

From Pleasure Isle to Internment Isle

Summer entertainment in Douglas 1939-45

by Maurice Powell

'Don't be surprised if all records for holiday traffic to the Island are broken this summer', remarked Mr. J. W. Cabourn, a representative of Pickford's Travel Service, during a conversation with an *Isle of Man Examiner* reporter during a weekend in June spent 'surveying the Island's beauties'. In his opinion, based on his considerable experience in the holiday trade, the state of international affairs was deterring thousands of people from travelling to Germany, Italy, France and Belgium and even Scandinavia, and the Isle of Man should reap the benefits from the situation. 'Many people like a sea passage as part of their holiday', he continued, and 'if only they knew what a delightful trip we had yesterday in the *Mona's Queen* . . . the Island looked as well as any continental setting I know as we approached it, in blazing sunshine from the sea'.

The summer holiday season of 1939 was indeed a bumper one, with promenades, beaches and gardens crowded by day, and ballrooms, variety theatres and cinemas packed by night. There was every reason to suppose that, with an estimated 552,000 visitors already arrived by the end of August, the total number of holiday makers would exceed even the record-breaking year of 1913. In June the first Sunday sailings in the history of the Steam Packet Company brought 2,000 holiday makers from Heysham, Liverpool and Fleetwood. Over the August Bank Holiday 45,000 visitors arrived, almost equalling the record of 47,000 visitors in 1937. The Steam Packet's thirteen vessels made twenty-five outward and sixteen inward sailings during the Saturday and Sunday, and even those arriving on the 2.30 and 3.30am sailings found a warm Manx welcome awaiting them. Twenty 'horse cars' had been lined up on the promenade near the sea terminal since 4.45am, and by 6.30am some 16,000 visitors had disembarked and were making their way to their accommodation. The promenade illuminations were switched on; the shelters at the Arcade and the Villa Marina were open and many boarding house keepers kept their lights on to welcome the early arrivals. At Cunningham's Camp six thousand breakfasts were served – eggs, rashers, bread and butter and tea – to all those awaiting the allocation of accommodation once they had deposited their luggage in the dining hall. With twelve hours of sunshine recorded each day of the August Bank Holiday, one observer of the Douglas holiday season imagined bleary-eyed young girls disembarking in the early hours of the morning, hastening to their accommodation for a quick breakfast and a wash and brush up, and by ten o'clock that same morning sunning themselves on the beach, 'almost clothed!'

'Shelters? Gas masks? They're not needed 'ere'.

As the height of the holiday season approached the mood on the Island shifted almost daily from a sense of the immanency of war, to relief that there could be no possibility of one. After all, had not Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain declared 'Peace in our time?' upon his return from meeting with Hitler in Munich in September 1938?* The whole country had heaved a collective sigh of relief, and for many in the Isle of Man it seemed as if the possibility of war in Europe was as remote as the Wars of the Roses. Many secretly wondered how long

appeasement would satisfy Hitler and Mussolini a mere twenty-one years after the signing of the armistice that ended World War I. 'Hitler has not hit Peel, and Mussolini is of no more importance than a mussel on the Quay', declared the *Examiner*, but the good folk of the West were not so sure. When asked by a visitor 'over a glistening glass of Manx ale in the Peveril' if there would be a war, a local in the bar replied: 'Well, I don't know, but Mr. Q told me yesterday that his tomatoes are not as good as last year'.

* He is frequently misquoted. Chamberlain actually said 'Peace for our time' when he landed at Heston Airfield waving the famous piece of paper at the assembled crowd.

There was an inescapable feeling of creeping unease, despite a policy of talking down the fears generated from the deteriorating situation in Europe, whilst, as unobtrusively as possible, preparing for a war the politicians maintained would never come. The most urgent fear was that of gas bombs being dropped on civilian populations, and although the Island was not considered to be a likely target for such attacks, that perception changed after it was announced that an RAF station was to be established at Jurby. The 'Hello Girls' at the Douglas telephone exchange were issued with gas masks so that they could stay on-line during a gas attack. Medical supplies were stockpiled at Noble's Hospital, and Tynwald built up food supplies in case Liverpool was bombed and supplies could not reach the island.

Propaganda films designed to allay fears often had the opposite effect. One particular British Pathé film about the impregnability of the Maginot Line was openly derided because audiences could clearly see that the Germans would easily outflank even those impressive fortifications. The sight of armed soldiers, military vehicles and stretcher-bearer parties in Douglas, though alarming, turned out not to be a sign of imminent invasion, but a series of military exercises. A disquieting echo from 1914 was heard in July, though, as 1,200 soldiers and officers from the Hallamshire Territorial Army Regiment from Sheffield marched to and from their training camp at Bilaboe near Onchan singing and whistling *It's a Long Way to Tipperary* and *Hello, Hello, Who's Your Lady Friend*.

A summer of wholesome family entertainment.

It was a summer of revues in the variety theatres of Douglas, although as far as the local newspapers were concerned the title 'revue' was interchangeable with variety show, summer or holiday show or even concert party. Near the end of its golden age, the revue, a multi-act concoction of skits and sketches, monologues and songs, dancing and choruses, peppered with local references, and linked together by a loose theme rather than a storyline, was a colourful spectacle. This perfect light-hearted summer entertainment was a *mélange* of variety acts that included top-of-the bill household names, 'number twos' and, to use the old music hall bill designation, those 'down among the wines and spirits'. Front-of-cloth comics - today's 'stand-up comedians' - shared the stage with illusionists, acrobats, adagio dancers, dance troupes, ventriloquists and multi-instrumentalists and vocalists accompanied by that all-important ingredient, a band or orchestra. Ramsey, too, welcomed its own 'snappy' concert party in June when Len Dodd's Super Entertainers appeared at the town's 'palace of changing fortunes', the Queen's Hall, for a season, with their 'first class band', the Select Syncopators, an Irish tenor, a comedian and whistler, a tap-dancing sister act, Ramsey

favourite, soprano Jessica Lynwood, and new child vocalist Joan Barnes, whose rendering of Gracie Field's *I'm Knitting a Singlet for Cecil*, went down a storm.

As the season proper got underway in July Charles Fox, until 1937 the chairman of the Palace & Derby Castle Ltd.,* addressed the Isle of Man Committee of the Actor's Church Union at their annual service at St. Matthews Church, and informed them that, in his opinion, 'the Douglas shows have never been better than they are this season', and, he might well have added, 'the cleanest'. The congregation on that occasion included top-of-the-bill entertainers from the current revues, Marion Davies, Wee Georgie Wood and Billy Danvers. Earlier in the season during the second week of June, Joe Kirkland and his band broadcast from the Palace Ballroom on the North Regional programme followed by the Isle of Man's Night Entertainment tour of the venues including *Pleasure on Parade* from the Villa Marina Garden Pavilion and dance music from Phil Richardson and his band from the Royal Hall, excerpts from the Derby Castle varieties, and Norman ('Hello, Folks!') Langford's revue *Moonlight Revels* of 1939 from the Palace Coliseum. The latter starring Zane Baynes, soprano, Maurice Sinnett, tenor, Austin Saunders' delightful violin solos, the Four Glorias dance troupe, Deveen, the 'silent' illusionist assisted by his beautiful New York Blondes, Jock Vernon's Scottish songs and dances and Billy Sizer's tip-top 'swing' band.

* See Maurice Powell, *Charles Fox Jr* in Manx Musical Worthies, manxmusic.com.

The Villa Marina opened 10th June for the season with Frank A. Terry's revue *Pleasure on Parade* in the Garden Pavilion - referred to as 'a shed' by 'Script' in the *Examiner* - '. . .to my mind, the finest revue Mr Terry has given us since the beginning of his long association with the Municipal resort' and possibly 'the best post-war show in Douglas since 1919'. The popular show starring radio favourites was enjoyed by residents and visitors alike who 'let themselves go' and forgot the 'obvious and oft-indicated disadvantages of the Garden Pavilion'. The blend of 'speed and brightness' together with that essential element in seaside entertainment – comedy ensured a near capacity audience every evening.

Principal comedian Louis Holt, making his Douglas debut, with Bert Maurice at the piano, poked gentle fun at a variety of familiar 'boarding house types' in their sketch 'Ballads in a Boarding House', a Burlesque of an impromptu drawing-room entertainment. Marian Dawson, 'the indescribable comedienne', an opera singer turned comedienne and later actress, quickly became a firm favourite. Madame Helena Lehmiski's Young Ladies dance troupe or 'beauty chorus' performed in national costumes; a Russian hunting scene gave particular pleasure. Fourteen-year-old Norma Cuddeford, billed as an exciting speciality acrobatic dancer, 'the last word in grace and skill', and Len Astor and Edna Green, displaying 'tap dancing at its neatest and best' completed the dance acts. The Four Rebels vocal quartet, and soprano, tenor and baritone vocal soloists completed the packed programme. James Rogers and the orchestra gave 'grand musical support'. In the Royal Hall, there was dancing to Phil Richardson and his band featuring the latest craze, *Boomps-a-Daisy*, derived from Florrie Forde's newest 'hit' song.

On wet mornings Feldman's Minstrels transferred from Douglas Head to the Villa Marina Garden Pavilion, and there was always a crowd at the song demonstration hall in Strand Street

where 'north-country' holiday makers could be heard 'letting rip' in the choruses of the latest popular songs. In fine weather there were daily concerts of light music in the gardens at 2.45pm with Phil Richardson and his band.

The Sunday concerts also attracted large audiences to see great acts such as the Western Brothers - not in fact brothers, but cousins – 'idle fellows' fresh from their radio series *Cad's College*, motto: *ad sum ard labour*, with their customary welcome, 'Good evening, cads, your better halves are here'. Attired in full evening dress with monocles, their monologues and songs made fun of public-school educated toffs. Their most popular songs *The Old School Tie* and *Play the Game, You Cads* - the introductory 'patter' for which included, perhaps for the first time, the phrase 'Cool Britannia' - were delivered in a languid, bored and disdainful upper class-drawl, as if they had just stepped out of P. G. Wodehouse's Drones' Club for a while in order to entertain the public. Two thousand people were present at their first concert.

In August another famous duo, Mr. Flotsam and Mr. Jetsam, appeared:

'We'll tell you our names
In case someone forgets'em.
I'm Jetsam. (I'm Flotsam).
He's Flotsam. (I'm Jetsam)'

Flotsam, B. C Hilliam, wrote their topical songs, sang in a light tenor voice not unlike that of Al Bowlly, and accompanied at the piano; Jetsam, the Australian *basso profundo* Malcolm McEachern, opera trained - he once toured with Melba - sang well-loved songs such as *The Floral Dance* and *In a Cellar Cool* in one of the richest, deepest voices ever recorded. 'I sing all the low notes', he sang; 'You'd wonder how he gets'em', replied Flotsam. Perhaps they sang their most enduring song *Little Betty Bouncer Loves an Announcer Down at the BBC* or *The Changing of the Guard* or *Schubert's Toyshop*, a song based on that composer's *Marche Militaire*. Rare film footage of their act reveals that in some respects they were the precursors of Flanders and Swann.

The African-American vocal quartet the Mills Brothers were unable to fulfil their engagement at a Sunday concert as they were involved in a car crash in Ormskirk on their way to the Liverpool steamer. Local soprano Norah Moore and Phil Richardson and his band stepped into the breach. Also appearing at a Sunday concert was the tenor known variously as 'The 'Minstrel Boy' and 'The 'Lancashire Caruso', Tom Burke,* the pit lad - a 'lasher-on' of the coal pit trucks - from the manufacturing and mining town of Leigh, who had conquered the operatic world with his wonderful 'Italianate' voice.

* He was chosen by the great Melba to sing Rodolfo opposite her Mimi in the 1919 *La Boheme* at Covent Garden, and subsequently appeared at La Scala, Milan, and the New York Metropolitan Opera, and became the darling of Britain's provincial theatres with his affecting singing of Irish ballads and Edwardian drawing room songs. He died in obscurity, a barman at a golf club, the victim of a deep-seated anger at the poverty he experienced as a boy, and a quarrelsome self-destructive streak, notorious drinking and womanising. His meteoric career of barely a dozen years was virtually over by the mid-1930s and he went into a long, slow decline. The once feted tenor ended his career singing in working men's clubs for a pound or two a night.

'You lucky people!'

'If it's laughter you're after, Trinder's the name'. Tommy Trinder, on stage from the age of twelve, and by 1939 one of Britain's foremost entertainers, was the consummate Cockney *ad libber*.* with a talent for pomposity-pricking quick-fire back-chat, and sporting his trademark jutting chin and pork-pie hat, he almost didn't make his engagement at a Sunday concert at the end of August. Shocked to find his air fare from London would be over £100, the star and his manager travelled to Liverpool by train and then chartered a flight as no regular service would take off due to the possibility of poor visibility at Ronaldsway. The total cost including rail and taxifares? £50.

* During the Blitz in 1940 he once ad-libbed for two hours during a power failure, and on another night appeared at no less than twenty-seven theatres in order to keep the entertainment going during the bombing.

The Villa Marina came under attack from an unexpected quarter in the shape of Alderman Frank Gale, who accused Douglas Corporation, who owned the venue, of 'prostituting the Villa Marina shows' and rendering it 'devoid of all that dignity which Douglas is entitled to'. An *Examiner* gossip columnist, *incognito*, investigated, expecting to witness degrading spectacles akin to the sacrificial rites of Moloch, but discovered instead 'a harmless diversion beloved by the holiday makers': a so-called 'stunt' night. At around 10 o'clock each evening there was a fifteen minute 'spot dance' during which a spotlight played across the dance floor, and any couples highlighted holding a copy of a Manchester newspaper would win a guinea. The Alderman's comments were dismissed as 'sheer nonsense and preposterous exaggeration', and the reporter went on to remind the readers that the Villa Marina dance floor, 'whose lighting and general décor exuded an air of subdued refinement', was one of the most orderly in Douglas, especially with the immaculately attired and experienced Master of Ceremonies George Kennish in charge.

Supposedly impromptu holiday fun events were popular at many seaside resorts. In Douglas that season visitors scoured the promenades in search of the anonymous character known as Potty Pumpkin, and once identified - or so they thought - challenged him, saying the prescribed phrase: 'You are Potty Pumpkin and I claim my £5'.* Whilst there was no doubt that such 'stunts' helped to sell newspapers at a time when many holiday makers might forego that particular pleasure, nobody was obliged to buy one even though they were on sale at the Villa Marina.

* It all began in August 1927 when the fictional character Lobby Lud was created by the *Westminster Gazette*. Soon picked up by other newspapers, this summer 'stunt' survived into the 1960s.

However, one would like to know more about the Prancing Pansy stunt that caused 'a congestion of humanity beyond description between the Villa Marina and the Castle Tap'. So much so that bus and tram traffic was delayed; commercial vehicles were unable to proceed about their business; charabancs were unable to leave their stands and the police were placed under considerable pressure. Shop keepers complained bitterly that 'the paper stunt spoils all trade . . . it ought to be stopped'. Perhaps it was an attempt to re-create the exploits of the *Beano's* Pansy Potter, The Strong Man's Daughter, who first appeared in 1938?

'A tip-top show'

At the Palace Coliseum throughout June Norman Langford's *Moonlight Revels of 1939* drew large crowds before transferring to the Pavilion Crescent on 1st July after which Tom Arnold's new summer revue *Keep Smiling* took over and held the stage for what remained of the season. Billed as 'a bright and breezy blend of wit, humour, grace and talent . . . with never a dull moment', it featured a resident jolly jester in the shape of Billy Danvers,* 'cheeky, cheerie and chubby' with a clutch of topical and local gags, and a new Isle of Man Song entitled *Isle of Man*, 'which was soon heard sung and whistled all over the town'. One correspondent suggested that the show be re-named *Keep Dancing* as dance routines predominated among the supporting acts principally Arnud, Peggy and Ready, 'sensational adagio dancers', in their terpsichorean fantasies *A Dance Phantasy* and *A Peach and a Green Pear* and Betty Hobb's twelve resident glamorous Globe Girls, who performed eye-catching routines on large globes. Descended from one of the most famous European clowning families, the Dario, Bario Family of musicians and dancers, complete with false noses, moustaches, painted faces and comic hats, appeared in a knockabout multi-instrumental turn. Rita MacKay, a sweet-voiced soprano, and the Four Jacks 'coloured' vocal quartet of two tenors, baritone and bass, delighted the audiences with their stylish, smooth-toned close harmony selections. Scottish comedians Shaw and Western introduced a Gaelic twist into the programme with their mini-revue 'A Scotch and Tonic'. Ernest Arnold's Coliseum Orchestra supplied the overture and musical accompaniments. By the end of August *Keep Smiling* was attracting thousands of holiday makers each week, amused no doubt by the opening scene depicting a railway station 'on the way to Douglas' and Billy Danvers' sketches *The Ever Open Door*, *The Insult*, *The Duel* and a chorus song *Umbrellas* which always brought forth howls of laughter. In the Palace Ballroom Joe Kirkham and his band provided music for dances old and new every evening at 7.45.

* William Mikado Danvers was a veteran old-time music hall comedian and entertainer, a master of the *double entendre* and a superlative 'Buttons' in pantomime.

'Will Dalton does it again'

There was standing room only in June for the variety show at the Derby Castle, and the doors were often closed twenty minutes before the commencement of the show. The sheer diversity of acts was astonishing compared to the frequently mind-numbing mediocrity of today's offerings. Will Dalton had gathered together a winning combination of acts that season including some of the best-known entertainers of the era: Jimmy James, Norman Evans, G. H. Elliot, Afrique, and Clapham and Dwyer. Jimmy James, never a top-of-the-bill star, a genuine comic's comic, and more a comic actor than a front-of-cloth comic, was famous for his surreal sketches, very much in the Rob Wilton mode, such as *The Spare Room*, during which a bridegroom gets drunk and finds himself locked out on his wedding night, and *Sober as a Judge*. He was a great ad-libber, and for many, the finest stage drunk in the business, although he neither drank nor smoked himself. He was once asked to describe his act, to which he replied, 'I'm glad you asked me that. It's been worrying me for years'. In support was Howard Rogers, 'the popular beaming country vicar' and his bicycle, and Rebla, 'the original lazy juggler' whose skill was disguised by dry comedy and 'an air that it's all a beastly bore'.

