon
	Mr. Haynes	Overture, <i>Massaniello</i> , Auber
		Selection, <i>La Sonnambula</i> , Bellini
	-	'Here in cool grot,' Mornington
	Miss Martin	'song'
	Mr. Torrington	Concerto violin, De Beriot
	Miss Beach	'Good bye, sweetheart,' Hatton
	-	Madrigal, 'Soldiers brave,' Gastoldi

Mr. Haynes	Grand variations on 'God save the Queen,' Kink <i>Mr. Haynes also played 'Andante and Allegro Vivace' from Mendelssohn's Grand Concerto in G minor</i>

The Harding Concerts:

Date	Performer(s)	Repertoire (given)
'Easter Thursday,' 1856	Mr. Harding	Overture, <i>Figaro</i> , Mozart
	Miss F. Martin (The Moss Troopers)	Chorus and Solo, 'Now tramp,' Sir H. Bishop
	Mr. Topham	'For love of thee,' Linley
	-	Quartetto, 'The nightingale has been away,' Mendelssohn
	-	Madrigal (six voices), 'No din of rolling drum,' Striggio
	Miss Martin and Mr. Topham	'The sailor sighs,' Balfe
	Mr. Torrington	Fantasia for the Violin, on an original

	theme, De Beriot
Mr. Harding	'The favourite Overture to Fra Diavolo, Auber'
-	Quartetto, 'Overt the dark blue waters,' Weber
Masters Bennett and Farmer	'The Swallows,' Kucken
Miss F. Martin	'Do not mingle,' (Sonnambula) Bellini
-	Glee, 'Where the bee sucks,' Jackson
Mr. Topham	'The bloom is on the rye,' Sir H. Bishop
Mr. Harding	Slow movement (pedals obligato), Haydn
10 Apr 1856	Mr. Harding
	Selections from <i>William Tell</i> , Rossini
-	Madrigal, 'My mistress is as fair is fine,' Bennett, 1600
Miss F. Martin	'song'
Mr. D. F. Davis	Solo harp, Grand Fantasia, 'La Dance des Feés,' Parish Alvars
-	Trio, 'Hark, the curfew's solemn sound,' Attwood

	Miss F. Martin	'song'
	Mr. Harding	Slow movement (pedals obligato), Haydn 'the celebrated Overture to Gustavus 2 nd , Auber'
	Miss Martin	'song'
	-	Glee, 'Flora now calleth forth each flower,' Stafford Smith
	Mr. Torrington	Solo, violin
	Miss Martin	'song'
	-	Duet ('by desire'), 'The swallows,' Kucken
	Mr. Harding	Grand March from <i>Jessonda</i> , Spohr
24 Apr 1856	Mr. Harding	Grand Overture to <i>Egmont</i> , Beethoven
	-	Glee (five voices), 'Beauties, have you seen a toy?' Evans
	Miss F. Martin	'When wandering from my home,' V. Wallace
	Mr. D. F. Davis	Solo harp, Introduction and Grand March, Parish Alvars.
	-	Glee, 'When winds breathe soft,' Webbe

31 Apr 1856	Mr. Harding	Selections from <i>I Pirati</i> , Bellini 'the celebrature Overture to Jessonda, Spohr'
	Miss Martin	'Stealing o'er the golden west,' Kucken
	-	Madrigal, 'My bonny lass, she smileth,' Bennett, 1600
	Mr. Davis	Solo harp, Grand Fantasia, 'Carnival de Venice,' Chatterton
	-	Fourt-part song, 'The Victor's return,' Mendelssohn
	-	Scotch ballad, 'It was within a mile,' Hook
	Mr. Harding	Grand March, Mendelssohn
	Mr. Harding	Overture to <i>Don Giovanni</i> , Mozart
	Miss Martin	'song'
	-	Four-part song, 'Behold the woods,' Mendelssohn
	-	Madrigal, 'O, who will o'er the downs,' Pearsall
	Miss Martin	'song'

8 Mar 1856	Mr. Harding	Selections from <i>Jessonda</i> , Spohr
		'The favourite Overture to Il Barbiere di Siviglia, Rossini'
	-	Chorus ('by desire'), 'Now tramp,' Sir H. R. Bishop
	-	Duet concertante, piano-forte and violin, <i>William Tell</i> , Osborne and De Beriot
	'two trebles'	Duet, 'O, could I teach the nightingale,' Keller
	Miss Martin	'With verdure clad,' Haydn
	-	Four-part song, 'The victor's return,' Mendelssohn
	Mr. Harding	Grand March, Mendelssohn
	Mr. Harding	Overture to <i>Jessonda</i> , Spohr
	Miss F. Martin	'song'
	-	Madrigal, 'O, who will o'er the downs,' Pearsall
	Mr. D. F. Davis	Grand Fantasia on the harp
	-	Quintet, 'Blow gentle gales,' Sir H. R.

	Bishop
Mr. Hodgkiss	‘Poor little man’
Mr. Harding	Selections from <i>Masaniello</i>
	Overture to <i>Zauberflöte</i> , Mozart
Miss Martin	‘song’
-	Glee, ‘Come let us roam the greenwood,’ Mendelssohn
Messrs. Harding and Torrington	Duet concertante, piano-forte and violin, Grand Sonata, Beethoven
Miss Martin	‘ballad’
Mr. Harding	Grand March, Spohr

Appendix II – Repertoire for the Worcester Corporation Organ Recitals, 1889

These programmes are all taken from the *Worcester Journal*, and covers both the seasons of 1889, from the first of the Corporation Organ Recitals on 18 May 1889 to the last of the year on 30 December, totalling eleven recitals. The programmes are presented as they are published and are at times incomplete.

Date	Repertoire and performers
Monday 13 May	<i>Mr. W. C. Box and Mr. F. Pedley</i> Toccata and Fugue in D minor (Bach) Overture, 'Maritana' (Wallace) Song, 'The Lost Chord' (Sullivan) Airs de danse, (a) 'Noralie,' (b) 'Espanola' (Berand) Selection, 'Dorothy' (Cellier) Song, 'True to Death' Grand march, 'Tannhauser' (Wagner)
Wednesday 22 May	<i>Mr. Haynes, Mr. F. Burston (song), with Mr. Quarterman on violin obligato in the second piece.</i> Prelude in C Major (Allegro Adagio) (Bach) Overture, 'Italiana' (Rossini) Sacred song, 'The Chorister' (Sullivan) Gavotte Francaise (a) (Sexton Clarke), Andante Cantabile (b) (Dr. C. J. Frost)

Offertoire in D Major (Batiste)

Song, 'Close to the Threshold' (Parker)

Andante in G Major (Batiste)

Grand Processional March (Dr. Chipp)

Monday 3 June

Rev. E. V. Hall (organ), Mr. J. J. W. Stoye (vocalist)

Overture, 'Saul' (Handel)

Aria, 'With verdure clad' (Haydn)

Vocal solo and air, 'Stabat Mater' (Rossini)

'Songs without words' (Mendelssohn)

'Outseley's exceedingly bright and sparkling march 'Polycarp''

Larghetto in A major (Beethoven)

'I fear no foe' [a song, given at an unspecified point in the programme]

Tuesday 11 June

Arthur Smith (organ), James Bradley (vocalist)

Fantasia 'on two English national airs,' op. 43 (Guilmant)

Allegretto from 'Lobgesang Sinfonia' (Mendelssohn)

Song, 'Ora pro nobis' (Piccolomini)

Allegro maestoso (flute concerto) (Rinck)

Sonata III, 'Pastorale', op. 88 (Rheinberger)

Song, 'Queen of the earth' (Pinsuti)

Offertoire, 'No. 4 (in G)' (Lef. Wely)

Festal march (Sir George Elvey)

Wednesday 19 June

L. G. Winter (organ), Miss Hopton (vocalist)

March 'on a theme of Handel', op. 15 (Guilmant)

Offertoire in A, op. 35, no. 5 (Lef. Wely)

Song, 'The Better Land' (F. H. Cowen)

Selection, 'Faust' (Gounod)

Melody (a), 'Eloquence' (Sydney Smith)

Gavotte (b), 'Le Charme' (Ch. Le Thiere)

Song, 'Will he come?' (Sir A. Sullivan)

Festive March (Henry Smart)

Tuesday 2 July

W. C. Box (organist), C. Fleet and F. Pedley (vocalists)

Last concert of the season

Prelude and fugue in E (Bach)

Overture, 'Fra Diavolo' (Auber)

Song, 'The distant shore' (Sullivan)

(a) Danse des Bacchantes, (b) Danse des Sabots (Diana)

Fantasia, 'The Storm' (Lemmens)

Duet, 'Excelsior' (Balfe)

Selection, 'Norma' (Bellini)

March, 'Schiller' (Meyerbeer)

Tuesday 29 October

Dr. Wareing (organ) and Mr. P. Taunton (vocalist, 'of Birmingham'). First concert of the season

Andante Grazioso (Smart)

Song, 'Jerusalem' (H. Parker)

Festal march, 'in D' (Elvey)

Pastorale, 'in G' (Wareing)

Song, 'Phillada' (Wareing)

Larghetto, 'From symphony in D' (Beethoven)

Song, 'Vulcan's song' (Gounod)

Festiva march, 'in D' (Smart)

Monday 11 November

Harvey Sprang (organist, 'late assistant organist at Chester Cathedral) and Mrs. J. Hamilton (vocalist)

Offertoire 'in D'

Air varie 'From symphony in D'

Song, 'Ave Maria'

Fanfare

Allegretto, 'B minor'

