

A PORTRAIT OF
A
MUSICIAN POW AND FREEMASON



Major James Hakin Howe MBE (Rtd)

A Portrait of a Soldier, Musician and Freemason



Soldier



The First World War had yet to cease when James Hakin Howe entered the world in a war torn Europe on 11 November 1917.



By fifteen, he joined the Royal Scots as a band boy. His musical career already started when he was nine years of age. In 1939, he went to France with his Battalion as a stretcher-bearer.

He was unfortunately taken prisoner and spent the next four years in a prison camp in Poland. (British prisoners right)

There he formed a dance band and obtained musical instruments by bribing the guards. He then copied the music from Glenn Miller records and gave a string of concerts in the camp that housed 25,000 persons. At one stage, the Germans took the band to Berlin to play for other prisoners-of-war. Not long after they arrived at the city, the RAF bombed it and they had to return.



Musician



(Argyll Glengarry)

After the war, he studied at the Royal Military School of Music and in May 1949 was appointed Bandmaster of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. He joined the 1st Battalion in Stanley Barracks, Hong Kong. Later, he went to the New Territories on the border of China and lived in a tented campsite. It was under canvas when he experienced his first typhoon. There he made an acquaintance of an Indian tailor, Mr. M.A. Rauf, who eventually became his proposer into Freemasonry. He recalled the interview in a Sergeants Mess in Kowloon. Present, where his seconder, Dusty Rhodes, Noel Smurthwaite and Harold Swabey. Jimmy, as he is effectually known, was formerly proposed at a meeting of Shamrock Lodge No. 712 Irish Constitution on 13 December 1950.

Freemason



The records of the original first Minute Book of Shamrock Lodge show they were written in green ink by the Secretary, W.Bro. Swabey 712 and that Jimmy was initiated in the Lodge on 10 January 1951 at Zetland Hall, Hong Kong. He was conducted through the ceremony by W.Bro. Swabey. On 3 April 1951, at an Emergency meeting of the Lodge he was Passed to the Second Degree together with Bros. R.W. Craig and G.A. Evans. Bro. Jimmy Howe was then Raised to the sublime degree on 11 July 1951 together with Bro. Craig. (Zetland Hall above)

He recalls those Masonic days in Hong Kong and music played an important part of the ceremonies and how he enjoyed spending his free time in Zetland Hall practicing the organ. He also played music at the horse races in Happy Valley with some of his Masonic friends, such as W. Bro. Arthur Gillard, Tyler of Shamrock.

In 1951, Mrs. Howe joined him in Hong Kong and they were crossing the harbour on the Star ferry, he recalls, attending a Shamrock Ladies Night when the news came during the crossing that King George VI had died. They arrived at the Hong Kong Hotel and decided to carry on with the dinner but to cancel the dancing, as a mark of respect.

The Highlanders were then posted back to England in 1952 and then to British Guyana in 1954. While stationed there he attended a Lodge in Georgetown.

It was with the Highlanders when he encountered one of his most memorable moments. In 1956 the band played at the British Industries Fair in Finland; one night they were due to play when the news came through that Finland's great composer, Sibelius, had died. The concert went ahead, and when they played 'Finlandia', the whole audience stood as one. At the end of the work that concludes in stirring fashion, there was total silence.

'I was startled. Usually we were engulfed with applause after such a finale, but this time there was nothing'. Then 'I looked and so many of the audience were just standing there, crying. They had enjoyed the music, but the occasion was too much. It was a tremendously moving moment. It was the only time we received what you might call a silent ovation.'

Director of Music Scots Guards



'Nemo me impune lacessit' (Nobody assails me with impunity)

His career took him forward as Director of Music of the Scots Guards. In 1964, he took the Scots Guards Band on a seventeen-week tour of New Zealand and Australia, spending five days in Hong Kong en route. There was not a meeting of Shamrock while he was there but he had an opportunity to meet with several members of the Lodge at the Peninsula Hotel and was happy to renew acquaintances.

He did wish to continue with his Masonic career but it was not until this time that he was permanently based in London that he was able to settle down and join another Lodge. He

affiliated to the 'Incorporated Society of Musicians Lodge No. 2881'. Eventually, in 1982, he became the Master of this Lodge. The members were mostly professional musicians. Some were from the BBC, others from Covent Garden Opera House and the Lodge met in Great Queen Street, Freemason's Hall. At his Installation, a Brass Quartet appropriately provided the music and a singer from Covent Garden sang the Master's Song. He was also an Honorary member of the 'Household Brigade Lodge No. 2614' and appointed London Grand Rank.

