

Aldbourne Band – a History

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Before beginning this most fascinating story, I have first to voice my many misgivings in allowing your goodselves to peruse this labour of mine. The production of a written work was never a vocation I ever really seriously contemplated, indeed if you had asked a couple of years ago if I might do just that I would have considered your question a very strange one indeed, surely anyone who has had as limited an education as myself simply do not do this sort of thing! I must admit to writing to a hobby magazine a couple of times but other than that the idea of such a task had never before crossed my mind, so when first I began any delving it was exclusively for personal interest only with no thought of committing anything as such to paper and therefore I beg you some leniency in your criticisms of my efforts. I have intentionally tried to keep my dialogue on the light side, for I dislike reading text that is too heavy and I felt that I did not want my work becoming bromidic or dull so although my style of presentation may not be the norm for such a work as this, I hope you find my efforts make for an easy read and that my enthusiasm for this history comes through in my more “amateur” mode.

The unearthing of the past has always been a great passion of mine and to part the folds of time and peer at days long gone is a great privilege. I was soon to realise that others were keen to hear of the tit bits that I was uncovering and it was at that point that I thought it necessary to put pen to paper. The history of an organisation such as a village brass band might on the surface appear as a uninteresting subject, but as you are about to uncover for yourselves the annals of the Aldbourne band and village are not in the least bit tiresome. Hang on a mo, village? isn't all this about the band? was so little found that the inclusion of village information had to be included just to stretch this publication out? Certainly not, I actually found a veritable treasure trove of detail but the history of the Aldbourne band is very much the history of the village itself and as you read on you will agree on this yourselves. Some of the yarns occasionally diversify away and out into more “open” country side, but to have not allowed you to savour the odd anecdote about the happenings that ran parallel with this story and not acquaint you with them would I felt been sorely amiss of me. I must make it quite clear that I am not for one moment attempting to present a full or complete village history, social or otherwise and that I have left plenty of room for any further research for anyone who might be encouraged by my own feeble efforts I do hope though that my witterings help bring alive the life and experiences that was to be had by our forebears who were not only responsible for the formation of our band but who also created much of the appearance, general atmospheres and traditions the like of we all hold so dear in our hearts, It is after all what makes living in Aldbourne the unique experience that it is.

Aldbourne's children have always shown much talent but of late there has been a serious decline in any development of their skills. In the 1970's the school boasted a musical group of great ability but it sadly does no more, so too the youth club often entertained with like fervour. Underlying this absence there also appears a lack of

young lads taking part with most of any “doers” being of the female gender. It would appear not to be “COOL” enough to do prissy things and not of the right image. Ironically it is only in recent years that ladies have been encouraged to take their rightful place amongst the men and even to join the brass band scene in general. In our own case a miss Lindsay Robinson was the first ever female member, but even then her inclusion took until the 1970’s. Surely, of all progressions that the brass band movement has made since its conception then the inclusion of women, particularly into the ranks of our top bands has to be singularly the most epochal and intelligent move it has, or ever will, make!

We must do something to stop this tragic loss of talent and if we can impress on our own sons a more enlightened way of thought before they reach such adolescent short-sighted thinking we might just have a few more musicians to entertain us in the future. The world of brass is one very much of comradeship and most friendships that are formed usually prosper and continue to flourish into adulthood. Often these friendships are formed from not only within our country but all over the world. It is imperative that we do not allow a musical desert to happen in our village, for if it does we will surely ALL be the poorer for it. Believe me, the sands will soon blow in if we allowed it.

This story was given birth to during the early years of the nineteenth century. When in 1837 Victoria became queen no one could have realised that her rule would not only be over the most emphatic empire this world will ever see but that it would also witness the incredible progressive effects of science, engineering, exploration etc. Though perhaps not noticeable on a daily basis, that progression was to change the lives of society at a pace that had never before been experienced.

The life to be had in Victorian Wiltshire was by today’s standards extremely arduous and an example of just how is that farm labourers (the largest workforce) would usually work in excess of 80 hours a week! and with an average agricultural wage of only £12 a year in 1850 at that. Ranks included women and boys as young as 12! Know that an allotment and back garden would also be needed to feed a family, this would also include the keeping of pigs and chickens as well, so a farm labourers day would be a very long one indeed. In 1889 a writer made a plea via the Marlborough Times asking if local farmers could help find jobs for the many unemployed men in Ramsbury. An offer came from a Broad Hinton farmer and anyone willing to up house and family could find help there. His kindness may well have helped one poor family but it didn’t stop the need that same year for a soup kitchen.

The Marlborough Times (MT) proved to be of the utmost importance in my research and without it, it was very unlikely that I could have established little of what you are about to read for its pages contain the facts and figures that I never imagined would still exist. To read those pages is as close as one can ever get to actually living in the past and so this newspaper must be better than any modern text at describing Aldbourne’s victorian life, as all the events and reports are obviously contemporary with their happenings and so then give for a totally unbiased? view of this area for us to study. I must just mention two other publications, one having an even longer history. Swindon’s Evening Advertiser was first published in 1854 but I did not peer too much into its pages as I felt that little would be gained in doing so. The Aldbourne Parish Church Magazine, of which the earliest I’ve have seen dated is 1895 was also an important source. Anyone researching any aspect of life in North

Wiltshire must do as I did and read all and every single copy of the Marlborough Times. Now this is in no way a small task as it was first published in September 1859, but it is of the utmost interest to wade through its pages. It took an average of two hours to scan the 52 issues that make for a complete year, but some years took even longer with 1922 taking four hours! The task was completed with the 1965 December issue, so with over five and a half thousand copies scoured you can now appreciate why I chose not to look at any other publication in anything as like as much depth and only then for any cross checking purposes only. For nearly three years I have lived and breathed the past one hundred and fifty odd years of this corner of Wiltshire and can never be grateful enough to the past staff of the Marlborough Times who made it their business to preserve a near complete set of copies for posterity with only half a dozen issues or so missing.

It was ironic that I should choose the Aldbourne band to research, for if I had decided to research the Ramsbury, Lambourn, or Great Bedwyn bands I would have made little, if any, headway. For reasons many, most of the important facts and figures concerning the Aldbourne band are to be found printed within its pages whilst the other bands, though often mentioned, simply do not enjoy anywhere near the same in depth documentation. The pride taken in our band by newspaper correspondents has meant that no other band or like organisation is found documented in as much detail as is ours. Although the actual village and social events of Ramsbury and Lambourn are reported with as much rigour and fervour as is ours, our band seems to have been of more importance to our community than any of the others were to theirs. It is also very noticeable that other villages also took a pride in having such a band as ours to call on when they needed us to play for them and comments like "Aldbourne's fine band" or "few villages boasting better" though perhaps marginally over the top are still typical of any comments found. This praise doesn't occur straight away though and we must remember that for many years Aldbourne band was in no way different to its peers, it could not claim to be any more skilful an outfit until after the great war.

During the 1840's the life expectancy for those who were working in the cotton mills of Manchester was only an unimaginable 17 years of age, doubled if you were lucky enough to be middle class or lived in the less squalid conditions of the surrounding countryside. Fortunately Aldbourne offered a more pleasant quality of life and this is indicated in a newspaper report of 1865 with the death of an Aldbourne lady "Mrs Elizabeth Sopp, a 96 year old nonagenarian". To have lived during the last century must have been just as or perhaps even more exciting than today. It's so easy to take things for granted, expecting that not only will improvements to the paraphernalia of modern life happen regularly but that any new items to make our days go easier will just appear. Close your eyes and try to imagine yourself back in time. Imagine the marvel of seeing your first photograph, especially if it was of you! or the first ever steam engine or motor car as it passed through our rutted streets. It would have stopped you dead in your tracks and made you clamber for a glimpse. Perhaps the car that was the first to visit Swindon had passed through here on its way. An 1897 report described just that of the first ever motor car to be seen there, it caused considerable attention and drew many onlookers. So too did the first car crash in the parish of Ramsbury when the two chauffeur driven cars belonging to Moses Wooland of Marridge Hill and Lady Hanbury of Aldbourne collided at Knighton crossroads. The sight of the first hot air balloon over our village must have been the talk on everyone's lips for weeks or even months. One made the headlines in 1903 when it

flew over Ramsbury and caused pandemonium to a flock of sheep as they were being driven up the high street. Certainly the 1934 visit of two light aircraft to Aldbourne brought much excitement but only the more moneyed folk would have bought flights for it cost 2/6d (12 1/2p) per person.

Try telling villagers that a journey to Swindon would take less than 15 minutes let alone less than four hours to America would be a total nonsense to them, they simply would be unable to comprehend the speed or many of the aspects of the world we now accept as norm. Apparently villagers had waited patiently for the "advent of a motor service" that eventually came in 1906. If you find any of this difficult to imagine then think back to your own thoughts when you yourself first experienced something that was to you totally foreign. Perhaps your first television programme in colour or watching the first man set foot on the moon, or perhaps a stereo hi-fi system, a camcorder or maybe your very first surf over the internet? Easy to become complacent, isn't it?

The arrival of Lambourn's first locomotive in 1898 or the coming of a telephone office in 1915 must have made our forefathers really believe that the happenings that they read about in newspapers were at last reaching this part of darkest Wiltshire and that for them life was really on the up. Not all newfangled improvements were welcomed however and even less if you had to pay for them. What thoughts to the coming of electricity is best described by the apathy shown in 1928 when the Lottage Road council houses were offered connection. Two of the tenants replied that they were willing to pay a small fee but eight responded that they were not, two households didn't bother to reply at all.

What would be the most obvious differences if we were able to go back and see just what Aldbourne has been like over that 150 years or so? The village was once very much smaller than it is today and I presume that I don't need to say where it has grown. The presence of cars, TV aerials, satellite dishes and overhead cables are but a few of the more obvious eyesores that would not block a view of the streets. Even the church tower would have looked bare as the clockface was not fitted until Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1887 when "300 givers" donated £3-4-8d. What a tight lot.

Most cottages were thatched as slate roofs didn't really catch on till the 1860`s. Many have been lost to fires and all it takes is a quick look around to see just where they once must have stood. One obvious to the eye is where the Alldays shop now stands. The present building was built after Heynes and Stag's shop was burnt down in 1892. One or two others disappeared for other reasons and the spot that the memorial hall now occupies is just one example as it was once the sight of Hodders farm. Thomas Henry Hodder originated from Middlesex but on his marriage to an Ogbourne girl settled here. He was obviously a respected man as he was a census enumerator in 1861. The bridge out towards Ramsbury is still known as Hodders bridge his farm (Hodders) was given to the village by a Mrs Pembroke of Yew Tree cottage in 1918. Many of these small farms were once to be found but now they have nigh on all disappeared. So too have the barn's that must have once littered our village (the last ones to disappear was the huge Corrs barn in West Street, Glebe barn where Glebe Close is sighted and in 1997 a smaller example in West street). None of immense size are left standing now though a few smaller ones do still survive, just, how much longer do we have the pleasure of their company?.

Improved road surfaces didn't come till well into this century and several letters on their state of repair were written. In 1889 the road between Woodsend and Aldbourne was described as "unsafe", and it most probably was as any maintenance was still the responsibility of a parish and any that run as far out from a village as that one would have been the near to last on any list for remedial work. Many travellers used shank's pony and at best a pony and trap to get around, and although we now sentimentally describe these old byways as green lanes, the metaling of our streets is essential to this list for it must have been a joy for everyone. Another problem of unmetaled roads was that of street dust and adverts were found for "Aridor" dust free sweet jars. They show how big a nuisance dust was and in 1914 'Akonia' was sprayed "with poor results" on the surface of Marlborough's high street in an attempt to reduce their problem.

The appearance of our country side would be very different to what we now see. An 1865 visitor described his approach to Aldbourne as a "pleasant ride through somewhat wild country". Britain's wildlife has also had to bare much of the brunt of mans progress. In 1866, Aldbourne`s curate Woodley witnessed a flock of sparrows strip an acre of barley and in 1881 complaints were printed from several Ramsbury farmers about their inability to control bird numbers. One told of a field sown with peas being covered by "thousands of birds". Such sights as this, though not totally unheard of in today's near wrecked world is rare to the extreme but how sad the otter hunts that were once held frequently in Ramsbury, as recently as 1922 an otter was shot there.

Of all these aspects probably the most noticeable would be the sounds and smells, some good and many more bad. Without becoming too involved in any personal problems had by folk, the general atmosphere of our village would be very different to today. The abundance of horses compared to what we now see would make a walk through our streets a much more hit or miss affair than it is now. The emptying of cess pits and the best time that this should be done was once the topic of a letter of complaint written in 1901, anti-social bonfires surely replace that particular evil, but the amount of smoke then bellowing out of the many chimneys would have also been very offensive. Cooking in the summer still involved the burning of wood though ironically an 1864 report told of the "clear bracing air of Aldbourne"

Curiously Aldbourne has two areas that serve for communal use, the Green speaks for itself with its market cross still standing but the vicinity of the pond does need a little explanation. The biggest thorn in the side of our village seems to have always been the general state of the pond area though it was not successfully(?) dealt with till just a short while ago. Being now constructed of concrete it would appear to any visitor as a totally man made feature and not of a natural origin but our modern day square was once a large boggy lake that was fed by springs that rise to the north of the village. These springs once rose for most of the year but as time has passed the water table has dropped causing the marshland to recede. During the early medieval period we hosted a market and animals brought here would have used this lake to be watered but the gradually dwindling caused the area to shrink and eventually it became just a small pond. Its likely that this drying marked the end of the market. The springs still rose of course but not as they once had, so this meant that buildings were able to spread down into this lower lying land forming what was once known as "Bell square", "California square" and of course "Pond place".

During the winters of 1994/5 extremely heavy rainfall caused the rising of the springs in Lottage and not for the first time either as in 1915 we suffered the worst floods since 1879 and some of the worst snow falls ever experienced as well creating floodwaters nearly two feet deep throughout the village. The 1994/5 rains caused problems with the sewerage system oozing its contents out of manhole covers and onto the road. Although not a pretty site there has always been this type of problem and it's also long been complained about. A letter written to the MT. in 1901 about the pollution that was being experienced told of the "liquid manure" that flowed from the six farms in Lottage and that emptied into the open ditches that run through our village. Things were often worse in the dry summer months for there would be only the occasional heavy rain to help wash this reeking slurry away and only the winter rain causing the bourne to fill would really wash it clean.

Medical knowledge made enormous advancements but we can still find the odd quack remedy or two in MT adverts as late as 1927. "Dr William's Pink Pills" professed to cure (big breath needed here) anaemia, sciatica, indigestion, rheumatism, fainting fits, inflammation of the lungs, nervous disorders, asthma, ladies ailments, general weakness, painful dry throats, varicose veins, oh I nearly forgot to include St Vitus's dance as well. Anyone with a worn out heart could also benefit from taking them and they were also good at keeping the old youthful and full of vigour. Moreover they could improve women's charms?, improved your sleep, gave colour to the pale, improved one's appetite and according to one old lady they even helped her "work and sew almost as well as a girl of 17! I am at this point struggling to make a suitable comment but if anyone has any of those pink pills spare, one or two might just be all I need to help me think of one.

Here in Aldbourne we have had to make do without our own doctor and so physicians from Ramsbury, Lambourn or Marlborough have always tended our ailments. Remember that they had to come by pony and trap and any messages would have had to be sent that way as well meaning that help would often take time to arrive and even then little relief might come. Imagine the pain a lady of Ramsbury endured in 1873 when she fell from the top of a straw rick that she was building breaking both her legs. Doctors from the newly (1871) built cottage hospital in Savernake came and tended to her injuries.

An advert was placed in 1860 by Mrs Moulding of West Street claiming an "effectual" cure for "broken breasts". She could also cure yellow jaundice, corns and bunions. Her remedies seemed to work if the letter of endorsement written by fellow villager Mrs Elizabeth Lawrence is to be believed. Elizabeth was one of our school mistress's so her blessing would have been a major bonus. Another advert was placed by a Newbury dentist in 1896 whose practice claimed "painless dentistry"! just who did he think he was kidding?

With few diseases not being cured or at least the pain that goes with them eased until the coming of more recent times, our villagers had much to endure. It really isn't all that long ago (1889) that a measles outbreak in Aldbourne was responsible for the deaths of two of our children or the death in 1915 of an Ogbourne St George girl of spotted fever contracted by drinking water from a pond. In 1878, we (frighteningly) suffered an outbreak of small pox and when in 1927 a flue epidemic hit our village the

MT. stated that “happily the death toll has been light”! “happily” is not a description that springs to my mind.

In 1918, there was a severe measles outbreak in Ramsbury with no fewer than 100 cases reported and can you believe that several families had as many as seven children all ill at the same time. Just remember the next time your little blue-eyed cherub is unwell what your great grandmother may have had to contend with, Victorian and Edwardian doctors were without doubt still working in the distance past.

Death is never an easy subject to discuss but it is the one happening in life that is a total guarantee. Though always sad and at times most pathetic, the inquest reports and causes of death given by our local doctors make for an extremely interesting read. If asked your thoughts on the most common cause of death of the last century some of you might respond with cancer, a horse kick, Pneumonia or even Consumption (T.B.). Well I`m sorry, but even if you were to name every known ailment (even those that only have the most minute or remote of chance in causing a persons departure from this life), I know I can quite safely concur that none of you, and I mean none, would get even close to what was actually frequently given. Until well into the last quarter of the nineteenth century the most commonly found cause of death given in our local paper was simply a “visitation from God”. (I said that you would never guess). This description obviously covers the myriad of diseases that once were (some still are of course) the curse of humanity but remember it was also a diagnosis? given in good faith, with the many true causes simply being unknown to our medical practitioners at that time.

One extremely sad case in 1873 was that of one year old William Emberlain when his cause of death was given as “irritation by teething”. Cancer is a word not often used in any of the early issues, if at all, but it might well be this malady that is repeatedly to be found described as “a long and painful death”.

Poaching is of course one and most likely THE most reported misdeed and several of our own villagers are mentioned in court proceedings though I must just say that men from Ramsbury and Lambourn feature many more times than ours. Were our men better at the art of poaching or were they a more honest bunch of chaps? I think more likely that they were probably just luckier and not caught so often . Aldbourne man John Barrett wasn't very lucky though for in 1882 he was brought to court in Marlborough and SENTENCED TO ONE MONTHS HARD LABOUR, and he was only “trespassing in search of game”! Theft has always been a common felony, though it was not usually of cash but of possessions. Churches, even then didn't escape and a report of 1878 tells us that the poor box in Kintbury church was broken open and its contents stolen, nothing new is there? Shop theft also wasn't unusual with the Swindon of 1875 seeing the arrest and the successful prosecution of “2 shoplifters”. In 1859 Aldbourne villager George Ebsworth, was found guilty of stealing a leg of mutton from one Charles Briant. The court was told that the leg was “a particularly fine one”. (what this comment had to do with the case I haven't as yet figured out, ideas on a postcard please ...).

Disgrace (usually pregnancies out of wedlock) was depressingly a frequent cause of suicide, and attempts in the area are an extremely common read, though most being unsuccessful. For us there appear to be only one or two cases, one being witnessed by

Wilf Jerram when only a young lad. In 1913 a tramp had tried to cut his own throat and having failed in his attempt was later punished by the Marlborough court, we have to remember that suicide was once recognised as a crime.

Murder, thankfully, is not a common subject to be found in any of the local village reports, but murder and attempted murder stories from all over Britain are and often they were described in an unhealthy way. One or two did happen locally though they were in no way connected to our village. Hungerford sustained two in 1876 with the murder of police officers by poachers on the Denford road, a memorial still marks the spot. The folk of Watchfield must have been stunned when in 1893 John Carter was brought to trial and subsequently executed for the murder of both his first (Rhoda) and his second wife (Elizabeth), Incidentally he buried both bodies in a farm yard. In 1849 Rebecca Smith of Swindon was duly executed for the murder of 7 of her 11 children. She had smeared arsenic of to her nipples whilst breast feeding.

Today we often see that a persons need to feed his or her drug addiction being the excuse given for many crimes. In the last century the need for men to feed often large families would have made them desperate enough to offend. Poverty is and always will be an undesirable situation and our village has often known it's presence. In the early 1830`s riotous conditions came to Aldbourne when many men from the county "called" on farms. A mob of men smashed at least seven farm machines and then demanded that farmers gave them a sovereign for each machine they had smashed. The names of the Aldbourne farmers who suffered are known to us, they being George and Richard Church, Broome Witts, Thomas Gould and John Brown. On their arrival toe the village the men were met with the news that the counties Yeomenry were on their way to stop them but they still continued till they had done what they had came for. Afterwards they dispersed into the surrounding countryside and villages but they were soon found and many arrests followed. Local man Thomas Barrett was one of the mob and in an account printed in 1890 in the Gospel Standard, a publication of the Baptist church he described his participation on that day.

The first legal "afternoon" marriage did not take place here till 1888 but that didn't stop one young couple. It was in 1860 that a young man and lady (they are not named) knocked on our curate's door. They asked him if he would be good enough to marry them that very day. Although neither could pay him for his services, he did as they requested. Imagine the relief for our young newlyweds as the very next day the young wife gave birth (pew). The young husband's income is quoted as being 5/- a week and with an 8lb loaf of bread (yes 8lb) costing 1/5d at a bakery in Ramsbury that same year we can well see how difficult it must have been for men to keep their families fed and clothed. With families large, and without TV etc. to pass the time away, folks just had to amuse and entertain themselves. This in itself probably caused large families! While we are on the subject of large families I must tell you of the announcement in 1864 that a lady of Aldbourne had just "presented her lord her 20th child"!

The Temperance movement that tried to oversee life in the two villages of Gt. Bedwyn and Ramsbury never took off with any real success here though many gave it their support. It would seem that drunkenness was never a major problem here, not that we didn't have any disorderly episodes ever, simply very few. In 1868 a writer stated that there was "not a house in the whole district better conducted than the

Crown”, Gould was the then landlord. In 1883 a vote was taken here on whether to allow Sunday opening or not. It was not a close run thing and with 233 of the 234 voting slips being returned it was obviously a near to the heart felt affair. Oh! you want to know the result? sorry, well 232 voted yes to allow it and one voted to be neutral. If you feel the need to do more research on this you will find that many brass band’s have been involved in the Temperance movement.

One of the saddest stories to be found concerning our Victorian village, is one of immense tragedy. At best it show’s us just what men had to do to enable them to feed their families. Benefit of sorts was available to prevent a family from starving, but men often proud, would not ask lightly for “parish relief” and so any work would be accepted to enable them to hold their heads up high. The men who had been arrested here in 1830 were very concerned with the way that farm machinery was ousting them off the land and out of their jobs. Farms that had once employed many were now employing many less and these men were really concerned about their ability to provide, particularly in the cold winter months.

One such morning in January 1890, found Aldbourne man William Stacey, one of his young sons and another youth arriving at farm buildings that once stood at Little Down in Baydon. William had been asked to clean out a well for a farmer called Pembroke and so he had taken the two boys to help him. This was a job for experienced men only but times were not good and being winter, work was, as often as not very thin on the ground. Men had struggled for years as by 1870 the winter work of willowing the corn crop had been mechanised by as much as 80%. Before descending into the well, William had tested for the presence of “damps” (known as carbonic acid, this gas is often found in mines, wells etc.). By throwing a bundle of burning straw down the 150 foot (50 metres) deep shaft, he thought it would show him if it was OK to descend its depths or not, but unknown to him the straw had given a false reading. The speed of the falling bundle of straw had dragged down with it sufficient oxygen to keep it alight. If he had lowered a lighted candle slowly (as recommended by a writer to the paper a couple of weeks later) it would have been snuffed out if it had passed through a problem area, but instead the bundle of straw had stayed alight until it was doused by the water. Happy that things were OK, William had the two boys lower him until he was a good way down the well. William then shouted to the surface that he thought he sensed the presence of damp and so had himself brought back up. He tested again and William even questioned after his own safety but anyway he decided to descend for the second time, but yet again he shouted to be hauled back up to the surface.

