

Walthamstow Notes - Music and performance in the late nineteenth century

Background and Activity for KS2 Groups

Background

There is information on the panels and elsewhere on this website about Walthamstow's rapid transformation from village to commuter town to urban area over just a few decades.

As it grew, Walthamstow changed in character. Many of the comfortably-off families who had lived in the area in the 1860s began to move further out of London, often making a handsome profit by selling their substantial gardens and orchards for development. Many local Victorian houses have one or two very old fruit trees or even a magnolia in their garden, survivals of past grandeur.

As time went on, most of the new development was of terraces of small brick houses for the new breed of less prosperous commuter, attracted by the cheap workmen's trains. Inevitably, with a larger, poorer population, there was more poverty. But there was also more investment, in everything from churches to factories to schools. Education for all children was now compulsory, and free, and that education included music as well as the Three Rs. In Walthamstow as elsewhere, the newly literate wanted more, and better, education for themselves and their children.

The first public concerts began to be held, first in church halls, and then in the grand Victoria Hall built by J F H Read - a prosperous resident who stayed on, helping the town as philanthropist, musician and promoter of many good causes.

At this time the only official safety net for those who fell on hard times was the workhouse. But there was also a network of local charities, providing everything from medicine to layettes for new babies to fuel to evening classes, with money raised by special events of all kinds as well as direct donations. And increasingly those in need themselves became involved in raising the money needed.

It was very common for local schools and churches to organise boot clubs. At a time when many children missed school because their families could not afford to buy them footwear, parents who could would pay a subscription to spread the cost of shoes. And for those who could not, the community would get together to find ways and means.

Activity

It's 1905, and you and your group are in charge of devising and organising an event to raise money for boots (almost all children wear boots and not shoes to school) for those in need.

You have decided you are going to stage a concert which will include a variety of items: choral music; solos; recitation of poetry; excerpts from plays; freeze frames. You decide. The panels include a review of just such a concert staged by a school in Highams Park around this time.

Was your school in existence at this time? Many local schools were

You will need to

Agree the programme

Write a polite letter inviting your chosen "great person" (?the head teacher?) asking him or her to come and be the guest of honour

Plan refreshments (lots of information about food of the time on the links).

Rehearse your event

Stage it

How much money did you make? You would of course be working in £ s d (information in the links section). How much are the boots going to cost? How many pairs can you buy?

Write a report for the Walthamstow and Leyton Guardian on your concert

Using the information on the panels, plan a fundraising strategy for the rest of the year