

DCB FORMATION HISTORY

By Geoffrey Haydock November 2012

It hardly seems that 40 years have passed since I had the idea of forming a band to provide an outlet for anybody of any age to play and it is wonderful, 40 years on, to see such an enthusiastic well organised group still playing together. The two local bands (Dunbartonshire Concert Band & Dunbartonshire Wind Ensemble) are a great facility for wind, brass & percussion players and on occasion it should be mentioned cellos/double bass/harp and piano. Not every area in the UK is so well served as here in Milngavie/Bearsden.

Now that DCB is reaching a landmark in time, I thought that present and future members might be interested to know how and why the formation came about. I can only write of course about the people involved in the first 5 years.

The idea of starting a band arose because I had always, until becoming a profession clarinettist, played in a military band in England. In the early 70s I taught about 14 private pupils and found that as they developed and needed somewhere to play there was nowhere. I met the local area music organiser Jack Pickup at a BBC SSO Concert in Glasgow Cathedral and briefly told him my problem with regard to a playing outlet for my pupils. He could offer no help for the adults but suggested that the school age ones could join Strathclyde Schools Orchestra which met twice yearly. It could only accommodate a few players of course and with meeting only twice a year together and an audition process, it was not ideal. I arranged a meeting with Jack Pickup at the Council Office in Dumbarton and discussed my idea with Glyn Bragg who came with me. At the meeting Jack agreed to finance the proposed new Dunbartonshire County Concert Band by:-

1. Giving us the use of a school hall on Saturday morning
2. Allow us £50 a year for music
3. A fee of £1.73 per hour (each) to cover the Saturday Morning Rehearsal.

Jack Pickup was a fairly elusive figure but charming and charismatic and an extremely fine pianist. We were delighted to get such a positive response of help from him.

I chose Bearsden Primary School as public transport from Glasgow and other parts of the region made it very accessible and the use of the car park was an added bonus. Glyn and I went to see the local Milngavie Bearsden Herald office in order to create awareness of the venture. At that time music for concert band was not widely available and £50 didn't go very far. As a result the repertoire played in the first 5 years was mostly Military Band arrangements borrowed from the band in my home town in Lancashire and from Glasgow Military Band which although now disbanded met on Sunday afternoons in the bus depot in Springburn.

Bearsden Primary School proved to be a good choice in that the janitor Mr Payne welcomed the band into the school, allowing us use of any other rooms for sectional rehearsals.



As the first morning approached we didn't know what to expect, how many or what type of person or age would turn up. I knew that there would be at least 10 clarinets present because all my pupils were under strict orders to be there.

Over 40 people turned up on the first day with ages ranging from 7 to 70, Stewart MacIllwham now Principal Piccolo/Flute of the London Philharmonic Orchestra being 7 and Harry Flowers a notable Glasgow Lawyer 70. The lowest pitched instrument that we had on the first morning was a tenor sax played by Jimmy Weir.

From that January morning the band grew and by summer a band of around 80 gave a concert in Douglas Academy as part of Milngavie Week. The guest artists appearing with the band were Jennifer Caws (soprano) and the New Kilpatrick Singers conducted by Tryphina Nixon both accompanied by Elspeth Lowe. Pipers George MacIllwham and Matt Henderson also joined the band as soloists in *Amazing Grace* and *Intercontinental Gathering* a new march written by George MacIllwham for a gathering in Canada. Glyn Bragg and I shared the conducting for this inaugural concert. We had lots of help from players in Glasgow Military Band and my father (Clarence Haydock) brought his tuba on the bus from Bury to help.

I had booked the school hall directly through the regional offices, which offended the Headmaster Mr Halliday who duly summoned me to his school office, reprimanding me for not having the courtesy to ask him and telling me in future to contact him if there was to be any other concerts in the Academy. I remember writing to him the following year and he telephoned me to ask if from my scribbling's was he correct in deciphering that I wanted to book Douglas Academy. He then went on to make some verbal errors to which I replied "from your mumblings do I understand that it is OK with him?". He replied touchéit was fine and we could have the hall. All was fine for a second concert in 1974 with only the janitors moaning at me on the day because they had had to work on a Saturday. I later met with Mr Halliday when I was appointed clarinet teacher at the Music School of Douglas Academy and he said I seem to know you from somewhere but I denied ever having had any contact with him and was duly appointed.

By the time that the new autumn/ winter term came along Glyn had been appointed to the prestigious position of conductor of Whitburn Brass Band and I was left to conduct and run the band alone. Although the band had no formal committee I had a great deal of help from several people notably Fred Bright (clarinet) who looked after the music amongst other things, David Wilson (clarinet) who looked after ticket income money and my wife Penelope Smith (oboe) who organised the selling of tickets. We also had several helpful gifts of music stands; timpani etc. from Jack Little who was winding up Glasgow Teachers Orchestra at the time.

From August 1973 Tony Swainson (BBC SSO Tuba) replaced Glyn Bragg in being on the Strathclyde payroll and played tuba at rehearsals, occasionally conducting when I was otherwise engaged with Nigel Durno deputising on Tuba when Tony was conducting.



