



# The 1920s

## At a glance

Post-war reprieve – spend, spend, spend. In a bullish attempt to rebuild the economy, the Australian Government invest in infrastructure development to position the nation as a large exporter of primary resources. We follow suit with Britain and America in an overspending spree.

For many, this is a decadent decade of dancing, fashion, and fast living where entertainment is king. The media that has fed the public with propaganda to get us through the war years, transforms into a convenient and much-welcomed distraction from all that has gone before.

Radio enters the living room and changes family life and how we listen to, relate to and think about music, forever. Newly released music on records from England and America swiftly finds its way onto the public airwaves. Brass bands and dance hall music become a family radio time hit.

Radio is not the only new phenomenon in media entertainment to sweep the country. The 20s also heralds a new era of cinema for entertainment and at the end of the decade we hear the first blockbuster 'talkies' when picture theatres receive an investment by Warner Bros into large and expensive equipment that brings sound to picture, to the masses.

*The Church Chronicle* writes,

Ballarat had gone mad on amusements – even madder than Melbourne. Every night 10,000 to 20,000 people, are said to be at the pictures and a further 2500 are either at live shows, socials, skating or dancing.

– [http://125.royalsouthstreet.com.au/  
timeline/1911-1920/](http://125.royalsouthstreet.com.au/timeline/1911-1920/)

In 1926 the Hoyts Theatre cinema chain is created, followed three years later by State and Regent Theatre cinemas opening in Sydney and Melbourne.

This decade also sees the beginnings of regular domestic commercial air travel. It is a decade of extraordinary technological change for the people.

Alice Guy-Blaché, the world's first female film director, made over 100 movies with sound before 1905. Cutting-edge filmmakers like Alice, and financial powers like Warner Bros, changed the way orchestral players made their living. First, by making silent movies, stimulating a lot of work for live musicians and, second, by adding pre-recorded sound and thereby quickly taking the work away.

Musicians are no longer required multiple times a week to meet the demand for entertainment, which created a gap in their regular income.



In 1921 the first live radio broadcast from South Street takes place. This hi-tech moment occurs in a reasonably low-tech world; after all, it wasn't until 1925 that Ballarat people began to enjoy their first fully operational public sewerage system.

In 1923 on 23 November, 2SB Sydney makes their first transmission and the 'wireless' is officially launched in Australia.

The first television technology is invented in 1927, but would not become popularised or affordable until the 1950s.

The following year, in 1928, Ballarat attempts its first live brass band broadcast, which was transmitted from the Soldiers' Memorial Bandroom.

While the 20s are characterised by decadence and progress, good things cannot last forever. In 1929 Wall Street crashes after a decade of post-war spend, spend, spend, activating the Great Depression, from which Australia does not recover until after World War II.



Hear Liz Jacka, (Author and Professor in Communications Studies for the Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney) discuss the impact of radio on Australian family life and just how British Australia was in the 1920s in [this video clip](#) from the National Film and Sound Archive.



Listen to a 1929 recording of *Ballarat The Fair*, performed by Robert Nicholson; Composer: Ernest Grenfell; Lyricist: Henry Brew. Broadcast (De Luxe Series) W555

Henry (Harry) Brew was a founding member of the Soldiers' Band and took on the role of drum major in the band in the 1930s.

# The band in the 1920s



1923, Early postcard of the Soldiers' Band performing the Quickstep 'B' Grade Championships, South Street, City Oval. Source: Kindly donated to the Ballarat Memorial Concert Band (BMCB) by Bob Pattie, original Wilkinson archive

The 1920s was a decade of highs and lows for the newly formed Soldiers' Band. There were wins, intrigue, victory by stealth, near merger, an Ugly Man competition and even the police were called upon at one point.

The band struggled to survive in the mid-part of this decade. Luckily, Frank Wright took over toward the end of the 20s, and the band was buoyed through to the early 30s under his musical directorship.

In this decade, sympathy letters for death or illness were often part of band committee business, including one to the Ballarat City Band. Carvery sets were the go for betrothal gifts to band members.

The band played for a South Street Appeal while South Street was in abeyance due to issues with the VBA. They put on their own band and solo comps in the bandroom to keep the contesting spirit alive when there were no South Street comps running. And, after having begun playing in their Diggers' uniforms, it wasn't long before it was time to return their khakis to the military and step out with an entirely new look. (Bow ties, no less.)

Almost 100 years later, in an envelope tucked away safely in the bandroom archives, a letter was found. Fortunately for us it contained the handwritten history of the band from 1920 to 1960. It was penned by William (Bill) Wilkinson, active member of the band and regular



committee member from the early 1920s to early 1980s. Bill Wilkinson played with the band from their first contest in 1921 and in every comp from thereon in through to the 1970s – a period of over 50 years. Bill's letter, augmented by the minutes, archive newspaper articles and former band member interviews from the 40s and 50s, form the basis for the first forty years of this band's history.

This is what Bill wrote:

Alf Rowell was appointed Bandmaster in 1920, and the band became registered with the V.B.A. the ruling body at that time. The band competed in "C" Grade the next year 1921 and secured 3rd in the Selection Contest. The test piece being Verdi's "ERNANI". "SPOHR" was played for own choice. "Naworth Castle" was the march played for the Quickstep. Donald Citizens won the Contest coached by "Massa" Johnston.



1920–24, Quickstep Competition, South Street, City Oval BP Arch

[The band also competed in Ararat and gained two second placings that year, followed by two firsts in Beaufort.]

In 1922 the band gained two firsts in "C" Grade in Daylesford and saw the last appearance of the Band in "C" Grade when they won the double in Selection and Quickstep. The adjudicator Chris Smith of Adelaide remarked that he had heard an "A" Grade performance of "Beethoven's Works" in "C" Grade.



1922, "C" Grade Win, band photo. Source: BMCB Archive

On this recommendation the Band was graded "B" Grade and again acquitted itself well in again winning the double in Selection and Quickstep in 1923.



