No Limit

8 Fun Packed Pages

The Yorkshire Ukulele Circle

The Yorkshire Ukulele Circle Newsletter - November 1996
Edited by Peter Pollard - Volume 2 - No. 4



Colour pictures of good old George are few and far between, so here's one here.
Pinched from a compact disc release and 'doctored to get rid of all the writing.
The CD only cost £4.99 - worth buying for the picture alone!
The only problem is, because your editor has to manage this newsletter thingy on a minute budget, you'll probably be reading this in good old black & white!

Don't Forget!

We need all your stuff to print in this famed fanzine - it can only be as good as you want it to be. You must have a story about George, if not - don't you know any scandal? Come on gang, support this epic comic and remember...

The Yorkshire Ukulele Circle

Fingers Needs Facts!

McGee's Meanderings

The September meeting at Mirfield was again a great night. I'm always amazed how Yorkshire Ukulele Circle do's turn out, every meeting seems to be better that the last, and there is nearly always a surprise event. Like Peter Pollard singing in key, or me remembering the words. But there, I dare not forget, with a certain watchful eye on me, forbidding me to use a music stand.

Mind you our keyboard player had me confused with the 'intro' and we were still having trouble at Blackpool. I blame Eddie Wright for getting Dickie all in a tizwoz. It really shows the popularity of our Circle when so many attend that we have to be rationed to one song. But I must admit that I like this method of drawing names for the playing order, especially when it means that we have a reet good thrash at the end of the night. That way everybody gets a chance to play. I have been lucky and have been drawn number one twice, so I was wondering George, would you mind picking six numbers for the lottery syndicate. The aforesaid P.P. selection is rubbish. A whole year now and we haven't one a million yet. I'll never get another Markendale at this rate. Speaking of Markendale, our glamorous member, no - not ex RSM Charles Hever. Michelle has, by the kind auspices of Ted and Christine Bradley, got her hands on one of the "big Gibson" type instruments, joining a select band of owners. Are we in danger of becoming a Markendale Mafia? Will Abbotts and Ludwigs be confined to the odd nostalgia outing?

I'm looking forward to the Wakefield venue which I believe is becoming as popular as Mirfield. Speaking of popular venues, I would like to thank those who turned up at the "Pudsey Plonkers" on the 30th September, for making it a cracking night. Paul Mountain gave grand support with his new amplifier. It seemed that everybody did a turn with somebody else, sparking off some new and unusual entertainment with some harmonica playing to add to the variety. Stan Brown and Lionel Owen showed what we could be playing like if we took Dennis Taylor's advice, "Practise, Practise, Practise" and as always, there was good advice and tips from both of these experienced players. What's more, the ladies God bless 'em seemed to be having a real good time as well and are already discussing a New Year party.

A New Duelling Duo

Anne Zeigler and Webster Booth eat your hearts out.

Did we see the beginning of a new warbling duo with the pairing of debonair Dickie Speake and melodious Michelle Kisby at Wakefield. Can we expect some more additions to their repertoire after this 'Baby'. But what of Dennis M. Will he now be sending out an SOS over the ether above for a new partner in his umbrella repairing business. Will he now be 'Free' or will he be like the rest of us, hoping for a spot on the Tony Marshall show.

Just kidding folks, Doesn't it just prove we have a great crowd in the Yorkshire Ukulele Circle who can enjoy ourselves playing together. It is no wonder others travel the miles to be part of the fun. It takes a holiday in Tenerife to make me miss a meeting.

Mac McGee

Peter Pollard's latest video is now available. It features the 35th Anniversary of the GFS in the Winter Gardens. Treat yourselves for Xmas - £12.00 for three hours of Formby bliss!



Uncle Joe's Mint Balls

On the back page of this issue you will see that we have printed the song that is rapidly making Roy Fielding a cult figure within the Uke Circle. Roy sent me a very interesting booklet on the Mint Ball thingy and I thought that as nobody but Roy appears to know all the words (and he keeps making new ones up) then we should all have a copy and then we can accompany him and therefore we shall send each other home even more happier and contented than normal.

