

Dedicated musician

On 24 February 2021, **Trevor Austin**, a former professional euphonium player with the Royal Horse Guards of the Household Cavalry and founding Director of one of the UK's largest retailers of brass band instruments, turned 90. Fellow euphonium player and BBW Editor, **David Childs**, interviews the man behind Rosehill Music, and reflects upon the life and career of this dedicated musician and businessman



Trevor Austin

Synonymous with one of the biggest retail names in the brass band fraternity, Trevor Austin needs little introduction. A committed Salvationist from childhood, he is currently President of the British Association of Christian Bands and, during his retirement, dedicates his time and resources to charitable causes and outreach projects close to his heart. Amongst euphonium players, he is respected internationally, so on the occasion of his 90th birthday, it was a privilege to learn more about his career and early influences, including his parents: "My mother grew up in Cornwall, went into Camborne SA Band during the First World War, and, because of the shortage of men, learned to play the trombone. My father was a coppersmith in Pembroke Dock, but when they closed the dockyard, he moved to Devonport where he met my mother. Once they were married, they moved up to Hayes, Middlesex, where I was born in 1931. My father was a cornet player with the SA band and I played in the junior band, but by 1940, the men had gone to the Second World War and we were amalgamated with the senior band."

During these formative years, Trevor gravitated to the euphonium and later auditioned for an ensemble that would prove to have a great influence on his career, Rosehill Band. Formed in 1939 as a staff band of The Salvation Army, it took its name from a mansion named Rosehill House in a suburb of Reading, where it evacuated to from bomb-threatened central London, at the outbreak

of the War. The band recorded regularly for the BBC and, in 1942, Eric Ball succeeded founding Bandmaster, Walter Ward, before passing the baton onto Albert Jakeway.

Trevor's audition was a success and, in 1948, he joined Rosehill Band under Albert Jakeway, initially playing second euphonium to Dennis Smith, alongside other huge names. Cornet virtuoso, Derek Smith (father of Philip Smith, one-time principal trumpet with the New York Philharmonic), who after emigrating to the USA became Bandmaster of The Salvation Army's New York Staff Band, was principal cornet of the band. Other famous members included the late Harold Nash, principal trombone at Covent Garden for more than 20 years before his retirement in 1997; the late James Williams MBE, cornet soloist and long-serving Bandmaster of Enfield Citadel Band; and Sir Gordon Jewkes, the career diplomatist who was governor of the Falkland Islands between 1985 and 1988.

Rosehill Band was certainly a well-respected ensemble and, reminiscing about his time with the band, Trevor spoke in glowing terms about his section leader, Dennis Smith: "He was a great player, despite developing Malaria during the War and only having one lung! Eventually, he left to join CWS (Manchester) and then Foden's, before becoming Musical Director of Wingates, but this gave me the opportunity to move into the solo slot."

Unfortunately, Trevor's time on the end-chair with Rosehill Band was relatively short-lived, as the band passed into history after a final engagement in May 1951. However, by this time Trevor was playing professionally with the Royal Horse Guards of the Household Cavalry, having signed up for military service at the age of 17. In 1953, he would play euphonium on horseback at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, an experience I was keen to hear more about. "It was certainly memorable and obviously great, great pressure for us at the time. In a mounted band, because of the way you held your reins, you'd be pulling the horse's head back and then, all of a sudden, he could throw his head up and smash your mouthpiece back into your embouchure! Derek Smith would never accept a solo job for a month after a mounted band job, such was the bruising that could occur. Looking back though, the coronation, the International Horse Show, the Trooping of the Colour and the Edinburgh Festival were all very special occasions."

After five years in the military, Trevor embarked upon a career in the construction industry, but continued to enjoy his music-making with a very unique ensemble: "My colleague, Keith Mansfield, a cornet player who went to Kneller Hall, transcribed a lot of string quartets for two cornets, trombone and euphonium. Maisie Ringham played trombone and, initially, Kevin Johnson and Jim Williams joined us on cornet – Jim could play the high parts with aplomb! Later it was Deryck Diffey and Richard Martin on



Trevor in the Royal Horse Guards of the Household Cavalry

cornet. Some of the best musical experiences of my life were playing string quartets with these talented musicians."

On leaving the military, Trevor was also keen to use his own musical experience to help others and, having played with Staines Band for a brief period, took up the baton to embark on a new project: "In 1958, we started a band and played without cornets for 18 months. Eventually, we did an advertising campaign, attracting some cornets, and became an adequate functioning local band. That was Slough Band. Then, after that, I had four-and-a-half years as Bandmaster at Harrow Band, before going on to conduct Beaconsfield Operatic Society."

