
by Steven Hars

When Steve Vickers first asked me to write the British section of his monumental tome, I was flattered, eager and, well, full of enthusiasm. But that was at the beginning and the more I thought about this subject, the more apprehensive I became.

I have been involved in marching bands since 1963 as a mere "nipper" and was in at the start of the British drum and bugle corps movement as one of the founding directors, but I finished any major active involvement around 1986, although I still get dragged out of "retirement" occasionally to act as announcer or commentator at local competitions.

This chapter will inevitably contain errors and inaccuracies -- not too many I hope -- but any mistakes are all mine, borne out of ignorance and memory lapse, but not out of intention, malice or bias -- honest!

In many respects, the growth of British drum and bugle corps over the past 25 years or so mirrors that of the United States, but the



Basildon Drum & Trumpet Corps, 1963 (photo from the collection of Steve Hars).

early post-war years may need some explaining.

The first thing to bear in mind is that in the United Kingdom, a "bugle" is a very different animal to that familiar in the United States. Our standard army bugle is a short, valveless, stubby instrument pitched in B-flat, usually made of brass and copper or silver alloy. It is comparatively cheap to produce and an easy instrument to play, with a maximum of six notes, but difficult to master.

They are still used extensively in the British infantry; the Royal Marines, Greenjackets (light infantry) or Ghurkas are all famous exponents of this instrument.

Whereas the British infantry used the B-flat bugle, the cavalry generally used the E-flat trumpet. Again this is valveless in brass or silver, but is a more elongated and, to my mind, a more elegant instrument giving a greater range of around nine playable

notes. The instruments used by the State Trumpeters at numerous state occasions are E-flat cavalry trumpets.

After World War II, there were untold numbers of uniformed youth groups throughout Great Britain including Scouts, Guides, Army Cadets, Sea Cadets, Air Training Corps, Boys Brigade, Girls Brigade, Church Lads Brigade, St. John's Ambulance Brigade



City of Nottingham Drum & Trumpet Corps, 1979 (photo by Ron Da Silva from the collection of Drum Corps World).

and the British Legion (the U.K.'s equivalent of the American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars) to name but a few.

All of these organizations were organized on quasi-military lines, with martial music, marching and parades being of great importance to their ceremonies.

Needless to say, all of these organizations formed marching bands and most of them comprised snare drums, tenor drums, cymbals, a bass drum and either B-flat bugles or E-flat trumpets. Only a tiny number of bands possessed any valved instruments. These instruments were obviously chosen for economy and ease of instruction. Very few members of the bands could read music. In fact, even many of the instructors -- who were, in the main, unpaid volunteers -- could read music. Most instruction was done parrot fashion and taught by ear.

Another factor to be taken into consideration is that the school system in the United Kingdom does not have a marching band culture as in the United States and Canada and music is very much geared toward full orchestral, if at all. The exception is in the Northern counties of England where our brass bands predominate and tuition on brass instruments is freely available to any youngster who wants it.

Almost all of the bands styled themselves as a "corps of drums" or a "drum and trumpet corps." All bands were comparatively small; 32 members would be considered a large band (Hornchurch contest actually had a special class for bands over 30 -- not many entrants!). A typical line up would be: one drum major (with mace), four to eight snare drums, two to four tenor drums, two cymbals, one bass drum and up to 20 bugles/trumpets.

Most did not add bell lyres or glockenspiels until the mid- to late-1960s. The bandsmen (or women) were first and foremost members of their parent

organization. Playing in the bands and practice usually took second place to the other, and in many respects, primary, activities of their group.

The first marching band competitions were organized by local town councils during World War II as part of the government's "spend your holiday at home" program. Hornchurch contest in Essex was one of the earliest -- probably the first. Legend has it the first contest in 1943 was finished during a Luftwaffe raid on the nearby Hornchurch Royal Air Force base!

There was no governing body for the bands and all competitions were run independently, each with its own set of rules. The one thing they had in common is that the majority of their adjudicators were supplied by the British armed forces.

The competitions varied from playing specially composed test pieces, pure marching and counter-marching and full marching routines much as we know them today. A major part of all competitions was the inspection, where every member of the band was marked for his or her turnout; "spit and polish" was considered a paramount part of the military feel of these units.

The contests of the 1950s and early 1960s were dominated by the bands of the national youth groups. Bands such as 13th Coventry Scouts, Haberdashers School CCF, King Edward VI Grammar School Army Cadets, Brighthouse St. John's Ambulance Brigade, Greenford Girls Brigade, Romford British Legion and several others all took top honors.

During this period, most competitions were fairly localized events. The Southern bands rarely met those from up North, but when they did, the Northerners usually triumphed. This was probably due to the instruction received from older members of the famous brass band culture. Another strange fact of the North/South divide was that contests in the North were often held on a Sunday, unheard of down South.

The junior leaders regiment bands of the British forces, such as the Royal Corps of Transport and Royal Engineers and the RAF



Havering All-Girl Corps of Drums, 1979, at the British Youth Band Championships (photo by Ron Da Silva from the collection of Drum Corps World).

