

# The Guildford Arms Jazz Festival

*Below is an extract from chapter XV of Graham Blamire's 2012 publication 'Edinburgh Jazz Enlightenment – the story of Edinburgh traditional jazz' This describes a small but significant and successful jazz festival that was presented in the Guildford Arms pub, Edinburgh, by the trombone player and later drummer Ken Ramage. This festival was still running annually at the time of writing in 2019, still organized by Ken Ramage, although he now took a less active part in the actual playing side*

Graham Blamire 2019

“A new development in 1987 was the starting up of a new, independent, local jazz festival. This was a ‘single venue’ festival set up and run by **Ken Ramage**, the former trombone player now playing drums, and it was run on the basis of no charge to the punters. David Stewart, of the company D M Stewart, had negotiated sponsorship with one of the breweries and then fixed up an agreement with Ken to put on a week long programme of evening jazz events in the Guildford Arms, in West Register Street, close to the east end of Princes Street. This was one of the pubs run by the Stewart family and not only was it in a central and prestigious location, it was also one of Edinburgh’s finest surviving Victorian pubs. Believed to date back to about 1890, it featured enormous sand blasted windows, wood panelling on the walls, a complex and beautifully decorated ceiling and a lounge bar perched on a balcony. It says much for the quality of the Guildford Arms decor that it managed to exist literally next door to the sumptuous Cafe Royal, another marvel of Victorian pub design, without being in any way diminished by its neighbour’s splendid marble floors, ceramic murals and sculptured ceilings. Sponsorship in the early years, without which the event could not have taken place, came from the Harviestoun and Atlas Breweries.

Ken’s jazz festival, which became known as the **Guildford Arms Jazz Festival**, was to present jazz of the traditional to mainstream type and was to become a successful annual event. The programme originally ran for a week, taking place each evening from 9.00pm to 12.00 midnight and generally the first two nights coincided with the last two nights of the EIJF. Each evening featured a band built around Ken’s own drumming, filled out with invited jazz musicians, mostly local but also including an impressive list of guests from further afield. Typically, there would be a piano, bass and drums rhythm section fronted either by a team of horn players carefully selected to blend well together or a guest soloist.

It is not possible to list all the many local jazzers who played a part but a random selection of names will give some idea of the quality and style of jazz that graced the Guildford over the years. The Edinburgh scene contributed the likes of pianists Tom and Jack Finlay, Ron Carruthers and George Cavaye, trumpeters Al Fairweather, who played all the Guildford Arms festivals between 1988 and 1992, Andrew Lauder, Gus Ferguson and Jim Petrie, bass players Ken Macdonald, Kenny Ellis, Ronnie Dunn and Dizzy Jackson, guitarist Lachlan MacColl, reeds men Jimmy Shortreed, Jack Graham, Bill Simpson, Jimmy Woods and Phil Bancroft, trombonist Graeme Robertson, vocalists Wendy Weatherby and Jean Mundell and many others. Guests from elsewhere in Scotland included pianists Frank Tinson and Jimmy Martin, bass player John Hartley from Aberdeen, tenor sax player Dave Roberts from Inverurie, another tenor man, Robbie Richardson, from the Borders and trumpeter Al Gibson

from West Lothian. Glasgow provided trumpeter George Ogilvie and the major attraction of vocalist Fionna Duncan.

The guest list from further afield was just as impressive and must be headed by the great trombonist Roy Williams, a star of both the Alex Welsh and Humphrey Lyttelton bands, who was to be an ever-present attraction over a span of twenty four years (and still counting). The London jazz scene was further represented by trumpeter Terry Meechan, clarinettist Ian Christie who was the guest star at the very first Guildford Jazz Festival in 1987, another Welsh and Lyttelton alumnus in reeds player John Barnes, guitarist Jim Douglas and the fine alto sax and clarinet player Bruce Turner, who made many appearances. Ken Ramage also sometimes arranged additional gigs or even little tours for his guests from the south, when he would take them, along with his backing trio, to venues in the north of Scotland. Speaking with Ken in 2011, he recalled one such trip when the guest soloist was Bruce Turner who asked him to make a detour on the way home to visit Pitreavie Castle, where Bruce had been stationed during the war.

