

THE NORTH - WEST

GEORGE FORMBY

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Specially Produced for George Formby Fans
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Welcome to Newsletter No.55

Well it's been a sad Christmas period at The Hollies. No sooner had we got over the loss of Denis Gale and Bill Pope, when I received a phone call to say that my singing partner, Eddie (Aber) Smith had died. Aber, who has entertained all his life, was very interested in George and the few times we took him to the meetings he was amazed at how well the meetings were organised. We took him to N. Wales and he was delighted when about 20 players mounted the stage and played ukes together. Later he performed a Jolson medley.

He has entertained in all sorts of clubs throughout his 75 years but, as he said, "I have never in all my years experienced anything like these George Formby meetings." Seeing young children playing alongside the oldies had him completely gobsmacked and he talked about it all the way home. So you see! We have something to offer to the newcomers and we take it all for granted.

GEORGE IN CIVVY STREET - The band that accompanied and acted in Civvy Street was the Johnny Claes Band and around the same time Aber was asked by Johnny if he would sign on as his regular singer. He turned it down because he didn't want to leave home to tour round the country.

HIS FINAL CURTAIN - Aber, with his strong personality, always called a spade a spade and because of his past experience he would make our local M/Cs quake in their boots if ever he visited their shows. Once on stage he was hard to get off and this carried through to the very end when, at the Crematorium, the curtains refused to close and his laughing band of followers joined together with "No-one ever drew the curtains on Aber."

It is an old saying that "You can tell a good man by the number of people at his funeral" Well I'm pleased to report that Aber's followers flooded the church.

For the past 5 years **Jim Bramwell** has completely milked a joke about a pig and everybody's heard it - many times over - at the N. West meetings. To get a few more miles out of the joke he experimented at Liverpool, changing the pig into a chicken and - guess what? For the first time ever, he didn't get one titter, - not one! So it's back to the pig Jim.



A Very Prosperous 2000 to all and many thanks to those who contribute to our Newsletter.
It is hard to believe that we are in our 5th year of production - without a hiccup

The Formby Story

Part 45 by Stan Evans

Beryl was no longer there to manage George's business affairs, - which left him in a wilderness. Like his father he had relied on a wife being by his side for support while he got on with the job of entertaining the public. It was the perfect combination and envied by many in the entertainment trade. He'd lost his prop and, as Ella, George's sister said, "He was lost when Beryl went."



It has been reported many times over that George was already having an affair with Pat Howson but there is no evidence of this. And the only proof that they come up with regarding reports of George and Yana is that Harry Scott, George & Beryl's valet, heard George say to Yana on the phone, "Well you've had your chance." But that could mean anything! It certainly didn't prove that they were having an affair!

Throughout this story I have emphasised many times over that George simply couldn't stand responsibility and evidence of this was none more prominent than after he lost Beryl. He was devastated and immediately searched around for someone to fill the gap. Pat Howson was a schoolteacher in her mid-thirties and the daughter of Fred Howson, a car salesman who sold cars to George. He began to pay visits to the Howson home. Personally, I'm not sure if love was the attraction for George. But I do feel that he considered Pat to be the ideal person to marry for the following reasons:-

FIRST she was available, and a schoolteacher, and therefore must have some of Beryl's management abilities. After all, Beryl taught George to read and write.

SECONDLY, as George wasn't a well man he needed an honest person to leave his estate to and Pat filled the role perfectly. He appeared to have reasons to reject his family which was probably due to the fact that he was thrown out of the family home at the age of seven and felt that he had no family. The newspapers reported that he rejected them because they were scroungers but maybe this was exaggeration on the part of the press???

THIRDLY, Pat was someone who could take the responsibilities off his shoulders while he got on with his entertaining. But this may have been quietly dashed when, six weeks after Beryl's death, at a news interview to announce their engagement, George said, "You'll have something on looking after me" which was followed by Pat saying, "Yes, and you'll have something on looking after me too." Those were words that Beryl would never had uttered and I often wonder if George felt disappointed with her reply. More Next Month

E. MAIL from Granada TV Studios. "Might be showing 'Hotel Get-Away' third week in (no month mentioned). Regret Cutting Room Floor footage not available. Regret also not their policy to include GF players in the credits. The only good news is that it will go out nationally and reach millions."

Tribute Night at Sale - It was one of the best nights ever at the Sale Christmas Party Night with lashings of food laid out and a house full of talented players.

THE FIRST TRIBUTE was to dear local lad Denis Gale who died recently. Organiser Cyril Palmer handed out song sheets to the crowd, made a short speech and then followed with one of Denis's favourite songs: "It's Been A Long Time Gone" - which Denis often sang at the meetings.

THE SECOND TRIBUTE was to Billy Uke Scott with Billy's song "Ragtime Mandarin," performed by Alan Southworth with the aid of his backing group: Sheila Palmer, Hilda Southworth and Vera Eaves - The Spicy Girls.

THE THIRD TRIBUTE was to our dear lost member Harry Stanford, "Please Let Me Sleep On Your Doorstep Tonight, which was very well performed by Cyril Palmer. In fact you could almost feel the cold shivers while he was singing it!