School at Halton, also competed at band contests. These boy soldiers also helped to push up standards, but by the end of the 1960s, these excellent bands were no longer competing. Maybe getting beaten by "amateurs" was more than their officers

United Kingdom

could bear.

The late 1950s and early 1960s heralded the advent of a new phenomenon: independent youth bands. There had been independent bands prior to this (Coventry School of Music was formed in 1947 and Romford Royal British Legion Boys Band in 1952), but they were few and far between. Essex in southeast England seems to have been the crucible that spawned this new idea.

Bands that formed around this time were (in chronological order) Romford Drum and Trumpet Corps, Hornchurch Drum and Trumpet Corps, Basildon Drum and Trumpet Corps, The Haverettes Girls Band and Southwark Corps of Drums, to name but a few. Most of these were formed by former servicemen or women (National Service only ended in 1963) and had a distinctive military look; they could easily have been mistaken for scaled down Royal Marines or Grenadier Guardsmen, except for the Haverettes, of



2nd Brighton Scouts, 1982 (photo by R.W. Harris from the collection of Drum Corps World).

the more familiar B-flat piston instruments. Romford favored a full military band setup with three-valved brass instruments as well as woodwinds. Romford British Legion was one of the first to equip with fully chromatic instruments, including a couple of sousaphones.

The march of the independents did not see the end of the national youth group's bands; many bands just got better. In fact, the whole movement was growing at a colossal rate, so much so that by the early 1970s it was generally felt essential to organize some kind of controlling body to encompass all bands.

In 1974, Glen Carter, bandmaster of the Basildon Drum and Trumpet Corps, organized a meeting of as many likeminded bandmasters and directors that he could muster at Southwark Cathedral in London. It was conservatively estimated that there were around 2,000 active youth marching bands in the United Kingdom at that time.

From that meeting the British Youth Band Association was born. It was a voluntary organization to include all branches of the youth marching band fraternity, encompassing contests, training and competition rules. The growth of membership was rapid and to this day, BYBA can probably still boast the largest membership of any single youth marching music association. Member units include all the previously mentioned organizations, drum and bugle corps, corps of drums, military-style bands, showbands, et al.

It was in the middle of the 1970s that many bands were looking for new challenges and direction. Many had already converted to full military wind sections and some, such as the Basildon Drum and Trumpet Corps, had added baritone and alto E-flat instruments to their brass section after beneficial exchanges with the MCC Laaren band in Holland.

Many others, including Dagenham Corps of Drums and Mayflower, soon followed. These top British bands were playing and performing better than ever. The harmonies coming from the valveless instruments were

fantastic and the precision of the drill and percussion were awesome. It's even more impressive when you realize that, up until this time, bands generally only practiced once or twice a week for a couple of hours at a time.

It was around this time that Carter was introduced to American drum and bugle corps. Through his contacts with Beatrix in Holland, he was shown film and played recordings of Drum Corps International. Needless to say, the effect was awe-inspiring. Carter was soon able to see DCI in the flesh in 1977 at Denver, CO, as the guest of DCW Publisher Steve Vickers, and after that there was no looking back.

Basildon's routines were soon taking on a distinct American feel, which was picked up by many of its contemporaries including Dagenham, Mayflower Corps and more. Until then, the drill routines of almost all bands had been totally military in style and almost entirely linear.

Also around this time, many bands adopting the drum corps style were converting their bell lyres to the horizontal position so both hands could be used. They had been carried upright for years and marching tuned percussion instruments were, as yet, unavailable in the U.K. The only alternative was for small orchestral xylophones and marimbas to be converted by willing handymen.

In 1977, Carter formed the first British color guard, an independent unit called the Gleneagles, allied to the Basildon corps. The first public performance of band and guard was at Lofthouse Road Stadium as pre-match entertainment for a first division football (soccer) match. Later that year, the guard marched with the band in a "march past" at Buckingham Palace in honor of the Queen's Silver Jubilee.

It was in 1977 that Dagenham Corps of Drums was the first corps-style unit to adopt American piston rotor G bugles. Coventry School of Music had already acquired G bugles, but never adopted corps style, maintaining a purely traditional military outlook.

Also around this time, bands started going coed. Most of the top organizations had been single-sex outfits (Basildon and Dagenham had formerly been boys-only bands; Mayflower and Havering Corps of Drums had always been all-girl bands). Adding female color guards to erstwhile boys bands seemed to open the floodgates to the ladies and the girls bands were soon to allow in the chaps.

Carter's visit to the United States opened a veritable tidal wave of cross-Atlantic

exchanges. British bands were soon employing American corps instructors and members, mainly on an unpaid basis, to help polish their shows, and more and more British corps enthusiasts were crossing the "pond" to visit DCI and Drum Corps Associates.

Films, records and videos of DCI were being copied and circulated like wildfire within the embryo drum corps movement



Mayflower Girls, November 25, 1979, at the British Marching Band Championships (photo by Ron Da Silva from the collection of Drum Corps World).

course, who were once mistaken for nurses by one of our colonial cousins.

