

# The Cory Band

Lisa Fitzgerald-Lombard

## Cory Cory Hallelujah Part One

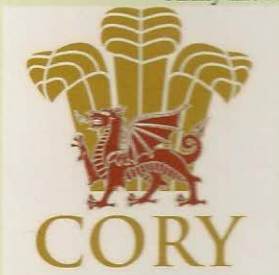
2009 was a very special year for the Cory Band; it was the band's 125<sup>th</sup> year and they marked it with some style by becoming Welsh Champions, British Open Champions, European Champions and World Champions. Cory also staged two fantastic anniversary gala concerts in St David's Hall, Cardiff and the Brangwyn Hall, Swansea with wonderful guests including Morryston Orpheus Male Voice Choir, Vintage Cory and the world famous trombone legend Wycliffe Gordon. To celebrate their milestone anniversary and commemorate their illustrious 125 year history, musical director Dr Robert Childs has written a book, 'Cory Cory Hallelujah' which will be published next month. This two part article outlines the history of the Cory Band and may well act as an appetizer to the official book.

Before iron and coal were kings in South Wales, the valleys were sparsely inhabited. In 1851 fewer than 1,000 people lived in the Rhondda, where the Cory Band hails from. In the space of fifty years the figure of 1,000 inhabitants increased to 114,000. Most of this shift in population was made up of men from across the border seeking work. In 1911 it was estimated that industrialization had pushed this figure to a staggering 153,000. During this time the development of ironworks and coal mines was colossal and the emergence of new brass bands was frequent.

Several families became rich and famous as a result of the rapid growth of the coal industry in Wales and the Cory family, originally from North Devon was one of the most prominent. The Cory family moved to Cardiff in 1838; however it was in 1859 that two brothers, John and Richard, formed a company called Cory Brothers. They acquired several collieries in the Rhondda and in a short space of time were mining coal and exporting in excess of four million tons of coal a year.

The Cory family was generous, giving unstinting assistance to charities and

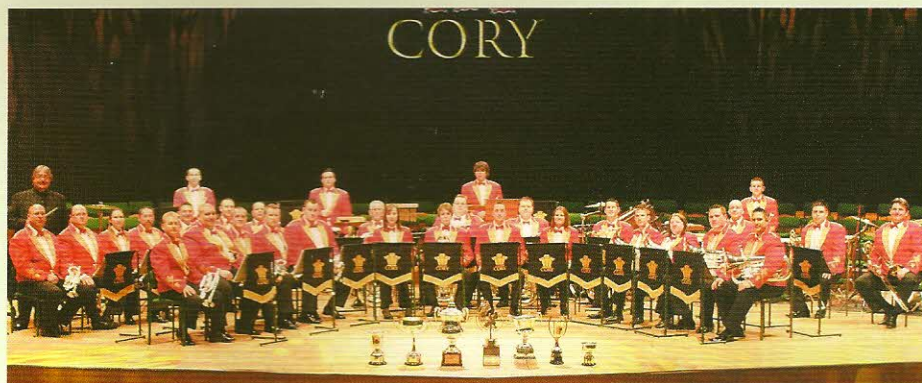
all evangelical movements; however John also had a close friendship with William Booth. Cory Brothers named one of their ships 'The William Booth' and donated monies to his new Salvation Army movement. William Booth showed



reciprocal friendship; this was epitomized when he named his daughter Evangeline Cory Booth.

Along with the prosperity and wealth that was generated by the industrialization of the Valleys came the evils of over-indulgence and

alcohol abuse. This was counteracted by the work of the Temperance Movement and William Booth's Salvation Army, both of which inspired brass bands to form and convert. One such band formed in the village of Ton Pentre, Rhondda in 1884. This was The Ton Temperance Band - the first incarnation of the Cory Band.



The Cory Band and conductor, Dr. Robert Childs, St David's Hall, Cardiff, 2009.

Very little is known about the Ton Temperance Band and its conductor Mr John Treherne. There is only one surviving photograph of the Band, taken outside Ystrad train station. The actual date the Band was formed is not known, however records show that the first rehearsals took place in a drafty shed behind the blacksmith's shop in Gelli. The Band later moved to a larger building in Ton Pentre. The Ton Temperance Band was a competitive band and although records show that they did not realise any premier honours at major competitions in South Wales, they were listed in the

prizes at several local competitions.

In 1895 the Ton Temperance Band was invited to play at the official opening of Gelli Colliery Library in Ystrad. Sir Clifford Cory (son of John Cory) performed the ceremony. He was so impressed by the standard of the band's performance that he offered to provide financial assistance and find suitable employment for a first class conductor. The Ton Temperance Band changed its name to reflect the generous financial assistance from Sir Clifford Cory and his family business, Cory Brothers. From 1895 the band became known as Cory Workmen's Band and engaged the services of Mr. E. Ambler as the band's first salaried conductor.

Mr Ambler had one thing in common with the Band's current conductor, Bob

Childs in as much as he also gave up playing the euphonium with the Black Dyke Mills Band to live in Wales and conduct the Cory Band. This is the only similarity one can draw between the two conductors as Mr Ambler's tenure was brief and the following year he

was succeeded by John Bailey, another celebrated euphonium player from Black Dyke Band. Under Bailey's guidance Cory Workmen's Band started to cultivate their reputation locally around South Wales, achieving a number of Second Class contest victories. Bailey was also

an accomplished composer and wrote the Cory signature march *The Singer*. Following Bailey's death in 1912, J G Dobbie of Birkenhead was the next conductor to be employed by the band. He was given a job at Gelli Colliery that allowed him plenty of time to study his scores and arrange music especially for Cory. During Dobbie's



Dr. Robert Childs.

