



The 1970s

At a glance

A departure from the desire for regimental discipline and structure. Disco, *Star Wars*, the Sydney Opera House, Gay Mardi Gras and significant shifts in rights for women and minority groups follow the awakening of the 60s. At the beginning of the 70s, the last of the baby boom generation are now in high school with their long hair and sideburns and anti-Vietnam war protests.

Daddy Cool, Captain Matchbox and Black Feather play Ballarat. Sovereign Hill opens (1970), Ballarat Tramways closes (1971) and South Street, now *Royal*, celebrates its first centenary (1979). BTV-6 is hugely popular with one of its most successful programs being the *Six Tonight* variety show hosted by Fred Fargher (son of Bill Fargher from the Soldiers' Band), which runs for thirteen years from 1972.

This decade also sees the last quickstep competition in 1978 held at Royal South Street, due to lack of interest by spectators, the same year the first Gay Mardi Gras is held in Sydney. The quickstep is to be replaced briefly by street marches and parades.

While girls who graduate in the early 70s could expect to have a career, choices are limited. Joanne Elliot (now Valentine) 1972 School Captain, Ballarat High School, remembers, 'We had no fear and a lot of hope'. (Class of '72: 'Living in the 1970s revisited', *The Courier*, 2003).

The Whitlam Government works hard on social reform and rights and protection for minority and underprivileged groups, the abolition of university fees, and cessation of compulsory national service. Utzon's iconic Sydney Opera House is opened by Queen Elizabeth II. The first Vietnamese asylum seekers arrive by boat off Darwin. Greer's *The Female Eunuch* hits bookshops and bedside tables. The Aboriginal flag is designed.

Australia experiences a recession and heavy industry is hit in Ballarat, which has a knock-on effect on population over the next twenty years. From a population of just under 40,000 in 1971, by 1976 Ballarat loses 5000 people. Population does not pick up again until the 90s.

In Ballarat, the first female mayor is elected, former Lady Mayoress Jessie Scott, in 1976. (Since then mayors have included Wanda Chapman, Vashti Lloyd, Judy Verlin and Samantha McIntosh.)

The people of Australia make an important musical decision in 1977. The results of a national poll determine which of these songs should be the national anthem and places them in order: *Advance Australia Fair*, *Waltzing Matilda*, *God Save the Queen*, *Song of Australia*.

The band in the 1970s



1970, Soldiers' Band, South Street. Source: BMCB Archive

After the band's successes of the previous two decades, big shifts were about to occur. These were largely influenced by lack and loss of options combined with new opportunities. The following factors played significant roles in the irreversible changes that occurred in the Soldiers' Band over the next two decades: music education policy reform in secondary schools, new roles and opportunities for women, losses to regional heavy industry, economic downturn and transfer of labour, mass media bringing entertainment home and lack of local tertiary options. We will hear about how each of these influences played out in the band, almost crippling it in the 70s and reviving it in the 80s – leading it to be the thriving band it is today.

But first, the last words from the letter containing the handwritten history from Bill Wilkinson:

In September of 1970 the Band suffered a big loss in the death of their President Councillor W.E. Roff C.B.E. He had served the City of Ballarat as their Mayor twice; he was a man of exceptional



ability as a leader and kept the Band together in harmony by his tact and on the move forward by his drive; he was responsible for the purchase of the site for the Bandroom, and the erection of the present building. He was president of the Band for 27 years.

Cr Bill Roff's contribution cannot be underestimated. Combined with the cultural shifts that worked against the band in the 70s, Bill Roff's death was a significant blow which contributed to the band's loss in momentum. With his dual roles of president of the band for almost thirty years, and Ballarat City Councillor, he provided tireless support.

It is only with the support of people like Bill Roff that the band had survived (and thrived) up until now.

In his passing, Bill Roff missed: early 70s successes followed by mid-70s dwindling of numbers, the advent of brass banding women in Ballarat, the first non-brass instruments in the history of the band and the last strides of the quickstep.



Cr Bill Roff. Source: BMCB Archive

Early 70s successes



31 November 1971, 'Trophies presented to band' article, *The Courier*. Source: BMCB Archive



Under the continued leadership of Frank James, the band won the following:

1971 South Street 'B' Grade championship.



1971, Winners Victorian 'B' Grade Championships. Source: BMCB Archive

1972 Traralgon 'B' Grade Championship.



1972, Rehearsal time. Source: Geoff Smith Archive



1972, 3rd Place at the VBL Contest in Coburg.



1972, 'Just a Warm Up', 3rd Place VBL Contest Coburg. Source: Geoff Smith Archive

They went on to win the 1972 South Street 'B' Grade Australian Championships.



1972, South Street 'B' Grade Champions. Source: BMCB Archive



1972, 2nd Place 'B' Grade Quickstep South Street. Source: Geoff Smith Archive

Of course, there was much reason for celebration:



28 October 1972, 'Band trophy', *The Courier*. Source: Geoff Smith Archive



1972 saw Victoria hosting the National Titles Championships. At that time five states took it in turn to host and, when it was Victoria's turn, they were held in conjunction with the South Street Competitions.

