

## Summer Entertainment on the Isle of Man

1956-60

Ronnie, Ivy, Ken and Phil, but no Joe

by

Maurice Powell

It was during this, the eleventh full summer season after the end of World War II, that visitors' concerns, observations and complaints became more pointed, vociferous, and persistent. For most holiday makers, their week or so on the Island was a pleasurable experience and reckoned to be good value for money, for the Island was undoubtedly beautiful, the entertainments were wide-ranging and still maintained a high standard. Yet a significant number of holiday makers felt that Douglas was falling behind other resorts around Britain's shores and put their thoughts into words that began to appear regularly in Editors' Postbags in the local newspapers. Visitors who had also experienced holidays abroad, where cafés and bars seemed to be open for business all the time, and where there were no restrictions to shopping and drinking on Sundays, also noticed that some accommodation in Douglas was looking tired and shabby; furthermore, many hotels and pensions abroad had *en suite* facilities as a matter of course. The unreliable weather around Britain's shores became more of an issue when holiday makers realised that glorious summer conditions could be virtually guaranteed in parts of Europe, particularly the Mediterranean. Another, admittedly small, cloud on the horizon, was the noticeable increase in what became known as 'Teddy Boy rowdyism' in the town, particularly at night.

### 1956 in a nutshell

Shirley Bassey's first single *Burn My Candle* was released in February; the Routemaster London bus entered into service; double yellow lines were introduced for the first time in Slough, Buckinghamshire; Karl Marx's grave was unveiled in Highgate Cemetery in March (a Mr Spencer lies in the plot opposite!); in April Humphrey Littleton and his Jazz Band recorded *Bad Penny Blues*; Granada Television was launched from Manchester on 3<sup>rd</sup> May; Manchester City won the FA Cup on 5<sup>th</sup> May; John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* was premiered on 8<sup>th</sup> May; Parliament passed the Clean Air Act in response to the Great Smog of 1952; *Hancock's Half Hour* was first shown on BBC television on 6<sup>th</sup> July; the first Berni Inn (steakhouse) was opened in Bristol on 27<sup>th</sup> July; on 31<sup>st</sup> July spin bowler Jim Laker took nineteen wickets at Old Trafford in the Test Match against Australia; the last RAF Lancaster bomber still in service retired in October; the Queen opened the first nuclear powerplant at Calder Hall, Seascale, Cumbria; the IRA launched its first attacks on the Northern Irish border in December; PG Tips launched their first 'Chimpanzee tea party' advertising campaign on ITV; Tesco opened its first self-service stores in St. Albans, Hertfordshire, and Maldon in Essex; Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals*, and Colin Wilson's *succès d'estime*, *The Outsider*, were published; the actress Imelda Staunton was born 9<sup>th</sup> January; the actor Tim

'Lord Percy' McInnery was born 18<sup>th</sup> September; the athlete Sebastian Coe was born 29<sup>th</sup> September; Sue Barker, tennis player and television presenter, was born 19<sup>th</sup> April; A. A. Milne, author of *Winnie the Pooh*, died 31<sup>st</sup> January; *The Lone Ranger* - and trusty companion Tonto - rode out for the first time on British television on Christmas Day, his cry of 'Hi-Yo Silver, Away' echoing in the gulches and across the plains.

### **Events and issues affecting the tourist industry.**

Photographs of Douglas published in the local newspapers in 1956 show the beach crowded with deckchairs and holiday makers as far as the eye can see, with many having resorted to sitting on towels on the promenades from Broadway to the Derby Castle. 'BUT', some commentators were asking, 'will such scenes soon be a thing of the past?' Far-reaching proposals in the report of a Commission of Enquiry into the visiting industry were causing concern as some of the sixty recommendations for boosting the Island's principal industry became known. These included raising the standards of hotel and boarding house accommodation; the implementation of Sunday opening for shops and public houses and the provision of a new indoor swimming pool for Douglas.\* The Commission's proposals were accepted by Tynwald with the notable exception of a continental-style gambling casino.\* In May licensing hours throughout the Island during the summer were regularised by Tynwald, from 10.00am to 11.00pm.

\* This much requested facility - estimated to cost £500,000 - received a setback in July when it was opposed by the Governor's Executive Council because its construction would have meant the loss of much of the Villa Marina Gardens. A decision was deferred, and for decades always would be.

\* An *Isle of Man Examiner* poll revealed that 49% of those asked for an opinion were in favour and 49% against, with 67% in favour of Sunday opening for public houses.

Seven of Britain's top band leaders contributed to the Ramsey Bay Tragedy Fund opened by the Mayor of Douglas, W. B. Kaneen, for the widows and families of the men who lost their lives in the recent disaster.\* Joe Loss donated 5gns and Ivy Benson 2gns; there were also donations of 1gn each from Jack Parnell, John Dankworth, Ken Mackintosh and Jack Leon.

\* Six men - including three Ramsey men - drowned in Ramsey Bay when an overloaded rowing boat making its way out to a Fleetwood trawler overturned and sank.

Plans for extensive alterations to the promenade at the foot of Broadway were unveiled in May. The area was a busy traffic hub, predominantly pedestrian in use, and a natural place from which to admire the sweep of Douglas Bay. No less an observer of Britain's architectural and natural heritage than the poet John Betjeman believed Douglas promenade to be 'magically beautiful', and his words were echoed by renowned architect Sir Hugh Casson, who was invited to the Island by the local government planning officer to review plans for the development of the promenades and make suggestions. His unsurprising conclusion? 'It is vital to ensure that any plan . . . preserves the essential personality of the town . . . and preserves and enhances its component features . . . so that they are not allowed to disappear in the name of "improvement".' \*

\* *Mona's Herald* 01.05.1956

A programme in the BBC series 'Night Out', billed as 'thirty minutes with the holiday makers', was broadcast on 6<sup>th</sup> July at 7.45pm with microphones strategically placed around Douglas allowing listeners to spend thirty minutes with the holiday makers. Wynford Vaughan Thomas\* set the scene from the Tower of Refuge whilst another commentator broadcast from a horse tram. Ronnie Aldrich and his band, and comedian Harry Bailey were heard from the Palace and Coliseum; Jack Parnell was heard from the Villa Marina with the Manx Girls' Choir, and there was a short feature from Douglas Holiday Camp with children's entertainer Len Carver. Alf Devereau talked about the herring trade.

\* Welsh journalist, radio and TV reporter. He had been a distinguished war correspondent; was one of the BBC commentators for the Royal Wedding in 1953, and was a great lover of and writer about the Welsh countryside, his rich native accent making his voice one of the most distinctive on radio and television

'Bigger, Brighter and Bolder' plans for the Douglas Carnival at the end of August began to take shape; but, emphasised the organisers, success depended on a huge response by the public. Many events were advertised including the crowning of the Carnival Queen and a '*Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly*' dance competition.

Britain's leading horsewoman Pat Smyth OBE visited Douglas in August as part of the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations of the Horse Trams. Thousands watched and lined the promenade as she inspected eighty gaily decorated horses and took the reins of the first tram of the day. 'The horsed look fit and bonny', she commented, 'and (they) loved the crowds'.

There was relief when it was announced that the Villa Marina grounds would remain open until 9.00pm from June to September, a long sought-after decision. There was also renewed hope of restoring the pre-war popularity of Port Soderick when Douglas Corporation purchased the once resort - beach, hotel and glen - for £9,000. The total cost of redeveloping the delightful bay and facilities as a municipal enterprise was estimated at £95,000.

Thirty thousand people attended the special open-air service at Kirk Braddan in its centenary year; young people turned to the 'new-fangled 'jitter-bug' and 'jive', although waltzes and foxtrots still prevailed in the ballrooms.

In June, bedridden, permanent invalid Mrs 'Birdie' Swallow of Wombwell, Yorkshire, arrived in Douglas as the guest of Mrs Sharp of 'Braemar' on Queen's Promenade who generously offered her a free holiday after reading in the *Daily Mirror* that she had never had a holiday. Mrs Swallow thoroughly enjoyed her first ever flight which landed in bright sunshine, the lovely view of the bay from her room and the tours around the Island organised for her.

The May Whit-weekend was surprisingly busy despite the cold winds that swept across the Island. Some 6,900 visitors arrived for an early holiday, with arrivals by air - 1,300, up from 1,100 on the previous season - showing an encouraging increase, the result of extra services on some existing routes, and new summer services from Carlisle, Newcastle and Leeds. The Villa Marina and the cinemas were well patronised; coach tours were quickly booked up, particularly the evening excursions and 'Mystery Tours', but some sports fixtures were poorly attended. Only the 'hardy types' ventured onto the shore, but at least the promenade illuminations 'gave a festive atmosphere to the sea front'. The owner of the drinks' kiosk at the Point of Ayre was caught unawares when he noticed a number of coaches approaching

the lighthouse; he opened up in double-quick time and did a brisk trade. Boats were in great demand on Mooragh Park Lake, Ramsey, and elsewhere beaches were crowded with picnickers, and in Peel and Port Erin, the cafés were busy catering to coach parties. Traffic was noticeably heavier throughout the Island with many English number plates in evidence.

### **The economics of running a successful entertainment venue**

The balance sheets for the Villa Marina for the 1954 and 1955 seasons only partly explain why Douglas Corporation decided to dispense with Joe Loss and his orchestra before the start of the 1956 season. In 1954 he had been engaged for eleven weeks; the total artists fees for the season amounted to £21,653. In 1955 Joe Loss was engaged for twelve weeks together with Ivy Benson, who played in the Gardens, for the Sunday Concerts and acted as the relief band; Harold Moorhouse fulfilled his familiar role in the early and late seasons. The total artists fees were £21,943, of which the largest amount was the engagement of Joe Loss and Ivy Benson.\*

\* *Mona's Herald* 14.08.1956

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the primary concern was Joe Loss's demand for more than the estimated 60% of the ticket sales, perhaps as much as 66%.\* For whatever reasons, the Corporation decided that it was time for change, and engaged four bands to replace Joe Loss for the 1956 season, those of Jack Parnell, Ken Mackintosh, John Dankworth and Ivy Benson, to cover thirteen weeks dancing, Sunday Concerts, afternoon concerts in the gardens and morning coffee dances. Harold Moorhouse was retained for the early and late season, and the organist George Donovan was engaged for the gardens.

\* It was even rumoured that, shrewd businessman that he was, he somehow monitored the sale of tickets very carefully by checking ticket numbers!

Details of the Villa band's schedule for the 1956 season were finally published in December 1955:

Early season, Harold Moorhouse 19<sup>th</sup> May to 2<sup>nd</sup> June, and Ivy Benson 4<sup>th</sup> June to 9<sup>th</sup> June.

Jack Parnell 11<sup>th</sup> June to 7<sup>th</sup> July.

John Dankworth 9<sup>th</sup> June to 4<sup>th</sup> August.

Ken Mackintosh 6<sup>th</sup> Sept to 8<sup>th</sup> Sept.

Ivy Benson was engaged to play in the Gardens from 3<sup>rd</sup> June to 9<sup>th</sup> September, for the morning coffee dances during July and August and in support of the guest artistes for the Sunday Concerts.

Late season, from 10<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> September, Ivy Benson and organist George Donovan would transfer to the Palace Ballroom to concentrate the dancing in one building.

Harry Orchid and the Swanee Minstrels would appear on Douglas Head from 11<sup>th</sup> June to 1<sup>st</sup> September.

Despite the fact the he did not personally appear in Douglas in 1956, the name Joe Loss continued to command the occasional headline, and at the end of the season in September

rumours, apparently emanating from the London headquarters of dance band professionals, leaked out that Joe Loss had been engaged for the Palace Ballroom for the 1957 season.\* The *New Musical Express* concurred, and anticipated that 'band competition at the Isle of Man next summer will be exciting . . . especially if the Joe Loss orchestra appears at the rival Palace Ballroom' after ten seasons at the Villa Marina. Others thought the rumours 'astonishing' in view of the 'terrific success of Ronnie Aldrich and the Squadronaires' who, in their fifth season at the Palace Ballroom, had been 'breaking all post-war records for the huge hall'. Meanwhile Joe Loss, who had been voted Britain's outstanding modern band leader for the third year running in February, appeared successfully in Llandudno, Rhyl and Blackpool during the summer. One local commentator speculated that 'by the time the summer ends the Town Council will be regretting his absence'.

\* *Mona's Herald* 18.09.1956

### **The Villa Marina**

The Villa Marina opened for the season on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> May with dancing to Harold Moorhouse and his band. The first Sunday Concert of the season took place the following evening and was styled a night of local stars. Sadly, it was poorly attended and was 'deserving of a larger audience'. The evening featured Norah Moore and Lewis Gale in a programme of songs and duets from the shows, the 'lovely singing' of the Lon Dhoo Choir conducted by Douglas Buxton including a stirring rendition of *You'll Never Walk Alone*, and the Manx Girls' Choir conducted by Harry Pickard who included *The Lord's Prayer*, *Steal Away*, and the *Nun's Chorus* in their selection of well-loved pieces. The accompanist was the ever-dependable Ethel Barrow; George Donovan played selections on the electric organ.

The Sunday Concert on 27<sup>th</sup> May featured the winner of the 1956 Manx Music Festival's Cleveland Medal and the F. M. Cubbon Rose Bowl for lieder, contralto Mona Huke, who included songs by Ivor Novello, Haydn and Dvorak in her programme. Baritone Dan Minay sang popular ballads and arias by Gounod, Tosti and Coleridge-Taylor, and the Lon Vane Ladies Choir conducted by Douglas Buxton, recent winners of the London Rose Bowl, sang pieces by Wagner, Lehar and Mendelssohn. George Donovan once again filled out 'a first-class programme' with selections on the electric organ.

### **Welcome Back 'Ivy Bunsen and her Burners!' \***

There was a huge reception for Ivy Benson\* and her girls for their first Sunday Concert on 2<sup>nd</sup> June. 'Better than ever!' declared the local newspapers; with 'new, sweet and swing numbers' and an especially warm welcome for her vocalist from the previous season, soprano Dena Farrell, whose songs included *My Hero*, *Because*, *The Holy City* and a selection from *Kismet*. 'Voice of the Stars' Toni Sharpe and her impressions of Eartha Kitt, Slim Whitman, Ronnie Ronalde and Johnny Ray were well received, but it was 'coloured' Blues singer Isabelle Lucas,\* 'the sepia songstress' from Toronto, Canada, who 'stole the show' on that occasion with the spirituals *Sweet Little Jesus Boy*, *Summer Time* and *The Walls Of Jericho* and W. C. Handy's 1914 jazz standard *The St Louis Blues*. Australian trumpeter Robey Buckley 'raised the roof' with her solos and violinist Thirza Whysall\* received enthusiastic applause for her playing of Fritz Kreisler's colourful *Tambourin Chinois*. Other band soloists included sixteen-year-old

trombonist Barbara Ellenor and Paula Pyke, the dynamic girl drummer from Liverpool; another newcomer to the band that year was trombonist Sheila Tracy who went on to secure a special place in the world of big bands and broadcasting.\* The band contributed several rousing popular numbers including *Zambesi*, *Bugler's Holiday*, *Lover* and *Hallelujah*, and Ivy herself played clarinet and saxophone solos.

\* The affectionate nickname is attributed to actor Roger Moore who was in Douglas in August 1956 together with his wife Dorothy Squires (last heard in Douglas 1947) and Pat Kirkwood (whose career began in Ramsey at the Swimming Pool Ballroom when she won a singing competition in 1943 at the age of thirteen), attending a reception for the premier of the film musical *Stars in Your Eyes*, which took place on August 12<sup>th</sup> at the Crescent Cinema. (See *This England's Second Book of British Dance Bands, The Singers and Smaller Bands*, compiled by Edmund Whitehouse, Cheltenham, 2001.) Spice Girl Melanie C (BBC Radio 2: *Sax Appeal: Ivy Benson's All-Girl Band*, 09.03.2013), a great admirer of Ivy Benson, attributes the nickname 'Ivy Benson and her Bunsen Burners' to Morecambe and Wise, who as variety newcomers, appeared with the band in 1950.

With a weak storyline about a group of vaudeville artistes who buy a run-down theatre to showcase their talents but whose efforts are nearly thwarted by a gang of crooks, *Stars in Their Eyes* was dated even before it was released. It was saved by some excellent performances by the entertainers, particularly Nat Jackley and Jimmy Clitheroe. The film starred Pat Kirkwood and Dorothy Squires, Nat Jackley and Bonar Colleano in the principal roles, and trumpeter and band leader Jack Jackson, Joan Sims, Freddie Frinton and Jimmy Clitheroe in the secondary roles. Hundreds of fans waited in heavy rain to watch the stars arrive, and Jimmy Edwards, who was appearing at the Villa Marina that season, came to the post-premier reception. It was the first world film premiere with the stars present ever shown on the Isle of Man.

\* It has been suggested that Ivy Benson lodged with the Manx violinist, conductor and teacher Kathleen Rydings in Onchan during the summer seasons during this period. See a letter from Nicola Knight, formerly Pantin, cited in Maurice Powell, *Loose Ends*, manxmusic.com., in which Nicola Pantin recalls that she was invited to play the viola in Ivy Benson's band during the 1954-55 summer seasons.

\* Isabelle Lucas - the local newspapers persisted in referring to her as 'Isobel' - formerly a star of the negro revue *The Jazz Train*, went on to carve out a career in musicals, straight plays, films and television.

\* Born in Roorkee, Northern India, concert violinist Thirza Whysall she was a pupil of Elgar's friend W. H. Reed, whose violin she owned. Her portrait by Elizabeth Robinson McCallum showing her luxurious wavy blonde hair is in the Royal College of Music collection.

\* In 1974 Sheila Tracy, became the first woman newsreader on BBC's Radio 4, and went on to present *Trucker's Hour* on Radio 2 and *Big Band Special* for more than two decades. She was a much-loved broadcaster whose extensive knowledge stamped her books *Bands, Broads and Booze* (1995), and *Talking Swing* (2008), with the authority of an experienced musician. Both are enjoyable and eloquent testaments to her love of big bands, the band leaders, the musicians and their music.

Ivy Benson's band was not the first all-girl band,\* but it was certainly one of the most, if not *the* most, enduring, and her example inspired many female musicians to take up jazz as she had done with Ivy Benson's Rhythm Girls, the Ivy Benson Ladies Orchestra and the Ivy Benson Showband, with the generous encouragement of Jack Hylton and Joe Loss.\* The advent of World War II brought new opportunities because many male musicians were called up for war service, and Ivy Benson set about recruiting young players from northern brass bands. In 1943 she enjoyed a residency at London Palladium, and in the same year she was contracted by the BBC as their 'house band' in Bristol. She returned to the London Palladium in 1944, and in 1946 was booked by the BBC for their first post-war radio broadcasts. She toured to Berlin with ENSA and to American bases in Germany and elsewhere. Ivy Benson had an on-going

problem with some of her girls marrying American servicemen - as she did herself in 1957 having announced her engagement to USAF Top Sergeant Brantley Calloway in February 1956\* - and musicians from other bands.

\* See Edna Croudson's Rhythm Girls, a Yorkshire based sextet which included Ivy Benson herself from 1929; Blanche Coleman's twelve-piece band, one of the first all-women bands in the 1940s, resident at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden when it was used as a dance hall for servicemen during the war, and thereafter well known in many seaside theatres; Dorothy Marno; Gloria Gaye and Her Glamour Girls' Band; Josephine Bradley and Her Ballroom Orchestra; Mrs Jack Hylton and Her Band (Ennis Parkes, born Parkinson, Douglas, Isle of Man, 1893; married to Jack Hylton until 1929, and led a short-lived band in the mid-30s); growing out of Ivy Benson's band, Gracie Cole - a trumpeter with Ivy Benson from 1945-50 - and her orchestra from 1952. This brief list does not include all-girl bands led by men eg: Phil Spitalny's Hour of Charm Orchestra and Virgil Whyte's Musical Sweethearts. (For more information see *The History of Women in Jazz* online).

\* Some band leaders were dismissive of Ivy Benson and her band - indeed of all girl or ladies' bands and orchestras - and she had to overcome a good deal of underhand opposition from male colleagues who feared she would take their jobs. She was an extremely hard-working and inspiring musician at a time of great change in the fortunes of big bands and would have been bemused at being adopted as a beacon for the latter - day girl- power movement. 'I didn't try to be successful at all', she modestly once remarked; 'All I wanted was a lovely band'. Her all-girl band survived longer than most.

\* He was her second husband, and they were divorced in 1964 following her refusal to return to America with him. Ivy Benson was the subject of Eamon Andrew's *This is Your Life* in 1976; she disbanded her band in 1983, retired to Clacton-on-Sea, Essex, and died in May 1993, barely a month before she was to have been made a Dame, according to Melanie C (*ibid*). One of her last appearances was on BBC television's The Russell Harty Show in 1983 when she quickly reformed her band on the occasion of her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

A setback to the usual early season events occurred when the Bathing Beauty Competitions in the gardens were postponed as only two entries were received for the title of 'Miss Ellan Vannin'. The BBC commentators set to cover the event were said to be 'disappointed'.

The top variety act, harmonica virtuosos The Three Monarchs, returned to Douglas after a five-year absence on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> June. The three brilliant musicians had established themselves on radio's *The Forces Show* and subsequently spent many seasons at the London Palladium supporting all the great front-line acts. Their twenty-minute appearance, led by diminutive bearded clown Cedric, whose hilarious 'off the wall' antics continually stole the limelight, included *Blow, Blow Boogie* (unidentified), *I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles*, a comedy version of overture to Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* and *Glow Little Glow-worm*.\* It was 'all good fun', especially as Ivy Benson and her girls 'were on top form', especially Lillian Jackson, piano, and the by now popular band soloists: Sylvia Monks, saxophone, drummer Paula Pyke, trombonist Barbara Ellenor, ace trumpeter Robey Buckley and the indomitable Ivy herself on clarinet and saxophone. Dene Farrell sang *O My Beloved Father*; personality girl and impressionist Toni Sharpe sang Eartha Kitt's *I Wanna Be Evil*; Isabelle Lucas\* - 'talent and personality' - began her programme with a magical version of *Summertime*, and the band's own Dixieland Group 'set toes a-tapping' with a selection of 'tip-top snappy numbers'.\*

\* Probably *Shine Little Glow-worm, glimmer, glimmer*, adapted in 1952 by Johnny Mercer for the Mills Brothers from a song in Paul Lincke's 1902 operetta *Lysistrata*. Generally known in Britain as *The Glow-worm*, in its orchestra version it became a popular light music miniature.

\* She had just received the news of the sudden death of her mother in Toronto, but trumper that she was, she carried on with her engagement with Ivy Benson.

\* Mr Webster of the Arragon Hotel, Santon, was so impressed with Ivy Benson and her girls when he attended the Sunday Concert that he invited them to dinner at the hotel.

It was during this period that Ivy Benson appealed for a Russian language teacher. Apparently one of her hobbies was learning foreign languages and she wished to improve on her smattering of Russian. Her call was answered almost immediately by a Mr Belenkin of Onchan.

### **No substitute for Joe and his boys.**

'Drummer-man' Jack Parnell\* and his seventeen-piece 'modern style orchestra' made their ? debut at the Villa Marina at the start of a four-week engagement on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> June.\* However, despite 'hitting the jackpot for jazz fans', 'making the rafters ring' with a 'high pressure modern jazz programme' . . . and 'a big brass section',\* Parnell and his band were not a success. His was not really a 'strict tempo' band and therefore not popular with dancers, despite his engaging personality and, incidentally, a good singing voice. The bands' first Sunday Concert took place on 17<sup>th</sup> June. Their programme opened with Parnell's signature tune *Jack's Back*, and the band was in 'top form' in *The Happy Whistler*, the *Saints*, *Skin Deep* (with furious drumming from the man himself), *In the Mood* and *Airmail Special*. Petite Irene Miller (ex-Joe Loss) sang *Rock and Roll Waltz*, *Try Another Cherry Tree* and *Jimmy Unknown* and a couple of duets with Parnell; South African Gene Williams sang *Young and Foolish*, *Heartbreak Hotel* and *No Other Love*.

\* An ex-drummer with Ted Heath, Parnell was voted *Melody Maker* magazine's best drummer during the 1940s and '50s. He formed his own band in 1951, and in 1956 became the musical director for Associated Television, in charge of weekend musical spectaculars from the London Palladium. He wrote a number of television themes including *The Golden Shot* and *Family Fortunes*, was the musical director for the *Benny Hill Show* and the conductor of the *Muppet Show* orchestra. Always associated with the best of British jazz, as late as 1994 he took over the London Big Band. The impresario Val Parnell was his uncle.

\* Parnell and his band left the Island in early July for Blackpool and the Tower Ballroom followed by four weeks at the Winter Gardens.

\* The instrumentation referred to in the *Mona's Herald* 19.06.1956 was: five saxes, five trumpets, four trombones, drums, bass and piano.

The lively, versatile radio comedian Dick Bentley was the celebrity guest at the Sunday Concert on 24<sup>th</sup> June. His mild-mannered, laid-back style was well received as he 'cracked jokes, played the violin and sang during two appearances'. Ivy Benson's programme opened with William Alwyn's *Great Day* and Coates' *Dam Busters' March*; Dena Farrell sang *Toran* and Puccini's *O My Beloved Father*; Isabelle Lucas sang the Waltz Song from *Merrie England*; vocal impressionist Toni Sharpe sang *September Love*. Pianist Lillian Jackson played Winifred Atwell's *Five Finger Boogie*, Paula Pyke excelled in the drum solo *Skin Deep*, 'trumpettes' Robey Buckley, Rene Ames and Elaine Harris played Leroy Anderson's charming novelty *Bugler's Holiday* and Thirza Whysall performed a selection of stylishly played violin solos.

Ivy Benson directed the Sunday Concert on 1<sup>st</sup> July which featured the baritone Howard Jones - well known from his appearances at the Villa Marina with Joe Loss, and currently appearing in the Dave King Show at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool - and ex-Joe Loss trumpeter Reggie

Arnold, with a 'varied programme' including a version of the old stammering 'hit' song from the First World War era, *K-K-K-Katie*, and 'a clever little piece about Marilyn Monroe'.

John Dankworth and his band opened in the Royal Hall for a four-week engagement on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> July for a one-and-only season! Dankworth and his musicians knew that the Villa Marina had always been 'a Joe Loss stronghold for strict tempo dancers' and that they were definitely not a strict tempo band! The band was progressive – indeed, ahead of its time - 'clinically brilliant' with a 'swinging drive', disciplined, with a repertoire of wonderful sophisticated arrangements. According to the jazz singer Cleo Laine (subsequently Mrs Dankworth), Dankworth made it clear right from the beginning of their association that 'this band will never become a singers' band in the Ted Heath mould with popular star vocalists like Lita Roza, Dennis Lotis and Dickie Valentine. He wanted the band to be listened to, and probably found catering for the needs of dancers a nuisance. 'You know we are going to need things like the Gay Gordons' one of the brass players told Dankworth when the band accepted the engagement. Despite adapting its repertoire for Douglas, the Villa Marina was the wrong venue for them and within two years they had taken America by storm. They received only two brief mentions in the local newspapers, being crowded out of the news by squabbles over where to site a proposed new swimming pool, a row concerning the advertising of venues in the local newspapers and the alarming drop in receipts for the hire of deckchairs due to the uncertain weather.\* Dankworth did however present the prizes at the preliminary heat of the National Ballroom Queen Competition, although he probably did not regard this as the pinnacle of his career thus far.

\* Peter Warner, tenor saxophonist with the band from 1955-57, recalled that upon arrival in Douglas during a hot spell of weather he rushed across the beach and leapt in the sea. 'It was as if someone had hit me on the back of the head with a sledgehammer'. He managed to crawl out of the freezing water, but after ten weeks of pounding headaches left the band to recuperate at home. Cited in *Talking Swing*, Sheila Tracy, Mainstream Publishing Company (Edinburgh) Ltd., 1997.

The thirty-two strong Berlin Boys Choir, conductor Frau Leonore Birkner, appeared at the Villa Marina on Thursday morning 18<sup>th</sup> and at St George's Hall on 20<sup>th</sup> July, together with Manx Girls' Choir conductor Harry Pickard, with whom they had secured accommodation. Aged between nine and fourteen years of age, and dressed in their distinctive uniform of blazers, short trousers and white knee-length socks, the boys impressed everyone who heard them. Part of their programme consisted of an excerpt from Mozart's charming youthful *singspiel Bastien and Bastienne* performed in 18<sup>th</sup> century costumes and wigs.

The Sunday Concert on 22<sup>nd</sup> July featured bubbly Anne 'Lay Down Your Arms' Shelton supported by Ivy Benson, and unsurprisingly, 'the packed audience would not let her go'. With her vibrant, melodious voice and a reputation of wringing every last ounce out of a ballad, she topped the bill everywhere and appeared in several Royal Variety Performances. Her programme included *The Tender Trap*, *No Other Love* and *Whatever Will Be, Will Be (Que sera, sera)*, but it was a Scots medley that 'brought the house down'. Her encores included *St. Louis Blues*, *Madonna in Blue* and *My Yiddisher Mamma*. 'Every item well-received' on the following Sunday, 29<sup>th</sup> July, when The Ray Ellington Quartette and vocalist Marion Ryan were the celebrity guest artistes, with Ivy Benson in support.

### **At last! A band leader who knows what we want.**

The first appearance of jovial Ken Mackintosh, band leader, saxophonist and composer whose band was heard frequently on the radio during the 1950s and early '60s, and who recorded with star vocalists such as Anne Shelton, Frankie Vaughan and Alma Cogan, took place on 5<sup>th</sup> August. His trademark was that he led his 'talented orchestra and several outstanding vocalists' from the saxophone, and his reception was 'terrific', particularly the 'deafening applause' that greeted his strong vocal team. Patti Forbes sang *This Old House* and *Mountain Greenery*; Kenny Bardell (a saxophonist who was with Mackintosh for twenty years) sang *He and Walk Hand in hand*; Don Cameron (a former member of Morton Fraser's Harmonic Gang) won over the audience with an excellent voice, polished delivery and charming stage presence. Ken Mackintosh himself played a saxophone solo *It ain't necessarily so*; Bob Johnson's impersonations of popular singers 'brought the house down, and the feature *Juke Box Saturday Night* with the Mackpies – the band's own vocal group - 'was a real winner'. The local newspapers were unanimous in their praise for the band, the relaxed style of its leader, its fine instrumental soloists and vocalists all presented with a dash of zany slapstick comedy.

### **'Visitors want to know' what's going on!\***

Municipal entertainments WILL be advertised in the local press despite the Parks Committee of Douglas Corporation's decision to stop advertising events at the Villa Marina and Gardens, including the Sunday Concerts, during July and August. The argument advanced was that 'local papers are not read by the visitors'. This sweeping assertion was refuted. Were holiday makers expected to actually visit the Villa Marina in order to learn what entertainments were scheduled? If the Corporation was prepared to spend £17 10s per week hiring five extra gardeners in order to keep the Villa Gardens open during the evenings, it was surely a false economy to penny-pinch over advertising.

\* *Isle of Man Times* 10.08.1956.

All reserved seats were sold out the previous day in anticipation of the appearance of irrepressible 'Professor' Jimmy Edwards, the guest celebrity on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> August. He clowned his way through thirty minutes of 'fun and frolics' punctuated by 'blasts' on a variety of musical instruments including the euphonium, trombone and tin whistle. Ivy Benson and her girls provided the musical entertainment for the evening. Isabelle Lucas sang *Danny Boy* most affectingly; veteran band member Gloria Russell's vocal impersonations caused 'roars of laughter'; Toni Sharpe sang the 'hot' numbers and Dena Farrell sang *Because* and *The Holy City*. A '1920s' sequence featuring all the vocalists produced 'roars of laughter' as the singers poked fun at the singing styles of thirty years earlier.

At the height of the season that month it was announced that there would be 'No Swim Pool in Villa Marina Gardens' following a debate when the Town Council voted 13-11 against the Parks Committee's proposal.\* The Gardens - 'the best shillings worth on the Island' - would be left mainly untouched by any development, but it was feared that the 5,000-6,000 people who visited the Gardens daily would find their entertainment (coffee dances, afternoon concerts and bathing beauty contests) 'scotched'. Other possible sites considered for the proposed pool were Port Jack, Port Skillion, Crescent Pavilion, The Falcon Cliff and the Chester

Street area, but all were ruled out for various reasons. The plans were shelved as the arguments for and against became bogged down in the familiar age-old conflict between those who wished to provide the visitors (and residents) with every possible amenity, and those whose deep-rooted desire was to keep them out! Another opportunity to provide a championship indoor swimming pool for Douglas withered and died.

\* The projected cost for the pool was £450,000. The building would have been 165 feet long, and featured a café, spectator seating, slipper and Turkish Baths.

The Sunday Concert on 19<sup>th</sup> August starred The Radio Revellers, four garishly dressed London lads formed after de-mob into a popular harmony group. Billed as 'Four Men, One Song' they were on 'tip-top form' in *Three Little Fishes*\* and *Who's Got the Money* and raised some laughs with their impressions of The Four Aces, The Beverley Sisters and black country and western – rockabilly- gospel legend Tennessee Ernie Ford. Other songs that evening included the *Whiffenpoof Song*\* and *Grandfather's Clock*. Gloria Russell – 'the voice of the stars' – was also on sparkling form with her well-known impersonations of British and American singing stars, and as usual the audience were reluctant to let her go.

\* Music by Saxie Dowell, recorded by Nat Gonella in 1939 and by Frankie Howerd in 1949. A cringe-worthy comic song barely redeemed by the Muppets in 1980.

\* The Yale University Whiffenpoofs, an *a cappella* singing group founded in 1909, adopted the *Whiffenpoof Song*, with lyrics adapted from Kipling's *Gentlemen Rankers*, as their college song.

Jimmy Young, the 'noted British recording star' received a thunderous ovation when he stepped onto the Royal Hall stage on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> August. His songs included *Wayward Wind*, *Chain Gang* (which he had recorded the previous year), *Young and Foolish*, *Happy Days and Lonely Nights*, *The Man from Laramee* and *I Feel Your Arms Around Me* which brought forth an audible sigh of 'Oh Yes' from a young fan in the audience. Ivy Benson was in support with her popular vocalists and star soloists; Gloria Russell brought the house down with her impersonation of Elvis Presley singing *Heartbreak Hotel*.

Another 'heart-throb', American Lester Ferguson, with his suave 'film star' good looks, entertained a near-capacity audience on Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> August with a selection of opera, operetta and ballad favourites, in what was acknowledged as 'one of the most entertaining concerts of the season'. He was obliged to sing *No Other Love* and several encores before he was allowed to leave the stage. Ivy Benson and her girls were at their best 'in top tunes and old favourites'.

Ivy Bensons' farewell Sunday Concert took place on 9<sup>th</sup> September, after which she transferred to the Palace Ballroom for the rest of the season. Every effort had been made to extend Douglas' longest post-war season, and one commentator noted that it was the first time since the war that a 'named band' had played on in Douglas 'after' the Manx Grand Prix week.

By the middle of September a rumour that Joe Loss was to be engaged to appear at the Palace Ballroom in the summer of 1957 in direct competition with the Villa Marina appeared in the *New Musical Express*.\* This startling news was judged 'surely wide of the mark . . . and an astonishing suggestion' in view of the huge success there of Ronnie Aldrich and the

Squadronaires. There was a further rumour that Joe Loss might return to the Villa Marina to replace the 'not very successful experiment of engaging the 'jazzy' bands of Jack Parnell and John Dankworth', along with the 'more popular' Ken Mackintosh, for the last five weeks of the season. Fred Barwell responded to these rumours by saying that 'the time is not yet opportune to make any statements concerning next year's booking'.

\* *Mona's Herald* 18.09.1956

### **The Palace Ballroom and Coliseum**

Phil 'King of the Ritz' Moss\* and his band returned for a fourth successive season on 16<sup>th</sup> June, and two weeks later, when Ronnie Aldrich and the Squadronaires arrived, transferred to the Derby Castle. He also appeared in the Palace Gardens that season playing for the Personality Parades. His band that season consisted of twelve players including four violinists and five vocalists including newcomer Jackie Paige.

\* Phil Moss, an ex-trumpet player with Joe Loss, earned the title 'King of the Ritz' because of his seventeen-year association with Manchester's Ritz Ballroom during the 1950s and '60s. He later played for the BBC's long-running television show *Come Dancing* for eighteen years. He spent a total of eleven summer seasons in Douglas.

The Squadronaires appeared in the ballroom every evening at 7.15 from 1st July for their fifth successive season, and thereafter packed the dance floor night after night. Tuesday evenings were a blend of 'Old Tyme' and 'Modern' dances; Thursdays were designated 'Late Nights' until 11.45. Ken James and his Compton Organ could be heard each morning and afternoon in the Palace Gardens.