Many of the earlier independents struggled to find adequate instruments. Peter Richardson and Dick Bouchard, joint founders of Romford, scoured army surplus stores, antique and junk shops and even made their own side drum shells.

Joe Dennis, founder and bandmaster of Southwark, went to even greater lengths, reputedly finding a supply of battered E-flat cavalry trumpets in a warehouse, which he had panel beaten and straightened. To this day, no one is quite sure how he managed to purloin war department snare drums and sell them at a profit, but we have our suspicions.

With no other activities to claim their attention and being able to devote all their time to their band work, the independents went on to dominate the contests of this era, vying with each other for the various competition titles.

Early in the 1960s, some of the bands changed over from their traditional non-valved instruments. Hornchurch Drum and Trumpet Corps even had a short-lived experiment with single piston G bugles before adopting

Dagenham Crusaders, 1985 (photo by R.W. Harris from the collection of Drum Corps World).



in the U.K. Names like Santa Clara Vanguard, Blue Devils and Madison Scouts were becoming commonplace; the only music listened to on a corps bus would be a DCI recording. Every British drum corps fan had a favorite and longed to emulate the Bridgemen, 27th Lancers or De La Salle Oakland.

Drum Corps World and *Drum Corps News* had also been discovered and copies were passing through untold pairs of hands with articles being unashamedly copied for local band newsletters and publications.

In 1978, Basildon and the Gleneagles amalgamated to become the Basildon Blue Eagles, and Dagenham Corps of Drums adopted the title of Dagenham Crusaders, having already formed their own integral color guard. Many of their peers were following suit. The size of the bands was growing, too. It was becoming common for the corps-style units to march around 60-70 members including their guard.

The march toward total drum corps style was further advanced in 1978 when Basildon, Dagenham and several other British bands

British awareness of true drum and bugle corps was growing at an amazing rate within the youth band world.

There was still no truly national marching band contest, although several styled themselves "national." In fact, contests had been held in such prestigious venues as the famous Royal Albert Hall and Alexandria

unstoppable juggernaut. Of course, it had its critics; many purists were totally against the "Americanization" of the movement and even more were skeptical, but the show went well and truly on the road.

The next few years saw the corps-style bands dominating the contest scene, although on some occasions they did suffer at the hands of some of our military adjudicators. Dagenham Crusaders had mastered their bugles; Basildon Blue Eagles took delivery of theirs and so did many other bands. One of the main problems was the lack of availability of G bugles in the U.K.

Both Basildon and Dagenham were making use of every contact they had in the United States to help out. The cost of G bugles and the accompanying percussion was largely prohibitive, so most units bought used equipment or had to use a readily available alternative such as the LaFleur range of forward facing B-flat instruments from Boosey & Hawkes.

American instructors were starting to be imported. Dagenham, Basildon, Mayflower



Beechmen, 1985 (photo by R.W. Harris from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Palace, birthplace of the BBC. However, in 1978 Steve Johnson, organizer of the Hornchurch/Havering band contest, along with promoter Larry Westland, got together and created the British Marching Band Championships to be held in London's Wembley Arena.

This was the first contest to truly be considered "national," and bands from all facets of the marching band scene were included: military style, showbands, valved and valveless, brass and woodwind and, of course, the blossoming American style drum and bugle corps. At this competition, held in November, only one organization owned G bugles -- the Dagenham Crusaders.

What really marks this competition as a milestone in the birth of British drum and bugle corps was the entrance of the 73 members of the Basildon Blue Eagles to the arena. Whereas Dagenham had purchased their new G bugles with uniform changes yet to follow, the Blue Eagles marched on sporting brand new Santa Clara Vanguard-style uniforms in dark blue, light blue and white with black slouch hats and white ostrich feather plumes.

The sell-out audience went wild; the effect of such a break in tradition and being such a closely guarded secret was phenomenal. Interestingly the top three places were taken by corps-style units: 2nd Brighton Scouts, Basildon Blue Eagles and Mayflower Corps from Billericay.

The British Marching Band Championships was also witnessed by many American citizens, several corps having imported American talent to help with their progress. The contest was also recorded by the camera of Ron Da Silva, a regular contributor to *Drum Corps World*, and his pictures of this event were published in that newspaper.

The added impetus of this contest to the growth of drum and bugle corps is incalculable, but it was now an

and 2nd Brighton, among others, all had their "pet Yanks." I'm not sure what they thought of our efforts at corps style, but I remember when Alex Saloutos of the Madison



Imperial Knights, 1984 (photo by Mike Shayes from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Anchormen, 1986 (photo by R.W. Harris from the collection of Drum Corps World).

attended the World Music Contest in Kerkrade, Holland. At this festival, marching bands from all over the globe compete for honors every four years.

The highlight in 1978 was the Largo Band of Gold from Florida. Until that time, the nearest thing to a drum and bugle corps most of us had seen was the Alberta All-Girls Band on one of their frequent visits to Britain. Although Largo was not strictly a drum and bugle corps, it used corps style and this further opened the eyes of many young British corps fledglings. When the Band of Gold had a 30-minute program devoted to them on British television, an even greater potential audience was achieved.