1923, "B" Grade Win, band photo. Source: BMCB Archive

This was the year of the introduction of the dual Test pieces at South Street "B" Grade being "Jessonda" and "Valkarr" (an abridged version).

– Bill Wilkinson





## DISCOVER MORE

Read [Alfred Rowell – the man behind the Soldiers' Band conductor's baton from 1920 – 1926](#), including firsthand accounts from former Soldiers' Band members of Alf as conductor and teacher.

1924 was a disappointing year for the band as far as South Street was concerned, being unplaced in both Selection and Quickstep (South Street records show 3rd in 1924 Quickstep), redeeming itself somewhat when three weeks later at Albury NSW during the Centenary Contest the band received 100 points for Selection under the same Judge Lt. Ord Hume. The test pieces being the same as for South St.'Il Corciato in Egitto' (Meyerbeer) and 'The Works of Haydn' (arr. Lt Ord Hume).



1924, Band competitions, Albury, winners 'B' Grade. Source: BMCB Archive

The following years, up till 1928, were anxious ones domestically, financially and numerically, membership dropped, but we still managed to compete at Maryborough VIC on New Year's Day 1928 under Bandmaster Bert Rasmussen who had built the Band up to a good standard but were beaten by Prahran City under the late Percy Code in 'B' Grade.

The late Frank Wright was appointed Bandmaster late in 1928 ...



c 1928, Ballarat Soldiers' Memorial Band, Frank Wright (Bandmaster). Source: Federation University Historical Collection

iv. AUSTRALASIAN BAND AND ORCHESTRA NEWS. October 26, 1927.

***The Leaders of the Band World Prefer—***

**BOOSEY**

**Britain's Best Band Instruments**

Mr. Frank Johnston, Collingwood Citizens Band.

Mr. Arthur Stunder, Australian National Band.

Mr. Alf Rowell, Ballarat City Band.

Mr. Jack Robertson, Champion Soloist.

Mr. Percy Code, Prahran City Band.

Mr. Percy Jones, St. Augustine's Band.

Mr. Alf Paxton, Hawthorn City Band.

Mr. Les Hofmann, St. Vincent's de Paul's Band.

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Printed by Mitchell & Casey Pty. Ltd., 25 Tattersall's Lane, Melbourne, and Published by the Proprietors, at 276 Collins Street, Melbourne.

... and although the Band had entered for the New Year Contest at Burnie TAS he could not accompany the Band due to orchestral commitments. The services of Percy Jones of St Augustine's Geelong was enlisted and although the Band acquitted itself well [gaining two second placings] were beaten by the Met. Fire Brigade who were then on the verge of promotion to 'A' Grade. The Test Piece was 'The Meister's Singers' (Wagner). Own choice was restricted to national songs of the British Empire.

— Bill Wilkinson

26 October 1927, *Australasian Band and Orchestra News*, 'Band Leaders of the World'. (Alf Rowell, Percy Code, Percy Jones were all associated with the Soldiers' Band.)  
 Source: BMCB Archive



Most of Bill Wilkinson's handwritten history formed the basis for an article published in *The Australian Band Leader*, December 1971.

What you are about to read, however, was never published in that article ...

We played a Selection 'Great Britain' a fine selection of Solos for every instrument including 'My Pretty Jane' for euphonium and 'The Sea is England's Glory' for Trombone. We had spent about three months on a Selection for own choice entitled 'National Songs of Great Britain and Ireland' but when Percy Jones took over from Frank Wright for the contest he suggested changing over to 'Great Britain' (Rimmer). This was about four weeks before the contest. This did not leave as much time to rehearse such a difficult piece.

'Massa' Johnston who had heard we were going fairly well made a trip to Ballarat and listened outside the fence at the Eastern Oval (it was customary to get as much outside practice as possible in those days) got a shock when he heard us playing 'Great Britain' that started a rush around to get a copy, it was reputed that there was only one copy in Melbourne, however he got a copy and won the contest. Hugh Niven was the adjudicator who remarked in his summary both Bands (there were only 2 Bands in 'B' Grade) gave different interpretations of the Test Piece both very fine,' whatever that meant.

– Bill Wilkinson

## Band crisis

The 'anxious years' Bill Wilkinson referred to involved a rift caused by a move to amalgamate Soldiers' Band and City Band.

In Robert (Bob) Pattie's book, *The History of the City of Ballarat Municipal Brass Band 1900–2010* (p77), two newspaper articles are included that point to the difficulties the bands were having by 1926.

The candle was dimming for the Soldiers' Memorial but enough members rallied and did not allow the flame to go out.

### *The Australian Band and Orchestra News, 26 May 1926*

... during the last few weeks your band (Ballarat Soldiers' and Sailors' Band) has passed through a very trying period, perhaps the most vital in its history, the proposed amalgamation scheme being the great question: The great majority of members, having signified their disgust at the thought of such a scheme, have also signified their intention of still giving their strongest support to the old band. We look forward to the coming year with its great possibilities, knowing that with the loyalty of all concerned the band must rise to even greater heights in the musical world.

### *The Courier, August 1926*

Many people are under the impression the Soldiers' Memorial Band no longer exists having amalgamated with the City of Ballarat Band. However, it appears several members of the Band repudiated the act of amalgamation and decided to reorganize.

Some were in favour of the amalgamation but more were not (including founding members McWilliam and Rutherford as well as the Wilkinsons).



A merger looked like it was going ahead, but at the last minute it was rescinded and a split occurred. At this point Bandmaster Rowell left his post as bandmaster for the Soldiers' Band and a number of men followed him across to the City Band. Not only did they leave, they were accompanied by band instruments, cases and uniforms which the remaining Soldiers' Band members felt were not theirs to take.

The ensuing emotional and financial distress went unresolved for the rest of the decade (and well into the next), with many unsuccessful measures to have property returned. Instrument Trustees were instated, the services of numerous solicitors were employed and there was even involvement by the police.

