A Long Blow

A non too serious memoir of a Brass Bandsman
by Peter Grace
To mark the 50th Anniversary of the reforming of Cirencester Salvation Army Band

(Drawn by the author while supposedly revising for A levels 1962)
In the Beginning

It is my considered opinion that amongst the material lodged on the DNA of humans there
must be a brass-band gene. The appreciation of and participation in brass band music for
instance is often evident in succeeding generations of the same family, particularly in relation
to members of The Salvation Army. This seems to be evident in my own case. I was born in
1943, the son of a Baritone horn player from Liverpool who had been redirected from Camel
Laird's shipyard in Birkenhead by the Air Ministry to work as a coppersmith at RAF Kemble
when the base opened in 1939. My mother was a native of Cirencester and as far as I know
they met at The Salvation Army Hall in Watermoor Road. I was their second son, my older
brother Mike being born some 14 months earlier.

We lived at number 2 Nursery Road in Watermoor, in a small terrace of Council Houses built
during the Great War at the base of the railway embankment on the Swindon side of
Watermoor Station. As we moved from there to Chesterton Lane in October 1947, I
remember little of the inside of the house except that just inside the front door was the larder.
In the larder was a strong smell of cheese, along with a large Eb Bass tuba minus a
mouthpiece. The mouth-piece could sometimes be found on the mantelpiece above the
fireplace in the living room. For some unaccountable reason, from a very early age I had an
overwhelming desire to get a sound out of this apparatus. I used to creep into the larder and
put my mouth to the pipe that should have held the mouthpiece. Of course I was unable to
blow a note and although a futile activity, it kept me out of mischief for short periods. Where
the idea of blowing on the tube came from is a mystery as I cannot now recall seeing or
hearing a brass instrument being played before I was four years old. I suppose it could have
been the result of being taken to the Victory Parade in the Market Place in 1945 or the
Carnival in 1946 or a Labour Party Fete on the Grammar School field or Kings Meadow.

There is the question as to why the Eb Bass should be in the larder? It was of no nutritional
value at all, not even in the days of rationing. The instrument was kept there because there
was no other safe place in the house large enough to store it. At the time it was not being
used regularly at the "Army" as there was no official band at the Corps. However throughout
the war while Cirencester was surrounded by military establishments and hosted shadow
factories and evacuees there were occasions when visiting Salvationist bandsmen could play
on the instruments left from the Band of the 1920s and 30s. My Dad, who had learned to
play in the Clubmoor Corps in Liverpool, obviously took every opportunity to "keep his lip
in". I know now that the object of "disarming" the instrument by removing the mouthpiece
was to prevent unauthorised persons from passing on unwanted germs from their lips.
Experience over the years has demonstrated to me just how overstocked with microbes infants
can be!

Referring back to genetics, I cannot say for certain that there was a brass-band gene from my
grandparents, as all but my grandmother from the Liverpool branch of the family died before I
was born. However I do know that my Dad's father was musical. He served in the Great War
in The King's Liverpool Regiment and when he wasn't digging tunnels under the Germans at
Ypres etc he would entertain his comrades in the trenches on his harmonica. He was of the
Roman Catholic faith but my grandmother was protestant and numerous relatives played in
the Orange Lodge bands. In fact my Dad played a fife in one of these bands before swapping one form of religious expression for a less confrontational one. So it was probably the brass-band gene rather than the smell of the cheese that led me to the larder.

The wartime period was one of make do and mend and recycling. To this end many of the objects in 2 Nursery Road were made from recycled materials found at Kemble. As children, most of our toys were constructed from bits of unrequired air ministry equipment, such as the windmill, the sails of which were turned by a motor from a Lancaster bomber's landing light mechanism. This toy still exists along with many other things he made. However a couple of things he made have I believe been lost to the family, namely two metal hot water bottles. They were made of aluminium, no doubt of aeronautical origin, but these shiny cylinders could, to a small child, easily represent some kind of instrument. Sadly it was a long time before the gene was to be activated by the real thing.

In 1948 younger brother David was born, we had moved to Chesterton Lane and the Eb Bass no longer resided with us although I still have the original mouthpiece. Not only had the Bass gone but the other small group of instruments that at one time were put under the platform in the Hall had disappeared. It is strongly rumoured that they were given to a local Corps despite Harry Ridout, the Corps Colour Sergeant's hopes of one day seeing a band back in the Corps. Later when we were in our early teens we managed to undo the front of the platform in the Hall to gain access to the space below. Sadly there was no sign of the instruments, just some newspapers from 1927 left there by the builders. So in the early days my connection with the world of brass bands was limited to the Band contest at the Carnival and the occasional visit from local Salvation Army Bands from Swindon, Stroud and Cheltenham and in particular a small group from Swindon Gorse Hill Corps who showed that numbers are not always required to perform satisfactorily. Some times we went further afield for Divisional events at Bristol as the Corps in those days came within the Bristol Division. I only vaguely remember a particular event when a close friend of the family Janina Pladek a Polish refugee who had come to Cirencester at the end of the war, married Douglas Neale from Bristol Staple Hill Corps. They had both finished their training as Salvation Army Officers at the Army's International Training College in London. Before entering the College Janina or Jennie as we called her was most helpful in overnight baby-sitting for the youngest addition to our family, in order for our parents to get a night's sleep. The Staple Hill Band played during the wedding ceremony and evidently it made such an impression on us that Major Newell, the Divisional Commander remarked that he could see the Grace boys' eyes popping out like organ stops.

The result of our parent's sleepless nights led to our next close encounter with a proper band. The doctor recommended a holiday particularly for my Dad. The long hours of work coupled with Home guard duties at Kemble, digging for victory and the privations of wartime diet had taken their toll. Thanks to our Corps Officer a holiday was arranged for the whole family to stay in Bournemouth with Mr and Mrs Nash from Winton Corps. On the way, I assume from Swindon by bus, we went through Salisbury where we just happen to witness a large Salvation Army funeral procession being led by Salisbury Band with the white ribbons on the flag and white armbands on uniforms. We learned later that it was the funeral of the Salisbury Bandmaster. The next encounter with brass came just a week later when we went to the Sunday afternoon meeting at Winton and on this occasion we listened to the excellent Junior Band. I was six or seven at the time and remember how I longed to get hold of one of those instruments to play music which by then was very much part of our lives.

We had a piano at home but it stayed closed most of the time acting more as a display shelf for family photographs and ornaments, although my Dad occasionally played it in his self taught way. One evening it played, apparently on its own, but the supernatural force turned out to be a mouse running along the keyboard. The music we encountered at home was at this
time mainly confined to the black bakelite Philco wireless from which emanated a fairly eclectic mix of light music, big band and classical, liberally dosed with religious material on a Sunday. There were programmes such as Chapel In The Valley introduced by Sandy McPherson the famous theatre organist who seems to have dominated the airwaves during the war. Another was With Heart and Voice which seems rather a strange choice since it consisted of Welsh Hymn singing provided by such groups as the Colwyn Bay Girls Choir, Bethesda Ladies Choir, the Penhryn Male Voice Choir and one I particularly recall, the Llithfaen and District Choral Society accompanied by Menna Leyshon. Pronouncing the names in this case has its difficulties, since experience has taught me that the Welsh language was invented mainly to confuse the English. However on reflection, there is no more difficulty in appreciating a good Welsh Hymn sung in seventeen flats than a more than amply proportioned soprano belting out an Italian aria. Could it be the Welsh influence which has made it easier for me to play in flat keys than sharp, or just a lack of scale practice?

On returning home from the evening meeting on Sunday nights the wireless provided further musical inspiration with Sunday Half Hour for the religious, coupled with Grand Hotel with its Palm Court Orchestra providing light and classical, along with Henry Hall’s Guest Night and other Big Band material. Another programme I remember that was broadcast during the week was Welsh Rarebit with Harry Secombe ending the programme with a rendering of We’ll Keep a Welcome in the Hillsid. This did not have much of a musical influence on me but must have been my first introduction to a member of the Goon Show. This had a great influence on my later academic career at Cirencester Grammar School where the saints Milligan, Sellers, Bentine and Secombe were held in high esteem.

I remember that on one occasion in my very early days as a listener, there was an orchestra playing on the wireless. As the set was on the dining table I had access to the rear of the cabinet that had ventilation holes in it to help cool the valves. Being a curious child, in more ways than one, I thought that somehow the musicians were inside the cabinet so I poked my finger through one of the holes bringing it in contact with the internal workings. In this particular set there was no mains transformer just a thing called a mains dropper that meant that the metal chassis of the wireless carried live current. I believe that it was this attempted contact with non-existent beings that has given me a certain amount of immunity to electric shocks.

Although my dad was a very skilled craftsman as a coppersmith, from an early age he had a passion for constructing and repairing radio and electrical equipment. He had been born one of a family of eight in the less affluent areas of Liverpool, so like so many others of his generation he might well have achieved greater things had fate allowed. However it was this passion and his ingenuity that created another musical influence in our home the one that brought me nearer to brass banding than anything else. He made a gramophone that he developed over the years. He started with a wind up motor and an electrical pickup that he fitted into an improvised cabinet. The lead from the pickup was plugged into the back of the previously mentioned wireless. Later he substituted an electric motor for the clockwork one and built an amplifier and tuner unit to replace the wireless. On this machinery he played a selection of 78rpm records by Bing Crosby, Vera Lyn etc. However at the same time he had a collection of Regal Zonophone records with blue labels and brown paper sleeves and the blue labels bore the crest of The Salvation Army.
Like the music on them the records were "sacred." They were kept in a shallow wooden box that was out of bounds to young members of the family. The records included marches, selections and solos played by famous Salvation Army Bands such as Rosehill, Cambridge Heath, Upper Norwood, Chalk Farm, Tottenham Citadel and of course the International Staff Band.

I remember many of the pieces such as the marches; New Zealand Warriors, Montreal Citadel and Torchbearers etc and hymn tune arrangements like Horbury and Blaenwern. One that made a lasting impression was that based on the tune Rockingham, used to accompany the hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." I used to listen to that piece and concentrate on the running passages played by the Euphonium and without the slightest notion of how, would convince myself that one day I would do that. Although I have never played the actual piece as it was arranged for bands with a full compliment of instruments I did enjoy playing the florid passages on the Euphonium from the hymn tune book before a recent republishing removed them.

Getting Started

A Chinese philosopher said "A journey of a thousand miles begins but with a single step." I suppose I, and some of my fellow "musicians" have come a long way over half a century but we had to start somewhere and I must admit that when we started the prospects were not great. To begin with you need some one to teach you at least the rudiments of music and the basic technique of handling and playing the instrument. On the first count we were fortunate. When I say we, I include my two brothers and other teenage members of Cirencester Salvation Army Corps. At the time one of the senior members Bill Gough, known always to us as Mr Gough (things were more formal in those days) decided that as well as running a Bible study class he was willing to attempt to re-form a brass band in the Corps.

Mr "Bill" Gough who started it all

He was a very good cornet player but had gained much of his banding experience in the military as a drummer. He had joined up as a drummer boy and in the 1930s served in India before getting involved in Dunkirk and the North African campaign in the Second World War. His skills with bass and particularly side drum were phenomenal. He also had a way of coming down to our level as far as the group was concerned. Another essential for a successful brass player is an instrument and here was the biggest problem. All we had at the time were two or three mouthpieces and the original Corps bass drum. This had been used in
the band in the 1880s, found its way to the Midland and South Western Junction Railway Band and then been reclaimed by Bandmaster Morse, for the Army band in the 1920s. Unfortunately in our early days it was in pieces hanging from a gas bracket in the small room off the platform in our hall in Watermoor Road. Attached to the pieces of the drum was a label bearing the legend £2 10s Scrap. We had a blackboard and chalk, but music manuscript was not easy to come by, so we each bought a Woolworth's exercise book in which to write and draw the staves necessary to illustrate the scales and other practical matters. I well remember the book as it had all those strange tables on the back cover telling you about rods, poles or perches and how many bushels were in a peck or was it the other way round? With something to write on and our knowledge of the alphabet from A to G we could make a start. The other necessity was to be able to count to 3, the number of valves on most brass instruments of those days. Having written out the C, F and G major scales we wrote the finger combinations required for each note on the scale then without having an instrument we tapped our fingers on the table in the order required to play the scale. This is a fairly neighbour friendly way of making music. Slightly noisier were the sounds made by forming notes with the lips by blowing on one of the mouthpieces we possessed. Of course taking time to wash the latter before passing it on to a colleague. Thus it was that the Cirencester Corps Band began its prenatal activities.

The great break through came in 1958 when a young Lieutenant was appointed from the International Training College in London to be Cirencester's Commanding Officer.

I must admit that the Lieutenant's arrival was a bit of a surprise. For the majority of my younger days our COs had been women and we scanned the Army's weekly newspaper The War Cry in the May to see who was moving where. It announced that the new Commanding Officer for Cirencester was to be Lieutenant Olive Connolly. We were surprised when the Lieutenant arrived not wearing a bonnet, but then as he was a six feet tall former farmer's boy this was to be expected. Olive was a proof-reader's error, his real name was Clive! As it turned out he was quite a character and completely in tune with the fledgling band learners. His stay in Cirencester however was brief. He left in the November of 1958 to go to the Felix Road Corps in Bristol in order to oversee the closing of that Corps which had been known as the Jam Factory from the origins of its buildings. Not long after he left Cirencester, against prevailing Army regulations, he returned one evening just before Christmas, meeting Mike and me from school with a hired car. Inside the car was a selection of brass instruments, three cornets two tenor horns and a baritone horn. These were to be the first instrument for Cirencester Band, albeit they had arrived by unorthodox means. While making an inventory of all the equipment at Felix Road, Clive had discovered a complete set of brass instruments hanging in a cupboard, their silver plating blackened by lack of use. Erring on the side of caution and without going through normal channels he sorted out the ones least likely to be missed and earmarked them for us, along with a cornet scrounged from a fellow officer from a nearby Corps.

