

Orange, Jubilee, Blue Ribbon, and others - a glimpse at Lowestoft's brass bands

Gavin Holman, 18 February 2024

Lowestoft, together with most communities in the country, celebrated the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887. This photograph shows the 1st Suffolk Orange Battalion Brass Band of the town, conductor George Dyke, displaying a board announcing their first place in the band contest associated with the town's Jubilee Sports.



Lowestoft Orange Battalion Band, 1887

The Lowestoft Orange Battalion was formed as a society for young men in late 1882. It was unrelated to the volunteer military artillery and rifle corps in the town.

On Tuesday evening a very enjoyable meeting of the members of a newly-formed society of young men, the First Suffolk Orange Battalion, was held in the Old Three Cups Coffee Tavern, Clapham Road, North. After tea, which was served to the satisfaction of all who partook of it, the captain gave a very interesting address, which was listened to with much attention by the members. Loyal songs and recitations followed each other, and the programme, which was successfully carried out, was properly closed with "God save the Queen."¹

The men had formed a fife and drum band by 1885, and held an entertainment to raise funds, at the Cocoa Tree Café on 4th April. Miss Foreman provided the piano accompaniment, and several members took part, including B. Elsegood, A. Rudram, E. Herring, F. Blowers, and Mr Walters. The band was converted to a brass band around June 1885, and the members put on several Saturday evening entertainments in the autumn of 1885 at the Raglan Street Coffee Tavern.

The Orange Brass Band's first external public engagement appears to have been at the Friendly Societies' Church Parade in Lowestoft, on Sunday 11 July 1886. Conducted by Bandmaster George Dyke, and together with the Artillery, Rifle, and Blue Ribbon bands, they led the Societies' members in procession through the streets of the town.

¹ Lowestoft Journal, 6 January 1883

The Orange Battalion Band entertained members of the “Freedom Lodge” of Good Templars at their meeting, on Wednesday 20 October 1886.

The week of Queen Victoria’s Jubilee, in June 1887, was a busy one for Lowestoft and its bands. The town’s Friendly Societies held a church parade on Sunday 19 June 1887, with the Orange, Artillery, and Rifle bands in attendance. The Orange Battalion Brass Band wore their uniform of orange and black for the first time on this occasion.

Monday 20 June saw the Orange Band entertaining 300 children at a meat tea at the Laurels, Oulton.

The town’s Jubilee celebrations started in the early morning of Tuesday 21 June 1887, when people began to traverse the streets. At seven, many congregated on the Battery-green, where the Artillery Volunteers fired a *feu de joie*. This was followed by the Artillery band parading the High Street with the Corps, in full uniform. The Rifle Volunteers gave a similar salute on the Esplanade, at ten. A procession, which included Friendly Societies, Fire Engine Brigades, the Pakefield lifeboat, together with the five bands, Orange, Artillery, Rifle, Town, and Blue Ribbon, providing the music, as they marched to the gala grounds. At the fete, in addition to the sports and band contest, some 10,000 people were entertained by a country fair, shooting matches, archery, and other games, gymnastic exercises and tugs of war.²

The band contest offered prizes amounting to £30, and it was adjudicated by Bandmaster Edmunds of the 1st Essex Regiment. The test piece was a selection from the comic opera “*Erminie*” by Edward Jakobowski, the bands playing in the order: Rifles, Artillery, Blue Ribbon, Town, and Orange. Each band also played a piece of their own choice: the Rifles played “*Rose d’Amour*” (Bleger); the Artillery “*Pastorella*”; the Blue Ribbon “*Robert Burns*”; the Town “*Martha*” (Flotow), and the Orange “*Little Gem*” (T. Watson). The results were: 1st prize, £15, Orange Battalion Band; 2nd prize, £10, the Artillery Band; 3rd prize, £5, the Rifle Band; unplaced, the Blue Ribbon Band and the Town Band.



HARRY PAULTON.

ERMINIE.

EDWARD JAKOBOWSKI.

Poster for *Ermine* - Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, 1894

² Eastern Daily Press, 22 June 1887

Following the contest the bands gave short concerts on platforms erected for them: on Love Road the Blue Ribbon Band played lancers “*Masquerade*”, valse “*For Aye*”, schottische “*Mayflower*”, and polka “*Bird of Paradise*”. The Orange Band played quadrille “*Rosalinda*”, valse “*Pleasant Dreams*”, schottische “*Laurel*”, and galop “*Checkmate*”. The Artillery Band played quadrille “*Rosalinda*”, valse “*Night and Morn*”, galop “*O’er the Downs*”, and valse “*Sweetest and Dearest*”. On the band stand on Beccles Road, the Town Band played polka “*Jubilee*”, “*Meditations*”, quadrille “*Crown Minstrels*”, and valse “*Denora*”. The Rifle Band played slow march “*Reception*”, valse “*Cordelia*”, quadrille “*Inspiration*”, schottische “*Sunny Downs*”, and fantasia “*Rose d’Amour*”.³

On Thursday 23 June 1887, the town of Lowestoft held a Children’s Jubilee celebration, for over 5,400 children at the Denes. Five separate groups of children from the various and numerous churches and schools were led in procession to the treat field by the Orange, Artillery, Rifle, Church Army and Blue Ribbon bands.