In addition to the Guildford event and the north of Scotland gigs, Ken was also active in arranging jazz weekends and charity jazz band balls through the year, some of which took place in the Masonic Club at Shrubhill, a very large venue which he was able to fill for a number of years. Al Fairweather, a great supporter of local jazz since his return from the south, played at all the early Jazz Band Ball events run by Ken as did pianist Alex Shaw, although Alex never managed to play the Guildford Arms Festivals. Sadly, Al Fairweather, who had been a constant support for Ken's various projects between 1988 and 1992, died just before a Jazz Band Ball run by Ken in the Leith Ex-serviceman's Club in June 1993. In a well-deserved gesture, Ken then ran the event as a tribute to Al, with Roy Williams on trombone, Jack Duff on reeds and Andrew Lauder coming in on trumpet in Al's place. Another trumpeter, George Ogilvie, sometimes brought his whole band over from Glasgow to play at the Jazz Band Balls. As a further contribution to the success of his various ventures, Ken and his wife Viv (who sadly died in 2010) would often provide accommodation for visiting jazzers, thus cutting costs in a budget that none-the-less usually ended up over-stretched. What should certainly be mentioned is that there was always a collection in aid of children with cancer at the Guildford events and the proceeds from the various jazz band balls went towards the annual Edinburgh Taxi Trade Handicapped Kiddies Outing. It was small wonder that Ken was able to count on the support of so many jazzers from Edinburgh and elsewhere for these events.

The first run of Guildford Jazz Festivals continued until 1992 but this sequence of seven years actually included nine festivals, as Ken ran two festivals in both 1990 and 1991. However, that brought the Guildford Jazz Festival to an end for the time being as Ken made a return to the USA, where he was to stay for the next nine years. Happily, his return to Edinburgh saw the resumption of his partnership with David Stewart and the Guildford Arms, with the first of a new series of festivals taking place in 2003. Since then, the Guildford Jazz Festival has again been an annual event, with sponsorship provided by the excellent Orkney Brewery, which brought the name 'Orkney Jazz at the Guildford Arms'. Many well-known jazzers from Edinburgh and elsewhere have taken part in the series of festivals beginning in 2003, their number including many who had already played a part in the first series, together with others such as reed players Gerard Dott, George Duncan, and Martin Foster, trombonists Alan Quinn and Dave Batchelor and many others. Guests from further afield have included reeds man Jim Galloway from Toronto and, in 2010, Frank Perowsky, a top tenor sax man who had played with the likes of Woody Herman, Peggy Lee, Sarah Vaughan and Billy Eckstine.

In the year of writing of 2011, the Guilford Jazz Festival continues to flourish, still attracting good crowds and still delivered without cost to the punters. It now takes place over no fewer than thirteen evenings and is advertised as part of a package: The Guildford Arms Free Fringe Music, the jazz festival being followed by Caledonian Folk and Blues at the Guildford. Like the rest of Edinburgh jazz, the Guildford Arms Jazz Festivals continued to be affected by losses among its regular contributors, with both Ronnie Dunn and Alan Quinn dying in the months following the 2011 event. However, others filled the gaps and the 2011 Guildford Arms jazz programme went ahead from 5<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> August and was, as usual, a well-attended success. It featured various combinations under the names the Ken Ramage Trio and the Ken Ramage Dixie Six and was again headed by the ever loyal and popular Roy Williams. The singer Freddie King also appeared, as did Jim Petrie's Diplomats of Jazz. The 'cast' for 2011 was billed as Key-board: Jack Finlay, Campbell Normand, Dave Graham, Graham Scott and Steve Grossart; Trumpet: Jim Petrie, Andrew lauder and Brian Robertson; Trombone: George Howden; Reeds: Dick Lee, Bob Busby, Bill Marshall and Andy Hampton; Bass: Ken Macdonald, Kenny Ellis, Owen Macdonald and Graham Blamire; Banjo: Bev Knight; Vocalist: Patsy Hindley and Drums: Ken Ramage. The Guildford Jazz Festival, after twenty four years, albeit with a break of about ten years, showed no signs of stopping for as long as the now seventy-four year old Ken Ramage, who had worked so hard to organise the festivals as well as annually knocking his pan in at the drum kit, wanted to keep it going."