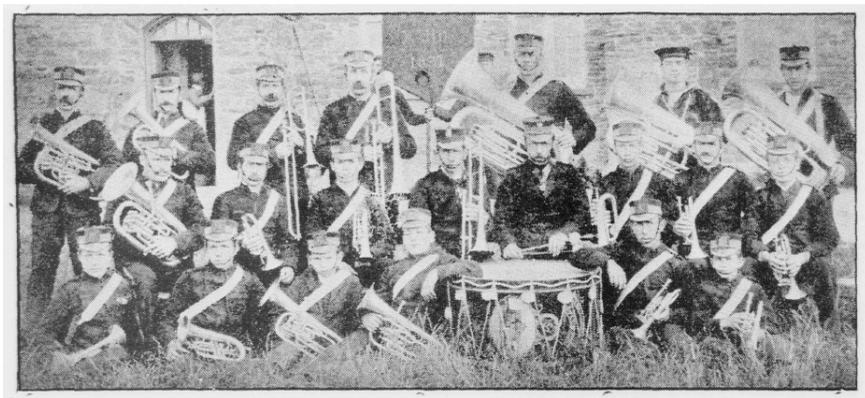


# Manx Notes 418 (2020)

## THE CASTLETOWN METROPOLITAN SILVER PRIZE BAND \*



“Castletown ‘Met’ Bandsmen—Then and Now.” *Isle of Man Examiner* 21 May 1954: 11c–e.

Despite the reproduction from newsprint this is a magnificent photograph of the Castletown Metropolitan Silver Prize Band, known simply as the Castletown Metropolitan Band, or, even shorter, simply as the “Mets.” Resplendent in their uniforms and with an intense manner in their poses, though in the case of one in the front row it is that of nonchalance as he drapes his arm over the drum, the photograph must date close to their foundation in late 1896. The town already had a band, the Castletown Town Band, formed in 1872, but the Mets came into existence as a result of a dispute over who would conduct them in the Island Band Concert of 12 November 1896 held in Douglas. Five bands entered, the Douglas Town Band, the band of the 7th Volunteer Battalion (Isle of Man) King’s Liverpool Regiment, the Foxdale Village Band, the Castletown Band, and the Laxey Temperance Band. Only four competed, the Laxey Temperance Band withdrawing and “[t]he reason was the very excellent one that recently several leading members of the band had left the Island for the gold districts of South Africa.”

The first competition was a quick step played whilst each band marched from the Jubilee Clock along the front at Douglas to the band stand on the Harris Promenade. Then it was inside at the Pavilion for the rest of the competition, the test piece being an arrangement from Verdi’s “Il Trovatore,” then a separate soloists

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competition again using the Verdi piece, and finally another quick step, each band choosing their own to play. The Foxdale Village Band took the honours on the evening winning the two classes of the contest and the Castletown Town Band came second. Their conductor spoke to the *Isle of Man Examiner* about the result: “Quoth Mr Valentine, ‘I consider the decision a perfect one.’” Not so it would soon transpire in Castletown....

Valentine had not been the choice of conductor for the contest, it was P. Collister who had been with the band from the start as conductor. Valentine was a professional band conductor from England, who had also tutored the band (the Foxdale Village Band also had similar help) and the result led to a schism in the Castletown Town Band with the majority of the band siding with Collister and a faction of ten members led by John Cubbon supporting Valentine.

The instruments used by the band had been purchased with a public subscription and through the proceeds of a bazaar and so did not belong to any one individual. As a consequence the band’s instruments were handed in to the Trustees (one of whom was Dr John Clague) who met to decide their fate. The decision taken was that given there was no good grounds in their opinion why Collister should not continue as conductor, that the instruments would be handed over those members of the band loyal to him. Those who had withdrawn from the band were swift to act on this—the Trustees met on the Friday and by Saturday night Cubbon and the others had replacement instruments after telegraphing to England the previous day.... (and this was the 25 and 26 December).

Recruitment to the Mets was swift with twenty-two players assembled by the close of December. They practised under John Cubbon and the newly-formed band held their first ever concert as such on 11 February 1897 to a full and house in Castletown Town Hall when over £17 was taken on the door. Valentine was back as conductor on the evening and the test piece from the contest in 1896 was repeated.

The Mets did not fade away after this but went on to become one of the Island’s premier brass bands and they were to play at “Club Days, concerts, regattas, shows, lifeboat days, private dances, hospital services, sports meetings and other events” showing the range of opportunities to play at and equally to be able to listen to music played.

On a final note, the band once left Castletown for a sports meeting to be held for Kirk Andreas Ascension Day. Travelling by horse-and-trap they left at 5 am for Andreas, when there played all day, and arrived back in Castletown at 4 am. With this in mind, there is no reason now for any reader of KMJ in the South not to go “over the bridge” for a music session in the North of the Island and for those “down the North” not to make the same journey....

STEPHEN MILLER, RBV

Drawn on here are the following sources: “[Notice] THE PAVILLION [...] THIRD ANNUAL BRASS BAND CONCERT AND BALLI,” *Isle of Man Times*, 7 November 1896, 1b; “[Summary and Notes] Additional eclat will ...,” *Isle of Man Times*, 7 November 1896, 4d; “Brass Band Concert at Douglas,” *Isle of Man Examiner* 14 November 1896, [4]f–g; “The Band Concert,” *Isle of Man Times* 21 November 1896, 7b–c; “[Local News] [Castletown and the South] The Split in the Town Band,” *Isle of Man Times*, 22 December 1896: 2g; “[Local News] [Castletown and the South] The Split in the Town Band,” *Isle of Man Times* 26 December 1896, 5e; “[Castletown] Metropolitan Band Concert,” *Isle of Man Times* 13 February 1897, 5c; “Castletown ‘Met’ Bandsmen—Then and Now,” *Isle of Man Examiner*, 21 May 1954, 11c–e.

