

THESE ARE THE TIMES



London Gangshow Fellowship
Founder: Ralph Reader CBE
Spring 2021

CHAIRMAN'S SPRING MESSAGE

In the light of the Prime Ministers latest announcement we can, finally, look forward to planning our usual events and enjoying each others company again. Whilst we can safely plan for the AGM on Sunday 31 October 2021 and the Reunion on Saturday 30 January 2022 it is difficult to be certain that the Camp will be allowed to go ahead on the weekend 25 to 27 June 2021.

The government hopes to be in a position to remove all legal limits on social contact by Step 4, which will take place no earlier than 21 June. If that happens then there would be no restriction on the number of people camping together, however, the planned date of the announcement is so close to the date of the camp there is no guarantee that we could proceed. Tree One will, in his usual enthusiastic and efficient way, maintain contact with Hurley and seek their advice letting us all know as soon as he can.

We will also be able to continue the massive task of sorting the archive and, when Scout HQ staff are working normally, progress our planned visit to view the Promise Pathway at Gilwell.

Some of our overseas members have suggested that we arrange a general Zoom 'get together' meeting and Brenda will issue details in due course. John Masters has been invaluable during the lockdowns in sending various communications to everyone and thanks are due to him and Brenda for continuing to produce TATs and to Richard Micklefield for mailing copies to the non-email community.

We continue to receive enquiries via the website from a variety of people both from within and outside the wider Gang Show family. Our thanks to Michael Hoffman for keeping the site updated and interesting.

I look forward to seeing you at our events this year and, in the meantime, I hope that you and your families keep well and stay safe.

David

FUTURE EVENTS.

ANNUAL CAMP Friday 25th – Sunday 27th June 2021, Hurley, Berkshire

AGM Sunday 31st October 2020

ANNUAL DINNER AND DANCE Saturday 29th January 2022

FELLOWSHIP CAMP 2021 circa 2019



Hi All,

Some of you with very, very long memories may recall that we once used to have an annual gathering which we referred to as London Gang-Show Fellowship Camp. Well we are strongly led to believe that it might actually be possible to restart that ancient long forgotten tradition. If that were to be the case, the dates would be Friday 25th June until Sunday 27th June 2021. We don't yet know whether Hurley Campsite will be able to open up but they are taking bookings with crossed fingers. If they get the OK I would like to know in advance how many pitches we are likely to need. This would not be a firm commitment on your part as possibly some of you may be a little reluctant at this time, but it would be a great help to me to be ready. Also anyone wishing to lengthen their stay should let me know so that they would be able to stay on the same pitch throughout. Looking forward to seeing you all,

Regards,

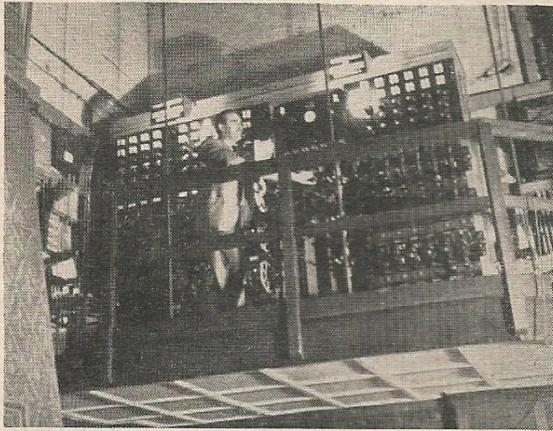
Tree One. Peter Bessell 0115 965 6531

JOGGING OUR MEMORIES!

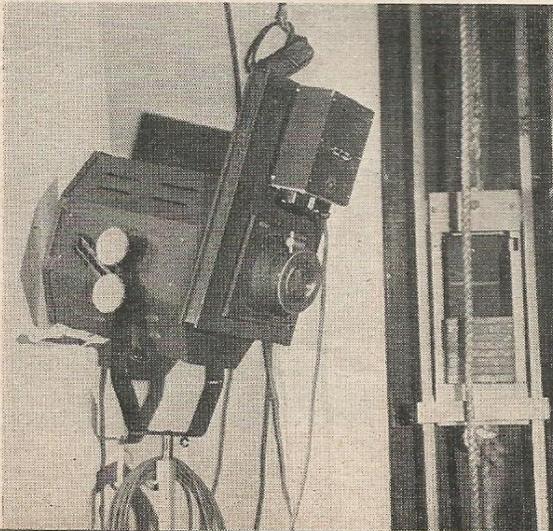
Mike Ely has been sorting through his papers and has found the following article and thought it might be of interest to members. Hope you enjoy



Ralph gives a few hints while (below) the electrician stands by at the switchboard.



The weird machine below projects effects like moving clouds and sea on to the backcloth. (Courtesy of Strand Electric.)



Focus on

By MICHAEL HURL

Photos by Stan Newton



The author busy giving cues from the prompt corner.

IF YOU are lucky enough to obtain a ticket for this year's *Gang Show*, you will see one of the fastest and—we hope—one of the most smoothly run shows being presented in the West End at that time.

But, I wonder, will you pause during one of the spectacular production numbers to consider how the scene was set in less than five minutes whilst

a sketch was being performed in front of the curtains; how the many "props" are placed in their correct places on the stage; and how lighting, curtain and effects cues are given? If you should, I hope that this article will give you some idea of what goes on behind the scenes and tell you something of the people who are never seen, but without whom it would be almost impossible to stage the show.

