

# 100 YEARS OF FREEDOM

Hubert Bath's *Freedom* is the test for the Senior Cup at next month's Spring Festival.

Band historian, **Tim Mutum**, explains the birth of the music 100 years ago and the single success one now long-gone band enjoyed at the Crystal Palace contest with this music

Although the First World War ended in November 1918, John Henry Iles wasn't able to resurrect his National Championships at the Crystal Palace until September 1920. He continued with his plans for commissioning new music and, for the 1922 contest, turned to Hubert Bath (1833-1945), who had attended the Royal Academy of Music to study piano and organ, as well as composition with Frederick Corder. He went on to compose many film scores and his *Out of the Blue* has been the theme music of BBC radio's 'Sports Report' since the programme started in 1948, of which there is also an arrangement for brass band.

Iles' commission resulted in *Freedom*, oddly sub-titled *Brass Band Symphony No 1*. The first movement has no title, the second is an *Interlude* with an uncomplicated, beguiling melody that serves as the basis of the movement, whilst the third, *Scherzo – Finale*, lives up to its title – 'light and lively'. The composer's own programme note describes the first movement as 'In God's fresh air, under the open sky, contemplating the gentle sweetness of nature itself', whilst the second is 'The quiet interlude of romance and love' and the third 'The gift of Laughter, joy, love, vigour, this also is Freedom.' Depending on chosen tempi, it is around 11-12 minutes in length.

The 1922 contest attracted an entry of 15, including the 'crack' bands of the time, Black Dyke Mills, Fodens Motor Works, Irwell Springs, Wingates Temperance and defending champion, St. Hilda Colliery. Also a relative newcomer, Horwich RMI, which had placed 12<sup>th</sup> on its first appearance at the Crystal Palace contest in 1921, winning the following year.

Formed in 1889, three years after the opening of the new locomotive works in Horwich, as the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company Band, the intention was to recruit from railway workers, but only one member of the Company passed the audition. Consequently, it recruited from other bands, including from Black Dyke Mills and Irwell Springs.

The Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company Band made little impact on the contest scene until it competed at the Belle Vue September contest in 1915, by which time J. A. Greenwood, a successful conductor of the era, was leading it. The band was runner-up, but won in 1916 and may have been helped by a lengthy strike at the Fodens factory the previous year, during which several players – possibly as many as 12 – left the band and joined Horwich. Stories vary as to whether they were sacked due to being pickets, or they moved simply out of financial necessity. Either way, Horwich RMI Band secured its first Belle Vue September success and repeated the feat in 1917, possibly laying the foundation for its Crystal Palace victory of 1922.

In an article titled 'Brass Band Contests and Railway Travel: Mobility, Audience Support and Sporting Comparisons', the author, Dr. Stephen Etheridge, refers to

the success of Horwich RMI at the Crystal Palace contest in 1922.

"Writing in September 1922, the *Bolton Journal* saw the railway station as a gathering point; a terminus of success. The railway had transported the image of a northern community to the south and brought the north back triumphant." The newspaper stated: 'As the time for the band's arrival from London approached, the streets became alive with people, and soon dense crowds had gathered outside the station and lined the approach to the platform. It appeared that the whole of Horwich had turned out en-masse to give the champion band a rousing reception. The band was met and entertained to

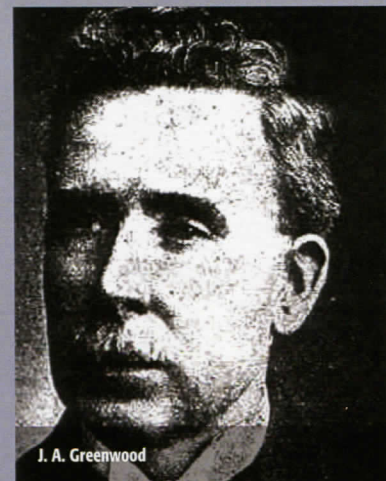
tea in Manchester by Mr. George Hughes CBE, Chief Mechanical Engineer of The London and North Western Railway. The train...was gaily decorated with bunting and evergreens, and on the front of the engine was the device welcome home.' Loud cheers were given, fog signals were exploded on the line and Horwich Old Band played a lively air as the train steamed into the station. Headed by Horwich Old Band and loco workers carrying torchlights, the band drove in a charabanc passing cheering spectators...cries of "Bravo Horwich" could be heard above the din and Mr. Hubert Bath said, "It is only possible for men who have music in their souls to play like that."

This win turned out to be the band and Greenwood's only Crystal Palace 'National' victory. The band continued to compete at the Crystal Palace until 1928, but sixth was the best return in 1927. There were two further visits to the top section at Belle Vue, but by 1949 the band had gone, although it did later reform for short periods from 1953-1955 and from 2016-2019. The reasons for its demise are unknown.

Unlike many an early test-piece, however, *Freedom* lives on. It was used at the Championship Section Final of the 'National' again in 1947 and 1973 (replacing Wilfred Heaton's *Contest Music* deemed too long for the BBC's broadcasting needs), and at the British Open in 1987. It has had other occasional outings, but it is undoubtedly appropriate that, in its centenary year, it has come to the fore once again and, as happy coincidence would have it, as the test for the 100th Senior Cup! What more perfect outing could there be for the centenary of Hubert Bath's *Freedom*? ■



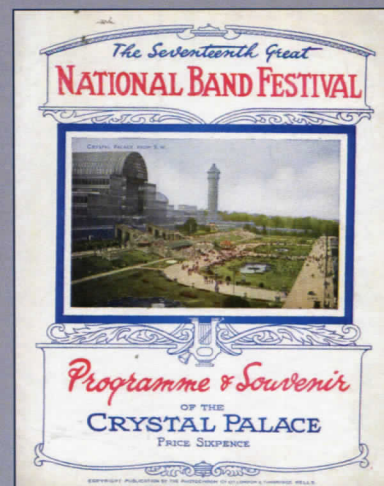
Hubert Bath



J. A. Greenwood



Horwich RMI Band in 1922 with the Crystal Palace Trophy



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