

THE NORTH - WEST

GEORGE FORMBY

Newsletter 67

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Welcome to Newsletter No.67

And it has been a busy period with members getting bookings for Christmas parties etc. The phone has been quite busy with enquiries for artists. Many had to be turned down.

Mike Turner has got through to the "Stars In Their Eyes" competition finals and our Outside Session in the streets of Lytham St Annes left us still thawing out a week later. Read On. . . .

GF Exhibition

- Due to a complaint from one of the GFS members, Warrington Museum is still determined not to loan us the display units. However, Wigan are now dealing with Warrington and I understand that they will look into it after December 16th. Keep your fingers crossed.

Blackpool

- The Gods were not with Charles Stewart at the November meeting. In the afternoon of the meeting Charles sets up the equipment and all is perfect, but at night however, the gremlins are out playing tricks on him. His first disaster was when the Monitor packed up working and Charles had to bring his spare monitor. Guess what! - It also didn't work so we had to operate without a monitor.

Half way through the meeting, Charles was struck another blow when one of the disks got stuck in the Mini Disk Player and refused to come out - disaster!!!. Very soon Charles was in his car speeding back home, for the second time, to collect his spare player. All went well after that - thank goodness. Actually we had a very good meeting and we were surprised when Paul & Kath Mountain from Yorkshire turned up to give us a few songs.



The Formby Story -

Final part 56 by Stan Evans - Soon after George's death a notice was placed in The Stage Magazine inviting George Formby fans to form an appreciation society. The notice was inspired by a Mr George Wilson of London, who was a very keen Formby fan with a lot of knowledge on George and also on ukuleles.



From the notice he received letters from 17 people who showed their interest in becoming members of the society.

Although the replies to George's advert were small in number, Bill Logan, a businessman from Carlisle, felt that George Formby's Society should be worthy of the best of hotels for their first meeting so he booked a room at the Imperial Hotel, Blackpool.



Bill Logan (front) but can you recognise any others?

A date was set and a group of 56 enthusiasts got together for their first meeting. At this meeting a committee was formed: Bill Logan was appointed President, George Wilson was elected as Secretary, Alan Kennaugh was chosen as Editor, Sylvia Kennaugh (Alan's wife and also Bill's Secretary) was appointed Treasurer, and Ray Bernard was given the job of Musical Advisor.

Prior to the meeting, Bill had contacted the members informing them of the forthcoming auction which was to be held at George's house, Beryldene, and asked them not bid as he would be buying on behalf of the society. Bill was successful in buying six of the ukuleles. One of the members, David Naylor, a young boy and keen GF enthusiast, ignored the instruction from Bill and pleaded with his father to buy a small wooden Fernandez ukulele which they bought for £6. Today David, of Liverpool, still owns this instrument.

At the following March meeting the air was filled with enthusiasm. All the ukes that Bill had bought on behalf of the society were put on show and anyone was allowed to play them. But there was no sign of George Wilson at the meeting. It appeared that there had been furious arguments between George and Bill over the ownership of the ukes once the society had sufficient funds to buy them. Bill however, was adamant that the ukes belonged to him and consequently George resigned and left the society. Never to be heard of again. Today the society is thriving with members in various parts of the world. THE END. If you have any comments please let me have them.

Geoff Shone - The best Pastie Warmer upper in N. Wales

writes - Dear Stan, I have recently received my Winter 2000 Vellum and I read with interest about the trip to the Isle Of Man which was organised by Nock Saunders. I noticed also a photo of George leaning on a lamp post in Douglas.

In 1995 a friend of mine was going over to the Isle Of Man for the TT Races and as I had heard that there was a statue of George there I asked him if he would take a photo for me. On his return he gave me the photo and as I was pleased with the result - especially the colour - I decided to have it mounted in a frame to hang in my music room next to an old 1928 Bugle Jacobs Ukulele.

The point of this letter is that my photo is of George leaning on a lamp post outside a photographers shop in the main street but the photo in the Vellum looks like George sitting on a Po-Go Stick at the back of a supermarket warehouse. Either George has taken to stretching his legs around the island or they've made a poor job of moving him. I am pleased that my photo was taken before the changes were made but could you please tell me when and why the changes took place?

Personally I prefer George leaning on a lamp post at the corner of the street to George on a Po Go Stick at the back of a supermarket warehouse. What do you think Stan. *Well I think that Geoff Shone - as brilliant he may be at dishing out tasty pasties hasn't been reading his Newsletter. In the September 2000 issue it was reported by Lawrence Jones that the Douglas Council had moved George from the corner of the high street to the Normandy Veterans Association Memorial Gardens which is on the corner of Ridgeway St and Lord St. I wrote to the IOM Tourist Office on a couple of occasions asking "Where and Why" but they didn't reply. I understand that the statue was misused in the shopping area so they had it cleaned up and moved it to the gardens.*

I didn't know that you had a music room Geoff! Is it for practising your drums? And is it correct that the house next door is always up for sale? I wonder why? Thanks for your article - keep sending em in. And don't forget to read your Newsletter.