Radio's future 'Cavalier of Song', dashing, debonair Donald Peers, already twenty-nine years old, yet with his heart throb years still to come, sang a selection of 'evergreens', perhaps including the song that in 1945 would revitalise his flagging career touring the smaller theatres: *By a Babbling Brook*. Described as 'rope and whip stars', Rex Roper and Maisie displayed jaw-dropping, split-timing skills in their rope spinning cowboy act. The Three Sandler Sisters (their brother was the popular violinist Albert Sandler) appeared 'in song and rhythm' on a variety of musical instruments. The supporting acts included ventriloquist Charles Seltzer's dancing dummy, aerial acrobats Tony Borelli and Mimi, and Lilian St. Johns' irrepressible Ten Moonbeams, the resident young girls' troupe, in a rough-and-tumble acrobatic dance routine called 'Fireworks'. The talented new conductor of the variety orchestra for the season was thirty-one-year-old Charles Tovey, the composer of a number of popular dance tunes including *Lazin'*, *New Moon*, *Park Lane Strutt*, the fox-trot *Content With You* and his own arrangement of Irving Berlin's *Change Partners*.

'That coalman was never away, you know . . . don't tell me it takes 35 minutes to deliver two bags of nuts!

Northern comedian Norman Evans, last seen at the Castle in 1937, the Royal Command Performance comedian who made the King and Queen laugh heartily,' appeared at the end of June in his well-loved sketches *Over the Garden Wall*, which featured one-sided conversations with the toothless, disapproving, gossipy, hatchet-faced Lancastrian housewife Fanny Fairbottom, characterised by the silent mouthing of words too delicate to speak out loud, and *Geoffrey Ramsbottom's visit to the Dentist*, during which he portrayed both patient and dentist. 'I'll have to go', he would say at the end of the sketch; 'I can smell summat . . . I think cat's in t'custard again!'

Edward Victor and his partner Paddy were masters of the unusual art of silent shadowcraft, or artistic 'hand-made humour'. They created silhouettes by the manipulations of their hands behind a screen of notable personalities and four generations of royals including Queen Victoria, King Edward VII and King George V, and were popular with the Royal Family. A novel balancing act by adagio dancers La Cygne Four, 'aristocratic roller-skating' from the duo Lucerne Skaters on a six-foot table, and illusionist Henri Hilton, 'the dexterous deceiver', completed a packed programme. Bert Noble and his band played for dancing in the ballroom from 7.45-11.00 together with a guest appearance of famous songwriter Billy Carlisle on the dance floor demonstrating the new dance craze *Booms-a-Daisy*.

The melodies linger on

G. H. Elliott, the original 'Chocolate-Coloured Coon', and a survivor from music hall's golden years, caused a huge sensation when he appeared at the Castle singing a selection of his best-loved songs: *Lily of Laguna*, 'Neath the Silvery Moon and *Hullo, Susie Green*, thus demonstrating that he was the true successor of the greatest of all 'black faced' singers, or 'negro delineators', Eugene Stratton. Indeed, he was said to perform Stratton's songs better than anyone other than Stratton himself. His soft-shoe dancing was said to be a highlight of his act.

What were described as 'absurdities' emanated from Noni, the French-born musical clown, considered by many to be the greatest clown since Grock, and his partner Barry, also a fine musician, that night after night kept the audiences in stitches. He wore a hat with a pom-pom, a shabby coat, very, very baggy trousers, oversized shoes reminiscent of those worn by Little Tich, and clutched his trademark large musical instrument case from which he took a diminutive violin upon which he began to play a short piece complete with double-stopping. He was in fact a very accomplished fiddler, and unlike most clowns, he actually spoke during his performance, regaling Barry with a stream of nonsensical chatter in a surprisingly cultured voice.

The supporting turns were equally entertaining. Zahoor, an Indian boy whose feats on a bamboo pole had to be seen to be believed, was an act new to Britain; Lola Cordell and Al Gold impressed with a sophisticated, 'classy' Astaire and Rogers style dance routine; Presco and Campo, one scruffy, the other suited, tumbled and stumbled across the stage and Alec Halls,* a true eccentric multi-instrumentalist, nearly raised the roof with his impression of a train on a drum. An old Douglas favourite, the number two theatre 'front-of-cloth' Yorkshire comedian Walter Niblo, received his usual warm welcome, and the Ten Moonbeams added a touch of youthful energy with their familiar whirlwind acrobatic act.

* He was the only ENSA artiste to be awarded the MBE during the war.

Other musical acts included Mario 'Harp' Lorenzi, said to be the first concert harpist to feature jazz in his performances; Mario de Pietro, the banjo and mandolin wizard, and Harrison Viney, billed as the 'troubadour of the accordion'. 'Silver-voiced' Irish tenor Ralph Silvester sang well-known ballads and played saxophone and accordion duets with his accompanist. The Great Cingalee, the 'Chinese Mystifier' or 'The Silent Man of Mystery' astonished audiences with baffling illusions from the Orient; 'Wee' Georgie Wood and his stage partner Dolly Harmer returned to Douglas after an absence of several seasons with their mother and son act; Levanda, a foot juggler, juggled balls, door-sized wooden panels and a barrel whilst lying on her back on a raised platform; Val Vett - a pun on 'velvet?' - fashioned pictures from rags and coloured cloth, and last but no means least, variety's endearingly eccentric dancers Wilson, Kepple and Betty in their 10-12 minute 'silent' act, including *Cleopatra's Nightmare*, featuring their famous soft-shoe 'sand dance' - a parody of ancient Egyptian postures as seen on tomb paintings - performed to the music of Luigini's *Egyptian Ballet*. Lanky Wilson and Kepple wore short Arabic costumes revealing 'weedy' legs, sported long moustaches and dead-pan facial expressions.* Slim, dapper Charles Tovey conducted the orchestra and introduced some of his own pieces: *You're Just a Baby After All*, *Reverie* and *I'm Going Back in the Army*. In August he programmed a selection of popular pieces composed by Harry Wood when he conducted the Castle Orchestra. Bert Noble and his band, assisted by the Tom Katz Saxophone Six, played for dancing in the ballroom each evening; Carnival Nights were Wednesdays and Fridays.

* There were at least ten Bettys over the years, but the 'Betty' at this period was Betty Knox who became a war correspondent in 1941. In 1936 Josef Goebbels condemned their act as 'bad for the morals of the Hitler Youth' when it was performed in Berlin.

In August another unique star was topping the bill, Afrique, who originally trained as an opera singer, and whose huge vocal range enable him to imitate the voices of both Richard Tauber and Paul Robeson, along with Vic Oliver, George Robey, and, most notable of all, the Prince of Wales (Edward VIII). Cingalee, now billed as 'The Mystery Man from China' and 'the most sensational illusionist of the age', was retained for a second week. The Seven Elliotts presented their 'Punch and Judy Harlequinade', a blend of multi-instrumentalist clowning, comedy sketches and pantomime. Also on the bill were the Delvaines Royal Marionettes ('living' puppets), and 'One big round of laughter', Tubby Turner, catch-phrase 'Hif hit's ho kay with you hit's ho kay with me', reportedly played every theatre from Hutton-le-Hole to the London Palladium with his famous deck chair sketch, during which he attempted unsuccessfully to put up a deck chair only to throw it across the stage in frustration, whereupon it landed perfectly and ready to sit in. The musical acts included Mario Lorenzi* 'The King of Harpists', retained for a further week with swing, dance and light classical pieces; Dorothy Penny, 'voice and personality', who sang gems from the world of operetta, and BBC pianist Renara, notable for her clever and entertaining arrangements of well-loved popular classical pieces. She somehow made her views of Hitler and Mussolini strike home through her piano playing! G. H. Elliott sang *I Miss a Little Miss in Southern Tennessee, My Southern Maid* and his encore *Hello Susie Green* which nearly brought the roof down. The supporting acts included Du Marte and Denzer's 'flying skeletons alive', Marie Louis's 'upside down' trapeze act, Irving Kay, the whistling violinist, Leon and Kiki, who made roller skating look easy, and impressionist Jimmy Elliott with 'noises from the farmyard'. Bert Noble and his band played for dancing in the ballroom.

* His 1926 recording of *I don't want nobody but you* features one of the earliest appearances of a harp on a dance band record.

'A gaudy posy for the popular soul'.

Florrie Forde's final appearance in the Derby Castle Ballroom at her customary time of 9.50pm was on Saturday 12th August. As usual the crowd surged across the dance floor to the stage as soon as Bert Noble's band stopped playing for dancing in a show of enormous affection for the great chorus singer, for many decades a Douglas favourite, and probably the variety artiste the Manx truly took to their hearts. She sang *Bull and Bush, Tipperary, Goodbye-ee, Cheerio, Count Your Blessings* and *Boomps-a-Daisy*. Thus, Florrie Forde was once again on the stage of the Castle Ballroom singing *Tipperary* as she had been a generation earlier in 1914, as the poet Louis McNeice recalled in *Death of an Actress*:

'In the Isle of Man before the war before
The present one she made a ragtime favourite
Of Tipperary, which became the swan-song
Of troop-ships on a darkened shore'

History was repeating itself, as it will, when its lessons are not heeded! In the Variety Theatre that evening newcomer to the Castle Jack Daly sang *The Mountains of Mourne* and *Nellie*

Dean plus stories and whimsical 'blarney'. His encore *Danny Boy* reduced many in the audience to tears.

Florrie's annual charity fete that season raised just over £370, an increase of £50 above the previous season, of which £120 went to Noble's Hospital, and the remainder divided among her other ten favourite charities including the RNLI, two children's homes and the Jane Crookall Maternity Home. Billy Danvers acted as compere, and Florrie's guests from the current revues included G. H. Elliot, Lorenzi, Norman Langford, Rex Deering and Sandy Powell. Bert Noble's orchestra accompanied the great chorus singer, and later Joe Kirkham and his band played for dancing in the ballroom. She also found time to star in a film of the pantomime *Little Red Riding Hood* made at the Falcon Cliff Studios at the Falcon Cliff Hotel as the eponymous heroine. The cast also included Eva Kane and the Perfectly Proper Pyjama Girls. The film was shown for charity during the winter months. It was to be her last season in Douglas. She died, in harness, in April, 1940, after singing for wounded troops in Aberdeen. McNeice continued his tribute to her with these eloquent words:

'Now on a late and bandaged April day
In a military hospital Miss Florrie
Forde has made her positively last appearance
And taken her bow and gone correctly away'.

A spot of bother

In mid-August radio stars Clapham and Dwyer - top hat, monocle and 'silly arse' aristocratic drawl, and tubby, bemused straight-man - appeared in new show at the Derby Castle based on their popular double act 'A Spot of Bother', featuring Cissie the cow. Theirs was an archetypal 'cross-talk' act, whose broad drollery had been thought risqué in the thirties (they were banned from the airways for six months for telling a mildly smutty joke) which featured their own 'Cockney' alphabet: A for 'orses; B for mutton; C for 'ighlanders - Z for effect'. Their mock broadcasting sketch with parodies of *Children's Hour*, *In Town Tonight* and the Western Brothers was especially well received. Renara, the pianist, was retained for a further week and introduced her version of *Tipperary* in various popular styles together with a *pot-pourri* of the signature tunes of famous people. In support were Vereck and Moir, 'jokers with clubs', or comedy club throwers; the Two Dancettes in syncopated, synchronised dance routines; the Zanfrellas, a nerve-racking 'statuesque pedestal balancing act'; Doris Cuban the snappy young step-dancing xylophonist, and 'two fools with cycles', the Moxham Brothers, who made balancing on one and two wheels look easy.

The musical highlight of the 'Anti-Depression bill' for the last week in August was Arturo Steffani and his twenty-one Silver Songsters, Britain's most successful boys' choir during the 1930s and '40s. They shared the stage with all the great stars including Gracie Fields, George Formby, Robb Wilton, Ted Ray and, as the earlier Sixteen Abbey Singers, toured with Florrie Forde in her revue *Swing is King*. Dressed in their traditional Tyrolean-style *Tracht* and playing guitars, accordions, the piano and percussion their repertoire ranged from Viennese waltz selections, Mendelssohn's *Oh! For the Wings of a Dove*, Broadway melodies and popular

'songs of yesterday'. Their act also included occasional comedy routines including a 'big boot' dance during a rousing version of *The Lambeth Walk*. What made them unique was that the boys, aged between nine and sixteen, and trained by Steffani himself, had astonishingly pure voices and sang perfectly in tune. Steffani's two newest discoveries made their Douglas debuts that season, Master Eddie Bartholomew, who sang *Il bacio* most affectingly, and Master Ron Warren, 'the world's greatest boy whistler', who was recalled several times after he performed Ketèlbey's *In a Monastery Garden*.*

* Ronnie Ronalde, the famous singing *siffleur* of the post-war years, and comedian Norman Vaughan had been members of the Silver Songsters.

The supporting acts were a typical mixed bag. Hamilton Conrad's 'feathered revue' of 'almost human' pigeons from the London Hippodrome vied with Gladys Church, 'a charming whistling songstress',* Johnson Clarke, the 'sportsman ventriloquist' and his dummy Hodge the Yokel, Rema and Rita, a balancing *pot-pourri*; the Armour Boys in a riot of slapstick 'boxing antics' and Conor and Drake, two 'back-chat' comedians in their 'toff and tramp' routine.

* Musical whistling or 'pucker' whistling was an enormously popular variety act; the Island's own Eva Kane was a singer and *siffleur*.

Something of a storm in a teacup blew up when a rumour that Mussolini had joined the Allies was announced from the stage of the Derby Castle by Charlie Clapham, of Clapham and Dwyer, and caused an uproar in the audience. This dubious piece of intelligence had been gleaned from one of the evening 'Specials' and taken in good faith. The management of the Palace & Derby Ltd., however, was enraged lest such a leak of misinformation might endanger an already damaged season. Clapham apologised for his unfortunate 'gaff' the following evening.

The final week at the Castle before war was declared fizzled out with American singers and comedians Al and Bob Harvey topping the bill with songs such as *The King of Zulu*, *The Mutton Song* and *The Girl with the Dimples* with the ubiquitous Ten Moonbeams in support. It was announced that Derby Castle would officially close on Saturday 2nd September. The final night was on Saturday 9th with the end of season Mhelliagh or Manx Harvest Home, with the hall decorated with corn, hops and flowers.

Laughs, songs and dances

The season at the Gaiety Theatre commenced in June with the Frank H. Fortesque Repertory Company's production of Anthony Kimmins' 'naughty' three-act comedy *While Parents Sleep*, described as 'the most discussed play of the century', but bedevilled by a confusing plot, and spiced with 'daring dialogue leading nowhere, and a hint of cami-knickers'. It was followed by the uncontroversial popular Irish comedy *Peg o' My Heart*. In July the same company presented Harry Delf's entertaining light comedy of family life *The Family Upstairs* about the machinations of an over-anxious match-making matriarch who frightens her daughter's suitors away, and to end their season, Emlyn William's tense psychological thriller *Night Must Fall*.

In mid-July Sandy Powell's *The Sandy Powell Road Show* took over at the Gaiety for a five-week season. A heady blend of revue and variety, with half-a-dozen well-known music hall acts, favourite sketches and dancing. Sandy was 'as funny as ever' in the opinion of the local newspapers, and everyone in the audience knew his catch-phrase 'Can you hear me mother?' However, Sandy's real silver-haired mother was in the theatre one night during a short holiday on the Island, and was introduced to the audience, and received a tremendous ovation. His sketches that season included *Sandy Joins the ARP* during which he demonstrated the wrong way to put on a gas mask, a domestic comedy *A Quiet Evening* and *Guilty or Not Guilty?*

George Harold, billed as 'the shy fiddler,' amused the crowds with 'skilful fooling' on his violin; Maisie Weldon's impersonations of famous stars included Anna Neagle as Queen Victoria and the Billy Shenton Trio in 'Cairo Capers' complemented Gretta Hagen's accordion selections. At 6 foot 7 inches tall, conjuror or burlesque magician Donald Stuart, superficially like Tommy Cooper in appearance, also found that magic could be more entertaining if you got it wrong; the Two Shenk Brothers contributed a 'thrilling balancing act'. All joined together in the 'snappy finale' led by Billy Scott-Coomber's Harmony Six* and the Ten Moonbeams.

* Originally an artist who trained in Dublin, and later a crooner with Jack Payne's BBC Dance Band, he had taken singing lessons from John MacCormack, and was highly regarded for excellent diction; post-war he was at the BBC with David Davies, the doyen of Children's programmes; his popular children's song *There's a Worm at the Bottom of the Garden . . . and his name is Wiggly Woo* was just one of 1500 recordings he made.

'The best show in Douglas'

In mid-August Duggie Wakefield - flat cap and gormless expression - and his Gang, the Four Manchester Lads, took over from Sandy Powell for three-week run of 'quick-fire comedy'. The show's compere, Fred Culpitt, kept up a stream of humorous commentary throughout the evening interspersed with comedy magic. In support were Macari and his Dutch Accordion Serenaders attired in national costume against a back-drop of windmills; impressionist Keith Wilbur with his TT radio broadcast sketch; the Cycling Astons in their rodeo style lasso show; the Six Mabettes, 'dainty clever dancing personified', and the *adagio* dancers Dan and Dorette's colourful Apache dance completed the line-up. The show's finale, the Crazy Cabaret, saw the entire cast on stage in a raucous farrago of song and dance.

Duggie Wakefield was nearly 'turned away' from his after-show 50th birthday entertainment, organised by Macari and Jack Hart from the Palais de Danse at the Sefton Hotel, when the Cocktail Bar manageress failed to recognise him and his partner Billy Nelson in their shabby stage costumes and directed them to the Vaults Bar 'where they would be served mild beer'. All was well when they eventually found the Saloon Bar and were instantly recognised.