Geoff Smith came first in the sacred solo competitions (Open) with *How great Thou Art*: 94 out of 100 points and in the Australasian Championship. The Judge's Award Sheet read:

This number is beautifully played, very good control. I am unable to fault the phrasing. Good cornet tone in evidence too. A beautiful rendition.

The dream of sons following their fathers into the band was still well and truly alive. Michael is wearing a tiny perfect replica version of the band uniform, handmade by his mother.



1972, Michael Smith, the band mascot with his mum, Vivienne. Source: Geoff Smith Archive



1973, Michael, Geoff Smith's son, at the quickstep competitions.
Source: Geoff Smith Archive

1970s playouts

The band was busy lending gravitas and celebration to many civic events.

The Begonia Festival was still a regular feature of the band's annual street marches:

As a prelude to the Begonia Festival Eve Ball, the Ballarat Soldiers' Memorial Band marched from the Town Hall to the Civic Hall where they played while guests entered the hall.

— *The Courier*, 1 March 1974

People still enjoyed the bands down at the gardens, just like in the old days. Well ... almost.

**Applause for
bands**

SIR — Please allow me space to express my thanks and appreciation to all concerned for a most enjoyable afternoon of band and massed bands music at the gardens recently.

It is ages since I've heard the large crowd that was present applauding for more at the conclusion of the program, a sure indication of a well received program. If a suggestion could be made, I feel that a few popular old hymns could be included in the next concert.

— "OLD BANDSMAN."

March 1974, 'Applause for bands',
The Courier. Source: E J (Mick) Smith Archive



The following month, April 1974, the band was represented in the Australian Championships in Hobart, Tasmania. Not everyone wanted to go, so the full band did not compete. Instead, a handful of the members flew down together for the competitions.

We had two septets and three quartets and won everything we entered!

– Jim Allen, who competed in the septet and took some solos while on tour.



1974, Australian Championships, Hobart, Tasmania. Source: BMCB Archive

Because I was a carpenter at the time, my boss said he could get all the photos in one frame. He gave the carpenter his instructions and he created a multiple photo frame to commemorate the event.

– Jim Allen

Cathi Smith was a small child at the time and still remembers the constant rehearsals in the lead-up to competitions and special performances:

I grew up with brass quintets, quartets or sections from the Soldiers' band rehearsing in our lounge room when we were in a tiny house. So they were my lullabies.

– Cathi Smith



Cathi and her father Geoff Smith.
Source: Geoff Smith Archive



Ted Lewis would come over, Dennis Hawkes, John Russell, rehearsing for their trip to Tasmania, playing in the Nationals. A Eupho player, Russel Jenkins, played with them and he would sometimes be involved with rehearsals as well. If it was a cornet section rehearsal then they would be going from 7 to 10 pm.

– Cathi Smith

One of the Tassie tour players was John Russell who joined the band in 1972. John was a top horn player from England who emigrated to Ballarat to join his family. Read more in the next section about John's impressions of the band, the trip to Tasmania, and find out what they played.

John also remembers 'Smithy' (Geoff Smith), inviting him in to help Maryborough Band out a couple of times during 1972–74 – including once in Tanunda playing *Ship Builder*.

While the start of the 70s were still buoyant times for the band, it was not long before the tide turned. Not only had the band lost Bill Roff, they were just about to lose their longstanding MD, Frank James, who saw them through their 60s 'A' Grade years.

1974: Frank James retires

Frank James had been the bandmaster of the Soldiers' Band since 1960. In that time, the band had their greatest competition successes and were playing at the highest sustained standard in their history. This was due to Frank's musical abilities along with his unique methods for rallying the troops for band practice and keeping attendance and practice up. Frank's successes with the band were also built on the strong foundation of dedicated junior band players from the 50s.

Let's take a few moments to pay tribute to Frank James:

Frank's Farewell

Ballarat's brass bands will suffer a big loss in a few months when local shops and factories inspector, Frank James, retires and moves to sunny Queensland.

Frank James played a big part in Ballarat Soldiers Band winning the B grade Australasian championships at Royal South Street a few weeks ago.

He first joined the Soldiers band when he was only 13 and became a cornet player.

After leaving Ballarat in 1938, he thought he had left brass bands for all time.

He was too busy playing in dance bands to ever think about returning to competitive band work.

But in 1946 he went to Sale and was soon in the local brass band. Two years later, he became bandmaster.

After another four years, the Maffra band was started, and he was asked to take a dual role as bandmaster of both bands.

Later he had to leave the Sale band to concentrate on his work at Maffra, and in 1960 he returned to Ballarat.

Although James likes and appreciates all kinds of music, brass bands seem to have a special importance to him.

It seemed natural that he would become a bandsman because his father played a trombone in the Ararat band.

Winning the B grade championship had a special importance to Frank James, because he was mainly responsible for the band filling its ranks with youngsters a couple of years

ago.

And it was he who moulded the young bandmen into a championship combination.

The win goes back to 1970 when the City Council supplied the band with new instruments valued around \$7000.

This gave the band the kick-on it needed, with plenty of old instruments for training the young bandmen.

As James willingly admits, no band would be able to raise \$7000 "in a million years".

James has left the band a great legacy, with 38 of the 42 members having an average age of about 20.

He knows that his successor will be able to come into a well established band that could soon rise from B grade into the A grade ranks.

