

THE GREAT EXHIBITION!

Co-Founder Gerry Glover looks at the BMHS Exhibition at Sands Film Studios, Rotherhithe SE16
(Photographs by Ralph J. Reardon)

For the first time since 1963, the Society has mounted a major exhibition of about half its collection, which is usually held in safe storage in North London. Our first great event was *An exhibition of 100 years of Music Hall*, exhibiting the small amount of memorabilia (mostly donated), which we had been able to collect to date. It was held at McDonald's Music Hall, 128A Hoxton Street (off Old Street) N1 on Saturday 2nd November 1963 where it was open from 2.30 p.m. - 6.30 p.m. and the guest of honour was **Miss Ada Reeve**. The exhibition to be followed by a *GRAND VARIETY SHOW* organised by the *Variety Artists Federation*.

Then (in conjunction with the Grand Order of Water Rats, the Lady Ratlings and the Variety Artistes' Benevolent Fund) we staged *A mammoth Music Hall Exhibition in the Brinsworth Estate (the VABF Home for Retired Performers) at Twickenham on Saturday 9th May 1964*.

Our third big event was held on Saturday 7th November 1964, when the Society staged *A Festival of Music Hall (featuring) the world's largest Music Hall Exhibition from 2.15 p.m. to 6 p.m.* supervised by J.O. Blake. *Star of Honour, Miss Dorothy Ward*. *President Don Ross has kindly agreed to present the evening Cavalcade of Variety... with a great constellation of Star Artistes.*

Also, through the good offices of our then President Don Ross, Vice President Mary Sparks curated and transported a BMHS exhibition to the National Exhibition of Music Hall at Sunderland Empire, which was opened on Monday 15 July 1974 by Wee Georgie Wood.

This splendid new BMHS exhibition was displayed at St Marychurch Street, Rotherhithe SE16 in conjunction with Sands Film Studios (Christine Edzard, Olivier Stockman and Neale Brown) and was officially opened by President Roy Hudd and the Mayor of Southwark (Councillor Eliza Mann) on Sunday 10 May 2009. Roy, who was introduced by co-founder Gerry Glover, paid tribute to organisers John Perry and Peter White who, with the active participation of Society Archivist & Historian Max Tyler and Study Group Organiser Terry Lomas, actually got the exhibits transported and displayed. Roy also read out a charming letter from a long-standing friend of the Society, Vera Lynn - she was unable to attend personally but sent her "love and best wishes for a successful 'run'".



Roy Hudd, The Mayor of Southwark (Councillor Eliza Mann), Peter White - At the official opening of the exhibition



Max Tyler busy at work!

Amongst the many guests at the launch party (and subsequently) were Simon Hughes (MP for Southwark), Mrs David Nixon, Steve Allen (LBC Radio and good friend to the Society), Past President Lew Lane, Johnnie Cliff (inaugural Treasurer), Nicholas Charlesworth (founder Member), Norman Hoskins, Vice-President Jack Seaton, Vice Chairman Daphne Bailey, Richard Norman (longstanding member of the Society), Gerald Smith (BMHS Merchandising), John Adrian

(Grand Order of Water Rats), David Drummond (book & print seller, who attended the first meeting of Music Hall enthusiasts who went on to become the BMHS), Tony Bushell (who introduced future Chairman Ellis Ashton to Ray and Gerry at their flat, 63 Great Cumberland Place, W1), Helen Watson, Len Belmont, Tommy Lees (Scottish accordion player), Bob Higgs (Mary Ward Players), members of Derby & Notts Music Hall



Adam Borzone, Gerry Glover, John Perry, Max Tyler, Roy Hudd and Lew Lane at the official launch



The George Robey table

Society, members of the Max Miller Appreciation Society, a party booking of 23 arranged by BMHS Executive Committee Member Colin Simmons, author Brian O’Gorman, Bill Clark of Windyridge Records (another good friend of the Society) and representatives from Wilton’s Music Hall.

Looking back over the forty-seven years of the life of the Society, I am delighted at the response to the latest exhibition. Thanks to good advance publicity by Adam Borzone and the organisers, a great deal of interest was shown by the public and word spread rapidly that we were displaying such goodies as costumes worn by Vesta Tilley (male impersonator), G H Elliott (*The Chocolate Coloured Coon*, his costumes donated by June Elliott in 1963), Hetty King (male impersonator), Max Miller (*The Cheeky Chappie*, his flamboyant floral suit and white hat donated by his wife, Mrs. Kathleen Sargent in 1963), Talbot O’Farrell (his top hat and cane) and Bud Flanagan (his famous moth-eaten fur coat donated by Curly Flanagan in 1962); also George Robey’s wigs and make-up box (donated by Blanche Robey in 1963), G H Chirgwin’s banjo and personal mementos

of Marie Lloyd. The display of posters, handbills and photographs as well as original song sheets and theatrical newspapers from the late 1800s, was comprehensive and caused many favourable comments. Our policy of welcoming the taking of photographs and allowing the handling of all but the frailest items was applauded by visitors.

There were two very particularly popular items in the exhibition. One was a television/video player on which visitors could play tapes of *The Good Old Days* or Jimmy Perry’s *Turns*. It was constantly in use and was much appreciated, especially by the many younger people who signed the Visitors’ Book. The other popular exhibit was a cassette tape/CD player featuring some of the many Music Hall CDs from Bill Clark’s *Windyridge* label.

Originally planned to run for two and a half weeks, the public response was so enthusiastic that Sands Studios kindly agreed to an extension of a further week. The exhibition finally closed on Friday 5th June 2009 having been seen by nearly a thousand visitors. A success on every score, I feel.

Richard Norman (for many years the Society’s ‘technical bloke’!) undertook to record the exhibition on film and he and Gerry Glover are now editing the footage to provide a short documentary preserving the efforts of all those involved in setting up the exhibition. It is intended to make inexpensive DVD copies available by the end of Summer 2009.