The 'rattling good show' was still drawing large audiences during what was to be the final week of the season - August 27th - September 2nd - and the 'breezy non-stop entertainment continued with Macari and his Dutch Serenaders with their impressions of Donald Duck, Pop-eye and Gracie Fields (three names rarely uttered together in the same breath one suspects) together with 'excellent yodelling' and brilliant accordion solos.

The happy family spirit also existed at the smaller venues such as the Onchan Head Pavilion where Ernest Binn's *Onchan Follies*, 'a bright, quick-fire show brim full of comedy, songs and dancing', attracted large audiences that season. Diminutive, straight-faced comedian Billy May portrayed a Lancashire Lad, a ventriloquist's dummy, and teamed up with Max Deering in a sketch where they appeared as would-be nudists. 'If there's a laugh in you, Billy May will extract it!' according to one reviewer after seeing their routine Bumkum's Broadcasting Agency. In support was Babette with 'an acrobatic keep fit routine'; fine singing from Welsh baritone Glynn Howell, soprano Sybil Atholwood and *soubrette* Dorothy Green. Ivy Desmond's child impersonations, Rosa Wayne and her Girls and breezy choruses such as *Swing your way to happiness* and *Blue Skies are just around the corner* helped banish any lingering holiday blues. The Climax of the show saw the entire cast on stage singing *There'll Always Be an England* and *Rule Britannia*, doubtless with the audience in enthusiastic full-throated support.

Norman Langford's *Moonlight Revels of 1939* transferred from the Palace Coliseum to the Crescent Pavilion in July, and now starred the popular Scottish tenor Jock Vernon, billed as 'The Kilted Laddie', Donovan and Hayes, 'assassins of sorrow', Rob, Rema and Rita's balancing act and Masu and Yuri, 'wonder balancers and jugglers'. George Harold, 'the shy fiddler', and the Four Glorias were retained along with new acts, the Wotherspoon Brothers, 'Vaudeville's Melodious Moderns', and Billy Sizer and his Swing Five. Jack 'Manxman' Hart, the 'live wire' conductor, took over from Harold Moorhouse and his Havana Band at the Palais de Danse in July with 'snappy' programmes of dance music - 'full of pep and vigour', unlike the 'soft pedal bands' - from 3.00 - 5.00 every afternoon and from 7.30 -11.00 each evening. Tuesdays and Thursdays were styled 'Carnival Nights' and were always 'bright and lively' occasions. At other times there was dancing to the Palaisphone.

The Silver Screen

Basil Rathbone, Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi wrestled with a dread family heritage and a destructive monster in *Son of Frankenstein*, whilst Edward G. Robinson, Hollywood's golden age tough guy, broke up a Nazi spy organisation in America in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, 'a film it is one's duty to see'. *The Spy in Black* starred Konrad Veidt as a resourceful U-boat commander on a secret mission to Scapa Flow during World War 1, out-smarted by Scottish school-teacher-cum-secret agent Valerie Hobson. George Formby's newest comedy, *Trouble Brewing*, saw gormless newspaper compositor George believing he is an ace detective and foiling a counterfeit gang. John Wayne braved a hail of arrows in the splendid *Stagecoach*, and Laurence Olivier and Merle Oberon indulged their passionate wind-swept romance in *Wuthering Heights*. Not the worst adaption of the famous novel, but close. Ralph Richardson's Harry Faversham absolved himself of the charge of cowardice in the Technicolour epic of the war against the Mahdi in the Sudan, *The Four Feathers*, whilst in *Shipyard Sally* 'our Gracie' helped to dispel the pall of gloom threatening to overwhelm Clydebank.

Also on offer was the long-awaited *Goodbye Mr. Chips* starring Robert Donat as a well-loved school master, as well as infatuated San Francisco sports reporter Errol Flynn pursued by serious-minded Bette Davies in *The Sisters*, a film notable for the climactic two-and-a-half-minute earthquake scene which took two-and-a-half weeks to film. Heaven's own cherub-

come-to-earth Shirley Temple single-handedly smarmed her way into the hearts of those suffering in the Depression in *Just Around the Corner*, and two musical films introduced some much-needed nostalgia into the fare on offer: a spectacular Technicolor film of *The Mikado* with Kenny Baker as Nanki-Poo and Jean Colin as Yum-Yum, supported by the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Geoffrey Toye, and *The Great Waltz*, the story of Johann Strauss II, a *schmaltzy* evocation of an evening in Old Vienna with extra dollops of *schlagobers*. 'Your Beating Heart, Your Pounding Pulse, will tell you it's the most exciting musical love story ever told', screamed the posters. If only.

Away from the cinemas, promenades and the larger entertainment venues, the Sunday open-air services at Kirk Braddan continued to attract huge crowds, especially on August Bank Holiday Sunday when an estimated 40,000 people attended. One hundred and sixty charabancs, forty hackney carriages and forty hackney cars, in addition to extra trains and Corporation bus services from Douglas to Quarterbridge, were required to cope with the demand for transport to the church. One wonders how much of the Bishop's attempt to use the service to warn young men and women of entering too much into the holiday spirit 'in an unwholesome way' was heeded.

One piece of good news reached the Island just as the season ended: Manx comedian Harry Korris, 'Blackpool's other tower', was rumoured to be returning to Douglas next season in a new Tom Arnold revue after nine years with Blackpool's *Arcadian Follies*.

Visitors' voices

Most visitors' experiences on the Isle of Man during the summer seasons in the 1930s were positive and treasurable, even during the summer months of 1939 when a pall of foreboding hung over Britain. Yet every year a substantial number of people arrived every year without securing their accommodation in advance, even during the Bank Holiday weekends. One group of trippers on their annual excursion from Dublin arriving on August Bank Holiday Sunday morning looking for cheap lodgings will have tested the good nature of even the most equable Manxman. 'Tis afther a place like this, I am', said one man waving a brochure from a Lancaster guest house under the nose of a bemused attendant at the pier. He was politely informed that bed and breakfast, the use of a piano or organ, chess, draughts, dominoes and free billiards, and free hot and cold showers, could not be had in Douglas for 1s 6d, 2s or 2s 6d in the peak season, and certainly not without pre-booking. Some of the group then became surly, and some refused to pay for what accommodation could be found and were forced to sleep in the shelters on Loch Promenade, and a few were subsequently arrested for shoplifting.

So large were the crowds in Douglas that last Bank Holiday before the war, that the demand for public transport could barely be met which left holiday makers resorting to scrambling to get a seat on anything with wheels without even asking where it was going! There were also additional demands on the postal service with tens of thousands of extra letters and telegrams being sent. The holiday makers were not backward in letting their likes and dislikes known through the letter columns of the local newspapers. One long-term visitor drew the inevitable comparisons with Blackpool, namely that Douglas needed a 'real up-to-

date' pleasure beach and that the dance halls should stay open until midnight. Another complained that the 'promenade is dead'; a military band was needed or a Pierrot show 'as of old'. Others felt that a bathing pool was essential.

The Island's Sunday restrictions were a constant source of disappointment and frustration. Why was dancing frowned upon on a Sunday when golf was allowed? Why shouldn't hotels be permitted to serve alcohol for two hours on Sunday mornings and for two hours after church on Sunday evenings? Why is it that only in Douglas are one's recreational activities dictated to us? These issues would raise their heads again the following year.

Reminders of the immanency of war were everywhere by the end of August. The *Times* reported that all members of police forces, together with army, navy and air force personnel, were recalled from holiday, as were forty-or-so campers at Cunningham's and Howstrake Holiday Camps. The Manx territorials left the Island to help defend England. On 1st September Arthur. Q. Moore, the doyen of observers of Manx life for many decades, wrote in the *Examiner*:

'Before the momentous question - Peace or War? - has been decided, I hope that twenty-five years into the future, no researcher will look through the newspaper files to refresh his memory of a war to end all wars in the face of the new international crisis. If it comes . . . this MUST be a war that will end all wars . . . never again must the fanatical ambitions of solitary men be permitted to flourish in a lust for power'. There followed some recollections of the corresponding weekend a quarter of a century earlier in 1914: steamer arrivals down; amusement resorts in full swing, but goodbyes to Herr Simon Wurm* at the Villa Marina Kursaal and many variety artistes who were hastily leaving the Island, so that by end of September only the Villa Marina and the cinemas were still open. He concluded: 'It won't be quite the same this time', he predicted, 'the little Corporal . . . has taken a wrong turning, and will encounter a different Britain, calmer and more confident, because she is no longer unprepared!'

* Maurice Powell, *The Imperial Viennese Orchestra at the Villa Marina*, manxmusic.com.

The Holiday Isle becomes the Internment Island

By a stroke of good fortune, a fascinating reminiscence of Douglas the day war was declared has survived in the recollections of Frieda Standen,* a well-known pianist, accompanist, amateur actress and entertaining observer of Manx musical life from the 1920s:

'Sunday, September 3rd, 1939, dawned fine and sunny, giving promise of a lovely day. As the morning progressed, a small collection of people . . . gathered in the open-air café of the Villa Marina. It was composed of several members of the orchestra which had played in the ballroom all the summer, a few of my stage professional friends from the Garden Pavilion, and a scattering of visitors. One of the musicians had brought a radio . . . (as) it had been announced the previous day that the Prime Minister . . . would be speaking at eleven o'clock . . . animated, anxious conversations dwindled in volume as the appointed time drew near. When he had finished there was utter silence, the only sound being the twittering of the sparrows as they hopped from table to table. The spell was broken by the melancholy sound

of *Mona's Queen's* siren blowing a long and sad farewell as she glided out of the harbour.* We were at war with Germany'. At that same time the Prime Minister's speech was relayed to two thousand people at the Kirk Braddan open-air service.

* Frieda Standen, *Wartime Memories*, the Manx Experience, 1997; see also Maurice Powell, *Frieda Standen in Manx Musical Worthies*, manxmusic.com.

* Ten of the Steam Packet's fleet of steamers were commandeered by the War Office as part of the emergency plans. The *Fenella* had departed for Liverpool a few days earlier with the territorials of the Manx Regiment. Only the *Rushen Castle* and *Peveiril* were left to provide the vital link with the UK.

That evening Frieda Standen joined a group of friends and musicians at the Picture House Cinema which was packed to capacity. Towards the end of the evening members of the Palais de Danse band joined them and gave an impromptu concert in front of the screen including the current 'hit' *South of the Border* and many World War I songs including *Pack Up Your Troubles*. 'It was reminiscent of the enthusiasm, patriotism and fervour one had heard of when World War I broke out', she recalled. That evening Douglas Promenade was ablaze with illuminations - over 600 electric lights and nearly 180 gas lamps - for the last time before black-out restrictions came into force.

At the Villa Marina that evening, the Savoyard Derek Oldham was the guest artiste at the Sunday concert and sang some of the musical and operetta favourites he was famous for, and led the audience in *Land of Hope and Glory*. The *Examiner* caught the mood perfectly: 'In one swift stroke last weekend the gay holiday life of the Douglas season was extinguished'. Many revue cast members left the Island on the Saturday midnight steamer before war was declared, their contracts immediately null and void. Yet almost immediately it was announced that *Pleasure on Parade* at the Villa Marina would continue whilst a few visitors lingered on wondering whether to go or stay. On Friday the 8th the Villa Marina finally closed its doors for the end of the season. Gifts were presented by the management to the cast of the summer revue and to the members of Phil Richardson's band in the Garden Pavilion. Four hundred attended the final Carnival Dance in the Royal Hall and joined in with *Auld Lang Syne* and the National Anthem at the end. The day before, Thursday 7th September, the entire cast of *Pleasure on Parade* had 'invaded' Mr Kirton's photographic shop to have passport photographs taken. 'The first time such a scene has occurred on the Island', remarked the bewildered proprietor.

Although Douglas rapidly became a 'ghost' town, with most of the hotels and boarding houses on the promenades closed, for some the brief period after the last holiday makers had departed and before the establishment of the internment camps* changed the Island for the duration of the war, there was an almost carnival spirit in Douglas. The bright lights and gaiety inside the dance halls contrasted alarmingly with the darkness outside imposed by black-out restrictions. By day the promenades were deserted but, as one resident later recalled: 'the wonderful summer weather persisted into September, and for once, we had our Island to ourselves'. Another group of friends joined the local crowds on the beach at the Lhen and later recalled that 'it was warm and sunny; the sea was blue and shimmering and there were long queues at the popular café where everything was home-made'. Only the sound of distant practice gunfire from across the sea in Scotland disturbed the atmosphere.

* Internees were 'boarded out' in hotels and guest houses throughout the Island. Douglas had six camps mostly named after the hotels that were commandeered. In addition there were 'camps' in Peel, Ramsey, Port Erin and Port St. Mary. Cunningham's Holiday Camp became HMS St. George, a training camp for young seamen; the Douglas Head Hotel became the naval radar training establishment HMS Valkyrie and Howstrake Holiday Camp became home to the Royal Naval School of Music.

The midnight steamer from Liverpool was delayed until Sunday morning in order to bring home three hundred mainly Manx residents on holiday in Britain, and soon night-time and double sailings were cancelled owing to light restrictions and affected the Fleetwood, Heysham and Dublin services. Two hundred children who had relatives on the Island, or whose fathers had been called for war service, arrived on the Island on Sunday 3rd accompanied either by their mothers or older sisters, 'fleeing the threat of German frightfulness'. Many had gas masks and were clutching toys or teddy-bears. On 5th September a Bill was introduced in Tynwald extending the life of the current House of Keys for one year* and in November the War Committee of Tynwald was established, headed by the commanding presence of the Lieutenant Governor, Vice-Admiral the Earl Granville. *

* See *Governors of the Isle of Man since 1765*, Derek Winterbottom, Manx Heritage Foundation, 1999.

* Lady Rose Granville, the sister of Queen Elizabeth, had the common touch and was a popular figure.

This 'War Cabinet' quickly inaugurated a number of war measures, and over the ensuing weeks and months life on the Island changed dramatically. The Home Office required that travel to and from the Island would need a permit. Illuminations at the entertainment venues and on the promenades were extinguished for the duration of the war. A National Registration Census was instigated as a prelude to rationing, and by October taxes on cigarettes, tobacco and spirits were adopted. Ronaldsway Airport became RAF Ronaldsway although some civilian flights continued throughout the conflict. In November, conscription grew a step nearer with the registration of male residents aged 20 -23 years under the National Service (Armed Forces) Act. On 9th September the *Manxman* rail service from London, inaugurated in 1927, was discontinued for the duration of the war. * The Isle of Man Football Association voted to cease matches during the war.

* It was reinstated in 1951 and was finally discontinued in 1966.

'Forward the Amateurs'

Arthur Brittain, the Managing Director of the Palace & Derby Castle Ltd., optimistically announced plans to bring winter shows to Douglas including Frank H. Fortesque's Repertory Company at the Gaiety Theatre, and the pantomime *Dick Wittington* was put on by the Company in January, billed as a 'Blackout Brightener'. The Green Room Drama Club, consisting of young amateur thespians, held a 'Banish Black-Out Blues' whist drive and dance at the Villa Marina in October, with the proceeds being donated to the Red Cross relief fund, and voted to mount a series of one-act plays during the winter months beginning with *We Do it For Love*. Twenty-five members of the Unnamed Dramatic Society attended a meeting at the Falcon Cliff Hotel and agreed to continue the work of that society; the Gaiety Theatre would be booked in October and a production of the naval comedy *The Middle Watch* was to be revived, followed a few weeks later by the old favourite comedy of army life *Orders are*

Orders. The Island's amateur performers, musicians, singers, entertainers and actors would be called upon more and more frequently to answer the call on the entertainment front, and, if not required for military service, step into the breach in order to maintain some form of gaiety on the Island . . . and they certainly did.

In November the Manx Amusement Company went into voluntary liquidation, and Douglas Choral Union's production of *The Desert Song* in January was postponed owing to the probable lack of male cast members being available. In December a film, *Pleasure Isle*, made under the auspices of the Isle of Man Publicity Board, was shown for the first time at a special matinee at the Royalty Cinema. Just fifteen minutes in length, it nevertheless contained some excellent footage of the Tynwald Ceremony and the Tynwald Court in session, holiday scenes in Douglas with the horse trams prominent, the bright lights of the dance halls, crowded promenades, a few examples of the Island's beautiful hills and glens, Peel Castle, Castle Rushen, Port Erin, Port St. Mary and Ramsey and some evocative shots of the *Lady of Man* steaming in the summer sunshine in her peacetime colours. The commentary was entertaining, and the film will have brought back 'many treasured memories of our merry little holiday Island as we shall hope to see it when the war clouds recede and the sun shines again on its green hills by the sea'.

The Island and its residents rapidly adjusted to the wartime situation, and with grim determination made the best of the anxious times. However, no-one could disguise the fact that, although considered relatively safe from attack, the whole Island was gradually becoming a huge internment and training camp.

A cold reality

January 1940 was a miserable month, and by the end of the month the whole Island was shivering under a blanket of snow. Kirk Michael was cut off for eleven days by ten-foot drifts and the unfortunate passengers on the Steam Packet vessel *Rushen Castle* were storm-tossed off the west coast for seventy-one hours. The situation on the Island was bleak.

Everyone recorded in the National Registration Census of September 1939 was now issued with a National Identity Card and a ration book.* Petrol rationing began almost immediately and people began to notice that newspapers were now thinner. Food shortages also began to be keenly felt; sugar was an early casualty, shortly followed by tea and butter. Fuel and coal were to be shipped to the Island, and farmers were encouraged to bring uncultivated land into production. Before the end of the year meat, margarine, lard, bacon and eventually chocolate and sweets would be subject to rationing to some degree. Jam, syrup, biscuits and dried fruit were subject to a points system. As one local newspaper put it: 'Who'd have thought it! Once frowned-upon tinned foods are now a Godsend. Thank goodness for rabbit. Even spuds and herring are popular once more'.

* Rationing was officially introduced in Britain in January 1940.

