

Royal visitor 'greatly impressed' by young performers

By Janet Archer

During the Second World War, when many male and female adults were serving in the armed forces, the Reepham Band was dependent on its younger players. As the Reepham Junior Band the players performed over seventy concerts to members of the forces in the space of three years.



In recognition of this effort, Queen Mary (widow of George V and grandmother of the present Queen), made a special visit to Reepham with two of her ladies-in-waiting in the summer of 1945 (as pictured in the August photo, above, in the Reepham Life 2021 Calendar).

The Junior Band gave a concert in the Band Hall, conducted by Tommy Ruffles and were joined by the Primary Band conducted by Gordon Frankland.



There were solos by Pam Barsted on cornet and Derek Woods on euphonium, and Queen Mary received a bouquet of carnations presented by the very youngest band member, Pamela Reeder.

The Band Hall was originally erected as a new home for the Band of Hope, a temperance movement which was launched in 1916, but by 1922 had expanded so much that it outgrew its original base in the United Methodist Chapel in Fishers Alley. With funding and support from Jesse Bircham, the chemist on Norwich Road, and John Walker who ran a household furnishing business, a large hall was built where the flats called The Maltings now stand. When it was first built it was known as the Methodist Hall and mainly used for Band of Hope activities and meetings, which included a brass band, a string orchestra and a choir. The movement began to decline in the 1930s and after Methodist Union the hall was eventually put up for sale. The Band of Hope brass band was still thriving and raised money to buy the hall, renamed it as the Band Hall and, under the leadership of Tommy Ruffles, the band became Reepham Town Temperance Band.

Following the concert Lady Cynthia Colville, one of the ladies-in-waiting, wrote that Queen Mary had been *"greatly impressed by the performance, by the intelligence & enthusiasm of the young performers - including the very young! - , by the delightful surroundings (such a very pleasant hall & so beautifully decorated with flags & those lovely dahlias!)....."*. One wonders if they noticed the chairs at the back!

Information from Reepham Archive, My Town by Wesley Piercy & The Reepham Town Band by Joyce Cox