While the issue remained outstanding, the band eventually and reluctantly put in orders for instruments.

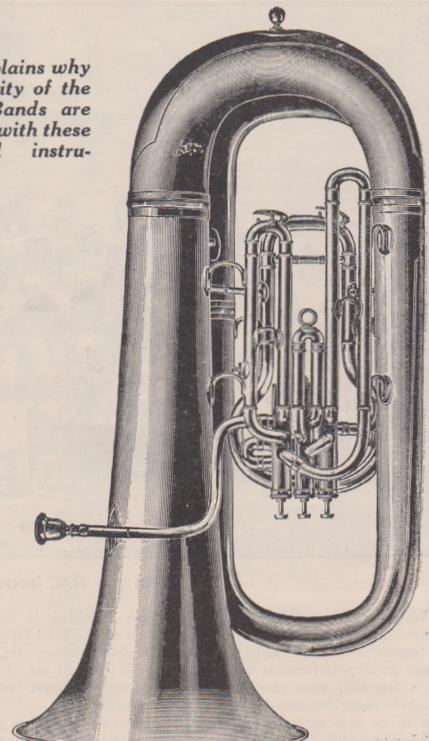
30 AUSTRALASIAN BAND AND ORCHESTRA NEWS. October 26, 1927.

## *Six Points of Supremacy in* **Boosey's Imperial Basses**

BOOSEY'S COMPENSATING PISTONS ARE NOT AN IMITATION BUT A GENUINE ORIGINAL IMPROVED PATENT

which explains why the majority of the leading Bands are equipped with these wonderful instruments.

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- 4** Perfectly in tune throughout the entire register
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26 October 1927, Australasian Band and Orchestra News., Source: BMCB Archive

In 1929, by which time Ballarat City Municipal Brass Band's previous Bandmaster Frank Wright had moved across to the Soldiers' Band (1928), the following attempts to resolve the issue are recorded in the minutes (and we gain an insight here into what may have contributed to the problem):

W Vickers      That terms 3, 4, 5 & 6 be adopted. The  
Geo Nagel terms to be. 3. Each side to be allowed  
to conduct its own care as it sees fit.

4. If amalgamation occurred, the instruments,  
with the exception of the senior horn, to remain  
as they are at present & that no demand, <sup>by the trustees</sup> be  
made for the instruments held by the Soldiers  
Memorial Band, unless that Band goes out  
of existence or does ~~not~~ <sup>not have</sup> require any further use  
for them in the future. If such arises instruments  
to be handed to Mr Blomeley.

5. If amalgamation did not occur all  
instruments held in trust by Mr Blomeley  
& his co-trustees be handed over to the Soldiers  
Memorial Band. That is that <sup>those</sup> instruments &  
accessories vested in Mr Blomeley & held by the  
City of Ballarat Band to be returned.

6. Agreement to be signed by Mr  
Blomeley on behalf of Trustees, & the  
Secretary of each Band on behalf of  
such Band.      Carried

27 June 1929, Excerpt from minutes of Special Meeting. Source: BMBB Archive

Throughout the minutes we learn how difficult it was for the band to move forward because they were not able to act on purchasing new instruments while awaiting the return of what they considered band property. The population of Ballarat at this time was around 35,000 people, the community tight knit. Finding replacement players was hard enough, let alone the funds to replace property. Times were tough.

So, among the great deal of discussion and special meetings held regarding property, there were just as many meetings and events held for raising funds. Here are a few of the activities the band got up to in order to achieve this, 1920s style!



## Fundraising

### Minutes, 8 April 1924

Talk of arrangements of a carnival or fair for raising money for new uniforms and general expenses. It was moved to organise a Tuesday afternoon Ladies meeting to discuss the same.

### Minutes, 5 May 1924

At the ladies meeting they decided to hold a ball on Tuesday 20th May. Ladies supplying supper, decorations free. Mrs Bell's Orchestra free. To be held at the City Hall

Stalls for the Fair to be: Sweet Stall, Produce, Cake, Refreshments, Jumble, Flower, Put, Bran Pie, Shooting Gallery, Games, Lucky Envelope.

The Lucas staff were also invited to be involved.

Moved that Ladies action be endorsed      carried

### Minutes, 28 July 1924

White ribbon with band stamp to be issued to stall holders for the Fair

Mr Greenaway offered to ride Motor Cycle at City Oval on Saturday with advertisement attached.      Accepted

### Minutes, 4 August 1924

The mayor is to be invited to open the Fair. Councilors and members of Parliament to be invited.

By all accounts, the ball was a huge success and in 1999 (22 May 1999) *The Courier* reprinted a 1924 article which read:

The popularity of the Soldiers' Memorial Band, combined with the delight of dancing was responsible for about 300 citizens, mainly young people, attending at the City Hall on Tuesday last, when the ball was given in aid of the band funds.

In 1926, a special meeting was called for the purpose of raising funds for the band where it was moved to hold an Ugly Man Competition to augment the funds of the band. (Minutes, 12 September 1926)

Following this was a series of minutes entries relating to who the shortlist should be and to wait on the Fire Brigade for their selection of the Ugly Man representative.

What was an Ugly Man competition? A 1920s version of Movember?

Ugly Man was a fundraising movement initiated in WA when a competition was held to raise money for the Red Cross during World War I. It quickly built to a powerful fundraising and voluntary benevolent workforce association by 1917. The competition made its way to the eastern states certainly by 1918 as we hear from the *Maryborough and Dunnolly Advertiser*, Wednesday 11 Sep 1918, article titled: "Ugly Man" Competition - The Final Ceremony'.



An interstate official offering her services at the Crowning Ceremony was reported to write of her willingness to officiate in Victoria for pleasure with no remuneration needed for her services. She explained that 'at every place where she had officiated elsewhere' her crowning of the 'Ugly Man' had 'caused great merriment'. In this particular case it was agreed that 'each "Ugly Man's" committee be asked to supply three items to the concert programme which would precede the crowning ceremony'.