Capacity audiences filled the Coliseum for the Sunday Concerts and the early season revue *The Laughter Show* which contained 'all the ingredients for a bright, breezy and successful summer holiday show' . . . 'a festival of fun, glamour, melody and thrills' in which the essential ingredient was 'high-speed humour'. In order to provide quality entertainment for both the early and late season visitors, the show opened two weeks earlier than usual on 16<sup>th</sup> June, and ran a week longer until 15<sup>th</sup> September.

The cast for the main summer revue, Syd Myers' and Hyman Zahl's 'quick-fire, sparkling show' *Toast of the Town*, was a particularly strong and characterful one with, unusually, two leading entertainers: Albert Burdon\* in his first appearance in Douglas since before the war with his acclaimed sketches *The Barber's Shop* and the 'uproarious' *The World's Worst Wizard*, and 'that broth of a bhoy', Harry Bailey, 'The King of Blarney', returning to the Castle after his success last season with his irrepressible Irish humour, 'violinistics', topical 'Teddy Boy' sketch and 'grand slapstick tomfoolery'. Sharing top billing was glamorous and vivacious *soubrette* Penny Nicholls\* singer, dancer and impressionist whose Gracie Fields was a 'hit', who sang selections of popular songs. The Twelve Toast of the Town Ladies appeared frequently during the show in *Caribbean Fiesta*, *Pony Carousel* and *Scots Wha Hae*, a Scottish Fantasy in which they were joined by the Dagenham Girl Pipers.\* Completing the line-up were The Musical Elliotts, clowns, and masters of the trumpet, saxophone and concertina, those Continental acrobats, the Gimma Boys and one shapely girl, who 'flew through the air at a whirlwind speed', and The Four (Three) Kingpins, three-part harmony boys whose fourth member was rushed to Noble's Hospital on arrival in Douglas and underwent an emergency operation. The

mistress of the dance routines was once again Betty Hobbs and the Musical Director was Billy Merrin. According to one reviewer only one sketch missed the mark: *The Awkward Squad*, featuring a 'silly ass' Army officer and a bunch of raw recruits, which was judged 'too corny to warrant inclusion' in an up-to-date show.

\* Tyneside-born, champion child clog dancer turned actor, comedian and panto star, who, uniquely perhaps, appeared with his son as the two ugly sisters in a production of *Cinderella*.

\* Penny Nicholls won the All-Britain Tap-Dancing Contest before WWII; toured with 'King of the Midlands' Billy Merrin, and Cyril Stapleton and his orchestra, had her own radio show *Penny Serenade* and appeared in countless summer shows and Christmas pantos.

\* The Dagenham Girl Pipers were founded in 1930 and were a professional band who toured extensively before and after WWII. They became an amateur organisation in 1968. Like Des O'Connor they were mentioned frequently in the Morecambe & Wise show.

The first Sunday Concert with the 'brilliant' Squads took place on 1<sup>st</sup> July, and was reckoned to be 'a scintillating band show, rich in comedy and vocal numbers and first-class instrumental solos'. Opera trained singer Peter Morton's programme concentrated on lighter, rhythmic numbers, and had the audience 'rocking in their seats' during the sketch 'Casino', which hilariously demonstrated what might have happened to the Island had it supported the 'much-publicised' gambling casino scheme, for which he wrote the lyrics. Almost as popular was the Rome sketch with band members dressed in togas, or rather, bed sheets. Lancashire tenor Ken Kirkham (no microphone nurser!), who had formally appeared with Joe Loss, sang *Granada, When You Lose the One You Love* and *No other Love*; charming brunette Joan Baxter, who had been the 1948 winner of The Golden Voice of Butlins and appeared with the Blue Rockets and on the radio, won many new friends that evening. Ronnie Aldrich, as usual, contributed a number of piano solos; there were other instrumental solos from the 'singing sax and clarinet' of Cliff Townsend, 'energetic drummer-man' Tommy Cairns, and trumpeter Bernie Sharpe. The band's resident pianist Syd Dale played his own arrangements of *In a Persian Market*; the band played *South Rampart Street Parade*, *Main Line* among their pieces.

David Hughes, 'the handsome Welsh recording star' with a magnetic personality that won over his audiences from the moment he stepped onto the stage, was the celebrity guest artiste on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July, fresh from London's West End, with the current 'hit' parade number *No Other Love, Fountains of Rome* and favourite songs from the world of musical comedy including *Make Believe* and *We'll Gather Lilacs*. His final encore was *There but for the grace of God, go I*. The Squads presented their foot-tapping show-within-show *Ragtime Show*; Andrew Reavley shone among the band singers, and Lancashire comedian Harry Shiels on loan from the Derby Castle provided a series of 'humorous diversions'. All-in-all it was 'a first-rate holiday show'.

### **Squads 'Pack-em' at the Palace Coliseum**

The near capacity audience heartily joined in the *Top of the Pops* themed grand finale of the Sunday Concert on 15<sup>th</sup> July. Cliff Townsend played a saxophone solo *Memories Are Made of This*\* and Andrew Reavley led the band's comedy routines in a 'varied and pleasing programme'.

\* He was seen on the silver screen later that season when he played a sax solo with Ted Heath's band in the film *It's a Wonderful World*, starring George Cole, the world premiere of which took place at the Picture House in August.

The versatile Scottish comedian Jimmy Logan, with the Squads in support, was said to be very much 'at home' on his return to Douglas in front of a Scottish audience on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> July. 'Patriotism beats stronger when you are away from home', remarked one local sage as Scots visitors packed into the Coliseum for an evening that appealed directly to their tastes, and although other visitors and locals found the 'dialect witticisms difficult to follow at times . . . he 'got awa' wi' it'. His sketches included an impression of a 'Teddy Boy' and an affectionate take on the athlete runner Chris Chataway aka Jimmy Getaway. His popular Scottish songs included *Sailing Down the Clyde*, *A Baby in the Hoose* and *We're No Awa, to Bide Awa* during which the entire Scots contingent joined in, clapping and cheering everything, and soon everyone in the hall was singing along too. Ronnie Aldrich played two piano solos including the *Warsaw Concerto*.

The ninth Grand Theatrical Gala in aid of local charities took place on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> July and starred over fifty stars from the principal resort shows including Phil Moss and his band, Billy Stutt (a stalwart front-of-cloth comic; a great warm-up act; but never top of the bill), Stella Hartley, the Dorchester Lovelies, the Dagenham Girl Pipers and Harry Burdon & Co. The afternoon was showery at first but cleared up by 5.00pm so that patrons could enjoy the various stalls.

### **At the cinemas**

Burt Lancaster, Tony Curtis and Gina Lollobrigida starred in *Trapeze*, a sweaty, over-heated, worthy but dull tale of the romance and rivalry in a circus between a crippled trapeze artiste, his brash *protégé* and a sultry and manipulative temptress; there was angst a-plenty for Susan Hayward in *I'll Cry Tomorrow*, a stark, no holds barred biopic of a Broadway star struggling with alcoholism, and a real summer holiday 'pick-me-up'; Kenneth Moore triumphed in the award-winning *Reach for the Sky*, the inspiring story of air-ace Douglas Bader, and Moore's finest hour (Bader himself approved as Moore made him a far more likable character than he actually was); essentially, a load of old 'bull' and nobody's finest hour, *Serenade* starred top tenor Mario Lanza as a poor vineyard worker-come-operatic tenor, who becomes obsessed with a rich, society lady but is saved from disaster by a feisty Mexican bull fighter's daughter; *The Revolt of Mamie Stover* featured Jane Russell as a 'gold digger' who reveals a surprising heart of gold, yet triumphs over that handicap and ends up as a wealthy war profiteer (an allegory of American society perhaps, and best forgotten); an uncharacteristically sinister John Wayne, fiercely independent and scheming Paulette Goddard and duped sailing line owner Ray Milland swashbuckled their way through the 1942 adventure of the shipwrecking age, Cecil B. DeMille's *Reap the Wild Wind*.

The Squads 'in their brightest form' provided the 'ideal holiday fare' on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July and gave fine support on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> August to guest entertainer Ken 'I won't take me coat off I'm not stoppin' Platt.\*. 'His lugubrious manner and fund of topical stories caused non-stop laughter' and he was recalled many times. Sharing the programme was musical clown Ravel, dressed in black tights, jacket and tails, with a zany blend of serious musicianship and bizarre

antics on the clarinet, piano and whistle; at one point a giant moth flew out of his music and was promptly shot!

\* Known as 'George Formby II' in his youth, he was transferred to the Combined Services Entertainment unit during World War II but found success hard to come by after demob and began working in a grocer's shop in his hometown, Leigh, Greater Manchester, where he was spotted by a BBC scriptwriter and became the resident comedian in the popular BBC Radio show *Variety Fanfare*. He was a treasured last link with old time music hall and variety, well-known on summer season and pantomime circuits, television sitcoms and a *Good Old Days* stalwart.

The Squads alone presented the Sunday Concert on 19<sup>th</sup> August, but on the following Sunday they were joined by 'ace accordionist' Chic Robini, a good opening act who always got the audience singing old favourites, such as *Lily of Laguna*, as his 'nimble fingers flashed up and down the keys'. 'Bewitching' vocal star Eve Boswell was due to appear but cancelled due to a sudden attack of the 'flu. Her place was taken by 'petite sparkling soubrette' Penny Nicholls, from the Palace show *Toast of the Town*, who was greeted with a rousing reception and deputised with great success with her impression of Gracie Fields – which received a tremendous ovation – and 'songs for every mood' such as the 'peppy' *Rock 'n Roll Waltz* and *Ricochet Romance*.

One local newspaper looked back fifty years to 25<sup>th</sup> August 1906 when 60,000 holiday makers were on the Island, and there appeared to be a 'marked and progressive improvement in the dancing and deportment'. Couples were reportedly better dressed . . . and 'the "hobbledehoy" no longer takes to the floor. . . the shorter skirt is "graceful and comforting" to the Master of Ceremonies'.

The Squads completed their highly successful fifth season on 2<sup>nd</sup> September in company with The Smith Brothers, a group of five Geordie lads 'in harmony', and 'new style vent' Derek Lawrence. After their characteristic opening: 'Hello! Hello! Hello! Hello! Hell-oo-oo', the Brothers sang *Marching Through the Heather, Birds and Bees, Walk Hand-in-Hand*, Perry Como's current 'hit' *Hot Diggity (Dog Ziggity)* and up-beat versions of popular North East songs such as *Blaydon Races* and *Keep Your Feet Still Geordie Hinny*. The Squads contributed in with *Woodchopper's Mambo* and *American Patrol*; the band vocalists were 'very well received'.

It was farewell to 'a most sparkling, witty and clever production' as *Toast of the Town* made its final bow at the Coliseum on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> September with the entire peak-of-the-season cast appearing to the end of the run. Many hundreds of Manx residents took a late season opportunity to see what Douglas provided for the visitors that summer.

### **The Derby Castle and Opera House**

The Derby Castle opened for the season on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July with Phil Moss and his orchestra, transferred from the Palace, nightly in the ballroom. The week of 1<sup>st</sup> July in the Opera House and featured 'a non-stop, quick-fire programme' starring Joyce Golding who regaled the audience with garrulous gossip about her much-abused and long-suffering husband, amused with her famous impressions of stars of stage and screen, and even sang all four roles in an

operatic quartet! There was energetic dancing, instrumental solos and somersaults from The Nelson Bothers; ventriloquist Barbara Ray managed to keep three dummies all talking at once; kilted Madrigal played the bagpipes, bells and xylophone whilst balancing on a unicycle, and Taro Naito foot juggled deftly. There was tumbling from comedy adagio specialists, The Sparkes Trio; the expert puppetry of The Hollywood Marionettes demonstrated why they had enjoyed such success at the Moulin Rouge, and the homely quips of Lancashire comedian Harry Sheils completed 'a marvellous show'. The Castle Orchestra was under the direction of Atty Baker, 'the singing conductor', who led the music hall style community singing which was a popular feature of Derby Castle shows.

There was 'Fun and Frolics' during the week beginning 8<sup>th</sup> July led by The Two Pirates whose 'cod' feats of strength and merry patter descended quickly into madness. Ventriloquist Derek Yelding, assisted by his dummy Eddie, presented an action-packed Punch and Judy Show featuring the now ubiquitous 'Teddy Boys' and a boxing match; Patricia Rossborough entertained the audiences with stylish piano 'pops' ranging from boogie-woogie to the classics; there was snappy canine sagacity from Reg Russell and Susie, 'a mathematical genius who barks' the answers, climbs a ladder, and jumps on her master, and 'smart miming' from recording 'mimists' Ross and Howitt. The Bedlams' multi-instrumental clowning, acrobatic dancing from contortionist Rene Dymott, and 'laughs galore' comedian George Betton all contributed to an 'excellent bright programme'. Patricia Rossborough and Derek Yelding were the guest artistes at the Sunday Popular Concert that week with Phil Moss and his band.

The week beginning 16<sup>th</sup> July starred tap-dancers Hal Mack and Winnie and, 'as droll and amusing as ever', that reliable veteran acrobatic variety act The Two Aberdonians. Shadowgraphist Edward Victor, 'Me and My Shadow', amazed the audiences with realistic depictions of the Royal Family from Queen Victoria onwards; the Lloyd Brothers entertained with popular selections on the piano, and Australian vocalist Shirley Ryan, 'beautifully gowned, attractive and confident', sang the current 'hit' songs. With help from members of the audience Pharos and Marina indulged in lightening-quick mental telepathy; Yorkshire 'lad' Walter Niblo, a Douglas favourite, was back again that season with a host of 'side-splitting stories'; The Flying Ladrings - two girl trapeze artistes - presented a series of high speed tricks involving a giant wheel, whilst the Mayfairs - 'two attractive girls' in fluorescent costumes - presented their delightful 'Singing in the Rain' routine, and finally, there was elegant and immaculate dancing from Gold and Cordell. Walter Niblo and Edward Victor were also the guest stars at Phil Moss' Sunday Concert on 22<sup>nd</sup> July.

The Lane Twins, 'pert and petite' quick-change novelty dancers, and Billy Barr and Lady Friend with their nostalgic evocation of Charlie Chaplin topped the bill for the week of 23<sup>rd</sup> July. Among the supporting acts were ventriloquist Winston Foxwell and his 'novel potpourri act'; The Great Felixio, balancing on a high platform and Reub Silver and Marion Day, the popular piano duettists with their 'magic carpet of melody'. Irish tenor James Ruddy was repeatedly recalled for encores especially after his rousing version of *Granada*; genial Irish comedian Billy Stutt, with his 'comic expressions' and gentle one-liners hit the mark as always when he found a 'missus' in the audience to spark off, and trampolinists Reading and Grantley proved to be

a 'tip-top bouncing act'. Silver and Day together with Winston Foxwell were the guest stars at Phil Moss' Sunday Concert on 29<sup>th</sup> July.

### **A 'high-class songstress' and a 'grand old trouper' appear at the height of the season**

Top of the bill for the week of 30<sup>th</sup> July, Ann and Bobby Black, a charming, kilted 'golden voiced' singer and her accordionist partner, performed a selection of Scottish ballads that warmed the hearts of their audiences as they had done the previous season; skilful, lightning-quick and humorous cartooning by television's Lorraine, and artful balancing from Krandon and Karna set the tone for a typical holiday show with something for everyone. Liverpool's Jimmy Gretty with his mouth organ and guitar got the audiences singing and Donald B. Stuart's magical tricks invariably went wrong much to the amusement of the audience. The Four El Granados, three charming girls and a cowboy, expertly 'twirled' and 'cracked' across the stage with ropes and whips in a spectacular Western-style act 'that can be seen again and again without any loss of interest'. The 'weird' hypnotic snake dance of adagio dancers Babette and Raoul 'gripped the audience'; the knock-about antics of acrobatic comedians Manley and Austin, and the 'mirthful stories' of 'grand Lancashire comic' Bud Bennett and his candle\* both had the house 'roaring'. Notwithstanding the fact that five artistes were held up in Liverpool and Fleetwood by storms and arrived with only minutes to spare for rehearsals with Atty Baker and the orchestra, there was 'no hint of raggedness in the show', which the *Ramsey Courier* described as 'probably the best two hours of vaudeville this season'. The Sunday Concert on 5<sup>th</sup> August starred Krandon and Karna and Lorraine.

\* His act may have been one I saw re-created in Barnoldswick, Lancashire, in the late 1970s by a local entertainer, who appeared in an old-fashioned 'Dickensian' night gown, bed cap and holding a candle 'to light him to bed'. 'Frederick 'Bud' Bennett appeared regularly in variety in the North of England during the 1950s and '60s, and on radio, and appeared as a barman in an episode of *Coronation Street* in 1963.

An unusual, possibly unique, act, Don Phillipe and Marta, topped the bill for the week of 6<sup>th</sup> August. He created on stage amazing, glamorous costumes for his 'model' Marta from just a few rolls of material and pins, everything from the 'naughty nineties to Ascot. The supporting acts included personality pianist Roy Stevens; hearty, boisterous Lancashire comedian Jimmy Couton; juggler Vic Sanderson, and the first appearance in Douglas of vocalist Rosalie Appleton, a former amateur from Warrington, with popular songs and ballads such as *If I Love You* and *Who Are We*. Campbell and Rogerson's colourful carnival act featured a 'three legged' dancing emblem of the Isle of Man, and comedy came in the shape of dead-pan Freddie Stobbs and comic cod-conjuror Claude Williams. Claude Williams and Freddie Stobbs were the guest artistes at Phil Moss' Sunday Concert on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

A further chapter in the woeful saga of a new swimming pool for Douglas appeared during the month when a threat to the continued existence of the Crescent Pavilion and Pleasure Land on Central Promenade became known. Both were doomed to be demolished at the end of the season unless Douglas Town Council rescinded its decision back in February which resolved to remove these temporary buildings by 31<sup>st</sup> March 1957 to make way for a possible site for the swimming pool. The Palace & Derby Castle Company asked that any decision be re-considered and deferred until an inspection was completed.

'Here's an opportunity for someone' proclaimed an advertisement in the local newspapers that month when an SOS went out for a female vocalist to join Phil Moss' four resident male vocalists, and fill a gap in the line-up as new songstress Jackie Paige was forced to return to England due to ill health.

American television star Miss Fredye Marshall, described as a high-class coloured songstress with an astonishing vocal range, was the star of the show for the week beginning 13<sup>th</sup> August. She was 'heart-rending' in Blues numbers and was called back several times for encores. It was 'a privilege to hear an artiste of her class', wrote one reviewer, in such songs as *Stormy Weather* and numbers from *Carmen Jones* and *Porgy and Bess*. If the supporting acts were not in that class, they were nevertheless as varied a cast as one could wish for in a seaside show and included 'easy on the eye', smart novelty juggling duo Cynthia and Gladys; the droll Yorkshire working man's comic Joe King (formerly a bus driver and rabbit catcher!); the Three Klefs with two accordions and a xylophone, which they played with hands and feet; Phil Darban and 'the lovely' Wendy whose novelty Western act culminated in boomerangs being thrown into the audience (the reviews do not mention whether they came back); television ventriloquist Elray and his two precocious dummies; comedy acrobatics, the Millinis Brothers, and children's illusionist Verdini, complete with balloons, clever tricks and a 'cheery personality'. In the pit, the 'smiling' Atty Baker, of course.

Radio memory man Leslie 'he was rarely stuck for an answer' Welch, who endeavoured to answer questions from the audience 'in great detail' on sporting subjects ranging from 'croquet to cricket', was the lead entertainer for the week of 20<sup>th</sup> August. Conjuror Lionel King did amazing card tricks with the help of volunteers from the audience; 'the man with three voices', Stan Stafford, sang songs in the soprano, tenor and baritone ranges, and mother and daughter foot jugglers Levanda and Van, members of a famous juggling family, manipulated and tossed large balls to one another whilst laying on their backs on square pedestals. The cast was completed by Buckmaster's Puppets, an unusual and amusing 'jazz quintet' routine manipulated by just one man; Liverpool's 'lump of fun' Billy Matchet, and impressionist Don Arden.

Advertised as 'The season's best bill', the show for the week beginning 29<sup>th</sup> August starred the seventy-five-year-old 'grand old trouper' Rob Wilton who brought his famous character Mr Muddlecombe to the Derby Castle for his birthday bow during his thirty-fifth year 'treading the boards' in Douglas. He was one of the last veterans of music hall's golden age and told the audiences that, with the exception of the Isle of Man, his days of touring the halls was over. 'I was here in the days of Florrie Forde', he told them; 'Douglas audiences were always known to be very receptive and have a keen sense of humour'. Liverpool's King of Comics also confided that he had never flown and never intended to . . . travel by sea is 'so healthy and enjoyable'. He received two curtain calls and responded to repeated calls for encores with his famous monologues *The Football Director* and *Back Answers*. That week also saw the return of the Jovers, Raf and Julian, members of a legendary circus family, with their comedy acrobatic stunts - including their trademark half-standing back somersault into an ankle catch - together with a new song and dance routine; tenor Eric Eleifson presented his 'romance in song' selection which culminated in Agustín Lara's rousing *paean* to the colourful Spanish city

*Granada*; ventriloquist Derek Lawrence, with his farmer and scarecrow trio of dummies, and novelty dance and tumbling act The Reid Twins, the highlight of which was their 'mirror' routine. 'The end-of-season programme' was completed by Maurice French and Joy; 'man of many instruments', including bagpipes and drums, Alec Hall, and The Bashful Boys in a quick-fire clothes swapping act.

Even as the last few weeks of the season ebbed away there were still many events around the Island to attract the holiday makers: at Port Erin, a Regatta; in Ramsey, the Royal Manx Agricultural Society Show and the Ramsey Bay Regatta; in Douglas, the Summer Flower Show and the Light Horse Annual Gymkhana in King George V Park; in Peel, an Angling Festival; returning to Douglas, the 1956 Isle of Man Dance Festival, the Douglas Bay Swim and Douglas Carnival on 30<sup>th</sup> August; the Final of Bathing Beauty Competitions in the Villa Marina Gardens took place on 9th September.

The final event of the season at the Derby Castle was the traditional end-of-season Manx Mhelliagh which took place on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> September.

### **The smaller venues**

The Gaiety Theatre remained closed as a theatre but continued to function as a cinema. At the Crescent Pavilion Stella Hartley's and Joe Crosbie's *Happy Holiday Show* drew enthusiastic families throughout the season. The new band leader in the Douglas Holiday Camp Ballroom, Vic Davies (ex-Phil Moss), received a warm welcome from local old-time dancing enthusiasts at the morning and evening dances and Sunday concerts. The Palais de Danse opened on 2<sup>nd</sup> July following re-decoration with Paul Kingsley and his band of nine players from Birmingham. During August occasional guest appearances from Irish comedian Billy Stutt impersonator, Billy Barr with his Chaplin impressions, Lancashire comedian Bud Bennet and harmonica player Jimmy Gretty enlivened some evenings.

The White City, Onchan Head, stayed open in all weathers for speedway, dodgems, open-air roller skating, the ghost train, speed boats, the Indian Theatre and much else.

At the Pavilion Theatre, Onchan, 'The Great Joseph Karma', lightning hypnotist presented his highly popular whirlwind mental telepathy 'show of mirth and mystery' assisted by Miss Elizabeth every evening – including Sundays – at 8.00pm. In Onchan Park Stadium there was a Mock TT Ladies Pram Race; novelty dog racing; a Donkey Derby and Soap Box Derby, and a Ladies Fashion Parade with a £5 prize awarded to the evening's 'glamour girl'.

The Hector Gledall Trio, with a reputation for an attractive blend of comedy and dance music, played mornings and evenings at the Ramsey Pool Ballroom from 30<sup>th</sup> July. Their mixture of old-time, modern, Latin-American and 'party dances' was deftly accomplished with a polished ensemble that between them fielded piano, clavioline and vocals, double bass and vocals and drums and vocals.

The Bradda Glen Ballroom was open for dancing on Saturday nights with music from organist Anthony Savage, although complaints about overcrowding resulted in a maximum of four hundred persons being imposed.

Throughout the summer the *Isle of Man Examiner* maintained its 'Spot Yourself' feature with prizes for audience members pictured at the Palais de Danse, Palace Coliseum and the Derby Castle.

### **'Island did better than most resorts this season'\***

The local newspapers were in a deeply reflective - even philosophical - mood when surveying a season of such mixed fortunes. 'Weather and Rowdyism give pointers for the future' warned one, whilst others noted that despite some appalling weather during the height of the season, 'full houses were reported everywhere'. Most agreed that the glorious summer of 1955\* had encouraged many to book well in advance for the current season, and the season's disappointing weather would certainly be reflected in bookings for 1957. All things considered, 1955 was reckoned to be 'an exceptional year' and markedly better than the 'poor' 1954. The final passenger arrival figures for 1956 appeared in October: 542,305. Lower than 1955 but an improvement upon 1953.

Ronaldsway airport enjoyed 'another record season' with an estimated 85,000 arrivals by air - an increase of 11,000 over 1955 and double that of 1952 - including 5,000 over the August Bank Holiday. The new coach/air service from Stranraer, and re-installment of the coach/air service from Leeds, and new service from Derby contributed to the impressive and encouraging figures, as did new services from Carlisle and Newcastle

Nearly seven thousand May Bank Holiday visitors by both sea and air were able to take advantage of a variety of sports fixtures and the Drama Festival assisted by the start of double sailings from Liverpool and the Fleetwood services, and excursions from Dublin. The owner of the refreshment kiosk at the Point of Ayre was 'taken by surprise' when several coaches turned up. Early season crowds flocked to Mooragh Park in Ramsey; Peel, too, saw large numbers of visitors as coach and bus excursions and evening 'Mystery Tours' commenced.

The perceived growth of hooliganism was frequently commented on, and as we have seen, 'Teddy Boys' became the butt of comedians' - and even ventriloquists' - jokes. Fears of the effect of boorish behaviour on the part of a minority of noisy and disruptive young visitors in the town on 'the better type of visitor' was thought to be over-exaggerated. Such behaviour was now a feature of many resorts around Britain.

Other familiar topics covered by the local newspapers included the question of Sunday opening for public houses; the need for an indoor swimming pool for Douglas and another urgent call for more wet weather facilities; some keen observers noticed a serious fall in the number of day excursions and the negative effect of late Lancashire holidays on visitor numbers in June. Optimistic hopes for a vibrant end to the season were not fulfilled. For the future, potential late season holiday makers needed to be made aware of what Douglas had achieved in extending the season. The solid backing of all concerned was needed if late season visitors were not to be disappointed. So 'KEEP ON TRYING'.\*

\* *Isle of Man Examiner* 21.10.56\*

\* Records revealed that the summer of 1955 was the sunniest on record with 1,897 hours of sunshine.

\* *Isle of Man Times* 14.09.1956

### **Visitor's voices from the North**

Two couples from Burnley, a family from Bury and a visitor from Congleton in Cheshire conveyed their different holiday experiences to the *Isle of Man Times* and *Isle of Man Examiner's* Editor's Postbags.\* 'Thank you for a "Glorious" Week in Douglas', wrote one couple, who were impressed with the general facilities with both young and old well-catered for, 'the wonderful organisation of the place', with amusements galore, lovely gardens and spotlessly clean streets. 'Douglas is lovely by day and a wonderland at night', and furthermore they had a 'homely landlady and good food' to return to at the close of the day. The other Burnley couple, however, were not impressed with the Island Holiday Roundabout Rail Ticket and 'non-user-friendly timetables', which invariably meant that excursions to the West coast towns had to be curtailed in the early afternoon in order to catch trains back to Douglas in time for tea at their accommodation. A visitor from Manchester, however, praised 'the out-town bus services' and particularly the conductors for 'their courtesy and friendliness'. He also noted that the timetable was adhered to very closely.

The family from Bury\* were dismayed at the conditions awaiting them at the Liverpool sea terminal and on the steamer itself. After enduring a five-hour standing wait to board, with no refreshments available, they discovered that, despite booking first class, the seating on board was inadequate with as many as four people having to share one seat, and others squatting uncomfortably on their suitcases. There was inevitably a struggle to obtain food and drink from the on-board kiosks and cafés. 'I experienced better conditions on troopships during the war', wrote the head of the family. 'The Isle of Man has lost four future customers . . . I shall not urge my friends to visit'.

'No more Isle of Man for me' wrote 'disgruntled of Bacup' to the *Isle of Man Examiner* concerning his grim return journey by sea from Douglas on 11<sup>th</sup> August. He joined the immense queue of some 3,000 holiday makers stretching down Lord Street for the steamer at King Edward Pier, only to find that when he finally reached the head of the queue, 'we were still being packed onto the same steamer'. Once on board he found that all seats and deckchairs were taken and passengers were packed in like sardines 'sitting on our luggage in the pouring rain'. Even those with first class tickets struggled to get under cover in the third-class compartment. The toilets, too, were occupied by people with nowhere else to go. 'That was the last straw . . . much as I love the Isle of Man I never again will visit your Island while these deplorable conditions exist . . . I shudder to think what calamity would befall so heavily laden a ship should disaster strike'.

\* *Isle of Man Times*, 24.08.1956; *Isle of Man Times*, 29.06.1956

### **'Scots Wha Hae . . .'**

Douglas had always been popular with the Scots, particularly during Glasgow fortnight when Scottish comedians and singers were engaged to entertain the visitors. In a piece entitled 'Where Holidays Are Holidays'\* sprightly seventy-year-old Alan McLean, Provost (Mayor) of Paisley, a regular visitor for over forty years, explained that many Paisley folk returned year after year to enjoy the variety of the entertainment and 'the virtues of clean air and

magnificent scenery'. He first visited the Island in 1913 and witnessed the great music hall star Vesta Tilley opening the Villa Marina. 'There is no place like the Isle of Man for a happy and healthy holiday'. These sentiments were echoed by Mr and Mrs Fred H. Pemberton, manager of the Canadian radio station CKSF, who had travelled far and wide and had attended no less than thirty-four TT events; for them the Isle of Man was 'the gem of all places'.

\* *Isle of Man Examiner*, 17.08.56

A visitor from New Brighton, Cheshire, in June urged Douglas to 'Make it a Real June Effort',\* for in his opinion the Island was nowhere near in full swing in the early part of the season. His main concerns were that the Palace & Derby Castle were not open; the Gaiety Theatre had been converted to a cinema despite the fact that Douglas already had a number of other cinemas; the illuminations in Summer Hill Glen were not lit up until 23<sup>rd</sup> June, and the much-admired promenade lighting was not switched on until 10.30pm 'when most people were either at supper or in bed!' He was, however, 'greatly pleased to see the improvements at Port Soderick' which attracted many people. 'Douglas is not the Douglas of old', he wrote. 'There was not one live show', so 'how DO you expect visitors to spend their evenings? what are the authorities in Douglas thinking of? shall we give the Island a miss next year?'

*Mona's Herald*, 17.07.1956

One group of visitors from Liverpool had an unhappy experience swimming at high tide in a rough sea 'in a little cove by the old baths'. Upon emerging from the water, they were 'all coated with what appeared to be fish meal . . . the smell was revolting . . . and washing our costumes, towels and clothes proved unsuccessful, and we had to bring them home in separate parcels to avoid contaminating our luggage'. No explanation for this probably freak occurrence was forthcoming.

Two holiday makers, one from Rochdale, the other from Cork, made their pleas for the retention of the Manx Electric Railway when they became aware of the current threatened closure: not only 'a most useful service, but a definite tourist attraction', said one, and 'This simply must not happen! No amount of buses or coaches will ever bring the numbers of visitors to the beauty spots on that coast'.\*

\* The directors of the MER maintained that they could no longer afford the mounting annual maintenance costs of running the railway. The Government took charge from 1<sup>st</sup> June 1957.

It should be remembered, though, that only a tiny percentage of visitors ever put pen to paper to record their holiday experiences, and the overwhelming majority of visitors evidently enjoyed memorable family holidays and returned year after year.

## **Round the Island**

Douglas Holiday Camp enjoyed a busy season and advance bookings for 1957 already looked promising. 'Not too bad, but not brilliant' was how Laxey viewed their summer, although more holiday guides were sent out than in previous years, and all accommodation was booked solidly throughout July and August. General trade was said to be 'fairly brisk' in contrast to other smaller resorts where visitor numbers were down, and commercial activity suffered 'a big drop'.

Castletown recorded a 'better than average' summer with many more coaches calling, and shops and cafés were left 'fairly satisfied'. Onchan witnessed high visitor numbers during July and August, but like everywhere else, suffered from the indifferent weather.

Peel had a better season than expected, capturing an estimated 90% of the week-end coach trade. Sea fishermen were catered for, but the reservoirs and rivers attracted disappointing numbers of anglers due to the blustery weather. The sandy beach attracted many families, particularly from Liverpool, on fine days, but it was clear that more food and drink kiosks, shelters and conveniences were needed on the promenade.

Port Erin recorded a better summer than the previous year with no reports of rowdiness or hooliganism, but fewer day-trippers. Whilst June was slow to get going, most accommodation was booked for July and August. Port St. Mary suffered a poor kipper season and ice-cream sales suffered in the unpredictable weather.

### **Visitors do not come here to do penance**

The debate over Sunday opening rumbled on as it did every summer season and was the subject of a report of the Licensed Victuallers Association who recorded a good season for hotels and boarding houses, but a disappointing season for public houses who enjoyed only a 'middling' season. Furthermore, 'we have heard nothing but ceaseless grumbling over this senseless law' relating to Sunday opening. Visitors were indignant that they are unable to meet friends for a drink on a Sunday. Our 'peculiar system' was not helpful for a 'holiday isle', and 'unless something is done in the near future the Isle of Man will lose thousands of visitors. Surely the legislators must recognise in this era of fierce competition for tourists, that the days when you could regiment people are gone'.

A. S. Kelly, the MHK for Ramsey, was of the opinion that 'our long-term policy should be to attract a better type of visitor'. He believed that hotel and boarding house charges were 'far too cheap'; and suggested that '. . . we should raise our tariffs and give better service'.

As August merged into September one 'Come-over' and would-be 'Stay-over' wondered how much more the crowds of holiday makers 'crammed on the Douglas front' would enjoy the shows like *Talk of the Town*, the revues, the cinemas, the dances at the Palace and the varieties at the Derby Castle if they had spent a day out in the countryside, exploring the glens and little-known secret coves beaches of the Island, 'which are unlike anything to be found elsewhere'. The five generations of the Goodaire family from Hoyland would have agreed with the sentiment. One member of the family had first holidayed on the Island as a schoolboy the year after Queen Victoria's Jubilee, and recalled that as the *Mona's Queen* approached Douglas harbour after the six-hour journey from Fleetwood arriving at 8.00pm, a gun was fired from the Fort Anne Hotel. 'Was this a warning to Douglas landladies to put the kettle on?' he wondered. Much had changed, he reflected, and much more had disappeared forever: the four wheeled bathing machines on the beach; Buxton's Pierrots, the Falcon Cliff Pavilion and the Old Iron Pier'.

Two young cousins aged eight and ten years of age from Leicestershire were moved to pen the following (abridged) verses extolling the Island's charms:

‘Go on your holidays when you can  
But always go to the Isle of Man.  
Other resorts are a bit of all right,  
But they give you such a terrible fright’

‘With a tall lighthouse and a rugged cliff,  
It gives other places such a biff.  
Now we close with a hearty cheer,  
Go to the Isle of Man next year’.

How many young children holidaying on the island in our age - if, indeed, any could be found - would write such an enthusiastic poem, bubbling over with such fulsome praise. One envies them their week of innocent fun . . .

**And finally . . .**

The ‘At Random’ column in the *Isle of Man Times*\* contemplated the approach of the day when the last of the visitors had left, and ‘the bright frocks and open-necked shirts - and the plastic macs – will have disappeared until next summer . . . the promenades would soon begin to take on their deserted winter look even though the sun might still be shining . . . sauce bottles – always a happy sign that the season is underway - will have been whisked away overnight (and hopefully cleaned), and the “vacancies” cards will appear again in the (boarding house) windows’.

\* *Isle of Man Times*, 24.08.1956

Inevitably the unemployment figures began to mount as the season ended.\* One hundred and four men left the Island for English sugar beet factories in Lincolnshire and Essex, with their fares paid both ways by the Government together with a loan of £3 to help with their first week’s accommodation, and a further grant to help dependents remaining on the Island. Various new schemes absorbed two hundred and eighty-two mainly men, but overall figures rose to five hundred and forty-two and were expected to rise again to an estimated seven hundred and fifty by the end of September, a figure nevertheless ‘far below’ the peak of post-war unemployment, the year 1953.

\* *Mona’s Herald* 19.08.1956

## 1957

### **The inexorable rise of television**

Better television reception, the result of the new transmitter on Carnane, Douglas Head, meant that with a little help from transmitters in Belfast and Carlisle, BBC television could achieve an estimated 90% coverage of the Island. The Island’s ‘live’ television debut occurred

in August when a programme in the *Holiday Town* series was relayed to an estimated 6,000,000 viewers via the ABC network.\* The Douglas television retailer T. H. Colebourne reflected that in the six years since television first came to the Island the cost of a television set had fallen steadily. Sales were particularly good in the peak holiday month of July and even the latest model could be purchased 'for as little as £72 19s 6d, with many buying their sets through hire-purchase schemes in order to avoid expected price rises.

