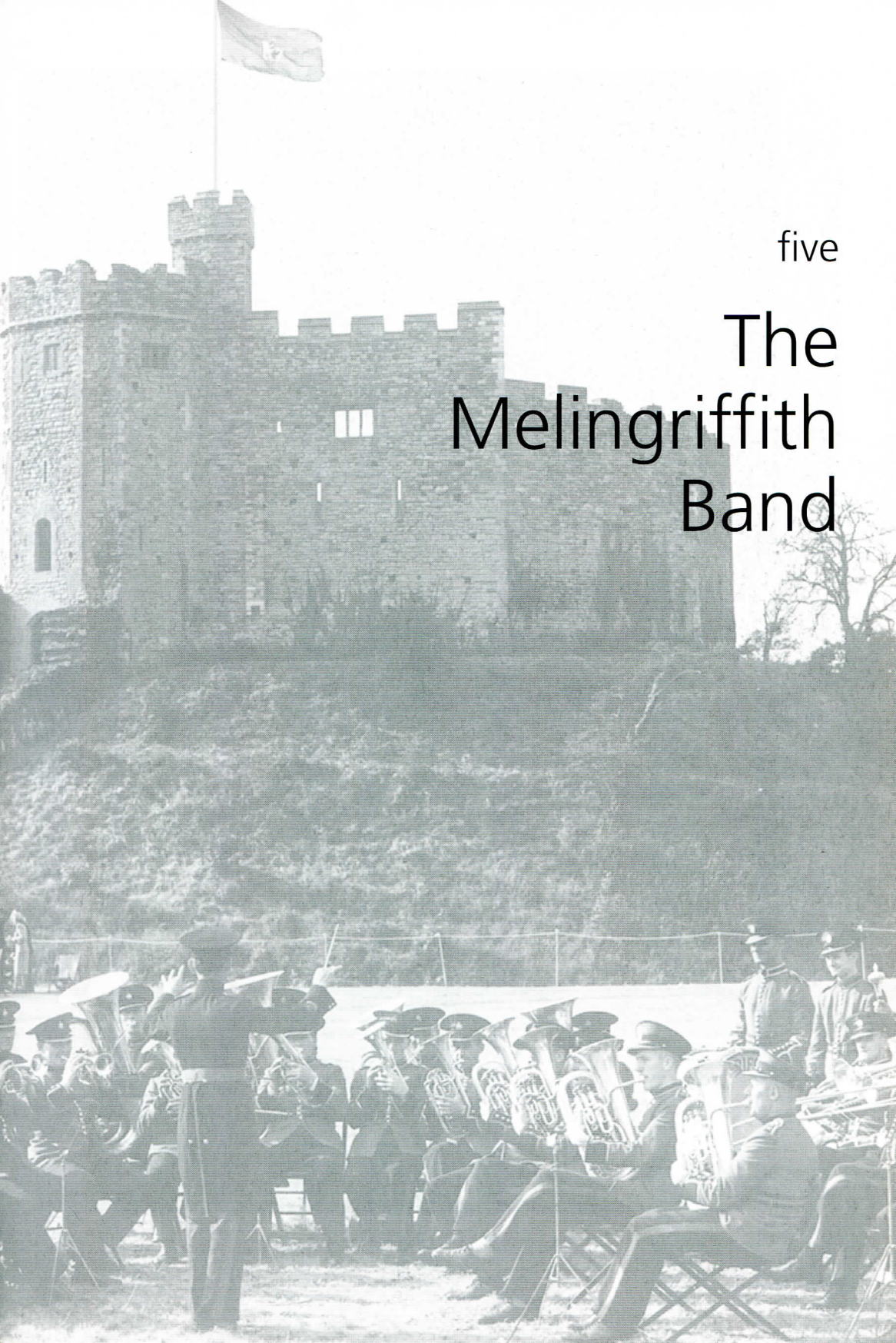


five

# The Melingriffith Band





Thomas James Powell (12 October 1897 – 29 January 1965).



