

# The Music of the Coronation Processions of King Charles III

By Colin Dean, Former Band Secretary, Irish Guards



'The Coronation' has always conjured images of the wonderful spectacle in 1953, and as 2023 unfolded we were all aware that the next such event just wouldn't be the same. It wasn't, of course, but despite everything it was nonetheless a very special day with our much-reduced armed forces putting on an impressive display of pomp and pageantry.

For the outward procession The King and Queen travelled in the Diamond Jubilee State Coach with a Sovereign's Escort and some additional officers, headed by the Mounted Band of the Household Cavalry under Major Paul Collis-Smith.

This band also led the return procession, the marches played being:

***Namur*** (Richards): The title relates to the army's earliest battle honour dating from 1695. The march was the winning entry in the Kneller Hall march competition in 1911, submitted by William Victor Richards who, after three years as a bandmaster, was granted a commission in The Dorsetshire Regiment and awarded the Military Cross for his bravery during the first world war. However, the evidence is such that it can be said with almost certainty that the march was really written for him by Joe Ricketts (Kenneth Alford).

***Golden Spurs*** (Rhodes): The Golden Spurs form part of the coronation regalia and are presented to the sovereign during the service. This slow march was composed for the 1937 coronation procession by Sam Rhodes when he was Bandmaster of the Royal Artillery Mounted Band. Lieutenant Colonel Rhodes MVO, MBE, Scots Guards, he was Senior Director of Music throughout the 1950s and responsible for overseeing the choice of marches played in the 1953 coronation procession.

***Bravura*** (Duble): Composed by Charles Duble, a trombonist in American circus bands in the early twentieth century and introduced to this country when the US Army Band played it at the Edinburgh Tattoo in 1996. The Scots Guards Band was also in the tattoo that year and obtained copies of the music; its popularity soon spread.

***By Land and Sea*** (Alford): The translation of the motto of the Royal Marines, Per Mare Per Terram. This was composed by Kenneth J Alford in 1935, originally as a suggestion for the regimental slow march, and includes reference to suitable nautical melodies.

***Boots and Saddles*** (Brigham): Composed by Earl Brigham, pen-name of Major Alf Young, Director of Music of the Royal Engineers during the 1950s and later professor of orchestration at Kneller Hall. It became popular with the mounted bands during the 1970s and 80s.

***Coburg*** (attributed to Haydn): A march believed to have been composed by Michael Haydn and possibly introduced to this country by Prince Albert. It has been used by a number of cavalry regiments as the regimental march and in the Victorian era it was normally played on the birthday parades after the Grenadiers March as the colour was trooped along the ranks.

***Crown and Commonwealth*** (Adams): Written by Trayton Adams, Bandmaster of 2nd Battalion The Northamptonshire Regiment from 1916 to 1936. He was the senior bandmaster for many of the great Aldershot Searchlight Tattoos in the 1930s and continued as musical adviser after his retirement. Crown and Commonwealth was played by the massed bands at the 1937 Aldershot Coronation Tattoo.

***Cavalry Walk*** (Bashford): Composed by Lieutenant Colonel Rodney Bashford OBE, Grenadier Guards, to be played by massed cavalry bands at the 1975 Royal Tournament and including reference to the trumpet call 'Walk'. It includes parts for cavalry trumpets and wonderfully captures the cavalry swagger.

With Kneller Hall trumpeters now consigned to history, the Royal Air Force provided the trumpeters in Westminster Abbey.

The dismounted bands in the return procession were:

- Band of The Royal Regiment of Scotland (including Lowland & Highland Bands)
- Band of The Rifles & Band of the Brigade of Gurkhas
- Central Band of the Royal Air Force & Band of the Royal Air Force College
- British Army Band Colchester & British Army Band Sandhurst
- British Army Band Tidworth & British Army Band Catterick & Band of the Prince of Wales
- Band of the Royal Marines Portsmouth & Band of the Royal Marines Collingwood
- Massed Bands of the Guards Division

An innovation devised by Garrison Sergeant Major 'Vern' Stokes MVO was for all troops to step off together, all timebeaters (bass drummers) to beat to a click-track and the bands to play the same marches simultaneously. There were no shortage of misgivings as to whether it would work but all went well, although no doubt there were some mutterings at Portsmouth about having to use five-pace rolls!

The marches played were:

***Coronation Bells*** (Partridge) Composed by Walter Partridge for the coronation of Edward VII in 1902. Partridge was connected with a firm which manufactured tubular bells and composed a number of pieces to feature the instrument to encourage sales. The bell effects in this inspiring march are heard from the cornets.

***The Bond of Friendship*** (Rogan) Composed by Lieutenant Colonel John Mackenzie Rogan CVO, Coldstream Guards, who was the Senior Bandmaster/Director of Music of the Brigade of Guards from 1900 until 1920, having served past his normal retirement date at the specific request of George V. This march was composed while he was Bandmaster of 2nd Battalion The Queen's Royal Regiment and based on themes which came to him in the immediate aftermath of the death of one of his bandsmen due to the heat while serving in India.

***Holyrood*** (Alford): Composed by Kenneth J Alford, the pen- name of Major Frederick Joseph Ricketts, when Bandmaster of 2nd Battalion The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. The outline was reputedly sketched on the back of an envelope as the band waited during rehearsals with a guard of honour to receive the King and Queen at the Palace of Holyroodhouse in July 1911. It later became the march of the RAF Regiment.

***The Great Little Army*** (Alford): Composed by Kenneth J Alford in 1916. The title was his response to the Kaiser's alleged description of our 'contemptible little army'.

***The King's Company*** (Mason): A march was written for the Queen's Company, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, in 1966 by Lieutenant Colonel Rodney Bashford OBE. With the change of designation to The King's Company, the regiment's director of music, Captain Ben Mason, has taken the structure and form of Colonel Bashford's march and substituted his own themes.

***Under the White Ensign*** (Dunn): Composed by Lieutenant Colonel Sir Vivian Dunn KCVO, OBE, Principal Director of Music of the Royal Marines from 1953 to 1968, who served four sovereigns as Director of Music of the Royal Yacht Band. It is the march of the Royal Naval Association and includes reference to nautical songs and bugle calls.

***Scarlet and Gold*** (Thomas): Composed by cinema organist, Lloyd Thomas, in the 1930s. The title has since been adopted for the regular concerts given by the Massed Bands of the Household Division.

***The King's Guard*** (Keith): This was the winning entry in a competition sponsored by Chappell and Company in 1904. The composer, John Henry Keith, was a musician in the Band of the Scots Guards.

All bands of the regular army marched in the procession. In addition, the Band of the Royal Marines Plymouth accompanied the tri-service Guard of Honour which was drawn up outside Buckingham Palace. The remaining two Royal Marines bands supported the streetliners with the Band of the Royal Marines Scotland at Horse Guards Avenue and the Band of the Royal Marines Commando Training Centre at Trafalgar Square.

The Guards Division streetliners in The Mall were supported by the Corps of Drums of the 1st Battalion Welsh Guards, positioned at The Duke of York's Steps, and the Corps of Drums of the 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, positioned at Marlborough Road, both augmented by drummers of the Honourable Artillery Company.

Positioned in Parliament Square were the Band of the Royal Air Force Regiment and the Band of the Duke of York's Royal Military School.

Massed Pipes and Drums of the Scots, Irish and Gurkha regiments, and the RAF, led the standards, guidons, colours and truncheon into position around the Victoria Memorial and then played as the parade formed up in the gardens of Buckingham Palace, including a new march entitled *King Charles III* (Finlay Johnston).

**Colin Dean**