No Limit 40

The Yorkshire Ukulele Circle Newsletter
October 2013 - Special Edition

WELCOME!

Forty glorious years of ukulele bashing and singing - and hasn't the time gone by quickly? Actually that question can only really be answered by four people who went to the first meeting all those years ago - and all four are still happily with us and playing (probably) the same songs that they played all those years ago! Dickie Speake, Paul Mountain, Lionel Owen and Ralph Hewitt are the four just men who can still remember (just barely) all those years ago.

We honour them all here and thank them for their enthusiasm and foresight in driving the Uke Circle through so many years.

Their actions then, plus the efforts and enthusiasm of countless others over the years have ensured that we are still a unique group in the world of ukulele. A group that has met twice a month for over twenty years at two venues. A group that even has its own song, a group that has given so much pleasure to so many people over all these years is certainly worth celebrating - so lets get started! Within the pages of this humble journal we will try to bring back some of those faces and memories from all those years ago.



Once Upon A Time…

Like all good stories, this one has a very happy ending - although to be accurate, the end isn't even in sight! But to start at the very beginning, Dickie Speake, Paul Mountain Lionel Owen, Ralph Hewitt and a few other Formby fans had the bright idea to create the very first branch of the George Formby Society. Unfortunately (or perhaps the reverse) GFS President Bill Logan had other ideas and declared that there would "never be any branches of the George Formby Society." So what did these determined Yorkshire lads do? They formed the Yorkshire Ukulele Circle!



Yes, if Bill Logan had been a little more charitable, then the Uke Circle would never have happened and we would just have become the Leeds branch of the George Formby Society.

But Dickie, Paul, Lionel, Ralph, Ron Holliday, Frank Ellis and Joe Cooper met in a pub in the Leeds area and because there was only seven members, they sat in a circle to entertain each other and so the Yorkshire Ukulele Circle was born.

The Leeds venue didn't last too long and to be honest, it seems that the Circle took on nomadic properties as they moved quite a lot over the next few years. I have tried to jog the memories of the founder members as to just where they did meet but it is impossible to track all these places. Suffice to say that they moved in the Leeds, Bradford, Shipley and Baildon areas before settling in at the Waterloo pub in Wakefield and the Constitutional Club in Mirfield where they have happily stayed for many years.



Whilst there may have only been seven members at the first historic meeting, and Lionel tells me about one meeting at St. Chads Church Hall in Headingley, Leeds when only himself and Dickie turned up and they had the meeting in the car! Don't run away with the idea that the Uke Circle struggled in these formative years, it wasn't too long before they could boast of 50 to 60 members and at one Christmas party over

150 people turned up! But it is fair to say that over the years the Circle did have its ups and downs and needed to move either because the room couldn't hold them, or the rent was too high.
But they did just what we do today, enjoy themselves. On one occasion they organised a barge trip which was actually caught on film and will be on show on a TV in this room today.
So the Uke Circle moved on and all in all, prospered, but memory being what it is, most of these early times are now long forgotten. So lets move on to January 1992 to the Waterloo pub in Wakefield when your writer in the company of the late Stan Brown, visited for the first time. The meeting was situated upstairs in a private room away from the bar area. I had received a uke as a surprise Christmas present from the lovely Kathryn (what foresight that girl has!) and I also took a video camera with me and filmed the event. Fortunately I repeated this process quite a lot in the 90's so we have a nice little archive of meetings and players - some of them can been viewed on the screen here today.