Purchase tax was introduced to help off-set war costs, and cigarettes immediately went up by 2d a packet. There was little work for seasonal summer workers, and many people were now preoccupied with how to replace the lack of income since the collapse of the tourist

industry. A plan to instigate the manufacture of camouflage nets came to nothing. In the meantime, the towns and villages were scoured for any amounts of scrap metal and scrap paper. Yet despite the privations that were starting to impinge on everyday life, the Manx economy appeared to be booming. The Budget presented to Tynwald revealed that the exchequer recorded a surplus for 1939-40, although this was mainly accounted for by the revenues generated by the internment of thousands of German and Italian aliens. It soon became plain to everyone that the Island's principal new role would be that of internment camp, and before long whole sections of boarding houses in most of the towns were commandeered and fenced off under guard. Six such camps alone were established in Douglas and remained in operation at various times during the war. In addition to some hotels and guest houses, the holiday camps were also commandeered for war service. Cunningham's Holiday Camp was taken over by the Royal Navy and renamed *HMS St. George* and the classrooms at the unfinished Ballakermeen High School became an annex for the teaching of basic seamanship for young boys aged 14-18 at *HMS St. George*. Howstrake Holiday Camp was transformed into a training school for the young musicians of the Royal Naval School of Music. The Villiers Hotel was occupied by officer cadets, and the Hotel Majestic, Onchan, became a military hospital.

In February the Local Government (Fires) Act came into force and created seven fire authorities, with Douglas being designated number one. The blackout restrictions continued to be rigorously enforced and were eventually taken seriously by everybody. The first real air-raid alert came at the end of August, and the first bombs to hit Manx soil were dropped near Dalby in mid-September, thought to be from a lost German bomber trying to find its way home. Gas masks were issued to all children from a distribution centre at Victoria Street Methodist Church Schoolroom, and were taken to school in cardboard boxes, slung over their shoulders. As with black-out restrictions and air-raid alerts, not everyone took them seriously. Air raid shelters were erected in the Loch Promenade sunken gardens, under the Villa Marina colonnades, and the Town Hall cellar was designated a public shelter. Other towns also made provision for public shelters, and in Peel old tunnels under Castle Street, reputedly once the haunt of smugglers, were adapted and given a new lease of life. Double summertime began at Easter.

The so-called phoney war ended in May with the German invasion of the Low Countries, and on the 28th, the start of the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk and the subsequent loss of three Manx ships, *HMS Mona's Isle*, *King Orry* and *Fenella*, whose sister ship, *Tynwald*, however, rescued more Allied soldiers than any other vessel involved in what was called Operation Dynamo.* With invasion narrowly averted Local Defence Volunteer forces - renamed the Home Guard in July - were formed following an appeal from Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden, and initially 1500 Manxmen aged between 17 and 65, being 'of reasonable fitness', responded. At the very least fifty-two observation posts around the Island would now be manned from dawn to dusk.

* Some 26,000 soldiers were rescued from Dunkirk by Manx vessels with the loss of thirty-three Manx crewmen.

Another war, another dance boom.

In a spirit of absurd optimism, the Publicity Board forecast that up to 50% of the normal number of summer visitors were expected. In fact, fewer than 25,000 people actually arrived, some friendly, some resigned, others to some degree hostile, mainly service personnel, enemy aliens - initially 14,000 - and evacuees numbering around eight hundred.

'Is it 'right' to seek light entertainment in wartime - and more particularly in the comparative safety of this Island? The answer is - of course it is right!'* Was this question being asked elsewhere in Britain? It seems unlikely, and the columnist went on to outline the benefits of entertainment and the vital role amusements played in keeping up morale for those enduring the privations of war and 'making do' on the home front, and for servicemen returning home on leave, and hoping to recapture something of the pre-war Douglas spirit. Entertainment was an antidote to wartime 'blues' and played an essential role in raising much-needed money for servicemen's charities. He concluded: 'So if you feel like enjoying a night at the cinema, theatre or dance hall, then GO TO IT!'

* *'Island's Wartime Dance Boom', 'Script', Isle of Man Examiner, 13.12.1940.*

And there was much to enjoy during what many regarded as a mini golden age for dancing, with sometimes six thousand servicemen and women and Douglas residents packed into the Royal Hall of the Villa Marina dancing to Steve Lahmer's Swing Star Band* and Phil Richardson's band. From May four to five hundred people attended the concerts in the Villa Marine Gardens by the Royal Marine Band and Douglas Town Band conducted by well-known local musician John Crosbie.* Harold Moorhouse and his Havana Band were in residence at Douglas' other Mecca of dancing, the Palais de Danse. Frieda Kelly* and her 'delightful swinging piano' entertained residents and military personnel alike at the Sefton Hotel and smaller venues, and occasionally joined with Tom Cowley's 'slap' bass and Harold Moorhouse's band. Sunday night concerts at the Villa Marina with the Band and Concert Party of the King's Regiment required only linking comedy items to give the show a 'dash of pep' according to one commentator. The Palais de Danse and the Villa Marina seemed to be attracting more dancers than ever, and the regular local bands were definitely improving, especially Steve Lahmers' Swing Star Band, which benefited from having military musicians in the ensemble, either from RAF Jurby or the RNSM training camp at Howstrake Holiday Camp. It was all 'a far cry from the time - not so long ago either - when the Island's 'gig' bands were a sad reflection of the pre-war glory days'. The organisers were warned to be wary of too many interruptions during the evening such as 'special announcements' and 'lucky number' draws. 'After all . . . dancers pay to DANCE"!

* Steve Lahmers was the former owner of a shop in Tynwald Street who was exempt from military service owing to a disability. Like Harold Moorhouse he was a part-time band leader for thirty years and seems likely to have been related to the Lahmers family of Bavarian musicians (German street bands) who came to the Island during the summer seasons from the 1870s, some of whom married Manx girls.

* The father of cornet player James (Jimmy) Crosbie, MBE, 1922-81, who was serving overseas at that time, and co-founder and conductor of the Douglas Town band and the Manx Youth Band.

* Better-known as Frieda Standen after her marriage to Cyril Standen in 1940.

A quick perusal of Harold Moorhouse's Havana Band engagements for 1940 at the Palais de Danse and other venues gives an accurate picture of just how important and well-attended local dances were during this bleak period. In January his band played for the Douglas High School Old Boys' Association Dance in support of the local Newspapers' Cigarette Fund, followed by the Douglas Women's Labour Party supper and dance at Collinson's Café. Throughout February and March there were a number of dances and whist drives at the Palais de Danse including one for the telephone exchange 'Hello Girls' in aid of Noble's Hospital, and a Caledonian Dance with guest musician Piper Forker.

In April the band supported the Lon Dhoo Male Voice Choir's annual dinner and dance at Collinson's Café, and in May Douglas Festival Choir's whist drive and dance, which featured the band's new 'crooner' Miss Mary Bell on her debut. Harold Moorhouse was back at the Palais de Danse in August for the winter programme of Saturday dances. In November the band appeared at Onchan Village Hall with the Women's Section of the Onchan Branch of the British Legion, and in December the band was back at the Palais de Danse with guest pianist Frieda Kelly for Mrs. Farrant's Charity Dance.

'Roll out the Barrell' every Monday night.

The servicemen and women stationed on the Island, many of them talented amateur musicians, singers, actors and entertainers, began to organise their own shows. One of the most popular was the series of Garrison Theatre Nights held at the Villa Marina every Monday evening starting in October 1940. These took their inspiration from the successful radio series *Garrison Theatre*, first broadcast in November 1939, which starred up-and-coming variety artistes who were serving in the forces, such as Private Jack Warner, who, like many others, would soon become household names. An Isle of Man version of the programme had first been suggested in *Women's Sphere* in the *Isle of Man Times*. The show was made up two important elements: a concert party of many individual turns, and the all-important sing-along, and talent spotting sessions with the audiences as judges. The talent competitions were open to amateur entertainers from the forces and the general public, and the shows were billed as 'an attractive form of amusement that quickly caught on with the Manx public' as the perfect entertainment for all Island residents, temporary or otherwise.

The shows were organised and compered by Sergeant J. Hodgson, and all kinds of acts were acceptable within a four-minute time limit. There were so many that space allows mention of only a few including Mrs Chandley and her tin whistle and clog dancing solos, and fourteen-year-old Jean Curphey, a young local singer who would become one of the Island's best-loved sopranos, who was a runner-up in one of the competitions. Aircraftsman Puddyfoot and his ukelele with a selection of George Formby style songs, the Howstralians, and a fine ten-piece band contributed the happy-go-lucky informality of the shows. All profits went to the Cigarette and Tobacco Fund, and by March 1941, 153,900 cigarettes in 2,500 parcels had been sent to Manx servicemen and women serving overseas, much of the money being raised from shows and other local events. One disquieting report in the *Isle of Man Times* in April threatened to deflate the great efforts of all those endeavouring to bring a little sunshine into the wartime gloom, namely the suggestion that the government was considering bringing in

an Entertainment Duty to be paid by amusement resorts, most of whom were struggling with the almost total loss of summer visitors!

Away from the places of entertainment, there were significant changes to the nature of broadcasting brought about by the war. On 1st September 1939 the National and Regional Programmes had merged into a single service, the Home Service. From January 1940 many light entertainment programmes were then diverted to the new Forces Programme which then broadcast mainly dance bands, comedy shows and quizzes. 'This is the BBC Home Service' became the opening announcement wherever the listener was in the UK,* but many listeners regretted these changes and complained of a dearth of high-class concerts and entertainment in favour of more news bulletins and gramophone concerts for their 10s licence fee.

* Last heard in September 1967 when Radio 4 was launched. These changes came about for reasons of security; one transmitter made it more difficult for enemy aircraft to locate an individual 'beam' and home in on a particular station.

Death of the Queen of Song

News reached the Island of the death of Florrie Forde on 18th April in Aberdeen, shortly after she had given a concert for wounded soldiers. She sang a medley of her most famous songs, including, as her final encore, a poignant *Goodbye-ee*. Brief obituaries soon appeared in local newspapers and one paid her the following tribute: 'She was the world's greatest chorus singer and intense admirer of the Isle of Man'. Another report revealed that only a fortnight before her death she had conveyed to Mr and Mrs Leo Kane of the Falcon Cliff Hotel, who were visiting her at her home in Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex, that her greatest regret was that the war meant a break in her long association with the Island. During the week following her death there were hundreds of tributes from entertainers, actors and actresses, soldiers and sailors and countless members of the public who knew and loved her.

As the year progressed towards what would have been the start of the visitor season, the swift and marked deterioration in Douglas' holiday infrastructure became increasingly noticeable. The sad state of affairs on Douglas Head particularly was picked up by a local newspaper columnist: 'Where are the thousands of happy, carefree holiday makers of just a year ago? With the side-shows boarded up, Charlie Dare's 'niggers' gone, no tumblers or Pierrots and no irreverent gibes from Uncle Herbert's guess your weight stand'. Only the ghosts of past uproarious seasons haunted the once crowded open-air spaces. Where was Florrie Forde sitting with Bert Feldman in the Douglas Head Hotel music room listening to the latest 'catches of the season'. Where were the rowing boats rounding the Battery Pier? Port Skillion was deserted; grass was rapidly taking over the footpaths; the electric railway offices were boarded up, with paint starting to peel, and the seats at the amusement pitch were losing a battle against invading ragworts.

'If ever a man suffered'

In February the *Isle of Man Examiner* revealed that, 'as the result of 'Hitleritis'', Manx comedian and wireless favourite Harry Korris* would not after all be returning to the Island to star at a Palace revue, but would be staying on in Blackpool as the star of *Blackpool One*, Tom Arnold's new revue at the Grand Theatre, which also starred Tessie O'Shea, piano

duettists Rawicz and Landauer, the Tiller Girls and his old partner Robby Vincent. Nevertheless 'Two Tons of Manx Fun' Korris could be heard on air entertaining the troops from Doncaster and Middlesbrough in the *Arcadian Follies*, and as the first guest in Wilfred Pickles' new show on the Forces Programme, *King Pins of Variety*, later in the year. During the course of the show he estimated that he had made over one hundred and twenty radio broadcasts but had lost count. He was 'Manx born and bred' or 'as tailless as a Manx cat', was born in Douglas, and recalled his early years as an entertainer on the Island and his association with Fred Buxton's Pierrots. He admitted ruefully that he had ballooned from 8 ½ stone just after World War I to 17 ½ stone in 1940.

* See Maurice Powell, *Harry Korris*, supplement to New Manx Worthies, manxmusic.com. He was a household name to thousands of listeners to BBC Radio's *The Happidrome*, a show based at an imaginary theatre, and actually broadcast live from the Grand Theatre, Llandudno on Sunday evenings from 1941 until 1947. The three main characters - harassed proprietor Mr. Lovejoy (Korris), straight man Ramsbottom (Cecil Frederick) and the gormless Enoch (Robby Vincent) - performed sketches, songs and comedy routines written by Korris. His catch phrase 'If ever a man suffered', and Enoch's 'Let me tell *you!*' became two of the best-known catch phrases on radio.

Harry Korris was the only Manxman ever to make a real success of a stage and film career and to become a household name through radio comedy. In November a new 'uproariously funny' wartime comedy film *Somewhere in England* was shown in cinemas all over the Island. Starring 'Sergeant' Harry Korris, 'Private' Frank Randle and 'Private' Robbie Vincent this first of three 'Somewhere' comedies about army life set in the North of England was billed as a 'Real Side-splitter . . . full of bright dialogue and slick wisecracks'.

There was news from Blackpool that Norman Savage, 'a favourite on Douglas Head for a number of years', was playing at Bert Feldman's theatre in the revue *Smiling Through*. Another star of that show was diminutive Harry Vardon who had been popular at the Cosy Corner, Ramsey, in the 1920s, and was an early stage partner of the young Harry Korris. There was also a rumour that Bert Feldman was considering bringing over a concert party from Blackpool on a flying visit, and that Gracie Fields had been approached to make a visit. In the event her commitment to travel to Canada prevented this.

The 49th Manx Music and Drama Festival was held at the Palace Coliseum and commenced on April 29th. There was a slight drop in entry numbers, down from the five hundred and eighty-one in 1939 to five hundred and sixty-six, but that still meant that nearly 2,500 individual performers took part. Of particular delight was the revival of the Children's Festival when 1,000 children sang songs in Scots, Welsh, English, Irish and Manx. Elgar's cantata *The Banner of St George** was performed by the combined choirs at the festival concert, with an orchestra made up from the Merseyside players supported by members of Miss Kathleen Rydings' Manx Amateur Orchestral Society, conducted by Dr. Geoffrey Shaw. The main orchestral work in the concert was Manx composer J. E. Quayles' fantasy-overture *The Magic Isle*. Sadly, the war left its mark on even this occasion as a local musician, the 'cellist Dr. Danziger, was forced to withdraw from playing in the concert because of anti-German feeling stirred up against him by a campaign in the local press.*

* Elgar himself had conducted the cantata during the 1914 Music Festival, and in his remarks had supported the formation of a Manx National Choir.

* See Maurice Powell, *ENCORE! The Story of the Isle of Man Symphony Orchestra*, 2012.

The headline in the *Isle of Man Examiner* of 14th June 'Council changes its mind', concerned Douglas Town Council's decision not to open the Villa Marina that summer, despite the recommendation of the Parks Committee in April that it should open on 17th June for twelve weeks. In the interim the War Emergency Committee had recommended that the Council should defer its decision in view of the small number of tourists coming to the Island. Running costs were estimated at around £4,000, but even with the revenue from Sunday concerts, concert parties, dances, bowls and deck chair hire, the losses would be contained at around £1500. The Parks Committee further maintained that it was 'too costly to keep Villa Marina Gardens open after 5pm' on the grounds that 'it is not a public park'.

Despite the restrictions and inconveniences of war on the Island, the range and number of events – many of them involving entertainment of some description – was astonishing, hardly less than in peace time. There was a British Legion 'War Chest' concert in July; a bowling tournament that attracted seventy-four entrants, including one from England; the Manx Women's Guild Garden Party, and on Tynwald Day, the World Manx Association Annual Gathering. Wanted: 'God-fearing men and women who believe in the infinite power of prayer wanted . . . as in Cromwell's day', was the stirring call to all those who wished to attend the religious services held at the Villa Marina organised by the Council of Christian Congregations. In August there was a bring-and-buy sale and dance with Steve Lahmers' band in the Royal Hall organised by the new Jane Crookall Maternity Home, and that same month the Manx Spitfire appeal raised £5,000 followed by a Spitfire whist drive and dance in September. Other local events included Flower days, Baby shows, a Ladies Utility Sales Poppy Day, Dog, Fur and Feather shows, American Hospital Teas, Choir Fetes, Country Shows and of course dancing and whist at every opportunity. Many of these events raised considerable sums of money for servicemen and women's charities.

Where are the holiday makers?

The August Bank Holiday visitor numbers paled into insignificance when compared with pre-war Bank Holiday weekends as barely two thousand visitors were landed from only two steamers instead of an anticipated 15,000! Few, if any, of these were in any real sense of the term holiday makers and included forty mothers with children (voluntary evacuees), and those willing to put up with the travel restrictions, including the requirement for passports with photographs. This requirement was labelled 'ridiculous' and was lifted after a 'storm of protest' by Manx residents wishing to see relations before they went to war.

What is harder to understand – even with the benefit of hindsight - is why anyone on the Island was expecting a sudden surge of visitors when the war was barely a year old, and wartime restrictions were beginning to bite. It is certainly true that throughout the war people did take what holidays they could, perhaps with their sweethearts or husbands home on leave, to the West Country or Scotland or to the nearest seaside resort in England. But to the Isle of Man? Even with its long tradition of entertaining thousands of holiday makers each

summer, it was an unlikely choice in the circumstances. There seems to have been a reluctance to believe that the visitor industry had become a casualty of war, and in September the *Isle of Man Times* attempted to redress the balance of opinion that regarded Douglas as 'entirely an alien town . . . taken over by internment camps'. Among the entertainments on offer that might entice the visitor to the Island the newspaper mentioned four excellent cinemas, the 'magnificent' Palais de Danse which could hold 1500 people, and the Villa Marina for dancing and other entertainments. A large programme of 'alien concerts' was announced – given by 'continental artistes' a euphemism for musicians and singers from the internee camps - but not likely to be patronised by locals, although an 'alien' charity concert in aid of Noble's Hospital was thought to be an exception!

