



Just a Note
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Andover Town Band

A Much Anticipated Return to Playing!



After 14 months of COVID restrictions that have prevented many brass bands, including ATB, from playing together, we are excited to announce that the Town Band returned to 'COVID secure' practice sessions from 20th May, initially as small-group 'bubbles', changing each week: the excitement has been palpable!

The global pandemic has been undeniably tough for brass banding ... and certainly not the way we'd have chosen to commemorate our ten year anniversary or the finale of Steve Large's time at the helm and the arrival of our new musical director, Scott Stewart.

However, Scott has done an amazing job of trying to keep the Town Band players

in practice and musically enthused, even whilst physically apart. Perhaps most popular amongst band members were the opportunity of several outdoor carolling sessions around town, bringing some much-needed, traditional festive cheer to Andover during an otherwise very different Christmas. Also, his recent 'One Take, No Edit' challenge on the members' WhatsApp group, which saw at least 14 players submit a 1-2 minute, unrehearsed, 'warts n all' piece of their own choosing.

Instruments were pulled out, dusted off and checked for spiders, washing machines were (mostly) switched off from whirring away in the background and everyone kept to the rules of the challenge – even when it meant leaving in the occasional blip or, in Scott's words, hoping that nerves and unpractised 'lips about to cave in' would instead be interpreted as 'a cultured vibrato'. The short solo pieces, played end-to-end, certainly made for an enjoyable mini-concert from home.

Whilst some members took the opportunity of a well-earned break from playing during COVID restrictions, others found the inner strength and dedication to continue practising regularly by themselves throughout. For example, Paul Kennett on euphonium (who features in this issue's 'Meet The Player') said he was motivated by a certainty that regular, end-of-day practice (which became a key part of his personal 'groundhog day' throughout COVID) would be easier in the long run than restarting from scratch. It also gave him a chance to experiment and refine his technique and embouchure (the way the lips are applied to the mouthpiece of a brass instrument).

During the hiatus in group rehearsals, and alongside the COVID risk assessments and practical mitigations and measures required to facilitate a return to playing, the band also took the opportunity to have a major overhaul of its suite of policies, procedures, supporting documentation and historic membership records, and began a detailed review of its constitution, charitable status and governance, a decade on from when these were originally set in place. The work is ongoing, in the hands of a particularly strong committee that is currently in place.

Now and Then



In November 2010, Andover Town Band was brand new, just starting out for the first time (early rehearsal photograph shown above). You can imagine the challenges the band faced at that time – a completely new organisational structure, beginning with nothing, not even funding for music, instruments or stands, needing to build its local reputation and UK section rankings from scratch.

Who would have guessed that, ten years on, the band would, in a sense, be starting out afresh once more? This time, not by ourselves, but in common with every other brass band in the country (and beyond), following a global pandemic.

The challenges this time around are rather different. Where we now have instruments and music, rankings and reputation (albeit some slightly out-of-practice musicians – rapidly coming back up to speed!), what we don't have is the freedom to squeeze everyone into one large, buoyant group, focused solely on the skill and enjoyment of making high-quality music together. COVID compliance is a big part of proceedings and likely to remain so for some time. Therefore, for now...

ATB's story is one of small-group rehearsals, well-spaced chairs, one-way systems, non-sharing of music and stands, sanitiser, personal tubs for collecting instrument condensate, continuous ventilation from open windows (who'd have thought we might need pegs to hold sheet music in place *indoors*?), 'masks' for the instruments (actually, they are elasticated 'bell covers' that go over the bell end) and mask-wearing for non-blowers such as percussionists (with the associated fogging of any spectacles giving quite some difficulty in seeing the music!).

But some things are completely unchanged since ten years ago: the dedication and enthusiasm of the band members, all trying to improve and play their very best!



