

'Harry Wood's first visit to the Isle of Man took place in the summer of 1884, when, at the age of 15, he performed a virtuoso violin piece at a concert at the Falcon Cliff. He could not have imagined that just two years after this seemingly inauspicious playing engagement, he would return to the Island at the commencement of a distinguished fifty year career, initially as a violin teacher and orchestra leader, and ultimately as the most popular and successful musical director in the story of the island's entertainment industry'.

### **Master Harry Wood at the Falcon Cliff**

Harry Wood's first visit to the Isle of Man, where, from 1886 until his death in 1938, he was a central figure in the musical life of the Island, and where he was accorded the status of an honorary 'Manxman', was recorded in two brief entries in his Engagements Diary for the year 1884,<sup>1</sup> the first of which reads as follows:

July 14<sup>th</sup>: Went to the Isle of Man on a visit.

The 15 year old Harry, who may have been accompanied by his father, Clement,<sup>2</sup> on this occasion, in all probability caught the 1.00pm sailing from The Prince's Landing Stage, Liverpool, to Douglas, and may have enjoyed passage on the paddle-steamer *Ben my Cree*, recently re-boilered, and back in commission with a new, distinctive four funnelled profile, and an average crossing time of 4 ½ hours. Unlike some visitors, their accommodation address was not published in the visitor's lists of either the *Manx Sun* or *Examiner*, or in the Manx Sun Office's visitor's book. Perhaps Clement Wood preferred to stay at a public house or small guesthouse rather than at one of the more expensive hotels - the Villiers, the Peveril, the Victoria or the Castle Mona - in which case it would be unlikely that such details would have been forwarded by the landlord or landlady to the local newspapers. It is also possible that father and son stayed with another famous 'Wood' from Slaithwaite, George Henry Wood,<sup>3</sup> who had resided on the Island since the mid-1850s, and who was the Secretary and Manager of the Isle of Man Railway Company.

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At the time of his first visit to the Island, Harry Wood's career as a young and talented professional musician was definitely beginning to take shape. Just two years earlier, in March, 1882, he had been appointed as a violinist in the orchestra of the Theatre Royal and Opera House, Huddersfield, and in that season alone took part in over fifty performances of some twenty-or-so pantomimes, operettas and musical comedies. By the following year, he was playing further afield, in Leeds, Bradford and at the Theatre Royal and Opera House, Stockton-on-Tees. During this very busy period he also founded his own ensemble – Master H Wood's Quadrille Band - and played at a wide variety of local events including balls, bazaars, trade association dinners, Mechanic's Institute concerts, Masonic processions and fund raising events and functions of every kind. Sometimes an event would end with a supper for up to three hundred people in several sittings in the large upper room of the

family home, the Lewisham Hotel, Slaithwaite. After once such event - the opening of the Slaithwaite Spa Baths in May 1882 - Harry's band played for the guests to 'trip the light fantastic toe' on the croquet lawn in the Spa grounds.<sup>5</sup> In 1884, Harry Wood began to teach his first local violin pupils, whilst continuing to travelling to Bradford to take lessons himself from the well-known, and highly respected violin teacher, George Haddock.<sup>6</sup>

The year 1884 was the busiest yet with Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida* given in Huddersfield by the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, and *Patience* performed for the first time in Stockton-on-Tees in March, followed by *The Pirates of Penzance*, and in April, *HMS Pinafore*. By the beginning of May, Harry was back in Stockton, but returned to Huddersfield for a run of *Iolanthe* in June. Later that month he was able to witness Yorkshire's triumph by an innings and a few runs over Sussex at a Grand Cricket Match in Huddersfield. On 1st July 'my father began having our fields cut', and on the 4<sup>th</sup>, he missed his violin lesson due to the hay making. On the 5<sup>th</sup>, two weeks holiday for the orchestra at the Huddersfield Theatre Royal was announced; the scene was set for an interesting and very significant summer excursion.

