

THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS

BANDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

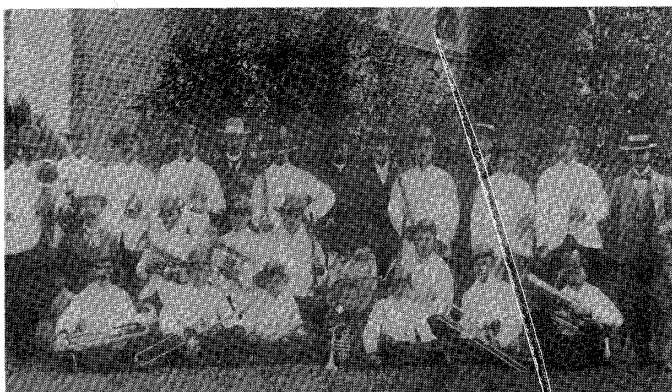
By *GEORGE BURGES, Secretary, Band Association of New South Wales.*

Reproduced from the Bandsman's Year Book, Australian 50th. Championship Band Contest, held in conjunction with Australia's 150th. Anniversary Celebrations, January 27th. to February 2nd. 1938.

Spasmodic and isolated attempts to foster band contests were made in the "80's and early "90's of the last century, but the first definite attempt to put them on a sound footing and to carry out contests with some semblance of order arose out of a meeting convened by Mr. C. Foret, proprietor of the "Intercolonial Band News", and held at Wollongong on 1st. January 1896, at which centre a band contest, won by the Fourth Regiment Band of Newcastle, conducted by Mr. W. Barkel, had just concluded.

At that meeting an ambitious scheme was launched to promote an Inter Colonial band contest on a much greater scale than previously dreamt of. Somewhat earlier, to be exact on November 24th. 1895, The Band Association of New South Wales had been inaugurated as a result of a meeting held in Sydney and convened by Mr. W.G.Cook, secretary of Redfern Borough Band. Many difficulties, some of which now read very strangely, were encountered when a set of rules for control of bands and for contesting were under consideration. In those days dance music at most of the harbour picnics was supplied by brass bands of eight performers, and at one of the early meetings of the newly formed band association the secretary of the then prominent Sydney Band expressed astonishment that the minimum number of members to compete with a band in a contest should be fixed at sixteen. He was very definite in his views that if a band was not able to play with a team of eight men it could not be called a band at all.

However the various conflicting opinions were reconciled, a set of rules agreed upon, officials elected and the Band Association of N.S.W. set upon it's feet, where it has remained firmly ever since. The original executive committee consisted of Messrs. R. Albury (Parramatta Model Band); S.A. Bibb (Glebe Borough); G.Gates (Premier); J.F. McCrory (Young Australia); C.A. Burton (Newtown); G. Burges (Cadet); F.Witton (Balmain Premier Coldstream); J.Moore (Enfield) and H.Peacock (Redfern Borough).

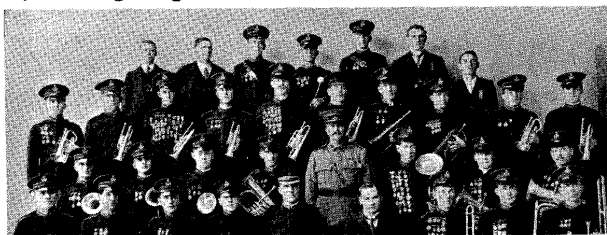


Berry Brass Band

As a result of the formation of the Band Association and the meeting held at Wollongong, events moved quickly and a committee was formed to implement the proposed contest, consisting of Messrs. J.H.Thompson, President; J.Palmer, Secretary; T.Mellor, Treasurer; G.Burges, Assistant Secretary; C. Helm, R. Chamberlain, R. Albury, G. Gates, W. Love, S. Bibb, F. Witton, W. Norris, W. Armstrong and H. Weaver.

The N.S.W. Government granted a subsidy of £250 to the fund and the contest, which was carried out at the Exhibition Building, Sydney, on November 7th. and 9th. 1896, and brought together bands from N.S.W., Tasmania and Queensland, there being nine competing bands in A grade and ten in B grade. The judges were Signor R.Hazon and Mr.T.P. Shaw, of Sydney, and Mr.W.T. Bates of Hobart. The A grade contest was won by Newtown Band and the B grade by Zeehan Military Band, from Tasmania. This contest may be fairly claimed as the first important band contest held in Australia at which there was any definite form of rules or system of control under which bands knew what they could and could not do.

