

THE NORTH - WEST

GEORGE FORMBY

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Specially Produced for the
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Newsletter 25 - We are now two years old and still going strong. This last month we have been busier than ever with articles from the readers and a number of reports have been used in the N. West press.

This month we have details of the Warrington Special Meeting and a report on the Pie & Peas Do at Crewe.

Three lots of poetry have come in including one from Harry - and a couple of old jokes! And Brian Edge informs us that Mr Wu is in danger of losing his job

Colin Wood wants to know where George's boat - Lady Beryl - is and we've some good reports on "Bananas." Plus we've got a couple of AMAZING FACTS!!! So read on

Snowballed!!!! It really was amazing how news of the intended Warrington meeting filtered its way through the media. I was afraid to splash out on the publicity for fear of having the room over packed. However, we didn't need to push the boat out any more as the media did it all for us. All the local newspapers picked up on our appeal to raise funds to send young Joseph Collins to Florida, for healing treatment, and to swim with the dolphins, and thanks to the Liverpool Branch, Billy & Wally, of Radio City, made a number of announcements and appeals for raffle prizes. During 'countdown week' the phone was red hot with enquiries and offers of help.

There was plenty of talent at the Warrington Alliance Club! For the benefit of our three 100 year old World War One veterans, we gave the night a war theme.

Richard Longstaffe, who teaches the playing of the bagpipes in America, played a medley of old songs and Tom Meredith did his Al Jolson spot. Young Clare Moody was excellent with her Vera Lynn songs and again, Ethel Guest gave a great impersonation of Gracie Fields.

Brother Ronald, our Industrial Monk, gave a few words on his experiences with George & Beryl and spoke of the time when the Goons, especially Spike Milligan, taught him how to play the uke. He said, "If they can play a uke, anyone can."

Naturally, we had plenty of George Formbys to fill the bill but the hardest task was trying to fit them all on the programme, at the same time avoiding having too many Formby players following each other. The drawing of the raffle appeared to take hours to perform.

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As usual we had the old hiccup at the beginning of the programme when the War Thrash tape suddenly decided to change half a key and the players had to bail out. Anyway, the rest of the show went very well and John Hickinbottom added a touch of quality with his keyboard and organ backing.

Came 10pm and the old veterans had to be home and tucked in bed. A guard of honour was arranged as they walked out of the hall. There was a great atmosphere as the old war songs were belted out for them. "It's A Long Way To Tipperary" and "Pack Up Your Troubles" never sounded better and the scene of those old veterans leaving the room brought a few tears. They had thoroughly enjoyed their evening.



♪ It's a long way to Tipperary ♪

Members of the World War 2 Soc. form a Guard of Honour for the veterans of 1914 -18.

This wasn't purely a GFS meeting but a combined effort from members from the George Formby Society, the Alliance Social Club, the British Legion, the Allied Forces Association and the World War 2 Society. Due to their generosity we received about 25 raffle prizes. A huge Mickey Mouse and a very large bottle of Chianti wine was auctioned off for £75 and in total about £630 was raised to help send 11 year old Joseph Collins on the healing trip. Two Liverpool members, Fred and Mike, presented the money on stage, to Joseph's father, Jim Collins.

Special Thanks to all who subscribed to the event and especially Ethel Guest who collected donations and prizes from her local area. Thanks also to Ken Smith, Tom Peddie and Ray Massey for their donations. It was a very worthy cause.

Granada TV - They are quite busy at the moment working on a couple of films that involve George. The first one is related to the T. T. Races on the Isle Of Man - for which they requested video shots. And the second one involves anything on George in the Warrington area. Will keep you up to date.

4 Re-united after 45 years -

In 1991, at the Warrington GF Exhibition, we had the honour of bringing together several members of the Formby family who had not met for many years. Jeffrey - Frank's son - had become completely detached from the clan and had no idea of where any of the family were living. The exhibition soon helped him to become re-united with Louie and other members of the family joined in on the occasion.

At this latest (May 30th) Warrington meeting we were very pleased that we were constructive in bringing together Ethel's (George's sister, now living in S Africa) son, Michael, and his sister, Geraldine. They had not met each other since they were children, when the family split and mother and father went their parting ways. This was a wonderful occasion for them both and they were highly delighted with the meeting.

It all started with Jeffrey and Michael contacting each other through the Internet. Michael was flicking through the pages on his computer and he noticed the George Formby information page, which was set up by Jeffrey Formby Booth. He immediately sent a message through and Jeffrey replied. We hope that this is the beginning of a long lasting friendship in the Formby family.



