

ROYAL MARINE BAND SERVICE

FACT SHEET



The Band of HM Royal Marines Portsmouth

'The Royal Band'

The origins of Royal Marine Bands in the Portsmouth area can be traced back to the middle of the 18th Century. However, the present Band is a direct descendant of the Band of the Royal Marine Artillery who were formed in January 1861. By 1865 the Band numbered forty-six musicians and eight band boys. They were under the direction of Bandmaster John Winterbottom and were based at the Royal Marines Artillery Barracks, Eastney and Portsmouth.

It was during the reign of His Majesty King Edward VII that the Band first provided music aboard the Royal Yacht when, in 1902, they embarked in HMY Victoria and Albert on the occasion of the cruise made by the King for the restoration of his health. One year later the Band was appointed by His Majesty The King as the permanent Royal Yacht Band, a privileged duty they performed until the eventual decommissioning of HMY Britannia on the 11 December 1997.

On their appointment as the Royal Yacht Band in 1903 and when embarked, the musicians were authorised to wear a special split cap badge which consisted of a flaming grenade surrounded by laurel leaves. Following the visit to India by His Majesty King George V in HMS Medina for the Durbar at Delhi in 1911 the King ordered that his Royal Cypher GRV in silver was to be a permanent addition to the special cap badge and that it was to be worn by the Band at all times.

In 1925 the Band were further honoured when, following a convalescent cruise by His Majesty King George in the Mediterranean in the Royal Yacht, the Sovereign commanded that all members of the Band should wear, at all times, a badge on the right shoulder bearing words 'Royal Yacht' surmounted by the crown. The badge was eventually adopted and worn by all Royal Yachtsmen. In April 1998 Her Majesty The Queen agreed that the Portsmouth Band continue to provide Royal Duty in the form of a Royal Band for the Royal Family. A change to the existing Royal Yacht shoulder badge was made to read 'Royal Band', and this is worn by the entire Portsmouth Band. The Royal Band is to wear the Divisional Tunic when on Royal Duty.

A further addition to the insignia worn by the Band came in 1955 when Her Majesty The Queen expressed the wish that all members of the Royal Marines Band Portsmouth should wear the combined Cyphers of Her Majesty and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh on their headdress badges. This honour was bestowed in recognition of the attendance on Her Majesty The Queen by the Band during Her Majesty's Commonwealth Tour in 1953-54.

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During their service in the Royal Yacht the Band visited and played in many parts of the world, as diverse as the small island of Pitcairn in the South Pacific to major cities such as Rio de Janeiro, New York, St. Petersburg to name only a few. They have provided music on major ceremonial occasions while embarked in the Royal Yacht, ranging from the Official Opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959, the Captain James Cook bi-centennial celebrations in Australia in 1970, the Commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of D-Day in 1994, the Official handing-over of Hong Kong in 1997 and many, many other such occasions.

When not embarked in the Royal Yacht some of the more important engagements undertaken by the Band since World War II have been the Victory Parade in 1946, the Royal Command Variety Show in 1949, Her Majesty The Queen's Coronation in 1953, Sir Winston Churchill's State Funeral in 1965, the 1966 World Cup Final at Wembley Stadium, Lord Mountbatten's funeral in 1979 and the Royal Tournaments.

Many illustrious names are to be found among the succession of the Band's Directors of Music, including Captain R P O'Donnell the Lieutenant Colonel P J Neville. Probably the most well known being Lieutenant Colonel Sir Vivian Dunn who held the position from 1931 to 1953 when he left the Band to assume the appointment of Principal Director of Music, Royal Marines.

The title of the Royal Marines Band Portsmouth has changed many times - in 1923 on the amalgamation of the Royal Marines Artillery and the Royal Marines Light Infantry the Band became the Band of the Royal Marines, Portsmouth Division. This changed in 1947 when it became the Royal Marines Band, Portsmouth Group. In 1972 the title of the Band changed yet again, when it became the Band of Commander-in-Chief, Naval Home Command, and it is now known as the Band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines, Portsmouth.

In 1997 the Royal Yacht was decommissioned much to the sadness of all who served on her. The Royal Band has continued to stay in the public eye with televised events such as the Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance, the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, the Mountbatten Festival of Music and other state events such as the Queen Mother's Funeral in 2002.

Royal Marines Musicians and Buglers are trained and actively carry out their military operational roles to this day. Bands were involved in the first Gulf War as casualty handlers on various hospital ships and later in 2000, ranks were deployed to Kosovo for six months during Op AGRICOLA supporting 3 Commando Brigade RM. During the Fireman's strike in 2002, Band Service personnel were deployed with 'Green Goddesses' to various Temporary Service Fire Stations around the UK. During the early part of 2003, 39 ranks deployed with the Primary Casualty Receiving Facility on RFA ARGUS providing casualty handlers with a further 26 ranks deployed with 3 Commando Brigade RM as Decontamination teams in Iraq.