THE FOURTH TRIBUTE was to N. Wales member, Frankie Woods when Brian Edge sang his song: "Why Can't a Turkey Have a Happy Christmas" Brian sang it like a professional till there wasn't a dry eye in the house. All the Sale members have now gone vegetarian.

What a Small World.

Jon Baddeley handed me a photograph of his father, Roy Baddeley, when he met Sam Bass in Egypt in 1948. Sam is on the right holding the young child.



Matthew Kelly - 87 - Monday Jan

3rd 2000 was a very special day for Matthew. It was his 87th Birthday! Born at a time when Britain was still reeling from the Titanic disaster and Scott had only recently made his last expedition. Matthew was just 18 months old when the Great War was declared and he is still going very strong playing his uke at Werrington and Crewe. He is certainly the oldest player in the N. West. Matthew awoke on his birthday to hear the strains of the ukulele on his radio. "What a wonderful start to the day" he said. It was made more special when he realised the performers on the BBC Radio Stoke were his friends Jonathan Baddeley and Connie and Brian Edge. The trio were publicising the Crewe Society's participation in "BBC Music Live" later this year. "To hear them was a great birthday treat" said Matthew. *Thanks Brian for the information. Now I'm not sure if Matthew is the oldest or not. High kicking Liverpool member Jimmy was 87 last year and he is the fittest man there. But due to the silly system the GFS have we don't know who are members or just visitors to the meetings. Who's bothered? Jimmy turns up every month and thoroughly enjoys himself.*

Big Slip-up at Blackpool - We thought it might be one of the best nights ever at the South Shore Cricket Club but when we arrived Charles looked desperate as he tried to explain the situation. It appears that the club had been double booked both to us and to a large party who were celebrating a 60th Birthday Party. Apparently the mishap was due to the party having booked under one name but paid the deposit under another name.

They had their equipment (noisy disco) all set up on stage alongside ours and early on there appeared to be only a handful of the other crowd dotted around the bar. Charles came to an agreement with them that we will play until 11pm and then they can take over. In the meantime they are at liberty to join in with our meeting which they appeared to be satisfied with. Everything seemed fine until hordes of people from the other party came in.

From then on it was noise, noise and more noise, and a lot of unrest from the huge crowd who, quite rightly, had booked the room in good faith. It was only natural that they were dissatisfied. Due to the confusion we were not sure of the reason for the cake - which was made by Elaine Kenny (Paul's Mum) and tasted delicious. Was it a Millennium Cake or had Elaine reached the ripe old age of 25?



Elaine and Tony Kenny.
She makes lovely cakes

Half time came and we devoured the wonderful spread supplied by the ladies, but the noise from the crowd had now become unbearable and the children were running riot in front of the stage. Charles and Eve appealed to the parents but received no response, so we had no alternative but to wind up the show. The meeting finished at 10pm.

APOLOGIES

Charles and Eve wish to thank the dedicated supporters who regularly turn up at the meetings and for the upheaval on the night. Charles has now come to a definite arrangement with the Club Manager that every **LAST MONDAY** in the month is George Formby night. Actually, looking on the selfish side, the early finish suited both Jim Bramwell and I. Jim was suffering from a heavy cold (after sniffing and coughing all over me in the car) and just as I was leaving home I received the bad news that my singing partner, 75 year old Eddie (Aber) Smith, had just died. This came as quite a shock as it was most unexpected.

S.O.S. H J Maggs of 30 Mendip Ave, Worle, Weston Super Mare, is asking if anyone knows what happened to Sara Gregory who played Sally in Zip Goes A Million with George. Do you know?

Whoops - Well you could have bowled me over with a wet dish-rag when at the Sale meeting, Alan Chenery - the bringer of good tidings - pointed out that the Crewe Report had been omitted from the latest Newsletter. "Nay", I said, "That's impossible, I can remember scanning the report in on my latest fool proof, fault proof, thief proof, fire proof scanning programme."

Well, he was right! The report wasn't there and I was completely flummoxed! - Nay, Gobsmacked - What had gone wrong?

TECHNOLOGY IS MARVELLOUS TODAY - Well, I can only assume that it was due to the fact that I'd not paid for the scanning programme and the trial free period was over. But I'd have thought that they would have least given a warning notice before the dreaded chop. That's the only excuse I can come up with, and I can hear Brian & Connie mumbling, "What the hell is he talking about?" Anyway, as promised, here is the November report (December page 12).

"November Surprise for Brian" For someone who is supposed to have his finger on the pulse of our group I just have to concede that the buffet arranged for my 67th Birthday proved to me, beyond all doubt, that I must be sliding into the realms of senility, as the whole thing came as a complete surprise. I would have gladly bet any money that such a coup would be impossible to achieve, but it certainly wasn't. This prompted me to recall my old dad's words to me as a fifteen year old. - "When you see a bookie going to work on his Hercules bike then that's the time to have a bet son. Everybody knew what was going on except 'yours truly' and I would like to thank you all for all for keeping the secret and for all your cards and gifts.

