

# BRITISH ISLES 19th CENTURY CIRCUS BANDS

News Extracts Collected by Gavin Holman, WJU #3943 - [www.ibew.co.uk](http://www.ibew.co.uk)

PART 2 - 1864 to 1883

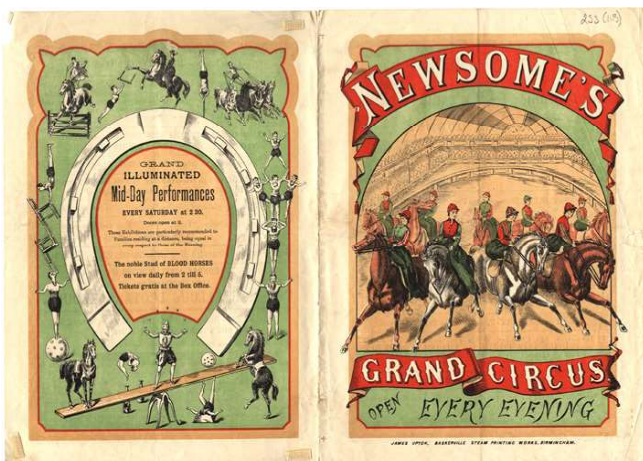
The life and times of circus and menagerie bands in the British Isles in the 19th century – extracts from contemporary reports:

- June 1864 saw **Edmond's (late Wombwell's) Menagerie** visiting Cheltenham, when their grand entry in to the town was led by the Royal Menagerie Band, conducted by Mr Drake (who later that summer took up a position as leader and founder of the **Sherborne Town Band** – a seasonal band created for that summer. Harrison N. Booth was a player in the **Menagerie Band** in 1864, before leaving to marry Emily Ward in Retford.

- **The International Circus**, a troupe of acrobats and equestrians, appeared at the Zoological Gardens at Clifton, in September 1864, accompanied by their circus band, which shared the musical entertainment on the day with Mr U. Richardson's band from Bristol.

- **Boorn's Russian Circus Band** was advertising for engagements in October 1864. Having played with Boorn throughout the summer, they had just been released. The band consisted of first, second and third cornets, Eb bombardons, Bb euphonium, and Eb tenor sax.

- **Newsome's Circus** visited Carlisle in November 1864, and the band, under the baton of Mr Saujeck, much impressed the audiences.



- In October 1865, on a visit to Scarborough, **Newsome's Circus** gave a benefit performance in aid of the Scarborough Lifeboat Institution, on which occasion the lifeboat, fully manned by her gallant crew, was drawn in procession through the town by six fine horses, accompanied by the Circus Band.

- February 1866 saw **Newsome's Circus Band** engaged to play music for the Upperby Church Bazaar, near Carlisle, where the Circus was performing.

- **Manders' Gigantic Menagerie** was installed at the old Royal Mews in Windsor, in October 1867. The Menagerie Band was conducted by Alexander D. Millar (who had previously led the **Wombwell's and Edmonds'** bands) and performed operatic and oratorio selections, delighting crowds of listeners.

- In July 1869 **Newsome's Circus Band** was engaged to play the National Anthem on the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales to Hull.

- **Mr Powell's Circus** visited Nailsworth in July 1869, and the Circus Band provided entertainment, together with the **Stroud Rifle Band**, at a fête and gala.

- **Sangers' Circus** and its "better than average" Circus Band greatly entertained the crowds at Southport in May 1870.

- June 1870 saw **Mander's Royal Menagerie Band** taking part in the Lady Godiva procession in Coventry, seated in a gilded chariot drawn by three elephants, two dromedaries, and two camels. Lady Godiva was "dressed" in flesh tights, which fitted close around the neck, and wore a white fall.

- In July 1870 E. Cook advertised his services as an Eb bombardon player, having previously performed with **Manders' Star Menagerie and First Class Circus Band** (on the circular bombardon).

- Robert Southworth, who died in Beverley in August 1870, had been a member of **Wombwell's Menagerie Band**, and had travelled with the Menagerie for 45 years. He had also constructed the coffin for George Wombwell with timbers recovered from the wreck of the Royal George, not using a single nail, all the parts being jointed together.

- **MacCollum's Circus Band**, on a visit to Bristol, was engaged to accompany St Philip's Conservative Association in the city-wide Conservative demonstration at Bristol in July 1871.



- **Sangers' Circus Band** was engaged for the Whitsuntide procession at Peel Park, Bradford, in 1872, in advance of the circus performances (for which the arranging committee had paid £400).

- **Allen's Excelsior Circus** played a short season at Parson's Field, Durham in May 1874. Their splendid Circus Brass Band was led by J.G. Cooper, and entertained the crowds each day. The opening selections were "Maritana" and "Valentine Galop".

