

SOUTHPORT CORPORATION MILITARY BAND (PART 2)

Philip Mather

The Band, under conductor William Rimmer, did its share of raising money, aiding army recruiting and improving morale during the Great War. In 1915 the thirty-four strong band was 'regarded as one of best Municipal Bands in the country'. Wounded soldiers were admitted free to the Lord Street bandstand concerts that year. Performances continued morning and evening with additional concerts on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday afternoons plus one Sunday evening performance at 8.15pm. A restriction on lighting, due to the war, saved approximately £250. Receipts were down that year but because of savings in the lighting bill a profit was eventually made.

It was decided at a November 1915 council meeting that only musicians ineligible for military service would be hired for the 1916 season. The new Amusement Tax recently imposed by the Government put up admission charges to band concerts; reduced admission prices, however, were adopted by the Corporation for soldiers in uniform. In addition to its bandstand performances the Band gave a benefit concert in aid of the South Infirmary in July 1916 where £18/4/1 was raised.

As the war progressed the size of the band was reduced. By 1918 wages for the band were £75 per week, there were now no morning concerts but everyday weekday performances in the afternoon and evening and on Sunday evenings.

In 1919 the size of the Band was increased to twenty-seven musicians. At the Corporation Band Committee Meeting of 21st October William Rimmer was again re-engaged for five seasons from 1920 at salary of £12/10/- a week, "Mr Rimmer to provide all the necessary music." However, Rimmer resigned on 2nd February 1920 as he had been offered a better appointment in Liverpool as Musical Editor of Wright & Round's Band Journal.

The 1920 Season ran from the middle of May to the end of September – concerts every weekday at 3.15pm and 8pm, Sundays 8.15pm. Admission was 4d enclosure, 3d outside, season tickets 10/6, children 5/3, weekly tickets 2/- including tax. The new bandmaster was to be Gordon E. Stutely at £10/10- per week the Corporation to provide the music. The music library was insured for £500 at this time.

Not much is known of Stutely's early musical life but he may have been Bandmaster of the Hastings Municipal Band in the days before the Great War. After leaving the Southport Band in 1922 he was active as a clarinettist in the Merseyside area in the late 1920s/early 1930s and was a member of the Plaza Cinema Symphony Orchestra in Birkenhead in 1930. He was Musical Director (MD) of the Merseyside Military Band c1934 and also a conductor at New Brighton. He adjudicated at the Belle Vue Military Band Contest of 1933 and was MD for the Pageant of Transport at the Liverpool & Manchester Railway Centenary Celebrations in 1930.

In 1921 the Corporation, in a spirit of optimism, again enlarged the band, this time to thirty players while also reducing the cost of admission tickets. Special weekly themed concert nights were also promoted.

In 1922 the thirty-six players were now dressed in red tunics, the upkeep of the band being £160 per week. Storms clouds however were brewing when The Amalgamated Musicians Union representative who had been touting for membership among the ranks of the band met the Band Committee in

January to talk about the musicians' wages for 1923. It was resolved, according to the Council Minutes, that the 1923 band be engaged on same terms as 1922, no rise in wages was evidently forthcoming. Whether the Corporation then adopted a "take it or leave it" policy and/or the Musicians Union advised its members not to apply for jobs with the Corporation band is open to speculation. What is known is that the Corporation announced that band concerts would cease and according to *Manchester Evening News* December 13th 1922 the (rather lame perhaps) reason the Corporation gave for not hiring a Corporation band for the 1923 season was that the band was not sufficiently loud to be heard above the noise of Lord Street, the town's main thoroughfare and site of the bandstand. Famous brass bands would be hired instead on weekly engagements.

From 1924 to 1929 various brass and military bands were engaged for week long engagements including the British Guiana Military in 1924; Life Guards, Coldstream, Scots, Grenadier Guards in 1925; 1st Bn West Yorkshire Regiment, Royal Marines, 3rd/6th Dragoon Guards, Scots Guards, Lancashire Fusiliers, 2nd North Staffs, 2nd Gordons, Welsh Guards, 13th/18th Hussars and Royal Artillery Mounted in 1927.