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On the Isle of Man, Mr J Stokes, the newly-appointed manager of the Falcon Cliff Pleasure Grounds, Douglas - formerly of the Seacombe Hotel and Pleasure Grounds on the Wirral - was anticipating a bumper summer season. The auguries were promising. Officially opened during the August Bank Holiday, 1883, in an unfinished state, and operating as an entertainment and dance venue in some form from the previous year, the Falcon Cliff enjoyed a reputation as an exciting entertainment venue, and the management confidently assured the public that 'no effort would be spared to retain for the Falcon Cliff the popularity which it attained with the visitors' last season. The recent Whit-week had seen the largest number of visitors to Douglas in living memory, and 'the extraordinary brilliance of the weather combined with the wide-spread knowledge of the beauty of the Island in summer', seemed likely to attract an even larger number of holiday makers in July.<sup>7</sup> Added to which, the steamer services summer timetable had commenced earlier than usual to help encourage the extension of the season after Whit-week, throughout May and June, before the season opened fully, and the promise of lower accommodation prices than the previous summer, as lodging-house keepers endeavoured to under-cut each other, contributed to the familiar 'feverish expectation' that could be felt throughout the Island as spring slipped into summer.<sup>8</sup>

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A number of improvements to the Pleasure Grounds and Pavilion had been completed in time for the opening of the 1884 summer season. The old entrance to the grounds from Crescent Road was replaced by a new iron and glass portico, with one turnstile entrance and two exit openings; concrete steps were set into to the steep path to the Falcon Cliff, the

wooden bridge in the grounds was widened, and the paths in the lower grounds were made more attractive with rustic fences and seats. The main feature was the water-powered hoist or tramway to convey the visitors up to the 'Monstre' Pavilion,<sup>9</sup> built to a similar design to three similar conveyances in use at Scarborough. The front of the Pavilion, from which there were superb views over Douglas Bay, had been laid out with lawns and rustic seating, and the Pavilion itself now boasted six separate entrances which would be opened during the afternoon orchestral concerts in fine weather, to enable the promenaders in the grounds to enjoy the music. For the more energetically inclined, there was a running and cycling track in the grounds, and so that the magnificent views of the whole span of the bay could be properly admired, a *camera obscura* had been erected in front of the Pavilion.

A gallery had been added inside the Pavilion, to enable some 250 spectators to enjoy the music and watch the spectacle of the dancers below, and two bars had been installed, one each side of the stage. The stage fittings would 'rank in excellence with many provincial theatres', and the scenery, 'worthy of any stage in the Kingdom'. The Pavilion was glazed throughout with tinted glass, and illuminated with gas jets, a foot apart, and in front of every window in the centre-piece at the front. The acoustics had been 'tested, and pronounced admirable'.

A visitor from Ireland,<sup>10</sup> who spent five days on the Island in a small party later the same month as Harry Wood's visit, described Douglas as 'gay and fashionable'. The writer was enchanted by 'the loveliness of the bay, the semi-circular sweep of sand and shingle, the lofty boarding houses' and the surrounding 'crescent of mountains'. He was, however, thoroughly irritated by the 'male touts, who are bores', and whose behaviour towards the visitors could be 'grasping, intimidating and aggressive', but charmed by 'the pretty Manx women' with whom 'we quizzed and wrangled' (*sic.* 'haggled'). He recorded that the tram journey from his lodgings to the Falcon Cliff entrance took 10 minutes, and that there was dancing until midnight. Other Douglas impressions were of the Derby Castle, with 'its lovely grounds lit by long lines of coloured lanterns', the firework displays at 10.00 pm, and again, the bay, which when lit up by the rising sun, 'could be compared to the Bay of Naples'.

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A season preview in the *Isle of Man Times* announced that 'a splendid band' of between 12 and 15 musicians would once again be under the direction of Mr Edgar Ward,<sup>11</sup> 'who was so appreciated last year'. Each evening would commence with an exhibition of transformation dancing by La Petite Rosie<sup>12</sup>, after which the band – 'the finest band out of London' - would play for dancing until 11.00 pm. Artists performing at the daily afternoon promenade concerts would be changed frequently and that the 'the very best talent and first class artists have been engaged'.

Harry Wood's invitation to play a violin solo at the Falcon Cliff may have come via Sydney Ward, the brother of the musical director Edgar Ward, and himself a musical director at the

Huddersfield Theatre Royal.<sup>13</sup> This first engagement on the Island took place during either the afternoon or evening of 18<sup>th</sup> July, and was recorded in the following second brief entry in his engagements diary:

Played at a concert at 'Falcon Cliff', Douglas. I played as a solo, Delphin Alard's *Fantasia on 'Un Ballo in Maschera'*.

The next day, the *Isle of Man Times* reported that there had been 'several solos by members of the band', but did not single out young Harry's contribution for special mention. His Douglas debut piece, the *Fantasia on Verdi's Un Ballo in Maschera*, by the French violin virtuoso and composer, Jean-Delphin Alard,<sup>14</sup> had been in his repertoire since 1883, and is a demanding show-piece. Perhaps his choice indicates that at that stage in his career, Harry might have chosen the path that would be taken by his brother Haydn, who was an outstanding virtuoso violinist as well as an up-and-coming young composer, before he began to write the delightful songs and orchestral works that he is best-remembered for today.

