

# MUSIC AT THE CENOTAPH

by Colin Dean

The programme of music played by the Massed Bands of the Guards Division at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday was standardised in 1930 to include national airs and suitably reflective music. The selection has changed a little over the years but the basic format remains the same.

**Rule, Britannia!** composed in 1740 by Thomas Arne as part of the music for his masque *Alfred*. This was first included at the Cenotaph in 1946.

**Heart of Oak** the March Past of the Royal Navy, composed in 1759 by William Boyce for a pantomime, *Harlequin's Invasion*.

**The Minstrel Boy** an ancient Irish air also known as *The Moreen*, with words by Thomas Moore (1779-1852).

**Men of Harlech** this first appeared in print in 1794 when it was included in *Musical and Poetical Relics of the Welsh Bards* edited by the harpist Edward Jones. It is believed to commemorate the heroic defence of Harlech Castle by the Earl of Pembroke during the Wars of the Roses.

**Pipes: Skye Boat Song** commemorates the departure of Bonnie Prince Charlie to the Isle of Skye after the Battle of Culloden in 1746.

**Isle of Beauty** composed by Charles Whitmore in 1835: *Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder, Isle of Beauty, Fare Thee Well*.

**David of the White Rock** an ancient Welsh air which is said to have been composed by a bard called David on his deathbed for playing at his funeral. It was first published in *Relics of the Welsh Bards* in 1794.

**Oft in the Stilly Night** another setting of a Thomas Moore poem: *Sad memory brings the light, Of other days around me*.

**Pipes: Flowers of the Forest** a lament which is believed to have been composed in memory of the Scots killed at Flodden Field in 1513.

**Nimrod** surely amongst the most haunting and beautiful of all music, this has been played at the Cenotaph since 1946 and so perfectly captures the dignity of the occasion. It is the ninth of the *Enigma Variations* composed by Sir Edward Elgar in 1899 and portrays the composer's friend A.J. Jaeger. Nimrod was the mighty hunter and Jaeger is German for hunter.

**When I am Laid in Earth** Dido's Lament, taken from the end of Act 3 of the opera *Dido and Aeneas*, composed by Henry Purcell in around 1689.

**The Supreme Sacrifice** The hymn *O Valiant Hearts*, composed by the Reverend Charles Harris, was included in the Cenotaph music from 1990: *O Valiant Hearts who to your Glory Came; Through Dust of Conflict and through Battle Flame*.

**Solemn Melody** composed by Sir Walford Davies, the first Organising Director of Music of the Royal Air Force. *Solemn Melody* was originally composed in 1908 for organ and strings.

**Last Post** sounded by buglers of the Royal Marines following the two minutes silence.

**Funeral March No. 1** this has been played during the wreath laying since the Second World War and, although attributed to Beethoven it was composed by a Prussian bandmaster named Johann Heinrich Walch. The original music used at this point was Schubert's *Ave Maria*, while *Chanson Triste* (Tchaikovsky) was used in 1929 and Chopin's *Funeral March* from 1930 up to the Second World War.

**O God Our Help in Ages Past** is sung during the short service conducted by the Bishop of London. The hymn was composed in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century by William Croft to words by Isaac Watts.

**Rouse** is sounded by Trumpeters of the Royal Air Force

### **National Anthem**

Further wreaths are laid and the parade reforms to:

**Trumpet Voluntary** composed by Albert Matt (1864-1941), a former professor of trombone at Kneller Hall.

**British Legion** a march composed by Thomas Bidgood, now begins the march past, with the music including the much-loved marching songs from the two world wars, including:

**It's a Long Way to Tipperary**

**Pack up Your Troubles**

**There'll Always be an England**

# LAST POST and REVEILLE

Remembrance for the lives lost in conflict takes a number of forms: the Cenotaph, the Unknown Warrior, the two minutes' silence and, of course, the poppy. However, music also plays its part, no more so than in the simple bugle call known as *Last Post* which has become perhaps the most emotionally charged music of all.

In days of yore, the soldier's day was regulated by a series of trumpet or bugle calls, telling him such things as when to get up, when to eat, when to be on parade and when to retire to bed.

The call *Watch Setting – First Post* was normally sounded at around 9.30pm to inform the camp that the picquet officer had commenced his inspection of the night guard at the first sentry post. Around 10.00pm another call, *Watch Setting – Last Post* indicated the officer had reached the final sentry and the camp was secured for the night.

So how did this simple bugle call become the revered symbol of remembrance we know today?

The analogy is simple in that the call that signalled the end of a soldier's day has come to symbolise the end of his life on earth. The earliest evidence of it being used in this way can be found in a letter from a padre who had conducted the funeral of a Scottish soldier in Quebec in 1853. The first reference to it on British soil is in 1871.

*Last Post* is normally followed by a short pause and then *Reveille* (or *Rouse*), the morning call of awakening, which symbolises the Christian faith in the resurrection and the beginning of a new life.

Although it is the bugle calls that are best known, different calls are used by the cavalry and sounded on an Eb trumpet.