

Bowler Dessert

Spring 2003

Number 61





Friday 2nd till Monday 5th May, 2003

Venue: Great Barr Hotel, Pear Tree Drive, Newton Road, Great Barr, Birmingham, B43 6HS. Telephone 0121 357 1141. Website: <http://www.thegreatbarrhotel.co.uk>.

Outline of Events:

Friday 2nd May

Registration (from midday)
 Film show
 Memorabilia room
 Welcome and Parade of Tents
 Opening banquet
 Raffle
 1998 Convention film show

Saturday 3rd May

Full English breakfast
 Coaches to Bridgnorth (approx 1 hour journey)
 Tour of steam train museum
 Vintage steam train ride through the Severn Valley
 Afternoon free time in the small town of Bewdley
 Evening trip to Perry Barr Greyhound Racing Stadium, with buffet

Enquiries: Steve Smith, 80 Old Penkrigde Road, Cannock, Staffordshire, WS11 1HY. E-mail: 24ukconv@sandl.org.uk.

Website: <http://www.sotd.org>

Sunday 4th May

Full English breakfast
 Games and competitions
 Inter-tent quiz
 Memorabilia room
 Light lunch in hotel
 Afternoon shuttle bus to Charlie Hall pub
 Film show
 Last night banquet and Passing of the Pineapple
 Fancy dress/costume party
 Grand auction
 Sons Entertain – including “Laurel and Hardy” live on stage
 DJ – dancing till late

Monday 5th May

Full English breakfast
 Grand Sheiks’ meeting
 Memorabilia room
 Goodbyes (around midday)

◇ On the night before the convention, Thursday 1st May, there is a Laughing Gravy Tent meeting. All conventioners are welcome to attend and can book an extra night at the hotel at a discounted rate, if required.

Dave’s a Son for life

The Blockheads Tent of Edinburgh has awarded Dave Walker a life membership. The honour was bestowed at the Christmas meeting, when Grand Sheik Charlie Lewis presented Dave with a framed certificate. Dave has been the projectionist for almost all of the tent’s long life, using his own projection equipment and films, dedication which has added enormously to the success of the tent.

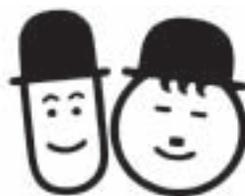
Dave has also helped at many events outside of the Blockheads’ meetings and frequently attends Sons conventions.



Dave Walker and Charlie Lewis

Contents

24th UK Convention . . .	2
6th European Convention . . .	4
Stan's banjo mandolin . . .	5
Yule be darn tootin' . . .	7
Roger reports . . .	11
Postbag . . .	12
Stan's father's father . . .	14
From the editor's desk . . .	16
<i>Living Famously</i> . . .	18
<i>Another Fine Message</i> . . .	19
Laurel and HarDay . . .	20
Stan's sister looks back . . .	22
In brief . . .	23
Louvisch in paperback . . .	25
JR Smith murdered . . .	25
Also in the cast: a tragic trio . . .	26
Return to Milledgeville . . .	28
Two homes have Hardy history . . .	29
Ones that got away . . .	31
Ellina – Stan's first sweetheart? . . .	32
14th Oliver Hardy Festival . . .	35
In the news . . .	36
Hats Off Tent party . . .	39
Hardy's health . . .	40
Did you see? . . .	43
Scholarly overtones . . .	44
Bits and pieces . . .	47
I'll bet they're good. . .	48
Worst film? . . .	49
The Laurel and Hardy home cinema . . .	50
The Laurel and Hardy charity fund . . .	53
Dramatic finale at the riverside . . .	54
Jerry Tucker collection . . .	55
Curios and oddities . . .	55
The Laurel and Hardy bookcase . . .	56
CD centre . . .	59
Bill's treasures . . .	60
UK tent listing . . .	62



Bowler Dessert is edited and published at least once a year by Willie McIntyre, 39 Bankhouse Avenue, Largs, Ayrshire, Scotland, KA30 9PF. E-mail: bowler.dessert@virgin.net.

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Two special issues are also available at 80p (€1.00, \$1.00) each: *Sons of the Desert – a souvenir of the movie* and *Bowler Dessert: the early years*.

◇ All prices include postage and package. Cheques etc should be made payable to Sons of the Desert.

Bowler Dessert Online:

<http://freespace.virgin.net/bowler.dessert>.

Plaque for Bishop Auckland

The Hog Wild Tent, with financial support from the local authority, is to erect a plaque at South View, 22 Waldron Street, Bishop Auckland, where Stan Laurel lived for a short period and where his sister, Beatrice Olga, was born on 16th December, 1894.

2003 coming major events



2nd till 5th May
UK Convention in Birmingham

6th till 9th June
European Convention in Amsterdam

5th July
Carnival Day in Ulverston

6th September
Laurel and HarDay in Wigan

4th October
Oliver Hardy Festival in Harlem



Venue: Hotel Avifauna, Alphen aan den Rijn, Netherlands

Outline of events

Friday 6th June

Registration (from 1pm)
 Film show
Darn Tootin' street organ
 Dinner
 Official opening
 Toasts
A Night in Honolulu with the Van Dijk Band & Babes



Enquiries: Bram Reijnhoudt, Postbus 870, 1200 AW Hilversum, Netherlands. E-mail: blotto@chello.nl.
 Roger Robinson, 115 Neil Armstrong Way, Leigh on Sea, Essex, SS9 5UE. E-mail: sapsatse@waitrose.com.

Website: <http://trak.to/euroconvention>

Saturday 7th June

Breakfast
 Coaches to Amsterdam
 Old time cinema show in the historic Tuschinski Theatre (with Max Tak Orchestra)
 Free time in Amsterdam
 Optional guided tours of Amsterdam
 Evening in Avifauna: traditional Dutch meal, Max Tak Orchestra, dance and *Sons Entertain*
 Open air film show, if weather permits

Sunday 8th June

Breakfast
 Presentation of extended edition of Jean Darling's *Peek at the Past*. Jean will sign
 Boat trip, lunch, quiz, pee wee
 Feed the birds
 Catch a flying elephant!
 Final banquet, toasts
 Fancy dress competition
 Partying with rock 'n' roll band John-Boy and the Waltons

Monday 9th June

Breakfast
 Film show
 Grand Sheikhs' meeting
 Dealers' room
 Goodbyes (around midday)

◇ Bookings have been made by Sons from the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, USA, England, Scotland and Ireland. The convention's website now has a message board (or "forum") and one of the messages is about the possibility of a post-convention trip to Solingen in Germany, where a new Laurel and Hardy Museum was due to open in March. Lookalikes Bud and Steve Hodgson have been added to the list of convention delegates and the Avalon Boys will be there.

Mystery of the missing plaque

When the commemorative plaque on the wall of the house where Stan Laurel was born was stolen last October, a secret organisation stepped in to provide a replacement. The original plaque on the house at 3 Argyle Street, Ulverston was unveiled in the 1970s as a result of campaigning by Bill Cubin.

The plaque was unscrewed and removed and was subsequently found nearby in a plastic bag.

Mabel Radcliffe has lived for twenty-seven years in the terraced house where Stan Laurel was born in 1890. She confirmed, "The old plaque turned up in the back street, by a neighbour's door."

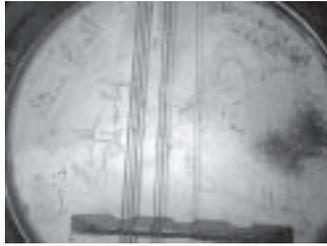
A group called the Ulverston Curry Club has come up with a replacement plaque and Mrs Radcliffe intends to have it erected higher above the front door, so that nobody can reach it. She says, "I would really like to thank them, whoever they are. I'm so appreciative. It's a beautiful plaque, pale blue with gold lettering. I'll still keep the old plaque so that when people visit the house they can have their picture taken holding it."

Laurel and Hardy fans who call are invited to sign a visitors' book and make a donation to motor neurone disease research, in memory of Mrs Radcliffe's husband, Norman, who died from the illness.



Stan's banjo mandolin

Gino Dercola circulated an inquiry about a banjo mandolin, owned by Lawrence Hiller. Lawrence and Gino are looking for photos of Stan Laurel with a banjo (of an eight-string variety) which matches the one now owned by Lawrence, who picked it up about seven years ago at a general auction in Southgate,



London. He says he seems to remember a chap working there saying that it was something to do with the estate of Stan's sister, Olga.

The face of the banjo is signed, "Hello, Stan Laurel" in what appears to be Stan's writing; it also shows what appears to be an original signature by Oliver Hardy; plus there is some other writing. On the back is printed, "Stan Laurel, 1938". There is a slip in the banjo case, which refers to the Friars Club, Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood, California; also on that slip, in what appears to be Stan's handwriting, is written, "Played and owned by Stan, London 47".

Dave Tomlinson suggests it could be postulated that Stan brought the banjo over from the USA with him in 1947, played it in London, maybe at one of the charity events, and passed it onto Olga during one of his visits to her. Alternatively, could it have been a gift from George Formby, whom Stan met in June, 1947? Dave has been unable to determine if Stan and Babe were members of the Friars Club, but knows that Bing Crosby was a member, with obvious social and gaming connections with Babe.

Dave remarks, "The autographs look reasonably good. The only comments I would make are firstly that the 'e' in Laurel is very abnormal but, given that he was writing on a strange medium, this is excusable. Stan has written his usual 'Hello' salutation but not named the recipient – which is unusual. It looks likely that he has purposely signed the item for a recipient unknown, probably for a charitable auction (or similar) maybe for the Friars Club (which I notice from an Internet search is still in existence)."

So, please tell Gino if you know of any photos of Stan playing this in London in 1947, or any other photos of Stan with this banjo. His address is 10134 Cape Ann Drive, Columbia, Maryland, 21046, USA.

So far no one has found such a photo – one came close but the banjo does not quite match. Says Gino, "I want to thank Siep Bousma in the Netherlands for going through his outstanding collection and finding one photo of Stan with a banjo (above, right). It's a really *great* photo of the Boys. I guess the search will continue until, hopefully, one day a photo will surface that shows Stan with the 'Hiller' banjo mandolin."

Dave Stevenson points out that there is a similar publicity photo (right) in Jack Scagnetti's book *The Laurel & Hardy Scrapbook*, on page 50 of the hardback edition. It is the photo that was used for the logo for last year's convention in Nashville.

Gary Cohen advised that he has a postcard signed by Stan as "Banjo Man".

Raymond Fraser

In the middle of November, Raymond Fraser died of cancer, at the age of fifty-five. Raymond was a flamboyant character, whose colourful exploits often attracted media attention, so much so that his death was fittingly reported in many newspapers. Some of his activities as a gifted advocate have become legendary, not only among his fellow Sons. Raymond attended the very first meeting of the Blockheads Tent at the Filmhouse in Edinburgh in 1984 – dressed as Sherlock Holmes! He visited the tent intermittently. He also enjoyed meetings of the Bonnie Scotland Tent in years past and was a keen supporter. We are sad to lose you, Raymond.



Frank is unique

Frank Sugden is not one for boasting, but we think he has a record unequalled anywhere in the world. He has been to 240 consecutive meetings of the Be Big Tent, without missing one! That's twenty years of monthly meetings. And he has been a projectionist for the tent for eighteen years.

The tent had a ceremony to mark the achievement. Well done, Frank. *Bowler Dessert* salutes you.

Ohio 2004

Fulfilling a ten-year dream, the pineapple was passed to Rick Lindner in Nashville when he successfully bid for Columbus, Ohio to be the site for the 2004 International Sons of the Desert Convention. After much research and several visits, Rick and his co-chairman, Mark Turner, agreed that the Hyatt on Capitol Square had the most to offer and say, "The entire hotel will have been renovated (which is a shame because they may have to do it over again once we leave)." The hotel is only two doors down from the Ohio Theater, where Laurel and Hardy performed on stage for a week in November 1940 and, hopefully, the location for at least one convention activity. Across the street from the Hyatt is the Ohio Capitol Building, where it is planned to stage the *Babes in Toyland Pee Wee Contest* on the front lawn. A trip to the Columbus Zoo is also in the works as well as a two-day Pre-Convention event that will visit sites around Ohio.

The convention, hosted by the Perfect Day Tent, lasts from 15th till 18th July, 2004. Registration forms are not yet available.

Haurel and Lardy

Jem Frazer (Ollie) and Graeme Hardy (Stanley) – yes it is his real name – were both ardent fans of Laurel and Hardy and they independently set up acts, paying tribute to Stan and Ollie for ten years. They decided to join forces after stumbling over each other while rummaging around the second-hand shops in Brighton, looking for bowler hats. "It sounds like a Hollywood story, but it is absolutely true," they tell us. They have been together now for over six years as Stan and Ollie lookalikes.

Jem's television appearances include *The Harry Enfield Show* and he had a principal part in the 2001 film *This Filthy Earth*, shown in Cannes. Graeme's appearances include *Peak Practice* and a pop music video for Bad Company. Last year they worked as Laurel and Hardy in Italy on a film called *The Face of Picasso*. The boys have also worked as Laurel and Hardy at many top venues in London and an unparalleled five years at Pinewood Studios.



The jewel in Haurel and Lardy's crown is their original 1924 Model T Ford

publicity material reveals that their "faithful reproduction of Laurel and Hardy vignettes, incorporating a diverse array of props, including dustbins, ladders, packing cases and a piano, has secured them bookings in Madame Tussauds, the Venice Simplon Orient Express and Monte Carlo."

To find out more about the duo visit their website <http://www.lookslike-laurel-n-hardy.co.uk>.



Bob has been ill



Grand Sheik Bob Hickson was in hospital in December following a heart attack. Bob has been overwhelmed by the flood of messages he has received and asks *Bowler Dessert* to express his thanks to everyone. He says he is now "feeling fine" and is easing himself back into his normal routine. Yes, while he was in the County Hospital, he was brought some hard-boiled eggs and nuts, he tells us.

Yule be darn tootin'

Members of the Hog Wild Tent held their 8th Christmas Social Evening in Bishop Auckland Town Hall on 3rd December. Grand Sheik Stan Patterson welcomed thirty members and guests to an evening of films – *Big Business* and *Laughing Gravy* – food and fun, including a raffle, *Spot That Tune* and a Kneesie-Earsie-Nosey competition. A good time was had by everyone in the Laurel Room, which has stills and posters from the Boys' films round the walls.

It was a busy first weekend in December in the south of England with meetings of both the Live Ghost Tent and the Men o' War Tent on the Saturday and the Saps at Sea Tent's meeting on the Sunday.

"Why it only seems like twelve months since our last December meeting," said the newsletter of the Brats Tent of Sheffield. It added, "'Tis the season of good cheer. Let's share it with Stan and Ollie and a pint of beer!" On the screen on 9th December were such favourites as *Big Business* and *The Fixer-Uppers*.

The 101st meeting of Canada's Leave 'Em Laughing Tent was on 14th at the Colborne Lodge. They tell us, "We had a sing-along of Christmas carols – including our favourite, the *Big Business Song*. Five door prizes were drawn. The big winner was Maureen Scollard, who was presented with a copy of William K Everson's *The Films of Laurel and Hardy*." Jeannie Lindsay, Rick Bestard and Dean Shewring have attended all 101 meetings!"

At the Edinburgh meeting of the Blockheads Tent, on 15th, was a mixture of films, nosh, drinks and levity. The fancy dress competition was won by Stuart Williams (dressed as one of Santa's helpers), with joint runners-up Jack Irvine and Sandy Devine dressed as menacing characters from *Star Wars*.

At the Early to Bed Tent's Christmas meeting, also on 15th, Ken Kind won the observers' quiz, based on *Big Business* and *Brats*. The prize? A Christmas tree!

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The Hog Wild Tent in the Bishop Auckland Town Hall



Blockheads at Ryrie's bar (left to right): Jack Irvine, Sandy Devine, Tony (Harry Potter) Reynolds, Graham Bishop, Stuart Williams, Charlie Lewis and Martin Tierney

Stan top man?

Tony Bagley and Nick Rich tell us that, in *The Mirror* (19.10.02.), Jonathan Ross chose Stan Laurel as his top choice of "Great Britons".

Jonathan wrote, "Given that everyone will talk about the greats – Shakespeare, Churchill – I want to nominate Stan Laurel, a genuinely funny guy but also someone who from all accounts was a decent and kind bloke, values that are underestimated these days."



Left to right, ten greats, selected by today's celebrities: Robbie Williams, Isaac Newton, Margaret Thatcher, Queen Elizabeth I, Princess Diana, Winston Churchill, Stan Laurel, Sean Connery, Freddie Laker and Beatrix Potter

Upstaging Tibbett

Lawrence Tibbett maintains that he had to put in so much work to prevent these two comedians from stealing the picture [*The Rogue Song*] and turning it into a riotous comedy that even now he has not yet fully recovered!