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Among the variety artists performing at the Cliff, as it was known locally, were the Lancashire comedian Lester Barrett<sup>15</sup> - one of the most popular entertainers in Douglas at this period - who sang his current 'hit' song *Delaney's Chicken* - and Bessie Bellwood,<sup>16</sup> 'Queen of the Halls', famous for her broad humour, 'rollicking style' and racy sketches, such as her current one during which she impersonated a factory girl typically dressed in multi-coloured skirts, and sang the new song that launched her career, *What Cheer, 'Ria!'*

The concert artists included the mezzo-soprano Madge Rockingham,<sup>17</sup> a protegee of Edgar Ward, who had just completed five tours with *Les Cloches de Corneville* - the most popular French operetta of all time - and Holberry Hagyard, the principal tenor of Trinity College, Cambridge, who sang two of the most and affecting nautical ballads popular during the nineteenth century, Dibdin's *Tom Bowling* and Braham's *The Death of Nelson*.<sup>18</sup> The dance sensation of the season was F C Poulter's new waltz *Endenia*.

The non-musical entertainments available included Professor Hodsman's 'pyrotechnic display representing the bombardment of Alexandria', and, on display in one of the larger hotel rooms, an imposing picture, some 18' x 8', entitled the *Raid of the Bashi-Bazouks on a Bulgarian Village*,<sup>19</sup> by one of the age's most eminent large-scale military and battle artists, Thomas Jones Barker RA.

Elsewhere in Douglas, *Iolanthe* was being given at the Grand Theatre; at the Gaiety, *Fun on the Bristol*, 'an American oddity', and the 'outrageously funny' burlesque *Fra Diavolo*,<sup>20</sup> at the top of the bill at the Grand Music Hall adjoining the Grand Theatre, was Witty Watty Walton, with his range of comical characters; at the Derby Castle, there was dancing every evening, firework nights and Lotto and Lillo, the daring trick cyclists; the Masonic Hall

presented The Court Minstrels and at the Victoria Baths there was an 'aquatic entertainment' during which Professor Bibbero - the Human Fish - ate, drank, wrote and smoked under water.

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Harry Wood and his father probably commenced their journey home on 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> July, for by 21<sup>st</sup> July, Harry was once again playing in the Theatre Royal and Opera House, Huddersfield, for a short run of the 'Farcical Comedy', *Little Vixen*, as well as rehearsing for a burlesque, *Queen of Arts*. On 25<sup>th</sup> July, he was in Leeds having a violin lesson with George Haddock, and doubtless engaging in a post mortem of his performance of Alard's *Fantasie*. On 28<sup>th</sup> July, *Little Vixen* and *Queen of Arts* transferred to the town hall, Harrogate, and thence to the Theatre Royal, Malton.

He probably did not stop to consider that he might return to the Isle of Man the following year for a full summer season at the Falcon Cliff, let alone return again in 1886 as member of Dick Ball's Falcon Cliff Orchestra, this time as an Island resident, and ultimately to be revered as Manxland's King of Music for half a century. Had he but realised it, he had been shown a tantalizing glimpse of the fascinating variety of entertainments that were available at the Falcon Cliff and the Derby Castle in 1884. In embryo, these were precisely the kind of entertainments that would soon be attracting even larger numbers of visitors to the Island each year, to see and hear such variety stars Florrie Forde, George Robey, Dan Leno and Vesta Tilley, and world famous concert artists such as Emma Albani, Clara Butt and Louisa Kirkby Lunn at the Palace & Derby Castle, largely under his musical directorship. For the time being, though, it was early August, and the talented young violinist was back in the leader's chair in the pit of the Huddersfield Theatre Royal, for a run of the musical comedy *Frivolity*, his brief holiday, a fading memory.

Maurice Powell, January, 2015.

#### Notes

1. Harry Wood's Engagement Diary (henceforth referred to as WED), is now in the private Wood family archive, Haydn Wood Music Library and Archive ([www.haydnwoodmusic.com](http://www.haydnwoodmusic.com)), located in Parksville, BC, Canada. The Engagement Diary covers the period from June 1878 until Sept 1885.
2. Clement Wood (1833-1886), a teacher, clerk, licensed victualler and innkeeper, small land-owner, amateur musician and conductor of a local brass band, was for a short period in the year of his death the joint licensee with his wife, Sabra, of the Black Lion Hotel, North Quay, Douglas.

