

BAND HAD ITS UPS AND DOWNS by Alan Marron

The first band to be formed in the Spennymoor area was Whitworth Brass Band, formed in the early 1870s, although in fact Whitworth did not become part of the growing township until some years later.

The nucleus of the band were the members of the Raine family, several of whom went on to be well known conductors with a number of different bands throughout the North of England.

The Whitworth Band was a very successful one, in one year alone they entered forty one contests, winning sixteen, being placed second in thirteen and taking third place in another seven. The late Tom Snowdon was one early conductor of the band, which he led to many note-worthy (no pun intended) victories in North Country contests. Tom had previously been appointed conductor of the Tudhoe Colliery Band, when he was only 18 years old.

Another famous local bandsman was John Mutton who was conductor of the Temperance Band for over forty years, during which

time they also won many contests.

Whitworth Brass Band changed its name, becoming Spennymoor Brass Band when Whitworth finally became part of the town area and became a volunteer band during the Boer War of the 1880s.

In 1913 the band borrowed money for the purchase of new instruments from Major B P Junor's Tower Brewery, and again changed its name, this time becoming Spennymoor Silver Model Band.

Thirteen years later, the band, still heavily in debt to the brewery, found its playing strength reduced to eleven members.

In order to keep going it was decided to allow woodwind players to join, and so became Whitworth and Spennymoor Military Band. After this it did not take long to pay off the debt, and as more brass players flocked to the band, the woodwind players left to take up places in dance bands and orchestras.

The effect of this was to return the band to its former brass band status.

After World War Two the band began contesting under the name of Whitworth and Spennymoor Silver Prize Band.



PHOTO: WHITWORTH AND SPENNYMOOR BAND (1950s) – back row (l to r) Jimmy Waters, Dacre Long, Bob Hepple, Eric Richards, Harry Smith, (?), Harry Stephenson, (?), Ken Taylor. (Centre Row) Les Oldsworth, (?), Johnny Edwards, Joe Bulmer, (?), Bill Longthorne, Gordon Jackson, Billy Knight, Jack Scarlett. (Front Row) (?), Harry Tolley, Jossie Dodds, Tommy Hull, (?), George Lavery, (?), Tommy Stephenson, Billy Bell. (kneeling) (?), Tommy Sinclair. [Photo: courtesy of Vera Wearmouth]

Brewery sponsorship gained in 1975 led to yet another name change, this time to Cameron's Silver Prize Band, but the sponsorship was withdrawn after only three years and the band was forced to fold until 1982, when a successor band, Spennymoor Town Band, was formed.

Christmas was a busy time for the band. They began the day on the bank leading to the Railway Station at 8.00am with their first carol, 'Christians Awake'. After calls at three private houses in Whitworth, they called at some of the towns public houses by request, playing a selection of pieces at each stop.

The band made frequent trips to Redcar, where they entertained holidaymakers and never failed to draw a good crowd, as a result of which money poured into the tins held by Vera Wearmouth, daughter of Tommy Stephenson and Ada McRoy, daughter of another band stalwart, Joe Bulmer.

Joe was one of the band's hardest working fundraisers, and raised hundreds of pounds through the band's raffles.

He became a miner at thirteen years of age, and lived to celebrate his 80th birthday despite being in poor health for a great many years.

Bob Hepple, now also sadly in poor health following a stroke, was one of the finest solo cornet players in the area, according to colleagues, and like many bandsmen both then and now, loved to help new members to become better players.

The list of bandsmen included Jimmy Waters, Dacre Long, Tommy Hull and Jack Scarlett.

Thanks to the efforts of readers, and long serving trombonist George Lavery, we are now able to name 21 of the 29 members of the band.