Retirement

When he retired from the Army, this talented musical Brother took on a new career, directing the BBC Concert Orchestra on the very popular radio programmes '*Friday Night Is Music Night*' and '*Melodies For You*'.

He retired to Eastbourne and became a member of 'Southbourne Lodge and was appointed Past Provincial Grand Organist of Sussex. One of his greatest memories was of conducting the Symphony Orchestra of Freemasons playing compositions of Mozart's music at Great Queen Street. The brethren were wearing their regalia at Freemasons Hall, as it was to mark the Bicentennial of Brother Mozart.



Jimmy marked the end of a personal era to commemorate a special moment from the First World War. The era belonged to one of the notable conductors, Major James Howe MBE, whose 81st birthday fell on 11 November 1998 after 25 years of presenting the 'Massed Bands Spectacular' at Fairfield, Croydon. He began the massed band concerts at Croydon in 1974, and over the years, hundreds of service musicians have taken part. He also organized a series of ex-prisoner of war reunion concerts with such soloists as Anne Shelton and The Beverley Sisters.

He savoured the astonishing moment in Christmas of 1914 when the opposing forces stopped shooting at one another, emerged from their trenches and exchanged Christmas gifts. (Trench Warfare)



That marked a lowering of the lights in the Croyden Concert Hall and; the singing of '*Silent Night*'. The concert included the '*Last Post*', and a silent tribute to the fallen of the world wars. With a flourish, it was ended with a rendition of '*Happy Birthday to Jimmy*', '*Land of Hope and Glory*' and, then everyone linking arms singing, '*Auld Lang Syne*'.

Among them was a party from the French town where he was captured by the Germans early in the Second World War led by their Mayor.

The last Encore

The last concert organized by Jimmy and conducted at Croydon together with Captain Ted Whealing of the Royal Marines, and WWII Geoff Broome of the Irish Guards, was with the Central Band, the Royal British Legion Band, and the Household Division Musicians Association. Vocalists included David Bole and Gloria Whealing and a commentary on the Great Wars sequence by Brigadier A.G. Ross of the Scots Guards. This was followed by a parade of standard bearers and Chelsea Pensioners.

In November 1999, many shoppers took a short break from their scurrying around to quietly remember those who died in this Century's wars. Outside 'Boots' in the Arndale Centre, Manchester, a large crowd gathered, as the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month approached. Mayor Beryl Healy introduced by Group Captain Bertie Wallace, former RAF fighter pilot, greeted a line of ex-servicemen.

A voice on the center's public address system triggered the two-minute silence.

Trumpeter Major Jimmy sounded a poignant rendition of the '*Last Post*' as standards were slowly lowered. Many shoppers stopped in their tracks – only the young children not appreciating the significance of the occasion.



Stanley Jones, who served in the Royal Navy, reiterated the importance of remembering. He said, 'Go to anywhere in France, Belgium or Holland and just look at the graves and see the ages of those poor lads 17, 18, 19 and you'll come home and realize why it is so important'. He highlighted why buying a poppy goes further than just showing respect.

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Major Howe, former Scots Guards Director of Music, trumpeted a lively version of '*Happy Birthday*' in honour of his own 82nd birthday. But the soldier, who was taken hostage by the Germans when serving with the Royal Scots, admitted he had mixed feelings on Armistice Day. He said, 'I do think in many ways I was very lucky to be here. But it was marvelous today.'



Advancing years conspires against us and it arrives for the best of us to 'call it a day'. Behind this story lies a remarkable man, a prodigious musical career that spans over seventy years and a Mason of fifty years standing. He has received from the Grand Lodge of Ireland his Fifty Year Jewel for his service to the Craft.

Major James Hakin Howe MBE (Rtd), soldier, musician and Freemason still has his Masonic Bible that was presented to him at his initiation in 1951 in Shamrock Lodge 712 IC Kong signed by the Master, W. Bro. G. F. Rhodes; the Secretary, W. Bro. H. Swabey and Senior Warden, Bro. F.W. Winyard and Junior Warden, Bro. W.H. Cowie.