Did you know by the way that our Roy is a very good harmonica player and accompanies Eddie Wright's Yorkshire monologue a treat. I can reveal that Roy will only play the mouth organ with a gob full of mint balls so you may have to bribe him with a couple of pounds of these superior spheres. Will he do it tonight?

MINT BALL MEMORABILIA

- **Mint Balls were first produced in 1921, the same year as George's dad died.**
- **1933 was the year in which the famed Mint Balls were actually patented.**
- **1937 was a big year because Uncle Joe went in for advertising, giving away free samples outside the school gates to young children with the slogan, "Go ask Mother for a penny" - They'd have been arrested today!**



Leeds GFS - October meeting

Members of the Circle were well represented at the Leeds branch of the G.F.S. for the October meeting which is temporarily situated at a different venue. The new place to meet is the "True Briton" pub on Stainbeck Road which is off the main Leeds - Harrogate road and not too far away from their previous venue.

As usual the room was quite full and although the ukulele playing takes place within the room shared with the 'normal' drinkers, they don't interfere because the action takes place away from the bar area.

Whenever I attend the Leeds meeting, I am always sure to be entertained by a wide variety of artists, not just ukulele players but singers, monologue recitals and musicians playing guitars etc. The welcome at Leeds is always friendly and the player is usually guaranteed a spot.

Star on this evening was none other than the "Duck Pond Dynamo" - our very own Charlie Hever. Charlie did some Jolson and was then requested to close the show with some Formby numbers and the ever popular "Katie Daley".

The one thing I wasn't happy with was the sound system, not everybody feels happy playing with the 'band' and of course the musicians don't know all the Formby numbers. The tape machine leaves something to be desired and it is not good for beginner or seasoned entertainer to lose touch with the backing half way through the song. Let's hope they get it sorted for the next meeting. A pleasant evening though in the company of David White, Peter Firth, Lionel Owen and the aforementioned aquatic person.



Alvin D. Keech

The father of the instrument we all know and love. Without this man's ingenuity we wouldn't have George Formby, the Society, the Yorkshire Ukulele Circle and you probably wouldn't know the person you are sitting next to tonight.

This was the young man who decided the wooden ukulele which was sweeping through America in the early 1900's wasn't loud enough to be heard within the auditorium of the theatre. No microphones at this time of course so this lad got his thinking cap on and came up with this miniature banjo which not only put him on the map and probably made him plenty of cash, it also gave us lots of broken fingernails and frustration but also, lots of good pals, happy times and an abundance of jollification - also when you think about it, this newsletter!

Kelvin K. Keech was one of the organisers of the firm of Keech Bros. based in San Francisco and was head of the entertainment department. He studied the ukulele in the Hawaiian Islands. His knowledge and expertise helped him to demonstrate and popularise the Hawaiian instruments made by Keech Bros. and he appeared in the vaudeville theatres across the U.S.A.. He served in Europe in the first world war and whilst recovering from war wounds in an hospital in Paris, he organised the first 'syncopated orchestra'. He called it "The White Lyres" and they played all the big clubs in Paris and London. At London Hippodrome fifty banjoleles were used in a show under the direction of Kelvin's brother, Alvin.

Kelvin Keech



Monty Banks - Obituary

Monty Banks, the film director husband of Gracie Fields, died in a train near Sempioni, Italy. He was 52 and by birth an Italian, his real name being Mario Bianchi.

By 1937 he had established his reputation in America as a film producer. In that year he was appointed associate producer for pictures Miss Fields was making, partly in this country, for Twentieth Century Fox. In March 1940, they were married in Hollywood. Their arrival in this country soon afterwards and their return to America led to questions in Parliament concerning Mr Banks alleged pro-Italian sympathies. Later the same year he was granted American citizenship.

