

THE NORTH - WEST

GEORGE FORMBY

Newsletter 41

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Specially Produced for
George Formby Fans

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Welcome to Newsletter No. 41.

And it gives great pleasure to report that all the N. West Branches are in extremely good health and showing increased numbers at the meetings. Crewe and Peniffordd have been successful for some time but Blackpool and Liverpool are now having packed houses. Thankfully Sale has improved tremendously over the past months and Werrington is maintaining the usual 40 odd attendance. So we are all doing very well!



BLACKPOOL - Charles and Eve Stewart - who couldn't attend the last Blackpool meeting - had a great surprise when they turned up for the last couple of hours. They dashed back from the Great Yarmouth expecting a sparse audience but were amazed to find the room full and a great atmosphere.

LIVERPOOL - Liverpool had the greatest night ever when every square foot of space was occupied with enthusiastic members. 14 players, including our friends from Crewe, entertained the packed room and it was the first time we've ever had to chase round looking for extra chairs. But the highlight of the night was most certainly the playing of John Shreeve, who's spider type fingers dazzled the whole audience. It is unbelievable how those magical hands produce such a wonderful sound. If only John could smile and radiate personality he'd be a much travelled, uke playing world beater.

POLLARD'S LETTER

In the last issue I reported that the Autumn 98 Vellum (now jokely dubbed The Venom) featured a letter from Peter Pollard which upset the majority of N. West members. Well this letter has sparked off a feeling of unity and camaraderie amongst the N.W. members and a sense of support for each other. In fact his letter has done the world of good for the N. West. We have now - thank goodness - become alive! At long last!

SOUTHERN IRELAND TRIP - We've had no luck whatsoever with the trip to the Irish Republic - not one of the six coach companies or agents have come back with anything to offer. Even the organiser of the Busking Festival failed in supplying any details as promised - he even offered to send a video of the event, - which never arrived.

ISLE OF MAN - Anyway, - are we downhearted? - not on your Nellie - because we've been in touch with an agent in the Isle Of Man who is keen to organise hotel accommodation, plus theatre shows, radio, tele, coach tour of the island, film show of "No Limit" etc. More news on this as it comes in. Sounds great!

George Formby Story

Part 31 by Stan Evans

Basil Dean, the film maker recalls:- “George volunteered to work for ENSA during the war years and did tremendous work in the factories and underground stations etc. True to his character, when he was sent to the largest munition factory in the country in Chorley, Lancashire. He was so keen on his war effort that he spent two weeks there entertaining and living in the factory giving three or four concerts every day. He was dedicated.”



G & B working hard on the Middle East Tour, - look how thin Beryl is.

Canon George Fox recalls:- “I was a senior Chaplain in the 8th Army in Normandy. We had no concert hall so we set up a table for him and the soldiers would sit on the ground. On the Sunday he asked if he could come to the church services and accompany the hymns on his uke. He practised the three hymns until he found all the chords and Stand Up Stand Up For Jesus sounded perfect.

George recalls:- When we landed in Normandy we were asked by Montgomery to go to the River Orme to entertain some soldiers who had been held for 56 days without relief. The following morning at 6.30 we drove with Basil Dean and the driver until we were almost on the German front line. It was most unusual as I had to play to an audience that was hidden in the bushes.

HOME GUARD - When George wasn't entertaining for the war effort he was a dispatch rider in the Home Guard, which caused a problem. His postman was also a rider in the same unit and he was a corporal and George didn't like the idea of his postman being his boss so he asked his CO, who was a tailor, to make him a uniform of officers material, - and include two stripes. The following Sunday he turned up as a fully fledged corporal and boasted that he was the only feller to promote himself. More Next Month.

All Change At Crewe - It's All Gud Stuff

Sixty two attended the September Concert and amongst them was popular Arthur Newton who was back on the circuit for the first time after his illness. Whilst Arthur is taking it easy, he is certainly looking his old self. He was glad to be back with his many friends who warmly greeted him upon his arrival. Arthur thanked everyone present for their many kind wishes during his illness. The fact that he took his place in the thrash is a good indication that it will not be too long before he is back giving solo performances.



It was nice to have Malcolm and Glynis Palmer with us for the first time. Malcolm has been a GFS member since 1972, and is organiser of the Stourbridge Branch. He has been a regular contributor to the Vellum over the years. I hope they enjoyed their evening with us.

Des Redfern came along proudly hugging the shield which he received at the Blackpool convention as winner of the "1998 Stanley King Song Writing Competition" with his "Changing Trains At Crewe" sang. Des got a real ovation and by popular request sang the winning song for us. As a encore Des introduced his song entry for 1999. He doesn't let much grass grow under his feet does he? This one is all about a "toe rag" of a Blackpool Traffic Warden and is really very funny. With a little bit of tidying up it looks like a potential winner. Well done Des you have brought a bit more fame to our branch.