For the 1930 season it was decided to again hire a Corporation band (possibly the cost of hiring outside bands was proving too expensive) of thirty-four (ten clarinets/Eb clarinet/two flutes/oboe/two bassoons/two saxophones/two horns/five cornets/three trombones/euphonium/three basses plus string bass/two drums) and conductor engaged at weekly cost of £215, sixteen concerts per week including one Sunday performance. J R Bell, late Bandmaster 2nd North Staffs was appointed as conductor. Bell had obviously been attracted back to Southport following the appearance of the 2nd North Staffs there in 1927. Rehearsals began on May 26th, the season commenced on 3rd June, the musicians to be dressed in ex-army scarlets as before. Bell's wages were £25 per week. Special evening concerts were to be given weekly on Wednesday and Saturday evenings of *British Army Quadrilles*. The Band was also engaged at Southport Flower Show that year.

John Robert Bell was born in 1892 in West Hartlepool. He enlisted into the Band of the 3rd Bn Rifle Brigade in 1910 and was a soloist on the flute and cymbalon (a descendent of the Hungarian dulcimer, an instrument with strings stretched over a horizontal sounding board and struck by hammers) taught to him by a famous Hungarian player. Bell served through the Great War with his battalion in France. Following the Bandmasters' course at Kneller Hall he was appointed to the 2nd Bn North Staffordshire Regiment in 1923. In 1924 he was one of eight bandmasters chosen to conduct a one thousand strong massed band at the Wembley Empire Exhibition.

From 1931 the size of Southport's band was progressively reduced, probably due to financial constraints. A section of it was used to form a dance band (about twelve players) which performed in the Floral Hall. Also, for a number of years in the early 1930s, the season was extended through October when the band became a concert orchestra which also performed in the Floral Hall. Both groups were conducted by J R Bell.

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Regional Meetings: North West Continued from page 4.....

After these introductions a 1988 video of "Beating the Retreat" at Fulwood Barracks was shown by James Ashton, Audio Visual Officer at the Museum, together with comments. Following a Lancashire Hotpot Lunch Mr John Gibson, retired Bandmaster, gave a talk on his days as a bandsman and bandmaster. He was the first bandmaster of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment after the amalgamation of the Lancashire Regiment and the Loyal Regiment. Those present enjoyed his talk very much and over tea and biscuits members had ample time to chat about their various interests in military bands and also to look around the museum and archives and visit the museum shop. Members dispersed at 4.30pm. All in all a most enjoyable day. Jim Ashton

(3) EASTBOURNE/SOUTH EAST

Dates and speakers for the winter season 2002/3:

Sun 1st Dec 2002: Capt Ted Whealing Royal British Legion Central Band.

Sat 25th Jan 2003: Major Graham Jones Coldstream Guards Band.

Sun 2nd March 2003: RAF DoM (tbc).

All meetings are held at the Lansdowne Hotel, Grand Parade, Eastbourne, commencing at 2.30pm until about 5.45pm. Meetings always include full afternoon tea and the cost is £6.75 for members and £7.75 for guests for the forthcoming winter season. All bookings to Stuart Gray "Rhinefield" 38, Norman Close, Battle, East Sussex, TN33 0BD. Phone 01424 773 936.

Eastbourne Summer Teas 2002

Just a reminder to all regulars and those who we give a warm welcome to this summer if you are in the Eastbourne area, visit the Society stand in the Grand Parade Bandstand or Redoubt Fortress on Sundays or Wednesday and Friday evenings and take tea on a Sunday afternoon commencing 23rd June, with the visiting Director of Music from 5pm to 6.30pm each Sunday apart from the Shrewsbury weekend when there will be no tea in Eastbourne. Cost Members £6.25 for members and £7.25 for guests/non members.

BEXHILL

The society were approached by the Mayor of Bexhill to have a promotional stand at the De la Warr Pavilion on

Wednesday 30th January in support of the Prince of Wales's Division (Lucknow) Band under the direction of Capt Tim Cooper. Over 400 attended a well chosen programme of music and played with a refreshing style and I was particularly impressed with the solo and duet work which created a very favourable impression with a very learned military music audience.

