



"Cherishing the Jewels of the Past and Actively Supporting the Interests of the Future"

## REMEMBERING DENNIS SPICER



*Dennis Spicer with James Green*

The Royal Variety Performance of 1964, televised by the BBC, included a young British ventriloquist who was rapidly reaching the top of his profession. His act that night was a highly complicated routine that many artists would balk at presenting on such a nerve wracked occasion. However this young man oozed confidence, wowing the audience with a superbly entertaining spot involving a corgi dummy, with a penchant for biting soldiers; a Bengal tiger and the loveable Maxwell, a monkey with only one ear. Spicer's act also included two disembodied voices in bottles; a dummy that walked off-stage unaided (Kenny Baker in disguise!); drinking a glass of water whilst the dummy was speaking and a spectacular finale with Dennis and Maxwell singing *Old Macdonald Had A Farm* at breakneck speed, alternating lines between the monkey and his own voice. It was simply a tour de force and the ovation that he received was completely justified. The reviews that followed named him as one of the 'hits' of the show and one of the Queen's personal favourites. Her Majesty told Dennis: "I loved the jokes about the corgi". The future looked starry bright for this young ventriloquist with a Palladium season pending and future bookings in America. Tragically it was not to be as two weeks later, driving home after taking part in a charity show, Dennis Spicer was killed in a road crash on the A1 near Stamford, Lincolnshire, aged just 29.

Dennis George Spicer was born on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1935 in Hillingdon County Hospital but the family later moved

from the London area to Gloucester before settling in Coventry. Dennis's interest in ventriloquism began when he was just eight years of age. His sister June recalls, "We were regular visitors to the local public library where we were allowed to borrow one factual and one fictional book. This particular day Dennis brought home a book on magic, inside which was an article on ventriloquism. In no time at all, he had cut the jaw of my one and only doll, threaded elastic through the back and hey presto – he had a talking doll! From the book he soon mastered the art of not moving his lips while talking in a different voice. We soon turned our back garden into a theatre. We charged all the kids a halfpenny and they had to bring their own chairs! We used to put regular concerts on and soon the mums and dads would come and watch. I can picture them now: the men in their shirts and braces and the women in their wrap-over pinnies and dinkie curlers!"

Dennis's father was obviously proud of his son's newly acquired skills as June remembers that one day when the family were returning from a working men's club outing, he shouted "Come on our Dennis, do us a turn with your vent doll." Everyone was very impressed, particularly a man called Lou who did a bit of ventriloquism in his club act. Lou decided to take Dennis under his wing and taught him how to master the art of ventriloquism. "He also sold him a dummy for fifteen shillings", recalls June. "Dennis called the dummy Enoch and I am pleased to say that I still have him!"



*Dennis Spicer meets The Queen and Prince Philip*

Dennis got his first booking at the Railway Club when he was just 10 years of age. "At first nerves got the better of him", remembers June, "and he just stood on the stage saying nothing. My dad shouted out 'Come on our Dennis' and he just burst into life and as the saying goes, he brought the house down. From there, there was no looking back and the bookings came in fast and furious. He had an agent called Sid Starr, who we called 10% Sid, and Dennis would get twenty shillings for a Saturday night or a Sunday morning booking and thirty shillings for the whole weekend."

His newly found wealth meant that Dennis could now afford a proper case for his dummy instead of using his father's old kit bag! Dennis's father was keen to see his son improve his skills. "My dad used to sit in the audience and signal to Dennis if his lips moved by touching his mouth," remembers June, "and if Dennis needed to be louder, my dad would touch his ears."

For the next few years Dennis was kept busy on the club and cabaret circuit and he even occasionally involved June in his act, having taught her ventriloquism. "This involved Dennis leaving the concert room for a minute while I carried on a conversation with the dummy", recalls June, "and sometimes he would stand there and drink a glass of water while I took over. Later, of course, he perfected the art of drinking and talking at the same time. He was absolutely brilliant and always practising new ideas for the act. He always seemed to have his head up the chimney 'throwing his voice'. This trick sometimes got him into trouble, when he was larking about at school! Dennis was very clever with his hands and would carve head shapes on broom handles and various objects and, with papier mache, would make various dummies."

Dennis left school at fifteen and struggled to settle in any profession as his heart was in show business. More and more bookings were coming in and he was travelling further afield. One of his best friends in the business at that time was the entertainer Billy Breen, who would later become a television favourite under the name of Larry Grayson. At the age of seventeen, Dennis made the decision to turn professional and left home. His days of appearing in working men's clubs were now in the past as he obtained more and more cabaret engagements and variety bookings, one of which was the exotically titled *Aqua Rhythm Rhapsody*, which played the Queens Theatre at Barnstable in April 1954. That summer he was booked as a member of the Resident Revue Company at Butlin's Holiday Camp in

Filey. It was there that he met his beautiful wife, also called June. The following year they were both at Butlin's camp in Clacton, Dennis in the resident revue with Joe Baker and Jack Douglas and June as the voice of Radio Butlin. His sister June also found work in the camp as a hairdresser.

"Dennis at first made his own figures and wrote his own scripts," recalls his widow, now June Sobey. "He was always writing new material and trying to be topical. Later, when the figures became more sophisticated, the heads were made by a toy firm. Actually, Dennis was going to design some toys for that firm when he died. His most famous figure was James Green but he also used a large rabbit, a monkey, a Bengal tiger and for the Royal Variety Performance, a corgi. My particular favourite was a teenage girl with long blonde hair (bought from Davenport's) but I felt it did not realise its potential. Two of his favourite routines were drinking a pint of beer whilst the figure was talking and swapping voices with the figure."

According to an article in the *TV Mirror* in August 1955, the idea of swapping voices with the dummy came about through a mishap one day whilst performing when James Green started talking with Dennis's own voice by mistake. Luckily the audience thought it was all part of the act and a new gimmick was born!



Dennis was also beginning to appear on television, having auditioned for the BBC in October and December of 1954. His first television appearance was in *Showcase*, directed by Ernest Maxin, which was

televised from the TV Theatre on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1955, resulting in lots of telephone enquiries for the young vent. In June, Dennis was booked as compere of *The Centre Show*, where he featured his regular dummy, James Green. *The Stage* reported 'Dennis Spicer was a great success, changing places with his dummy on occasion and challenging the camera to close up on his lips, which were motionless – although you could see his tongue moving like mad!' The following month Dennis was on television again when he appeared in Ernest Maxin's *Variety Parade*. *The Stage* noticed that the young 'ventertainer' 'had many new gimmicks, which he worked with his dummy Jimmy Green.'

In October 1955 Dennis married June in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne and managed to get much media attention when it was discovered that his dummy, James Green, was to be best man and would make a speech at the reception! It was also reported that Dennis, still only 20

years of age, had signed an exclusive contract with BBC Television and later that month he appeared on *The Dave King Show*. Numerous television appearances followed over the next few years including a regular appearance on Vera Lynn's fortnightly BBC show.

"We had no permanent house for four years", remembers his widow June, "but stayed mostly in theatrical digs. One summer season in Blackpool we rented Jimmy Clitheroe's house. One of the first things we bought was a horse and that went with us on summer season! Dennis was also always rescuing dogs and then bringing them back home with him. He even did that when we were touring Australia!"

As well as television appearances Dennis was keeping busy with live stage work, be it variety (where his fellow artistes included Max Miller, Ronnie Carroll, Joan Regan, Diana Dors and Mrs. Shufflewick), summer season (Blackpool Central Pier, Southsea, Llandudno) or pantomime (East Ham Palace, Hackney Empire and Belfast Opera House). He was with the Forrester George agency, which meant that he often worked with a young up-and-coming comic who was with the same firm – Ken Dodd. The two soon became firm friends.

"I first met Dennis, on a very foggy day, at Ardwick Hippodrome," remembers Ken. "I was immediately intrigued by his enthusiasm and energy. His head was full of ideas and we used to discuss and argue over ventriloquists. Because we had the same agent we would often appear on bills together. Dennis was one for crazes. One week he would be into Indian philosophy and his dressing room would be very dark and there would be the smell of joss sticks! The following week he would be into antiques and I would arrive at the stage door to find all these items of furniture waiting for Dennis to say 'Yea' or 'Nay' to! He was a great creative thinker and was always rushing into my dressing room with new ideas for his act."

Ken and Dennis appeared in *Let's Have Fun* for the summer season on Blackpool's Central Pier in 1956 with Jimmy James, Jimmy Clitheroe and Roy Castle, where *The Stage* critic reported 'Dennis Spicer is a brilliant performer.' Over the next few years the pair appeared together in such productions as *The Ken Dodd Show* at Birmingham Hippodrome (1962), Bristol Hippodrome's *Spring Show* (1962), Coventry Theatre's *Spring Show* (1963) and *The Ken Dodd Show* at Liverpool's Royal Court Theatre (1963). Dennis also appeared in Ken's BBC television series in 1960 when they did a double vent act. "The last summer season Dennis did was for me," recalls Ken, "when we were in *The Big Show Of 1964* with Rosemary Squires and Joe 'Mr. Piano' Henderson at the Blackpool Opera House. Dennis was a lovely, wonderful man, always game for a laugh."

Ken has remained close to the Spicer family over the years. He was godfather to Dennis and June's only son,



*Ken Dodd, James Green and Dennis Spicer*

Robin, and performed the opening ceremony at June's (Dennis's sister) new hairdressing salon in Coventry. He also made sure he sent a bouquet to Dennis's mother, Molly, when she celebrated her 100th birthday in 2009. (Incidentally, Molly keeps very active and will celebrate her 102nd birthday in July!)

Dennis's career went from strength to strength. He toured Australia on two separate occasions, visiting Perth, Sydney and Melbourne as well as appearing on various television shows including one memorable broadcast with Australian vent Ron Blaskett on *In Melbourne Tonight*. "I remember on the liner coming home," recalls his widow June, "Dennis was asked to organise the ship's concert. He also arranged the auditions – a bit like *The X Factor* but without the cruel comments. For doing this we were upgraded which was rather nice!" Dennis also appeared in cabaret in Calcutta where the management offered 1,000 rupees to anyone who could see Dennis's lips move!

Dennis also scored a great success in the States where he was quickly booked to appear on several of the top rated Ed Sullivan shows. "Dennis used to say 'Not bad for having a little doll on my knee'," recalls his widow, June, laughing.

When the talented vent appeared in one of the famous *Five Past Eight* revues at the Alhambra, Glasgow in 1963, he proved to be an outstanding success with the critics rating him 'the most improved performer of 1963'. Joining Dennis in that production were Bob Monkhouse and the glamorous singer, Yana. "I remember," recalls June, his widow, "that you could smell her perfume all over the theatre!"

I can remember seeing Dennis at Butlin's camps when I was quite young. On a couple of occasions he was the star guest on the Sunday night variety show. I thought then that he was wonderfully entertaining but was probably too young to understand the skill involved. All these years later, thanks to Dennis's sister June, I have watched footage of Dennis in action on the 1964 Royal Variety Performance. He shone like the star he was that



night, proving without any doubt that he was a brilliant ventriloquist. He greatly admired the vent Arthur Worsley. Well, I feel he was certainly Arthur's equal and the future looked extremely bright for him that evening. He was booked to appear for the Christmas season at the Manchester Opera House in *The Dora Bryan Show*. A Palladium season was also being lined up as well as further bookings in the States.

On Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> November Dennis appeared in two charity shows. He firstly entertained the inmates of Leeds prison, leaving there at 4pm to appear in a special gala in aid of a new Leeds and District Jewish Convalescent Home. Appearing with him on the bill were Dickie Henderson, Audrey Jeans and Janie Marden. It was while driving home from this second charity show that he was involved in a collision with another car. Dennis was killed instantly and the driver of the other car died two days later. The police found a pair of very small shoes in the wreckage and assumed a child had been in the car. Of course, the shoes belonged to James Green.



Dennis was buried at North Mymms, near Potters Bar as he was living in nearby Brookman's Park in Hertfordshire at that time. In fact the family were in the process of moving to Hatfield when Dennis died. Among the personalities attending the funeral on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1964 were Tommy Cooper, Jimmy Tarbuck, George and Alfred Black, Eddie Calvert and, of course, Ken Dodd. The Queen sent a tribute. Dennis's grave was, for many years, unmarked, as June, his widow, did not believe in headstones, but in 2001 the Magic Circle

unveiled a plaque at Dennis's grave under the Circle's Memorial Initiative which seeks out, attends and honours graves of past magicians and those in allied arts (like ventriloquism). Robert Freeman, a member of the Magic Circle, suggested a plaque for Spicer's grave. "In 1964 when Dennis's funeral took place," remembers Robert, "I was living at my parents' home, East Lodge, located at the entrance of the drive leading to St. Mary's Church, North Mymms. In the ensuing years, it was a puzzle to us why the grave had been neglected after all the 'glitz' on the day. When the Circle's Memorial Initiative was up and running I had the idea that Dennis's resting place might come within the remit of the rules. Approval was given and I undertook to actually locate the grave."

With the vicar, Robert went through records and eventually located the plot. A simple brass plaque was obtained and on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2001 there was a simple ceremony at the grave attended by Magic Circle members. Although Robert moved from the Hatfield area in 2006, he still tends the plot regularly, cleaning the plaque, clipping the grass and planting a few spring bulbs.

Dennis, sadly, is all but forgotten today, although thankfully his appearance on the 1964 Royal Variety Performance is preserved for all to see and there is footage of him with Michael Holliday on YouTube. He deserves to be remembered as a superb and very entertaining ventriloquist, one of the best that Britain has ever produced. He was also a clever joker, as this anecdote from Barry Cryer's extremely entertaining book *Pigs Can Fly* makes very clear:

'Once I was in Newcastle doing a show with Ted Ray and others at Tyne Tees Television, and Dennis, who was also appearing, arrived very late. He finally entered the dressing room, apologising profusely and talking about the traffic, and put a case down on the table. He opened the case, took out a small doll and hung it on a hook on the wall. Then he said, "I must have a pee, I must have a cup of tea, I'll be back in a minute, sorry about this," and left the room. He'd left the case unfastened, and the lid was ajar, so Ted Ray said, "Oh, let's have a look" and he opened the lid of the case, and there was a frog with rolling eyes and all sorts of interesting props and bits and pieces in there, and then Ted said, "We shouldn't be doing this." He closed the lid, and when Dennis Spicer entered the room the doll on the wall said, "He's had a look in your case, Dennis!"

### Geoff Bowden

**(My thanks to Dennis's sisters June and Rose, Dennis's widow June, Dennis's son Robin, Robert Freeman and Ken Dodd OBE for all their help with this article and for supplying the photographs.)**

## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



I was very saddened to hear the news of Vice President Jack Seaton's death. He was a very successful Chairman of the BMHS and was always a delight to chat to. Our President Roy Hudd pays tribute to Jack later in the magazine. Jack's funeral at All Saints Church in Harrow Weald on Friday March 4th was packed to the rafters. Richard Jenkins, husband of Jack's cousin Gill, commented that Jack would have been delighted to know that he had a full house and at a matinee too! He said, "I'm sure Jack is looking down at us now and counting the house!"

It seems such a shame that the British Music Hall Society will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2013 and still has no permanent home to display its ever-growing archive of memorabilia. The magnificent exhibition that was staged in 2009 showed us what a wealth of material the Society has collected over the years but for most of the time it is locked away out of sight. Various efforts have been made over the

years to find a suitable venue but so far without success. If anyone thinks they know of a permanent (and secure) display location for the Society's archive, I'm sure the committee would be only too pleased to hear from them.

In the winter edition of *The Call Boy* we published a photo of Jason Donovan holding a copy of our magazine. We have now learnt that Jason has joined the touring production of *The Sound Of Music* playing Captain Von Trapp opposite Verity Rushworth (from *Emmerdale*) as Maria. I caught the production at Bristol Hippodrome last November when Michael Praed was playing the Captain and Philippa Buxton played Maria (it was Connie Fisher's night off!). However, it was Marilyn Hill Smith, as the Mother Abbess, who stole the show, bringing the house down with her singing of *Climb Ev'ry Mountain* at the end of Act 1.

This year's pantomime at Brick Lane was great fun with Vincent Hayes in fine form, especially during the raffle! Chris Emmett was terrific as an Old Mother Riley-inspired *Mother Goose*. Our President Roy Hudd will be returning to Brick Lane in May. Not to be missed.

**Geoff Bowden**

6, New River Crescent, Palmers Green, London, N13 5RF.

Email: [geoff.bowden1@btinternet.com](mailto:geoff.bowden1@btinternet.com)

## ANGELS ON THE ALGARVE

The Angels Theatre Group, based on the Algarve in Portugal, continue to entertain and to raise money for local charities. Last October the three-night run of their *Music Hall Revue* played to capacity houses. The increasingly popular show was a huge success, and the finale looked to the North for inspiration, with an accomplished Scottish piper leading the whole cast to the stage.

December had the Angels performing their *Christmas Cracker Show* at the Holiday Inn Hotel. The Salvation Army band played, there was a 'Nativity play' of sorts(!), cracker jokes, sad and funny poems, sing-a-long carols and the welcome appearance of Santa Claus with his elves, snowmen and a fairy Queen. The finale had the entire audience involved in singing *The Twelve Days of Christmas*.