George's family meet again: Geraldine and her husband Tony (left) are re-united with her brother Michael. Tom Meredith does a wonderful mime act to Al Jolson and Richard Longstaffe - over from America - treats us to a few sing-alongs on the bagpipes.

The Formby Story - by Stan Evans part 14.

At the age of seven George left school and was sent to join George Lampton in Newmarket to be trained as a jockey. It was his father's ambition that someday he would manage the family racing stables. Although he was fond of horses and competed in many races, he never rode a winner and consequently there was concern for the boy's future. To encourage George, it was planned that he would be given the opportunity to ride a sure winner in the hope that it would break the spell that was holding him back. The plan was put into operation and George was urged to put all he had into achieving his first win.



Alas it was not to be as young George fell asleep in the stables and didn't wake up until the race was over. There were times when he felt sad, especially when news or photos of his well known family appeared in the press. Many times he attempted to run away from the stables to get back home to his home in Warrington. George taught himself to play the mouth organ and whenever he felt low he would relax himself by playing tunes to the horses.

George, the oldest of the seven surviving children, was sixteen when his father died. This was a bitter blow to him as he was at a cross roads in his life and uncertain of his future.

GEORGE TELLS HIS OWN STORY

I was becoming too heavy to be a jockey and although I'd tried hurdling (and didn't like it because there were too many bumps) I thought the family might have some ideas on what I should do to earn a living. I returned home.

The stage was the last thought in the family's mind. But fate has a funny way of handling things. A pal of mine was going abroad and sailing from Southampton. I went to see him off. On the journey back I spent a night in London and called in on a show. Having a fondness for music halls I chose the Victoria Palace. I was thoroughly enjoying the show when a comedian came on and used all my father's material, word for word and the same mannerisms. I felt very queer and went outside. I walked half of London thinking of what I had just sat through in the theatre, and what was I going to about it. It was a very big decision to make but I decided there and then that if anyone was to impersonate my father it had to be me.

I didn't return home to Warrington but instead went to Birkenhead to see J D Clarke, the manager of the Argyle Theatre who had been a close friend of my father's. More next month.

Bid To Help Little Joe, By George



● Turned out nice . . . Fred and friends with Joseph, parents Jim and Eileen and Lord Mayor Cllr Margaret Clarke. Below, Fred and Joseph. Pictures: ANDREW TEEBAY

By Jayne Atherton

A GEORGE Formby fan is helping a disabled Liverpool boy get a chance of a more normal life.

Cerebral palsy sufferer Joseph Collins, 11, of Kirkdale, cannot walk or talk, but his family hope a holiday swimming with dolphins in America will help him break through the communication barrier.

Plight

They are raising £10,000 to go to The Dolphin Human Therapy Centre in Florida, where the thrill of meeting the mammals in water has encouraged brain-injured children to talk.

Now Fred Walker, 60, who also has learning difficulties, has offered to help out after hearing of Joseph's plight.

Mr Walker, who belongs to the Liverpool branch of the George Formby



Society, has taken on the cause as part of his own rehabilitation into the community.

Now ukelele-playing members of the Warrington-based appreciation society - George Formby was living in Warrington when he shot to fame - are holding a concert to help Fred.

The concert, with songs

from George, Vera Lynn, Gracie Fields and Al Jolson impersonators, will be at the Alliance Social Club, Orford lane, Warrington, on Friday May 30 at 8pm - four days after George would have been 93.

Stan Evans, of the George Formby Society, said: "We are very proud of Fred's effort and want to do all we can to help."

Muriel Roberts wrote- Some time ago I read your address in the Lancashire Evening Post. As a life long fan of George Formby I wrote a poem of which I enclose a copy. I hope you enjoy reading it.

By George

Way back in the thirties, when things were pretty grim
A talent burst upon the scene, we all remember him
A ukulele he would strum and sing of Mr Wu
A saucy wink, a cheeky grin, a Lanky through and through

His songs were often naughty in a carefree sort of way
But how the people loved it, when he began to play
Auntie Maggie's Remedy was always sure to please
A cure for all that ailed you, a miracle indeed

The time came when Great Britain could no longer stand aside
Our boys and girls in uniform were scattered far and wide
But George was there, a breath of home, no lamp posts there for leaning
With wicked ease he wowed them with his song of window cleaning

Peace returned in forty five, the world was changing now
But still he weaved his magic as only he knew how
Unrelenting sell out tours he took them in his stride
He knew the score, but carried on, a trooper till he died

He was no mean entertainer, this man of great renown
He never failed to lift us whenever we were down
We miss him still, but when they play his songs from 'way back when'
We know the sun is shining cos' it's turned out nice again.