At last we had our hands on the real thing, no more sharing mouthpieces or tapping fingers on the table. At least that is what we thought. However our joy was short lived. Clive's successor as CO in Cirencester was a young Welsh Lieutenant, Marion Lewis. It being the season of goodwill she was invited to the annual Officer's Christmas party at DHQ in Bristol. Unfortunately the goodwill was in short supply and along with Clive she was summoned
before the Divisional Commander who had somehow heard of the unorthodox transfer of instruments from Felix Road to Cirencester. She was told to remove the instruments from the would-be instrumentalisists and to lock them in the Officer’s room in our Hall until the Divisional Commander had decided what the course of action should be. So near and yet so far! It has to be said at this point that the instruments in question were not in the best of condition. The tenor horn that I received sported insulation tape on two joints and I pressed a small piece of soap into a hole that should not have in the middle valve. Mike’s baritone had seen much better days and we joked that it had so many extra holes you could play it like a flute. Fortunately the DC’s wrath was short lived and within a couple of weeks he relented and we were given permission to get out the valve oil and get on with learning to play. We learned later that the problem over the instruments was mainly due to the fact that they were earmarked for a much larger Corps just around the corner from Felix Road.

If ever I smell Duraglit metal polish I remember walking down Chesterton Lane with my highly polished tenor horn under my arm for the first time on my way to band practice. Anyone, other than a child prodigy, who has ever taken to learning to play a brass instrument, will tell you that it is not as easy as it looks. Being left-handed doesn’t help to start with. However we plodded on and gradually the basic scales were almost recognisable. Trying to learn the correct fingering was the main hurdle since writing it under the notation was frowned upon. However when I practiced at home, which was far too frequently for the good of the neighbours I used some old vocal music scores with the tonic sol-fa printed above the stave. By learning the fingering that corresponded with this I gradually got the hang of it. My main offering was the hymn tune ‘Abide with me’ which I played far too often. I still have qualms of conscience thinking about the May family who lived next door.

Our early efforts as an ensemble were somewhat restricted by the range of instruments available although the only member of the group who had started work, John Ashfield, bought his own trombone which added an extra part. Along with this we had first and second cornet, first and second horn, baritone and the resurrected bass drum. At this point we had no bass end apart from the drum. Two of the COs who followed almost immediately after Lieutenant Lewis, Lieutenants Geoff Blurton and John Travers were both brass players which was quite fortuitous and meant that we graduated from scales to hymn tunes. The first of the latter in our repertoire was the hymn tune Sawley and I had moved on to second cornet by the time. We first played this in a Thursday evening meeting. By this time also we had added a Euphonium and Eb Bass tuba to our range of instruments. These were donated by Divisional Headquarters and were in the same state of preservation as the rest of the instruments. In fact my Dad had to use his metal working skills to manufacture valve caps and one valve top for the bass before it was playable. However in theory we now had enough to produce four-part harmony. For a short time we had the occasional help of a lad from Stroud on the Euphonium, but eventually my Dad was persuaded to get his lip back in on the instrument. I have to admit that I find it hard to remember just which instruments I tried and when, in those early days but I do remember that playing in public was quite an ordeal as I was not the most outgoing of teenagers, although of course teenagers were only just being invented.

At that time also the music of youth was being forged by Beatle mania and the guitar revolution. The Army of course was soon on to this bandwagon, with its own group the ‘Joy Strings’. So it was hardly encouraging to us to be asked why we were bothering with brass bands when the rhythm group would soon be king. Thankfully there is a place for all forms of musical expression and 50 years on there is still one for a brass band, especially at times such as Christmas. They require neither electricity nor batteries and are waterproof, if some times prone to freezing. Encouragement did however occur from another perhaps unusual source. Mike, David and I attended Cirencester Grammar School in a period when there was a rather enlightened leadership. In my case when I joined the school John Barnett was the new headmaster, a man with a very forward-looking policy. Although the school celebrated its
500th anniversary in 1958 it was by no means stuck in the past. There were many traditions, official and unofficial, but the school philosophy was developed so that a pupil's talent in any direction would be encouraged. You did not have to be a budding genius to feel at home. Being, I suppose, a nosey person, I have always had bit of a magpie mind, picking up information and the odd skill from science and the arts although I must admit that much of mathematics remains a mystery. This despite nearly every maths report saying "satisfactory work and progress." It was not so much the academic that inspired me but the opportunity to do unusual things like constructing the scenery for the school plays. While in the sixth form a group of us built a craft block with two art studios and a kiln room (now the canteen for the Primary School) While digging the foundations we were also conducting an archaeological excavation. Although not officially doing woodwork or metal work I spent a lot of my free periods in the workshops. It was here that our Band benefited. Mr Ron Dyer the metalwork teacher took time to teach me silver and soft soldering so that I gave up the use of insulation tape and some of our early instruments came on to the school premises for proper repair.

Although not unusual today, the study of music did not have much priority in many Grammar Schools in those days but we were fortunate. With considerable foresight Mr Barnett appointed a new music teacher in 1959, one Peter Maxwell Davies now Sir Peter and Master of the Queen's Musik. His inspirational teaching led in a very short time to the formation of a large proficient school orchestra that played in London's Festival Hall at the Bath Festival and other famous venues. They also made an LP record that was recorded in the Bingham Hall. This was the hall where our assembly was held each morning and where Max accompanied the hymns on the piano. Music became the in thing. He gave opportunity to pupils to make and write their own music and refreshingly treated everyone as equals. This was in complete contrast to his own career at Manchester Grammar School where, when as a pupil he asked if he could take A level music, the Headmaster replied, "This is not a girls school!" I suppose in our case as we were co-educational that might have helped! I must admit that my level of self-confidence and skill on the cornet did not lead me into the orchestra but making music was deemed respectable. My other skills were however brought into play in a different way. I was occupying my time one day in the metal workshop when Max came in bearing a length of brass tubing and a glockenspiel. He said "I believe you are a bit of a musician would you please tune that to Bb and he handed me the tubing. I confessed that I could play the C scale on a cornet so was given the task of striking Bb on the glockenspiel then the tube, then sawing off the end of the tube until the resulting notes matched. This was a test of nerve since I could not stick the brass back if I cut off too much. Thankfully I managed the task to his satisfaction and the tubular bell featured on the LP record. This I can prove since in recent years I acquired a film of this event that was featured in a BBC Monitor programme entitled "Two Composers" which came out at the time comparing the early careers of Max and Dudley Moore. My other contribution to the school music at the time was in printing the orchestra's music. Mr Whitmore, the woodwork master, made a light box that operated as a primitive Dyeline copier. It consisted of a wooden box with 16 light bulbs in ranks of four with a piece of plate glass above the bulbs. Max would write orchestral parts on tracing paper, this was placed on the glass and above this light sensitive paper. After a sufficient exposure time we sponged a developing liquid onto the paper and the image would be developed and fixed. As this was a liquid process the parts would then have to be dried. It was not unusual to see such music laid out around the playground drying off held down with stones at the corners. A windy day could play havoc with the arrangements.

Lieutenant Blurton, no mean musician himself, took time to visit Max at the school on a number of occasions that helped in many ways to boost our confidence. We still had a way to go as far as playing in public was concerned and it took some time before I could deal with the fingering by memory. Lieutenant Blurton, being not much older than ourselves, joined in with less formal antics. On one occasion using two tape recorders he played all the instruments in one band piece. He recorded the 1st cornet part on one recorder then
accompanied that recording putting in the second cornet part and recording both parts on the second recorder. By this method he reproduced the whole band. He was also a very good pianist and one evening we were at the Hall informally and he decided to remove the front of the upright piano and place copies of the “War Cry” behind the strings. As he played the sound was akin to jazz on a pub piano. Unfortunately in the middle of his recital the Divisional Commander walked in unannounced and was not impressed. One of the Band’s unofficial duties was to clean the Hall after band practice in preparation for the weekend’s meetings. The polishing of the lino was based on military methods at the instigation of Mr Gough we took it in turns to tie polishing cloths around our shoes and skated up and down the aisles until they shone.

It was shortly before the end of Lieutenant Blurton’s stay that Harry Ridout was taken ill and although he knew that his ambition to see the Band reformed was in the offing, sadly we never managed to play for him. Lieutenant Travers, the next CO, again was an efficient brass player and in those days in small Corps such as ours the officer’s salary was not always regular. After one sparse period he had enough back pay to go out and buy a second hand cornet. I believe that it was at this time I moved from cornet to the Eb bass for the first time. I felt a bit more comfortable on the bass as it was easier to disguise the odd wrong note than on the more exposed cornet. At this time a number of younger Corps members were introduced to practice, including Martin Gardner. Mr Gough had already restored the bass drum to playable condition but to accommodate Martin who was in his early teens, he reduced the size of the barrel, hoops and skins to the size it is today. After serving with our Band for a number of years Martin eventually became bandmaster of the Cirencester Town Band. This post had been held in the past by at least two ex Salvationists. In his days with us Martin had a great sense of humour but once he started to laugh he had great difficulty in stopping. While we were still finding our feet before being officially commissioned we played the occasional hymn tune in meetings. We sat in a U formation on a central bench with two or three chairs on either end. We knew when Martin found something to be funny, as the bench he was sitting on would begin to shake. At other times when he got bored with the sermon he would put his head down on the drum and we would wake him in time for the closing song.

**A New Commission**

William Booth, the Founder of The Salvation Army, is often credited with saying, “Why should the devil have all the best tunes?” but it took almost three years before we felt confident to declare ourselves ready to stand up and face the devil. When Lieutenant Travers moved on, Major and Mrs Albert Phillips were appointed as COs to Cirencester. Although past retirement age, (the Major had been commissioned by William Booth) they took on responsibility for the Corps. It was one of those rare times when there is an influx of new people, due in no small part to the Major’s imposing presence. He was over six feet tall, wore a bright red field major’s tunic, which was well recognised around town along with his deep Welsh voice. Along with newcomers from Cirencester, we had Alf Davis and his wife from Stroud. He was a former bandmaster and had served as a bandsman in the RAF. It did not take long before he linked up with the Band and eventually brought with him another bandsman, Reg Pickett, his wife and their son, who played Cornet. This meant that the band now had the full compliment of parts to play marches and selections. As I remember for a short time, I went back on to the cornet having bought my own second-hand SA Bandmaster cornet for the princely sum of £25-10s earned mostly from the proceeds of my morning paper round.
In 1962, it was decided that the time was ripe for those of us not yet bandsmen, to be commissioned and for the Band to be commissioned as a Corps music section. So it was that, on August 13th, the commissioning took place and we were able to don our uniforms as bandsmen with the official collar insignia bearing the title Cirencester Band. Most of us were wearing second hand uniforms, mine had been given to me by Clive Connolly, one that he had worn as a cadet in the training college. They were of the design with a stand up collar that meant they could be hot in Summer but any shirt underneath would do and in Winter they could hide warm layers.

By the time of our commissioning I had moved down the band again to the BBb bass, the largest of them all. I came by this in a rather unusual way. In recent years a phrase coined by an anarchic comedy group has entered into common parlance "Yes, but what did the Romans ever do for us?" Well, outside of my Army activities I developed an interest in archaeology. Cirencester or Corinium, was the second largest Roman city in Britain and this was to be investigated during the 1960s and 70s. Thus it was that during the Summer of 1962 I was working on the excavation of Cirencester’s Amphitheatre. While trowelling away in a narrow trench near the original arena entrance I heard a strange clanking noise. I looked up to see Lieutenant Travers our former CO walking along the crest of the embankment carrying a large somewhat blackened Bass instrument.

The clanking came from the carrying strap hitting against the metal. He laid it beside the trench and explained that he had brought it for us from his Corps at Street where it was no longer used. He had needed the strap, as his means of transport was a motorbike and he had travelled the 60 miles or so with the instrument strapped to his back. He admitted that he had looked around a couple of times, seen his shadow and nearly fallen off. He eventually left the instrument with me and went off to visit friends. Not long after I could smell the scent of pipe tobacco, this meant that John Wacher, the director of the dig was approaching. When he got to my trench he looked somewhat surprised at the large metal object lying at the side. He was
not convinced that it was a high status fourth century votive object. Close examination showed it to be of silver plated brass, bearing the inscription Besson Class A and it proved to be a very useful BBb bass. At the time of my commissioning as a bandsman I was also commissioned as Corps Secretary. This meant trying to buy a new uniform. I managed to do this by using the student allowance I received for the next dig at the Amphitheatre, so the Romans had come in very useful.

The only problem I encountered with the new bass instrument was that it was long and narrow so that when we learned later to march to and from open-air meetings and I was always in the left rank, the lower two feet of the tubing was inclined to come into contact with the wing mirrors of parked cars. I use the excuse that I have never had good spacial awareness probably due to being left handed and right eyed. I believe the technical term is cross lateral. The latter doesn’t help either when reading repetitive passages of music where the bars are just filled with repeat signs. Even now I still find it hard to remember how many I have played. It is also hard to remember the dates when looking back all these years so perhaps its best not to worry too much about it and look at the band’s experiences since the commissioning in episodes of activity. Just two months after the Commissioning, an Army event was held in the Congregational Chapel in Dyer Street. This was billed as a rBand Festival with Stroud, Swindon Gorse Hill and ourselves. We played two pieces from the new Unity Series music for small bands, entitled Never Part Again and Happy are We. Everyone must have been reasonably happy because in the evening meeting the next day Alf Davis was commissioned as Bandmaster with my Dad as Deputy.

Out and About
I will always remember August 3rd 1963, the first time we played at a big Divisional Army event. Jean Parker one of the girls from the Corps had decided to enter the Training College to become a full time officer. This meant that just prior to leaving for the college she would take part in a Farewell meeting along with other candidates from the Division. Thus it was that Cirencester Band was invited, or should I say summoned, to play for this occasion in the Bristol Citadel Hall in Saint Paul’s. Not only were we summoned but also Bandmaster Davis was instructed that we should play a particular selection entitled Marshal Melodies. We therefore practised this in preparation. Unfortunately Alf was unwell near to the time of the performance so, when he recovered, he approached the Divisional Commander to see if we could play a simpler march with which we were more familiar. Unsurprisingly, the request was denied so we now had to make the best of it.