However, the damage was done. The Palace, Derby Castle and Villa Marina all closed earlier than expected, and if anyone still harboured lingering hopes that the Island could still benefit from even a reduced holiday season, these were surely dashed when the Government requisitioned the Palace Ballroom, Coliseum, grounds and shops; the Derby Castle Ballroom and variety theatre as well as the Crescent Pavilion; the Crescent Cinema, mostly for use as storage facilities for furniture from the hotels and boarding houses requisitioned for military use or for internee camps. One question remained unanswered for the time being, namely, 'would the confusion and mistakes of the last war blight the boarding house keepers and tradesmen again?'

The question of Sunday entertainments reared its head once again when a local newspaper, citing the theatrical journal *Theatrecraft*, reported on the perceived situation in the Isle of Man describing it as 'totally confused, seemingly arbitrary and contradictory', although much the same could have been said all over Britain. In Liverpool plays were permitted; in Birmingham musical entertainments were permitted, but costumes were banned; some towns allowed comedy sketches, others did not. The journal questioned the wisdom of leaving decisions on such matters to 'local opinion and prejudices'. Why was it acceptable to visit a cinema, but 'highly improper' to attend a theatrical performance . . . even Shakespeare! Referring again to the conditions pertaining on the Island the local newspaper made a plea for the relaxation of Sunday restrictions: 'Sunday afternoon entertainment would be very welcome in these dreary times, after all, concert parties in full costume appear at the Villa Marina!'

Nevertheless, a surprisingly rich year for entertainment drew to a close with various events at the Villa Marina. In September there was a Cinderella Dance and Whist Drive in aid of Noble's Hospital where an unnamed orchestra was said to have 'brightened the proceedings'. This was followed by a Manx Mhelliagh and Island Farmers' Special War Effort Dance where £3,000 was raised. In October Steve Lahmer's Swing Star Dance Band played for a 'Go to it' Carnival Dance in aid of the Air Raid Distress Fund. During the festive season the Garrison Theatre presented a variety show, followed by an Army Welfare Dance on December 21st and Doris Lowthian's School of Dancing annual display on Boxing Day. Steve Lahmer's Swing Star Band played for dancing at the Boxing Day 'Hunt the Wren' dance, and Harold Moorhouse's Havana Band appeared at the Palais de Danse for the St. Stephen's Night Carnival Dance on 26th when the hall was decorated with festive illuminations and there were spot dances and

other dance novelties. Harold Moorhouse was in action again at the Palais de Danse for the New Year's Eve dance.

An extract from the Douglas Weekly Diary of October 1940 might have raised a smile and some recollections of the brilliant 1939 summer season when it published the following piece of dialogue with its echoes of Norman Evans:

Man: 'I want some arsenic for the mother-in-law'.

Chemist: Have you got a doctor's prescription?'

Man: No, but here's a photograph of her'.

The year ended with the news that Harry Taggart, a well-known Manx musician and a veteran violinist and saxophone player with Doug Swallow's and Bert Noble's bands, had been lost at sea when the merchant vessel he was travelling on was torpedoed.

The Annual General Meeting of the Palace & Derby Castle Company in December recorded losses of more than £7,500, and A. E. Kitto MHK, Chairman of Directors, presiding, indicated that, although a dividend for shareholders was unlikely, a brighter 1941 was predicted for the cinemas and Gaiety Theatre.

'Isle of Man Go to It'*

The year 1941 dawned on an Island increasingly ready and able to meet the challenges of war at home, during increasingly anxious times as Britain fought on alone after the fall of France. The economic position for residents had greatly deteriorated, and the fear that those involved in the catering industry before the war would suffer as they had during World War I became a reality. Rationing bit deeper and rapidly became a feature of everyday life. There were now restrictions on milk, preserves, syrup and treacle, sugar and cheese, and a ban on synthetic cream in addition to the rationing of butter and sugar introduced at the end of 1940. Unsurprisingly there was considerable anger when a London Sunday newspaper described the island as a 'Shangri-La of luxury in a world at war'.

* The rallying call coined by Herbert Morrison, Minister of Supply

However, the economy unexpectedly benefited from the British government's substantial investment in the Island's three wartime airfields. The Steam Packet Company, the Railway Companies and the utility companies all announced record profits, and there were continued budget surpluses arising from increased Custom and Excise duties, the consequence of thousands of service personnel being billeted on the island.* Those who had good reason to travel to the Island found that safety precautions on the steamers were slack, 'a matter of please yourself', and the quayside taxi cabs that awaited the unwary overcharged just as they had before the war!

* See *Here is the News, A Chronicle of the 20th Century*, the Manx Experience, 1999, and *A New History of the Isle of Man, Volume 5, 1830-1996*, edited by John Belchem. Liverpool University Press, 2000.

In March the Palace & Derby Castle Company made an application to Douglas Rates Assessment Board for a reduction of business rates in view of the loss of summer seasonal

business for the Strand Cinema, Picture House and Palais de Danse. The case seemed strong as the running costs were higher than in 1939, attendance at places of entertainment was affected by blackout restrictions, and service personnel were admitted at half price. The net profit in 1940 was 50% of that in 1939. The application met with considerable resistance, the Company was accused of greed, and further consideration of the matter was postponed until the following month.

Meanwhile strenuous efforts continued to be made to ensure that the island was on a secure, realistic war footing. Air Raid Precautions were not considered to be as efficient as those in place at Blackpool for example, and, even during this second year of the war, a significant number of adults were obstinately reluctant to take blackout regulations seriously despite campaigns in the local newspapers and fines for those hauled into court. In August the Civil Defence Commission was put on a more efficient footing and was given responsibility for Air Raid Precautions throughout the Island. No longer required merely for assembling thousands of gas masks, five hundred wardens - 'A Responsible Job for Responsible Men' - were recruited, both unemployed men and many from the Loyal Manx Association, originally formed during the previous conflict. Hundreds of volunteers were required for the Ambulance Section and after first aid training would act as stretcher bearers and ambulance staff. The new ARP Head Quarters established in Woodbourne Road became the all-Island control centre, and the Masonic Temple in Douglas was equipped as an emergency hospital. Fire Watchers from the Fire Section were stationed at various positions in Douglas, although the new fire tenders for the Auxiliary Fire Service, soon to be renamed as the National Fire Service, were not expected until the following year. Last but by no means least, a Corps of Messengers aged between sixteen and eighteen was formed in order to maintain communications should the telephone exchanges become inoperative.

There were also improvements in Home Guard training and five hundred volunteers were required to undertake three weekend-long training courses at *HMS St. George*, formerly Cunningham's Holiday Camp, and were equipped with regular army battle dress and boots. The Granville and Regent Hotel internment camps on Loch Promenade were commandeered by the Admiralty and became *HMS Valkyrie*, a naval radar training school; all very 'hush-hush' as one local newspaper described it!

RAF Andreas opened on five acres of productive fertile land, two acres of which was commandeered from Ballaghau and Braust farms. Andreas rectory was requisitioned for the officers' quarters and when other buildings had either been commandeered or built, they would help relieve the overcrowding at Jurby, which was accommodating Polish and Australian fighter squadrons, and which in July, would become the No. 5 Air Observers School, and a vital arm of Bomber Command's strategy of bombing German cities. A new road, known locally as the Burma Road, was constructed linking the village of Andreas with Bride, and the skyline of Andreas village changed forever as the 120 foot tower of Andreas Church was reduced by half as it posed a potential hazard to aircraft taking off and landing from the southern end of the airfield. Despite promises this unique landmark, visible for miles across the marshy flatlands of the northern plain, was not re-instated after the war.

That year the Women's Land Army, formed to assist hard-pressed farmers maximise the use of their land, were issued with two sets of clothes, one for work and a second 'walking

out' uniform, familiar to us today from feature films and documentaries, consisting of fawn coloured riding breeches, shirt, green V-necked pullover, brown great coat and shoes. Following six week's training at Knockaloe Experimental Farm near Peel in everything from milking cows and wringing chickens' necks to the harder physical farm labouring work, recruits were either billeted on individual farms or, as 'mobiles', were billeted in Peel or Lezayre. By 1943 'DIG FOR VICTORY' posters were much in evidence; allotments were given over to growing potatoes, and meadowland, out of use for years, was put to the plough. Italian internees were drafted in to help on the land and schools closed for extra half-day holidays in September so that children could help with blackberry picking.

The *Abdiel* class fast minelayer *HMS Manxman* was commissioned in June. The second Royal Naval vessel to bear the name, she served with the Home Fleet, in the Mediterranean with the Malta Convoys and the Indian Ocean with distinction. As it was considered an honour for the Island that the Admiralty should name a warship *HMS Manxman* it was decided that an appeal should be launched to raise funds for traditional gifts for the ship including a silk white ensign, a shield for a competition between gun turret crews, a small library and 'comforts for the ship's personnel'. Various local organisations were asked to participate including the Ladies' Guild and the Island's schools, and house-to-house collections were made in some parishes. In supporting the appeal, the Lieutenant Governor wrote in the *Ramsey Courier* in October: 'I may say . . . that *HMS Manxman* is a ship of such quality that the people of this island may well be proud to have her name associated with their Island home'.

Few dull moments as amateurs step forward.

The local music scene continued to be vibrant although there was disappointment, and incredulity from some quarters, that the decision was taken by the Manx Music and Drama Festival committee to cancel the Festival that spring 'owing to uncertainty about the future', although the Manx Amateur Drama Federation came to the rescue and the Drama Festival* went ahead at the Gaiety Theatre over three days in May. The Festival committee considered holding a limited festival in the autumn but by September had decided against this idea. Prospects for a Festival in 1942, the Jubilee Year of the Manx Music and Drama Festival, were discussed and finally decided upon in December. Those with fond memories of the Festival in the 1920s were saddened in August by news of the death in a flying accident of Pilot Officer Philip Arthur Christian, an old boy of both Douglas High School and Ramsey Grammar School, who, as a young violinist, had been a frequent competitor in the Festival violin classes.

* The Drama Festival was said to have been 'well and efficiently run' and more or less paid its way which meant that the general festival account showed a healthy balance of £173. Between 1942-46 the Festival was known as the Wartime Festival of Music and Drama, and run 'on the least expensive scale', with money prizes withdrawn and smaller venues to be used for some classes. The classes were all to be 'open' with a special invitation issued to service personnel stationed on the island to participate, as, indeed, the boy musicians of the Royal Naval School of Music did throughout the war.

The annual concert of the Manx Amateur Orchestral Society was discontinued, although members continued to take part in various local musical events. The conductor, the renowned

local violinist and teacher Kathleen Rydings, continued to enjoy some success every year at the Music Festival directing her Avondale Junior String Orchestra.*

* See Maurice Powell, *A Very Talented Manx Lady*, Wibble Publishing, 2014; *Kathleen Rydings* in *Manx Musical Worthies*, manxmusic.com; *ENCORE! The Story of the Isle of Man Symphony Orchestra*, Douglas, 2012.

The Palais de Danse and the Villa Marina continued to be the main venues for dancing with the Gaiety Theatre putting on a succession of plays and revues. The cinemas showed all the main feature films to capacity audiences, including Italian and German internees on certain matinee days. A discordant note was introduced by a shocked *Examiner* entertainments correspondent when he realised that *God Save the King* was not played at the end of these showings. When he enquired why he was apparently informed that 'it was because our German and Italian guests mightn't like it!' Furthermore, the military powers were wary of anything that might lead to 'troublesome incidents'. The writer concluded by suggesting, with his tongue firmly in his cheek, that 'Hitler and Musso' could be invited over to brighten things up with a light-hearted duet.

The New Year's Eve Carnival Dance at the Palais de Danse with Harold Moorhouse's Havana Band featured a novelty dance, and accomplished 'the miraculous musical feat' of playing *There'll Always Be an England* in waltz time! Otherwise there was dancing on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays and an Officer Cadet Training Unit Dance. The Valentine Charity Ball in February featured novelty dances and spot waltz competitions. In April three hundred people attended a dance in aid of the Free French Comfort Fund; there were fifty tombola prizes and the 'hit' of the evening was an exhibition of ceremonial drills. 'From Blitz to Bliss' was the theme of the Carnival Dance on 19th May in aid of Liverpool's blitzed children, which coincided with the arrival on the Island of seventeen babies from Liverpool. The Havana Band gave their services free, and £200 4s was raised for the 'bombed babies'. This may have been Harold Moorhouse's farewell to the Palais de Danse for a while as sometime in the summer he joined the RAF, and Sam Acres, late of Carroll Gibbons' Savoy Orpheans Band, took over the dance programmes with the Havana Band. 'Sing with the Island's Favourite Band' was the theme of an entertaining evening at the Palais de Danse in May, followed by a Grand Ball in aid of Malta's beleaguered people, who had so far suffered 500 air raids. 'The Manx people's generosity to fellow islanders ensured the evening was a great success'.

Meanwhile at the Villa Marina Steve Lahmer's Swing Star Band played for dancing every evening from 7.30 until 11.00. In April the revue *Gay Nights* was presented by the King's Regiment and local artistes at the Villa Marina. 'One of the brightest entertainments seen in Douglas for some time' reported the *Mona's Herald*, with 'not a dull moment'. The cast included comedian Charlie Burke supported by Jim Onley; 'charming contralto' Enid Lord; singing and dancing routines from Mrs Dot Yorke and Mrs Joyce Whittle accompanied by a saxophone and piano; Doris Lowthian's Young Ladies and the King's Hill-Billy Boys completed the line-up. The Good Friday Service held at the Villa Marina included a lantern slide show entitled 'Rejected of Men' and local vocal soloist Miss Lilian Pickard.

Ramsey Pool Ballroom was the venue later that month for the farce *Tons of Money* produced by Herbert C. Sargent of ENSA, in which an impecunious inventor pretends to be his own

cousin in order to deceive his creditors. Presented by Jurby Dramatic Society and Ramsey Grammar School Old Scholars Dramatic Society, the production lacked cohesion, and despite many 'bright and amusing moments', the 'spirit of the play was not always in evidence'. At the end of the month there was a Military Dance in the ballroom, and in May the Legion Players presented *The Last of Mrs Cheyney*, a popular play about a jewel thief passes herself off as a society lady and falls for one of her victims. 'It is not a good sort of play', said the critic James Agate, 'but a very good play of its sort'.

The Gaiety Theatre 'revueville' *Monday Night at Eight* was given by the Douglas Co-optimists and was followed by Frank H. Fortesque's Repertory Company who mounted Emyln Williams' *The Light of Heart*, the 'tender and moving' story of a faded Shakespearean actor, taken to drink, who attempts to revive his career while his long-suffering daughter seeks true love. This was immediately followed by the new revue *Hitting the High Spots*, Ernest Binns' *Arcadian Follies* and George Bernard Shaw's *Candida*, a play so popular that the phenomenon known as *Candidamania* accompanied its early performances, and which posed the question, 'what does a woman really desire from her husband?'

The Manx Museum held a series of public lectures including one entitled 'Malta' and another, 'The Development of the Gun'. Bass-baritone Albert Dudley, who during WWI had served in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve on the Manx steamer *Viking*, then living in Douglas having been bombed out of his London home, gave a talk about his life and career.

Mr Lovejoy, Enoch and Ramsbottom at the Gaiety

Harry Korris – Manxland's genial 'heavyweight' comedian - finally came home to Douglas in June, a week later than planned, accompanied by his wife and partners in comedy from the BBC Radio show *Happidrome*, Cecil Frederick and Robbie Vincent, to join the cast of the *Arcadian Follies* at the Gaiety Theatre for four nights of *Let me Tell You*, a mini sketch show built around Enoch's famous catch-phrase. Renowned for his appearances in the *Arcadian Follies* in Blackpool for many years, 'a bumper welcome' was anticipated as he had not appeared in Douglas for many years. He greeted a familiar face in the stalls with the familiar 'How yer doin', yissa?' and proceeded to make himself 'very much at home' with the family audience. 'Local lad makes good . . . but no 'posh' hotel, though, he stays with relatives'. The first night was not well patronised because, according to 'Script' in the *Examiner*, 'Manx audiences always wait to hear what a show is like rather than take a chance . . .' Among the supporting cast were 'vivacious, charming *soubrette*' Zoe Wheeler, 'clever acrobatic dancer' Wendy Maye, comedians Fred Rayne and Terry Wilson, and the Gerrard Sisters in song and dance routines.

Korris, a natural ad-libber who could invent a topical gag on the spur of the moment, had been asked by Arthur Brittain to state what it would take to get him to return to the Gaiety, and he immediately fired back: 'Two battleships and six destroyers'. On the final night of the short run Korris stepped back onto the stage after the final applause and thanked the local crowd for his warm reception.

Three days later, on Sunday 22nd June the Germans launched operation 'Barbarossa', the invasion of Russia. The next evening Rex Deering's *Jolly Revellers* revue opened at the Gaiety

Theatre and stirred happy memories of the 1939 *Onchan Follies*. The cast featured Van Luin, a master of voices from mellifluous tenor to Donald Duck and Popeye, who had last appeared in Douglas with Macari's Dutch Accordionists; the Variety Three, a precision step dancing act; tap dancer Wally Dearden and partner Babette, an old favourite from the Villa Marina and Douglas Head; the Revelry Girls and the Swingsters band. Sometime during the summer, the blister hangers at RAF Jurby were converted into the 'Jurby Ritz Theatre'. A camp dance band, the Aeronautics, was formed by musicians stationed there led by Jack Hart and Harold Moorhouse, transferred to Jurby by the RAF to take charge of entertainments.

King William's College revue *Rolling Stones* was staged at the Villa Marina in August, and in September the Derby Castle was 'decked out with the fruits of harvest' for the traditional end-of-season Manx Mhelliah. Twelve hundred dancers danced to the Royal Marines Band and the proceeds went to local charities and the Manx Prisoners of War Fund. Later that month there was an RAF Victory Ball at the Villa Marina, and a military parade mustered at King George V Park before processing through the town. The *Isle of Man Examiner* received a letter in mid-September from a well-known Douglas musician, Johnny Laughlin, a saxophonist and clarinettist with Steve Lahmer's band, now serving 'somewhere in England'. Life was very different from the 'dance band game', he reported, although he was fortunate enough to be playing with an RAF band together with other fellow Manx musicians, Tom Cowley of the Palais de Danse, piano accordionist and banjoist Leo Quayle, drummers Teddy Egner of Peel and George Platt, both formerly of the Knights of Rhythm.