You will have by now probably made a guess at what happenings are to come next and most of you will be correct in your thoughts. If only William had heeded his own words of warning for if he had I would not be telling you this story now, for within the next few minutes William would be dead.

For the third time he was lowered down into the darkness only this occasion he reached somewhere near the level of the water. Straining to breath, he shouted in panic for the boys to pull him up but he was quickly overcome by the airless conditions, and as he had not tied himself on, fell off his wooden seat into the water and drowned.

The young boys up top, on realising that William was in serious trouble shouted and called for help. William Herring, an Aldbourne shepherd who was working closeby heard their cries and rushing to their aid had them lower him down in order to save him. William Herring never stood a chance either for he too was overcome and so perished the two men. The two bodies were recovered some hours later by grappling hooks and the two doctors, Burman and Connor that were called to the scene, pronounced them both dead.

Twenty three year old William Herring had only been wed to Lucy Coxhead for six months. She had been widowed before and was now left alone again to bring up her newly born baby and her two other children. William Stacey also left Ruth his wife and their six children and so the next time you walk past the Methodist chapel you may like to pause to read the stone laid in the front wall of the present youth centre in memory of them both.

Even with all the hardships of life to contend with, in 1867 our villagers were still able to find the will to raise money for the renovation of St Michael's church. It cost the village the then huge sum of £2,000 and it's at this point I return to what is after all the main subject of this work the band. To put the forming of a band into perspective in 1887 it was announced that the town of Newbury was to attempt to create a band of its own and the estimated cost for the quoted number of 28 bandsmen was £100, plus a further £100, for uniforms, etc. To enable them to do the same today I estimate this cost would now be some c£100,000! The expense of kiting out our early band was not of that magnitude as the reports and photo's that were taken in those early years show a much smaller number of approximately ten to twelve members, but still a tidy sum of money still had to be found.

I trust that these snippets from the past has helped you to visualise the life to be had here. The paintings of past lives on the TV or cinema screens frequently show too rosy a scene. Believe me when I say things could be hard, they could be, damned hard! Aldbourne man Reg Penny once wrote "low wages and hard living but contented happy families". Possibly they were, as having said all of this, times could also be good and I often wonder if the life to be had then was more rewarding than possibly that of today for the individual had little to tempt them into the extravagance of doing nothing and lots of time to participate in as many of the village activities as he or she saw fit or were able to. Self development was not impeded by things like mundane TV programs, videos or the playing of pointless computer games or internet surfing. Another challenge for our children is the amount of homework they are now required to do in order to achieve later in life, things are very different now even if compared to only thirty years ago. Time really is too precious to waste.

I hope that this publication is readable to both none Aldbourne villagers and none bandsmen alike as I have tried very hard not to make it a restrictive read. The history of the village of Aldbourne is really not all that different to any other village in Britain and most of you will have some semblance of what has already been said but for those of you who know little or even less of the richness of Britain's brass banding movement, here is just a very short account of its history.

There are many different reasons that "bands" came into being but many resulted because of a Parliamentary Act passed during the reign of Elizabeth I. It classed all wandering peoples as "rogues and vagabonds" this included wandering minstrels and

the policing of this act forced those ambulant musicians to stop and settle down. It was those wanderings that would have brought any new songs, instrumental and vocal, but probably of most importance and certainly of more interest to all villagers was the national and even international news that was forthcoming, even if it was out of date, it was still welcomed. Some town bands were established when these musicians were forced to get together in order to survive and the resulting groups were made up of all kinds of different types and combinations of string, reed and brass instrumentation.

Before the mid 1600`s, the music in British churches was generally provided by organs, but these instruments had then been forbidden by Puritan churchgoers and a decree of 1644 demanded that all organs and frames should be taken out and defaced. A request by the churches for help in replacing these now defunct instruments was answered by village singers who formed either or both white robed choirs or orchestras. I would guess that being asked to take part in another form of musical expression or to join in another outlet to show off their musical talents would without doubt have also appealed to many but by the middle of the nineteenth century most of these orchestras and bands had been removed as the then church hierarchy decided that neither of these forms were any longer an acceptable type of religious accompaniment and that organs and their like were then more fitting. An 1881 MT article stated that the rector of Cherhill “some thirty years since, banished the old string orchestra from the church services”. The report also tells that it had become extremely common to find congregations struggling to perform often complex anthems. It would take more than just a few words here to explain the why’s and wherefore’s behind all this so I leave you to do your own research if you have the need to know more.

The majority of Britain’s churches had minstrel galleries but these were nigh on all dismantled when it became the fashion to “renovate” during the last century. Believe it or not it would appear that our own church had two as an entry in the churchwarden account books dated Nov 5th 1756 stated that Thomas Strong paid for seats to be added to the “upper gallery”. These “unsightly galleries and the space beneath them” was removed during the restoration of 1865. As far as I can ascertain we had two situated in the West window and its opening up must have made as big an impression in 1865 as did the removal of the organ pipes in 1996. The purging of the orchestra also meant the demise of the church choir. An 1895 obituary for villager Thomas Haines told of his conversion from the C of E to the Wesleyen Methodists due to the removal of the “singing gallery” as he had still wanted to sing in a choir and only they were able to provide this in their act of worship.

In general, all over the country and for various reasons, church orchestras had their string instruments removed from their ensembles and so the military style of wind band was born. Eventually reed instruments disappeared so bringing about an all brass combination. Brass band contests started by the mid nineteenth century and by 1900 they were enormous affairs with many being held all over the land. The public response was as big as anything that had ever happened at any time, with thousands attending concerts and contests. When the giants of the brass band movement such as the Munn and Felton band of Kettering returned home after a victory, thousands went out to welcome them. It was reminiscent of football crowds welcoming home their winning team after a Wembley final and would have been typical all over the country. By the seventies however a slump had set in and at the time of writing the

banding world is I believe still in decline or at best this decline has levelled off. Will the banding world continue to live or will it fade away? Without painting too gloomy a picture I think it is doubtful that we will ever return to the like of the old days and that it will decline even further but I doubt that it will ever die completely, it would be a most tragic loss to the British way of life if it was allowed to do so.

In 1929 when asked why Aldbourne was so famous, a young lad replied because “all were borne there” (think about it). But Aldbourne has to have been THE or at least one of the most celebrated villages in Wiltshire, for many is the time that it has been host to a camera or microphone. From the making of a Dr Who story in 1971 or the village documentary, a pop video or just the filming of the church bells, cameras have often rolled. One Christmas morning the sound of our church bells was even broadcast live to the nation and as if to crown all this our village has even witnessed the rise of television's most beloved children's celebrity ever, Johnny Morris, and if you haven't as yet read his biography I suggest that once you have finished reading this, you do.

Being on the way to nowhere and with no main thoroughfare to bring us any passing wealth as such, our predecessors had to be diligent in the finding for themselves of a living and therefore several notable industries have come and gone leaving little or more often nothing in the way of evidence of their existence. Rabbits were probably the first major village export with many ending up in the markets of London but little, if anything survives of that animal husbandry apart from the odd mark or two in the countryside and a few copper monetary tokens that were issued in 1666 by warrener John Adee.

The fustian trade that was probably introduced by the Witts family, has left a building that once produced that cotton cloth. It still stands, albeit one storey less in height, in South Street behind Yew Tree House. Willow weaving was once a very profitable way of earning a living but you must not confuse that craft with the more rural art of basket making. Willow weaving was of a much finer quality with the willow being sliced into very fine strips indeed, bleached and then woven to produce a flat sheet which was then used for hat construction. In 1874 William Pizzie died and the MT report of his death says that he was the bringer of the “staple trade” of willow weaving to our village. True or not in 1887 a letter written by Henry Palmer told of the depressed state of Aldbournes willow trade. Henry was both farmer and willow weaver who operated from Neal's farm in South street. His letter complained that the influx of cheap foreign products was destroying his business and that it would soon mean he would not be able to provide his men and women with work. His letter may well indicate the coming of the end of the willow weaving industry. Another letter written that same year by John Orchard told of his concern for his own chair and table business though his fears were to be unfounded as his son took over and still continued well into the 1920's. It is unknown if any of these products still survive, as they don't have “made in Aldbourne” stamped on them it really is very difficult or almost impossible to tell if an item was made here or not.

Bells of course were cast here for more than two hundred years and it must be this industry that Aldbourne is most famed for. Today there is nothing to be seen of any foundry buildings as such but at least many of the bells still survive. Not only were large church bells cast but quite small ones and some of these smaller examples can be found in village homes today.

Despite though the successes and subsequent failures of all of these village businesses, the name of Aldbourne has been spread more widely than all of these put together by yet another of our great village institutions. Nothing spreads the reputation of any entity quicker than success, and nothing has been more successful than our brass band. It's without question that it put the name of Aldbourne on the map! Time was that the band WAS Aldbourne as it was once the singularly most proliferant organisation of our village. Locally this is displayed by the many reports printed in the MT that are either about or include mention of our band, the only other regular reports are of our church and its bell ringers, the two Methodist chapels and our once "unstoppable" football team. Bandsmen also frequently turn up regularly in these other village stories showing us that if you were involved in village life at all you were likely to be involved completely. Organisations such as the three churches, fire brigade, parish council, bellringers, football team, or the many village benefit clubs are typical of such fraternities that our bandsmen not only turn up being members of, but often as not helping to run as committee members as well.

During the last century, and well into this, any musical education being taught in our "National School" (built c1858) would alas have been of a very basic nature. Only bare essentials were taught and musically at best the tonic solfa and perhaps a few "traditional" songs. Our village youth would leave school to start work at the age of 12 and the village census returns of the last century show this well with most occupations being listed as "agricultural labourers". Its also interesting to see the amount of females who too list themselves under this occupation. Our lads would have had very little or at best quite poor tuition in any instrumental techniques and I cringe just imagining what the musical groups of various forms that we have had here in Aldbourne actually sounded like. We have had more than one musical group here over the last two hundred odd years and I hope to acquaint you with them as we pass on this, our journey through time.

I mention to you once more that until more recent times the fairer sex of our country were considered to be very much second class and were rarely allowed to mix as they do today in the world of the men. A report of an 1886 political meeting held here told of an appeal for votes by Mr W.H.Long MP to the "loyal men of Aldbourne" as there was of course still a long wait for the ladies to receive their right of suffrage. Despite this none involvement as playing members of our band most would have been able to play the many various instruments such as piano, cello or violin. Being taught at home would have been the norm and to break into song was course second nature to both sexes with everyone having their own party pieces that they could perform and we would often find ladies taking part in band and village entertainments. Any ability to play more than one instrument often included bandsmen and an example of this expertise is Mr Albert Stacey, a member of the early part of this century, he played not only the euphonium but the piccolo, violin and the piano as well.

It was in the year 1816 that the Peter Wharton Band was formed in the Yorkshire village of Queensbury, later it became known as the world famous John Foster and Sons "Black Dyke Mills Band". In 1818, Cleggs Reed Band was formed and they later became the Besses O` th` Barn Band. These two were to become all brass by the 1850,s whilst our own band was still using clarinet's until well into this century. I don't intend to get too deep into the history of the brass band movement (there are several authors more qualified than me that have already done so) but I want to put

our own village band into perspective with the other bands in the country. Although we have had many successful times in the past we cannot even begin to compare with the great`s of the movement such as the Brighthouse and Rastrick or Black Dyke Mills bands though we do however compare with the rest of the country`s somewhat less successful bands. For many years we were always the equal and many times the better of the likes of Hanwell or Luton of London, Bodmin or St Dennis from Cornwall, Cinderford or Yorkly Onward from the Forest of Dean, Cable and Wireless, John Dickenson, Pressed Steel Fisher or the Morris Motor bands from Oxford and even the Desford Colliery Band are just a few of the works sponsored bands we once often beat.

There are few bands in the West of the country that have gone from a small musical group to become a feared adversary on the contest stage and the only other Wiltshire band with a history that might sound similar to ours is that of the village of Woodfalls near Salisbury. They also have been of great credit to the banding scene for many years but to have only two bands in the whole of the county to not only rise above the others but to stay as long as we have amongst the top of southern bands is a pitiful amount when you think that just about every village and town in the country once had a band of one sort or another. Our village band was not unique to this area nor was it the first one either. Ramsbury`s village band was already in existence by 1859 and it appears to have still been functioning until 1911, in fact Ramsbury once boasted three brass bands! Thomas Edwin Hobbs formed a methodist band in 1900 and with a Salvation army band as well all three operated at the same time from 1900 until 1911. The SA band seems to have continued until at least 1935.

The midpoint of the nineteenth century saw throughout the country brass and military bands appearing at a breakneck speed. The country experienced a musical explosion, the like it had never seen before and most certainly never will see again. With few communities being able to claim not having a band this must give us some idea of just how big a business the banding world has been. Lets take look around our immediate area at the bands of various types that are found mentioned in our local paper. I`ve drawn a circle that stretches only twenty odd miles out from Aldbourne, though the MT has a geographical void that stretches from Newbury through to Wantage and Faringdon around to Cirencester, their news seems to have taken care of by Swindon`s Evening Ad. From the first issue of the Marlborough Times in 1859 till the outbreak of the second world war, the following have all been found mentioned at least once within its pages.

- Avebury brass
- Alton Barnes brass
- Amesbury Comrades brass
- Bishopstone brass
- Burbage brass
- Beechingstoke brass
- Blunsdon brass
- Broad Somerford brass
- Childrey brass
- Chilton Foliat drum and fife/military
- Cricklade brass
- Calne rifle corps/Town brass
- Chippenham Rifle Corps/Town brass

- Chiseldon brass/drum and fife, string
- Cold Ash brass
- Crookham drum and fife
- Charlton brass
- Devizes rifle corps/Town brass
- Durrington brass
- East Woodhay brass
- Enborne brass
- Easton Royale brass
- Everliegh brass
- Froxfield drum and fife
- Fighledene brass
- Fairford brass
- Faringham brass
- Great Bedwyn brass x2/drum and fife
- Hungerford brass
- Highworth brass
- Inkpen Temperance/Imperial brass/United Silver
- Kingstone Lisle brass
- Kintbury Temperance brass
- Kennet Vale brass
- Lambourn brass/drum and fife Temperance
- Leckhamstead Thicket Methodist brass
- Lavington brass
- Lockeridge brass
- Marlborough Dismounted Yeomenry Rifle Corps/Prince of Wales Own Yeomenry Royal Wiltshire/Town brass/Kaffir Bugle/Coronation
- Market Lavington brass
- Newbury Town brass/Prize Temperance/South Berks Brewery
- Netheravon brass
- Oare drum and fife/Overton brass/Westlyn Mission brass,
- Pewsey brass/Kings corner/Rifle Yeomenry, Purton brass
- Plaistow Green brass
- Pottern Temperance brass
- Ramsbury brass/Primitive Methodist brass/Salvation Army/Temperance Drum and Fife/Tea total drum and fife
- Rushall brass/Rushall and Charlton brass
- Shalbourne brass
- Shrivenham brass
- Stratton St Margaret brass
- Shefford Drum and Fife
- Swindon Town/Gorse Hill Wesleyan brass /Military/Prospect/ G.W.R. Staff Association/Old Town S.A./Home Guard/Central Hall Methodist drum and fife/Wills whistle/RAOB/Moredon brass/Wiltshire Highland pipe
- Thatcham brass
- Tidcombe?
- Vale of Pewsey silver
- Wantage brass
- Woodborough Prize brass
- Wanborough brass
- Wickham brass

- Wootton Rivers brass
- Wootton Bassett Drum and Fife/Town brass
- Weston brass
- Woodspeen brass
- Wroughton brass/Methodist Prize brass,

and yes, believe it or not even Beckhampton and Russley both boasted a small orchestra, they did, honestly. Opening a map of our locality will show that we seem to have missed out on the odd one or two communities, Ogbourne St George, Broad Hinton and Shrivenham are but three communities that should surely have had a band of their own but evidently didn't, no mentions of them were found anyway. Suffice it to say that this list is only a minute portion of the total amount of bands that once existed throughout the British Isles. The one area that seems to have had plenty of brass bands is that that of Pewsey through to Devizes, but with the sheer amount of communities present there no wonder.

In a "Brass Band News" article written in the fifties our band is described as "a giant of pre-war days", and so it was in this part of the country. Nobody, unless they were kidding themselves, wrote off the Aldbourne Band at any contest EVER! We were never a non runner and it became the expected thing for us to win! Expected not only by us but by our rivals as well! A 1927 report said that "few villages could boast such an honour except perhaps one or two in Yorkshire". Though perhaps a trifle over stated, this comment really does describe the respect that folk once held for our band. When arriving at contests the first thing to be done is to buy a programme and take a look see at who are in the competition. Was Aldbourne there that day?, if so conductors knew that if they were going to win they had us to beat first! The abilities of our players over the last few years has always been unquestionably of a high standard and this perhaps stems from our ancestors. In a press statement in 1950, Tommy Liddiard, a member for fifty years, claimed that "as 21 of the 28 players in the band were descendants of the first band, that musicians were born and not made" and that the gift "has been handed down family to family and we have got it here in the band today". I like to think he was right and that in his words there is still an element of truth. Even now, though the majority of the band come from "foreign" parts, the core of the players are still Aldbourne trained if not Aldbourne born and bred. Mores the times I have heard say that "its not like it used to be when our band was made up of "village" people only". Well many years have passed since the "rot" set in as early as 1922 we had a "NON villager" as a member. Albert Gregory came from Hungerford to work at Smiths farm in West Street as a shepherd but its well to remember that if these "outsiders" hadn't come to play with us we probably wouldn't have had the calibre of band that we have all enjoyed listening to over the decades.

Chapter 2: The Churchwarden Account Books

Let's now take a look at the earliest surviving documentation that makes mention of any of Aldbourne's musicians. To do so we must view the churchwarden accounts that are now stored in Trowbridge, the two books can be seen in the archive department by anyone, anytime. The first entry that interests us was made 1807 and it shows that the church had embraced a musical group, or what it has since become known as the orchestra, and were providing it with instruments for the use in services.

Here is a list of all the relevant entries found in those account books:

- 1807 "paid Thos Palmer for the claret £2-12-06"
- 1810 "James Brigman strings base 8s "
- 1811 "paid James Brigman for base £3-15-00 "
- 1811 "Pd Mr Bridgeman for a bassoon for the use of the parish £3-3-0"
- 1813 "Mr Palmer,s bill new clarionet & reeds £2-13-00 "
- 1816 "J Bridgeman 10-6d for bassville
"James Brigman for base 11s "
"James Brigman for a base last year 14-6d "
- 1817 "James Brigman,s bill for basevile 10-6d "
- 1818 "James brigman for base £1-00-00 "
- 1820 "James Brigman for the base 12s "
- 1821 "Mr Hill for the new base £5-10-00 "
- 1822 "reeds for clarinett 3s "

It is also interesting to note that the last of the village bell founders, James Bridgman, was a member of this orchestra and it would appear that he played a prominent roll in it. Several entries concerning him are to be seen, specially where the maintenance of the string bass was concerned, he must have played it. Although we don't know the name of the leader of the group it may well have been him. Like his father John, James had worked in the bell foundry for the Wells family and had gone to London when the business had transferred there after the death of James Wells and then subsequent bankruptcy of the business in 1827. Not being happy to remain in London he returned a few years later and cast bells in his own name. His wife Elizabeth did much work encouraging education for village children, the 1841 census shows their address as being in "Baydon Street". Bridgeman married in 1803 to Mary Brind d 1854 census of 1841 says her name is Elizabeth, how come?

1803 JAMES BRIDGMAN m MARY BRIND b 1780 d 1 oct 1854

JAMES BRIDGEMAN 1782- d13 sept 1858 WORKING LIFE=1828-1851.

We can see then that 1807 is the earliest mention of this orchestra but that sometime after 1823 it would appear it had gone. It had in fact been made outcast and ordered to be disbanded (more concerning this shortly) but we can probably presume however that this orchestra continued to get together after 1823 for the odd village function, we will probably never know as there are no surviving written records.known of that time.

The next “known” group of musicians did not make an appearance for many years, thirty seven to be precise, but it possible that some of the next personel were past members of the first orchestra. The Aldbourne “amateur flute band” seems to have been very short lived as only three engagements were found concerning them. They performed in Ramsbury during June 1860 for the “Bell Inn Union society AGM” and shortly afterwards they played for the “Aldbourn Club” performing “their most popular airs”. Finally in the August of that year they accompanied a party of villagers up to Marridge Hill for a “tea party” where after games of cricket and other jollity’s they again played their “most popular airs”. The flute band is never again mentioned after 1860 and so we must presume that shortly after these final three engagements it discontinued.

Within the pages of the churchwarden accounts for 1827 there is a record of an appeal to raise funds for the purchase of an organ, the appeal raised the sum of £82 - 14 - 6d. Along side this list of subscribers is an amusing entry telling, in unduly large capital letters, that “TBM Baskerville, lord of this manor, promised to give five pounds towards the purchase of the organ and when called upon for the money forfeited his word and did not give anything”. The entry is signed by Richard Church and George Witts the churchwardens who were clearly very angry with Baskerville (who for some unknown reason renegaded on his promise) and were not afraid to tell the other villagers of their indignation. This list of donors and amounts given include an individual named Richard Brown Bunce who had given the sum of 2/6d. Here then is the first mention of the man I can definitely declare “Founded” the Aldbourne band.

Richard Brown Bunce, baptised 6th of June 1808, was the sixth child born to John and Anne Bunce. Anne was a daughter of Mark and Elizabeth Brown and it would seem that she made certain Richard received a good education for although destined to become a humble village carpenter he did become a most respected villager and a very able musician. The Bunces farmed in Lottage road for over one hundred years and a barn that stood till recently on the site of the bungalow that stands to the right of the entrance to Lottage Way, was known as Bunces barn and was part of their farm complex and possibly Foundry cottage was their home.

In 1859 he was living at 14 the Green, in fact an advert announcing that the property was to be auctioned told that he was the then occupier. It was described as having a walled garden, a pig sty and 30ft long carpenters shop where he practised his art of “carpentering”, the workshop was still standing in 1999. If the Bunce family did move they did not go far as the 1861 census shows that they were still living on the Green so it’s possible that Richard in fact bought the property. Richard may have worked along side his brother John, also a carpenter and wheelwright, and his business may have included his father John and Thomas his uncle as they were also both carpenters, a family trade obviously. We know that one set of his great grandparents were married at Chute and that his great uncle Thomas Bunce, a warrener, willed Richard’s father the tenancy of both the Aldbourne and Liddington Warren Farms.

On January 18th 1832 Richard married Sarah Stephens of Ramsbury. She was three years older than him and incidentally their marriage took place in Aldbourne and not as you would expect in the brides home. Her death in 1843 left Richard to rear their six children alone but soon after, in 1845, he married Sarah Ann Turner of Liddiard Millicent. She provided him with a further seven children, though the two girls that

were had both been named Ellen died in infancy. The names of his surviving children were George, Richard, Sarah, Rachel, Frances, Elizabeth, Marraine, Isabella, Emily. Charlotte and Alethea.

