

**‘A New Impetus to the Love of Music’:  
The Role of the Town Hall in Nineteenth-Century English Musical Culture**

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**The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.**

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**Abstract**  
**Rachel Elizabeth Milestone**  
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On 6 March 1884 an article appeared in the *Birmingham Gazette* that reflected positively on the active musical life of the town, attributing much of the success to the town hall, and stating that the building had given 'a new impetus to the love of music'. Representing a link between municipal and artistic life, the nineteenth-century town hall was intended to be a monument to the glory, abilities and achievements of the town in which it was built. Due in part to the increase in and growing demand for public concerts at this time, such town halls also emerged as a new type of performance space for music, particularly in recently industrialised areas, and many became integral to the musical life of the town. To investigate key aspects or stages of this development, the town halls of Stalybridge (1831), Birmingham (1834) and Leeds (1858) are selected as case studies, and present an informative comparison.

Town-hall performances were a regular phenomenon in all of these towns, playing a large part in general local music-making. However, this similarity conceals a number of underlying differences in the use of the three town halls as music venues. The main distinction between the town halls of Stalybridge, Birmingham and Leeds can be seen in their conception and design. Stalybridge Town Hall was designed as a market, the town hall of Birmingham was built specifically as a concert hall, and Leeds Town Hall housed a complex of facilities for local government. At Stalybridge for much of the century, musical activity was held in the 'large room' that, although built with an 'orchestra', had no organ and no proper performance facilities. In stark contrast, Birmingham Town Hall was a purpose-built concert hall containing one of the best organs in Europe, with every necessary facility for the performance of music. Although Leeds Town Hall was designed as a local government building, the large hall was specifically designed for music-making, again housing an organ that was at the forefront of modern technology.

Often a town hall would enable or encourage the holding of a musical festival, prompting the engagement of international artists and the commissioning of new repertoire. Such events hold an integral place in the history of music in nineteenth-century Britain, and here the town hall played a central role. Stalybridge differed from Leeds and Birmingham in not hosting a musical festival, however. In addition, a festival was only a small part of the musical function of many town halls, and such events often overshadow the vast range of performances that were held in all three buildings in the intervening years. The frequent use of the building by local musicians in particular ensured that all three town halls worked as a great stimulus to the musical life of the town in which it was placed, even overcoming competition from rival commercial venues.

The nineteenth-century town hall was a new performance space and a distinct cultural phenomenon. It was a symbolic building that stimulated the creation and performance of some of the most important works in the nineteenth-century repertoire, and that allowed thousands of people to hear music they could never have otherwise experienced. Through the town hall a local government could act as patron, bringing the community together through musical provision designed to 'improve' the citizens of all classes. In an age of diversity and division, the nineteenth-century town hall played an important unifying role, open to all members of society and uniting them in one common cause – 'the love of music'.

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Solely-authored chapter, “‘The Exponent of the Life and Soul of the City’: The Town Hall as a Music Venue in the 19<sup>th</sup> century’, in *Victorian Soundscapes Revisited*, ed by Martin Hewitt and Rachel Cowgill, Leeds Working Papers in Victorian Studies 9 (Leeds: LCVS with LUCEM, 2007), 178-190. ISBN 978-0-9540-1598-5.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1: The Development of the Town Hall

The notion of progress was a driving force in British culture in the nineteenth century – an age characterised by rapid and continual change in intellectual, social and material environments. At the heart of this fascination with advancement was the increasing industrialisation and urbanisation of nineteenth-century society. There had been a major shift in technological, socio-economic and cultural conditions in the late eighteenth century. An economy previously based on manual labour was replaced by one dominated by the machine, beginning with the mechanisation of the textile industries and the development of iron-making techniques. The impact of this change on society was huge. Encouraged by the prospect of the higher wages and steady employment that the factory system could potentially provide, there was a population drift from rural to urban environments, leading to the growth of new and larger towns. The four counties that were most affected by industrialisation (the West Riding of Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, and Lancashire) increased their share of the total population from seventeen per cent in 1781 to twenty-six per cent in 1861.<sup>1</sup>

Such urbanisation, together with increasingly competitive commercial environments, stimulated a developing consciousness of local and civic pride. Changes in legislation encouraged this by enabling a move towards more democratic administration from within the town. The repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts in 1828 made it possible for Nonconformists, many of whom were already significant members of their local community, to take part in government, with the 1832 Reform Act encompassing the new, non-landowning industrial elite. The Municipal Corporations Act in 1835 encouraged further change by allowing a greater number of towns to become corporations, and making existing municipal corporations more answerable to electors. This new civic independence often fostered local rivalry, normally between places that were part of a wider urban area, such as Manchester and

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<sup>1</sup> John Stevenson, 'Industrialization', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture, 1776-1832*, ed. by Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 133-141 (p.137).

Salford or Leeds and Bradford, but it was also echoed in smaller communities such as Stalybridge and Ashton-under-Lyne.

Municipalities capitalised upon this rivalry as a means of fostering local pride and therefore social cohesion. In a further effort to encourage a sense of community, and to legitimise the status and authority of local government in the first half of the nineteenth century, politicians began to place great emphasis on community projects, buildings and celebrations as part of the creation of local customs that would consolidate the townspeople, creating a sense of tradition, and therefore import. According to Eric Hobsbawm, the creation of traditions occurs more frequently 'when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which "old" traditions had been designed'.<sup>2</sup> He goes on to state that invented traditions in the period after the industrial revolution fall into three overlapping groups:

- a) Those establishing or symbolising social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities.
- b) Those establishing or legitimising institutions, status or relations of authority.
- c) Those whose main purpose was socialisation, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour.<sup>3</sup>

These invented traditions were consolidated in the nineteenth century in the erection of civic buildings as material symbols of the constitutional and economic changes of the time. In 1845 the architectural journal *The Builder* acknowledged that 'the architectural embellishment of a city is of much greater consequence in forming the character of the people than some hasty thinkers now-a-days recognize'.<sup>4</sup> The erection of public buildings fuelled the intense rivalry between the towns and cities, and town-hall building was at the forefront of this. A town hall was seen as a monument to the glory, abilities and achievements of a town or city and, according to William E.A. Axon in 1878, a town hall symbolised 'not merely the opulence of the city, but also that great principle of local self-government'.<sup>5</sup> In the opinion of Sir Charles Barry, architect of the new Houses of Parliament:

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<sup>2</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-14 (p.4).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>4</sup> *The Builder*, 3 (1845), p.373.

<sup>5</sup> William E.A. Axon, *An Architectural and General Description of the Town Hall, Manchester* (Manchester and London: Abel Heywood, 1878), preface. Axon, a librarian, antiquary and local historian, was influential in the building of Manchester Town Hall and this statement anticipates what the new town hall would symbolise to the people of Manchester. For more on Axon see Brian Charles Hollingworth, 'Axon, William Edward Armytage (1846-1913)', *Oxford*

A Town Hall should [...] be the most dominant and important of the Municipal Buildings of the City in which it is placed. It should be the means of giving due expression to public feeling upon all national and municipal events of importance. [It should serve,] as it were, as the exponent of the life and soul of the City.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst nineteenth-century town halls were often built to celebrate recent 'national and municipal events of importance', most were designed in the classical architectural styles of the past. Paradoxically, a town hall was to be a symbol of progress and modernity but at the same was conservatively linked with the traditions of past empires as a self-conscious claim for civilisation. In keeping with Hobsbawm's groups of 'invented traditions' mentioned above, the creation of the nineteenth-century town hall was the invention of a new tradition, designed to represent the newly established community, to legitimise the authority of the local government, and to encourage civilised beliefs, values and behaviour amongst the citizens of the town.

The town hall was not a new phenomenon, however. Robert Tittler defines a town hall as 'that edifice characteristically regarded by contemporaries as the seat of whatever degree of autonomous civic administration a particular town may have enjoyed'.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, according to architectural historian Colin Cunningham, the buildings that could first be considered as town halls were the basilicas of the Roman Empire.<sup>8</sup> Another early form of town hall was the Medieval Moot Hall – 'moot' literally meaning an assembly or meeting. The Guildhall was a further manifestation. Guildhalls were erected throughout Europe during the late Middle Ages and in Britain some were adapted to form town halls, such as those in York and King's Lynn.<sup>9</sup> The title 'guildhall' was also sometimes adopted for the principal civic building in a city, as in Bath or London.<sup>10</sup> Both types of buildings were connected with the organisation and local administration of the town, and could therefore be thought of as precursors of the town hall. In addition, the independent assembly rooms built in the eighteenth century

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*Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/57406>, accessed 2 Feb 2009].

<sup>6</sup> Sir Charles Barry, quoted in Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Odhams, 1968) p.159. Barry made this statement in 1859 when discussing plans for the building of Halifax Town Hall with the Halifax Corporation. It has not been possible to trace the original source for this quotation.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Tittler, *Architecture and Power: The Town Hall and the English Urban Community, 1500-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p.9.

<sup>8</sup> Colin Cunningham, 'Town Halls', in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. by Jane Turner, 34 vols (New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 1996), xxxi, 235-244 (p.235).

<sup>9</sup> See Colin Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p.2.

<sup>10</sup> Colin Cunningham. 'Town hall.' *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. 5 Apr. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordartonline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/art/T085901>>.

as places for the higher social classes to gather often consisted of a main room and several subsidiary rooms, such as tea and supper rooms. The emphasis on entertainment makes them an important precursor to the nineteenth-century town hall, and many survived well into the next century.<sup>11</sup>

The development of the town hall as a building type in Europe was linked with the growth of trade;<sup>12</sup> therefore, from the Middle Ages the town hall became the symbolic centre of the power, prosperity and pride of European cities. During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the number of town halls in Britain increased dramatically; according to Tittler, 'close to half of the approximately six to seven hundred towns in the realm at this time appear to have built, substantially rebuilt, or purchased and converted a town hall, and some of them more than one such edifice, between 1500 and 1640'.<sup>13</sup> This was probably due to the Royal Charters of Incorporation obtained by many towns at this time. Charters of Incorporation had been in existence since the reign of William I (1066-87), and by 1216 over 300 had been granted. The Charters allowed such privileges as the right of paying a fixed rent independent of sheriffs, exemption from legal actions outside the borough, the right of returning writs direct to the King and, perhaps most importantly, self-government through the election of magistrates.<sup>14</sup> After being awarded such a charter, local governors often felt the need to symbolise their new status, leading to the erection of many town-hall-type buildings. Most of those built were small constructions, normally including a hall, possibly with a small room at each end, commonly raised on pillars to accommodate a market space below. The town hall at this time was seen as a focus of the newly self-governing local community, thus 'symbolic of civic authority, power and legitimacy'.<sup>15</sup> With the birth of the new towns and the changes in local government in the nineteenth century, town halls were built for the same symbolic purpose. However, whilst the buildings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were smaller structures with an emphasis on utility and with very little ornamentation, the nineteenth-century town hall embodied a new symbolism both in its ornamentation and an increasing preference for grand, imposing structures. The town hall of the nineteenth century was

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<sup>11</sup> See Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p.3.

<sup>12</sup> Cunningham, 'Town Halls', p.236. For more on the origins of town halls see his *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, pp.1-7.

<sup>13</sup> Tittler, *Architecture and Power*, p.11.

<sup>14</sup> See Robert Tittler, *Townpeople and nation: English urban experiences, 1540-1640* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp.23-24.

<sup>15</sup> Tittler, *Architecture and Power*, p. 96.

the ultimate representation of the new age of urban consciousness and a future age of wealth and progress, but also a statement of permanence through architectural references to past civilisations.

## 1.2: Music and Progress

As we have seen, the establishment of new towns and cities, the independence of local government, the recently erected municipal buildings, and the great technological advances of industrialisation stimulated large amounts of local pride. However, there was also a profound concern amongst many regarding the moral implications of the huge increase in population in these urban centres.<sup>16</sup> Whilst political reformers saw progress through urbanisation and all it encouraged, moral reformers thought that real progress could only be achieved through the promotion of morality and self-improvement. The notion of progress through improvement had been a trend in the cultural life of the eighteenth century. Those who enjoyed 'fashionable culture' were attracted to the idea of promoting their own improvement since it linked with edifying ideals of the time such as sensibility, sentiment, sociability, civility, politeness and taste.<sup>17</sup> It was further encouraged by the widespread acceptance of Methodism, of which self-improvement was a central feature.<sup>18</sup> In the eighteenth century it was the higher classes who enjoyed the culture of improvement as a tool of social exclusivity since it required considerable personal resources and disposable income; it attracted 'all those who perceived themselves as successful, or aspired to be so'.<sup>19</sup> This eighteenth-century desire for improvement was the impetus for the forceful moralising of the next century, but in the 1800s the notion of improvement was also aimed towards the lower classes of society, in a paternalistic, top-down approach encouraged by increasing numbers of social reformers. In 1866 the didact Samuel Smiles wrote: 'The spirit of self-help is the root of all genuine growth in the individual; and, exhibited in the lives of many, it constitutes the true source of national vigour and strength'.<sup>20</sup> Those of the

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<sup>16</sup> See Asa Briggs, *A Social History of England* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.216.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Borsay, 'The Culture of Improvement' in *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Paul Langford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 183-210 (p.184).

<sup>18</sup> Richard Brown, *Church and State in Modern Britain 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.124.

<sup>19</sup> Borsay, 'The Culture of Improvement', p.185.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (London: John Murray, 1860), p.15. Samuel Smiles held the opinion, as did many others, that individual improvement rather than structural change was the most important means of social advance. Concerned with the education and improvement of ordinary people, Smiles wrote *Self-Help* in

higher classes who considered themselves to have been 'improved' now wanted to encourage the lower classes to improve themselves.

In the early part of the century commentators repeatedly said that the only real form of recreation available in the new urban setting was that connected with the consumption of alcohol. In 1844 Frederick Engels suggested that for the working men of Manchester, 'Liquor is almost their only source of pleasure, and all things conspire to make it accessible to them'.<sup>21</sup> From the restoration onwards there had been a link between music and alcohol, mostly taking the form of free-and-easy musical performances in taverns and pleasure gardens. In addition, many public houses served as the meeting places for musical societies and clubs. According to Peter Clark, 'clubs and societies became one of the most distinctive social and cultural institutions of Georgian Britain',<sup>22</sup> and public houses were often used as the venue for their meetings, not only because of the availability of refreshments, but also because they represented a controlled environment, 'open in principle to all-comers, but regulated by convention and etiquette and by the landlord's management'.<sup>23</sup> The London musical society the Academy of Ancient Music, for example, met mainly at the Crown and Anchor tavern in the Strand, whilst a provincial model can be seen in the Messiah Club of Halifax which met at the local Old-Cock inn.<sup>24</sup> Public houses and taverns were even used as early venues for choral-society meetings, for example, those of the Halifax Choral

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order to emphasise the importance of the application of good character to the problems of daily life. On Smiles see H. C. G. Matthew, 'Smiles, Samuel (1812–1904)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/36125>, accessed 17 May 2009].

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844; With a Preface Written in 1892*, trans. by Florence Kelley Wischniewetzky (London: S. Sonnenschein, 1892), p.113. Engels was a businessman and revolutionary leader from Barmen, Germany, who came to England to work at his father's textile firm in Manchester. He was influenced by the sentiments of a book written in 1841 by Moses Hess, *Die europäische Triarchie*, which spoke of the imminence of social revolution in England. Engels spent his two-year stay in Manchester studying the conditions that he thought would lead to this revolution, and wrote two publications on the subject. The second, *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England nach eigener Anschauung und authentischen Quellen*, translated for the English-speaking market as *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, was first published in Leipzig in 1845, and became famous as a classic account of social conditions in England during the Industrial Revolution. See Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Engels, Friedrich (1820–1895)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, May 2006 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/39022>, accessed 14 May 2009].

<sup>22</sup> Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580–1800: the Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), p.2.

<sup>23</sup> Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p.164.

<sup>24</sup> Rachel Cowgill, 'Disputing Choruses in 1760s Halifax: Joah Bates, William Herschel, and the Messiah Club', in *Music in the British Provinces, 1600–1914*, ed. by Rachel Cowgill and Peter Holman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 87–113 (p.92).



Society, established in 1817.<sup>25</sup> From the end of the seventeenth century, inns had developed as the prime venue for such entertainments as balls, assemblies, plays, lectures and concerts,<sup>26</sup> and throughout the eighteenth century, taverns and public houses became larger, more lavish and more commercial. Landlords often became social and cultural entrepreneurs, marketing musical entertainments in their drinking houses, with some even erecting organs and 'orchestras' – platforms for musical performances.<sup>27</sup> However, from the eighteenth century there had been a growing concern over the potential immorality of public houses, not only because they were places for organised drink but also because some were used for prostitution.<sup>28</sup> In the nineteenth century, the form of recreation the moral reformers were perhaps most anxious about was the music hall. This Victorian music hall grew out of the song and supper rooms of the early nineteenth century, where variety and song was provided in addition to food and drink. Alcohol played a considerable role in the venue, mainly as a source of income; many had no entrance charges, relying entirely on the sale of alcohol to cover running costs and pay the performers.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, from the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and for most of the nineteenth, social reformers became anxious to break this connection between music and the sale of alcohol, and to limit the place of drinking in working-class culture. They first attempted to do this by repression, and their efforts in the second quarter of the nineteenth century did have some effect, persuading parliament to pass legislation which would potentially support and improve the cultural lives of the working classes.<sup>30</sup> However, there was soon a movement to provide alternative, 'rational' recreation. The following statement by Thomas Herring, archbishop of Canterbury from 1747-57, gives some indication of the practical approach to moral recreational reform at the time:

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<sup>25</sup> See Rachel Cowgill, "'The Most Musical Spot for its Size in the Kingdom": Music in Georgian Halifax', *Early Music*, 28 (2000), 557-576 (p.567). This society was first known as the Halifax Quarterly Society.

<sup>26</sup> See Peter Borsay, 'Concert Topography and Provincial Towns in Eighteenth-Century England', in *Concert Life in Eighteenth-century Britain*, ed. by Susan Wollenberg and Simon McVeigh (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 19-33 (p.24).

<sup>27</sup> See Peter Clark and Robert Allan Houston, 'Culture and Leisure, 1700-1840' in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, II, 1540-1840*, ed. by Peter Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 575-613.

<sup>28</sup> See James Walvin, *Leisure and Society, 1830-1950* (New York: Longman, 1978), pp.33-46.

<sup>29</sup> See Dagmar Kift, *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class, and Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.112-114.

<sup>30</sup> See, J.M. Golby and A.W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd: Popular Culture in England 1750-1900* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), p.107.

It has [...] been generally agreed among moralists, that all public sports and entertainments should be so regulated, as to have a tendency to the encouragement of virtue, and the discountenancing of vice and immorality.<sup>31</sup>

The most popular form of rational recreation was music, encouraged greatly by the Nonconformist reformers and church leaders. In their opinion, however, there was both good and bad music. The songs sung in pubs and music halls were generally regarded as obscene, but the performance of music that was uplifting and improving was encouraged.<sup>32</sup> According to Houston and Clark, the enjoyment of 'bawdy songs' was 'affected by the new-found respectability and religiosity of public sociability'.<sup>33</sup> 'Uplifting and improving' music was generally sacred, evolving out of hymns sung by all denominations, but especially the Methodist tradition, where music and communal singing held a central role in worship. According to Temperley, 'The cardinal point about singing for Methodists and Evangelicals was that it should be a heartfelt and spontaneous act of worship by the people'.<sup>34</sup> William Vincent, the dean of Westminster, admired the Methodist's approach to music and worship and encouraged others to follow its lead:

That the harmony arising from the voices of a well regulated Methodist Congregation is delightful, no one who has heard it, can deny. Let us not envy them the enjoyment of it, but draw our own instruction from it.<sup>35</sup>

From the end of the eighteenth century sacred, and therefore 'appropriate', music began to play an important part in the informal education of the lower classes. The moral reformers operated a paternalistic imposition of particular repertoire and vocal styles that Temperley suggests were determined by two distinct classes of motive:

One was religious: sacred music, both in church and out of it, should be an expression of piety, and a weapon in the general raising of standards in religion and morality. The second was aesthetic and materialistic: the old way of singing gave offence, and must give place to

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Herring, *Letters to William Duncombe, Esq: deceased, from the year 1728 to 1757* (London: J. Johnson, 1777), p.179. On Thomas Herring see Robert T. Holtby, 'Herring, Thomas (1693–1757)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/13098>, accessed 3 Aug 2009].

<sup>32</sup> Golby and Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd*, p.105

<sup>33</sup> Clark and Houston, 'Culture and Leisure', p.581.

<sup>34</sup> Nicholas Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.209.

<sup>35</sup> William Vincent, *Considerations on Parochial Music* (London: T. Cadell, 1790) p.15. On Vincent see Tony Trowles, 'Vincent, William (1739–1815)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, May 2008 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/28316>, accessed 4 Aug 2009].

something more appropriate for the public celebrations of a prosperous and successful society.<sup>36</sup>

Because of its perceived ability to civilise and humanise, to raise 'standards in religion and morality',<sup>37</sup> music became known as the 'sacred art' and its performance was encouraged by Christian philanthropists and missionaries of the time as a form of self-improvement. It was thought that music should be more than a form of amusement or aesthetic experience. It was seen 'as an object of social utility and [a] balm for society's many evils' because of its capacity to touch the emotions but not the passions, and to shape men's thoughts and actions to the good.<sup>38</sup> According to music critic George Hogarth, in an article we would consider patronising today, written 'to exhibit such a view of the principles of music as may be calculated for popular information and use':

The experience of the present day has shown, and is showing more and more, that even the classes who earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, may find in music a recreation within their reach, full of innocent enjoyment, and pregnant with moral and social benefits.<sup>39</sup>

The link between music and morality was not a nineteenth-century idea. Plato viewed music as a powerful force in affecting people's lives because of its ability to shape human character. In his work *The Republic* (in Benjamin Jowett's 1901 translation), he wrote: 'musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten, imparting grace, and making the soul of him who is rightly educated graceful'.<sup>40</sup> Plato's views were observed to varying degrees throughout the centuries, of course, but gained new momentum with the rise of a more public concert life in the eighteenth century, until finally reaching their apotheosis in the nineteenth. Not only was music as a social tool encouraged by the overtly religious society of the time, but it also emanated from a direct attempt at political control by the newly enriched middle classes. Because of the threat from Chartism, and the nervousness

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<sup>36</sup> Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church*, p.100. Such imposition for the sake of moral reform often squashed a flourishing indigenous tradition.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England: 1840-1914: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p.17.

<sup>39</sup> George Hogarth, 'Music - Art of Singing', in *Chambers's Information for the People*, ed. by William and Robert Chambers, 2 vols (Edinburgh: William and Robert Chambers, 1842), ii, 769-797 (p.769).

<sup>40</sup> *The Republic of Plato: An Ideal Commonwealth*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (London: Co-Operative Publication Society, 1901), p.86.

surrounding the European revolutions in the first half of the nineteenth century, the education of the lower classes was seen a crucial.<sup>41</sup> This was particularly the case in the 1840s when, according to Dave Russell, 'continuing industrialisation was producing an environment that was hostile and frightening to many middle-class observers'.<sup>42</sup> As a result, there emerged a movement not only towards the provision of music expressly for the working classes, but also an avid involvement in the performance of sacred music as a form of rational recreation by the middle classes, normally by joining choirs and choral societies, in order for them to distance themselves from lower-class entertainment.<sup>43</sup> Music in nineteenth-century Britain was seen not just as a form of leisure; it permeated many areas of both public and private life as a form of moral instruction for all classes to live by. In 1897 the Italian Government sent a musician, Count Giuseppe Franchi Verney, to report to the Italian Education Department on music in English schools. As part of his report, Verney commented on the enthusiasm the English people had for music:

There are few countries in the world where music is made the object of such enthusiastic worship. It might almost be said that music is a vital and indispensable element of English life.<sup>44</sup>

As the century advanced, halls specifically designed as suitable venues for popular, though culturally respectable, activities were increasingly in demand and it therefore became a necessity for towns to supply performance spaces other than those traditionally provided, and restricted, by the church, not least because of the spread of non-conformism and doctrinal diversity. Music, some said, was only a force for the good if it was heard 'in an atmosphere of moral purity suitable to the proper enjoyment of such a gift',<sup>45</sup> but there was serious doubt as to whether such performances of music were appropriate in a church. Many thought that a Christian sanctuary was 'far too

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<sup>41</sup> See John Saville, *1848: The British State and the Chartist Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). However, some moral reformers also perceived this to be risky because it could give the lower classes 'ideas' and make them aspire to things beyond their means. Therefore, any education had to be well controlled.

<sup>42</sup> Russell, *Popular Music in England*, pp.23-34.

<sup>43</sup> For more see Clark and Houston, 'Culture and Leisure', pp.575-613.

<sup>44</sup> Reported in *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 38 (1897), p.742.

<sup>45</sup> Rev. G.M. Conder in a letter to *Leeds Intelligencer*, 1 May 1852. Conder was Minister at the Independent Chapel in Leeds. In this letter he was advocating the provision of 'People's Concerts' at the Music Hall in Leeds, where he suggested working-class men could attend entertainments, with their families, in a venue away from drunkenness and prostitution. Some of Conder's sermons survive in the Leeds Local Studies Library, and are based on such subjects as 'free press', 'free speech' and 'religion and working men'. See the card catalogue at the library for more information.

sacred to be used as a place of intellectual entertainment'.<sup>46</sup> Theatres, in contrast, were thought to be places devoid of any 'moral purity'. Although they gradually became more respectable throughout the nineteenth century, for many people, often with a Nonconformist background, they were seen as unacceptable because of their perceived immorality.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, in many places the new town hall presented the ideal venue and in some cases was built expressly for this purpose. No town hall was considered complete without its great hall and so the use of this non-denominational space for concerts provided an important direct link between the citizens and municipality of the town, achieving a political, moral and artistic mission. Journalist and biographer Thomas Wemyss Reid, in a discussion of the building of Leeds Town Hall, stated:

If a noble municipal palace [...] were to be erected in the middle of their hitherto squalid and unbeautiful town, it would become a practical admonition to the populace of the value of beauty and art, and in course of time men would learn to live up to it.<sup>48</sup>

As we have seen, the town hall was a significant, symbolic building in the nineteenth century, whose large hall provided a suitable space for the substantial increase in 'respectable' and 'improving' music performances at the time. But was music in the town hall a regular phenomenon, and if so, what type of music was performed, and how large a part did this institution play in the music-making of the town in which it was placed?

### 1.3: Literature Review

The position of the town hall in nineteenth-century musical culture has not been discussed as the main focus of a dedicated study, but some authors have referred to the nineteenth-century town hall as a music venue as part of their own studies. Michael Forsyth, for example, in his *Buildings for Music*, discusses the northern town hall as a

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<sup>46</sup> Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Founder of the Methodists, Volume 2* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1870), pp.499-500.

<sup>47</sup> See Kift, *The Victorian Music Hall*, p.77. This is a complex issue. There were varying opinions as to the morality of the theatre, often influenced by contrasting Metropolitan/Provincial and religious/atheistic attitudes.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Wemyss Reid, *A Memoir of John Deakin Heaton, M.D. of Leeds* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1883), pp.142-143. Deakin was an influential figure in the promotion of a town hall for Leeds, and here Reid is describing Leeds Council's impetus for the erection of such a building. For more on Heaton see Tristram Hunt, 'Heaton, John Deakin (1817-1880)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, May 2006; online edn, May 2007 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/94166>, accessed 3 Feb 2009]. For more on Reid see G. Le G. Norgate, 'Reid, Sir Thomas Wemyss (1842-1905)', rev. H. C. G. Matthew, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/35720>, accessed 3 Feb 2009].

venue that provided a setting for 'monumental music on a grand scale, combining great size with the highest architectural accomplishment'.<sup>49</sup> In addition, Nicholas Thistlethwaite considers the musical use of the town hall in his discussion of the rise of the concert organ, stating 'in architectural, cultural and social terms the Victorian town hall was a distinct phenomenon, wholly characteristic of the age and an uncompromising expression of some of its most cherished ideals'.<sup>50</sup>

Other authors have made the consideration of the role of the town hall generally in English society the topic of particular studies. Tittler makes a detailed study of the architecture, impact and usage of the town hall during the period 1500-1640. He suggests that even at that time, the building of a town hall marked the rising status of a town, proposing that 'we have in its construction and use the architectural representation of a more mature stage of civic development, a widely understood symbol of civic authority, power, and legitimacy'.<sup>51</sup> Cunningham's study of Victorian and Edwardian town halls, takes the same approach but from a nineteenth-century perspective. Briggs, in his *Victorian Cities* considers town-hall building from the standpoint of its impact on the city as a whole, and uses centres such as Leeds and Birmingham as case studies. However, none of the above publications explore how such ideologies translated into the musical activities facilitated by these halls.

Whilst such publications have had an important place in developing my thesis, the models for my work have been musicological studies. Compensating for an earlier period of relative neglect, there have been many notable publications in recent years that consider British musical life in the nineteenth century. Many of these, such as Robert Beale's *Charles Hallé: A Musical Life* and Paul Rodmell's *Charles Villiers Stanford*, focus on a particular composer, conductor or other significant individual and consider his role in nineteenth-century life.<sup>52</sup> Others discuss a particular type of music and its performance in nineteenth century Britain in particular contexts, such as Muir's *Roman Catholic Church Music in England, 1791-1914: A Handmaid of the Liturgy?*, and Scott's *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and*

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Forsyth, *Buildings for Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.140.

<sup>50</sup> Nicholas Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.270.

<sup>51</sup> Tittler, *Architecture and Power*, p.97.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Beale, *Charles Hallé: A Musical Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Paul Rodmell, *Charles Villiers Stanford* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

*Parlour*.<sup>53</sup> Most helpful as models for my work, however, are those that concentrate on particular provincial centres and institutions. One of the most important has been the recent collection *Music in the British Provinces*,<sup>54</sup> the first book to specifically concentrate on musical life in provincial Britain as opposed to a specific region. Each chapter provides a detailed case-study of various aspects of music-making in a number of provincial centres, and demonstrates the fundamental role music played in provincial culture between 1690 and 1914.

My work links most obviously with those studies that concentrate on music in a particular town, such as Wollenberg's book, *Music at Oxford in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*.<sup>55</sup> The individual chapters of my thesis follow the same general structure as Wollenberg uses in chapter four of her study, 'Concert-life in Eighteenth Century Oxford'. The focus of her chapter is the use of the Holywell Music Room as the main venue for music-making outside the university. Wollenberg begins by discussing the conception and design of the new concert room and why it was needed, then charts how the building was received by the musicians of the town, and its subsequent use for musical performance. As she observes at the beginning of the chapter, 'Oxford's concert life received its greatest impetus from the establishing of the Holywell Music Room (opened 1748). The opening of the Music Room marked not so much a new beginning, as a significant stage in a process of development'.<sup>56</sup> Much the same could be said for each of the town halls selected for my case studies. Other influential studies in the area of provincial music-making include Cowgill's work on music in Georgian and Victorian Halifax,<sup>57</sup> and Russell's work on music in northern England and particular centres such as Bradford, Leeds and Manchester.<sup>58</sup> 'Provincial

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<sup>53</sup> Thomas E. Muir, *Roman Catholic Church Music in England, 1791-1914: A Handmaid of the Liturgy?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Derek Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour*, 2nd edn (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Rachel Cowgill and Peter Holman, eds., *Music in the British Provinces, 1690-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). My work on music in Stalybridge Town Hall was featured in this publication as "'That Monstrosity of Bricks and Mortar': The Town Hall as a Music Venue in Nineteenth-century Stalybridge", pp.295-323. The chapter forms the basis of my work on Stalybridge Town Hall in this thesis. See 'Published Works' at the end of this thesis.

<sup>55</sup> Susan Wollenberg, *Music at Oxford in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44.

<sup>57</sup> Cowgill, "'The Most Musical Spot for its Size in the Kingdom'": Music in Georgian Halifax', *Early Music*, 28 (2000), 557-576; 'The Business of Music in Late Georgian and Victorian Halifax, c.1760-c.1901', *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 10 (2002), 77-95; 'Disputing Choruses in 1760s Halifax: Joah Bates, William Herschel, and the Messiah Club', in *Music in the British Provinces*, 87-113.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, David Russell "'Awakening to the Reality of our New and Loftier Position." The Bradford Triennial Musical Festivals 1853-1895', *Bradford Antiquary*, Third Series, 6

Concerts in England, 1865-1914' considers concert-giving in a wide provincial context, then focuses on Bradford as a more detailed example. My thesis adopts a similar approach by considering the town hall as a music venue in a general sense, then using case studies to illustrate national trends in Victorian music-making. My work differs from Russell's article in a number of ways, however, such as my more detailed consideration of concert repertoire.

Further models for my work are those that concentrate on particular musical institutions or venues. One of the most significant is Michael Musgrave's *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace*.<sup>59</sup> In this study he charts the life of the Crystal Palace as a music venue by discussing its conception and design, the transformation of the building for musical purposes, the use of the venue for musical festivals and other concerts, its organ, the performers and the repertoire performed. These themes have also emerged as significant in my thesis, and indeed there are many similarities between the Crystal Palace and town halls in their stimulus to music-making in the nineteenth century and beyond. For example, Musgrave states, 'the Palace was never built for any one role alone [...] but as an enabling location'.<sup>60</sup> Most town halls did not have a single use, but were built to meet the varied requirements of the people of the town, often including their musical needs. Like the Crystal Palace, opened in 1851 in London's Hyde Park and then rebuilt at Sydenham in 1854, town halls in the Victorian age 'enabled' large-scale, interdenominational, inter-class music-making in a way no other building had done before. But in his study Musgrave seems to overlook the influence that town halls had on mass music-making. He states, 'in the middle of the nineteenth century, public concerts such as we understand them today hardly existed – [the Crystal Palace] takes on a special significance in showing the creation of a public venue'.<sup>61</sup> Whilst no town hall was ever built on the scale of the Crystal Palace, by the mid-nineteenth century

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(1992), 3-21; 'Music in a provincial city: Manchester, c.1860-1914', in Christina Bashford and Leanne Langley eds., *Music and British Culture, 1785-1914. Essays in Honour of Cyril Ehrlich* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 233-254; 'The Leeds Rational Recreation Society, 1852-9: "Music for the People" in a Mid-Victorian City', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, 56 (1981), 137-158; 'Provincial Concerts in England, 1865-1914: A Case-Study of Bradford', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 114 (1989), 43-55; 'Music in Huddersfield, c.1820-1914', in E.A. Hilary Haigh, ed., *Huddersfield, A Most Handsome Town: Aspects of the History and Culture of a West Yorkshire Town* (Huddersfield: Kirklees Cultural Services, 1992), 653-79. Russell's book, *Popular Music in England: 1840-1914* has also been an influence on my study as a consideration of music-making as cultural practice.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Musgrave, *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.



many town halls were the venues for large-scale musical festivals and any number of public concerts in all manner of guises. It would be more accurate to say that town halls and the Crystal Palace stand side by side as innovative performance spaces that gave impetus to a new era of music-making. Kift's study of the Victorian music hall was also important to my work through its exploration of the workings of the venue as an institution, and its place within nineteenth-century society.<sup>62</sup> Kift's work attempts to move away from the London-centric consideration of the music hall that is most frequently studied by setting the history of the institution within a national perspective. Kift frames her argument around a number of themes that I have also used to structure my thesis. These include the management of the halls, the identity of performers, and audience demographic.

Other publications in this area include Elkin's study of the Queen's Hall and Johnston's study of the impetus behind the building of the Ulster Hall,<sup>63</sup> both of which consider the circumstances surrounding the erection of the building, the subsequent music-making in the hall and, ultimately, how influential it was as a music venue within the town in which it was placed. The structure of these studies is similar to my own. Boydell's study of music at Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, is somewhat different in configuration since it is based upon a sacred medieval building, not a concert hall. Music-making here was linked with worship and was run by the church authorities, which therefore impacted on the type of performer and music performed. Boydell's work offers a valuable study into how musicians and repertoire are affected by a particular venue.<sup>64</sup> Antje Pieper's book, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture: A Comparative History of Leipzig and Birmingham*,<sup>65</sup> forms both a provincial and institutional musical study. Pieper explores middle-class culture in Birmingham and Leipzig by comparing the purposes and practices of the Birmingham Triennial Festival and Leipzig's Gewandhaus. Although the study overlooks substantial caches of primary source material that have informed my research, leading to us to draw differing conclusions in our work, Pieper's work shows the importance of status and

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<sup>62</sup> Kift, *The Victorian Music Hall*.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Elkin, *Queen's Hall 1893-1941* (London: Rider & Co., 1944); Ray Johnston, "'Here Will We Sit': The Creation of the Ulster Hall", in Bashford and Langley, *Music and British Culture*, 215-232.

<sup>64</sup> Barra Boydell, *A History of Music at Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004).

<sup>65</sup> Antje Pieper, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture: A Comparative History of Leipzig and Birmingham* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

venue in middle-class music-making in Birmingham and Leipzig in the nineteenth century in a manner that is useful for a comparative study of other provincial centres.

Much has been written on London's Italian opera house in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>66</sup> However, I have not used this literature as a model for my work since this building was designed specifically for opera performance and the needs of a particular type of opera company run by private subscription.

#### 1.4: Methodology

This thesis argues that the town hall played an integral role in nineteenth-century English musical culture. On 6 March 1884 an article appeared in the *Birmingham Gazette* that reflected positively on the active musical life of the town, attributing much of the success to the town hall, and stating that the building had given 'a new impetus to the love of music'. This pronouncement has a number of implications when considered within both a local and a national context. Most significantly, it must be contemplated whose 'love of music' had been given 'a new impetus', whether the town hall had stimulated the performance of stylistically progressive or conservative music, whether some genres of music were sustained and promoted at the expense of others, and whether this enthusiasm would and could have found fulfilment if the town hall had not existed. Ultimately, this thesis argues that the nineteenth-century town hall was indeed 'a new impetus to the love of music', but that several factors have to be deliberated in order to justify that assessment. Consequently, in each chapter, my study considers a number of issues concerning the town hall as a music venue. These include the conception and design of the building, the erection and design of an organ, public opinion and support of the venue, the holding of musical festivals, the commissioning of new repertoire, and the general use of the town hall for music-making as compared with alternative music venues within the town. The issue of the conception and design of the building is one of the central features of my study, exploring how this was affected by the planned use of the town hall for musical performances, whether there was a social, governmental or musical need for a town hall, and, consequently, whether

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<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Ian Woodfield, *Opera and Drama in Eighteenth-Century London: The King's Theatre, Garrick and the Business of Performance* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001); Curtis Price, Judith Milhous, and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London: Volume I, The King's Theatre, Haymarket, 1778-1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Judith Milhous, Gabriella Dideriksen, and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London: Volume II, The Pantheon Opera and its Aftermath, 1789-1795* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001).

its use as a music venue influenced any subsequent refurbishments or remodelling. Another important issue addressed in my study is the subsequent use of the town hall for music-making, encompassing performer and audience demographic at town-hall performances, the influence of the local council on the letting of the building for musical purposes, and whether the establishment of a musical festival and the presence of an organ encouraged or discouraged music-making within the town hall. A consideration of the public's opinion and support of the venue, normally evidenced through newspaper reports, throws additional light on how successful the town hall was as a concert hall in the Victorian period, and whether there was a perceived need for further venues within a town.

The main problem with the scope of this project is the enormous number of town halls in existence in the nineteenth century,<sup>67</sup> and the amount of nineteenth-century material that would need to be consulted in order to deal with all of them. For the purposes of this current study I have attempted to focus the discussion by concentrating on the town halls of Stalybridge, Birmingham and Leeds. Table 1 offers a comparison of the populations, and therefore the size, of the towns in the first half of the nineteenth century. These figures show that Stalybridge was significantly smaller than Birmingham and Leeds at all times in the first half of the nineteenth century, and that Birmingham was larger than Leeds and had a greater population growth.

**Table 1: Population Figures for Stalybridge, Birmingham and Leeds**

	1831	1841	1851
Stalybridge	14, 216	c.20,000	21,098
Birmingham	143,956	183,922	232,841
Leeds	123,393	152,074	172,270 <sup>68</sup>

The buildings of Stalybridge, Birmingham and Leeds characterise contrasting types of town hall and represent different stages in the development of the building as a Victorian cultural phenomenon. Early nineteenth-century Stalybridge was a rapidly expanding and industrialising cotton town, close to Manchester. Since the Stalybridge

<sup>67</sup> Cunningham has produced a chronological list of town halls from 1820-1914. See his *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, Appendix III, pp.252-299. In "That Monstrosity of Bricks and Mortar", p.300, I include a table of town halls built between 1820-1834 (when Stalybridge Town Hall was built), based on the information provided by Cunningham in his chronological list.

<sup>68</sup> Data taken from *Accounts and Papers: Population (England and Wales)*, 48 vols (1863), xxv, p.103, Edwin Butterworth, *An Historical Account of the Towns of Ashton-Under-Lyne, Stalybridge, and Dukinfield* (Ashton: T.A. Phillips, 1842), p.99, and Butterworth, *A Statistical Sketch of the County Palatine of Lancaster* (London: Longman, 1841), p.5.

Commissioners built a town hall in 1831, before the great era of municipal building stimulated by the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, Stalybridge Town Hall made a particularly good case study as an early example of nineteenth-century town-hall erection, providing a foundation for the further study of later buildings.<sup>69</sup> In the course of my research it became apparent that Stalybridge Town Hall played an integral role in the musical life of the town as a whole in the nineteenth century. It seemed a natural progression, therefore, to consider music-making specifically in Stalybridge Town Hall, and then to compare this with national patterns. The town halls of Leeds and Birmingham were important concert venues in the nineteenth century, holding internationally renowned musical festivals that commissioned many of the important works in the repertoire today, such as Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, and many more that have dropped out of the repertoire. Therefore, as case studies they provide an interesting contrast to the small town of Stalybridge, and as very different industrial centres enable a comparison between themselves. In addition, the selection of a midlands town hall allows an opportunity for comparison with those in the north, offering an insight into whether town-hall music-making was a particularly northern phenomenon. Table 2 demonstrates the key events in the lives of the three town halls in the nineteenth century.

**Table 2: Town-Hall Events**

Date	Place	Event
1829	Stalybridge	Resolution to build a market (later to be the Town Hall)
1831	Stalybridge	Opening of the market/town hall
1862	Stalybridge	Musical desertion of the Town Hall
1871	Stalybridge	Substantial redecoration of the large room
1883	Stalybridge	Opening of renovated Town Hall
1827	Birmingham	Resolution from the Musical Committee requesting a Town Hall
1830	Birmingham	Competition for the design of the Town Hall
1834	Birmingham	Opening of the Town Hall
1888	Birmingham	Appointment of Charles William Perkins as City Organist
1890	Birmingham	Transfer of the ownership of the organ to the municipality
1850	Leeds	Public meeting to discuss erecting a public hall
1851	Leeds	Council decision to erect a town hall
1852	Leeds	Competition for the design of the Town Hall
1853	Leeds	Laying of the foundation stone

<sup>69</sup> Mark Girouard, in chapter 11 of *The English Town: A History of Urban Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), discusses the impact the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 had on the erection of town halls and other public buildings.

1856	Leeds	<i>Leeds Improvement Amendment Act</i>
1856	Leeds	Competition for the design of the organ
1858	Leeds	Opening of the Town Hall
1858	Leeds	Official opening of the Organ
1860	Leeds	Appointment of William Spark as Town-Hall Organist
1894	Leeds	Erection of a permanent gallery in Victoria Hall
1897	Leeds	Appointment of Herbert Fricker as City Organist

I began this study with a number of hypotheses. The main one was that the town halls of Leeds and Birmingham, being large symbolic buildings in important industrial towns, would be very similar in terms of conception and design and subsequent music-making, and that Stalybridge would stand apart as a less ornate building in a small cotton town. In fact, whilst there are similarities and differences between all three buildings, each one stands alone as a representation of a new trend in town-hall design, and therefore represents a different aspect of English musical culture in the nineteenth century.

A potential problem with my use of these case studies has been maintaining objectivity in my work. When one spends a large amount of time researching a particular place in intimate detail, it seems inevitable that one begins to feel a connection with the people and institutions therein. This was particularly the case when researching Stalybridge, my home town, where I was considering buildings that I had walked past every day for most of my life. A further cause for concern once I had finished my Stalybridge research was whether I would have sufficient insight as an 'outsider' into the communities and histories of Birmingham and Leeds, and, therefore, whether my being an 'insider' in relation to Stalybridge meant that my approach to the three case studies would inevitably be different. However, spending a number of months intensively researching one particular place leads to a real connection with the town, and some perspective of life as an 'insider'.

The particular town halls I have chosen as case studies have influenced the chronological framing of my work. My study ranges from 1827, the start of the campaign for Birmingham Town Hall, to 1901, the death of Queen Victoria. Exploring such a wide period of time represented a challenge in terms of the material and contexts to be absorbed, but it enabled me to chart longer-term changes and trends in town-hall music-making in the nineteenth century. This was therefore another reason for me to concentrate on just three case studies. If I had designed my project to consider a larger number of halls but only for twenty years after the opening of each building, for example, I would have missed phases in the musical lives of Stalybridge and Leeds

Town Halls when new venues usurped their position as the principal performance spaces in their towns. By focusing on a smaller number of halls within this longer period, and contextualising them in the musical life of their towns and of England more broadly, I have been able to reach a more comprehensive conclusion about the part the town hall played in the musical life of the nineteenth century.

### 1.5: Sources

My research draws on both general and focused sources. From broad historical and musical literature on nineteenth-century Britain, such as that mentioned above, I moved on to consider each case study in turn, initially by reading contemporary, historical and musical literature on the town. The benefit of using such literature as a resource is that an author may have recorded events or opinions that are long-forgotten, and may even have had first-hand experience of an event, such as the opening of the town hall or attendance at town-hall organ concerts – as such, then, they can be valuable as primary as well as secondary sources. The disadvantages of such resources are that they often give very focused accounts from a narrow perspective, generally written from memory, and imbued with the expression of local pride. It is a challenge not to allow one's judgement to be swayed by such rhetoric celebrating progress and improvement. Recent local histories may also present those traps, but by using a combination of the two I was able to construct an historical overview of a particular provincial centre, revisiting it throughout my project, which helped to orientate me when I began my more in-depth research in the archives.

A large part of my study has concentrated on an investigation of nineteenth-century newspapers. Such exhaustive research is typical of this type of project and is exemplified in, for example, Simon McVeigh's work on concert life in London.<sup>70</sup> As McVeigh states, 'newspapers provide a much more comprehensive picture than any other single source'.<sup>71</sup> Stalybridge in the nineteenth century only had one weekly newspaper but it would still have been extremely labour intensive to look at every edition from 1831 to 1901. I therefore began by looking at newspapers that spanned a significant year, such as the opening of the town hall, then moved on to another full year of newspapers ten years later. I would often follow this by looking at newspapers

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<sup>70</sup> Simon McVeigh, *Concert life in London from Mozart to Haydn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xv.

for the year of the re-opening of the extended building, or the opening of a rival venue and then, again, at reports from ten years on. I then went back to the newspapers to cover years that had subsequently emerged as important. For Birmingham, there were a number of weekly newspapers available. My plan, therefore, was to take 'snapshots' by looking at the same three years in each decade – the year before a triennial festival, the year of the festival itself, and the year following – in an attempt to determine the impact the festival had on the musical-life of the town hall, including the preparation for and the aftermath of the event, and what music-making went on in non-festival years. This was combined with more specific newspaper research surrounding the planning, construction and opening of the town hall. Part way through my time at Birmingham Local Studies Library, the British Library launched its *19<sup>th</sup> Century British Library Newspapers* database, enabling wide and swift free-text searching of newspapers from anywhere in the country via a desktop computer. This resource was clearly advantageous to my project, but it has disadvantages. Fundamentally, this cannot be considered a comprehensive research tool, as such free-text searching is not exhaustive due to the reliance on the database itself to find 'relevant' articles. In addition, there is generally only one newspaper per provincial centre, so this does not enable the historian to address and compensate for issues of bias. Such disadvantages were minimised in this project by using many different but related search terms, and by looking at newspapers from other provincial centres to acquire alternative perspectives on certain events or institutions. In addition to using the database for blanket searches on various subjects, I also undertook more intensive searches, issue by issue.

The compilations of newspaper cuttings that are housed in the local studies libraries at Ashton-under-Lyne,<sup>72</sup> Birmingham and Leeds have also been an important resource. Such collections are useful in providing an overview of an event, society or institution, and for accessing articles from some of the more obscure newspapers, complete runs of which, in some cases, have not survived. Again, however, it is important to remember that these collections are not objective – they have been compiled by one person, with a particular outlook and interests, for a particular reason. I undertook further newspaper research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where the library houses microfilms of British nineteenth-century newspapers on the open shelves, which enabled me to work through each newspaper

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<sup>72</sup> The Tameside Local Studies Library, based at Ashton Central Library, houses all the archives for Stalybridge that were previously held in Stalybridge Town Hall and Stalybridge Library.

methodically for specific years. For example, I was able to find an article in the *True Sun*, pertaining to the opening of Birmingham Town Hall,<sup>73</sup> which contained information that ultimately changed my conclusions about the conception of the building.

The advantage of using local newspapers as a resource is that they provide an immediate reaction to an event, and give an indication of public opinion on various significant issues as they unfold. However, one must always be aware of the potential political bias of each newspaper. I have therefore used *The Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals, 1800-1900* as a reference for newspaper affiliation in order to determine the history and orientation of a particular publication.<sup>74</sup>

My newspaper research was complemented by linear periodical searching. Most of this was undertaken in the library at the University of Illinois, which has full runs of a variety of nineteenth-century periodicals including *Punch*, *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, *New Literary Journal*, *Athenaeum*, *Musical World*, *Musical Times*, and *Dwight's Journal of Music* all on the open shelves. The *British Periodicals* database was also helpful for researching particular people and events. Non-musical journals have added to the results from the newspaper research, and the music periodicals have been important for providing a musical viewpoint on such events as the opening of Birmingham and Leeds town halls and for reviews of forgotten individuals and repertoire. Again, articles in national music periodicals are not unbiased, as many, especially in the *Musical World*, were written by 'correspondents' from the town in question. There was also a tendency for a 'London versus the Provinces' bias which worked both ways.

A large part of my research has concentrated on the minutes of Town Councils. They have proved to be a very useful resource as they provide a factual record and demonstrate a progression of events, containing details of council policy that are not reported in the newspaper. As the official history of events they are not, however, comprehensive. The chronicled material is that which the officials wished to be recorded for posterity, and therefore some aspects of council proceedings may not have been minuted. In fact, it is often the case that the local newspaper reports the council meetings in more detail than the official minutes. Despite these disadvantages, the

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<sup>73</sup> *True Sun*, 9 October 1834.

<sup>74</sup> <<http://0-www.victorianperiodicals.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/series2/defaultLoggedIn.asp>> [accessed 5 April 2009].



council minutes have been invaluable for giving a sense of committee structure, decision making and key players in town-hall music-making.

The archives of musical festival committees and musical societies have also been a useful resource. They have included concert programmes, photographs, administrative records, and official and unofficial correspondence. The large amount of official correspondence is well-represented in the archives but the unofficial has rarely survived, and it has only been possible to access this through personal memoirs and collections held in local-studies libraries. The most useful correspondence has been the letters exchanged between committee and composers regarding the securing of commissions for new works, and those to and from conductors and performers, requesting their appointment and stating the terms of engagement. What is missing for both Birmingham and Leeds are the minutes from the festival-committee meetings. Like those for the Town Councils, such documents would have provided integral information on the behind-the-scenes workings of the musical festivals.

For each of my case studies there have been differences in available source material that have made maintaining consistency in my research in all of the three centres a challenge. To counter this, where I found a useful primary source for one town, I attempted to locate the same type of source in the other two. For example, Leeds was the last case study I researched, and during my time in the West Yorkshire Archives I discovered the minutes for the Town Hall Committee, the Lettings Committee and the Organ Committee. These documents contained such valuable information that I then went back to the local studies libraries for both Birmingham and Stalybridge to see whether they held the same kind of documentation. Whilst each local council was constructed in its own distinctive way, equivalent documents for Birmingham and Stalybridge are indeed still in existence and proved enormously fruitful.

The extensive research programme detailed above has enabled me to demonstrate in this thesis that the town hall played an important role in the musical life of the nineteenth century, not only because it offered a new type of venue, but also because it stimulated the development of musical festivals, choral societies and orchestras that in turn encouraged new repertoire. My research has also revealed that the influence of the town hall as a music venue within its provincial centre depended on varying factors, including its conception and design, financial provision, municipal management and public support. Whilst a number of similarities and differences

between the town halls of Stalybridge, Birmingham and Leeds have become apparent, my study has demonstrated that the link between them all is the integral role that they played in nineteenth-century English musical culture, with each of them providing 'a new impetus to the love of music'.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Birmingham Gazette*, 6 March 1884.

## Chapter 2

### 'That Monstrosity of Bricks and Mortar':<sup>1</sup>

#### The Town Hall as a Music Venue in Nineteenth-Century Stalybridge

##### 2.1: Historical Stalybridge

Stalybridge in the early nineteenth century was a construction of the Industrial Revolution. From the eighteenth century the town became well known as the home of woollen cloth manufacturers, dyers, pressers, and weavers.<sup>2</sup> In 1748 it contained 34 houses and 148 inhabitants who were principally employed in 'the spinning of worsted yarns for the Nottingham hosiers'.<sup>3</sup> Until the last quarter of the 1700s, Stalybridge was still essentially a village consisting of cottages clustered around the bridge of Staley, but in 1776 the first cotton mill was erected in the town, 'by a person named Hall'.<sup>4</sup> This mill encouraged the settlement of workers in Stalybridge and thus transformed the town and the area surrounding it. A greater sense of community was established with the erection of St George's church in 1776, built to accommodate the new inhabitants. In 1795 John Aikin described Stalybridge in the following manner:

The place is now a very large and extensive village, the houses well built, some of stone, but the greatest part of brick. On an eminence stands an octagon chapel of the Church of England, in which is an organ. Part of the village is on the Cheshire side of the Tame, but by far the greatest in Lancashire, in a continued street of half a mile, well paved. The greatest part of this village, as well as the chapel, has been built in the past eighteen years.<sup>5</sup>

As the above quotation indicates, St George's church had an organ, which led to the formation of a choir, and other churches and chapels erected in the town after this date followed the trend, eventually leading to the formation of musical societies. According to Temperley, in rapidly growing industrial regions like Stalybridge the local church was often serving a population far too big, leaving little money to be spent on organs.<sup>6</sup> That Stalybridge had a church with an organ from the 1790s was unusual therefore, and follows more the pattern of market towns 'without a cathedral but with a single, large

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<sup>1</sup> *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, 28 March 1857.

<sup>2</sup> John Aikin, *A Description of the Country from Thirty to Forty Miles Round Manchester*, 1795. Reprint edition. (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1968), p.230.

<sup>3</sup> *Morris and Co.'s Commercial Directory and Gazetteer of Ashton-under Lyne and District* (Nottingham: Morris, 1874), p.250.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Aikin, *A Description of the Country*, p.230.

<sup>6</sup> Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church*, p.108-109.

parish church', who, according to Temperley, were more likely to have churches that were able to 'acquire a good organ' and to 'pay a reasonable salary to an organist'.<sup>7</sup>

An important musical development in Stalybridge outside the realm of church music was the establishment of a woodwind and brass band in 1809 or 1810 which soon became part of any local celebration.<sup>8</sup> Herbert sees the formation of such small town bands as significant to provincial musical life since 'these early bands were the first to create a tradition of literate instrumental ensemble music making outside the professional, middle- and upper-class enclaves in which such activity had previously been centred'.<sup>9</sup> Whilst Herbert disputes the link between these bands and the origins of the brass band movement, by 1820 the woodwind/brass band in Stalybridge had developed into the Stalybridge Old Band, a brass band which is still in existence today.<sup>10</sup>

In the latter half of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth mills continued to be built in Stalybridge. In 1801 the firm Lees, Cheetham, and Co. placed an engine of 'forty horse power' in their factory, and according to the *Morris and Co.'s Commercial Directory*, this was the catalyst for numerous other cotton factories to be erected in the town, until the cotton trade employed the major part of the population.<sup>11</sup> As the town expanded and the number of inhabitants increased musical activity grew accordingly, resulting in a need for a larger, more central music venue than the churches and public houses could provide. Such a venue was found with the erection of Stalybridge Town Hall, built in 1831, and this chapter will consider the nineteenth-century use of the building as it fell into and out of favour with the musicians and audiences of the town. The musical life of the building can be divided into three distinct periods. In its first thirty years, the original Town Hall was generally treated with respect as a public building, and was frequently used for performances by musicians from within and outwith the town. The beginning of its second phase, a musically desolate period, coincided with the opening of the Mechanics' Institution in

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.109.

<sup>8</sup> For a history of this band see Wilbye Ratcliffe, 'Stalybridge Bands and Contests', in *A Stalybridge Scrapbook*, ed. by E.A. Rose (Stalybridge: Stalybridge Historical Society, 1985), pp.35-37.

<sup>9</sup> Trevor Herbert, 'Nineteenth-Century Bands: Making a Movement', in *The British Brass Band: A Musical and Social History*, ed. by Trevor Herbert (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.18.

<sup>10</sup> Russell, in *Popular Music in England*, p.156, states that Stalybridge Old Band was firmly established by that date.

<sup>11</sup> *Morris and Co.'s Commercial Directory* (1874), p.250.

1862, after which the Town Hall was no longer in favour either as a public building or performance space. In the third period, however, after the renovation of the building (1881–1883), Stalybridge Town Hall once again became one of the town's principal performance venues.

## 2.2: Conception and Design

In the early nineteenth century Stalybridge was one town in an area consisting of small cotton towns supported industrially by their proximity to Manchester. The most important were Ashton-under-Lyne, Mossley and Dukinfield. Table 3 offers a comparison of the population figures of the towns in 1831:

**Table 3: Population figures for neighbouring towns to Stalybridge in 1831**

Stalybridge	14,216
Ashton-under-Lyne	14,670
Mossley	1,300
Dukinfield	7,000 <sup>12</sup>

Although linked by their dependence on cotton, these geographically close towns were quite separate in terms of their administration. In Stalybridge in the 1820s, the leading citizens of the town began a movement to petition Parliament for a self-governing body to be established. On 9 May 1828 the Stalybridge Police and Market Act, known within the town as the Stalybridge Improvement Act, became law, enabling Stalybridge to become an independent, self-governing town. The Act was 'for lighting, watching, and otherwise improving the town of Stalybridge', and for 'regulating the police thereof; and for establishing and regulating a Market, and erecting a Market Place within the said town', and twenty-one town commissioners were elected 'for carrying this Act into execution'.<sup>13</sup> The granting of a market charter was often the first liberty of a borough, making the public market one of the most important displays of independent township at this time.<sup>14</sup> Almost immediately, in April 1829, the Stalybridge Commissioners resolved that it was 'highly expedient and necessary that the Market be proceeded with', to be paid for through joint stock, and appointed a committee to find a

<sup>12</sup> Data taken from Butterworth, *An Historical Account of the Towns of Ashton-Under-Lyne*, pp.99 and 176.

<sup>13</sup> *Stalybridge Improvement Act 1828*, in Tameside Local Studies Library, L352.

<sup>14</sup> Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p.3.

site and obtain estimates of the probable expense.<sup>15</sup> The land was donated by George Harry Grey, sixth Earl of Stamford and Warrington. Little information on Grey has survived, but it seems that he owned land in Lancashire (including areas in Stalybridge and Ashton-under-Lyne), Cheshire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire.<sup>16</sup> According to his obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 'the Earl of Stamford was universally esteemed for the excellence of his private character, and the firm yet courteous manner in which he discharged his public duties'.<sup>17</sup> What moved the Earl to make this donation for the sake of the new Stalybridge building is unknown; perhaps he hoped it might be named after him and therefore further raise his family's prestige in the area.<sup>18</sup> Whatever the motive, his donation certainly reduced the expenditure needed, but it was hardly a suitable site for the town's first secular public building, being on the incline of a hill, and its shape making it difficult to build a classically styled structure there.

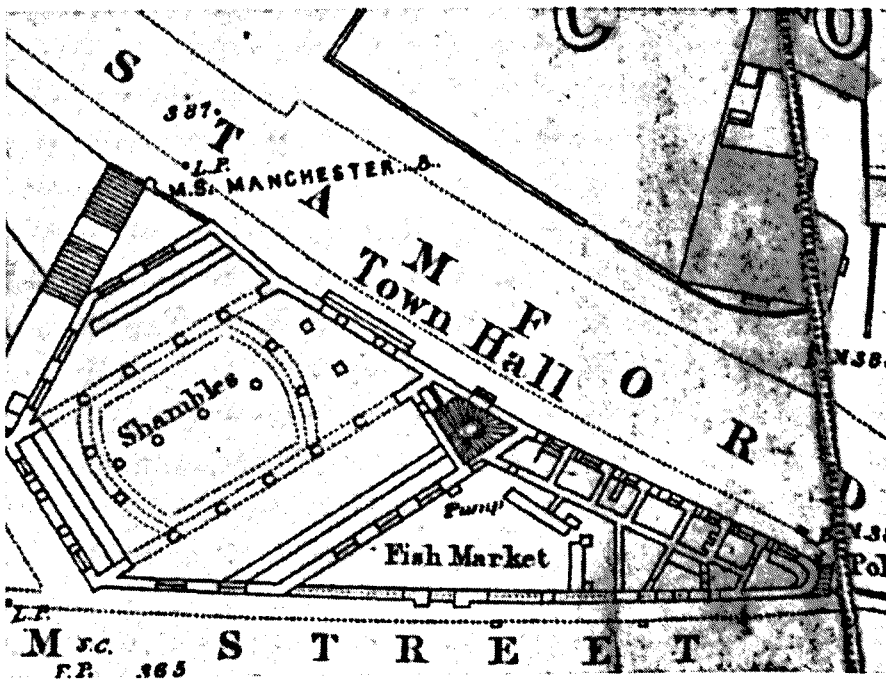


Figure 1: Ground plan of Stalybridge Town Hall, taken from the Ordnance Survey Map, 1852.  
© Crown Copyright 1852

However, it seems that any notions of civic pride or architectural splendour were outweighed by the financial advantages of the site and the desire not to offend the

<sup>15</sup> 1 April 1829. Stalybridge Improvement Commissioners Records Minutes 1828-1833, Tameside Local Studies Library, IC/STA/1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ashton Reporter*, 6 January 1883.

<sup>17</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, 23 (1845), p.647.

<sup>18</sup> In fact, the street running along the top of the site was named 'Stamford Street'.

generosity of the Earl.<sup>19</sup> In March 1830 the Commissioners resolved to adopt plans for the intended 'Market Place', prepared by the architects Fairbairn and Lillie. According to John J. Parkinson-Bailey in his architectural history of Manchester, William Fairbairn was 'one of the great engineers of the nineteenth century, and one of the greatest millwrights'.<sup>20</sup> He set up in partnership with James Lillie as consultant millwrights in 1817, and the pair quickly established themselves as 'young men who were likely to introduce improvements to the construction of machinery, millwork and general mechanisms of other branches of industry'.<sup>21</sup> Parkinson-Bailey suggests that Fairbairn and Lillie's appointment as designers of the Stalybridge building demonstrates that their expertise was not limited to engineering.<sup>22</sup> Colin Cunningham, however, in his history of Victorian and Edwardian town halls, suggests that the building 'only avoids being mistaken for a mill by the provision of a careful Doric portico at the level of the lower ground floor and pedimented gable two floors above',<sup>23</sup> so perhaps their expertise was not that varied after all.

As the erection progressed it seems that the Commissioners became more ambitious for the requirements of the market, authorising the provision of a town clock, water closets, and committee rooms in September 1830,<sup>24</sup> and an additional wing to the building in March 1831.<sup>25</sup> Gradually, the building remit was being changed from simply a market to a 'town hall' with the market underneath.<sup>26</sup> Stalybridge was one of the last town halls to incorporate a market, this being more of an eighteenth-century model,<sup>27</sup> but the hall was built for purely functional reasons, before any real sense of civic pride affected the architecture. Hence, the Stalybridge building was not at the forefront of ornamental design. Between 1800 and 1830 the fashion amongst architects, particularly in the north, was for the Greek Doric style.<sup>28</sup> Architects of the Greek school designed buildings that were bare and functional in every aspect except

<sup>19</sup> See F.R. Stott, 'Town Hall Buildings in Tameside' (unpublished Master's dissertation, University of Manchester, 1983), p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> John J. Parkinson-Bailey, *Manchester: An Architectural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.25.

<sup>21</sup> William Pole, ed., *The Life of Sir William Fairbairn, Partly Written by Himself* (London: Longmans, 1877), p.115.

<sup>22</sup> Parkinson-Bailey, *Manchester*, p.25.

<sup>23</sup> Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p. 127.

<sup>24</sup> 1 September 1830. Stalybridge Improvement Commissioners Records Minutes 1828-1833, Tameside Local Studies Library, IC/STA/1.

<sup>25</sup> 18 March 1831. *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> See Stott, 'Town Hall Buildings in Tameside', pp.22-23.

<sup>27</sup> Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p.3.

<sup>28</sup> Roger Dixon and Stefan Muthesius, *Victorian Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), pp.144-145.

for the façade,<sup>29</sup> and the Stalybridge building follows this pattern. It was built at the end of the Greek period, so displayed none of the symbolic decoration associated with later Italianate or Gothic town halls such as Leeds or Manchester.

During the course of its erection, the only reference to the potential use of the building for music-making can be seen in the Commissioners records on 2 December 1831, when they discuss putting gas burners at the front of the 'orchestra', a platform at the front of the hall.<sup>30</sup> The particular use of this word is significant since it is derived from the Greek  $\alpha\rho\chi\epsilon\alpha\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$ , meaning 'to dance', whilst the word  $\alpha\rho\chi\eta\sigma\tau\rho\alpha$  refers to the semi-circular space in which the chorus gestured and danced.<sup>31</sup> The word as an architectural term only ever has musical or theatrical connotations, therefore the use of it with regard to the Stalybridge building suggests an inclination to utilise the room as some form of performance space in the future.

On 2 December 1831 the Commissioners ordered 'that there be a public procession at the opening of the Market',<sup>32</sup> and so, when the building was officially opened on 30 December 1831, it was with a great deal of music and ceremony, as described by the *Manchester Guardian*:

About ten o'clock on Saturday morning, the magistrates and gentlemen of the town and neighbourhood, together with a number of friendly societies from various parts, formed a grand procession through all the principal streets of the town with bands of music playing and colours flying. The procession halted in line at the market hall, and the market was opened by proclamation by Mr Hugo Worthington, the steward of the Earl of Stamford and Warrington.<sup>33</sup>

The newspaper concluded its announcement of the opening by referring with pride to the growth of Stalybridge as a town through increased trade and commerce, further evidenced by this new erection:

Thus has the once little village of Staley Bridge been raised, through the extension of trade and commerce, within a few years, to a market town containing fifteen thousand inhabitants, with a splendid market hall where the necessities and comforts of every class of people can be plentifully supplied.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, pp.124-128.

<sup>30</sup> Stalybridge Improvement Commissioners Records Minutes 1828-1833, Tameside Local Studies Library, IC/STA/1.

<sup>31</sup> J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, eds, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> Stalybridge Improvement Commissioners Records Minutes 1828-1833, Tameside Local Studies Library, IC/STA/1.

<sup>33</sup> 7 January 1832.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*



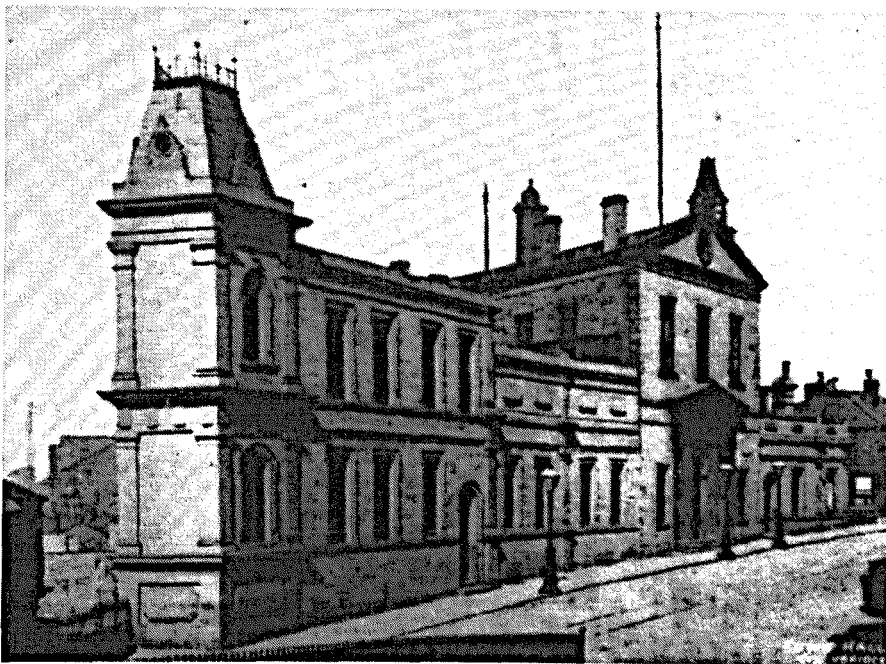


Figure 2: Photograph, taken before 1905, of the renovated town hall from the back. The middle portion of this elevation was part of the original building, with wings added at either side. Tameside Image Archive, t10992.

The report in the *Manchester Guardian* on 7 January 1832 offers the only contemporary account of the final design of the market-cum-town-hall:

The market hall, which is situated nearly in the centre of the town, is an elegant stone building, three stories high, having two entrances with Doric porticoes, supported by handsome and substantial Doric columns. The second and third stories likewise stand on stone columns, which gives it a singular and handsome appearance. The ground floor forms a commodious market, where butchers'-meat, fish, fowls, and all kinds of vegetables are exhibited for sale. The second storey of the building forms a kind of bazaar, nearly circular, where every thing is seen below, and where all sorts of wearing apparel, woollen cloths, cotton and linen goods, together with toys and trinkets, are exhibited for sale. Above this storey is a large handsome public room, 67 feet long, 38 feet wide, 23 ½ feet high; with small and convenient ante-rooms, and an orchestra. The room will consequently be very well adapted for concerts, balls, assemblies, public meetings and public exhibitions.

The author of this report, at least, seems sure of the building's use for future music-making. It is difficult to determine what it was that made the room 'very well adapted for concerts', but it seems likely that this opinion was formed by the presence of 'small and convenient ante-rooms, and an orchestra', again suggesting that the use of this building for performance had been a consideration in its design, even though it was officially opened as a 'market'.

### 2.3: Early Musical Use

In April 1832 the Commissioners ordered 'that the large room over the market be let for public purposes so as to be made productive', and subsequently let the room

to the proprietors of the Leeds Theatre 'for any period not exceeding three months at a rent of £13 per week exclusive of the orchestra ante rooms and gas'.<sup>35</sup> Even at this stage in the building's history, when it was being hired for public use, it was still officially referred to as a 'market', and it was not until August 1832, eight months after its official opening, that the Commissioners' start to refer to it as a 'town hall'.<sup>36</sup>

Evidence of the continued use of Stalybridge Town Hall for music-making in the ten years after its opening is scarce. There is little mention of the hire of the hall in the Commissioners' minutes, other than for a Ball in February 1833,<sup>37</sup> for the members of the Mechanics' Insitution in December 1838 for six nights at £3 10s.,<sup>38</sup> for another Ball in March 1839 at 10s. plus gas, and for a Dr Warwick, who hired the hall for six nights for £3 10s.<sup>39</sup> Stalybridge did not have a local newspaper until the *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, and *Stalybridge and Dukinfield Chronicle* was established in 1855,<sup>40</sup> and the *Manchester Guardian* or the *Manchester Times* did not report on the cultural life of Stalybridge in any great detail before this time, so there is little newspaper evidence of musical activity in the Town Hall in the 1830s and early 1840s. That does not mean, of course, that there were no performances held in the building during these years. In fact, the Commissioners' continued concern with the large room in the Town Hall suggests that it was hired on enough occasions to make the improvements to the room profitable. As early as May 1833 the Commissioners requested the procurement of 'estimates, plans, specifications &c. for fitting up the Large Room in the Town Hall',<sup>41</sup> and they

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<sup>35</sup> 25 April 1832. Stalybridge Improvement Commissioners Records Minutes 1828-1833, Tameside Local Studies Library, IC/STA/1. Unfortunately it has not been possible to determine what the 'Leeds Theatre' was or what type of entertainment it was providing. Newspaper reports suggest that Leeds had a theatre from 1809, see *Leeds Mercury*, 24 June 1809, and the same paper, on 30 May 1829, advertises the 'Leeds Theatre'. By 1832, the theatre is known as the 'Theatre Royal' (*Leeds Mercury*, 10 November 1832). It is not known whether the theatre or theatres advertised in the *Leeds Mercury* have any connection with the organisation hiring the room in Stalybridge.

<sup>36</sup> 10 August 1832. Stalybridge Improvement Commissioners Records Minutes 1828-1833, Tameside Local Studies Library, IC/STA/1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 25 January 1833.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 7 December 1838.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 15 March 1839. There is no indication of who Dr Warwick was or why he needed to hire the hall.

<sup>40</sup> From 1858 this newspaper was known as the *Ashton and Stalybridge Reporter*. The bulk of the newspaper reported on Ashton, but Stalybridge had its own section, seemingly written by a correspondent from the town. It was not until 1883 that Stalybridge had its own full newspaper, the *Stalybridge Reporter*. The reports given in both newspapers are unsigned, but seem accurate, if somewhat didactic.

<sup>41</sup> 8 May 1833. Stalybridge Improvement Commissioners Records Minutes, May 1833 - March 1844, Tameside Local Studies Library, IC/STA/2.

subsequently contracted the Stalybridge joiner and builder, Thomas Stokes, to renovate the room 'for public purposes'.<sup>42</sup>

In January 1837 the earliest known choral society concert was given in Stalybridge Town Hall.<sup>43</sup> Choral singing was an important pastime in both Lancashire and Yorkshire textile districts, and Stalybridge certainly reflects that pattern.<sup>44</sup> The town's first recorded independent choral society was formed in 1824, not long after the founding of what is reputed to have been the first choral society nationally, in Halifax in 1817, and only a few years behind the Bradford Choral Society, which began in 1821. Stalybridge was therefore an early contributor to the choral movement. The concert in January 1837, given by this choral society, was a performance of *Messiah*. William Farrington was the conductor and Thomas Norton led the band 'with much ability'.<sup>45</sup> There is no record as to the occupation or status of these two men, which suggests that they were not prominent figures in the town. Unfortunately, according to the newspaper, the concert was a financial failure, and the society, for which there is no recorded name, dissolved around 1840.

There is more evidence of musical activity in Stalybridge Town Hall from 1843. In December of that year the Commissioners allowed the use of the large room for the meetings of the Stalybridge, Ashton and Dukinfield upper singing school, in connection with the Lancashire and Cheshire Workhouses.<sup>46</sup> It is not clear what this group was charged for the hire of the room, or how long the agreement lasted. On 14 August 1844 the *Manchester Guardian* reports that they performed a concert in Stalybridge Town Hall, and gave the following summary of the evening:

The selections were of a miscellaneous character, comprising of the madrigals of Morley, Edwards, &c.; the choruses and glees of Drs. Cooke, Callcott, Danby, Sir H Bishop, &c. The following compositions were performed in a very creditable manner:- Stevens' trio and chorus, 'Strike the harp in praise of Bragels', and Sir John Stevenson's 'Come unto these yellow sands'. The trio in each instance being sung by the operative members of the school with precision and judgment. Danby's prize glee, 'Awake, Aeolian lyre', was an effective performance; at the words - 'Now the rich stream of music winds along, Deep, majestic, smooth and strong', the *crescendo* of the powerful chorus told remarkably well, and the audience appeared to appreciate the effect produced by the choir, in their sudden burst from

<sup>42</sup> 10 March 1834. *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> There is no contemporary report of this concert but it is referred to in a retrospective report referring to Stalybridge's first choral society in *Stalybridge Reporter*, 15 September 1883. There may have been concerts by this society in the Town Hall before 1837 but there is no evidence to prove it.

<sup>44</sup> See Cowgill, 'Disputing Choruses in 1760s Halifax'.

<sup>45</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 15 September 1883.

<sup>46</sup> 7 December 1843. Stalybridge Improvement Commissioners Records Minutes, May 1833 - March 1844, Tameside Local Studies Library, IC/STA/2.

the *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* upon the last word. Callcott's 'Red Cross Knight', was loudly applauded, as was also Bishop's delightful serenade, 'Sleep. Gentle lady', sung by a portion of the Dukinfield glee party. Miss F. Leech, and Mr T. Rawson, towards the close of the second part, sung (*à la* John Parry) 'Wanted a governess', which was loudly encored, but instead of repeating it gave one of Jas. Smith's (author of 'Rejected Addresses') comic effusions. We must not forget to name the impression created by Dr. Cooke's glee of 'Hark! The lark, at heaven's gate sings', which was given well by the chorus. The concert was conducted by Mr. Weston, superintendent professor of the Lancashire and Cheshire Workmen's Singing Classes (with which body this upper school is connected), and appeared to give general satisfaction.

It seems that this concert was intended for a high-class audience since the reporter was moved to reflect:

Cannot some system be adopted, to interest more generally the working population of this neighbourhood to avail themselves of this delightful source of enjoyment and recreation! Nearly all the leading people of the neighbourhood appear anxious for the success of this musical movement amongst the workpeople, and attend these concerts.<sup>47</sup>

It was in 1844 that Stalybridge's most consistent performer of music in the Town Hall was founded. The Stalybridge Harmonic Society, presumably named after the largest of the London choral societies, the Sacred Harmonic Society, which had begun just over a decade earlier in 1832,<sup>48</sup> grew mainly out of the large choir connected with the King Street Chapel. After singing together for some time, and possibly after a dispute,<sup>49</sup> the members of the choir decided to form a new musical society in the town. According to the *Stalybridge Reporter*, 'the determination of this little band of singers and players was to learn something higher than simply psalm tunes', implying an aspiration to perform oratorio.<sup>50</sup> The following extract from the local paper indicates that the Society's membership – and therefore those who performed in its Town Hall concerts – was drawn largely from mill-workers:

At this period the mills worked until half-past seven o'clock in the evening, yet the rehearsals were arranged for a quarter to eight, because the members, particularly upon these nights, had their teas in the mills, and went direct to the place of meeting upon leaving work.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> See Nicholas Temperley, et al. 'London (i)'. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 2 Aug. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/16904pg6>>.

<sup>49</sup> Samuel Hill, *Bygone Stalybridge* (Leeds: M.T.D. Rigg Publications, 1907), p.179.

<sup>50</sup> Report on the Jubilee of the Stalybridge Harmonic Society, *Stalybridge Reporter*, 24 March 1894. Most of the early choral societies included a small orchestra. Although reports of the Stalybridge Harmonic Society do not often refer to the instrumental musicians, a photograph of the instrumentalists of the Society has survived from c.1865–1885 (Tameside Image Archive, t08601). The instruments seen in the photograph are a cello, violin, cornet, clarinet, flute, and piccolo.

<sup>51</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 24 March 1894.

Apart from the mill workers, many of those listed as original members were involved in retail and related professions: Robert Crossley was a 'Shopkeeper and Dealer in Groceries and Sundries', Ralph Whitehead was a 'Corn and Flour Dealer', Joseph Norman was a pawnbroker, and Edward Hilton worked for a company that made cotton-spinning machinery.<sup>52</sup> The conductor, Samuel Garlick, who had played the oboe in the 1824 choral society, was a self-taught musician. He had worked in the mills all his life, but 'like many of his contemporaries, he [had] found time, despite the long hours of labour usual in his youth, to acquire and cultivate a taste for the art of which he is locally so distinguished an exponent'.<sup>53</sup> Although the first public performances by the Harmonic Society were given in the Foresters' Hall,<sup>54</sup> it was decided in 1854 that the tenth annual oratorio, Handel's *Samson*, should take place in Stalybridge Town Hall. Table 4, taken from the accounts of the Stalybridge Harmonic Society that year, shows the expenses incurred by this Town Hall performance:<sup>55</sup>

Table 4: Expenses incurred for the Town Hall performance of Handel's *Samson* by Stalybridge Harmonic Society in 1854

Date	Expense incurred	Amount
25 May	'Small Score to Handel's <i>Samson</i> '	3s, 4d.
22 June	'Binding <i>Samson</i> '	18s.
19 September	'Tenor to <i>Samson</i> '	1s, 3d.
22 September	'Drum sticks'	1s, 6d.
7 October	'4 Voice parts to <i>Samson</i> '	6s, 8d.
12 October	'7 Voice parts to <i>Samson</i> '	--
25 October	'William Farrington for writing [i.e. copying] music'	3s, 6d.
26 October	'Hire of Town Hall and Gas'	£1, 1s.
26 October	'Replacing town hall platform'	9½d.
26 October	'John Swallow for going to the Gentlemen of the town for patronage and selling tickets'	£1, 2s, 6d.
26 October	'Large bills posting'	4s.
26 October	'Sockets for orchestra'	10s, 1½d.
26 October	'William Clay for fixing gas pipes and fittings in the town hall'	4s, 6d.

<sup>52</sup> Slater's *Alphabetical and Classified Trade Directory of Manchester and Salford, and their Vicinities* (Manchester: Isaac Slater, 1851), pp. 1062-1065.

<sup>53</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 15 September 1883.

<sup>54</sup> In 1836, members of the Foresters' Lodges in the Stalybridge District erected a substantial building called the Foresters' Hall. Night schools in connection with the Order of the Foresters were held there, but it was very much a building for public use. The large room was capable of holding 800 people, and at one time housed a large organ and a library. For more see Hill, *Bygone Stalybridge*, pp. 184-185, and Morris and Co.'s *Commercial Directory and Gazetteer of Ashton-under-Lyne and District* (Nottingham: Morris, 1878), p. 326.

<sup>55</sup> All data, for the year 1854, taken from the Stalybridge Harmonic Society's Treasurer's book, 1850-1855, Tameside Local Studies Library, DD111/5.

26 October	'Mrs Sunderland Engagement and expenses' <sup>56</sup> [soprano soloist]	£5, 5s.
26 October	'Mrs Lawton Engagement and expenses'	14s, 6d.
26 October	'Mr Inkersall Engagement and expenses' [tenor soloist]	£3, 3s.
26 October	'Mr Edmondson Engagement and expenses' [alto soloist]	£1, 11s, 6d.
26 October	'Mr Mellor Engagement and expenses' [bass soloist]	£1, 1s.
26 October	'Mr Jackson Engagement and expenses'	£1, 5s.
26 October	'Mr Miller Engagement and expenses'	£1, 1s.
26 October	'Mr Smith Engagement and expenses'	10s.
26 October	'Mr Thorly Engagement and expenses'	£1, 11s, 6d.
26 October	'Mr Gledele Engagement and expenses'	£1, 11s, 6d.
26 October	'Mr Shepherd Engagement and expenses'	£1, 7s, 6d.
26 October	'Mr Elwood Engagement and expenses'	£1, 17s.

This table of accounts shows items normally associated with putting on a concert – the hire of the room or the buying of music, for example – but there are items that appear to raise questions about the condition of the room. If the room in the Town Hall was in a condition ready for performance, why would the Society have had to pay William Clay for fixing gas pipes and fittings, and for replacing the Town-Hall platform? This suggests that although the room seems to have been intended as a possible venue for concerts from the opening of the Town Hall, no provision for the needs of performance were considered. In order to perform an oratorio in the Town Hall, quite fundamental changes to the room had to be implemented and paid for by the performers themselves. Despite the amount of money spent in order to perform *Samson* in the Town Hall - £25 15s. 8d. in total, £1,137.05 in today's money<sup>57</sup> - the *Stalybridge Reporter* of 24 March 1894 recalled that 'the enterprise was a great success both musically and financially, the result being a gain to the society of £20'; the account books of the Society support this statement.

In the following year the society performed *Judas Maccabeus*, again in Stalybridge Town Hall, suggesting that the positive aspects of performing in that building the previous year had outweighed the negative. This year the accounts show that the hire of the Town Hall and gas was 15s. 6d., significantly less than the year before. They still had to pay 8s. for 'gas fitting' and 6s. 6d. for 'carting planks', presumably either for the performance platform or the seating, resulting in a total known expenditure of £1, 10s., £87.80 in today's money. They printed 950 tickets, 800

<sup>56</sup> Susan Sunderland was a nationally-known singer. For a summary of her career see J.A. Hargreaves, "'The Calderdale Nightingale': Susan Sunderland, 1819-1905", *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 6 (1998), 46-54.

<sup>57</sup> All figures here and elsewhere in the text have been converted using  
< <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/default0.asp> > [accessed 9 May 2009].

programmes, and 500 books of words. They sold 80 tickets at 1s., 235 tickets at 1s. 6d., 157 tickets at 2s., and 47 tickets at 3s.,<sup>58</sup> making a total of £44, 7s. 6d. in ticket sales alone, £2,597.27 in today's money. There were, therefore, 519 people who bought tickets for the concert, quite a substantial audience in a room that was not specifically built as a performance venue, but as they printed 950, it seems that many more people could have been accommodated.<sup>59</sup> The Stalybridge Harmonic Society was the principal performer of oratorio in the Town Hall and, from 1854 onwards, the society gave one or more concerts a year, sometimes miscellaneous concerts of mainly sacred music,<sup>60</sup> but always an oratorio for the annual concert in October, and, at least for the next few years, always in the Town Hall.

Stalybridge had another choral society at this time, known as the Stalybridge Philharmonic Society, run by John Marsden, the organist of St Paul's Church, Stalybridge. Local organists played important roles both in the spread of the choral movement and in local musical education in nineteenth-century textile towns,<sup>61</sup> and Marsden was often responsible for bringing musical performances to the Town Hall. Like other provincial organists, he would have been expected to put on concerts to supplement his income, and his 'annual grand concerts' began in 1852, featuring international soloists and instrumentalists such as Mrs Henry Wallack, 'Prima Donna from the Theatre Royal, London' and M. Guilmette, 'Primo Basso from the Italian Imperial Opera, Rio de Janiro [sic]'.<sup>62</sup> These concerts ended in 1856, however, when he formed the Stalybridge Philharmonic Society which gave on average four concerts a

<sup>58</sup> Stalybridge Harmonic Society's Treasurer's book 1850-1855, Tameside Local Studies Library, DD111/5.

<sup>59</sup> In a report on a 'Ten Hours' Bill' meeting held in Stalybridge Town Hall, the *Preston Guardian*, 17 February 1849, states that the room 'is capable of seating 700 or 800 persons'.

<sup>60</sup> On 26 March 1857, for example, they gave a concert which consisted of 'Dr. Elvey's Oratorio "RESURRECTION and ASCENSION," Romberg's Cantata, "HARMONY of the SPHERES;" with selections from Handel, Mozart, Mendelssohn, &c.'. See *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, 21 February 1857. Elvey and Romberg were reasonably well known composers at the time. Elvey's works had been performed by the London Sacred Harmonic Society during the 1850s. See, for example, *Musical World*, 26 (1851), p.82. However, their inclusion in this concert may have more to do with the publication of *Resurrection and Ascension* in the 'Novello's Folio Editions of Oratorios' series (See *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 5 (1852), p.47) and the publication of Romberg's *Harmony of the Spheres* in the 'Novello's Cheap Musical Classics' series (see *ibid.*, 5 (1853), p.243). The publication of these works by Novello would have increased their popularity, but it is possible that the society was simply performing whatever cheap music was available.

<sup>61</sup> See Peter Horton, 'Outside the Cathedral: Samuel Sebastian Wesley, Local Music-making, and the Provincial Organist in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England', in *Music in the British Provinces*, 255-268 (pp.255-256).

<sup>62</sup> *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, 8 September 1855.

year in the Town Hall, normally two in the spring and two in the autumn.<sup>63</sup> The repertoire was mainly popular, vocal, and often secular, and they never performed works in full. The following programme, from a concert they gave on 4 March 1857, is indicative of the kind of repertoire performed by this society:

Irish ballad - 'Kate Kearney'  
 Cavatina - 'Sweetly o'er my senses stealing'  
 Ballad - 'Bonnie Prince Charlie'  
 Ballad - 'Why art thou sad?'  
 Ballad - 'I'll ne'er prove false to thee'  
 Ballad - 'The Sunflower'  
 Ballad - 'My Pretty Jane'  
 Scottish love song - 'Jessie the flower o' Dumblane [sic]'  
 Comic song - 'I'm a roamer bold and free'  
 Ballad - 'I'm an Englishman'  
 Ballad - 'Standard bearer'  
 Quartet - 'Sleep, gentle lady'  
 [Several part songs]  
 Overture - 'Zampa'<sup>64</sup>

The Philharmonic Society was also keen to provide music for the lower classes, stating that 'The object of the society [is] to enable the humbler classes to listen to the best of music for a few pence, which otherwise they could not hear for less than some shillings'.<sup>65</sup> To ensure the fulfilment of this aim the Society sometimes performed a 'People's Concert' a few days after their fully priced concerts, with more-or-less the same repertoire, and apparently with much success:

Considering the superior quality of the music and the low rates of admission [Reserved seats, 1s.; Back seats, 6d.; Gallery, 3d.; as opposed to their fully priced concerts - Reserved seats, 3s, 6d.; Back seats, 2s.; Gallery, 1s.<sup>66</sup>], we do not hesitate to say that this was the cheapest concert we can recollect to have been given in this neighbourhood, and have to congratulate the committee of the Philharmonic Society on the satisfactory results of their spirited endeavours to provide good cheap music for the people.<sup>67</sup>

According to Russell, by the mid-nineteenth century 'People's Concerts' were 'a firmly established feature of social life in most European centres'.<sup>68</sup> Certainly, by the 1850s the 'People's Concert' had been established in areas relatively close to Stalybridge, such as Manchester, Leeds, Oldham, and Huddersfield. These concerts were specifically designed to unite different classes in the same building, representing a

<sup>63</sup> 'Stalybridge Philharmonic Society - First Season 1856-7', *ibid.*, 21 February 1857. It seems likely that the instrumentalists from Marsden's previous concerts formed a core of players for the choral society although it has not been possible to identify them.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 March 1857.