Bristol Citadel Hall was a huge edifice that at one time had been an indoor circus, so we felt rather vulnerable perched at the side of the vast platform in front of a congregation much larger than we had ever encountered at home. I remember sitting on the back rank with the large Bass, behind which I could hide to a certain extent. It was a rather nerve racking experience to say the least and I was shaking in my shoes. Now, I don’t know how much it was due to nerves or to what happened next but as we were about to play, before raising his baton, Alf turned his back on the congregation removed his top denture, powdered it and replaced it, then we were away. It was then I learned that you could play the BBb and laugh at the same time. How much the laughter was due to nerves I will never know. It does however remind me of an incident in pre banding days when as junior members of the congregation at Watermoor Hall we were seated on the front benches at a meeting. The preacher was a Hell fire and damnation man from a nearby village chapel. He got to an explosive passage in his sermon, hammered his fist on the lectern and his false teeth shot out and landed on the floor in front of us. How hard it is to remain pious under such circumstances. In the event he had the embarrassment of descending from the platform to retrieve the said articles, the point of his tirade lost in a cloud of confusion. At least Alf had the presence of mind to spare us that.
In fact his contribution in those early days was substantial. He could read a full score and remember it in detail in a very short time. That didn’t mean that we mastered it as quickly. He would often consign some new piece to the back burner with the words think we’ll come back to that. He also had sayings like tip it don’t whip it in matters of tonguing and little arrows, stars and circles would adorn parts of the score or our instrumental parts where he wanted to miss something out or alter it. He often conducted with an ebony baton that had been presented to Bandmaster Morse in the 1920s, but on occasions he was known to remove a valve slide from the bass he was playing and use that to beat time. In instrumental parts where there were rests but another part printed in small type to be played in the absence of that instrument he would say play the currants. Sometimes however he was lost for words.

I remember one particular open-air meeting we attempted in Chester Street not far from the Hall. It was a Sunday evening with the threat of rain. We arrived and formed up with our instruments in the usual circle. We had an opening prayer then Alf stepped into the ring to announce the first song. We had no amplification so he had to shout, but as he did so he lost his train of thought, coming out with; We are going to open by singing song number umm,-- in the Army we call them songs, but you call them hymns in the what? Well there was a muttering in certain quarters of We don’t sing hymns in the what’s it? and at that moment the heavens open, the Lord intervened and to save our embarrassment we headed for the Hall out of the deluge. On another occasion we were holding an open-air meeting in Stepstairs Lane and as usual for the benefit of bystanders the songs were being outlined. We got to the words Whosever will may come. when a rather notorious dog came out on the attack and I was forced to chase it away still strapped in to my Bass and others advised it to clear off or words to that effect. The latter incident happened after the Davises and Picketts returned to Stroud Corps but their contribution to the Band and Corps in those early days had certainly made a difference. Afterwards they often came back to take part in meetings or help augment the Band for special occasions. It was visits from Salvationists from Stroud that led to the opening of Cirencester Corps in 1881 and strong links were forged once again in the 1960s. It is often said that if you remember the sixties you weren’t there. I suppose that may be true for some but I do recall one or two things. For instance I remember exactly where I was when President Kennedy was shot, or at least when the news came through. I was in band practice. We had moved band practice night from Tuesday to Friday and just at the beginning on Friday November 22nd 1963 Mrs Gough came in to tell us that the President had been shot. I suppose that at least this would prove to the conspiracy theorists that we could hardly have been responsible.

Thinking once again about Stroud, every time we travelled there something unusual, often amusing, seemed to happen. There was the annual May Morning service held at 7.30am on Rodborough Common on the first Sunday in May. It was tradition that the Stroud Corps invited a visiting Band, usually one of some standing in the Army. (Although we took part one year.) A music festival was held on the Saturday evening then on the Sunday morning the band assembled at the bottom of the steep hill below Rodborough Fort. They then marched up the hill and held the service outside the fort. After the service came the tricky bit, marching down again. I am reminded of the grand old Duke of York. I am also reminded of one occasion when the Songsters were to take part, which meant that the pedal organ had to be manhandled to the top of the hill. As was often the case a strong wind was blowing which played havoc with the organ music as the organist pedalled away while two comrades held tight to the organ to prevent it slipping off the hill or into the bushes. Had the latter occurred it would have caused serious matters of health and safety as the bushes provided cover for the collectors who would emerge from them at the chosen moment. There was a caravan camp next to the fort and I often wonder just how much the campers appreciated being woken up by a brass band at 7.30 on a Sunday morning. For many years we made the sacrifice and got up early for Stroud and I can help but wonder what the true origins of the ceremony were. I am quite sure that, being Stroud, there was some sort of ritual going on, on that hillside long before William Booth founded the Army. Of course we always tried to support the band.
festival the night before because that gave us opportunity to hear music that was too complex for our limited instrumentation or gave us something to aim at. Again I am reminded of one occasion when a prestigious band from the East Midlands was presenting the festival and, as always there was a visiting dignitary to compere the programme. However on this occasion the gentleman was a bandmaster whose epaulettes were bigger than his band. After the opening rousing march his comment was “Well bandmaster I suppose that’s the one you always start band practice with”. He then sat through the programme with the score of each piece and commented on various aspects of the playing sometimes on a particular bar like some early day OFSTED inspector. Thankfully we have never suffered from a humourless bandmaster although for long periods we have not had one at all. When Alf Davis left my Dad who had been his deputy continued in that post for administrative purposes, but it was not until the early 1970s that a successor was appointed.

In 1965 The Salvation Army celebrated its Centenary and gained a great deal of publicity in the media which helped small Corps like us to realise that we were playing our part in something that was world wide. In the summer of that year an International Congress was held in London with a “Field Day” at Crystal Palace. Lieutenant Mary Skinner the recently appointed CO made the final arrangements for a coach for Corps members and friends to attend the day. The only slight hiccup in the arrangements was that the coach driver had never driven in that part of London before. Using his initiative he noticed a red service bus going to Crystal Palace and decided to follow, stopping every time the bus stopped. Eventually the bemused driver of the bus got out and asked our driver what he was playing at. After a brief explanation all was well and we followed along to the Crystal Palace. When we arrived at the entrance, which was thronging with people from all over the world, the first person we met quite by chance (or was it?) was Clive Connolly our early day benefactor. Sadly this was the last time we were to see him as he was killed some years later in a road accident. Throughout the day at the Crystal Palace at various points around the grounds there were bands playing. These came not only from around Britain but from all over the world. Having acquired an 8mm cine camera two years before I was able to record activities throughout the day, without sound of course. The final event with General Coutts taking the salute was most impressive with the delegates from the International Congress marching past along with the bands, banners, timbrels and drums. I believe that it helped us to see how we fitted in to the overall pattern of things and later to cope when all was not big and bright. We were later to have a very successful weekend visit by General and Mrs Coutts in September 1973.

For me personally, the arrival of Lieutenant Skinner in the Corps was to be of life changing importance, not because during her officership I went from a short period on cornet to Eb Bass, but as I was Corps Secretary/ cum Treasurer and Young People’s worker our paths
crossed frequently. To cut a long story short in 1968 unlike most cases in business the secretary married the chief! Before our marriage however the Centenary had given a boost to the Army generally and the period that followed was a very prosperous one for the Corps as we were able to establish ourselves more firmly in the community than ever before. We were no longer on the fringes of town activity. One thing that became a regular feature for a number of years was an annual Spring Festival given usually by one of the larger Corps Bands from the Bristol Division in Watermoor Church. In 1966 because of personal connections with now Captain Skinner, we were privileged to welcome Major Lesley Condon, the renowned composer and member of The International Staff Band.

![Major Lesley Condon](image)

This connection was to have strange consequences some years later. In 1971 the Corps was to celebrate its 90th Anniversary with an exhibition and Festival in the Temperance Hall in Thomas Street that had been the Army's first home in Cirencester in 1881. For a number of years we had had some tune books of Band Music numbers 1 and 2 from the original band of the 1880s in the archives, but not a complete set of parts. From some of the extra music stuck on the inside of the covers it was evident that a non-Army band had at some time been using the ones we had. By 1971 Major Condon had a senior post in the music department at national headquarters so I wrote to him to see if we could trace extra instrumental parts so that we could play one or two of the pieces at this anniversary festival. He replied that by a strange coincidence he had recently been sent a set of Band Music Volume 2 that we could borrow. When they arrived we set about practicing some of the marches etc. During the first practice Mike noticed that inside the cover of his 1st Horn book, stuck in on a small piece of paper there was a list of venues for open-air meetings. This included Midland Road, Querns Hill, Cricklade Street, Chester Street, Purley Road etc. all places in Cirencester. It turned out that the books had been sent to London from Swindon Old Town when that Corps closed and they had been taken originally to Swindon by Harry, one of the Bosworth family who had been in Cirencester Corps in the 1930s. His brother Jack had become Bandmaster of Cirencester Silver Band and they had been responsible for the extra pieces stuck in the books we already had. When told of the situation Major Condon suggested that as the books had obviously originally belong to Cirencester we could keep them. These rare volumes now have a prominent place in our archives but are brought out on special occasions for a "blast from the past."

**Highs and Lows**

Referring back to 1965, I have an LP record of the Centenary Thanksgiving Service held in Westminster Abbey. In an extract from his address the Arch Bishop of Canterbury remarked, "I have never seen a gloomy Salvationist." Although this begs the question as to how many Salvationists he was acquainted with, I have to say that despite one or two low moments...
Cirencester Band has thrived or survived on its corporate sense of humour. There has always been a healthy banter at band practice and when appropriate during other activities.

We had a short period after Alf Davis returned to Stroud when our numbers reduced. We were disappointed on all counts when both railways in the town closed, especially when in 1964 Dr Beeching robbed us of our trombone player George Williams.

He was the driver of the diesel railcar service from Cirencester to Kemble. Our banding duties done for the day, along with a full compliment of passengers, we rode with him on the last train to Kemble and back on Sunday evening the 5th April. As it left Kemble at 11.35pm, the rail car carried a wreath on the front and fog detonators all along the line sounded the death knell of the service. The burning of an effigy of the notorious doctor outside the station by one of the employees did nothing to placate the gods and we had to let George return to Wales with his trombone.

The 1960s and 70s proved to be a period of growth not only for the Corps but also the Band and other music sections. In 1970 I left the Engineers Department of the Council to train as a day student at Saint Paul's teacher training college in Cheltenham. While my main subject was science I took the opportunity to study a combined arts course in music art and drama where my previous Army activities proved most useful. I had already in 1965-66 studied the Army's band training course at intermediate and advance level and worked in the Young Peoples Corps for a number of years. Most of our young folk attended Watermoor School, a Church of England foundation and after our marriage Mary took on the position of Young People's Sergeant Major and the strong link between the school and the Army led to her being appointed to the school's managing body. Under Mary's leadership together with dedicated helpers including many of the parents the Young People's work thrived.
The Timbrels and The Singing Company made great strides and for the first time in many years we were able to form a Band Learners group. There were a number of periods when the Corps was left without a CO but thanks to the commitment of the local folk the work was maintained so the main problem for the Band Learners was the age old one of available instruments. Although the insulation tape age was over for the senior members, we had only been able to borrow a few replacements for our original instruments. One week an article appeared in the *Musician*, the Army’s weekly paper that preceded the *The Salvationist*. This article mentioned that at that time (Oh how things have changed!) some local authorities were offering grants to Young People’s activities and YP bands often qualified. On the strength of this I wrote to our County Council who, whilst being unable to help, put me in touch with The Gloucester Community Council. I had a reply from their music organiser who said that they were unable to help in a financial way but ten instruments had just been returned from a youth band in Bristol and we were welcome to have them on loan. He duly arrived one Friday afternoon and left the set with me. The financial arrangements of the Army in those days quite often made financing of a small Corps a real headache for the locals, so when it came to broaching the subject of the hiring fees I did so with some trepidation. His answer was it would be £1 per instrument. I said I thought we might have difficulty in finding £10 per week. To which he replied, ‘Oh, didn’t you know, it is £1 per instrument per annum.’ I discovered later that he had family connections with our friends from Stroud. The Lord moves in a mysterious way.

These instruments like all our others were in high pitch and around that time there was a move to get all Army bands to convert to low pitch instruments to make them more compatible with the piano and other orchestral instruments. There were two ways of doing this, one, buy new instruments, two, have sleeves added to the adjustable slides of the valves etc. Needless to say for financial reasons the latter was our only possibility. While this process was going on it made united band efforts difficult. We played in a united band at Bristol Divisional Youth Councils and had to borrow low pitch instruments. In 1966, we had
a very special visit from my Dad’s Home Corps Band, Liverpool Clubmoor, for our Band Weekend. On the Saturday after tea they undertook a march of witness around the Watermoor end of town before presenting a Festival of Music in the Hall. The compère for the evening was Rev John Forryan who during the proceedings presented our Band with a new S.A. Herald Cornet. It was the first new instrument we had been able to afford after eight years. It cost all of £27 including case! Unfortunately it was in high pitch so younger brother David could not play it with our visitors. Instead Clubmoor Band had taken the trouble to bring extra low pitch instruments with them so that we could all join in the Sunday’s activities. In the event we made good use of them. The day started with a prayer meeting at the Hall at 9.00am followed by a march to North Hill Road for an open-air meeting then back for the morning meeting. After lunch an open-air meeting in St Michael’s Road followed by a festival of music at the Hall at 3pm. After a brief tea it was off to Paternoster House to play to the residents, then a march around the town and back to the Hall for the evening meeting followed by an informal wind up. And after all that the band covered all its own expenses. Fortunately for us the financial situation over low pitch was also met by another act of generosity. All the instruments belonging to the Community Council were converted at their expense so our future was secured for a little longer.

