

THESE ARE THE TIMES



London Gangshow Fellowship
Founder: Ralph Reader CBE
Spring 2020

CHAIRMAN'S SPRING MESSAGE

Reunion

We enjoyed another happy night at our reunion. Phil Philips provided music throughout the evening and, as usual, helped everything go well. Tracey Martin entertained us well and involved several of us in her act; Norman aka Colin Brown and Brenda Pow providing much merriment as backing singers – video clips are widely available! Ian Sutherland, ably accompanied by Alan Hunter, reprised his performance of year ago to much acclaim. If you could not make it this year book next year's date, Saturday 30 January 2021, it really is a fun night.

The toast to the memory of Ralph and to the London Gang Show Fellowship was proposed with sincerity and warmth by Ewan Murray, HQ advisor for scout entertainment (a title we understand as opposed to the current typical HQ job titles!) He treated us to many happy reminiscences - it was particularly interesting to learn that Ralph's great nephew and niece appeared in the cast of the Harpenden GS this year.

Promise Path

We have approved the design of our brick to be placed in the Promise Pathway at Gilwell in memory of Ralph and it is now being engraved. We are planning to have a small reception at Gilwell to view the brick when it has been laid and will issue details when known

Website

Don't forget, suggestions for items for inclusion on the website always welcome, please send to Michael Hoffman
Mikeh25@waitrose.com.

The Gang goes camping!

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.

You will have seen from an earlier email announcement that it is important to book early with Peter Bessell if you wish to extend your stay before or after the "official" weekend of 26 to 28 June 2020. Peter 01159656531

FUTURE EVENTS.

ANNUAL CAMP Friday 26th – Sunday 28th June 2020, Hurley, Berkshire

AGM Sunday 25th October 2019

ANNUAL DINNER AND DANCE Saturday 30th January 2021

FELLOWSHIP CAMP 2020 circa 2019



This is a reminder to book early. The site gets very busy and apparently we now fall into the high season category! Peter is again gallivanting around the globe between now and June so he needs to know numbers sooner rather than later!!

This year's Fellowship Camp will again be held in our "home" at Hurley Riverside Park. The jamboree will run from Friday 26th June until Sunday 28th June 2020. Peter has already received a great response and it would be wonderful if he had to find more pitches if they have them, although not always easy. So get in touch with him as early as possible. I think you all know by now how to get to the site, but if anyone needs information please get in touch with Peter (0115 9656531).

Hurley prefer you not to arrive before 1300 hours due to a narrow access to the Park making it very difficult if you meet people leaving the site. For sat-nav users the post code is SL6 5NE. On approach to the Park, avoid the signs for Hurley Village and follow the International Camp Site signs, following along Shepherds Lane and bearing left at a sharp right bend and forward into the site. Present yourself at Reception, giving your name and pitch number (which Peter will give you when you book-in with him), and mention London Gang-show Fellowship [or Peter Bessell and although the poor staff's face will drop they will know who and where you are!). If you should need to contact Peter during the week prior to the camp, He can be reached on 078 543 75515. We are all looking forward to seeing you there,

[Tree One (Peter Bessell) Tel: 0115 9656531, Mob: 078 543 75515]

This was received recently and I thought it would make interesting reading for members who remember 1963.

"I hope you & yours are all well, Happy New Year, I have attached a photo of a poster for the 1963 show which was my 1st year on stage, someone who worked on the underground gave me the poster as they were displayed at stations, I took it around the dressing rooms at Golders Green Hippodrome before & during the show and got as many fellas as possible to sign it, the photography should allow it to be enlarged on a computer screen enough to recognise the names, I hope members will find this of interest."

