

BAND HISTORY

The Tilbury Band

by HARRY N. GALLEY (Press Officer)

In 1919 Tilbury had a population of 9,000. It was served by the London Midland and Scottish Railway, among whose employees were six men with an ambition to form a Brass Band. Led by Mr. Fred Chipperfield, and sponsored by the Tilbury N.U.R., they achieved their ambition. In that year the Tilbury Railwayman's Band was formed.

A set of instruments was purchased from the Shoeburyness N.U.R. for under £200 and Band practices started in a field at the bottom of Chadwell Hill, Tilbury.

They made their debut (about ten strong) in the Christmas of 1919 with carol playing around the streets. This venture would have proved short-lived had not the local lads improvised lamps with jam-jars and candles to supplement the half dozen or so street lights that Tilbury provided in those days. Their first indoor practices at the Co-op Hall in Dock Road, Tilbury and the admission of non-railwaymen to their ranks showed happy progress, but money was still scarce.

The Band had, as yet, no uniform, and to raise funds they relied on collecting boxes at their various ventures. These consisted of playing every Friday night at Tilbury Dock Station and three Sundays every month at the

Tilbury Ferry Booking Office. They also began to play at garden fêtes in all the surrounding villages during the summer months, and then played for dancing during the winter at a local school.

Contesting then became part of the Band's programme and several successes were achieved. This, of course, included participation in the legendary "Crystal Palace Contest".

At the outbreak of World War II, Banding activities were suspended and it was Mr. Fred Chipperfield again who looked to the future. All Band property was stored and maintained by himself and Mrs. Chipperfield, so that, at the end of hostilities, the Band was once more able to become active.

Practices were held at various venues thanks to the goodwill of such organisations as the "Tilbury Club and Institute" and the "Tilbury Catholic Church". In 1950 the Mission Hall in Dock Road was purchased from the Salvation Army and the Tilbury Band at last had permanent headquarters.

Mr. George Nicholls followed his pre-war service as Band Master with a further period after the war and led the Band to many successes, including the Finals of the Daily Herald National

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Tilbury 'C' with 1st Prize for Quartets at Winston (25/10/81)

Contest and the Championship of Essex. Failing sight forced George to retire from conducting, but he retained his interest as Vice-President of the Band until his death a few years ago.

Towards the late 1950s, the Tilbury Band hit a very bad patch when membership dropped to single figures, and it was only due to the tenacity of a few stalwart members that the Band was kept afloat.

However, 1960 saw the tide turn slowly and contesting was resumed in the early sixties.

Since then the Tilbury Band has gone from strength to strength. Membership has grown, plus a very active "Junior Band" under the direction of Mr. Colin Daryl.

At the present moment in time, the Tilbury Band under its Musical Director Melvin J. White is enjoying its most successful period in its 62-year history, as this was the third year running that they qualified for the National Final.

It is also important to note that both of our leading musicians — that is our principal cornet player and our lead tenor horn — are ladies (Mrs. Barbara King and Mrs. Rosemary Mann).

Also in their ranks are a number of different professions. They range from Teachers, Dock-workers, a Petro Chemist, a Saville Row Tailor, to an out-of-work Painter and Decorator, plus some members still at school. The oldest is in his 70s and the youngest is about 13. But, alas, no Railwaymen.