27 years as conductor between 1912 and 1939 (thereby making him the longest serving conductor in the Cory Band's 125 year history), he secured First Class status and in so doing amassed many contest prizes. Successes gained under his baton were: 79 Firsts, 36 Seconds, 19 Thirds, 5 Fourths, numerous trophies and 36 Gold Medals plus gaining all premier honours, including: Welsh National Eisteddfod, Treorchy, 1928; Liverpool Open and Welsh Sections, 1929; and also at Neath and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Belle Vue, Manchester in 1930. In Cardiff on 19 July 1923 the Cory Workmen's Band also took part in what is believed to have been the first radio broadcast of a Brass Band.

In April 1940 Dobbing was succeeded by Redvers Little, a successful conductor with many band achievements to his name. Redvers continued his winning ways when he joined Cory Workmen's Band by winning a host of local contests, most notably the Welsh Regional Championships in 1941, 1943 and 1945. Success outside the Principality, however, still remained elusive, although the Cory Band were invited to play at many prestigious concerts and all the players and Mr Little took their banding very seriously.

One of the most celebrated conductors of the Cory Band's 125 year history, Walter B Hargreaves (1907-1998) was born in Glasgow and began playing the cornet at an early age. The introduction of Walter Hargreaves in 1946 proved to be the catalyst to lift the Cory name on to the National platform. Despite his diminutive stature, the charismatic Hargreaves commanded a huge amount of respect from his players and drew a unique sound from his band. His efforts came to fruition in 1948 at the National Finals on the test piece *On the Cornish Coast*, when the Cory Workmen's band were rewarded with second place on only their third (and Hargreaves's first) appearance at the competition. This was a significant achievement not only for the Cory Workmen's Band, but for the whole of the rapidly developing Welsh brass band scene since, at the time, second prize was



Ton Temperance Band conductor John Treharne, 1884. Ystrad Station, Rhondda.

the highest position achieved by a band from the Principality.

It was under the leadership of Hargreaves that Cory also enjoyed what was, at the time, their most successful spell at the British Open Championships. In 1950, at his first appearance at Belle Vue with the band, Hargreaves led the band to another second prize-winning performance of Eric Ball's *Resurgam*; the highest placing of a Welsh band at the Open. The magnitude of this achievement is perhaps highlighted by the fact that it would be another fifty years until any non-English band would surpass second prize, when Dr Robert Childs and the Buy As You View Cory Band secured the famous shield in 2000.

It was not solely this unprecedented contesting success which earned Hargreaves his distinguished reputation. More celebrated was his ability to draw the best from his players and, above all, his enthusiasm, professionalism and dynamism which endeared Hargreaves to the players who performed under him. Bram Gay described him as a creative conductor with a nearly infallible instinct for the right thing in



Pentre Colliery - the first bandroom.

music, the right turn of phrase, the right balance and above all perfect intonation." John Trotman (distinguished long serving member of Cory Band) endorsed Bram's words and added: "Hargreaves could spend thirty minutes tuning one chord, he wouldn't let it go until it was right. Walter didn't take any prisoners in band practice, he'd make you play your part on your own, he was like a terrier with a rabbit, he

kept on and on until you got it right."

In contrast, John also commented on the compassionate side of the man saying: "Walter Hargreaves was the only professional conductor I can remember that showed any active interest in the Cory Junior Band. He attended most of their weekly rehearsals and occasionally conducted them on concerts. Walter's way was quite different with the youngsters than it was with the senior band. He gave them a lot of confidence and nurtured their talents. Quite a few of the junior band progressed into the senior band and became soloists."

Hargreaves left Cory in 1952 to become a professor at the Royal Marines School of Music in Deal, Kent and it was here that the Scot acquired his unofficial title, the 'Wee Professor'. He returned to Cory briefly in 1961, conducting the band to victory at the Welsh Regional Championships on Vinter's *Salute to Youth* and also to the third prize in 1962 on Haydn John's arrangement of Wagner's *Rienzi* overture. However, his time with the Cory Workmen's Band during 1946-52 was the period when the 'Wee Professor'

showed the banding world his talents as a motivator and a musician. Cory had for many years been one of the most successful bands in Wales. Walter Hargreaves' tireless work, talent and determination, coupled with the dedication and ability of his players, elevated the Band's position and reputation from being the best in Wales to one of the best in the World.

Other notable Musical Directors who delivered



The Cory Workman's Band and Walter Hargreaves, 1948.

Walter Hargreaves' high expectations for the Cory Band in the years immediately following were Mr L. Wainwright, Mr Stan Brown, Mr Aaron Trotman, Mr T.J. Powell and Mr John Harrison. Aaron Trotman conducted the band for two years and he was at the helm when Cory were included in the 1958 Guinness Book of Records for being involved in the fastest production of a music recording. The Band recorded *God Bless The Prince of Wales* on the Black Mountain label. They recorded the song on the Saturday and by the Monday morning the record was on sale!

T.J. (Tom) Powell (1897-1965) was born in Tredegar and played with the Salvation Army Band there before joining the Royal Marines. He became the leading brass band conductor in Wales during the 1950s and was appointed Musical Director of Cory's in 1959. He conducted the Band to their 1961 Area win, but because of failing health Walter Hargreaves returned to conduct the winning performance the following year. T.J. Powell was known as the 'Welsh March King' and amongst his considerable compositions there were a number of well known contest marches and some test pieces. He sadly died of a heart attack whilst conducting the Cory Band in the Cardiff BBC studio, as part of the BBC's Challenging Brass competition in 1965.