Muriel Roberts

Wonderful

Uke For Sale - J G Pape, on 01282 695034 has a luxury uke/banjo for sale. The arm, top, side and back is covered in mother of pearl and the fittings are brass. The badge on the peg head reads "The Broadcaster - J & A.M. London. It mainly needs a new skin and strings. There are nine tension rods. Mr Pape considers that the instrument is worth around £450.

Harry to cigar smoking boxing manager: "It's a long way from the dressing room to the ringside, Mr Solomon."

BOXING MANAGER: Don't worry lad I don't expect you'll have to walk back!"

This driver broke down in Warrington - he burst out in tears



ABOVE: Turned out nice again! - Kevin Blanchfield, Martin Fowell, Dennis Lee and Ray Davies of the George Formby Society entertain an Extravaganza audience.

N.Wales - by Dennis Lee. A huge thank you to all who attended our June meeting which turned out to be one of the best ever. Due to a fire at the Penyffordd Legion we had to arrange a temporary venue. The cross keys at Buckey was ideal and Alan, the landlord, welcomed us with open arms. About 40 people attended and 19 players took part. Young Gareth Sumner (11) and Frank Murphy (6) did us proud with their duet of Lamp Post. Our loyal contingent arrived, as usual, and delighted us with Dr Jazz.

The improved standard of all players has been remarkable over the past 12 months which goes to prove that practice pays off. Our group is now the proud owner of a quality, professionally made banner and thanks to Stan Evans for arranging to have it made at a very reasonable cost. It adds that touch of colour to the meetings. The Cross Keys room was smaller and more intimate than the one we use at the Legion and consequently the meeting was more informal. To achieve a similar atmosphere at the Legion we need to reduce the size of the room and prevent people sitting at the back of the back. A good solution would be to put up screens across the room and I would like to hear if you have any suggestions on how we can obtain them. Please ring me on 01244 544799 if you can help. See you on July 4th at Penyffordd. Dennis

Craig Tynsley popped in recently and brought a three stringed Russian balalaika. It is very much like a banjo/uke but the noisy end is triangle shaped - not round. It is made completely from wood with a small sound hole. The tone of it is quite merry. Does anyone know how to tune the thing, and how to play it? If you do please give me a ring on 01925 727102 Stan.

Don't Forget to Send A Letter for the Newsletter.

George Formby Calling - Part Three. . .

So Beryl and I walked, arm in arm through the brightly lit West-end streets of London and back to our hotel. It was great to hear the occasional Lancashire accent or two from passers by. It made us feel at home.

It's great to be "Top of the bill." My dad had been one for years - yet he never wanted me to be one. I have often wondered why. Maybe he had his reasons - As a youngster I never saw my dad on stage and even if I ever tried to poke my nose through the stage door he would tell me to clear out of the theatre.



I must have had a hankering for the stage as I could never pass the stage door without peeping in and getting a smell of the grease-paint. I had no claim to fame except that I prided myself on playing the mouth-organ pretty well. 'Frinstance, at Christmas-time I discovered that while my pals sang carols, and were rewarded with half-pennies, I could play some of my father's popular songs, like "Standing At The Corner Of The street" and be showered with pennies.

Sir Harry Lauder was a great friend of my father's. They appeared on the same bill many times together. But it was not until Beryl & I were just starting out in variety, as a double act, that we were privileged to meet him. One night we were appearing at a minor hall in a northern town, while Sir Harry was the sensation of the town at the local big theatre. Actually there had been a matinee at the big theatre and I had joined the pit queue (standing room only) to see the great idol who was my father's friend. When the crowds came out - with tears streaming - I considered going around to the stage door and making myself known. After all, he knew my dad and I'd often heard him talk about his friend Harry Lauder. I got to the stage door and when I saw the large crowd of folks waiting to see him, decided not to try. He was probably too busy to see me. I went back to the digs singing one of Harry's songs and wondering how it would be to have crowds of fans waiting for your autograph.

That evening, when Beryl and I were in the theatre, we got a nice surprise. We had just finished our act when the call-boy announced that there was a gentleman to see us. A couple of seconds later Sir Harry Lauder's face popped round the door! "I knew your dad and now I want to know you." We shall never forget that conversation and especially his parting shot to us, "Nail it down," which meant "Look after your money." George Formby

Harry went into the bank and asked the receptionist to check his balance! She pushed him over!