Richard was heavily involved with church affairs as he was not only the church organist from 1842 to 1860 but also sexton from 1836 to 1860. The warden accounts show annual payments for his work as organist, £6-00 in 1844 to £8-00 in 1854, I leave you to work out any rate of inflation. In 1861 he was paid £3-10-00 for attending the clock and chimes and as a village tradesman he was often asked to carry out remedial work on the church and many of the receipts he gave for payment still survive. A busy man then, he also found time to enumerate the 1841, 51 and 61 census's. Richard, like his father, also attended to the fire engines, their upkeep was like many village affairs looked after by the Church, and an entry of 1838 shows a payment to Richard of £1-10-9d.

In 1862 he was involved in extinguishing a large fire that had occurred at North Farm, then owned by Thomas Chandler and later he helped in the distribution of payment to those who had helped in its dousing, the disbursement was made by the Royale Exchange Insurance Company. He was also vice-chairman of the "Aldbourne Club", one of several benefit societies that once existed. In 1860 a Mr Luke replaced Bunce as the church organist for Richard had been bestowed with the task of creating Aldbourne's most celebrated entity for it was in the September of 1860 that Richard Brown Bunce formed the Aldbourne band, let me explain the events that brought this about.

The summer of 1859 witnessed a panic that gripped the whole of our country. French armies, fresh from victories in Austria, were thought to be preparing for an invasion of Britain and so the ensuing consternation brought about a formation of literally hundreds of volunteer forces. By 1860 thousands of men had rushed to enrol into these "private" armies and so locally, throughout the later part of 1859 and the early months of 1860, local towns like Marlborough, Calne, Swindon, Wootton Bassett, and Devizes etc. had duly formed their own rifle corps, many "complete with bands". The men of Aldbourne were not going to be left out of all this and a letter printed in the MT and dated Saturday, September 1st 1860, tells all.

"The inhabitants of the secluded, though not less important village of Aldbourne, anxious not to be left behind the more populous towns in the county, in loyalty to their Queen and country have decided on joining with the surrounding villages for the purpose of forming a rifle corps and as an adjunct to the same have taken the necessary steps for the formation of a brass band, towards which, we are happy to hear some of the principle inhabitants have subscribed handsomely. The list is headed by the Rev G.P. Cleather, F. Neate, T. Chandler and others. The band will be under the tuition of Mr Richard Brown Bunce, by whom as bandmaster any subscriptions or contributions will be received".

This letter concluded with the mention the names of two members of Bunce's band, they being J Palmer jnr, treasurer and J Smith, secretary. I must point out that all this must then mean that although the church had an orchestra the Aldbourne band did NOT originate directly as a continuance of it as had been previously believed. In 1827 that orchestra had been replaced by an organ and by 1860 many of the men

who had been members would, even if still alive, I believe have been very unlikely to have taken any active interest in Bunce's band.

In 1860 Bunce also took over as agent for the MT meaning that he not only the vended the paper on Saturday evenings at five o'clock but fortunately for us also acted as the village newspaper correspondent as well and its very interesting to see how quick he was to promote not only his village but of more interest for us his band, note how he was not adverse to any self promotion as well. All was quiet for the next six months with no band reports until April 20 1861 when a report told of the death of a young man. Bunce had replaced William Sheppard, a village baker and grocer as correspondent and it was his 24 year old son William who had died. William's funeral was attended by many villagers and appears to have been a very sad affair.

"ON SUNDAY LAST THE FUNERAL OF A YOUNG MAN IN THIS VILLAGE named William Sheppard. The church yard was filled by a very large number of spectators, chiefly young persons, many of whom could not forbear shedding the tear of sympathy. The deceased young man was very much beloved by all his companions. he was first, with Mr Bunce, organist of this village, to establish the band now in operation here. His illness has been of seventeen months duration, during which time his bodily and mental sufferings have been great, but death was to him no king of terrors, for he died rejoicing in Christ"

This report was of course written by Bunce himself and the following week an epistle was also printed.

" Having read in your last weeks impression a short account of the funeral of the late lamented W.Sheppard jun, allow me to add not only was he the first to co operate with me in the formation of the band, but a most useful, efficient and active member, as well as a great help in writing copies for and aiding in instructing the junior pupils. A few years back he was heavily afflicted, and confined to his room for twenty months, both the former and latter illness he bore with exemplary and Christian fortitude. A tear of sympathy (as observed) was general, and only interrupted by the officiating clergyman stopping short the funeral service at the grave, and refusing to proceed until a young man present uncovered his head. The deceased was an amiable and kind companion, an affectionate friend, and truly regretted by all that knew him, and by none more than your obedient servant "

Richard Brown Bunce, bandmaster

William Sheppard was the Aldbourne bands very first member, a detail I did not ever expect to discover. We move on to August 1861 for the first written report of the bands very first public engagement.

" A picnic party on Tuesday last, proceeded from this place, headed by the Aldbourne Brass Band under the able leadership of Richard Brown Bunce, assisted by Messrs Palmer, Smith to Mrs Sheppards meadow "

Incidentally Mrs Mallet of the Crown did the catering and I believe the meadow was land that is now occupied by the tennis club in Castle st. The next engagement was for the Aldbourne Friendly Societies annual festival parade. The Aldbourne branch,

formed in 1837, was titled as the Aldbourne Chase Court No 6336 and as such was for many years the most important of all the village welfare societies.

November 3rd 1861 marked a very special occasion for the band and a letter printed tells us that

“The patron of the band F.W.Neate esq. has this week very handsome presented every member of the band with an entire new costume in style imitating the rifle corps. This liberal act is much appreciated by the recipients “

Neate is a name of long association with our village, several being remembered on memorials in the church. AW Neate of Newbury owned land that he rented out but like many other persons little of Francis Neate is known. He is mentioned in the warden account books and in the years 1862 to 1866, it is written that both he and the Rev John Parker Cleather paid for the services of Bunce as organist. There were only two mentions of our rifle corps to be found so we must presume that this military force faded away as quickly as the threat of invasion did.

Strangely three years were to pass before the next mention appeared when on the 9th April 1864 the band played at “Mr&Mrs Jerome Lionel`s entertainment”, Aldbourne band present under the able leadership of Mr Bunce, bandmaster”.



1861

Lionel, an American “now adjourning at Aldbourne”, was probably responsible for the earliest photograph as in 1861 he could be found advertising his business in Marlborough of “ambrotype” photography and although its difficulty to confirm that

the first plate this the photograph probably does date from this time. Tommy Liddiard stated in 1950 that "Fox Talbot himself" took a photo of the band, however I think that Tommy was being slightly enthusiastic with his comments and that Jerome was probably the one responsible. If you still think 1860 a very early date for a photograph the 1864 MT carries adverts placed by G.Jones, another photographic artist of Marlborough.

Sadly the whereabouts of the original photograph is unknown to us, it must be doubtful it still survives at all, but this copy was found in a collection of memorabilia that once belonged to Bob Barnes, a more recent bandmaster and I believe it to be of Richard Bunce's 1861 rifle corps band in their new uniform. The instrumental line up is not easy to define but there appears to be the following: one baritone, five cornets, two clarinets, one bass drum, two trombones and an ophicleide. The chap third from the left appears to have a cornet tucked under his arm but is also holding a clarinet, note that two of the cornets appear to be of the helical type. If one of these men is Bunce then it must be the clarinet player to the left of centre as this character looks to be the only one old enough to be him. (I like to think it is Bunce anyhow). Sadly another early photo once existed and was lent out by its owner, John Fisher, but it was never returned and for us yet another slice of the bands history has disappeared?

No reports in 1865 but 1866 saw them playing at a ploughing match at Lambourn Woodlands. Aldbourne's Friendly Society parade was enlivened by "well known strains" and the next time they appeared in public seems to have been at a village tea meeting.

"Mr Richard Brown Bunce attended with his band, which took of course a prominent part throughout the evening, and by their efficient aid many a merry dance in which rich and poor alike adjoined, was brought to a happy termination".

There then followed another three year gap with again no mention of any band activities until 1869 when reports tell that they played at a ploughing match at Ramsbury, an Ancient Order of Foresters "Court Crowood" do complete with a procession and then next at Liddington's Friendly Society event when "melodious strains did much to promote the enjoyment" of the day.

Bunces band were also included in a private function given by Chandler of North farm when after a dinner party he had laid on for his farm workers, they led a procession from the "Crown Commercial Inn" up to the Green. Three barrels of beer, paid for by Chandler was distributed to the waiting two or three hundred or so farm labourers that had gathered there. Little relaxation was to be had and the word holiday was rarely used so no wonder so many men jumped at the chance for a bit of fun and a free glass of beer, One is left to ponder on just where did they get all those glasses from? The 1868 Friendly Society parade report recorded that "the farm labourer has but few holidays and so looks forward to club day". Finally that year the band were involved in a village ploughing match when the 500 odd "visitors and onlookers" were escorted by the band out to fields in Lottage Road.

For ten years Bunce led his band until the day he suffered a most terrible accident. It too is to be found documented in the MT and is described in some detail.

23rd June 1870

Fatal accident

“A sad calamity has occurred of Mr Richard Brown Bunce, an old inhabitant. He was repairing a cistern at the top of Mr Churches house when a rotten rafter gave way, and he fell a distance of 25 feet. After lingering a fortnight, Mr Bunce died from the effects of internal injuries received on Friday last leaving a widow and 11 children to mourn their loss”

There is a problem with where this accident actually happened but It would appear that of all the spots to choose to fall through a ceiling he had fell from above the stair well of the Old Rectory. Thomas Arthur Palmer told us this in a letter to our parish magazine, but in the report it states that it occurred in Mr Church’s house. Searching through the census lists we see that a Mr Church lived in West street and not in the Old Rectory but as no house in West street has anything like a 25ft ceiling, this accident could not have happened there. One theory is that the printer who was setting the type face and reading from a hand written letter miss read the word THE for MR. If this is correct the sentence would have read “the churches house” (i.e. the Rectory) and not “Mr Churches house”. This theory contains one little glitch and that is that the same report in the Swindon Advertiser quotes the very same wording and lets face it, the chances of the same mistake being made by two different printers are small to the extreme, so I can only presume that the only other answer is that the writer of the latter actually wrote it down wrong in the first place. As this my only concern of accuracy, does it really matter if we don’t know the truth? Well the course of history won’t change too much if we don’t and this event must join the other few that we may never know all about. Richard is buried with his first wife at the rear of the church under the wall of the Court House along side his parents and his headstone is very easily found.

The impact of Bunce’s death was to be very disastrous indeed and for the band a most monumental calamity. Thomas Arthur Palmer, in his 1950’s letter stated that the band probably “collapsed” after Bunce’s death. A leader would certainly have been most necessary and his replacement was a very essential and urgent matter. The band was not able to replace Bunce and so and it would seem quite definite that it did cease. This demise is surely confirmed with the absence of any mention of the Aldbourne band in any MT reports for many years to come.

Any musical events that did occur here during this absence were also rare. In 1870 the Ramsbury Choral Society performed in our National school room and in 1871 a Mr J Hollaway played “cornet solos at a tea given for the young hand bell ringers” at the Mason’s Arms. This Mr Holloway must have been a local bandsman, if not from Aldbourne (he is not to be found in any Aldbourne census list), from Bishopstone, Wanborough or somewhere equally close. The reason for his presence as a cornet player at this function is also unknown.

In 1876 there was a return visit of the “Ramsbury Choral Society”. The report stated that “It’s a long time since this village has been able to boast of having anything in the shape of a concert in the National School Room”. Mention of any bands parading through our streets during this time are also thin on the ground but there are a few to be found. In 1883, 84 and 85, the Aldbourne benefit society used the services of the

Wootton Rivers and Swindon Primitive Methodist bands. Although the Marlborough Times is the most incredible source of information and tells us so very much it sadly does not tell us everything. On this occasion nothing is to be found documented about any band demise and to conclude this moment the use of a little postulation is essential before we move on, lets just recap on what we know so far.

The last mention of the Aldbourne band had last occurred in 1869, the year before Bunce died when it played for Ramsbury's Ancient Order of Foresters and the Liddington Friendly society parade and it was not until 1885, some fifteen years later, that the band re-appeared proper playing in a political parade. Proper? an unexplainable one off appearance happened in 1882 when "the band" played in the friendly society parade. There are no more details on this event to be found anywhere and try as I might I have failed to find any written explanation of this apparent appearance and I feared it might have to remain a mystery forever but I think that I do have the answer but will explain later.

Chapter 3: Joseph Barnes Alder (c. 1884-1888)

This 1885 appearance was found in a report of the visit by the districts Liberal Parliamentary Candidate. It stated that the Aldbourne band headed a procession out towards Preston to “meet the man”. The procession had been oblivious to the fact that the visitor had entered Aldbourne from another direction but word was quickly sent out to the parade and on its return the band “played a lively selection and the National Anthem”. After the meeting that was then held in Henry Palmer’s barn (where Glebe Close now stands) and that was attended by some four hundred villagers, the band then led a procession till they were met by a similar parade from Ramsbury. This was one of two political visitors to our village that year, the second was Walter Long M.P.

The man who had rekindled interest in a band was Joseph Barnes Alder. Joseph was born on the 6th of October 1865 and was one of five boys inherent to Tom and Elizabeth Alder. Tom, an émigré from Ramsbury had married an Aldbourne girl and settled in the second of the Westfield cottages in Castle Street. Tom was a trustee of the West Street chapel and was also one of their Sunday School teachers. What musical talent either of the parents had is unknown but their children had many, the most gifted being Joseph. He is listed in census lists as an agricultural labourer but he also made his living as a hurdlemaker, sheepshearer and smallholder having plots of land in Grasshills and the North Fields.

Joseph married Elizabeth Mary Sims and they lived for a short while with his father and younger brother in the “new cottages” though after they later lived for many years in Box cottage. You know it well, its thatch towers over the Methodist chapel in Lottage Road. They were blessed with three children, one of whom was Reginald. He once won a gold medal for his wonderful singing at the Crystal palace. Joe was to become without question Aldbourne’s most esteemed man of music ever for he dominated around fifty years of this village’s musical events. He was the organist for his chapel and 1923 saw a presentation of an “ebony time piece” for his 40 years of devoted service as both the organist and choirmaster. He was also the natural choice as conductor of the United Methodist choir and he had several successes with them in local competitions. Also a very talented cello player and a prolific arranger and composer, with some of his work being performed as far away as America. All this aptness made him the obvious choice as the organiser of both chapel and village musical events. 1929 saw him being awarded prizes in “Messrs Blackberry’s competition class C”, I wonder if any of his compositions or arrangements still survive? Aldbourne’s Bill Deacon and Nancy Barrett both remembered him well and Bill described him as a very accomplished musician. Bill once lived opposite him and Joe would often call on Bill’s parents to ask if it was possible for “the boy” to help him on his small holding. Like any child, always keen to miss on a day at school, Bill frequently did.



Aldbourn Band, 1885

The c1885 photo shows him with his newly formed band and among its members are his four brothers and we will of course look at them in more depth. Although I made mention of his bands earliest engagements elsewhere the ones that ensued were as follows. In 1886 two parades were led, the first for the Aldbourne Friendly Society parade and the second for a November 5th firework display.

1887 was much busier with involvement in a penny reading concert, the evening consisting of band, songs and of course readings. It was a typical village entertainment but just to add a little snippet of interest that night there was a full moon and the report tells us that its timing was “favourable to those who came a distance”. Next came the Aldbourne and Baydon friendly society parades and Lambourn’s Mutual aid benefit society where the band appeared in “neat uniform” and finally the Queen Victoria jubilee celebration (just how many jubilee’s did that woman have) that was held out in “West street meadow” (now known as Woodleys).

Joseph’s time as bandmaster did not last long and by August 1888 he had departed for the report given on the Benefit club parade stated that “the band discoursed very good music throughout the day under the efficient leadership of Fred Palmer”. It would appear then that Alfred Palmer became the band’s next leader but this is not quite as it initially appears for this was probably a last ditch attempt on Alfred’s part to maintain a band presence. Anyway, it would seem he failed and so for the second time the band once again ceased operations. This turned out to be a privation for the village of seven years but the absence of a band did not stop some of the remaining bandsmen from still playing, if even only sporadically. In a Wesleyan Band of Hope entertainment in 1892 not only did bandsmen Tommy Liddiard and Albert Stacey sing but Tom Stacey and Fred and Tom Brind also played cornet solos.

Joseph was leader till roughly the August of 1888 but what exactly was the cause of his egression? It was prior to Joe's leadership that our village first saw the exodus of families who moved away to find work in London. But grass always looks greener doesn't it? And although Joseph too was one who decided to up and move away he and his family didn't enjoy London. Joe's 1936 newspaper obituary told that he "declined to stay away and soon returned".

In 1921, Sir Felix Pole of Great Bedwyn was made the general manager of the Great Western Railway and his association with our area made it relatively easy for local men to get work on the railway and even during the difficult times of the thirties John Dore, a local Methodist lay preacher also helped some of our villagers find work on the Hungerford line. William Deacon, our medal winning euphonium player of that period was one of the reported "7 fine players" who was forced to move from the village in order to find work due to the depression in the agricultural industry.

What of the other four Alder brothers? All of them moved to the London area at one time or other. Frederick Charles Alder on his departure to London became a painter for the GWR. Musically he played a tuba for the GWR Paddington band and one of his two sons also played in that band in later years. Fred returned here during the latter half of the first war after which he rejoined his native band. He can be seen on the 1922 and 25 photo's stood next to the set of tubular bells. He was a regularly featured playing them and incidentally Fred actually made them, what a talent! After the war he lived in Lottage Road and worked for a local builder as a painter and decorator. Later he ran a wet fish shop in West street for a few years. His claim to fame is that he wrote words to the band's then signature tune, a march entitled "The Good Old Pride of Aldbourne". Members would sing the words and the lower pitched instruments would play the melody, the band were still performing this march at concerts well into the fifties. A man with a jovial disposition, he died in 1928.

James Alder was born 31 January 1861. He married Elizabeth (nee Wherrel) and when he moved to London he found work as a porter and later as an omnibus conductor. They had 7 children, their oldest boy Frederick, also became a bandsman. James did not return till ill health over took him at the young age of 46 and his return c 1905 made his home in West Street.

William Alder too moved away but like his brother Joseph did not choose to stay too long either for he and his wife Martha nee Witts (they married in 1885) had returned before 1891 to live in Baydon Street. William played the trombone and can be seen on the 1885, 1909, 12 and 14 photographs. Petro, for that was the nickname given to him by the young lads of our village on account of the way he pronounced the word petrol was born in 1862 and died in 1932.

Of Archibald little is known. Born in 1877 he was by far the youngest of the five brothers and he too moved to live in London. He married, had a daughter named Millie and just might have become a tenor horn player with the Paddington band. A 1912 report of a visit to our village of that band said that 7 Aldbourne men were then playing with them, "four sons and three grandsons". Who these seven were is not easy to work out but I believe I'm right in thinking that they were Fred Alder on tuba, his son Joe on cornet, Frederick Alder son of James on euphonium, Archibald Alder on tenor horn and the three Barrett brothers, Frank on tuba and John and William both on trombone. It has been said that some of our bandsmen were involved in the

As to why Joseph Barnes Alder did not rebuild his band on his return c1890 or why he had few dealings with them ever again is not known but ill feelings due to desertion and letting the band down must top any list. He had returned after only a short absence but we must conclude that his services were not wanted by the men he had left behind. There were no further instances of a band for six years or so and Aldbourne seems once more to have had to make do with the engagement of bands from elsewhere. I'm positive that if a band had existed during those years it would have been mentioned and the MT agent S.Liddiard, when airing his views in a 1896 report said that we were becoming "quite an unmusical village" so this too reinforces this absence.

Bands were invited and a chronologically ordered list includes the following. For the years 1889 and 1890 no bands are mentioned at all but in 1891 and 1892 the Bishopstone band, led by W Rigley, came. In 1893 the two regimental bands of the 1 ST Durham and Northumberland Fusiliers performed concerts on our village green. In 1895 "the band" is cited in a "cricket club" festival report and in 1896 and 1897 the Inkpen band played in both the hospital parade and flower show. Also in 1897 the Hungerford Town band came for our Rational Sick and Benefit society and in 1898 the Bishopstone band, led on that occasion by a Mr R Retford once more came for the hospital parade and flower show.

Before moving on I want to make one thing perfectly clear. The dozens of village agents who have worked for our local paper have, when writing about their own village events most commonly have written "the vicar" or "the choir" when referring to individuals or groups that belong to their particular village. Most visiting dignitaries are recognised as such and so the 1895 reference to "the band" must refer to one that belonged to Aldbourne. If I'm right, and I am 100% sure I am, it must mean then that our band re-existed in 1895.

I did say earlier that the history of our band was not boring didn't I?

Chapter 4: The Stacey Connection

Edward Stacey (c. 1895-1898)

I again make reference to the letter written by Thomas Arthur Palmer in that he stated that Edward Stacey established a small orchestra in the final years of the nineteenth century. Arthur may have been misled by whoever told him as there are no mentions to be found in the MT of either Edward Stacey being connected to the band or of any orchestra. If an orchestra did exist it certainly was never mentioned (as such) but usually there is no smoke without fire and I believe that Edward did indeed form or at least lead a group that is described as “the band” in not only the 1895 report but possibly the 1882 report as well. Let me tell you what makes me think this.

It may well be that a small orchestra had been formed of brass, reed and string players, members of JB Alders band were left with no leader and may have jumped at a chance to play again. Bill Deacon said that as a young lad he would often spend evenings working alongside Albert Stacey in his bakery. Albert was Edward’s son and he often told Bill stories during the time that he spent with him. He told him once that an attempt to include string instruments had ended in failure as the climate that we enjoy here in Britain does little to enhance the stability of wood and strings when being used out of doors. This meant that the strings had to be replaced by reed and brass. This demise of strings may also be the reason that Albert took up playing the euphonium (we know he played the violin) and this removal of string instruments was probably known personally to him, Bill Deacon agreed with me on all of this anyhow.

Albert never actually told Bill that his father had led the band but this 1895 “the band” may not have been exactly the same type of group that Albert himself had led from 1898. (yes it’s to him we turn to next) and therefore he might not have thought it necessary to elaborate further. This is not my own personal conjecture but is the best I have been able to put together so far, Someone was the leader of that 1895 band and both Bill Deacon and myself believed Edward was it. We know Edward was the leader of the Wesleyan choir in 1897 and I cannot see any reasons that he was not leading a musical group subsequent to that. Odd village events mention Edward accompanying various people on the piano so he was definitely a pianist but could he play a stringed instrument as well? Any proof of this is impossible for me to show but as many people appeared to have been able to play a violin or whatever, I see no reason to think that Edward couldn’t, Albert his son could and Edward did too I’m sure. In his later years Edward was most certainly a keen band follower being a recognised village and consequently a collector for the band as well. He can be seen on the 1922 picture and like Albert was well involved with village life in general and so this family are of great interest to us here.

