

## **W BRO ROGER SWIFT**

W Bro Roger Swift was born 20th May 1938 in Sheffield. In 1960; aged 22 and already an accomplished musician, he enlisted into the Royal Engineers (Aldershot) Band as both a Pianist and Clarinettist. Roger was soon in high demand, usually for his keyboard skills.

He completed the 3-year Bandmaster course at Kneller Hall in 1974, coming top of his class by winning 8 of the 13 awards, and becoming Band Sergeant Major of the School before being appointed Bandmaster of the Queens Royal Irish Hussars on 4 November that year. He served with them in Germany until April 1979 when he returned to Kneller Hall as the School Bandmaster; the top WO1 in Army music. That appointment began with mixed emotions as Roger's wife Rita had just passed away; something we all grieved; my wife and I had been friends and close neighbours of theirs in Paderborn's married quarters.

He was commissioned into The Light Infantry on 11th February 1981 as Director of Music of the Light Division, based at Winchester, a very appropriate appointment as one of that Division's regiments bore the motto, Celer et Audax, which translates as Swift and Bold! This was in the heyday of massed band events and the Light Division were always a great favourite. Listening to recordings of them under Roger's baton with a metronome to hand, confirmed they were marching at 160 paces to the minute, not just strolling around at the regulation 140!

The blackest professional moment of Roger's career must surely have been the bombing of the Band of 1st Battalion The Royal Green Jackets in Regent's Park in 1982. He found himself very much at the heart of the aftermath, culminating with an emotional concert by the Division's Bands and Bugles at the Royal Albert Hall on 30th June 1983 to raise funds for St. Mary's Hospital, Paddington, where the casualties had been so well treated.

Captain Swift was appointed Director of Music of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps on 1st November 1983. After 2 happy years with that band, it must have been a very special moment for Roger in November 1985 when he became Director of Music of the Coldstream Guards, taking over the band from Lieutenant Colonel Richard Ridings, his Director of Music with the Royal Engineers and the man who put him forward for the bandmaster course.

Meanwhile, Roger had met and married Carol, a musician in her own right with the WRAC. He was also involved with the Westminster Festival of Music for a number of years, and in 1992 treated the audience to a virtuoso performance at the piano of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, accompanied by massed bands from the Household Division.

Roger retired from the army in 1990 and took up the retired officer appointment of Assistant Director of Music at Kneller Hall, as well as being Professor of Conducting and Curator of the Museum. As if this wasn't enough, in September 1992 he also became Director of Music of the Honourable Artillery Company serving them until 2000 when he handed over the baton to yours truly. He finally retired from Kneller Hall in 2013 after 53 years' continuous service to Army music.

His visits to my home were not infrequent during the 1990s, always bringing great excitement to my 2 boys who were for ever challenging him to play Chopin's Minute Waltz in less; they never won.

As far as I could trace, W Bro Roger Swift started his Masonic life in 1978 with Doric Lodge number 886 in the Province of Berlin West Germany. 1981 we see him in Walsingham Lodge number 2148 registered in the Province of Kent although documents relate to the Lodge meeting in West Germany – another forces idiosyncrasy.

In 1981 he was a Founder member of Forget-me-not Lodge number 9035 that met in Ludgershall in Wiltshire; a Lodge I visited as his guest, recalling it to be a typical rural friendly lodge. For many of these lodges Roger was the Organist and it was as such that he succeeded Major Jimmy Howe, formerly DOM Scots Guards as Organist of Household Brigade Lodge number 2614 that meets in nearby Duke Street; a lodge for which he became Master, breaking the tradition of only having Regular Officers from the Household Brigade take the chair. I have it on good authority that his work as such was word perfect – he told me so! He was organist for Fitzroy Chapter who meet at the Honourable Artillery Company in the City and was the chosen Pianist to many Worshipful Companies, also in the City.

His elevation to being PPAGDC in Middx Province came in 2016 followed by becoming a Grand Officer when he was invited to carry out the post of Assistant Grand Organist for the United Grand Lodge of England.

Lt. Col. Stuart Watts, OBE, SLGR, PPrGSwdBr