

Comic Bands - Kazoo and Zobo

Gavin Holman – August 2020 (2nd edition)

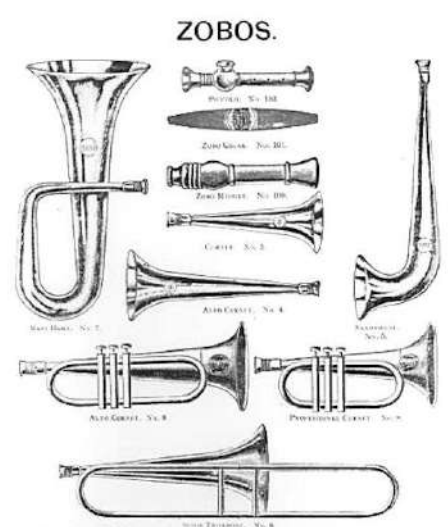
A few years ago I was sent a picture of *Professor Mugger-Swaggers Band* from Batley. Though not a true brass band, it was interesting as an example of the “comic” bands which were active in the 1890s and 1900s, formed to entertain the public and raise money for charity.



Professor Mugger-Swaggers Band

These bands were sometimes created ad hoc for galas and festivals, and occasionally had a more long-term existence. Usually they consisted of kazoo-like instruments and drums, interspersed with home-made and “real” brass or woodwind instruments.

Zobo instruments, based on kazoo principles, were invented and developed in the USA in the early 1890s, rapidly becoming a new craze for a while – largely due to the ease of “playing” and relative low cost of the instruments. The instruments also spread across to the UK soon thereafter.



In the West Riding of Yorkshire these bands were known as Tommy Talker bands and had interesting names such as Nanny Goat Lancers, Underground Artillery Jazz Band, Royal Tramps, King Tut's Lancers, Dr Hall's Rough and Ready Band, Paddock Silver Piggie Band, Keighley Wiffum Waffum Wuffum Band and Morley Parrock Nook Anthem Band. The latter band was formed in 1900, its leader being Billy Commons, who dressed as a dancing donkey. These bands were active on and off until WW2 – a later example being the Edge Arpers of Thornhill Edge, Dewsbury, so-called because they were local Air Raid Precautions (ARP) workers.



Comic band in Consett

“Ordinary” bands were also involved in the comedy business from time to time. For certain events they would dress up (or down, in tramp clothes), sometimes blacking their faces, appearing as clowns, or adopting women’s clothing. The usual brass instruments were used in the performances, but these were occasionally augmented or replaced by zobo/kazoo equivalents.

This type of comic band was also to be found in the USA, with the added component of “real” clown and comic bands from the various sideshows and circuses that toured the country in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

Pictures of a number of examples of these bands are shown below, starting with British bands, followed by those from the USA. Sadly, in most cases, it is not possible to identify the bands, the locations or the events, but it is clear that both the public and the players enjoyed their performances and appearance.

Further information

The Rise of the Zobo Instruments

<http://www.kwintetgoedkoper.nl/Zobo.htm>

The Tommy Talker Bands of the West Riding

https://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/t_talker.htm

Zobo and Songophone

https://brasspedia.com/index.php?title=Zobo_and_Songophone

Association of American Kazoologists

<http://kazooologist.org>

- Langley, Otto - *Instructor for Zobo Brass Instruments, for Soloists, Quartettes and Zobo Bands* - W.H. Frost & Co, 1896
- Wharton, R. and Clarke, A. - *The Crown Street Comic Band*
- Wharton, R. and Clarke, A. - *The Tommy Talker Bands of the West Riding: The History and Development of a working class entertainment* - Wharton and Clarke, Bradford, 1979



Kazoo Band, Clayton Heights, Bradford



7th Airdrie Rifles Zobo Band, 1914



Loco Duda band at Fleetwood, 1911



Alverthorpe Working Men's Club Comic Band



Chelmsford Poor Law Institution House Officers Jazz Band, 1920



Abercynon comic band during the miner's strike of 1921



The Moth & Beetle band - Chapel en le Frith Gala



YE BESSIES O TH' BYRE'S BAND N°2.

Bessies o' th' Byre Band – Mickleton, 1915



Hospital Demonstration
Mickleton, 1915. N°6.