Items of entertainment perhaps?

The article went on:

The whole function will conclude with a grand ball, at which as many as possible will be asked to attend in fancy dress. Each 'Ugly Man' will be required to attire himself in costume befitting the nature and cause of his candidature and will be asked to provide retinue of six attendants - three ladies and three gentlemen - who will attend him on his march up the ball to the stage prior to the crowning ceremony.

– Maryborough and Dunnolly Advertiser

Tickets were sold for audience members and the Ladies of the Red Cross were invited to cater for refreshments and so make a profit for their cause.

When the Soldiers' Band held the Ugly Man competition in 1926 they raised £20 (over \$1500 in today's currency).

#### **Minutes, 20 October 1927**

Christmas Goose Club – 2000 tickets to be printed for Raffle and sold at 3/ea

Band fundraising had been made more difficult a few years earlier. In 1924, the Council had made a move to stop bands making collections on their civic turnouts such as at The Gardens or the Alexandra Rotunda in Sturt Street.

Councilor Levy is reported by the *Melbourne Argus*, Thursday 3 May 1924 p.16, to have put forward that:

The collections were objectionable in principle rate payers paid for improvements at the Gardens and when they went there to enjoy themselves a box was thrust in front of them.

Councilor Levy said that he would sooner increase the subsidy of £200 than that people should be penalised when they went to the gardens.

– *Melbourne Argus*

We can only imagine how much banding was respected and how important it was considered in civic life. These quotes imply that people had a right to access this kind of civic experience. It is also noteworthy that this was not a Ballarat newspaper report, but a news story picked up by a Melbourne publication. Banding, in the 20s, was still big news.

#### **Minutes, 8 April 1924**

Correspondence: City Council re Collection stating same would have to stop except by special permission occasionally.



Cr Elsworth [then President of the Band] spoke in reference to the letter from Council and stated he hoped the band would be able to make one big effort and so do away with the collecting.

It is noted by Bob Pattie that even though the motion to stop the collections was passed, they were still taken at regular Sunday turnouts by both bands right up into the 50s and 60s when bands would take it in turns to play the rotundas in Sturt Street, with cars parked backwards down the street and windows wound down just to hear them.

Jimmy Allen also remembers collections during wartime when the American forces were in Ballarat in the 1940s. Without these collections and other fundraising activities, the band would not have survived.

In fact in 1927 we get a hint as to what the band was up to:

#### **Minutes, 6 October 1927**

A fine collections box is donated by W Wilkinson and on it is to be inscribed "Contributions for Band Funds"

### **Some popular 20s turnouts for the band**

#### **Engagements list, 1924**

Memorial Service, 'Eight Hour Day' Procession, Citizen Forces Parade, Recital (Gardens), Anzac Service, Grammar School Memorial Gates, Sacred Concert (Theatre), Australian Imperial Band, Ballarat College Memorial, Football Match, Australian Imperial Band (Football Match), 30th Fire Brigade, Heavy Weights Amateur Boxing, Flower Stall (Gardens), Torchlight Procession Fair, Armstrong Street Traders, Jubilee Fair, Community Singing, Commercial Travellers Concert (Charities), Sturt Street Alexandra Rotunda, Torchlight Procession Eighth Brigade Fair, Parade for Albury [see Albury Centenary Band Contest Souvenir Program Below], Recital for the Albury Hospital, Street Parade on return from Albury, Eureka Stockade, Christ Church Garden Fete, Funeral for Bandsman (A Willian).

Number of engagements recorded in the minutes:

1924 – 37

1925 – 18

1926 – 21

Many of these were fundraisers such as the Torchlight Parades in support of the Fire Brigade with whom they had a close relationship of mutual support. There was a turnout for a South Street Appeal. Others were charitable events like playing at the Albury Hospital, Daylesford Hospital and the 'Hospital for the Insane' were also on the band's performance roster.

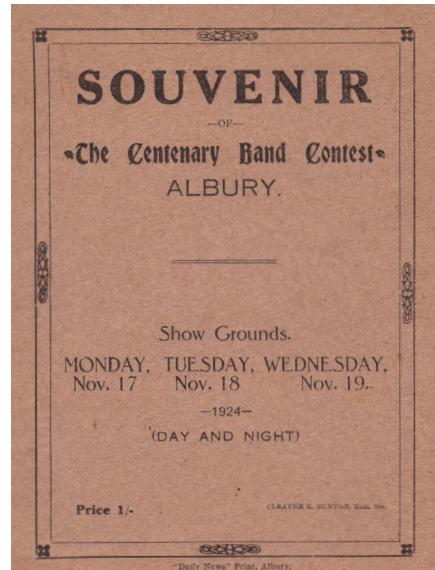
## Centenary band contest and Ord Hume

In 1924 Albury held a centenary celebration for the town; by then its own band had been playing for fifty one years. They decided to mark the occasion with 'The Centenary Band Contest'.

It was a self-proclaimed 'programme of largest musical festivities ever conducted in Albury'

- Prize money of £500 being competed for'.

