

## **Abel Dean**

### **1814 - 1887**

Abel Dean was one of Halifax's great 19th Century musicians, and in his early years was a performer with the Halifax Choral Society. He was renowned as the conductor of the Halifax musical "Jubilees". Every five years or so, from 1831-1890, a series of Sunday School Jubilees was held at the Piece Hall during Whit week in May. Massed gatherings of children, their teachers, and thousands of spectators, supported chiefly by the local independent churches, they were a major event in the town's social calendar.

Abel was one of ten children of Abel Wadsworth Dean, and his father was a keen musician who trained his children in music from an early age. Abel was exceptionally gifted, and at the age of nine was playing the organ for services at Northgate End Unitarian Chapel; two years later he was organist at Square Chapel. Soon after that he took a long-term post as organist at Northgate End. Abel also became a proficient violinist, playing for the Choral Society concerts. He earned a living teaching singing, plus organ and piano playing, in Halifax and Huddersfield.

Abel was one of the founders of the Dean Clough Glee and Madrigal Society, conductor of the Ovenden Madrigal Society, and first conductor of the Halifax Yeomanry Band. But to most Halifax people he was chiefly known as the conductor of the Halifax Jubilee Commemorations in the Piece Hall from 1852 to 1885. At the event of 1856, 20,323 scholars, 4,464 teachers, the school bands, and 8,000 spectators filed into the Piece Hall from 11 a.m. At 12.45 p.m., Abel Dean ascended the platform and turned towards the orchestra, "where the monster brass band at once uplifted their bright and shining instruments. One wave of the baton evoked a preliminary roll of the drums, four bars of an introductory movement by the cornets, and then came a majestic crash of instruments, such as had never been heard in Halifax before." The band assembled consisted of 560 instrumentalists, brass, woodwind, percussion, double basses, and 25,000 voices were raised in song.

After the 1885 Jubilee, Abel was presented with a testimonial and a purse of £165 as a reward for his services over 30 years. That same year he suffered a stroke, and was an invalid for the last two years of his life, dying peacefully on the 7th November 1887, aged 73. Latterly, widowed Abel lived with his sisters at Lightcliffe.