<sup>65</sup> Stated in a report of a concert given by the Society in *ibid.*, 28 March 1857.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 February 1857.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 March 1857.

<sup>68</sup> Russell, *Popular Music in England*, p.27.



sense of community and shared experience.<sup>69</sup> The 'People's Concert' was a rare occurrence at Stalybridge Town Hall, but that it was present at all shows some acknowledgement of the cheap concerts that had been established in Manchester and were advertised in the local paper.

For the first thirty years of its existence, Stalybridge Town Hall was regularly used for the performance of music; the majority of performers were amateurs coming from within the town itself. While the two choral societies were the most regular users, other musicians and singers from different areas of Stalybridge life used the Town Hall for their music-making. The Stalybridge Old Band, mentioned above, was very popular with audiences in the town. For many years in the nineteenth century the band held grand concerts, sometimes in the town hall, when they engaged soloists and instrumentalists to support their miscellaneous performances.<sup>70</sup> In addition, the hall was used for the popular nineteenth-century social event of 'tea party and concert', where the concert normally consisted of glees and songs, performed chorally or as duets or solos, often with instrumental solos added for interest:

We cannot conclude our notice of this interesting party without passing a well earned compliment upon the members of the Church Choir and the Tonic Sol Fa Association for the efficient manner in which they carried out their part in the evening's entertainment. The singing was really beautiful, and called forth repeated bursts of applause. The songs, ballads, and choruses were such as breathe the most lofty and pure sentiments, and their effect upon the audience must have been of the most beneficial character.<sup>71</sup>

This combination of food and entertainment was very popular with churches, and during its first period the Town Hall was regularly used for this purpose.

The Town Hall was also occasionally a venue for visiting performers, often companies who had transferred from Manchester or Liverpool, as with the Brousil

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<sup>69</sup> See *ibid.*, pp.27-28. 'People's Concerts' remained popular for most of the century. In London, for example, during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century such organizations as the Kyrle Society, the People's Entertainment Society, and the National Sunday League were formed 'to break down the barriers which seemingly existed between the lower classes and the full enjoyment of music'. See Eric D. Mackerness, *A Social History of English Music* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 200.

<sup>70</sup> For example, *Manchester Times*, 24 September 1853. According to Hill in *Bygone Stalybridge*, pp.177-178, the Stalybridge Old Band was very successful in the mid-nineteenth century, winning many contests and gaining a reputation as the best brass band in the country. Whilst Hill's opinion may be clouded by local pride, the list of 'Open and Championship Results' in Appendix 5 in Herbert's 'The British Brass Band', confirm that Stalybridge Old Band was successful in a number of the competitions.

<sup>71</sup> *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, 10 May 1862.

family, a string-and-piano ensemble of six child prodigies from Bohemia aged 6–17, who had also been performing daily in London the previous summer.<sup>72</sup>

TOWN HALL, STALYBRIDGE: THE BROUSIL FAMILY (who have been so enthusiastically received at the Free-trade Hall, Manchester) have the honour to announce a GRAND EVENING CONCERT, on Monday next, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1857, being the only evening they have at liberty previous to their leaving this neighbourhood, in order to appear before her Majesty, the Queen, in obedience to the royal command.<sup>73</sup>

The musical activities of Stalybridge Town Hall were on occasion reported in the national musical press. In 1845 the *Musical World* reviewed a concert by the well-known English tenor and composer John Braham,<sup>74</sup> which was ‘very numerously attended’ and ‘a rich treat’.<sup>75</sup> They also reviewed performances by performers from within the town, such as a concert by blind performers in 1854,<sup>76</sup> and by the Philharmonic Society in 1858.<sup>77</sup> The appearance of concert reviews in such a prestigious publication as the *Musical World* indicates either that Stalybridge Town Hall was establishing enough of a reputation as a music venue to attract a visiting reporter from the journal, or that the performers at the town-hall concerts wished to raise their reputation by sending their own reviews to the editor. Either way, Stalybridge Town Hall was becoming known as a concert hall outside the local area. There is no doubt that Stalybridge Town Hall was a popular music venue in its early existence. Whilst this may have something to do with the novelty and potential prestige of a new town hall, as will be seen, it could also have been because there was nowhere else suitable. Apart from the Foresters’ Hall, a building that was not in the centre of the town, there was no other secular public hall in Stalybridge that could house a large audience. When a newer, more fashionable, more suitable location was built, things began to change and the period of musical decline in Stalybridge Town Hall began.

## 2.4: Desertion and Decline

In March 1857 Stalybridge was granted a charter which enabled the town to become a corporation. The incorporation of a town was often a catalyst for the building of a town

<sup>72</sup> On the Brousil, see *Littell's Living Age*, 50 (1856), p. 256.

<sup>73</sup> *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, 7 February 1857.

<sup>74</sup> On Braham see Ronald Crichton. ‘Braham, John’. *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. 13 May. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/03812>>.

<sup>75</sup> *Musical World*, 20 (1845), p.453.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 32 (1854), p.773

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 36 (1858), p.154.

hall to mark its newly raised status.<sup>78</sup> Stalybridge did not follow this pattern, however. The town already had a Town Hall, but one that by this time was considered 'the laughing-stock of all who came into the town',<sup>79</sup> rather than a building to be proud of. As early as 1853 the suitability of Stalybridge Town Hall as a concert venue was brought into question. In a review of one of Mr Marsden's concerts, a Manchester reporter was complimentary about the performance but not about the Town-hall facilities, a subject that was apparently a source of conversation for the audience as a whole:

The filthy state of the room where the concert was held seemed to be a frequent subject of remark. The dingy walls are covered thickly with dust, and the window blinds appear not to have been cleansed or taken down for an indefinite period. Altogether, the place has more the appearance of a lumber store than a room for public assemblies.<sup>80</sup>

In an age when purpose-built concert rooms were being erected in towns across the country, for Stalybridge's prize music venue to be described as a 'lumber store', especially by someone from outside the town, must have been a source of embarrassment and frustration to the townspeople. Unfortunately, it seems that nothing was done to remedy the situation in the following years, suggesting a lack of interest on the part of the Council. At another of Mr Marsden's concerts in 1855 it was reported:

The concert room afforded undoubted evidence of the neglect of public property at present in this town; everything was filthy and covered with dust – the walls, the blinds, and the floor – all were thickly coated, and it may be easily imagined what were the feelings of a large number of Mr Marsden's patrons after sitting there for two hours in the dust-clouds so repeatedly raised.<sup>81</sup>

In 1857 Mr Churchill, a member of the Stalybridge Philharmonic Society, was of the opinion that Stalybridge Town Hall could still potentially be an aid in the cultivation of music in the town: 'The people of the town were not accustomed to hear much music; but by coming to the concerts they would acquire a taste for, and learn to appreciate, the charms which melody brings'. He then goes on to acknowledge, however, that at their last concert the society had been forced to spend £10 in labour, 'in consequence of the Town Hall not being properly adapted for public concerts'.<sup>82</sup> At the Society's

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<sup>78</sup> See Girouard, *The English Town*, pp.204-205.

<sup>79</sup> *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, 9 June 1866. At this time the town was building a new market, and this comment was made during a discussion of the new building at a meeting of the Stalybridge Town Council. The mayor said that the town hall was not very handsome, 'but experience made fools wise, and he did not think they should fall into the same error with their new market'.

<sup>80</sup> *Manchester Times*, 26 November 1853.

<sup>81</sup> *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, 29 September 1855.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 June 1857.

annual dinner earlier that year, John Frederick Cheetham, secretary of the Stalybridge Philharmonic Society and a member of a prominent mill-owning family, had suggested in his speech that the problems with the town-hall building were rather more fundamental:

He complained of the inconvenience of the Town Hall for the performance of music, denounced it as 'that monstrosity of bricks and mortar, in which it was difficult to keep one's gravity.' He hoped that when the new corporation got into full exercise [...] a new building would arise that would give the society sufficient accommodation for the concerts (cheers).<sup>83</sup>

This 'new building' was found in the Mechanics' Institution, which opened in July 1862. Mechanics' Institutions had been built rapidly in the provinces after the inauguration of the London Mechanics' Institution in December 1823. Originally intended to educate the artisans in order to make them better workers, the institutions gradually became clubs for the lower middle classes. They were an important part of the social history of the nineteenth century, offering 'a variety of activities which were largely social in character, but still, to a considerable extent, educational in purpose'.<sup>84</sup> The first Stalybridge Mechanics' Institution was formed in 1825, when 'a considerable stock of scientific apparatus was rapidly obtained, and classes for instruction in arithmetic, mathematics, music, [and] geology were formed'.<sup>85</sup> In 1860 a meeting was held at Stalybridge Town Hall where Mr Walter Kenyon moved the resolution, 'that the important town of Stalybridge, with its numerous population, and increasing prosperity, ought to possess a more eligible and commodious building for the purpose of a Mechanics' Institution'.<sup>86</sup> It seems ironic that the rhetoric of civic pride used in this speech was that often used when talking about the building of a town hall, especially at a time when Stalybridge Town Hall was being described as a 'laughing-stock'.

Although built by subscriptions from prominent Stalybridge councillors and landowners rather than public money,<sup>87</sup> the new Stalybridge Mechanics' Institution became the symbol of the new age of corporation: 'an excellent building for the improvement of the intellectual and moral condition of its inhabitants'.<sup>88</sup> For the Mechanics' Institution, 'the Italian style [was] adopted, with, however, a considerable

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 March 1857.

<sup>84</sup> Mabel Tylecote, *The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire Before 1851* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957), p.76.

<sup>85</sup> Hill, *Bygone Stalybridge*, pp.165-166.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.166-167.

<sup>87</sup> Hill gives a full description of the process leading to the erection of the new building in *ibid.*, pp.166-168

<sup>88</sup> *Ashton and Stalybridge Reporter*, 25 January 1862.

amount of Gothic Feeling in the details'.<sup>89</sup> The Gothic revival in Britain was at its peak between 1855 and 1875, and the Italian style was often used in connection with the Gothic,<sup>90</sup> so in architectural terms the building for the Mechanics' Institution was at the height of fashion, and the first one of its kind in Stalybridge – very different from the plain Grecian façade of the Town Hall.

The large room in the Mechanics' Institution was clearly designed for community gatherings:

The large hall is a splendid room, and apparently well adapted for meetings, concerts, lectures, &c., and we understand that it will contain between 400 and 500 chairs [...] they have provided for the comfort and accommodation of the members, as well as attended to the useful and ornamental character of the interior, they would have felt highly rewarded for the great care with which they have attended to the true interests of the institution. [...] it will be a great ornament to the town, and what is still better, it will be a most useful institution and well adapted for the object its promoters have in view.<sup>91</sup>

At a time when music-making was seen as important for the purposes of education, leisure, and self-improvement, the Institution had been built with facilities for both performers and audience. In an attempt to communicate worthy values, the large hall was decorated with mottoes, although it is not known what these were. This is strikingly similar to Leeds Town Hall, which had opened just four years earlier, where mottoes such as 'Weave Truth with Trust' and 'Forward' were inscribed in various parts of the hall.<sup>92</sup> In fact, it seems that the Mechanics' Institution was built as if it were a town hall, both physically and symbolically. It appears that it was designed to offer the people of Stalybridge everything they had missed out on in the building of their Town Hall in 1831 – the chance to create a symbol of progress, prosperity, and civic pride that was fully equipped to enhance the life of the community. Therefore, people from all aspects of Stalybridge life wanted to be a part of it.

The move away from music-making at the Town Hall coincides exactly with the opening of the new Mechanics' Institution building in July 1862. Stalybridge Town Hall was being used for musical performance on a regular basis in the first half of the year, but at the end of June, when the Mechanics' Institution came into use, those performances ceased abruptly. The Mechanics' Institution hosted all the musical events that were previously performed in the hall, including the two choral societies' concerts. Many Institutions around the country gave classes in music and singing, but

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 August 1861.

<sup>90</sup> Dixon and Muthesius, *Victorian Architecture*, pp.12 and 164.

<sup>91</sup> *Ashton and Stalybridge Reporter*, 12 August 1862.

<sup>92</sup> Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 181.

few followed the pattern of Stalybridge of hiring out the building for private choral societies to appear.<sup>93</sup> Pritchard, in his history of choral singing in the nineteenth century, suggests that music would not have figured so prominently in the activities of the mechanics' institutions were it not for the sight-singing mania of the 1840s which encouraged musical instruction for all classes.<sup>94</sup> There is no evidence, however, of any link between music in Stalybridge Mechanics' Institution and the Tonic Sol-fa movement. It seems that the use of this building for music-making was determined by the want of a new music venue in the town, rather than any organised movement to musically educate the people.

In January 1866 the local newspaper had this to say about the musical life of Stalybridge:

If any local town can boast of a musical population, Stalybridge is that town. The Harmonic Society with its regular practices, and with the talented artistes who have been from time to time engaged by them, to say nothing of the late Philharmonic Concerts must have done much to elevate and refine the popular taste.<sup>95</sup>

It is significant that, by 1866, no concerts are reported as being performed in the Town Hall at all. So whilst the popular taste was being 'elevated and refined', Stalybridge Town Hall, it seems, had no part in it.

In 1870 there was a slight change in the Town Hall's favour, both in terms of musical life and public opinion, which seems to be linked with the redecorating of the large room in the Town Hall that year. The *Ashton and Stalybridge Reporter* of 2 July predicted that when finished it would be 'the most handsome room in the town and a credit to the Corporation'. However, the 1870 renovations did not entice the majority of Stalybridge musicians back to the Town Hall, although there was a slight increase in the number of musical events, including 'tea party and concert' entertainments and occasional concerts by societies such as the Ashton-Under-Lyne and Stalybridge Vocal Union.<sup>96</sup> Throughout this middle period the Town Hall was still used for lectures, meetings, and Council business, but also occasional visits from visiting performers such as the African Opera Company in 1863:

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<sup>93</sup> Brian W. Pritchard, 'The Musical Festival and the Choral Society in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Social History' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 1968), pp.540-541.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.541-542.

<sup>95</sup> *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, 27 January 1866.

<sup>96</sup> For an example of their concerts see the *Ashton and Stalybridge Reporter*, 10 December 1870.

On Wednesday night, the African Opera Company of male and female vocalists, musicians, comedians and dancers, gave their evening's entertainment in the Town Hall to a tolerably large audience, who received the performances with the greatest marks of approbation.<sup>97</sup>

It is useful to compare the musical life of Stalybridge Town Hall during this period with that of its neighbouring town, Ashton-under-Lyne. Ashton was larger than Stalybridge – the 1871 census shows a population of 64,557 in Ashton to Stalybridge's 35,114<sup>98</sup> – and the populations of both were heavily concentrated in the cotton industry. A factory inspector described Ashton in 1863 as a town 'almost entirely' dependent upon cotton.<sup>99</sup> In 1840 the commissioners of Ashton built a new Town Hall, 'in the Corinthian Style',<sup>100</sup> which was subsequently enlarged considerably in 1878.

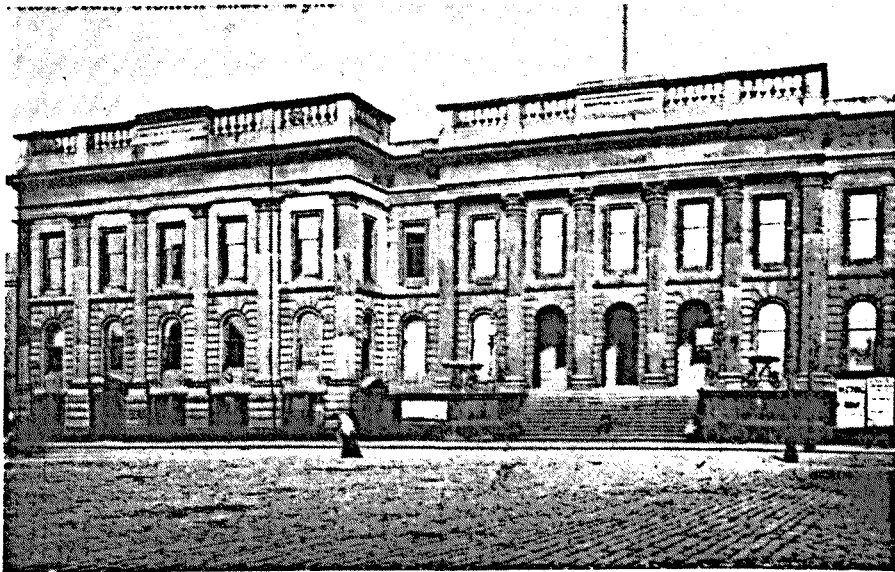


Figure 3: Ashton Town Hall, c.1900  
Tameside Image Archive, t09357

In Stalybridge the primary aim of the commissioners had been to build a market hall, with its municipal and community functions a secondary consideration. In contrast, the large hall in Ashton Town Hall was designed specifically as an assembly room for the people of the town. It was stated that 'the Town Hall will not be let for any purpose

<sup>97</sup> *Ashton and Stalybridge Reporter*, 8 August 1863. Not much is known about this particular touring company, which was probably made up of black rather than blackface singers. For context on touring black performers in England, see note 150 below.

<sup>98</sup> *Morris and Co's Commercial Directory and Gazetteer of Ashton-under-Lyne and District* (Nottingham: Morris 1878), pp.1 (Ashton) and 326 (Stalybridge).

<sup>99</sup> *Reports of Inspectors of Factories* (Redgrave, 30 April 1863), XVIII, p. 119, cited in N. Kirk, *The Growth of Working Class Reformation in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 46.

<sup>100</sup> *Ashton-Under-Lyne Official Handbook* (Cheltenham and London: ED.J. Burrows and Co. Ltd., 1949), p. 12.

having an immoral or irreligious tendency, and the committee will reserve the right of breaking any engagement if the hall is intended to be used for any purpose at variance with these conditions'.<sup>101</sup> The commissioners of Ashton, it seems, wanted the Town Hall to be a place for rational recreation, the embodiment of the Victorian values of temperance, self-improvement, and morality.

**Table 5: Comparison of musical events in Ashton Town Hall and  
Stalybridge Town Hall in 1876.<sup>102</sup>**

	Ashton Town Hall	Stalybridge Town Hall
27 January	'Hague's Minstrels' <sup>103</sup>	
12 February	'Private assembly: Alexander Owen's band and chorus'	
19 February	'Ashton Gentlemen's Glee Club'	
26 February	Dramatic and musical entertainment' – George Langford'	
4 March	'Grand ball – Enos Andrews' String Band'	
24 June		'Old Folk's Tea Party'
16 September	'Vocal comedian, mimic, ventriloquist, instrumentalist, author and delineator of comical characters – Harry Liston' <sup>104</sup>	
5 October		'Stalybridge Harmonic Society, Handel's <i>Solomon</i> '
28 October	'Dramatic and musical entertainment – George Langford'	
15 November	'Gentlemen's Glee Club Concert'	
5 & 18–19 December	'Charity concert for St Joseph's Orphanage and Industrial School Sacred Service of Song – Wilmington's Jubilee Singers'	
27 December	'Gentlemen's Glee Club Annual Dress Concert'	

<sup>101</sup> *Reporter Book Almanack and Manual of Local Information for 1882* (Ashton-Under-Lyne: J. Andrew and Co., 1882), p. 65.

<sup>102</sup> Data from the weekly editions of the *Ashton Reporter* for 1876. The title of this newspaper does not necessarily indicate a bias in the reporting of musical events in Stalybridge and Ashton, see note 40 above.

<sup>103</sup> The same troupe performed at the People's Hall in Stalybridge. This building was erected in the centre of the town in 1864 as a general educational institute for the working classes, and re-opened in 1880 as the Victoria Theatre. See *Morris and Co's Commercial Directory*, p.326, and *Ashton Reporter*, 4 September 1880.

<sup>104</sup> He also performed at the Mechanics' Institution, Stalybridge.



The above table 5 shows an unmistakable contrast between the musical lives of the two town halls, further enhanced by the fact that some of the acts which transferred from Ashton to Stalybridge did not transfer to the unpopular Town Hall. The difference can be explained firstly in terms of fashion: Ashton Town Hall was a large building, designed with performances in mind. Built less than ten years after Stalybridge Town Hall, it was still considered to be stylish, impressive, and useful to the people of the town. As discussed, Stalybridge Town Hall had lost ground to the Mechanics' Institution; Ashton also had a Mechanics' Institution, which was sometimes used for the performance of music, but its influence on the musical life of the town did not rival that of Stalybridge. In Ashton the Town Hall seemed to provide for all musical needs, whereas in Stalybridge, at this time, the Town Hall certainly did not.

As the above table suggests, surprisingly, in 1876 the Stalybridge Harmonic Society gave a performance of Handel's oratorio, *Solomon*, in Stalybridge Town Hall. It seems odd that the society decided to give their performance in this building, especially as it was advertised as a prestigious event, 'under distinguished patronage [...] Band and Chorus of 120 Performers'.<sup>105</sup> Despite the 1870 renovations, the newspaper review of the concert again mentions the deficiencies of Stalybridge Town Hall as a concert venue firstly when talking of the Tenor soloist, saying, 'we are inclined to think that the acoustic properties of the hall interfered with the proper effect of his vocal powers', and later when talking about the chorus: 'At the outset the defective acoustic properties of the hall were rather painfully apparent, preventing, as it did, the thorough blending of the vocal and instrumental parts'.<sup>106</sup> It is difficult to know how much attention was paid to the acoustics of the Mechanics' Institution by its architects, but no complaints of this kind seem to have been reported.

The most virulent complaint hereto found regarding the use of Stalybridge Town Hall came at the end of 1876, when a reporter for the local newspaper felt moved to write a column suggesting in graphic detail why the Town Hall should not be used as a concert venue, or indeed, for any other public meeting.

We make bold to say that there is not another Town Hall, and very few public halls of any kind, in the kingdom, with so disgraceful and dangerous an entrance as the Stalybridge Town Hall; and all that is required to reproduce in all its horrors the scene so recently witnessed at

<sup>105</sup> *Ashton Reporter*, 30 September 1876.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 October 1876.

Brooklyn,<sup>[107]</sup> with probably even greater loss of life, is an alarm of fire on some occasion when the hall is filled with a mixed audience. [...] [The entrance] is by what may be called a side door, and then by a long narrow staircase divided by an extremely small landing. The stair is narrow, crooked, and tortuous, in descending which even in a quiet and orderly manner it is almost impossible to reach the bottom in safety without holding carefully either to the wall or to the balustrade that extends from the landing to the foot of the steps. The arrangements at the top of the stair are still more extraordinary. Instead of being spacious and open, the passage branches off right and left underneath the platform, more like the low and narrow roadways of a coal mine than the entrance to a town hall. [...] Once inside the hall, an audience is nicely caged as ever was a poor mouse in an ingeniously constructed trap. [...] Not a single meeting is held in that hall in which the lives of all present are not placed in jeopardy.<sup>108</sup>

Even allowing for exaggeration on the part of the journalist, if the patrons of the Town Hall concerts have to risk life and limb to attend the venue, it does not seem an incentive for either performer or audience. However, newspaper reports show that the building was used on a frequent basis during this period for lectures and public meetings, and therefore could not have been overtly dangerous. Nevertheless, fundamental structural changes had to be made to the building in order for Stalybridge Town Hall to be used once again as the town's principal music venue.

## 2.5: Renovation

The renaissance of music in Stalybridge Town Hall began with the passing of the Stalybridge Extension and Improvement Act in 1881.<sup>109</sup> The town had sought Parliamentary consent to include three nearby villages within its boundaries. The result was a fourth ward for municipal election purposes, which created more councillors, enlarged the town's population, and enhanced its status. The Mayor of Stalybridge suggested, therefore, that the present Town Hall could no longer accommodate the increased number of officials resulting from the extension to the town.<sup>110</sup> This was apparently a nationwide problem; as the pressure on town-hall accommodation increased, additions to original buildings became commonplace from the 1860s.<sup>111</sup> Stalybridge Town Council initially considered erecting a new Town Hall on a different

<sup>107</sup> On 5 December 1876 there was a fire in a Brooklyn Theatre. During a stage performance a gaslight ignited the wooden theatre building filled with 900 people; 295 died, hundreds were injured. See *The Times*, 8 December 1876.

<sup>108</sup> *Ashton Reporter*, 16 December 1876.

<sup>109</sup> For full details see *The Stalybridge Extension and Improvement Act, 1881*, Tameside Local Studies Library, CA/STA/292/1. The Act is 72 pages long with 173 sections.

<sup>110</sup> See John March, ed., *Stalybridge Centenary Souvenir 1857–1957* (Stalybridge: Stalybridge Corporation, 1957), p. 59.

<sup>111</sup> Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p.25.

site, but eventually decided to extend the existing building.<sup>112</sup> The architect employed was Gregory Gill, of whom little is now known, but who seems to have lived locally, since the *Journal of the Society of Arts* refers to him as a resident of 'Dukinfield, Cheshire'.<sup>113</sup> He also appears to have been popular in Stalybridge since he was the architect for the Methodist Chapel in 1872,<sup>114</sup> and for the new Oddfellows' Hall and Social Club and Institute in Stalybridge, opened in 1880.<sup>115</sup> Gill's design for Stalybridge Town Hall took account of the 'Queen Anne' style of architecture, which was at its most popular in the last quarter of the nineteenth century for its freedom from the essential elements of Gothic and Classical construction; it was 'a Classical style without Classical laws of proportion'.<sup>116</sup> A signifier of the 'Queen Anne' style was the use of a considerable amount of ornament for its own sake,<sup>117</sup> therefore indicating that the style of the new Stalybridge building was to be in direct contrast to the more functional Greek Doric style of the original Town Hall. Gill's detailed description of his design in the local newspaper demonstrates a greater general consideration for the appearance as well as the practicalities of this building than the last. He states that he deliberately attempted to harmonise the new structure with the old, although the newer portion would be 'considerably richer in detail', 'carried out in a spirited and pleasing manner', with many of the details being 'novel, and perhaps unique'.<sup>118</sup> Gill talks of the complexity of the shape of the site, referring to much of the old town hall as a 'standing disgrace to the town', but boasts that he has overcome any difficulties in a way 'which can but astonish those of the inhabitants [who thought] that nothing good could possibly be got out of the old site'.<sup>119</sup> The building was designed to contain, amongst other things, a court room, mortuary chambers, a council chamber, council retiring rooms, facilities for the police, collector's and cashier's offices, and several further offices on the ground floor.<sup>120</sup> The old town hall had contained most of those facilities but in a building that was built as a market. The new building was to be a purpose-built town hall, with 'due provision for the accommodation of the Corporate

<sup>112</sup> There is no specific mention of the Town Hall within the Extension and Improvement Act.

<sup>113</sup> *Journal of the Society of Arts and of the Institutions in Union*, 14 (1866), p.575.

<sup>114</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner and Edward Hubbard, *The Buildings of England: Cheshire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), pp.336-337.

<sup>115</sup> *The Quarterly Magazine of the Independent Order of Odd-Fellows, Manchester Unity*, new series, 12 (1880), 201-202 (p.201).

<sup>116</sup> Dixon and Muthesius, *Victorian Architecture*, p.27.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 22 September 1883.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

Officials and the conducting of the municipal business of the Borough'.<sup>121</sup> Significantly for the musical life of the town, the large assembly room was increased in size and the old entrance near the platform was adapted to provide an extra exit in case of emergency. A new staircase rose to the large room from the vestibule of a more imposing main entrance,<sup>122</sup> therefore encouraging patrons to think they were entering a more grandiose environment. It seems that enhanced grandeur throughout the building caused people to change their responses from embarrassment to pride. As a whole, this building exhibits more symbols of civic pride, such as the display of the borough arms and the date of the commencement of the extensions, 1882, on a tympanum above one of the doorways.<sup>123</sup> Gill suggests that the Stalybridge Council worked hard to erect a superior building:

The whole affair is creditable alike to the town, the Council, the committee appointed to see the matter carried into effect, the architect and builders. Everything seems to have had proper attention, the heating, lighting, ventilation and furnishing, all of which appear to have been done on a liberal scale, and of excellent quality.<sup>124</sup>

The Council made sure that, this time, they would have a town hall of which they, and the inhabitants as a whole, could be proud.

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<sup>121</sup> 2 December 1881. General Purposes Committee, January 1873 – October 1892, Tameside Local Studies Library, CA/STA/111/2.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> 'A vertical recessed triangular space forming the centre of a pediment or over a door', *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*.

<sup>124</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 22 September 1883.



Figure 4: Stalybridge Town Hall from the Front, c.1896-1902  
Tameside Image Archive, t10325

The new and improved Stalybridge Town Hall was opened on 22 September 1883 with a whole day of celebrations, including a procession around the town accompanied by two of the town's bands (involving officials from Stalybridge as well as neighbouring towns, the architect, the workmen, and many Stalybridge inhabitants), an exclusive tour of the new building, and a celebratory banquet at the Town Hall in the evening.<sup>125</sup> This level of public rejoicing was a feature of the age, with the opening of town halls providing an excuse for some of the most abundant revelry; it was 'the occasion for a town to measure itself against its neighbours and claim its new status'.<sup>126</sup> For fifty years Stalybridge Town Hall had stood as a monument to the utilitarian buildings of the past; now the newly renovated hall was the height of architectural fashion, no longer a 'laughing stock' but a building of status that could be measured against that of Ashton and the surrounding towns. As he opened the new building with a gold key, the Mayor stated that Stalybridge now had 'a municipal home which would

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p. 216.

not only reflect credit on the town, but adequately serve all possible requirements for at least another half century'.<sup>127</sup>

There was some local press attention surrounding the new Stalybridge Town Hall. The *Manchester Times* was complimentary in its review, stating that the considerable improvements to the old building had been carried out 'with very good effect'.<sup>128</sup> The *Stalybridge Reporter* approved of the renovations and gave specific attention to the improvements made to the large room, stating:

The hall itself has been considerably enlarged and very much improved in every respect. In raising the gallery space has been obtained for a number of seats underneath it, while by throwing back the wall the gallery is itself enlarged. More space too is provided on the platform, and there are now two pleasant little ante-rooms within convenient access of the platform – a very great improvement on the cellar-like places in which speakers and singers were at one time accommodated.<sup>129</sup>

## 2.6: Musical Revival

With the provision of more suitable accommodation, the return of the musicians of Stalybridge to the Town Hall was almost as abrupt as their departure; as soon as the building was in use a number of musical events were given in the large room. The local branch of the British Women's Temperance Association gave the first concert in the new building on 29 October 1883, performing 'a number of glees, songs, duets, &c.',<sup>130</sup> followed then by a three-night run of performances by the Hague's Minstrels from 26 November.<sup>131</sup> Sam Hague's minstrel troupe was normally resident at the St James's Hall, Liverpool, and previous to coming to Stalybridge had spent four months at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester.<sup>132</sup> The entertainment included vocalists, comedians, instrumentalists and various 'novel specialities'.<sup>133</sup> The local newspaper described this minstrel company as 'the best exponents of this style of entertainment in the world',<sup>134</sup> and warmly recommended that the inhabitants of Stalybridge attend their concerts. That Stalybridge Town Hall was able to house such an entertainment indicates the improvement in facilities and the rise in reputation of the hall, especially since this troupe had performed in Stalybridge before, and at that time the Town Hall

<sup>127</sup> *Manchester Times*, 29 September 1883.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 15 September 1883.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 November 1883.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 November 1883

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

had been thought unsuitable so they performed at the People's Hall instead;<sup>135</sup> this gives some indication of the new, favourable opinion of the Town Hall as a concert venue. The renewed interest in the building prompted the Town Hall Committee to implement more official regulations regarding letting,<sup>136</sup> much of it probably following the policies used at Ashton Town Hall. The Town Hall Committee minutes state the following terms and conditions:

The Town Hall or Rooms will not be let for any purpose having an immoral or irreligious tendency, and the Committee reserve the right of breaking any engagement if the Hall or Rooms are intended to be used for any purpose at variance with these conditions.

#### CHARGES

For the use of the Assembly Room and Ante-Rooms adjoining-

Lectures, Entertainments, &C., First Day.....	£1 1s. 0d.
Do. Do. Subsequent Days.....	£0 15s. 0d.
Bazaar or Dinner Party, First Day.....	£2 2s. 0d.
Do. Do. Subsequent Days.....	£1 5s. 0d.
Concert.....	£1 11s. 6d.
Concert, with band and chorus.....	£2 2s. 0d.
Tea Party.....	£1 11s. 6d.
Tea Party and Ball, or Ball.....	£2 2s. 0d.
Do. Do. If continued after midnight.....	£2 12s. 0d.
Do. do. If a license be obtained, extra.....	£0 10s. 0d.
Gas to be charged at the rate of 4/- per thousand feet as registered by the Meter. Extra lights One Half-penny per light per hour.	

The Hall or Rooms must not be kept open after 12 o'clock p.m., except under special arrangement, and for which an additional charge will be made.

[...] All applications for hire of the rooms for any purpose other than those above-named to be deemed special, and to be submitted to the Committee for approval or rejection.

[...] Application for the Hall and Rooms must be made at the Cashier's Office.  
BY ORDER OF THE TOWN COUNCIL.<sup>137</sup>

As a consequence of the now superior building, and possibly because of the policies implemented by the Council, potentially including a rise in hire charges, average ticket prices for concerts in Stalybridge Town Hall came into line with those for the same type of performances at Ashton - namely 3s. for first seats, 2s. for second, and 1s. for back seats and the gallery.<sup>138</sup> In addition, it was advertised in the newspapers that 'for the convenience of the Ashton people, tram-cars will run from the doors of the Town

<sup>135</sup> See note 103 above.

<sup>136</sup> There is no surviving evidence of any official policy on the letting of the Town Hall for the old building.

<sup>137</sup> 7 January 1884. Stalybridge Town Hall Committee Minutes 1884-1894, Tameside Local Studies Library, CA/STA/119/30.

<sup>138</sup> See, for example, *Stalybridge Reporter*, 9 February 1884 and 14 March 1885.

Hall to the Old Square after the concert',<sup>139</sup> thus suggesting that Stalybridge Town Hall was now of a standard to poach patrons from its rival in Ashton. A variety of different musical, social, and reforming organizations began to give miscellaneous amateur concerts in the Town Hall, from the Orpheus Vocal Quartet to the Stalybridge Anglers' Association, and often the Stalybridge branch of the British Women's Temperance Association.<sup>140</sup> The provision of 'music for the people' was not generally a great concern to those who performed at Stalybridge Town Hall, or to the town Council, possibly because the lack of an organ gave little scope for cheap music-making. However, organisations did, from time to time, give free concerts and the Stalybridge branch of the British Women's Temperance Association was the most frequent. The local newspaper promoted these events, stating that 'the effort to provide free entertainments of a healthy tone for the people deserves all encouragement'.<sup>141</sup> Stalybridge Town Hall was now being used as a venue for the spreading of those Victorian moral values towards which Ashton Town Hall had been striving for many years.

Choral societies were again a feature of the concert life of the Town Hall, although not until the 1890s. Stalybridge Harmonic Society was still active, but the Stalybridge Philharmonic Society had long since disbanded. However, a new choral society, the Stalybridge Choral Union, which was founded in the 1870s and originally performed in the Mechanics' Institution, began to give performances in the Town Hall. This society generally performed operas, such as *Chilperic*, a comic opera by Hervé (1825–92), given in 1894. Andrew Lamb comments that 'Hervé's compositions were mostly written for unsophisticated audiences and often hastily produced';<sup>142</sup> however, it was one of the first performances of opera in the Town Hall and, while acknowledging its weaknesses, the *Stalybridge Reporter* of 12 December 1894 indicated that it had been well received:

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 February 1884.

<sup>140</sup> 'The Stalybridge Orpheus Prize Quartett will give a grand concert, town hall, Stalybridge, Tuesday, February 27, 1894', *Stalybridge Reporter*, 17 February 1894; 'The members of the Stalybridge Anglers' Association held their third annual concert in the Town Hall on Thursday evening', *Stalybridge Reporter*, 22 March 1890; 'British Women's Temperance Association, Stalybridge Branch. The third entertainment will be held in the town hall, Stalybridge, [...] January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1884', *Stalybridge Reporter*, 26 January 1884.

<sup>141</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 8 December 1883.

<sup>142</sup> Andrew Lamb. 'Hervé.' *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. 7 May. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/12910>>.



The work is one which had considerable vogue in its day, but it has gone rather out of fashion lately [...] It contains very tuneful and sprightly music, and the libretto is smart. Some middling puns there are, but they are compensated for by humorous, witty, and pungent sayings [...] The total effect of the performance is extremely pleasing, and on Thursday night especially, the approval of the audience was very warmly displayed.

Whilst opera was new to the audiences of Stalybridge Town Hall, it was apparently well attended, which seems to have led both choral societies to move often from oratorio to opera in the 1890s.<sup>143</sup> In this third period the Town Hall also became a regular venue for the enhancement of the mass-singing movement amongst children.<sup>144</sup> Sometimes the performers were from homes for the destitute; but there were also children from the many church schools in Stalybridge, where singing was promoted for the improvement of the students. This was presumably to give the children the experience of singing on a different stage, to a larger audience, and in a more prestigious environment, whilst arguably also indulging a sentimental streak in Victorian culture.

One of the benefits of using town halls for concerts and entertainments was that the performance space could be inter-denominational. The churches of Stalybridge certainly made use of the facilities offered at the Town Hall, whether it was for tea parties and entertainment, or simply amateur concerts. However, it seems to have been the Catholic Church that made the most use of the building. In the early nineteenth century there had been a major influx of Irish immigrants into England, attracted by new employment opportunities in the cotton and construction industries of the north-west. What was perceived of their moral condition appalled Victorian society. Fifty years later Engels remarked that:

The southern facile character of the Irish-man, his crudity, which places him but little above the savage, his contempt for all humane enjoyments, in which his very crudeness makes him incapable of sharing, his filth and poverty, all favour drunkenness.<sup>145</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century Stalybridge had a large Irish immigrant community of its own.<sup>146</sup> Out of a population of c.20,000 in 1841, over 3,300 of them were Irish

<sup>143</sup> This tallies with Dave Russell's observation that choral societies began to add operatic selections to their repertoire from the 1890s onwards; see *Popular Music in England*, p. 216.

<sup>144</sup> On children and the mass-singing movement, including Tonic sol-fa, see Bernarr Rainbow, *The Land without Music: Musical Education in England 1800–60, and its continental antecedents* (London: Novello, 1967), pp.139–155.

<sup>145</sup> Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1892), p. 125. On Roman Catholicism in England at this time, see Edward Norman, *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

<sup>146</sup> Neville Kirk, *The Growth of Working Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p.108.

Catholics.<sup>147</sup> The Catholic church of the town maintained a watch over this new society, making arduous efforts to render the Irish more culturally acceptable to the 'respectable' sections of the town. Catholics were traditionally seen as outsiders and even potential traitors in England; but by establishing Catholic schools and mutual improvement societies, for example, the Catholic church of Stalybridge promoted diligence, frugality, and temperance as qualities the Irish population of Stalybridge should aspire to attain.<sup>148</sup> Using the Town Hall – the venue used by the highest class of performers and audiences in the town – for their St Patrick's Day celebrations and concerts by the Catholic brass band, the Irish population could signal their aspirations in that direction.

During this period the Town Hall was again used by touring artistes on an infrequent basis – often those artistes who had previously performed at the Mechanics' Institution. Touring concert companies were the most frequent visitors to the hall, mostly performing a professional version of the programmes favoured for miscellaneous choral society concerts. Other companies presented a far more diverse programme, such as the following:

On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday next, Clari's Concert Company will appear in a Grand Entertainment, 'The Scottish Chieftians,' also Bros. D'Alcorn, negro artistes: Misses Clara and Nellie, duettists; Mr Marcus Boyle, vocal comedian, from the London music halls; The Excelsior Variety Troupe; Messrs Ridley and St. Clare, musical clowns and contortionists.<sup>149</sup>

There were also travelling minstrel companies such as the Robertson and Holme's Coloured Operatic Kentucky Minstrels, and international acts like the Jungfrau Kapelle, a German family who performed on unusual musical instruments.<sup>150</sup> The style of the entertainment supplied by these visitors, some of whom were actually billed as music-hall artistes, suggests that they were using Stalybridge Town Hall as a temperate and more respectable alternative to the music hall. Music halls were not seen as reputable until the end of the nineteenth century, mainly because the acts were not considered sufficiently wholesome or moral; if an act wanted to be considered reputable and 'high-class', therefore, it needed to find a more respectable venue, and in Stalybridge and

<sup>147</sup> C.B. Phillips and J.H. Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540* (Harlow: Longman, 1994), p.141.

<sup>148</sup> Kirk, *The Growth of Working Class Reformism*, pp. 206, 319–20.

<sup>149</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 25 April 1885.

<sup>150</sup> The Victorians took delight in the foreign and exotic, and were attracted to acts like these; see Derek Scott, 'Blackface Minstrels, Black Minstrels, and the Reception in England', in *Europe, Empire, and Spectacle in Nineteenth-Century British Music*, ed. by Rachel Cowgill and Julian Rushton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 265–280.

Ashton, the town halls seemed to offer just that. The acts that performed as part of 'Clari's Concert Company' (see the quotation above), fall into the three categories that Dagmar Kift identifies as the main components of a music-hall programme: circus numbers, music and theatre, and information and innovations.<sup>151</sup> It appears that the type of building Stalybridge Town Hall represented thus made the difference between rough and rational recreation.

## 2.7: Alternative Venues

While this third period in the musical life of Stalybridge Town Hall mirrors the first, to some extent, in terms of its richness and diversity, there is a significant difference between the two: in the 1830s–50s, the Town Hall had what was really the only large public room in the town, and there was little competition for audience and performers. As already demonstrated, the Mechanics' Institution was the first real rival as a music venue to the old Town Hall. With the opening of the new Town Hall in 1883 the number of performances at the Mechanic's Institution decreased, although it still remained a popular musical venue. By this later period, however, there were many more halls and musical attractions in the town to compete for patrons. The following article appeared in the *Stalybridge Reporter* of 19 October 1895, neatly summarizing the changing nature of the town's musical life in the last quarter of the nineteenth century:

There has been such a surfeit of cheap music at P.S.A. meetings and religious services on the one side, and at smoking concerts and various public occasions on the other, that the desire to attend the old-fashioned concert or mixed concert of a superior, or, at any rate, a more formal and expensive character, has declined [...] There is apparently some change in the public taste, or, as we say, it has been to some extent partly surfeited and partly vitiated by the growth of smoking concerts, P.S.A. entertainments, church and chapel music services, and other semi-gratuitous attractions.<sup>152</sup>

The most commercial rival to the Town Hall in the 1880s was the Victoria Theatre. Opened in 1880, it was a professional theatre with its own company, and aspired to present cultured entertainment. Before its opening, the *Ashton Reporter* of 18 September 1880 announced that 'a high-class company is to be maintained, and Shakespearian plays will probably be given periodically'. Although mainly established

<sup>151</sup> Kift, *The Victorian Music Hall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 53.

<sup>152</sup> The P.S.A., or Pleasant Sunday Afternoon movement, was founded in 1875 by John Blackham. Mainly introduced for the benefit of working men, it was an international movement with the aim of religious, cultural, and moral education on a Sunday afternoon. See John Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), p.139.

for the performance of drama, the theatre was often used for music – obviously music written for the stage, but also the kind of miscellaneous vocal and instrumental concerts, sometimes of sacred music, that were performed at the Town Hall; the management was constantly striving to provide a respectable form of entertainment. However, theatres at the time could not fully escape from the reputation for roughness they had acquired in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. As one visitor stated:

The most striking thing to a foreigner in English Theatre is the unheard-of coarseness and brutality of the audience. The consequence of this is that the higher and more civilised classes go only to the Italian Opera, and very rarely visit their national theatre.<sup>153</sup>

The Victoria Theatre burnt down in the mid-1880s and was replaced, on the same site, by the Grand Theatre, which opened on 25 August 1890.<sup>154</sup> This theatre was strictly regulated by the Stalybridge Council, in order to ensure its ‘order and decency’:

1. No Theatre shall be open during Passion Week, or on any Sunday, Christmas Day, Good Friday, or day appointed for a Public Fast.
2. Every Theatre shall be closed at half past eleven o’clock at night except on Saturday night when the time of closing shall be eleven o’clock.
3. No intoxicated person, public prostitute or known thief shall be allowed to enter any Theatre.
4. Nothing which shall tend to bring the Christian Religion into contempt or be offensive to public decency or good order shall be acted, recited, or sung in any Theatre.
5. No Boxing Match, Cock Fight or Dog Fight shall be allowed to take place in any Theatre.
6. Public Constables dressed in uniform or other Constables known to the manager or his servants shall have free access into every Theatre at all times during the time of public performance.
7. The manager shall to the best of his ability maintain good order and descent [sic] behaviour during the hours of performance.
8. For every breach of any of the above rules, the Manager shall forfeit and pay a penalty of not exceeding Five Pounds.<sup>155</sup>

This was not enough, however, to secure the use of the theatre by those seeking to give ‘respectable’ entertainment. In November 1890 the Stalybridge Harmonic Society, then in its forty-sixth year, gave a production of Auber’s opera *Masaniello*. As the staging involved five fully painted sets, the management of the theatre suggested to the society that they perform the opera there. The society refused the offer, possibly because they thought that to perform the opera in that building would not be suitable for a society promoting rational recreation. The *Stalybridge Reporter*, on 22 November 1890, reported on the incident:

<sup>153</sup> E.M. Butler, ed., *A Regency Visitor: The English Tour of Prince Pückler-Muskau, Described in his Letters, 1826-1828*, from the original translation by Sarah Austin, (London: Collins, 1957), quoted in Golby and Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd*, p. 70.

<sup>154</sup> *The Era*, 30 August 1890, gives a full description of the building.

<sup>155</sup> 3 March 1890. Signed Council Minutes, November 1886 – November 1890, Tameside Local Studies Library, CA/STA/100/8.

Mr Walters [the manager of the Grand Theatre at the time], we believe, would have been glad at the outset to have negotiated for the production of the opera at his theatre, but some of the members and their friends had scruples, which we can easily understand and appreciate, on the subject, and the idea was not pressed.<sup>156</sup>

Although in the same year the local newspaper had predicted that 'the Stalybridge people will possess in the new theatre a Temple of the Drama in which they will be able to take an honest pride',<sup>157</sup> and the theatre programme never included anything that could be compared with music hall,<sup>158</sup> the reporter here does not seem at all surprised at the Society's decision, which suggests that this view of the theatre's moral unsuitability was fairly wide-spread in the town. Ironically, the large room in the Town Hall itself was granted a theatre licence in the 1890s,<sup>159</sup> specifically for the 'Public Performance of Stage Plays'.<sup>160</sup> Perhaps this is another demonstration of the town hall rationalising what, in other buildings, may have been considered 'rough' recreation.<sup>161</sup>

Other halls in Stalybridge owned by various institutions offered the same type of entertainment as the Town Hall but not necessarily in a 'rational' environment. The Foresters' Hall, the Oddfellows' Hall, and the Drill Hall all hosted musical concerts, sometimes taking the form of social gatherings and conversazione, using both performers from within the institution and visitors.<sup>162</sup> The Oddfellows' Hall even had performers from outside the town, such as Mr T.R. Nugent's Comic Opera Company in

<sup>156</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 22 November 1890.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 January 1890.

<sup>158</sup> Plays such as *Maria Marten*, *The Convict*, *Hard Times*, and a variety of Shakespeare were performed, often several different plays a week (*Ibid.*, 23 August 1890). A pantomime was often presented for three weeks at Christmas, and dramatic and musical companies (such as D'Oyly Carte) also visited (*Ashton Reporter*, 16 December 1882).

<sup>159</sup> 31 August 1892. Market, Town Hall, Lighting and Hackney Carriage Committee 1891-1895, Tameside Local Studies Library, CA/STA/119/21.

<sup>160</sup> 2 October 1893. Signed Council Minutes, December 1890 - October 1894, Tameside Local Studies Library, CA/STA/100/9.

<sup>161</sup> Douglas A. Reid suggests that 'theatrical entertainment enjoyed in morally unsullied venues like hotel assembly rooms, temperance halls, town halls, or even the circus, was acceptable'. See his 'Playing and Praying' in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, III, 1840-1950*, ed. by M. Daunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 745-807 (p. 780).

<sup>162</sup> The Foresters and Oddfellows were among a range of friendly societies that developed out of the drinking clubs in taverns, convivial societies, and debating clubs of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century they were examples of working-class self-dependence and respectability, qualities induced in their members by a combination of rituals and benefits; see J. Fullagar, 'Friendly Societies', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, p. 514. These friendly societies were closely related to the working-men's clubs which were most prolific in northern England from the 1860s. They were intended as a temperate alternative to the public houses, although the sale of alcohol was eventually permitted.

March 1885. The admission prices for this were cheaper than for the Town Hall – 2s. for front seats, 1s. for second seats and 6d. for back seats.<sup>163</sup>

The Liberal and Conservative Clubs of Stalybridge provided musical entertainment, most often in the form of ‘Smoking Concerts’, so called because they took place in the ‘smoking room’ – the large assembly room in the various buildings used as club premises. They were miscellaneous concerts of mainly vocal repertoire, also of the kind given in the Town Hall, and sometimes with guest artists engaged:

The fifth smoking concert of the season was held at this club on Tuesday evening. There was a large and appreciative audience. Mr Linton Ives as pianist and principal vocalist, and Councillor J.W. Whitehead, as chairman, were in attendance.<sup>164</sup>

This seems an entirely respectable form of entertainment. However, the presence of a ‘chairman’ suggests a link with music hall, and with the likelihood of there being alcohol at such institutions, the smoking concerts would not have won approval from all sides.

The churches of Stalybridge offered alternative sources of entertainment, and generated a wide range of supplementary organisations, clubs, and societies. Stalybridge was dominated by Nonconformity, although the significant number of Anglican establishments brought the number of churches in the town to twenty by 1871.<sup>165</sup> They were all active in trying to bring respectable yet cheap, if not free, entertainment to the Stalybridge population. This generally took the form of ‘Band of Hope’ meetings,<sup>166</sup> tea parties with concerts,<sup>167</sup> and the ‘service of song’,<sup>168</sup> all of which were linked to the idea of temperance and moral improvement. Such entertainments are likely to have been directed towards a more working-class audience and therefore generally not the same audience as for the Town Hall. However, it is likely that many

<sup>163</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 14 March 1885.

<sup>164</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 22 November 1890.

<sup>165</sup> *Morris and Co.’s Commercial Directory* (1874), p.287, has a list of the churches. For more on the religious history of Stalybridge see Hill, *Bygone Stalybridge*, pp. 101-125.

<sup>166</sup> For example, ‘Chapel-street Band of Hope – The fortnightly meeting of the above society was held in the school room on Wednesday evening [...] A miscellaneous entertainment, consisting of songs, readings, recitations, &c., was gone through’, *Stalybridge Reporter*, 1 March 1890. The Band of Hope was the youth wing of the temperance movement. Founded in Leeds in 1847, it sought to educate young people against the evils of alcohol through recreation and instruction. See Pamela Horn, *Pleasures and Pastimes in Victorian Britain* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), p. 250.

<sup>167</sup> See, for example, the ‘tea party and concert’ given at Holy Trinity Mission Hall on 11 April 1885, *Stalybridge Reporter*, 18 April 1885.

<sup>168</sup> For example, ‘A new service of song entitled “Florence Nightingale, or the Crimean Heroine” was rendered at the Gospel Mission Hall, on Sunday afternoon, by the members of the choir’, *ibid.*, 12 April 1890.

middle-class philanthropists attended the church entertainments as their duty, and the Town Hall concerts as their recreation.

At the opposite end of the scale of respectability, the public houses of Stalybridge frequently offered musical entertainment, often in the form of the benefit concert:

On Friday evening week a benefit concert was held at the Friend and Pitcher Inn, Caroline-street, for the benefit of Messrs Burrows and Hardwick. The chairman was Mr H Gamble and Mr W Shepley officiated as the accompanist. During the evening the following talent appeared and gave their services – John Wade, tenor; H. Hamilton, character comedian and dancer; W. Cummings, Irish comedian; H. Elliot, Dutch vocalist; R. Heywood, motto and topical vocalist; and Messrs Burrows and Hardwick, English and Irish character duettists. The room was crowded, and the affair proved a great success.<sup>169</sup>

It seems ironic that though these concerts were given with the purpose of raising money for someone in need, their location would have made them morally unacceptable to many. Admittedly the programme reported above is familiar from the music halls, but again, this form of entertainment had been seen at the Town Hall.

There was much, therefore, to rival the Town Hall entertainments in this latter period. Indeed, at points in the year there was some form of musical entertainment almost every night of the week in Stalybridge. The newspaper might have suggested a drop in attendance at ‘the old-fashioned concert or mixed concert of a superior, [...] more formal and expensive character’ (see above), but the alternative entertainments described here seem not to have affected the number of musical events given in Stalybridge Town Hall now that the inhabitants had a new, more custom-built building in which to perform and to listen; for attending the Town Hall was a signifier of status and respectability – a symbol of the wealth and prosperity of the patron as well as the town.

## 2.8: Conclusion

The musical life of Stalybridge Town Hall was entirely commensurate with changes in public taste regarding the building. In the first period, when the building was new, the large room was used frequently as a music venue. At this time there were really no other large public halls in the centre of town. By the start of the second period, Stalybridge had become a Corporation, which enhanced civic pride among the citizens. Whilst other towns and cities built lavish town halls that symbolised their prosperity

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 September 1890.

and progress, Stalybridge was trapped with a Town Hall 'built at a period before the revival of architectural taste, and one of the relics of that unfortunate Georgian era in which almost every building erected was a model of hideousness and bad taste'.<sup>170</sup> It was unfashionable and distasteful to the people of the 1860s whose attention refocused, therefore, on the building for the Mechanics' Institution. The design was the epitome of the progress and fashion of the time, and consequently the building became the centre of community life. At this point, it was the Mechanics' Institution, no longer the Town Hall, that was at the heart of the musical life of Stalybridge.

An article on town halls in *The Builder* of 1878 suggested that 'possessing wealth is the prelude to architectural display'.<sup>171</sup> By the time it came to the rebuilding of the Town Hall in 1881–3, at the start of the third period, the architects had learnt from the example of town halls across the country, and designed for Stalybridge a building that not only catered to the needs of the community but also that was fashionable and, at last, a symbol of civic pride. Even though the town had many public buildings that could be used for the performance of music, Stalybridge Town Hall proved itself as the hub of musical life in the community, supplying this important cotton town with opportunities for respectable, rational recreation and self-improvement, whilst stirring the musical and civic pride of the inhabitants.

Stalybridge Town Hall was able to compete with the other musical activities in the town because it was now a valued building. T. Wemyss Reid, the nineteenth-century biographer of J.D. Heaton, a prominent Leeds doctor, suggested that:

It may seem a small matter to those who have not studied these questions of local politics whether a Town Hall in a provincial city shall be of one style of architecture or another, whether it shall be large or small, handsome or the reverse. As a matter of fact, a great deal may depend upon the decision which is arrived at in such a matter by the authorities upon whose judgment the final decision depends.<sup>172</sup>

This was certainly true of Stalybridge. The reputation of the original town hall was affected because it was built on an inappropriate piece of donated land with attention to function but not aesthetic in its design. Nobody wanted to perform music in 'that monstrosity of bricks and mortar', but once the Council decided to rebuild the hall as a symbolic, fashionable building, it became the principal performance space in the town. The *Stalybridge Reporter* boasted on 15 December 1883:

<sup>170</sup> *Ashton Reporter*, 10 December 1881.

<sup>171</sup> 'The Development of the Modern Town-hall', *The Builder*, 36 (1878), 821–2 (p.821).

<sup>172</sup> Reid, *A Memoir of John Deakin Heaton*, p.121.



We are musical people in Stalybridge. Everybody says so and everybody is right. There is, in fact nothing in which we have a better right to pride ourselves.

But it was only when Stalybridge Town Hall was able to stimulate the civic pride of those 'musical people', that it could really be said to have influenced the musical life of the town.

The next chapter will consider the musical life of Birmingham Town Hall, a building that was erected to provide a venue for the town's musical festivals. Stalybridge Town Hall, built originally as a market, became the principal music venue of the town by default, falling in and out of favour with local musicians according to the condition of the building. In direct contrast, Birmingham Town Hall was the main concert venue of the town by design, with the superintendence of the Council and the musical festival committee ensuring that the building remained popular with local and visiting musicians throughout the century.

## Chapter 3

### 'A Powerful Agent in the Cause of "God-like" Charity':<sup>1</sup>

#### Birmingham Town Hall – A Concert Hall in Disguise?

### 3.1: Early Festivals

The eighteenth century has been called many things – the Age of Improvement, the Age of Benevolence, the age of Reason – but, according to Pritchard, it was also 'the Age of the Musical Festival'.<sup>2</sup> From the early eighteenth century, some charities in England held annual fund-raising 'anniversary meetings' in churches, many of which included a selection of sacred music. In 1784 the musician, composer and music historian, Charles Burney, commented on the practice:

The most favourable eulogism that can be bestowed on the power of music is, that whenever the human heart is wished to expand in charity or beneficence, its aid is more frequently called in, than that of any other art or advocate.<sup>3</sup>

The music was used as a means to entice outsiders in the hope that they would give generously to the collection, but eventually it was this that became the central feature, leading the occasions to become more 'musical festivals' than religious services.<sup>4</sup> In the second half of the eighteenth century hospitals began to follow the same pattern of regular meetings, often establishing music festivals on an irregular or triennial basis, and it was probably this trend that inspired the first Birmingham Musical Festival in September 1768, held to raise money for the hospital that was being built in the town. It is likely that the Birmingham Festival was established using the example of the annual Foundling Hospital Festivals in London, inaugurated by Handel in 1750, where *Messiah* was performed to raise money for the hospital. The repertoire of the first Birmingham Festival was, apart from an 'anthem' by Boyce, exclusively Handelian, thus reinforcing that link.<sup>5</sup> In addition, *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* in 1852 declared:

<sup>1</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 28 June 1852.

<sup>2</sup> Pritchard, 'The Musical Festival', p.5.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Burney, *An account of the musical performances in Westminster-Abbey, and the Pantheon, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, and June the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, 1784, in Commemoration of Handel* (London: T. Payne and Son, 1785), p.viii.

<sup>4</sup> The annual service of the "Sons of the Clergy" is probably the first example, with instrumentalists and soloists accompanying the anniversary sermon from 1709. See Pritchard, 'The Musical Festival', p.12.

<sup>5</sup> For the details of the programme of the first Festival see John Thackray Bunce, *A History of the Birmingham General Hospital and the Musical Festivals: 1768-1873* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1873), p.64. Although Birmingham may have been inspired by festivals elsewhere, in

When our Festival was set on foot [...] the *Messiah* had for many years been annually performed in London for the benefit of the Foundling Hospital. [...] So we may conclude that it was from the 'mighty master' himself that the founders of our Festival took the idea of applying it permanently to the benefit of one great benevolent establishment.<sup>6</sup>

The initial 1768 festival in the town was followed by other one-off events, and it was only in September 1784 that the Birmingham Triennial Musical Festival was established as a continuous source of income for the hospital, always under the auspices of the Musical Committee of the General Hospital.<sup>7</sup> As a popular provincial festival, according to Pritchard, the eighteenth-century Birmingham musical festivals 'provide us with one of the earliest and perhaps the best provincial example of the connection between a humanitarian charity and an extended music meeting that occurred only at long intervals'.<sup>8</sup> From this time, St Philip's Church and the New Street Theatre were used as the Festival venues, but on 5 November 1827 the Musical Committee presented a resolution to the Street Commissioners of the town asking them to consider erecting a building for the purpose of magisterial and public business, including the holding of the Musical Festival. The result was the classically styled town hall, opened in 1834, that stands in Birmingham today.

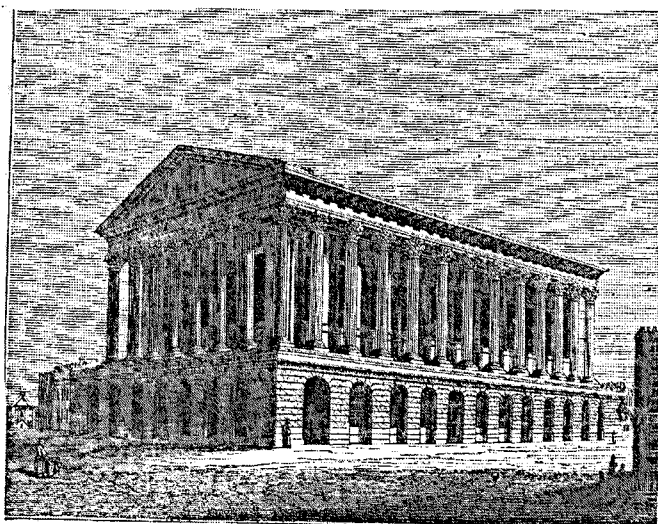


Figure 5: Birmingham Town Hall, from *Penny Magazine*, 21 June 1834

contrast to other festivals, the first Birmingham festival opened with a 'secular' evening performance. Pritchard suggests that this may have been a deliberate move to distinguish this festival from the nearby Three Choirs Meeting. See Pritchard, 'The Musical Festival', p.59.

<sup>6</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 28 June 1852.

<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to determine the actual name of this Committee. Sometimes it is referred to as the Musical Committee, sometimes the Festival Committee, sometimes the Orchestral Committee. Newspaper evidence and Council minutes suggest that the three were one and the same, but since the records of the General Hospital are not in existence it is difficult to say for certain. For the purposes of this chapter, I will use the term 'Musical Committee', unless quotations using either of the other terms determine otherwise.

<sup>8</sup> Pritchard, 'The Musical Festival', p.24.

Although it was given the title of ‘town hall’, much of the national press was reporting that Birmingham had built a magnificent new ‘music-hall’, rather than a municipal building to house the offices of local government. In addition, *The Builder* of 1878 suggests that this building ‘can hardly, from any point of view, be called a model for a town-hall, which should always appear at least as much a place of business as festivity’.<sup>9</sup> This begs the question, therefore, was Birmingham Town Hall a concert hall in disguise?

### 3.2: Historical Birmingham

As table 6 demonstrates, Birmingham in the first half of the nineteenth century was one of the biggest industrial cities in Britain.

**Table 6: Population figures for 1841<sup>10</sup>**

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London - 1,948,417
Manchester - 311,269
Liverpool - 286,487
<b>Birmingham - 182,922</b>
Leeds - 152,074
Bristol - 125,146
Newcastle - 70,337
Bradford - 66,715

It was in the latter half of the seventeenth century that Birmingham first gained the reputation of being a centre of manufacturing, stimulated by the establishment of two new industries – gun-making and brass-manufacture. By the mid-1700s these industries were thriving, employing people both from within the town and the adjoining counties. The years between 1770 and 1830 saw rapid growth, and the town soon became the hub of the commercial life of south Staffordshire and ‘the leading nucleus of the Industrial Revolution in Britain’.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *The Builder*, 36 (1878), p.822.

<sup>10</sup> John Langton, ‘Urban Growth and Economic Change: From the Late Seventeenth Century to 1841’ in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Volume II, 1540-1840*, ed. by Peter Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 453-490 (pp.473-474).

<sup>11</sup> ‘Birmingham’. Encyclopædia Britannica. 2009. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 2 Jan. 2009 <<http://0-search.eb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/eb/article-9015377>>. For more on Birmingham at this time see Conrad Gill, *History of Birmingham, Volume I, Manor and Borough to 1865* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp.48-120, and Asa Briggs, *History of Birmingham, Volume II, Borough and City 1865-1938* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp.28-29.

The communal environment of Birmingham during the early nineteenth century was unique and distinctive. In the early nineteenth century, there was something of a religious kaleidoscope in the town. Although the city was a Nonconformist centre from the seventeenth century, Methodism in early nineteenth-century Birmingham was relatively weak, especially as an influence over local government. Unitarianism and Quakerism had a bigger influence on local politics, and the Church of England in Birmingham was numerically powerful.<sup>12</sup> In the religious life of early nineteenth-century Birmingham can be seen a freedom that was indicative of the more relaxed social conditions of the town.

The working environment in Birmingham at this time was also distinctive. Significantly, work was not carried out in huge factories but in small workshops, allowing social relations between workers and employers to be closer, facilitating various forms of social and cultural co-operation as well as a political alliance between the classes.<sup>13</sup> An example of such coalition can be seen in the formation of the Birmingham Political Union, launched by Thomas Attwood,<sup>14</sup> a local banker and industrialist, in 1829, to bring together co-operation between the middle and working classes, to 'knock at the gates of government' and secure parliamentary support.<sup>15</sup> According to Attwood, such a union was necessary since 'the interests of masters and men are, in fact one. If the masters flourish the men flourish with them; and if the masters suffer difficulties their difficulties must shortly affect the workmen in a threefold degree'.<sup>16</sup> Such a statement is indicative of the close working relationship between employer and employee in Birmingham in the early nineteenth century. This was brought about, according to Asa Briggs, through a larger skilled workforce in Birmingham than elsewhere. As a result, the workers had a higher level of income, a greater ambition and realisation of social mobility, and the hours of labour were often

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<sup>12</sup> Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p.201.

<sup>13</sup> Asa Briggs, 'Social History Since 1814', in *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of Warwickshire, Volume VII*, ed. by R.B. Pugh (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 223-245 (pp.223-5).

<sup>14</sup> Attwood's family had been heavily involved in promoting the industrialisation of the region around Birmingham. In 1811 Attwood was appointed High Bailiff of Birmingham, and although at this point his politics were that of a 'church and king' tory, by the 1820s he came to recognise the need for a reform of parliament that would extend the franchise to the middle classes. He later joined the Chartist movement. See Clive Behagg, 'Attwood, Thomas (1783-1856)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/878>, accessed 25 April 2009].

<sup>15</sup> Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p.187.

<sup>16</sup> Asa Briggs, 'Thomas Attwood and the economic background of the Birmingham Political Union', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 9 (1947-9), 190-216 (p.191).

shorter and less tiring than in other places.<sup>17</sup> As early as 1781, in his history of Birmingham, William Hutton had boasted that:

Even the men of inferior life among us, whose occupations one would think tend to produce minds as callous as the metal they work, lay a stronger claim to civilization than in any other place with which I am acquainted.<sup>18</sup>

This 'claim to civilization' prevailed well into the nineteenth century, and is significant not only in the industrial history of Birmingham but also in the social and leisure history of the town, ensuring fertile ground for innovations and new institutions.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, by 1830 Birmingham already had a number of significant secular public buildings such as a Market Hall, a Public Office and a Mechanics' Institution, leading the *Architectural Magazine* in 1835 to say of the town:

Birmingham, within the last twenty years, has risen greatly in the scale of population, wealth and importance; and is now rapidly becoming one of the first manufacturing towns in the kingdom. The improvements in the town itself have kept pace with the improvements of the arts and manufactures which have been so successfully cultivated in it; and new streets and public buildings have succeeded each other so rapidly, that a stranger, who knew the town twenty years ago, would now scarcely be able to recognise it as the same place.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.3: Conception

One of the most significant innovators in nineteenth-century Birmingham was Joseph Moore. He moved from Worcestershire to Birmingham in 1781 to learn die-sinking, and afterwards entered into a partnership in the button trade. One of his closest acquaintances was Matthew Boulton, a prominent industrialist of the town and a keen music-lover,<sup>21</sup> who suggested that Moore launch a series of concerts in order to provide the public with good music. Both Margaret Handford and J. Sutcliffe Smith have demonstrated that the performance of music in Birmingham can be traced back over 600 years.<sup>22</sup> Whilst much of it before the eighteenth century centred around church services, the opening of the new St Philip's Church in 1715 provided a stimulus for a

<sup>17</sup> Briggs, 'Social History Since 1814', p.224.

<sup>18</sup> William Hutton, *The History of Birmingham: With Considerable Additions* (London: George Berger and Birmingham: James Guest, 1836), p.160.

<sup>19</sup> For more on Birmingham in the nineteenth century see Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, pp.184-193.

<sup>20</sup> *The Architectural Magazine and Journal of Improvement in Architecture*, 11 (1835), 16-18.

<sup>21</sup> See Jennifer Tann, 'Boulton, Matthew (1728-1809)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, May 2007 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/2983>, accessed 20 July 2009].

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Handford, *Sounds Unlikely: Six Hundred Years of Music in Birmingham, 1392-1992* (Birmingham: Birmingham and Midland Institute, 1992); and 'Music in Birmingham 1392 to 2006' in *British Music: The Journal of the British Music Society*, 29 (2007), 52-75; Joseph Sutcliffe Smith, *The Story of Music in Birmingham* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1945).

more organised concert life. This was encouraged by the presence of an organ in the building which, in turn, prompted other churches to erect such instruments, thus increasing music-making potential in Birmingham. The organs attracted accomplished organists to the town, and from the time the *Birmingham Gazette* began publication in 1741, reports of musical activities were regularly recorded.<sup>23</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, as in many other provincial towns in the nineteenth century, music-making in Birmingham was stimulated by a local organist. Barnabas Gunn was the first organist of St. Philip's church, and from 1740 established regular winter concerts in the New Theatre, featuring noted outside performers.<sup>24</sup> In addition, Richard Hobbs, organist of St Martin's Church, was an active figure in the musical life of the town, giving oratorio festivals in 1759 and 1760 to commemorate Handel's death and to celebrate his music. In 1762 the Musical and Amicable Society, which met at a coffee-house for practice and music-making, was officially established. According to *Grove*, this society was 'vital to Birmingham's musical development',<sup>25</sup> presumably because its drawing together of singers from several of the local church choirs for the formation of the Society was probably the start of the great choral tradition that Birmingham was famed for in the nineteenth century. It was the combination of Hobbs' Handel Festivals and the establishment of the Musical and Amicable Society that led to the first Birmingham Musical Festival in 1768.

The churches of Birmingham were frequently used as venues for musical performance, as were the numerous theatres in the town that housed concerts and musical theatrical productions. In addition, two coffee houses were used for music-making along with the Pleasure Gardens, most notably the Vauxhall and the Apollo Gardens, where the popular music of the day – mostly Arne and Handel – could be heard.<sup>26</sup> The other significant secular music venue in Birmingham in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was the Royal Hotel, and it was here that Joseph Moore, at

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<sup>23</sup> Handford, 'Music in Birmingham', p.53.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Handford. 'Birmingham'. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 6 Apr. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/03130>>.

<sup>26</sup> Handford, 'Music in Birmingham', p.54. The Vauxhall Gardens were presumably modelled on those of the same name in London, with the name itself indicating a desire to emulate London fashion. See Nicholas Temperley, et al. 'London (i)'. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 20 Jul. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/16904pg5>>.

the suggestion of his friend Matthew Boulton, established his concerts, known as the 'Private Concerts', which were held there from 1799 to 1844.<sup>27</sup>

These concerts established Joseph Moore as one of the leading pioneers of music, improvement and philanthropy in the history of Birmingham. Seeing the immediate success of the Private Concerts, the Musical Committee of the General Hospital, which included Matthew Boulton, approached Moore in 1799 and asked him to take charge of the running of the musical festivals. Under Moore's directorship the festivals grew in stature, increasing the profit for the General Hospital from £897 to £1470 in the first year,<sup>28</sup> until the Birmingham Triennial Musical Festival became one of the most popular and innovative provincial musical festivals in the country. As early as 1805 the local press felt moved to comment on Joseph Moore's great contribution to the Musical Festival:

We cannot close this account without adding our humble tribute of praise to a gentleman of the committee, to whom so much is due from the public for his uncommon industry, application, and arrangements for this festival, and to whose musical taste and judgment this town and neighbourhood are on all occasions, so deeply indebted.<sup>29</sup>

Through Moore's 'industry' the reputation of the festival grew, but he felt that its expansion was being hampered by the inadequate size of St Philip's Church, the venue used for the sacred performances.<sup>30</sup> According to his memoirs, 'it appeared quite evident that, if Birmingham could not raise a finer and better room for the morning performances, the Festivals would soon become unprofitable, and of course must be given up'.<sup>31</sup> This was not just Moore's opinion. In 1826 the *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* assessed the Festival of that year in positive terms, but suggested:

These excellences do not enjoy the praise [...] that really belongs to them, and would as surely follow them [...] on account of the buildings wherein the concerts are heard. This will, we trust, be remedied, for it is an enormous drawback. [...] The town owes it to the promoters of its festival not less than to its own honour to remove the evil as soon as may be practically possible.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gordon Goodwin, 'Moore, Joseph (1766–1851)', rev. Jeremy Dibble, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/19139>, accessed 29 Dec 2008].

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 7 October 1805.

<sup>30</sup> Conrad Gill, in *History of Birmingham, I*, p.76, states that St Philip's had room for a congregation of 2,000.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 2 July 1855. Moore's memoirs were never published and cannot be located. It seems that the extracts quoted in the *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* in 1855 are the only surviving record.

<sup>32</sup> *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, 8 (1826), p.293.



Moore's solution was to suggest that the planned St Peter's Church might be built to a size big enough to house the Festivals, but when the relevant church authorities rejected his proposal, it seems that Moore turned to the notion of building a town hall.<sup>33</sup> Before approaching the Birmingham Commissioners Moore obtained the measurements of the largest concert rooms and halls in Europe, even visiting the 'great room in Amsterdam' himself, and 'made a plan for a room such as I thought suitable for a Town Hall and for the Musical Festival'.<sup>34</sup> After canvassing support from significant members of Birmingham society, Moore presented a memorial to the Commissioners, 'very numerous and respectably signed'.<sup>35</sup>

According to Conrad Gill, 'it is a curious feature of the Commissioners' history that so many of their chief undertakings were suggested to them from outside their membership'.<sup>36</sup> It is widely acknowledged in reports from the nineteenth century to the present day that the Town Hall was the outcome of an organised movement which was led by the Committee of the Musical Festivals, which was in turn led by Joseph Moore.<sup>37</sup> Although the scheme met with general approval from the Commissioners, a town hall could not be built without an Act of Parliament, so the provision for building a town hall was added to the Improvement Act that was already in formation.<sup>38</sup> Within the Act it was stated:

And be it further enacted, That when and so soon as the said Town Hall, with its Appurtenances, shall be erected, the same shall or may thenceforth be used for all Public Meetings called by or under the Direction of the High Bailiff for the Time being of the said Town of BIRMINGHAM, or by or under the Direction of Two or more of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace acting for the County of Warwick, or by or under the Direction of any Ten or more of the said Commissioners appointed by this Act, and for all such other Purposes as the said High Bailiff, Justices, or Commissioners shall from Time to Time order and direct.<sup>39</sup>

Whilst this statement seems congruent with the erection and consequent uses of a municipal building, the centre of local government, the following statement does not. The Act continues by stating that the above uses are permitted,

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<sup>33</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 2 July 1855.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Gill, *History of Birmingham*, I, p.198.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.320.

<sup>37</sup> Two examples of this acknowledgment can be seen in the *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* of 2 July 1855, which states that Birmingham Town Hall 'may be said to owe its very existence' to Joseph Moore, and the article on Moore in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [accessed 29 December 2008], which states that Moore 'began actively to agitate for the erection of a new town hall'.

<sup>38</sup> For the history of this act see Gill, *History of Birmingham*, I, pp.178-198.

<sup>39</sup> Extracts from Minutes of Street Commissioners, 1827-[c.1835], relating to the building of the Birmingham Town Hall, Birmingham City Archives, 422407 (IIR 18).

provided, nevertheless, that the said Town Hall and its Appurtenances shall also, for the Space of Six Weeks before the day appointed for any Musical Festival to be from Time to Time held in the said Town for the Benefit of the BIRMINGHAM General Hospital, and during the Continuance of the said Festival, and for Seven Days afterwards, be under the Control and Direction of the Committee of Governors of the General Hospital appointed to superintend the Arrangement of each Musical Festival; and the said Governors, or such Board or Committee thereof, shall have power to put up an organ in the said Town Hall, the Property of which organ shall be vested solely in them, and they shall have free Access thereto at all suitable Times, for Practice and Rehearsals, and other necessary Purposes connected with or preparatory to the said Musical Festival; and also to erect therein, at the Period of the said Musical Festival, such temporary Seats, Galleries, Scaffoldings, and other Conveniences as they shall deem requisite, and afterwards to remove the same, and deposit the Materials in some convenient part of the said Town Hall to be provided for that Purpose, they the said Governors or Committee repairing and reinstating the said Town Hall in such parts thereof as shall be injured in consequence of such Use or Occupation thereof by them, or any other Person under their Authority.<sup>40</sup>

The key point here is that the Musical Committee was given the power to take control of the Town Hall when it was needed for the Musical Festival, taking precedence over all the business of local government. It seems even at this preliminary stage that the use of the Town Hall for music-making was an overriding concern; the fact that it was mentioned in the Act at all shows that music was of great significance to the erection of the building. Although difficult to say for certain, it is probable that this is the first instance of the needs of music-making being given the same status as the needs of local government, especially in the building of a town hall.

### 3.4: Justification

It is difficult to imagine, however, how the Musical Committee persuaded the Commissioners to agree to their extensive plans when a much smaller and cheaper building would have been enough to accommodate the needs of the town Commissioners at this time. In fact there had been a local government building in Birmingham since 1807. In 1802 the 'Lamp' Commissioners and County Magistracy moved to jointly erect a 'Public Office', which contained a prison and court house for the Magistracy and a meeting room and office for the Commissioners. This building fulfilled the accommodation needs of the Commissioners but the business of the magistrates soon overflowed into offices in different parts of the town.<sup>41</sup> By 1827 the magistrates complained that the accommodation provided in the Public Office was too small. Therefore, in his quest for a town hall, Moore would probably have had the

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> For more on the Birmingham Public Office see Gill, *History of Birmingham, I*, p.182, and G.L. Hamilton, 'The Transformation of the Town Hall in England in the Nineteenth Century', (unpublished MA Dissertation, King's College, Courtauld Institute of Art, 1971), pp.5 and 11.

backing of the town magistrates, if not the Commissioners. It can be argued, however, that Joseph Moore held two trump cards, important in the nineteenth century, that could be presented to the Birmingham Commissioners as modes of persuasion – those of civic pride and philanthropy.

Asa Briggs, in his study of early nineteenth-century Birmingham, suggests that civic pride was prevalent among the cities inhabitants throughout the century. As early as 1812, Thomas Attwood, in a letter to his wife, favourably compared the men of Birmingham with the members of Parliament he had met in London:

Such a foolish set of mortals as the members of both Houses are, I did never expect to meet with in this world. The best among them are scarce equal to the worst in Birmingham.<sup>42</sup>

In his work, Briggs acknowledges that such local pride was not just a phenomenon of the nineteenth century, but argues that ‘it helped to shape the character of men and the moulding of an environment’.<sup>43</sup> It was this civic pride that Joseph Moore drew on when submitting his resolution for a town hall to the Commissioners. The Musical Committee was very careful in the phrasing of the resolution at the beginning of its campaign, in asking whether the Commissioners would consider erecting a building ‘suitable for magisterial and other public business, and at the same time be available for the holding of the Musical Festival’.<sup>44</sup> There is no reason why the organisers of the Musical Festival would be concerned with providing Birmingham with a building ‘suitable for magisterial and other public business’; but by introducing this as the crux of the argument, appealing to the Commissioners’ civic consciousness, they could then subtly add the real reason for the resolution, ‘the holding of the Musical Festival’, as a secondary statement. If this did not appeal to the Commissioners then the following statement, ‘every town in the kingdom of any importance, with the solitary exception of Birmingham, is possessed of a Town Hall [...] and it is not creditable to the public spirit of the place to be left without such accommodation’,<sup>45</sup> could not have failed to. The benefit of the Festivals for Birmingham as a whole may also have been noted in the local-pride argument. It seems impossible for the Commissioners to ignore the overall

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<sup>42</sup> Letter from Thomas Attwood to Mrs Attwood, 30 April 1812, quoted in C.M. Wakefield, *The Life of Thomas Attwood* (London: Privately printed, 1885), p.24.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Asa Briggs, ‘Press and Public in Early Nineteenth-Century Birmingham’, in *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs: Volume One – Words, Numbers, Places, People* (Urbana and Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1985), 106-137 (pp.108-109).

<sup>44</sup> Extracts from Minutes of Street Commissioners, 1827-[c.1835], Relating to the building of the Birmingham Town Hall, Birmingham City Archives, 422407 (IIR 18).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

benefit to the town of Birmingham that a larger music festival, through the provision of a larger building, could provide.

Joseph Moore's other hope may have been an appeal to the Commissioners' sense of philanthropy. Philanthropy in the nineteenth century was a subject of national pride. As Sarah Lloyd observes, 'acts of individual benevolence and contributions to organised charities were promoted as a Christian duty made necessary by social inequality', whilst organised philanthropy such as the musical festivals 'claimed to advance public interest and order', establishing moral reform as a requirement of social improvement.<sup>46</sup> The voluntary hospital of the eighteenth century was one of the most popular outlets for philanthropy, as a means not only of healing the sick but as a way of bridging the widening gulf between the social classes. In his article 'Philanthropy and Provincial Hospitals in Eighteenth-Century England', Roy Porter suggests that the voluntary hospital 'threw a cloak of charity over the bones of poverty and naked repression, [enabling] the polite and propertied to pose as tender souls'.<sup>47</sup> Moore held the opinion that without the new building the Musical Festivals would no longer be sustainable, and thus the main source of income for the General Hospital would be terminated. Faced with such a prediction, it would have been difficult for the Commissioners to have ignored this responsibility when making their decision. However, by using this argument the Musical Committee was not simply appealing to the Commissioners' sense of philanthropy in order to provide itself with a concert hall. They too were motivated by their own philanthropic concerns for the hospital. Cunningham, in his study of the building of Birmingham Town Hall, states that 'the charitable intentions of the musical society [i.e. the Musical Committee] need to be taken as seriously as their commitment to high art'.<sup>48</sup> An article from the *Musical Times* about the history of the Festival seems to confirm this:

The history of its many meetings – dating back even as far as 1768 – records equal benefit to Art and Charity; and it must indeed be a satisfaction to all engaged in so laudable an object to reflect that, whilst accumulating a fund for the assistance of one of the most deserving institutions in existence, they are at the same time enriching the world of music by the presentation of enduring works which, but for such an incentive to exertion, might never have been created.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Sarah Lloyd, 'Philanthropy', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, 643-4.

<sup>47</sup> Roy Porter, 'The Gift Relation: Philanthropy and Provincial Hospitals in Eighteenth-Century England', in *The Hospital in History*, ed. by Lindsay Granshaw and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1990), 149-178 (p.152).

<sup>48</sup> Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, pp.43-44.

<sup>49</sup> Henry C. Lunn, 'The Birmingham Musical Festival', in *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 14 (1870), p.615. The Committee went to great lengths to make sure that the greatest

While the Commissioners seem to have been convinced of the need to provide a building for the Musical Festivals, and to use public money through a town rate to erect it under the title of 'town hall', other Birmingham citizens were not. In May 1830 the Commissioners received the following memorandum:

We the undersigned have heard with considerable regret, that clauses were introduced into the Act of Parliament obtained during the session of 1828 for the further improvement of this Town, empowering the Commissioners to expend upon the projected Town Hall a large sum of money beyond the amount required for a building adapted to the civil and commercial interests of this large and important town, in order to render it available for the purposes of the Triennial Musical Festival, and also directing that the Town Hall be withdrawn at certain times from the disposal of the Civil Authorities, and placed occasionally under the control of the Committee for managing the affairs of the Oratorio. We beg leave, therefore, to represent that we consider that such an alienation of the edifice from the Civil Authorities, may be attended with serious practical evils; that as theatres, infirmaries, dispensaries, exhibition rooms etc. etc. are supported by voluntary contributions, so a Musical Hall should depend upon the same source for its support, that if a compulsory tax be resorted to, with a view to support the Hospital, it were better to raise it directly for that benevolent object, than indirectly by building a Musical Hall, and especially that as many respectable and liberal inhabitants of the town disapprove of Oratorio's [sic] because in their estimation they are connected with a profanation of religion; it must be offensive to their consciences to contribute towards the object, and it is therefore neither just, nor politic, to require them to do so.

We would, therefore respectfully, but earnestly request the Commissioners to apply to Parliament for the repeal of those clauses in the Act, which relate to the Musical Festival, that they may be at liberty to erect a building entirely independent of the Oratorio.<sup>50</sup>

There seems to be no doubt in the minds of the memorandum writers that this building is not a town hall but a concert hall. They are not objecting to providing Birmingham with a town hall, but are objecting to such a large sum of money being spent on accommodating the Musical Festival when a much smaller and cheaper construction would suffice 'for a building adapted to the civil and commercial interests of this large and important town'. In fact, this memorandum touches on many of the points that are considered in this chapter as anomalies in the building of a town hall: that it seems

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amount of money possible was given to the hospital; even the soloists gave a donation from their fee, however small. Madame Malibran agreed to sing at the Chester, Gloucester and Birmingham musical festivals 'for the sum of one thousand pounds – But as these festivals are held for the purpose of aiding the funds of public charities I agree to give a donation of seventy five pounds to be equally divided between the three charities at Chester, Gloucester and Birmingham'. Letter from Madame Malibran to Joseph Moore, date unknown, Birmingham City Archives, MS 1292/4/6. Whilst £25 from £1000 cannot be described as overly generous, it indicates that the notion of giving money to charity was so prevalent at the Festival that it did not just apply to audiences. In addition, in giving part of her fee to charity, Malibran may have been hoping to combat the image of the grasping 'prima donna' that was prevalent at the time. See Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.166.

<sup>50</sup> Extracts from Minutes of Street Commissioners, 1827-[c.1835], Relating to the building of the Birmingham Town Hall, Birmingham City Archives, 422407 (IIR 18). The term 'Oratorio' was sometimes used as an alternative term to 'Musical Festival' in the nineteenth century.

incongruous for a town hall to at certain times be withdrawn from the civil authorities and placed under the control of the Musical Committee; that it is unusual for this 'musical hall' to be funded by public money; that it is questionable whether a town hall is a suitable place for the performance of sacred music, although here the memorandum writers view the idea of a musical festival on the whole as a 'profanation of religion', rather than the venue itself. This memorial points to those incongruities in the building of Birmingham Town Hall that the Commissioners seem to overlook, although it is possible that some of the Commissioners were among the signatories. The memorandum writers are not even persuaded by the argument of philanthropy, suggesting that building a concert hall in order to save the hospital is rather an indirect means of funding. The number of people who signed the memorandum is not known, but it can be assumed that there must have been several people in agreement in order for the memorandum to be given the attention of the Commissioners at their meeting. There are also surviving letters to the Commissioners from other parties of a like mind. The following is a particularly significant example:

Sensible as I am that a Town Hall in this large and populous place would be a great public convenience [...]; yet with my views, I cannot feel justified without protesting against its intended connexion with the Musical Festival, and I therefore purpose to submit the following Resolution to the next Meeting of the Commissioners –

*That no Money be expended on the Town Hall, with a view to its being appropriated to the performance of the Oratorios, and that an early application be made to Parliament for the Repeal of that part of the present Act which places it occasionally under the control of the Musical Committee of the General Hospital*

[...] I am fully aware how strong an interest is felt by many of the higher and middle classes of the Inhabitants of the Town and Neighbourhood in favour of the Musical Festivals, and should, therefore, notwithstanding my conviction that there is a large and increasing number who altogether disapprove of such performances, have gladly contented myself with silently withdrawing from your body.<sup>51</sup>

This letter is remarkable because it comes from the pen of Joseph Sturge, who was at this time one of the Birmingham Commissioners. The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* describes him as a 'philanthropist' and goes on to say that Sturge's range of interest as a reformer covered such subjects as 'anti-slavery, peace, free trade, suffrage extension, infant schools and Sunday schools, reformatories, spelling reform, teetotalism, hydropathy, and public parks'.<sup>52</sup> With such a wide range of sympathies it seems odd that Sturge was not in favour of erecting a building that would ultimately

<sup>51</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 1292/9/1.

