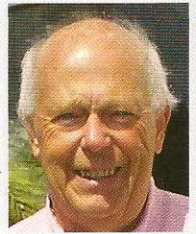


Yorkshire Imperial Metals Band

80th Anniversary

Dennis Wilby



As a young aspiring cornet player it was always my father's wish that I should become a member of a works' band and, living in Yorkshire, there were plenty to choose from, Yorkshire Copper Works being the nearest to my home in Ossett. Located in Stourton, near Leeds, "Copper Works" as it was affectionately known was regarded by many as one of Yorkshire's finest, which would have been ideal.

However, being a 13-year-old, band manager Tim Shackleton had other ideas, as he considered me too young to become a member, though he did permit me to sit in at rehearsals and it was not until three decades later, when Yorkshire Imperial Metals Band invited me to conduct a concert at the National Railway Museum in York, that I once again renewed my very brief association with the band from Leeds.

As a tribute, this article looks back through the history of the illustrious Yorkshire Imps, who, this year, celebrate their 80th anniversary.

The band has enjoyed a long and distinguished history since its formation in Leeds in 1936 as the Yorkshire Copper Works' Band; it was later renamed the Yorkshire Imperial Metals Band in 1958 as a result of an industrial merger by Yorkshire Copper Works and ICI Metals Division. Since those days (as with many of today's bands), name change has been commonplace. In 1999 it became the Wallace Arnold (Rothwell) Band, reflecting sponsorship by coach tour operator Wallace Arnold, then in 2000 it merged with the Yorkshire Imperial Band, becoming the Yorkshire Imperial DUT (Rothwell) Band. Through various sponsorships other names have emerged: IMI Yorkshire Imperial Band and Yorkshire Imperial David Urquhart Travel Band.

The role played by David Urquhart, who stepped in to provide sponsorship when IMI withdrew, was crucial and without David's sustained generosity the band would not be in existence to-day.

performance, the adjudicator awarding the band an unprecedented 199 points out of a



The current Yorkshire Imperial Band conducted by Stig Maersk.

The band first represented Yorkshire at the National Brass Band Championships in 1946, conducted by a famous name in brass band folklore, Sam B. Wood, playing Henry Gheel's *Oliver Cromwell*. Since then the band has made twenty appearances, being placed on no less than fifteen occasions. It was, however, during Trevor Walmsley's tenure as conductor that the Imps reached the pinnacle of the elite division of banding, claiming the British Open Brass Band Championships in 1970 (*Pageantry*) and in 1971 (*Festival Music*).

The band's appearances at the Yorkshire Regionals show 24 top three places and nine wins, with a hat-trick of victories during 1977-8-9, a runner-up placing at the 1976 National Brass Band Championships; then in 1978, with conductor Denis Carr leading the band to victory with the winning performance of Arthur Bliss' *Checkmate*.

The band's victory at the Yorkshire Regional Championships in 1981 conducted by John Pryce Jones, Chorus Master of Halifax Choral Society and Opera North, must have been some

maximum 200. Amongst its other numerous achievements, the band has been the BBC's Band of the Year, Edinburgh International Music Festival winner three times and Brass in Concert Champions.

One of the events in the banding calendar which has been a top priority for the Imps is the annual Whit Friday Marches. Here again, the band has a successful record playing Shipley Douglas's

Mephistopheles.

Much of the credit for the remarkable success of the 1970s and 1980s was largely due to Trevor Walmsley's tenure as conductor. Unlike many of the top bands from that era, Yorkshire Imps avoided following the general trend of engaging a professional conductor for contesting. Trevor was ably assisted by Denis Carr (who later became Musical Director), all of the conducting duties being undertaken "in house".

There was no ego with Trevor, a "down-to-earth" uncomplicated conductor and perfect gentleman who loved his band, players and music in general. He had strong views on the banding scene, but with a philosophical outlook. He was "old school".

One of Imps friendly rivals was based at Shipley - the Hammonds' Sauce Works Band. Conductor Geoffrey Whitham and Trevor Walmsley, though good friends, were constantly playing mind games (long before the arrival of Jose Mourinho as manager of Chelsea Football Club and now Manchester United) during their respective band's preparation for major contests. Hammonds always had a short break during weekly rehearsals to discuss and update how the Imps "down the road" in Leeds were progressing. The "spies" were out in force to keep both parties up to speed on the bands' respective progress. Little was of concern to Geoffrey as to what was going on at Queensbury (Black Dyke) or Brighouse (Brighouse & Rastrick); only the Imps' in Stourton, Leeds was his concern. It was all good fun with nothing malicious from either side, but on contest day and after the results were announced it was



Yorkshire Imperial Metals Band, 1965. Phillip McCann is principal cornet.

a different matter, with the bragging rights always a major issue, usually in favour of the Yorkshire Imps, much to the despair of Geoffrey Whitham.