Multiple Sclerosis Society

- Just received a Thank You letter from the Warrington Branch of the MS Society for entertaining them in November. Actually it was a bit of a disaster as quite a number of them were youngsters who were not interested in our type of music.

They dished up a lovely vegetarian meal, for Stan Watkinson and I, so I went to the lady to tell her how much we enjoyed it. "Want any sex?" she said. I was gobsmacked, "Yer What!" - "Want any sex?" she replied. I couldn't believe it! I thought she was joking so I said, "Just say that again - slowly. "Do you want any secs? Any seconds!

Sad Blow for Sale Branch. Alice Cronshaw and Walter

Kirkland looked a bit serious when I met them at the November meeting. Apparently the committee at the Woodheys Social Club had decided that they would get bigger bar sales if they rented the room out to parties, so they gave us our marching orders as from the December meeting.



It's a great pity really as we'd become settled there and the staff were always very helpful. However, it wasn't what you would call a great room for holding meetings. The "L" shaped room wasn't ideal and the huge chairs almost filled the room even before we'd piled in.

Walter, Alice and Dick Eaves, the best raffle ticket pullers in Sale.

But it did have a very friendly atmosphere.

Cyril Palmer was away so he wasn't aware of the situation but no doubt he'll be disappointed when he hears the news. Alice & Walter are now looking for another venue and considering approaching the new owners of The Sale Hotel where we held meetings up to November 1995. On the occasion, Ann & Ken Ratcliffe rang the Sale Hotel to ask if they could bring the food down in the afternoon for the Christmas Party night. "Sorry" said the steward, "We've double booked so you'll have to find somewhere else. "Oh no" said Ann, "What are we going to do with all these cakes?"

With a couple of hours notice Ken quickly ran around all the pubs and clubs in the area and found a spot at the Brookland's Sports Club. From there we progressed to the present venue, Woodheys.

NOVEMBER MEETING - Despite the sad news we had a great little meeting and we were not short of players. Eddie Bancroft, Stan Watkinson, Walter Kirkland, Connie & Brian Edge, TV star Ben Halliwell, Arthur Newton, Alan Southworth, Paul Kenny, Margaret Moran, Les Pearson and Brian Jolley all sang their hearts out to give us some good entertainment. More news later on a new venue.

For the Guinness Book of Records, the song, "The Biggest Banjo Uke Group In The World" will soon be ready for distributing to all the branches. It will have three basic chords "D" - "G" - "A7" only and so easy to play that anyone will be able to join in. Already we have started to practise it at Liverpool and Sale.

Anthony Mason & Hannah are now mum and dad for the first time. ELLIOT SPELLER-MASON was born 7lbs 10ozs on November 29th 2000. Well we wish them the very best of luck with their new baby who, no doubt, will be playing the uke within a few months. Anthony and Hannah are living in Chelmsford and already he has met some of the GFS members in the area. He also intends visiting the Ukulele Society of Great Britain meetings - that's if Hannah lets him.

JUST RECEIVED AN Email from them - Hello there, Well, we have had four nights with Elliot so far, and with the exception of last night, it has been rather an interrupted affair. He seems to sleep for about two hours at a time then feeds for about an hour, then sleeps for three hours, then feeds, then sleeps for one hour then feeds. Rather erratic but he seems to be settling down a little now.

We are having some photos developed today so will send you a couple when they are done. Write soon, Elliot, Hannah and Anthony

Les Pearson writes on the Sale Meeting - Eddie Bancroft opened the evening with his version of "Mr Wu's A Window Cleaner Now" and Connie Edge told a joke in an attempt to prove that the ladies can tell jokes just as well as the men. The ladies all agreed. Young Ben Halliwell got cracking with his two spots and our other youngest member, Paul Kenny, who is always smart on stage, sporting a tie with a star motive, dedicated his spot to his grandfather and showed the cuff links which once belonged to him.

It was good to hear Maragaret Moran hit the top notes again, after her absence, with Gracie Fields's "Homing Waltz" and she donated a copy of her signed CD to the raffle which was won by Arthur Newton.

Our guest visitors, Brian Jolly (half of the Memphis Dou - which won the best group of the year award 1999) and Brian's wife, April, who is a nurse at Broughton House which is possibly the last remaining home for ex - servicemen.

Our evening finished off in grand style with Alice Cronshaw and company singing a "War Time Medley." In the absence of Cyril Palmer, Alan Southworth kindly provided the sound equipment.

