

THESE ARE THE TIMES



London Gangshow Fellowship
Founder: Ralph Reader CBE
Spring 2016

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

We enjoyed another great night at our reunion although a few regulars were unable to join us this year and sent their good wishes. We remained true to the format established by dear Jack Seaton who has had a lasting effect on the way things are run!

Phil Philips provided music throughout the evening and, as usual, helped everything go well. Steve Galler provided a very entertaining cabaret act and delighted us with his unique blend of comedy and music – sparkling virtuosity and charming humour combined with great songs – a great warm up for our singalong later in the evening

The inimitable patrol leader of the Trees dressing room, Peter Bessell, proposed the toast to the memory of Ralph and to the Fellowship in his very own amusing and enlightening way. A highly entertaining speech.

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. The museum hope to “unveil” the newly refurbished Ralph Reader exhibit when they open for the season at Easter.

Whilst he was in London our archivist, Gordon Blackburn, arranged to visit the Scout association archive at Gilwell where we were met by LGSF member Peter Ford. Peter was very helpful and was able to supply material to fill gaps in our archive, Gordon was also able to supply some items which the association did not have. Whilst there we were able to view the material recently donated by LGSF member Alan Nunn - a very interesting and personal collection of his time as “Boy Scout”

We also spent a day with Maureen Cook, Ron Meyers sister, and again filled some gaps in our archive. We hope that we also helped Maureen identify some of Ron’s memorabilia so that she may offer it to the relevant Gang Shows.

Congratulations to Tony Guy, WAGS, on the award of his MBE for services to scouting.

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

FELLOWSHIP DINNER – JANUARY 2016

As usual this was a great evening, good food, good entertainment and time with friends to catch up with news. The Committee have asked me to share the following with you.

The Grace was taken by Tec Evans:

Dear Lord,

We gather here this evening with grateful thanks for your servant Ralph Reader, on whom you bestowed such talents. Who throughout his life became your ambassador of communication to thousands through the world of music, dance, drama and laughter.

A very extraordinary man who could have been a millionaire, but he shared his talents with you and me and helped many well-known people up the ladder.

Amen

The Toast was proposed by Peter Bessell (Tree One):

This evening I have the honour and privilege to propose the Toast to The London Gang Show Fellowship and to the Memory of Ralph. It's not the first time that I have proposed this toast, and I obviously made such a good job of it last time that I have been invited back again – and after only 44 years! What an impact I must have made.

Actually there was quite an impact, albeit unwanted. It was the occasion of the celebration of 40 years of London Gang Shows and I was one of two cast members on the Gang Show Committee. Cast members were changed every two years, one new member each year. (I'll explain the conundrum later to anyone struggling. Anyway, it was decided in committee that we would mark this special event with a presentation to Ralph, and after a collection had been made amongst cast and back-stage members, alike, a sum of around £350 was raised. I can't remember the exact figure but it was somewhere in that ballpark. Now that may not seem such a large amount today, but at that time I was working as a printer in what was considered to be a very well paid job and I was earning about £14 per week, so £350 wasn't chicken feed. The Committee decided in it's wisdom to present Ralph with an engraved watch, to be given to him and the Re-union Dinner by the cast rep,(me),as part of the annual Toast to Ralph. That was when the problem arose. When I went to pick up the watch two days before the Dinner, there had been a hic-cup (my extremely polite word for it). The watch had not come back from the engravers and would be available in time for the dinner. Catastrophe. What the hell would we do?? Easy really, we'd do what Ralph had always instilled in us over the years. When things went wrong, ad lib. So I made the speech in front of 150 plus members, all eager, expectant and unaware, and presented Ralph with an envelope containing a promissory note and an explanation. He as usual, took it all in his stride, said "Thanks Son" and thumped me round the back of the neck. I swear I can still feel it today. That of course was Ralph's normal greeting. A thump round the neck, followed by, "Hello Son". In the early days of the girls joining the case, they were confused to find that they too were his Sons, although I think they did escape the G.B.H.

Ralph was amazing. He knew the name of every cast member, and woe-be-tide anyone that didn't personally say hello or goodnight to him. At rehearsal, he would stop a full stage production number to walk across to say good evening to someone that hadn't spoken to him on arrival. "You were busy when I arrived Ralph" would be met with "I'm never too busy to speak to you Son." That person never forgot again.

In the early years of my Gang Show life, I spent quite a lot of weekends at Ralph's home in Fitzjohn's Avenue in Finchley. There was a crowd of the gang there ever weekend, at least half-a-dozen. There were bodies sleeping everywhere. Breakfast was made by anyone who could cook, the same with lunch. We often went out and about to see local scout shows, and many is the hour we spent

round the piano. Ralph loved fish and chips, and returning from a show in Croydon, we pulled over at a chippie for some take away. As we gave our order the lady behind the counter said “ere, ain’t you that scout geezer, cor I do love your show on tele – ‘ere Harry it’s that Ralph Reader bloke, come out and say dib-dib-dib. We left there 20 mins later with 5 portions of fish and chips that she refused to take the money for. As we sat in the car eating Ralph said it was the best fish and chips he had ever tasted, and I do like her prices.

