

THE NORTH - WEST

# GEORGE FORMBY

## Newsletter 46

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Specially Produced for  
George Formby Fans  
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# Welcome to Newsletter No. 46

Here we are at No. 46 and once again we have good news from the N. West Branch meetings. All are showing good attendance - Crewe counted 112 at Walter & Alice's Engagement Party and all the others averaged around the 40 mark - 66 at Peniffordd - so we are doing GREAT!

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**Hilda Hunt** - Alas the Society has lost its keenest George Formby fan. Hilda's husband,

Albert, rang to inform us that dear Hilda had passed away and he was deeply upset. Hilda contacted us at the time of the Warrington Exhibition and told us of her constant love for George and his songs and how she chased him from one theatre to another. Even in her teenage years she was attracted to Albert because he had the looks of George.



Hilda came to some of the meetings but recently she was confined to the wheelchair. The last time was at the Penketh Carnival when she bought a uke so that should strum out a few of George's songs. We are so terribly sorry Albert. She was such a kind lady and so dedicated.

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## INTERNET - AUSTRALIAN RADIO

Just heard from Radio Presenter Beryl Eissens who has a radio show in Perth, Western Australia. Beryl, who plays George Formby and Gracie Fields, is coming over to England the first week in June and staying at either Manchester or Bebington. We are hoping to get her to the Liverpool or N. Wales meeting.

We are also in the process of linking up with about 400 different Yellow Pages, - situated all over the world - so our little Newsletter should (I hope) be getting more feed back shortly. Or so the salesman said who sold the idea to us

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**Penketh Day Out - Sat 3<sup>rd</sup> July** and all are invited to come along to our usual Marquee Concert and buy a few items from our Car Boot Sale. If you've any stuff to get rid of please bring it along and - if it doesn't sell - you can take it home again. Well at least it's had a day out!



# The Formby Story

## Part 36 by Stan Evans

George was concerned that the opening of "Zip Goes A Million" in London, might be a failure. So he insisted on a six week tour in the north and midlands before testing London. The world premiere was held at the Hippodrome Theatre Coventry on Sept. 4th, 1951 and all was going well until a dispute arose between Equity and one of the main singers. They complained that Barbara Perry was not a union member and threatened to call a strike unless she joined. Miss Perry refused to join the union as a matter of principle, and once again George showed his lack of responsibility when he declared, *"I know nothing about it and I'm not taking sides."*



It becomes plain to see, throughout their married life, why George was so successful. After all, he had little more to do than entertain while Beryl carried the weight of responsibility. It also gives a clear vision - unlike the impression given by the media - why George needed Beryl at his side. She was, undoubtedly, his tower of strength. And what is more. She knew that she was!!!

The cast was instructed by the union to refuse rehearsals and not to perform, which was very serious for the show and for the producer Emile Littler. On the day before the opening the dispute was threatening to wreck the show, however Miss Perry signed the Equity application form, and paid her subs, but refused to speak to the press. Littler was still concerned that the late dress rehearsal might ruin the opening.

However, they had nothing to fear. The show, although ragged at times, was an instant success and this was because it had been built around George. The media claimed that the poor script was kept alive by George who constantly pleaded with the audience to stop shouting for "More" so that they could get on with the show. All the newspapers praised George and classed the show as a 'one man pantomime.'

George's mother, Eliza, who was at the opening show, said, "I would have liked his father to have been here to see him and to know that he has kept his name alive." Oscar Hammerstein, the famous American show producer, was there to see the show. He said, "Now that Sid Field is dead I would rate George Formby as your best and most characteristic comedian."

The build up to the London show was encouraging with advance bookings of £60,000. **MORE NEXT MONTH**

## All Records Broken at Crewe - Brian Edge

The February meeting was dedicated to the engagement of Alice Cronshaw and Walter Kirkland. Walter and Alice sponsored a splendid buffet which was enjoyed by the one hundred and eight members that supported the event. A record attendance.

Jon Baddeley took over the role of Master Of Ceremonies for the night due to the illness of Carl Basford.



Carl Basford

It was a great surprise to have the company of Frankie Woods, Jean and Alyson from Rhyl, G.F.S Member Honorary Jack Jones from St Helens, Mac & Millie McGee from Leeds, Tony, Elaine and Paul Kenny from Whittle le Woods, Alan & Hilda Southworth and Vera & Dick Eaves from Preston. We all hope they went home with happy memories of their evening with us.

It was a great variety show beginning with Des Redfern dressed as a Policeman giving an excellent performance of "On The Beat." Alice Cronshaw gave her own version of the Billy Uke Scott number "I've Got A Girl Friend" - Alice called it "I've Got a Boy Friend" and was backed by three swinging Charleston Girls - Hilda, Vera and Sheila, - a colourful act.