Monty Banks did not return to this country until 1947. Under American law Miss Fields remained a British subject. Among the productions he made in England were "Not So Quiet On The Western Front," "Almost A Honeymoon" "My Wife's Family" and "We're Going To Be Rich." One of his most recent pictures was "A Bell For Adano."

This article was the obituary for Monty Banks and was printed in the Daily Telegraph on January 9th 1950. Monty Banks was of course the producer of two of George Formby's most famous films. "No Limit" and "Keep Your Seats Please."

Dewsbury Museum

Whilst on the subject of Monty Banks, we should mention the exhibition of Gracie Fields memorabilia which is currently taking place in the recently opened museum in Crow Nest Park, Dewsbury.

The exhibition is a interesting look at the life and times of 'Our Gracie' and is certainly worth a visit. There is also a very nice section featuring Dewsbury people over the last 100 years and an even nicer section featuring the lovely old theatre which was a feature of the town of Dewsbury - the Empire Palace Theatre. This is definitely worth a second look as all the big stars played there including (I'm told), George Formby. I actually once went into Dewsbury library and searched through about ten years of the local newspaper looking for any evidence of George's appearance but couldn't find a thing. I searched all the newspapers in the 1930's which is quite a feat and I can tell you I had to shield my eyes from the light when I left the reading room!

Whilst looking at the lovely collection of photographs, I saw good old G.F. in a picture which was dated 1920. I'm certain it wasn't Formby senior but I didn't think that George appeared on stage until 1921. The museum authorities wouldn't let me take a photo of the picture but I'm off back when it's a bit quieter to see if I can't get it. Fingers crossed you'll find it within these pages very soon.

Join The George Formby Society

Suffering from piles, a bad back, mid-life crisis, panic attacks? There's only one solution, join the George Formby Society. I know it's hard to believe but it is true, some of you are missing out by not being members of the GFS. Just think of it.. Bugger off and leave the wife and screaming kids four times a year. Oodles of jollification as you drink in the sights of lovely Blackpool, the sound of lovely ukuleles and gallons of lovely beer! Ten quid a year gets you four glossy magazines nearly as good as this, free admission to the four conventions and lots more great mates to meet. Go on, you know it makes sense.



Well, Well, Well!

Look who's here. Our very own Michelle Kisby who recently celebrated her birthday and received a big birthday kiss from your editor. (The money's rubbish but the treats are great!)

Michelle is always immaculately turned out and can deliver a performance to match. Things can only get even better now that Michelle has found a home for one of Gordon Markendale's 'big Gibson' ukuleles. This one found it's home in Kisby Towers via Australia were it's previous owner is currently languishing.

Ted Bradley is the name of course and Ted will be pleased to learn that Michelle is getting far more out of this instrument than he ever managed.

Only joking ... We all know that Ted Bradley is the foremost exponent of ukulele skills down under, he's the only bloke with a uke!

Thanks to George Butterworth for his always excellent photos, Mac McGee and Roy Fielding for their contributions. Charles & Barbara Hayes for the info on the Keech brothers. Also, David White for previous articles.

NEW COMPACT DISC RELEASE...

I recently received the latest compact disc recordings of George Formby and this one is a bit special in that the sleeve notes and recordings are the property of one our fellow members within the George Formby Society, my good friend Reg Thacker.

The CD is entitled "Turned Out Nice Again" and features twenty four high quality tracks of our hero, some of which have never been obtainable on the compact disc format.

All the recordings are extremely well produced and have been subjected to a special computerised process which takes all the pops and crackles out of old 78 rpm records. The tracks on the CD include both sides of the sketch, Gallant Dick Turpin, Said The Little Brown Hen, American & British Medleys, The Old Cane Bottom Chair and lots of other goodies. The CD is issued on Empress RAJCD 878.