The two shows benefited Centre Algarve, a new project to provide a holiday centre for people with special needs. 5000 euros will decorate and furnish the reception areas of the Centre. A further 2000 euros was given to the Sao Bras Museum to fund

their community programme. During December The Angels approached a local supermarket, Intermarche, with the result that 50 Portuguese Christmas Cakes, were delivered to poor families in the Sao Bras area.

The Angels are now into rehearsals for their next production, which will be staged at the Sao Bras Theatre on June 4th. *Variety on Stage* will include local professional musicians and dancers, who will give of their time and talent to support the Angels cast in raising money for the local fire brigade. The fire service is partly run by volunteers who are short of equipment and specialist clothing.

We'd like to take this opportunity of thanking Max Tyler. Sourcing specific items for our shows here on the Algarve can be challenging, even with the internet facility. As our next production will benefit our volunteer fire brigade, we thought it appropriate to try and find a music hall song with this theme. Max came up with some suggestions and also kindly gave us a contact at The Bodleian Library, who in turn has found us FIVE. We are presently waiting for the copies to

arrive and then choosing one for our show. Any BMHS members visiting the Algarve will be made most welcome. Please contact Joy or Marion on 96 608 6181 or e-mail [theangelstheatreco@live.com](mailto:theangelstheatreco@live.com) More details can be found on the web site [www.theangelstheatregroup.com](http://www.theangelstheatregroup.com)

Best wishes to all BMHS members and to *The Call Boy* journal, for a successful and happy 2011.

**Joy Behennah & Marion Griffiths**



**COPYDATE FOR SUMMER ISSUE - June 3rd, 2011**

# JACK THE LAD

A Tribute To Past Chairman, Vice President Jack Seaton

by Roy Hudd

(Photos: Ralph Reardon)



I always thought I was the person who loved show business more than anyone else – and then I met Jack. Our Jack was totally in love with the game. He was someone very special indeed – particularly to our Society.

Let me tell you a bit about the comedian whose ad lib exchanges with the late Chubby Oates were an education to me. The producer whose shows always came down on time. The singer who did *Susie, Susie* better than anyone before or since. The kind, kind man who always worked as hard for any charity he took under his wing as he ever did when he was being paid.

He was born in 1929 in Soho, which must be how he became a streetwise 'Jack the lad' so very early in his life. Very early because, at the start of the war, he went to live with his grandparents in Harrow Weald. He attended Whitefriars School in Wealdstone where his cousin, Gill Jenkins, is a teacher today. Jack, believe it or not, became a choirboy at All Saints Church. The very church where his funeral was, on the 4th of March. Was this where he learned what goes on *In the shoe shine shop*? He probably taught it to his fellow choristers!

At the end of the war the Soho lad returned to his birthplace. Always on the look out to earn a couple of bob he started washing cars. One of which belonged to Tommy Trinder. Tommy recognised a fellow patterer and they became friends. What a time that must have been – all through Tom's record breaking seasons at The London Palladium. They stayed friends all through the comedian's life. Jack never forgot the great man and, indeed, carried on 'gophering' for him and visiting him till Tom's final curtain. It was Mr. Trinder who persuaded Jack to have a go at 'comicking' himself. Not that he needed much persuading. Tommy wasn't a bad judge. Jack became a 'pro', becoming a popular solo turn and compere for lots of managements till he became his own boss. He mounted his own variety bills. Something he'd wanted to do all his life.

Most recently, he devised his own one-man show doing what he did best, spinning yarns and talking about his greatest love - the variety theatre.

Jack was the man who, just when the dream of a British Music Hall Society seemed about to bite the dust, came to the rescue. He became our Chairman. Like everything he took on he jumped in with both feet. He was the drum beater superb. In the name of the Society he mounted umpteen music hall and variety

shows, did dozens of radio, television and newspaper interviews and shoved the Society into the unique position it holds today.

He was a great Scout *Gang Show* fan and an assistant to Ralph Reader. Among his best memories was looking over the pianist's shoulder when Ralph sang, just for Jack, his newest song, *Strollin'*. He heard it even before Bud Flanagan.

He was a truly charitable man and, like all the genuine ones, never boasted about the work he did. I've only just learned that, for many years, he was a Trustee of an organisation based at Hampton Court Palace - The Horse Rangers Association. The Association teaches horsemanship to adults and children, both the able bodied and those with special needs. Jack loved riding and I have a Christmas card from him. A photograph of himself as a young, sleek jockey on board a sleek steeplechaser taking a fence. He commented, "These days only a shire horse would be able to take me!"

He achieved an ambition all true 'pros' aspire to. He became a member of The Grand Order of Water Rats. He embodied all the qualities the Rats most admire. He was good at the job, he could laugh at himself and was hugely generous with his time and talent helping his brother and sister artistes – especially at Brinsworth House - for The Entertainment Artistes Benevolent Fund. He was always there as a member of it's Executive Committee, organising cabarets for the residents, helping with transport and, most importantly, chatting to and cheering up the retired pros. He knew lots well and visited lots more. A few days before he died he arranged to go and chat with a ninety eight year old lady, Kate Tilley. Kate is the widow of one of the first radio comedians, John Tilley. How Jack and Kate would have enjoyed each other's company. Alas it wasn't to be.

I'm grateful to Graham and Gill Jenkins for helping me with things I didn't know about Gill's cousin, Jack. Graham told me on a wall of Jack's flat was a framed handbill of a show he devised and presented at the Hackney Empire. It was the first variety bill to play there on it's re-opening in 1987. It was a memorable night. I was there and was able, at curtain down, to put an arm on Jack's shoulder as he genuinely wiped away a tear. It was a great night and all down to the man who tried, and succeeded, against all odds, to keep the music hall and variety flags flying. Rest in peace, Jack the Lad.



Jack Seaton, Barry Balmayne and Roy Hudd

# FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DIARY

SPRING 2011



J.B.Priestley's comic masterpiece *When We Are Married* has finished its scheduled sixteen weeks at the Garrick Theatre and I am now, as they used to say, 'at liberty'. It wasn't an imprisonment I wanted to escape from. We could easily have gone on a bit longer but another show was booked in and, as they still say, 'That's show business!' We did have an empty start to the run. First the tube strikes, then the snow and then the student riots. But, once folk were happy to come into London again, boy! did the show take off. We played to terrific houses for fourteen weeks. Why? Our management certainly didn't swamp everywhere with posters, press adverts and all the usual hyperbole. Our full houses were purely down to word of mouth. The very best form of publicity there is. The cheapest too! Priestley is coming back into fashion following the huge success of *An Inspector Calls* and now our show. Let's hope more of his immaculately written dramas and comedies return to their rightful place, centre stage.

One of the great things about a season in the West End is just how many friends pop backstage to see you. In this case

all of 'em came back with a smile on their faces. Then you know all is well. We've all gone backstage to see chums when we've just witnessed a bad 'un and what do you say. An actor friend of mine used to say "How about those frocks" or "What about you then", both of which mean nothing at all. I usually say, "Shall we go and have a drink?" That's enough to cheer up most of my pals. I did get lots of photographs and programmes from customers who'd seen me in the past. I got a complete set of *Out Of The Blue* programmes from the Babbacombe Concert Hall. The couple who gave them saw the show while on their honeymoon. This time they were celebrating their golden wedding! Fifty years ago! I tried to persuade them the Roy Hudd in *Out Of The Blue* was Roy Hudd senior but they weren't having any. I think they remembered my tie.

Right now we're having a few days in the sun with our friend, Past Queen Ratling Joane Hall. Joane is the best company in the world so I'm looking forward to lots of indiscreet memories. Yippee!

I'll be rushing back to do my twopennorth for *Yours* magazine at their annual *Yours Live* at Butlin's Skegness and a week at my favourite venue, Brick Lane Music Hall. The entire *When We Are Married* company went to the Brick Lane panto and, like everyone who goes there, thought it was the best. The best atmosphere, the best grub and the best rude jokes in London. And if that doesn't get me another week there – nothing will.

## BHMS AGM 2011

The AGM took place on Sunday 6th March at 2.30pm at the new venue of The Lancaster Hall Hotel. It was presided over by the Chairman Doreen Hermitage and attended by 53 members. Before the meeting officially commenced, Doreen Hermitage led a one-minute silence to Vice President and past Chairman Jack Seaton. The Chair then paid tribute to Vice Chairman Daphne Bailey, who had passed away on the 23rd March 2010, and asked the members to warmly welcome the new Vice Chairman Adam Borzone.

Treasurer Larry Cheadle said that the society funds were still healthy and very similar to the previous year. Membership is currently 812 with 29 new members already in 2011. Terry Lomas sent a report saying the 275th Study Group meeting was due in March and Max Tyler said the archive department was getting very full and we should perhaps also start thinking about our 50th anniversary in 2013. Co-Founder Gerald Glover proposed that the Society seeks suitable storage and displaying premises through designated fund raising. This was unanimously agreed upon.

Andy Foster said he had managed to store over 400 hours of sound and visual material on one hand held hard drive. Call Boy Editor Geoff Bowden said he was delighted that he had been contacted asking permission to reproduce

some of our articles in other magazines and, although the Call Boy had been increased by 4 pages, he still had plenty of articles to fill them. Chairman Doreen Hermitage said the Annual Ball of 2010 was the first in recent history to make a small profit. Gerald Glover proposed a vote of thanks to Doreen for her leadership and hard work for the Society. This was seconded by Vice Chairman, Adam Borzone, and a unanimous vote from the floor.

The reason for the new venue was to make the AGM a more sociable occasion in the BMHS Calendar. Before the official meeting there was a meal in the hotel restaurant and after the main business of the day there was a chance to purchase BMHS memorabilia and view items from the archives over a cup of tea/coffee and a slice of cake. Then Co-Founder Gerald Glover gave a fascinating talk on how, when and why the Society was founded and what the early years were like, before he took questions from the floor. A welcome surprise was the appearance of entertainer Lee Young, who was in London on a short holiday from his home in Australia. Gerry persuaded Lee to give a short summary of his extensive career. A wonderfully interesting afternoon in the Society's calendar, with special thanks to Colin Simmons and Peter White.

Adam Borzone

**BMHS Website: [www.music-hall-society.com](http://www.music-hall-society.com)**



# PALS FROM THE PAST

WYN CALVIN recalls the politics behind one of radio's longest running variety programmes.



"This is the BBC Home Service. It is twelve-thirty and time for *Workers' Playtime*," proclaimed the announcer in London, then the sound of cheers and applause would be stilled by the voice of the urbane Bill Gates to introduce another thirty minutes of lunch-time variety to a lively audience of war workers 'somewhere in England'. The actual location was not to be revealed in case it attracted German bombers lurking in the skies. Such was national security that 'somewhere in England' could be a Glasgow shipyard or a munitions factory in South Wales.

This mid-day variety programme joined the ranks of the popular Saturday evening *Music Hall*, Sunday's *Variety Bandbox* or *Palace Of Varieties* on Wednesday. It was meant to raise the morale of wartime workers and transmitted to factory canteens throughout the country.

When Winston Churchill created his all-party government - a TRUE coalition - his war cabinet comprised valuable MPs from across the party-political spectrum. Bristolian Ernest Bevin, a keen socialist

and trade-union leader, became Minister of Labour and National Service. *Workers' Playtime* was his idea. In 1940 variety was then top-popularity on the wireless and its star names were to appear in factory canteens during a lunchtime break. These names included (to list a few) Elsie and Doris Waters, Flanagan and Allen, Ted Ray, Sandy Powell, Albert Modley, Mabel Constanduros, Suzette Tarri, Jimmy James, The Two Leslies (Sarony and Holmes), Vic Oliver or 'The Voice Of Them All, Peter Cavanagh, with singers like Issy Bonn, Dorothy Squires, Anne Shelton, John McCormack and Dan Donovan, or accordionists Tollefsen or Max Geldray. In fact an alphabetical range from Arthur Askey to Anne Zeigler.

The running-order would comprise a musical act, comedian, singer and star comic. Although Bill Gates compered most of the programmes, a regional announcer sometimes appeared. One that some remember was Midlands announcer Philip Garston-Jones (who some rude comics called Philip Ghastly Jones) a charming actor with a posh BBC accent - until later in his life joining the cast of *The Archers* as the Brummie-accented Jack Woolley.

The BBC Variety Department booked the acts but the wartime locations were chosen by the Ministry of Labour for the live lunchtime broadcasts each Tuesday and Thursday. This was the BBC's first touring variety show, which meant transporting crew, cables, microphones, pianos, presenters and performers to locations, often remote, when roads in wartime were not signposted. Post Office telephones provided landlines from factory canteens to be relayed to factories throughout the country.

When WW2 ended in 1945, Ernest Bevin, in the new Labour government, wanted the programme to continue. "To raise the morale of the workers while the government rebuilt Britain and the

British economy," he said. Little did the BBC or the government visualise that *Workers' Playtime* would continue for almost twenty years after the war. In its latter peacetime years *Workers' Jerkers* (as some called it) provided many younger comics with a radio baptism in the second spot. My own came in 1954 and over the next ten years appeared so frequently in that spot that I got the nickname 'The Workers' Plaything'!

Memories flood back of factories like Hood-Haggies Rope Works near Newcastle, which had a reputation for employing the toughest female workers on Tyneside, known locally as 'Haggies Angels'. The screaming which greeted this reference could be heard nationwide. At any factory a reference to the foreman or one of the management (popular or not-so) would be a sure reaction. What it meant to radio listeners was doubtful.

Other memories include sharing the programme with a charming young singer called Gerry Dorsey before his name was 'shortened' to Englebert Humperdinck. Another is of reaching a Midlands location in the dense fog of November 1962 to be greeted by a desperate producer, having been telephoned during the swift pre-broadcast rehearsal to be told top-of-the-bill Anne Shelton was fog-bound miles away. He made hurried changes to the running order, asking the instrumental act to do an extra number and the male singer to add another song, and would I extend my spot to fill the final spot? Thanks to that fog I became top-of-the-bill for the first time!

Far from those factories the programmes were constant lunch-time listening in millions of homes while *Workers' Playtime* on radio at mid-day kept the variety flag flying until 1964 when Bill Gates last proclaimed his usual finish 'Good Luck All Workers'.

## North West Music Hall and Variety Friendship Society

Despite a quiet winter season, members are looking forward to an interesting summer especially now that Merlin Entertainments is moving into Blackpool and Nickelodeon Land is being developed at the Pleasure Beach. Blackpool front is closed completely until July.

Our society, now a division of Ansdell Institute, has facilities for pool, snooker, society meetings and a bar, and is getting more well-known in the town, but it is a constant battle to get older

people to come out at night. Secretary John Spindler and Chairman Brian Halliwell have given talks on their background but Miss Patricia, due to give her talk at the February meeting, had to be postponed owing to the chairman and other interested members being absent and will now give her talk at the March meeting.

Lowther Pavilion, Lytham had its first professional pantomime last Christmas. Members who belong to Friends of Lowther assisted behind the scenes.

The March meeting has been put back a week as some members will be going to Skegness for the *Yours* magazine spring gathering at Butlin's. President Roy Hudd and Debbie will be giving a question and answer session. Secretary John Spindler and Joan Bond hope to enter the talent contest where ten from about thirty acts are given six minutes to perform.

Best wishes to all members.

**John Spindler**  
**Hon Sec.**



# CLICKO: THE WILD DANCING BUSHMAN

Never judge a book by its cover says the old adage – and it sometimes has a genuine as well as a metaphorical justification. At first sight the title, *Clicko: The Wild Dancing Bushman*, set on a garish red-curtained cover, suggests the run-of-the-mill memoir of a middle-range performer, tricked out with a few faintly amusing anecdotes and sprinkled with the names of celebrities met on the way, the whole unpretentious, pleasant but ephemeral.

Not so. This is an academic treatise, closely annotated and copiously referenced. No shipping register or minor newspaper is left unleafed. Every avenue is exhaustively, just occasionally exhaustingly, explored, or, as Robb Wilton was wont to remark, 'no turn is left unstoned'. We learn, for instance, that William Edmund Ironside, who makes a comparatively tiny entry into the tale, worked for British intelligence in South Africa, was the model for John Buchan's Richard Hannay of *The 39 Steps* fame, was possibly earmarked by Hitler as his Lord Protector of Britain, heading a Nazi puppet government, and was appointed by Churchill as commander of the Home Guard.

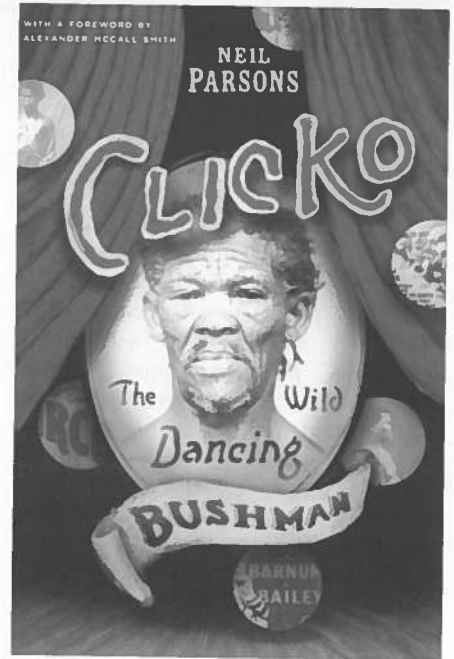
Clicko was Franz Taibosh, a South African native, born in the 1860s, of small proportion, with an adept skill in frenetic dancing and a talent for mimicry. Various billed as the last Bushman, a Hottentot, the Wild Man of Borneo and an Australian Aboriginal and invariably passed off as over a 100 years old, he became a long-serving stage, fairground and circus performer, chiefly in the United States, but also in England and on the Continent, as well

as Australia and Cuba. He bamboozled naïve scholars and was stared at by millions. He was, in the uncompromising term of the age, a 'freak'.

