Chapter 6:
Fiddle, concertina, melodeon and tambourine

In spite of its introduction at the very pinnacle of English society - at the court of Henry VIII - the violin met with resistance among the elite. Its brilliance of tone, greater volume and carrying quality, found little favour with lovers of the established viol. Discussing gentlemen players of the viol before the Restoration, Anthony Wood wrote, 'They esteem a violin to be an instrument only belonging to a common fiddler.'[1] Violins were initially imported, and were therefore expensive, but within sixty to eighty years of their first appearance in England there were apparently enough fiddles in the hands of working men for the phrase 'a common fiddler' to have meaning. John Playford, author of dance manuals for the elite, wrote of the treble violin in his *Introduction to the Skill of Music* (1660) as a 'cheerful and spritely instrument much practised of late.'

By the middle of the seventeenth century the violin was established as the dominant instrument in mainstream art music and the dance music of the elite, the instrument of the professional, trained musician. In its other guise, as the fiddle, it was the most popular dance instrument at the lower end of the social scale. Trained professional musicians presumably modified their viol techniques for use on the violin, but had there ever been a popular tradition of viol playing? 'Common fiddlers', I suggest, invented and developed their own playing technique and evolved a new repertoire, partly by the adaptation of existing material and partly by the creation of new genres, within a generation or two.

Early evidence of 'common fiddlers' in Scan's locality is found in the personal account book of Giles Moore, rector of Horsted Keynes, 1656-1679, which provides not only the names of two fiddlers in the village, Cain(e) and Old Joseph, but some clues about their activities.[2] Moore records payments to a fiddler or fiddlers at eighteen weddings, although he officiated at many others without making similar payments. The questions arise: what were the status and function of the fiddlers at the weddings and why did the rector pay them? Keith Thomas's general comment, that the Puritans 'objected to the bagpipes and fiddlers who accompanied the bridal couple to church,' suggests that the Horsted Keynes fiddlers might have processed to the church with the couple and the rector's payments were tips, just as he doled out to the 'howling boys'.[3] However, on 25 April 1664, Moore recorded 'Giv'n at H Pellings feast to the Fiddler 6d his son 4d', which at face value would establish the fiddlers as secular performers employed for the festivities following the wedding ceremony. A third possibility, supported by what is known about Sussex church bands, but unsupported by the fact that the payments were recorded in Moore's personal accounts and not those of the church, is that the fiddle music was used in the church service. What seems clear is that, as a leading member of the local gentry, he patronised the village musicians.

There is no reason to doubt the direct line of descent from Cain and Old Joseph to Scan, the Gorringes, Denner Head and the Awcocks, but equally we must not assume it. What changes in style and fashion, social function and status could have occurred in 250 years?

A fiddler closer to Scan in time and not too far away geographically was Michael Turner (1796-1885), shoemaker, parish clerk and sexton at Warnham in Sussex.[4] He was seen towards the end of his life as a local character, perhaps a link with a disappearing past, and a brief biography was published, for sale on a picture card:

> He was in great request at Village Fetes
> all the neighbourhood round, and at the
> big houses, to play the music at their
> dances; and between times he would
> perform a first-rate jig playing his fiddle
> the while, or sing a capital comic song.[5]

As leader of the church choir, consisting of fiddle, clarinet and cello, he claimed he could 'play the tune on his viol, sing the 'seconds' himself and beat time with his head for the rest'. He was musically literate, to some degree at least, as he left two manuscript

John Hope, aged 97, of Beaconsfield Terrace, Cross-in-Hand.
(Sussex Express, *19 August 1927)*

books dated 1845-9 and 1852, containing tunes for quadrilles, polkas, waltzes, country dances and psalms. Some, if not all, of these pieces were copied from print and included expression markings in the notation.

Turner was respectable and respected, relatively poor but at the upper end of the working community. His biographer was from further up the social scale and may not have been privy to all of Turner's activities. Did Turner ever play in pubs? He played for his own jig dancing, so did he also play for stepdancing? Clearly he was employed by the gentry to play at their private balls, yet he also played at village fetes - a foot in two camps. Christopher Stephens of Fairwarp remembers his father talking of the 'old days' when Mr Cap Hemsley (fiddle) and Old Frog Spat from Five Ashes went to the big houses to play, booked by the gentry, Christopher thinks, to add local colour for their house guests. Did Turner allow himself to be patronised or was he a real craftsman employed because of his practical skill as a dance musician? Did he have two working repertoires, one by ear and memory for the village working people and the other from print for the gentry? Did he follow the expression marks on the sheet music, or did he play with a flat tone and even volume?

The manuscript books indicate a heyday during his early middle age, half way through the nineteenth century, with an up-to-date repertoire of recently published pieces (*La Tempête, Jenny Lind Polka* and the *Original Schottische Polka*, for example), but what did he play as a young man, and did his repertoire progress with changing fashions later in his life? His biographer makes no comment about whether he had any musical partners, except for mention of the church choir. It is difficult to visualise him making secular music without contact or association with other secular musicians. Did he play in a dance band of any sort?

In 1927 a newspaper reporter chanced upon a fiddler with elements in his experience common to Michael Turner, who might well have met or known Scan and the Fairwarp musicians. John Hope, a carpenter, moved to Cross-in-Hand, near Heathfield, around 1887 from nearby Hadlow Down, where he had been born in 1829. Aged ninety-seven when he was interviewed, he first of all sang to the reporter *What is the Life of a Man* to his own fiddle accompniment, and then talked of his early days playing for dancing at Blackboys and Hadlow Down:

> Though he has never belonged to an orchestra, Mr Hope used to be in great demand at the country balls, where he had to play on an old fiddle, owned by

> his father a hundred years ago ..... Asked to name his favourite tunes, he named "The Soldiers' Joy," "The Triumph," and a ditty, the first line of which runs, "Oh beautiful star in Heaven so bright.".[6]

What little I know of Scan's fiddle style is based largely on the three occasions I heard him play *The Girl I Left Behind Me*, double stopped in G and C, the two occasions he played 32 bars of a schottische, and the advice he gave me.[7] My lasting impression is of a stylist. His tone was flat, with no hint of vibrato, the melody line was broken up rhythmically, and there was more to his right hand than single bowing. His comment, 'I used to use a short bow, not like Reg's' [MP], implied its physical size, not his mechanical method. In the *Heel and Toe Polka* he showed me how on the first two beats he would make heavy down bow strokes right across the fiddle, catching the G and D strings open and the A string fingered as B, and on the first two beats of the fifth bar he would do the same on the open G, a fingered E on the D string and a fingered C on the A.