A tribute by E.Vaughan Morris in *The Conductor* magazine, April 1965: 'T.J. Powell: A mighty friend'. W.G. Atkins September 1969

*T.J. (Tom) Powell was born in Tredegar, Monmouthshire, on 12 October 1897 to Edgar and Sarah Anne Powell. As has been the case with many musicians in the brass band movement, he started as a boy in the Salvation Army, and was playing side-drum in the youth band at the age of seven. He transferred to the Tredegar Senior Band on cornet and studied theory and harmony during this period with Mr Hurley, who was Bandmaster there. Just prior to the First World War, he joined the Tredegar Town Band but then left South Wales to serve with distinction in the Band of HM Royal Marines; he furthered his studies during the war in the Marines School of Music. In 1920 he was appointed Musical Director of the Melingriffith Volunteer and Cadet Corps Band which was connected to the Melingriffith Tinplate Works at Whitchurch, just outside Cardiff; he lived locally for many years at No. 81 Velindre Road, Whitchurch. This was the beginning of an association which lasted all his life, and the names of*

*'Melingriffith' and 'Tom Powell' will be forever linked together. He conducted with Mr Tom Moore – a top cornet with Besses of the Barn – who had been coaching the band in those early days and within three years the band progressed very rapidly from Class C to Class A. At the same time he coached the Cardiff Transport Band and had quite some successes with them. Over the years the Melingriffith Band grew in reputation with Tom Powell conducting, and T.J. eventually came to adjudicate all over the country and was in great demand as a coach, despite the fact that he never advertised.*

*Composing was a great joy to him. Early in his career with Melingriffith he wrote a March called 'Appreciation', dedicated to Mr David Millward who was secretary of the band at the time and who helped Tom in his early days. He excelled at writing Marches and 'Appreciation' was a forerunner of more than fifty. Some have never been printed, but are on manuscript in the library of the Excelsior Ropes Band who succeeded Melingriffith on the closing of the Tinplate Works. Many of the Marches were named after Welsh castles – Castell Coch (the Red Castle), which was visible from his home, and Castell Caerdydd (Cardiff Castle) and Castell Caerphilli (Caerphilly Castle) were close by. 'Caernarfon Castle' was written in 1958 when HM the Queen announced that Prince Charles was to be made Prince of Wales. His March the 'Contestor' has been recorded by Black Dyke Mills, amongst many others. Harry Mortimer once referred to him as the 'Welsh Sousa'. He also composed many selections, waltzes, studies and solos, to his credit; he arranged many pieces for brass band, including a complete book of Welsh hymns.*



T.J. Powell's works are often broadcast and frequently used as test pieces. There are some interesting anecdotes about the inspiration for some of his works, for example 'Snowdon Fantasy' was written by Tom following a visit to Snowdonia with Mr Hughes – a North Wales Bandmaster who lived at the foot of the mountain. 'Forest Bells' was inspired by the pealing of church bells in the Forest of Dean when he was walking through the Forest to rehearse Pillowell Band there. He wrote many pieces for solo instruments with Bank accompaniment: his quintet 'The Tops' is a favourite of many bands. Some works were composed specifically for particular Melingriffith bandsmen, and for want of titles he reversed their surnames – thus 'Smikta' is an Eb Bass Theme and variations, while 'Elyod' a euphonium solo and variations. He was an exceedingly quick writer of manuscripts; he would often try out an idea on the piano, and have full band parts and score ready by the next rehearsal.