HAWTH THEATRE 2002

One of the ever increasing and popular winter venues to hear military and brass bands is the Hawth Theatre, Crawley who put on a very special six concert series commencing in September and going through until March normally on a Sunday afternoon although there have been some on a Saturday evening or Sunday evening. This winter the military bands were Band of the Scots Guards in October and the Central Band of the Royal British Legion in March. Two extremely fine concerts. The Society recognises this venue as one of its most successful for the travelling promotional stand and welcomes the opportunity of meeting more followers and members at next year's winter series of concerts. The series opens in October with the Band of the Parachute Regiment on the 27th October and finishes with the Band of the Irish Guards on Sunday 9th March. Both concerts commence at 3pm.

COLCHESTER JUBILEE TATTOO 2002

The Royal Star & Garter Home in Richmond, Surrey, will be celebrating The Queen's Golden Jubilee in style with a spectacular and unique Military Tattoo taking place on Saturday July 27th from 7pm at the Nayland Road display ground West Bergholt, Colchester.

This not-to-be-missed event promises to rival the now discontinued Royal Tournament, featuring the finest and most exciting tri-service bands and displays including:

- Royal Marines
- Royal Air Force Central Light Division
- Army Air Corps Parachute Regiment
- Honda Imps Motorcycle Display Team
- Essex Dog Display Team

Taking to the air will be the world famous Blue Eagles Army Helicopter Display Team, and the Silver Eagles Free Fall Team.

The Grand Finale for this unique, action-packed event will feature the Household Cavalry Musical Ride (to be confirmed) culminating in a spectacular night-time parachute jump by the Red Devils Display Team.

In this, the 20th anniversary year of the Falklands conflict, Falklands veteran, Simon Weston, a Vice President of the famous Home will be the Guest of Honour and will address the audience. All proceeds from the Tattoo will help support the disabled ex-service men and women of The Royal Star & Garter Home.

Further information from either Michael Culham on 01206 271253 or Brian Gander at The Royal Star & Garter Home on 0208 439 8112
Press release

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In 1932 Bell's band was now only twenty-seven in number Bell being paid £500 per annum, the cost of the band was not to exceed £190 per week. Three weeks were allowed for outside engagements, presumably to raise extra revenue. Sixteen concerts were to be given weekly including Sundays.

