

ELEVEN EMPTY SPACES

PART OF AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT RECORDING AND REMEMBERING
THE EVENTS OF THE IRA ATTACK ON THE ROYAL MARINES SCHOOL OF MUSIC, DEAL
ON 22 SEPTEMBER 1989

“You have to look and say ... ‘ what is our attitude going to be to this?’ and apart from the one of outrage, the thing that it seemed to me that we needed to be doing was to say ... ‘the past is done let’s look forward, let’s see what positive attitude we can take to this’ ... I remember the front page ... The Band Plays On ... showing that life goes on” – M Mitchell

The march past gave people the opportunity to express their feelings as a community but many still wanted to do more to look after those left behind and to ensure that the eleven bandsmen would never be forgotten.



Deal Mayor Cllr Towe, Rohit Tanna of the Round Table and Lt Col Graham Hoskins at the bandstand in 1993

Picture courtesy of the East Kent Mercury

“The day after [the bombing] people were coming in with cheques and saying ... whatever fund is set up we want this to go to it. We hadn’t thought of that obviously at that stage” – J Perkins

Many fundraising activities took place.

“The day of the bombing I didn’t know that ... most of the dart team had been killed ... Jocky Wilson the Scottish dart professional had ... been put in touch with Arthur at the Keppel. He said he would come down and play exhibition games with anybody in Deal and all the funds to go into

the Marine fund ... [Jocky Wilson] had tears in his eyes because the Royal Marines give him a fanfare onto the stage and presented him with a tankard with the Royal Marine badge and crest on it and he was so pleased he wouldn’t let it out of his hand” – H Woodcock



Royal Marine bugler at the Memorial Gardens
Image provided by Dover Museum

“It’s right that that event should have been remembered and should always be remembered, not because of any lapse of security ... but for a very important event in the life of the town” – M Mitchell

In addition to the bandstand, a memorial garden has been created where the bombing took place. This provides an area of quiet contemplation and a focus for remembrance.

“It was good to see the memorial garden take shape as it is now” – B Bano

There still remained the issue of the poor security at the barracks.

“It was absolutely wide open. The MOD knew it was a soft target. You’d got civilian contractors guarding the place ... we were in the middle of an IRA campaign and it was such a soft target that one man could have walked in there and planted the bomb” – T Bartlett

“After the event all the barbed wire went up everywhere: razor wire, enormous amounts of security put in train - too late” – G Hoskins

Rumours that the School of Music would be moved to Eastney barracks at Portsmouth continued.

“Whilst the facilities at Deal ... were superb ... it’s on a limb, it’s out on the outskirts of Kent. It’s nowhere near any naval depot ... Chatham was the nearest depot and as soon as Chatham closed down that was the death knell for Deal” – D Duxbury-Williams



Royal Marines play a fanfare at the opening season of the Deal Memorial Bandstand in 1993. Picture provided by Linda Mewes

“Trish and I were invited out to various arenas where there were fundraising things going on I can recollect at one party we went to, this man ... came up to me and said ‘Colonel there you are’ and he literally gave me a wad of notes and they were all £20 notes and there was I think £700 ... collected by labourers in one of the farm areas locally. I mean that sticks in my mind forever ... [the fundraising activities] went on until the autumn of next year” – R Dixon

“The All Stars band concert which is held every year in March at the Winter Gardens in Margate ... was originally set up as a fundraiser for the disaster the year after the bombing” – W Walters

“It was apparent that the town itself felt the need for some permanent thing ... all the youngsters who had provided so much pleasure in the town ... they felt very conscious that they owed allegiance to these people that had been killed” – G Hoskins

“Round Tablers in Deal hooked on to this idea ... their annual collection of money should go to something like this, so they raised the money, something like £35,000 at the time and a bandstand was considered and eventually constructed” – G Hoskins

“The bandstand I thought was a stroke of sheer genius” – B Hawkins



The campaign to keep the Royal Marines School of Music in Deal is unsuccessful
Picture courtesy of the East Kent Mercury

The local people fought against the move and a campaign to Keep the Marines in Deal was launched. When this proved to be unsuccessful it left a strong element of sadness in the area.

“I was invited to meet Sir Nicholas Soames in London at the War Office ... to put the case forward as the Mayor to say ‘please don’t take the Royal Marines away from Deal’ Emotionally they did understand ... financially it wasn’t going to happen and they allowed the boys to stay a little bit longer. I suppose really it gave a little bit of false hope and when they did go the effect was quite devastating. People felt very sad and a little bit lost” – M McNicholas

“And later of course when it was ... finally decided that the Royal Marines would move we [The East Kent Mercury] again led a campaign to keep the Royal Marines in Deal ... and then at the very end when ... the Royal Marines finally left Deal I had this picture of a Royal Marine drummer on the front page and a huge sun behind him ... ‘The Final Sunset’ which to me epitomised the end of the road of the Royal Marines in Deal” – M Mitchell

“I really do think when the barracks closed it ripped the heart out of the town, it really did. It’s something that will never come back” – R Walters

“Who knows how the town would have been without the incident ... I think there’s a great camaraderie within the town still about ... it’s proud history with the Marines and the incident is part of that history” – M Cowie



The names of the dead bandsmen are inscribed on plaques on the eleven sides of the Memorial Bandstand
Picture provided by Linda Mewes