I was lucky enough to spend a couple of Christmas’ with Ralph and the boys. I remember one where he took us out for Christmas lunch at The Trocadero in Shaftesbury Avenue. It was the first “posh” restaurant I had ever been to and in those days, one of the most sought after in London. The food of course was excellent and almost as good as my wife Sylvia now serves on a regular basis The atmosphere was electric. Ralph seemed to know everybody and they him. One chap I particularly noticed at a near by table, simply because of the enormous Christmas Cracker he had brought in with him. It must have been 4 feet long and everyone seemed to take an interest in it. He came over to speak to Ralph, and some of the boys new him already. That was my first meeting with Jack Seaton. I never did find out what the cracker contained.

The following Christmas I was invited to go with Ralph and a couple of the other lads to Crewkerne to spend time with his family. I wasn’t even sure my Mum would let me go. The previous year had been ok, after a lot of soul searching, but then I was staying in London, where I lived, but to go further afield was something else. It says much for Ralph’s persona that she allowed me to go. It was shortly after the war, she had never been anywhere, we’d never had a family holiday and this was my chance to get away somewhere nice. Anyway off we went, 5 of us to Crewkerne. Ralph decided that on the way down we would stop for a couple days at a hotel in Eastbourne that was managed by an ex-RAF gang member, by the name of, I think Tony Mancini. The hotel was fabulous. It had a proper foyer, carpets all over the floor and stairs and in the rooms. It was fantastic. I should point out that I lived in the Kings Cross area of London, which was very rough, tough and bleak. We had three families living in one house, one shared toilet and no hot running water; so this hotel was like being in wonderland.

We had a drink at the bar and chatted with the manager. Ralph then went off with the manager after arranging to meet us all in the bar in an hour and a half before going into dinner. We went to our shared rooms to tidy up and get changed. I opened the door and couldn’t believe the luxury in front of me. And there was a bathroom, a real bathroom with a real bath. I had found Utopia – for me back home, bath time was a galvanized tin bath on the floor of the kitchen on a Friday night. The whole family got in, one after the other. If I was very lucky I would get in last, after my Dad, which meant lots of water, albeit full of scum - . Kenny Cregeen, who I was sharing with, had a shower and went to meet the boys at the bar. Eventually Ralph wanted to go into dinner, it was already half an hour after our meet time and sent Kenny to find me. I was still in the bath, singing away over an hour after I had got in it. Did I tell you I was a lead singer?.... That was my first ever real bath, and I have never forgotten it. Thanks Ralph.

It was shortly after this time that I became a less frequent visitor at Fitzjohn’s Avenue. I had found another interest. Girls. One in particular. Oh how I wish that I had stayed with Fitz-johns Avenue.... I remember Jimmy Cregeen warning me that Ralph was always a bit frosty towards any female that was the cause of distracting one of his regular visitors, so it was with some trepidation that I found myself sitting with Sylvia in front of Ralph and John Stiles at a St. Pancras Gang Show. Sure enough he leaned over and said to her “so you’re the reason we don’t see so much of Peter these days”. To which she replied, smiling sweetly, “You can have him back anytime, he’s not much of a catch anyway”. She was lying of course..... Ralph grinned, gave her a kiss and invited us for a drink after the show. They always got on like a house on fire. A few years later, just after we got

married, the show was running at the Odean, Temple Fortune. Sylvia was in the Dress Circle watching the show, did I tell you I was a lead dancer..... During the interval she went to do what a girl has to do, and as she crossed the foyer, Ralph was standing with Anna Neagle. He saw Sylvia and shouted across "is your old man still beating you?" Thanks Ralph....

It was around this time that Ralph inadvertently laid the seeds of what has become dare I say Gang Show folklore. He had spent most of one rehearsal night setting up a full stage dance routine number. Did I mention I was a lead dancer?..... He had one line running here, one line running there, criss- crossing all over the stage. My line had come on and stood at the back across the stage - and stood at the back across the stage - and stood at the back across the stage. We were getting giddy watching everybody else moving. "Right", said Ralph, "let's hit it from the top." So John Stiles hit the keyboard, and away we went.."Stop – stop – stop!" Ralph shouted. "Peter what are you doing? When does your line move on, Son" "We don't Ralph", I said, "I think we're flipping trees." We thought no more about it until the dress rehearsal at Golders Green. We were all allocated a dressing room and every one from the original line up was uncannily put into the same room. Someone jokingly said "The Trees are together again". We all looked at each other and decided the name on the dressing room door would read 'Tree Patrol' The name stuck and we are still know today as the trees. I was the patrol leader, so I became, just for a laugh, Tree One..(at this stage several more `trees`, in turn stood and said `I'm Tree Two, I'm Tree Three, I'm Tree Four and so on..`) The legend lives on! I guarantee, wherever there is a Fellowship gathering, the Trees will be there, 40 years after the last show! All because of Ralph. Thanks Ralph.

