

THESE ARE THE TIMES



London Gangshow Fellowship
Founder: Ralph Reader CBE
Spring 2015

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

We had a thoroughly enjoyable night at our reunion, numbers were slightly up on last year even though neither the Grand Order of Water Rats nor a party from the Entertainment Artistes Benevolent Fund were able to join us this year. It seems likely, but unfortunate that although they supported us for some years after we lost dear Jack Seaton that link may now be broken.

Phil Philips provided music throughout the evening and, as usual, helped everything go well. David Capri provided an entertaining cabaret act and was quick to spot the dancing and singing abilities of Edinburgh Gang show's Andy Johnston, John Duncan and Scott Walker and enlisted their help in his act.

The renowned double act and dancing duo of Douglas Gordon and Laurie Derbyshire proposed the toast to the memory of Ralph and the Fellowship in a very amusing and enthusiastic way with Laurie doing the talking and Doug much of the writing. As Ralph was credited with saying "If you can't sing, dance and if you can't dance, play for laughs" they certainly gave us a lot to laugh about

The raffle raised substantial funds for the Ralph Reader Memorial Fund and the quiz arranged by Phil raised further funds towards the restoration of the exhibit about Ralph at Crewkerne museum. It is planned that the restoration will go ahead this year.

Our next event is the camp at Hurley, details elsewhere in these pages. Do try and come even if only for a day visit, it really is a good reunion with time to share. I hope to see you there.

David Clay

ANNUAL REUNION DINNER 2015

Another great evening catching up with friends. It was lovely to see David and Sylvia Catt-Camfield after a very difficult year for them both. I know we all wish them a full recovery from their problems and look forward to seeing them at this year's events.

The speech this year was given by Laurie Derbyshire on behalf of himself and Dougie Gordon, it was so apt and in the true spirit of Gang Show that the Chairman has asked me to share it with you.

"Ladies, Gentlemen and Fellow Gangsters,

It is a great privilege to be asked to propose this toast to Ralph and the London Gang Show. However, I must confess, I am here by default because it was supposed to be my great friend Dougie Gordon making this speech tonight and our Secretary Brenda Pow charged me with the responsibility of asking him. That was the first mistake. Brenda asked me two days before I went to Thailand for over 6

weeks, just before Christmas, and I forgot every word about asking Dougie. In an effort to redeem the situation Brenda suggested that Dougie and I could do a double act. Well we are certainly no Morecombe & Wise even if I have got short hairy legs. But Douglas ever the master of generosity said it would be unfair to have a smartly dressed debonair “man of the world” making a speech alongside an “Old Crock”. So tonight for the next 3 hours you are lumbered with me, the “Old Crock.”

Fortunately Dougie, in the spirit of a double act, has collated both his and my memories of our early years in the London Gang Show at Golders Green and produced a script of our reminiscences which I make no apology for reading to you because I do not want to forget any of Dougie’s wonderful prose.

It is called: ***A View from the Green***

It is a well-known fact that a person’s long term memory is very clear even though it may have a rosy glow round the edges, yet ask an older member of the community what they had for breakfast yesterday or what they did this afternoon and they probably will have difficulty remembering .

Well it is around 50 years since The London Gang Show said goodbye to the fabulous Golders Green Hippodrome, we were then obliged to move to The Odeon, Temple Fortune and after that the Gaumont State, in Kilburn.

Dougie and I both joined the show at the same time at Golders Green and as some of you may remember, there was a parade of shops opposite our dressing rooms at The Hippodrome. One in particular had a very large sign over the shop advertising a certain George Tarratotee. Now it could have been an estate agents or a solicitors I know not but every night the gang would serenade the said George Tarratotee with 3 or more football like chants of Tarratotee, Tarratotee, Well you have got the idea. Just up the road from this shop was the Express Dairy, which was actually a café and on cold winter nights at the end of October the windows would always be steamed up with lots of Gang Show boys inside downing mugs of tea and mountains of beans on toast or scrambled eggs. They would then sprint across the road to the stage door and up the stairs to their dressing rooms to get made up for the Opening Chorus

The makeup room was run by Old Bert ably assisted by Young Bert, Young Bert’s sister, Big Nell, Big Nell’s daughter the wonderful Jenny who became Mrs Pete Reglar and of course our very own Lovely Lorna. They would do their best to make silk purses out of sow’s ears, but after a couple of days in our first show Dougie and I realised that we would have to avoid Old Bert like the plague, as his eyesight was not very good and he had the habit of trying to put a red dot in the corner of your eyes. It usually went into your eyes nearly blinding you for the rest of the show. Leg makeup was also strictly compulsory as white pubescent knees could be spotted from the back of the stalls, or worse still the back of the dress circle. So outside the makeup room there was the dreaded orange plastic bowl, filled with a dark brown jolop, called, in the legitimate theatre, leg makeup. Into this slurry was to be found floating a small foul smelling sponge the odour of which I am sure lives on in our nostrils to this day. You see, unfortunately, this was before the days of spray tan.

