

## TOUR OF THE NORTH SCOTLAND DIVISION - 2006



### Thursday 25 May

The tour commenced on Thursday when the band assembled at the hall to load instruments, suitcases and countless other items of 'necessary' equipment on to the coach. After much pushing, heaving and head-scratching, everything was stowed on board somehow, though we were unsure how 30 bandsmen would fit-in. So in "German-tourist style" the bandsmen used their caps to reserve their seats. Finally we waved goodbye to the coach as our intrepid driver, Trevor Thorn, accompanied by his wife Yvonne, set-off with the aim to be at Glasgow airport by tomorrow evening to meet the band on their arrival.

### Friday 26 May

The first challenge to confront the group setting-off from the hall was that the minibus had a flat battery. Efforts to 'bump-start' it down the hill were unsuccessful. Eventually a willing volunteer with a car and a set of jump-leads, plus a bit of patience, and the minibus engine roared into life. The party was then soon at Wokingham station courtesy of Peter Howlett to meet the remainder of the group. The train journey to Gatwick was uneventful, though at least one passenger was prompted to ask what the purpose of such a large group travelling together was. We were pleased to explain and the lady wished us every blessing.

After negotiating check-in and security, time was spent enjoying the delights of Gatwick's departure lounge, though it was rumoured that two bandsmen with frequent flyer privileges had slipped away to the peace and quiet of the Executive Lounge. Eventually the time came to board, and after a short delay we were in the air and on the way to Glasgow. Before we took off, news had filtered through that the coach had already arrived at Glasgow airport.

At Glasgow the weather was noticeably cooler and the sky looked unsettled as we boarded the coach and headed for our first overnight stop, the Lynnhurst Hotel in Johnston, first passing the exit for Paisley which is the 'home' town of our Commanding Officer, as he gently reminded us.

Some tricky manoeuvring of the coach along the narrow and steep hotel driveway was required before we disembarked and unloaded our bags. We were treated to an excellent meal served by the hotel staff before we finally retired to our rooms for the night.

### **Saturday 27 May**

At 8:00am bandsmen slowly drifted into the dining room and tucked into a hearty full English (or was it Scottish?) breakfast. The last four members of our party, who had travelled up from London on a very early flight, joined us for devotions. Commissioner Alex reminded us of a little-known hero of aviation and a reluctant hero in the Bible, and spoke about how we might become heroes in the sight of some who we would be ministering to during the coming days.

Then back on the coach and some tricky reversing that involved George Parker doing a fair impression of Tarzan holding back some tree branches and we were on our way to Fort William.

We passed along the shores of Loch Lomond, stopping briefly at the village of Luss to sample the warm shortbread at the village shop. Alex was first in the shop to make sure that the usual 'wee drams' on offer with the shortbread were left alone! We continued along winding roads beyond Loch Lomond with a lunch-stop at The Green Welly at Tyndrum before crossing the glens towards Fort William.

Spectacular scenery confronted us at every turn, though the weather throughout was either raining or about to rain. We queued in traffic for a couple of miles due to traffic control at construction work on a bridge at Glencoe bridge, but arrived in Fort William in good time to a warm welcome at the Corps.

Then came the task of unloading and setting-up for the first time, and a warm-up for the band. This was followed by tea, during which the band locals were watching the weather closely. The timing in the itinerary for the open air meeting was planned for 4:30am but unfortunately it was raining hard. However, at 5:30pm there was a sudden change in the weather and the band locals chose in favour of a short open-air concert in the town. As soon as the open air meeting had finished and the band safely back at the hall, the heavens opened once again!

The evening concert at the hall was played to a small but appreciative audience, including one person who had not been inside an Army hall for 55 years, and the bandmaster's brother who had travelled for 5½ hours to support the band. Packing away was followed by more food and drink and then the band dispersed to billets and overnight accommodation.