It was at this time that Dickie had just mastered the keyboard and had made available to the members, a set of audio cassette tapes that contained his backing tracks. This was ground breaking stuff because before too long, the whole of the George Formby Society was playing to Dickie's backing via the cassette tapes and not too long after that, mini-discs started to appear and that brings us right up to today.
Also in the 90's for a couple of years we ran a version of this little magazine. It lasted on and off for a couple of years but pressure of work killed it in the end and it hasn't seen the light of day until today!
In my time with the Uke Circle, we have had some fantastic times, we used to play annually at Nostell Priory which is a stately home in the Wakefield area. The lads and lasses have appeared in all sorts of events and the Lightcliffe Christmas parties were very memorable indeed, lots of fun and games with some dancing thrown in for good measure.
And in 2013 we are still turning up and enjoying each others company - enough said!
Peter Pollard



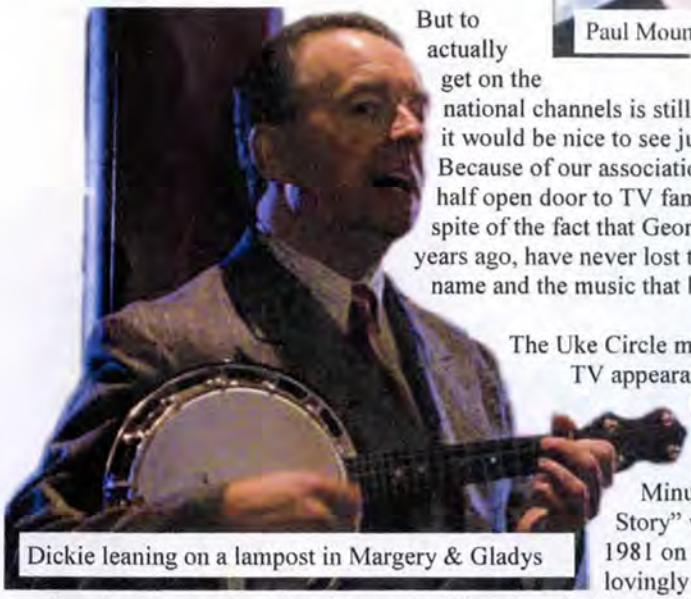
Celebrating the 25th - Paul, Dickie and Lionel

Who's Been On Tele?

Lets face it, in this day and age we all know someone who has made it on to the tube in the corner of the front room (actually in these affluent times there is one in every room!) Also in this day and age with the internet, modern technology and YouTube, it is quite the norm for anyone to get their ugly mugs on tele in some form or other.



Paul Mountain on 40 Minutes in 1981



Dickie leaning on a lampost in Margery & Gladys

But to actually get on the national channels is still quite special so I thought it would be nice to see just who has managed it. Because of our association with the GFS we have a half open door to TV fame because the media in spite of the fact that George Formby died over 50 years ago, have never lost that love affair with his name and the music that he produced.

The Uke Circle members have done well in TV appearances over the years with Lionel Owen and Paul Mountain getting some quality footage in "40 Minutes – The George Formby Story" which was broadcast in 1981 on BBC TV. Paul speaks lovingly of our hero, "George Formby meant everything, he was the life and soul of England, the greatest, there will never be another. He was the tops, he brought happiness to everyone, wherever he went." And Lionel states that "I liked his songs, they were a bit on the spicy side and his ukulele playing was superb."

The dedication these lads showed on TV in 1981 came through with genuine warmth, and of course both Lionel and Paul have been two of the main players within our Uke Circle and showed the same sort of devotion for all the forty years of our existence.



Lionel Owen on Calendar in 1990

Our late-much missed friend Dennis Taylor did countless interviews promoting the name of

George Formby and The George Formby Society and also featured in the TV serial "Coasting" which starred Peter Howitt and also in "Margery & Gladys" alongside another special guest today, Gerry Mawdsley and our very own Dennis Mitchell and Dickie Speake. Dennis Taylor was also involved in The South Bank Show.
Paul Kenny has been cooking shrimps on the beach in Morecambe with Ade Edmondsone (bet he didn't bring any home for mum!). And of course Gerry, Dennis and yours truly featured in the Frank Skinner on George Formby film that has been shown countless times on BBC since it was first released in late 2010 after filming at the March 2010 convention. The TV transmission has worked wonders to promote the GFS and the ukulele as the instrument of choice.
It is not just television that has promoted our cause, many of us have featured in all sorts of magazines and the Uke Circle was once featured in The Big Issue! I once went to the camera shop to get some Formby photos copied and the next thing I heard was the knock on the door from the local paper wanting to find out more about my interest in GF - such is the power of Formby!