<sup>52</sup> Alex Tyrrell, 'Sturge, Joseph (1793–1859)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/26746, accessed 30 April 2009].

fund the voluntary hospital in the town. G.D.H. Cole, the political theorist, writes the following of Joseph Sturge, which perhaps gives some explanation:

His weakness was that, with all his ready sympathy, he looked much less at causes than at effects, and never penetrated below the surface ills of society which he so ardently desired to reform.<sup>53</sup>

Ultimately, Joseph Sturge was objecting to the performance of sacred music in a secular venue, an opinion that was entirely congruent with his beliefs as a Quaker. At the time, the Quakers were a puritanical denomination who saw such performances as blasphemous.<sup>54</sup> Sturge maintained that money could be given to the hospital without the self-indulgence of a festival and a new building to house it, and in October 1834 attempted to prove his point when the following notice appeared in the local newspaper:

Birmingham General Hospital – The Committee of this Charity acknowledge the receipt of the following Donations from ‘several persons who scruple to patronize the use of Sacred Music for amusement, as patronized at Musical Festivals.’ October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1834.<sup>55</sup>

Joseph Sturge’s name is among the list of donors. It is unclear what the collective response of the Commissioners was to those who opposed the building, but it seems that their sense of civic pride and philanthropy countermanded any conflicting views, allowing Joseph Moore to achieve his ideal of a concert hall to save the hospital, and enabling the Birmingham Festival to continue, in the words of the local newspaper, as ‘a powerful agent in the cause of “God-like” Charity’.<sup>56</sup> In 1849 the *Musical Times* printed a statement from the chairman of the Musical Committee, who stated that the General Hospital was dependent upon the Musical Festival for one half of its income.<sup>57</sup> Moore maintained that this would not have been possible without the erection of the Town Hall. Indeed, after Moore’s death *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette* spoke of the public-spiritedness of Joseph Moore, ‘to whom our General Hospital owes much of its present magnitude and extensive usefulness’.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *Chartists Portraits* (London: Macmillan, 1941), p.186.

<sup>54</sup> H. Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge* (London: S.W. Partridge, 1864), p.61.

<sup>55</sup> *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette*, 3 November 1834.

<sup>56</sup> *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette*, 28 June 1852.

<sup>57</sup> *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 3 (1849), p.207.

<sup>58</sup> *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette*, 2 July 1855.

### 3.5: Origin

If Birmingham Town Hall really was built to provide a concert hall for the Musical Festivals, how and why did Joseph Moore decide that, since building a bigger church was not an option, the best course of action was to build a town hall? In his memoirs he says simply, 'The thought of the Hospital losing such an important means of support [i.e. the musical festival] induced me to try to have a building erected for a Town Hall'.<sup>59</sup> This statement by Moore belies a more complex history. Birmingham Town Hall was built many years before such large municipal buildings as Leeds and Manchester town halls; so how did Joseph Moore conceive of the idea to build a town hall as a music venue? Without an answer in his memoirs, this question cannot be answered definitively. There is, however, certain evidence from which one may speculate. Historically, a venue devoted entirely to music-making was a rare thing. Apart from a few exceptions, such as the eighteenth-century Holywell Music Room in Oxford and the Music Hall in Liverpool, concerts at this time were given in multipurpose buildings. In his chapter, 'Concert Topography and Provincial Towns in Eighteenth-Century England', Peter Borsay concludes:

The eighteenth century saw the emergence and development of concert life in England. But generally this was not accompanied in provincial towns by the establishment of purpose-built or specialist musical auditoriums. By and large concerts had to make do with locations – such as town halls, inns, theatres and assembly rooms – constructed primarily to serve some other function.<sup>60</sup>

Whilst the links between music, theatres, inns and assembly rooms have been widely recorded in most studies of eighteenth-century concert life, it is rare to find a discussion of musical performances held in town halls in the eighteenth century. As we have seen, an eighteenth-century town hall was generally a utilitarian building, often with an assembly hall above an open market arcade, with the emphasis on 'providing accommodation for both townspeople and the neighbouring gentry'.<sup>61</sup> According to Borsay, town halls were widely used for concerts at a time when 'public buildings containing a large room or hall provided one obvious resource to call upon'.<sup>62</sup> Moore may have had one such example in mind. In his book, *The Concert Tradition*, Percy Young quotes an advertisement from the *Worcester Journal* of 7 July 1732, which

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Peter Borsay, 'Concert Topography and Provincial Towns in Eighteenth-Century England', in *Concert Life in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 19-33 (p.33).

<sup>61</sup> Colin Cunningham, 'Town Hall', in *The Dictionary of Art*.

<sup>62</sup> Borsay 'Concert Topography', p.22.



reads, 'On Tuesday, August 1, 1732, in the evening, at the Town Hall, will be performed a Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Musick, for the benefit of Mr William Hayes, Organist of the Cathedral'.<sup>63</sup> Since Worcester did not have a town hall in 1732, this is probably a reference to a concert at the Guildhall, which was at times also referred to as a town hall. If this building was used as a venue for concerts, and Joseph Moore was aware of this, having been educated in Worcester, it seems possible that Worcester Guildhall/Town Hall may have given him inspiration.

There was another precedent in the North. When the York Festival had reached the same crisis point as Birmingham - the large audiences at the festival of 1823 revealing that the York Assembly Rooms were no longer big enough to accommodate the growing number of patrons at the evening concerts - they built the 'Festival Concert Room', attached to the Assembly Rooms, with money raised from a second musical festival in 1825.<sup>64</sup> Although Joseph Moore and his Musical Committee must have known of this building, it seems that they were either unwilling or financially unable to do the same. This may have been because the Birmingham building was to be substantially bigger, at near double the cost; or it may have been because the situation in Birmingham was slightly different to that in York. Joseph Moore was looking for a building that would provide accommodation for the Festival's sacred performances, which had previously been held in the church. There is never any mention of the New Street Theatre, the venue for the secular performances, being unable to accommodate the large number of festival attendees.<sup>65</sup> In fact, when the Town Hall was first opened, the New Street Theatre was sometimes still used for the festival's secular evening performances. If the committee was unable to find further sacred accommodation and consequently had to have recourse to the secular accommodation of a town hall, would it not have been possible to hold the whole festival in the theatre? One answer to this question, of course, is the likelihood that the theatre was not seen as a suitable venue for the performance of sacred music. The minister of Carr's Lane Chapel in

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<sup>63</sup> Percy M. Young, *The Concert Tradition From the Middles Ages to the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 98.

<sup>64</sup> *The Harmonicon*, 1824, p.102.

<sup>65</sup> The New Street Theatre was originally built in 1774, although in 1792 it was burnt down. By 1796 the building had been restored and extended to hold 2,000 people. At this period in its history, drama only occupied the theatre for part of the year. At the other times of the year the entertainment was more variety based, often looking forward to the Victorian Music Hall. In 1820 the theatre was again destroyed by fire. In the same year a new, extravagant theatre was built on the site and named the Theatre Royal. It was said to be 'scarcely equalled out of London, either for accommodation or elegance'; see W. Hutton, *The History of Birmingham, Volume I* (Birmingham: James Guest, 1835), p.287.



Trinity College Hall, Cambridge. 110 feet long, 40 feet wide, 50 feet high.  
 Crosby Hall, London. 69 feet long, 27 feet wide, 36 feet high.  
 Old Hall, Christ's Hospital. 151 feet long, 30 feet wide, 28 feet high  
 New Hall, Christ's Hospital. 187 feet long, 51 feet wide, 49 feet high  
 Eltham Hall, Kent – 101 feet long, 36 feet wide, 40 feet high<sup>69</sup>

The original specifications of Birmingham Town Hall were 145 feet long, 65 feet wide, and 65 feet high.

Although the above quoted document is not the original from Moore's 1827 trip to Europe, since it is dated 25 April 1828, it does give some indication of the type of hall he was considering as a model. It is difficult to know how closely Moore's specifications were followed in the final design, but a letter from Joseph Hansom, the eventual architect of Birmingham Town Hall, to the *Architectural Magazine* reports that there was some interaction between the architect and the Musical Committee: 'at the suggestions of a gentleman connected with the musical arrangements, an alteration was made in the interior decoration or finish of the walls, by substituting Corinthian pilasters and cornices, for an adaptation of the Ionic antae which I had designed'.<sup>70</sup> Although there is no further evidence as to who this 'gentleman' was, it seems highly likely that it was Joseph Moore, indicating that he continued to influence the design of the building during construction. In addition, Moore's memoirs suggest that his specifications were followed quite closely:

I had agreed to allow the width and height [of the Hall] to be reduced to sixty-five feet, but the room would be spoiled for the purposes of the Festival unless ten feet were added to [the length of] it.<sup>[71]</sup> [...] After waiting some time I begged [that the Commissioners] would state what this addition of ten feet would cost, and they informed me that they could make this additional length for 1200l., and our hospital committee agreed to pay that sum out of the profits of the next Festival.<sup>72</sup>

However, the Musical Committee did face opposition on certain matters, generally those concerning expenditure. The cost of their preferred site for the Town Hall, on the corner of Waterloo Street and Bennett's Hill, proved too expensive for the Commissioners.<sup>73</sup> Despite the protestations of the Committee, the Commissioners

<sup>69</sup> Manuscript, *Specifications of Concert Halls*, dated 25 April 1828, Birmingham City Archives, MS 1292/8/6.

<sup>70</sup> *The Architectural Magazine and Journal of Improvement in Architecture, Building and Furnishing and in the Various Arts and Trades Connected Therewith*, 11 (1835), p.238.

<sup>71</sup> It is likely that Moore is referring here to the need to extend the room in order to accommodate the large organ that was requested by the Musical Committee. The subject of the organ and the extension of the hall will be discussed later.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 2 July 1855.

<sup>73</sup> It seems that the Musical Committee favoured this site because of the amount of room available for building and its position was 'most convenient'; it was a site 'equally desirable in

would not compromise, with the result that the Musical Committee was forced to seek an alternative.<sup>74</sup> Although the Musical Committee were overruled by the Commissioners on this occasion, this episode in the building of the Town Hall confirms the integral part played by the Musical Committee in the planning of the building, even to the extent of recommending the site. It must be remembered, however, that there were members of the Musical Committee who were also Birmingham Commissioners, so such persons will most likely have been working in the interests not only of the Musical Festival but of the town as a whole.<sup>75</sup> The site eventually chosen upon was land with a frontage to Paradise Street. At the time of purchase the site was enclosed by houses, but it was decided to buy the surrounding land as soon as possible so that the appearance of the town hall 'might not be spoilt by incongruous buildings beside it'.<sup>76</sup> According to Gill, from this time onwards the policy of the local government was to buy up property in this district as it became available, indicating 'the germ of the modern design of a civic centre'.<sup>77</sup>

The design of Birmingham Town Hall was chosen by an architectural competition, probably the first held for a town hall design in England. Such competitions were not new to the nineteenth century; there is evidence of artistic competitions dating back to the fifth century B.C. According to Joan Bassin, 'competition as practiced [sic] in Victorian England seems to have arisen as a result of the history of the organization and development of the architectural profession and in response to the economic and social development of England during the century'.<sup>78</sup> Although the latter half of the eighteenth century had witnessed architectural competitions for buildings of a public or semi-public nature, they were often carried out in an arbitrary manner. The competition for the Houses of Parliament in 1835 is considered to have firmly established the competitions system and set the standard for

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all respects'. It was in the centre of Birmingham, at the heart of the town improvements that were taking place at that time – a hall in the fashionable part of town would add to the appeal of the venue. See Gill, *History of Birmingham*, I, p.198.

<sup>74</sup> See Frank Salmon, *Building on Ruins: The Rediscovery of Rome and English Architecture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p.153.

<sup>75</sup> It has not been possible to locate precise information regarding the membership of the Birmingham Commissioners or the Musical Committee in the early 1830s.

<sup>76</sup> Gill, *History of Birmingham*, I, p.323.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Joan Bassin, *Architectural Competitions in Nineteenth-Century England* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1984), p.3.

future open competitions.<sup>79</sup> That the strictly regulated architectural competition for Birmingham Town Hall was initiated five years before that of the Houses of Parliament, gives some indication of the forward-thinking of those concerned with its erection. The Birmingham competition was advertised as follows:

The Commissioners of the Birmingham Street Act having determined to ERECT a TOWN HALL on a site recently purchased by them in Paradise Street and Congreve Street, are desirous of receiving PLANS, SPECIFICATIONS, and ESTIMATES of the proposed building, which is to be used for the musical festivals as well as for the general purposes of a town hall.<sup>80</sup> A premium of £100 will be paid to the architect who shall furnish the plan most approved by the Commissioners, and £60 and £40 to the respective parties who shall supply the second and third best, with the understanding that such plans are at the disposal of the Commissioners. A ground plot of the land, showing its extent, form and level, may be obtained by application to Messrs. Arnold and Haines, solicitors, Birmingham, of whom also further particulars may be had. The plans, specifications, and estimates must be delivered to us, sealed up, and addressed to "The Town Hall Committee," on or before the 1<sup>st</sup> day of February next. By order of the Commissioners. Birmingham, Dec. 2, 1830.<sup>81</sup>

The above advertisement gives no specific details of the requirements for the building, but architectural historian Frank Salmon has compared the drawings of the three finalists, Rickman & Hutchinson, John Fallows, and Joseph Hansom & Edward Welch, in addition to the design submitted by Charles Barry, and suggests that the following were the functional requirements of the building:

There was to be a hall of 140x65 ft, 65ft high, capable of accommodating at least 3000 people, in part on public galleries at the south end and along the east and west sides. At the north end there was to be an orchestra gallery, where an organ would also be situated. At least one room was to be provided for committee meetings, together with rooms for retiring and refreshment. Domestic accommodation was required for a caretaker.<sup>82</sup>

Although this is speculation on Salmon's part, it is significant to note how dominant a concern the required musical accommodation is compared with the accommodation for the Commissioners. Birmingham Town Hall was the first such building. Earlier town halls had been utilitarian constructions, often containing a large hall, but ultimately built for the purposes of local government. However, *The Builder* of 1878 suggests that:

Birmingham Town Hall is an almost exceptional specimen. The existence of one great room is the emphatic feature of the building, which, as everyone remembers, is externally a sort of

<sup>79</sup> For more on the development of the competition system see Bassin, *Architectural Competitions*, pp.1-17.

<sup>80</sup> Note the priority given to the use of the building for 'musical festivals' over the 'general purposes of a town hall'.

<sup>81</sup> *The Times*, 16 December 1830.

<sup>82</sup> Salmon, *Building on Ruins*, p.156.

Classic temple, on an elevated basement, in which the business requirements may find space how they can: the hall is the *raison d'être* of the building.<sup>83</sup>

Briggs also observes that the Town Hall 'was not set aside for the purposes of local government, and while thousands of people could gather there for great political meetings – or music festivals – the Town Council met in a room which allowed space only for about a dozen of the public to stand and watch'.<sup>84</sup> Although this would seem to confirm that the needs of the local government were a low priority in the building of the Town Hall, Colin Cunningham suggests that, at the time, a single committee room would have been considered sufficient for the needs of the Commissioners, and 'entirely appropriate for the Birmingham Town Hall'.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, while it is right to suggest that 'the hall is the *raison d'être* of the building', this was not necessarily at the expense of the local government.

Out of the seventy competition entries, the winning design was that of the young Liverpool architect Joseph Hansom, for a building that was to be a replica of the Temple of Jupiter Stator in Rome.<sup>86</sup> The end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 had seen the re-establishment of the Grand Tour of Europe for the wealthy and highly educated, which in turn stimulated a renewed enthusiasm in Roman architecture. For those unable to embark on a 'Tour' themselves, a series of publications appeared, charting many of the historical and architectural landmarks. In 1821 *The Architectural Antiquities of Rome*, a book by Taylor and Cresy, was published, containing detailed information on various Roman temples with their excavations and measurements, and the Jupiter Stator is one of those recorded.<sup>87</sup> Salmon is of the opinion that this book was the source used by Joseph Hansom, due to the relationship in proportions between Taylor and Cresy's surveys and Hansom's design.<sup>88</sup> According to Salmon, the erection of public buildings of a 'Roman' design, 'show[s] the appropriation of Roman

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<sup>83</sup> *The Builder*, 36 (1878), 821-822 (p.822).

<sup>84</sup> Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p.209.

<sup>85</sup> Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p.8.

<sup>86</sup> According to the *Architectural Magazine* of 1835, quoted in *Mechanics' Magazine*, 22 (1835), p.271, the design of the Birmingham Town Hall 'was one jointly produced by Messrs. Hansom and Welch two years before, and was intended for Fishmonger's Hall, London'. This assertion was not widely reported and seems unlikely. Hansom was adamant that his partner Welch had nothing to do with the design for Birmingham Town Hall. Even if Hansom had used the model of the Jupiter Stator for the Fishmongers' Hall, the specifications for Birmingham Town Hall as a concert hall would have been so precise that any previous designs would have needed to be severely altered.

<sup>87</sup> George Ledwell Taylor and Edward Cresy, *The Architectural Antiquities of Rome; measured and delineated, etc.* 2 volumes. (London: n.p., 1821, 1822).

<sup>88</sup> The Birmingham building is almost exactly three quarters the height of the Roman model. See Salmon, *Building on Ruins*, pp.160-162.

paradigms by the rising urban middle classes, in some cases working to establish new identities'.<sup>89</sup> Therefore it is likely that the Birmingham Commissioners selected the design of a Roman temple for their Town Hall as a symbol of the town's stability, permanence, and status as an important industrial and cultural centre, linking the building with the glories of past civilisations - it was to be 'a temple to the collective and democratic endeavour of the Birmingham people'.<sup>90</sup>

### 3.7: Design of the Organ

After Joseph Moore's plans for the town hall had been accepted by the Commissioners, Moore began to research ideal specifications for the organ he wanted in the building. Since the Musical Festivals had previously been held in a church, an organ had become a crucial feature of the sacred performances, and Moore therefore decided that an organ was a necessity for the new hall. In order to secure a superior instrument Moore journeyed to Amsterdam, Haarlem, Hamburg and Berlin to view what he considered the biggest and the best of the organs on the continent, to make sure that Birmingham Town Hall would, in his words, 'obtain an Organ proportioned to the edifice and equal to the finest organs in Europe'.<sup>91</sup> The organ was paid for through subscription, sought through the distribution of an appeal leaflet, and through money from the Musical Festival. Continuing the arguments justifying the erection of the Town Hall, the leaflet suggested that the organ would 'be an honour to the Country, and tend to perpetuate the widely extended benefits which Charity, through the means of the General Hospital, has been, and is daily conferring upon the most appalling cases of human misery', and that to deliver a Festival in aid of charity without an organ would be an 'impossibility'.<sup>92</sup> It was inconceivable to the Musical Committee for the Town Hall to be built without an organ; as the *Mechanics' Magazine* reported in 1834: 'The Committee consider such an organ indispensably requisite for the production of those choral effects, which have hitherto rendered the Birmingham festivals so attractive'.<sup>93</sup> However, the presence of an organ at all in a town hall at this juncture in the nineteenth century was an unusual thing. In fact, Birmingham Town Hall was the first town hall in England to have an organ. Architectural historian Mark Girouard suggests that,

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.166.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 2 July 1855.

<sup>92</sup> Printed appeal leaflet and list of subscribers for the organ for the Town Hall, 1833. Birmingham City Archives, Plan 214.

<sup>93</sup> *Mechanics' Magazine*, 21 (1834), p.403.

through the example set by Birmingham Town Hall, 'an organ became an essential status symbol for all similar buildings'.<sup>94</sup> This instrument was to set a precedent and pave the way for the magnificent instruments of later in the century in such town halls as Leeds and Manchester.

### 3.8: Press and Public Response

Birmingham Town Hall was officially opened on 7 October 1834, with, appropriately, a musical festival. The event drew some telling responses from the press. Some reports, such as the following from *Old England*, simply referred to the 'magnificent new Town-Hall, said to be the largest in the world'.<sup>95</sup> Others, like the *Athenaeum*, referred just to the 'splendid music room',<sup>96</sup> with *The Times* in 1852 going as far as to say that 'The Birmingham Town-hall is one of the finest music-rooms in Europe'.<sup>97</sup> Likewise, the local *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* says that the 1834 Musical Festival 'has established the Town Hall as by far the best constructed as well as the most splendid music-room in Europe'.<sup>98</sup> Although such reports refer to the building as a 'town hall', suggesting that the building was a town hall with a concert room inside, when *The Times* says that Birmingham Town Hall 'is' one of the finest music-rooms in Europe, rather than Birmingham Town Hall 'has' one of the finest music-rooms, it acknowledges that the large hall, the 'music-room', fills the majority of the edifice. As already noted, in Birmingham Town Hall 'the existence of one great room is the emphatic feature of the building. [...] The hall is the *raison d'être* of the building'.<sup>99</sup> For *The Times* to say that Birmingham Town Hall 'is' a music-room was therefore congruent with its conception and design. *The Times* was not the only publication to describe the building in this way. The *Gentleman's Magazine* said the Town Hall was 'by far the best constructed, as well as the most splendid, music room in Great Britain, if not in the whole world',<sup>100</sup> and the *Musical World* reported:

The townsfolk have both wisdom and wealth, and in the spirit of the one, and with the aid of the other, they have built themselves a music-room. [...] This Town Hall, as it is called, is really a superb building of its kind.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Girouard, *The English Town*, p.207.

<sup>95</sup> 11 October 1834.

<sup>96</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 364 (1834), p.770.

<sup>97</sup> 8 September 1852.

<sup>98</sup> 13 October 1834.

<sup>99</sup> *The Builder*, 36 (1878), p.822.

<sup>100</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1834), p.520.

<sup>101</sup> *Musical World*, 7 (1840), p.217.



Here again the Hall is referred to as a 'music-room', but the final sentence seems slightly ironic, as if the reporter does not believe that this was a town hall at all.

A number of journals and newspapers of the time take their reporting of the Hall one step further, referring to Birmingham not as having a new town hall, but reporting, instead, the opening of a new music hall. The *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* reported that 'there has been one of the most splendid music-meetings ever held, at Birmingham during the past month, upon which occasion the new music-hall was opened'.<sup>102</sup> The newspaper the *True Sun* goes so far as to say, 'The Music Hall of Birmingham is the most magnificent building of the kind in Europe'.<sup>103</sup> But if Birmingham Town Hall is being hailed as one of the best concert rooms in Europe, were the newspapers of Europe of the same opinion? There was certainly continued press coverage of the Birmingham Festivals in the European newspapers throughout the century, but it has also been possible to locate articles on the opening of the hall in *Le Pianiste* and *La Gazette Musicale de Paris* of France and the *Neue Leipziger Zeitschrift für Musik* of Germany, which reported:

This year's festival also served as the official opening of the new building erected by this rich manufacturing town for large gatherings and in particular for musical performances. Its dimensions are large, but it is acoustically so well-made that it is possible to pick up the quietest sounds from all parts of the hall. Even the pianoforte can be heard here: Moscheles earned outstanding applause, and the subtlety of his playing could be appreciated by the more than 3,500 persons present in this gigantic venue as much as if it were a normal-sized room.<sup>104</sup>

Whilst this article does not call Birmingham Town Hall the best concert room in Europe, it does seem to consider the edifice to be a superior music venue, and at no point is the building called a town hall. Later in the century Birmingham Town Hall was still often referred to as a concert hall rather than a town hall, the *Musical World* in

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<sup>102</sup> *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* (1834), p.360.

<sup>103</sup> *True Sun*, 9 October 1834.

<sup>104</sup> 'Die ganze Uufmertsamkeit der Musikliebhaber in England beschäftigte unlängst das grosse Musikfest in Birmingham, (am 11. Oct.), welches, seit 1784 alle drei Jahr niederkehrend, dieses Jahr jugleich zur Einmeihung des grossen Saala gedient hat, don diese reiche Fabrikstadt für grosse Bersammlungen und insbesondere für musik. Productionen erbaut hat. Die Dimensionen sind grossartig, aber von so richtigen akustischen Berhältniffen, dass man in allen Theilen des Saals die zartsten Modulationen deutlich vernehmen kann. Selbst das Pianoforte macht hier Effect. Moscheles hat auf demselben den glänzendsten Beifall geerntet. Die ganze Feinheit des Spiels tonnte in diesem ungeheuren Local, mie in einem gemöhnlichen Saal, von mehr als 3500 Personen vollkommen gemürdigt merden'. *Neue Leipziger Zeitschrift für Musik*, 20 November 1834. I am grateful to John Wagstaff for translating this passage. Ignaz Moscheles was engaged as soloist for this festival and played his pianoforte solo, *Souvenirs d'Irlande* (Recollections of Ireland), op.69. See *Spectator*, 11 October 1834, 965-966 (p.966); and Jerome Roche and Henry Roche. 'Moscheles, Ignaz.' *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. 28 Jul. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/19185>>.

1858 reporting that the building was ‘an edifice which excited general admiration as the finest concert-room in the world’.<sup>105</sup>

Whenever Birmingham Town Hall was compared with other buildings by the press, as in this example, seen in table 7, from the *Birmingham Daily Post*, 12 July 1884, it was normally with concert halls rather than with municipal buildings.

Table 7: Comparison of specifications of concert halls

	Length.	Width.	Superficial Area devoted to Audience
Covent Garden (London).....	80	80	7,120
St. James' Hall (London).....	134	65	8,040
Exeter Hall (London).....	133	77	10,241
Liverpool Philharmonic.....	108	64	6,912
Birmingham Town Hall.....	130	65	8,450
San Carlos (Naples).....	100	85	8,500
Grand Opera (Paris).....	103	102	10,506
La Scala (Milan).....	105	87	9,135
Metropolitan (New York).....	108	101	10,508
Albert Palace Concert Hall (Battersea)	157	118	17,625

Generally Birmingham Town Hall is considered to be the superior music venue, with statements such as the following appearing in the musical press on a regular basis: ‘We have been assured by persons acquainted with almost all the spacious rooms in England and on the continent, that the Birmingham Hall surpasses every one they have seen, for the purposes of grand musical performances’.<sup>106</sup> Inevitably there was much comparison between Birmingham Town Hall and London music venues, often provoking positive comment from London reporters. A reporter in the *Athenaeum* was referring to the hall in Birmingham when he wrote: ‘our envious London eyes [...] would see so splendid a concert-room within our own boundaries’.<sup>107</sup>

In addition, Birmingham Town Hall is reported only rarely in a newspaper’s ‘provincial news’. Whether the building is referred to as a town hall or a concert hall, the account is most often found in the musical review section of the newspaper, suggesting that the new building was thought of as more significant to the musical world than the political. In the majority of press coverage, from the opening of the hall in 1834 to the present day, Birmingham Town Hall is celebrated as a seat of music-making, not of local government.

<sup>105</sup> *Musical World*, 36 (1858), p.628.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 78 (1837), p.204.

<sup>107</sup> *Athenaeum*, 983 (1846), p.891.

Although a number of Birmingham inhabitants disagreed with the erection of the Town Hall, once opened it excited a great deal of interest among Birmingham residents and beyond, for playing 'a great part in forming the public spirit and character of Birmingham'.<sup>108</sup> Even a year after its opening the local newspaper reported that a large number of people were still requesting daily to view the building:

It having been reported to the Commissioners of the Birmingham Street Act, that Applications are being made at all hours of the day by Persons desirous of seeing the Hall [...] – the Commissioners have directed that the Hall be opened for general inspection *between the hours of ten and four on every day of the week, except Sundays and Thursdays*, and that on *Thursday* it be open *from ten to twelve*.<sup>109</sup>

Certainly, the presence of a colossal 'Roman temple' in the centre of Birmingham in the early 1830s, 'on a scale of magnificence at present unattempted in this country',<sup>110</sup> provoked much attention. The assertion that it contained 'the finest and the most stupendous instrument ever erected' must also have been a crowd-puller.<sup>111</sup> However, more than that, Birmingham Town Hall was a milestone in architecture,<sup>112</sup> performance space, organ construction, and municipal building. In fact, Frank Salmon, in his study of Roman architecture in England, goes so far as to suggest that Birmingham Town Hall is 'England's earliest truly civic building'.<sup>113</sup> Whether a town hall or a concert hall, from its opening this building became central to the civic life of the people of Birmingham, raising Birmingham 'high in estimation among the towns of England'.<sup>114</sup> Surely Joseph Moore's trump-cards of civic pride and philanthropy had made the difference.

### 3.9: Reception of the Organ

At the time of the first Festival in 1834, the full organ, although playable, was not yet fully installed. Nevertheless, the instrument still invited speculative comment from the press. The *Mechanics Magazine*, for example, said of the instrument:

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<sup>108</sup> Elihu Burritt, *Walks in the Black Country and its Green Border-land* (London: S. Low, Son, and Marston, 1868), p.64.

<sup>109</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 19 October 1835.

<sup>110</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 1 September 1834. Joe Holyoak's more recent description of Birmingham Town Hall being like 'an ocean liner anchored in a fishing village' seems particularly apt. See *All About Victoria Square* (Birmingham: The Victorian Society Birmingham Group, 1989), p.7.

<sup>111</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 13 October 1834. This is just one example of the hyperbole used by the local and national press when describing the Birmingham Town Hall organ.

<sup>112</sup> Frank Salmon suggests: 'With Birmingham Town Hall, both as conceived and as built, English public architecture moved on to a new footing'. *Building on Ruins*, p.168.

<sup>113</sup> Frank Salmon, *Building on Ruins*, p.22.

<sup>114</sup> *Architectural Magazine*, 11 (1835), p.27.

This superb organ will greatly exceed, in the extent of its powers, the most noted of those on the Continent – including those of Haarlem and Rotterdam, as well as the beautiful instrument recently erected in the Cathedral at York: it will embody all the contrivances and improvements which the present advanced state of musical mechanical science can suggest.<sup>115</sup>

Much of the confidence in the instrument may have been generated by the reputation of its builder, William Hill, the leading organ builder of the day, who had previously erected the large organ in York Minster mentioned in this article.<sup>116</sup> The design of the instrument, however, is less easy to attribute. Moore's part in the creation of the instrument has already been discussed but, in addition, both Sigismund Neukomm and Vincent Novello are credited with its creation.<sup>117</sup> Whoever was responsible, it was designed to be one of the largest and most technically advanced organs in Europe. Unfortunately, as a consequence, it was built to such immense dimensions that the instrument was too big for the Hall. By the Festival of 1837 the organ was complete, the hall having been extended to make more room for the orchestra and singers, but principally in order to accommodate the instrument in a recess.<sup>118</sup> It seems a further indication of the dominance of music over the architecture of Birmingham Town Hall that, instead of the size of the organ being reduced, the size of the room was increased.

Once the fully completed organ had been displayed to the rest of the country through the medium of the 1837 Musical Festival, reports on the instrument began to appear in the national and provincial press. The following article from the *Leeds Mercury* provides a typical example:

The organ as now completed is a most stupendous instrument. The swell and choir organ are inferior to none; and the scale of the pipes in the great organ is larger than in any other organ whatever. The power of the diapasons is finer than any ever built, and in the reeds a posaune equal in power to four trumpets, but finer in quality, with a trumpet, clarion, and fifteenth reed (all upon extra large scale) which, combined with the whole, produce an effect that probably never was before obtained.<sup>119</sup>

Moore had succeeded in his ambitions for the instrument, acquiring an organ that excited much interest not only in general newspapers, but also in the musical and

<sup>115</sup> *Mechanics Magazine*, 20 (1834), p.403.

<sup>116</sup> Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, p.57.

<sup>117</sup> As early as 23 August 1833 *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* attributes the design to Neukomm, but in an advertisement in the *Musical World*, 1 (1836), p.19, Joseph Alfred Novello credits his father with the design of the 'grandest instrument in the world – the new organ in the Town Hall, Birmingham'. The *Morning Post* of 25 September 1843 states that the design was by both Novello and Neukomm. Thistlethwaite, in *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, p.127, agrees that Neukomm was 'certainly involved in some way'.

<sup>118</sup> Nicholas Thistlethwaite, *Birmingham Town Hall Organ* (Birmingham: Birmingham City Council, 1984), p.7.

<sup>119</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 2 September 1837.

scientific press. The organ was considered to be of such interest to the outside world that more than twenty years after its opening it was reported in the Boston periodical, *Dwight's Journal of Music*, that 'the Hall is open on two or more days in the week, between 11 and 12 o'clock, for the exhibition of the organ to strangers, as at Haerlem and Freyburg, in consideration of a small admission fee';<sup>120</sup> the instrument was still being favourably compared with those on the continent. The Birmingham Town Hall organ was generally regarded as one of the foremost instruments in the country, and Thistlethwaite acknowledges it as 'a landmark in English organ building'.<sup>121</sup>

The greatest anomaly regarding the organ in Birmingham Town Hall was that, even though it was housed in an allegedly 'municipal' building, it was not owned by the municipality. The instrument was the property of the Birmingham General Hospital, having been erected out of the proceeds of the Musical Festival since, as the Musical Committee had already persuaded the Commissioners to build a town-hall-cum-concert-hall in the form of a town hall, it would have been unreasonable for them to expect the Commissioners to pay for an organ which was certainly not required for the purposes of local government. It was not until 1890 that ownership of the organ finally transferred from the General Hospital to the Birmingham Corporation. A desire for the Council to purchase the organ from the General Hospital had been expressed in 1864, and the Town Hall Sub Committee was requested to consider the situation, but decided against it at this time.<sup>122</sup> Negotiations for the transfer of ownership began in earnest in 1881 but communications soon broke down, mainly because the Hospital was worried about the loss of control, and therefore the potential loss of revenue.<sup>123</sup> In fact, it could be argued that the Musical Committee of the General Hospital retained ownership of the organ for so long in order to maintain as much control as possible over the use of the Town Hall for its own profit-making.

In 1886 talks began again, and after several meetings between representatives of the General Hospital and the Birmingham Council the following terms were finally agreed in 1887:

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<sup>120</sup> *Dwight's Journal of Music*, 9 (1856), p.44.

<sup>121</sup> Nicholas Thistlethwaite, 'The Organ in Birmingham Town Hall', *Musical Times*, 125 (1984), 593-599 (p.593).

<sup>122</sup> 28 December 1864, Estates and Building Committee 1862-1866, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.

<sup>123</sup> Letter from Mr Evans, Chairman of the Sub-Committee for the transfer of the organ, 20 June 1883, in Estates Committee 1880-1883, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.

1. Subject and without prejudice to the provisions in favour of the Hospital contained in section 74 of the Birmingham Corporation (Consolidation) Act 1883,<sup>124</sup> the Council may use the Organ for any of the purposes specified in the Schedule hereunder written but for those purposes only and may receive for their own benefit all moneys paid for the privilege of using and hearing the Organ when used for those purposes.
2. For exercising any of the privileges hereinbefore mentioned the Council shall have all necessary control over the Organ and may employ their own organist and officials.
3. The Council shall at their own expense keep the Organ in good and efficient repair and insured in the name and for the benefit of the Hospital against damage by fire in the sum of £5,000 and the Council shall also pay the Organist and all expenses in connection with their use of the Organ and of any formal agreement between them and the Hospital.
4. Any question that may arise as to the state of repair of the Organ shall be determined by the Organist of St. Paul's Cathedral London or some other competent and independent person to be agreed upon by the Council and the Hospital.

The arrangement shall be terminable by either party at any time on giving to the other 12 calendar months previous written notice of the intention to terminate it, the notice if given by the Council to be under the Common Seal and if given by the Hospital to be under the hand of the Chairman for the time being of their General Committee or of their House Committee.

The Schedule above referred to:

Either for single days or for any number of days consecutive or otherwise

Official receptions, Meetings, Banquets  
 Religious Services, Lectures, Balls  
 Conversaciones, Soirees, Breakfasts  
 Tea Parties and other social Entertainments  
 Bazaars, Flower Shows, Gymnastic Displays Private Rehearsals  
 Union of Sunday Schools or Band of Hope Entertainments  
 Organ Recitals For Single performances only  
 Concerts and Musical Entertainments not specifically mentioned above.<sup>125</sup>

Ultimately, the terms ensured that the General Hospital would release its control over the organ, and that the Birmingham Council would take over all that the Hospital Committee had previously organised regarding the instrument. The official transfer of the custody of the instrument finally took place in a musical ceremony in the Town Hall on 29 March 1890. According to the *Birmingham Daily Post* many people before this date had thought it odd that, even though the instrument was housed in the Town Hall as 'the chief decorative feature of our local Acropolis',<sup>126</sup> it had no direct connection with the civic authorities:

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<sup>124</sup> Section 74 of Birmingham Corporation (Consolidation) Act 1883 states the following:

1. The Corporation if they deem fit purchase by agreement any organ placed in the Town-hall and vested in the governors of the Birmingham General Hospital or any trustees on their behalf, and the said governors and trustees may sell and dispose of any such organ to the Corporation and may enter into contracts and do all acts necessary and proper for the purpose.
2. The Corporation may borrow for the purposes of this section on the security of the borough fund and borough rate such sums as they may require and shall provide for the discharge of all sums borrowed under this section by means of a sinking fund within a period not exceeding *thirty* years from the times of respectively borrowing the same.

In Birmingham Corporation Documents, Volume 1, Birmingham City Archives, 51216.

<sup>125</sup> 11 January 1887, in Estates Committee 1884-1891, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.

It must seem to many people somewhat of an anachronism that the Birmingham Town Hall organ, which has played so important a part in our civic life, and has contributed so much to the fame of our Triennial Festivals during the past half-century, should only now for the first time become the property of the town.<sup>127</sup>

The author of the above article is right to state that the organ played an important part in civic life, but this was through the superintendence of the General Hospital, not the civic authorities. With the transfer of the instrument to the municipality, the Council would be able to utilize the organ as it wished, and consequently might also gain more control over the use of the Town Hall itself as a music venue.

### 3.10: Influence of the Musical Committee

The ownership of the organ for most of the nineteenth century ensured that the Musical Committee of the General Hospital could continue to influence the function of Birmingham Town Hall, as stated in the original Improvement Act. The link between the building and the musical festival also ensured that the committee continued to have some control over the appearance of the Town Hall, and this was supported by the Council, as is evidenced by the establishment of a Town Hall Sub Committee in 1858 'instructed to take into consideration the requirements of the Festival Committee and to confer with them from time to time thereon'.<sup>128</sup> The Musical Committee of the General Hospital frequently wrote to the Town Hall Committee, possibly directly to this sub committee, with requests, such as for the cleaning and redecorating of the Hall before every Festival. The following letter to the Mayor from Richard Peyton, chairman of the Orchestral Committee, is an example of the argument that was used to ensure that the Town Hall Committee paid for the redecoration:

I am requested by the Orchestral Committee who are making the preliminary arrangements for the Triennial Musical Festival to be held in the autumn of 1876, to draw the attention of your Worship and the Town Council to the present condition of the interior of the Town Hall. It is not necessary to point out how discoloured and unsightly the walls and ceilings now are; but as it is evident that some considerable expenditure in their restoration must be incurred before very long my Committee desire respectfully to urge that the Town Council should have executed before next Festival, not only the cleaning as in former years, but the entire re-colouring and re-decorating of the Interior of the Hall. I would venture to add that the Orchestral Committee are of opinion that this is a matter affecting the credit of the Town on

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<sup>126</sup> The reference to the building as the 'local Acropolis' is somewhat of a misnomer, since Birmingham Town Hall is based on the design of a Roman rather than a Greek temple.

<sup>127</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 31 March 1890.

<sup>128</sup> 23 March 1858, Estates and Building Committee 1857-1858, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.

the occasion much more than the success of the Festival, and that they do not doubt you will let it have full consideration.<sup>129</sup>

Peyton's motion was passed and the Musical Committee achieved what they desired. His mode of persuasion here harks back to the original argument of civic pride used in the memorial for the erection of the building – that the Town Hall will be a reflection on Birmingham itself. In their opinion, audiences would not return to the Festival if the Town Hall was poorly presented – the 'satisfaction of the eye [...] has a good deal to do with the comfort and pleasure of the ear'.<sup>130</sup> Peyton's letter also suggests that the condition of the Hall was not a significant factor of concern to the Town Hall Committee outside the Festival years, otherwise it would not have been allowed to become 'unsightly' in the first instance.<sup>131</sup> Further evidence of this neglect can be seen in the following newspaper article from the last quarter of the century:

I would draw the attention of the various committees to the, at times, disgraceful state of the hall. The seats are so carelessly dusted that frequently the dirt could be scraped off with the finger. Several ladies to my knowledge have had good silk dresses utterly spoiled by being branded across the back with a dirty stripe, where they have leaned against the seat, and the stains of which it has been found impossible totally to remove.<sup>132</sup>

It can be argued, therefore, that it was only through the influence of the Musical Committee that the Hall was kept in a superior condition, and this normally only every three years.

In addition, it was often through the Musical Committee that technical advancement was made in the Hall. When in 1882 the Crompton-Winfield Electric Light Company wished to use Birmingham Town Hall as an advertisement for the success of their electric light, they wrote to the Musical Committee of the General Hospital for permission, not the Town Hall Committee.<sup>133</sup> The Musical Committee agreed, on the grounds that the introduction of electric light would improve the performance conditions for their concerts:

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<sup>129</sup> 8 June 1875, Town Hall Sub-Committee Minutes: November 1870 - December 1876, Birmingham City Archives BCC/AM.

<sup>130</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 983 (1846), p.891.

<sup>131</sup> This links with the neglect of Strybridge Town Hall by the Strybridge Council mentioned in the previous chapter. In Strybridge, however, there was no musical festival to ensure its triennial redecoration.

<sup>132</sup> Newspaper and exact date unknown. *Birmingham Festival Choral Society Newscuttings, Leaflets etc.: Volume One 1876-1891*, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55.6, 663277.

<sup>133</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 16 February 1882, gives details of a meeting held by the Festival Committee, where the matter of the use of electric light had arisen due to a letter from Winfield & Co., requesting that they be allowed to light the Town Hall with electric light during the time of the Festival.



The committee were not disposed to adopt the offer through any desire for novelty, but they recommended it because of the serious difference in pitch which the heated atmosphere of the room, especially late in the evening, made upon a number of the musical instruments. It was solely for that reason, and not from the desire for novelty for its own sake, that they proposed to accept Messrs. Winfield's offer. They believed it would conduce very materially to the comfort of the audience and to the success of the performances.<sup>134</sup>

Before 1882 the Hall had been lit by 820 gas burners, but this apparently had a number of disadvantages. The burners created unpleasant fumes, and, according to a pamphlet by the Crompton-Winfield Electric Light Company, produced the equivalent heat of 4,230 persons.<sup>135</sup> When this was then added to the heat of the possible 3,100 persons which composed a full orchestra and audience,<sup>136</sup> the temperature of the Hall during a concert could become unbearable for performers and audience alike. Hence Birmingham Town Hall was cited by one audience member as 'one of the worst specimens of a badly ventilated public building to be met with'.<sup>137</sup> As the above extract suggests, the temperature of the Hall also adversely affected the Organ, causing some of its notes to rise by a semitone and creating discord between the pipes. As a result, the organist would often have to stop using the Swell half way through a concert, and the orchestra would have to tune to whatever pitch the organ had settled in.<sup>138</sup> A further disadvantage of the gas burners was that the light given off was not comfortable to the eye for the reading of music. Consequently, when the electric light, already used by venues in London such as the Savoy Theatre, was used for the 1882 Festival in Birmingham Town Hall, the change was hailed a success by audiences and performers alike, apparently creating a much more comfortable performance environment. Comments made by the performers at that Festival were published by Winfield and Co. as part of their advertising campaign. The following are a selection:

Well lighted, the atmosphere of the room greatly improved, and the equal temperature of the whole building has greatly diminished the risk of taking cold from the draughts in entrance and exit.

Much more pleasant than any other occasion, in fact I never saw a more brilliant light in any hall or concert room in my life. It is a great success, I should imagine.

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<sup>134</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 16 February 1882.

<sup>135</sup> For further details see R.W. Winfield and Co., *The Birmingham Musical Festival 1882, and the Crompton-Winfield Electric Light: Particulars of the Installation* (Birmingham: T.H. Smith, 1883), pp.5-6.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* It is possible, of course, the statistics were exaggerated in order to work in the company's favour.

<sup>137</sup> Mr Lawson Tait, quoted in *Birmingham Daily Post*, 11 March 1882.

<sup>138</sup> Letter from James Stimpson, Town Hall Organist, to Messrs. Winfield & Co. Quoted in Winfield and Co., *The Birmingham Musical Festival 1882*, p.28.

Well lighted, very much cooler, thus allowing *us* to warm to our work by our own exertions, and also to cool down by resting. A general satisfaction is expressed at the improvement of the comforts of the workers.<sup>139</sup>

The following letter from a concert-goer to the local newspaper indicates that the benefit of the use of electric lighting on the performers was apparent even to the audience:

I refer to the wonderful freshness and certainty of intonation of the chorus up to the very last item of the Friday evening's programme, as compared with their condition on the last day of the previous Festival. I am inclined to attribute this, at least in part, to the state of the atmosphere in the Town Hall (due to the use of electric light instead of gas). [...] When the atmosphere was surcharged with carbonic acid, owing to the artificial light, &c., the voices of the singers became flat and nerveless, but upon the introduction of fresh air they were able to sing perfectly in tune, and with all their usual vigour.<sup>140</sup>

The use of electric light was also of great benefit to the organ, as expressed in a letter from James Stimpson, the Town Hall organist, to the Crompton-Winfield Electric Light company:

Dear Sirs, I owe you a deep debt of gratitude for the comfort I have experienced during the Musical Festival just past. [...] For the first time I was enabled to use every part of the instrument with satisfaction and pleasure; and so admirably did it remain in tune the whole of the week, that the orchestra never had the trouble of tuning to it after the first day's rehearsal.<sup>141</sup>

To have successfully lit such a hall as Birmingham, and at such a prestigious event as the Musical Festival, would surely have enhanced the reputation of the company, and therefore the exercise was of benefit to all concerned. The introduction of electric light into Birmingham Town Hall continues the connection between such advanced technology and the performance of music in the Town Hall, first seen in the form of the organ.

The General Hospital remained dedicated to the continued up-keep of its organ, with the instrument undergoing alterations and additions at various times. Thistlethwaite suggests that, even though Birmingham Town Hall organ was at the forefront of technology in 1834, the speed of innovation in organ-building was such, that 'in less than a decade it looked curiously out of date'.<sup>142</sup> In 1840 the organ received an addition of 'a row of stupendous trumpets, constructed on entirely novel

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>140</sup> Letter to the Editor from Graham De Lancy in *Birmingham Daily Post*, 15 September 1882.

<sup>141</sup> Quoted in Winfield and Co., *The Birmingham Musical Festival 1882*, p.28.

<sup>142</sup> Thistlethwaite, 'The Organ in Birmingham Town Hall', p.593. For details of the specifications of the instrument see Appendix.

principles',<sup>143</sup> which nearly doubled its power. This addition helped to keep the organ technically advanced, to the extent that it was considered by *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, on 2 May 1840, to be 'the commencement of a new era in organ building'.<sup>144</sup> When, in 1843, the organ was considerably enlarged and improved, the Musical Committee again looked to the organs of Europe for inspiration. *Jackson's Oxford Journal* reported on the improvements, stating that 'the alterations consist in certain new arrangements and adaptations, founded on an extensive survey of the great organs both in Germany and Holland; and will have the effect of greatly increasing the powerfulness and variety of this noble instrument'.<sup>145</sup> Although the organ continuously underwent improvements, by 1890 it was considered to be old-fashioned and was substantially improved and updated, preserving the best of its old features whilst furnishing it with all the latest improvements.<sup>146</sup> The overhaul of the instrument in 1890 was the final refurbishment by the General Hospital, requested by the Council before the handover of responsibility.

The Birmingham Town Hall organ may have received superlative comments from the press at various times during the nineteenth century, but those who actually had to play the instrument had their criticisms. The main mechanical problem that had beleaguered the Birmingham organ from its erection was the heaviness of the action. According to Nicholas Thistlethwaite, 'performing on it must have been very hard work for the organist, and this would be doubly frustrating at a time when much of the music played was of an orchestral character, and so demanded a degree of fluency which a heavy tracker action rendered all but unattainable'.<sup>147</sup> Mendelssohn reportedly found the instrument difficult to play,<sup>148</sup> as did James Stimpson, the Town Hall organist from 1842-1886, who said that to play the instrument 'requires the force of a steam engine'.<sup>149</sup> The local newspaper reported:

The mechanism was so complicated and ponderous that only a player of great muscular power and agility could aspire to cope with it. The organist, in fact, must be an athlete as well as a

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<sup>143</sup> *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 2 May 1840.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 February 1843.

<sup>146</sup> Nicholas Thistlethwaite. 'Hill (i).' *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. 14 January 2009 [http://0-](http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/13023)

[www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/13023](http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/13023).

<sup>147</sup> Thistlethwaite, *Birmingham Town Hall Organ*, p.23.

<sup>148</sup> See *ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>149</sup> Letter to journal from English organ-builder, Thomas Casson, quoting from a letter he received from James Stimpson, in *Musical Opinion*, 8 (1890), p.470.

musician, and unite the strength of the modern SAMSON with the technical skill and special knowledge of a BEST or a SPARK.<sup>150</sup>

The many improvements that were made to the organ in the nineteenth century were often attempts to remedy this situation. In 1849 and 1882, for example, pneumatic levers were added, but it was not until the improvements of 1889-90 that the entire action was replaced so that a lighter touch became possible.

Through their supervision of the improvements made to the organ, as well as to the Hall itself, the Musical Committee of the General Hospital ensured that throughout the century Birmingham Town Hall continued to fulfil its role as a concert hall. Their arrangement with the Council, initiated through the Improvement Act, ensured that the Musical Committee managed to retain influence over its upkeep and usage without the financial responsibility; it was all done in the name of charity - an argument instigated by Joseph Moore in 1827 and which the Council continued to find hard to ignore. Through his research into the appropriate specifications for the building, and his superintendence of the design of the hall, Moore realised his initial vision for providing Birmingham with a music venue comparable with any other venue in England. According to the *Times*, the efforts of Joseph Moore and the Musical Committee had enabled 'the perfect adaptation of the hall to the production of the richest musical effects, on a scale of magnificence at present unattempted in this country'.<sup>151</sup> The foundations laid by the Musical Committee paved the way for the continued influence of the Festival on the building throughout the century, ensuring that it remained a nationally renowned concert hall rather than just a provincial town hall.

### 3.11: Musical Festivals

So far this chapter has considered Birmingham Town Hall chiefly from a structural viewpoint. However, whatever its design and reception, Birmingham Town Hall cannot be considered a concert hall if it was not regularly used for the performance of music. The picture of this building as a venue integral to nineteenth-century music-making in Birmingham has possibly been over-painted because of the reputation of the town's musical festival. A number of books have been written on the subject of the

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<sup>150</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 31 March 1890. The names of 'BEST' and 'SPARK' refer to William Best, organist at St George's Hall, Liverpool, and William Spark, organist at Leeds Town Hall, both of whom had reputations as being amongst the best organists in the country in the nineteenth century.

<sup>151</sup> *The Times*, 6 September 1834.

Festival, most notably Bunce's history of the Birmingham General Hospital and the Musical Festivals,<sup>152</sup> and, more recently, Elliott's brief history of the Festivals from 1784 to 1912.<sup>153</sup> The Birmingham Triennial Festival was one of the most important festivals of its day, creating an international artistic reputation for Birmingham. During the days of the Festival, Birmingham as a town was transformed:

The town has been filled with the families of the nobility and gentry of this and the neighbouring counties, as well as from more distant parts of the kingdom. [...] The streets were on each day thronged with spectators; and the shops, almost all of which have undergone the process of decoration, presented to the admiring thousands every novelty and refinement in productive and mechanical arts for which the emulative and inventive talent of this country stands pre-eminent.<sup>154</sup>

In the years following the opening of the Town Hall, the Birmingham Festival became famed for its large choral and instrumental forces and the quality of the performances. The following report of the 1867 Festival in the *Musical Times* gives a picturesque description of how the Birmingham Festival was perceived at the time:

London, with all its boasted power, splendour, and refinement, can show to the artistic world no such grand and noble sight as the Town Hall, Birmingham, with a gigantic orchestra, filled with the first instrumentalists in Europe, the most perfectly trained choristers ever assembled within a building, and presided over by a conductor whose will can move this vast living body as one machine. [...] We cannot help hoping – perhaps against hope – [...] that art-lovers, both at home and abroad, may not be compelled to travel to Birmingham once in three years in order to hear the real musical strength of England.<sup>155</sup>

Without the Musical Festival, Birmingham Town Hall would not have existed in its gigantic form, but there seems to be little doubt that if it were not for Birmingham Town Hall, the Festival would not have developed into one of the largest and most respected musical festivals of the time. In the opinion of the critic George Hogarth:

[Birmingham Musical Festival's] long existence has embraced a period which may be regarded as the most eventful in the history of Music – a period of constant and rapid progress. And this progress the Birmingham Festival has contributed to accelerate, because it has not only kept pace with, but has rather been in advance of, the taste and knowledge of the age. In truth, when we peruse the records of the Birmingham Festival, we seem to be reading the History of Music for three quarters of a century; for we find that the greatest works of genius in every branch of art have been brought under the notice of our provincial public as soon as they were known, and sometimes before they were known, to the metropolis itself; nay, more, several of the most sublime of these masterpieces have derived their being from

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<sup>152</sup> Bunce, *A History of the Birmingham General Hospital and the Musical Festivals*.

<sup>153</sup> Anne Elliott, *The Music Makers: A Brief History of the Birmingham Triennial Musical Festivals 1784-1912* (Birmingham: Birmingham Library Services, 2000).

<sup>154</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 31 August 1846. This article not only gives an indication of the atmosphere of the town during the time of the Festival, but also suggests the audience demographic, stating that the 'nobility and gentry' had travelled to Birmingham to attend the Festival.

<sup>155</sup> *Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular*, 13 (1867), p.165.

the Birmingham Festival. And its records, in like manner, bear the name of every great artist, vocal or instrumental, who has appeared in England during the whole period of its duration.<sup>156</sup>

Hogarth's suggestion that the Birmingham Festival 'contributed to accelerate' the progress of music in England mainly stems from the policy of the Festival Committee, instituted in 1834, of commissioning new works by prominent composers for each Festival. It is again Joseph Moore who is given the credit for conceiving the idea. It began with the opening of the Town Hall when Austrian composer Sigismund Neukomm wrote his oratorio *David* especially for the occasion, 'as a fitting complement to the noble organ and the magnificent hall'.<sup>157</sup> A pupil of Haydn, Neukomm was a prolific composer whose compositions were performed at all the major music festivals of Britain, normally with him as conductor.<sup>158</sup> Although this new work was eagerly anticipated and warmly received by the audience, it did not become part of the established repertoire. The local newspaper spoke admiringly of the work, later commenting that 'the effect of the performance was so great that it is somewhat difficult to account for the neglect into which a work unquestionably possessed of much grandeur and beauty has subsequently fallen'.<sup>159</sup> Mendelssohn suggested, however, that Neukomm may have tried too hard to write a work that fitted the gravity of the occasion:

Effect was chiefly studied: the huge organ, the choruses, the solo instruments, all were introduced to please the audience; and people soon find [sic] this out, and it never answers.<sup>160</sup>

In a review of the work in 1845 the *Musical World* stated that *David* could be summarised as having three characteristics:

Firstly, its style is trivial; secondly, its effects are theatrical; and, thirdly, it is written throughout with a disregard of the severe counterpoint, which is properly insisted upon by critics as the basis of grave and lofty inspirations.<sup>161</sup>

Despite criticisms of the quality of the work, the commissioning of *David* encouraged Moore to pursue this policy, his most famous acquisition being Mendelssohn's oratorio,

<sup>156</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 28 June 1852.

<sup>157</sup> Bunce, *A History of the Birmingham General Hospital and the Musical Festivals*, p.88.

<sup>158</sup> See Rudolph Angermüller. 'Neukomm, Sigismund Ritter von'. *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. 30 April 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/19774>>.

<sup>159</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 28 June 1852.

<sup>160</sup> Paul Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Carl Mendelssohn Bartholdy, eds., translated by Lady Wallace, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, From 1833 to 1847* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1863), pp.134-135.

<sup>161</sup> *Musical World*, 20 (1845), 171-172 (p.171).

*Elijah*, commissioned for the 1846 Festival. In most instances the Musical Committee would approach the top composers of the age to ask them to write a composition for the Festival. They included Mendelssohn, Moscheles, Costa, Smart, Sullivan, Sterndale Bennett, Gade, G. Macfarren, William H. Cummings, Schira, Cowen, Saint-Saëns, Bruch, Alfred Gaul, Dvořák, Stanford, Cowen, Parry, Bridge, Elgar, Liszt and Wagner.

The following letter, from the English pianist and conductor Walter Bache, discusses the potential acquisition of a work from Wagner, and gives some indication of the processes involved in the securing of new repertoire:

I feel pretty certain in my own mind that Wagner would not write for any Festival whatsoever but I am very glad that you are resolved to try him as one can never tell what these great fellows will do – and the notion might please him. If you would let me make a suggestion it would be that Mr. Peyton should procure an introduction to Madame Wagner – I think Dannreuther could manage this – and if Mr. Peyton likes, I should merely tell Dannreuther that the president of the Birmingham Festival will call upon him – I think that then he would write the letter – but I rather fear that if I mention beforehand what Mr. Peyton wants he might get frightened, and think he must not do it. I am so sorry to have failed in so simple a matter as obtaining Liszt's address: but it is very likely that Madame L. may have had to write to Germany for it and that I may hear from her in a day or so – I cannot get any definite information from anyone in London and the German musical papers generally give their news a month or so after date.<sup>162</sup>

It seems that the acquisition of works from the most prominent composers was often down to detective work and networking. The Musical Committee must have had a secure belief in their 'product' to approach such highly-rated composers, whom they assumed would have heard of the Birmingham Festival, or at least would have a desire to write for such an institution.

By the end of the century many composers were desperate to have their works performed at the Birmingham Festival, often sending them to be considered by the Musical Committee without invitation. The following is a letter from the conductor and composer, Dr Frederic H. Cowen:

Would you oblige me by laying the enclosed before the Festival Committee at the earliest opportunity and letting me know the result. I am very anxious to write something, no matter what, for the festival next year, and perhaps, if the Committee do not meet just yet, you would use your influence for me to get permission to do so, or at any rate tell me the best way to set about arranging the matter.<sup>163</sup>

This is a letter from an eminent musician of the time, not a struggling composer trying to find work, and yet Cowen is still 'anxious to write something, no matter what' for the Birmingham Festival. Cowen had already attracted the attention of the Musical

<sup>162</sup> Letter to Mr Beale of the Festival Committee, undated, in Autograph Scrapbook, Birmingham City Archives, MS 1552/1.

<sup>163</sup> Letter to Richard Peyton, 17/7/1892, in Autograph Scrapbook, Birmingham City Archives, MS 1552/1.

Committee, having been commissioned to write a work for the 1876 Festival (the cantata, *The Corsair*) and the 1885 Festival (the cantata, *The Sleeping Beauty*). Since he was so 'anxious' to write for the 1894 Festival, he must have felt that previous commissions had enhanced his career and reputation. On this occasion, however, Cowen's work was not accepted. Having a work performed at Birmingham meant a composer had achieved a certain standing in the musical world, and it was thought, by the *Musical Times* of 1881 amongst others, inconceivable for a composer to turn down a commission because of 'the position of the Birmingham Festival and the greatness of the honour implied by its patronage'.<sup>164</sup> There were, of course, some composers who were approached but were unable to write for the Festival. Meyerbeer was one, although he turned down the commission with regret, his letter of reply once again giving some indication of the reputation the Birmingham Festival had at the time:

I feel myself the more honoured by this step on your part, as I know from the voice of fame how much the Musical Festivals of Birmingham have always been distinguished, as well by the excellence of their musical execution as by the great masters called upon to produce new works for them. It is therefore with the most profound regret that I find myself forced to decline your flattering offer.<sup>165</sup>

One of the most notable composers of the time to apply to the Musical Committee was Charles Gounod. He approached them in the late 1870s with the offer to write a work for the next Festival, but for the very high remuneration of £4,000 (£193,240 today).<sup>166</sup> His offer was originally rejected, but the Committee went back to him to offer a commission for the 1882 Festival at his requested fee. It only managed to find this sum of money by selling the rights of the resulting work, the sacred trilogy *The Redemption*, to Novello music publishers for nearly the same amount.<sup>167</sup> The *Musical Standard* described the work in the following manner:

[The] music, while occasionally somewhat secular in tone, being throughout earnest and serious, [is] yet full of melodic grace and charm, and all the richness of those varied harmonic progressions which belong to the modern period of musical art. [...] 'The Redemption' must rank as a masterpiece of its kind, especially in the orchestral treatment, which is a marvel of musical colouring.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 22 (1881), p.617.

<sup>165</sup> *Musical World*, 33 (1855), p.489.

<sup>166</sup> All conversion figures have been taken from

<<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/default0.asp>> [accessed 19 October 2009].

<sup>167</sup> For more on the commissioning of Gounod see Elliott, *The Music Makers*, p.14.

<sup>168</sup> *Musical Standard*, 9 September 1882.



Although, on this occasion, the almost universal praise generated by *The Redemption* justified the expenditure of such a large sum on its commissioning, this incident indicates how hard it must have been for the Musical Committee to balance its wish to commission top composers with the necessity of making a profit for the General Hospital. The *Musical World* sympathised with this situation:

[The Orchestral Committee] distinctly lays down and supports the principle that nothing short of the highest attainable excellence will maintain the pre-eminence of the Birmingham Festivals, or continue to afford the General Hospital the revenue it has hitherto derived from this source. The committee show that while it would undoubtedly be possible to cut down the expenses of the next Festival [...] and thus to make a large profit, such a course would certainly result in so greatly lowering the prestige of the festivals as to render them utterly valueless, either as expositions of the musical art or as helps to the cause of charity.<sup>169</sup>

By necessity the Musical Festival at the Town Hall was run as a business rather than simply an artistic venture.

The Musical Committee was also innovative in its use of existing repertoire. Bach's choral works were neglected for a large part of the nineteenth century, despite the 'English Bach Awakening' that was initiated by Samuel Wesley's advocacy of the composer in the first two decades of the 1800s.<sup>170</sup> Notwithstanding the founding of an English Bach Society by William Sterndale Bennett in London in 1849, it was not until 1854 that England experienced the first modern performance of the *St Matthew Passion*, when it was performed by Sterndale Bennett's society at the Hanover Square Rooms, and even then Bach's choral works did not become part of the English festival repertoire until 1871, when the *St Matthew Passion* was performed at the Gloucester Festival.<sup>171</sup> At the Birmingham Festival, the first full performance of the *St Matthew Passion* was not until 1891, largely due to festival conductor Michael Costa's reluctance to programme Bach; he apparently spoke of the 'unsuitability of Bach's compositions for Festival choirs'.<sup>172</sup> The first performance in the Town Hall had been earlier, in 1882, by the Philharmonic Union. As early as 1837, however, extracts from

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<sup>169</sup> *Musical World*, 39 (1861), p.6.

<sup>170</sup> See Yo Tomita, 'The Dawn of the English Bach Awakening Manifested in Sources of the "48"', in *The English Bach Awakening*, ed. by Michael Kassler (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 35-168 (p.35).

<sup>171</sup> Nicholas Temperley and Peter Wollny. 'Bach Revival'. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 9 Apr. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/01708>>. For further information, Kassler's *English Bach Awakening*, pp.1-33, has a 'Chronology of the English Bach Awakening' with entries from 1754-1829.

<sup>172</sup> Cited in J. Sutcliffe Smith, *The Story of Music in Birmingham* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers Limited, 1945), p.41. Sutcliffe Smith makes this statement based on correspondence he had seen between the Birmingham Musical Committee and Costa.

the work were being performed at the Festivals, making Birmingham probably the first provincial centre to bring music from the *St. Matthew Passion* to festival audiences.<sup>173</sup> 1837 is certainly an early date for the performance of Bach choral works, albeit extracts, in England, which indicates some innovation in programming on the part of the Musical Committee.

Although a pioneer in the area of choral repertoire, for most of the century the Birmingham Festival only programmed the more conservative instrumental works, and then only on an occasional basis. The *Musical Times* gave the following critical summary in 1876:

From 1834 to 1876 Symphonies by three composers only have been performed, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Mozart (and very few even of these); [...] only a small number of the best Pianoforte Concertos have been played; and [...] not one note of Schubert or Schumann has ever been heard.<sup>174</sup>

Whilst the content of this article is accurate,<sup>175</sup> it must be remembered that the author is writing with the benefit of hindsight and with little regard to the musical tastes of the earlier century.

Because of the prestige of new and innovative repertoire, the Festival Committee was able to engage two of the most renowned conductors of the day - Michael Costa, followed by Hans Richter - alongside many famous European soloists such as Madame Maria Caradori-Allan, Madame Clara Novello, Madlle. Adelina Patti and Madlle. Therese Tietjens. Soloists even wrote to the Committee asking to perform at the Festival, as the following letter from the distinguished contralto Maria B. Merest, formally Maria B. Hawes, indicates:

If you wish me to appear at any of your concerts I shall be happy to arrange with you for them. I would rather sing in the "Messiah" and "Israel in Egypt" than any other oratorios of Handel's. [...] Perhaps you are not aware that I was the original contralto in "Elijah" at Birmingham in 1846 and saved the "O Rest in the Lord" from being cut out as it was to have been until Mendelssohn heard me sing it at the first rehearsal he attended at Mr Moscheles' house.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular*, 17 (1876), p.694.

<sup>175</sup> For a more detailed list of repertoire performed at the Birmingham Festivals in the nineteenth century see Sutcliffe Smith, *The Story of Music in Birmingham*, pp.23-50.

<sup>176</sup> Letter to Mr S.W. Martin, 5 April 1861. In Birmingham City Archives, MS 565/1. It is possible that this letter is not known to Mendelssohn scholars. On Maria Hawes see J. A. Fuller Maitland, 'Hawes, William (1785-1846)', rev. David J. Golby, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/12649>, accessed 9 April 2009].

This letter has almost a pleading tone, with the singer feeling the need to list her previous achievements in the hope of securing an engagement. The singer's entries in *Grove Music Online* and the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* do not suggest that she was in financial difficulty at this time but, according to other reports in the musical press for 1861, Merest was attempting to rejuvenate her career after some time away from public life. *The Musical World* predicted that she would be 'welcomed back to the concert-room, of which she was ere while so distinguished an ornament'.<sup>177</sup> Her past reputation, however, was not enough to secure her employment at the 1861 Birmingham Festival. Such an example shows the powerful position that the Musical Committee held when engaging top soloists.

As can be seen from table 8, most of the works commissioned for the Birmingham Festival followed either a religious or historical theme, giving the pieces, and consequently the festival itself, an aura of longevity and moral respectability:

**Table 8: List of commissioned works for the Birmingham Triennial Festival**

Date	Composer	Title	Genre	Text
1834	Sigismund Neukomm	<i>David</i>	Oratorio	J. Webb
1837	Sigismund Neukomm	<i>Ascension</i>	Oratorio	Klopstock
1837	August Haeser	<i>The Triumph of Faith</i>	Oratorio	W. Ball
1837	Felix Mendelssohn	Piano Concerto in D, no.2		
1846	Felix Mendelssohn	<i>Elijah</i>	Oratorio	W. Bartholomew
1846	Ignaz Moscheles	<i>93<sup>rd</sup> Psalm</i>		Dr Broadley
1849	Michael Costa	'Vanne a colei che adora'	Vocal trio	
1849	Edmund Chipp	'God Save the Emperor'	Organ fantasia	
1849	S.S. Wesley		Organ fantasia	
1852	S.S. Wesley	Anthem		
1855	Michael Costa	<i>Eli</i>	Oratorio	W. Bartholomew
1855	John William Glover	<i>Tam o'Shanter</i>	Cantata	
1858	Michael Costa	<i>The Dream</i>	Serenata	W. Bartholomew
1858	Henry Leslie	<i>Judith</i>	Oratorio	H.F. Chorley
1864	Michael Costa	<i>Naaman</i>	Oratorio	W. Bartholomew
1864	Henry Smart	<i>The Bride of Dunkerron</i>	Cantata	F. Enoch
1864	Arthur Sullivan	<i>Kenilworth</i>	Masque	H.F. Chorley
1867	William Sterndale Bennett	<i>The Woman of Samaria</i>	Sacred Cantata	H.F. Chorley
1867	John Francis Barnett	<i>The Ancient Mariner</i>	Cantata	S.T. Coleridge
1870	Julius Benedict	<i>St. Peter</i>	Oratorio	H.F. Chorley
1870	John Francis Barnett	<i>Paradise and the Peri</i>	Cantata	T. Moore
1870	Robert Stewart	<i>Ode to Shakespeare</i>		Henry Toole
1870	Ferdinand Hiller	<i>Nala and Damayanti</i>	Cantata	S. Hasenclever
1870	Arthur Sullivan	<i>Overtura di Ballo</i>		
1873	Francesco Schira	<i>The Lord of Burleigh</i>	Cantata	Desmond L. Ryan
1873	Arthur Sullivan	<i>The Light of the World</i>	Oratorio	George Grove
1873	Alberto Randegger	<i>Fridolin</i>	Dramatic Cantata	Rudersdorf
1876	George Macfarren	<i>The Resurrection</i>	Oratorio	Dr Monk

<sup>177</sup> *Musical World*, 38 (1861) p.604.

1876	Frederic Cowen	<i>The Corsair</i>	Cantata	Francillon
1879	Alfred Gaul	<i>Silent Land</i>		
1879	Camille Saint-Saëns	<i>The Lyre and the Harp</i>	Cantata	Victor Hugo
1879	Max Bruch	<i>The Lay of the Bell</i>	Cantata	Schiller
1879	Charles Swinnerton Heap	Concert Overture in F		
1882	Alfred Gaul	<i>The Holy City</i>	Sacred Cantata	
1882	Charles-François Gounod	<i>The Redemption</i>	Oratorio	Gounod
1882	Julius Benedict	<i>Graziella</i>	Cantata	Herny Hersee
1882	Charles Villiers Stanford	Orchestral Serenade in G Major		
1882	Hubert Parry	Symphony in G, no.1		
1885	Charles-François Gounod	<i>Mors et Vita</i>	Sacred trilogy	Gounod
1885	Frederick Bridge	'Rock of Ages'	Motet	
1885	Antonin Dvořák	<i>The Spectre's Bride</i>	Cantata	K.J. Erben
1885	Ebenezer Prout	Symphony in F, No.3		
1885	Charles Villiers Stanford	<i>The Three Holy Children</i>	Oratorio	Bible
1885	T. Anderton	<i>Yuletide</i>		Julia Goddard
1885	Alexander Campbell Mackenzie	Violin Concerto in C sharp		
1885	Frederic Cowen	<i>The Sleeping Beauty</i>	Cantata	F. Hueffer
1888	Hubert Parry	<i>Judith</i>	Oratorio	Parry
1888	Frederick Bridge	<i>Callirhoë</i>	Cantata	W. B. Squire
1891	Charles Villiers Stanford	<i>Eden</i>	Dramatic oratorio	Robert Bridges
1891	Alexander Campbell Mackenzie	<i>Veni Creator Spiritus</i>	Cantata	J. Dryden
1891	Arthur Goring Thomas	'The Dawn'	Duet	
1891	Antonin Dvořák	Requiem Mass		
1894	Alexander Campbell Mackenzie	<i>Britannia</i>	Nautical Overture	
1894	Hubert Parry	<i>King Saul</i>	Oratorio	Parry
1894	Arthur Goring Thomas	<i>The Swan and Skylark</i>	Cantata	Keats, Shelley and F. Hemans
1894	George Henschel	<i>Stabat Mater</i>		
1897	Charles Villiers Stanford	Requiem Mass		
1897	Arthur Somervell	<i>Ode to the Sea</i>		Lawrence Binyon
1900	Edward Elgar	<i>Dream of Gerontius</i>	Oratorio	Cardinal J. H. Newman <sup>178</sup>

The oratorio form was the most frequently commissioned and performed, followed closely by the sacred cantata, due to their often direct link with biblical text. Using oratorio as the staple musical diet of the Birmingham Triennial Festival enabled the Musical Committee to market the event as a mode of religious worship rather than a profit-making exercise. It also contributed to the philanthropic environment cultivated to ensure the patronisation of the middle and upper classes. According to Antje Pieper:

<sup>178</sup> Data taken from Sutcliffe Smith, *The Story of Music in Birmingham*, reviews of the Leeds Musical Festival in *The Times*, the *Monthly Musical Record* and the *Musical World* for the festival years between 1834 and 1900, and biographies of composers in <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>> [accessed 28 April 2009].

Combined with its association with public charity, elevation of the public spirit and ennoblement of the mind, oratorios ensured that Birmingham's urban elite, steeped in the evangelical tradition, was safe to partake in cultural enterprise.<sup>179</sup>

In addition, oratorios could bridge religious divisions, allowing people of all denominations to 'worship' in the Town Hall. William Weber, in his *Rise of Musical Classics*, argues that 'since the librettos had a moral as opposed to a metaphysical focus, they established a common ground for expressing certain basic religious beliefs that reunited the English as no other area of the nation's culture had done'.<sup>180</sup> In 1876 the *Monthly Musical Record* stated that the Birmingham Musical Festival offered an atmosphere where 'people of every shade of religious conviction can meet as it were on common ground'.<sup>181</sup> Even so, according to one report, the performance of sacred music at the Birmingham Musical Festival in the Town Hall did create some controversy from time to time, exciting 'the anger and animadversion of the puritanical party in the town'.<sup>182</sup> The specific details of such protestations are not reported, but the objection seems to have been that religious music was being performed in a situation 'wholly disconnected with divine service'.<sup>183</sup>

Despite such pronouncements, there were occasions when the Town Hall was used as a purely religious building outside of the Festival's sacred performances. As stated earlier, religious life in Birmingham in the first half of the nineteenth century was notably diverse. William Hutton, writing in 1836, reported:

In a town like Birmingham, unfettered with chartered laws, which gives access to the stranger of every denomination, for he here finds a freedom by birth-right; and where the principles of toleration are well understood, it is no wonder we find various modes of worship. There are forty-five places of worship in Birmingham, thirteen belonging to the Established Church, and thirty-two to the various sects of Protestant Dissenters and others.<sup>184</sup>

The religious freedom here suggested by Hutton may have led to the general acceptance of the use of Birmingham Town Hall as an interdenominational sacred space. In 1865, when the Carr's Lane Chapel was closed for repairs, the Town Hall was used as a replacement 'church', with morning and evening services and sermons on such subjects

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<sup>179</sup> Pieper, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture*, p.79.

<sup>180</sup> William Weber, *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth Century England: A Study in Canon, Ritual and Ideology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.121.

<sup>181</sup> *Monthly Musical Record*, 6 (1876), 155-159 (p.155).

<sup>182</sup> *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, (1834), p.360.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Hutton, *The History of Birmingham*, p.243.

as 'The Living Christ' and 'Morality and Religion'.<sup>185</sup> The use of the Town Hall for church services was a reasonably frequent occurrence, especially for those services that were meant as a unifying event for a number of churches.<sup>186</sup> Antje Pieper suggests that Birmingham's multi-denominationalism 'invoked a religious atmosphere which was constantly and intensely heated, with each denomination with its own religious and liturgical conventions being at odds with the others'.<sup>187</sup> The Town Hall, however, was often used as a space to bring denominations together, not least at the time of the musical festivals, cementing church relations in an age of religious dissent.

The nineteenth century had increasingly become an age of secularization, when many in society moved away from the dominance of religion and the church. Ironically, this encouraged an apparent sacralization of non-religious buildings, with the result that such places as museums, art galleries, theatres, and town halls, often built to resemble temples or churches, were visited almost as a pilgrimage.<sup>188</sup> One stimulus for this came from an interest in the 'Sublime'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the archaic meaning of the word to be, to 'elevate to a high degree of purity or excellence'.<sup>189</sup> Whilst such definitions were widely acknowledged, it was the use of the word as a noun, rather than an adjective, that pervaded art and literature in the nineteenth century. Burke's theory, first expounded in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, published in 1757, formed the basis for the Romantic ideal of 'The Sublime':

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<sup>185</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 10 August 1865. In apparent contradiction to the public feeling of the time, there were also church services in the Grand Theatre and the Queen's Theatre in Birmingham. However, since many of the services in theatres were a result of an organised campaign such as the Adult Sunday School Association, this was probably an effort to bring services to the people and are therefore different from those given at the Town Hall.

<sup>186</sup> The scholars' service in connection with the Midland Christian Union Sunday School Association reported in *Birmingham Daily Post*, 18 May 1885, is one example.

<sup>187</sup> Antje Pieper, *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture*, p.12.

<sup>188</sup> For more on sacralization see T.C.W. Blanning, 'The Commercialization and Sacralization of European Culture in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern Europe*, ed. by T.C.W. Blanning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 120-147.

<sup>189</sup> Simpson and Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*. The concept of the Sublime can be traced back to the first-century Greek author Longinus. He uses the word to refer to the 'extraordinary', the 'great' and the 'beautiful'. Of the two most influential later writers on the Sublime, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) concentrates on 'the transcendent moral and religious reality we catch sight of in the experience of the Sublime', whereas Edmund Burke (1729-1797) describes the experience of the Sublime as 'some kind of intense delight acquired upon our escape from the privations of the human condition'. See Tsang Lap-Cheun, *The Sublime: Groundwork Towards a Theory* (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 1998), pp.xiv-xv.

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature [. . .] is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other.<sup>190</sup>

The pilgrimage to magnificent public buildings was engineered to overwhelm the visitor, to leave persons in wonder of the building and its contents, to fill their minds so that they could not contain any other thought. Furthermore, people entered into such environments expecting and desiring to be overawed. The performance of music played an important part in the idea of the nineteenth-century Sublime. In the words of the English musician William Crotch:

The Sublime is founded on principles of vastness and incomprehensibility. The word sublime originally signifies high, lofty, elevated; and this style, accordingly, never descends to anything small, delicate, light, pretty, playful, or comic. The grandest style in music is therefore the sacred style – that of the church and oratorio – for it is least inclined to levity, where levity is properly inadmissible, and where words convey the most awful striking images.<sup>191</sup>

Birmingham Town Hall, especially at the time of its Musical Festivals, was the ideal environment for the patrons of the Sublime. In addition to its magnificence as a Roman Temple in the centre of a British provincial town, for many, Birmingham Town Hall was a place to come and worship at the altar of music. According to the *Musical World*:

We go to an oratorio of Handel as we go to a view of the Alps, or St. Peter's at Rome, or to the Falls of Niagara [...] to be raised to a mood of real sublimity, to have our nature brought out, to feel a succession of grand ideas passing through the mind, which hardly recognised itself in such lofty company.<sup>192</sup>

It is difficult to say for certain whether the composers of works commissioned specifically for performance at Birmingham Town Hall were influenced by the 'sublimity' of the building. It is likely, however, that they used the forces available for the musical festival – such as the enormous organ, the acoustic of the hall and the large number of performers available – to sculpt particular effects into their scores, using specific orchestral or vocal textures to make use of the sonic space. Letters from Mendelssohn, for example, indicate his appreciation of the part the 'sublime' forces of

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<sup>190</sup> Edmund Burke, edited by James T. Boulton, *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p.58.

<sup>191</sup> William Crotch, *Substance of Several Courses of Lectures on Music Read in the University of Oxford, and in the Metropolis* (London: Longman et al, 1831), p.32.

<sup>192</sup> *Musical World*, 37 (1859), 573-574 (p.573). For more on the link between Handel and the sublime see Ruth Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chapter 4.

the Birmingham Musical Festival played in the success of the first performance of *Elijah*:

The full, rich sounds of the orchestra and the huge organ, combined with the powerful choruses who sang with honest enthusiasm, the wonderful resonance in the grand giant hall, an admirable English tenor singer [...] and in addition a couple of excellent second soprano and contralto solo singers; all executing the music with peculiar spirit, [...] and in addition, an impressionable, kindly, hushed and enthusiastic audience - all this is indeed sufficient good fortune for a first performance. In fact, I never in my life heard a better [one] [...], and I almost doubt whether I shall ever again hear one equal to it, because there were so many favourable combinations on this occasion.<sup>193</sup>

Birmingham Town Hall during the time of the Festival was a building where the audience could be overwhelmed, not only by the music itself, but also by the enormity of the architecture, the number of performers and the technologically advanced organ – an instrument that was a manifestation of the ‘sublime’ through its ability to make an overpowering sound, but that also had powerful religious connotations. The performance of oratorio at the event, the genre of music which was considered by many to be ‘to the Musician the exact analogy of what the Cathedral is to the Architect – the highest Art-form to the construction of which he can aspire’,<sup>194</sup> contributed to the sacralization of the building, enabling it to be used as a sacred space, not only by musicians but also by religious authorities. It is possible that the prospective use of Birmingham Town Hall as a sacred space, principally through the performance of oratorio at the musical festivals, is why the building had to be a respectable, elevating, over-sized, and therefore potentially ‘sublime’, town hall, and consequently a concert hall in disguise.

Whilst the music chosen was of central importance when designing a ‘sublime’ musical-festival experience, it seems that, when commissioning new repertoire, it was the text of the work, rather than the music itself, that was the most important element in the minds of the Musical Committee. Pieper suggests that the music ‘was deemed to exist as an accompaniment to the word, it was judged according to whether it could support the meaning of the liturgy, or the biblical and operatic stories musically, in short, whether it could heighten and intensify the feelings and sentiments emanating

<sup>193</sup> Letter from Mendelssohn to Frau Doctorin Frege, Leipzig from London, 31 August 1846, in Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn*, p.405.

<sup>194</sup> William Rockstro, ‘Oratorio’, in *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. by George Grove, 4 vols (London: Macmillan and Co., 1879-89), ii, 559.



from the words alone'.<sup>195</sup> There is certainly evidence to confirm that Joseph Moore showed an active concern for the libretto of the works commissioned. Letters received by Moore from Church of England clergyman John Webb, author of the text for Neukomm's oratorio *David*, are an example of this.<sup>196</sup> In a letter written on 24 August 1830 Webb speaks of 'the alterations at which you hint in the Oratorio of David',<sup>197</sup> and on 11 September 1830 states: 'I have to tell you that I have finished all the alterations you originally proposed'.<sup>198</sup> It seems that Moore was extremely detailed in his continued supervision of the work since on 20 September 1830 Webb writes: 'You have added so many more suggestions in your last letter that at present I hardly know what to do about them'.<sup>199</sup> It is not known whether Moore was involved to such an extent in all the works commissioned, and whether such close superintendence was continued by the Musical Committee after Moore's death. However, the commonality of themes displayed in the works chosen for performance at the Birmingham Festival indicates a sustained prominent regard for the text.

As mentioned earlier, the works commissioned were not all based upon religious texts; there were also those which followed a medieval or archaic theme. These include Sullivan's *Kenilworth*, a 'welcome' to Queen Elizabeth I, in the form of a Masque, based on Walter Scott's novel of the same name,<sup>200</sup> or Dvořák's dramatic cantata *The Spectre's Bride*, based on an ancient Czech fairy tale, with libretto by K.J. Erben.<sup>201</sup> The popularity of such themes shows a link with the Victorian nostalgia for times long past. According to Gregory Claeys in his study of nineteenth-century Utopianism, 'Britain had undergone a process of rapid and extensive social transformation in which the naturally virtuous mores of a closely knit, largely agricultural society were being supplanted by more selfish, impersonal, aggressive manners dominated by money-getting and the diffusion of luxury goods'.<sup>202</sup> This rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, and commercialisation of British society from the late eighteenth century stimulated in art and literature a wistful nostalgia for a time of purity

<sup>195</sup> Antje Pieper, *Music and the Making of the Middle Class*, p.51.

<sup>196</sup> On Webb see W. W. Webb, 'Webb, John (1776–1869)', rev. Brian Frith, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/28924>, accessed 27 July 2009].

<sup>197</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 1292/2/15.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, MS 1292/2/16.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, MS 1292/2/17.

<sup>200</sup> Arthur Jacobs, *Arthur Sullivan: A Victorian Musician* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992), p.39.

<sup>201</sup> Klaus Döge, 'Dvořák, Antonín.' *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 19 Jan. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/51222>>.

<sup>202</sup> Clays, Gregory, 'Utopianism', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, 82–89 (p.82).

and simplicity as an escape from the more aggressive industrialised world. Such sentiments were reflected in some of the music written in the nineteenth century, including those works with an historical theme that were written for and performed at the Birmingham Festival – while not sacred texts they were based around a deep sense of morality. By programming such repertoire the Musical Committee was continuing with the themes of purity, selflessness, and respectability that linked with the religious works also performed, and the notion of philanthropy that surrounded the Festival as a whole.

If the Birmingham Festival had remained in the church, how many of the newly written works would and could have been commissioned for the Festival? Without the erection of such a large and well-equipped concert hall, purpose built for the event, how many eminent soloists and conductors would have performed there? According to Joseph Moore, it is even possible that without the Town Hall the Birmingham Festival would have ceased to exist altogether.<sup>203</sup> This notion is seconded by W.P. Lloyd, one of the securities for the building of the town hall,<sup>204</sup> who wrote ‘I would say to the Gentlemen who are interested in the General Hospital, could they have had their Music Meeting if it had not been for my exertions?’.<sup>205</sup> It is of course impossible to give an answer to such questions, but it can be argued that since the Birmingham Festival had a huge purpose-built concert hall, that contained reportedly one of the best organs in Europe, these were major factors in making this Festival, according to the first edition of *Grove*, ‘the most important ‘music meeting’ in the provinces’.<sup>206</sup>

### 3.12: Music-making

Considering the importance of the Musical Festival, it is easy to overlook that the events were held triennially, and only for three or four days at a time; a building cannot be considered a concert hall if it only hosts concerts on three days every three years. Sir Arthur Sullivan, some of whose works were commissioned for the Festival, was of the opinion that musical activity in the intervening years, for much of the nineteenth

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<sup>203</sup> As mentioned earlier, in his memoirs Joseph Moore wrote: ‘It appeared quite evident that, if Birmingham could not raise a finer and better room for the morning performances, the Festivals would soon become unprofitable, and of course must be given up’. *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 2 July 1855.

<sup>204</sup> He lost £1,300 when the Commissioners needed to call in the money after the building costs exceeded those estimated. See *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 20 April 1835.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> Charles Mackeson, ‘Birmingham Festival’, in *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, i, p.243.

century, was scarce: 'When I first knew Birmingham it reminded me, in musical matters, of a huge boa constrictor that took an enormous gorge once in three years and fasted in the interim'.<sup>207</sup> Yet forty years earlier, Hugh Miller, an American on a tour of England, suggested of Birmingham that:

No town of its size in the Empire spends more time and money in concerts and musical festivals than Birmingham. [...] The people live in an atmosphere continually vibrating with clamour, and as the imprisoned thrush or linnet is excited, by even the screeching of a knife-grinder's wheel, to pour out its soul in music, so the very noises and peculiar characteristics, of the place may have an influence on the people by causing them, like the bird beside the cutler's wheel, to burst forth into song and melody in unconscious rivalry of their hammers and engines.<sup>208</sup>

Although neither Sullivan nor Miller, as visitors, could have had a comprehensive knowledge of the musical life of Birmingham, there is considerable evidence of an active concert scene in the town away from the Festival that would support Miller's statement. Margaret Handford, in her analysis of the musical life of Birmingham, states that music-making in the town can be traced back 600 years,<sup>209</sup> whilst John Money's study of Birmingham and the West Midlands details substantial musical activity away from the influence of the Festival in Birmingham from the eighteenth century onwards.<sup>210</sup> In addition, reports in local newspapers confirm that the Town Hall became integral to the non-festival musical life of nineteenth-century Birmingham.

The use of the Town Hall as a concert venue began intermittently. The small number of concert advertisements in the local newspapers in the 1830s suggests that after the opening Musical Festival, Birmingham Town Hall did not immediately see a large amount of musical activity. In its first year only five town-hall concerts were reported in the newspaper, given by societies from within the town such as the Oratorio Choral Society.<sup>211</sup> One explanation could be that since the Town Hall was still undergoing some construction, this may have interfered with the availability of the Hall for concerts. Another point that should also be noted is that all bodies wishing to use the Hall, whether musical, political, social or philanthropic, were under the jurisdiction

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<sup>207</sup> Statement made by Sullivan as part of a lecture in 1883 to the Clef Club in Birmingham. It has not been possible to locate the original source but the quotation is mentioned in a number of histories of music in Birmingham, for example, W.C. Stockley, *Fifty Years of Music in Birmingham: Being the Reminiscences of W.C. Stockley from 1850 to 1900* (Birmingham: Hudson and Son, 1913), p.57.

<sup>208</sup> Hugh Miller, *First Impressions of England and Its People* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1847), pp.254-255.

<sup>209</sup> Margaret Handford, *Sounds Unlikely*.

<sup>210</sup> John Money, *Experience and Identity*, specifically chapter 4, pp.80-97.

<sup>211</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, October 1834 - October 1835.

of the Town Hall Committee, which had the power to accept or reject an application and to set the rate for the hire of the hall. By 1844 the following scale of charges was in place:

- That all Town Meetings called by or under the sanction of the constitutional authorities and for strictly Town purposes be held free of expense.
- All meetings called with respect to general questions affecting the Town but for the purpose of expressing particular opinions as to such questions, 5£.
- All meetings called in support of any of the Charitable or Benevolent Institutions of the Town or Neighbourhood to pay five pounds.
- All meetings called in support of any of the Scientific Institutions of the Town or Neighbourhood to pay five pounds.
- All Concerts, Balls or other entertainments of that nature and all Lectures and Assemblies for personal or individual profit when they are inhabitants of the town to pay 15£ and when not inhabitants 25£.