Trevor remained in the construction industry as Personnel Manager for 20 years. During the same period, he studied business for six years and, in 1967, founded Rosehill Instruments, the trading name of Austin Catinet. Combining his own surname with that of his wife, Grace Catinet, Trevor set up the Company to formalise a previously part-time activity of sourcing, and supplying brass instruments to friends and acquaintances, operating out of his garage, whilst continuing to study business and earn a living in the construction industry. As a low brass enthusiast, the name 'Catinet' caught my attention; it was Philip Catinet who famously premiered the Ralph Vaughan Williams *Concerto for Tuba* with London Symphony Orchestra in 1954. When I asked Trevor if there was a connection, he revealed: "Yes, Grace

and Philip were cousins! The 'Concerto' premiere took place at the Royal Festival Hall, two years before we were married, and we were in the audience sitting with Philip's mother. It was rather something special."

For me, this was quite a revelation and caused our conversation to detour somewhat, before returning to the mid-seventies, when a rehearsal with the Beaconsfield Operatic Society led to the acquisition of Rosehill Instruments' first premises. Having spent a great deal of time searching to find suitable premises within a 30-mile radius of Beaconsfield, Trevor's luck changed: He recalled: "During a tea-break one evening, an estate agent, who sang tenor in the choir, told me about a deal that had just collapsed; the sale of the 'Old Town' coffee shop. I met with the owner the following day and we reached an agreement." Having been a former school, and a coffee shop, this Grade II listed, 250-year-old building has been the home of Rosehill Instruments for the past 46 years. It opened in spectacular fashion on 10 May 1975: "It was charter fair day," said Trevor, "so the roads were closed. We had two bands playing, City of Oxford, and Birkhamstead and Boxmoor, and the Operatic Society sang *Come to the Fair*. Our friend and former customer, Roy Castle, was guest of honour and played his alphon. My colleague tied a piece of string to the inside of the shop door and, as Roy played, he pulled the string, giving the appearance that the alphon was blowing the door open!"

Two years later, in 1977, Austin Catinet acquired British Bandsman from Robert Alexander and, with Trevor's close friend and business colleague Peter Wilson as Managing Editor, 'BB' was published each week for twenty-three-and-a-half years from the same shared premises. "Although accountants advised against it at the time, I never regretted the acquisition of British Bandsman because working with Peter Wilson was just wonderful."

Trevor and Peter continued to work together as Austin Catinet expanded into music publishing, with the founding of the Rosehill Music Publishing Company. Rosehill Music quickly became a big name in brass band music publishing, with an impressive roster of composers and arrangers, some of whom were featured in the 1987 British Bandsman Centenary Concert at Manchester's Free Trade Hall, organised by Trevor and Peter. Talking about this iconic concert, Trevor was typically modest, insisting: "That was Peter's baby, and he did wonderfully. We featured Black Dyke, Besses o' th' Barn and Yorkshire Imps, all under the direction of Harry Mortimer, Roy Newsome, Peter Parkes and James Scott. Elgar Howarth provided a wonderful piece entitled *Legends*, featuring all four of Black Dyke's principal cornets since the War: Willie Lang,



Trevor with his son, Paul

Maurice Murphy, Jim Shepherd, Phillip McCann, and Robert and Nicholas – the Childs Brothers, premiered Peter Graham's euphonium duet, *Brillante*. That was something special. We also did a Centenary Dinner at the Dorchester, where people like Eric Ball and Harry Mortimer attended and spoke. We reinstated the Bandsman's Service, which continued to take place on the band contest weekend in London until Covid last year."

Talk of my father and uncle, together with Peter Graham's euphonium duet, led us to the Euphonium Player of the Year – an annual award founded by Trevor in 1979, which my father, my uncle and I, together with 19 other recipients, were lucky enough to receive between 1979 and 2007. Clearly still passionate about the euphonium, Trevor mentioned another former Euphonium Player of Year, Derick Kane, from whom he recently received a video-call with a special rendition of Happy Birthday! "As he was playing, I thought maybe I could still play that, until he got to the end and hit a glorious high C!"

Peter Wilson shared Trevor's passion for the euphonium, and his retirement in 2000 prompted the sale of the British Bandsman to Kapitoll Media Ltd. Around the same time, the publishing company also passed into new ownership. By the mid-1990s, the reins of the music retail business had been handed to Trevor's son, Paul, although Trevor continued contact with his many loyal customers in the Beaconsfield showroom. It is this human contact that Trevor continues to enjoy to this day: "I still get to the shop, and see many old friends and folks who've become friends over the many years. It means a great deal to me." Undoubtedly it means a great deal to them too.

During our conversation, it became clear that the formative years as a Rosehill Band member represented a special period for Trevor, and provided him with inspiration to encourage and assist the countless musicians he's had contact with throughout his lifetime so far. It is perhaps fitting, then, that the name of this iconic band, which hasn't existed for 70 years, is still fondly remembered and remains in the public eye today because of one man. Happy Birthday Trevor! ■