His performing life fell into two distinct stages. For years he was abominably exploited by his unprepossessing 'owner', the nasty Paddy Hepston, after which, in the face of legal action, he was rescued by Frank Cook, the shrewd fixer for the Barnum and Bailey circus, and, more happily, was cared for by the easy-going Cook family until his death in 1940. In effect, Franz Taibosh switched abruptly from being little more than a zoo animal to a regular performer of some self-esteem. Not that he was a gentle innocent in the Elephant Man tradition; he seized many chances of being a lech and souse, and good luck to him after his earlier travails.

His biography is contextualised within an often philosophic study of racialism, in particular, the relation between the purportedly civilised groups and the perceived uncivilised ones, and how Franz Taibosh's life, in microcosm, portrays the shift in that perception from cruel to cuddly, with Walt Disney's cosy seven dwarfs a helpful analogue.

This text is valuable for some stunning descriptions of the popular entertainment of the first half of the 20th century. Neil Parsons is particularly strong on the American circus trains, with the Ringling-Barnum company requiring four lengthy trains for all its paraphernalia, as well as its army of 1400 performers and supporting staff.



Franz Taibosh, especially in the second part of his career, lived and was liked among the midgets, giants, bearded ladies and so on who were a staple of entertainment then. If there is a pleasant aspect of all this, it is the manner in which the entertainment industry has sometimes been able to throw a protective veil over those who ordinarily would be regarded as abnormal – think Wee Georgie Wood or Jimmy Clitheroe – and give them an opportunity to find some fulfilment.

**Eric Midwinter**

Neil Parsons: *Clicko: The Wild Dancing Bushman*

University of Chicago Press £11.50  
ISBN: 978-0-226-64742-5

## MAIL BOX

I think BMHS members would be interested in a new book published by Peakpublish called *Coaldust to Stardust*: the memoirs of Jackie Toaduff.

Born in County Durham in 1933, the son of a coal miner, Jackie worked down the pit for 12 years while at the same time making a name for himself as a tap and clog dancer. All he wanted to do was sing and dance, although his mother Sarah poured scorn on his ambition. He persevered and became the national champion clog dancer at the Royal Albert Hall. This led to front-page news when he was later invited to dance with Princess Margaret. Was he the model for Billy Elliot?

As time went by he met his manager Colin Edwardes and then his stage partner Roland Roy ('Roy'). Roy and Jackie performed all over the world, and spent 21 years as entertainers on the QE2. They met many famous people from an endless list including Bob Hope, Margaret O'Brien, Margot Fonteyn, Ruby

Keeler, Sir John and Lady Mills, and Ginger Rogers who proposed marriage to Jackie. The book is full of wonderful stories and adventures – you will not want to put it down, not even after reading the outcome of Ginger's proposal! Maybe the younger generation in showbiz can be inspired by Jackie's hard work and determination to reach stardom.

May I quote a paragraph by Jackie Toaduff from *Southside* magazine: 'My highlight is the day I left the mines for the last time. When I came out of that cage from half a mile underground, it was the sunniest day; the sky was as blue and as wonderful as anything I'd seen; and there was Colin Edwardes with a beautiful car waiting to take me from black and white into glorious technicolour. What a life.'

Maureen Whitmore, Lea Cottage, Albaston, Gunnislake,  
Cornwall, PL18 9AJ  
Tel. 01822 833047

# CENSORSHIP ON THE BRITISH MUSIC HALLS

By Michael Kilgarriff

It is surprising to learn that there was never any kind of formalised censorship of the music halls. Censorship of material for public performance only existed in the 'legitimate' theatre, i.e. playhouses whose texts all had to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for approval. Even after a licence was granted any changes had to be re-submitted. Plays staged prior to 1737, the year in which the LC gained full censoring powers, were exempt although any changes to the text—even one word—had to be submitted. The absurd thing was that you could publish a play subject to the usual legal constraints of libel, obscenity, blasphemy, etc., but if you performed it in public you had to have the approval of the Censor of Plays who was himself answerable to no one except the LC. There was no machinery for an appeal through the courts. Many managements were in favour of this arrangement, for an LC's licence gave them protection against any threats of prosecution for sedition or indecency; censorship, it was thought, kept the stage wholesome and respectable. The whole system was scrapped in 1968—I have one of the last play licences ever issued—though copies of every publicly performed play must still be sent to the statutory libraries.

The 1843 Theatres Act loosened things up considerably, especially where the inchoate music halls were concerned. Buildings intended for public performance were subject to two kinds of licences: one for a theatre and one for a burletta house/music hall. The former could present plays but not serve refreshments in the auditorium, nor was smoking permitted; in the latter audiences could smoke, eat and drink but not see a play. But what constituted a play? Sketches on the halls led to a good deal of litigation. In one

celebrated case a *ballet d'action* was deemed to be in breach of the law if performed in a music hall because it told a story, whereas a *ballet divertissement*, being plotless, was permitted. But sketches slowly edged their way onto the 'illegitimate' stage and by the early 1900s were permitted provided they did not last longer than 30 minutes, had no more than six principal characters in the cast (there could be, and often were, dozens of extras) and that no more than two such items were performed on the same bill. This absurd situation kept m'learned friends in fat fees right until 1911, when the first double licences were issued.

So much for plays and sketches. But what legal controls were there over comics' patter and song lyrics? The short answer is that there weren't any. In London there were any number of attempts to bring music hall material under some sort of official scrutiny, but the expense and complexities defeated even the most fervent 'Prude on the Prowl'. Bernard Shaw was on one such panel which looked into the problem, but the difficulties of supervising every performance of every hall, of demanding copies of all songs and patter routines in advance for examination and approval, proved insurmountable.

In any case, the raciness of the performers is, in my view, greatly exaggerated, and to a large extent the halls were self-regulating. Coarse and vulgar, of course, compared with what was on at the Lyceum under Irving or Her Majesty's under Tree, but a touch of raucous coarseness was just the job after a hard day's graft. This did not mean your working man or woman was entirely indiscriminating, and any artiste who overstepped the mark would be given the bird in no uncertain terms.

Marie Lloyd was booed when she laid it on too thick (as the expression went) in an East End hall, and in Sheffield she was reduced to floods of tears at the adverse reaction to her unwonted crudeness; so if even the Queen of Comedy had to be careful not to overstep the bounds of propriety we can be sure the lesser lights did too. To harp on salaciously about the baser passions could be seen as insulting, especially in the presence of wives and daughters, and music hall managers and owners would be swift to ban any such transgressor from their stages. They were also keenly aware that complaints to the local licensing justices from, say, the police or the local vicar could put them out of business.

Political references as well as sexual innuendo had to be watched carefully; an insulting reference to Gladstone in the wrong town could provoke a riot in the auditorium. Many halls would have a list on the stage door notice-board displaying the subjects which were forbidden such as the Royal Family, German Princes, local councillors, MPs, etc. etc. But this was voluntary censorship; the halls, to the chagrin of the nation's Mrs Grundys, remained unbothered by Parliamentary legislation.

For further information see articles on Dramatic Censorship and on Music Hall in *Who's Who In The Theatre* (14th edition 1967).

[m.kilgarriff@btinternet.com](mailto:m.kilgarriff@btinternet.com)

**(Editor's Note:** I know some readers have had difficulty purchasing Michael's latest book *Back Stages*, so I am delighted to announce that Michael now has copies for sale @£14 including p&p. Please contact him on 020 8566 8301 or on the email address above.)

## MAIL BOX

Whilst working at the Chine Hotel, Boscombe Spa Road, Bournemouth at Christmas, I noticed on menus that it was a FJB Hotel. On speaking to the manager I discovered it belonged to F. J. Butterworth of the 18 provincial variety theatres chain, who started acquiring theatres in 1935. There are four 3-star FJB Hotels, all in the Bournemouth area. The hotels are owned now by John Butterworth, the son of F.J. He still owns the Boscombe

Hippodrome, and spent a large sum of money restoring it in recent years. It is now leased out to O2 Academy, doing mainly modern one-night bookings.

At the hotel, on the wall outside the ballroom, is a wonderful display (8 30"x 30" frames) of photos, nearly all signed, of variety artists of the '30s to '50s; about 40 in each glass fronted display. These include many speciality acts as well as stars. They are in perfect

condition, with the signatures readable, as they are in an area that does not get any natural daylight.

Well worth a visit! On entering the hotel, reception is on the left. Turn right and down one flight of stairs for the permanent exhibition,

Stuart Smith, 102, Bingham Road, Croydon, Surrey, CRO 7EF.

Email: [svdsmith@talktalk.net](mailto:svdsmith@talktalk.net)

# Variety at the BMHS - 1st March 2011



**The cast backstage**  
(Photo: Ralph Reaeton)

There was a good crowd to greet the students from the Central School Of Speech and Drama, who were the performers for the first BMHS show in 2011. 15 performers, plus their tutor Pamela Parry on piano, presented *A Music Hall Pick And Mix* covering the well-known and the seldom heard, to the delight of the audience. Highlights of the evening included *Don't Do It Again Matilda* (a rarely heard but very amusing song), the Lionel Monckton comedy number *Two Little Sausages*, *The Galloping Major* (performed with zest and a twinkle in the eye by the young singer), *With Her Head Tucked Underneath her Arm* and *If You Were The Only Girl In The World*, given a novel twist by having the girl juggling whilst the young man sings of his love. The society's own Adam Borzone compered the show, feeding the audience interesting titbits of information about the songs and the music hall stars originally associated with them.

GSB

## MAIL BOX

Dear Fellow Performers (past and present),

Since retiring after many years of performing professionally, I have finally become a member of the British Music Hall Society and want to share this thought with you - Aren't we the most privileged, lucky, happy people on the planet! Who would ever have thought it would become our 'thing' to entertain other members of the human race and maybe even get paid for it!

Looking back on the time I spent in this incredible business, I can hardly believe it all happened. I was formerly one half of the team of Ann and Bobby Black - *Scottish Songs and Music*. My husband Robert was the other half, a fine accordionist and a former member of *Stars In Battledress*. I am at the moment working on preparing a talk for non-pros and others who live in this area of Scotland, by way of being a tribute to him. With that in mind, I am hoping to make contact with anyone who knew us and maybe even worked with us in the past. Oh, by the way, I was a singer. Though I had previously trained for opera as a dramatic soprano, my variety-minded hubby, through a deal of persistence on his part, adapted our talents to suit what is now known as music hall. We must have done something right, because (believe it or not) our first professional engagement as a team was at the Victoria Palace in *Knights Of Madness* featuring dear Bud Flanagan and the Crazy Gang! I'm working here from notes that Bob had made, to be the start of his memoirs, which, unfortunately, he didn't have time to finish, but maybe one day I will.

After our start in the West End we toured for many years throughout the U.K. playing the Empires, etc. as well as some smaller independent theatres and eventually working men's clubs. We also did a summer season, I remember, in Douglas I.O.M., a Butlin's season in North Wales with Irish comic Billy Stutt (who, I may say, had me doing some comedy bits!), and from time to time some overseas tours of various army and air force bases. These included the British zone of the Allied Occupation Forces in Germany; there was also a Middle East stint during the build-up to the Suez crisis before the canal was taken over by Egypt; and we even were

booked to fly to Japan and the Far East following the delayed signing of a peace treaty in Korea (I believe still not officially signed; just a 'truce' and of course you'll know there is still a bit of friction there! They say music soothes the savage beast but I guess we personally didn't achieve much success in that direction!)

Then, we moved over to Europe to sample the offers coming from the American Forces clubs, and stayed there for more than 10 years. One of Bob's 'ideas' came to fruition while we were in Germany - this was initiating a rival group to the Dagenham Girl Pipers. We called ours the Edinburgh Girl Pipers. After a whole lot of trials and tribulations we finally got the pipe band launched, and ended up having them handled by a German agent by the name of Lorenz K.V. ('Kah-Vay') Reich in Heidelberg.

Then we were free once again to follow our own devices and continued working for the U.S. Forces clubs until, out of the blue, we were contacted by an acquaintance (a Dutchman known as Ted Easton, or Ted Van Est in his own language) who had been an agent for these clubs in France and knew our work well. He had now become the booking manager for Holland America Cruises and so we found ourselves contracted to do the next three years at sea! We thoroughly enjoyed that time. It was wonderful; I even discovered then that I was never seasick once (I had been subject to 'mal de mer' previously, especially on board the channel ferries!).

After we retired professionally and emigrated to the United States we had one more major sortie - into movie land! Bob was engaged to appear playing the accordion at a fictitious wedding scene in a Mike Myers' film with the unlikely title of *So I Married An Axe Murderer!* I was hired too as a not so well paid extra! Ah well, that's show business!

Don't forget, I'd really like to hear from you; you know who you are!

Sincerely,  
Ann Black  
[annieblack709@btinternet.com](mailto:annieblack709@btinternet.com)



# BFI Palladium/Variety Season

The British Film Institute on London's South Bank was virtually my second home during December and January as I wallowed in the delights on offer in their two-month tribute to variety and the London Palladium.

I managed to see all but two of the screenings, which were well supported in the main, although one or two had disappointingly small audiences. Hopefully Dick Fiddy, who was responsible for programming all of these shows, will be suitably encouraged to plan a future season of variety shows from the television archives, but if he does he will need our support.

The shows screened in December were all planned to celebrate the centenary of the London Palladium so it was no surprise to find several editions of the ground breaking live variety show *Sunday Night At The London Palladium* with Tommy Trinder, Bruce Forsyth and Jimmy Tarbuck as the various comperes. Highlights of these shows included The Dior Dancers in a stunning routine from 1960, the jazz vocals of Sarah Vaughan, principals from the London cast of *The Most Happy Fella* in a tribute to the composer Frank Loesser and the wonderful Victor Borge. The Tiller Girls in their famous *Precision* routine were a delight, made more special by the fact that several ex-Tillers were in the audience. It was also great fun to see *Beat The Clock*, with Brucie in his element dealing with members of the public. Of course most of the *Sunday Night At the London Palladium* footage is now available on DVD. (see review on page 13 )

Other high points of the Palladium season included silent footage from 1922 of some scenes from the revue *Rockets*; a half hour film showing extracts from *A Night With The Stars* (1950) featuring very brief, tantalising, glimpses of such acts as Afrique, Zoe Gail, 'Monsewer' Eddie Gray, Dickie Henderson with his father Dick Henderson, The Bernard Brothers, Anne Shelton and the Five Smith Brothers; *Judy and Liza At The Palladium* with stunning performances by two legendary entertainers and *Golden Gala*, a 1978 spectacular, mounted to celebrate 50 years of equal voting rights for men and women. This gala boasted an all-female cast ranging from Lady Isabel Barnett and Elaine Stritch to Lynn Seymour and Su Pollard with a stand out performance by

Georgia Brown supported by ladies from the Players' Theatre including our own chairman, Doreen Hermitage.

For me, the one disappointment in the season was *Bob Hope At The London Palladium*, a 1979 Anglo-American production. The comedian was not on great form and his guests Richard Burton and Raquel Welch didn't exactly set the place on fire. Miss Welch looked great but I've no wish to hear her sing Sondheim ever again!

The screenings in January celebrated television variety from the '50s to the '80s. Genial magician David Nixon hosted a 1959 edition of *Showtime*. Surprisingly he only performed one magic trick, the rest of the time he acted as comperes to such artists as Stanley Unwin, Eve Boswell and Chico Marx. The show's finale found Chico on piano, Eve on sax and David on double bass! This show was coupled with a 1964 edition of *Club Night*, hosted by Donald Peers. A strong line-up included The Bachelors, Arthur Worsley, Joan Turner, Morton Fraser's Harmonica Gang and David Hughes.

An evening devoted to French music hall featured the only surviving extract from a 1958 BBC show filmed on stage in Montmartre and introduced by none other than Billy Cotton! The stage seemed to be full to overflowing with dancers but one name I recognised was the cabaret singer Tonia Bern, who married speed ace Donald Campbell. This was followed by *Les Grands Moments Du Music Hall* introduced by Charles Aznavour and featuring great footage of Josephine Baker, Charles Trenet, Edith Piaf and other French stars.