Song, 'Alas! Those chimes' (Maritana)

March, 'Naaman'

Tuesday 26 November *Mr. W. Haynes (organist) and Henry Brown (vocalist, 'of Malvern')*

March of Israelites, 'Eli' (Costa)

Flute concerto (a) 'Adagio', (b) 'Allegretto' (Rink)

Song, 'The winged chorister' (Pinsuti)

Selection from 'Norma' (Bellini)

Air du dauphin (Roeckel)

Song, 'The King's courier' (Verne)

Grand choruses, by desire (a) 'He rebuked the Red Sea' (b) 'But the waters overwhelmed them' (c) 'The horse and his rider' (Handel)

Monday 9 December *Mr. Box (organist) and the Worcester Amateur Vocal Union*

March, 'Battle of Magenta' (Marie)

Part song, 'The rover's song' (Becker)

Overture, 'William Tell' (Rossini)

Barcarole, from Concerto (Sterndale Bennett)

Part song (a), '[B]attle prayer' (Storch)

Chorus (b), 'The Northman's song' (Kucken)

Selection, 'Pirates of Penzance' (Sullivan)

Part song (a), 'Adieu, ye woods' (Abt)

Polka Serenade (b), 'Trip, trip' (Schaffer)

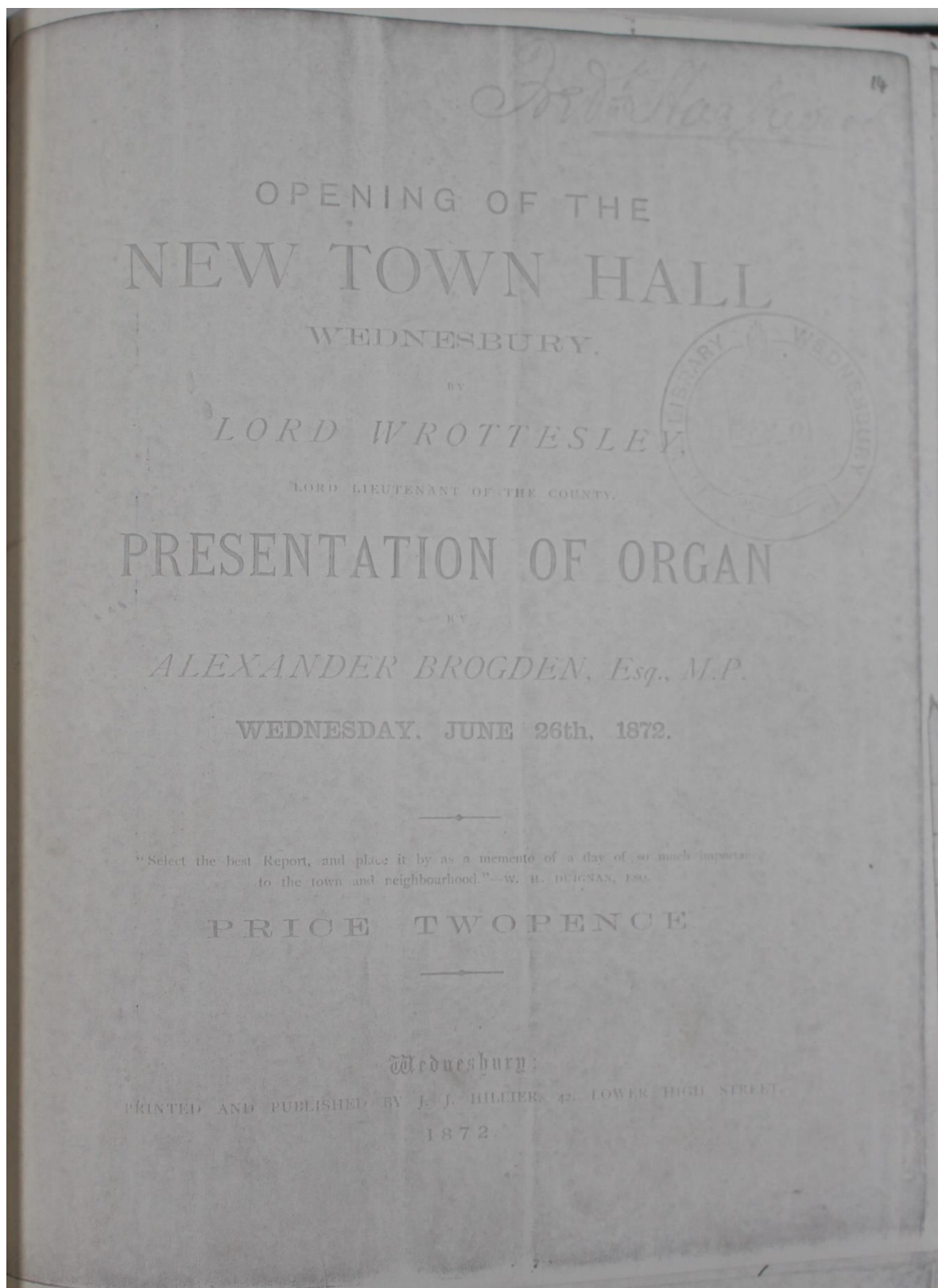
March, 'The Turkish Patrol' (Michaelis)

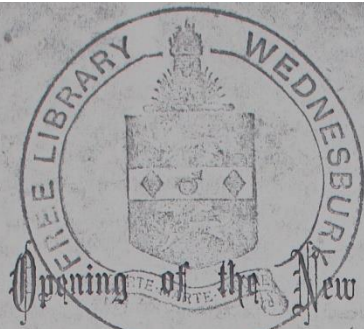
Monday 30 December *Mr. Box and the Worcester Amateur Vocal Union*

Last concert of the season

Same programme as 9 December 'as so many could not gain
admittance at the last recital'

Appendix III – Full report from the opening of Wednesbury Town Hall and the presentation of the organ, 26 June 1872, as printed in the *Wednesbury Observer*, 29 June 1872.¹⁴²





15
Red-Haewood
1872

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26th, 1872.

From "The Wednesbury Observer," of Saturday, June 29th, 1872.

THE great day of the opening of our Town Hall is past and gone, and the event has on all hands been acknowledged a great success. That the hall would be in every way worthy the reputation of the architects, and commendative of the judgment of the promoters, had gradually become the conviction even of those who had cavilled the most at its position, dimensions, and outward appearance. Trammelled in all these particulars, the Board have, whenever scope has been afforded them, displayed taste and discrimination, and the result has been a building of which Wednesbury is justly proud, and which we trust will be utilized for the elevation and rational amusement of our populace. We cannot too heartily thank the Board for their exertions on behalf of the town, for their work has by no means been of an easy character. In the face of opposition, ill-natured remarks, and spiteful forebodings, they went steadily on with their work, carefully elaborating every detail, till their final triumph culminated last Wednesday in the general satisfaction evinced by all classes at the success of their efforts. So much for the hall, its promoters and opponents. The effect of the hall is, moreover, greatly enhanced by the magnificent organ so generously presented by our Borough Member. Mr. Brogden has bestowed upon the town a most acceptable gift in the splendid instrument whose powers were so ably developed by Mr. Best last Wednesday. It is indeed a most munificent gift, and one which, whatever may be the future connexion, political or social, of Mr. Brogden with Wednesbury, will always recall pleasant associations of the representation of our borough by this our first representative. It will be long ere the people of Wednesbury, when they listen to its grand

tones, will forget Mr. Brogden and his generosity.

The proceedings of the opening day itself were characterised by the fortunate issue which the care and foresight of the executive committee reasonably promised, and the assembly of illustrious guests must have been favourably impressed with the hearty energy of the town in commemorating the opening of its really first great public building. From the banquet to the concert the whole proceedings were marked by an order and decorum which must have been most gratifying to those to whom had been entrusted the management of the ordinary details. We owe to the sub-committee of the Board, and especially to Messrs. R. Brown and E. Blake-more, that the mere routine was unmarred by even the slightest hitch; and it is much to the credit of these gentlemen that, though Wednesbury is not quite au fait to such days, their arrangements were so complete and yet so simple that none experienced the slightest difficulty in finding their appointed places. Thus all we had to do was to go and enjoy ourselves; and surely the same may be said of the banquet, which was presided over by our Lord Lieutenant, who, declining the powerful attraction of a Royal invitation to a State concert, did Wednesbury the honour of opening her new Town Hall, and officiated as Chairman at one of the most successful gatherings it has been our lot to witness, and one, we venture to state, equally enjoyable to the gentlemen below and the ladies in the gallery above. But why have separated the two? We suppose, however, such will always be the case till the rule of etiquette shall be to enjoy ourselves in the most rational and effective way. As a pageant, the effect was striking in the extreme. The assemblage of fair faces, enhanced by

tasteful toilettes, afforded the gentlemen below a sight upon which the eye dwelt with delight, as it noticed the pleasing harmony and delightful contrast of colour presented by the sea of dresses in the serried tiers of the gallery. We hope the spectacle furnished by the gentlemen was equally edifying to the fair sex,

And the Choral Association, what shall we say of them? Reviled and abused, the very idea of their undertaking the performance of so great a work as the "Elijah" being such as to call forth expressions of dissent from the spiritual world in the person of "Mendelssohn's Ghost," they may be said to have raised themselves to a pinnacle of eminence rarely attained by amateurs. They achieved not merely a perfect success but a glorious triumph, silencing completely those detractors who had prognosticated failure. Not only were their efforts appreciated by the audience, but they also elicited expressions of astonishment and satisfaction from professional musicians, who, accustomed to the most elaborate displays, were surprised at the degree of perfection to which our local artistes had arrived. "Truly a prophet is not without honour save in his own country." We hear our Class so often that we begin to be callous to their merits; let strangers visit us, and their expressions of delight open our eyes to the true value of that we are disposed so lightly to esteem.