Soldiering on

As far as the Senior Band was concerned 1971 was a watershed. We had been soldiering on against the odds with minimum numbers then things took a turn for the better. Firstly we had the transfer in of David and Maureen Brierley from Swindon. They had recently married and moved into town where David had come to work in the Finance Department of the Urban District Council. David had until recently been Bandmaster of Swindon Citadel Band, a combination of standing within the Bristol Division and farther afield. In fact the year previously he had brought the band to Cirencester to help us with the annual Good Friday march arranged by the united churches of the town. With his band so close at hand we fully expected him to maintain his position in Swindon, however, thankfully, David and Maureen transferred to Cirencester and within a short time we asked David to take on the roll of Bandmaster. He readily agreed to this and remained in the position for the next 12 years. Maureen also agreed to take on the position as Assistant YPSM. Other transfers in during this time included the Harraway family from Tavistock and some of our own young folk began to take their place in the Band. The progress of one of our juniors, Keith Phipps, encouraged his father Ken to renew his connections with the Corps and learn to play. The Phipps family had been connected with the Corps since the revival of the 1920s. Whether we had a great influence I am not sure, but after leaving school Keith entered the Coldstream Guards then went on after completing his service to undertake to ceremonial duties in the Houses of Parliament. Who could have guessed that one of our number would go on to carry the mace at the opening of Parliament and be principle doorkeeper of the House of Lords? And more recently been seen on national television introducing the welcoming speaker and the Speakers of the House of Commons and Lords as they undertook their duties at the lunch provided by the Livery Companies for the Queen and 700 guests in Westminster Hall in celebration of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee.

I would be first to admit that ceremonial and marching does not come easy to me. There have been times however when such activities have been required. Two occasions in Stroud come readily to mind. In one instance we were asked to go to Cashes Green Hospital to assist Stroud Band at the annual fete. After playing to entertain the masses during the afternoon we were asked to lead the procession of entries for the fancy dress competition. Unfortunately, no one seemed to have been briefed about the route we were to take so we followed the instructions of a Stroud colleague whose similar lack of knowledge led us to parade around the Hospital grounds finishing up in a dead end amongst the dustbins in a back alley. There was no order to dismiss, so the parade petered out in confusion. In September 1974 we were asked to go over to Stroud once again to help with a parade. On this occasion it was in
connection with the 60th anniversary of the Baden Powel Brownie movement. Our duty was to lead a parade of Brownies from all over the Stroud area from the Subscription Rooms in the centre to the Methodist Chapel at the East end of the town in Lower Street. We arrived in good time and assembled ready for the Brownies to join us. Within a very short time we were joined by hundreds of the small creatures each carrying a large sunflower. We had not been informed that all the Brownies in the District had been growing sunflowers for a competition before the parade. The hills around Stroud have been likened to Switzerland and in the town the streets are rather steep. Eventually the drum-beat called us to attention and off we set to climb out of the town. Whether it was cunning born of local knowledge I am not sure, but for some reason some of the Stroud Band decided to accompany us by strolling silently alongside on the footpath as we headed up towards the chapel. On one of the steepest inclines the Bandmaster of the home team on the footpath came alongside me carrying his euphonium under his arm and announcing what we were to play next as, "Song of the Highway" a tune, the euphonium part for which, is well sprinkled with triplets. At that point I put in a request for an oxygen bottle. By this time the Stroud drummer who had been positioned in the centre of the band had, because of the slope, gradually worked his way to the back rank. In a pause between tunes I glanced back to observe something akin to the woods of Dunsinane from "Macbeth" with hundreds of sunflowers waving in the humid air. Amongst the procession was an old lady who had been one of the very first Brownies or "Rosebuds" as I think they were called originally. Assistants were arming her up the hills, one on either side. Eventually we arrived at the chapel that then filled with brownies, sunflowers and supporters. Unfortunately, the ceiling was too low to accommodate some of beanstalk like flowers so they bowed their heads presumably in prayer all through the service that followed. Sometimes it is necessary to just soldier on and thank the Lord that you're not on home territory.

I cannot remember the date but in the early months of my euphonium playing we linked up with the folk from Abingdon to take part a combined music festival for Corps in their area. We found ourselves in Marlow and I was enjoying the experience until the chairman for the evening announced, "We will now have a euphonium solo by Corps Secretary Peter Grace." A moment of panic turning to terror, who had landed me in it? Then my namesake from Marlow Band, I believe, stood up with his euphonium and played an excellent solo. I am no soloist. However I was once called upon to perform at a Divisional meeting held in our Hall. Before I played I did explain that there were only two reasons for me being the soloist. One was that I was the only euphonium player in our Band and two, it was Halloween! David Brierley who was accompanying me on the piano did have the grace to explain before we played that the final note was correct although it would probably not sound so. It was one of those solos written more to shock than edify.

More lighter moments

In the early 1960s the Council of Churches was in the process of discussion to try to get the various congregations in the town to understand each other better and cooperate where possible in bringing the gospel to the community. Events such as the Good Friday March of Witness was inaugurated and perhaps initially the most progressive idea of attending services in each others churches and chapels to become familiar with what are in the main common beliefs. This led to us augmenting our number with Rev John Forryan vicar of Watermoor a keen euphonium player. He was followed eventually by Rev Waterson who had been a YP band member in Ireland. He often joined with us to play the BBb bass and when he left the town he generously donated a trombone to us. As well as the serious united evangelism that took place there were the lighter moments. As we were relatively young we got involved in a scheme to encourage young people into the churches. One event was to be a night of light entertainment provided by the young folk of the churches in the Corn Hall in the centre of town. Volunteers from each church were to come together to provide musical and other items. Having the musical base the Army was chosen for the general organisation and to provide rehearsal facilities. The music was not to be limited to brass and anyone who
wished could bring an instrument to form an ensemble. We had a good range of brass woodwind and strings that meant making arrangements of various pieces. Rehearsals went well until the week before when the majority presented their apologies, said they had really enjoyed the fellowship but were unable to come on the night. The whole entertainment fell back on the Salvationists, two Methodists and a Roman Catholic friend of my brother David. We managed to entertain the large audience for the evening by the old method of making them laugh then putting over the serious message. We relied mostly on old Edwardian ballads and patriotic poetry, overdone. My main contribution was to play a solo on a watering can with trombone slide attached.

The success of this gave us a taste for the unusual to such an extent that within the Band after the arrival of David Brierley we formed a "chamber orchestra". David, a very accomplished pianist, was able to play by ear. Around the piano part we "orchestrated" parts for what past generations had termed chamber pots. Using the said china receptacles as a base together with steel model aircraft control wire and Sketchley coat hangers we made a series of stringed instruments, some to be struck others plucked. We drew the line at the Aeolian harp that requires the wind to generate notes. My pride and joy was the bass instrument that I manufactured from a circular bedpan with a diameter of about 2 feet that had a tubular spout. A broom handle was pushed into the spout and a single wire stretched from the top of the handle to a bolt fixed through the rim of the pan so that the wire passed across the diameter of the pan. A masonry drill was used to make the hole for the bolt. This improvised string bass was known as the sitar. The performances of the chamber orchestra were restricted to informal occasions such as harvest suppers. It was for entertainment rather than spiritual enlightenment. To counter balance the orchestra some of the younger ladies of the Corps formed a singing group known as the "Swindle Singers" a parody of a popular commercial group of the time.

Sadly the instruments were lost in the "great fire" of 1972. Lieutenant and Mrs Ray Ebden had been at the Corps for less than a week when the shed in the Officers Quarters garden was burned down. We had been without a CO for some time and the garden had become overgrown. With the enthusiastic help of the young folk we built a garden bonfire that we kept banked up each day for a number of weeks. When we last attended it, it just resembled a smoking mound of grass. After unpacking, the new COs had boxes to burn so finding the bonfire still alight they raked back the grass and put the boxes on. A little later they heard the fire siren sounding and next there were firemen running hoses between the Hall and the Officer's Quarters next door, attempting to extinguish the garden shed which was gutted. This was not surprising, as along with the instruments of the chamber orchestra it had contained rolls of vinyl and polystyrene tiles from our renovations of the Quarter's kitchen, along with two paraffin stoves and some cans of creosote. As the shed was made of railway sleepers this didn't help either.

The Hall in Watermoor Road
I was told of the fire by one of the band learners who lived close to the Hall and came running up the road to our house in Sperringate. I was in the garden making a film for my college course but my first thought was for the Hall and our hard won brass instruments. Abandoning filming I ran to the Hall but need not have feared, the firemen had hosed the back wall to prevent the fire spreading and after getting in to the building gone straight to the instrument store to remove everything. It was no coincidence as most of the firemen’s children came to Sunday School, some were band learners so they knew just how precious these brass instruments were to us.

The Band with Lieutenants Ray and Joyce Ebden in front of the COs’ Quarters and YP room next to the Hall in Watermoor Road

No further attempt was ever made to revive the chamber orchestra for one thing the sitar was irreplaceable, but four years after the great fire new COs arrived, Lieutenant and Mrs Kevin Hoyle. Under their leadership there was something of a revival of less formal activities. Kevin had an Emu puppet almost identical to the Emu who assisted Rod Hull on stage and television. He even had the jacket with a false hand. Once in character he could delight the children and frighten the ladies of the Home League. I had written some songs for a show at Eastcombe School where Mike was teaching. They were written in local dialect after the style of Adge Cutler and the Wurzzles. We performed them at a social event at the hall along with other pieces from the original Corn Hall event, calling the evening ‘From Culture to Agriculture’. It started with Edwardian songs and verse ending with the rural offerings. We wore dress suits for the occasion salvaged from a ‘Help the Aged’ scheme. It was thought that aged refugees would have little use for formal dress. In the event the entertainment proved so popular that we took it on the road. We were asked, by an Officer relative of the Brierleys, if we would entertain the guests at the Harvest Supper at Dunstable in Bedfordshire.

We arrived in good time to allow certain adjustments to be made to the Dunstable piano. We had had a piano in our Hall that for some time had only been held together by the woodworm holding hands. Eventually they gave in and the instrument was consigned to the scrap heap but not before we had removed the copper covered bass strings for future use. They came in to their own at Dunstable when they were placed inside their piano along with a joss stick which was Blu tacked to the inside just below the lid. During the programme following an almost edifying performance of Sir Henry Newbolt’s poem Vita Lampada by brother David resplendent in stripped jacket and cricket togs, David Brierley came to the piano to accompany our rendering of ‘Just a Song at Twilight’. For this he was dressed as Rowlf the dog from the Muppets. On striking the first notes of the piece he pretended that there was something wrong with the piano. It was then left to the rest of us to delve into the piano with wire cutters etc in order to remove the offending strings. At the same time our Commanding Officer surreptitiously lit the joss stick, so with smoke billowing from the piano and the
previously planted strings being thrown across the floor chaos reigned. After the emu had caused considerable panic amongst the audience calm was temporarily restored with a couple of Edwardian ballads. We then exchanged our cultural dress suits for a more rustic apparel to serenade the assembled throng with the recently composed traditional rural songs from the Stroud valley. To add authenticity and create a suitable ambiance whilst singing we distributed samples of simulated manure amongst the front row. (For health and safety reasons this was made from guinea pig straw bedding and peat and contained nothing of a noxious nature). By the end of the performance we had succeeded in entertaining our audience to such an extent that one lady remarked that her daughter would have been so disappointed not to be there. When asked where the unfortunate absentee was, "on honeymoon" was the reply!

We have had other genuine agricultural moments mainly through a link with the Walkley family who for many years were stalwarts of Tewkesbury Corps. During a period when Tewkesbury Corps had no Sunday morning meeting Hubert Walkley came to our morning meetings in Cirencester. In the 1970s and 80s because of this connection, his brother, Bandmaster Syd Walkley invited us to events in Tewkesbury. These included united services and pet services but most enjoyable of all was the annual Rogation Service held in the various villages around Tewkesbury belonging to a combined C of E circuit. The venues varied from working farms to stately mansions but always the emphasis was on thanking God for the rural communities and their contribution to the well being of the nation. Usually they entailed hymns, prayers and readings at various points around the farm, village or estate. The setting and the theme reminded us all of a natural cycle of life all but lost in our supermarket, "buy it when you want it" culture. It was not unusual to have the Bishop and other clergy sitting on straw bales complete with their regalia and green wellies.

As well as the Tewkesbury pet services we have had the odd excursion with other animals. We often provided the music for the Palm Sunday procession at Tetbury following behind a donkey. There were occasions when the donkey had to be persuaded to move by someone leaving the ranks to fetch carrots as an incentive. One year we led the procession to a redundant church in Tetbury where the donkey joined the congregation inside. The most memorable occasion at Tetbury was in the early 1980s when my son Robert was playing euphonium alongside me. We arrived at the marching off point and lined up in ranks behind the donkey and his handler. As we were chatting informally before starting off the donkey must have had a moment of panic. He decided to evacuate his digestive system. Unfortunately Robert's instrument was standing on the ground right in the line of fire and got completely covered in "glory". As there were no facilities handy to clean the instrument...
completely, having resorted to newspaper as first aid, it was put back into our car boot and our compliment of euphoniums for the procession was reduced to one.

More recently at Meysey Hampton's Palm Sunday procession the donkey was accompanied by a sheep. Both animals entered the church then stood very reverently for the whole service in the Chancel, an example to us all.

**A Momentous Year**

1975 was a momentous one for the town as it celebrated 1,500 years since its foundation by the Romans. This could not be allowed to go unnoticed so civic celebrations were planned well in advance and the Corps wanted to be involved. One Friday evening in the general banter at band practice, suggestions were being put forward as to what we could do. Someone more in jest than hope suggested asking the International Staff Band to come. Captain Yvonne Cowley the CO, not one to let the grass grow under her feet, said "Why not? We can only ask." She put in a formal request and low and behold the reply was "Yes we can come on November 1st and 2nd."

When we had recovered from the shock there were things to do, not least to arrange for venues and billets. As the Hall in Watermoor could hardly contain our congregation at times an alternative had to be found. Our new found position within the united churches and the previous success of the Spring festivals led to the offer of the Parish Church for the venue of the Saturday evening festival and Watermoor Church for the morning and evening meetings on the Sunday. The Bingham Hall in King Street was offered free of charge by the trustees for the Sunday afternoon Festival.