Special Events



Let's face it, every time we get together either at Carrgate or at Mirfield it is a special event. But over the years we have also put on some *very* special events and although I can only go back roughly 22 years, I feel sure that older members will also hold cherished memories of times gone by, savoured by friends and family. Sadly there is not much photographic evidence of events from the early days, one must assume that they were all too busy with the songs and nobody bothered with a camera.

Over the last 20 odd years though things have changed thanks mainly to George Butterworth and also my own interest in video and photography.

One very good 'do' was of course when we all met up in the club at Lightcliffe and celebrated in style with ukulele playing, dancing, a magnificent supper and a top class raffle - but most of all, we had a visit from a very special couple when Her Majesty The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh visited us to celebrate her Golden Jubilee. Actually they were represented on this occasion by Alice Hodkin and Colin Reed but what a regal couple they made as we all lined up to greet them.

Another Lightcliffe party was when we all dressed in 1940's clothes to celebrate the VE day anniversary. There were some sights to behold and everyone excelled in their costumes. Lightcliffe of course featured for many years as the venue for our Christmas parties and they were always a great success with of course a visit from our very own resident Santa! One year though the weather beat us and we had to cancel the whole event at short notice - but we made up for that disappointment with an Easter Bonnet bash when there was an amazing and creative display of bonnets from both gents and ladies.

In 2012 we again celebrated the Queen with her Diamond Jubilee when we had a double-event, not at Lightcliffe this time but one party at Carrgate and the other at Mirfield. We magnificently decorated the rooms at both events in the royal colours and of course we had our usual band of Dickie and Dale to support us.



One other event that must be mentioned was when the cream of the George Formby Society visited us when we celebrated our 21st anniversary with a

party in Shelf near Halifax. This was another packed house with a grand concert and a special supper.

Although you will read in another part of this mag that we were rejected as a branch by the George Formby Society, hence the title (Yorkshire Ukulele Circle), it must be said that if it wasn't for the GFS, we would not be here in this room today.





Looking Thru A Lens…

Most of us just arrive at the Uke Circle, get a drink and sit down and enjoy all the other performers throughout the evening. Not so **George Butterworth**! George over the years has viewed all the action through the lens of his camera and on these pages we remember some of his fine work. Not only was he our chief photographer - but he used to double as our official Santa! The real Santa in my opinion cos his beard is bolted on to his face, not like all those false stick on jobs!





John Beevers, Paul Kenny & Paul Mountain



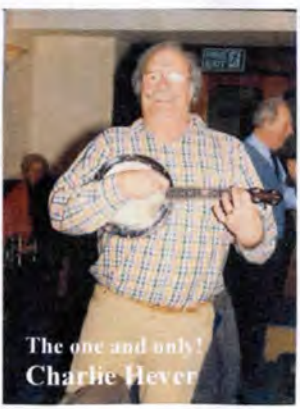
Above we see Don and Shirley Riley. Don was responsible for getting the Mirfield venue for the Circle.



Ron Holliday is in the red shirt in this 'thrash' image.



Dennis Mitchell's original Poppettes, Christine Bradley, Pat Taylor and Kathryn Pollard - Aren't they lovely!



The one and only! Charlie Hever



Eve Stewart, Christine Bradley and Hilda Southworth.



A busy night in Mirfield





Above - TV presenter Ian Clayton pays a visit to Carrgate
Right - The Middlesbrough Concert - This group played at a WMC in Middlesbrough in May 1993.
Below - Dale Norman looking perplexed as Alice Hodkin shows him how to do it!





The May Babes - Paul Mountain, Mac McGee, Peter Pollard, Adam Smith and Dennis Taylor all celebrated May birthdays.

The Yorkshire Ukulele Circle 'Do'

Composed by Dickie Speake





Some people go to watch a film or some go to the pub



Some go for a game of golf or bingo at the club.



But twice a month I've something that I never want to miss




I've done it now for years and years, I'll tell you what it is




I'm going for a night out with the Yorkshire Ukulele Circle



Lots of fun is had by one and all.