\* The broadcast was considered a technical triumph for Manxman Ken Killip, senior engineer for the ABC Commercial Television Company, particularly as local radio 'Wiseacres' had predicted a 'wash-out'. Only the choice of a poor arrangement of the classic chorus song 'Kelly' struck a sour note.

A new programme aimed at teenagers featuring 'their' stars, music and fashion trends was first aired in February: *Six Five Special*. The show, designed to fill the 6.00 - 7.00pm slot in the schedules, was co-hosted by DJ 'heart-throb' Pete Murray from Radio Luxemburg. The following year ITV/ABC broadcast another new 'teen' show entitled *Oh Boy!* which made stars of Cliff Richard, Marty Wilde and Vince Eager.

### **1957 in a nutshell**

Harold 'you've never had it so good' Macmillan became Prime Minister in January; Tommy Steele reached 'number 1 with *Singing the Blues* in January; the Cavern Club in Liverpool opened as a jazz club; in February Norwich City Council became the first British local authority to install a computer; also that month, the so-called television 'Toddlers' Truce', the hour between 6 o'clock and 7 o'clock in the evening, supposedly to allow parents to put their young children to bed, was abolished; the gap in the schedules was immediately filled by the first edition of the current affairs programme *Tonight* presented by Cliff Michelmore; on April 1<sup>st</sup> BBC television's *Panorama* broadcast the famous 'spaghetti tree' hoax; Patrick Moore presented *The Sky at Night* for the first time in April; Hammer Films released *The Curse of Frankenstein* in May; Britain tested its first atom bomb in Malden, Essex (just kidding, it was Malden Island in the Pacific); Stanley Matthews played his final international football game after an international career lasting twenty-three years; in August the cartoon character Andy Capp made his debut in the Northern edition of the *Daily Mirror*; *Which* magazine was first published in October; that month also saw the release of David Lean's *The Bridge on the River Kwai*; the BBC early morning radio programme *Today* was first broadcast on 28<sup>th</sup> October; the Queen's Christmas Message broadcast to camera for the first time; Agatha Christie's *4.50 from Paddington*, John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos*, Alistair MacLean's *The Guns of Navarone* and Ian Fleming's *From Russia, with Love* were published; the veteran musical hall entertainer Gertie Gitana died in January; the statesman Leslie Hore-Belisha (he of the Belisha Beacon) died in February; the horn player Dennis Brain was killed in a car crash in September, and the composer of 'light music' Eric Coates died in December.

### **More Conferences for Douglas**

There was some optimism in the air about the forthcoming season when there was a record number of 23,654 arrivals by air during the first four months of the year, and in April a new monthly record of 8,597, an increase of just over 1,500 on the previous year. In early June the newspapers reported that it had been 'a lively start to the season as three conferences in

Douglas end in sunshine'. The Island gained 'useful publicity', and all concerned expressed their thanks for the welcome and hospitality they received from the Manx people and the quality of the facilities and the entertainment provided.

Did a shiver pass through the audience during the Manx Music Festival in May as the coveted and prestigious Cleveland Gold Medal left the Island for the first time in the history of the competition when it was won by the bass Robert Kendrick from Birmingham? In October, however, a young Manx singer, Margaret Curphey, achieved an outstanding success at the Blackpool Music Festival.

There was 'a storm of protest in the House of Keys during a debate concerning the future of the Manx Electric Railway when it was narrowly agreed that, in the light of the renewal and operating cost having risen to £45,000 and not the agreed £25,000, the railway should continue to operate only as a 'scenic' railway with no early or late services.\* Tynwald did approve the sum of £14,000 estimated to reconstruct a section of Marine Drive pending a decision on its ultimate future. The Electric Railway was in fact promoted as *the* holiday railway, 'a twenty-mile route that memories are made of', where some of the finest coastal and mountain scenery can be viewed from the cars as they halt at quaint country stations, where passengers can alight and explore 'dozens of delightful retreats . . . rustic paths, delightful streams in the lovely glens, and at Laxey, the branch line to Snaefell summit'.\*

\* The Manx Government officially took over the MER at a ceremony on Saturday June 1<sup>st</sup> when the Lieutenant Governor (Sir Ambrose Flux Dundas) signed the order accompanied by members of the new MER Board. See *It's Our Railway Now*, *Mona's Herald*, 04.06.1957.

\* The cost of a two-day unlimited travel Rover ticket that season was 10s; the return fare from the Douglas terminus to Ramsey was 5s, and the coast route to Laxey was 3s 6d.

The first 'Manx' postage stamp was issued after 20 years of 'agitation', featuring a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II framed by a Celtic chain pattern, with the Three Legs of Man in the top left corner.

As early as January the *Mona's Herald* holiday feature announced that brochures for Butlins Holiday Camp and Hotel - venues designed for the British climate it was maintained - were available from local travel agent W. H. Chapman Ltd. Indeed, as the result of large-scale publicity, enquiries for Continental Holiday brochures was heavier than the previous season.

Elsewhere in local newspaper affairs a dynasty ended following the sale of the *Isle of Man Times* and the *Isle of Man Examiner* to Henri Leopold Dor. The former had been in the Brown family since 1861, and the latter owned by T. R. Radcliffe until he became ill. There was some unease about these events and the accusation of 'asset-stripping' on the part of Dor. Both institutions had passed into the hands of a stranger 'who does not inspire confidence'.

On 24<sup>th</sup> May the *Isle of Man Examiner* announced that it would soon publish a small twelve-page tabloid-style holiday newspaper entitled *Holiday News* which would be devoted to the Island's amenities and entertainments available for the visitor, available every Tuesday between June and September. There would be plenty of photographs, including some from the previous weekend's events, and 'Spot Yourself' competitions with prizes. The first issue

appeared during the second week of June costing 2d, and soon became extremely popular with holiday makers and residents alike; the *Examiner* was praised for its enterprise.

### **A season of contrasts as Teddy Boys arrive with the crowds**

A disagreeable aspect of holiday seasons throughout Britain reared its head for the second summer running that year: the re-emergence of so-called 'Teddy Boy' thuggery in Douglas. There were many reports of disorderly behaviour on licensed premises, and street fighting, sometimes involving flick knives and blackjacks. Manx courts were encouraged to impose sentences of corporal punishment (birching), and restrictions on alcohol sales to young people during the summer season were considered.

In October a new Tourist Bill designed to give power to the Tourist Board to introduce the compulsory registration of boarding houses and hotels was introduced in order to ensure that standards were improved and maintained. The Douglas Residential and Boarding House Association asked that hotel and boarding house tariffs not be printed in the 1958 Douglas Holiday Guide because it was unwise and impractical at a time of economic uncertainties and a fluctuating market.

A significant change in Douglas occurred when, for the first time ever, traffic was banned from Strand Street for four hours each day during the holiday season.

As far as the major entertainment venues were concerned it became accepted that not all Sunday Concerts would feature a 'big' star. On many occasions the entire concert would feature just the resident band: the Squads, Ivy Benson or Ken Mackintosh, utilising their very considerable in-band talent for the entire evening. This pattern had in fact already become an established feature with Joe Loss, and Ronnie Aldrich in particular, who had an excellent team of singers and instrumentalists who were also comedians. Discerning visitors saw this development as the thin end of the wedge and felt cheated that there were fewer well-known 'stars' to entertain them. Others saw this as evidence of a decline in the quality and quantity of entertainments in Douglas.

There were plenty of signs that 'the times they were a-changing' with the introduction of Rock 'n' Roll displays at the Palace Ballroom; in July the local 'Skiffle' group, Tom Courtie and the Tom Cats, entertained at Ballerkermeen High School in aid of a local charity, but an era in the Island's entertainment history came to an end that season when the Douglas Head open-air theatre was scheduled to close due to falling attendances at the Pierrot shows. Later in July, though, a Manx Wedding Pageant at Maughold Village attracted thousands of visitors, and in August a Floodlit Tattoo at King George V Park attracted seven thousand visitors to witness the appearance of the 751<sup>st</sup> USAF 'Jiving' Band.

The Postcard Censorship Committee (holiday fun spoilers, out of step with other popular resorts) declared that 34% of seaside postcards submitted to them in the past year were 'unsuitable'.

### **AQM reflects**

With so much that was new in the world of entertainment, Arthur Q. Moore, the doyen of commentators on Manx life, found time at the height of the season to reflect on the 'Naughtie Nineties' (the 1890s that is) in the edition of *Holiday News* dated 3rd August. 'Every type of amusement was a novelty; horse trams; balloon ascent and parachute descent by 'Professor' Grais; women shrieking in terror whilst watching the first film shows in Douglas; Blondin's tight-rope walk in the Palace Grounds; John Tiller's Girls, dancing arms linked at the Palace; the Lady Athletic Footballers; Zaeo, 'The star of stars' of aerial performers; the one-and-only Dan Leno, and strolling back to the boarding houses after a show or dancing along a promenade decked with 'fairy lamps'. Moore indulged in further nostalgic 'ramblings about this-and-that' in the *Examiner's* regular feature *Summertime Notebook*. One regular visitor he interviewed noted a decline in quality of Douglas entertainments referred to earlier. Another issue contained a photograph of Buxton's Pierrots\* from an earlier era, and Karma's assistant, the muscular Miss Elizabeth (formerly Elizabeth Hunter of Leeds) on stage during their act. She had apparently 'mesmerised' him at Butlin's Holiday Camp five years earlier after which they decided to become partners in all senses for life. She became understandably exhausted during their act, as she was frequently required to manhandle people much heavier than her own ten stone, so that Karma had to hypnotise her so that she could sleep at night!

\* See *Isle of Man Examiner*, 09.09.1957.

Under the heading 'Oh! That Ozone' in his *Summertime Notebook*, *Isle of Man Examiner*, 7<sup>th</sup> June, Moore attempted to describe the 'ghastly stink' from the foreshore that annually wafted over the Derby Castle end of the promenade 'for as many warm summers as I can remember'. Every year visitors commented on the 'stink to end all stinks' and some speculated whether the cause was sewer-gas or the after-effects of testing an H-Bomb over Douglas Bay. Perhaps, it was suggested, the composer John Ireland was inspired to set John Masefield's evocative *Sea Fever* after he got a whiff of 'the stink', as Mendelssohn was inspired to write his *Hebrides* overture after visiting Fingal's Cave? 'CAN'T ANYTHING BE DONE?' Moore asked, and wondered how long Douglas could continue to present itself as a healthy resort when such a pungent 'pong' assailed the visitors even from the safety of a horse tram!

Not everyone was in sympathy with Moore's reminiscences or agreed with his views. The writer of the *Roving Reporter's Notebook* in *Holiday News* later that month headed 'You write a lot of piffle'\* clearly believed that nostalgia was not only 'a thing of the past', but should stay there, and that all was well with the visitor industry on the Island in 1957. August brought with it warm, sunny mornings but chilly evenings. Many visitors continued to enjoy excursions to Douglas Head by the Corporation yellow bus from Peveril Square to see Harry Orchid's popular concert party shows in the open air, and thence on to Port Soderick via Marine Drive. Onchan Head Pavilion with 'cod' hypnotist Josef Karma, and the White City pleasure ground, continued to offer daytime family fun.

\* See *Holiday News* 20.08.1957

## **Holiday Gossip**

Those columns in the local newspapers devoted to the eccentricities of holiday makers often published small items of curiosity. Here is a small selection from 1957:

A group of visitors from Lancashire were heard singing Christmas Carols in the Corner Lounge of the Villiers Hotel during August Bank Holiday!

'Who the 'eck is Bel Ami when she's at home?' asked one holiday maker. Visitors were encouraged to visit Laxey Glen Gardens and find out for themselves.

\* Bel Ami and her eighty recorders!

The stars of the season were occasionally pinned down and interviewed which sometimes led to interesting snippets of personal information not generally known to the public leaking out.

Ronnie Aldrich revealed to Pandora in the *Ramsey Courier*\* that before he trained as a concert pianist, he had, by the age of thirteen, become a proficient violinist in the Folkestone Municipal Orchestra. The Aldriches enjoyed exploring the Island by car and had become 'experts' on Manx folklore to the amazement of their friends.

Ivy Benson, too, had entertained hopes of becoming a concert pianist, and played her first piece in public at the age of eight. She then studied painting and sculpture at Leeds College of Arts but turned to dance music after she taught herself to play the saxophone in three months. Ivy Benson had quickly learned that on the Isle of Man the holiday audiences expected the widest range of music possible, everything from Bach to Boogie-Woogie to suit 'toddlers, teens, newly-weds and old-timers. That season she was also determined to learn to drive a car!

Phil Moss spent years brass banding and was once an instructor for the WAAF Bugle Band. 'Playing for "old time" is anathema to some band leaders', he told one interviewer, 'but for me it is one of my greatest pleasures, for with "old time", you feel you are really playing for the PEOPLE'.

Ken Mackintosh, too, knew exactly what was required in Douglas: 'The first essential for the important summer booking in Douglas is that the band should be able to play in the 'strict tempo' demanded by dancers'.

\* Pandora, *Ramsey Courier*, 16.08.1957

### **The Villa Marina**

There was 'Something for Everyone' at the Villa Marina that season, with all the attractions of a family resort: dancing, flower-bedecked gardens, bathing beauty contests, a cosy café and a shopping arcade. Two pre-season events, however, hinted at things to come at the Island's entertainment venues: boxing returned to the Villa with thirteen contests organised by the Manx Amateur Boxing Club on Friday 10th May. A Whole-Island Rock Competition was held with heats in Ramsey and Douglas and the final on 17<sup>th</sup> May. Competitors were expected to choose one slow number and one fast one.

Dancing for the season commenced in the Royal Hall during the last week of May with Harold Moorhouse and his band. The Villa Marina Gardens opened for the summer on Sunday 2nd

June with Ivy Benson and her All Girl band for their third season. They received a tremendous reception especially after Ivy announced her forthcoming engagement to the crowds.\*

\* See a fine photograph of Ivy Benson in the Villa Marina Gardens, crowded with visitors, the cafés and the stars in *Holiday News*, 18.06.1957.

\* See a photograph of Ivy Benson, her white poodle Pepe, her fiancé and father in the *Isle of Man Examiner* 07.06.1957.

So impressed were Douglas Corporation with Ken Mackintosh\* during his short engagement the previous season that he was engaged for a fifteen-week season in 1957. He, too, received 'a great welcome back' before a packed house, and told the audience at his Sunday concert on 2<sup>nd</sup> July that he and the boys were 'delighted to be back on your lovely holiday Isle'. Voted 'an excellent evening's entertainment', the programme featured a strong vocal team headed by twenty-year band veteran, baritone Kenny Bardell, Bobby Johnson, a member of the brass team with his vocal impressions of Johnny Ray and Billy Daniels, and newcomer Kay Elvin, whose 'charming voice and personality' endeared her to the audiences that season. She also led the band's vocal quartet, the Mackpies. Pianist Jackie Bourne played a 'potted' version of Grieg's piano concert 'in swing time!', and other band soloists, including the trombone section who won great applause with *Holiday for Trombones*, and saxophone solos from Ken Mackintosh himself, ensured that the programmes were varied and entertaining. There were even a few Rock 'n' Roll numbers 'which the audience didn't seem to mind'. A popular soloist in every concert was Frederick Curzon,\* broadcasting organist and composer.

\* See a fine photograph of Ken Mackintosh and his band in *Holiday News*, 25.06.1957.

\* British composer, pianist, organist, and conductor in various London West End theatres. A successful composer in the British Light Music genre - *The Boulevardier*, *The Robin Hood Suite* which included *The March of the Bowmen*, the *Dance of the Ostracised Imp* and the *Cascade Waltz* - for films, radio and the theatre.

### **'Glad You're Back . . . You're an institution now, Ivy'.**

Ivy Benson's band included three newcomers that season. Nineteen-year-old Stella Wenlock (real name Gloria), from London, took the place of Gloria Russell, who had left the profession, married a Polish gentleman and started a boarding house in London. She had recently starred in *Kismet* in London and the provinces and she sang the well-loved ballads and musical comedy numbers with a 'a beautiful soprano voice'. The second newcomer was twenty-one-year-old Patsy Blair who joined the band in Belgium after singing with Ted Heath and sang the popular modern numbers. The third new member of the band was multi-instrumentalist Margaret Joyce, who performed on the piano, accordion, xylophone and vibraphone, who had been discovered by Ivy Benson at the final of television show *Bid for Fame*.

Jon Pertwee was the guest artiste at the Sunday Celebrity Concert on 9th June. He was on the Island visiting his colleagues from the Service Players with whom he had the strongest possible links from the war years in Douglas. He was not a conventional comic, rather a man of many parts, but was very much at home on stage in Douglas. His 'antics and stories had everybody rocking in their seats' in a forty-minute turn during which he sang, danced, played the guitar, presented his famous character-study, the postman, and concluded with a fairy tale reading. With his *raconteur* hat firmly on his head, he amusingly recalled his time in

Douglas during the war stationed at HMS Valkyrie, the inauguration of the Service Players, and his old friend Mrs Dale in whose cottage at Greeba he used frequently to stay. The programme was completed with comedy numbers and instrumental solos from Ivy's girls, including a glittering trumpet trio featuring 'ace trumpeter' Robey Buckley, Rene Ames and Elaine Harris. There was an energetic drum solo from Paula Pyke; piano and violin solos from Lilian Jackson and Jean Carr; a saxophone solo from Sylvia Monks, and Puccini's *One Fine Day* sung by band vocalist Muriel Wharton.

Ken Mackintosh and his band broadcast from the Villa Marina on the BBC Light Programme on 15<sup>th</sup> June.

The Sunday Celebrity Concert on 16<sup>th</sup> June starred The Kordites, who provided excellent entertainment during their two appearances, with such vocal items as *The Best Things in Life are Free*, *Zing*, *Green Beret* and *A House with Love*. Ivy Benson's familiar band soloists were joined that evening by organist Frederic Curzon.

### **'The voice of an angel - the wit of a devil'**

Television star Joan Turner, 'the girl with a thousand voices', whom many regarded as the natural successor to Gracie Fields, was the guest artiste for the Sunday Celebrity Concert on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. She was undoubtedly enormously talented, possessed a voice of enormous range, a repertoire that ranged from George Formby to Puccini, but like Harry Secombe, was erratic and undisciplined, and just as likely to dazzle her audiences with show-stopping operatic arias as reduce them to fits of laughter with her brilliant imitations of great singing stars such as Eartha Kitt, Vera Lynn and Rose Murphey. Audiences did not always know what to make of her and were frequently left wondering whether she was a singer or a comedienne. Ivy Benson and Ken Mackintosh's resident vocalists Kay Elvin and Kenny Bardell were in support.

Before the end of the month three programmes of music broadcast from Douglas: the BBC Northern Dance Orchestra on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup>; Music by the Sea from the Palace Ballroom with Phil Moss on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> and on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup>, Ken Mackintosh from the Villa Marina.

A 'big step' for a local group Tom Courtie and his Tomcats was taken with the opportunity to star with Ivy Benson in the Villa Marina Gardens on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> June. After their performance Ivy said 'they did darned well', despite the fact that their lead guitarist failed to appear, having gone to 'tinker' with a friend's bike! A fan helped to secure a guitar for a stand-in.

'They're Here From 'Owdham' announced *Holiday News* on 25<sup>th</sup> June, as the cotton town's Wakes Weeks began on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> in chilly weather following an unbroken spell of warm weather. Overcoats and mufflers were abandoned by Sunday - 'give or take the odd spot of rain' - as the good folk of Oldham, together with their fellow holiday makers from Macclesfield, Middleton, Chadderton, Failsworth and Hollinwood, congregated in force at the open-air service at Kirk Braddan.

The Sunday Celebrity Concert on June 30<sup>th</sup> starred Fayne and Evans, 'radio's sporting commentators', with their signature tune *Exactly Like You*, supported by Ivy Benson. Theirs was a unique act in which they depicted two radios, side by side, with perfectly 'in sync'

commentaries on a test match *à la* John Arlott. Their 'take' on how radio might have sounded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and impersonations of radio and television personalities, including one Gilbert Harding taking over *Housewives Choice* and an 'interview' with a heavy smoker, also caused plenty of laughter. Nevertheless, they were very nearly upstaged by nineteen-year-old soprano Gloria Wenlock who received a big ovation and virtually 'stole the limelight' from the guest stars. She sang Stephen Adams' fine old Victorian ballad *The Holy City*, Cartillo and Cordiferro's Neapolitan 'weepy' *Catari*, and *Bless This House* with 'great depth of feeling and with every word crystal clear'. Margaret Joyce delighted the crowd when she played the accordion and the xylophone simultaneously with her feet! Patsy Blair's 'bright and lively' song and dance numbers included *Hound Dog*, *Roll the Carpet Up* and *Rock a-beatin' Boogie*. Plenty of encores were demanded, but not for the Rock 'n' Roll numbers, which suggests that a typical Ivy Benson audience was older than a Ken Mackintosh one. Among the band's soloists making a name for themselves with the holiday makers were trombonist Sheila Lugg, charismatic drummer Paula Pyke, and Australian trumpeter Robey Buckley.

Ivy Benson's Talent Contest in the Villa Gardens during the first week of June was won by two boys, aged eleven and ten from Edinburgh, enjoying their first holiday on the Island as Ivy's guests, with their guitar and vocals Rock 'n' Roll act, which was described as 'first rate'.

Ken Mackintosh presented what might have been called 'The Ken Mackintosh Band Show' on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> July when he introduced a quick-fire medley of rhythmic numbers in the styles of Billy May, Mantovani and Glen Miller. Mackintosh himself played Duke Ellington's *Harlem Nocturne*, and other band soloists featured in *Trumpeter's Lullaby*, *Holiday* for trombones and a piano solo derived from Grieg's piano concerto played by Jackie Borne. The band played the *Dam Busters' March*, *The Saints* and *Wembley Stadium*. Vocalists Kenny Bardell (with the band since it was formed in 1949) earned a huge ovation when he sang *I give you the world* and *You'll Never Walk Alone* and Kay Elvin was warmly applauded when she sang *Mr Wonderful*.

### **Mr Heart-Throb comes to town**

With his dark, curly hair and 'a smile that never fades', 5' 11" tall Frankie Vaughan, 'Mr Moonlight', packed the Royal Hall on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July and immediately raised the roof with a 'zippy' performance of *Sitting on Top of the World* accompanied by stamping feet, whistles and clapping, and 'with quite a lot of girls screaming'. Described as 'pure dynamite', with his 'flashing, handsome film-star looks and amazing vitality', he sang number after number during a thirty-minute appearance and proved that he was the idol of both teenagers and older folk too. The applause was deafening as the crowd – young and old alike - clapped and roared when he sang *Green Door*, *Lucky Seven*, *Give Me the Moonlight*, *Seventeen* and *Stealing*. One local reviewer caught the atmosphere of his performance perfectly: 'Sometimes . . . he just wades into a song like a boxer out for a quick knockout. Then next, he is more precise and elegant for the mood of the song . . .' at one point he suddenly leapt from the stage to indulge in a private R&R session with a member of the audience. As it happened, his latest film, *These Dangerous Years*, in which he played a tough gang leader and wannabee Rock star from the Liverpool slums called up for military service,\* was showing in Douglas at the Picture House, and Vaughan made several surprise appearances in the town, including a brief one at one of Ivy Bensons' afternoon concerts in the Villa Gardens. Ivy Benson and her girls were in support

and contributed an entertaining sequence entitled '1920' which featured vocalist Patsy Blair, tenor saxophonist June Pressley and Phyl Brown. Ivy herself joined in the *Banana Boat Song*, and Gloria Wenlock and Margaret Joyce in supporting acts.

At the rehearsal with Ivy Benson before the show he sang snatches of twenty songs at break-neck speed and thanked her and her girls for sight-reading the unfamiliar arrangements so professionally. At the end of the evening he paid a generous tribute to Ken Mackintosh's band vocalist Kenny Bardell, 'a much better singer than myself', whom he told the audience was 'the most underrated singer of the day'. After the show there was a backstage reunion with Ken Mackintosh, with whom Frankie Vaughan made the records that had rocketed him to fame five years earlier. Hundreds mobbed the stage door as he left.

'Will the real Mr Vaughan step forward?' requested Fenella of the *Isle of Man Examiner*,\* and in an in-depth interview with the star was able to tease out some biographical details and bring him much more into focus and altogether more human than his variety stage and screen *persona* might suggest. As a performer: 'Dynamite!' as he 'kicked, wiggled and jumped on and off the stage like an athlete' and against a background of screams and clapping that nearly took the roof off. Yet despite his Italianate 'smouldering' good looks, off-stage he was quietly spoken, a devoted husband and father of two who began life as a commercial artist - and still liked to paint and draw for relaxation - who, only after his apprentice years as a song and dance man, became the immaculately dressed recording star with his trademark top-hat, bow tie and tails. At heart he always remained the star who chose a quiet family life.

Ever self-effacing and polite, he even thanked Fenella for giving up *her* Sunday to interview him!

\* Set during the years when Britain still retained National Service, the film, Anna Neagle's debut as a producer, also starred George 'Inspector Wexford' Baker, Carole Lesley and Thora Hird, and was to have starred Diana Dors, who declined a role as she was in Hollywood. Generally thought to be 'decent' rather than 'outstanding'.

\* *Isle of Man Examiner* 19.07.1957. Born Frank Fruim Abelson in Liverpool, his Jewish-Russian grandmother once told him in her thick accent 'you are my number vorn grandson', and so 'vorn' became Vaughan! He had been member of the Lancashire Lads' Club as a teenager, and later, appalled at the level of violence among young people, he later became associated with a youth project in Glasgow's notorious Easterhouse. Having been steered in the right direction as a lad in Liverpool, he had recently contributed £5,000 to the National Association of Boys' Clubs.

And finally: Frankie Vaughan strolled around Douglas on the Saturday before his concert but was unrecognised until he arrived at the Rose Show in the Villa Gardens. When approached by a young girl who asked for his autograph, he wrote in her book:

*Roses are red, violets are blue'*

*I'm Frankie Vaughan - who are you?*

'Teenland' in the *Isle of Man Times*\* asked the question: 'Is Rock 'n' Roll on the way out, or here forever?' The Manx Top Ten in mid-July seemed to confirm that Rock 'n' Roll was here to stay and was taking over the 'pop' charts. Frankie Vaughan did not make the top ten that month which showed Elvis at number 1 with *All Shook Up*; Lonnie Donegan at number 3 and 4; Bing Crosby at 9; Tommy Steele at number 12 with *Butterfingers*; Gracie Fields at number

13 and Nancy Whiskey with *Freight Train* at number 14, and newcomer Terry Dean (the 'Dean-ager!') at number 15 with *White Sports Coat*. Vaughan appeared in the charts in August when *These Dangerous Years* reached number 7, but soon fell to number 10.

\* 'Teenland', *Isle of Man Times*, 19.07.1957

The local cinemas did brisk business throughout the season with such offerings as *After the Ball* at the Strand Cinema, Port Erin, the life story of Vesta Tilley, starring 'zestful' Pat Kirkwood as Tilley and Laurence Harvey as her husband Walter de Freece, which was bogged down with a yawn of a script occasionally relieved by lively, more-or-less authentic music hall scenes. At the Picture House, *Gunfight at the OK Corral*, with Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas as Wyatt Earp and Doc Holiday, a 'ruggedly acted' western loosely based on a true event. *Heaven Knows Mr Allison* with Robert Mitchum as a marine and Deborah Kerr as an Irish nun stranded on a Japanese occupied Pacific island, who develop an unlikely friendship, but not much else.

### **Not so 'Glum' . . . Ron without 'Eth**

Australian comedian Dick Bentley with violin, 'slick patter', 'laughs galore' and many quips and stories about his colleague Jimmy Edwards (Pa Glum) from radios *Take It From Here*. Special praise was reserved for Gloria Wenlock, Ivy Benson's 'straight' singer, who sang a selection from *The Desert Song*, *The Londonderry Air*, *Around the World*, 'and captivated her audience with the *Holy City* and encore *Ellan Vannin*, which was encored. The excellent band soloists including Paula Pyke, Robey Buckley, Patsy Blair, Nina Dellamura and Margaret Joyce.

The Sunday Concert on 4th August featured Ken Mackintosh and his orchestra and organist Frederick Curzon. Kenny Bardell and Kay Elvin introduced popular Scottish ballads into their part of the programme which went down particularly well with the large Scots contingent in the hall; the medley 'Round the World' with music from many countries was especially popular. There were brilliant trumpet solos, *O My Papa* and *Cherry Pink Mambo*, from Johnny Harris, who perpetrated a joke on the audience when Britain's answer to Marilyn Monroe, model, actress and singer, and 'blonde - but by no means 'dumb'- bombshell', Sabrina was announced, but turned out to be Harris in disguise. The following Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> August, the Ray Ellington Quartet appeared as Ivy Benson's guests. Ellington's vocalist Shirley Jackson proved to be a 'a big success', and the quartet's *Giddy Up*, *Tutti Frutti* and *Banana Boat Song* were among the numbers 'gay and blue, hot and smooth' that delighted the packed house. Ivy's charming vocalist Gloria Wenlock opened with a selection from *The King and I* and ended her part of the evening with *My Hero*. Jean Carr was the violin soloist, and newcomer Margaret Joyce entertained on the xylophone, vibraphone and accordion and with a spot of tap dancing. The Sunday Concert on 18<sup>th</sup> August also featured Ken Mackintosh with his 'show band show'.

The London impresario Philip Ridgeway visited Douglas for the second time in 1957 at the August Bank Holiday to investigate 'the possibilities found here', including a discussion with local girl Shirley Currie for whom he had arranged a recording with Columbia Records. There was also a nostalgic reunion after twenty years with Harry Orchid, and meetings with old friends Ivy Benson and Ken Mackintosh, and he departed even more convinced of the Island's possibilities.

A young Sheffield trumpeter, Marie Fawbert,\* who had come to the Island with her father on the off-chance of an audition with Ivy Benson, won the talent competition that week and was rewarded with a contract to join the All-Girl band, effective immediately.

\* See photographs in *Isle of Man Examiner* 23.08.1957 and 27.08.1957

Dick Emery was the guest celebrity at the Sunday Concert on 25<sup>th</sup> August, and 'entertained in grand style', and sang in a fine, almost operatic voice *Come Back to Sorrento* and *That Old Black Magic*. He was supported by the Lhon Doo Choir, directed by Douglas Buxton, just prior to their television appearance in *Holiday Town*. Ivy Benson provided the musical interludes which featured popular soprano Gloria Wenlock, trumpeter Robey Buckley, 'peppy' personality girl Patsy Blair and Margaret Joyce with a selection of 'evergreens' on the accordion, xylophone and vibraphone.

At 10 o'clock in the morning on 6<sup>th</sup> September, a day-or-two after she was spotted shopping for her trousseau in Douglas, Ivy Benson and her fiancé USAF Master-Sergeant Berthold Brantley Callaway from California, who saw action in Africa and Italy during WWII and subsequently in Korea, attended the Douglas Registry Office, Athol Street, for what was billed as 'the first big show (business) wedding on the Island for years', and traffic in the area was nearly brought to a halt. The bride was given away by her father 'Digger' R. Benson, a musician himself. Two hundred invitations were issued and among the guests were the Mayoress of Douglas, and drummer Paula Pyke, Ivy's attendant and witness. The other guests included one of the Tanner Sisters and all twenty-one members of Ken Mackintosh's band. The reception took place at the Reading Room at the Villa Marina, 'exquisitely decorated with floral arrangements' for the occasion. Britain's youngest orchestra leader, Alyn Ainsworth of the BBC Northern Dance Orchestra, was among the well-wishers along with organist Frederick Curzon, Phil Moss, local entertainer Stella Hartley, and Ivy's constant companion, Peppy the white French poodle. Ivy's girls formed the guard of honour. Many telegrams were read out during the reception including those from The Crazy Gang, Wilfred Pickles, Ted Heath, Harry Secombe, Edmundo Ross and Billy Cotton. An hour and a half after the reception Mrs Ivy Benson Callaway was in the Villa Marina Royal Hall preparing for the afternoon concert. The couple then hoped to enjoy a weekend 'somewhere quiet' on the Island before Ivy was engaged for the Old Time Dance Festival, and then dashed off to Belfast and Southern Ireland, at which point her husband returned to his base at Upper Heyford in Oxfordshire.\* The honeymoon would have to wait until December

\* See *Isle of Man Times* 06.09.1957, *the Isle of Man Examiner* 13.09.1957 and *Holiday News* 10.09.1957 for wedding photographs.

\* Inevitably, perhaps, their very different careers developed into a circle of commitments that could never be squared. Ivy Benson ultimately refused to return to America with her husband and they divorced in 1964.

Ken Mackintosh's final Sunday Concert of the season took place on 1<sup>st</sup> September; he and his band left the Island on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> following a Grand Farewell Dance the previous evening. The following Sunday the concert was given by Ivy Benson, organist Frederick Curzon and the Manx Girls' Choir, conducted by Harry Pickard. The well-filled hall responded with loud applause at the end of the evening. 'Music for All' was the title of the concert on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup>

September with the Lon Dhoo Male Voice Choir conducted by Douglas Buxton with guest artistes Owen Brannigan, baritone, John Mitchinson, tenor, and Elizabeth Simon, soprano.

*Holiday News*\* published a short nostalgic piece entitled 'Snowflake' Waltz Kept Them Cool!', a reminiscence of 'Victorian Nights of Gladness' in Douglas during the Victorian and Edwardian eras, when Harry Wood had been musical director of the Palace & Derby Castle Company, decades before the first modern dance bands came to the Island. The writer recalled that each dance hall had its own distinctive programme of dance music each week. The evening might begin with a lively march, but the dancing commenced with a Waldteufel waltz and ended hours later with a Strauss waltz. Such was the profusion of famous waltzes, polkas, lancers, quadrilles and mazurkas, Harry Wood virtually never had to repeat a programme of dances during the season. As the average time for a Viennese waltz was around ten minutes, the ladies 'in their high-necked dresses, puffed sleeves and frocks that swept the floor' must have been very warm. The highlight of each evening was the Snowflake Dance during which the lights were dimmed as thousands of tiny pieces of paper drifted down from the ceiling, giving at least the illusion of a winter's night. Those members of the orchestra not actually playing, sang the following refrain: 'Softly the snow falls in the night; covering the earth in a mantle of white'.

\* *Holiday News* 10.09.1957

As the season closed there came the surprise resignation of S. A. Perry, the Entertainments Manager, Douglas Corporation, whose duties included the management of Villa Marina. Appointed from Eastbourne, he had been in post since 1946.

### **Palace Ballroom and Coliseum**

The Palace Ballroom opened for the season on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> June with Phil Moss and his band in the ballroom who received a warm welcome prior to their engagement at the Derby Castle for the rest of the season.

From June in the Coliseum Stanley Myers presented his 'Laughter show' *Stars on Parade*. Billed as 'the big 'live' show of the season . . . a festival of fun, glamour, melody and thrills', it began its summer run of 'down to earth, fast-paced, side-splitting sketches' with 'quick-fire' Scots comedian Jack 'the life and soul of the party' Anthony, a popular pantomime star in Glasgow who never quite made top-billing south of the border, in his most popular sketches, the dentists waiting room, and one about a 'minister' entitled 'Truth Will Out', where he was assisted by straight man Bond Rowell and blonde 'bombshell' Bertha Ricardo. Comedian Billy Stutt, the 'bright-and-breezy bhoy from ould Oirland', whose patter and tall tales were 'guaranteed to cause the most stolid patron to rock in his seat'. Britain's leading sixteen-strong teenage vocal group, Francis Langford's Singing Scholars, the 'minstrels of the microphone', delivered their repertoire that encompassed *Ave Maria* and Rock 'n' Roll with 'lively abandon' and impressions of famous recording stars accompanied by guitars, 'so beloved of modern youth'. The 'out of the rut', very slick 'sensational' continental acrobatic troupe the Trio Rayros, dressed as railway porters, demonstrated 'tricks and twists at lightning speed', and vied with jugglers and spinners with cups, saucers and cut-glass bowls, Eddie Rose and Marion to dazzle the audiences. The 'Xyli-fool' Sid Plummer, a great pantomime favourite,

with his unique novelty xylophone virtuoso act - his chromium plated instrument was 'customised' with as many gadgets as he could fit onto it - produced from his instrument snakes, sausages and flowers, and such effects as smoke, donkey's legs and even a pair of hands that clapped along in time! The 'sweethearts' of the show, vocalists Frank Crane and Joy Harris, presented a glittering *Winter Wonderland* sequence featuring the 'shapely, vivacious and eye-catching' Palace Starlets dance chorus. This troupe of 'beautiful girls dressed in startlingly colourful costumes' included two local girls, Maree Corkill, a teacher and medallist at the Manx Music Festival who had appeared professionally in Glasgow, and Barbara Evans, a dance teacher and principal of the Douglas Academy, in a song and dance routine entitled *April in Portugal*. The orchestra was conducted by Louis Arthur who, according to the *Mona's Herald*, was 'right there' throughout each performance.