The Commissioners in supporting the above five clauses and rates of charge think it necessary to observe that indiscriminative [sic] admission to the Hall even upon the above terms ought not to be granted there being obviously many purposes for which it would be impossible to grant the Hall on any [occasion] and when such cases may occur the Town Hall Committee will be happy to meet and confer with the other Authorities who have [requested] to grant the use of the Hall.<sup>212</sup>

The closing statement indicates that certain proposed events were rejected as unsuitable, thus lowering the number of events in the hall. In addition, organisers of events may have been deterred by the fee for the use of the building.

### 3.13: Organ Recitals

The one form of music-making in the town hall that was popular from the beginning was the giving of organ recitals. Since the building had been erected with such a magnificent and technologically advanced instrument, it was the most obvious means of ensuring that the Town Hall continued to function as a concert hall, and the Musical Committee were able to dictate this since they owned the instrument. Although utilised for solo performances, the Birmingham Town Hall organ had been conceived solely for the purposes of choral accompaniment. Although, according to Thistlethwaite, the inspiration for the Birmingham instrument came from the English eighteenth-century taste for oratorio,<sup>213</sup> it was the Birmingham Town Hall organ that was the inspiration for the great Victorian organs of the second half of the nineteenth century. In the 1830s, however, the solo organ recital was a relatively new phenomenon. Organ performances had been given in London throughout the eighteenth century, but Samuel

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<sup>212</sup> 'At a Special Meeting of Commissioners of the Birmingham Street Act', exact date unknown. Correspondence Between the Curator and High Bailiff and a copy of the Town Hall Committee Minutes re: use of halls etc., 1835-44, Birmingham City Archives, plan number 215.

<sup>213</sup> Nicholas Thistlethwaite, *Birmingham Town Hall Organ*, p.6.

Wesley and Benjamin Jacob's performances at the Surrey Chapel, Blackfriars between 1809 and 1814 are thought to have been the first solo organ recitals, alongside those of William Crotch, who was performing solo organ recitals in the Hanover Square Rooms in 1809. The London Apollonicon Recitals from 1817 helped to establish the organ recital as a legitimate genre of public performance, as an early manifestation of the solo recital that was to be made popular by Liszt twenty years later.<sup>214</sup> The recitals on the Birmingham Town Hall organ in the 1830s, therefore, were some of the first to be given outside London, setting the precedent for the Town Hall organ recitals that were to become so important at Leeds and Manchester. In fact, the local newspaper considered the organ in Birmingham Town Hall to be 'that originator of weekly organ recitals for the people'.<sup>215</sup> This claim is difficult to corroborate without more extensive research but likely to be true.

The organ recitals in Birmingham Town Hall were superintended by a town-hall organist. Again, since the instrument was owned by the General Hospital, it was that institution which employed the organist, not the Council. There is little surviving information on the work of the first two town-hall organists – Thomas Munden, employed from 1834 to 1837, and George Hollins, employed from 1837 to 1841. *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* in 1835 advertises that there will be performances on the organ every Thursday between the hours of one and two at the price of one shilling, presumably given by Thomas Munden.<sup>216</sup> There is no further mention of these recitals in the newspaper until 1836, when it is reported: 'Performance on the Organ, by Mr George Hollins takes place every Thursday between the hours of one and two',<sup>217</sup> which seems to confirm that the performances had been occurring for some time. That these recitals were given by George Hollins in 1836, i.e. before he was town-hall organist, suggests that the employed organist did not have a monopoly over the instrument. The employment of James Stimpson as town-hall organist in 1842, however, firmly established the role within specific boundaries stipulated by the organ trustees of the General Hospital, consisting of members of the Musical Committee and

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<sup>214</sup> See Rachel Cowgill, 'The London Apollonicon Recitals, 1817-32: A Case-Study in Bach, Mozart and Haydn Reception', in *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 123 (1998), 190-228.

<sup>215</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, January 1881, in Birmingham Festival Choral Society Newscuttings, Leaflets etc.: Volume one, 1876-1891, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55.6, 663277.

<sup>216</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 19 October 1835.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 January 1836.

the General Hospital Committee. Stimpson did not receive an annual income from the trustees. For the concerts that he gave on Mondays and Thursdays, he paid the costs but kept the profit. Out of this profit he had to pay the trustees £70 a year to cover the rental of the organ, the Festival musical library, and other equipment belonging to the Festival stores. The trustees used the £70 to keep the organ in proper order, to insure the instrument, and to pay the salary of the Festival library librarian. Stimpson was awarded sole use of the organ and was allowed to charge five guineas for a performance with one previous rehearsal, and two guineas for a second rehearsal, if required, as stipulated by the trustees. In addition, Stimpson was also allowed to give minor performances for his own benefit, at charges that could not exceed those set by the trustees.<sup>218</sup>

The organ recitals established in the 1830s would have been inaccessible for most working people, not only because of the entry fee, but also because they were held during the afternoon on a working day. In 1844 the *Musical World* reported that 1,600 'working people' attempted to remedy to the situation by writing to the Governors of the General Hospital, requesting that they have the chance of hearing the organ in the form of weekly evening organ recitals from half-past seven until nine, therefore after work. The request was accepted and at the inception of the recitals the attendance was high: 1,143 people the first night, between 1,700 and 1,800 the second, and nearly 1,500 the third.<sup>219</sup> The introduction of these concerts truly established the regular use of the Town Hall for organ recitals.<sup>220</sup> Under the control of the Musical Committee, these Monday evening performances, at three pence admission, were seen as a way of educating the masses, 'to afford rational amusement and to elevate and refine the public taste',<sup>221</sup> and therefore the repertoire was carefully chosen:

The selections made by our organist, Mr Stimpson, have been of that popular class likely to prove attractive to such an audience; but, nevertheless, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, have had their allotted places, and though we cannot expect the 'uninitiated' at once to 'fall

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<sup>218</sup> 16 January 1863, in Sub Town Hall (Organ) Committee Minutes, 21 November 1856 to 7 October 1869, West Yorkshire Archives, LLC/20/3/1. In December 1862, the Leeds Sub Town Hall (Organ) Committee wrote to various provincial centres, including Birmingham, requesting information on how their governing bodies managed the organs and organists within their public halls. What followed was a series of communications from a number of regional councils, giving precise details of the work and remuneration of the musician in their employ and the usage of the instrument itself. The information on Stimpson's employment is taken from Birmingham Council's reply to the Leeds Committee.

<sup>219</sup> *Musical World*, 19 (1844), p.396.

<sup>220</sup> Any surplus profit from these concerts was given to the General Hospital, along with the Festival receipts.

<sup>221</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 3 December 1855.

down and worship' those great men, the Monday evening performances *must* not only incline the heart to better things, but give a taste for that divine science, which, so long as this life lasts, we must all truly love.<sup>222</sup>

In time the organ recitals were extended to include solo singers, a choir, and a pianist for the sake of variety. With the introduction of soloists and choirs the repertoire had to be closely monitored, but in the opinion of the local newspaper the standard was maintained:

With regard to the class of music performed, the system laid down at the outset has been steadily pursued, and the selections, consisting of portions of oratorios, cantatas, glees, madrigals, duets, and soli pieces with chorus, have been kept up to pretty nearly the same standard throughout. With this view the schemes have usually been arranged from the compositions of the best writers, and framed with the desire to raise the public taste to the appreciation and enjoyment of what is good and beautiful in music, rather than to yield to a desire for every-day, commonplace novelties, merely for the sake of attracting and amusing the audience.<sup>223</sup>

By 1855 the attendance at these concerts began to wane. It was suggested that this may be because the music was too 'high-class' for the audiences, but the Musical Committee would not bow to pressure to popularise the repertoire. It was even suggested that it would be better for the Monday Evening Concerts to cease than perform 'such music', since to do so would contradict the reason the Concerts were established in the first place; it would 'pervert the object aimed at, namely, the intellectual advancement and refinement of the people, at whose request and for whom the Concerts were instituted'.<sup>224</sup> The concerts continued and were considered a priority by the Council, probably because of the control the Musical Committee held over the use of the hall through its ownership of the organ. When the secretaries of the Queen's Hospital applied to use the Town Hall on a Monday evening they were informed that 'as the use of the Town Hall on the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> May is already engaged to the Festival Committee [...] this Committee cannot comply with their request'.<sup>225</sup> This episode did stimulate the Estates and Buildings to review the arrangement with the General Hospital.<sup>226</sup> However, because the Commissioners had stipulated the following in 1851, it was thought inadvisable to modify the arrangements.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> *Musical World*, 19 (1844), p.396.

<sup>223</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 3 December 1855.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> 5 March 1862, Estates and Building Committee 1860-1862, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.

<sup>226</sup> 14 May 1862, Estates and Building Committee 1860-1862, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.

<sup>227</sup> Resolved 3 August 1862, Estates and Building Committee 1862-1866, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.

We think it right to advert to the arrangements which have been made with the Committee of the General Hospital by which the Thursday performances on the Organ and the Monday Evening Concerts were established both tending much to the gratification of the Public and the latter being conducive to the cultivation of musical taste and the mental recreation of a large number of the Inhabitants of all Classes.<sup>228</sup>

Although the Musical Committee was in control of the organ recitals, the Council kept a watchful eye on the performances and was quick to contact the General Hospital if it felt that the organisers of the concerts were operating outside their remit. In December 1867, for example, the Town Clerk was instructed to write to the Musical Committee to enquire as to why the original arrangements for the holding of cheap musical concerts had been departed from, since admission prices had been recently increased. A 'cordial' letter was received in reply, explaining their position and thanking the Estates and Buildings Committee 'for the courtesy shown in reference to non interference with their existing arrangements'.<sup>229</sup> Such correspondence indicates some tension between the two parties, since this attempt by the Council to show their authority is met with a request, veiled in politeness, for the Council not to interfere in the Musical Committee's business. Unfortunately, on this occasion, the Council were not placated and they stopped the Monday Evening Concerts from 25 March 1868.<sup>230</sup> The concerts were only revived in the 1870s, 'under the Patronage of the Mayor'.<sup>231</sup>

The organ continued to be a mode of bringing 'music to the people' throughout the century. From the late 1860s the Town Hall organist, Mr Stimpson, gave weekly Saturday Afternoon Organ Recitals, again aimed towards a lower-class audience. By this point in the nineteenth century, the Saturday half day for workers was becoming widespread,<sup>232</sup> so such performances would potentially be open to all classes. The following extract is from the *Birmingham Daily Post* of 2 March 1878:

ORGAN RECITAL, at the Town Hall, THIS DAY, [Saturday] from 3 till 4 o'clock. – First Sonata and Wedding March, Mendelssohn; Romanza, Haydn; Largo, Beethoven; Selection, 'Der Freyschutz'; Overture, 'Norma'.

<sup>228</sup> Extract from the final Report of the Commissioners, 31 December 1851, quoted 11 June 1862 in Estates and Building Committee 1860-1862, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.

<sup>229</sup> 15 January 1868, Estates and Building Committee 1866-1870, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 8 September 1874.

<sup>232</sup> For more on the improvement of working hours and conditions see Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75* (London: Fontana Press, 1979), p.137.



This list of repertoire for the Saturday Afternoon Organ Recital gives some indication of what music was considered to be 'improving',<sup>233</sup> and, when compared with the article from the *Musical World* in 1844, mentioned above, which stated that repertoire of a 'popular class likely to prove attractive to such an audience' was performed alongside 'Handel, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven',<sup>234</sup> a winning formula for educating the masses can be perceived that seems to have been used for much of the century.

From 1880, in a further effort to make music in the Town Hall more accessible, admission to the recitals was free. On this the local newspaper commented, 'in these entertainments we see another valuable instrument for instruction'. It is important to note that, throughout the century, when the Town Hall offered 'free concerts', the audience was apparently a capacity one, and of all classes.<sup>235</sup> This suggests that it was the cost of many of the concerts at the Town Hall that was prohibitive – there was no shortage of audience, just a shortage of disposable income.

It was James Stimpson's death in 1886 that gave the impetus for the handover of the Town Hall organ to the Birmingham authorities. The Estates Committee, the people in charge of the Town Hall from 1851, desired the swift appointment of a new organist, allegedly because the organ would suffer if not regularly played and because of the close proximity of the Festival,<sup>236</sup> but probably also because it could facilitate a quicker reconciliation of the subject of organ ownership between the Council and the Hospital. On 21 June 1888 a competition for the position of Birmingham Town Hall Organist was held at Westminster Abbey, attended by members of the Estates Committee and the Musical Committee, in order to make a 'joint appointment'.<sup>237</sup> It was judged by musicologist and composer Sir John Stainer,<sup>238</sup> and organist and composer Dr Frederick Bridge.<sup>239</sup> Out of three candidates, the one chosen was Charles

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<sup>233</sup> The inclusion of operatic excerpts in an 'improving' programme indicates a shift in opinion. However, the composer and subject of a specific opera would determine its respectability.

<sup>234</sup> *Musical World*, 19 (1844), p.396.

<sup>235</sup> The performance of two concerts by the Festival Choral Society in 1897 is one example: 'never has our noble building contained a vaster concourse of music-lovers of all classes, than yesterday afternoon. The floor of the hall, particularly, presented a sight not easily forgotten. The seats had been removed from the body of the hall, thus affording an opportunity to at least 2,000 visitors of hearing the musical entertainment. Every standing place was occupied, and the galleries were filled to their utmost capacity at each concert'. *Birmingham Post*, 21 June 1897.

<sup>236</sup> 11 January 1888, in Estates Committee 1884-1891, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> On Stainer see Jeremy Dibble, *John Stainer: A Life in Music* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007).

<sup>239</sup> On Bridge see Guy Warrack and Christopher Kent. "Bridge, Sir Frederick." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. 9 Apr. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/03978>>.

William Perkins,<sup>240</sup> who held the position of City Organist from 1888 to 1923. When discussing the establishment of the position in 1887, the following terms of employment were stipulated by the Council:

1. The Organist to receive what fees he can earn, and to pay over a sum of £35 per annum for the tuning and repair of the Organ.
2. Power to be retained to permit any organist, not being an inhabitant of the town, to play upon the organ; but in that case the town organist to be paid such a fee as he himself would have received if he himself had played, not exceeding 4/4/-.
3. The appointment to be terminable on 3 months notice by either party.<sup>241</sup>

Since there is no documentary evidence to suggest otherwise, it seems likely that the above terms were used in the employment of Perkins. In addition, there is no evidence of a change in terms at any point during the nineteenth century.

With the new ownership of the organ in place, the Council sanctioned the giving of a free organ recital on the first Saturday afternoon of each alternate month throughout the year.<sup>242</sup> Birmingham Town Hall was ultimately a high-status venue for the higher-class patron, but nevertheless the cheap, or free, organ recitals that were held at the Town Hall for much of the century indicate a real effort, however paternalistic, to open the doors of the Hall to those without the means to join the elite. However, although the town-hall recitals were linked with the provision of 'music for the people', before 1890 it was the General Hospital and not the municipality that was doing the providing.

### 3.14: Choral Societies

As the 1840s progressed, concert activity at the Hall increased. It was from this period that the Town Hall began to be used on a regular basis for the concerts of the numerous Birmingham choral societies. The most consistent performer of choral music in the Town Hall was the Birmingham Festival Choral Society, officially founded in 1843 but whose origins can be traced back to the Oratorio Choral Society established by Joseph Moore sometime between 1805 and 1808 to combine local singers in one association

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<sup>240</sup> 26 June 1888, in Estates Committee 1884-1891, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.

<sup>241</sup> 9 December 1887, in *ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> 30 September 1890, in *ibid.*

‘for the supply of an efficient Festival Chorus’.<sup>243</sup> The Festival Choral Society was established in order to provide a chorus for the Musical Festival using singers from within Birmingham. Membership was open to all through recommendation and audition, although they had to be able to afford the admission fee and be ‘of good moral character’. It was stated in the rules:

Each male member shall pay an Admission Fee of not less than ten shillings or more than one pound, at the option of the committee, but each soprano may, in lieu of this fee, assist in the Concerts of the Society for two years.<sup>244</sup>

Whilst this statement suggests that the high fees of admission would have been prohibitive to many, there was also a stated alternative, which may suggest a wish to open the society to those on a lower income, and therefore gives an indication of the wide demographic of performers using the Town Hall: ‘Persons wishing to join us as Ordinary Members without payment of an Admission Fee, may arrange with the Committee who shall specify a more lengthened probation, such probation, however, shall not be less than two years’.<sup>245</sup>

Throughout the century the Festival Choral Society was the principal performer of oratorio and cantata in Birmingham, often re-introducing the works that had been performed at the previous Festival into its concerts. This practice was firmly established by the end of the century, winning general approval as a means of revitalising the works and enabling those who were not at the Festival to hear them:

The committee have studied popular taste, and their programme for the three concerts is not only attractive to a degree, but included the principal novelties of the late Musical Festival, thus affording all classes and all lovers of music an opportunity of hearing the principal new works which have been cast upon the musical world, at prices generally accessible.<sup>246</sup>

The Festival Choral Society also introduced new works outside the Festival; A.R. Gaul’s cantata *Joan of Arc*, premiered in 1887, is just one example.<sup>247</sup> They were also the principal performer of Handel’s *Messiah* in Birmingham, giving an annual

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<sup>243</sup> Andrew Deakin, *History of the Birmingham Festival Choral Society* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1897), p.11. The date of the establishment of this society is not certain. Pritchard discusses the issue in ‘The Musical Festival and the Choral Society’, p.296. Whilst the year of origin is contentious, Pritchard states here, ‘there can be no doubt whatever in claiming Moore as founder’.

<sup>244</sup> ‘Abstract of Rules Relating to Ordinary Members’, in Scrapbook Containing Items Relating to the Birmingham Festival Choral Society, 1845-1981, Birmingham City Archives, MS 1870.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> Unidentified newspaper cutting (origin unknown), 23 November 1894, in *Musical Notices Contributed to Birmingham Newspapers, etc. by Oscar Pollack, 1894-1896*, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55, 341803.

<sup>247</sup> *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 28 (1887), p.603.

performance at Christmas, and therefore contributing to the 'entertainments of a superior kind'<sup>248</sup> given in the town at this time of year. The performance of *Messiah* contributed, it seems, to the sacrilization of the Town Hall, since this concert was not seen as entertainment but as part of the Christmas worship in the town:

The annual performance at this season of the year serves the purpose of a religious musical service, and had it not been for the irresistible outbursts of applause that followed each number, the complete effect of such a service would have been realised.<sup>249</sup>

The subject of applause during oratorio performances in the Town Hall was one that was discussed in the press throughout the century, normally in order to express the opinion that it was inappropriate. The earliest such instance was in the report following the first public musical performance in the Town Hall, a choral rehearsal for the ensuing Festival, in September 1834:

Some of them [the singers] indeed excited so much gratification that they were loudly applauded. On future occasions it is however hoped that this excess of feeling will be refrained, as ill suited to sacred subjects.<sup>250</sup>

This was the first performance of sacred music in the Town Hall and therefore there would have been no other reference point for audience etiquette than those performances given at St Phillip's church. By 1849, applause at the morning performances of the Festival had been prohibited - 'by a wholesome regulation recently adopted, the execution of the oratorio was uninterrupted by any manifestations of approval'.<sup>251</sup> It seems that there was a wish on the part of some to treat the performances of sacred music in the Town Hall with the same reverence as in a church, thus using the Town Hall as a building for religious observation. For others, in the following example probably from a writer outside Birmingham, this made no apparent sense:

What real objection, we should like to know, can be offered to a popular demonstration in the Birmingham Hall during the representation of an oratorio? It is no cathedral, nor sacred edifice, the *genius loci* of which might indeed with reason plead for extra decorum and forbearance; but a good, stout, profane structure, devoted to all sorts of purposes, like St. James's or Exeter Hall.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 26 December 1887.

<sup>249</sup> Unidentified newspaper cutting (origin unknown), c.1897, in *Musical Notices Contributed to Birmingham Newspapers, etc. by Oscar Pollack, 1896-1899*, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55, 341803.

<sup>250</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 1 September 1834.

<sup>251</sup> *Musical World*, 24 (1849), p.564.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 39 (1861), p.570.

Some in Birmingham at this time may have been angered by this article. Calling the Town Hall a 'profane structure' was in contradiction to everything the Musical Committee had worked for and, judging from the newspaper evidence, against the majority of public opinion at the time. For those who were closely involved with the musical life of the Town Hall, especially the Musical Festival, the building was a sacred edifice used to worship, according to the *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 'the divine art'.<sup>253</sup>

Despite the prevalence of oratorio and cantata, in the last quarter of the century the Festival Choral Society began to occasionally introduce some popular operatic extracts into its miscellaneous concerts. The following is an early example of a concert given by the society on 29 November 1877:

Psalm 42, Op. 78, No. 2 – 'Judge me, O God' .....	Mendelssohn
Aria, <i>Tannhauser</i> – 'O du mein holder abend stern' .....	Wagner
Romance – 'Lonely amid my sorrow yearning' .....	Wagner
Song – 'The Garland'.....	Mendelssohn
Scena, <i>Roberto Il Diavolo</i> , 'Roberto, o tu che adoro' .....	Meyerbeer
Solo Organ – Second Sonata .....	Mendelssohn
Part Song – 'Resurgana'.....	H. Lestte
Songs – (a) 'Renunciation' (b) 'Understanding'.....	Klenod
Serenade – 'Wake, my love'.....	Loder
Solo and Chorus – 'Methinks I hear'.....	Crotch
Part Song – 'Song and melody, awake'.....	Gaul
Canzonet – 'My mother bids me bind my hair' .....	Haydn
Song – 'Fare thee well' .....	Duvizier
Solo Organ – Offertoire in C minor .....	Batiste
Songs – (a) 'The sunny beam' (b) 'Twas all a Dream' ..	Henschel, Lasser
Romance – 'Alice, where art thou?'.....	Ascker
Part Song – 'Sands of Dee'.....	Macfarren
Aria, <i>Le Nozze Di Figaro</i> , 'Deh vieni'.....	Mozart
Aria, <i>Alexander's Feast</i> – 'Revenge, Timotheus cries'.....	Handel
Glee – 'The Three Chafers' .....	Truhn

*Birmingham Daily Post*, 30 November 1877

According to William Stockley, the conductor of the Festival Choral Society until 1895, the Committee decided to include operas in their programmes, 'under the impression that this was needful for the prosperity of the Society'.<sup>254</sup> Stockley disagreed and resigned the conductorship because of it. He felt, as did others, that the Town Hall was not the right setting for the performance of opera because of the inability to use stage sets, and the voices of the choral society did not have the correct training for the genre. The music of the choral societies can be seen to have

<sup>253</sup> 18 August 1849. The journal used this phrase in a review of the 1849 Birmingham Musical Festival.

<sup>254</sup> William Stockley, *Fifty Years of Music in Birmingham*, p.51.

represented a link between oratorio, philanthropy and the middle class that was in self-conscious opposition to the link between aristocracy and opera that endured from the eighteenth century. An offshoot of this principle was a distinct avoidance of the impression that music was for profit. In 1623 the essayist and poet, Owen Felltham, had written, in his book *Resolves: Divine, Morall, Politicall*, 'I believe it, [music], as a helper to good and ill; and will therefore honour it when it moves to virtue, and beware it when it would flatter into vice'.<sup>255</sup> That this publication appeared in several abridgements and reportedly complete editions in both England and America between 1800 and 1840 indicates an early nineteenth-century sympathy with his seventeenth-century thoughts.<sup>256</sup> Any suspicion of 'vice' in Victorian music-making was avoided with regard to the most respectable performances, and, as has previously been discussed, linking those performances with the presentation of religious texts confirmed that they were above mere entertainment for profit. In addition, Rachel Cowgill suggests that the higher class of audience found enjoyment at such concerts through 'a paternalistic sense of superiority' – music was being 'made' for them, rather than them taking the role of a 'customer'.<sup>257</sup>

The performance of opera by the Festival Choral Society crossed this line, therefore creating a feeling of self-indulgence and consumerism about concert-giving and attendance. Nevertheless, the society continued with this genre and in 1899 there was an even greater departure from precedent when they performed a concert version, in English, of Wagner's *Der Fliegende Hollander* (*The Flying Dutchman*). The local newspaper gave the following review of the performance:

For the first time in the history of the society opera completely displaced oratorio and cantata. [...] It was the first time in our experience that the opera has been given without the omission of a single note, either on the stage or in the concert-room. [...] Of course it is artistically very wrong and improper to perform operas apart from their stage surroundings [...] on the other hand, we are not over-well provided with opera in Birmingham, and there are many people who object less to opera than to the theatre.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Owen Felltham, *Resolves, Divine, Moral and Political*, 13<sup>th</sup> edition (London: Pickering, 1840), p.198. The spelling of the title was modernised in the later editions. On Felltham see Ted-Larry Pebworth, 'Felltham, Owen (1602?–1668)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/9269>, accessed 27 April 2009].

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>257</sup> Rachel Cowgill, 'Disputing Choruses in 1760s Halifax: Joah Bates, William Herschel, and the Messiah Club', in *Music in the British Provinces*, p.108.

<sup>258</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 8 December 1899.

As the reporter suggests in his final sentence, there had been a stigma attached to opera for most of the nineteenth century, it being too closely related to the theatre. There had been a small number of performances of full operas in the Town Hall from the 1850s, and a more frequent use of operatic excerpts in miscellaneous concerts throughout the century,<sup>259</sup> but the moral ambiguity of the genre is almost certainly why concert performances of opera had not been a common feature of the musical life of the Town Hall. Opposition to the genre was relaxing by the end of the century however, and, under the auspices of the Festival Choral Society, this performance of Wagner must have been considered respectable. The Town Hall can certainly not be classed as an operatic venue, but at the end of the century opera became a feature of its musical life, ensuring that the inhabitants of Birmingham had a 'rational' environment in which to experience it.

Many Birmingham choral societies performed in the Town Hall in the nineteenth century, and the newspaper reports of the time suggest that they were all of a high quality, tackling the most difficult repertoire. At some point in the mid-century, the Town Hall itself even had a choir – the Town Hall Glee Choir – which was conducted by James Stimpson.<sup>260</sup> The chorus of the Birmingham Triennial Festival, consisting predominantly of the members of the Festival Choral Society but also of other choral societies from within and outwith the town, became famous as the best body of choral singers the country possessed, with such superlatives as 'The Birmingham singers have proved themselves the model singers of England – perhaps of the world',<sup>261</sup> regularly appearing in the reviews of the Festivals. The high standard of the Birmingham chorus may well have been a result of the continued use of the Town Hall as a venue for choral singing outside the event, allowing societies to hone their skills in the inter-festival years.

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<sup>259</sup> There were even occasions when a miscellaneous concert consisting of purely operatic excerpts was given. One example is a morning concert given by Her Majesty's Opera Company in Birmingham Town Hall on 11 December 1886. For further information on this concert see *Birmingham Daily Post*, 8 December 1886.

<sup>260</sup> The only reference to the Town Hall Glee Choir that has been found is from a report in the *Musical World*, 32 (1854), p.371. However, that article was referring to a presentation by the Glee Choir to their conductor as an 'expression of respect and esteem', which may suggest that the choir had been in existence for some time.

<sup>261</sup> *Musical World*, 36 (1861), 566-568 (p.566).

### 3.15: Visiting Performers

It was also in the 1840s that Birmingham Town Hall began to feature on the Provincial concert 'tour' circuit, attracting outside performers who appeared at the Hall for 'one night only'. The celebrated Swedish soprano Jenny Lind, for example, sang in concerts in the Town Hall in 1846 and 1848, also appearing in a performance of *Elijah* in 1849. Lind's performances at Birmingham Town Hall were during the era of 'Lind-mania', when her face appeared on memorabilia from matchboxes to candle snuffers.<sup>262</sup> For her to perform at the Town Hall at the height of her career indicates the high reputation the building held as a music venue at this time, and the Birmingham audiences seem to have been just as infatuated with Lind as the rest of the country:

On Thursday night Jenny Lind gave a gratuitous concert at the Town Hall, Birmingham, for the benefit of the Queen's Hospital. The interest excited on the occasion was unprecedented, and from an early hour in the day, vast numbers of highly respectable persons continued to arrive from the principal towns throughout the district. There were three thousand persons present.<sup>263</sup>

In September 1844 the French composer and showman Louis Jullien gave the first of his touring Promenade Concerts at the Town Hall aimed at the 'shilling-public'. His role in establishing the early promenade concert was significant, not only in Birmingham but in England as a whole. His self-proclaimed aim of ensuring amusement 'as well as attempting instruction',<sup>264</sup> through combining the performance of traditional and lighter works, attracted large audiences to the Town Hall to hear, for example, Beethoven symphonies next to D'Albert's Sebastopol Quadrilles.<sup>265</sup> In 1853, Davison of the *Musical World* suggested that Jullien 'was undoubtedly the first who directed the attention of the multitude to the classical composers [...] [he] broke down the barriers and let in the "crowd"'.<sup>266</sup> In bringing his concerts, aimed at lower-class audiences, to Birmingham Town Hall, Jullien was possibly the first to introduce classical orchestral repertoire to concerts outside the Festival environment. The

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<sup>262</sup> On Jenny Lind see Carole Rosen, 'Lind, Jenny (1820–1887)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/16671>, accessed 30 April 2009], and George Biddlecombe, 'The construction of a cultural icon: the case of Jenny Lind', in Peter Horton and Bennett Zon, eds., *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*, Vol. 3 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 45–61.

<sup>263</sup> *Musical World*, 24 (1849), p.14.

<sup>264</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 9 November 1850.

<sup>265</sup> See *Birmingham Daily Post*, 22 December 1886.

<sup>266</sup> Keith Horner. 'Jullien, Louis'. *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. 30 Apr. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/14538>>.



*Birmingham Daily Post* said of Jullien, 'No man of bygone days has contributed more towards elevating the taste for orchestral music in Birmingham'.<sup>267</sup>

### 3.16: Local Societies

Despite the musical activity of the 1840s, William Stockley recalled in 1913 that even by 1850 the musical life of Birmingham was still overshadowed by the Festival:

Coming to Birmingham in 1850 to learn the business of a pianoforte and music dealer [...] I need scarcely say that on settling in a town so noted for its musical gatherings, my expectations were of the most sanguine nature. My disappointment, therefore, was very great when I found that, although Birmingham deserved its splendid reputation, this was due to its glorious festivals, which were held once in three years.<sup>268</sup>

In 1855, a correspondent in the *Musical World* wrote that 'for some months prior to our great Triennial Festivals, matters musical are always very quiet here; now and then only do we get a little music in the town apart from the gin-palace or saloon'.<sup>269</sup> The Festival was normally in August, September or October, however, so the months prior would have been outside the musical season anyway and therefore would probably have lacked musical activity as a matter of course. Nevertheless, further newspaper evidence confirms that it was only post-1850 that Birmingham Town Hall became a significant music venue. The second half of the century saw the growth of a great number of musical societies in the town, mostly vocal but some instrumental. One of the most notable was the amateur orchestra established by Stockley himself in 1856, not only for the purpose of accompanying the Festival Choral Society in their concerts but also to give orchestral concerts with the aim of creating a first-class orchestra for Birmingham. The previous lack of orchestral activity in Birmingham is evidenced by a comment in Stockley's memoirs: 'I immediately set about the task of forming an orchestra, and as there were but few instrumentalists in the town, and those principally engaged at the Theatre Royal, and the music halls, my task was a difficult one'.<sup>270</sup> The

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<sup>267</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 22 December 1886.

<sup>268</sup> Stockley, *Fifty Years of Music in Birmingham*, pp.1-2. Little is known about Stockley's background and training other than his own description in this extract, of coming to Birmingham 'to learn the business of a pianoforte and music dealer', and similar brief biographies given in various histories of music in Birmingham such as Sutcliffe Smith's *The Story of Music in Birmingham*, p.43, which states: 'He came to Birmingham in a business capacity, being connected with the firm of Sabin, music-sellers in Colmore Row. His love and enthusiasm for all things connected with music soon manifested itself in the life of the town. He planned organs at a number of churches, trained choirs, formed orchestras wherein he instituted the nearest approach to a local permanent orchestra the town had, up to that time, possessed'.

<sup>269</sup> *Musical World*, 33 (1855), p.385.

<sup>270</sup> Stockley, *Fifty Years of Music in Birmingham*, pp.4-5.

initial series of subscription orchestral concerts begin in 1873, presenting three concerts a season in the Town Hall, always on a Thursday evening. Through these concerts Stockley enabled many contemporary British composers such as Parry, Cowen, Macfarren and Elgar, to have their music performed; Elgar, in fact, played first violin in Stockley's orchestra between 1882 and 1889.<sup>271</sup> Stockley also encouraged composers to conduct their own compositions at his concerts, a practice that was popular with composers and audiences alike. Despite such innovation in programming, Stockley's 'orchestral concerts' generally consisted of more standard orchestral repertoire, with 'overtures' being the staple ingredient. The following, taken from the advertisement for a concert in the Town Hall on 8 November 1883, is a typical example:

'Scotch Symphony'... Mendelssohn  
 Overtures: 'Egmont'... Beethoven  
           'Mignon' ... A. Thomas  
           'Scotch Rhapsody' ... Mackenzie  
           'Dance of the Hours' from *La Gioconda* ... Ponchielli  
 'Ah Perfido' ... Beethoven  
 'With Verdure Clad' ... Haydn  
 'Let the Bright Seraphim' ... Handel  
 Trumpet Obligato ... Mr Robinson  
 'Lend me your aid' ... Gounod  
 'Prayer' from *Rienzi* ... Wagner  
 'Some Village Hampden', from Gray's *Elegy* ... Cellier  
 'Duet Concertante No.3, Opus 57' ... Spohr<sup>272</sup>

Although advertised as an 'orchestral concert', the presence of numerous vocal items suggests either that audiences were not ready for a concert consisting of purely instrumental items, or that the orchestra did not have enough repertoire to give a concert on their own. Nevertheless, Stockley's concerts were popular with audiences and went some way to ending the dominance of choral performances in Birmingham. By 1894 the local newspaper was able to comment of Stockley and his orchestra:

His indefatigable labours in the furtherance of musical culture in this great centre of the Midlands has at last born fruit, and we may now safely boast of having one of the finest orchestras in the provinces. It proved uphill work, it involved pecuniary loss, but at last a permanent result has been achieved, and these excellent orchestral concerts may now be considered a musical institution of the town.<sup>273</sup>

<sup>271</sup> See Stockley, *Fifty Years of Music in Birmingham*, p.40, and Diana McVeagh. "Elgar, Sir Edward." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 4 Jan. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/08709>>.

<sup>272</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 1 November 1883.

<sup>273</sup> Unidentified newspaper cutting (origin unknown), 9 November 1894, in *Musical Notices Contributed to Birmingham Newspapers, etc. by Oscar Pollack, 1894-1896*, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55, 341803.

These concerts lasted until 1897, when George Halford took over the baton.

The Birmingham musical societies would often combine for a performance. In 1880 a number of concerts were given on Saturday evenings under the auspices of the Birmingham Musical Association. The performers were the various local musical societies and the aim seems to have been 'promoting the improvement of taste amongst the industrial classes'.<sup>274</sup> Thus the Town Hall was again being used as a venue for 'improvement' through music. In addition, in the years before the turn of the century, a monthly series of concerts was given at the Town Hall, shared by the Birmingham Choral Union, the Choral and Orchestral Association, and the City Choral Society.

The Town Hall continued to be used as a venue for charity fundraising. Benefit concerts for such local charities as the Railway Servants' Orphanage, Postmen's Provident Society or the Poor Childrens' Boot Fund sustained the combination of music and philanthropy that was so integral to the Town Hall's conception. Harking back to the controversy that had surrounded the building of the Town Hall, there continued to be tension as to whether these concerts were events for the benefit of music or charity. In 1890 the local newspaper commented of a Railway Orphanage Concert, 'It is quite possible that the strong array of artistic talent engaged had something to do with the magnitude of the attendance – for there are still "names to conjure with" in the musical world; but we prefer to believe that the spirit of benevolence at least had an equal share in bringing about so satisfactory a result'.<sup>275</sup> The repertoire of these concerts generally consisted of popular ballads of the day, interspersed with oratorio or cantata excerpts.<sup>276</sup> There were also concerts in the Town Hall by those in need of the charity themselves, such as an instrumental concert given by the Sailors' Orphans in 1880.<sup>277</sup> In addition, in 1879 the Mayor of Birmingham, 'with the true feeling of a philanthropist',<sup>278</sup> initiated a series of four free Concerts at the Town Hall to which he invited workingmen and their families. The tickets were distributed, accompanied by a circular from the Mayor which stated the following:

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<sup>274</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, January 1881, in Birmingham Festival Choral Society Newscuttings, Leaflets etc.: Volume one, 1876-1891, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55.6, 663277.

<sup>275</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 25 February 1890.

<sup>276</sup> For an example see the report of the Great Western Railway Servants' Widows and Orphans Benevolent Fund Concert in *Birmingham Daily Post*, 25 May 1886.

<sup>277</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 10 September 1880.

<sup>278</sup> *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 20 (1879), p.305.

It is to be regretted that in this town no opportunity exists for hearing high-class music except by payments which are so high that they place this privilege out of the reach of the majority of our townspeople; and it consequently happens that the popular taste for music remains undeveloped, and the pure delight and absolute usefulness of good music are both comparatively unknown and unenjoyed. I therefore propose to invite to these concerts those persons who from various reasons are unable to obtain the enjoyment of listening to high-class music, in the hope not only of affording an evening's pleasure to a large number of people, but also that from these concerts something permanent may grow, which may result in bringing good music within the reach of all classes.<sup>279</sup>

It is possible to argue that it was Joseph Moore's original philanthropic arguments for the building of the Town Hall that had enabled the Mayor of Birmingham to become known as a philanthropist himself through the use of the Town Hall. The repertoire chosen for this concert included excerpts from *Messiah*, *Judas Maccabeus*, *The Creation*, *St. Paul* and other oratorios, all given by the Festival Choral Society. In addition there were several orchestral compositions such as the overtures to Weber's *Oberon* and Rossini's *Semiramide*, the Allegretto from Mendelssohn's *Hymn of Praise* and the introduction to the third act of Wagner's *Lohengrin*. According to the local newspaper the repertoire was applauded loudly and 'the generosity of Alderman Jesse Collings was warmly appreciated'.<sup>280</sup> Although there are no surviving reports from the target audience to corroborate the newspaper's assertions, it seems, since the audience applauded loudly, that the working-men and their families appreciated the chance to hear a concert in the Town Hall, a music venue that would otherwise be beyond their financial reach; such 'concerts for the people' were repeated in the remaining years of the century. Using the Town Hall as a venue for musical education can also be seen in the concerts and demonstrations given by the Tonic Sol-fa Association. The following is an advert in the local newspaper for such an event:

#### TOWN HALL, BIRMINGHAM

ON TUESDAY NEXT, June 6, an OPEN REHEARSAL of a Selection of VOCAL MUSIC will be given by Herr EMIL BEHNKE'S UNITED TONIC SOL-FA CLASSES, numbering upwards of 200 Singers, all holding (at least) the 'Elementary Certificate'.

#### A 'SIGHT-SINGING TEST',

Consisting of a FOUR-PART SONG, composed for the occasion by T. Anderton, Esq., Mus. Bac., and not previously seen by the Choir will be sung immediately upon the distribution of the copies, which will take place in the presence of the public.

Reserved Galleries, 3s.; Reserved Floor (not numbered), 2s.

Unreserved Great Gallery and Floor, 1s. Children admitted Half-price.

Doors open at 7:30; to commence precisely at Eight. Carriages may be ordered for Ten.

<sup>279</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>280</sup> *Birmingham Daily Mail*. Quoted in *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 20 (1879), p.306.

A plan of the Reserved Seats may be seen at the Music Warehouse of Messrs. Harrison and Harrison, Colmore Row.

Tickets to be had at the principal Music Warehouses.<sup>281</sup>

By the second half of the nineteenth century there was certainly no shortage of local amateur talent to sustain the Town Hall's role as a concert hall between the Festival years. In fact, in December 1886 the *Musical World* suggested of music in Birmingham, 'In other large cities the professional man rules over the amateur; in our town it is the reverse – the amateur dictates to the professional man'.<sup>282</sup> This was not, however, meant as a compliment. Such a statement links with a certain amount of national controversy that surrounded the role of the amateur in nineteenth-century music-making. Earlier in 1886 another article had appeared in the *Musical World* entitled 'The Place of the Amateur in Music'. It was written by an anonymous 'amateur' musician in an attempt to promote the value of amateur musicians and their contribution to the study and advancement of music. In presenting his argument the author gives an indication of how some professional musicians viewed amateur music-making at the time:

There are a considerable number of professional musicians who would like to make it penal to be an amateur, and who regard the existence of this class as one of the chief causes of that financial depression which is making itself felt in music and in other arts as well as in the commercial world. The 'artists' [...] would state their grievance somewhat as follows: 'These amateurs are the ruin of music, for their charity concerts take away the money that should be spent on ours. [...] The amateurs take the bread out of our mouths'.<sup>283</sup>

Although such a statement cannot be considered representative of thinking in general, it does offer a context within which to place the quotation from December 1886, regarding the prevalence of amateur music in Birmingham, mentioned above. Taken from a larger article on music in the town, the author criticises what he perceives as a lack of professional musical excellence in the town through the audiences' preference for amateur, and therefore cheaper music. There was indeed a higher proportion of amateur to professional music-making in the Town Hall due to the large number of local musical societies that performed there, but it cannot be said that it was to the detriment of the standard of music-making in the town. Such amateur societies as the Festival Choral Society and Stockley's orchestra performed repertoire of the highest standard and level of difficulty, employing top soloists for the concerts and therefore

<sup>281</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 2 June 1871.

<sup>282</sup> *Musical World*, 64 (1886), p.790.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid*, p.51.

attaining a performance of utmost professionalism and competence. The music-making of Birmingham may have been dominated by amateurs, but the popularity of amateur concerts was due to the professionalism of the performances, not a lack of discernment by the audiences. In addition, it is possible that there was more support for local societies and artists who were performing for charitable or non-profit-making means, than for professionals who would profit from their appearances. The potentially frivolous activity of music-making could be justified by philanthropy.

### 3.17: Out of the Shadow

Despite the musical activity in the Town Hall discussed thus far, even as late as 1894 an article in the *Birmingham Mail* suggested that the musical life of Birmingham had only recently emerged out of the shadow of the Festival:

The name of Birmingham has always been conspicuous in the musical world on account of the brilliant associations of the Triennial Festivals; but of late years it has been gradually acquiring a strong musical life within itself.<sup>284</sup>

In the second half of the century much of the musical life of the Town Hall fell into a recognised 'season', as it would in other provincial concert halls across the country. This season lasted generally from October to May, although there were occasional concerts given in the interim, normally for charity. In this period Birmingham Town Hall continued to serve as one of the most important concert halls in the country, attracting outside musicians and impresarios for single concerts and for regular concert series. According to Margaret Handford, the Harrison Concerts, established in 1853, were the most significant concert series given in Birmingham, as they 'played an important part in keeping the musical flag flying between the festivals, they were in themselves trail blazers'.<sup>285</sup> The founder of the concerts, Thomas Harrison, established the series in order to bring 'the most famous singers and instrumentalists',<sup>286</sup> to Birmingham. In 1870 he was joined by his nephew, Percy, who inaugurated the Harrison Subscription Concerts, which ran in Birmingham and other principal towns in Great Britain until 1915.<sup>287</sup> In Birmingham four concerts each season were held in the

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<sup>284</sup> *Birmingham Mail*, 28 March 1894.

<sup>285</sup> Handford, *Sounds Unlikely*, p.140.

<sup>286</sup> *Musical Times*, 59 (1918), p.68.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.* Percy Harrison's obituary in *The Times*, 29 December 1917, gives a brief account of the man and his contribution to British musical life between 1870 and 1917: 'Mr. Percy Harrison, the well-known concert director, died on Christmas day at Lindenhurst, Wake Green-road, Moseley, in his 72<sup>nd</sup> year. He was born in Buckingham, and was a son of the late Alderman

Town Hall, two in the autumn and two in the spring. Even though these concerts were, from 1872, on occasion advertised as 'Harrison's Popular Concerts', they were not concerts intended for the lower classes. Since the cheapest ticket available was one shilling,<sup>288</sup> the prices of admission would have determined the class of audience able to attend, ensuring that the Harrison Concerts remained prestigious events. Despite the ticket prices,<sup>289</sup> the concerts always attracted a large audience:

We have never beheld a more remarkable coup d'oeil than that seen in our Town Hall last night in the occasion of Messrs. Harrison's extra concert. Not only were all the seats in the side and great gallery and floor reserved, but the whole of the orchestra right up to the organ loft was occupied by reserved ticket holders. So great was the demand for seats that the Hall could have been filled twice over.<sup>290</sup>

One of the great attractions of the concerts was the artistes engaged, many of whom rarely performed outside London. According to the *Musical Times*:

The list of the artists engaged at the Harrison concerts would include nearly all the great vocalists and instrumentalists of the times – from Clara Novello, Mario and Grisi, Piccolomini, Tietjens, and Guiglius, to Patti, Tetrazinni, Clara Butt, Paderewski, Sarasate, Nikisch, and Gerhardt. Mr. Percy Harrison also brought to Birmingham the most celebrated orchestras of the day.<sup>291</sup>

When the concerts were initiated, the performers engaged, normally singers, performed standard 'festival' repertoire, but from 1866 Harrison began introducing audiences to the chamber music of Haydn and Beethoven, and the piano music of Schubert, Chopin and Liszt. From 1875 a popular tradition was established whereby the Hallé Orchestra gave the last concert of the season, normally with Lady Hallé as violin soloist:

Messrs Harrison's last popular subscription concert of the present season was given last night in the Town Hall in the presence of one of the largest assemblies ever seen within its walls on such an occasion. The concert was a brilliant success from beginning to end, and proved a worthy finale to an excellent series. According to long established custom the services of Sir Charles Halle and his orchestra are requisitioned for the last subscription concert, and this procedure was again observed last night. [...] To hear Lady Halle is one of those exceptional

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Harrison of that town. In 1870 he entered into partnership with his uncle, Mr. Thomas Harrison, of Birmingham, and arranged a series of subscription concerts in London and the country. Adelina Patti was engaged by him for a concert tour in 1887 which was a signal success, and for many years Mr. Harrison arranged all the concerts in London at which she appeared. On Mme. Patti's retirement from the concert platform he became solo impresario and manager for the provincial concerts at which Mme. Tetrazzini appeared'.

<sup>288</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 23 September 1872.

<sup>289</sup> The prices for the first Popular Concert on 26 September 1872 were 'Reserved Seats: Gallery, 6s.; Floor, 4s. Unreserved Great Gallery, 2s. Floor and Orchestra, 1s.'. *Ibid.*

<sup>290</sup> Unidentified newspaper cutting (origin unknown), 13 April 1896, in *Musical Notices Contributed to Birmingham Newspapers, etc. by Oscar Pollack, 1894-1896*, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55, 341803.

<sup>291</sup> *Musical Times*, 59 (1918), p.68.

musical treats for which we have to wait for the space of a year and surely there is no artist more welcome here than the Queen of Violinists.<sup>292</sup>

Despite the efforts of William Stockley, the lack of a professional orchestra in Birmingham was a disappointment to many music-lovers in the town. Some considered it an embarrassment that they had to turn to an orchestra from Manchester, a rival industrial and musical centre,<sup>293</sup> in order to experience a professional orchestral concert in Birmingham Town Hall:

Certain amateurs have [...] been ventilating their emotions in the columns of the local papers. They would have [...] an orchestra established here as a permanent institution – if Manchester can afford to sustain such, why not Birmingham?<sup>294</sup>

Such embarrassment at the importation of the Hallé did not affect audience numbers. In fact, this concert was thought to be the climax of the concert series and always attracted large and enthusiastic audiences. The discomfiture of the situation may have been appeased by the establishment of Harrison Concerts in Manchester in the early 1880s, therefore creating a sense of reciprocity.

According to the *Musical Times*, the Harrison Concerts were ‘always the great attraction of the Midlands, and became in time the most fashionable provincial concerts of the year’.<sup>295</sup> These concerts, alongside those given by Stockley and Jullien, played a large part in introducing to Birmingham, a city whose musical life had for so many years revolved around choral singing, to orchestral music. Although newspaper reports suggest that the Town Hall was the main venue for the performance of orchestral music in the nineteenth century, and by the end of the 1800s around twenty orchestral concerts

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<sup>292</sup> Unidentified newspaper cutting (origin unknown), 12 March 1895, in *Musical Notices Contributed to Birmingham Newspapers, etc. by Oscar Pollack, 1894-1896*, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55, 341803.

<sup>293</sup> Asa Briggs, in *Victorian Cities*, pp. 185-193, presents a comparative account of the rivalry between Birmingham and Manchester, mainly based on their differences rather than similarities as industrial centres. On p.185 he quotes G.M. Young’s comparison of the two cities: ‘In many ways the change from Early to Late-Victorian England is symbolized in the names of two great cities: Manchester, solid, uniform, pacific, the native home of the great economic creed on which aristocratic England has always looked, and educated England was beginning to look, with some aversion, and some contempt: Birmingham, experimental, adventurous, diverse, where old Radicalism might in one decade flower into lavish Socialism, in another into a pugnacious Imperialism’. In musical terms, both towns laid claim to being the most musical town outside of London. On 19 August 1848 the *Musical World* said of Manchester, ‘The presence of Charles Hallé will have an immensely beneficial influence on the progress of [music] in Manchester, which has been justly styled “the second musical city of the empire”’. On 13 January 1872 the same journal said of Birmingham, ‘Birmingham, for more than a century, has had the reputation of being the first provincial town in the United Kingdom; that is, as the *locale* of a Triennial Festival, unrivalled in its successfulness whether artistically or commercially’.

<sup>294</sup> *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 35 (1894), p.257.

<sup>295</sup> *Musical Times*, 59 (1918), p.67.



were performed in the Town Hall per season, there were also some orchestral concerts held at the Masonic Hall and the Midland Institute from the 1850s. This led the local newspaper to suggest that orchestral music had begun to be held in higher esteem than choral:

Orchestral concerts represent the highest form of musical art, and their gradual development in this city is mainly due to Messrs Harrison and Mr Stockley, who have been the means of making our musical amateurs acquainted with the great works of the classical masters and the polyphonic compositions of the nineteenth-century tone poets. We believe we are correct in saying that until 24 years ago, when Sir Charles Halle's orchestra gave their first concert under the Harrison regime, no symphony in its entirety had been performed here. The late Monsieur Jullien was the first to introduce single movements of symphonies at his promenade concerts, and he in reality must be considered the pioneer in developing a taste for orchestral music in this country.<sup>296</sup>

The popularity of orchestral music in Birmingham indicates a shift in concert programming, dependent on placing greater trust in the intellectual capacities of the audience. Earlier in the century choral music had been prevalent because of its perceived capacity to provoke moral and righteous thoughts in audiences of all classes. In an age of moral reform, the performance of choral music, normally in the form of oratorio, was promoted due to its link with biblical texts, thus making it respectable, 'rational' recreation. If music had no words then audiences would be able to think for themselves – a potentially dangerous liberty. The revolution of the lower classes in France was of concern to many in Britain. Numerous reformers in the first half of the nineteenth century strove to keep the minds and bodies of the lower classes occupied in fruitful labours, instructing them on how to think and behave, thus steering them away from societal problems that had been exacerbated by mass urbanisation. According to Dave Russell:

Middle-class concern about the political and social problems generated by the emergence of distinctive and, to many minds, suspect working-class cultural patterns led to a major expansion of musical provision expressly for the working class. Certain elements of popular musical life – the singing class, some brass bands, the people's concert – were in part born out of fear of the problems created by industrial society'.<sup>297</sup>

The following article, from 1830, promotes the performance of choral music over orchestral:

<sup>296</sup> Unidentified newspaper cutting (origin unknown), 13 March 1896, in *Musical Notices Contributed to Birmingham Newspapers, etc. by Oscar Pollack, 1894-1896*, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55, 341803.

<sup>297</sup> *Popular Music in England*, p.11.

Music would not have recommended itself so effectually to general esteem, had it always been merely instrumental. For, if I mistake not, the expression of music without poetry is vague and ambiguous. [...] A fine instrumental symphony, well performed, is like an oration delivered with propriety, but in an unknown tongue; it may affect us to a certain degree, but conveys no determinate feeling. [...] the singer, by taking up the same air, and applying words to it, immediately translates the oration into our own language; then all uncertainty vanishes, the fancy is filled with determinate ideas, and determinate emotions take possession of the heart.<sup>298</sup>

It is difficult to equate such opinions, and there were many who held the same, with the giving of organ, and therefore 'instrumental' concerts as a means of 'improving the masses'. Possibly it was the traditional link between the organ and the church that made such performances acceptable, giving a further suggestion of the sacralization of the town hall as a performance space.

By the end of the century, in Birmingham, it was the advantages of orchestral music that were being endorsed:

The true beauty and usefulness of orchestral music lie in the absolute freedom of every hearer to translate the composer's thoughts into whatever is in best consonance with his own thought and feeling.<sup>299</sup>

The growing popularity of orchestral music was seen as a positive move towards more independent judgment by the general public – 'a progressive sign of the nineteenth century'.<sup>300</sup> It must be acknowledged, however, that the increased popularity of orchestral music coincided with the increased use of programme notes as a means of directing audiences in their listening, telling them what 'meanings' to draw from it, and educating them about what was 'good' music.<sup>301</sup> The listener could choose whether or not to follow the programme notes, but their overall popularity with audiences as a means of demonstrating intellectual superiority ensured an element of control. Through this increased interest in orchestral concerts the musicians of Birmingham finally felt able to compete with other provincial centres, although how realistic this competition was is debatable. With the increase of orchestral concerts in the town the press was able to comment:

<sup>298</sup> Dr. Beattie, 'On the Power of Association in Music' in *The Harmonicon*, 1830, p.107.

<sup>299</sup> *Birmingham Gazette*, 25 August 1898.

<sup>300</sup> This quotation is taken from a review of an orchestral concert given by Hans Richter's orchestra in the Town Hall, from an unidentified newspaper, dated 29 October 1896. Unidentified newspaper cutting (origin unknown), in *Musical Notices Contributed to Birmingham Newspapers, etc. by Oscar Pollack, 1894-1896*, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55, 341803.

<sup>301</sup> For more on the use of programme notes see, Christina Bashford, 'Educating England: Networks of Programme-Note Provision in the Nineteenth Century', in *Music in the British Provinces*, 349-376.

The name of Birmingham has always been conspicuous in the musical world on account of the brilliant association of the Triennial Festivals; but of late years it has been gradually acquiring a strong musical life within itself. [...] From a town dependant for its higher-class music upon instrumentalists from Leeds, Bradford, Nottingham and London, Birmingham is now able to supply its own music, and can depend entirely upon local talent to perform the masterpieces of orchestral composition.<sup>302</sup>

Despite the dominant position that orchestral music held in Birmingham at the end of the century, it was not until 1920 that Birmingham had a full-time, professional orchestra, and, in the nineteenth century, its orchestra could not compare with those of Manchester or Liverpool.

### 3.18: Chamber Music

One genre of music that was not popular in the Town Hall was chamber music. Town Hall Chamber Concerts were given but were not particularly well attended. This may again have been because of the preference for choral music, but it is also very possible that audiences were deterred by the difficulty of listening to chamber music in such a large hall. When the Masonic Hall in Birmingham began to give chamber-music concerts, they were warmly and thankfully received, prompting the following article:

Last night witnessed the realisation, for the first time in Birmingham, of one of the music lover's ideal combinations, viz., a really first-class instrumental concert, in a room of moderate dimensions. Hitherto the minor concert rooms of the town have been given up to second-rate concerts, and the performances of our leading instrumentalists have, for obvious commercial reasons, been reserved for the Town Hall, where all subtler beauties of execution have been more or less lost in the vastness of the arena. [...] In the small room of the new Masonic Hall, where, whatever slight acoustic defects are discernable, the smallness of the space to be filled, assures the satisfactory hearing of the most refined and delicate performance.<sup>303</sup>

Not only does this article confirm the incompatibility of the Town Hall with chamber music, it also gives further evidence of the Town Hall being used as 'the' venue in Birmingham for 'first-class' concerts. It also suggests that a concert at the Town Hall would ensure commercial success, presumably because of the large audience that could be seated, and also the prestige of the venue.

The problems that the promoters of chamber music encountered in Birmingham Town Hall due to the sheer size of the building were not isolated ones. The Hall was designed for a capacity audience, listening to a large orchestra and choir. A small concert audience adversely affected the acoustics, enabling too great an echo:

<sup>302</sup> Unidentified newspaper cutting (origin unknown), in *Musical Notices Contributed to Birmingham Newspapers, etc. by Oscar Pollack, 1887-1890*, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55, 341801.

<sup>303</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 17 March 1871.

The attendance was anything but encouraging, the hall being half empty, and under these conditions the acoustic properties of the building give rise to an amount of vibration which is detrimental to the proper balance of tone.<sup>304</sup>

In addition, the vastness of the Hall, in an age before the benefit of amplification, meant that only those singers with the largest of voices could create an impact in performance. Many reviews of concerts in the Town Hall bemoan that the singer did not have a voice adequate for the building:

Miss Thekla Fischer, to whom was assigned the prayerful contralto air, 'O Lord, Thou hast searched me out', possesses a mezzo-soprano voice of pleasing quality, and sings with taste and expression, but her voice lacks power for due effect in so large a building as our Town Hall, more especially when accompanied by a full orchestra.<sup>305</sup>

There is perhaps a patronising tone to this report, almost a pride that the singer was defeated by the building. In the eyes of many the difficult acoustic of the Town Hall for solo singers meant that only the best, or possibly the loudest, could sing there and thus raise the reputation of the Hall as a music venue through its association with only the finest performers.

### 3.19: New Repertoire

Outside the Festival, the Town Hall remained a place of innovation in the area of repertoire. As has already been stated, the repetition of new festival works by the Festival Choral Society was an established practice, and other local societies followed its lead in performing rare works alongside the more traditional repertoire. One such work was Handel's *Jephtha*, of which *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* in 1881 commented:

In thus producing a little-known oratorio by the chief of oratorio writers the committee of the society [the Philharmonic Union] did useful work, for a knowledge of the peculiarities and merits of a great master can only be secured by acquaintance with numbers of his works.

The same article continued by reflecting on the previous year's Town-hall concerts: 'Our societies have laudably rivalled each other in the production of little-known works of excellence'.<sup>306</sup> There were occasions when the Town Hall was the venue for premieres of works outside the Festival. Often these were for special occasions, such as the composition by J.A. Baker that was written for a concert in aid of the Queen's

<sup>304</sup> Unidentified newspaper cutting (origin unknown), 9 November 1894, in *Musical Notices Contributed to Birmingham Newspapers, etc. by Oscar Pollack, 1894-1896*, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55, 341803.

<sup>305</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 6 March 1875.

<sup>306</sup> *Aris's Gazette*, January 1881, in *Birmingham Festival Choral Society Newscuttings, Leaflets etc.: Volume one, 1876-1891*, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55.6, 663277.

Hospital in 1852.<sup>307</sup> Many compositions were written for performance by the Birmingham choral and orchestral societies, quite often by the conductors themselves. In 1875, Dr Charles Swinnerton Heap, conductor of the Birmingham Musical Union, introduced the first part of his oratorio *The Captivity* to a Town Hall audience.<sup>308</sup> Similarly, in around 1892, Thomas Facer, conductor of the Birmingham Choral Union, composed a Christmas Cantata for the choir entitled *Noeltide*,<sup>309</sup> and in 1898 a cantata, *The Pilgrim Fathers*.<sup>310</sup> The organ remained a source of compositional inspiration, with many composers writing works to be played by the town-hall organist. The following example was reported in one of the local newspapers:

Mr. C.W. Perkins, the city organist, played last Wednesday at the free organ recital in the Town Hall a manuscript composition by Mr. Andrew Deakin, of this town, which was specially composed for Mr. Perkins. It is an original air, with variations, modelled on strictly classical lines, and quite in Mozartian style.<sup>311</sup>

Few of the compositions that were premiered at Birmingham Town Hall outside the Festival have survived in the repertoire. Most were well received at the time but normally tried to follow a winning formula, often written in the style of Handel, Mozart, Mendelssohn and other prominent composers, and therefore lacked originality. A.R. Gaul's *Joan of Arc* is one example. The *Musical Times*, in reviewing the first performance of this work by the Birmingham Festival Choral Society in 1887,

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<sup>307</sup> *Derby Mercury*, 29 December 1852. The only information regarding Baker's composition is the minimal information given in this article: 'Mr. J.A. Baker has kindly undertaken the office of Musical Steward, and has written a composition for the occasion in honour of that great benefactor of the hospital, Dr. Warnerford'.

<sup>308</sup> See *Birmingham Concerts Scrapbook*, Birmingham Local Studies Library, F/3, LF55.4, 260373. There is no record of this composition having been published.

<sup>309</sup> Unidentified newspaper cutting (origin unknown), in *Musical Notices Contributed to Birmingham Newspapers, etc.* by Oscar Pollack, 1893-1894, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55, 341802.

<sup>310</sup> Unidentified newspaper cutting (origin unknown), 28 February 1899, in *Musical Notices Contributed to Birmingham Newspapers, etc.* by Oscar Pollack, 1896-1900, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55, 341805. Both *Noeltide* and *The Pilgrim Fathers* were published but do not seem to have survived in general circulation. On the occasion of the first performance of *The Pilgrim Fathers*, the *Musical Times* of 1 April 1899 commented: 'It is altogether on popular lines, and with a choir of 800 voices to the able organ accompaniment of Mr. C.W. Perkins, the performance was very effective'.

<sup>311</sup> It has not been possible to identify this work. Unidentified newspaper cutting (origin unknown), 16 July 1895, in *Musical Notices Contributed to Birmingham Newspapers, etc.* by Oscar Pollack, 1894-1896, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55, 341803. Andrew Deakin was a local musician of some note. He was a music teacher, organist, singer, violinist and composer, and also conductor of the Birmingham Tonic Sol-fa Association. In addition, from 1849 to 1894 he worked as music critic for various Birmingham daily papers. See *Musical Herald*, 671 (1904), p.39.

comments that Gaul's music is 'suggestive' of William Sterndale Bennett's.<sup>312</sup> In a later article *The Musical Times* comments further: 'It would be incorrect to say that Mr. Gaul's music, as a whole, is either very original or very powerful, but it falls very pleasantly on the ear'.<sup>313</sup> From the brief reports in the local and musical press of other works that were first performed in Birmingham Town Hall, outside the Festival, it would seem that such a comment would be an accurate epitaph for most.

### 3.20: Standards of Performance

A general picture of the musical life of Birmingham Town Hall in the second half of the century is reported widely in the local newspapers. The following report, which appeared in the *Aris's Gazette* in January 1879, gives a concise insight into the musical activity of Birmingham and its Town Hall in the previous year:

Looking through our twelvemonth's records, we find that we have had in the Town Hall during the year rather more than a dozen high-class – or at least comparatively high-priced – concerts, and about the same number of high-class lower priced concerts. [...] The concerts given in other buildings than the Town Hall have been very few, and very few indeed can be pleasantly referred to.<sup>314</sup>

Whilst this article is not altogether complimentary, it does demonstrate the dominance that the Town Hall held as a music venue in the town. It also seems to indicate some disapproval of what may be a relaxation on the part of the Town Hall Committee as to the type of performer granted use of the Hall. From the 1870s there is an increase in 'popular' entertainments in the Town Hall, one of the most frequent being the various minstrel troupes that were touring the country at the time. Such entertainment, what the newspaper describes as a 'happy combination and contrast of the sentimental with the rollicking and boisterous burlesque of negro minstrelsy',<sup>315</sup> although considered respectable at the time, was hardly the traditional 'top-class' Town-Hall entertainment

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<sup>312</sup> *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 28 (1887), p.665. *Grove Music Online* proposes that Sterndale Bennett's style 'bears a natural resemblance to that of the one Romantic composer he did wholeheartedly admire, Mendelssohn'. See Nicholas Temperley and Rosemary Williamson. 'Bennett, Sir William Sterndale'. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 7 Jan. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/42930>>.

<sup>313</sup> *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 29 (1888), p.153.

<sup>314</sup> In *Birmingham Festival Choral Society Newscuttings, Leaflets etc.: Volume one, 1876-1891*, Birmingham Local Studies Library, LF55.6, 663277.

<sup>315</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 17 May 1880. The reporter is here referring to a performance by the Matthews' Minstrels. Even in this genre of entertainment Birmingham Town Hall set a precedent by being the first venue outside London to accommodate the Moore and Burgess Minstrels in 1880, who had never before performed outside St. James's Hall, London. See *The Era*, 28 March 1880.

that had been promoted from its opening in 1834. In 1863 the Estates and Building Committee had denied the use of the Hall to Victor Julien for a flying trapeze performance because of the 'character' of his entertainment.<sup>316</sup> In 1866 the *Birmingham Daily Post* defined any performance associated with the word 'popular' as 'opposed to the idea of classical excellence' and therefore unsuitable for performance in the Town Hall.<sup>317</sup> In 1870 Birmingham Town Hall was the venue for 'Billiard Entertainments'. However incongruous the link between billiards and the Town Hall may seem today, use of the Hall was granted, but under strict restrictions that the Town Hall Committee made sure were stated in the advertisements for the event:

These Exhibitions have been organised with a special view to the presence of Ladies as well as Gentlemen, and every endeavour will be made to disassociate the Entertainments from anything that might be considered offensive. Smoking and Betting will be strictly prohibited, the use of the Hall having been granted on that express condition.<sup>318</sup>

Further relaxation in standards can be seen in the form of the Ventriloquist performances given in the Hall in 1886,<sup>319</sup> and the gymnastic display given in 1888.<sup>320</sup> It is probable, although there is no confirming evidence, that all such 'popular' entertainments given in the Town Hall were allowed only under similarly strict regulations. Since the Town Hall Committee had been so stringent throughout the century as to the quality and respectability of Town Hall performances, even after a relaxation of accepted entertainment genres, they must surely have governed those entertainments with a firm hand. It can be argued that this perceived relaxation of the rules stemmed from the need of the Town Hall to compete with the numerous other institutions of entertainment that Birmingham could provide in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In order for the Town Hall to remain commercially viable as a music venue the Town Hall Committee could not afford to let their desire for moral superiority drive customers elsewhere. Whilst retaining its reputation as a high-class concert venue through the use of the Hall for the Festivals and the concerts of the choral and orchestral societies, and the strict policing of the Town Hall Committee, Birmingham Town Hall in the last quarter of the nineteenth century subtly became a

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<sup>316</sup> 18 February 1863, Estates and Building Committee 1862-1866, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.

<sup>317</sup> The newspaper in this instance was referring to the use of more popular repertoire in a Harrison concert. See *Birmingham Daily Post*, 22 February 1866.

<sup>318</sup> *Birmingham Daily Post*, 16 May 1870.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 May 1886.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 December 1888.

venue for the performance of the more 'popular' entertainments of the age that were fashionable elsewhere in the town but had previously been unavailable to Town Hall audiences. However, not everybody was convinced by this relaxation of policy, especially the music critics of the local press. The following is a review of a performance given by Jennie Gabrielle, the child pianist, who played blindfolded:

Such clap-trap is all very well in entertainments specially provided for such purposes, but it is quite out of character in our Town Hall.<sup>321</sup>

Despite the popularity of other venues that provided more fashionable performances, it seems that the Town Hall would always be considered as a venue that should only be used by the higher class of artist.

In February 1888 the Estates Committee received an application from Mr William Brown of Sheffield for the hire of the Town Hall 'for the purposes of Cheap Concerts every un-engaged Saturday of the present season, and for every Saturday of the ensuing season'.<sup>322</sup> The Mayor was requested to deal with the application and this prompted him to make a survey of the concerts being given in the Town Hall at that time. He found that concerts had been given, or were to be given, on twenty out of thirty one Saturdays between 1 September 1887 and 31 March 1888. The hall was hired for eleven evenings, at £2, 10s each, by a Mr Gilmer, for concerts principally of instrumental music executed by his brass band. The Midland Musical Society hired the hall for four evenings for free, where a volunteer chorus and string band performed oratorios and cantatas. Mr H.M. Parker hired the hall for three evenings, at £2, 10s each, for ballad concerts. In addition, the hall was hired on one occasion by the singing teacher Charles Lunn, and once under the auspices of an offshoot of the Birmingham Musical Association. According to the Mayor, for all the concerts 'the music selected is of a high order, and uniformly well-rendered'. Commenting on the type of audience the events attracted he stated: 'At these concerts, the Town Hall is generally filled by appreciative audiences of the superior artisan class'.<sup>323</sup> As a result of his review of the town-hall entertainments, the Mayor decided that it would be unwise to grant Mr Brown's application since priority should be given to artists from within the town, although Brown was allowed to engage the Hall for any Saturday evenings available for

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<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 November 1896.

<sup>322</sup> 8 February 1888, Estates Committee 1884-1891, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM. In 1885 Mr Brown is reported as giving 'Saturday Evening Concerts' in Sheffield. See *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 507 (1885) p.290.

<sup>323</sup> 14 March 1888, Estates Committee 1884-1891, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.



the coming season.<sup>324</sup> The Mayor also stated the Council's ethos in employing the Town Hall as a music venue: 'The first consideration of the Corporation is the enjoyment of the Town Hall by the people of Birmingham irrespective of the revenue to be derived by its letting'.<sup>325</sup> Since the Mayor's research shows that the Town Hall was let on most Saturday evenings to persons from within the town at the lowest rate of hire, or even for free, it seems that the Council really did prioritise the 'people of Birmingham' in the use of the building for the performance of music.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Birmingham Town Hall was established as a prominent music venue, not only in Birmingham but in England as a whole. In addition to its national reputation as a concert hall, singers who performed regularly at the concerts in Birmingham Town Hall were advertised for events in other parts of the country, with the addendum, 'Of the Birmingham Town Hall Concerts'.<sup>326</sup> Such a description as a recommendation indicates the national prestige that was attached to the concerts in Birmingham Town Hall. The Town Hall attracted the best of both local and European talent, whilst still remaining true to its philanthropic roots by hosting performances by charitable bodies without charge. It is also possible to argue that, through the Musical Festival, many of the most important works in the repertoire were written for this venue. The Town Hall was clearly an important location in the musical life of Birmingham. Before the Town Hall there had been musical performances and musical societies, both of which were normally connected with the various inns and theatres of the town, but there were no large public rooms available for concert performance.<sup>327</sup> Birmingham Town Hall filled this void. The building was used for music significantly more than for three days every three years, therefore confirming that Birmingham Town Hall did continue to function as a concert hall outside the influence of the Musical Festival. As the *Gazette* surmised in 1884:

The opening of the Town Hall fifty years ago [...] gave a new impetus to the love of music, and enabled performances on a much larger and bolder scale than had hitherto been attempted in the town to be possible there, and besides, caused a competition in musical matters which could not but be beneficial to a music-loving public.<sup>328</sup>

It is significant that in this article the reporter is discussing the town hall as an independent music venue, outside the influence of the Musical Committee.

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<sup>324</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>326</sup> For example see *Derby Mercury*, 29 November 1899.

<sup>327</sup> See Handford, *Sounds Unlikely*, pp. 45, 77, 82, 85.

<sup>328</sup> *Birmingham Gazette*, 6 March 1884.

### 3.21: Conclusion

The existence of Birmingham Town Hall cannot be separated from the musical history of the town. From its conception, through the agency of Joseph Moore, to its reopening as a major concert venue in October 2007, Birmingham Town Hall has been an active venue in English musical life. Birmingham Town Hall served as a meeting place for local government, as a forum for great political debate and speechmaking by such eminent orators as Joseph Chamberlain and William Gladstone,<sup>329</sup> as the venue for Charles Dickens' readings of his works,<sup>330</sup> and for numerous other public meetings, philanthropic and community activities, from Temperance meetings to flower shows.<sup>331</sup> Indeed, Birmingham Town Hall was the centre of so much political activity that Capt. Lord Charles Beresford said of Birmingham, that 'a man who secured audiences in Birmingham Town Hall practically secured the ear of the nation'.<sup>332</sup> However, the frequent use of the building aside from music does not detract from the fact that, ultimately, this town hall was originally designed as a concert hall, a point which Cunningham refers to when discussing other nineteenth-century town halls:

The halls were genuinely multi-purpose spaces throughout the period, and even those that were originally built as concert halls, like Birmingham, were also used for other meetings such as political gatherings or the civil service examinations or even for drilling volunteers.<sup>333</sup>

In fact, many of the 'non-musical' events in the Town Hall were accompanied by some form of musical performance, often in the form of a military band such as the Band of the King's Dragoon Guards,<sup>334</sup> or by making use of the organ.<sup>335</sup>

The building may have been given the title of 'town hall', but this was probably partly in order to obtain the public money needed to pay for the erection of the building, and also to create the aura of moral respectability needed to use the building for the performance of sacred music. It was never used as the central seat of local government, even before the opening of the Council House in 1879. Council proceedings were

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<sup>329</sup> For example, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 January 1889 and 27 October 1888.

<sup>330</sup> For example, *Ibid.*, 26 April 1866.

<sup>331</sup> For example, *Ibid.*, 8 October 1879 and 24 November 1864.

<sup>332</sup> *Bristol Mercury*, 16 March 1896.

<sup>333</sup> Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, pp.214-5.

<sup>334</sup> As at the United Exhibitions of the Birmingham Botanical and Warwickshire Floral Societies at the Town Hall, reported in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 2 May 1836.

<sup>335</sup> For example, 'Birmingham Botanical and Horticultural Society. The Third Exhibition of Plants, Fruits and Vegetables for the present year, will take place at The Town Hall. [...] Mr Hollins will preside at The Organ, and develope [sic] the extraordinary powers of that magnificent instrument'. *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 21 September 1835.

mainly executed from the 1807 Public Offices on Moor Street, and the Town Clerk's private office, which contained the Mayor's Parlour, on Temple Street,<sup>336</sup> and as early as 1858 the erection of a building was being considered to house 'the public offices and Departments of the Corporation in one suitable building'<sup>337</sup> – a need that should surely have been fulfilled by a town hall. The paradox of building a town hall without accommodation for town business is apparent here, and only provides further evidence of this building being built as a venue for music rather than local government.

It seems appropriate for the final word on this matter to go to Joseph Moore, or rather his tombstone, upon which is written:

He rendered the most important services to the General Hospital by his able direction for fifty years of the Triennial Musical Festivals, for the more effective performance of which he ultimately obtained the erection of *the Music Hall* with its magnificent Organ [...] A rare example of what might be effected in a private situation by an enlightened mind, great energy, and genuine benevolence.<sup>338</sup>

However subjectively, it is here written in stone that Moore obtained the erection of a 'Music Hall' rather than a 'Town Hall'. It was through the 'enlightened mind, great energy, and genuine benevolence' of Joseph Moore that the Birmingham Commissioners were persuaded to build, not a town hall, but 'a concert hall in disguise'.

The next chapter will consider the musical life of Leeds Town Hall, the country's first 'municipal palace',<sup>339</sup> where the designation of the building as a music venue was part of a considered directive for the hall to be at the heart of the town and its municipality. Ironically, it is precisely because the Birmingham building was designed as a large music venue but disguised as a town hall, thus establishing a model for the coming period of extensive municipal building, that Leeds Town Hall was built on such a gigantic scale.

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<sup>336</sup> Gill, *History of Birmingham*, I, p.421. Also, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 29 December 1857 and 31 December 1857. All three buildings were within a close proximity to each other in the town centre.

<sup>337</sup> 22 December 1858, Estates and Building Committee 1858-1860, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.

<sup>338</sup> Quoted in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 2 July 1855, emphasis mine. Moore's tombstone is now in a state of disrepair, making any inscription unfortunately unreadable.

<sup>339</sup> Surviving evidence suggests that the first use of the description 'municipal palace' was in connection with the Hotel de Ville in Paris. In Britain it was used to describe the Guildhall and Mansion House in London. It is probable that its use by the *Leeds Mercury* to describe Leeds Town Hall on 23 March 1858 was the first application of the phrase in connection with a provincial public building.

## Chapter 4

'A Municipal Homage to Art':<sup>1</sup>

## Leeds Town Hall and the 1856 Amendment Act.

## 4.1: Historical Leeds

Leeds in the mid-nineteenth century was experiencing dynamic industrial development. The town had long been an important provincial centre, however, having been granted a borough charter in 1626. Around 1698, Celia Fiennes, after travelling through most of England, described Leeds as 'a large town, [...] the wealthiest [sic] town of its bigness in the Country'.<sup>2</sup> For the majority of the eighteenth century the town continued to function as a market centre and woollen manufactory,<sup>3</sup> but with the dawn of industrialisation Leeds grew into a successful industrial, political and cultural urban centre with the result that, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was the seventh largest town in England.<sup>4</sup> Most studies of this era in British history use Leeds as an example of an industrial 'boom' town.<sup>5</sup> Asa Briggs describes nineteenth-century Leeds as 'one of the new *genus* of industrial cities',<sup>6</sup> whilst John K. Walton, in his chapter on the industrialisation of the North in the *Cambridge Urban History* discusses the town's development as an important manufacturing district, describing it as the rising alternative metropolis to Manchester.<sup>7</sup> Between 1801 and 1841 the population of Leeds rose dramatically, from 53,000 to 152,000.<sup>8</sup> In 1810 William Hutton gave an insight into its transition from market town to industrial metropolis:

Leeds is rising, and will continue to rise [...]. The river, having been made navigable, gives an easy access to the markets. The number of elegant buildings recently erected shows what the Leeds folk have been able to accomplish; but the enterprising spirit of the inhabitants will perform future wonders. Good fortune stamps the place her own.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 12 October 1895.

<sup>2</sup> Celia Fiennes, *The Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, ed. by Christopher Morris (London: Cresset Press, 1949), p.219.

<sup>3</sup> See Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p.139.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>5</sup> This phrase is used by John Waddington-Feather in *Leeds: The Heart of Yorkshire* (Leeds: Basil Jackson Publications, 1967), p.68.

<sup>6</sup> Asa Briggs, *A Social History of England* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.216.

<sup>7</sup> John K. Walton, 'North', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume 2, 1540-1840*, ed. by Peter Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 111-132 (p.114).

<sup>8</sup> Joyce Ellis, 'Regional and County Centres 1700-1840', in *ibid.*, 673-704 (p.679).

<sup>9</sup> William Hutton, *A Trip to Coatham: A Watering Place in the North Extremity of Yorkshire* (London: John Nichols, 1810), p.33.

By the mid-nineteenth-century, Leeds was a town with a variety of trades, partly as a result of its role as a regional centre, but also because of its flexible industrial structure.<sup>10</sup> In 1855 Leeds had thirty-seven flax mills, employing about 9,500 workers, but the town also produced, for example, cotton, silk, carpets and ready-made clothing, in addition to being a great centre for engineering which, by 1861, was the second largest employer of the local workforce.<sup>11</sup> Cheap labour for the burgeoning trades was found not only through the population shift from country to town, but also through immigration. Many Irish workers came to Leeds in the 1840s as a result of the potato famine. In addition there were a number of Scottish migrants and a large Jewish community. *The Lancet* in 1888 suggested that, to the Jew in danger of persecution in his own country, 'the name of Leeds was but a modern term for an El Dorado'.<sup>12</sup> It is true that Leeds in the 1850s was an attractive prospect to any outsider looking for work. *The Historical Guide to Leeds and its Environs* in 1858 described Leeds as being 'the metropolis of the manufacturing district and of a world-wide commercial celebrity'. The author went on to give the following detailed description of the town:

Besides the wealth and commercial skill, we have nearly every advantage that can be accumulated in a town which has long been an important seat of manufacture:- first rate banks, commodious cloth hall, old and substantial mercantile houses, and a working population surpassing that of most manufacturing towns in industry, sobriety, intelligence, skill, and virtue; a respectable magistracy and municipal body; scientific and literary institutions; good newspapers with talented editors, extensive printing and bookselling establishments; eminent clergy and ministers; medical men and lawyers of great learning and practice; also artists and musicians; [...] almost every conceivable means of popular improvement, in places of worship, schools, charitable and provident institutions, and benefit and temperance societies. We believe there are few towns more religious and moral, or where the upper and middle classes are more domestic and intelligent. The blessing of Providence hath smiled in many instances on industry and economy.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst this article displays obvious local bias, it paints a vivid picture of the town of Leeds in 1858, or at least of how it wished to be perceived by its neighbours. However, although industrialisation brought prosperity and development, it also brought dirt and insanitariness; in 1847, at a Mechanics' Institute dinner, Charles Dickens apparently described Leeds as 'the beastliest place, one of the nastiest I know'.<sup>14</sup> The negative

<sup>10</sup> See David Reeder and Richard Rodger, 'Industrialisation and the City Economy', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume 3, 1840-1950*, ed. by Martin Daunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 287-313 (p.298).

<sup>11</sup> See William R. Mitchell, *A History of Leeds* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2000), p.95.

<sup>12</sup> *The Lancet*, 9 June 1888.

<sup>13</sup> Anon., *An Historical Guide to Leeds and its Environs: With a plan of Leeds, view of the Town Hall &c.* (Leeds: T. Fenteman, 1858), preface.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Waddington-Feather, *Leeds*, p.82. Whilst this statement is often quoted, it has not been possible to find the original source.

effects of industrialisation and urbanisation had induced a number of measures of 'improvement' in the town, given greater impetus by the passing of the Municipal Corporations Act in Leeds in 1835.<sup>15</sup> According to the *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, the Act 'replaced a Tory Anglican elite of merchants and manufacturers with a Liberal nonconformist elite of merchants and manufacturers'.<sup>16</sup> Although this comment suggests that the appointment of a new town council had little effect, the resultant governing body was keen to effect progress through a number of innovations. These included a new Borough Prison, Industrial Schools, a new Poor House and a sewerage scheme.<sup>17</sup>

There were others who had concerns, not only about the physical improvement of Leeds as a town, but also about the social development of its inhabitants. At the forefront of this campaign for moral improvement in the town was the religious community. When the Reverend Walter Farquhar Hook came to Leeds at the end of the 1830s he observed of the town that 'the *de facto* established religion is Methodism'.<sup>18</sup> Nonconformity was indeed strong in Leeds in the first part of the nineteenth century, not just religiously but also socially and politically.<sup>19</sup> With the election of Hook to the vicarage of Leeds in 1837, however, Anglicanism in Leeds was revived and by the end of the nineteenth century Leeds had become primarily a 'High Church' town. Hook's appointment was one of the most significant events in the religious history of the town, but was also greatly influential in the progress of moral improvement. Hook was a strong supporter of factory reform, the breaking down of class divisions, the support of working-class aspirations and popular education through such means as mechanics' institutes.<sup>20</sup> He was one of many reformers of the time who were concerned about the effects of urbanisation on the morality of town dwellers. In 1813 the playwright and writer Richard Ayton commented on the issue by stating 'Degeneracy results from the increase of manufactories, and the consequent attraction

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<sup>15</sup> Before this time the Corporation had been a self-selecting body, but after the passing of this Act the Council had to be elected by the ratepayers of the town. On this subject see Percy Robinson, *Leeds: Old and New* (Leeds: Richard Jackson, 1926), p.56 and Waddington-Feather, *Leeds*, p.87.

<sup>16</sup> Barry M. Doyle, 'The Changing Functions of Urban Government', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume 3*, 287-313 (p.298).

<sup>17</sup> Robinson, *Leeds: Old and New*, pp.58-59.

<sup>18</sup> William Stephens, *Life and Letters of William Farquhar Hook*, 2 vols (London: Publisher unknown, 1878), i, p.403.

<sup>19</sup> Nigel Yates, 'The Religious Life of Victorian Leeds', in *A History of Modern Leeds*, ed. by Derek Fraser (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 250-269 (p.252).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.253-4.

of a larger population to one point'.<sup>21</sup> It was thought that cultural and social improvement could counteract potential degeneration, and in Leeds this was encouraged in a number of forms, such as the Leeds Literary Institution, the Mechanics' Institution,<sup>22</sup> the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society,<sup>23</sup> and the Leeds Improvement Society.<sup>24</sup>

The most popular means of promoting morality at the time was through the performance of music. Most commentators on music in Leeds, notably Robert Demaine and Emily Hargrave,<sup>25</sup> agree that the town had experienced an active public musical life since the eighteenth century. According to Hargrave, the first musical performance given in Leeds to be advertised in the press was the following, in 1726:

Notice is hereby given that on Friday next will be performed at the Assembly Room in Kirkgate, Leeds, a Consort of Vocal and Instrumental Musick by several eminent persons. Tickets are to be had at Mr. Henry Abba's at the Chequer in Briggate, at half a crown each beginning at 5 o'clock in the afternoon.<sup>26</sup>

The Assembly Room in Kirkgate was the first significant music venue in Leeds. For the majority of the eighteenth century, concerts, music meetings and performances of ballad operas were held there, but other places used include a 'concert hall' in Vicar Lane, and the local public houses.<sup>27</sup> Musical life in Leeds at this time was greatly stimulated by the exertions of two local organists: Mr Crompton, organist at St Peter's Church from 1756 to 1772, and David Lawton, organist of Leeds Parish Church from 1791 to 1807. Both gentlemen organised and performed concerts in the Assembly

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Ayton, *A Voyage Round Great Britain Undertaken in the Summer of 1813* (London: Longman, 1814), p.70. On Ayton see T. F. Henderson, 'Ayton, Richard (bap. 1786, d. 1823)', rev. M. Clare Loughlin-Chow, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/957>, accessed 15 Feb 2009].

<sup>22</sup> Opened in 1825, this was one of the oldest mechanics' institutions in the country. See Dave Russell, 'The Leeds Rational Recreation Society, 1852-9: "Music for the People" in a Mid-Victorian City', in *The Publications of the Thoresby Society*, 56 (1981), 137-158 (p.141).

<sup>23</sup> The Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, founded in 1818, included among its members 'some of the most enlightened citizens of Leeds', according to Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p.160. By the mid-1850s it boasted, 'the demands and the taste for literary and scientific achievement have increased in Leeds in a ratio far exceeding the numerical increase in population'. See Briggs, p.161.

<sup>24</sup> The Leeds Improvement Society had been founded in 1851 'to suggest and promote architectural and other public improvements in the town'. See Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p.160.

<sup>25</sup> See Robert Demaine, *Individual and Institution in the Musical Life of Leeds 1900-1914* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 2000), p.23; and Emily Hargrave, 'Musical Leeds in the Eighteenth Century', *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, 28 (1928), 320-355 (p.321).

<sup>26</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 20 September 1726.

<sup>27</sup> It seems that the 'concert hall' was opened c.1768 but there is no further record of the building. The churches in Leeds were also important music venues in the eighteenth century, mostly for the performance of oratorio.

Rooms in addition to their church musical activities. Crompton arranged regular subscription concerts from 1757, and Lawton was the first to perform a piano concerto at the subscription concerts he continued to promote.<sup>28</sup> There were even a number of Handel festivals in the town, held both in the Assembly Rooms and in the churches, the first being in Trinity Church in 1769. The expanding audiences resulting from such organised music-making had outgrown the Assembly Rooms by the 1790s, despite the opening of the New Assembly Rooms in 1777,<sup>29</sup> so in 1794 the Albion Street Music Hall was opened.<sup>30</sup> This is an early example of a purpose-built concert room, although it was built above a cloth-hall, thus retaining the multi-functional character that was typical of many music venues at the time. *The Leeds Guide* of 1808 described the building as 'exceedingly commodious and finished with great elegance [...]. The seats are well disposed for the auditors, and are calculated to hold a considerable number commodiously.'<sup>31</sup> This building continued as the principal concert room in Leeds until the 1850s. By this time musical Leeds was flourishing. According to the *Leeds Mercury* of 16 March 1858:

Leeds stands second to no English town in its appreciation and practice of music, both vocal and instrumental. The numerous concerts annually given, the prevalence of instrumental bands amongst our operatives, and the general efficiency of the choirs in our churches and chapels, sufficiently testify this.

Although many a provincial town at this time would have claimed to be 'second to no English town in its appreciation and practice of music', the article does substantiate its claim by demonstrating an active musical life in Leeds.<sup>32</sup>

The increase in musical activity in the first half of the century presented a need for a new music venue in Leeds. This chapter will focus on how the need was met by the opening of the Leeds Town Hall in 1858. With the creation of this building, and the erection of a large organ therein, the town Council felt duty-bound to provide 'music for the people', but was this civic promotion an impetus to music-making in Leeds, or an obstacle to musical enterprise?

<sup>28</sup> See Percy M. Young. "Leeds." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 15 Feb. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/16254>>.

<sup>29</sup> See Hargrave, 'Musical Leeds', p.335.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.348-349.

<sup>31</sup> John Ryley, *The Leeds Guide: giving a Concise History of that Rich and Populous Town, the Circumjacent Villages and Kirkstall Abbey* (Leeds: Printed for John Ryley by Edward Baines, 1808), pp.61-62.

<sup>32</sup> The frequent advertisements for concerts that can be found in the Leeds local newspapers in the 1850s provide additional evidence of the large amount of music-making in the town.