AND THERE'S MORE - by Margaret Moran. A group of happy minstrels from the Sale Branch joined together on the 3rd November - an absolute foul night - to entertain at the Sale Residents Village Association, at the Holy Family Church in Sale. This was a really happy night for all concerned and £70 was raised for the Sale Branch of the GFS.

Mobile Phones are OK if they work. I only have one in case of emergency but by the time I've managed to get through, the emergency has gone. Anyway, they've brought a new one out now that you can speak into to get the number. Sounds a good idea.

Cliff Mason writes . Dear Stan, sorry to have taken so long to reply. I purchased a ukulele from a Promoter and Entertainer, Mal Richmond - now passed on - who claimed that it once belonged to George Formby. He also once owned Tesse O'Shea's ukulele. Joe Brown, Mike Reid and a member of Marty Wilde's backing group have all played the instrument.

I have been told by several people that George Formby was unable to tune his ukes so he had seventy odd placed at different points around the UK so that if he got into difficulties at a gig, he could soon get another. The banjolele I own is number 69 and I've also been informed that the story of the numbered ukes was published in one of the national newspapers some 3 or 4 years ago.

Thanks Cliff but I'm afraid you've been given a few whoppers there! George was a dab hand at tuning his uke, in fact, he had the expert knack of walking across the stage, talking to the audience, and at the same time playing a simple one-finger tune like "The Campbell's Are Coming." If the tune sounded right then the tuning was spot on.

I've never come across the story of George having ukes stored throughout the country. Also, if this was reported in a national newspaper 3 or 4 years ago we would have heard about it. The story simply isn't true! Unless, that is, one of our readers knows better.

FIVE UKES - It was a fact that George made uke playing as simple as possible and that was why he chose to have 5 ukes on stage - all tuned to a different key. This saved him the problem of transposing from one key to another.

A Joke from Cliff Royle - Englishman, a Scotsman and an Irishman were talking of their families and the Englishman said, "My son was born on St George's Day so we called him George." The Scotsman said, "My son was born on St Andrew's Day so we call him Andrew." The Irishman said, "My son's name is Pancake."

Wigan Rugby Stadium - Jim Bramwell, Stan Watkinson and I have just performed at Wigan's brand new stadium for the Pensioners Christmas Party and the venue is really a credit to them. Unlike the old type football ground, it has a large reception with smartly dressed staff and lifts to all floors, function rooms etc. Very clean and well decorated. Our room was overlooking the ground, which holds 25,000 people, and the biggest job was carting all the equipment up to the 3rd floor. As far as the show went it was a bit of a disaster. We were asked to perform while they were serving meals to the old folk and consequently they were more interested in their meal than in us. Jim was appealing for them to join him in his sing-along and some tried to oblige. But it wants a bit of doing when you've got a mouth full of Christmas pudding. Jim, a rugby fan, is now boasting he once played at the Wigan ground.

Crewe's 6th Birthday Celebration I expect

that by the time you read this you will all be looking forward to a happy Christmas with loads of pressies, plum duff and festive spirit. Lets hope that our December meeting turns out to be the be the ideal aperitif for Christmas.

At the last meeting I sat at the back of the hall and soaked up the atmosphere – dimmed lights and a stage show where artistes were doing their very best to put on a good performance. There were lots of colour and a wonderful audience of eighty-five who were so attentive and really enjoying every minute of the show and also enjoying the company of such an amiable group of people. It is great for the artistes to know that after all their work in rehearsing their spot that the audience are really listening to them. “It’s a lot better than the television,” said one lady after the concert. I thought about that later. Here we have a group of amateur entertainers and yet someone prefers to travel miles to come and see them than to stay in and watch a professional show, which costs untold millions to put on. It is very easy to get delusions of grandeur but there must be something in what the lady said. Perhaps the secret is that we are unique and just have something that all the others haven’t got. Whatever it is it is very gratifying to those who have worked hard over the past six years in the hope that their efforts would reap such rewards.

Yes it was our sixth birthday last month, doesn’t the years pass quickly by? Looking back on photos and videos taken over the years it is clear how we have progressed. On looking at these pictures one asks, “ did the stage actually look as bare as that?” “Surely that was not me, did I really perform as bad as that?” Well I can tell you that the pictures tell a true story, but everyone has worked really hard on their playing and their performance, both at home and by attending practise sessions. Virtually everyone you see on stage started from scratch, not able to play, and never before stood in front of a microphone. They have progressed by their own determination to succeed and inspired by the group of wonderful supporters who make up our audience and without whom there would be any point in continuing. So a special big hand to all our non-playing supporters.

