

The 1950s

At a glance

A new era of idealism, stable employment, prosperity and boom, boom, boom for babies.

Black and white television becomes commonplace in the home, giving us a direct line to American and British popular culture. Within the intimacy of the family lounge room, television furthers the transformation that radio brought since the 1920s by adding picture to sound. Rock 'n Roll dancing and fashion take centre stage of young people's hearts and minds (and feet). Newscasts, variety shows and American advertisements for mod cons such as refrigerators and washing machines are in.

The Civic Hall opens to coincide with Ballarat hosting Olympic canoeing and rowing competitions at Lake Wendouree, and the Begonia Festival kicks off, attracting visitors from far and wide including the newly coronated Queen Elizabeth, followed a few years later by her mum.

In 1956 while Ballarat hosts Olympic games, South Street holds its competitions at the new Civic Hall built on the site of the old Haymarket. The city farewells Alfred Hall – the iconic venue, with an audience capacity of over 5000, which had been hastily erected in time to welcome Prince Alfred. This venue was built in 1867 but by the 1950s had become an uncomfortable health hazard. When it was constructed, it provided an architectural bridge, physically uniting Ballarat East and West (now the site of Big W).

In 1955 the millionth post-war immigrant arrives in Australia in November and Dame Edna makes her stage debut. Melbourne's Moomba Festival kicks off (inspired by Ballarat's Begonia Festival). The polio vaccine becomes available to the masses.

By 1959 Australia's 1.5 millionth post-war migrant is received into a population of 10 million, and work begins on ending the White Australia Policy. The same year, South Street broadcasts the second half of the Prize Winners' Concert through BTV6 to the box in people's living rooms, from a packed house at the Civic Hall.



Ballarat's Henry Sutton: ahead of the times

Australia's history refers to Henry Sutton as the great grandfather of technology and was Australia's Edison.

Around 1870, at the age of fifteen, Henry Sutton first conceived of a method so that any big event in Melbourne could be visually transmitted to Ballarat by medium of the telegraph line.

By 1885 Henry had invented what he called 'The Telephane'; later this was known as the first feasible television system. In 1890 Henry went to England where he demonstrated his Telephane to the scientific community and published his paper on his Telephane in England, France and America. Henry's paper was republished again in 1910 by *Scientific American*.

Henry did not patent the Telephane but John Logie Baird did use Henry's principles to invent television some 43 years later. The Telephane is considered to be Henry's magnum opus by some people.

– Lorayne Branch



DISCOVER MORE

Read more about [Henry Sutton](#) on the Federation University website.

The band in the 1950s



1950s, Soldiers' Band, South Street Quickstep Competitions, City Oval. Source: Norm Newey Archive

We are now moving into the realm of living memory. So, with Bill Wilkinson's handwritten history through to 1960, as well as the minutes and newspaper articles from the band and private archives, we also have oral histories to guide us through the banding highlights.

Thanks to *The Courier*

Generous permission from Ballarat's *The Courier* has allowed us to include newspaper articles and images in this history.

Bill Wilkinson's notes for this decade focus on band competition results. It seems that under the bandmastership of Sgt. Herbert Ludwig Rasmussen, the band was doing very well.

In 1950 gaining 2nd place* to Collingwood who were conducted by the famous 'Massa' Johnston.

[*This was in York Park Launceston for the Australian Championships, 4th October 1950. Later that month in the South Street Ballarat Competitions they placed 3rd in 'A' Grade aggregate - Ballarat Brewing Co. Trophy, 3rd in Quickstep and 3rd in the Allan, Boosey & Hawkes Trophy]

1951 saw the Band back in 'B' Grade when we again won the Selection Contest at South St.
[Honourable mentions in Test, Own Choice, Quickstep and in the 'B' Grade aggregate - RSS]

1952 was the year of the 2nds - 2nd Test, 2nd in our Own Choice, 2nd in the Quickstep [2nd in the 'B' Grade Aggregate – RSS]

1953 1st 'B' Grade Own Choice [2nd 'B' Grade Aggregate – RSS]



Listen to 1953 *Own Choice* – *White Rider* side 1 and side 2.



1953, *Own Choice* – *White Rider*. Source: Lindsay George Archive

2nd 'B' Grade Quickstep South Street



1953, Quickstep – BB & CF. Source: Lindsay George Archive

[4th in the Test and 2nd overall in the 'B' grade aggregate]

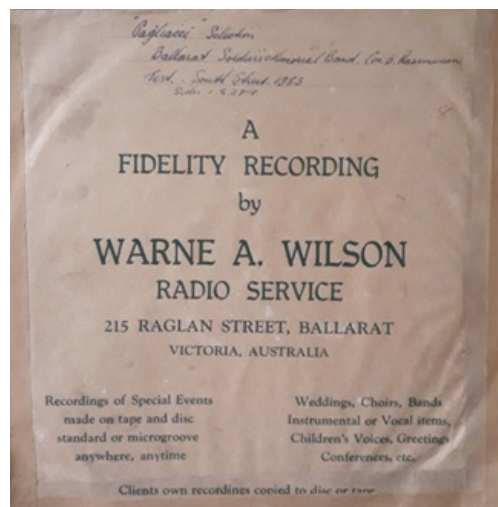


Listen to 1953, *Test piece – Pagliacci selection*, [side 1](#), [side 2](#), [side 3](#), [side 4](#).