He received many honours. He was presented to HRH Princess Marina by the South Wales & Monmouthshire St Johns' Ambulance Brigade function in Caerphilli when he was awarded a medal for loyal services to the Ambulance Brigade and for several years he was president of the South Wales & Monmouthshire Brass Band Association. He was invited to conduct at many important functions with the National Brass Band. He was one of the few holders of the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians of London, presented to him at Belle Vue in 1958. He was presented with the Diploma of Honour of the NBCCC of Great Britain. As an ex-Marine he was always spick and span and expected his band to be likewise. Mr Alan Spence-Thomas (whose family owned the Melingriffith Works) was a Captain in the Welsh Guards and he designed the MGB uniform to be similar to the Guards. He too was insistent that the Band should be well turned out for all occasions, and over the years many prizes were won for marching and deportment – more often than not marching in one of T.J.'s compositions. Tom Powell inspired all who were around him and commanded their great respect as conductor and composer and also in his qualities as gentleman and friend. His tragic death on 29 January 1965, whilst guest conducting the Cory Band, brought to an end a life which had been spent in ungrudging service to others. The brass band movement lost a champion. Undoubtedly Wales' 'Man of Brass'.



T.J. Powell started his musical career as a boy in the Salvation Army band, and was playing side-drum in the youth band at the age of seven. This postcard of the Salvation Army band came from T.J. Powell's own collection of memorabilia. He is seen here in the back row, far right.



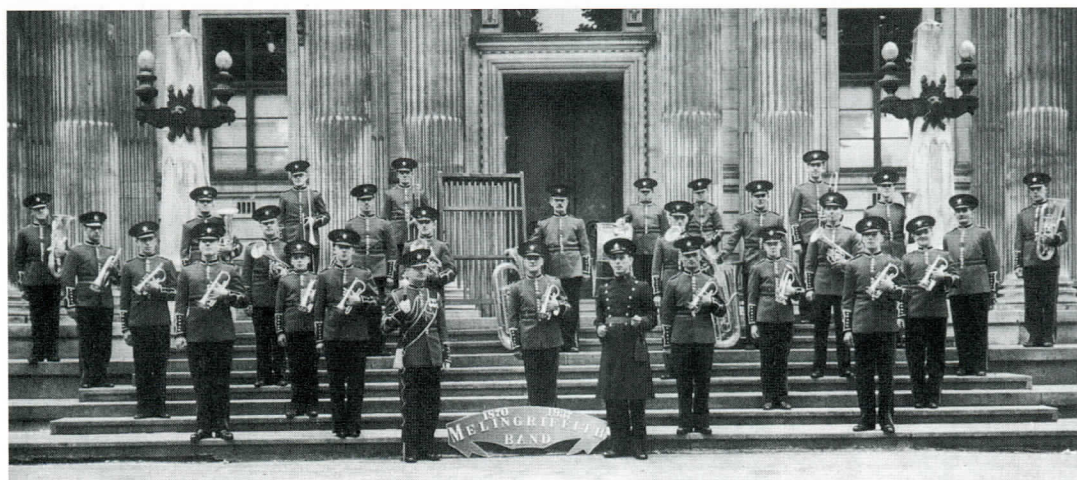
Whitchurch Brass Band, 18 September 1908. From left to right, back row: \*T. Bodger, \*Callaway Smith, \*E.C. Smith, W. Nicholas, T. Fuse. Middle row: W. Thomas, T. Richards, T. Howells, S. Fuse, \*A. Villa, \*F. Smith, B. Smith, F. Morgan (chairman), J. Morgan. Front row: Aubrey J. Morgan (secretary), \*P. Collins, E. Billing, Mr J. Chivers (conductor), \*T.H. Collins, A. Baker, Arthur Morgan (treasurer), D. Thomas. (\*Members of Committee)



The Melingriffith Band in 1923.



The Melingriffith Volunteer and Cadet Corps Band, 1928. From left to right, back row: H. Brown (Librarian), C. Smith, E. Morgan (Deputy Bandmaster and Hon. Treasurer), I. Rich, W. Williams, J. Woollen, N. Rees, T. Fuse, T. Grimshaw. Middle row: J.B. Smith, B. Smith, S. Grimshaw, H. Tansley, A. Doyle, S. Howells, E. Hole, A. Davey. Front row: A. Morgan, H. Grimshaw, T. Addicott, J. Brown, T.J. Powell (Bandmaster), C. Doyle, R. Brown, T. Atkins, P. Nibblet, C. Luce, H. Evans (Assistant Secretary).



