

Brass Band to Professional



Dennis Wilby

I guess few players who have played in a brass band would have aspirations at some stage in their playing career of becoming a professional musician. I certainly didn't, but in December 1959, I found myself on a flight to Belfast, Northern Ireland to start a new career in one of the BBC's "house" orchestras.

Scroll forward some 30 years and I seem to recall reading in a magazine that 85% of all brass players working in the professional music industry had spent their former years in a brass band, and as anyone who has had any connections with a brass band will tell you, banding, as it is affectionately known, is the perfect grounding to nurture and develop stamina, technique, sound and sight reading, all minimum requirements for a professional musician. So it's no small wonder that the United Kingdom, with its long tradition of brass bands, has produced some of the finest professional brass players in the world.

But making the transition from amateur player in a brass band (whatever standard) to that of a professional musician, can become a challenge, not just musically, but also by way of a lifestyle change. I'm frequently asked by enthusiastic brass band players "how do you become a professional musician?"

It's a good question and I'm sure that every musician has his/her own story to tell in answer to that question, but as with other professions it can be by word of mouth, recommendation, application through a newspaper advertisement, or simply by being in the right place at the right time, which by what I hear from my colleagues in the profession is the most likely. However, with more brass band players than ever before now studying at college or university establishments, inroads into the music profession are often by way of their tutors, who usually have close connections with the music profession. This is usually followed by an audition and in some cases a trial period with the orchestra or big band.

But the transition from playing in a brass band to working with a professional orchestra can have challenges. Cornet players having to change to trumpet, becoming familiar with transpositions, a requirement for all orchestral musicians, plus adapting to various new styles. Trombonists and tubists have new clefs to overcome. Rarely do we hear of tenor horn players joining the ranks of the music profession. However, in the 1950's a good friend of mine, Barry Castle, who was a member of his local Marsden Musical Institute Band, near



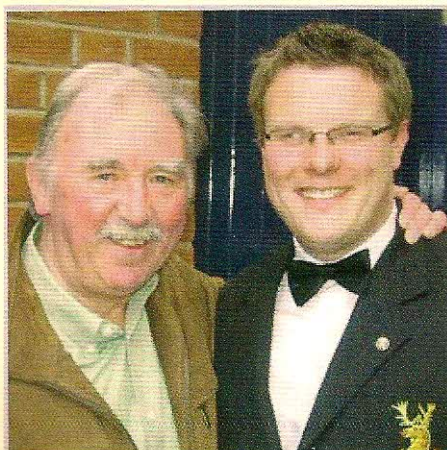
Derek Southcott.

Huddersfield, Yorkshire did transfer from tenor horn to French horn, becoming a long-serving member of the Royal Opera House Orchestra, Covent Garden, later joining the ranks of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Derek Southcott (ex-Syd Lawrence Orchestra)

Another experienced professional musician is trombonist Derek Southcott, who was lead trombone with the BBC Northern Radio Orchestra, followed by 22 years with the Syd Lawrence Orchestra. I asked Derek, a former member of one of the top brass bands in the country (Black Dyke), how he made the transition to the professional music scene.

I think the biggest shock of changing from brass band to dance band and light music was finding out just how little I knew about music and playing the trombone in different styles. Having played with one of the very best brass bands, I tended to feel that I could play all types and styles of music. But sadly not. My first introduction to dance band playing was with the Stuart Atkins Orchestra, based at Batley Variety Club, and it was there that I met a great mentor in ex-Joe Loss lead trumpet player Peter Ferris, who helped change my style completely, working on my phrasing and the more relaxed style of playing. The second major transition was, of course, playing in the bass clef, as I had only ever played in the treble and tenor clefs with Black Dyke; however, with practice this became easier. Help



Maurice Murphy and Richard Marshall.

was also gained by sitting next to players who had dance band style experience. Moving to the BBC and playing constantly was also a bonus, so when I moved to the Syd Lawrence Orchestra I had the required style, but not quite the precision, as this orchestra, to this day, is the most precise band I have ever played with and to prove my point Count Basie once said of the Syd Lawrence Orchestra 'this band is so good, it should be banned'. Enough said."

The LSO/Black Dyke Connection

Derek follows a long line of former Black Dyke players who have graced the professional music scene. Willie Lang (London Symphony Orchestra) was followed into the principal trumpet seat by Maurice Murphy, universally regarded as the greatest trumpet player of his generation. Maurice was affectionately known by his colleagues as Mr. LSO, while Jack Pinches (a well-known family name associated with Black Dyke) joined the trombone section of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. The LSO's current principal trumpet, Rod Franks, worked for many years in Norway as principal trumpet with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra.

I well recall as a young and enthusiastic cornet player in my local brass band having a keen interest in playing trumpet with amateur orchestras. The conductor of the band told me in no uncertain terms that should I continue playing the trumpet, it would ruin me as a cornet player and that under no circumstance was I to venture into playing with a dance band. Thankfully advice I chose to completely ignore.

This immediately prompts me to thinking of ex-cornet players who have graced the professional ranks as trumpet players in big bands. Brian Rankine (BBC Radio Big Band), played cornet with a brass band in Scotland, Nigel Carter (BBC Radio Big Band) played with the Ferodo Works' Band, the legendary Kenny Baker was a member of his local brass band in Hull, and the fabulous Derek Watkins, BBC Radio Big Band and the James Last Orchestra, who comes from a family with a long history associated with brass bands. His great grandfather was a brass player in the Salvation Army in Wales and his grandfather became a founder member and conductor of the Spring Gardens Brass Band in Reading, eventually succeeded by Derek's father, who taught his son from the age of four. Derek was later to play in the band.

"When you speak of lead trumpets, Derek is Mr. Lead" - the words of Dizzie Gillespie.

Derek is universally known for his high profile solos with the James Last Orchestra and those high note "screamers" on every one of the James Bond films, his first at the age of 19.

Since 1974 he has worked with Dr. Richard Smith on instrumental development and has helped to test every aspect of the new Smith-Watkins designs.

In 1960, during my ten years with the BBC Northern Ireland Orchestra, as the orchestra's chairman I was required to attend meetings in London with representatives from the other BBC "house" orchestras. It was during these visits that I first met Stan Newsome, who was lead trumpet with the BBC Variety Orchestra and also a freelance with the Mantovani Orchestra. Stan, originally hails from my part of the country, Yorkshire, and often spoke affectionately about his early days playing cornet with his local brass band in Dewsbury.