Edward Stacey was born in 1856 and on leaving school found employment as an agricultural labourer (who didn’t). In 1891 Edward and Ann his wife, Albert and Emily their two children, lived in Pond Place, what is now known as Pond House and if you take a peak at the two photos dated c1900 you can see that they were taken in the back yard of that property. In 1891 Edward’s occupation was that of a general dealer and toy shop owner. Edward was conducting the Wesleyan church choir from 1897 through to at least 1905. In 1902 he took over as secretary of the “Pig Club”, it

being formed in 1895 this being an office previously held since 1899 by Henry Brind Sheppard yet another of our active bandsmen. Edward was also a member of the Temperance movement being described in 1923 as a “veteran to the cause”. He was obviously a good Christian man but he thought nothing of “sticking a pig” for Thomas Orchard in 1894, any Christian thoughts didn’t stop him, it’s funny how life’s values have changed isn’t it?

Albert Stacey 1898-1922

Although it is probably the Edward Stacey ensemble that turned up briefly in 1895, a band is not mentioned again for sure until 1897 when it reappeared playing once more for the “Aldbourne Benefit Club”. The writer said “this band is of recent origin, but it gives a great promise of success and excellence”. Evidently it was not yet quite up to scratch or full strength and it was not until the following year that it really made any impact on village events.



Aldbourne Band 1902, Baydon Hill

The two photo’s of c1900 show Albert and his band wearing their brand new uniforms, Albert, then 20 years old, is not only the the band’s euphonium player but as we can see by the much more ornate uniform he is wearing the leader as well. Albert continued this manner of dressing slightly differently to the other bandsmen not only when they purchased their next uniform prior to the first war in c1912 but throughout his time as bandmaster. Please note that in 1911 the band again purchased new instruments at a cost of £130 so it must be c1912 that the next photo was taken.



Albert Stacey and his wife Mabel, 1913

The position of being a leader and not just a conductor can be likened to a player/manager of a football team and most would actually conduct and play at the same time, instrumentalists were always at a premium. With most performances consisting of parading around streets and therefore the playing of numerous marches, most of the stick wagging would have taken place in the rehearsal room and not in public.

Albert had an unusual little feature he would often employ for he would not only conduct the band and play the euphonium but when coming to what is known as a “bass solo” spot he would pick up his piccolo and join in on this instrument. Molly Lunn (Albert’s daughter) recalled as a little girl watching her father’s band parade out along South Street and that the last thing she heard as they marched into the distance had been the faint sound of her father’s piccolo. Albert continued to be both a player and conductor for the most part until at least 1905. When Molly saw the photos of her father with his band she sat there for several moments in silence eventually telling me that this was the first time she had ever seen her father without a moustache.

I can only guess that Bert’s father taught him to play the violin and or the piccolo and his ability to accompany singing on the piano (chords only) and his brass playing would have made him a most knowledgeable musician and therefore a much respected man with his colleagues. For he was still a very young man of eighteen when he became the leader in 1898 and as you didn’t achieve recognisable manhood till the age of 21 one so young must have been unusual. This 1898 date is confirmed in the inscription on a tea set that was presented on April 30th 1913 on the occasion of his marriage to Mable Fanny Penny. It tells us that by 1913 he had already given

the band fifteen years service as its conductor. In 1911 Albert had been presented with a silver and ebony baton for “services rendered”, it was probably just a thank you for all his hard work, it was given on behalf of the band by the Reverend William Butler and Albert can be seen holding with it in the “prize winning quartet” photo.



The first event that recorded Albert’s name as leader appears to be at a children’s service for “the Missionary society” in 1899. This was the first of several engagements that year that included the usual flower show, hospital parade, Chilton Foliat’s flower show and finally Ramsbury’s F S parade.

Albert occasionally fell out of favour and it appears that during these tiffs Tommy Liddiard took to wielding his baton. Reports of 1903, 1906 and 1907 mention Tommy as conductor but the most interesting report was of 1905 when our agent wrote the following:

“it is rumoured that after many years of zealous care and tact, and much public appreciation, bandmaster Stacey has signified his intention to resign his post. Mr Stacey has discharged the duties with ability and energy, and it is feared the band (having recently lost several members) is in a critical position. Hopes are entertained that Mr Stacey will reconsider his decision. Under any circumstances it is hoped a little less of open air trumpeting by unattached soloists on single instruments, especially on Sundays, will be heard in future. The services of the band have always been appreciated, and it is hoped that it will survive the present difficulty”.

A reply signed by “Narcissus” was printed the following week but its unnecessary to record it here in its entirety. The writer, (Tommy Liddiard himself perhaps?) stated

that things were now ok and that the unaccompanied playing was merely bandmen practising at home, a necessary function of all bandmen to improve their playing standards.

Albert once told Bill Deacon that at contests he would meet a Stacey who was a relation and who was also the conductor of the Inkpen band. Two have been found holding this position, Andrew as early as 1906 and then Henry to as late as 1932. The Inkpen band had various names such as Imperial, Silver Prize and but the night their Temperance band provided the music for a village dance must have been a sobering experience.

According to Albert they were as good as us in those days, and so they would have been with all of the bands in this area being of a fairly low standard. In 1908 Walter "Tapey" Lawrence jnr organised a church choir outing to London where they heard the performance of four brass bands. The report remarked that "a doubt" had been raised by the choristers "if the Aldbourne brass band was fully up to the mark", they most absolutely would not have been! Although they had started winning contests under Albert well before the twenties and indeed had started to worry other bands well before the first world war, the band were not really any better than others until the coming of a professional conductor named Dimmock in 1922.

Albert was a baker by trade having done his apprenticeship under Alfred Williams whose bakery stood at the side and to the rear of the Masons Arms. Albert's bakery was to be found next to next to "Mr Well's bell shop", where the petrol pumps once stood in Bell Square. Albert also kept pigs somewhere near the present site of the tennis courts in Castle street and was a member of the 1914 formed Aldbourne Agricultural Co-op society. During his years as conductor, many contest trophies and medals were to be seen displayed in the little window of his bakery shop. In the thirties our winnings were displayed in the window of the Wessex Electricity Co that occupied buildings opposite the library and that were once part of the bakery complex of Alfred Palmer.

During Albert's leadership the band enjoyed relative stability, by 1905 it was at least 20 strong and this strength must have helped in the permanence of our band throughout some extremely difficult times yet to come. The popularity they enjoyed in this area brought them financial gains but Albert's permanent retirement in 1922 was sadly not a happy occasion. The band had been of late successful in winning prizes at contests and many offers of work had come in due to this success. The committee at that time decided it might be a good thing if a professional conductor was used for future contests, the band could afford it and it should improve their bands standard further. This first professional conductor may have been a Mr Brooks or a Mr George Cave but how the fog rolled in thick on this one. Cave certainly existed as a farm manager at Baydon and he was a musician but as to who Brooks was will have to remain a mystery.

According to Molly Lunn, her father heartily approved of all this and he thought that to have a more professional man in for contests a good idea but sadly his wife did not agree. She thought it was insulting and not only did she demand that Albert sent his resignation to the band, she actually wrote it out for him! It would appear that she believed the band would back down on receiving a letter of resignation, but tragically for Albert she thought wrong.

Albert's resignation was taken very badly by his fellow bandsmen some of who went as far as booing him as he left the band room. Albert wouldn't admit to them that it was his wife's doing and not his as Mable was a of a very strong character and so poor Albert had to suffer the consequences of her actions, never again playing his piccolo, or piano. Some village folk even went as far in their snubbing of him by buying their bread from another bakery.

Molly Lunn said in her mother's defence that with Albert being a baker he generally worked late into the evening and started early in the morning. He was also a bell ringer, bandsman, member of many committees, church chorister and was often out of an evening appearing in village entertainments either playing his violin or singing. Molly thought that the pressures on her mothers' shoulders of the cash collecting on Saturday mornings when folks came in to pay their bills, bringing up a family etc. simply became too great for her to bear. She just got fed up with him being out all the time and that this suggestion was the last straw. She probably felt, and I think justifiably, that all the efforts she had put into backing her husband as a supportive wife were not being appreciated either.

Albert's last known time as a conductor occurred after his departure in 1922 when he was asked to conduct the Lockeridge band at a contest at Longford Castle near Salisbury. Aldbourne won their section but Lockeridge band came nowhere. The year following Albert's departure his old band showed little compassion for they included in a concert program a descriptive piece called "the deaf bandmaster", somewhat heartless you must agree. This was then a sad end not only to the one who incited our band's development but to a man who only ever gave of his best. Albert retired from baking in 1953 and died in 1962.

Chapter 5: Contesting

Most might think of brass band contests as events that occur in more northerly spots but many have been held in and around Wiltshire. In 1909 Marlborough decided to get on the bandwagon and hold such an event. Villagers nor bandsmen could have realised that they were witnessing the dawning of one of the most significant slices of the Aldbourne band's history. The leader of our band in 1909 was the "energetic" Albert Stacey. He was a very competent and forward thinking bandmaster it was due to his talents that his band changed its name from plain Aldbourne Band to "Aldbourne Village Prize Band", the dawn of many contesting glories had at last arrived.

On the 2nd of August 1909 we entered our first ever brass band contest. It was the second such event held in Marlborough and we were featured in the prizes and thankfully two photographs of that occasion survive. Two, because several of the bands personel had not been included with the ones that actually played. The reason might have been due to a limit on numbers but I think it more likely that some of the players were simply not quite good enough. Albert it would appear, was firm enough to tell his members that they were to be dropped for the day for as we can well see the two photographs are quite different. These photographs also contain the last evidence of the use of reed instruments for the next photo taken some two or three years later (c1912) show that they have all been removed. At last, after some fifty odd years Aldbourne had a proper brass band.

A MT report tells of the build up to the event that started it all and the following week a full profile of that day's events was printed. It all started in a July edition with an appeal by Mr AJ Crosby, chairman of the "contest and sports committee" who asked "that tradesman in the High Street brighten up their shop fronts for the forthcoming contest as 15 bands and some 300 people will be present". Any profits were to be shared between the Savernake Hospital and the Towns "bathing place". The venue was Furze Coppice "the time honoured enclosure", this would appear to be the site of the present Cricket Pitch in Savernake Forest though the march contest was held down in the town where each band "accompanied by a mounted policeman" marched along the high street.

We entered section two and the own choice test piece we chose to perform was titled "Water Witch". Other bands that entered the same section were Wroughton Primitive Methodist, Lambourn, Gorse Hill, Southampton Post Office, Oaksey United from near Malmesbury, Swindon Prospect Primitive Methodist, and Wootton Rivers. The adjudicator was a military man named James Brier and in his summing up, subsequent to announcing the results he pointed out that the chief faults with the playing in the second section was the "stammering and exaggeration of dynamics" (stammering?). Anyway the result was Oaksey Utd won the march section and Southampton PO were first in the selection. We were placed second in the selection with the Wroughton band coming third. The band from Southampton was to come second in the top section held later that day and it would look like they had come to Marlborough on a "pot hunting" trip.

Aldbourne folk were obviously very pleased with this result as the newspaper report the following week tells us that "the enthusiasm of the supporters of the Aldbourne Band, who mustered in strong force, was most marked, and for some minutes after

the result was known the band was surrounded by an admiring crowd". This contest was held in 1908, 1909 and 1912 but for unknown reasons we did not enter the two other times. As far as the MT is concerned this was a very barren time as few reports or mentions of our village, let alone band are to be found so the reasons for their none attendance must remain a puzzle. Later claims of contest successes indicate that we must have entered several contests but apart from a prize at Newbury in 1912 I have struggled to confirm any prize winning at all during these years. The obituary of bandsman Richard Loveday in 1918 mentions that he had been a member during many of his band's successes but infuriatingly there is no mention of when or where these were, anyhow the Newbury contest seems to be where we gained our inaugural FIRST! prize.

Anyway, imagine the honour for Albert of this occasion, returning to the village with his band's first ever prize, surely a prouder moment he would never have. The band actually carried Albert around the square on their shoulders and the "whole village" turned out to welcome them home. The villagers of Aldbourne always showed the greatest interest in the doings of their band, but with less and less of today's personnel now living here there is sadly a corresponding lack of support. Another example of this enthusiasm was reported on and came after a win in 1925 when the band returned late to the village and played to "hundreds of villagers". At the 1925 Silchester contest the band entered and won both sections plus four individual medals as well. That day they performed the usual march "London Pride" and in the selection chose to play "Iolanthe". Joe Alder won best cornet and Fred Sheppard best soprano. The writer stated that they "must be the best efficiently trained band in the country", perhaps this was a little exaggeration but they really were a force to be reckoned with. One member of the once much respected Hanwell Band from London shouted from the crowd "why don't you give them the bloody bandstand as well". Bandsmen never show a great deal of affection for each other till after the results with everyone hoping that all the other bands will have an "off day".

In August 1925 they entered the Wednesday evening contest that was part of the Pewsey carnival week . "Purianti" was performed for adjudicator Albert Lawton from Leicester and as usual success in gaining first place was attained. Lawton said that he was not familiar with any band present and therefore had no axe to grind, he added that Aldbourne "were a long way ahead of the others". Back in the twenty's the band also boasted a quartet of immense talent. Molly Lunn called them the "prize winning quartet" and they often practiced in the workshop in the Jerram brothers builders yard in West Street. The quartet of the Bristol Imperial Band had been unstoppable for years until they appeared and although they used an unconventional instrumental set up to what is known as the norm, they were the ones that eventually stopped them dead!

In 1950, an article featuring our band appeared in the "John Bull" magazine. In it Wilf Jerram told of the problem of sabotage to band instruments being a common occurrence and that on one occasion one of our horn players had to borrow a mouthpiece as his had gone missing. It turned up later when a rattle appeared inside his instrument and when investigated the missing mouthpiece was found. Another story was of an occurrence at the Silchester contest in 1924 when a competing band disputed our right to enter and play. There was a rule that stated that all bands should wear uniforms when on the stand. During these years we didn't have one and so the complaint was laid down against us. A fight broke out with the drummers of

both the complaining band and us, we don't know who won the fight but we were allowed to play on.



1950

At yet another contest one of our men decided to get his haircut and thought that as long as we had a late draw he would be ok to go off to find a barber. Well you guessed it, he thought wrong and had to rush back to the contest with only half his hair cut finished. Believe these stories and you'll believe anything but stories such as these do make for wonderful reading and I just had to include them. Having no uniform to wear during this time Bill Deacon told me that other bands called us "that rough civvy lot from Alborn". Two photographs show how scruffy we looked, one of the "prize winning quartette and the other taken at a typical outdoor band contest such as Silchester or Fairford. Here would seem to be as good a time as any to cover uniforms and looking through the photo`s we can see that several sets have been purchased. As ever the present one is now showing signs of age so it was decided that 1996 would see the start of replacements on a few at a time basis as the lack of funds simply did not allow en mass replacement.

In 1930 Aldbourne eventually won through to play at the Crystal Palace National championships. but it was in 1932 that it gleaned perhaps the bands greatest ever prize. That day we won the 6th section beating over 30 other bands including the Birmingham Met, Leicester and Rothwell Temperence, Hanwell from London and Morris Motors from Oxford. The 1932 photo commemorates this win showing us posing proudly with the "Iles Shield". The band still tries to hold the name of

Aldbourne high at the contests it enters today and the 1938 comment of “keeping up the reputation it has earned in the past” is still upheld as frequently as possible.

Chapter 6: Entertainments

The earliest band engagements consisted almost entirely of parades and only occasionally did a small group or full band participate in any village entertainments and then this only occurred during the very latter years of the nineteenth century. Concerts given by any village organisation were filled with a very mixed bag of acts with participants singing, playing the piano, performing recitations, etc etc. and are best described as they were in a 1902 report as of “varied character”. The band often took part in these sundry concerts including one in 1899 that also included two professionals, a Miss Macaulay, a contralto singer of the Savoy Theatre, London and a Miss G Frank who played the violin.

When the band decided to hold entertainments in their own name they were not very different to any of the others then held in their make-up. Our men seldom played brass instrumental solos in these inaugural concerts but they did frequently take part performing dialogues, singing etc. Two simple examples of this is the evening that Jim Penny, a young cornet player, sang a duet with Alice Cook and when Francis Jerram rendered some “amusing recitations”.

If you look between the two outside doors of the church tower you can find a poem about young Jim that one of his friends once scrawled, it says “J Penny is the biggest fool of any”.

The band's very first indoor concert performed under their own banner was on the 23rd of February 1900. A mixed bag is a very good way of describing these early concerts and mixed they certainly were. In one of 1909 we had the pleasure of gramophone records being played and this was obviously a major contribution to that particular evening's activities but I think you will agree that the most odd thing to find included in any concert programme was the 1902 display by 12 young men of military drills. They had been instructed by Fred Wakefield, the father of one of our young bandsmen. At another in 1902 Tommy Liddiard gave such an “amusing lecture on music” that he apparently had the audience in stitches. Any instrumental solos that were being performed were not as yet accompanied by the band and Walter Lawrence jnr often did this job on a piano or harmonium.

Walter Lawrence jnr (Tapey) was a very popular chap following very much in his father's footsteps not only as a painter and sign writer but as a major participant in most village events. Walter Lawrence snr was the leader of the Aldbourne Amateur Choral society in the 1880`s and presented our church with a new set of hand bells in 1889. It was Walter Lawrence snr and F H Ault snr who we have to thank for many of the old village pictures we all love looking at. Frederick Horatio Walker Ault was a Swindon photographer operating from 11, Islington street and the marriage between his son Frederick Hubert William to Aldbourne girl Mary Jane Barrett, sister of Dumper Barrett, in 1897 shows his connection to Aldbourne.

Walter jnr was also a bell ringer, both tower and hand and lived in Fir cottage, the thatched cottage that once stood next door to his father's home on the Green. Of fairy tale appearance it was destroyed when the great fire occurred at High Town during the twenties. He married Sarah Tipper in 1899, she was headmistress of our school for 39 years. He seems to have started off his musical career as a flautist but

eventually he became another church organist. Walter died in 1932, possibly of Altziemers.

Lets take a look at some concert reports found in the MTimes and the Church Magazine as only they can best describe the nature of those early ones.

February 23rd 1900

A concert held in the “new” band room at which the band were wearing their “brand new uniforms”. Where this room was will have to wait for now but the report also recounted “unruly and ignorant behaviour by young and older persons and not for the first time”! What! fractious behaviour by our grandparents? what ever next!

A similar report in 1901 mentioned “exemplary behaviour”.(I should think so too). The programme content was described as a “little too heavy” and the concert also included the Bishopstone Hand Bell band conducted by Walter Lawrence snr. The programme included two March`s entitled “Departure” and “Harlech” plus two polka`s “Pretty Polly and Silver King”. Included in this concert was Reginald J.Alder and Harry Stacey, although a cornet player here he played a violin solo (just who didn't play the violin?) and was accompanied by his wife on the piano. This was obviously a very busy evening and I doubt if a more different line up of entertainments could be had anywhere.

March 1901

This was a two night entertainment for the purpose of fund raising. “The first evening was poorly attended but the second was full and the audience enjoyed songs by Messrs Orchard, Barrett, and with Mr Collier on a piano that was kindly loaned by Mr Orchard”. John Orchard, owner of the village chair and table factory was famous for and often performed his “dialect” songs.

In the October a we took part in a “Smoking Concert”, it was actually held in the school room! These do's were to be a regular thing for many years not going out of fashion til the late sixties (along with all those who attended as well I can only imagine). but we apparently enjoyed “improved harmony and smart appearance”. Another held in 1901 tells of Albert Stacey playing a “charming violin solo”. Mention must be made here of the evening had that same year during which a Mr W.F.Hayden enthralled his audience with a talk on “The Evolution of the Horses Foot”. (Nay, I just can't bring myself to make a comment).

In 1902 a concert was held to raise money to “procure a side drum and cymbals and thus become an ideal band for a country village”, incidentally this was the first time the band performed sat down and not stood. The writer went on to say that we were “still improving” and that we “now compare favourably with many bands in larger places due to an energetic bandmaster”. The thought process can indeed be a funny thing as surely the size of a community has little if any effect on the caliber of anything? In a statement given by a chap from Hungerford in 1911 he too said something along the same vein, but when I tell you that the greatest band of all came from the small Yorkshire village of Queensbury (the celebrated Black Dyke Mills) you will have to agree that size is not everything. (who else said that?)

In the December of 1902 we held yet another concert in aid of band funds. It raised the princely sum of £2-10s and once again, according to the village agent, we were "still improving". The concert also included F and J Barrett and T Stacey in a comedy sketch.

In 1903 the windmill at the top of Baydon Hill was demolished but it was also that year that the band made its first official appeal for money to buy new instruments, their next being one in 1909. We don't know how much was raised but they soon replaced the helical tuba that is to be seen on the photo dated c1905. It's being played by Tom Palmer, which is strange as he was playing a conventional tuba, albeit an elderly instrument in the 1898 photo. Though these instruments went out of fashion in the late 1870's (they regained notoriety as redesigned sousaphones a few years later) we were still using one over thirty years later, perhaps it was used only for marching? The Ramsbury Methodist band also used one, perchance we sold it to them. Theirs was played by Uriah Hunter. For another village concert in 1903 to raise band funds Tommy Liddiard actually formed a "nigger troop", thankfully this most insulting form of act has now died its death, anyhow the report says that the evening was "of varied and successful character".

In 1904 we showed an advanced outlook when a quintet made up of Albert and Tom Stacey, Fred Barrett, Tom Barnes, and Frank Wakefield performed in a Band of Hope entertainment, Tom Stacey also "contributed a capital cornet solo". A few weeks later a quartet that included Jack Liddiard, Edward and Christopher Hawkins, Tom and Charles Barnes took part in a Primitive Methodist entertainment. (Charles Barnes was to become Bob Barnes's father in law). That autumn a concert had to be cancelled as a large proportion of the players and audience were taken ill due to a "sickness in the village". But when it did occur a week or so later it shows us that Albert Stacey was still a playing member as well as leader as the report tells us that he played a "duet with Tommy Liddiard". A flu outbreak also struck in 1932 and for the second time a concert had to be postponed.

1906 was the year that we performed in a sing-a-long entertainment to raise funds for the churchyard extension fund and even now the proceeds of the band's Christmas concert in St Michaels are still given to the churchyard fund. In 1907 the Swindon Gorse Hill methodist band came for the hospital Sunday parade and we travelled out to Chilton Foliot to play at their fete and to Baydon for their hospital day. 1908 proves to have been yet another quiet time for us as so does 1909 and 10 but in 1911 we performed a concert in the "village theatre" in aid of the football club and the "music was both charming and well selected". Why the village did not make more use of this building for its entertainments is a mystery as this is the only reference found of this venue being used for such an event. As the theatre was in private hands we must guess that its owners did not welcome its regular use for village recreational events.

Fund raising for the survivors of the Titanic disaster occurred in 1912 with many of our surrounding villages holding events. We were expected to play at a football match held between the clubs of Aldbourne and Lambourn but for some unknown reason we were unable to attend so the Lambourn band did the job instead. That same year a band quartet performed in a village concert and the comment was that "an item from this quarter being always welcome". This evening also included the Aldbourne Choral society and as many of their number were bandsmen it might

explain why only a quartet only was available. Apart from the 1913 Easter celebration it would seem none were worth reporting on as naught were.

Prior to 1900, the band rehearsed in a willow weaving shed and they would parade from there to play short concerts. These concerts were performed either in Bell square outside Bert Stacey`s bakery or outside the Crown and so must be forerunners of today`s pond concerts. A 1923 report mentions that we had resumed another series of Sunday concerts in the square so it would seem that the now (often copied by others but bettered by few) famous pond concerts have also a long history.