*Bless 'em All* was a 1955 BBC show celebrating the 10th anniversary of VE Day and featured such wartime favourites as Vera Lynn, Jack Warner, Doris Hare, Eric Barker and Pearl Hackney, Kenneth Horne, Richard Murdoch, The Windmill Girls and Jack Train. For me, the star of the show was Charlie Chester, in dazzling form. After years of hearing him on Sunday afternoons on Radio 2 reading out requests for such items as portable commodes, I had forgotten how good a comic he was. This show was coupled with *Stage Door Canteen*, a 1984 40th anniversary celebration of D-Day, filmed at the Lyceum and hosted by Sarah Kennedy. Herb Miller and his orchestra and the Ted Heath Band were on hand to supply the music and the

cabaret was provided by Vera Lynn. It may be treason to say this but there was just too much of Miss Lynn in this programme. She sang something like 8 numbers, many of which we had heard her sing in the previous show, *Bless 'em All*. The finale of *Stage Door Canteen* found Vera on stage backed by a large collection of celebrities singing, what else, but *We'll Meet Again* (for the third time that evening!) and I spotted the figures of Lita Roza and Dennis Lotis standing immediately behind Miss Lynn. What a shame the television programme didn't allow them to sing a solo.

*The Variety Show* was a fast moving forty five minutes of entertainment from ITV in 1960 with juggler Henri Vadden, The Delta Rhythm Boys, jazz singer Chris Connor, tap dancer Baby Laurence, comic Bob Baxter and our own Frankie Howerd. This was screened with a 1961 ATV edition of *The Jo Stafford Show* where the special guest was Ella Fitzgerald. Both ladies were in superb voice.

*The Birthday Show: 21 Years Of Variety From Thames Television* was a 75 minute clip fest of highlights from past Thames successes linked impeccably by Edward Woodward. Originally shown in 1989, it offered lots of goodies in the shapes of Tommy Cooper, Bruce Forsyth, Morecambe and Wise and Eric Sykes.

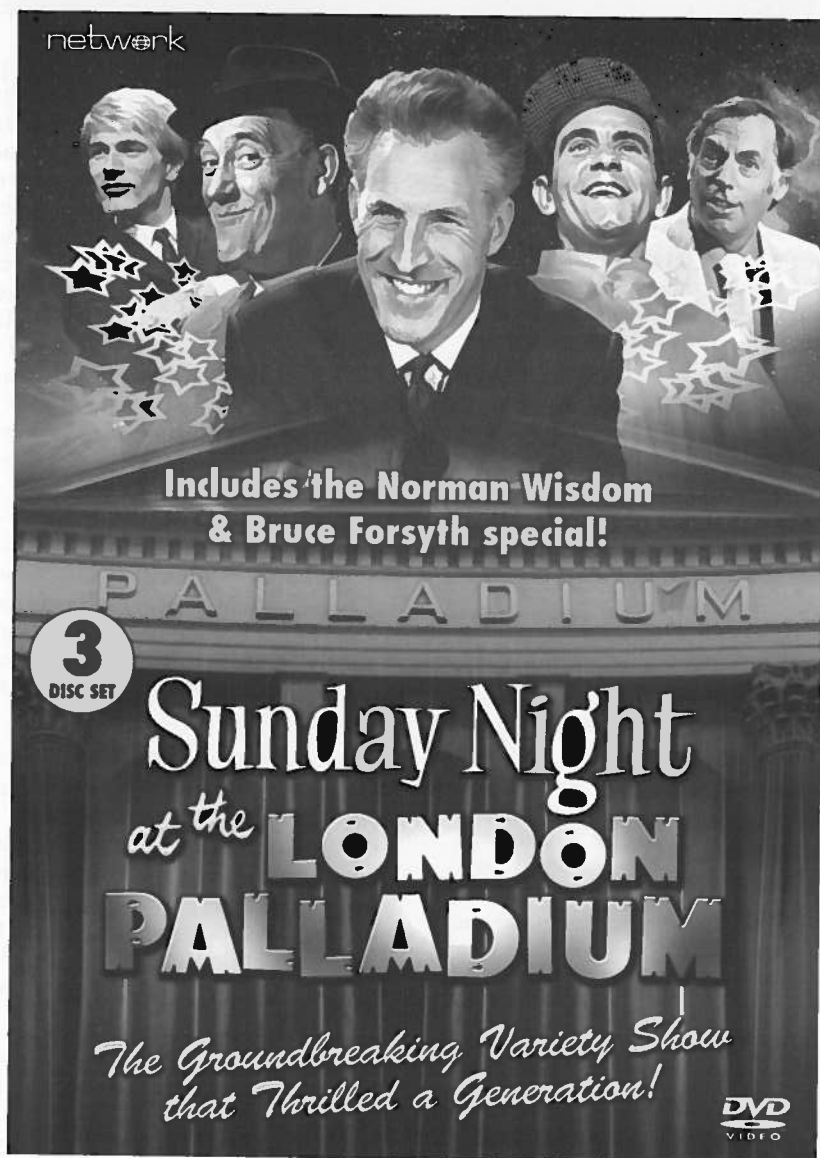
The undoubted highlight of the January BFI programme was the preview screening of the first part of the BBC4 documentary *The Story Of Variety*, presented by Lord Michael Grade. A packed house loved this hour-long tribute to the post war world of variety, containing anecdotes and clips galore. (It was eventually screened on BBC4 at the end of February). The audience's enjoyment was further enhanced when Michael Grade and Barry Cryer took to the stage after the programme and reminisced about the variety world before taking questions from the audience. It was clear to every member of the audience just how much these two men were enjoying themselves. A memorable and highly entertaining evening.

Thanks must go to Dick Fiddy for programming such a varied and entertaining selection of shows. Here's to the next season!

GSB

## VARIETY ON DVD

# *Sunday Night At The London Palladium*



The celebrations by the British Film Institute of the centenary of the London Palladium have come and gone, but there is a permanent record of the last fifty years of the theatre's magnificent history, a three-DVD set comprised of ten editions of *Sunday Night At The Palladium*. When the show was premiered during the first week of ITV, it was as though a bomb had been placed under British television. We had never seen anything like it on our tiny screens. Even the opening credits were spectacular; we were watching big stars from overseas live; the cosy BBC was quickly upstaged; and the show leapt to the top of the ratings.

But that was half a century ago and the public's taste for entertainment changes fast. The first *Sunday Night* to be featured on the new DVDs went out on 24th November 1957 with the unctuous Hughie Green as compere. Two of the

acts he introduced were a pair of clever acrobats and three singers from the Dominican Republic, each of them like Carmen Miranda, but less so. The acrobats threw themselves around for three minutes and the Miranda manquees sang for nine-and-a-half. Far too long! In the past fifty years, our collective attention span has sharply diminished.

By the second show in the set (13th April 1958), Tommy Trinder had taken over, milking his audience for laughs, but dealing with members of the public like the old hand he was. He had to be reminded that an act he was about to introduce were Pinky and Perky because, he explained, he had been too busy learning jokes. Then came a manic, unintelligible American comic, Dick Shawn, who left everyone perplexed. Thank goodness for Sarah Vaughan, an oasis of sophistication.

A breath of fresh air wafted in for the next show (10th April 1960) since, by then, Bruce Forsyth was in charge. The compere's compere, Brucie was effortlessly able to weave everything together into a homogenous whole, while apparently having a riotously good time himself. Mercifully, he had Bobby Darin and the cast of *The Most Happy Fella* to introduce. Forsyth stamped his authority all over the show, joining in with acts whenever he could. On 17th April 1960, in spite of what looked like an unsuitable pairing, his duet with the latest pop heartthrob, Adam Faith, was both funny and harmonious.

At the heart of the show that went out during a strike by Equity on 3rd December 1961 was the now classic slapstick sketch performed by Forsyth and Norman Wisdom. Slapstick is not slapdash. It requires very precise timing. And Messrs Forsyth and Wisdom gave us a master class. On 22nd March 1964, it was heartening to hear a modern audience laughing heartily at and loudly applauding Billy Russell, a figure representing undiluted old-fashioned music hall.

There is a gap of nearly ten years before the next show on 25th November 1973 in which Rod Hull and Emu deal with Larry Grayson in much the same way as they did with Michael Parkinson. On 6th January 1974, Bob Monkhouse again showed he was a much better comic than he was ever given credit for. Mike and Bernie Winters appeared on the 24th March 1974 edition (enough said) and Ted Rogers compered a few weeks later (14th April 1974).

It is hard now to believe that we were once absorbed by those ridiculous *Beat The Clock* games and that we would feel cheated if every show failed to be opened by a minute or so of the well-drilled Tiller Girls. But there is no getting away from it. *Sunday Night At The London Palladium* is part of our cultural heritage. There is plenty of dross, but some gold too.

The CDs are produced by Network. There is a nominal recommended retail price of £24.99. But you should be able to buy them for anything between £14.62 and £14.99.

**Richard Anthony Baker**

# PALLADIUM

An Exclusive Extract from  
*Old Time Variety:*

## OLD TIME VARIETY

An Illustrated History

Foreword by Roy Hudd OBE



The greatest and most famous variety theatre in the world is (or, more precisely, was) the London Palladium. Every big star, British and American, aspired to play there and, for many years, it staged the most lavish and spectacular pantomimes in the land, but it was not always so successful. The low point came in 1928, eighteen years after it opened.

The Palladium was the brainchild of Walter Gibbons. With the encouragement of his father-in-law, George Adney Payne, one of the leading variety managers of his day, Gibbons formed a public company, the London Theatres of Variety, to take over fifteen music halls, all but one of them, the Holborn Empire, in the London suburbs and run them as a circuit. Gibbons also wanted to build a new theatre in the heart of London. This was the Palladium, designed by Frank Matcham, at a cost of £250,000, in today's money, £14 million.

Once it opened, Gibbons spent his money unwisely and, by 1912, it was clear that he was incapable of putting the Palladium on a sound financial footing. Approaches were made to Oswald Stoll, who agreed to run LTV temporarily, but only if Gibbons left. He got his way. A statement was issued announcing that Gibbons was resigning through ill health. He returned to his chief interest, cinema, and tried again and again to bring sound to silent movies by synchronising them with gramophone records. Here, too, he failed.

Under Stoll and his young company secretary, Charles Gulliver, the Palladium was soon prospering. There were strong variety bills, a series of spectacular revues and, in 1927, the Palladium's first musical, *The Apache*, starring the

heartthrob, Carl Brisson. In anticipation of a big success, Gulliver doubled seat prices. But *The Apache* ran for only 166 performances.

Worried about the enormous success of the first talking picture, *The Jazz Singer*, Gulliver then turned to a man who knew all about movies, the disgraced Walter Gibbons. Together with a financier, Gibbons bought LTV back for £1,570,000 (£45 million) with the aim of staging cine-variety. Gibbons was happy to choose the films. He entrusted the selection of variety acts to a young man in Gulliver's office, Val Parnell. He also began searching for provincial variety theatres to add to his chain.

He became particularly interested in a northern circuit, which was experimenting with cine-variety with great success. It was run by three brothers, George, Alfred and Ted Black, who said they would sell provided George was given a job in London. Gibbons agreed and a new company was formed, the General Theatre Corporation. Gibbons was the managing director and Black was given a place on the board. Cine-variety was to go ahead at the Palladium, but, in the meantime, Gibbons became fascinated by *Dawn*, a film starring Sybil Thorndike as the First World War heroine, Edith Cavell.

Gibbons gleefully predicted a six-month run, but the Palladium, everyone agreed, was the wrong venue. Within ten days, the film was transferred to a cinema a couple of miles away. Its failure at the Palladium marked Gibbons' final decline and fall. His associates demanded his resignation and he left, complaining that he was being ordered around by amateurs. Five years later, he died, a disillusioned, disappointed man.

It was now George Black's job to run the Palladium. When he took over, he was instantly welcomed by variety entertainers, who recognised him as a man bursting with ideas. George was determined to make the Palladium the world's greatest variety theatre. He set 3rd September 1928 as the date when the new era would begin. In the weeks before, London was plastered with posters that announced: Variety is coming back. Later, the words, To the Palladium, were added. His opening bill included Ivor Novello, famous then as a cinema idol, and Gracie Fields. Wearing a magnificent new gown, she made her entrance past rows and rows of swathes, swags and chiffon and then confided in her audience: "Ee, ba gum. It's all too grand for me."

George's big idea was to quicken the pace of shows. The changes he introduced were welcomed by audiences, performers and reviewers alike. He knew he had to battle against the increasing competition of cinema, but there was another problem for him, the growing popularity of radio. In 1922, 35,000 people had wireless licences. Within the space of five years, that figure rose to more than two million. Uncharacteristically, George could not make up his mind about radio. Before he took control of the Palladium, LTV had imposed a ban on all broadcasts from the theatre because it was felt that routines by comics, for instance, could become stale in one night. George lifted the ban, arguing that, if comics were forced to find new material, everyone would benefit. He changed his mind when he came to realise that people were staying at home, listening to their favourite entertainers for free, rather than paying to see them at the theatre.

From the outset, the entertainers' trade union, the Variety Artists' Federation, was stubbornly opposed to radio. Stoll felt the same, believing that, when broadcasting reached a high state of perfection, 'the best singers, actors, lecturers and orators will be listened to by ten million people at a time, but all the lesser fry in artistry will be wiped out.'

As it turned out, people hearing new entertainers on the radio then went to the theatre to see them as they wanted to know what they looked like. The fledgling BBC soon found that listeners rated variety shows as their favourite programmes. It began finding its own entertainers, such as Norman Long (*A Song, A Smile And A Piano*), Mabel Constanduros, who wrote sketches about the fictional Buggins family to amuse her mother and sisters; and John Henry, who played a hen-pecked Yorkshireman.

In the early years, leading lights in the variety world despaired at the lack of experienced producers at the BBC. One showbiz paper complained that the BBC's variety was as much like variety as Poplar was like Paradise. The criticism was unsurprising. The Corporation's first Director General, John Reith, loathed variety as much as he did jazz. It was not until 1933 when Eric Maschwitz was appointed its first Head of Variety that the BBC started to behave more professionally.

In time, the BBC became a major employer of variety entertainers. *Music Hall* (1932-1952), one of the first programmes to be recorded before an



# 100 DAYS

## Richard A. Baker's new book *Illustrated History*

invited audience, was followed by *Workers' Playtime* (1941-1964) and *Variety Bandbox* (1942-52), all immensely popular shows. The BBC was as strict with its performers as George Black, a stern disciplinarian who cut any dubious line from a comic's script. In its earliest days, the BBC told its entertainers there were to be no references to politics, no vulgar or distasteful material and no Biblical quotations.

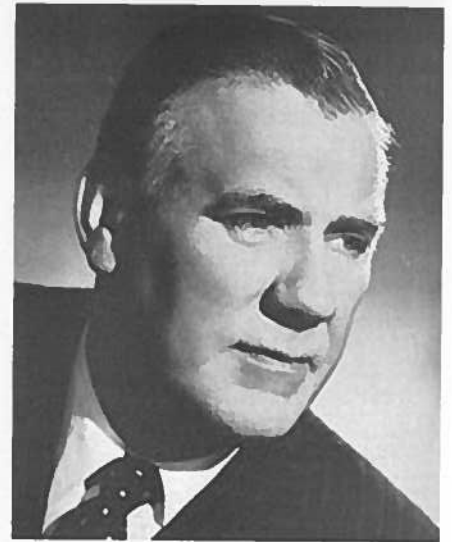
In 1932, George Black became even more powerful when the General Theatre Corporation merged with Moss Empires. Six years later, he was made managing director of Moss Empires. A splendid example of his sense of showmanship came with the abdication of Edward VIII. After a patriotic scene had been staged at the Palladium, he stopped the show. The cast, assembled on stage, stood to attention while the abdication speech was broadcast throughout the theatre. Immediately it ended, a singer dressed as Sir Francis Drake led the cast and audience in *Land Of Hope And Glory*, followed by the National Anthem. By the time this shameless stunt had been staged, George's days were sadly numbered. He was only 54 when he died after an operation in 1945.

Val Parnell was a worthy successor. Like George, he had been steeped in the theatre since he was a child. His father was the world-famous ventriloquist, Fred Russell,

a stalwart of the Variety Artistes' Federation. At the age of 13, he started work in the office of Sir Walter de Frece, who ran a circuit of northern music halls. Later on, as the booking manager of the General Theatre Corporation, he looked an unlikely figure. Quiet and unobtrusive in appearance, he might have worked in banking.

In the late 1940s, when he felt there were not enough British variety stars, he turned to the United States and brought over a string of American names to top the Palladium's bills: Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Judy Garland and many more. Val concentrated on the Palladium. He entrusted Moss Empires' other theatres to his chief booking manager, Cissie Williams, a martinet in the variety world, who was as strict as her theatre colleagues about what comics could joke about.

In 1949, the BBC decided it needed to lay down stricter and more specific rules for variety producers about the subjects it considered unsuitable for humour. It ordered a ban on jokes about immorality of any kind, effeminacy in men, lavatories, suggestive references to prostitution, ladies' underwear, honeymoon couples, chambermaids, fig leaves, animal habits, lodgers and commercial travellers. A list of banned songs was maintained and constantly updated. It included *One For The Road*; *She Had To Go And Lose It At The Astor*;



VAL PARNELL

*Only A Glass Of Champagne*; and *Please Do It Again*. On a quiet night, John Reith can be heard turning in his grave at great speed.

(Editor's Note: Many thanks to Richard and Pen and Sword for allowing *The Call Boy* to publish this extract.)