Bessies o' th' Byre Band – Mickleton, 1915



Bessies o' th' Byre Band – Mickleton, 1915



Another, unknown, "Besses" parody band



McNamara Band – TGWU Convalescent Home, Littleport, 1935



Keighley Wiffum Waffum Wuffum Band

The Wiffum Waffum Wuffum Band was formed in 1902 and disbanded in 1907. Their uniform was old painted clothes or sugar bags, and were led by Joe Murgatroyd on his Hobby Horse. Their instruments were made from tin cans soldered into shape, and two of their favourite tunes were Souza's March & The Death of Nelson.



Thornhill Lees Working Men's Club Comic Prize Band



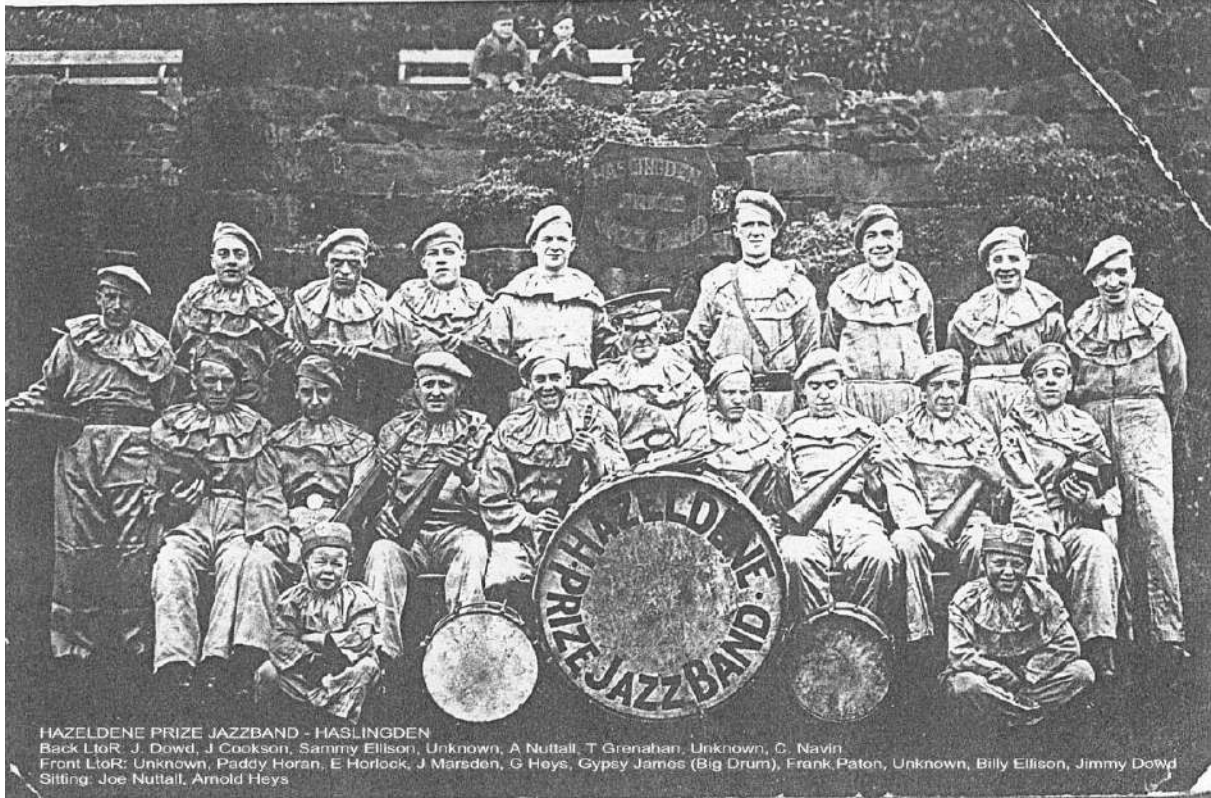
Tregony Silent Band - they can't play a note, they just go through the motions of playing while a gramophone record churns out their only tune "Colonel Bogey" - conductor uses a stick of rhubarb