Parading seemed to happen all too frequently and often in the winter evenings. The bandsmen wore shoulder straps complete with a pouch to keep their music in and the band had two lights that were carried by a team of helpers. Remember that before the coming of electricity (first brought to the village by Mr Cheeseman) here in Aldbourne there were no street lights or at least not until 1928 and even then only a few.

Occasionally others would hold a concert in aid of band funds and one that raised the then quite amazingly huge sum of £20 happened in 1920, it was organised and performed by the (wait for it) Dudmore lodge farm co.

Chapter 7: Village Functions

From the very first public engagement in 1861 to the carnival procession of 1996 our village band has played at virtually every village event ever held. For occasions such as football matches, sport days, national celebrations or even political meetings, village causes like the various benefit societies, the sound of brass has been heard. It would seem to have existed solely to bring enjoyment, colour and atmosphere to village functions and though not as often as in those days long gone, we still find the presence of the band when any event organisers ask of it and free of charge for any “village” function at that.

In the past it was so easy for the band to turn out at a moments notice for any village do but this sadly is not now the case, in fact it is now virtually impossible and with so many members living outside the village a repeat of those times will probably never reoccur. Examples of village events are very diverse and as most are covered elsewhere we will only take a look here at some of the more important or unusual ones. Several political meetings were attended but they would appear not to include allegiance to any in particular. There was one meeting in 1934 that the band did not attend, that held by Mosely’s Blackshirts.

The very first event that included both the band and our village happened in 1887 with the celebration of Queen Victoria`s silver jubilee. Led by the band, a procession made its way to “West Street meadow” where some 900 villagers “sat down to a tea” (did they all bring their own chairs I wonder?). The report tells us that a beacon was lit that night on “Peaks hill” by Chandler of North farm.

Celebrations in the March of 1900 were held for the relief of Mafeking and when the news reached our parish “bells were rung, flags were hoisted and “a torchlight procession, headed by the band” was held. Our village agent also made good use of his report and said that “this is an opportunity for recognition of the good progress of the Aldbourne band”. Most other village reports follow along the same line as ours as the news was welcomed by all of the country with most communities having a more official celebration a few days later. On the day that Great Bedwyn received the news an attempt to muster some of the players from the “old band” failed although “a band of youthful musicians” did form. They had to wait for Aldbourne’s band to travel there in order for them to celebrate the occasion in officially and in full style. Sadly for them they have failed to keep alive any musical organisation for they have not only had two brass bands but a drum and fife band as well. A Mr Rosier of Great Bedwyn formed the second band in 1926 but it appears to only have lasted for about 2 years or so.

A few years later a service of mourning was held on the death of Queen Victoria and prior to the service we played “several suitable pieces on the village green”. In 1901 our band were involved in the welcome home of two returning dabchicks who had been present at the relief of Mafeking. Their names were G.R.Palmer and Earnest Bray. The band headed a large procession from Preston back into the village with the two chaps standing proudly high up on a wagon the whole village turned out that day.

In April 1901 we were invited to Ramsbury to play at a “floral fete” held at the Rookery and in the August we played at our own Horticultural Society annual show and sports where some band members did extremely well in the vegetable prizes.

1902 brought the end of the Boer War and when that news hit our village our people seem to have dropped everything to ensemble in the square joining with their neighbours and friends to celebrate the occasion ”the band soon mustered and played the National Anthem and other suitable music”.

In 1903 a village entertainment was organised in aid of the new “nurses fund”. Including the band the report said that it “furnished agreeable items”. The Aldbourne and Baydon Nurse Day was to become a firm event in our two village calendars. With the event of a similar nature to that of the hospital day the only difference was that the money raised was used to support a village nurse as well, with the fund being split between the two. The bungalow that stands at the right of the entrance to Goddards Lane was built for her and a charge of 2d a week to every household was also made to cover the use of her services.

In 1903, Aldbourne`s Total Abstinence Soc invited the Ramsbury Methodist band to play so in return we popped over the hill to them. Never missing out on any chance to fund raise we played at the end of the day under the great elm tree collecting for a “new instrument fund”.

Although 1904, 05, 06 and 07 were relatively busy years very little occurred out of the norm though one or two comments do deserve to be highlighted here. Due to “sickness in the village” the 1904 xmas concert had to be held over til the following week and in 1906 a fancy-dress football match was held with a “capital entertainment” concluding the day. “so over crowded was the room that a little girl named Stroud dislocated her kneecap”. Though present day concerts are not patronised quite as enthusiastically as that one a concert held in the October of 1996 found our church full to overflowing.

In the September of 1909 we again paraded, only this time to “the square”, and it was evidently clear that the band was “still improving”. Interestingly the very next mention in the MT named us as the “Aldbourne Prize Band” as we had now a contest result under our belt we had apparently arrived!

It was also during 1909 that the band formed its first committee, chaired by Mr Charles McEvoy, a non player, who lived at the Malt House. It was he who wrote the “Village Wedding”, a play that was produced in 1910. I’ll side step here for a few moments to tell you of the event that was to be the talk of the village for many years. McEvoy had moved to the village in 1907 and shortly after moved down from Windmill Cottages to the Malt House on his marriage to Gwendolin Nutley of Devon. He soon started work on the conversion of the oast house that still stands in South St. We know it as the building with the large weather vane consisting of the old man complete with shovel on it’s roof.

McEvoy`s intention was to create hundreds of village theatres and Aldbourne was to have the very first one.

Daniel Cook, a builder whose workshop still stood until recently at the bottom of Castle Street, did the main alterations and the seats were cast in the W.T. Loveday foundry in Lottage Road. The theatre was to hold 150 people "by licence" and no expense was spared for even the seats were sloping to enable all to see better. An amusing request in the official programme asked ladies to: "remove their hats, bonnets, or any kind of head dress. This rule is framed for the benefit of the audience, and the management trusts that it will appeal to everyone, and that ladies will kindly assist in having it carried out".

The play was a "Cottage Drama of three acts" and naturally our band was involved in its production with Albert Stacey conducting an "orchestra" made from band members. They were seated at the front in a proper pit "sunk after the most approved fashion". The music performed was described as "folklore music", (what ever that was) and the cost of entry varied from 1/- to 2/6d. George Jerram, was in both the cast and the orchestra, acting out a character named William Picter meant that he had to swap between the stage and his drum in the pit. The theatre was opened by Mr Granville Barker, an eminent man of his time, on the 26th of February at 4-30 pm and many notable names came to see the opening night. After the week long event the play next moved on to Oxford, followed by Swindon, and then finishing on May 29th in London. It then toured more West country towns. Though this theatre was the first to be created McEvoy's dream of a country wide set up did not materialise. 1913 saw the production of a second play written by McEvoy. It was called "The situation at Newbury" and was again performed in his theatre but this time the band was not included and it would appear that no more productions were performed after this one. McEvoy`s dream did not materialise.

In 1910 a sports day was organised by our scouts troop and typically the band were there to entertain. They were also involved in the June 1911 event to commemorate the coronation of Edward VII. In 1912 and 1913 an Easter festival was had and an entertainment was held that included a tea and an entertainment by "members of the band".

In 1913, a November 5th firework display was held at the top of Baydon Hill. It was accommodated in a field opposite Windmill Cottages and the report tells us that "the band headed the procession". Imagine now having to march up Baydon Hill, somehow I think not! This event appeared in the church magazine as a small affair but the report in the MT stated that the event was actually organised by the band. The evening started at the Crown at 7:30pm with a cannon being fired and a procession comprising of one hundred torch bearers and floats representing most if not all of the village trades This was a very large and exciting village do with the band being responsible for yet another village entertainment and this was the second such function that our band had organised, the first being in 1886. Over the coming years the band were to organise many activities such as this not only for the benefit of the villagers but also of course for the purpose of raising much needed funds.

In the 1913 Thanksgiving festivities the band "marched in full force and uniform and also had a "decided improvement in their harmony and execution". In 1920 we turned out for the football match between Aldbourne and Ramsbury, who won? what a stupid question, we did of course 2-1. Also in 1920 a temporary village hall was opened by a Mrs Tanner and we were of course present. This hall stood in the Butts road just opposite the entrance to the stable yard belonging to the Old Rectory.

Throughout the pages of this publication we can well see that very little has altered much over the last one hundred years or so as far as the type of events held here are concerned. Most if not all of the villages and towns in this area held their own hospital fund days, in our case the money raised going to fund Savernake Cottage Hospital. Aldbourne's first Hospital Sunday happened in 1897 and was held under the auspices of the Ancient Order of Foresters and Rational benefit society. They were to be a main event on our village's calendar for they continued until 1934, they continue today under the auspices of the carnival committee.

The photo dated 18th July 1914 pictured our band at Ramsbury playing in one of these events. Our band were often invited to take part in Lambourn's hospital day and in 1902 an "18 strong band under Mr A Stacey made a "capital contribution". They not only marched around the streets of Lambourn but paraded out and around Eastbury and after all that we marched back to Lambourn. I don't know about you but I'm worn out just typing about it.

From 1837 to 1892 another annual engagement parade that our band invariably led was for the Aldbourne branch of friendly societies. The open air play that was held in here in July 1996 was based on one of these events and although fictive it really did portray its like well, showing us well what things might just have looked like. For many years the Paddington GWR band visited Aldbourne and when they did the whole village would turn out to listen. The three photos that survive of the 16th of June 1916 visit show that the men of the G.W.R. band were continuing their lives as normal with the on going war having little affect on their banding anyway. We see them in what would now be deemed as an unusual formation, a square with the conductor facing away from the tuba section, perhaps he would turn around and face a section of the band when he felt it necessary, I really have no idea. It's also unusual to see them sitting down, as it was more the the norm for bands to stand when playing.

The connection of Paddington's band to Aldbourne is easily explained by remembering back to the Alder brothers and the departure of numerous families to London. It has even been documented that some of our bandsmen were involved in the formation of the GWR Paddington Borough Silver Prize Band (to give them their full name). This cannot be correct however as this band was already formed many years before the exodus of our men. This is confirmed in a report that the Paddington band played at the GWR widows and orphans fund fete held at Hungerford in June 1860, the very same year that our own band was first formed. Anyhow, in a 1912 report of that years visit it tells that 7 Aldbourne men were then playing in their band, we don't know all the names of these bandsmen for certain but an educated guess is possible and they were probably the Alder brothers Archibald, James, Frederick and his son Joe jnr and the brothers Frank, William and John Barrett. The GWR has figured often in the life of our village even to the point of discussion of bringing a line through Ramsbury to Aldbourne but this as we now now never happened.

The years that the Paddington band came were 1907, 12, 18, 19, 20 and finally 1922. The 1907 and 12 visits are well reported on with a committee being formed to organise the '07 occasion. This committee included GM Watts chairman, W Brown sec, Rev AJ Pitkin, C Orchard, J Orchard, AE Bray, J Alder, W Alder, A Ford, HB

Sheppard, J Wakefield, A Stacey, F Hale, F Perrott, C Liddiard, H Westall and W Pye. The band were represented by J Barnes, G Jerram, A Jerram, F Wakefield and the then bm T liddiard (nearly as many were involved in the organising as probably attended to listen). Paddington first visited Swindon where they gave a concert to raise funds for the widow of a player who had been formerly an Aldbourne bandsman. For some unknown reason his name is not recorded though I believe it to have been James Alder, anyway £5-16s-41/2d was raised for the widow. The 1912 report tells that they performed three concerts and that some 600 people attended each do. They were being conducted in 1912 by Tom Morgan and in 1918 by A Wallen.

When they next came in 1919 they took part in the hospital parade concluding the next day not only with their usual concert on the village green but joining with our band to play for a village dance. A collection was made in favour of the Aldbourne band in 1920 and their final visit in 1922 coincided with one of our own village band contests which they entered but surprisingly didn't feature in the prizes. Surprisingly? as they were recognised as a tip top band they should have done so. However bad the result was for them they stayed on to entertain us and the Sunday saw them parading from the band room in West Street to the green where they gave a concert. Later that afternoon they paraded to the memorial hall for a short service of remembrance where they laid a wreath in respect of our our 43 fallen men.

Villagers supplied accommodation and Bill Deacon often had them stay with his family, particularly a Mr Luke a tuba player. It was generally agreed by all that they were a much better band than our own and our own bandsmen must have learnt many things having more able players to listen to. Having said that there are none of our village bandsmen to be seen listening to them on the 1912 photo and it really is odd that there are none in sight, surely they are just off camera? The platform they are using was apparently constructed for them by the brothers Jerram.

In a parish news article of 1974 a writer said that a German band once came in the 1890's to play in Aldbourne and strange as it may sound this visit just might have actually happened. A German band certainly visited this part of Wiltshire and can be found mentioned in a letter written in 1889 from an irate Marlborough man who complained about the bad behaviour and drunkenness of some of the men when in the town. No report of any such visit here was made but the two 1893 regimental band visits may well be the answer.

Albeit that our band held several of its own band contests in our village, (1922, 23, 24 and 25) only one record of any financial accounts survive. The MT report tells us what form the event took, but the financial side of things was documented in an issue of the Church Magazine. All three contests would have all been of the same format, they were held in Whitley Meadow, what is now the tennis courts in Castle Street and they involved the whole village in that they included a village fête and was generally a day of fun and excitement for all.

1922 was a little different from the other years as it was decided to split the event and hold it on two separate days as several of the bands that normally came sent word that due to other engagements they were unable to attend on the first date. On Saturday July 28th East Woodhay conducted by A Muddiman, Wroughton led by W Robinson, Tadley and Silchester bands all assembled on the green. As per norm they

all marched in turn to Whitley meadow where they each performed their own choice test piece. The Silchester band, conducted by B S James won both the march and selection sections.

Part two was held on September 2nd with an identical format. An ad in the M.T. tells us that it cost 15/- for a band to enter and that the total prize money available was £27-5/-. This time the Swindon GWR band won the march and the Kingswood Evangel band from Bristol won the selection. A Mr Cooper from Huthwaite nr Nottingham was the adjudicator, he returned on two other occasions in 1923 and 1924. He once made a controversial decision "the chief bone of contention was putting Swindon GWR right out of the prizes". Anyway the result put Headington first in the march and Kingswood first in the selection. The three bands of Fairford, Tadley and East Woodhay entered the second section. Whilst our own village contest existed it was known as the East Wilts brass band contest.

From the church magazine:

1925 July

"The contest organised by the Aldbourne Silver Prize Band was held on July 25th It was unfortunate that several bands were not able owing to engagements elsewhere to enter the contest. Never the less the playing was of a very high standard, The Newbury Band captured two first prizes and one second prize and Silchester one first prize and two second prizes. We are glad that the contest was a financial success".

What sort of success we can see for ourselves.

BALANCE SHEET OF THE ALDBOURNE BRASS BAND CONTEST 25TH JULY
1925

INCOME		EXPENDITURE	
Taken at gate	£11-19-08 1/2	Prize money	£12-02-06
Bowling for pig	£12-08-00	Ajudicators fee	£ 6-06-00
Teas	£ 8-02-07 1/2	Cockerals and ducks	£ 0-06-04
lemonade and ice-cream	£ 4-11-08	Darts and cigarettes	£ 1-05-03
Jumble sale	£ 4-06-09	Ice cream and	
Advertisements	£ 4-05-00	chocolate etc.	£ 0-18-10
Coconuts	£ 3-06-04	Pig	£ 1-00-00
Throwing on squares	£ 2-15-7	Printing	£ 3-19-06
Darts	£ 2-05-07	Police	£ 0-12-06
Flower stall	£ 1-11-06	Hire of coconut shies	£ 0-07-06
Rifle range	£ 1-11-03	Coconuts	£ 0-12-06
Programmes	£ 1-08-02	Carriage of coconuts	£ 0-05-00
Guessing for ducks	£ 1-05-03	Peas	£ 0-00 06
Subscriptions		Postage paper &etc.	£ 0-10-00
(inc 12/- for social)	£ 1-02-00		
Table skittles	£ 1-01-04	Skittles	£ 0-19-05
Bran pie	£ 0-13-06		

Loop ball	£ 0-03-11	
Competition	£ 0-11-00	
Donkey rides	£ 0-08-00	
Quotes	£ 0-07-06	
Throwing basins	£ 0-06-05	
Entrance (jumble sale)	*£ 0-06-04 1/2	
Pie guessing	£ 0-06-03	
Pea guessing	£ 0-05-04	
Cockerels	£ 0-02-00	
Entrance fees	£ 1-10-00	
Total	£68-10-07	Total £28-05-11
Balance	£40-04-08	

“£40 of this balance will be paid towards the debt on the new instrument fund leaving £293 still outstanding”.

The bands marched from Pond Square up to Whitley Meadow and were judged on their smartness and playing ability. Next would come the “selection”. The bands would play on a raised platform set in a semi-circle and would play either a set test piece or would be allowed to choose a piece of their own. Our band can be seen ready for action on just such a stage in a photo taken in the early twenties, note the spelling of Aldbourne.

It wouldn't have been unusual for a host band to be included in its own contest, even if to only boost the numbers. The Marlborough band played in their own contest of 1909 but as far as we know ours didn't ever take part here. Our band did round the day off though playing in the evening for dancing.

What an interesting read this balance sheet is. It tell us of all the fete events and stalls to be had, they weren't very different to those of today were they? I do wonder what the stall named “throwing the basins” entailed, I bet it was a smashing game. Having a coconut shy was an expensive exercise but what about the of the cost of the peas? I realise that people were not made of money but to charge for a jar of peas is surely the ultimate in miserly deeds?

The most important figures however to be found in these accounts has to be the amount specified as the balance of the debt of the new instrument fund. Tales have abounded for many years concerning a gift of instruments to the band by a chap named Jimmy White but the story behind this affair is a little confused, so lets take a look at the Jimmy White saga of 1922, and correct yet another known misnomer of an event that never actually happened. The story behind Jimmy White has over the years been documented to some degree but I think it best that we are put in the picture here.

James White, originally came from Rochdale in Lancashire and was a self made millionaire. Although he had a residence in Park street, Westminster, London, he also owned King Edward Place at Foxhill. White had many financial interests, one even included involvement in the purchase of the Wembley site, and he was also the owner of Daly`s theatre in London. Although he was married with two children he did not live with Doris his wife. White often entertained famous names of the day at Foxhill and Roland Mundy once told in a letter of playing there at a grand house

party when many famous actors and actresses were present. Our band frequently travelled out to Foxhill, usually on a Sunday, to play for him and White often called us "his band".

This gift of a set of instruments by Jimmy White never occurred. What did happen was told to Arthur Palmer by Wilf Jerram but the truth of those events can actually be found documented in a 1922 issue of the Times. The band had resolved that if they were to advance themselves still further they would have to first improve on the instruments that they were using, so it was decided to approach White for a loan. Now this was not something that would have been decided on lightly. Lets just say that as our men were not ones to throw money around willy-nilly but they must have thought that to repay a loan was well within the bands capabilities.

It would appear that a conversation was held between the bands committee and Whites estate agent Major Valentine Steven Bland. Major Bland must have thought it likely that a meeting between them and White could be worth our bands while, so a meeting was arranged and our bands committee was duly invited along to have a "chat". Edgar Dixon, Fred Jerram and Harry Westall duly arrived and asked White if he would lend them the money to purchase the instruments with. White asked from whom the instruments were to be purchased, and was told the name of the firm. The conversation then continued along the following lines "I know those ?@%£-*s so I'll get you your instruments. I will give the band a donation, but don't worry about the balance you pay me back when you can". The report that confirms that White lent the band £500 interest free and donated £100.

This was the offer the band had wanted and they certainly couldn't afford to turn it down and so shortly afterwards the new set of Hawkes Excellior Sonorous instruments was duly delivered. They were of course collected by the band's chairman Tom Barnes from the Hungerford Railway station. Repayment of a substantial amount had been made to White until the Wednesday morning of June 1927 when James White was found dead in his bed. He had administered himself a lethal dose of chloroform, he was only forty nine years of age. White's company, the Beecham Trust Ltd had gone bankrupt to the tune of £450,000. and with assets of only £83,002 he had decided to end it all. He was buried in Wanborough church yard though there is no headstone to mark his grave.

The accounts of the band contest show us that £293 was still owed to White, withal an enormous amount. This was a very worrying time for our band as they didn't quite know what was going to happen. The question on their lips was would White's receivers come knocking asking for the balance still owed to be repaid in full immediately? If they did it would not be possible to repay such a large sum and as there was nothing as such written down about the repayment method etc etc..... things really didn't look too good. They were doubtless very worried that the band might be declared bankrupt, and as officials might become liable for the debt themselves! Fortunately Mr Bland sorted out the problem with the receivers who agreed to wave the debt. Our band didn't quite get a free set of instruments but they didn't have to find all of the money for them either. The balance had been waved to the relief of all. They had borrowed some five hundred pounds and still had some £300 left to repay.

All credit must be given to our village for supporting their band to such a great extent for to repay a total of some £200 was in its self a huge achievement. To put this amount into perspective we can compare the cost of the building of the memorial hall in 1921, just six years earlier. My source for this figure is again the MT and it that tells us that the cost was £1200, a veritable fortune at that time.

Interestingly, several years later it was decided that it might be better if any written mentions of this affair didn't exist at all (just in case) and Arthur Palmer, a then 12 year old player and committee member witnessed the burning of the band's records by Cecil Liddiard, Tommy Barnes and secretary Harry Westal on the fire of the West Street band room. This explains why there are no surviving band records from this period, in fact there are no surviving anything until the early sixties and this opportunity must be taken to thank Jesse Jones, band secretary for many years for keeping his records for use in the future.

According to the MT 1921 was a "1921derful year" but as far Aldbourne or its band were concerned little occurred to make it stand out in any crowd. The band entered two contests and won them both and apart from the formation of yet another amateur dramatic club the only thing mentioning is a little story that surrounds our houses of worship. Instigated by the Anglicans it was proposed to hold a united Rogation service. All three congregations were to meet on the green and they were to be led by the band. Well the band turned up and so did the Anglicans but when it looked as if the others weren't coming off they all went. Later claims that they left early were made but one thing is for sure, one of the Methodist chapels did not turn out. Men would live, work, play, and even die together but worship ? No way!

In 1923 a comic pushball match was held in the field behind Mt Pleasant and our band as always led the procession there, in aid of the hospital fund, this game involved the use of extremely large balls. A similar event in 1930 was well reported on and was a very humorous affair indeed. Band members dressed as ladies and village ladies dressed as men. Fred Jerram, the referee, dressed as a member of both sexes so as "to show impartiality". Apparently the match consisted of the men frequently stopping in order to powder their noses or to issue complaints of "rough play" by the ladies as they were "clever with their handling of not only the ball but of the mens skirts as well". Fred Barnes was advised to put a tuck into his skirt after expressing concern about his lower garments and the general consensus of opinion on both sides was that the ref should be reported to the football authorities for gross misconduct. The score? 11-5 to the ladies of course.

`Those of us familiar with the film "They shoot horses don't they" will know that the craze of non stop dancing once swept across America during the 1930 depression but few might realise that it too was popular here. In 1932 the band organised one such event and "100 dancers" took part. Reg Penny was the M.C. with the music being supplied by the "Hungarians" from Hungerford and the "Aldbourn octave" band, sorry but I am unable to tell you who won the event or if any horses were shot either.