Stan Evans did a magic trick for us and then entertained us with his world famous Newspaper Tearing Trick. As young Jim Bramwell wanted to know how it was done Stan invited him on stage and told him to do everything that he did. Jim, wearing the most comical hat (which for some reason would only fit sideways) and with his trousers rolled up above his knees, made a reet pils of it! Stan performed the paper tearing slowly whilst singing that lovely balled "Hurt" and Jim followed as best he could but ended up more like "Sally The Salvage Queen" than a magical paper tearer. Mind you, everybody agreed that he has a fine pair of knees! He is a grand sport our Jim, and his jokes are getting better.

Being Master of Ceremonies is not at all an easy job. Since last January we've two, Alan Chenery and Carl Basford who alternate every month with each other. None had experience of the job when they first accepted the challenge and they have both worked hard at being 'front man' and the 'front of the house man', It was Alan's turn on stage this month and possibly his best performance to date.

'Privet and Edge' were back in action with their special rendering of that old

favourite 'Pasadena' and Ron and Walter gave a unique duet on the bones which went down well. Ron later aided Connie in a duo 'Connie & Ronnie' - What next!

Our special thanks to all who donated the excellent raffle prizes - one or two were held over until next month's meeting. The tables were decorated by Connie with Union Jacks and along with the enormous Union Flag on stage and Stan's flag at the rear we were looking really patriotic. George & Beryl would certainly have approved as no-one was more patriotic.

The additions in our sound system arrived the day before the concert so Colin had quite a job sorting things out for the night. The stage monitor and the new sound mixer looked quite impressive but by the time you read this I'm sure that Colin will have everything worked out.

Finally a special thanks to all who helped in any way with the concert. Those who helped in the afternoon and those who helped to clear up after the event. However great or small, it is invaluable to us as we couldn't manage without it.

Many thanks Brian. It was another great night when Jim's bonny knees stole the show. He had to turn his hat to the side to stop the peak dropping over his eyes.

Variety!!! - I was handed a copy of a theatre bill by Malcolm Palmer and on it was the cast that was playing at the Hippodrome Theatre, Dudley.

- Heading the bill was George Formby assisted by Beryl, followed by:
- Arthur Worsley - with dummy, Charlie Brown
- Robb Murray - Juggling Star
- Hackford & Doyle - Wood & Wind, mostly wind.
- The Lucerne Skaters - Thrills on wheels
- The Sensational Myrons - Perchists (are they birds?)
- Fred Hearn presents his Krazy Komedie Kirks.
- and to top it all - Olsen and his Wonder Sea Lion.

Just received
 delivery of a
 new Photo-
 copier which
 is the seventh
 since starting
 to work on the
 Vellum in 1988

So our little touch of variety is nothing compared with George's. We don't mind a bit of variety but we are drawing the line at performing seals!!!

Ludwig Copy For Sale -

Graham Greenfield is selling a Gordon Markendale Ludwig (copy) Banjo Uke - nickle plated - crown cut outs - in beautiful condition, better than the originals - excellent sound. With case. £600. You can ring Graham on 01283 223074. Tell him you read it in the Newsletter. - He's not a bad lad!

You've Forgotten the Newsletter - Again!!!

Ray Davies does a grand job helping to organise the Penifordd meeting. To save time going on stage he shepherds the next artist to sit on the form near to the stage. Some are so nervous that he refers to this as waiting on Death Row.

A Prayer for the Old Uns

Lord, you knoweth that I am growing old so please keep me from boring the back-side off everybody in sight by giving them the full pedigree of every ache and pain in my body.

As you know Lord, I love to entertain in a small way, so please help me to refrain from telling the same jokes and singing the same boring songs I sang 20 years ago. I need a new script Lord.

Teach me to realise that I can be wrong, - well sometimes, - not often. And help me to listen when they tell me of their aches and pains, - well not often.

Teach me to get to the point instead of going all round the houses giving minor details and finding I've forgotten what I was talking about in the first place.

Amen

George Moore of Hull rang. George, who does a very good impersonation of our George playing the uke, has appeared on TV several times and he's just completed a show with Freddie Starr called "Beat The Crusher" - which is to be shown on Sky One TV. He's not sure of the date but he thinks it could be January. Look forward to seeing it.

John Taylor - He's a lad!!! His favourite car, a Vauxhall Caviller has suddenly given up the ghost and failed its MOT. Anyway he went to one of his local car auctions and took a fancy to one which was the same model. He was feeling a bit tired on the day and having to wait several hours for the car to come up made him feel worse.