**Dunbartonshire
Concert Band**

The Dunbartonshire Council Concert Band enjoyed enormous help for the first five years from many professional musicians who came along voluntarily to play and coach. Among these were George MacIllwham (BBC SSO) Bill Kenchington (SNO) Albert Thompson (BBC SSO) Rita James (ex Sadler's Wells) David James (BBC SSO) Bob Jenner (SNO) Terry Darke (BBC SSO) Anthony Halstead (BBC SSO) Jenifer Caws (BBC SSO) and most of all Trevor Green (BBC SSO). Howard Nelson (Principal Flute of the SNO) also helped by conducting rehearsals when both Tony Swainson and I were unavailable. Although Glyn Bragg had given up conducting the band he still featured in every concert by doing what I think are the best arrangements ever for concert band. His arrangements for whatever guest choir we had in the Festive Fanfare Concerts at the City Hall gave the DCCB an added brilliance and quality not available to other similar bands. On reflection there were no other similar bands around at that time and the various groups now supported by the regional councils were yet to be formed.

Between Christmas and New Year 1973 the band took over the City Hall in Glasgow. There was at that time no hall available locally and there still isn't today that could do justice to the sound and size of The DCCB, which had now grown to around 120 players. The guest choir at the first concert was the Castlehill Primary School Choir conducted by Eileen Wilcox. Subsequent guest choirs at the City Hall were the Bearsden Borough Choir conducted by Renton Thomson and the New Kilpatrick Singers. The band in those days had no membership subscription and no funds to pay for the hall so I paid the hire costs for hall, piano etc. and hoped that everything would be OK. My wife Penny organised ticket sales and demand outstripped supply. For the few days up to the performance we were inundated with impassioned telephone pleas for more and more tickets for grandma and friends. The demand for tickets grew every year with each passing Festive Fanfare.

By January 1974 the numbers had grown again particularly with younger less experienced members joining. Trevor Green was now using the first part of each Saturday to coach the less able players assisted by Rita James. Mr Payne the ever helpful Janitor opened up the Gym and Trevor's group sat on the very low benches. Following the break everybody came together and played as one huge band.

Around February 1974 Dunbartonshire County Wind Ensemble (DCWE) was formed as a group on its own. The £50 a year from Strathclyde Regional Council was still being paid and they used that money to buy some of their early repertoire. Sitting on benches designed for Primary School children was not ideal and Jack Pickup funded through the Regional Council Castlehill Primary School for Saturday morning use by DWE along with Trevor Green at £1.73 per hour. D.C.W.E joined D.C.C.B. at their summer concert in 1974 and again at the Festive Fanfare Concert 1974 at the City Hall. Although the two bands were now separately organised they regularly came together in the first 5 years with Trevor Green's charismatic personality and enthusiasm eventually making DCWE into a very big 100 + group. Through the ranks of both bands came many fine players and DCWE have several ex members in full time orchestral posts. The two bands although now separately run had the same objectives that was to provide an outlet for



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those playing a musical instrument. DCCB still had no committee despite an attempt by me to form one however Trevor Green did have a very effective committee which gave him enormous support. Many of them weren't playing members but parents of children playing in DCWE and notable amongst them were Jock Ross, Ian Mitchell, Hamish MacLean,.....

During the first five years in addition to concerts in Douglas Academy and Glasgow City Hall the DCCB played in Glasgow Cathedral, Cairns Church and a Sunday Afternoon Concert in Kensington Hall. In the cathedral three new works were performed, *Diversions* by Michael Norris, *Suite for Flutes* by George MacIlwham and *My Love's in Germany* by Glyn Bragg. At the Kensington Hall Concert harpist Suhala Mount joined the Band on Harp and Carolyn Morley on Piano in a performance of the Finale from Shostakovich's 5th Symphony. Although there are recordings of all the DCCB Concerts from 1973 and some printed programmes and newspaper cuttings it is of course now looking back a pity that better records weren't kept.

There are several non-musical aspects that I remember during my time with DCCB. Following the 1974 summer concert at Douglas Academy a Mrs Margaret Rose wrote a letter to the local Milngavie Bearden Herald. Mrs Rose berated me for the band playing rubbish when there was such good music to play. Replies to her filled pages in the then broadsheet M&B Herald and even Sunday Papers telephoned for information and comment on the story. In reply to her original letter entitled "Musical Tripe and Sin" in which she had said that the concert '*only confirmed a hundred fold to me what I have felt since settling in this delightful area of Bearsden just 11 years ago. It was apparent to me that there was nothing worthwhile musically & that people were content to wallow in that mass of a musical ginger water and honey...*' etc.etc. I didn't have to reply to Mrs Rose. Glyn Bragg wrote a letter via the M&B pointing out all the benefits of playing a musical instrument in a band and many parents and members replied again via the M&B letters of support for DCCB politely telling Mrs Rose not attend again. It was great publicity and both bands grew again in membership.

After 5 years or so of establishing, conducting and developing the band I was delighted when Glyn Bragg now free from his Whitburn Band commitment agreed to take over conductorship which was announced at the City Hall during my final Festive Fanfare Concert in 1977.

Every Musical Director has his own way of moving an organisation forward and it is good to see Robert Baxter (ex-player) doing such a wonderful job as musical director with both DCB and DWE. Such organisations are very important in society and many such bands have folded but with good leadership DCB looks all set for another 40 years.