It was during 1937 that the Melingriffith Band, upon the instigation of the then president Mr Alan Spence-Thomas, adopted their now-famous scarlet Welsh Guards pattern uniform, and one of the first things to do was have their photograph taken on the steps of the County Hall in Cardiff.

Some history of the Melingriffith Band taken from T.J. Powell's Annual Report for 1949:

*It has occurred to me that, as we have quite a number of new members it would be a good thing to say something about the history of our band. I think it is a fine thing when one knows just what lies behind any cause for which one works and strives especially if, by knowing, one can realise a source of pride and pleasure from such knowledge. If I can convey to you, in part at least, the past of this band I feel sure we will all find both pride and pleasure in our connection with it. How far back in history it goes we are not quite able to say – but it is fairly certain that it goes back a hundred years at least. We have heard that it was originally a drum and fife band, later becoming a sort of semi-military in the days when the works were owned by a family called Booker. It seems that in some ways the band was then on a similar basis to the present day Foden's in as much that the main interest of the employer owner family was in the men's ability to play in the band. The players were very often at the boss's house playing instead of at work. There is no evidence though of any strides having been made outside of their locality at Melingriffith. Eventually the band left the environment of the works and became Whitchurch Brass Band and flourished quite well for many years having some well known men of that day as conductor players, such as James Livesay of the famous Cyfartha band family and Elias Billings one of the leading cornet players of his time. These two men were still about when I came to Melingriffith in 1920, thirty years ago. I can give you a much better picture from then of course. I found a band of 11 players when I came, little or no funds, in the main a poor lot of instruments, a library which had hardly an item complete and uniforms for some and not for others. You must remember that there had been a break in the activity during 1914-1918 war. What I did find here was plenty of enthusiasm and a tremendous willingness to be led. I knew very little about the running of a band on amateur lines, but we got down to work and in 6 months had a full band, the following year entering the first contest. It will be of interest to you to know that, in our ignorance of band matters, we found we had entered a class 'B' contest and were up against bands like 'Cory's' and Aberaman, who were class 'B' bands at that time. You don't need me to tell you we were placed last. However, 6 months later, having to drop players to compete, on account of the numbers restriction we registered our first win gaining first prize at Treorchy in a class 'C' contest. Mr Jimmy Roberts was our coach, acting over me as I would now act over BM of say Pillowell. I wasn't quite happy about him though as I felt that he was not quite the man we wanted, I wanted tuition too as well as the band and it was arranged to call in Mr T.G. Moore who taught me more in ten minutes than anyone else has in my whole life. We had success with him, but the financial side was poor in those days and we resolved to leave competition and try to build up in other ways. We went out to popularise the band for engagements and succeeded very well indeed being able as a result to obtain good uniforms, instruments and a good library, that this was very much to the good there was no shadow of a doubt for, when we decided to return to the contest field in 1928 nothing could stop us, without a coach or outside help of any sort, starting at Chepstow open contest in 1928 we walked through to class 'A' in three years, and we have stayed there ever since. The amount of work to put in, in those days would hardly be believed and how necessary it all was is apparent when I tell you that I can remember an annual meeting such as this when our funds showed a credit balance of 9d. Quite a different story of today. The building up of equipment has been a very hefty job and I would like the younger people realise that, easy as it seems now to be equipped with uniform, instrument, Music, given decent transport to jobs, paid lost time and indeed having everything made as comfortable as possible is only the result of very hard work in the past. It was in 1931 that we first broadcast. For 25 years this has been the foremost band in Cardiff District, having played for Royalty and all big public functions more than any other band can claim. Just one other thing in this very brief run over the past. In 1950 I find myself the oldest member as far as the playing membership goes, with one exception, Dick Brown, who was a member when I came. With that I am afraid, very sketchy run into the past I come to the report for 1949.*

CARDIFF CIVIL DEFENCE WELFARE COMMITTEE.