Victoria soon after entered the contest field, and at Easter 1897, the Druids' Friendly Society promoted a contest which attracted Bands from N.S.W., Tasmania and New Zealand. At this contest all bands competed in the one grade, and it is worthy of note that it was not until 1905 that any system of grading was introduced into Victorian contests.



Rozelle Band

The Melbourne contest of 1897 attracted 11 competitors and was won by N.S.W. Railway Military Band, second and third places being also filled by N.S.W. Bands in Newtown and Glebe Borough. The Victorian Band Association, with headquarters at Ballarat, was formed in 1901 and from that date exercised its influence

in the control of contests in a similar manner to that of the N.S.W. Association with which it became affiliated.

At Christmas, 1898, Tasmania, which in those days had several important bands, including St. Josephs of Launceston (founded 1845), came into line with a contest on an Inter - Colonial scale held in Launceston, bands from N.S.W. attended.

It is worth mentioning that at the Launceston contest the N.S.W. Railway Military Band competed as the official representatives of N.S.W., having been selected for that honour by the combined N.S.W. Bands, and part of its expenses were defrayed by contributions from other bands. They were not successful however, and an unknown country band from N.S.W. McMahon's Hillgrove band, actually filled a higher position in the prize list. This band contained seven McMahon brothers, one of whom was the Conductor. The family subsequently migrated to the Western Australian Goldfields and by their outstanding ability lifted Boulder City Band of W.A. to a position where it challenged the very best bands that Australia could produce.

It was not for many years afterwards that the other states conducted band contests with anything more than a local appeal. Queensland's first attempt at a championship contest that attracted Inter-state competition was at Brisbane in 1914, the successful band being Rozelle District Band from N.S.W. Annual championship contests were continued thereafter.

The system adopted in Queensland differs from other states in that the Championship contest is held in a different centre in each year. The contest is held in one of the principal towns in the State and the venue has extended over the area from Brisbane and Toowoomba in the south to Townsville in the far north. Except that the 1931 contest was abandoned altogether and that the 'A' grade Championship contest lapsed in 1934, there has been no break since in the continuity in Queensland, culminating in the state's greatest effort in its Coronation Championship Band contest at Brisbane in 1937.

In recent years South Australia has carried out its championship contest regularly at Tanunda, while Western Australia, owing to its isolated position and sparse population, has only been able to hold championship contests occasionally. In 1931 Bondi Beach Band from N.S.W. won the W.A. Championship at Perth.

On two occasions N.S.W. bands have competed for the championship of New Zealand and were successful on both occasions, Newcastle City being the winners in 1906 and South Sydney (now known as Bondi Beach Band) in 1923.



Canbelego Town Band 1909

Band Associations were formed in the various states, and in February 1915 a conference was held in Melbourne at which an attempt was made to arrive at a set of contesting rules suitable for the whole Commonwealth. At the time there were several important differences in the views of the different Associations as to the proper method of band contesting. At the conference N.S.W. was represented by Messrs G. Burges and W.H.O'Donnell.

An attempt was made to set up a supreme band contest governing body for the whole of Australia, but the different views could not be reconciled and, although subsequent conferences were held in 1920 and 1921, no satisfactory settlement was arrived at. It remained for the Sydney conference of 1934 to bring into being a universal set of contesting rules and to establish the Australian Band Council, which is now the supreme band contesting authority in the Commonwealth. New South Wales was Represented at the Sydney conference by Mr. G. Burgess

Except for a championship contest in 1902, there was a temporary lull in N.S.W. from 1898 to 1904, but a definite revival took place in 1905, and only two years since (1907 and 1917) has Sydney failed to carry out its championship band contest.

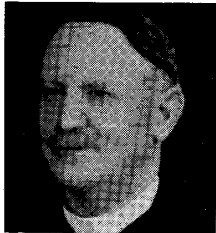


The only known 'Ladies Band' in New South Wales

Throughout all kinds of trials and tribulations Sydney's annual

championship contest has been a feature of band life in Australia, and except in the two years mentioned previously, the championship contest has been held with unbroken regularity since 1905. Wars, droughts, depressions and shortage of money have never broken the contesting spirit of the N.S.W. bands and, whether prize money has been large or small, has made little difference in the number of bands competing.