Film Pictorial (July, 1932)



Cover note

Picking a photograph for our front page is never an easy task. In your last issue your editor chose the top photograph of Ollie and Marion Byron, but might just as easily have chosen the one on its right. As for our rear page, the photo of Stan with his furry friend might have been supplanted by the one on its right. In the same vein, the photograph on the bottom right would not have been amiss. Ollie has been on the front page of *Bowler Dessert* more often than Stan so we might use the one of Stan and Viola Richard in your next *Bowler Dessert*. On the other hand, something else might catch your editor's eye. . . .

For this issue, we are indebted to Del Kempster for supplying the front and back page photographs. Thanks, Del.

35mm Appeal

Laurel and Hardy films were made for showing in cinemas all around the world. 35mm is the worldwide cinema standard gauge and many prints came into the hands of private collectors.

Occasionally some come onto the market. The Sons in the UK would like to buy some prints, so that we can arrange occasional screenings as special events at cinemas around the UK, to help promote local tents and to "perpetuate the work and memory of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy".

Film authority David Wyatt of the Live Ghost Tent is keeping a lookout for prints coming onto the market (and this can happen anywhere in the world) and will make the decision as to whether they are worth buying or not, funds permitting. Neil Williams of the Busy Bodies Tent will look after the repairs and maintenance side of the celluloid, and Chris Coffey of the Bacon Grabbers Tent is looking after the administration side.

Chris says, "Why not get your tent to hold a raffle once a year with the profits going to this good cause? The Sons have opened a separate bank account, but have so far raised only £553. Just as we started, the Statue Appeal came along and this rightly received priority. However, now is the time to relaunch the 35mm Appeal."

Please make your cheques payable to the "Laurel and Hardy 35mm Appeal Fund", and send them to Chris at 64 Dale Crescent, St. Helens, Merseyside, WA9 4YE.



Bowler Dessert in the Archive

Dwain Smith has kindly sent his large collection of tent newsletters and Laurel and Hardy publications to the Sons of the Desert Archive at a California university. Included was every copy of *Bowler Dessert* except issue 24. If any reader has a spare copy of that issue, please send it to your editor, who will pass it on so that the Archive will have a complete collection.



On trail to Avalon

"It seems an unlikely route to fame and fortune, but a north-west band specialising in covering songs from Laurel and Hardy films is rapidly achieving cult status among film buffs," states the website <http://manchester.online.co>. It adds, "The Avalon Boys have been invited to perform before Europe's biggest gathering of aficionados of the comedy legends," referring to the Avalons' booking for this year's European Convention.

After their low-key start in a Wilmslow pub, the group has moved onto a new level and the album *Songs of the Desert* has become a firm favourite in the UK and USA.

"We met up occasionally in the King's Arms, Wilmslow, and found a shared love of great songs, turning into impromptu gigs," says co-founder Dub Blune. "The landlord has a selection of musical instruments adorning the walls and welcomed the entertainment."

"We don't perform note-for-note copies of the songs from the films. They are our own interpretation of them," said fellow Avalon Richard Barry. "We are big fans anyway, and the warmth and affection that the films still generate is amazing. We love playing the songs, so, as long as they invite us, we will be happy to perform." Richard, Pat and Dub have also been invited to perform at this year's proposed UK tour of Tom McGrath's play *Laurel and Hardy*.

Songs of the Desert had a play on the Desmond Carrington programme *All Time Greats* on Radio 2 (21.07.02.), with a good review, and another track was on the same show two weeks later. The show's producer, Dave Aylott, tells us, "The Avalon Boys have proved to be a great hit with Desmond's listeners (and me!) so you can be sure we'll be playing their CD again in the future." Many Sons wrote to the show, expressing their appreciation of the slot, which spotlighted the song *Fresh Fish*.

◇ Your editor has the CD *Songs of the Desert* for sale at £12.00, including p&p.



Norman takes charge

Chris Coffey (far left) handed over the post of Grand Sheik of the Bacon Grabbers Tent to Norman Leigh at the Laurel and Hardy in September. A report on the Day starts on page 20.

Tom Silcock

I'm afraid I have some sad news regarding a former member of the Be Big Tent in Ashton-under-Lyne. Tom Silcock died in hospital on 14th August, aged 79. Tom was a very large player and organiser in the 1979 UK Convention in Ashton, and was still attending odd meetings of the Be Big Tent until quite recently, until failing eyesight made it increasingly difficult for him to see the films.

An intelligent and often very funny raconteur and conversationalist, Tom will be much missed by his family, friends and other Sons of the Desert who were fortunate enough to know him. A great character who will never be forgotten.

Jonathan Hayward

Tom was a founder member of the Be Big Tent. Despite ill health he rarely missed our Christmas meetings.

Austin Stigwood and I represented the tent at Tom's funeral at Duckinfield Crematorium. Former Be Big Grand Sheik Martin Williams was also present. *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* was played as we entered the chapel and *Honolulu Baby* was played as we left. Tom's fez was placed on top of his coffin, along with a floral tribute from the Sons of the Desert.

Dean Carroll

Marker in Georgia

Oliver Hardy spent several years of his childhood in Madison. Although he lived in various houses there, none is still standing. Visitors to the town often inquired at the Welcome Center about Oliver Hardy, so Marshall Williams and a volunteer committee worked for two years to secure an official Georgia Historical Marker. It was unveiled on 15th July last year. The Oliver Hardy Marker is placed on the site of the Turnell-Butler Hotel, where Hardy's father was proprietor in 1891.

About one hundred Sons of the Desert travelled from the International Convention in Nashville to Madison, where they witnessed Stan Deaton, Director of Publications of the Georgia Historical Society, unveil the marker. Dave Schliessman entertained the crowd on a piano keyboard.

"The idea for the historical marker began when visitors came to the Welcome Center from England," said Marguerite Copelan of the Madison Convention and Visitors Bureau. "The visitors had come to trace the steps of Oliver Hardy, which brought them to Madison. It was the first we had heard of it and we sent them to meet Marshall Williams, of Madison Archives."



Peter van Rooij took this photograph of Sparkie and Pogo with the marker

Boys at the Bull

The annual celebration at the Bull Inn in Bottesford on 27th July had a visit from the local Central TV. Fifty Sons turned up and organising Grand Sheik Dave Scothern had a pleasant surprise when



Chris Coffey (with Norman and Charlie) arrived on his first visit to the Bull Inn.

David Wyatt presented some video clips which the audience had not seen before.

Dave Scothern tells us, "We had a local chap come along to tell us that he met the Boys when he was a sixteen-year-old paper boy. He brought along various photos and some signed autographs. He also said that they were very friendly and down-to-earth, as we all imagine them to have been. Sadly he declined to put the autographs into the raffle! Doh! Thanks to everybody who turned up and here's looking forward to the next 'Boys at the Bull'."



Dave Scothern and Duncan Whysall

(Above) Dave Scothern on television and (below) the throng at the Bull Inn



Roger reports

Alone in the desert

I have been a Laurel and Hardy fan for as long as I can remember. No, I tell a lie. It is longer than that. You see I had my car key only thirty minutes ago and I can't remember what I've done with it. I know one thing for certain; I have been a Laurel and Hardy fan for more than half an hour. Now, if I engage my brain (steady on, Roger), I can say in all honesty that I have been a fan since the day I was born. That was on September the ninth, 1949 (way, way back in the last millennium), just in case anyone wants to send me a birthday card! Yes, I was a Laurel and Hardy fan at my birth – and probably even before. I'm not going to share my reminiscences from the womb, after all *Bowler Dessert* is not *that* sort of magazine. I suppose if Willie ever runs out of Laurel and Hardy material, and he seems to have an ample supply to keep us all going into the next millennium, he could always diversify into the *Take a Break* market. We could have photos of Eric Woods aged ten, tips from Bob Hickson of how to maintain your herbaceous border and John Ullah's recipe of the month. What a catsaphromy all that lot would be!

My Laurel and Hardy reminiscing will thus commence when I was nought years old. I gave a Stan Laurel cry when I entered this world, wiggled my ears and looked dumb. The audience consisted of Mum (she just insisted on being there) and my dad. They stood back in amazement at the arrival of the new Laurel and Hardy fan. . . and christened me "Roger Reports". During childhood (no relation to Darla Hood) my adulation of the comedians grew even stronger with trips to Saturday morning pictures. My local cinema was

the Forum (Odeon) in Ealing, just along the road from the Hippodrome, where Stan once briefly had the starring role in Fred Karno's *Jimmy the Fearless* only for another member of the Karno Troupe, a certain Charlie Chaplin, to demand that he take the lead part. That was in 1910, some fifty years before I was going to the Saturday morning pictures. (I hope you are all following this, because there will be a test at the end.) At the Forum, Laurel and Hardy were easily the best and most popular films they showed. Some of my contemporaries look back with fond affection at the weekly serials but I took little interest in them. I think the main reason was that I used to alternate my Saturdays between swimming and pictures and knew that, if I got engrossed in the fate of Spiderman or whoever, I would never know what happened to him the following week because I would be in "at my own deep end" at Ealing Baths. In retrospect, the every-other-Saturday rota didn't do my swimming any good because I'm about as buoyant on water as the Titanic. It is a sad admission that, even though I live in Southend-on-Sea, I can't swim. Truly I deserve the title of a Sap at Sea.

By the time I became a teenager, at the age of eighteen – well I was a late developer – I had learned to read and write and added a new dimension to my enjoyment of Laurel and Hardy. I didn't need any substance to get high – reading *Mr Laurel and Mr Hardy* was my ecstasy. Maybe some of my mates had *Playboy*, but it was my copy of John McCabe's book that had the well-thumbed pages. Now, at the risk of sounding like an anorak or possibly a duffle coat (hands up if you had one of them), my interest in Laurel and Hardy was getting even stronger. I scanned the newspapers (not with a scanner of course – they weren't invented then!) to find odd screenings of Laurel and Hardy films in London. As well as the *big* screen, these were also the halcyon days when Stan and Ollie were being shown regularly on the *little* screen at home, the television. When I became a man (I'm typing this in a deep voice) the video recorder had been invented. I seemed to have witnessed so many inventions in my lifetime: scanners, video recorders, electricity and the wheel. The video recorder gave me the potential to start my own library of Laurel and Hardy films, if only I could press the right button. How many

I first dreamed of becoming the Grand Sheik of Saps at Sea at the Coronation Parade in 1953



Continued on page 57

Postbag

Porcelain plates

Danbury Mint has a planned collection of twelve fine porcelain Laurel and Hardy plates, rimmed with precious 22 carat gold (their description). I bought the first one and I can assure you that the quality is first class. Each plate costs £22.95 (plus £1.95 p&p). The address is Danbury Mint, Cox Lane, Chessington, Surrey, KT9 1SE.

Graham Bishop

New recruit

I was recently given a copy of *Bowler Dessert* by a work colleague who had just returned from a visit to the museum in Ulverston. Firstly I would like to say how much I enjoyed reading it. Although I have enjoyed the Boys' films for many years, I have only recently started reading about them. Your magazine was full of useful and interesting information, none of the articles was so long as to be boring and the tent listing was really useful. I am a member of the Helpmates Tent but had no idea there was a tent on my doorstep in Widnes.

Tom Carey

At large

I was on holiday in Nigeria and I can add this to the list of countries in which *Bowler Dessert* has been read! It would be interesting to see a list of countries into which *Bowler Dessert* has been smuggled past customs! Apart from Nigeria, I can add Poland to the list.

Howard Parker

Three Essex boys

During the official opening of the Laurel & Hardy Museum, the Berth Marks Tent of Harlem recruited a few new members, boosting their total to seventeen. All of the members are from USA with the exception of Paul Allen, Laurie Young and Russell Clay. The trio from Southend's Saps at Sea Tent readily became members when they visited the museum and have now received their membership package. As their Grand Sheik, I think that my "Three Men in a Boat" have truly epitomised the spirit of the Sons of the Desert by becoming members and I am sure that both John McCabe and Jerome K Jerome will be proud of these good old Essex boys.

Roger Robinson

Dark side

I went to the Saps at Sea's fourth birthday celebrations and had a really enjoyable time. One of the Saps' members, a young woman called Sue, came up to chat about an essay she is planning for her Fine Art course at Southend College. She is interested in *Film Noir* as well as Stan and Ollie. So, she plans to make a connection between the two! Actually I think it can be done via the Oedipus myth and a bit of Freud – something to do with man being the product of his own downfall! Hey, that's what happens when you watch too many arthouse films!

Andy Kimpton-Nye

Glasgow plaque

I live near Buchanan Drive, Rutherglen, Glasgow and have heard that Stan Laurel stayed there at one point. I even went for dinner at a friend's house in Craigmillar Road, Battlefield, Glasgow and came across a plaque hanging on her dining room wall. It stated that Stan Laurel had lived there.

Jim McLaughlin

Ed: The Jeffersons lived in Glasgow in Prince Edward Street, off Victoria Road; 17 Craigmillar Road, Battlefield; 42 Buchanan Drive, Rutherglen; and 185 Stonelaw Road, Rutherglen. See also page 58.

Popeye first?

We are holding a local quiz in aid of Demelza House Children's Hospital. Can you confirm that Laurel and Hardy sang *By the light of the Silvery Moon* in the first Popeye film?



Terry Davis

The claim re the first Popeye film is complete nonsense. Laurel and Hardy never contributed directly to any of them. I've had that first cartoon – and quite a few others – for many years. That song doesn't even appear in the film. The only songs that appear are: (over the titles) an unnamed man, with chorus, singing *Strike Up the Band for Popeye the Sailor* (a theme tune that was abandoned after the second film); Billy Costello (as Popeye) singing *I'm Popeye the Sailor Man*; and Mae Questel (as Betty Boop) singing a Hawaiian song. Nothing else. It beats me how these things start up.

Glenn Mitchell

Chicken feed

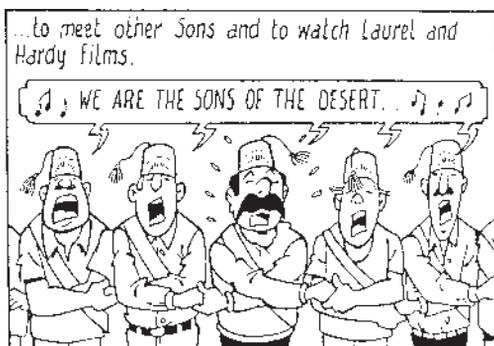
I wanted to congratulate you on another excellent *Bowler Dessert*! The only trouble is that it's hard to put down, so I'm a bit more tired than I should be at work today. Could you make the next one a bit more boring?

We've just had another great turnout at our Saturday night Chickens Come Home Tent meeting (and some new, younger members in the audience, which is always good news). We showed, amongst others, *Them Tar Hills* (one of my all time favourites), *Tit for Tat*, *Busy Bodies*, *Big Business* and *A Chump at Oxford*. A very funny night was had by all.

The Chickens' web pages have some funny bits of video and some really good pictures from the parade in Ulverston.

Mike Duckles

Ed: Sorry, Mike, I'm afraid we don't have any machinery for making *Bowler Dessert* more boring!



Robert Merhottein's cartoon strip

I went to an exhibition regarding the work of Robert Merhottein, a Flemish drawer of comics who is also a member of the Sons of the Desert. At that exhibition I saw a comic strip by his hand, which was published in *Bowler Dessert*.

As I am a great admirer of the work of Mr Merhottein I hope that you can help me out. He made a comic strip especially for your magazine in 1989 (regarding the convention in Preston). The issue where the strip was published was issue no 36. Is there any way to locate that magazine? You would make me the happiest person on earth if you could help me out.

Joeri Delamane
Joeri.Delamane@rug.ac.be

Ed: Does anyone have a spare copy for Jeori?

Projector repairs

I repair and recondition movie projectors of all gauges and formats. I have a stock of all different types ready for shipment to almost any point in the world. Contact Clyde H Powell Photoptronics, 3822 Edwards Terrace, Chattanooga, TN 37412, USA. Phone: (423) 867-3200. Fax: (423) 867-5266. E-Mail: ClyPow@msn.com.

Clyde H Powell

Ref: Tip for projectionists, *Bowler Dessert* 60 page 34



Sorry to have to disagree with Chris. His misinformant has passed on some garbled information. The temperature of the transformer has negligible (if any) effect. The relevant change in temperature is that of the lamp's filament, which, made of tungsten, has a large positive coefficient of resistance. When cold (at switch-on) its resistance may be about an eighth of its hot (operating) resistance. If a cold lamp is connected to full operating voltage, then there is a current surge. Although this may last for only a few thousandths of a second until the filament attains its very high working temperature, the surge has an adverse effect upon the lamp, sometimes causing failure.

M Finn

One wot I rote

I would like to apply for the post of worst poet in the world. Here's one wot I rote (*à la* Laurel). For some reason, my wife doesn't find it very funny. But, then, she has no sole!