I think that the one thing that I am most pleased about is the emergence of a number of lady performers who have entered what was once a male dominated hobby. Not that ladies were ever excluded they were just few and far between. This is a great step forward and we are always looking for more lady ukulele players.

As a step towards this you will have seen tonight ladies on stage who you have never seen up there before. They have sportingly agreed to have a bit of fun for your entertainment, they have never been on stage before and were indeed quite daunted by the prospect but they have had a go. Who knows a star may emerge. I certainly hope so.

Well it has been a successful year lets hope we continue to prosper. Finally lets spare a thought for Sheila Palmer and any other of our friends who are currently under the weather, A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU ALL. Brian.

Fred Stevenson wishes to thank all who supported him in his time of need. It was reported in the last issue that he was due to have a neck operation in hospital and he was concerned that he may have sung his last song. Well we are pleased to report that the op. went very well and he is looking forward to another spot of yodelling very shortly. We are all very pleased for you Fred. You can't keep a good man down!



New Venue

- Further to Page Five - It might be a trial meeting only but on Friday the 19th January, the Sale Branch will be meeting at the Holy Family Parish Centre, Old Hall Road, (continuation of Marsland Road), Sale.



Travelling from the current Woodheys Club, travel towards Manchester and turn right into Marsland Road (A6144). Keep on until you pass the Sale Hotel on the right. Approx 1/4 mile on go straight across the junction into Old Hall Road and the centre is on the right on the corner of Baguley St.

FROM THE M63 (now M60) Leave at Junction 8 and travel towards Sale on the A6144. The centre is about 1/2 mile on the left before the B5166 junction.

Fine Gesture by Crewe Member

- Crewe member Bob Hodgkinson has made a superb Rocking Dog which he has donated to the society to raise funds. This lovely item will no doubt be in somebody's Christmas stocking as it is to be raffled at the Crewe Christmas Party on the 19th December. Special thanks Bob from all members of the society for your generosity and kind thoughts.



LATE NEWS - JOHN GUY HAS DIED -

Just received last minute news from Kevin Bridgewater that dear John Guy passed on today Sunday 10th December in Hospital. John, who lives alone, has been suffering ill health for some time now, so, at least, the lad is at peace and no longer suffering. Full report in next issue.

Super Star & Ace Reporter Cliff Royle



(Mister Reliable) once again brings you all that is going on in N. Wales. Friday 1st December saw a new style to our Christmas Celebrations. It took the form of a Dinner, with all Ukes Banned; well nearly all. This was held at our usual venue where 64 sat down to festive menus accompanied by orange juice, and of course wine. We were delighted to have some of the hierarchy of the Penyffordd British Legion with us to whom we are most grateful for their excellent support through the years. Many votes of thanks were given to those who had provided valuable support, especially to Dennis and Lesley Lee who always put in tremendous work, much behind the scenes. Many others were mentioned who did their bit not only at meetings but at other times. Also voiced was the support we receive from our Crewe friends, and that jovial miracle man, Stan Evans who produces our Newsletter and gets the GFS a

lot of publicity.

Happy Birthday wishes went to Geoff Shone; he says he is XX (dare I say what) but I think he is younger. There was some entertainment. Simple quizzes (necessary in some cases), a few party games, a song from Lesley Lee in a gold tight fitting dress who was waiting for someone to "Hurry Down The Chimney Tonight" - she never said what for but there were a dozen Father Christmases stuck in the chimney when she got home. Then we had a couple of turns from Brian Edge and his Crewe Jazz Men. A worthy show.



AND THERE'S MORE - Monday 4th December saw a group of our members playing a short session at the Annual Pensioners Party at the same British Legion. Some 8 players gave a performance of GF songs to some 80 guests and received a rapturous welcome. Young Stephen Ensall did a solo spot and got great applause. At great expense we had Geoff Shone on the drums (Geoff was also the resident drummer for the band that was entertaining that evening. The "War Time Medley" went down very well, as did "Out In The Middle East" in which 3 ladies from the audience took part in the fun (with Fezzess) along with two of our own members. Lesley Lee and her dancing team also put on a display of line dancing.

AND THERE'S MORE - - - - DISASTER!!! - There was a request for us to do a short spot at the Burma Star Re-union (at the same place) which coincided with the Blackpool Meeting. However 4 members were delegated to perform. We arrived on the night to find the stage full of Disco Equipment - it looked like a recording studio. The stage front was covered with various items so we had no option but to work around this equipment the best we could. Things eventually came right until we played the "encore" and found that the ukes were all in the wrong key. The initiator of this error is currently attempting to leave the country. Still we all learn by our mistakes, so please come back wherever you are.



GFs Order Of Lenin?