But to whom may the success of the day be principally attributed? Without doubt to the energetic Chairman of the Local Board. To Mr. Williams' assiduous care and thoughtful attention to minutiae may be ascribed the prosperous issue of the opening of the hall, whilst

his untiring and unceasing labour in forwarding the building deserves in every way the cordial thanks of the community. This is but one of the many services Mr. Williams has rendered the town, and we should be glad to see some practical recognition of the progress effected during his tenure of office. There has been some effort to attain this in a petition to the Lord Lieutenant, to confer upon him the honour and dignity of the magistracy. This may be brought about, and would be a welcome acknowledgement to the people of Wednesbury of the satisfaction felt by his Lordship at the enthusiastic reception bestowed upon him on his first invitation to the town in his official capacity. But this would not be so much a recognition of Mr. Williams' services as a provision for the judicial needs of the town; nor on the other hand would it be the action of the townspeople so much as that of Lord Wrottesley. It would be most fitting that Wednesday's proceedings should be marked by some record that should attach itself to the Hall, and at the same time speak to posterity of the gratitude it owes the present Chairman of the Board for his efforts to promote in every way the well-being of the town. The organ, with its plate of inscription, tells of the liberality of Mr. Brogden, and is a mark of the connexion existing between the Borough and its Member! We would suggest the painting of Mr. Williams' portrait by subscription, to be hung in the Hall as a memorial of the day itself, and of the services he has rendered. It would be at once an ornament to the building and a graceful tribute to Mr. Williams. We hope the idea may prove acceptable, and be speedily carried out.

OPENING OF THE NEW TOWN HALL,
WEDNESBURY.
—o—
PRESENTATION OF THE ORGAN,
BY ALEXANDER BROGDEN, ESQ.
—o—
THE INAUGURAL CEREMONY.
—o—

On Wednesday last, amid universal rejoicings, and with a brilliancy of display such as Wednesbury has never before equalled,—the opening of the New Town Hall took place under the most auspicious circumstances, and was attended with unequivocal eclat. The day was observed as a general holiday, all the

principal tradesmen closing their establishments from eleven o'clock. Flags and banners were profusely displayed on the Hall itself, in Holyhead Road, High Street, the Market Place, and Union Street. The day began promisingly, and though the falling barometer foretold the coming showers, the weather proved more favourable than was anticipated. The town for one day, gave itself up to festivity and rejoicing, bent upon the enjoyment of a brief interval in its busy every-day life. From flagstaff and window, flags fluttered gaily in the breeze, and as the time of the opening ceremony drew near, large and enthusiastic crowds thronged the streets. Between the Public Offices and Brunswick House, the residence of R. Williams, Esq., Chairman of the Local

Board of Health, two arches of a very tasteful and striking design, gaily decorated with evergreens and flowers, were erected by Messrs. Brown and Co., of the Wednesbury Tube Works. Barriers were put along the footpath in front of the Hall, which were guarded by a body of police under Superintendent Holland.

THE TOWN HALL.

Standing in the rear of the Public Offices, which front the Holyhead road, and through which is the main entrance to the hall, the building itself is, externally, plain in the extreme, the Local Board having, on the score of economy in the expenditure of the public money, dispensed with all ornamentation on the exterior. Such considerations have not, however, been allowed to mar the beauty of the interior. The internal proportions are; length, 75 ft.; width, 46 ft.; height 36 ft.; accommodation being provided for an audience of 780 persons, and in the orchestra for a band and chorus of 120. The walls are divided into panels, separated by Corinthian pilasters embraced, supporting a full Corinthian cornice, (with enriched modillions,) from which springs a coffered and panelled ceiling, with moulded and panelled ribs, and enriched centre flowers, from which are suspended five star-light burners; the general effect being exceedingly good. By day, light is obtained by semi-circular windows, groined into the coffering of the ceiling. The hall is supplied with a gallery, the front of which forms a continuous curvilinear line, forming a well at the far end, and finishing in a curve at the end nearest the orchestra against each side wall of the building. The front as also the front of the orchestra, is decorated with rich mouldings, and filled in with cast-iron panels of an ornamental pattern, and coloured. Abundant means of ingress and egress are afforded by five doors, which are so arranged that any part of the hall may be reserved, and the audience be distributed at will. Two are from Albert Street, upon which the hall abuts, and three from the Holyhead Road, the principal being through the Board of Health Offices, while the others are on each side of the building. In the basement is the hall-keeper's house, with scullery, engine-house, &c.; while above, retiring rooms, and all other necessary offices are provided. The total cost will not exceed £3,000., including gas-fittings, heating apparatus, and seats, which, like all the wood work of the interior, are of pitch pine, stained and varnished. The builder is Mr. D. Moore, of Walsall, who has executed the work in highly creditable style.

The hall, both as regards beauty of design and finish, and capacity, furnishes a striking contrast to the old, contracted, and undecorated room in Russell Street, which for many years served as a Town Hall, and is one of the most marked evidences of that progress which, thanks to the good and enlightened government of our local rulers, and the enterprise of the inhabitants, has so eminently distinguished the town of late years; while the organ is such a gift as it falls to the good fortune of but few towns to get.

THE ORGAN.

The organ is an instrument second to none, perhaps, in the Midland Counties, that of Birmingham excepted. It has three manuals of the complete range of 58 keys, CC to A in altissimo, and a pedal of 30 from CCC to F. It consists of Great, Swell, and Choir Organs, all of the full compass of the manuals and a Pedal Organ of the same compass as the pedal keys, and contains the following stops arranged in the

various organs as below:—

GREAT ORGAN.

	Feet.	Pipes.
Double Open Diapason, metal	16	58
Open Diapason .. metal	8	58
Violin Diapason .. metal	8	58
Hohl Flute .. wood	8	58
Principal .. metal	4	58
Harmonic Flute .. metal	4	58
Twelfth .. metal	2½	58
Fifteenth .. metal	2	58
Mixture .. metal	4 ranks	232
Trumpet .. metal	4	58
Clarion .. metal	8	58

Pipes in Great Organ .. 812

SWELL ORGAN.

	Feet.	Pipes.
Bourdon .. wood	16	58
Open Diapason .. metal	8	58
Salicional .. metal	8	46
Rohrflöte .. metal	8	58
Principal .. metal	4	58
Fifteenth .. metal	2	58
Mixture .. metal	3 ranks	174
Horn .. metal	8	58
Oboe .. metal	4	58

Pipes in Swell Organ .. 626

CHOIR ORGAN.

	Feet.	Pipes.
Dulciana .. metal	8	58
Lieblieb Gedact .. wood	8	58
Lieblieb Flute .. wood	4	58
Flauto Traverso .. metal	4	58
Harmonic Piccolo .. metal	3	58
Krummhorn .. metal	8	58

Pipes in Choir Organ .. 348

PEDAL ORGAN.

	Feet.	Pipes.
Grand Open Diapason wood	16	30
Bourdon .. wood	16	30
Violoncello .. wood	8	30
Trombone .. metal	16	30

Pipes in Pedal Organ .. 120

SUMMARY OF PIPES.

Great Organ	812
Swell Organ	626
Choir Organ	348
Pedal Organ	120

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The pedal keys and manuals are connected or isolated by the following couplers:—

Pedal to Great.	Great to Choir.
Pedal to Swell.	Swell Sub Octave.
Pedal to Choir.	Swell Super Octave.
Great to Swell.	

There are also three combination pedals, producing various mixtures to the great organ, and two to the swell. The entire number of draw-stops, including the Trombone, is 38.

The wind is supplied by two pairs of bellows, fixed underneath the organ platform, and both being under the immediate control of the performer. To one pair are fixed diagonal feeders, which are moved by hand, and to the other are fixed French feeders, worked by



Duncan's patent hydraulic engines, supplied by Messrs. G. Forester and Co., of Liverpool. The movements are finished in a very superior manner, and the work throughout is of first-rate quality, while the tone is all that could be desired.

The front bears the following inscription:—"Presented by A. Brogden, Esq., M.P., the first member returned for the borough of Wednesbury, June 26th, 1872."

The case, which is from designs by Messrs. Loxton Brothers, architects, of Wednesbury, is constructed in pitch pine, stained and varnished, and is in thorough harmony with the internal details of the building. It consists of an imposing central classical tower, supported by Corinthian columns engaged, surmounted by an enriched Corinthian cornice, bearing a pannelled and mounted arch, with parapet, cornice, and carved consoles. This tower is flanked on either side by a flat, and that by a circular tower at the angle, carried by a carved cusp springing from the angle of the case, and surmounted by a massive cornice to match the central tower. The pipes presented to view are decorated and enriched in colour and gold, and are carried round the sides of the case as well as shown in the front. The builders, both of the organ and case, are Messrs. Forster and Andrews of Hull.

THE INAUGURAL CEREMONY.