FIFTH BIRTHDAY

I was of course aware that there was to be a party - the 5th Birthday of our wonderful group - where we have all made so many lovely friends - and a place where we can go to relax and escape, for just a while, from the crazy world in which we live. We received a lovely card from Christine and Colin Wood wishing us all a happy night. Colin, our sound engineer, was unable to attend as he and Christine had to attend a family wedding. Another complete surprise to everyone was a large birthday cake decorated with a large ukulele (tuned in D) and the legend "five years". This was a spontaneous gesture from that lovely lady Angela Caldecott (Ashley's mum). Thank you Angela it was a super contribution to a memorable evening.

It was great to see Fred Stevenson bouncing back after his recent illness - a wonderful example for any of us who may have health problems in the future. My night was made complete by the presence of our friends Derek and Barbara

Ball who have not been able to come for some time and also Derek Jones and Trudy and their young neighbour and budding uke player Simon Owen. New guests present were Tom Francis and Ray Bernard.

In view of our sound engineer Colin being away his place was taken by his stand in Allen Chenery who did an excellent job on the night. Allen would normally have been the M.C. so Connie stood in for him and I didn't think that she managed very well at her first attempt. The concert was enjoyed by an audience of 82 and comprised a wide variety of entertainment which went on until 11.20

Uke Wanted- Graham Greenfield has just phoned. He is looking for a BABY GIBSON if anyone has one for sale you can ring him on 01283 223074. Or E Mail selton13@netscapeonline.com.uk



Graham Greenfield

Graham told me that he has just done a show with ALAN RANDALL at Brimsworth House, the home for retired stage artists, and while they were there the nurses brought Louisa (George's sister) down to see them. Also performing at the home were Joan Regan, who is now in her 70s - Susan Maughan, Jack Douglas and Roger DeCaucey the ventriloquist.

Jimmy Vondy - Liverpool's Keyboard Accompanist told me a



wonderful story of when he met George. Jimmy was living in an orphan's home in West Kirby in 1945 with about 200 other children.

STARVING - The meals were very meagre: A small bowl of cornflakes for breakfast, broth for dinner and a piece of bread for supper and the boys were of an age when they needed plenty to eat - but they never got it.

Then one day they were invited to go and see George perform at the nearby RAF camp. George, looking immaculate made them very welcome and treated them all to a big nosh up meal that they'll never forget.

Most of them had never seen so much food in their lives so it was all like a dream to them. The show was star studded with magicians, singers etc. but the children felt very honoured to be in George's company. He was a very big star then yet he took the time to talk to them before and after the show. He was their hero.

Charity Shows - We had a mixed bag over Christmas. Stan Watkinson, Jim Bramwell and myself had a number of bookings, some of which we won't do again. Jimmy Vondy, our Liverpool accompanist came with us on the first outing, - a Pensioners Party, and took his keyboard along.

We'd just got going when the Steward started moving all the pensioners to the back of the hall so that he could dismantle all the trestle tables. We stopped our concert to help them. We got started again to an audience of shaking heads and long faces. It was very disappointing and lacking in respect. Half way through our songs they were shouting for Ken Dodd, or Frankie Vaughan, which didn't boost our confidence one bit. They wanted professional artists.

At the end of our show the organiser said, "Don't worry, they are always like that! - Are you coming again?" No Fear!!! Worse than the Glasgow Empire

BLIND SOCIETY - Our second show was at the Blind Society in Warrington and it was a pleasure to entertain them. They really appreciate our efforts and are very well behaved. They enjoy all the songs and love listening to Jim Bramwell's jokes. They are an excellent audience and show their appreciation each time by coming to us to thank us before we leave.

HOLY SMOKE - All Quick Fire Stuff - We reported in last month's Newsletter that we were giving a Christmas Show to raise some funds for a small church and once again the audience was delightful. It was the most horrendous weather that night which accounted for the small audience, however those that arrived thoroughly enjoyed our show and showed their appreciation. It was a pleasure to entertain them. The artists were: Des Redfern, Jim Bramwell, Stan Watkinson, Ethel Guest (Gracie Fields) and Stan Evans. One of the church ladies also did an excellent job in making her own Demis Russos (The Singing Tent) outfit to do a miming impression.

DAY CENTRE - Our fourth effort was supposed to be entertainment for the pensioners, however when we arrived at the large venue there was about a hundred there of mixed ages who were thoroughly enjoying a very professional disco session. The disco was creating a very good atmosphere and everybody was joining in. It didn't take us long to realise that the organisers hadn't planned it right. Surely we couldn't follow that!

MENTALLY HANDICAPPED

The sad part is that 95% of the crowd were unfortunately mentally handicapped and we immediately felt that, as they were having such a good time it would have been wiser for the disco to carry on. However this wasn't possible as the disco chap had another engagement to go to. So we were thrown in at the deep end. As expected, our act didn't go down well at all. We were flat

compared with the lively, ear splitting disco they'd been dancing to and they showed their feeling by gathering in small clusters and ignoring us. Every one of Jim's jokes went down like a lead balloon. However Stan Watkinson's Elvis songs raised a few raised heads. It was another tough session and we were glad when it was over. Anyway, once again, you can't win em all!

The Eastbourne Trip - Regret to report that the trip is cancelled and over £500 in deposits has been returned. Unfortunately, although 30 had booked, we only had 4 players on board and there is a time limit on paying the hotel deposits. It looked like a good idea at the time and a full schedule was being arranged with bookings at various clubs etc. However, again, you can't win em all!