Changing from cornet to trumpet doesn't seem to have done these players any harm. So much for the advice given to me as a youngster by my band conductor to stay away from the trumpet.

If professional big bands have had their fair share of brass band converts, so have the ranks of the symphony orchestras.

Nigel Boddice MBE comes from a family steeped in brass band tradition. He was taught in his local Church Gresley Band, later becoming Principal Cornet of the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain. He was a long-serving principal trumpet with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra in Glasgow, and I well remember a very young and talented Ian Bousfield in the principal trombone chair with the Leeds-based Yorkshire Imperial Band. Ian until recently was the principal trombone of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, previously holding the same position with the London Symphony Orchestra. Another trombonist, Wingate's current Musical Director, Andrew Berryman, gained his early playing experience with Grimethorpe Colliery Junior Band during a period when father, John, was conductor of the senior band. Andrew later was to secure the principal chair with the Ulster and Hallé Orchestras.

Katy Jones (Hallé Orchestra)

The current Hallé brass section has strong connections with brass bands. Principal trumpet Gareth Small played with



Katy Jones.



"Mr Lead Trumpet" Derek Watkins.

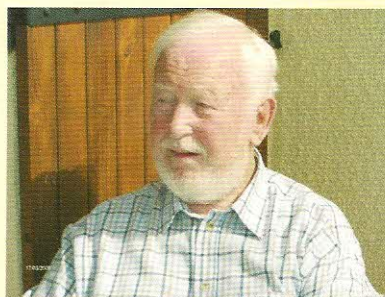
his local band in Wales, Penclawdd, West Glamorgan Youth and the National Youth Brass Band of Wales, while the trombone section, led by Katy Jones (she started her playing career with the Kirkby Lonsdale Band) has colleagues Roz Davies and Adrian Morris, together with tubist Ewan Easton MBE, all who have graced the brass band scene. After decades of male domination in some of the world's famous symphony orchestras, the increase in lady members of brass sections is to be loudly applauded. But Katy isn't the only female to occupy the principal trombone chair in the famous Manchester-based orchestra.

As a young and enthusiastic lover of classical music, I became a regular patron of the Hallé Orchestra's concerts whenever they visited my native West Riding of Yorkshire. The concerts were usually conducted by their long-serving maestro Sir John Barbirolli and sitting in the principal trombone seat was Maisie Ringham. A rare sight back in the 1950's

The BBC Philharmonic Orchestra's current principal trumpet, Jamie Prophet, was born in Cornwall and played with the Bodmin Town and Cornwall Brass Bands, while colleague Chris Evans (tuba) has performed with Brighouse & Rastrick and Grimethorpe Colliery bands.

Liverpool Philharmonic Legend Alan Stringer

One of this country's most respected trumpet players from yesteryear was the late Alan Stringer. Introduced to the cornet by his parents, his early years were in local brass bands around his native Manchester. He later progressed to Besses Boys' Band; however, it



Alan Stringer.

wasn't long before he was promoted to the senior band at the age of 16. Alan, a stalwart of the principal trumpet chair of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, did, however, take a short break away from the orchestra in London, but soon returned to his beloved Liverpool Phil.

Speaking of stalwarts, it would be remiss of me not to mention Harry Mortimer and Jack Mackintosh (Mac and Mort), two cornet legends, both of whom had distinguished orchestral careers.

Some of the most prolific players to have enjoyed successful careers in the professional music scene had their earliest training in the Salvation Army. Ray Farr, a highly respected arranger and conductor, held trumpet posts with the BBC Midland Light Orchestra and the BBC Radio Orchestra. Current principal trombone with the London Symphony Orchestra, Dudley Bright, continues to return to his roots and can regularly be seen appearing as soloist with the International Staff Band, as can his LSO colleague, principal trumpet Philip Cobb, who has recently become one of the hottest properties on the London music scene. Don Lusher spent his early training

in the Salvation Army in Peterborough, though readers will remember him with great affection as the long-serving lead trombone with the Ted Heath Orchestra, later fronting his own Don Lusher Big

Band. Don was another musician who often returned to his roots as guest soloist with a brass band. Trombonist Denis Wick, a name known for his signature brand of mouthpieces and mutes, is a former long-serving principal with the London Symphony Orchestra. The names of Bram Wiggins (LSO), William Overton (BBC Symphony Orchestra), Harry Dilley (Royal Opera House Orchestra) and Cliff Haines, who worked as a London studio free-lance musician, all had their early playing experience in Salvation Army bands.

Brass bands, universally noted for their high standard of amateur music-making, have throughout their long history been a great source in producing some of the finest brass players to enter the professional music scene.

In Part 2, I will be featuring Elgar Howarth, Geoffrey Brand, James Watson, James Gourlay, Arthur Butterworth, Bramwell Tovey, Allan Withington, Howard Snell and others who have returned to their roots, playing an active role in the brass band movement.

Brass Band to Professional

Back to their Roots

Part 2

Dennis
Wilby



The brass band movement has a world-wide reputation for being a beacon of excellence when it comes to amateur music-making. In Part One (Brass Band to Professional) I featured musicians who made the transition from the “banding family” to A-list professionals. Some have returned to their grass roots, contributing substantially as conductors, composers, arrangers and adjudicators.

Geoffrey Brand

It was around 1966 that I first met Geoffrey, who had joined the BBC in 1955 as a Music Producer. He regularly visited the Corporation’s “house” orchestras, hence his trip to Studio 1, Broadcasting House, Belfast and the BBC Northern Ireland Orchestra (no doubt keeping an eye out for the trumpet section?). But it was some years later when he re-visited, this time as guest conductor, that I had the opportunity to play for him and chat at great length during breaks in rehearsal about a common interest.....brass bands. Around that time he had been appointed professional conductor of the Black Dyke Mills Band, so the topic was of particular interest. History tells us that he was to have considerable success with the Queensbury band in the forthcoming years.

Geoffrey’s roots began in the Salvation Army as a cornet player, becoming a member of Gloucester Salvation Army Band, followed by a successful scholarship in 1944 to the Royal Academy of Music, London, which had to be put on hold as he was eligible for military service. It was during this military service

he became a member of the Royal Army Service Corps Staff Band from 1945-1947.

In 1950 he began his professional career with a three month tour of the USA as a member of the trumpet section of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Later appointments included a four year stint with the Royal Opera House Orchestra and free-lance work with London-based orchestras.