- Christmas Day, 1874, saw members of the **Manders' Menagerie Band** augment the local volunteer band in the procession of the new Mayor of Carmarthen to the Tabernacle Baptist Chapel. Later, on 5 February 1875, a grand concert was held in the Carmarthen Assembly Rooms, organised by the Mayor, David Morgan, for the benefit of the Menagerie Band who were "unable as yet to remove from there."



- **Manders' Menagerie Band** eventually escaped from Carmarthen, and were engaged during their visit to Llanstephan in June 1875, to perform at the Ivorite Fete being held there.

- **Wombwell's Menagerie** visited Sunderland at New Year, 1876, and the band was greatly admired for the quality of its music.

- **Batty's Grand Circus** advertising for brass band members in February 1876.

- **Hengler's Circus** visited Dublin, in June 1876, and set up in the gardens of the Rotundo Lying-In Hospital, which were raising funds via the circus and also via a skating rink established at the other end of the gardens. The Circus Band kept up the music unceasingly from half-past seven to half-past ten o'clock each night.

- The Wolverhampton Fair, held in June 1876, engaged the **Wombwell's Menagerie Band** for its procession, and the use of the band carriage with elephants, camels etc. was eagerly accepted by the organising committee.

- **Hengler's Circus** auditorium, during their visit to Liverpool in January 1877, was used for a large Conservative demonstration, and the Circus Band alleviated the tedium of waiting with their music.

- The Bradford Peel Park Whitsuntide charities committee engaged **Pinder's Circus** for their gala in May 1877. The Pinder's Circus Band, together with six other local brass bands, to provide musical entertainment over the two days.

- **Fossett's Circus** visited Hartlepool in May 1877 and its troupe was paraded around the town by the Circus Band.

- February 1878 saw the **Wombwell's Menagerie** in Bristol. A procession took place with the Band, in a carriage and four, with the great elephant leading the way, along Queen's Road. When opposite the fountain in the Triangle, "*one of the urchin tribe teased the animal, giving him orange peel. Upon his repeating the offer, the elephant took the boy up with his trunk, twirled him round over his head, and deposited him safely – screaming with terror – in a heap of mud close by, but quite out of harm's way from the vehicle following.*"

- **Keith's Circus** building in Derby burned down in March 1879, causing the death of the groom, Ralph White, who died with all the circus horses. At his funeral the Circus Band played the *Dead March* from Saul, using instruments borrowed from the local Volunteer Band, as theirs were all destroyed in the fire. Later, in April there was a benefit concert for Keith's Circus, at the Drill Hall, Derby, involving **Keith's Circus Band**, the **Midland Railway Band** and the **Derby Volunteer Band**. During the evening the Circus Band, leader Mr Bell, was presented with new instruments provided by subscribers to the fund set up to aid the Circus. These consisted of three Bb cornets, two tenor horns, one euphonium, one bombardon, one tenor slide trombone, one bass drum and one side drum – each instrument inscribed with "*Destruction by fire of Keith's Circus at Derby on March 25th 1879. Presented to ---- by Mr Alderman Leech, on behalf of the subscribers of the relief fund*". The concert programme was: march "*The Advanced Guard*" (W.V. Scholes), the combined bands; "*Les Cloches de Corneville*" (Planquette), DVB; trombone solo "*The Village Blacksmith*" (Weiss); valse "*Mello*" (Waldteufel), DVB; overture "*Semiramide*" (Rossini), MRB; "*Pas des Patineurs*" (F. Godfrey), MRB; selection "*Lurline*" (Wallace), KCB; fantasia "*Songs of England*" (W.V. Scholes), DVB; euphonium solo "*Cavatina*" (Bellini); selection "*Scotch Airs*" (Boulderstone), MRB; valse "*Basse de Nuits*", MRB; selection "*Tannhauser*" (Wagner), DVB; and "*God Save the Queen*", combined bands.

- For August Bank Holiday, 1881, and through to October 1881, **Percy Williams' Great Circus** appeared at the Crystal Palace and the Circus Band entertained the audiences on the Palace Lawns at intervals through the day.

- The circus band of **Fosset's Circus**, at Wakefield in November 1881, lost several instruments including a cornet and a horn, which were stolen by Henry Buckley, an ex-employee of the circus. The instruments belonged to Thomas Howes, the circus bandmaster, and two of his players, Thomas Smith and William Hodges.

- **Stoodley's Circus** visited Newbury in June 1883, and its Circus Band was engaged to play at the annual fete and gala in July, together with another band, which concluded with a balloon ascent and fireworks.