Allan. Woolsey



In his own words

You may remember in the Autumn 2019 TATTS there was an article from Peter Baker recalling his memories of Ralph and the shows. Since then the Committee have come across the following interview in the archives and I thought it would be worth including Ralph's own word:

An interview with Ralph Reader



RALPH READER

and The Story of the Gang Shows

A FEW years ago two old Cockney women outside Covent Garden, watching a distinguished audience pour out after Ralph Reader's production of *Pilgrim's Progress*, saw on the posters the words "Produced by Ralph Reader". One said to the other, "Oh, it's him, is it? He'd never have been heard of if it wasn't for the Boy Scouts".

Ralph himself overheard this remark, and like the sort of man he is, he said in his book *It's Been Terrific* that it is good to hear these things because they help to keep one's feet pretty firmly on the ground.

Well, maybe he's right, for when a man has achieved the success Ralph Reader has achieved, it must be easy to become conceited. But Ralph Reader has never fallen to that temptation. If he were the sort of chap to become cocky he wouldn't have made that remark in his book!

You all know of Ralph Reader as the producer of the famous Scout Gang Shows, and of the RAF Gang Shows during the war, perhaps, but that isn't all the story, not by a long chalk. The two old Cockney women were very wide of the mark, even though maybe some of Ralph's best work has been with the Gang Shows; certainly he would agree that his most enjoyable job has been producing those wonderful shows and writing the music, the lyrics and the words as well, not to mention creating the dances and everything else!

Before he ever thought of a Gang Show he was famous, not only in this country but in America. In fact it was in New York, on Broadway itself that he had his first training and his first taste of fame. His is a fascinating story, of the orphan boy who made good, as Lord Rowan says in his foreword to *It's Been Terrific* He made good but at the same time kept his head when success came ... and never forgot his

An interview with Ralph Reader

first love, the Scout Movement.

EARLY DAYS

Ralph was left an orphan at the early age of nine, living then in Crewkerne in Somerset. He lived with his grandmother until 1914, when he was eleven and then, because he was weakly, went to stay with his uncle and aunt by marriage in Sussex. There he helped his aunt's father, Granddad Lovegrove, with his vegetable round; and it was Granddad Lovegrove who first took him to the theatre, to the Hippodrome at Brighton. And there, during the very first performance he ever saw, young Ralph decided he must at all costs become an actor.

After working at various jobs, including telegraph messenger and office boy, in 1920 his aunt's sister, who lived in America but was on a visit to England, said that she could help the boy in New York for she had a connection with the stage there.

In the end Ralph went to America. It was the beginning of his wonderful career, a career from which Scouts everywhere were eventually to benefit, although neither he nor they knew it at the time when Ralph Reader, full of hope and ambition but with very little money, embarked on the liner *Homer*.

SCOUT READER

But by then he had been a Scout for many years, for he had joined the Movement as early as 1914. That was the first big event in his life—the biggest of all in his own opinion. From the moment he joined as a youngster of only eleven, Ralph Reader was a Scout through and through. And even while in America, going from success to success, he never forgot the Scouts. For one thing he found plenty of Scouts in the States, where the Movement had taken a firm hold. In America he found that his aunt's sister had very little influence. There followed many different jobs, as clerk and packer, but always Ralph's ambition was to become an actor. He was taught dancing during the evenings and at last landed a job. After that he toured with small-time companies all over the States, often hungry, often unpaid, but learning his job and learning, too, to take it on the chin. He knew much of misfortune during those years, but he never gave in. No good Scout ever does, anyway!

A LUCKY BREAK

An interview with Ralph Reader

And then came the lucky break. An agent discovered his flair for producing dances and creating new dance routines as well. He secured a three-year contract to produce dances in Broadway shows and also to act as juvenile lead. After that it was a story of uninterrupted success.

DANCE PRODUCER

By 1928 Ralph Reader was famous on Broadway as the inventor and producer of dances in famous musical shows like *The Passing Show* and *Cherry Blossoms*. In that year he returned to London although he had also come back for a brief holiday the year before. He came to produce dances in the West End. What a list of London successes followed!