Simply Amazing!

Back in 1991 we held a Formby Exhibition at the Warrington Museum and I was completely gobsmacked when a man, a visitor to the exhibition, told me that soon after the war his mother brought him to see this sun-bronzed man, in a white suit, performing the ceremony of re-opening this very room where the exhibition was being held. Apparently the war office had taken occupation of that room during the war and after it was handed back they decided to have it re-opened. The man who opened it was George Formby. Unbelievable!!!

FILM CONTRACT

Well, here is another amazing fact. During the war years, when George was serving with the Home Guard, he and Beryl had to go along to meet a bunch of film directors to sign a film contract. They chose the very same room, in the Blackpool Wintergardens, where we hold our meetings and in exactly the very same place where the shop was originally set up. Unbelievable!!!



The above photo of George in his Home Guard suit, and Beryl, was taken just inside the main door of the Foyer Lounge room where we hold our GFS meetings. Now there must be half a million square feet in the Wintergardens and they chose this very spot! Amazing!!!

Harry got stung by some bees! They charged him £5 for a jar of honey!

Song and dance for George



Special celebration... from left war veteran Ted Rimmer, aged 99; Gracie Fields soundalike Ethel Guest; organiser Stan Evans, of the George Formby Society; veteran Eddie Brown, aged 101, and Berliner Lydia Koenig.

DG102-9.

WARRINGTON'S resident George Formby expert, Stan Evans, scored a military coup when he invited three World War veterans to an evening of music and song composed by the world's most famous ukelele

player. Veterans Ted Rimmer, Leo McCormack and Wilf Walworth - who have a combined age of 299 - were among the VIP guests who celebrated what would have been George's 93rd birthday.

11 Youngsters

Priority was given to the 3 young players at the Warrington concert meeting. Clare Moody delighted the crowd and so did Gareth Sumner and Richard Cunningham. Richard's family were keen for the boy that they travelled a round trip of 160 miles to be with us. There was a time when we would have seen as many as 15 or 20 youngsters at our meetings - wanting to play like George. They must be encouraged.

Is Mr Wu's Job In Jeopardy? - By Brian Edge.

'He sat down, those hot irons he didn't spot 'em, he gave a yell and said "Oh My! I've gone and scorched me . . . singlet, Mr Wu, I'm telling you, he's in the Chinese navy now!'

When I recently performed 'Mr Wu Is In The Chinese Navy Now' everybody laughed, but according to Tim Butcher, the Defence Correspondent of the Daily Telegraph, the life of the Chinese laundry men aboard Her Majesties ships is anything but funny.

Ever since the mid 1930's Hong Kong Chinese Laundry men (Mr Wu's) have lived on the lower decks of all the warships working in high temperatures and heavy humidity, scrubbing starching and pressing Royal Navy uniforms. They rarely learn English but often stay on the same ship for longer periods than any of the crew. In some cases in excess of 10 years. They are paid by the seamen and officers and are provided with food and accommodation. These men have been worried about their future when Hong Kong is handed over to China but it seems that the new contracts which have been signed by the Ministry of Defence may mean that they will retain their jobs albeit under the control of new masters. *Do you know Brian? My computer won't accept the word 'Singlet.' I wonder why? It was a very common word before they called it a vest. Just goes to prove that computers don't know everything! Thanks for the article.*

Almost another S.O.S. I was just about to appeal to the Newsletter readers for the words to "I'll Tell Me Ma," which is a wonderful little Irish uke song - popular some 50 years ago. I'd already asked the old ladies at the weekly get-together and they all stared at me with open mouths. "Never heard of it," they replied. However, they all knew the song at the Liverpool branch and Cyril Palmer produced a copy out of his bag. How's that for service? - Couldn't believe it! Thanks Cyril - Stan.

Peniffordd - Check with Dennis Lee before setting out. The British Legion have had a fire and the June meeting had to be quickly switched to the Cross Keys pub, Buckley. It is possible that the Legion will be back to normal for the July meeting - but check to make sure.

Ken Smith - who was featured in the last issue, walking, busking and collecting funds for the children's hospitals, wrote to say that his target is £5,000 not £50,000 as printed. As he said, "You'll have me busking into the next century!"

Sorry about the error Ken. Fortunately it was a newspaper cutting that was printed and not mine. Thanks for the donation to the Joseph Collins fund. It was very kind of you.

Got quite a shock at Blackpool - Harry, who has got himself a brand new banjo, actually left the room to tune the instrument up. His old banjo never needed tuning. Anyway he looked real smart on stage.

