

BIRCHINGTON SILVER BAND

by Bill Evans
written in January 1963

In 1951 eight devoted amateur musicians got together to form what is now the 28 strong Birchington Silver Band. Five of the founders are still with the Band, including the three Hayward brothers - Raymond, Evan and Wilfred - together with Messrs Tom Horton and Edward Sturgess.

There was a Boys' Brigade Band in Birchington before the Second World War, followed by a British Legion Band in the later forties. But that lasted only about a year and it fell to the eight keen villagers to start the new band. "We were able to borrow the British Legion instruments", the chairman, Mr Raymond Hayward, told me, "and at the same time we had a loan of £150 from a well-wisher. He told us that if we repaid £100 in twelve months, he would remit the other £50. This we managed to do."

Buying instruments is a costly business, especially for a band whose members only paid 6d a week subscription. But in 12 years, funds have been built up from many of the Band's own performances, to be spent on silver instruments, now insured for over £2,000. Among the members, 16 of whom started in - and were trained by the Band - are carpenters, bricklayers, shop assistants, electricians, stocking makers, a bus driver and a shoe repairer. Eleven of the musicians are under 21.

The Band's voluntary spirit is shown by the fact that, during the winter it makes trips all over Thanet to play at hospitals and homes. One member described the Band's objects to me as: "Promotion of music and assistance to charitable institutions, as well as being a hobby."

Not all the members live in Birchington - another instance the enthusiasm of the Band fosters. Conductor, Mr Arthur Hollands, for instance, lives in Westwood, Broadstairs, and travels to Birchington for practice in the Old Scholars' Club in Park Lane, twice a week - on Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings. Mr Hollands, employed by a Ramsgate firm of builders' suppliers, is an accomplished musician and has done a lot to weld the Band into shape. Tapping his baton on the music stand at rehearsal, he called for "Rule Britannia" and immediately the bandsmen - and women - went into the stirring strains with a confidence which would not have disgraced a Royal Navy band at Portsmouth.

Trombones, euphoniums, cornets, drums - all blended together as the music-makers of Birchington followed the baton. Though several members of the Band are experienced amateurs, the high proportion of young players - boys and girls - competently handling the silver instruments is partly a reflection of the popularity of the famous trumpeter, Eddie Calvert.

"There is no doubt he is a big influence on young people," said Evan Hayward, the deputy bandmaster, "for several youngsters who cannot at first play a note, come along and tell me they want to play a brass or silver instrument 'just like Eddie Calvert'." The success which many of them earn in Birchington's Silver Band is due to Mr Hayward's teaching. "Every Friday night, I hold class for boy and girl players. About a dozen attend, and some of them progress very quickly." he told me. "For instance, our second trombone, Iain Maitland, has only been a member about a year."

Iain, who is also the Band's honorary secretary, is one of four young men who started playing in their late teens. The others are Ron Stanley and Alan Denby (percussion) and Peter Stringer (third cornet). Ron Stanley's contribution to the Band does not end with his ability to bang the cymbals. He has also embroidered the music

stand banners, as well as the Band's badge for the conductor's stand - a task that took him about fifteen hours.

For several, the Band is a family affair. There is Bernard Bushel (solo cornet) and his daughter Marion (second cornet); Arthur Fright (solo horn) and his son Graham (first horn); Leonard Crowther (bass) and his daughter Jennifer (flugelhorn). And, of course, the brothers Hayward: Wilfred (solo euphonium) and his daughter Cridwen (second baritone), while Evan plays the cornet and Raymond the soprano cornet. A fourth young lady player is Miss Janet Hogben, who plays the second horn.

An out-of-pocket expense which members cheerfully afford is the Band's new dark blue and red uniform, designed just over a year ago and now costing 22 guineas. Summer engagements have taken the band all over Kent, including concerts at Herne Bay, Dover, Gillingham and Ramsgate, and last year they played in Calais and Boulogne, having been guests of Eagle Steamers, and who took them to France in the "Queen of the Channel".

But their proudest moments come when they take part in the village life of Birchington. They make frequent visits to the parish church of All Saints to play at services, including the annual Carol Concert, organised by the Band. On one occasion they played at a United Service in the presence of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Fisher of Lambeth. Not the least of the events where members play regularly, however, is the Band's own annual sports and fete in August - an event which has become an annual highlight in Birchington's life.