Dennis Lee writes . . . The Eastbourne Trip has been cancelled and what a pity after the amount of work that Stan and Bill Davies have done to get the wheels moving - all because we are short of players. For the past two years we have enjoyed first class memorable excursions to both Normandy and Southern Ireland. The intention was to make such trips annual events and encourage members from all parts of the country to come with us.

There is still time to plan an alternative provided a formula can be found which will attract enough players. Certainly there is enough enthusiasm amongst many players to be part of an excursion this year so let's feed our ideas to Stan. *Thank you Dennis. I've got a better idea!!! All the players should get their heads together, - have a pow-wow to thrash out their requirements, - where to go to, - which event to enter, - time of year, - how many days, - book the hotel - hire a coach - work out the costings, collect deposits, - let me know and I'll join em. Bum, Bum.*

New Year's Resolution - Over the past 15 years I have possibly attended more George Formby Society meetings than anyone else in the country - Nay! the world!!!

In the N West here we hold seven monthly meetings and I have regularly attended five of them each month. Plus concerts, talks etc. Crewe is a round trip of 67 miles, N. Wales 68 miles, Blackpool 100 miles, Liverpool 28 miles and Sale 34 miles. A lot of miles! So I have decided that, - having lost a few dear friends recently - it is time to slow down a little and let the younger members take the spotlight. So if you don't see Eva & I at some of the meetings it's because we've got our feet up at home. Stan Evans

Trip to Somme & Flanders- Geoff Shone on 01244 544605 is organising a 4 Day Coach Trip - 16th to 19th June, - only £129 all in (B/B). Please give Geoff a ring if you are interested in the trip.



Anthony Mason in "Alice in Wonderland"

Over the past few weeks Anthony has been touring the country ...

He left Warrington for a brief period to tour round various civic halls and theatres etc. with the Pendle Productions troupe of actors, who are based in Blackburn. Anthony played the Mad Hatter in "Alice



in Wonderland with Anne Speller (right) who played Alice.

He also appeared with Anne, in pantomime "Jack and the Beanstalk" as 'Fleshcreep' the wicked villian, who is booed by thousands of kids, - who were very frightening at times says Anthony.

After five very hard days of rehearsal he was thrown in at the deep end with a list of one-day bookings, - they performed two or three shows of Alice during the day and one performance of "Jack and the Beanstalk" at night. He worked 7 days a week - from 6am to midnight, without a break and only had one complaint to make: He didn't have time to spend his money so he had to save it up. This is unusual for Anthony as he normally spends it before he's got any.

The tour took him all round the N. West, Liverpool, Warrington, Burnley, Accrington, Widnes, Wigan, London and many Yorkshire towns. "It was hard work" he said, "But I enjoyed every minute of it and it was very good experience." To finish the tour he has two more shows to do in Burnley during January. Anthony called in on his way to N, Wales Anglesea where he has been booked to let in the New Year.

For the benefit of the readers who don't know Anthony, he was one of our child players who, from the age of 14, outshone 99% of the society with his brilliant playing. At the age of 16 he entertained 37,500 visitors to the Warrington George Formby Exhibition, which gave him the experience to turn professional.



Anthony aged 14

Anthony not only plays Formby type songs but also - like Billy Uke Scott, plays melodies on the uke. His most popular piece is "The William Tell Overture" which delights audiences of all ages. He is also a good, self taught keyboard and piano player who produces his own backing tapes.

Which OF GEORGE'S SISTERS WAS A HAIRDRESSER?

Way back in 1992 I wrote as follows to Stan Evans who was at that time the Editor of the George Formby Society's magazine "VELLUM." "I was talking to my 85 year old mother the other day and she reminisced "I remember once having my hair permed in a salon in Dalton Road, Barrow in Furness in the thirties by a lady who I believe was a George Formby's sister. She married one of the entertaining group "The Three Dales" and she added that one of them used to play the piano for Max Bygraves."

I asked in my letter to the VELLUM whether any G.F. historian could verify what my mother had told me but the general response was that "old people often get things wrong" and that "none of George Formby's sisters ever did any hairdressing." I recall the Dale family in Barrow in Furness. 'They ran a couple of Greengrocers shops in the town but after so many years had elapsed my enquiries came to a dead end.

I reluctantly had to accept that my mother must have been mistaken, although I have to say she, like many other old people, have perfect long term memories. However, when I received the following information concerning the Crewe Theatre in 1936 (then known as The New Theatre) the whole matter raised its head like the legendary phoenix, and I now have every reason to believe what my old Mum told me as true after all.

Performing in the New Theatre between the 3rd and the 8th of February 1936 in a Fred Reynold's production was DEVEEN and a variety cast including FORMBY AND DALE. The report on the show explained that Miss Formby was the daughter of George Formby Senior.