Well I've always been doubtful regarding George getting the Russian Order Of Lenin for his war services. The whole story seemed too far-fetched! Although I did see a war-time newspaper cutting with a large heading: **GEORGE RECEIVES THE ORDER OF LENIN.**



Well I've just had a reply to my enquiry from Anatol. G Uvarov, Captain 1st Rank (rtd) Russian Navy. . . Dear Stan, thank you for the video, "Let George Do It" and audio cassette with his songs. Arthur passed them on to me along with your urgent request for details of George receiving The Order Of Lenin.

I passed a copy of your letter to my friend - director of Cinema Studio "Lenfilm" and he put all your questions to the administration of the Cinematography Museum in Moscow. The answers are . . .

1. George was never awarded the Lenin or any other Order.
2. He was not acclaimed a national hero of Russia.
3. His signal particular film "Let George Do It" was copied by studio "Mosfilm" in 1942 with translated Russian inscriptions at the bottom of the stills and released on screens in 1943.
4. This picture had great success all over Russia and ran on screens over 6 - 8 years. During the war it was the loveliest film of sailors and soldiers of Russia. Songs from this film were performed on many stages by various orchestras and jazz bands with Russian words and variations.

Using the opportunity I send you all my good wishes for Christmas and the new 2001 year. Sincerely Yours, Anatol. p.s. In October this year I organised the seeing of this film at a Russian veterans of War meeting. *Thanks by Email has just has gone to Anatol for taking the trouble to search this information out. Whoops! It's just come back again. Wrong Email address.*

All Bunged Up! - It's happened again. Paul Woodhead (bless his heart) sent in a coloured photo by Email and for two hours the computer was struggling to get it through. Senna pods & Laxatives didn't work! Now here's good idea. If you want to make a protest: send all the politicians a regular supply of Paul's photos through Email and within a week you'll close the country down. It's easier and cheaper than blocking petrol suppliers.



Paul Woodhead

Landing In Normandy

The following was sent to Jeffrey (Formby) Booth's Email address:-

Dear Mr. Formby,

A few years ago my father, Francis Carl Willmott, jotted down some of his war-time recollections, initially to help my daughter with a homework assignment. I thought you might be interested to see a small extract from these, which I attach, as they deal with the time when my father, as Officer Commanding, and Entertainments Officer, 137 Line Section, 12th Air Formation Signals, was given the unlikely task of escorting George Formby to the Normandy beaches shortly after D-day. Please feel free to pass this material to any other George Formby enthusiasts that you think might be interested. Kind regards, Nicholas Willmott



Beryl and George on their Middle East tour. Notice how thin they look.

As we received our final orders for embarkation I was sent for by our commanding officer, Lt.-Col. Tom Norrish. He had been informed that there was a desperate need for entertainment on the other side of the Channel. Resources could not be spared to send ENSA parties over, but individual artists could be smuggled over if Entertainment Officers were prepared to take the risk. It was emphasised that I could not be ordered to do this, but that it would be credited as a praiseworthy contribution to the War Effort. How could I refuse?

I was sworn to secrecy and was not told the name of the entertainer who would travel with me in my jeep. I just had to make room for him and his baggage. Should I recognise him, I must keep the identity to myself as his identity might breach security. I was given a map reference in Hampshire where my passenger would await me in uniform and under escort. The next day we were on our way and, although we were behind schedule, there was obvious activity at the appointed place. In fact there was quite a crowd and the identity of our pick-up was no longer secret. It was George Formby.

If you look at his picture you can see that his features are quite remarkable. What surprised and worried me was that his wife, Beryl, was also with him and similarly uniformed and equipped for active service. There was no time for discussion as we were travelling in a big convoy and the identity of our passengers was quickly spreading all along the line. Somehow George and Beryl were bundled in and we set off for our point of embarkation.

When we arrived somewhere near the coast our convoy was in procession behind others, all lining up to board our vehicle landing craft. Of course it was all very secret and we



George's Army truck complete with a banner - "George Formby"

were not supposed to know where we were, but our bet was that we were in a back street of Southampton. We were told to get what sleep we could as we should be sailing just before morning light. Uncomfortable inside our jeep, George got out and, scarcely incognito, he brought out his ukelele and entertained all and sundry. He was, literally, leaning on a lamp-post at the corner of the street. The problem of George and Beryl's overnight accommodation

was more than readily solved by willing householders alongside.

We embarked very early and in the early morning light got ready to drive ashore at Arromanches. The scenery looked familiar and, ready for anything, we found we were back in Southampton: for some reason we had been turned back in mid-channel. So we and the citizens of Southampton had a second night of entertainment. Eventually we reached the French coast and we were grateful that our water-proofing stood up to the test. We set foot on the beach without getting our boots wet. I handed over the Formbys to an escort of military police amid mutual thanks.