But there is little doubt that the band will continue improving for at least the next one to two years and eventually become an A grade band.

In his years as a bandsman, James has had many thrills, but none like the South Street win.

He knew before the contests that only a top class band would be able to beat his own.

People close to Frank James know his three great loves in life are his work, home and band.

So they are already betting that some band in Queensland is about to recruit a likely bandmaster.

Among the members of the band is Geoff Smith, who was successful in the Sacred Solo at South Street.

Geoff is the deputy bandmaster of the Soldiers Band.

Back Row: S. Donohue, C. Bodey, D. Smith, K. Barracough, D. Hawkes, B. Cannon, R. Smith, R. Oldham, Centro W. Judge, R. Pyke, W. Roberts, K. Bell, S. Mitzell, G. James, P. Brierley, E. Judge, C. Fibby, R. Gray, A. Fitzpatrick, C. Cockrell, A. Whiting. Front: J. Allan (Sec.), W. Locke, B. Gray, R. Secombe, P. Forrester, F. James (Bandmaster), A. McGregor (D.M.), W. Wilkinson (Pres.), P. Gray, K. Cannon, L. Garrett, A. Ross.



FRANK JAMES

1972, 'Frank's Farewell'.
Source: Geoff Smith Archive

MASSED BANDS
Sunday, Dec. 3rd.
CRESWICK
STREET MARCH
RECITAL
NOVELTY EVENTS
To Support
Creswick Band Uniform Fund
CONDUCTED BY CRESWICK APEX CLUB.



Frank James with Soldiers' Band highlights during his career as bandmaster, 1960 – 1974. Source: BMCB Archive

Although Frank was set to retire in 1973, he didn't leave until mid-1974, when he handed the baton to Norm Litt.

On 4 June 1974 it was written in the minutes:

F James reported on Band going quite well. Mr Litt should have quite a good Band when he takes over. Also that one or two players need a reminder regarding practice.

F James spoke of the wonderful time he has had over the past fourteen years with the Band and he thanked the Committee for giving him their full support over the years. He also thanked the Committee for the wealth of experience he had got Conducting the Band which in turn had led to him being a registered adjudicator with the V.B.L. He wished the Committee and the Band all the success in the future and he was sure the Band would go on to better things under Mr Litt.'

Norman Joseph Litt born in Stawell, 1910 was an ex-RAAF officer.

A couple of weeks later, Geoff Smith stood down as deputy bandmaster due to his appointment as manager of the Ballarat scrap metal company. As with many of the jobs in Ballarat at the time, this involved heavy physical labour. His daughter Cathi still remembers accompanying her dad while he 'broke batteries with an axe or mattock on cold Saturday mornings'.



Dwindling numbers

Norm Litt took over, but not for long. On 14 August 1975 it is noted in the minutes:

Norm Litt reported on happenings of Band leading up to V.B.L. Contest, very poor rehearsals.
The final practice was the only full practice before Contest.

Apparently the band played well, considering, but Norm stated that 'attendance will have to improve 100% if Band is to come up to the standard for South Street. Otherwise he will have to look at his commitments closely'.

It seems that attendance did not pick up. Only eight people at rehearsal on Sunday 8 September and by 10 September Norm Litt had handed in his resignation.

It appears that Geoff Smith stepped in for the rest of 1974 until the new year when the bandmaster's position was advertised.

Bob Pattie remembers Norm Litt:

He was a professional trumpet player, a very good one, he played in the big dance orchestras. He ended up playing in Sydney and he played in the big bands in Melbourne as well. Big Band Jazz. He played with Jim Davidson and his ABC Dance Orchestra in the 30s. He was very well connected with musicians in Melbourne too.

Norm Litt appears on record, playing the *Dipsy Doodle* in June 1938 with Jim Davidson and His Dance Orchestra.

In his later years he drifted up here. He was living in a flat in Wendouree. He wasn't in the best of health when he was here. He was taking the Soldiers' Memorial band but he didn't take them for very long. His requirements were pretty strict, whenever the band were to play out I heard him actually say it, 'If I've got twenty players, I'll do it, if I haven't we won't be doing it.' He was conductor when they were struggling a bit for numbers I think. Then he was bandmaster at Ararat.

– Bob Pattie

What could have led to such a decline in numbers in the 70s?

Economic factors may have played a part in the declining numbers in the 70s. The Australian Government lifted import tariffs in 1973, so Australia was no longer protected from a globally competitive market. Ballarat heavy industrials including Bendex Mintex, Villiers, Rolson and Tippet, Myers, Ballarat Woolen Mills, M B Johns, Timkins, Morleys and Lucas, which had formed much of Ballarat's workforce were closing their industrial sites, and closing fast.

Labour transferred over time to the health, service and convenience food industries. McCain and Mars built factories, Sovereign Hill historical theme park opened its doors and mass aged care like Queen Elizabeth and the orphanages Nazareth Children's Home and Ballarat Children's home were de-institutionalised and care was dispersed into smaller facilities.

With no university for Ballarat yet, the high school graduates of the 70s and 80s were forced to seek tertiary education in Melbourne or Geelong. (Deakin opened 1974.) Naturally, with more work prospects in a bigger metropolis, they often settled in Melbourne or further afield.