Lot number 150 came up and his friend nudged him, "Did you buy it?" "No" said John, "I fell asleep."

Uke Wanted - D S Griffin on 01744 604519 is looking for a uke banjo so please give him a ring if you have one for sale.

Anniversary - At the next Liverpool meeting we will be celebrating our 6th Anniversary so something special will be taking place.

And Another Anniversary - Peniffordd will also be celebrating their 5th Anniversary and it has been requested that we all turn up in something very colourful.

Wanna Learn Magic? Then if you intend doing the "Newspaper Tear and Restore" trick you must beware of using the Wrexham Evening Leader newspaper. At the Wainwright meeting I demonstrated this particular trick along with Jim Bramwell and got into a holy mess when the newspaper wouldn't tear downwards. It kept on insisting on splitting side-wards. The demonstration was a failure. So use the Daily Express.

Don't Let Old Age Hold You Back -

Just heard from 80 year old Joe Taylor of Newcastle upon Tyne. His family gave him a surprise 80th Birthday Party at the Newcastle United Stadium and he is such a lively lad that they are planning his 100th at the same place.

Joe keeps very busy entertaining at the Fellowship of Services meetings, and, because he has a broad Lancashire accent, does a good impersonation of Stanley Holloway: "Sam, Sam, pick up tha musket."

Joe is also a member of the Royal British Legion Male Voice Choir who regularly give concerts at Residential Homes and Community Centres. On October 8th they will be giving a Charity Concert in aid of the Children of Ethiopia and some months ago they raised £2,000. 00. for the same cause.

Joe finishes by saying that he has often considered putting his feet up but then feels that keeping going is the secret of long life.

I agree with you Joe. It's wonderful being active after retirement and keeping the brain cells moving. I try to learn a new song every couple of weeks plus keep up to date with all the computer activities, - it's extremely hard at times but well worth the effort once you've mastered it.

Joe sends a few quotes:-

Someday my boat will come in and with my luck I'll be waiting at the airport.
Cleanliness is next to Godliness but only in the Irish dictionary
Bad spellers of the world untie!

Whatever did we do before we discovered nostalgia? Thanks Joe.

Brian Edge Rang - "You keep making a error in your Sale report. Dick & Vera's surname is "Eaves" and not "Leaves." Well I'm not sure what it is Brian because Alice Cronshaw sits near Vera at the meetings and in her report she writes "Leaves." Anyway we'll soon find out. Come on Vera - Help us out

September Sale Meeting - by Alice Cronshaw.

After celebrating at Penyffordd, Liverpool, the Alliance and finally at Sale, Stan Evans had an unlimited session of parties for his 70th Birthday. We presented him with a card signed by all and a gift from all his friends at Sale. Next one Stan is your 80th.

Cyril Palmer and Stan did an excellent job of compering the meeting and Liverpool's Stan Watkinson entertained us with his 6 string banjo and "Shanty Town." Our thanks to Brian & Connie Edge and Joan and Jim Bramwell for their support. Harry did us proud with his jokes - we could put on a 4 hour show with all our comedians. We are pleased that our Sale meeting is improving each month and appreciate members like Alan & Hilda Southworth and Dick & Vera Leaves travelling such long journeys. Ivy Lockerbie was back on the door again but unfortunately suffering from a sore throat.

Many thanks Alice and thanks also for the wonderful surprise, - especially the Bananas Card, - Great!. I'm looking forward to my 80th.

A Little Pill -

How does a little liver pill, - when you are ill
Know where your liver is, eh?
How does it know the correct thoroughfare
Cos it always finds its way?
It's got no legs to walk there - no!
Got no eyes to go with the flow
But it never gets lost and knows where to go
So how does the little pill know?

Hill Crest
George family home has finally been sold and I understand that it is on the market again at £285,000 - almost twice the original price
More news later

Janet & Dave from Milton Keynes, are holidaying in sunny Spain and having a marvellous time with 7 days of thunderstorms, rain and heavy winds. However, the sun has just peeked round the corner so there's a chance that it'll brighten up yet. Well we hope it does J & D.

Many Thanks to all who responded with the words to "Sipping Cider Through A Straw." However we are still a little confused because both the tape from Kath Hammond, of Sheffield, and the sheet music from Alan Chenery featured "Sipping Soda" and not Cider. However, all will be revealed as soon as poss. There's no doubt about but if you put a request in the Newsletter it will bring response.