Between 1967-1975 Dr. Denis Wright invited him to become his successor as Music Advisor of the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain. His early conducting career started with the John Dickinson Band, based in Hemel Hempstead. It is, however, for his success on the contest platform with the Black Dyke Mills Band that he will be remembered, in particular for his reading of *Journey into Freedom* in 1967 at the National Brass Band Championships, Royal Albert Hall, London, which gained the Yorkshire band the coveted top award. Geoffrey had a deep passion for the music of Eric Ball, and he repeated his success in 1972, when Dyke again claimed the title with *A Kensington Concerto*. Success followed in 1968 and 1972 with Black Dyke and in 1978 with Brighouse & Rastrick at the British Open Brass Band Championships. Geoffrey Brand’s return to his brass band roots has been a significant contribution in the development of the brass band movement.

Bram Gay

Another former professional trumpet player who returned to his brass band roots is Bram Gay. Born in Treorchy, Glamorgan, Wales in 1930, he was a member of the Foden’s Motor Works’ Band under the conductorship of Harry Mortimer and was the band’s youngest principal cornet. Bram served in the Band of the Scots Guards, performing at the funeral of King George VI and at the Coronation of Elizabeth II. He often joked that he was the shortest man ever to play in the Scots Guards’ Band.

Leaving the army, he was appointed principal trumpet with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and in 1960 followed into Harry Mortimer’s chair at the Hallé Orchestra under maestro Sir John Barbirolli. When Barbirolli died in 1970, he left the orchestra in Manchester for London and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, staying in the trumpet section for four years, after which he was offered the position of Orchestra Director. During this

period he had a close working relationship with conductors Sir Georg Solti, Colin Davis and Bernard Haitink.

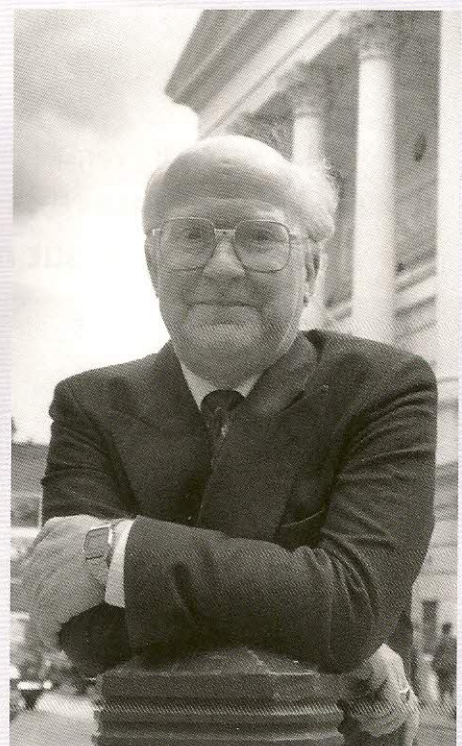
His “return” to the brass band scene has taken several routes. He had spells conducting the Parc and Dare Band, Wales and the Gothenburg Band in Sweden, but it is for his fine arrangements for brass band that he will be best remembered.

These well-crafted arrangements include the entire score of Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* and Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 3*, along with a transcription of the old warhorse classic *Les Preludes* which was selected as the test piece for 149th British Open Brass Band Championships in 2001. Although this was a comprehensive and considerably more demanding score than the earlier and much-loved short abridged version by William Rimmer, first impressions received mixed reviews; however, it has been used subsequently at numerous high profile contests.

In 1987 I had the pleasure of sharing the Adjudicators’ Box with Bram at Pontins’ Brass Band Festival in Prestatyn, Wales. During the lunch break, we discussed at length the music business in general, with Bram recalling his orchestral career in Manchester with the Hallé Orchestra and at Covent Garden, but also fond memories during his days with the Foden’s Motor Works’ Band and Harry Mortimer.



Geoffrey Brand.



Bram Gay.

One media acclaim came from the banding website 4barsrest.com which nominated Bram Gay as "one of the ten most influential people in the brass band movement". High praise indeed.

Arthur Butterworth

Having recalled earlier working with Geoffrey Brand and Bram Gay, I also had the privilege of performing school concerts with Arthur Butterworth. Following my ten year stint with the BBC Northern Ireland Orchestra in Belfast and having returned to reside in Yorkshire, I spent a year in the employment of the West Riding Education Authority as a Brass Instrumental Teacher. Thursdays were scheduled as "playing days" requiring the Authority's brass instrumental teachers to perform school concerts. The brass quartet consisted of Arthur Butterworth and Dennis Wilby (trumpets), Wilfred Heaton (horn) and Reg Brown (trombone). During lunchtime break the topic of conversation, while eating our sandwiches in the comfort of Wilfred's camper van, was the music of Gustav Mahler, Beethoven or Eric Ball, but never the immense contribution which Arthur or Wilfred had made to the brass band repertoire. Two very modest gentlemen. Though much of Arthur's career revolved around classical music and symphony orchestras (for thirty years he was conductor of the Huddersfield Philharmonic Society), his roots go back to New Moston, Manchester and playing with his local St. Chad's Church Brass Band. He later joined the Culcheth Military Band at Newton Heath and Street Fold Methodist Band, Moston, followed by Besses o' th' Barn. In 1939 Arthur was awarded the Alexander Owen Memorial Fund Scholarship, which set him out for a career as a professional musician,



Arthur Butterworth, MBE.



Bramwell Tovey.

having studied trumpet, composition and conducting at the Royal Manchester College of Music. He was a member of the trumpet section of the Scottish Orchestra, now the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, six years later returning to his native Manchester and the Hallé Orchestra.

His interest in brass bands never diminished and from 1975-1984, at the request of Geoffrey Brand, he became Music Advisor to the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain. Arthur, however, could be an outspoken critic of the band movement and in an article written for the Music in Education journal in 1970 "The Brass Band - A Cloth Cap Joke?" he created strong reaction in band circles, when he considered that there was an unhealthy pre-occupation with competitions, and that his honest belief was the need for more distinguished repertoire rather than transcriptions of "pot-boilers" and novelty items.