Wounded Soldiers Comic Band – Harrogate, 1916



Unknown comic band, England, 1950's



Hazeldene Prize Jazz Band, Haslingden



Comic kazoo band, Bradford



Another British kazoo band



Ladies' zobo band – UK



Ladies' kazoo band – Lancashire



Ladies zobo band - England



Morley Parrock Nook Anthem Prize Band, c. 1906



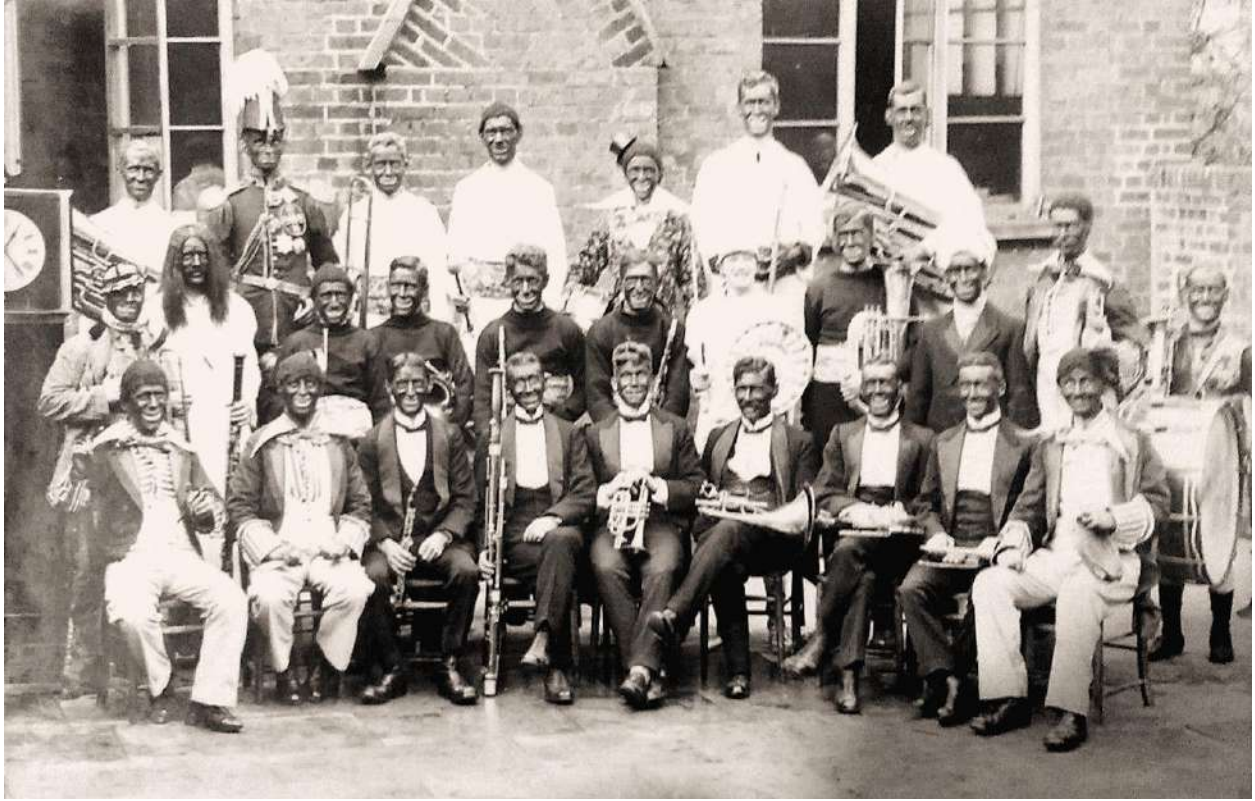
Morley Parrock Nook Anthem Prize Band



Otley Splisham Splashem Splushum Comic Band



Tommy Troll Band



Unknown blackface comic band



Rivets Ragtime Band, Aylesbury



Hospital Saturday Carnival Band, Chipping Norton, 1911



Knuts Prize Band, Haltwhistle, Hexham



Band – collecting for the Queen Victoria Memorial Home, Dunblane



Horbury Mounted on Foot Comic Band



Golden Valley Church Band, Ripley, Derbyshire, 1904



Unknown kazoo band, Lancashire



The Nuts Select Band, Liverpool



March Town Silver Band in fancy dress



The Milburn Toffs, North Shields – this band was formed for the Tynemouth Carnival of 1926 and survived at least until 1930. Similar “submarine” bands, as they were often referred to, in the area were – The Dixie Coons, The Rudolph Valentinos, The Tin Can Fusiliers, The Bobbed Hair Kids, The Harold Lloyds, and The Colleens