Frank and Louie

So which of George's sisters trod the boards as "Formby and Dale?" Was it Louisa, Ella, Mary or Ethel? I believe that Louisa's surname was De Hailes which sounds remarkably like D - ALE. Could De Hailes have been a stage name I wonder? Over to you Stan. You are the expert on the Formby family, lets get to the bottom of this once and for all. Brian Edge. *Thanks Brian. Ethel was a hairdresser who had her own business in Widnes. Not aware of Barrow connection. Louisa partnered Ethel, Frank and Ella, in turn, until each found a partner and split the act. In each case Louie was the one remaining. Her last partner was her husband, De Hailes. Like you, Geraldine (Ethel's daughter) assumes that Dale could be short for De Hailes. Mary didn't go on stage but toured round with a circus act - A Boxing Kangaroo.*

how to join your er, - er, you know - er, your plinky plinky society?

Crewe's Christmas Party

"TURNED OUT NICE AGAIN!" by Brian Edge.

The night started with the traditional Group thrash – the stage being packed with uke players. There were some really good speciality acts; one featuring a couple of Highlanders in kilts complete with wide paintbrushes in lieu of sporrans. "Let the wind blow high, let the wind blow low" they sang as they pranced about in a very bold effort to prove to everyone, and leaving nothing to doubt, just what, if anything, a Scotsman wears under his kilt! The writer was in the front row and it must be said that there wasn't anything worth while reporting. The two red headed Scots were played convincingly by Alan Newton and Dennis Lee. Too good a performance for a one off. Let us hope we may see it again before too long.

Connie performed a George Formby Number from the film 'Its Turned Out Nice Again' entitled 'You can't Go Wrong In These.' Whilst she sang her assistants Joan Cain and Angela Caldicott paraded behind her exhibiting some of the most archaic ladies support garments and underwear that could be found outside of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The climax of the act was the brazen exposure of their matching bloomers for all to see as they took their bow.

Glenys gave another fine trumpet solo and this was followed by a comic rendition of Jingle Bells. This was performed by Alan Newton glaying Glenys's trumpet (rather badly) and by Glenys who seemed to fare better on Alan's trombone. As for the overall effect – well one gains no friends by being a critic! Twentytwo individual performers trod the boards on the night.

Yours truly had a first attempt at playing some melodies on a ukulele. It might not have happened had Ray Bernard not very kindly loaned his ukulele when mine mysteriously became out of tune.



Ron (bones) Wiston

Andrew Little, who is widely known for playing the lowest hung ukulele in the world yet playing it at a greater altitude than any other known person, shocked us all by disposing of what he called his fifth string and resorting to playing his bangolele in the conventional unsupported manner. It seems that someone had been putting him under considerable pressure to change. Whilst it is generally agreed that fifth strings are not to be encouraged, Andrew's unique style made a nice change from convention.

That lovely lady Vera Jones made her stage singing debut with a medley of four popular songs. She was supported on the ukulele by Brian, Alan and Jonathan. Nearly sixty years ago (in January 1939) Vera was a Pantomime dancer and she

was appearing, in Manchester in Frank H. Fortescue's Robinson Crusoe at the Queen's Park Hippodrome at the same time as George Formby and Beryl were performing at the Palace in Tom Arnold's Dick Whittington. It was a good performance by Vera.

Santa Claus arrived at 9.15pm prompt and distributed Christmas Cards and Lucky King George Millennum Pennies to everyone present. It was very strange but everyone seemed to want to kiss Santa or for him to sit on their knees, how strange! Pamela Baddeley certainly made an excellent Santa but she didnt fool everybody notably Frank Murphy's younger brother who was heard to say "thats a lady!" He was quite happy with the explanation that Santa was ill and had had to send his wife in his place!



Mary & Arthur Newton

Pamela then got everyone to their feet to sing the "Twelve Days of Christmas" and soon had everyone doing all the actions and leaping about, laying and milking etc until everyone was virtually exhausted! Great fun.

Stan Evans missed his first meeting at Crewe for some 4-1/2 years and it has to be reported that there were mutterings that he wasn't there because as he had failed to insert the Crewe report in the magazine this month and was afraid of the dire consequences. It is true that the Crewe report was missing from the magazine but Stan is adamant that he put it in. He actually read the magazine over several times and still couldnt believe it wasnt there. Its obviously just another of Stan's miracles! Hallelujah! It has to be said that Stan had good reasons for not being able to attend although he had better not let it happen again!

The memorable evening was appropriately rounded off by Jonathan and Pamela. The buffet was to the usual excellent standard, prepared for us by Betty and Thelma. There were some really good raffle prizes too and some really excellent prizes were donated by members for which we give special thanks. Special thanks to everyone who helped to set up, and those who helped to clear up and indeed to anyone who helped in any way to make the night such a memorable one. Thanks to Carl our M.C., to Colin our Sound Engineer, to Steve on the Drums and Ron on the Bones to Chris Metcalf on the door and to Simon who sold the magazines. To the ladies who helped with the tea and cleaned up after the bunfight. To anyone who has been missed - thanks. A big thank you to our audience for coming along for we cannot do without you. *Thanks Brian - sounds like a great night. Sorry we were not with you but we were exhausted after loads of entertaining.*

Are you planning for BBC Live Music, May 25th - 29th?