His contribution to the brass band repertoire has been both challenging and stimulating, none more so than his demanding *Sinfonia for Brass Maoriana*, commissioned by the New Zealand Brass Band Association and selected in 1994 as a Regional Brass Band Championship test piece. Other original compositions include *Three Impressions for Brass*, *Odin*, *Caliban*, *Passacaglia on a Theme of Brahms*, *Variations on a Theme by Handel*, plus earlier works *A Dales Suite* and *The Path Across the Moors*. Arthur Butterworth's considerable contribution to the brass band movement has sometimes been sadly overlooked within the banding media.

Bramwell Tovey

It was in 2006 that Bramwell Tovey succeeded Elgar Howarth as Artistic

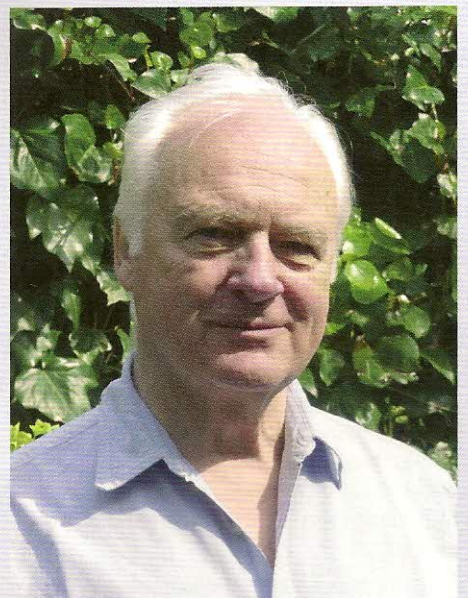
Director of the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain. Bramwell has appeared with most of the major symphony and opera orchestras throughout the world, with highly acclaimed performances, yet he still finds the time and enthusiasm to return to his roots, giving young players a musical experience which will remain with them for the rest of their lives.

His early brass playing was in the Salvation Army in Ilford, London, where his father was a euphonium player with the International Staff Band. He studied at Ilford County High School, Royal Academy of Music and the University of London. His formal music education was as a pianist and conductor, but was also a student of the great tuba virtuoso John Fletcher and in 1974 became a free-lance musician. During his student days he conducted the Hanwell Band; its former conductor, Eric Bravington, was a household name on London's professional orchestral scene as one of the outstanding trumpet players of his generation. Bramwell's interest in brass bands, however, continued as conductor of the City of Coventry Band, Rigid Containers Group Band, now the Virtuosi (GUS) Band and Norway's Eikanger-Bjørsvik Musikklag. His album "Maestro" with the Foden's Band featuring New York Philharmonic trombonist Joseph Alessi and Mark Fewer (violin) has received high acclaim from the banding media.

To have such a distinguished internationally-renowned conductor involved in banding has been a major boost to this great amateur movement and in particular his involvement with the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain.

Elgar Howarth

Mention the name Elgar Howarth to the banding fraternity and immediately his



Elgar Howarth.

association with Grimethorpe Colliery Band springs to mind.

It was in 1972 that he became the band's Music Advisor, but only on the understanding that the band must engage in performing new, modern and commissioned works. During his long association with Grimethorpe Colliery, the band duly fulfilled his wishes with recordings and high profile concerts performing quality contemporary and commissioned music.

Elgar Howarth's many recordings of major works from the brass band repertoire have included "The History of Brass Band Music" covering the early music from 1850 to present day in a six volume series and two albums featuring his music "Fireworks" and "Howarth" by Norway's elite outfit Eikanger-Bjørsvik Musikklag.

But there was another side to Elgar Howarth's music. Writing under the pseudonym of W. Hogarth Lear readers of a certain age will remember his descriptive light pieces *Pop Goes The Posthorn*, *Chinese Takeaway*, *Pel Mel*, *Cops and Robbers* all featured at Grimethorpe concerts in the 1970's.

In professional circles he was a trumpet player in the Royal Opera House Orchestra, Covent Garden, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Philip Jones Brass Ensemble and all the major London orchestras. Furthermore he has a renowned reputation as an international conductor with the London Sinfonietta and having a passion for opera, working in many of the famous opera houses throughout the world.

Elgar started in a brass band, Barton Hall Works' Band, where he became its principal cornet at the age of 14. His father, the band's conductor, was his early teacher, but Elgar had trumpet lessons from Cecil Kidd at the Royal Manchester College of Music, during which time he had been awarded the Alexander Owen Memorial Scholarship and had composed his first piece for brass band.

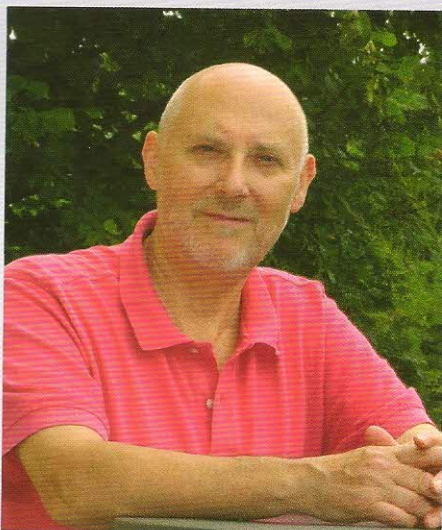
Elgar Howarth became Artistic Director of the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain from 2001 to 2005.

His contribution to the brass band movement has been immense.

Howard Snell

If you care to browse through a Rakeway Music catalogue, you'll find the significant contribution which Howard Snell has made to the brass band repertoire. He has been one of the most influential professional musicians to grace the brass band movement.

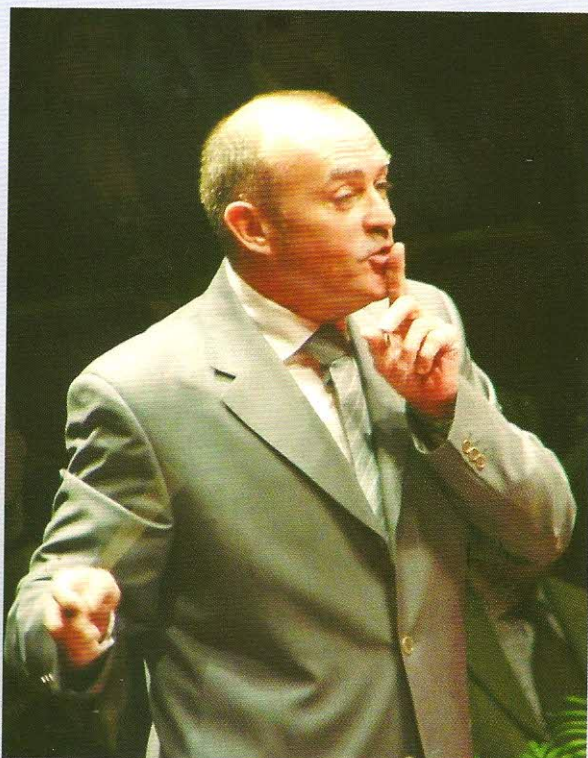
Howard was born in Wollaston, Northamptonshire, the same



Howard Snell.

village as Stanley Boddington, a former conductor of Munn and Feltons, later known as the GUS (Footwear) Band.