### **Sunday 28 May**

A 7.40am start at Fort William hall soon revealed those who were 'morning' people and those who weren't. Captain Stephen and Teena Kirkland led devotions, and spoke about how the song "How Great Thou Art" only really came alive when they were appointed to Scotland. With all of the scenery that we had seen the previous day, and with his hall being virtually in the shadow of Ben Nevis (which remained stubbornly concealed by cloud all the time we were there), we easily understood what they meant.

The coach was loaded and we were soon on our way to Inverness, crossing several swing-bridges over the Caledonian Canal and taking in the magnificent scenery as we travelled the length of Loch Ness (the monster was 'not at home' to visiting bandsmen). As we arrived at Inverness Adam Hall gave us some interesting information about the town, and pointed out "General William Booth Road".

We were greeted warmly with a cup of tea at the Corps. Once again the heavy work of unloading the coach and setting up the equipment began, and we were ready for the start of the morning meeting, which saw the hall almost full to capacity. Rob Molloy expertly led the meeting, during which the band played 'A gift for His altar' and Taryn Roestoff sang 'The Christ of Calvary', appropriately to the tune 'Annie Laurie'.

During the meeting the Divisional Commander, Major Martin Hill officially welcomed the band to the North Scotland Division. Then asked Commissioner Alex to present a 35 year, long service award to Major Margeret Halbert of Huntly House Social Social Centre.

In his message, Alex spoke about the need to shed unnecessary cumbrances and not giving up. The meeting was followed by a buffet lunch with the Corps, then the band walked to the High Street and formed up to march through the shopping centre, perform a short open-air concert and march back again. This generated much interest from the general public, and many people stood and listened. One followed the band back to the hall for the afternoon concert, performed to a full hall.

Bandmaster Stuart decided to abandon the set programme and selected items from the band's repertoire that was well received by the audience. During Ian's rendition of 'the Saints', the sight of video on the screen of the band marching along Inverness High Street only an hour earlier gained an appreciative reaction.

The audience also gave sensitive silent appreciation to the band's playing of 'All to Jesus' and 'And they were Heroes'. After concluding with 'Emblem of the Army' rather than the more traditional 'To Regions Fair', packing-up was a necessary task (we seem to be gradually getting quicker at it!) before the band dispersed to dinner with billets and overnight accommodation.

### **Monday 29 May**

We met at Inverness hall at 8.00am to load the coach. Majors Paul and Gill Billard led us in devotions. Paul introduced us to the first CD he was ever given, a song once used in an advert for British Rail, which he skilfully linked to the 'Gospel Train' theme of the tour.

We departed for Wick, 100 miles away, with Trevor skilfully backing the coach out of another tight space as we left. As we drove north the scenery was becoming less rugged and more agricultural. We paused for a short break at Golspie where the weather obliged us by raining! The public toilets were not to be recommended! With the cold northerly wind adding to the

discomfort most retreated to the nearby coffee shop, which seemed to have opened the moment the coach appeared.

Our journey continued along the North Sea coast to the pleasant town of Wick. We unloaded at the hall and changed into full uniform before driving to the grounds of Ackergill Castle, a privately owned castle on the coast line for a formal band photograph. In the strengthening wind the photo didn't take long and we were glad to get back on the coach and head towards John o'Groats. Lunch was a 'soup and sandwich' at the Sea View hotel. After lunch a small group returned to Wick by car to conduct Home League at the Corps. As the rest of the band proceeded to the small ferry terminal at John o'Groats we were wondering which group had the better arrangement!

There is little at John o'Groats itself, rather like Land's End, just a car park, Tourist Centre and the inevitable souvenir shop and retail outlets. A local guide boarded the coach and explained to us some of the history of the place, and identified the Orkney islands that could be clearly seen to the North. Of course, it was obligatory for the band to form up at the John o'Groats signboard, which indicated that Maidenhead was 687 miles away.

In spite of the cold wind, Bandmaster Stuart decided on a short open-air concert, which attracted passing attention from the tourists around. It was too cold to hang around and the opportunity to retreat to the coffee shop was a welcome relief. We were soon back on the coach returning to Wick to set-up for the evening concert. The local corps treated us to a meal in a nearby restaurant. The evening concert was played to a capacity crowd who greatly appreciated every item, and especially the video presentation that accompanied the playing of 'And they were Heroes'. As well as fellow Salvationists from Thurso the band were delighted to welcome a small contingent who arrived on the ferry from Kirkwall Corps on the Orkney Islands.