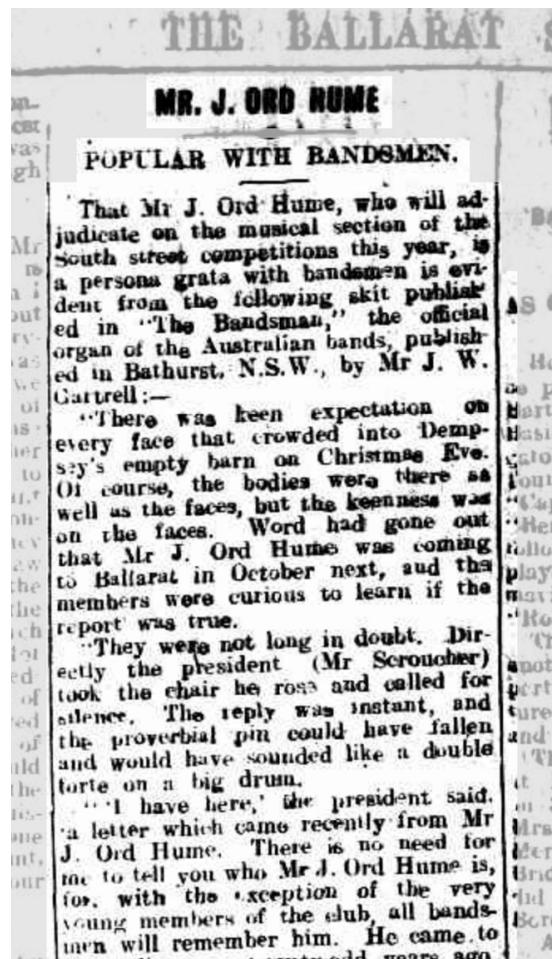
According to the Reserve Bank of Australia, in real terms at time of writing, that would be a whopping \$40, 000.



1924, The Centenary Band Contest, Albury, Souvenir Program. Source: BMCB Archive

BALLARAT SOLDIERS & SAILORS' BAND.	
A. Rowell (Bandmaster):	Cornet.
R. Jerram:	Cornet.
J. Allan:	Cornet.
C. Hewitt:	Cornet.
A. Leith:	Cornet.
G. Thomas:	Cornet.
D. Jones:	Cornet.
A. Thane:	Cornet.
A. Pearce:	Cornet.
J. Hancock:	Cornet.
H. Esmond:	Trombone.
W. Wilkinson:	Trombone.
G. Wilkinson:	Trombone.
W. Cockerill:	Trombone.
N. Nankervis:	Tenor Horn.
E. Hehir:	Tenor Horn.
H. Casley:	Tenor Horn.
P. Hines:	Baritone.
J. Reid:	Baritone.
S. Allen:	Euphonium.
R. Lockett:	Euphonium.
A. Nylander:	E Flat Bass.
A. McWilliam:	E Flat Bass.
C. Cromwell:	B Flat Bass.
G. Nagel:	B Flat Bass.
R. Rutherford:	B Flat Bass.
G. Benoch:	Drum.
G. Bell:	Drum.
J. Welsh:	Drum.
R. Stevens:	Drum.
W. Humphries:	Drum-Major.
Cr. W. R. Elsworth,	President.
P. A. Tonkin:	Secretary.

1924, Albury Band Contest list of Soldiers' Band personnel. Source: BMCB Archive



26 January 1924, *The Ballarat Star*, 'Mr J. Ord Hume: Popular with bandsmen'. Source: Trove



## Lieutenant J Ord Hume

Lieut. J Ord Hume (1864–1932) was born in Scotland to a very poor family. His musical career spanned from his beginnings at age sixteen as cornetist in a military orchestra to professional brass band conductor, composer and world-renowned adjudicator. Like TE Bulch he used pseudonyms for his compositions and became a prominent figure in the development of the brass band movement through his activities as composer, performer, band leader and in Hume's case international adjudication.

He was adjudicator at the Centenary Band Contest in Albury 1924 in the same year he was adjudicator for South Street in Ballarat. This was his second trip out from the UK to South Street, his first trip being in 1902. It would have been an honour to have an adjudicator of his calibre giving feedback to the band.

The article 'Ballarat Competitions' from the *Adelaide Observer*, Saturday 8 November 1902, the year that Ord Hume first visited South Street begins with:

Ballarat is re-echoing from one end to the other with the music of brazen instruments. Every day bands are arriving at the station, where they are generally welcomed by officials of the South Street Society and leading citizens. They then form in order and march to their hotels, to the strains of lively music, that attracts a customary following, brought up in the rear with a miscellaneous assortment of small boys and a stray dog or two. Even the latter appear to possess a sort of musical instinct in Ballarat.

— *Adelaide Observer*

After his death Frank Wright wrote of Hume: 'As a composer, arranger and adjudicator, J Ord Hume was placed by his own abilities in the forefront of his profession'. (Frank Wright, 'The Late J. Ord Hume – An Appreciation', *The British Bandsman*, June 15, 1935, p.4.)



1924, Lieut. J Ord Hume photo in The Centenary Band Contest, Albury, Souvenir Program. Source: BMCB Archive



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Another highlight for the band in this decade was the 1928 live radio broadcast from the bandroom.

Here's an excerpt from the minutes:

**Sunday 9 September 1928**

The generosity of Mr Kerr in broadcasting the Band from 3.A.L. Ballarat on Sunday evening Sep 9th 1928 was much appreciated by the Committee. It was the first time that Mr Kerr had ever attempted to broadcast a Band and it turned out very successful. Supper was handed around with the help of Mrs Rasmussen and Mrs Henderson and a very fine evening terminated the proceedings.

Did you know that radio broadcasters wore full evening dress, replete with bow tie, to broadcast?

And towards the latter end of the decade we see a shift in banding activities from civic and memorial activities (such as Anzac Day) to include fundraisers for limbless soldiers, those who have lost their sight through war and so on as the community grasp at ways to support those who served and lost during the previous decade's war.

Steph Mitaxa's son Noel tells the sad family story of his father's cousins Jack and George Zilles who returned from World War I with War Neurosis and would sometimes be found digging trenches in the back yard. Each person was finding their own way to respond to the horrendous experience of war, loss and identity.

Music had a bigger part than ever to play in the reparation and re-identification of a community.

And with the economic crash of 1929, funds were soon to be needed not just for aging soldiers with disabilities as they tried to support their families, but indeed for everyone.

Fortunately for the band they had a highly musical and motivated musical director in Frank Wright to strengthen their position and to lead them through the early 30s.