### **More popular than ever**

From their signature tune *There's Something in the Air*, to the Rock 'n' Roll inspired finale, there was 'never a dull moment' during the Sunday Concert of 31<sup>st</sup> June which featured the immaculate Ronnie Aldrich and the Squadronaires, back for a sixth successive season, who received a huge reception. The show was marked by the 'usual uproarious comedy' in typical Squads style – they might have been described as a comedy band – featuring newcomer vocalist and tenor saxophonist Derek Butterworth, and 'cheery and chubby' bass Andrew Reavley, who led the 'hand clapping' numbers. Lancashire's Romantic singer Ken Kirkham (who had appeared with Joe Loss before being invited to join Ronnie Aldrich) was in better voice than ever in sentimental *When I Fall in Love* and songs from *Carousel*, and charming Yorkshire lass Jean Baxter sang numbers both smooth and swinging including *Mr Wonderful*. There were antics-a-plenty from stalwart Peter Morton, the opera-trained comedian of the band, who wrote all the comedy numbers including *The Holiday Feeling* and *Peasant's Opera*, and drummer Paul Brodie. There were piano solos from Aldrich himself, and 'sweet melody and rip-roaring rock 'n' roll from the band in *South Street Rampart Street Parade*, *String of Pearls* and *When the Saints Come Marching In*. Cliff Townsend's singing saxophone and clarinet was heard in Coates' *Sleepy Lagoon*

A young Bob Monkhouse,\* billed as 'the popular TV star', was the guest celebrity at the Sunday Concert on 7<sup>th</sup> July, and kept the audience of two thousand in high holiday spirits with his quick-fire patter, stories, jokes and songs. As one reviewer wrote: 'it was one long laugh lasting thirty minutes'. The welcoming applause had been thunderous but he received a tremendous ovation when he sang *I'll See You in My Dreams* to a young lady in the audience who was celebrating her 21st birthday in the darkened hall, lit only by audience cigarette lighters and matches! Margaret West, 'red-headed vocalist', received a terrific reception with popular and classical songs such as *Granada* and *The Holy City*. In support, the Squads were 'on tip-top form', and earned themselves an especially warm round of applause when they played *I'll Take You Home, Kathleen* for a Belfast couple celebrating twenty years of happy marriage. There were the usual comedy numbers featuring the band's musician entertainers, replete with holiday quips about boarding houses, landladies, ferries and horse trams.

\* Bob Monkhouse was a top of the bill stand-up comedian, radio and television celebrity, all his long career, and like his contemporary Bruce Forsyth, constantly adapted his material to suit the changing times. Originally a cartoonist, he was an actor, singer, script writer and the inventor of thousands of jokes, gags and one-liners.

The Squads were on equally good form the following Sunday, 14<sup>th</sup> July, when their excellent vocalists and fine players gave a 'first-rate' programme of popular dance, solo, comedy and modern numbers topped off by 'Crazy' Peter Morton's strip-tease version of Elvis Presley's *Heartbreak Hotel*.

### **Have ye all paid ye fines?**

This was the opening 'crack' at the Sunday Celebrity Concert on 21<sup>st</sup> July starring Scottish comedian Jimmy Logan which was much appreciated during Scot's weeks at the Coliseum. He gave his, by now, obligatory 'Teddy Boy' sketch, and earned waves of applause during an act characterised by boundless energy, antics of all kinds and constant patter. It was all 'homely yet rollicking' according to one commentator. For the sketch Keeping the Streets Clean he came onto the stage hauling a corporation dust cart. The most memorable moments came when his lilting voice led the many Scots in the audience in singing 'the old nostalgic songs', for his third appearance of the evening he appeared in a bright tartan jacket. The Squads provided the rest of the programme in their usual style and presented the entire Sunday Concert once again on 28<sup>th</sup> July.

Stan Stennett,\* that 'crazy fellow . . . certified insanely funny', with off-beat 'tall tales', one-liners, an excellent skiffle guitar and impressions of famous stars delivered in a range of 'strange vocal effects', was the guest celebrity on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August, and doubtless the audience 'roared' at his 'seaside postcard' jokes such as: 'My mother-in-law is so bandy-legged, that she is the only women I know able to walk up a bowling alley whilst the game is still going on!' The Squads were in support with Gary Miller in particular pleasing the crowd with a selection of songs both 'pop' and Romantic.

\* Welsh-born Stanley Llewelyn (Stan) Stennett was one of many stars who achieved fame through the wartime show *Stars in Battledress*. He then became a member of the Harmaniacs comedy vocal trio but became known as a solo comic on the radio show *Welsh Rarebit*. He was a popular pantomime star and seaside entertainer for decades, a permanent fixture in the *Black and White Minstrel Show*, who made appearances in *Coronation Street*, *Casualty* and *Crossroads*, and in the 1990s, presented a country music show on Welsh Radio. His 'gag' book was estimated to contain 25,000 jokes.

The Sunday Concert on 18<sup>th</sup> August featured the Squads' by now familiar holiday showband show, and the following Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> August, Lancashire favourite Ken Platt, currently starring in ITV's *Spot the Tune*, was the guest celebrity comedian who entertained the audience with his topical showbiz yarns and anecdotes about his summer season in Blackpool. In support, young trumpeter June Birch, fresh from a week at the Derby Castle, joined the Squads for the rest of the programme and sparkled in *Bugler's Holiday* and the *Post Horn Galop*. Tommy Cooper was apparently in the audience and signed autographs during the interval.\*

\* *Mona's Herald*, 27.08.1957. There is no other reference to Tommy Cooper on the Island that season. Perhaps his was a private holiday visit.

The guest celebrity on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September was George Formby, at his best in front of a 'live' theatre crowd packed with holiday makers, who laughed and sang along with him through all

the old favourites. The jokes and patter may have been familiar - the audience knew it all word-for-word - but that hardly mattered. He generously fielded endless audience requests, and still retained what comedian Terry-Thomas had noticed years before: an ability – in common with many music hall veterans whose survival in the business relied on their being able to ‘work’ their audiences - to instil a mood in the theatre to such an extent that anything that followed was in danger of seeming an anti-climax. The main supporting act was the novelty musical turn The Geddes Brothers. At the end of the evening Ronnie Aldrich and Squads bade farewell to Douglas after an excellent season. There was long and loud appreciation for the band singers and for Aldrich himself who signed off with a brilliant performance of the *Warsaw Concert*.

Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> September saw the last night of *Stars on Parade* in the Coliseum. Ivy Benson, Phil Moss and organist Frederick Curzon joined forces for the final dance of the season in the ballroom, ending with farewell speeches, *Auld Lang Syne* and the National Anthem.

### **The Derby Castle Ballroom and Opera House**

The Derby Castle opened for the season on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> July with Phil Moss and his band in the ballroom after opening the early season at the Palace Ballroom. In the Opera House, Atty Baker presided over the variety orchestra in his inimitable way, and led the community singing, the indispensable component of an evening’s entertainment at the Castle.

### **Songs and Smiles at the Castle**

‘Variety at its Best’ boasted the advertising notices, and so it seemed as entertainer and impressionist Alan Clive from the London Palladium soon had audiences clapping along to a Dixieland number. The supporting acts included Margaret West who sang well-loved melodies old and new from ‘top of the pops hits’ to Puccini; veteran music hall cycle act Slim Rhyder, and ventriloquist Griff Kendall; a duo of versatile hand-balancers, The Brauns; tap-dancers Kay and Val Glynne; high-speed tumblers, the Matanzas; up-and-coming young comedian Bob Hatch from television’s *Bid for Fame*,\* and Patsy Sylva, ‘Tom-Boy of the Air,’ in a breath taking, high speed trapeze act.

\* A now forgotten television game show, aired by ABC Midlands between 1956-59 but not networked, searching for stars and personalities of the future. Thousands of viewers in the Midlands and North voted for Bob (Stanley) Hatch who was identified as ‘a boy who would go places’ as a Bid for Fame Comedy Discovery. Many people remember him around the pubs and clubs in the Birmingham area during the 1960s.

‘A bright, top-speed bill’ headed by Betty Driver, comedienne and singer, known as ‘the Manchester personality girl’, was promised for the week of 8<sup>th</sup> July. Her roots were firmly embedded in Variety decades before her *Coronation Street* debut in 1969, and during the 1950s she was widely regarded as the successor to Gracie Fields. Together with her accompanist Albert Sadler she sang *All of Me*, *Mr Wonderful* and *I Only Have Eyes for You*. The supporting turns included glamorous juggler Eve Valere, and versatile comedian ‘of distinct promise’ Johnny Dallas.\* Veteran Yorkshire comic Walter Niblo, ‘as clean as they come’ and ‘as sprightly and youthful as ever’, returned to Douglas with topical stories, dance routines and a cheery song to finish. A marionette act, La Poupee Fantastique, appeared with ‘a remarkable novelty’ which was not revealed in the reviews ‘lest it spoil things for others’;

clever mimic of the stars Peter Quinton became Robert Mitchum one minute, James Stewart the next and finally television curmudgeon Gilbert Harding; international musical clowns, The Bedlams, with concertinas, bagpipes and a one-man-band routine brought a touch of 'big top bedlam' to the proceedings; sleight-of-hand magician Lester Sharpe\* assisted by the shapely Iris performed 'amazing tricks with cards', and finally there was acrobatic comedy from The Falcons.

\* Leicester-born Johnny Dallas, real name Peter Ross was, uniquely perhaps, discovered no less than four times: initially as an impressionist in a touring revue; secondly by Don Ross who engaged him for two years in his revues; thirdly by Ralph Reader who gave him a spot on his *Bid for Fame* television show, and fourthly, after enjoying many seasons in pantomime and summer seasons at Rhyl, as an all-round entertainer, as a straight actor 'who often "popped" up on the telly'.

\* A husband-and-wife specialist variety, cabaret and children's show act which endured for over forty years. During a gruelling six-month tour to India during which they were expected to provide twenty-four changes of programme, they survived by altering their act as little as possible and changing costumes frequently.

The popular Sunday concert on 14<sup>th</sup> July was presented by Phil Moss and his band. The following week, the beginning of Scots weeks, featured the 'Amazing Sporting Memory Man' Leslie Welch; The Hollywood Marionettes and their Rock 'n' Roll skeleton routine; kilted Ann and Bobby Black with familiar favourite Scottish songs and ballads accompanied by an accordion; Canadian comedian and compere Frank Dowie, 'the man women love to hate', with Candy Kane in a Wild West routine involving guns and guitar; unicyclist Pat Rosa; newcomers, the tap-dancing Cooper Twins; Eric Eleifson, with kilts, bagpipes, funny stories and a stentorian voice; novelty juggler Charles Ancaster, and 'mid-air sensations' from The Rosinas.

Stylish concert pianist Patricia Rossborough - lured into the world of the syncopated piano in the 1930s - made a welcome return visit to the Derby Castle for the week beginning 22<sup>nd</sup> July, with a programme of popular pieces ranging from jazz to classics, 'rattled off at great speed'.\* The supporting artistes included juggler Henri Vadden and Partner, brilliant impressionist Clifford Stanton (politicians and showbiz celebs including Gilbert Harding and president Nassar of Egypt!); master of Oriental mystery Cingalee; comedian Freddie Stobbs, 'the lad who put the 'L' in laughter'; glamorous American songsters The Terry Twins; James Tattersall with Jerry & Co., a ventriloquist who uniquely made all his own life-size dummies; the character comedy duo Campbell and Robinson, and acrobats The Two Whittams. Atty Baker provided the musical accompaniments and interludes throughout the evening. The Sunday Concert on 27<sup>th</sup> July was presented by Phil Moss with guest stars Clifford Stanton and Patricia Rossborough.

\* From the evidence of her recordings, her style reminds me of George Gershwin playing his own pieces: surprisingly hectic and with an improvisatory feel to them.

The 'Coloured Harmony Quartette', The Southlanders, topped the bill for the week of 29<sup>th</sup> July with a blend of modern numbers and old-time ballads, supported by the comedy dance routines of Terry and Doric Kendall; American harmonica virtuoso Frank Cook, who played the harmonica with hands free whilst accompanying himself on the guitar, and Liverpool comedian Jimmy Couton, who told 'topical funny stories with a smile'. Described as the cute, shapely blonde personality-plus girl, 'peppy' Mavis Whyte, 'who makes love to a member of

the audience' during her turn (presumably not literally), presented lively impressions of Gracie Fields, Rose Murphey and dynamic dance duo The Horler Twins; old time comedian George Bolton – he was born in 1900 - had the house roaring with his topical quips, and Reg Russell's performing dogs Susie and Company amazed the audience with their canine sagacity.

'A Colossal Show' was promised for the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Grand Theatrical Gala in the Palace Grounds which took place on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> July. The bill was packed with fifty stars from the principal Douglas shows, and the grand sum of £4,698 was raised for local charities.

The Sunday Concert on 4<sup>th</sup> August featured Phil Moss and his orchestra with guest stars The Southlanders, lively songstress Mavis Whyte and comedian George Bolton.

August, the peak month of the season, saw another 'Bright and Breezy Show' commence a week-long run during the first week. Accordionist Chick Robini soon warmed up the audiences and had them singing along to the 'songs of yesteryear'; Gary Miller\* sang romantic ballads and 'swingly' numbers in his smooth and polished style; there was a display of brilliant hand-balancing from The Morlands; Australian illusionist Esme Levante mystified the audiences with her bottomless sugar cannister, and more tales of domestic woe from old friend of the Island Joe Crosbie, described as 'lugubrious' by one reviewer, and 'the chirpy wee lad from Lancashire' by another, who was given a warm Castle welcome. The topical tales and lively impressions from Tommy Locky kept the humour going, and the dexterous balancing feats of foot juggler Levander added a touch of suspense to the evening. A saucy Can-Can from the 'three smart girl dancers' of La Rochelle Trio, and 'fiddle funster', baritone Jock Morgan's *Rock Around the Fiddle* sequence, Scottish and Irish songs and bagpipe imitations, completed a varied family show.

\* Miller's rugged good looks and manly voice ensured that he enjoyed chart success with *The Yellow Rose of Texas* in 1955, and the theme from the television series *Robin Hood* in 1956. He also appeared as an actor in such television series as *The Saint* and *Gideon's Way* and on the London stage. His career flourished in the shadow of such stars as Frankie Vaughan, Michael Holiday and Ronnie Hilton, but was cut short in 1968 when he died of a heart attack.

Advertised as a 'Sparkling Variety Bill', the variety show beginning 12<sup>th</sup> August starred Billy 'Uke' Scott, singer, composer and superb ukulele player, whose 'full of fun' turn belied his brilliant musicianship. With every appearance he enlivened whatever show he was in and consequently his name could be found on variety bills everywhere for summer seasons and pantomime. Sharing the bill were Smoothey and Layton whose old-time music hall patter and warm cockney humour contrasted well with rising young entertainer Des O'Connor, a good opening comic, with an endearing laid-back personality, winning smile, amusing stories and modern songs, who got the audience clapping along to the old favourite *Harvest Moon*.\* The Kordites were a 'slickly drilled' vocal quartet in songs such as *Lucky Old Sun*, *Mountain Greenery*, and *Old MacDonald*; there was high-speed mind reading from The Zodiacs; comedy juggling from Joe de Voe, and hilarious results when The Skating Meteors persuaded members of the audience to join in with them.

\* A mere eight years later he would be the star of his own television show *The Des O'Connor Show*, which ran for eight series. He made a thousand appearances at the London Palladium; the rest, as they say . . .

The week beginning 19<sup>th</sup> August featured the lanky and loquacious ‘flat cap lad’ from Lancashire, Ted Lune,\* whose gentle, daft humour and comic antics made him popular in working-men’s clubs throughout the North and propelled him to the top of the bill in Blackpool throughout the 1950s. The rest of the bill was as varied as one could wish for a seaside entertainment and featured the rich voice of Scottish baritone Alastair McHargh\* who was heard in popular songs at the piano; an illusionist with doves and rabbits, The Amazing Ariston; Desmond and Marks, knockabout comedy; Ross and Howitt who deftly mimed to recordings of Danny Kaye and Eddie Cantor; the ‘attractive’ young trumpeter June Birch delivered her selection of popular pieces in fine style; George and Lydia performed remarkable feats on a ladder; quick-fire comedian George Betton kept the laughs coming, and Kaye Ross danced decorously across the stage with Atty Baker and the orchestra in support.

\* Lune, as in the Lancashire river apparently, but perhaps ‘loon’ as in lunatic might have been more appropriate. He became a national figure when, between 1957-61, he starred as Private Len Bone in Granada Television’s sitcom *The Army Game* along with William Hartnell, Alfie Bass, Bernard Bresslaw and Bill Fraser about that dysfunctional group of conscripts in hut 29.

\* He became a familiar face in Scotland through his regular appearances in the ‘sanitised, tartan *kitsch*, the White Heather Club variety show on Scottish Television, along with Andy Stewart, Jimmy Shand and vocal duo Robin Hall and Jimmy Macgregor (remember *Football Crazy?*), whose picture appears reading a local newspaper on a Douglas street when the iMuseum website is accessed). McHargh moved to Australia and enjoyed a second flourishing career as a television personality, tour operator and cruise director before retiring.

The last week of the season at the Derby Castle began on 24<sup>th</sup> August and starred ‘dusky American songstress’ Fredye Marshall who captivated her audiences by the sheer force of her personality in blues songs, spirituals and comedy numbers including *Basin Street Blues*, *The Battle of Jericho* and *Summertime*. The supporting cast included whirlwind tumblers The Speedacs; juggler, unicyclist and roller skater Colin Fleming; accordion medleys from Dorothy Reid; variety veterans and comedy musicians The Geddes Brothers - they had been one of the first British acts to appear in Russia in the immediate aftermath of World War I - who played saws, bells and bicycle pumps; ventriloquist Jack Beckitt and his talking shoes, one of which was a bulbous-nosed, cigarette-smoking alcoholic called Willie Drinkall; the crosstalk antics of Whittaker and Law, and knockabout capers from The Lynton Boys.

The end of season Mhelliah, billed as a ‘Grand Final Carnival and Jollification’, took place on Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> August.

### **The smaller venues**

Jackie Thorpe and his band played for the dancing at the Palais de Danse with occasional guest artistes such as juggler Charles Ancaster, The Cooper Twins, ventriloquist Tattersall and comedian Freddie Stobbs. Ramsey Swimming Pool and Ballroom opened for the season on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> June with the Hector Gledall Trio.

The programme changed every Thursday at the Crescent Pavilion between June and August when *The Happy Holiday Show* starred ‘vivacious personality girl’ Stella Hartley and her concert party together with ‘chirpy Yorkshire fun maker’ Jay Martel, a ‘breezy comic’ in the George Formby mould. Roger Bourne and Barbara mimed to gramophone records; Lilian

Brown, accordionist, played popular selections; the Dorchester Lovelies and Rosemary Banks provided tip-top dance routines. The accompanist was Harold Hall.

It was 'all the fun of the fair' on Onchan Head and the White City, with 'lightning hypnotist' Josef Karma and assistant Miss Elizabeth packing the Pavilion Theatre day after day. On Douglas Head, Harry Orchid gave two shows daily, described as 'a gay little show' with which to spend a pleasant hour or so. Groudle Glen continued to mount Sunday Concerts afternoon and evening with guest artistes.

There was dancing every day from the end of May at Douglas Holiday Camp, together with 'versatilities' led by Roy Morton, roller skating and Sunday evening concerts at 8.00pm. Visitors could sample bowls, tennis and crazy golf at the Switzerland Sports Field and Café.

The coastal resort Port Soderick, modernised 'and well worth a visit', attracted sixteen thousand visitors each week, and offered a 'charming creek and natural glen', a fully licensed hotel, cliff walks and caves, a 'sunny promenade with a continental air', and entertainment afternoon and evening. Just four miles from Douglas by sea, road, rail or via the Marine Drive, Port Soderick was a popular excursion.

Noble's Park offered such attractions as bowls, tennis and mini-golf; open from the end of May, the Falcon Cliff Hotel's resident entertainer was Howard Rudd; Douglas Bay Hotel had its Texas Bar, music by the Texas Rangers and singer Julie Starr with Ivor Daniels and His Music; there was a swimming pool at The Majestic Hotel and Lido, and dancing and a cabaret in La Tonnelle Ballroom, with a 'Him to Her' dial a dance telephone on each table. There was open-air dancing at the Nursery Hotel, Onchan.

In the opinion of some the Douglas Carnival was marred by bad planning, mainly because the parade set off too early in the evening. Thousands of holiday makers had 'hardly digested their evening meal and were not yet ready to enter into the Carnival spirit; the procession needed 'artificial' light not daylight for the costumes and decorations to make their full impact; the three dance bands in the parade were too close, thus Ivy Benson's band leading the procession 'blasted' Ken Mackintosh and Phil Moss into silence! A Civil Defence van bearing H-bomb and A-bomb warnings was considered to be inappropriate for a carnival parade; the hundreds of voluntary helpers were commended for their efforts, but a lack of response from hotels and boarding houses was disappointing; some did not even bother to arrange coloured streamers for their guests.

'August Bank Holiday spells RAIN', but Douglas was still alive with the sound of music as hotels and boarding houses mounted their own 'convivial entertainments' around a piano, or even with a small band if players could be found. Music publishers' and song pluggers' singing rooms may have largely disappeared by the end of the summer season, but the impromptu sing-songs 'traditionally associated with the Island' are still popular. 'AND the publishers are still waiting to hear what the visitors are singing this week and next before they decide what the pantomime song hits of 1957 will be!' In other words, 'it's the northern holiday makers who pick the winners'.

**The review of the season**

The 1957 summer season was generally rated the poorest since the war, and the facts and figures generally support this depressing view. Particularly unsettling was the fact that visitor numbers declined at the height of the season, and with 506,000 arrivals for the entire period, were reckoned to be down an alarming 78,000 over 1956. Arrivals by sea were down by an alarming 7,000 in July, but it was a record year for Ronaldsway with almost 100,000 summer arrivals, and nearly 250,000 for the year. In the three months May-June-July arrivals by air were 59,768, an increase of 9,360 over 1956, with record arrivals from Blackpool, Manchester, Liverpool and Prestwick, and no discernible effects from coach strikes in England and Scotland. Other resorts: Llandudno, Colwyn Bay, Southport, Rhyl, Scarborough, Morecambe and Bridlington reported increased numbers of visitors. Douglas' 'big brother' Blackpool acknowledged a 'fair to average' season.

*The Isle of Man Times*\* at the peak of the season accepted that '... it cannot be denied that the visiting season so far has not come up to expectations which were aroused by a good beginning in May and June'. The sharp fall in numbers at the time came as a sharp reminder of the vulnerability of the holiday industry and how it can be affected by conditions over which the Island has no control.

\* *Isle of Man Times*, 02.08.1957

### **Decline and fall. . . the writing is on the wall**

The *Ramsey Courier* in August\* painted a bleak, but realistic, picture of the situation and attempted to identify and explain the season's losses: 'The decline in the visiting industry *which has been in progress for several years*, has steadily continued during the present season as week by week the numbers of arrivals by sea have shown a depressing decrease'. Although arrivals by air saw a slight increase '... the melancholy fact remains: the numbers are well and truly down'.

Many reasons were suggested, some familiar, some new, including the increase in continental holidays; the cost of living; poor weather; industrial disputes in the north of England; the growth of car ownership; the 'casino' mentality; the noisy campaign for Sunday opening, and the constant decrying of the amenities on offer. The Island, and Douglas in particular, was attracting 'some doubtful types'; Ramsey and Port Erin, who catered mainly for families, both enjoyed 'a fair season'.

The Island would not be able to support 'the costly social schemes currently enjoyed' if the revenue from the tourist industry continued to fall. If the holiday industry continued to decline, can it be replaced by new industries that will bring employment? The time to act is NOW!

\* *Ramsey Courier*, 23.08.1957

### **Visitors' Voices – 'Brickbats and Bouquets'**

On leaving Douglas by steamer in August after 'a wonderful visit to the island', one seasoned visitor from Buckinghamshire, who had nothing but praise for the island, but . . . admitted he was 'easy going, easy to please and don't look for faults which from my viewpoint do not

exist', overheard several adverse comments from his disgruntled fellow-passengers, and conveyed them to the editor of the *Isle of Man Examiner*.<sup>\*</sup> Here is a selection:

'You can go to Europe cheaper'; '(in Douglas) they skin you alive'; 'they couldn't care less'; 'they resent us at certain places'; 'the transport system is lousy'; 'all we got was chips; chips, chips, we are glad to move'; 'everything is double in price'; 'we got fed up so are going home – it's the last time'.

He concluded that Douglas was losing its popularity and urged the Corporation to 'get sorted out this winter', warning that 'if you don't, in ten years at the present drop in visitors, we veterans who have been coming for years and will not change, will be the only "supporters"'.

In the same issue, another visitor, who signed his or herself 'Fair's Fair', took issue with the standard of catering and accommodation in Douglas, reminding the readers that '. . . visitors mostly come to the Island from industrial areas with frayed nerves (from) working overtime to get holiday cash'. The first impression conveyed to holiday makers upon obtaining a steamer ticket was that they were 'trespassing'; no one seemed very helpful; landladies 'could be more helpful too . . . I stayed in a house with twenty-five other guests and not one was going to recommend the place to another'. The visitor asked 'why must we eat tinned food, especially vegetables, in an Island that should be able to provide fresh food? The only onions I saw were on a hot dog stall'.

The mis-match between boarding house teatimes and train timetables, resulting in many visitors arriving back in Douglas following excursions to Peel or Port Erin too late for tea, was raised every year, but the matter was not taken seriously, and there was little sympathy or flexibility shown by the boarding houses. The 'stupid Sunday licensing laws', described as 'out of date, bigoted, ancient and silly' by one holiday maker, were, as usual, much derided and considered a deterrent to many who did not practice Sunday abstinence; 'visitors are apparently only welcome on weekdays . . .' The lack of children's play areas in hotels, compared to the south of England, was also noted. In one hotel the Yorkshire puddings 'looked as if they had been run over by a steamroller, and in another, the tea 'was sometimes like dishwater'. 'Fair's Fair' did, however, 'admire the parks and gardens and (the) standards of cleanliness and tidiness in the town'. The opinions of visitors from Scotland was altogether more positive, for according to the Glasgow-based *Daily Record*<sup>\*</sup> many who stayed in Douglas during Scots' weeks praised the Island for representing 'the best value for money in Europe'.

<sup>\*</sup> *Isle of Man Examiner*, 06.09.1957

<sup>\*</sup> Cited in the *Mona's Herald*, 04.05.1957

### **'I'm crazy about your paradise island'**

This was the opinion of a Reverend gentleman from 'the dirt of a Durham mining parish', who nevertheless expressed some reservations:

'You have a grand boat service, but why do you cram us like cattle on the vessels after hours of exhausting queueing?' He was also less than impressed with the '. . . take-it-or-leave-it service in the dining room which made us feel not second class, but second rate!' Needless to add, there was 'bedlam from the bars during the entire crossing'.

'The shingle beaches at Douglas are a disappointment (Laxey is even worse, no wonder visitors there are so scarce); modern earth-moving equipment could get rid of all the shingle and reveal the sand'.

'Your trains quaint and perfect for an island of its size, but why stop the run-about fares in the middle of the season?'

The gentleman's lasting impressions were however positive. He heaped praise on boarding houses and restaurants, the 'natural un-forced courtesy he received everywhere (perhaps because he was a man of the church), the cleanliness, the 'finest sea-front in Europe', and many other 'lovely impressions . . . like a fairy kaleidoscope'.

Several holiday makers wondered why there was no first-class swimming pool in Douglas. It seemed that the Parks Committee\* were keeping possible plans for a 'Swim Pool' in Douglas close to their chest. Perhaps they were waiting for the right moment before announcing a large-scale and expensive scheme? Meanwhile the £50,000 re-development of Port Soderick and 'other smaller schemes' were likely to go ahead during the winter.

*\* Isle of Man examiner, 16.08.1957*

The doom and gloom that pervaded much of the comment in the local newspapers was to an extent tempered by those who were thinking constructively about the Island's future prosperity. The Manx Government would have to 'reflect seriously on its spending policies'; Tynwald was urged to exercise more control before costly projects were entered into as the general revenue was likely to be insufficient to meet all the demands made upon it.

### **How to sell the Island\***

'If the decline in the number of visitors continues the whole structure of the economy will be drastically altered'. This was the fear expressed by Donald Lowey, a Douglas businessman and entertainments organiser, who posed the following questions: why did some 14,000,000 potential British holiday makers either stay at home or chose other resorts for their annual holiday? Was the Island doing enough to attract visitors?

He believed that tourist agencies 'sold' the Island only when possibilities at all other resorts, which were easier to fill, and for which, it was suggested, they received larger commissions, had been exhausted. Furthermore, the Island's sales organisation was inadequate. How was one man and a van expected to promote a £10,000,000 business?

Mr Lowey strongly believed that the Tourist Board itself should go into the business of tour operator organising all-inclusive holidays to the Island, an idea he had first put forward three years earlier. Tourist Offices should be set up in the UK in selected areas, dedicated to heavily promoting the Island during the winter months, concentrating on people intending to take their holidays in May, June and early July. A special workforce should be engaged for this task which would return to the Island during the summer months and act as couriers. Furthermore, the whole Island should be promoted - not just Douglas.

The price of an all-in or inclusive holiday would include the cost of trains, steamers, hotel or boarding house accommodation, with seats guaranteed, no queueing and baggage taken care

of. The holiday 'package' could also include an all-Island travel ticket, and tickets to shows and concerts, all paid for in advance, perhaps through local holiday clubs. Attractive rates could be offered by hotels and boarding houses who knew in advance that they were likely to enjoy full occupancy for their rooms.

Money for this scheme should be invested by the Government.

\* *Isle of Man Examiner*, 02.08.1957

The Commercial Travellers' Annual Conference at the Villa Marina on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> June,\* called for the Board of Education and the Board of Trade to introduce a scheme for staggering holidays in both schools and industry. Year after year the summer seasons were becoming shorter with the result that workers' holidays linked to school holidays resulted in cramped holiday resorts, some of which were in danger of becoming depressed. Furthermore, if the season was extended from May to September, hotels and boarding house could offer cheaper rates.

\* *Isle of Man Examiner* 14.06.1957

It was generally agreed that whilst every effort should be made to develop the holiday industry 'upon which we must continue to mainly depend', the base of the Island's economy should be also be broadened through the development of light industries, with greater support for native industries such as fishing. There was also a campaign initiated to attract permanent residents\* to the Island. '. . . an all-out effort should be made to publicise the advantage which the Island has to offer as a place of permanent residence, particularly for those hard-pressed people dependent on fixed incomes', presumably British pensioners. 'A larger resident population . . . and an increase in all-year round trade are the objectives we must strive to attain'. A series of Tourist Board advertisements in the principal British newspapers, together with the publication of a second edition of a permanent residence booklet, produced encouraging results, as did efforts to 'boost' the Island in a small way in East and West Africa!

\* *Isle of Man Times*, 09.08.1957

### **Yobs dominate the headlines**

There was concern that all efforts to show the Island in a favourable light could be seriously undermined by a potentially damaging article in the *People*\* entitled 'Ugly Stories from the Paradise Island', which referred to 'rowdyism' in the Isle of Man and Jersey. Amidst reports of drunken fights between boys and girls, and shameless love making in the open-air, there was a call for Douglas to be cleaned up. 'Lax drinking laws' were to blame; the promenade in Douglas was likened to 'one vast public house'; considerable nuisance was caused by gangs of youths terrorizing passers-by with water pistols, sometimes filled with ink; yobs linking arms and blocking the pavements in Strand Street, defied shoppers not to make way for them. Ronnie Aldrich contributed to the debate by saying that his father no longer risked walking home as louts delighted in shoving old people into the gutter.

\* Cited in the *Mona's Herald*, 06.08.1957

There was a certain amount of bad press in some Sunday newspapers and the suggestion that 'decent folk are shunning the Isle of Man'. Sensational stories of 'sin at the seaside' proliferated, and although wildly exaggerated, contained unsettling elements of truth. The bad behaviour of some teenagers was put down to '... a reflection of a mode of conduct which is becoming all too common'; the Manx experience was no different to other popular holiday resorts. Perhaps the Island was reaping the 'random harvest of ill-conceived campaigns' during the winters of 1955 and '56, namely, the introduction of a gambling casino, a racecourse and dog tracks, and the loosening of restrictions on drinking by 'giving the visitor what he - or she - wants'.

Even if anecdotal reports of outbreaks of drunkenness and rowdyism were frequently far-fetched, and there was no 'wave of teenage terrorism surging through the town',\* the perception that the Island was a place where anything goes 'as long as there was money to be made' had to be firmly refuted. Fortress Mona's Isle armed itself for a battle-royal with the great unwashed from the north of England. 'Hit the hooligans - hit them harder!'\* demanded the *Isle of Man Examiner*, for the Courts were too lenient when dealing with 'drunks, hooligans and unruly mobsters ... the miscreants may be small in number, but they tarnish the Island's reputation'. Penalties, it was demanded, should be severe enough to scare away the 'riff-raff'. Let it be known: 'The Island will stand no nonsense in this matter'.

\* *Isle of Man Examiner*, 26.07.1957

\* *Isle of Man Examiner*, 09.08.1957

Nor everyone experienced unpleasantness in and around Douglas during the summer season. The Douglas Residential Hotel and Boarding House Association denied that rowdyism and drinking was encouraged in the houses of their members. There had been 'a good deal of late-night singing in the streets', but other allegations were 'absolute rubbish'. One Douglas resident testified that 'never once have I encountered an instance of rowdyism, fighting or objectionable drunkenness in ten years of being around the town at all hours of the day and night'. For thousands of visitors and their families the holiday experience on the Island was a peaceful one, filled with happy memories, and, for the time being, they would continue to return year after year.

## 1958

### **'TV or NOT TV . . . live audiences will never die'.**

Was television to blame for the poor support given to the Island's amateur theatrical shows and other outside activities? The question was asked in the *Isle of Man Times* in June\* when it was revealed that seven thousand television sets had been licensed on the Island providing entertainment for not only for families of three or four, but also for their neighbours! It may have seemed that half the population had given up going to the cinema and theatre, but according to D.F. Barwell, Manager of the Palace & Derby Castle Company, the decline in audiences was a national problem; singer Howard Jones (he had appeared with Joe Loss in Douglas for many seasons) remained confident that summer visitors would always demand 'live' shows if the right shows are put on.

\* *Isle of Man Times*, 18.06.1958.

### **1958 in a nutshell**

February 6<sup>th</sup>: the plane carrying the Manchester United football team crashed at Munich airport with the loss, ultimately, of twenty-three lives; February 26<sup>th</sup>: Bertrand Russell launched the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; March: Sir Vivian Fuchs crosses Antarctica using Sno-Cat 'caterpillar' vehicles and dog sledges; the Duke of Edinburgh opened the London Planetarium; work on constructing the M1 began; April 27<sup>th</sup>: BOAC's de Havilland Comet made its maiden flight; June: the first Duke of Edinburgh's Award made at Buckingham Palace, and Gatwick Airport was re-opened by the Queen; columnist Miss Marjorie Proops of the *Daily Mirror* visited the island and was impressed enough to write a flattering article about her experiences; July: the first parking meters are installed in Britain; Charles is appointed the Prince of Wales by the Queen; August: the Notting Hill race riots; October: *Grandstand* and *Blue Peter* first aired by the BBC; the *Black and White Minstrel Show* first aired; the *Flower Pot Men* take their final bow although the original episodes continued to be aired for some years afterwards; the films *Carry On Sergeant*, *Ice Cold in Alex* and *Dunkirk* released; November: Donald Campbell sets the world water speed record at 248.62 mph; Ian Fleming's *Dr. No*, Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana* and the *Bunty* magazine published; Toyah Wilcox and Andy Gibb born; death of suffragist Christabel Pankhurst and British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Arthur Moore, tongue firmly in cheek for his New Year Notebook predictions in the *Isle of Man Examiner*,\* believed that for Manxland's 'worthy optimists' 1958 would be a HAPPY one for those content with life's simple pleasure; SNAPPY for those concerned about the Island's tourist industry if ongoing problems were addressed; for the 'Scottish cousins' in our midst, it was probably already a 'wee DRAPPIE' year, and for the staff at the Jane Crookall Maternity Home a NAPPY New Year! The sting in the tail in his generally light-hearted piece, and a sour note sounded, when he predicted that 'hooliganism will increase in the coming months' as the Island would once again be invaded by 'more roughnecks and teenage "floosies" than ever' . . . DON'T say you haven't been warned!

\* *Isle of Man Examiner*, 02.01.1958

### **'Wake Up Little Susie', Rock 'n' Jive has arrived.**

Port Erin Commissioners agreed to the purchase of a record player and gramophone records (£140) for Bradda Glen during the summer so that music would be available during the day to complement the small ensemble that played for dancing during the evenings. There would be some modern records, said Mr Woolnough, but no Rock 'n' Roll sessions, as 'to play such records in succession would drive people potty'.

