

**Mary Marsden (nee Tankard)**  
**1829 -1915**

Mary Tankard was born in 1829 and baptised at St. John's Church, Coley, on 30<sup>th</sup> August that year, the youngest of the three children of Daniel Tankard of Towngate, Northowram, and sister to Henry who emigrated in 1858. She came of a very musical family. Her father Daniel was at one time chief alto singer at Halifax Parish Church, and then at Square Chapel for many years. He was also a fine performer on the flute and the double bass; and he had a brother who played the silver trumpet. And Daniel's father, John Tankard (1775-1852), was one of the earliest members of Halifax Choral Society, founded by 1818.

In her early years, every day Mary's father helped her learn to play the piano. Soon afterwards, young Mary took singing lessons from Joseph Henry Frobisher (1813-69), Halifax Parish Church organist, and others. She sang in the choir at Coley Church from an early age, but – being possessed of a remarkably fine soprano voice - was soon in demand elsewhere.

"For all the years I was in church choirs in Halifax," Mary recalled, "I never missed Sunday services. I used to walk from Northowram [to Halifax and Bradford] in all weathers, have my dinner and tea in town, and then tramp back." In Mary Tankard's early days at Halifax Parish Church, the choir there consisted of only nine voices; though by her last months there it had been enlarged to 16.

Early in the 1840s, Mary joined the Halifax Choral Society, when its rehearsals were held at the Talbot Inn, Woolshops; she also became a member of the local Glee and Madrigal Society. She began taking lessons from the famous Susan Sunderland. Before long Mary was singing at concerts in public, frequently in Halifax, but soon around the West Riding and in Lancashire. She had a remarkably high register, and occasionally she even sang certain numbers for which her voice was better adapted than that of Mrs. Sunderland. The two ladies often sang duets. In later years, with a laugh, she would speak of the first of these, "O, Lovely Peace," sung in the Oddfellows Hall (the concert-room at that time) and the remark of old "Kit" Dawtrey, a cellist who ran a music shop in Old Market, "Why, Miss Tankard, lass, thou art as good as her!"

Pride of place for 19<sup>th</sup> Century Yorkshire sopranos must always go to Mrs. Sunderland; yet, in writing of the latter in 1907, Alfred Clay said: "...next to her in power of song and equal with her in the love and esteem of the people of the day came Mary Tankard, pupil of "The Yorkshire Queen of Song," and constant companion of hers on concert platforms."

In 1872 Mary married widower John Marsden, a draughtsman and model-maker at Dean Clough; soon afterwards, she retired from public singing, even in church. John Marsden died in 1881, but Mary lived on until December 1915, living latterly at 28 Cavendish Terrace.