Silver Shadows, Scotland (photo by Mike Shayes from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Blue Barons, Scotland, 1985 (photo by Mike Shayes from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Scouts came over to help out with Basildon Blue Eagles color guard, he was shocked to see the girls turning up for rehearsal in high heels and skirts. But all that was soon to change.

In April 1979, Dagenham Crusaders hosted the first drum-corps-only competition at a local football ground and called the show "Drum Corps Britain." This was an interim





Gravesham, 1985 (photo by R.W. Harris from the collection of Drum Corps World).

show and was judged by a member of each corps' staff as no judging panel was yet available. The Basildon Blue Eagles won.

At this stage in our evolution, many corps were still not equipped with G bugles, but the style had been adopted and that was what mattered. Eventually all these units would be the proud owners of G bugles, so from now on they will be referred to as "corps" or "drum and bugle corps."

The British Youth Band Association was doing a splendid job for the marching music fraternity in general, but the drum and bugle corps movement was, to some extent, being penalized by the military style of judging at contests catering to all types of band and corps. The corps were also having an undue influence on the movement as a whole. And anyway, the drum and bugle corps craze was gaining such



Northwest Kent, 1985 (photo by R.W. Harris from the collection of Drum Corps World).

momentum that many corps directors wanted to be able to compete against "like for like" and felt it was time for their own organization, competitions, rules and judges.

In January 1980, John Johnson of the Dagenham Crusaders, Alec Powell of the Beechmen and Trevor Haworth called the directors of 12 British drum and bugle corps to a meeting at a school in West Bromwich, near Birmingham in the Midlands, to discuss topics of mutual concern -- a plan that I believe was hatched earlier at DCI in Atlanta. That meeting witnessed the birth of Drum Corps United Kingdom.

The directors originally wanted to ally the association to DCI and call the organization Drum Corps International UK. Needless to say, DCI was less than enthusiastic about this idea, so DCUK it was.

DCUK also set up its own winter guard circuit, which proved very popular with corps members during the winter months. This, however, is outside the scope of this history.

The founding member corps and directors of DCUK were John Johnson (Dagenham

Crusaders), Alec Powell (Beechmen), Selwyn Bottomley (Anchormen), Steven Hars (Basildon Blue Eagles), Lindsay Holcroft (Green Lancers), Andy Shaw (Pacemakers), Gill Fairhead (Chelmsford Challengers), Dave Cowstick (2nd Brighton Scouts), Andy Hicks (Mayflower), Keith Mayhew (North West Kent), Robin Bolton (Pheasey Cavaliers), Nigel Greaves (Show Stars) and Ron Ashton (City of Bristol).

Johnson was elected as the first chairman of DCUK and Haworth was appointed executive director.

Initially the corps were playing a wide range of instruments, from full chromatic brass B-flat through E-flat Cavalry trumpets to G bugles; in fact, the only thing they had in common was a color guard. All member corps had, however, committed to converting to G bugles by 1985.

On September 27, 1980, the first DCUK Championship was held at the Alexander Stadium, Perry Barr, Birmingham in England's heartland. Thirteen corps competed at this inaugural event, including the Anchormen, Basildon Blue Eagles, Basildon Blue Eagles B, Beechmen, Chelmsford Challengers, City of Bristol, Dagenham Crusaders, Green Lancers, Mayflower, North West Kent, Pacemakers, Pheasey Cavaliers and the Showstars, with eight going through to the finals.

The judging was based on the DCI "blue book" and, as no judging organization as yet existed, the adjudication was carried out by imported experts from Holland and the United States as well as our own emerging team.

The judging team included: marching and maneuvering -- Leo Schaeffer, Paul Rawlinson and Paul Litteau; percussion -- Franz Weland, Mervyn Murray and Jim Mallen; and brass -- Lee Packham, Paul Wilkinson, Eddie Hendle and Ian Lyall.

The results were: first, Dagenham Crusaders (68.25); second, Basildon Blue Eagles (67.35); third, Mayflower (63.95); fourth, Green Lancers (61.20); fifth, Anchormen (59.25); sixth, Pacemakers (55.25); seventh, Show Stars; and eighth, Pheasey Cavaliers (51.90).

The 1981 season was hectic. Senior instructors and former corps members were



Conquest Alliance, 1988 (photo by Keiron J. Trebilcoe from the collection of Drum Corps World).

being recruited and trained for the newly formed DCUK Judges Association and seven DCUK regional contests were held in Bristol, Maidstone, West Ham, Birmingham, Elland, Warrington and Chelmsford. And all the while, membership was growing.