So if you'd like a night out with the Yorkshire Ukulele Circle




Come along with me you'll have a ball.





Our chairman does his best to keep us all in check





"Quiet boys and girls" he'll shout and murmur "by heck"






If you don't shut up quick you'll get his uke round your neck





It's the Yorkshire Ukulele Circle 'do'.

Our treasurer he brings his box and takes off the lid
A job that no one wants and that he'll never get rid
It's funny were some people hide when he wants half a quid.
It's the Yorkshire Ukulele Circle 'do'

I'm going for a night out with the Yorkshire Ukulele Circle
Lots of fun is had by one and all
So if you'd like a night out with the Yorkshire Ukulele Circle
Come along with me you'll have a ball.

Our accompanist he thinks a keyboard player is he,
He forgets the introductions and the endings you see.
But one day soon I'm sure he'll play it in the proper key.
It's the Yorkshire Ukulele Circle 'do'.

FORTY WONDERFUL YEARS!



Little did I think when I had the idea for our monthly get-togethers that we would still be meeting forty years on. What an achievement! Any organization can only be as good as its members make it so I think that speaks for itself and I take my hat off to all members past and present for their support.

We have had some great times over the years and long may we continue to do so. These days I don't take such an active part in the running of our Circle but I would personally like to thank all the hard working people who make our meetings such a success.

I'm mentioning no names as we all know who they are! The ukulele is the four strings that keep us all together as a family and I hope that the school children who are just discovering the instrument get as much pleasure and comradeship from it as we have. We have half a lifetime's start! My best wishes to you all.

Dickie Speake - Founder member - Yorkshire Ukulele Circle

Those Curtains!

If only curtains could talk! The curtains at the Mirfield club have been hanging there since we started using the venue over twenty years ago! So they have actually been present at every meeting (you can tell I am now getting desperate for stuff to write about!). Check the images below, on the left is Dickie and Jack Sharp from around 1993 and on the right is our Wrexham based member Lewis Clifton in front of the same curtains!





Words From The Wise...

Kathryn Pollard



When I attended my first meeting of the Yorkshire Ukulele Circle over twenty years ago I couldn't have imagined that one day I would be involved to the extent that I am today.
People come and go but those who stay for the long haul have become like an extended family to Peter and myself. On that note, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the ladies who help, twice every month and on special celebration occasions, by making sandwiches and cakes etc. Without their help there would be no supper provided and no raffle as the raffle pays for the supper.

At the meetings I love to sing along to the Formby songs but sometimes I wake up in the early hours singing them to myself. This 'Formby' lark really gets under your skin but I wouldn't have it any other way. I love it!

Dennis Mitchell



I well remember my first visit to the YUC at the Waterloo public house in Westgate, Wakefield. Not knowing what to expect I tentatively approached the upper room via a narrow staircase and could hear a uke being played. It was magical! Very hesitantly I opened the door. Inside seated around the room were two ladies and about twenty men one of whom was playing the uke. The whole atmosphere was very informal with everyone being very attentive listening to this one performer who was seated like everyone else. Much banter developed with the next man introduced, Dennis Taylor, for he was following Dickie Speake.

The welcome I received was extremely warm and so many wanted to have a chat and shake my hand. I was offered advice on how to improve my modest Melody uke, showed techniques to improve my playing and immediately knew I was amongst friends.

Things have changed a lot since that time. Dickie brought his keyboard regularly for some years (he still does occasionally) and provided backing. The performer is now raised on a dais and uses a microphone, part of a good quality sound system, and we are able to use backing tracks to enhance our performances. Over the years the attendances have increased considerably and twenty today would seem very disappointing indeed.

One thing which hasn't changed and which hopefully never will, is the wonderful comradeship that pervades throughout our Circle plus the warmth and friendliness that awaits new members making the Yorkshire Ukulele Circle the unique club that it is.

Produced and published by Peter Pollard on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the best club in the world!

YORKSHIRE UKULELE CIRCLE