*Chairman*: Councillor D. ALLAN ROBSON, J.P.

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Reardon Smith Lecture Theatre

Tuesday, April 20th, 1943

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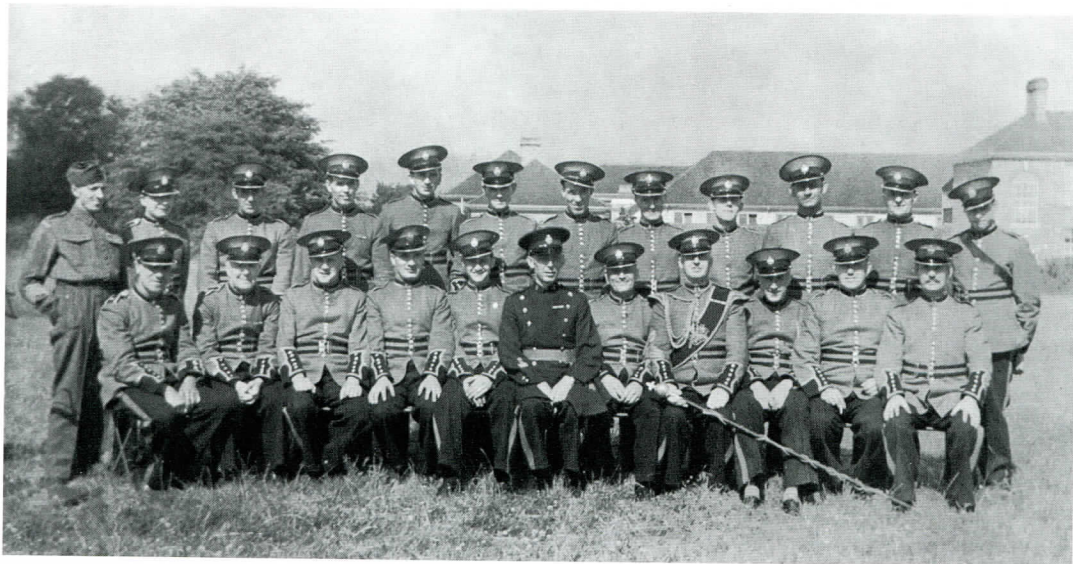
PROGRAMME—By

MELINGRIFFITH WORKS BAND

(CONDUCTOR - T. J. POWELL).

ACCOMPANIST - T. W. MILLAR.

1. March ... "Light of Heart" ... *T. J. Powell*
  2. Overture "Poet and Peasant" ... .. *Suppe*
  3. Song ... Selected. ... ..  
(Musician T. N. Rees)
  4. Cornet Duet ... "Ida and Dot" ... .. *Losey*  
(Musicians W. Thomas and J. Hurman)
  5. Selection ... "The Student Prince" ... .. *Romberg*
  6. Trombone Solo "The Acrobat" ... .. *Greenwood*  
(Soloist, H. Morgan)
  7. Vocal Duet "Watchman! What of the Night" ... *Sargent*  
(Musicians T. N. Rees and T. J. Powell)
  8. Selection ... "Community Land" ... .. *Stodden*
  9. Trombone Quartette "The North Wind" ... .. *Rimmer*
  10. An Arrangement of "The White Cliffs of Dover"  
*Arr. Mackenzie*
  11. E. Flat Bass Solo "Snikta" ... .. *T. J. Powell*  
(Soloist, G. Atkins)
  12. Song ... Selected ... ..  
(Musician T. N. Rees)
  13. Euphonium Solo "Mother Machree" ... *Arr. T. J. Powell*  
(Soloist, H. Pope).
  14. Scotch Novelty "Swing o' the Kilt" *Quentin Maclean*
- GOD SAVE THE KING.