It is interesting to note that the history of banding records contesting concert bands as early as 1904. The Brisbane Municipal Concert Band was formed in 1904, by Mr. J.Hendry Grice, and held its first practices in his jewellery shop at the Valley. The first name was the Valley Concert Band. After a few contests as a brass band, a gradual development was made in the direction of a mixed band of reed and brass, otherwise a military band. Early in its existence, the band was granted a small subsidy by the Brisbane City Council, and changed its name to the present one. The band had mixed contesting success including a tie for 3rd. place in Sydney in 1913. This was the band's last appearance as a brass band, a decision being come to by the members to endeavor to promote, or induce other bodies to promote, competitions for mixed bands. Eventually, the South Street Society of Ballarat was persuaded to include a section for Military (or mixed) bands in their 1921 contest. The concert band entered for this, and was successful in pulling off the first prize of £175.



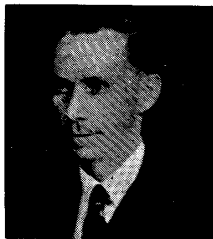
J. B. TOUGHER

To take a party, which numbered fifty people, to Ballarat cost well over a thousand pounds. There were only three bands in the Military Band Contest, the other two being the Launceston City Band of Tasmania, and the Victorian Railways' Military Band.

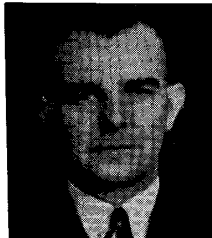
A few incidents out of the ordinary may be of interest: -

For the 1906 contest, twelve Sydney bands handed over to the contest fund £300, being their total earnings from the City Council Park programmes, and that contest was carried out in Hyde Park free to the public.

For the 1916 contest the Band Association of N.S.W. found itself without any money and the possibility of the championship contest being abandoned was contemplated. Better councils prevailed, however, and it was decided to offer the bands a contest on the best terms that could be managed. Total cash prizes of £50/10/0 were announced for the three grades, the first prize in the championship being £10. No less than fifteen bands competed.



GEO. McLEAN,



J. L. O'CONNOR

A total of £73 in cash prizes was announced in 1918 and 1919 and in 1918 twenty two bands competed, while in 1919 the number grew to twenty eight, including eight in A grade, for which the advertised first prize was £20 cash.

Never in its history has Sydney ever had to cancel a championship contest once it has been decided upon.



The Rockdale Band

In 1935 for the purpose of placing the annual championship contest on a sounder financial footing, the Band Association of N.S.W. joined forces with the Citizens of Sydney Organising Committee and, commencing with 1936, the Band Council of Control, consisting of representatives from the Citizens of Sydney Organising Committee and the Band Association of N.S.W., with Sir Samuel Walder as chairman, has managed the championship contests.

It is confidently expected that the Australian Championship Contest for 1938, carried out in connection with Australia's 150th. anniversary celebrations, will eclipse anything previously attempted in the Southern Hemisphere.



GEORGE BURGES, a fine service record.

Some of the more influential personalities in the first fifty years included George Burges who was the secretary in 1938 and had a good deal to do with the organisation of the National Band Championships that were a part of the "Australia's 150 Anniversary Celebrations".

At that time George Burges had been connected with banding in New South Wales for some 43 years. A testimonial dinner given in his honour, was held in January on the second day of the contest and it would be safe to assume that with so many bands gathered for the Championship event, there would have been a large gathering of bandspersons paying tribute to



The Newcastle Steel Works Band

THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS

RESEARCHED by KEN HUCKSTEPP, BILL BELCHER and KEN LUZZI

After the successful 1938 National Championship which was organised by the Band Association of N.S.W., very little of any great significance happened except that Mr George Burges, the inaugural Association Secretary, retired after 43 years of continuous service in that position. He was succeeded by P.A Fay.

Around this time also, the Bondi Beach Band obtained the sponsorship of the New South Wales St. John Ambulance Brigade. This band was to play a very important part in the progress of bands in New South Wales for many years after the war.

The war years proved to be rather lean as far as bands and banding were concerned both Nationally and in this State.



Bondi Beach Concert Band 1930s. Conductor Albert H. Baile.

The R.A.A.F. with 'Digger' Walmsley and the Eastern Command band under Lt Pearson were at this time and during the previous five years, perhaps the most busy bands in the Sydney area with lunch time concerts in Martin Place and parades and processions mostly to support fund raising for the war effort.

Because there had been little effort available for the training of youth during the war, many bands were severely depleted in the immediate post war period and the task of rebuilding fell to the then secretary, Frank Johnson and in the later 1940's, Arthur Green.