Lord Wrottesley, the Lord-lieutenant of the county, arrived at the Great Western Station, punctually at 11-22, and was met by R. Williams, Esq., whose carriage was in waiting to convey his Lordship to Brunswick House, where the distinguished guests were to assemble. The usual body guard of police to attend upon the Lord-lieutenant was drawn up in front of the house. The Lord Bishop of the Diocese and A. Bass, Esq., M.P., arrived soon after, and were introduced to Alexander Brogden, Esq. M. P., James G. Brogden, Esq., W. T. Best, Esq., E. Blakemore, Esq. the Rev. E. J. Wrottesley, and the Rev. John Lyons. A few minutes before twelve o'clock, Lord Wrottesley and party proceeded to the hall, headed by the police. At the appearance of the procession, the interest and excitement increased greatly, and did not diminish until the noble lord and his friends had passed through the crowded lines, into the hall, and the deafening cheers had died away. On entering the Board-room, his Lordship was introduced to the County Magistrates, the members of the Local Board, the Chairmen of the several Municipal bodies in the borough, and other guests.

If externally there were abundant tokens of rejoicing and festivity, internally those tokens were more manifest still, and by the time for the commencement of the inaugural ceremony, the Hall wore an appearance surpassingly brilliant. The carved vases on the orchestra were filled with choice exotics laden with rich coloured blossoms; while more flowers, in long lines of vases, adorned the luncheon tables; and the attractive features of the scene reached the point of culmination in the gallery above, which was filled with ladies, attired in the gayest and brightest of summer toilets, radiant with smiles and pleasurable expectancy. Soon after mid-day, by which time the guests had taken their allotted places at the luncheon tables, Mr. R. Williams, Chairman of the Board of Health, entered the hall, accompanied by Lord Wrottesley, Lord-lieutenant of the county, the Lord Bishop of the diocese, Mr. A. Brogden, M.P., Mr. A. Bass, M.P., Mr. Sampson Lloyd, J.P., Mr. W. T. Best, the members of the Local Board, and

other gentlemen. Their entrance was the signal for loud applause, again and again renewed, as guest after guest made his appearance, and bursting out with redoubled vigour as the worthy member came forward. Lord Wrottesley and those who accompanied him having taken their places upon the orchestra,

Mr. R. Williams said it was his duty, as well as his privilege, as chairman to the Local Board of Health, to introduce to that brilliant assemblage Lord Wrottesley, Lord-lieutenant of the county of Stafford; and he did so with the greater pleasure, because there had assembled on that occasion such a meeting as had never before been seen in the ancient town of Wednesbury (Applause). They had present the Lord Bishop of the Diocese—(applause)—the members for the county and the newly-made borough—(renewed applause)—the whole body of the local magistrates in the district, the clergy and ministers of all denominations, the chairmen of the governing bodies of the four towns making up the confederacy of that Parliamentary borough, the leading tradesmen of the several towns, and last, but not least, the very flower of the ladies of Wednesbury (Cheers.) In referring to the history of this ancient town, he could find no record of any such meeting as that. The speaker congratulated the assemblage upon the presence of the Lord-lieutenant as the representative of her Majesty, and went on to say that prior to the erection of the present hall the people of Wednesbury had no place of their own in which to meet and discuss municipal, parliamentary, social, or other matters. At first, like other towns, they were content to do their business in school-rooms and other places, from which they were at times liable to be excluded from various causes; but, as the place progressed, and other wants sprang up, it was found that some better accommodation was needed. For years there had been some discussion on the subject, but it never took definite shape until recently—until the last election, in fact. Some buildings in which the ratepayers had been in the habit of meeting were then refused for the holding of political meetings; and on the fever heat of feeling which then prevailed arose the determination of the people to have a hall of their own in which they could assemble for all lawful purposes. A memorial in favour of the project was presented to the Local Board, and it was followed by a counter-memorial, the result being that the Board took a poll of the parish, which lasted three days, and was most fairly conducted, as he could testify, from having presided, and which showed a large majority in favour of the erection of a hall. That was in 1870. Then tenders were obtained, and the work was undertaken in earnest. These facts he mentioned mainly to show his Lordship that the hall was the offspring of the will of the people, and that it was their property, and would remain theirs for ever, if his Lordship would honour the town by declaring the building open. Two or three circumstances ought to be mentioned in order to dispose of some misunderstanding which had risen in reference to the subject. First of all, exception had been taken to the site, and it had been urged that the hall should have been erected in the Market Place or elsewhere than where it had been put; but the fact was, the Board in London said that unless the hall was erected in connection with the offices it could not be built by the Local Board at all, leaving them, in fact, nothing but Hobson's choice. (Laughter.) This should be a sufficient answer to the objectors, and also to those who said the hall was too short; the fact being, that between the Public Offices in the front and Albert Street at the back, they could not make it larger. (Applause.) As to expense, it was at first proposed

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to restrict the outlay to £2,000, out of consideration of the fact that the money would come, not out of the pockets of a wealthy constituency, but from the pockets of a hard-working, wage-earning class, to whom every shilling was a consideration. It was found, however, that that limit could not be observed, especially taking into account the handsome present they had to place in the building; but the total outlay would not exceed £3,000. (Applause.) That would be spread over thirty years, and would not cause a rate of more than three halfpence in the pound, so that a person living in a £10. house would not have to pay more than 1s. 3d. a year. (Applause.) This should be widely known, because there were always agitators at hand endeavouring to sow the seed of discord. (Hear, hear.) Although the building was not costly, it was fairly handsome. It was commodious enough for the population, and he believed it would be all that was necessary for their comfort, for their social necessities, and not only for their social necessities, but for the municipal and parliamentary necessities of the town. In conclusion, he invited his Lordship to declare the hall opened.

Lord Wrottesley, who was greeted with loud cheers, said he had much pleasure in being able to identify himself with an event of so much importance to the town of Wednesbury, as that in which they were taking part that day. (Applause.) There were certain events in the history of places, as in the lives of individuals, which left their mark, and afterwards formed part of the history of those places; and he thought that day was one which must form an important part of the history of the town—(applause)—following, as it did, closely upon an event, which also marked an important epoch in the history of Wednesbury, viz.: the time when the town, with the surrounding district, achieved its own proper political independence. (Applause.) He considered himself fortunate in being able to come among them in a time of great commercial activity, when he could congratulate the town upon the development of its trade, and upon that prosperity which such development carried in its train. (Applause.) With this increase in material activity came also an increase in the wants of the population, and the events which were thereby engendered gave rise to those social problems which were more and more pressing for solution, and which he was sure would receive due attention within the precincts of the building. (Applause.) He hoped, as he believed, that the legislation of the past 20 years—a term not long in itself, but long when looked at in connection with the rise of the town and district, had done much to further those facilities for advancement in sanitary science, which enabled those to whom they entrusted their interests to promote all those measures which tended in themselves to further the comfort and health of populous districts. (Applause.) They had been recently told by one of their most eminent statesmen, that at a time not far distant, these subjects as far as he was concerned, would become all-important, and be those which must first engage the attention of those in power. (Hear, hear.) He could not help thinking that they had from time to time necessarily engaged the attention of those in power as well as the attention of many of the most eminent individuals not entrusted with power: but he would only say, what nobody present would be inclined to deny, that they were second to none in importance, and that they would be still carefully watched on behalf of Wednesbury, by those by the enterprise of whom the building had been projected, and under whom it would be devoted to the public uses for which it was so eminently fitted. (Cheers.)

He congratulated all present, and the people of Wednesbury generally, upon the possession of such a handsome building—a building so excellently adapted, as they would see if they only looked around—for the purposes to which it was dedicated, and in which they would no doubt frequently reap the full benefit of having such a place in which to meet for instruction and amusement. (Cheers.) In conclusion, he could not help alluding, though perhaps prematurely, to the noble gift which adorned the building—(loud cheers)—and as he had touched upon some of the graver questions which would come under the consideration of the leaders of their interests, he might add that he was quite sure that great relief would be found in the cultivation of that art which the gift they were to receive that day, would go so far to promote. (Cheers.) It only remained to him to say that he acceded with pleasure to the request which had been made to him by the Chairman of the Local Board—he who had taken so much interest in the undertaking, and worked so hard to bring about the brilliant result which they witnessed—(cheers)—to declare the Hall open for all purposes to which hereafter it might lawfully be applied. (Cheers.) And in doing so he would ask the company to receive with all that honour and gratitude which were so eminently due to him—the gentleman who had placed that noble gift at their disposal—Mr. Brogden, their member. (Loud cheers.)

Mr. Brogden then rose, and was received with loud cheers, again and again renewed. He said it gave him infinite gratification to be present on that occasion, but had he consulted his own feelings he would rather have taken some humble, retired position, so as to be only a witness of, instead of a partaker in the ceremony; but, of course, he felt that on that occasion it could not be otherwise than that he should be called upon to say a few words. (Cheers.) It gave him the greatest pleasure to be present on the occasion of the opening of that handsome and magnificent Hall, and to be able to present to the Chairman of the governing body, an organ to be placed in the building. (Loud cheers.) Mr. Williams had so very ably explained the origin of the building, and gone through the different phases of its history, that he would not dwell upon that, except to say, that when he became aware that it was determined to build a Town Hall for Wednesbury, and it was suggested to him by Mr. Williams and other friends that it was intended to use it for public purposes and for recreation and amusement, he was delighted to accede to their suggestion, and undertook to place an organ within the building. (Cheers.) Whether it came up to their expectations or not he left them to say—(loud cheers)—but having once made up his mind to have an organ placed there, he gave instructions to those who were connected with its construction, that it should in every way be worthy of the building. (Cheers.) He hoped it would prove so, and that it would prove, not only on that occasion, but for many long years, the means of the recreation, and instruction, and elevation of tone of the whole community. (Loud cheers.) Knowing as he did that as Mr. Williams had observed, they were all workers in that neighbourhood, he thought it might be the means, used freely by the public, of relieving that constant strain of exertion which was the necessary concomitant of their daily occupation, and, allowing people to dismiss for the moment the cares and anxieties of their daily lot, to receive solace and recreation. (Cheers.) If it did that, and if in doing that he was, even for a moment, remembered with pleasure, he should be amply repaid. (Renewed cheers.) He considered it an honour to himself to be allowed to place the organ in that