Chapter 8: The Great War



Aldbourn Band in Whitehall 1914

The now annual Christmas eve carol concert held in the church brought to an end a relatively quiet year for the village. Curiously the parish magazine made little if any mention of the clouds of war that were by then looming on the horizon, infact the hostilities that first announced it's genesis seem to have surprised everyone. It didn't of course and even HG Wells once said that "every intelligent man knew" but the more important things in life still carried on as usual, Salisbury cathedral improved it's lighting system and parochially Baydon continued with their church organ fund and Aldbourne not only rehung the church bells but also re-gilded the clockface. The first few months of 1914 seem to have passed by at life's normally blisteringly slow pace. English society had long been brought up to believe that they were secure in the hands of their armies and as our shores had not been threatened seriously for nearly one hundred years why should this time be any different? The M.T. did of course relate news of fighting but it was not until the July issues that any interest appeared to be taken in events that had started to occur though even then one article actually stated '..... the great war, the like the world has never seen', In no way could that writer have ever realised just how prophetic his words were to become.

One of the earliest indications that affairs might be amiss could be seen in an advert announcing the cancellation of the Pewsey carnival. (matters must have been getting serious) and even Newbury cancelled its band contest but then nearly all the village

reports began to tell of the 'sons' that had gone off to fight. Patriotic young men enlisted by the thousand, keen to be in on any action before the coming Christmas as it would "all be over by then". By the end of that November two of Aldbourne's men already lay dead.

In essence Britain sent four very diverse types of army. The first consisted of our most battle hardened and experienced soldiers who formed the British Expeditionary Forces but incredulously by the end of the first few months of 1914 some 90% of them were either wounded, missing or dead. The next body of men to go in was of territorial form but by the end of 1915 they too were more or less all dead as well. The boys who had rushed to enlist for King and country in 1914 and who had spent some two years in training were the lambs who were the bulk of the third who then marched into the raging inferno that by then beckoned them. Conscription did not begin till 1916 and those that were then coerced made up the nature of forth.

Although intentions had been noble how different any realities were. Visions of a quick victory soon perished and the conditions enjoyed by those men can never be overstated and never must be, for trench warfare must surely be the most afflictive type of existence one could ever experience. Certainly the trenches that created the Western front were some 450 miles of indescribable hell, nay Hell would be far more preferable. Being cold, wet, hungry and totally exhausted would be the least of our lads torments. Try to conceive clothes so full of lice that they could and often did continue to move when you took them off or the pain of feet literally rotting away due to being immersed for days on end in mud, blood and water. Being deafened from near continuous shelling or the continuous threat of the "grim reaper" (machine guns) when you went yet again over the top or the fear of just being blown into three, four or even a thousand little pieces was nothing to what must of been the most hideous death of any, that of being gassed. The agonising pain of your lungs quite literally dissolving away and then finally drowning in a yellow blood stained froth is exactly what occurred. If you were lucky to survive to 'tell the tale' and finally return home your memories might haunt you forever. Perhaps the memory of the rats, fat with the abundance of 'food' that abounded by the million or else the putrefying stench of rotting flesh would and did haunt many for the rest of their lives. Even to this day when one walks out into those killing fields there is a sadness that prevails, an atmosphere that has to be experienced to be believed.

It has been said that the band dispersed during that time but this too is not quite as straight and clear cut as that might suggest. Although there are no mentions of any banding activities in any of our church magazines, there are several to be found mentioned in the local paper. A report in January 1915 stated "it is much regretted that the band is practically dissolved", it also added "it is a pity to let them fall through, now they have reached their present eminence". Albert Stacey did indeed have difficulty in raising a band as most of his players had enlisted. Many of our village men seem to having joined up with the 6th and 7th Wiltshire regiments, an article mentioned that the 7th Wilts regimental band played every Saturday in the "Salonika (Turkey) battlefields".

The band still maintained its presence in the hospital parade and when two squads of the Derbyshire Yeomanry Regiments were stationed in the village, our band led a parade that included them in a church service where "very well they looked in their smart uniforms". By 1915 they had to join forces with the Ramsbury PM band for the

hospital parade as local bandsmen were “doing their bit”. Albert was able to put on a show for an Xmas concert the report stating that they deserved “great credit”. I think it probable that after their initial training period and before actually being sent abroad, some men came home on leave and it was then that this concert was held. The sum of £4-6s was raised and was shared between parents to pass on to their soldier sons. The report also tells us that “only” 43 lads had left our village at this time, by the end of 1917 some 190 men had “now gone”. Thomas Arthur Palmer remembered playing at a send off in 1915 for three reservists, he was then aged fourteen and these young boys along with just one or two men made up the remnants of a much decimated band that carried on for much of that war.

While many of our bandsmen did join up several didn't due mainly to being in occupations considered too important to the war effort. We can only guess on the reasons why the men left here eventually stopped playing altogether, perhaps their time was taken up with more important tasks or it may be simply that they did not wish to be seen to be having an easy time or enjoying themselves too much and so jeopardise any appeals to the tribunals they might make or create any ill feelings within the village.

1916 also seems to be a fairly busy year for a band that didn't exist for a whist drive was held on behalf of both the band and the nurses fund. A later event raised money for the church organ fund, the important things in life just didn't go away did they? In the hospital Sunday report Albert is said to have “obtained the services of a few of the members (several having joined the army) and played excellent music”. HB Sheppard also organised a concert for the OAP tea party that included the band in the entertainment that followed.

The slaughter of the 43 men undoubtedly depredated not only the families but the whole of this small community. Though this was not the first (nor last) time Aldbourne's men went off to fight in a war this was the first to interrupt Aldbourne's peace and quiet since the two civil war skirmishes that occurred some two hundred and fifty years earlier.

The first death of one of Aldbourne's “sons” occurred in 1914. Seaman Leslie Aldridge was serving onboard the SS Vedra when, laden with submarine fuel, she was blown up and sunk but it was in 1916 when news came of the first death of a bandsman. William Thomas Dew private 21234 6th Wilts battalion died of wounds received on Friday 3rd of November. Billy was only 23 years old and has no known grave, though he is commemorated on the Somme's Theipval memorial. In 1917 John and Ann Dew, his parents, had this poem printed in his memory.

We prayed that God would not let him fall,
but fortune failed in the strife;
as he went forth with a heart so bold,
to answer his country's call

A year has passed,
and still the wound is sore,
he did his duty to the last,
we miss him more and more.

During the late summer of 1916 news was received that baritone player John Orchard 3186, sergeant in the 8th battalion Kings Royal Rifles, had been awarded the D.C.M, in fact this was only one of several that were accorded to village men. A proud moment for his family, his father was John Orchard the chair factory proprietor. Young "Jack" had led the first wave of his company in an assault on enemy troops and although wounded he had held out for two hours before returning with two prisoners. Sadly his family's rejoicing was short-lived as John was killed on Friday August 24th 1917 aged 23 . He is buried at the Hooze crater cemetery in Belgium though a military headstone can be seen in our own churchyard.

1917 seems to be the year that the band disbanded proper with no mentions being made again of them until 1919. The problems had by one bandsman might confirm that it was best to leave well alone and stop all banding till hostilities ceased. Thomas Dixon Barnes made claim that as he was the only village haulier to go to Hungerford he should be made exempt from military duties. An exceedingly irate letter appeared in 1918 written by a very upset wife indeed concerning a petition that had been put together by villagers in an attempt to stop Tommy's call up. In it the lady fiercely criticised Tommy's military absence and his reply was of course then printed. Tommy stated that his job consisted of more than just driving a horse for a few hours each day such as the lady had implied. He described his occupation in some detail telling that he had to "carter four horses daily" and "weigh up 7-8 tons of coal" and "deliver" and "sell it". He intimated that this did not include his many other sundry duties.

However village events still had to continue so without their own men to call on the Swindon PM band was engaged to lead the hospital parade, it cost £2-2s for the brake hire to transport them here and back.

The following list is compiled from information taken from the Marlborough Times and our Aldbourne Parish Magazine.

Church Magazine.

1916 Military personnel from Chiseldon camp gave a concert in the church.

1917 Military personnel from Chiseldon camp gave a concert in the school room. "A concert was given in the church schools on Wednesday June 8th, by the soldiers from Chiseldon Camp. An excellent and varied program was gone through, and from start to finish the interest of the audience was maintained. Everyone was deservedly applauded and the writer can confidently say that it was by far the best concert he has attended in the county of Wilts". It was apparently also a "real tonic" to those present. This report was written by the Reverend William Butler and praises this concert so highly that I would have thought that the band members left in the village would be quite put out by his comments, but perhaps they agreed with him.

Marlborough Times entries.

1915

A band concert in aid of village soldiers.

Aldbourne band in hospital Sunday parade.

Aldbourne band Xmas concert.

1916

Whist drive in aid of Aldbourne band and Nurse fund.

Band concert in aid of the church organ fund.

Aldbourn band play in the hospital parade.

Swindon Gorse Hill band play in village on hospital day.

In 1918, three young men, George Hull, Fred Sheppard and Jesse Emberlain, walked over the hill to Marlborough with intentions of signing up. Both George and Fred were accepted, though they did only light duty's and returned safely, but Jesse was refused entry as he was deemed too young. He was refused again in 1939 because by then he was not only considered too old but he was also still in a protected occupation. Even in his last year of life at the age of 91 he still seemed to be angry about the way he had been excluded from duty. With guilty feelings still running around inside him, he told me that he felt he had failed not only his village but his family and friends. Men like Jesse Emberlain never failed anyone, for his work was just as important as any. Perhaps the land girls and men who stood watching when our village paraded in 1995 in celebration of the last armistice should have been included in that procession too?

Many events, including concerts, were held to raise money for the village wool club fund. They subsidised the knitting club that made items such as balaclavas, gloves and underwear that were sorely needed in the trenches. Finished garments were left at Ivy house, where any callers could select what they needed to send to their loved ones free of charge. 1d each a week was also donated by villagers to secure the wool supply.

Over 5,000 Wiltshiremen were slaughtered in that war. Aldbourne dispatched some 190 of its men and tragically 43 never returned, 5 of the dead were bandsmen. What little we know of Billy Dew and Jack Orchard has already been told but facts on the other three were nigh on impossible to ascertain as well.

Chummy Westal, the bands euphonium player, can be seen on photos dating 1909 to 1914. It was not possible to ascertain his christian name as he was always known by his nickname. No obituary was written in fact even his death went unannounced and I was unable to find anyone who could tell me which of the two Westals that were killed was Chummy, therefore I have to list them both. TC Westal 10313 gunner in the Royal Marine artillery died Saturday 10th august 1918 and is buried in the Port Charlotte United Freechurch on the Isle of Islay, Argyllshire and CE Westal gunner 198546 A batt 103 Royal Field artillery D 22nd of October 1917 and is buried at La Clyte military cemetery Heuvelland, Belgium.

Frank Henry Wakefield played with the band as a young lad and was included as a young soloist in a concert report in 1903. He had been encouraged by his father to become a full time soldier and had joined the 2nd Wilts regiment well before the onset of the war rising to the rank of corporal 26450. his father John had been a survivor of Robert's famous march to Kandahar, and his sister Winnifred married Alfred Jerram in 1919. Frank was killed on Thursday, March 21st 1918 and is buried at Savy british cemetery Aisne, France.

Richard John Loveday had joined the 6th batt Wiltshire regiment and was killed on the 29th April 1918. He was the second son of William Loveday of the Lottage iron

foundry works. His obituary told that although he had been wounded twice the “third bullet had proved fatal”. He is buried at the Arneke british cemetery, France.

Bandsmen who returned safely were Fred, Frank, Wilf and George Jerram, George Hull, Walter Barnes, Fred Barnes and Fred Sheppard. As some of the bandsmen remain anonymous to us they will have to remain forever unidentified, more may have been killed but if so we will never know. Over the breadth of the country numerous bandsmen sacrificed their lives and in 1926 J Henry Iles erected a plaque to the memory of our country’s bandsmen. It’s nice to know that even our village lads are included.

In later years another of our bandsmen was to suffer as much as any as a prisoner of war. Cyril John Palmer was captured in Italy and forced marched, via several Stalag POW camps to Poland to work as forced labour in coal mines. His was an horrific war, often witnessing obscenities no man should. Cyril lived to see another day though he could never again eat beetroot having once had to survive on little else. Always a gentleman and a most modest man he was never heard moaning of his lot, a lesson for us all perhaps.

Walter Young Barnes had been living in Toronto when the war started having gone there to find work just a couple of years earlier. On the outbreak of war “Pelly” immediately joined the 34th Canadian infantry brigade and of course their band. Shortly afterwards he returned to Britain where he transferred to the Royal Engineers. Pelly served on the Western front for three years eventually suffering a nervous breakdown after which he was discharged from his duties.

Its been said that our bandsmen were involved in the forming of the first Wiltshire Regimental Band. Certainly Frank and Fred Jerram and Fred Barnes took their beloved instruments with them and it is of course possible. On a picture taken in France c1915 the two Jerram brothers and Fred Barnes can be seen as members of a band formed from men of various regiments for a visit by Earl Haig.

Several of our bandsmen who were eligible for military duties made petition to the appeal committee for exemption. Albert Stacey was a village baker and told in one of his several appeals that he baked 6 bags of flour a week. We’ve already read about TDBarnes but Edward Sheppard and Albert Gregory were two others who were successful in their appeals as carter’s too. Fred Alder snr had a lucky escape, as he also claimed to be a carter and an agricultural labourer (for J Cook) but even though he was fifty years old his appeal in 1918 was adjourned till a later date. For him the war probably couldn’t finish soon enough and luckily for him it did.

Bonnie Barrett “an old soldier suffering from malaria”, was described as a water engineer and agricultural labourer for Sir James Currie of Upham house and so was also made exempt as he had already done his bit.

An interesting article in 1920 told us that during that war the band had loaned to another band several of their instruments but that on being returned they had been found to have been badly damaged. I presume these were the instruments taken to the battle fields. According to this article at the start of the war the band had an instrument fund debt of £35 but now they needed “£500 to buy new instruments”, hey ho there they go again.

Chapter 9: 1919-1939

The long years of that incredibly barbaric engagement finally drew to an end on the 11th of November 1918. It left some nine million dead and the price had been high for Aldbourne with the brunt of the bill being paid with not only a death toll of ?? but also by the often forgotten wounded, with missing limbs, facial disfigurements, severe head injuries being just a few that have been mentioned in various articles. Thankfully our bandsmen were robust to the extreme and soon reformed their now defunct organisation. When the news of peace was announced the band members that had remained behind immediately gathered in the village centre "out playing patriotic airs" but it wasn't till March 1919 that they band was up and running once again in earnest.

In 1919 it was announced that the Lockeridge band was to reform infact that year also saw the Beechingstoke band reform but in a later report the writer said "It was not the Band of the past, only a remnant". The importance of resuming to normality was mentioned once or twice in odd articles and the village of Woodborough even went as far as holding a public meeting to discuss the reconstruction of not only their village's life, but of their band as well.

All over the country bands did not reform, due not to a massive loss of life but simply because men were weary of being away from their homes and loved ones. Full of the horrors that they had had to endure, many just did not feel any desire to make music. Being away for so long meant for many that they simply wanted to sit down and rest and to enjoy the company of their wives and children, it was mostly as simple as that.

Here is a list of band engagements for the year of 1919, starting on March 16th the band paraded prior to a memorial service held in honour of the "returned soldiers" and headed a procession that included some "two hundred children". March 22nd saw a supper for the returned soldiers during which "the band played selections of music". In July the "Aldbourn silver band was in attendance at the Feast celebrations and proved a great attraction" and at a cricket match the "band came out and played patriotic airs". Another report stated that they played each Saturday night somewhere in the village ... "the instrumentalists play with great sympathy". No contests, or even concerts or any engagements outside the parish at this time but it was still early days. At least daily life had resumed its dull but safe monotony, dullness and safety must have been much needed by the returning "hero's".

The band's president in the early twenties was Thomas Illingworth J.P. who lived in Rose Cottage in West Street. Kitty, his daughter married Capt William Brown of the Manor. The Illingworths originated from Halifax and owned a company that was involved in the production of photographic paper. He gave the band a huge silver cup that was used as first prize in the band contests held here during the twenties. It is of Irish silver and was stamped in Sheffield in 1921.(see photo). Another, for use in the six-a-side football matches, was donated by Sir James Currie of Upham but its whereabouts is unknown. The Illingworth's eventually moved to live in Chalford, Glos but soon after in 1923 Thomas died. He can be seen on the 1922 photo.

Young players were encouraged to take part in both band and village concerts and before becoming full members, junior players would usually make their public debuts playing in quartets. Lads like of Bertie Palmer would join with Bobby Barnes, Eric

and Vic Barrett, Bollo Braxton, Arthur and Cyril Palmer, going round to Joe Alders at Neals Farm for any final rehearsal needed. (see photo).

Life in our village must never have been dull though it has been described as such on more than one occasion. Men were always out and about being involved in village life, much more probably than most of us are today. With any amount of things to do they still found time to serve their community.

In the Aldbourne Fire Brigade records (yes, they do survive and what wonderful reading they make) of the middle twenties is to be found the names of many of our bandsmen. They were George, Alfred, and Frank Jerram, Arthur and Henry Palmer, Fred Barnes, Jack Loveday, Fred Alder and last but not least Harry Wooton an ardent band supporter for many years. The brigade had been led for a couple of years by Capt Thynne but after an accident in 1926 he had decided to retire. Alfred Jerram followed him and became captain in 1927, and he was to be its leader for the next 21 years! Fred Jerram completed a total of 38 years (once asked if his father was ever at home his son Vin reply was in the negative) service and on December 28th 1945 he wrote in the brigades record book: "papers etc. handed over by A V Jerram being his last night of duty having presented his resignation to parent station one month previous. Same was accepted. W.H.C.Humphries appointed leader".

During the second war Fred had been injured at a call out here in Aldbourne. On May 26th 1944, an army lorry had caught fire outside the petrol station in West street and whilst attending Fred was badly burned on his face, neck and hands, still suffering from shock the report of that incident was written in his own (slightly shaky) hand, but true to form by June 16th he was back on duty.

Tommy Liddiard once said that "even if you have the talent in your boys you still must have the foresight and fortitude that brings out the best in your students" and boy was he right. Luckily we have had such men, some locally bred others as paid tutors. Even the loss of Albert Stacey in 1922 doesn't seem to have hit as hard as it might have and the band seems to have recovered quickly. Albert was replaced by Alfred Jerram who remained as the day to day bandmaster until early in 1929. Alfred of course worked along side the professional conductor Fred Dimmock, who first appeared in 1926 when he took the band to the Silchester contest. Rent a crowd was the order of the day and many of the village supported them and it was reported that they "tensely listened to the music that proved victorious". That day Herbie Palmer won another of his many medals for his trombone playing it being described as "far and away ahead of the other trombone soloists".

By 1927 the band was already recognising Dimmocks work in raising their musical standards when they presented him with an arm chair as he had "done much to bring them up to their present excellence".

Dimmock liked it here in Aldbourne and his loyalty to them is shown with the length of time he continued to come here. In 1929 he said in his speech at the annual dinner that what he liked most about the Aldbourne mentality was "that whenever they went to a contest they went with a will to win". Dimmock enjoyed winning and he would not have stayed so long if the band had not delivered the goods.

Band members had to each pay 6d a week to enable their band to be able to afford Dimmock as his charge was a heavy one of £3-00 a rehearsal. If all the prizes such as the £20 won at the Pewsey contest in 1925 were so lucrative then it was obviously worth the bands while. His worth was criticised by some in our village at that time but what ever his costs were they were insignificant for his teachings were to be repeated over and over again by his successors, from Joe Alder through to Bob Barnes. He instilled a will to win into not only the players that once sat in front of him but through his teachings into future bandsmen, money well spent?

When money of the past is mentioned it is often difficult to compare to today's rate of exchange so if I tell you that a AGM report in 1926 told that they had won £48 at the three contests entered during the previous year and that the same carried an advert for a Citroen 3 seater coupé from the Slough factory costing £255 you still wouldn't be any the wiser would you?, I'm not anyway. Sadly no actual records of the bands finances exist except for a couple of reports in the M.T. For the year of 1928 we had an income of £187-12s-9d and the grand sum of £13-14s in hand at that years end.

The very first contest Arthur Palmer attended was in 1926 and held at Newbury and although he didn't play (well he was only ten) he did hold the music on the stand for Mr Dimmock as it was a windy day. This must have been the normal thing for the young members to do as Eric Barrett once said he had done the self same thing. For the Newbury contest the band would practice at Stockcross, with rehearsal facilities being arranged by former member Reg Penny, when he worked for the Sutton estate. A rehearsal held in a farm building is not such a peculiar place and I can personally remember one held in a farm yard and another held in Barnes coach depot. The majority of band contests were always held outside unless rain forced them into cramped village halls or under canvas and so the weather always took a major part in a days pleasantries.

When in the village Dimmock often stayed with Oliver Hawkins and his family. Oliver was one of our most eminent village statesmen, always a staunch supporter of anything Aldbourne and particularly the band. Oliver's daughter Nancy well remembered Dimmock and described him as "a gentleman with a strict nature". Members would turn up well before the required time to get themselves ready for the practice knowing that there would be trouble if they were late. Dimmock was a very popular band trainer in the London area and often conducted several bands at the same contest. A 1932 report probably sums him up best with him being described as "an instructor of proved worth". Dimmock had a brother who conducted a band in Wales and he occasionally came and took rehearsals if Fred was busy elsewhere and his son Peter was once head of outside broadcasts for the BBC.

Concerts and contests are the only two outlets for a brass band to show it's worth and over the years the band has performed many hundreds if not thousands though the majority of these being to audiences outside Aldbourne. 1927 saw a performance in Ramsbury for which they took advantage of Dimmocks presence for rehearsals for the coming Amesbury contest. The report interestingly tells us that he had presented Joe Alder jnr with his first medal at the age of twelve.

Dimmock was obviously well known to our bandsmen prior to his coming and his abilities had a well tested history for when it was decided to employ a professional conductor his name was the only one on their list. The years under Dimmocks

guidance was to have a dramatic effect on the contest results (see list) and he continued to lead them to victories until 1939. The outbreak of the second world war meant the no contests for over five years and this was to be the end of a unprecedented relationship between Dimmock and the band.

Trouble once reared its ugly head at the rehearsal of another of our professional conductors. Mr Victor Brooks had made sarcastic remarks aimed at Bonnie Barrett, now Bonnie would have walked that day from Upham where he lived to band practice and would have been faced with the long haul back and the last thing he was going to tolerate was anything like that so he told Brooks in no uncertain terms what he thought of him and concluded with the threat that he would "wrap his trombone around his neck!". I`m disappointed in not being able to tell what came of this but Brooks was not destined to become a well-known figure in the bandroom after that.

In 1936 Mr Jack Lennon was involved in a concert conducted by TA Palmer, in fact Jack performed some cornet solos. He played with them in the early thirties being a local man from Swindon and became another of our professional conductors but his reign too was but a short one, Lennon adjudicated at the 1936 Hungerford contest.

Professional conductors have been used many times in recent years but and after the last war William Scholles of the Rushden Temperance band was to be a prominent figure for several years and again the band had some considerable successes under him, he was here on and off from 1950 to 1958. Another was George Crossland (1952 – 1958) George conducted the Luton band but he also gave us many good results too. From 1953 to 1959 Joe Alder fronted the band at all contests and concerts and from 1959 to 1973 so too did Bob Barnes. Bobs time with the band as it's conductor has to be seen as important an era as any, though not as long as some his contest results are quite unbelievable and much of the bands more recent prowess is down to his work.

