

Bugle Band Contest - WEST OF ENGLAND BANDSMAN'S FESTIVAL.

When does a contest become an institution ? How many years passed before the annual West of England Bandsman's Festival became such an essential part of the social calendar in Cornwall for so many people, not just for brass band enthusiasts, but for the public at large. How could those doughty villagers who staged the first open air Festival in 1912, to raise funds for a working men's institute and band room in Bugle, have foreseen that the festival would still be going strong a century later.

One of the prime movers of the festival was F J P Richards who recalled, "going to the Bank with 44 sovereigns in my pocket, each sovereign put up by committee and friends to ensure the Prize Money". One of many long serving officials, he remained involved as Secretary and Promoter until his death in 1961. Back in 1912, on the 14th of September, some 6000 people crowded into fields at Peniel, a farm on the outskirts of the village, to hear ten bands from Cornwall and one from Devon compete for those golden sovereigns. The victors, judged by G H Mercer, were Camborne Town in Class A and Foxhole Temperance in Class B. With such a success it was inevitable that the festival would continue and with the exception of the war years it has been held in the village in the open air ever since.

Popularly known as the Bugle Contest, one of its unique attractions is that the competing Bands march down through the village to the Contest Field to start the day and back during the evening, the winners proudly bearing their Trophies before them. During the march all traffic is brought to a standstill and the winning Band in the Championship Section halts in the village Square to give a short concert, ending by tradition with Deep Harmony.

The current Contest Schedule lists no less than thirty-five Trophies available to be won, by both Bands and individual players, including the unique and prestigious Royal Trophy, presented to the festival in 1913 by the then Prince of Wales, Duke of Cornwall. From 1934 until quite recently the Duchy of Cornwall also presented a set of Prince of Wales' Medals, one for each player and the Musical Director, to any Band who won the Royal Trophy three times in a row. Since then, this has been achieved fourteen times, by St Dennis on seven occasions, Camborne on six and St Austell once.

In the early years people travelled to the festival on foot, by horse and cart and by train, but as the years went on the motor car took over and by the early sixties Peniel, with its Bandstand built across a hedge between the fields and cars packed in nose to tail, became too small to cope. In 1966 the festival transferred to the Molinnis Park, closer to the heart of the village, where it remains to this day. With cars on one side of the Bandstand and seating on the other, there is ample opportunity for listening and conversation with old friends and visits to the famous Tea Tent for Pasties and Cream Teas.

Over the years many famous brass band names have become involved with Bugle, William Rimmer wrote his march, Royal Trophy, for the festival and in 1974 Eric Ball wrote his Cornish Festival Overture for the 50th Festival. For that Festival the present Duke of Cornwall presented an inscribed silver Trumpet to be awarded to the Outstanding Cornet Soloist, a prize that went to the late Bill Buzza of The St Austell Band. Eric Ball followed this with Peniel in 1976, named after the festival's spiritual home, and in more recent times Goff Richards wrote both The Aeronauts and Oceans for the Festival. The list of Adjudicators reads like a Who's Who of the brass band world and over the years many famous Bands have come to compete in the Cornish air, including Black Dyke, Munn & Feltons, Cory and Carlton Main.

As an Open Contest Bands are welcome from anywhere and have travelled from all over the United Kingdom and even Europe to enter. The day, however, is particularly dear to the hearts of the Bands and people of Cornwall. They continue to flock to Bugle each year, as they have done now for a century, to meet old friends, make new ones, and to play in and enjoy the sound of their Bands in this unique setting in the heart of the County, with the great spoil heaps of the China Clay Industry towering above the village.

To have remained successful for a Century is a tribute to the single mindedness and unfailing support of the many officials, bandsmen, conductors, adjudicators, and sponsors, as well as members of the general public, who have recognised the importance of this very special Festival and its place in the Brass Band World. The present team of dedicated officials rightly continue to uphold the traditions of the festival, whilst at the same time making subtle changes aimed at improving conditions for Bands and spectators to ensure this great day of Banding continues for many years to come.

By Phillip Hunt

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