Your birthday comes but once a year,
So does easter too,
New year's day's not far away,
A merry christmas to you.

Dani Barker

Sykes on Laurel

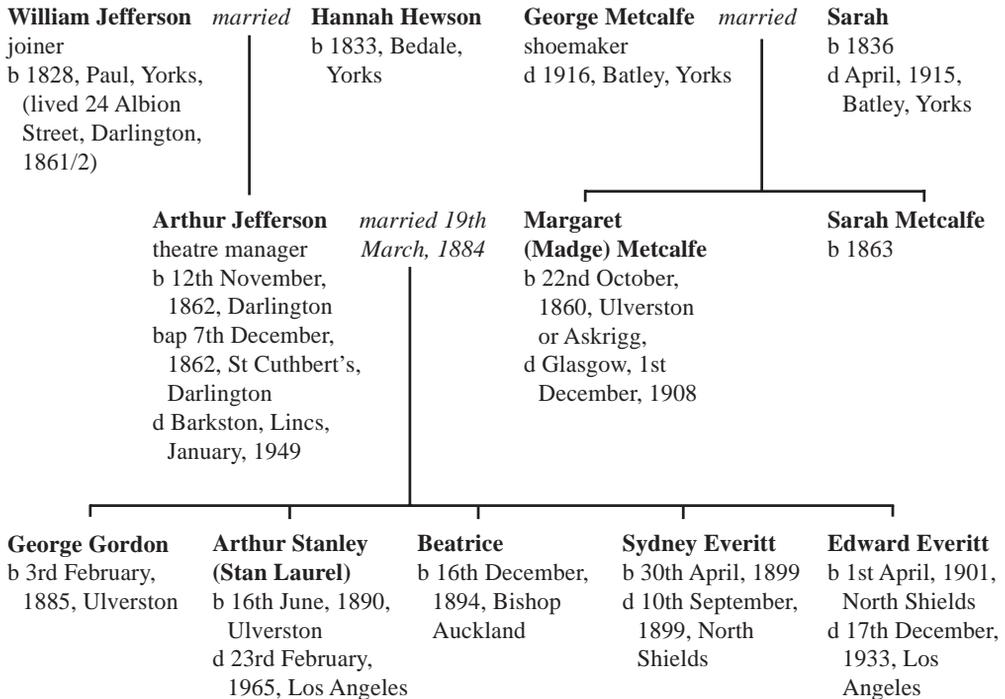
I read in the *Sunday Observer* (20.10.02.) of an interview with 79-year-old Eric Sykes. He gave mention only once to fellow comedy performers and he related memories of his childhood: "Laurel and Hardy have inspired me my whole life. When I was in the cinema as a boy, there was a buzz or a ripple through the crowd. Their comedy was full of innocence. They broke all the rules of cinema. You're never supposed to look at the camera – they looked at it all the time. What we have now are just abstract heroes."

Eric Woods

Stan's father's father

Stan Laurel's father was born in Darlington, Co Durham, in a central part of the town which has now disappeared. He was the only child, as far as can be ascertained, of William Jefferson, a joiner by trade, and his wife Hannah. The family were in Darlington at the 1861 census, and Arthur was baptised there in 1862. Unfortunately, those are the only traces that have been found of the Darlington connection in that they weren't in the town in 1851, 1871 or 1881 and there were no other baptisms at St Cuthbert's.

This research has been carried out by Tony Hillman and Tom Hutchinson of the Hog Wild Tent, Bishop Auckland, and this is the first time it has been published anywhere.



New busy place

The Busy Bodies Tent has found a new venue, only yards from the previous one. The August meeting was the last one at the War Memorial Club. Tony Bagley tells us, "Sadly the club was in financial trouble. I think that our monthly shows were probably their busiest evenings. We had been there for a number of years and had



always enjoyed a good relationship with all concerned."

The tent met on 30th October at the Stourbridge Cricket Club. The club cannot accommodate the tent on Tuesdays, so the Busy Bodies have changed their meeting nights to Wednesdays. "The venue is very comfortable," says Tony. Their only snag is that, as it is a cricket club which plays evening matches from May to September, they may have to review their position in May.

Glenn's play on the radio

Glenn Mitchell's play *Catching up with Clifford* was on Radio 4 on 30th August. It was the story of Nat Clifford, a music hall comedian and entertainer blessed with the gift of creating havoc wherever his career took him, and starred Roy Hudd and Chris Emmet. Clifford, alias Frank Terry, appeared in, and directed, some Stan Laurel solo films, worked at Roach studios with Harold Lloyd and others, and appeared in *Me and My Pal* and *The Midnight Patrol*.

Twilight Roach

Check out *Twilight Zone* volume 4, episode 2. It takes place after a nuclear war between the USA and the USSR, and stars Charles Bronson and Elizabeth Montgomery as the only two survivors. To get the look and feel of a bombed city it was filmed at what was left of the Hal Roach studios. One scene takes place in a barber's shop – could it be the one from *Oliver the Eighth*?

Antony Waite

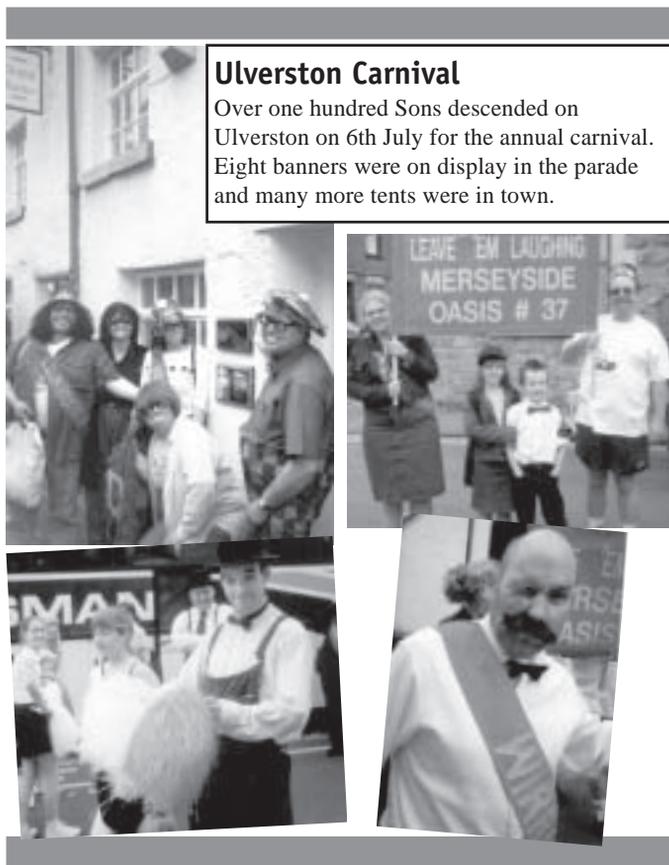
A different kind of oath

David Oyston sent in a clipping from *Classic Images* (June, 2001), in which Sam Rubin recalled how in the early days of *8mm Collector* he reduced the size of type to squeeze in extra text. The size of type upset one reader, Stan Laurel. . . .

The only complaint I remember receiving was from Stan Laurel who, upon receiving a copy of *8mm Collector*, swore and said that it was like reading stuff printed on the head of a pin.

Meet Jacqueline White

You are invited to meet Jacqueline White, one of Laurel and Hardy's few remaining co-stars. She will be appearing at the Memphis Film Festival this June. Website <http://www.memphisfilmfestival.com> has the details.



Ulverston Carnival

Over one hundred Sons descended on Ulverston on 6th July for the annual carnival. Eight banners were on display in the parade and many more tents were in town.

Jitterbugs changes

The Jitterbugs Tent in Holland is in its thirteenth year and said goodbye to Hans Ligtenberg as leader. From 1st January Davy Goderie has been the new Grand Sheik. Hans remains part of the organising team, but has cut down on his activities, to concentrate on work with his new band. Tent meetings continue under Davy's guidance and we wish Hans and Davy much luck in their future endeavours.

The CD-ROM *Megazine 5* from the Jitterbugs is currently available from your editor for £5.00 and looks like becoming a collectors' piece. After number 6, which is at present being put together as a double CD-ROM set, there won't be a new *Megazine* for some time. Over the last three years the *Megazine* has cost the tent quite a lot of money and so the publishers will take things easy for a while.

The tent has a new e-mail address, jitterbugstent@home.nl.

Mike's Ollie

Michael Senig is an Oliver Hardy lookalike who has won a number of awards, including the Hardy lookalike prize at Sons conventions. He has also made a few TV commercials and tells us that he has worked with Sparkie (as Stan) a number of times. However, Mike has a problem. He says, "I don't have anyone to play Stan on a regular basis. My son was Stan when we did the Ohio Theatre for the last two summers when they did a week of silent movies."

Mike has some interesting items for sale on page 23.



Michael Senig, Jerry Tucker and George Mazzezy

From the editor's desk

The eBay sales site on the Internet has an enormous array of items for auction or straightforward sale. At any one time you can count around a thousand Laurel and Hardy offers! I thought I would share with you a few gems. You can visit the site at <http://www.ebay.com>.



This is a real one dollar bill with a picture of Laurel and Hardy perfectly transposed with George Washington's face. Did you know that Celebrity Dollars are permitted by the US Treasury Department and are legal tender? Neither did I, but it is true! I wonder if Cuckoo bank notes would be accepted by UK officials?



At around the same price of £4.00 was other strange currency, such as these 10/- and £1 notes.



20" x 28" prints by Stuart Coffield were on offer for around £10.00.



Three photos were also on auction for around £10.00.



The print above was on sale for around £7.00 and the ones below fetched around £3.00.



A very rare game from 1962, in mint condition, was on offer. The price paid is unknown.

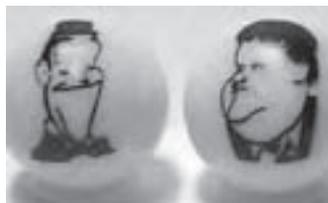


A cast iron doorstop cost around £12.00 and a teapot around £20.00.



String puppets were on sale for around £50.00 per pair.

Two marbles cost around £4.00.



A cut-out advert cost £1.00.

Living Famously



On 15th January, BBC2 paid tribute to the Boys in a new hour-long telling of the Laurel and Hardy story, *Living Famously*, narrated by Caroline Quentin. Readers air their views . . .

◇ The BBC should be congratulated on a superb new biographical documentary. I thought it was a very well put together programme, which successfully mixed narration with commentary, interviews and film clips. Some of the interviews were old (eg T Marvin Hatley, Lucille Hardy) but they blended very well with quite a few new items, including comments from Glenn Mitchell, John McCabe, Simon Louvish, Barry Cryer, Tony Robinson and the great Sir Norman Wisdom. Some interesting interludes were provided by the larger than life and colourful Californian, Bob Satterfield, showing off what some of the more familiar film sites look like today – including the *Music Box* steps and the *Big Business* house. Some of the shown film clips were very rare, including various solo films, UK tour footage, and the BBC *This is Music Hall* footage. Indeed a great programme.

Dave Tomlinson

◇ Whoever wrote the press release should take a look at the 1974 BBC *Omnibus* on Laurel and Hardy. The production team of *Living Famously* secured no “interviews with family members, friends and colleagues, giving a fresh insight into their lives” – these were all taken from the old BBC programme. Nothing new except interviews with authors John McCabe, Simon Louvish *et al*, I’m afraid. (I helped a bit with film clips, but it’s a daytime programme with nothing like the budget of even the 1974 documentary.)

David Wyatt

◇ There was the usual distraction of talking heads (Tony Robinson, Barry Cryer, etc); it’s nice to know that they are fans of the Boys but, in a programme of this nature, are they relevant?

Much of the programme extracted interviews from the BBC’s earlier *Omnibus* programme *Cuckoo* and also had a curious fascination in showing scenes from *Be Big*, not one of their best shorts.

The documentary also took considerable liberties in claiming Babe Hardy’s bit part in *They Looked Alike* as an acting breakthrough, but they deserve congratulations for showing the ultra-rare extract from the BBC programme *This is Music Hall* from 1955, which proved to be the very last screen appearance of Stan and Babe. And virtually all biographical details were truthful. Despite some dodgy moments, a mostly accurate and watchable effort.

Jonathan Hayward

Four Stan and Ollies

Interesting to read what BBC gave to their viewers. Hopefully *Living Famously* will find a way to other countries. These reviews reminded me of another film, made in 1988. My connection with this movie started when I read about the Laurel and Hardy Museum in Ulverston. I sent them a letter, asking for details and got a nice friendly answer from the late Bill Cubin. I decided to do the long trip from Berlin via London and Lancaster to Ulverston. At one or two stations before Ulverston suddenly a film team, four Laurel lookalikes and four Hardy lookalikes boarded my train and started to film. After a while I was nervous, imagining that some staff from the museum was involved in this film project. I asked and received the answer that Bill Cubin and others were among the lookalikes. So I was more nervous doing this long and expensive trip perhaps only to find the museum closed. But everybody got off at Ulverston station. In the meantime I had made contact with Bill, who told me not to worry – after some filming everybody would drive to the museum and I could join them. So I took several pictures with Bill’s camera and mine.

Now came one of the nicest episodes in my Laurel and Hardy life, in this car together with two Laurels and two Hardys, driving through Ulverston. It’s a pity that I have no picture from that experience.

I had more correspondence with Bill in the early nineties, but I never heard any more about that film project, if it was finished or released or not. It was probably planned for Stan’s hundredth birthday. If anyone knows more about this, I’d like to know.

Axel Schumacher

Another Fine Message

In 1976 the Ulverston tent was launched. Bill Cubin was its Grand Sheik until his death in 1997 and the tent continues under the supervision of Bill's daughter, Marion. Marion came across the first edition of the tent's newsletter, edited by Bill Cubin and Barry Knowles and here we reproduce parts of it

Stan, as most of you will know, was born in Ulverston. . . and there's a plaque outside his house in Argyle Street. There's also a pub called the Stanley Laurel (just round the corner a bit and ask again) where they sure serve some good cocktails. That's really why you're reading this now, because Bill Cubin and a few of the other guys at the cement works thought it was about time Ulverston had its very own branch of the Sons of the Desert. Because dear Stan was born right here we thought we'd call ourselves the Berth Marks Tent, after a very funny two-reel film the Boys made in '29.

◇ The Sons of the Desert welcome their youngest member, Jeremy Craddock of Kendal. Jeremy looks like becoming a skilful cartoonist. He's wild about Stan and Ollie and he's just eight years old.



◇ From an old Columbia 78 record:

Stan: Stop twiddling your tie.

Ollie: What do you mean, stop twiddling my tie ?

Stan: Well every time you get fancy you start twiddling your tie and it makes you look silly.

◇ I am delighted that you have expressed interest in founding a tent of the Sons. Basically, each tent tries to uphold the Constitution of the Sons as printed in my book *Mr Laurel and Mr Hardy* and to show the films at meetings attended by genuine Laurel and Hardy buffs. (Incidentally, we are not a "fan" club, we are a group of buffs. "Fans" totally and uncritically adore. . . "buffs" are discriminating in their affection and know the reasons why they love and what they love). Laurel and Hardy buffs are people who really love Laurel and Hardy. . . they are not drop-in visitants who think Stan and Ollie are kinda cute or sort of funny, but who in their hearts prefer Chaplin or the Marx Brothers. Genuine devotion to the "Boys" is *sine qua non* for membership.

Other requirements of your tent's membership should be determined by your founding members. These requirements vary just as people vary: they are established by the essential personality of the individuals who join. For example, some tents sternly exclude ladies except at special "Mae Busch nights" or at an annual banquet: other tents welcome ladies at all times. Some tents insist that membership be limited to those of legal drinking age. Other tents welcome members of any age. In other words, you determine your own entrance qualifications."

John McCabe

◇ I am pleased to tell you that we have well over seven hundred and fifty new pence in the "kitty".

I feel that our tent should have some aim in mind. It would be nice to be able to raise enough money to erect a bust of Stan in the town and also take up the suggestion of Mr McCabe that our film shows should be shared by groups of children, old folk etc, and give pleasure to as many people as possible. To do this we do need a few bob in the "kitty" and it would be ideal for our tent to have its own projector and collection of the Boys' films.

Bill Cubin

Ollie: You haven't told any of these nice people how to get their next issue.

Stan: Well, that's easy. All they have to do is send some money or some hard-boiled eggs or something to Bill Cubin and the whole thing's easy, isn't it?

Ollie: I suppose you realise the man who's typing this is drunk. . .

Stan: Yeah, but he sure is a nice fella and he bought me a steam shovel once. . .

◇ Three Laurel and Hardy films have basically identical plots. In *The Chimp* the Boys are looking after a gorilla. In *Laughing Gravy* (a masterpiece) a stray dog rules their lives, and in *Angora Love* the Boys adopt a pet goat!

◇ The auctioneers routine from *Thicker Than Water* was recreated in *The Dancing*

Masters.

