

THE SCARTHIN BAND

**THE HIGH PEAK SUITE
MEMORIES OF A CROMFORD CHILDHOOD**



The CD cover (reproduced above) is from a photograph taken at Cromford Station in June 1959. The young man in the white short-sleeved shirt holding his lunch in a bag is John Biddulph aged 5 years. The person obscured by the supports to the platform canopy is his Dad.

The High Peak Suite – Memories of a Cromford Childhood

A collection of songs and instrumental pieces influenced by a childhood in Cromford. Not surprisingly, people, buildings, natural features, family history and events all appear in the pieces and there's a little bit about Arkwright in there somewhere!

1. Chant for Arkwright

A three part unaccompanied vocal to the words:

Come let us all here join in one,
And thank him for all favours done;
Lets thank him for all favours still
Which he hath done besides the mill.
Modestly drink liquor about,
And see whose health you can find out;
This will I chose before the rest
Sir Richard Arkwright is the best.
A few more words I have to say,
Success to Cromford's market day.

leading into

2. Masson Mill

The first 2 pieces have very different backgrounds. The first unaccompanied song or chant is based on words written at the time of Arkwright's reign in the Derwent valley. The source remains a matter of debate and speculation. One view is that they were penned by a woman and pinned to the door of the hotel that is now known as the Greyhound Hotel. Another view is that Sir Richard Arkwright required workers to sing in his honour. He certainly did a lot for his workers but the tied element of his philanthropy meant that if a worker lost their job, they lost their home.

The words to the song Masson Mill appeared mysteriously in the year of the mill's closure. Apparently anonymous, they reflect a strong sense of place for both the mill, its workers and its heritage.

3. Mill Pond Jig

Next comes the Mill Pong Jig. It's a tune in the dance style of a jig and has three sections. The Mill Pond has always been a focal point of the village and certainly has a considerable history. I remember enjoying watching swans and cygnets gliding over the water as a child.

4. The Singing Miller

My great-grandfather was the miller in the Corn Mill located on the left up the Via Gellia. So was his father and his forebears dating back over a century. Originally, there were 3 dams above the corn mill all fed by Bonsall brook. These were known as Biddulph dams but in recent times they have been reduced to a single dam. My great-grandfather was well known through the village and beyond for his vocal prowess and was known locally as the Singing Miller. He was the father to 14 children all brought up in the mill built by, you guessed it, Arkwright.

5. Mist on the Moor

Cromford moor was a place for picnics and walks and, in the case of my Uncle Peter, a place to climb a hawthorn tree in order to take a look (and only a look) at the eggs in a Jay's nest. I can remember watching skylarks flitting up and down and being shown the food supply or 'larder' of the red-backed strike impaled on a barbed wire fence. No wonder it's also known as the 'butcher bird'! Mist on the moor is that early morning experience of bird song and patches of mist rolling off the moor into the valley below before being burnt off by the sun and disappearing in the heat of the warm summer morning.

6. The Bear Pit

The Bear Pit is the local name given to a stone built feature soughs bringing water down from Cromford Moor meet. There are 2 points of departure for the torrents of water that used to cascade down through the Bear Pit (open to all viewers and a potential danger for those who tried to lean over too far!) one left to go under the Market Place; the other leaves on its journey towards the sough that goes over Mill Lane or Mill Road (as it is sometimes known).

7. Derwent Valley Mills

The next song is called Derwent Valley Mills. It tells of the Arkwright Heritage but perhaps more significantly, the part played by the river Derwent in all of this industrial development. You might even hear a reference to a well known folk tune in there somewhere! So we sing of a legendary valley.

"It's powered his mills and yet it trickles through our hand".

8. Market Day – A Gallimaufry

Market day. Lots happening, new sights, sounds and smells. A busy day with plenty of people coming and going. The full title of the piece is Market day – A

Gallimaufry. This is an old English word meaning a hotchpotch, jumble or medley. I hope this series of tunes is not a hotchpotch but the word is used to reflect the many dimensions of market day and the fact that there are some brief references to other pieces in the melodies.

9. High Peak Jig – Middleton Top Reel

The next pair of tunes is a jig and a reel – good old traditional folk dances, though we will remain entirely stationary throughout if you don't mind. The first tune is called High Peak Jig and the second is called Middleton Top Reel. There is a little story attached: As a five year old, I used to stand on our backdoor step at 31 The Hill Cromford (now 75ish I think) and watch in some great wonder at the steam emerging from over the fields at the very top of the hill. This was, of course, the J90 steam engines pulling the trucks on the Cromford and High Peak Railway. They were full of limestone on the way down from the more northerly Derbyshire quarries before depositing them at the top of Sheep Pasture incline and chugging back off, empty, for another load.

10. He Caught a Pike

And he really did. My dad and his friend set out to catch a fish they had seen lurking under the reeds in Cromford Canal. Their choice of bait is shrouded in a little mystery and not a little folk-lore and village legend but I know the true version. In the song, you can hear how they caught this fish and what happened next, a rather unexpected outcome!

11. Steeple Arch

When my Dad died in 1992, I decided that he should be buried in Cromford. He died in a little village called Horbling in Lincolnshire so there were immediate logistical problems, not least of which was following a hearse for over one hundred miles travelling at a suitably 'sombre' speed. Prior to this, the funeral directors had established contact with the various people and organisations to make this happen including a local vicar who clearly serves a little more than just St. Mary's Church nowadays. I realised that short of a posthumous name change to Arkwright, the chance of getting him buried in St. Mary's was non-existent. I already knew that St. Mark's (where my Grandparents and many other Biddulphs are buried) had been decommissioned as a church. I suppose I was slightly disappointed when I received a letter informing me that the nearest cemetery was (to my thinking anyway) in Wirksworth but it was near enough and as a family we had spent many an enjoyable hour on Black Rock and Cromford Moor, so it seemed fitting enough. The other factor involved was that as non-residents (for some considerable number of years), I had to pay several hundred pounds for a lease on a plot of Cromford (or Wirksworth) that was, I quote "approximately 7'6" x 3'6" and no deeper than 9 feet" unquote, and whatever the depth

allowance, the deeds indicated that I certainly had no mineral or mining rights, which was something of a relief. I had no intention of exercising them and I'm glad the legal rule was in place really as it was alarming to think that I might turn up to pay my respects in future only to find scaffolding in the adjacent plot and a substantial pile of fluorspar or some other mining 'waste' alongside.

On my Dad's grave stone it says "a man who could inspire with a whisper".

10 Cromford Wakes

And finally, Cromford Wakes. What can I say? This was the highlight of the year as far as my Cromford childhood was concerned. Family came over from Clay Cross, I had candy floss and several other dubious foodstuffs and the lights, noises and rides were delightful except for one year. I was a passenger in a head-on dodgem car collision between my dad's vehicle and my uncle Brian's considerably faster vehicle (my uncle Brian has always liked cars with high specifications) I banged my head on the dash board. However, consolation was not far off in the shape of fish and chips and a bottle of pop. The pop I 'shot down' with my cork pop gun off the shelf in Robinson's Chip Shop – that was in 1959. You'll hear about this and more in the song Cromford Wakes. If you'd like to join in the chorus the words are:

"Come along to Cromford Wakes, the Market Place is humming, lots of families gathered round and many more are coming."

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