Next to the makeup room at the top of the theatre was the canteen, supervised by Lou Lacey but dominated by Edna Biddlecombe which most boys avoided unless they had a couple of hours to waste or had lost the will to live. As Edna would impart the world shattering news that she had skillfully mixed margarine with butter to make it go further in our sandwiches. Should an unsuspecting boy show interest in this information Edna would then bring out the photographs of her most recent trip to Canada to bore them further. There was no truth in the rumour though, that a collection was started in order that Edna could stay in Canada for the duration of the show.

To reach the stage at the Green you had to pass Ralph’s dressing room with its magnificent silver plated door. All the cast never failed to call into his dressing room to say good evening on arrival at the

theatre and to say good night after the show, because Ralph knew everyone by name and would know if you failed to do this. Lots of boys in the show had nicknames; there was Mike Hoffman who was Dancer, because he always led off on the wrong foot. David Evans was Tec, and Dave Fricker was Larzy, and of course Tree 1 was our very own Pete Bessell.

Well I was lucky enough to be in Tree 1's dressing room, which was rather untidy during the run of the show, so I used to try and keep it tidy by picking up all the spare hangers. Unfortunately there were never enough hangers to go round so if the boy next to me was changing to go on stage I would assist him by picking up his discarded hanger and putting something of my costumes on it. Just to keep the place tidy you understand. I had socks on one hanger, ties on another and so on. My fetish for hangers extended to all the other dressing rooms, even the girls dressing rooms when they came into the show. By the second night of the show all my clothes and costumes were on hangers on my 2 hooks on the wall. I remember I bought a hot dog one night but I didn't have time to eat it before going on stage. When I returned to the dressing room my hot dog was skewered to a hanger hanging on my hook. Well my nickname at the Green was of course Hangers and I had the greatest difficulty trying to explain that to my wife to be!

The only dressing room I never liberated a hanger from was Ralph's. One reason I suspect was because Fred Hurl and Geoff Birch were always hovering outside like a couple of night club bouncers while Mick Barker was inside with a few Groupies checking where the drinks were kept. In fact the great John Stiles used to call Mick Barker and co. the "Blotters" because they could always be relied upon to soak up Ralph's supply of whisky.

The wonderful Bob Corp Reader of course was running the show as stage manager in the prompt corner assisted by Mike Hurl, Fred's son, who later went on to become a well-respected BBC producer in his own right.

After the curtain came down at the end of the show and Ralph said goodnight to the boys he would meet and entertain his guests in the Dress Circle bar. This bar was very efficiently managed by Peggy, who knew everything and everyone both in the show and the theatre. Once the older boys removed their makeup they would call into the bar to say goodnight to Ralph, well that was their excuse anyway. Now Groupies are a modern show business phenomenon and even 50 years ago the Gang Show was no exception. One of the Gang Show Groupies was a lady called Lillian, known to us as Mrs Fish & Chips; a lady Ralph had met on a Mediterranean cruise. As her nickname implied she owned a fish and chip shop in Chester le Street and Lillian's claim to fame was that her son George looked much older than she did. There was another lady called Podge from Southampton. Now we never knew why she was called Podge, apart from the fact that she was a lot wider than she was tall and was only just over 4 feet tall. Another set of Groupies that spring to mind were Ken and Gladys Kwell and their rather lumpy sons. They were very strong Salvationists and sometimes arrived at the theatre for the Gang Show in full Salvation Army uniform which seemed rather odd because you expected them to be outside the theatre selling the War Cry. They were unique in the fact that they had tickets for the stalls for every performance of the show, even the matinees. The dance team used to speculate as to which seats they were sitting in, although, sometimes you could not see them until the first act finale when the stage lighting would illuminate the Stalls. But they would all be there for the whole two weeks of the Show.

We also had an evening newspaper that was produced at the Green called The Gang Show Star which had a new edition every night of the run, for only a penny. It was edited and printed by Tec Evans with none other than Edie Gregory who was always full of fun as the roving reporter and always had a new remedy for 'Bald Headed Men' in the adverts section. As you can see none of the remedies worked!

In those far off days none of us realised just how privileged we were to be touched by Ralph's fantastic talent and his great friendship. Not only did we play to capacity houses for two weeks every year, we made television programmes in black and white and also in colour, with the likes of Bud Flannagan, Billy Cotton, Bob Monkhouse and even appeared on Sunday Night at the London Palladium. We made records with Max Bygraves, Russ Conway, Mrs Mills and Dora Brian and appeared in the Royal Command Performance in the presence of her Majesty the Queen and his Royal Highness Prince Philip. The Queen and Prince Philip even attended a gala performance of the London Gang Show at the Green and on many occasions other members of the Royal Family graced us with their presence. How lucky were we.

As I have mentioned before Dougie and I both joined the show at the same time and Ralph picked Dougie because he was naturally talented and a bundle of energy as he still is, but I wasn't. It was only my great friend John Styles the producer of the Tottenham and Hornsey Gang Show who twisted Ralph's arm and got me into the London Show. Although Dougie and I were great friends we were never in the same dressing room because I was in the Trees' dressing room and Douglas was in the classy dressing room next door but that was probably a good thing because we would never have got out of the dressing room for laughing so much and would have missed all our entrances on stage. In fact I always maintained that the Gang Show audiences seemed to be cheated because we had more fun back stage than they could ever have had out front in the auditorium. Years later I mentioned this fact to Ralph and of course he had the answer. He said "Son, It was the fun and enjoyment that you shared back stage that translated into the **enthusiasm** that you all showed on stage."