Mervyn Plunkett heard of Bill Gorringe from both Scan and Jack Norris, and his unexpected, lightning visit to Bill's home in Cuckfield resulted in the recordings issued by Topic.[8] Within about fifteen minutes, with only a few false starts, Bill played the sequence of tunes on the record, together with a rough *Cock o' the North* and an abandoned *Phil the Fluter's Ball*, which have been omitted. No conversation was recorded, except for the comment 'I seem to forget 'em all'. Mervyn took me round to see Bill shortly afterwards but it seemed unlikely that he would ever be persuaded to play the fiddle again. His recorded performances are really quite remarkable, not only as the only surviving recordings of an old Sussex country fiddle style, but as music in their own right. At 87, infirm and out of practice, with his elbow resting on the table to support the fiddle, his mind was alert enough to be able to present a brief cross-section of his early repertoire.

His style conforms to expectations generated by the recorded evidence of a handful of his contemporaries and peers from other parts of southern England. He produces a flat tone with no finger vibrato, occasional droned open strings and a punchy, animated dance rhythm, employing subtle melodic and bowed variations and Scotch snap,[9] and he uses mostly single bowing, with occasional tied bowing on triplets. The tunes, as they appear on the record, are pitched in the keys of F or C, although he fingers as if he were playing in the keys of G or D on a fiddle tuned in concert pitch. Either he tuned the fiddle down a tone, or the tape recorder was running fast. The use of G and D fingering establishes that these keys were used by the Fairwarp fiddlers.

CONCERTINA AND MELODEON

The single-action English concertina, essentially a drawing-room instrument, was patented in 1829. It was some time, however, before the German double-action concertina was designed and subsequently developed in England as the Anglo-German concertina. It is not known for certain how and when the latter instrument, the type Scan played, found its way into popular use in the countryside. Mervyn Plunket tentatively suggested

> ... the sequence of penetration as roughly 1860 - 1885; German rectangular concertinas ... being replaced by British-made instruments from then onwards, but the concertina being swamped quite rapidly by the melodeon from 1885 - 1890 onwards reaching apogee before WW1.[10]

A young lad, the son of a labourer, earning his living playing the concertina in London in 1861, told Mayhew about the popularity of the concertina in the 1850s:

> I was about getting on for twelve when father first bought me a concertina. That instrument was very fashionable then, and everybody had it nearly. I had an accordion before; but it was only a 1s. 6d. one, and I didn't take a fancy to it somehow, although I could play a few tunes on it. I used to see boys about my own height carrying concertinas about the streets, and humming them.... I play entirely out of my own head, for I never had any lessons at all. I learn the tunes from hearing other people playing of them. If I hear a street band, such as a fiddle and harp and cornopean playing a tune, I follow them and catch the air; and if it's any sort of a easy tune at all, I can pick it up after them, for I never want to hear it more than twice played on an instrument.[11]

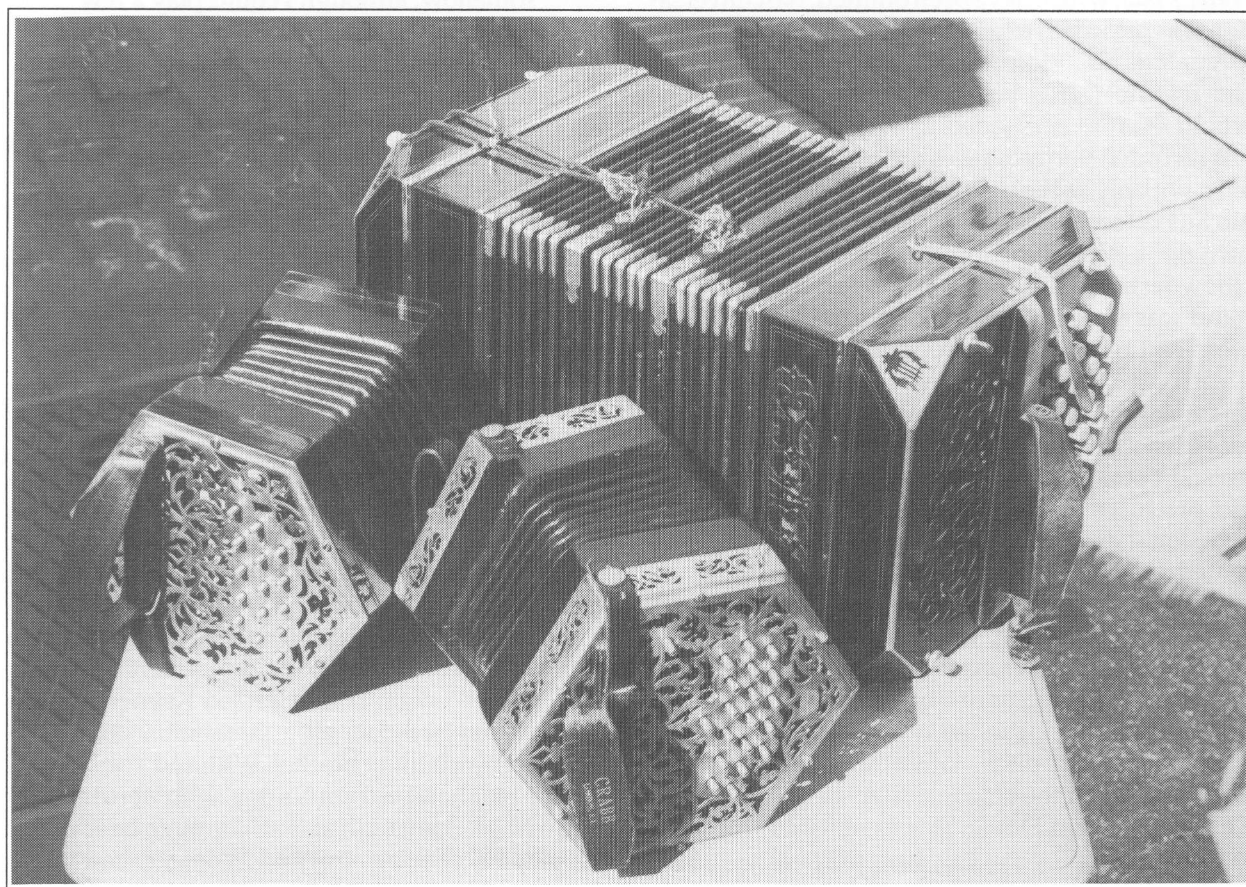
If the concertina was common on the streets of London in the late 1850s, Mervyn Plunkett's estimation of its arrival in the countryside about 1860 may not be far out. Scan was in all likelihood from the third generation of concertina players. Those he mentioned in tape-recorded conversations were Joe Marten (born 1870) from Chelwood Gate, Albert Browning and Harry Woolgar from Horsted Keynes, and his own brother Trayton, all a generation older than him; and his younger brother, Will, and Tommy and Martha Stephenson from Nutley, who were roughly his own age. Scan implied that, although he admired the playing of Browning and Woolgar, and learnt

tunes from them, they were not technically advanced; Woolgar could only play on one side of the instrument.