What a Let-down for Jim - For the past few years Jim Bramwell, with his uke, has been plugging "Uncle Joe's Mint Balls" at every meeting and handing out a few to his friends. However it appears that the Japanese are not too happy with the size of Uncle Joe's Mint Balls so they've told the little Wigan company to reduce the size - otherwise they'll stop buying them.

I think we'll have to send Jim - and his uke - over there to sort 'em out! - Cheek!

And Derek Ball - who is a bit of a mint imperial told us the story that his daughter, who plays the guitar, has started to learn the uke. She rang up at 11.30pm one night and said, "How does 'Bananas' go?"

Thanks to all who rang offering to send the words to "Be Like The Kettle and Sing." It's a great little war-time uke song. Thanks also to Derek Ball for sending them in.

I Like Bananas because they have no bones . . . Didn't I tell you?

Bananas have become the country's favourite fruit since we started singing about them. We should have arranged a contract with the importers.

Since we starting singing "Bananas" we have discovered that

1. They have formed an official Banana Fan Club
2. Linford Christie almost lives on bananas
3. The scent of bananas beat 21 other fragrances to take the world's favourite smell
4. The banana plant is not a tree but a herb
5. In parts of Africa they eat up to five kilograms every day.
6. Manchester United players eat them with jam sandwiches before a match
7. The England Rugby Union team eat them at half time
8. Henry Paul, the Wigan Rugby League ace, eats up to ten a day

Bananas contain only about 80 calories - no fat - and 90% natural sugars which are quickly released into the bloodstream for an instant surge of energy.

So this is why George sang "I Like Bananas."

Daily Mail 16th June 1997 **In reply to a debate.** One reader had previously wrote claiming that George performed all his own stunts in "No Limit." Which was not correct - see page 8 of the last issue.

QUESTION: Did George Formby ever ride in the TT races?

TO EXPAND on an earlier answer, although George Formby offered to perform the stunts in the film No Limit, the insurance company and director Monty Banks wouldn't allow him to. In 1935 George was virtually unknown outside the North and in no position to insist. In the first scene he was replaced by a stunt rider who drove through a garden fence. Other stunts were performed by experienced TT riders.

After his great success in the North in the budget films Boots Boots and Off The Dole, the plan was to match him with Florence Desmond, a big star in the South, to launch him nationally. But there was tension between the two when Florence didn't get equal billing.

Riders and extras went on strike when Monty Banks was sarcastic to them and mean with their pay. The taxi driver, who got three guineas a day, stopped work when he heard that a donkey had been hired at £5 a day and free beer.

Stan Evans, Editor, George Formby North West Newsletter, Penketh.



George: Stunted ambition

MY father Bert Gerrish was taken to the Isle of Man by Monty Banks to double for Formby in his stunts for No Limit, including riding up the front steps and out of the back door of the Ballacrane Hotel.

My father's cinema career spanned more than 20 years, performing stunts on horseback, swimming and diving, in cars and motorcycles and doubling for many Thirties and Forties stars including James Mason (whom he resembled) in Odd Man Out, but the ten days he spent on the Isle of Man were the best paid.

Roger Gerrish, Beckenham, Kent.

ARTICLES

About 8 readers rang to say that this article (left) had appeared in the Daily Mail but no-one had sent it in. Also they couldn't remember the date. Please! cut out anything you read about George or Music Hall in general. Or I'll send Harry round.

Could George Really Look Into The Future?

George must have been aware that one day there would be a big political upheaval in Parliament. He must have known that there was going to be a Chancellor who would be a bachelor at the same time as a Prime Minister, with a young family which would necessitate making space in number 11 for some of those living in number 10.

Rubbish! You say. O.K., but why else would George have sung the song 'It Might Have Been A Great Deal Worse.' and include in the lyrics:

'Brown went home and caught young Blair cuddling his wife in a chair!' Of course we all know that it was Blair's wife that Blair was cuddling, not Brown's, because Brown hasn't got one. (a wife that is). He was a clever chap our George! There is no truth in the rumour that Harry Stanford wrote this article.

Thanks to Brian Edge for the article. Of course George could look into the future. Or so he tells us in the first line of "Horoscope."

Jonathan Baddeley supported Crewe at Wembley recently in their successful attempt to win promotion, but I am told by a reliable source that his request to play "Abide With Me" on his uke, in the centre circle, during the pre match build up, was politely turned down by the Wembley management. They have just got no imagination some people. Keep trying Jonathan.