The Orange Battalion Band continued to entertain the people of Lowestoft and surrounding towns, performing concerts, playing at regattas and fêtes, leading processions and more. In June 1888 the band renamed itself the Jubilee Band.



A band playing on Lowestoft beach, c. 1905

The known bands in Lowestoft were:

- 1st Suffolk Orange Battalion Band - founded in June 1885, renamed Lowestoft Jubilee Band in 1888.
- Eastern Coach Works Band (Lowestoft) - active in the 1950s/60s.
- Lowestoft Artillery Volunteer Band (1st Suffolk Artillery Volunteers) - active in the 1880s. Bandmaster Cowles in 1886.
- Lowestoft Blue Ribbon Army Brass Band - a temperance band, founded in early 1882. Still active in 1887. Bandmaster was C. Mallett in 1886-1887.
- Lowestoft Borough Brass Band - *See: Lowestoft Brass Band (2)*
- Lowestoft Brass Band (1) - formed in 1851. Still active in 1858

³ Norwich Mercury, 25 June 1887

- Lowestoft Brass Band (2) - active from July 1899 to 1904, conductor W.P. Cooper in 1900-1904. Also known as Lowestoft Borough Brass Band.
- Lowestoft British Legion Band - active in the 1930s
- Lowestoft Church Army Band - active in 1887.
- Lowestoft Citadel Band - the band of the local Salvation Army, dates unknown, but probably in the early 1900s.
- Lowestoft Pier Band - active in 1905. Probably a professional, ad hoc band, engaged by the town council for the summer season.
- Lowestoft Railway Silver Band - active in 1910. Founder and bandmaster was John Bultitude.
- Lowestoft Rifle Volunteers Brass Band - active in 1872. Bandmaster was Mr Brown in 1886, W.G. Moseley in 1904. It was the band of the 17th Suffolk Rifle Volunteers, later H & I Companies of the 2nd Norfolk Rifle Volunteers, from 1880.
- Lowestoft Salvation Army Band - *See: Lowestoft Citadel Band*
- Lowestoft Town Band (1) - active from the mid-1880s to 1887
- Lowestoft Town Band (2) - founded in 1891, active to 1894. Conductor J. Ord Hume in 1891, Mortlake Mann in 1894.
- Lowestoft Town Band (3) - active from 1909-1914 & 1919-1921. Founded by bandmaster Herbert Wright.
- Lowestoft Town Band (4) - active from the 1950s. In 1979 it changed name to Gunton Hall Silver Band. Folded in the late 1980s or early 1990s.
- Lucas Brothers Brass Band - *see South Wharf Brass Band.*
- South Lowestoft Brass Band - active in 1884, conductor Robert Blackburn.
- South Wharf Brass Band (Lowestoft) - active in 1865. Still active in 1886. Conductor C. Widdows in 1877, R. Blackbain in 1879. Associated with Messrs Lucas Brothers Ltd, a well-known building and construction company - building railways, docks, hotels, bridges etc.



An unknown band in Lowestoft



Lowestoft Citadel Band



Lowestoft Citadel Band



Lowestoft Salvation Army YP Band



Lowestoft Salvation Army YP Band



Lowestoft Pier Band, 1905



LOWESTOFT RAILWAY SILVER BAND.

Lowestoft Railway Silver Band

One final band of note, associated with Lowestoft, is the Polka-Dot Ladies' Band, known from their photograph below.



The ladies have a variety of instruments, some are clearly kazoo/zobo-like and others (such as the tenor horn, bassoon and trombone) are more 'standard' instruments. There is no established or visiting band to Lowestoft or its area that fits these fine ladies during this time. It is most likely that this was a group that was formed for a particular occasion, a fete or carnival, rather than a touring ensemble. However their outfits clearly match each other quite closely, at least on the surface - looking closely you can see some variation in footwear and the dresses under the outer smocks.

Two contenders for this anonymous band are 1) the "Royal Hungarian Ladies Band", led by Miss Kate Erl, which toured the country from 1897 to 1903, with one of the last known performances being in Norwich at the chrysanthemum show at St Andrew's Hall in November 1903; and 2) Miss Penley's Ladies Band, which played at the Kessingland Flower Show in July 1898. Miss Penley was a local pianist who organised many musical events in the town. However, a later report mentions Miss Penley's Mandoline Band, which is different to the wind instruments of the Polka-Dot band, probably excluding this as a real possibility. However there were some other unnamed ladies bands who occasionally performed in Lowestoft in the early 1900s.