## 4.2: Conception

The Victorian era was a time of competitive commercialism, when a new local and civic pride encouraged displays of civic wealth and prosperity. The erection of public buildings played an integral part in this movement, and was often an expression of the intense rivalry between neighbouring towns and cities. The towns of Leeds and Bradford provide a perfect example of this phenomenon. According to Asa Briggs, the rivalry between Bradford and Leeds gained in intensity during the nineteenth century, 'not only from the differences between the geographical, economical and political bases of the two communities but from their competition to do the same kind of thing'.<sup>33</sup> It was partly municipal competition between Leeds and Bradford that gave the impetus for the building of Leeds Town Hall. Neither town had any significant public buildings in the 1840s, but in 1849 the Mayor of Bradford attempted to address the issue. He suggested and approved the erection of a public building in the town, later to be known as the St George's Hall, to meet the cultural needs of this newly industrialised city.<sup>34</sup> For the opening of the Bradford building, special trains were put on from both Leeds and Manchester.<sup>35</sup> It seems likely that one such train would have contained the Leeds Town Council, not wishing to miss such an opportunity to survey the competition. Therefore, it can hardly be a coincidence that a public meeting was held in Leeds less than a year later to determine the extent of local support for the erection of a large public hall.<sup>36</sup> The money for the Leeds building was to be raised from the sale of shares, but the campaign was not successful. The suggestion of erecting a public hall in Leeds remained a matter of significance however, leading Alderman Hepper to propose that the Council itself erect a town hall with suitable corporate buildings.<sup>37</sup> The desire

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<sup>33</sup> Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p.153.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.154.

<sup>35</sup> See *ibid.*, p.157.

<sup>36</sup> J. Mayhall, *The Annals of Yorkshire, From the Earliest Period to the Present Time*, 2 vols (Leeds: Joseph Johnson, 1874), i, p.589. The Leeds meeting, held 29 July 1850, was also convened in connection with plans to erect a statue to honour the work of former prime minister Sir Robert Peel, who had died at the beginning of that month. Peel was admired by working men throughout Britain for his attempts to improve life for factory and mine workers. The *Leeds Mercury* of 13 July 1850 justified the building of a statue in Peel's memory in the following manner: 'We owe to Robert Peel not only the repeal of the Corn Laws, but the removal of many taxes and restrictions which had greatly oppressed our manufacturing industry'. On Peel see John Prest, 'Peel, Sir Robert, second baronet (1788–1850)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/21764>, accessed 16 Feb 2009].

<sup>37</sup> Special Council Meeting, 1 January 1851. Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

for a town hall in Leeds must have been widespread amongst councillors, since a meeting on 17 January 1851 decided:

That in the opinion of the Committee it will be just and reasonable that the expenses of erecting a Town Hall should be borne by the Borough at large.<sup>38</sup>

Despite this evidence relating to the conception of Leeds Town Hall, some nineteenth- and twentieth-century sources suggest that it was the musicians of Leeds bemoaning the lack of a large concert room that convinced the Corporation to build a Town Hall. The programme of the 1901 Leeds Musical Festival states:

The fretful local musicians who for years had been agitating for a large public concert room doubtless did much towards convincing the Corporation that a Town Hall was desirable.<sup>39</sup>

William Spark, prominent local musician and later co-designer of the Town Hall organ and the first Town Hall Organist,<sup>40</sup> credits himself with the conception of the Town Hall, stimulated by the same need for a substantial music venue in Leeds:

In 1855, at the time the Leeds People's Concerts, given on Saturday evenings, were so crowded out in the Old Music Hall (the only room – holding rather less than eight hundred persons – then available for concerts and other meetings in Leeds), Henry Smart paid a visit to me, and I mentioned to him the evident necessity, and my own great wish for the erection of a large new hall, which should have a grand organ possessing all the requirements for mass meetings, musical festivals, etc. To use a familiar phrase, he 'jumped at the idea', and said with enthusiasm, 'My dear friend, go in for it will all your heart and soul'. [...] All this was easily said, but who could imagine that out of these few words ultimately rose up the magnificent Town Hall of Leeds, and its glorious organ!<sup>41</sup>

Spark continues in the next paragraph to discuss how he called a meeting of the 'leading inhabitants' to initiate the building of a new public hall, whereupon the matter was eventually taken up by the Borough Treasurer who 'successfully plied it at the Corporation meetings' until it was agreed to build a town hall. As we have seen, the minutes of the Leeds Town Hall Committee from 1851 contradict this view, especially since the meeting Spark refers to was held four years after the erection of a town hall

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<sup>38</sup> Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>39</sup> For example, 'Programme, Souvenir and History of the Leeds Musical Festival', 1901, Leeds Local Studies Library, L780.79 L517, p.3.

<sup>40</sup> Spark was born in Exeter in 1823 but moved to Leeds in 1842 with S.S. Wesley, to whom he was articled. After a spell at Tiverton and Daventry, Spark returned to Leeds in 1849 as organist at St George's Church. From this point on he played an integral role in the musical life of Leeds as a conductor, organist and composer, consequently establishing a national reputation as a musician, especially in the organ world. See *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 38 (1897), p.482.

<sup>41</sup> William Spark, *Musical Reminiscences Past and Present* (London: Simpkin et al., 1892), pp.236-7.

had been confirmed. The Councillors of Leeds did not live in the isolation of the Council Chamber, however, and were bound to be influenced to some extent by certain individuals who had a passionate cause that a particular Councillor identified with. It is therefore possible that such an individual as William Spark could have had some leverage in the approval of a town hall. It might also be argued that the musical performances given in such prominent buildings as Birmingham Town Hall are also likely to have been in the consciousness of the Town Council when considering the erection of a town hall. Therefore, whilst there is no evidence to suggest that Leeds Town Hall was designed as a music venue in the same way Birmingham was, the following discussion will show that its use as music venue was integral to its conception. As Asa Briggs acknowledges, 'The Town Hall was conceived of, among its many other roles, as a centre of music'.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4.3: Design

It seems that there was little opposition to the erection of a town hall in the town, or, at least, there is no archival or newspaper data suggesting negative public opinion. The only evidence of resistance to the building of the town hall came in February 1852, when some members of the Council unsuccessfully attempted to stop the process because of the projected costs.<sup>43</sup> The budget had been set at £22,000 (£1,287,660 today), which perhaps seemed an inordinate amount of money to some councillors who had never been involved in the expenditure of such a large amount of money for the erection of a public building.<sup>44</sup> Such concerns were not individual to Leeds, since the desire for frugality dominated much mid-Victorian local-government activity. Nevertheless, since any opposition to the erection of a Leeds town hall was ignored, the genuine advantages of erecting such a building must have countermanded the desire for economy. The meeting on 17 January resolved that the new Town Hall would provide:

A Town Hall to contain 6000 people; Council Room; Police Office; Town Clerk's Office; Board of Works; Borough Surveyor's Office; Borough Accountants Office; Committee

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<sup>42</sup> Asa Briggs, 'The Building of Leeds Town Hall: A Study in Victorian Civic Pride', in *The Publications of the Thoresby Society*, 46 (1963), 275-302 (p.288).

<sup>43</sup> Councillor Titley had proposed, 'That in the opinion of the Council it is not expedient and unwise to proceed further with the erection of a Town Hall'. Meeting of 11 February 1852. Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>44</sup> The sum was increased to £35,000 (£2,048,550 today) in the 'Instructions to Architects', 8 July 1852. Leeds Local Studies Library, LQP 725.137 L517.

Rooms; Witnesses Rooms; Grand Jury Room; Mayor's Parlour; Magistrates' Bankruptcy, or Assize Courts and other necessary Buildings.<sup>45</sup>

After stipulating its requirements the Council decided to seek expert opinion in order to obtain the optimum building. It began by consulting with Joseph Paxton, the designer of the Crystal Palace. Paxton was an innovative designer; after his death in 1865 *The Times* described him as 'the founder of a new style of architecture'.<sup>46</sup> It therefore seems significant that it was to this particular architect that the Leeds Council turned for advice. This was not a decision made without thought, however, since the Council was greatly concerned to secure the most appropriate design for its building. In addition to consulting Paxton, a deputation was sent to such places as Manchester and Liverpool, in order to assess the size and style of their public halls. As a result of such research, on 8 July 1852 the Council was able to launch a detailed architectural competition for the design of the building they desired:

BOROUGH OF LEEDS.  
TOWN HALL, INCLUDING CORPORATE AND JUDICIAL BUILDINGS.  
INSTRUCTIONS TO ARCHITECTS.

Designs are required for a Town Hall, including Corporate and Judicial Buildings, for the Borough of Leeds. [...]

The Town Hall, with Orchestra and Gallery, is to be capable of holding 8,000 persons standing; designed principally for Public Meetings, but to be so constructed as to be available for Lectures, and Musical Entertainments. Connected with the Hall, there must be Two Performers' Rooms; Two Refreshment and Two Retiring Rooms; Two Dressing, Clothes and Hat Rooms.

A Servants' Hall

Kitchen. Scullery. Pantry.

Larder. Two Store Rooms.

Wine Cellars, Gas, Firewood, Coal, Stores, and other conveniences.

The whole to be heated by artificial means.

The Corporate Buildings must have a Council Room, capable of conveniently accommodating 300 people sitting.

N.B. There are 64 Members of Council, besides Officers, the remaining room is required for spectators.

A Council Committee Room, of not less than 50 yards area.

A Waiting Room.

A Mayor's Parlour.

Town Clerk's Office.

Ditto ditto Private Office, with Retiring Room.

Ditto ditto Record Room.

Ditto ditto Waiting Room.

Ditto ditto Two Clerks' Offices, with Retiring Room.

Borough Treasurer and Accountant's Office.

Ditto ditto Record Room.

<sup>45</sup> Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>46</sup> *The Times*, 9 June 1865. On Joseph Paxton see John Kenworthy-Browne, 'Paxton, Sir Joseph (1803–1865)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/view/article/21634>, accessed 19 Sept 2008.

Ditto ditto Clerks' Office.  
 Borough Engineer's Office.  
 Ditto ditto Private Office.  
 Ditto ditto Record and Plan Room.  
 Ditto ditto Two Clerks' Offices.  
 Borough Surveyor's Office.  
 Ditto ditto Private Office.  
 Ditto ditto Record and Plan Room.  
 Ditto ditto Two Clerks' Offices.  
 Inspector of Nuisances Office.  
 Inspector of Scavengers Office.  
 Inspector of Lamps and Clerk of Market Offices.  
 Inspector of Weight and Measures Office.  
 Two additional Offices.  
 Improvement Rate Office.  
 Chief Clerk's Office.  
 Record Room and Safe.  
 Two Courts of Justice.  
 One Rotation Office, for Borough Magistrates.  
 One Magistrates' Court for West Riding Justices.  
 One Magistrates' Room.  
 Magistrates Clerk's Office.  
 Ditto ditto Record Room.  
 Ditto ditto One Clerks' Office.  
 A Room for Witnesses to each Court.  
 A Room for Female Witnesses to each Court.  
 Grand Jury Room.  
 A Solicitors' Conference Room to each Court.  
 One Indictment Office.  
 A Retiring Jury Room to each Court.  
 A Waiting Jury Room.  
 Judges' Conference and Robing Room.  
 Barristers' Robing Room.  
 Barristers' Consulting Room.  
 Prisoners' Van House.  
 Fire Engine House.  
 Stables for Four Horses.  
 Harness Rooms, Manure Places, &c.  
 Porters' Day Room.  
 Ditto Bed Room.  
 Chief Constable's Office.  
 Inspector of Police Office.  
 Prisoners' Searching Room.  
 Store Room for Clothes.  
 Small Store Room for Stolen Articles.  
 Police Muster Room.  
 Police Lamp Room.  
 Police Shoe Store Room.  
 Gaoler's Day and Bed Room.  
 Ditto Pantry, Coals.  
 Five Men's Cells.  
 Five Women's Cells.  
 A large Airing Yard for Prisoners.  
 The Prisoners to be conducted underground to Docks in Court.

In forming his Plan the Architect must keep in view that the Council have fixed the cost of the buildings, which will include Fittings, and provisions for Warming, Ventilating, and Draining, at a sum not exceeding £35,000; and the Council are anxious to bring the cost as much within that sum as can be done, consistently with ample accommodation and proper classification of

the rooms, required for the public business of a large and increasing municipality, and with solidity of construction, and an appropriate and neat exterior.<sup>47</sup>

Such an extensive list of requirements suggests that the Council were looking to this building to fulfil the needs of all areas of local government – from the Council Room to the Fire Engine House – and that their town hall would be the heart of the municipality.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the ‘Instructions’ contain the first official mention of the town hall as a potential music venue, when it states that there was to be a Hall with Orchestra and Gallery, ‘designed principally for Public Meetings, but to be so constructed as to be available for Lectures, and Musical Entertainments’.<sup>49</sup> It is therefore clear that the Town Hall was intended to be used for the performance of music in some capacity.

In 1877 the *Building News* reflected on the difficulty of designing a town hall:

A town hall for a provincial town is a problem that presents to the architect a larger scope for thought and variety than almost any other class of building. [...] Its complex organic arrangements demand all the resources and ingenuity of planning.<sup>50</sup>

This article was written over twenty years after the Leeds competition and displays an understanding, based on experience, that the design of a town hall building would be multifaceted and therefore problematic for the architect. At the time of the Leeds competition the architectural press had never seen such a complex list of requirements and thought them somewhat excessive. *The Builder* described the above ‘instructions’ as ‘more formidable than inviting; in fact amount[ing] almost to a direct *noli me tangere*’,<sup>51</sup> suggesting that such hopes and aspirations on the part of the Leeds Council were fantastical. The writer begins with a discussion of the requirements for the large hall:

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<sup>47</sup> ‘Leeds Town Hall 1852, Instruction to Architects’, Leeds Local Studies Library, LQP 725.137 L517. One thing that the Instructions to Architects does not contain is advice about the style in which the building was to be designed. According to Derek Linstrum, ‘probably there was no thought that it would be anything but Classical’. See his *Towers and Colonnades: The Architecture of Cuthbert Brodrick* (Leeds: Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society Ltd, 1999), p.18.

<sup>48</sup> The accommodation of all the provisions listed in the Instructions to Architects would obviously require an enormous, and therefore expensive, building. Whilst it is difficult to equate this with the Council’s desire for economy, the Mayor in his speech at the laying of the foundation stone of the Town Hall stated that the concentration of local and municipal business in one building meant that it could ‘therefore be done better and cheaper than it could be otherwise’. Quoted in J. Mayhall, *The Annals of Yorkshire*, p.634.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Leeds Town Hall 1852, Instruction to Architects’, Leeds Local Studies Library, LQP 725.137 L517.

<sup>50</sup> *Building News*, 1 (1877), p.433.

<sup>51</sup> *The Builder*, 496, 10 (1852), 503-4 (p.503). The Latin phrase means ‘touch me not’.

There is something staggering even in the very first article of the instruction, since it asks for a hall for public meeting capable of containing no fewer than eight thousand persons standing! Its area, therefore, can hardly be at all less than 12,000 square feet, [...] dimensions nearly equal to those of Westminster Hall; and as, to be in tolerable proportion, its height could hardly be less than 50 feet, that single room alone would swallow up the whole of the sum named as that to which the estimates are expected to conform; or rather that sum would be found insufficient. May there, then not be a mistake? Has not the printer inadvertently put a cypher too much, and thereby converted eight hundred into eight thousand persons?<sup>52</sup>

It is clear from this outpouring that no one inside or outside the architectural profession had encountered such a building before; architecture historian Derek Linstrum states that 'the brief was for a building type such as did not yet exist in England'.<sup>53</sup> Despite the incredulity and disbelief of the writer in *The Builder*, the measurements for the large hall were indeed just short of 12,000 square feet, at 11,664, with a height of 75 feet. The writer scoffs at the idea of a provincial town hall being built to the same dimensions as those of Westminster Hall,<sup>54</sup> but the following table indicates that this was indeed close to what the Council wanted:

Table 9: Comparison of Specifications

	Feet Long	Feet Wide	Feet High
Westminster Hall	228	66	92
Leeds Town Hall	162	72	75 <sup>[55]</sup>

However, it was not just the size of the hall that caused concern to the writer in *The Builder*:

Besides this unusually capacious 'hall', the number of separate business offices, and other rooms, a spacious council-chamber included, which architects are expected to provide, is so considerable as to render the arranging them within such compass as would not be thought extravagant, a very difficult task.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *The Builder*, 10 (1852), 503-4.

<sup>53</sup> Linstrum, *Towers and Colonnades*, p.17.

<sup>54</sup> *The Builder* is here referring to is the stone hall which is the only surviving part of the original Palace of Westminster, built by William II in 1097. The hall housed Grand Councils, some early parliaments, and Law Courts. It was retained by Sir Charles Barry in his design for the new Palace of Westminster in 1836. See Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert, *The London Encyclopaedia* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), pp.977-8. Colin Platt, in *The Architecture of Medieval Britain: A Social History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p.64, suggests that when it was built it was a building with few parallels on the Continent, so it seems significant that the Leeds Council were attempting to erect a comparable building.

<sup>55</sup> Approximate figures taken from *Building News*, 10 September 1858, p.911.

<sup>56</sup> *The Builder*, 10 (1852), 503-4 (p.504).

The requested inclusion of such large rooms, in addition to the enormous hall, was setting a precedent. As Linstrum reflects, there had previously been moot halls, concert rooms, court houses and assembly rooms, but the Leeds Council was the first to attempt to combine them all under one roof.<sup>57</sup>

As a further mark of the determination of the Council to provide Leeds with the most superior building possible, they again resolved to seek advice from a professional when it came to judging the competition entries.<sup>58</sup> The person appointed was the newly knighted Sir Charles Barry, the architect of the Houses of Parliament, considered at the time to be the head of the profession.<sup>59</sup> Ultimately only sixteen architectural designs were received, much fewer than expected.<sup>60</sup> It is possible that this was a result of the comments on the competition by *The Builder*,<sup>61</sup> or simply because of the innovative requirements of the brief. After considering the submitted designs Barry submitted the following report on 21 December 1852:

In compliance with your wishes, I have very carefully examined the several Designs, which have been submitted to you, in competitions for the proposed new Town Hall, and I have now to Report, that with one exception, none of them can be said to have been prepared in strict accordance with the letter of the conditions of the competition. Many of them, however, evince a considerable amount of talent, and are in my opinion sufficiently in accordance with the spirit of those conditions as to be worthy of acceptance; and three of them in particular are deserving of the premiums offered. [...] I think it right to add that neither of the three designs which I have designated, would in my opinion, be altogether worthy of being adopted, by the Borough of Leeds, without undergoing a considerable amount of modification.<sup>62</sup>

The design awarded first prize was submitted under the title 'Honor alit artes', 'Honour nourishes the arts', and was the work of a twenty-nine year old unknown architect from Hull, Cuthbert Brodrick.<sup>63</sup> It is possible that the Leeds Council was hoping for an

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<sup>57</sup> Linstrum, *Towers and Colonnades*, pp.17-18.

<sup>58</sup> Meeting on 11 November 1852. Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>59</sup> On Barry see M. H. Port, 'Barry, Sir Charles (1795-1860)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/view/article/1550>, accessed 22 Sept 2008]

<sup>60</sup> Linstrum, *Towers and Colonnades*, p.18.

<sup>61</sup> See above. One correspondent to the *Leeds Mercury*, 8 January 1853, under the name 'An Architect', confirms that they were deterred from entering the competition because of the enormity of the requirements: 'I prepared my sketches before the instructions were issued; but when I saw what was required, I knew that it would take six months' hard labour to meet the views of the committee as set forth'.

<sup>62</sup> Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>63</sup> Brodrick had entered the profession in 1837 and until 1843 was articled to Henry Francis Lockwood, the winner of the second prize of the Leeds Town Hall competition. For more on Brodrick see Derek Linstrum, "Brodrick, Cuthbert" *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*, 25 Sep. 2008 <<http://0-www.oxfordartonline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/subscriber/article/grove/art/T011453>>.



architect of greater experience and standing, so although Brodrick was awarded first prize in the competition the Council sought further assurance from Barry as to the reliability of entrusting this architect with the whole project. Barry was impressed by Brodrick's design and confident in his abilities:

On being asked [...] whether he thought such a young man [...] might be entrusted with the construction of so large a building, Sir Charles replied that, previous to the competition he was not aware that such an architect existed, but he was fully satisfied that the Council might trust him with the most perfect safety.<sup>64</sup>

In addition, *The Builder* reported that Barry 'predicted that the new Town-Hall would be the most perfect architectural gem outside London'.<sup>65</sup> The Council accepted Barry's advice but informed Brodrick that, although he had been awarded the first prize, his plans needed considerable modifications and therefore he should consult with Sir Charles Barry and subsequently submit altered plans to the Town Hall Committee.<sup>66</sup> Although Brodrick's new plans necessitated a larger expenditure of £39,000 (£2,282,670 today), they were approved by the Council,<sup>67</sup> and work on Leeds Town Hall began.

The style of Brodrick's design has been described in various ways. Nineteenth-century writers tend to describe it as 'Roman Corinthian',<sup>68</sup> whereas most twentieth-century writers refer to it as 'Renaissance'.<sup>69</sup> In addition, many modern architects talk of the style as being 'High Victorian'; Henry-Russell Hitchcock talks of the building as 'a masterpiece of the High Victorian',<sup>70</sup> and Colin Cunningham comments that, 'for classical town halls, Leeds was undoubtedly the high Victorian moment'.<sup>71</sup> When the current Leeds City Architect, John Thorp, was asked for a definitive description of the architectural style of Leeds Town Hall, he called it a 'sublime fusion of a powerful French neo-classicism and English baroque'.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps

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<sup>64</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 18 September 1858.

<sup>65</sup> *The Builder*, 11 (1853), p.59.

<sup>66</sup> Meeting on 31 December 1852. Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>67</sup> Meeting on 21 February 1853. Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>68</sup> For example, *The Official Programme for the Inauguration of the New Town Hall*, 7 September 1858, p.6. Leeds Local Studies Library, 942.75 LS1L.

<sup>69</sup> Briggs, 'The Building of Leeds Town Hall', p.299.

<sup>70</sup> Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p.228.

<sup>71</sup> Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p.205.

<sup>72</sup> Author's interview with John Thorp, Leeds Civic Architect, 17 November 2008, quoted with permission.

the difficulty in defining the style has been because, as Derek Linstrum suggests, the building is 'quite simply, unique'.<sup>73</sup>

#### 4.4: Building Process

The ceremony for laying the foundation stone took place on 17 August 1853. It was attended by large crowds and included a procession which incorporated representatives of the various societies and institutions of the town, as well as members of the Council and official visitors from neighbouring boroughs.<sup>74</sup> In his speech for the occasion the Mayor declared that the Town Hall was to fulfil two functions: it was to be an ornamental building and also a building that could house all the local or municipal business of the borough in one central space. As part of the celebrations, the Leeds Madrigal and Motet Society sang a chorus written by William Spark, which celebrated the town hall and its future usage:

A blessing we ask on the work now begun,  
May it prosper in doing – be useful when done:-  
May the Hall, whose foundations thus broadly are laid,  
Stand a trophy to Freedom – to Peace – and to Trade:-  
While within it, may Honour for ever preside  
Over those whom opinion may chance to divide:-  
    And in ages to come may the Fabric we rear,  
    Be greeted by men yet unborn with a cheer.  
May Justice and Mercy, enthroned on the Law,  
Here the innocent shield – keep the guilty in awe:-  
May our Councils be govern'd by wisdom and right,  
And be open as day, and as pure as its light.  
After labour is sped, here the 'Million' may throng,  
To be soothed and refined by the spirit of Song.  
    Thus in ages to come, shall the Fabric we rear,  
    Be greeted by men yet unborn with a cheer.<sup>75</sup>

Here the reference to the Town Hall as a music venue is evident, with the hope that 'a million may throng' to the town hall for music-making 'to be soothed and refined by the spirit of Song'. Since William Spark was the author, he may have had an ulterior motive in writing such words connected with his hopes for the new building. The text was, however, reproduced on official Council documents and must therefore have been authorised.

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<sup>73</sup> Linstrum, *Towers and Colonnades*, p.28.

<sup>74</sup> On the ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone, see Briggs, 'The Building of Leeds Town Hall', p.283.

<sup>75</sup> Programme from Town Hall Foundation Stone Ceremony, Leeds Local Studies Library, QD 942.75 LS1L. The chorus remains unpublished and it seems only the words survive.

Whilst the Council foresaw the use of the Town Hall as a music venue, others within the town were not convinced that this building would fulfil the need for a new concert hall. An article in the *Leeds Intelligencer* reviews the concluding concert of a series of 'People's Concerts' that had been held in the Albion Street Music Hall during the previous musical season. At the end of the first half of the concert the Hon. Secretary, John Andrew, spoke of the series, with particular reference to the need for a more appropriate venue:

With regard to the necessity of a commodious room, commensurate with the wants of this and other societies, the committee have had under their consideration the desirability of building a new plain, but substantial Concert Hall in the centre of the town, capable of comfortably seating 2500 people, and although they have not yet adopted any specific plan for raising the necessary amount, (which they are assured by competent architects will not exceed £4000, including the site,) they will nevertheless keep the object in view, and hope at no very distant day to be able to make a satisfactory announcement on the subject, especially as the committee are of the opinion that the noble room in the Town Hall (which is to seat 6000 people) will not be altogether for *ordinary* concerts and other entertainments.<sup>76</sup>

It is unclear what was meant by 'ordinary' concerts, or, indeed, what would be the 'extraordinary' concerts that they perceived would be welcome in the Town Hall. It is possible they thought that, because the audiences at 'People's Concerts' would not necessarily be the cream of society, the Town Hall would not be for the use of such people or such musical entertainments. What their precedent for such a view would be is difficult to determine. Predecessors to Leeds Town Hall, such as its counterpart in Birmingham – which, as we have seen, had been used as a music venue from its opening in 1834 – were generally used for all forms of rational recreation, allegedly patronised by people of all classes, although ticket prices may still have been prohibitive. However, it could be argued that the use of Leeds Town Hall for so much municipal business (including the Council chamber, law courts and police station) suggested to people that admission to this building would be restricted, despite the presence of a concert room.

Once the Hon. Secretary had finished the report quoted above, the Mayor spoke in reply, attempting to reassure those present that the Town Hall as a concert venue would be open to all:

The Mayor, at the close of the reading, said the report left him little to do beyond addressing to them a few words of congratulation. He would, however, [refer] to the only part of the report to which he had listened with any sort of misgiving – the part which referred to the supposed necessity of erecting a new building for these entertainments distinct from the intended Town Hall of Leeds. Now, so highly did he think of the provision made to those meeting for popular

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<sup>76</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 4 June 1853.

amusement and instruction, that if he thought a new building were necessary for the purpose, he would think the money very well expended for such an object. But knowing as he did the views, objects, and feelings of those who promoted and were promoting the erection of a new Town Hall in Leeds, he knew that one favourite object with them is to provide accommodation for meetings of this description; and if it should happen that the new Hall will not be found adapted to the purpose, he was sure they would be grievously disappointed. He could answer for them that their wish and endeavour would be to adapt the Hall for all large assemblages, and more especially for large assemblages having objects and purposes like this.<sup>77</sup>

For the Mayor, therefore, the provision of the Town Hall as a music venue was an important factor in the erection of the building.

Possibly the most significant event in the musical life of Leeds Town Hall was the appointment, on 21 September 1853, of a Town Hall Committee Sub-Committee 'to consider and report to this Committee, the fitness of the proposed Hall for musical purposes'.<sup>78</sup> What that actually meant is not stated but can be hypothesised when it is considered within the context of the overall progress of the erection of the Town Hall. By September 1853, the foundation stone of the building had been laid and the building work was underway. It seems unlikely therefore that this Sub-committee had any influence over the structural design of the Hall at this point, but it would have been possible for them to have been involved in any further decisions relating to the building, ensuring that it housed all the facilities needed for the room to be used as a concert hall. It seems probable that the actual purpose of this Committee was 'to consider and report' to the Town Hall Committee 'how the proposed Hall could be made fit for musical purposes'.

Although building work was underway in September 1853, there was still one major decision to be made regarding the external design of the Town Hall – should the building be adorned with a tower? The main reason for a lack of resolution on this matter was a long-standing debate surrounding the additional cost it would incur. The journalist and biographer T. Wemyss Reid suggests that during the course of the erection of the Town Hall there was concern amongst some Leeds inhabitants that the Council's desire for economy would override important decisions such as this:

They were more than suspected of a leaning towards a discreditable parsimony, and the more public-spirited and intelligent inhabitants of Leeds feared lest the borough should be permanently disfigured by a building which should be a perpetual monument of the lack of taste and liberality on the part of the local governing body.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 4 June 1853.

<sup>78</sup> Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>79</sup> Reid, *A Memoir of John Deakin Heaton*, p.123.

Evidence in the form of the Council and Town Hall Committee Minutes suggests that such worries were not unfounded, but were slightly premature. It is true that the Council was trying to spend as little money as possible, and, as evidenced earlier, some council members resented such expenditure on a public building. However, the Council ultimately wanted a building that Leeds could be proud of, a symbol of the achievements of the town and of its good management. The aforementioned controversy surrounding the erection of a tower on the Town Hall is a particular case in point. On 22 August 1853 the Town Hall Committee decided that it would be beneficial for the Town Hall to have a tower. According to Heinle and Leonhardt, the desire to construct towers on public buildings stems from:

A striving for power, position and wealth, for domination and for being served. [...] The drive to demonstrate power and greatness [...] led to numerous and diverse towers on town halls or on princely palaces. Such towers frequently contribute as well to the beauty of the town, to the enrichment of the landscape, and hence to the joy of the people.<sup>80</sup>

A tower on the Town Hall would have made it the tallest building in the town and would therefore have enabled it to dominate the skyline, thus symbolising the importance of the building.<sup>81</sup> On 21 September 1853 Brodrick submitted a design for the tower, with an estimated cost of £7,000 (£409,710 today). Thus began a debate that raged through the Council meetings, columns of local newspapers, lectures for local societies and conversations between Leeds inhabitants. Those ‘against’ the tower could not see the justification for spending so much money on what was basically a useless ornament. In a Council meeting in September 1853, Alderman Bower denounced the tower as a ‘weathercock’, while Mr Francis Carbutt, perhaps with a more measured argument, said that a tower, a spire or a dome was only suitable on an ecclesiastical building, and that the style of architecture of the town hall forbade one.<sup>82</sup> Carbutt was not the only person to regard the tower as being in conflict with the design of the building. The art- and social critic John Ruskin commented: ‘I see that “The Builder” [...] has been endeavouring to inspire the citizens of Leeds with some pride [...] respecting their town-hall. The pride would be well, but I sincerely trust that the tower

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<sup>80</sup> Erwin Heinle and Fritz Leonhardt, *Towers: A Historical Survey* (London: Butterworth Architecture, 1989), introduction.

<sup>81</sup> Colin Cunningham reflects, ‘only in the late 1960s did the splendid tower of Leeds town hall begin to be dwarfed by the growing forest of tower blocks’. *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p.8.

<sup>82</sup> Council meeting on 30 September 1853. Reported in *Yorkshire Weekly Post*, 21 April 1906.

in question may not be built on the design there proposed'.<sup>83</sup> Those 'for' the tower maintained that it would add to the power and majesty of the building and therefore would be beneficial to the town in terms of the civic pride it generated. The man at the forefront of the campaign for the tower was Dr John Deakin Heaton, described in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* as 'physician and advocate of provincial civic pride'.<sup>84</sup> Heaton was born in Leeds in 1817, but left in 1838 to pursue medical training. After a grand tour of Europe, he finally settled back in his home town in 1843. Heaton was appalled by the insanitary and uncultured conditions of industrialised Leeds, especially when compared with the architectural wonders of Europe that he had encountered on his grand tour:

Foreign travel had done much to improve his taste and enlarge his ideas; he saw now more clearly than he had ever done before the glaring deficiencies of Leeds as a city; and he now laboured as earnestly to increase its beauty as to improve its sanitary state.<sup>85</sup>

Using the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society and the Leeds Improvement Society as vehicles for his campaign,<sup>86</sup> he joined a band of merchants, professionals and industrialists who were committed to the cause of progress and reform in Leeds.<sup>87</sup> It is no surprise, therefore, that Heaton was at the forefront of the movement for a Town Hall in Leeds, advocating both its practical and symbolic purpose:

The municipal buildings about to be erected by the burgesses of Leeds, besides the primary object of furnishing convenient accommodation to their officers in the transaction of public business, are intended to present an appearance worthy of the wealth and prosperity of the town. [...] They will form a monument which shall present an object of beauty not merely for their own contemplation and that of their children for successive generations, but which may be famous beyond their own limits.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> John Ruskin, *Lectures in Architecture and Painting Delivered at Edinburgh... 1853* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1854), p.vi. The involvement in the tower debate of such an important figure as Ruskin demonstrates the national interest the building of Leeds was generating. On Ruskin see Robert Hewison, 'Ruskin, John (1819–1900)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn., Oct 2007 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/24291>, accessed 17 Feb 2009].

<sup>84</sup> Tristram Hunt, 'Heaton, John Deakin (1817–1880)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, May 2006; online edn., May 2007 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/view/article/94166>, accessed 22 Sept 2008].

<sup>85</sup> Reid, *A Memoir of John Deakin Heaton*, p.122–3.

<sup>86</sup> According to Briggs in *Victorian Cities*, p.160, the Leeds Improvement Society often disagreed with the Council on matters but was strongly in favour of the building of the Town Hall. Dr Heaton was its treasurer.

<sup>87</sup> See Hunt, 'Heaton, John Deakin', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>88</sup> Reid, *A Memoir of John Deakin Heaton*, p.147–8.

Heaton was also greatly influential in the campaign for the town-hall tower. His argument was pragmatic and measured, always considering the benefit such an addition would have on Leeds as a whole:

Were this a question to be decided on merely utilitarian grounds, I believe the tower must be condemned, for it is not my opinion that any of the possible uses suggested, to which such an erection might be applied, are of sufficient practical importance to warrant the expense of such a structure [...]. But let us ask what is appropriate to a building for the purpose of the one in question, and what will be conducive to its dignity and beauty? And should we decide that a tower may be made and indeed is essential to fulfil these conditions, let us not, after having nobly determined on the expenditure of so large a sum upon the body of the work, grudge a few additional thousands to give this completion to the whole.<sup>89</sup>

Thanks in no small part to the advocacy of Dr. Heaton and other public-spirited individuals like him,<sup>90</sup> it was finally agreed by the Council, as late as March 1856, to allow the extra expenditure for the tower in order for the building to be, in the eyes of many, properly completed. It was said that, without it, future generations would comment:

The Leeds people projected a noble building, but they had not the heart to carry it out: they curtailed the plans of the architect in that very feature of the building which was to be its crowning beauty: for the sake of an odd thousand pounds or two they spoiled a Hall on which they had expended fifty or sixty thousand, and which was to give character to their town for centuries: they put a little head upon a great body, and left their chief municipal structure a perpetual deformity and reproach.<sup>91</sup>

The utmost weapon in such a battle was always 'civic pride', but, in the words of Asa Briggs, in this case 'pride was having to be paid for in good hard cash'.<sup>92</sup> According to the Pevsner Architectural Guide to Leeds, 'the tower was to be the dominating symbol not only of the place of Leeds in the hierarchy of great northern cities, but also of municipal government in general'.<sup>93</sup> The inclusion of a tower on Leeds Town Hall is a further example of the innovative nature of the building. Colin Cunningham describes it as 'the prototype' - an effective urban symbol that was echoed in many subsequent buildings, such as the town halls of Manchester and Bradford.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.149.

<sup>90</sup> For example, a J.E. Denison of Ossington offered to contribute £100 towards the erection of the tower. See Briggs, 'The Building of Leeds Town Hall', p.282. Other significant individuals in the Town-Hall campaign were John Hope Shaw, a Leeds Solicitor and three times Mayor of Leeds; Canon Hook, Vicar of Leeds; and the Marshall and Gott families of businessmen. For more see Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p.160-1.

<sup>91</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 27 September 1856.

<sup>92</sup> Briggs, 'The Building of Leeds Town Hall', p.282.

<sup>93</sup> Susan Wrathmell, *Pevsner Architectural Guides: Leeds* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p.64.

<sup>94</sup> Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p.167. Cunningham here refers to the tower at Leeds as 'still one of the very best'.

Whilst the debate on the external adornment of the Town Hall was raging, a further discussion was underway regarding the internal design of the building. The 'musical' Committee was pursuing plans for the adaptation of the hall for the purposes of music.<sup>95</sup> Their first mission was to secure the building of an organ in the Town Hall. Whilst space for an organ had not been specified in the original competition instructions, Brodrick, in his design entry, had designated a recess for such an instrument in 'The Great Hall'.<sup>96</sup> As a mechanically ingenious and visually impressive instrument, an organ could be an object of interest and civic pride in its own right. In addition, an organ might function not only as an accompanying instrument, but also as a soloist and an orchestral substitute.<sup>97</sup> At this time of competition between municipal buildings, when no Victorian public hall would have been complete without an organ, it is difficult to imagine that the Council could have conceived of this building without one.<sup>98</sup> The *Musical World* also regarded an organ to be a pre-requisite in Leeds Town Hall:

it is equally difficult to understand how a large music-room can be made at all times available – especially in the north of England, where choral so greatly preponderates over instrumental strength – unless it contains an organ of proportionate capabilities.<sup>99</sup>

The 'musical' Committee was of the same opinion, advising that 'The Town Hall Committee be recommended to introduce to the notice of the Town Council the important subject of the erection of an organ in the Town Hall'.<sup>100</sup> Both the 'musical' Committee and the Town Hall Committee saw the provision of an organ in the Town Hall as 'essential',<sup>101</sup> and must therefore have been concerned about the structural progression of the Town Hall and how this would restrict any adaptations to the building needed for the erection of a large instrument. Although Brodrick had made

<sup>95</sup> The name for this Sub-Committee is my own, for the purposes of clarity, since it does not seem officially to have been given a concise title. There were a large number of Sub-Committees within the Council, from the Sub-committee for Lettings to the Sub-committee for Smoking Chimneys.

<sup>96</sup> See, *Leeds Town Hall: Specifications and Estimates for Building*, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, WYL1003.

<sup>97</sup> Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, pp.271-272.

<sup>98</sup> Thistlethwaite, in *ibid.*, p.271, suggests that since 'improvement' was amongst the principal motives of those who initiated the building of the town halls, particularly using the performance of music as a tool, 'by the 1850's, the provision of a grand organ had become an important plank in this particular platform'. As discussed in the previous chapter, this trend started with the use of Birmingham Town Hall to bring 'music to the people'.

<sup>99</sup> *Musical World*, 34 (1856), p.649.

<sup>100</sup> 24 August 1855, in Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>101</sup> 24 August 1855, in Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.



provision for an organ in his original design, a discussion at a Town Hall Committee meeting on 24 June 1854 seems to suggest that the design of the room would have to be changed in order to accommodate the instrument. The Committee proposed:

That the North Wall of the large Hall be extended further back to make room for an Organ according to the plan of the Architect now produced.<sup>102</sup>

It is clear from this proposal that Brodrick had been involved in the redesigning of the room for the organ, but it is unclear whether the Town Hall Committee's suggestion was part of the final design of the hall.

In order for the Town Hall to have an organ the matter had to be approved by the Council's Parliamentary Committee, which in turn needed to acquire the relevant parliamentary powers to erect the instrument. The powers were granted on 21 July 1856 in the form of the *Leeds Improvement Amendment Act, 1856*. After the establishment of the 'musical' Sub-Committee, the granting of this Amendment Act was perhaps the most important event in the musical life of Leeds Town Hall. Section eighteen covered the following provisions:

As part of the Fittings up of the said Town Hall to provide and erect, or hire and maintain, in the said Town Hall an Organ, and either gratuitously, or for such Payment as the Council from Time to Time may think proper, to grant or let the Use of the said Organ, and of the Part of the Town Hall wherein it shall be placed, together with all necessary Conveniences, to any Person for the Performance of Music therein, to which Performances the Public shall have Admission either freely or subject to such Payments and Regulations as the Council shall from Time to Time appoint.<sup>103</sup>

The stipulation by an Act of Parliament that the Hall was to be used for the performance of music was an issue that was taken seriously by the Council and was therefore to have far reaching implications for the use of Leeds Town Hall as a music venue in the future. The prescribed use of the hall as a music venue came as no shock to the musical press, who had taken an active interest in the building of Leeds Town Hall since the design competition was announced. As the *Musical World* pragmatically suggested in 1856, 'It is difficult to see what very practical use can be made of so vast a hall as theirs, unless as a music-room'.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> 24 June 1854, in *ibid*.

<sup>103</sup> 'The Leeds Improvement Amendment Act, 1856', *Leeds Acts of Parliament*, Vol.2, 1790-1925, Leeds Local Studies Library, LQ352 L517.

<sup>104</sup> *Musical World*, 34 (1856), p.649.

With parliamentary permission in place, finally, in December 1856, a competition was launched by the Council for the design of the organ, attracting much attention in the press:

No event of late has excited so much interest among the curious in organ-building matters as the recently terminated competition for the best design for an organ to be erected in the Leeds Town Hall.<sup>105</sup>

Before choosing a winning design the Musical Sub-Committee were thorough in their research in order that Leeds would 'secure for itself, one of the finest Organs, as regard mechanical arrangement, and composition, which has yet been built'; an instrument that would be 'inferior to none, and superior to almost any other'.<sup>106</sup> They obtained information on the specifications of 'most of the large organs in this Country, and on the Continent', specifically 'the Large organs at Liverpool, Birmingham, the Ponoptican [sic], [and] the Crystal Palace',<sup>107</sup> with the aim of combining all the best features of each. Despite such aspirations, they typically hoped 'that this will be done at a less cost, than in any previous instance'.<sup>108</sup> Out of the eight entries submitted, the winning design was that of William Spark and Henry Smart, a decision that was not generally popular, possibly because of Spark's lack of reputation as an organ designer. Spark acknowledges that when the competition result was announced, 'a general scream of indignation went up from the disappointed aspirants for the honour and glory [...] of designing an instrument for the noble Town Hall of Leeds'.<sup>109</sup> On their design

<sup>105</sup> *Musical World*, 35 (1857), p.592.

<sup>106</sup> Committee Meeting, 13 July 1857. Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* The Liverpool organ referred to would be the instrument in St George's Hall, built by Henry Willis in 1855. As this was the most recently commissioned, and therefore the most technologically innovative, it would probably have been of the most interest. The Birmingham organ would be the Birmingham Town Hall instrument, built by William Hill in 1834. The 'Ponoptican' mentioned here is actually the instrument at the Royal Panopticon of Science and Art, built by Hill in 1853. The Crystal Palace organ is the instrument built by Gray & Davison in 1857. See Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, pp.135, 127, 205, 304. That these instruments were all secular organs demonstrates the progression from the organ being merely for church accompaniment to that of an important solo concert instrument.

<sup>108</sup> 13 July 1857, in Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>109</sup> In William Spark, *Three Organs and Organists of the North: Being excerpts from the Yorkshire Post*, Leeds Local Studies Library, LQ786.6 SP26. This document is a scrapbook compilation of articles Spark wrote on various organs, 'made up in Leeds in 1910', and includes a report of that of Leeds Town Hall. Since Spark died in 1897 the scrapbook cannot have been by him. Despite the controversy surrounding the appointment of Spark and Smart, according to the Souvenir Programme for the *Inauguration of the Rebuilt Organ*, 17 May 1972, in Leeds Local Studies Library, LP786.63 L517, 'Henry Smart was possibly the finest organist in London, and both he and William Spark had a wide knowledge of organ design'. Organist and composer, Henry Smart had designed the organs in the City and St Andrew's halls, Glasgow, in

entry, 'Semper Fidelis', 'Always Faithful', Spark and Smart described their philosophy as regards the design of the instrument:

It has not been the intention of the designers to attempt to impose upon the judgements of the Committee by anything very surprising either in the number or names of the stops set forth in their list: they have sought rather to confine themselves to what was chiefly useful and necessary for the instrument considering its intended position and the purposes for which it is intended to serve.<sup>110</sup>

It seems that they were attempting to display restraint and frugality to the Town Hall Committee in order to instil confidence in the economy of their design. The tender accepted for the building of the organ was that of Gray and Davison, a firm that had enjoyed a high reputation as organ builders during the first half of the nineteenth century, gained not least through their building of the 'monster organ' in the Crystal Palace.<sup>111</sup> They were confident about the quality of the design and their ability to build it:

We have carefully examined the Specifications and Plans of the Organ proposed to be erected in your New Town Hall, and we have no hesitation in saying that if carried out in a proper manner, this Instrument will be unsurpassed in this or any other Country, either in mechanical arrangement or musical effect.<sup>112</sup>

With the inclusion of an organ decided upon, the design of Leeds Town Hall was complete and the 'musical' sub-committee had overcome their first hurdle. In May 1858 the *Musical World* reported that although the Town Hall had yet to be properly acoustically tested, 'the general opinion seemed to be that it was admirably adapted for musical purposes'.<sup>113</sup> With the publication of this sentence, the 'musical' Sub-Committee of the Town Hall Committee had achieved their mission. Their superintendence had ensured that Leeds Town Hall was indeed 'fit for musical purposes'. The building in general was exciting interest in the press and, although the final specifications did not actually encompass all the facilities requested in the original

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addition to the instrument at Leeds. See W.H. Husk and Nicholas Temperley. 'Smart'. Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. 19 Feb. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/25981pg3>>.

<sup>110</sup> *Town Hall Organ Contracts and Drawings*, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LC/TC 1-13, A-G.

<sup>111</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 18 August 1857. For more on the firm see Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, p.55. Thistlethwaite, on p.284, considers the Leeds organ to be Davison's 'magnum opus'. William Spark thought the Leeds Council had assistance from an expert when choosing the winning design and was of the opinion that this expert was the organist, organ designer and composer, Dr. Henry John Gauntlett. See William Spark, *Three Organs and Organists of the North*.

<sup>112</sup> *Town Hall Organ Contracts and Drawings*, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LC/TC 1-13, A-G.

<sup>113</sup> *Musical World*, 36 (1858), p.310.

'Instructions to Architects', it seems that they still fulfilled the Council's required functions. As the Mayor had promised at the laying of the foundation stone, the final building was both ornamental and practical:

As a work of art [...] it occupies a very high rank; and remembering the purposes for which such a building is required by a large and increasing community, it has been designed and constructed in no parsimonious spirit. For municipal purposes it has been spoken of as unrivalled; and for the administration of justice, for large assemblies of the people on questions of exciting interests, for literary and scientific gatherings, for soirees, for musical entertainments, and for every object which can tend to elevate and enlighten the masses of the people it affords facilities which are not exceeded in any town in the country, and are very rarely combined together in one edifice.<sup>114</sup>

As Leeds' first significant, secular, and ornamental public building, many commentators within the town hoped that the complete Leeds Town Hall would stimulate the raising of architectural character in the town. Even the *Manchester Weekly Times* was moved to state, 'The new Town Hall of Leeds must cause the ungainly brick edifices of that town to blush'.<sup>115</sup>

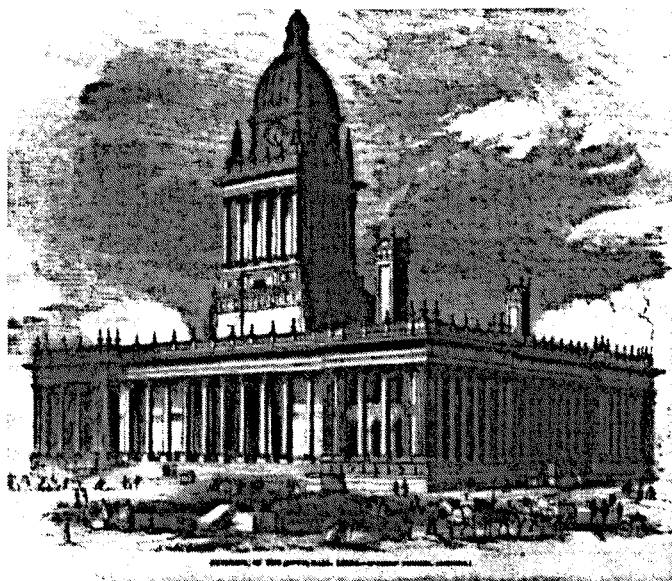


Figure 6: Leeds Town Hall, 1858,  
Leeds Library and Information Services, LIHV (5)

#### 4.5: Grand Opening

As the building neared completion, discussion began as to the best way to celebrate its opening. It was finally decided to combine a visit from Queen Victoria and Prince Albert with an exhibition of local manufactures and a musical festival. Cunningham suggests that the planning of such celebrations was entirely congruent with the opening

<sup>114</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 11 September 1858.

<sup>115</sup> *Manchester Weekly Times*, 11 September 1858.

of other significant public buildings in the country. He comments that, 'as part of the purpose of these buildings was self-advertisement, it was always a good thing to have outsiders to see the splendour, and an important celebrity was very much to be desired'.<sup>116</sup> The opening of the Town Hall was to be not only a celebration of the building but also of the town of Leeds and of Britain as a whole.

The organising of the opening festival was an enormous undertaking. Here again, William Spark credits himself with the idea for the event. He did indeed write a letter on the subject to the *Leeds Mercury*, 20 February 1858:

And now I wish most respectfully to ask our spirited mayor, the members of the corporation, and the inhabitants generally, whether they intend to have their magnificent Town Hall and organ opened with the enthusiasm and rejoicing which can alone find appropriate expression in a grand musical festival, on a scale worthy of the metropolis of the West Riding, of the commercial eminence of our town, and its taste and patronage of music?

In his autobiography, Spark states that this letter was published in 1857,<sup>117</sup> whereas, in fact, it was in the *Leeds Mercury* on 20 February 1858. Spark's claim to have initiated the festival cannot entirely be dismissed, however, since the issue was not resolved by the Town Hall Committee until 3 March 1858, although the Committee minutes suggest that the debate had been going on for some time.<sup>118</sup> Joseph Bennett and Fred Spark, the brother of William, in their *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, are certain that the festival was the Council's idea, simply as a means of celebrating the opening of the Town Hall:

It is interesting to note that, in view of the ceremonial opening of the new building, the suggestions of a Musical Festival originated, not, as might have been expected, with the amateurs of the town, but with the Corporation Committee (who may, indeed, have been amateurs to a man) specially charged with oversight of all matters connected with the then nearly completed edifice.<sup>119</sup>

This view is supported in various other publications from the nineteenth century onwards, and seems to have been the accepted pattern of events, not least because the Town Hall Committee minutes show that on 5 March 1858 it was resolved 'that it is

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<sup>116</sup> Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p.217.

<sup>117</sup> William Spark, *Musical Memories* (London: W. Reeves, 1888), pp.96-7.

<sup>118</sup> Town Hall Committee Minutes, 12 November 1857 to 21 December 1860, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/2.

<sup>119</sup> Fred R. Spark and Joseph Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals 1858-1889* (Leeds: Fred. R. Spark & Son, 1892), pp.1-2. William Spark was not happy that his brother had written a history of the musical festivals that contradicted his. In his *Musical Reminiscences*, p.236, William described the version of events written by his brother as a *suppression veri* [sic], a concealment of the truth, 'which is not very creditable to the Editors'.

desirable that the Town Hall be opened with a Musical Festival'.<sup>120</sup> That the idea for the musical festival came from the Council is not such an unusual suggestion when one considers the symbolism of such an event. Frank Musgrove describes the provincial musical festival in the following way:

The festival was a statement. It said for the northern city: We are rich, successful and powerful, but we are also civilized.<sup>121</sup>

This was the reputation the Council was trying to create by building a town hall, and holding a musical festival to mark its opening was exactly the way to cement it. In addition, for the Town Hall Committee, the opening of the Town Hall with a musical festival would be a way of justifying the money expended in the creation of a hall fit for musical purposes, including the building of the organ:

The principal reasons which induced the Town-hall Committee to propose a festival were, that the Town-hall was the property of the people, and that the large room was specially designed for musical performances. With that object in view, the committee had incurred great expense, and had secured a first-rate organ.<sup>122</sup>

In addition to the public reasons stated by the Council, surely an additional impetus was that Bradford had held a musical festival to open its St George's Hall in 1853.<sup>123</sup> Like Leeds, the Bradford Festival had been conceived as a means, not only of celebrating the erection of the new Hall, but of 'selling the city' to the rest of Britain.<sup>124</sup>

At the aforementioned Town Hall Committee meeting on 5 March it was resolved that 'the Mayor be requested to take such steps as he may think proper, to convene a public meeting to consider the best means of carrying out the proposed measure [i.e. organisation of a musical festival] in an efficient manner'.<sup>125</sup> The Mayor

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<sup>120</sup> Town Hall Committee Minutes, 12 November 1857 to 21 December 1860, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/2.

<sup>121</sup> Frank Musgrove, 'The Rise of a Northern Musical Elite', *Northern History: A Review of the History of the North of England and the Borders*, 35 (1999), 50-76 (p.73).

<sup>122</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 13 March 1858.

<sup>123</sup> One writer to the *Leeds Times*, 3 April 1858, suggested that after the Leeds Musical Festival, 'Leeds should take a step far, very far, in advance of Bradford'.

<sup>124</sup> David Russell "Awakening to the Reality of our New and Loftier Position". The Bradford Triennial Musical Festivals 1853-1895', *The Bradford Antiquary*, 6 (1992), 3-21 (p.5). There were only three Bradford Festivals (1853, 1856, 1859), but they managed to achieve national recognition. They were held in late August or early September and lasted for three or four days. The performances consisted of standard festival repertoire, i.e. mainly Handel and Mendelssohn, with the addition of specially commissioned works that had become a prerequisite for success. See Russell, p.6. It is probable, therefore, that Bradford had looked to the Birmingham Festivals as a model for their own. As we shall see, the first Leeds Musical Festival also followed the same pattern to some extent, yet displayed innovation in many areas.

<sup>125</sup> Town Hall Committee Minutes, 12 November 1857 to 21 December 1860, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/2.

at the time was Peter Fairbairn, a mechanical engineer, who it seems took an active involvement in the arts in Leeds. According to his entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 'he supported educational and religious causes, and had a broad interest in the arts, including music and drama'.<sup>126</sup> It is possible, therefore, that this task was of personal as well as professional interest to Fairbairn and, since he had an awareness of the musical life of the town, he may have had useful contacts to aid in the establishment of a musical festival. In his capacity as Mayor he issued circulars that stated that 'the committee of the Town Hall deemed it desirable that the magnificent building should be inaugurated by a festival, and the co-operation of the town was sought'<sup>127</sup> – another example of the Council seeking advice from those who might know more than they in order to achieve the optimum result. A meeting to discuss the subject, held on 11 March 1858, was attended by 'many of the leading inhabitants and musical amateurs' of the town.<sup>128</sup> The attending 'inhabitants' resolved to 'cordially unite with the Town Hall Committee in carrying out the proposed measure in an efficient manner',<sup>129</sup> and appointed a General Festival Committee consisting of seventeen members of the Town Council and seventeen 'townsmen'.<sup>130</sup> In addition, this initial meeting resolved that 'the profits, if any, of the proposed Festival should go to the funds of the Leeds General Infirmary'.<sup>131</sup> The majority of the leading musical festivals of the time donated their profits to charity, and so for Leeds not to do so would have looked mercenary. The General Infirmary was an indispensable Leeds institution and at this time was in pecuniary need, so the decision to donate the money to this cause was not entirely arbitrary:

The Infirmary is in a struggling condition, though so wide-spread is its excellence, and so high in repute is the skill of its medical attendants, that patients come hither not only from all parts of Yorkshire, but also from the adjoining counties. For such a charity, we feel assured, a Musical Festival must succeed; and we shall show that, if only the average result which attends nearly all musical festivals in England be obtained, a handsome sum will be handed over to the treasurer of the institution.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Gillian Cookson, 'Fairbairn, Sir Peter (1799–1861)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/view/article/9066>, accessed 9 Oct 2008].

<sup>127</sup> *Musical World*, 36 (1858), p.172.

<sup>128</sup> Spark and Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, p.2.

<sup>129</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p.2. The original source for this quotation has apparently not survived.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2. Here, Spark and Bennett give a list of those who were appointed to the General Festival Committee. In the light of William Spark's claims to have originated the idea for the Leeds Musical Festival it seems significant that he was not amongst this number.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, quoted in the *Musical World*, 36 (1858), p.181. The infirmary had for some time benefited from concerts in Leeds and from the York Festivals held in York Minster from

Within the General Festival Committee there were established three sub-committees – orchestral, financial and general business. It was the orchestral sub-committee that was therefore charged with the ‘musical’ arrangements, such as the programme, the appointment of a conductor, soloists, band and chorus. The choice of conductor was possibly the most important decision to be made, as it was this that would attract the most attention and potentially determine the overall success of the festival. In this matter the orchestral sub-committee had a dilemma – they were torn between fame and patriotism, between Michael Costa and William Sterndale Bennett. At the time, Costa was possibly the most acclaimed conductor in the country, conducting the Philharmonic Society, the Sacred Harmonic Society, the Crystal Palace Handel Festivals, and the Birmingham Triennial Musical Festivals.<sup>133</sup> In contrast, Sterndale Bennett, professor of music at Cambridge, had little experience of festival work.<sup>134</sup> He did have conducting experience as director of the Bach Society, which he had founded in 1849, and as conductor of the Philharmonic Society from 1855. He did not have the reputation of Costa but he possessed one significant attribute that the famous conductor did not – he was a Yorkshire-man, having been born in Sheffield in 1816.<sup>135</sup> It was this, in the end, which secured him the conductorship of the first Leeds Musical Festival. Thus, civic pride surrounding the new town hall had even influenced the choice of musician to conduct the opening festival:

Leeds was far enough from London to be in great measure unaffected by the craze for foreign musicians which then prevailed in the metropolis, and it shared the pride in every Yorkshire success which has always characterised the county. So good an opportunity as the election of a Festival conductor for the gratification of national and local sentiment was not to be lost, especially as in the case of Sterndale Bennett it could be utilised without risk, and with a certainty of general approval.<sup>136</sup>

The appointment of Sterndale Bennett was welcomed in the local and musical press, with the *Musical World* suggesting that, ‘under the superintendence of Professor

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1823. See J. Sprittles, ‘Leeds Musical Festivals’, *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, 46 (1963), 200-270 (p.200).

<sup>133</sup> For more on Costa see Nigel Burton and Keith Horner. "Costa, Sir Michael." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 9 Oct. 2008 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/06635>>.

<sup>134</sup> He had conducted some Lancashire Festival Concerts in Manchester in the winter of 1857-8. This is possibly what brought him to the mind of the Leeds Committee as a potential conductor for their Festival. See J.R. Sterndale Bennett, *The Life of William Sterndale Bennett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), p.279.

<sup>135</sup> On Sterndale Bennett see Nicholas Temperley and Rosemary Williamson. "Bennett, Sir William Sterndale." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 9 Oct. 2008 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/42930>>.

<sup>136</sup> Spark and Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, p.4.



Sterndale Bennett the chances of the Leeds Music-Festival being more than was anticipated, even by Leeds itself, are doubled'.<sup>137</sup> The enthusiasm that the preparations for the first Leeds Festival excited was widely reported, not without satire. Originally it was to be held in October, leading the *Musical World* to pass the following ironic comment:

The month of October is, we understand, selected for the historic immortality which the Leeds Musical Festival is to confer. Following this, it would be only in keeping to re-christen October, 'Leeds' – in accordance with the manner of the Roman senate under the Empire.<sup>138</sup>

Since the same article later charges Leeds with 'egotism', it is possible that the importance of the occasion was being over-emphasised, but in the eyes of many this was no ordinary musical festival. It was a festival to celebrate the opening of what Derek Linstrum has since called the 'first complete municipal palace'<sup>139</sup> – an occasion that possibly warranted egotistical amounts of civic pride.

Leeds Town Hall was officially opened on 7 September 1858. This event is documented as one of the most significant in the history of the town, with thousands of people from within and outside Leeds coming to the town for the occasion – according to an 1868 guide to Leeds, 'not less than 150,000 to 200,000 people were crowded into the streets'.<sup>140</sup> Cunningham suggests that the Leeds celebrations were some of the grandest ever seen for the opening of a Town Hall.<sup>141</sup> According to Asa Briggs:

The comments made at the time in the local press suggest that a mood of quite unreal romance was being cultivated in Leeds for this royal occasion. [...] The Town Hall was the symbol of it in much the same way that the Crystal Palace had been the symbol of romance for the nation in 1851.<sup>142</sup>

It would have been possible for the significance of the opening of Leeds Town Hall to be over-shadowed by the visit of Queen Victoria. However, one newspaper suggested that, whilst the visit of the reigning monarch did indeed influence the huge amount of public feeling surrounding this event, it was just as important to the citizens of Leeds to celebrate the opening of the building itself, regardless of the Queen's attendance:

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<sup>137</sup> *Musical World*, 36 (1858), p.248.

<sup>138</sup> *Musical World*, 36 (1858), p.232.

<sup>139</sup> Derek Linstrum, 'Brodrick, Cuthbert'. *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. 20 Feb. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordartonline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/art/T011453>>.

<sup>140</sup> *Green's Handy Guide to Leeds* (Leeds: David Green, 1868), p.25.

<sup>141</sup> Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p.217. Whilst the celebrations for the opening of Stalybridge Town Hall, discussed in chapter 2, cannot possibly compare with those at Leeds, they were stimulated by a comparable amount of civic pride and were probably only limited by monetary factors.

<sup>142</sup> Briggs, 'The Building of Leeds Town Hall', p.295.

To the inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood [...] the completion of the new Town Hall, rivalling the noblest structures of the kind in England, or perhaps in Europe, is an event which would, in itself, quite apart from the *éclat* of a royal opening, call for hearty and universal congratulation.<sup>143</sup>

As befitted such an opening ceremony, many speeches were given by various town dignitaries, all of them reflecting on the magnificence of the building, its stimulus to potential improvement, and the present and future glory and prosperity of Leeds. In her reply Queen Victoria seemed to agree:

It is highly gratifying to me to witness the opening of this noble hall, a work well worthy of your active industry and enterprising spirit, and while it will reflect a lasting honour on the town of Leeds, I feel assured that it will also secure to the thriving community whom you represent the important social and municipal advantages for which it is designed.<sup>144</sup>

The opening ceremony of Leeds Town Hall saw the first use of the building for the performance of music, and also the first use of the 'monster organ'.<sup>145</sup> The instrument, although unfortunately not finished by this point, was playable, and Henry Smart accompanied a large chorus at the opening ceremony in the National Anthem and the 'Hallelujah Chorus'.<sup>146</sup> Although incomplete, the instrument still drew positive comment from the press. *The Times*, for example, described it as 'the best specimen of musical architecture [...] we have seen'.<sup>147</sup>

The day after Queen Victoria's visit, the Town-Hall opening celebrations continued with the start of the musical festival, which began with the performance of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. The decision to open the first municipal Leeds Musical Festival with such a traditional work suggests that the Festival Committee were attempting to link the occasion with the great festivals that had gone before it, such as Birmingham, and to show that this new festival could become part of that tradition. However, other works performed did not conform to convention. In his capacity as conductor, Sterndale Bennett was commissioned to write a new work for the event, and produced the pastoral cantata *The May Queen* to a libretto by Henry Chorley. According to Rosemary Williamson, this work marked a new direction in the development of his

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<sup>143</sup> *Daily News*, 8 September 1858.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> A writer to the *Leeds Mercury*, 20 September 1876, said that the instrument 'may be regarded as one of the very best of the half-dozen monster organs in the world'.

<sup>146</sup> See *The Leeds Musical Festival, September 1858; With Biographical Notices of the Principal Composers, And an Account of the Various Performances; To Which is Appended A Description of the Visit to Leeds Town Hall by Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen* (Leeds: Leeds Intelligencer, 1858), pp.87 and 91.

<sup>147</sup> *The Times*, 6 September 1858.

musical style. Although he used a libretto that had been written for him ten years before and borrowed his unpublished overture, 'Marie du Bois', they were only brought together with the impetus of the Leeds commission.<sup>148</sup> Sterndale Bennett had requested that Chorley write a text for him that was 'something like [Handel's] *Acis and Galatea*', written in 1718, with words by John Gay.<sup>149</sup> Chorley suggested that an English scene would be preferable, and *The May Queen* is written very much in the Pastoral tradition. The story begins on May-Day, and the May-Queen-elect slights her constant lover to flirt with a 'forest hero' calling himself Robin Hood. As a consequence, the rival suitors quarrel. Encouraged by the May-Queen's attention, Robin Hood attempts to kiss her. This infuriates her lover who then strikes Robin Hood. Because the blow was given 'upon the Royal domain' the offender has to 'forfeit the hand that dealt it'. The arrival of the real Queen encourages more violent outbursts between the rivals, which leads the May-Queen to plead for the cause of her constant lover. The Queen, who recognises Robin Hood as a nobleman of her court, upon inquiry decides in the favour of the lover, and the May-Queen is commanded to marry him the following morning.<sup>150</sup> *The May Queen* consists of an overture followed by ten vocal pieces for soprano ('The May Queen'), alto ('Queen'), tenor ('The Lover') and bass ('Robin Hood') soloists and chorus. The work has many common points of musical style with Handel's work, such as the extensive use of compound and triple rhythms, simple illustrative instrumental effects, and comic elements.<sup>151</sup> Williamson suggests that *The May Queen* was an important influence on the secular cantatas and operettas of Arthur Sullivan and his contemporaries,<sup>152</sup> and aspects of the work can certainly be heard in, for example, *The Mikado*, written twenty-seven years later in 1885. These include the use of syncopated rhythms, call and response writing for the chorus, and attractive, lively, memorable melodies. After its first performance the

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<sup>148</sup> Rosemary Williamson, *William Sterndale Bennett: A Descriptive Thematic Catalogue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.210.

<sup>149</sup> *Musical Standard*, 21 October 1871. *Acis and Galatea* was an extremely popular work in the Victorian period, thought to be, according to the *Musical World*, 22 (1847), p.635, 'a living, translucent fount of inspiration from beginning to end, [...] the most beautiful [...] of Handel's compositions'. See Roberta Montemorra Marvin, 'Handel's *Acis and Galatea*: A Victorian View', in *Europe, Empire and Spectacle*, Cowgill and Rushton, 249-264.

<sup>150</sup> Taken from a study of the score, but also based upon a review of the work in *The Times*, 10 September 1858.

<sup>151</sup> Williamson, *William Sterndale Bennett*, pp.211-212.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p.212.

*Musical Times* said of the work: 'The music of this agreeable composition is simple, unaffected and excellent; and the whole work deserves the highest commendation'.<sup>153</sup>

It is of great significance that *The May Queen*, the first work commissioned for the Leeds Musical Festival, was not an oratorio, and was not based on a religious text. In this age of moral reform, it was a significant break from the festival tradition seen in places such as Birmingham, where the performance of choral music, normally in the form of oratorio, was promoted through its direct link with biblical texts, thus making it respectable, 'rational' recreation. In addition, the Leeds programme contained a number of orchestral works, such as Mozart's Symphony in C Major, presumably the 'Jupiter', and Mendelssohn's Piano Concerto No.1 in G minor Op.25, in addition to 'as much organ playing as is consistent with a judiciously arranged programme'.<sup>154</sup> Again, the inclusion of so many instrumental items in a traditional festival programme, and the prominence they were given, was unusual, stemming from the view that oratorios were 'improving' because of their religious words, whereas instrumental works could be dangerous as they allowed too much free thinking.<sup>155</sup> *The Times* welcomed this alteration to the normal festival programme, viewing the instrumental items as 'judicious innovations in the prevalent custom at festivals, which is to satiate the public with endless selections of vocal music'.<sup>156</sup>

The 1858 festival was formed around the normal four-day pattern but with one augmentation – a People's Festival Concert which was held on the Saturday night, after the conclusion of the main festival. As the title suggests, this was a novel move to offer a concert at cheap prices in order to open the festival, and therefore the town hall, to the lower classes. The *Musical World* three years previously had bemoaned the exclusive and prohibitive nature of the Birmingham Musical Festival:

Now that the festival is over, and the Town Council once more invested with the control of the Hall, would it not be a graceful act [...] to throw open its doors for a couple of days, in order that those who have paid for decorations which have made it the most superb music hall in Europe, might have the opportunity of judging how far the praise it has received from strangers is deserved?<sup>157</sup>

The organisers of the Leeds Festival may have had such sentiments in mind. People's concerts had been held in Leeds since 1852 and were an important part of the musical

<sup>153</sup> *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 8 (1858), p. 323.

<sup>154</sup> Committee Meeting, 14 August 1858. Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>155</sup> See the article by Dr. Beattie, quoted in the previous chapter, note 297.

<sup>156</sup> *The Times*, 8 September 1858.

<sup>157</sup> *Musical World*, 33 (1855), p.575.

life of the town, mainly promoted by the Leeds Rational Recreation Society which attempted to 'counteract the demoralising influences of places where strong drink and vicious amusements are the chief source of attraction' by the provision of cheap concerts.<sup>158</sup> Without a concert of this kind as part of the Town-Hall celebrations, the general populace of Leeds would not have been able to see the interior of the building, never mind experience the musical festival celebrating its opening. By adding an extra 'People's concert' to the festival programme the Committee were enabling a greater number of people to be part of one of the greatest events Leeds had ever seen. It was, after all, meant to be a 'town' hall – a building for the people paid for by the people. According to reports, the People's Concert proved so popular that within 20 minutes 2,283 people had passed through the vestibule, with 4,000 people in total attending the concert.<sup>159</sup> Although the practice of giving a People's Concert had been established at the Norwich and Bradford Festivals in the 1850s, the inclusion of it at Leeds shows foresight and sensitivity on the part of the Festival Committee. Much of the Leeds Musical Festival of 1858 broke with convention. There was still the performance of traditional oratorios such as *Elijah* and *Messiah*, but the programming of a secular work, the inclusion of orchestral items and the incorporation of a People's Concert indicate that the Leeds Festival of 1858 strove to be innovative and independent of those which had gone before.<sup>160</sup>

Since the Musical Festival was the first public performance of music in the Town Hall, it was the earliest real opportunity for the building to be judged as a music venue. *The Times* was of the opinion that the successful performance of *Elijah* warranted 'the most unqualified verdict in favour of the new building as an arena for music', and that the performance of Mendelssohn's G minor Piano Concerto was 'another exemplification of the perfect adaptability of the Leeds Town-hall for musical purposes',<sup>161</sup> whilst the *Musical Gazette* thought that the performance of *Elijah* 'set all doubt at rest as to the adaptation of the Hall for musical purposes'.<sup>162</sup> Overall, the first Leeds Festival was deemed a success by the local, national and musical press alike, and was also a financial success with £2,000 (£86,320 today) being given to the

<sup>158</sup> Russell, 'The Leeds Rational Recreation Society', p.143.

<sup>159</sup> Sprittles, 'Leeds Musical Festivals', p.207.

<sup>160</sup> For the full programme of the 1858 festival see Spark and Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, pp.8-12.

<sup>161</sup> *The Times*, 10 September 1858.

<sup>162</sup> *Musical Gazette*, quoted in *Dwight's Journal of Music*, 8 (1858), p.215.

Infirmity.<sup>163</sup> *The Times* stated that the event 'had been so great, and on the whole so well-merited, a success' that Leeds 'may be congratulated on having more than realized what was expected from as wealthy, populous, charitable, and music-loving a borough. [...] Uniform success [...] has attended every stage of the proceedings'.<sup>164</sup> The Council of Leeds had not only proved that they could build a magnificent building to symbolise their wealth and prosperity, but had arranged a musical festival that demonstrated the practical use of this wealth to enable the town to prosper through the holding of the event. In addition, it was now known nationally that Leeds had a concert hall and an organ that could be favourably compared with any other in the country, including St George's Hall in Bradford. The eyes of the country had turned to Leeds on the occasion of the visit of Queen Victoria, and then stayed on the town through the triumph of the musical festival. The Town-Hall celebrations had ensured that Leeds became, for those few days, in the words of one contemporary, 'in a sense the seat of the Empire'.<sup>165</sup>

After its opening, Leeds Town Hall continued to excite interest nationally and internationally, and was 'said to have been esteemed in its day, by American Visitors, as highly as the great medieval cathedrals'.<sup>166</sup> The press sustained its reports on the building, often comparing Leeds Town Hall favourably with the significant edifices of Europe, using such statements as, 'The new Town Hall at Leeds is said to be one of the finest buildings in Europe'.<sup>167</sup> In addition, members of the architectural profession who, as we have seen, had taken a lively interest in the design of Leeds Town Hall since the launch of its competition, continued to do so after its opening. Having tracked the various developments of the building for the previous five years, *The Building News* reported in 1858:

The erection of [Leeds Town Hall], one of a remarkable class, is not without its historical signification, for, like similar monuments of the middle ages, it shows not only the wealth to which the cities have attained, but the development of municipal institutions. [...] The Town-hall of Leeds is one of the gorgeous structures of the class. Profuse in its adornments, it represents an age in which wealth has passed beyond simple comfort to the enjoyment of luxury. It speaks of abundance, and displays it. Its clustered columns, its profusion of lights, its ribbed vault, bespeak the wealth of its builders, and it is made to minister to their recreation and indulgence [...]. The architect has undoubtedly achieved his aim, for he has given the people of

<sup>163</sup> See Spark and Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, p.34.

<sup>164</sup> *The Times*, 13 September 1858.

<sup>165</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 7 September 1858.

<sup>166</sup> John Physick and Michael Darby, 'Marble Halls': *Drawings and Models for Victorian Secular Buildings: Exhibition, August – October 1973* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1973), p.131.

<sup>167</sup> *The Nonconformist*, 8 September 1858.

Leeds a hall which tells of the luxury of kings; but it may be questioned whether he has not set himself and others on the task to rival his performance. [...] Thus we look upon efforts like this remarkable one at Leeds as steps only in progress, leading us on to that time when architecture shall indeed flourish, and hand down distinctively to after ages our nation and our time.<sup>168</sup>

As the Council would have wished, the writer is referring here not only to the magnificence of the building but also to its place in history and its symbolism of the wealth and progress of Leeds as a provincial centre. The Council attempted to build on the reputation created by the opening of Leeds Town Hall by continuing to exploit the royal visit in as many ways as possible. Most notably, it was decided that the large room in the building, the music room, would be known as the Victoria Hall.<sup>169</sup> This would ensure that the Town Hall would be forever linked with the Queen, and the day of her visit, when all eyes turned to Leeds.

#### 4.6: Municipal Music

It was hoped by many reporters in the local press that, after the furore surrounding its opening, the Town Hall would continue to ‘inspire’ and ‘improve’ the inhabitants of the town. The following report reads almost like a prayer for the future of the building and consequently the future of Leeds:

May this stately edifice built in the midst of our town – as firm as it is elegant, as useful and commodious as it is ornamental, and destined to look down from its noble elevation on successive generations of busy inhabitants – witness in them a long course of honourable improvement! Let it silently reprove whatever is low and vulgar; let it allure to all that is elevated and good; let it draw up the aspirations of those who behold it to better things; let it help to mould the character of the people to strength, beauty and dignity.<sup>170</sup>

As we shall see, the function of Leeds Town Hall as a music venue was one answer to that prayer.

Although the Victoria Hall had been designed for the purposes of musical performance, there was no guarantee that it would continue to be used as a music venue after the opening musical festival. The Leeds Council, however, had ensured that the room was fit for musical purposes because of the commitment that was made in the passing of the 1856 Amendment Act. Because this Act of Parliament stated that Leeds Town Hall was to be used ‘for the Performance of Music therein’, the Council saw it as their lawful duty to provide musical events for the people of Leeds in that building. At

<sup>168</sup> *The Building News*, 4 (1858), p.1289.

<sup>169</sup> 9 November 1858. Town Hall Committee Minutes, 12 November 1857 to 21 December 1860, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/2.

<sup>170</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 6 December 1859.

a Council meeting following the opening of the Town Hall, the subject of providing music was discussed as a matter of responsibility.

It would be remembered that when the erection of the Town Hall was discussed, the great argument urged was the importance of such a building for the purposes of giving cheap concerts and cheap entertainments to the working-classes, and the same argument was used when the organ was proposed. The application to Parliament for power to build an organ out of the rates, was based upon that argument, and all he proposed [Mr Carter] was, that the powers thus obtained should be placed in the hands of the Town Hall Committee, so that they might make such arrangements as should be deemed necessary for giving cheap musical performances and entertainments.<sup>171</sup>

Alderman Botterill, who incidentally had been Vice-Chairman of the 1858 Festival Committee, was of the opinion that the provision of music in Leeds Town Hall was the Council's duty, not only because of the 1856 Amendment Act but also because of the subsequent benefit to the social improvement of the Leeds inhabitants:

Mr Alderman Botterill said that the section gave the Council power to provide cheap performances, instrumental and vocal, and the propriety of this had been urged over and over again. It was argued that such entertainments were calculated to refine the taste of the inhabitants, and withdraw them from places debasing their character, thus making their population better servants and better citizens [...] and he thought they should continue to take such measures as were calculated to promote the interests of the people.<sup>172</sup>

On 17 September 1858, the Town Hall Committee appointed another Sub-Committee 'to carry into effect the provisions of the 18<sup>th</sup> section of the Leeds Improvement Amendment Act, 1856',<sup>173</sup> thus ensuring that after the opening Musical Festival Leeds Town Hall would continue to be used for the provision of music. Combined with this sense of duty was also the desire on the part of the council to justify the large expenditure on the organ. Therefore the most obvious remedy to satisfy both desires was to use the organ as a means of bringing town-hall music to the people, especially since the 'people' had paid for the organ through their rates. The local newspaper later suggested that such concerts 'give to the ratepayers the additional interest arising from a sense of ownership in the magnificent instrument which forms so fine a feature of our Town Hall'.<sup>174</sup> From 1858 the Town Hall was reserved by the Council on Saturday evenings for popular organ and musical performances and on Wednesday afternoons

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 September 1858.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>173</sup> 17 September 1858, Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>174</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 7 February 1881.



for organ performances only;<sup>175</sup> it is likely that Wednesday was half-day closing, therefore allowing more working people to attend. As the century progressed the organ performances were moved to Tuesday which was Market Day and therefore attracted more visitors from outside Leeds. The *Building News* was correct when it predicted that the use of the organ in Leeds Town Hall would encourage music-making and therefore bring the building to life:

When such a hall is filled with a moving throng, the organ inciting a thousand voices with the words of the poet and the tones of the composer, with life in its highest moments, why should art be dead and the building alone a sepulchre to the universal soul!<sup>176</sup>

When the Council established the organ concerts the instrument was still incomplete, as the official opening of the Leeds Town Hall organ did not take place until 7 April 1859. The occasion was celebrated with a whole day of organ performances given by Henry Smart and William Spark, the designers of the organ. Again, the instrument excited much interest amongst musicians: 'At the morning performance there were about a thousand listeners, including nearly every musical person in the town, and organists from a distance'.<sup>177</sup> Now the organ was complete, the musical press was able to pass further, more detailed comment:

There was but one opinion as to the quality, power and excellence of the instrument; and the Leeds Corporation may honestly congratulate themselves in possessing one of the finest, if not *the* finest organ in the world. Its orchestral effects are truly wonderful.<sup>178</sup>

After its inauguration the organ continued to cause debate in the press. Anybody who had any association with organs had an opinion on the instrument and most wanted to share it with the rest. The Leeds press initially praised the instrument, but soon after its inauguration, negative comments surrounding the instrument began to be published. Paradoxically, it seems that much of the disapproval of the organ was coming from within Leeds itself. A pamphlet published in February 1860 virtually condemns the instrument:

Leeds meant, unquestionably, to possess a fine and successfully-built organ, and to pay for it a fair honest price – the price actually paid for our Organ might have entitled us to the possession of as fine an instrument as that of St. George's Hall, Liverpool. [...] No one will deny that the Organ is in many respects very fine and telling. So large an Organ could hardly be destitute of all good qualities. Professional men, however, long before a single pipe had so

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<sup>175</sup> 11<sup>th</sup> October 1858, Town Hall Sub-Committee as to Letting &c., West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/6/1.

<sup>176</sup> *Building News*, 4 (1858), p.1289.

<sup>177</sup> *Musical World*, 37 (1859), p.229.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.* For a full stop-list of the instrument see Appendix.

much as whispered its faintest tone, had declared that the large mass of mechanical trash, in the shape of numberless couplers and combination movements, would put the organ out of working gear, and would have to be cleared away, and the Organ have to be materially altered, and re-designed. [...] The defects [...] have been, it may be said, generally felt by most persons who have, as yet, heard the Hall Organ. [...] For various important reasons, it may appear desirable that this matter should be put on thoroughly satisfactory grounds; for the attainment of which, the first step seems to be that of our all admitting that MISTAKES HAVE BEEN MADE. Then will follow the question – **What now will satisfy the public?**<sup>179</sup>

It seems odd for people allegedly representing the Leeds ‘public’ to denigrate their own instrument so publicly, especially when others from outside Leeds were speaking of the instrument in more positive terms. In the same month Charles McKorkell, organist of All Saints, Northampton, wrote to the *Musical World* to give his judgment:

I regret to see, by a report copied in the pages of the *Musical World* from the *Express*, that a feeling of doubt and dissatisfaction exists in Leeds regarding the new organ in your Town Hall. I had an opportunity of hearing and playing on it some weeks since, and, as an impartial observer, interested in the welfare of the art of organ-building, I beg you will allow me to express my opinion concerning this magnificent instrument.

I am acquainted with the finest organs in this country, as well as those in Paris and Germany, including those at Frankfurt, Ulm, Weingarten, Haarlem, &c., and still have no hesitation in saying that yours is a master-piece of art and science combined.<sup>180</sup>

The American organist and composer Eugene Thayer came to Leeds in 1866 to hear the organ and made the following comments on the instrument:

Having heard and played your grand concert organ here, and being, I believe, the only organist who has played all the great organs of the two worlds, I trust that you will allow me a word about this masterwork, and, being a concert organist of long experience, my word may not be entirely without value.

Briefly, then, I have never heard or played an organ capable of such a variety of effects, particularly orchestral ones, and also of the full organ; and I have never seen but one that would favourably compare with it. [...] I travelled nearly a thousand miles to hear this celebrated work, and I feel fully repaid for the journey.<sup>181</sup>

Since the organ was so celebrated by the national press, the criticism within Leeds may be considered a case of a prophet not being welcomed in his hometown. It could also be argued, however, that the musicians of Leeds had a superior and more regular acquaintance with the instrument and therefore had a greater claim to knowledge of it. It is also possible that they felt more passionately about this organ and were therefore more likely to address the faults in order that they be remedied, leading eventually to an organ that was flawless. The opening paragraph of the above pamphlet suggested such reasoning was behind their publication:

<sup>179</sup> Original source unknown. Cutting in *Spark Collection 1858-1901 of documents etc. on general and local matters*, Leeds Local Studies Library, F942.7 SP26L.

<sup>180</sup> *Musical World*, 38 (1860), p.168.

<sup>181</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 10 March 1866.

the inauguration of our Town Hall by Her most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, has stamped with a peculiar and lasting significance every circumstance connected with the Hall itself and the uses to which in future it may be applied; and further, that while, on the one hand, we can justly regard with pride and satisfaction the efforts which have been made to adorn and beautify our Hall so, on the other, we should not apathetically close our eyes where any defect or failure can, properly, be said to exist; and therefore, if the large costly Organ, lately completed, is in any respect deficient in quality, the course to be taken, as due to the public generally, to the musical public especially, and due also upon the score of a wise and foreseeing economy, must be that of first clearly ascertaining and then effectually curing all well-sustained defects which in any way militate against the public interest in our large and expensive Hall Organ; and this, not more for the object of rendering the musical performances satisfactory, than, from an active and well-founded desire to remove every just ground of complaint as to the mode in which an edifice stands finished which has been honoured with the signal and ever memorable approbation of our Queen.<sup>182</sup>

Therefore, ironically, it was probably the upholding of civic pride amongst the Leeds inhabitants that was motivating the criticism of the Leeds Town Hall organ. A correspondent to the *Leeds Mercury* in 1876 was able to look back on this period in the life of Leeds Town Hall organ as an interesting historical event, but one that was no longer relevant to the instrument:

When it was first played at the opening of the Town Hall by the Queen, in 1858, and for some time following, the organ was rarely in proper order in consequence of its complicated machinery, and thus both organ and organist suffered in reputation, a circumstance that seemed to gratify those who were opposed to the musical arrangements of the hall. But time works wonders both with organs and individuals, and it must now be gratifying to the Council as well as to the inhabitants generally, that the town possess a grand organ, in perfect order, presided over by one whose skill as an executant, and whose gifts as a musical composer are so widely known and so generally appreciated.<sup>183</sup>

The controversy continued to surface, from time to time, but the general consensus seems to be that the Leeds Town Hall organ was an exceptional instrument of which the town should be proud.

The above extract from the *Leeds Mercury* talks of one who presides over the organ; and here they are referring to the Town Hall Organist. The suggestion of establishing such a position had been made by individuals from within and outwith the Council for some time, but it was not until 1860 that the Leeds Council announced their intention to hold a competition for the appointment of an organist for the Town Hall. At a meeting of the Council in April 1860 the subject was discussed. It was thought desirable to create such a position, not least because of the continuing storm of debate on the merits of the organ at this time:

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<sup>182</sup> Original source unknown. Cutting in *Spark Collection 1858-1901 of documents etc. on general and local matters*, Leeds Local Studies Library, F942.7 SP26L.

<sup>183</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 20 September 1876

One of the reasons given why it was considered necessary to appoint a permanent organist, was the jealous and envious feeling of certain musical people, who declared the organ to be a failure, when they ought rather to have blamed their own want of efficiency in playing upon it. [...] Competent authorities have long urged the advisability of appointing a permanent organist, who shall have full control over the instrument, instead of letting any inexperienced person tamper with such a wonderful piece of workmanship.<sup>184</sup>

The organist would receive a salary of £200 (£8,632 today) per annum and would be required to give one hundred performances during the year.<sup>185</sup> H.B. Thompson states that the average annual income of a London parochial organist at the time was £50 (£2,158 today), whilst a cathedral organist would earn approximately £150 (£6,474 today).<sup>186</sup> Therefore, the salary of the Leeds Town Hall organist was generous compared with the national average; but since a London professor of the pianoforte could earn £400 to £800 (£17,264 to £34,528 today) at this time, it was not excessive.<sup>187</sup> Indicating the type of organist the Council was looking for, the committee minutes state that 'the Gentleman to be appointed should be a thorough good player on the Organ, and also understand Solo, Concert and Oratorio playing, and have a good knowledge of music generally'.<sup>188</sup> Out of those who applied, seven were selected to give an anonymous 'competition performance' in front of the panel of independent judges – William Best, organist of St George's Hall, Liverpool; John Goss, organist at St Paul's Cathedral; and George Cooper, organist of the Chapel Royal. As in the case of the organ design competition, by deferring the final decision to apparently impartial experts the Council were able to escape criticism when a Leeds gentleman was chosen – especially since that Leeds gentleman was William Spark, designer of the organ. As Town Hall, or Borough, Organist, Spark held a monopoly over the instrument. If concert-givers wished to use an organist other than Spark they had to apply to the Town Hall Committee. If the replacement organist was considered to be of sufficient eminence then permission might be granted. However, this would rarely be the case over the coming decades, not least because the employment of the Town Hall Organist for a concert would incur an additional fee for the Council.<sup>189</sup> As Town-Hall Organist,

<sup>184</sup> *Musical World*, 38 (1860), pp.218-219.

<sup>185</sup> 23 April 1860. Town Hall Committee Minutes, 12 November 1857 to 21 December 1860, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/2.

<sup>186</sup> H.B. Thompson, *The Choice of a Profession: A Concise Account and Comparative Review of the English Professions* (London: n.p., 1857), pp.317-319.

<sup>187</sup> Cyril Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain Since the Eighteenth Century: A Social History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), p.44.

<sup>188</sup> 23 April 1860. Town Hall Committee Minutes, 12 November 1857 to 21 December 1860, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/2.

<sup>189</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 31 August 1858

William Spark became one of the most influential figures in the musical life of nineteenth-century Leeds, and of the Town Hall itself, until his death in 1897. In 1898 Herbert Fricker was appointed as City Organist, a position he held to great acclaim until 1917.<sup>190</sup>

Through Spark, the Council-led concerts gained a new impetus. Although under the ever watchful eye of the municipality, Spark took responsibility for the events, choosing increasingly innovative repertoire to ensure their continued appeal. In 1885 the local newspaper stated that Spark's role as Town-Hall Organist was that of 'musical educator',<sup>191</sup> a title that accurately summarises his philosophy in programming the concerts, to judge by the following passage in his memoirs:

The masses of the people, high and low, rich and poor, are musically uneducated, and prefer only what they can understand – weak, meaningless compositions. [...] To correct this baneful influence, the rising generation should have correct ideas concerning real music instilled into them before they can contract vicious tastes, and which will prove an everlasting and effectual antidote to any tendency to form such tastes. The best music should be performed upon every fitting occasion, and at admission prices within the reach of all.<sup>192</sup>

The Leeds Town Hall organ was not just designed as an accompanying instrument; it was a concert organ built to act as soloist, orchestral substitute, ensemble player, or choral accompanist. The use of the organ as an orchestral substitute was an essential requirement in concert instruments during this period, and this is reflected in the repertoire performed by William Spark in his concerts. The following example of one of Spark's programmes gives an indication of the varied programme and the move away from traditional organ repertoire. In addition, it also demonstrates a great preponderance of orchestral transcriptions, and existing works used for improvisation and extemporisation:

Grand Prelude and Fugue (G Major) (Mendelssohn); Air, with variations (F major), from a Symphony (Haydn); Overture *Der Freischütz* (Weber); Andante for the Organ (F major) (Lefebure Wely); Double Chorus, 'Fixed in His Everlasting Seat,' *Samson* (Handel); Recollections of the Grand Opera, *Les Huguenots*, including the Instrumental Introduction and the Chorale; the Chorus, 'Piàcer della Mensa;' the Cavatina, 'Nobil Donna;' the Huguenot Song, 'Piff, paff!;' and the final Chorus (Meyerbeer).<sup>193</sup>

There were those who disapproved of this practice. Harvey Grace stated that the influence of the transcription was the greatest bar to the establishment of a nineteenth-

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<sup>190</sup> For more on Herbert Fricker see H.C. Colles and Helmut Kallmann. 'Fricker, Herbert'. *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. 29 Oct. 2008 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/10245>>.