Stan Evans at last performed his Inverted Water Miracle successfully although Connie maintained that it was the way she held her mouth when she drew the water from the tap that did the trick! Jim Bramwell got some good laughs as usual and Bacup Comic, Les Pearson, also had a good night.

There was much flag waving when lovely Margaret Moran dressed patriotically in red, white and blue, sang a medley of "Keep The Home Fires Burning" - "There'll Always Be An England" and finished off with that great patriotic song, "Land Of Hope And Glory." Red, white and blue flags were handed out and it was quite a scene with everyone waving their Union Jacks. It is great to have Margaret on our stage, she is a lovely singer and a lady with a charming personality.



Margaret Moran

It was also great to have Jack Jones on stage at Crewe for the very first time and he got a really good reception from everyone. I am sure he went home with a good impression of our set up at Crewe. Thanks to Les & Stan Watkinson for bringing Jack along. The night ended with Mac McGee singing a medley of three great numbers. "Sweet Sue, Sweet Georgia Brown, and Some Of These Days." Thanks Mac it was great to have you with us.



Local chaps Bob & Arthur made a really nice gesture in making an ornamental wheelbarrow planted with multicoloured polyanthus. It is a lovely thing to have in ones garden. It was agreed to auction it off for society funds and after some keen bidding the barrow raised £30. Special thanks from all of us go to Bob & Arthur. It was a memorable night indeed. The society presented Alice & Walter a set of crystal cut glasses with everyone's best wishes for their future happiness. *Thanks Brian, it was a great night. Actually I counted 108 present but I didn't count the 4 Dolly Sisters who were round the back getting changed out of their stage costumes. - So, at least 112 were present.*

*But we'll have to improve Connie's stage presence! All these swanky TV Magicians have dolly bird assistants that prance around flaunting their short mini skirts whilst passing the jug of water. It's all part of the act to turn the heads of the audience while the magician secretly palms the Ace or stashes the rabbit up his sleeve. I don't stand much of a chance when Connie walks on in Gum Boots and Land Army gear! So come on! Give the lad a chance.*

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**Max Miller** - Just heard from Jack Strutt of the newly formed Max Miller Society. He was pleased with the tips sent to him on forming a society. He reports that a local ITV company has approached him regarding making a documentary to be screened around May/June. Max will also be featured in the Brighton Museum in around 18 months time. Jack is fortunate in having contacted Clive Allen who was Max's pianist and hopes to persuade him to take part in a show with a Max Miller impersonator.

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**Colin Wood**, our Sound Engineer, has been neglecting his uke practise lately and has been making a series of excuses. However when Colin sustained a hand injury at work which involved hospital treatment his first reaction was to say, "I wont be able to play at the concert next weekend!" Now knowing Colin, my first reaction was to say, "I'm not accepting that as an excuse Colin. You will be as fit as a fiddle on concert night!"

Well just imagine my surprise when I was summoned to appear before the Accident Sister at the hospital who told me in no uncertain terms that "Mr Wood must not play his ukulele until he gets the all clear from us!"

Now that is a true story. However I am pleased to say that Colin's injury was not as bad as had originally feared and that he will soon be in action again.

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**Crewe** has just purchased a "Samson Servo 550 Power Amplifier £300 to replace the old amp which was causing Colin Wood a few problems. The branch now has some excellent equipment to produce a better quality of sound - Brian.

## The Royal Archives - Another letter.

Dear Mr Evans,

Further to Royal interest in the ukulele and George Formby, I am afraid we would not have any information as to the musical tastes of the Queen and Princes Margaret, so could not confirm what music they may have enjoyed listening to in the 1930s and 1940s.

With regard to George Formby entertaining the Royal Family, I have found only one reference to his specifically doing so. In 1941, Lt. Col. Hon. Piers Legh, the King's Equerry, wrote to Mr Formby that Their Majesties would be very pleased if he could perform at Windsor. The suggestion was that the entertainment should start at 4.30pm. and last about 1 ½ hours; the audience would number around 400 - 500. The date finally agreed to was Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> May. A list of songs was sent for their Majesties to select from, and 9 were chosen, although it was emphasised that if this was too much strain, Mr Formby should not perform them all.

The songs selected were: Mr Wu; Window Cleaner; Lancashire Toreador; Leaning On A Lamp Post; With My Little Stick Of Blackpool Rock; Sergeant Major; It's In The Air; Bless em All; and You'll Be Far Better Off In A Home. There were no further details about this entertainment.