H 'Digger' Walmsley

Not many contests were organised and the bands were in fact not very strong. An indication of this weakness among the banding fraternity was the cancellation of the 1947 State Championships for lack of entries. This was the first time in the history of the Association that a contest, once decided upon, was cancelled. Although there were in fact some 67 bands registered with the Association, (all brass bands) the number of entries meant that the venture would be non profitable and too risky for the meagre funds available.

Another contributing factor may well have been the fact that the New South Wales Association was to host the Australian National Championships at Newcastle in September of that year.

The 1947 National event attracted 26 entries including two bands from New Zealand (Wellington Waterside Workers in 'A' grade and their Junior band in 'B' grade) along with several interstate bands.

A contest held at the North Sydney Oval in 1945, combined the 'A' grade section of the National Championships with the lower grades of the State Championships and was to be the beginning of the post war rebuilding of the bands in New South Wales.

At this event the R.A.A.F. Band stationed at Bradfield Park in North Sydney, conducted by 'Digger' Walmsley won the 'A' grade event with the St John Ambulance band under Charlie Bignal winning 'B' grade.

This contest marked the emergence of bands into contesting following the war years.

Even so band contesting in the State was very spasmodic and apart from the allotted National Championships in 1948, the Coronation Championships of 1953 and the 1955 Championships, the only contests organised by the Association were the City of Sydney events in 1950 and 1952. At the 1950 contest the 'A' and 'B' grades and the 'C' 'D' and Junior grades were combined, however in 1952 all grades competed. Both these contests were staged at the North Sydney Oval.

1951 was however important from the point of view of National Championships when, at Ballarat, 50 years of Federation was commemorated with a special trophy presented by the Federal Government which was won by the St John Ambulance Band under Albert Baile. To this day this magnificent trophy is housed at the St John Ambulance head quarters in Sydney. One other New South Wales band competed at this contest, Hurstville Municipal conducted by Jim Huggett. Jim entered the band in both 'C' and 'B' grade, winning the 'C' grade event and finishing fourth in the more senior event.



Albert Baile

At the end of the decade there was very little information available as there was no journal or newspaper published. Before the war the "Australian Bandsman & Orchestral News" was published by Allens Music in Melbourne and the "Music Maker & Orchestral News" had a band section, however both publications lapsed in the late 1940's along with "The Tempo" another publication which included information on the band scene.

Later the "Australasian Bandsman" was published by the well known New South Wales banding personality, Ted Simons.

Although it is quite common in the later part of this century to learn of bands making trips overseas, the first overseas trip after the war was made in 1952 by the Portland Boys Band who, under Ted Simons went to New Zealand.

Many New South Wales bands have since made the trip across the Tasman to compete in their National Championships, including Willoughby City, Blacktown City, St Marys District, Tuggerah Lakes, Newcastle P.C.Y.C. and Yagoona & District.

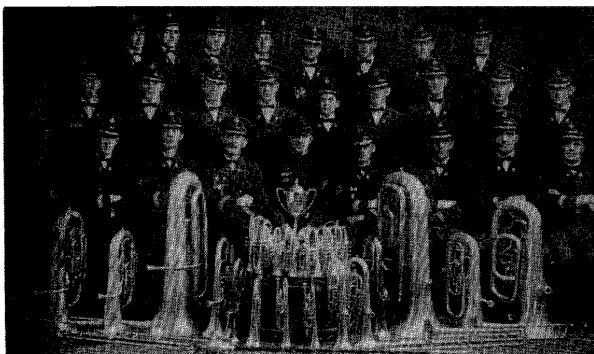
In the last decade bands from New South Wales have made very successful trips to countries much farther afield including The Hornsby Concert Band who have made more than one tour of Europe and America and the N.S.W. Fire Brigades Band who have also toured America. Other bands to travel to the other side of the world are the City of Sydney Concert Band and the Leichhardt Band both of whom included England in their tour with the later band taking in many other European countries.

In 1953 at Easter time, Les Turner introduced the Rockdale & District Solo & Party Competition. This event was later to become the State solo and party championships. This was a very successful venture attracting up to some 600 entries.

Many fine players emerged at this time as a result of this promotion including Ross Griffiths, Fred Combes, Terry Davidson, John Flynn, Peter Robertson and many others all of whom bore credit to the fine teaching that was now in place after the war years.