Laurel and HarDay

Beer Engine, Wigan, 7th September, 2002

Neil Evans reports

We had yet another packed Laurel and HarDay. We finally got David Wyatt to tell us what the connection was between Will Hay and Laurel and Hardy – well, there are astounding similarities between some gags in Will Hay pictures and gags in Laurel and Hardy pictures. Also Will Hay had been a member of Fred Karno's troupe, as had Stan. In the film *Oh Mr Porter* there is a train being driven at high speed and then crashing into the buffers at a station – it is not Will Hay driving the train but Tony Baker, who was the driver of the train Laurel and Hardy rode on the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway when they reopened it after the war.



David Wyatt (centre) with Neil and Ann Evans

attended every single Laurel and HarDay and given us some form of scholarly presentation. We had Bob Hickson with us, who has also attended every Laurel and HarDay as a member of the audience.

Chris Coffey announced his retirement as Grand Sheik of the Bacon Grabbers and to mark this occasion we presented Chris with a framed certificate signed by all the Bacon Grabbers present. Thanks for all your hard work, Chris.

It was good to see Ronnie Dunn back with us. We had an international visitor, Michael Schmitz from Germany, making him the Son who has travelled the furthest to visit us.

The International Kneesie-Earsie-Nosey Competition had a new champion this year – Vincent Byrne from the Laughing Gravy Tent.

Tony Bagley and friends held the annual Charity Auction, auctioning off various prints, jigsaws, original Tony Bagley cartoons and various other stuff donated by Sons in the room, including the



The Riff Raff



Chris Coffey

We had our usual huge display of memorabilia, so browsers and collectors were well catered for.

The major treat was the Avalon Boys, with their own interpretations of the music from Laurel and Hardy films and their own original compositions based on the films. They went down really well.

We had presentations to David Wyatt, Eric Woods and Dougie Brown, all of whom had

Avalon Boys donating an album and Gary and Steve, our own video unit, donating a special edition Nancy Wardell T-shirt. Roger Robinson donated a couple of East German policeman's hats, and the result of all this was that the Laurel and HarDay raised £257 for Nancy's charities.

The Bacon Grabbers Quiz was won by young lads who hadn't actually joined a tent yet.

David Wyatt's quizzes get more and more convoluted every year. This year's quiz did not contain a single Laurel and Hardy clip. How is this possible

with a Laurel and Hardy quiz? David showed us twenty-five clips from various films and we had to decide what Laurel and Hardy film the gag reminded us of – for instance he showed the pie fight from the end of *The Great Race* and that was supposed to suggest *The Battle of the Century*. A lad from the One Good Turn Tent, Matthew Ross, got all twenty-five right.

◇ Tony Bagley led the annual Charity Auction. He says, “I would like to thank Samantha Traynor, Bob Hickson and Phil Ruston for helping me. Also a big thank you to all the very generous Sons who not only boosted the total by hefty bidding, but also donated many items for sale.”

Visit website <http://www.laurel-and-hardy.co.uk> for a full, illustrated report



Matthew Ross and Ian Parker



Vincent Byrne



The Avalon Boys



Tony Bagley and Phil Ruston



Ronnie Dunn



◇ For the Kneesie-Earsie-Nosey Competition, Master of Ceremonies Ian Parker drew up rules, some of which are given below. . . .

Competitors must have the requisite number of limbs. Those who have two noses must nominate which nose they will use. Those who have three legs will be disqualified. Floating knee-caps are not allowed. Those who have one leg can use a surrogate leg of a non-competitor provided they are over eighteen years of age. False legs are allowed, but not false ears or noses.

Heavy colds are to be declared and competitors must have a tissue or nose-bungs.

People with extra large ears and noses or short necks are to be handicapped.

On no account must the head leave the shoulders or be placed between the knees.

Eating, drinking, drooling, snoring, tap-dancing, singing, poor impressions, picking of nose, playing pee wee, scratching, application of any oils, mustard plasters or other embrocation during the game is encouraged.

First aid is available behind the bar, including nose-slings, ear-slings and replacement knee-caps (at own cost).

In the case of a competitor catching fire, please dowse with beer. This does not disqualify a player who may return to the competition when fully dampened down.



“Sag” Southworth



Three wise men

Stan's sister looks back

AJ Marriot came across an article in The Journal newspaper (17.12.73.)

To the neighbours Mrs Olga Beatrice Healey is just the widow who lives next door. But to many of the world's theatre stars she is much more.

For Mrs Healey, who is now in her late seventies, is the sister of one of the world's greatest comedians – Stan Laurel, who died in 1965.

Gone are the days when her name appeared in lights outside the country's top theatres. In those golden days of the theatre she was a star in her own right. But now all she has left is a mountain of old pictures and a heart full of memories. And yesterday in the living room of Mrs Healey's cottage at Roker, Sunderland, she shared some of them over a cup of tea.

The story began in Dockwray Square, North Shields, seventy-nine years ago, when she was born into a family of eight.

"My father and mother were both on the stage. Our lives revolved around the theatre and because of this the family was split up. I was educated in a convent school in Belgium and Stan went to school in Barnard Castle," she said.

"Stan wanted to be a great comedy director. And when he was about twenty he left this country

with Fred Karno to make his fortune in America.

"Before Hardy met Stan he hadn't done much in the comedy field, although he had appeared in a few films."

Mrs Healey also teamed up with a partner – her husband, Billy, who was a musician. "We met during a tour. Billy played the cello and the banjo in the show band.

"After twenty-five years we decided to retire from the theatre and we bought a pub called the Black Bull in Bottesford, midway between Grantham and Nottingham and there we stayed for another twenty-eight years." Mr Healey died in March this year, aged seventy-seven.

"Stan made a point of working in this country for a few months with Hardy and they would always spend a few days at our pub," said Mrs Healey.

Then she opened a drawer and brought out an old dusty box, overflowing with pictures of herself, her husband and the comedy duo.

Many of them bore short notes, written by Laurel and Hardy. One read: "To Bee, Our Love Always, Stan and Ollie."

"Since Stan died in 1965 people from all over the world have written to me asking for photographs and information about him. But I wish they would just let him rest."

Stan's wife Ida Laurel regularly writes to Mrs Healey from her home in Santa Monica, California, where she lives with her daughter Lois.

"Whenever people bring Stan up in conversation I get terribly embarrassed and have to walk away. I don't like shouting about it. And anyway, there isn't much I can tell about him that the world doesn't already know," she said.

Angora love

The following review of Laurel and Hardy's last silent film Angora Love appeared in what is thought to have been Film Daily in 1929

Here is a short comedy, just sizzling over with rapid-fire, laughter-stirring situations that click equally well with youths and adults. Laurel and Hardy are an unctuous pair of funsters that always boom along on a current of rippling merriment. True, they are the very incarnation of acrobatic tumble bugs and ludicrous whatnots that defy the straight line of analysis; but, oh boy, who cares about the properties of cinema construction when two big ginks are pulling off stunts that would shake all the sugar out of a chronic diabetic all tied up in knots of laughter?



In brief

Adverts

◇ Michael S Senig, Ollie's Place, PO Box 1426, Lancaster, OH 43130, USA has Sons fezzes for sale at \$65.00 plus \$19.00 shipping and insurance. State hat size. Fez stabilisers, red or white, cost \$6.00 each. Pee wee \$10.00 + \$6.00. Sye Roberts Gold Mine deed £1.00 + \$2.00. Various rubber stamps from \$18.00.

◇ George Mazzey Sr has a large selection of 16mm Laurel and Hardy films for sale, all in mint condition. For a list write to him at 189 Regis Drive, Staten Island, New York, 10314-1423, USA.

Did you know?

Laurel and Hardy ridicule Erich Von Stroheim in *Double Whoopee*. Did you know that Von Stroheim actually praised the film?

◇ David Cole has a Goldentone Red 78rpm record produced by Larry Harmon in the sixties, with Larry playing the part of Stan Laurel. The song featured is *One Together is Two*.

◇ Ronald Thomson, who wrote recent articles for *Bowler Dessert* and the poem *Swan Song*, passed away in September. A nervous disease took away his ability to walk, then he suffered a fatal heart attack. He is sadly missed.

◇ All of the old Pathé newsreels are now on view on the Internet. A search for "laurel hardy" results in an extensive collection. A "preview" with superimposed text can be downloaded, free of charge, but to buy a clip is costly.

◇ Peter Andrews's oasis, the Fraternally Yours Tent, has a new meeting place. See page 62.

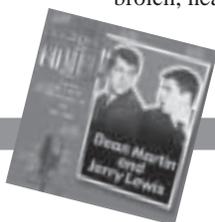
◇ A new member of the Early to Bed Tent, Irving Roy, is the first member of the tent to have actually seen Laurel and Hardy live.

◇ Graham McKenna's Laughing Gravy Tent celebrated its 21st birthday in November. Graham says, "Has it really flown by so quickly?" He was in Bath in September, on a day's visit, which brought back many happy memories of the 1982 UK Convention.

◇ In a survey of 160,000 babies born in Britain in 2002, the name Oliver proved to be the tenth most popular, according to the *Daily Express* (28.12.02.).

◇ Antony Waite's two splendid magazines *Whoopee* and *Slapstick UK* now have twelve pages and feature colour throughout.

◇ Harry Hoppe staged a Laurel and Hardy exhibition in Grevenbroich, near Mönchen Gladbach, in January.



The Golden Age of Comedy

The Golden Age of Comedy is a series of classic, vintage, audio recordings. Nine CDs have been released and are available from your editor at only £3.00 each. Add £1.00 for p&p for one CD, but two or more CDs are p&p free. Prices include VAT. Make cheques etc payable to Sons of the Desert.

Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy*
The Marx Brothers
Groucho Marx
George Burns and Gracie Allen

Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis
WC Fields
Jimmy Durante
Mel Blanc
Abbott and Costello

* Reviewed on page 59

All of the CDs play for approximately one hour, are in sealed cellophane wrappings and are on the Pulse label.



Master Comic, Master Mason

Oliver Hardy was a very funny man. He was also a very successful man. But, while most people recognise the name, few realise that “Babe”, as his family and friends called him, was a Master Mason long before he was a movie star. In fact, the Masons played an important role in the young life of Oliver Hardy, whose heart was as big as his 300-pound body.

In 1913, Oliver Hardy moved to Jacksonville, Florida, and went to work for the Lubin Motion Picture Company. During his years in Jacksonville, Oliver was made a Mason in Solomon Lodge No 20. His wife Lucille has stated Babe was very proud of being a Mason and tried to live up to the Masonic ideals all his life. In October 1948, after most of his films were completed and the heyday of Laurel and Hardy over, he was made a life member of Solomon Lodge. Babe still managed to keep up his interest in the Masonic fraternity. He was a frequent visitor to Hollywood and Mt Olive Lodges in California.

For years critics refused to place Babe and Stan alongside their contemporaries like Chaplin, Keaton and Harold Lloyd. (Lloyd, by the way, was an active Mason and one who devoted many years to Masonic work.)

In 1961 Stan Laurel was awarded an Oscar for the work he and Hardy had left the movie world.

*Glenn Laxton in The Northern Light,
June 1980 [abridged]*

I think Babe said he joined the Masons around the time of WWI, or shortly before. He promised them [Solomon Lodge] if he ever went through the 33rd degree he would return to Jacksonville to do so, but the opportunity never arose. However, in 1948 Solomon Lodge awarded him a life membership, of which he was extremely proud. No – he never went the Shrine route.

Lucille Hardy Price in a letter dated 11.03.75

◇ Documents seen by your editor confirm that Hardy joined the Masons in March, 1916.



Artwork on sale

Peter Finnigan is a professional artist, specialising in Laurel and Hardy. He exhibited his work at the UK Convention in Oldham some years ago. Having drawn and painted since childhood, Peter’s love of early silent movies gave him the inspiration to create original drawings. Signed, limited edition prints and originals of his work are for sale on his website http://www.artsbar.com/jshop/pete_finnigan.htm. The reproduction shown above measures 315 x 235mm and the one below is 250 x 230mm. They cost £20.00 each.

You can also order from Sales Department, Art’s Bar Ltd, 2 Highfield Drive, Alkington, Middleton, Manchester, M24 1DJ.

Peter is making Sons a special offer of buy-two-get-one-free (of equivalent value) when they visit his website. Just e-mail Peter before you purchase (because this offer is not for the general public) and mention that you found the site through *Bowler Dessert*.



Star quote

Davy Jones of the Monkees once said, “We would sit around for hours watching the Marx Brothers, the Three Stooges and Laurel and Hardy, learning comedy timing.”

Louvish in paperback

With Simon Louvish's book *Stan and Ollie, the Roots of Comedy* out of print in hardback, the publication of a paperback edition at £8.99 prompted a review by Steve Jelbert in *The Times* magazine *Play* (07.09.02). . . .

Nothing evokes childhood quite like the movies of the universal clowns Stan Laurel and Oliver "Babe" Hardy, the filmic starting point for literally hundreds of millions of people. The pair defined a style that clearly linked the 19th century music hall, where the Englishman Laurel, the son of a theatre owner, started out, and the emerging cinematic form. In the process they became popular all over the world and, unlike the equally innovative Chaplin, himself a one-man industry, their work still delights today. The Sons of the Desert fan club keeps their memory alive, mediating over the remarkably intense schisms that are thrown up by the various Stan and Ollie subjects.

It is a pity, then, that Louvish's lovingly detailed biography does its best to remove all the simple joy from their work. It resorts instead to insanely arcane detail, unprovable psychological speculation and tedious and irrelevant passages of florid description. Something of a veteran at this caper (his WC Fields and Marx Brothers biographies are exemplary works, the latter as intriguing as its cast), he struggles when coming up against subjects that are as transparent as this pair. Laurel's taste for statuesque luses and Hardy's genuine depression at the appearance that made him wealthy aside, there is little to tell that cannot be seen better on the screen.

Their authentic humanity cannot be denied (for instance, the Georgian Hardy married a Jewish woman at the height of Ku Klux Klan hysteria in the South), but like so many accounts of comics, there is a whiff of impending tragedy that the bare facts cannot justify.

Louvish's endless digressions on their active part in the continuing history of performance are indisputable, but indigestible, while the transcripts of some of their most famous scenes serve little purpose beyond sparking a desire to discard this shamefully dull tome and pop in a video instead.

Judged on those terms, then, this book succeeds, but as an attempt to measure the unquantifiable, it is a failure.

Royal honour

Shortly after Prince Charles and Diana's wedding they went on holiday. To escape attention they booked their flight under the assumed names of Mr and Mrs Hardy.



JR Smith murdered

We were shocked to learn of the death of one of the kids from Hal Roach's silent *Our Gang* films. His stabbed and bludgeoned body was found in a deserted area near Las Vegas on 5th October.

Police charged Charles "Wayne" Crombie, a befriended homeless man, with murder and other felonies in connection with the killing.

Smith's second wife, Florine, to whom he was married for forty-six years, died just over a year ago and Smith took her death badly. About six months later, Smith stunned family and friends when he allowed a homeless man he identified only as "Wayne" to live in the large shed behind his home in return for doing odd jobs around the house.

87-year-old Smith was a celebrity guest at the International Convention in Nashville last year. He once said of his *Our Gang* work, "None of us took it seriously while it was happening. But looking back, it was a very pleasant time in my life, and as I grow older it gets more valuable."

He appeared in thirty-six *Our Gang* comedies, but the only one to place Smith in a central role was *Rainy Days* (1928). His freckled appearance earned him the occasional nickname "Speck".

In *The Independent* (06.11.02.) Glenn Mitchell wrote a lengthy obituary and included the following:

A few of Smith's *Our Gang* appearances overlap with Laurel and Hardy. Laurel may be seen briefly in *Seeing the World* (1927), while Hardy appeared with the Gang in *Thundering Fleas* (1926), *Baby Brother* (1927) and *Barnum & Ringling, Inc* (1928). Smith was also among the Gang members to be seen in a Glenn Tryon comedy of 1926, *Forty-Five Minutes from Hollywood*, which holds the distinction of being the first Roach film to include both Laurel and Hardy in its cast.

Also in the cast: a tragic trio

Robert Cheadle sent us this article from Idols magazine, dated April 1989

The face of comedy is often mirrored by that of tragedy. Laurel and Hardy, those clown princes of mirth, saw a sad story emerge when three of their screen princesses suffered tragically premature deaths.

One actress who appeared in three of their silent films was an extra when she was engaged to play in *Liberty* in 1929. The same year she was hired to appear in two further Stan and Ollie vehicles, *Double Whoopee* and *Bacon Grabbers*. Although only seventeen, she was already married and had changed her name from Harlean Carpenter to Jean Harlow.



