WOLLONGONG'S STEELWORKS BAND

When Jack Tougher was being recommended for an Australia Day award, the following testimonial was written by Hans C Wallbaum of Farmborough Heights. By comparing the first and last paragraphs, we can date this item at c1976. With the permission of Jack’s son, Trevor, the testimonial is reprinted below:
JACK TOUGHER, WOLLONGONG BANDSMAN

John (Jack) McDonald Tougher was born in Lithgow NSW on November 19th 1904, from a family of musicians. In his younger days he played in the Lithgow Municipal Band and was regarded as a champion cornet player even then. Other bands, such as Bondi Beach Concert Band, would 'borrow' Jack to assist them, and as a result he travelled to many parts of Australia to contest against other bands. During this time he also played in solo championships and gained many successes.

In Lithgow he worked as a moulder in the Hoskins Steelworks and played cornet in the orchestra at nights for the silent pictures.

Mr Tougher married Mary Sharples in 1924 and they had a family of three: two girls Jean and Pamela, and a son Trevor.

During the depression he moved with his family to Wollongong in 1931 to work at Australian Iron and Steel which had been moved to Port Kembla.

Shortly after establishing his family in Wollongong he decided to form a brass band of his own. Starting with a few old instruments and other players who had moved from Lithgow, he started the Wollongong Steelworks Brass Band in 1934. The band under his leadership was immediately accepted and became very popular. Regular concerts and dances were held in Wollongong, all organised by Mr Tougher.

One newspaper reference reads as follows: “Steelworks Band Concert last Monday night was a great success and, judging by the enthusiastic response from the packed house, establishes this band as a prime favourite.

Bandmaster Jack Tougher’s cornet solo at the concert was a real gem, and told its own story. When the leader is so accomplished there is no doubt about the prospects of the combination.”

Another reference was: “After hearing this brilliant performance by the band one cannot help realising the headway it has made under the very capable ability of the conductor, Mr J M Tougher, who although only yet a young man, and a first class cornetist, shows promise of being a first-class conductor. Wollongong (people) should be proud to have such talent in their midst.”

The band was active in the community and involved in most of its activities as well as taking part in many contests at which it was again successful under Mr Tougher’s leadership.
When World War II broke out, the Steelworks Band as a unit became attached to the 34th Battalion for the duration. The day before the end of the war Mr Tougher was informed of Peace and was asked to organise the music for the celebration in Wollongong’s main street when the news was announced. This he did very capably and the celebrations continued so long the police could not disperse the crowd, so the band was asked to play on the back of a truck, and using the ‘pied Piper’ method to entice the crowd out of the main street to a large reserve near the beach.

In 1944 (before the end of the war) when not involved with the 34th Battalion, Mr Tougher formed a boys’ band. He taught every boy individually and then collectively as a band. This time-consuming task is still continuing today and this is the reason for recommending Mr Tougher for recognition. Thirty-two years of continuous teaching and training have produced many champion musicians. On arrival home from work Mr Tougher would teach every week-day until 6pm or 7pm, then Saturday mornings were used for more individual teaching. Friday nights were set aside for boys’ band [individual] practice and for rehearsal as a band. We must not forget that the Steelworks Band was practising on Tuesday nights and Sunday mornings at the same time. In addition, the bands had concerts to fulfil, so the time devoted by Mr Tougher could be conservatively estimated at 25 hours per week, every week for 32 years.

His ability to teach was highlighted when the boys’ band was entered in a Junior Championship Contest in 1946, but due to one player being a year too old meant either dropping that player or withdrawing the band. Not being defeatists, they decided to rehearse every night for three weeks solid and enter the Open Band ‘D’ Grade Championship of NSW, so every member could play. This they did and won the Championship. A local newspaper commented: “The Wollongong Boys’ Band and their conductor, Mr Jack Tougher, have reason to be very proud after their trip to Sydney last Thursday, which resulted in their winning ‘D’ Grade in the Band Association Championships with 81 points, the judge commenting on their very fine performance.”

[Many more newspaper references pay tribute to Mr Tougher’s ability to teach and conduct, but unfortunately these are neither sourced nor dated. One of these cuttings mentioned a highly praised performance at Sydney’s Luna Park.]

As the band progressed into the fifties Mr Tougher was instrumental in organising fund raising for new uniforms and enthused members to strive for a new band hall. Up until that time the band hall was Mr Tougher’s garage in the back yard of his home.
During the next few years Mr Tougher contacted many business houses for donations. Some came forward with cash and others building materials. In 1959 the current hall was completed on a block of land next to Mr Tougher’s home, another project instigated by Mr Tougher.

Keep in mind that while all these activities were going on Mr Tougher was still teaching pupils and conducting the bands at rehearsals and concerts. The band had many successes over the past forty-two years, as indicated on the separate list.