By 1953 contesting was again well under way and the "Coronation National Championship" was organised by the Association and held at the Kogarah Oval. Henry Geehl, well known in the band scene in England was invited to adjudicate.

Some Idea of the discipline that was expected of the bands that took part in the contests at this time, can be gained from the announcement at the 1955 contest, that the Burwood band had been disqualified



The Kogarah Municipal Band

because one of the players had broken the rules in that he failed to wear his cap on stage!

Les Turner was elected to the office of secretary in 1957 and for many years his influence was the driving force behind the Association.

Les was largely responsible for reintroducing the State Championships on a regular basis after an absence of some nine years. He was also the main motivator in ensuring that all State contests should be held in an indoor venue. An innovation that has been maintained to this day.

The dominance of the St. John Ambulance band throughout the 1950's diminished with the death of Bert Baile in 1961 and other bands that took over this mantle were the Broken Hill band under 'Digger' Walmsley and the Hurstville Municipal Band conducted by Jimmy Huggett. The Wollongong City Band and the Bexley Band were also very prominent in the State contesting field.



The Hurstville Band

Throughout the 60's decade, several innovative changes were introduced by the Association Executive.

Much due to the work of 'Cobber' Burnett, there was a move to hold more contests in Country areas which led to the National Championships being held in Dubbo in 1961 and again in 1966.

Other country towns that have organised State contests are:- Lismore (1962), Katoomba (1964), Wollongong (1977/81), Gunnedah (1976), Nowra (1980), Gosford (1982), Maitland (1984/92), Armadale (1985) and Newcastle (1988).

The formation of the Sydney Metropolitan Band Group (now the Sydney Metropolitan Band Branch) in 1961, was inspired by Vinie Furlong and Roy Orton (President and secretary respectively). Shortly after, other branches in the West, the North West and in Newcastle (now the Hunter Valley Region Branch) were formed.



The St John Ambulance Band marching at Ballarat

These branches have played a very important part in the development of the Association and today organise band and solo competitions on a regular basis.

The decade of the 60's saw many changes

1962 Les Bragg after some 20 years in official capacities for the Association, retired and was succeeded by Tom Gawn.

1963 Playing a hymn as part of the Band Championship was introduced. However this innovation was not popular with the bands and was subsequently withdrawn the following year.

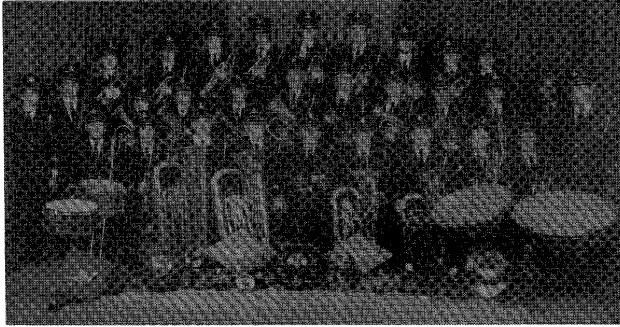
1964 Diagram marching in State contests was made optional for the first time.

1967 Helen Taylor, daughter of Massa Johnson, became the first woman to be appointed as Music Adjudicator for a band contest in New South Wales. There was no woman conductor of a registered band at the time and up to the present, Helen is the only woman to have been appointed as an adjudicator in this State.

1997 Was also the year in which a percussion solo was introduced into the State championships. The first winner was Hayden Huckstepp.

Another stalwart of the banding fraternity in New South Wales decided to retire in 1997. Les Smith, conductor of the Kogarah Municipal Band for the past 58 years and a band member for 68 years, decided to have a break. This record was considered at the time to be exceptional and remains today as a shining example of one mans dedication to one band.

The '60s were truly a period of significant change, none less that the introduction of low pitch instruments. Debates as to the pros and cons of changing took place at Association committee meetings and the then President, Tom Gawn, on one occasion offered the opinion that progressive bands would be well advised to make the change at an early date. Among the first bands to do so were The Broken Hill Industrial Band, The St Marys District Band, The Camden - Campbelltown & District Band and the Liverpool City Band.



The Bankstown City Band

Since the introduction of a concert band championship in 1968 there has been a steady growth in the municipal concert band, generating from the school band system.

More changes to the contesting rules came in 1969 when at the insistence of the bands the adjudicators at State championships were not enclosed in a 'box' and judged in the open. It is interesting to note that since 1988 the adjudicators have again been screened from the bands, also at the insistence of the registered bands.