Jean Harlow's entrance in Double Whoopee

There is a famous scene in *Double Whoopee* when Ollie, as a doorman, opens the door of a cab for Jean and escorts her into the lobby of the hotel. However, Stan, in another accidental action of incompetence, closes the cab door prematurely and rips the back of her dress off and Ollie and Jean continue on their way to the lobby, her legs revealed, unaware that the rest of her gown is hanging from the cab door. Incidentally, although *Double Whoopee* is a silent film, it saw the introduction of Ollie's phrase "Another fine mess". He mouths it.

The following year Jean was discovered by Howard Hughes, who starred her in *Hell's Angels*.

The 18 year old girl became a star almost overnight and rapidly became Hollywood's reigning sex siren in films such as *Platinum Blonde* and *Red Dust*.

She married studio executive Paul Bern but on her wedding night he beat her viciously with a cane and bruised her kidneys. Bern committed suicide, but the damage of the beating led to Harlow's death. Her kidneys didn't function and poisons infected her gall bladder. Her mother, a Christian Scientist, refused to allow her to go to hospital. She was filming *Saratoga* with Clark Gable and collapsed in his arms, dying soon after of cerebral oedema. She was 26 years old.

Thelma Todd co-starred in four* films with Laurel and Hardy and became a successful comedienne. Apart from her movies with Stan and Ollie, she made films with Charley Chase and co-starred in a series with ZaSu Pitts. Her first Laurel and Hardy vehicle was the 1929 film *Unaccustomed As We Are* and she followed with *Chickens Come Home* in 1931, *Fra Diavolo* in 1933 and *The Bohemian Girl*, which was issued in 1936, the year after her death. She died during the production of the film and, out of respect to her, most of the footage featuring Thelma was taken out of the completed film.



Thelma Todd strikes in Unaccustomed As We Are

Thelma's death remains a mystery. She was found dead in her car of monoxide poisoning, but she had no reason to commit suicide.

There were rumours that she had become entangled with gangsters who murdered her.** She was thirty years old.

Lupe Velez made her film debut in Stan and Ollie's *Sailors Beware!* in 1927 and also appeared with them in *Hollywood Party* in 1934.



Lupe Velez's revenge in Hollywood Party

She became known as the Mexican Spitfire, had affairs with John Gilbert and Gary Cooper and married Johnny Weissmuller. After her divorce from the screen's favourite Tarzan, she had a succession of affairs and became pregnant by a man called Harald Ramond. Rather than have an abortion she decided on suicide. She had her make-up man and hairdresser attend to her one night and took an overdose of Seconal when they left.

It was 1944. Lupe was thirty-six years old.

* Ed: The writer has omitted a fifth film with Thelma – *Another Fine Mess* (1930).

** Ed: This view was advanced by Andy Edmonds in her book *Hot Toddy*, but other researchers reject her conclusion.

Also in the cast:

Dorothy Layton

Jonathan Hayward saw an interesting page on the Internet Movie Database (www.IMDb.com). It was about actress Dorothy Layton, who appeared in a few Laurel and Hardy films. She was ninety years of age on 13th August. Observes Jonathan, "She is one of the very few Laurel and Hardy co-stars living now. Does anyone know where she is?"

Birth name: Dorothy
Wannenwetsch

Date of birth and location:
13th August, 1912, Cincinnati,
Ohio, USA

Filmography:

Hollywood on Parade No 9
(1933) . . . Herself

Pick-up (1933) . . . Peggy

Fallen Arches (1933) . . . Miss
Layton, Billy Gilbert's
secretary

Pack Up Your Troubles (1932)
(uncredited) . . . Bridesmaid

Young Ironsides (1932) . . .
Herself

County Hospital (1932) . . .
Nurse

The Chimp (1932) (uncredited)
. . . Bit part

Chickens Come Home (1931)
(uncredited) . . . Bit part

Tent logos: no 2



Mike Duckles drew this clever logo for his Chickens Come Home Tent.

Hog house

I can't confirm that this story is true, but if it isn't, it should be. . . .

When the film *Hog Wild* was being made, none of the householders around the area was particularly keen on having a film crew climbing all over the roof of their houses, so a dummy house was constructed. After filming was completed, the studio crew was dismantling the house when a gentleman from the census office came to survey the street. He was told that the owners were away – could he come back tomorrow?

This he did and, of course, when he got there the house had gone!

*Neil Evans on the Bacon
Grabbers Tent's website*

Blades and blitz

John Burton came across a familiar story in his local newspaper which again related Laurel and Hardy to the Sheffield blitz:

Stan Laurel sent a dollar bill to Sheffield in December, 1932, to buy some razor blades. Stan and his partner Olly had been in London not long before, and, while they were in this country, Mr George H Lawrence, whose firm made Laurel razor blades, made sure that Stan received a sample supply. Stan wrote to Lawrence from California, saying that he had enjoyed using the blades. "I am enclosing a dollar bill and would appreciate if you would send me the amount of blades this will buy," he wrote.

Mr Lawrence, always an enterprising man, used a facsimile of Stan's letter in his newspaper advertisement proclaiming "Laurel Blades for Hardy Beards".

On the night of the Sheffield blitz, December 12, 1940, a bomb fell on the [Lawrence] factory and he was killed.

Plague

We liked the misprint which appeared in a magazine, which referred to "a plague commemorating the Cumbrian birthplace of comic genius Stan Laurel." It should have read, "plague".

Bob's travels



Above: Bob Hickson posed outside the Laurel & Hardy Museum in Georgia last year

Below: some of the other sites he captured on camera





Return to Milledgeville

Dennis "Sparkie" Moriarty sent us clippings penned by Cheryl Mitchell in The Union-Recorder newspaper, dated 16th and 31st July, 2002, prompted by Sons descending en masse on Ollie's home. We offer our readers an abridged version

They had the waddle down to perfection. With a squiggle of fake mustaches and a roll of their eyes, they strolled through Milledgeville like ghosts from the past – from a time when black and white movies reigned, and Laurel and Hardy were the reigning comics of the day.

Two Greyhound busloads of the Sons of the Desert emerged and one could almost hear the long-lost voice of Oliver Hardy, in the wind – “Here’s another fine mess you’ve gotten yourself into!”

Douglas Rimmer from the Live Ghost Lodge said he came on the pilgrimage to honor the old films. “During the day of Laurel and Hardy, the jokes were clean and the laughter was sincere,” he said.

Fans say the reason they keep coming back is because the message Laurel and Hardy spread was that of family unity through laughter. Two of the old child stars from the Little Rascals *Our Gang* series, who starred with Laurel and Hardy in several films, agreed. Jean Darling, the blonde girl who played in almost all of the silent *Our Gang* films, and Jerry “Tucker” Schatz, who played the little rich kid on the show, both said Laurel and Hardy, much like the Little Rascals, were geared to family laughter.

Hardy and Laurel were the original “stooges” of their time, but without the violence that seems to plague the movie screens today, they said.

When asked about her film career, Darling cocked her head to the side and smiled. “It was a time of innocence,” she said. “We were sweet and shy, with just a wee bit of mischief in our hearts.”

Darling appeared on Broadway in the original *Carousel*, and in vaudeville before movies took center stage. Both she and Schatz say they miss the days when movies and television played a role in teaching youth the difference between right and wrong.

Schatz, who starred with Darling in *Babes in Toyland*, is best known as the naughty rich kid on the *Our Gang* series during the 1930s and '40s films. “Those films were much cleaner and family-oriented than the films of today,” he said.

“It’s a shame that today’s generation can’t see what we saw back then,” said Schatz, adding that “true stars are born from a love of the silver screen, and a desire to entertain without a big fuss to be great.”

It is a part of Milledgeville’s history that, like old silent films and fading one-line jokes, has slipped from memory. The story of an overweight boy, born in Harlem on Jan 18, 1892, who grew up down on Greene Street with the nickname “Fatty” and went on to become one of the greatest comics of his time.

It is the bittersweet story of Oliver Hardy. “A boy who never really quite fit in, but went on to make a world laugh,” said Dr Bob Wilson, a local historian and professor of history at Georgia College & State University.



Jean Darling

These days Wilson wants to rekindle the legacy left behind by Hardy. He is now gearing up to revive the comic’s local fan club and with it he hopes to pay homage to one of the town’s greatest heroes – a hero who never really got the hometown recognition he so greatly deserved.

“A boy who never really quite fit in, but went on to make a world laugh”

“The most important component of young Oliver Hardy’s life was here,” Wilson said recently. “He lived in town from 1903 to 1913, but little has been written in our local history in his honor. Oliver Hardy, and what the comic’s life was like when he lived in Baldwin County, has all but faded from our conversations.”

The youngest of five children, Oliver was given the birth name of Norvell, his mother’s maiden name. An oversized son of a hotel keeper, Norvell was often teased about his weight.

“By the time he was 17, he was well past 270 pounds. Everyone called him Fatty, even when he was referred to in the newspaper,” Wilson said, adding the first mention of Hardy in print was in *The Union-Recorder* when he was about 16.

“Norvell Hardy was playing in a baseball game fundraiser, and he was brought in for a substitute. He got a hit,” Wilson said. “The paper wrote about how amazingly fast he could move around the bases with his ponder of weight.”

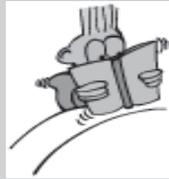
Back then, Hardy wasn’t a big movie star. Quite the contrary. “He could be seen walking the corner of Wayne and Greene Streets with a sandwich board advertising hotel specials of the day for his mother. Or on his way to the local Palace movie theater where he worked as the projectionist,” he said. It was during this time, while viewing the stars on the silent screen, that Norvell “Fatty” Hardy got his first taste of Hollywood.

“He changed his name to that of his father, Oliver, and went off to become one of the greatest comics ever known.” There are so many facts about Hardy that need to be preserved before they are forgotten,” Wilson said, “stories like how Bolling ‘Boley’ Moore, the editor of the newspaper, used to let Hardy into the Masonic building downtown, where the paper was once located.”

Moore used to let Hardy “come in and feed the presses,” he said, adding, “You can just picture this kid sort of wandering around town, trying to fit in.”

And then there is the story of how his brother died in 1909. “His older brother drowned in the Oconee and Oliver tried to save him but he couldn’t,” said Wilson.

There also are the restless stories of Hardy running away from home. And the ones centered around his dreams to be a singer. “He had a lovely tenor voice and even when he became famous he always loved to sing,” Jean Darling said.



Two homes have Hardy history

There seems to be some misinformation as to what happened to the house where movie great Oliver Norvell Hardy was born. One story is that the house was moved. This is not true.

I would like to give some history about two different houses.

Oliver Hardy Sr and Emily Norvell Tant were married in March, 1890. They moved to Madison where they ran a hotel. Mr Hardy for many years was tax collector for Columbia County. When Mrs Hardy was ready to give birth to their baby, she returned to the home of her parents, the Norvells.

The Norvell house was located behind the railroad depot on what is now South Hicks Street in Harlem. Little Ollie was born there on January 18, 1892.

After the Norvells, there were a number of people who resided in the house. The house remained undisturbed until it was torn down in 1957. A laundromat now adorns the site where the house stood. Berth Marks Tent members placed a monument there, and seasonal flowers are planted around it.

A house on Freeman Harris Road was never moved from anywhere. You can very easily see that the chimneys and the hand-hewn beams under the house were put there when the house was built over a century and a half ago. Several years ago, some members of city government, my daughter and I went out to look at this house. We examined underneath it, which was easy because it is high off the ground – in fact, all you have to do is duck your head and walk under. The purpose of this expedition was to see if the house could be moved.

This house was a family home on the Hardy side, located two miles from Punkin Center. Over the years Oliver would visit his relatives there and bring his movies to show to family and friends.

This in all probability is the house in which Oliver Sr was born on December 5, 1841 to Samuel and Catherine Hardy.

*Bette J Sargent in The News-Times
(22.09.02.)*

Amos 'n' Andy

Canada's *Laughing Gas* (Oct-Dec, 2002) magazine has more to tell us about Amos 'n' Andy, who are mentioned by Stan in *Pardon Us*:

Following successful radio shows, a television version of *The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy* began production at the Hal Roach studios in the fall of 1950. It was the first television series to feature an all black cast. The show premiered on 28th June, 1951. It was a hilarious comedy, with many scripts rehased from the radio show. By the end of the 1951/52 season, the show ranked thirteenth in the Nielson ratings. It was nominated for an Emmy only to be beaten by the *I Love Lucy* show. Unfortunately, due to continuing pressure from the NAACP, who felt that the show was degrading to African-Americans, CBS cancelled the show after the second season.

Passing the Pineapple

The first pineapple was passed by Lori Jones to Marshall Korby in Hollywood in 1980. Lori initiated the tradition of "Passing the Pineapple" from one convention host to the next. The first pineapple was made of tissue paper, deliberately fragile, symbolising the fragility of friendship. It was gone within a few years! At the International Convention in Nashville last year came the retirement of the well travelled, bronzed pineapple, to be replaced by an antique crystal pineapple.

Come what Mae

When a lady says, "Come up and see me sometime" in *Bonnie Scotland*, Stan remarks, "It's Mae West." Mae West was a devotee of the Boys and once wanted to make a film with them. She never did.

Costello reference

Bill Crouch came across the line, "Bring back Liberace or Ollie or Stan" in *Damnation's Cellar*, a track on the CD *The Juliet Letters* by Elvis Costello and the Brodsky Quartet, recorded in 1992.

Stan's visit

Clive Mitchell heard a contribution on *The Palace of Laughter* (Radio 4, 22.10.02.), Geoffrey Wheeler's tour of the nation's variety theatres, that when Stan Laurel was appearing at the Manchester Playhouse in the 1950s he visited a children's hospital nearby and spent an afternoon entertaining the youngsters. Says Clive, "I didn't get all the details as I wasn't expecting to hear anything about the Boys. From AJ Marriot's book, the date would have been November, 1953.

To be or not to be

by Jean Poulain



What is the question?

Bad luck song

Tony Bagley read in Hylda Baker's biography that the song *I Dreamt That I Dwelt in Marble Halls* is reputed to bring the worst possible luck for any show. This superstition was very strong in vaudeville days, as mentioned in your last *Bowler Dessert*.

Nick Rich spotted an item in *Permission to Speak, Sir* (Autumn, 2002). *Dad's Army's* Jones and Walker start to sing *I Dreamt That I Dwelt in Marble Halls* in the episode *The Armoured Might of Corporal Jones*. Jones and Walker say that the song is supposed to be very unlucky. "Now there might be something in this," says Nick.

However, we know of no reports of misgivings at the time of including the song in *The Bohemian Girl*.

Ones that got away



Paul Allen as Elvis Presley at the Southend convention



The crowd at the plaque unveiling at Southend

Hundreds of photographs were taken at and around the conventions in Southend and Nashville last year. It's time now to share a few more with our readers. The photos on this page were taken by Graham Bishop, Bob Hickson, Del Kempster, Anni Morris and Tony Traynor.



Crammed into the back of a coach on the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway are Mathias Günther, Peter Küppers, Harry Hoppe, Michael Schmitz and Dougie Brown



Tony Traynor meets Bella Emberg and, from the Pier Museum, Marie Dowie, at Southend



Toasts! Andrea Nightingale, Bob Hickson, Tony Bagley, Trudi and Jim Hutchinson in Nashville



Tony Bagley in the Perfect Day car at Nashville



Pogo and Sparkie with Our Gang star Dorothy DeBorba in Nashville



Jean Darling opens the museum in Harlem. The lady in the bowler hat and seated in a wheelchair is Lois Roberts (widow of props man Thomas Benton Roberts) and the gentleman in the dark glasses is Jerry Tucker, of Our Gang

Along came Ellina – Stan’s first sweetheart?

by *Grahame Morris*

In the early 1900s a young lady called Ellina Turner took the stage name Ellina Starr and teamed up with one Syd Masson to form the double act “Starr and Masson, The Versatile Pair”. Touring the music halls of Great Britain, Syd played the piano and Ellina was a male impersonator dubbed the “Pocket Vesta Tilley”. (Vesta Tilley was herself billed as the “Pocket Sims Reeves” in her early career.) While they never hit the big time they were always in work with their act comprising, as they themselves described it, “musical entertainment”. Females impersonating males were very popular then and a music hall tradition that lives on in the British



Ellina and Syd

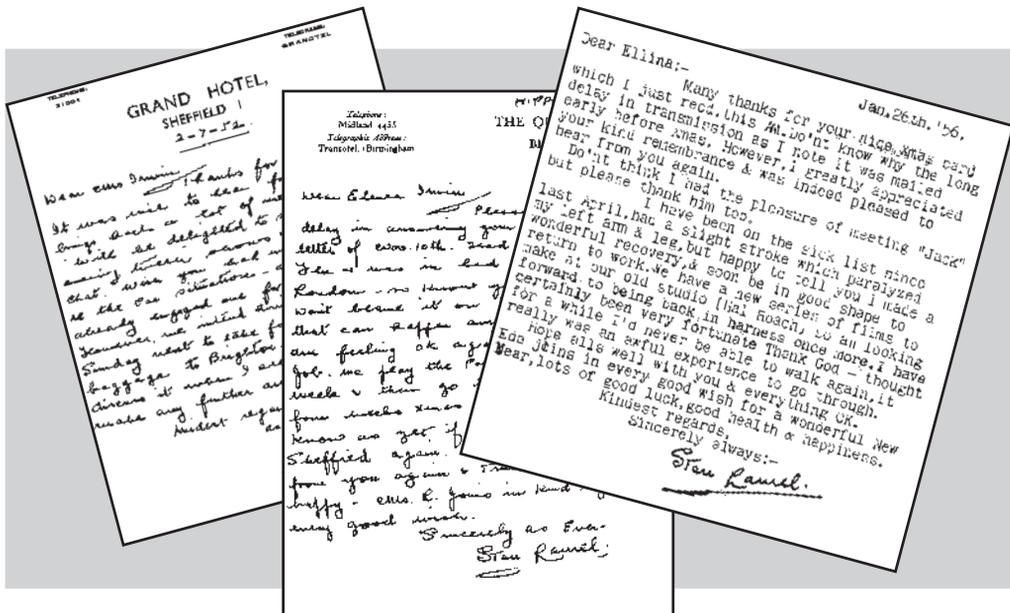
pantomime. Ellina was born into “the business” and began her career on the stage at the age of five, with her parents. She only retired at the age of seventy, latterly appearing in clubs and pantomime. “All very interesting but how is this connected to Laurel and Hardy?” I hear you mutter. Well, Ellina Turner claimed that she had once been engaged to a young comedian making his way in the halls, by the name of Stan Jefferson!

