



Mrs Sunderland

The Calderdale Nightingale

Born Susannah Sykes in Brighouse in 1819, she had very little education as a child and went to work in the textile mills at an early age. When she was 12 years of age a local Blacksmith, Luke Settle, heard her singing in her parent's garden. Luke was also a singer and the Choirmaster at Brighouse Parish Church. Recognising Susan's potential he gave her free coaching, teaching her to breathe correctly and to project her voice.

As well as Luke Settle, several other local musicians helped her, notably Henry Broomhead, who, as well as coaching her singing, gave her school lessons at his Bonegate Academy, and Mr Goldthorpe (Superintendent of the Bridge End Sunday School) who taught her music and singing and even gave her a piano so she could practice at home.

She first sang in public on 25th September 1833 at Lightcliffe Church but was soon in demand for concerts around the West Riding and wider afield. In 1836 she was one of the founding members and the principal soprano of the Huddersfield Choral Society with whom she sang for many years.

On 7th June 1838 she married Henry Sunderland, a local farmer and butcher, being known thereafter as 'Mrs Sunderland', and together they had 6 children.

The opening of Leeds Town Hall on 7th September 1858 saw her performing before Queen Victoria and she was subsequently to sing for the Queen in Buckingham Palace on 1st June 1860. She retired in 1864 after a final performance at St George's Hall in Bradford although she continued to give music lessons for some years.

She and her husband lived in Brighouse all their married life and on the occasion of her Golden Wedding a concert was held in her honour at Brighouse Civic Hall. An illuminated scroll was presented to her to mark the occasion.

The concert generated a cash surplus and it was decided to use this money to start a Vocal Solo Competition to be held in Huddersfield. The first 'Mrs Sunderland' competition was held in April 1889 and Mrs Sunderland herself presented the prizes. It is now one of the largest in the UK with a wide range of musical and other activities.

Susan Sunderland died, in her Brighouse home, on 7th May 1905 at the age of 86 and she is buried in Brighouse Cemetery.