After T.J. Powell the Band engaged the services of several conductors and eventually secured the services of Mr John Harrison of Halifax who was successful in leading the Band to several Area wins. The next musical director after John Harrison was Major Arthur Kenny who took control of the Cory Band in 1970.

All great wines have a year that history deems the best vintage. There is no doubt that in the history of the Cory Band 1970 was special. Although the year didn't yield much in the way of silverware it was the year that new vines were planted. History now shows that the decisions made then paved the way to success for the next fifteen years. Major Arthur Kenney joined Cory Band in September 1970.

Major Horatio Arthur Kenney was born in 1919 at Ivor, Buckinghamshire and was educated at Wells Cathedral School where he was a chorister from 1925 to 1934. From 1934 to 1969 he enjoyed a most distinguished musical military career, during which time he won a vast number of prestigious

His first engagement with the Band was 17<sup>th</sup> November 1970 at the Mineworker's Finals run by the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation (C.I.S.W.O.); the test piece was Eric Leidzen's *Sinfonieta*. The band was apprehensive as they waited for his first rehearsal. The Major (as he was affectionately known) arrived and began the rehearsal with his head in the score. He worked his way through the test piece (in hindsight this was very uncharacteristic of him, because he conducted most of his contest pieces from memory) and it was some time later that the players learned that the Major was, in fact, sight reading - he had never seen the music before. Nevertheless Graham Sheppard (BBb bass) remembers that: "Even though he was sight-reading, the musical touches and nuances were intuitively evident and he conducted the actual contest performance with the same interpretation." Such was the greatness of the man who was to change the fortunes of the band forever.

Major Kenney's impact was immediate and the band took first prize after only two weeks rehearsal.

1971 saw the very first Granada Band of the Year contest held in the King's Hall, Belle Vue Gardens, Manchester. Initially Cory were not included in the top ten line-up of bands taking part in this event; however, Black Dyke and G.U.S (Footwear) both withdrew from the contest. G.U.S had withdrawn well in advance of the contest, but Black Dyke pulled out two weeks before the event took place resulting in Cory Band being invited as a last minute

replacement. Ron Massey, reporting for the British Bandsman said: "Arthur Kenney had everything ready for the programme and they went on and won it. That was the beginning of the rise of the mighty Cory Band." This was reinforced in Blackpool at the C.I.S.W.O. Finals where the band took first prize for the second successive year.



Celebrating at the Royal Albert Hall in 1974. The Cory Band.

accolades. In July 1969 he played a prominent part in the celebrations connected with the Investiture of Prince Charles as Prince of Wales. This was one of Major Kenney's last important engagements for he resigned his commission in October of that year in order to devote more time to his interests in civilian music.



The Cory Band in America in 1974.

Another significant event for the Band the following year was the signing of Jim Davies on principal cornet. Jim had joined Cory from Mid Rhondda Band and remained with them until the mid 1980s, leading the Band with distinction and carving a name for himself as one of the best cornet players of his generation.

Having secured a podium position in 1972 at the British Open, Cory Band gained another creditable fifth place at the Nationals Brass Band Championships, which put the band in a buoyant mood for their assault on a hat-trick of wins at Blackpool's C.I.S.W.O. finals. The band was not disappointed and winning Blackpool gave them the hat-trick they all wanted so badly.

In March 1974 Cory booked their ticket for the National Finals in London in significant style by winning the Welsh Regional by seven clear points. Later that year they also improved their British Open form, gaining fifth place, but it was a few weeks later that they made history by winning the National Finals of Great Britain on Malcolm Arnold's *Fantasy for Brass Band*. Cory Band played a magnificent performance that gave the band first prize, bringing the trophy away from England for the first time in the contest's history.

Graham Sheppard summed up what the Major had brought to the band: "Even though Cory was not competing on a level playing field with their heavily sponsored English rivals, the Major gave his players self belief and absolute confidence in him and in their own ability. He was a great conductor." Local press coverage of Cory's win was substantial. The Western Mail featured a full page spread. As far as they were concerned it was a double win for Wales because Tredegar Junior Band won the youth section at the same contest (and a certain seventeen year old Bob Childs played solo euphonium with them).

The Major was respected by all the players and they would have followed him to the end of the earth if asked. He always conducted the band on a small circular podium and all the players knew that this piece of equipment had priority. When loading the coach before travelling to concerts or contests more than one player would ask: "Is the Major's rostrum on?" One act of dedication was epitomised when the Band were in Manchester and the Major discovered he had forgotten his



**Denzil Stephens conducting the 1980 European Win.**

stage trousers. He took great pride in his appearance and was the height of sartorial elegance. John Bowen, the band's principal horn player, offered to drive the Major back to Newport to fetch them and the Major accepted his kind offer!

One of the highlights in Cory Band's history was its tour of America in 1976. Local newspaper, The Rhondda Leader, broke the news that Cory Band were going to America. They cited the trip as the first time the prize winning band had played outside Great Britain since their formation in 1884 and for many of the players it would be their first flight in an aeroplane. Ron Pryce, secretary of the band at the time, said: "We first received the invitation to go to America in February 1975 and it was



**The Cory Band celebrate a hat-trick of National wins in 1984.**

confirmed in September the same year. I think we were invited because we won the National Championships in 1974. Now under the musical leadership of Bram Gay, the Band prepared two programmes for their concerts and a third for a joint concert with Grimethorpe Colliery Band to be performed in Philadelphia."