In the one hundred years since the inception of the Association there have been many outstanding bands. None more so than the Willoughby City Band who have recorded 17 'A' grade section wins over the past 21 years. The junior band have an even more impressive record with 19 wins in the same period. Both bands have also enjoyed success at the national level, the Juniors having taken the Junior 'A' grade title on no less than 18 times out of a possible 21. This excellent record has been achieved under the guidance of Musical Director, Peter Walmsley whose son Matthew is now conducting the Junior Band.

Whilst today it is very common to see overseas adjudicators at the National Championships, it was in 1975 that the N.S.W. executive invited Geoffrey Brand to Australia to adjudicate. This was the first time that an overseas adjudicator had been appointed since Henry Geehl 22 years before.

Just prior to this contest, 'Cobber' Burnett took over the position of State secretary and remained the secretary until 1983, serving the Association with distinction.

In the bicentenary year 1988, the Band Association of New South Wales was again responsible for organising the National Band Championships. As an added attraction the John Foster & Sons Black Dyke Mills Band was engaged and made a very successful tour of the State, performing at the contest venue and the Sydney Opera House as well as many country centres.

Other bands from overseas have visited the State on previous occasions namely, Hammonds Sauce Works, Grimethorpe Colliery, C.W.S. Glasgow and Stocksbridge Steels. Several Salvation Army Bands have also visited notably the New York Staff Band and the International Staff Band. Notable instrumentalists have included Philip McCann, Steven Mead, David King, John Clough and Robert Childs all of whom have helped to raise the standard of players and bands alike.

With Norm Peverell as President and Cobber Burnett as secretary, the programme of State championships grew to more prominence and many of todays senior bands made great progress. Sutherlandshire Silver, Christian Brothers Lewisham, Holroyd Municipal (now City of Holroyd), Kahibah Bowling Club, St Marys Band Club and from the country, Gunnedah Shire, Dubbo, Orange City and Orange Industrial to mention but a few of the brass bands that are still taking part in State and National band championships. Concert bands that became well known during this period included Hornsby, Hills Music Academy, Newcastle City, Lane Cove, Bankstown P.C.Y.C., Sutherland P.C.Y.C. and Broadmeadow High & Community.

Meanwhile the State and private school system had begun to encourage the formation of bands, which were mainly concert bands thus offering the students a wider option in selecting instruments. By the 70's decade the concert bands had become a substantial part of the Association and today almost half of the bands that are registered are concert bands.

The foundation for today's high standard was however set by the dedication of many bandspersons who devoted much time to teaching the young learners many of whom are today's top players. Personalities like Teddy Newbury with the Moree Band, Harry Sloggett with the Orange City Band, Frank Simms who founded the Newcastle P.C.Y.C. Band, still among the finest junior bands in the country.

In the southern parts of the State Jack Toughter with the Wollongong Steelworks and the Cowra Band under Jack Grumley. In the west it was Ted Simons at Portland and the Lithgow Band, Digger Walmsley in Broken Hill and in Katoomba Wilf Dyason. Further north Alex Cluelow and the Gosford Band and in Armadale too a very successful band programme



Warratah Mayfield Band

where many young persons were introduced to the satisfaction that comes from making music.

All these people made a significant contribution to bands and banding in New South Wales and the tradition continues today with Peter Walmsley and Willoughby City, Ron Grice in Warratah, Jack Saunders in Warringah, Ken Bradley with the St Marys District band and Brian Mc Guinness following his father, Frank with the Sutherlandshire band.



Warringah Concert Brass

In 1989 a major step in administration took place under the Presidency of Norm Peverell and the then secretary Cliff Goodchild, later to become the President, when the Association became a company limited by guarantee. Thus the one time Executive Committee became the Board of Directors and the affairs of the Association came under the

watchful eye of the Corporate Affairs Commission. The appointment soon after of a full time Secretary/Administrator sees the Association today being run in a more professional manner than ever before.

The Band Association of New South Wales is today led by the President, Bill Belcher well known band personality following many years of broadcasting band music on A.B.C. Radio and Elaine Markham the Secretary/Administrator who very efficiently runs the affairs of the Association.

Still however the President, Treasurer and board of Directors are volunteers who give freely of their time as have many in the 100 years since the Band Association was first conceived.

There can be little doubt that in years to come many will follow, thus ensuring that the next 100 years as in the century before, will be one in which amateur music making through the medium of bands, will remain a major contributor to the quality of life in the society in which we live.