3. Slaithwaite, West Yorkshire, the home of the Wood family, and birthplace of three eminent brothers, Harry, orchestra leader, violin soloist and musical director; Haydn, virtuoso violinist and composer of *Roses of Picardy*, and Daniel, a celebrated flute virtuoso.

4. Harry Wood recorded in WED that on 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday June, 1885, he enjoyed tea and supper with Mr G H Wood, and played a number of solos with one of his daughters, a talented pianist; later that year, on 13<sup>th</sup> Sept, he noted that he spent 'a very pleasant afternoon and evening at his beautiful house' in Derby Road.

5. *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1882.

6. George Haddock. Founder of the Leeds College of Music and the Bradford Amateur Orchestra; the teacher of the young Delius, whose students' concerts may have been the inspiration for Harry Wood's Students' Concerts on the Isle of Man. His family's collection of rare violins was considered the finest in private hands, and included the 'Emperor' Stradivari, which Harry Wood heard many years later in Blackpool, when it was owned by the virtuoso Kubelik .

7. Valery Kinrade, *Music of the Manx Tourist Industry 1870-1970* (Dissertation, 2009) states that the number of visitors to the Island in 1884, was approximately 182,500.

8. *Examiner* 7<sup>th</sup> June, 1884. However, the correspondent warned 'that the town – the entire country – is far too dependent upon the results of the Season', and that 'too much is at stake for all eggs to be in one basket!' He cautioned that, if the Island lost its reputation as a pleasant watering-place, and the visitors ceased to come, both town and country would lose their prosperity, 'and both would sink into a worse poverty than fell upon them on the collapse of the great smuggling trade of the last century'.

9. An advertisement in the *Manx Sun*, 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1883, refers to the Pavilion as the 'Monstre Pavilion'. For a contemporary description of how the remarkable lift to the Pavilion worked, see *Isle of Man Times* 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1884.

10. For a contemporary visitor's view', see *Douglas and Back, Manx Sun*, 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1884.

11. Edgar Ward was the earliest musical director at the Falcon Cliff, certainly from 1883 and possibly even earlier. He was succeeded by a series of eminent musical directors: Dick Ball in 1886, Oliver Gags in 1887-8, Charles Reynolds in 1889, John H Greenwood from 1890-92 and F C Poulter from 1893-94.

12. Sometimes billed as *Little Rosie*, her act consisted of various dance-tableaux in national costumes, including Irish, Scottish and an English Sailor's Hornpipe.

13. See WED entry for 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1884, where Harry Wood recorded that the conductor for the show *Life in London*, was 'Mr Sydney Ward, the brother of a great friend of mine, Mr Edgar Ward'.

14. Jean-Delphin Alard (1815-88), was a violin professor at the Paris Conservatoire, and the teacher of Sarasate.

15. Lester Barrett (1855-1924), real name Stephen Barrett, brother of T A Barrett aka Leslie Stuart, the composer of *Lily of Laguna* and the 'hit' musical *Floradora*. He was the popular resident comedian at the Falcon Cliff for a number of seasons. Another of his most famous songs was C W Murphey's "Kelly the Carman", one of a number of 'Kelly' songs popular on the Isle of Man.

16. Bessie Bellwood (1856?–1896). Born in Cork, real name Kate Mahoney. A ballad singer, turned comedienne. Her career was rather eclipsed by the rise of Marie Lloyd, and like so many music hall artists, she died early - of cardiac disease exhaustion - and in some degree of poverty. Kind, tender-hearted and generous, she could also be headstrong, heedless and impatient according to those who knew her well. She was famed for portrayals of a range of working class characters, and for a vibrant quick-fire repartee with her audiences in which she frequently 'gave as good as she got!' Thousands followed her funeral cortege.

17. English actress, singer, manager and principal boy in many pantomimes, she formed her own troupe, the Madge Rockingham Company. *Encore*, London 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 1896, described her thus: 'a fine presence, a pretty face and figure and a grand mezzo-soprano voice, and an actress. Bravo!'

18. *Tom Bowling, Poor Tom or The Sailor's Epitaph* by Charles Dibdin from his *The Oddities* of 1789, a ballad replete with nautical metaphors. *The Death of Nelson*, a stirring tenor scena from the 1811 opera *The Americans* by John Braham, himself a celebrated tenor.

19. The Bashi-Bazouks were brutal, irregular soldiers of the Ottoman Empire. T J Barker's other fine epic scenes include *The Siege of Lucknow*, *Wellington at Sorouren* and *The Taking of the Russian Guns at Balaclava*.

20. What we would now refer to as a 'send up' of Auber's famous opera comique *Fra Diavolo* (1830).

**Maurice Powell, Andreas 2015**