1953, *Test piece – Pagliacci selection*.
Source: Lindsay George Archive

These 1953 recordings were made by Warne A Wilson, Ballarat recording engineer, whose business included providing recordings through the 50s and 60s of music competitions, including South Street, VBL competitions and musical theatre performances such as Lyric and BLOC shows.



1953, Soldiers' Band record sleeve showing Warne A Wilson production. Source: Megan Talan

Young players, big changes

In the early 1950s, as was the case in every decade since the band formed, there was a strong need for junior players to secure the future of the band.

What were the young members up to? The memory on the next page comes from one of the early years of the ex-RAAF hut bandroom, when it was situated on the Yarrowee ('drain') down on Eastwood Street, nestled in among houses.

I remember vividly at the time, the drum major was Charlie Thomas, he was a very tall military trained gentleman. We were getting close to performing, I don't know if it was a Gala Day, because there was always a march up Sturt Street in those days. Whatever it was we were to be involved in, we had a Sunday afternoon rehearsal with the band and we got out onto Eastwood Street. There was not much traffic in those days. I'm talking 1949 or 1950. Charlie Thomas drilled us and the impact for the first time of *moving* while I was playing, because I had just sat and played [up until then]. And all of a sudden you had to march, and march in time.

It was sort of exciting. I can remember feeling a bit exposed that we were out. And of course everybody in the street would come out of the houses to watch it, so it was odd and very easy of course with your embouchure to lose it because, of course, you were moving.

The discipline was good training.

– Fred Fargher

Junior band members in Fred Fargher's 40s post-war cohort were starting to peter out. Fred, by now had been ensconced in Wavie Williams Pantomime Company for long enough to know that, even with his ability for music, movement was his first choice over the cornet. With too few junior members, it was time to find some new young players to catch the banding bug.

BAND-MASTER'S DELIGHT



Eight sons, ranging in ages from 6 to 20 years, and all members of the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Memorial Band, is the proud record of parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Howell, of 76 Hertford street, Sebastopol.

The boys, trombonist Bill, 20; bass drummer John, 18; bass player Don, 16; euphonium player Walter, 15; cornet players Kevin, 12, and Douglas, 11, and tenor horn players Darryl, 9, and Austin, 6, have been members of the band for different periods from six to twelve months.

Kevin is the pride of his brothers, he plays second cornet and has played solos.

The only musical limb remembered in the family tree

is a brother of the boys' grandfather — Gomer Thomas, well known Ballarat cornet player of a few years ago. He will be long remembered for his playing of the "Last Post" at commemoration services.

The boys all learned to play their instruments after they joined the band and have taken part in several concerts.

They were induced to join through the offices of Mr. R. Seccombe, secretary, who is a friend of their father.

These are the eight sons of the one family, all members of the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Memorial Band. They are: back row (left to right), Walter, 15, John, 18, Donald, 16, Bill, 20. Front row, Kevin, 12, Darryl, 9, Austin, 6, and Douglas, 11.

1954, 'Band Master's Delight', *The Courier*. Source: Kevin Howell Archive



This is the start of it all and I was one of eight boys, they are my seven brothers with me. I was twelve then so it was 1954 and the story is there [Band Master's Delight article], a friend of my father suggested that maybe the boys should come down. The Soldiers' Memorial Band (the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Memorial band was the full name), they thought it was a good idea that they start a junior band because all these men were all returned servicemen and they were quite elderly. Not all of them but most of them and they had very few members in the band that were of an age that would see the next decade or so. In their wisdom Dick Secombe, I think he might have been Secretary at the time, he said 'I know Harry Howell and they've got eight boys, let's see if they might be interested in joining'. So they started a junior band and we *were* the junior band. There's only three of us left [alive] now.

We all went to Hertford Street and Redan School and we lived out in the country there. The four elder boys (pictured in the back row of the photo), were given an instrument first and I was really peeved about this, I thought 'How dare they!'. I was the oldest of the four younger boys and they brought these instruments home which was a trombone and a tuba and something like that, the large instruments, and they're trying to get a noise out of these in the back yard. We had cows in the paddock so we could hear all this brrr brrrr brrrr and the cows came galloping up. They thought it was the bull coming! (laughter).

It was a few weeks, maybe a month or something and I was given a cornet and the younger brothers were given some instruments. I loved the cornet and I was keen and I practised.

So that was our start with our involvement with the band and it lasted right through the 50s through to the late 60s.

– Kevin Howell

Kevin Howell's impressions of his first bandmaster:

In my time there was Bert Rasmussen, our first. A very strict discipline. I think that made the quality of the music. Music is fun – and serious music can be fun too when you're on top of the discipline you knew what you had to do. And if you left your music home and you didn't know your part, well ... you were in trouble! At the time our drill instructor was a man named Aub McGregor. He worked in Ballarat for the water board or something like that. But he was a big man. As a young man you took notice of him!