## DISCOVER MORE

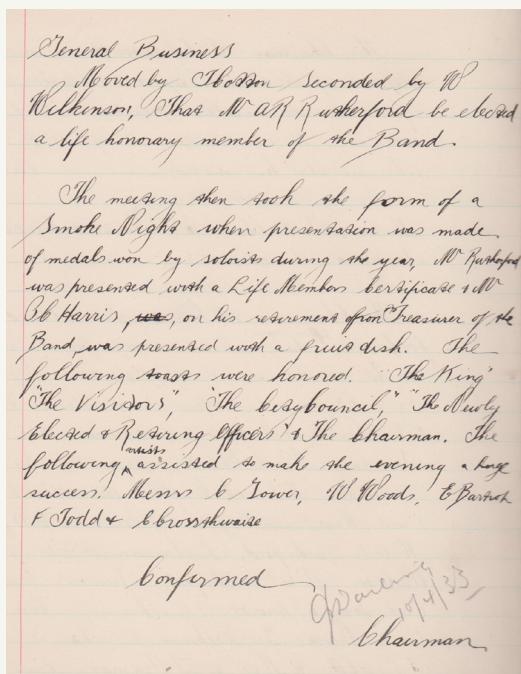
Step back in time to the comps of Ballarat 1902 with the full article, [Ballarat Competitions](#), from the Observer's Special Correspondent 'Musicus'.



26 October 1927,  
Australasian  
Band and Orchestra  
News. Source:  
BMCB Archive.

Read the warnings for bands in [Band Conduct and Etiquette](#) from the 1920s. How much has really changed?

Read about founding member and V.B.A. representative Russ Rutherford, in historian and former Soldiers' Band member, [Amanda Bentley's article](#).



19 April 1933, A  
Rutherford, First Life  
Member – excerpt  
from minutes of  
12th AGM held at the  
Soldiers' Institute.  
Source: BMCB Archive

## Frank Joseph Henry Wright

2 August 1901 (b. Smeaton) – 16 Nov 1970  
(d. London)

Frank Wright was born in Smeaton near Ballarat in 1901 to a musical family of gold mining origins. He left school at the age of fourteen to focus on music and studied assiduously up to ten hours a day. As a boy, he was tutored by Percy Northcott in piano, composition and orchestration. He then studied cornet from the age of fifteen with renowned player, teacher and conductor, Percy Code.

By seventeen Frank Wright had been awarded a gold medal for the candidate with the highest marks in the Overseas Dominions for his exam achievements (98 out of 100) through the London College of Music for the Associate Diploma (ALCM). This award was higher than the Commonwealth gold medal. When he was eighteen he became the Australian Open Cornet Champion equalling his teacher Percy Code. Frank played Code's *Wendouree* in the solos.



Frank Wright wearing Soldiers' Memorial Band Uniform with baton in hand and cornet. Source: Federation University Historical Collection



Frank at eighteen, winner of the Australian Cornet championships. Source: Federation University Historical Collection

Frank regularly cycled the twenty miles to Ballarat and then back again for lessons or band practice. Through the musical skills he gained at this time, he went on to travel the world. A 1919 article stated:

In Frank Wright the Ballarat District has produced a cornet player of outstanding gifts and unlimited possibilities. This youth, who resides at Smeaton, defeated the cream of players from Australia's leading bands in the South Street champion cornet solo.



They were not wrong about Frank's potential. This was only the beginning for Frank. The following year, in 1921 he took on the position of musical director at Ballarat City Band when Percy Code left for San Francisco.



Frank during his musical directorship with the Ballarat City Brass Band which he took on nineteen. Source: Federation University Historical Collection



Easter 1923, Heading off to Brisbane with Ballarat City Band by train.  
Photograph by Frank Wright (MD). Source: Federation University Historical Collection

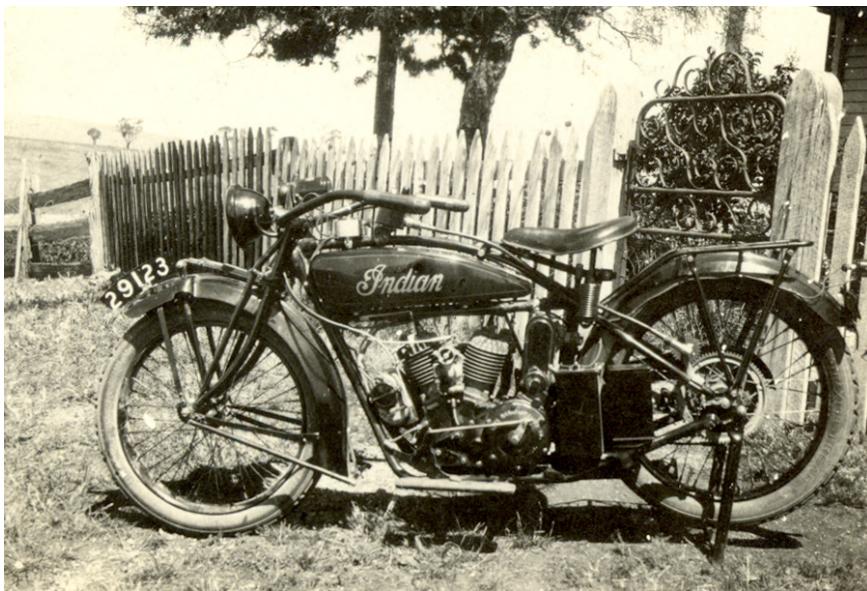


He also conducted St Joseph's Orphanage Band.



1924, St Joseph's Orphanage Brass Band, Frank Wright (conductor).  
Source: Federation University Historical Collection

According to Frank's history written in 'Legends in Brass' (p. 58), Wright's nephew Frank Ritchie recalled stories of his uncle having been 'flamboyant and gregarious' in his younger years.