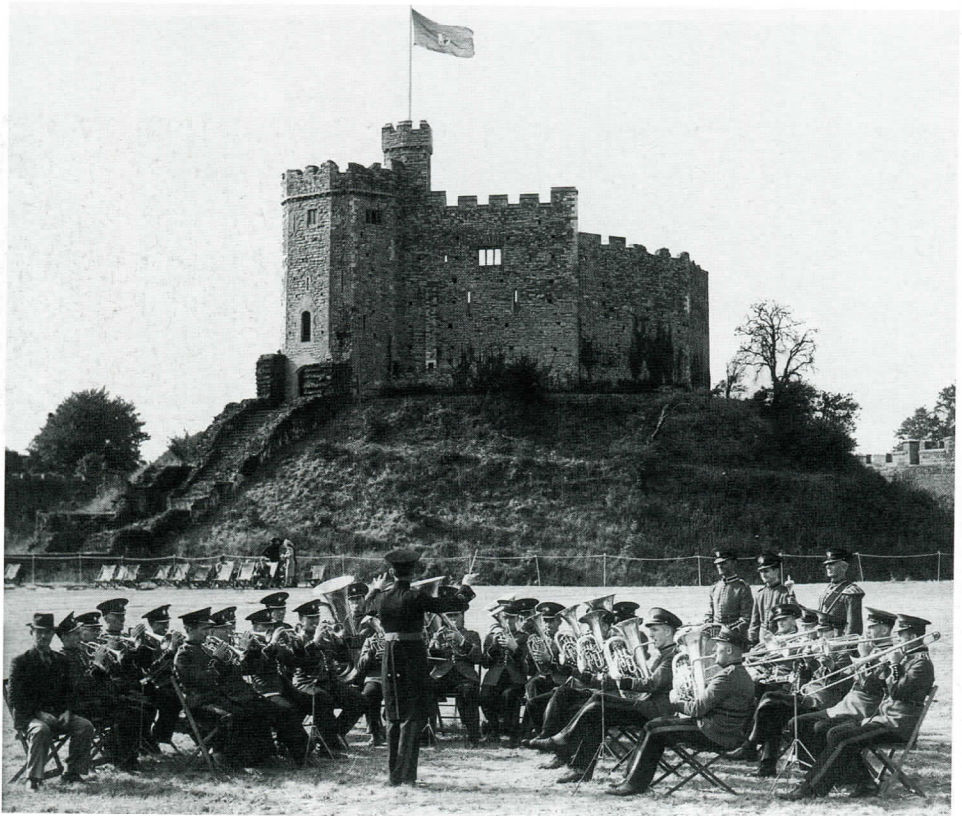
Melingriffith Band at Home Guard sports day, Whitchurch Grammar School field, 14 June 1943. From left to right, back row: J. Atkins, T. Bravery, N. Rees, W. Williams, W. Hocking, J. Brown, R. Squires, A. Cosh, -?-, F. Jones, J. Shepstone, H. Atkins. Front row: G. Atkins, J. Hurman, W. Parkins, W. Thomas, R. Oliver, T.J. Powell, E. Baker, J. Moore, A. Atkins, H. Morgan, A. Morgan.



T.J. Powell rehearses the Melingriffith Band prior to their visit to the Welsh Industries Fair in London, 1947. At this time, the band room was the old Whitchurch piggery near Ty Mawr farm.



*Above and below:* T.J. Powell leads the Melingriffith Band at celebrations for the handover of Cardiff Castle to the City by the Marquis of Bute in 1948. Under Powell the band became justifiably famous for their marching skill and immaculate turn-out, their high-collared scarlet tunics being modelled on those of the Welsh Guards.