The only other reference I found to Mr Formby showed the Queen Mary also saw him perform in 1941. She lived at Badminton for most of the War, and on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1941 there was an entertainment for the birthday of the Duchess of Beaufort (Queen Mary's niece). George Formby and his wife were staying in the neighbourhood, as he was travelling round cities collecting money to help the bombed people of Bristol. He and his wife performed a comic piece, he played his ukulele, and his film "Spare us a Copper" was shown, which Queen Mary thought very amusing.

I fear, however, that this was the only information on this subject which I found, but limited though it is I trust it may prove of some interest.

Yours Sincerely, Allison Derret.

*More on the subject as it comes in!*

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**Freddie Starr** - Just been watching a video of an old recording of "Give Us A Clue" with Freddie Starr. Fiona Fullerton failed to guess the name of a particular film so Michael Aspel offered the men a point if they could name any of the actors in the film. "George Formby" shouted Freddie, but Michael wasn't satisfied. "No! - It was Robert Redford!"

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## More From George's Pianist

Herbert Halliday and Joe Cooper - CONTINUED

Joe: Did George smoke?

Herbert: Like a chimney, in packets of 200 and 400 at about 20, 30 or 40 a day. But in the 6 years I worked for him I never came across any of intoxication in either him or Beryl. But, like all others in high standing, they kept a good wine cabinet.

Joe: A popular story is that Beryl died from drink.

Herbert: I left them in 1952 and she died on Christmas day 1960. What happened in that interim period I don't know but she was in good health when I knew her. She had a good colour and everything and she took part in his pantomimes as Dandini. She would do a bit of Hoofing (dancing) in the show.

Joe: Did either of them read many books?

Herbert: No! The only books he read were Westerns! He was an adventurer, a light-hearted person. He would ring me and say "Have a look at this, educated one," but he would say it in a joking way. We were on the best of terms for the 6 years. He respected my ability as a musician and when we went to a new theatre, Monday night, first house, after we'd finished the first house I would go to his dressing room and say to him, "Well, how was the orchestra?" His reply would be, "I haven't said anything, have I? OK?"

Joe: Did he ever praise you? Or was he enthusiastic about things? Or was he dead pan about his own success or did he express pleasure?

Herbert: No! We were just a working partnership. In the theatre he would never go for rehearsals. He would tell me to have a word with the stage manager and I would go along on Monday morning to rehearse the orchestra to my satisfaction. I would work in the orchestra pit and when George came onto the stage on the Monday night that would possibly be the first time the conductor saw him, or anybody saw him. He rehearsed for recordings and broadcasts naturally, for sound levels etc.

George played on 6 instruments and I carried all 6 on my back. 3 on one side and 3 on the other. I carried them into taxis and buses. He didn't need to help me because it was part of my job and I got used to carrying them. He would use 4 in his act and have two on stand-by. MORE NEXT MONTH

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You've not sent a report for ages, is it something I've said?

## Brian Edge reports - Stan's New Banana Routine

Two months ago I hinted that Stan Evans was practising a new banana routine. At the time he was clearly not too keen on letting his secret out until his act had been perfected, but it seems that I am now able to reveal the secret of one of the most daring acts to ever grace the stage at a GFS meeting.

The act involves a strong coil spring which is cleverly attached to the buckle of Stan's belt onto which is affixed a bunch of five very large bananas. The skill required to perform the act is to be able to play the ukulele (Stan's version of the split strike) to sing "Bananas", and at the same time flexing the knees at precisely the right point in the song i.e. two beats prior to the word bananas appearing in the lyrics.



The timing of the flexing of the knees adds a third dimension to the act as this makes the bunch of bananas oscillate up and down which is hilarious from the viewpoint of the audience. However, it must be stressed that timing is vital, for if Stan should miss a beat this would result in him doing himself a serious mischief.

The sketch shows clearly how the act will appear to the audience. Grateful thanks for this impression must go to Joe McCaffrey, of our Liverpool branch, a truly great cartoonist is Joe and he is becoming a jolly good uke player too.

We all look forward to seeing Stan in action don't we?

*Thank you Brian and Joe. Actually the act started with a bunch of coconuts but it became extremely dangerous. I will unveil the act at the Warrington Special so don't miss it!*

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## Anthony Mason's Blackpool Summer Season

Beginning at the end of May, Anthony will be performing with his Jazz Band every Saturday and Sunday and on Mondays and Tuesdays each week he will be performing GF songs along with Steve King (Jolson) and a Bing Crosby impersonator. This is at the Tangerine Club, Bloomfield Rd, Blackpool.

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## SOUTHERN IRELAND CANCELLATION

We still have one seat left for a male to share a room with the coach driver. Contact either Dennis Lee or Stan Evans.