It was our great honour and privilege to have been in the London Gang Show and we are eternally grateful to Ralph for giving us that opportunity.

So please be upstanding and join Douglas and myself in proposing an enthusiastic toast to Ralph and the London Gang Show."

So if you missed this year's dinner put next year's date in your diary and come along for a great evening catching up with friends and memories.

FELLOWSHIP CAMP WEEKEND 2015

Would you believe it? Spring is just around the corner. Just around the next corner Summer is waiting. Summer heralds the arrival of.....HURLEY TIME. Yes, that time of year has crept up on us again. I hope you have all had a good time since last we met. Now it's that "get the tent/caravan/ motorhome ready" time. This year we will again be at Hurley Riverside Park, by popular request, from Friday 26th June until Sunday 28th June. They are holding 26 pitches for us which is only just enough, so **get in early with your booking or you may be out of luck**. When they have gone I may not be able to get any more. As you are aware, the Hurley Camp-site is ever increasing in popularity. I have already received quite a few bookings so please don't hang about.



The Coffee Morning and raffle will be held on Saturday at 11.00 am, this has proved popular over the last few years as it enables everyone to strike camp on Sunday around our erratic weather!

As usual, please contact me for a reservation, at which time I will give you a pitch number for you to state at reception on arrival. Do not pay any money. I will collect from you on site. This pitch number is particularly important if you are amongst those who wish to extend your stay, either before or afterwards. You will need to contact the Camp-site yourselves for any extension, but by stating the pitch number I will have given you, you will not have to move. We are requested to arrive between **1PM and 8PM**. If you get there a little earlier, don't panic. I think it is done to avoid cars and caravans/trailers attempting to pass one-another on the narrow approach road.

For anyone still uncertain of the directions to Hurley here they are: Leave the M4 at junction 8/9 following the A404M signposted Henley. Continue forward onto the A404. Turn left along the A4230 signposted Hurley/Henley for about 5 miles into Hurley. Ignore the sign for Hurley Village and continue for a further mile. At the International Camping sign turn right into Shepherds Lane. The site entrance is about 200 metres along the lane on the left side at a sharp right bend. Follow for a further 200 metres into the site. The reception office is on the right. You will be asked for £5 for an access key to /from the Site over the period for which you are booked. This money is refunded on your departure. If on an extended stay, don't forget to tell them so that the Key will cover the whole stay.

Should anyone need to contact me during the week prior to the Camp, I can be reached on 078 543 75515.

Looking forward to seeing you all,

Regards,
Tree One Peter Bessell (0115 9656531)

FUTURE EVENTS

Annual Camp Friday 26th – Sunday 28th June 2015, Hurley, Berkshire.

AGM Sunday 31st October 2015

ANNUAL DINNER AND DANCE Saturday 30th January 2016

OF INTEREST!

A couple of years ago I was "surfing" the web, as you do, and came across the Scout Archives web site.

<http://www.scoutsrecords.org/scoutsuploads/Film%20Collection%20List.pdf>

It had a DVD of the 1957 London Gang Show. The DVD is shown as item 50 on the Archive list, but can also be viewed on You-Tube by typing "1957 Gang Show". I sent for a copy and to my amazement I and a few others from my old troop (5th Hornchurch) were in it, with Dinky Rew, Jack Palmer, R. Reader and a few other notables. If anyone would like a copy (the quality ain't that good) try the Scout Archives you may see what you looked like 50+ years ago. When I joined LGS in 1956 another Mike from our troop, Mike Hannan and I were featured in the "Scout Magazine" as "The two Mikes join the London Gang Show". Unfortunately I had lost my copy of the magazine so, tongue in cheek, I emailed the Scout Archivist to see if he had a copy. This was in January 2007. About a year later I received an email from the archivist apologising for the delay but he had found a copy of the

article which he included in his despatch. If anyone is interest here it is. Unfortunately I have lost contact with Mike Hannan so if anyone knows of his whereabouts I would be interested to know.

Mike Ely

Note from the Editor

Contact with members of the gang continues to go well. This means that TATTS is being received both by e-mail and post by a growing number of the gang. However, if anyone hears of a member who is not receiving TATTS and information please give them Richard Micklefield's or my address and e-mail and we will ensure they are able to get back in contact.

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I would like to apologise to anyone who received a strange e-mail from the lgsf site over the last weekend. It seems I had picked up a nasty from someone else's e-mail and it sent some strange messages and links to quite a lot of people in the mail box. Hopefully I have cured this, but please let me know (via David Clay as he can contact me by telephone or my private e-mail) if any further problems occur and I will close that account and open a new one.

Many thanks to all those people who keep me up to date with events around the globe and for ideas to keep TATTS more interesting. It is difficult to include all the features as they come in as TATTS would be too long, but keep them coming please and I will include as many as possible.

Brenda

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