– Kevin Howell

Not only did the new young players invigorate the band as they moved up from the junior to the senior band, but non-playing family and community members provided an equally important lifeblood.

During the twenty-year period when his father was secretary, Kevin remembers that they had a close-knit committee. Cr Bill Roff was the president and he was also the mayor of the city at one point. The band was always busy. They rehearsed every Wednesday and Sunday morning for performances and competitions.

Brothers Bill and George Wilkinson who started in the band with their father in the early 20s were stalwarts of the band. With Bill, as actively engaged on the committee as he was in the 20s, and his brother George, a dentist who regularly checked the kids' teeth as they rolled in for band practice.



Noel Mitaxa, son of bandsman Stef, remembers the informal dentist appointments, as well as his dentist's nickname.

Porky would say, 'I think your teeth need fixing' and he'd arrange free dental care for the band. Dad kept his own teeth til he was seventy nine. Never had false teeth!

– Noel Mitaxa

Over a number of years you got to know the members of the senior band and they really took us in. Scally-wags they were, they were returned servicemen they liked to have a smoke and a drink, you know. I can remember going up to the RSL and they used to have smoke nights. They called them smoke nights. They'd go along and they'd all sit around the table and they all be smoking and having a drink and they'd have some entertainment and the entertainment was the brass band, or the junior band. And they loved it.

– Kevin Howell

Although they never talked about their war experiences with the younger band, Kevin says that, 'You knew some of them were hurting ... we had respect for them as returned servicemen but we never really pried into that. I was the same with my grandfather, he went to the Boer War'.

Kevin fondly remembers the kinship in the band between the older and younger players. For instance, he used to go down to the pie cart with Jimmy Allen after rehearsals and back for a cup of tea at his house.

I remember one day sitting between Bill Fargher and Norm Newey and I was just a little youngster and the bandmaster asked me to sit there and not to play. I couldn't play just sit there. But then he stopped the band and said, 'Kevin, where are we?' And I pointed. So it was that sort of discipline.

If I have a memory of all of it, it was all about discipline. Absolutely. Not only music, but the way you behaved.

It's a very special and long lasting bond that is formed. The members of the band became lifelong friends when you spend that much time together. So there's a really close bond.

– Kevin Howell

Results in the mid-50s

The band continued on in 'B' Grade in the mid-50s.