1924, Indian Scout Bike belonging to Frank Wright at the property, 'Laura Villa' where he grew up in Smeaton (near Anderson's Mill).  
Source: Federation University Historical Collection



Frank also lead the Victory Band (Creswick) during this period and had two private bands 'Frank Wright and his Coliseum Orchestra' and the 'Frank Wright Frisco Band'.



1925, Frank Wright and his Coliseum Orchestra at the Coliseum Ballarat.  
Source: Federation University Historical Collection (Drummer George Bell [far right] was Bob Pattie's uncle-to-be and early Soldiers' Band member.)

And in 1928, he took on the Ballarat Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Band musical directorship, building the band and leading them to competition success.

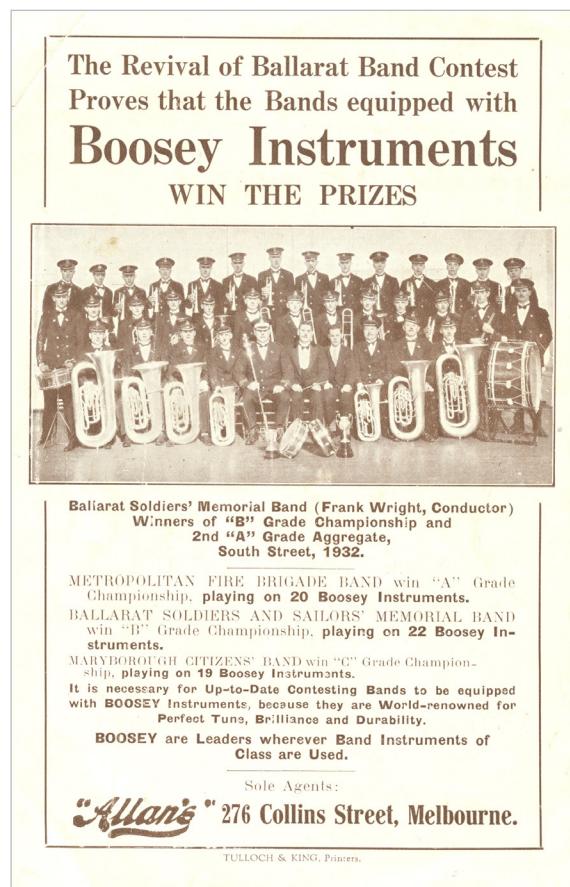


October 1930, Soldiers' Memorial Band rehearsing with Frank Wright at Tanunda SA.  
Source: Federation University Historical Collection

In 1933 while Errol Flynn was making his debut in *In The Wake of Bounty*, Frank Wright was packing his bags and making arrangements for the long journey over to 'the motherland' to conduct St Hilda's Band and seek to further develop his career. His move overseas was likely motivated by the downturn in orchestral jobs during the period when sound was introduced into moving pictures and the economic climate during The Great Depression. He stayed with the Soldiers' Band until his departure.

Farewell celebrations for Frank Wright were held over three weeks in July 1933, including a concert held in City Hall. The Ballarat Soldiers' Band performed for his send-off at the Ballarat railway station as he left to connect with his ship the Balranald to set sail for England.

Pictured in the Farewell Concert Program is the Ballarat Soldiers' Memorial Band (Frank Wright, Conductor). Winners of "B" Grade Championships and 2nd "A" Grade Aggregate, South Street 1932. Further down in the *Allan's* advertisement it states: Ballarat Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Band win "B" Grade Championships playing on 22 Boosey Instruments.



Two images of the program for Wright's farewell in Ballarat 1933.

Source: Federation University Historical Collection

Frank went on to gain stable employment and travel widely throughout his career; first, with St Hilda's Band.

St Hilda's Band performed in a pavilion in Hastings 1934. I wonder how he would have felt? A far cry from the Ballarat bandstands and the back paddocks of his hometown, Smeaton.

And we get a good idea of the calibre of this band when we see their performance poster. They were a top class band at the time Frank Wright took up position of MD.



5 August 1933, A Herald photographer took two photos of Frank's departure in Port Melbourne. Source: Federation University Historical Collection



St Hilda's Band, Cardiff Wales. Source: Federation University Historical Collection



St Hilda Band poster. Source: Federation University Historical Collection

Then, Frank landed a job as events manager for Greater London Parks and Gardens through which he was able to contribute to brass banding and other musical genres in England.



Duncan Blythell in his essay 'The Brass Band in Antipodes' writes (p. 229):

Australia's leading cornet player in the generation after Code, emigrated permanently to Britain in the 1930s, was quickly appointed organizer of concerts in London's parks for the London County Council, and established himself as a leading figure in the British brass band world.

– Duncan Blythell

By this time Frank was already an internationally recognised performer, conductor and adjudicator.



1932, Maryborough Queensland, Officials from the Australian Band Championships where Frank Wright was adjudicator: Joe Foster, Geo Cousins, Bill Caught and Frank Wright.  
Source: Federation University Historical Collection

Adjudicators were positioned in a judge's tent so that they assessed a band's merit solely on what they heard, not according to any prior knowledge of the band or alliances.

Frank was also a professor (Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Trinity College of Music in London from 1935), editor (*The Conductor, UK Magazine; music editor for Boosey & Hawkes from 1946*), composer and arranger and was given the honour of being made Master of the Worshipful Company of Musicians.



February 1933, Frank Wright outside judge's tent, Dunedin NZ. Source: Federation University Historical Collection



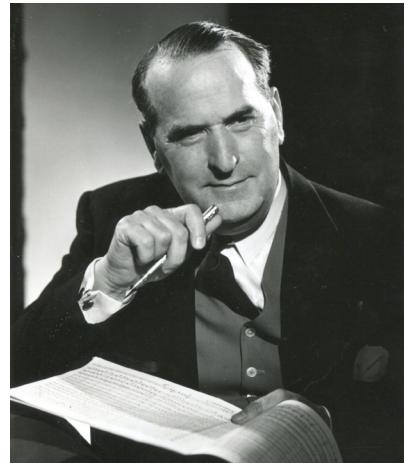
In 1949 he returned briefly to Ballarat to a hero's welcome where he adjudicated for the South Street competitions. In 1971 the *Australia Band Leader* noted that during his life Frank adjudicated at nearly every important band competition worldwide.

