

# Friends to the End - Old Comrades bands formed in Britain following the end of WW1

*Gavin Holman, 24 March 2025*

A number of bands were formed in Britain after the Great War by returning servicemen. Generally known as (Old) Comrades' bands, they were, in the main, short-lived ensembles, mainly brought together to show solidarity at civic and remembrance occasions. Some existing bands, which had remained at least partially active during the War, were adopted by the 'Comrades' organisations, augmented by returning servicemen. Some of these bands lasted into the 1920's. Most of these bands were military in style, with both brass and woodwind instruments, the rest being wholly brass bands. The members of the 'Comrades' bands gradually picked up with the reforming and new brass bands once life began to get back to normal, and the 'Comrades' bands gradually died out or were replaced by civilian bands with no association to the services. After the British Legion was formed, in 1921, a few of the 'Comrades' bands converted to or were adopted by new local Legion branches. The British Legion itself established a number of new bands over the years. Of the 120 or so such bands that I have records of, 5 have survived to today - with Soham Comrades Band still retaining the name. The photo shows the Newcastle Comrades Band.



*Newcastle Comrades Band*

*"The Comrades of The Great War"* were formed in 1917 as an association to represent the rights of ex-service men and women who had served or had been discharged from service during World War I.

*"The National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers"* was a veterans' organisation. It was founded in early 1917 at a conference in Blackburn, drawing together various local groups representing working men who had served in World

War I but had since been discharged. It campaigned for better pensions, and more opportunities for re-training.

Both of these associations supported bands in various branches in towns across the country.



*Lancaster Discharged Soldiers Military Band, 1919*

In 1921 these two organisations merged with the “*National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers*”, and the “*Officers' Association*”, to form the “*Royal British Legion*”.

Once the Royal British Legion was established, some of the existing ‘Comrades’ bands were renamed British Legion bands. Others disbanded or had their members absorbed into the reforming civilian bands.

Around 160 British Legion bands were formed in the 1920s and 1930s, and later. Some 33 of these still survive to today – with 5 of them retaining ‘British Legion’ in their name.

Similar ex-servicemen’s bands existed in Australia, where they were often known as ‘Memorial’, ‘Returned Soldiers & Sailors’, or ‘RSL’ bands.

On Saturday 30 October 1920 a band contest, limited to bands belonging to Comrades of the Great War, took place in Blackpool. Seven bands competed, each playing excerpts from “*Aida*” (Verdi) and the march “*Colonel J. Ward*” (Cheeseman). The results were 1. Sheffield, 2. York, 3. Wallsend, 4. Manchester, 5. Nottingham, 6. Carlisle, and 7. Pontypool.

The following is a list of the known 'Comrades' bands.



**2nd London (Old Comrades) Band** (Middlesex)

Active in 1920, conductor H. Alexander

**Acceler8** (Crewe, Cheshire)

[A current brass band] - Former names: Crewe 95th ATC and Old Comrades Band, Crewe Co-operative Band, United Co-op Band (Crewe), Co-operative Funeralcare Band North West, TCTC Group Band

**Allerton Bywater Comrades Band** (Yorkshire (West Riding))

Active in the 1920s

**Amesbury Old Comrades' Hut Band** (Wiltshire)

*See: Amesbury Town Band*

**Amesbury Town Band** (Wiltshire)

[A current brass band] - Founded in 1870 - Former names: Amesbury Town Brass Band, Amesbury Old Comrades' Hut Band (1919), Amesbury British Legion Band (1921), Amesbury Town Silver Prize Band (1922). Secretary M. Truckle in 1897. Bandmaster Mr Truckle in 1902, Mr Harrison in 1904. Note: Merged with Amesbury Temperance Brass Band (1905) in 1912