Quote from Ray Seaton and Alan Randall's biography

**"George Formby."** "Equity British re-issued "Keep Fit", "No Limit" - "Spare A Copper" and "Come On George." They were re-edited to a convenient length for playing in Double Feature programmes. When was this was done and are the copies that most of us have taken off the television the originals or are they the re-edited versions? If they are the latter, then perhaps there is a fair amount of footage that none of us has ever seen. Has anyone any ideas on this?

*Thanks Brian. I recall John Guy mentioning that Boots Boots and Off The Dole were cut down in length. He'll be on the phone as soon as he gets his copy. Hello John!*

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**Talking about Cinema** - I was 16 years of age and the war was on, which created a shortage of manpower, so during the day I worked at the local wire works, and at night at the Warrington Grand Cinema as 2<sup>nd</sup> Operator.

I remember once showing a full feature Laurel & Hardy film. I've forgotten the name but it was something to do with them being on a boat, (one of the Laurel & Hardy members will know it). Well this film was an eight reeler and we always joined them together in twos to make them into four double reels. This saved having to change from one projector to the other so often. I was in charge on this particular night as it was when Sunday showings first started and the 1<sup>st</sup> Operator had to have a night off during the week.

I screened the first double reel, which went well. Then the second double reel which also was fine. But then, I looked at the screen and discovered that the third double reel had been missed out and we were almost coming to the end of the film. What a tragedy! - And it was almost a full house!

The audience were actually watching the end of the film and all the middle bits had been left out. At 16 years of age I was in a right state! I very quickly laced up the third double reel on the other machine and switched over, - expecting the management to come charging up with loads of complaints. But they didn't!

After the show I stood near the exit listening for peoples opinions and surprisingly no-one was any wiser. Not even the management! So I kept quiet.

Thank goodness it was a Laurel & Hardy film and not a serious thriller. Just imagine they might have disclosed who the murderer was before he'd committed the crime. Now that would have been a disaster! Stan Evans.

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**LATE REPORT** - Cliff Royle was dead chuffed when Brian Ensall (young Stephen's dad) ventured on stage to do a couple of Billy Fury numbers.

## Uke Solos - are they always necessary? - In the "Up &



"No solo Dennis"

Comers" at the Wintergardens, at least half of the entertainers were struggling with the uke solos. Perhaps some members think that because it is the George Formby Society, they are obliged to perform just like George did. Well they aren't!!!

Way back in the days when Dennis O'Connell did the backing, it was quite common for the artist to say to Dennis, "No solo Dennis" and he would just play it through for him without any solo spot,

Now I'm not saying that we shouldn't learn split strokes etc. we should! But if we are struggling to put on a reasonable show, and it is ruining our act, or if we feel conscious of it,

then we should cease including solos into the act until we feel confident with it.

Just imagine being asked to entertain at an Old Folks Home and struggling with a uke solo through every song. The old folk will think, "What on earth is it?" Especially if playing without a backing tape. It would sound dreadful!

If you are playing to a backing tape (which includes a solo spot) then simply sing another verse to fill that spot. If there isn't another verse then have a go at writing one to fill the space.

**PERSONALITY** - As I have said many, many times. It is all to do with selling your personality! You can be the finest uke player in the world, - with split strokes coming out of your ear holes - but if you haven't got personality then you haven't George's main ingredient. George would still have been a great, great star even without his uke solos. Stan Evans

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### Crewe Practise Nighters

- performed at the Haslington Cricket Club on Sat the 13th March and the effort was in aid of the Red Cross Handicapped Children and local charity for the needy in Haslington. About 70 people paid £6 a ticket for a two hour show which included a rather tasty hot-pot supper. The concert was well received with plenty of audience participation which was well orchestrated by our polished special concert M.C. Jonathan Baddeley. Taking part were Alan Chenery, Connie Edge, Jon & Pam Baddeley, Arthur Newton, Don Chalkley, Steve Hassall, Des Redfern, Alan Newton, Glenys Huntington, Brian Edge, Colin Wood, Mary Atkinson and Ron Wiston.



## Blackpool's Wintergardens As speculation grows

about the future of the Wintergardens complex the Citizen Newspaper took a look down memory lane for the history of the building.

In August 1875 a group of Blackpool businessmen purchased 160,000 square feet of land for £28,000 but few imagined the chequered history that was to follow. Forming the Wintergardens and Pavilion Company Ltd, they planned the development of the most popular and famous entertainment and conference centre the country has ever seen. The first part to be completed was a magnificent ice skating rink in July 1876. The official opening was two years later when the Grand Pavilion opened its doors. But shareholders were not happy with the returns during the first seven years. However a rise followed the slump and in 1883 the company recorded takings of £16,747. The Opera House was opened in June 1889 at a cost of £9,500 with a production of *The Yeomen Of The Guard* and since then the stage has attracted many recognisable names - most notably Charlie Chaplin in 1904, and the great Caruso in 1909.