'Make the troops laugh'*

On Sunday 2nd November the first ENSA (Entertainments National Services Association) concert party to appear on the Island, *Musical Cheers*, direct from the Theatre Royal in London's Drury Lane, attracted a large crowd at the Ramsey Plaza Cinema. The show was compered by conjuror Carton Garvan and starred versatile entertainer Mai Bacon, who reputedly flew to France in a Wellington Bomber to entertain the troops and was said to be the last woman to be evacuated from Dunkirk. The full supporting cast included concert violinist Arthur Anton who dazzled the audience with a selection of showpieces, comedian Bobby Kerrigan 'who kept the fun going at a merry pace', Arthur Askey look-alike vocalist Leslie Rome, glamorous *danseuse* Robina Woods and vocalist Pat Challis who 'brought the house down' with *Little Grey Home in the West*. The sum of £22 was collected for the Services Welfare Fund.

* The motto adopted by the NAAFI, Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes

Many of the entertainers were not established professionals, and most would not have careers in show business after the war, yet in the opinion of some writers on the history of ENSA, it was unfair to mock the earnest efforts of these artistes and refer to the organisation by the acronym 'Every Night Something Awful'.* Many of those who volunteered were seasoned seaside entertainers, perhaps in the second rank, whose seasonal work had dried up, or pub comics, or those involved in amateur dramatics, and some were 'has-beens' who hoped that ENSA concerts would revitalise their flagging careers. The fact remains that fewer talented entertainers were able to earn a steady income for the duration of the war, and the

few genuine up-and-coming talents found their first step on the ladder to future stardom. Not all acts were welcome, as one ENSA statement made clear: 'no amateur tenors and sopranos would be performing to the troops as it is not the type of entertainment the men want'. However, Frank Olloms with his impersonation of Popeye was acceptable! *

* See *Greasepaint and Cordite*, Andy Merriman, Aurum Press, 2013.

* Possibly Francini Olloms, 'Europe's finest concertina player', juggler and acrobat, who had been treading the boards since the heyday of music hall, and who may have lived in Douglas for a time.

The war, and the shortages it brought with it, was never very far away and even intruded during an ENSA concert in Peel in December 1941 when a comedian produced a bunch of dummy bananas and a child in the audience audibly asked: 'Mummy, what are those things?' In May 1943 ENSA presented its Star Variety show featuring a nationally popular duo, the Two Leslies in 'a flow of songs and jokes', supported by popular pianist Renara, *danseuse* Moira Kennet, and Bert Brownbill, an old style concert party character comedian who had starred with Happidrome's Cecil Frederick in *The Kit-Kat Kids*, broadcast from Leamington Spa in 1935, in sketches in which he appeared both as an ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service) girl and a bus conductress. *Cabaret Parade* in July starred the well-known ventriloquist Arthur Worsley and vocal duo Frank Varney and Teddie Butt.

ENSA shows on the Isle of Man were not without controversy though. A letter in one of the local newspapers made the point that in the UK the shows were essentially for service personnel only, therefore artistes fees were accordingly nominal and entrance prices low. Yet on the Island the general public were encouraged to support the shows, enjoyed the benefit of cheap ticket prices, with the result that other entertainments suffered from unfair competition. There were also clashes between ENSA shows and dances at the Palais de Danse. An attempt was made by the Salvation Army to find ways to prevent children being admitted to ENSA shows on Sunday afternoons as this meant that some Sunday Schools suffered from declining numbers. The matter was left in abeyance following exhaustive discussions, but eventually it was agreed that children under 14 years of age should not be admitted to the shows.

The question of Sunday entertainments once again raised its head and some bizarre local regulations were highlighted: Sunday 'concert' artistes were not permitted to wear makeup; cinema films were permitted in some towns, but good plays were forbidden. The local newspapers shared the view that 'the majority of people would welcome a broader outlook, more particularly these days'. There was also a call for the licensing regulations to be relaxed to allow the sale of alcohol in places of entertainment 'where the presence of troops is likely to create a special need'. In other words, a Manxman could fight and die for his 'little nation' anywhere in Europe, but could not buy a pint in Douglas on a Sunday!

Two Manx singers recall WWI experiences entertaining the troops

May Clague, 'as delightful a soprano as the Isle of Man ever produced', recalled entertaining soldiers in Bedfordshire when a voice from the audience shouted, 'give us *Ellan Vannin* gel'. She immediately recognised Billy Cain, a well-known Manx choir master and comedy monologist, with whom she joined in the Manx dialect sketch *Kanys ta shiu Cashens*. May

Purcell also sang *Ellan Vannin* under sadder circumstances at a hospital for Canadian soldiers in France when she recognised a Ramsey lad, Harold Routledge, who died shortly after she sang for him.

The troops guarding the internment camps enjoyed a measure of seasonal cheer even at that bleak period in the war. The Hutchinson Camp Christmas Dance was held at Tromode; the Peel Guard Detachment enjoyed a Christmas Dinner and Smoking Concert; Onchan Camp put on a dance, cabaret and supper for their soldiers and guests; on New Year's Eve there was a cold supper and smoking concert at The Crescent, and the Metropol Camp no doubt enjoyed their hot-pot supper and dance at the Douglas Bay Hotel. Nor were the internees and their families forgotten. The Douglas Hot-Pot Committee delivered three hundred and thirty-five hot-pots on Christmas Day, plus a four-pound loaf for each internee. Old mutton was used along with the beef and a Manx grower came to the rescue with a supply of onions! On Boxing Day Father Christmas made a surprise visit to a children's party at Port St. Mary internment camp; other camps had similar parties on a smaller scale. An altogether more relaxed attitude by the authorities towards the wartime 'guests' resulted in a number of friendships being formed, particularly with Italians. The excavations at the Iron Age sites at Ballacagan, Ballanorris and Balldoole undertaken by the German archaeologist Dr Gerhard Bersu, interned on the Island at the married camp at Port St. Mary with his wife Maria, but released initially to prospect for manganese, are still considered ground-breaking today.*

* See *Round Mounds of the Isle of Man*, Gerhard and Maria Bersu, www.roundmounds.wordpress.com.

The Villa Marina hosted a number of events during November and December including an Aid to Russia Dance; a British Legion Armistice Show; the Allotments Association Dance; the King's Regiment *Gay Nights* revue and the Hospital Committee Employee's Dance and Whist Drive. Bobby Hind's London Sonora Band appeared at Peel's Centenary Centre in a 'sparkling' All Services show with music, comedy, singing and dancing under the auspices of ENSA, and again in December at the Plaza Cinema, Ramsey. Christmas and New Year's dances at the Palais de Danse raised the sum of £4 4s for cigarettes for the Manx Regiment now serving in the Middle East, whose ranks included some ex-Palais Band members: Gunner Sizer, Bombardier Leneghan, Gunner Jacobson and Steward Ansell. The year ended on the entertainment front with the disappointing news that the Garrison Theatre would close in February owing to the lack of public support. The talent competition part of the shows had always been popular, but many of the entertainments had drawn adverse criticism as being 'too amateurish'.

On the morning of Sunday 7th December, the Japanese Imperial Navy Air Force attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbour, and the following day the Americans entered the war. It was too soon to see this development as heralding the turning point in the war, but the fact remained: Britain was no longer alone.

Make Do and Mend

In contrast to the dreadful winter of 1940, the winter of 1941-2 was one of the warmest in living memory. Double summer-time began at Easter and lasted until 8th August. The population of the Island had soared to over 93,000 of which some 40,000 were service

personnel, and the Steam Packet vessels not commandeered for war service were kept fully occupied ferrying them on and off the Island.

Although rationing had been in progress for meat and bacon for some time, official rationing for these items began in 1942. The advice in the 'Femina' column in the *Isle of Man Times* in July: 'Plant savoys, sprouts and broccoli . . . an hour in the garden saves two in the queue'. As more able-bodied men were called to arms, labourers on the land became in short supply, and working parties from the internment camps worked to the mutual benefit of all concerned. When six hundred internees arrived from Finland, Hungary, Romania and Japan, a dozen expert chicken sexers* were identified and released for work in the poultry industry!

* The procedure was known as 'vent sexing', a description of which happily lies beyond the scope of this book.

'Bananas impossible, but plenty of fish', announced a local newspaper. There were of course price rises for just about everything, and many everyday commodities, such as the popular soap powders Rinso, Persil and Lux were in short supply. Ladies make-up was virtually unobtainable, and locally made substitutes, such as face creams, were thought to be too greasy. Two meatless days each week were announced from February together with 'beefless weeks' when only mutton, pork and lamb would be available. Families were required to register with a butcher of their choice, but at least the strict rationing imposed in England was avoided. It was hoped that the Island's plentiful supply of rabbits and 'a return of the traditional dish of spuds and herring' would help supplement the nation's diet. Wheatmeal bread, very nutritious, but 'heavy, grey and gritty of texture', was introduced in March in the shape of the National Wheatmeal Loaf, but tobacco, cigarettes, paper, chocolates and sweets were not so easily obtained. Beer remained plentiful, and, as some local newspapers hinted, spirits 'and other items' were still available to regular customers 'under the counter'. Any food scraps were urgently 'scavenged' by farmers to make 'swill' to feed to their pigs, although with everyone on the home front engaged in 'the people's war' being exhorted to 'Never leave any food on your plate' it is a wonder that there was anything left for the cat, let alone the pigs!

Be thankful and never grumble

New war measures came into being and others were reviewed. The conscription debate raged on with those whom the tribunals had exempted from military services being referred to as the 'shirkers' or the 'beastly rats' by the Lieutenant Governor at a Home Guard dinner. The unguarded comment attracted instant condemnation and was deemed unfair especially to those in reserved occupations. Most people felt that the Island should be seen 'to be pulling its proper weight in the combined effort to defeat the scourge of Nazism', yet because of 'the dictatorial attitude of the Lieutenant Governor and the Legislative Council' the House of Keys voted against the National Service Act being applied to the Isle of Man, save in respect of women aged between twenty and thirty years of age, providing they were 'directed to war work on the Island'. Men aged between eighteen and sixty years of age were now required to register for Civil Defence and Fire Section duties in order that 'air raid precautions can be raised to a high state of efficiency'.* An Isle of Man Army Cadet Force, affiliated to the Home Guard and Isle of Man Territorial Association, was formed of some four hundred boys

between the ages of 14^{1/2} and 17 years of age. They were given military style training and complemented those boys who had already joined the Sea Cadets or the Air Training Corps, founded the previous year.

* *Here is the News, A Chronicle of the 20th Century*, Volume 1, 1901-50, The Manx Experience, 1999.

Air raid precautions were still not always taken seriously, and were therefore re-assessed, with the result that air raid warning sirens were heard more frequently.* A scrap metal drive was instigated on behalf of the Ministry of Supply in the UK. Unwanted metal could be deposited in dumping areas and then shipped to UK, and some churchyards and grave sites were denuded of railings and other metal fixtures and fittings. RAF Andreas became operational in March as part of 9 Group Fighter Section. *HMS Tynwald*, which took part in the heroic evacuations from Dunkirk, was sunk off the coast of North Africa in November. She was the fourth Steam Packet vessel to be lost during the hostilities.

* *The Isle of Man at War 1939-45*, Matthew Richardson, Pen & Sword Military, 2018.

The bands played on

A bright start to 1942 was provided at the New Year's Eve Ball at the Villa Marina with the RAF Aeronautics Dance Band - signature tune *Heartbeats on the air* - conducted by Corporal Jack Hart, and Steve Lahmers' Swing Stars Band presented 'a tip-top programme' for the Manx Choir's Dance and Whist Drive. The Palais de Danse continued to be popular with members of the forces who were invariably smart in appearance and well behaved. Many service personnel stayed overnight at the Walpole, a large boarding house in Walpole Avenue, which served excellent food – when available – and provided a warm welcome. Local pianist Frieda Standen recalled that 'many local boys spent their last night of embarkation leave at the Palais. The music played was terribly nostalgic: *Now is the Hour, Soon I'll be Sailing* etc. What a wonderful sight it was to see all the different uniforms and wives and girlfriends dressed in their best'.

The entertainments on the Island between 1942 and 1944 broadly followed the pattern established during the previous two years. Well attended dances at the Palais de Danse and Villa Marina, often raised considerable funds for various wartime charities such as the Manx Prisoners War Parcels Fund, the WAAF Welfare Fund, the Onchan Farmer's War Effort Fund, the Merchant Navy Comforts Fund - 'one of the most deserving efforts ever organised in the Island' - and in March 1943, the Manx Aid to Russia Fund. Nearly 4,000 gifts had already been sent and a further £60 was raised during that evening at the Palais de Danse. Saturday afternoon tea dances at the Palais de Danse were always well attended, and nine hundred attended a Naval Ball in November 1943 which featured a quick-step competition open to all services and civilian partners.

Thousands thronged to the August Bank Holiday dances at the Palace Ballroom with the bands of the Royal Marines and Royal Naval School of Music, to the Villa Marina to dance to either Steve Lahmers' band or Harold Moorhouse's Aeronautics Dance Band. At the Palais de Danse there were dance competitions and exhibitions with the Sam Acres band, and the popular 'name the bands' and 'name the cinema stars' competitions from gramophone

recordings, all with novelty prizes.* Later that year Harold Moorhouse and his Aeronautics Band 'from RAF Jurby' played for the local newspapers' Cigarette Fund dance at the Palais de Danse, organised by the Strand Cinema Company, and in December at the Christmas Parcels Dance when Moorhouse himself appeared as Santa Claus.

* *Isle of Man Times* 9th October. Sam Acres left the Island and returned to the London Savoy Orpheans. His Manx-born wife and son soon joined him.

The summer seasons of Sunday Concerts at the Villa Marina began in 1943 with a mixture of local and British guest artistes. The programmes invariably consisted of marches, light overtures such as Herold's *Zampa* and Schubert's *Rosamunde*, instrumental solos from the young bandsmen of the Royal Naval School of Music, selections from popular operettas - *Merry England*, *White Horse Inn*, *Cavalcade*, *Lilac Time* and *the Geisha* - descriptive pieces, and ballads and arias from popular operas and operettas. Open air concerts in the Villa Marina grounds given by the band of the Royal Naval School of Music also commenced in the hope that they could be sustained throughout the summer.

On 4th July Douglas Festival Choir and Douglas Male Choristers, conducted by Noah Moore, appeared at a Sunday concert, and on the 11th Frank Titterton, the well-known lyric tenor, popular concert artiste and broadcaster was the guest performer. Early in August the principal guest artiste was the tenor Henry Wendon, supported by local soprano Norah Moore, and later that month the soprano Margaret Eaves and bass-baritone Richard Standen appeared. The list of famous concert artistes goes on. The bass, Hamilton Harris, appeared in September and sang an aria from Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Stanford's stirring sea song *Drake's Drum*. Muriel Brunskill was the guest later that same month, and on the 26th Walter Widdop, one of the most highly regarded of all English tenors sang *Sound an Alarm* from Handel's *Judas Maccabaeas*, Vaughan William's lovely *Linden Lea* and Schubert's *Who is Sylvia*. One of the most popular concert artistes to appear in Douglas during the war was the *basso profundo* Norman Lumsden, who sang in opera and oratorio, for whom Benjamin Britten created important roles in the 1940s, and who later appeared at Aldeburgh, Covent Garden and Glyndebourne. He was the veteran of over two hundred *Messiahs* and was still performing as an actor in small television roles in the 1970s. He found fame again late in life as J. R. Hartley in the 1983 Yellow Pages advertising campaign, which was voted the fifth most popular television advertisement ever in a 2015 poll. There was even a spin-off when J. R. Hartley's imaginary book, *Fly Fishing* by J. R. Hartley, was published, and became a minor best-seller.

Pantos, revues, plays and the cinema

Pantomimes continued to flourish at the Palace Coliseum or the Gaiety Theatre. The Royal Naval production of *Cinderella* in 1942 boasted a cast of WRENS, RNVR personnel and the Royal Marines Band and Frank H. Fortesque's *Red Riding Hood* at the Gaiety Theatre in January 1943 drew large crowds as did Ernest Binns' *Arcadian Follies* at the Gaiety in July. Starring Lancashire comedian Terry White, the local newspapers voted it 'another bright show with screamingly funny jokes, snappy sketches and merry banter, devoid of slapstick and risqué humour'. *Babes in the Wood* was staged at Jurby RAF Station in December that year, supported by an RAF band conducted by George Broad and led by Harold Moorhouse. Local

variety shows and revues popped up almost anywhere on the island, such as the new show for Ramsey in March 1943, *Out of the Blue*, which featured an RAF Benevolent Fund auction of messages, autographs and photos of the stars. Harry Korris sent 'a characteristically breezy message from Ramsbottom, Enoch and Me' which fetched a good price. Others were received from huge stars like Max Miller, Ben Lyon and Bebe Daniels and Ivor Novello, no less.

One dramatic society, founded in 1942 by twenty-two-year-old naval lieutenant Jon Pertwee,* stationed at *HMS Valkyrie*, the secret radar installation on Douglas Head, is still going strong today. The first production by the Service Players took place in 1943 with a company of amateurs and servicemen, some of whom were professionals. The play was Emyln Williams disturbing psychological thriller set in remotest Essex, *Night Must Fall*.*

* The English actor and entertainer best remembered for his role as Chief Petty Officer Pertwee in BBC Radio's *The Navy Lark*, as the third 'Doctor' in *Doctor Who* from 1970 until 1974 and as Worzel Gummidge from 1979-81 and later 1987-89.

* Recent productions by the Service Players at the Gaiety Theatre include amusing adaptations of the TV series *Blackadder*, *Dad's Army*, and *Yes, Minister*.