<sup>191</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 1 July 1885.

<sup>192</sup> William Spark, *Musical Memories*, pp.332-4.

<sup>193</sup> *Musical World*, 40 (1862), p.75.

century English organ compositional tradition.<sup>194</sup> Whilst preference for arrangements of existing repertoire may indeed have stemmed the production of original repertoire, the transcription was a means of bringing orchestral music to people who never would have had opportunity to hear it played by an actual orchestra, since visiting orchestras were expensive and town orchestras were rare - the concert organ was an ideal replacement.<sup>195</sup> Eugene Thayer declared of Leeds Town Hall organ, that he had 'never heard or played an organ capable of such variety of effects'.<sup>196</sup> On another occasion he commented, 'the organ, then, claims to be an orchestra'.<sup>197</sup> The capabilities of this organ allowed William Spark great freedom in the repertoire he performed, and, by the same token, induced him to programme music that showed off the instrument.

The organ concerts commissioned by the Leeds Council proved to be popular both with Leeds inhabitants and visitors to the town.<sup>198</sup> The local press often reminded their readers of the existence and worth of the concerts, suggesting that attendance would prove 'promoting' and 'elevating'.<sup>199</sup> In addition to the moral benefits, it seems that, for some, attending an organ recital was an excuse to see the Town Hall itself. Many would come for the musical entertainment and then 'spend some hours in inspecting the Assize Courts, the Municipal Rooms, and the various departments of the hall'.<sup>200</sup> As long as the visitors did not interfere with municipal business, this was presumably something that would have been encouraged by the Council as a means of continuing to promote the building, and therefore Leeds itself. In an effort to keep the organ concerts relevant to the day-to-day life of all attendees, Spark often produced a programme that reflected current affairs, a policy that again did not go unnoticed:

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<sup>194</sup> Harvey Grace, 'The Complete Organist: VI: Of Arrangements and Disarrangements', *Musical Times*, 55 (1914), 241-245 (p.242).

<sup>195</sup> See Thistlethwaite, *The Making of the Victorian Organ*, pp.270-4. There is a parallel here with Franz Liszt's piano transcriptions of operas and orchestral works. They were so faithful to the original works, and were so effective in introducing such works to a mass audience, that they have been called 'gramophone records of the nineteenth century'. See Alan Walker, et al. "Liszt, Franz." Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. 23 Jun. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/48265pg10>>.

<sup>196</sup> Letter from Eugene Thayer, *Leeds Mercury*, 10 March 1866.

<sup>197</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 9 April 1859.

<sup>198</sup> '[The organ concerts] have now become quite an institution, in connection with our noble Town Hall, and, in fact, form one of the principal attractions to strangers'. *Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular*, 12 (1866), p.432.

<sup>199</sup> For example, 'We again cordially commend these organ concerts to the attention of all lovers of good music, as affording a delightful way of passing an hour, and of promoting and elevating the general taste for the "tuneful art" in Leeds'. *Leeds Mercury*, 21 March 1864.

<sup>200</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 20 September 1876.

Dr. Spark, the well-known Leeds organist, is quite alive to the importance of rendering his Recitals attractive by making them, when opportunity occurs, appropriate to any event that is in people's minds for the time being.<sup>201</sup>

For example, to commemorate the death of Lord Beaconsfield, Benjamin Disraeli, in 1881,<sup>202</sup> Spark performed Beethoven's funeral march, appropriate numbers from Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang*, the 'Dead March' from *Saul*, Gauntlett's funeral hymn 'Brief life is here our portion', a funeral march composed by Spark himself, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' from *Messiah*, the funeral anthem from Sullivan's *Martyr of Antioch* and the 'Hallelujah Chorus' to close; this was 'a choice and interesting although necessarily mournful selection'.<sup>203</sup> In an extension of Spark's policy of programming concerts that reflected national events, he also held concerts that had a more direct link with Leeds as a town. The most frequent of this type were the Assize concerts; from May 1864 the West Riding Assizes were held in Leeds Town Hall.<sup>204</sup> To become an Assize town was a matter of great importance, and the Leeds Council had campaigned for the West Riding Assizes to come to Leeds, in direct rivalry with neighbouring towns such as Wakefield, since the erection of the Town Hall.<sup>205</sup> Spark, therefore, must have seen an opportunity to use this to his advantage, and programmed organ concerts to coincide with the Assizes, possibly as a further means of linking the music of Leeds Town Hall with the municipality, to encourage the civic pride of the Leeds inhabitants and to keep in favour with the Council. The provision of municipal 'Concerts for the People' at this time would have been a good advertisement for the philanthropy of the local government when the town was full of visitors. It seems, however, that the only difference between the Assize concerts and the normal organ entertainments was the name. It appears that Spark did not use any special or symbolic repertoire at these events, programming works that he would use in any concert during the year.<sup>206</sup>

As a further example of Spark's desire to appeal to all Leeds inhabitants, he would occasionally programme concerts that would attract a certain section of society,

<sup>201</sup> *Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular*, 36 (1895), p.90.

<sup>202</sup> Disraeli was prime minister in 1868 and then from 1874-1880. See Jonathan Parry, 'Disraeli, Benjamin, earl of Beaconsfield (1804-1881)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn., Jan 2008 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/7689>, accessed 25 February 2009]

<sup>203</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 27 April 1881.

<sup>204</sup> The assizes were periodic courts of justice that were held in all the counties of England. See 'assize'. Encyclopædia Britannica. 2009. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 25 Feb. 2009 <<http://0-search.eb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/eb/article-9009943>>.

<sup>205</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 28 February 1857.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 August 1868.

for example to the large and influential Jewish population of the town. Thus on 5 May 1883 Spark gave an organ recital consisting of selections from the works of Jewish composers, including numbers from Meyerbeer's *The Prophet* and *The Huguenots*, Benedict's *Malcolm* and *Brides of Venice*, and 'three specimens of synagogue music'.<sup>207</sup>

The concerts were also an opportunity for Spark to introduce his own compositions for the organ, of which there were many but none that have retained any great prominence in today's repertoire. The composition that Spark was possibly most proud of was his published oratorio, *Immanuel*, a work of 'simple and melodious music'.<sup>208</sup> Although it was performed in the Town Hall in 1887, and was often repeated at Christmas, Spark's wish of having the work performed at the Leeds Musical Festival was never realised.<sup>209</sup> In addition to his own new compositions, Spark used the concerts to introduce Leeds audiences to unknown works from recognised or unrecognised composers:

Our borough organist certainly spares no pains to render the programmes at these concerts as interesting as possible by their variety; and in his researches for new pieces he does not confine himself to the classical authors alone, but adopts at once any new music he thinks likely to prove attractive.<sup>210</sup>

Between musical seasons Spark often travelled to the Continent, returning with new repertoire to perform at the Town Hall.<sup>211</sup> Through Spark's ingenuity and vast musical knowledge the Leeds public were able to hear brand new repertoire in their Town Hall, often for free.<sup>212</sup> For example, in April 1892 Spark gave extracts from Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, which had only been performed in London in October 1891. Spark strove to keep the Leeds Town Hall Organ Concerts at the forefront of modern trends in music. Spark's dedication to the progression of music through the continued performance of original works brought Leeds and its Town Hall to the forefront of

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<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 May 1883.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 July 1887.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 November 1888. In his article on Spark in *Grove*, Nicholas Temperley states that *Immanuel* was performed at the Leeds Festival on 17 May 1887 but this was not the case, especially since there was no Festival in 1887. See Nicholas Temperley. "Spark, William." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. 30 Jul. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/26364>>.

<sup>210</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 8 December 1863.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 September 1870.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 April 1892.



provincial music-making. *The Times* in 1873 acknowledged that it was William Spark who had 'done so much for music in that populous and thriving city'.<sup>213</sup>

In the first year of Spark's appointment as Town Hall Organist, seventy-six organ concerts were given to an attendance of about fourteen thousand and the performance of 165 different pieces.<sup>214</sup> In 1891 it was stated that during the previous year William Spark had given sixty-two recitals which had been attended by circa 57,000 people.<sup>215</sup> It is unknown exactly how many of the working classes, who were ultimately the target audience, attended the Town Hall organ concerts. The following account from a regular attendee, however, gives a romantic description of the audience demographic:

Any regular attendant will bear witness that while on every occasion all classes have been represented, often the working classes have been preponderatingly [sic] so – amongst them frequently decent, respectable men with their wives or daughters, market baskets on arm, calling on their return home, leaving the hall with satisfaction depicted on their countenances, having evidently spent a most agreeable hour. Cases are known where employers have allowed well-conducted, trustworthy assistants the privilege of absence from their places of business to enable them to enjoy the hour's musical entertainment at the Town Hall.<sup>216</sup>

The provision of these concerts by the Council drew positive comment from the musical press, with the *Musical World* stating that the corporation had provided 'a great boon' for the public.<sup>217</sup> By the 1870s the Town Hall organ concerts were so much a feature of Leeds' life that they were depicted in F.M. Fetherston's book *Oops and doons, an' sayin's an' doin's ov Timothy Goorkrodger*, whose main character, Timothy Goorkrodger, describes his experience of attending one of Spark's performances:

When I left the Town Hall, I felt better for hearing that music and those songs, I did. I think the people of Leeds are doing right; their fine Town Hall could not be better made use of, and I hope they'll go on, and give the Leeds working folk an others every chance of leaving drink, and spending their time in such places. Put Town Hall Concerts against Public House Concerts, with their dirt, and noise, and beastliness, and my word I know which will conquer in the long run.<sup>218</sup>

Since it has not been possible to locate any concrete evidence as to Fetherston's socio-economic background, profession, or political inclination, this source cannot be taken at

<sup>213</sup> *The Times*, 15 July 1873.

<sup>214</sup> *Musical World*, 39 (1861), p.509.

<sup>215</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 2 February 1891.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 July 1864.

<sup>217</sup> *Musical World*, 39 (1861), p.509.

<sup>218</sup> F.M. Fetherston, *Oops and Doons, an' Sayin's an' Doin's ov Timothy Goorkrodger, his Aud Deeame, and Darter Meary, a'Whoame and Abroad* (Huddersfield: printed for the author, c.1875), p.86. This book is a novel, written in the Yorkshire dialect. The character of Timothy Goorkroger is a farmer, and the book charts his various excursions, one of which was to Leeds and the Town Hall concert.

face value. In fact, since the book information indicates that it was 'printed for the author', this suggests that Fetherston had sufficient means to pay for the publication himself, and therefore was probably not of the same class as Timothy the farmer. Nevertheless, if William Spark or the Mayor of Leeds had written this passage themselves it could not better describe the ethos of the Town Hall organ concerts, and this description does give some indication of the popularity of the organ concerts and the positive influence they were thought to be having on the musical life of Leeds and its inhabitants. In the words of the local newspaper, they were a 'municipal homage to art'.<sup>219</sup>

William Spark's organ concerts were not the only Council-led initiative to bring music to the Town Hall. To ensure variety the Leeds Council established concerts on a Saturday night that combined the organ with vocal and instrumental performances. At first they tried to organise the concerts themselves, but without great effect. Since the first concert took place on 13 November 1858, the close proximity of this performance to the opening of the Town Hall shows the eagerness with which the Council wished to proceed with their mission, especially when one considers that the organ was still not completed. Although this concert was well-attended, there was a much smaller attendance at the second.<sup>220</sup> It became obvious that if the Council hoped to keep the interest of the general public they would have to be more creative. They resolved to advertise their 'cheap concerts' in the *Musical World*, most likely in order to attract performers rather than audience, and possibly to let the rest of the country know of their endeavours. The Council also actively sought artists to perform at their concerts at the Town Hall. They resolved to approach the concert entrepreneur and regular visitor to the provinces, Mons. Jullien, and to 'write to some of the Principal Music Dealers, asking them to inform the Committee, and to give the address of any musical parties, a person, who might be taking a tour in the Country'.<sup>221</sup> Louis Jullien was a big name at this time, attracting the best London players and first-class soloists to his company.<sup>222</sup> In addition to his great popularity with audiences, as a pioneer of the 'democratization

<sup>219</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 12 October 1895.

<sup>220</sup> *Musical World*, 36 (1858), p.759.

<sup>221</sup> Committee Meeting, 8 November 1858. Town Hall Sub-Committee as to Letting &c, West Yorkshire Archives, LLC20/6/1.

<sup>222</sup> Keith Horner. 'Jullien, Louis'. Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. 30 Jul. 2009

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[www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/14538](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/14538)>.Keith Horner. 'Jullien, Louis'. Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. 22 Mar. 2009. See also the previous chapter.

of music' – combining both substantial classical works with those of a lighter school, in order to 'break down the barriers to let in the "crowd"',<sup>223</sup> – Jullien was an obvious choice to help the Council in their bid to bring music to the people of Leeds.<sup>224</sup>

Despite such efforts to engage popular artists for the sake of variety, many ratepayers apparently thought that the Town Council, as a corporate body, ought not to continue giving Saturday evening concerts, since they were doing so at the expense of the borough fund.<sup>225</sup> Therefore, from 1859 to 1879 the Council engaged the services of the Town Hall Concert Society to assist William Spark in the Saturday evening concerts.<sup>226</sup> This society was created on the back of the 'Leeds Rational Recreation Society' which had been established in 1852, initially to promote 'elevating recreations and amusements for the working classes',<sup>227</sup> but ultimately functioned as an organisation for the provision of cheap concerts. Russell suggests that the idea of providing 'rational recreation' for the people of Leeds was not new, but one that had probably been initiated with the opening of the Mechanics' Institution for 'rational instruction' in 1825. In addition, music had been used as a vehicle for social control in Leeds 'since the sight-singing activities of the 1840s, which greatly impacted on the social life of the town'.<sup>228</sup>

A correspondent to the *Leeds Mercury* in 1860 spoke in hindsight of the influence of the Leeds Rational Recreation Society:

In its own way the Association [Leeds Rational Recreation Society] has effected an immense amount of good for Leeds, and most indisputably gave that increased taste for music which led overflowing audiences to the old Music-hall, and afforded the strongest argument for the erection of our noble Town Hall and its magnificent organ.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> Jullien had first performed in Leeds at the Music Hall, in 1845. See *Leeds Mercury*, 13 September 1845. He continued to perform in the town on occasion as part of his provincial tours, but he did not perform in Leeds as a result of the Council's invitation in 1858.

<sup>225</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 18 December 1858.

<sup>226</sup> In January 1879 the Town Hall Concert Society sent a letter to the Sub Corporate Property Committee that stated, 'in consequence of their non-success it has been determined to discontinue the concerts after Saturday next, and applying to be relieved from their engagement with respect to the Victoria Hall for the remaining Saturday Evenings'. The Committee resolved: 'That the application of the Town Hall Concert Society be acceded to, and that an advertisement be inserted into the *Era* advertising offers for the engagement of the Hall'. Committee Meeting, 10 January 1879, Sub Corporate Property (Corporate Buildings) Committee Minutes, 7 February 1873 to 27 November 1884, West Yorkshire Archives, LLC29/3/1. When the Hall was not hired by outside performers the Saturday concerts were left to the charge of William Spark who engaged those artists he thought suitable.

<sup>227</sup> Russell, 'The Leeds Rational Recreation Society', pp.143-144.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p.141.

<sup>229</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 8 December 1860.

Since the Society had such an impact on the musical life of Leeds before the opening of the Town Hall, it seems only natural that they would desire the use of the purpose-built concert room to house their 'overflowing audiences' when the new building opened. In October 1858 they applied to the Town Hall Committee for the use of the Victoria Hall on Saturday evenings. Their application was refused on the following grounds:

The Council have empowered the Town Hall Committee to carry into effect the 18<sup>th</sup> section of the Leeds Improvement Amendment Act, and that the Committee having in consequence appointed a Sub-Committee to superintend the giving of a series of cheap Musical Performances on Saturday evenings during the ensuing Winter months, the Town Hall will be required for those purposes, and cannot therefore be at the disposal of the Recreation Society.<sup>230</sup>

The Council refused the use of the Hall for the Recreation Society's concerts because they would interfere with their own, which they hoped would serve the same function. The main aim of the Rational Recreation Society had been to break the growing link between working-class entertainment and the public house; it was 'one response to what they perceived as the problems of urban life'.<sup>231</sup> This was entirely the reasoning behind the Council's provision of 'concerts for the people' in the Town Hall. Therefore when the Town Hall was opened, the Rational Recreation Society was disbanded and the Town Hall Concert Society took over its mantle. To engage public attention this new society strove to provide innovative and interesting entertainment, including the introduction of unknown performers, often debutantes in Leeds and original works. The first original composition to be performed was Lindpaintner's oratorio, *The Widow of Nain* in March 1860. The *Leeds Mercury* declared that the experiment to introduce new works at these concerts was 'quite successful'.<sup>232</sup> Generally, a concert by the Town Hall Concert Society would consist of a miscellaneous variety of instrumental and vocal works, although occasionally a full oratorio would be performed. The concert given on 13 December 1862 provides an example of the type of repertoire programmed by this society, which ranged from popular song to opera and oratorio:

Sonata for cello & piano, No. 3 in A major, Op. 69...Beethoven  
 'It was a fine May morning'...Smart  
 'The Three Loves'...Lover  
 'Tears, idle Tears'...Blumenthal  
 'The Last Rose of Summer'...Moore  
 'A Father's Love', from *Lurline*...Wallace  
 'I arise from dreams of thee'...Salaman

<sup>230</sup> Town Hall Sub-Committee as to Letting &c., West Yorkshire Archives, LLC20/6/1.

<sup>231</sup> Russell, 'The Leeds Rational Recreation Society', p.141.

<sup>232</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 3 March 1860.

'Batti, Batti', from *Don Giovanni*...Mozart  
 'Shadow Song', from *Dinorah*...Meyerbeer  
 Unnamed duets  
 'O Hills, O Vales', quartet...Mendelssohn  
 'Bello e il cielo', trio...Campana  
 Fantasia on airs from *La Traviata*...Ganz  
 'Qui Vive', gallop...Ganz<sup>233</sup>

Whilst instrumental music was included in the programme, it is clear that vocal repertoire still predominated. The performers would often vary between concerts, but in 1867 'The Town Hall Choir' was formed to assist on a more regular basis.<sup>234</sup> The society also engaged established professional performers such as Therese Tietjens,<sup>235</sup> the internationally renowned German soprano, whose presence as a soloist would have raised the reputation of any concert.<sup>236</sup> For the working classes to be able to hear such an artist for the price of a penny shows great initiative and dedication to duty, not only on the part of the Council, but also on that of William Spark, the conductor and producer of the Town Hall Concert Society concerts. It seems likely that at these concerts, as at his organ concerts, Spark employed the philosophy of bringing a variety of high-class and innovative music to the people. A further similarity to the organ concerts can be seen in the programming of repertoire and artists that would appeal to various areas of Leeds society. For example, on occasions a concert for children was given. The *Leeds Mercury*, 10 January 1860, reviews a performance by 'Dr. Mark and his little men'. The audience included 'a large number of children', indicating that these concerts must have been considered a moral and upstanding environment.

To diversify the character of the concerts even further, on some occasions the Society engaged visiting artists to take charge of the whole concert. An operetta performance by Mr and Mrs Drayton in November 1861 was one such example.<sup>237</sup> It is likely that Mr and Mrs Drayton were the American-born opera singer Henri Drayton and his wife.<sup>238</sup> Since they were internationally renowned singers, only having returned from America earlier that year, their engagement shows the high calibre of artists engaged for the Town Hall Concert Society entertainments. This is particularly

<sup>233</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 15 December 1862.

<sup>234</sup> Like its counterpart in Birmingham, the composition and the longevity of this choir is unknown.

<sup>235</sup> Sometimes her surname was written as 'Titiens'.

<sup>236</sup> For more on Tietjens see, Elizabeth Forbes. 'Tietjens, Therese'. *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. 31 Oct. 2008 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/27950>>.

<sup>237</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 4 November 1861.

<sup>238</sup> On Henri Drayton see *Musical Standard*, 17 August 1872.

significant when one remembers that these events were not highly-priced subscription concerts aimed at the upper classes, but 'concerts for the people' where, in theory, any person could attend for a nominal fee.

The Town Hall Concert Society concerts became known as the 'Penny Concerts', since a portion of the Hall was reserved purely for the working classes who gained entry for a penny each; other patrons paid 3d. or 6d. These concerts were normally well attended, with an audience 'averaging nearly 1,000 persons'.<sup>239</sup> However, the concerts were not so popular with the other musicians of Leeds. In the first instance, because of its connection with the Council, the Town Hall Concert Society obtained the Town Hall facilities for reduced hire prices. Before the Town Hall was officially opened the charges for hiring the Victoria Hall were set as follows:

1. That all borough meetings called by or under the sanction of the Mayor, be held ..... Gratuitously
  2. All other public meetings (except as hereinafter mentioned)..... £5 0 0
  3. All meetings, concerts, or balls, called or held in support of religious, charitable, or benevolent institutions, or in support of any of the scientific institutions of the borough..... £2 10 0
  4. All concerts, balls, and other entertainments of that nature, and all lectures and other assemblies of inhabitants, if for personal benefit or advantage..... £10 0 0
  5. If for personal or individual profit, when not inhabitants..... £20 0 0
- Besides the above charge, the lighting of the hall with gas, and the cleaning of the hall, to be paid for.  
 The expense of the removal of the benches is included in the charge for the hall.  
 When the use of the hall is granted gratuitously, it is to be subject to the charge for removing the benches and cleaning the hall, as was as lighting with gas.  
 The above charges do not include the use of the organ.  
 The Hall not to be open or let on Sundays.<sup>240</sup>

There were many within the Council who thought that the Town Hall should be let on Sundays for religious services for the working classes, since the Town Hall was considered a non-denominational building. It was decided, however, that such a policy may cause sectarian unrest, and the resolution was not passed.<sup>241</sup> The scale of charges was not arbitrarily decided by the Town Hall Committee but was based on those at Birmingham Town Hall, which the Committee thought, 'after considerable experience, had been found to work exceedingly well'.<sup>242</sup>

Once it became known that the Town Hall Concert Society was being charged at the £2 10s. rate, whilst other Leeds musicians were being charged the £10 rate, a

<sup>239</sup> *Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular*, 12 (1866), p.432.

<sup>240</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 31 August 1858.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

great deal of angry correspondence appeared in the press. A letter to the *Musical World* in 1860 suggested that the conductor of the Leeds Choral Society, Mr. Burton, had been charged £10 per night, while the Town Hall Concert Society had been charged £2.<sup>243</sup> This may have been because the Council viewed the Saturday night concerts as a charitable institution. In the *Leeds Mercury*, Edwin Gaunt, a member of the Council and honorary secretary of the Town Hall Concert Society, defended the differing hire charges, stating that the Society was justified in hiring the Hall for less since they existed 'for the purpose of giving the middle and working class good and cheap concerts', rather than for their own profit.<sup>244</sup> The issue was also discussed at a Council meeting where Alderman Botterill stated:

With reference to the remarks which had been made as to the concerts, some gentlemen seemed to ignore the fact that whilst one set of concerts was given by an individual for his own benefit, the other was given by a society for the public benefit, Mr. Spark having no personal interest whatever; and they might just as well object to the Hall being let to mechanics' institutions for £2 10s., because such institutions had a managing secretary, as object to the Town Hall Concert Society having it for that sum because it had a musical director, who was merely paid for his services, and derived no other benefit.<sup>245</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the differing hire prices, coupled with the monopolisation of the Town Hall on consecutive Saturdays during the winter season, caused much consternation amongst other societies and concert promoters. This led to various verbal attacks on the concerts. A mock advertisement was circulated, displaying the contempt in which the events were held by some, and the disregard for their claim to promote high-class music:

May be had for One Penny,  
UNDERGROUND GROANS!  
BY THE  
'UNSEEN QUARTET',  
ASSISTED BY  
The Leeds Drawing-Room Furniture Choir

'CLAP-TRAP MUSIC' Supplied Wholesale by DR. SHARK.<sup>246</sup>

Many individuals thought that the Town Hall Concert Society concerts were taking business away from the legitimate musicians of Leeds, destroying 'every other effort in the cause of music in the town',<sup>247</sup> because they were offering concerts for such a minimal price that no-one else could compete. The Concert Society was backed by the

<sup>243</sup> *Musical World*, 38 (1860), p.681.

<sup>244</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 1 December 1860.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 January 1861.

<sup>246</sup> Leaflet in Spark Collection, 1858-1901, Leeds Local Studies Library, F942.7 SP26L.

<sup>247</sup> Letter to the Mayor from Robert Burton, published in *Leeds Mercury*, 22 October 1867.

Council, resulting in no obvious financial worries and in a perceived favouritism towards their concerts. Critics felt that the Council was holding a monopoly on the miscellaneous concert in the town hall, to such an extent that it was damaging the work of the other musicians and societies in the town. In a letter to the *Leeds Mercury* in 1860, Lyndon Smith, a local musician, expressed his frustration by suggesting:

Let me have Free Trade in music. [...] Let the Town Hall Concert (late Recreation) Society – satisfied with its endeavours to advance music, and the reputation it has conferred on its officers – quietly dissolve itself, and leave the management of concerts to those who legitimately cater for public entertainment – the professional musicians of the town. Let all subsidies and encouragement to any particular party be withdrawn; let all be put on the same footing, and a healthy competition will insure the public against loss, and advance both the cause of music, and the just interests of the *many* talented professors of whom Leeds may well be proud.<sup>248</sup>

The Council defended their policy, stating that without these concerts, the thousands who had attended them would have filled the singing saloons of the town instead.<sup>249</sup> They were of the opinion that their concerts attracted a different class of audience to those provided by other performers within the town, and therefore would not detract from other music-making. The Council even suggested that the Town Hall Concert Society concerts, rather than destroying the cause of music, would ‘improve and elevate the people’, by giving them ‘a taste for music’ which would lead them, ultimately, to become ‘supporters of first-class concerts’ and therefore patrons of the other concerts performed in Leeds.<sup>250</sup> Although this viewpoint is more idealistic than factual, since at various points over the years the concerts promoted by the Council were badly attended and were occasionally stopped altogether for a reassessment of strategy, it demonstrates the Council’s philosophy and subsequent determination in providing music for the people of Leeds at a price they could potentially afford. Throughout the century the Council continued to review the best means of doing so in accordance with the 1856 Amendment Act, admittedly in a manner carefully calculated to expend as little money as possible.

#### 4.7: A ‘Triennial’ Musical Festival?

With the establishment of municipal music in Leeds Town Hall, thoughts turned to the prospect of another musical festival as a further demonstration of the Council’s commitment to music-making and civic support. Unlike Birmingham, Leeds Town

<sup>248</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 18 September 1860.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 October 1867.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*



Hall was not built because of the music festival, but the erection of the building stimulated the desire to hold such an event in the town on a regular basis. Before 1858 this was simply not possible, since there was no venue in Leeds large enough to house it. In the words of the 1901 Leeds Musical Festival programme, 'there would have been no Leeds Musical Festival if there had been no new Town Hall to hold it in'.<sup>251</sup> The success of the opening festival in 1858 led many Leeds inhabitants, including some members of the town council, to call for the establishment of a triennial tradition, 'to retain the good name which the town had won'.<sup>252</sup> A triennial musical festival would assist 'the charities of the town; and at the same time produce musical works which should prove attractive to lovers of music not only in Yorkshire, but throughout England'.<sup>253</sup> As in the first instance, the Council gave their full support to the venture, granting the free use of the Town Hall, and 'every facility for holding such a festival', provided that the profits went to the charitable institutions of the town.<sup>254</sup>

Given such enthusiasm from most parties, it seems strange that the 1861 Leeds Musical Festival failed to take place. That the blame for this failure can be attributed to the musicians of the town seems even more absurd. However, most reports agree that it was bickering between the two Leeds' main choral societies that caused the abandonment of the festival. The Leeds Choral Society, established in 1838, was directed by conductor and organist, Robert Burton,<sup>255</sup> the chorus master for the 1858 musical festival; while the Leeds Madrigal and Motet Society, established in 1850, was conducted by William Spark. Both choral societies had been active concert-givers since their formation, performing at the Music Hall and then the Town Hall. When writing of the two societies in 1858, the *Historical Guide to Leeds* stated glibly, 'It is probable that all the above musical societies will be merged into one grand society, to

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<sup>251</sup> *Programme, Souvenir and History of the Leeds Musical Festival*, Programme of the Leeds Musical Festival 1901, Leeds Local Studies Library, L780.79 L517, p.3.

<sup>252</sup> Public meeting reported in *Musical World*, 38 (1860), p.592.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> 9 November 1860, *Town Hall Committee Minutes, 12 November 1857 to 21 December 1860*, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/2.

<sup>255</sup> Robert Burton, born in Dewsbury in 1820, succeeded S.S. Wesley as organist of Leeds Parish Church in 1849. He was conductor and chorus master of many Yorkshire Choral Societies, including the Yorkshire Choral Union itself, and had a great influence on music in such places as York, Leeds, Bradford, Huddersfield, Halifax, Barnsley and Harrogate. Newspaper reports suggest that Burton was an ambitious, determined and competitive musician whose reputation grew out of an attention to detail. See Herbert Thompson. "Burton, Robert." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 23 Mar. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/04414>>. The *Magazine of Music*, 6 (1889), 128-9 (p.128), referred to Burton as 'one of the most famous musicians Yorkshire has produced'.

be called the "Leeds Festival Choral Society".<sup>256</sup> Herein lay the problem. Many musicians in Leeds thought that the amalgamation of the two societies would work for the greater good of both; the *Leeds Mercury*, on 14 May 1863 for example, spoke of the 'desirableness of the union of the two bodies into one society' that would embrace 'the entire musical talent of the town'. It had been a matter of contention at the 1858 Festival that out of 245 chorus members, all from the West Riding, only eighty were from Leeds.<sup>257</sup> It was thought that the establishment of a 'Leeds Festival Choral Society', consisting of the members of the two existing societies, would enable the chorus of the festival to comprise only Leeds inhabitants. There were several meetings between the two bodies and on 20 September 1858 it was resolved:

That for the better providing of first-class and cheap popular concerts in Leeds, it is the opinion of this meeting that a new musical society, under the joint direction of Mr. R.S. Burton and Mr. W. Spark, be immediately formed.<sup>258</sup>

However, at a meeting in November 1858 the 'direction' of the proposed society was changed, with Burton appointed as conductor and Spark as organist and pianist. The members of the Madrigal and Motet Society were extremely unhappy with the relegation, as they saw it, of their conductor to accompanist, and so pulled out of the deal. When, in 1860, the Festival Committee met to consider the next festival, it became obvious that the Festival could not go ahead without the combined forces of the two choral societies. The threat to abandon the 1861 festival stimulated the Madrigal and Motet Society to approach the Choral Society, now ironically calling itself the 'Festival Choral Society', to readdress the matter of an amalgamation. The Festival Choral Society declined. That situation was deemed so damaging to the musical life of Leeds and the reputation of the town as a whole that James Kitson, Mayor and Chairman of the 1858 Festival Orchestral Committee, intervened. He organised an assembly, at which a committee was formed to act as a mediator between the two choral societies through a series of further meetings. While the mediating committee was at work, the Festival Committee continued to make arrangements for the Festival, going so far as to appoint Sterndale Bennett as conductor, and inviting him to supply a

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<sup>256</sup> *An Historical Guide to Leeds and Its Environs*, p.122.

<sup>257</sup> Spark and Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, p.15.

<sup>258</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, pp.40-1. A detailed account of the negotiations between the two choral societies as part of the 1861 musical festival is given on pages 39-47 of this source. It has not been possible to locate the original sources for the extracts from the meetings held by the Festival Committee, the Mayor or the mediating committee.

new work for the occasion.<sup>259</sup> There was even an advertisement in the paper asking for chorus singers for the forthcoming festival.<sup>260</sup> In an attempt to sooth all factions the Chorus Committee for the Festival resolved:

That the chorus be selected from the following societies – the Leeds Festival Choral Society, the Leeds Madrigal and Motet Society, the Yorkshire Choral Union (exclusive of the Leeds section), and the Bradford Festival Choral Society, together with such members of Cathedral choirs as have formerly been connected with Leeds; the preference being in the first instance given to the two Leeds societies; and that an independent musician of eminence (such as Mr. Henry Leslie or Mr. Hullah) be appointed, to whom it shall be referred to test the efficiency of any chorus-singer on the requisition of any member of the Chorus Committee, and the decision of such referee shall be conclusive.<sup>261</sup>

Although striving for impartiality, this resolution was the final nail in the coffin. Robert Burton was insistent upon having complete control over the choice of chorus and, since the Chorus Committee was unrelenting in requiring an impartial ‘independent musician of eminence’ to choose the chorus, Burton resigned as chorus master. On 16 May 1861 the Festival Committee finally resolved to cancel the Festival, due to the ‘circumstances and difficulties attending the organisation of the arrangements’.<sup>262</sup> However, the Committee decided to not simply postpone the event, but to abandon the idea altogether. They even placed an advertisement in the local newspapers in order to sell off the music purchased in 1858:

Dr, Sterndale Bennett’s *May Queen*, with Orchestral Parts and Marginal Directions by the Composer, and twenty copies of each Chorus Part, and Principal Singers’ Copies; also, the same number of Chorus Parts of Mendelssohn’s Oratorio, *Elijah*.<sup>263</sup>

Since there was no desire to keep this music in order to create a festival library, it suggests that any hopes of a future Leeds Festival had been abandoned. The musical rivalries in Leeds and the dogged personalities of some of its leading musicians were actually destroying the progression of music in the town, rather than aiding it.<sup>264</sup> The building of the Town Hall had enabled the ambition of many to make Leeds into a

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<sup>259</sup> See J.R. Sterndale Bennett, *The Life of William Sterndale Bennett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), p.288. It has not been possible to determine what the new work might have been.

<sup>260</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 12 January 1861.

<sup>261</sup> Quoted in Spark and Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, p.52.

<sup>262</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p.53

<sup>263</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 13 April 1861.

<sup>264</sup> There had been bitter rivalry between Leeds musicians and their choral societies from the 1840s, particularly between Robert Burton, William Spark and Samuel Sebastian Wesley. See Peter Horton, ‘Outside the Cathedral: Samuel Sebastian Wesley, Local Music-Making, and the Provincial Organist in Mid-Nineteenth-century England’, in *Music in the British Provinces, 1690-1914*, ed. by Rachel Cowgill and Peter Holman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 255-268 (pp.262-268).

festival town to be realised. However, the existence of the building was not enough to secure the continuation of the festival, as the *Musical World* laments:

Thus Leeds, after having spent some £70,000 upon its Town Hall (Victoria Hall having been erected principally for music purposes), after having spent upwards of £5,000 on an organ, after having had its first Festival ushered in under the sanction and the presence of Royalty, quietly allows some half-a-dozen people, for party purposes, to throw a veil over art; and Music – like Imperial Caesar in the Capitol, is stabbed by those who profess to be its nearest and dearest friends.<sup>265</sup>

It took twelve years for the town to recover from the events of 1861. After such a number of years with no festival, it is in some ways a miracle that plans for a Leeds Musical Festival were ever resuscitated. Various reports suggest that the intervening years were not devoid of desire for a festival, but it was only in 1873, with the appointment of a Mayor who was willing to enter the musical battle, that the Leeds Festival was revived and the Leeds Triennial Musical Festival began. Alderman Henry Rowland Marsden was aware of the benefits of a musical festival in a provincial town and was determined that Leeds would be one of them:

The Musical Festivals in many provincial cities and towns, possessing far less resources than Leeds, have been productive of great musical and pecuniary results, benefiting alike the musical connection and the charities of their respective localities.<sup>266</sup>

Marsden was a well-admired Mayor, known as ‘one of the most popular men in Leeds’ during his term of office because of his ‘public spirit, unwearied energy, and profuse liberality’. He was a philanthropist who regularly donated and raised funds for a wide variety of charities.<sup>267</sup> It is therefore probable that the revival of the musical festival appealed to Marsden because of the opportunity it afforded for raising large amounts of money for the charities of Leeds. At the heart of the Mayor’s plan to avoid the skirmishes of 1861 was the resolution that the entire management of the festival would be superintended by persons who had no connection with the musical profession, in the hope that ‘no private or sectional interests would be allowed to stand in the way of another attempt’.<sup>268</sup> This rule, strictly adhered to, caused controversy but ultimately worked to the advantage of the Festivals, enabling the establishment of a triennial tradition. By 1880 the Festival Committee were able to publish the following strategy,

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<sup>265</sup> *Musical World*, 40 (1861), p.329.

<sup>266</sup> Circular, quoted in Spark and Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, p.58.

<sup>267</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 January 1876.

<sup>268</sup> Quoted in Spark and Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, p.58.

purposefully endeavouring to adhere to the original principles of the 1858 Festival. For them, the *raison d'être* of the Leeds Musical Festival was:

1. The promotion of the cause of music of the highest character, and the most efficient rendering of such music.
2. The encouragement of original, chiefly English, composition.
3. The assistance, by these means, of charitable institutions which have a special claim on the general public.<sup>269</sup>

In addition, in 1889 the Chairman of the Festival Committee, Thomas Marshall, stated that in planning the Festivals, 'they had held up to themselves a very high standard, and endeavoured to make the Leeds Musical Festival as perfect of its kind as their means and abilities would make it'.<sup>270</sup> Through this striving for perfection the Festival Committee ensured the re-establishment of the Leeds Musical Festival as a triennial event, and its continued status as one of the most popular provincial musical festivals in the country.

The appointment of an eminent conductor for the triennial festivals continued to be viewed as of the greatest importance. There was always much debate as to the suitability of various candidates, with the Festival Committee continually torn between prestige and patriotism. For the festivals of 1874 and 1877, prestige won, and Sir Michael Costa was employed as conductor. Costa was a festival conductor who liked to have complete control over the proceedings.<sup>271</sup> At Leeds he refused to perform Beethoven's Symphony No.9 and Bach's B Minor Mass, for example, and insisted on having the decisive voice in the selection of music, singers and players.<sup>272</sup> The Leeds Committee would not be dictated to in this way, and so Costa lost favour after the 1877 Festival.<sup>273</sup> Many wanted Costa replaced for the 1880 Festival, and some thought that the principle of supporting English music at Leeds should be applied not only to the music performed and the artists engaged, but also to the conductor. Therefore when the opportunity arose to appoint a native conductor in the form of Arthur Sullivan, it was an appointment that proved popular:

I am delighted to know that the Leeds Festival Committee have succeeded in securing the services of Mr. Arthur Sullivan as their conductor. [...] It is the fact that for an *English* Festival

<sup>269</sup> Quoted in Sprittles, 'Leeds Musical Festivals', p.216.

<sup>270</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 5 December 1889.

<sup>271</sup> Spark and Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, pp.142-143.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, p.155.

we are to have an *English* conductor. Too long have we in this country bowed down to foreign talent, even when it has been far inferior to English talent.<sup>274</sup>

Although Sullivan was mainly known at this time for his operetta collaborations with W.S. Gilbert, he was a composer of some note outside that genre, having won the Mendelssohn scholarship in 1856 which enabled him to study at the Royal Academy of Music and later the Leipzig Conservatoire.<sup>275</sup> Nevertheless, for the Festival Committee to choose Sullivan over Hallé and Costa was a leap of faith, since the English composer did not hold the same reputation as a conductor as these other two candidates. Also, in an age when foreign musicians were seen as superior to native ones, the appointment of an English conductor could have damaged, rather than enhanced, the reputation of the Leeds Festival; the engagement of either Hallé or Costa would automatically have awarded the Festival a certain status that Sullivan could not bring. However, his success at the 1880 Festival supported the decision of the Festival Committee, and he continued as conductor of the Leeds Triennial Musical Festival for the rest of the century.

Following the tradition begun in 1858, the Leeds Festival continued to seek innovation in the works to be performed, a practice that was possibly the Festival's greatest legacy. According to the music critic Herbert Thompson, writing in 1931, 'The one permanent contribution which the Leeds Festivals have made to art is the result of their invitations to composers to write works which they would otherwise have small inducement to attempt'.<sup>276</sup> The Festival Committee sought to commission compositions from English composers at a time when this was unfashionable, apparently continuing the principle of the Leeds Festival as a representative of native music. The works that resulted include G.A. Macfarren's oratorios *Joseph* (first performance in 1877, libretto by Monk) and *King David* (first performance in 1883, libretto taken from the Bible), Sullivan's sacred music drama *The Martyr of Antioch* (first performance in 1880, libretto by Gilbert) and his cantata *The Golden Legend* (first performance in 1886, libretto by J. Bennett), Parry's *Ode on St Cecilia's Day* (first performance in 1889, libretto by Pope) and his ode *Invocation to Music* (first performance in 1895, libretto by Bridges), and Elgar's cantata *Caractacus* (first

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<sup>274</sup> Written by a 'Local Gossip Writer'. Quoted in Spark and Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, p.172.

<sup>275</sup> On Sullivan see Arthur Jacobs. 'Sullivan, Sir Arthur'. *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. 13 Mar. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/27100>>

<sup>276</sup> *Radio Times*, 3 April 1931.

performance in 1898, libretto by Acworth). That is not to say that the Festival Committee did not also turn to renowned foreign composers in order to raise the profile of the Festival, for, whilst the 'encouragement of English composition' principle was admirable, it was not necessarily profitable. Works commissioned by continental composers included Dvořák's oratorio *St Ludmila* (first performance in 1886, libretto by J. Vrchlický) and Humperdinck's *Moorish Rhapsody* (first performance in 1898). There were, however, far more new compositions by British composers. Maybe this really was because the Festival Committee wanted to promote native talent. Or maybe, being a 'young' festival, the Leeds Triennial Musical Festival did not have the reputation to entice the foreign composers. If so, this was not through want of trying. The Festival Committee wrote to many of the foremost composers of the time including Rubinstein, Gade, and D'Albert, who for various reasons declined the offer. As conductor of the Festival, Sullivan was also consulted on the composers asked to supply new works. In 1881, for example, he gave advice on the commissioning of a new oratorio, stating that Macfarren was the only Englishman whom it would be 'safe' to ask.<sup>277</sup> Also at this time Sullivan wrote to Verdi, enclosing an official letter from Spark, but the Italian composer declined the commission on the grounds that he had given up composition.<sup>278</sup> Later in the decade the Committee also communicated with Brahms regarding the composition of a new symphony for the 1889 Festival. The composer apparently seemed a little confused about the British festival movement and the importance of new works:

I cannot make up my mind to promise you a new work for your Musical Festival. Should you see one of my old works worthy the honour of being performed on this occasion, it would be a great pleasure to me. But if this is, as it appears, not the case, how may I hope that I shall succeed this time? If, however, the charm of novelty be an absolute necessity, then pardon me if I confess that I fail to properly appreciate, or have no particular sympathy with, such a distinction.<sup>279</sup>

Every provincial festival outside Birmingham was looking for a new *Elijah*, and here it seems that Brahms does not appreciate the prestige that the writing of a work expressly for Leeds would have brought to the Festival. *The Musical Times* in 1892 suggested

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<sup>277</sup> Young, *Sir Arthur Sullivan*, p.207.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.* Both letters are also quoted in Spark and Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, p.207. It seems that the original letters were part of the Musical Festival papers that have not been possible to locate.

<sup>279</sup> Quoted in Spark and Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, p.324. It has not been possible to locate this letter in any of the Brahms literature other than in a biography by John Lawrence Erb, *Brahms* (London: J.M. Dent, 1913), p.100.

that the composer's refusal to write for the Leeds Festival was because 'Brahms did not like writing to order, for the works which he has given to the world were not mere *pièces d'occasion*, but the outward expression of inward feeling. [...] In that letter he was writing as one who was conscious of his high calling and properly jealous for his art'.<sup>280</sup>

Although none of the works commissioned for the Leeds Festival proved to have the longevity of *Elijah*, many were considered compositional triumphs at the time of their first performance. The press described Sullivan's *Golden Legend*, for example, as a work that had won a place, 'not only amongst the permanent successes of our generation, but even in the shelves of the classics'.<sup>281</sup> That such a work was written for the Leeds Triennial Musical Festival must have brought acclaim to the event as a whole.

From letters quoted in the *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals* it seems that those composers who did write for the Leeds Festival were generally satisfied with the first performance of their works. Dvořák's letter on 28 October 1886 to Alfred Broughton, chorus master, is one such example:

Before leaving England, a country to which I much owe, I cannot but express my gratitude to you and your incomparable choir. You have taken so much trouble and pains in preparing and performing my work, that it is a matter of course when I once more repeat my hopeful thanks to you, and I assure you the rendering of 'Ludmilla' was a matter of great admiration to me. The most beautiful voices of the ladies, and the powerful tenors and basses I never can forget! I was much moved and touched on hearing them.<sup>282</sup>

Aside from those composers who were approached by the Festival Committee, there were many who wrote to the Committee themselves in the hope that their composition might be accepted. The following correspondence between the Bradford-born composer Frederic Cliffe and the Festival Committee is one example,<sup>283</sup> and gives some

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<sup>280</sup> *Musical Times and Singing-class Circular*, 33 (1892), p.468. Erb, in *Brahms*, p.100, agrees with this assertion.

<sup>281</sup> Charles Villiers Stanford, 'Sullivan's *Golden Legend*', *National Review*, 8 (1886), 400-407 (p.400).

<sup>282</sup> Quoted in Spark and Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, p.381. It has not been possible to locate this letter in the Dvořák literature. However, several authors, including John Clapham in his publication *Dvořák* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1979), use the Spark and Bennett book as a reference, which suggests that it is considered a reliable source by Dvořák scholars.

<sup>283</sup> Frederic Cliffe was an English pianist, organist, composer and teacher who had played the organ for the premiere of Sullivan's *Golden Legend* at the Leeds Festival of 1886. He was a teacher at the Royal Academy of Music, and later at the Royal College. See Guy Warrack. 'Cliffe, Frederic'. Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. 16 Oct. 2008 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/05965>>.



indication of the protocol for the programming of new works at the Leeds Festival. Initially Cliffe sent the Festival Committee the following letter:

I have lately finished a symphony for full orchestra, which I have been working at (on and off) for some twelve months, perhaps I may be allowed to say with the highest aspirations, and a hope that I might have the honour of hearing its initial performance at the next Leeds Festival.<sup>284</sup>

After a personal meeting with the honorary secretary in London, and further deliberation by the Programme Committee, Cliffe received the following in reply:

The first thing the Programme Committee did yesterday was to strike out of our sketch programme two symphonies, as we found no fewer than *five* set down. This was unfortunate for your application; and the committee, to whom I made a strong appeal, felt that they could not accept your symphony. I may add that several offers of new works have been declined by us, and I have told each composer that his application is too late, even for consideration.<sup>285</sup>

Cliffe wrote a second letter to the Committee expressing his disappointment and surprise at the rejection of his work, to which they replied:

I am sorry you feel so keenly the inability of the committee to produce your symphony; but remember how many applicants must be disappointed! Even Mr. F. Cowen has at two Leeds Festivals been unable to secure acceptance. Your time will probably come. Not all the influence the world could bring would change the committee's decision.<sup>286</sup>

Cliffe's time did come with the successful performance of his second symphony at the Festival in 1892, which won general acclaim as 'a work of great power and magnitude [and] an honour to English musical art'.<sup>287</sup> The communications between Cliffe and the Festival Committee show the eagerness of aspiring composers to have their work performed at the Leeds Festival. It also shows that the tradition of giving importance to instrumental works, established at the 1858, continued to be observed. Pritchard states that, from the 1860s, 'there was a growing realisation that a festival was not merely a choral "tour de force", but that the orchestra had its own individual contribution to make'.<sup>288</sup> Therefore there was generally a more frequent appearance of large orchestral works in the miscellaneous concerts at festivals.

When one considers the titles of the new works written for Leeds in the Victorian era, shown in table 10, there is an obvious prevalence of secular subjects:

<sup>284</sup> Spark and Bennett, *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, p.334.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.334-335.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, p.335.

<sup>287</sup> *Musical News*, 3 (1892), p.364.

<sup>288</sup> Pritchard, 'The Musical Festival', p.827.

Table 10: List of commissioned works for the Leeds Triennial Festival

Date	Composer	Title	Genre	Text
1858	William Spark		Organ Sonata	
1858	William Sterndale Bennett	<i>The May Queen</i>	Pastoral	H.F. Chorley
1874	William Spark	<i>Deutschland</i>	Unaccompanied Chorus	
1877	Walter Austin	<i>The Fire King</i>	Dramatic Cantata	
1877	George Macfarren	<i>Joseph</i>	Oratorio	Dr. Monk
1877	William Spark	<i>Concertstück for Organ</i>		
1880	John Francis Barnett	<i>The Building of the Ship</i>	Cantata	H.W. Longfellow
1880	James Broughton	<i>The Better Land</i>	Part Song	
1880	Walter Macfarren	<i>Hero and Leander</i>	Overture	
1880	William Spark	<i>Vespers for organ</i>		
1880	Arthur Sullivan	<i>The Martyr of Antioch</i>	Sacred musical drama	W.S. Gilbert
1880	Thomas Wingham	<i>Mors Janua Vitae</i>	Overture	
1883	Joseph Barnby	<i>The Lord is King</i>	Psalm	
1883	George Macfarren	<i>King David</i>	Oratorio	
1886	Antonin Dvořák	<i>St. Ludmilla</i>	Oratorio	J. Vrchlický
1886	F. Kilvington Hattersley	<i>Concert Overture in E minor</i>		
1886	Alexander Campbell Mackenzie	<i>The Story of Sayid</i>	Cantata	Bennett
1886	Charles Villiers Stanford	<i>The Revenge</i>	Ballad for Chorus and Orchestra	A. Tennyson
1886	Arthur Sullivan	<i>The Golden Legend</i>	Dramatic cantata	J. Bennett
1889	Frederick Corder	<i>The Sword of Argantyr</i>	Dramatic Cantata	Corder
1889	William Creser	<i>The Sacrifice of Freia</i>	Cantata	
1889	Alexander Campbell Mackenzie	<i>Pibroch</i>	Violin and orchestra	
1889	Hubert Parry	<i>Ode on St. Cecilia's Day</i>	Cantata	A. Pope
1889	Charles Villiers Stanford	<i>The Voyage of Maeldune</i>	Ballad for Soli, Chorus and Orchestra	Tennyson
1892	Frederic Cliffe	Second Symphony		
1892	Alan Gray	<i>Arethusa</i>	Cantata	
1895	Edward German	Symphonic Suite in D minor		
1895	Jules Massenet	<i>Visions</i>	Symphonic poem	
1895	Hubert Parry	<i>Invocation to Music</i>	Ode	Bridges
1895	Arthur Somervell	<i>The Forsaken Merman</i>		Arnold
1898	Frederic Cowen	<i>Ode to the Passions</i>		Collins
1898	Edward Elgar	<i>Caractacus</i>	Dramatic cantata	Acworth
1898	Engelbert Humperdinck	<i>Moorish Rhapsody</i>		
1898	Alan Gray	<i>A Song of Redemption</i>	Sacred Cantata	
1898	Otto Goldschmidt	<i>Ode to Music</i>		Lewis Morris
1898	Charles Villiers Stanford	<i>Te Deum</i>		
1901	Samuel Coleridge-Taylor	<i>The Blind Girl of Castél-Cuille</i>	Cantata	Longfellow
1901	Alexander Glazounow	<i>Memorial Cantata</i>		
1901	Charles Wood	<i>Dirge for Two Veterans</i>	Baritone and chorus	Walt Whitman <sup>289</sup>

<sup>289</sup> Data taken from Spark and Bennett, 'Index to Works', *History of the Leeds Musical Festivals*, pp.387-396, reviews of the Leeds Musical Festival in *The Times* and the *Monthly*

The move away from the dominance of sacred music demonstrates a real break from the biblical oratorio tradition of traditional festivals such as Birmingham. When Sullivan was commissioned to compose a full-length work for the Leeds Festival of 1880, his first thought was to write a Bible-based work, but he decided that the Bible had been used so much by oratorio composers that he had to look elsewhere for his text.<sup>290</sup> Sullivan eventually set Milman's poem, *The Martyr of Antioch*. Although this is still a religious poem, it marks a significant departure from the Bible-based librettos traditionally used. Pritchard observes that although sacred music was the most 'moral' type of choral music, the texts of secular works were normally innocuous, also emphasising some moral point.<sup>291</sup> Whilst such a need for new literary inspiration may offer some explanation for the break with tradition at Leeds, composers continue to draw on the bible for their librettos to this day. Another explanation may have been composers' desire to break the mould, to move away from convention and offer audiences something new and inspiring. Percy Young suggests that it was Sullivan's works *The Martyr of Antioch* and *The Golden Legend*, departing from the 'convention of religiosity' in choral music of that era, that 'helped emancipate such music from the shackles by which it was bound'.<sup>292</sup> It is possible that, by accepting such works, the Leeds Festival Committee was employing the same ethos in their programming. In 1901 the *Monthly Musical Record* suggested that the Leeds Musical Festival 'has a vigorous habit of going her own way and not caring much for the opinion of outsiders'.<sup>293</sup> It could be argued that, because the Leeds Festival was a 'new' event, and therefore did not have the longevity of such festivals as the Three Choirs and Birmingham, they felt more able to break with the sacred choral tradition in order to offer audiences a more musically varied and innovative festival experience.

There is little evidence to suggest that the Leeds Festival Committee had any influence over the texts used by composers, although some authors of books on specific composers suggest that the Committee stipulated the type of work they required. For example, John Clapham writes that the Committee wanted Dvořák to write a sacred choral work for the 1886 Festival. He continues by stating that, although he knew

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*Musical Record* for the years 1892, 1895, 1898 and 1901, and biographies of composers in *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>290</sup> Flower, *Sir Arthur Sullivan*, p.110.

<sup>291</sup> Pritchard, 'The Musical Festival', p.758.

<sup>292</sup> Young, *Sir Arthur Sullivan*, p.218.

<sup>293</sup> *Monthly Musical Record*, 31 (1901), p.243.

Leeds was hoping for a shorter sacred cantata, Dvořák persisted in writing an oratorio as he desired.<sup>294</sup> So whilst the Festival Committee was in a position to express a preference as to the type of work composed for the Festival, the decision was ultimately left to the composer. Percy Young, when discussing Sullivan's commissions for the Festival, suggests that the Leeds Committee were most concerned with the length of time the composition would last for programming purposes. He states, 'In Leeds they liked to know exactly what they were going to get for their money'.<sup>295</sup>

In addition to the performance of new repertoire, the Leeds Musical Festival was also an occasion for the programming of established works, in particular those that were not part of the traditional festival repertoire. There was a definite aspiration on the part of the Festival Committee to programme works of the great composers that had yet to be performed in Leeds. The Bach B Minor Mass was one such work, and of its performance in 1886 the *Musical Times* wrote:

Sir Arthur Sullivan evidently aimed at a 'monumental' performance, and may now congratulate himself upon having given the most complete interpretation of Bach's sacred masterpiece ever heard in this country, or, for that matter, any other.<sup>296</sup>

This was not a particularly well-known work in the country at the time. Part of the Mass had been programmed at the Birmingham Festival of 1837, but it was not given in full in England until 1876 when the Bach Choir performed it in London; it seems that they were the main performers of the work for the rest of the century.<sup>297</sup> Journal and newspaper evidence suggests that the performance of the complete work in Leeds in 1886 was probably the first given at a provincial festival in England. The inclusion of the B Minor Mass in the programme was not Sullivan's innovation as conductor, but was decided on by the Committee. In fact, Sullivan was not pleased at being told that the performance of the work was non-negotiable.<sup>298</sup> The Leeds Festival was gaining a reputation as a first-class musical event, and the programming of such works as the B Minor Mass indicates the ambition of the Committee to live up to this reputation by continually raising the standards of the Festival performances.

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<sup>294</sup> Clapham, *Dvořák*, p.64.

<sup>295</sup> Young, *Sir Arthur Sullivan*, p.203.

<sup>296</sup> *Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular*, 27 (1886), p.655.

<sup>297</sup> Nicholas Temperley and Peter Wollny. 'Bach Revival'. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 22 Mar. 2009 <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/01708>. See the

previous chapter for a more detailed discussion of the English Bach Revival.

<sup>298</sup> Young, *Sir Arthur Sullivan*, p.210.

The Leeds Festival was not only innovative for the works it did perform, but also for the works it did not. For over a hundred years Handel's *Messiah* had been the main work given at all provincial musical festivals, and was normally the most highly attended concert. At Leeds, *Messiah* was performed in 1858 and 1874, but only once more in the nineteenth century, in 1895. Although Leeds was not the only festival to do this,<sup>299</sup> it was a highly irregular and brave move by the Festival Committee, not only in terms of the Festival's reputation but also in the potential loss of profit that would be gained by a *Messiah* concert, which generally could be guaranteed full attendance. In the programme for the 1877 Festival the Committee justified their decision as follows:

Some surprise has been expressed at the omission of the 'Messiah' from the scheme: the Committee, however, have from the first resolved that the 'Leeds Festival' should not become a slave to any traditional necessity, which by setting apart one day during every Festival to a particular work, cramps the power of selection, and prevents the production of other great works. The stupendous grandeur of the 'Messiah' and 'Israel in Egypt' seems to blind people's eyes to the fact that there are other works by the same great master which require equal resources for their proper expression – resources which are unavailable except on occasions like the present.<sup>300</sup>

As will be discussed later, *Messiah* was given on a very frequent basis in Leeds outside the musical festival, so it is probable that its omission was due to the Festival Committee's desire to replace the over-performed with the rarely-performed. The provincial musical festival was a well-established institution, but the Leeds Committee was not prepared to programme certain works for the sake of maintaining tradition.

It could be argued, of course, that the Leeds Festival Committee was risking the success of its festival by departing from convention so much, something that other festivals, such as Birmingham, were not prepared to do. It is possible that the Committee were more concerned with the music than the charity - other festivals were perhaps too worried about loss of profits to be innovative. Certainly the Leeds Festival Committee was not as jealous about ensuring the profits for charity as, for example, the Birmingham Committee.<sup>301</sup> In fact, on one occasion the Chairman of the Festival Committee stated that the object of the Leeds Musical Festivals:

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<sup>299</sup> The Liverpool Festival, for example, omitted both *Messiah* and *Elijah* from the programme in 1874. See *Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular*, 16 (1874), p.669.

<sup>300</sup> Programme for performance of *Joseph*, 21 September 1877, Leeds Local Studies Library, LQ780.79 L517.

<sup>301</sup> However, in 1889 Fred Spark suggested that the Birmingham Festival Committee was coming to the same conclusion as Leeds as regards the performance of *Messiah*: 'In 1876 Birmingham had an attendance of 2,000 persons, while in 1888 it fell to 1,411, showing that although the work was believed to be their rock of support, the musical public were looking for

[...] was not to make money on behalf of the medical or any other charities. Their object was to secure as good a Festival as could be had, and if they succeeded in that, depend upon it other things would be added, and they would at least have a surplus which they would know how to apply.<sup>302</sup>

In an age when the performance of music on such an extravagant scale could only be justified by its link with philanthropy, it is a significant mark of the Leeds Festival that the Committee cared more about the music than the ritual and charity normally at the forefront of such events. From 1874 the Committee even changed the practice of giving all proceeds to charity in order to put aside large amounts for festival purposes. In 1880, for example, out of a profit of £2,000 (£96,620 today), £329. 0s. 10d (£15,896 today) was set aside for the next festival.<sup>303</sup> Although Pritchard states that, in general, the connection between musical festivals and charity had become increasingly more tenuous throughout the late 1830s and 1840s,<sup>304</sup> the appearance of philanthropy had to be maintained. Therefore, for the sake of public relations, when the Leeds Committee issued statements referring to the Festival, the raising of money for charity was still stated as one of the main aims of the event:

The primary cause of the Festival may be music; but has it never occurred to you, that the second great cause – the cause of Charity – was the greater? The Infirmary and the many Institutions that benefit by the moneys obtained by the success of the Festival is a solace to the poor afflicted beings of our city. This alone should stimulate us in our endeavours.<sup>305</sup>

Whatever the risks taken by the Festival Committee, the Leeds Festival was quickly established as one of the leading musical festivals in the country. Even a Bradford newspaper conceded:

Leeds already occupies a foremost place amongst the towns which hold these great musical meetings; and if her success next week is as well assured as that of the Birmingham Festival last year was doubtful, she will certainly be entitled to take the absolute lead. This is a proud position to occupy, and it is one which we do not think can be denied her by any impartial

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something better than the “Messiah”. *Leeds Mercury*, 5 December 1889. This statement not only indicates that close attention was paid to the workings of rival festivals, but also that Leeds had been an innovator in the non-performance of this work.

<sup>302</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 5 December 1889.

<sup>303</sup> Pritchard, ‘The Musical Festival’, p.830.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, p.672.

<sup>305</sup> *Leeds Musical Festival Guide 1901*, Leeds Local Studies Library, LQ780.79 L517. During the Festival of 1874 a letter from the Festival Committee was inserted in the local paper stating: ‘Allow us, through the medium of your columns, to remind those ladies and gentlemen who seem to be so thoroughly enjoying the Festival that its primary object is charity’. The insertion of this during the festival may have been propaganda, however, to encourage patrons to spend more money. *Leeds Mercury*, 14 October 1874.

critic who has made a comparison of the various festivals which have been held within the last six years.<sup>306</sup>

In its appointment of the top conductors, its commissioning of new works, its refusal to be bound by tradition, its highly respected chorus,<sup>307</sup> and in its employment of first-class soloists, the Leeds Triennial Musical Festival was able to compete on an equal level with the other, more established provincial musical festivals. At a time when England was considered to be a musically bereft,<sup>308</sup> the critic of the *Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung*, in November 1889, suggested that the Leeds Musical Festival had raised the reputation of English music:

Side by side with the business interest of the inhabitants, their interest in Art is a far more living one than is the case under similar circumstances in German towns. [...] In the face of such liberality on behalf of a musical performance, and in view of our own miserably paltry proportion, have we any occasion, or even any right, to jeer at the sincere interest of the English in music, or even to question it?<sup>309</sup>

Such publicity caused a certain amount of rivalry amongst provincial festivals, especially with Birmingham. That is not surprising when articles such as the following were appearing in the national press:

Immediately upon its establishment in 1874 the triennial festival in Leeds took very high rank among enterprises of this nature, and its subsequent history has been a record of steadily increasing success, until at present it may fairly claim to rank by the side of the far older gathering at Birmingham, which for many years enjoyed a pre-eminence apparently unassailable.<sup>310</sup>

Newman Flower, in his book on Sullivan, suggests that the antagonism between the two festivals stemmed from Birmingham's refusal to 'play second fiddle' to Leeds, new on the festival scene.<sup>311</sup> In 1884 the Birmingham Festival was looking for a new conductor and Arthur Sullivan was one of three candidates, the other two being Alberto Randegger and Hans Richter. Many on the Birmingham Committee wanted a British conductor, but ultimately Richter was chosen. According to the music critic Joseph Bennett, when Sullivan heard of it he thought that the appointment discredited English

<sup>306</sup> *Bradford Observer*, 9 October 1880. The Bradford Triennial had ceased in 1859. For more see Russell, "Awaking to the Reality of Our New and Loftier Position", pp.3-21.

<sup>307</sup> On 6 October 1895 *The Observer* reported, 'Ever since the Leeds Festival has existed its chief glory has been its choir'.

<sup>308</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte is reported to have said that the English 'have no music, or, at all events, no national music'. Quoted in *Musical World*, 39 (1861), p.584.

<sup>309</sup> Quoted in Percy A. Scholes, *The Mirror of Music 1844-1944*, Vol. 1 (London: Novello & Company Limited and Oxford University Press, 1947), p.161. There is no record of the translator of the source.

<sup>310</sup> *Athenaeum*, 16 October 1886.

<sup>311</sup> Sullivan and Flower, *Sir Arthur Sullivan*, p.146.

art and artists, seeing it as an 'affront to all of us English'. Bennett maintains that Sullivan continued by saying 'I should certainly have considered it an honour if they had offered me the festival'.<sup>312</sup> Flower suggests that Sullivan was not given the position because of his close association with Leeds.<sup>313</sup>

Once the Leeds Musical Festival had been separated from the petty squabbles of local musicians, it had all the ingredients for success – a committee willing to be innovative, a supportive town council, local musicians of a high standard and, of course, a purpose-built music venue. Indeed, as in Birmingham, without the Town Hall, the establishment of a triennial musical festival would not have been possible. The *Musical Times* stated that Leeds Town Hall offered a venue that was 'second to none in the kingdom'.<sup>314</sup> In his work on the nineteenth-century musical festival, Musgrove observes that 'festivals rose with the new town halls. [...] Essentially they were signalling a city's standing and cultural credentials'.<sup>315</sup> Pritchard agrees with this statement, since the festival was 'aimed at the powerful and prosperous middle classes'.<sup>316</sup> According to him, it 'satisfied an awakening civic pride' and 'brought respectability and a certain cultural standing to the town'.<sup>317</sup> Neither Musgrove nor Pritchard are here referring to any town in particular, but such statements surely apply to the Leeds Triennial Musical Festival and its inception as a means of celebrating the opening of the new town hall. The Leeds Festival became a national rather than a local institution, therefore ensuring that the town maintained a reputation, at least triennially, as one of England's most accomplished cultural centres.

#### 4.8: Music-Making

It was the opinion of some in the nineteenth century that a triennial musical festival could damage the general musical life of the town in which it was held, since the festival 'tends to exhaust the soil of musical activity'.<sup>318</sup> Therefore some would argue that the people of Leeds only experienced first-class music during the festival period: 'there can be no doubt that the pleasing fiction that Leeds is a specially musical place is

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<sup>312</sup> Joseph Bennett, *Forty Years of Music: 1865-1905* (London: Methuen, 1908), pp.74-5.

<sup>313</sup> Sullivan and Flower, *Sir Arthur Sullivan*, p.146.

<sup>314</sup> *Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular*, 16 (1874), p.672.

<sup>315</sup> Musgrove, 'The Rise of a Northern Musical Elite', p.72.

<sup>316</sup> Pritchard, 'The Musical Festival', p.832.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, p.839.

<sup>318</sup> *Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular*, 36 (1895), p.762.



largely due to its festivals'.<sup>319</sup> Even the local newspaper acknowledged the detrimental effect the Festival could have on the Leeds musical season:

In former years we were accustomed to publish some prospective notes of the musical season; but there are so few symptoms this winter of any musical season in Leeds, that they do not afford material for a preliminary article. [...] It has been supposed that the Triennial Festival of 1880 was in some measure responsible for this failure. [...] The fact remains that amongst those who support the festivals, only the few who are passionately devoted to music afterwards support concerts in their native town.<sup>320</sup>

An additional argument was made by those who thought that the Musical Festival could have no influence because Leeds was not a musical town and therefore cared little about any musical events of whatever importance:

In Leeds, music is not the business of men's lives. [...] an institution like a musical festival cannot excite in a busy work-a-day population any great enthusiasm; indeed we should regret such a result, inseparable as it must be from a giving up of more advantageous and stable pursuits. Besides the existence of this business feeling, which has made failures more or less of all the musical festivals in other business towns, there is the extent of the population to be taken into account, and also the general taste.<sup>321</sup>

There were, of course, also those who argued for the positive influence the Musical Festival had on music in nineteenth-century Leeds, arguing that the event 'elevates the tone of local life, and tends to the advancement, not only of the Divine Art itself, but of culture generally'.<sup>322</sup> Herbert Thompson, music critic of the *Yorkshire Post*, acknowledges that the Musical Festival will have benefited the musical life of Leeds as a whole: 'A festival, under a distinguished composer, must raise a standard to which local music should aspire',<sup>323</sup> while the *Leeds Times* suggests: 'We believe that the Festival answers [a] beneficent purpose in the aesthetic life of the town. The taste for better music and better performance is nourished'.<sup>324</sup>

Whatever the influence of the Festival, those who argue that Leeds did not have a musical life outside the event overlook evidence, both newspaper-based and archival, of the strong concert life that was stimulated by the opening of the Town Hall. As Percy Young states in *Grove's Dictionary*: 'A new chapter in the musical history of

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<sup>319</sup> *Leeds and Its History: 300 Years of Achievement*, printed from the Tercentenary Supplement of the *Yorkshire Post*, 1926. It is likely that this was written by Herbert Thompson, music critic of the *Yorkshire Post* from 1886 to 1936.

<sup>320</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 2 November 1881.

<sup>321</sup> *Leeds Daily News*, 6 October 1874.

<sup>322</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 5 October 1892.

<sup>323</sup> *Radio Times*, 3 April 1931.

<sup>324</sup> *Leeds Times*, 16 October 1886.

Leeds began with the opening in 1858 of the town hall'.<sup>325</sup> The argument that the Musical Festival destroyed music in Leeds loses impact when one considers that between 1859 and 1873 there was no festival in the town, therefore giving time for a musical tradition to be established in the new music venue away from the festival. Most significantly, such an argument also disregards the major influence of the Leeds Town Council, who were determined that the Town Hall would be used as a music venue and therefore would stimulate the musical life of Leeds as a whole. As a correspondent to the local newspaper in 1881 stated, 'Depend upon it if music, as music, is to prosper in our town it will not be by making a great effort once in three years, but by faithful, earnest, and constant support'.<sup>326</sup> This was exactly what the Council set out to do.

As discussed earlier, the Council's main way of providing music for the people of Leeds in the Town Hall was through the organ concerts given by the Town Hall Organist and the more miscellaneous concerts given by the Town Hall Concert Society. Such performances continued in various guises for the rest of the century but all had the same purpose: to introduce the public to 'a large amount of classical music' as a mode of self-improvement, and to display 'the multiform resources of the superb instrument which is the vehicle of interpretation'.<sup>327</sup> Although numerous societies and individuals wished to hire the Town Hall for performances, especially on a Saturday night, the Council always prioritised the organ concerts:

The City Buildings Sub-committee of the Leeds Corporation yesterday decided that the recitals on the Grand Organ at the Town Hall should be given on Tuesday afternoons and Saturday evenings, except during the months of July and August. Many applications for the use of the Town Hall on these days are received by the committee, but they thought the ratepayers had a right to be considered, and resolved that the hall should not be let on Tuesday or Saturdays if this would interfere with the organ recitals.<sup>328</sup>

Since this article refers to a meeting in 1899, it is clear that throughout the century the Council remained dedicated to their duty to provide music for the citizens of Leeds as stipulated in the 1856 Amendment Act. Since such a policy would have resulted in a loss of potential revenue for the Council, it seems that in Leeds, municipal obligation was put before income when it came to music provision.

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<sup>325</sup> Percy M. Young. 'Leeds'. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 30 Oct. 2008 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/16254>>.

<sup>326</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 20 January 1881.

<sup>327</sup> *Musical World*, 40 (1862), p.75.

<sup>328</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 10 June 1899.

#### 4.9: Visiting Performers

In addition to the 'in house' entertainments commissioned by the Council, they also actively advertised the Town Hall as a concert venue for hire in the provincial, theatrical and musical press of the day. This was especially the case after the disbandment of the Town Hall Concert Society in January 1879. In February of that year the following advertisement appeared in the London newspaper, *The Era*:

LEEDS – TOWN HALL – The Town Hall Concert Society having discontinued their series of Concerts on Saturday evenings, the Town Hall, recently redecorated at a cost of £4,000, is now TO LET on Saturday Nights and other Evenings. The Victoria Hall, with the Festival Gallery, will seat about 2,500 persons.<sup>329</sup>

Later in the century, advertisements like the following would periodically appear in the same newspaper:

WANTED, for Town Hall, Leeds, a Complete really good entertainment, for Dec. 26<sup>th</sup>, 1890.<sup>330</sup>

Such advertising helped establish Leeds Town Hall on the provincial tour circuit, with the foremost performers of the day giving concerts there on a regular basis. A regular visitor to Leeds Town Hall was Charles Hallé and his orchestra from Manchester. The newly formed ensemble first performed at Leeds Town Hall in 1859,<sup>331</sup> and they continued to give periodic appearances at concerts there until a more formal arrangement was agreed in 1865, when Hallé was booked for six concerts a year under the auspices of the Leeds Choral Union, conducted by Robert Burton:

We are glad to be able to state that the Leeds Choral Union Committee has made arrangements with Mr Charles Hallé for five concerts, which are to be given in the Victoria Hall during the winter months. [...] The success which has attended Mr Hallé's labours in Manchester will not, we trust, be wanting in Leeds, and we are assured that those who support them will be made the partakers in one of the richest and most refined musical treats within the reach of any class of the community.<sup>332</sup>

Again, this article suggests a desire to bring good music to the community, a factor that seems to pervade Leeds music-making, and gives an indication of musical cooperation between the two provincial centres, with the writer here hoping that the presence of the Hallé orchestra in Leeds would raise the town's musical profile. Indeed, the *Leeds*

<sup>329</sup> *The Era*, 2 February 1879.

<sup>330</sup> *The Era*, 6 December 1890. Since this advertisement appears on the 6<sup>th</sup> and the entertainment is needed for the 26<sup>th</sup>, it is possible that the Council had resorted to this measure in order to try and let the Town Hall for the people over the Christmas period. The Town Hall was normally used on 26 December by one or other of the choral societies.

<sup>331</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 5 February 1859.

<sup>332</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 18 August 1866.

*Mercury* reported in 1870 that the enthusiasm for the Hallé concerts in Leeds was convincing proof of the love of music in Yorkshire.<sup>333</sup>

In 1881 these concerts were reorganised as the Leeds Subscription Concerts by the Leeds solicitor and music-lover John Rawlinson Ford, primarily for the performance of orchestral and chamber music. Hallé's orchestra continued to take precedence but concerts were also given by visiting London orchestras as part of the series. The status of the concerts was often heightened by the engagement of a visiting international soloist from London, such as Paderewski or Joachim - a mark of the respect afforded these concerts by professional musicians. In addition, they were normally supported by the choral forces of the Leeds Philharmonic Society. The concerts became the Leeds Popular Concerts in 1884 and the Town Hall was a frequent but not permanent venue for these events. Frank Musgrove considers such concerts to have been status symbols in much the same way the Festivals were:

It was by staging high-profile concerts of choral classical music, often led by highly paid international stars, that the great northern industrial cities signalled and celebrated their civic dignity, vitality and power.<sup>334</sup>

Outside the Hallé concerts, or the Subscription/Popular Concerts, other orchestras visited the Town Hall. For example, both Edward De Jong's Orchestral Concerts in the 1870s and the Richter Concerts in the 1880s gave a number of performances there.

There were also visiting bands, such as the Band and Pipers of the Scots Guards,<sup>335</sup> and visiting choirs such as the Alpine Choir, the Alleghanian Vocalists and Bell Ringers, and the Glasgow Select Choir, who gave 'regional' concerts at the Town Hall. Leeds Town Hall as a concert venue was non-partisan and non-denominational. Both Irish and Scottish concerts were given, and celebrations for St. Patrick's Day and Burns' Night were also held on occasion. Most of the nationally renowned visitors to the Town Hall used Leeds as part of their nationwide tour:

Through the enterprise of Messrs. Hopkinson, Leeds has been favoured with a flying visit from one of the two rival companies of Italian opera which are now making a tour through the provinces.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 28 July 1870. The Hallé also performed regularly in such places as Liverpool, Bradford, Birmingham, Kendal, and Edinburgh, as well as in London later in the century. See Michael Kennedy. "Manchester." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. 16 Mar. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/17587>>.

<sup>334</sup> Frank Musgrove, 'The Rise of a Northern Musical Elite', p.72.

<sup>335</sup> For an example see *Leeds Mercury*, 6 December 1879.

<sup>336</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 30 November 1875.

It is probable that the 'Hopkinsons' mentioned in the above advertisement were the owners of a piano warehouse in Leeds who had also been working as concert entrepreneurs since the late 1830s.<sup>337</sup> From newspaper reports it seems that they were most concerned with engaging outside artists to perform in Leeds venues, normally the Town Hall, sometimes working with concert promoters from other provincial centres such as the Harrisons of Birmingham.<sup>338</sup> The following programme from a 'Hopkinson Concert' in 1875 offers an example of the format and repertoire of these performances, showing a prevalence of Italian operatic excerpts:

#### PART FIRST

Trio... 'Lui pora il tianchi'... (*Lombardi*) Verdi  
 Duo... 'Si la stanchezza'... (*Trovatore*) Verdi  
 Air... 'I miei rampolli'... (*Cerentola*) Rossini  
 Duo... 'La ci darem'... (*Don Giovanni*) Mozart  
 Solo Violin... 'Cha Conne' [sic]... Bach  
 'Scene de Jolie'... (*Lucia*)... Donizetti  
 Romanza... 'Vien Leonora' (*Favorita*)  
 Duo... Mendelssohn

#### PART SECOND

Quartetto... 'Un di si ben'... (*Rigoletto*) Verdi  
 Air... 'M'Appari'... (*Marta*) Flotov  
 Aria E Waltz... (*Fra Diavolo*) Auber  
 Solo Violin... 'Romance'... Wilhelmj  
 'Nocturne'... Chopin  
 Song... 'The Bird that came in Spring'... Benedict  
 Ballad... 'Robin Adair'  
 Aria... 'Sei Vendicata'... (*Dinorah*) Meyerbeer  
 Quartetto... 'Mentre il pie'... (*Marta*) Flotov<sup>339</sup>

Many other concert promoters in Leeds organised concerts at the Town Hall. Archibald Ramsden, referred to in the local newspaper as 'our enterprising townsman',<sup>340</sup> is another example of a promoter who engaged outside artists, although he also organised concerts at the Town Hall using local talent. He regularly gave a series of 'four high-class subscription concerts',<sup>341</sup> in addition to other occasional enterprises. This programme was performed in a Ramsden concert in 1870:

#### PART FIRST

Grand Sonata... Piano and Violin... in E Flat, Op. 12, No. 3... Beethoven  
 Cavatina... 'Bel raggio'... (*Semiramide*) Rossini

<sup>337</sup> See *ibid.*, 21 October 1837.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 January 1890. For a discussion of the Harrisons see the previous chapter.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 November 1875.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 November 1874.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 October 1878.

Solo Violin...Ballad and Polonaise...Vieuxtemps  
 Cavatina...‘Pensa la patria’...(L’*Italiana*) Rossini  
 Solo Pianoforte...Polonaise in E...Weber  
 Duet...‘Si la Stanchezza’...(Il *Trovatore*)Verdi

#### PART SECOND

Duetto...‘Ah! Figlia’...(Maria *Padilla*) Donizetti  
 Romanza...‘Alma soave’...(Maria *di Rohan*) Donizetti  
 Solo Violin...Romanza in F...Beethoven  
 Valse...‘Ah! Che Assorta’...Venzano  
 Cavatina...‘Fanciulle’...(Dinorah) Meyerbeer  
 Duet...Piano and Violin...Adagio and Rondo in B flat – Dussek  
 Duetto...‘Parigi o cara’...(La *Traviata*) Verdi  
 Quartetto...‘Un di si ben’...(Rigoletto)Verdi<sup>342</sup>

The repertoire performed at this concert is similar to that performed at the Hopkinson Concerts. Again there is a prevalence of Italian operatic repertoire, possibly in a conscious attempt to use the link between the Italian Opera and Aristocracy to justify the title ‘high-class concerts’. Most miscellaneous concerts given in Leeds Town Hall by visiting artists took the same form. In addition, the networking of individuals such as Ramsden ensured visits by eminent soloists, both vocal and instrumental, to give independent recitals or ‘Grand Concerts’ at Leeds Town Hall; Hallé, Paderewski and Rubinstein, for example, performed at the Town Hall outside the auspices of the Subscription Concerts or any other regular concert series.

In terms of more ‘popular’ entertainment, a recurrent act at the Town Hall was the Great Vance. Alfred Vance was essentially a Music Hall artist,<sup>343</sup> and therefore his regular performances at Leeds Town Hall, a venue of ‘rational’ recreation, seem slightly incongruous. Here again it seems that it was the venue that made the act respectable. In addition, Vance worked hard on raising his image in his advertisements by stating that his concerts had been ‘Patronised by the *elite* of Society’, and describing the entertainment as ‘Ballad Concert, Operetta, Spanish Fable, and Vance’s Comic Impersonations and Characteristic Songs’.<sup>344</sup>

Other more ‘popular’ visitors to Leeds Town Hall include such entertainers as the Blondinette Melodists, ‘a clever company of vocalists’,<sup>345</sup> and Harry Clifton, a

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 December 1870.

<sup>343</sup> See Joseph Knight, ‘Vance, Alfred Glenville (1839?–1888)’, rev. Nilanjana Banerji, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/28060>, accessed 17 March 2009].

<sup>344</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 12 March 1876.

<sup>345</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 27 December 1873.

music hall artist.<sup>346</sup> Regular performances were given by the various blackface minstrel troupes that toured the country in the late nineteenth century.<sup>347</sup> The phenomenon developed in New York in the 1830s, and after the visit of American groups to London in the 40s, troupes soon formed in England.<sup>348</sup> Minstrelsy was very popular with Leeds audiences, as it was across the country, and the Town Hall was frequently filled to capacity for such performances. According to Derek Scott, the enthusiasm for blackface entertainment in Britain stemmed from the 'unruly humour' which provided the audience with 'a release of tension in an age of social restraint and inhibition'.<sup>349</sup> Despite its popularity in Leeds, there were still many who disapproved of this form of entertainment, although some acknowledged the part it was playing in bringing music-loving audiences to the Town Hall:

THE CHRISTY'S MINSTRELS. – This company of coloured minstrels again appeared at the Town Hall on Saturday night, and were received, as on former occasions, most favourably by a very crowded house. [...] The amusement of the audience was unquestionable, and whilst it is impossible to endorse the taste which crowds such extravagant entertainments, whilst superior concerts are given to empty benches, one cannot but accept the hearty enthusiasm of the audiences as a proof of their enjoyment and pleasure.<sup>350</sup>

According to Scott, St James's Hall, London, had been the home of minstrelsy from 1849,<sup>351</sup> and the Moore and Burgess Christy Minstrels had been resident there since September 1865,<sup>352</sup> but also took their shows on tour. A typical entertainment by them would include ballads and comic songs, with a narrative to conclude the first half, and then parody and burlesque in the second half, normally concluding with an opera burlesque.<sup>353</sup> The Christy Minstrels advertised their shows as being suitable for families,<sup>354</sup> and blackface performers in general stressed the wholesomeness and respectability of their entertainment. For concerts by the Christy's Minstrels at the Town Hall in October 1863 the admission prices were 1s., 6d., and 3d., suggesting that

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<sup>346</sup> See Andrew Lamb, 'Music hall', *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. 6 Nov. 2008 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/19440>>.

<sup>347</sup> See the discussion on touring minstrel troupes in chapter 2.

<sup>348</sup> Derek B. Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis: The Nineteenth-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris and Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.51. See also Michael Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

<sup>349</sup> Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis*, p.147.

<sup>350</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 15 September 1862.

<sup>351</sup> Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis*, p.157.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, p.158.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, p.157.

the projected audience was the lower classes.<sup>355</sup> However, although their form of entertainment greatly appealed to working-class audiences, blackface troupes 'always had a bourgeois audience more firmly in their sights'.<sup>356</sup>

The Queen's Minstrels, in 1872, used their visit to Leeds Town Hall as part of their publicity campaign:

The following indisputable facts warrant them in asserting that  
the most Popular Entertainment in the World is  
THE QUEEN'S MINSTRELS.

[At] LEEDS – TOWN HALL – Floor, Gallery, and Orchestra crowded Nightly.  
Thousands unable to obtain admission. [...]  
BRADFORD – ST. GEORGE'S HALL [...]  
MANCHESTER – FREE TRADE HALL [...]  
NOTTINGHAM – MECHANICS' HALL [...]  
SHEFFIELD – MUSIC HALL [...]  
BRISTOL – COLSTON HALL [...]

The above are not small, ill-conditioned Halls, holding from Six to Seven Hundred Persons, but nearly all equal, and many superior, in size to the Great St. James's Hall, London: and it should be borne in mind that that they are not selected merely in holiday times, but in season and out of season, whenever visited by the Queen's Minstrels [...], they are crowded to overflowing, an evidence of a popularity unparalleled in the history of the World's amusements.<sup>357</sup>

Although self-promoting, this advertisement gives some indication both of the popularity of Minstrelsy at this time, and of the frequency and popularity of its performances at Leeds Town Hall. Also, since they used Leeds Town Hall as an example of the top-class venues the Queen's Minstrels had performed at in order to raise their profile, Leeds Town Hall must have been considered nationally a top-class concert hall and they compared it favourably to St James's Hall, one of the foremost concert halls in London at the time.<sup>358</sup> Other performers began to advertise their having sung at Leeds Town Hall Concerts, a statement that was similarly meant to raise their reputation and therefore suggests the high reputation the Town Hall Concerts held at this time:

ULSTER HALL  
MONDAY POPULAR CONCERTS  
FIFTH CONCERT OF THE SEASON,  
MONDAY EVENING, 2<sup>ND</sup> OCTOBER, 1871.  
VOCALIST:

MISS ANNIE ANYON

(From Leeds Town Hall Concerts, &c. Her first and only appearance here).<sup>359</sup>

<sup>355</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 October 1863.

<sup>356</sup> Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis*, p.145.

<sup>357</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 12 May 1872.

<sup>358</sup> Nicholas Temperley, et al. 'London (i)'. *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. 22 Mar. 2009 <<http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/16904pg6>>.

<sup>359</sup> *Belfast News-letter*, 29 September 1871.



According to local musician George Haddock, once the Town Hall opened, the number of concerts in Leeds multiplied.<sup>360</sup> Admiring this proliferation of music in Leeds Town Hall, *Dwight's Journal of Music* expressed the opinion that music had stimulated more music: 'There cannot be a doubt that the closer our familiarity is with everything good in art, the greater is our appreciation of it, and the higher our delight'.<sup>361</sup> It seems, once the people of Leeds had experienced concerts in the Town Hall, that they wanted more. In fact, the local newspaper suggested that there was too much music-making in the town, resulting in small audience numbers. Referring to a concert given by the Leeds Choral Union in the Town Hall in 1864, the reporter stated:

We regret that music of so high a character [*Hymn of Praise* and *The Seasons*] did not bring together a crowded hall. This may, we believe, in a great measure be attributed to the unusual number of entertainments to which the public have lately been called upon to give their patronage. In music, as in the case of other luxuries, a little abstinence will sharpen the public zest for its enjoyment.<sup>362</sup>

#### 4.10: Choral Societies

The proliferation of concerts in the Town Hall was not just due to the work of the Council. Like Stalybridge and Birmingham, Leeds in the latter half of the nineteenth century had many local societies and concert entrepreneurs who wished to use the Town Hall for their concerts. The most frequent performers at the Town Hall, outside the Council entertainments, were the numerous choral societies of Leeds and the surrounding areas. Since a good choral society was a local asset, an intense rivalry between societies and towns developed. According to Brian Pritchard, 'Societies had their "fans" just as football clubs have today – and their merits were discussed just as avidly'.<sup>363</sup> This was particularly the case in the West Riding, where the towns were so close together, and Leeds played an integral role in this phenomenon.<sup>364</sup> Choral singing in the town had its roots in non-conformity, and, as has been discussed above, by the time the Town Hall was opened in 1858 there were already two prominent choral bodies in the town, the Leeds Madrigal and Motet Society and the Leeds Choral Union. Both societies gave oratorio concerts in the Town Hall from its opening. Eventually, in

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<sup>360</sup> George Haddock, *Some Early Musical Recollections of G. Haddock* (London: Schott and Co., 1906), p.118.

<sup>361</sup> *Dwight's Journal of Music*, 114 (1861), p.184.

<sup>362</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 April 1864.

<sup>363</sup> Pritchard, 'The Musical Festival', p.621.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*

1863, the two amalgamated to form the Leeds Choral Union.<sup>365</sup> The amalgamation created a choral society of circa 300 singers and, in time, mainly through its work at the Musical Festivals, it achieved national renown. At the beginning of its existence the new Leeds Choral Union felt that its progress was being hampered by the Leeds Council, which the Society blamed for the losses sustained at its concerts. Once again, the perceived favouritism shown to the Town Hall Concert Society was at the root of the problem. In the opinion of the Choral Union, the Council was restricting the progress of choral singing in the Town Hall and therefore in Leeds as a whole:

The committee further state that their desire to improve the taste for good music has received a check from the Town Hall Committee, who refused to grant their application for the use of the Victoria Hall for the sum of £2 10s. [the fee charged for concerts given for charitable purposes] instead of £10 nightly – a privilege which had been to granted to the ‘Leeds Town Hall Concert Society’.<sup>366</sup>

Since the Choral Union had given three concerts and sustained a loss of £22 8s. 1d.,<sup>367</sup> if they had been charged at the £2 10s. rate they would have made a profit. Crucially, they did not view the Town Hall Concert Society as a charitable institution, as the Council did, but as a rival. Their argument can be understood when one considers that if the Town Hall Concert Society was fulfilling the role of a choral society at a fraction of a cost to patrons, it was difficult for independent concert societies to compete. An additional grievance with the Council at this time was the monopoly of the Town Hall for the use of the Town Hall Concert Society, particularly on Christmas Eve. On 24 December 1863, the secretary of the Choral Union had applied in writing for the use of the Town Hall on Christmas Eve the following year. Regardless of the application being entered into the books by the secretary of the Town Hall, their application was seemingly ignored in favour of the Town Hall Concert Society.<sup>368</sup> In the eyes of the Choral Union, how could they compete with such an institution in the use of the Town Hall when it was the most prestigious venue available in Leeds?