Roy Newsome remembers the phone call he had from Bram Gay inviting him to join the tour: "One evening early in 1976 he rang to ask if I'd like to go to America to conduct the band during

the second half of its American tour in connection with the Bicentennial Celebrations. Bram's 'day-job' was at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and whilst he could accompany the band during the first week of its tour, it seems that this centre of excellence for opera couldn't survive without him for two whole weeks. It took me about a tenth of a second to decide I'd accept the job and plans were put in hand for me to join the band in Philadelphia for the second leg of the tour."

The tour was a huge success with the Band giving concerts in Denver, New York, Philadelphia, Indiana, Charleston, Knoxville, Birmingham and Jasper before returning to Wales. The Cory Band had many glowing reviews of their concerts during the tour, with the Daily Mountain Eagle Newspaper in Jasper, Alabama giving the headline: "THE CORY BAND - it came, it saw, it conquered".

Bram Gay resigned his position as Musical Director in 1978. The same year, Denzil Stephens resigned from the RAF Music Services and after a short spell at Carlton Main Frickley Colliery Band agreed to conduct Cory. Denzil worked the band hard, always rehearsing them for two hours without a break. Several of the Cory band players commented that Denzil was a hard task master. Hard or not, the band improved in both tone and ensemble; they began playing together as a team and soon were used to his way of conducting.

Under the strong leadership of Denzil Stephens the Cory Band sailed through the opening rounds of the BBC Radio Wales competitions with ease and they were BBC Radio Wales Champions on more than one occasion. All this was good preparation for the Granada Band of the Year Entertainment Contests, in which the band did very well against

Britain's finest bands. There were other contests such as Yeovil Entertainment, where the band had a hat trick of wins. Pontins Brass Band Festival brought yet more successes and several traditional contests such as the Welsh Association contests, where the band became almost unbeatable.

Denzil commented: "National success did not come easily," but added that: "The Cory Band always gave a good performance at both London and the Open. It was gratifying for the Band and me to eventually beat Black Dyke by winning the European Championships in 1980 at The Royal Albert Hall playing *The Land of the White Cloud* and *Triumphant Rhapsody*."

Cory had qualified for the 1980 European Championships by virtue of becoming Champion Band of Wales in 1979, when they won all six of the Welsh Association's ranking contests. It was the first time that this been done. They finished five points clear of their nearest rival and were presented with the crown at the Pontypridd Contest in December 1979.

Winning the 1980 European was the high water mark for the Cory Band under Denzil Stephens and he remembers the period with fondness, saying: "All in all, I enjoyed training and conducting the Cory Band, proving that with the co operation of the players, it is possible to achieve success with a mix of experienced and less experienced players. Team spirit is so important in order to do this and it needs experience in man management, as well as the training and conducting technique of the conductor. I am indeed proud to have been associated with this fine band."

Denzil Stephens' tenure as Musical Director ended in 1982 after a very fruitful five years and Major Kenney returned to Cory as Musical Director. A few weeks later they travelled to London to compete in the National Finals of Great Britain. Cory had a good draw, playing off number 17. They began their performance with steely determination and all the soloists performed well especially Jim Davies, who negotiated the solo one and a half octave descending leap from top C sharp with consummate ease. The

band played on top form and brought the house down. It was a superb performance that clinched the title. The Cory Band under the magical baton of Major Arthur Kenney were once again National Champions of Great Britain. A title they last won under the same conductor eight years earlier in 1974.

The following year Cory Band were quite busy playing concerts and in January travelled to Stroud to take part in The Stroud Brass Band Festival. The Festival featured top class bands throughout the year. The 1983 season featured Cory Band, Fairey Engineering, James Shepherd Versatile Brass, Besses O' Th' Barn, Desford Colliery and Foden's Motor Works. However, like the previous year, it is competing at the National Championships of Great Britain that remains foremost in the memory. This year the organisers had commissioned Joseph Horovitz to write the test piece, *Ballet for Band*.

*Ballet for Band* was particularly demanding for soprano cornet and flugel horn and both Gwyn Thomas and Jeff Thomas delivered stunning individual contributions. As in the previous year, Cory had a favourable draw. Playing off number nine, the band gave a terrific performance to win the

title Champion Band of Great Britain for the second year in succession.

The following year the band were full of eager anticipation and the expectancy of the brass band public was high given that Cory had won the Nationals two years in succession. 1984 was to be a special year for the Cory Band as they were celebrating their Centenary. The highlight of the Centenary celebrations was a concert held in Cardiff on 2<sup>nd</sup> June where Cory gave the world première of the specially commissioned *The Year of The Dragon* by Philip Sparke.

Later that year Edward Gregson was chosen to write the test piece for the National Championships of Great Britain and the work was titled *Dances and Arias*. The work is in one continuous movement, but as the name suggests, is a series of alternating fast and slow sections. Playing off number fourteen, Cory put up a brilliant performance to take the coveted cup back to Wales for the third successive year. The Brass Band News, November 1984 sums it up: "Hat-tricks are rare and popular, and the upward thrusting fist of the diminutive Major Kenney, as he came on stage to accept the award, embodied an explosive exhilaration which was shared by the vast majority of the audience."