When the girls came in the show in 1968 they were all issued with what they called gripper knickers, so that they could move around in various stages of undress without any embarrassment. They moaned like crazy because the gripper knickers were so uncomfortable and unattractive. So the `trees` bought each of them a pair of lacy, saucy briefs to cheer them up, to be worn over the top; and presented to them one girl at a time. To make sure we didn't offend, and because she was always a good sport, the first pair were presented to Brenda Taylor...(Brenda stood here and confirmed 'Give Way' was written on hers and Eileen Fricker stood and announced she had `Stop`, on her pair). The `Trees` have branches everywhere!..... Another memory Ralph is responsible for. Thanks Ralph. The memories are endless.

Inevitably the Gang Show finally came to an end and slowly but surely the boys no longer "came knocking at the door". There were still some that did, however. One such was John Roake who would run Ralph anywhere he wanted. Ralph became a member of The Grand Order of Water Rats, a membership of which he was very proud. But as he got older it became very tiring for him to make the return journey from and to Bourne End. So once a month John would pick him up, and bring him to our home in Islington, and Sylvia would cook us all a roast dinner. He would afterwards sit and relax for a while, perhaps have a nap and then John would take him along to the Rats meeting, nicely refreshed. On one such occasion, we were listening to a Readers Digest Collection of Songs from Broadway. As each one played, Ralph told us which show it had come from, always correctly, until about the 10th or 12th one which according to the record sleeve he had got wrong. Sorry Ralph you're wrong on that one. I'm sure I'm not came the reply. Then as Sylvia read the sleeve in more depth, it said that the song had originally been written for an earlier show which Ralph had said, but had been removed after the opening night because of over-run. One night only, and he knew it was there. He might have been getting old and weary but his brain still worked. And what knowledge! Thanks Ralph.

Shortly before the Gang Show ended, the Fellowship was formed so as to give us all a vehicle to cling to and help us to continue the friendships we had formed over the years. I suppose we have been reasonably successful although quite a few have fallen by the wayside. It is a shame that so

few of the girls from the show have kept in contact. Perhaps the `Trees` didn't give out enough knickers!.....

Age is of course becoming our biggest enemy. But as long as we have our Friendships, our gatherings and our MEMORIES we live on, Thanks Ralph for everything. As he once reminded us "We've been making memories for a LONG, LONG, LONG LONG TIME."

For me, the greatest memory of them all is Ralph. THANKS MATE.

DIARY REMINDERS:

ANNUAL CAMP Friday 24th – Sunday 26th June 2016, Hurley, Berkshire

AGM Sunday 30th October 2016

ANNUAL DINNER AND DANCE Saturday 28th January 2017

SUMMER SOLSTICE

Well, another Gang Show Re-union is behind us, and although yours truly probably made a fool of himself, a good time was generally had by all, as always. Although we were unable to repel insurgents from across The Border; at least we were able to contain them! We now prepare ourselves for the Main Event of the year, I refer of course to the Summer Solstice held annually on the banks of The Thames at Hurley Riverside Park. The Fellowship Camp, that gala of joy and festivity. This year's get together will be held on **Friday 24th until Sunday 26th June** and all are welcome.

We started our weekend gatherings back in 1978 at a camp site in Woodford Green, moved to Billing Aquadrome, Northampton for a few years and then moved to Hurley on Thames where we have remained. We have been at Hurley for about 25 years, we're a bit vague on the starting date; some of the gang have attended every year so can anyone help on this point? There have been a lot of changes over the years, all for the better.

As you are aware the Hurley camp site has become extremely popular and it is imperative that we book early if we are not to be disappointed. I have booked our usual pitches but they will only hold them so long, if they start to get busy, and they will. I have already received quite a few bookings so please be prompt, I may not be able to get more pitches. 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 it from you on site. You will have to pay £10 for an entry key into the site over the weekend, which is returnable when you leave. We will be holding the **Coffee Morning at 11 am on Saturday**, leaving you free to enjoy the rest of the time as you will.



How to get there: Leave the M4 at junction 8/9, following the A404(M) signposted Henley, continue onto the A404. Turn left along the A4230 signposted Hurley/Henley for about 5 miles through 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 access is about 200 yards along the lane on the left side, ignoring a sharp right hand bend, follow the road for a further 200 yards into the site. The Reception Office is on the right. You are requested to **arrive between 1.00pm and 8pm**. If

you get there a little earlier, don't panic; I think it is done to avoid caravans/trailers attempting to pass one another on the narrow approach road.

Anyone wishing to extend their stay before or after the camp needs to do the booking with the site direct. However, book with me first to get a pitch number to give to the office to avoid having to change pitches, also make sure you ask for your access key to cover your complete stay.

Should anyone need to contact me the week prior to the camp please use : 078543 75515. Looking forward to seeing you all again.

Regards,
Tree One (0115 965 6531)

Note from the Editor

I hope Peter Bessell's `Toast to Ralph` has inspired you to get in contact and attend one of the gatherings- if you are not already a convert. Perhaps it has jogged your memory of cast members who you think would enjoy seeing some old friends. Whatever the reason please let Richard or myself know and we will be happy to make contact and get you and your friends involved again.

"You can get along without money, you can lose your dividends, you can get by without lots of things, but, you gotta have friends!"

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Many thanks to all those people who keep me up to date with happy and sad 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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