Quote of the month - Pete Smith when he was about to perform with Dennis Lee at Crewe: "Dennis is so well dressed it makes me feel that I've just come off the garden."

And Mary Atkinson at the Crewe meeting: "I never believed it possible that I could ever make so many new friends as I have since I joined the Crewe branch.

And I thought that the quote of the month was Harry offering to do a quick spot at any of the branches. He starred again at the Liverpool meeting - sang three songs and told jokes for about 20 minutes. Has anybody got a shepherds crook?

Quote from the Jasper Carrott trial BBC1 TV 10th June. Said Carrott in his own defence "As George Washington said 'I never tell a lie', and as George Bernard Shaw said, 'I always tell the truth'. And as George Formby said 'It may get sticky but I never complain!'"

Error in the last issue - and only John Guy spotted it! Due to the computer doing funny tricks the Werrington report was printed twice.

Pie & Peas at Crewe - it really were a reet good do!

The highlight for me at the Crewe May Concert was the monologue given by Lottie Stanford. What a wonderful lady she is, despite her handicap she just presses on. I've seen her climbing up and down two or three flights of stairs and up slippery metal fire escapes in the pitch dark. She really is wonderful. The recital she gave was the third of Stanley Holloway's 'Albert' monologues which we have not heard before.

During the first thrash those on the stage sang "Happy Birthday" to Adam Smith who was sixteen the previous day and the members all signed a card wishing Jenny & Pete Smith every good wish for their Silver Wedding Celebrations, the following day.

Arnold Osborne performed his song in a smart cowboy outfit and looked really great on stage. Mary Atkinson, at long last, made her solo debut at Crewe. We had waited a long time for her to pluck up courage and we were delighted with the performance. Mary sings good, plays good, and by golly she certainly looks very good. Mary is working hard on some of the songs and by the time you read this I'll bet you will have heard her perform at least one of them.

It was nice to see Arthur & Mary Newton, Les & Margery Edwards and Mr & Mrs Davis and hope they enjoyed the evening.

There were no less than 28 ukes on the stage for the thrash which reduced the audience down to a mere 33. This was a record according to our MC, Jonathan. By way of a change from the usual tea & biscuits there was a Pie & Pea supper laid on in the form of a thank you to everyone for their stalwart support. Now everyone enjoyed the pie & peas except Pam Baddeley. Unfortunately, after she'd had a quick bite, and 3 peas, Jonathan announced that her raffle ticket had won a prize. When poor Pam came back clutching her Quacky Duck prize she discovered to her dismay that somebody had consigned her juicy pie & peas to the waste bin! All say Awwww!

Thanks for the report Brian. I know how Pam feels! Someone nicked my specially prepared vegetarian dish at one of the Crewe meetings. Incidentally, Lottie's handicap - do you mean Harry?

Janet's Jokes all the way from Milton Keynes ...

Introducing Mr & Mrs
Pipe and their son Duane

How do you get an
elephant upstairs?
In an ele-vator!

What do you call an underground
train full of scientists?
A tube full of smarties!

What terrorises the deep
blue sea and plays a ukulele?
Jaws Formby!

What do frogs drink?
Croak-a-cola!

George at the Sydney Opera House by Grant Higgins

and submitted by Jeffrey Formby Booth.

Dear Jeff,

My recent silence has been a product of something that you might find interesting. Every year, the Sydney Opera House stages a major concert event, "The Last Night of the Proms" (a concept with which you'd no doubt be familiar) with a full symphony orchestra, a choir of 100, the grand organ, for a paying audience of 2700 people. My brother and I have written the scripts for this show for a few years now, and this year the Opera House asked me to do (that is, perform) a George Formby tribute in the production, as it salutes all things British.

Well.....scared isn't the word for it. The other soloists in this concert are usually people from the Australian Opera, or 'name' musicians, (not banjo-uke players!) but I decided that opportunities like this come along once in a lifetime, and I threw caution to the wind and took it on.

As a kid I dreamed of such a thing, and I knew I'd never forgive myself if I chickened out of it. Many weeks of daily practice later, I emerged last Saturday night on the concert hall platform, and performed "Little Ukelele", "Leaning on a Lamp Post", "Bless 'Em All" and "When I'm Cleaning Windows.". And I'm happy to report that the crowd reaction was wonderful. Aged from about 18 to middle aged, they laughed in all the right places, they joined in clapping and singing along (from Lamp Post onwards) and (to my astonishment and, still shock!) they called for more at the end. And how nice it is to perform those songs with a large orchestra of about 65 top musicians behind you. I figured that I could carry off a gig for a small crowd, but a concert hall with an orchestra was new and untried territory for me, and it frightened the living daylight out of me. But the happy result made it well worthwhile. I'm pleased to say, it "turned out nice again".