I suspect that Joe Marten and Trayton took a relatively simple technique - perhaps little more than an uncluttered statement of the melody, based on the established fiddle style - from the first generation of country concertina players, and made something more of it. Joe Marten was good with his hands, inventive and musical, and seems the likely candidate amongst the Chelwood - Horsted lads for exploring the instrument's possibilities. Trayton was in the right position to have been the one who adapted the Fairwarp fiddle stepdance tunes for the concertina. The articulated melody line, dressed by triplets and fill-ins between phrases and underlined by parallel octaves, (the two notes of each octave played on different sides of the concertina) and harmony represented by the odd, almost accidental use of thirds in place of octaves, characterise the Tester style. These techniques, together with the lift generated by the attack, staccato notes, the sharp intake of air in the bellows and the heavy punctuation at the end of an eight bar phrase, were, in all probability, Trayton's gift to his younger brothers. The recorded duets by Scan and Will of tunes from their childhood are played in near unison. If Scan used his musical creativity in many ways, in absorbing 1920s dance tunes, for example, it was not employed in modifying his old material. It is probably safe to assume that, when we listen to Scan and Will in duet, we are hearing Trayton's music.

Scan heard very few other concertina players, at least not players of the Anglo-German concertina in a country style, although he probably heard English and duet concertinas at the variety theatre and on the wireless.

> **Scan:** I like to hear a concertina played (especially my younger brother; he used to play a lot), especially if I was in another room listening. Well, I expect that was the only time I heard the concertina played. [VS]
>
> When we used to play together we always used to play in C; nearly always play in C. I used to play a B flat instrument a lot. My youngest brother used to play a B flat instrument with me, and, well, that's what I used to play on Brighton beach ... and that was a jolly good instrument. That was one of Lachenal's make. I sold it about a month or six weeks ago [speaking in July 1966] and it was a five-fold bellows. You see, my wrists are a lot weaker than what they was when I used to play that, and it



> was blooming hard work to play it. You know, I had a job to [move] it to and throw [fro]. And then I had this rheumatism as well, so I thought, 'Well, I'll sell it'. I took it down on the coast [to a club] one night with me, and I thought, 'Well, I'll take it down there, and I'll play it, and see if I can sell it. 'And blowed me, if I didn't get a buyer come for it directly. I sold it to him. I didn't leave it that night, so I told him, I said, 'Well, I'll bring it down or you can come up.' He says, 'Well, I'll come up to your place and I'll pay you for it.' So he come up and got it and paid for it. [RH]

> So I've just bought - well, a week or two back, up London - I bought another one. Only its a Jeffries and it's a thirty-key instead of a forty-key, but it don't make much difference. I can get what I want to play on a thirty-key alright. I don't need a forty-key, not now. [RH]

Scan played the melodeon as a child and young man, but he much preferred the concertina and fiddle. To a limited extent he was intolerant of some of the rough melodeon players, who had been fairly thick on the ground. The three basic instruments, the fiddle, the melodeon and the concertina were improved during his life time. The earlier instruments had less power and volume. Gut strings were replaced by steel on the fiddle, the brass reeds were replaced by steel in the concertina and the old three or four-stop, rather fragile ten-key melodeon was replaced by the sturdier and louder Vienna button accordion.[12]

Opposite: Scan's musics; 1971.
(Photograph: Hamish Black)

KEYS, HARMONY AND PART-PLAYING

On the question of keys, the key of C was imposed on traditional music by the manufacturers of fixed pitch melodeons, concertinas and the Clarke's tin whistle, and thus created a tension between players of the new instruments and the established fiddlers, who were used to the keys of G and D. Scan adapted to the company he was in. He played in C with a tin whistle or melodeon player, most of the time in Testers' Imperial and usually with Bill Avis (piano accordion). He would have used G with a fiddle player, and sometimes with Testers' Imperial to accommodate the bandoneon, which was pitched in G, A and E. He played in B flat on Brighton beach and in duet with his brother Will, who had a B flat concertina and a B flat clarinet. The key of G can sound harsh after a while, but it cuts through a crowd more effectively than C.

> **Scan:** [G] is alright for singing, but C is a bit too high ... You can nearly always get them in G; that's why I play in G a lot, if I'm going to play for anyone to sing. [VS]

Scan used to say he could play in any key, but that claim was based on his experience of the keys other musicians used, rather than on academic theory of music. There is no doubt he could often pick up the key of a singer, perhaps forcing him or her into concert pitch, and then following the course of the song.

The older instrumental music in country pubs in southern England was essentially linear, with the rhythm carried by the emphasis and phrasing of the melody line. Harmony in the form of either parts and counter melodies or chordal accompaniment - prior to the introduction into pubs of pianos, mandolins and banjos - was absent. That is not to say that harmonies are not implicit in the structure of the melodies: harmony was represented by drones on the fiddle and occasional thirds, fourths and fifths added often accidentally and sometimes apparently haphazardly on the concertina and melodeon, and by the grunted, ambiguous basses of the melodeon.

There is evidence of 'bassing' on the cello in Scottish fiddle music, southern English church bands and in Yorkshire, Cornwall and Norfolk.[13] There is also evidence of part singing in Sussex, by, for example, the Copper Family of Rottingdean and Bill Hawkes and Peter Gander from Cuckfield. In Scan's early experience there were some part playing and vamping, introduced from brass band and string band music (for example, Trombone Billy and Jack Carr), and during the Edwardian era the influence of the

