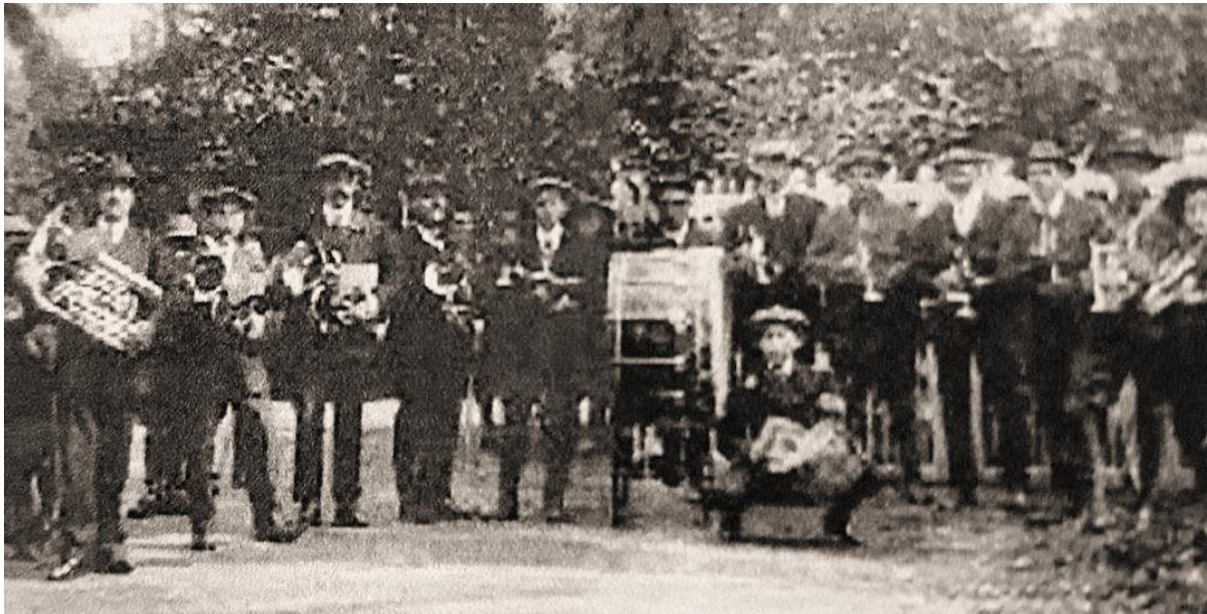


# Hemsby Brass Band - a few glimpses of an Edwardian village band

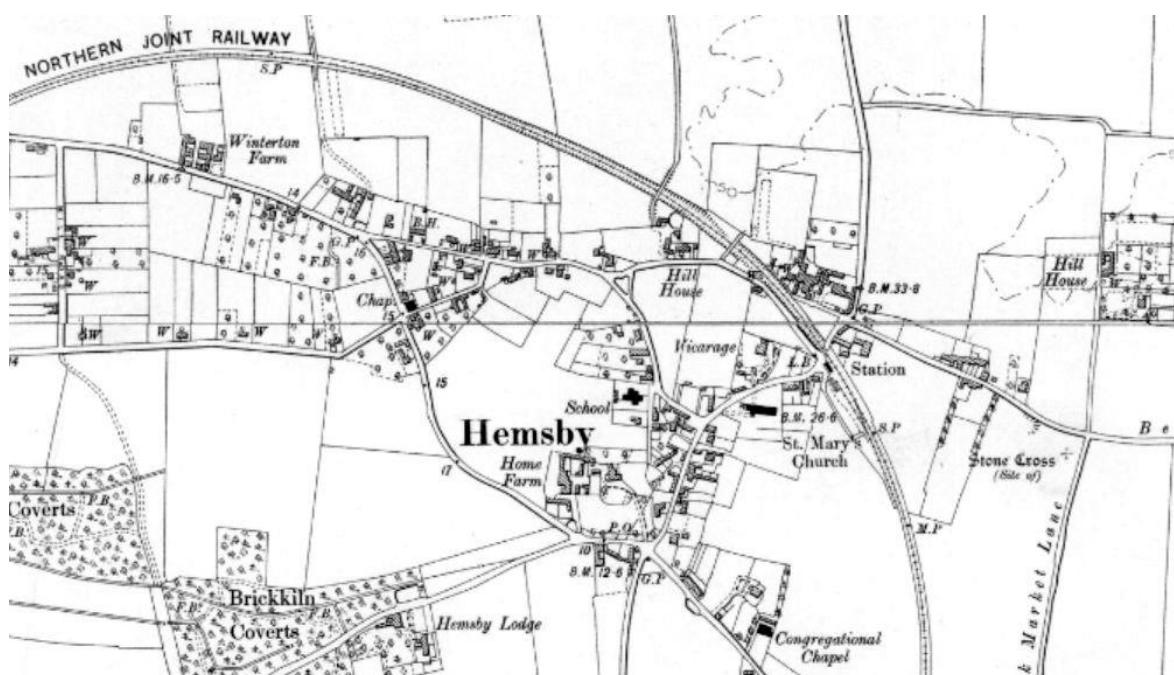
*Gavin Holman, 19 November 2022*

I recently encountered the Hemsby Brass Band, which previously had been unknown to me, in the guise of an official document which gifted the instruments of the Band to the local Hemsby Parish Council.



*Hemsby Brass Band*

Hemsby is a village on the Norfolk coast, north of Great Yarmouth, the main village being about a mile inland. Coastal erosion has destroyed a number of homes in Hemsby Beach and others are still threatened today.