During the 1970 and 1980s the band had a formidable line-up of principals: Graham Walker (cornet), Roy Roe (soprano cornet), Carl Balmford (flugel horn), Roy Brown (tenor horn), Derek Stout (baritone), Bill Rogers (trombone), Ian Craddock (euphonium) and Harvey Whiteley (percussion), with Fred Muscroft becoming a member, having recently been demobbed from the Band of HM Scots' Guards.

Towards the end of the 1970s Sandy Blair (Eb bass), Philip Denton and Irvin Vaines (cornet) and Ian Bousfield (trombone) all made a significant contribution to the success of the band at the National Brass Band Championships in 1978 and The British Open in 1980.

In his book "The Modern Brass Band" the late Dr. Roy Newsome listed the band as one of the top ten of the second half of the 20th century.

Trombone virtuoso Ian Bousfield joined the Imps at the age of fourteen, remaining in the principal seat for four years before joining the professional ranks as principal trombone with the Hallé Orchestra in 1983, London Symphony Orchestra 1988 and the Vienna Philharmonic in 2000. Phillip McCann started his early career in Yorkshire with the Imps as principal cornet, and euphonium legend Robert Childs was associated with the band. Peter Kitson (resident conductor) and Andrew Owenson are two names also fondly respected at Yorkshire Imps.

Two current members of The Yorkshire Imperial Band, Allan Briggs (tenor horn) and Mark Tweedle (Eb bass) were former players with the successful Imps of the 1970s and 1980s, a remarkable achievement.

In the 1980s there was a steady change in personnel, Alan Exley being appointed principal cornet in 1983, a position he held for a decade, before relinquishing the role to take up the baton as Musical Director.

His tenure as MD lasted for four years, resulting in eleven top three placings at National contest level, including wins at the 1993 Yorkshire Regional Championships and Brass in Concert in 1995. Prior



The Yorkshire Copper Works Band in 1937.

to joining Imps, Alan had enjoyed a distinguished playing career with Black Dyke, Brighouse & Rastrick, Grimethorpe Colliery, Hammonds Sauce Works, Carlton Main Frickley Colliery and Stanshawe. Alan passed away in March 2016 at the age of 63.



Yorkshire Imperial Band in 1993. Alan Exley is the conductor

Ian Craddock, solo euphonium throughout the glory days of the 60s, 70s and early 80s, recalls his memories of the band:

"The Yorkshire Imps name conjures marvellous magical performances, beautiful balanced sounds, with a superb ensemble, plus the country's finest soloists. Trevor Walmsley's contribution was enormous; he was responsible for the initial successes with the two British Open wins of 1970 and 1971. His forward thinking ideas regarding the concert programmes were also outstanding."



1978 - Yorkshire Imperial Metals Band winning the National Championships at the Royal Albert Hall, London.

Denis Carr became the Musical Director in 1977 and in 1978 was responsible for the band's first elusive National Championship win at the Royal Albert Hall. Denis also brought the band many original brass works. At that time he had leading principals, including Graham Walker, Ian Craddock, Ian Bousfield and Roy Roe.... imagine the concert solos repertoire.

The 1980 British Open win was conducted by the then new MD, John Pryce Jones. For many of the players he was the ultimate musician. At the time, he was the Chorus Master at Opera North. The test piece was Robert Simpson's "Energy", an experience I will never forget and for me the outstanding performance of all the contest wins.

Two years ago Yorkshire Imps Vets, former players from the 60s/70s and early 80s got together at Kippax Band Club to perform to their many followers. The venue was full one hour before the concert commenced. James Scott conducted John Ireland's "Elegy" from *A Downland Suite*, bringing delightful memories.

Just one final question. Would the Imps 1980 band be able to compete with the 2016 bands? The answer would be a big YES."

As the current band prepares to celebrate its 80th Anniversary, aficionados of a certain age still recall with fond affection the "glory" days of the 1970s - 1980s and although much has changed since then, today's band is rightly proud of its illustrious past, its roots taken from the old Stourton Band of the 1930s and later the merger with the Rothwell Band in 1999.

A formal celebration will take place on October 22nd at Ossett Town Hall, when a warm welcome will be extended to former players, who will share the stage for the anniversary concert. The evening promises to be a very special occasion, reflecting on some of the successes from the past, but also to an exciting and musically challenging future. Further details will be published shortly on the band's website <http://yorkshireimps.co.uk>

The concert will be conducted by the band's recently appointed Musical Director, Steven Walsh, former principal euphonium with Brighouse & Rastrick Band.

I would like to express my grateful thanks to Mark Tweedle (Yorkshire Imperial Band) and Ian Craddock (former Yorkshire Imps principal euphonium) for additional material and photographs.