Band members who had been well-employed in manual labour had to find alternate employment. Some moved over to music education and the entertainment sector with pit orchestra and television performances. Others left town.

These changes affected a downturn in band numbers with current and potential members seeking to further their careers outside Ballarat throughout the 70s and 80s.

Key players get busy

We already know that Geoff Smith took over the management of the scrap metal yard at this time, but he was still playing with the band until the mid-70s and helping them out for South Street when needed, which he did in 1976.

Geoff also started teaching brass part time at Clarendon College and conducted the Soldiers' Band in between MDs. He was able to transfer his conducting skills, honed at the Soldiers' Band, to his new role as Director of Music at Ballarat College.

Some of the other key players from the previous decades including Norm Newey, Kevin Howell and Dennis Hawkes became otherwise engaged early on in the decade. Norm had a burgeoning professional career that took him to television broadcasts on top of his teaching.

I became very heavily involved with a local show band (Vibratones) and we performed on IMT (In Melbourne Tonight with Graham Kennedy and Bert Newton) and Ballarat TV during the 70s and that's when I gave this band away to play the trumpet with the Vibratones. We performed all over Victoria and we did twenty performances on IMT nationally.

– Norm Newey

Dennis Hawkes was drafted into the army during the Vietnam war. He wasn't the only one.

All the birth dates went into a barrel and as the dates dropped out you had to go in. And in those days it was two years but they brought it back to eighteen months.

You got asked what your skills were and I said, 'Bloody band, band, band!!' 'Coz I didn't want to do anything else. David Smith [Geoff Smith's brother, former Soldiers' band member], he'd been in and somebody else as well and they said, 'Just tell them you're in the band'.

Once you were in the band, it was just like a day job. You'd rehearse new numbers, somebody would have a garden party, you'd play at the races, you'd play at the matron's garden party. You had a March Out Parade every Monday morning, so Friday was taken up with rehearsal with troops marching up and down on the parade ground with the band. Monday, you'd have a rehearsal with the troops and then they'd go and put all their spit and polish gear on and the mums and dads would come and watch them march around the square.

– Dennis Hawkes

Dennis' role at No. 1 Recruit Training Battalion until 1973 was getting troops ready to go across to Vietnam as well as different stations all around Australia.



When I found out that I had to go into the army and I found out that I could play music there, it was brilliant! To get into the band you had to be able to play four major and minor scales. Well I could do that. In the old hall I could do that and I could read music, just the same as everybody can now. That was an absolute bonus, an absolute bonus.

– Dennis Hawkes

Kevin Howell had been working in the UK for some time, but when he got back the numbers and energy were already low.

I went and joined the City Band after the demise due to lack of numbers here of the Soldiers' band. Bands go through this all the time.

– Kevin Howell

John Russell was offered a job through Wilf Dyason, teaching maths and music in Melbourne, so he too left the band.

Slowly though, new members who never before would have joined the band were doing so, and changing history.



Read about [John Russell's experience](#).

Women enter the bandroom to play (not to deliver sandwiches)

As part of the statewide policy for secondary school students to learn instruments, more girls had access to more instruments. Their teachers were, as we heard in the previous chapter, often drawn from brass bands. So band members Norm Newey and Frank Rollard invited their students to come along to band practice. For the first time, women entered a brass bandroom in Ballarat, not carrying sandwiches, but instrument cases. Their own. And that wasn't all. When numbers were low, in the mid-70s, drummer Lindsay George suggested that his two young daughters play too. Only they didn't play brass.

With female players also came a wider range of instruments. After decades of missed opportunities for young players, the 70s brought new opportunities and irreversible change.

In 1971, Pam Forrester became the first girl in the history of the band (see previous 1971 band photo).

I just loved brass. I loved it because I was a marching girl as well. I marched with the highlanders and Lew Zilles was the drum major of the Highland Band ... he was a character!

Before I was allowed to join, a special meeting was held. I was the first female.

When asked what it was like in those initial years, Pam answered with one word: 'Scary'.

I remember when we were getting our uniforms, we were meant to be measured and they all wanted to measure my inside leg. When I first came, I was the only female, because my music teacher was Norm Newey, and that's how I came down here. Anyway, we had to have uniforms and we had to be measured and they all wanted to line up to measure me inside leg. And they had a Ladies Committee then and I wasn't allowed pants.



Being the only girl, Pam was a target for larrikinism:

There was that many second and third cornets and the boys, they were real awful to me ... if you got lost they'd point to where you were but, it wasn't where you were. They'd give you the wrong music.

– Pam Forrester

She remembers it being unnerving, 'Especially when they forgot I was in the room. And they'd tell dirty jokes and that'.

Pam was allowed on the Hobart trip in 1974, but only with her uncle's wife as chaperone.

We can get a sense of how intimidating it must have been and how determined young Pam was to persist within this male-centric culture. We know that there must have been a great level of support from early teachers such as Norm Newey and Frank Rollard who were comfortable with supporting the introduction of their young female students into the band.

By the mid-70s, Pam was joined by players Amanda Bentley and Leanne Pattie.

