



The Medal Group of Drummer Spencer Bent



Drummer William Kenny receiving his VC from King George V on 18 May 1915 at Glasgow Green



The inscription upon the Company Gold Watch presented to Bandsman Rendle

on the following day rescued into cover wounded men who were lying exposed in the open. The awarding of his Victoria Cross was announced in the London Gazette on 9 December 1914... He was 23 years old.

These feats of almost unimaginable courage and commitment were discussed at a Musicians' Company Court meeting on 26 January 1915 at Stationers' Hall. It was suggested by Senior Warden, Charles Lukey Collard, that a suitably inscribed Gold Watch be presented to Drummer Bent in recognition of his actions and well deserved military honour. The Court agreed, but before any such presentation could be made, the Company was informed of two further musicians who had been awarded the VC: Drummer Lance Corporal William Kenny and Bandsman Lance Corporal Thomas Rendle. It was subsequently minuted that an inscribed Gold Watch from the Musicians' Company would be presented to every professional musician awarded a VC for the duration of the war. That number eventually became five with the addition of Piper Daniel Laidlaw, and Drummer Corporal Walter Ritchie.

Daniel Laidlaw was a piper in the 7th Battalion, King's Own Scottish Borderers and in September of 1915 at the beginning of the Battle of Loos, near Lille on the Western Front he earned the now famous title 'The Piper of Loos'. During a period of disarray amid the worst of the bombardment and with his section shaken by the effects of gas drifting

across the trench, Laidlaw jumped upon the parapet and began striding up and down the line, playing the Regimental March *Blue Bonnets Over The Border*. This brought his Company back into order, eventually leading to a successful (albeit short-lived) advance. Amazingly, a 1934 short film was made of Laidlaw discussing his activities of that day and actually playing that very tune on his pipes – part of this film can be seen on the WCOM archive website.

So far, archival research has discovered only one of the Gold Watches – the one presented to Bandsman Rendle. That watch is kept in the Museum at Kneller Hall, home of Army Music since its foundation in 1857. We are most grateful to that organisation for the photographs of the Watch and of Rendle's VC Medal Group, included here and on the website respectively. It is a fitting tribute that all members of the Phase 2 Musician Training Course at Kneller Hall are now known collectively as *The Rendle VC Troop*.

Although wounded at Ypres in 1915, Drummer Walter Ritchie survived to be present on the first day of the Battle of the Somme (1 July 1916). During that terrible, single day over 19,000 British troops perished and nine men were awarded the Victoria Cross. Ritchie was one, collecting his Medal from King George V in November 1916 and his Gold Watch from the Lord Mayor in December. The Master Musician at the time, past Lord Mayor Sir George Wyatt Truscott,

read out his citation.

The archive website contains many more details of all these events, photographs of the men, their full VC Citations, reports of their medal presentation ceremonies at Buckingham Palace and their visits to Mansion House to receive their Gold Watch. All this information (including the film of Laidlaw) can be found in *Objects & Ephemera* within the 'Treasures' section and a portrait of Truscott is featured within the 'Artworks' section. The website also offers links to the relevant hand-written Minutes taken at Court meetings throughout the war. Previous issues of *Preserve Harmony* have mentioned before the existence of these documents on the archive website which continue to form the backbone of most of our archival investigations.

If anyone has any questions, or would like to get involved with the Archive Project, please get in touch via the 'Contact Us' section of the website.
www.wcomarchive.org.uk

What's New in the Archives?

The Home Page of our Archive website now includes a *What's New* feature, which shows recent additions to the site and charts its fascinating development over the last 18 months. Check out *What's New* often; it is constantly being updated and will lead you straight to our latest researches online!