building, because it was a record of an event which was historical to the borough, and also historical, he might say without vanity, to himself. (Cheers.) On the plate on the front of the organ, was a recital of the fact that it was given by "the first member returned for the borough of Wednesbury," and that would be handed down from generation to generation, as an enduring record of the time when they were first placed in a position of political responsibility. (Cheers.) He, for one, was very glad to hear from the Chairman of the Board, that the fever heat of political excitement which prevailed at the election, was the author and father of that building—(applause)—for if that was the first-fruit of a fever heat election—(laughter)—a second fever heat might produce a result more gratifying still. (Laughter and cheers.) What shape that would take he could not prognosticate, but he congratulated that audience upon the result of the fever heat of the first election. (Laughter and applause.) He repeated that he had the greatest satisfaction—more than he could express in words—in presenting to Mr. Williams, as the presiding officer of the governing body of the town—that organ, which would be used for public purposes, in a room belonging to the ratepayers, not only for the pleasure of the audience he saw before him, but for the pleasure of the teeming population of the neighbourhood, who would use the opportunities of frequently being present in that Hall and listening to the strains of the instrument. (Loud cheers.)

Mr. R. Williams said, that on behalf of his fellow townsmen and townswomen, he accepted that noble, costly, and most appropriate gift, and promised on the part of his colleagues and himself, that it should be used for all lawful and legitimate purposes, as often as possible. (Cheers.) When the Hall was designed they had an idea that it would never be a complete building without an organ, and they sketched out an orchestra, but they had no idea they should meet with such a gracious giver as Mr. Brogden—(loud cheers)—or that they should in any way obtain so magnificent an instrument, for he was justified in saying that with the exception of the Birmingham Town Hall organ, there was no such instrument in the Midland counties. (Cheers.) If, therefore, any of the visitors or of the townspeople, were disposed to think the organ too large or the orchestra too small, they must remember that when the building was designed such an organ was not expected (applause). They knew that when the building was finished, some liberal people would be found to place an instrument in it, and they thought that in common fairness to Mr. Brogden, he, as their first member, should have the first opportunity (laughter and applause). Mr. Brogden fell in with the suggestion very cordially—(applause)—and there was not a single person in the town who did not thank him for it most heartily (cheers). If there was an error at all, it was that the organ was too large, but that was an error on the right side; and even in that respect he thought the audience would find they were mistaken the more they looked at the matter (hear, hear). As to the power of the instrument he would say nothing, except this, that the fears of some timid individuals that the roof would be blown off, were not likely to be realised (laughter). The powers of the Local Board were, of course, limited, but they intended to strain a point in the direction of moral effort, and try a little of the effects of music and the organ in the improvement of the people (applause). Since the formation of Wednesbury and neighbouring places into a Parliamentary Borough, the people had begun to think a little more

than before, and take a greater interest in various public matters, and he thought it should be the aim of the Local Board, departing a little from its ordinary sanitary work, to assist them in their advancing tendencies (applause). A great aid in that direction would be the instrument which had just been presented to the town,—(applause)—for not only was it beautiful to the eye, but when its ravishing strains were poured forth, he believed the Board would have an invaluable auxiliary in dealing with the great masses of the people who needed something to utilise and brighten their spare hours—(cheers)—which, owing to recent movements, were more numerous than before. They hoped to utilise it weekly, throwing the place open at a small charge, for elevating performances—not to let it rust out, but to wear it out if possible (laughter and applause). Mr. Best told them that the more they used it the better it would be, and they meant to put his advice into practice (applause). The building was beautiful, but without the instrument it would be but a dead carcase (applause). It was that which gave it vitality, and with it the Board desired and expected, not only to entertain and do good to the masses while they were there, but to send them home, better men and better women, with tempers softened, dispositions elevated, and in every way more qualified to distribute among their families the harmonious influences with which they would become imbued there (cheers). There were great difficulties, as was well known, in connection with the subject of popular amusement, and it was also well known what form it too often took in that neighbourhood (hear, hear). The want grew with the town, and it really seemed as if the instrument had been providentially put there to meet the emergency, and provide the means of supplying recreation of a more rational and elevating kind than was too often resorted to (applause). A great deal could be said upon this subject, but he would forbear, and content himself with promising on behalf of the Board that whatever lay in their power to make the gift useful to all classes, high or low, rich or poor, that they would do (applause). And he could safely say that never would the eye be pleased by gazing on its fair proportions, or the ear be ravished by listening to its sweet sounds, but the name of Mr. Brogden would rise up in grateful remembrance (loud cheers).

The Lord Bishop of the diocese then offered the following prayer:—

"Lord of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things, we cannot be so unmindful of Thy benefits as not to take the opening of this Hall as a fitting opportunity for offering to Thee our praises and thanksgivings for the great prosperity which Thou hast granted to the trade and industry of this place, and to the country at large. We thankfully acknowledge Thy fatherly care in preserving the health of the crowded population of this town and neighbourhood. We pray that the uses to which this Hall may be applied may tend to Thy glory and to the well-being of Thy people, that those who assemble here may never forget that Thou art present in the mart of commerce, and in the banquet hall, no less than in Thine own house of prayer. May the spirit of Thy blessed Son be ever with us in our public meetings to inspire us with mutual forbearance and brotherly charity; in our social festivities to teach us to use Thy gifts and not to abuse them. Guided by the example of his self-denial, may our public men love themselves least, and seek the good of others rather than their own. May the gospel preached in Thy house be seen here in its practical effect; may an all-pervading spirit of Christianity be here seen and felt in perfect integrity in commercial dealings; in reciprocity of interests between masters and workmen; in the extinction of petty jealousies and

party strife: and in the dedication of our powers of mind and habits of business and worldly goods, to the correction of all social evils, to the preservation of health, to the care of the sick, the aged, the widow and the orphan. Finally, we pray that whenever the strains of sacred music shall ascend in this place from the organ now devoted to Thy praise, many hearts may be raised to Heaven of those

'With whom the melodies abide
Of the everlasting chime;
Who carry music in their heart,
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet,
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.'

All these our prayers and thanksgivings we offer unto Thee, O Heavenly Father, in the name and for the sake of Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Redeemer. Amen."

Mr. Best, of Liverpool, then took his seat at the organ, and while luncheon was being prepared, played a masterly improvisation, effectively displaying the various stops, and the rich tones and wide capabilities of the instrument, and concluding with the National Anthem. The performance was at once a delight and a surprise to the audience.

THE LUNCHEON

was served by Mr. Birch, of the Dartmouth Arms Hotel, and was well worthy of the occasion. The tables were effectively ornamented with a beautiful display of cut flowers and hot-house plants.

BILL OF FARE.

SOUPS.

Mock Turtle. St. Julien.

FISH.

Salmon and Lobster Sauce. Stewed Eels.

COLD COLLATIONS.

Roast Sirloins of Beef. Legs of Lamb.
Shoulders of Lamb. Gallintine of Veal.
Roast Chickens Sardoons. Roast Ducks.
Boiled Chickens. Boiled Hams
Lobster Salad. Pain de Veau Veal Cakes.
Raised French Pies. Pigeon Pies.

ENTREMENTS.

Lemons Calves' Foot Jelly. Wine Jelly.
Blancmange. Swiss Cream.
Iced Puddings a la Nessel Rode.
Tipsy Cake. French and Italian Pastry.

CHEESE AND SALAD.

Stilton and Cheddar.

DESSERT.

Oranges. Grapes. Peaches. Figs. Strawberryrise.
Apples. Apricots. Cherries. Wine Biscuits.
Almonds. Muscatels. Nuts, &c., &c.

Lord Wrottesley presided, and was supported on his left by Mr. R. Williams, Mr. A. Brogden, M.P., Mr. T. S. Hatton, Mr. J. G. Brogden, Mr. J. Bissell, and Mr. W. T. Best; and on the right by the Lord Bishop of the Diocese, the Rev. E. J. Wrottesley, Mr. A. Bass, M.P., Mr. S. Lloyd, J.P., Mr. T. Davis, J.P., Mr. T. Jesson, J.P. There were also present at the cross table Dr. Underhill (Tipton), Mr. J. Marshall, J.P., Mr. Cook (Bath), the Rev. P. Maitland (Naples), the Rev. L. Bathurst, the Rev. H. H. Campbell, the Rev. T. Wilkes, Mr. S. L. Foster, the Rev. R. B. Stoney, the Rev. R. Twigg, the Rev. J. Lyons, Mr. W. Williams, the Rev. J. Moorhouse, Mr. J. D. Bennett, and Mr. Rubery. During luncheon refreshments were supplied to the ladies in the gallery, at the cost of the chairman of the Local Board of Health.

On the removal of the cloth,

The Chairman proposed "The Queen." He said they all had sympathised with her Majesty, in the afflictions which had befallen her family and herself, and now they rejoiced with her, that her health, and the health of her beloved son had been restored (cheers).

The toast was drunk with becoming loyalty, and Mr. Best played "God save the Queen."

