

Bands on the AirSeries No. 1

# Canterbury Pride

## Veteran Conductor Recalls Highlights in History of Woolston Band

Special To The "Record"

by

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**F**ORTY-FIVE years ago, out of the Woolston Rifles and the Oddfellows' Lodge, was born the Woolston Band. Its balance and mastery of music is well known to New Zealand listeners. It has stepped from success to success all its life.

Conductor R. J. Estall, interviewed at his home last week, told me a graphic story of the band's progress.

The first conductor, he said, was George Bonnington, who was followed by E. C. Derry, Alec Lithgow (the famous composer), Lieutenant Siddall, who started the band in contest work, and A. Mullinger. In 1915 the band won the championship of New Zealand, but during the war years following there were no contests.

Here are the highlights in the story of one of the finest New Zealand bands to broadcast:—

**VETERAN ESTALL** has been with the band 35 years. He started his musical career in a school band, later joining the celebrated Jupp, the Wellington Garrison Band, and, finally, Woolston. He has played under Capt. W. S. King, James Crichton, and Lieut. Siddall, all famous men in the brass band world.

**THE** players come from all walks of life. To-day there are only four playing members who were with the band when Mr. Estall took it over. They are W. Lanham, R. Barber, G. Wilson and P. Dunn. In the personnel there are clerks, painters, plasterers, motor-body builders, railway and Post and Telegraph men.

**WOOLSTON** once had the honour of a five-hours' lesson from Alec Owen, conductor of the Besses o' the Barn. Mr. Estall found that experience of inestimable help to him and his band conferees.

**ALTHOUGH** not a military band, Woolston is under stern discipline. The performers are chosen just as much for their behaviour as for their musical ability, and they always receive high praise from contest officials. There are no rules, except the one of esprit de corps. Any man who "lets the band down" would receive the frigid shoulder from the others.

**THE** combination is purely voluntary and amateur. All receipts from broadcasting and other performances go



CONDUCTOR R. J. ESTALL.

*"I have been with the band 35 years . . ."*

into the band fund, which is responsible for all instruments and uniforms.

**THERE** are two rehearsals a week—more at contest time. To date, Woolston has won over £4000 in competition work.

**B**AND music, particularly the music of competent New Zealand combinations, is becoming increasingly popular with radio listeners. In the belief that thumbnail histories of these bands will be of wide interest, the "Record" here presents the first of a series of special articles.

**A** TRUE brass band can never be used for jazz or swing music, says Mr. Estall. It is totally unsuited to the purpose. The great masters of to-day are composing for brass — Elgar, Bantock, Gheel, Gustav Holst and Bath. They are not turning out arrangements, but producing original compositions.

**HYMN-PLAYING** is most popular. In the fan mail after a broadcast the band generally finds requests for at least two more hymns on the programmes.

**TO-DAY**, many musical combinations are experimenting with new arrangements for the National Anthem. Its original, simple form is the only one, and the Woolston Band adheres to that strictly.

**PLAYERS** sometimes get nervy, even at rehearsals. Once a man roared out at the conductor: "I can't play, and I won't!" It was arranged for him to have a day's run in a car. He was perfectly all right next night. A cornet player broke down on the stage, and the band played an accompaniment with no melody. Even then it finished up second.

(Continued on page 41.)