

ILES John Henry

John Henry Iles lived in Birchington in his latter years at the bungalow on the corner of Cliff Road (called 'Aurora') as it meets Herschell Road. He was the founder of Dreamland, the large holiday entertainment complex on the seafront at Margate. However, for his memorial he asked that his other great love be commemorated rather than the Dreamland project. His second passion was Brass Band music.

This began with a visit to Scotland with a friend when he was a young man in his early twenties. During their holiday his friend took him to a Scottish National Brass Band Competition. He thoroughly enjoyed the music and was bowled over by the excellence of the musicianship but also by the way the bands were all so smartly attired. When he asked some of the competitors where the money came from they all referred to their employers, who provided not only the uniforms, but also the instruments and the tutoring of the players. He was deeply impressed and asked his friends whereabouts this sort of thing took place in England. He was horrified to discover that no such competitions took place south of the border. "Why not?" he asked. "Because no-one has started one" replied his friend. "Then I will" was Iles response.

True to his word, when he returned from his trip, he set about finding funding and sponsorship for a British Brass Band Competition. He contacted as many businesses as he could, especially where there was a good sized male workforce, like mines and factories, and explained what he had found in Scotland and how great it would be to have the competitions nationwide. He also pointed out how it improved relationships within the businesses and gave the men something to be proud of and how it also improved the image of the supporting businesses. Within a very short time he had the scheme up and running. From then on, he continued to monitor and encourage the competition for the rest of his life. He was honoured with the leadership of the Company of Musicians 1932 – 33, which made him very proud.

When he died many years later, it was this achievement he wanted honoured and he asked that, whatever form his memorial took, it would recall this part of his life rather than the success of 'Dreamland'. A seat was erected in All Saints churchyard, near the lych gate in memory of John Henry and his wife Eleanor. The wording on the memorial is as follows:

"In loving memory of John Henry Iles OBE
Company of Musicians 1932-1933
who devoted his life to
the advancement of Brass Bands
Died 29th May 1951, aged 79
And of
Eleanor Marion
his beloved wife and lifelong companion, who
greatly aided him in his life's work
Died 1st March 1953, aged 81 years
Whose mingled ashes rest in this Churchyard"



The Iles' memorial seat 2000

Sadly the seat was being used rather badly shortly after this photo was taken and to make sure the main part with the wording remained intact, the seat section was removed and the back was re-sited against the north wall of the churchyard, near to the Lych Gate.