Financially it would be impossible to estimate the money spent by Mr Tougher for his pupils and his band. He would buy tutors for pupils and if they could not afford to pay, would conveniently ‘forget’ they owed him money. Other times he would pay entry fees in contests or eisteddfods for pupils, purchase music for the band, buy mouthpieces etc. All small amounts, but for over forty years would come to a considerable sum. When approached regarding this matter Mr Tougher would say: “It was nothing, not worth claiming from band funds.”

In recent years Mr Tougher, now retired, is still continuing his teaching and conducting. He has been the only conductor of the band since its formation forty-two years ago, a record to be extremely proud of. Currently he is training groups of children at Wollongong Primary School and the Illawarra Grammar School once a week and prepares them for school concerts. The results are extremely good and receive favourable comments after all the performances.

Mr Tougher is renowned for his unique method of teaching pupils brass instruments. He has the ability to know what type of instrument will suit a learner by just hearing them produce a note, and then teach all different types of instruments.

The result of his teaching has produced many champion players, as can be seen by photostats supplied, who have continued musically to play in Symphony Orchestras, Military Bands, Dance Bands etc. At one time most of the brass players in local orchestras were former pupils of Mr Tougher.

It is important to mention that during the last six years Mr Tougher has suffered two heart attacks and a collapsed lung and even this threat to his health has not daunted him as he continues to teach and conduct, knowing it could have serious results.
In summing up, it is obvious that Mr Tougher has given to music and the community far more than most people collectively have done in a lifetime and without the efforts of this man the City of Wollongong would have lacked the musical pleasure it has enjoyed for so long.

Now, at the age of 72 years, I feel that Mr John McDonald Tougher deserves and has earned the right of recognition for his devotion and contribution to music.

Hans G Wallbaum, 121 Panorama Drive, Farmborough Heights.

[Presumably written about 1976]

### WOLLONGONG STEELWORKS BAND CONTESTS

**1936 – 1972**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Championship</th>
<th>Result</th>
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<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Wollongong</td>
<td>South Coast Championship</td>
<td>First</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>C Grade Championship of Aust</td>
<td>First</td>
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<td>1939</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>B Grade NSW Championship</td>
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<td>1941</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>A Grade NSW Championship</td>
<td>Third</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>A Grade Quickstep Champ’ship</td>
<td>Third</td>
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<td>1941</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>A Grade Street March</td>
<td>First</td>
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<td>1944</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Quickstep NSW Championship</td>
<td>First</td>
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<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Hymn Tune</td>
<td>Third</td>
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<td>1949</td>
<td>Wollongong</td>
<td>Street March</td>
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<td>1949</td>
<td>Wollongong</td>
<td>Selection</td>
<td>Third</td>
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<td>1950</td>
<td>Albury</td>
<td>C Grade Quickstep NSW</td>
<td>First</td>
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<td>Anzac March</td>
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<td>A Grade Quickstep NSW</td>
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<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>B Grade Selection Australia</td>
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1953 Sydney  B Grade Quickstep Australia  First
1959 Sydney  B Grade Hymn Tune NSW  First
1959 Sydney  B Grade Test Selection NSW  First
1959 Sydney  B Grade Quickstep NSW  Second
1960 Sydney  A Grade Quickstep NSW  First
1960 Sydney  A Grade Test Selection NSW  Second
1960 Sydney  A Grade Hymn Tune NSW  Second
1960 Sydney  A Grade Own Choice NSW  Third
1961 Dubbo  A Grade Test Selection Australia  Third
1961 Dubbo  A Grade Quickstep Australia  Third
1961 Dubbo  A Grade Own Choice Selection Aus  Third
1961 Dubbo  A Grade Street March Australia  Fourth
1963 Blacktown  A Grade Choice Selection NSW  First
1963 Blacktown  A Grade Test Selection NSW  Third
1963 Blacktown  A Grade Hymn Tune NSW  Third
1970 Miranda  C Grade Australia and NSW  First
1971 Rockdale  C Grade NSW Championship  First


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[Trevor has a large collection of newspaper cuttings which Jack preserved, but only a few have been dated or sourced. Here is one that can be dated 1938]

STEELWORKS’ BAND DOINGS

On Sunday last, by special arrangement, the Band made a first appearance at Luna Park and received widespread compliments on the excellence of their playing.

So delighted was the manager with the reception given this country combination that he made a tentative engagement for a further presentation. It goes without saying that the bandsmen are just as eagerly looking forward to their next trip.

Len Raymond, in the trombone solo, “Sliding Thro' the Rye,” (sic) received a great ovation, as also did Bandmaster Jack Tougher and Joe Trueman on their presentation of “Ida and Dot.”

