

The Bands of Forres – seventy years of music in a Scottish town.

Gavin Holman, 6 October 2023

The town of Forres lies in the old county of Morayshire between Nairn and Elgin. The first brass band in the town was established in the early 1840s, and it was certainly performing by 1844. The following notes present an outline of the known bands in the town over the next seventy years until the outbreak of WW1.



Forres Town Band, c. 1908

Forres Instrumental Band – This was active from 1843 to 1862. A concert it gave in April 1856 included the quadrilles “*Edinburgh*” and “*Haunted Well*”, “*Turkish March*”, “*King Pippin Polka*”, “*Grand March of the Allies*”, “*Scots Wha Hae*”, and “*Lightly Tread ‘tis Hallowed Ground*”.

Forres Band of Hope Instrumental Band - Active in 1859 through to 1863. The band’s tutor was Herr Meerfeld, and their uniform consisted of a light blue jacket, white trousers, and long Wellington boots. They were active in promoting the message of Temperance and Total Abstinence across the town and district. Also known as Forres Band of Hope Brass Band. It is possible that this band was the ‘rebranded’ Forres Instrumental Band which had ‘taken the pledge’ – but this is not known for certain.

Forres Brass Band – This was formed in the mid-1870s. John McKimmie was its bandmaster from its formation through into the 1880s. It was active until 1898.

St John's Brass Band (Forres) - Active in the 1890s through to 1900. Its conductor was Harry Tuff in 1899.

Forres Town Band – Founded in early 1905. John Ross was the conductor in July 1905, when the band made its first public appearance. The band was also, occasionally, known as Forres Brass Band.

The following are some known concert programmes of the band:

- July 1906: march “*Robbie Burns*” (Rod Mackenzie), waltz “*Queen of Love*” (Round), Welsh fantasia “*Llewellyn*” (Round), intermezzo “*Bridal Roses*” (Hume), fantasia “*Memories of Scotland*” (Newton), and march “*Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep*”.
- August 1906: march “*Lochnagar*” (J. Ronald Wood), waltz “*Queen of Love*” (Round), Welsh fantasia “*Llewellyn*” (Round), intermezzo “*Ye Merrie Monarch*” (N. Holloway), Scotch selection “*Echoes of Rothesay*” (Scholes), valse “*My Guiding Star*” (Felix Burns), and march “*Il Cavaliere*” (A.N. Middleton).
- August 1907: under Bandmaster Shelton, playing: march “*In Camp*” (J. Ord Hume), valse “*Flora*” (Haig), selection “*Scotch Songs*” (E. Morton), barn dance “*In Old Kentucky*” (J. Linter), overture “*The Sentinel*” (H. Round), lancers “*Coronation Gems*” (E. Newton), and march, “*Lochnagar*” (J.R. Hood).
- March 1908: included the march “*John Bull*”, cornet duet “*The Ash Grove*” (Sergeant-Major Shelton and Bandsman A. Campbell), fantasia “*Elmwood*”, euphonium solo “*The Village Blacksmith*” (Bandsman D. Grant), and selection “*Ireland*”.
- August 1909: march “*Under the Double Eagle*” (Wagner), fantasia “*Beauties of Scotland*” (Newton), waltz “*Venus on Earth*” (Lincke), hymn “*Lead Kindly Light*”, Japanese romance “*Poppies*” (Moret), Welsh fantasia “*Llewellyn*” (Round), march “*The Old Rustic Bridge*”, and cornet, trombone, baritone, euphonium and tenor horn solos.
- September 1909: march “*Austria*” (J. Nowotny), Scotch selection “*Echoes of Rothesay*” (Scholes), waltz “*Queen of Love*” (Round), hymn “*Abide with Me*”, selection “*H.M.S. Pinafore*” (Sullivan), intermezzo rococo “*Rendezvous*” (Ord Hume), march “*Alice Where Art Thou?*” (Ascher).

Mr Macritchie was the secretary of the band in 1906.

Robert Murray, mason, and James Taylor, tailor, were both members of the band up to 1907 when, sadly, both died.

Bandmaster Shelton stepped down in May 1908, and the position was advertised – requiring a ‘good cornet player’, with an annual salary beginning at £20 per annum. A.D. Macdonald was appointed bandmaster and held the position until 1910.

June 1910 – James Taylor, bandmaster of Elgin City Band was appointed bandmaster of Forres Town Band also.

By September 1911 the band was in financial trouble and the Town Council met to discuss the condition of the band. It is not known when the band folded, but it certainly did not survive WW1, its instruments being sold off in March 1918.