It was quite taboo for women to play brass instruments in many places and Victoria was certainly one of the last states where women joined brass bands. Cathi Smith remembers that when she was growing up 'girls didn't play brass instruments'. Her father, brass player and teacher, Geoff Smith, encouraged her to choose a woodwind instrument. When Cathi started playing she played flute, her sister played clarinet, but both her brothers were allowed to play brass instruments. All Cathi wanted to do, however, was to play brass.

This is of course, an uncomfortable history because as Jeanette Pattie, committee member from City Band, says about the era, 'women were nothings'. Ouch. She is not referring to women in banding, she is referring to women in society even as late as the 1970s.

In the City Band women entered in the latter part of the 70s and, unlike the Soldiers' Band, they were actually directed to wear pants. Jeanette remembers comments from some of the men, 'I don't mind, as long as I get to walk behind her'.

While it was not easy and sometimes scary for women to enter the bandroom for the first time as young players, it was also very exciting. These brass students didn't even think of the impact they were making, they were just playing their horns. And yes, they were the pioneers for modern banding in Ballarat.



1975, Soldiers' Band, South Street, Frank Rollard conducting. Source: BMCB Archive

Frank Rollard, a short stint

In the early months of 1975, Frank Rollard, once again took on the bandmastership.

1976, New world: (L to R) Dennis Hawkes, Ted Lewis, Roy Pike, Frank Rollard. Source: BMCB Archive

● BELOW: Members of the Ballarat Soldiers' Memorial Band had good reason to look pleased with themselves at the Civic Hall on Saturday. They were placed second in the hymn section of the B grade bands' competitions. Pictured from left, Dennis Hawk, Ted Lewis, Roy Pike and Frank Rollard.





Frank Rollard's commitment to banding was strong and he had been with the Soldiers' Band over many decades, playing, leading the junior band or conducting in the 50s. You will remember that Frank had been voluntarily training young musicians and encouraging them to come down to band practice since the 50s. Neil Glover was one such musician who happened to live next door to the Rollards in Ballarat North in the early 70s. Neil started playing at North Tech with Frank as his tutor:

There was a band at school, there were only about eight people in the band. Frank used to teach a lot of the school kids everywhere. It was hard for me because I couldn't wag me lesson, because I was right next door. I couldn't say I'm sick, coz he could look over the fence and say 'Oh there you are!' (lol).

– Neil Glover

Amanda Bentley, joined the band in 1976 because Frank Rollard was her trumpet teacher and band conductor at Ballarat East High. She reflects on how Frank Rollard impacted her as a musician:

Frank Rollard was very gregarious, musically brilliant, and was responsible for starting hundreds of young students on a lifetime of music. He served in WWII as an entertainer...he was a very good singer, too, and there are a lot of newspaper reports describing his voice. He was one of the best euphonium players in the country...I loved listening to him play. He'd often be practicing on the stage in the assembly hall at school and I'd just sit on the edge of the stage and take it all in... one of his favourites was *Che Gelida Manina* from *La Bohème*, which he always called *Your Tiny Mitt is Frozzed*. He smoked a pipe and the smell of pipe smoke is still a favourite of mine.

As a conductor he was very similar to Leonard Bernstein – very physical, not just hands. His whole body would transmit the energy of the music. I've worked with some of the finest conductors in the world, and I still see him as the first in a distinguished lineup. He was that good.

I know it broke his heart when I gave up the trumpet to concentrate on my singing. But he'd already given me a love and respect of music, a professional attitude that I still carry with me, and a belief in myself as a woman in a male-dominated arena.

– Amanda Bentley

Frank took over the band the same year his wife died and sadly his tenure was not a smooth one.

By mid-1976, tensions had arisen and in September Frank resigned as bandmaster, but continued as a playing member of the band.

And so ended the era of the three Franks: Frank Wright, Frank Rollard and Frank James.



Jim Allen stood in, then out



1975, Victorian Champion Brass Quartette, Royal South Street competitions. Source: Geoff Smith Archive

As was the case several times over the years when there was an abrupt resignation from an MD, one of the experienced players generously took up the baton to keep the band going. A matter of necessity rather than choice perhaps; Jim Allen, a much-respected long-standing fellow bandsman, had no particular aspiration to be the band leader.

Jim had played with the band since the 40s and in September 1976 Jim was acting head covering for the loss of Frank as bandmaster. By the start of the following year Jim took on the bandmaster's role. By November 1978 Jim resigned but held over resignation 'til Christmas to help the band out. He carried on, however until mid-1979.

During his last duties as bandmaster, he lead the band in the annual playout for the Eureka Stockade and at the opening of the Gold Museum, Sovereign Hill.

The minutes of 5 Dec 1978 report:

Bandmaster congratulated on choice of music and control of the Band in General.

Band member Hugh Craddock took over from mid-1979 until late 1980.

This transition occurred during the time when many of the more experienced brass players were thin on the ground and young players were learning more than just brass band instruments. Many stalwarts of the band continued on though, including Bill Wilkinson, Stef Mitaxa and Mick Smith. But this wasn't enough to keep the band going to the degree it needed to thrive, or even survive. The band was becoming endangered for lack of brass players.



Woodwinds walk in

As we heard, Lyndsay George who had been playing drums with the band since the 1930s, had two daughters who were keen to play. There was, of course, that one tiny hitch ...