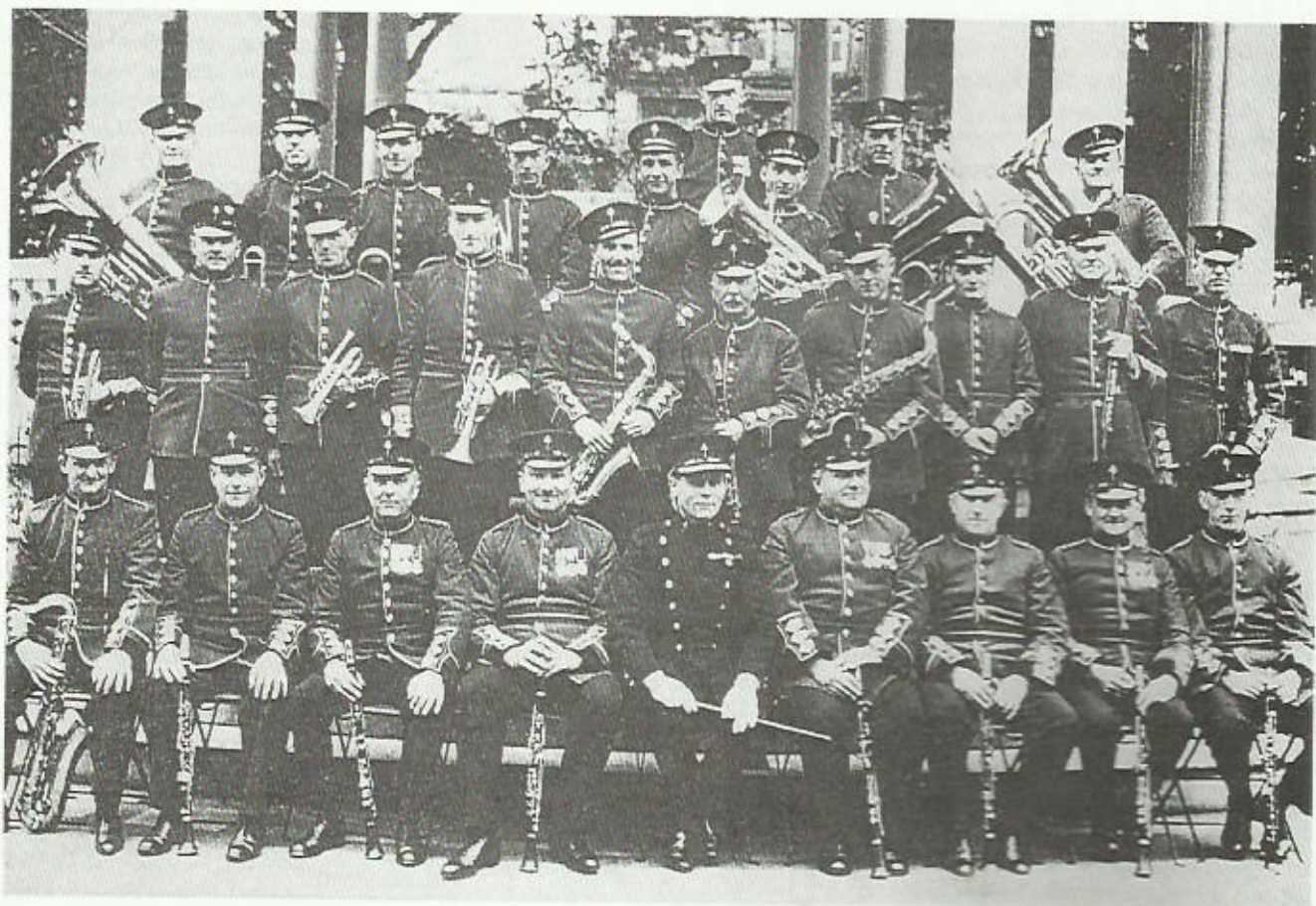
At some point Bell wrote the music for a theme song *Sunny Southport* played at the end of each radio broadcast band performance.

In 1933 a smaller band of twenty-two musicians was engaged, doubling on orchestral and dance band instruments performing a mixture of military and dance band concerts. Other concerts were given by brass and local military bands both at weekends and in the evenings.

In 1934 the Band of twenty-two were playing seven days per week 'without amplification'. In a conversation with dance band musician Arthur Jacobson (recounted to the writer in a letter) Bell was alarmed that the corporation kept cutting the number of musicians more and more so that he could not play certain pieces and that in his opinion it was the corporation's intention to put an end to the band.

He was proved right for 1934 was to be the last season of performances by the Southport Corporation Military Band, a band that had given pleasure to thousands of visitors for nearly thirty-five years. The following years, music was to be provided by outside bands.

Photo back page.



Above: The Southport Corporation Band with Bandmaster J R Bell photographed in front of the Lord Street Bandstand in 1932. Following the demise of the band John Bell continued to live in Southport, became music master at Ormskirk Grammar School and taught music privately. He also continued conducting orchestral programmes in the Cambridge Hall, Southport; became the Bandmaster of the 5th Bn Manchester Regiment (TA) brass band in Wigan from 1935-37; was MD of St Hilda's Professional Brass Band in their last touring and broadcasting season of 1937 and conducted Imperial Military Band of Liverpool at the Belle Vue Military Band Contest of 1937. He acted as musical director of various amateur operatic societies especially that in Ormskirk where he was to continue in that capacity until his death. He died on 22nd July 1953 in his adopted town of Southport. The Editor would like to thank Bob Wray (late RAF Music Services) for the loan of the above photograph and additional information on the life of J R Bell.

Below: Part of the massed bands of the Prince of Wales's Division, Cardiff Castle July 1992.



If undelivered: return to P Mather, 34 Malvern Avenue, Bury, Lancs BL9 6NW