

History of Patcham Silver Band - Jim Calloway

My band career began with the 19th Brighton boys' brigade, headquarters, the Baptist church, Gloucester Place, next to the old Astoria cinema, I was 12 years old. The tutor we had was a Mr Fred Weston, principal conductor of the Salvation Army bands. Forty years on, his grandson Paul Weston, conducted Patcham Band, and did so very successfully for several years.

During the war years I was a bevan boy, i.e. conscripted miner and played in a colliery band. Released from mining and returning home to Brighton, I looked for a brass band in the area. There's not many local now, but there were even less then.

I found a band had been formed in Patcham by the Vicar of All Saints church. More enquiries (no email or mobile 'phones then) and I found the band had been formed in 1946 and practised at the Patcham Church hall in Mackie Avenue on a Friday evening. I was invited along any time. The year was 1949 and I began my long association with Patcham Silver Band.

The band consisted of five elderly players, and a drummer, not the same sort of drummer that we possess now with all that equipment, but a drum and a stick. He was the church warden, which made him conductor and musical director. He beat out every first beat of the bar. Sounds like the band from the Floral Dance but not as good.

The only instrument left for playing was a very old tenor horn with the shape of a French horn. That same evening I become principal horn player of Patcham Band. There is a 1960 picture of me with that horn. The horn I remember well, me I don't recognise.

From that beginning, there was only one way to go; up and so it was.

In the sixties the band won the coveted S.C.A.B.A. cup for the best band Southern England, the venue was the old town hall (before fire burnt it down). The conductor Mr Bert Osgood, test piece, Quo Vadis, with thirty musicians. You remember all the details when you win! Mr Osgood went to accompany Gabriel with his harp as did the original five members, and the drummer. God bless them all.

The band continues. It is self financing relying on subscriptions, donations and concerts (such as tonight), not easy when the smallest instrument can cost over £500 when new.

We had to find a new home for the band, as the old church hall had become dangerous when occupied by so many people, or maybe it was the noise.

Before the move, we had a major happening. One Friday evening, the current conductor announced that owing to bereavement, he was leaving immediately. The conductors name, Mr Samuel Gordon.

A band of 20-30 musicians needs a conductor like a ship needs a rudder. Not only do you need to know music scores, but how to control those musicians. They come very thin on the ground.

Cometh the hour, cometh the man, or in this case woman, a young woman said she'd take us on. I found this amazing, a young woman taking on this lot. No problem. We were calling her madam within a month. Yes it's easy to guess the bands saviour was Barbara Deane, our current musical director.

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The band has had other conductors, between then and now. Mr Richard Baker must be mentioned. He took us to the same SCABA contest, Folkestone this time, not Hove. And we took first prize and the same cup that Mr Osgood won all those years ago.

When the band moved from the hall we had a short spell at the Methodist Church in Ladies Mile Road before taking up permanent residence at Patcham Junior School.

Another major happening about this time was the formation of the Junior band (with their fantastic uniforms!). The youngsters get musical training for a very small fee which goes to band funding. The band receives the finished product. In tonight's band there should be half a dozen or more who have come to us by that route. The downside of this is poor Sandra. She teaches by day and takes on the juniors in the evening but she never complains, indeed she has been the band secretary as well.

All bands have their share of romances, gossip and scandal. For the romances, two of our principal players met their spouses because of Patcham Band. Indeed the band played at David's (principal cornet for many years) wedding. For the gossip and scandal read all about it in our centurion programme forty years from now.

Now for the present and the future.....

Barbara Deane our current conductor hangs up her baton after this concert. The band and members owe her a huge debt; she's not leaving, but changing her baton for an instrument.

Who will take over? It's not an easy task. Very much like a football manager, if the team is good it's a good team. If the team is bad sack the manager. Yes it is a challenge, but sixty years ago it must have been a bigger challenge to start it all.

On behalf of the hundreds who have sat with Patcham Silver, I thank the Reverend who began it all sixty years ago.

Jim Calloway
October 2006