Meligriffith Band, with T.J. Powell, marching through Whitchurch to mark the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.



The Meligriffith Band on the march.



National Eisteddfod, Caerphilly, 1950. From left to right, back row: J. Hurman, W. Ellis, J. Shepstone, W. Thomas, A. Pope, G. Davies, W. Howells, H. Payne. Fourth row: T. Burley, E. Baker. Third row: T.J. Powell, P. Bellringer, J. Atkins, G. Tout, C. Goss, W. Hocking, R. Squires, C. Cawley, A. Atkins. Second row: R. Cruwys, N. Rees, S. Howells, H. Pope, T. Atkins. Front row: H. Jenkins, G. Atkins, F. Jones, R. Brown.



*Above:* Members of the Melingriffith Band get a pep talk from conductor T.J. Powell before competing in the National Eisteddfod in Singleton Park, Swansea, in August 1964.



*Left:* Mary Ann Powell and Thomas James Powell, c. 1940.



**Daily Herald**

**NATIONAL BRASS BAND  
CHAMPIONSHIPS  
OF GREAT BRITAIN**

**FESTIVAL  
CONCERT**

*Under the Gracious Patronage of  
Her Majesty The Queen*

**ROYAL  
ALBERT HALL**

*(Manager: C. R. Hopper)*

**Saturday, 20th October  
1962**

**1/-**

Programme from 20 October 1962 when the Melingriffith Band played at the Albert Hall.



T.J. Powell's home at No. 81 Velindre Road, Whitchurch.

# Praise for Powell

**MOST** cities honour their famous sons in some way or another, yet Cardiff, or more precisely, Whitchurch, has a son whose fame was and remains international wherever musicians come together to play.

**He was a prolific composer whose work spans mood and style effortlessly, yet his original work lies neglected.**

**I refer to the man known affectionately as "the Welsh Sousa" — T J Powell.**

**For those who don't know the name, T J Powell is one of the greatest British composers of brass music, ranking alongside Rimmer, and was, for many years, conductor of the once great Melingriffth Band.**

**Isn't it time that we DID honour him? And isn't it time that we made a serious effort to collate and restore his music?**

***PETER SUNMAN, Boleyn Walk, Penylan, Cardiff***

News cutting praising T.J. Powell.



## ROYAL NEW ZEALAND AIR FORCE

TELEPHONE: 482.049  
Ext 833

RNZAF Base Wigram,  
Private Bag,  
Christchurch,  
NEW ZEALAND.

IN REPLY QUOTE .WG...1200/4

2nd June 1983

Mrs. J. King,  
58 Heol Penlan,  
Whitchurch,  
CARDIFF,  
S. Glam CF4 2BZ,  
WALES.

Dear Mrs. King,

Thank you for your letter of 23rd May 1983 seeking information on the march played by the Wigram Base band during the visit by Their Royal Highnesses The Prince and Princess of Wales.

You are of course correct when you assume that it was a march written by your late father. The name of the march was "Castell Caerffili" and a note to this march was that it was written to commemorate the Welsh National Eisteddfod 1950. "Castell Caerdydd" and "Castel Coch" are two other marches that are very frequently used by our New Zealand bands for contest and concert programmes, and T. J. Powell's music is held in very high regard by our bandsmen in New Zealand.

I trust that this information is helpful to you and I wish you many hours of pleasure listening to your father's music.

Yours faithfully,

(G. V. ALDRIDGE)  
Bandmaster  
for Base Commander



# Diploma of Honour Award

TOM POWELL

The personal award of a "Diploma of Honour" was instituted last year by the National Brass Band Contesting Council to recognise both lengthy and signal individual service to the brass band movement. Already a number of personalities in the band world have been so honoured.

★ Today, a diploma presentation is to be made in the Royal Albert Hall to 65-year-old Mr. Tom Powell, of Cardiff.