Years before, when I was in Bristol on holiday as a small boy, I was taken on my first theatre visit: a Music Hall. Top of the bill was George Formby, father of the one about whom I have been writing.

Later, when I began teaching, I went into lodgings at Mrs. Keyes, near Redland Station in Bristol. Her daughter, Lillian, was a well known singer and did the female vocals for young George Formby's film, "Boots". I remember how proud her father and mother were. My brother-in-law, Uncle Bill, became a great fan. When he stayed with us in Frome we sent him as a responsible teenager to see an early evening showing of a George Formby film. When he had not returned by 10.00pm we became quite worried and set out in search. We met him on his way back, still laughing after seeing the programme through twice.

It was after we came to West Witton that I discovered that the young George Formby had been a stable boy at Middleham, having been apprenticed as a jockey. Several locals whom I met when lecturing on the Music Hall had their own personal memories. He often visited the farm house that you pass on your way up Penhill and did his early entertaining in the local Inns here. Dr. Anderson, who was for many years Chairman of the local Tournament of Song, told me that George competed both in 1913 and 1914.

So much for the unrecorded facts of history. More important is that George Formby was the first ENSA recruit to take part in the Normandy invasion. I thought that Beryl Formby might have been the first woman to go over, but there were some nursing Sisters who went over very early on. Francis Carl Willmott. (December 1996)

Tommy Ashmore - Kevin

Bridgewater writes - It is with great sadness I write this tribute to my dear friend Tommy Ashmore, who passed away on the 1st November aged 73 years.



His whole personality can be summed up in the title to that Formby song "Happy Go Lucky Me", for that is what Tommy was, a happy go lucky chap who would help out anybody if he could. At every meeting I would see him chatting to members about uke's and showing youngsters how to play a song and helping out if they got stuck on a certain chord or rhythm of a song.

He was born in Dudley but lived some time when he was young in Holmfirth. He had always loved George Formby and told me the first Formby film he saw was "No Limit." He said he went several times in one week and could not get over George's style of playing. It was around this time he purchased his first ukulele. He joined The Society in 1969 and has attended every meeting since apart from two when ill health stopped him. In the early 70s himself and Floss went to meetings in Oldhill for local members. He was a great player of the uke with his own style, which sadly many members missed as due to modesty, Tommy would not perform on the stage in Blackpool as he felt a little shy. Just before he died Tommy and Floss celebrated their Golden Wedding.

His Funeral though very sad for all who attended was a great celebration of his life, with two Formby number's played. "You're Everything To Me" and "Goodnight Little Fellow Goodnight." I know that his dear wife, Floss, and daughter, Pat, will carry on attending the meetings just as Tommy would want them to and be as Happy Go Lucky as he was in his attitude to life. Goodbye dear Friend and God Bless.

Thank you Kevin. A very fitting tribute to a very nice man.

Dennis Lee says:- You've got it wrong Stan! In the last issue you reported that Christian was going through a spot of bad luck when he had his car submerged by the floods. It's not true! It was his boss's car, which he'd borrowed. He couldn't use his own car because it had been vandalised.

Oh dear. It gets worse! Not to worry Christian. There's always a silver lining.

Alan Chenery saw the opening credits on the Rory Bremner Show which came out George singing "Turned Out Nice Again" followed by "Leaning on a Lamp Post". So George keeps popping up. Many thanks Alan - and your new BT Emailer.

YOU'VE STILL NOT SENT IN AN ARTICLE! HOW ON EARTH CAN YOU SLEEP?

Liverpool's Tom Bailey rang

- You've got it wrong Stan! (*not again*) Ken Dodd, the squire of Knotty Ash, isn't in his 60s as printed in the last issue, he is 73 years of age and still going strong.



73 year old Ken Dodd, the Squire of Knotty Ash.

As you know, Ken lives a few hundred yards down the road from our meeting place, in Broadgreen. I was talking to his brother recently and he told me a load of jokes but unfortunately they are unprintable.

The latest news is that Ken is in line to be honoured Freeman Of The City by the Liverpool Council. In the past the honour is to recognize the achievements of individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to the city over a significant period of time, and Ken is certainly one of them. *Thanks Tom. - Well he doesn't look 73!*

Liverpool's Alan (Taxi Driver) Williamson

Collected a passenger (OAP) from the Royal Liverpool Hospital and she was very impressed with the tape he was playing - George!. She asked where she could buy one from so he gave her his copy.



Alan Williamson

Another pasenger - mid thirties - listened to GF and told me that the local pub (a young persons pub) The Red Birch, County Rd, Walton, has a Juke Box and they regularly play George's records.