We had just one other major commitment to cope with, as part of the Town Celebrations and that was to take a message to the Queen at Buckingham Palace. Again during band practice early in the year someone had suggested that members of the Band might like to walk from Thames Head, the source of the Thames near Kemble to London Bridge. It wasn't as if we needed the exercise but we were in the throws of a scheme to raise money for a new Hall to replace the temporary 1927 version. It was thought that with sponsorship we could raise a significant sum. We had connections with the Town Council at the time so the Chairman thought, as we were going to London we might pass on a message of loyalty to the Queen from the Council as part of the town's celebrations. We were also to pop in to International Headquarters in Queen Victoria Street to pass on their good wishes to the General by way of a similar document acknowledging the Army's work around the world. The date was set for early August giving the teaching members of the Band the chance to use the school holidays and do the full distance, while David Brierley was able to cover the first leg from Thames Head to Tadpole Bridge to the east of Lechlade. We assembled at Thames Head to be seen
off on a damp Sunday morning from the source of the river that was quite dry at the time, it being summer. However here the Chairman of the Council handed over the scrolls while our temporary COs Cadet and Mrs Startin from the International Training College and family members watched as we set off across the fields towards the first trickles of the mighty river. The journey was quite an eventful one that we recorded on film. After the first leg walking all together we realised that our six day schedule would be difficult to achieve so we decided that for the rest of the journey we would walk in relay with splitting each day in to two stages with Mike and David walking as one team and Ken Phipps and I as the other. We used Mike's car after the first day as back up carrying essential supplies. As we had only passed Lechlade on the first day we had returned home for the night then set out from Tadpole Bridge next morning. As Mary was within a few weeks of Sarah our youngest daughter being born I travelled back home on the second night but rejoined the trek after that for the rest of the subsequent stages. Space does not allow for a full description of the journey but we travelled each day in scorching heat negotiating the towpath where it existed. There was no Thames Path as there is today so in places we had to walk backwards through waist high grass and brambles. At one point when Ken and I reached Pangbourne we found a ford in the river and just stood for about twenty minutes knee deep in the water to cool our aching feet. As many of the ferries and crossings were no longer in use on occasions we had to walk away from the riverbank and follow the nearest road. We stayed over night in Army Halls on the way at Abingdon and Maidenhead while in between at Reading the Corps arranged for us to stay with local Salvationists. We reached Windsor on the evening of the fifth day and got some excellent shots of the castle tinted by the sunset. We then spent that night at the Army's conference centre at Sunbury Court. There was a youth conference on at the time so we had been asked to take some of the cine films we had made with our Sunday school children, so we worked for our supper. The next morning as we headed for London Bridge walking beside the river we noticed how the private moorings to say nothing of the cruisers became more lavish as we neared the City. We eventually reached our goal at around midday where we met up with Captain Yvonne Cowley who was now working at IHQ.

After the statutory photographic proof that we had reached the Bridge we then set off for the short journey to IHQ to deliver our message to the General.
We then made our way via the normal tourist route to Buckingham Palace where the greetings of the Council were handed in to the Queen.

Following this we set off for home in Mike’s car on a journey taking a couple of hours as apposed to the six days on foot. The pint of milk that had spilled the day before in the boot did little however to add to the comfort of the homeward trek. Before we had set out Ken Phipps had calculated the distance from his house to the Hall in Watermoor Road to be exactly a mile and the Talbot Inn to be about half a mile. As we walked together using the distances calculated by Mike from his map of the Thames, Ken frequently remarked that we should have reached the equivalent of the Talbot by now. It was not until we got home that we realised that the map of the river with its distances between bridges etc was calibrated in nautical miles. We had walked over 200 miles along our meandering route.

At the beginning of September the Cadets left us to return to the Training College and we were left once again to our own devices. Since the walk however there had been two additions to the infant department of our families. The next thing on our minds was the visit of the International Staff Band and being without COs, all the arrangements for billeting etc had fallen to us at local level. However when the day dawned Captain Yvonne Cowley took leave of her post at IHQ in London to help. Before the evening festival a meal was provided in the Town Hall building above the South Porch of the Parish Church. There was some consternation when a bag of frozen peas was put into the Burco Boiler to thaw them out. Unfortunately the bag split and it was extremely difficult to get some of the peas out of the
tap. During the meal I had to go home to collect a new cassette recorder we had purchased for the occasion. As I was about to leave the living room of our house that was immaculate in preparation for receiving our overnight guests, we received an unexpected visitor. There was a fluttering noise accompanied by a rumble and down the chimney into the open fire place came a blackbird, starling or thrush together with a pile of soot. The unidentified bird flew round the room two or three times before it flew with its sooty disguise out through the front door. It took frantic action with vacuum cleaner and dusters to restore order before heading back to the church. The church in those days had seating on the pews for around a thousand visitors and by the time the Band processed in from the vestry all the seats were taken. It was Major Ray Bowes’s first away weekend with the band as Bandmaster and he later confided in us that when he walked out through the curtain that shielded the vestry entrance, the sight of the vast congregation made him go a bit weak at the knees. He need not have worried, the festival was a great success, in fact along with the rest of the weekend it is still remembered fondly not only by local Salvationists but by many others in the town. It is also recorded in Brindley Boon’s book “The Story of the International Staff Band, published in 1985.

On the Sunday morning a prayer meeting was held in our Hall. Following this the morning meeting in Watermoor Church was excellent as was the Festival in the Bingham Hall on the Sunday afternoon and the evening meeting once again in the church. From a banding point of view for me the March of Witness around the town was the highlight. Not in my wildest dreams when listening to the Regal Zonophone Records could I have imagined that I would play with the International Staff Band but truth is often stranger than fiction. The whole weekend’s experience was one of real fellowship. Despite their great international reputation the members of the band showed no sign of superiority or condescension toward what some might term a small Corps, and our band. We were delighted when Major Bowes suggested that our band should march in with them around the town on the March of Witness. By this time I had moved to the Euphonium, the cello of the brass band, an instrument that gave me great satisfaction. Our repertoire was limited as was our experience of marching, however we took our place in the ranks and set off into town.
As I remember it we marched along King Street and into Victoria Road playing as we passed our old school and Max's music room. We then turned into Lewis Lane. I cannot remember the marches we played until we got to Lewis Lane when the message came to play "Montreal Citadel" which was outside my repertoire. I was marching beside Major Maurice Cooper the principle Euphonium player who was moving on to pastures new after this weekend. He asked me if I had the music for this march and I confessed that I did not. He gave me his book and proceeded to play the whole piece by memory while I tried to do my best. After entering the Market Place we turned into Cricklade Street and the sound that resonated from the buildings on either side was fantastic it will live with me forever even if Woolworths has disappeared.

The Season of Goodwill
There is something magical and very traditional about the sound of carols being played by a brass band on a starlit frosty night or in a crowded market place at Christmas. It is now over fifty years since we first ventured out into the streets of Cirencester to do our bit. In fact my memories of carolling go back even before that to when I was about ten years old and it was arranged for us each year to go to Watermoor Hospital to sing carols to the patients on Christmas day. In fact we rarely had our Christmas dinner until Boxing Day because of our Army duties. I particularly remember one occasion when we had sung to the patients in the main wards on the first floor and were making our way along the corridor. The matron came out from a door on the stairs that led to a private room. She asked our leader "Please will you sing "Silent Night" for Miss C, she is dying. As we stood outside that door I, and I suppose the other children must have been wondering exactly what was happening in there. It must have been a miracle because for at least the next four years we received the same request on behalf of the same patient! Another memory from those days was of going in to a room that had painted brick walls and was filled with tobacco smoke. It was here that we sang to some old men who lived in this part of the hospital permanently. They lived there because they had been born there when the building had been the Town's Workhouse.

In later years as a band, until its closure, we usually visited Watermoor hospital on Christmas Day or Boxing Day. Now, as medical provision has moved on and few patients remain in the town's hospital over Christmas, we tend to visit on the nearest Sunday to Christmas after taking part in the Chapel service.
In the 1970s and 80s we also visited Tetbury Geriatric Hospital on Christmas Morning. This was particularly significant for me as I played outside the ward where I had been born in 1943 when the hospital’s function was quite different and it served as the maternity hospital for this part of Gloucestershire. In fact I once met a lady still working there who had been a nurse on the ward when I came in to the world.

In the time of Lieutenant Geoff Blurton, before we could play carols, he decided that we would revive the tradition of carol singing and go carolling to Chesterton Estate. He was proficient on many instruments, not least the piano accordion. So with his accordion for accompaniment we set about the task. Unfortunately there was a dog in the garden of one of the houses that managed to get out and every time a certain note was sounded on the accordion the dog began to howl. We tried every means to discourage the hound including shutting it in nearby gardens but to no avail. There was no other course than to give up and go home. On another occasion instead of the accordion we took out a small pedal organ that had begun life as a cabin organ on sailing ships. We were at the junction of Siddington Road and Bridge Road with the organist sat on a stool on the edge of the carriageway. The night had turned very foggy and as we were in the middle of singing "It came upon a midnight clear" a bus loomed out of the fog and we had to grab the organ, organist and stool and deposit them on the pavement.

By the next year with Lieutenant John Travers in charge we were considered to be efficient enough with our instruments to venture out in the Market Place on a Saturday to play carols. To play for few hours took considerable stamina so we ended up in the afternoon on the steps of the Midland Bank, which of course was closed for the afternoon, with the melody being played most of the time by Lieutenant Travers on the trombone. So began a tradition of playing in the Market Place at Christmas which has lasted until this day, barring one occasion when it snowed so hard that there was no one in town, even the late lamented Woolworths store closed for the day. There was one other occasion in the 1990s when a difficulty with certain authorities prevented us from fulfilling our normal duties. In recent years we had one Saturday in December when our date, governed by the Council, clashed with a visit from a team of bell ringers to the Parish Church. Their campanology, whilst seasonal was hard to combat and when after about two hours the bells stopped we all felt a physical relief but the ringing in the ears went on for a considerable time. On another occasion, not at Christmas, when playing for the National Appeal street collection we were again put to the test by the Bell Ringers who were helping the vicar celebrate 25 years of vicaring.

For many years we have taken part in the ceremony of the lighting of the Christmas tree and street decorations to herald the Christmas season, but as in recent years it has crept well in to November there is a tendency to interpret it as "the blessing of the tills" although we always
hope that the few carols involved in the ceremony might just remind some of the true meaning of Christmas.

Before the civic ceremony evolved in the 1970s some of the larger stores opened up for late night shopping for the benefit of the elderly and disabled and we usually found ourselves asked to go along to add to the season atmosphere, a task that was very rewarding. On one occasion Rackams store in the Market Place had invited the famous comedian Ken Dodd to open the proceedings. After a great deal of characteristic comic banter he came to where we were playing and asked if he could conduct a carol. As we had members of our family living in Knotty Ash, how could we refuse? Thus it was that Cirencester Band was conducted by Ken Dodd with the aid of his tickling stick, a far cry from Alf Davis’s ebony baton!

In the early days before the installation of double glazing and loud televisions it became the custom for us to spend at least the three weeks before Christmas carolling around the streets. We may have had one night in each week free but there would be more than one engagement most Saturdays and as well as the normal meetings, carol services, etc on Sundays. This activity was not confined to the town but we also travelled to Tetbury and Cricklade.
In recent years we have found ourselves even more heavily involved in supporting civic occasions and the churches in surrounding towns and villages. I have to admit that I find supporting such events as Fairford Christmas lighting ceremony where all the local organisations have stalls and take part very enjoyable. A number of times we have gone out around the village of Kempsford accompanying the village choir and villagers. I particularly appreciated the fact that the singers walked while we perched ourselves on a farm cart behind a tractor. Accompanying carols in local village churches such as Meysey Hampton and Kempsford also has something special about it.

I am also reminded of a few amusing incidents while out and about in the rural community. The first time we ever ventured as far Cricklade carolling was interesting. We had limited transport in those days and on this occasion six of us including the Eb Bass and other instruments were packed into a mini van belonging to Alan Bobbs one of our number who was also a serving policeman. When we disembarked on an estate in Cricklade we met up with the rest of the band and collectors who had arrived in the other vehicles and prepared to play. Before we produced a note a minibus arrived and a large number of young people emerged from it. It was the local Boy’s Brigade who had come to sing carols. As it was our first visit to Cricklade we did not wish to be in opposition to the locals so we decided to move to another part of the town. At the time we had a collector who had a rather difficult speech impediment and a rather distinctive uniform with a Bonnet of historic value. Our carolling that evening was uneventful and as I remember profitable. However when we were making our way back to the transport the CO’s wife asked Alan’s wife where the said collector was. She said that she did not know and thought she’d been with her. After some searching we found the collector back in the area where we had originally parked. She had carried on collecting oblivious of the fact that we had all moved on. Evidently householders had difficulty in understanding what she had said to them, but seeing the Army bonnet assumed the singers to be Salvationists and paid up generously. I think we all had a bit of a conscience when we beat a hasty retreat.

Another of our volunteer collectors was a well-known local character, Herbert Stark, known to everyone in the district as Starkie. He was what you might call a "ragged trousered philanthropist." His joy was to do a good turn to anyone and he gave away most of his income to good causes and needy individuals. We came across him when bunches of flowers appeared mysteriously on the steps of the hall to be found early on Sunday mornings. One Saturday night we happened to be in the hall very late and as we came out we caught Starkie placing flowers on the step. Once acquainted he formed a lasting friendship with us. At the time we discovered that he was living on South Cerney RAF camp where he worked in the
Mess after his retirement from the RAF. He had been batman to both Group Captain Leonard Cheshire VC and the nephew of Sir Winston Churchill.

Herbert Stark batman and Carnival entrant

Despite his apparent eccentricities he was well acquainted with some of the highest in the land. On one occasion he showed us some of the Christmas cards he received from the Royal family.

It was on another visit to Cricklade that Starkie gave us some amusement. In order to keep out the cold and it was cold that year, he had bought a fur coat at a jumble sale and cut off the arms. He sewed these on to a pair of fur gauntlets so that he was fur from his shoulders to the tips of his fingers. He had also been issued with one of our new plastic collecting boxes the string of which was a loop that went in through the top then came out through the bottom. In order to allow the string to lie flat on the bottom there was a groove in the plastic base. We were playing at the top of the High Street where there is quite a slope and it was very cold and icy under foot. As Starkie knocked on a nearby door he took a step back and slipped on the ice, falling to the ground. One of occupants of the house came to the door and peered out into the gloom to see something on the ground in front her. As the something tried to get up she had a vision of two furry objects rather like large cats waving about. Eventually the furry thing rose up and waved a collecting box at her. Unfortunately as he fell Starkie had dropped his box and was holding it upside down. The would-be donor was rather mystified to find that the slot for coins was blocked. She was trying to put the money into the groove in the bottom of the box. Thankfully she saw the funny side of his antics. We had to laugh on another occasion when he volunteered to help collect on one of the estates in town on a Sunday afternoon. Just as we were about to strike the first note he produced a large alarm clock in a polythene bag from the basket of his carrier bike and waved it under the Bandmaster's nose asking if this right Bandmaster, only I've got to be back at camp at 4.30? Needless to say we all missed a beat. Starkie was a one-off, generous to a fault, so after he died, when the Army Housing Association opened the housing units in Golden Farm Road it was agreed that the complex should be named Herbert Stark Close. It was also fitting that Princess Anne, the Princess Royal, who as a child had regularly been sent sweets by Starkie at Christmas, should open the complex.

