

frequent visits to Colin Pomeroy's record shop in South Kensington and to Doug Dobell in Charing Cross Road, who was allowed to have a box of records on the counter of his father's bookshop.

"One day in his shop I saw a poster advertising a jazz concert by George Webb's Dixielanders. I remember I was a bit late for the concert (I'm always late for everything anyway), and as I opened the swing doors the sound of the band completely mesmerised me. This was the kind of jazz I knew to be the real thing. Of course, one's horizons do widen a bit later, but you've got to start with something like that. Everyone starts with an ideal, whether it be Charlie Parker or Louis Armstrong. I never looked back from then really."

When Humphrey Lyttelton's band became resident at the Leicester Square Jazz Club, Chris Barber was a regular, often to be found sitting on the front of the bandstand. Due to a slightly twisted spine he'd given up playing the violin.

"If you'd asked me then what I would like to play. I would have said the cornet. To watch a trumpeter, you can't sit in front of him, you have to sit to one side, so I sat in front of the trombone player, Harry Brown, whom I came to know.

"One night Harry tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'Do you want to buy a trombone?' I didn't know what to say because in the first place I hadn't thought of it, and secondly I didn't know anything about buying trombones.

"How much is it?" I asked.

"£6.10s," said Harry.

"I was earning £11 a week working in an insurance office, which wasn't bad at 18, and



Early days: Chris Barber in 1954, with Lonnie Donegan on banjo, Jim Bray playing bass, drummer Ron Bowden, cornetist Pat Halcox and Monty Sunshine on clarinet

as I had £6.10s in my pocket I couldn't think of any excuse not to buy it.

"I took it home and tried to play it with records, much to my mother's dismay. My parents were divorced by this time, and I was living with my mother. She liked music as long as it was classy music, but I don't think a loud trombone was classy, and I played pretty badly.

"Having played the violin for four or five years I had an idea what music was supposed to sound like – Bb is Bb, not a quarter of a tone sharp or flat – so I just watched other people playing. Harry Brown joined George Webb as a replacement for Eddie Harvey who got called up, but Eddie used to drop in every now and then and play. I loved his trombone playing – a very nice tone, and he sounded like a jazz

musician when the others sounded like amateurs. Then Humph got Keith Christie, who was a very competent technical player, and I would watch him.

"Within a few months I'd met other friends who had instruments, so we tried to play together, and by the end of the year we'd got together a little band of sorts. Of course, there was no rule book then. Nowadays you can go to the Guildhall and learn how to play jazz – not that they tell you much about it, to be honest, but they do their best. I know several graduates of the Leeds College of Music jazz course who are wonderful jazz players, and they learnt it there where my friend Dickie Hawdon was the principal.

"My definition of an amateur jazz band is a number of jazz enthusiasts who have access to musical instruments, but that's all. And that's how we were. Some of us got closer to it, and some didn't. We all enjoyed ourselves, as everyone should. I feel that anyone who can make music should, but one has to differentiate between amateur music which isn't going anywhere, and serious music (and I include jazz in serious music) which is. If you're going to do serious music, you've got to do a lot more than just mess around.

"A lot of people in the Trad era found themselves able to earn a living messing around. Nice for them but no future in it, not in the end. Hopefully not, because it doesn't stand the music in very good stead. The music gets blamed for the excesses of people who don't care about it, which I think is terrible. I've been watching it happen, and living with it ever since. Many of our contemporaries were more concerned with other things, mostly the drinking. Not that I'm anti-drinker, but I'm not a keen drinker either.

"Anyway, our amateur band carried on, and I was studying mathematics and working with an insurance company with the idea of becoming a high-class mathematician. I used to spend all the afternoon in the office



Forty years on: all very sober-sides in May 1994, with (left to right) Monty Sunshine, Lonnie Donegan, Pat Halcox, Ron Bowden, Chris Barber and Jim Bray

Continued on page 12