**Ashington Comrades Band** (Northumberland)

Active in September 1919, conductor Mr Stephenson

**Axminster Comrades Band** (Devon)

Active in November 1919. Conductor J. Clist in 1920

**Aylesbury Comrades Band** (Buckinghamshire)

Active in July 1919, conducted by R. Payne

**Ballyclare Comrades Band** (County Antrim)

Active in 1920

**Bampton Comrades Band** (Devon)

Active in 1920, solo cornet W. Bowden

**Banbury Comrades Band** (Oxfordshire)

Active in June 1919, conducted by Percy Dunn. Still active in 1920

**Barnstaple Comrades Band** (Devon)

Active in April 1919, with 18 players, conductor W.B. Cole

**Bath Comrades Band** (Somerset)

Active in July 1919, conductor M. Costello.  
Conductor H.V. Anst in August 1920

**Belfast Comrades Band** (County Antrim)

Active in April 1919, conductor Fred May

**Bideford Comrades Band** (Devon)

Active in 1920

**Billericay Comrades Band** (Essex)

Active in 1920

**Birmingham Sailors' and Soldiers' Federation Band** (Warwickshire)

Active in 1919, conductor C. de Courbard

**Blackley Band** (Lancashire)

[A current brass band] - Founded in 1941 - Former names: Blackley Home Guard Comrades Association Band, Blackley Silver Prize Band (1946)

**Blackley Home Guard Comrades Association Band** (Lancashire)

*See: Blackley Band*

**Blackley Home Guard Comrades Band** (Lancashire)

Active in the late 1940s

**Blaydon Comrades Victory Band** (Durham)

Active in 1921. Probably formed by survivors of the Great War.

**Bodmin Comrades Brass Band** (Cornwall)

*See: Helland Brass Band*

**Brentwood Old Comrades Band** (Essex)

Active in the 1920s



*Brentwood Old Comrades Band*

**Bridgend Comrades Band** (Glamorgan)

Active in 1920

**Bristol Comrades Band** (Gloucestershire)

Active in October 1919

**Bromyard Comrades Band** (Herefordshire)

Active in 1920, conductor Reginald James

**Budleigh Salterton Comrades Band** (Devon)

Active in August 1919, conductor S.R. Keslake

**Burnley Comrades Band** (Lancashire)

Formed after WW1 - active in 1920.

**Cardiff Comrades Band** (Glamorgan)

Founded in spring 1919, made its first public appearance on Peace Day, 19 July 1919

**Carlisle Comrades Band** (Cumberland)

Active in 1920

**Caversham & Reading Veterans and Comrades Band** (Berkshire)

Active in November 1919

**Chalgrove Old Comrades Band** (Oxfordshire)

Active in 1920, conductor A.W. Higgins

**Chesterfield Town and Old Comrades Band** (Derbyshire)

*See: Chesterfield Town Silver Band*

**Chesterfield Town Silver Band** (Derbyshire)

Formed in the late 1900s or early 1910s, active through the 1920s. Became the Chesterfield Town and Old Comrades Band in March 1919, under the conductor Leonard Sheppard

**Chester-le-Street Comrades Band** (Durham)

Active in 1920

**Cirencester Band** (Gloucestershire)

[A current brass band] - Founded in 1919 as Cirencester Comrades of the Great War Band, conductor B. Dunn, later known as Cirencester Silver Band (1922-1972)



*Cirencester Comrades of the Great War Band, 1919*

**Combe Martin Comrades Band** (Devon)

Active in June 1919, conductor S. Pearce

**Comrades of the Great War Band** (Cirencester, Gloucestershire)

*See: Cirencester Band*

**Comrades of the Great War Brass Band** (Newcastle upon Tyne, Northumberland)

Active in the early 1920s

**Comrades of the Great War Brass Band** (Cork)

Active in the 1920s

**Comrades United Band** (Leeds, Yorkshire (West Riding))

Active after WW1.

**Coulsdon Comrades Band** (Surrey)

Active in 1920, conductor W.J. Woodman

**Crewe 95th ATC and Old Comrades Band** (Cheshire)

*See: Acceler8*

**Crosby Comrades Band** (Lancashire)

Active in 1920

**Delabole Comrades Band** (Cornwall)

Active in 1922. Previously known as Delabole Ex-Serviceman's Brass Band, and later Delabole British Legion Band