Richard A Baker: *Old Time Variety: An Illustrated History*

Pen and Sword, £19.99  
ISBN: 978 1844681266

## Special Offer For CALL BOY Readers

Pen and Sword Books are offering *Call Boy* readers copies of Richard A. Baker's *Old Time Variety: An Illustrated History* at the special price of £17.99 including p&p (Usual price is £19.99 plus p&p). To order, please send your payment to Pen and

Sword Books, Sales Department, 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S70 2AS or telephone 01226 734222.

Don't forget to quote the special code 118961.

## CALL BOY COMPETITION

Win a copy of Richard A. Baker's book *Old Time Variety: An Illustrated History*

Thanks to the generosity of publishers, Pen and Sword, we have 2 copies of this book to give away. To win a copy, simply answer the following question:

What was the name of ventriloquist Arthur Worsley's talkative dummy?

Send your answer, together with your name and address, on a postcard to The Editor, *The Call Boy*, 6, New River Crescent, Palmers Green, London N13 5RF or email your answer to [geoff.bowden1@btinternet.com](mailto:geoff.bowden1@btinternet.com)

Closing date: Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2011. The first two names drawn will be sent a copy of Richard's book.

## Competition Winners

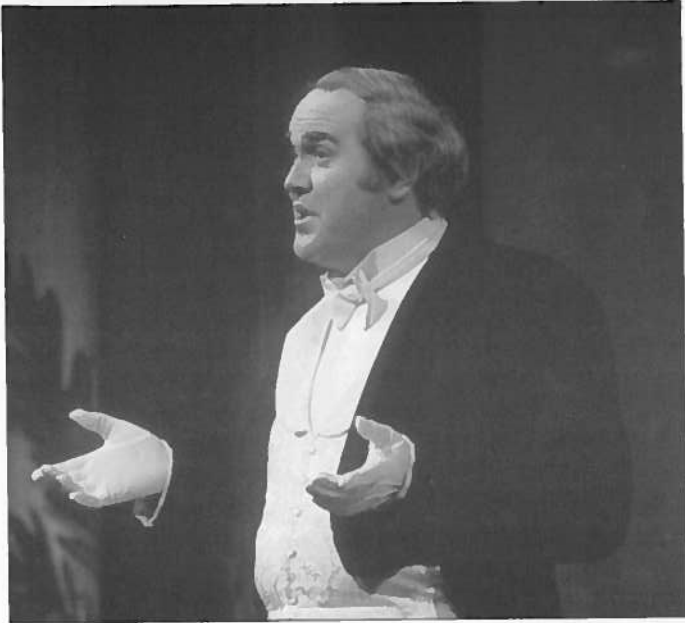
We had another good postbag for the competition in the last issue to win copies of John Fisher's latest book, *Tommy Cooper's Mirth, Magic And Mischief*. The question asked was *In which country was Tommy born?* The answer, of course, was

Wales. The first five names pulled out of the hat were **Dr. C. P. Lee, Mr. R. E. Fox, Eric Fowler, Brian Dazley and Robin Hargrave**. Congratulations to you all!

# From Stage Manager To Songster Manqué

## Part Two

By Jason Barnes



Bill Flynn

So last winter's edition of *The Call Boy* left me in 1971 as a stage manager at the National Theatre where an early production, in what was to become nearly a forty-year career there staging over 250 productions, was O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*. There I had the good fortune to work with the delightfully made-up director Michael Blakemore, stage manager Richard Mangan, now recently retired as Director of the Mander and Mitchenson Theatre Collection, and the play starred Laurence Olivier, Constance Cummings, Dennis Quilley and Ronald Pickup together with an unknown but clearly interesting actress called Maureen Lipman as the maid.

That NT West End season at the then New Theatre, later the Albery and now the Coward, was devised to practise running more than one theatre in addition to the Old Vic repertoire and in preparation for the new building on the South Bank, as delays had put back the opening. In September 1971 I received notice as a stage manager, but invited to join Douglas Cornhill, the NT General Stage Manager at the Old Vic, running the technicians, stage management, stores and transport.

My responsibilities included conducting brief tours of the Old Vic Theatre itself together with the annexe scenery and prop construction workshops just across Webber Street, and now the NT Studio and Archive for developing new writing, direction and research.

I hosted many U.S. educational visitors during that time and often they would bid me goodbye with an invitation to visit if in their neighborhood (sic). The leader of one such group repeated the customary invitation, this time to New Jersey and added – "we'll pay"! This was my first meeting with Bill Flynn who was to become my dearest and longest standing U.S. friend.

I had never been to America and a year later in 1976 Bill wrote announcing a return visit to the U.K. and enquiring about the possibility of our seeing an English music hall, he having been an actor and remaining an anglophile.

On the first visit to Aline Waites' *Aba Daba* at the Pindar of Wakefield, Bill fell in love with the form, and immediately asked me to research some material for a production at the Mercer County Theatre, where he was Director. There is very little that matches sharing one's joy with a friend and that night led to eight trips to that well appointed playhouse amongst the fields outside Princeton, which belie the neighbouring industrial spread of Trenton New Jersey, whose motto is 'Trenton Makes – and the World Takes'.

Panic ensued, but I increased my visits to the Pindar, the Players and caught as many *Good Old Days*, broadcast from Leeds City Varieties (one of our oldest surviving halls; soon to re-open after a major restoration) as I could. I dug through my schoolboy library of music and between Bach and Verdi lay the Barney Colehan introduced BBC/EMI *Good Old Days Songbook*, Francis Day & Hunter's *Sixty Old Time Variety Songs* and the then more recently published *Songs Of The British Music Hall* compiled by Peter Davison, who concludes his afterword with Brecht's words, 'Like every art, Music Hall can make its contribution to the greatest art of all, the art of Living'.

The shape of this first show, which was to be replicated year after year, was sketched out. Five hand picked performers from recent graduates of the Performing Arts course at the College would have a solo spot in each half and I would join making three pairs for the concerted numbers topping and tailing each part of the evening starting with a rousing medley of favourites recognized and loved on both sides of the Atlantic – *Daisy Bell*, *Swanee*, *The Old Bull And Bush* and so on. Close each half with a themed scena, and pop in a feature song by Bill Flynn the Chairman into the middle of each half.

Being an academic institution, and to justify (camouflage) my presence and stipend as a Visiting Artist, we needed some foundation for daytime classes for those students who have seen a performance. Well, the results of even cursory examination of the vast wealth of material available struck me fair and square. Swathes of music hall songwriting and monologues reflect the social mores of the period and much of it mirrors our contemporary lot. No end of gems categorise themselves: housing, alcohol use and abuse, love requited and not, marriage successful or not, transport, holidays, travel and hence the new experience of the seaside with its jaunty tars, scantily clad female bathers and little bits of tell-tale seaweed. Not to mention the military, cash and food and drink. Wealth indeed!

Did I dare to emulate Peter John's rendition of *Nobody Loves A Fairy*? Certainly not in the first half; a favourite Gus Elen number *The 'Ouses In Between* would suit my then skinny frame and none too mellifluous voice. But risk *Fairy* for an American audience whose frame of reference proved so wildly different to ours?

Bill's confident view was that if he, as Chairman, couldn't set me up right with his intro, no one could, especially as the folk had hopefully imbibed in the bar and been greeted with the expectation that they returned 'Relaxed, Refreshed and Relieved!' And – the news that there had been a change of straw in the dressing rooms!

Double entendre has always played a significant part on the halls; with its growing dawn of realization tickling if not shocking the audience, although sometimes tricky to pace so as to maximize the laugh. Whereas we could not venture near the overt sexual material collected in George Speight's *Bawdy Songs Of The Early Music Hall*, we did, one year, find two relevant songs for a brief tour to the New Jersey coast at Long Branch where the company delighted the local populace with a rendition of *On Long Branch Pier* and a heaven-sent seaside number; *Oh, I Do Love A Blow - On The Front!*

Over the eight years I had the distinct, if nerve-wracking experience, of mounting and appearing at Mercer County with Bill Flynn's support, (I'll wear it always) I reprised *Fairy* with regularity, wearing down my pink toe-shoes. I affected an exit backwards *en-pointe*, aided by a brilliant star-topped wand, fashioned from a geometrical flexi-curve, intended for assisting the drawing of smooth curves (not that I had any!) which, when held in one plane remained rigid and erect – until the line 'Your fairy-days are ending, when your wand has started bending'. Cue quick flick of the wand through 90 degrees and 'hey presto' you have the perfect illustration of brewer's droop!



Jason Barnes: *Nobody Loves A Fairy*



Richard  
Anthony  
Baker

## MUSIC HALL AND VARIETY ON CD

By Richard Anthony Baker

impressionist make for particularly interesting listening. During the 1940s, he recorded his own appearances on radio and television and, as the BBC did not retain copies of all of its shows, Sellers' recordings are unique and are heard here for the first time on CD. Just to listen to him mimic Stewart MacPherson and Michael Moore from *Ignorance Is Bliss* is a reminder that here was a man at the start of an extraordinary career.

Milligan's two CDs provide a comprehensive review of his life: his childhood in India, his wartime service, the Goons on radio, the Q series on television, his poems for children and his session with Anthony Clare *In the Psychiatrist's Chair*. There are six comics in the *Remembering* series. The other four are Bob Monkhouse, Kenny Everett, Willie Rushton and Kenneth Williams. The BBC's prices are rather eccentric. Milligan and Everett each cost £8.99. The other four are £4.81 apiece. Both prices offer exceptional value.

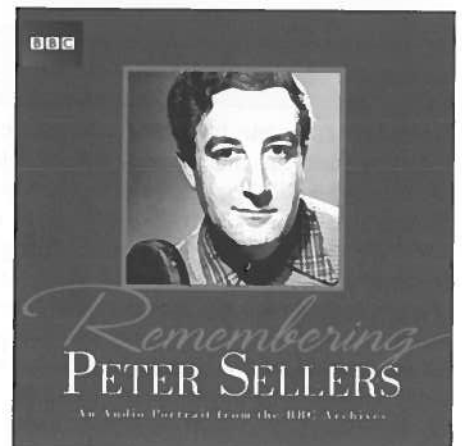
In 1980, I recorded a Christmas music hall programme for Radio Two with the *ITMA* and *Ray's A Laugh* stalwart, Fred Yule. I got to know Fred after learning that he lived in the next road to me. On paper, the programme seemed to be a good idea. Christmas equals Yule - and Fred began his career in music hall. He and his wife were part of Marie Lloyd's last company; when Malcolm McEachern died, B.C. Hilliam asked him

to take McEachern's place (Fred declined); and it was his voice that halted London's traffic with a cry of 'Stop' on *In Town Tonight*.

But, at an hour, the Christmas music hall material I unearthed was stretched far too thin. All credit to Windyridge, then, for producing its second Christmas CD, *Jolly Old Christmas*. The songs, which always seem better than the sketches, are in the hands of the BBC Dance Orchestra, Harry Champion, Gracie Fields, George Formby, Norman Long, Charles Penrose and Leslie Sarony. With the exception of Champion, all the tracks were originally recorded between 1928 and 1940. So, sound quality is first rate. Windyridge CDs, still only £10 each, including post and package, can be ordered from Mr. W. J. Clark, Windyridge, Kettleburgh, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP13 7JR or on line at [www.musicallcds.com](http://www.musicallcds.com).

The dying days of variety, eclipsed partly by radio, overlapped with a new generation of entertainers. So, as the Goons, for example, became popular on radio, their fans wanted to see them in person, albeit in the sadly diminishing number of variety theatres. Peter Sellers undertook miserable tours of fading variety venues, as did Harry Secombe, although his encounters with live audiences pre-dated the Goons. He had become a national celebrity courtesy of *Welsh Rarebit*. Once the Goons had established themselves, Sellers and Secombe were free to travel the country from Monday to Saturday and return to London on Sunday to record the show. It was different for Spike Milligan. As the writer of highly demanding surreal comedies, he had to sit down at his typewriter every Monday morning and dream up 30 minutes of entertaining anarchy to be broadcast at the end of that week, a demanding task that probably triggered the first of his series of nervous breakdowns.

Both Sellers and Milligan have now been honoured by the BBC as part of a series of double CD sets under the title, *Remembering*. Sellers' early years as an





# The CALL BOY GALLERY



Alfie Boe and Neil Sean

Alfie Boe tells Neil Sean on TV show *Be My Guest* that he first became aware of *The Call Boy* backstage at the Marine Hall in Fleetwood. "No, truthfully, the manager got it and I used to borrow it," said Alfie, "so to be in it now will shock them all as they all like to know what I am up to!" Alfie also told Neil he wants to see more people sign up to *Call Boy*, as the magazine is the "real heart of show business and the world should know about it."

Pictured with Neil Sean on *Be My Guest* is none other than the 'Go Compare' singer Gino, better known now as Wynne Evans, who has his debut album out called *A Song In My Heart*. "I remember going to Blackpool and seeing the likes of John Hanson," recalls Wynne, "and at home we had records of Joseph Locke. I had to cover their songs as they are part of my childhood." By the way Wynne told Neil "It's not a fat suit I wear in the ad sadly, it's all me!" No Comparison, eh!



Wynne Evans and Neil Sean

## Derby and Nottingham Music Hall Association

Snow and ice and the severe weather conditions caused chaos to our winter programmes, with cancellations and rearrangements being hurriedly organised. Inevitably disruption followed to our schedules, which appeared to add fuel to the rumours that the Association was in dire straits with closure imminent. As secretary of the association I issue this statement: **This association is not going to close nor is the association in financial trouble.**

Our February programme continued as normal at Derby with Alan Hopkin keeping the audience spellbound with a resume of his career and life in the music business. He lived over and worked in a music shop in Derby where famous musicians came to shop. He saw army service as a bandsman, broadcast over BFN and a professional musician on the Mecca circuit, served 14 years at the Wisher Music Shop in Derby. He recalled the changing face of popular music in the 20th century and he is presently specialising in stringed instruments.

A change of speaker at the March 17th meeting at Sutton will see the return of the ever popular speaker/entertainer Trevor Lee (a founder member) who will delight us with the story of The Music Hall, presented in his own delightful and interesting style.

A special entertainment event with a hot supper will be held at our Sutton venue on 15th April 2011 when we will be presented with *Veterans of Variety* with our very own long time supporter and honorary member Kenny Cantor with daughter Shani. This will be a spectacular 'not to be missed show' and a night to remember.

The meeting on 21st April 2011 at a new venue will be *Dream Palaces of Derby* when William Allen will recall the history and location of cinemas now gone. Thursday 19th April 2011 will be the AGM at our Sutton meeting place where elections will take place for officials for a 2-year stint. Our ever-popular Annual Luncheon will be on Sunday 9th October 2011 at Derby where Stu Francis (*Crush A Grape*) will star in *The Big Laughter Show* with full supporting cast.

All members regret the passing of our patron Jack Seaton who was instrumental in the initial forming of and a continued supporter of our association. He will be sadly missed. Our condolences go to all his friends and family.

**Trevor Carter**  
Secretary DNMHA  
E-mail: [dnmha@talktalk.net](mailto:dnmha@talktalk.net)

## MAIL BOX

I wonder if anyone has got any recording of any type of the French Vaudeville Star, Chaz Chase. I believe that he appeared on *The Good Old Days* on 26th June 1969 and it would be great to find a recording of this programme or of any other show on which he may have appeared. I am searching on behalf of Noel Britten who performs the Bath Bizarre Walk [www.bizarrebath.co.uk](http://www.bizarrebath.co.uk) every evening from 1st April to 29th October 2011 and has done for the past 20 years!! Any information would be much appreciated. Many thanks.

Peter Wentworth, 3 Maple Road, Faringdon, Oxon SN7 8BD  
email: [peter@milehighmagic.co.uk](mailto:peter@milehighmagic.co.uk)

Always interesting things in John Wade's articles in *The Call Boy*. Stan and I were doing a summer season at the West Pier in Brighton, the last show ever on that pier. It was club style with tables and chairs. Stan had produced our dove, Pauline, and, unlike her, she flew into the audience and laid an egg in the ashtray. The couple at the table were so delighted that they said I could keep the egg! The dove was obviously in a hurry to get it laid!

Diane (of Stanley Watson and Diane), 39, Badgers Way, Sturminster Newton, Dorset, DT10 1DA.

# RANDOM HARVEST

Art Start in Enfield, in collaboration with some local schools, has recreated some of Enfield's old theatres using the medium of mosaic. Local MP Andy Love says, "These new public mosaics give Enfield and particularly Edmonton a great sense of character and provide people with a little bit of local history." The size of each mosaic was chosen to enable their placement as near as possible to the original sites. Some of the buildings celebrated were The Edmonton Empire and The Regal. Art Start produced a booklet with photographs of the mosaics and the original venues.

BBC4 is planning a 90-minute programme on Music Hall with Lord Michael Grade to be screened sometime during the summer.

Fans of Hinge and Bracket (Patrick Fyffe and George Logan) should check out the official website of those 'Dear Ladies' at [www.hingeandbracket-official.co.uk](http://www.hingeandbracket-official.co.uk) where CDs and DVDs are available to buy. 2012 marks the 10th anniversary of Patrick Fyffe's death and on the website there is a petition which you can sign to persuade the BBC to pay tribute to Patrick by rerunning their television series and gala concerts.

The Society would like to thank the undermentioned for their donations to the Archive:

Colin Dale, for a copy of his book *The Last Edwardian Jester* and Charles Chilton for a collection of song albums.