I pieced the story together from conversations with Mrs Dorissa Irwin, now eighty years old, who is the widow of Ellina’s son James Irwin. Before Ellina started the double act with Syd she performed with her parents and solo on the music hall stage, meeting Stan and, she says, becoming engaged to him. She said, “I heard he was carrying on with someone else so I packed him up. I didn’t give him his ring back, though!”

This ring is now on one of Mrs Irwin’s fingers, albeit in an amalgam with two others. When Ellina died in 1976 the ring passed to her son, James Irwin, and as it was very thin he had it melted down with two other rings and made into one for his wife. (Isn’t that a pip?) There is no independent evidence that the ring came from Stan Laurel or indeed that Ellina was really engaged to him, but they certainly knew each other well. The evidence is in seven surviving letters from Stan to Ellina in the fifties.

Ellina’s maiden name was Turner, which she changed to Starr for the stage and she married her stage partner Syd in 1916, becoming Ellina Masson. Later she married again, becoming Mrs Ellina Irwin, and was living in Sheffield when Laurel and Hardy visited the city on their 1952 tour. (Sheffield was not visited on the 1947 tour.) She wrote to Stan offering Laurel and Hardy the use of a car but whether this was a private car or not I cannot ascertain.

Stan replies on 2nd July from the Grand Hotel saying how nice it was “to hear from you – brings back a lot of memories” and arranging to meet. He opens this letter with “Dear Mrs Irwin” but three days later writes another letter from the Empire Theatre beginning “My Dear Ellina”. Stan writes,



“It was so nice to see you again and chat over the good old days” and “sorry your car didn’t have enough luggage space, would have been delighted to give you the business.” This implies that the car was a taxi or perhaps part of a car hire business, but the present Mrs Irwin was unable to confirm this. Laurel and Hardy, and presumably their wives, subsequently travelled to their next engagement in Brighton by another car. Without the benefit of motorways the journey of over two hundred miles in a 1950s car would not have been particularly comfortable but Stan describes it as a “nice trip” in the next letter, dated 11th July from the Royal Crescent Hotel in Brighton. He reveals that they “stopped by and saw my sister Beatrice in Bottesford, Notts. (Bull Inn), a surprise visit for us both.” Stan didn’t know they would be passing close to Bottesford on the way south to Brighton down the A1, the main North-South road at the time. It must have been a pleasant surprise as well as a welcome break in the journey.

In a short note from the Westminster Hotel in Rhyl, dated 22nd July, Stan says it will be nice to see Ellina again when they play the Alhambra in Bradford. There are no more surviving letters from the 1952 tour but on 10th November, 1953 Ellina wrote to Stan again. In a letter dated 3rd December on the Queens Hotel paper, but written at the Hippodrome, Birmingham, Stan apologises for the delay in replying as he had an attack of flu and was in bed for a week in London. The Sheffield born cousins Jewel and Warriss replaced Laurel and Hardy at the Empire, Finsbury Park while Stan was ill. He mentions the Christmas run at the Nottingham Empire but at that time did not

know if they were revisiting Sheffield. In March they did play Sheffield again and Stan and Ellina met once more. From the Empire Theatre, York on 25th March, 1954 Stan wrote, “it was indeed nice to see you again in Sheffield” and “thought you looked very well and growing younger”. He gives Ellina the dates of other appearances in the area so they may have met again but there are no remaining letters in the collection written in the UK.

The final letter in the series is dated 26th January 1956 and comes from Stan’s penultimate home at 1111, Franklin Street, Santa Monica. This one is typed and thanks Ellina for her Christmas card, received that morning although posted “early before Xmas”. Stan tells of his “awful experience” having a stroke, but has made a “wonderful recovery”. Poignantly Stan continues, “We have a new series of films to make at our old studio (Hal Roach) so am looking forward to being back in harness once more”. As in all the letters Stan includes Eda in sending regards and on this occasion “every good wish for a wonderful New Year, lots of good luck, good health and happiness”.

Ellina Irwin was born in County Durham in 1895 and died in Cleethorpes in 1976 having led, in her own words, “a very, very interesting life”. If she really was engaged to the future Stan Laurel, and hadn’t broken off the engagement, it might have been even more interesting!

◇ With thanks to Mrs Dorissa Irwin and acknowledgement to *Laurel & Hardy – The British Tours* by AJ Marriot.

It's all in the stars

I was reading a book called *The New Astrology* (Susan White, 1986), which details combined western and eastern traditions. I was curious to know how accurate the book would be on Stan and Babe, and whether any of their real life traits showed up in their films. This is what I discovered. . . .

Stan was a Gemini-Tiger, one who has an "unusual destiny". Gemini-Tigers are supposed to be fast, energetic and highly original. It states that "as a boss he's hopeless, and as an employee too". They are best employed at jobs they thought up themselves. Like Stan, they are supposed to be very theatrical and get on well with children, although it also says that they "are pretty much alone in life's crowd". Other Gemini-Tigers include Marilyn Monroe and Uri Andropov.

Babe was a Capricorn-Cat, a pleasant, dignified and extroverted character that shows a physical gracefulness more than any of the other Capricorn combinations, yet they can be clumsy at times. They can also show streaks of snobbery and have a need to impress. It also says that they like to entertain at home, they are sentimental and are fascinated by artistic or gypsy types. On love, it says that they "will hardly ever take up with someone for the sake of beauty or good looks". This is also interesting: "There is a nice balance in this character's approach to friendship, they operate best in a co-operative atmosphere, and generally know how to take orders." Best of all, "they will take up with someone utterly different". Other Capricorn-Cats include Cary Grant and Joseph Stalin.

Vicky Waite

Laughing Gravy diners

John Burton saw an article in his local press about a building in West Yorkshire which at weekends is a restaurant called Laughing Gravy. It is housed in the basement of the Birchcliffe Centre at Hebden Bridge.

On the Internet, John found that there is a restaurant in London also called Laughing Gravy, which, when reviewed in an article, is claimed to be named after the dog in the film. The address is 154 Blackfriars Road.

Twice Stan



The Liverpool Echo (15.03.02.) described Stan Laurel and ex-Liverpool soccer star Stan Collymore as lookalikes

Annual quip

In *The Laughing Gravy Annual*, John Ullah said, "The bars at conventions in the US always close early, and Nashville was no exception. Picture this. It is the last night of the convention and the bar is full. Most of the Brits are in there with quite a few US Sons as well. Everyone is having a laugh and then at 12.30 the bar closes. This year we will host the 24th UK Convention and one of the questions we asked the hotel was, 'Can we have a late bar?' The answer, of course, was, 'Yes'."

Lucky number

Steve Brown said at last year's International Convention, "I have no problem with the fact that Nashville 02 is convention number thirteen. This past October we attended the thirteenth annual Oliver Hardy Festival in Harlem, this past May our local Scram Tent celebrated thirteen years in Nashville, and Marriott Hotel has thirteen letters. Perhaps for this event we should refer to Stan as Jefferson, so that his name can be thirteen letters again!"



Hal Roach weds

Dayton, O – Hal Roach, 50, originator of Our Gang comedies, and Miss Lucille Prin, 29, of Los Angeles, were married here last nite. Roach has been at Wright Field, Army Air Corps Material Centre, for about three weeks, working in the Training Film Production Laboratory.

Peterborough Examiner (02.09.42.)

14th Oliver Hardy Festival

The 14th Oliver Hardy Festival took place in Harlem on 5th October last year. Gino Dercola says, "People began to arrive, slowly at first, and then in an absolute flood, which lasted continually through the day. Boy, what a huge crowd! I would estimate 35,000 to 40,000 people came. As always, admission and parking were free."

Merle Hardy Childs and Margaret Hardy Bledsoe, from South Carolina, travelled to Harlem for the first time to visit the museum. Both women are second cousins of Oliver Hardy.

350 vendors had stalls with just about everything one could imagine and Laurel and Hardy items, though those were limited. Two stages had continuous entertainment, with musicians, dancers and Laurel and Hardy sketches.

The children's parade was followed by the main parade, with more than sixty entries. It included marching bands, crazy cars, a dozen old Model A and T cars, clowns, horse riding, majorettes, precision marching units and much more. A radio station broadcasted live.

There were ten participants in the Laurel and Hardy Lookalike Contest. Gino tells us, "A set of young boys won this year as the best team, and I was told that one of the boys, Rusty, is a fifth cousin of Oliver Hardy. A young teen won the best Ollie lookalike. It was enjoyable seeing these (and other) lookalikes walking around throughout the Festival."

Earlier in the week, the city had sponsored a newspaper with a line drawing of Laurel and Hardy for elementary school children, who could colour it and enter it at the Festival.



On the Grand Parade was a 1912, brass, handmade Model T Ford. The driver and owner is Ed Meloan, seen here with lookalikes Pogo and Sparkie

Other attractions included rock-climbing, a water-dunk game, a chance to whack a car with a sledgehammer, a bike race, a raffle, pony rides and a Confederate encampment with actors in full 1860s outfits and uniforms.

One of the big highlights was the opportunity for visitors to visit the Laurel & Hardy Museum. Gino says, "Babe's Bijou was in full swing in the room behind the Museum, showing some great movies. The host and projectionist was Steve Brown, doing an excellent job."

The final event was a dance featuring the Swingin' Medallions and in the evening some Sons met for what has become a traditional dinner at the Red Lobster Restaurant in Augusta, Georgia.

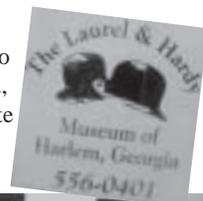
The 15th Oliver Hardy Festival will be held in Harlem on 4th October, 2003.

Berth Marks Tent

The Berth Marks Tent was formed in Harlem in 1988. Over time, for one reason or another, membership began to wane and the oasis disappeared. Last year, however, a committee breathed life back into the tent. David Bartlett is the Grand Sheik and Elizabeth Couture is the Vice Sheik.

The tent meets on the third Tuesday of every month, at 6.30pm, in the Laurel & Hardy Museum, located at 250 N Louisville Street in Harlem, Georgia (unless otherwise notified). Yearly dues are \$15 per person. Refreshments are always served, and each meeting is cheerfully followed by at least one Laurel and Hardy two-reeler in Babe's Bijou.

Following the Laurel and Hardy lesson of sharing, at Christmas members helped with presents and food for some of the less fortunate families in the Harlem area. They went to a nursing home in January with a film and they will be trying to do something for the community throughout the year.



The Museum and exhibits were major attractions



Winning young lookalikes

In the news

Press items spotted by Tony Bagley, Graham Bishop, Dean Carroll, Nick Higgins, Dennis "Sparkie" Moriarty, Nancy Murphy, Bob Spiller, Dave Tomlinson, Tony Traynor and Eric Woods

◇ Stan [Laurel] was such a comic genius that he made it look so easy. That's why the artistry escapes people. . . . It was underplayed.

Steve Brown in The Tennessean (14.07.02.)

◇ In the *Richard and Judy* column of the *Daily Express* (20.07.02.), Judy wrote about Richard's new haircut and said, "When he awoke the other morning, I told him he looked like Stan Laurel. He did too but, sadly, I've been telling my son the same thing for years."

◇ The *Sunday Mirror* (04.08.02.) had an illustration of Iraq and the attacks which were being proposed there. One attack was called "Son of Desert Storm"!

◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇

◇ *The Scotsman* (30.08.02.) had a four-page article on Laurel and Hardy, by Andrew O'Hagan. The photo on the right was included, as was the excerpt below. . . .

The important thing about Laurel and Hardy is their friendship: every one of their films is really about the way their friendship works and fails to work, the way pride and civility are bent out of shape by the actions of these two child-men. There may be less poetry in Laurel and Hardy, but there are bigger laughs; Stan's absurdity and his sleepiness, his tears and stubbornness, seem to sit so perfectly with Ollie's plausible rotundness, his irritation, ambition and wide-eyed panic.

What happens to friendship when everything goes wrong all the time? Laurel and Hardy perpetually get in each other's way, they get on each other's nerves, and while the general battle is against humiliation, they are always busy with the effort to extricate themselves from the fine mess they bring about in one another's lives. In one way the wonder of Laurel and Hardy lies in their capacity for animating and increasing their friendship through disaster: even when they have a really trying time together, they seem bigger people, and better friends, in the end, as if they've just offered a splendid and exhausting lesson in the gentle art of mucking about.

◇ The *Masterminds* feature in the *Liverpool Echo* (31.08.02.) had three questions based on Laurel and Hardy. . . .

In the Laurel and Hardy series of films who or what was Laughing Gravy (a) Horse (b) Dog (c) Monkey?

And in the film *Way Out West*, why did Stan Laurel begin singing in a high-pitched voice at the end of *Trail Of The Lonesome Pine*?

When asked, "You never met my wife, did you?" what did Stan Laurel famously reply?

The answers are at the foot of this page.



◇ Exactly 50 years ago this week, Portsmouth played host to two comedians who throughout the world were acclaimed as the ultimate comedy team – a certain Mr Laurel and Mr Hardy.

The comical pair were in the city to play a week's variety at the New Theatre Royal, commencing Monday, September 8, 1952. This was Stan and Ollie's second visit to Portsmouth, the first being when they appeared at the King's Theatre in Southsea for the week beginning August 4, 1947.

During an interview in their dressing room at the Theatre Royal for the *Evening News*, both Stan and Ollie remarked what a difference that five years had made since their previous visit. "When we were here in 1947 there were so many shortages," said Stan.

"You couldn't get lemons, grapefruit, or bananas, vegetables were hard to get, the bread was dark, and people's clothes were shabby."

Stan went on to say that "now everything is 100 per cent better" and that he and Ollie were delighted with the reception they had received from British audiences.

Stan and Ollie revealed that they had been asked by Bernard Delfont to do a pantomime at the London Palladium, but if they had done so they would have to pay tax here as well as in America.

As Stan put it: "We would have owed ourselves money!"

However, they did promise that they would come back the

Masterminds answers: Dog; Ollie hit him over the head with a mallet; "Yes, I never did."

next year – 1953 – for a longer visit, and hoped to do the pantomime then.

Their stage act went down well with Portsmouth audiences in 1952. Stan had written a new sketch for the tour, *Birds of a Feather*, which also featured a mad psychiatrist named Dr Berserk.

The act was not elaborate, but their style of straightforward slapstick had not diminished over the years and the Portsmouth audience loved them.

Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy packed their props and sailed home to the States on October 8, but they did return to Portsmouth on January 18, 1954, for another week at the Theatre Royal.

The News (07.09.02.)

◇ Mourners came as Laurel and Hardy and played *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* at the funeral of Stan and Ollie fan Bobby Hawkins, 76, in Cardiff.

The People (22.09.02.)



The unusual photograph above was in *Professional Engineering* (02.10.02.) with the caption, “Here’s another fine mess: But can the government find the key to the energy strategy?”

The photograph on the right was used to attract attention in an article about accidents in the *Motoring* section of *The Daily Telegraph* (23.11.02.)

◇ “Familiar tunes. . . cowboys and saloon girls. . . a visual treat” sounds like a comment on a 1937 film. In fact, the quotation is from a review in *The Times* (05.10.02.) of *Western Symphony*, part of the opening bill (entitled *Way Out West* no less!) of the Birmingham Royal Ballet’s new season at the Hippodrome.

