

Fred Midgley Bower's Band

Gavin Holman, 23 January 2024



F. Midgley Bower's Band at Towers Hall, Bradford, 1909.

On receiving this photographic postcard, I originally thought this band was associated with the firm of Midgley Bowers & Co., machine makers, of Lady Royd Works, Allerton Road, Bradford. However, these went bankrupt in 1879, and the postcard is clearly one from the late 1890s or early 1900s at least. Midgley re-opened the machine works at Lady Royd, which was fully operational in 1886, and went on to form a new partnership with John Beanland, which continued at least until the mid-1890s. The company produced special machinery for preparing and combing wool.

A closer look into Towers Hall, discovered it was originally a meeting place of the local Temperance movement, particularly notable for the preachings of Rev. A.C. Perriman in the 1890s. The site was converted to a roller-skating rink in 1909, the main building being 84 by 38 yards. Three other rinks were built at the same time in the city - the Coliseum Rink, the American (Rolarena), and the Hippodrome Rink. At its opening, in April 1909, it was noted that a military band would be in attendance. An advertisement for the Coliseum Rink in 1910 mentions the F.M. Bower's Military Band being part of the attraction.

One of the features of these early roller-skating rinks, was the provision of musical entertainment for the skaters and visitors. Some rinks had their own 'house' bands, others engaged local bands and musicians on an ad hoc basis. F. Midgley Bower's Band clearly were engaged at the Towers Hall rink in 1909 or 1910, and again at the Coliseum.



Towers Hall in West Bowling, Bradford

TOWERS HALL, BRADFORD.

PROVINCIAL RINK COMPANY, Ltd.

SPLENDID HIGH-CLASS MAPLE SPRING FLOOR.

Beautifully Decorated and Illuminated.

PRICES OF ADMISSION :—

MORNINGS	FREE
AFTERNOON—LADIES FREE (Saturdays and Holidays excluded), GENTS 6d.	
EVENING	LADIES and GENTS 6d.
USE OF SKATES, ANY SESSION	6d.
CHILDREN (including use of Skates)	6d.

Advertisement, Shipley Times and Express, 16 April 1909

TO BE UP-TO-DATE YOU MUST LEARN TO SKATE.
TOWERS HALL SKATING RINK,
MANCHESTER ROAD, BRADFORD.
RE-DECORATED AND REDUCED PRICES.
 Morning, 10.30 to 12.30. Admission Free. Skates 6d.
 Afternoon, 2 to 5. Ladies Free. Skates 6d.
 Gent.'s Purchasing Skate Ticket, including Admission,
 6d. Gent.'s Admission only 3d.
 Evening, 7 to 10. Admission 3d. Skates 6d.
 Military Band. Afternoon Teas. Competent Instructors.
 Richardson and Winslow Skates in use.
FINEST SKATING SURFACE IN THE CITY.

Advertisement, Bradford Daily Telegraph, 29 November 1909

The rink was claimed to be "a terrific success" and boasted "Richardson's Light Ball-Bearing Skates". By January 1911, Rink Hockey was played every afternoon. and evening.

BRADFORD COLISEUM RINK,
DUCKWORTH LANE.
LARGEST RINK IN THE NORTH.
DAILY, 10.30, Two, and Seven.
F. N. BOWER'S MILITARY BAND.
Headquarters of the BRADFORD CITY RINKING CLUB.

Advertisement, Bradford Observer, 10 February 1910

However, the skating novelty quickly faded and the demand for cinemas increased so the huge rink was split into two sections and the front part nearest Manchester Road was converted into a picture hall. It was taken over by Hibbert's Pictures and converted into the Towers Hall Cinema, which opened on 25th September 1911 with Alma Taylor in "*Fight with Fire*" plus a supporting programme of movies.



Towers Hall Picture House

The Towers Hall Picture House, in 1913, had its own in-house orchestra which was led by Fred Bower.

Fred was born on 22 November 1877 at Great Horton, Bradford. His father was Milton Bower, a woollen warehouseman, living at 90 Alexander Street, Great Horton, with his wife Charlotte (née Midgley). In 1891 the family was living at 153 Woodroyd Road, Bowling, and Fred was employed as a stuff warehouse boy. Fred married Rose Illingworth in 1899 and by 1901 they were living at 61 Heywood Street, Great Horton, employed as a stuff warehouseman, with Rose as a school mistress.

In 1911 Fred was recorded as being a job dealer in textile fabrics, and lived with Rose, her mother and her two sisters, at 41 Little Horton Green, Bradford. Fred later went into business with Victor Bottomley, setting up the Hollinwood Motor Company, to sell and service automobiles, at Listerhills Road, Bradford. He died in 1942.

Sadly, nothing more is yet known about Fred's musical accomplishments, clearly a part-time amateur role, nor about the other members of his band, shown in the photograph.

Further reading:

- Holman, Gavin - *Music to roll along by - bands that entertained the Victorian and Edwardian roller skaters* – January 2021
- Holman, Gavin - *Who needs ice? Roller-skating in Victorian and Edwardian Harrogate* – June 2021

Both available from <http://gavinholman.academia.edu>