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<sup>365</sup> William Spark later became dissatisfied with the amalgamated society and left to form his own. He eventually reformed the Leeds Madrigal and Motet Society in 1867 ‘for the purpose of consolidating and cultivating the choral talent of the town and neighbourhood, and of giving good performances with complete orchestra, of the highest order of compositions, as well as to introduce new works by living writers, conducted by the composer’. Programme for a concert by the society at the Town Hall, 4 December 1867, Leeds Local Studies Library, LP780.73 L517. The society continued to give their concerts in the Town Hall until c.1876.

<sup>366</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 13 October 1864.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*

The committee announce their inability to fight against such odds, and their determination to abandon all concerts in the Victoria Hall. If no favouritism had been shown, they say, they intended to give at least six first-class concerts during the season 1864-5, and the sum they would have paid for the use of the Hall would have been £60. They think the conduct of the Council neither fair nor reasonable, and hope that the Town Hall Committee will yet see that it is so.<sup>369</sup>

In 1865 a correspondent to the local newspaper suggested that the people of Leeds were not willing to support first-class, more expensive, concerts: 'Much of [the blame] rests with the public of Leeds, who do not support in the manner they ought any association for giving really good concerts on a liberal scale'.<sup>370</sup> In such a climate, it is difficult to imagine how any society could compete with the cheap entertainments provided by the Town Hall Committee. On the one hand the Council was achieving its aim of using the Town Hall to bring music to the people of Leeds, but on the other hand it was actually driving it away. Despite their protestations, the Leeds Choral Union continued to use the Town Hall as their concert venue, but in doing so they tried to outwit the competition. Instead of giving their performance of *Messiah* on Christmas Eve, since that was when the Town Hall Concert Society was giving its performance of the work, the Choral Union gave its performance a day earlier on the 23 December. Rather than sitting back and complaining about the competition, they got in there first, a strategy that seems to have been successful:

Last night, the Choral Union gave a performance of the 'Messiah', in the Victoria Hall, in anticipation of the usual Christmas-Eve production of it by the Town Hall Concert Society. It is no part of our province to discuss the merits of the unfortunate controversy on this question which has for some months existed between these two musical bodies, and which led to the repetition of the same oratorio in the same place on two consecutive evenings, but we may venture, we hope, without being subject to the charge of partisanship, to express the hope that the Victoria Hall may to-night be filled with as large and as brilliant an audience as that which last night overflowed that noble room, extending even beyond its walls as far as the statue of Her Majesty in the vestibule.<sup>371</sup>

The performance given by the Town Hall Concert Society the next evening was just as crowded,<sup>372</sup> but by performing the day before, the Choral Union had maintained their reputation and generated a profit, all in the face of musical adversity. It is possible that it was this particular situation that helped establish the tradition of numerous performances of *Messiah* in the Town Hall during the Christmas season. From the 1860s onwards there could be at least three performances of the work in the Town Hall within a week:

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<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 October 1865.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 December 1864.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 December 1864.

Three Christmas performances of the 'Messiah' have taken place in the Leeds Town Hall. The first, on Friday, was under the direction of Mr. R.S. Burton; the second, on Saturday, under the direction of Dr. Spark; and the third, on Monday, under the direction of Mr. Hallé.<sup>373</sup>

The *Leeds Mercury* gives the following reasons for *Messiah's* popularity:

In Yorkshire, as every one knows, 'The Messiah' plays a special and a most important part in the celebration of Christmas. [...] 'The Messiah' is the accepted musical embodiment of religious feeling in England. [...] In no part of the world is Handel held in greater veneration than in Yorkshire. [...] Such is the vitality of 'The Messiah,' that each year serves only to quicken rather than to destroy the sympathies of those who are familiar with every note of it.<sup>374</sup>

It was this proliferation of *Messiah* performances in Leeds during the general musical season that was the reason the work was not given prominence at the Music Festivals. The building of the Town Hall enabled *Messiah* to be brought to larger audiences in Leeds, and certainly stimulated great enthusiasm for the performance and patronage of the work in the years after its opening. The first annual Christmas *Messiah* at the Town Hall in 1859 drew a crowded audience of circa 2,940.<sup>375</sup> By 1860 the popularity of the annual tradition almost provoked a riot:

Last Saturday [...] a scene occurred of the most exciting description. [...] An immense demand for tickets sprung up. The doors of the Town Hall were besieged for an hour before the time fixed for the opening, and the crowds extended across each street. Within a short time after the audience were admitted not a seat could be obtained; and ultimately, not only every inch of ground, but even the pilasters around the hall, the orchestra steps, and the organ recesses, were crowded with music-loving people. Still more room was required, and, to gain this, the doors at the south end of the hall were thrown open, and about two hundred persons were content to stand in the vestibule, where, by the bye, the effect of the choruses was truly magnificent. The number of persons crammed into the hall was no less than 3,300, being 1,300 more than were present at any of the grand festival performances, and at least 500 persons were unable to gain admission.<sup>376</sup>

As already discussed, there was no small amount of rivalry between the various parties performing *Messiah*, even though there always seemed to be a large audience. The furore in 1860 was possibly heightened by a rumour that the principal soprano for the performance, Susan Sunderland, had died; a rumour allegedly started by persons who had arranged an 'opposition performance' of *Messiah* in the same week. It can be argued that through the performance of *Messiah* at Christmas the Town Hall became part of the religious celebrations of the season – an extension of the church. The local

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 December 1867.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 December 1883.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 December 1859.

<sup>376</sup> *Musical World*, 38 (1860), p.24

newspaper suggested that the tradition could hardly be considered as a religious rite, but that 'it certainly is not altogether devoid of religious significance', since in *Messiah*, 'art once again acts as the hand-maid of religion'.<sup>377</sup>

With the amalgamation of the choral societies, the tension between the two conductors, Burton and Spark, continued to fester. By the mid-1860s William Spark had left and R.S. Burton was frequently absent. In 1865 the Choral Union decided to change their musical direction, and the conductorship was given to Charles Hallé.<sup>378</sup> At first the Society prospered,<sup>379</sup> but not enough to avoid the disbandment of the Leeds Choral Union in 1867. In 1875 Robert Burton reformed the society and it survived until 1886.<sup>380</sup> A new Leeds Choral Union was formed in 1896 using singers from Leeds Parish Church as its core.

Although many other choral societies used the Town Hall in the nineteenth century, such as the Leeds Nonconformist Choral Union,<sup>381</sup> the Leeds Temperance Choral Society,<sup>382</sup> the Leeds Wesleyan Choral Union,<sup>383</sup> and various children's choirs, the most significant choral society in late nineteenth-century Leeds was the Leeds Philharmonic Society, described by the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* as 'the famous Yorkshire choir'.<sup>384</sup> This society was founded by local musician T. Dobbs in 1870. Dobbs' father had established the Leeds Amateur Vocal Association, which performed at the Town Hall in the 1860s. The Philharmonic Society was first conducted by James Broughton and later by his brother Alfred, both of whom had been chorus masters at the Musical Festival. In 1896 Adolph Beyschlag, who was formerly employed in Mainz, Frankfurt, Belfast and Manchester, was appointed conductor, only to be

<sup>377</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 December 1889.

<sup>378</sup> Burton re-established the Leeds Festival Choral Society in 1867, but it disbanded in 1870.

<sup>379</sup> The *Leeds Mercury*, 17 October 1866, reports that at the annual general meeting of the Choral Union in 1866 it was stated: 'The society is in a very flourishing condition. The concerts given by the society last season, under Mr. Charles Hallé's conductorship, were alluded to as having raised the character of music in the town, and produced results which for many years have been desired'.

<sup>380</sup> Some sources refer to this society as the Leeds Choral Union, some as the Leeds Choral Society. Burton also conducted the Leeds Amateur Musical Society from c.1870 to 1877.

<sup>381</sup> This society was formed in 1894 and had approximately 200 members from various chapel choirs in Leeds, 'thus conferring a reflex advantage upon the cause of congregational psalmody, besides securing a constituency of skill and capacity in singing'. *Leeds Mercury*, 12 October 1895.

<sup>382</sup> The society was formed in 1881 by Mr T. Thompson. It consisted of 150 members and gave concerts in the Town Hall until its disbandment in 1896.

<sup>383</sup> This society was formed in 1886 by Alfred Benton, organist of Leeds Parish Church.

<sup>384</sup> Quoted in Percy M. Young. 'Leeds'. *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. 1 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/16254>>. The translator of the source is unknown.

succeeded by Charles Villiers Stanford in 1897. The Philharmonic Society quickly established a high reputation in Leeds music-making, with the *Leeds Mercury* in 1890 stating that the society had done much to develop musical taste in Leeds and had a large share in maintaining the musical reputation of the town.<sup>385</sup> The society gained a reputation for introducing to Town Hall audiences 'new or forgotten works, which otherwise would never, apparently, be heard in Leeds'.<sup>386</sup>

The Leeds Triennial Festival of the nineteenth century was famed for its chorus. In 1877 *The Times* reported that the Leeds chorus was 'unquestionably the finest in Great Britain, and it may be added, without much fear of contradiction, in Europe',<sup>387</sup> whilst the same newspaper, in 1898, stated that the Leeds chorus 'held a position of supremacy in the musical world'.<sup>388</sup> Such a reputation was thanks in no small part to the continued hard work of the local choral societies in giving concerts in the Town Hall outside the Festival years, often in the face of adversity.

Opera was a feature of Town-Hall concerts in Leeds from the beginning. In addition to operatic selections in choral concerts, complete operas were frequently performed in concert form, often with nationally renowned soloists engaged for the occasion. The Leeds Festival Choral Society in May 1859 was one of the first when they performed Bellini's *La Sonnambula*. Again, the Town Hall Concert Society, supported by local choral societies, was also one of the innovators, and the following review indicates:

The first of the Leeds Town Hall Society's concerts for the ensuing season was given on Saturday evening in the Victoria Hall, and was very successful. The performance consisted of the recital of Verdi's opera *Il Trovatore*. [...] The introduction of this class of performances into our concert rooms we cannot but regard with pleasure, for, besides the novelty of the opera selected being given complete, the genius of the composer is more clearly traced, and the idea which he may wish to convey is more forcibly expressed than by the mere selection in disjointed fragments of a few gems, scattered here and there through the score. [...] We need hardly say that the artistes were all local vocalists, but the performance was one of a superior character.<sup>389</sup>

Although the local societies were frequent exponents, there were also many guest artists, normally from London companies, who performed opera in the Town Hall, both in full and in excerpts in 'operatic concerts'. One regular visitor was Josef Cantor, whose 'Gems of the Opera Company' were very popular with Leeds audiences.

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<sup>385</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 29 November 1890.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 October 1879.

<sup>387</sup> *The Times*, 21 September 1877.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 October 1898.

<sup>389</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 11 October 1859.

Although 'popular' in character, these concerts were considered to be 'rational', and Mr Cantor was supported in the press as providing 'wholesome recreation'.<sup>390</sup>

#### 4.11: Orchestral Activity

Orchestral works, as already indicated, were an important feature of the repertoire of the Leeds Triennial Festivals, although the Festival orchestra consisted almost exclusively of London musicians, with 'not more than eight or ten local players'.<sup>391</sup> Therefore the employment of instrumental musicians from within Leeds was not a regular occurrence in the Town Hall. There were, however, performances by various militia or police bands both from within Leeds and from outside:

A concert of a novel and very successful character lately took place in the Town Hall. The novelty consisted in combining the grand organ with the band of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Guards, by means of which all the effects of an immense orchestra were given.<sup>392</sup>

Despite the suggestions of this newspaper report, such concerts could not be considered 'orchestral' in the modern sense, and most frequently involved non-Leeds musicians. However, there was still some orchestral activity in Leeds outside of the Festival. The frequent visits of Hallé's band and other visiting orchestras ensured some performance of instrumental music in a town that was dominated by the choral repertoire, but this was still provided by artistes from outside Leeds. In 1863 it was noted in the programme of the *Easter Musical Festival*, first established by Burton in 1860,<sup>393</sup> that Leeds had concerts 'in abundance, indeed far too many; but of orchestral music nothing'.<sup>394</sup> Robert Burton, the organiser of this Musical Festival, established the event in order to, amongst other things, encourage orchestral music by performing choral works that could be accompanied by an orchestra.<sup>395</sup> It is indicative of the spirit of the time that orchestral music could not be separated from choral music. More than anything else, this event seems to have been a vehicle for Robert Burton to exhibit his musical prowess, but it did attempt to recreate a festival atmosphere, and it did include orchestral playing through accompanying the chorus in works such as Haydn's *Seasons* and Beethoven's *Mount of Olives*, and the playing of some instrumental works such as

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<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 November 1894.

<sup>391</sup> Quoted in *The Leeds Musical Festival Album, 1901*, Leeds Local Studies Library, LQ780.79, L51L.

<sup>392</sup> *Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular*, 14 (1870), p.539.

<sup>393</sup> The *Leeds Mercury*, 30 March 1861, gives a detailed account of the ethos of the event.

<sup>394</sup> Programme for the Easter Musical Festival, 1863, Leeds Local Studies Library, LP780.73 L517.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*

the overture to Weber's *Der Freischütz* and Mozart's Symphony in E Flat Major, K.543. The orchestra generally consisted of 'about forty, chiefly of Leeds and its neighbourhood, with a few from Manchester and other places'.<sup>396</sup> It seems that the 'annual' Easter Festivals finished in 1864. In the same year the local newspaper published an article suggesting that gathering musicians together for a one-off event such as the Easter Festival was not enough, and that the lack of orchestral activity in Leeds was ruining its reputation as a musical town:

In the strength and excellence of its choral combinations, Leeds need fear no comparison with any provincial town; but we could point to a time when it had better orchestral bands. The latter fact is a serious drawback in our claims to a high position as a musical town, and ought if possible to be remedied, as no 'impromptu' combination, however good the separate parts may be, can be expected to play with the unity and precision of a regularly practised band under a skilful leader.<sup>397</sup>

It was Burton's rival, William Spark who attempted to remedy the orchestral situation. In the autumn of 1864 he formed an orchestra to take part in the 'Leeds Orchestral Concerts' given at the Town Hall. The orchestra consisted of around 45 musicians, both local amateurs and professionals, with the principals engaged mainly from Hallé's band and the Liverpool Philharmonic Society. The following is the programme given by this orchestra at the third out of the five concerts:

#### PART 1

Overture...*Die Zauberflöte*...Mozart  
Aria... 'A quelle nuit'... (*Le Domino Noir*) Auber  
Invitation à la Valse (for the orchestra) Weber  
Song... 'Gentle Flower'... (*Love's Ransom*) Hatton  
Symphony in A Major No.4... (*The Italian*) Mendelssohn

#### PART 2

Overture...*Guillaume Tell*...Rossini  
Air with Variations... 'Ah vous dirai-je'...Adam  
Flute Obligato...Mr de Jong  
Operatic Selection...*Robert le Diable*...Meyerbeer  
Air... 'Angels ever bright and fair'... (*Theodora*) Handel  
Overture...*Leonora*...Beethoven

This sample programme demonstrates that this orchestra was willing to tackle full-scale orchestral works, and, according to the review in the local newspaper, to execute them well:

[Mendelssohn's 'Italian' Symphony] is a composition which tests the higher qualities of a band as much as, or even more than, its mere instrumental ability. The orchestra which obeys the baton of Dr Spark has already shown that it possesses these qualities, and they were

<sup>396</sup> *Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular*, 9 (1860), p.271.

<sup>397</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 25 January 1864.



probably at neither of the previous concerts more powerfully displayed than in the execution of Mendelssohn's symphony.<sup>398</sup>

Despite the emphasis on the orchestral, the concert was still supported by vocal soloists; a purely orchestral concert at this time was perceived to be undesirable to audiences. After attracting positive press reviews and praise from local musicians,<sup>399</sup> the committee of the Leeds Orchestral Concerts advertised subscriptions for concerts to be given during the coming season. However, 'the series of concerts given last year were a sacrifice to true art [but] few worshippers approached the shrine'.<sup>400</sup> There were not enough subscribers for a second season, and the concerts were abandoned. Later in the decade Robert Burton attempted to keep the idea of a local orchestra alive. He wrote in the local newspaper: 'we have the finest choral bodies in the kingdom, but in the whole of the county of York we have not the resources for a good band'.<sup>401</sup> This was not necessarily the case since Halifax, a flourishing textile town near to Leeds and Bradford, had possessed an orchestral society of some form for most of the century.<sup>402</sup> It would have stung the pride of those advocates of a permanent orchestra in Leeds if they had read the programmes of the Halifax Philharmonic Society in the 1870s, which claimed that '[f]or many years past, Halifax has been the only town in the West Riding possessing a completely resident orchestra'.<sup>403</sup> However, the inability to sustain an orchestra was not a problem that was peculiar to Leeds. Charles Stanford, in 1908, wrote of the situation affecting the entire country:

England, as a whole, has one very strong and one very weak point in her musical position. Her strength lies in the wealth of choral societies; her weakness in the dearth of provincial orchestras [...] orchestral music being absent, one of the chief investigators to musical invention is absent too, and a large and healthy increase of English composers is not to be expected.<sup>404</sup>

The question of a Leeds orchestra continued to be discussed, since many thought orchestral music would educate and refine the people. The *Leeds Mercury*, on 27

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 January 1865.

<sup>399</sup> In its review of the last concert the *Leeds Mercury*, 9 March 1865, stated: 'The series of concerts which were thus brought to a conclusion have been in the highest degree creditable to the musical taste of Leeds – not certainly because they have received a large measure of support from the general public, but from the mere fact that they have been given'.

<sup>400</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 3 October 1865.

<sup>401</sup> *The Yorkshire Orchestra*, 1 (1867), p.9. *The Yorkshire Orchestra* was a weekly newspaper that published from December 1867–April 1868.

<sup>402</sup> See Cowgill, 'The Business of Music'.

<sup>403</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p.86

<sup>404</sup> 'The Development of Orchestras in England'. Charles Stanford, *Studies and Memories* (London: A. Constable and Co., 1908), pp.25–6.

November 1872 for example, stated that 'orchestral music should be freely cultivated as a means of educational improvement, no less than as affording very choice recreation'. There were various attempts to address the problem by the formation of a number of orchestral societies. The Leeds Philharmonic Society, for example, rather than having to rely on outside musicians, wanted to form a Leeds orchestra to accompany them in their concerts. The progress was slow but in March 1896 the local newspaper reported that Leeds possessed 'no fewer than three orchestral societies, who are all, by turn, giving concerts within the interval of a week'.<sup>405</sup> Although none of these orchestral societies had much longevity, it was at this time that the question of a municipal orchestra really developed. In 1896 Edgar and Percy Haddock, principals of the Leeds School of Music, which they had established in 1892 to offer teaching 'on a level with the best Continental conservatoires',<sup>406</sup> took matters into their own hands and established the Leeds Permanent Orchestra, conducted by Alfred Benton, which gave high-class orchestral concerts in the Town Hall. The Haddock brothers had been attempting to establish an orchestra in Leeds since 1886, when they began their 'Musical Evenings'.<sup>407</sup> Since there was an emphasis on chamber music in these concerts, the Victoria Hall would be laid out as if it were a drawing room, with 'chairs, carpet and floral accessories'.<sup>408</sup> This is very much in the style of the Musical Union concerts, founded by John Ella in London in 1845.<sup>409</sup> After the first of the Haddock's 'Musical Evenings' held in the Town Hall, *The Era* wrote of the contribution they were making to the cause of a Leeds orchestra:

As the local orchestra question is much discussed at present, the following will no doubt be of interest:- At the sixth 'musical evening', and last of the present series, given in the Town Hall, Leeds, on the 4<sup>th</sup> inst., Mr Edgar Haddock put forth a programme that may exercise more influence over musical matters in Yorkshire than any of its predecessors, as for the first time a complete orchestra consisting entirely of local players was brought forward publicly. The strings, upwards of 100 in number, were specially selected from the advanced students of Mr Haddock's Leeds Academy of Music, whilst the full compliment of wind, both wood and brass, was drawn from Leeds and its immediate neighbourhood, making a complete orchestra of 171 performers.<sup>410</sup>

It seems that whilst this orchestra employed local players, it was still not professional.

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<sup>405</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 25 March 1896.

<sup>406</sup> *Magazine of Music*, 9 (1892), p.225. Although the school was sometimes referred to as the Leeds College of Music, is it not connected to the institution of the same name in existence today.

<sup>407</sup> The first advertisement for these concerts appeared in the *Leeds Mercury*, 9 January 1886.

<sup>408</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 31 October 1896.

<sup>409</sup> See Christina Bashford, *The Pursuit of High Culture: John Ella and Chamber Music in Victorian London* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007).

<sup>410</sup> *The Era*, 21 March 1891.

Although the musicians were keen to establish a permanent orchestra in Leeds, and the cause was frequently promoted by the Leeds press, the public did not show their support of the endeavour and the concerts were badly attended.<sup>411</sup> Unfortunately it seems that this endeavour was short-lived, seemingly only lasting one year. The musicians of Leeds did not give up, however, and neither did Fred Spark. After the Festival of 1898, he ensured that part of the profits was set aside for the formation of a permanent orchestra in Leeds. In a further attempt to involve the Council, on 4th October 1899 a deputation of local professional musicians presented a memorandum to the Leeds Council which stated:

The Corporation of Leeds are urged to recognise, foster, and support an orchestra of instrumental players who shall adequately interpret the works of the great masters of all countries for the education and pleasure of the citizens of Leeds.<sup>412</sup>

Despite the work of Fred Spark, who formed his own scheme of support, the canvassing of other interested parties, a number of meetings with the Council, and the general support of the Lord Mayor, the Council as a whole were not persuaded. A municipal orchestra would need a lot of money, and the Leeds Council at the end of the nineteenth century was not prepared to invest in such a scheme.<sup>413</sup> The debate continued to rage, reaching the point of meetings between the Leeds Council and Leeds musicians. Even the rivalry between Leeds and Manchester was not enough to secure the funding needed:

It is surely not entirely quixotic to hold it possible for Leeds to do as much in 1899 as was done in 1857 in Manchester, less populous then than Leeds is now, by a foreigner who took up the work simply as a private enterprise, and carried it on for thirty-seven years with such success that the Hallé Orchestra is even now a 'going concern'.<sup>414</sup>

During the 1800s, the performance of orchestral music in the town hall was reasonably frequent, but never had the civic or public support afforded to choral performances. The establishment of a municipal or even a more permanent orchestra in Leeds was a debate for the next century.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 October 1896.

<sup>412</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 5 October 1899.

<sup>413</sup> Demaine, *Individual and Institution*, pp.139-40.

<sup>414</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 18 January 1899.

<sup>415</sup> For more on orchestral activity in Leeds in the 1890s see Demaine, *Individual and Institution*, pp.134-43.

#### 4.12: Charitable Performances

In addition to the choral and orchestral societies, there were other bodies from within the town that used the Town Hall for musical performances. Regular patrons were the temperance societies, such as the Leeds Band of Hope League, who gave an annual concert. This could be considered surprising since the Town Hall was not always a temperate building. Immediately after its opening the Town Hall refreshment rooms sold, 'Wine, Spirits, Confectionary, Sandwiches, Bottled Ale, Bottled Porter, Tea and Coffee',<sup>416</sup> although it is probable that the alcoholic refreshments would not have been on sale when the Hall was hired for temperance celebrations. The use of Leeds Town Hall by the temperance societies may simply have been because of the lack of any other public building in Leeds that could house the large audiences attracted to these events. It may also have been because of the building's perceived respectability. Although difficult to say for certain, a search for any mention of the Town Hall refreshment rooms in the *Leeds Mercury* seems to suggest that they closed at some point in the 1860s.

Outside the Festival, the Town Hall continued to be used for charitable concerts. Benefit concerts, normally to raise money for the unfortunate families of deceased Leeds individuals, were frequently given in the Hall, whilst concerts for particular Leeds charities, such as the Railway Servants' Orphan Fund, were also given. Other one-off concerts were held in the Town Hall in aid of the Leeds Infirmary or the 'Leeds Charities' in general. The following is one example:

Two harp and organ concerts were given at the Leeds Town Hall on Saturday afternoon and evening, in aid of the funds of the Leeds Infirmary. The attendance in the afternoon was only moderate, but in the evening the hall was filled.<sup>417</sup>

From its opening, Leeds Town Hall was used to educate the lower classes musically. A further way that this was implemented was the use of the building by the promoters of the Tonic Sol-Fa movement. Various classes from Leeds and the surrounding area would come together and give a concert in the Town Hall to demonstrate their achievements:

The annual assembly of the West Riding Tonic Sol-fa Classes took place at Leeds on Thursday night, when the members gave a performance of sacred and secular music in the Victoria Hall [...] and the object was to give a practical demonstration of the efficacy of the

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<sup>416</sup> Committee meeting, 1 July 1859. Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>417</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 12 January 1885.

method in the musical education of the people, and in this respect it was eminently successful.<sup>418</sup>

There can be no doubt that Leeds Town Hall was an active and important music venue in the nineteenth century. Through the enterprise and fortitude of individuals such as Spark, Burton, Ramsden and the Haddocks, in addition to the dutiful efforts of the Town Council – that is, though a combination of municipal provision and private musical entrepreneurship – Leeds Town Hall became central to music-making in the town during the nineteenth century, enabling people, regardless of class, to experience a wide variety of music, *en masse*. In the words of Town Hall organist William Spark, the Leeds Town Hall of the nineteenth century existed ‘as an embodied answer to the demand for means of doing justice to the musical taste earnestly craving gratification among all classes in Leeds’.<sup>419</sup>

#### 4.13: Alternative Venues

Despite the vital role Leeds Town Hall played in the musical life of the town, there were other venues in central Leeds that housed concerts. The aforementioned Albion Street Music Hall remained an important musical building even after the erection of the Town Hall. As early as 1859, however, only a year after the opening of the new building, Mayhall’s ‘Annals of Yorkshire’ noted of the Albion Street Music Hall: ‘The hall has considerably diminished in importance since the erection of the Town Hall’.<sup>420</sup> Perhaps in an effort to compete with the town-hall facilities, the Music Hall was refurbished in 1859 and the *Leeds Mercury* was optimistic about its future, identifying a place for the building as a music venue in Leeds alongside the Town Hall:

The saloon has always been celebrated for its acoustic properties, and with its new attractions, it is not improbable that for classical chamber and other concerts it will now be in much greater requisition than it has been since the dazzling grandeur of our Town Hall usurped an almost exclusive monopoly of music entertainments.<sup>421</sup>

The Music Hall did indeed continue to function as a venue for smaller concerts, but ultimately could not compete in the new musical climate and closed in 1870. The above article gives some indication of the impact Leeds Town Hall had on the musical life of the town after its opening, gaining a ‘monopoly of music entertainments’. According to the *Leeds Mercury* in 1870, ‘One of the most curious characteristics of the

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<sup>418</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 26 November 1859.

<sup>419</sup> William Spark, *Musical Memories*, p.100.

<sup>420</sup> John Mayhall, *The Annals of Yorkshire*, p.177.

<sup>421</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 15 October 1859.

town consists of the number of small concert rooms which abound in it'. The article goes on to say, however, that these concert rooms 'are for the most part connected with low publichouses, and the company frequenting them is anything but select'.<sup>422</sup> Places such as the Church Institute, the Albert Hall and the Philosophical Hall were frequently used for smaller musical performances but, because of their size, did not rival the Town Hall as a music venue. Unfortunately for the Town Hall, however, in July 1885 a new venue was opened that would. Reports of a new public hall for Leeds appeared in the press from about 1876. In January of that year the *Leeds Mercury* reported:

We learn that a project is being set afoot for erecting a new public hall in Leeds, suitable for concerts or other entertainments on an extensive scale. Designs are being prepared, and a site is expected to be secure in a central and convenient situation. The intention of the promoters, who will probably form themselves into a company for the carrying out of the scheme, is to provide a hall which will comfortably accommodate between 4,000 and 5,000 people.<sup>423</sup>

The resulting building was the Leeds Coliseum, built on Cookridge Street, quite near to the Town Hall, and opened in July 1885. As the above report indicated, this building was built specifically for the purposes of entertainment. It was 'an amphitheatre in form, with gallery, and is designed to afford comfortable sitting accommodation for 3,000 persons'.<sup>424</sup> *Jackson's Guide to Leeds* in 1889 said of the building:

The Coliseum is the largest and most convenient public hall in the town, and well provided with the adjuncts of its use. Externally it has pretensions to architectural baldness; internally it is suited to its purpose.<sup>425</sup>

There were many in Leeds who thought that the town needed a new concert hall, mainly because they considered the Town Hall's Victoria Hall to be too small.

It has been almost impossible to make a first-class concert at the Victoria Hall pay, simply because that noble apartment will not accommodate a sufficient number of persons to allow of popular prices being charged. [...] In the Coliseum we have a public hall which is sure to become very popular, and which must supply a want that has long been sorely felt.<sup>426</sup>

The large seating capacity of the Coliseum continued to be the most reported attribute of the building; the *Leeds Mercury*, on 20 July 1885 for example, talks of the Coliseum as being capable of accommodating double the number of the Victoria Hall. However, the new building was also considered to be more comfortable than the Victoria Hall, mainly because it was not plagued with the draughts that were inevitable in a building

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<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 July 1870.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 January 1876.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 March 1881.

<sup>425</sup> *Jackson's New Illustrated Guide to Leeds and Environs* (Leeds: Richard Jackson, 1889), p.173.

<sup>426</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 11 July 1885.

like the Town Hall,<sup>427</sup> and because it was lit with electric lighting, therefore enabling a cooler atmosphere. There were attempts to address these problems in the Town Hall but the changes were initiated not by the Council as a result of the competition of the new hall, but by the Festival Committee, who wished to increase the size and comfort level of their audiences. Although the Festival Committee ultimately had no legal claim to use the Town Hall, and no authority in local government apart from those members who were on both the Festival Committee and the Council, the holding of the Festival did influence changes to the building. In order to increase the capacity for the Festival of 1874 the Festival Committee gained permission to erect a gallery in the Victoria Hall which seated approximately 600.<sup>428</sup> This structure caused much controversy. Although all could see the benefit of increasing the audience, some thought the gallery should be removed as soon as possible after the Festival since it ruined the elegance of the Victoria Hall, whilst others wanted it to be a permanent structure in order to increase audience capacity at all Town Hall concerts:

A gallery in the Victoria Hall is not a thing of beauty, but it is a necessity if the Musical Festival is to be maintained, or if it is to fulfil the object of bringing much-needed philanthropic aid to the charitable institutions of the town.<sup>429</sup>

As the century progressed the various galleries that were erected were each more improved in appearance and capacity than the previous, until eventually a permanent structure was sanctioned in the 1894. The Musical Festival was also the first to use electric light in the Town Hall in 1883, and to erect inner folding doors in the Victoria Hall to prevent draughts.

Despite the improvements to the Town Hall, the new Coliseum was considered by many to be the superior concert room:

The Coliseum [...] from its capacity and acoustic properties, is the only hall in the town where concerts can be given with perfect success, and it is fitted and furnished with due regard to the comfort of the audience.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> In a report of the Philharmonic's *Messiah* given at the Victoria Hall in 1889, it was noted: 'The only drawback to complete enjoyment was the prevalence of hurricanes of draught, such as have often been complained of, but which it apparently passes the wit, or the will, of the Corporation to put an end to'. *Leeds Express*, 19 December 1889. In some adverts in the 1890s they even advertised that the Victoria Hall would be 'well warmed' before the concert, e.g. *Leeds Mercury*, 29 January 1895.

<sup>428</sup> In 1877 the Festival Committee paid £70 towards the £250 structure. Committee Meeting, 28 June 1877, Corporate Property Committee Minutes, 10 November 1868 to 26 February 1874, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC29/1/1.

<sup>429</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 2 July 1891.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 May 1892.

In the period following its erection, the Coliseum thrived as a music venue and was soon in direct competition with the town hall; more often than not, the Coliseum won. Within four months of its opening a correspondent to the *Yorkshire Post* suggested that, 'the Coliseum appears to have become our principal concert room in Leeds'.<sup>431</sup> Since the new venue was bigger, more adaptable, more comfortable and probably cheaper to hire than the town hall,<sup>432</sup> many of the regular local societies and visiting artists shifted allegiance, in some cases as an experiment, in other cases as a permanent transfer. Concert series were established that were almost identical to those at the Town Hall. For example, Saturday evening concerts at low admission prices were established for the same purpose as those given by the Council:

The price admission will be WITHIN THE REACH OF ALL, thus enabling those who are debarred from attending entertainments of a first-class character on other evenings to avail themselves of the opportunity provided in the COLISEUM SATURDAY CONCERTS.<sup>433</sup>

In addition, the Leeds Popular Concerts that were on occasion given at the Town Hall were also given at the Coliseum. Although such concerts were potentially damaging to the musical life of the Town Hall, there seems to have been no concern on the part of the Council regarding the competition. In fact, the Mayor and other councillors were present at the laying of the foundation stone of the Coliseum, presided over by Sir Andrew Fairbairn, MP. In his speech for the occasion Fairbairn said that the new building would supply a long-felt want in Leeds:

The Victoria Hall, which was the first room in the borough and ought, therefore, to be the best in regard to its acoustic properties, was one of the worst halls in the town in that respect. This building would remedy this defect, and the town would henceforth possess a hall that would belong to no particular institution, but one which could be let out freely for all purposes.<sup>434</sup>

The presence of the Mayor and councillors of Leeds on this occasion seems to indicate their approval of the scheme. It could be argued that the Town Council did not object because, as long as their quota of music at the Town Hall had been covered and they had fulfilled their duty, they were not overly concerned about the prominence of the building as a music venue. Alternatively, they may just have had supreme confidence in the magnificence of their building. If this was the case, they were right. After the initial enthusiasm surrounding the facilities of Coliseum, the building lost its novelty

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<sup>431</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 12 November 1885.

<sup>432</sup> Newspaper reports give the impression that this was the case but it has not been possible to locate any evidence of the hire charges for the Coliseum.

<sup>433</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 1 January 1887.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 August 1882.



and people came to remember why they had originally used the Town Hall. Eventually the press reviews comparing the two buildings turned in the favour of Victoria Hall:

It is now five years since the Philharmonic Society occupied the Town Hall for this annual performance [*Messiah*], and it was impossible not to be struck by the advantage accorded to them by the resonant qualities of the building. The Victoria Hall being well filled, there was not too much resonance; and not only did the voices sound brighter and clearer than in the Coliseum, but it almost seemed as though the members of the chorus sang with greater ease and freedom in this larger space.<sup>435</sup>

Although the Coliseum had a large audience capacity, it seems the Victoria Hall was better adapted to musical sound:

Although the Victoria Hall will not hold as many as the Coliseum, this financial disadvantage is somewhat atoned for by the aid given to the musical effect by the resonant qualities of the building.<sup>436</sup>

Ultimately, despite the size, facilities, and acoustic properties of the two halls, the Coliseum could never compete with the town hall as a status symbol, and consequently the Town Hall continued to be a venue for high-class performances: it is significant that the Musical Festivals stayed at the Town Hall, despite the greater profits through bigger audiences that would have been possible at the Coliseum.

#### 4.14: Conclusion

Leeds Town Hall was an innovator. The building was a 'town hall' in the true sense of the word – it was built in such a way as to house all the important business of the town. It was the home of local government and municipal business, but it was also the hub of musical life in Leeds – it was the first 'complete' town hall.<sup>437</sup> At the opening of Leeds Town Hall the Mayor had said in his speech to the Queen, 'For the mere purposes of municipal government a less spacious and costly building might have sufficed',<sup>438</sup> but the desire to erect a building that would be a centre for all the needs of the community defined its novel design and huge cost. Leeds Town Hall was built as a monument of self-promotion; a symbol of the prosperity and commercial achievements

<sup>435</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 December 1889.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 November 1887.

<sup>437</sup> At its opening Leeds Town Hall was indeed 'complete' in housing all the need of local government under one roof. However, by 1876 the town administration had outgrown even this building and a competition was launched for the design of the Public Offices. According to the *Leeds Mercury*, 25 November 1876, the council did not want to imitate the massive scale of the Town Hall, 'for economical reasons', and also thought it necessary 'that these buildings should be so designed as not to appear to compete with the Town Hall in importance'. Even though the Town Hall had not served the complete needs of local government for long, it was still important to the Council that it retained its status as 'the' municipal palace.

<sup>438</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 11 September 1858.

of the town and its superiority over its neighbours. In the words of the official programme for the inauguration of the Leeds Town Hall, 'Her Majesty comes amongst us to inaugurate our noble Town Hall, which will for ages to come remain a memorial of the prosperity of Leeds under her most beneficent rule'.<sup>439</sup> The greatest tribute to the foresight of those who commissioned and designed Leeds Town Hall is that in the twenty-first century it is still used as a municipal public building and a first-class music venue; it is not simply a monument to 1858. The building remains a great architectural accomplishment, holding a place in *The Best Buildings of England* where it is stated: 'Leeds can be proud of its town hall, one of the most convincing buildings of its date in the country, and of the classical buildings of its date no doubt the most successful'.<sup>440</sup> It was a seminal building. Leeds Town Hall established the concept of the town hall as the nexus for the political control of the community, becoming a prototype for future municipal buildings.<sup>441</sup> A 'Historic Building Report' on the Town Hall by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England acknowledges that:

It was probably the first town hall in the country to provide offices for all civic administration, and its basic layout of central hall surrounded by offices became the most popular of the nineteenth century, being used for both classical buildings, and gothic ones such as Manchester Town Hall.<sup>442</sup>

Despite its daily usage as the centre of local government in Leeds, the Town Hall was a truly diverse building, used for a variety of public meetings and social gatherings. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Leeds Town Hall the *Yorkshire Post* reflected: 'What congresses, concerts, town's meetings, bazaars, has the Victoria Hall not sheltered'!<sup>443</sup> However, although the Victoria Hall had many uses, it was for the purposes of music-making that it was most often engaged. Leeds Town Hall was not built as a direct result of the need for a new music venue in the town, despite the reports of some musicians of the town,<sup>444</sup> but the provision of a concert hall

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<sup>439</sup> John Arthur Ikin, *Official Programme of the Inauguration of the New Town Hall*, 1858. Leeds Local Studies Library, 942.75 L51L.

<sup>440</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Best Buildings of England: An Anthology* by Bridget Cherry and John Newman (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1986), p.186

<sup>441</sup> There are copies of the building not only in Britain, for example in Morley, Bolton and Portsmouth, but throughout the world, such as Durban Town Hall. For more see Linstrum, *Towers and Colonnades*, p.40.

<sup>442</sup> Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, Leeds Town Hall, Historic Building Report by James Darwin, June 1996. Leeds Local Studies Library, LQP 725.1 HIS

<sup>443</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 7 September 1908.

<sup>444</sup> Geo. Haddock in 1906 maintained that 'as a direct result of the gradual growth of the love for and support of music in Leeds, the Town Hall had been erected. [...] It was mainly a result of a musical development'. See Haddock, *Some Early Musical Recollections*, pp.116-7.

was an important factor in its erection. Similarly, although the Town Hall was not built for the holding of a musical festival, its erection enabled such an event to become a possibility; as the *Musical Standard* acknowledged in 1894, 'the story of the Leeds Festival is that of the Leeds Town Hall'<sup>445</sup> – the two cannot be separated. Herbert Thompson suggests that, 'In the eyes of the musical public of the country, Leeds Town Hall has been associated chiefly with the festivals which have been held in it'.<sup>446</sup> Whilst this may be true, there was much music-making in the Town Hall outside the influence of the Musical Festival, organised by the Council, by local societies and entrepreneurs, and by visiting artists. Leeds Town Hall was seen as a building that, through its architecture, could elevate the taste, but through music, could also 'improve' the citizens of Leeds:

Once set the fashion, accomplish our first festival, make arrangements for its annual celebration, and throw in a few minor concerts here and there, parenthetically as it were, and my head on it, Gentlemen, the true use of our Town-hall would begin to show itself. For one 'public meeting', depend on it, you would have a dozen concerts. Set to work methodically with these, cheapen them, blend the simply amusing with the elevating, draw the people onwards from the animal excitement of beating time to the whirl of a waltz, to the intellectual enjoyment of a thorough musical combination; above all, show them that a symphony of Beethoven or a chorus of Handel costs no more in the enjoyment than a skin full of brandy and water, and, depend upon it, Gentlemen, there will be less need of temperance societies, policemen, and perhaps, assize courts and full bottomed wigs.<sup>447</sup>

If one considers other public buildings that were used for musical performances in the second half of the nineteenth century outside the music hall, such as Birmingham Town Hall and both the Liverpool and Bradford St George's Halls, the variety of concerts, however eclectic, will often be the same – the local choral society, the church societies, the benefit concerts, the visiting entrepreneurs and artists, and so on. In the case of Leeds, however, it is not the performances themselves but the circumstances behind the scenes that determined the influence of the town hall on the musical life of the town. The performance of music in Leeds Town Hall was strictly governed by the Council, influenced by their perceived obligation to provide its citizens with music in their Town Hall. Any musical performance in the Town Hall took place on the Council's terms, without any obvious regard for how this might impact on the musical life of the town overall. Because of, or possibly in spite of, the Council's interference, the Leeds Town Hall of the Victorian era truly became 'a municipal homage to art'.<sup>448</sup>

<sup>445</sup> *Musical Standard*, 25 August 1894.

<sup>446</sup> Herbert Thompson, *Radio Times*, 3 April 1931.

<sup>447</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 22 July 1854.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 October 1895.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

Representing a link between municipal and artistic life, the nineteenth-century town hall was intended to be a monument to the glory, abilities and achievements of the town in which it was built. Due in part to the increase in and growing demand for public concerts at this time, such town halls also emerged as a new type of performance space for music, particularly in recently industrialised areas, and many became integral to the musical life of the town. To this end, the town halls of Stalybridge, Birmingham and Leeds have presented an informative comparison. Each case-study has demonstrated that town-hall performances were a regular phenomenon in all of these towns, playing a large part in general local music-making. However, as we have seen, this similarity conceals a number of underlying differences in the use of the three town halls as music venues.

#### 5.1: Town-Hall Conception and Design

The main distinction between the town halls of Stalybridge, Birmingham and Leeds can be seen in their conception and design. It is easy to make assumptions about these buildings, based on some historical knowledge. Michael Reed, for example, states that Stalybridge built its town hall as a direct result of the civic pride generated by the building of the first cotton mill in 1776.<sup>1</sup> Reed places this statement within the historical context of industrialisation and urbanisation, suggesting that 'places which once had been rural villages rapidly became towns and in due course acquired their own sense of civic pride, to be given expression in the building of town halls'.<sup>2</sup> Whilst this was certainly the case for many towns in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and, indeed, Stalybridge was one of those 'rural villages' which rapidly became a town, deeper historical research shows that this was not the reason for the building of Stalybridge Town Hall. As discussed in chapter 2, the building in Stalybridge was conceived and designed as a market, was not referred to as a 'town hall' until some months after its opening, and was not properly designed as a town hall

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Reed, *The Landscape of Britain: From the Beginnings to 1914* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.290.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

until the refurbishments of the 1880s. Some historians believe that Birmingham Town Hall, if not built as the home of the local government, was conceived as a political forum, since the building was the scene of some of the great political debates of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Further research has demonstrated, however, that, whilst the building was indeed of immense importance to the political classes, where thousands gathered for great public meetings,<sup>4</sup> Birmingham Town Hall was conceived through the ingenuity of Joseph Moore and the Musical Festival Committee, and was designed primarily as a concert hall. Leeds Town Hall, as the first 'municipal palace' built as a great demonstration of civic pride, could be mistaken for a purely ornamental building whose main purpose was to advertise the wealth and status of one of the most influential and prosperous industrial centres of the mid-nineteenth century. Whilst this was certainly the case, Leeds Town Hall was as much of a utilitarian building as Stalybridge Town Hall. It was conceived and designed to house all the needs of local government, including that of music provision, and every part of its structure had a practical use. Even the tower, thought by some to be an unnecessary ornamental feature of the building, was at one point used for storage, although this was soon abandoned since it was not weatherproof.<sup>5</sup>

Stalybridge Town Hall was thus designed as a market, the town hall of Birmingham was built specifically as a concert hall, and Leeds Town Hall housed a complex of facilities for local government, including the council chambers, the fire station and prison cells. Although all were given the title of 'town hall', these buildings were entirely different in design; the original Stalybridge Town Hall was built in the plain Greek Doric style, Birmingham Town Hall was built as a replica Roman temple, and Leeds Town Hall was designed in a 'sublime fusion of a powerful French neo-classicism and English baroque'.<sup>6</sup> However, despite their great differences, all three buildings were ultimately used for music-making. At Stalybridge for much of the century, musical activity was held in the 'large room' that, although built with an 'orchestra', had no organ and no proper performance facilities; it was at one point referred to as more of a 'lumber store' than a music room.<sup>7</sup> It was only after the opening of the refurbished building in 1883 that the 'large room' was enlarged and

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<sup>3</sup> See Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, chapter 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.207.

<sup>5</sup> See Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p.30.

<sup>6</sup> Author's Interview with John Thorp.

<sup>7</sup> *Manchester Times*, 26 November 1853.

facilities for music-making were improved. In stark contrast, the music room in Birmingham Town Hall was the '*raison d'être* of the building'.<sup>8</sup> Designed to the specifications of the greatest halls in Europe, as stipulated by the committee of the musical festival, Birmingham Town Hall was a purpose-built concert hall containing one of the best organs in Europe, with every necessary facility for the performance of music. Although Leeds Town Hall was designed as a local government building, a committee was specifically formed to ensure that the large room, the Victoria Hall, was fit 'for musical purposes'.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, like Birmingham, the Victoria Hall at Leeds was designed for music-making, again housing an organ that was at the forefront of modern technology.

Despite the differences in their design, both Birmingham and Leeds town halls set important precedents. Indeed, it is possible to argue that, without Birmingham Town Hall, Leeds Town Hall would not have existed in its present form. At Birmingham it was the musical festival that required such an enormous building, rather than the functions of local government, for which a much smaller and cheaper building would have sufficed. Even in the case of Leeds, as the Mayor said in his speech to the Queen at the opening of the Town Hall, 'For the mere purposes of municipal government a less spacious and costly building might have sufficed',<sup>10</sup> but in this case it was the desire to erect a building as a centre for all the needs of the community, rather than specifically as a concert hall, that was the defining factor. And besides, it had to surpass any other public building in the West Riding – it was deliberately designed to be bigger than other provincial halls.

Birmingham Town Hall set an architectural precedent for future gigantic town halls such as Leeds, making a purpose-built concert hall a prerequisite and establishing a model for the coming period of extensive municipal building. Leeds Town Hall became a prototype itself, using the precedent set by Birmingham as its foundation, yet establishing the concept of the 'town hall' as the nexus for the political control of the community, with musical provision an extension of that via the principles of rational recreation. The original Stalybridge Town Hall was built before Birmingham Town Hall, and therefore before the age of gigantic, symbolic municipal buildings. Even when the structure was renovated and extended in the 1880s, the Stalybridge Council

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<sup>8</sup> *The Builder*, 36 (1878), p.822.

<sup>9</sup> Town Hall Committee Minutes, 17 January 1851 to 25 September 1857, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC20/1/1.

<sup>10</sup> Reported in the *Leeds Mercury*, 11 September 1858.

were restricted by a lack of money and available land. Nevertheless, the desire to use the building to house all administrative and legislative needs of the town, from the Council Chamber to the mortuary, indicates a desire to build a 'municipal palace' in the manner of Leeds Town Hall. In addition, the renovation of the large room to create better facilities for musical performances and public meetings suggests an aspiration to draw on the Birmingham legacy – a wish for Stalybridge Town Hall to be used as the principal music-venue for the people of the town.

In actual fact, the scale and design of Stalybridge Town Hall is probably more indicative of the nineteenth-century town hall than Birmingham and Leeds. Most small towns, particularly, in the north, possessed a small but utilitarian town-hall building that was ultimately used to house the workings of local government, and may also have been used for music-making through the provision of a large room and the want of an alternative music venue in the town.<sup>11</sup> Buildings such as Birmingham and Leeds were exceptions. They were trail-blazers that influenced subsequent town halls, but most nineteenth-century towns, like Stalybridge, had neither the money nor the space to build on such a scale.

## 5.2: Town-Hall Organs

One of the most important facilities for the provision of music-making in a town hall was an organ. Stalybridge Town Hall did not have such an instrument, and no reports referring to an aspiration for an organ in the building have come to light in the local newspapers or the Council minutes. Consequently, the performers at Stalybridge Town Hall had to be self-sufficient; there was no organ to substitute as an orchestra and there was no organist to work as a ready-made accompanist. It seems that the Town Hall did not even have its own piano, since the *Stalybridge Reporter* states in 1885, after the refurbishments to the large room, that the piano for the Old Folk's Tea Party was 'lent for the occasion by Mr. W. Tinker, jun., Market-street'.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, unless a performer or society could afford to hire a piano they would have to rely on a musical band of some sort,<sup>13</sup> which was likely to again increase their expenditure.

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<sup>11</sup> See Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*.

<sup>12</sup> 27 June 1885. It seems that Mr Tinker had a music shop of some kind on Market Street, and advertised in the *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 23 (1882), p.456, as a 'pianoforte and harmonium tuner and repairer'.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, note 50 in chapter 2.

In contrast, both Birmingham and Leeds Town Halls were built with huge, technologically innovative organs. As stated in chapter 3, when the Birmingham organ was installed the presence of an organ in a town hall was unusual, if not unknown, and was only erected at Birmingham due to the instrument being so crucial a feature of the festival's sacred performances, which had previously been held in a church. As Mark Girouard states, through Birmingham, 'an organ became an essential status symbol for all similar buildings'.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, by the mid-century it had become imperative for town halls, or at least those who could afford them, to house a 'grand' organ that was as much a symbol of progress and status as the building itself, and Leeds followed this pattern. The installation of an organ in a town hall greatly affected subsequent music-making in the building. In both Leeds and Birmingham it was used to provide music that was designed to educate and 'improve' the masses, and both towns had an organist to act as instrumental guardian and musical educator. The Leeds Council felt a duty to provide the citizens of Leeds with cheap musical performances, and considered the organ and their organist to be the perfect means of doing so. The situation differed in Birmingham, since for much of the century the organ belonged to the General Hospital and they employed the organist. Nevertheless, here the organ and organist are linked with the provision of 'music for the people', although it was the General Hospital and not the municipality that was doing the providing. However, once the instrument was the property of the Birmingham Council it was still used to provide cheap, or free, concerts for working people. Victorian councils were notoriously frugal, and yet both those of Birmingham and Leeds were prepared to spend money on the upkeep of an expensive instrument and a musician to give it voice. But councils saw the provision of cheap organ concerts as their responsibility since, according to the Leeds Council, 'such entertainments were calculated to refine the taste of the inhabitants, and withdraw them from places debasing their character, thus making their population better servants and better citizens'.<sup>15</sup> Both Birmingham and Leeds town halls developed their own set of policies regarding the use of the instrument and the employment of an organist, but it seems that each was working towards a sense of the greater good – to make music accessible to the masses.

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<sup>14</sup> Girouard, *The English Town*, p.207.

<sup>15</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 16 September 1858.



### 5.3: Musical Festivals

Often a town hall would enable or encourage the holding of a musical festival, prompting the engagement of international artists and the commissioning of new repertoire. Such events hold an integral place in the history of music in nineteenth-century Britain, and here the town hall played a central role. A triennial musical festival had a significant influence on the musical life of a town hall and the local musical culture of the town in which it was placed. Some thought this to be a positive influence, some negative. Stalybridge differed from Leeds and Birmingham in not hosting a musical festival, however, which had a great effect on the role of Stalybridge Town Hall as a music venue. A musical festival gave a venue a certain status, making it a fashionable symbol of respectability and philanthropy. It would house the highest class of audience for the event, would attract the most renowned composers, conductors and performers of the day, and would guarantee that the building held an international reputation as a concert hall. Because of the precedent set at Birmingham, a musical festival would necessitate the erection of an organ, and, as discussed earlier, the instruments that were erected for these elitist events were then used as a means of bringing music to the people; of allowing those with little money to hear transcriptions of works only the wealthy could previously experience. A town-hall musical festival would also ensure that, at least once every three years, the building would be kept in a superior structural and decorative condition, since the 'satisfaction of the eye [...] has a good deal to do with the comfort and pleasure of the ear'.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the presence of a smaller-scale musical festival at Stalybridge would have encouraged a greater civic pride of the town hall and its musical life, stimulating music-making through the better upkeep of the building, and a national reputation as a concert venue.

In direct contrast, both the Birmingham and Leeds Festivals were internationally renowned, and, by their commissioning of new works, both contributed greatly to the nineteenth-century musical repertoire. However, the two events were underpinned by quite different policies. In Birmingham, the main impetus to the triennial festival was that of philanthropy. Essentially, the Festival existed to ensure the continued financial survival of the General Hospital. The nervousness surrounding the amount of profit needed, therefore, led the Musical Committee to be quite conservative in their programming for much of the century, sticking to a formula that they thought would

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<sup>16</sup> *Athenaeum*, 983 (1846), p.891.

ensure the largest audience. Even though the Leeds Festivals were charity based, this was not the main impetus behind them. Having been established to celebrate the opening of the Town Hall in 1858, the event was a statement of Leeds' achievements, saying 'we are rich, successful and powerful, but we are also civilized'.<sup>17</sup> Although the next festival was not held until 1874, the link with civic pride remained dominant. The organisers expressed this by commissioning new works and programming what were considered to be the greatest existing works in the repertoire, then engaged top-class soloists to perform them. The musical quality of the event was of the utmost importance to the Leeds Festival Committee – in the words of the Guide to the 1901 Leeds Festival, 'the primary cause of the Festival [is] music'.<sup>18</sup> This was not least as a means of competing with other more established festivals such as Birmingham. They achieved this by following the traditional festival pattern yet at the same time secured a reputation for innovation by, for example, promoting British composers, conductors and performers, and by often programming non-religious works, in an innovative move away from Bible-based texts that automatically ensured moral respectability. Birmingham was too worried about loss of profits to risk much innovation.

#### 5.4: Local Music-Making

There were some who said that the Festivals at Leeds and Birmingham ruined local musical culture. Whilst it is true that the musical festival was more of a national than a local event, attracting performers and audiences mainly from outside the town, evidence suggests that it was more of a stimulus than a deterrent to town-hall music making. In both Birmingham and Leeds the festival encouraged a sense of community amongst amateur musicians, leading to the establishment of choral societies whose members would not only sing in the festivals themselves but would also give concerts at the town hall in the intervening years. There was a desire in both places, also, to create an orchestra that would be good enough to contribute to the festivals, and, like the choral societies, those orchestral societies would perform concerts in the town hall as a means of gaining experience. It is possible, however, that the inability of both Birmingham and Leeds in the nineteenth century to sustain a permanent orchestra, through a lack of public and municipal support, was due to the prevalence of choral music in the towns, encouraged by the musical festival. Although the price of Festival

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<sup>17</sup> Musgrove, 'The Rise of a Northern Musical Elite', p.73.

<sup>18</sup> *Leeds Musical Festival Guide 1901*, Leeds Local Studies Library, LQ780.79 L517.

tickets was far outside the remit of the average townspeople, the events encouraged an apparent desire in local residents to be part of the festival-scene. During the days of the festivals the streets would be lined with inhabitants who wanted to catch a glimpse of the gentry and performers entering the building for the concerts. In Lowell Mason's account of his attendance at the 1852 Birmingham Festival, for example, he states: 'we found the sidewalks filled with people of all ages and descriptions, who, notwithstanding the mud and wet, had taken their stand to look into the carriages as they passed'.<sup>19</sup> Some people would even stand outside the town-hall building in the hope that they may be able to hear some of what was going on inside:

By the bye, who was the little old lady in brown who was to be seen during every morning performance outside the Town Hall? She took up her place every day without a single exception, and listened to the performance as well as she could from the outside. The soli of course were lost to her, but some of the choruses could be heard well. What made her more conspicuous was that she had every morning, a book of the words, and followed it leaf by leaf, utterly regardless of the curiosity she excited.<sup>20</sup>

Consequently an effort was made to allow local people to experience festival music in the town hall, whether this was by holding a 'People's Festival' as at Leeds, or by repeating the new festival works in cheap or free concerts afterwards: 'It was natural that people who had been unable to attend the Festival concerts should embrace the opportunity of hearing, whenever possible, the whole or parts of those works about which so much had been written and spoken'.<sup>21</sup> This is further evidence of the general desire for town-hall performances to be non-prohibitive – a wish to open even the most elite music-making to all classes. The inclusivity of the town hall as a music venue is in direct contrast to such places as opera houses, where exclusivity was the emphasis. As a result, a festival could inspire a local interest in music-making and concert-giving that far outlasted the three or four days of the actual event.

Although the benefits of a musical festival in the encouragement of music-making are numerous, in Stalybridge, where there was no festival, and in Leeds, where no Festival was held for the first sixteen years of the Town Hall's existence, the town hall was still a popular music venue. In Stalybridge, this was more by chance than good management. Although the original 'market' building had a large room with an 'orchestra', the use of Stalybridge Town Hall as a music venue was mainly through the

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<sup>19</sup> *Musical Letters from Abroad: Including detailed accounts of the Birmingham, Norwich, and Dusseldorf Music Festivals of 1852* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1854), p.209.

<sup>20</sup> *Birmingham Mail*, 9 August 1885.

<sup>21</sup> Report on a Leeds Free Corporation Concert, *Leeds Mercury*, 25 October 1886.

want of a spacious public room in the centre of town. Nevertheless, this town hall in the nineteenth century housed numerous varied entertainments, from local choral societies and church concerts to touring companies, including blackface minstrels and music-hall artists. Whilst oratorio was the most frequent genre of music performed, miscellaneous ballad and instrumental concerts were also popular, with opera becoming a more regular feature in the 1890s. It was not until the mid-1880s that the Stalybridge Council had any real policy regarding the letting of the room for musical performance, and it therefore seems that, whilst nothing immoral would have been permitted, performers were generally unregulated as long as they paid the room-hire fee.

The musical life of Leeds Town Hall, in contrast, was strictly regulated by the Town Council. Because of their stringent observance of the *Leeds Improvement Amendment Act* of 1856, which stated that the large room – the Victoria Hall – should be used ‘for the performance of music therein’,<sup>22</sup> the Council felt obliged to use the building to provide ‘music for the people’, and thus prioritised a concert series, and employed an organist, to ensure that this would happen. Here the overriding concern was the Council’s perceived responsibility to provide its citizens with music in their Town Hall, often disregarding external musical ventures that interfered with their set agenda. In the eyes of many Leeds musicians, these concerts were unfairly subsidised by the Council, undercutting other performances. Some thought that they would ‘destroy every other effort in the cause of music in the Town’,<sup>23</sup> and, whilst this was an overstatement that never became a reality, it is true that music-making in the Town Hall took place on the Council’s terms, without any obvious regard for how this might impact on the musical life of the town overall. Like Stalybridge, Leeds Town Hall was used for a variety of musical entertainments by local musicians and visiting performers. In fact, the musical activity of all three town halls in this study is remarkably similar: the annual performance of *Messiah*; further performances of mainly Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn oratorios during the concert season; frequent ‘grand’ miscellaneous concerts where extracts from oratorio, cantatas, and operas, in addition to popular ballads of the day, were performed; the instrumental or orchestral concert, held in an effort to establish an orchestral tradition in the town comparable with that of Manchester; the visiting performers and impresarios such as Susan Sunderland, Jenny

<sup>22</sup> *Leeds Acts of Parliament*, Vol.2.

<sup>23</sup> Letter to the Mayor from Robert Burton, 1/10/1867, in *Sub Town Hall (Organ) Committee Minutes*, 21 November 1856 to 7 October 1869, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, LLC/20/3/1.

Lind or Louis Jullien; the touring minstrel companies; and novelty acts such as the Brousil Family. As already indicated, the only real difference in the music-making at Stalybridge compared with Leeds and Birmingham can be seen in the absence of an organ and a musical festival. Essentially, it is not the performances themselves but the circumstances behind the scenes that differ.

In Birmingham, since the organ did not belong to the municipality and any organ concerts were governed by the General Hospital, the Council did not have the same control of music-making in the Town Hall as that of Leeds. Antje Pieper has suggested that the Musical Committee had so much control over music-making in Birmingham Town Hall that it 'frequently intervened whenever new musical enterprises, requiring Town Council permission, threatened to disturb the triennial enterprise'.<sup>24</sup> Whilst this is possible, there is no hard evidence to confirm it. Sources do verify, however, that the letting of the town hall was regulated by the Estates and Building Committee, which had ultimate control over music-making in the building, including the organ concerts given by the Musical Committee.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, although the Council neither owned the organ nor employed the organist, if it was not happy with the way the concerts were being organised, it would intervene. It cannot be denied that the Musical Committee of the General Hospital had a huge influence on the town hall as a building, but it was the Council who regulated the music-making outside the musical festival. They were not overly active in this respect, especially when compared with Leeds, but they operated careful vetting of requests to hire the hall, always working in what they perceived to be the interests of the townspeople and the moral standing of the Town Hall. Perhaps, if the organ had belonged to the municipality from the beginning, the policies regarding music-making in Birmingham Town Hall would have been somewhat different.

### 5.5: New Repertoire

As discussed in chapters 3 and 4, the new repertoire written for town-hall performance was mostly that of oratorio and cantata, normally with a religious or historical theme that promoted 'moral' values. The most significant work was Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, written for the 1846 Birmingham Festival. This work set a marker for all future

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<sup>24</sup> *Music and the Making of Middle-Class Culture*, p.151.

<sup>25</sup> See the minutes from the Estates and Building Committee, Birmingham City Archives, BCC/AM.

musical-festival commissions and many composers attempted to write compositions in its style in order to replicate its success. Whilst festival commissions and other town-hall compositions played an integral role in the repertoire of the nineteenth century, few have survived in the concert repertoire to this day. It is possible that this stems from a lack of originality, since creativity was often restrained through the attempt to write to a winning formula, with Handel and Mendelssohn as the most popular models. However, whilst this applies to several of the works, and few proved to have the longevity of *Elijah*, most were unanimously well-received by nineteenth-century critics and audiences, and many were considered music of superior quality and compositional triumphs at the time of their first performance. As demonstrated in chapter 4, Charles Villiers Stanford described Sullivan's *Golden Legend*, for example, as a work that had won a place, 'not only amongst the permanent successes of our generation, but even in the shelves of the classics'.<sup>26</sup> In the case of such compositions, their subsequent neglect can hardly be justified. Nicholas Temperley, in the introduction to his history of music in the Romantic age, suggests that music during the Victorian period was like any other – 'it may include much that is very bad, but it also includes much that commands respect and some that is superlatively good'.<sup>27</sup> It is important for our understanding and appreciation of such works that we know about the town halls in which they were performed. When placed within the context of 'the sublime' forces of the nineteenth century musical festival – the huge performance space, the large number of performers, the gigantic organ – the overwhelming, dense vocal and orchestral textures and sweeping sentimental melodies often used by nineteenth-century composers can be seen as a product of the particular sonic environment of the time. The move away from Victorianism in the intervening generations has seen the unjustified debasement of much nineteenth-century British music. Perhaps the renewed interest by musicologists in this period of musical history will lead to a revival of lost masterpieces in live performances, and town-hall composers such as Sullivan will be given full recognition for the part they played in European musical repertoire.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> In *The National Review*, p.400.

<sup>27</sup> Nicholas Temperley, ed., *The Blackwell History of Music in Britain: The Romantic Age 1800-1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p.1.

<sup>28</sup> Recent recordings by Hyperion of Romantic works, including Sullivan's *Golden Legend*, and edited volumes of music by nineteenth-century composers such as Sterndale Bennett and Parry in *Musica Britannica*, may go some way to making this possible.

## 5.6: Audience Demographic

Whilst information about the identity of performers in town-hall music-making is relatively widespread through newspaper reports and musical society records, where individuals can be traced through censuses and trade directories, data on audience demographic is much more elusive. Although concert reviews often give an account of attendees, the information can only be considered anecdotal. The following from the *Leeds Mercury* is a perfect example:

Any regular attendant will bear witness that while on every occasion all classes have been represented, often the working classes have been preponderatingly so – amongst them frequently decent, respectable men with their wives or daughters, market basket on arm, calling on their return home, leaving the hall with satisfaction depicted on their countenances, having evidently spent a most agreeable hour.<sup>29</sup>

This quite detailed report does offer some evidence as to audience demographic at the Leeds Town Hall organ concerts, but the absence of hard data makes the author's observations, shaped by the ideologies of 'improvement', impossible to verify. For those concerts that were aimed towards the working classes through lower ticket prices, there is no evidence to confirm that they were present; the audience could simply have consisted of those of a higher class who wished to buy cheaper tickets. It must be acknowledged, however, that attendance at concerts in the nineteenth century was often an announcement of wealth and status. If one could afford to buy tickets at the highest price then it was an overt sign of societal position. As William Weber states, 'ticket prices created a finely-graded hierarchy of concerts and listeners. Status-consciousness reinforced the social ladder by ascribing special prestige to events costing above certain amounts'.<sup>30</sup> In such a climate, therefore, would patrons have risked their reputation for the sake of buying a lower priced ticket? It is perhaps more likely that the higher classes would have supported the free organ concerts in the cause of philanthropy, but set themselves apart from the lower classes through the hierarchy of seating in the hall; people liked to watch their socially inferior counterparts at leisure in order to enhance their sense of superiority. Still, the only possible way of determining the audience demographic-in such an instance is by records of ticket sales. Whilst the lowest and middle-priced tickets could potentially have been bought by anybody, seats of the highest price could generally only have been bought by those of greater means.

<sup>29</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 29 July 1864.

<sup>30</sup> William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: the Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris, and Vienna*, 2nd edn (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p.23.

Unfortunately, very few records of this kind exist. In the course of this study, only the treasurer's records for the Stalybridge Harmonic Society have offered such evidence. However, since in actuality a working-class person could have saved their wages to 'treat' themselves to a better seat for a special occasion, in the absence of nineteenth-century audience surveys detailed information on audience demographic at town-hall concerts can only ever be anecdotal. It must also be acknowledged that a working-class audience at Stalybridge, a small newly industrialised northern cotton town, would be different to that of a working-class audience in, for example, the more established industrial centre of Birmingham, through the influence of their local economy and environment. For example, the type of labour they undertook, the hours they worked, the wages they earned, their access to education through free libraries and mechanics' institutions, their religious persuasion and the amount of music provided by the church, would all play a part in the makeup of the individual and, therefore, how they functioned as a concert attendee. In addition, issues such as urban geography and civic values would also have contributed to how each particular local centre influenced its own audience demographic, affecting who attended town-hall concerts, how often, and why. Again, unfortunately there is little more than speculative evidence as to what influence local environment actually had on town-hall concert attendance. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that although certain concerts may have been given the same title in all three town halls, and may have been part of a nationwide initiative, they were not necessarily attended by the same type of people.

### **5.7: Alternative Music Venues**

Whilst issues such as the conception and design of the building, the erection of an organ, the housing of a musical festival and council policy all played a great part in the use of a town hall as a music venue, the provision of alternative venues within the town had an immense impact on the influence it had in local musical life. Although Birmingham had no serious rival to the Town Hall, both the town halls of Stalybridge and Leeds were usurped as the principal concert hall in their town for a time due to the opening of a rival commercial venue. For Stalybridge, it was the opening of the new Mechanics' Institution that led to the virtual abandonment of musical activity in the Town Hall. At this time the town-hall building was thought to be dirty, dangerous, and



aesthetically displeasing - a 'monstrosity of bricks and mortar',<sup>31</sup> and therefore completely unsuitable as the town's principal music venue. The Mechanics' Institution building was built with ornament, civic pride and music-making in mind, resulting in an architecturally fashionable, purpose-built concert room that performers from within and outwith Stalybridge wanted to use. Stalybridge Town Hall only really became a respected music venue when it was renovated with a greater concern for the appearance of the building and the facilities needed for concert audiences and performers.

Like Stalybridge, Leeds Town Hall's influence on the musical life of the town was affected by the opening of a new rival venue – the Leeds Coliseum. Again comparable with Stalybridge, there were many in Leeds who thought that a new concert hall was necessary for the town. However, this was not because the town hall was unsuitable, but mainly because it was considered to be too small to make a profit. For a time the Coliseum was thought to be 'the principal concert room in Leeds' because of its preferred use by many of the local musical societies;<sup>32</sup> but after about five years, when the novelty of the new building had waned and the Town Hall had been improved with a gallery, electric lighting, and heavy curtains to stop the draughts, performers and audiences began to consider the facilities at Leeds Town Hall to be superior and the Coliseum fell out of favour. The cases of Stalybridge and Leeds demonstrate that, despite any municipal intervention, a town hall had to retain public support in order to remain an influential music venue.

While the influence of Stalybridge and Leeds Town Halls on the music-making of their towns was seriously affected by rival buildings, it seems that Birmingham Town Hall remained the principal music room in the town throughout the nineteenth century. There were of course other concert halls in Birmingham but the Town Hall never fell out of favour with audiences or performers. This was possibly a result of the constant refurbishment of the hall for the musical festivals and the great influence of the Musical Committee on the upkeep of the building. Whilst Leeds Town Hall was also the home for a triennial musical festival, this was not until the last quarter of the century, and the Festival Committee of Leeds had little authority over the Town Hall building. The Musical Committee of Birmingham, having been involved in the conception and design of the Town Hall, felt a large amount of ownership over the hall, compounded by their legal rights to use the hall as stated in the original Act of

<sup>31</sup> *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, 28 March 1857.

<sup>32</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 12 November 1885.

Parliament, and their ownership of the organ for much of the century. The Musical Committee wanted the Town Hall to remain as the principal music venue because of its links with profit-making for the hospital. The Birmingham Council supported the Musical Committee in their use and supervision of the building because they were always met with the argument that, without the money raised through the triennial festivals and other musical events connected with the organ, the General Hospital would have to close. Therefore it is possible to argue that neither the Musical Committee nor the Council would have allowed Birmingham Town Hall to have been usurped as the principal music venue of the town.

### 5.8: Conclusion

As the above evidence has demonstrated, despite the many similarities and differences between the town halls of Stalybridge, Birmingham and Leeds, music-making was a regular phenomenon. The frequent use of the building by local amateur musicians in particular ensured that all three town halls worked as a great stimulus to the musical life of the town in which it was placed, even overcoming competition from rival commercial venues. Ultimately, this study has demonstrated that the nineteenth-century town hall was a unique and influential musical space; it was an inter-class performance venue, regardless of sex and denomination. As the *Leeds Mercury* suggested in a review of one of the organ concerts, 'all classes meet in the [Town] Hall, without being fenced off from each another. Out of the mutual comfort of this custom comes the growing mutual respect between all classes'.<sup>33</sup> Attendance at the expensive town-hall concerts was a means for the higher classes to show their wealth and status, and their support of the cheaper concerts showed an interest in philanthropy; but again this was a symbol of status since one had to have time and disposable income to be philanthropic. Potentially, all classes were catered for in town-hall music-making, and many thought this was only right since in many places, Birmingham and Leeds being two examples, the building was paid for by the people for the people. It was a 'town' hall in the true sense of the word, with the concerts, in the words of the *Leeds Mercury*, giving the ratepayers 'a sense of ownership'.<sup>34</sup>

It can be argued, however, that the town hall was not unique in its availability to all areas of society. Dagmar Kift, in her study of the music hall in the nineteenth

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<sup>33</sup> 29 July 1864.

<sup>34</sup> 7 February 1881.

century, states that 'the music hall was a community-based institution which catered for both the working class and the lower middle class [...] it served as a communication centre for family groups and circles of friends, neighbours and workmates of both sexes'.<sup>35</sup> The difference at the town hall, however, was that it was 'rational', 'respectable' recreation, therefore attracting not only the lower classes but also the higher echelons of society. All three case studies have shown that 'music-hall' entertainments were from time to time held in the town hall, but the type of building the town hall represented made the difference between rough and rational recreation. The nineteenth-century town hall was a building that signified the wealth and status of a town, 'symbolic of civic authority, power and legitimacy'.<sup>36</sup> It was a high-status building, and the link between music and municipality was what set the town hall apart from other musical spaces in the nineteenth century – the venue legitimised the music.

But can these three case studies be said to be representative of all town halls in England? The answer, of course, is no, since even the town halls of Stalybridge, Leeds and Birmingham demonstrate a diversity between such buildings and the varied musical environments of the towns in which they were placed. Nineteenth-century newspaper reports reveal that hundreds of town halls in England were being used for music-making, but even those that were not concert venues are significant because of the issues behind their non-use, such as a lack of municipal support or the presence of more significant music venues in the town. The 1877 Manchester Town Hall can be seen as an example of this. Although built with an organ, the building was infrequently used for music-making, other than organ recitals. Michael Kennedy, in his book *The Hallé Tradition*, states that Charles Hallé found the acoustic of the large room in the building to be 'acoustically dreadful, as others have done since'.<sup>37</sup> Whilst this may offer some explanation of the only sporadic use of Manchester Town Hall for music-making, further research into Council policy surrounding the erection of the building and its subsequent use, and a consideration of alternative venues such as the Free Trade Hall, would definitively determine why that particular building was not the principal music venue in the city. Each nineteenth-century town hall in England has its own story – its own conception and design, musical history, and place within local music-making.

<sup>35</sup> *The Victorian Music Hall*, p.176.

<sup>36</sup> Tittler, *Architecture and Power*, p. 96.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Kennedy, *The Hallé Tradition: A Century of Music* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), p.22. Robert Beale, in his *Charles Hallé: A Musical Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p.169, also mentions Hallé's dislike of the acoustics.

Ironically, this study has been limited by the sheer proliferation of available resource material, but there is almost endless potential for further comparative studies of the role of individual town halls in nineteenth-century English musical culture. In addition, a consideration of municipal music-making in continental and commonwealth town halls would further deepen our understanding of this cultural phenomenon.

This research has contributed significantly to our knowledge of nineteenth-century music-making through its exploration of the town hall as a new performance space and cultural phenomenon. It was a symbolic building that stimulated the creation and performance of some of the most important works in the nineteenth-century repertoire, and that allowed thousands of people to hear music they could never have otherwise experienced. Through the town hall a local government could act as patron, bringing the community together through musical provision designed to 'improve' the citizens of all classes. In an age of diversity and division, the nineteenth-century town hall played an important unifying role, open to all members of society and uniting them in one common cause – 'the love of music'.

## Appendix:

## The Specifications of Birmingham and Leeds Town Hall Organs

## Birmingham

The precise specification of the 1834 Birmingham Town Hall organ is difficult to determine since there are conflicting contemporary reports of the instrument. The following is taken from Nicholas Thistlethwaite's, *The Making of the Victorian Organ*,<sup>1</sup> and is his attempt to correlate the sources in order to produce a probable version of the original scheme:

<b>Great Organ</b> (CC to f <sup>3</sup> )		
Double Open Diapason (c)		16
Open Diapason		8
Open Diapason		8
Open Diapason (wood)		8
Dulciana	8	
Stopped Diapason (wood)		8
Principal	4	
Principal	4	
Principal (wood)		4
Twelfth		2 2/3
Fifteenth	2	
Fifteenth (wood)		2
Sesquialtra	v	
Mixture		III
Trumpet		8
Posaune		8
Clarion		4
Octave Clarion		2
<b>Swell Organ</b> (C to f <sup>3</sup> , with Choir bass from CC)		
Double Diapason		16
Open Diapason		8
Stopped Diapason	8	
Principal	4	
Harmonica (wood)	4	
Fifteenth	2	
Horn		8
Trumpet		8
Oboe		8
Clarion		4
Carillon (Bells)		4
<b>Choir Organ</b> (CC to f <sup>3</sup> )		
Open Diapason (wood and metal)		8
Open Diapason (c) (wood)		8
Dulciana (G)		8
Stopped Diapason (wood)		8
Principal	4	
Principal (wood)		4
Stopped Flute		4

<sup>1</sup> Thistlethwaite, pp.128-129.

Fifteenth	2	
Cremona & Bassoon (GG)		8

**Combination Organ (fourth manual)***From Choir:*

Open Diapason		8
Dulciana	8	
Stopped Diapason	8	
Harmonica	4	
Stopped Flute		4

*From Swell:*

Open Diapason		8
Stopped Diapason	8	
Principal	4	
Harmonica	4	
Fifteenth	2	
Horn		8
Trumpet		8
Oboe		8
Clarion		4

**Pedal Organ (C to c<sup>1</sup>)**

Double Open Diapason	32
Double Open Diapason (wood)	32
Trumpet (wood)	16
Swell to Great	
Choir to Great	
Pedals to Great [Great to Pedal]	
Pedals to Choir [Choir to Pedal]	

## Leeds

The following description of the Leeds Town Hall organ appeared in the *Musical World*, 36 (1858), 484-486:

The fine instrument possess four manual clavier – compass of each from CC to C in altissimo – 61 notes; and a pedal clavier extending from CCC to F, or a compass of 30 notes. The Orchestral Solo Organ (uppermost clavier) contains the following stops:-

### BY PIPES ON SOUND BOARDS

1. Bourdon (wood) – 8 feet
2. Concert Flute Harmonic (to fiddle G) – 8 feet
3. Piccolo Harmonic (to tenor C) – 4 feet
4. Ottavina Harmonic – 2 feet
5. Clarinet – 8 feet
6. Oboe (to tenor C) – 8 feet
7. Cor. Anglais and Bassoon (free reed) – 8 feet
8. Tromba – 8 feet
9. Ophicleide – 8 feet

### BY MECHANICAL COMBINATION

10. Clarinet and Flute in octaves
11. Oboe and Flute in octaves
12. Clarinet and Bassoon in octaves
13. Clarinet and Oboe in octaves
14. Oboe and Bassoon in octaves
15. Flute, Clarinet and Bassoon in double octaves
16. Flute, Oboe, and Bassoon in double octaves

The Swell-Organ (second clavier) contains the following stops:

1. Bourdon (wood) – 16 feet
2. Open Diapason – 8 feet
3. Stopped Diapason (treble to tenor C) – wood – 8 feet
4. Ditto ditto, Bass – (wood) – 8 feet
5. Keraulophon (to tenor C) – 8 feet
6. Harmonic Flute (to fiddle G) – 8 feet
7. Octave – 4 feet
8. Gemshorn – 4 feet
9. Wood Flute – 4 feet
10. Twelfth – 3 feet
11. Fifteenth – 2 feet
12. Piccolo (wood) – 2 feet
13. Sesquialtra – 5 ranks
14. Mixture – 3 ranks
15. Contra Fagotto – 16 feet
16. Trumpet – 8 feet
17. Cornopean – 8 feet
18. Oboe – 8 feet
19. Vox Humana – 8 feet
20. Clarion – 4 feet

The Great Organ (third clavier) contains, in reality, two complete and distinct organs, of different powers and qualities. One, called the 'front great organ', contains the following stops:-

1. Double Diapason (open metal) – 16 feet
2. Open Diapason – 8 feet
3. Spitz Gamba – 8 feet
4. Stopped Diapason (wood) – 8 feet
5. Octave (metal) – 4 feet
6. Wald Flöte – 4 feet
7. Twelfth – 3 feet

8. Fifteenth – 2 feet
9. Quint Mixture – 5 ranks
10. Tierce Mixture – 5 ranks
11. Trumpet – 8 feet
12. Clarion – 1 feet

The contents of the 'back great organ' are as follows:-

13. Bourdon – Wood – 16 feet
14. Flute à Pavillon – 8 feet
15. Viola – 8 feet
16. Harmonic Flute (to Fiddle G, continued to the bottom in open wooden pipes) – 8 feet
17. Quint – 6 feet
18. Octave – 4 feet
19. Harmonic Flute (to Gamut G), small open – 4 feet
20. Harmonic Flute – 2 feet
21. Cymbal – 6 ranks
22. Furniture – 2 ranks
23. Contra Trombone – 16 feet
24. Trombone – 8 feet
25. Harmonic Trumpet – 8 feet
26. Tenor Trombone – 4 feet

In the Choir Organ (lowermost clavier), are the following stops:-

1. Sub-dulciana (open metal to Tenor C and stopped wood to the bottom) – 16 feet
2. Open Diapason – 8 feet
3. Stopped Diapason, treble to Tenor C (metal) – 8 feet
4. Stopped Diapason, Bass (wood)
5. Salcional – 8 feet
6. Viol da Gamba (to Tenor C) – 8 feet
7. Octave – 4 feet
8. Suabe Flute, to Tenor C (wood) – 4 feet
9. Harmonic Flute (to Tenor C) – 4 feet
10. Twelfth – 3 feet
11. Fifteenth – 2 feet
12. Ottavina (wood) – 2 feet
13. Dulciana mixture – 5 ranks
14. Euphone (free reed) – 16 feet
15. Trumpet – 8 feet
16. Clarion – 4 feet

The Pedal Organ contains the following stops:-

1. Sub-Bass (open metal) – 32 feet
2. Contra Bourdon (wood) – 32 feet
3. Open Diapason (metal) – 16 feet
4. Open Diapason (wood) – 16 feet
5. Violon (wood) – 16 feet
6. Bourdon (wood) – 16 feet
7. Quint (open wood) – 12 feet
8. Octave – 8 feet
9. Stopped Flute – 8 feet
10. Twelfth – 6 feet
11. Fifteenth – 4 feet
12. Mixture – 5 ranks
13. Contra Bombard (free reed) – 32 feet
14. Bombard – 16 feet
15. Fagotto (free reed) – 16 feet
16. Clarion – 8 feet

The 'Coupling Stops' are as follows:-

1. Solo Organ to Great Clavier
2. Great to Solo



3. Solo Organ Super Octave (on its own Clavier)
4. Solo Organ Sub Octave (on its own Clavier)
5. Swell Organ to Great Super Octave
6. Swell Organ to Great Super Unison
7. Swell Organ to Great, Sub Octave
8. Swell Organ to Choir Clavier
9. Choir Organ to Great, Unison
10. Swell Organ to Pedal Clavier
11. Choir Organ to ditto
12. Great Organ to ditto
13. Full Pedal Organ
14. Solo Organ to Pedals.

There are, also, eleven pedals 'for various purposes of mechanical adjustment', arranged as follows:-

1. Swell Pedal
2. Swell Pedal for Solo Organ
3. Tremulant Pedal
4. Pedal admitting wind to the back Great Organ
5. Pedal coupling the back Great Organ to Swell Clavier
- 6., 7., 8., 9. Composition Pedals
10. Crescendo Pedal
11. Diminuendo Pedal

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## Chapter 15

# 'That monstrosity of bricks and mortar': The Town Hall as a Music Venue in Nineteenth-century Stalybridge

Rachel Milestone

The notion of 'progress' was a driving force in British culture in the nineteenth century, an age characterized by rapid change in intellectual, social, and material environments. Increasing industrialization and urbanization, linked with revolutionary developments in the textile industry, drew labour from the countryside into new and expanding towns, encouraging a developing consciousness of local and civic pride. The repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts (1828-29) made it possible for Nonconformists, many of whom were already significant members of their local community, to take part in government, and the Reform Act (1832) enfranchised even more of the new industrial elite. The Municipal Corporations Act (1835) further encouraged a change towards more democratic administration from within the town. Such civic independence encouraged town and city rivalries, normally between places that were part of a wider urban area, such as Manchester and Salford or Leeds and Bradford, but echoed in smaller communities. Politicians placed great emphasis, therefore, on community projects, buildings, and celebrations as part of the creation of local traditions that would consolidate the community, and give a sense of longevity and import.

Many civic buildings were erected as a result of municipal patronage, made possible by the constitutional and economic changes of the time. In 1845 *The Builder* described architecture as: 'The monumental representation of history and civilisation - a reflection of the sentiments, manners and religious belief, of the people practising it', and further, that 'the architectural embellishment of a city is of much greater consequence in forming the character of the people than some hasty thinkers now-a-days recognize'.<sup>1</sup> Town halls were at the forefront of the public building that fuelled the often intense rivalry between urban centres: a town hall was seen as a monument to the glory, abilities, and achievements of

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1 *Builder*, 131 (9 August 1845): 373, quoted in Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: the rise and fall of the Victorian city* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004), p. 98.

the community, and, according to the librarian and antiquary W.E.A. Axon, it symbolized not only 'the opulence of the city, but also the great principle of self-government'.<sup>2</sup> In the opinion of the architect Sir Charles Barry:

A Town Hall should [...] be the most dominant and important of the Municipal Buildings of the City in which it is placed. It should be the means of giving due expression to public feeling upon all national and municipal events of importance. [It should serve,] as it were, as the exponent of the life and soul of the City.<sup>3</sup>

However, the town hall was not new to the nineteenth century: it had been the symbolic centre of the power, prosperity, and pride of European cities since the Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup> During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the number of town halls increased dramatically in Britain, and those newly built were mostly small buildings, normally including a ground-floor hall, possibly with a small room at each end, and commonly raised on pillars to accommodate a market space below. The political motivation behind this building was the need to mark the new status of towns, many of which had obtained Royal Charters of Incorporation, and the town hall was seen as a focus of the newly self-governing local community, 'symbolic of civic authority, power and legitimacy'.<sup>5</sup> With the development of new towns and changes in local government in the nineteenth century, town halls were built for the same symbolic purpose – the ultimate representation of a new age of urban consciousness, and of a future age of wealth and progress.

The idea of progress through improvement had pervaded the cultural life of the eighteenth century: piety and philanthropy were attractive ideals for those who enjoyed 'fashionable culture', partly due to the widespread acceptance of Methodism, a central feature of which was self-improvement. This had little meaning for the lower classes, however, since it operated as a tool of social exclusivity, appealing to 'all those who perceived themselves as successful, or aspired to be so'.<sup>6</sup> The evolution of this culture was the impetus for the dynamic moralizing of the nineteenth century. Samuel Smiles, for example, argued in 1860

2 W.E.A. Axon, *An Architectural and General Description of the Town Hall, Manchester* (Manchester: A. Heywood, 1878), quoted in R. Dixon and S. Muthesius, *Victorian Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), p. 168. Axon was influential in discussions of the murals for the new Manchester Town Hall, completed in 1877, and is referring here to what the Town Hall symbolized to the people of Manchester.

3 Quoted in Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Odhams, 1968), p. 159. Barry made this statement in 1859, when discussing plans for the building of Halifax Town Hall with the Halifax Corporation.

4 One of the earliest forms of public building was the medieval moot hall, which was connected with the organization and local administration of the town, and therefore a precursor to the town hall. For more on the origins of town halls, see Colin Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 1–7.

5 R. Tittler, *Architecture and Power: the town hall and the English urban community, 1500–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p. 96.

6 Peter Borsay, 'The Culture of Improvement', in P. Langford (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century: 1688–1815* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), pp. 183–210 (p. 185).

that 'The spirit of self-help is the root of all genuine growth in the individual; and, exhibited in the lives of many, it constitutes the true source of national vigour and strength'.<sup>7</sup> Nineteenth-century notions of improvement were aimed towards the lower classes of society, encouraged by increasing numbers of social reformers.

The values of progress and improvement were reflected in the musical environment of the time. It was said repeatedly in the early part of the nineteenth century, that the only real form of recreation available to working men in the new urban setting was that connected with the consumption of alcohol: Frederick Engels, writing in 1844, observed that 'Liquor is almost their only source of pleasure, and all things conspire to make it accessible to them'.<sup>8</sup> Since the Restoration there had been 'free-and-easy' musical performances in taverns and tea gardens, which increased greatly in variety and number as taverns and public houses became larger, and more lavish and commercial. With landlords increasingly acting as social and cultural entrepreneurs, marketing musical entertainments in their drinking houses, social reformers were anxious to break the link between music and the public house, and to limit the place of alcohol in working-class culture.<sup>9</sup> At first, this was attempted through repression, but soon there was a movement to provide alternative, 'rational' recreation:<sup>10</sup>

It has [...] been generally agreed among moralists, that all public sports and entertainments should be so regulated, as to have a tendency to the encouragement of virtue, and the discountenancing of vice and immorality.<sup>11</sup>

The most popular form of 'rational' recreation was music, encouraged greatly by Nonconformists; but in the opinion of many such reformers and church leaders there was both good and bad music. Songs sung in pubs were generally regarded

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7 Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help: with illustrations of character and conduct* (London: John Murray, 1860), p. 1, quoted in J.M. Golby (ed.), *Culture and Society in Britain 1850-1890* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), p. 106.

8 Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1892), quoted in J. Walvin, *Leisure and Society 1830-1950* (London: Longman, 1978), p. 2.

9 From the beginning of the eighteenth century, inns were developing as the prime venue for entertainments such as balls, assemblies, plays, lectures, and concerts; see Peter Clark and R.A. Houston, 'Culture and Leisure, 1700-1840', in P. Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Vol. 2, 1540-1840* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp. 575-613.