Don't Forget The Newsletter

Penyffordd October Meeting by Cliff Royle

There was a big panic at the meeting when it was realised that we were once again going to run out of pasties. Geoff Shone had to go out to buy more and Leslie Lee rustled up extra sausage rolls. Following a spate of publicity we were inundated with visitors which was caused by Dennis Lee becoming Chairman of the GFS and being interviewed on Radio Wales. He's also been involved in giving a talk in a children's school and had his "Photo In The Press." The hall was almost full for an excellent night, - where else could you get a good night's entertainment and a big pasty for 50p? Of course, one person who shall be nameless tried to get in for half price by claiming he was a pensioner.

Apart from the usual turns, we had a first class Puppet Show by Alison Nadin, assisted by mother Jean and supported by Mr Frank Woods, their tutor. Frankie was a professional entertainer until ill health restricted his activities. However Alison now has use of the puppets:- Chicken, Skeleton, Violinist, a Victorian singer, and our dear George, who brought the house down.



Young Natasha celebrated her birthday and we were pleased to have a couple of our more recent members perform solo: Brian Wright did a small sketch and played "Maggie" and Alan Whittaker did a solo turn of an old favourite "Putting On The Style." Cyril Palmer delighted us with "Delila:" which was interspersed with some off stage ribald remarks and noises. All good fun.

We were delighted to have Sam Bass with us again and we really appreciate the support given by Crewe, Sale and our other many friends; including of course Stan Evans. Talking to new member, Steve Ragsdale, it transpired that at the recent Wintergarden's Convention something unusual happened. He wanted a new bridge for his uke and when he visited the shop he discovered that he was a long distant cousin of Dennis Taylor.

Our next meeting is on Friday the 6th of November when we celebrate our Fifth Anniversary. It is hoped to make the night a little different and everyone is asked to wear something very colourful; and do what they can to make the event a great success.

NOTE: Due to circumstances there will NOT be meetings on Jan 1st and Feb 5th. However there WILL be a meeting on Friday January 29th to cover both months. *Thanks Cliff. You are doing a fine job. Not every Editor has a star reporter that worked with L S Lowry.*

You've Forgotten the Newsletter - Again!!!

Family Favourites

ALTHOUGH she will be forever remembered as a Cockney charlady, Irene Handl's background was far from the East End.

She was born in well-heeled Maida Vale, in North-West London, in 1901.

The daughter of an Austrian banker and a French mother, it was said that she based her Cockney accent and stage persona on conversations she overheard between staff at her parents' house.

She came to acting at a relatively late age. Educated at a variety of schools, she travelled widely in her youth.

After her mother's death she stayed at home to look after her father until she was 35.

Laughter

The story goes that one day her father told her, "You must go out into the world, get a job and meet people. Now you are lonely and have no friends. Life is passing you by."

Irene replied, "I am happy as I am." But her father insisted, and Irene said, "Well, perhaps I could try to become an actress."

She enrolled in a course at the Embassy School of Acting in Swiss Cottage. The school had its own theatre, and it was here that she made her first stage appearance, in February 1937.

Within three weeks, she was on stage at Wyndham's Theatre in the West End. Her role, as the tongue-tied parlour-maid in *George and Margaret*, was described by one commentator as, "A part which lasted exactly three minutes and one in which she was not called upon to utter a single word of dialogue."

"Irene Handl played Beer, the world's most forbidding parlour-maid, whose appearance in the closing minutes of the play brought down the curtain to gales of laughter."

Film companies clamoured for Irene's services, but *George and Margaret* ran in the West End for two years, and the theatre's management would not release her.

During the War, she played a number of character roles, mainly at the Garrison Theatre in Salisbury, and made her film debut in 1940 in *The Girl In The News* with Margaret Lockwood and Emyln Williams.

Many more stage and film roles followed. She appeared in *The Belles of St Trinian's*, and as Peter Sellers' wife in *I'm All Right Jack*. She was Tony Hancock's forbidding landlady Mrs

Based her Cockney accent on parents' domestic staff



Cravatte in *The Rebel*, and Mrs Hudson, the housekeeper at 221b Baker Street in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*.

During her career, she played most of the classic stage comedy roles, from Mrs Malaprop to Lady Bracknell. She was a notable Madame Arcati in Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*.

Long run

Irene was also a very accomplished writer. She published two highly original novels, *The Sioux*, in 1965 and *The Gold Tip Pfitzer* in 1966.

She actually began *The Sioux* in the 1920s, when she was living in Paris, but she put it away for many years.

She only returned to it in the early 1960s, when she was starring as the lovable Cockney charlady in *Goodnight Mrs Puffin*.

"It was a long run," she remembered, "and

when I saw it stretching out before me I saw there was a danger of going stale, which I loathe. I thought I would build on this novel which would be so different from what I was acting; both would spark each other off."