Major Kenney and the Cory Band are synonymous with each other and they both had huge respect for each other. The Major immortalised his feelings for the band in the Centenary Booklet: "I feel very proud to be with the band again, yet at the same time I feel very humble in the company of players who are able to produce musical sounds which one would never imagine amateur brass players could produce. To conduct the Cory Band is to enjoy a musical experience which words cannot describe. The dedication and response in both rehearsal and performance is something which I personally have never experienced anywhere else. Yet in this dedicated approach to the job in hand, there shines through a tremendous sense of humour plus a will to help one another in times of personal adversity...a true family Band. *CORY, I SALUTE YOU*."

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# The Cory Band

## Cory Cory Hallelujah

Lisa Fitzgerald-Lombard

### Part Two



In an article written in the Times newspaper, John Trotman (Cory Band stalwart) said: "During the seventies and the eighties the Cory Band had a big, round sound and then we gradually lost it. By the time we got to the 1990's I didn't think things could get worse; two principal players left, two long serving bass players left. Then the conductor, Major Arthur Kenney, who'd taken us to four National wins, retired following a heart attack. Finally, to cap it all, on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 1990 the band room burnt down."

The fire was a disaster for the band. The biggest financial loss apart from the building itself was the value of the instruments, which amounted to thousands of pounds. Clayton McCann took some photographs the following day and quickly realised that all of his percussion equipment was destroyed. However, it was the irreplaceable items such as memorabilia which adorned the walls which would be missed the most by the band members. The band had also accumulated an eclectic library of more than 5,000 sets of music, some dating back as far as 1884; seventy-five percent of it was also destroyed in the blaze and the rest was badly damaged. Clayton McCann, principal percussionist and librarian said: "It was a poignant and maybe prophetic moment when I found a sodden but uncharred score of Eric Ball's *Resurgam*, the title of which means *I Shall Rise Again*."

Part of the Cory Band's resurgence was owing to a generous sponsorship package from the Welsh company, Just Rentals PLC. Previously the band's main source



of financial support was courtesy of the Cory Band Ladies Committee. People often say that 'behind every great man is an even greater woman'. Nothing could be closer to the truth for Cory Band as this dedicated group of women, made up of wives, mothers, girlfriends, sisters, aunties and other female friends of the Band, raised an amazing sum of £43,000 over a period of approximately twenty five years.

Just Rentals PLC was the brainchild of two very successful self made businessmen and entrepreneurs: Bernard Jones OBE and Gerald Coleman were co-owners of the company. Just Rentals was established in 1972 and had grown to become the largest independent electrical retailer in Wales, and the market leader in coin meter television retailing. The cornerstone of the company's success was its reliance on traditional values and the delivery of unbeatable standards of customer service.

On 30<sup>th</sup> April 1998 John Southcombe (cornet player and committee member) walked into Dinas Isaf House, the

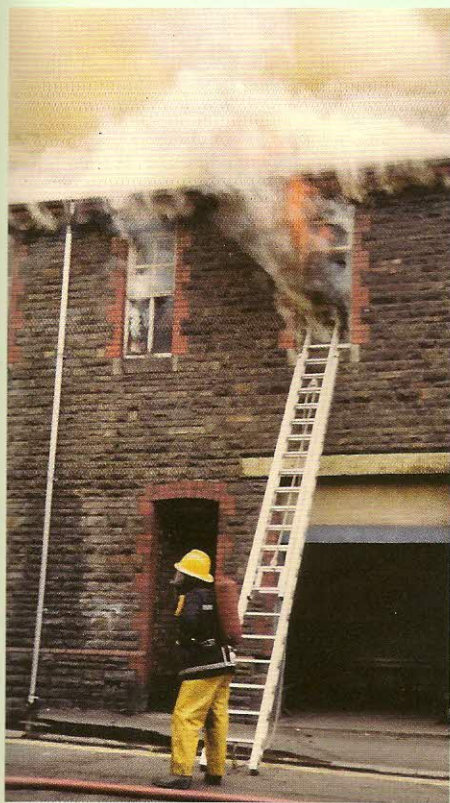
headquarters of Just Rentals in Williamstown, deep in the Rhondda Valley to present the band's ideas to the company. Little did he realise that the presentation he delivered would prove to be the catalyst of a relationship that would help shape Cory's future. As it turned out, the whole two hours flew by, with the majority of conversation taken up reminiscing about brass bands. Before their business ventures had taken off, both Bernard and Gerald had been former players in brass bands. Gerald had in fact spent a short time as cornet player and member of the Cory Band, whilst Bernard had been a tenor horn player for many years with the Mid Rhondda Band. As their business grew into a market leading force in the coin meter sector they unfortunately had to leave their playing days behind them, though they always kept an eye on proceedings from a distance. There was commercial benefit to be gained from a partnership with the Cory Band, but deep down it was the love of brass bands and being associated with the best that helped Bernard and Gerald come to a decision. On 27<sup>th</sup> July 1998 a letter was sent to John Southcombe stating: "I am delighted to confirm formally to you that Just Rentals Direct will sponsor the Cory Band".

The following year the Just Rentals organisation went through a process of re-branding, which resulted in the company changing its name to Buy As You View Ltd. The band was happy to be part of the re-branding and immediately became known as the Buy As You View Cory Band. That same year another hugely successful partnership was formed, when Robert Childs first took over as Musical Director.