He was principal trumpet of the London Symphony Orchestra, served on the Board of Directors for five years as chairman, and occupied the principal chair with the London Sinfonietta and English Chamber Orchestra. He founded and conducted the Wren Orchestra. But it was in 1978 that Howard came into prominence in the band world as Musical Director of Desford Colliery Band, parting company in 1987 for Foden's (Britannia Building Society), a band he held in high esteem. In 1988 Howard travelled to Norway, a country whose brass bands had progressed in leaps and bounds, to conduct Eikanger-Bjørsvik Musikklag at the European Brass Band Championships held in Switzerland. This proved to be a smart move on the part of the Norwegians, lifting the European



Allan Withington.

crown, which they repeated the following year on "home ground" in the Grieg Hall, Bergen, Norway, the first time a European band had taken the title from a British band.

Howard's masterful arrangement of Maurice Ravel's Second Suite *Daphnis and Chloe* was selected as the test piece for the 2012 National Brass Band Championships, receiving high acclaim from the participating bands and most importantly the paying Royal Albert Hall audience.

Allan Withington

There is little doubt that the most successful conductor in the last decade has been Allan Withington. Under his baton many of the top bands in the UK and Europe have triumphed at major contests. Allan has been resident in Norway for many years, during which time he has been a member of the trumpet section of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra.

Allan's early musical upbringing was within the brass band movement in the North West of England.

His entire family were well-known names in banding circles; his father, Jack, conducted Trinity Girls' Band, uncle Len was a long-serving principal euphonium with the Wingates Band and his two sisters both played cornet with the Foden's Band. Allan received his early tuition from his father, in due course securing the principal cornet seat with Wingates and Foden's Bands. His education was at the Royal Northern College of Music with trumpet lessons from Howard Snell.

Allan's early conducting career flourished in Norway with Krohnengen Brass Band and Tertnes Brass and later with Eikanger-Bjørsvik Musikklag, Manger Musikklag and Stavanger Brass Band.

But it was when he was invited to become the Professional Musical Director of the Brighouse & Rastrick Band that success was to follow with the National Brass Band Championship titles in 1997 and 1998, All England Masters in 1998 and the European in the same year, one of the most successful periods in this famous Yorkshire band's 120 year-long history.

Then it was the Manchester-based Williams Fairey Band (2002 and 2003) and Grimethorpe Colliery (2006) for further National success, which prompted the brass band internet site 4barsrest.com to announce Allan Withington as Conductor of the Year. This phenomenal run of victories continued up to 2012,

when he guided the Foden's Band to a convincing triumph at the National Brass Band Championships with a stunning performance of Howard Snell's *Daphnis and Chloe*.

Is this to be the start of a long association with the Foden's Band?

Allan has always had a progressive outlook to creative programming, repertoire and conductors' courses, which led to a new project in June 2009 with Soli Brass Band in Holland. The Allan Withington Annual Conductors' Summer School was born with eighteen students from all over Europe descending on Leeuwarden for a six day residential course.

Throughout his entire professional career Allan has always had something of a "soft spot" for the brass band movement, his success on the contest platform rates on a level with all the great conductors from the past.

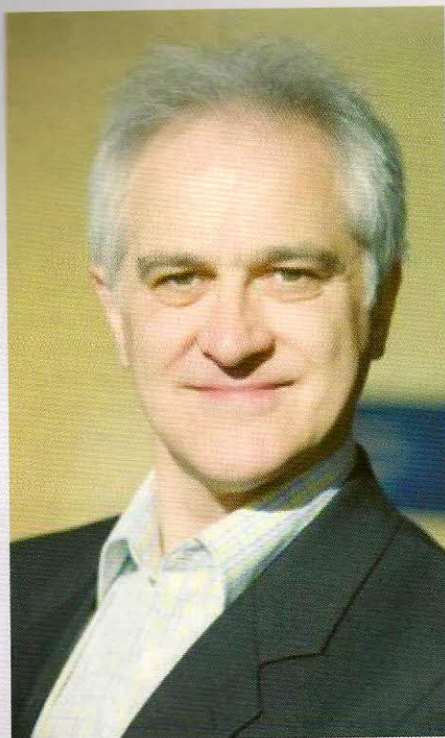
James Gourlay

Recently I was fortunate to obtain a copy of the album "Dreaming of the Masters" featuring the remarkable trumpet ace Jens Lindemann with the Foden's Band, conducted by James Gourlay. The backing for the soloist from the ladies and gentlemen of Foden's is some of the best playing I've heard for a very long time, which no doubt must be credited in part to the expert direction of James Gourlay.

It has been a distinguished professional playing career for James, his first orchestra being the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, as principal tuba after studying at the Royal College of Music, three years later occupying the same chair with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Whilst working in London he became involved with the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble, sharing the tuba role with the legendary John Fletcher. He spent ten enjoyable years with the BBC, during which time he worked with some of the world's finest conductors, but then it was a move abroad, to the Zurich Opera House, Switzerland. After a spell of nine years, James returned to the UK, this time to the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester as Head of its Wind, Brass and Percussion Department and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama as Deputy Principal (Music).

It was during his stay in Zurich that he developed his conducting skills whilst attending master-classes with Ralph Weikert, but throughout these busy professional playing appointments, he never forgot his roots and brass bands.

Born in Scotland, he first played in his local school brass band, becoming the Scottish National Solo Champion at both junior and senior levels. Today he is General Director of River City Brass, the world's only full-time professional



James Gourlay.

brass band, based in Pittsburgh, USA, who perform over 70 concerts annually throughout the United States. His involvement with bands in the UK has been well documented, including Williams Fairey, Brighouse & Rastrick, Grimethorpe Colliery and Foden's, whilst in mainland Europe Brass Band Berneroberland and Brass Band Treize Etoiles are just some of the bands who have benefited from the wealth of his professional knowledge.