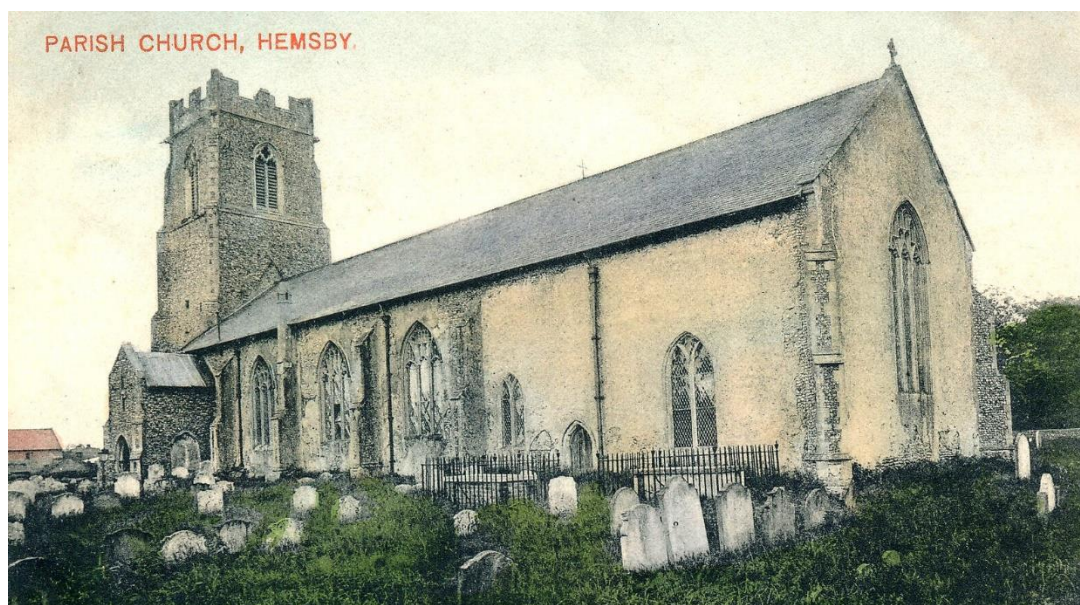
In 1920 the original site of the first permanent and mixed-use holiday camp in the United Kingdom, *Potters Resort*, was established at Hemsby. Although this closed in 1924, two other rival holiday camps were formed which ran successfully until they were bought by Pontins in 1971 and operated as a single site until 2009. During this time, Hemsby rang with the sound of brass bands with the Pontins regional brass band championships being held there from 1976 to 1993 in the spring, as qualifiers for the national Pontins finals in the autumn.



