

# The Wellington Band

**The following has been extracted from The Bacup & Rossendale News and relates to The Wellington Band in the 1870s**

Wellington Supper – The Bacup Old Band was known far and wide as the most successful contesting band which appeared before the public. Deaths and removals, at last, thinned their ranks and after having honourably won in money and instruments nearly £1,500, they retired on their well-earned laurels. The Wellington Band, to a certain extent, took the place of the old band in sustaining the musical reputation of the town, and in fact, some of the members of the original band have now joined The Wellington. During the disastrous cotton famine this band fairly set off on tramp, rather than becoming a burden on the relief fund or accept of gratuitous relief.

On the last day of August 1862 they commenced their peregrinations. Sowerby Bridge was their first halting-place. From Sowerby Bridge they proceeded to Huddersfield and Leeds, where they got into a row with the Police, who insisted on their 'moving on'. Doncaster St Ledger proved a rare windfall for them. From there they went to Goole and Hull. They then took the packet from Hull to London and those who were not too sea-sick contrived to pick up part of their passage money as ahead by playing upon deck.

The day after their arrival they made their appearance before a London street audience. Their first stand was near the Exhibition and opposite a bookstall. The proprietor of the stall came to them, presented them with a small book each and half-a-crown. He requested them to continue playing; but then a policeman came up and ordered them off. In London they met with varied success. The tunes which took best with the cockneys were 'The Vital Spark' and 'Life's a Bumper' and at one favourite stand near London Bridge they took as much as 17s 6d per man in less than two hours, and they completely frightened the German bands from that locality.

The publicans did not at all relish them playing about their houses as they drew the company from the drinking bars. The drawback of London was that none of them had their health. They all ailed something and a move was made to Portsmouth. Here the police interfered with their playing in the streets. The people, who invariably took their part, told them to go on 'God's Ground' meaning the sands below high water mark where they could play unmolested, which advice was soon followed. From Portsmouth they sailed to The Isle of Wight. At Cowes they met with a sergeant who had just come down from the royal palace who, to their intense astonishment, saluted them in as 'broad Oldham' as could be well-spoken. They then tramped towards Her Majesty's residence at Osborne.

When near the palace, the Queen's dog kennels attracted their attention and they were busy admiring the dogs when one of their party, who had twice seen her Majesty in a procession, suddenly shouted out "The Queen" and sure enough a lady in a small phaeton and accompanied by a

single servant was driving up. Their first impulse was to give a lusty cheer but they seized their instruments and struck up the National Anthem which Her Majesty acknowledged by a graceful bow and they now boast of being one of the few Lancashire bands which have had the honour of playing before the highest personage in the realm. At Devizes they met with a poor tailor from Preston who fairly cried on hearing his familiar Lancashire dialect.

They then found their way to Southampton but had poor success and tramped over Salisbury Plain footsore and nearly famished. They took passage from Bristol to Liverpool and walked to Warrington where they were fairly done up. After a rest they reached Bury and played their last tune on the Bull's Head Bridge in Bacup and their collecting box is now kept as a relic of their wanderings during the cotton famine. Since then, the band has seen more prosperous times. They have recently spent nearly £200 on instruments and £10 in music alone, and on Saturday evening sat down to an excellent combination of supper and tea in the large room of the Green Man Hotel.

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