Crewe 'Formby' Celebrate on the last day

of the Century - By Brian Edge - There was a distinctive air of change at the Crewe special end of century meeting as it was the first time that dancing and party games had been introduced into the traditional Formby concert. The night began with an introductory exercise where the tramps and bagladies had the opportunity of getting to know each other. They needed to find out which of them had a gold tooth, a tattoo or a hole in their tights.etc. etc.and it wasn't many seconds before the place was a bustling melee of vagrants trying to locate somebody wearing long Johns or someone who had had their appendix out! Lesley Lee emerged being the first to discover the inner most secrets of those present.



Crewe's Des Redfern

A thrash followed enabling everyone to have a bash on their uke and the early strains of the 'Music Man' had everyone smartly on their feet singing and going through all the actions. It was an electric atmosphere. Alan Newton and Denis Lee then presented 'We're a Couple of Tramps' so well that everyone believed them. Connie then began to sing 'You Can't Go Wrong in These' only to find that you could go wrong as the mike was switched off! Colin got the usual icy stare, but was not accepting any responsibility and blamed Dennis Lee! The act successfully went on. Connie being ably assisted by Angela Caldicott and Joan Cain. Passing the parcel may seem a bit tame in what was almost the twenty first century but everyone took the floor and was glad of the opportunity of putting 10 pence into the parcel upon their elimination. By certain strokes of good fortune the younger of the Murphy boys was in at the kill and went off with the bunce!

It was most encouraging that so many got into the spirit of the party by dressing up. Not an easy job. It had been previously decided to appoint three neutral judges to give an opinion as to the best tramp and baglady. It must have been a very difficult decision to make as so many people had gone to so much trouble. It was clear that everyone was a winner. However a decision had to be taken and the winning tramp was Ron Whiston one of our bones players who hadn't shaved for a fortnight. Upon being presented with his prize Ron maintained that he was very much offended as he was wearing his best suit! Joan Cain won the prize for the best lady tramp. The party continued with the Conga which must have toured Nantwich before arriving back at the hall. The first half concluded with a turn 'Oh! What a Lovely Bunch of (Coco) Nuts'. Colin Wood, Alan Newton and Alan Chenery had the audience in tucks (Lancashire expression). Colin looked sexy in his silver wig whilst Alan Newton had great difficulty in

at a George Formby get-together but all good fun. After an excellent buffet supper Glenys and Ron did the free draw and after another short thrash we were all well entertained by Alison Nadin with magic followed by her great ventriloquist spot which was very well received by all.

A Christmas Quiz got everyone's brains working and this was followed by a trip to Hawaii where Brian and Lesley performed 'Honolulu Baby' that memorable number from the Laurel and Hardy film "Sons of the Desert". Lesley convincingly dressed as a Hula Dancer shook her hips and danced to the music. The Hokey Cokey followed, always a sure thing to keep the party going and this was followed by Carl Basford who performed a Lad from Lancashire" dressed as Charlie Chaplin. It must be said that Carl looked more like Charlie Chaplin than Charlie Chaplin did! A tremendous get up. A line dance to a relatively modern version of "Windows" was next and Lesley got everyone going and giving them the lowdown on grapevines and diagonal forward hip bumps etc. Everyone it must be said soon got into the swing of things especially Arthur Newton who seemed to have a great time pointing his toe in the appropriate direction.



Gareth Sumner is growing into a fine young man and an excellent uke player.

Cliff and Peter, Gareth and Fred and Jonathan and Pam all entertained and that was followed by Steve Hassall's new version of "Everybody Loves My Baby" which went down very well with the audience. Steve was accompanied by Jonathan (clarinet) and Alan Newton (trombone).

The party then danced to Superman and Agadoo and Ashley to Viva Espana with everyone joining in clapping and singing – a wonderful and touching part of the evening.

The final turn was a highlight of the show. Alan Newton and Dennis dressed as two of the Beverley Sisters performing their song "Sisters". What a super job Lesley did of the girls make up. A great performance. The show was nearly over and it was the last day of 1999. I recall asking everyone to remember what they were doing on the last day of the 20th Century and recalled the good times we had had over the last five years and anticipated the good times we would have in the future. Thanks were given to our wonderful supporters for without them there would be nothing. Best Wishes were offered to everyone for the year 2000 and the music for the last waltz had everyone on their feet and the meeting concluded with Auld Lang Syne. Brian Edge.

Roy Hudd tells a brilliant story about Beryl in his book, "Roy Hudd's Book of Music Hall Variety." He claimed that whatever Beryl was really like, she did make George a star (I hope Bob Drinkwater is reading this) and there was no fiercer advocate of his talents or his position in the business. They were all back stage in the Green Room at one of the fund raising variety shows and a young female vocalist, who had made a name for herself with a handful of records, was telling how she had been invited to entertain the Royal Family at Windsor Castle.

"Oh they were nice to me. It was wonderful. They sent a car for me and looked after me so well. They were friendly. They knew all my songs and even sang along with me. They were so complimentary to me afterwards, we even had supper together . . ." and so on and so forth. Glowering in the corner throughout this sat Beryl. Eventually she could stand it no longer. "That" she said, "Is nothing. Nothing at all! Why George and I have been there so many times that the last time we went, just as we were leaving, the King said to us, 'Well you know where we live, don't be strangers!'"

Dennis Lee says -

MARTIN BORMANN IS NOT DEAD!