As a soloist he has made five albums, including the highly acclaimed "British Tuba Concertos" and more than 20 CDs



James Watson.

with brass bands and wind bands. James Gourlay brings a wealth of professional expertise to the brass band movement. Long may it continue.

James Watson

In the February - April 2011 issue of this magazine, Editor Philip Biggs wrote a glowing, moving and comprehensive tribute to James Watson, who had suddenly passed away at the young age of 59. The death of James was a shock to both the professional London music scene and the brass band movement. His musicianship was of the highest pedigree and he will be remembered as one of the finest trumpet players of his generation. His contribution to the brass band movement, which he loved, was immense, devoting most of his conducting duties to two bands, Desford Colliery and Black Dyke.

You only have to browse through the National Brass Band Championship result archives to find the name James Watson, first in 1987 with Desford Colliery Band (Philip Sparke's *Harmony Music*). This was the first victory of the hat-trick which followed, 1988 (Ray Steadman-Allen *Seascapes*) and 1989 (Arthur Butterworth *Odin*). Desford were to continue their victorious partnership in 1991 with a winning performance of Robert Simpson's *Energy*. The band had been barred from competing in 1990 owing to its hat-trick wins in previous years.

James Watson had a close family bond with Desford Colliery Band, being its principal cornet in the 1970's. His brothers Robert and Jeremy were band members and father, James, Band Chairman. James junior started his playing with Desford at the age of seven, later becoming its principal cornet, staying with the band until he became a student in London at the Royal Academy of Music.

Prior to his success with Desford, James had a spell in the 1980's as conductor of Brighouse & Rastrick Band, but it was the Yorkshire band's near rivals from "up the road" in Queensbury - Black Dyke - who gave James further success at the Nationals in 1994 and 1995 with stunning performances of Joseph Horowitz *Theme and Co-operation* and Elgar Howarth's *Songs for BL*. Away from the cut-and-thrust of contesting, James had a passion for the concert platform and was instrumental in shaping Dyke's popularity with their concert audiences.

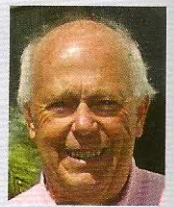
He was a giant of a musician and will be extremely missed within the banding fraternity. The world of brass both professional and amateur just won't be the same without him.

In the next issue of *The Brass Herald* I will look at the "outsiders" with no roots in banding who have made a considerable contribution to the brass band movement.

Brass Band to Professional

The 'Outsiders'

Part 3
Dennis Wilby



In this third and final article - "The Outsiders" - I feature some of the distinguished musicians from orchestral, choral and military backgrounds who have been at the forefront as composers, conductors and adjudicators within the brass band movement.

Professor Philip Wilby

The first of the "outsiders" is a composer who has contributed immensely in the development of the brass band repertoire.

Professor Philip Wilby is a Yorkshire man, born in Pontefract, a town situated at the very heart of brass band country. Brass tuition was readily available at his school, with Wilfred Heaton the peripatetic teacher. However, Philip resisted the temptation to take up a brass instrument, favouring choral singing and the violin. It was to prove a smart choice when he later became a member of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain at the age of 14.

His early education was at Leeds Grammar School and later Keeble College, Oxford, reading music and composition. On completing his studies, he became a professional violinist at Covent Garden Opera and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Working with these two busy orchestras became somewhat time consuming, but this didn't deter his love of composing. The name of Philip Wilby however first emerged in brass band circles in the 1970s when he returned to live in his native Yorkshire, having joined the staff of Leeds University in 1972. It was during this period that I first met and played alongside Philip in the Northern

Concert Artists' Orchestra, a free-lance symphony orchestra which recruited most of its members from Yorkshire and the Manchester area, many from the BBC Northern Orchestra (now the BBC Philharmonic) including the late Maurice Murphy in the first trumpet chair.

Philip Wilby's orchestral and choral music has been featured extensively world-wide, but brass band players became aware of his music through his close association with the Black Dyke Band, with whom he has served as Music Associate for 15 years. Philip has appeared with the band as guest conductor of his own compositions and occasionally makes an appearance as organist during Dyke's major concerts.

Many of his works are based on his Christian beliefs and in 1990 his first commission, *The New Jerusalem* was commissioned and performed by the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain, selected two years later as the set test piece for the National Brass Band Championships of Great Britain. Since then, rarely does a major brass band contest take place without some of Professor Wilby's music making an appearance. The list is endless: *A Dove Descending, Revelations, Red Priest, Vienna Nights, Jazz, Northern Lights, A Lowry Sketchbook, Music for the Moving Image* all familiar titles which have appeared at The British Open, National Brass Band Championships and European Brass Band Championships, many commissioned by the Black Dyke Band. But of all the music coming from the pen of this distinguished composer *Paganini Variations*, the test piece for the 2011 Regional Championships still remains a particular favourite with bands and audiences; in fact it's his most performed work. Philip being a former violinist, a piece based on the classical repertoire just had to make its way into the brass band repertoire...and why not?

As well as being a noted classical composer, Niccolò Paganini was also a great classical violinist, with a reputation for having an incredible technique. He was often quoted as saying: "I'm not handsome, but when women hear me play, they come crawling to my feet."

UK readers will be familiar with this music as the signature tune for the successful television series "The South Bank Show" in the Andrew Lloyd-Webber version.

Whilst the majority of Philip's music can be classed as "heavyweight" not all his output has been directed at elite bands. A *Little Light Music* and *The Seasons* became

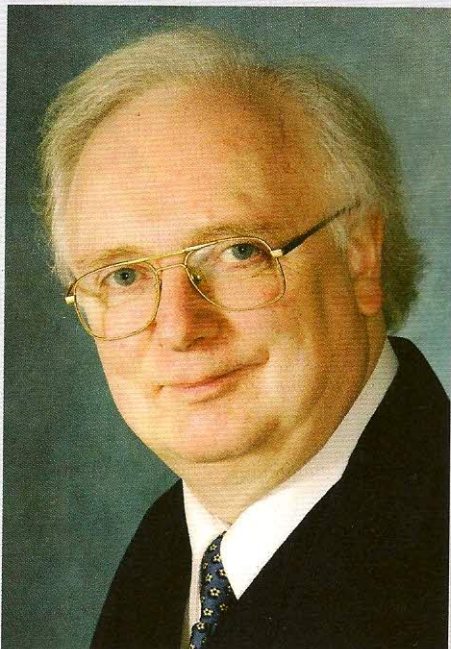
popular when chosen for the lower section Regional Brass Band Championships in 2011 and 2007 respectively.