**Denaby Comrades Band** (Yorkshire (West Riding))

Active in October 1919

**Derby Comrades Band** (Derbyshire)

Active in May 1919, bandmaster Charles Hardy, conductor M.B. Hurley

**Discharged Sailors' and Soldiers' Association Brass Band** (Darlington, Durham)

Founded in 1919, bandmaster H. Lambeth



*Darlington Discharged Sailors and Soldiers Band*

**Discharged Soldiers and Sailors' Band** (Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire)

Active in 1919

**Dorchester Comrades of the Great War Band** (Dorset)

First public appearance in June 1920, 20 players, conducted by R.W. Stevens, former band sergeant of the 4th Dorset Regiment

**East Lancashire Comrades Band** (Burnley, Lancashire)

Active in 1920

**Eastleigh Comrades Band** (Hampshire)

First appearance in May 1919, conducted by T.G. Fry, late bandmaster of the 53rd Hants Regiment

**Edinburgh Old Comrades Band** (Midlothian)

Active in July 1919

**Ely Comrades Band** (Cambridgeshire)

Active in November 1919, bandmaster Sergeant Brown

**Fleetwood Comrades Band** (Lancashire)

Founded in late 1919, conductor W. Holden

**Folkestone Comrades Band** (Sussex)

Active in 1920

**Glasgow Central Comrades Band** (Lanarkshire)

Active in July 1919

**Hale Comrades Band** (Hampshire)

Active in 1920, conductor A. Skinner

**Hampstead Comrades Silver Prize Band** (Middlesex)

Active in 1920, conductor R. Abbott

**Hartley Wintney Comrades Band** (Hampshire)

Active in December 1919

**Hayle Comrades Band** (Cornwall)

Active in August 1919, conductor Norman Courtice. Conductor Mr Trebilcock in 1921



*Comrades of the Great War Prize Band (unknown location)*

**Helland Brass Band** (Cornwall)

Formed about 1890 they kept up a fairly busy life until 1927 when what was left of them became the nucleus of the Bodmin Town Band. Known as Bodmin Comrades Band after WW1 for a time, when they raised money for new instruments - secretary E.W.Tabb and conductor R. Symons in 1919. In their earlier days they were conducted by George Bailey who went on to conduct St Blazey and District Band until the day of his retirement. A R. Symons

conducted the Helland Band before and after World War 1. No contesting was ever carried out.

**Helland Brass Band** (Yorkshire (East Riding))

Founded in February 1919. It held its first rehearsal on 27th February, led by W. Homer Evans, at the Comrade's Club, 41 George Street. The band's secretary was G. Lee

**Henley Comrades Band** (Oxfordshire)

Active in 1920

**Huntingdon Comrades Band** (Huntingdonshire)

Active in 1920

**Hurstpierpoint Comrades Band** (Sussex)

Active in 1920

**Ilfracombe Comrades Band** (Devon)

Active in December 1919, conductor P. Becker

**Ilkeston Old Comrades Band** (Derbyshire)

Active in 1920

**Kimbolton Comrades Silver Band** (Huntingdonshire)

Formed after WW1 and active through to the 1950s

**Kingsbridge Comrades Band** (Devon)

Active in 1920

**Kingston and Surbiton Comrades Band** (Surrey)

*See: Kingston Comrades Band*

**Kingston Comrades Band** (Surrey)

Active in September 1919, conductor Joseph Gateson

**Lancaster Discharged Soldiers Military Band** (Lancashire)

Active in June 1919

**Langport Comrades Band** (Somerset)

Active in August 1919



*Unknown Comrades Band*



**Lewisham Comrades Band (Kent)**

Active in 1920, conductor A. Gardiner

**Lincoln Old Comrades Brass Band (Lincolnshire)**

Active in March 1919, conductor Frank George

**Liverpool Old Comrades Band (Lancashire)**

Active in March 1919

**Luton Old Comrades Band (Bedfordshire)**

Active in April 1919, conductor Mr Depledge. Conductor H.J. Lambert in January 1920