Born in Tredegar, Monmouthshire, he joined the local Salvation Army band as a cornet player at the age of eight. After gaining further playing experience with other bands, he took up conducting, in 1920, with the Melingriffith Band. In addition to his contest success with this band, he has also been called in as trainer by many leading bands in South Wales and the West of England.

★ His wide musical experience includes conducting massed bands concerts, directing at more than 100 band broadcasts, and acting as conductor of the National Brass Band of Wales. A talented writer of band music, quite a number of his compositions, including some stirring marches, have been published.

A respected adjudicator, he has fulfilled responsible appointments all over the country. He has judged at the four Finals of the *Daily Herald* National Brass Band Championships, and today judged the National Second section Championship at the Kensington Town Hall.

Tom Powell receives his Diploma of Honour.

'T.J. Powell: A Mighty Friend', a tribute by E. Vaughan Morris

*Goodbye is difficult at any time and in any circumstances. If we accept that it means 'God be with you' it makes it easier to accept that inevitability of the expression. In the case of Tom Powell, with abruptness and no apparent warning, we found it necessary to bid him farewell. Here again, if we can ease our sorrow at the parting in the belief that our muttered and muted salutation means 'Fare Thee Well', the hurt may be lessened in our hearts and minds. Tom was someone very personal to me. Whether he ever wore a mask – which so many of our fellow creatures seem to do – I do not know. To me he was crystal clear and rang true in the manner of his thinking and the nature of his living. There was no artifice in his face, nor in his actions. I honestly believe he was a man imbued with a sense of mission and paramount in his conception was honesty of purpose, untrammelled with self-glorification and self-aggrandizement. I first met him 21 years ago, when he was still sprightly and vigorous to a marked degree. It would be right to say that the Melingriffith Band provided the avenue by which he could give vent to his love and devotion to Brass Band music. There was a combination of respect, affection and utter trust which permeated the atmosphere. In which, the Band and its conductor worked to make music of the highest standard possible. At that time, and for several years afterwards, Tom fronted the Band on its public appearances dressed in the full dress uniform of a Band turned out in impeccable style. He did not ask of his players what he was not prepared to give himself. In the intervening years I had countless opportunities of enjoying a close association with this exceptional and dedicated man. I was privileged to make a contribution towards easing the anxieties and uncertainties with the establishment of the National Brass Band of Wales, which had long been an objective which had animated him until it became a reality. Time and again, he assisted me with that flair and judgment with which he was richly endowed in carrying out adjudication assignments at all levels of the National Brass Band Championships. I was at his side when he was presented at the Royal Albert Hall with the highest accolade of the Brass Band Movement – the Diploma of Honour of the National Brass Band Contesting Council of Great Britain. I had long come to accept him as a friend before whom I could think aloud. He was possessed of a kind of glory which seemed to light up his mind. With the result that he appeared to pour his inner resources and vitality outwards as a torrent which would not be denied and yet he was in nowise diminished. In Tom Powell we had a man of faith. Not for him the barren spending of himself on small matters which had no heart or spirit, tormenting himself over popularity or success, until he had lost the capacity to live each moment to the fullest. I believe that he had – as few men seen to be prepared to do – come into the full realisation of his own awakened internal powers, with the result that he conditioned his Life in strict accord with what he would have it. In taking our farewell of this kind and gracious man, and even accepting the inevitable that the earth gives all and takes all, may we not also think on these lines a person is exactly the same the moment after he as 'died' as he was the moment before. No magical, instantaneous change takes place either in mind, or body. We surely pass on with all our earthly likes and dislikes, all our fancies and foibles all our idiosyncrasies and all our errors fast upon us. If we are just as we were on earth, and it is reasonable that we behave as we did on earth, then we may think and take consolation from the true picture of himself as he really was which our friend Tom Powell will reflect for all time. I shall miss you sorely, good and understanding friend – when occasion permits commune with us so that we continue to feel the warmth of your presence. Farewell!*