*Ind-Coope Burton Brewery Band at Pontins, Hemsby, 1982*

Hemsby's own brass band has few documented records. It was fully active by 1908 and was still performing in the early 1920's, when it would meet holiday makers at the railway station and march with them to the holiday camps.

The first known appearance of the Hemsby Brass Band is on Monday 20 January 1908, when it performed various selections during a meeting of the United Village Band of Hope at the Congregational Chapel, where an address on 'Reasons for abstinence from intoxicating drinks' was given. This followed tea in the schoolroom for 130 children and 25 adults.



A similar Band of Hope meeting was held on Monday 17 February 1908, where 17 pledges of abstinence were taken. Once more the Hemsby Brass Band provided musical entertainment. The conductor on this occasion was Mr Grimes.

Monday 8 March 1909 saw the Hemsby Brass Band enliven another Band of Hope Meeting, which featured an address on "Facts and fancies concerning strong drink".

The Band had raised the money for their instruments through public subscription and, in March 1911, they decided to hand ownership of them over to the local Parish Council. This resulted in a formal acceptance document being signed on 18 September 1911 to that effect, which read:

Whereas the Musical Instruments specified in the schedule hereto were purchased by the Members of the Hemsby Village Band with the assistance of public subscriptions for the use of the Members of such Band, and such Members being desirous of vesting the Musical Instruments in the Hemsby Parish Council, the Secretary of such Band attended a Meeting of the Hemsby Parish Council held on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 1911 and stated that "it was the wish of the Band Committee to hand over to the Parish Council all the Instrument belonging to the Band to hold the same as Parish property for all time."

And thereupon the Council considered the proposition and being empowered by the Local Government Act 1894 sec. 8 (h) to accept gifts of personal property unanimously agreed "to accept the Instruments as Parish property, the management of the Band being left to a Committee appointed by the Members of the Band, the Parish Council having the right to appoint one of its Members at least on the Managing Committee."

And accordingly in pursuance of such desire and resolution as aforesaid all and singular the said Musical Instruments are hereby deemed to be vested in the Parish Council on the terms embodied in such resolution as aforesaid.

As witness our hands, this 18<sup>th</sup> day of September 1911.

1 Bass Drum and Strap and Stick; 2 Cornets; 1 Bass Euphonium; 1 Slide Trombone; 1 Tenor Horn; 1 Baritone; 1 Bombardon; 1 Pair Cymbals.

Signed:

James E. Flatt - Chairman Hemsby Village Band  
Henry B. Blowers – Secretary Hemsby Village Band  
Henry Bagnall Oakely – Chairman Hemsby Parish Council  
Richard Cobden Jones – Parish Council Member  
Albert King – Parish Council Member