1954 3rd 'B' Grade Test Piece

1955 1st 'B' Grade Test 2nd 'B' Grade Own Choice 2nd 'B' Grade Quickstep

1956 3rd 'B' Grade Own Choice 3rd 'B' Grade Quickstep South Street

Soloists

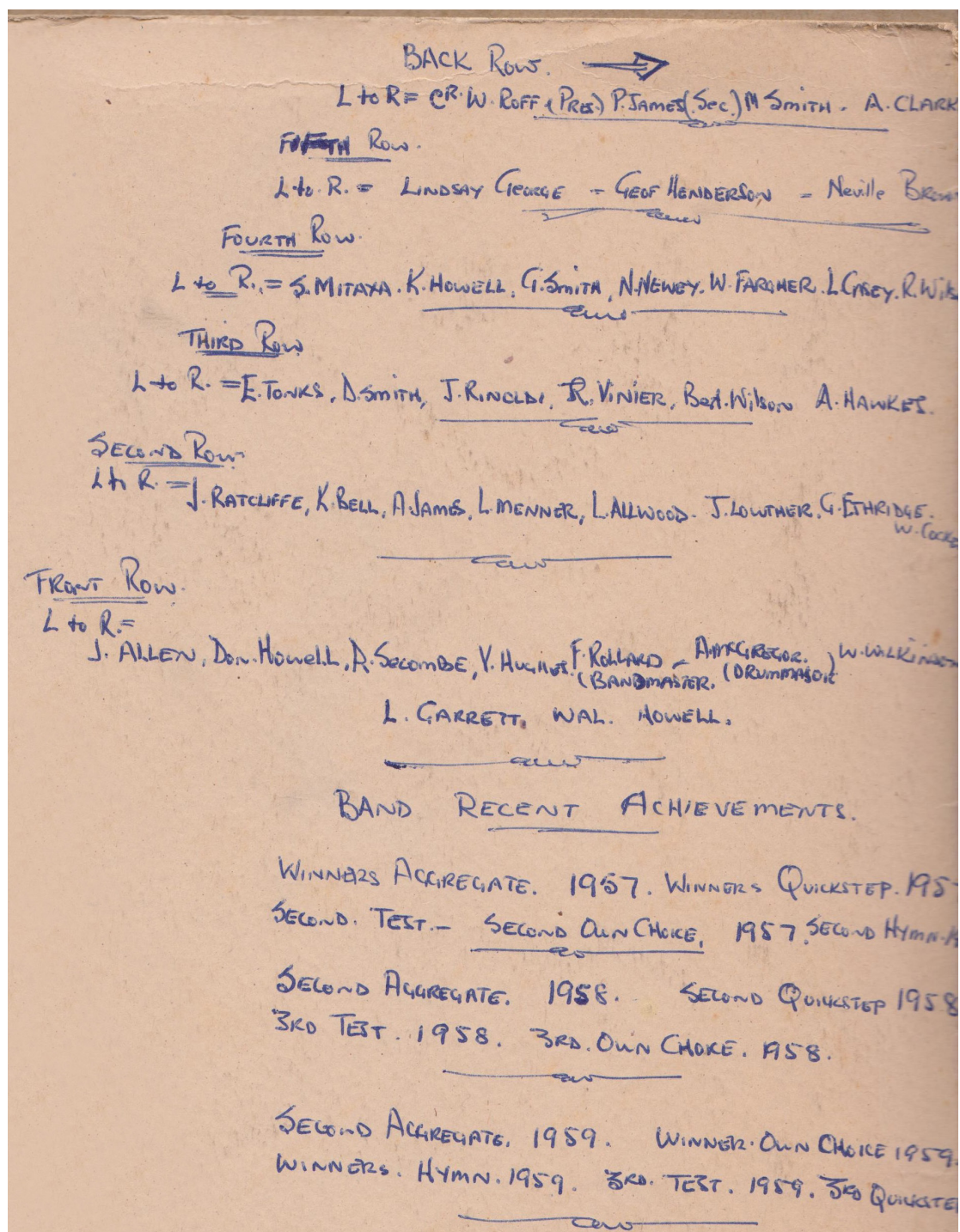


Pre-1954?, Norm Newey, Les Casey, Allen Reid, NN, Souvenir Snaps Agent J Ewins & Sons
111 Sturt St. Source: Norm Newey Archive



1959, Junior Bandsman, Geoff Smith, before taking second place in the
Bb cornet section of South Street. Source: Geoff Smith Archive

The soloists' success of the late 50s is listed on the inside cover of a spiral-bound archive scrapbook from the 50s:



1950s, soloists noted in the 50s scrapbook. Source: BMCB Archive



1959, South Street, Frank Rollard, Jim Allen, Geoff Smith. Source: Geoff Smith Archive

A lot of our players were soloists and we were told, I think Bert Rasmussen said this, that if you got to play a solo in the band, practice a solo and enter the soloists competition, which was run prior to the band competition, on the day of the band. So if you've got a solo in the band all the nerves are gone because if you've already exposed yourself to this stage thing. And that was really a good thing to do. And people like Jim Allen, Norm Newey and myself we won South Street a number of times, in fact, one year Jim and I won our sections.

– Kevin Howell

I can remember playing in Her Majesty's Theatre to a full house for the champions. We did that a few times, Jim did and Norm Newey did too. Geoff Smith was another one. He was a cornet player. And Frank Rollard was another too. They were all in the Soldiers' Band and Frank conducted the Soldiers' Band for a couple of periods.

– Kevin Howell



Frank Rollard, South Street Soloist, *The Courier*. Source: BMCB Archive



A competing bandsman from the same era recalls his South Street experiences:

They were good times, I used to enjoy them. Half the time you'd be on stage [South Street] shivering and bloody shaking and hoping you were not going to make a mistake and everything has to be spot on. I was very lucky because I had people like Bob Pattie, but also his dad who was one of Australia's champion cornet players and his associates, the old timers, the "Lee Wallises" and "Eric Stephens", and all those people. They'd all gone through the mill of competitions before hand. So as a young bloke, I was fairly confident when I was sitting there I would never play the integral important parts *they* had but I still had second cornet parts or whatever to play, it still had to be right. And it made you feel at ease to have these competent players who'd played in front of people hundreds of times. But it's still very daunting to look out - the worst thing you could do was to be on stage and look out - through the lights. In those days, the hall would be packed with a thousand people!

– Jim Dennis

Soldiers' Band soloist Norm Newey recalls the 50s banding buzz:

First ten years, I don't think I missed a rehearsal I just loved it. The camaraderie, it was so much fun. We used to finish our South Street competition and then you'd virtually get the test piece for the following year and start getting ready for the next year, and that'd go on all the way through the year.

– Norm Newey

Helping out

As well as South Street and other brass band competitions, the band participated in all sorts of community events. Most were community parades and fundraisers for charities. (See below for a sample list of engagements for '59–'60.)

We were about fifteen there, we used to go together. There's Allen Reid there in an old '28 Chev and we'd go to Maryborough on New Years' Day and help the Maryborough Band out. (laughter) We did that for five or six years. As a small group we used to go just to help the Maryborough band on their New Year's Day they used to have a big show there. Just give them numbers and boost them a bit, yeah. Dick Secombe was the bass player and he used to drive us.

– Norm Newey



Photo from the 50s, Maryborough New Year's Day, Norm Newey and Allen Reid.
Source: Norm Newey Archive

The bandroom

Norm remembers the ex-army hut that was the bandroom from 1946 to 1981:

It was cold in winter, hot in summer because it was a tin hut. My friend, Allen Reid, and I as kids we used to get our bikes in there and when there was no practice we'd ride our bikes round and round. We shouldn't have been doing it!