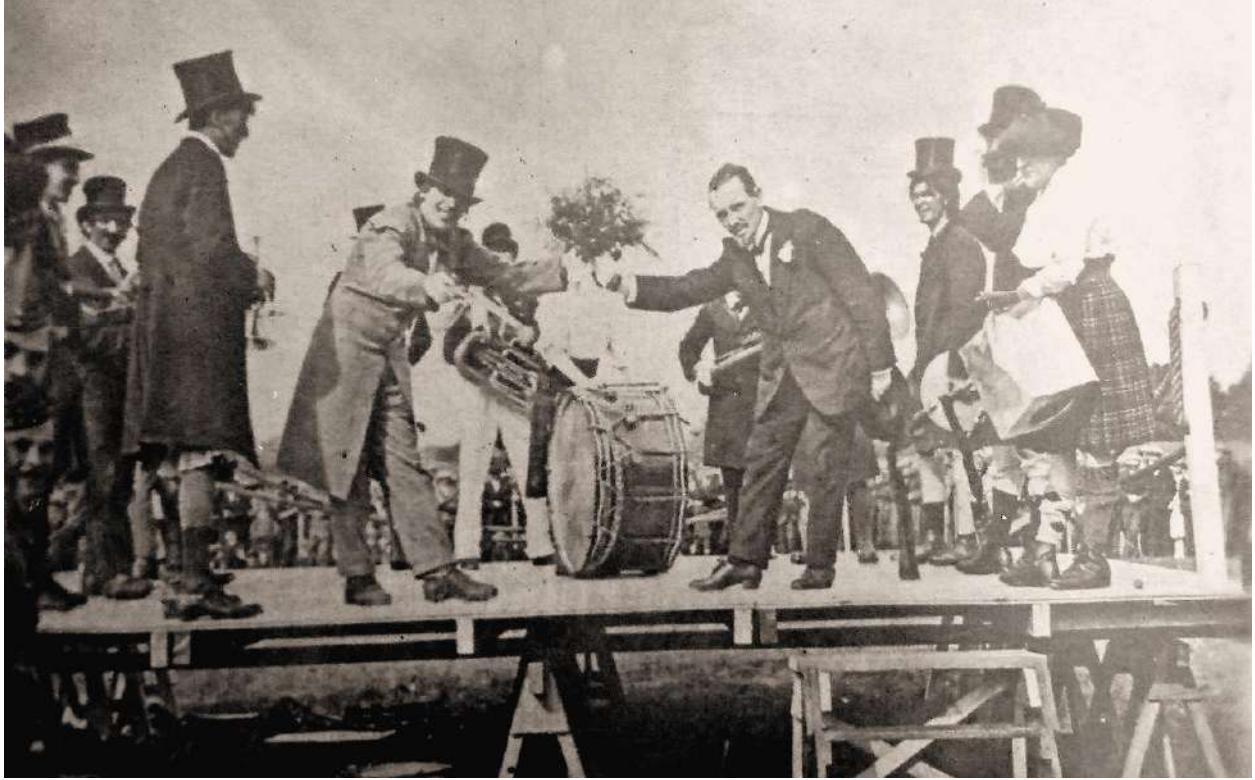
St Anne's Spider Band



Navvies' Band, Jarrow



Kottinla Dayleet Katriwower Prize Band - Cottingley, Yorkshire, 1911



Unknown comic band on stage



Unknown comic band off stage



St Neots Rag Band



Waff an' Fuff Band – on those Golden Slippers – Honley, Yorkshire



Ladies zobo band, Girlington, Bradford



The Scarlet Mimic Band



Boys' zobo band, USA



Metlakatla girls' zobo Band, Alaska



Unknown comic band, USA



Unknown comic band – USA



Unknown comic band – Kansas, USA, 1910



Unknown comic band – USA



Unknown comic band - USA



Unknown US military band – with graffiti added



Nutt Club Band, 1911



H.T. Cushman Manufacturing Company Military Band, North Bennington, VT, 1912



The Boscobel Dutch Band, WI



Bellows Falls Brass Band, VT, in costume, 1892



Rube Band, Ravenna, NE, 1923