The 1981 DCUK Championships were



Northern Skyriders, 1985 (photo by R.W. Harris from the collection of Drum Corps World).

once again held at Alexander Stadium where there were 20 corps in prelim competition, including Mayflower B, Gravesham, Cavaliers, Pacemakers, Dagenham Crusaders, Purple Phantoms, Trojans, Crawley Vanguard, Troopers, North West Kent, Silver Shadows, 2nd Brighton Scouts, Show Stars, Anchormen, Basildon Blue Eagles, Mayflower A, Green Lancers,

Brigthouse Royal British Legion, Beechmen and Chelmsford Challengers. Incidentally, the Silver Shadows from Glasgow was the first Scottish drum and bugle corps and the first to compete at the DCUK Championships.

The judging panel was once again an international affair with our own judges and imports from the United States and Holland.

Of the 20 corps in prelims, eight went through to finals (prelims and finals were held on the same day, finals being under floodlights in the evening). The results were: Show Stars (35.25), Anchormen (66.75), Mayflower A (67.65), Gravesham (67.80), Basildon Blue Eagles (69.85), Green Lancers (73.30), 2nd Brighton Scouts (76.90) and champions for the second year running, Dagenham Crusaders (79.65).

There were similarities to the names of

American corps, because until the advent of drum and bugle corps, most units just carried their town name and description (i.e. Dagenham Corps of Drums). Now, everyone wanted a more dynamic and glamorous title.

Music was also being imitated and copied. Old American arrangements were being bought or outright plagiarized by the British corps; anything Garfield Cadets could do we could do -- well, nearly.

Purple Phantoms, 1985 (photo by R.W. Harris from the collection of Drum Corps World).





Masquerade, 1985 (photo by Mike Shayes from the collection of Drum Corps World).

And uniforms! I've already mentioned the Blue Eagles' Santa Clara-style outfits, and Dagenham Crusaders had opted for an elegant Cadet-style uniform reminiscent of British officers mess dress in black with red facings and black shakos with white plumes.

And the Beechmen from Birmingham, West Midlands? Well, Powell's

predominantly black corps had gone completely "bananas" by copying the Bridgemen's long yellow coats including the black floppy hats.

For many of us, our first contact with a real American drum and bugle corps came in 1982. Boston Crusaders were invited to perform at the International Festival of Marching Bands in London in July. They were hosted primarily by Mayflower Corps of

Billericay and Basildon Blue Eagles, both towns being just a few miles apart and 25 miles from the capital.

While in the U.K., the Crusaders gave several exhibitions and helped with instruction at Basildon and Mayflower, among others, and made contacts that were to last



Show Stars, 1985 (photo by R.W. Harris from the collection of Drum Corps World).

many years.

Thirteen regional DCUK-sanctioned contests had now found their way onto a very busy calendar and membership was growing faster than ever. We now had 33 member corps, not including cadet or B corps,

spanning the country from Sussex in the South to Glasgow in Scotland, and from Essex in the East to Bristol in the West.

The DCUK Championships had quickly outgrown Alexander Stadium and on September 25, 1982, the third British Drum Corps Finals were held at West Bromwich Albion Football Club (The Hawthorns) in West Bromwich, which was to be the home of the contest for the next couple of years.

This was also the first DCUK event that had a totally home grown judging team on the field. Many of them had been



3rd Glasgow Boys Brigade, 1986 (photo by Mike Shayes from the collection of Drum Corps World).

adjudicating for some time and the crew at this contest, headed by judges chairman Eddie Hendle, had many years of instruction and judging experience between them.

Twenty corps competed in prelims and, as in previous years, eight went through to the floodlit evening finals. The placings for this year were once again Dagenham Crusaders (86.05) in first place, followed by 2nd Brighton Scouts (84.65), Green Lancers (81.75) Anchormen (73.76), Beechmen (73.30), Gravesham (71.85), Northern Skyriders (71.60) and Mayflower (70.10).

All this while, piston rotor and two-valve G bugles were finding their way across the pond by fair means or foul, and tuned percussion instruments were also being imported. Most corps at this stage imported directly from the United States, many setting up their own little import agencies, a veritable self-help cottage industry.

One problem the movement was experiencing was lack of instructors and senior members in late July and August. There was a mass exodus of marching drum members across the Atlantic to visit drum corps shows and DCI, some even getting to march for a few weeks with an American corps. This effectively created a closed season in Britain during these months as no contests could be staged when corps were missing their most experienced members.

This is a situation that



Cavaliers, 1984 (photo by Mike Shayes from the collection of Drum Corps World).

persists to this day; however, the lessons learned and experiences gained were and are invaluable.

The 1983 season was one of the most exciting in British drum corps history. Not only did we now have 38 member corps and a contest circuit of 10 regional contests, but Dagenham Crusaders were going to be the first British drum and bugle corps to tour the United States and compete at DCI World Championships.

John Johnson, director of Dagenham, had visited the States a couple of times to set up his trip. Their grueling two-week tour covered 4,000 miles and 14 states and encompassed many contests where their Beatles-based show was extremely well-received by American fans.

The Crusaders encountered many unforeseen problems during their trip, not the least of which was the great distance they had to travel -- we Brits just have no conception of what a vast country America is -- but adversity was overcome with typical British fortitude; the Dunkirk spirit lives on.