She had a busy career in television, including appearances in *Hancock's Half Hour*, but will probably be best remembered for the 1970s series *For The Love of Ada*, in which she and Wilfred Pickles played an elderly couple finding romance late in life.

Irene Handl died in her sleep in 1987.



Irene Handl who played Maggie Turner and gave George problems in Get Cracking

LOOKING BACK

with Les Gent



George Formby, his little white dog, and the Bolton dentist

NO doubt you remember my recent stories on the Chinese laundry ('oh no, not more', I hear you cry! Don't worry, read on).

Mrs Sheila Crook, of Crossdale Road, Brightmet, recalls that during that saga, it was mentioned that George Formby visited a dentist lower down Derby Street (there you are, what did I tell you. Nothing to do with the laundry!).

"This was 68 Derby Street," she writes, "and the dentist was Fred Healey. His wife Dinah was my mother's cousin (she was also named Dinah). Fred and Dinah had a daughter, Joan, who also became a dentist working in the Blackpool area."

"She recounted to me this tale of George Formby a couple of years ago."

"George had his teeth attended to at Fred's surgery for as long as Joan remembered right until Fred's death. He used to have a little white dog in his act to begin with, and took it all over with him. Joan would be very disappointed if she missed seeing the dog when George came for his dental treatment."

"When George was playing the Grand Theatre in Bolton he used to "dig" at the Duke of York pub in Derby Street, on the left-hand side going up towards Daubhill, and Beryl, who became George's wife, stayed there too."

"Joan cannot remember which of them had toothache first, but it was before they were married, and one recommended the other."

"George used to ask Fred to make their appointments at the same time so he could date Beryl later - George's white limousine would be parked in front of the surgery."

Thank you for those details, Mrs Crook. A good story to get your teeth into!

A Lovely Story-from the war years -

by Margery Larose

While serving with the ATS in Margate, with REME, I met a dashing young Scottish - Canadian soldier. I got a posting to my home town I invited him home to meet my parents. "You'll love Manchester," I told him. "It's a great place."

On the day of his arrival, mother and I stood in the doorway to greet him. We were talking to other neighbours and we all agreed that he made a magnificent picture. He was jauntily marching down the street, buttons shining bright as gold, boots gleaming, and to top it all, a fabulous kilt to complete his uniform which was absolutely immaculate. Reaching our doorway he came smartly to attention, halted, turned right, gave a cheery salute, stamped his right foot on the ground and disappeared, along with a horrible crunching sound.

COVERED IN DUST

The smiles of welcome frozen on our faces as he rapidly disappeared from view. After a bewildered moment, we realised what had happened. The coal grid, which was just in front of the doorstep had given way suddenly under his weight, taking him and the surrounding pavement to the cellar below!

We flew in panic down the cellar steps where we found him sitting astride a mound of coal his beautiful kilt in ruins, his glory dimmed by a fine film of coal and cement dust which covered him from head to toe.

There was a glazed look in his eyes as we helped him up the steps into the kitchen, there to render first aid. Fortunately, apart from bruises and scratched legs, he seemed little the worse. After a short rest and a hot drink, he recovered his dignity a little, but seemed in rather a hurry to leave. I remember his parting words as he made a slow but rather painful exit, "I'll certainly remember Manchester."

We were unable to use the front entrance for over a week whilst repairs were carried out, and I had to stand a lot of good-natured chaff from the neighbours who came to the unanimous conclusion that it was the best afternoon's entertainment they had had for some time. Marjorie Larose.

What a wonderful story.

Old Stamps - Christmas is coming so please save your old stamps for Ivy Lockabie, who does a grand job collecting the money at the Sale meetings. Ivy also does a grand job in collecting stamps to raise fund to buy guide dogs for the blind, - a very worthy cause. So please save your old stamps.

Don't Forget The Newsletter

Dear Old Ken Platt. It was announced that the popular radio comedian, Ken Platt, has died at the age of 77.

Ken was born in Leigh, Lancs, on February 17th 1921 (a few days after the death of George Formby Senior). On leaving school he worked at a local wire cable firm but soon got tired with the monotony of the job. He then turned to entertaining at Sunday School events and working men's clubs playing the ukulele and imitating his idol, George Formby. He also entertained the Combined Services in Italy, Greece and Austria.



In the 1950s he turned to radio comedy and his famous catch-phrase was "I'm not taking my coat off I'm not stopping," which was repeated by almost everyone in the country. He worked on "Radio Fanfare" - "Workers Playtime" - "Spot The Tune" - and was spotted on TV as a delivery man in the popular "Liver Birds" show. In 1990 Ken suffered a stroke.