Norm's memory of the bandroom stretches back to those days of the 50s as he brings it to life for us:

There was an open area and in one end to one side there was a little room and on the other side there was a library and that was it, the rest was all open. With a big fireplace over the side for winter nights.

– Norm Newey

Let's take a short walk from the 50s bandroom to the heights of 50s modern architecture ...

The opening of the Civic Hall in 1956 was a mammoth event. It heralded in a period of new optimism and strength. The Soldiers' Band played on the second day of their opening celebrations.



View the 1956 opening of the [Civic Hall program](#) from the Victorian Collections.

The Begonia Festival: not one, but two royal visits

Inspired by the Ballarat floral festivals of 1938 and 1939, Ballarat held its very first Begonia Parade showcasing their world-famous flora.

The Floral Festival for the 1938 Centenary celebrations was so loved by locals and tourists alike that it was decided to make the Floral Festival not a one-off, but annual event. We can understand how important for community spirit the festival must have been during the Great Depression.

In 1939 the Floral Festival was held again, attracting thousands of people from across the state as well as interstate. It did not continue into the 40s due to the war.

It wasn't until 1952 that the community reconsidered the festival and so, with great enthusiasm, planning began for the Begonia Festival. The first festival attracted around 5000 people who travelled to Ballarat on a specially commissioned train service.



1956, Queen of the Begonia Festival Float.
Source: Australiana Research Collection,
Central Highlands Libraries

Without the Floral Festival of the late 1930s the Begonia Festival may never have been conceived.

The Floral Festival [1938 & 1939] included some of the features seen in future Begonia Festivals: a floral carpet, Festival Queen, floral displays, and a street procession with floats along Sturt Street.

– Ballarat Tramway Museum (btm.org.au)

Will the real Queen please step forward?

As well as having a Festival Queen, the newly coronated Queen, HRH Queen Elizabeth herself, came to visit the Begonia Festival in 1954. This was the second year of the festival, coinciding with the young regina's second year of reign. The rare 1950s colour image of the Soldiers' Band on the march below is from the slide collection of Mrs Bon Strange, gifted to the Ballarat library. It is most likely to be from the 1954 royal visit, indicated by the Union Jack and bunting including a crown.



c.1954, Soldiers' Band, Begonia Parade, Sturt Street, Ballarat.
Source: Australiana Research Collection, Central Highlands Libraries

1954: Queen's visit

There was much excitement across Australia to catch a glimpse of young Queen Elizabeth when she toured the continent.



1954, Royal Visit, Queen's Procession, Sturt Street, Ballarat. Source: Ballarat Historical Society

And HRH may have even mentioned the spectacle to her mum, because four year later, guess who paid Ballarat's Begonia Festival a visit?

1958: Queen Mother's visit

The Queen Mother graced the Begonia Festival with her presence in 1958 and fifteen members of the junior band played for her (eight of them were the Howell brothers!).



1958, Queen Mother's visit to the Botanic Gardens during the Begonia Festival, Ballarat.
Source: Ballarat Historical Society

The senior band also played:

The Soldiers' Memorial Band played items during the afternoon and entertained the quiet, patient crowd with music including 'Oh What a Beautiful Day'. As Her majesty drove slowly along the footpath the band played 'Over the Sea to Skye' in slow waltz time.

– *The Courier*



Read more about her visit in [Queen Mother Stops Royal Car at Home](#), *The Courier*, 1958.

Who was there to greet the royal carriage which arrived from Melbourne at the Ballarat train station on this auspicious occasion? Margaret McWilliam, Drum Major of the Ballarat Ladies Pipe Band. If her surname sounds familiar, that's because she is the daughter of Norm McWilliam, founder of the Soldiers' Band.



2 March 1958, Ballarat Railway Station Platform, Mayor of Ballarat, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother greeting Drum Major Margaret McWilliam.
Source: Federation University Historical Collection

1956: Rasmussen hands over to Rollard

Bert Rasmussen resigned in 1956 and Frank Rollard took over bandmastership of the Senior Band and taught the juniors from 1957. Under his baton, the band saw some more wins to finish off this solid decade of discipline, hard work, contribution and achievement.

The Famous South St. Band Contest

AT

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1957 1st Quickstep and winners of 'B' Grade aggregate at South Street



1957, 'B' Grade Champions with Bandmaster, Frank Rollard. Source: BMCB scrap book archive

1958 2nd Aggregate 'B' Grade South Street [3rd 'B' Grade Aggregate, 2nd Quickstep - RSS]

1959 1st Own Choice 1st Hymn 2nd Aggregate South Street



1959, Soldiers' Band photo, City Oval. Source: Cathi Smith Archive



The same photo is in the band archive scrapbook and lists the names as follows:

Back Row L to R: Cr W Roff (Pres), P James (Sec) M Smith, A Clark

5th row: Lindsay George, Geof Henderson, Neville Brown

4th Row: E Tonks, D smith, J Rinoldi, R. Vinier, Bert Wilson, A Hawkes

2nd row: J Ratcliffe, K Bell, A James, L Menner, L Allwood, J Lowther, G Ethridge, W Cockerill

Front Row: J Allen, Don Howell, R Secombe, V Hughes, F Rollard (BM), Aub McGregor (Drum Major), W Wilkinson.