Flashback to 1998: Sons of the Desert conventioners go backstage at the Hippodrome to tread where the Karno Company performed in 1910. Clowns, way out funsters, dancers – this theatre has seen them all.



Using Laurel and Hardy for political satire is becoming even more ingenious, as demonstrated in *The Sunday Times* (13.10.02.)



David Seaman and Alan Smith

◇ “That’s another fine mess you’ve got us into” was the bold headline in the *Daily Mirror* (17.10.02.). It went on to say “Seaman was left scratching his head Laurel and Hardy style after allowing Artim Sakari’s 11th minute corner to float over him.”

◇ When I think of the physical subtlety of my favourite screen comedians – Laurel and Hardy, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, even a contemporary comic such as Hugh Grant – [Jim] Carrey’s frantic face-pulling and limb-waving seem all the more gauche.

Andrew Collins
(Radio Times 07-13.12.02.)



This nicely illustrated an article in *The Times* (07.12.02.) on parking!

◇ *The Bugle* (19.12.02.) had a full page article on the Tipton Slasher (mentioned in *Do Detectives Think?*). Part is given here. . . .

William Perry [the Tipton Slasher] was born aboard a canal narrowboat, moored at Tipton, on March 21st, 1819 and died at the Old Toll House in Gibbet Lane, Bilston on December 24th, 1880. During boyhood, he was nicknamed “Young K-legs”, due to a bout of rickets leaving him with a right leg which was decidedly “in-kneed” and he was often referred to as such in his early fights, before “the Tipton Slasher” succeeded it as his slugging soubriquet”.



The Tipton Slasher lands a straight left on the jaw of massive Jem Scunner, whom he beats in thirty-one rounds (in two rings) in November, 1837

This came about because, in present day ring parlance, he would be dubbed “a good hooker”, a style forced upon him by a lack of mobility which caused him to “get in close and shorten his blows” rather than employ the straight punching favoured by most successful prize-fighters.

William Perry’s official prize ring career lasted from 1835 to 1857, during which he claimed and was accorded the title “Champion of England from 1850-1857”.

In his early prize-ring days, he was something of a showman. It was rumoured that he kept a large ape in the cellar of his quarters, at Tipton, wrestling and sparring with the anthropoid on a daily basis and becoming so fond of his “sparring partner” that a taxidermist was called upon to “stuff him” when the creature died. . . .

The Sunday Observer Magazine (05.01.03.) had an article on sneezing, the common cold and its characteristics. It chose Billy Gilbert to illustrate the piece, with one of his main attributes



◇ *The Times* (15.01.03.) featured an article on Bert Hardy. No, not the twin from *Our Relations*, but a star photographer of *Picture Post* magazine between 1938 and 1957. The item was headed “Laurels for Hardy”.

◇ ◇ ◇

A full-page Laurel and Hardy comic strip appeared in the January issue of Viz.



Hardy solo film discovered

The Filmmuseum in Amsterdam has discovered part of *The Head Waiter*, a missing Hardy solo. Larry Semon stars in this two-reeler, made in 1919 for Vitagraph with Hardy as a policeman. The film was found in the estate of a Dutch film collector who died in 2000. It was identified as the missing film by Claudia Sassen, a German film researcher well known for her Semon expertise.

The Filmmuseum turns out to be a treasure trove for the solo films. Earlier finds were *A Bankrupt Honeymoon* (Hardy), *The Snow Hawk* (Laurel) and *Get 'Em Young* (Laurel).

Bram Reijnhoudt has been in touch with Claudia Sassen. Bram says, “Claudia has accepted my invitation for a talk at the Euro convention about Semon and the Laurel and Hardy connection. In fact only the first half of the film

has been found in Amsterdam and we’re not at all sure it will be preserved in time for the convention. The film is in intensive care at the Amsterdam Filmmuseum. It’s in bad condition.”

The restored *Rogue Song* trailer will be shown at the convention. The Filmmuseum received word from its UCLA sister archive in Los Angeles that the trailer will be loaned out for a special screening at the Tuschinski Theatre on 7th June.

The line-up for the show is now:

Do Detectives Think?

(with live score by Max Tak Orchestra)

German trailer: *Pardon Us*

Trailer: *Rogue Song*

Blotto

Block-Heads

Bram adds, “We plan to have uniformed usherettes too. . . .”

Car books

Michael Senig tells us, "I have been trying to get my book published for the last few years! The title is *Laurel and Hardy Use the Model T Ford*. I had a picture of Henry Ford with Stan and Ollie and Ford, who said they were the best advertising he ever had, totally free."

Bob Spiller found the photograph below, taken in New York City on 30th October, 1929 and featured in the new book *Drive On! A Social History of the Motor Car* by LJK Setright. The photo shows Walter Thornton attempting to survive the Crash. Bob notes that there is a connection with *One Good Turn* and that the asking price for the car was the same as in that film!



Cars in Films (published by Haynes) was described in *The Times* (08.12.02.) as "Santa's treat for motor-mad cineastes." It explains, "Martin Buckley and Andrew Roberts have produced a genre-by-genre lowdown on the cars that are the stars, in everything from *Genevieve* to *Die Another Day*."

Bob wonders, "Could this book include the Boys' Ford T?"

Don't mention the war

Michael Schmitz came across a very detailed file on the Internet about Harry Hoppe. Is this the Harry Hoppe we know as the Grand Sheik of the That's My Wife Tent, or some other chap? The Harry Hoppe in question was born in 1884, entered the army as a war volunteer in 1914, was a major in the army by 1935 and a Generalleutnant by 1943. He became a prisoner of war in 1945. Could this be someone other than "our" Harry? Perhaps, but this apparently older Harry was nicknamed Stan Laurel by his comrades, because of his facial resemblance to Stan!

Site grabbing

Neil Evans has redesigned the Bacon Grabbers' site. Visit it at <http://www.bacongrabbers.co.uk> for a splendid tribute to the Boys and the Sons.

Hats Off Tent party

On 30th November I had the great pleasure of attending a special Hats Off event in Derby. Howard Parker and his tent (but mostly Howard Parker) arranged a wonderful afternoon and evening's indulgence of Laurel and Hardy entertainment. Whilst Stan and Ollie entertained us on the screen in glorious DVD, live entertainment was provided by the Avalon Boys and Bud and Steve. The Avalons' renderings are delightful, as testified by the popularity of their CD *Songs of the Desert*. If any Sons have an opportunity to see and hear live the talented trio of Richard, Pat and Dub, then they are in for a real treat. Bud and Steve, the Welsh wizards of impersonation of the Boys, performed on and off stage and even had myself and David Wyatt joining them in dancing to *At the Ball*, played live by the Avalon Boys. We enjoyed ourselves! And all the assembled Sons certainly enjoyed the rare footage that David Wyatt showed. Rob Lewis had goodies galore at the memorabilia stall, the food buffet had everything apart from hard-boiled eggs and there was a mega-affle. With Sons from Scotland, England and Wales all enjoying the magic of Laurel and Hardy in Derby on a dull November day, it is "Nowonder" that we all took our "hats off" to Grand Sheik Howard Parker for organising this event and a half.

Postscript 1

The Avalon Boys have released another CD, *Avalon Road*, which was on sale at the event. Once again close harmonies and a feel-good factor to their songs are the trademark of their music. The added bonus is that all three of the members have written songs for this CD and it is a successful blend of styles of music ranging from blues to commercial pop, with a sprinkling of folk, country, ballad and even novelty. It works a treat and is highly recommended. For further details of the Avalon Boys and their music visit <http://www.avalonboys.co.uk>.

Postscript 2

Three Helpmates Tent members in Scotland, who seemed to be oblivious to other tents, *Bowler Dessert* etc, travelled to Derby for this event. I have e-mailed one of them (Andy Wilson) with all details of tents north of the border.

Roger Robinson

Hardy's health

AJ Marriot sent us some press cuttings. The newspaper's name is not known. . . .

20th May, 1954

Mr Oliver Hardy (60), of the Laurel and Hardy comedy team, was last night stated to be gravely ill in Plymouth, with suspected pneumonia. Mr Stan Laurel said they had cancelled their engagement in Swansea next week, and would return to the United States as soon as possible.

21st May, 1954

Mr Oliver Hardy, who became ill shortly before he was due to appear at the Plymouth Theatre, was said yesterday to be slightly better.

15th September, 1956

Oliver Hardy had a stroke at his home at Burbank, California, yesterday and was admitted to hospital. He was later reported to be in a semi-conscious state.

17th September, 1956

Oliver Hardy was reported to be slightly improved yesterday.

22nd September, 1956

Oliver Hardy is getting better. He is in a Hollywood hospital.

7th August, 1957

Oliver Hardy, whose death is reported in a Reuter message, visited Britain on many occasions with his partner, Lancashire-born Stan Laurel.

Hardy died at the home of Mrs Minnie Jones, his mother-in-law. He had been

incapacitated and unable to speak since a stroke last September. He had been sinking steadily in recent months and his once plump body was wasted to a shadow. His wife, Lucille, was at his side at the end.

The death of Hardy breaks a partnership famous throughout the world. "Yes – even the Chinese love us," declared Hardy when he came to England in October, 1953.

Laurel and Hardy started quite a few youngsters off to film fame. Among these were Lupe Velez, Jean Harlow, Paulette Goddard and Vivian Blaine. They rode the wave of popularity for 20 years and their salaries hit 3,500 dollars (about £1,250) a week.

Born near Atlanta, Georgia in 1892, Hardy was destined for a military career, but left college to join a troupe of minstrels and worked his way up the show business ladder the hard way.

Laurel and Hardy films were screened in scores of countries and have been perennial favourites. The team never lost touch with the stage. They toured Britain in 1932, 1947, 1952 and 1953. They also appeared in variety on the Continent and in Australia.

Ed: For reappraisal of the Coburn Minstrels story, see pages 43-44 of Simon Louvish's book *Stan and Ollie, the Roots of Comedy*.

Good shows

David Wyatt's Laurel and Hardy show at the MAC in Birmingham on 13th October went well, as usual, as did his show at St Mary's in the Castle, in Hastings on 10th, with Laurel and Hardy silents and a live piano accompaniment by Neil Brand. Paul Merton and his girlfriend were in the audience – great fans of Laurel and Hardy and silent comedy generally.

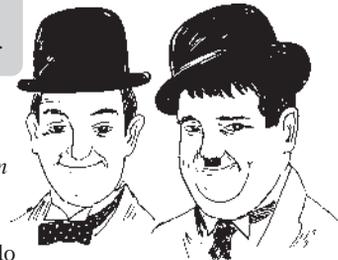
David says, "The Windsor Arts Centre Laurel and Hardy shows on 20th were well supported and the audience applauded every film in the last show. The technical adviser and projectionist was someone I knew from years ago at the BBC and coincidentally was the chap responsible for restoring all the BBC Laurel and Hardy prints. Another first – his name is Ollie!"

Fifth Day at the Races

The ninety-ninth meeting of Canada's Leave 'Em Laughing Tent was on 28th September at Springville Café and Kawartha Downs in Fraserville. Dinner was followed by racing and fun at the slot machines.

Ginger

Lois Laurel said that her father "had very, very blue eyes, and reddish-brown hair, or light auburn hair. As a boy growing up in England he was nicknamed 'Ginger'."



Drawing by *Barrie Finney*

Paul is Birmingham's editor

Following the sudden, sad death of Barrie Finney in May last year many voids were left in the Laughing Gravy Tent. *The Birmingham Bark* newsletter was edited by Barrie and had his unmistakable stamp. John Ullah asked Paul Flynn to become editor of the *Bark* and the September issue emerged very successfully. Said Paul, "I do not consider this as taking over from Barrie, more that Barrie has passed me the baton and I'm running with it. He may have had short legs, but he ran well! God bless Barrie." Paul has also accepted a place on the tent's committee.

The Tree in a Test Tube

Richard Bann once said, "Credited on screen as the editor, Boris Vermont was actually engaged at Fox as a cutter. In 1948 the studio made him a producer in charge of foreign versions and documentaries. He won an Oscar for a Fox short called *Light in the Window* (1952), but certainly merited no prizes for cutting *The Tree in a Test Tube*, with its many physical edits visible on the screen as splice lines."

Friendship without frontiers

Peter van Rooij, Grand Sheik of the Swiss Miss Tent in Geneva, borrowed an "Irish derby" from Dennis "Sparkie" Moriarty for a skit at the Nashville Convention. He was so impressed by Sparkie's friendliness and generosity that he often refers to him as a superb example of the spirit of the Sons of the Desert, where you make friends easily but sincerely.

Statues

Tony Traynor took this photograph in Fuengirola. The statues cost £150.00 each!



House spoof

The extra reels added to *Pardon Us* to bring it to the length of a feature film were added mainly to vindicate the high price of erecting the prison sets. Roach preferred this to the price-tag MGM had attached to their original agreement with him, that in return for the use of the sets from *The Big House* Laurel and Hardy should make a movie for them. Spoofing *The Big House* must have reminded Stan Laurel of the parodies he made in his solo days.

Mr Laurel says

Q: Wasn't *The Rogue Song*, one of your best sound pictures, originally made without you and Mr Hardy?

A: Yes. It was made at MGM with Lawrence Tibbett, the opera star. It was a singing picture with a Russian background, and in colour. After they previewed it they decided it needed some comedy – it was strictly a singing picture with romantic situations. They also realised Tibbett didn't have a name overseas. So they decided to get Laurel and Hardy to supply comedy and boost the foreign sales, and we were sent down from Roach to fit ourselves into the picture (we were then releasing through MGM). Some of the sets were still up, and we studied the picture and put funny sequences into different spots. We wrote ourselves in as members of Tibbett's gang – Tibbett was a "Russian Robin Hood", you know, one of those dashing guys. After he had finished the picture he returned to New York and so had to fly back to Hollywood to shoot a scene with us – the only scene in which he and we appeared together. Well, when it was released abroad it starred Laurel and Hardy – we had the bigger name overseas.

Films in Review (March 1959)

Drawing by Tony Bagley



Polls

"Who is your favourite of Laurel and Hardy's regular supporting actors?" asked the website <http://www.sotd.org>. James Finlayson scored a whopping 82% of the votes!

When it polled surfers on their favourite post-Roach Laurel and Hardy movie, *Jitterbugs* came top with 40% of the overall votes. Second was *A-Haunting We Will Go* with 16%. Joint third were *The Big Noise* and *The Bullfighters* with 12%.

Tony Baker meets the Boys. . . again

On 14th October some members from the Saps at Sea Tent met Tony Baker, the driver from the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway. Roger Robinson says, "Tony was the train driver in 1947 when the Boys travelled on the miniature railway and reopened the Dungeness extension. The visit was filmed and shown in a cinema newsreel soon afterwards and most Sons will be familiar with this footage. "Tony and his wife, Esme, live in Frinton, Essex, and were scheduled to be among the special guests at the UK Convention in Southend in May last year and travel with conventioners to the RH&D Railway. However, a nasty bout of shingles 'derailed' Tony and he was not able to attend the convention.

"Saps at Sea arranged a special presentation meal for Tony and Esme at the Harbour Lights restaurant. Not only did five Saps greet Tony and Esme when they arrived at the restaurant, but Laurel and Hardy, in the resurrected form of ace impersonators Bud and Steve Hodgson, entertained our special guests. On behalf of all Sons of the Desert, we presented Esme with flowers and Tony with a miniature blue plaque, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Boys' visit to Southend, and some convention goodies."

Tony said, "You don't know what this day has meant to me."

(Bowler) Dessert Island Discs

Whatever happened to Grand Sheik Wesley Butters? His Babes in Toyland Tent of Salford (later rechristened the Double Whoopee Tent) was active during the 1990s. Dean Carroll sent us a clipping from *Metro* (17.12.02.), telling us that Wes had been signed up to present the Radio 1 flagship *Top Forty* show on Sunday evenings! We quote:

Step up to the mike 23-year-old Wes Butters, the replacement for Radio 1 stalwart Mark Goodier, who has hosted the show for eight years. Appointing Butters is an attempt by the station to bring a younger feel to the show.

Butters will be following in the footsteps of DJ legends Tony Blackburn, Simon Bates, Bruno Brookes – and the doyen of all chart presenters, Alan "Fluff" Freeman. It is a big step for a DJ whose name is hardly known outside Newcastle, where he fronted a mid-morning show on Galaxy Radio. To make him feel at home, the Beeb is renaming the Sunday afternoon slot *The Official Chart Show with Wes*.

Radio 1 controller Andy Parfitt is confident he has got the right man. "Wes is a great young radio star with bags of enthusiasm," he said.

Butters started his reportedly six-figure salary job on 9th February.

Brats' success

Meetings of the Brats Tent have been going well with attendance remaining steady at around forty-five. They held a Fourteenth Anniversary Banquet on 21st October, which, John Burton tells us, "surpassed all expectations". It was at the New Crown Inn, their regular venue for meetings.