These visits are a valuable aid to the Band, both from a playing and social point of view, and more of a like nature are advocated by all.

The visit was not without its humour. Noah’s Ark fascinated at least four members——rumour has it they were “lost,” but there is another side to their delayed appearance.
The Big Dipper held one chap spellbound, and from the greatness of his heart the caretaker proffered (sic) a "buckshee" mat, but at the head of the dip the bandsman's heart failed him. "It's a long way back to Wollongong minus the seat of one's pants," he remarked, and made his descent per the stairway for preference.

Then there was the chap who searched every pocket diligently for his ticket, but found it clutched in his hand.

It was a grand break from the common round and we shall welcome more.

The Band is running the Xmas Stocking the same as last year, and tickets can be had from any of the Bandsmen.

Next Sunday night, and every Sunday after, the Band are holding a Concert and Community Singing in the Drill Hall grounds, in Harbour Street.

Mr Tougher and Jack Trueman are playing the Comet Polka, that had 1,500 people on their toes at Luna Park, so don't forget to come and hear them; also Len Raymond in "Coming Thro' the Rye."

[The proof-reader missed the inconsistency about "sliding" thro' the rye. For younger readers, the "Drill Hall in Harbour Street" is now the beautifully restored Old Court House, built in 1857 and opened for use on 1st February, 1858. Another undated snippet pays tribute to the Boys' Band:-]

**Successes of Mr. Jack Tougher's Pupils**

At the N.S.W. Bands' Association Competitions held in Sydney last Saturday, 29th September, Jack Tougher had remarkable results with his pupils, who incidentally, are all members of the Wollongong Boys' Band, not one boy being out of a place in his section, and this is a most gratifying reward for the time and patience given to the boys.

The results are as follows:-

Comet Solo (under 14). – Trevor Tougher (80 pts.) 1st.

Trombone Solo (under 14). -- Neale Adlington (77 pts.) 1st.

Under 16 Bb Bass Solo. – A. Pettigrew (81 pts.) 1st.

Under 16 Tenor Horn. – J. Nelson (77 pts.) 1st.

Under 16 Baritone Solo.—N. Benson (78 pts.) 2nd.

Under 16 Soprano Comet. – R. Hesse (70 pts.) 2nd.

Under 16 Trombone Solo.—E. Farthing (79 pts.) 3rd.

Under 16 Comet Solo. – J Testro (87 pts.) 1st.

Under 18 Soprano Comet. – R. Hesse (74 pts.) 2nd.

Under 18 Bb Bass Solo. – A. Pettigrew (64 pts.) 1st.

Under 18 Eb Bass Solo. – W. Regan (85 pts.) 1st.

Under 18 Baritone. – N. Benson (79 pts.) 2nd.

Under 18 Tenor Horn. – J. Nelson (84 pts.) 2nd.

Under 18 Comet Solo. – J Testro (88 pts.) 1st.

Special Section. – Harry Barker 3rd.
Open B. Ross 3rd.
Euphonium Solo (open). – M. Rogan 3rd.
Baritone Solo. – C. Jennings 1st

Another young competitor was Barry Adlington, who, though he didn't gain a place in the Comet section, did himself credit by gaining 70 points.

[This excerpt was undated, but as Trevor Tougher was under 14 at the time, it must have been no later than 1948. Another undated photo shows Trevor playing his cornet in the Wollongong Eisteddfod at eleven years of age.

Another cutting that is dated comes from *The Advance* of 9th May, 1946:-]

**Wollongong Boys’ Band**

The first Grand Concert by the Wollongong Boys' Band will be held in the Town Hall Annex on Tuesday next, 14th May, at 8 p.m.

This band has made great progress since its formation two years ago, under the experienced leadership of Mr. Jack Tougher.

Members of the Band have won 18 cups in Solo Contests during the past year. An outstanding performance was the winning of the Open "D" Grade Senior N.S.W. Championship at the Annual Band Contests held in Sydney during Easter. Eminent musical critics are high in their praise of these boys' outstanding talent.

The Bandsmen are in urgent need of uniforms. Here is an opportunity to support your own Band, of which every citizen of this City may be justly proud.

[The *Illawarra Mercury* of December 17th, 1991, recorded the death of Jack Tougher. Here are first and last paragraphs from the article:-]

**Wollongong Brass Band founder dies.**

Jack leaves city 50-year legacy as students carry on his music.

An era in brass band music in Wollongong ended at the weekend with the death of its greatest devotee and Wollongong Brass Band founder John (Jack) Tougher.

Although he retired in 1987 as bandmaster of what had become Wollongong Brass Band, no matter how ill, he rarely missed observing a band practice and continued until the last few weeks to keep an eye on "his" band.

Jack Tougher will be sadly missed.

Submitted by F Osborne.