Heather played clarinet and Karen played flute. They had been part of the band as family members, doing trips, seeing the band play and compete, waiting around in the bandroom for their dad to finish teaching the junior percussion and drum players. It was a small step then to take their instruments down and join in. Although, it wasn't easy being the only woodwind players in a brass band.

Heather remembers that she did not enjoy being there in the transition. 'You can't hear the clarinet, you can only hear the trumpets!' was a common complaint she had after band practice.

At this stage it was still a brass band playing brass band repertoire, and players like Heather and Karen were additional, playing trumpet parts. Heather was the first musician ever to play this role in the band: 'I was playing in it while it was a brass band'.

Karen, who joined after her sister, remembers: 'I was playing transposed trumpet parts on flute'.

That's when Karen decided to play percussion instead of flute in the band because she was too young to enjoy transposing the parts herself, which was what was required.

The very first public appearance of woodwind in the band is recorded in the minutes of 1 May 1979:

Bandmaster's report, a very good Band on Anzac Day 27 players. Miss George having her first play out with the Band.

This implies that they were stretching it to have under thirty players. And we know from the minutes that a special meeting was to be called to discuss the future of the band.

1 May 1979

Moved S Mitaxa Seconded W Wilkinson that the band add as from now on any other Instruments as required, the first instance woodwind then when composition of the Band attains that required, a Concert Band be formed. Carried.

By this time, the quickstep competition, which had long been an iconic South Street event, had been axed.



The final strides

The last quickstep competition at South Street was held in 1978, but the band had not placed in it since 1974.

I remember in the 60s and 70s TV took over as entertainment and bands were no longer very popular. I am sure that this would have affected the competitions.

– David Callinan, Royal South Street (2019)

People weren't turning up to it so it got the chop and they replaced it with the street march. That was still a comp.

– Bob Pattie, Ballarat City Municipal Brass Band

What was it like going from the quickstep to a street march only?

It was a bit better. I think the days when people would go and watch bands march were well and truly over! People have other things they do, go to the football and play sport, cars had a lot to do with it. In the early days of bands there was no other competing interest. All music was live, no recordings, no record players – there was radio, no this, no that. All the things that they didn't have in those days so the local band, the banjo player, or piano player or anybody who could play music live was in big demand.

But as time went on, you get movies and people have cars and they go away for holidays and they have sporting interests. At one stage the South Street Marching competition was attracting in Ballarat as many people as the football grand final. In the early days of the band competitions, I think around about 1912, the workers of Ballarat had the day off to go to the band competition.

But things change.

– Bob Pattie

The 70s turned out to be tumultuous years of transition for the band with the loss of many key long-serving members, Bandmaster Frank James, President Cr Bill Roff and key soloists. It was also a decade of irreversible change with a whole new gender of players joining and the opening of a new palette of sound with woodwinds entering what had been – for over fifty years – an all-brass domain. It is sobering to think that the band survived only by a reed's breadth to face the challenges and uplift of the 1980s.

With the passing of time and the conclusion of the all-brass, all-male era, it was time to honour past members of the Soldiers' Band:

Life members as listed in the notes for the AGM 30 April 1975:

A Rutherford	F Galvin
W Wilkinson	R Secombe
W Fargher	W Cockerill Jr
G Pearson	P James
S Wilson	S Mitaxa
A Wilson	J Allen
H Howell	F James



Members of the Ballarat Soldiers' Memorial Band, who won the septette section in the bands section of the Royal South Street competitions, took time out from playing on Saturday to visit the band's former secretary, Mr Harry Howell. Mr Howell was secretary from 1958 until 1969 before ill health forced him to retire. Pictured with him are, from left, John Russell, Warren Roberts, Jim Allen, Frank James, Adrian Fitzpatrick, Chris Philby, Kevin Dodson and Geoff Smith.

1973, Band members visit their much-respected former secretary Harry Howell, father of the eight Howell boys who formed the 1954 nucleus of the junior band. Source: Geoff Smith Archive

'Trombone Bill' gets a surprise

It's hard to know what gave 80-year-old bandsman Mr Bill Wilkinson a bigger thrill — receiving the British Empire Medal in the New Year Honors or last night's surprise given him by his fellow bandsmen.

Although Mr Wilkinson knew he was going to be awarded a BEM for his services to brass bands in Ballarat five weeks before the awards were announced, last night's party was a complete surprise.

His fellow bandsmen at the Ballarat Soldiers' Memorial Band, in conjunction with their first practice night for 1976, gave their only surviving foundation member a "congratulations" party which literally took the "wind from his sails."

So much so he was unable to blow his trombone which he has played in the band since 1917.

Spry and alert, Mr Wilkinson described his BEM as "a great surprise, but the hardest thing for me was to keep it under my hat."

"Even my daughter and son didn't know about it."

Past, present and future bandsmen attended the function.

Mr Wilkinson actually began playing in 1916 with Prouts Band when he was 20.

He transferred to the Ballarat City Band in 1918 but was back with the Soldiers' Band in 1919.

"I've been competing since 1921," he said.

"Bands were very big in the 1920s when he would

least three times a week.