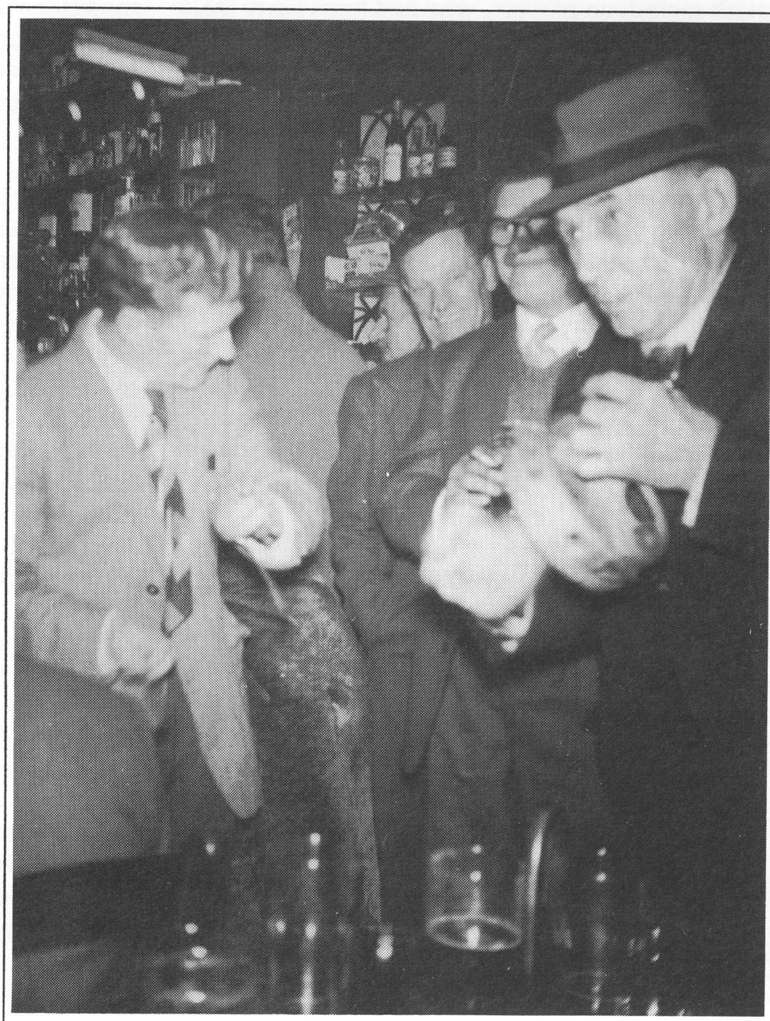
Brighton variety theatres and the gramophone record would have been felt. In answer to a specific question, however, Scan confirmed he had never seen or heard a cello or double bass played in a pub or dance band.

PERCUSSION

In as far as there ever was an accompaniment - and it may well have been very common indeed - it was percussive, on one or more of four instruments: tambourine, triangle, bones and spoons.[14] Bert Wood and Charlie Bates both volunteered, in reminiscing about the old days, that the tambourine, spoons and bones were common around Danehill. Peter Gander from Cuckfield took his triangle playing seriously, playing along with Jack Norris's melodeon throughout an evening, and late in Peter's life Jack asked the local blacksmith to make him a new one. Similarly, Rabbity Baxter would play the tambourine with Scan at the *Stone Quarry* on all his material, even in waltz-time, double timing on the slow numbers. Mervyn Plunkett heard of a nest of musicians at Selmeston, including Eric Crouch, who played fiddle, tambourine and spoons, and Art Winter and his three brothers from Hailsham assembled well into the 1950s for their Christmas session in the *Trevor Arms*, Glynde, a family band of melodeon, bones, triangle and tambourine.[15]

References to the tambourine turn up unevenly right through southern England and, although there was a degree of stylistic variation, a common purpose prevailed. Unlike military music and its derivations, where the drums are employed largely to keep time, and art music where they are used for tonal and dramatic effect, country percussion is an integral part of the music, on equal terms with the melody instruments, contributing to the momentum, the dynamics and most of all the rhythmic swing. Scan and Will's tambourine and Bill McMahon's spoons on the Topic recordings illustrate the point.

Bill McMahon had several other percussion devices. He would hold one of his spoons between two fingers, leaving the handle hanging loose, and he would strike it with the handle of the other spoon, producing a triangle-like effect. By clapping his hands in



Bill McMahon (spoons) and Bill Agate (tambourine) at the Half Moon, *Balcombe; 1959.*
(Photograph: Reg Hall)

front of his open mouth and by changing the shape of his mouth, he could create a popping noise with variable pitch. This sort of invention seems to have been endemic. Certainly during the 1950s and 1960s I witnesssed in many country pubs various make-shift percussion instruments, always phrasing around and on the melody. There was a certain amount of floor thumping on the beat, but never hand-clapping on the beat (as television and film reconstructions of period rural frolics would have us believe).

The Testers' tambourine technique employed three basic phrases. The most exciting was the beaten tattoo on the taut vellum using the second joint of the right hand middle finger as if it were a drum-stick. That was very wearing on the wrist and finger joint; the second phrase - rattling the jingles, with a few odd accented beats - brought some dynamic variation to the music as well as physical relief to the tambourine player. Returning to beating the skin gave a great lift.

The third technique produced a rhythmic propulsion similar to a tailgate trombone glissando in New Orleans music, slightly anticipating the beat on the first beat of a phrase. It required fiddle rosin to be rubbed on the vellum in advance. The player licked his or her thumb, then, pressing it hard against the vellum, pushed it from the bottom of the instrument to the top. The effect was twofold: a dynamic roar, accompanied by shimmering jingles.[16] Bill Agate's method, a relentless four beats to the bar with the back of his hand on the vellum, was outside the mainstream.[17]

NOTES

1. Quoted in Francis W. Galpin, *Old English Instruments of Music* (1910), p. 94.
2. *The Journal of Giles Moore*, Ruth Bird, ed. (1971), pp. 316-18, 320, 322-23, 326, 329, 331, 333, 335, 341, 349-50, 352-53.
3. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971), p. 66.
4. Vic Gammon, 'Michael Turner, 19th Century Sussex Fiddler' *Traditional Music*, 4, (mid 1976), pp. 14-22, 32.
5. Playing the fiddle and dancing at the same time is not such a rare phenomenon; it was an essential skill of 18th and 19th century dancing masters. Examples of country musicians include Michael Coleman and Michael Gorman (Co. Sligo), Jinkey Wells, (Oxfordshire) and Emile Benoit, (Newfoundland). Lucy Farr (Co. Galway) says her aunt could lilt, play the fiddle and stepdance at the same time.
6. *Sussex Express*, 19.8.1927.
7. On one of these occasions, in 1958, Mervyn Plunkett recorded 32 bars of a schottische, but the tape is no longer in existence. Scan was also recorded playing *Danny Boy* on the fiddle. This was several years later and is unrepresentative of his intention, as his bow hand was shaking beyond his control (Mervyn Plunkett Collection).
8. Bill Gorringe lived-in at Miss Turner's dairy at Whiteman's Green on moving from Horsted Keynes. He later lived at Brandsmead, Cuckfield, and worked as a milkman until retirement (Florence Norris).
9. Scotch snap is a rhythmic device - a semi-quaver followed by a dotted quaver - used in strathspeys, schottisches and some Irish hornpipes.
10. Letter, Mervyn Plunkett to me, 16.1.1986. Mervyn did not state his evidence and was offering an informed guess. See also Mervyn Plunkett, 'A Note on the Accordeon, Melodeon and Concertina', *Ethnic*, I, 4, (1959), pp. 4-11.
11. Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor, III* (1861), p. 183.
12. Scan probably changed to top-quality steel reed concertinas fairly early in his career. I have no idea when steel violin strings replaced gut; it may be that Scan never changed from gut. Vienna accordeons began to replace the old melodeons in the 1930s, long after the hey-day when 'everybody had a music'. On Topic 12T455/6 Jack Norris and I play Vienna accordeons.
13. Recorded examples of ensembles using a cello:

    Tintagel and Boscastle Players (Cornwall) (1943), Topic 12T240.