So George's memory and songs are very much alive in Sydney, and I think that even you might be surprised at the youth of some of the audience who knew the lyrics. I won't give up my day job (I'm a writer), but the enjoyment of George Formby tunes sure brings out things inside of me that I didn't know were there.

I hope hearing of this gives you something of the pleasure I had in performing it.
All the best, Grant Higgins

Another Miracle - Eh Bah Gum, Hallelujah or Yakki thingi, it's got to be one of Stan's miracles when he says the Crewe July meeting is to be held on July the 22nd. It should be Friday the 25th July. However Stan says he was just testing whether we read the magazine, well we all do every word, don't we?

Once again you have passed the test Brian

Penketh Carnival - Don't forget to come along to the Penketh Carnival on Saturday July 5th at about 1.30pm. We are supplied with a marquee, with about 50 chairs, and a generator to produce power for the tape player. We always have a great day out so you are welcome to come along.

Wigan Pier - Also we have our Wigan Pier meeting on Sunday 3rd August. Again the time is 1.30pm. All are welcome.

Have you ever had one of those nights? I was invited to give a lecture at a Magic Club. All went well with the preparation and a script was carefully produced for the occasion. Arriving at the club, it gave a sense of walking into the Glasgow Empire - the comedians graveyard. On entering I was informed that due a visit from the fire authorities we had to use the small pool room - which was domineered by the pool table at one end. Also we had the blast from the juke box in the next room. .

On unpacking my cases I discovered that I'd forgotten to pack my script - disaster!!!! It took some 20 minutes to settle the members down, which meant that we were running late, and I'd just started my lecture when, suddenly, the door burst open and the bar steward arrived on the scene with "drinks all round". One of the members was celebrating his birthday and we were treated to a free drink. Loads of excitement followed and everybody joined in with "Happy Birthday To You," at which point I said "hold on a minute" - taking my uke out of the case - "and we'll get the right key." At that point everybody had finished and I was left singing "Happy Birthday" on my own - amidst loads of chatter. The excitement was so wild that nobody gave two hoots whether I gave the lecture or not. It was a total disaster! As George said, after his debut at Earlestown, "I died the death of a dog!" Certainly no miracles that night!!!!



Royal strum-along

☐ THE sight of the Queen Mother clapping along in time as the gormless-looking entertainer George Formby strummed his ukelele, may seem somewhat improbable. But it was a regular event behind Palace doors, I learn, when the late Lancashire comedian was in his Fifties heyday. According to the Queen Mother's former butler, Peter Russell, she frequently invited Formby for private performances. "George was one of her favourite entertainers," says Stepney-based Peter, who has broken his silence on life as a royal retainer. As secrets go, the QM seems to have got off lightly. Mr Hickey only hopes that Munnoo will follow Peter's loyal example should he ever be tempted to disclose the secrets of the Hickey household.

Wish
you'd
sent
some-
thing
for
this
space

Many thanks to all who contributed to this Newsletter. All articles are appreciated

Lady Beryl - sent in by Brian Edge. . . Colin Wood works in a boat yard and he was surprised to see the following advert in a boat magazine - dated August 1944. He wonders who owns Lady Beryl now.

Well I can tell you that this particular boat belongs to Ted Partin, or at least it did up to 1992. It was for sale at the time at around the £30,000 MARK. Ted came to visit us at the Warrington Exhibition, in 1991, and later he sent in a few photos in the hope that we could find a buyer for him. Ted joined the GFS when he came to the exhibition but I'm not sure if he is still a member. *And now Brian and Colin are getting in on the miracles act! They claim that the above advert appeared in a magazine, in August 1944, but the boat was only built in 1950. Now that is a miracle!*

LADY BERYL



Late George Formby's. A lovely old 43ft cruiser. Built by Graham Bunn, 1950, diesel Ford six engine, teak hull and mahogany superstructure. Thames.
£55,000.
Tel: 0252 621297

Harry - a 75 year old joke from an 85 year old Joker . .

NEWSBOY:- 53 people swindled - 53 people swindled.