One annual event which often features the music of Philip Wilby is the French Open Brass Band Championships held annually in Amboise. In 2010 Jacques Gaudet, President of the organising committee, invited Professor Wilby to join the adjudicating panel when *A Lowry Sketchbook* was the set test piece.

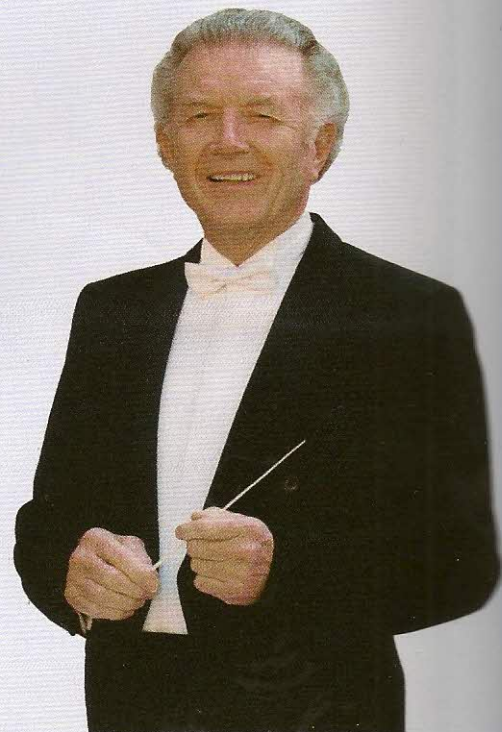
Having lived for many years in a converted windmill near Halifax in West Yorkshire, Philip now resides in Bristol, but his close association with Dr. Nicholas J. Childs and the Black Dyke Band continues. No doubt in the coming years the brass band repertoire will be further enhanced with more gems from this extremely influential and popular Yorkshire composer.

Major Peter Parkes

Following the untimely death of James Watson came the dramatic news that the brass band world had lost another great figure, Peter Parkes. Known throughout banding circles as "The Major", Peter Parkes arrived on the brass band scene via the British Army, which he joined as a junior bandsman, playing clarinet. He was later commissioned, becoming Director of Music of the Band of the Corps of Royal Engineers and prior to leaving the Army Director of Music of



Dr Philip Wilby.



Major Peter Parkes.

the Regimental Band of Her Majesty's Grenadier Guards. Regular readers of this magazine will remember his interesting and informative articles recalling experiences as a junior bandsman and Director of Music, during his long service in the British Army.

The name Peter Parkes first appeared in brass band circles in 1975, when he was invited to conduct the Black Dyke Mills Band at the National Brass Band Championships. The test piece was Robert Farnon's *Un Vie de Matelot*. The final rehearsals up to the "big day" had not been going well, with the outlook looking somewhat grim for the Major's first association with the famous Yorkshire band. But as the contest archives tell us, the band's performance came good on the Royal Albert Hall stage, the adjudicators awarding the Queensbury band the top award. This was to be the start of things to come.

It was to prove a good move on behalf of Black Dyke, as they went on to complete the hat-trick in 1976 and 1977 under their new professional conductor. This success was to be the beginning of a very productive and enjoyable partnership between a Dyke band, now with a settled personnel and Peter Parkes at the helm, and with a new and exciting International contest organised for the following year (which the band had been invited to enter) further success seemed inevitable. The first European Brass Band Championship, held at The Royal Albert Hall, London in 1978 proved to be the "kick-start" for future success for the Dyke/Parkes partnership with the band claiming the title from 1978 to 1985, with just two breaks in 1980, when the Cory Band from Wales, conducted by Denzil Stephens became European Champions and in 1981 with local rivals Brighouse & Rastrick (James Scott) lifting the title. In the coming years Black Dyke were to continue this success under the leadership of David King (1990-1991), James Watson (1995) and in more recent years under their current Director of Music Dr. Nicholas J. Childs.

The introduction of this new European event in 1978 became something of a talking point amongst the brass band fraternity, during which time I recall having a long conversation with Trevor Walmsley, conductor of the Yorkshire Imperial Metals Band, who were one of the UK's most successful contesting bands during that period. We discussed the prospects of the new European Brass Band Championships in great detail. Trevor expressing his view that he did not go along with a brass band contest involving European bands having any future, as it would be completely dominated by UK bands. They were, in his opinion, far superior in standard, had



Sir Vivian Dunn.

a long and distinguished history, with tradition heavily in their favour and the all-important "know how" when it came to contesting at the highest level. Whilst I appreciated Trevor's point of view (which proved to be correct for the first ten years with UK bands dominating), I pointed out, however, that the European brass band scene was rapidly changing. Bands in Norway, Sweden, Belgium and Switzerland were narrowing the gap and it would not be long before a European band would take the title, which proved my point when Eikanger-Bjørsvik Musikklag (Norway) claimed the title in 1988 and 1989, Brass Band Willebroek (Belgium) in 1993, 2006 and 2007 and Manger Musikklag (Norway) in 2011.

Throughout his association with brass bands Peter Parkes retained his former military rank into civilian life, often being addressed as "The Major". He was the most successful brass band conductor of modern times, winning a total of 21 National Championships, British Open and European Brass Band Championships, plus eight Scottish National titles and 27 Regional Championships.

In 1994 he conducted the Williams Fairey Band to success at the European Brass Band Championships in Montreux, Switzerland, and in the following year was appointed Professional Musical Director of Grimethorpe Colliery Band.

He was a prolific visitor abroad, adjudicating and conducting in the USA, Japan, New Zealand, Australia and through Europe, an active member of ABBA (Association of Brass Band Adjudicators) and for 14 years held the post of President of the British Federation of Brass Bands.

His success on the contest platform speaks for itself!