Dagenham Crusaders placed 34th in open class, just nine places from DCI associate member status.

As if that was not exciting enough, Haworth had contacted Channel 4 National



Brighouse Royal British Legion, 1986 (photo by Mike Shayes from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Television -- in fact, he virtually hijacked them from BMBC -- and negotiated for them to film a series of seven one-hour programs featuring an overview program, regional contests, Drum Corps Holland, Dagenham's tour of the States, DCUK Finals and DCI.

The programs proved extremely popular, especially with drum corps fans. The main "bug bear" with the British corps members is that the production company insisted on calling the series "Bands of Gold." They felt "drum and bugle corps" conveyed little or nothing to the



Squires, 1990 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).

British audience, probably with some justification.

The program was hosted by Northern Comedian Tony Capstick and co-hosted by yours truly as technical advisor.

It was a shame that, after swingeing budget cuts, Channel 4 could not repeat this exercise.

The 1983 DCUK Championships were once again held at West Bromwich Albion's football stadium and 23 corps from across the United Kingdom were filmed competing in prelims. As in previous years, the highest

scoring eight went through to finals. This time we had a new national champion. The Green Lancers from Warrington, Cheshire (85.65) had wrested the crown from Dagenham Crusaders (85.42), who came second. Imperial Knights (76.05) were third; Blue Barons (71.95), fourth; Anchormen (70.70), fifth;

Northern Skyriders (67.70) sixth; Silver Shadows (66.80) seventh; and in eighth place was Brighthouse Royal British Legion (64.15).

Thanks to the TV recording, DCUK was able to produce its first record of the finals and a long playing album of the top four corps went on sale at £3.50 including postage.

Interestingly, the Imperial Knights were formed from the famous 2nd Brighton Scouts who had broken away from the Scout movement and become totally independent. In fact, many corps had already broken from their parent organizations.

The Anchormen were formerly a Boys Brigade band. One of the reasons for going it alone was the stringent rules enforced by some of the national youth groups regarding uniforms, but each corps may obviously have had other criteria.

Rule changes in the United States were also adopted in the U.K. and 1983 saw some corps using the pit for the first time. It was normal for the U.K. just to copy DCI, but in one respect we were way ahead of America: DCUK had already approved the use of three-valve G bugles, which

were proving immensely popular.

Several British instrument dealers had "cottoned on" to this growing market and

realized there was buck or two to be made.

The summer of 1984 saw 40 corps in membership, all sporting G bugles, one year ahead of schedule. There was a regional circuit of 18 shows, but, alas, no TV coverage.

The DCUK Championships were moved on September 22 to another football stadium, the Molyneux ground in Wolverhampton, home of Wolverhampton Wanderers football (yes, I really mean soccer!) team.

The finalists on this occasion were Imperial Knights (83.1), Dagenham Crusaders (82.7), Green Lancers (82.4), Blue Barons (79.1), Basildon Blue Eagles (76.6), Silver Shadows (70.3), Beechmen (68.9) and Mayflower (67.8).

One thing generally considered detrimental to the British corps activity, and copied virtually wholesale from the United States, was movement of members between

corps. This had been happening since virtually the beginning of DCUK and is something that very rarely happened previously. It was very difficult, especially for the smaller corps, when a senior member who may have been with that corps for several years decamped for a larger, more successful unit just to get a finals or winners patch.

Also town loyalty was undermined and it was well nigh impossible for a corps to perform out of the DCUK season.

Periodic attempts have been made to control this problem, but, to be honest, the more successful corps were happy to take advantage

of the situation and any controls appear to have been half-hearted and ineffectual. The problem persists to this day and can only be solved when there is a real will to do so.

Corps membership of DCUK seems to have peaked in 1984; never again were we to reach 40 member corps. One of the reasons has been listed as intensity of competition leading to burn out by marching members and another that the "winning at any cost" syndrome had taken a lot of the fun out of corpsdom.

We also started to see corps folding, merging and amalgamating. But whatever the causes of the decline in the number of British corps, performances were

improving by leaps and bounds.

A new class of competition was started in 1985. The A class was intended to encourage new and smaller corps and avoid them being overawed by the big boys. I should point out at this stage that I don't believe any corps in the U.K. marched anywhere near the 128 allowed by DCI. One or two got over the 100 mark, but around 60-70 was more the norm for the bigger corps.

The 1985 championships were held at, yes, you've guessed it, another football stadium. The venue was Sheffield United's ground in Sheffield, Yorkshire.

Blue Barons from Glasgow were the first and only Scottish corps to take the DCUK title with an impressive score of 93.1. No doubt many a wee dram was supped that night.

Another first occurred at finals in 1986 when Conquest Alliance from Yorkshire tied for first place with



Green Lancers, 1986 (photo by R.W. Harris from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Blue Stars, 1985 (photo by R.W. Harris from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Thurrock Marching Brass, 1985 (photo by R.W. Harris from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Caledonian Regiment, 1994 (photo by Roy Leamon from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Somerford Sound, 1985 (photo by R.W. Harris from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Chelmsford Challengers, 1985 (photo by R.W. Harris from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Dagenham Crusaders from Essex (82.4). This certainly put an end to the so-called North/South divide.