PASSER BY:- I'll have one of those, thank you. Hey, this is yesterday's paper

NEWSBOY:- 54 people swindled, 54 people swindled

And here's Harry's little poem:-

One day I took a stroll in the country
And I had walked about a mile
When passing a stranger I gave him a smile
The stranger looked surprised, but looked back at me
And as I went on my way I could clearly see
That that one smile would make the day for me

I'm getting a bit worried about you Harry. You must stop smiling at strange men.

Another of Harry's jokes - No matter how far you stroll you only move two feet.

Anneka Rice - Did you see the "Treasure Hunt" programme on Sky TV on Thursday 5th June? The programme was made in the Isle Of Man and involved Anneka chasing various clues, by helicopter, along with her cameraman and pilot. During this particular show she mentioned the T.T. course where the motorcyclists ride every year and then burst into song with "If there's one thing that I like it's riding around on a motorbike, I'm a speed king" and claimed that it was one of her favourites. I was amazed that she knew the words.

Memories in verse . . . George Formby immortalised Wigan in one of his songs which had the line "In My Little Wigan Garden." But so did a Wigan man who wrote this when a prisoner of war in Germany.

His wife, Hazel, who lives in Cheadle Hulme has sent the poem entitled "Hometown"

This is a tale about a town of which you must have heard
A town in good old Lancashire, believe me it's superb
Its streets may not be paved with gold, its lights may not be gleaming
But it's the place where I was born, of which I'm always dreaming

It's not a great industrial town, with buildings standing high
It hasn't got a Town Hall Square, but that is by and by
But what it has is a rugby team, a pier and all that's in it
It even claims George Formby, who made the film "No Limit"

Walk down the street and you will find, fish and chips that can't be
beaten

And I have heard that in our town, the first bag of chips was eaten
The clogs and shawls have given way to dresses made with laces
The girls themselves are beautiful - they too can set the paces

And though this gallant waterway, has seen the days go by
Its name will live forever, for the Pier will never die
One day my dream will turn out true, although it is a big 'un
For very soon I will return to my home in dear old Wigan.

Cliff Royle , veteran 74 year old cyclist and walker of the N Wales Branch will be riding with young, and quiet Kevin Blanchfield as part of his "team" on the sponsored Bike Ride from London to Paris to raise funds for the British Legion Poppy Appeal. Any sponsorship offers for this worthy cause will be most welcome.



My wife says that although I'm a slow starter I can keep going all day - whatever that means.

I've no idea what she means, but it sounds interesting. You can ring Cliff on 01928 731088. Incidentally, Cliff, I think your playing is coming along very well. You were better than ever at Liverpool, and we were very pleased to see you. Hope your friends enjoyed the night.

N. West Branch Meetings and Future Dates

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

Blackpool Branch - Wainwright, Hornby Rd, B/pool - Every 1st Sat. in the month - Tel Eve Stewart on 01253 768097 - Future Dates: Jul 5th, Aug 9nd, Sep 6th, Sep 27th (NOTE DATE CHANGES IN AUG. AND SEPT. - NONE IN OCT. Adm £1 with Buffet. All are welcome.

Liverpool Branch - Broadgreen Conservative Club - Every 2nd Friday in the month - Ring Tom Bailey on 0151 228 9769

Sale Branch (New Venue) - Woodheys Club, 299 Washway Rd, Sale - Usually every 3rd Friday but subject to date change - Ring Ken Ratcliffe on 0161 430 8290. Every 3rd Friday in the month. Adm £1.

Crewe Branch Wistaston Memorial Hall - Ring Brian Edge on 01270 69836 Future dates - Fri July 25th, Fri Aug 22nd, Fri Sept 26th, Fri Oct 24th, Tues Nov 25th, Thur Dec 18th. Adm 50p.

Warrington Alliance Sports & Social Centre, Evans House, Orford Lane, Warrington - Stan Evans on 01925 727102 - SPECIAL MEETINGS ONLY

Werrington Branch (Near Stoke) at the Werrington Village Hall - Every 2nd Thursday in the month, Ring Bill Turner on 01782 304858. Future dates - July 10th, Aug 14th, Sept 11th, Oct 9th, Nov 13th, Dec 11th.

To receive the N. West Newsletter by post please send a cheque for 50p + 25p pp. (or £2.25 for 3 months) payable to Stan Evans - Address on front cover. Branch organisers can order a minimum lot of 10 copies for £3 plus 60p postage and you are welcome to sell them to help raise branch funds.

Deadline for next issue - 15th July

So as George would say -

"Get Cracking"

Support Your Newsletter

Apologies to Derek Ball but the Werrington report missed the deadline date. - George said "Get Cracking!!!!!"