Orchestral Influence

Many high profile professional conductors, with no brass band tradition, have graced the brass band scene. Marcus Dods was conductor at Sadler's Wells Opera, London, from 1952 to 1956 and the BBC Concert Orchestra from 1966 to 1970, during which time he also enjoyed brief spells conducting brass bands, as did Czech musician Vilem Tausky, born in Moravia, who conducted the BBC Concert Orchestra from 1956 to 1966. He was the first overseas conductor in 100 years to conduct the Band of Her Majesty's Coldstream Guards. He became an instructor at the Royal Military School of Music (Kneller Hall) and adjudicated at brass band contests. Bernard Keefe, conductor of the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, also had associations with the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain, as did Sir Vivian Dunn, Director of Music Royal Marines, who was a regular and very popular guest conductor at massed brass band concerts, also officiating at many contests as an adjudicator. Between 1976-1980 the Hallé Orchestra's conductor Maurice Handford became involved with brass bands when engaged to conduct the CWS (Manchester) Band and Brighouse & Rastrick at the North West and Yorkshire Regional Championships respectively. Another high profile orchestral conductor who made the occasional appearance at brass band events was Sir Charles Groves.

In 1978 John Pryce-Jones joined the staff of the newly-formed Opera North, based at the Grand Theatre, Leeds as Chorus Master and it was during this period that he became actively involved in brass band circles, having been invited to take the baton of the Yorkshire Imperial Band, who under his leadership became British



John Pryce-Jones.

Open Champions in 1980 and in the following year BBC Band of the Year.

John Pryce-Jones was educated at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, where he won an organ scholarship. In 1988 he was appointed Artistic Director of the Halifax Choral Society and in 1998 a new album *Christmas Song* was released on the Doyen label, featuring the Foden's (Courtois) Band and the Halifax Choral Society, the conducting duties shared by Nicholas J. Childs and John Pryce-Jones.

Composer Karl Jenkins CBE has contributed immensely to the brass band repertoire, mainly through a close association with Dr. Robert Childs and the Cory Band, who have recorded and featured his music extensively. Born in Wales, Jenkins' career began in the National Youth Orchestra of Wales as an oboist. He studied at Cardiff University and the Royal Academy of Music with Alun Hoddinott and it was through an excellent brass band arrangement by professional trumpeter Tony Small of excerpts from his symphonic work *The Armed Man* - a Mass for Peace that his music became popular with brass bands. Other successful additions to the repertoire is his magnificent *Euphonium Concerto* written for former principal euphonium of the Cory Band, David Childs (it has two accompaniment versions, orchestra and brass band) and a magnificent work which has been extensively featured by the Cory Band, *This Land of Ours*.

Gilbert Vinter

For two decades prior to the 1960s, test pieces for the British Open and National Brass Band Championships had almost exclusively been dominated by the music of Eric Ball and the popular transcription of orchestral works by Frank Wright.

Then in the late 1960s, the name Gilbert Vinter appeared on the brass band scene. Though no stranger in orchestral circles, here was a name which became the talking point at band rooms up and down the country.

Born in 1909 in Lincoln, during his youth he was a chorister at Lincoln Cathedral, later taking up the bassoon, becoming a member of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the BBC Military Band in 1930. It was at this time that he took an interest in conducting. During World War II he joined the Central Band of the Royal Air Force and was appointed in 1952 as the first principal conductor of the newly-formed BBC Concert Orchestra, a position which he held for one year.

His name came to prominence in banding circles in the 1960s when the *The Daily Herald* newspaper, who were



Gilbert Vinter.

sponsors of the National Brass Band Championships, commissioned Vinter to write his first major work for brass band, the result being *Salute to Youth*, followed in 1964 by another gem, *Variations on a Ninth*, the chosen test piece for the National Brass Band Championships of Great Britain. Vinter's style of writing was far removed from what bands had previously experienced in test pieces, his music requiring the use of additional percussion, the structure of the work using irregular rhythmic patterns, dissonant chords and in *Variations on a Ninth* multi cadenzas for soprano cornet, tenor horn, baritone, euphonium and solo cornet. This was brass band music with a new twist, but as Vinter's music continued to gain popularity in bandrooms throughout the country, players and conductors eventually got to grips with this "new" style of music.

It was, however, during his tenure as conductor of the BBC Midland Light Orchestra that his music revolutionised the brass band repertoire, particularly with the introduction of yet another new test piece for the 1969 British Open Championships.....*Spectrum*.

Here was a style of music completely "foreign" to conductors and players at that time. It also divided opinions as to its suitability for such a prestigious event as The British Open Brass Band Championships, which previously had remained faithful to a more traditional style of test piece. This "new" music painted a vivid musical picture, ablaze with colour and rhythm, challenging players, conductors and percussionists, creating wide-spread "head scratching"

in the early stages of rehearsal. Vinter's music can never be described as monochrome, always awash with colour, rhythm, style and sound. This was to be a new era in banding.

Today players might question what all the *Spectrum* fuss was about, but during the 1960s this was groundbreaking music raising the barrier of the brass band repertoire. Regrettably Vinter was unable to attend the première of *Spectrum* due to ill health.

As well as *Spectrum*, Gilbert Vinter's output was vast and included: *James Cook - Circumnavigator*, *Triumphant Rhapsody*, *Challenging Brass*, *Symphony of Marches*, *John O'Gaunt* and *Vizcaya* - all works containing the highly original Vinter stamp, many of which are still very much in demand at Own Choice contests to-day.

Although Gilbert Vinter was rarely seen conducting a brass band, he had a close relationship with the GUS (Footwear) Band and could often be spotted at band rehearsals, which led to him writing *Elegy and Rondo* (1966), *Fancy's Knell* (1967) and *Alla Burlesca* (1968) for their award winning quartet at the National Quartet Championships

In 1964 the BBC commissioned Vinter to write a major work for brass and voices, the result being his most ambitious and finest achievement. This powerful cantata *The Trumpets* - the text taken from the Old Testament - is scored for bass solo, mixed choir, augmented band and percussion. Following its successful première it received high acclaim in the banding media; however, due to the large musical logistics and funding costs involved in performing this work, it has sadly never received the recognition it fully deserves.

Though Vinter will be best remembered for his "heavyweight" test pieces, he never overlooked writing for the concert platform, his many light pieces including *Portuguese Party*, *Lisbon Carnival* and his arrangement of the cornet solo *Mattheson's Air*.

Here was a composer who made an immense impact on the brass band repertoire and for those of us who knew him well, having had the privilege of working with him in the orchestral world, he will always be remembered as a traditional English gentleman and a true professional.

Gilbert Vinter died in 1969 in Tintagel, Cornwall.

In compiling this feature, I have been fully aware there have been many other distinguished "outsiders" who have contributed immensely to the brass band movement; to all of them we must be eternally grateful.