When Ralph Reader first conceived the idea of an "All-Scout Show" he was determined that not only should the cast consist of Scouts but that, as far as possible, the back-stage jobs should be manned by Scout personnel. I think it says a lot for Mr. Reader's confidence when one realizes that he entrusts a large part of the running of a high-speed show to amateurs—but they're Scouts, that's why he has confidence! (On the professional stage only highly skilled technicians would perform the same duties.) Not, of course, that these "amateurs" do not make mistakes—even Scouts are human—but I must admit that these are most infrequent.

It is most interesting that audiences very rarely notice mistakes, because they do not know that they are mistakes. I can best illustrate this by telling you of an incident in last year's *Gang Show*. In the second act there was a musical number called "Sailing On" which was performed on a dimly lit stage whilst different-sized warships, lit up with tiny lamps, appeared in the background: thus giving the impression of a large fleet of ships at anchor. These "lit-up" ships were illuminated at different times; first the small ones, then the medium-sized ones, then the largest ones. One night the writer gave the wrong cues and the wrong-sized ships were illuminated at the wrong moments. To both Ralph Reader and myself this was the most devastating mistake—but no one in the audience appeared to have the slightest idea that anything was amiss. I must admit that the effect was not improved by my mistake!

As the whole show depends on speed, the back-stage organization must also be streamlined. This is achieved by dividing the staff into separate sections, each section being responsible for one specific job. All these sections, both amateur (Scouts) and professional, are under the control of the Scout stage director, Geoff Birch. He is a man of infinite patience, who has to deal with hundreds of questions, tricky problems and situations of all kinds

Backstage at the Gang Show

which can only be termed "panics." He is assisted by Alf Wingrove, who keeps his eye on the cast, acting as a sort of sheepdog; and Tommy Thompson, who deals with the secretarial side of the organization.

Then we come to the different sections. Firstly, the direction side, run by professional stage director Bill West, who controls all the professional members of the staff (these include electricians, scenery shifters and curtain men), and his assistant, who helps with the continuity of the show by running the "prompt" corner giving lighting and curtain cues. Being a professional stage director with the *Gang Show* is something of an experience. For a non-Scout to have to work with over 150 people who think and talk Scouting the whole time can be overwhelming. Fortunately, Bill West was a Scout when he was a boy, so he is one of us—and I mean that—he's very much part of the Gang. Of course, the "Gang" cast are quite merciless with him when his birthday occurs during the run of the show—but that's another story! He can be thankful that he has not shared the fate of a pre-war professional member of the stage staff who was always having practical jokes played upon him by the cast. One famous trick was when they filled his closed umbrella with confetti, with the result that when he left a tube station one evening in the rain, he opened his umbrella only to be showered with tiny pieces of paper—to the amusement of the passers-by!

But seriously, this section is one which is controlled entirely by the factor of time; speed in setting scenery; the precise timing of curtain calls, and lighting cues; and, above all, seeing that the show is kept running smoothly. It is interesting that the difference between a properly timed "black-out" and "curtain," and a wrongly timed one—however small in a matter of seconds—makes a tremendous difference to the amount of appreciation and applause that any particular item may receive.

Then there is the "props" department led by Jim Figg; this is the largest all-Scout section, as it contains about ten members who are kept busy the whole evening, moving and setting furniture and miscellaneous "props," speedily and quietly. I always liken this section to a group of removal men, for whenever I see them they are always carrying some article of furniture to or from their "props" store. They are very hard working, and I know that several Scout readers would be both amazed and amused to see their Commissioner carrying a sofa or an African drum around the stage!

The remaining two sections are the orchestra, led by top-line musical director Harry Hudson; and the dressing-room staff, call-boys and prompters. The dressing-room staff of three old *Gang Show* members are in charge of the younger boys in the cast, and help them with any quick changes of costume that they may not be able to manage themselves. Whilst on the subject of dressing-rooms, I am sure that readers would be interested to know that the cast is run on the Patrol system, the occupants of each dressing-room constituting a separate Patrol under a Patrol Leader—and I can assure you that there is a con-



The glamour of the stage door.



Peter Dunlop designing and making the costumes for the first act finale.

siderable amount of rivalry between neighbouring Patrols.

There is one more person you quite frequently see back-stage. His name is not among the stage staff or the cast, but everyone knows him—many of you readers do, too. I mean Ralph Reader who IS the *Gang Show*; the author, producer and "inspirer-in-chief" of the whole lot of us. No one is quicker to spot a mistake, and no one more readily gives a pat on the back for a good job. Long may he lead us, and come back-stage to check up on his "slaves."

There we are, a brief insight into the complex world back-stage at the *Gang Show*; there is no secret about their efficiency—the plain fact is that from the first rehearsal they are disciplined and rehearsed just like the cast. I know that I speak for all those concerned when I say that I hope you enjoy this year's show just as much as we enjoy presenting it for you.

Editor's Notes

As you can see we are all very hopeful that camp will go ahead. However, please understand that we can only arrange events within the restrictions, therefore I must emphasize that members interested in camp must let Peter know as soon as possible so that he can act with up to date information.

I will let all members know the details of the zoom meeting in the next couple of weeks, so watch out for email details that will come via John, in the usual way. It's a great way to catch up with people and chat freely.

I would like to thank the Edinburgh GS for allowing me and several other members to join their usual Friday evening get together on the date that would have been the date for the Reunion Dinner 2021. Good to see you all, to have a drink and plenty of laughter.

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.

Don't forget to let me know of any reunions and hopefully shows in the not too distant future it will be good to hear we're still out there enjoying ourselves.

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 your news so that we can publish details of any events locally so that 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 hoping to be at camp again and look forward to seeing everyone there. Stay safe and fingers crossed for a happy and eventful coming GS year.

Brenda

TATTS is sponsored by ATL