Films were often good for morale and none more so than those starring Lancashire's perpetually gormless lad George Formby. After *Trouble Brewing* in 1939 Formby continued to make morale boosting wartime comedies, and in his topical new film for 1943, *Get Cracking*, he became embroiled in an inter-village Home Guard squabble. Formby had in fact been virtually type-cast from *No Limit* (1936) and essentially reprised his role as that favourite but unlikely hero, 'the little man', often defeated, but refusing to lie down, a *persona* Norman Wisdom would successfully adopt post-war. *Trouble Brewing* was followed in 1939 by *Come On George!* which was first shown to the troops serving in France before going on general release, and the following year *Let George Do It!* now considered by connoisseurs to be one of his finest films, which includes a dream sequence during which George is parachuted into a Nuremburg rally and punches Hitler. *Spare a Copper*, set in the Mersey Docks, and his second film of 1940, sees him somehow thwarting fifth columnists and saboteurs. George is caught between his smart, modern wife and his domineering mother in *Turned Out Nice Again*, a domestic comedy set in an underwear factory. *Much too Shy* in 1942 was a flop; *Bell-Bottom George* in 1944, in which hapless waiter George, thrice rejected for military service, is mistaken for a sailor and stumbles across a nest of Nazi spies, proved to be surprisingly enduring in popularity. In *He Snoops to Conquer* (1944) George plays an odd job man lost in the murky goings-on in local politics and town planning.

In addition to his enormously popular film comedies George Formby saw service entertaining the troops with ENSA in France, and throughout the war endlessly toured factories, theatres and variety halls throughout Britain, including a marathon three-week, seventy-two show tour of Northern Ireland in 1942. He also gave free concerts for local charities and numerous good causes, and set up his own charities with his wife Beryl.

Vera Lynn, 'official' forces sweetheart and national treasure-in-waiting, starred in her own escapist wartime films. *We'll Meet Again* in 1943 is the semi-autobiographical story of a young dancer and reluctant singer who becomes a star in wartime London; *Rhythm Serenade* is a

musical about a young teacher who organises a nursery in a munitions factory, and the 1944 musical comedy *One Exciting Night*, sees a plucky aspiring singer wooing the crowds and foiling a kidnap gang. In 1941 she began her own enormously popular radio show *Sincerely Yours*, during which she sang the songs most requested by soldiers. She visited new young mothers in hospital and sent personal messages to their husbands serving abroad, and toured with ENSA to Egypt, India and the Far East.

After *Shipyard Sally* in 1939, which featured a song that became a wartime favourite, *Wish Me Luck as You Wave Me Goodbye*, Gracie Fields, everybody's other forces sweetheart, made far fewer films during the war years than George Formby, and none had a wartime setting. She did, however, tour extensively with ENSA, and was frequently in the thick of things, entertaining the troops from a sandbagged bunker or from the back of a military vehicle, whilst her audience were sometimes sheltering in fox holes. She travelled to the Far East to entertain Australian soldiers and was the first big star to perform behind enemy lines in Berlin.

Two films shown at the Picture House Cinema during 1944 were nobody's finest hour. *This is the Army*, a light-weight romantic musical comedy, starred a young Ronald Reagan, and *A Yank at Eaton*, a thinly disguised propaganda comedy drama demonstrating that 'Yanks' and 'Limeys' could get along together 'just swell' when they had to, starred Mickey Rooney. Both are best forgotten.

Yet despite the wealth of entertainment for Island residents and the service personnel stationed here, and the realisation that Steam Packet vessels were very unlikely to be attacked on their way from Liverpool to Douglas, the visitor industry remained moribund. Nevertheless, the year drew to a close in a mood of some optimism; perhaps Christmas 1943 would be the last Christmas of the war, and that 1944 would be the 'Victory Year'.

No end in sight

In reality, though, the war still had nearly a year and a half to run, and with the Island's population now exceeding 93,000, Manx farmers were being urged to put even more land, out of use for years, under the plough so that 'every available acre is brought into cultivation for potato, corn and green crops'. Even Douglas' prestigious golf course did not escape. Rationing seemed likely to be tightened as a crisis point in the battle to feed the Island loomed, and an urgent appeal went out for more volunteers for the Women's Land Army. To add to everyone's woes, for much of January 1945 the Isle of Man was caught in the grip of a severe frost.

On the lighter side, an Italian internee was fined £10 for building an illicit still in a Douglas detention camp whereby he had distilled a 44% proof spirit from potatoes, beetroot and sugar amongst other things. Described as 'the most sensational non-war event', an 18-ton flywheel from Douglas Power Station was hurled through the roof and landed in bits 'all over the centre of town'. The noise of the incident was likened to that of a 'Doodlebug', and the flying wheel was soon nicknamed 'The Kelly Bug!'

Although 320 German prisoners of war arrived at the end of November 1944, the gradual return of some internees continued throughout the year, including some 600 men, women

and children who had departed from Port Erin in September. Blackout restrictions were finally lifted in that month, and in December the Home Guard took part in a 'Stand Down' parade.

There were the usual New Year's dances at the Palais de Danse and the Villa Marina in 1945, and Saturday Tea Dances, Military Dances and Service Balls, hospital dances and so forth throughout the year. The Military Bands played in the Villa Marina Gardens on Sunday afternoons during the summer months, and there were orchestral and choral concerts on Sunday evenings. The Derby Castle was occasionally available for Service Dances. Lady Mountbatten was the guest at a Midsummers Dance at the Palais de Danse supported by the band of the Royal Naval School of Music. There was a concert given by the Manx Amateur Orchestral Society in March, and 'This for remembrance', presented by the British Legion, took place on 10th November at the Villa Marina.

Preparing the Island for business again.

Before the end of the war, yet with victory assured, the Island began to prepare itself for the first post-war holiday season. In September 1944 Harry Korris and his wife together with the theatrical producer Tom Arnold had visited the Island for a short holiday and at the same time opened negotiations regarding possible post-war entertainments. Korris was the guest at a British Legion social event and reminisced about his life in the entertainment business. In his opinion the Isle of Man 'was one of the finest holiday resorts in the kingdom, but . . . we keep it too much to ourselves . . . if we get too many people here, it may make the place common!' As one career in entertainment reached its peak another was just starting. Seventeen-year-old Stanley Bateman, 'prominent in the Island's entertainment life for many years', left the Island to embark on a professional stage career with a three-year contract with Ernest Binns' *Marine Follies* at Fleetwood.

In February 1945 the Government announced that it intended to purchase Marine Drive, Douglas Head, the popular panorama drive, closed throughout the war, its railway out of use. Cunningham's Holiday Camp was sold to a new public company called the Douglas Holiday Camp Ltd. in April for £400,000. Although left in a poor condition by the Admiralty, the prospectus noted that the camp had accommodated nearly 4,000 visitors in 1939 and consisted of a large hall for concerts, dancing and films, a winter garden, sports ground, football pitch, sixteen all-weather tennis courts, golf course, swimming pool, billiard room with eight full-size tables, lounges, reading and writing rooms, shops and a camp bank. There was also an escalator from near the sea front to the camp site. The camp was finally de-requisitioned in January 1946.

On March 31st Arthur Brittain, the General Manager of the Palace & Derby Castle Co. Ltd. for fifty-three years, retired, and in April Douglas Frederick Barwell was appointed to succeed him. A last link with the Company from the heyday of musical hall and the fabulous inter-war years was gone, but an exciting new era was about to begin. As the memories of the Harry Wood years slowly began to fade into the past, a bright, new chapter in the story of the Island's entertainment industry was about to begin. It was, however, an industry that for many reasons - changes of musical fashion, competition from other, hitherto insignificant,

forms of entertainment and other social pressures - began a long, slow decline, although there were a few high peaks on the horizon.

A stuttering start

The beginning of the last year of the war began with a familiar round of local dances with an Army Cadet Force dance at the Palais de Danse in January, the Women's Section of the British Legion dance in February and in March the 1st Douglas Scouts (founded 1909) held their annual dance, all with Harold Moorhouse and his band. There were Manx Prisoner of War Fund dances – including a Valentine Ball in Ramsey – pantomimes, concerts and whist drives, American Teas, brass band concerts and late Easter dances at both the Palais de Danse and the Villa Marina. Even the small community of Bride hosted an annual concert in the Parochial School on behalf of the Bride, Maughold and Lezayre Nursing Association, with entertainment from a Ramsey concert party consisting of songs, accordion solos and monologues. Local groups such as The Jolly Millers' Concert Party* travelled all round the Island from Ramsey in the North to Laxey in the East, Peel in the West and Port Erin in the South. Directed by Mrs Arnold F. Kermode LRAM, their blend of recitations, vocal and instrumental solos and choruses were immensely popular and raised over £1500 for various charities in the four years since their first appearance.

* The Jolly Millers first appeared in the local newspapers in April 1940. Two early photographs show a mixed troupe of fifteen Pierrot-style entertainers sporting large floppy bow ties.

On 27th March 27th a musical event took place at the Villa Marina that resonated loudly throughout the Island. A magnificent performance of Handel's *Messiah* was mounted to celebrate the forthcoming retirement of Noah Moore* as manager of the Villa Marina, and much admired for many glorious years as a conductor and choir trainer. The combined Douglas Festival Chorus, the Douglas Male Choristers and the Manx Ladies Choir totalling some 130 voices was named The Manx Oratorio Choir for the occasion. The soloists were Ena Mitchell, soprano, Ruth Bowman, contralto, Stephen Manton, tenor and Norman Lumsden, bass. The Orchestra of the Royal Naval School of Music with trumpet soloist Corporal M. E. Earle, R.M., with Miss Emily Christian, piano accompanist, was directed by Noah Moore. The modest attendance despite an audience swelled by 'temporary residents' - military personnel and perhaps internees - and the small financial loss sustained, drew the following comment from the *Mona's Herald* reviewer: 'such events rarely get the support deserved on this Island'. Moore officially retired on 12th October, and Miss Christian took over the role of conductor.

* Noah Moore was a choral conductor and trainer for over fifty years. He was associated with Douglas Choral Union, Douglas Male Choristers, 'one of the greatest Manx choirs', the Ladies Choir, the Manx Oratorio Choir, Douglas Festival Choir, boys' choirs at the Manx Music Festival for fifteen consecutive years and the teacher of many fine local singers. One thousand friends and colleagues attended his benefit dance at the Villa Marina.

Over at last!

After 2,077 days of conflict the Allies accept the unconditional surrender of Germany's armed forces on Tuesday 8th May, known forever as VE (Victory in Europe) Day, and more than one million people took to the streets throughout Britain in celebration. The Isle of Man began its own celebrations the previous day in expectation of the official end of hostilities. In Douglas

there was a Victory Parade led by the band of the Royal Naval School of Music; hundreds of people thronged the promenades singing the old wartime favourite songs, *Pack Up Your Troubles*, *Tipperary* and *Rolling Home*.

VE-Day was declared a public 'paid' holiday. Air-raid warning sirens sounded the 'all clear' for 5 minutes and the Island tuned in to the Prime Minister's VE-Day broadcast. At 4.00pm the Mayor of Douglas and Council members attended St. Thomas' Church for a one-hour service following the announcement of the cease fire. The following day, Wednesday 9th May, the Band of Royal Naval School of Music, Douglas Town Band and the Salvation Army Band played in the town to the crowds thronging the streets including groups of "jolly jacks" naval ratings in some 'boisterous merry-making'. Bonfires and fireworks lit up the foreshore; a children's party took place in Chester Street - 'one of the poorest quarters of the town' - and was by all accounts 'a real victory spread'. Flags and bunting decorated many buildings and it was announced that an extension of licensing hours for dances 'will be sympathetically considered'.

The official Thanksgiving Service took place in St. George's Church at 11.00am on Sunday 13th May. Church bells sounded throughout the Island, and in Douglas vied with the sound of ship's sirens. Lighting restrictions were lifted immediately which allowed Douglas Town Hall to be floodlit. At 3.15pm a Great United Service of Thanksgiving for all denominations took place at the Villa Marina, followed by a joint armed services victory parade through the town of some two thousand men and women. The Manx Music Festival, known as 'The Victory Guild' that year was mounted at the Gaiety Theatre between May 7th and 13th, and, all things considered, was well-patronised.

What we need now is entertainment

A new era of summer entertainment on the Island began bravely on Sunday 20th May at the Villa Marina with a Celebrity Sunday Concert given by the Grand Orchestra of the Royal Naval School of Music and guest artiste Nosmo King,* billed as 'the one-man music hall act', the veteran of five hundred radio broadcasts and - according to his own publicity - the receiver of two thousand letters from admirers after every appearance! He adopted the stage name 'Nosmo King' after seeing a 'No Smoking' sign split into No Smo King on two partly open backstage doors, and became a household name after he was joined by his son Jack* in a double act Nosmo King and Hubert. When stooge 'Hubert' was called up for military service he developed a solo act centred on comic monologues and 'patter', including one specially written for the Isle of Man on the steamer coming over. Among the supporting acts was Gunner Ronnie Corlett, tenor, who had recently returned to the Island after four and a half years serving with the 41st Battery of the Manx Regiment in the Middle East, where he had broadcast every week with the Cairo Area Military band in the radio variety show *Expressly for You*. He sang arias and songs by Handel and Schubert and Neapolitan favourites with piano accompanist Miss E. Christian.

* The English variety artiste H. Vernon Watson, 1886-1952. He began his career before WWI in music halls and displayed a rare talent for impersonating the great comedians of the day. He eventually became a 'black-face' comedian - the name Nosmo is perhaps redolent of the minstrel age - and worked the variety theatres in Leeds during the 1930s.

* Petty Officer Jack Watson was the compere of BBC Radio's Forces Programme *Navy Mixture* (1944-46) and became the rugged man of action in such films as *The Wild Geese* and *The Sea Wolves*, and iconic television series including *Z Cars*, *Upstairs Downstairs*, *Minder* and *Heartbeat*, and sporadically *Coronation Street* for over twenty years.

Nosmo King appeared twice during the evening amid an orchestral programme which began with a march and Beethoven's *Egmont* overture, continued with two short orchestral pieces by Rubenstein and Buccalosi, a selection from Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, a concert waltz, a selection from Edward German's *Merry England* and concluded with Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* no. 1 and *God Save the King*. The evening will have brought back memories of the superb Sunday concerts of the pre-war decades and fervent hopes of a resurgence of the Island's entertainment industry.

At this early stage the auguries seemed favourable if mixed, and before the end of May the first queues had formed at Fleetwood for the steamer *Snaefell*. Not everything went according to plan, however, and the Whit-weekend sailing was over-subscribed and one hundred and eighty holiday makers were left behind on the quay because four hundred members of the armed services had been granted priority. 'Thousands of our factory mates in Lancashire have made up their minds to try and celebrate victory year in Douglas this summer', announced a local newspaper, yet although sunny, Whit-Saturday was beset with chilly wind, and Whit-Sunday was wet, foggy and generally miserable'. Only six hundred visitors arrived on Whit-Monday. Douglas Town Band's concert in the Villa Marina Gardens was cancelled due to heavy rain.

The Villa Marina opened officially for dances and concerts on Friday 1st June with a whist drive and dance presented by the Douglas Boarding and Apartment Association, the highlights of the evening being the waltz and slow foxtrot competitions. Later that month the Villa Marina hosted a tribute to Noah Moore attended by one hundred and twenty friends and supporters during which he recalled forty years of happy memories and musical achievements. The Sunday afternoon concerts in the Villa Marina Gardens with the Douglas Town Band often attracted four hundred visitors, although one resident expressed his incredulity after witnessing visitors being 'turned out of the Gardens at 5.00pm apparently without rhyme or reason . . . often in bright sunshine on to the streets of Douglas'. His verdict was: 'a gratuitous insult . . .', but the Town Council disagreed and argued that as the Gardens were not a public amenity, they were not obliged to keep them open until sunset.

Thus, the first full month after the end of the war continued with many of the local events that characterised the summer war years: Scout Week Rallies, Dog Shows, Empire Youth Services events, annual teas, fun fairs and garden parties. An RAF musical revue *Blues Away* was mounted at the Plaza Cinema in aid of the Montgomery Bed Fund at Ramsey Cottage Hospital; film star Deborah Kerr, who had recently been on Island filming, donated £3 to this fund. Towards the end of the month, though, a fire broke out at the Strand Cinema causing an estimated £7,000 worth of damage.

The national spirit throughout the Island was considerably lifted by the visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth who arrived at Victoria Pier (unaccompanied by Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret) on 4th July for a three-day visit, their first such visit outside Britain since the

advent of war. Later that day they were entertained by a four thousand strong children's choir at the Villa Marina. Their crowded itinerary included attending the Tynwald Ceremony on Tynwald Day in front of a record crowd of onlookers and presiding over a meeting of Tynwald members at St. John's Church. They toured many towns and villages, paused to greet the well-wishers in Royal Avenue, Onchan, and Parliament Square, Ramsey, and inspected some of the Island's military installations including the Women's Land Army base at Knockaloe, HMS Valkyrie, the Air Navigation (radar) training school on Douglas Head and finally reviewing the assembled officers and men from HMS St. George (Ballakermeen High School) at a field adjoining Cunningham's Holiday Camp. They returned to London by Dakota from RAF Jurby after inspecting some 1000 airmen and WAAFs.

Although the Palace and Derby Castle ballrooms and variety theatres remained closed, the Villa Marina forged ahead with a summer programme of Sunday Celebrity Concerts and dance programmes, and on Sunday 1st July the immensely popular piano duettists Rawicz and Landauer* appeared with a programme of their highly attractive arrangements of popular classics with a precision that was legendary. Both artistes been arrested early in the war and interned in Hutchinson Camp, Douglas - the so-called 'artists camp' - after being invited by the Prince of Wales to give a concert for Queen Mary. In an act of great kindness, the camp Commander, Captain Daniels, arranged for two baby grand pianos to be installed at their accommodation so that they could continue playing throughout their sojourn on the Island.