Tetbury Corps closed in the 1940s but over the years a number of Salvationists have lived there including Brigadier Cox a retired officer. Through the retired officer links it was normal for her to be visited by our CO since the town is now part of our district. To this end the Band always went to Tetbury to play carols around the streets even before taking on the now regular performance in the Market Square. In the early days we had limited transport and on one occasion it was just Ken Phipps' Ford Popular. We made our way to Tetbury in shifts and when we finished playing it was decided that Ken would transport the first group back to
Cirencester then return to pick us up. It was a clear frosty night so instead of waiting around
we decided to start walking. We set off out of the town along the road to Cirencester but
started to get a bit worried when we had walked about three miles and Ken had not returned.
Eventually we saw headlights approaching and he pulled up sounding rather perturbed. On
his return journey he had been stopped by a police motorcyclist who accused him of not
driving fast enough! Eventually Ken persuaded the officer that he did not like driving at night
on icy roads and it was no more sinister than that.

Playing under the arches of the Market Hall in the centre of Tetbury has always been a bit of
an ordeal, as no matter which way the wind is blowing it blasts its way through the arches.
On one occasion David Brierley collapsed with hypothermia while playing his trombone and
had to be taken to a house nearby to be revived with hot coffee. They say it is an ill wind
etc...and for some years afterwards we were all invited into the same house for coffee and
mince pies after playing. Today we leave the stallholders under the arches and the collectors
in the streets to get chilled as we play sat down on the veranda of The Snooty Fox Hotel!

In the 1960s Mike was a student at Culham Teacher Training College near Abingdon and as
he attended the Abingdon Corps and played in the band a connection was made between our
two Corps that included helping each other out with carolling. It was such an event in around
1966/7 that I went from playing the Cornet to the Eb bass over night. We had gone to help
out playing carols at a Dr Barnado’s home near Abingdon. On arrival we found that although
there were more than enough cornet players there was no one to play the Eb bass. As I had
some limited experience on the instrument I volunteered and as a result did something to
affect my lip on the cornet. Thus it was that I was back on the Bass for a few more years. I
must confess that I never found the cornet an easy instrument anyway. Could it be something
to do with the mouth and size of the mouthpiece?

On another occasion some of us were due to go over to Abingdon to take part in an event
and all piled into Mike’s Hillman along with our instrument. We pulled in to the Filling
Station on Burford Road for petrol. It was before self-service and a senior citizen came out to
top up the petrol, which he did quite satisfactorily. However when a request was made for
some oil he insisted that he should put it in. With the bonnet lid slammed shut the engine was
started and we prepared to move off. As we did so we noticed smoke rising from beneath the
bonnet so we made a quick exit. There was no sign of a fire extinguisher on the forecourt as
far as we could see and all our would-be helper was shouting ‘get it away from the pumps’!
Had we followed his directions we would have been right over one of the main storage tanks.
Instead my Dad asked for the blanket from the boot then we quickly lifted the bonnet and he
smothered the ‘fire’ with the blanket. It turned out that our more than helpful assistant had
missed the hole for the oil and poured some over the hot engine. In the event, the lighting
harness had been burnt out so we never got to Abingdon. Thankfully no damage was done to
our hard won instruments.

One Christmas, on a reciprocal visit by some of the Abingdon Band, we were to spend the
evening carolling in Stratton. I was working in the Engineers Department at the Urban
District Council and came out of the offices at 5.30pm to go home. At the bus stop opposite
was our enthusiastic collector with the ‘historic bonnet’. She had told us that she had friends
in Stratton so would go to see them before joining us at about 6.30pm for collecting duties.
All was in order when we began carolling, the Abingdon folk had arrived safely in their
minibus and we began moving from lamppost to lamppost around Stratton. However we
were minus one collector, which was something of a worry when we got to our last few stands
in Tingles Field that was the Northern limit of Stratton in those days. Our fears were soon
allayed as she came down the hill towards us. She explained that when she got on the bus the
person next to her asked for a ticket to Cheltenham and she had asked for one to Stratton.
Unfortunately the conductor had misheard her, charged her 2/6d and she had been taken all
the way to Cheltenham. All was not lost because she said when she got to Cheltenham they saw her Army bonnet, gave her a cup of tea and put her on the next bus home. She collected for the last three stands and got enough money to cover her bus fare.

In 1973 as a Corps we were looking, as always, for ways to reach out to the folk on our district. With our connections in Tetbury we wanted to reestablish an Army presence in the town. Apart from the fact that I had been born there and Mary's father had been an Officer in the Corps there in the 1920s, we felt there was real potential. To get things moving it was decided that the Band would organise a festival of carols in the Market Hall that Christmas. Unfortunately that year there was industrial action amongst power workers leading to electricity cuts and although we did not have to resort to candle light there was no heating in the Market Hall. Despite the difficulties the success of this event led to the offer of a community room in the town for our use once a month to hold Army meetings. These meeting continued until 1997 when leadership problems in the Corps led us to, with great regret, cease this worthwhile enterprise.

Another annual activity from the 1960s to the 90s was Christmas Eve around the pubs. Each week my Mum, usually along with CO and for a number of years myself, visited most of the pubs and hotels in town selling the War Cry and Young Soldier. She did this for over fifty years and when the Band was formed it was almost inevitable that she would volunteer us to spend Christmas Eve carolling around the town. At the height of this activity we visited at least nineteen establishments. We started at about 6.30pm near the Hall in Sperringate then made our way via Chesterton Lane and Somerford Road to Chesterton Grove. There were few street lights making it difficult to see the music at times and often in Somerford Road we gathered around the light from the telephone box. Also in Somerford Road we always played "Once in Royal David's City" for one of the residents who I believe reached the age of 100 despite our efforts. We always had to arrive at the Grove after 8.00pm. This was due to the fact that Mike, David and I all did paper rounds in our youth for Baily and Woods shop in the Market Place. Mr Woods the owner lived in the Grove, but as he was a Roman Catholic he always went to Mass after locking up the shop on Christmas Eve and would not be home before 8.00pm. This part of the Christmas Eve tradition still takes place although the Woods family moved away some years ago. Now many of the residents come out into the street to sing along with the Band and we usually repair to the house where the Woods family used to live for refreshments very kindly provided by the present owners.

In the past however from the Grove we would make our way to the "Hope Inn" at the bottom of Quern's Hill (now a saddlers) and the tour of the town would begin. Usually we would stand outside and play a couple of carols then just as we thought we could move on my Mum would emerge from the door having been in to see the landlord then we would have to go inside to play a few more. I must admit that although smoke-laden the atmosphere was always convivial since we knew many of the regular customers. Playing a large instrument first the Bass then the Euphonium I imagine that breathing in the atmosphere was somewhat hazardous. On one occasion I was aware of money being thrown down the bell of my Bass so when we got out in the street outside the "Three Compasses" I had to tip it up to prevent the coins going further into the instrument and blocking the tube. We saw, heard and tasted many things in the hostelries never alcoholic of course. There were too many to record here but I must admit that when we were playing in the King's Head Hotel I always felt a bit guilty having to open the water key on my instrument and deposit the liquid on to King Charles' face that peered at me from the pattern in the carpet. We were always asked to go in to this hotel on Christmas Eve to play to the guests having their special Christmas meal. It was always warm and comfortable even on the coldest night and the food we could smell tempted the palate. However, on one occasion, as I stood with my euphonium by the serving table I did notice roast potatoes coming back from the plates on various tables.
Finding enough players to go out on Christmas Eve was always a challenge and any volunteers were always welcomed. One year we had the father of one of the COs who was spending Christmas in town and volunteered his services, which was great, except for the fact that the only instrument he could play was the Bass Trombone, the tubing of which is rather difficult to control in confined spaces. When we reached the crowded public bar of the Bear Inn he jokingly informed one customer that they would have to pay extra to listen to this large contraption. I suggested half a crown a yard. Then he proceeded to knock another customer’s pint off the table with the end of his trombone slide. An apologetic hasty retreat was then deemed to be in order.

As we wandered the streets, often until after midnight, anything could happen. Once we came out of the Talbot in Victoria Road when there was quite deep snow on the ground and it was icy cold. It was a night when the moisture in the instruments froze causing the valves and slides to seize up. It had also caused a lorry to break down outside the pub. There was nothing else we could do than lay our instruments in the snow and push the lorry to safe parking in Purley Avenue opposite. The driver was on his way from Manchester to Southampton but with a phone call from the pub back to his base he was assured that help was on its way to get him back home for his Christmas dinner. The lorry would have to wait for a day or two. The fact that in those days the street lights in Cirencester went out at eleven o’clock didn’t help much. That was also the case when in 1964 Lieutenant Stewart came out of The Horse and Drill and dropped one of the new plastic collecting boxes that cracked open. As this was our last call of the night the box was full, so it took a great deal of waving of torches to retrieve the coins scattered all over the road. Fortunately there was no snow on the ground this time. One would have to admit that when this part of Watermoor was reached and it was nearing midnight our lips would be pretty sore and the quality of the vocals from the patrons often left something to be desired. The rendering of Silent Night in The Plume of Feathers at closing time was interesting but we rarely saw drunkenness or the uncivilised behaviour characterised by the present day unregulated supermarket driven binge drinking.

However, I actually had a brush with the law one night. It was gone midnight and very dark as I made my way home from counting the money from the night’s carolling. I had to go up Bridge Road to get to Chesterton Lane through the long low railway bridge. As I neared the bridge headlights came towards me from beneath the arch and a police van drew up. The driver asked me where I was going and what I was doing at this time of night. I thought my cap and uniform might have been a clue and I could not tell a lie so confessed that I was going home after carolling. He seemed satisfied then I asked him if he would be kind enough to put his hand brake on as in the dark his van was running over my foot! He complied and announced that one of his lot was in our Band wasn’t he? He was referring to Alan Bobbs. He then wished me a happy Christmas and drove off into the night. I had the feeling that he just wanted to talk to someone on his travels. Had he been round the corner in Siddington Road on another occasion he might well have had his suspicions aroused. One Christmas Eve when coming out of the Horse and Drill again at midnight, we saw a character all dressed in red with white trimmings to cuffs and collar and around his hood. Wearing black boots and carrying a sack on his back he came out of a house in Siddington Road and crossed over to go to one of the maisonettes opposite in Melmore Gardens. We had not been drinking so it can mean only one thing. He does exist! Two other venues we have visited in times passed are the Jubilee Social Club and on one occasion the Bingo Club in the late Regal Cinema. We always went to the Social Club on the Sunday following the Carol Service in our Hall and the patrons always sang well but often we had to wait to begin as the Bingo took precedence. Bingo was also the reason for being at the Regal that doubled as cinema and bingo hall. We had a request from the manager to go there one Christmas Eve to play during the interval. We were somewhat surprised to think that anyone would be there on Christmas Eve but got a
shock when we got on to the stage to see the auditorium crowded. We were glad that we were able to fit it in to the evenings schedule as most folk there seemed to be elderly or middle aged and this was probably the most company they would have over the festive season. We felt that it was well worth the effort.

Today with the dramatic reduction in the number of pubs and hotels and their changed character, more as eating than drinking places, we no longer make the rounds of the pubs on Christmas Eve although we still cover the street carolling district then end up at the Drillman’s Arms in Stratton. Here we provide the patrons with carol sheets, sometimes before the event, so that they can practice the carols. The singing is very enthusiastic and not untuneful with one or two usually of Welsh origin putting in the descant in “The First Noel”.

The Christmas season would not be right without a miracle. Before the “Children in Need Appeal” came on to television the BBC decided without much prior warning to have a scheme to collect toys to be distributed to needy families. Nationally they chose The Salvation Army as the organisation to be responsible for the receiving and distribution of the toys. We had always collected a number of toys at Christmas for this purpose but for three or four years thanks to the BBC it was on the grand scale and we were able to supply gifts to a large number of families in our district. However as quickly as the scheme appeared it was ended which left us with a bit of a problem when our contact with Social services rang to ask if there would be toys again for Christmas. I explained that with the “Children in Need” appeal taking centre stage we would probably have a few to give out as in earlier days but I was not very confident. However we went down to the Hall on the last Friday before Advent for our last band practice before the carolling season and found that we could not get in the back door. Blocking the porch entrance was a huge cardboard crate that we eventually dragged into the Hall. When we opened it we found it to be full of brand new toys, books and jig saw puzzles etc. There were no labels on the box or packaging but some of the contents had their prices on and these alone totalled around £400. It was a great feeling to be able to contact the Social Services to tell them that an unknown benefactor had been to visit us. We eventually discovered that in this case it was not the ancient saint in red but a local businessman who was no longer dealing in toys. As with most miracles, it was the timing that counted.

Just after David Brierley became Bandmaster and our numbers increased it was decided that some of us should have a change of instrument including my Dad swapping with me. He went to Eb bass and I took over on the Euphonium that has always been my favourite.