James' notes from the annual meeting 23rd April 1960 read:

The high standard of the Band has been well maintained during the year [Apr 59 - Apr 60] and a great deal of credit must go to the Band Master, Mr F Rollard, who through his choice of music played has not only kept the members interested, but has drawn considerable applause from the public, on all occasions.

We offer our congratulations to our Soloists who, through their great efforts not only at the V.B.L. Contest in Melbourne but also at South Street, brought to Ballarat for the first time the V.B.L. Shield. [This was awarded for the most success in Solo competition]

It is also noteworthy that in previous AGM of 1959, a softening of a certain historic relationship was noted by Cr Roff:

Our good wishes are also extended to Sister Bands and it is good to note the spirit of co-operation throughout the community.

One bandsman's experiences with the *Last Post* during peace time

As a very young lad, Kevin Howell saw his great uncle, an ex-serviceman, play the bugle for the RSL. 'My father took me down there to see him sound the last post and I said to my father on the way home in the car, "One day I'm gonna do that!"'

Kevin swallowed hard before his next statement. 'He frightened the daylights out of me, he had one leg, a wooden leg, and one eye. Amazing.'

This great uncle never got to see Kevin play or know that he'd inspired him. But he was the reason that Kevin wanted to play cornet.

I've played in a number of funerals and for returned servicemen, I would sound the last post. I did that a number of times. A returned serviceman has the right to have a bugler sound the *Last Post*.

– Kevin Howell



2 October 1941, 2/27th Australian Infantry Battalion. Middle East, French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon, Lebanon, Tripoli Area. Source: Australian War Memorial (#010451)

I did play the *Last Post* for many years here. I remember I was fourteen and my father picked me up from school and they wanted a bugler down at the RSL and I went down and played the last post and I stood in the corner down in St Pat's yard there and the tram would go past and sound the last post and the old members took me into the bar and I sat down at the bar and had a glass of lemonade and then I was presented with a cheque for one guinea [one pound, one shilling, about \$35 in today's currency] which is quite a lot to a lad of fourteen. That was a big day and I'm quite proud of that. And that was it, so I did that on and off over the next years for the RSL quite regularly, the dawn service, I would play six times on ANZAC day, for the Singapore POWs, the Vietnam memorial, the arch of Victory and the service in St Patrick's Cathedral just prior to the main service. The last time would have been at the football on the Eastern Oval.

– Kevin Howell

Then in the late 60s on the way over to work in England, a strange twist occurred when Kevin's services were called upon again:

I was playing on the ship on the way over and the captain saw me, I was reading music and playing with the band and I got a slip under the cabin door, would I sound the last post for a funeral on the lower deck in a couple of days' time? So I phoned the person and let them know that I would be available. I go down and I'm looking around for the casket and the captain came along and we called him woof woof because he spoke like that and he said I've got a few words to say and then



I'll give you the nod and you'll sound the *Last Post*, so I thought it must have been a digger [ANZAC soldier] because they buried people at sea in those days – they don't do that any more now but this was back in '68 and they did then.

Anyway, I sound the *Last Post* and he thanked me and he was all in his regalia and I was looking around but there was a little box like this [motions to a box slightly smaller than a shoe box] sitting on the rail with the Union Jack draped over it. I couldn't work it out. So when the captain had said his few words, over it went into the ocean so I said to the lads and they were getting the crates of beer out for the wake afterwards, I said 'Who was that?'. They said, 'Oh didn't you know? That was the ship's mascot, the parrot!'. It was The Canberra and The Canberra was six years old and it had been on board for six years! So that's the thing about music, it will take you anywhere into anything.

– Kevin Howell

List of engagements from 8 June 1959 – 3 March 1960:

Civic Hall (Hospital), Regent Theatre (March P.O.W.), Cadet Church Parade, Turning on of Water Buninyong, Queen Elizabeth Homes, South Street Contests, Firemens Torch Light Procession, Pax Hill Scouts, Ballarat Show Marching Girls, Concert at Gardens (afternoon), Concert Alexandra Bandstand (night, same day as afternoon concert), Mary Mount Convent Concert, Travellers Procession Marching Girls, Eureka Celebrations, Mums and Dads (pre Christmas), Concert at Gardens (afternoon), Clunes Christmas Carols by Candlelight (night), Marching Girls to Theatre, Concert at Gardens (afternoon), Concert Alexandra Bandstand (same date, night), Queen Elizabeth Procession at the Showgrounds, Concert Titanic Bandstand (Sat. Morning), Her Majesty's Theatre, Begonia Opening at the Gardens, two Concerts at the Titanic Bandstand during the Begonia festival weekend.

– Minutes book



DISCOVER MORE

Read more about [the history of the Begonia Festival](#) from the Ballarat Tramway Museum.