Whilst sitting at the lights, playing a GF tape another lady was pleased that I was playing the old stuff rather than the noisy BOOM BOOM which is often played. "Makes a nice change" she said. *Thanks Alan - George keeps on going.*

*

Liverpool - Well it was a great December meeting and also very encouraging to see another full house. We've conquered the sound system - thank goodness. Young Ben Hallewell was one of the stars of the night. His playing has come on really well and he's also throwing in one or two of Jim Bramwell's jokes to fill in any gaps: albeit he has to wait until Jim has gone home before he can tell them.

After a long break it was great to see Paul Robinson back with us. But times have changed since he was with us last: We are all on Mini Disc now while Paul is still searching for the beginning of his song on tape. Anyway, it was nice to see him back.

Lytham St Annes - WHAT A DAY! - Some weeks back Charles Stewart asked us to gather a gang together to entertain in St Annes shopping square which was going through a rebuilding programme. The council wanted some entertainment and what better than George Formby to start it all off. George & Beryl lived there before they passed on and the locals are proud of this.

It was set for Sat 2nd Dec and after a few phone calls we had a sturdy group of reliables to put on a good show: Charles & Eve Stewart, Dennis Lee, Stan Watkinson, Steve & Eileen Abbott, Alan Middleton, Alan & Marilyn Yates, Paul & Jill Woodhead, Frank (and grandson) Ben (Blue Peter) Hallewell.



This motley crew tried hard to raise a smile but struggled

We arrived at 11am, for a 2 hour spot, and soon discovered that we'd been given the coldest and windiest day of the year. It was freezing and our only protection was a glorified bus shelter with the front facing the sea, and raging wind. Des Redfern once said: These shelters are as much use as an "ashtray on a motorbike." The wind hit us head on and it was a question of who gave up first. Us or the wind!

Charles made an excellent job of setting up the sound system but the wind was blowing the backing music down the street. The shoppers could hear it half a mile away but we couldn't hear anything from five feet away. Actually the noise of the wind hitting the shelter was louder than what we could faintly hear from the speakers. As soon as we turned the volume up we got feed-back so we switched the backing off.

To keep the gang in time I was given the job of hand clapping in tempo and consequently was the only one with warm hands. The others were freezing! Young Ben Hallewell was shivering so he packed his uke at half time. Anyway, the crowd of about 10 braved the cold and applauded us with gloves on! It was nice to see Alan Yates back with us after a long spell. He works regular nights so he didn't have any sleep before the show. I'm sure he must have been thinking, "What on earth am I doing here when I could be in bed." Alan (22) is now a really excellent entertainer.



Shivering Steve & Eileen Abbott

Playing without a backing, or the cold, didn't bother Stan Watkinson. All rugged up with three pairs of Long Johns and a flying suit he gave the crowd (now 5) a touch of Elvis and some of the old singalongs. Well done Stan!



Warm-hearted Stan Watkinson.

Olwen Gale writes - Another spot of George Formby news:- A crowd of legendary names from the music world had congregated for Joe Brown's (2nd wedding) - he and his Bruvvers were one of the big bands in the 1960s with a Beatle, George Harrison, as best man. Well at the reception, in Oxford, a string quartet was booked and ten minutes before the performance the head musician collapsed and was rushed to hospital, - so it was cancelled. Joe found some tapes he had compiled with favourite songs on them and one he put on was George Formby singing "Somebody's Wedding Day."

Thank you Olwen. Some of our readers might not know that Joe Brown is a keen Formby fan. And so are lot of these artists from 60s - 70s. About nine years ago we were holding a GF meeting at the Patten Arms in Warrington when in should walk Chas & Dave who were appearing with Joe Brown a few hundred yards away at Parr Hall. They expressed their delight in listening to George's songs and when they got on stage that night they told the audience that they had been to a GF meeting and how the were delighted with nine year old Keiran Marshall singing George Formby songs Joe Brown brought out his own versioin of "With My Little Ukulele In My Hand" but apparently it was banned.



Lytham St Annes

when we were playing in Lytham Square a man came up to me and gave me this excellent drawing of George. He told me that he is the son of Kenn Robinson who is a professional artist.

The man was in his upstairs flat when he heard the sound of George Formby songs flowing through the wind. He had been looking for someone to pass the drawing on to for safe keeping and who better than members of the society.

This is possibly the best likeness I've seen of George and if anyone wants a copy I'll be pleased to supply one.

Kenn Robinson can be reached on 01603 660372 - or 270446.

His Email address is kenn@btinternet.com.

They Wouldn't Let George Off! - An interesting

story lies behind the announcement of George Formby's concert at the Theatre Royal, Bolton. He had provisionally promised to appear there if back in England in time after entertaining the troops in France, but it nearly didn't come off!



An Army officer and George's keenness not to miss the Grand National, helped to get him there. He was playing at a seaport some six hours journey from his port of embarkation, and transport was placed at his service to enable him to reach England - incidentally leaving all his music and "ukes" with the company's baggage behind.