10 The efforts of such reformers in the second quarter of the nineteenth century did have some effect, persuading parliament to pass legislation which would potentially support and improve the cultural lives of the working classes; see J.M. Golby, and A.W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd: popular culture in England 1750-1900* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), p. 107. On nineteenth-century notions of 'rational' recreation, see pp. 92-110 in Golby and Purdue, and also Sarah Taylor's chapter (Chapter 11) in this current volume.

11 Thomas Herring, *Letters [...] to William Duncombe* (London: J. Johnson, 1777), p. 179, quoted in E.D. Mackerness, *A Social History of Music* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 101-2.



as obscene, but music that was uplifting and improving was encouraged – that is, mostly sacred music and hymn singing. Music was seen as more than a form of amusement or aesthetic experience; it was ‘an object of social utility and balm for society’s many evils’.<sup>12</sup> As George Hogarth reflected:

The experience of the present day has shown, and is showing more and more, that even the classes who earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, may find in music a recreation within their reach, full of innocent enjoyment, and pregnant with moral and social benefits.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst the use of music as a tool for morality was not a nineteenth-century idea,<sup>14</sup> it was during this time that it reached its apotheosis. Not only was it encouraged by the overtly religious society of the early Victorian period, it also emanated from direct attempts at political control by the newly enriched middle classes, particularly in the 1840s when, according to Russell, ‘continuing industrialisation was producing an environment which was hostile and frightening to many middle class observers’.<sup>15</sup> Because of this, alongside the provision of music expressly for the working class, an avid involvement in the performance of sacred music as a form of ‘rational’ recreation also became a means whereby the middle classes could distance themselves from lower-class entertainment.

As the century advanced, halls designed specifically as suitable venues for popular, though culturally respectable, activities were increasingly in demand, and it became a necessity for towns to provide performance spaces other than those traditionally provided, and restricted, by the church. Music was only a force for the good if it was heard ‘in an atmosphere of moral purity suitable to the proper enjoyment of such a gift’.<sup>16</sup> In many places the new town hall presented the ideal venue. Although theatres throughout the nineteenth century gradually became more respectable, for many people, often from Nonconformist backgrounds, they were seen as unacceptable because of their perceived immorality.<sup>17</sup> There was also

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12 Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840–1914: a social history* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987), p. 17.

13 George Hogarth, ‘Music – Art of Singing’, in *Chambers’s Information for the People* (2 vols, [Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers,] 1842), vol. 2, p. 769, quoted in Mackerness, *A Social History of Music*, p. 132.

14 For example, in Birmingham, from about 1750, musical societies such as the Musical and Amicable Society were formed by enthusiasts to raise money for charity and to promote music as rational recreation. This was the case in many other large towns, such as Hull, Liverpool, Leeds, and Bristol. See Mackerness, *A Social History of Music*, p. 114.

15 Russell, *Popular Music in England*, pp. 23–4.

16 Revd G.M. Conder, in a letter to the *Leeds Intelligencer*, 1 May 1852, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 29.

17 This is a complex issue. Opinions varied on the morality of the theatre, and often differed between metropolitan/provincial and religious/atheistic affiliations. For a useful summary, see Gillian Russell, ‘Theatre’, in Iain McCalman (ed.), *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British culture 1776–1832* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), pp. 223–32.

serious doubt as to whether such performances of music were appropriate in a church: 'A Christian sanctuary is a place far too sacred to be used as a place of intellectual entertainment',<sup>18</sup> was the view of many. No town hall was considered complete without its great hall, and so the use of this space for concerts provided an important direct link between the citizens and the municipality, achieving a political, as well as a moral and artistic, mission. In the words of Dr J.D. Heaton of Leeds:

If a noble municipal palace [...] were to be erected in the middle of their hitherto squalid and unbeautiful town, it would become a practical admonition to the populace of the value of beauty and art, and in course of time men would learn to live up to it.<sup>19</sup>

To illustrate some of these themes, and to explore how the changing role and status of the town hall influenced the musical life of its community, the northern cotton town of Stalybridge provides a useful case study. Stalybridge Town Hall, which was built comparatively early in 1831, fell in and out of favour with the musicians and audiences of the town. The musical life of the building can be seen in three distinct periods. In its first 30 years, the original town hall was generally treated with respect as a public building, and was frequently used for performances by musicians from within and outside of the town. The beginning of its second phase, a musically desolate period, coincided with the opening of the Mechanics' Institution in 1862, after which the Town Hall was no longer in favour either as a public building or performance space. In the third period, however, after the renovation of the building (1881–83), Stalybridge Town Hall once again became one of the town's principal performance venues.

### Phase I: A Prestigious Venue for Music

Stalybridge was one town in an area consisting of small cotton towns supported industrially by their proximity to Manchester. Though close geographically, they were quite separate in terms of their administration. The four largest towns expressed their independence by building new town halls – Stalybridge (1831), Ashton-under-Lyne (1840), Hyde (1885), and Dukinfield (1901) – whilst smaller towns converted buildings from other uses – Droylesden, converting a building used by Droylesden Education Institute (1858), and Mossley, converting a private house (1892). As can be seen, Stalybridge Town Hall was the first in this area, and when this is compared with other town halls across the country (see Table 15.1), Stalybridge is seen to have been one of the earliest nineteenth-century town halls on the national scale.

<sup>18</sup> J.L. Tyerman, in his book, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley* (3 vols, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1870), vol. 2, pp. 499–500, quoted in Mackerness, *A Social History of Music*, p. 124.

<sup>19</sup> T. Wemyss Reid (ed.), *A Memoir of J.D. Heaton, M.D.* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1883), p. 142, quoted in Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 162.

**Table 15.1** The building of town halls in England, 1820–34, based on Colin Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 254–6\*

<i>Town</i>	<i>Date of building of town hall</i>
Kington	1820
Ryde	c. 1820–25
Bourne	1821
Devonport	1821–23
Guisborough	1821
Margate (town hall and market)	1821
Manchester	1822–25
Macclesfield (town hall and assembly rooms)	1823–24
Salford (town hall and market)	1825–27
Bolton (Little)	1826
Droitwich	1826
Derby (town hall and market)	1828–30
Sudbury	1828
St Albans (town hall and courts)	1829–33
Brighton	1830–32
Chorlton-on-Medlock	1830–31
Haddington (town hall with spire)	1830–31
Stalybridge (town hall and market)	1830–31
Warminster	1830
Leamington	1831
Birmingham	1832–46
Settle	1832
Upton-upon-Severn	1832
Basingstoke	1833
Ellesmere	1833
Stoke-on-Trent	1834

\* Taking our cue from Cunningham, town halls have been included here if they combined three functions: municipality, magistracy, and meetings.

At some point in the 1820s, leading citizens of Stalybridge began a movement to petition Parliament for a self-governing body to be established. In 1828 the Stalybridge Police and Market Act, known within the town as the Stalybridge Improvement Act, became law, enabling Stalybridge to become an independent, self-governing town. As laid down in the Act, 21 town commissioners were elected 'for lighting, watching, and otherwise improving the town of Stalybridge', and for 'regulating the police and erecting a Market Place within the said town'.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Extract from Act, quoted in S. Hill, *Bygone Stalybridge* (Leeds: M.T.D. Rigg, 1907), p. 126.



In 1830 the commissioners compiled a proposal for the building of a market hall, built through joint stock; the granting of a market charter was often the first liberty of a borough, making the public market one of the most important displays of independent township. It was the opinion of many that the site chosen was not a suitable position for the town's first secular public building, the shape making it difficult to build a classically styled structure (see Figure 15.1), but it seems 'civic dignity or architectural composition must not have been sufficiently important to the commissioners to outweigh the financial advantages of the site'.<sup>21</sup> During the construction of the market, changes were made to the original design in order to provide water closets, committee rooms, and a public hall, thus changing the building into a town hall with the market underneath.<sup>22</sup>

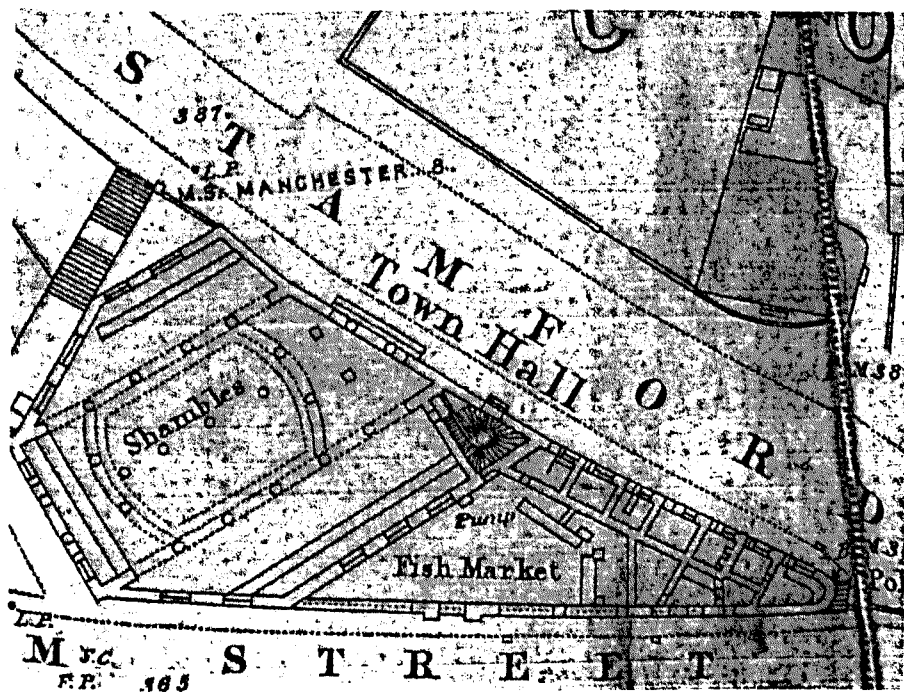


Figure 15.1 Ground plan of Stalybridge Town Hall, taken from the Ordnance Survey Map, 1852. © Crown Copyright 1852

Stalybridge was one of the last town halls to incorporate a market, this being more of an eighteenth-century model, but the hall was built for purely functional reasons, before any real sense of civic pride affected the architecture. Stalybridge Town Hall was not at the forefront of ornamental design. Indeed, Cunningham

<sup>21</sup> F.R. Stott, 'Town Hall Buildings in Tameside' (unpublished MA dissertation, University of Manchester, 1983), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> See 'Town Hall Buildings in Tameside', pp. 22-3.



states that it 'is built in a straightforward way against the slope, and only avoids being mistaken for a mill by the provision of a careful Doric portico at the level of the lower ground floor and pedimented gable two floors above'.<sup>23</sup> Between 1800 and 1830 the fashion amongst architects, particularly in the north, was for the Greek Doric style. Architects of the Greek school designed buildings that were bare and functional in every aspect except for the façade, where decoration was often concentrated on a large Grecian portico. Many early town halls gained distinction by such Classical ornament, which could be added to otherwise plain buildings to achieve some form of splendour. Stalybridge Town Hall was built at the end of the Greek period, so displayed none of the symbolic decoration we associate with later Italianate or Gothic town halls such as Leeds or Manchester (see Figure 15.2).



**Figure 15.2** Photograph, taken before 1905, of the renovated town hall from the back. The middle portion of this elevation was part of the original building, with wings added at either side. Tameside Image Archive, t10992

The *Manchester Guardian* of 7 January 1832 concluded its announcement of the opening of Stalybridge Town Hall as follows:

Thus has the once little village of Staley Bridge been raised, through the extension of trade and commerce, within a few years, to a market town containing fifteen thousand

23 *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p. 127.

inhabitants, with a splendid market hall where the necessities and comforts of every class of people can be plentifully supplied.

The new building is referred to with pride, but not as a town hall. The emphasis on Stalybridge having been raised in stature through the trade and commerce of the market, rather than through the building of a town hall, illustrates the fact that the hall was built before the erection of buildings symbolizing the civic pride of the town. The town halls and other civic buildings of previous centuries, such as the eighteenth-century assembly rooms, may have been built to express a town's status, but the expression of this civic pride was often subdued by the lack of money. Although many of these buildings were built by subscription, as often happened in the nineteenth century, 'they exhibit[ed] an emphasis on utility rather than on aesthetic considerations'.<sup>24</sup> Such buildings, of which Stalybridge Town Hall was one, were very different from the large, symbolic municipal palaces of the Victorian era.

The *Manchester Guardian* also mentioned that the upper portion of the building was not reserved solely for official business.

Above this story is a large handsome public room, 67 feet long, 38 feet wide, 23½ feet high; with small and convenient ante-rooms, and an orchestra. The room will consequently be very well adapted for concerts, balls, assemblies, public meetings and public exhibitions.

This large assembly room in the town hall would become integral to the musical life of the community. The first reference to entertainment in Stalybridge Town Hall was during a commissioners' meeting, when it was decided, probably for financial reasons, 'that the large room be let for public purposes so as to be made productive'.<sup>25</sup> The first letting was to the proprietors of the Leeds Theatre, after which the large room was used for all manner of community events including balls, lectures, and concerts.

An integral part of the musical life of Stalybridge was the concerts given by the choral societies, whose membership in the nineteenth century tended to be drawn predominantly from chapel choirs and for whom singing offered a means of self-improvement through music. As George Hogarth observed on the concerts of choral societies in general:

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24 Tittler, *Architecture and Power*, p. 42. The independent assembly rooms built in the eighteenth century, as places for the higher social classes of both sexes to gather, often consisted of a main room and several subsidiary rooms, such as tea and supper rooms. The emphasis on entertainment makes them an important precursor to the nineteenth-century town hall, and many survived well into the next century. See Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p. 3.

25 Taken from the minutes of a Commissioners' Meeting, 25 April 1832, quoted in J.W. March (ed.), *Stalybridge Centenary Souvenir 1857-1957* (Stalybridge: Stalybridge Corporation, 1957), p. 100.

A well-chosen and well-performed selection of sacred music is listened to by a decent and attentive audience of the same class as the performers, mingled with their employers and their families [...] They are no longer driven by mere vacuity of mind to the beer-shop, and a pastime which opens their minds to the impressions produced by the strains of Handel and Haydn, combined with the inspired poetry of the scriptures, means something infinitely better than the amusement of an idle hour.<sup>26</sup>

Choral singing was an important pastime in both Lancashire and Yorkshire textile districts, and Stalybridge certainly reflects that pattern.<sup>27</sup> The town's first recorded independent choral society was formed in 1824, not long after the founding of what is reputed to have been the first choral society nationally, in Halifax in 1817, and only a few years behind Bradford Choral Society, which began in 1821. Stalybridge was therefore an early contributor to the choral movement. The earliest reported concert given by this choral society was a performance of *Messiah* at Stalybridge Town Hall, in January 1837. William Farrington was the conductor of the society and Thomas Norton led the band 'with much ability'.<sup>28</sup> There is no record as to the occupation or status of these two men, which suggests that they were not prominent figures in the town. This society, for which there is no recorded name, dissolved around 1840.

Stalybridge's most consistent performer of music in the town hall was founded in 1844 as the Stalybridge Harmonic Society, presumably after the largest of the London choral societies, the Sacred Harmonic Society, which had begun just over a decade earlier. The Stalybridge Harmonic Society grew out of a chapel choir, and, according to the *Stalybridge Reporter*, 'the determination of this little band of singers and players was to learn something higher than simply psalm tunes', implying an aspiration to perform oratorio (see Figure 15.3).<sup>29</sup> The following indicates that the society's membership – and therefore those who performed in its town hall concerts – was drawn largely from mill workers:

26 George Hogarth, *Musical History, Biography and Criticism: being a general survey of music, from the earliest period to the present time* (2 vols, London: J.W. Parker, 1835), pp. 430–431.

27 See the chapters by Rachel Cowgill, Sally Drage, and Catherine Dale in this current volume (Chapters 4, 10, and 16 respectively).

28 From a retrospective report on the historical background to Samuel Garlick's testimonial concert, published in the *Stalybridge Reporter*, 15 September 1883. From 1855 Stalybridge shared a weekly newspaper with Ashton-under-Lyne. The bulk of the newspaper reported on Ashton, but Stalybridge had its own section, apparently written by a correspondent from the town. The reports are unsigned, but seem accurate. (It was not until 1883 that Stalybridge had its own full newspaper, the *Stalybridge Reporter*.)

29 Report on the Jubilee of the Stalybridge Harmonic Society, *Stalybridge Reporter*, 24 March 1894. Most of the early choral societies included a small orchestra. Although reports of the Stalybridge Harmonic Society do not often refer to instrumentalists, they are present in a photograph of the society from c. 1865–85 (see Figure 15.3, Tameside Image Archive, t08601). Instruments in this photograph are a cello, violin, clarinet, oboe, flute, piccolo, tenor horn, timpani, double bass, and harmonium.



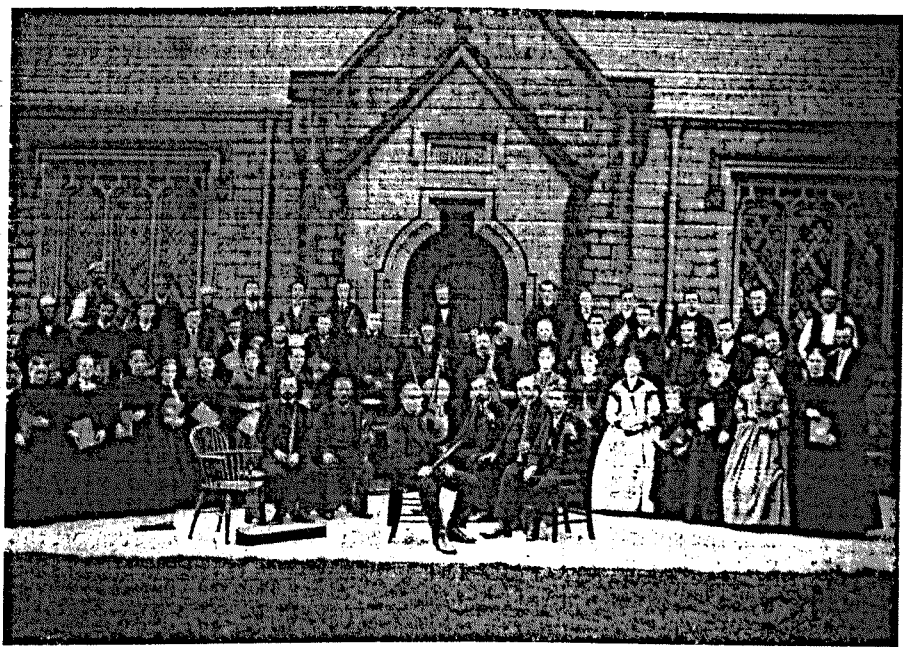


Figure 15.3 Photograph of Stalybridge Harmonic Society, c. 1865–85. Tameside Image Archive, t08609

At this period the mills worked until half-past seven o'clock in the evening, yet the rehearsals were arranged for a quarter to eight, because the members, particularly upon these nights, had their teas in the mills, and went direct to the place of meeting upon leaving work.<sup>30</sup>

Many of those listed as original members were involved in retail and related professions: Robert Crossley was a 'Shopkeeper and Dealer in Groceries and Sundries', Ralph Whitehead was a 'Corn and Flour Dealer', Joseph Norman was a pawnbroker, and Edward Hilton worked for a company that made cotton spinning machinery.<sup>31</sup> The conductor, Samuel Garlick, who had played the oboe in the 1824 choral society, was a self-taught musician. He had worked in the mills all his life, but 'like many of his contemporaries, he [had] found time, despite the long hours of labour usual in his youth, to acquire and cultivate a taste for the art of which he is locally so distinguished an exponent'.<sup>32</sup> Although the first public performances by the Harmonic Society were given in the Foresters' Hall,<sup>33</sup> it was decided in 1854 that the tenth annual oratorio, *Samson*, should

<sup>30</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 24 March 1894.

<sup>31</sup> *Slater's Alphabetical and Classified Trade Directory of Manchester and Salford, and their Vicinities* (Manchester: Isaac Slater, 1855), pp. 1,062–5.

<sup>32</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 15 September 1883.

<sup>33</sup> In 1836, members of the Foresters' Lodges in the Stalybridge District erected a substantial building – the Foresters' Hall. Night schools in connection with the Order

take place in Stalybridge Town Hall. Table 15.2, taken from the accounts of the Stalybridge Harmonic Society that year, shows the expenses incurred for this town hall performance.<sup>34</sup>

The table of accounts in Table 15.2 shows items normally associated with putting on a concert – the hire of the room or the buying of music, for example – but there are items that appear to raise questions about the condition of the room. If the room in the town hall was in a condition ready for performance, why would the society have had to pay William Clay for fixing gas pipes and fittings, and for replacing the town hall platform? This suggests that although the room seems to have been considered as a possible venue for concerts from the opening of the town hall, no provision for the needs of performance was considered. In order to perform an oratorio in the town hall, quite fundamental changes to the room had to be implemented and paid for by the performers themselves. Despite the amount of money spent in order to perform *Samson* in the town hall – £25 15s. 8d. in total – the *Stalybridge Reporter* of 24 March 1894 recalled that ‘the enterprise was a great success both musically and financially, the result being a gain to the society of £20’; and the society’s account books support this statement. Stalybridge Harmonic Society was the principal performer of oratorio in the town hall during this period, also performing miscellaneous concerts of mainly sacred music.

Stalybridge had another choral society at this time, known as the Stalybridge Philharmonic Society. Local organists played important roles both in the spread of the choral movement and in local musical education in nineteenth-century textile towns,<sup>35</sup> and John Marsden, the organist of St Paul’s Church, Stalybridge, was often responsible for bringing musical performances to the town hall. As elsewhere, he would have been expected to put on concerts to supplement his income as organist, and his ‘annual grand concerts’ began in 1852, featuring international soloists and instrumentalists.<sup>36</sup> These concerts ended in 1856, however, when he formed the Stalybridge Philharmonic Society<sup>37</sup> which gave on average four concerts a year in the town hall, normally two in the spring and two in the autumn. The repertoire was mainly vocal and sacred, yet it never performed oratorios in full. It was keen to provide music for the lower classes, stating that ‘The object of the society [is] to enable the humbler classes to listen to the best of music for

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of the Foresters were held there, but it was very much a building for public use. The large room was capable of holding 800 people, and at one time housed a large organ and a library; see *Bygone Stalybridge*, pp. 184–5, and *Morris and Co.’s Commercial Directory and Gazetteer of Ashton-under-Lyne and District* (Nottingham: Morris, 1878), p. 326.

34 Tameside Local Studies Library, Stalybridge Harmonic Society, Treasurer’s book, 1850–1855, Archive DD111/5.

35 See Walvin, *Leisure and Society 1830–1950*, p. 98.

36 ‘Mr John Marsden (Organist of St Paul’s, Staley), has much pleasure in intimating that he will give his fourth annual grand concert in the town hall, Stalybridge’: *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, 8 September 1855.

37 ‘Stalybridge Philharmonic Society – First Season 1856–7’, *ibid.*, 21 February 1857. It seems likely that the instrumentalists from Marsden’s previous concerts formed a core of players for the choral society.

a few pence, which otherwise they could not hear for less than some shillings'.<sup>38</sup> To fulfil this aim the society sometimes performed a 'People's Concert' a few days after its full-priced concerts, apparently with much success:

Considering the superior quality of the music and the low rates of admission [Reserved seats, 1s.; Back seats, 6d.; Gallery, 3d.; as opposed to their fully priced concerts – Reserved seats, 3s. 6d.; Back seats, 2s.; Gallery, 1s.<sup>39</sup>], we do not hesitate to say that this was the cheapest concert we can recollect to have been given in this neighbourhood, and have to congratulate the committee of the Philharmonic Society on the satisfactory results of their spirited endeavours to provide good cheap music for the people.<sup>40</sup>

By the 1850s the 'People's Concert' had been established in such places as Manchester, Leeds, Oldham, and Huddersfield. The concerts were specifically designed to unite different classes in the same building, representing a sense of community and shared experience.<sup>41</sup> The 'People's Concert' was a rare occurrence at Stalybridge Town Hall, but that it was present at all shows some acknowledgement presumably of the cheap concerts that had been established in Manchester and were advertised in the local paper.

For the first 30 years of its existence, Stalybridge Town Hall was regularly used for the performance of music, the majority of performers coming from within the town itself. While the two choral societies were the most regular users, other musicians and singers from different areas of Stalybridge life used the town hall for their music-making. As well as concerts, the hall was used for the popular nineteenth-century pastime of 'tea party and concert', where the concert normally consisted of glees and songs, performed chorally or as duets or solos, often with instrumental solos added for interest:

We cannot conclude our notice of this interesting party without passing a well earned compliment upon the members of the Church Choir and the Tonic Sol Fa Association for the efficient manner in which they carried out their part in the evening's entertainment. The singing was really beautiful, and called forth repeated bursts of applause. The songs, ballads, and choruses were such as breathe the most lofty and pure sentiments, and their effect upon the audience must have been of the most beneficial character.<sup>42</sup>

This combination of food and entertainment was very popular with churches, and during its first period the town hall was regularly used for this purpose. The town hall was also occasionally a venue for visiting performers, often

38 Stated in a report of a concert given by the society: *ibid.*, 28 March 1857.

39 - *Ibid.*, 28 February 1857.

40 *Ibid.*, 21 March 1857.

41 In London during the last 30 years of the nineteenth century, such organizations as the Kyrle Society, the People's Entertainment Society, and the National Sunday League were formed 'to break down the barriers which seemingly existed between the lower classes and the full enjoyment of music', see Mackerness, *A Social History of Music*, p. 200.

42 *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, 10 May 1862.



**Table 15.2** Expenses incurred for the town hall performance of Handel's *Samson* by Stalybridge Harmonic Society in 1854

<i>Date</i>	<i>Expense incurred</i>	<i>Amount</i>
25 May	'Small Score to Handel's Samson'	3s. 4d.
22 June	'Binding Samson'	18s.
19 September	'Tenor to Samson'	1s. 3d.
22 September	'Drum sticks'	1s. 6d.
7 October	'4 Voice parts to Samson'	6s. 8d.
12 October	'7 Voice parts to Samson'	—
25 October	'William Farrington for writing [i.e. copying] music'	3s. 6d.
26 October	'Hire of Town Hall and Gas'	£1, 1s.
26 October	'Replacing town hall platform'	9½d.
26 October	'John Swallow for going to the Gentlemen of the town for patronage and selling tickets'	£1 2s. 6d.
26 October	'Large bills posting'	4s.
26 October	'Sockets for orchestra'	10s. 1½d.
26 October	'William Clay for fixing gas pipes and fittings in the town hall'	4s. 6d.
26 October	'Mrs Sunderland[*] Engagement and expenses' [soprano soloist]	£5 5s.
26 October	'Mrs Lawton Engagement and expenses'	14s. 6d.
26 October	'Mr Inkersall Engagement and expenses' [tenor soloist]	£3 3s.
26 October	'Mr Edmondson Engagement and expenses' [alto soloist]	£1 11s. 6d.
26 October	'Mr Mellor Engagement and expenses' [bass soloist]	£1 1s.
26 October	'Mr Jackson Engagement and expenses'	£1, 5s.
26 October	'Mr Miller Engagement and expenses'	£1 1s
26 October	'Mr Smith Engagement and expenses'	10s.
26 October	'Mr Thorly Engagement and expenses'	£1 11s. 6d.
26 October	'Mr Gledele Engagement and expenses'	£1 11s. 6d.
26 October	'Mr Shepherd Engagement and expenses'	£1 7s. 6d.
26 October	'Mr Elwood Engagement and expenses'	£1 17s.

\* Susan Sunderland was a nationally known singer. For a summary of her career, see J.A. Hargreaves, "'The Calderdale Nightingale': Susan Sunderland, 1819–1905", *THAS*, 6 (1998): 46–54.

companies who had transferred from Manchester or Liverpool, as with the Brousil family, for example, a string and piano ensemble of six child prodigies from Bohemia, aged 6–17, who had also been performing daily in London the previous summer.<sup>43</sup>

TOWN HALL, STALYBRIDGE: THE BROUSIL FAMILY (who have been so enthusiastically received at the Free-trade Hall, Manchester) have the honour to announce a GRAND EVENING CONCERT, on Monday next, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1857, being the only evening they have at liberty previous to their leaving this neighbourhood, in order to appear before her Majesty, the Queen, in obedience to the royal command.<sup>44</sup>

Visiting artistes were eager to be seen as respectable performers, and, similarly, the promoters of performance in the town hall were keen that the venue should appear as a place for 'high class', rational recreation.

There is no doubt that Stalybridge Town Hall was a popular music venue in its early existence. Whilst this may have something to do with the novelty and potential prestige of the town hall, as will be seen, it could also have been because there was nowhere else suitable. Apart from the Foresters' Hall there was no other secular public building in Stalybridge that could house a large audience. When a newer, more fashionable, more suitable venue was built, things began to change and the period of musical decline in Stalybridge Town Hall began.

## Phase II: Desertion and Decline

In March 1857 Stalybridge was granted a charter which enabled the town to become a corporation. The incorporation of a town was often a catalyst for the building of a town hall to mark its newly raised status. Stalybridge did not follow this pattern, however. The town already had a town hall, but one that by this time was considered 'the laughing-stock of all who came into the town', rather than something to be proud of.<sup>45</sup>

As early as 1855 the suitability of Stalybridge Town Hall as a concert venue was brought into question. At first the criticisms were of superficial matters, such as cleanliness:

The concert room afforded undoubted evidence of the neglect of public property at present in this town; everything was filthy and covered with dust – the walls, the blinds, and the floor – all were thickly coated, and it may be easily imagined what were the

43 On the Brousil family, see Mackerness, *Littell's Living Age*, 50 (26 July 1856): 256.

44 *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, 7 February 1857.

45 *Ibid.*, 9 June 1866. At this time the town was building a new market, and the comment was made during discussion of the new building at a meeting of the Stalybridge Town Council. The mayor said that the town hall was not very handsome, 'but experience made fools wise, and he did not think they should fall into the same error with their new market'.



feelings of a large number of Mr Marsden's patrons after sitting there for two hours in the dust-clouds so repeatedly raised.<sup>46</sup>

However, two years later John Frederick Cheetham, secretary of the Stalybridge Philharmonic Society and a member of a prominent mill-owning family, suggested in his speech at the society's annual dinner that the problems were rather more fundamental:

He complained of the inconvenience of the Town Hall for the performance of music, denounced it as 'that monstrosity of bricks and mortar, in which it was difficult to keep one's gravity.' He hoped that when the new corporation got into full exercise [...] a new building would arise that would give the society sufficient accommodation for the concerts (cheers).<sup>47</sup>

This 'new building' was found in the Mechanics' Institution, which opened in July 1862. Although it was built by subscription rather than public money, the institution became the symbol of the new age of corporation, 'an excellent building for the improvement of the intellectual and moral condition of its inhabitants'.<sup>48</sup> For the Mechanics' Institution 'the Italian style [was] adopted, with, however, a considerable amount of Gothic Feeling in the details'.<sup>49</sup> The Gothic revival in Britain was at its peak between 1855 and 1885, and the Italian style was often used in connection with the Gothic, so in architectural terms the building for the Mechanics' Institution was at the height of fashion, and the first one of its kind in Stalybridge – very different from the plain Grecian façade of the Town Hall.

The large room in the Mechanics' Institution was clearly designed for community gatherings:

The large hall is a splendid room, and apparently well adapted for meetings, concerts, lectures, &c., and we understand that it will contain between 400 and 500 chairs [...] they have provided for the comfort and accommodation of the members, as well as attended to the useful and ornamental character of the interior, they would have felt highly rewarded for the great care with which they have attended to the true interests of the institution. [...] it will be a great ornament to the town, and what is still better, it will be a most useful institution and well adapted for the object its promoters have in view.<sup>50</sup>

46 Ibid., 29 September 1855.

47 Ibid., 28 March 1857.

48 *Ashton and Stalybridge Reporter*, 25 January 1862. Mechanics' Institutions were built from 1823 onwards, after the inauguration of the London Mechanics' Institution. Originally intended to educate the artisans in order to make them better workers, the institutions gradually became clubs for the lower middle classes. They were an important part of the social history of music in the nineteenth century, offering classes in music and singing, as well as concerts in the large hall. For more, see Mackerness, *A Social History of Music*, pp. 147–52.

49 *Ashton and Stalybridge Reporter*, 24 August 1861.

50 Ibid., 12 August 1862.

At a time when music-making was seen as important for the purposes of education, leisure, and self-improvement, the institution had been built with facilities for both performers and audience. In an attempt to communicate worthy values, the large hall was decorated with mottoes, although it is not known what these were. This is strikingly similar to Leeds Town Hall, which opened just four years earlier, where mottoes such as 'Weave Truth with Trust' and 'Forward' were inscribed in various parts of the hall.<sup>51</sup> In fact, it seems that the Mechanics' Institution was built as if it were a town hall, both physically and symbolically; and was designed to offer the people of Stalybridge everything they had missed out on in the building of their town hall in 1831 – the chance to create a symbol of progress, prosperity, and civic pride that was fully equipped to enhance the life of the community. Therefore, people from all aspects of Stalybridge life wanted to be a part of it.

The move away from music-making at the town hall coincides exactly with the opening of the new Mechanics' Institution building in July 1862. Stalybridge Town Hall was being used for musical performance on a regular basis in the first half of 1862, but at the end of June, when the Mechanics' Institution came into use, those performances ceased abruptly. The Mechanics' Institution hosted all the musical events that were previously performed in the Town Hall, including the two choral societies' concerts.

In 1870 there was a slight change in the Town Hall's favour, both in terms of musical life and public opinion, which seems linked with the redecorating of the assembly room in the Town Hall that year. The *Ashton Reporter* of 2 July predicted that, when finished, it would be 'the most handsome room in the town and a credit to the Corporation'. However, even after these improvements the room still provoked criticism, as in this review of a Stalybridge Harmonic Society performance of Handel's *Solomon*:

We are inclined to think that the acoustic properties of the hall interfered with the proper effect of [the tenor soloist's] vocal powers. [...] At the outset the defective acoustic properties of the hall were rather painfully apparent, preventing, as it did, the thorough blending of the vocal and instrumental parts.<sup>52</sup>

It is difficult to know how much attention was paid to the acoustics of the Mechanics' Institution by its architects, but no complaints of this kind seem to have been reported.

The renovations did not entice the majority of Stalybridge musicians back to the Town Hall, although there was a slight increase in the number of musical events, including the 'tea party and concert' entertainments and occasional concerts by societies such as the Ashton-under-Lyne and Stalybridge Vocal Union.<sup>53</sup> Throughout this middle period the Town Hall was still used for lectures,

51 Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 181.

52 *Ashton Reporter*, 7 October 1876.

53 For example, *ibid.*, 10 December 1870.

meetings, and council business, but also occasional visits from visiting performers such as the African Opera Company in 1863:

On Wednesday night, the African Opera Company of male and female vocalists, musicians, comedians and dancers, gave their evening's entertainment in the Town Hall to a tolerably large audience, who received the performances with the greatest marks of approbation.<sup>54</sup>

It is useful to compare the musical life of Stalybridge Town Hall during this period with that of its neighbouring town, Ashton-under-Lyne (see Table 15.3). Ashton was larger than Stalybridge – the 1871 census shows a population of 64,557 in Ashton to Stalybridge's 35,114<sup>55</sup> – and the populations of both was heavily concentrated in the cotton industry. A factory inspector described Ashton in 1863 as a town 'almost entirely' dependent upon cotton.<sup>56</sup> In 1840 the commissioners of Ashton built a new town hall, 'in the Corinthian Style',<sup>57</sup> which was subsequently enlarged considerably in 1878. In Stalybridge the primary aim of the commissioners had been to build a market hall; its municipal and community functions were a secondary consideration. In contrast, the large hall in Ashton Town Hall was designed specifically as an assembly room for the people of the town. It was stated that 'the Town Hall will not be let for any purpose having an immoral or irreligious tendency, and the committee will reserve the right of breaking any engagement if the hall is intended to be used for any purpose at variance with these conditions'.<sup>58</sup> The commissioners of Ashton, it seems, wanted the town hall to be a place for rational recreation, the embodiment of the Victorian values of temperance, self-improvement, and morality.

The contrast between the musical lives of the two town halls is unmistakable, and further enhanced by the fact that some of the acts which transferred from Ashton to Stalybridge did not transfer to the unpopular town hall. The difference can be explained firstly in terms of fashion: Ashton Town Hall was a large building, designed with performances in mind; built less than ten years after Stalybridge Town Hall, it was still considered to be stylish, impressive, and useful to the people of the town. As discussed, Stalybridge Town Hall had lost ground to the Mechanics' Institution; Ashton also had a Mechanics' Institution, which was sometimes used for the performance of music, but its influence on the musical life of the town did not rival that of Stalybridge Mechanics' Institution. In Ashton

54 *Ashton and Stalybridge Reporter*, 8 August 1863. Not much is known about this particular touring company, which was probably made up of black rather than blackface singers. For context on touring black performers in England, see note 71 below.

55 *Morris and Co's Commercial Directory*, pp. 1 (Ashton) and 326 (Stalybridge).

56 *Reports of Inspectors of Factories* (Redgrave, 30 April 1863), XVIII, p. 19, cited in N. Kirk, *The Growth of Working Class Reformation in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 46.

57 *Ashton-under-Lyne Official Handbook* (Cheltenham and London: E.D.J. Burrows, 1949), p. 12.

58 *Reporter Book Almanack and Manual of Local Information for 1882* (Ashton-under-Lyne: J. Andrew, 1882), p. 65.



**Table 15.3** Comparison of musical events in Ashton Town Hall and Stalybridge Town Hall in 1876\*

	<i>Ashton Town Hall</i>	<i>Stalybridge Town Hall</i>
27 January	'Hague's Minstrels' <sup>†</sup>	
12 February	'Private assembly: Alexander Owen's band and chorus'	
19 February	'Ashton Gentlemen's Glee Club'	
26 February	'Dramatic and musical entertainment – George Langford'	
4 March	'Grand ball – Enos Andrews' String Band'	
24 June		'Old Folk's Tea Party'
16 September	'Vocal comedian, mimic, ventriloquist, instrumentalist, author and delineator of comical characters – Harry Liston' <sup>‡</sup>	
5 October		'Stalybridge Harmonic Society, Handel's <i>Solomon</i> '
28 October	'Dramatic and musical entertainment – George Langford'	
15 November	'Gentlemen's Glee Club Concert'	
5 & 18–19 December	'Charity concert for St Joseph's Orphanage and Industrial School Sacred Service of Song – Wilmington's Jubilee Singers'	
27 December	'Gentlemen's Glee Club Annual Dress Concert'	

\* Data from weekly editions of the *Ashton Reporter* for 1876. The title of this newspaper does not necessarily indicate a bias in the reporting of musical events in Stalybridge and Ashton, see note 28 above.

† The same troupe performed at the People's Hall in Stalybridge, which became the Victoria Theatre in 1880.

‡ Liston also performed at the Mechanics' Institution, Stalybridge.

the town hall seemed to provide for all musical needs, whereas in Stalybridge, at this time, the town hall certainly did not.

### Phase III: Revival

The renaissance of music in Stalybridge Town Hall began with the passing of the Stalybridge Extension and Improvement Act in 1881. The town had sought Parliamentary consent to include three nearby villages within its boundaries. The result was a fourth ward for municipal election purposes, which created more

councillors, enlarged the town's population, and enhanced its status. The Mayor of Stalybridge suggested, therefore, that the present town hall could no longer accommodate the increased number of officials resulting from the extension to the town.<sup>59</sup> This was apparently a nationwide problem: as the pressure on town-hall accommodation increased, additions to original buildings became commonplace from the 1860s. Stalybridge Town Council initially considered erecting a new town hall on a different site, but eventually decided to extend the existing building. Significantly for the musical life of the town, the large assembly room was increased in size, and a new staircase rose to it from the vestibule of the main entrance. The old entrance near the platform was adapted to provide an extra exit in case of emergency, and the creation of a more imposing main entrance encouraged patrons to think they were entering a more grandiose environment. It seems that enhanced grandeur throughout the building caused people to change their responses from embarrassment to pride.

Like Ashton Town Hall, the new building was not only to be an administrative centre, but a prestigious place of assembly for the people of the town. The design took account of the 'Queen Anne' style of architecture, which was at its most popular in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and featured picturesque detail (see Figure 15.4). The new and improved Stalybridge Town Hall was opened on 22 September 1883 with a whole day of celebrations, including a procession around the town accompanied by two of the town's bands (involving officials from Stalybridge as well as neighbouring towns, the architect, the workmen, and many Stalybridge inhabitants); an exclusive tour of the new building; and a celebratory banquet at the Town Hall in the evening.<sup>60</sup> This level of public rejoicing was a feature of the age, with the opening of town halls providing an excuse for some of the most abundant revelry; it was 'the occasion for a town to measure itself against its neighbours and claim its new status'.<sup>61</sup> For 50 years Stalybridge Town Hall had stood as a monument to the utilitarian buildings of the past; now, the newly renovated hall was the height of architectural fashion, no longer a 'laughing stock' but a building of status that could be measured against that of Ashton and the surrounding towns.

The return of the musicians of Stalybridge to the town hall was almost as abrupt as their departure; as soon as the new town hall was in use a number of musical events were given in the large room. Average ticket prices came into line with those for the same type of performances at Ashton – namely 3s. for first seats, 2s. for second, and 1s. for back seats and the gallery<sup>62</sup> – and it was advertised in the newspapers that 'for the convenience of the Ashton people, tram-cars will run from the doors of the town hall to the Old Square after the concert'.<sup>63</sup> This suggests that Stalybridge Town Hall was now of a standard to poach patrons from its rival in Ashton. The rise in performances at Stalybridge Town Hall resulted in a decrease in the number

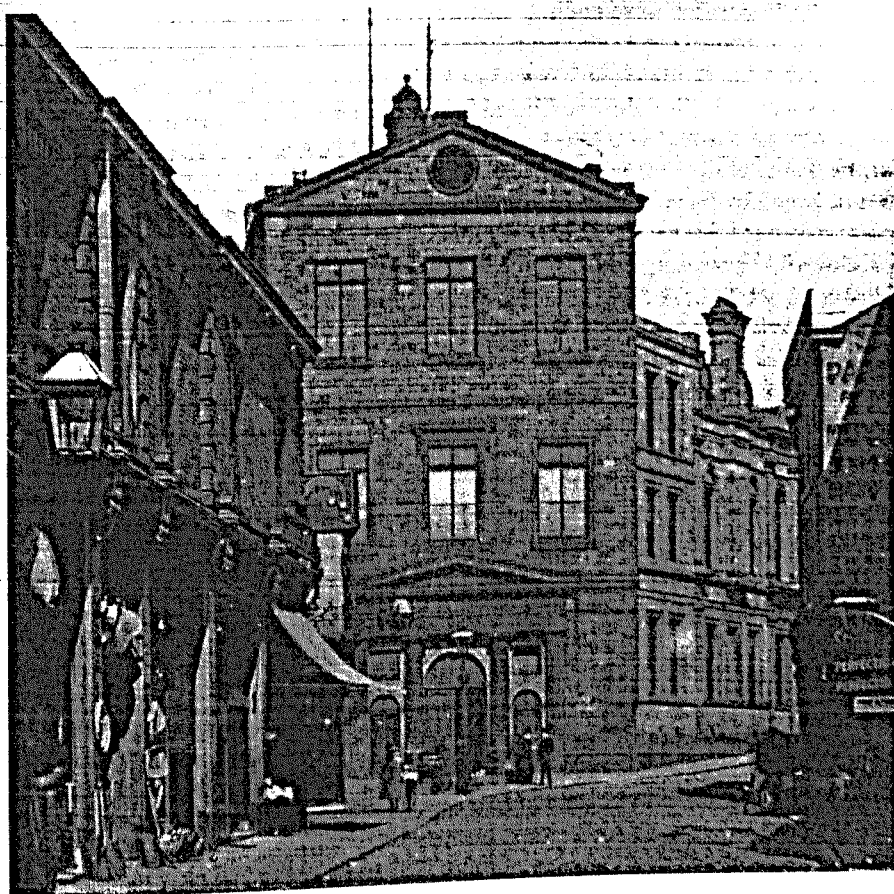
59 See *Stalybridge Centenary Souvenir 1857–1957*, p. 59.

60 *Stalybridge Reporter*, 22 September 1883.

61 Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls*, p. 216.

62 See, for example, *Stalybridge Reporter*, 9 February 1884 and 14 March 1885.

63 *Ibid.*, 18 February 1884.



**Figure 15.4** Stalybridge Town Hall from the front, c. 1896–1902. Tameside Image Archive, t10325

at the Mechanics' Institution, although it still remained a popular musical venue. A variety of different musical, social, and reforming organizations began to give miscellaneous amateur concerts in the town hall, from the Orpheus Vocal Quartet to the Stalybridge Anglers' Association, and often the Stalybridge branch of the British Women's Temperance Association.<sup>64</sup> Guest vocal and instrumental soloists were engaged from the area, with repertoire mostly consisting of glees, songs, and duets, both religious and secular, and solo instrumental pieces.

<sup>64</sup> 'The Stalybridge Orpheus Prize Quartett will give a grand concert, town hall, Stalybridge, Tuesday, February 27, 1894'; *ibid.*, 17 February 1894. 'The members of the Stalybridge Anglers' Association held their third annual concert in the Town Hall on Thursday evening'; *ibid.*, 22 March 1890. 'British Women's Temperance Association, Stalybridge Branch. The third entertainment will be held in the town hall, Stalybridge, [...] January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1884'; *ibid.*, 26 January 1884.



Choral societies were again a feature of the concert life of the Town Hall, although not until the 1890s. Stalybridge Harmonic Society was still active, but the Stalybridge Philharmonic Society had long since disbanded; however, a new choral society, the Stalybridge Choral Union, which was founded in the 1870s and originally performed in the Mechanics' Institution, began to give performances in the Town Hall. This society generally performed operas, such as *Chilperic*, a comic opera by Hervé (1825–92), in 1894. Andrew Lamb comments that 'Hervé's compositions were mostly written for unsophisticated audiences and often hastily produced';<sup>65</sup> however, it was one of the first performances of opera in the Town Hall and, while acknowledging its weaknesses, the *Stalybridge Reporter* of 12 December 1894 indicated that it had been well received:

The work is one which had considerable vogue in its day, but it has gone rather out of fashion lately [...] It contains very tuneful and sprightly music, and the libretto is smart. Some middling puns there are, but they are compensated for by humorous, witty, and pungent sayings [...] The total effect of the performance is extremely pleasing, and on Thursday night especially, the approval of the audience was very warmly displayed.

Though opera was new to the audiences of Stalybridge Town Hall, it was apparently well attended, which seems to have led both choral societies to move often from oratorio to opera in the 1890s.<sup>66</sup> In this third period the Town Hall also became a regular venue for the enhancement of the mass singing movement amongst children.<sup>67</sup> Sometimes the performers were from homes for the destitute; but there were also children from the many church schools in Stalybridge, where singing was promoted for the improvement of the students. This was presumably to give the children the experience of singing on a different stage, to a larger audience, and in a more prestigious environment, whilst arguably also indulging a sentimental streak in Victorian culture.

One of the benefits of using town halls for concerts and entertainments was that the performance space could be interdenominational. The churches of Stalybridge certainly made use of the facilities offered at the town hall, whether it was for tea parties and entertainment, or simply amateur concerts. However, it seems to have been the Catholic Church that made the most use of the building. In the early nineteenth century there had been a major influx of Irish immigrants into England, attracted by new employment opportunities in the cotton and construction industries of the north-west. What was perceived of their moral condition appalled Victorian society. Fifty years later Engels remarked that:

65 Andrew Lamb, 'Hervé [Ronger, Florimond]', in *GMO* (accessed 23 June 2006).

66 This tallies with Dave Russell's observation that choral societies began to add operatic selections to their repertoire from the 1890s onwards; see *Popular Music in England*, p. 216.

67 On children and the mass singing movement, including Tonic Sol-fa, see Bernarr Rainbow, *The Land Without Music: musical education in England 1800–60, and its continental antecedents* (London: Novello, 1967), pp. 139–55, also the chapters by Sarah Taylor and Catherine Dale in this current volume (Chapters 11 and 16 respectively).

The southern facile character of the Irish-man, his crudity, which places him but little above the savage, his contempt for all humane enjoyments, in which his very crudeness makes him incapable of sharing, his filth and poverty, all favour drunkenness.<sup>68</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century Stalybridge had a large Irish immigrant community of its own. The Catholic Church of the town maintained a watch over this new society, making arduous efforts to render the Irish more culturally acceptable to the 'respectable' sections of the town. Catholics were traditionally seen as outsiders in England; but by establishing Catholic schools and mutual improvement societies, for example, the Catholic Church of Stalybridge promoted diligence, frugality, and temperance as qualities the Irish population of Stalybridge should aspire to attain.<sup>69</sup> Using the Town Hall – the venue frequented by the highest class of performers and audiences in the town – for their St Patrick's Day celebrations and concerts by the Catholic brass band, the Irish population could signal their aspirations in that direction.

During this period the Town Hall was again used by touring artistes on an infrequent basis – often those artistes who had previously performed at the Mechanics' Institution. Touring concert companies were the most frequent visitors to the hall, mostly performing a professional version of the type of programmes favoured for miscellaneous choral society concerts. Other companies presented a far more diverse programme, such as the following:

On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday next, Clari's Concert Company will appear in a Grand Entertainment, 'The Scottish Chieftians,' also Bros. D'Alcorn, negro artistes: Misses Clara and Nellie, duettists; Mr Marcus Boyle, vocal comedian, from the London music halls; The Excelsior Variety Troupe; Messrs Ridley and St. Clare, musical clowns and contortionists.<sup>70</sup>

There were also travelling minstrel companies such as the Robertson and Holme's Coloured Operatic Kentucky Minstrels, and international acts like the Jungfrau Kapelle, a German family who performed on unusual musical instruments.<sup>71</sup> The style of the entertainment supplied by these visitors, some of whom were actually billed as music-hall artistes, suggests that they were using Stalybridge Town Hall as a temperate and more respectable alternative to the music hall. Music halls were not seen as reputable until the end of the nineteenth century, mainly because the acts were not considered sufficiently wholesome or moral; if an act wanted to be

<sup>68</sup> Engels, *Condition of the Working-Class in England*, p. 125, quoted in Hunt, *Building Jerusalem*, p. 42. On Roman Catholicism in England at this time, see Edward Norman, *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984).

<sup>69</sup> Kirk, *The Growth of Working Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England*, pp. 206, 319–20.

<sup>70</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 25 April 1885.

<sup>71</sup> The Victorians took delight in the foreign and exotic, and were attracted to acts like these; see Derek Scott, 'Blackface Minstrels, Black Minstrels, and the Reception in England', in Rachel Cowgill and Julian Rushton (eds), *Europe, Empire, and Spectacle in Nineteenth-Century British Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 265–80.



considered reputable and 'high-class', therefore, they would need to find a more respectable venue, and in Stalybridge and Ashton, the town halls seemed to offer just that.<sup>72</sup> The acts that performed as part of 'Clari's Concert Company' (see the quotation above), fall into the three categories that Dagmar Kift identifies as the main components of a music-hall programme: circus numbers, music and theatre, and information and innovations.<sup>73</sup> It appears that the type of building Stalybridge Town Hall represented made the difference between rough and rational recreation.

While this third period in the musical life of Stalybridge Town Hall mirrors the first, to some extent, in terms of its richness and diversity, there is a significant difference between the two: in the 1830s–50s, the Town Hall had what was really the only large public room in the town, and there was little competition for audience and performers; by this later period, however, there were many more halls and musical attractions in the town to compete with for patrons. The following article appeared in the *Stalybridge Reporter* of 19 October 1895, neatly summarizing the changing nature of the town's musical life in the last quarter of the nineteenth century:

There has been such a surfeit of cheap music at P.S.A. meetings and religious services on the one side, and at smoking concerts and various public occasions on the other, that the desire to attend the old-fashioned concert or mixed concert of a superior, or, at any rate, a more formal and expensive character, has declined [...] There is apparently some change in the public taste, or, as we say, it has been to some extent partly surfeited and partly vitiated by the growth of smoking concerts, P.S.A. entertainments, church and chapel music services, and other semi-gratuitous attractions.<sup>74</sup>

The most professional rival to the Town Hall was the Victoria Theatre, which opened in 1880. After the original theatre burnt down, it reopened as the Grand Theatre in 1890.<sup>75</sup> Although mainly established for the performance of drama, the theatre was often used for music – obviously music written for the stage, but also the kinds of miscellaneous vocal and instrumental concerts, sometimes of sacred music, that were performed at the Town Hall; the management was constantly striving to provide a respectable form of entertainment. However, theatres at the

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<sup>72</sup> Douglas A. Reid suggests that 'theatrical entertainment enjoyed in morally unsullied venues like hotel assembly rooms, temperance halls, town halls, or even the circus, was acceptable', see his 'Playing and Praying' in M. Daunt (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: vol. 3, 1840–1950* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), p. 780.

<sup>73</sup> Dagmar Kift, *The Victorian Music Hall* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 53.

<sup>74</sup> The P.S.A., or Pleasant Sunday Afternoon movement, was founded in 1875 by John Blackham. Mainly introduced for the benefit of working men, it was an international movement with the aim of religious, cultural, and moral education on a Sunday afternoon.

<sup>75</sup> This was a professional theatre with its own company, and aspired to present high culture. Before it opened, the *Ashton Reporter* of 18 September 1880 announced that 'a high-class company is to be maintained, and Shakespearian plays will probably be given periodically'.

time could not fully escape from the reputation for roughness they acquired in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. As one visitor had put it:

The most striking thing to a foreigner in English Theatre is the unheard-of coarseness and brutality of the audience. The consequence of this is that the higher and more civilised classes go only to the Italian Opera, and very rarely visit their national theatre.<sup>76</sup>

In November 1890 the Stalybridge Harmonic Society, then in its 46th year, staged a production of Auber's opera *Masaniello*. As the staging involved five fully painted sets, the management of the theatre suggested to the society that it perform the opera there. The society refused the offer, suggesting that to perform the opera in that building would not be suitable for a society promoting rational recreation:

Mr Walters [the manager of the Grand Theatre at the time], we believe, would have been glad at the outset to have negotiated for the production of the opera at his theatre, but some of the members and their friends had scruples, which we can easily understand and appreciate, on the subject, and the idea was not pressed.<sup>77</sup>

Whilst the local newspaper predicted that 'Stalybridge people will possess in the new theatre a Temple of the Drama in which they will be able to take an honest pride',<sup>78</sup> and the theatre programme never included anything that could be compared with music hall,<sup>79</sup> the reporter here does not seem at all surprised at the society's decision, which suggests that this view of the theatre's moral unsuitability was fairly widespread in the town.

Other halls in Stalybridge owned by various institutions offered the same type of entertainment as the town hall. The Foresters' Hall, the Oddfellows' Hall, and the Drill Hall all hosted musical concerts, sometimes taking the form of social gatherings and *conversazione*, using both performers from within the institution and visitors.<sup>80</sup> The Oddfellow's Hall even had performers from outside the town

76 E.M. Butler (ed.), *A Regency Visitor: the English tour of Prince Pückler-Muskau, described in his letters, 1826-1828* (London: Collins, 1957), quoted in Golby and Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd*, p. 70.

77 *Stalybridge Reporter*, 22 November 1890.

78 *Ibid.*, 11 January 1890.

79 Plays such as *Maria Morton*, *The Convict*, *Hard Times*, and a variety of Shakespeare plays were performed, often several different plays a week (*ibid.*, 23 August 1890). A pantomime was often presented for three weeks at Christmas, and dramatic and musical companies (such as D'Oyly Carte) also visited (*Ashton Reporter*, 16 December 1882).

80 The Foresters and Oddfellows were among a range of friendly societies which developed out of the drinking clubs in taverns, convivial societies, and debating clubs of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century they were examples of working-class self-dependence and respectability, qualities induced in their members by a combination of rituals and benefits; see J. Fullagar, 'Friendly Societies', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, p. 514. These friendly societies were closely related to the working-men's

such as Mr T.R. Nugent's Comic Opera Company in March, 1885. The admission prices for this were cheaper than for the Town Hall – 2s. for front seats, 1s. for second seats, and 6d. for back seats.<sup>81</sup>

The Liberal and Conservative Clubs of Stalybridge provided musical entertainment, most often in the form of 'Smoking Concerts', so called because they took place in the 'smoking room' – the large assembly room in the various buildings used as club premises. They were miscellaneous concerts of mainly vocal repertoire, also of the kind given in the Town Hall, and sometimes with guest artists engaged:

The fifth smoking concert of the season was held at this club on Tuesday evening. There was a large and appreciative audience. Mr Linton Ives as pianist and principal vocalist, and Councillor J.W. Whitehead, as chairman, were in attendance.<sup>82</sup>

This seems an entirely respectable form of entertainment. However, the presence of a 'chairman' suggests a link with music hall, and with the likelihood of there being alcohol at such institutions, the smoking concerts would not have won approval from all sides.

The churches of Stalybridge offered alternative sources of entertainment, and generated a wide range of supplementary organizations, clubs, and societies. Stalybridge was dominated by Nonconformity, although the significant number of Anglican establishments brought the number of churches in the town to almost 20 by the end of the century.<sup>83</sup> They were all active in trying to bring respectable yet cheap, if not free, entertainment to the population. This generally took the form of 'Band of Hope' meetings,<sup>84</sup> tea parties with concerts,<sup>85</sup> and the 'service of song',<sup>86</sup> all of which were linked to the idea of temperance and moral improvement. Such entertainments are likely to have been directed towards a

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clubs, which were most prolific in northern England from the 1860s. They were intended as a temperate alternative to the public houses, although the sale of alcohol was eventually permitted.

81 *Stalybridge Reporter*, 14 March 1885.

82 *Ibid.*, 22 November 1890.

83 For more on the religious history of Stalybridge, see *Bygone Stalybridge*, pp. 101–25.

84 For example, 'Chapel-street Band of Hope – The fortnightly meeting of the above society was held in the school room on Wednesday evening [...] A miscellaneous entertainment, consisting of songs, readings, recitations, &c., was gone through': *Stalybridge Reporter*, 1 March 1890. The Band of Hope was the youth wing of the temperance movement. Founded in Leeds in 1847, it sought to educate young people against the evils of alcohol through recreation and instruction; see P. Horn, *Pleasures and Pastimes in Victorian Britain* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), p. 250.

85 See, for example, the 'tea party and concert' given at Holy Trinity Mission Hall on 11 April 1885: *Stalybridge Reporter*, 18 April 1885.

86 For example, 'A new service of song entitled "Florence Nightingale, or the Crimean Heroine" was rendered at the Gospel Mission Hall, on Sunday afternoon, by the members of the choir': *ibid.*, 12 April 1890.



more working-class audience, and therefore generally not the same audience as for the town hall. However, it is likely that many middle-class philanthropists also attended the church entertainments, as their duty, and attended the town hall concerts as their recreation.

At the opposite end of the scale, the public houses of Stalybridge frequently offered musical entertainment, often in the form of the benefit concert:

On Friday evening week a benefit concert was held at the Friend and Pitcher Inn, Caroline-street, for the benefit of Messrs Burrows and Hardwick. The chairman was Mr H Gamble and Mr W Shepley officiated as the accompanist. During the evening the following talent appeared and gave their services – John Wade, tenor; H. Hamilton, character comedian and dancer; W. Cummings, Irish comedian; H. Elliot, Dutch vocalist; R. Heywood, motto and topical vocalist; and Messrs Burrows and Hardwick, English and Irish character duettists. The room was crowded, and the affair proved a great success.<sup>87</sup>

It seems ironic, that though these concerts were given with the purpose of raising money for someone in need, their location would have made them morally unacceptable to many. Admittedly the programme reported above is familiar from the music halls, but again, this form of entertainment had been seen at the town hall.

There was much, therefore, to rival the town hall entertainments in this latter period. Indeed, at points in the year there was some form of musical entertainment almost every night of the week in Stalybridge. The newspaper might have suggested a drop in attendance at 'the old-fashioned concert or mixed concert of a superior, [...] more formal and expensive character' (see above), but the alternative entertainments we have described here seem not to have affected the number of musical events given in Stalybridge Town Hall now that the inhabitants had a new, more custom-built hall in which to perform and to listen, for attending the town hall was a signifier of status and respectability – a symbol of the wealth and prosperity of the patron as well as the town.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the leisure occupations of the English people were fundamentally transformed in the nineteenth century by the process of urbanization and industrialization, and the building of town halls made a significant contribution to this. As a symbol of status and morality, the town hall made the ideal venue for nineteenth-century music-making. The musical life of Stalybridge Town Hall was entirely commensurate with changes in public taste regarding the building. In the first period, when the building was new, the assembly room was used frequently as a music venue. At this time there were really no other large public halls in the town. By the start of the second period, Stalybridge had become a corporation,

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 6 September 1890.

which enhanced civic pride among the people of the town. Whilst other towns and cities had built lavish town halls that symbolized the prosperity and progress of the town, Stalybridge was trapped with a town hall 'built at a period before the revival of architectural taste, and one of the relics of that unfortunate Georgian era in which almost every building erected was a model of hideousness and bad taste'.<sup>88</sup> It was unfashionable and distasteful to the people of the 1860s whose attention refocused, therefore, on the building for the Mechanics' Institution. The design of this building was the epitome of the progress and fashion of the time, and consequently it became the centre of community life. At this point, it was the Mechanics' Institution, and no longer the Town Hall, that was at the heart of the musical life of Stalybridge.

An article on town halls in *The Builder* of 1878, suggested that 'Possessing wealth is the prelude to architectural display'.<sup>89</sup> By the time it came to the rebuilding of the Town Hall in 1881–83, at the start of the third period, the architects had learnt from the example of town halls across the country, and gave Stalybridge something that catered to the needs of the community, but was also a fashionable building and at last a symbol of civic pride. Even though the town had many public buildings that could be used for the performance of music, Stalybridge Town Hall proved itself as the hub of musical life in the community, supplying this important cotton town with opportunities for respectable, rational recreation and self-improvement, whilst stirring the musical and civic pride of the inhabitants.

Stalybridge Town Hall was able to compete with the other musical activities in the town because it was now a valued building. T. Wemyss Reid, in his biography of the prominent Leeds doctor J.D. Heaton, suggested that:

It may seem a small matter to those who have not studied these questions of local politics whether a Town Hall in a provincial city shall be of one style of architecture or another, whether it shall be large or small, handsome or the reverse. As a matter of fact, a great deal may depend upon the decision which is arrived at in such a matter by the authorities upon whose judgment the final decision depends.<sup>90</sup>

This was certainly true of Stalybridge. The reputation of the original town hall was affected by the fact that it was built on an inappropriate piece of donated land, with attention to function but not aesthetic in its design. Nobody wanted to perform music in 'that monstrosity of bricks and mortar', but once the council decided to rebuild the hall as a symbolic, fashionable building, it became the principal performance space in the town. The *Stalybridge Reporter* boasted on 15 December 1883:

<sup>88</sup> *Ashton Reporter*, 10 December 1881.

<sup>89</sup> 'The Development of the Modern Town-hall', *Builder*, 36 (10 August 1878): 821–3 (p. 821).

<sup>90</sup> *A Memoir of J.D. Heaton, M.D.*, quoted in Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 159.

We are musical people in Stalybridge. Everybody says so and everybody is right. There is, in fact nothing in which we have a better right to pride ourselves.

But it was only when Stalybridge Town Hall was able to stimulate the civic pride of those 'musical people', that it could really be said to have influenced the musical life of the town.



MARTIN HEWITT AND RACHEL COWGILL, EDS,  
'VICTORIAN SOUNDSCAPES REVISITED'  
(LEEDS: LCVS WITH LUCEM, 2007)

'The exponent of the life and soul of the city': the town hall as a music venue in the nineteenth century

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The notion of progress was a driving force in British culture in the nineteenth century – an age characterised by rapid and continual change in intellectual, social and material environments. At the heart of this fascination with progress was the increasing industrialisation and urbanisation of nineteenth-century society. Together with a progressively more competitive commercial environment, this encouraged a newly developing consciousness of local and civic pride. As a result, local politicians encouraged the building of civic buildings as material examples of the constitutional and economic changes of the time. The erection of public buildings fuelled the intense rivalry between the towns and cities, and town hall building was at the forefront of this. A town hall was seen as a monument to the glory, abilities and achievements of the town or city. In the opinion of Sir Charles Barry:

A Town Hall should [...] be the most dominant and important of the Municipal Buildings of the City in which it is placed. It should be the means of giving due expression to public feeling upon all national and municipal events of importance. [It should serve,] as it were, as the exponent of the life and soul of the City.<sup>1</sup>

The town hall of the nineteenth century was the ultimate representation of the new age of urban consciousness and a future age of wealth and progress.

As a result of the increase in population of the towns and cities, moral reformers of the time became increasingly concerned with the idea of progress through a greater sense of morality. In the early part of the

century commentators repeatedly said that the only real form of recreation available in the new urban setting was that connected with the consumption of alcohol. Social reformers became anxious to limit the place of alcohol in working-class culture in order to create a 'rational' recreation.

The most popular form of rational recreation was music, encouraged greatly by the Nonconformist reformers. Through them, music became known as the 'sacred art' and, because of its perceived ability to civilise and humanise, its performance was encouraged by Christian philanthropists and missionaries of the time as a form of self-improvement:

The experience of the present day has shown, and is showing more and more, that even the classes who earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, may find in music a recreation within their reach, full of innocent enjoyment, and pregnant with moral and social benefits.<sup>2</sup>

As the century advanced, halls specifically designed as suitable venues for popular, though culturally respectable, activities were increasingly in demand and it therefore became a necessity for towns to provide performance spaces other than those traditionally provided, and restricted, by the church. In many places the new town hall presented the ideal venue, and in some cases they were built expressly for this purpose. No town hall was considered complete without its great hall and so the use of this space for concerts provided an important direct link between the citizens and municipality of the town, achieving both a political as well as a moral and artistic mission:

If a noble municipal palace [...] were to be erected in the middle of their hitherto squalid and unbeautiful town, it would become a practical admonition to the populace of the value of beauty and art, and in course of time men would learn to live up to it.<sup>3</sup>

But was music in the town hall a regular phenomenon and did the building of a town hall influence the musical life of the town or city? I shall attempt to address these questions in this particular paper by using the town of Stalybridge as a case study.

Stalybridge in the nineteenth century was one town in an area made up of small cotton towns, supported industrially by their proximity to Manchester. In 1828 the Stalybridge Police and Market Act, known within the town as the Stalybridge Improvement Act, became law, establishing a body of twenty-one elected commissioners 'for lighting, watching, and otherwise improving the town of Stalybridge', and for



'regulating the police and erecting a Market Place within the said town'.<sup>4</sup> In 1830 the Commissioners prepared a proposal for the building of a market hall, built through joint stock. During the construction of the market, changes were made to the original design in order to provide water closets, committee rooms and a public hall, thus changing the building into a town hall with the market underneath.

Stalybridge was one of the last town halls to incorporate a market, this being more of an eighteenth-century trend, but Stalybridge Town Hall was built for purely functional reasons, before any real sense of civic pride affected the architecture. Stalybridge Town Hall was not at the forefront of ornamental design. In fact, Colin Cunningham's study of Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls suggests that it 'is built in a straightforward way against the slope, and only avoids being mistaken for a mill by the provision of a careful Doric portico at the level of the lower ground floor and pedimented gable two floors above'.<sup>5</sup> Stalybridge Town Hall was built at the end of the 'Greek' period, resulting in a town hall that displayed none of the symbolic decoration associated with later Italianate or Gothic Town Halls such as Leeds or Manchester.

In its report of the opening of Stalybridge Town Hall the *Manchester Guardian* mentions that the upper portion of the building was not reserved solely for official business.

Above this story is a large handsome public room, 67 feet long, 38 feet wide, 23½ feet high; with small and convenient ante-rooms, and an orchestra. The room will consequently be very well adapted for concerts, balls, assemblies, public meetings and public exhibitions.<sup>6</sup>

The large assembly room in the town hall became integral to the musical life of Stalybridge. The first reference to entertainment in Stalybridge Town Hall is during a Commissioners' meeting when it was decided, probably because of the financial incentive, 'that the large room be let for public purposes so as to be made productive'.<sup>7</sup> The first letting was to the proprietors of the Leeds Theatre, after which the large room was used for a variety of community events including balls, lectures and concerts.

An important part of the musical life of Stalybridge was the concerts given by the choral societies. Choral singing was an important pastime in Lancashire and Yorkshire textile districts from the early nineteenth century and Stalybridge certainly reflects that pattern. The first recorded secular choral society in the town was formed in 1824. The first recorded choral society nationally was formed in Halifax in 1817, with the next in Bradford in 1821, so Stalybridge was an early contributor to the movement. The earliest reported concert given by this choral society

was *Messiah*, performed in Stalybridge Town Hall in January 1837. This society dissolved circa 1840.

1844 was the year in which Stalybridge's most consistent performer of music in the town hall was founded. Growing out of a chapel choir, the members adopted the name of the largest of the London choral societies, the Sacred Harmonic Society, calling themselves the Stalybridge Harmonic Society. According to the newspaper, 'the determination of this little band of singers and players was to learn something higher than simply psalm tunes'.<sup>8</sup> The following extract indicates the background of some of the society's members, and therefore ultimately the performers of many of the town hall concerts:

At this period the mills worked until half-past seven o'clock in the evening, yet the rehearsals were arranged for a quarter to eight, because the members, particularly upon these nights, had their teas in the mills, and went direct to the place of meeting upon leaving work.<sup>9</sup>

It is intimated here that several of the members were mill workers, and, of the people listed in the article as original members, Robert Crossley was a 'Shopkeeper and Dealer in Groceries and Sundries', Ralph Whitehead was a 'Corn and Flour Dealer', Joseph Norman was a pawnbroker and Edward Hilton worked for a company that made cotton spinning machinery.<sup>10</sup> The conductor, Mr Samuel Garlick, who had played the oboe in the 1824 choral society, was a self-taught musician. He had worked in the mills all his life but 'like many of his contemporaries, he found time, despite the long hours of labour usual in his youth, to acquire and cultivate a taste for the art of which he is locally so distinguished an exponent'.<sup>11</sup>

Although the first public performances by the society were given in the Foresters' Hall, in 1854 it was decided that the tenth annual oratorio, *Samson*, should take place in Stalybridge Town Hall. The following table, taken from the accounts of the Stalybridge Harmonic Society in 1854, show the expenses incurred for this town hall performance.<sup>12</sup> This table of accounts shows items normally associated with putting on a concert – for example, the hire of the room or the buying of music. However, there are items that appear to raise questions about the condition of the room being used as a performance space. If the room in the town hall was in a condition ready for performance, why would the society have to pay William Clay for fixing gas pipes and fittings in the hall, and for replacing the Town Hall platform? The information in this table therefore suggests that, although the room seems to have been considered as a possible venue for the performance of concerts from the opening of the town hall, no provision for the needs of performance were considered. In

order to perform an oratorio in the town hall, quite fundamental changes to the room had to be implemented and paid for by the performers themselves. Despite the amount of money spent in order to perform *Samson* in the Town Hall, the newspaper states that 'the enterprise was a great success both musically and financially, the result being a gain to the society of £20'.<sup>13</sup> The Stalybridge Harmonic Society was the principal performer of oratorio in the town hall during this period, also performing miscellaneous concerts of mainly sacred music.

Table 1: Expenses Incurred Stalybridge Harmonic Society, 1854

Date	Expense Incurred	£	S	d
May 25	'Small Score to Handel's Samson'		3	4
June 22	'Binding Samson'		18	
Sep 19	'Tenor to Samson'		1	3
Sep 22	'Drum sticks'		1	6
Oct 7	'4 Voice parts to Samson'		6	8
Oct 12	'7 Voice parts to Samson'			
Oct 25	'William Farrington for writing music'		3	6
Oct 26	'Hire of Town Hall and Gas'	1	1	
Oct 26	'Replacing town hall platform'			9 ½ d
Oct 26	'John Swallow for going to the Gentlemen of the town for patronage and selling tickets'	1	2	6
Oct 26	'Large bills posting'		4	
Oct 26	'Sockets for orchestra'		10	1 ½
Oct 26	'William Clay for fixing gas pipes and fittings in the town hall'		4	6
Oct 26	'Mrs Sunderland Engagement and expenses' [Soprano soloist]	5	5	
Oct 26	'Mrs Lawton Engagement and expenses'		14	6
Oct 26	'Mr Inkersall Engagement and expenses' [Tenor soloist]	3	3	
Oct 26	'Mr Edmondson Engagement and expenses' [Alto soloist]	1	11	6
Oct 26	'Mr Mellor Engagement and expenses' [Bass soloist]	1	1	
Oct 26	'Mr Jackson Engagement and expenses'	1	5	
Oct 26	'Mr Miller Engagement and expenses'	1	1	
Oct 26	'Mr Smith Engagement and expenses'		10	
Oct 26	'Mr Thorly Engagement and expenses'	1	11	6
Oct 26	'Mr Gledele Engagement and expenses'	1	11	6
Oct 26	'Mr Shepherd Engagement and expenses'	1	7	6
Oct 26	'Mr Elwood Engagement and expenses'	1	17	

Stalybridge had another choral society at this time, known as the Stalybridge Philharmonic Society. The society gave on average four concerts a year in the town hall, normally two in the spring and two in the autumn. The repertoire was mainly vocal and sacred, but they never performed full oratorios. This society was keen to provide music for the lower classes, stating that 'The object of the society [is] to enable the



humbler classes to listen to the best of music for a few pence, which otherwise they could not hear for less than some shillings'.<sup>14</sup> To fulfil this aim the society sometimes performed a 'People's Concert' a few days after their fully priced concerts, seemingly to much success:

Considering the superior quality of the music and the low rates of admission [Reserved seats, 1s.; Back seats, 6d.; Gallery, 3d. – as opposed to their fully priced concerts – Reserved seats, 3s. 6d.; Back seats, 2s.; Gallery, 1s.],<sup>15</sup> we do not hesitate to say that this was the cheapest concert we can recollect to have been given in this neighbourhood, and have to congratulate the committee of the Philharmonic Society on the satisfactory results of their spirited endeavours to provide good cheap music for the people.<sup>16</sup>

The 'People's Concert' was a rare occurrence at Stalybridge Town Hall, but its presence at all shows some acknowledgement presumably of the cheap concerts that had been established in Manchester and were advertised in the local paper.

For the first thirty years of its existence, Stalybridge Town Hall was regularly used for the performance of music, the majority of performers being from within the town. While the two choral societies were the most regular, other musicians and singers from different areas of Stalybridge life used the town hall for their music making. As well as concerts, the hall was used for the popular nineteenth-century pastime of the 'tea party and concert', where the concert normally consisted of glees and songs, performed chorally or as duets or solos, often with instrumental solos added for interest. This form of food and entertainment was very popular with churches and during this first period the town hall was regularly used to this purpose.

The town hall was also at this time occasionally a venue for visiting performers, often companies who had transferred from Manchester or Liverpool:

**TOWN HALL, STALYBRIDGE: THE BROUSIL FAMILY** (who have been so enthusiastically received at the Free-trade Hall, Manchester) have the honour to announce a **GRAND EVENING CONCERT**, on Monday next, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1857, being the only evening they have at liberty previous to their leaving this neighbourhood, in order to appear before her Majesty, the Queen, in obedience to the royal command.<sup>17</sup>

There is no doubt that Stalybridge Town Hall was a popular music venue in the first thirty years of its existence. Whilst this may have something to do with the novelty and potential prestige of the town hall, it will be seen

in the next period that it could also have been because there was nowhere else suitable. When a more appropriate location was built things began to change and the period of musical decline in Stalybridge Town Hall began.

In March 1857 Stalybridge was granted a charter which enabled the town to become a Corporation. The incorporation of a town was often a catalyst for the building of a town hall in order to express its newly raised status. Stalybridge did not follow this pattern. The town already had a town hall, although at this time it was considered to be 'the laughing-stock of all who came into the town'<sup>18</sup> rather than something to be proud of.

As early as 1855 the suitability of Stalybridge Town Hall as a concert venue was brought into question. At first the criticisms were of superficial matters, such as cleanliness:

The concert room afforded undoubted evidence of the neglect of public property at present in this town; everything was filthy and covered with dust – the walls, the blinds, and the floor – all were thickly coated, and it may be easily imagined what were the feelings of a large number of Mr Marsden's patrons after sitting there for two hours in the dust-clouds so repeatedly raised.<sup>19</sup>

However, two years later John Frederick Cheetham, secretary of the Stalybridge Philharmonic Society and a member of a prominent mill-owning family, suggested in his speech at the Society's annual dinner that the problems were rather more fundamental:

He complained of the inconvenience of the Town Hall for the performance of music, denounced it as 'that monstrosity of bricks and mortar, in which it was difficult to keep one's gravity'. He hoped that when the new corporation got into full exercise [...] a new building would arise that would give the society sufficient accommodation for the concerts (cheers).<sup>20</sup>

This new building was found in the form of the Mechanics' Institution. Although it was built by subscription rather than public money, the building became the symbol of the 'new age of corporation', 'an excellent building for the improvement of the intellectual and moral condition of its inhabitants'.<sup>21</sup> At this time of large symbolic buildings, the plain Grecian architecture of the Town Hall would have seemed rather unfashionable. According to the *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, for the Mechanics' Institution 'the Italian style [was] adopted, with, however, a considerable amount of Gothic Feeling in the details'.<sup>22</sup> The Gothic revival in Britain was at its peak between 1855 and 1885, and the Italian style was often used in

connection with the Gothic, so in architectural terms the building for the Mechanics' Institution was at the height of fashion, and the first one of its kind in Stalybridge.

The large room in the Mechanics' Institution was designed for community gatherings and was described in the following way:

The large hall is a splendid room, and apparently well adapted for meetings, concerts, lectures, &c., and we understand that it will contain between 400 and 500 chairs ... they have provided for the comfort and accommodation of the members, as well as attended to the useful and ornamental character of the interior, they would have felt highly rewarded for the great care with which they have attended to the true interests of the institution. [...] it will be a great ornament to the town, and what is still better, it will be a most useful institution and well adapted for the object its promoters have in view.<sup>23</sup>

At a time when the performance of music was seen as important for the purposes of leisure, moral reform and self-improvement, the Institution had consequently been built with the necessary facilities for both the performers and audience. It seems that this building offered the people of Stalybridge everything they had missed out on when the town hall was built: the chance to provide themselves with a building that symbolised the civic pride of the time, containing purpose-built facilities to enhance the life of the community. Therefore, people from all aspects of Stalybridge life wanted to be a part of it:

Without entering into the real cause of the increase we may remark that the Saturday night's social meetings [...], having become increasingly attractive, the room being so crowded that it is often difficult to obtain a seat. We were there a few minutes on Saturday night, and were surprised at the array of vocal and instrumental talent present. Not only is the musical talent attractive to those who can obtain admission, but on Saturday night there was a large number of people outside listening to the music.<sup>24</sup>

The move away from music making at the town hall coincides exactly with the opening of the new Mechanics' Institution building in July 1862. Stalybridge Town Hall was used for the performance of music on a regular basis in the first half of 1862, but from the end of June, when the Mechanics' Institution came into use, the performance of music in the Town Hall for that year abruptly stopped. The Mechanics' Institution housed all the musical events that were previously performed in the hall, including the two choral societies' concerts. The Stalybridge



Philharmonic Society gave its third concert of the season in the Town Hall on 25 February 1862, but on 30 August there was an advertisement in the newspaper that stated:

The Committee of the Society beg most respectfully to announce to the subscribers and public that their concerts for the forthcoming season will be held in the Assembly Room of the Mechanics' Institution.<sup>25</sup>

The Town Hall was embarrassingly out of date in comparison with the fashionable architecture and modern facilities of the new Mechanics' Institution, so performers did not value its use. It seems that the people of the town wanted to be associated with the status symbols of progress and prosperity, which the Mechanics' Institution could offer and the Town Hall could not.

The renaissance of music in Stalybridge Town Hall began with the passing of the Stalybridge Extension and Improvement Act in 1881. At this time Stalybridge sought Parliamentary consent to include three nearby villages within its boundaries. The result of this was a fourth ward for municipal election purposes, creating more councillors, a larger town population, and therefore increased town status. In order to house the enlarged number of councillors, the Town Council originally considered erecting a new building on a different site, but eventually decided to extend the existing building. Significantly for the musical life of the town, the large hall was increased in size, and a new staircase rose from the vestibule of the main entrance. The old entrance near the platform was adapted to provide some means of exit in case of an emergency. The creation of a more imposing entrance must have encouraged patrons to think that they were entering a grandiose environment. Such enhanced grandeur throughout the building could change people's mind-set from embarrassment to pride.

The new building was not only to be an administrative centre but a prestigious place of assembly for the people of the town. The 'Queen Anne' style of architecture was at its most popular in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and consequently this was used for the design of the new building. With this town hall the officials of Stalybridge had at last given the populace of the town a modern symbol of individuality, status and, most importantly, civic pride.

The return of the musicians of Stalybridge to the Town Hall was almost as abrupt as the departure; as soon as the new Town Hall came into use there immediately followed a number of musical events in the large room. Consequently, the increasing number of performances at Stalybridge Town Hall resulted in a decrease in the number at the

Mechanics' Institution, although it still remained a popular musical venue.

The people of the district once again saw Stalybridge Town Hall as a viable option for their performances and the resulting increase in music making in the hall produced a wide variety of entertainment from within the town. Many different musical societies as well as social or reforming organisations, from the Orpheus Quartet to the Stalybridge Anglers' Association, and often the Stalybridge branch of the British Women's Temperance Association, gave miscellaneous amateur concerts. They normally engaged guest vocal and instrumental soloists from the area, with repertoire mostly consisting of glees, songs and duets, both religious and secular, and solo instrumental pieces.

The choral societies were again a feature of the concert life of the Town Hall, although not until the 1890s. Stalybridge Harmonic Society was still an active participant but the Stalybridge Philharmonic Society had long since disbanded. However, the new choral society, the Stalybridge Choral Union, which originally performed at the Mechanics' Institution, began to perform in the Town Hall. This society generally performed operas and, whilst opera was new to the audiences of Stalybridge Town Hall, it was apparently well executed and well attended, leading both choral societies to often move from Oratorio to Opera in the 1890s.

In this third period the Town Hall became a regular venue for the enhancement of the mass singing movement amongst children. Sometimes the performers were from homes for the destitute, but there were also children from the many church schools in Stalybridge where singing was promoted for the improvement of the students. This was presumably to give the children the experience of singing on a different stage, to a larger audience, and in a more prestigious environment.

One of the benefits of using town halls for concerts and entertainments was that the performance space could be inter-denominational. The churches of Stalybridge certainly made use of the facilities offered at the town hall, whether it was for tea parties and entertainment or simply amateur concerts. However, it was the Catholic Church that made the most use of the building. In the first half of the nineteenth century there had been a major influx of Irish immigrants into England, attracted by new employment opportunities in the cotton and construction industries of the northwest. By the mid-nineteenth century Stalybridge had a large Irish immigrant community of its own. The Catholic church of the town maintained a strong-hold over this new society, making arduous efforts to make the Irish more culturally acceptable to the 'respectable' sections of the town. Using the Town Hall for their St Patrick's Day celebrations and for concerts given by the



Catholic brass band, the venue used by the highest class of performers in the town, brought the Irish population closer to the respectability they desired.

During this period the town hall was again used by touring artistes but on an infrequent basis. They were often artistes that had been to Stalybridge before but had performed at the Mechanics' Institution. Touring concert companies were the most frequent visitors to the hall, generally performing concerts that were a professional version of the miscellaneous choral society concert. Other companies presented a far more diverse programme:

On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday next, Clari's Concert Company will appear in a Grand Entertainment, "The Scottish Chieftians," also Bros. D'Alcorn, negro artistes: Misses Clara and Nellie, duettists; Mr Marcus Boyle, vocal comedian, from the London music halls; The Excelsior Variety Troupe; Messrs Ridley and St. Clare, musical clowns and contortionists.<sup>26</sup>

There were also travelling minstrel companies such as the Robertson and Holme's Coloured Operatic Kentucky Minstrels, and international acts like the Jungfrau Kapelle, a German family who performed on many different unusual musical instruments. The style of the entertainment supplied by these visitors, some of whom were actually billed as music hall artistes, seems to suggest that the companies were using Stalybridge Town Hall as a temperate and more respectable alternative to the music hall. If an act wanted to be considered reputable and 'high-class' they would need to find a venue offering 'rational' recreation, and in Stalybridge the town hall seemed to offer just that. In the nineteenth century, when any entertainments given in music halls would be seen as the lowest form of recreation, Stalybridge Town Hall housed some of the same entertainments but with perfect respectability. It appears that the type of building Stalybridge Town Hall represented in some cases made the difference between rough and rational recreation.

While this third period of the musical life of Stalybridge Town Hall seems to mirror the first in terms of its popularity, there is a varying factor in the later period. In the first period, as mentioned above, the town hall had really the only large public room in the town, but by this later period there were many more halls and musical attractions in the town which could compete for patrons. In 1895 the following article appeared in the local newspaper:

There has been such a surfeit of cheap music at P.S.A. meetings and religious services on the one side, and at smoking concerts and various public occasions on the other, that the desire to attend the old-fashioned concert or mixed concert of a superior,

or, at any rate, a more formal and expensive character, has declined.<sup>27</sup>

This piece of writing presents a very accurate summary of the musical life of Stalybridge in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. There was much to rival the town hall entertainments in this latter period. At some points during the year in Stalybridge there was an opportunity to go to some form of musical entertainment almost every night of the week if one wished. Although the newspaper suggested a drop in attendance at 'the old-fashioned concert', the alternative entertainments seem not to have affected the number of musical events being performed in Stalybridge Town Hall now the people of Stalybridge had a new, more custom built building in which to perform and attend. For the inhabitants of Stalybridge in the latter part of the nineteenth century, there were many venues and types of entertainments to consider when planning the week's musical activities, but only the town hall could offer a venue that was a status symbol – a symbol of the wealth and prosperity of the patron as well as the town.

In conclusion, as this case study has shown, in the fundamental transformation of the leisure occupations of the English people in the nineteenth century by the process of urbanisation and industrialisation, the building of town halls made a significant contribution. To those seeking status and moral reform, the town hall was a symbol of progress and morality, which made it the ideal venue for nineteenth-century music making. My PhD thesis will go on to consider four different town halls and how they concurred with any national pattern. For the purposes of this paper I chose to consider the musical life of Stalybridge Town Hall, and I conclude that it was entirely commensurate with changing public taste regarding the building. When the building was new, the assembly room was used frequently as a music venue. However, once the more fashionable Mechanics' Institute was built the Town Hall became obsolete as a performance venue. It was only when Stalybridge Town Hall was rebuilt that it became a building that not only catered to the needs of the council and community, but a fashionable building that at last was a symbol of civic pride. In the last twenty years of the nineteenth century Stalybridge Town Hall proved to be the hub of musical life in the community – a building that provided opportunities for respectable, rational recreation and self-improvement, whilst stirring the musical and civic pride of the inhabitants.

In 1883 the *Stalybridge Reporter* said: 'We are musical people in Stalybridge. Everybody says so and everybody is right. There is, in fact nothing in which we have a better right to pride ourselves'.<sup>28</sup> It seems that it was only when Stalybridge Town Hall had the ability to stimulate the

civic pride of those 'musical people' that it can really be said to have influenced the musical life of the town.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Quoted in A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Odhams, 1968), 159. Barry made this statement in 1859 when discussing plans for the building of Halifax Town Hall with the Halifax Corporation.
- <sup>2</sup> G. Hogarth, 'Music - Art of Singing', *Chambers's Information for the People*, 99 (1842), vol. 2: 769. Quoted in E.D. Mackerness, *A Social History of English Music* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1966), 132.
- <sup>3</sup> Dr. J.D. Heaton of Leeds, in T. Wemyss Reid, ed., *A Memoir of J.D. Heaton, M.D.* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1883), 142, quoted in *Victorian Cities*, 162.
- <sup>4</sup> Extract from the Act, quoted in S. Hill, *Bygone Stalybridge* (Leeds: M.T.D. Rigg, 1907), 126.
- <sup>5</sup> Colin Cunningham, *Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 127.
- <sup>6</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 7 January 1832.
- <sup>7</sup> Taken from the minutes of a Commissioners' Meeting, 25 April 1832, quoted in J.W. March, ed., *Stalybridge Centenary Souvenir 1857-1957* (Stalybridge: Stalybridge Corporation, 1957), 100.
- <sup>8</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 24 March 1894.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> *Slater's Alphabetical and Classified Trade Directory of Manchester and Salford, and their Vicinities* (Manchester: Isaac Slater, 1855), 1062-1065.
- <sup>11</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 15 September 1883.
- <sup>12</sup> All data taken from the Treasurer's book 1850-1855, archive DD111/5, held at Tameside Local Studies Library.
- <sup>13</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 24 March 1894.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ashton Weekly Reporter*, 28 March 1857.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 February 1857.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 March 1857.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 February 1857.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 June 1866.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 September 1855.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 March 1857.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ashton and Stalybridge Reporter*, 25 January 1862.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 August 1861.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 August 1862.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 October 1862.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 August 1862.
- <sup>26</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 25 April 1885.
- <sup>27</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 19 October 1895.
- <sup>28</sup> *Stalybridge Reporter*, 15 December 1883.