

Don Holden – Thames Citizens Band’ longest living active Life member.

Don started with the Thames Citizen’s Band as a Junior in 1950 at the tender age of 8. Don was taught by the then Thames Citizens Band conductor, Arthur “Smokey” Williams, on Tenor horn. A year later Don was put onto cornet and he has never looked back. Don’s parents were right behind him and bought him his first “Hüttle” long Cornet at the age of 12.

Don has been very involved musically around the town of Thames, while attending Thames High School he got involved in the School Dance Band, he also played in the High School “Bugles and Drum” Band (on his cornet).

Don recalls this ‘Bugles and Drum’ band was used at the end of each week for the School Cadets to do a “March past” and a Salute to the “Dignitary of the Day.” One time they ran out of music to play just before the “March Past the Dignitary” so Don, in his inventiveness, decided to avoid the silence he launched into “The Yellow Rose of Texas” and the rest of the band could join in. Unfortunately, he forgot bugles can not play such a piece, so he played a solo with the drums, the buglers were NOT amused! He was ragged about this for weeks.

Don helped to dig the foundations of the current Thames Citizens Band Hall, at 301a Queen Street, Thames, which was opened on 8 October 1955. Don remembers marching with the Band from the Old Post Office to the newly built Band Hall.

Playing for local dances: The Catholic Dances on wednesday nights with Glad Hodges, playing with Horace Johnson’s group and sometimes with Herb “Doughy” Walker in his Jazz bands, made sure Don was fully occupied for a number of years. He was also made a Life Honorary Member of the local R.S.A. at the age of 18 for his services rendered playing “The Last Post” at funerals, Smokos, and Memorial occasions – something he still has and treasures.

Don left Thames Citizen’s Band in 1963 to spread his wings in the dance band scene and working for Griffin Refrigeration. Then he met his wife, Lois, in 1965. She loved Piano/Organ music, so eventually his trumpet surfaced around an electric chord organ in the family home. When their first son, Bevan, was also sent at age 9 to the Thames Citizens Band to learn the cornet, Len Edmonds was the Conductor. It soon became too much for Len, watching Don sitting on the sideline listening, as Len had played with Don in the Band previously, so Don was co-erced into playing with the Band once more. Don initially asked to be put onto 2nd cornet, but after a few bars of a March Don decided it was a bit light at the top-end and launched into the Solo part off-by-heart!! Not bad after twenty years Don! And thus he rejoined in 1983.

Don’s second son, Chris, joined the Band at 8yrs old and soon after Don’s wife Lois also joined. So the 4 of them were soon happily “oompah-ing” together as a family.

Don has moved about in the Brass and Concert Band movement for a number of years now, he was on the first Executive Committee of the newly formed N.Z. Concert Band Association in 1987. He has played both as guest and member for several bands around the Waikato/Bay of Plenty, like: Manukau City Concert Band, Waikato/Bay of Plenty “Golden Oldies” Composite Band, Waihi Federal Band, Katikati Concert Band and Tauranga Brass Band ...just to name a few.

He is again playing “The Last Post” for Servicemen and Women to honour them at Funerals, Anzac and other Memorial Services, so he has gone full circle. Don has happily given time to working bee’s for the Band and the benefit of his knowledge with his limited Electricians ticket to keep the new Band room safe and functioning.

Dons loyalty, team work and expertise was honoured in May 2010 when he was made a Life Member of Thames Citizen’s Band.