No comments please - I know this isn't the Gardens but it's all I've got.

**HEAVY LOSSES** - In 1928 crippling losses forced the company to amalgamate with the Tower thus ending its competition. In 1929 the Big Wheel, which cost £1,000, was demolished and scrapped as a financial flop. The Olympia took the place of the Big Wheel, the Spanish and Baronial Halls replaced the Victoria Annexe and the restaurant was built along with the Galleon Bar.



















During the two World War years the bank balance was rocketing. Around 3,000 people at a time were taught Morse code in the Olympia as the Gardens turned its attention to the war. Entertaining the 50,000 servicemen and women who were posted in the town was no mean feat but the Gardens proved that it could be done and prospered doing it. *Thanks to Charles Stewart for the information.*

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## Crewe March Practise Night - Seventeen attended

which was very productive indeed and everyone went home satisfied. Beginners Tony Jones and young Johnnie showed positive signs so all credit to Alan Chenery and Colin Wood for the patiently training Johnnie and his sister. The night enabled the group to practise a new jazz number, "Way Down Upon The Swanee River" which sounded very well from the floor.

# Another Little Irish Song -

					
HAS ANYBODY	HERE SEEN	KELLY - K E	double L Y	Has anybody	here
					
seen Kelly -	find him if you can.	He's as bad as old Anton-i-o,	left me on my		
					
own-i-o.	Has anybody here seen Kelly.	Kelly from the Emerald Isle	or - the Isle of Man		

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## First year Medical Test - Questions and Answers

Artery - The study of paintings.	Bacteria - Cafe's back door
Barium - What happens	Cauterise - Gave her the wink
when they are dead	Coma - A punctuation mark
Dilate - Live longer	Enema - Not a friend
Fibula - A little lie	Impotent - Well known
Pelvis - Elvis's cousin	Recovery room - Where they do up
Terminal illness - Getting ill at	furniture
the airport	Tumour - More than one
Urine - Opposite to 'you're out'	Varicose - Near by

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**Just received a card from John Guy** who is sunning it up in Tenerife. And I could just imagine John strolling up the beach playing his ukulele, with his knotted handkerchief over his head and his trousers rolled up. All the Spaniards will be shouting, "Ah! - There is an Englishman." Hope you've enjoyed your holiday John after all your health problems.

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**Alan Randall & Ray Seaton's** book, "George Formby" suggests that George was infatuated by the beautiful Yana and implies that on the day of George's engagement to Pat Howson, Harry Scott (George's Valet) overheard a phone call. George said, "well you have had a chance so now you've had your chips. Harry, it seems surmised that this was the end of George's tentative relationship with the showgirl. Thanks Brian. But according to stage gossip, George would have been barking up the wrong tree anyway. It appears that life had delivered a cruel blow to poor Yana which made her different from the majority of us. Personally I don't think that Harry knew what he was talking about. - Anyway a good valet wouldn't snitch on a boss who has picked him up from a failed stage career and given him work for so many years.



## Harry's Joke Page

Hello, Harry here! You can't get rid of me as easy as that! Did you hear about the time of the Warrington bombings.

The police were doing a search through everybody's handbags and one night, as I was going to the Warrington meeting at the Patten Arms, carrying my uke case, (not a handbag) I was stopped by a policeman who I knew many years ago. He said, "Hello Harry, what have you got in your case?" I said, "Oh, I've got a tommy gun!" "Oh thank goodness for that, I thought you had your ukulele."

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After weeks of rain my boots were constantly soaked in water so I put them in the oven to dry them off. I completely forgot all about my boots until about 3 weeks later when I opened the oven door to put a couple of Wigan meat pies in.

What a mess my boots were in! They were so twisted and shrunk that I had difficulty recognising them. Anyway I put an advert in the papers, "Riding Boots For Sale" and a couple of days later there was a knock at the door. A young man came in and I showed him the boots. "They are not Riding Boots," said the young man. "Of course they are," I replied, "You try walking in them."

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What do you call a judge with no fingers? - Justice thumbs!

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My cat has had a little kitten and I was telling Stan that it always answers to Stan Evans. A few weeks later he called on me and I was on the floor calling, "Here Brian, come on Brian." Stan said, "Hey!, I thought you told me that it always answers to my name." - "Oh no!" I said, "It's had its eyes opened since then."

**MORE OF HARRY'S 75 YEAR OLD JOKES NEXT MONTH**

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## Fred Stevenson

was dead chuffed at the Crewe meeting. Alan Southworth showed him a letter from Kealoha Life - a veteran pro. guitarist, uke player etc. claiming that he had been listening to a tape of Fred yodelling and considered it to be the best bit of yodelling he'd ever heard. So how's about that?

