

<i>Month & Year of Topic</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Written & Spoken Presenters</i>
November 2006	The History of the Kogarah Municipal Band	Alec Leach

Copyright Except where material is attributed to an earlier creator, you may copy, distribute, display, download and otherwise freely deal with this work for any purpose, provided that you attribute Oatley Heritage Group as the owner. However, you must obtain permission if you wish to (a) charge others for access to the work or (b) include the work in advertising or a product for sale, or (c) modify the work.

Disclaimer: Some material prepared by the Oatley Heritage Group is based on information provided by its members or others and is intended to be for general information purposes; as to its accuracy, therefore, no warranty is given or implied.

OATLEY HERITAGE GROUP

MEETING DATE: 30th November 2006

TOPIC: Kogarah Municipal Band

PAPER BY: Alec Leach

OATLEY HERITAGE GROUP

Presents

*The
History
of the
Kogarah Municipal
Band.*

Compiled and presented

By

Alec Leach

for the Group's quarterly meeting, Thursday, 30th November, 2006.

The History of the Kogarah Municipal Band.

*Presented to the Oatley heritage group. Thursday 30th November 2006.
Compiled by Alec Leach.*

Today, "Kogarah Municipal Band" plays under a slightly different name. In 1984 with the demise of Brass Bands, it was decided to change to a Concert Band. This allowed the entry of woodwind instruments and an appeal to younger musicians. Hence today's name of "Kogarah (Municipal) Concert Band".

The Band began as the "St George District Brass Band" in 1888. In July 1889, it was officially recognised. In 1921, an agreement was arrived at between the Band and Kogarah Municipal Council, to change its name to the "Kogarah Municipal Band". A consideration of a subsidy of one hundred pounds per annum was made to help maintain the band.

One would wonder why the *Oatley Heritage Group* would be interested in seeking this Band's history. The reason is that the Kogarah Municipal Band rehearsed in the Oatley School of Arts from 1970 until 1998. The Band originally rehearsed in the Temperance Hall in Bryant Street, Rockdale.

Over the years, the Band has rehearsed in a few different locations. In the nineteen twenties and thirties they occupied the Regent Hall, Kogarah, George Street, Rockdale and the Drill Hall, Kogarah. From the Secretary's Minute book, it is noted that the Band rehearsed at the Railway Parade Hotel, Kogarah during World War 1. Their next location was the Kogarah Council Chambers. From 1963, their venue was at The Mall, South Hurstville. They moved into the Oatley School of Arts in 1970 until 1998. Today the Band and the St. George Concert Band rehearses at the Kogarah School of Arts.

On the first floor of the Kogarah School of Arts on the corner of Queens Avenue and Bowns Road Kogarah, is the "Les Smith" Band room. Les Smith was an outstanding member. He joined the band in 1901 at the age of eleven and was forced to retire with ill health in 1967. He was Bandmaster for fifty three years from 1914 until 1967. Members of the Band fluctuated around thirty in the early 1920's. In 1925 the Band numbers had fallen, so Les Smith, in conjunction with his conducting duties, would play Euphonium, Trombone or Horn solos as required.

To encourage new Band members, he established a learner's class. He was addressed as Mr. Smith, with respect, by the majority of Band members. Mr. Smith was a Sales manager for Palco Paints. Mr. Smith passed away at the age of eighty two in 1971.

The St George & Sutherland Shire Leader reported on Wednesday 12th January 1972, details of his long existence with the band and concluded "Kogarah bandsmen paid a tribute to their former colleague and leader as he lay in Calvary Hospital just before his death. The band gathered on the lawn outside the window of his room and played several of his favourite hymns in his own arrangement". Les was and is still well respected by all who knew him.

In 1997 a reunion of four members of the Band at Nowra, celebrated fifty years of their association. It comprised, Ray Cameron, Max Croot, Keith Sloman and Ron Lee, they recalled "Mr. Smith". Their reunion was reported in the South Coast Register. It was stated that they said "he was very lean of frame and a little fat on. A gent of great brass musical knowledge".

In the early nineteen hundreds, the Band performed and entered contests as far away as Tamworth, Lithgow and the South Coast championships at Wollongong. They enjoyed weekends away to Kiama, where they would play and enjoy the hospitality of the local Band.

As today, John Philip Sousa's marches were popular with both the band and the public. A reference from a book published to commemorate the Centenary of the Kogarah Municipal Band in 1988, reflects on the decade of 1900-1910. It states that "King Cotton, from the Deep South, is a typical Sousa March. Cheerful, yet "Militaire", the piece is a standard in any marching bands repertoire".

When three Band members returned from World War 1, a social evening was arranged to welcome them back. They were presented with a suitably inscribed medal as a token of appreciation from their fellow Bandsmen.

In the early nineteen twenties and a few years before, the shopkeepers of Kogarah and Rockdale made a financial contribution to keep the band financially viable, by paying a levy of one shilling (ten cents) per week in the early 1920's. In return, the band would perform at these shopping centres on a Friday evening.

Throughout the 1920's and 1930's the Band performed in various competitions, as well as the usual Municipal performances, played regularly at Taronga Park and would hold internal solo competitions.

The great depression which began in the late 1920's, took its toll with Band members, yet throughout, the Band still managed to perform. Again Les Smith contributed by at times donating part of his salary to keep the Band functioning.