A Manx Jive and Rock 'n' Roll Club opened at Burton's Ballroom, Douglas, on 26th February, but many teenagers were turned away as the hall rapidly filled to capacity for the first 'Cool for Cats' session. A BBC recording unit was on hand to record The Sinners for a broadcast on the Home Service the following Sunday. The club would remain open until just before the start of the summer season, then re-open after the tourists had gone.

'Kats Keep Kool' at the Manx Kat, with the opening of the Island's first exclusive Rock 'n' Roll and Jive dance hall in Wellington Street (previously the Theatre Royal), with plans for a shopping arcade, amusements and a Jimpy Snack bar. All the 'the latest pops' Hi-Fi dance music on the Juke Box and Don Williams and the Harlem Boys from June. Thursday nights were designated the King Kat Karnival with the top twenty played on the Hi-Fi. There was also Rock 'n' Roll at the Ramsey Swimming Pool, re-opened in July, on Wednesday evenings.

The most popular records sold on the Island in July included Don Lang's *Witch Doctor*; Buddy Holly's *Rave On*; Sheb Wooley's *Purple People Eater*; Frankie Vaughan's *Kewpie Doll*; Michael Holiday's *Stairway of Love*; Max Bygraves' *Hands* and Perry Como's *I May Never Pass This Way Again* . . . if only!

It was announced that BBC's 'Six-Five Special' was scheduled to be televised from the Villa Marina in August with auditions in the interim for those hoping to take part. The Five Dallas Boys and the Basil Kirchin Band were booked to appear.

### **The Villa Marina**

With the start of the summer season in sight, two prestigious concerts took place at the Villa Marina. On 20<sup>th</sup> May the BBC Northern Orchestra conducted by Stanford Robinson with Douglas Buxton directing the Lon Veah Choir (the Lon Vane and Lon Dhoo choirs combined) performed Haydn Wood's *Mannin Veen* (with the choir joining in *The Harvest of the Sea* at the end) plus music by Glinka, Sullivan and Liszt, and popular choruses by Wagner and Gounod.

On 27<sup>th</sup> May the BBC Northern Dance Orchestra conducted by Alyn Ainsworth gave a concert which was recorded and broadcast on 19<sup>th</sup> June. The guest vocalist was Sheila Buxton, a vivacious young singer from Manchester, who had been discovered when working as a machinist in a leather-goods factory.

There was welcome news when it was announced that the entertainment tax would be lifted from the Island',\* although no guarantee was given that the Palace & Derby Castle Company would reduce the price of their tickets accordingly. The Villa, however, did reduce its ticket prices during the week, on Saturdays, and for the Sunday concerts.

\* *IoME* 22.05.1958; *IoMDT*, 27.05.1958

Ivy Benson and her band arrived on the Island on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> May for a fourth season\* and opened at the Villa Marina the following evening with four new vocalists: Cherry Hutton from Mansfield who sang the light classical numbers and popular ballads; from Glasgow, Pat Gentles in full Scottish 'kit' and bagpipes, who sang her national songs; recent discovery eighteen-year-old June Leslie, who performed the hit-parade numbers, and 'eye-catching' singer and dancer Carol Elvin, who sang popular show tunes. Among the new instrumentalists who appeared at the band's first Sunday Concert on the 25th were 'merry-eyed 15-year-old saxophonist' Gillian Dennis, and violinist Janet West, who joined band stalwarts, drummer Paula Pyke and ace trumpeter Robey Buckley. For the rest of the season Ivy Benson and Ken Mackintosh shared the task of paying for the Sunday concerts.

\* The band were hotfoot from their recent tour of Germany, and from filming the diamond heist caper *The Man Inside* starring Anita Eckberg, Jack Palance and Nigel Patrick, with Anthony Newley and Sid James among the smaller roles, where they play the title theme in a sequence set in a Madrid hotel. See *Holiday News* 14.06.1958 for photographs of Ivy Benson's new recruits.

Frederick Curzon, the popular organist from the previous year, returned to take part in the Sunday concerts and join Ivy Benson in the Villa Gardens from 26<sup>th</sup> May. Enjoyed by visitors and residents alike, drawn to the gardens by the relaxing surroundings, the attractive musical selections, the ever-popular Bathing Beauty contests and novelty talent contests, thousands enjoyed the lazy afternoons in the Villa Marina Gardens during the season.

Ken Mackintosh and his band appeared in the Royal Hall for their Sunday Concert on 1st June together with guest vocalist David Hughes, the popular Welsh tenor well known for his numerous radio and television appearances, who in the 1960s, returned to his first love, opera, and that evening included something for everybody in his programme: *The Donkey Serenade*, the current 'hit' *I May Never Walk This Way Again* and *Jailhouse Rock*. The reviewer wrote that Ken Mackintosh's success was due to the fact that 'he has a keen appreciation of just what the British – and Manx - public likes'. Regular vocalist Kenny Bardell sang *You'll never Walk Alone*, and versatile Titian red-haired Glaswegian newcomer Shirley Western, appearing for the first time with a top band, sang *Sugar Time* and *Birth of the Blues*. The biggest ovation was for Ken Mackintosh himself for his saxophone solo *Raunchy*. Jackie Bourne, pianist, played the popular 'potted' version of Greig's piano concerto; other band soloists included trumpeter Johnny Harris, Phil Morgan, flute, and drummer Kenny Hollick.

\* See *Holiday News* above for photographs of Ken Mackintosh's band and vocalists.

### **'A thundering good money's worth'**

Joan 'the girl with a thousand voices' Turner received a tremendous reception on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> June, and stormed and clowned her way through a programme of 'potted' opera highlights, 'hit' parade numbers and a selection from *My Fair Lady*, all delivered with a wickedly mischievous smile and a host of wisecracks about her 'digs', well-known stars including 'Our Gracie', Vera Lynn, Eartha Kit and Judy Garland and a bewildering host of topical allusions. There were several demands for encores, and she concluded her one-woman *tour de force* with a virtuoso impression of Yma Sumac (the unique, exotic Peruvian coloratura soprano with a five octave range from 'bass' to 'sopranino'.) The Manx Girls' Choir conducted by Harry Pickard were 'on sparkling form' in *The Lost Chord* and *Ellan Vannin*; Ivy Benson and her familiar band soloists were in their 'brightest and breeziest form', featuring the recent instrumental discoveries, clarinettist Gillian Bean, and sparkling new saxophonist Gillian Dennis, 'who is surely booked for future stardom'. Frederick Curzon accompanied and played a stylish medley entitled Fred Astaire Memories. The evening overran by thirty minutes, but nobody seemed to mind.

John Pertwee, 'gagged his way through a series of anecdotes about his war service on the Island, zany antics and jokes' on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> June much to the delight of the audience. The Lhon Doo and Lon Vane Choirs directed by Douglas Buxton received an enthusiastic reception for their selection of Manx songs. Ivy Benson with Frederick Curzon, piano, contributed to a grand finale of 'evergreens' for choirs and organ.

From Monday 16<sup>th</sup> a novel competition, Beat the Band, was inaugurated. Couples were requested to write their names on a card; four cards were selected during the evening and the chosen couples were invited to name up to twelve tunes played by the band in a medley lasting just one minute. The winners each evening took part in a 'jackpot' competition on the Friday evening. The competition, with money prizes ranging from £10-£20, proved to be a huge success and grew in popularity throughout the season.\*

\* See *Holiday News*, 12.07.1958 for photograph of contestants 'puzzling their brains'.

The guest celebrity before a capacity crowd at the Sunday concert on 22<sup>nd</sup> June was petite, blue-eyed, 'curvacious cutie' Marion Ryan, dubbed 'the Marilyn Monroe of popular song', and the star of the hugely popular Granada Television quiz *Spot the Tune*, who sang *It's Wonderful*, *Stairway of Love* and an amusing impromptu duet with a male member of the audience: *You Made Me Love You*. Ken Mackintosh and his band supplied the rest of the programme with a mixture of 'modern tunes and old favourites', a surprise highlight of which was the appearance of 'coloured' vocalist Isabelle Lucas, formerly with Ivy Benson and now married to a member of Mackintosh's band. Generous applause was also reserved for Kenny Bardell, Shirley Weston, Bobby Johnson and for the Mackpies vocal group.

The Sunday Concert on 29<sup>th</sup> June starred the Ray Ellington Quartette with talented and versatile seventeen-year-old Valerie Masters,\* his new featured singer, replacing Marion Ryan in the year of her first single *The Secret of Happiness*. Ivy Benson and her girls were in support together with two local singers, Jean Curphey,\* who sang *The Holy City* and *O my beloved father*, and June Jones, who sang *My Hero* and *Shine through my dreams*. Both artistes were warmly received.

\* After representing Great Britain in the 1961 Eurovision Song Contest, she enjoyed popularity in Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavia, and appeared regularly on BBC Radio and television, in cabaret and in clubs. In 1960 she co-hosted Jimmy Saville's *Young at Heart* and was much sought after for film theme songs, as a backing singer and for television commercials; as an actress she appeared in *Secret Army*, and during the '80s in *Russ Abbot's Madhouse*.

\* Jean Curphey was the niece of Ena Gelling, the Cleveland Medallist at the Manx Music Festival in May that year. Later that year she broadcast from Glasgow, Cardiff and London with Jack Leon, Ray Jenkins and Wilhelm Tausky.

From Monday 30<sup>th</sup> June, Ivy Benson and her girls played for dancing at the Villa Marina each weekday morning at 11.00 until 12.30.

\* See *Holiday News*, 05.07.1958 for photographs of Ivy Benson's saxophone section of five girls and *ibid* 26.07.1958 for a photograph of the trumpet section.

The Sunday Concert on 6<sup>th</sup> July starred The Radio Revellers, the entertaining four-part vocal group, billed as 'Four Men, One Song', singing some of their most popular numbers in their inimitable 'sweet and swing' style, including *Witch Doctor*, *Who's Sorry Now* and *Lollipop*. During a 'typically robust' and popular programme Ken Mackintosh played a saxophone solo *Come Back to Sorrento*; vocalists Kenny Bardell, Shirley Wester, Bobby Johnson, and Isabelle Lucas, who sang *Sweet Little Jesus Boy* and *Bless This House*, delighted the crowd with their selections, and there was a brief guest appearance of radio disc jockey Brian Matthew, who was on the Island to judge the Holiday Fashion Parade in Ramsey during his holiday. From

Monday 7<sup>th</sup> the heats of Lou Praeger's ITV Dream Girl Contest began nightly at the Villa, with competitors, aged over sixteen, resident or non-resident, choosing to wear either day or evening dress. The winners of each evening's contest were selected, not by a panel of judges, but by the audience. The area finals were scheduled to be held in London during August.

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> July witnessed the concert debut on the Island of 'golden boy' tenor David Whitfield, who, microphone in hand and sporting a red carnation, threw kisses to his host of admirers, mingled with the audience and sang fourteen songs during his thirty-five-minute appearance including the theme-song from *The Vagabond King*, *September Song*, *Tell me tonight*, *Cara Mia* and many more, with Ivy Benson accompanying him from the piano. He sang directly to some couples, waltzed with one young lady and serenaded another cheek-to-cheek. Ivy Benson and her girls were on good form in *One O'clock Jump Mambo*, *Raunchy* and a selection from *Showboat*. Young local singer Margaret Curphey\* (no relation of Jean Curphey) sang *Danny Boy* beautifully which was warmly appreciated by the audience; there were vocal solos from Carole Elvin, June Lesley, newcomer Wendy Todd from Newcastle, a violin solo from Thirza Whysall, and songs and bagpipe pieces from ebullient Glasgow personality girl Pat Gentles.

\* Margaret Curphey was born on the Isle of Man in 1938 and won the Cleveland Medal and the Blackpool Rose Bowl in 1960. She went on to study at the Birmingham School of Music and sang with Opera for All, Glyndebourne, Sadler's Wells and English National Opera. She was highly regarded in various Wagner roles under the baton of Reginald Goodall. She retired to the Island in the mid-nineties with her husband, the baritone Philip Summerscales, and continues to play an important part in the musical life of the Island.

On Friday the 18<sup>th</sup> Don Lang, star of BBC Television's *Six-Five Special* whose cover release of *Witch Doctor* had just reached the Top Ten UK singles chart, paid a two-hour visit to Douglas in order to open the new Fox and Lane record store in Drumgold Street. This was something of a homecoming as he first began his show-biz career in Douglas in 1947 as a nervous young trombonist with Bert Noble's band at the Derby Castle, followed by four years with Ken Mackintosh as a trombonist/vocalist before forming his own group, the Frantic Five. He was mobbed by teenagers looking for autographs.

The celebrity guest artiste on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> was Kenneth McKellar making his first visit to Douglas, who received a great reception from the large audience of mainly Scots during Glasgow weeks (Jimmy Logan was also appearing in Douglas that week at the Palace Coliseum, and it was estimated that two thousand of his fellow countrymen were on the Island that weekend). Equally at home in opera, oratorio, the ballads of his native land or in comic songs about midges, he sang *Scotland the Brave*, *Tipperary*, *My Love is Like a Red, Red Rose* and *This Old House*, and even after two appearances the audience was reluctant to let him go. Isabelle Lucas sang *Summertime* and *Stormy Weather* and Ken Mackintosh and his boys supplied the rest of the full programme.

The Sunday Concert on 27<sup>th</sup> July starred the well-established Scottish double act, comedian Chick Murray and Maidie Dickson, his 'tiny' accordionist wife. He, invariably wearing his trademark tartan bonnet, was a highly original dead-pan comic whose surreal meandering monologues earned for him the status as an early 'alternative' comic. They were 'on great

form' at the Villa that night, and their on-going stage gag - that Maidie struggled on, despite his disruptive antics, to perform on her accordion - kept the audience 'in fits'.

A month before the BBC's summertime outside broadcast unit - comprising a compere, a couple of clowns, a pianist and a drummer - was due to record an episode of *Children's Caravan* from the Villa Marina, the entertainments manager, Mr D. Brooke Auty, invited the Island's talented youngsters aged fourteen years and under - excluding pianists and elocutionists - to audition for a place in the show.

There was standing room only at the Sunday Concert on 3<sup>rd</sup> August to hear Eddie Calvert, the man with the golden trumpet, play *Oh My Papa*, *Little serenade*, *Cherry Pink*, *Mandy* and a selection of popular old Italian tunes. He 'fairly brought the house down' when he sang *The Common Touch*. Isabelle Lucas sang the ever popular *Bless This House*; Ken Mackintosh - who was celebrating his 39<sup>th</sup> birthday that week - and the band were as entertaining as ever with their selections, and a surprise guest appearance by five 'top' models from the *Daily Express* fashion show due to take place the following day brought forth a great burst of applause from the appreciative crowd.

One of the most entertaining evenings of the season occurred on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> August when The Morton Fraser Harmonica Gang ran riot on the stage with their zany knockabout antics involving midget Tiny Ross, the butt of many of their jokes, skilful playing and comedy numbers with the Hill Billy Serenaders, and frequently had the audience 'in stitches' of laughter. Ivy Benson provided the musical interludes with her familiar team of instrumentalists and vocalists.

### **Tight jeans and 'sloppy joes' at the Villa**

Advertised as 'an historic transmission', television's *Six-Five Special*\* was relayed from the Villa Marina on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> August for the first time 'abroad'. The non-stop programme of 'sizzling syncopation' starred glamorous, petite Lita Rosa, The Dallas Boys, Lonnie Donegan Ken Mackintosh and his band and the Basil Kirchin Band and was compered by Jim Dale who interviewed guest celebrity Ivy Benson during the show. Furthermore, the two thousand holiday makers and teenagers present - including many members of local youth and sports clubs - were 'well turned out' in blazers and terylene slacks, suits and 'teddy boy' outfits even though they 'sweltered' under the television lamps. The quick-fire performances went without a hitch, and not one second was lost between the acts, each of whom had their own mini platforms placed around the hall. The *Isle of Man Daily Times*\* declined to name the least popular act but was full of praise for Lonnie Donegan when he sang *Nobody Loves Like an Irishman*. The reporter perceptively observed just how much like some traditional Irish Bands Donegan was. 'With a little bit of toning down', he suggested, Donegan could easily take his place at the annual Oireachtas Festival, and with a little 'pepping up', the Irish folk singers could 'more than hold their own' in the company of some of the 'Top Twenty Wonders'. According to producer Denis Main-Wilson, the BBC sent word that the evening has been 'the best ever'.

\* Launched the previous year as soon as 'the toddler's truce hour' was abolished, and commencing at 6.05pm every Saturday evening, this was the BBC's first attempt at a magazine-style programme devoted to Rock 'n'

Roll. The opening sequence consisted of film of a steam train accompanied by The Cort Skiffle Group singing the theme song and compere Pete Murray's catchphrase 'It's time to jive to the old six-five'. The resident band was Don Lang and his Frantic Five. The programme was short-lived as ITV countered with *Oh Boy!* (1958-59). The BBC's *Top of the Pops* began its long run in 1964.

\* *Isle of Man Daily Times*, 19.08.1958

Topping the bill for the Sunday Concert on 17<sup>th</sup> August was Lancashire comedian Tommy 'brother of Gracie' Fields, and there was an especially warm welcome on his return to Douglas for baritone Howard Jones (ex-Joe Loss band vocalist) and partner Reg Arnold, in a night of songs and gags, with Ivy Benson and her girls in support.

Beginning five minutes after midnight and lasting until 4am on Monday morning, there was non-stop dancing by twelve hundred people to the bands of Ken Mackintosh, Ronnie Aldrich, Ivy Benson, Frank Weir and Basil Kirchin, at the Midnight Cabaret Ball at the Villa Marina together with stars of television, stage and radio – who gave their services free – and brought to the Island by arrangement with Silver City Airways. There were special guest appearances from crooner Michael Holliday, ex-Joe Loss band vocalist Howard Jones, entertainer and 'teen idol' Jim Dale, Don Lang, comedians Albert Modley and Ken Platt, master of gobbledegook 'Professor', Stanley Unwin (replacing actor Gerald Campion, alias Billy Bunter), Tommy Fields, film star Joan Rice, who had starred alongside Richard Attenborough, Trevor Howard, Burt Lancaster and Norman Wisdom, and last-minute celebrity, actress Hazel Court. The proceeds from this spectacular event – which culminated with a Tombola draw which alone raised £900 - went to the Winter Hill Disaster Fund.

### **Greetings from Douglas, and a new 'sensation' at the Villa**

On Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> there was a broadcast (telecast) of *Wish You Were Here*\* from the Villa Gardens starring vocalist Carole Carr, Scottish comedian Chick Murray and comperes Peter West and Geoffrey Wheeler. The cameras went on location around the Island BUT forgot to film in Ramsey and the North! Furthermore, the 'Cloak of Manannan' shrouded the event in mist and spoiled the views of Douglas promenade.

\* See *Isle of Man Times*, 22.08.1958 for details of all four broadcasts.

'It's just like a dream', said seventeen-year-old Eleanor Wark from Glasgow, on holiday on the Isle of Man, after she had 'brought the house down' with her performance at a Talent Competition in the Villa Gardens. Persuaded to enter the contest by her sister, she borrowed a guitar from Ivy Benson and wowed the crowd with a selection of Skiffle, Rock 'n' Roll and Hillbilly songs. Instead of presenting her with a prize, Ivy Benson offered her a job on the spot!

The Sunday Concert on 24<sup>th</sup> August was what used to be known in Douglas as 'a high class concert', and featured world-renowned piano duettists Rawicz and Landauer, which, the commentator thought, made '... a very pleasant change in these days of Rock 'n' Roll'. They performed many of their most popular arrangements of the *Warsaw Concerto*, *Legend of the Glass Mountain*, *Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue*, and a selection of Strauss waltzes. The Ken Mackintosh Band Show provided vibrant support. The following Saturday, 30<sup>th</sup> August, was the band's farewell concert at the end of another successful season. The next day there was a large congregation assembled for the Sunday open-air service at Kirk Braddan conducted by

the Lord Bishop of Sodor and Man. These popular events had first started one hundred and two years earlier.

Canadian singing star Edmund Hockridge,\* supported by the Lhon Doo Choir and Ivy Benson and her girls, was the ruggedly good looking celebrity star of the Sunday concert on 31st August. 'They sure breed 'em big and strong in the Canadian backwoods!' said one reviewer noting the 'big ovation for a big guy' - he was over 6 foot tall – with a rich, robust voice to match. The ex-leading baritone of the Canadian Broadcasting Opera Company had dozens of roles to his name ranging from Gilbert and Sullivan to Mozart, Puccini and Benjamin Britten. That memorable evening he sang *Some Enchanted Evening*, *S'wonderful*, *Largo al factotum*, songs from *Carousel* and *The Pyjama Game* 'without microphone hugging', took many bows, gave several encores, and in a reference to the Douglas 'toast racks' quipped: 'What time is the last horse?'

\* See *Holiday News*, 30.08.1958 for an excellent concert preview and photograph.

BBC Television's *Children's Caravan* was televised from the Villa Marina Gardens on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> September despite threatening rain clouds. One hundred young spectators gathered together with selected successful Manx acts including dancers from Peel Clothworker's School, conjuror/magician Violet Geddes, vocalist Pat Shimmin accompanied by Colin Callow, violin, and deserving his place on the Roll of Honour, Keith Dycher, who had rescued a friend from drowning in Peel harbour. 'Professor' Stanley Unwin rambled on about Manx cats and kippers, and Ken Mackintosh and his band kept the dancers happy, supported by singer Carole Carr and comedian Chick Murray, clowns Maxo, Toto and Flippo, 'foot juggler' Levanda, and the Rio Ranch Boys in a selection of cowboy songs.

The Southlanders and Ivy Benson fronted the Sunday Concert on 7<sup>th</sup> September. The following Saturday, the 13<sup>th</sup>, Ivy Benson and her girls gave their farewell dance for the season, and on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> Jean Curphey, now resident in London, but holidaying on the Island with her husband, was the guest artiste with the Lhon Doo Choir and organist Frederick Curzon in an evening entitled 'Music for All'. Sharing the honours that evening was the imposing figure of New Zealand operatic bass-baritone Inia te Wiata, star of the musical *Most Happy Fella*, film actor, and a noted 'whakairo' master Māori wood carver. He was appointed an MBE 'for services in the field of operatic singing' in the 1966 New Year's Honours.

### **The Palace Ballroom and Coliseum**

Ivy Benson and her all-girl band opened the early season in the Palace Ballroom on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> May and Whit-Monday, then transferred to the Villa Marina during the week. Frank Weir and his orchestra gave concerts in the gardens and supported the Personality Parades with musical items. Stanley Tudor and his Compton organ played for dancing in the ballroom at 10.45am and 2.30pm.

The first Sunday Concert of the season in the Coliseum on Whit-Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> May starred popular variety and television personality Bill Maynard, the joint star with Terry Scott of television's *Great Scott – It's Maynard*, with his trademark crew-cut hair and chunky woolly sweater, and a top line variety performer eighteen years before his fame as Yorkshire

Television's *Oh No, It's Selwyn Froggitt*, and thirty-four years before he played lovable rogue Greengrass in ITV's *Heartbeat*. 'A pleasing versatile act of amusing patter' wrote one commentator. Ivy Benson and her girls provided the musical interludes, and the next day transferred to the Villa Marina Gardens for the afternoon concerts.

### **'On with the Modley . . . an absolute scream'**

What was billed as 'the best Palace summer show for years', and 'a sparkling, glamorous seaside revue that was 'a real tonic', was devised and produced by Stanley Myers, and commenced its annual seasonal run on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> June. The verdict was: '. . . a first-class show . . . good, homely stuff that every member of the family can safely listen to . . . clean fun makers and laughs galore' . . . and 'a rare blessing in these days of posturing, croaking, guitar-strumming teenage "idols."' The star of the show, old-school Lancashire comedian Albert Modley, back in Douglas after a gap of six years, quipped 'It's great to work with real artistes – no nudes and no crooners' when he acknowledged his warm reception, and he even saluted the fairies! He soon had the house roaring with his topical patter, impressions, razor-sharp ad-libbing, sly 'digs' at well-known Manx personalities, sketches during which he was assisted by accordionist Chic Robini and Matt Leamore, and clowning during which he accompanied himself on the drums, xylophone and trumpet, and all without recourse to the *double entendre*. The supporting cast were all 'top-notch' variety turns without any weaknesses and included, from Germany, The Two Heinkes, a breathtaking novelty trick cycling act; from France, the gravity-defying antics of high-speed comedy acrobatic duo Les Marcellis; 'sophisticated sorcery' from Jamaican illusionist Vendryes and his 'very pretty assistant', who produced brightly coloured doves from handkerchiefs and the inside of a balloon; the shapely, 'sprightly and attractive' chorus known as the Twelve Zio Angels and their famous Phantom Guard, Fan Fantasy, and Drum Majorette routines; handsome vocalists Pamela Moon, soprano, and Michael Ryan, baritone, in romantic songs and duets; Jimmy Currie's novel *Waltzing Waters*, with foaming coloured fountain jets shooting up in time with the music of Strauss; artistic dancers Ilona and Rudi Szigeti in a colourful Romany *tableaux* entitled *Gypsiana*, and kilted accordionists Dorene and Sylvia Stephens, whose 'Scots Wha Hae' medley of Highland songs soon had the audiences singing along with them. The choreographer was Betty Hobbs and the Coliseum orchestra was conducted by Gordon Webster.

### **'A programme lavishly besprinkled with fun making . . .'**

The Sunday Concert on 29<sup>th</sup> June marked the return of the Squadronaires, one of the few top bands 'who have managed to master the art of comedy'. Band member Peter Morton, an opera-trained baritone and natural comic who wrote his own lyrics and patter for two of the sketches, *Television Opera* and *Ancient Rome*, comfortably assumed the mantle of star of the evening. There were excellent solos from Bernie (Satchmo) Sharpe, trumpet, trombonist Ralph Lenner, saxophonist Lew Warburton, and from the 'the singing saxophone' of Cliff Townsend. Lancashire vocalist Ken Kirkham and charming, attractive soprano Joan Baxter, who introduced a new song, *Fever*, both received a warm reception, as did Ronnie Aldrich himself who played two of his 'brilliant piano arrangements'.

No introduction was needed for Norman Evans on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> July, for many in the audience had happy memories of his two big post-war shows in Douglas. According to one commentator, he was 'at his wittiest and best' and thoroughly deserved his prolonged ovation. The Squads and band vocalists were 'on good form' in support, as they were the following Sunday, and again on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> when Joan Baxter delighted a mainly Scottish audience with *On a Hillside in Scotland*, and Ken Kirkham sang *On the Street Where You Live*, *Cathy* (partly written by Peter Morton himself) and *Because*. Ronnie Aldrich played the *Warsaw Concerto* and *The Man I Love*, and lanky jester Peter Morton - 6 foot tall with a Yul Brynner hair style – caused 'gales of laughter with his zany version of *Witch Doctor*.

The 'House Full' signs were out for the Sunday Concert on July 20<sup>th</sup> which starred 'Scotland's favourite comedian' Jimmy Logan, 'on top form with the crowds rocking with laughter' at his 'Teddy Boy' and Spanish Onion Seller sketches. Later that week show business stars were seen at their warm-hearted and generous best at the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Charity Fete, which took place inside the Coliseum due to unseasonably biting winds. After two hours of non-stop laughter, songs and music, with fewer visitors than in previous years, the sum of £390 3s 7d was raised for local charities.

'Bright, bubbling songstress' Eve Boswell topped the bill for the Sunday Concert on 3<sup>rd</sup> August, and received a 'terrific reception' when she sang *Wonderful Time Up There, I May Never Pass This Way Again* after which the audience demanded *Sugarbush* and *Pickin' a Chicken*. The supporting turns featured comedian Jimmy Gay with a 'smooth line in humour' from the Derby Castle, and the Squads show band. The Squads also presented two hours of rip-roaring entertainment for the Sunday Concert on 10<sup>th</sup> August which featured irrepressible Peter Morton and fellow band clowns dressed in togas in a new sketch 'The Fall of Pompei' or 'See you later gladiator'.

The popular British crooner of the pre-Beatle era, Michael Holliday, whose easy, relaxed, fire-side style earned him two number one 'hit' singles, *The Story of My Life* and *Starry Eyed*, filled the hall on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> August. The story of his life, however, was more than tinged with tragedy, for despite appearances, he suffered from stage fright and bouts of depression, and sadly died in 1963 from a suspected drug overdose. Whilst on the Island he revealed in an interview that he once worked on the Isle of Man steamers and had been a redcoat at Butlins Holiday Camp, Clacton. He shared the evening with Welsh comedian and tenor Ossie Morris, the resident comic on BBC Radio's long-running magazine-style show *Welsh Rarebit*. The Squads 'show within a show' contributed the rest of the entertainment.

Just four years after his show-business debut at the Nottingham Empire as Professor Yaffle Chucklebutty, 'Operatic Tenor and Sausage Knotter', Ken Dodd, who in 1958 had earned his first top billing in Blackpool, rampaged through an evening of rapidly delivered surreal jokes and 'quaint impressions' at the Sunday Concert on 31<sup>st</sup> August. The Squads were in support plus 'lively Canadian entertainers Fran Dowie and Candy Cane.

The big attraction on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> September was favourite Lancashire 'funster' Ken 'as daft as a brush' Platt, the resident comedian on radio's *Variety Fanfare*, whose immaculate timing and ad-libbing soon had the audience helpless with laughter. Ace accordionist Chic Robini

played favourite melodies old and new, and Frank Weir and the orchestra gave a varied programme of pieces to suit everyone.

The final night of that 'end of season tonic' *On with the Modley* was 12<sup>th</sup> September; the Palace and Coliseum closed for the season the following evening.

### **The Derby Castle Ballroom and Opera House**

The Derby Castle Ballroom opened for the season on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> June with Frank Weir (also clarinet and saxophonist) and his orchestra. Likewise, the Opera House (Variety Theatre), with a 'bright and breezy' music hall style show with the orchestra under the direction of new musical director Robert Hartley, formerly the chief arranger for his uncle Ken Mackintosh. It was the 82<sup>nd</sup> year of the 'Hall by the Sea', Douglas's oldest entertainment venue, originally known as the Derby Castle Ballroom, Pavilion and Pleasure Grounds, where in the early years the entertainments began at 10 o'clock in the morning with 'an exhibition of feeding by Performing Seals, and music provided by 'a magnificent band of sixteen talented and carefully selected instrumentalists'.\* Archery, swings, Aunt Sallies and croquet were available during the day, and dancing in the Grand Illuminated Pavilion followed by a Grand Display of Fireworks 'organised by the Company's pyrotechnist' were a feature of most evenings, and all for the price of 1 shilling.

\* *Isle of Man Examiner*, 03.07.1958

There was sadness, though, at the start of the season with news of the death of Douglas 'Dougie' Swallow in Manchester at the age of sixty-three, a treasured link with the Island's 'Golden Age' as a holiday resort. Born in Demesne Road, Douglas, he left the Island aged thirteen to become a military bandsman, and thereafter spent most of his career in Glasgow, Birmingham and Manchester. He returned to Douglas, to the Palace and Derby Castle, for four seasons during the 1930s and played for such stars as Florrie Forde. For the Streatham Locarno Ballroom, South London, he wrote his famous St. Bernard Waltz, an old-time favourite, and in 1937 he broadcast from Birmingham for the Coronation of King George VI.

Top of the bill in the Opera House for the season's new look variety show 'Music Hall', was radio impressionist Peter 'the voice of them all' Cavanagh, a singer turned mimic, whose amazing vocal impressions in the era before television's Mike Yarwood and Rory Bremner included Jimmy Edwards, Norman Wisdom, Bernard Miles and Norman Evans. A veteran of radio's *Variety Bandbox*, and with an amazing resemblance to Field-Marshal Montgomery, he was one of the first impressionists to imitate several characters in the same sketch eg. the entire cast of *ITMA*. His closing routine was famous and began with 'So it's goodbye from . . .' followed by a word or two from all those he had just imitated! The Castle's favourite Yorkshire comedian Walter Niblo, and Donald B. Stuart, the 6' 7" cod-conjuror, magician and pantomime favourite, whose 'apologetic' comedy routine would find an echo in Tommy Cooper, were the principal fun makers. The supporting turns included vocal duo The Terry Sisters with *Catch a Falling Star* and *Siesta*; novelty juggler Vic Sanderson; Irish comedian Jack Kirwan and Gillian and June, 'beauty in precision'; Mons de Voe's realistic shadowgraphs of cute animals and other characters, and father and daughter balancers, the athletic Ansons. Robert Hartley directed the orchestra in a 'hit-parade' medley.

The vibrant baritone voice of Gerry Brereton, the stylish blind crooner\* and popular 'Columbia records singing star', rang out across the Opera House when he returned to the Castle on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> July after a gap of three years (as he was about to travel to America to take part in a blind golf championship), in songs 'sentimental and gay' including *Hold Me, Thrill me, Kiss Me, From Here to Eternity* and *If You've Ever Been in Love*. Reub Silver and Marion Day, piano duettists, delivered a selection of popular pieces from 'modern pops to classics', while there were canine capers involving Reg Russell's three clever dogs. Quick-fire patter came from Freddie Stobbs, and old time music hall buffoonery from Bob Nelson, a Lancashire variety legend, gormless and toothless, with an off-beat nonsensical act that often involved a large cannon ball, a huge pile of chairs which he endeavoured to climb, and the catch-phrase 'Aren't plums cheap?'; Kitty McShane,\* Roy Roland and William Neal performed in a revival of that loveable character, Old Mother Riley, while the evening rounded off with versatile snake and balloon dancers Emerson and Jane; wire artiste Babu, and Susie and Company. The Sunday Concert the following day featured orchestral selections from Frank Weir and his orchestra and guest artistes Bob Nelson and Silver and Day.

\* Brereton, an ex-Derby County footballer, had been blinded during a World War II commando action in Sicily and began his stage career on Hughie Green's *Opportunity Knocks* in 1950.

\* Formerly Old Mother Riley's daughter Kitty, with husband Arthur Lucan as Old Mother Riley, until Roy Roland took over Old Mother Riley when Arthur Lucan died in 1954. Old Mother Riley featured in a number of films between 1936 and 1952.

The week commencing 14<sup>th</sup> July starred Gary Miller, 'Golden Boy of Song', and in complete contrast, Lancashire comedian Ted Lune who enjoyed two 'spots' during the evening, and the skilful instrumental clowning of The Musical Elliots. Peter Quinton's quick-fire cartoons proved to be a popular novelty act; Colin Fleming's breath-taking feats of balance brought forth many a gasp from the audience, as did the 'thrills in the air' from the Denvers and Mary Kitson's baffling illusions which completed the bill of fare. Mary Kitson and Gary Miller were the guest artistes for the Sunday Concert on 20<sup>th</sup> July.

The 'amazing television mind reader' Al Koran topped the bill for the week beginning Monday 21<sup>st</sup> July, together with Clifford Stanton, whose impersonations of famous people including Sir Winston Churchill and Harold MacMillan drew great applause from the audiences. The supporting acts included novelty acrobats The Kid and I; 'personality girl' and singer Billie Anthony with popular favourites old and new from ragtime to Rock 'n' Roll; comedy juggling from Tassi and Diana; show-stoppers from 'attractive trumpeter' June Birch; ukulele songs and topical tales with Ron 'the cheery Scot' Scot, and clever perspicuous puppetry from The Hollywood Marionettes. Musical Director Robert Hartley coped masterfully with the knotty musical problems he was given to solve, most notably, artistes arriving for rehearsals with unsuitable orchestral arrangements for their songs. The guest artistes for the Sunday Concert on July 27<sup>th</sup> were Cliff Stanton and accordionist Chic Robini.

The principal guest artiste for the week beginning Monday 28<sup>th</sup> July was Kirk Stevens, billed as Scotland's leading singer of romantic songs, and noted for his 'ear-shattering vocalism' and 'trailing mike technique'. Newcomer Roy Castle, a former child star, steeped in variety, was described as a versatile, multi-talented, multi-instrumentalist, tap-dancer and impressionist,

whose exceptional comic timing marked him out as 'a young man with a future'. The supporting acts included McAndrews and Mills, modern dance stylists; no less than three comedians led by Jimmy Gay, 'as gay and amusing as ever', with his laid-back 'commentaries' on life; Jimmy Edmundson, who 'raised some of the heartiest laughter heard for a long time', and Hal Miller, known as the 'parish' comedian. First class juggling and balancing from The Brauns and community medleys accompanied by personality pianist Billie Wyner completed a fine high-season week of family entertainment. Hal Miller and Kirk Stevens were the guest artistes at the Sunday Concert on 3<sup>rd</sup> August.