## **Tuesday 30 May**

Again we met at the hall at 8.00am to load the coach followed by prayers. Major Norman Waddington referred to 'And They Were Heroes' and spoke of the challenges that had faced him during his officership.

On the coach we re-traced our steps to Inverness. An early arrival gave opportunity to visit the town centre before lunch, and we also collected clean white shirts that had been laundered by corps folk for which each of us (and those who sit next to us) were very grateful. After an excellent lunch in the hall we boarded the coach again for another 3 hour journey to Peterhead.

The landscape to the east of Inverness was much less dramatic than what we had seen before, being of the 'rolling hills' variety, but very lush and green. The coach was quiet for a while as eyes dropped and many of the group snoozed. A comfort stop at Cullen gave some the chance to sample the local award-winning ice-cream. We were again well-fed on arrival at the Peterhead hall and starting to become accustomed to Scotch Broth!

It was then onto Peterhead Academy, the venue for the evening's concert. A theatre with tiered seating and a large stage. Over 200 people gathered for the concert and received the band's music with enthusiasm. At the conclusion it made a change to be able to leave all the equipment set up as we were returning in the morning when the venue would be filled with 11 & 12-year-olds from the local schools. So we departed for our overnight accommodation, some in billets and some at a nearby hotel.

### **Wednesday 31 May**

We were blessed with a lie-in today - we didn't have to be at the hall until 9:00am for prayers. Captain Martin Cordner spoke to us about how our ministry could provide comfort to those in need of it. We particularly appreciated the Captain's support, as his wife Leanne had given birth to their second son only the day before, and we recognised that dealing with that and a visiting band had provided challenges.

We then returned to the Peterhead Academy to prepare for a lively concert in front of 250 11 & 12 years olds from local schools. The light numbers of the repertoire were given an airing, and members of the audience were given that chance to join the percussion section. Two volunteers also had a go at conducting the band. Steve Parker held the audience's attention with a talk about Charles Cadbury - famous for chocolate but also the first person to organise a 'Sunday School' and he also described the work of the Salvation

Army with the help of some PowerPoint slides. After packing and loading, we returned to the hall for yet more food (and broth!) and then set off on the (relatively) short journey to Aberdeen.

Our first engagement was a concert in the Wintergardens. The sun chose this time to shine so it was quite warm for the band seated in the conservatory surrounded by tropical plants. We then called at the church venue for the evening concert to unload. Back to the hall for more food and then return to the church to rehearse with the Stonehaven Chorus for the joint concert. A good crowd gathered for the concert which, for the band at least, was a different format with the choir singing in two 'spots' during the evening, their 'a capella' renditions of classical songs being a contrast to the band's livelier music.

The choir sang a song from the Faeroe Islands that had a particular appeal to the band with the chorus of seagull sounds produced by the choir! Finally came now the usual routine of packing-up and loading the coach before departing for billets, this being the only night of the tour when the entire band was accommodated in billets.

### **Thursday 01 June**

We met at 9.00am for prayers at the Torrey Corps. Captain David Alton the CO of the Citadel Corps spoke to us about our ministry and its significance even if we never became aware of any positive results. We then boarded the coach for a short-guided tour of Aberdeen, stopping to wander through the old town, and also visiting Aberdeen Citadel's hall.

This imposing building, designed in the style of Balmoral Castle, has just closed for refurbishment, but we were still able to admire the traditional surroundings of the main hall. We also climbed the tower, led by Captain Jane, and enjoyed the spectacular views of the city. Then we headed towards Dundee, stopping at the Airdrie Arms Hotel in Kirriemuir for lunch (no broth this time!).

On arrival at Dundee we met up with some of the wives and friends who had flown into Glasgow that morning and met by George Parker with a minibus (nothing new there!). After unloading the band proceeded to a square in the

town centre and performed an outdoor concert to an interested audience in an arena surrounded by imposing granite buildings that provided a rich reverberation to the brass sound.