    Walter Bulwer (Norfolk) (1962), unissued, Topic.

    Billy Harrison (Yorkshire) (mid 1980s), Musical Traditions 201 (cassette).

14. '[T]he Parish Boyes towards a Drumme 9d.' *Journal of Giles Moore,* Bird, ed., entry for 26.2.1660, p. 322. What kind of drum and for what purpose? Were the Horsted parish boys organised?

    The tenor or side drum does not appear in the evidence of rural social music, i.e., in pubs, etc. The two hobby horse ceremonies currently making use of tenor drums take place in towns (Minehead, Somerset, and Padstow, Cornwall).

15. Mervyn Plunkett and I went to see Art Winter on 10.5.1960, but he could not be persuaded to play. The landlord of the *Trevor Arms* was said to have had a mid-1950s tape of the four Winter brothers.

    Compare F. J. Collings, 'The Concertina in Cornwall around 1890', *Concertina Newsletter,* 7 (Aug. 1972), pp. 9-10. His favourite combination was concertina, bones, triangle and tambourine.

    A common ensemble in early American black-face minstrels consisted of fiddle, single-row accordeon, tambourine, bones and triangle (Hans Nathan, *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy* (1962), illustrations p. 148-9 (1844-5), p. 152 (1843).

    Ted Duckett (Hampshire), four recorded performances on the bones (1972), Forest Tracks 3001.

16. The tambourine was and still is played in country districts in Ireland, in styles close to those of English players.

    Recorded examples:

    Coleman Country Traditional Society, (Co. Sligo) (1971), Leader LEA 2044.

    Jack Cooley, (Co. Clare) (1973) Gael-Linn CEF 044.

    John Reynolds (Leitrim) (1927), Folkways FW 8821, and (1928) Columbia 32247F and 33260F.

    Seamus Tansey/Eddie Corcoran (Co. Sligo) (1967), Leader LEA2005 and Topic 12T184.

    Gerry Wright (Co. Limerick) (1976), Topic 12TS306.

    Gerry Wright/Mary Heffernan (Co. Limerick) (1987), Swilly SWC 005 (cassette).

17. Folktape FTA 102 (reel-to-reel tape).

Father Fletcher's Band, Uckfield, undated. The band was listed in Brooker's Directory *in 1888 (but not in 1892) as the 'original Town Band', as opposed to the Town Band which was also listed.*

Rev. P. Fletcher, Roman Catholic priest at Uckfield from 1885-93, stands next to James Haestier, the bandmaster (in white hatband). Two of the cornets were already old-fashioned, with valves on the far side of the bell pipe, and there are no trombones.

(Information and photograph courtesy Norman Edwards)

Chapter 7:
Church bands and village bands

The continuum from the 'common fiddlers' of the seventeenth century to the Christmas get-togethers of the Winter family band in the 1950s embraces a broad spectrum of lower class, self-taught, often domestic, usually amateur, music-making. Vic Gammon's academic work on Sussex church bands focuses on other aspects of country proletarian music.[1] The facts are simple enough. The music accompanying divine worship in Sussex churches at the beginning of the nineteenth century was part of popular rather than high culture. For the more than three hundred parishes in Sussex there is evidence of over one hundred choirs, and there may have been many more. These choirs (or quires), ensembles of male and sometimes female voices, often included instruments, sometimes just one, but more often in various apparently arbitrarily chosen combinations. Tenor, alto and bass voices, fiddle, flute, clarinet, cello, bassoon and serpent exploited possiblities for rehearsed and well-practiced orchestration, in the form of solo and repeated chorus lines in the psalm and anthem repertoire and two, three and perhaps four-part harmony. Purchase and maintenance of the instruments and music books were sometimes financed from parish funds.

A degree of musical literacy existed among the players and some would have learnt the basics of their craft from instruction books. Others, probably the majority, learnt on the job by trial and error, listening to and observing others at choir practice or at home. Lining out, the practice of reading out the words line by line in anticipation of the congregation singing them, points to a general illiteracy (or perhaps just a shortage of psalm books), but the survival of some manuscript books indicates that some musicians could make use of written notation.[2]

Contemporary perceptions of the nature of this music are polarised, with two opposing views expressed in the written record. The untrained voices and the exuberance of the performance produced a wide range of tonal texture. Some members of choirs doubled in the community as dance musicians, and there is more than a suggestion that the dance quality came through in the church music, which was characterised by an organic momentum, perhaps even a rhythmic swing.[3] The music may have been raucous, joyful and rough, but it was a source of satisfaction and pride for its participants, inspired by a combination of secular and spiritual motives and emotions. It was their music, expressed in their terms, and for many it was their great joy and the height of their personal attainment. The opposing view was held by the clergy and the squirearchy, whose cultural roots, aspirations and aesthetic judgement came from a quite different value base. They saw rural church music as crude, unrefined and irreligious, quite unfit for association with divine worship.

Church music provided a point of contact for two cultural value systems in conflict; inevitably the more powerful triumphed. Vic Gammon offers a political interpretation. When church bands were secure in their purpose and status they represented an organised power base among working people in rural communities. Pluralism and absenteeism distanced the clergy from their congregations, and parish clerks and choirs filled the vacuum. A movement within the Anglican church in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, based on a twin rationale involving theological redefinition and notions of middle class cultural superiority, reinforced the social class divide. It encouraged the clergy to wrest back from the people their authority as the rightful leaders of the church.[4] The old-style choirs had to be destroyed; working men's organisation within an Establishment institution presented a threat to Church management and middle class authority in general, and was also an affront to its sense of respectability. The clergy and the gentry rallied round; barrel and manual organs were provided, organists and choir masters appointed and a new form of religious music, the hymn, was devised and promoted. Vic Gammon concludes that by the end of the 1860s very few of the old-style church bands and choirs survived.[5]

The church band musicians were faced with a number of courses of action. They could comply with the new order, or find alternative outlets in Nonconformity or in secular working men's organisations. Some gave up music altogether in despair, others perhaps spent more time in the pubs. It would appear that with the demise of the church bands and the social organisation associated with such music-making, there was a consequent decline in their ability to hold together as organised dance bands. Part-playing and bassing among dance musicians became a rarity. However, as one door closed, another opened: the energy that had gone into the church string and wind bands was diverted into secular bands using brass, woodwind and percussion, calling for their participants on the same body of rural and small country town working men, artisans and shopkeepers. The transition can be seen in Horsham, a small country town less than fifteen miles from Horsted Keynes, where the Town Band around 1835 or 1840 used instruments that belonged essentially to the brass band - keyed bugles, trumpet, trombone, french horn and bass drum - and others - fife, flute, clarinet and serpent - that would have been equally at home in a church band.[6]

Village bands caught on far and wide throughout the rest of the century. The early pattern was set down during the Napoleonic Wars, when regimental bands, financed by the officers, provided music for garden parties and receptions, as well as on the parade square. In the four or five decades following Waterloo, civilian patronage produced similar ensembles in Sussex: fully literate musicians capable of satisfying the needs and sensibilities of the county elite. The movement continued with the formation of the Volunteer regiments. Further down the social scale, popular subscription and/or sponsorship by socially-minded members of the gentry made possible the formation of village and town bands as temperate, uplifting and honourable social pursuits for respectable working men.