Robert remembers the series of events clearly: "In 2000, I got a phone call from my brother Nick who had been approached by Cory to take them to the Ebbw Vale contest on Bailey's *Diadem of Gold*. Nick was unable to take them, so I agreed to take Cory and set about preparing for the contest. I set about the rehearsals with thorough preparation. The band played great and adjudicator Ian Brownbill put us three clear points above the rest.....we won! At the same time things were beginning to break down at Black Dyke; we had just lost our sponsorship from Bradford and Bingley Building Society and the conductor James Watson was on the verge of resigning.



The Cory Band, champions of the world in their 125th year.



Disaster - Firemen fight the blaze as Cory's bandroom burns down.

I'd played at Dyke for almost ten years and was thinking about a change. I really enjoyed conducting Buy As You View Cory, so after the Ebbw Vale contest I mentioned to Austin that I would be interested in taking the band on full time. I had been conducting Black Dyke a little at the time and after taking Buy As You View Cory I could easily hear their great potential. I remember saying to my brother "this band could beat Black Dyke". I was officially appointed Musical Director of the Buy As You View Cory Band in June 2000 and travelled from Hull to Ton Pentre until I relocated in Wales the following year."

After a successful result at Ebbw Vale, Bob Childs and the band followed that up with a win at the Welsh National Eisteddfod, held at Llanelli in August. Preparations were then in full flow for the start of the contest season. Firstly, the British Open in September - this was to be Bob's debut conducting at the 'Open'. The test piece was *Ceremony* by Michael Ball. Buy As You View Cory and Bob produced a stunning performance resulting in another first prize. However this wasn't Ebbw Vale or Llanelli, this was the British Open Championships - it was the prize that had eluded the Buy As You View Cory Band in their long 116 year history. It was also the first time any Welsh band had won in the contest's 148 year history. Three contests and three wins, the perfect start, but could it continue?

Once the celebrations had died down the hard work began again, this time for the National Finals at The Royal Albert Hall. The test piece was a new commission by

Peter Graham called *Harrison's Dream*. The members of Buy As You View Cory Band were beginning to find out that Bob's contest preparation left no stone unturned. The Band's Principal Cornet player Ian Williams commented: "Bob's preparation was a revelation; we had never experienced such a meticulous approach before." Contest day soon arrived and the Buy As You View Cory Band gave another fine performance. The year was complete and the partnership of Buy As You View Cory and Bob Childs was cemented by winning the National Championships of Great Britain and achieving 'The Double'. The Buy As You View Cory Band and Robert Childs had shocked the banding world by winning its two most prestigious contests in the first year of their relationship.

Bob also reflected on the instant success and gives a few reasons as to why it may have happened: "I think that maybe it was that I was new to conducting at the top level and had nothing to lose. I had been watching people work for the last 20-30 years, people like Major Peter Parkes, Roy Newsome and James Watson etc. I took the best of what I'd seen and put it into practice. I was also lucky that both my first British Open and National test pieces with Buy As You View Cory were new pieces. What I have discovered about myself is that, on new music, I don't have to try and invent things. I just look for what's on the score and bring it out, and certainly my record with Buy As You View Cory on new pieces reflects this." Ian Williams sums up in his own opinion why the new partnership worked so well: "Bob allowed the band to play as a band. Before Bob arrived we were a group of individuals: Bob joined us all together."

Bob puts most of the success the band has had over the last decade down to team-work and continued support from their sponsors. Bob speaks very highly of former Buy As You View Chairman,

Bernard Jones O.B.E. and co-owner, the late Gerald Coleman. "They always supported me and the Band. Ty Rhondda, the Headquarters of Buy As You View was a significant building with state of the art offices and a massive warehouse. There were big revolving doors at the entrance and the first thing any visitor saw when entering the place was a picture of the Buy As You View Band; not a standard sized picture, it covered the whole wall, two metres tall and three metres wide. That picture said it all to me - what fantastic support!"

As well as reforming the band's approach to contesting, Bob Childs also revitalised the band's concert work. Commenting on concerts Bob said: "I don't know any band that worked as hard as Buy As You View Cory, but they needed to lift their expectations in concerts, CDs and new repertoire. Denzil Stephens and Major Kenny both worked hard in these areas, but over the years standards had slipped. Concerts were not a priority to them: winning contests was the be all and end all."

Apart from Philip Sparke's *Year of the Dragon*, which was commissioned in 1984 for the Cory Band's Centenary, the band commissioned nothing else until Bob Childs came along. When you look at the pieces the band has commissioned the output has been quite immense, which has all helped the Buy As You View Cory Band develop musically outside of the contest field. In 2001, they appointed Dr John Pickard as their 'Composer in Residence'. John Pickard's tenure with the band ended in July 2005 when the band made history giving the première performance of his *Gaia Symphony* at the prestigious Cheltenham International Festival. The *Symphony* was broadcast live on Radio 3 and, over an hour in duration, it is currently the largest scale original work in the brass band repertory. The band is dedicated to new music, raising the profile of the brass



The 'double' winning Cory Band of 2000.

band genre and keeping music alive in Wales. It has an active commissioning policy and has performed works by many of Britain's leading composers: John McCabe, Judith Bingham, Elgar Howarth, Edward Gregson, Alun Hoddinott, Karl Jenkins, Gareth Wood and David Bedford, as well as John Pickard, to name but a few. The band's current 'Composer in Residence' is Welshman Gareth Wood. Since Gareth's appointment he has written three large scale works for the band: *A Tear in the Fabric of Time*, *Concerto for Tenor Horn & Band*, and *Actaeon - Symphony for Brass & Percussion*.