Adam Borzone is on the lookout for talented performers among the BMHS membership to appear in the *BMHS Members' Show* at the CAA in November. Please contact Adam on [adamborzone@hotmail.com](mailto:adamborzone@hotmail.com) if you are interested. If you haven't got access to a computer you can always write to Adam c/o The Editor, *The Call Boy*, 6, New River Crescent, Palmers Green, London N13 5RF.

A new book *Looking at Durham Stage And Screen: Memories 1884 – 1963*, compiled by John C. Foster, takes a year-by-year look at theatre both professional and amateur in Durham City. Live theatre at the Assembly Rooms, still operating today as a university theatre, and the Palace variety theatre are included in the book's pages. The Palace Theatre, situated in Walkergate, Durham, opened its doors for the first time in August 1909 with a bill including Cliff Ryland, The Royal Temples and Jack North. Later years saw popular acts such as Stylo, a hoop manipulator, Marie Santos and her Merry Japs, J. G. Aitken, a Scots comedian and Florrie Gallimore, a Sheffield comedienne, known for performing *My Girl's A Yorkshire Girl* and *It's The Poor Wot 'Elps The Poor*. Other artistes to appear at the Palace included Wee Georgie Wood, Dick Henderson, Elsie Carlisle, Jimmy James, Nat Jackley, Morris and Cowley, Hughie Green, George Doonan and Harry Korris in his revue *Don't Worry*.

The book (ISBN: 978 1 84104 218 3) priced at £15.99, is now on sale from The Memoir Club Ltd., Dartmoor Suite, The Courtyard, Front Street, Langley Park, Durham, DH7 9XE. Telephone 0191 373 5660. E-mail: [memoirclub@msn.com](mailto:memoirclub@msn.com)

Rexton Bunnett, creator of the UK's largest private collection of musical theatre-related memorabilia, has announced his intention to leave the collection to the nation. To achieve this, Bunnett has created Overtures: The Bunnett-Muir Musical Theatre Archive Trust, to ensure the future of the collection. The archive will formally transfer to The Victoria and Albert Museum upon Bunnett's death. Started in the late 1950s by Bunnett and his late partner John Muir, the archive is a treasure trove of recordings, posters, scripts, books, programmes, photographs and other memorabilia documenting the evolution of the musical since the 19th century in the UK and on Broadway.

Remember the TV panel game *Jokers Wild*, featuring comedians and hosted by Barry Cryer? The first series of this popular show, first screened in 1969, has now been released on DVD by Network and features Ted Ray, Jimmy Edwards, Les Dawson, Charlie Chester and our own Roy Hudd.

## MAIL BOX

I am currently researching a book to be written by my wife, Pip Granger, for publication (we hope!) at the end of next year. Titled *The Spice of Life*, it is looking at variety theatre (and revue and pantomime), focusing mainly on the two decades after World War I. As with Pip's last book, *Up West*, about life in the West End of London during the same period, the beating heart of the book will be interviews with people who experienced it first hand, and the emphasis will be not so much on the glamour and the stars – although naturally they will have their place – but on ordinary people living extraordinary lives. As well as looking at the turns, we are also interested in talking to families, about how they reconciled family life with the variety lifestyle, as well as to those who were involved but who did not actually perform, but worked backstage or front of house. We are interested in hearing not only about what went on in the theatres, but also stories of digs, travelling, and how people filled their leisure time – if they had any!

Given the decades we are focusing on, we cannot help but reflect the decline of variety theatre, but this is not the main narrative of the book; essentially it is an informal social history

of a time and way of life that is still within living memory, yet already seems rather far away. This last point was brought home to me by the fact that the first interview I did was with Jack Seaton, less than a week before he passed away; what a lovely man, and a sad loss.

If there is anyone who would like to contribute, please contact me directly. Despite my out of the way location, I am willing to go anywhere in England for an interview - Have Senior Citizen Railcard, Will Travel – but would also be interested in written reminiscences or even a chat on the phone. My email is [dyinglight@homecall.co.uk](mailto:dyinglight@homecall.co.uk), my home phone number is 01363 772404, and my address is 10 Mill Lane, Sandford, Crediton, Devon, EX17 4NP.

Ray Granger

PS I am particularly interested in hearing from anyone who was associated with *Soldiers in Skirts*, as one of the people I have interviewed already is the son of Fred Sloan, who toured in it for 11 years, and he would be very interested in talking to anyone who remembered his dad.

## Reg Moores, 1922 - 2011



Reg Moores died at his home in Brighton on 13th February aged 88 and to say that he had a remarkable life would be one of the greatest under-statements of all time. In a short obituary it will be difficult to do him justice but I can but try.

As well as being a champion ice skater, an inventor, a magician, a whistling champion, a showbiz agent, a barrel jumper, a uni-cyclist, a fire-eater and a singer, he could also light lamps just using his body. Need I go on, because I could! His talents were endless and he will be sadly missed by all those who knew him, including the 25 different organisations he was involved with.

Reg was born in Brighton where he lived all his life. During WWII he served as a

flight engineer with the RAF and it was during this time that he came up with one of his first inventions. After a 36 hour journey lugging heavy kit bags by train and boat, he decided to fit castors to his bags. Now you know who to thank next time you wheel your luggage through arrivals! Perhaps Reg's most significant invention was one that would have made a fortune if he had taken the trouble to apply for a patent. Tom Arnold's 1949 Ice Spectacular, *Aladdin On Ice*, was being staged at Brighton's old Sports Stadium and the producer insisted on some of the skaters being able to speak without holding unwieldy microphones. So Reg, who was the lighting director, came up with the very first hands-free radio microphone, built from a combination of firemen's belts and discarded RAF transmitters stitched into performers' costumes. It's now in the Science Museum in London. Another invention I've only recently found out about was a giant kite with which he lifted John Noakes on Blue Peter!

Did I mention that Reg was also a scientist? His work in NQR spectroscopy (the study of atoms), took him round the world for more than 30 years to mingle with top scientists. Perhaps it's not surprising to learn that he was also a top TV and radio engineer.

50 years before Luke Skywalker wafted his light saber in *Star Wars*, Reg had already mastered the art of conducting electricity through his body to light up glass batons. He used the same principle to invent an electric dressing gown to help cut down on heating bills! And,

before I forget, Reg could also lick a red-hot poker while playing the harmonica.

As a member of the International Brotherhood of Magicians and the Magic Circle, Reg was at one time an advisor and trainer to Paul Daniels. There is a wonderful piece of film of Reg on the Paul Daniels Show where he negotiates his way up a wobbly rope ladder, much to the amazement of the audience.

I mentioned that Reg was a member of numerous organisations and I first met him when he became a founder member of the Max Miller Appreciation Society in Brighton in 1999. He was always very supportive and hardly missed a meeting in 12 years. I am sure the same goes for all the other bodies he belonged to, which apart from those I have already mentioned included, Equity, British Music Hall Society, amateur radio clubs, twinning groups, International Ice Skating Association and the Institute of Patentees and Inventors.

Reg had one regret. Although his inventions changed the world of entertainment, media and travel, he never received the official recognition they surely deserved. Nevertheless he has left his mark far more than most people and maybe we can achieve some kind of recognition for him in Brighton.

**Jack Strutt**

**Editor of The Max Miller Appreciation Society's magazine *There'll Never Be Another***

## No Titters, Please

At a dinner given by Robert Maxwell, the late boss of the *Daily Mirror*, Frankie Howerd found himself sitting directly opposite the author and historian, Paul Johnson, who immediately burst out laughing. "What are you laughing at?" Howerd asked. "Your face, Mr. Howerd. It is the most valuable face on earth," Johnson replied. "What do you mean?" Howerd wanted to know. Johnson's

response was somewhat lengthy: "You have good lines and tricks, but it's your face which is the basis of your genius for making us laugh. The ability to make large numbers of people laugh in the midst of their misery on earth is the greatest of all gifts. Tycoons and generals and politicians may have the power to rule and crush and stamp on us. But only great comics, like you, Mr. Howerd, can

raise us up above the human condition and show the way to the stars. You are God's most useful gift to our species and I salute you." Instead of telling Johnson he was a terrible old bombast, Howerd said it was the nicest thing that had ever been said to him and burst into tears.

**RAB**

## VARIETY TRIVIA

Trawling through *The Stage* archive one idle afternoon, I stumbled across the name of the first man to play Hylda Baker's stooge, Cynthia. He was Cyril Hatton, who, with his brother, Jack

Herbert, appeared in variety as (who else?) Herbert and Hatton. Their father was the manager of the Pavilion, Scarborough. Cyril died in September 1983, aged 76. Now, the difficult bit:

who succeeded him, how many were there and in which order?

**RAB**

## TATE UP TO DATE!

The registration number of Harry Tate's car in 1913 — T8 — appears to be one of the first examples of text language.

**RAB**



# MUSIC HALL GAZETTEER – M, N and O

Compiled by Terry Lomas

## MARGATE

A plaque in *The Bull's Head* public house commemorates the wedding breakfast of Eric and Joan Morecambe following their marriage on 11th December 1952 at St John's Church.

## MANCHESTER

There are fifty commemorative plaques on the *Wall Of Fame* at the Palace Theatre including Tommy Cooper, Les Dawson, Ken Dodd, Harry Houdini and Morecambe and Wise. The names were chosen by the theatre staff.

Also at the Palace Theatre is a Comic Heritage plaque to the memory of Les Dawson, which was unveiled by actor Roy Barraclough in August 1999.

## MORECAMBE

A statue of Eric Morecambe on the promenade was unveiled by Her Majesty, The Queen in July 1999. The money for the statue was raised over a number of years under the auspices of a local newspaper, *The Morecambe Visitor*. Eric was born in the town and his real name was Bartholomew.

There is a plaque to the memory of Albert Modley, dialect comedian, formerly at 333, Marine Parade but now in the Morecambe Hotel, Lord Street that was unveiled by BBC radio

producer, Mike Craig on 18th September 1999. Albert's granddaughter owned a restaurant, *Modley's* located nearby which has now closed.

The Morecambe and Wise Fan Club erected a plaque to the memory of Eric Morecambe at 43, Christie Avenue. Eric was born at 42, Buxton Street but the family moved to Christie Avenue two years later.

## MORLEY

There is a statue, commissioned by Morley Town Council of Ernie Wise in Morley, his birthplace. It was unveiled and paid for by his widow, Doreen on 4th March 2010.

## NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE

A plaque commemorates the site of Balmбра's Music Hall in Cloth Market, which was immortalised in George Ridley's song, *Blaydon Races* written by him in 1862. Balmбра's opened in 1840 and was re-built in 1862 and later became known as the Oxford Music Hall. The premises were re-built again in 1962 when music hall shows were staged as part of the Blaydon Races Centenary celebrations and continued until 1981, since when there have been several transformations of the premises.

## OLDHAM

A plaque to the memory of ventriloquist, Terry Hall (died 2007) was unveiled by his wife, Dee in Middleton Road, Chadderton, close to where he was born.

## OXFORD

The Ashmolean Museum has a drawing by Walter Sickert, *At The Middlesex* (formerly the Mogul Saloon in Drury Lane, London).



Eric Morecambe's Statue

## MAIL BOX



We are holding our ninth reunion of Steffani's Silver Songsters from the 1st - 5th of May at the Roselea Hotel, Albert Road, Blackpool. We take over the whole hotel so as we can be on our own. We all hope our patron Ronnie Ronalde can come again this year. Together with his wife Rosemarie they have

been 7 times out of the past 9 reunions. During our five days together we have guest cabaret artistes to entertain us in the evenings and on the Tuesday, May 3rd we have a day trip out to Llandudno. While there we shall go along to see Duggie Chapman's *We'll Meet Again* show at the Theatre Cymru. Then it will be back to our hotel for a late dinner.

We have a newsletter which is published free of charge about four times a year; it contains a lot of old photos and memorabilia from the old days of the Songsters. If there are any old Songsters or relations out there, we would love to hear from them. We have many old photos and CDs of the Songsters. If anyone would like to get in touch (e.g. wives, family and friends) I would love to hear from you.

Many thanks,  
Rex Graham, 2, Knockaloe Beg, Patrick, Nr Peel, Isle of Man,  
IM5 3AQ.  
Tel. 01624 843451 email: [rexcolin@manx.net](mailto:rexcolin@manx.net)

## MAIL BOX

Having recently completed the biography of British star, Patricia Roc, I am now writing the biography of Anthony Steel. If there are any members of BMHS who worked with Tony, and would like to share their memories (good, bad or indifferent) of him for inclusion in the book, I would be very pleased to hear

from them. Tony, you may recall, was a top British star during the 1950s but his career went 'down the Swanee' after his disastrous marriage to the voluptuous Anita Ekberg!  
Michael Hodgson  
E-mail: [mhod883811@aol.com](mailto:mhod883811@aol.com)

# SHOWS WITHIN SHOWS: *HAPPIDROME*

From *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet*, via Richard Sheridan's *The Critic*, to Alan Ayckbourn's *A Chorus of Disapproval*, the legitimate theatre has utilised the device of the play within a play. In the musical theatre, *Kiss Me Kate* flirts, apropos *The Taming Of The Shrew*, with the same convention, while, amid many examples from light entertainment, perhaps the best-known illustration is Fred Karno's *Mumming Birds* burlesque of the music hall, first performed in 1904, the sketch in which Charlie Chaplin was to star as 'the inebriated swell.'

When variety first transferred to the 'wireless', it was often by way of outside broadcasts from theatres like the Argyle, Birkenhead. Then the BBC manufactured its own variety shows, notably John Watt's *Songs from the Shows*, launched in 1931, Harry S. Pepper's *White Coons' Concert Party* (1932) and the *Kentucky Minstrels* (1933). A very enduring example, starting in 1932, was *Music Hall*, which was for many years the standard Saturday night variety show, compered by the likes of the actor, Norman Wooland, and usually with a strong programme of well-known artists.

It followed that, to vary the straightforwardness of the direct switch of variety to radio, efforts would be made to freshen the format. On some occasions this was successfully done by casing the ordinary variety bill in a primary setting of another 'story'. *Garrison Theatre* was one example, to be described in a further edition; *Happidrome* was another.

*Happidrome's* contextual continuity was provided by three employees of the eponymous theatre. These were the theatre manager, Mr Lovejoy, who introduced the real turns, the stage manager, Ramsbottom, and, with a bow of acknowledgement to this journal, the call boy, Enoch. They were played respectively by Harry Korris, a Manxman, born Henry L. Corris in 1891, Cecil Frederick and Robbie Vincent. The show catapulted the threesome to national fame and they toured as a variety act. The comedy was founded in the threesome's conversation pieces between acts, plus a weekly comedy song, with Ernest Longstaffe and the BBC Revue Orchestra in tuneful support. Their signature tune became well known. It was a skit on *We Three (My Echo, My Shadow And Me)*, that rhythmic song most famously recorded by the Ink Spots in 1941.

We three we're not highbrow,  
Working for the BBC  
Ramsbottom and Enoch and me.

When the lugubrious Mr Lovejoy became exasperated with the inanities of the idiotic Enoch, out would come his much repeated catchphrase, 'Ee, if ever a man suffered' However, an even more popular catchphrase belonged to Enoch, who always began his assertive statements with the strident monotone, each word emphasised with equal strength, 'Let Me Tell You.' Outside of the *ITMA* genre, it was one of the commonest quoted

of wartime catchphrases. There would be an exchange along the following lines.

Enoch: "Let Me Tell You – I've got blue blood in my veins."

Mr Lovejoy: "What d'you think I've got; dandelion and burdock?" or

Enoch: "Let Me Tell You – my Sunday school teacher says I'm a soldier of heaven."

Mr Lovejoy: "Tell your Sunday school teacher you're a hell of a long way from barracks."

Harry Korris, like many radio comics, was originally a concert party artist, first with *The Debonairs* on the Isle of Man, and



Harry Korris

then for eleven years with Ernest Binn's *Arcadian Follies* in Blackpool, where he earned the billing of 'the Falstaff of the South Pier' (presumably everyone in the 1930s knew who Falstaff was). In 1913 he married the soubrette, Connie Emerson, and they had done some revues – *Gay Paree*, for instance – and summer shows together. He did some film work with Frank Randle while, as late as 1950, he took the lead in the modest movie, *Mr Korris Goes To Paris*. From 1926 he had been associated with Cecil Frederick, who was perhaps more a feed than a comedian. After the war Harry Korris also developed a double act with the experienced Elva Sheridan, who appeared on stage and radio as She-noch, a replacement for Enoch. Harry Korris died in 1971.

The major run of the unpretentious and homely *Happidrome* was 1940 to 1947, a strong solid run, indeed, but none of the trio really emulated any of

their *Happidrome* celebrity afterwards. Curiously, in the context of shows within shows, they made a film called *Happidrome* in 1943. Written by Tom Arnold, it also starred the singer and dancer, Bunty Meadows, who was Cecil Frederick's wife; Leslie Hutchinson and the Cairoli Brothers. The plot involved a serious drama that became a comedy hit – another show within a show. Although the great film critic, Leslie Halliwell, dismissed it as 'naive', he did say that the theme was later used in *The Producers*, the 1968 Mel Brooks vehicle, with *Springtime For Hitler* the cult show within a show.