The morning efforts were at once made to remind him of his promise to Bolton. "But I've no music" replied George huskily, pretty well worn out by the farthing a song tour of France. An insuperable obstacle! George even offered to redeem the promise by coming later and providing the whole programme, but Bolton's resource proved equal to the occasion. Mr Joe Hill, musical director at the Grand Theatre, was there and in quick time the music difficulty was overcome, and a "Uke" was waiting in the theatre for him to collect.

Artists France Can Do Without - George Formby

came home from France complaining of the behaviour of fellow artists who treated the French tour as a gala holiday. "I have heard of hotel rooms being wrecked after they drank the local wines which were very cheap to buy, Yet some come home complaining of having to live in rough conditions.

As I have said before that type of artist would be better staying at home and not going out to entertain the troops. I have every praise for E.N.S.A. and the grand job they are doing." *Good for you George!*

Manchester Evening News - 25.10.1939.

Few entertainers are working harder than George & Beryl Formby who are in great demand by the troops. They were in a 16 week engagement when the war came. Immediately the show was closed down temporarily and during this period George gave the troops free shows at the local hall. The hall holds 700 but four times that number had applied for tickets each day so George gave four shows a day to fit them all in.

Officers In The Queue - (from a newspaper article)

Even under stress of war-time conditions the British Army is sticking to its modern principles of democracy. When George Formby gave a concert to several hundred soldiers at a large military camp (somewhere in North England) I saw officers of high rank waiting in the queue alongside the privates. Once inside there was a happy mingling of officers and soldiers with their wives. Many of the officers were acting as ushers directing soldiers to their seats, which would have been unthinkable not so long ago.

Trickster at Large - I received a

phone call from Geoff Shone, "Stan, you are coming to the Penyffordd Dinner aren't you? - "Yes!" - "Well would you mind bringing you own knives and forks because we are a bit short?" - "No problem!"



No. 1 trickster Geoff Shone but just you wait young Geoffrey

Eva said, "Well I don't want to take the best dinner set as they might get lost, and we must take some extras as someone on the table may have forgotten theirs. We'll have to go shopping." Well the weather was dreadful. It was howling and the freezing rain was coming down in buckets. Time was short so we had to brave the awful weather. It was one of those days when you have to walk against the wind at 45 degrees and the car park at Widnes was wide open to all the elements.

We couldn't have picked a worse day and when we reached the store we were soaking saturated wet through. We looked as if we'd just walked out of the sea and both frozen to the skin. To save time we grabbed the first saleswomen and with chattering teeth Eva said, "Dooo yooo yooo kkknoww w w where der der kknives and f forrks are?" We were led to the counter where there was a nice set of six for what we read as £3.30. But our tear filled and bloodshot eyes were playing tricks with us as the credit card read £33. 00. Not to worry they'll come in handy for the next dinner.

On arriving home Dennis Lee rang to make sure we hadn't forgotten the occasion and I told him that we'd been shopping to buy the knives and forks. "What knives and forks? We've got plenty!" It appears that Geoff Shone has played a trick on us but, - just wait! Keep looking over your shoulder young Geoffrey.

From Les Dawson's Blankety Blank.

There was an old farmer named Burke. Who pulled up his cart with a jerk
His load of manure, which was most insecure. Left him up to his neck in his work.

If ever you are lost in the jungle with nothing to eat, always look for a snake and a dead pygmy. Because nothing tastes better than snake and pygmy pie.

Stars In His Eyes - We reported in last month's issue that Mike

Turner of St Helens had got through to the semi-finals of the show. Well Mike has just phoned to say that he has now reached the finals which will be at St Helens Theatre on Saturday 20th January. Again Mike, we wish you the best of luck.

BLACKPOOL NIGHT HAS BEEN BROUGHT FORWARD to 18th DECEMBER

N. West Meetings

North Wales Branch - British Legion, Penyffordd (10 miles from Chester) Every first Friday in the month. Tel Dennis Lee on 01244 544799 Adm 50p. Where can you get a better bargain than that?

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

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

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

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

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

Blackpool. SOUTH SHORE CRICKET GROUND, Common Edge Rd, Blackpool. Every last Monday in the month -Tel Eve & Charles Stewart on 01253 768097. Wonderful buffet.

Wintergardens GFS Meetings:

- Sat & Sun 17th & 18th Mar 2001
- Sat & Sun 23rd & 24th June 2001
- Sat & Sun 15th & 16th Sept 2001
- Sat & Sun 24th & 25th Nov 2001

N. West Web Site: www.thehollies.u-net.com/ formby. E Mail: stan@thehollies.u-net.com

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