My first and only new instrument

It took some time to adjust to the pitch of my instrument and the fact that it had a fourth valve positioned so that it could be operated by my left hand. The instrument was over eighty years old but properly played had an excellent tone. It served me well for some years then disaster struck. We had been asked by the Council of Churches if we could put on a special united
service with Christmas music and we readily agreed. It was to take place on the second Sunday of Advent in our Hall. The event went well and, as is the custom in such meetings, there was a promise of tea, coffee and a mince pie at the end. We were positioned in the front of the Hall in our usual semi circle. As we finished the concluding music I had just had enough time to put my instrument down and lean it against my chair when an elderly lady rushed forward to be first with the refreshments. As she did so she knocked the euphonium over and it hit the then tiled floor with such force that the seam on one of the larger tubes split open making it unplayable. Each year the Council designates which Saturday we have to play carols in the Market Place and it is major annual money raiser. We had no suitable replacement for the instrument and the day was less than two weeks away. My brother David was teaching in Gloucester and had connections through music to an instrument retailer so he rang for an estimate for a new 4 valve Euphonium. As it was an emergency Divisional Headquarters helped us bypass a lot of red tape so that I could play on the Saturday. Unfortunately there was a delay, so as carpet was being put down in the Hall I borrowed some carpet tape and bound it around the offending split and saw out the Saturday’s carolling with the carpet tape as Christmas decoration. Within a few days however the replacement arrived but my main problem was that when I opened the case to my 4 valve Yamaha Euphonium I found that all four valves were arranged in a line where three were on my old instrument. This meant that instead of operating the fourth valve with my left hand I had to operate it with the fourth finger of my right hand. As a lefthander I found it very difficult to cope with some of the sharps and flats when my second and fourth fingers had to be used at the same time. For many weeks I wished that the makers had confined their activities to manufacturing motorbikes!

When out and about we have been asked to play so that people could tape record our efforts then send them on to relatives abroad. On more than one occasion when the Band has been outside where we lived in Sperringate Mary has phoned our friends, Karl Heinz Geilen and his wife Edeltraut in Hamburg so that they could hear the Christmas music over the telephone. On one occasion Robert was over in Hamburg with them for Christmas so even there he could not escape our carolling. Karl Heinz had been a German prisoner of war at the camp in Siddington and one of those who used to attend meetings at the Army after the war until they were repatriated in 1948. Karl, as we called him, went back home to Hamburg where he eventually became a pastor in the Lutheran Church. He along with two others was a frequent visitor to our home in Chesterton Lane. In fact when David was born a large number of the prisoners came to see him before their repatriation some three weeks later. We kept in contact with Karl for many years. He presented a flag from his church to the Corps. His church being a barge moored in the Hamburg docks where he served the barge people coming from all parts of Europe including the Eastern Block. We reciprocated by presenting his congregation with an Army Crest that now is displayed in his church. Christmas became a special time for renewing an old friendship. Perhaps at this point it is worth noting that as the years went by Divisional Headquarters had come to value our contribution to our outreach of the Corps through the Band and in the 1970s and 80s especially in periods where we had no regular Commanding Officer it was quite common for members of the staff to come over and give a hand with Christmas carolling. This was a far cry from that first Christmas with our first instruments. In terms of outreach this could have been no greater than during Advent in 1986 when we were asked by the Council of Churches to take part in Advent Songs of Praise to be broadcast by the BBC from the Parish Church. The rehearsal went well as far as the playing and singing was concerned, as did the actual recording. However just as recording was about to begin one of the floodlights high in the nave blew. We watched in awe as three riggers replaced it. Standing on the polished tiled floor two held a triple extension ladder up while the third climbed the first section then pushed the next section up and so on until it rested on the bar where the lamp was fixed. He then replaced the lamp. So much for health and safety! The first words of Ian Gall the presenter, as he held the Advent wreath were "It’s that time of year..."
again this took five takes as every time he did it one of the candles on the wreath fell sideways. For the last successful take he rested the offending candle against his chest then tossed it on to a pew saying "so much for BBC props". This set a relaxed mood for the evening and we were all able to enjoy the occasion despite that when it was over my Dad's Bass and that of Captain Day, the CO, had large quantities of candle wax sticking to the bell as they had been sitting directly below one of the large candelabra. The last shot of the broadcast was of our Hall and it was great to see Cirencester Salvation Army Band on the credits. Today the BBC tends to use its own "Songs of Praise" ensemble.

![BBC Advent "Songs of Praise"

This was a most enjoyable experience and for our part I think we acquitted ourselves well. Although not a large combination we had a good balance, all three of our children taking part with Catherine on cornet, Robert sharing the euphonium part with me, and Sarah on bass drum. Two of Mike's children were also involved, Paul on cornet and Corinne on tenor horn. With my Dad on Bass Eb Mike on tenor horn and Helen and David on cornet the Grace family brass band gene was functioning at almost full capacity although Mary gave up the tenor horn just before Sarah was born.

**Acts of Remembrance**

For many years now the Band and individual members have been involved in civic occasions especially with Remembrance Sunday. It started with Mr Gough going to Bibury to play the Last Post at the Bibury British Legion parade and service in Bibury Church. In the mid 1960s my brother David began to go with him and to this day he continues to fulfil this duty, one that in over 40 years has never been rained on! Eventually the Legion asked if the rest of the Band might be able to take part in the event and permission was readily granted. Up until the 1990s we led the parade from the Swan Hotel along the main road by the river to the church at the other end of the village.

![Marching through Bibury](image_url)
However as time has taken its toll on the number of Legion members first the march was shortened to go from the village hall to the church and now the whole ceremony that is nonetheless moving takes place in the church. Although of course a serious occasion there have been the lighter moments. On one of the early parades where the local dignitaries wore their bowler hats and medals, one Major Percy was leading the parade. As we assembled on the car park near the bridge he dashed in and said “I lost me poppy in the hunting field, had to take one from last year’s wreath” and sure enough he was sporting a huge poppy on his lapel. His parade orders were not always precise. On another occasion as we stood in our ranks trying to be military he announced, “At the end of the parade I shall say halt, or something and the band will fall out in the graveyard.”

Some of us had been subject to drill instruction when in the scouts but I have never been good with my right and left. One year as we were brought to attention and about to move off Mike who was standing in the rank next to me whispered look left. I could not resist the temptation and a glance showed that the new standard bearer had taken blanchoing his white gauntlets to new heights but while attempting to adjust his beret had left a clear white handprint across the top. Another headdress incident occurred in the early 1990s when the COs were Auxiliary Captains John and Ann Thomas. It was the custom to park our cars before the parade near the Swan Hotel then take the music stands etc to the church. Ann Thomas played the Eb Bass and as she walked along carrying her music a gust of wind attempted to remove her hat. In trying to grab it she let go of one of her tune books that fell into the river where it floated lying open towards the church. Mike’s youngest son Karl was playing the trombone at this stage so he climbed down some stone steps at the side of the river and when the book reached him he fished it out with aid of his trombone slide.

In this instance a lack of music was avoided, however there was one tricky situation when our music went astray. We loaded the cars at the Hall as usual then set off in convoy arriving in time to set up, then report to the parade leader at the bridge by the Swan. However as we unloaded the kit my brother David asked me for the case containing the music I replied that I thought he had it and at this moment we realised that our music was still in the case back in the Hall in Cirencester. I must say that we have always been able to get out of scrapes with a bit of improvisation and this was no exception. As one of the hymn tunes was not in our tune book, David had arranged it and printed it out on cards that he had with him. As the tune was in common time it meant that we could use it on the march and lead the parade to the church. While we decided how to get over the next hurdle Mike got into his car and headed back to Cirencester to collect the case. Our immediate problem was that the service in the church commenced with the National Anthem and few of us played by ear. Fortunately a solution was to hand as four of us had small pocket editions of the solo cornet part with us. These were spread around the Band so that all the Bb instruments could play the tune in unison. It was an unusual arrangement with instruments playing the same notes at octave and double octave intervals. After the service we were congratulated by some of the congregational on the interesting version of the Anthem. We held our tongues and kept the secret. Before the first hymn Mike crept back in and carefully handed round our correct parts and all went without a hitch. Appropriately the first hymn was “O God Our Help in Ages Past”. In this case the past was almost present. Although we have been taking part in this special event in Bibury for so many years I never ceased to be moved by the wreath laying ceremony when the names of the three dozen men who died in the wars are read out and David plays The Last Post out from the church porch. You can hear it echoing across the village away to the large number of tourists who are walking by the river and admiring the ancient Cotswold cottages of Arlington Row in the village that William Morris reckoned was the most beautiful village in Britain.
As well as playing at Bibury we also on the same morning go just down the road to Ablington where there is now an attractive roadside memorial to the men of that village who died in both World Wars.

We were present when this was dedicated in July 2001. Prior to this when David played the "Last Post" at the other memorial which consisted of a bronze plaque and water tap set into the side of a low wall he had to stand on a wooden cover below which was a septic tank that served nearby cottages. Any risk has thankfully now been removed with the resiting of the memorial two hundred yards up the road. Helen, Mike’s wife, now Songster Leader has also for a number years played the "Last Post" at Siddington Church during the evening service and since reintroduction of a service around the Memorial in Cirencester Market Place on Armistice Day has added this to her activities.

Another aspect of supporting remembrance goes back to the early 1970s. In those days I spent my Saturday nights in the pub, or should I say touring the pubs, selling the Army papers. On one occasion I arrived home at around 11.30pm and the telephone rang. It was a gentleman named Alan Hartley who asked if the Band had a cornet player who could play the "Last Post", not an unusual request except that he needed them the following morning to play at a memorial service on the old airfield at Down Ampney. I knew that David would still be up at that time of night so I went to see him about the request.
The "Last Post" for the annual Arnhem Reunion

He readily agreed and this has now become yet another annual event. The service takes place around a memorial on the airfield, which has now returned to farmland, but during World War Two it played a vital part in the invasion of Europe and particularly the Arnhem operation. In fact the service is for the reunion of the Arnhem veterans and their families and is organised each year by Alan. A familiar face at many of these right up until a few weeks before his death, was Jimmy Edwards the radio, television and film comedian and accomplished brass player. In his younger days as Flight Lieutenant James Edwards DFC he flew Dakotas from RAF Down Ampney receiving the DFC for his bravery during the attempt to drop vital supplies to the Allied troops trapped in Arnhem. Being a brass player Jimmy asked one year if he could play the "Last Post" at the reunion as it was something he had always wanted to do. This was arranged, but Alan asked David if he would still go along and take his cornet just as a contingency. Jimmy was best known for his skill on the trombone and euphonium but as I usually went with David I was privileged to witness the skill of this veteran on trumpet. In fact within a few weeks Jimmy died, but he had been able to fulfil what he considered to be his duty. One of the other connections with similar events was when the Band was asked to play at the unveiling of a new memorial at Cricklade on the old RAF Blake Hill airfield that was also involved along with RAF Down Ampney and RAF Fairford. As at the Remembrance Day at Bibury there are always moving moments, none more poignant than listening to the Arnhem veterans and their families and friends singing unaccompanied the hymn "Abide with me". It is also rather strange that in all the years, as at Bibury, to date it has never rained on the Arnhem Reunion.

As mentioned before even the serious matter of Remembrance Sunday can have its lighter moments. I am reminded of one other incident in the 1970s when David Brierley decided that he would play the side drum on the parade to help us all keep in step. He was successful in this until his beat got over enthusiastic and the drumstick went through the top drum skin. We looked around for a way of repairing this but discovered that the drum was of non-standard size and would need specialist attention. We were told eventually of a firm in London that might be able to help and given instructions where to find their premises. They happened to be in the middle of Soho. We decided that perhaps it would be a good idea if some of us went to London for the day and took the drum along to get it repaired. We travelled by train from Kemble at our own expense of course and eventually found ourselves in the somewhat dubious vicinity of Soho, although at this time it was a very important centre of the music retail trade. It was impossible however to avoid seeing other less reputable activities on offer. Mr Gough being the drum expert was in charge of the party and true to his somewhat impish sense of humour he amused himself by going in and out of a number of the "clubs" in the square. With the drum under his arm he would walk past the bouncer on the door, they assuming him to be an aging jazz drummer. He would then come out and announce to the rest of us "no he's not in there". Eventually however we found ourselves at the address of the

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drum repair experts. There was an archway on the street leading to an open passageway to the door of the company’s premises. We rang the bell at the archway entrance and eventually the door at the end of the passageway opened and coming towards us was a fully operational Hippie. He had the statutory long hair, yards of beads, a kaftan and open-toed sandals. We had written to the company beforehand so he knew what we were there for. He asked us to leave the drum with him and come back in an hour or two. He then tucked the drum under his arm and retreated back up the passage. We wandered off for more exploration of nearby places of interest. About two hours later we arrived back and rang the bell. Our Hippie friend came down the passage and announced in solemn tones "Bad scene with the drum man," we stood and waited then he gave a fuller translation. Unfortunately he could not help. The drum was, as we already suspected, non-standard size and he was unable to provide a replacement. We had to admit that although we were unsuccessful in one thing, the day had been an eye-opener. Our own drum expert eventually solved the problem, cutting down the skin of another drum that was no longer playable.

Anniversaries and moving on

As one grows older it is inevitable that more and more anniversaries come around and things change, some for the better and some not. Every year it was customary to hold a Corps Anniversary on the anniversary of the opening of the Corps which in our case was September 9th, 1881. Some anniversaries were more enthusiastically embraced than others often depending on the COs’ interest. In 1971 our CO was Lieutenant Wendy Collett who was a very hard working conscientious leader who readily embraced the idea of celebrating the previously mentioned 90th Anniversary of the Corps. Hollinwood Band from Manchester was invited for the event, as Mr Gough’s son-in-law Colin Mann who had been our CO in 1954 was a member of the band. For the Anniversary Festival, thanks to the trustees, we were able to use the Temperance Hall in Thomas Street and our Band also played music from the band Music No.2 books.

Throughout the late 1960s 70s and into the 80s it became traditional for us to arrange an Autumn or Spring Festival each year. The venue for this was usually the Parish Church or Watermoor Church. These included visits from Bands and Songsters from Coventry, Woking, Reading, Bristol, Swindon and Gloucester also those already mentioned from Clubmoor and Hollinwood. In addition to the contribution of Brass Bands to the life of the Corps, rhythm groups consisting mainly of vocalists, electric and acoustic guitar and percussionists akin to the "worship bands" of today played their part. After Mike married Helen who is an accomplished guitarist, she formed a group within the Corps from the teenagers who attended at the time.

