



Aldbourne Band 

Aldbourne Band Heritage Project 2014



Produced by the Friends of Aldbourne Band

Founded 1860



The village of Aldbourne is found about six miles northeast of Marlborough, nestling in the Lambourn Downs of Wiltshire, and has been home to the award-winning Aldbourne Band for over 150 years.

Integral to village life since its early history, the brass band attracts top-level amateur players from both the village and further afield and continues to go from strength to strength. It has been highly successful in contests, particularly in recent years, and has performed at the Royal Albert Hall, Festival Hall and been broadcast on national radio.

The band has also played in prestigious concerts at venues across the country with special guests including Evelyn Glennie, and most recently gave a première performance of an arrangement of Grieg's Piano concerto with the soloist Oliver Williams.

"Napoleon's coming! Quick, let's form a band!"

The Aldbourne Band was founded in 1860 by the organist of St. Michael's church. It was, in a way, an indirect response by the villagers to the very real threat of invasion by Napoleon and the French. Across the country, this fear had given rise to the formation of hundreds of volunteer forces, and those of the local towns of Swindon, Calne, Wootton Bassett and Marlborough had also gone on to form their own rifle corps. Not to be left out, the inhabitants of Aldbourne decided to join with surrounding

villages to form a rifle corps of their own, but at the same time to start a brass band to which some principal members of the village subscribed handsomely.



The first photo of the Aldbourne Band in 1861 shows them in a uniform in the style of the rifle corps, paid for by a Mr F. W. Neate Esquire. The band's very first public engagement is recorded as having been in August 1861. A report reads:

"A picnic party on Tuesday last, proceeded from this place, headed by the Aldbourne Brass Band under the able leadership of Richard Brown Bunce, assisted by Messrs Palmer and Smith, to Mrs Sheppard's meadow."





Very soon, the band became involved in many aspects of village life. In 1887 they are reported as having played in West Street Meadows as part of the village celebrations of Queen Victoria's Jubilee. They played at football matches, sports days, political meetings and national celebrations and in 1900, when news of the relief of Mafeking reached the village, bells were rung, flags

waved and the band led a torchlight procession. A year later, they played suitable music on the green prior to a service of mourning upon the death of Queen Victoria.

By the early 20th century, the band had started entering and winning brass band contests. The photo below shows them at the National Brass band festival at Crystal Palace in 1911. The band had got rid of their old uniform by now, choosing to spend money instead on quality instruments. The instrumental line-up had changed too, with euphoniums replacing the old ophicleides (see picture, top right). A full brass band



GRAND NATIONAL BAND FESTIVAL, CRYSTAL PALACE, 1911.

line-up would consist of 10 cornets, a flugelhorn, 3 tenor horns, 2 baritones, 2 euphoniums, 3 trombones, 2 E \flat basses and 2 B \flat basses plus percussion.



At this time, there were hundreds of brass bands across the country based in local communities and industries. All the Aldbourne players in 1911 would have come from the village.



Disbanding and re-banding!

This pre-WW1 photo includes five band members who were to lose their lives on the battlefields of Belgium. Upon the outbreak of war, band activities were stopped but it is said that members of Aldbourne Band helped to form the 7th Service Battalion Wiltshire Regiment in 1915. Bandsmen Frank and Alfred Jerram and Fred Barnes certainly took their instruments with them when they signed up and the Jerram brothers can be seen in the picture below, taken in France in 1915 as members of a band formed from various regiments for a visit from Earl Haig.

When the end of the war was declared in 1918, the village celebrated with their usual gusto by holding a peace celebration and





some 200 children led by the band paraded around the village. As soon as the men returned to their homes, the bandsmen amongst them were soon back together and it is reported that throughout 1919, the band could be heard playing somewhere in the village every Saturday evening.

Taking their banding seriously

In 1922, the band appointed their first professional conductor, Mr Fred Dimmock, who was an orchestral trumpet player from London. He went on to conduct the band until the outbreak of WW2. In the photo below, the band show off with some of their contest trophies on the steps of the Old Rectory.



The Memorial Hall becomes the band's home

Again, a war meant that the band was temporarily unable to continue, but in 1946 efforts were made to get things going again. There were problems with finding somewhere to rehearse regularly, but in the 1950s the band was offered the use of the Memorial Hall on Tuesday and Friday evenings.



These evenings were now free as a group had relinquished their booking, so what had up to that point been 'Film Night' now made way for band rehearsal. To this day, these are the evenings on which the band practices. The photo above shows the band with their bandmaster, Joe Alder, who was central to reforming the band after the war.

The Band continues to be involved with village life



The origins of the band had connections with St. Michael's Church through the organist Richard Bunce Brown, and those connections still flourish today. The band often performs in the church, and has strong connections with St. Michael's Primary School.

They march in the annual carnival, lead the Remembrance Parade and service, and form a central part of village life during both the summer months and at Christmas time.

Christmas festivities

Christmas in Aldbourne would not be complete without the Aldbourne Band! Each year a joint concert takes place in the Church with the children from St. Michael's Primary School, and the band enjoy playing for community carols around the pond.

Throughout December, small groups from the bands will travel around the village playing carols for residents as they fundraise. There is a longstanding tradition of playing carols in the church tower at 4:30am on Christmas morning. The first recorded instance of this was reported in the *Marlborough Times* in 1898. As many of the bandsmen were also bell ringers who would be needed to ring at 6am, they opted for the early start, a tradition that continues to this day!



The Pond Concerts

The Square – the area around the village pond – has traditionally been the village gathering place whenever there is great news and often the band has marched out to meet any visiting dignitaries. In the 1970s, the band started performing regularly around the pond on the first Sunday evenings of June, July, August and September, creating the 'Pond Concerts', as we know them today.

Over the years, it has become a tradition to locate the August concert on the village green in the afternoon and to call it 'Proms on the Green'. The audience brings a picnic, cakes are sold and flags waved in a very traditional British celebration with music from the 'Last night of the Proms'.



The Training Band

Formed in 2011, the Aldbourne Training Band provides an opportunity for young musicians to continue the 150-year tradition of brass banding in the village. Many of the Training band members are dabchicks (the nickname for anyone born in Aldbourne) and some are even third- or fourth-generation Aldbourne Band members!

The Training Band have recently taken over from the Senior Band in providing music for the annual combined churches summer fete on the green, and they also perform at school fairs and play carols at the Aldbourne Forge open evening every Christmas.

Although most of the players are aged between 9 and 14, some retired bandsmen come along to share their experience, as well as a committed group of other adult players who support the youngsters.

Friends of the Aldbourne Band

In 2009, the Friends of the Aldbourne Band was formed as a way to give fans and enthusiasts a way of expressing their support in both financial and practical ways. As one of the Friends' objectives involved promoting and supporting band training and education, a Training Band was started in 2011. This was extended in 2013 with the addition of a Beginner Band.

The Friends also obtained a grant from the Lottery Fund to record the rich history and legacy of Aldbourne Band. Documents and photos are being digitally captured and oral interviews from past members recorded. There is a wealth of stories and anecdotes that have been discovered through old newspaper cuttings and previous band members' research, which is absolutely fascinating.

The family names of Alder, Barnes, Barrett, Jerram, Palmer and Sheppard crop up time and time again and it is fascinating to see that four of those names are still represented in the bands today.

This leaflet has aimed to give you a taster of the history, legacy and ongoing presence of the Aldbourne Band. For band news, information about the Training Band or the Friends of Aldbourne Band please visit www.aldbourneband.org.uk, where you can also read news of any village activities involving the band.

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