

OUR VILLAGE 17th ARTICLE

AN EARBY MUSICAL FAMILY OF SIXTY YEARS AGO

I am largely indebted to Mr. Stephen Pickles, J.P., of Thornton-in-Craven, for interesting information relating to the Pickles families of Earby and Barnoldswick-----
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Referring to the last article on the Earby Brass Band and the contest at Salterforth in 1868, Mr. Pickles remembered it well, and it was the finest contest held in the district. A hand bill has been preserved by a Salterforth man, Mr. Crabtree, which announced that "A grand brass band contest will take place in the Aqueduct Field, Salterforth, on Saturday, May 9th, 1868. Prizes to be awarded : First prize. £4 4s and one "Star Jupiter" cornet, value £9 9s., of the highest class fabrication of the celebrated manufacturer, F. Besson, London, presented by the committee. Second Prize, £3 3s. : solo prize, £1 1s., for B flat cornets.

The programme gave the names of the bands in the following order (but the order of playing was to be decided by drawing lots on the field at 3-30, the contest to commence at 4 o'clock punctually) :-

Barnoldswick Ribblesdale Band. Conductor, William Rushforth
Earby Band (17 performers). Conductor, William Rushforth
Barnoldswick Model Band (18 performers) Conductor, John Lord
Kelbrook Band (18 performers). Conductor, W. Jasper.

The test piece selected by the committee was "Zauberflote," by Mozart : but each band could select another piece, the first two choosing "Torquato Tasso" by Donizetti, and the last two "Semiramide," by Rossini.

For the solo prize, on B flat cornets, the test piece was " The Last Rose of Summer" (with variations) and the contestants were :

Joseph Windle, Ribblesdale Band
James Bailey, Earby Band
Thomas Whittaker, Model Band
John Wilkinson, Kelbrook Band.

The handbill contained at the foot the names of John Widdup, Thomas Turner, and Henry Edmondson, on behalf of the promoters of the contest. At the conclusion of the contest, prior to the decision of the judge, the united bands were instructed to play "God Save the Queen," and "any band refusing to join shall forfeit the prize which otherwise might be due."

The whole community for miles around was worked up to intense enthusiasm for the famous event, and there was an amazing crowd, considering the size of the population. The Barnoldswick people were divided into two hostile camps (and in addition to their local favourites, the Ribblesdale followers always "backed" Black Dyke and the Model supporters "backed" Bacup).

The Earby Band was undoubtedly the winner of the coveted first prize, the Model came next, followed by Ribblesdale and Kelbrook.

The Kelbrook solo cornet player was awarded the prize in that class.

A PRACTICAL JOKE

The band contest was made the occasion of a practical joke, a form of enjoyment which was characteristic of the period, and took the form of impersonating the judge.

A plot was hatched at Clough Mill, Barnoldswick by Henry Slater, Sam Slater, Jim Slater, Stephen Edmondson and Stephen Pickles, senr. It was arranged that Stephen Edmondson, who was a handsome young fellow, should be disguised and appear at Salterforth a few hours before the contest and impersonate the judge. He was rigged up with a false moustache and beard, eye-glasses and an imposing attaché case. He was sent off to Foulridge Station on the Saturday morning, and took the train to Earby. When he arrived at Earby he assumed great dignity, and inquire in tones of importance whether any one was there from Salterforth to escort him. Eventually someone was found to accompany him to Higher Green Hill, the residence of the Rev. Richard Bell, a retired Congregationalist minister, who was to entertain the judge. Mr. Bell made profuse apologies for no one being present at Earby Station to meet the train, and gave him a very hearty greeting. He insisted that he should pull off his shoes and make himself comfortable. Then they had lunch, and Mr. Bell was very entertaining, talking all the time about the people of the district, and telling all the stories he could think of to enlighten his visiting guest, who could scarcely restrain himself from bursting into laughter.

But Stephen was getting alarmed, as the time for the contest was drawing near, and he made an excuse to leave the room and go outside. He put on his shoes, seized his hat and case, and ran "for his life" over the fields to Barnoldswick.

Mr. Bell went out to look for his guest, but he was not to be seen, and before long, to Mr. Bell's utter dismay, the proper judge arrived. Salterforth people, too, were highly displeased by the hoax, and for years after they taunted the offenders with eating the judge's lunch.

Some time after the contest Sam Slater and Stephen Edmondson called on Mr. Bell to apologise and explained that Stephen was the first "judge" to appear. "What, you, Stephen ! you Stephen ! Of all the young men in the world I should have thought of anybody but you."

A LONG WALK

Mr. Stephen Pickles, senr., was born at Well House, in 1823. He removed to Earby in 1838, and stayed there until 1843. He worked as a weaver at Bracewell's Green End Shed, and he was working there when the Plug Drawing Riots took place. He was pulling a piece off at the time the rioters entered the shed, and they would not allow him to finish pulling it off and take it into the warehouse.

Work was very irregular, and he removed to Burnley, then to Carleton, where he got married. He was a very good musician, both as an instrumentalist and vocalist. On one occasion when they were living at Carleton, he walked over the moors to Earby on the Sunday morning, picked up his cousin, Henry Pickles, with his 'cello, and walked on to Clitheroe Parish Church, to take part in a musical service (a performance of the "Messiah") and then walked back through Earby to Carleton on the Sunday night.

Henry Pickles (a cousin of Stephen Pickles), who kept a small grocers shop in Aspen Lane, Earby, was regarded as the most accomplished musician for miles around. His knowledge and love of music amounted almost to genius, and he had the ability in an uncommon measure of being able to impart musical knowledge to others, and train them to play various musical instruments. All the time he could spare was devoted to music, and when playing his favourite instrument, the 'cello, he timed himself with an old case clock. He had a passion for the best music, and for its performance in the best possible style.

An old friend of mine used to relate with great delight how he was taught to put expression into his playing. For his weekly lesson the youth was given "Vita Spark," and when he came to play it over the following week the old master took his 'cello and seated himself at the piano and playing with rhapsodic interpretation the Christian's triumph song. It was a lesson that could not be forgotten.

Henry Pickles had pupils who came from all parts of East Lancashire and the West Riding, and after he passed away in 1872 it was felt that some permanent memorial should be erected to his memory.

To secure the necessary funds a performance of the "Messiah" was given in 1873 in the Baptist Chapel, and it is no exaggeration to state that it eclipsed all oratorio performances given before or since in this district. Instrumentalists from nearly every town and village from Keighley to Burnley formed the orchestra and a choir of imposing dimensions from the chapels and churches in the district. It was such a spontaneous tribute to a worthy villager that it has never ceased to be talked about by those who were living at the time. The memorial took the form of a beautiful monument which was erected in Thornton churchyard.

John Pickles was a brother of Henry Pickles, and one of the leading men at the old Methodist Chapel. A class leader and superintendent of the Sunday School, he was beloved by all who knew him. He too, was an accomplished musician and not only played the 'cello, but acted as precentor. It was said of him that he never started a tune that the people couldn't sing, and they never had to stop for the tune to be pitched afresh.

Josiah Pickles, of Barnoldswick, another cousin of Stephen Pickles, gave a memorable instrumental entertainment with Henry Pickles in the old Mechanic's Institute in 1864. Josiah was a skilled player on the flute and piccolo, and later went to London, where his abilities as a flautist found worthy recognition. He was the first flautist to be engaged to play in the Gilbert and Sullivan Operas at the Savoy Theatre. He gave all his children a musical education, and to-day one of them is in the Glasgow Municipal Orchestra.

J.H.

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