This was a very difficult period for British drum and bugle corps. There was much dissatisfaction throughout the movement, especially in the upper echelons. As usual, it was politics and personalities that were to throw a spanner in the works. Many of the aforementioned problems were coming to a head and storm clouds were brewing.

The winter of 1987 saw a split in the movement and 13 corps broke away from DCUK to form a rival organization, the British Drum Corps Federation. The reasons were manifold, but the following quote from Peter Friend (former treasurer of DCUK), one of the founders of the federation, goes part way to explain it: "There is no purpose dwelling on how and why the federation came into being. It is sufficient to say there was a desire among corps to bring a sense of enjoyment back into the activity. The number of young people taking part in drum corps has fallen in the last five years. One of the main reasons for this decline must be the intensity of competition. The activity has, perhaps, lost sight of its prime aim, which is to develop well-balanced young people with a sense of discipline and direction. We want to bring back the element of fun to drum corps."

The British Drum Corps Federation ran its own championship, held in Leicester at the Cyclodrome on September 19, and the results were as follows: Concord (90.8), Beacon Sunrisers (86.9), Poynton Commodores (72.1), Blue Stars (71.5), Mayflower (70.0), Free Spirit (65.2), Couriers (53.2), Phantasy Force (50.9), Anchormen (47.5), Pride of Bristol (46.9), Mirfield (46.2) and Tornados (34.1).

The DCUK Championships were once again back at The Hawthorns, home of West Bromwich Albion FC. The

results for the finals in 1987 (and this is the last time I will list them completely) were Conquest Alliance (88.3), Dagenham Crusaders (87.0), Valley Sound (81.3), Basildon Blue Eagles (81.2), Silver Shadows (80.9), Warrington (78.1), Blue Barons (77.4) and Beechmen (74.3).

Unfortunately, the rift not only split the

corps, but also the judges and there was no way the United Kingdom could sustain two rival organizations for long, but 1988 did see two separate drum corps circuits operating in almost direct competition to one another. Both were competing for the same fans and, in many cases, the same judges.

But in many ways, the factional problems aside, 1988 was a vintage year. The Basildon Blue Eagles toured the United States and competed at DCI in Kansas City with a show set around Lionel Bart's "Oliver." Dagenham Crusaders also toured the U.S. that year under the pseudonym of the British Crusaders. Both corps were extremely well-received and a lot of lessons had been learned since Dagenham's last trip to DCI.

But the Atlantic takes two-way traffic and in 1988, British corps fans were to get the treat of their lives. None other than the mighty Madison Scouts toured Europe and co-sponsored two shows in the U.K., one in Birmingham and one in Luton. Not only did the British fans respond wildly to the Scouts, but the Scouts also obviously profited from the experience. That was the year they won DCI!

The 1988 DCUK Championships, held on September 24 again in West Bromwich, was won by Southern Knights (92.55), with Dagenham Crusaders (91.95) runners up and Basildon Blue Eagles (89.1) third. This contest was to be Dagenham Crusaders' "swan song"; sadly, later that year they folded.

The Federation's championship was held October 1 at Oldham Athletic Football ground and was won by 3rd Glasgow BB (91.2). Second was Beacon Sunrisers (85.0) and third was Free Spirit (97.4).

Fortunately, the madness of 1987-1988 was resolved and the

two organizations got back together under the auspices of DCUK. Many lessons had been learned, hatchets were buried and the only way was forward.

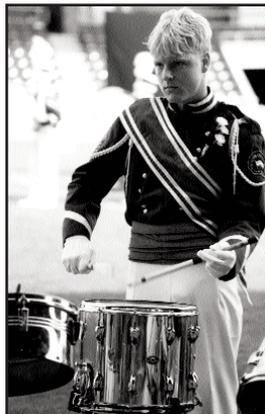
The main route of British drum and bugle corps now follows that of the United States. The corps virtually adopted anything that was advocated, the rules and judging system are



Black Knights, 1996 (photo by Paul Westfall from the collection of Drum Corps World).



6th Hove Scouts, 1998 (photo by Paul Westfall from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Poynton Commodores, 1998 (photo by Paul Westfall from the collection of Drum Corps World).



Cadence, 1997 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).



(Top to bottom) Concord, 1989 (photo by Keiron J. Trebilcoe); West Coast Cadets, 1990 (photo by Keiron J. Trebilcoe); Stateside, 1998 (photo by Paul Westfall); Ghost, 1998 (photo by Paul Westfall); Encore, 1998 (photo by Paul Westfall); Pride of Bristol, 1993 (photo by Alan Howells, all photos from the collection of Drum Corps World).



similar and the instrumentation is precisely the same.

The subsequent years of DCUK were dominated by the Basildon Blue Eagles, who won every finals from 1989 (when they achieved the highest score ever recorded at a DCUK Final of 94.85), through 1996 except in 1993 when the Senators from Eastleigh, Hampshire, took the crown from them.

