

MEN WITH MUSIC IN THEIR SOULS

ALBERT KEARSLEY gave half a century of service to St. John's Brass and Reed Band and, looking back on it all now, those fifty golden years have become one long golden day in his life. "They were great times lived with great companions," he says; "I am very proud of St. John's Band, and proud of the men I paraded and played with." Men, too, like Jack Fitzgerald and Patrick McGrath like to talk of the early days of the Band, and to recall some stirring incidents in the years before the First World War.

When Albert Kearsley joined the Band in 1912, F. P. Moane, Senr., was bandmaster, and the group was known as St. John's Temperance Band. Other bandmasters under whom he played were Ned Moloney and Jim Imbusca, and then he took over charge of the band himself. Part of the Temperance Hall was used as a bandroom, and there they practised to reach a standard of perfection that made the Band one of the showpieces of Limerick.

Limerick was proud of the Band, and the Band took on some proud assignments. On the instructions of the then President, Rev. Fr. J. Carroll, the group, 48 strong, played at Tadhg Barry's funeral in Cork, and at the funeral of Captain Starr in Nenagh.

But perhaps Albert's most memorable experience was during the troubled times after the Insurrection of 1916, when the bands were forbidden by the military authority to parade in public.

Albert ignored this interdiction, and on the occasion of a national procession brought out his band and paraded it up his back street, "I was on my way up that the Boherbuoy band had been attacked, and that it was dangerous to go any further than Cathedral Place," he says. "Turning down Cathedral Place he played 'The Last Stand,' a quick march, and as they reached the bandroom, he ordered the members to lock up their instruments immediately.

The Black and Tans were approaching, and running upstairs to the billiard room, he hid for an hour under the window sill in a back compartment. He got home without incidents, but some other members of the band were sought out by the Tans, and had to be taken to hospital as a result of the beatings they received.

WORKINGMEN'S BAND

The Band eventually broke off its association with St. John's Temperance Hall, and when it reformed under its own management it was known as St. John's Workingmen's Band. For many years subsequently they played under the baton of Albert, and during his time they had the contract for playing at all the principal G.A.A. matches including Munster finals. The Band was a familiar sight at these great sporting fixtures, as led by their Bandmaster, they paraded the field.

During the years of the Emergency the musical instruments were laid one side. But on the occasion of the visit of a Cardinal to the Cathedral, Albert was asked by the Administrator to get the members together and parade for the important occasion. The members had disbanded, the instruments were locked away in a cellar of the building, but Albert immediately set about his task and in the incredibly short time of five nights had his band fully prepared.

Albert retired from the Band at Christmas, 1963. It was a long time ago, 1912, that he had joined its ranks, but nevertheless he was the first band to play with. He first stepped it out with his brother in the Boherbuoy Band, and one of the members of this other great band was the famous euphonium player, Ned O'Reilly. Albert himself played the euphonium and he was quick to realise that the expertise of O'Reilly bordered on genius.

When on holidays in Kilkee, Albert, with other St. John's men like Johnny Clarke and Paddy Naughton, paraded and played with the local band. Men like these had music in their souls and they liked to share the joy of it everywhere they went.

JACK FITZGERALD

Eighty-eight years old Jack Fitzgerald of 10 Garsfield Court, Garryowen, is probably the last surviving member of the Victuallers' Band. He joined in 1895 as a trombone player, and some of his companions were: Stephen Collins (euphonium); Dan Doyle (baritone), Joe Doyle (bass), Ned Wallace (bass), Jack Kelly (trombone), Switzer O'Brien (trombone), De Hogan (drums), M. Hanley (drums), Jack Mackey (tenor horn player), Eugene McMahon (do), Keyes (drum), Paddy Naughton (bass), and his brother (E flat clarinet), Frank Collopy (clarinet), Tim Quane (clarinet), Mullins (bass) and Paddy Lillis, bandmaster.

In 1897 the Victuallers were disbanded, and for the years that followed Jack served in the Army in such faraway places as India, Aden and Tibet. He re-enlisted during the Great War of 1914-1918 and took part in several expeditions that now have their place in military history. He spent three months in hospital recovering from wounds he had received in action at the front.

When he re-joined the Band on his return to Limerick in 1919 Jack was playing with such men as Jack Healy (big drum), Mick Powell (bass), Pa Keane (bass), Paddy Naughton (trombone), Dan Healy (trombone), coronet players Jim Maher and Messrs Donovan, Canty and O'Brien of Pennywell; Albert Kearsley (euphonium), Ned Reilly (euphonium), Willie Reeves (saxophone), Jim Kieley (E flat sax), H. Montgomery (slide drums) and clarinet players Cantillon, Cuddihy, Reeves and O'Reilly.

If Jack had a lively time at the front, things were not too quiet either on his return to Limerick in 1919. In November of that year a public procession to Mount St. Laurence Cemetery in memory of the Manchester Martyrs (Allen, Larkin and O'Brien) was planned. The Tans

had thrown a cordon across the top of William St. and as the St. John's Band detoured up Chapel Lane to Cathedral Place they met the Boherbuoy Band coming back.