Upcoming Events

ATB hopes to run the following events. It depends on a number of factors – not least, ongoing changes in Government guidance – so, **please check the website for up-to-date listings!**

<http://www.andovertownband.com/Concerts/Events/>

Sunday 18th July	10:00 – 12:00	Time Ring, Andover High Street
Sunday 29th August	14:00 – 17:00	Parish Party, Little London, nr Andover
Saturday 11th September	13:00 – 17:00	Longparish Fete
Sunday 19th September	10:00 – 12:00	Time Ring, Andover High Street
Saturday 23rd October	15:00 - 17:00	Concert at Salvation Army Hall, Andover

ATB Youth & Community Band and Prospects



During the last year, we were sad to say farewell to Marie Wilds, who decided to step down from leading Prospects, our group for complete beginners, after many years. Everyone who knows Marie or has themselves come up 'through the ranks' from Prospects will be familiar with Marie's enthusiasm, encouragement and huge patience, and we thank her for all she has done for our young (and not-so-young!) beginners.

This means that we are currently between musical directors for both the Youth & Community Band and Prospects. We are sure that there will be experienced musicians willing and able to step up to the challenge, ready to try out conducting and musical leadership, perhaps for the first time, and we are very pleased that the Town

Band will have trialled, refined and paved the way for COVID-secure playing, led by the hard work of our committee and H&S officer.

However, we do want to ensure a suitable and sustainable musical offering for the beginner and intermediate levels, providing stretch, progression and fulfilment both for players destined to reach the Town Band and those for whom the YCB will remain a suitable level of commitment and skill. At the same time, the arrangements need to be achievable, tenable and not unduly impose on just a tiny minority of members. No mean feat! We are therefore taking time to consider the options, rather than rush the decision in our eagerness to start playing together again!

Did You Know?

Over 150 players from about 100 different families have played with the ATB bands since ATB's creation in November 2010.

About one-third of the players are still current.

Meet The Player



Paul

Euphonium player in ATB

When and why did you start playing?

I was about 4 or 5 years old. Dad was a Salvation Army Band Master and peripatetic brass teacher. One day, my brother and I were exploring and discovered a couple of trumpets hidden under a bed. We used to blast on the trumpets whilst bouncing all over the beds. Dad decided we ought to learn to play properly!

Your brass banding journey to date?

Initially, Dad pointed us in the right direction and was our gentle guiding light up to 'exhibition level', at which point you could have a county brass teacher come to your home and give lessons. I had a Mr Tamplin and also joined the County Band.

I was in the Salvation Army Band until I was 17, then tried a few other bands including Marchwood and Winchester. The other players didn't always take practising seriously, so I left. Within 2 weeks, my brother asked me to join him at Woodfalls on Eb tuba for the imminent national finals. Obviously, that was a, 'Yes!'

And there I stayed on tuba until William was born. With a young baby, two hours of driving (round-trip) for two hours of rehearsal followed by a trip to the pub was no longer possible. I completely stopped playing 2003-2013. Then William started learning, I stumbled upon ATB in 2014, and it was just the right level of stretch for both of us. You might say that ATB saved my [playing] life!

Editor's note: Funnily enough, Paul started out on baritone (after the bed-jumping trumpets), had a good spell on tuba at Woodfalls, but has spent most of his time on euphonium ... when what he really wanted to learn was trombone ... until he found that his arms weren't long enough!

Family links in the band?

Obviously, my Dad and brother in brass generally, and William in ATB until university called. But, actually, both my other sons also played in ATB bands – Christian on drums and Daniel in the YCB on cornet. But my wife has her own successful interests and stays well out of it all!

Best thing about brass banding? And the challenges?

Best is the family feeling and friendship. The emotional support I got when I lost Dad a couple of years ago really helped me cope. I enjoy the feeling of an inter-generational group of people all working well together, driving towards a common goal. It's not perfect all the time, but it's powerful. Oh, and I love playing brass. But ... maintaining your standard as you get older is hard. Think brain fog and less agile fingers. The key is to get a high enough underlying level that the 'bad days' still just meet the grade. Experience helps, but sometimes rightly tells you that you can no longer do it!

Your favourite brass player and music?

It changes all the time, but, just now, it's Philip Wilby's *Paganini Variations*. Beautiful.

Life outside the band?

I am a sales engineer in IT (previously, in telecoms). I enjoy cars, both driving and tinkering with them. During my 11-year playing hiatus, I learnt karate and proudly progressed to brown belt!

Future banding aspirations?

To remain in ATB, and help it be the best it can under the new perspective Scott will undoubtedly bring. And, when the time comes for someone to take my place, to give them every support.