Once again burn out comes into play as the Blue Eagles, arguably the most successful British corps to date, folded in 1997.

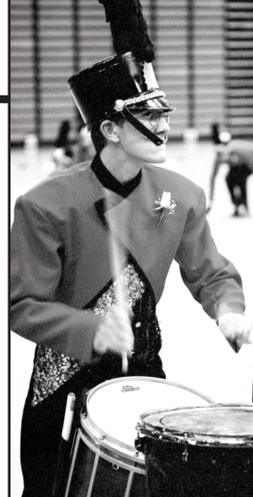
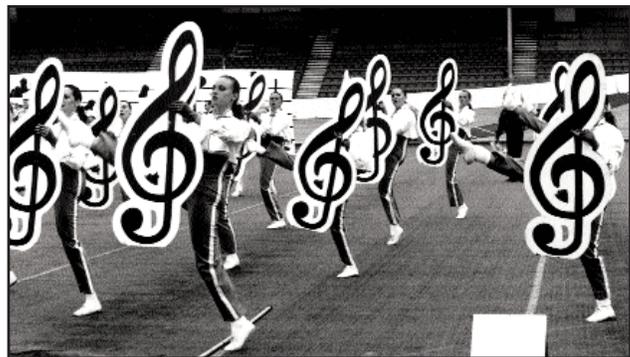
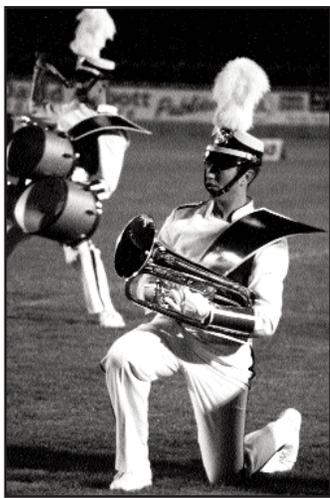
The corps that won DCUK Finals thereafter were 1997 Senators, 1998 Sunrisers, 1999 Cadence, 2000 Senators, 2001 Senators and 2002 Southern Aurora.

It's unfortunate that I don't have space to list every corps to have existed in the United Kingdom, but the total number to have marched at least one season is 165. Admittedly, some of these were junior or cadet corps and some are the result of mergers, but it is sad to say that of the 12 corps competing at the first DCUK Finals in 1980, only three or possibly four are still in existence.

The important thing is that untold thousands of young people have gained knowledge of music and marching hitherto unavailable to them, and the standard of professionalism achieved by some is amazing.

The bonds

(Clockwise from below) Staffordshire Knights, 1994 (photo by Tony Gore); Kidsgrove Scouts, 1998 (photo by Paul Westfall); Basildon Blue Eagles, 1989 (photo by Keiron J. Trebilco); Senators, 1995 (photo by Paul Westfall), all photos from the collection of Drum Corps World.



(Left to right) Statesmen, 1989 (photo by Keiron J. Trebilco); Magic, 2002 (photo by www.drumcorpsphotos.com/Paul Westfall); Southern Aurora, 2002 (photo by www.drumcorpsphotos.com/Paul Westfall); Northern Star, 2002 (photo by www.drumcorpsphotos.com/Paul Westfall), all photos from the collection of Drum Corps World.

forged here, in Europe and the United States, have been paramount to a significant number and led to lifelong friendships. The opportunity for travel has been opened up to untold numbers of young people. Inter-corps romances and marriages have become frequent, and we are now seeing the second generation of children performing in drum

corps, whose parents have long aged out or moved on.

The numbers may be down, but witness the number of Web sites dedicated to drum and bugle corps and the number of alumni or reunion corps springing up. There's life in the old dog yet!

In my humble way, I hope you have found this chapter of interest. If I'm inaccurate or incorrect in any matter, please let the publisher know and we will try to improve our efforts for the reprint that is bound to be needed.

I must, at this stage, acknowledge the help and advice of several people, each far more knowledgeable in their particular era than me. They are the Friend brothers, Peter and Keith; Trevor Haworth; Richard Adam; Pauline Scanlan; Steve Vickers (who was the only person able to furnish me with 1982 results); and my wife Gillian for her patience over the past few weeks with my frustrations and general grouchiness.



Steve Hars was born in Basildon, Essex, England, in 1952, the year of the Queen's accession. He joined the Basildon Drum & Trumpet Corps in 1963 as a wee recruit and stayed with them after aging out in 1974, first as an instructor and then as adjutant.

When founder Glen Carter left to work in Kuwait in 1978, he took over as director of Basildon Blue Eagles, a position he held until 1982. During this period he was a founding member of DCUK.

In 1982, DCUK appointed him publicity officer, a function that also coralled him into co-hosting Channel 4 TV's "Bands of Gold" series.

He retired from active participation in DCUK around 1986, but occasionally grabs the microphone at local contests as announcer.

Hars works in London in the reprographics industry, still lives in Basildon and has been married to Gill (her younger brothers marched in the corps) for 29 years. They have two daughters, Emily and Verity.