**Lynn Comrades Band (Norfolk)**

Active in 1920, conductor A. Haigh

**Lysaght's Orb Works Brass Band (Newport, Monmouthshire)**

Formed under Bandmaster Jack Marsh when the men returned from the Great War, and the first parade was at the reunion at Somerton Park in 1919. Mr. A. Leyshon (late of New Tredegar and Cwm Prize Bands), who has a lifetime experience of first-class contesting was placed in charge in 1924, since when the band has been known as "The Newport Popular Band" and are regularly engaged for the important events in Monmouthshire and adjoining counties. Their repertoire consists of the works of all the great masters and they can be guaranteed to give a programme suitable to any occasion. Mr. Fred Pugh and Mr. Brad. Shergold are the only members who were members at the time of its formation. Mr. Owen Davies has been the Hon. Secretary for the past seven years. As reward for perseverance and success, Mr. W. R. Lysaght has presented them with a very comprehensive Coronation gift of new instruments and uniforms. (Report by Owen Davies, Band Secretary, 1937)



*Soham Comrades Band, 1922*

**Manchester Comrades Band (Lancashire)**

Active in June 1919

**Middlesbrough Comrades Band (Yorkshire (North Riding))**

Active in the 1920s

**Moreton-in-Marsh Comrades Band (Gloucestershire)**

Active in 1920

**North Shields Comrades Band** (Northumberland)

Active in 1920

**Northampton Comrades Band** (Northamptonshire)

*See: Northampton Concert Band*

**Northampton Concert Band** (Northamptonshire)

Formed in 1919 by a group of ex-servicemen who wanted to continue their musical interests in civilian life, conducted by F. Drury. They were originally called the Northamptonshire Comrades of the Great War and also known as the Merry Comrades Band. In 1976, the name was changed to the Northampton Concert Band



**Nottingham Comrades Band** (Nottinghamshire)

Founded in March 1919, secretary Ralph H. Jay. Still active in the 1920s. Competed in a brass band contest at Overseal, Leicestershire in July 1921, under conductor William Blackburn (drawn 8 of 11 bands, they were not placed)

**Nottingham Comrades of the Great War Band** (Nottinghamshire)

*See: Nottingham Comrades Band*

**Old Comrades Association Brass Band** (Croydon. Surrey)

Founded in early 1933

**Old Comrades Band** (Brentwood, Essex)

*See: Brentwood Old Comrades Band*

**Padstow Comrades Brass and Reed Band** (Cornwall)

*See: Padstow Town Band*

**Padstow Town Band** (Cornwall)

Formed after WW1 from members of the previous Artillery Volunteers Band, they carried on until 1939. Their first title was 'Padstow Comrades of the War Brass and Reed Band', changing in 1921 to 'Padstow British Legion Band.' In 1923 their conductor was S M Ravenhill, an organist, and in 1932 Edgar Tonkin was the bandmaster. He had conducted the old Volunteer band for a good period of time. They were formed in time for the 1919 Peace Celebrations, and for quite a while were raising funds to purchase new instruments and uniforms, an ambition that was finally realized in 1932. The band re-emerged in the 1950's, but throughout their history they never attended a Cornish contest.

**Peasenhall Comrades Band** (Suffolk)

Active in 1920

**Penwithick Silver Band** (Cornwall)

Penwithick Band was formed soon after World War 1 from some of the many bandsmen living in the St Austell area who had played in brass bands before the war, some of whom had been with the old Volunteer Bands that had disbanded on the outbreak of hostilities. And as not all civilian bands had reformed in 1918/1919, there was now a surplus of spare musicians who dearly wanted to make music again. Once started, they must have been a popular outfit as they were, almost from day one, a very busy band. They finally disbanded in the mid 1950's.

**Plymouth Comrades Band** (Devon)

Active in 1920, bandmaster Omar King

**Pontypool Comrades Band** (Monmouthshire)

Active in 1920

**Preston Comrades Band** (Lancashire)

Active in 1919, conductor Mr Simpson

**Ramsgate Borough Band** (Kent)

Founded in the early 1880s. Disbanded during WW1 and reformed in 1919 as Ramsgate Comrades Band, conducted by L.J. Brooks

**Ramsgate Comrades Band** (Kent)

*See: Ramsgate Borough Band*

**Redhill Comrades Band** (Surrey)

Active in 1920, conductor W. Bashford

**Rochdale Comrades Band** (Lancashire)

Founded in April 1919, conductor G. Lye, chairman F. Cooper

**Rotherham Comrades Band** (Yorkshire (West Riding))

Active in 1920

**Royal Leamington Spa Victory Band** (Warwickshire)

Founded in 1919, bandmaster G.H. Reid. Active through to 1922

**Rugeley Comrades Band** (Staffordshire)

Formed in 1919. Later became the Rugeley Progressive Working Men's Club Band, active in the 1930s.