There was *Virginia*, *Good News*, *Merry Merry*, *Hold Everything*, *Silver*

Wings and then association with C. B. Cochran in Cochran's 1930 *Revue*.

These were followed by an association with Ivor Novello in *Glamorous Night*, *Careless Rapture* and *Crest of the Wave*.

And so it went on, success after success, Ralph Reader accepted as one of the finest dance producers and creators the West End had ever seen. There was acting, too, on the stage and on the films. Ralph Reader had reached the pinnacle.

The list of his successes is far too long to quote here, but what of his greatest success of all, as he himself looks upon it and with very good reason? What of the *Gang Shows*?

THE FIRST GANG SHOW

Before Ralph ever left England in the first place he was, as we noted, already a Scout. When he returned to London he took up his association with the Movement again, producing the *Roland House* *Pantomime* to raise money for a *Settlement* in the East End. Then came a contact with the *Holborn Rover Scouts*, with HQ. at the *London Central Y.M.C.A.* And very shortly after that he was enrolled as one of their *Rovers*.

Destiny was at work, a destiny which was to bring incalculable benefit to the *Scouting Movement*. Ralph was a top-line Broadway and West End producer. He was also a Scout. The stage was set now for the two to come together, for the one to assist the other to the tremendous benefit of the Movement. Over a quarter of a million pounds has been raised for the Scout Movement as a result of the various productions of the *Gang Show* and other efforts such as the

An interview with Ralph Reader

musical pageant *Boy Scout!*

Headquarters asked Ralph, after a few shows produced at the *Holborn Rovers H.Q.*, whether he would stage a show in aid of a swimming pool at one of their *Camping Sites*, at *Downe, Kent*. Ralph agreed, it was decided that talent should be sought not only amongst the *Holborn Rovers* but in other districts, and it was also agreed that the show should be a modern, fast-moving *revue*. The *revue* had no title but there were several suggestions, none of which satisfied Ralph Reader., until one rehearsal evening the chap acting as call-boy was sent to round up the actors after a ten-minute coffee break. He reported that the gang was all there and that gave the title *The Gang Show*.

The *Scala Theatre* in London was booked for three performances, 30th and 31st October and 1st November 1932. Rehearsals went well, some two hundred Scouts were enrolled as actors, but the question remained would the show be a success? Would sufficient people buy seats to make it a success?

For the first performance the house was only about a third full, but those who were present grew more and more excited as the show proceeded. The *Sea Scout* song *Steer for the Open Sea*, like everything else in the show written by Ralph Reader himself was a huge success; and by the time the curtain finally descended the audience were cheering.

People, however, didn't flock to the *Scala*. Even for the last performance the house was by no means full, although those responsible had hoped that word would get round and that London would come in its thousands.

MAKING THE GRADE

The next year, however, saw a change, for in the meantime people had talked about *The Gang Show* of 1932. The *Scala* was booked for a week in 1933, for a show entitled *The Gang Comes Back*. The last three performances were staged before full houses.

Then in 1934 it was decided not only that it must be an annual show but that the title must always be simply *The Gang Show*, for that's how people were talking about it. And the third year, 1934, was one of triumph. Long before the opening date every seat for every performance was sold. All over the country people were talking about the wonderful Scout show. Other towns and cities staged their own versions of it, including *Glasgow*, *Manchester*, *Newcastle*, *Birmingham* and *Edinburgh*. The hit song of the 1936 show, *We're Riding Along* on the

An interview with Ralph Reader

Crest of the Wave, written, of course, by Ralph Reader, became as widely known as any popular musical comedy song. It has become almost the theme song of Scouting.

ROYAL COMMAND PERFORMANCE

The greatest triumph of all was in 1937, when for the first time an amateur show received the distinction of a Royal Command Performance. And on 15th November 1937, at the world famous London Palladium, The Gang Show was staged before Their Majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth.

What a night that was when a hundred and fifty London Scouts lined up with such stars as Max Miller, Grade Fields, George Formby, Cicely Courtneidge, the Crazy Gang, Will Fyffe and many others.