The Dundee Central Corps provided a meal, and there was time to relax for a short while before the evening concert performed in front of a large and enthusiastic audience. The march chosen by the audience was, as in previous concerts, once again Star Lake in spite of Stuart's efforts to persuade them otherwise. Once again Commissioner Alex was asked to present a long service award, 30 years, this time the CO of Dundee Central, Major Stephen Slade. The packing-up routine followed the concert before we retired to billets or hotel rooms.

### **Friday 02 June**

After a comfortable night we met at the hall to load the coach. After resolving the minor problem of being unable to park in the road outside the hall, everything was on board then we met for prayers during which time Captain Stephen Slade spoke about the purpose of our ministry.

Then the band walked with instruments to the City Council Chambers to be greeted warmly by the Lord Provost. After some refreshments the band played and the Lord Provost gave a welcome speech. He presented Commissioner Alex with a plaque depicting the city's coat-of-arms, and Bandmaster Stuart responded with a tour pennant. We were then given an interesting explanation of the history depicted by the various features of the council chamber.

Then came the time to walk to the waterfront where the coach was waiting to take us on to Blairgowrie. The coach park was adjacent to Scott's ship Discovery and there was a brief opportunity to view the vessel and reflect on the 'discoveries' of the tour.

The Army in Blairgowrie consists only of a community centre and charity shop, with no hall. Nonetheless we were treated to a generous buffet lunch before proceeding to Well Meadow for an outdoor concert. Compared with the conditions at John o'Groats, the warm sunshine was a sharp and welcome change.

A minor hitch to the afternoon's timetable was that the coach had developed a punctured tyre as we had arrived at Blairgowrie and we had to wait a short time while it was repaired. Although we couldn't check-in to our hotel rooms, we were given the use of a hotel lounge to relax in the shade. As soon as the coach was ready we went to the Parish Church to unload and set up for the evening then back to the hotels to check in. A break before tea gave some welcome time to relax or shower and change.

The evening concert was played to an audience of around 60 local people. This time Stuart decided not to allow the audience to choose a march, and elected to play 'Spirit of Endeavour'. After a big build up in his introduction to the service to bands by Norman Bearcroft, the band struck up with 'Star Lake' anyway. The expression on Stuart's face was worth seeing. He achieved his payback later by taking 'Dance before the Lord' at a breathtaking pace. We packed away and loaded the coach for the last time and said farewell to Major Paul Billard, who had been an excellent and entertaining guide throughout the trip.

On the coach thanks were expressed to Peter Hill who had worked tirelessly to organise the tour, and Bandmaster Stuart who had so expertly guided the band and compered every concert. Stuart then thanked the band for its support and hard work. Back at the hotel Band Sergeant Stephen Parker dug deep into his pocket and provided refreshments for the whole band as we relaxed prior to turning-in to prepare for an early departure tomorrow.

### **Saturday 03 June**

4.30am came all too soon for those heading back to Maidenhead. The hotel kindly laid on a buffet breakfast for us prior to departure at 5.30am. Simon Parker, Andrew Collier, Sarah Mayer and Taryn Roestoff were up to wave us off, but there was no sign of the others in the 'holiday' party that were staying on to return to Loch Ness for a few days. The roads were very quiet as we headed towards Glasgow airport, and we arrived in good time for our flight, which departed promptly and arrived at Heathrow 25 minutes early. Our lifts arrived with little delay getting us home in time for lunch.

## **Sunday 04 June**

We arrived for the morning meeting to find the coach already parked there, Trevor and Yvonne having had an excellent trip south. The unloading of the 'heavy' stuff was left until after the meeting. During the meeting recognition was made in the meeting of the fact that it was Trevor and Yvonne's 51<sup>st</sup> wedding anniversary, and they were presented with a large bouquet of flowers to mark the occasion. Appreciation was also expressed for the part played by them both in making the tour a success.

*John Renouf*