### **'The best bills for many a long day' left many aching sides in Douglas**

Top of the bill for the week beginning Monday 4<sup>th</sup> August, popular Lancashire harmony group The Kordites sang *Mountain Greenery*, *You'll Never Walk Alone* and *Diana*, whilst Ronnie Collis tap-danced through his famous Charlie Chaplin impression. Prankish Porcine Puppetry involving water pistols and comedy sketches from those mischievous twin piglets Pinky and Perky and 'friends', created and handled by Czechoslovakians Jan and Vlasta Dalibor,\* vied with shapely juggler Christine Martell, acrobatics from The Cortez Brothers, and Maureen Gabriel's trumpet and accordion selections to be 'the best of the rest'. There was plenty of laughter and comedy magic when veteran Irish comedian Hal Roach appeared on stage with his catchphrase 'Write it down, it's a good one'. Sixty years in the business, his homely humour largely played on the tourists' image of Ireland and Irish stereotypes. All-round entertainer, revue and pantomime star, and later straight actor, Johnny Dallas added a touch of exuberant class to the show. Irish 'funster' Hal Roach was the star of the Sunday Concert on 10<sup>th</sup> August.

\* A BBC Television children's series in 1957, they developed into a popular variety novelty act, amusing enough if you were five years old, but otherwise intensely irritating. In 1958 they had appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show, and later in 1964 shared the bill with the Beatles, Tom Jones and Morecambe and Wise. Their high-pitched squeaky voices and antics were also featured in appearances alongside such stars as Frank Sinatra and Harry Secombe. In fact, it was Mike Sammes of The Mike Sammes Singers who was the voice of Pinky and Perky, recorded at a very slow speed, then speeded up for the record release. In 1972 they transferred to ITV, were briefly revived in 1992 and resurrected again as an animated series on CBBC. Like the contemporary Chipmunks . . . best forgotten.

Tubby Welsh comedian Ossie Morris, 'Mrs Morris' little lad', dominated the programme the week of Monday 11<sup>th</sup> August, with lively topical patter and fine Rhondda Valley voice. A naturally funny man who was at his peak in the 1950s, he was a pantomime star, harmonica player, bird mimic and much else, and was the resident comedian on radio's *Welsh Rarebit*. Vivacious blonde singing star Barbara Law proved that she was also an excellent vocal impressionist whose re-creations of Vera Lynn and Gracie Fields earned warm applause. The supporting turns featured acrobats The Roxanos; Billy 'Uke' Scott; French Club jugglers Ninette Mongadors and Ann; 'sprightly' dancers Ann and Val Shelley; daring, breath-taking knife-throwing from Elizabeth and Collins, and newcomer Jeffrey Lenner, the comedian with the voice of a 'pop' singer. There was no Sunday Concert on 17<sup>th</sup> August.

There was a warm Castle welcome back for Billy Stutt, with his big smile, new songs and stories for the week beginning Monday 18<sup>th</sup> August, and he soon had audiences 'doubled up' in their seats. Scintillating, vivacious singer Jean Scott, 'a real sweetie', from television's light-hearted entertainment show *Beauty Box*, and The Mandos Sisters from Belgium, whose

artistic aerial act on a 'life-size anchor' had to be seen to be believed, were among the fine supporting acts. Further down the bill, The Skating Morenos whirled around the stage dizzily, and Fred Lovelle proved to be a novel - possibly unique - ventriloquist, whose 'unseen' Lilliputian dummy hopped from hand to hand. 'Feats from feet' were made to look easy from foot juggler Levanda, and there were thrills and spills from comedy cycling act, the Cycloonies, who also doubled as wire artistes Delora and Rikki. Clean, wholesome comedy came in the shape of 'Likeable Lancashire Laddie', Bill Waddington.

The final week at the Derby Castle, commencing 25th August, starred one of television's most likeable couples, piano and vocal duettists Ken Morris and Joan Savage from *Top Tune Time*, with a blend of stylish songs, understated burlesque-style comedy and impressions. In support were Shan the amazing memory girl; comedy magician Masoni; American comedians Fran Dowie, who dispensed advice for unmarried men, and partner Candy Kane, who stormed through their colourful 'rip-roaring' wild west sketch, and 'always popular with Douglas audiences', comedian Jimmy Couton. There was quick-fire acrobatics from The Matanzas; novelty roller skating from Lotus and Lila and endearing canine sagacity from clever doggy Sandy and her owner Mandy.

'Douglas goes gay' for the four-day Douglas Carnival held between Monday 25th and Thursday 28th August. Among the top bands in the parade were the Royal Artillery Band from Plymouth and the Bon Accord Ladies Pipe Band from Aberdeen. Ivy Benson and her girls, and Ronnie Aldrich and the Squads were engaged to play for the dances, both open-air and indoor. A Grand Parade and fireworks brought the event to a suitably jubilant close.

The season ended at the Castle on Saturday 30th August with a traditional Manx Mhelliah.

### **The smaller venues**

The Palais de Danse featured the Basil Kirchin Band,\* who had recently returned from a successful American tour, for Morning Coffee Dances at 10.45, evening dances at 7.30, a Wednesday evening late night carnival, and popular Sunday Variety Concerts with guest entertainers such as the comedian Walter Niblo and 'voice of them all' Peter Cavanagh.

\* Blackpool-born Basil Kirchin was the son of Ivor Kirchin, who was associated for forty years with the Mecca company in Manchester. Both were drummers and teamed up to form the 'Biggest Little Band in the World', popular from the 1930s to the '60s. From the late 1950s Kirchin perceived the looming demise of the band era and diversified into electronic and experimental film music, saying he was 'fed up with playing other people's music'. Maverick and pioneer, he was an influential musician who showed the way for many younger composers and arrangers.

The Gaiety Theatre continued to fulfil its new role as a cinema, and during the winter became the venue for local shows such as Douglas Choral Union's *The Merry Widow* in January 1959.

Douglas Head was much quieter than in previous decades now that the minstrels had gone, but visitors still enjoyed a quiet morning spent ambling about and enjoying the views. Onchan Head still attracted plenty of families to see the donkey derbies, fashion parades, athletics, cycle track racing, and the dog and motor-cycle gymkhanas at the Onchan Stadium, or enjoy the fourth season of Karma at the Pavilion Theatre.

*Happy Holiday*, the summer show at the Crescent Pavilion, starred 'droll Yorkshire comedian' Jay Martell and his ukulele and 'vivacious life of the party' Stella Hartley. 'Chock full of laughter from beginning to end', the turns included Roger Bourne and Barbara Dowling whose puppets mimed to gramophone records; balancing and tumbling from The Regency Twins and lively dance routines from the Dorchester Lovelies. Rupert Harvel's lightning sketches of famous personalities and audience members went down very well; Charles Harris, baritone, entertained with popular songs and ballads and accordionist Adel French played cheerful selections of melodies old and new.

Raymer Brothers Circus could be seen daily at 3.00pm in Laxey Glen Gardens Tuesdays and Sundays excepted. There was dancing to Harry Orchid and the Three Georgians daily and a concert each Sunday at 8.00pm.

Ramsey Pool Ballroom featured a small dance combo - referred to as 'a tip-top' orchestra in the Ramsey Courier - The Ralph Shaw Trio, whose leader, bass player and vocalist was Ralph Shaw, with Ken Ingrams, drums, and pianist and entertainer Spadie Lee, 'a coloured girl' and a night club singer from London. Later in the season pianist Stan van Raalte joined the group. There were afternoon tea dances, while Wednesday night was Rock 'n' Roll night. On one occasion late in July there was 'Rockin' and Rollin' to the 152<sup>nd</sup> Glasgow Boy's Brigade Pipe Band, and early in August there was Scottish Country Dancing at a designated 'Scottish Night' with music from the same band. The following week, the last of a series of country dances in Mooragh Park was held which it was hoped would be 'a Manx evening'.

#### **'Much better than expected . . .'**

Throughout the season *Holiday News*\* keenly promoted Douglas and it's 'Entertainments to Suit All Tastes' with photographs of the dance bands, their conductors, the vocalists and instrumentalists at all the important venues with the Villa Marina Gardens spotlighted when Ivy Benson was playing there in the afternoons, with hundreds relaxing in deckchairs, listening to the music or watching the beauty parades and talent competitions in warm sunshine. The smaller venues also received a share of the publicity.

*Holiday News* was in a nostalgic mood in August when it reminded readers that in 1911 Douglas became the first seaside resort to introduce illuminations, and, in a possible side-swipe at Blackpool, the ten thousand bulbs gleamed 'for the whole summer season, not just for a few weeks at the close of the season'.\* Summer Hill Glen was recommended as featuring 'one of the most charming transformations'.

Port Soderick was suggested for those seeking quiet relaxation amid splendid scenery with the added attraction of a licensed hotel and orchestra. For the more adventurous there were boats trips to and from Douglas. For the sporty, Douglas' King George V Park Bowl - 'the Island's Wembley Stadium' - featured weekly gymkhanas. Noble's Park boasted two fine crown bowling greens, tennis on both hard and grass courts, mini golf, a putting green and a children's playground. The Villa Marina Gardens, too, offered a bowling green and putting green, and was open Sundays up to 5.00pm. There was also a bowling green at Finch Hill and a golf course at Pulrose. Peel, too, experienced something of a boom that season as the 'charas' brought hundreds of day trippers to the 'sunset city' to enjoy its natural advantages

of scenery, 'blue seas', an impressive Medieval castle, tennis tournaments, dances in the Marine Hall and a 'wonderful atmosphere and friendliness untainted by "stiff snobocracy"'.

Visitor numbers held up very well in 1958. Bank Holiday Weekend arrivals by sea totalled approximately 24,000, much in line with the 1957 season,\* and day trips from Dublin, Workington and Liverpool brought some six to seven thousand extra trippers. For those visitors who had an hour or so to spare in Douglas, the new penny admission to the upper promenade on the Victoria Pier was considered the cheapest – and 'most fascinating' – entertainment the resort had to offer: 'watching the Manx boats arrive and depart'. Ronaldsway Airport experienced its busiest weekend of the season, with Blackpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Prestwick, Liverpool, Newcastle and Dublin the busiest routes. Yet air arrivals were down by just under six hundred, and by 12,000 for the season.\*

\* *Holiday News*, 16.06.1958.

\* Blackpool's annual lights festival began in 1879, but the first 'modern' display was in 1912 when a new section of promenade was opened by Princess Louise, and Blackpool, too, was festooned with lamps using 10,000 light bulbs.

\* *The Isle of Man Examiner*, 07.08.1958, under the by-line 'It's A Secret', reported that in line with the Harbour Board's new policy, passenger lists would no longer be published monthly, but at the end of the season.

\* *Isle of Man Times*, 12.08.1958. 1958: 44,091; 1957: 56,569

The season did indeed turn out to be much better than expected contradicting the usual pre-season gloomy predictions and dismal forebodings. The harmless annual Manx moaning was after all 'designed to bring out the best in us', but others were not so sure, and warned that 'such things can have a strangling influence on enterprise and undermine confidence'. The one element that no British seaside resort could control – or even accurately predict – was the weather, and the Island experienced the worst summer conditions in living memory as rain-laden depression after depression 'attacked our shores'. The experts were adamant that the Spring and Autumn seasons were actually drier and sunnier than they used to be, that August Bank Holiday could be transferred to October, and that everyone should anticipate unreliable summers for the next five to six years! Those involved in the visitor industry remained optimistic that the Island could 'weather' any passing 'depression' and retain 'its unrivalled reputation as a happy holiday ground for those who believe that the most enjoyment is to be had in the holiday crowd'. Others believed that the future of the Island as a holiday destination lay in the smaller resorts catering for discerning visitors who desired to escape the crowds. However, fewer visitors, even with more spending power, was not good for Manxland, and would not fill the boats, hotels and boarding houses.

In his *Island Notebook* early in September Arthur Q. Moore, a shrewd observer of Island life, wondered how much an average family of four from Lancashire might spend on a ten-day holiday on the Island staying at a moderately priced boarding house. The answer: £100. 'The Island used to be famed for its cheapness, he wrote, but '... personally I find "taking it easy" on my own home territory to be a darned expensive business'.

He also reflected on the rise in violent, anti-social behaviour amongst young, mainly male, visitors. 'Manx people with long memories of the Island's past summer glories, DON'T WANT

the teenagers of the type that Douglas has been attracting in recent years', notwithstanding that 'tougher police and magisterial methods have already had a marked effect this season'.\* He also believed that in focussing on Douglas, Manx journalists were partly to blame for giving the whole Island a bad name. In other words, the reputation of the Island must not be tainted by the perceived experience of Douglas. 'Douglas isn't the Isle of Man!' Of course, Douglas was not alone in experiencing anti-social behaviour during the summer months, and although many resorts throughout Britain accepted it as inevitable, there was no room for complacency; the campaign against poor behaviour in public on the Island would intensify.

\* The *Ramsey Courier*, 20.02.1959, presented some facts and figures in a short piece entitled 'Less Drunkenness in 1958 Season'. The reduction in visitor numbers and far stricter attention being paid to visitors' conduct by many licensees - some of whom took on more staff - together with 'certain measures' taken by the police, resulted in fewer reported incidents of drunkenness. Not all offences, however, were committed by visitors. Twenty-eight offences of drunkenness were recorded: twelve by residents and sixteen by non-residents. In addition, there were ten incidents of drunk and disorderly behaviour: three involving residents and seven involving visitors.

For some in the business community the Island's characteristic sense of false security continued to prevail: the visitors had been coming for generations, and thus, they always would. Where were the vigorous forward-looking policies necessary to keep pace with the changing needs and wishes of the holiday makers? There was even the suggestion\* that instead of spending £150,000 on advertising, the Island should find a way to give money back to the tourists! After all, the Island had been extracting as much as it could from its visitors for decades 'yet puts nothing back'. Why not inaugurate a National Sweepstake, Tombola or Lottery – 'call it what you like' – with tickets sold only to *bona fide* visitors, to raise funds for a really worthy cause: 'the future of the visitor industry?' Although the idea gathered some support, 'the men in high office' replied 'NO HOPE'.

\* *Isle of Man Examiner*, 04.09.1958

As the season ended and winter approached, the unemployment figures inevitably started to rise. The Lieutenant Governor's response in his budget speech was to encourage people to 'Buy Manx' products, made on the Isle of Man, whether it be 'carpets, bacon, tweeds, beer, iron castings or fuel . . .'

### **Visitors' Voices: 'There's Little Wrong with Douglas'**

A group of holiday makers from Hertfordshire\* reflected on their experiences on the Island after a gap of eight years although some of the issues they raised were not supported by the facts. Over all they were delighted that the Island's natural beauty continued to be well cared for, although more imagination was needed in publicising the Island's small resorts and hidden gems of nature.

A poor impression was created when menu prices on the steamer were examined; the price of 5s 3d for dinner suggested that the Island would be expensive. The editor of the *Isle of Man Times* disagreed, and asked 'on what steamer can you obtain dinner for less than 5s 3d?' The existing arrangements concerning road services tickets came in for some criticism, as passengers were apparently required to book for each part of a journey (unlike rail where you could get on and off with the same ticket), thereby discouraging visitors to break their

journeys, with the result that many places of interest were bypassed. The editor was at pains to point out that both railway and road services offered 'rover tickets' which allowed visitors to break their journeys. A recurring complaint was that the summer season ended too soon! September visitors - and those who choose to come early in the season - were neglected and not properly catered for.

\* *Isle of Man Times*, 20.08.1958

The issues surrounding the proposal for a casino in Douglas reached the English press through 'a certain noisy group in the House of Keys', and regular and potential visitors were apparently asking 'how has the Island come to this'. In his column the editor responded that the Tourist Board was in favour of a casino, but the House of Keys rejected the idea. The casino plan 'was never seriously mooted here', he wrote in an attempt to put the record straight, but did confirm that the Island had suffered from adverse publicity leaving some 'roughs' among the visitors with the impression that the Island was a 'free for all'. He concluded by stating that, in his opinion, 'there will never be a casino here\* . . . (and) there will never be horse racing . . . unless the character of the Manx people changes'.

\* A casino adjoining the Palace Hotel was eventually opened in May 1965 by Sean Connery with the first spin of a roulette wheel.

On a light-hearted note, the results of the totally un-scientific, good-natured survey conducted by a panel of male students attempting to appraise the merits or otherwise of the season's holiday girls appeared in the local newspapers. Manchester's lovelies won awards for all-round attractiveness and natural friendliness; Scottish lassies were voted 'the most smartly dressed', and ranked highly as intelligent conversationalists; the outstanding characteristics of the 'sparkling eyed' Irish girls were their vivaciousness and lilting Belfast accents; sadly, there was not enough data to evaluate even one Welsh Miss, and as for the Bathing Beauties, the verdict was that the contestants were 'occasionally above average but nothing to write home about, and wouldn't have been noticed in a crowd of even averagely pretty girls'.

### **Has Douglas 'had it?' The views of a 'Disappearing Glaswegian'\***

Of more concern was ' . . . an astonishing list of grumbles' from a correspondent who signed himself simply D.V. that appeared in the *Isle of Man Times* at the height of the season. The steamer service from Glasgow via Ardrossan was expensive and 'chaotic'; the boats were overcrowded, and many passengers were forced to bed down on the lounge floor. The early morning view of Douglas Bay came as a relief, but the taxi fare from the pier to the boarding house was double that of similar journey in Glasgow. There were complaints about the food served in hotels and boarding houses, with the lack of fresh fruit particularly remarked upon; standards varied widely in both quality and quantity. Some beaches were disfigured by heaps of oily sludge waiting for the tide to disperse them.

Gone were the days when Douglas was widely known for attracting famous entertainers. Other resorts still had them. Many visitors believed that Douglas 'has not been the same since the engagement of Joe Loss was terminated', and how long was one cinema in particular going to be content to show 'that moth-eaten Formby picture' during T.T. week?

Why was such a disproportionate ‘fuss’ made of ‘Homecomers?’ What about those visitors who, like himself, had been coming to Douglas year after year since the 1920s? Furthermore, there was far too much publicity given to antics of drunks, ‘who are hardly a novelty in Glasgow!’ Yet, despite the moans and groans, the annual Isle of Man holiday remained ‘a must’ for many Glaswegians.

\* *Isle of Man Times*, 01.08.1958

Citing ‘Man O’ The People’ in *The People* Sunday newspaper in a piece entitled Holiday Gloom,\* Arthur Q. Moore agreed that there was a ‘decline in the number of people visiting Britain’s seaside resorts’ and reflected many of the views of holiday makers he had heard in Douglas. ‘If you are having a thoroughly miserable holiday in the rain, crawling around at the seaside with nothing to do, don’t blame the weather . . .’ for, at the cost of a few million pounds, ‘our holiday resorts could be transformed into magnificent all-weather playgrounds’. In the light of this Moore hoped that ‘our legislators and members of the Island’s visiting industry . . . will have good cause to hold an ‘inquest’ on the serious effects of the present season . . .’

\* Reprinted in part in the *Isle of Man Times*, 20.08.1958.

The writing was on the wall. The Isle of Man resorts, in common with their British competitors, had to invest in new holiday infrastructure as a matter of urgency in order to keep up to date and continue to attract summer visitors. Shelters on the beaches, covered promenades, children’s play areas and covered swimming pools were desperately needed otherwise there loomed the very real prospect of ‘distressed areas’ being created. Resorts must develop to survive! It could not be emphasised too often: ‘the Island depended entirely upon the visiting industry for its economic stability, and the maintenance of its standard derived from the degree of success of the holiday trade!’ But was anyone listening?

## 1959

In an effort to stamp out the scourge of ‘Teddy Boy’ violence and drunken hooliganism in Douglas during recent summers the Manx Courts were given increased powers to use the birch, and a further bill granting even more powers was expected to pass through the Legislature in 1960.

Eight hundred hoteliers and boarding house keepers met at the Villa Marina to fight new legislation requiring them to register with the Tourist Board and accept a grading of holiday accommodation. The new regulation was intended to improve standards, but in the light of summer arrivals falling to below 500,000\* for the first time since World War II, many suspected that they would go out of business before any long-term benefits could be felt.

\* Although published figures at the end of the summer would show an increase of 50,000 visitors over 1958, the number of visitors for the season was a disappointing 495,804.

Plans for two much desired Douglas projects - the establishing of a continental style gambling Casino, and a new indoor swimming pool - were either dismissed or ‘showed no progress’ and were thus effectively shelved. A further plan to open public houses on Sundays was also rejected.

The Island had been in the grip of 'Arctic weather' in January, but in complete contrast August proved to be the driest on record, with thousands having to cope with the inconvenience of water rationing at the height of the season.

Another treasured link with the past was severed with the announcement of the death of the composer Haydn Wood at a London nursing home in March.\* He had last visited the Island in 1951 in connection with his enormous contribution of music for the Manx Pageant.\* His most famous song, *Roses in Picardy*, was sung by Manx soprano Jean Curphey at a Manx gathering at St. Bride's Institute in the City of London the following month.\*

\* Haydn Wood's parents moved to the Island from Slaithwaite in West Yorkshire in late 1885 or early 1886 and became the licencees of the Black Lion Hotel on Douglas' North Quay. Haydn's elder brother Harry was already playing in the orchestras at the large entertainment venues during the summer seasons and gave him his first violin lessons. He left the Island in 1897 to study at the Royal College of Music, and the rest, as they say, is history.

\* See Maurice Powell, *The Isle of Man Festival of Britain Pageants, 1951*, in manxmusic.com

\* In November 1952 she had 'taken tea' with the composer and his wife in their Baker Street, London, flat.

In September the Island bade farewell to the congenial outgoing Lieutenant Governor, Sir Ambrose Flux Dundas, after seven years in office, and welcomed Sir Ronald Herbert Garvey, KCMG, KCVO, MBE, \* described by one Manx politician as 'a breath of fresh air for the Island'.

\* An Ex-Governor of Fiji, and by all accounts a colourful character, he was a man of ideas and energy and fully aware how fragile the Island's tourist industry was, particularly when facing the steady growth in cheap continental holidays that was drawing away its core visitors. He was popular, and a good administrator with 'a flair for public relations'.

### **1959 in a nutshell**

In May British Empire Day become British Commonwealth Day; *Juke Box Jury* was first aired on BBC Television in June; the Hovercraft was finally launched; Cliff Richard and the Shadows released *Living Doll*; postcodes were first introduced in Britain in Norwich in July; in August BMC launched the Mini; in October Harold Macmillan won a third successive general election for the Conservatives with Margaret Thatcher as a new member of Parliament; the first section of the M1 Motorway was opened in November, and London Transport introduced the Routemaster double-decker bus into service; the *Ken Dodd Show* was first aired by the BBC, and *No Hiding Place* was first shown on ITV; Ian Fleming's *Goldfinger* was published; actor Hugh Laurie was born in June; the actress Kay Kendall, the star of the 1953 comedy film *Genevieve*, and Albert Ketèlbey, the famed composer of *In a Persian Market* and other light music miniatures, died.

**When it comes to entertainment, 'Douglas has something for everyone. Young or old, wet or fine, there's something "on" to suit the age and the mood'.**\*

\* George E. Faragher, Entertainments Manager Douglas Corporation, *Holiday News*, 11.07.1959

### **The Villa Marina**

The issue of the evening opening of the Villa Marina Grounds rumbled on throughout the summer. 'There are lots of "niggers in the wood pile" in this Island', responded one Douglas

Town Councillor after a meeting to discuss the Parks Committee's unpopular decision to close the Villa Marina Gardens during summer evenings at 7 o'clock. 'They must be shown up in their true colours and rooted out', he demanded.\*

\* *Isle of Man Examiner*, 16.06.1959. In 1957 the Park's Committee agreed a plan for Douglas Town Band and three choirs to perform in the Villa gardens at intervals during the summer. This proved to be highly popular with both visitors and residents, with crowds of 500-1000 often attending. The following season the Parks Committee 'sabotaged' this plan by dropping the choirs in order 'to save a few pounds'. In June 1959 the Park's Committee decided that the Gardens could remain open until 9.30pm until Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> August, although a survey in July revealed that on one particular evening just eighty-six people hired deckchairs whereas during that morning the number had been just over four thousand.

The 1959 season at the Villa Marina commenced in mid-May with dancing to Harold Moorhouse and his band on Whit Saturday, Monday and Tuesday. On Whit-Sunday the Lhon Doo Choir, musical director Douglas Buxton, celebrated their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday with a concert featuring a nostalgic return of the much-loved English tenor Heddle Nash, last heard at the Villa thirty years earlier. He was joined by his son, the baritone John Heddle Nash, and Manxland's soprano Jean Curphey, whose 'natural vivacity and wonderfully clear diction' won her a warm reception in songs from *The Desert Song* and *The Merry Widow*. Arthur Moore in the *Isle of Man Daily Times* wrote that the choir's 'Music for All' series recalled the Royal Hall's pre-war splendour.

From 30<sup>th</sup> May there was dancing with Ivy Benson during the evenings, 'Jazz and Jive' sessions in the Royal Hall in the mornings, and themed novelty competitions – including 'Scooter Girl' and 'Loving Cup' - for young hopefuls who provided much of the entertainment value in the Gardens at 2.30pm. The Bathing Beauty Contests took place on Thursday afternoons, and early in the season Catherine Wall gave open-air recitals on her Hammond organ in the Gardens from 11.00am until 12.30pm. Ivy's band of twenty players included the familiar band soloists: trumpeter Robey Buckley, Wendy Todd, Eleanor Wark, Pat Grey, Pat Gentiles and drummer Paula Pyke, and not forgetting her pet poodle 'Kelly', from the Isle of Man, who provided dogged support from the wings. Ivy's band were certainly the busiest band on the Island that season, and her girls invariably attracted lots of attention whenever they ventured into town, witness the effect just two of them aroused in a group of Oldham lads when they 'gracefully swung' along the promenade after the concert in the Villa grounds one Saturday in June attired in their characteristic shorts and abbreviated 'tops'. One middle-aged lady was overheard to remark that such attire was better suited to the beach, but other holidaymakers were glad to get an eyeful of 'Les Girls', as was the lady's husband!

See photograph of Ivy Benson and her girls on Douglas Promenade, *Holiday News*, 18.07.1959

For the youngest holiday makers there was fun-a-plenty to be had in Kiddies Corner, where 'Jester' Tom Kemp and his Children's Theatre in the Gardens kept them amused with Punch & Judy shows, conjuring tricks, competitions and all manner of on-stage games and activities. The first of five broadcast programmes from the Villa Marina in the series Northern BBC Children's Hour took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> June. Doris and Gwen sang with local children; Kathleen Killip read a Manx Fairy Story and there was a nature quiz.

The Sunday Celebrity Concert\* on 30<sup>th</sup> May starred Edna 'Arrivederci *Darling*' Savage. The Warrington-born telephone operator turned 'soft-voiced songbird', wearing her trademark choker - a velvet ribbon and brooch - easily won over the audience with a voice of star quality and an engaging stage personality. Ivy and her girls provided the musical interludes with their by now familiar entertaining show-within-a-show.

\* The Sunday Concerts at the Villa Marina were styled 'Sunday Celebrity Concerts' that year.

\* Edna Savage was accompanied by husband rock singer Terry Dene - once thought of as the 'British Elvis' - for a few days holiday at the Fort Anne Hotel. In an interview in the Isle of Man Daily Times in early June, Edna Savage told of husband rock singer Terry Dene's depression, his brief spell in the army and their problem marriage. They were looking for their own home in London, meanwhile she was due to start a ten-week engagement of radio and television appearances, and he was off to Sweden on tour. 'We are not completely happy yet, but we will be'. Their disastrous marriage ended in divorce. Bad publicity haunted Terry Dene's erratic career and in 1964 the one-time 'Dene-ager' became an Evangelist. Her career slipped away after the mid-1960s.

Edmund Hockridge, London's resident male lead, was the guest artiste on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June, his powerful baritone voice and imposing stage presence both seen and heard to advantage in songs for Sky Masterson and Billy Bigelow from *Guys and Dolls* and *Carousel*. He was joined by the Lon Dhoo Choir and supported by Ivy Benson and her band.

On Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June entertainer and TV quiz master Hughie 'Double Your Money' Green provided a 'tip-top' forty-five-minute turn featuring his on-stage quiz, although not everyone was bowled over by his mildly risqué joking with ladies under garments on a Sunday evening in front of a family audience. His unctuous 'door-to-door salesman's smile' and much-mocked catchphrase 'I mean that most sincerely' had made him a household name, but many found his style and delivery 'too American'.

Band leader and clarinettist Sid Phillips\* and His Popular Radio Band - 'a bright and breezy Dixieland jazz group', signature tune *Hors D'oeuvres* - first appeared in Douglas on June 22<sup>nd</sup> together with resident vocalists Kay McKinley and Bill Harley and a guest cod-comedy 'professor', who, after continually attempting to get in on the act, eventually proved himself to be a superb multi-instrumentalist. Phillips had been reluctant to visit the Island of 'the TT and kippers' but, won over by the Island's beauty-spots, quickly became 'an ardent Manx fan', and even bought cocker-spaniel puppy as a souvenir.

\* See *Holiday News*, 11.07.1959 for photograph of Sid Phillips in action at the Villa Marina. Under the name Simon Phillips he had written some 'serious' orchestral works including a concert overture once performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Adrian Boult, and the concert *Valse Pasionelle*. Puccini once told him he was 'wasting my time with jazz!' He was also a keen amateur artist who regularly visited art galleries all over the world.

### **A season of British songbirds**

Sid Phillips' first Sunday Celebrity Concert on 28<sup>th</sup> June starred the delightful radio and television star Petula Clark - 'lovely to look at plus great talent' – back at the Villa Marina after a gap of five years, who 'charmed the audience' with her varied twenty-five-minute programme of romantic and lively songs old and new. Unsurprisingly, the audience was reluctant to let her go. Later in the programme there were dance demonstrations by Stan Dudley and Christine Norton. Sid Phillips himself received a 'terrific reception for his clarinet

solos'. The Celebrity musician on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> July was trumpeter, band leader, arranger, composer, Humphrey Lyttleton\* and his band, 'The King of the Jazzmen', in a programme of 'top hits and favourites' enjoyed by a large crowd which did not, however, merit a review. To add insult to injury, the posters all over the Island apparently spelled his name 'Littleton'. Hrrumph!

\* Born and educated at Eton College, Lyttleton was also a calligrapher, author, a lifelong ornithologist, *Daily Mail* cartoonist, and much later, the dry as dust chairman of BBC Radio's *I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue*, voted *Radio Times*' 2020 greatest radio comedy of all time, ahead of *Hancock's Half-Hour* and *Round the Horne*.

The Celebrity Concert on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July was a truly glittering affair. Alma Cogan, 'a tremendous favourite' in Douglas and known as the vivacious 'girl with a smile in her voice', was almost as famous for her sumptuous gowns - which she designed herself - as her bubbly personality and sense of comedy, which had boosted her to the top of the bill everywhere in the pre-Rock 'n' Roll years. The local newspapers expended many column inches describing her outfits - which she claimed never to have worn twice - particularly a diamanté peacock blue full skirt made from thousands of ostrich feathers and beads. 'I think the audience like to see something glamorous', she responded when asked about her dresses. Whilst on the Island Cogan had visited her grandmother Esther Cogan ('Boba') in Victoria Road, Douglas, and her cousins, the family of Alfred and Hettie Grey of Marathon Road, the well-known photographer, and 'Boba' was present at the Villa Marina to see and hear her illustrious granddaughter.\*

\* Sadly Russian-born 'Boba' had lived in Douglas for just a year when she died on Sept 19<sup>th</sup> aged seventy-seven years. A Rabbi from Liverpool conducted the funeral service which was attended by many of the Island's Jewish community.

The celebrity artistes on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July were The Three Monarchs, a novelty, knock-about comedy harmonica ensemble well known from radio's *The Forces Show*. It featured three virtuosos, one of whom was an 'idiot' blessed with brilliant comic timing, and became a top-rated variety act and appearing during many London Palladium seasons and Royal Variety performances. Ivy Benson's band lent its usual sparkling support.

The following Sunday, 26<sup>th</sup> July, the prodigiously talented comedian, singer, jazz trumpeter and multi-instrumentalist, dancer and versatile star with variety in his blood, Roy Castle, billed as television's 'new look' entertainer, a one-time child performer, a stooge for Jimmy James and Jimmy Clitheroe who had first appeared at the Royal Variety Performance the year before, bedazzled the audience with his breath-takingly brilliant show-within-a-show.

Along with Alma Cogan, glamorous, 'petite and popular' Marion Ryan, known as 'the Marilyn Monroe of popular song', was one of the most popular female stars during the pre-Beatles era. Well known through her frequent appearances on television during the early years of Granada Television, the hugely popular seaside variety show *Music for the Millions*, which toured all the major summer resorts during this period, and the television musical quiz *Spot the Tune*, she appeared at the Villa Marina on Sunday 2nd August. Her recent 'hit' *Love me Forever* had reached number five in the UK Singles Chart in 1958, but although an engaging performer, her style was not really 'in tune' with the modern trends in popular music, and she gradually withdrew from the music scene during the 1960s.

The star of stage and screen, Diana Dors, 'the famous blonde bombshell', made her first visit to Douglas, together with her high-speed, wise-cracking comedian husband Dickie Dawson, for the Sunday Celebrity Concert on 9<sup>th</sup> August, with an act that included stories, anecdotes and favourite Cole Porter numbers, with Sid Phillips and his band providing the musical support. There had been crowds at Ronaldsway airport to greet her, and when she arrived in Douglas the crush on the promenade was so great with holiday makers hoping to catch a glimpse of her, she had to be 'smuggled' into the Villa Marina by the stage entrance. In complete contradiction to her fame as a 'sex-symbol', behind the scenes Diana Dors was a 'homely', private person who generally eschewed the trappings of celebrity; she stayed quietly at the Fort Anne Hotel during her visit to the Island.

The celebrity artiste on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> August was 'the man with the golden trumpet, Eddie Calvert, a brass bander in his youth and Billy Ternent's lead trumpeter, whose top selling 'hits' *Oh, Mein Papa* in 1953\* and *Cherry Pink* in 1955, along with five other instrumental entries into the UK charts, made him a household name during the 1950s.

\* *Oh, Mein Papa* earned him a Golden Disc, the first UK Chart entry to do so. After a world tour in the late 1960s, including several visits to South Africa, he finally settled there, disillusioned with Harold Wilson's Labour Government's attitude towards Rhodesia, and maintaining a low profile as the tax man began to take an interest in his career! See photograph in *Holiday News*, 08.08.1959.

Like most summer resorts, Douglas produced its fair share of surprises and bizarre incidents, as the glamorous singer with Ivy Benson's band, Wendy Todd, discovered when she was coming to the end of one of her numbers and a young 'Casanova' in the audience rushed onto the stage, clasped her in his arms, and kissed her passionately. As he was summarily ejected from the Royal Hall, his face 'covered in lipstick smears', he proudly admitted to a sudden rush to the head.

On Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> August, Belfast-born husky-voiced Ruby Murray appeared at the Villa supported by Sid Phillips in a programme of the kind of sweet, innocent plaintive ballads for which she reigned supreme.\* She had launched her career with *Heartbeat* in 1954, and enormous fame followed with no less than five hit singles in the UK pop charts in a single week in 1955,\* the year she was also voted the *New Musical Express* favourite female vocalist, 1,000 votes ahead of Alma Cogan. That same year she appeared at the London Palladium with Norman Wisdom in the Royal Variety performance and was voted Britain's top female artiste. By the age of twenty-one she was presenting her own television show and in 1956 made her one and only film, *A Touch of the Sun*, with Frankie Howerd and Dennis Price, which is perhaps best described as cheery stuff on a wet afternoon.

\* As Rock 'n' Roll began to dominate the charts during the 1960s Ruby Murray starred in pantomime together with husband Bernie Burgess of The Jones Boys, but her life-long struggle with alcoholism took its toll and her meteoric career faded thereafter, although she continued to perform in cabaret and nostalgia shows until the early 1990s.

\* A feat equalled only by Elvis Presley and Madonna according to Richard Anthony Baker, *Old Time Variety: an illustrated history*, Remember When 2011.

Douglas Carnival Week commenced on 24<sup>th</sup> with the Bon Accord Ladies Pipe Band from Aberdeen leading the parade. The event concluded with a Carnival Concert and Fair with fireworks in the Villa Marina Grounds.

The Sunday 'Popular Concert' on 30<sup>th</sup> August starred Chester Harriott and Vic Evans,\* billed as 'Britain's greatest coloured entertainers', a pianist and tenor, immaculately dressed in white ties and tails, who brought back memories of Layton and Johnson with their smooth jazz-inspired delivery and sparkling piano playing. They were supported by the Manx Girls' Choir conducted by Harry Pickard.

\* See photograph in *Holiday News*, 22.08.1959. Jamaican-born Pianist Chester Harriott, known as 'the black-faced Liberace', joined forces with Cuban-born Vic Brown in 1954 to become the duo Harriott and Evans. They went their separate ways in 1962. One of Harriott's five children is the television chef Ainsley Harriott.

Arthur Moore penned a reminiscence of 'that wonderful old trouper and great character actor Bransby Williams in his Summer Medley column\* who was celebrating his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday that year. He had been a regular star of the summer seasons of the 1920s and '30s, and last appeared in Douglas in a play at the Gaiety Theatre in his early fifties. 'No other actor could equal his impersonations of Dickensian characters such as Scrooge, which many considered to be his finest portrayal'.