"And if you didn't come to practice, competition to get into the band was so fierce, your place would soon be filled."

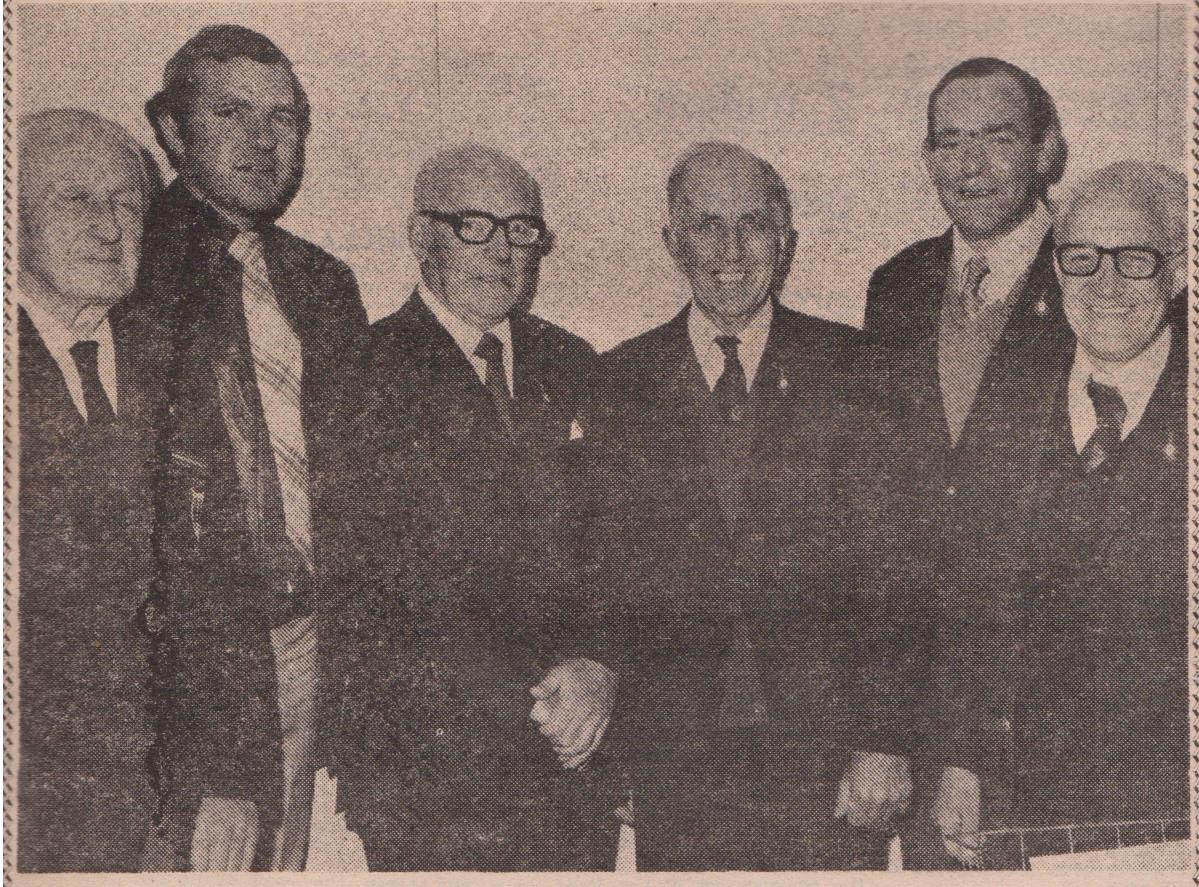
Mr Wilkinson has marched in every Begonia Festival procession since 1956 and says he will be there this year.

Any thoughts of retiring?

"Definitely not, I'd be lost without it," he says with a broad smile.

1976, "Trombone Bill" gets a surprise, *The Courier*.
Geoff Smith Archive

SEVEN BANDSMEN WITH 309 YEARS OF SERVICE



Victorian Band League president Mr A. Foley has presented seven badges of merit for service to the band movement to members of the Soldier's Memorial Band.

The merit badges were introduced by the VBL in the last few years.

One member, Mr W. Wilkinson, has worked for bands for 59 years, possibly a record time.

He has been a president of the Soldiers' Memorial Band and plays trombone.

Other merit badges presented went to Mr S. Mitaxa (49 years); bandmaster, Mr F. Rollard (47 years); Mr J. Allen (39 years); Mr E. Smith (55 years); Mr G. Smith (22 years); and Mr A. Mitchell (38 years).

Mr E. Smith also received a life membership, presented by the president, Mr S. Mitaxa.

A former member, now bandmaster at Beaufort,

Mr C. Filby, was also remembered with a presentation.

Mr Mitaxa was elected president of the band for the third term but leaves today for a six-month trip to Canada where he will attend the International world contest of bands at Toronto.

Other office-bearers elected were: Vice-president, W. Wilkinson, K. Bell, W. George, E. Lewis; secretary, J. Allen; assistant, R. Pike; treasurer, E. Smith; librarians, W. Lock, K. Bell; assistant, S. Mitaxa; auditor, W. Wilkinson; bandmaster, F. Rollard; assistants, J. Allen, J. Lowther; and drum major, G. Horwood.