George in Cinderella - At the Liverpool Meeting, well known personality Steve Laramie got up on stage to give a few words on when he worked as a Call Boy at The Liverpool Empire Theatre. George was playing Buttons in the pantomime, Cinderella and one occasion - half way through the show - he went out through the back door to take some waste to the bin, and he met George who was taking a breather in the fresh air. "Bah Gum lad," said George, "I could eat some fish and chips."

Steve also remembers that George left one of his ukes on stage, after his act, and Steve claimed it. He still has the uke which he's offered to bring along to the next meeting. Sounds interesting!

S. O. S. - Dennis Lee is looking for the sheet music (or tape) of the old favourite music Hall song "When Father papered the parlour." So please look among your old songs and give Dennis a ring on 01244 544799 if you find it.

Three Specials at Warrington in 1999

At the Alliance Social Club

on Friday April 30th, Friday July 30th and Friday October 29th when we hope to get in fine form for the demand for shows during the Millennium Year. We want plenty of well-rehearsed acts (be professional) with touches of variety which blend in with George & Beryl's era. So get practising for 1999.

Ken Smith of Leeds, writes . . . On a recent visit to Scarborough I struck up a conversation with a man called Gordon Crossley with what he claimed to be George Formby Senior's ukulele.

Now I thought that GF senior didn't have, or played, a ukulele! However Gordon claims that he was given the uke by a woman named Lillian who was part of an acrobatic trio. The trio accompanied GF on a world tour and Lillian was the pianist. They played at the Grand Hotel in Scarborough for some years. She was last known to be seen in the Shrewsbury area and if still alive will be an old lady now. The other acrobats were called McGill. What do you think.

Thanks Ken. Now I do know that GF senior didn't play the uke in his act, but Louie claimed that there was always a wooden uke knocking around the house for any the family to pick and play. Through a magnifying glass it looks very much like a "Kumali," which was made by John E Dallas. Were they operating before 1921? - we must find out. Has anyone got any information on Dallas?

Young Frank Murphy - Did you see him on TV? Seven year old Frank appeared on Channel 4s "Big Breakfast" show "The Old Codgers" on Tuesday the 13th October and the presenter went into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

Big Breakfast rang up with a couple of queries: (1) A simple George Formby question that Frank could answer but the public would have a struggle with. Reply:- Name the film where rides a racehorse and wins the race. - Reply: - Come On George.

And (2) can you think of something that would be suitable as a prize if Frank gets the question right. - Reply: - A jazzy waistcoat - I suggested that they give John Beck's wife a ring and she'll make one up to size, - which they did - a brilliant jazzy waistcoat with "The Old Codgers" sewn on the back.

Frank was asked the question and after a moment's pause he said: Carry On George. "Right," shouted the presenter. Now you can either have this lovely brand new waistcoat or this computer game.

Frank thought for a few seconds and then decided that although he is a keen George Formby fan he'd get more fun from a computer game than could from a waistcoat. He chose the game and the presenter then realised it was a stupid question to ask any youngster in this day and age. Naturally they'd choose a computer.

Anyway, Frank was wearing the waistcoat at the end of the show so chose right.

SNIPPET FROM THE APRIL 1973 VELLUM

by Monty Montgomery

George Formby was never a jazz man, but I claim that he was born with a sense of rhythm which cannot be required. You have either got it or you haven't

Sometime people ask me "How does George play the breaks?" Almost as if you learn one break and that's it, listen to his records and you will find that no two are the same. You don't believe it? Listens again and compare the difference between "Grandad's Nightshirt" and "You don't need a licence." How different can you get? George could have been a brilliant drummer, but would have proved too adventurous to sit in a disciplined band.

Have you thought about George's solo in "Hitting the high spots?" Nothing extraordinary you might say but on the first beat of the bar following the solo he manages a triple stroke! Impossible, unorthodox, unmusical, against all rules, maybe, but it made him the finest rhythm man in the business.

Article from the British Railways magazine

"Penfriend" Sent in by Brian Edge.

WHEN I'M CLEANING WINDOWS

Eric Atherton worked on the LMSR from 4th May 1927 where he started in the goods department at Albion Station. Having various posts throughout his working life, Eric retired on Feb 9th 1978 from his post as District Inspector at Birmingham New Street. Although he had some very happy days on the railway Eric says that he now has the best job he's ever had - making banjos and ukuleles.



Eric turned his little garden shed into a workshop where he retreats in the winter months for "banjo therapy". The instruments he makes are all hand made, right down to all the intricate metal work and marquetry.

DON'T GET OVER EXCITED SEARCHING THROUGH THE PHONE BOOK

One instrument can take up to three years to make and over his 20 years retirement Eric has made six instruments and is now on his seventh. Eric is now 85 years of age.

