

The International Staff Band - The Army's Premier Musical Combination

David Miller, August 2011



The I.S.B at Berne 1907. Bandmaster George Mitchell

The Junior Staff Band of The Salvation Army was commissioned on April 22nd 1889 under the direction of Bandmaster Samuel Webber. The new band consisted of office boys and junior clerks from International Headquarters in Queen Victoria Street. After having been in existence for about two years, most of the players were too old to be regarded as 'junior', and in October 1891 a memorandum from the Chief of the Staff brought into service the International Headquarters Staff Band. Staff Captain, Fred Fry was appointed to take charge of the newly formed band.

In September 1893 the band was reorganized, with Jabez Lyne becoming the first officially appointed bandmaster of the International Staff Band. His time with the baton did not last long however, and in 1894 Caleb Burgess, late of the Household Troops Band, took charge. He was succeeded later the same year by George Mitchell, who served as bandmaster until 1920. Upon Bandmaster Mitchell's retirement the band ceased to function for two years, due, in the main to the toll taken by the First World War.

Reformed in 1923, with Major George Fuller, the new Bandmaster, the I.S.B's first engagement was at Bideford in Devon. Major Fuller had been a member of the band since 1891 and was Deputy Bandmaster for some 23 years. As part of the band's golden jubilee celebrations, the I.S.B. were, in October 1941, accorded the honour of playing in the forecourt of Buckingham Palace.

In 1942 Major Fuller was presented with the Order of The Founder by The Chief of the Staff, Commissioner Alfred G. Cunningham, after serving in the position of 19 years. Major Eric Ball, a well known name in Salvation Army music circles took up the baton upon Major Fuller's retirement. On 31st August 1942 the I.S.B. broadcast

under the baton of it's new bandmaster for the first time over the BBC Forces network.

Major Ball left the I.S.B. in 1944, having resigned his commission as an officer of the Salvation Army. As a temporary measure, Lieutenant-Colonel Bramwell Coles was asked to conduct the band for the remainder of that season. In September 1944 Brigadier William Stewart, an ex cornet soloist with the I.S.B., was appointed it's new bandmaster. Two years later Brigadier Stewart asked to be relieved of the bandmastership and was succeeded in the position by Major Bernard Adams. Major Adams was to become the longest serving bandmaster of the International Staff Band, serving for some 28 years until his retirement in 1975. He led the band on many tours both in the United Kingdom and overseas, including the first visit to mainland Europe for 23 years when in 1949 the I.S.B. campaigned in the Netherlands.

The Band celebrated it's Diamond Jubilee in 1951 with around 85 former members attending a reception on Saturday October 15th, including 81 year old Colonel Alfred Hamilton, the I.S.B.'s first flag officer. The climax of the celebrations was the Monday evening festival in the Royal Festival Hall, presided over by General Albert Orsborn before an audience of some 3,000. Eight days later the band were again playing by Royal command in the Forecourt of Buckingham Palace. Upon his retirement in 1975, Colonel Bernard Adams was admitted to The Order Of The Founder by General Clarence Wiseman. Major Ray Bowes was appointed to be Colonel Adams successor as bandmaster of the I.S.B.



The I.S.B in 1978. Bandmaster Col. Ray Bowes

The following year Major Bowes celebrated 25 years as bandmaster at Harlesden Corps. He was to conduct the I.S.B. at Westminster Abbey for the Commonwealth Day Service held in the presence of Her Majesty The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh. In 1976 the I.S.B. attended the Army's Holiday Plus Fellowship Camp at Butlins, Bognor Regis, for the first time playing to over 4,000 guests.

To date there have been two other bandmasters of the International Staff Band, Major Robert Redhead, and the present incumbent, Bandmaster Stephen Cobb. The Army's premier band has now given nearly 110 years, 78 years of that unbroken,

carrying the message of Salvation to the world through its' music. Long may their unique way of spreading the word of God continue.

For further reading we recommend what is perhaps the definitive history of the International Staff Band. 'I.S.B. The Story Of The International Staff Band' by Colonel Brindley Boon.