Musicianship was dependent on limited literacy, rote learning and some ear-playing. Even relatively late photographs of such bands show instruments without music clips and musicians with no pouches for carrying music cards, and seem to indicate an aural approach to musicianship. A defence of ear-playing came from a mid-nineteenth century London street musician:

> The class of men in the street bands is, very generally, those who can't read music, but play by ear; and their being unable to read music prevents their obtaining employment in theatres, or places where a musical education is necessary; and yet numbers of street musicians (playing by ear) are better instrumentalists than many educated musicians in the theatres.[7]

There is little reliable record of how village bands sounded; the exact composition, at least in the early bands, would have depended on the availability of instruments. According to the same London street bandsman, the 'cornopeans or cornet-a-pistons came into vogue' in the late 1840s, followed shortly after by ophicleides and by saxhorns in the late 1850s. Clarinets and valve trombones persisted into this century, and a photograph of Lingfield Town Band taken before the Great War shows euphoniums, drums and mouth organs![8] It was the brass band competitions, regional and national championship events, that regulated the instrumental constitution of brass bands and encouraged development of the style heard today. The sweet, bell-like tone, consistent throughout the whole range of each instrument, is a modern affectation, unknown to the village bandsmen in the years leading up to Scan's introduction to brass band music. Henry Burstow's working man's eye view of Horsham Town Band, around 1835 or 1840, with its alcoholic inspiration and rustic repertoire, makes the connection with Scan's musical world:

> [I]t was as a big drummer to the Old Band that Ike used to afford us the greatest satisfaction. When there was a band job on he would be sure to have sought inspiration in an extra glass or two, and then he would delight us boys by his extraordinary drumstick flourishes, and his industrious accompaniments to the Band's favourite melodies - "Hearts of Oak", "Bonnie Dundee", "Bonnets of Blue", "Rory O'More", "The Brighton Camp", etc.
>
> These tunes, with perhaps a few others used to constitute the Band's repertoire. Music in band parts being in manuscript only was hard to get and very expensive. It appeared, too, to be the subject of much misunderstanding among the bandsman, and some of the harmonies were certainly rather hard for the public to appreciate, especially towards evening at the Broadbridge Heath and other club feasts where the Band was engaged to play.[9]

HORSTED KEYNES BAND

Horsted Keynes, according to Scan's account, appears to have been late acquiring a band of its own. If there was an earlier version of the band, no record has come to light for the 30 years before 1890.[10] Two tradesmen, Stamford Bish, a bootmaker (born c. 1873), and a blacksmith, were the leading lights. Scan's comment that Stamford Bish 'was a good musician, but he wasn't no good till they formed the band' implies that Scan knew him before he learnt to play. The blacksmith was probably Old Tom Murrell's younger brother, who played the bass horn, while other members were Ernie Walder (euphonium), Joe Awcock (tenor horn), his son, Joe, Geoff Wickham and Tommy Briggs (cornets), and a man named Wood on the drum.

> **Scan:** We was living at the *Green Man* when the Boer Was was on. I wasn't in it [the Horsted Band] when it started, but they'd got a band here then, when the Boer War was on, because I can remember that well... I think one of the main ones was this shoemaker and this blacksmith. I think, they two got together - what I could understand about it - got one or two in the mind of it, and they had a meeting in the workingman's room to see what they could do and how many they could get. Well, they found out they could get a dozen or more. Well, they could go out with ten, you see, so that's how they formed the band. [RH]
>
> I went in the band as a drummer. Well, you know, I used to get hold now and then of one of their cornets, and, course, I could pick out a lot of stuff on the cornet by ear. I got hold of the scales quick on it. You know, you've only got three valves, and the bandmaster wanted me to join the band. Well, he wanted me to join like the others to learn music. Well, he give me some music, a sheet of music with scales on, and told me, 'When you think about it, if you got the time, you can keep having a look at that music.' He says, 'You'll get used to seeing it and you'll begin to know.' Well, the man what was the bandmaster of the band, he used to be a shoemaker and used to go down there, and he used to be pointing this music out to me, trying to learn me. He was a cornet player and, course, I couldn't learn that music, you know. I wasn't no good. I tried! I tried hard enough to learn it, but I couldn't, and they all thought I was going to learn music, because I was good on any music. I was playing a music, but as for to learn the music to read it off, I couldn't, and I never did, and that was the reason why that I come out of the band a lot, because I was no good to the band if I'd got wait to learn the tune [by ear] before I played it.[11] [RH]
>
> I expect I was with the band two years, 'cause I had a side-drum a long time, but, you see, that was early on. Well, according as the band got on, they started going out to play to clubs and fairs, but I was never in the band when they played to the clubs and fairs. I have known them hire two or three blokes from Ardingly to make up enough for they to go to two clubs one day. You see, they used to get about three pound and there was usually ten of them, so there wasn't a lot of money each, was there? But there was, I should say, about fourteen of them all told. [RH]
>
> This man, a man name of Grynyer, he lived at West Hoathly station and he had the pub there what they call the *Railway Hotel*, and he was a violin player.[12] He was as good as any pro. He was a good bloke, and he properly understood music. He'd been used to tutoring people music, and they got him to take them over, see, and he got them on well enough that they could go out. Then he used to come down so often, you see, and put them through their paces. But this snob [Stamford Bish] he was a good musician, but he wasn't no good till they formed a band, but blowed if he wasn't a good bloke afterwards. He got hold of it a bit quick, see, and he took interest in it. [RH]
>
> [It was] that bloke from West Hoathly that taught me a roll and that. It's only 'daddy, mummy, daddy, mummy', you know. It wants a bit of practice, but it's as easy as shelling peas, if you know how. A lot of it why I couldn't learn the music, I think, I was too interested in cricket and that, and I wanted to be off to cricket of a night instead of being banding, you see. I hadn't got sense enough to know different, and that was a lot of my trouble not learning. I'm sure it was. [RH]