Did The Gang Show come off that night? It did! The verdict of the papers the next morning was that the Scout show was second in popularity only to the great Max Miller himself!

Every moment of Ralph's spare time was now given up to Scouting not just producing shows, although he did many others besides The Gang Show to help the Movement but practical Scouting. As a keen Scout he ran his own Troop at Holborn, attended conferences and spoke frequently at District meetings.

NEW VENTURES

And as well, besides his professional work, which was heavy, Ralph took part well, of course in the film of The Gang Show, while in 1938, instead of a revue at the Scala, the Scouts staged Great Days, a much larger venture but as successful as any of the others.

Boy Scout, the great pageant of Scouting, Ralph Reader produced at the Royal Albert Hall in 1936, in case he wasn't already doing enough for the Movement! The mighty hall was packed from floor to ceiling ... and the show was a triumph. Scouting, of course, had been "on the map" for many years, but Ralph Reader and his actor Scouts put the Movement even more firmly on it, for as a result of the shows tens of thousands of people became actively interested and came to realise what a wonderful job was being done for such expert productions to be staged.

The war intervened and Ralph went off to organise the RAF Gang Shows and do the job he knew best in many other ways, entertaining and keeping up morale. When it was over back he came to the

An interview with Ralph Reader

West End as a top-line producer and also to Scouting. Boy Scout, produced a second time in 1938, has been staged over and over again and also successive Gang Shows... and still the shows go on, breaking records every year.

NOT A PENNY FOR HIMSELF

Now here is something really important which perhaps some people don't know. Ralph Reader himself has never taken a penny from any of his Scout shows, not even expenses. He has given up time which could have been earning him big money to the Movement, and what a benefit has accrued to Scouting! What's more, not a single Scout appearing in any of the shows has ever accepted a penny, either. Every Scout has found all his own expenses.

Well, that's Scouting, of course, to work as a team for the common good and not expect any reward but the knowledge of a job well done to put in, not to take out. That is Scouting, but just the same, although it is an accepted principle of all Scouts, that doesn't mean that gratitude is not in order from those who have benefited from the wonderful work done. The Movement is indeed grateful to Ralph Reader and his helpers. Scouts everywhere salute him, a top-line showman, writer, producer, dancer ... but above all a good Scout. Of all his achievements, and they have been vast since the Crewkerne days, he ranks none so high as that... he has helped the Movement and he is a good Scout!



Apologies for the layout, but this is scanned straight from the document.

Editor's Notes

Please don't forget to look at the website and encourage others to do the same, there are some amazing photographs and fabulous memories, which are updated as and when new material is found. Have a chuckle at yourself and remember old friends and the great fun we all had **lgsf.org.uk**. As David said any contributions will be gratefully accepted, or I can pass anything on.

I am happy to report that I attended a great celebration of two birthdays in Eastbourne last weekend. Many of you I know will recognize this couple. Kevin now reaching an interesting decade, I am finding out!! Of course Angie is much younger. A lovely party and good to catch up with some friends.



Don't forget to let me know of any reunions, it's always good to hear we're still out there enjoying ourselves.

We are hoping to hear from Gilwell soon about The Pathway stone in memory of Ralph. They have held a small reception for contributors in the past and we are hoping we can be part of the next tranche. We will keep you informed.

We continue to contact members of the gang but this depends on your support in passing on information to help us. TATTS is being received both by e-mail and post and I can only hope that the numbers grow as more people get in touch. However, if anyone has any ideas how we can reach some of our past show members or knows of any members who would like to be contacted, please let Richard or myself know.

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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 would be great to hear about your shows so that we can publish details and any locals or those wanting to catch up with friends to visit and of course any great reviews or relevant information about members. Although it is difficult to include too many features keep them coming please and I will include as many as possible.

We are booked into camp for a two week stay again and look forward to seeing everyone there.

Brenda

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