The commemorative parade was now out of the question, and just as the band had reached their headquarters the Tans closed in and as Jack put it "flammed all rough them." And for the rest of that evening Jack was hard put to it to convince himself that he was in the outpatients' department of a Limerick hospital and not in a field hospital in Flanders!

PATRICK McGRATH

Another old campaigner with fond memories of those early days is 82-year-old Patrick McGrath, of 28 Bengal Tce. Patrick

was born in Lelia St. at the foot of the old Town Wall, next door to Mick Hogan's public house, and worked with Arthur Guinness & Son for a number of years. He saw service in the Boer War and the Great War and has a fine collection of historical works on the latter.

He was a prominent member of the great Shamrock Football Club team of 1903, 1904 and 1907 (The only other survivor of that great winning combination is, I am given to understand, Denny Maher.) Patrick played also on the old Lansdowne team with Bow Higgins, Mick O'Brien (postman), the Kennedys (stone-cutter), Mick Hartney, Willie Foley and Tom McNamara.

Patrick had a special twinkle in his eye as he recalled the Christmas Eve night of many years ago when 'four' friends

went to the bandroom (which was on the floor above the Shamrock Club) and as he says: "put in a bit of practice." And, seeing the night that was in it, they decided to live up to the town and play in Christmas Day.

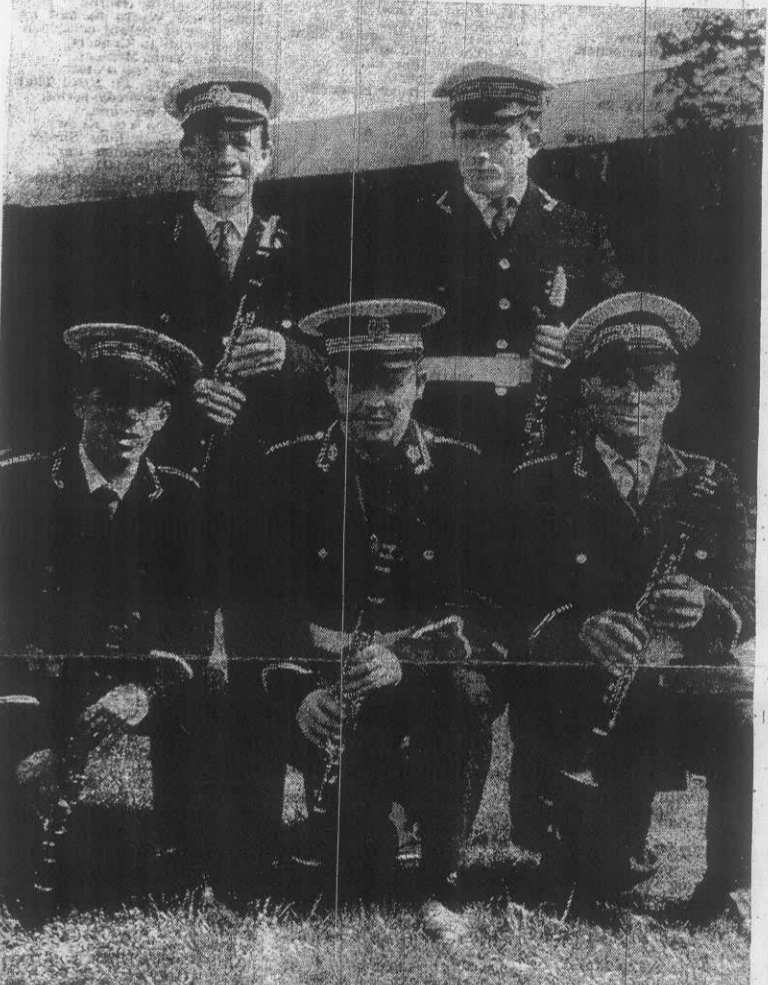
With instruments at full blast they paraded up Garryowen, and down the Pike, and, as none of the quartette were members of the band, the music was rather discordant!

Eventually, the Night Watch decided to take a band, but the four would-be musicians successfully eluded them. And back in their local for the next few weeks they had difficulty in holding back the laughs as their companions spoke in awe about a phantom band that played through the old town in the early hours of Christmas Day.

Members of St. John's Brass and Reed Band pictured at a gathering in the Shannon Arms about 1910. (l. to r.)—Tommy Braddish, Josie O'Brien, Albert Kearsley, Paddy Naughton, Joe Nash and Johnny Clarke.



Bass players Paddy O'Donoghue and Michael Kelly.



Clarinet players, front row (l. to r.)—Michael Hinchy, Mick Cantillon, Joe Curtin. Back row—Mick Enright and Joe Cantillon.



Drum section (front), Cyril Duggan (back)—Thady O'Dwyer, Jimmy Miller and Paddy O'Halloran.

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