A new tactic was employed in 1920 with the placing of an advert in the M.T.to attract engagements, flower shows, garden parties, sports days and dances was the type of engagement being sought.

In 1922 Fred Barnes was "tried out" by the Swindon football club, a special license having to be arranged as he did not live in the Swindon area. Although an extremely fine player, by village standards that is, it would seem that he was not destined to play for them.

ARTICLE DATED APRIL 1926 IN "MUSICAL PROGRESS"

"Aldbourne is a small village, lying far away "from the madding crowd," and several miles away from a railway station, but, like many other English villages, it is possesses a band of fine players who have all been brought out "on the premises." We have not been given the name of the local bandmaster, but Mr Fred Dimmock, of London, is the professional teacher, and the secretary Br T.D. Barnes, who has worked very hard in the interests of the bandsmen.

The band has had its ups and downs, and during the war was entirely disbanded because nearly every man went forth to “do his little bit” for the cause of the empire. Since the reorganisation of the band at the conclusion of hostilities, and the purchase of their fine set of Hawkes Excelsior sonorous instruments, the band has made remarkable strides. Although it is difficult and expensive for the band to attend contests, as they are situated so far away from the scene of action, they never neglect that this means of improving their status, and last year they attended three competitions and were successful in winning no less than six first prizes and one third, with two challenge cups and soloist medals. At one of those three contests the band won every prize there was to win in both sections!”

Chapter 10: Members

One band member, though never a playing member but one of many who was just as essential, was Reginald Decimus Penny. Brother-in-law of Albert Stacey, Reg was a collector with one hell of a reputation, for those who knew him reckoned he could get a pound note out of a brick wall! Today we have Jesse Jones and his unstinting work in the money raising stakes has to be now well in advance of Reg. In the autumn of 1996 Jesse single handedly raised over £1000 and it is difficult to imagine how or who who will be able to improve on that!

Reg had achieved the grand age of 93 when I had the privilege of sitting with him at his home in Newbury. Reg is to be seen on the 1922 photo aged 19, very much an odd job man for the band, keeping the lights that they used when parading round the village in good working order. As stated previously Reg was a formidable collector and being one of as many as five regular men who turned out to help the band. They would have a friendly competition between themselves to see who could collect the most, but this ended in an argument between Reg and the then “Head” collector (probably William Loveday, Reg wouldn’t say) when Reg was able to beat him in the amount collected and from that day on Reg was at the top of any pecking order. Collectors like Reg would also be involved in collecting money for any of the other village organisations that required their services. Reg was a wonder to talk to as it was rather like going into a time machine and it was a rare privilege for me. Sadly, I was only able to visit with him the once and shortly after my visit Reg passed away. The many things I learnt from him was invaluable to this story and I will always be grateful to him for the stories he shared with me.

I would like to describe here, the men that made the band what it once was. Some, perhaps, didn’t become major figures in the band’s history, yet without them it wouldn’t have had one. Unfortunately we don’t know the names of every member, for though faces can be clearly seen on the surviving photos there is sadly no one left alive to put names to them. Still, I have attempted to record for posterity as many as was possible. Also to know a little of the private side of the men of our past is I feel as important as any other of the stories that had to be pieced together. This list also contains the names of any who may have supported the band in other ways. Many of our village men were not known by their christian names but by their nicknames and so I include them as well if they had one:

Earnest Ashfield

An adopted boy.

Archibald Alder

He moved away to Paddington and like his brothers played with their band.

Frederick G Alder

Documented elsewhere but in his retirement he lived at No 8, Lottage Road and worked for Mr Moulding as a painter and decorator, and J Cook as a farrier and he also ran the wet fish shop in West St, a man of much humour.

Frederick Alder jnr "Luke the eleventh"

Like his elder brother Joe, Fred was born in London and came to live in Aldbourne when a young lad. A very good player for his time "octaving" (Playing eight notes beneath the written notation) light years before the majority of the country's bass players. Fred retired to Australia to be with his son and ended his days there.

James & Joseph Alder

Can be found documented elsewhere.

Joseph G Alder

Born in London, Joe worked on the railways as a painter. Principle cornet and later bandmaster.

William Alder "Petro" b. 1862

William played the trombone in his latter years and can be seen on the 1909 photo. As an old man he wore steel rimmed glasses and got his nickname because of the way he pronounced the word petrol. He lived in Baydon Street and in the 1891 census he was listed as a chimney sweep.

William Barrett

In 1886 band?

James Barrett "Dumper"

A small stocky man.

He was a gamekeeper for the Crowood estate lived Castle St and lodged in with George elder bros ? up Baydon Hill.

Married Mary Witts, 3 children.

Charles Stead Barrett "Bonnie" 1882-1961

He had been a chauffeur at Upham and also drove wagons for Charley Stacey.

In 1930 he had to go to Ramsbury to deliver a load of bricks for Charles Stacey. He had popped into a shop and after lighting a cigarette had then set off on his journey. On his arrival he found a young boy perched on the footboard of his wagon who admitted hitching a ride. (how frightening) For years he walked down from Upham into the village to attend band engagements, often setting out a couple of hours before he was due at the band room so he wouldn't be late.

Father of Sid, Cyril, Vic and Eric. Lovingly remembered for missing one of the chimes in a solo " Bells across the meadow". I don't think he ever lived that one mistake down.

Eric Barrett 1914-1994

Though he was secretary for 35 years, his wife Nancy did most of the writing. Eric completed 50? years with the band in 1972. He was a first class carpenter and made many of the bands current kit boxes. He was responsible for the band getting back together as soon as they did after the second war. Eric for many years ferried any players who were unable to get to band.

A most perfect example of a bandsman, the like of him is rare indeed.

Vic Barrett 1915-1970

Vic was one of the members that went with Joe Alder when he went to conduct the GWR Band in Swindon. A bass player, his favorite brass band composition, the name of which can to be seen carved on his headstone was Eric Balls beautiful Resurgum – I shall rise again.

Vic had quite a sense of humour. On attending a contest at Oxford he befriended a bass player of the Black Dyke Mills Band and was allowed by him to play an item with them at their concert in the town hall. (the conductor was unaware!) The only Aldbourne player who ever played with at such great heights, such was Vic.

Sidney Barrett

Played in the quartet of young boys that Bridgeman taught during the second war. Never an adult bandsman.

Frank Barrett b 1871

Worked on the railways and played E bass with the GWR Paddington Band.

Father was William and Jane?

Fred Barrett

Brother of Frank?

James Barrett 1855-1888

Shoemaker

John Barrett

Brother of Fred.

Thomas Dixon Barnes 1886-1976

Tommy was a village hauler and coal merchant and coach proprietor buying his original business from Jimmy Martin for whom he was the head groom.

He was also bandmaster and a chapel choir leader for a time. His sons Robert and James followed him into the band. It was Tommy that organised the bands football matches that started in 1925. (continuing until 1936, its 11th) also band sec.

Robert Harris Barnes 1917-1990

A soft spoken man with a very good singing voice. He often sang duets with his wife Stella who incidentally made, along with Nancy Barrett, the bands first stand banners. He worked in the family business all his life. A Methodist lay preacher and WI choir leader. The band played under Bob for many years with great success.

James Barnes 1922-1990

Jim also worked in his fathers coach and coal business that in later years he run along with his brother Bob.

Fred Barnes

A footballer of great potential, he was once "tried out" for Swindon town. To do this a special dispensation was granted as he was from Aldbourne and not Swindon. He was not successful and continued his football with his own team.

Walter Young Barnes "Pelly" 19/2/1886 – 3/7/1968

A self appointed town crier (photo in MT 1934) with a deep bass singing voice which is ironic as he played the soprano cornet. Also a flugal player and a member for many years. As a postman he would cycle to Lambourn to collect post from the railway and on his return would deliver it as the villages second post. Pelly emigrated to Canada prior to the 1st war but returned immediately to do his duty joining first the Life Guards and then the Royal Engineers. He served for three years on the Western Front during which time he was gassed and also suffered a nervous breakdown he was medically discharged. Lived in Little Bethel, Baydon Hill.

William Braxton "Bollo" d 1995

A cornet player of note (sic). He joined the Royal Horse Guards "Blues" Band in 1933 where he played the trombone as well. He composed a march for the band's inaccurate jubilee celebrations of 1950 that he called "Aldbourne Band Jubilee". He followed Joe Alder as the bands principle cornet.

Bill once fell off his horse at a trooping of the colour parade and the then Prince of Wales stated that the Groom in charge was to get the telling off and not Bill himself. He reached the rank of Band Sergeant.

His aunt, Mrs Teagle, created hell with Joe Alder after he helped him get into the army but Joe insisted he did it for the boys own good.

Ralph Bridgeman

Came to village in the twenties.

Died c late 1987 in Australia.

Thomas Brind d 1869

In 1891 he is listed as a mail delivery assistant. On pc in 1896.

John Cook b 1851 or 1856

A machinist at the chair factory and living in Castle Street in 1891, and later lived in the green. A probable member of Bunces band, and he may also have played in the Edward Stacey orchestra. In 1902 however he played two solos at a concert when he was apparently still “capable of handling a cornet”

Charles Coxhead or Cox

His widowed mother married Harry Westal. Nothing else is known.

Played drum.

Hubert Davies

One of the small boys who played during the second war.

William Deacon

A first class euphonium player of his day, William worked at Hungerford on the railways. He lived in Pudley Cottage, Castle Street and finally moved away to Basingstoke. Arthur Eric Palmer once met up with him at a Reading contest when William was playing with another band in his later years. As they stood talking to each other a wasp stung William on the mouth and he was unable to play that day. William won many soloist medals during his time as the bands euphonium soloist. I wonder they all went?

AG William Deacon “Bill” 1909-1996

Started his working life as an apprenticed baker eventually becoming a bricklayer, eventually he had his own building firm. He was chairman of the band for some twenty years and eventually its president.

William Thomas Dew (Billy)

A Private in the 6th Wiltshire regiment, he was killed nr Albert in France on the 3rd November 1916 aged 23.

Edgar Dixon 1880-1964

Another most loyal long standing member. A bass player and in his latter years percussionist. He homes included Petty Well, a bungalow he built in Lottage Road and another of identical design up Baydon Hill. Born at Marriage Hill and like his father James from Larkhill was a carpenter and his mother Jane came from Ramsbury. He married twice, Roda Sheppard and then Sarah Batchelor and is buried

with both his wives. Father of Jack, and uncle of Bert his great nephews Tim and Johnathan from Ramsbury played in the band in the 1980/90's.

Jack Dixon 1910-c 1969

Son of Edgar, Jack attended Marlborough Grammar School and for a short time was secretary of the band. He played the baritone and it was Jack and Cecil Liddiard who for some reason stole a euphonium mouthpiece from a trade stand at a Crystal Palace Contest in the 30's, its value was 7/6d. They gave it to Arthur Palmer who used it for the whole time he played euphonium and he still had it in his possession in 1995. (perhaps we shouldn't know this).

Jack died of M.S.

Tom Emberlain

Tom often collected for us and his son Jesse at the grand age of 91 in 1995 helped me in my research.

Albert Gregory 1895-1962

The first known "foreigner" in the band. He came to work at Smith's farm in West Street as a farm labourer. Seen on the 1922 for the first time stayed in the band a for good few years.

George Hull

George was a very competent G trombone player and another man to show his "good" side when posing for the camera. He could sometimes be a show off and might sometimes outstay his welcome. He was an illegitimate child and was brought up by a Mrs Simms who lived at Mow Cop. Every morning she would make him recite the ten commandments before he went off to school pressing her knuckles hard into the back of his neck until he got them right. For all his faults he was a very loyal bandsman and those like him are necessary for the continuation of a band!

Frank Hubert

Our G trombone player in the 30`s. played the mouth organ.

Thomas Haines b 1861

A bricklayers labourer in the 1891 census. A member of the Brown Bunce Band and probably played the Trombone as Bill Deacon remembered as a lad playing it along with the young boys of the family when they lived opposite him in Baydon Street. The trombone hung on the staircase wall, the slide didn't work very well if at all. Bill also remembered him repairing the roads using horse dung and stones.

Father of Tom, Fred and Ted Haines.

Tommy Haines

Playing rep in the 20`s,

Family lived in Coles, Lottage.

Fred Haines

Full time soldier drum major in Wilts 1st Regiment.

George Gulliver Jerram 1884-1947

The man with the most colourful of names played the bass drum. He also starred in the village play and also was a well known singer, often entertaining at village concerts. Known to be a little grumpy. Clerk to the parish council and a church steward. Did lead light glazing.

Alfred Vincent Jerram 1889-1959

A G trombone player he was Albert Staceys best man at his wedding and it him with his back to us on the wedding photo. A wheelwright and carpenter by trade. He was also secretary and bandmaster. Alfred completed a total of 38 years with the fire service. he played a violin solo at a harvest social in 1932.

Francis Daniel Jerram b after 1891-1961

A bricklayer by trade

Wilfred Jerram 1895-1981

A member of the prize winning quartet. He became conductor of the band after the war. It was he who raised the alarm for the fire that destroyed the Powells racing stables at High Town in 1921? The burning straw flew as far as four barrows! Dimmock once told him not to be so humble when playing a baritone solo

A carpenter and joiner by trade.

Married Edith Hale in 1922

"Noah" Liddiard

Father ? of Alan the last blacksmith in the village. Noah, a blacksmith bought the forge in 1910.

Jack Liddiard

Brother of Alan the blacksmith did play in band

Tommy Liddiard

A trombone player, he became an auctioneer in Swindon, and a member of the band for fifty years. Arising from some village reports is one interesting point. Initially there appears another conductor in the middle of the period that is accredited to Albert Stacey. Reports dated 1903 and 1907 both mention a Mr Tommy Liddiard as conductor, it would appear that Tommy took the baton when Albert fell out with the band on a couple of occasions.

Tommy once brought his Fife and Drum band from the Swindon Central Mission hall to play at a Wesleyan fete in August of 1925.

Tommy was described by Mr Reg Penny as a “smart man”, and he once lived in the Old Market House on the green and in later years moved to Swindon and became an auctioneer.

William Liddiard “Busky” 1904-1976

Founder of the building firm and played with the band during the 1930’s.

Albert Liddiard

A farmer

Theodore T Little 1905-1962

Theo was a workhouse boy from Hungerford who came to live here with Edie and William Tucker along with his brother Bob. He worked for Jack Barrett as a chair polisher but also acted as a Catalogue agent like anyone might do but considerably bigger mode. In later times his adopted father collected for the band. He is buried with Violet his wife whom he married in 1932 and her parents Edie and William Tucker. After returning from a contest the worse for drink he went back to Busky Liddiards for a cup of coffee in an effort to sober up a little. His mother stormed into the room and clouted him severely around the head as he was not to act like this. Sued May Palmer for using obscene and profane language at his wife. May was fined £5.

Children were Ruby and Mervyn.

Walter Lawrence

He was church organist and did some arrangements of hymns for the band. He also took several of the official photos. He was related to Lawrence`s builders of Oxford Street, Ramsbury.

He also took part in many of the bands concerts accompanying soloists on the piano.

Jack Mildenhall

Another illegitimate child, lived at Preston with his mother in the Tollhouse. In the 1891 census his mother "worked in the fields", (what hard lives our people had). He lived alone in later years.

John Orchard snr "Jack" 1870-1945

A supporter only and on the 1910 photo. He is documented singing at band concerts. A chairmaker by trade till his business went bankrupt, he was also the village postman, living at the post office on the green. His wife was Sarah Rebecca who died in 1964 aged 94.

John Orchard "Jack" 1894-1917

Son of John (Jack) the chair maker. He joined up in 1914 and became a sergeant in the Kings Royal Rifle Corps and was awarded the D.C.M.

He was killed Nr Hooge in Belgium on the 27th of August 1917 aged 23.

Alfred Palmer 1844-1925

A baker at The Old Bakehouse in West Street? A member of Bunces band.

In 1888 he led our band in the Aldbourne Benefit club parade.

Joe Palmer b 1887

Was a hurdle maker and woodman. A pleasant man and a regular chapel goer. He was the father of Bert?

Henry Palmer

Berties oldest brother and was a labourer for Charles Stacey.

He lived along side the fish and chip shop.

Bertie Palmer

A painter for Mr Mantle. In later years he lived in ? Lottage, and retired to Eastbourne. . He was chairman for ? and even bandmaster for a short time after the war following Arthur Palmer. He was awarded a certificate for fifty years service in 1972.

Albert`s mother used to light the fire in the winter months when they rehearsed in West Street.

Married Hilda ?

Thomas Palmer b 1875

As his father before him he was a woodman and would sell bundles of faggots for 3d a bundle.

He was the father of Jim, Herbie, Arthur and Eva. He joined the band aged 10 in 1884?

Mr Palmer

Mentioned in the churchwarden accounts.

Herbert John Palmer 1905- 13/12/1972

A woodman, worked at Cowcroft at the top of Ogbourne hill.

Married Elsie Sylvia Grace b. 1910 d. 1967.

Jim Palmer 6/5/1912-15/8/1985

Married Daisy Edwards from Inkpen

Children Rodney, Colin and Keith

Colin played in band till approx 18yrs old

Lived in later years at Axford retired to Chiseldon 20 Butts Rd. Worked with father as a woodman as a youth, then became a building labourer. Joined army Glos Regt military police. Served in India during war. After demob worked in GWR Swindon til retirement.

Arthur Thomas Palmer

Joining the band at the age of eleven Arthur was a very keen bell ringer for an enormous amount of years being taught by Alfred Palmer, also bandmaster for a short period, 1932 – 37 .He played at the annual club dinner at Great Bedwyn from 1912 to 1914 and then at a send off of three of our bandsmen in 1915. Thrown out of fire brigade in 192?

Eva Palmer c1908-Nov 1999

A staunch supporter of the band all her life. Even now, though well into her eighties takes an interest, although her health doesn't allow her to make any appearances. She has fond memories of her father Tom and her brothers Arthur, Herbie and Jim playing with the band. Although in times past it was unthinkable for a woman to play she was truly a bandsman at heart and if born today would be accepted gladly into the movement. When the band went to London to play at the Crystal Palace, Eva would always come along and support them as she was in service in London.

William Palmer "Fanny"

Was a chair turner and a fine G trombone player for his day.

Cyril John Palmer 1917-1993

Eventually a G trombone player and went with Alder to the GWR Band in Swindon. He was brother of Arthur Eric Palmer.

Arthur Eric Palmer 1916-1995

The only player to become both the principle cornet and principle euphonium player of the band.

Reg Decimus Penny 1902-1995

Born the tenth child (Decimus, get it?) of thirteen and the brother of Mable Penny. Collected for the band some ten years. He was out one day, just listening to the band, when they were playing at the Swindon town gardens, and he was seen by a man from Ramsbury who made comments that he was safe from Reg as he wasn't collecting that day. Few were missed when Reg had a box in his hand! He ceased being a member when due to the lack of work left the village in 1928.

Jim Penny d 1974

He died in 1974 and his family presented the band a conductors stand in his memory. It was stolen in 1995 at the Yeovil contest.

Thomas William Stacey b 1870

Cornet player, a bricklayer and brother of Harry and Charles the village builder. Also a cousin of Albert.

Henry Stacey b 1877

A cornet player was a shepherd for the Brown family.

Edward Stacey "Mobey" b 1856

In the 1871 census an agricultural labourer. A general dealer and toy shop owner. wife was Ann b. 1845. His father was Job Stacey b.1827 a woodman from Lambourn.

Edward Sheppard b 1888

In 1891 living in oxford Street.

Henry Brind Sheppard 1868-1946

Was the very first carrier in the village. He also did hair cuts and shaving from his premises on the green. He started the Sheppard farm in ? as a small holder until his son Fred expanded the farm.

His wife was Rose Ann Dew. Mightily proud of his village once stated in 1926 “a football team any village might be proud of and a band that was second to none” also said “the band contribute a good deal towards relieving the monotony of the life in the vilage”.

A prominent member of the parish council and a writer of many letters to the Marlborough Times. One, written in 1909 complaints of the treatment of our school children on winter mornings when he felt they should, after walking many miles into school have been given a hot drink. I wonder if he got his way?

Sec of Rational Benefit society.

Frederick Henry Sheppard 1901-1971

A carpenter by trade also helped his father on his small holding. Later Fred expanded the farm and became a full time farmer. Worked on building aircraft during first war,

Henry (Harry) his son and a future principle cornet followed in his footsteps, and James, his son a tuba player in 1995.

James Stroud b 1874

Brother in law of Tom Palmer came down from Paddington Band after working on the railways and played bass.

Married Sarah Hatheril in 1901.

Horace Vockins “Cake-eye”

Was a workhouse boy from Hungerford? and taken in by a Mrs Deacon. He got his name when asked the colour of his trousers answered Cake-eye instead of Kakhi. His father also collected for the band.

Albert Waite

A footballer of some renown his grandson, David played for a short time in the seventies. Her married Florence Rosier in 1920.

Harry Westal b 1876

Harry appears on nearly every early photo there is(all?). He worked for Jack Orchard at his chair factory in Turnpike and this was the trade he was apprenticed to. He lived in Lottage Road and at Mt Pleasant. He married for a second time in 1909 to Mary Ann Cox. His first wife was ??????????

Son Charles played in a military band and after the war beat the bass drum sometimes for us?

[Chris Rust: Having traced him to be a 7th cousin once removed, I can say: He was born 1875, had three wives: Mary Ann Scarlett, Mary Ann Cox and Violet Eva Evans]

Albert Westall

The son of Harry on 1900 photo as a baby and a cornet player in 1922?

FG & ? Wicks

Father and son from Lambourn and both saddlers. They played in the band in the twenties and early thirties when they were needed.

They were never regular members of the band and fell out over non payment of expenses.

A Mr Wicks died in 1900 at Lambourn and is said to come from Bishopstone.

Chapter 11: 1939 – Today

The coming of the war in 1939 came (as it did in 1914) presumably as a shock to our band as they were still preparing for a contest right up to the outbreak. Eric Barrett said they had “wasted their time”. In reality our band did close down this time round with more or less all of the men going off but some modicum of effort to keep things ticking over was still made. Ralph Bridgman, a very talented cornet player from Ware in Hertfordshire had been asked by Dimmock to come to play with us as our principle cornet player. Ralph had been encouraged here by various bandsmen and supporters who had even helped him eke out a living and Oliver Hawkins allowed him use of some land on which he kept chickens. Being a contentious objector Ralph had not gone to war but had decided to get some of the boys of the village together. We can see them all in a photo taken in the garden of Beech Knoll House, they are: Sidney Barrett, Dennis Keen, Harold Wilkins and David Smith.

On cessation it was not long before we were back in action. Eric Barrett soon started to contact players as they in turn came home. On May 17 a meeting re revival was organised, Bill Deacon presiding. Oliver Hawkins told that the finances stood at £15-00. The new committee consisted of Jim Barnes hon sec, Bill Deacon chairman and Edgar Dixon, C Barrett, F Smith H Wilkins and Wilf Jerram as bandmaster, and so they were off once again with winning ways in the junior section of the Reading contest.

Dimmock never returned. He had once told the band that he would ask Dr Dennis Wright, a then leading brass band officiate, to come but this never was to be, if the war had not occurred who knows what the future may have held for them.

I leave off at this point for the period following the second war is not for me to touch too heavily upon and I feel I must leave something for the future. I must however not exit without a some mention of highlights of events that followed on after the regrouping in 1947.