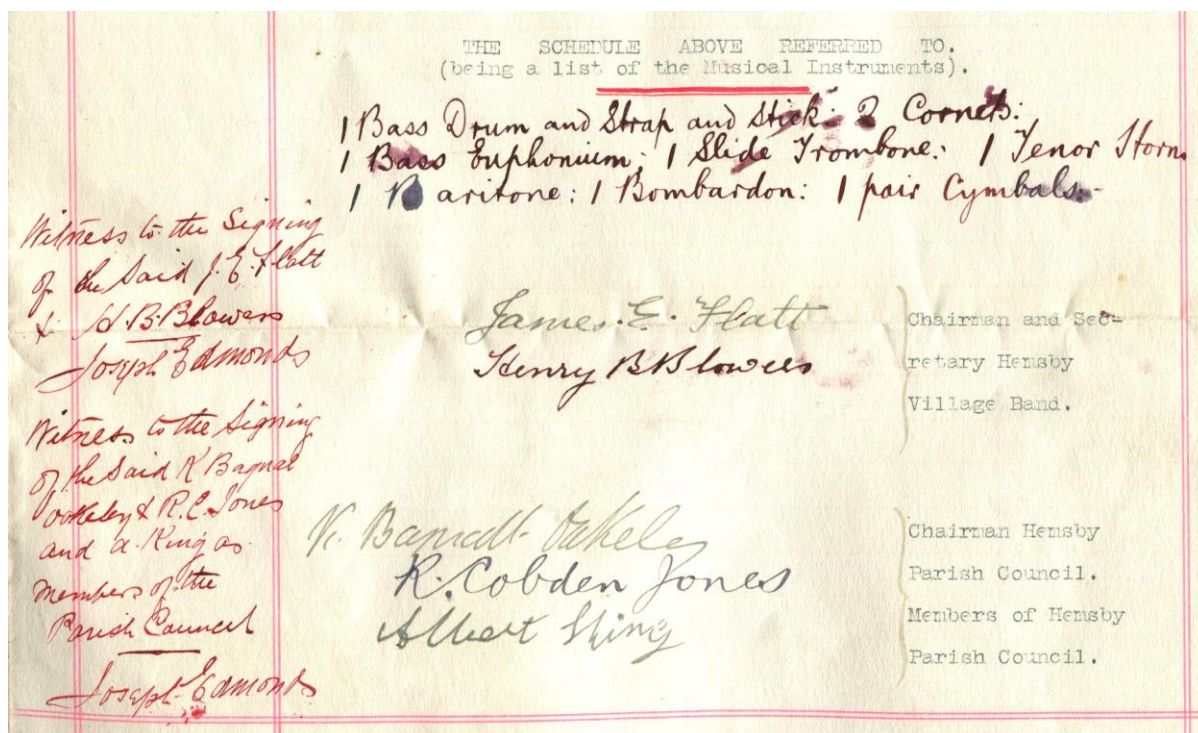
Henry Bagnall Oakely (b. 1865) was the vicar of the parish church

Richard Cobden Jones (b. 1865) was the school headteacher

Albert King (b. 1858) was a farmer

James Edward Flatt (b. 1878) was a platelayer on the railway (Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway)

Henry Blowers (b. 1877) was a fisherman



Once the instruments' ownership had been settled, the Band continued to meet and perform as before. They next appear in the records in May 1913, conducted by Mr Thompson, providing musical entertainment as part of a concert held by the Hensby Boy Scouts, and also led the Scouts' parade to the church on Whit Sunday 1913.

The Band seems to have survived WW1 as, anecdotally, and as mentioned above, it met holiday makers at the railway station and marched with them to the holiday camps. The ultimate fate of the Band is not known, but I suspect it disbanded later in the 1920's.



Hensby Bowling Team, 1904 – both Edward Flatt and Henry Blowers were members

George Beech wrote the following poem about the Hemsby Brass Band.

## **Our Band**

*by George Beech*

If you walk up on Station road  
Past the Church, you know  
You will hear our Village Band  
Thundering out a row  
Which isn't exactly music in the sense of the word  
But something like 'em shunting  
In the station yard.

During war in case the Huns  
On your shores did land  
Noble patriots – full of zeal  
Formed the Village Band  
All the members were classed  
In category C.3

But most of them at Xmastime  
Who went to the 'Bell' before  
When they put their music up  
Kept on seeing four  
Music sheets upon their music stands  
And some of them dropped their instruments  
From their nerveless hands.

The following are a few images of Hemsby from the early 1900's, showing the scenes that would have been familiar to the Hemsby bandsmen.





*Newport, Hemsby*



*Hemsby Station*



*Fishermen's cottages*





*Mrs Moll's shop, Hemsby*



*Local carriage service in Hemsby*