Printed music - that's what cost the money! When they had to get music, you had to have a certain amount of copies - enough for a small band. Well, it cost a tidy bit of money, you see. That's where their subscriptions what they used to collect round went for, you see. The blokes didn't have it; it went in the band fund. So that's what they used to buy their music with, you see. Course, you were sure wages weren't very much that time, but they had to buy their uniforms themselves. Mind you they all had uniform. Yes! A blue uniform with a peaked cap and braid round their arms and cross their shoulders and all down their trousers each side. [RH]

Then when they broke up, I don't know what become of their musics. Well, I expect some of them kept them. If you had an instrument belonged to the band, why, you had to take that back when you finished, but a lot of them bought cornets, you know, second-hand cornets ... and that, and a lot of them got their own instruments, you see. The musics what belonged to the band, this bandmaster had them, because he'd got a span roof to his shoemaker's shop, and he put a platform up there, and put these musics up top, and that's where they was the last time I see them. But, course, he's been dead for several years now. I don't know what become of them, bar this big drum, the old drum. The old drum is still about here now what we used to have. They had a new drum and they still kept the old one for bonfire night and rough nights and that, and this new one, it was a posh drum, a later drum, thinner and bigger, see. They had a Church Lads Brigade here formed, so I expect it was this shoemaker told them they could have this drum. They had the big drum and the side drum. [RH]

I've never known where their instruments went to what belonged to the band. There couldn't have been many, I know, but there was some, because a lot of these bass players wouldn't buy a bass instrument, but now a euphonium player - well, they might buy their euphonium, if they was interested, and if they thought about playing music afterwards. Course, a euphonium is a useful instrument, ain' it? And there was a trombone player. They'd only got one trombone, a slide trombone. They got one, two, three... they got four cornets before I went in. That's first cornets, and a soprano cornet. You know what a soprano cornet is - it's higher! And when they first started they had two clarinets in, but they didn't stick to clarinets long. I expect they wanted too much learning, perhaps. So both of these give up clarinet playing and took another instrument. [RH]

The old drummer, Old Tom Murrell - we used to call him Jolly Beggar[13]... We was on the march one night in the summer marching for practice. We went right up the village and up towards Keynes Place - Birchgrove - up that way, and I was on the left-hand side with the old side drum, and this bloke was beating the drum, and a screw come out the end of his drumstick. The old drumstick, when he put his stick up, flew right out and right over in the field, and he kept hitting with his fist. I didn't know what had happened, and presently he got hold my shoulder and tore me round much as to throw me arse over head. He says, 'Go on, get the head of my drumstick.' Well, I had to run out and go back and over the gate and up the field and find the drumstick. When they got up the road so far, the bandmaster, he rushed forward and give him a nudge and the drum [beat] three times for the stop. That's how he used to signal, see. When they stopped he said, 'What's the matter?' 'Well,' he said, 'I lost my drumstick.' And they had to come back and help me find it. [RH]

There's only one that I know of [still alive in 1964] and he's a very old man. Ninety, pretty well, I'd say, and I ain't seen him now for some time. He was a euphonium player and his brother, a younger brother, and him, they was both euphonium players and, course, that was one of the main instruments in a brass band, because so often they had to play the leading part and, in fact, I think it was one of the finest instruments in a band, because you had more solos on a euphonium than you had anywhere. And they had two baritone players, one tenor and they had one, two, I think they had three or four bass players. Well, they had an E flat and a B flat and then they

had a double bass, see, the biggest one of the lot. [There] used to be a blacksmith played this big bass, and the last photograph I see of the band was this bloke what used to play this big bass, and he'd moved to Hailsham. He'd got a business at Hailsham, and when I went to see him one day there, he says, 'I want you to look at this photograph.' And that's the only photograph of the band that ever I see, and this was several years ago now. Course, the bloke's been dead now for a long time, because he was a man when I was a boy, you see. [RH]

I forgot when Horsted Band packed up, but they never had no band after the First War ... I couldn't tell you how many years the band run; it run several years, 'cause I was only quite a boy when I went in it.[14] [RH]

These other bands round about here all was going a long time after this one. West Hoathly was one, Ardingly and Turner's Hill and then the next one was East Grinstead up that way[15] ... Forest Row. I think West Hoathly and Turner's Hill were the top bands. West Hoathly - I can remember them having all new instruments - all silver - and the bloke that took over bandmaster for them used to play with us here. Tommy Briggs his name was, and he was a cornet player. He'd got - I don't know whether it was three or four - brothers used to be members of West Hoathly Band. Well, they got enough they could go out anywhere and play. Mind you, they was good musicians, and then old Tommy, he used to play in Horsted Band. Well, West Hoathly wanted him to come there as bandmaster, so when they had their new instruments, he took them over. Well, then he'd been there a year or two, and he got a job at Crowborough, and he went to Crowborough, and he took their band over, and they all had new silver instruments, and goodness knows what happened to him then.[16] But I know him well, bloke used to wear glasses. He was a little taller than me, but he wasn't very tall. Cor, he was a good musician. All of them were, and I believe there are some of them living up there now this side of West Hoathly. Briggs their name was. They used to have a brickyard there. [RH]

NOTES

1. Vic Gammon, Parochial Music in Sussex: A Study in Social and Cultural Conflict (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Sussex, 1985).

   Vic Gammon, 'Babylonian Performances: the Rise and Suppression of Popular Church Music 1660-1870', E. and S. Yeo, eds; *Popular Culture and Class Conflict* (1981).

   Vic Gammon, Popular Music in Rural Society: Sussex, 1815-1914 (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Sussex, 1985).
2. Anne Loughran and Vic Gammon, *A Sussex Tune Book* (1982), introduction.
3. 'Much evidence suggests the connection between church bands and social dance was strong and widespread.' (Gammon, Popular Music, p. 30).
4. Vic Gammon argues that bell-ringing was also a vehicle for secular, working men's organisation, and a similar movement within the Church sought to crush its independence (Popular Music).
5. Gammon, 'Babylonian Performances', p. 78.

   Vic Gammon's view is that the symbolic ending of the old church choirs was the publication of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* in 1861 (Popular Music, p. 69).
6. Henry Burstow: *Reminiscences of Horsham* (1911), pp. 49-50.
7. Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor, III* (1861), p. 163.
8. This photograph was in the possession of Albert Farmer (born 1893), the one-man-band from Lingfield.
9. Burstow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 49-50.
10. Vic Gammon's newspaper searches revealed no reference to a Horsted Keynes band for this period.
11. Norman Edwards explains that the basic technique is the same for all valve brass instruments. From early on all band parts were written in the treble clef, which made it possible to teach all musicians from scratch together in one group. The exception is the trombone part, written in the tenor clef; 'even then it was customary for the young tenor trombone player to be told to 'knock off two flats and play in the treble clef'. (Letter, Norman Edwards to me, 16.7.1989).