Some years ago Kealoha got himself in hot water with the GFS when he claimed that George was a poor uke player. He preferred Tessie O'Shea rather than George. Personally I thought that Tessie was no better than the average GFS member on the uke but she had an amazing personality that carried her through.

**Paul Kenny** got a special applause for his improved playing at the Blackpool - Wainwright Meeting. His performance of Sergeant Major went down really well.

But at **Liverpool on Red Nose Day** he got a good round of applause when he performed with a red nose that flashed on and off like a beacon. This song, sung by the two Stans, was dedicated to him . . .



When I wore a tulip, a sweet yellow tulip,  
and you wore a **Big Red Nose**

We are pleased that Liverpool is thriving really well and once again all the seats were taken. We were pleased also that Jimmy? - who is an excellent key board player - visited us for the very first time and showed us some of his skills on Stan Watkinson's key-board. The only problem was that Stan hadn't brought his amplifier along but this, I am assured, will be rectified next month.

We are still struggling with equipment and, although the music side is set up satisfactorily, with a tape and mini disc player, we still need to purchase a good quality powered amp for the vocals. However, Tom assures us that we will soon have sufficient cash in the kitty to purchase one.

Lawrence Jones received a special round of applause and rightly so. Since joining us he has struggled with his playing and felt at times that he will never master the uke. However, at the last meeting he showed how his constant practising is now showing results and, - for the first time - he put on a really good performance. Well done Lawrence!

We have a growing band of newcomers at Liverpool who are learning to play. So for the future - after 6 years - it all looks very rosy.

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**Vellum** - I've received a number of comments re. the front cover of the latest Vellum. "It is dreadful and George with red hair, it looked nothing like him." Well I have to agree! It certainly isn't my image of George in the 1930s - 40s when he was at his greatest. Or at any time.

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**The Crewe Concert Party** are entertaining at the Crown Hotel on Sun 4th April 2pm - 4pm in the Third Nantwich Jazz & Blues Festival.



## Peniffordd - March - Meeting by Cliff Royle

Well, due to the clash with Liverpool you couldn't be with us this month Stan, so we had our own miracle. Imagine Dennis Lee getting an SOS in Lanzarote to say that the hall for the meeting had been double booked for the already changed date of March 13<sup>th</sup>.

On returning home, after making his usual great effort, the problem was eventually solved; the meeting would be at the Masonic Hall, Buckley. Then of course everybody had to be informed of the change of venue. Thanks Dennis.



So it was with a little trepidation that we turned up in the outback of Buckley, wondering what sort of a success the evening would be. Well we should not have worried for it was a resounding success. The Masonic members behind the bar joined in the fun, (some kissed our lady members when they departed for home) the locals joined in the festivities, and at the end of the evening we had a vote of thanks from the Chairman of the Management Committee. Festivities went on to nearly 11.30pm and even our own members said what a wonderful evening it had been. It was, I am sure, the input of the Committee that helped to create such a wonderful feeling.

Buckley of course is really coming into the fore. The Branch had previously been asked to be involved in a Marcher Gold Radio programme about Buckley on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> March.

Again we thank Crewe for their excellent support. Lesley Lee for the Gracie Field's song, "Walter, Walter, Lead Me To The Altar (and I'll show you where I'm tattooed)" which was dedicated to Walter & Alice; the various duos and trios; and in fact everyone who contributed to an excellent night. Alan Whittaker put on a superb and faultless rendering of two Fornby songs. Alan does not keep too well, but it is his interest in playing that really keeps him going. Plus, of course the constant support he gets from his wife Elizabeth.

Brian Wright displayed some excellent wooden cut-outs; Ray Davies did the usual job as M.C. (without the aid of Charlie Penman's off-stage ribbing, and Geoff & Dolwen Shone provided the usual free pasties. It was an excellent night. Thank you Cliff. *But I'm a bit worried about the regular members kissing the ladies. Especially if you turn up in "Drag" for one of the specials. But don't get too bothered about it. Stay near us and we'll keep our eye on you!*

# Blackpool Wainwright Meeting

**ALAS THIS WAS THE LAST NIGHT AT THE WAINWRIGHT**

Our last night was held on Saturday March 13<sup>th</sup>. We've had many happy meetings over the past five and a half years. The Wainwright have recently formed a new Committee who can rent out the concert room at a better price than we have been paying.

The meeting coincided with Jeffrey Formby Booth's birthday?? - nephew of George Formby. It was a memorable occasion. Jeffrey & Christine travelled up from Milton Keynes and Eva Evans supplied extra refreshments to make it a special do! Eileen Abbott & Carol Middleton came up trumps as usual with the catering so the buffet was great! - and all for £1.