It should not be assumed that the new direction Buy As You View Cory's was taking made contesting any less of a serious business, as in fact the triumph of the British Open win in 2000 was repeated in 2002 when the band won its second British Open title. The piece was *Maunsell Forts* by John McCabe. After the competition the composer wrote a letter to the band saying how pleased he was with their playing. He said that he found the performance 'utterly compelling from beginning to end'. Also in 2002, the band was selected to play in London for the Queen's Jubilee celebrations and has since performed in many of the world's finest concert venues including the Grieg Hall, Stravinsky Hall, the Royal Albert Hall, the Welsh Millennium Centre and Birmingham's Symphony Hall. The band regularly appears at the prestigious Welsh Proms and has had the pleasure of sharing the 'Last Night' with the Royal Philharmonic and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestras on several occasions.

2003 started with a win at the Areas on *Prague* by Judith Bingham, followed by two superb performances in the European in Bergen, Norway. The set test piece was *Aubade - The Fabulous Birds* by Aagaard-Nielson and the band gave a truly stunning performance of Wilby's *Revelation in the Own Choice*. Buy As You View Cory was disappointed to learn that it had come second once again with exactly the same points as YBS, who won by virtue of a higher placed set test piece performance. Next was the Open where the band came 6<sup>th</sup> on Holst's *Planet Suite*, followed by 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Nationals on

*Enigma Variations* by Elgar. The following three years from 2004-2006 saw the Buy As You View Cory Band win the Welsh Areas three times, finish 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> at the Europeans, and 2<sup>nd</sup> three times at the British Open, with two 4<sup>ths</sup> and a 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Nationals, a 3<sup>rd</sup> at Brass in Concert in 2005 and a 2<sup>nd</sup> at The All England International Masters the same year.

Black Dyke Band for which Bob had wisely kept Cory in the warm up room. Bob explains: "I knew Dyke would put on a stunning performance and I didn't want my players to be psyched out by this, so I made a conscious effort to keep them in the warm up room." It worked and Cory went on to play a faultless performance of *Visions of Gerontius* to again win the

British Open title. The win was even sweeter when both Bob and brother Nick were also awarded the Iles Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians for Services to Brass Bands.

The third British Open title for Cory meant that the band was awarded the World of Brass 4barsrest rankings trophy for being the No. 1 band in the world at the end of the year. The band consolidated these successes with continuing innovation away from the contest arena and a film crew from the BBC followed the band for several months and produced a documentary called 'The Brass Factory'. When questioned about his unique management style that brought so much success to the Cory Band, Bob Childs replied:

I am totally dedicated when rehearsing, but I am a disciplinarian rather than a martinet. Many conductors can be quite ruthless in their management styles, but I don't sack many people. If someone has a genuine problem, then I don't just dump the player; instead, we look at what the band can do to help out. Welsh people are different; they

always understate things and then over perform. If someone said to a Welsh person: "You're a good player, aren't you?" they would say: "Well, I'm alright" - and then would take their cornet out and dazzle you. That's what's special about them. Also the Cory Band is a real family, not just that we have a lot of families within the band, but I feel that the band is a family - we all feel for each other. Having my own children in the band with me is also lovely; being a conductor can be a lonely existence, but having my family by my side to bounce ideas off and use as a soundboard is very special. I also have a tolerant wife. Lorraine has always supported me in my music - without her I'd only be half a man."

2008 didn't start too well for the band. After a stunning performance of *Festival*



The Pride of Wales - Cory Band in their 125th year.

2007 started with a now almost predictable sixth win in a row at the Welsh Area, followed later that year with a collaboration between the Cory Band, Karl Jenkins and Only Men Aloud (Cantorian) to produce a CD with EMI of Karl Jenkins' compositions and arrangements. The band was elevated into the limelight with numerous TV appearances, briefly becoming film stars for the promotional video. The CD enjoyed great success and entered the Top Ten on the Classic FM Chart, making Cory the only brass band ever to have achieved this honour. Shortly after recording the Karl Jenkins CD the band took the stage at Birmingham Symphony Hall to try and win the British Open for a third time in the decade. Cory had to follow a great performance from the



Robert and Lorraine Childs and the Cory Band following their win at the 2009 European Championships.

*Music* by Eric Ball at the Welsh Area, Cory was awarded a disappointing 3<sup>rd</sup> place. This only put fire into the belly of both conductor and band. The Welsh area affords the first placed band to compete at the following year's European Contest; having come third the only way to qualify for the 2009 Europeans was to win the 2008 Contest at Stavanger. The band rehearsed hard as usual, but with an added hunger for success and a near perfect performance of the set test piece *Brass Blot* led to a standing ovation from a packed hall. The next day the band played *Music for Battle Creek* and after a fine display retired to the local music bar. When the phone call came through it was down to two bands - Grimethorpe and Cory - 'and in first place..... The Cory Band'. The players erupted - at last the curse of the Europeans was lifted and after so many near misses this win was extra special, The Cory Band was Champion of Europe. Bob still jokes with his old friend Alan Morrison, because if he hadn't placed Cory 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Welsh Area the Band might not have had the hunger and drive that clearly propelled them to their first European win...thanks Alan!

After two great performances in the Open and Nationals, with podium finishes at both it was left to the Brass in Concert entertainment competition, held at The Sage in Gateshead, to round off the contesting year. The band put in a great deal of work and concentration both with the music and choreography and was awarded first place with 199/200 for musical performance with the added bonus of David Childs winning the Solo Prize. This win put the band once again at the top of the World Rankings. The Cory Band ended the year as No.1 in the world for the second year in a row.