*Happidrome* was affectionately appreciated. I recall straggling along in a customary Sunday evening family walk during the war years, one that took us not through rustic lanes or even to the local park, but, rather purposelessly, just through the roads of the town. We strolled languidly on a sunny evening along one or two longish streets of small terraced houses, all fronting directly onto the pavements, all with windows wide open, and all with wirelesses blaring away. As we ambled along, it was thereby possible to listen in to Mr Lovejoy, Enoch and Ramsbottom without missing a word.

The radio was very popular – and so was *Happidrome*.

Eric Midwinter

# TALES FROM ENSA

## Sweethearts of the Forces

In the early years of the war Vera Lynn was enthusiastically dubbed *The Sweetheart Of The Forces*. She toured with ENSA, singing to the troops where there was active warfare, all over the world, often in very uncomfortable circumstances.

The German soldiers also had their own 'Sweetheart Of The Forces.' She was Lale Andersen. She achieved fame by singing one song – *Lily Marlene*, first recorded in 1939. It was broadcast regularly to the German troops all over Europe from Radio Belgrade, starting in 1941. Goebbels, Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, delivered an order forbidding all broadcasts of the song, as it



Lale Andersen

was bad for the morale of the German troops. The idea soon caught on, and William Joyce (a renegade Englishman known to us as Lord Haw-Haw) who broadcast dangerously clever propaganda from Hamburg to Britain, started including the songs of Vera Lynn (he must have got hold of her recordings) in the hopes of damaging the morale of the British troops. Even questions were asked in our Parliament about the harm her songs did for morale. In no time at all the German troops put paid to Goebbels' command; and our own troops soon demanded more of Vera Lynn's 'sad' songs. We enjoyed listening to Lale Andersen and *Lily Marlene* as well by hearing the German Army broadcasts in the Western Desert, except that we had our own words to the song (written by Tommy Conner). And we had some other words that do not deserve repeating.

I was a soldier in the war stationed in Jerusalem before I joined ENSA. My comrades and I had our own *Sweetheart Of The Forces*. Once a week we sat round a small wireless set in our barrack room, listening to an ENSA broadcast – *Date With The Desert*. It featured Geraldo and his Band. His vocalist, Doreen Villiers, was that *Sweetheart*. Her voice was beautiful, sensual and seductive. We

loved it. We had no idea what she looked like but we could imagine.

The news came to us that Geraldo was bringing his Band to Jerusalem and would be performing in the Zion Cinema. Our troops filled that theatre to bursting. After a few numbers, Geraldo announced, "And now boys, here she is – Doreen Villiers". She swept onto the stage and we all saw, to our great delight that she really was gorgeous; and her voice was just as alluring as we all remembered from the broadcasts.

I have to admit that, lovely as she was, we never ceased to adore Vera Lynn as well.

Norman Dannatt



Doreen Villiers

## BOOK REVIEWS

### Max Tyler reviews two recently published books that have a music hall flavour

#### *The Last Edwardian Jester*

Like so many genealogy enthusiasts these days, Colin Dale knew nothing about his great grandfather Harry Dale when he started his researches. As he says 'there is much material written on the well-known stars and household names of the Victorian and Edwardian periods but little has been published about the lesser folk of the music hall'. It is a good thing for Colin that his great grandfather made use of the weekly theatrical newspaper *The Era* as well as *The Stage*. Snippets of information in these papers greatly assist our researcher in his endeavours. Not only did Harry Dale have a pleasant singing voice but he was also capable of writing songs. Four of these songs are held in the Music Section of the Bodleian Library. Harry Dale, finding that more and more performers were treading the music hall stage, decided to have a go at presenting his act in the circus. His act was so well received that he gradually left the music halls and spent the later part of his career performing in the circus ring. Colin Dale decided to put his findings down and then publish them. He

discovered that he only had enough information to fill half a book and the second part of the book he devotes to the careers of other family relations. The book is well written and nicely presented and also proves a useful *aide-memoire* for those researchers wanting to find out more about relatives who worked on the music hall stage

#### **Bouffonerie Musicale: the Story of H.B. Farnie, journalist, golfer, librettist, adapter and song writer.**

One of the definitions of opera bouffe, which started in France, is 'an opera with a happy ending and in which some of the text is spoken'. One of the early exponents of opera bouffe was Offenbach. H.B. Farnie was a British librettist and adapter of French operettas and an author. It mustn't be forgotten that although we think of Charles Morton as 'The Father Of The Halls' he was responsible for introducing opera bouffe to the general public in England and presented some of Farnie's translations with great success. Emily Soldene also looms large in this story. We learn of

Farnie's marriages, his committing 'bigamy', and his translating opera bouffe from the French into English. We learn that John Hollingshead, proprietor of the old Gaiety in the Strand, presented some of these translations. They strongly competed with the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, which were being performed for the first time

This is a most enjoyable book and introduces H.B. Farnie to many of us for the first time. He certainly deserves a place in the story of Victorian entertainment.

Colin Dale: *The Last Edwardian Jester*. ISBN: 978 09566024 04, £15 including p&p. Available from bookshops, online and from the author, Colin Dale, 32, Greenbank Gardens, Edinburgh, EH10 5SN.

Keith Drummond Sharp: *Bouffonerie Musicale: the Story of H.B. Farnie, journalist, golfer, librettist, adapter and song writer.*

Queme Press, £8.50. ISBN: 978 0 9567090 04. Available from bookshops and online.

# BMHS STUDY GROUP

The December meeting took the form of a Social ably organised by Peter and Floss White. After a substantial meal and a raffle, a near full-house was entertained by the Study Group Chairman, Terry Lomas who sang a selection of songs which epitomised the different genres made popular on the halls including *Champagne Charlie* (lion comiques), *After The Ball* (sentimental), *Two Lovely Black Eyes* (political), *Goodbye Dolly Gray* (patriotic) and *Robin Redbreast* (comic). The selection ended on a rousing *End Of the Road*. Those present were given ample opportunity to raise their voices in the choruses and also learn something about the songs and the artistes who sang them.

Peter Charlton, a regular speaker at Study Group meetings, specialises in researching the lives and careers of less well-known music hall artistes and in January his subject was George Beauchamp – *One Of The Early Birds*.

Accompanied at the pianoforte with considerable skill by Steve Lethbridge, Peter sang a selection of Beauchamp's songs including *We Did Have A Lively Time*, *Get Your Hair Cut*, *I'm One Of The Jays* and, of course, his most popular song, *She Was One Of The Early Birds*.

Peter had spent a great deal of time examining the theatrical press of the time to find reviews of Beauchamp's act and tracing his life and career. Very little is recorded in secondary sources and Peter added to our knowledge about an artiste who was very successful and popular in the 1880s and 1890s but who is little remembered today.

In February, Andy Foster presented a series of sound recordings from the BBC Archives and his own collection dating from the

early 1920s to the early 1960s. John Henry had radio's first catchphrase and, with Blossom, broadcast sketches in the 1920s, which were a forerunner of radio sitcom. Jack Sheppard's Concert Party from Brighton (1938), Will Fyffe at a Clydeside shipyard factory (1942) and Arthur Askey in *Music Hall* (1936) were broadcast live from theatres.

*Garrison Theatre* made a star of Jack Warner during the Second World War and *Happidrome* also kept radio audiences laughing and in good spirits at this time. We heard the voices of Albert Whelan, G. H. Elliott and George Robey in a *Festival Of Music Hall* (1951) and Robb Wilton as Mr. Muddlecombe, J.P. (1941) and finally, Mrs Shufflewick (Rex Jameson) in *London Lights* (1961). A highly appreciative audience enjoyed a very entertaining and informative presentation by an acknowledged expert on radio comedy.

| FUTURE MEETINGS                |   |   |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Thursday<br>14th April<br>2011 | HI-DI-HI; A NOSTALGIC<br>TRIP TO BUTLIN'S<br>HOLIDAY CAMP,<br>CLACTON-ON-SEA  | Norman Jacobs                                 |
| Thursday<br>12th May<br>2011   | MUSIC HALL AND<br>VARIETY ON FILM   | Keith Fawkes-<br>Underwood &<br>Roger Fillary |
| Thursday<br>9th June<br>2011   | TOP 10 MUSIC HALL<br>SONGS AS VOTED FOR<br>BY MUSIC HALL<br>SOCIETIES IN U.K. | Terry Lomas                                   |

## JACK SEATON

Members of the Study Group and I were saddened to hear of the death of past Chairman and Vice President, Jack Seaton. The Study Group was struggling to attract members and visitors to its meetings in 1984 and it was Jack, the new Chairman of the Society, who suggested that we meet at The Green Room Club in John Adam Street, off The Strand in central London. This was a successful move and the Study

Group flourished and continues to do so today. Jack always gave encouragement and sound advice concerning the Study Group for which we were grateful.

Jack did many things for charities. He was responsible for arranging the entertainment at Brinsworth House in Twickenham, and I was privileged to be asked by Jack to entertain the residents on several occasions.

He donated personal ephemera to the Society's archives and I enjoyed chatting to him in his flat in Ealing about his time in show business.

Jack was very generous with his time to so many people and organisations and he will be sadly missed.

Terry Lomas

## MANCHESTER MUSIC HALL ASSOCIATION

As usual the Britons Protection did us proud with the superb buffet at our Christmas party, and, despite the weather, plenty of folk turned up to enjoy it, a good time being had by all. However our expected artiste, Dave Buck, was obliged to cancel, having been booked for several days that week by Granada for *Corrie* when the celebrated tram smash was being filmed. Dave recommended his friend, a well-known local entertainer Paul Waldron, in his place, and Paul did not disappoint with his varied mixture of songs and comedy.

A lady I've known for a number of years, Jeannie (Jean Thomas), was asked to come along in January to talk about her career in entertainment. This she did admirably, adding some delightful songs for good measure – and she brought her mum along to add her own 'penn'orth' to the story. Jean began performing professionally in the clubs at the age of 13. The next stage was fronting a band for several years, and here she met Bob, who was playing guitar. The two married and launched a classy duo, much

sought after in the North in particular, called Jean and Bobby Jo, later modernised to Jeneiro. With the decline of the clubs they sought pastures new, and although they have never regarded themselves as country singers, have now become principals in the show *Country Legends* which has been touring theatres for several years.

True to his promise made when he had to cancel in December, Dave Buck came, in fine form, to the February meeting. Dave is a seasoned comic with a refreshing approach and needle sharp wit. A very clever man, with nothing blue in his material, he's neither old school nor present day 'stand-up' – just himself. We were lucky he could make it, before the cruising season gets under way, but he always enjoys himself when he comes – and so do we!

Roger Holmes, 26, Stocks Gardens, Stalybridge, Cheshire, SK15 2RD  
[rogerholmes26@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:rogerholmes26@tiscali.co.uk)



# The British Music Hall Society Programme 2011

All shows: Early Doors 7.00 p.m., Curtain Up 7.30 p.m.

Bi-Monthly. Shows are held at The CAA (please sign in on arrival)

Club for Acts & Actors, 20 Bedford Street, Covent Garden, London WC2

**Tuesday 10th May**

**With a Song and a Smile**

*presented by the Rainham Theatrical Society*

**Tuesday 12th July**

**"Opera Tottie"**

*Miss Carolyn Allen - Delicious Diva and  
Mr Paul Smith - Magic Maestro*

The BMHS wishes to thank all the artistes who are performing in their shows

**Box Office - Show Information - Bernard Palmer - Tel: 020 7998 1884**

**Note: Admission by programme donation at the door**

*All artistes appear subject to their personal and professional commitments*



Also a new show for **GILBERT & SULLIVAN** devotees. Most of the famous patter songs from 10 of their operas, plus an amusing insight into their private lives

Both starring  
**GORDON PETERS**

(BBC1 The Gordon Peters Show, Dad's Army,  
One Foot in the Grave, My Family)

Music Director for both shows  
**DAVID CARTER**

**Book either through: 020 8399 2915**  
[www.gordonpeters.co.uk](http://www.gordonpeters.co.uk)

THE HUMOUR OF

*Gilbert & Sullivan*

TRIAL by JURY / MIKADO / HMS PINAFORE  
YEOMAN of the GUARD / AND MANY MORE



## CHARLIE KUNZ

Collector would like to purchase or view photographs, programmes, magazine articles, sheet music etc. of this artist during his variety days. All material will be acknowledged.

**Details to: Cameron Matheson, 45 Brittany Road,  
St. Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex TN38 0RD**

**Tel: 01424 203127**

**e-mail: [cameron.mathesonIM4@btinternet.com](mailto:cameron.mathesonIM4@btinternet.com)**

## ROY HUDD, O.B.E.

has all sorts of  
sheet music, photographs, programmes  
and ephemera to sell for BMHS funds.

*If you'd like a list send an sae to*

Roy Hudd Enterprises,  
P.O. Box 604, Ipswich IP6 9WZ

**MICKIE DRIVER and VARIETY COLLECTIVE**

offer the very best

**PROFESSIONAL ENTERTAINMENT**

for homes, sheltered housing, clubs, hospitals, theatres, day centres etc.  
Planning an outing? Ask about our famous **VARIETY LUNCHES**

**Phone 0208 881 9592**  
for an information pack  
47 Walpole Road, London N17 6BE

## Are you stuck for a gift idea?

*Why not give a friend or relative  
a year's subscription  
to the British Music Hall Society?*

It only costs £20, and includes 4 issues  
of "The Call Boy"

*For further details, contact*

**Howard Lee,  
Thurston Lodge, Thurston Park,  
Whitstable CT5 1RE**

## OLD THEATRES - THE THEATREGOER'S COMPANION

Why not join all the enthusiasts who cherish Britain's **OLD THEATRES**? This wonderful and quite unique beautifully produced magazine brings together audiences and entertainers in their love of our country's great halls of entertainment.

Each issue contains over 100 illustrations (some in full colour) within its 48 pages, many of which have never been seen for decades, together with many nostalgic articles about 'lost' theatres, old theatres that have been restored, and other information which is not normally seen in other theatre publications.

Please send £6.66 (including UK post and packing)  
for your copy of the current issue to

**Terry Kirtland, Primrose Cottage, 20 Rife Way,  
Felpham, Bognor Regis, PO22 7BW**

(Cheques should be made payable to T. G. Kirtland)  
[www.oldtheatres.co.uk](http://www.oldtheatres.co.uk)

## DISCLAIMER

Neither "The Call Boy" nor the British Music Hall Society can accept responsibility for the content of any advertisement appearing in these pages.



## THE Call Boy

The Journal of the Society 'The Call Boy' is a privately published glossy magazine intended for private circulation only and is posted Free to Members quarterly during the months of April, July, October and January. For sample copy of current issue send £2.50 please to Membership Secretary, Howard Lee, Thurston Lodge, Thurston Park, Whitstable, Kent CT5 1RE. E-mail ActorLee@btinternet.com

### EDITORIAL:

Editor, **GEOFF BOWDEN**

6 New River Crescent

Palmers Green, London N13 5RF

E-mail: geoff.bowden1@btinternet.com

### BMHS 100 Club winners:

March 2011: Sylvia da Costa  
Michael Embleton

## THE LISSENDEN PLAYERS MUSIC HALL

Third Wednesday of the month (except August & December)

Each month a change of programme and cast

8 p.m. - Lauderdale House

Highgate High Street, London, N6

And elsewhere on request

New performers always welcome

Enquiries: Barbara Kealy: 020 8674 0526

enquiries@lissendenplayers02.fsnet.co.uk

www.lissendenplayers02.fsnet.co.uk

## ENCORE

The Magazine for the  
Entertainment Professional

News, Views and Reviews,  
Venue, Artiste & Production  
Listings & Advertising

Editor: Johnny Mans

Johnny Mans Productions  
P.O. Box 196, Hoddesdon  
Herts EN10 7WG

Tel: 01992 470907  
e-mail: encoremags@aol.com

## KEN DODD

Collector and Researcher on career of Ken Dodd wishes to purchase programmes, photos, sheet music, records, books, mags, news items, "Doddy" memorabilia, Diddymen figures etc.

All material will be acknowledged. Please contact:

Geoff Quible, 53 Clarke Avenue,  
Loscoe, Heanor, Derby DE75 7GA  
Tel: 01773 762282

## FOR SALE BY BRITISH MUSIC HALL SOCIETY

A selection of postcards  
featuring interiors and  
exteriors of well known theatres  
drawn by Nick Charlesworth.  
Also a selection of publicity cards  
of well known theatres  
past and present.

These are facsimiles of posters of the time.  
Each batch contains five coloured cards.

Batches 1 to 30 still available.

Price £3.50 per pack inc. p&p.

\*\*\*\*\*

### 40th Anniversary 8oz bone china mugs.

Printed in light blue with Society logo  
on front and on back

"We've been together now for 40 years"

Price £6.50 per mug inc. p&p.

\*\*\*\*\*

Back numbers of 'Call Boy' are available  
Price £2.50 each inc. p&p.

\*\*\*\*\*

Cheques and postal orders (no cash please)  
should be made payable to "British Music  
Hall Society" and sent to: Gerald Smith,  
BMHS, 39 Joydon Drive, Chadwell  
Heath, RM6 4ST  
We regret that this offer is open to  
UK members only.