I rate this release as one of the best of the fourteen or fifteen compact discs which are available on George Formby. I believe the price is around £5.99 so it will hardly break the bank. *Go on, treat yourselves!*

The Royal Variety Performance -1937

From the book "Curtain Up!" by Lord Delfont

After a gap, the Royal Variety Performance came back with a flourish two years later, for the 1937 show, once again at the Palladium, and this time before King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, watching their first Royal Variety Show as monarchs.

They were treated to Max Miller at the height of his comic powers, to Gracie Fields, the Crazy Gang, the brilliant impressionist Florence Desmond, **George Formby** in his one and only London Royal Variety Show, and Ivor Novello conducting the Palladium orchestra.

The stunning show also coincided with the longest ever BBC radio broadcast of the performance. It ran from 8.05 pm to 9.30 pm and then from 9.50 pm to 10.50 pm.

Most commentators that night agreed that Max Miller, the 'Cheeky Chappie', stopped the show. Perfectly natural and, in the words of *The Times*, displaying 'his usual engaging intimacy with the usual shattering effect upon any gravity that might still be lurking in an odd corner of the house', he was rewarded by the first unconstrained laughs of the evening.

With his legendary sartorial idiosyncrasy, he managed to outshine even his flamboyant wardrobe, appearing in a strikingly patriotic costume of red, white and blue checked coat, pantaloons and shoes. 'I know how to dress for these occasions: nice and quiet!" he confided amid loud laughter in which the King and Queen joined with relish.

A little later in his act he was telling a favourite story about a sailor who returns home, buys a cricket bat, raps on his front door with it and then dashes round the back. Half-way through, with the audience in convulsions, he stopped, grinned, and said with a sly glance to the Royal Box, 'No, not tonight ... any other night but not tonight', and then went on to finish one of his sauciest stories just as he always did!

Unknown to the audience, **George Formby** was paying a special tribute to his father. Under the lapel of his suit, Formby had a diamond and sapphire pin which he wore for luck. It had belonged to his father, George Formby Senior, given to him by George V when he performed at a private party of Lord Derby in 1913. Formby Senior had worked even when he knew he was dying so has to provide for his family.





Now there's a place in Wigan, a place you all should know,
A busy little factory where things they are all the go.
They don't make Jakes or Eccles cakes or things to stick on walls,
But night and day they work away at Uncle Joe's Mint Balls.



Me dad has always wanted curly hair on his bald head,
Suck an Uncle Joe's Mint Ball that's what the doctor said,
So he got an Uncle Joe's Mint Ball and sucked it all night long,
When he got up next morning he had hair all over his tongue.

Me Uncle Albert passed away from ale upon the brain,
The doctors said that he was dead and would never walk again,
So they gave the corpse an Uncle Joe's and then stood back aghast,
Cos the corpse jumped up and ran t'pub and spent the insurance brass.

Me granny said me grandad 'e were gettin' old and slow,
And fire in grandad's boiler 'ad gone out long ago,
So e' got an Uncle Joe's Mint Ball sucked it all the night,
But his hot breath singed her vest and set the bed alight.

We'ad a pigeon it were bald and couldn't fly too fast,
Never won places in the races always coming last,
Though it were bald no feathers at all it won a race one day,
We give it an Uncle Joe's Mint Ball and it ran all 't bloody way.

I had a girl, her name was May in passion she was lackin',
Fed 'er with whisky to make 'er frisky still wouldn't get crackin',
So I gave 'er an Uncle Joe's Mint Ball to get 'er all aglow,
Now she combs the streets of Wigan looking for Uncle Joe.

We gave some to the coalman's 'orse as it stood in the road,
It gave a cough then beggared off with it's cart an' load,
It ran on to the race course going like a bird,
Covered the track in nutty slack and come first, second and third.



CHORUS:

Uncle Joe's Mint Balls keep you all aglow,
Give 'em to your granny and watch the beggar go,
Away with coughs and sniffles take a few in hand,
Suck 'em and see and you'll agree,
They're the best in all the land.