One of the great mysteries following the second world war was the disappearance of Adolf Hitler's secretary, Martin Bormann. A world-wide search over many years failed to uncover his whereabouts and many people have concluded that he must now be dead.

New evidence has revealed however that he is very much alive and has been living in a sleepy little village called Horseman's Green near Wrexham. By way of disguise he now wears a toupee and goes under the alias of Helmut Murphy. When interviewed recently he told us that he had spent the last 54 years trying to perfect the 'split stroke'. His favourite song is, 'Manual the Bandito' which he also sings to spinsters groups and sometimes as a lullaby at the local kindergarten.

After some persuasion he agreed to put in an appearance at the North Wales meeting as the photo shows. Helmut's pet hate is people who play ukuleles during in interval. P.S. Did you know that Lord Lucan has also been discovered in the area masquerading as Des Redfern?

Thanks Dennis. Des Redfern has also been found down Coronation Street masquerading as Les Battersby. That's why he is always missing when we go on a trip. He's a busy lad.



Who took this awful photo?

Penyffordd January Meeting by Cliff Royle

We were down on numbers this month, no doubt due to the bug (flu not millennium), though even Brian Edge managed to put on an excellent performance, in spite of having a bad throat, by playing a uke solo. However there was still a good turn out with a few new faces who were warmly welcomed.

Unfortunately I have to report that Sheila Beech, one of our door "bouncers" is still very poorly. We hope she recovers soon. It was nice to see Fred Stephenson back again after his illness; it has certainly not affected his yodelling. Glad also to see the John Taylor's (Father and Son) visiting us again, and that the Senior of the two is making a good recovery, and looking quite sprightly again.

Ray Davies acted as M.C. and performed his usual excellent job, though he got so carried away once that he forgot to call the next turn. Charlie Morrison was welcomed with his keyboard. He says that he may take a little time to get into the swing of backing our singers, but he did well as a first attempt. He played a short sing-a-long which rather intrigued me for it contained two songs; April Showers and Slow Boat to China. Yes; memories for me. April Showers was played when I took my first love to the cinema, and the other song when I first danced with Margaret in Rothesay. (Don't mention the April Showers event to her). Then Alan Newton also played Slow Boat; what a coincidence. Keep it up chaps I will one day ask you all to play it for us, as a Big Band.

There were a few unusual turns. Leslie Lee sang one of Frankie Mood's songs "I want a boy" and there were eight volunteers. Her song was not surprising after we had seen our drag queens Gertrude and Florence (Dennis and Alan) do their act. What legs and figures. Dennis Lee did well with his Window Cleaner No.2 and the youngsters Gareth Sumner, and Stephen Ensall both got great applause, as did Stephen's father Brian who gave his Billy Fury renditions. Then we had some of Des Redfern's humorous, prize winning songs that he has written, and Jonathan Baddeley played George's final recording "Happy go lucky me", followed by "The old cane bottomed chair" revised to include a quip about Connie. Walter and Dennis played and acted the "Bones" routine, now a regular feature (we need a few more similar acts), and Pam Baddeley lead a Sing-a-Long to a musical arrangement by husband Jonathan. Welcome to our trainee music engineer, Deg, who says that he really enjoys participating in a behind the scenes part of the Club's activities. Thanks Deg. In all another "guid nicht oot", if I can use a Scottish expression??? *Thanks Cliff.*

P.S. Dennis Lee, Geoff Shone (on drums), Jim Knight, Charlie Penman, Ray Davies, Frankie Woods and Alison put on a show at the British Legion in thanks for their support in letting us use their superb facilities. We are getting plenty of publicity: Dennis on radio talking about George. Alison and Frankie with a half page in the Rhyl and Prestatyn Visitor and Jim Knight in the Wrexham Mail.

Frank Formby

Further to my notes about the dates Frank Formby performed in Crewe I can now give more details: 17-22 November 1947

Jayne Enterprises presented FOR YOUR PLEASURE With Frank Formby

27th July-1st August 1953 Kingscourt Productions presented "COMIC STRIP" SHOW With Frank Formby and Eight Beautiful French Artistes

14th-19th December 1953 STARS YOU KNOW The Grand Final of the Local Talent Show Including Frank Formby

30th May - 4th June 1977 Don Ellis presented OLD TYME MUSIC HALL including Reginald(Confidentially)Dixon, and Frank Formby

I have had numerous reports that for a time Frank Formby was a milk delivery man in Crewe and this could be the reason why he appeared in the final of a local talent show. As the show was called STARS YOU KNOW one wonders whether he impersonated George in this one. Further research is required.

If anyone can come up with any information of Frank Formby's performances around the country please write in. Brian Edge. *Thanks again Brian. First time I've heard that Frank was a milkman. I know that Ted was.*

Bill Pope - After reporting the death of Bill in last month's Newsletter, one or two members rang to say that they couldn't quite put a face to the name and did I have a photo. I rang Maureen who put me in touch with Stella Murphy who kindly popped one in the post.



Quite a lot of North West members might not know Bill because he mainly attended the Liverpool meetings. Paul Woodhead, one of our happy coach trippers, remembered Bill as the person who kindly loaned him his guitar for the Southern Ireland concert - "a very nice man" said Paul.