The Chairman next gave "The Prince of Wales and the Royal Family." He said they had arrived at a time when the members of the Royal House were gathered together in this country, and were taking their share in those public affairs which so eminently befitted their position (applause). They had just had a visit in the neighbourhood of one member of the Royal House, and no doubt many present had had the opportunity of offering him the welcome which he was sure his Royal Highness so eminently deserved (applause). The princes of the Royal House had shown their anxiety to promote all that might conduce to the welfare and happiness of the nation, and the acknowledgments of the people were due to them for the heartiness with which they had come forward (cheers).

Mr. Best gave "God bless the Prince of Wales," with exquisite effect, and the performance was enthusiastically re-demanded.

The Bishop of Lichfield then gave "The Army and Navy, and Auxiliary Forces." He said he could not help contrasting that day's gathering and the circumstances attending it, with the day and the occasion of his first visit to the town. Then the streets were so full of workmen out of work that he could scarcely pass along; but now things were far different, and those were no vain words which he offered in his prayer that morning, because he knew how greatly it had pleased God to alter this state of things for the better (applause). Before addressing himself to the toast, he ought, perhaps, to explain the reasons of his appearing in the ambiguous—he had almost said amphibious (laughter)—position in which he found himself. For want, he supposed, of some better advocate, he had been called upon to propose "The Army and Navy, and Auxiliary Forces," and it might be thought that he was out of place. Yet he had had his share of service in both these departments. For many months, in the war in New Zealand, he served as a military chaplain, and for many weeks he had officiated as chaplain on board a man-of-war. Therefore he was not without some qualifications for proposing the toast (hear, hear). He had also taken some interest in the Auxiliary Forces, the Militia and Yeomanry—on the occasion of their annual visit to Lichfield, and had been glad to see them in the Cathedral, and to address to them such words as he could (applause). Therefore, although he entered upon it with some misgiving, he hoped they would accept the toast at his hands—(applause)—and although living in the very heart of the country, he was shut out from the element with which he was most familiar, and upon which he should be most ready to act, if the Lord Lieutenant should at any time be obliged to call upon the Auxiliary forces of the country, he should, at his Lordship's bidding, put on his New Zealand uniform as chaplain to those forces (laughter). He then called upon the company to drink the toast, remarking that the Army and Navy of Great Britain, and also the Auxiliary forces, always had performed, and always would be ready to perform their duties in the spirit which animated those two great men, Wellington and Nelson, who lay together in St. Paul's Cathedral (cheers).

Mr. Best gave a selection of national, military, and naval airs, including "The British Grenadiers," and

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"Rule Britannia," and the performance excited scarcely less enthusiasm than the preceeding one.

Major Williams, in responding, said the gallant deeds of the army and navy were so well known and so highly appreciated, that every assemblage of Englishmen and Englishwomen would feel they had made an omission if they did not drink the toast (applause). As a Yeomanry officer, he would say nothing about the force to which he belonged, but he would say that the Volunteers had taken advantage of every opportunity of making themselves efficient (applause).

Captain W. Williams gave "The House of Lords, with the health of Lord Wrottesley." He said the House of Lords knew how to do its duty, and those assembled knew how to appreciate the performance of that duty. It had been observed that all in that neighbourhood were hard-working men; and of the members of the Upper House who were with them that day, he could say with truth that they were hard-working members of the august body to which they belonged (applause). Of the Bishop of the Diocese he need not say a single syllable. Every one knew his zeal, and the admirable way in which he discharged the duties of his high office. He (the speaker) knew his lordship years ago, and could speak of him as being then a man honest, upright, and independent; and what he was then he was still in the higher position to which he had been called (applause). He was a man, whom to know was to respect, and to respect was to like and love (applause). The people of Wednesbury and the Black Countryites generally delighted to welcome him among them that day—(applause)—and both his Lordship and the Lord Lieutenant would, he was sure, go away with the feeling that if the Black Country was a black diamond, it was a diamond of worth (applause).

Lord Wrottesley acknowledged the kindness with which his name had been mentioned and received, and said he felt deeply any expression of sympathy with either the office he held or himself individually. He was glad of the opportunity of coming into that district—a district into which his avocations had not previously led him, but one which had always been to him a source of great interest (applause). He recollected that when very young, before the days of railways, he passed through it on the coach, and it struck him with a certain amount of astonishment. Since then, he had seen it developed from time to time, until it had arrived at a pitch of industry and prosperity that twenty years ago could scarcely have been anticipated (applause). Knowing this, and the changes it had gone through, he had never ceased to take a deep interest in the district—a district peculiar in its features, and peculiar in its share in the elements of the prosperity of the country (applause). The House of Lords had had to bear adverse criticism, but he could bear testimony, not only to the learning and ability which distinguished that House—(applause)—but also to the fact, that in all they did they had but one object in view, the welfare of the nation (applause). Although from time to time they might not go so quick as the more ardent and impatient reformers could desire, he was sure of this, that if they had the power, they had not the will to place obstacles in the way of the well recognised machinery of the country (cheers).

Mr. P. D. Bennett, in proposing "The House of Commons and the Health of the County Members," said every Englishman must justly be proud of the House of Commons, which was the embodiment of the idea of representative government and of the national will, and effectually carried out the wishes of

the nation. He considered that the people of that division of the county were very fortunate in the gentlemen they had selected as their representatives—(applause)—and he was quite sure they would continue to do their utmost to promote those beneficent laws which were necessary for the well-being of the entire community (applause).

Mr. A. Bass, who was received with loud cheers, said he must first acknowledge the kind manner in which the toast had been received; next, offer his most grateful thanks for the kind invitation which had given him the opportunity of being present on so pleasant and auspicious an occasion; and, next, express the pleasure it gave him to revisit Wednesbury for the first time since those party feelings engendered by the election had died out, and when he could be recognised not as the chosen of one party, but as the representative of all classes (applause). It was also his duty to express Mr. McClean's sorrow at his inability to be present that day. Mr. McClean had been ill for some months, from an attack which struck him down in India, and from which he had not at present recovered. As a Staffordshire man, he should not stand excused if he did not say a word in praise of the good old town of Wednesbury. They were all proud of it (applause). It set all those connected with other towns a good example in the excellent way in which its local affairs were managed by the governing body, under the presidency of Mr. R. Williams—(cheers)—and he trusted that this would be but the precursor of a more extended form of municipal government (cheers). The good government of the people was strengthened by any agency that supplied good, wholesome pleasures, and he could imagine no agency so potent to that end as that which by the wise and open-handed munificence of Mr. Brogden had been placed in that Hall that day (loud cheers). It was not without reason, then, that that day they did honour to him who had offered so noble and munificent a gift to that town—a town, he might add, so well deserving of it (laughter and applause). The town of Wednesbury had yet to earn its laurels in the art of music (no, no.) He should be the last person to make an attack upon any art the town possessed; but if—and he only said if—(laughter)—the town did not possess the art of music, with such splendid opportunities in its possession, it would not long lack that art (hear, hear). What he wished to say was that although Wednesbury might have to earn its laurels in the art of music, in the associated art of poetry it already held a distinguished place (laughter and cheers). He never heard mentioned the name of the good old town of Wednesbury—or Wedgebury, as he preferred to hear it called—but he thought of a famous epic which he should blush to name in the same breath with anything less than that of Homer—he meant "The Wedgebury Cocking" (loud laughter and applause, and a voice: "Give us a verse"). He hoped he should be forgiven his little harmless joke; and he trusted that the Hall that day inaugurated would long continue open to all, and that those questions so intimately connected with the moral, social, and political welfare of the town might be calmly and temperately discussed therein (cheers). He trusted, in fact, that that day was the commencement of a new era in connection with the town of Wednesbury (cheers).

Mr. J. Slater proposed "The Health of Mr. Brogden." He said it gave him the greatest satisfaction to be allowed to take part in the writing of that deeply interesting page in the history of the borough which Wednesbury was writing that day, and he could not but think that all connected with the borough were greatly indebted to the authorities of Wednesbury for

their courage in putting up such a building (applause), a building which reflected the greatest credit upon the architects by the skill and taste which they had displayed—(applause)—and which, no doubt, would be used for the good of the town. It seemed to him they were on that occasion extremely happy—their cup of happiness was full to overflowing—but still there was just one dash of regret; and they, the "lords of creation" asked by what hard and cruel fate it was that they were separated from the ladies—(laughter and applause)—who bloomed, radiant and beautiful, in the regions above, while they themselves, were left in a state of agonising despair on the floor below (renewed laughter and applause). He prophesied that if the proceedings lasted much longer, a devoted band of pilgrims would be found setting out for the celestial city, headed by the Lord Lieutenant himself (loud laughter and applause). Although, however, they had not the ladies by their side on that occasion, they had among them some respected members of the sterner sex, and among them was Mr. Brogden (cheers). That gentleman had been known in the neighbourhood but a comparatively short time, but he was known and esteemed in every house in the borough, and the esteem with which he was held was on the increase (cheers). It was no place for politics—upon which differences of opinion were so great, and were increasing every day—but he would venture to say this of Mr. Brogden that he was a diligent student of history, and searcher after truth, a wise reformer, and a man who not only took a great interest in those international questions at present agitating the public mind, but who would desire to see those steps adopted which would uphold the national honor (cheers). There were differences of opinion of course, upon these subjects, but he believed those differences would not lead Mr. Brogden to swerve from those principles which he had taken up (cheers). When Mr. Brogden was placed in the position at present occupied by him, he declared that it was the proudest moment of his life; but he (the speaker) believed he would rather sacrifice that proud position, than give up one single article of his political faith (cheers). No sooner was the painful struggle over which placed him in the position of their representative than he said he would put aside all the feelings which had been engendered in the heat of the controversy, and it would be his study, as it was his duty, to represent, not any one section of the constituency, but the whole borough, with its vast, mighty, and important interests, and its varied classes (cheers). How far he had succeeded in carrying out that determination he (the speaker) need not say: there were many present who knew it perfectly well (cheers). No one ever sought his advice without receiving sound counsel, given in the kindest possible manner (hear, hear). And of the manner in which he had discharged his parliamentary duties, he (the speaker) need not say a word. He was in his place with remarkable regularity, and the division lists seldom or never appeared without his name being there. When they remembered the vast business engagements the hon. gentleman had to discharge, the wonder was how he found so much time to attend to his parliamentary duties (applause). If Mr. Brogden were absent, he should be tempted to speak of his liberality in detail, but in his presence he would merely say that every division of the borough had received munificent gifts from him, calculated to help along many good causes, and that persons interested in the various institutions of the borough had never appealed to him for support, without receiving it most handsomely and generously given (cheers). If, by some cruel fate, his connection with the borough were severed—which he ventured to say

was a very remote possibility, while life lasted (cheers)—his faithfulness to his trust, the excellent manner in which he had discharged the duties of that trust, and his liberality, would prevent his name and worth from ever being forgotten in that locality (cheers). He prayed that the hon. gentleman and his family might always be blessed with increasing health and happiness (cheers).