The Band assisted the unemployed by playing at Charity Concerts, notably; one was at the St. George Theatre, Bexley.

With the advent of World War II, Band numbers were reduced, at one stage it was decided that the Band would keep operating until six members remained. The Band cooperated whenever possible to play when requested at Military Establishments and assisted in a march in connection with the War Loan in 1943.

When peace was declared, the Band was in demand, firstly, to play at the Victory Celebrations in the Domain on the afternoon, Wednesday, 15th August, 1945. That night Radio Station 2SM broadcast their performance from Queens Square. The next night there were further celebrations at the Soldiers Memorial, by Massed Bands and finally on 19th August, Kogarah Council held a Thanksgiving Service at the Victory Theatre, with a March by returned soldiers.

Bands were in demand in the mid to late 1940's. Apart from playing throughout the Municipality and in the City, they entered many contests. Not only did they have their regular rehearsal nights, they would also have special marching practice sessions on some Sunday mornings at Jubilee Oval.

To list a few accomplishments in that era, the Band was the winner of the State Quickstep Championship in 1946, Australian "C" Grade Championship, Selection and Quickstep "B" Grade Championship 1947 and State "B" Grade in 1948. These results were proudly displayed on the Band's letterhead of the day.

From 1950, the Band would visit Toukley and participate in the Anzac March every year for twenty three years.

In 1963 "The Last Post" was recorded by the Band. Fifty copies were made and sold to R.S.L. Clubs.

Throughout the years, wives of Bandsmen became committee members, with many taking on the roll of administration.

Until the Band changed to the Concert Band in 1984, it entered and was highly placed in many contests including the Australian National Band championships.

The Band attained "A" Grade status in 1951.

It is noted that members regularly played at the Parramatta Mental Hospital. The Band would receive payment for performing at functions such as the Rugby Union and League Test Matches. These funds would assist the Band to take part in excursions for the weekend, to places such as Bathurst.

Television has been blamed for the demise of many traditional entertainment forms. The Brass Band is no exception. It was harder to enlist younger players and the postwar crowds were not to be found. With the change of name in 1984 and a new style of music, there has been enough interest generated by musicians and the public to keep the Band afloat.

Today, although the Band performs at a high level, the members do not enter competitions and concentrate their efforts entertaining the public of the Municipality as required.

Of the one hundred and eight years the Band has been in existence, Les Smith's fifty three years as Bandmaster amounts to almost half of its life. Today's Bandmaster, Ian Bown, has been doing the job for approx. eight years.

Clear records of the Bandleaders over the years have not been recorded. The earliest recording in 1894 lists an L.C. Walker followed in 1899 by Mr. Devlin, Mr. Goodsell 1905 and J.S. Watson in 1908. Then there was the long reign of Les Smith from 1914 until 1967.

Since then there have been a number of Bandleaders. In the latter part of Les Smith's leadership, his health was failing. Mr. Keith Sloman became acting Bandleader, then upon Les's retirement in 1967 was ultimately appointed Bandleader for which he held the position until 1970. Slotted in was a mention of a Mr. A. Searle for a short period. Mr. J.H. Huggett held the position from 1970 to 1972. 1973 is the next recorded Leader, Max McCarran, with Harry Rudd, then Reg Bishop in 1981. His son Peter followed in 1983. For the next few years there were a number of Acting Bandmasters. From 1984 to early 1986 Barry Jenkins took the baton, then Greg Stenning until Mid 1987. Greg Briscoe – Hough took over until May 1988. Rocky Thomas took the helm for a few months until September of that year when Greg Briscoe – Hough took on the role again until Andrew Del Riccio rose to the occasion in 1990 and since then Chris Howes and Glenn Armitage have succeeded Andrew. Today when Ian Bown is unavailable, Dennis Murphy is the deputy Bandmaster and waves the baton admirably.

I have had the privilege of being able to attend rehearsals and a performance at the Kogarah Fair and Charity Bed Race to video the band. Although the members of the band were embarrassed by my presence, I was made welcome.

Acknowledgments

Ian Bown, the Bandmaster: for his patience and allowing me to film and position myself where I wanted when filming. Yes, for playing my request of "Caravan". Twice!

Greg Briscoe–Hough: for allowing me to borrow the minute books dating back to 1889.

Ron Lee: joined the Band in 1941 and is a life member. Ron's Musical association with Bands began as a boy when he joined the Young Australia League Band, which toured New Zealand. He was a foundation member of the Leichhardt Brass Band and is still an active member of the Sutherland Brass Band (formally the Sutherland Silver Band).

Edgar Starr: has been extremely helpful to me and a wealth of knowledge, he has had a broken membership of the band since 1961. This was due to work commitments as a Bank Manager. When at Wollongong, he managed to slot in with the Steelworks Band. Edgar has been a member of the St. George Concert Band since 1974 and is their enthusiastic Band Leader.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the members of the Kogarah Concert Band for their patience and kindness to me throughout our association.



*Portraits of a bygone era
of the
Kogarah Municipal Band*



*The Kogarah & Georges River Concert Bands
Performing at the
Kogarah Fair & Charity Bed Race
Saturday 26th August 2006*



Bandmaster: Ian Bown