Anderson Concert Band, MI



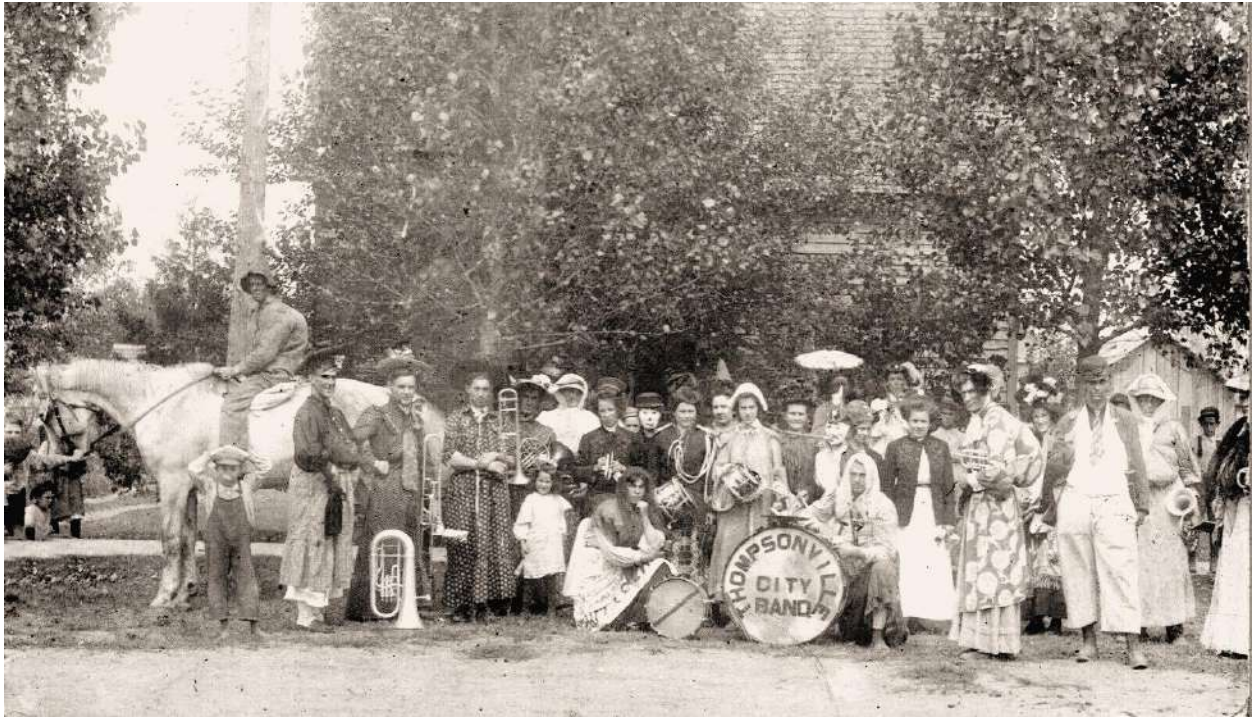
Comic Band, Blanchard, MI



KCO Ladies' zobo band



LA Sousa Clown Band, Luna Park, Seattle, WA, 1909



Thomsonville City Band, MI, in drag, 1908



Watertown's Famous Band, WI



Wildwood Scrap Iron Band, NJ



Wildwood Scrap Iron Band, NJ



Wildwood Scrap Iron Band, NJ



Yreka Brass Band, CA, 1901



Band, Wolverine, MI



Band, New York State



Band, New York State



Clown Band, USA



Clown Band, USA



Unknown comic band, USA



Unknown Rube band, USA, 1911



Unknown comic band, USA



Unknown clown band, USA



Unknown comic band, USA



The Great Meccana Band, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada



Comic band, Exeter, Ontario, Canada, 1928



German zobo band, 1933



Costumed band, Cologne, Germany, c. 1912

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