\* *Isle of Man Daily Times*, 26.08.1958, together with photograph.

Five nights of Modern Dancing with Leslie Douglas began on 31<sup>st</sup> August, and on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September Ivy Benson appeared in the ballroom together with a guest appearance of the Hedley Ward Trio (piano, bass and guitar), the popular radio and television ensemble who had appeared on *Educating Archie* with Max Bygraves and the Tanner Sisters. The final of the Bathing Beauty Contests took place on September 9<sup>th</sup> and Ivy Benson and her girls bade farewell to Douglas until the following season on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup>.

On Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> September, *Music for All* was billed as 'an International Charity Concert' with the proceeds donated to the South Douglas OAP Association Building Fund. The evening featured the Lhon Doo Choir, conductor Douglas Buxton, 'Canada's eye-catching soprano Doreen Hume, the New Zealand baritone John Hauxwell and the Maltese tenor Paul Ascias in a programme of operatic favourites, songs from the world of musical theatre, folk songs and ballads. Disappointingly, the concert was poorly attended.

### **The Palace Ballroom and Coliseum**

The Palace Ballroom opened on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> June with Leslie Douglas\* and his band of ten players and vocalist until the 27<sup>th</sup>, when Ronnie Aldrich and the Squadronaires arrived for their eighth season, and after which they transferred to the Palais de Danse. Leslie Douglas was also heard in the Palace Gardens from 28<sup>th</sup> June until 28<sup>th</sup> August playing for the afternoon concerts and Personality Parades, and again at the tail end of the season between 31<sup>st</sup> August and 12<sup>th</sup> September. The band also supported the Tourist Board's Manx Modern Dance Festival at the Palace Ballroom the week commencing Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> June. The resident vocalist was Jill 'the voice of the hit parade' Barrett and the resident comedian was Sammy 'a

ton of fun' Herman. There was also dancing to Stanley Tudor and his Compton organ mornings and afternoons in the ballroom from 29<sup>th</sup> June to 22<sup>nd</sup> August.

\* A former member of the Fred Hartley Sextet and a vocalist with Henry Hall, and last on the Island in 1933 with Charlie Kunz at the Palais de Danse, Leslie Douglas had spent the early part of the war square-bashing before he was asked to form a five-piece band which included Cliff Townsend, saxophone, Jack Parnell and Steve Race, and subsequently formed the renowned Bomber Command Band which featured Pearl Carr as their resident vocalist. She later formed the famous singing partnership with husband Teddy Johnson and came second in the European Song Contest in 1959 with *Sing Little Birdie*.

### ***There's Something in the Air\****

On 29<sup>th</sup> June 'The Rhythm King' returned to Manxland'. Ronnie Aldrich and the Squads were back for an eighth season in the ballroom with all the versatility that Douglas had come to expect from the star-studded band and superbly entertaining vocalists. Joan Baxter's velvet voice\* was heard to great advantage in *As I Loved You* and *He's So Married*; Cliff Townsend and his 'singing sax', newcomer Bobby Burns, trombone, Donald Fay, flute and exuberant drummer Freddie Potter completed the line-up of top instrumental soloists from within the band. Comedy came in the shape of irrepressible 'wild man' Peter Morton's 'capering and clowning' in a brilliant send-up of *Yes, I Remember it Well* from *Gigi*. The band played *Manhattan Spiritual*, *A Foggy Day in London* and *Buck Dance*, and the Squadcats launched into their 'hot Dixieland numbers' with gusto, fully justifying one commentator's by-line: 'There's no BEAT that can BEAT the Squads'. The guest celebrity was Norman Evans, Lancashire's Ambassador of Mirth', who, accompanied by his panda puppet, delivered a series of 'side-splitting sketches and monologues' including the obligatory *Over the Garden Wall*, and was 'carried on a wave of welcome'.

\* The signature tune of the Squadronaires. Ronnie Aldrich's love of the 'Mystery Isle' inspired two compositions: *The Island Waltz* in 1953, and *Holiday Island* in 1957

\* Between 1954-65 Joan Baxter recorded cover songs for the budget Embassy label which was sold exclusively through Woolworths, until the label disappeared when the parent company, Oriole, was taken over by CBS records. It has been said that during the 1950 and '60s hardly anyone could claim not to have an Embassy record in their collection.

The Squad's farewell dance of the season was on 29<sup>th</sup> August; Ivy Benson then stepped in to play for the Old Time Dance Festival, and the last night of the season - 12<sup>th</sup> September - featured Leslie Douglas and his band.

### **'Laughter is a MUST for folks on holiday'**

'The best Coliseum revue in years!' received a 'hearty reception' when it opened on 20<sup>th</sup> June and 'packed 'em in' until 12<sup>th</sup> September. *Toppin' the Town*, produced by Sydney Myers with choreography by Sylvia Addison, was a 'richly colourful, large scale summer show' that went with swing from start to finish and lasted almost three hours on the first night. 'Lancashire's comedy star' Jack Story,\* a firm favourite in Blackpool and 'just the job for our Northern visitors', was new to Douglas and introduced his zany brand of broad comedy, with 'nothing doubtful' to get a huge number of laughs every night. He was assisted by fellow 'mirth-providers' Max Norris, Marjorie Holt and Terry Greenwood who provided comic support throughout most notable in the 'Landlady' and 'Romeo and Juliet' sketches. Popular the

previous season, Jack Whitley's chorus line the Twelve Zio Angels\* led by vivacious personality girl, delectable *soubrette* Audrey Mann, enlivened the show every time they appeared with their vibrant dancing and colourful costumes; the Italian Five Medifreds (father, two sons and two daughters) in garish costumes dazzled the crowds with high-speed juggling and acrobatics, and vied for gasps of amazement with contortionists Joe Slack & Company from Sweden's Schuman Circus and their 'impossible gyrations' ('gyrastics') in their *The Chef's Special* routine. The audiences were also 'bowled over by bow-wows' and comedy canine capers from Darlys and Company,\* an outstanding dog act during which a troupe of perspicacious pooches appeared unsupervised on stage in a range of colourful costumes in a series of sketches including a shopping expedition, pushing 'twins' in a pram, a visit to the 'local', the lover, the hotel room and the jealous husband. 'Slick and personable' American male vocal quartet Group One sang old time favourites in a programme of movie memories including a burlesque of the Keystone Cops, whilst the show's resident vocalists, Scottish soprano Grace Calvert and partner, baritone John Cartier, sang selections of romantic duets which persuaded one reviewer 'that life without rock 'n' roll is still worthwhile'. Musical Director Louis Arthur presided over the band in the 'pit'. With 'Laughs - Thrills - Melody - Glamour' in abundance, it was possible to believe that 'Music Hall (was) not dead yet' at the Palace Coliseum!

\* See *Mona's Herald* 18.08.1959 for photograph.

\* See *Mona's Herald*, 23.06.1959 and *Isle of Man Examiner* 25.06.1959 for a photograph.

\* See *Isle of Man Examiner* 02.07.1959 for a photograph.

ABC TV's *Holiday Town Parade* was broadcast 'live' on 4<sup>th</sup> July and starred Richard Hearne (Mr Pastry) on his first visit to the Island,\* Jack Storey and Group One. The highlight was a competition worth £5,500 to find Britain's Bathing Beauty Queen, Fashion Queen and Adonis.

\* The wonderful, doddering old man character Hearne created endeared him to people of all ages. In fact, he was a skilled 'tumbler' and slapstick artiste from a circus background whose most memorable turn was to dance the Lancers on his own. Like Clive Dunn of *Dad's Army* fame, his 'old man' *persona* became a national treasure; according to Roy Hudd, he retired from show business too early, 'totally disillusioned with the vulgarity that crept into the business'.

The guest celebrity star on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> July was 'that great little comic' Albert Modley, and on 12<sup>th</sup> July, the concert featured the popular vocal trio The Mudlarks,\* supported by the Squads. Theirs was a clean-cut, wholesome act and they had rocketed to fame in just twelve months with appearances on the Jack Jackson Show, Cool for Cats, Cyril Stapleton's BBC Television Showband Show and at the London Palladium.

\* The Mudd family vocal trio group (tenor Jeff, baritone Fred and soprano Mary) from Luton all of whom originally worked in the Bedford Vauxhall motor plant, before being discovered by David Jacobs and given a slot on *Six-Five Special*. They were voted top British vocal group by the readers of the *New Musical Express* in 1958. Their 'hits' included *Mutual Admiration Society*, *Lollipop* and *Book of Love*. Their popularity waned after the mid-1960s.

Thought by some to be the natural successor to Mario Lanza, the 'handsome' Italian-born Yorkshire tenor Tony Dalli\* was heard in the Coliseum on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July. His powerful voice

filled the hall with his current 'hit' *Come Prima*, which he followed by *Granada* and a selection from *The Student Prince*.

\* An ex-miner and steel worker discovered by Max Bygraves, he was popular in America, where he had his own TV show, South Africa and Australia. When he tired of touring, he opened a restaurant in Marbella, Spain.

That month *Worker's Playtime* was broadcast from the Aristoc factory canteen in Ramsey in a programme that featured Jack Storey, Group One and the Harry Hayward Trio.

Two visitors to Douglas left their impressions with the local newspapers. Manxman Nigel Kneane, creator of television's Quatermass and other 'shockers', visited the Island for 'a sort of busman's holiday' before returning to London to write the film script for John Osborne's *The Entertainer*. During a conversation with Arthur Moore at Felice's café he said how impressed he was with the standard of shows at the Coliseum ('fresh and workmanlike') and Crescent Pavilion ('wholesome and unsophisticated appeal') and approved of the 'absence of gagging - asides or wisecracks - between performers . . . there's nothing worse and gives the impression that the Company is tired of their work – and their audiences'.

Manxland's 'forgotten' former child star Binkie Stuart\* visited Douglas for a month's holiday twenty years after she was a sensation in the 1939 film *My Irish Molly* in which she sang *Farmyard Frolics*. Billed as Britain's Shirley Temple she starred in fifteen films before she was six years old alongside George Formby in *Keep Your Seats Please*, Alistair Sim, Florence Desmond, Maureen O'Hara and Tom Burke. Although her career effectively ended with the start of World War II, she retained her enthusiasm for the film industry and acting, but never wanted to become a 'glamour girl' and be expected to play 'sexy parts'. Among her memories of her childhood on the island she recalled Isle of Man Rock with her name running through it, Gilbert Harding's Bicycle shop where she acquired a tricycle, an American Tea at the Jane Crookall Maternity Home, and the Raglan Café in Peel.

\* Her real name was Alison Fraser. Born 1932, her father was a member of the pre-war Palace orchestra. See *Isle of Man Daily Times* 27.07.1959 for a photograph.

### **A gathering of the clans.**

Jimmy Logan was in top form before a packed audience for the Sunday Concert on 26<sup>th</sup> July and was met with a storm of applause and stamping feet that equalled the 'Hampden Roar' when he first appeared on stage. He 'obliged' with encore after encore before the audience would let him go. The Squads were in support, and Ronnie Aldrich's selection of 'Russ Conway' piano 'hits', and Dixieland swing numbers from the Squadcats, went down particularly well.

On Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> 6,000 attend the Highland Gathering which took place at Onchan Park Stadium in brilliant sunshine, which opened with the City of Glasgow Police Pipe Band in Royal Stuart Tartan with 'their damnable skirlin' pipes'. There followed field and track events, and traditional Highland games including, pole vaulting, wrestling, shot and caber, Scottish dancing and 'as many pibrochs as would have deaved a mill-happer . . .' Onchan's Village Commissioners hoped to establish an annual event during Glasgow Fair weeks like the great gatherings at the nunnery before World War II. The events were followed by Ball at the Palace.

Versatile, smooth, laid-back comedian, dancer, 'crooner' and master of the 'prat fall', Dickie Henderson, was the celebrity at the Sunday Concert on 2nd August, with the Squads in attendance. The following Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup> August, Harry Bailey, who counted foot juggling, acrobatics and trapeze artistry among his accomplishments, was the star turn. His brand of Irish blarney was blended with musicianship - like Ted Ray and Jimmy Wheeler, his endless patter was accompanied on the violin - and was familiar to audiences through his popular radio shows: 'twenty-eight children has Mrs O'Brien, she feels fine but the stork is dying'. 'Television's charmer' Sheila Buxton provided 'a wave of song' with the Squads in support.

Holiday makers continued to convey their thoughts and experiences to the editors of the local newspapers and at this distance in time give us a first-hand glimpse of what they really thought about the Island. A sixty-year-old visitor from Tunbridge Wells wrote to *the Isle of Man Daily Times* complimenting teenage girls on their 'crisp freshness and well-groomed appearance . . . and deportment'. Not so the boys, whom she described as 'generally unappealing and unkempt'. A brass band enthusiast asked whether the great Sousa and his band ever visited the Island? Yes, came the answer, fifty-six years earlier with his band of fifty-two players who performed at the Palace. The *Isle of Man Examiner* suggested that 'visitors are missing seaside personalities' such as song-plugger Ted Judge, ferryboat fiddler Johnny Ventro and the lively atmosphere in Feldman's and Lawrence Wright's song plugging rooms.

There was a rousing reception for the urbane Vic 'Mr Showbusiness' Oliver, on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> August, part wisecracking comedian, part serious violinist and pianist, assisted by vocalist Vanda Vale, and supported by the Squads and their 'show-within-a-show'. The following Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> August, former 'Mr Heart-throb' and idol of thousands of teenagers, Birmingham-born 'Welsh' tenor, David Hughes, was the celebrity guest artiste. 'I'm glad to have lost my heart-throb tag', he told the audience, and sang his two 1956 'hits' *Summer Song* and *By the Fountains of Rome*. He had easily progressed from 'Pop Idol' to operatic tenor and was a household name throughout Britain with important roles at Glyndebourne, English National Opera and Welsh National Opera,\* appearances at countless Sunday concerts and his BBC Television show *Make Mine Music*. The supporting artiste was American harmonica player Frank Cook.

\* He sang Pinkerton in Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* many times and died at the young age of forty-seven the day after collapsing at the London Coliseum in that role. He appeared on *Desert Island Discs* twice, once as a 'pop' singer and later as an operatic tenor.

That night, David Hughes, together with Ruby Murray, Bridie Gallagher from the Derby Castle and the cast of *Toppin' the Town* led by Jack Storey, were among the two hundred performers who gave their services free for the Mayor of Douglas' Annual Midnight Charity Ball at the Palace Ballroom which lasted until 4.00am Monday morning. The evening included a forty-five-minute cabaret, a tombola and dance music from Ronnie Aldrich, Ivy Benson, Basil Kirchin, Leslie Douglas and Sid Phillips. Over two thousand attended and the event which raised the princely sum of £496 2s 1d plus £470 7s from the tombola, was judged 'an overwhelming success'.

\* Ruby Murray and husband Bernie Burgess were seriously delayed after her plane failed to land at Ronaldsway even after four attempts due to poor visibility and was forced to return to Liverpool. The couple did eventually

land safely at Jurby at 8.15pm, but the car despatched to collect them failed to turn up on time. Of a painfully shy and fragile disposition, Murray was too unsettled to sing when she eventually arrived at the Palace, much to the disappointment of the crowd, but was gently persuaded to say a few words by David Hughes and wished the Mayor success with the Ball.

The former director of the Palace and Derby Castle Company, Arthur Brittain, now retired and living in London, visited the Island on holiday in August. A lowly 'office boy' with the Derby Castle Company in the 1890s, he progressed to be Secretary of the Amalgamated Palace and Derby Castle Company, and later General Manager and Director for more than fifty years. He recalled the extending of the Queen's Promenade and the first time that horse trams brought customers directly to the 'Hall by the Sea'. He was accompanied by his daughter Florence, a well-known pianist and accompanist, and winner of the Baume Scholarship in 1919, which had entitled her to four years' study at the Royal Academy of Music.

### **Douglas had that something extra in the 'good old days'**

Another visitor was seventy-nine-year-old William Unsworth of Blackpool - a retired engineer - who had visited the Island every year from his ninth birthday, and always stayed at the same boarding house, that of Mrs Kenny, Liverpool House, Peel Road, Douglas, first with the grandmother of Mrs Kenny, then with her mother. 'I have seen many changes down the years and I think they are all for the best'. He recalled his first visit when he arrived on a paddle steamer after a voyage of two-and-a-half to three hours and was ferried ashore in a small boat as the larger vessel was unable to dock at low water. The fare from Barrow to Douglas cost 2s 6d. He never missed the open-air Sunday morning service at Kirk Braddan. For Mr Unsworth, 'the Island will never lose its beauty . . . the illuminations are a wonderful sight at night and turn the whole place into a fairy wonderland'. He intended to celebrate his seventy-first birthday on the Island in 1960.

The second appearance of the The Mudlarks\* that season took place on 6<sup>th</sup> September, when 'Britain's foremost vocal group' were supported by Leslie Douglas and his orchestra.

\* See *Holiday News*, 29.08.1959 for photograph of The Mudlarks.

Flat-capped lugubrious Lancashire comic Ken 'as daft as a brush' Platt,\* one of the last links with the eras of music hall and variety, topped the bill on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> August, as he did year after year in pantomime and summer seasons throughout Britain, with catchphrases such as 'if you can laugh at this, you can knit fog'. In 1956 he had become one of the newcomers to star in radios' *Educating Archie* with Peter Brough and a host of other burgeoning talents such as Julie Andrews, Max Bygraves, Tony 'flippin' kids' Hancock and Dick Emery, and established his best-known opening line: 'I won't take me coat off, I'm not stoppin'. The supporting act was Billy 'Uke' Scott together with the Squads.

\* See *Holiday News*, 22.08.1959 for a photograph of Ken Platt.

End-of-season dancing in the ballroom with Leslie Douglas and his orchestra of twelve commenced early in September, and on the 12<sup>th</sup> *Toppin' the Town* closed for the season. The star of the show, Jack Storey, addressed the audience on the last night and confided that he had relished 'twelve of the most wonderful weeks he had ever enjoyed in show business . . . with a fine band of artistes and wonderful weather'.

## The Derby Castle and Opera House

The Derby Castle complex, the famous old Hall by the Sea had suddenly become ‘. . . the problem child of the Manx family of entertainment resorts’\* after eighty-seven years, and the question was posed: in order to survive, should the famous and much-loved entertainment venue become a Music Hall and Dance Pavilion appealing especially to middle-aged visitors, as many of them apparently found the new style entertainments ‘too smart and up-to-date’. All-in wrestling had been introduced on Wednesday evenings from June and throughout the season and proved to be enormously popular with TT fans in particular, but was this the ‘thin edge of the wedge’ that signalled its ultimate demise? In the meantime, for those that still remembered the heyday of the Castle, the new Florrie Forde Bar adjoining the main entrance to the ballroom, decorated with pictures and song sheets of the great chorus singer, provided a nostalgic haven in which to contemplate the changing face of entertainment in Douglas throughout the decades.

\* See Arthur Q. Moore (AQM), *Isle of Man Examiner*, 02.06.1959

\* William Sykes, the long-time manager of Derby Castle Ballroom, retired in July; he became the bar manager at the Villiers Hotel for a short time.

Basil Kirchin and his band opened the season in the ballroom on 29<sup>th</sup> June except Wednesdays. From July 31<sup>st</sup> there was dancing to Leslie Douglas and his orchestra, (also in the Palace Gardens during afternoons), with old-time nights on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Basil Kirchin moved to the Palais de Danse.

### Irish charm at the ‘Hall by the Sea’

The main summer show at the Opera House took place between 29<sup>th</sup> June and 29<sup>th</sup> August, the Bridie Gallagher ‘all Irish’ Show starring charming Bridie Gallagher herself. ‘The girl from Donegal’, fresh from box office breaking success in London and sensational sell-out concerts in Ireland, presented a programme of Irish songs and lyrical memories of Donegal and Erin’s Isle, supported by non-stop stand-up comedy with Belfast-born ‘bundle of energy’ Frank ‘It’s a cracker’ Carson, ‘a broth of a bhoys’, and stooge accomplice ‘Mr Fixit’ Billy Livingstone. Singer, dancer and personality girl Gertie Wine (apparently an extra in the court room scenes in the film *Shake Hands with the Devil* starring James Cagney) made a strong comic trio. The beautiful nineteen-year-old girl from Dublin, Deirdre O’Callaghan, sang with ‘angelic sweetness’ to the Irish harp (she was a regular vocalist on George Formby’s BBC TV show *Stepping Out with Formby*). The rest of the cast included The Mumfords with ‘Mamselle de Paris’, a two foot high wooden puppet that stole the show every night; mimic Connie Stewart; ‘musical moments’ with accordionist Pat Yorke; Irish tenor Frank McIlroy who ‘plucked at the heart strings’ with Irish ballads; the glamorous Harvey Sisters’ skilful tempo tap dancing; the Cy Brent Trio, who played ‘old time numbers’ and provided instrumental backing from the ‘pit’; stylish vocalist Ronnie Brewster and an indispensable and lively chorus completed the line-up. There were rather too many memories of Donegal and Erin’s Isle and sad laments for some tastes, but no-one could fail to be caught up in the ‘warmth and sincerity’ of the first-rate family entertainment. It was not a ‘rollicking’ spectacular looking show, but one that steadily won new audiences through the individual stars’ personalities, even if the ‘modern

curtain sets' contrasted oddly with occasional old-style variety back cloths. Perhaps the Castle was running out of back-stage resources and was no longer able to mount a really lavish production?

The end of season Manx Mhelliach at the Castle took place on 29<sup>th</sup> August supported by Leslie Douglas and his band.

### **At the 'flicks'**

The charming, captivating, elegant, easy on the eye musical *Gigi*, starring Leslie Caron, Maurice Chevalier and Louis Jourdan, with words and music by Lerner and Lowe, enjoyed a nine-week run at the Regal. Audrey Hepburn and Peter Finch starred in the Academy nominated, major box office success *The Nun's Story*. Billy Wilder's acclaimed, quick-witted romantic comedy *Some Like It Hot* featured Marilyn Monroe as a singer and ukulele player, and Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon as two musicians in 'drag' attempting to escape from the clutches of the mafia, and is still regarded as an enduring movie treasure today. *Some Came Running*, with Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Shirley MacLaine, was a cynical, bitter-sweet drama and probably Sinatra's best screen role. Once listed among the fifty worst films ever made, the musical *Say One for Me* with Bing Crosby and Debbie Reynolds misfired in three vital areas: story, acting and direction, but Howard Hawk's *Rio Bravo*, with John Wayne, Dean Martin, Ricky Nelson and Angie Dickinson endeavouring to keep a powerful rancher and his gang at bay whilst waiting for the arrival of a United States Marshall, is regarded by many as a 'classic' western. Despite some fine action sequences, however, others found the tale of a sheriff, a cripple, a young gunfighter and a drunk merely 'slow moving but watchable' for those with time on their hands.

HLD in the *Isle of Man Times*, 25th September, reflected on some disquieting news 'from all sides' of 'further inroads on cinema (ticket sales) returns'. The Rank Organisation\* were apparently already conducting experiments with 'other lines' - including skittle alleys - which could eventually outstrip films in the amount of revenue they yielded. Had not the Palace & Derby Castle Company's proposal for a skittle alley on the promenade been turned down last season? This decision now seemed short-sighted when a better balance between outdoor and indoor entertainments was seen to be the key to the continued success of Douglas as a resort of choice in all weathers. 'Should we (too) not seek new fields to replace those which are going out of fashion? The Palace & Derby Castle Company has the personnel, the machinery, the capital and, above all, the experience.' Fantastic summers could never be guaranteed.

The following week's offerings at the local cinemas included the X-rated *Horrors of the Black Museum* shown in Cinemascope and Eastman Colour, and Walt Disney's *Fantasia* presented in Superscope and full Stereophonic Sound and in colour by Technicolour.

\* The owners of five major British film studios including Pinewood, Ealing and Lime Grove and 650 cinemas. By the mid-1950s they were concentrating on the family market with such ventures as the Doctor series, the Norman Wisdom comedies and the Carry On series.

### **The smaller venues**

Basil Kirchin and his band played for dancing in the mornings at 10.30 and 12.30, and Leslie Douglas' (strict tempo) Quintet in the evenings at the Palais de Danse, together with new vocalist Jill Barrett and later in the season with Chris Andrews and Viki Lee, stars of television's *Oh Boy*. Tuesdays and Thursdays were designated 'old time' nights, but the 'Jive and Jovial' sessions some mornings and evenings were aimed at teenage holiday makers and attracted hundreds of enthusiastic young holiday makers. Jay Martell and Stella Hartley's *Happy Holiday Show* attracted huge family crowds at the Crescent Pavilion.\*

\* See *Holiday News* 20.06.1958 for photo of Stella Hartley and Audrey Mann (the star from *Toppin' the Town*).

The White City and Onchan Head Pavilion presented a variety of attractions and new features including 'lightning hypnotist' Josef Karma with assistant Elizabeth (his wife), and regularly had audiences 'rolling in the aisles' when audience members volunteered to be 'put under the 'fluence' and perform many ridiculous antics on stage. His 'cod' act was one of the most popular, or perhaps 'fishy', and successful shows in Douglas for many seasons.

There were Bingo or 'Housey-Housey' sessions in the visitors' lounge at Douglas Holiday Camp after the resort had been granted a license to hold the sessions at the request of the visitors, and dancing to Ronnie Booth and his music, plus Sunday concerts. George Pears and his 'good tempo' orchestra (probably a small 'combo') could be heard in the Pool Ballroom, Ramsey, and were an instant 'hit' with the dancers each afternoon and evening. The main resident vocalist and leader of a quartet of singers was Doreen Gayson; Wednesday night was 'Rock 'n' Roll night. George Pears and his ensemble left the Island at the end of 'a tremendous season' with farewells and happy memories of the 'wonderful Manx people'.

The café at Mooragh Park featured Harry Orchid for the season with a programme of old-time dances and a Sunday afternoon concert. There was dancing at Port Soderick with the Janet West Trio, as well as the Hermit's Cave, the Bishop's Chair, King Hago's Chair, a Smuggler's Cave, the Glen, and the Hotel and Café.

From June the Manx Kat Ballroom, Wellington Street, Douglas - the site of the old Theatre Royal where Henry Irving once appeared, and later a Salvation Army Citadel, a Civil Defence HQ, a skating rink and a warehouse - hosted 'Jive' sessions and talent spots (guitars provided) exclusively for local teenagers. The Cabin Ballroom in Duke Street, with its 'excellent floor and surroundings' presented old-time and sequence dancing every evening at 7.30 Fridays and Sundays excepted.

Perhaps the most unusual spectacle that season took place on 27<sup>th</sup> July when seventeen stone Manchester housewife 'Musical Marie' attempted to play the piano for 158 hours non-stop. Her nurse and trainer were in attendance!

### **Season's Reviews . . . visitors and other voices**

The passenger returns for the four months to the end of August\* revealed that 453,650 had travelled to the Island, an increase of 41,567 over the previous season, and whilst the improvement in the number of visitors was generally acknowledged, many businesses had not benefitted as much as was hoped and maintained that the consistently good weather kept people out of shops, cafés and entertainment venues. It proved difficult to tempt them

to leave their deck chairs on the promenades and sun-drenched beaches and board coaches for excursions to the Island's beauty spots and smaller towns, and no analysis of visitor numbers accounted for the decline in the take-up of day excursions from Fleetwood and elsewhere. Some traders observed that although they were busier, holiday makers had less money to spend. There was also a noticeable increase in visitors from far-flung places such as Hong Kong, Canada, Australia and Nyasaland (present day Malawi), part of the Federation of Rhodesia at the time. All spoke highly of the beauty of the Island.

\* *Isle of Man Examiner* 24.09.1959

Peel bucked the trend among the smaller resorts and emerged as one of the Island's 'high spots' with a marked increase in the numbers of day trippers seen about the town, and sales of meals, teas, soft drinks and ice creams all up. Parking and congestion, however, remained a bugbear, and a move to clear 'charas' from Peel promenade met with a mixed reception from many businesses: 'No wonder motorists do not come to Peel'. Some felt that the warm weather had affected the coach tour trade with holiday makers preferring to stay on the beaches.

The Villa receipts were up just over £1,600 on the 1958 season although the café recorded a small decline in business. Expenditure on bands and artistes was down with a consequent saving of £3,000.

**'The future is uncertain . . . our entertainments can survive only if they are made to pay and are an essential part of our visitor industry'.\***

Arthur Moore in his *Examiner* Island Notes\* asked 'why aren't the North Country holiday resorts (including the Isle of Man) drawing the visiting crowds they used to do?' He suggested that the usual reasons commonly applied to the Island: 'no swim pool, no casino, dear fares and dear beer' ignored 'the basic causes' such as changes in holiday habits, more cars and caravans on English roads, more workers deciding to spend their cash on weekend breaks rather than saving all year for an annual fling in Douglas, Blackpool or Morecambe as their parents and grandparents had done, and the inexorable increase in 'trips to the Continent'. These were 'the BASIC causes' that accounted for the loss of thousands of holiday guests at British seaside resorts, and he concluded by stating that 'we are living in an age of innumerable "counter attractions"', and to blame local conditions 'means that we appear not to see the wood for the trees'.

\* *Isle of Man Times* 25.09.1959.

\* *Isle of man Examiner* 25.06.1959

**'Now is the time for a "New Look" for summer entertainments'.\***

An article in the *Daily Mail*, cited in the *Isle of Man Daily Times* in early September, propounding the view of a number of British climatologists that the present fine summer heralded 'hot and humid' summers for the next twenty or thirty years, with semi-tropical heatwaves a feature of some areas, prompted Arthur Moore\* to urge that 'the pattern of summer entertainment must undergo a revolutionary change'. 'Indoor shows', he suggested, 'may well become extinct - though indoor dancing is likely to survive for many more seasons

. . .' Whilst promoters of shows and revues invariably prayed for poor weather so that the holiday makers would seek indoor entertainment, the holiday makers themselves prayed for long, sunny days which they could spend on the beaches. However, the weather - good or indifferent - could not be blamed for fluctuations in visitor numbers, nor for the falling off in audiences for summer shows which were to be found in the nature of the shows themselves, which too often fell back on the tried (tired) and trusted formulas of earlier generations. What was needed was 'an influx of fresh ideas' and an acknowledgement that the most popular seaside entertainments were those that involved the audiences in talent competitions, quizzes and television inspired 'give-away shows'. In this respect, the editor of *The Stage* praised the *Happy Holiday Show* at the Crescent Pavilion which featured *Stella's Party* which had run successfully for eleven successive seasons to date.

Moore concluded that if the scientists were to be believed, and 'we are to be faced with a long succession of 'sizzling' summers', then sooner or later outdoor entertainments will begin to attract night-time as well as daytime holiday patrons, and therefore the Island should lose no time in preparing to cater for audiences who won't want to spend their evening nights indoors'. *Al fresco* attractions, including food and drink, inspired by holiday makers' experiences of Continental holidays, could be part of a new 'heatwave' future for the entertainment industry. If the Island was not to be 'caught napping', then the Douglas Head entertainments could be reinstated and revitalised, and a permanent summer light orchestra ('in evening dress, please!') to perform during the evenings should be formed. The Mayor of Douglas, Alderman T. D. Lewis, ostrich-like, clung on optimistically: 'I have always held that the trend in favour of continental holidays . . . would pass, and now I think the cycle is ending and home resorts can look forward to better times'. He was, of course, quite wrong!

\* Mollie Ellis, editor of *The Stage*, August 1959.

\* *Isle of Man Daily Times*, 02.09.1959

### **'It's like old times . . .'**

An elderly Douglas resident remarked to the *Mona's Herald* in July, that 'it was good to see a large number of families . . . with so many youngsters playing happily on the beach' . . . because 'they give the whole place a carefree and cosy holiday atmosphere'. The Island should welcome young visitors with open arms because the children of today might return to the Island with their own families in the years to come, as one visitor certainly did after falling in love with the Island when he stayed at Cunningham's Camp as a teenager 'counting the coppers', meeting his future wife at a dance at the Derby Castle, returning to the Island for his honeymoon and later for holidays with his own children. Far from staying at the cheaper boarding houses, 'that now wealthy gentleman . . . still comes to the Island . . . because he enjoyed such good value here as a boy'.

Douglas, it seemed, was by no means 'finished, as the pessimists would have us believe', and the Island's natural beauty continued to be an ace in the pack. There was a welcome drop in rowdiness that season, something which had been of some concern in recent seasons, and the Police were complimented on their efforts to stamp it out.

**'Your bread and butter and our pleasure at risk'.\***

One veteran of thirty-seven annual holidays in Douglas asked: 'Are you trying to encourage or discourage visitors going to the Isle of Man . . .' Bert Storey of Belfast fondly recalled the atmosphere in Douglas during the Florrie Forde era, the piano playing in the singing rooms, the musicians on the pre-war cross harbour ferries and the entertainments on Douglas Head. He had visited the Island in recent years for both the TT and the Manx Grand Prix and was disappointed that both the Crescent Pavilion and Derby Castle were closed in June, and that the best the Gaiety Theatre could offer was to take out of 'cold storage' George Formby's *No Limit*, 'a picture played out years ago'. He concluded: '. . . we Northern Ireland folk and the Manx people have a lot in common. I am one of the Island's best ambassadors, so don't let me down'.

\* *Mona's Herald* 29.09.1959

On a positive note, Selwyn Griffith of Caernarvon, North Wales, reflecting from his cottage on the slopes of Snowdon on his first visit to the Island with two friends, wrote of their lovely room overlooking Douglas Bay from their boarding house on Loch Promenade and the fresh air coming through their bedroom window and the enticing smell of eggs and bacon each morning. Other highlights included a Mystery Coach tour and a Strawberry Tea at Rushen Abbey listening to music from the resident trio; the darting trout along the river from the Abbey; the view of Douglas Head; the sun-baked sheltered beaches at Port Erin and Port St. Mary; the Castle at Castletown; 'the kipper smelling' lanes of Peel and an after dinner walk along Fenella Beach to St. Patrick's Isle; they were reminded of certain Welsh fishing ports as they wandered around the harbour in Ramsey and relaxing in a deck chair that afternoon listening to Ivy Benson's band; the top of Snaefell they thought to be 'bare and uninteresting' (it is, and littered with 'junk!') but the winding climb to the top of Laxey Wheel was well worth the effort. Welsh was apparently not a language often heard in Douglas; one resident asked them if they were Spanish or Yugoslavian and another Icelandic! Mr Griffiths looked forward to saluting the 'glistening' Island from the peak of Snowdon in the near future.

\* *Isle of Man Daily Times*, 21.10.1959.

The Licensing Commission re-opened its public sessions at the Douglas Courthouse at the end of September - it had been appointed eleven months previously - and decided that the question of Sunday opening during the season should be put to an Island plebiscite, but the Bill when presented to House of Keys was rejected.

The new licensee of the Star Hotel, Drumgold Street, Douglas was Mrs Lois Jones, the wife of the dance band singer and radio star Howard Jones who was well known on the Island through his many appearance with Joe Loss at the Villa Marina. She was the daughter of Walter Howarth of the Waterloo Hotel and an experienced licensee; Howard Jones would be frequently away from the Island fulfilling his many engagements.

In September Chapman's Travel House reported that many more Manx folk had booked Continental Tours at the end of the season than ever before, with Portugal, Spain and Italy proving the most popular. All-in holidays at British resorts were also well supported with Eastbourne and Margate especially popular.

**'Construct a Tunnel from England!'**

What may have been the end of season's 'silliest suggestion' came from Onchan Commissioner Frank Stone\* who earnestly proposed the construction of a fourteen-mile tunnel from Whitehaven to Ramsey. He anticipated that his 'wake up' initiative would result in the disappearance of sea travel to the Island within twenty years and would banish the woes of seasickness forever.

\* *Isle of Man Times*, 30.10.59

## 1960

### 'Douglas leads the way with holiday fun'.

In the opinion of some commentators, however, Douglas was a fading resort living on its pre-war reputation, or even those golden decades during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. For those who thought long and hard about the future of the Island's economy there was the realisation that 'for a long time to come the Island's prosperity will rely on the tourist trade'. Others believed that the way ahead lay in making a priority of attracting new permanent residents to the Island with the tourist industry taking second place; it was accepted that this strategy could take years to develop with no guarantee of success.

The realisation that the three-month holiday season would never create the resources to create work on a small Island, let alone pay out unemployment benefit in increasing amounts every year, came into focus as the spectre of heavy winter unemployment and queues outside the Employment Exchange loomed as each season - however successful - drew to a close. In the words of J. C. Nivison MHK, it was 'a tragic sight (that was) accepted as inevitable', barely relieved by the departure of men in October to work in the English sugar beet industry.\*

\* 'Situation scandalous', *Isle of Man Daily Times* 06.09.1960.