Looking for a song? Try the Newsletter.

Frankie Woods - a Stage Pro. of Yesteryear

What a wonderful night we had at the October Penyffordd Meeting.

A special act was performed while Frankie Woods - now sadly in a wheelchair, - watched his life's work of puppets being used by his assistants Jean and Alison with a blacked out stage and spotlight. They were great! One of the puppets (about three foot tall) was Billy Uke Formby the ukulele player who sings George's songs. He played his uke and danced while George sang on tape.

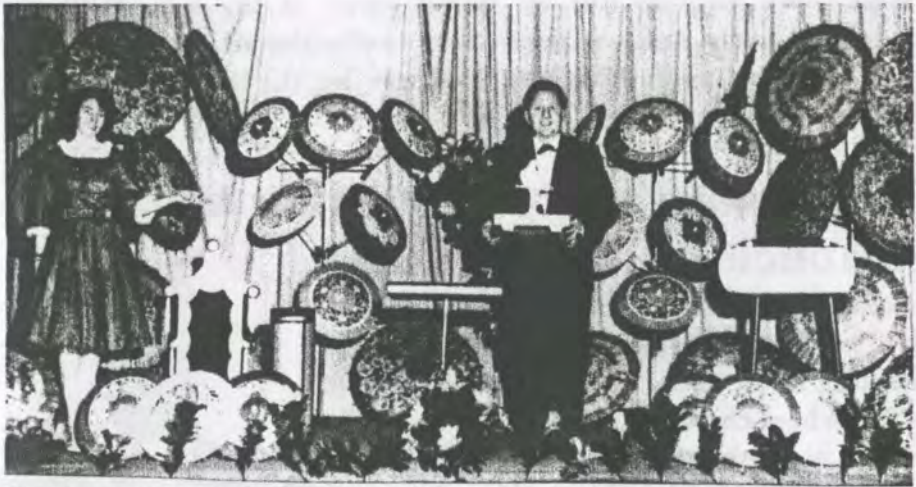


Frankie has always been interested in entertainment and his main influence in the early years was George. He learned to play the uke, Balloon Modelling, Magic, and of course, the Marionettes, - which he made himself. He has seventy-two in total.

With the help and support of his late wife, Barbara he performed semi - pro. before the war and after being de-mobbed from the Royal Marines continued to do so whilst working in the silk mills in Macclesfield.

In 1953 they turned professional and the first summer season was in the Pavilion Gardens at Filey in Yorkshire. They were there until 1956 and during the winter they worked at private functions, Masonic Halls, the Buffalo's, weddings, birthday parties, and theatres up and down the country. They appeared with many artists including Billy Uke Scott.

They also worked for three years at the Blackpool Tower with children's entertainment and then got a contract with Pontins Holidays, the first season being at Morecambe in 1960. From 1966 to 1973 they were at the Blackpool Centre (we called them camps then) and in 1974 moved to the Prestatyn Centre where he wrote a song for Sir Fred Pontin called "Thumbs Up Book Early" which he recorded with the Tony Strudwick Band for their promotions. On the reverse side was another of Frankie's songs, "Ragtime Girl of



The above photo shows Frankie and his assistant with a stage full of various coloured umbrellas. It is wonderful to see the great lengths he went to put on his act. A tremendous amount of work which he deserves credit for

Mine." Altogether he wrote over 90 songs, - mainly in Formby style and used them in the act.

Sadly he lost Barbara in 1982, just at a time when they were beginning to slow down and enjoy the free time, however, with the help of his friends he manages to carry on with the private parties and has completed a final show at Pontins.

In 1983 he bought a Newsagents Shop in Macclesfield which he and his friends ran for eight years. However, in 1992 he suffered a stroke which left him with damage to the left hand side and with his+ speech. The worst effect is not being able to play the uke or do the magic etc. but he is very grateful for the forty - odd years of doing something he loved. He was there in the best years when all the theatres were still standing and all the music and performers were all live.

Last year, at the Peniffordd meeting Frankie met his old friend, Sam Bass, who they worked with 35 years ago at places including the Birmingham Hippodrome and the Crewe Lyceum Theatre.

Frankie has now moved to Rhyl and lives on the sea front. The

seventy-two puppets are all stored away in the loft along with shelves of magic, boxes of music and a collection of ukuleles. He has one that was made specially for him by the late Jack Abbott. Frankie has many happy memories.

But you can't keep these Wheelchair lads down!