2009 was a particularly special year for the Cory Band for a variety of reasons, but top of the list was the fact that the

band celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The year began in some style when both Bob Childs and the Cory Band were awarded The John Edwards Memorial Award for "outstanding contribution to Welsh Music" by the Welsh Music Guild. This was a particularly special honour as The John Edwards Memorial Award, named after the Guild's founder, is the most prestigious non-competitive award given in Wales for services to the nation's music.

This wonderful achievement was followed in March by success at the Welsh area. The test piece was Gilbert Vinter's *Salute to Youth* and it suited the Band immensely. A technical first movement with plenty of florid cornet work, an expressive second movement and a third movement with a sting in the tale: a wall of death euphonium solo that could have been especially written for David. Cory drew number ten and won the contest for the seventh time in nine attempts. This win was particularly sweet because the band's President Bernard Jones O.B.E. was present to witness the success at first hand. The adjudicator, David Read M.B.E., commented that it was the best performance of the piece that he had ever heard and wrote in his remarks that it was 'a truly outstanding performance'. David Childs was awarded best instrumentalist of the day, a richly deserved added bonus.

The first contest of the year went to plan; now the band needed to focus on defending its European title. One of the most successful trends at the European Championships is to have a new work

specially written for a band to play in the own-choice part of the competition. Peter Graham was asked if he would write something for Cory to play at this event and he kindly agreed to write *On the Shoulders of Giants*. The set test-piece was a fantastic piece written by Belgian composer Jan Van der Roost, titled *From Ancient Times*. The Band played superbly well on both days and all the soloists played "out of their skins". Cory won for the second year in succession, this time by a massive eight point winning margin, the largest in the contest's recent history.

After such a magnificent win, the band was ready for fresh challenges including a spectacular 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Concert. This was held at St David's Hall, Cardiff on 20<sup>th</sup> June where the Band was joined by the Morryston Orpheus Choir and the legendary trombonist, Wycliffe Gordon. World of Brass were attracted to the event and they took control of its promotion. They filmed and made a DVD of the concert, another first for the Cory Band, which proved to be just as successful as some of its CD recordings when it went straight to the top of the brass band charts.

The month following the concert is normally a month when the band personnel begin to think about summer holidays and how to re-charge their batteries ready for the British Open in September. However 2009 was a special year, so the band decided to enter the World Brass Band Championships in Kerkrade, Holland. Like the European Championships, the contest is in two sections; a fixed test-piece followed by an own choice concert programme. Peter Graham's *Harrison's Dream* was chosen as the fixed work, a piece the band knew well!

An added pressure for Cory was the presence of a television company from Wales who were travelling with the band to make a documentary; naturally everyone wanted the film to have a happy ending! The film crew were not to be disappointed when the performance of the set work, *Harrison's Dream* on the Friday night followed by a stunning 40 minute concert programme on the



Gerald Coleman, Bernard Jones M.B.E. and Robert Childs at the headquarters of Buy As You View.

Saturday gave the reigning Welsh and European champions their first ever World Championship title.

After a short summer break Cory began preparations of Herman Paul Huber's *Titan's Progress* for the British Open Championships. Working on the piece, the band was almost scared to contemplate what everyone else was asking - can Cory win the Open too? On the big day Cory drew number six, which statistics show is a little too early to win the coveted gold shield. The piece had never gone better and once again the audience really showed their full appreciation of the performance. It seemed the band couldn't do anything wrong in its 125<sup>th</sup> year; for the fourth time in ten years, the coveted Shield was on its way back to Wales and Bob had been awarded another Mortimer Maestro Trophy for his personal trophy cabinet.

Unfortunately, the year didn't quite have the perfect ending in contest terms, although Cory did secure podium finishes in both the National Finals and Brass In Concert (3<sup>rd</sup> prize in both). Nevertheless, the band still had its Jubilee Concert to look forward to, the last official celebratory concert of its 125<sup>th</sup> year. The



Wycliffe Gordon performs with the Cory Band.

Concert was held in Brangwyn Hall, Swansea and it began with a tribute to Karl Jenkins and included the world première (brass band version) of his *Euphonium Concerto*, a piece written especially for David Childs.

All that was left was the band's Christmas Awards Dinner, which was held at the Vale of Glamorgan Leisure Resort. It was a thoroughly enjoyable evening for the band to bask in glory and remember the great performances of the year. There were however a few surprises left. The Band's President Bernard Jones announced that 4barsrest readers had voted Cory - Band of the Year and Dr Robert Childs - Conductor of the Year.

He also reminded us that for the third successive time the band had been awarded the World of Brass World Ranking Trophy for being number one in the World. Finally, to cap it all, Cory was announced Band of the Decade!

How does a band and conductor continue after a decade of unprecedented success? Well if the conductor is Robert Childs and the band is the 'Mighty Cory', by securing their hat-trick at

the European Championships in 2010! The band's illustrious history has been fully documented in their new book, *Cory Cory Hallelujah*, written initially to celebrate the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but with a newly added coda section to include the story of the band's most amazing hat-trick. This title, published by Prima Vista Musikk is available now. Written by the band's conductor, Dr Robert Childs with contributions and personal anecdotes from many brass band greats, the magnificent achievements of this band from the Valleys of Wales has been turned into a wonderful read, the spirit of which has been captured in this two part article created exclusively for *The Brass Herald*.