Photos of the [Queen](#) and [Queen Mother's](#) visits to Ballarat and the Begonia Festival, 1954 and 1958 respectively.

Frank Bernard Rollard

Born 1917, died 28 June 1992 (Bowen, Queensland)

Frank Rollard was a brass player (trombone, trumpet, euphonium) and, among other musical projects, played in the Soldiers' Band. He took over as bandmaster from time to time and competed as a soloist in South Street for the Soldiers' Band. As well as being a band player, soloist, MD and teacher of the Soldiers' Junior Band in the 50s and 60s he was also a singer with – by all accounts – a lovely baritone voice.

FRANK ROLLARD



This very likeable personality returns to the Plaza after an absence of six months, during which time he appeared at the State Theatre, Melbourne, with the stage band, under the leadership of Stan Bourne.

Besides being the possessor of a fine operatic baritone voice, Frank is a character who was a favourite in comedy sketches when he was here. You may recall Flytox. Frank, besides being a singer, is a musician of note, playing no less than five instruments—his favourite being the trombone. He will be heard in Solos, Scenas, and Duets with Miss June Phillips, so a singing treat is in store for you in this show.

November 1951, Frank Rollard, Plaza Theatre Northcote.
Source: BMCB Archive

THE TIVOLI
★ B4912
Gala Opening Performance
★
FRIDAY, 5th March, 1948 at 8 p.m.

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× FRANK ROLLARD — The Vest Pocket Baritone
IAN WESTBROOK — The Australian Whipcracker
ED MÜLLER — The Ace Accordionist
THE PROBERTTS — Sensational Gymnasts
FEMALE IMPERSONATORS
CYRIL HOWE FRED BEAN

IT'S NEW, DIFFERENT, CLEAN ENTERTAINMENT

As you will read, Frank joined the Army in 1943 and played at Dubbo in the training band, then in 1944 as concert party musician and, by 1946, travelled to Japan to entertain the troops, to lift their spirits. During wartime, popular musical acts incorporated humour and parody as vital light relief. Frank would have honed his comedic entertainment skills during this period while he served with the 'Kangaroos'. (Read more in the Kangaroos Concert Party Program on p. 137.)

1948, Kangaroos AIF show advertisement.
Source: BMCB Archive

He sang regularly at The Plaza Theatre in Melbourne, did revue and vaudeville shows and even moved to Brisbane in the early 50s to perform at the Theatre Royal. In these theatre shows he sang and played 'opera to pop' repertoire with a knack for comedy. Sometimes he was billed as 'the little guy with the big voice'.

Norm Newey recalls that the Soldiers' Band performances with Frank Rollard often had a twist:

We used to play up at the lake every Sunday or every second Sunday and we'd be playing something from one of the musical comedies and he'd turn around and sing the song. Sort of unheard of in a brass band situation. But he was a very good musician.

– Norm Newey

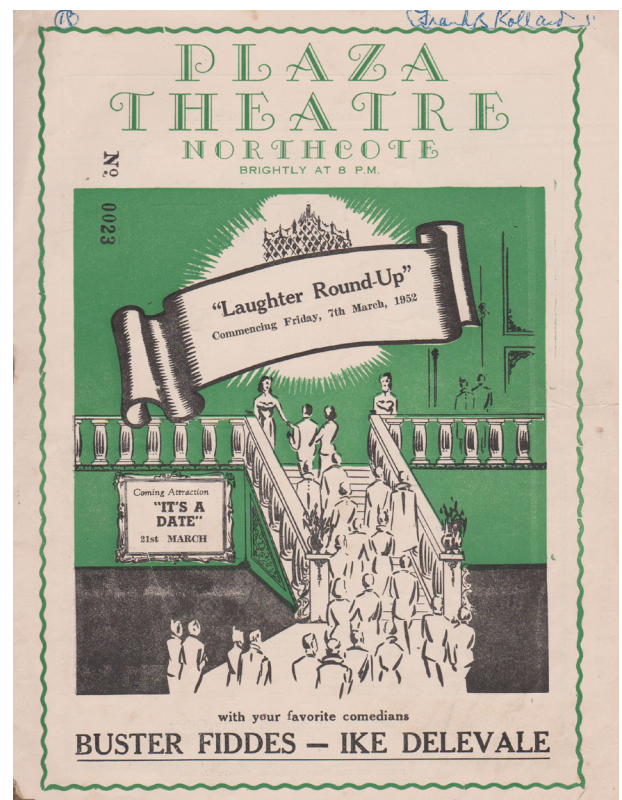
While it was quite usual for a singer to perform with a brass band in that era it was totally unheard of for the band *conductor* to be that singer.

For instance, in 1958 in the lead-up to the Queen Mother's visit, Frank sang the Begonia Festival theme song *I say it with Begonias* with the band as they toured the Wimmera promoting the festival to the regions.

Dennis Hawkes also remembers Frank, because as well as being his bandmaster at the end of the 50s in the Soldiers' Band and, training the junior players, Frank also taught a small selection of kids at North Tech. Dennis was one such student and remembers these times from when he was only ten or eleven years old.