A Touch of Magic - Eva & I

booked to see Wayne Dobson, the Magician, at The Queens Hall, Widnes. At the opening of the show Wayne was pushed (on a tall wheel chair) to the front of the stage where he explained to the audience that he suffers from Multiple Sclerosis but, even so, he will ensure that we thoroughly enjoy the show. Being a member of the Magic



Circle I can usually spot how the illusion is done but I must admit that Wayne and his three lovely ladies had me completely baffled. They were great and we could have watched them for another 2 hours.

One particular trick was the lady in the square box with umpteen swords thrust through from every angle. Now we all know that there has got to be a space inside big enough for the lady to squeeze into, - where she can dodge the swords. But when Wayne does the trick the swords are so close together that even the smallest child couldn't escape them. It was a really wonderful show and well worth going to see.

Actually Wayne has almost finished this year's tour: - Sept 22nd Thameside Hippodrome, Ashton under Lyne, Sept 23rd Lyceum Theatre, Crewe and Sept 24th The Queens Hall, Widnes, followed by shows at Horsham, Chesterfield, Bedworth, Clacton on Sea, Epsom, Swindon and Hayes.

Wanted: Any articles on the old stars.

Please send em in for the Newsletter.

Talking about Shows - Croft Village Hall near Warrington, are putting on a MUSIC HALL type of show on Sat, 21st of November to raise funds for the village. The show will consist of a Tommy Cooper look-alike (no it's not me) named Tiny Ted, who does an excellent magic act. A comedian (Ken Dodd's friend) - who is very well known (but I've forgotten his name) is doing a comedy spot. I will be doing about 4 songs. Anyone fancying joining us is welcome to ring one of the organisers, Tony Bridge on 01925 763916. Seats £8.50

More On The Theatre - The management at the Queens Hall, Widnes are doing great work in promoting various old time shows. On Thursday 29th October, 2.30 and 7.30pm, they are presenting "The Flanagan and Allen Story" and a tribute to The Crazy Gang. They publish it as:- A Trip Down Memory Lane, Laughs, Songs, Show Girls, and a number of songs made popular by Flanagan and Allen. Seats £7.50 - £6.50 for concessions. Matinee all £5.

MINSTRELS - Also, on the previous day, Wednesday the 28th, at 2.30pm, British Stage Productions are presenting a "Minstrel Show" and invite all to come along to sing all the old favourites. Seats £5.00 - Concessions £3.50.

Dennis Lee - Just been reading the Wrexham Evening Leader newspaper which featured a huge picture of Dennis, - our new GFS Chairman - playing his uke. However the caption underneath the photo read: "TRAGIC WASTE OF AN ALCOHOLIC'S LIFE."

So what's it all about Dennis? What have you been up to. We are very worried when we read things like this in the newspapers and you are all full of beaming smiles. Is this the reason why you keep disappearing every few minutes at the meetings? We all want an account of what is going on in the next Newsletter. Well folks it'll be very exciting in the next issue when Dennis explains what he's been up to. Poor Leslie, I'll bet she's got a lot to put up with.

Just Received a copy of a receipt dated Jan 8th 1947 issued by

Scorchers Music Shop (Established 1795)

59/61 Corporation St, Birmingham.

The receipt was made out to Mr Prince, 139 Towbrooke Rd, Small Heath and it was for a

1 Dallas Ukulele Banjo	£6. 14. 6d
Deposit	3. 0. 0

Balance	£3. 14. 6.
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Paid in full on the 22nd of Jan and received by P Edwards.

Very interesting. I wonder if Scorchers are still in business? I'm sure that John Guy will be on the phone in the next couple of days. He'll know.

N. West 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 - Wainwright, Hornby Rd, B/pool - Every 1st Sat. in the month - Tel Eve Stewart on 01253 768097 - Future Dates: - Nov 7th, Dec 5th. Adm £1 with Buffet. All are made very - very - very welcome.

Liverpool - Broadgreen Conservative Club - Every 2nd Friday in the month - Ring Tom Bailey on 0151 289 1711 Players Urgently Wanted

Sale - Woodheys Club, 299 Washway Rd, Sale - Dates are now settled - Every 3rd Friday - Ring Alice Cronshaw on 0161 727 9829 or Cyril Palmer on 0161 748 6550. Adm £1.

Crewe Branch Wistaston Memorial Hall - Ring Brian Edge on 01270 569836 Future dates - Fri 27th Nov, Fri 18th Dec. Adm 50p. Come early for a seat. PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL NEXT YEAR'S MEETINGS WILL BE HELD ON THE 4th FRIDAY OF THE MONTH.

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.

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. Organisers can order a minimum lot of 10 copies for £3 plus 60p postage and you are welcome to sell them to help raise funds.

Deadline for next issue - 18th Nov.

So as George would say -

"Get Cracking"

Support Your Newsletter

NEWS NEXT MONTH on the COACH TRIP HOLIDAY