### 1960 in nutshell

The Grand National was broadcast for the first time in March; the marriage of Princess Margaret and Anthony Armstrong-Jones took place in May, the first Royal Wedding to be televised; in July Sir Francis Chichester arrived in New York on *Gypsy Moth II* after his solo Atlantic crossing of forty days; in August the Beatles gave their famous Hamburg concert under the name 'Beatles'; in September ITV broadcast the first live football match; the first traffic wardens began to infest the streets of London; D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* sold 200,000 copies in one day when the ban on its publication was lifted; the Nation's favourite 'soap' *Coronation Street* was first aired by Granada Television in December; the last farthing was minted on December 31<sup>st</sup>; conscription ended; Ian Fleming's *For Your Eyes Only* was published; the actor Kenneth Brannagh was born; radio and television personality Gilbert Harding and novelist Neville Shute died; Lionel Bart's *Oliver* opened in London's West End; Colin Davis made his conducting debut at a Promenade Concert; Lonnie Donegan recorded *My Old Man's a Dustman*; on the silver screen Peter Cushing vanquished *The Brides of Dracula* and, ordered by Churchill to *Sink the Bismarck*, Kenneth More duly obliged with the help of several Royal Navy capital ships, an aircraft carrier and some flimsy torpedo planes. On a lighter note: the Manx Tartan was registered in September, and Patricia McQuaid of Ramsey was awarded the Manxmark.

## Phil and Ivy at the Villa Marina

Absent from Douglas for two seasons, Phil Moss\* and his seventeen-piece band opened for a ten-week season at the Villa Marina on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> June, supported by the band's new mascot, a white Manx kitten named 'Marina'. He told the *Mona's Herald* that he was very happy to do 'old time' nights when dance floor and galleries 'were packed with thousands of old age pensioners who, when they take to the dance floor, give an object lesson to the Rock 'n' Rollers and Jivers . . . you really feel you are playing to the PEOPLE'. The band's star vocalists Jackie Allan, talented Toni Sharpe, Geoff Lindsay and Don Banks were supported by the harmony group the 'Hi-Fi's' (a trio formerly known as The Metronotes) whose members included Miss Lee Williams, and the group's skilful arranger Liverpool-born Ted Griffith, whose parents were hotel owners in Port Erin, and who had toured with Shirley Bassey and appeared at London's Windmill Theatre. There was late night dancing every Wednesday until 11.45. 'Cool Cats' were catered for at the Villa Marina Jive Club each morning when Ivy Benson and her band played for upwards of 2,500 young holiday makers, 'swirling and shuffling' to the band. Perhaps it was now considered 'square' to be 'square' wrote one commentator as he noticed the 'dead-pan' expressions on the faces of the young dancers. 'Are they actually enjoying what they're doing?'

\*Manchester-born bandleader Phil Moss first came to the Island as a trumpeter with the Joe Loss band in 1947. He formed his own band in 1951 and in 1953 returned to Douglas as resident band at Cunningham's Holiday Camp followed by four successive seasons at the Derby Castle and Palace Ballrooms (1954-57). A keen dancer himself, he had a reputation for playing 'strict tempo music for dancing'. Photograph in *Holiday News* 20.08.1960

Billy Duncan and his Hammond organ\* could be heard in the Gardens every morning, and Auntie Rose and Uncle Roy entertained the youngest holiday makers in the children's theatre (Kiddies Corner) at 2.45 each afternoon. The fourth season of Bathing Beauty Contests began on 30<sup>th</sup> June, together with the Talent Competitions.

\* See *Holiday News* 09.07.1969 for a photograph.

Ivy Benson and her all-girl band - together with pet poodles Pepe and Kelly - returned to the Villa Marina on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> June for a sixth successive season after a thirty-hour trip direct from the Hamburg Lido (and Allied Air Force base at Ramstein, where four girls deserted the band for American soldiers!), followed by a brief stop-over in London where Ivy was a guest on BBC Radio's comedy quiz *Does the Team Think*, which she described as 'a riot'. Her new American forces husband was stationed in England and was expected to spend the summer with Ivy in Douglas. Glamorous vocalist Wendy Dodd from Newcastle appeared for a second season with Ivy in Douglas and sang everything from hit parade numbers to popular operatic arias; drummer Paula Pyke (fourteen years with the band since she left school); vivacious pianist Muriel Todd, and eighteen-year-old Rock 'n' Roll singer Ann Bridgeman\*, a Brummy lass discovered by Ivy Benson when the band performed at an Ideal Homes Exhibition in Birmingham, were among the soloists. Eighteen-year-old trombonist Jackie Davies\* rejoined the band that summer after a serious operation, and was joined by fifteen-year-old sister trombonist Julie. 'It's music - music - music all the way in the Davies family'.

\* See *Holiday News* 25.06.1960 for early season photographs of Ivy Benson's drummer Paula Pike, Ronnie Aldrich, Phil Moss, Ivy Benson herself, pianist Semprini, Irish comedian Harry Bailey and Vanda Vale who was starring with Vic Oliver at the Palace Coliseum.

\* She later became the lead guitarist with the '60s all-girl group 'The Beat-Chics', all Ivy Benson 'band graduates', who achieved short-lived success with *Skinny Minnie* and *Now I Know* in 1964.

\* Their father Jack Davies was a multi-instrumentalist who worked with Charlie Chester, Max Bygraves, Frankie Vaughan, Tommy Steele and Norman Wisdom, and had been a member of Billy Ternent's and Henry Hall's bands.

### **Pearl and Teddy, Eddie, Ronnie, Alma top the bills**

On Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> the celebrity guest star was Carole Carr, a dance band singer from the age of fourteen, a former Forces' sweetheart, the first singer to appear on television when broadcasting resumed after World War II, and the first to appear on colour television in 1957, she was almost as well known for her beautiful gowns as for her rich, mellow voice and elegant phrasing. Another popular singer appeared the following Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> June, David Hughes, with the Lhon Doo Choir conducted by Douglas Buxton. He sang a selection of popular ballads and operatic arias, supported by Ivy Benson and organist Billy Duncan.

Husband-and-wife duo Pearl Carr and Teddy Johnson,\* supported by Phil Moss and his band, topped the bill at the Sunday Concert on 3<sup>rd</sup> July. Among their numbers was *Sing Little Birdie*, the song which had earned them second place in the 1959 Eurovision Song Contest, and which reached number 12 in the UK Singles Chart.

\* They represented the UK again in 1960, but in the final they were pipped to second place by Johnson's brother Bryan with *Looking High, High, High*. They retired from showbusiness in 1990; Teddy Johnson died in 2018 and Pearl Carr in 2020, both aged 98.

Eddie Calvert\* 'The Man with the Golden Trumpet', was the top of the bill on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup>, with Ivy Benson in support. The reviews do not mention what pieces he played, but it's almost certain his selection will have included his 1953 'hit' *Oh, My Papa*, and *Cherry Pink* from 1955. Although his individual, open sound strongly appealed to record buyers in the 1950s - *Oh, My Papa* was in the UK charts for nine weeks, a record for a British instrumentalist - like so many stars of the '50s his popularity faded during the 1960s.

\* See *Holiday News* 09.07.1960 for photograph.

On Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> Scotland's vocal star, tenor Allan Bruce, 'the new romantic voice', together with Ivy Carey,\* and with support from Ivy Benson and her girls, appeared in a programme of Scottish and Irish favourites including *Marching Through the Heather*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, *The Danny Boy* and the *Eriskay Love Lilt*. Billed as 'Scotland's favourites', the husband-and-wife double act Gracie Clark and Colin Murray, known as Mr and Mrs Glasgow, were the celebrity guests on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup>. Their two singers at the piano, hen-pecked husband and nagging wife act, endeared them to many and before World War II they appeared often with great Scottish iconic stars like Harry Lauder and Will Fyffe. Their comic potential was recognised by Jimmy Logan who described them as 'two old pros who could always make me smile and roar with laughter'. Doubtless they performed their signature duet *And I Love You So*, with Gracie at the piano and Colin in full Highland dress. Phil Moss and his band and the Hi-Fi's were in support.

\* Possibly Ivy Carey Ford, 'the Scottish Nightingale', whose seventy-year career spanned the globe. She moved to America during the 1960s and continued performing for Scottish Clan and St. Andrew's Societies.

The current Cleveland Medallist at the Manx Music Festival, 'talented young Manx soprano' Margaret Curphey,\* appeared with Ivy Benson in the Villa Marina Gardens on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup>, deputising at short notice for Wendy Todd who had sustained burns following an accident at her 'digs'. She also appeared at Port Erin cinema with the Band of the Royal Horse Guards conducted by Major Tommy Thirtle, who later became something of a Manx brass banding legend, and after whom the Thirtle Bridge in Castletown is named.

\* Margaret Curphey, a pupil of Douglas Buxton, also won the lieder and oratorio classes that year

The star of Dial M for Music, velvet-voiced Ronnie Carroll, sang *First Love* and *My Believing Heart* at the Sunday Concert on 31<sup>st</sup> July. A headline act during the 1950s and '60s with eight chart hits, he represented Britain two years in succession at the Eurovision Song Contest in 1962 and '63. Like so many solo singers of the 1950s his popularity waned during the 1960s, unable to combat the irresistible surge of 'Beatle' and other 'manias'. Ivy Benson and her band together with the Manx Girls' Choir conducted by Harry Pickard lent sterling support.

Meanwhile, large crowds were daily 'basking in the sun, and enjoying the fun' in the Villa Marina Gardens, none more so than three-year-old Lynda Bates from Warrington, who was placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in one of Ivy Benson's talent competitions.

The 'vivacious singing star' Alma Cogan made her second visit to the Villa on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> August. Memories of her previous visit in 1959 were, however, tinged with sadness as her grandmother, who lived in Douglas, died that September. On this occasion Alma was accompanied by her mother Fay, on her first visit to the Island, who supervised the laying of a memorial stone at the grave site in Douglas Borough Cemetery.

Two thousand people attended the Midnight Charity Ball which commenced at 11.00pm on the 14<sup>th</sup> and featured the famous bands in Douglas for the summer - the Squads, Ivy Benson's girls, Phil Moss and organist Stanley Tudor - and 'a galaxy of stars' from the holiday shows. The cabaret was led by Edna Savage; Stella Hartley drew the winning tombola tickets at 3am.

### **'The Wacky Warbler'**

'The girl who had everything', immensely talented and versatile Joan Turner was the celebrity start on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> August. She has been likened to a female Harry Secombe, as both possessed voices of operatic quality but found their home in showbusiness. Hers was an on-off career whose peak period extended from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. In addition to a vocal range of four octaves – she would sing the *Jewel Song* from Gounod's *Faust* one minute and 'an eerily convincing' impersonation of Bette Davis the next - she had a tremendous gift for comedy, which left audiences wondering who the real Joan Turner was; such nicknames as 'The Wacky Warbler' did her no favours.\*

\* During the 1980s she appeared in New York and Los Angeles, and returned to the UK with a one-women show which was not successful. Many later television opportunities were short-lived because her drinking and unreliability made her difficult to work with. In 2001 she was reported to be living as a virtual down-and-out in

Los Angeles. It was a sad end for a superb natural talent and, for a time, the highest paid female singer in the UK.

Hughie 'Double Your Money' Green was the celebrity television personality on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> August. The ensuing week was marked by dance demonstrations by Bob Burgess and Doreen Freeman, winners of the 1960 'Star' Championship in London, during the 6<sup>th</sup> Isle of Man Old Time Dance Festival. Phil Moss and his band provided the dance music; the week ended with a Grand Old-Time Ball. During the mornings that week the crowds were entertained by the Band of the Royal Horse Guards.

'Let Douglas Go Gay!' was the order for the 1960 Douglas Carnival which took place between 22<sup>nd</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> August. Among the special features was a group of seventeen glamorous 'high-stepping' drum majorettes; Mona Douglas' Manx International Dancing Team; the Band of the Royal Horse Guards and the return visit of the USAF 'Jiving' Band. The Carnival Queen was chosen at the Selection Ball at the Villa Marina on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

The esteemed piano duettists Rawicz and Landauer topped the bill on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> August, with Ivy Benson's all-girl band and the Lhon Doo Choir for one of the best-attended concerts of the season. For the following two weeks Ivy Benson and her band entertained the crowds each afternoon in the Gardens at 2.30 and played for dancing in the Royal Hall each evening at 7.30. Each morning and afternoon organist Billy Duncan played in the Gardens for old time dancing enthusiasts.

The celebrity star on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> September was the 'insanely funny', seaside postcard style comedian, pantomime stalwart and wizard guitar player Stan Stennett, supported by 'pops' prima donna Margaret West. The fourteen-week series of Bathing Beauty Contests culminated on 9<sup>th</sup> September when 22-year-old Blackpool secretary Marny Birchall was crowned 'Queen of Man' in the Villa Marina Gardens. Ivy Benson's farewell dance took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> when the popular band leader and personality thanked the audience for their warm welcome to Douglas, and the local newspapers thanked Ivy and her girls 'for their tremendous contribution to entertainment in the resort'.

\* He once boasted that his joke book contained 25,000 jokes, and later in life insisted that he was now *the* alternative comedian, as everyone else was 'filthy'. He is best remembered for regular appearances in the *Black and White Minstrel Show* in the 1960s, and roles in *Coronation Street*, *Crossroads* and a number of films

### **The Palace Ballroom and Coliseum**

Ronnie Aldrich and the Squadronaires returned to the Palace Ballroom on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> June, together with his familiar team of vocalists, soloists and entertainers including 'zestful' Peter Morton,\* Bobby Burns, 'vocal charmer' Joan Baxter\* and the 'singing saxophone' of Cliff Townsend\* Laurie Brown, drummer, and Reg Rossiter, tenor sax and violin. The 'Squadcats' – the name was inspired by the American group the Bobcats - consisting of trumpet, clarinet, trombone and rhythm section, played Dixieland Jazz numbers, together with legendary jazz pianist Jack Honeybourne,\* who had played with Ken Mackintosh, Nat Gonella and Joe Loss, and had been the accompanist for many singing stars including Frankie Vaughan, Eartha Kitt, Sammy Davis Jr. and Peggy Lee, and for nineteen years, Vera Lynn as both accompanist and arranger. The 'Squadronets' - a smaller group of Squads players - performed in the

'Continental' style in the Palace Gardens during the afternoons which included the Personality Parades. Stanley Tudor, the King of the Mighty Wurlitzer, at one time the resident organist at the Gaumont Theatre, Manchester, and a regular BBC broadcaster, played organ requests every morning.

\* See *Holiday News* 09.07.1960 for photograph

\* See *Holiday News* 13.08.1960 for photograph

\* See *Holiday News* 23.07.1960

\* *Mona's Herald* 21.06.1960. His new wife Maron was the winner of the Miss Fenella Bathing Beauty Contests at the Villa Marina in June. He appeared in the charming 2012 film *The Quartet*.

The season in the ballroom ended with a number of prestigious events. A Grand Military Ball took place in the Ballroom on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> August, followed by a carnival ball the following evening, and a Grand Highland Ball on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Billed as 'one of the great features of the late season', the fourth annual Old Time Dance Festival, which attracted 2,000 members of the International Sequence Dance Circle, commenced on the 29<sup>th</sup> in the Villa Marina and Palace Ballrooms, and was a popular event for visitors and residents alike. Famed for its 'one big happy family' atmosphere, the festival was first brought to the Island by Mr F. J. Mainey in 1956, and his faith that 'one day thousands of members would attend' was fully justified. The ladies in their gowns and the gentlemen in full evening dress presented 'a never to be forgotten spectacle'. The Lieutenant Governor and Lady Garvey were present together with the mayor of Douglas at the final night Festival Ball on 2<sup>nd</sup> September; the evening ended with the Squadronaires, and Stanley Tudor, organ, played *Land of Hope and Glory*.

### **'A Summer Show with A Glow'**

Billed as 'A Festival of Fun – Glamour – Melody – Thrills', the resident summer show at the Coliseum from 20<sup>th</sup> June starred 'mouth-ragious' and wisecracking 'Mr Variety' himself, Vic Oliver, whose blend of 'Sentiment and Sophistication' in musical entertainment ranging from Grieg, Saint-Saëns and Chopin to the 'hottest pops', went down well with Douglas holiday audiences. He was joined by actress Vanda Vale and the 'blonde charmer' with a lovely voice Nina Cooke 'in several side-splitting sketches'. Other acts included The Kentones vocal group, the Salici Puppet Company from Italy, roof-raising acrobatics from the Manetti Twins and Marie de Vere's Twelve Glamourettes\* in their Ballet Montparnasse fantasy and Can-Can routine. Les Brasilianos introduced an element of exotic dancing and juggling in their 'Mardigras' parade sequence, and Patricia Ashworth added a touch of 'classical' ballet *élan* to the programme.

\* See *Holiday News* 30.07.1960 for a photograph.

\* Whilst staying in Port St. Mary during the summer Vic Oliver met Port Erin landscape artist William Hoggatt, who had found inspiration on the Island when he moved here forty years earlier. He later recalled that he found Vic Oliver to be 'a very nice man'.

The guest celebrities on 6<sup>th</sup> June were Robert Earl, 'The Voice of Variety' and Harry Bailey 'The King of Blarney'. The Mudlarks appeared on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, and Ronnie Hilton - 'charm and an easy manner' - sang *Young and Foolish; Around the World; Wonderful, Wonderful; and I'm*

*Beginning to See the Light* topped the bill on the 10<sup>th</sup>. Two great Scottish entertainers, Kenneth McKellar and Jimmy Logan, played to full houses on 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> July respectively, and on the 31<sup>st</sup>, Toni Dalli,\* a phenomenon whose film star looks secured for him a loyal following amongst teenagers even though he sang mainly ballads and operatic arias. On that occasion, however, he gave a selection from *The Student Prince*, and the ever popular *Come Prima, Chao, Chao Bambina* and lastly *My Ain Folk*.

\* See *Holiday News* 23.07.1960 for a photograph.

Topping the bill for the first time at the Coliseum on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> August was the beautiful twenty-six-year-old 'sizzler' Yana, the perfect 5' 2 Essex-born model, singer, actress and pantomime star, voted one of the six most beautiful women in the world. She was a household name in the 1950s due to her 'pin-up' girl looks, but was perhaps rather more than just another 'blonde bombshell' in the Munroe and Dors mode. Although as one commentator put it: 'If hers was 'the face to launch a thousand ships' then she certainly possessed the body to keep them in harbour after they arrived!' She sang many well-known favourites in her thirty-minute act, and shared the programme with Harry Bailey, the King of Blarney', supported by the Squads.

\* Yana (real name Pamela Guard) rose to fame and flourished during the 1950s, but in an era of blonde bombshells she was one blonde bombshell too many, and her career faded during the 1960s. Although her BBC television series 'The Yana Show' lasted just one series, she frequently appeared at Sunday Night at the London Palladium and other variety stages alongside bigger stars such as Norman Wisdom, Tommy Steele, Max Bygraves, Jimmy Clitheroe, Jewell and Warriss, Jimmy Young and George Formby. She appeared in cameo roles in three films and made over two hundred appearances on American television. Her most popular 'hit' record was the seductively sung *Climb up the Wall*. By the 1980s she was working in a Boots Chemist in London, and although briefly re-discovered, her last engagement was demonstrating a slimming machine at Harrods. She died of cancer at the age of fifty-seven.

Peter Brough and Archie Andrews, together with twenty-four-year-old petite singer Edna Savage,\* topped the bill on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> August. Presented as 'The greatest Vent Act in Showbusiness', he was certainly not that, and some thought that he was barely competent despite his immense popularity on radio. Perhaps that was the point. One could be a mediocre 'vent' on radio because nobody could see your lips moving! The radio show's enormous popularity was due in part to the appearance of a host of guest 'tutors' for 'dummy' Archie, including Max Bygraves, Tony Hancock and Sid James, and for the excellent scripts by a team of writers who included Eric Sykes. Peter Brough was not a superb ventriloquist in the Arthur Worsley league, but he was always billed alongside the very best entertainers.

\* She was in the throws of a divorce from her wayward Rock 'n' Roll star husband Terry Dean, whereas the previous season she had been hoping for a reconciliation.

The House Full signs were out for Dickie Henderson on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> particularly after his 'brilliant impersonation' of Norman Wisdom set the rafters rattling. Michael Holliday's second appearance in Douglas on 28<sup>th</sup> August proved to be one of the most popular Celebrity Concerts of the season, and his relaxed, easy-going *persona* fully justified the *soubriquet* 'The British Bing Crosby'. His well-crafted *nonchalant*, cosy armchair style, however, hid a career-long struggle with stage fright which led to a mental breakdown just a few short years ahead, and may possibly have contributed to his early death in 1963 from a suspected drug overdose.

It is not known precisely which songs he sang on that occasion, but we can be sure that his selection included his 1958 UK number one 'hit' *The Story of My Life*, and probably *My Heart is an Open Book* and *Life is a Circus*. Pearl Carr and Teddy Johnson\* topped the bill on Sunday 4th September, and Vic Oliver's season ended on September 10<sup>th</sup>.

\* See *Holiday News* 27.08.1960 for a photograph.

### **The Derby Castle and Opera House:**

So far as I am aware, 1960 was the first - and sadly not the last - year in the history of 'The Hall by the Sea' when no resident band was engaged for the ballroom for the summer season, apart, that is, for the two seasons lost forever due to wartime restrictions. Instead, the ballroom was given over to 'All-star, Free-style Wrestling', which returned on 15<sup>th</sup> June on Monday and Wednesday evenings. Wrestling had been 'a big hit' at the Castle last season and was presumably a less expensive option than trying to compete with the Villa Marina and Palace Ballroom and their well-known bands and charismatic band leaders. Many will have seen this as another example of the sad decline in the fortunes of the Derby Castle, if not indicative of a perceived general decline in the quality and quantity of entertainments in Douglas since the departure of Joe Loss in 1955.

'A whirlwind show of mirth and mystery' in the Opera House from July until 11<sup>th</sup> September starred 'man of mystery' Karma, formerly at the Onchan Head Pavilion, with a show that combined 'merriment and mesmerism' in which he was assisted by his wife Elizabeth. This 'cod' stage hypnotist maintained that, 'being fey', the Celtic races were the most suitable subjects for hypnosis, although Manx girls were just too shy to appear on stage when volunteers were called for. Billed as a 'lightning hypnotist, Josef Karma's shows were amongst the most popular in Douglas for years, particularly when he put a crowd of people on stage into a trance and got them to make fools of themselves eating lemons which they were told were oranges, feeding fairies and singing to a microphone. One normally sceptical reviewer wrote that he had not laughed so much in a theatre for a long time, and would not have missed it for worlds.\*

\* *Isle of Man Examiner* 07.07.1960

### **The smaller venues**

*The Happy Holiday Show* opened at the Crescent Pavilion on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> June with Stella Hartley and 'principal funmaker', Yorkshire comedian Gordon Peters in charge together with a host of supporting acts including West End stars Martin Gluth and Helen James, a popular vocal and piano cabaret style duo, who appeared in fabulous 'period' costumes, researched at the British Museum and elsewhere, and designed and made themselves. The rest of the cast included Bourne and Barbara, 'Miming Their Own Business'; The Regency Twins and Mary Miller 'at her piano'. Stella's on-stage 'Party' ('fun for all with gifts and prizes') was the most popular feature of a show which entertained families for years, although one visitor from Wigan judged it to be tired, hackneyed and third rate. The show ended at the end of the first week of September.

\* See *Mona's Herald* 21.06.1960 for a photograph of Stella Hartley and Gordon Peters.

George Pears and his Radio Quartette returned to the Pool Ballroom and Swimming Pool, Ramsey, every evening from 8.00 until 11.00, and at Douglas Holiday Camp, Jack Stone and his band, direct from the Apollo Ballroom, Manchester, played for dancing and presented a Sunday evening band show.

Ted Reece and his summer show *Variety Funfare* played twice daily at Douglas Head open-air theatre (or in the Douglas Head Hotel when wet) twice daily at 1.00am and 3.00pm from 20<sup>th</sup> June, and featured Jim Della's performing dogs, Velma, a mind reader, the Yorkshire comedian Slim Wood, entertainer at the piano Freddie Fyans and The Three Georgians, two accordion ladies and one man, with 'modern rhythm' selections.

John Jolley and his band provided the music at the Palais (de Danse) Ballroom, whilst there was old time dances at the Cabin Ballroom, and the Perrino Dance Club, Duke Street, a Children's Ballroom Club. Howard Rudd, pianist, entertained nightly at the Falcon Cliff Hotel, and there was dancing at the Majestic Hotel to the new Hammond Organ at 7.30 each evening. The Vicki Levis Trio were resident at Bradda Glen for the season.

The Anne Hathaway Restaurant and Supper Club (Victoria Street) presented a twice nightly Cabaret featuring exotic dancer Maltese-born Wanda Lamarr with 'her lovely dark looks and fondness of Indian dances', the Singing, Swinging Suedettes, the Meteors, 'vocal group with a difference', Wade Reynolds, Rock 'n' Roll Songster and singer and pianist Jim Maddox. Jimmy Jackson, tenor, with 'a song for everyone' appeared nightly at the Prospect Hotel, together with Jonnie 'Guitar' Fallon, Manxland's favourite pianist Ken Douglas and Frankie Heath, drums.

At the Witches Mill, Castletown, there was dancing in the new ballroom afternoons and evenings. That fine old Manx institution, Strawberry Teas at Rushen Abbey were as popular as ever, and bowls, crazy golf, tennis and much else was available at the Switzerland pleasure ground, and with its escalator from Queen's Promenade to the Switzerland Café, was an easy excursion from the centre of Douglas.

Of dubious entertainment value perhaps, Louis Tussaud's Waxworks and Pictorial Exhibition in Wellington Street, featured exhibitions of infamous murderers, World War II, and 'The Horrors of the Concentration Camps!' Another decades old Manx tradition, the open-air services at Kirk Braddan and Douglas Head Grotto, were as well attended as ever.

### **Season reviews**

*'Not a bad season . . . maybe even a fairly good season . . . but a disappointing season'.*

*Disappointing because something better was expected.*

John Quirk \* in the *Isle of Man Daily Times* wrote wistfully about the approaching end of the summer season in his 'Diary' in September: 'Two weeks to go before the holiday season will be over . . . steamers tied up for the winter; brown paper will adorn the windows of certain hotels on the promenades; beds stripped and linen stored; temporary staff will 'sign their autographs at Noble's Hall'; tram horses will depart for their winter grazing; deck chairs stored away and reels of *No Limit* will be returned until required next June when the Island 'shakes

the dust from the well-worn doormat'. He predicted that there would be few visitors to enjoy 'the autumnal tones in the South', as the 'moderate-to-good season' nose-dived during the second week of September. A major end-of-season event was needed, like the Old Time Dance Festival which attracted two to three thousand people, which demonstrated' that small events can grow into large ones!' Soon the familiar round of local events would begin as the Island prepared to shrug off the dispiriting prospects of a long, dismal winter: dinners, dances, Ballamodha whist drives and Knocksharry beetle drives; Dalby Cruinaght, Grenaby tay fights; farmer's forums; 'jive' contests at Fairy Cottage and so forth.

His tongue-in-cheek predictions as to what might occur during the forty-five weeks between seasons make interesting reading:

- A battle will ensue when the Bill to register hotels and boarding houses comes before the House of Keys.
- The Douglas Borough Treasurer will convince the Tramways Committee that the horse trams cost too much, even though the horse trams actually pay their way, and the buses lose money.
- One thousand unemployed people will be hand-cuffed in groups of twenty and put to work filling the gaps in Marine Drive which will be renamed MAN 1 or the Bolton Bye-Pass!
- The stones on the foreshore will pile up-and-up to a height that will eventually cover the shops at Broadway.
- The price of beer will go up two weeks after the first visitors arrive.

There would, he predicted, be much talk – but only talk – about a variety of topics: a swimming pool for Douglas; developing Douglas Head, the Queen's Prom and King George V Park, and providing a bus station. 'For if there is one thing that Manx politicians can do, it is just that . . . talk!'

\* John Quirk's Diary, 'Gazing into the Crystal Ball', *Isle of Man Daily Times*, 06.09.1960

### **'Mr. Variety' offers to lend a hand**

Concerning the state of the island's entertainment history in 1960, Vic Oliver, the star of the Coliseum show, revealed that after thirty-one years in show business he needed a change, and offered to become entertainments and publicity manager for the Isle of Man. A 'straight' musician (violinist); a Rotarian; a strict tea-totaller and an antique collector who was 'very concerned about the Isle of Man', he even hinted that he might retire to the Island, except that 'show people never retire – they die on stage'.

Until this season he had appeared only at Sunday night concerts and erroneously believed that 'the Isle of Man was Douglas, and only Douglas . . . the promenade and kippers!' His twelve-week stay on the Island with wife and daughter in Port St. Mary had 'opened his eyes to the Island's limitless possibilities', and he was correct in stating that 'your Island isn't publicised enough in UK . . . in fact, it's practically non-existent!' In his view, any travel agent would offer brochures about Capri, Majorca, even Israel, Blackpool or Scarborough, but the Isle of Man 'has so much more!'

Some of his observations concurred with the more progressive thinking about the future of the visitor industry, but never won over the 'stick-in-the-muds':

- You need a casino to attract wealthy punters from London, Liverpool and Manchester who fly over for a day. NOT in Douglas, but 'miles from anywhere' like a casino city with a first-class hotel. Draw people all-year round. A popular style casino would only bring ruin . . .
- And the money to develop such a casino? Float a loan on the Stock Exchange and you'd be over-subscribed in two years. Onassis himself would be interested in an Isle of Man casino.
- You have a marvellous Island . . . but no one capitalises on it! Don't you all realise you are living in 'a jet-propelled rocket age?' The Isle of Man is a piece of gold or a diamond that remains uncut and unpolished.
- The abolition of sur-tax (the old 'super tax', first levied in 1929) will not attract enough people to live here . . . not enough people pay the tax anyway.
- The Island should encourage and maintain facilities for horse racing, dog racing, international golf and tennis tournaments, and other attractions for wealthy visitors.
- The coach-air scheme initiated in 1952 brought 30,000 visitors to the Island . . . and there could be many advantages for holiday makers, particularly as package holidays were catching on.

#### **'Modern Travellers Want Higher Standards'**

So declared the British Travel and Holidays Association in a report that overseas visitors to Britain in 1959 numbered almost 1.4 million - 11% higher than the previous year - and represented £153 in revenue. Even so, Britain lagged significantly behind other (European) countries in investing in tourist facilities, a caveat that applied equally to the Isle of Man, where an entrenched resentment against all visitors, except, perhaps, the very wealthy ones, lay smouldering, like a peat fire, just below the surface.

Of course, the vast majority of holiday makers were unaware of such feelings and praised the warmth of the welcome they received all over the Island. Most visitors - particularly families - thoroughly enjoyed their holiday experience: the variety, quantity and quality of the entertainments, the beaches, the charming small resorts, the excursions to the remotest spots, and considered that the Island represented good value, notwithstanding the holiday moans and groans about the tiresomeness of travelling to and from Douglas - some perfectly justified - and 'traditional' grumps about boarding houses and their fare on offer.

Many regular visitors continued to appreciate the simple pleasures on offer, as the comments from a Miss Barbara Edwards of Huyton in praise of the Island in a letter to the *Liverpool Echo* in August demonstrate: 'My ideal holiday is a week in the Isle of Man, which I have found to be a resort which suits people of all ages' She was particularly delighted with the beaches, glens and coach tours to all parts of the Island, and the fact that 'everywhere . . . the Manx people . . . are kind and courteous'. Douglas at Night, the one-and-half-mile crescent promenade 'turned into a scintillating wonderland of glittering, coloured illuminations', and

Summer Hill Glen, magically transformed into a bewitching fairy kingdom, still resonated in the affections of many visitors.

The abrupt end of the season continued to rankle with some who put pen to paper as August drifted into September.\* In the minds of late holidaymakers it gave the impression that the Island wanted to wash its hands of the visitors as soon as possible, and the lack of entertainment - the Palace & Derby Castle Company were accused of timidity in their policy of not bringing over top artistes at the end of the season - reduced transport - the Steam Packet double service to Liverpool ended on 12<sup>th</sup> September, and the Fleetwood service ended until the following season - and a 'closed, empty atmosphere' in the towns by mid-September only emphasised this view. Such feeble efforts as there were to make the Island an attractive venue at the end of the season were invariably nullified, and arrivals in September must have wondered if they were really wanted.

\* 'Shut Down', *Isle of Man Examiner* 15.09.1960.

### **'Let's Raise the Standard here too!'**\*

In their reviews of the season the local newspaper commentators rated the summer shows as 'good' but not always 'top-line'. As for the Sunday concerts, once the crowning glory of a week's entertainment in Douglas, some were considered 'good' but others 'poor'. In their estimation Dickie Henderson's appearance at the Palace Coliseum stood out as 'particularly good'.

'Will Dickie Henderson, Bruce Forsyth, Tommy Trinder, Harry Secombe or Ken Dodd ever be considered for a full season's engagement here', wondered some seasoned season watchers? To be sure, their high fees were seen as a barrier, but it had to be remembered that if 'big names demand big money' their engagement could result in capacity audiences. It was also pointed out that although many stars were familiar on television, holiday makers still desired to see them 'live', and whilst they loved to be entertained 'outside' during the day, especially if the weather was kind, they expected to pay for and see a first-class show 'inside' during the evening.

\* *Isle of Man Times*, 12.12.1960.

Even the choice of bands at the Villa Marina was questioned. The hard-working Ivy Benson and her girls were accepted as an essential feature of the Douglas holiday scene with their outdoor concerts and talent competitions in the Villa Gardens always well attended. When it came to dancing in the Royal Hall, the view of some commentators was that although there was nothing wrong or inferior about Phil Moss and his orchestra, he was not as well known as Cyril Stapleton, Alyn Ainsworth, Geoff Love or Bob Miller. The 'biggest mistake' was not engaging Joe Loss in 1956 for visitors were still writing to boarding houses and hotels asking when Joe Loss and his band will be appearing so that they could be in Douglas then. W. B. Kaneen MHK attempted to draw a line under the matter when he said: 'Joe Loss made Douglas, and Douglas Made Joe Loss . . . but there is no prospect of his return as we would now not have the money to pay him'. Rod in the *Isle of Man Daily Times* Cartoon Round in September shows the entrance to Villa Marina with a hydrogen bomb exploding in the background, with the caption: 'The mood seems to have changed since Joe Loss left!'

Other matters that indicated to the Cassandras that the end of the era of Douglas as a serious holiday venue was nigh, were also frequently aired throughout the season:

The suggestion to turn Derby Castle Ballroom into a slot machine arcade was roundly deplored.

The fact that the popular summer and winter dance venue, the Palais de Danse, was now a shopping arcade.

That favourite old venue the Crescent Pavilion was due for demolition.

That the Gaiety Theatre had been relegated to a cinema during recent summer seasons.

The Avenue Cinema, Onchan, had closed.

And what of the weary hotel and boarding keepers, and others working in the tourist industry, as the season drew to a close? The *Isle of Man Daily Times* suggested that they enjoy two or three weeks in Ireland in September, soaking up the 'mystic twilights, wonderful scenery, rivers packed with fish, moors packed with game, race meetings . . . a hallowed history complete with fairies and leprechauns, and friendly people, where the cares of the world would soon be dispelled in the soft, clean air.' In fact, with the exception of racing and leprechauns (and who needed them when you have the Phynnoderee and the Moddey Dhoo?), much like the Isle of Man!

### **Winter unemployment**

As the season ended, of most concern was that the Island still staggered from summer to summer over the issue of the lack of winter employment, and for some Islanders, the various schemes half-heartedly put forward to alleviate what was an annual scourge were likely to be ineffective. Forward planning to utilise the Island's labour force advantageously between seasons when 'a golden opportunity to develop the Island for tourism and use the skills and labour of its people in the best way possible' presented itself, was lacking. There seemed to be no sense of urgency; no priorities were laid down, and there was no consensus as to what was needed. Many promising schemes stagnated with 'plenty of effort expended to show why various schemes *cannot* be adopted . . . and thus round and round we go . . . lost in a maze of talk and prejudice'.

Many questions were asked, but suspicions were aroused when few answers were forthcoming:

Why fix *any* date for schemes to commence? Why not start the work schemes immediately after the season closes rather than wait until mid-October or November to commence work? Was it that if schemes such as the airport improvement scheme started earlier than projected, they might be completed 'too soon', which could amount to an admission that there is room for even more schemes? When is the Island going to start INVESTING IN ITSELF?

It was known that if certain work schemes did go ahead early, some 1,050 men were expected to register as 'out of work' for five weeks at end of the season.\* In the meantime, the Lieutenant Governor set aside £100,000 to develop work schemes for perhaps two hundred

or two hundred and fifty men, and provide £60,000 of interest-free loans for those wishing to improve their holiday accommodation in preparation for the next season. Forty men would be needed for new construction work at Castle Rushen High School; thirty men were needed for the new bus station in Douglas; the private Enterprise Employment Scheme that operated the previous winter with Government assistance was to operate again, and preparatory work on a new passenger terminal at Victoria Pier would be started by the Harbour Board. At the end of the decade, though, the inescapable fact remained: UNEMPLOYMENT WAS UP!

*\* Isle of Man Examiner, 08.09.1960.*