### B.M.H.S. Historian

Max Tyler

76 Royal Close, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 7FL

Tel: 01243 783322

max@maxtyler.orangehome.co.uk

## WANTED:

Photos/programmes - Syd Boyd, Bert Brierley,  
Evelyn Joyce, Nick Tanner, Joy Adams,  
Tommy Truman, from 'Happy-Go-Lucky' 1946;  
The Burt Twins, Jack Frost,  
Louis Hayden from 'Cinderella' 1946.  
Barbara Ford, Jack Anton,  
Ernest Maxin, from 'This Year of Carnival' 1951.  
Doreen Hulme, Irving Davies, Paddy Stone.  
Contact: Carolyn Dee Tel : 0161-480-8860

## Music Hall

and all other entertainments

BOOKS AND EPHEMERA for sale.

Quality stock. Send three first class stamps  
for current catalogue of items for sale.

Anne FitzSimons

3 Croft Park, Wetheral, Carlisle CA4 8JH

Tel: 01228 562184



## Ronnie Ronalde

Route 86

Listen to his newly recorded CD,  
a delightful mix of  
singing - yodeling and whistling

Cheques payable to: Ronnie Ronalde  
PO Box 521, Ormeau, Gold Coast,  
Queensland, 4208, Australia

Price £10.00 incl. p&p  
Enquiries: ronalde@bigpond.net.au

## Merchandise available from Roy Hudd Enterprises

### "Roy Hudd's very own Music Hall"

15 songs from the one-man show with  
full orchestra and choir: *Where Did You  
Get That Hat, My Old Dutch, When  
Father Papered the Parlour, Two Lovely  
Black Eyes, I Live in Trafalgar Square,  
Pretty Little Polly Perkins, The  
Spaniard that Blighted my Life, While  
London Sleeps, Our Neighbourhood,  
It's a Great Big Shame, The Future Mrs.  
'Awkins, The Hole in the Elephant's  
Bottom, A Nice Quiet Day, 'Arry, 'Arry,  
'Arry, The End of my Old Cigar. CD  
£5.00* (including postage and packing).

### "Roy Hudd's pick of The News Huddlines"

A double cassette. Roy's selection of  
favourite sketches, songs and  
monologues from the last five years of  
the show. Autographed by Roy, June  
and Chris. £8.99 (including postage).

### "Roy Hudd performs MIRTH, MAGIC and MELODRAMA"

26 much requested monologues  
accompanied by Ian Smith. *My Mother  
doesn't know I'm on the stage, Laugh  
and the World laughs with you, The  
Gravedigger's Wedding, Jenny Kissed  
Me, The Lion and Albert, Dawn Patrol,  
Yorkshire Pudden, But he didn't!, An  
Old Dogs Prayer, The Girl on the stairs,  
A Sailor's Farewell To His Horse, The  
Green Eye of the Little Yellow God,  
Piddling Pete, Providence, Mandalay, If  
You'll Pardon My Saying So, London  
Pride, Shut up!, The Magic Wand, The  
Pig, The Touch of The master's Hand,  
Death - is nothing at all, Brahn Boots,  
London Transport Prayer, The Little  
Guttersnipe and Wonderful Love. £6.50*  
(including p&p).

"The Pantomime Book" by Paul  
Harris (foreword by Roy Hudd)

A unique collection of classic panto  
routines and gags. This little book is  
invaluable to everyone connected with  
pantomime. £12.95 (including postage  
and packing).

Cheques and Postal Orders to  
ROY HUDD ENTERPRISES  
PO Box 604, Ipswich IP6 9WZ

## Do you need music for your next show?

Fully orchestrated Music Hall  
tracks and much more!

THE online Theatre Music store.

Visit us at:

[www.TheatreMusicShop.com](http://www.TheatreMusicShop.com)

# BRITISH MUSIC HALL SOCIETY

Founded September 1963 by Ray Mackender and Gerald Glover  
Registered Charity Number 1128961

**President:**  
**ROY HUDD OBE**

**Past Presidents:**  
1963-1979 Don Ross  
1980-1983 Lew Lane  
1984-1985 Ellis Ashton MBE  
1986-1992 Louis Benjamin

**Vice Presidents:**  
Wyn Calvin MBE Jim Marshall OBE  
Jack Seaton Mary Sparks

**Life Patrons:**  
Sir Cliff Richard OBE; Des O'Connor CBE;  
Alan Titchmarsh MBE & Alison Titchmarsh  
Paul O'Grady MBE, Jools Holland OBE, DL,  
Val & Lynn Doonican

**Chairman:**  
Doreen Hermitage

**Executive Committee:**  
Adam Borzone *Vice-Chairman*  
Daphne Masterton *Secretary*  
Lawrence Cheadle *Treasurer*  
Max Tyler *Historian*  
Terry Lomas *Study Group Chairman*  
Howard Lee *Membership Secretary*  
Andy Foster *Sound Archives*  
Bernard Palmer *Box Office*  
Adam Borzone *Minutes Secretary*

Danny Barker, Sigmar Berenzweig, Peter Bexon, Geoff Bowden,  
Mary-Jane Burcher, Dean Caston, John Danbury, John Perry,  
Colin Simmons, Janey Slater,  
Denis Warrilow, Peter White

All the above members can be contacted by writing to them  
at the Secretary's address:

Hon. Sec., 45 Mayflower Road,  
Park Street, St. Albans, Herts AL2 2QN

If you would like to support us by joining the Society, write to:  
Membership Secretary, Howard Lee,  
Thurston Lodge, Thurston Park, Whitstable, Kent CT5 1RE

Subscriptions payable on 31st January Annually:  
£20.00 (UK) £25.00 (Couples) £25.00 (Overseas)

Overseas subscriptions must be made by International Money Order  
in £ sterling. Standing Order forms are available.

Our Study Group meets the second Thursday of each month  
from October to June at 7.45 p.m.  
at the C.A.A., 20 Bedford Street, London WC2

Our Society holds bi-monthly shows  
from March to November -  
at the C.A.A.20 Bedford Street, London WC2.  
Doors open 7 p.m. Show 7.30 p.m.

Guests are always welcome as are new members.

**Further details from Bernard**  
on 020 7998 1884 before 9 p.m.

## ADVERTISING MANAGER:

ABI CARR, Lavender Lodge, 31 Woodside Road,  
Guildford, Surrey GU2 8HH  
Email: [ads.callboy@gmail.com](mailto:ads.callboy@gmail.com)

## The Vesta Tilley Society

[www.vestatilleysociety.com](http://www.vestatilleysociety.com)

The Swan Theatre, The Moors, Worcester, WR1 3ED

# THE FINAL CURTAIN - SPRING 2011

(Compiled by Richard A. Baker  
and Geoff Bowden)

## BARRY, John

Musician and Composer, on January 30th 2011, aged 77. Born in York, Barry achieved worldwide fame as a film composer with his scores for *The Ipcress File*, *Midnight Cowboy*, *From Russia With Love*, *Dances With Wolves*, *Out Of Africa* and *Born Free*. He also composed five stage musicals including the smash hit *Billy*, which ran for 904 performances at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1974. Early in his career he enjoyed success as leader of The John Barry Seven, touring theatres and concert venues, and his group can be seen on one of the surviving *Sunday Night At The London Palladium* TV shows where they play a solo instrumental number before backing the top of the bill, Adam Faith.

## BRADLEY, Bill

Actor and Singer, on November 24th 2010, aged 79. Bill Bradley was a musical theatre actor who appeared in many West End shows, tours and pantomimes as well as television. One of his early contracts was with Clarkson Rose's show *Twinkle*, which he claimed was the very best training he could have had. He followed this with a stint as a George Mitchell Singer, performing on many TV shows. Later West End appearances included *Charlie Girl*, *Privates On Parade*, *70 Girls 70*, *Treasure Island* and *Drake's Dream*. (Obituary kindly supplied by Avril Gaynor)

## GARRETT, Betty

Singer and Dancer, on February 12th 2011, aged 91. In 1949, Betty Garrett made three movies, *Take Me Out To The Ball Game*, with Frank Sinatra and Gene Kelly; *Neptune's Daughter*, in which she and Red Skelton sang *Baby, It's Cold Outside*; and most memorable of all, *On The Town*, in which she played the amorous taxi driver, Hilde Esterhazy, pursuing Sinatra as one of three sailors enjoying a day's leave in New York. Born in Missouri, Betty found she had a talent for acting while still at school. She made her stage debut in 1938. Four years later, she stood in for Ethel Merman in Cole Porter's *Something For The Boys* and in 1946 starred in the revue, *Call Me Mister*, which led to a contract with MGM. Her career collapsed when she and her husband, Larry Parks, who played Al Jolson in *The Jolson Story* were blacklisted in the McCarthy witch-hunt for their brief membership of the Communist party. It was not until the mid-50s that she found further work in America. On television, she appeared in *All In The Family*, the American version of *Till Death Us Do Part*, as well as *Murder She Wrote* and *The Golden Girls*.

## OWEN, Alan

Radio Producer and Composer, on February 9th 2011, aged 82. As a distinguished music producer for BBC Radio, the pinnacle of his career was eleven series of programmes on Radio Three about America's finest songwriters and jazz musicians, written and presented by Alistair Cooke. Under the name Alan Langford, he was also a prolific composer of light music, which has recently enjoyed a resurgence of interest. Owen attended the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and joined the BBC as a clerk in the Music Library. Once he was promoted to music producer, he worked across the radio networks. On Radio Three, he produced *Matinee Musicale*, a programme of light music, while on the Light Programme, the precursor of Radio Two, he was responsible for *As You Were*, a show of 1920s dance band music. His work with Cooke began in 1974. Between then and 1987, they worked on no fewer than 74 programmes that culminated in a six-part series, *The Life and Times of George Gershwin*. Besides Cooke, Owen regularly produced such Radio Two stalwarts as David Jacobs and Alan Keith and gave the King's Singers their first broadcast. Away from the music, Owen was an antiques dealer with a regular stall in the Portobello Road market, specialising in old clock and watch parts; he indulged his passion for art house movies; and, as a member of the Performing Right Society, he took his place on a committee that considered the plight of members facing financial difficulties. In retirement, he recorded books for the blind enormously assisted by his perfect enunciation and his knack for mimicry.

# THE FINAL CURTAIN - SPRING 2011

(Compiled by Richard A. Baker and Geoff Bowden)

## **PAUL, Betty**

Actress, Singer and Dancer, on February 27th 2011, aged 89. A great stage beauty in her day, Betty Paul moved effortlessly between musicals, revue, straight plays and radio. In 1938, she became one of Mr. Cochran's Young Ladies, a team of chorus girls who C. B. Cochran presented in cabaret at the lavish Trocadero restaurant in the West End. She also appeared in a revue that year, *Happy Returns*, at the Adelphi with Flanagan and Allen and Beatrice Lillie. Another revue, *Lights Up!*, starring Evelyn Laye, came two years later followed by a Stanley Lupino musical, *Lady Behave*, at His Majesty's in 1941. During the Second World War, she worked with the radio comedian, Vic Oliver, for two years. She then joined him in the revue, *The Night and the Music*, at the Coliseum. There followed Betty's two favourite roles, firstly as Suzanne Valdis in *Bless The Bride*, which ran for three years, and then as Manon in a touring production of *Bitter Sweet*. From 1948 to 1950, she returned to comedy, appearing with Jewel and Warriss in their radio series, *Up the Pole*, and in one of their films, *Let's Have a Murder*. Throughout the 1950s, she appeared regularly in many West End shows, including Vivian Ellis's musical about Samuel Pepys, *And So To Bed*, and *Damn Yankees* at the Coliseum, in which she had three songs.

## **RUSSELL, Jane**

American Movie Actress, on February 28th 2011, aged 89. Discovered by the eccentric millionaire film mogul, Howard Hughes, she was cast in *The Outlaw*, a Western about Billy the Kid. Russell's pneumatic frame and sultry glances meant that her looks were more important than her acting. The film was first released in America in 1943, but it triggered such controversy that it was quickly withdrawn and not widely distributed until 1950. Oddly, in Britain, it was given a 'U' certificate, meaning that children could see it without their parents. The most memorable picture that Russell made was *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), in which she played the worldly brunette showgirl to Marilyn Monroe's blonde ingénue and revealed her gift for comedy and her talent as a singer and a dancer. But, apart from guest appearances and cameo roles, her career was all but over by the late 1950s. From then on, her fame largely rested on what she was rather than what she did.

## **RUST, Brian**

Discographer, on January 5th 2011, aged 88. *British Music Hall On Record*, one of Rust's many discographies, is an essential part of any music hall buff's book collection. Yet, it is ultimately a disappointing book as there are many omissions of minor artistes and recording sessions. The reason is probably that Rust was not a devotee of music hall. His main interests were jazz and dance band music. His discographies of these subjects are masterful. Rust joined the BBC Gramophone Library in 1945. Six years later, he took a suitcase full of rare British 78 rpm records to America to sell or trade with other collectors. In 1960, he left the BBC to work as a freelance researcher and author. He wrote for *The Gramophone* and *The Melody Maker* and was responsible for the sleeve notes on many LPs. His first discography was *Jazz Records* (1897 - 1942), which was expanded over the years, reaching its sixth edition in 2002 as *Jazz And Ragtime Records*. His other major work was *American Dance Bands On Record And Film* (1915 - 1942), a two volume work originally published in 1973 and later expanded by other scholars to five volumes and published in 2009/10. Most of Rust's books without illustrations now change hands for hundreds of pounds.

## **SEABROOKE, Terry**

Comedy Magician, on January 11th 2011, aged 78. A box of tricks, a Christmas present he was given as a boy, led Seabrooke to a lifelong love of magic. He worked first as a bank clerk. After National Service, he became a fire inspector for an insurance company. During one

inspection, he discovered that the claimant was a well-known magician, Billy McComb, who became Seabrooke's mentor. After turning professional in the 1970s, Seabrooke toured the world. He travelled extensively throughout Britain, making several appearances at the London Palladium, and made nearly 150 tours of America. In one of his favourite tricks, he asked a member of the audience to produce a bank note and sign it. Seabrooke then set light to it, but always managed to retrieve it intact. In 2004, he was awarded the Masters Fellowship, the highest honour in magic, by the American Academy of Magical Arts.

## **SEATON, Jack**

Comedian, Compere and Producer, on February 13th 2010, aged 81. Born in Soho, Seaton began his career as an errand boy at the London Palladium. He became friends with two great comics who appeared there regularly, Max Miller and Tommy Trinder. His vision coincided with that of the British Music Hall Society: to keep alive the spirit of music hall and variety. To this extent, he had great success. As a compere, presenter and producer, he came into his own when he was appointed Chairman of the Society in 1984. It was then in the midst of celebrating its twenty-first anniversary for which Seaton arranged shows starring Roy Hudd and the last generation of music hall performers, including Cavan O'Connor and Leslie Sarony. The Society's historian, Max Tyler, said: "Jack was an excellent Chairman and worked very hard for the Society. When he assumed the chairmanship, the Society was going through a rough patch and Jack succeeded in pulling it through." Seaton branched out by producing lunchtime shows at the Palace Theatre in Cambridge Circus and others at the Hackney Empire, the Wimbledon Theatre and the West Cliff Theatre in Clacton.

## **SHEARING, George**

Composer, Pianist and Bandleader, on February 14th 2011, aged 91. Blind from birth, Shearing, who was born in Battersea, soon showed musical talent by learning to play the piano at three years of age. His first job was as a pub pianist but he soon found work with the bands of Harry Parry and Ambrose as well as with Stephane Grappelli, with whom he toured theatres. In 1947 he emigrated to the States, achieving fame when he formed the George Shearing Quintet. Later years saw him form a successful musical partnership with the singer Mel Tormé. His most famous composition was *Lullaby Of Birdland*. At one concert, almost half a century after *Lullaby* had been composed, he introduced it by saying: "I have been credited with writing 300 songs. Two hundred and ninety-nine enjoyed a bumpy ride from relative obscurity to total oblivion. Here is the other one." Shearing was knighted in 2007.

## **WHITING, Margaret**

Singer, on January 10th 2011, aged 86. The daughter of the songwriter, Richard Whiting, who was responsible for *Ain't We Got Fun?* and Shirley Temple's *The Good Ship 'Lollipop'*, Margaret Whiting was taken under the wing of the singer/songwriter, Johnny Mercer, when her father died in 1938. Four years later, Mercer co-founded Capitol Records, persuading Nat 'King' Cole, Peggy Lee and Jo Stafford to sign for the label. Whiting was given a contract too and her first hit song, *That Old Black Magic*, which Mercer wrote with Harold Arlen, made her a star at the age of eighteen. Other hits followed including *It Might As Well Be Spring* and *Come Rain Or Come Shine* and in 1949 a duet with Mercer, *Baby, It's Cold Outside*, stayed in the *Billboard* chart for nineteen weeks. Later, Whiting enjoyed a career as a nightclub and cabaret singer. In 1994, she had a sell-out season at Pizzeo in the Park in London. Divorced three times, her fourth husband was the gay porn star, Jack Wrangler. Everyone assumed the relationship was platonic, but, on being asked whether Wrangler was gay, Whiting replied "Only round the edges, dear."