The health was drank with great enthusiasm, the entire company upstanding, and Mr. Best playing "Swell the full chorus," (Handel).

Mr. Brogden, on rising was received with renewed cheers. He assured the meeting that he felt quite overwhelmed by the kind terms which Mr. Slater had used towards him, and the hearty manner in which the toast had been received by that assemblage. He would therefore restrict himself to the expression of his thanks; but they would, perhaps, permit him to add one word more, and that was that he could have no dearer wish than to know he grew in the esteem of the people of the borough, and that the way in which he attempted to discharge his duties met with their approval (applause). He remembered the struggle which he and many of those present had had side by side, in the first contest for the borough, and how his friends rallied round him in that effort; and he thanked not only those friends, but those gentlemen who were at that time his opponents, for their presence that day in that Hall, where they could meet on common ground and feel that they had common interests (cheers). Mr. Slater had not exaggerated one word in saying that from the moment he became the representative of the borough, he ceased to regard himself as the representative of one party, and strove to seek to ascertain and properly to represent all the interests of that vast community (cheers). He tendered his sincere thanks for the expression of the hope that his connection with the borough would be continued, and acknowledged his sympathy with the hope. Not that he meant to say he hoped he should continue to represent opinions which he did not agree with, but that he should continue to represent the political views of the party with which he had always been associated, and putting aside political questions, that he should represent all the rest (cheers).

Mr. S. Lloyd, in proposing "The Health of the Chairman and Members of the Wednesbury Local Board of Health," said years ago he laboured to get the Board established, which was done after considerable difficulties had been overcome. His late brother was the Chairman of the Board for many years, and after his brother's death he himself occupied the chair for some years. Consequently, he knew something of the workings of the body and all the labours connected with it; and he was proud to think that, although often under great difficulties and amidst much opposition, it had gone on progressing and always increasing in popularity, until they were privileged to meet that day in that handsome building erected by the Board (hear, hear). He trusted it would go on achieving results still more worthy of its labours than those it had already accomplished; and that that day was the commencement of a new era, in which many works of usefulness still remaining to be done for the health, the benefit, or the adornment of the town, would be carried into effect (cheers).

The health was enthusiastically drunk, the entire company upstanding.

Mr. K. Williams, chairman of the Board, returned thanks. He said that according to the definition which had been given of the duties of the Board, it seemed that their province was to deal chiefly with sanitary matters; but there were collateral duties devol-

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ving upon such a body, and one of those had found realisation in the erection of the building which they had met to inaugurate that day (applause). He apprehended they were not going beyond their duty in extending their operations beyond their own strictly defined domain, into that moral field, which in too many parts of the Black Country was but a waste, and constituting themselves, what he considered they should be, a Moral Board of Health as well as a Local Board of Health for sanitary purposes (cheers). As a Board it was their intention to use that instrument (pointing to the organ) as a moral weapon, and they were a stronger body that day with that instrument, backed as they were by the countenance of the Lord Lieutenant, than ever before (cheers). Alluding to the difficulties which the Board had to encounter, and the obstacles they had to overcome, he said if there was any young man present who aspired to a seat at that Board, he must learn to cultivate the virtue of patience, to close his ears to slander, to suppress his temper, and to do his duty irrespective of contumely or praise; first sitting down to think out what his duty should be, and then following it out steadily and fearlessly (cheers). That was the spirit in which the Board had acted, and the presence of so many gentlemen at that table was a proof that it was the right way to act (applause). He defied anyone to enter the Board room and say there was a party there (hear, hear). The only party there was a party deterred to do right (hear, hear). He hoped that small as their powers were, and elected as they were, not from gentlemen who had acquired wealth and gone into the country to live, but from those who had plenty of work upon their hands, they should go on in the path of usefulness upon which they had entered (applause). They deserved their reward, and the events of that day were their triumph, the remembrance of which they should cherish as one of the most delightful associations connected with their term of office (cheers).

Mr. Brogden then proposed, "Prosperity to the Town and Trade of Wednesbury and District," a toast which he said was peculiarly fitted for the occasion, and one which could not be omitted from the list. The state of the trade of the country, as had been observed by the Lord Bishop, exhibited a remarkable contrast with that which existed a few years ago. Then there was general slackness of trade, general want of employment, and great distress. At the present moment they were in danger of running into the opposite extreme; and in his experience he never knew a time when conciliation and consideration were more required, both on the part of employer and employed, producer and consumer, than at the present time (hear, hear). And he must say that those who, taking advantage of the competition and demand, were seeking to establish themselves in a higher sphere of remuneration, were exerting themselves all over the country in a spirit of conciliation which was highly creditable to them (hear, hear). He, for one, looked with great pleasure upon the prosperity which was attending that class, but at the same time he could not help feeling that there was great danger in the prosperity, and that sudden changes might result at some not distant period, in a recurrence of that distress to which allusion had been made (applause). So that to all he offered the same word of advice—exercise towards those you have to deal with the greatest amount of consideration and conciliation, and the greatest desire to meet them under the circumstances in which they are placed (applause). The hon. gentleman then expressed the pleasure it would give him to know that the interests of demand and supply were equitably adjusted, and to know also that the working classes

were taking advantage of the present time of prosperity to lay by something in the building and other societies which were existing in that and other localities. Never he supposed in the experience of anyone in that room had there been such a prosperous, and at the same time perplexing state of trade as at the present time (hear, hear). The special trades of Wednesbury might in some of their branches be restrained in outward development and increase by the degree of prosperity which attached to the production of the crude materials, so that the interests of the town would be best served by all parties dealing moderately with each other, so that every branch might prosper, and every one receive his due reward (cheers). He was glad to have by his side on that occasion the Chairman of the Board of Health, because he knew the great endeavours which had been made by that gentleman and the body to which he belonged to improve the sanitary state of the town; and that by reason of the precautionary measures which had been adopted, and to the wise steps which had been taken, was, under Providence, due the fact that they had had in Wednesbury none of those epidemic attacks which had carried away lives elsewhere (applause). In this there was great cause for congratulation and thankfulness (hear, hear).

Mr. J. Marshall responded. He said it was a toast which required but few words of acknowledgment from him, it having really been already responded to in anticipation by two gentlemen. One of those, the Lord Bishop, drew a contrast which particularly struck him, between the depression of three years ago and the prosperity of the present, which he hoped would long continue (applause). He could not sit down, however, without expressing the pleasure it gave him to be present himself as a magistrate to meet the Lord Lieutenant—(applause)—as a Churchman to welcome the Bishop—(applause)—as a lover of music to be charmed by the performance of Mr. Best; and as a social man to meet that company, graced as it was by the presence of ladies (applause). Much as he liked their elevation, he should have been better pleased had they been side by side with the gentlemen, as they were at Aston on the previous day (applause).

Mr. T. S. Hatton proposed "The Architects, Builders, and Builders of the Organ," without the aid of whom the intentions of the Board and of the worthy member would never have been carried into effect (applause). How well they had carried out the work entrusted to them he need not say. That was patent to all (applause).

Mr. J. Loxton briefly expressed his acknowledgments of the kind manner in which the allusions to the Hall had been made and received, and said he could testify, from some knowledge of the construction of an organ, to the excellent make and finish of the instrument to which Messrs. Forster and Andrews had produced to the order of their worthy Borough Member (applause).

Mr. W. H. Duignan proposed "The Press." He said they all knew the value and importance of that estate. Without its aid a knowledge of the proceedings in that Hall on that auspicious occasion would not be carried forth to the outer world; but by its co-operation the excellent speeches which had been delivered that day would be preserved and sent out to an interested circle of readers (hear, hear). Wednesbury was particularly fortunate in the matter of newspapers. The town had three—all excellently conducted, and their contents so carefully selected that no parent need hesitate about introducing them into his family (applause). On Saturday those papers would no doubt contain full and accurate reports of the proceedings, and those he addressed could select the best report, and place it by to be treasured as a memento of a day of so much importance to the town and neighbourhood.

Mr. Hillier responded.

The Rev. E. J. Wrottesley, in a few happy sentences,

proposed "The Ladies," and took the opportunity of urging those who were blessed with a good voice to use it in that Hall for the benefit of those who were not often brought under the ameliorative influences of music—(applause)—his hope being that there would often be concerts there, at a cheap rate, for the benefit of the masses (applause).