February 1952, Frank Rollard Plaza Theatre Northcote. Source: BMCB



March 1952, Plaza Theatre Northcote, cover. Source: BMCB



As I went to secondary school they started this little school band and Frank would come up of a lunchtime. He'd have his lunchtime from 12 to 1pm, same as the school. We'd all collect there, only about six of us. He worked in the foundry as a turner or fitter of some such. John Valve's is on the corner of Norman and Creswick Rd (vacant block now) they used to make big water valves and he'd ride his bike up to North Tech and he smelt of all the cutting fluids. It was just like smelling a motor mechanic's overalls, and he was a marvelous musician.

– Dennis Hawkes

In many ways, Frank was a self-made man, having grown up an orphan who may have even made up his own name.

In the band archives there is a handwritten note outlining Frank Rollard's banding history. It appears to be written by Rollard himself. (Note that this is a rough guide; it is not exact in terms of the dates.)

F B Rollard

A rough outline of banding history

- 1928 St Vincent De Paul's Boys Band (Les Hoffman)
- 1932 Competed in Sth Street in B + C Grades
- 1932 Kew Competitions
- 1933 Won Junior Amateur Solo (Eupho)
- 1933 Aug Joined Ballarat City Band (Alf Rowell) 1st B Grade 1934
- 1935 1st Prize South Street Tenor Horn Solo (Coliseum) P Jones? (Adjudicator)
- 1938 Competition P + A Parade Ballarat City 2nd Prize (band player)
- 1939 Competition P + A Parade Ballarat City 1st Prize (band player)
[1941 Married Hazel Irene Hyatt]
- 1943 Joined Army. Played at Dubbo in training band.
- 1944 Joined 4th Dvn Concert Party As singer and musician. [service No. V50624]
- 1945 Was selected in Army Orchestra as Trom + Singer
- 1946 Joined Japan in Army Concert Party Singer, Trom + Trumpet
- 1947 Back to Ballarat City Band
[1947 Birth of daughter Rhonda, appears to be the eldest of three]
[1952 Residency at Theatre Royal in Brisbane]
- 1954 Conducted Alexandra Town Band. Taught juniors.
- 1957 Conducted Soldiers' Band. Taught juniors.
- 1958 Taught School Band part time Ballarat North Tech.
- 1960 Played Ballarat Soldiers'
- 1960-65 Taught junior players Soldiers band.
- 1966 Conducted and taught Stawell Brass Band
[Census records show that in 1968 he was living in Stawell]
- 1969 Played in Soldiers' Band, at Ballarat East and Ballarat High School

- 1970 Won Ballarat + District School contest with Ballarat High School, BEHS, Grand Aggregate BEHS
- 1970 Third in South St, T.V. Talent Quest with Band of High School. Also played in Soldiers' Band
- 1971 1st Prize with BEHS South St. 3rd BHS Royal South Street
- 1972 3rd Prize with BEHS
- 1973 1st Prize BEHS 3rd BHS Royal South Street. Won Veterans Solo. Played with Ipswich Band.
- 1971-74 Produced Champion of Champions (Junior) at South Street
- 1972-74 3 times Champion Band at St John's competitions BEHS School Band
- 1974 1st Prize BEHS Royal South Street.
- 1975 Conducting Ballarat Soldiers' Band
[1975 His wife Hazel died and his mother in law also died this year]
[BEHS = Ballarat East High School]

Concert parties

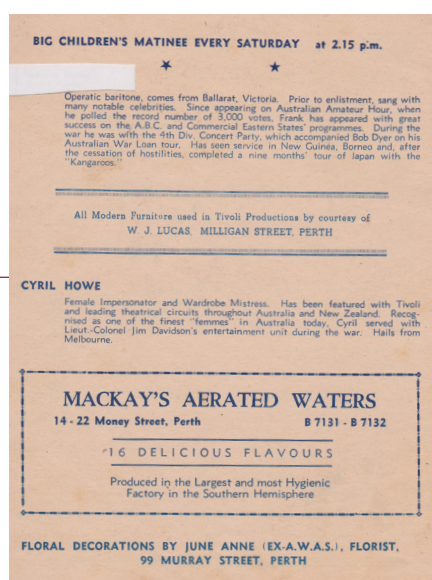
These excerpts from the Kangaroo's Concert Party Program in the BMCB Archive tell about the work of concert party troops in World War II of which Frank Rollard was a part.

The programs help us to understand Frank's own history and, in broader terms, shed light on another aspect of how music was used during wartime by members of the Soldiers' Band. This use is different to a battalion band musician's role in that these musicians had a sole duty to entertain (with no field ambulance duties). The musical performance centered on comedy, light music and entertainment.



Read excerpts from
the Kangaroos Concert
Party Program.

Source: BMCB Archive



Frank's talents were put to good use – the public's appetite for revues, comedy, send ups and parody did not wane throughout the war. In the postwar period, comedy was also a vital force as people worked hard once again to gain a semblance of normality.