

BRITAIN'S BANDS (1)

Every schoolboy knows that an army marches on its belly, but it marches faster and farther if its feet move to music. This is the first of a series of short histories of the most famous bands of Britain. The author is an expert who prefers to remain anonymous.

H.M. GRENADIER GUARDS BAND

THE Band of H.M. Grenadier Guards made its first American appearance in Boston in 1872, when it played to 200,000 people. At the end of the performance it played "God Save the Queen," accompanied by a chorus of twenty thousand voices, the big organ, the ringing of church bells, and the thundering of cannon.

But its history goes back to the days of the Stuarts.

The loyal English who shared the exile of Charles the Second in Flanders in 1657 were formed into six regiments, the first of which was called the "Royal Regiment of Guards."

The year 1685 was indeed an "annus mirabilis" for music, not only because it saw the birth of Handel, Bach, Domenico Scarlatti: on January 3, King Charles authorised the maintenance of twelve hautbois in the King's regiment of Foot Guards.

That was the genesis of what we know to-day as H.M. Grenadier Guards Band, the title of "Grenadier Guards" having been given to the first regiment of Foot Guards in 1815, recognition of their having defeated the French Grenadier Guards at Waterloo. The band was in Paris during the occupation in the same year.

Paying The Piper

It was then in charge of its first bandmaster, James Blayney, a clarinet player. As far back as 1657 the regiment had two drummers to each company, but five years later the position of drum-major was created with pay at eighteen pence a day. One solitary piper (fifer) at one shilling a day was also added to the strength of the regiment, and within two years Pete Vanhausen, a fife instructor, was made available to the regiment to teach one man in each company how to play that instrument.

CAMERA COMPETITION

Comments By Judge

ON the opposite page we announce the prize-winners in our Camera Competition, and reproduce three of the winning photographs.

The number of entries was very large, but many had to be rejected because they did not comply with the conditions laid down when the Competition was first announced. Some were miniatures; a considerable number were too indistinct for satisfactory reproduction on any class of paper; others were suitable for reproduction on art paper only. Some had already appeared in other publications.

Those that went finally to the Judge came from all parts of the Dominion, and were the work both of professionals and of amateurs. These are his remarks:

"One of the outstanding advances of the last few years has been the extraordinary progress on the technical side of photography—due doubtless to the demands of the film world. This advance is obvious in the photographs submitted for the competition. The technical standard was very high. The imaginative qualities however were by no means encouraging. Many of the subjects were very hackneyed, and the inventive efforts were too obvious. However, the results are of considerable value and I am sure that quite a number of the submitted works will find their appropriate places in future pages of 'The New Zealand Listener.'"

"The human values were on the whole deficient; remarkably few of the photographs suggest that the people in New Zealand do anything but indulge in 'day-long blessed idleness,' and of course we know that that is definitely not the case."

From such modest beginnings has grown the magnificent organisation we now hear almost nightly on New Zealand radio. In 1934 we had the additional thrill of seeing the bandmen in action in New Zealand.

From 1815 to 1856 various successors to James Blayney wielded the baton, and in the latter year the band came under the direction of its most famous bandmaster, Dan Godfrey, the son of the director of H.M. Coldstream Guards Band. The Grenadiers took a big step forward under his inspiring leadership of forty years.

A Doctor of Music

Dan Godfrey attracted the attention of Queen Victoria so much that on the occasion of her Jubilee in 1887 she had him gazetted a Lieutenant. He was the first bandmaster in the British Army to receive a commission.

On Godfrey's retirement in 1896, he was succeeded by Mr. Albert Williams, Mus. Bac., who later took the degree of Doctor of Music at Oxford, and was the first British bandmaster to possess that distinction. Lieutenant (now Major) Miller succeeded Dr. Williams, and under him the band of seventy players has gone on from strength to strength.

The Grenadiers, being the First Regiment of Guards, take precedence at the annual ceremony of Trooping the Colour, and are stationed on the right of the formation.

Romantic Uniform

There is romance, too, in the uniform of the Grenadiers. The chevrons of woven silver wire, dipped in gold, cover the Grenadier's breast, and as the men put it, they are the only regiment which is entitled to wear a "full breast of ribs." In the other regiments there are gaps in the series. Those ribs, according to tradition, are the survivals of the skeleton designs with which fighting savages were painted. So are the scarlet seams on the blue trousers.

Is it any wonder the Guardsman is jealous of a uniform with such a story? There was nearly a riot when the Geddes axe fell, about 1920, and it was announced that the mourning bands of the time-beaters would be abolished to make the uniforms less costly. The men were almost mutinous about it, and in the end they gained their point. They could not save the bullion from the epaulettes, though. Now they wear "wings" decorated with a little gold braid, and the original function of epaulettes, to protect the shoulder from sword blows, is almost forgotten.

It takes six years to make a passable bandsman, but a lot depends on the instrument. Even after twenty years on the French horn a man is just beginning to be able to play it.

Under Major Miller, the son and grandson of military bandmasters, it is easy to believe that the band has reached a degree of efficiency that warrants certain famous words set to the melody "The British Grenadiers," which is the regimental march—

*But of all the world's great heroes
There's none that can compare
With a tow row row row row row
To the British Grenadiers.*