Badges of merit, totalling service for 309 years, have been awarded to seven members of the Soldiers' Memorial Band. Band members to receive the badges were, from left, W. Wilkinson, G. Smith, E. Smith, S. Mitaxa, J. Allen and F. Rollard. The seventh member, A. Mitchell was absent.

9 May 1975, 'Seven Bands with 309 Years of Service', *The Courier*, Source: E J (Mick) Smith Archive



Stefano Mitaxa

(b. 1907 and d. 1986)

On 1st May 1962 Bill Fargher motioned that Stefano Mitaxa be made a life member for services rendered to the band for the past 30 years.

Stef joined the band in 1929 and served on the committee for many, many years.

He was second-generation Australian and his Greek grandfather had ventured to Ballarat during the Goldrush in 1851 to seek a better life.

– Noel Mitaxa

Stef was a hardworking man who survived the Depression collecting bits of rags and bottles and selling them.

He was twenty one or twenty two with all the hopes ahead of him and suddenly he couldn't get work as a builder. Then World War II rolled round. As a carpenter he was reserved occupation so he couldn't enlist. So he was building munitions factories.

– Noel Mitaxa

His son Noel remembers his dad's work ethic. He says that he sometimes worked so hard in the winter that his hands would split, but he kept on working. He was 'a bit of an improviser'. In one instance, when one of his braces buttons was lost, he used a nail instead so as not to be late for a medical appointment (to the great horror of his wife).

Stef's youngest son Noel remembers joining his family at many Soldiers' Band events in the 40s and 50s.

I remember Sundays in the Gardens, hearing the band play, the sense of peace and security. A touch of old England with Brass bands and people just relaxing under the trees.

I remember going out to Clunes to some sort of community event. The bands were invited to all sorts of places just to add a sense of community and history and enjoyment. South Street was a big feature each year with crowds at the Civic Hall and the City Oval. Tanunda in South Australia. Coburg. Launceston on the old ferry.



Early 1930s, photo of Soldiers' Band member Stef Mitaxa who continued on in the band into the 1970s. Source: BMCB Archive



I remember him saying how back in 1971 the Greys, a Regiment in the British Army was being disbanded. They had a version of *Amazing Grace* which was popular on the hit parade at the time with bagpipes. So they decided they'd try to do the piece and they invited half a dozen bagpipers into the room to practise with them. They had to ask all but one to stop because they were drowning everybody out. That was a rare moment of cooperation between highland bands and brass bands!

– Noel Mitaxa



Hear the Royal Scot Greys' stirring rendition of *Amazing Grace*, recorded before they amalgamated in 1971.

Noel went on to explain:

Brass bands march at 95 paces to the minute, highland bands are 88, and that's why they always separate them at any big procession. From a highland band player's perspective brass bands are marching too fast!

On hearing his dad play and band humour:

He was just one of the crew. And you'd hear them stirring each other about this note or that note or this bit of timing.

I do remember him telling me about the bus trips home from some band contests where they'd be liquifying their throats. Dad was a non-drinker and they'd trust him to lead them with the cornet for the songs. And just for fun, he'd lift it a semitone each verse and each new song. These guys were finding themselves as sopranos and wondering why – it was just his way of stirring!

Commenting on band humour, Noel aptly noted, 'it builds the team'.

In answer to the question of what he thought the band meant to his father, Noel replied:

It was the love of music, and teamwork, I never heard him say a bad word about any other band member. He just loved the music. He hated 'geetars', classical music was his strength.

Those times, there was much more of a community feel because nobody had radios, or very few people did. If you wanted music you had to go and make it, or listen to it live.

Winning the championships in the 60s was a very proud moment for Stef. In later years he moved to what he called the 'Frugal Horn' because he didn't have the lung control or the power that the cornet required.

He was on the committee during his time and he was very, very loyal to the band. I remember him saying when the stocks were a bit low on members he was going down to practise with the 'quartet'!

– Noel Mitaxa

December 1974.

To Victorian Bands League

as a bandleader of many years. I would like to apply for the long service medal.

My life with bands started in 1926, with the City of Ballarat Band under Percy Coard.

The following year by Alf Revell, who took us, to 2 military camps as the band attached to the 8th Battalion Ballarat. We did a concert tour of Adelaide in 1928. In 1929 I transferred to the Ballarat, Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Band under Frank Wright. I have been with this band ever since - with the exception of a break during the war years.

I am at present serving a record term as President. and would be proud to wear the medal. yours forever a bandleader
Stefano. S. Mitaxa

1974, Stefano Mitaxa service medal letter. Source: BMCB Archive



DISCOVER MORE

Women in banding

Read about the fascinating counter culture of women in banding in *Early female brass bands in Australia: they were rare but they made their mark*, by writer and VBL archivist Jeremy de Korte.

Uncomfortable for whom?



7 March 1934, 'That Ladies' Band',
The Courier-Mail, Brisbane, QLD,
p 10. Source: Trove

Concert parties, 1970s style

At the end of this 1971 *Christmas messages from Vietnam* recording, we see the kind of concert parties that were being thrown in 1971 in Vietnam – a far cry from the concert parties of Alf Rowell, Bert Rasmussen or Frank Rollard's World War I or World War II army days.