**Ryhope Comrades Band** (Durham)

Active in August 1919

**Saffron Walden Comrades Band** (Essex)

Founded in June 1920s

**Salisbury Comrades Band** (Wiltshire)

Active in August 1919. Hedley Davis was a member of the band.

**Salterton Comrades Band** (Devon)

*See: Budleigh Salterton Comrades Band*

**Shaftesbury Comrades Band** (Dorset)

Formed after WW1, in spring 1919, and active through to the early 1930s

**Sheffield Comrades Military Band** (Yorkshire (West Riding))

Active in March 1919, conductor J.E. Reynolds



*Sheffield Comrades Military Band*

**Shoreham Comrades Brass Band** (Shoreham-by-Sea, Sussex)

Active in 1922

**Soham Comrades Band** (Cambridgeshire)

[A current brass band] - Reportedly founded in 1921 by the amalgamation of Soham Excelsior Prize Band and Soham Town Band. However the Soham Comrades Band existed as a separate unit in May 1919, conducted by F.J. Talbot.

**Southampton Comrades Band** (Hampshire)

Active in 1920

**St Pancras Branch of the Comrades of the Great War Silver Prize Band** (Middlesex)

*See: St Pancras Comrades Band*

**St Pancras Comrades Band** (Middlesex)

Active in 1919, when they were soliciting donations to their uniform fund. In October 1919, conducted by R. Abbott, they won first prize in a quartette contest at Walthamstow, gaining a silver cup, five medals and an illuminated certificate.

**Staveley Comrades Band** (Derbyshire)

Found in April 1919, conductor P. Hay

**Strabane Comrades Band** (County Tyrone)

Active in 1920



*Shoreham Comrades Band, 1922*

**Swindon Old Comrades Band** (Wiltshire)

Active in the 1930s

**Taunton Comrades of the Great War Band** (Somerset)

*See: Taunton United Band*

**Taunton United Band** (Somerset)

Founded in 1914, bandmaster T.W. Gill, later followed by Mr Ulrico. After the end of the Great War, in November 1919, with the return of several of the original players, it was agreed to rename it Taunton Comrades of the Great War Band, under Bandmasters Bridges and Stewart

**Teignmouth Comrades Band** (Devon)

*See: Teignmouth Discharged Soldiers' Brass Band.*

**Teignmouth Discharged Soldiers' Brass Band.** (Devon)

Formed in 1919, bandmaster C. Robbins

**Thetford Comrades Band** (Norfolk)

Active in November 1919, conductor H.R. Bowes

**Trowbridge Old Comrades Band** (Wiltshire)

Active in 1920

**Walker Comrades Band** (Northumberland)

Active in 1920, conductor George Ross

**Wallingford Old Comrades Band** (Oxfordshire)

Active in February 1919

**Wallsend Comrades Military Band** (Northumberland)

Active in May 1919, conductor W. Fairgreaves. Mr Ramshaw was one of the 45 band members.

**Wellington Comrades of the War Brass Band** (Shropshire)

Active in 1920, conductor Mr Ralphs



*Soham Comrades Band, 1919*

**Willington Quay & Howdon Comrades Band** (Howdon, Northumberland)

Active in July 1919

**Windsor Comrades Band** (Berkshire)

Active in 1920, bandmaster Samuel Hatton

**Wokingham Old Comrades Band** (Berkshire)

Active in 1919, conductor S. Butler

**Woolwich Old Comrades Band** (Kent)

Active in 1920

**Worcester Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Comrades Band**  
(Worcestershire)

Active in July 1919. Contemporary with the Worcester Old Comrades Band

**Worcester Old Comrades Band** (Worcestershire)

Active in July 1919, conductor W. Austin. Contemporary with the Worcester Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Comrades Band

**Workington Discharged Sailors and Soldiers Band** (Cumberland)

Active in the 1920s

**York Comrades Band** (Yorkshire)

Active in 1920