* Polish-born Marjan Rawicz and Walter Landauer from Vienna first performed together in 1932 on Austrian radio and subsequently toured throughout Europe. In 1935 they moved to England to escape Nazi Germany. They made regular BBC radio broadcasts and sold tens of thousands of records, many with Mantovani and his orchestra, including Richard Adinsell's *Warsaw Concerto* and Hubert Bath's *Cornish Rhapsody*, Charles Williams' *The Dream of Olwen*, Nino Rota's *The Legend of the Glass Mountain*, Khatchaturian's *The Sabre Dance*, Debussy's *Clair de Lune*, Sinding's *Rustle of Spring* and Strauss waltzes. They appeared together on *This is Your Life* in March 1961. See Ronald Stent, *A Bespattered Page, The Internment of His Majesty's Most Loyal Enemy Aliens*, André Deutsch, 1980.

Referred to affectionately as 'Rabbits and Lawnmower' by Morecambe and Wise in later years, the Villa Marina was 'packed to the doors' for their all-star concert, the crowded scenes conjuring up memories of pre-war concerts. All bookable seats had been reserved by Saturday despite the comparatively high prices; the stage of the newly decorated Royal Hall was bedecked with flowers. The 'lightly classical programme' included music from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* ballet and their arrangements of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, Addinsell's *Warsaw Concerto* and Weber's swirling waltz *Invitation to the Dance*. The local newspaper reviewer certainly appreciated an evening of 'genuine musical "lollipops", not high-brow and above sing-a-longs', performed with 'the highest peak of perfection'. In support was the fine tenor Frank Titterton, whose singing of Puccini's *Your Tiny Hand is Frozen* from *La Boheme* earned him a triple encore, and 'the fresh voiced, charming young rising star', Mary Denise, soprano, who delighted the audience with gems from musical comedy, *Musetta's Waltz Song*, also from *La Boheme*, and Delibes' *Maids of Cadiz*. There were a large number of encores throughout the evening, and the reviewer summed up with 'the concert came to us like a breath of fresh air after the long years of summer gloom'.

Band leader Billy Ternent* and his band of seventeen began their eight-week season on Monday 2nd July and attracted thirteen hundred dancers on the opening night. 'The amiable Geordie' never lost his Tyneside accent and was highly thought of 'pro of the old school'. He was the veteran of 6,000 broadcasts, including *ITMA* with Tommy Handley, *Variety Bandbox* and *Music While You Work*, formed his own band in 1944 and adopted the song *She's My Lovely* as his signature tune. He developed a distinctive, rich and mellow sound through his sophisticated arrangements so that the phrase 'that unmissable sound' was always associated with his band, not really a 'Swing Band', but a 'dance band' who played popular and familiar ballads in a 'strict' but up-tempo style. The *Mona's Herald* caught the mood of these early post-war summer concerts and suggested that they were 'something like a return to the Island's pre-war standards of season entertainment'.*

* Billy Ternent had been Jack Hilton's deputy, was a superb orchestrator, and conductor of the BBC Dance Orchestra, known as Billy Ternent's Sweet Rhythm, in the 1940s. In later years he conducted at the London Palladium and for *Those Were the Days* from the City Varieties, Leeds.

* *Mona's Herald* 5.6.45.

On Sunday 22nd July the Serbian violinist Milan Yovanovitch Bratza was the guest artiste at the Sunday Celebrity Concert. A phenomenal talent, he had performed before the crowned heads of Russia, Austria, Serbia, Roumania and Montenegro before becoming a naturalised British subject, but sadly his concert merited only a three-word advertisement in the local newspapers, and no review. A similar fate affected the concert on 19th August when the violin virtuoso Yfrah Neaman was ignored by the local newspapers, his recital overshadowed by reports of the Service Unit's and Civil Defence Parade and Thanksgiving service at the Villa Marina the same weekend.

Meanwhile on 18th July the Palais de Danse celebrated its eighteenth birthday by engaging the 'radio star violinist' and conductor of the Blackpool Tower Orchestra Bertini (real name Bert Gutsell) as the guest artiste, supported by the Palais Players and the Rhythm Five. This event was followed by a 'Thank You' dance in aid of two merchant seamen's associations, and an 'Old Time Waltz' competition in conjunction with the new film *Waltz Time* starring Richard Tauber, Anne Ziegler and Webster Booth. The finale of the competition was scheduled for the following January in London and it was hoped that Manx couples would do well.

VJ-Day (Victory over Japan) was celebrated on the Island on Wednesday 15th August with a public holiday, and that evening the Palais de Danse was 'packed with happy dancers'. A Victory Parade took place in Douglas on the 19th with 2,000 taking part. By the end of the month the Lieutenant Governor, Vice-Admiral the Earl Granville departed the Island with his wife Lady Margaret Rose (the sister of the Queen) for new duties as Governor of Northern Ireland, and early in September the new Lieutenant Governor, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Geoffrey Bromet (who served in Coastal Command during the war), was sworn in at Castle Rushen. He would do much to support the Island's recovery after the war and encourage and stimulate the vital tourist industry to the point where, for a few seasons, visitor numbers once again reached pre-war levels.*

* Derek Winterbottom, *Governors of the Isle of Man since 1765*, Manx Heritage Foundation, second edition 2012.

The Villa Marina bid farewell to Billy Ternent and his band on Sunday 25th August, and on the 29th there began a short season of Wilby Lunn's revue *Cavalcade of 1945*. This 'bright, breezy and entertaining' show 'that goes with a swing' featured a cast of eighteen including comedienne Doris Palmer whose 'gay chatter' had recently entertained the troops in the Far East, Connie Hart's marionette show, the 'pure nonsense' of comedians Robert Keppel and Jimmy Wright, cabaret dancers Rosina and Carlos, the *soubrette* Sheila Ritter and later in the short season Will Fyffe Jr.* A 'band' of two pianos and percussion completed the line-up. A Talent Discovery Competition in mid-September, with the audience as judges and cash prizes, proved to be popular. The show closed on Saturday 22nd September.

* The son of Scottish entertainer Will Fyffe of *I Belong to Glasgow* fame. Will Fyffe Jr. (1927-2008) was a talented musical director and accompanist for such stars as Ronnie Hilton, and, at the time he appeared in Douglas, the musical director at the Gaiety Theatre, Ayr.

The Sunday Celebrity Concerts at the Villa Marina grew in stature throughout September and attracted even larger audiences eager to see and hear some of the finest artistes and entertainers of the day. Rawicz and Landauer returned on Sunday 2nd and rewarded their legions of followers with 'two hours of sheer enjoyment'. In support was the young harmonica virtuoso Ronald Chesney,* who perhaps dazzled the audience with his signature piece, Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Flight of the Bumble Bee*, and baritone Morgan Davies.

* Born René Lucien Cadier, he became Britain's foremost chromatic harmonica virtuoso. During the war he travelled all over the world entertaining the troops, and even organised an appeal for harmonicas for POWs in Germany. Remarkably, the BBC invited him to give a series of harmonica lessons over the radio which generated over 10,000 letters of appreciation. After the war Chesney toured extensively with a light classical programme, and in the 1950s earned a performing spot in the Archie Andrews radio comedy show. In the 1960s and 70s he and his writing partner Ronald Wolfe collaborated on such comedy hits as *The Rag Trade* and *On the Buses*. He died in 2018, aged 97.

A pianist of international reputation, Russian-born Mark Hambourg,* appeared at the Villa Marina on Sunday 9th September, and looking every inch a piano virtuoso - he bore a striking resemblance to his teacher Anton Rubinstein - played music by Chopin, Mendelssohn, Percy Grainger, Liszt and Beethoven, and graciously acquiesced to the many encores demanded of him. In an *Isle of Man Times* interview* he warmly recalled his many visits to the Island before the war, and although he enjoyed his flight over the Island as he arrived, he was un-nerved by the plane flying 'too close to Snaefell for comfort'. Margaret Eaves, soprano, sang songs and arias by Schumann, Handel and Mascagni and the wartime favourite *When Big Ben Chimes*, complete with 'chimes' in the accompaniment. The eminent Polish tenor Herman Simberg sang arias by Puccini, Bizet and Verdi, and young 'cellist Beatrice Clare 'charmed the audience with her delicate artistry'.

* Mark Hambourg enjoyed a career stretching from 1890 until the mid-1950s. He made his first recording in 1909 and in 1937 was one of the first pianists to appear on the fledgling medium of television. He toured throughout the world but confessed that he found America particularly fatiguing. Although disabled late in life he continued to play Schubert and Chopin from his wheelchair.

* IoMT 15.9.1945.

The celebrity artiste on Sunday 16th September was the concert with operatic soprano Elena Danielli, supported by the Douglas Male Choristers in a selection of well-known stirring songs, accompanied by the Grand Orchestra of the Royal Naval School of Music. Herman Simberg returned the following Sunday with a selection of arias by Flotow, Puccini, Leoncavallo and Rossini, supported by Sheena Harvey, a talented young pianist who played pieces by Chopin, Mozart, Sibelius, Grieg and Paradies. Two variety artistes completed the line-up, Jessie Matthews* who charmed the audience with her effervescent personality and friendly manner in songs by Cole Porter and Noel Coward, and one of the most unusual performers ever to appear on a stage, anywhere, Stanelli, the Irish-born actor, musician, composer and violinist known as 'The Fanatic Fiddler'. * Immaculately dressed in a white tie and tails, his 'ruthless fooling about with the violin', which included an impression of a cow playing a violin, kept the audience in 'paroxysms of laughter' for twenty minutes. His anecdotes and comic monologues such as '*She was only a musician's daughter, but she knew Sir Henry Wood*', were delivered in a cultured voice, dripping with insouciance. He was also famous for his Hornchestra, a giant contraption festooned with twenty-or-so car horns which each played a different note, but no doubt logistical problems prevented him bringing this remarkable 'musical instrument' with him to Douglas.

* From chorus girl to major West End stage star in the 1930s, actress, film star, singer 'with a pleasing warbling voice' and dancer, Jessie Matthews is remembered by many for her role as Mary Dale in the long running daily BBC Radio soap *Mrs Dale's Diary*.

* Edward Stanley de Groot studied violin at the Royal College of Music and conducted his own orchestral work *Atlantis* with the Hallé Orchestra, Bournemouth and London Symphony Orchestras in 1946. Originally an act called Stanelli and Edgar, violinists and tap and soft-shoe dancers, he appeared in his own radio show *Stanelli's Stag Party* (1935-39), described as 'a jolly, joyous, jubilant, jamboree for jaded nerves', and the 1939 follow up *Ship A-hoey*.

Manx children were heard on the BBC Children's Hour from the Villa Marina on the 23rd in a selection of traditional Manx songs and a violin solo from fifteen-year-old Sheila Corlett. Two days later there was a Manx Music broadcast from the Villa Marina in the series Music from the North Country, with Frances Davidson, the Secretary of the Manx Society, acting as compere. Lewis Gale and Nora Moore were the vocalists in *Ramsey Town* and J.E Quayle's setting of *Cushag's Dreaming*. The Manx Folksong Choir, conducted by Noah Moore, and Douglas High School Boys Choir conducted by Emily Christian were joined by the Royal Naval School of Music orchestra in many fine old Manx songs. Three more broadcasts were scheduled for November.

Rather a 'flop'

Those visitors who ventured to Douglas for the August Bank Holiday weekend certainly made a determined effort to re-capture something of the pre-war holiday atmosphere, although there were some 'grotesque and freakish' fashions on show on the promenades due to clothes rationing. Some of the largest crowds attended the band concerts in the Villa Marina Gardens and were rewarded by eleven hours of sunshine on three of the four holiday days. Round-the-Island and Mystery Coach Tours trips were popular due to fifty-sixty coaches

miraculously being made available. With the notable exception of those unfortunate souls sailing on the *Rushen Castle* who were forced to endure an eleven-hour sojourn due to fog, the hundreds left stranded because only two steamers from Fleetwood were available, and the eight hundred-or-so visitors whose return journey on the *Viking* was delayed due to a fireman's strike over an 'extra trip' payment, around 45,000 visitors were disembarked from forty-five sailings, thirty inward and fifteen outward. In fact, the Steam Packet Company had begun a post-war rebuilding programme and residents and visitors alike were delighted to see the return of not only the *Viking* but also *Mona's Isle*, both in their wartime camouflage, and *Manx Maid*. In November *King Orry IV* was launched at Birkenhead, and at 2,485 tonnes she became fleet leader.

Many boarding houses and hotels were in no state to receive visitors, and even those that were now de-requisitioned, and relieved of military personnel, internees and detainees, were often in a deplorable condition, and their owners struggled to provide even basic accommodation. In many cases furniture and fittings supposedly safely stored during the conflict had vanished, and records of who owned what were found to be inaccurately kept, if at all. The truth of the matter was that some boarding house keepers and hoteliers took advantage of the chaotic situation and helped themselves to whatever they fancied once the storage facilities were open irrespective of whether they actually owned the items.* Food shortages were another major headache and many boarding houses could provide little more than breakfast, resulting in lengthy queues forming at the town's cafés at lunch times.

*Charles Guard related to me the experiences of his parents who owned a boarding house on the promenade. They had the foresight to secretly mark their furniture before it went into storage and were thus able to retrieve it from their opportunistic neighbours when searching for it.

Douglas Head was virtually deserted and bore a forlorn look as apparently only thirty-two holiday makers made their way there on Bank Holiday Monday, and only two girls were observed on the beach at Port Skillion. The Douglas Head Hotel was still boarded up, and the whole area had a faded look about it in great contrast to the crowded pre-war scenes when Florrie Forde held her Bank Holiday Monday concerts there. Some Douglas Head attractions such as Marine Drive Tramway and the Gypsy Encampment would never re-open, and across the other side of the bay the seals at Groudle Zoo would never be seen again. Nevertheless, the Villa Marina, the Palais de Danse and the cinemas all did good business. The verdict on the first post-war August Bank Holiday? 'Quiet . . . rather a "flop" as far as the Isle of Man was concerned', according to the *Isle of Man Times*, and 'not a good start to post-war holiday revival . . .'

Another problem was how to re-integrate returning service personnel into the Manx economy. The much-maligned winter works schemes had become a feature of Manx life, yet few reconstruction plans were announced, and the feeling was that the Government was dragging its feet. One project though, begun in 1938, that was sanctioned with work promised for one hundred men, was the promenade widening scheme at the Derby Castle.

'The biggest business merger on the Island for many years'.

There of course were more optimistic signs of post-war regeneration that would, by the following holiday season, begin to bear fruit. In August the Palace & Derby Castle Ltd. purchased the ordinary share capital of the Strand Cinema Theatre Co., Ltd., and the Strand Cinema (1920) Ltd. and thus acquired properties in Strand Street including the Strand Cinema and the Palais de Danse. This meant that the Palace & Derby Castle Ltd. now controlled not only the Palace Ballroom and Coliseum, the Derby Castle Ballroom and Variety Theatre, the Gaiety Theatre and Crescent Pavilion, but the Crescent Cinema, Regal and Royalty Cinemas and the Avenue Cinema, Onchan. In all, eight cinemas under one company including those in Peel and Port Erin.

The Isle of Man's Thanksgiving Week commenced on 27th October with an ambitious target to raise £800,000 through various events around the Island. In fact, under the slogan of 'let's make it a million', £1,003,448 was achieved, which meant that more than £4,000,000 had been raised during the four wartime savings weeks! An incredible achievement. The week's events began with a ceremonial opening and a flypast of Barracudas and a parade. Later there was a thanksgiving dance at the Villa Marina, various exhibitions, frogmen displays, a mock air attack on HMS Urley from a carrier in Castletown Bay, and the submarine *Tantivy* and a destroyer open to the public. There were the usual whist and bridge drives, bring and buy sales, a Royal Naval Variety Show and a joint Services football match at the King George V Park.

A new conductor 'of extraordinary gifts', Harry Pickard, appeared on the local musical scene in October and directed a concert version of Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann* given by the Laureston Choral Society at the Villa Marina supported by an orchestra made up of members of the Manx Amateur Orchestral Society, Douglas Town Band and musicians from the Royal Naval School of Music. The new Lieutenant Governor and his wife were in attendance.

A following Sunday the first of a new and innovative series of Winter Celebrity Concerts took place at the Villa Marina with guest artiste Albert Sandler, violinist, one of the most popular band leaders between the wars. Hopes were high that the concerts would be a success and would develop into a highlight of the local musical scene. Noah Moore, on the verge of retirement as manager of the Villa Marina,* felt strongly that 'Douglas must adopt a policy of bringing over only the best artistes in order to compete with other holiday resorts'. Gwen Cately, soprano, sang Adele's *Laughing Song* from Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*, *Poor Wandering One* from *The Pirates of Penzance* and Haydn Wood's *A Brown Bird Singing*'. Billy Mayerl*, the English pianist and composer of exquisite 'syncopated' light music trifles such as *April's Fool*, *Marigold* and the whimsical *Bats in the Belfry*, also appeared. Sandler played music by Schubert, Hubay and Godowsky, and with pianist Jack Byfield and 'cellist Reginald Kilbey (better-known for their later association with Max Jaffa's Palm Court Trio) gave a selection from Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Kálmán's *Countess Maritza* and acceded to several encores. The concert was a great success and attracted a large audience. As the *Ramsey Courier* noted, 'virtually every hackney motor vehicle was requisitioned to convey parties to the Villa'. If there was a Celebrity Concert on Sunday the 28th there is no report of

it', and the concert scheduled for 9th December was cancelled 'due to unforeseen circumstances'.

* Noah Moore retired on 12th October and was granted a superannuation allowance – a pension from Villa Marina profits - of £316 7s 4d *per annum* upon his official retirement as manager.

* Billy Mayerl, 1902-59, was a master of light music, had given the London premier of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* in 1925, and wrote music for the musical stage with a horse racing theme including *Over She Goes* and *Twenty to One*.

Later in December Noah Moore and the Manx Folksong Choir supported by an orchestra from the Royal Naval School of Music made a recording of the Manx National Anthem together with a selection of traditional Manx songs. The recordings were to be broadcast in New Zealand and introduced by Kathleen Killip of Laxey who related significant events in the Island's history. Meanwhile at the Palais de Danse two events billed as 'Pillow Fighting and Dancing' and the 'finale of the basket balancing contest' were scheduled for the week before Christmas. The precise details of these events are lost in the mists of time.

November 2019