Young Paul Kenny dazzled us all with his now quite brilliant solo playing, and Steve Abbott crooned his way tunefully through a delightful Sing-along. Jim Bramwell's jokes had us all in stitches, - how does he remember them all? Stan Evans's rich tones carried us through the evening in spite of the whining mongrel dog hanging round his neck.



Happy Birthday Dear Jeffrey

Stan Watkinson & his brother Les, sang us a medley of ballads to the accompaniment of the banjo, and Alan Middleton rounded off a superb evening with his very apt "Farewell Song" followed by the usual group thrash.

Eve & Charles wish to thank all who have given such wonderful, loyal support during the years at the Wainwright, and sincerely hope it will be continued with as much pleasure at the new venue which has easy access from the motorway. We also hope that Monday evenings will help to unravel the week-end congestion of Branch meetings. Thank you all - Charles & Eve Stewart.

**WHERE IS THE NEW VENUE and WHEN?**

**Dates:** Every LAST MONDAY in the month.

**Where:** South Shore Cricket Ground,  
Common Edge Rd, Blackpool  
Opposite the Tree Baron Garden Centre

**Parking:** Tons of it!

**Club Phone Number:** 01253 763636

**Eve & Charles's Number:** 01253 768097

**ALL ARE WELCOME TO THE OPENING NIGHT**



Well - here's to our  
new venue



**Alice & Walter** would like to thank everybody for so many gifts and cards for our engagement. With so many friends wishing us every happiness how could we not be happy together?

We've had a full month of celebrations in Manchester and Crewe - so much so that we didn't know what day it was. We would like to thank Connie & Brian for their hard work in organising the Crewe Party - and the ladies who created the wonderful buffet.



We are so lucky Walter & I having so many friends in the society - in fact it's just like having a very large family. Thank you all and don't forget the christening.

*And thank Walter & Alice for your letter. You are right, we are one big happy family and we must keep it that way! It is amazing how we all travel round supporting each other.*

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**Me Car's Bin Nicked!** - It was panic stations for Peniffordd's M/C Ray Davies as he left the March meeting. Due to double booking they had to do a quick shuffle over to Buckley where the Masons kindly allowed them to use their club room. At the end of the night Ray went to jump into his car only to find that someone had nicked it.

"Get the police" shouted Ray, "Get the police." But the members showed no sympathy whatsoever. Geoff Shone responded with, "But it's only a Golf and I've got a better one that I can lend you." "Yes, but it's got the baby's pram in it," shouted Ray. "Well mine's got a pram in it" replied Geoff, and he took Ray round the back of the hall where he found an identical car park with his car safely parked. Ray wasn't aware that the hall had two car parks.

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**Uke Wanted**-Graham Greenfield is looking for a Ron Beddows Ludwig copy (round holes) If anyone has one for sale please ring him on 01283 223074.

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**"The Hollies"** As you know, my address is "The Hollies". But I've just received a letter from the Wigan Council who think that I am a member of the Hollies group. They ended their letter with, " I do hope you are successful in finding an occasion for The Hollies to perform at. - I could understand it if my letter headings didn't display an image of George playing his uke! - Bah Gum.

Northern comedians were backbone of movies slammed by the critics

# Lancashire audiences loved Blakeley's films

**ANY film buff asked to list British film studios, could easily reel off names such as Elstree, Pinewood or Ealing.**

However, it is less likely that they would name the Mancunian Studios, which were based in Manchester and closed in 1953

The Mancunian story begins many years before the studios were opened in a converted Methodist church on Dickenson Road, Rusholme, in 1947. Its beginnings were in 1908 when a young Manchester man, John E. Blakeley, entered the world of cinema exhibition.

He went on to own and operate a number of venues around the city and, in doing so, began to notice how the mill-town audiences eagerly lapped up the knock-about comedy of stars such as Charlie Chaplin.

By the 1930s, and at a time when variety was still highly popular, Blakeley had formed his own production company, and had the idea of putting top music hall names - especially northern comedians - into his films,

George Formby, whose father was from Ashton, and who was destined to become Britain's top box-office draw, between the wars, made his film debut in the Blakeley production "Boots! Boots!"

A low budget epic, the film was completed in

just two weeks, and at a cost of only a few thousand pounds.

Other northern greats such as Norman Evans, Jimmy James, Sandy Powell and Frank Randle soon followed, leaving a legacy of laughs on celluloid.

The first productions, while all conceived and edited in Manchester, were actually shot in London, where Blakeley used rented

space at the Riverside, Albany or Walton studios.

Blakeley would often direct as well as produce, simply asking the stars to be funny.

The formula proved a huge success in the North West, but the films did not travel well. London-based critics slammed them, saying that they were not released, but allowed to escape. However, none of Blakeley's 25 films lost any money.