Events now took on a positive turn with the band becoming more and more successful on and off the contest stage. The professional conductors that came after the war were from 1953 to 1956 a Mr William Scholles of Rushden Temperance and from 1958 to ? a Mr George Crossland of the Marston Valley Band.

The successful times continued though arguably the best band was yet to come under the wing of Don Keen. The era of Bob Barnes was as good a time as ever for winning ways. The band became a Championship section band in 1963 though Bob once said that “now the band was in the top section we were not able to win quite so often as the competition was much stiffer”.

Joe Alder 1923-1959

Born not in Aldbourne but London. His parents had come from the village so a dabchick he may not have been in the true sense of the word but a Dabchick he was by blood never the less. He demanded nothing short of perfection and when he couldn't get it would go off else where in search for it (not finding it meant returning to us for another go) Although he switched between the G.W.R band of Swindon a few times he always did return. Joseph jnr was a very advanced man in his thinking

for his time. By this I mean he was a very able player who had an inner need to be as professional as possible. Even his posture in the early band photos show him posing for the photographer. Joe`s stance to banding is to be likened to the attitude of players from more Northerly climates. I am sure that if he had been a Yorkshireman he would have been even more feared than he was, and believe me he was a feared man, making many of his students cry when giving them lessons!

Fred , his brother was not afraid of him and several times at band rehearsals they nearly came to blows. Once when rehearsing in West Street Joe asked Fred to play in a certain style but Fred refused and Joe almost threw Fred down the stairs during the row that followed. The fellowship of banding sometimes runs a little off course! Reg Penny, a non-player member of the band from 1918 to 1928 tells of seeing a young William Braxton with swollen lips and eyes after a lesson with Joe, meaning that he had not only been working hard but that he had been crying as well due to Joe`s hard ways.

Joe`s need for the band to progress, come what may, resulted in the retirement of some of the older players such as Harry Westal when Joe took over as Band Master. He wanted the band to advance and improve but his ways could be far from subtle. Rolly Mundy, a Swindon man that also played with us, tells in a letter that “Joe could be very temperamental and quite severe in his methods but he got good results”. Joe was probably the toughest man the band has ever known.

After Cyril Winstone, a Salvationist from Swindon joined the band on principle cornet Joe came back and played the repiano part. Joe conducted the band on and off between 1922 1929? and 1956? When in his late years the band would arrive during xmas week to play him a couple of carols. Don Keen would always tell us to play as well as possible or Joe would be criticising us. He died in 1973 at the age of 77 of T.B and the band played of course at his funeral.

Wilf Jerram 1946-1951

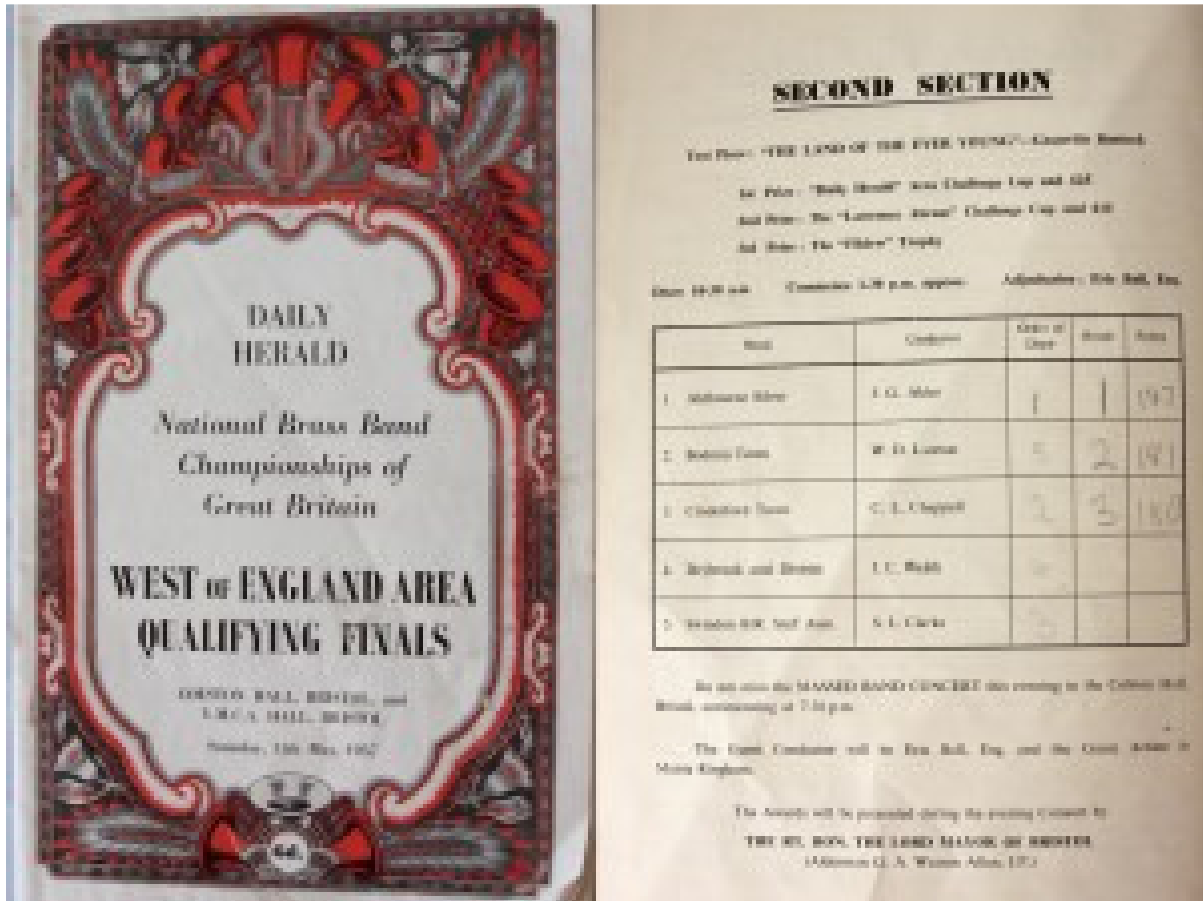
Wilf had been the solo baritone in the band for many years and a very good player he was too. An amusing little tale is the time he played the missing note of the chapel organ on his baritone. He played the missing note every time it appeared through out the service, honestly.

Wilf took the band after the second war until the early fifties.

Robert Harris Barnes 1959-1973

Bob took the helm in the late fifties and the band stopped its use of professional conductors under Bob, but it is noticable that the band was still a major threat without them. Bob was probably the most sensitive (musically) of all of our home grown conductors and much could be learnt even today of his skills by our present and future conductors! In his earlier days Bob became the bands solo horn player, infact the whole horn section was dominated by the Barnes family at one time with TD, Jim, Terry, Lionel and Fred all past horn players. Bob also formed the bands only choir that although didn`t last very long was a great success whilst in existance. report mentionns them in 1952 singing in a wi concert

Under Bobs direction came the man who was to make the Aldbourne Band of the late seventies and most of the eighties probably the best trained unit the village has ever had. A few might dispute this but the players of this time were without doubt, technically the most proficient and when under Don Keens direction had several noticeable successes, a hat trick win at Reading and the West of England title in 1981.



After Don's departure in 1982 the band entered a period of great unrest. As you now know it's life has been one of several stops and starts and when in 1994 it nearly came to yet another breach in its life. Some were ready to admitted defeat and if it was not for the one thing that this village is renowned for, fortitude and fighting abilities, it would have succumbed. Fortunately we resisted, and with the high moral that our present band members are deemed rich with we are once more becoming a "Worry to the others".

I stop at this point with my ramblings and I leave any in depth work of the period of post world war two in the hands of another. My advice to that person is to not leave it as late as I nearly did. I missed out on much of the knowledge of Eric Barrett, Bob Barnes, Big Arthur Palmer, William Braxton, and of course every one else who has passed away before I started to ask questions. I only just caught Arthur Palmer, Mrs Molly Lunn, Bill Deacon and Reg Alder before they died and it saddens me to think what stories I've missed out on just because I and few others never thought to ask our older members any questions.

Chapter 12: Bandrooms

The earliest known bandroom amazingly still stands. We know of its existence from chats held with Albert Stacey and Bill Deacon, when as a young lad he had worked for Albert in his bakery. The location used was a wash house behind “Ellen Liddiard,s”. She lived there in the early part of this century. It stands at the rear of Holly Cottage in Church Street. It’s a room only 10 to 12 feet square, still complete with the fireplace and boiler for washing, and was used until they moved to somewhat larger premises c1900.

The next was an large shed that stood at the side of “Chandlers lane”. It leads to the rear of the Blue Boar to the terrace known as Willow Cottages. This was one of several buildings that had originally been constructed for use by our willow weaving industry. By the late 1890’s these sheds had become redundant but this one being large was being used for public functions, it was even called the “parish room” and for a few years it became the home of many village organisations such as the “workmens club”.

The salvation army also held the odd meeting in this “parish room”. This barn was fairly large and one end “farmer Pike” stabled his horses. At one such meeting and whilst an officer was evangelizing a horse was heard to break wind, this of course brought a snigger to the lips of the young lads that were there. Now instead of letting things pass the fatal question of “who was that?” was asked. One of the lads named Teddy Hawkins shouted out the name of one of his pals. “it was Jack Sheppard” The officer replied “Well God bless Jack Sheppard, for he is a sinner”.

The one major thing that the village has never aided the band with, is the owning of its own bandroom. With more and more of the top bands in the West of England having their own bandrooms they have been able to adjust the acoustical properties to help them in the all so important area of making quality sounds. We sadly have been unable to keep up with them in the one area that our band was always renown for, the quality of its sound. Perhaps one day it might be fortunate to have one of its own.

In 1909 the band yet again moved bandrooms. This time to Mr FW Couch `s room in West Street square. It had been originally been converted for use for the Salvation Army (though never used by them) and a report of Friday 5th February tells an interesting story.

“The band gave an entertainment in their new bandroom, the first held there and it was full”. Mr Henry Brind Sheppard was chairman and was recorded in saying that “the band did a lot of good in brightening up the village and that he was very proud of the band”. Selections were played and songs were sung by J. Orchard, G.Barrett. Mr Collier played the harmonium and Miss Palmer gave the auction sale. Of particular interest she also played some songs on a gramophone and F. Jerram and C. Martin did some recitations.

The West Street band room was to be our home for many years. Nancy barrett told that as a young girl she lived opposite this room and often listened to the band never realising that it would one day become such a prominent part of her life.

In 19?? we again moved to the grounds of the Old Rectory. We had the use of a large stable with a tin roof. freezing? etc

Next we move over the road into the church hall that once stood ? This room must have seemed a luxury as it had heating.

Chapter 13: Christian Awake!

Well, my attempts at raking out the past from piles of dusty papers, books, faint images on micro fiche screens, cassette tapes etc. etc, have nearly come to an end but since starting out on my pursuit for information and sat down at my computer tapping away, I have tried, with no luck, to find a space to talk about the most famous of Aldbourne band's traditions, what else but that of the Christmas morning jaunt around our village streets.

The only theory I have come across to date that seems to make any sense at all is that some bandsmen were also bell ringers it simply wasn't worth them going to bed after finishing their Christmas Eve carol playing just to get up again a few hours later. This seems to me a most realistic explanation but like many other episodes in any history we will probably never really know the exact truth. Arthur Palmer stated that as young boys of the late twenties they would often go down to the band room to practice of an evening just for something to do, and while there would talk to the old bandsmen about times gone by. According to him even then nobody new much about those early days. I find this odd as most happenings are recorded by our reporters and it would seem definite that the custom did not start until the turn of this century.

The earliest written mention is in a report of 1903 that stated that "at 5am the inhabitants were enlivened by strains of music by the Aldbourne brass band". I am sure though that if this had been happening for any amount of years before this it would have mentioned and therefore I am forced to conclude that it had not. Another report in 1910 said that on the Thursday prior to Christmas day that the band visited "principle residences and inns playing in "first class style" and that the next morning we "played with our usual good taste so as not to break the slumber, but rather make it more peaceful". In 1912 the report said that "one felt sorry to hear the last sounds dying away in the distance" and in 1913 we are described as "playing sweet music on Christmas morning.

The January 1920 report has this to say: " AWAKENED BY THE SWEET STRAINS OF OUR BAND. THEY WERE TOO CHARRY OF THEIR MUSIC, PLAYING JUST ENOUGH TO MAKE PEOPLE LONG FOR MORE", what cordial words. Apart from the pleasure given to many of our villagers over the years many folk have also enjoyed doing the rounds, bandsmen or no, occasionally the worse for wear, sober, mad or sane?

A wonderful report was written by Mr H. Canning of Marlborough to the Marlborough Times in 1951 telling of the morning he and his wife spent with the band and how much they enjoyed it. Another year a professor of church music from Loiseville, Kentucky, joined us on our rounds before flying home to America later that day. Back in the thirties and forties the band would call at the Rectory and have yet another glass of wine and a mince pie, courtesy of houseman Mr grunt and his wife. Eric Barrett once said that the band members were often worse for wear after an evenings caroling. (please note that I have cleaned this up).

Only an hour or so before they had already been entertained to tea by Tommy Barnes and his wife Ada. This welcome break is still very much part of this tradition and

Nelly his daughter in law still gets up and gives us a huge spread. I think a public “thank you” to Nelly has to be in order.

Tales also abound about the Christmas excursions, like the morning that the two men threw the contents of their night pot at them. They missed! Another morning one of the chaps had declined to come out some of the band walked a little out of their way to “serenade the failed bandsman”.

One morning Jesse Jones failed to arrive so it was decided that a wake up call was in order so a call was made from Jim Barnes`s and a carol was played.

The money collected during the couple of weeks build up is of great importance to the band and it would surely struggle if it didn`t collect as much as it does. Interestingly for a few years the money was split between the bandsmen themselves. It was worked on a share system, the more times you turned out the more shares you acquired. One year one of the lads, was taken seriously ill so the band decided to donate all of that years collection to him and his family.

If the intentions of this work achieves what it is intended to do, then our band will “break the slumber so as to make it more peaceful” for many years to come, I thank you for the interest you have shown.

Chapter 14: Families

Names like Alder, Barnes, Barrett, and Palmer were once synonymous as the very name of Aldbourne. Sadly, and oddly a trait that has been proved a curse for our band, a lack of male offspring from our bandsmen has meant the extinction of several of these families from not only our band but of our village as well.

Families of course was once the main stay of our band for the greater part of its life or at least until the post war years when the more common ownership of cars and motorbikes by the general public meant they could more easily commute ten/twelve miles of an evening. This meant that they were no longer “stuck” where they lived and that any players from outside the village who were known to be able to handle a brass instrument were now able to be encouraged to come here to play with us.

Five Alder brothers were once band members all at the same time. They were eventually followed by two sons of one of these, making theirs a family tradition lasting some ninety years! Take a look at the c1886 photo where all of these brothers can be seen together. Four of them left the village to go to London to work, though Archibald was too young and Joseph soon returned. They were just a few of many villagers that decided to move up to Paddington to work for the GWR.

Joseph Barnes Alder is the Euphonium player and leader. James Alder was one of the bands tuba players and William Alder can be seen as the bass drummer. In his later years William played the trombone and can be seen in several photos. In the two census returns of ? and ? William`s occupation is listed as a shepherd and chimney sweep respectively.

The youngest was Archibald, and though a young cornet player on this photo he also went on to play the trombone in his later years. Frederick Alder, also a cornet player eventually went on to play the tuba. He played the tuba with the Paddington band but on his return to Aldbourne in his later years he played what little percussion that was available. Fred`s sons, Joseph and Fred (confused already?) continued their family banding tradition till the 1970`s.

The name Barrett is also one of very long standing. Charles Barrett (Bonnie) and his four sons Eric, Victor, Sidney and Cyril (see right, 1938) have all been bandsmen but sadly Tim Barrett, Eric`s son is the last of the Barrett clan to play.

Another Barrett family was that of Frank, William and John. These brothers, like the Alders, had also gone up to London to work at Paddington and like the Alders had also played with that band. Frank Barrett eventually returned to the village and lived in number two, Willow Cottages. He had played the tuba with us until his departure to Paddington and on his return had worked at Upham as a handyman. He was responsible for starting off in the band his grandson George. George was born to Ester, Franks daughter, had married a lad named Greasley. George



once promised his grandfather that he would one day play the tuba like he had and George did indeed do just that, in the time that he spent with a T.A. band. Frank is to be seen on the 1910 photo and also the photo of the Paddington band taken in c1912. George`s grandchildren Amanda and Simon Hancock also once played, It would appear that the two other brothers William and George didn`t return home.

George? Alfred Barrett it would seem never played a brass instrument but he did play the clarinet and violin. Fred may have moved to work in Swindon though this didn`t stop him being actively involved with village affairs. In a 1906 church magazine he is mentioned playing a clarinet solo in the church after an evening service and in 1910 he took part in a village entertainment playing a violin solo. He would often join with Albert Stacey in violin duets and one evening they traveled by pony and trap to Wanborough to take part in an entertainment. At the end of the evening one old boy came up to them and said “you two can`t half tickle the necks of those fiddles”. It is probably him pictured on the 1909 photo standing at the rear left with the clarinet.

Although the name Palmer has been with the band since its conception it must be explained that though there appears to have been three separate families with the same surname associated to the band it is extremely probable that they all descended from just one source. Two of them have now been connected and so too must be the Barretts (this must happen frequently in such a small community as ours, thus is the way of a village).

Brothers Tom and Joseph Palmer were both members for a very long time and between them appear on many photos. Tom first appeared on the 1886 photo and the two can be found pictured from 1886 right through to 1950. A long and loyal length of service for the brothers but for both Tom and Joseph their banding life nearly came to a sudden halt. In 1915 Tom suffered a very serious accident when he was part of a group of sheepshearers who had been on their way to Axford on a horse drawn cart. The horse had taken fright and the cart had been overturned throwing all the men to the ground, two being hurt badly. Joseph Barnes Alder had been badly bruised all over his body but Tom suffered most by having “both his jaws broken”, what a catastrophe to happen to a bandsman but fortunately for Tom he recovered to continue in his beloved hobby. In 1924 Joseph Palmer cut the tendons of his left hand whilst he was shearing sheep, again a potential hobby stopping injury.

Tom`s four sons also became longtime players. Their names were Herbert, James, William and Arthur. Herbert`s son was never a player but became our bands mascot, complete with miniture uniform and Colin , James`s son, was the last of their line to be members.

Joe`s two sons were Henry William and Albert were also bandsmen.

I do hope you enjoy what will prove to be both a musical and visual experience, in this the life and times of what must be the greatest of all or any of Aldbourne`s fixtures “The Aldbourne Band”.

The only two other names mentioned are a Mr Hill and a Mr Thomas Palmer.

They would appear to both be members if so Palmer is then the oldest Aldbourne name that still survives as part of the tradition of the band to this day. My son Ian

James Palmer and I are both bandsman at the time of writing. Ian is a descendant of Alfred Palmer 1844-1925. Alfred is Ian`s great, great, grandfather and was probably a founder member of his band but not found mentioned by name until the 1880`s. A baker and grocer, he was also a bell ringer for some fifty years and it was he who taught another bandsman, Thomas Arthur Palmer, that art. Alfred often appeared in village entertainments, occasionally with his brother James when they would perform songs together.

In 1889 Alfred was fined the sum of one Guinea for being cruel to a horse. It was being used to plough when it was in fact too old and frail for that kind of work. Alfred told the Marlborough court that as the horse had been unable to do the work for which it had been purchased, that it had been despatched from this life by his brother James. Alfred may not have been able to afford to purchase a fit and healthy horse but that same year he purchased for the sum of £200, from the estate of Stephen Palmer dec, a dwelling and grocers shop.

Alfred didn`t have a lot of luck where horses were concerned. In 1916 he was out delivering bread to Alma farm at Preston when a passing military wagon so frightened his horse that it bolted and as a result broke its leg.

Brothers Arthur and Cyril Palmer were from another line of the Palmer clan. Arthur`s claim to fame is that he once occupied the positions of principle cornet and principle euphonium. His playing prowess is still recognised as being of the finest quality. Cyril`s playing career finished with him as a G trombone player. He was one of the few who decided to go with Joe Alder over the hill to play with the Swindon GWR band. This is one family that still continues as playing members with Arthurs grandson Ian now a member of the band. Cyril decided to remain a bachelor and so joined the ranks of the bandsmen who didn`t produce any future players for us.

Barnes is of course another of our more famous village names. This family has had members since Thomas Dixon Barnes joined in the early years of this century. Tommy was for most of his time a tenor horn player and they as a family dominated this section of the band for many years. Robert and James, his two sons were both capable tenor horn instrumentalists and their children Terrence and Lionel respectively followed them. Today see`s Lionel`s son Luke as one of our percussionists.

The name Jerram will also be long remembered with all four brothers members from the first half of this century. Their names were Alfred, Wilfred, George and Francis. Like the Barretts only one of their line now remains. Gerald, son of Francis is the only surviving Jerram still playing, though in his retirement he now gives his services to the Ramsbury band.

Sheppard is yet another name that has been very much part of the past of Aldbourne village. What with our first ever bandsman being a Sheppard its important to note that there is still a member of that name with us today.

Henry Brind Sheppard was the second with that name, his son Frederick came next, Harry his grandson became the bands principle cornet in the early fifties with James his son joining in 1995 on tuba, complicated is it not?

I must just point out one thing that springs to mind not only about our band`s genealogical tree but of our village too. You must remember the next time you run down (verbally that is) someone from Aldbourne to another villager that they are probably related one way or another to the person you are running them down too. Worrying isn`t it?

Chapter 15: Chronicle

Important village and band events reported during AV Jerrams time as bandmaster.

1922

Opening of Memorial Hall.

JG Alder married.

Aldbourne band play every sat evening in the square.

Fred Barnes played football for Swindon?

1st "East Wilts" band contest held in Aldbourne.

Both village public wells "lowered".

Lady Currie of Upham lost in her attempt as Liberal Candidate.

A sausage shaped water spout witnessed in village.

Hungerford ladies choral party in Aldbourne on behalf of band funds.

James White .

A band fete raises the enormous amount of £30.

1923

Aldbourne band win Fairford contest

The 2nd Aldbourne village brass band contest held.

1924

Band concert included items such as the duet Ida and Dot, the march BB and CF, and the selection from the Pirates of Penzance, three numbers still regularly performed by todays bands.

Concert by the Aldbourne "laughter makers" whose cast included several bandsmen.

Aldbourne jazz band conducted by T D Barnes.

Aldbourne brass band contest

1925

Swindon fife and drum band from the Central Hall and led by dabchick Tommy Liddiard and Ramsbury Methodist band both play in village.

1926

Band play at Woolands Marrison Hill Wimbledon tennis event.

first of band 6 a side football matches

1927

Band concert and bowling competition in the square.

Band at Aldbourne Hospital sports day event.

Band whist drive.

1929

Band dinner

Two band whist drives

Aldbourne band sacred concert held raised £1-8-3

Easter Monday dance in aid band funds Aldbourne band did not play

Aldboure's "clever band" 1st Newbury

Aldbourne band 6 a side football

Aldbourne and Chilton Foliat in Aldbourne hos parade

1930

first appearance of band's OCTAVE jazz band.

New uniforms cost £100.

1936

Death of JB Alder

The Swindon sa band conducted by Mr G Snook come to village.