The Rev. P. Myles responded.
The company then separated.

THE EVENING CONCERT.

The general success of the day was fully carried out by this performance, which was given in such a manner as thoroughly to harmonize with the rest of the proceedings, and to form a fitting conclusion to the day's enjoyments. Speculation had been rife for many a day as to the verdict which would have to be pronounced upon the performance, and we think all must agree with us when we say that verdict must be "Unqualified success." The audience was, as may be inferred, the largest and most select that has ever been gathered together within any building in the town, including as it did the elite of the neighbourhood. Mr. Brogden, M.P., and party honoured the performance with their presence.

The fact of the whole of the vocal music being rendered by the members of the Wednesbury Amateur Choral Association, to a certain extent disarms criticism. Nevertheless those who took part in the performance need not fear being criticised, for taking into consideration the fact above mentioned that the vocalists were exclusively amateurs, and quite unaccustomed to singing to a band accompaniment, the result was highly creditable and gratifying. The band was composed of well selected and proficient instrumentalists ably led by Mr. Henry Hayward. Mr. W. T. Best, of Liverpool, the most able and accomplished organist in the kingdom, presided at the organ, and Mr. B. Woodward skilfully wielded the baton.

Punctually at half-past seven o'clock, Mr. Thursfield, upon whom the arduous role of the prophet's music devolved, uttered the announcement that for three years "there should be neither dew nor rain." This was followed by the marvellously descriptive overture, in which, if ever any effect in nature was portrayed by music, the drought is vividly depicted. The succeeding chorus "Help Lord" with its touching passage "The harvest now is over, the summer days are gone, and yet no power cometh to help us," was admirably given. The duet "Zion spreadeth her hands for aid," was exceedingly well sung by Mrs. Lloyd and Miss Brevitt, the accompanying chorus "Lord bow thine ear to our prayer" being given in a subdued tone. Mr. John Knowles gave a careful and pleasing version of the very beautiful air "If with all your hearts," although in this he did not put forth his wonted energy. The next chorus "Yet doth the Lord see it not" was at times unsteady, but the latter portion "His mercies on thousands fall" to our minds one of the most glorious items in the work, left nothing to be desired. The short recitative "Get thee hence, Elijah" was beautifully and impressively rendered by Mrs. Bissell. The double quartett "For He shall give his angels charge over thee" was sung by Miss Brown, Mrs. Lloyd, Mrs. Bissell, Miss Fry, and Messrs. G. Rogers, J. Knowles, B. Knowles, and Thursfield, but the accompaniment though exceedingly effective was at times much too loud. This was followed by an excellent rendering by Mrs. Bissell of the recitative "Now Cherith's brook is dried up," distinguished by great clearness of articulation. Mrs. Lloyd sang the music of the widow with excellent taste and expression, and Mr. Thursfield's part in the same scene was very praiseworthy, the concluding part where both voices blend being little short of perfection. After a successful rendering of the chorus "Blessed are the men," Mr. Thursfield delivered with spirit the recitative, or series of recitatives, summoning the followers of Baal unto Mount

Carmel. The "Baal" choruses were all executed with great precision and vivacity, notably so the first of them "Baal we cry to thee" with its highly effective unison passages on the words "Hear us Baal! Hear mighty God!" The prayerful air "Lord God of Abraham" was ably sung by Mr. Thursfield, though we think, scarcely appreciated as it deserved to be. The ever popular quartett "Cast thy burden," by Mrs. Lloyd, Mrs. Bissell, Messrs. J. and B. Knowles aroused the warmest applause. After a fair execution of the difficult chorus "The fire descends from heaven," Mr. Thursfield undertook the very trying solo "Is not His word like a fire?" In this Mr. Thursfield's voice was at times perceptibly over weighted by the accompaniment, but the spirited and exact manner in which he delivered the difficult passages of the air, deserve unqualified praise. Mrs. Bissell's rendering of the very beautiful air "Woe unto them" was most excellent. The simplicity, clearness, and musicianly feeling which characterised this performance were highly gratifying, and honestly merited the applause with which it was greeted. The duet scene in which Elijah sends the youth to the mount to discover if possible some symptoms of approaching rain looming beyond the expanse of ocean, was a great success, both Mrs. Lloyd and Mr. Thursfield exerting themselves *con amore*, the effect being increased by the lovely choral prayers which intervene, and which were rendered sotto voce by the chorus seated. The wondrous chorus "Thanks be to God" wherein the unbounded joy of the panting multitude at the arrival of the long wished for showers, is so vividly painted, was splendidly executed. This composition alone would serve to make the reputation of the author. The marvellous orchestral description of the rushing floods, the fierceness of the announcement that "the stormy billows are high, their fury is mighty," and the intensely grand passage which follows and declares that there is one "who is above them and Almighty," at once stamp this chorus as a master-stroke of genius. Its execution on Wednesday left little or nothing to be desired.

Part II. commenced by a magnificent rendering, by Miss Brown, of the soprano air of the work, "Hear ye, Israel." In spite of the trying pace at which, to our thinking, the latter portion was taken, Miss Brown's success was genuine and complete. The applause was vociferous, and an encore was undoubtedly intended, but through the necessity of completing the performance within a certain time, in order to enable many of the instrumentalists to reach their homes by train, Mr. Woodward hurried on to the next chorus, "Be not afraid," to which the orchestral accompaniment uninterruptedly leads, thus preventing the audience paying a just tribute to this talented lady, whose reputation is, however, too firmly established to suffer from such an accident. This chorus was another most successful item in the performance. Miss Fry sang the highly dramatic solos of Jezebel in a truly excellent manner, her powerful voice being well adapted to such music. The short but picturesque choruses which intervene were given with great spirit, the same remark also applying to the declamatory chorus, "Woe to him." Mr. John Knowles gave a very careful and fervent reading of the recitative, "Man of God," while Mr. Thursfield's "It is enough" was characterised by true pathos, and was another most commendable effort on the part of this gentleman. A word of warmest praise is here due to Mr. Owen for his excellent playing of the beautiful violoncello obligato to the above piece. The trio of angels, "Lift thine eyes," was allotted to Miss Brown, Mrs. Lloyd, and Mrs. Bissell, and in spite of a slight "hitch," which somewhat marred the effect of the opening, earned its full share of applause. The succeeding chorus, "He watching over Israel," may be cited among the chief successes of the evening. The ever-popular "O rest in the Lord" found a worthy exponent in Miss Fry. It is needless to say it was encored, because it always is whenever and wherever sung. It would somewhat astonish its composer, we imagine, were he to know that the air which he desired

to have expunged from his work as unworthy of it, and which, by the way, is not his own, is now apparently the most popular number in the oratorio. We do not judge of Miss Fry's success on Wednesday evening, from the bare fact of her being encored in a piece which, as we have said, is always encored; but when we say that, considering the fact that the piece in question is not exactly in accordance with her powerful, and if we may say it, tragic voice and style, the simplicity and earnestness of her performance created a decidedly favourable impression, we are paying her the highest compliment. The remarkable choruses descriptive of the natural phenomena, which accompanied the Lord's appearance to Elijah, were magnificently rendered, the pianissimo effect at the words, "And after the fire there came a still small voice," being thrilling. The "sanctus" was admirably sung by Miss Brown, Miss Brevitt, Mrs. Bissell, and Miss Fry, the chorus accompanying it being very effective, though perhaps a little more attention to the piano and forte passages might have been advantageously displayed. The chorus descriptive of the translation of the prophet to heaven "in a fiery chariot" was rendered with great crispness and precision. The lovely air, "Then shall the righteous," as sung by Mr. J. Knowles, may be reckoned among the triumphs of the evening. The fervour, sweetness, and devotion which characterised Mr. Knowles' delivery of this superb piece, aroused the audience to enthusiasm, and a spontaneous encore was the result. Mr. Knowles, however, contented himself with bowing his acknowledgements. Miss Brown's delivery of the short recitative, "Behold God hath sent Elijah," was extremely beautiful; and the lovely quartett sung by the same lady, assisted by Mrs. Bissell, Messrs. J. Knowles and Thursfield, was a most enjoyable performance, though

the band accompaniments were at times exceedingly loud. The final chorus, "Lord, our Creator," was as complete a success in point of spirit, energy, and correctness as any of the preceding ones; and, in fact, the whole work, and this be it remembered a by no means easy one, was executed in a most satisfactory and creditable manner, and formed the greatest and most important musical victory yet achieved by the Wednesbury Choral Association.

Just before the conclusion of the concert, Mr. Brogden, M.P., rose from his seat in the gallery, and proposed a vote of thanks to the performers, both vocal and instrumental, coupling with them the names of Mr. Woodward and Mr. Best. Mr. R. Williams seconded the motion, mentioning the name of Mr. J. Garman, the Secretary. That gentleman having responded, the proceedings were brought to a most successful termination.

We may mention that after the concert was over, many persons remained to hear a very clever improvisation upon the organ, the chief theme being "God Save the Queen," splendidly played by Mr. Best.

OPEN AIR PERFORMANCE.

By the kindness and liberality of Mr. Richard Williams, the Wednesbury Rifle Corps Band was engaged to perform selections of music in the Market Place, from 6-30 to 9 o'clock in the evening. The band mustered at the armoury and marched past the Hall into the Market Place, where an orchestra had been erected. The enlivening strains of music drew together a large concourse of people, who seemed greatly pleased with the treat that had been provided for them.



PRINTED BY J. J. HILLIER, AT THE "OBSERVER" OFFICE, WEDNESBURY.

Feudal Organ, 000 to 1