Perhaps the most notable of the groups to visit the Corps was a Group from Amsterdam in Holland who were touring Britain and came to present a programme in the Corn Hall. It was at this event that we launched a scheme to replace our Hall in Watermoor Road.
It is salutary to me to think that when I was first taken to the Hall in Watermoor Road in 1943, the building was only 16 years old. Recently someone enquiring about the development of the site where it still stands asked me if it was listed as an historic building! I must say that I still have very happy memories of the times spent there but not long after the Band was formed and when we had such thriving young people’s work it became obvious that the building was not only reaching the end of its useful life to us but we were outgrowing its facilities. We had wanted to develop our original corner plot in Watermoor and while trying to comply with building and other regulations for our proposed scheme a former colleague of mine from the Council came one Friday evening and set up his decibel meter on the Quartermaster garden. At the end of band practice he came in and announced that the Band’s playing was not a public health hazard. We are proud of this distinction. However the powers that be considered our scheme to be too expensive.

Mention of the sponsored walk to London to raise money for a new Hall scheme has been covered and although fund raising was a daunting task it was more the fact that the red yellow and blue tape of the Army’s property department issued forth in profusion that frustrated our efforts. It would take another volume to unravel the story of how we eventually did it but we said goodbye to the old Hall and moved into the new in November 1977. The Hall of course had been the Army’s first home in Cirencester in the 1880s but now we owned it. Once a few late problems were solved we had Bristol Citadel Band for the opening weekend that also included Remembrance Sunday. On the Saturday afternoon we formed up outside the old Hall and with the Bristol Band leading the way we marched away for the last time finishing up at the new Hall in Thomas Street.

Here Colonel Bertram Wells performed the ribbon cutting ceremony to open the Hall officially. Colonel Wells was from Headquarters in London but in the 1937 he had been our CO. After the opening ceremony our band and the Bristol Citadel Band contributed to a Celebration festival that followed. On the Sunday the Bristol folk took part in the morning meeting while we took our usual place in the Bibury Remembrance Sunday parade and service augmented by Bandmaster Clark from Bristol Citadel and Bandmaster Armstrong the Divisional Bandmaster. The Bristol Band presented a programme of music in the Hall during the afternoon and was responsible for the evening meeting. The opening of the new Hall had its poignancy not least emphasised during this first Saturday and Sunday when the piano was
played. The piano at Watermoor was in poor condition and there was no way that it could be transferred. It was therefore decided that the Young People of the Corps would raise funds for a replacement and to do it in memory of Carol Smith a former Junior Soldier, Singing Company member, timbrelist, and YP Band member.

![Junior Soldier Carol Smith]

She was a very special youngster who had fought bravely against a brain tumour that eventually took her life at the age of fifteen. In the event the children raised over £450 that enabled us to purchase an excellent reconditioned piano suitable for a large hall. It bears a small brass plaque in memory of Carol. As it is actually a Pianola I have been known to pedal it on the odd occasion.

In the new Hall we had much more room and certainly better storage facilities for our instruments and extensive music library. Four years on it was to be the Corps centenary and ideas were pooled as to how we should celebrate this notable achievement. After their first visit the International Staff Band leaders expressed the wish that they would one day like to come again, so taking them at their word I wrote to the authorities to see if they could come for the Centenary. Sadly they said that they were already booked for 1981 so we had to change our plans. Instead we arranged for a flower festival in the Hall on the weekend nearest to 9th September presented by the ladies of Oaksey Flower Arranging Club that was run by Ann Raines one of my teaching colleagues at Ashton Keynes School. This was a great success, as was an exhibition we had on at the Corinium Museum at the request of David Viner, the curator. The BBC West of England television got to hear of the centenary and sent a film crew and interviewer to spend the day filming activities including the Sunday school children at work and other Corps activities. The Band was filmed at some length mostly playing the March “Fighting Onward” which was then dubbed on to the subsequent report that appeared on the regional news. They also filmed at the Museum where the exhibition was so popular that although due only to run for a month we were asked if it could remain longer and it ran on until Easter 1982 with over 8,000 visitors having seen it.

Once the Centenary passed we settled down to the next 100 years but from 1982 we had almost four years without a CO. However with a full compliment of Local Officers we were able to maintain the work and make progress. As Corps secretary I received all the official documentation from Bristol Divisional Headquarters. On opening the weekly budget one Friday in February 1984 I had quite a surprise. There was an envelope addressed to me from the Secretary of the International Staff Band. The letter inside said that they had not forgotten our 1981 request and as they had a free weekend in October would we like them to come as they had in 1975. I was taken aback by this unexpected offer but after consultation with folk in the Corps we accepted the offer trusting that despite not having a CO we could once again make the necessary arrangements. With our new Hall having better facilities we were able to arrange for the normal Sunday morning and evening meetings to be in the Hall as well as the Sunday afternoon festival. The Saturday evening festival was to be once again held in the Parish Church. Arrangements were also made to hold an open-air service in front of the Waterloo flats on the Sunday Morning after the meeting in the Hall.
On the day, as the Hall is in a one-way system, it was decided that I should meet the ISB’s Coach at the London Road junction and direct them to the Hall. This I did and as we were travelling along now Lieutenant Colonel, Ray Bowes told me how much they had enjoyed their first visit. His billet along with a colleague with Lord and Lady Wigram had been very relaxed and in fact he said that on the morning they left when half way down the M4 he found the key to the Wigram’s home in his pocket and had to post it back. The whole weekend had been like a holiday with a very relaxed atmosphere. The latter would also be a feature of this new visit. Evidently visits can be different. There are those who go to listen to the ISB or some other top ensemble just hoping to hear wrong notes, a bit like some who go to watch the planes at Heathrow hoping for the excitement of a crash landing or some other emergency. We once went to hear the ISB at Reading and my evening was somewhat spoiled by the man sitting next to me wearing a blazer with a flamboyant badge on the pocket who did nothing but find fault throughout the festival. He was obviously a greater genius than I, as I heard nothing to complain about. Thankfully if there were any critics in the Parish Church for the Festival they did not surface. Once again the programme was well balanced and it was great to see so many local people who had obviously been influenced by the 1975 visit.

Despite the lack of a CO we managed once again to billet everyone successfully Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Thompson the Executive Officer was to be billeted with Lord and Lady Wigram this time at their home in Poulton. Mary had become acquainted with Lady Wigram at a series of local ‘Cottage Meetings’ in the 1966. Lord Wigram was on duty at the House of Lords on the day of the festival, but we arranged for him to collect his guests from our house after the performance. I arrived home after we had put the church pews back in order and rang the doorbell to get in, whereupon our son Robert came to the door and announced ‘The Lord is in the kitchen!’

After the Sunday morning meeting the ISB marched to the Waterloo for the open-air meeting. Their return to the Hall could have been problematical with Dyer Street being One Way and we wanted them to come back through the Market Place. The problem was easily solved. Whilst on her Saturday night pub round my Mum always left a copy of the War Cry at the Police Club for Inspector Richardson and after the festival she called in to the club. Inspector Richardson was there so she just asked if it would be possible for the band to march back to the Hall the wrong way up Dyer Street and through the Market Place. He said ‘leave it to me’ and the following morning the necessary police presence was on hand to allow just that (how things have changed).
I will always remember that open-air meeting for the moving performance by the band of Mozart’s Ave Verum Corpus. The configuration of the buildings in the Waterloo gave rise to wonderful acoustics. The march to the hall was no less impressive. I marched in front of the Band with Lieutenant Colonel Thompson to lead the way along the route. We came into the Market Place just as the congregation was coming out of the morning service at the Parish Church. As they came out they surged into the centre of the car park to witness the magnificent sound of the Band echoing from the surrounding buildings. It was a time to be proud to be part of the International Army. The afternoon festival in the Hall was crowded making it necessary for us to use the balcony and the programme again was well balanced and moved along in a relaxed good humoured way. I have always been partial to a bit of Wagner so my favourite piece by the Band that afternoon was Elsa’s procession to the Cathedral. Had the playing been a little louder at the climax to the piece we might well have had to replace the roof of our new Hall. After the evening meeting we were invited to play with the Band for an informal wind up. Our children and Mike were all playing in our Band at the time including our youngest daughter Sarah. Today she spends much of her time doing drama work nationally and internationally for the Army. Her one-woman shows are based on various odd characters and extracts from the shows have often featured in programmes that have also included the ISB. I doubt that the members would know that the alter ego of Hatty Stand, Primrose Oyle and the little lady with the big brolly once played the bass drum with the ISB. I will always treasure the experience of the two ISB visits, as I will that day during Advent in 1986 when our own Band went international on Songs of Praise.

There is no doubt that the Band’s activities have played a significant part in establishing the Army’s reputation in Cirencester and the surrounding towns and villages. However in recalling the past I am reminded that even when times are hard it is possible to get through by dogged determination and faith in the rightness of the cause. Like all organisations run by human beings and the Army is no exception it can be subject to human failings. For a short period in the late 1990s we had a crisis of leadership caused in no small way by a major reorganisation that led to the dismantling of the Bristol Division and out transfer to the West Midlands Division, where initially I believe our local situation was not fully understood. Time has now healed the wounds and once again as a Band we are able to fulfil our rightful place in Corps activities. There was one previously mentioned Christmas when we were unable to play carols in the Market Place. This was in 1997 and coming as a bitter blow it could have been the end of everything. However, as I sat at home on the Saturday that had been allocated to us by the Council, I got to thinking what was the true purpose of Christmas carolling, or for that matter any of our banding effort. As part of my college course I had to put pen to paper to write poetry and on the odd occasion since. So that weekend I penned a poem simply entitled Carolling. When it was finished I thought it might be an idea to send it to the editor of The Salvationist, Captain Charles King. To my amazement when I picked up my copy of the paper from the Hall, there on the front page fully illustrated was my poem. (See the epilogue). I hoped that it would help to show certain doubting authorities that we knew well what our purpose was and is.

A New Millennium

Had it not been for the appointment of Lieutenants David and Joy Stevenson as COs in 1998 the approach to the new millennium might well have been a difficult one. However thanks to their understanding and that of the new Divisional leaders the Corps and with it the Band crossed over into the Twenty First Century with fresh hope. Although some contacts had been lost during the previous difficulties we had managed to maintain our links with the local community and nearby towns and villages. In keeping with town and country activities the composer Derek Jordan arranged the hymn tune Down Ampney specially for us and made an arrangement of the tune played by the carillon of Cirencester Parish Church.
Playing in earlier days at Down Ampney, birthplace of the composer Ralph Vaughn Williams

Village open air service at Duntisbourne Abbots

Contact with the many villages on our district is an important aspect of the Band’s activity as it was for the first Cirencester Salvation Army band in the 1880s

During these early years of the new century, as we celebrate fifty years and look forward to the future, there is much to be done and much that can be accomplished. Over the years we have established connections with so many groups within the town and the rural area leading to an annual programme for the Band that sees us out and about in the Spring and Summer supporting services fetes and festivals, continuing our annual Remembrance duties and celebrating Christmas all over the district.
Playing for the Good Friday Witness and Summer Songs of Praise in the Abbey grounds organised by Churches Together in Cirencester

Joining with Oxford Band at St Giles Fair and at the Trout Inn Lechlade for "Songs of Praise" with Lechlade Churches Together
Each year the number of requests increases showing just how relevant the service of an Army Band is despite the rise of other forms of "worship". We were disappointed once in the late 1990s to be told by a high-ranking officer that "the vision of the Army Band on the street corner is now old hat". Thankfully experience tells us otherwise and we seem to be in greater demand in our community than ever.
With the recent commissioning of a Corps Songster Brigade and the Worship Group taking part in most meetings there is, and always should be, something for everyone. I have to admit, however, that the sound of the brass band and the words associated with the music seems to resonate more with me than some forms of modern “worship song”. Some of the latter particularly those with one or two verses to be repeated ad nauseam seem more to emulate a BBC 1 jingle than have any meaningful theology. I am sometimes amused by the fact that the number of lines in the copyright beneath can outnumber the lines in the “song”. I suppose this could be just a sign of ageing as was the fact that after Christmas 2010 I decided to hand over the euphonium to a much younger player and take up duties once more on the BBb Bass.

Epilogue

In this new millennium we have been fortunate to have new players join the Band from further afield. Pam Godsell had connections with Cardiff Canton and Graham Harris, Harrow Corps. When Major Susan Walters came as CO in 2002 she brought with her, her son Mark who has more than filled my place on the euphonium. Our latest reinforcements Geoff and Eric Halliday together with their wives Lizzie and Betty originate from Swindon and it is a very strange coincidence that I now play alongside Eric who was one of the small group of players from Gorse Hill Corps who first introduced me to live brass band music in the late 1940s. The fortunes of Cirencester Band over these past fifty have fluctuated and our numbers have never been large but throughout it all we have been able, we hope, to bring the Christian message to the Cotswolds and occasionally beyond. The fellowship and fun have far outweighed any difficulties and who knows what the future holds. It is not easy to recruit new players but, looking back, we have always had reinforcements when the time was ripe and, as my Dad was still playing in his eighties, I intend to go on as long as the DNA holds out. As long as people’s hearts can be touched by music I know that there will always be a place for live music including the unique sound of a brass band.

In writing this record I have relied mostly on my memory so that others may remember the events differently. This is how I saw it and obviously I have not been able to record everything, nor would it have been wise to do so concerning events that could be interpreted incorrectly. As St John explains in Chapter 21 of his Gospel, he could have written a lot more and I suppose I could, but I hope there is sufficient material to show how quickly 50 years can fly by. However, in that time a lot has happened and I hope been achieved. It has also been a lot of fun, but I am sure we have never lost sight our true purpose perhaps summed up to a certain extent in the verses from my poem “Carolling” written at a very difficult time in the
Band’s history. It reminds us that if we are to fulfil our purpose we should be reminding the listener of the ultimate sacrifice Christ made for them.

Carolling

Beneath the ancient market cross
stamping feet in the winter’s chill.
Wind whistling between pillars,
turning the brass to ice.
Cold fingers, cold lips
tremble to express the sound.
From deep within the soul
it rises from each brazen bell.
Note upon note to harmonise
the age old message on the frosty air.
Filling the market square.
Gliding down side street.
Sliding in at automatic doors
to hail the crowds at check-out tills.

Beneath another ancient cross
Christmas has its counterpoint
Tortuous heat on barren hill,
Pierced body, parched lips
cry on the desert air,
Father forgive them
for they know not what they do.
Sky as black as the birth night
in the early afternoon.
No star to guide, nor angel choir.
The rending earth and tearing veil,
It is finished.
Peace on earth goodwill to men.
God come down to rise again.