The January Liverpool Meeting was hit by the flu bug and resulted in less than a handful of artists turning up. However the house was packed so we had about six spots each. Paul Kenny had his first attempt at giving lessons on various Split Strokes etc. which went down very well with the crowd. Jim Bramwell and Stan & Les Watkinson couldn't make it and Jimmy forgot to bring his keyboard. Star of the night was the other Jimmy (87) who danced and sang to a Jolson medley. Great Night

Statues could bring legends back to life

TOM Bright put the spotlight on the "show business statues" debate (December 27) but his views are a little out of focus.

In asking why entertainers should be honoured with statues – and why we should copy Morecambe's example with her famous son – Tom overlooks the fact that he is talking about Blackpool.

You know the place. Fun City of live entertainment, funny hats, roller coasters – and showbiz legend.

Our visitors, young or old, still come for one thing. A good laugh. It's not gone out of fashion. Tom questions the logic of honouring Charlie Cairoli and Les Dawson with statues. He says they were just doing a job and getting well paid. What's that got to do with it? They also happen to be two of the biggest icons in Blackpool's showbiz century.

Wouldn't it be better, says Tom, to honour the people who have changed the town for ever? Yes, Tom, but weren't they just doing a job and being well paid for it? The trouble is, such worthy persons wouldn't be recognised by the visiting millions, so there wouldn't be any point in having statues of them!

The visitors, however, all know Les Dawson, Les's TV shows will come round time

and again. Many visitors also remember Charlie Cairoli – and George Formby seems to have secured his membership of the showbiz icon club through his films, his records – and his Blackpool seasons.

I'm not arguing the case out of nostalgia but from a business standpoint. A resort that can discard its "brand names" and "trade marks" and, instead, commission a load of stree' "art" is throwing away a glorious chance of publicity that would continue for years.

Just answer this question. What would be more likely to generate a thousand newspapers and TV images and a million home video clips and snapshots – some concrete, plastic and tin street art or a star parade of showbiz legends?

How about George Formby leaning on a lamp-post in Talbot Square, Les Dawson leaning on a railing near the Grand, Charlie Cairoli sitting on a bench opposite the Tower, Frank Randle swigging a bottle of ale outside the Manchester Hotel?

And, dare I suggest, we do the job properly and have Morecambe AND Wise? They played six summer seasons in Blackpool, probably amounting to around 1,200 performances (How many did they do at Morecambe?)

I would suggest that in towns and cities of note, local birth has not been a requisite for honouring legends with statues.

BARRY BAND,
Bournemouth Road,
Blackpool.

What about a town museum?

MANY commendable letters have appeared in The Gazette regarding the proposals to erect statues to our past idols such as Les Dawson, Charlie Cairoli and George Formby, etc. Most of us have derived a great deal of pleasure from these artistes but what of the younger generation?

A town like Blackpool with its historical beginnings, its aviation and theatrical past as well as the tourism element is surely worthy of a museum.

I am sure that the aforesaid statues could be incorporated in such a museum and that the many admirable organisations in the town can assist to get one off the ground in this millennium year. If Kirkham can do it surely we can.

RON GALE,
Preston Old Road,
Marton.

TEASERS - Answers Below - No Peeping - Cheat Fair.

1. How Long will an eight day clock go without winding?
2. What weighs the same no matter how large it is?
3. What was the highest mountain before Mount Everest was discovered?
4. Two children were born on the same day to the same parents but they are not twins. Why?

ANSWERS

1. It won't go at all.
2. A hole.
3. Mount Everest.
4. They were triplets.

N. West Meetings

North Wales Branch - British Legion, Penyffordd (10 miles from Chester) Every first Friday in the month. Tel Dennis Lee on 01244 544799 Adm 50p.

Liverpool - Broadgreen Conservative Club, Every 2nd Friday in the month - Ring Tom Bailey on 0151 289 1711 - Bring Your Uke

Werrington Branch (Near Stoke) at the Werrington Village Hall - Every 2nd Thur in the month. Bill Turner on 01782 304858.

Sale - Woodheys Club, 299 Washway Rd, Sale - Every 3rd Friday in the month - Ring Cyril Palmer 0161 748 6550 Adm £1.

Crewe Branch - Wistaston Memorial Hall - Every 4th Friday in the month - apart from Dec 19 (Tues) - Brian Edge on 01270 569836.

Westhoughton - The Red Lion Pub (Opp. Police Station) Ring Gerry Mawdsley on 01942 817346 - Every last Wednesday in the month. Uke Tuition.

Blackpool. SOUTH SHORE CRICKET GROUND, Common Edge Rd, Blackpool. DATES CHANGED TO LAST MONDAY IN THE MONTH. Tel Eve & Charles Stewart on 01253 76809'.

To receive N. West Newsletters by post please send a cheque for 50p plus 25p postage (or £2.25 for 3 months) - (£9 for the year) payable to S. Evans - Address below.

Please join in by sending your articles, stories, jokes, etc to Stan Evans, The Hollies, 19 Hall Nook, Penketh, Warrington WA5 2HN

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DON'T FORGET TO WRITE IN

