



Concert pitch in 1891

This photograph of the Westmorland Festival, taken in St. George's Hall in 1891, shows Mary Wakefield, the founder, in the conductor's rostrum.

It will be noted that members of the orchestra have placed their bowler hats on the grand piano, to prevent them from being trampled underfoot.

The occasion was noteworthy as Princess Louise attended the concert.

Among those who are on the picture are Miss Crewdson, Sir Arthur Somervell, Mr. J. Smith, Wood Winder, Mr. T. B. Jackson, Mr. C. J. Cooper, Mr. A. H. Gordon, and Canon

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THE COUNTY OF MUSIC-MAKERS

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In the early issues of the Gazette, reference is often made to concerts in the parish rooms and schools, which served as the centre of community life in days when candles and oil lamps were the order of the day, and walking was the principal means of transport. Music was largely a local affair a century ago, and the fiddle, piano and accordion provided the basis for most entertainment.

A change came about when the railway moved north from London into Westmorland in 1845, and concert programmes showed that at great expense to the promoters (and probably some inconvenience to the performers) a noted singer, or player had been engaged. But such artists were mostly reserved for the drawing-room of the larger residences, where celebrity concerts most frequently took place, and on invitation.

There were one or two choral societies in existence in the larger centres of population in Westmorland, and were frequently called glee classes. Kendal Choral Society was one of the first to be established about a century ago, and was responsible for bringing many notable artists to the county.

More than 80 years ago, Mary Wakefield held a choral competition on the lawn at Sedgwick House, near Kendal, and it was from that small beginning that the present Mary Wakefield Westmorland Music Festival owes its origin.

The festival was founded in 1885, and was held annually until 1906, when, because of its rapid growth, and the more difficult choral music being performed, it was necessary to turn it into a biennial event. As such it has continued ever since, and it shows no sign of losing its appeal.

Some of the essentials laid down by Mary Wakefield in her pioneering days still form the background to the festival. The most interesting in these days, perhaps, was the principle that there could be no monetary reward, and music-making must be for music's sake.

The effect of Mary Wakefield's pioneering work was to establish choral groups in villages in all parts of the county, and over the borders into Lancashire and the West Riding. Though many of the villages are no longer represented at the festival, local music owes much to the movement which was born at Sedgwick.

The pages of the Gazette in the past 50 years clearly illustrate the widening interest in music in the county after the first world war, particularly during the 1930's. Concerts promoted by Mr. J. P. Johnson had brought great enjoyment to people in the Kendal area in the early part of the century. Then there was a series of winter concerts between the two wars which were the means of bringing a great deal of international talent to Westmorland. Such names as Clara Bull, Kennerley Rumford, John Coates, Agnes Nicholls, Muriel Brunskill (the Kendal contralto), Poulshnoff and later Myra Hess, Jelly d'Aranyi and Adila Fachiri bring to mind some of the artists of the past.

One of the earliest instrumental groups to arrange concerts was the Kendal Amateur Orchestra, which was the predecessor of the present Westmorland Orchestra. It was the Mary Wakefield Festival, however, which brought the great orchestras, composers and conductors to these parts. The famous composer, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, was the guest conductor in Kendal Drill Hall in 1901 in a performance of his now-famous choral work "Hiawatha's Departure" only 12 months after it had been composed.

Over the years since 1904, such orchestras as the Queen's Hall Orchestra, the City of Birmingham, the Halle, the Northern Symphony, the Northern Sinfonia, and the B.B.C. Northern Orchestra have visited Westmorland under the auspices of the festival.

As far back as 1907 Mary Wakefield commented on the previous year's festival, at which the Queen's Hall Orchestra had played: "I felt that the taste of performers and audience had been steadily raised when two movements of Beethoven's C Minor Symphony were encored vociferously by a chorus of 500 villagers from the dales and fells of Westmorland." Little did Mary Wakefield think that at the festival 80 years after, in 1967 similar enthusiasm would still be in evidence.

Coupled with orchestras have been such noted conductors as Signor Risegari, Mr. (later Sir) Henry Wood, Sir Hamilton Hart, Sir Malcolm Sargent, Sir Edward Baird, Sir Adrian Boult, Charles Groves, John Hopkins, Stanford Robinson, and George Hurst, the last four through the influence of the B.B.C., which has shown a deep interest in the festival for the past 30 years.

The Gazette has always taken a keen interest in cultural pursuits in the county, and in terms of space—apart from events during the 1839-45 war—the biennial festival has been the event which has received the greatest coverage in the past 50 years.

Soon after the second world war, there was a feeling in the county that musical activities and organisations should be brought into closer relationship and the Westmorland Music Council was formed as

the co-ordinating body. Since then it has acted as the sponsoring body for chamber orchestras and string ensembles, touring opera companies, ballet groups and folk-dancers from various countries. It was also responsible in the early days of supporting the formation of Kendal Midday Concert Club, which has gone from strength to strength and gained in popularity over the past 20 years.

In 1960, a band of enthusiastic patrons of music formed the Lake District Festival, to run complementary to the Mary Wakefield event, but with the marked distinction that it would be all-performers. Since that time, international singers and players have been brought to Lakeland, the Furness area and the West Riding. The festival, like the Mary Wakefield, is always held in May, and attracts visitors from many parts of the country and overseas.

The growth of orchestral playing in schools has been one of the most notable features of the last decade, and young players of note have come from the areas covered by the Gazette, and whose names appear from time to time within its pages. The emphasis on youth found expression in the formation of the Westmorland Junior Orchestra, which has provided an invaluable opportunity for joint rehearsal and common enjoyment of ensemble playing for those yet to aspire to the senior ranks.

Outstanding choral achievements in the past decade were gained by two groups from Kendal. The Greenside Choir gained the distinction of twice winning a trophy offered by the B.B.C. for the best choir in a county-wide competition. The Kendal High School Junior Choir also made history by winning the trophy for school choirs.