

FRANCIS COWLEY
BIOGRAPHY OF HIS BRASS BANDING LIFE

Francis Cowley began playing the cornet at the age of nine years with Wroughton Silver Band, following in the footsteps of his Father, a cornet player with the Band and his Grandfather, who was a founder member of the Band.

After a short while with Wroughton Silver Band, Francis moved to the then Great Western Railway Social, Education and Union Staff Association Band, whose name has changed over the years to Swindon British Rail Staff Association Band, John Holmes Swindon Concert Brass, Swindon Concert Brass and to its most recent name of Swindon Pegasus Brass.

Fran left the Band for a short while in 1945 when he was conscripted into the Army. During this time he maintained his interest in music and was Principal Cornet for his Regimental Band (The Wiltshire Regiment).

Apart from his enthusiasm for Brass Bands, Fran was, and still is, a very keen Big Band trumpet player, again playing for his Regimental Dance Band whilst in the Army and eventually assisted in founding the Swindon Big Band for which he still plays Lead Trumpet. Fran is also a very experienced Solo Cornetist, competing locally and nationally, at one point in his playing career was fourth best Solo Cornet player in the Country and undefeated Champion Solo Cornetist of Wessex.

On completion of his conscripted service to the Army, Fran rejoined the G.W.R.S.E. and U. Band as Principal Cornet and Bandmaster, playing an important part in the development of the Band.

In 1966 Fran was instrumental in founding a Club for young musicians in the Swindon area (Swindon Instrumental Music Club, known now as Swindon Young Musicians). Fran helped the club grow from a mere handful of string, woodwind and brass players into the vast organisation of over eight hundred members at the time of his retirement in December 1994.

In 1974 Fran founded a Youth Brass Band within Swindon Young Musicians and remained their Musical Director for twenty years, whilst continuing to play Principal Cornet for the British Rail Staff Association Band and Lead Trumpet with Swindon Big Band.

In 1982 Fran extended the Youth Brass Band so that older members could continue to play and started contesting a Fourth Section Band (also known

as S.Y.M. Youth Brass Band), which was successful at a local competitive level.

After thirty three years as Principal Cornet with the (by now) Swindon Concert Brass, and playing under Joe Alder, Roly Mundy, Cyril Winstone, George Snook, Barbara Stone and Denzil Stephens, Fran took over as Musical Director in 1983, following the retirement of the then M.D. Courtney Bosanko M.B.E..

As a Conductor with both Swindon Concert (Pegasus) Brass and the Youth Brass Bands, Fran has been very successful. Within his first eighteen months with Swindon Concert Brass, he had taken the Band through twelve contests, eleven of which saw the Band in the winning frame.

Frans successes with the Youth Brass Band run into a small catalogue including winning the West of England Youth Brass Band Champions title in 1977, 1984, 1985 and 1991. In 1993, Fran lead them to success in the West of England Open Youth Brass Band Championships. As a result of these successes, Fran has had the privilege of conducting the Youth Brass Band in such locations as The Royal Albert Hall, London – bringing back memories of the time he sat on the stage of The Royal Albert Hall as Principal Cornet with the Swindon British Railway Staff Association Band when they participated in the National Brass Band Championships of Great Britain (Championship Section) under Barbara Stone in 1973.

Fran continued in the post of Musical Director to Swindon Pegasus Brass until October 1991, where, after more than fifty years loyal service to them, he terminated his membership, feeling that he could channel his efforts with more effectiveness, elsewhere. It was this move that saw the Birth of Swindon Brass (then Swindon Band (s.y.m.)), as a Fourth Section Band, and, in only two years, Fran had lead them successfully to the Status of Second Section. During this time, Fran was still Musical Director of Swindon Youth Brass Band.

In December 1994, retiring from full time work, aged 67, Fran had to relinquish his position as Musical Director of Swindon Youth Brass Band, but continued as Musical Director to Swindon Brass (previously known as Swindon Band (s.y.m.)).

Having retired from full time work for Swindon Borough Council in 1994, he continued to teach at Pinewood School, Bourton, near Shrivenham, until his 86th birthday in May 2013.

Fran has continued as Musical Director to Swindon Brass through its ups and downs, and has achieved, with the Band, at this years National Brass Band Championships Qualifying rounds, promotion to Third Section after a number of years back in the Fourth Section. 2013 also sees Fran take the Band to the National Finals for the second time in eight years and earlier this year Fran had been in attendance, either playing, conducting, or both, at the West of England Qualifying rounds of the National Championships of Great Britain for 64 consecutive years.

His very first appearance at the Championships was at Alexandra Palace with Wroughton Band in 1938 (the last Championships to be held before the 39-45 War). He was unable to participate after the War whilst serving in the Army, but on leaving the Army in 1948 took up playing again with the Railway Band, competing at the Championships in 1949 and every year since.

September 2013.