In the 1950s Frank Wright was called upon to arrange a selection of nineteenth-century compositions for contest pieces. His arrangements were written for and performed at the British Nationals in the 50s and 60s.

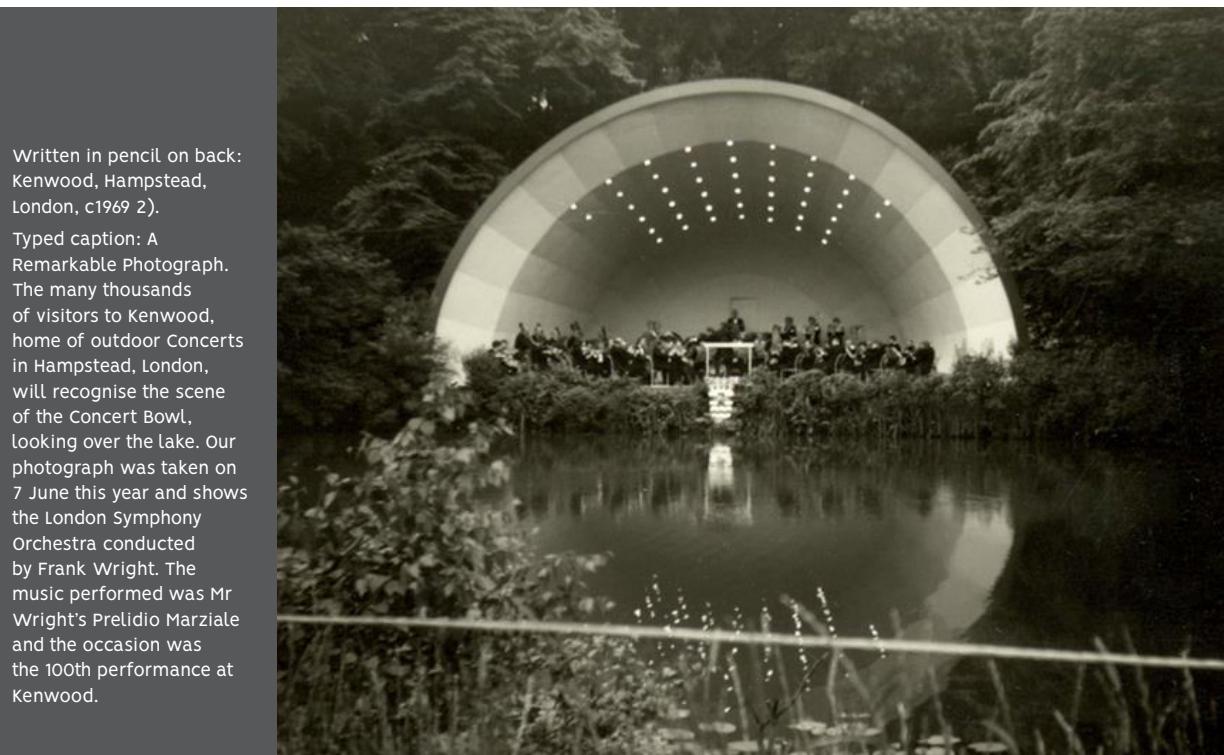
Wright's original works and arrangements for Brass include: *Sirius*, *Preludio Marziale*, *Threshold trilogy*, *Purcellian Suite*, *Whitehall*, *Boys of the Old Brigade*, *Diadem of Gold*, *Irish Folk Tune*, *Old Westminster*, *Sovereign Heritage*, *The Shining River*, *Le Roi d'Ys*.

In 1967 Frank Wright became a Member of the Order of the British Empire Member (MBE). He received this honour from the Queen in 1967 for his contributions to the arts.

In his position of music director (parks department) to the London County Council, Wright organised hundreds of outdoor concerts and events every year. One of his greatest achievements, according to *The Courier*, is that he initiated the outdoor performances at Kenwood inspired by his trip to the Hollywood Bowl. He effected the construction of numerous outdoor performance spaces, organised thousands of events and was responsible for initiating outdoor concerts not only at Kenwood, but also Holland Park and Crystal Palace during his career.



1960s, Frank Wright. Source: Federation University Historical Collection



Written in pencil on back:  
Kenwood, Hampstead,  
London, c1969 2).

Typed caption: A  
Remarkable Photograph.  
The many thousands  
of visitors to Kenwood,  
home of outdoor Concerts  
in Hampstead, London,  
will recognise the scene  
of the Concert Bowl,  
looking over the Lake. Our  
photograph was taken on  
7 June this year and shows  
the London Symphony  
Orchestra conducted  
by Frank Wright. The  
music performed was Mr  
Wright's *Preludio Marziale*  
and the occasion was  
the 100th performance at  
Kenwood.

1969, Concert at Kenwood, Hampstead, London. Source: Federation University Historical Collection



Frank was so keen to continue with his musical life that he got himself discharged from the hospital in order to conduct in the Netherlands in the months before he died.

9 August 1970, Frank Wright conducting an orchestra with floral tributes to rapt audience (possibly Kerkrade, Netherlands). Source: Federation University Historical Collection

From the Lake Wendouree and Sturt Street bandstands to multiple performances at the Royal Albert Hall, throughout the UK and many European tours, Wright made a huge contribution to brass banding, not least to the continuing legacy of the Soldiers' Memorial Band.



Frank Wright, Jack Cartasso and Jack Zilles at Creswick Baths.  
Source: Federation University Historical Collection



#### DISCOVER MORE

Wright never married so his collections of scores, photos and personal belongings of cultural interest are now held at Federation University Australia Historical Collection (Geoffrey Blainey Research Centre).

Search online under [Frank Wright](#) in Victorian Collections.