The company's first production from Rusholme was "Cup-tie Honeymoon", which starred Sandy Powell. A musical burlesque, it was a mixture of romance and football, made on a budget of £45,000.

In its six-year residency in Manchester, the studio remained a profit-making operation thanks, in part, to its star performers; and particularly to Frank Randle.

As well as being a top comedian of his day, Randle was a shrewd businessman, and as a director of the company. Other board members included Joe Gomersal, a Manchester architect, who owned a number of local cinemas, including the Roxy in Hurst Cross.

However, in the 1950s, as television began to make its mark, Blakeley - who had reached 65 - decided to call it a day.

He closed the studio in 1953, just as coverage of the Coronation was to give television its pre-eminent position in British entertainment.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Late News** - Gerry Mawdsley and Glyn Mitchell are organising a meeting at the Red Lion Pub, Westhoughton (Town Centre) and the first meeting will be on Wednesday the 31<sup>st</sup> of March. Ring Gerry on 01942 817346.

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**ALSO** there is a Practise Night held at The St George's Club, Maghull, (near the Maghull Station), every Monday night. You can ring Howie on 0151 526 9886.

## Leeds

Just received news that the Leeds Branch of the GFS have started holding meetings again at the Pudsey Sports & Social Club, 8 Parkfield Terrace, Pudsey. First meeting on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> April. Anyone interested can ring Jack Transport on 0113 2662862.



**We'll Meet Again** - A black & white film of 1942 was shown recently on TV. The picture starred Vera Lynn and featured the song which has become Vera's signature tune. Patricia Roc and Geraldo co-starred and the film was made by Columbia (British) Productions Ltd. at Riverside Studios London. The Musical Director was Harry Bidgood (who was responsible for the musical direction of about six of George's films). The Producer was Ben Henry. The final credit filled the screen, it read: Associate Producer George Formby. It would seem that the most obvious reason for George getting a mention is that perhaps he sponsored the film in some way, but does anyone have the full story?

*Thanks Brian, we had this query some years back and I'm not sure if we sorted it out. Must look through the old Vellums.*

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**Having Problems with P. A. Equipment?** - Well just recently I have had no end of problems. Companies claim that they can repair them and at the end of the day charge something like £40 per hour for a faulty job. Good P.A. engineers are hard to find

Well, not to worry! I've come across a small (one man) company in Bolton who is Spot On with repairs, - Really Excellent! His name is Ian and his phone number is 01204 389941. The name of the company is I G Electronics and the address is: Unit 1, Brownlow Business Centre (it's a mill) Darley St, Bolton. He specialises on commercial equipment and doesn't touch domestics. Mainly he does repairs for the trade but will take in repairs from individuals.

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**Alan Whittaker** - With regret we

report the death of another dear member, Alan Whittaker. Alan has suffered for some time with a heart problem but found relief from playing his George Formby songs. Alan has been going through difficult times recently so he and Liz had to cancel the trip to Southern Ireland. However Alan got up on the stage last Friday at Peniffordd and excelled himself with "Sitting On The Ice In The Ice Rink". Dennis Lee told him afterwards that he was proud of the way he had fought back and performed so well. Our thoughts go to his wife, Liz, who has courageously nursed Alan through his difficult times, particularly during the visit to the Normandy beaches last year when at times Alan had to rely on his wheelchair. Rest In Peace Alan.



We don't have a photo of Alan but members will probably remember him through Liz who was constantly by his side.

Our thoughts go to Liz and her family and we are pleased that George's type of entertainment provided enjoyment for Alan during his last years.



# 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** - MOVED TO SOUTH SHORE CRICKET GROUND, Common Edge Rd, Blackpool. DATES CHANGED TO EVERY LAST MONDAY IN THE MONTH. Tel Eve & Charles Stewart on 01253 768097 - Future Dates: - Mon Apr 26th, May 31st, June 28th, July 26th. Adm £1 including light buffet.

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

**Sale** - Woodheys Club, 299 Washway Fd, Sale - Every 3rd Friday in the month - Ring Cyril Palmer on 0161 748 6550. Adm £1. All Are Welcome.

**Crewe Branch** Wistaston Memorial Hall - Ring Brian Edge on 01270 69836 Future dates - Every 4th Friday in 1999 - apart from December 18th. Adm 50p. Get there early for a seat.

**Warrington** Alliance Sports & Social Centre, Evans House, Orford Lane, Warrington - Stan Evans on 01925 727102 - SPECIAL MEETING ON FRIDAY the 30th APRIL- BE PROFESSIONAL.

**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 - 15th April**

**So as George would say -**

**"Get Cracking"**

**Support Your Newsletter**

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**E Mail - [stan@thehollies.u-net.com](mailto:stan@thehollies.u-net.com)**