12. *Kelly's Directory of Sussex* for 1891 and 1901 lists John Grynyer at the *Railway Hotel* (now called the *Bluebell*).

    The East Grinstead Volunteer and Town band under the conductorship of Mr. J. Grynyer played at Danehill Flower Show *(Southern Weekly News,* 29.7.1893).

13. Thomas Murrell (born c. 1865) was a coal merchant, carman and market gardener.

14. Horsted Keynes band played at the Horsted Keynes village sports on Coronation Day, 22.6.1911 (*Sussex Express,* -.6.1911).

15. There was a band in Turner's Hill in 1849 (Gammon, Popular Music).

    The *Sussex Express* referred to Fletching Band in 1897 (26.6.1897).

16. 'CORONATION - BRASS BAND free for Coronation Day - Martyn, 7 Croham road, Crowborough.' (*Sussex Express,* 16.6.1911).

Ashdown Forest Friendly Society gathered in front of Nutley Inn, *before making the rounds of the village; c. 1897. Photograph by Daddy Francis.*

(Courtesy Gordon Turner and Phil Lucas)

Chapter 8:
Friendly Society feast days

Friendly societies, organised by working men and encouraged by Rose's Act of 1793, provided financial benefit based on mutuality and principles of self-help, but they also provided a social life closely connected with village bands, and their feast days in late spring and early summer were important events in the working man's calendar. A newspaper report in 1910 gives some idea of the size of the endeavour in Forest Row:

> The Equitable Association is a local friendly organisation which has been in existence for close on seventy years and has accomplished much useful work. During the year 1909 the sum of £82.15s.1d. was paid to sick members. The total worth of the Association is £2,388.1s.5½d. which represents an average of £20.4s.9d. per member. During the past year the Association's income exceeded expenditure by just over £80.[1]

In Horsted Keynes, according to *Kelly's Directory of Sussex* for 1889, 'The Village Benefit Society hold [sic] its anniversary meeting on the last Monday in May'.

> **Scan:** I can't tell you how they started. They started before I could remember, but they used to pay so much a quarter, and they got sick benefit and, I think, when they got so old, if they stopped in the club and retired as a club member, they used to get about one-and-six a week or something of that as long as they lived, you see. They had a burial fund and sick benefit and this pension, that's all you got. Well, that went on like that, and when these other clubs formed - the National Deposit and the Equitable and such clubs as that - the young people didn't join these friendly societies. Well, as a matter of fact, I was a National Deposit bloke... [RH]
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> You see, all the old members were dying off and it got like that they hadn't got a lot of members and then, of course, what they done where they had got a little money, the club broke up and what members there was in the club, the money went to them. Well, you see, the band money come out of the club, but it got so short of members, you see, there was no money coming in the club... I don't know what they paid. It wasn't a big amount, but every member had to pay so much a quarter... [RH]
>
> When they had their feast days, you see, the money for the band come out of the club. Well, they had a dinner, you see, and that come out of the club, but they all was supposed to attend church - the service at feast days. But if they didn't, they were fined a shilling, so there was ever so many fined a shilling! They'd stopped up in the pubs, because the pubs was open from six in the morning to ten at night that time of day ... Well, then they used to start about 10 o'clock in the morning, and they used to form up at the headquarters - course, there was flags up all at the club. [They used to] march to the church for the service. They used to come out of the service, and all the main subscribers round what subscribed to the club, you see, they used to visit them. The band used to march round ... to their front door, and they used to stand there and play about a couple of tunes, then march round to the next place. Course, soon as ever they'd played about a couple of tunes or whatever they was going to play - they never played long - they was formed up and marching to the next place, you see. Well then, they always strike up a march tune from where they come from till they got away. Then, course, they'd wait

till they got a certain distance away from the next house, and then start up playing another march, you see. That's how they used to do it. [RH]

There was a banner in front of the members of the club, the club banner. There used to be two blokes carry that, but that's all there was. And all the club members, well most of them, used to travel round with them, you see, because if they didn't, they wouldn't get no subscription [benefit?] next year. So most of them used to follow the band, and, course, [a] lot of outsiders used to follow as well, you see. It's similar to a bonfire procession in that way. Well, that used to last to over lunchtime sometimes; perhaps, they got somewhere to go after lunch, see, they used to fulfil that, then what time they'd got up to teatime and that, they'd play out at the club ground, you see. Only perhaps, they'd be playing that end of the club ground, and the roundabout would be down this end - the roundabout organ, you see - so they wasn't huddled up close together, and then after teatime they used to have to play for dancing up to ten o'clock. That was what the band had to do. [RH]

The dances were the schottische, the polka, the waltz and the sets.

Scan: They used to play a rare lot of set tunes ... and they always got plenty of sets out. [DN]

Scan, however, never played in the band for dancing, just for marching. Strangely, little of the band's repertoire rubbed off on him.

Scan: Well, I know some of them. I've thought about them sometimes. I know bits and pieces of some of the marches, but I've never played them, mind, as I know of. I used to play one old waltz what they used to play, but I ain't played that for years now. But sometimes I think of a piece of some of the tunes what they used to play. Well, I know one tune - this was when I was in it - *Soldiers in the Park. Washington Post,* I've played that with them. [RH]

The formal notice of Horsted Keynes Club Day in 1901, published in the *Sussex Express,* throws quite a different light on the proceedings and contrasts sharply with Scan's account.

The members of the local Friendly Society held their annual feast on Monday. Headed by Horsted Keynes Band, the members marched from the Crown Inn, their head-quarters, to Horsted Keynes Church, where a service was held by Rev. F. D. Smythe, who also gave an address. The Annual dinner was held at the Crown Inn, the Rector presiding and submitting the principal toasts. Mr. B. Clarke acknowleged the toast "The Horsted Keynes Friendly Society", Mr. J.K. Esdaile, J.P., replying to that of the honorary members and Councillor Whittington of Lewes answering for the visitors.[2]

During June and July of the same year, the *Sussex Express* carried reports of the Horsted Keynes Band playing for the friendly societies at Nutley and the *Sheffield Arms.* In June 1905, 'songs were sung by Messrs. Bestie, S. Bish and C. Spriggs' at the club feast at the *Crown,* but there was no mention of Horsted Band in the press report.[3] A month later the *Sussex Express* ran the following notice:

The Horsted Keynes Benefit Society, which had been in existence for upward of fifty years, has been dissolved. At one time the membership was over 120, and it gradually dwindled down to 23. The share-out to each member was nearly 12s.[4]

NOTES

1. *Sussex Express,* 18.3.1910.
2. *Sussex Express,* -.6.1901.
3. *Sussex Express,* 3.6.1905.
4. *Sussex Express,* 22.7.1905.