At the Anniversary Banquet are (left) Grahame and Anni Morris, Kevin Hepplestone and John Burton. Above are some of the Board Members at Large

Did you see?

◇ I got my chance to see *Film Fever* (C4, 28.08.02.) and what a fine show it was, a welcome repeat of the brief portrayal of the Sons of the Desert. Well done, Saps at Sea and Laughing Gravy Tents.

On *Weakest Link* (BBC2, 15.10.02.) the question was asked, “Arthur Stanley Jefferson was one half of which American comedy team?” They do like their Laurel and Hardy questions on *Weakest Link*. A variation of the question was on the same quiz show on 29th November. The contestants got it right.

This same question has been on *15 to 1*.

Nick Rich

◇ “Another fine day we got ourselves into,” said Michael Aspel at the end of *Antiques Roadshow* (BBC1, 13.10.02.).

I Dreamt That I Dwelt in Marble Halls was sung by Enya over the closing credits of the 1994 TV movie *Good King Wenceslas* (BBC2, 21.12.02.)

BBC2 showed the following shorts between 29th December and 2nd January: *The Laurel-Hardy Murder Case*, *Come Clean*, *Busy Bodies*, *Beau Chumps*, *Going Bye-Bye!*, *Oliver the Eighth* and *Scram!* All were outstandingly clear, sharp prints.

Living Famously (BBC2, 15.01.03.) put the spotlight on the Boys in a new documentary (see page 18). This was preceded (except in Scotland) by *Dirty Work* and *Way Out West*.

Willie McIntyre

Laurel and Harry

At least two reviews of the movie *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* referred to Rupert Grint, the actor who plays Harry’s friend, Ron Weasley, as a young version of Stan Laurel. Rupert was able to express fear comically by using his changing voice to good effect.

Laughing Gas (January - March, 2003)



◇ I was watching the programme *Most Haunted* on Living TV on 28th October. The programme is about castles, hotels and theatres that are supposedly haunted. This episode was about the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, which is considered to be the most haunted theatre in Britain. During the programme they were saying which ghosts and/or spirits haunt the Theatre Royal.

The presenter, Yvette Fielding, informed us that the backstage area of the theatre is haunted by the spirit of Mr Dan Leno, who was a well known Pantomime Dame at the turn of the twentieth century. Apparently he walks the backstage area late at night.

Actress Patsy Rowlands said in the programme that late one night after a show she was leaving the theatre through the backstage area when she heard footsteps beside her. When she turned round to see who it was, there was nobody there.

I wonder if Stan and Ollie haunt anywhere. I hope not. They should be at rest.

Graham Bishop

◇ Good to see Laurel and Hardy on again over the Christmas holidays; if I’m not incorrect, I think *Come Clean* was shown on mainstream TV for the first time since the early 1980s. But no kudos for not showing *Thicker Than Water* as advertised. Fred Astaire was shown instead!

Jonathan Hayward

◇ Channel 4, (28.12.02.) repeated *The 100 Greatest Films*, as voted by the public, and we were reminded that *Way Out West* made it to the 92nd position. The clip showed part of *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* at the point where Ollie hits Stan on the head with a mallet.

Tony Hillman

◇ Did you see *Flog It* (BBC2, 25.01.03.)? A pair of Laurel and Hardy Beswickware salt and pepper pots sold for £70.00 in a lot which included a Beswick teapot. An autograph book which included Laurel and Hardy and various others failed to reach its reserve price of £300.00.

Dean Carroll

◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇

Tudor meetings

The Jitterbugs Tent alternates meetings between the north and south of Ireland. In the north they have the use of Noel Spence’s magnificent private cinema, the Tudor. Located a few miles outside of Comber, Co Down, the cinema is the result of years of hard work by Noel, from building it and then scouring closed down cinemas for the fittings to give it its authentic “old style” feeling.

Scholarly overtones

Roger Robinson tracked down this article in
The Manchester Guardian (22.03.30.)



Two comedians are at present the most vital force in the American kinema, and good comedians are rare. They usually are to be found turning out a number of short films in quick succession with such skill that it becomes discouraging to think how good they might be with better material; and when found they usually end by taking themselves, or, what is worse, their humour, seriously. The first has happened with Bebe Daniels, the second with Chaplin. It is only a Harold Lloyd or a Buster Keaton who can survive promotion to full-length pictures. But Laurel and Hardy are still in the short film stage, and yet their films, their methods, and material seem perfect. It is hard to imagine them being any funnier or having better stories. It is true that their humour is slapstick, but it is all the better for that; real and loud laughter is too rare in the kinema in these days of "silence for a talking session". Not all their gags are new; Laurel and Hardy throw pies at each other, they drop heavy weights on their feet, and the picture which Laurel nails up falls on Hardy's head. They even use the time-honoured flypaper – but with a difference. It sticks to Laurel's foot. After the usual business with getting rid of it, he turns his sock inside out to prevent it sticking on the floor, and the real point of the incident lies in what we are left to imagine.

Their films are made by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and so, though they are to be found everywhere, the surest place to see them is at the London Empire. When a Laurel and Hardy film precedes Greta Garbo's latest picture, as it did this



Flood of destruction in Big Business

week at the Empire, one may be sure of seeing American screen entertainment at its best; just as, when they are shown in conjunction with the beautiful and stirring *Turk-Sib* by the London Workers' Film Society, one may be sure one is seeing, in this Russian and this American film, the best that the kinema has to offer at the moment.

They have been making pictures for about two years, and the astonishing thing is that, though they have various directors, all their pictures have the same remarkable quality. Their gags may be old, and some of them may not always succeed in making us laugh, but they all succeed in holding their place in the film, and the quality which makes these films so irresistible is the relentless picture they give of logic carried to absolutely fantastic extremes. Here is no busy attempt to be funny; something just goes wrong, and in their attempts to repair it, either by making two blacks a white or in seeking to cover up a black with a white, they make a world which from everyday beginnings grows into a world of incredible and absurd happenings where people do what they feel they would like to do, where savagery is unchained and honesty would be defeated were it not that inborn deceit comes to its rescue again, so that Laurel and Hardy always escape.

Laurel is thin and Hardy fat, with something of the appearance of Paul Whiteman. Laurel is always on attendance on Hardy, but it is he who is the originator. Hardy has something happen to him, he turns to Laurel to suggest a way out, and Laurel suggests some things which would be quite all right were it not that he had overlooked the most important part of the problem. In *Big Business*, they are turned away from a house. Laurel therefore suggests going into the next street. They do. But unfortunately the house is a corner house, and it has an entrance in the next street. Laurel overlooks this, and they get turned away again. With their efforts to avenge themselves on the householder's roughness begins the flood of destruction in which their films always end. From a small beginning things that had begun to rock and totter fall about them. A picture falls down and a blind goes up; by the end

of the film the ceiling is collapsing and the bed is broken. In *Big Business* they damage the householder's doorpost. In return for which he spoils the tree they are trying to sell. They then begin to destroy his house in earnest, while he starts to smash their car. One may be certain that however rich a room or splendid an automobile one finds them in at the beginning to a picture it will be fit only for a scrap-heap at the end.

In *Two Tars* they go out for a ride, and head a long queue held up by a repair in the road. When they try to back they touch the car behind them. This is enough. Reprisals begin. Laurel and Hardy look at each other. Laurel nods. They remove a lamp from the other car. The owner then slashes their tyres. Laurel then bends back his radiator, and by this time all the cars in the queue are implicated. Doors are ripped off, hoods slashed, running-boards shattered, and by the time the cars are able to move again there is not one that can run normally on four wheels or with any ordinary amount of springs.

Logical Folly

Laurel and Hardy spread destruction in their wake.



Reprisal in *Two Tars*

And yet they have always a perfectly valid excuse for doing it. Some little thing goes wrong at the start and they try to repair it. They are not to be blamed for that. They are not to be blamed for other people having such evil dispositions. If someone else rips their tyres they naturally want to retaliate. When they have got even with their aggressor they are prepared to move on – but the other person will not let them, and then their fighting spirit is aroused. It is all quite logical, and this is the secret of their films. They roll on, like a snowball, from one small incident, and they are funny because of this and not only because of what they contain. Most of their tricks are excellently turned, and one thing follows another with great technical skill. Laurel and Hardy are also good pantomimists; Laurel is the best, though he is always the unfortunate one in their pictures, bullied and beaten by the larger Hardy. But he has a bland smile when troubles end or before they begin, which is delightful, and his look of perplexed astonishment when Hardy will not see it was not his fault is one of the best facial expressions on the screen. One simple little look when he feels disaster impending is worth hundreds of feet of action or dialogue.

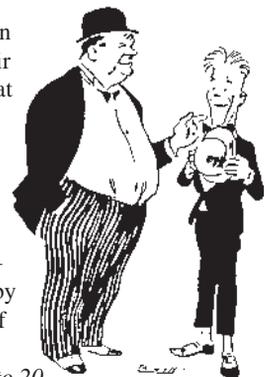
But the real secret of their films is this unfailing formula of one idea being carried too far, of one idea developed to the exclusion of anything else. Laurel pursues his *idée fixe* through a world full of many conflicting ideas, and the havoc he wreaks in that world is something quite new in screen humour. Their best films are *Big Business* and *Two Tars*, but there are many others, silent and talking, and it is because they are to be seen all over the country, in kinemas of every size, that I judged them to be so popular as to justify consideration at length. They are not to be missed.

In Europe

In Denmark in 1947, Oliver Hardy said, "We didn't know there was such a country as Denmark before we made plans to come here. Don't forget we're no intellectuals! But now we know Denmark and we want to stay here. *Skol!*"

Laurel and Hardy had great bitterness over their treatment in Sweden in 1947. Critics all agreed that the supporting programme which opened their show was "disgraceful". Hardy said, "The audience was so bored by it that the people had almost dropped off when it was our turn."

Laurel and Hardy's visit to Antwerp on 2nd January, 1948 was a big disappointment for the Boys. They appeared at an indoor cycle track and were advertised as the star attractions of an event dedicated to policemen who had perished in World War II. They drove into the grounds in a car which fell apart, just as it did in their movies. It was a complete disaster – what works well on screen failed to work "in the flesh". It was followed by Stan and Ollie having a cycle race, another failure. Providently, the rest of their performances in Belgium that year were much more successful.

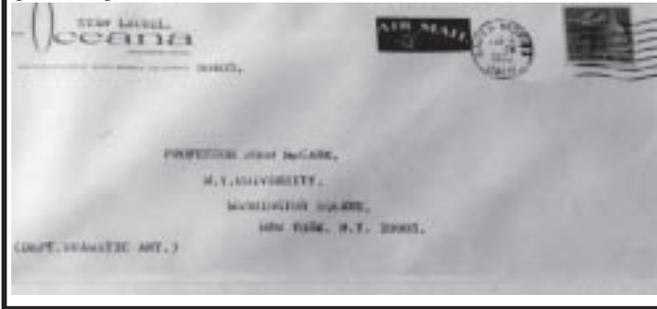


Source: *Blotto 20*

The Laurel letters

Graham Bishop writes, “At the convention at Southend-on-Sea I was successful in bidding for an envelope which Stan Laurel had sent to John McCabe. The envelope is interesting on two aspects. One is that Stan’s typewriter was not printing correctly so Stan filled in part of the address by pen. The parts that he touched up are very noticeable.

“I did not notice at the time, but when I arrived home I took a closer look at the envelope and saw that it is postmarked 15th February, 1965, which is only eight days before Stan died. This might be one of the last letters that Stan sent to anyone. A precious piece of memorabilia indeed.”



Dutch exhibition

The latest *Blotto* magazine appeared at the end of January and a news item announced a Laurel and Hardy exhibition in the Museum of the 20th Century in Hoorn, north of Amsterdam. The exhibition will run from 22nd March till the end of June. Most of the exhibits come from the vast collection of Siep Bousma, a regular contributor to *Blotto*.

Early pardon

Hans Ligtenberg tells us, “I found Billy Murray’s version of the *Pardon Us* song *I Want to go Back to Michigan* on the Internet. This recording dates back to 1914 and I believe this is the earliest version.”



Showing in Stockport

The Plaza, a theatre recently restored and reopened in the centre of Stockport, showed two Laurel and Hardy classics on 6th October, *The Music Box* and *Way Out West*. This is not unusual as it has done this before with other old films, but the indications were that this was the best attended showing of an old film since it reopened a year or two back. I went there and can certainly confirm that, although it wasn’t absolutely full, it was over three-quarters full.

I recognised one or two Sons of the Desert at the screening (notably dear old Austin Stigwood from *Be Big in Ashton-under-Lyne*). Many just went there to be amused and entertained, and, encouragingly, many children were present. Both films were rapturously received by the audience, enough to gladden the heart of any Son of the Desert about the still timeless, universal appeal of Stan and Ollie (though I was personally sometimes put off by some splices in *Way Out West*).

It’s always great to see the Boys on the big screen, and let’s hope the Plaza may consider showing the Boys again at a future date. All in all, a memorable evening.

Jonathan Hayward

Ku-Ku buy

Movie Mirror (1933) reported that Oliver Hardy bought the rights to their signature *Ku-Ku* theme from the composer Marvin Hatley for \$25.

Remake

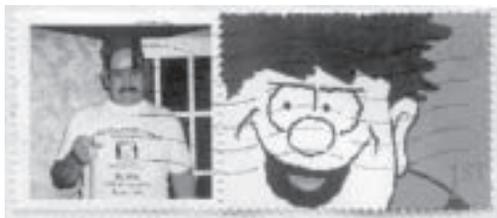
The Music Box is a remake of not only *Hats Off*, but also of a Keystone Charlie Chaplin short *His Musical Career* (1914), in which Charlie and Mack Swain shift a piano. For a detailed description of *His Musical Career* and its piano gags, see page 128 of Glenn Mitchell’s *The Chaplin Encyclopedia*.

Bits and pieces



◇ This year the Laughing Gravy Tent has two very important events lined up. It will be the tent's tenth birthday. John Ullah says, "We are on the lookout for a venue to host a special birthday meeting. This will take place on a Saturday evening, which means all our members will have the chance to come along. We may even decide on a trip out somewhere." And, of course, the tent will be hosting the 24th UK Convention.

◇ Antony and Vicky Waite of the Midnight Patrol Tent say, "We had our tent's fifth anniversary meeting on 12th November, with over twenty people in attendance. We watched *The Midnight Patrol* and *Sons of the Desert*, and gained some new members."



Grand Sheik David Barker had some eye-catching postage stamps made which depicted himself with a favourite menace

◇ Mandy Finney recounts that, when she visited Madison in the USA last year, she was determined to find the first school Babe Hardy attended. She explained, "The highlight for me was a beautiful, wood panelled auditorium, with a small stage. I had to stand on the stage, because it occurred to us that this was Ollie's first school, and primary schools in America always put on pageants. Had we discovered Oliver Hardy's first stage?"

◇ "Bring a friend for an evening of squeaky clean, innocent comedy from an era when people wanted to make films and not necessarily money," urged Peter Andrews in his newsletter for the Fraternally Yours Tent.

◇ "The Bacon Grabbers Tent has its own video projector so it can now show many more movies and rare footage not available on film," writes Neil Evans. "We will also have an observation quiz on the shorts."

◇ The Bonnie Scotland Tent met at the West of Scotland Rugby Club in Milngavie on 20th October for a screening of *Sons of the Desert* and a selection of shorts. The club was one of the venues visited during the 2001 UK Convention.

◇ In an unidentified newspaper, Pamela Vos joked, "What did the gerkin say to the onion? This is another fine pickle you've gotten me into."

◇ The Way Out West Tent hosted another successful banquet on 14th September, this year at the Taix Restaurant in Hollywood. Guests were entertained with the *Ku-Ku* music, performed live by the Sons of the Desert Pipes and Drums, a new Los Angeles band. The twelve members of the band were made honorary members of the Way Out West Tent.



◇ Sparkie writes, "Oliver Hardy deserves our support to be inducted into the Georgia Music Hall of Fame. Go to <http://www.gamusichall.com> and send your letter of nomination to The Honorable Nathan Dean, State Senator, 421 State Capitol Bldg, Atlanta, Georgia, 30334, USA." The awards have been made annually in September since 1979.

◇ The Beau Hunks Orchestra made its debut in 1992 at a film show organised by the Perfect Day Tent in the Tuschinski Theatre in Amsterdam. Later that year was released their first CD *The Beau Hunks play the Original Laurel and Hardy Music*. Since then the band has undergone some drastic changes and now has thirteen members. Nine of them are saxophone players!

◇ *Blotto Online* has a downloadable version of the entire first issue of *Blotto* magazine, which was in print twenty years ago.



French caricaturist Jean-Claude Morchoisne has this delightful portrayal

I'll bet they're good

Grahame Morris reviews Tom McGrath's play Laurel and Hardy

From the moment Damian Williams walks on stage, twiddling his tie and impatiently tapping his foot, waiting for Peter Duncan's Stan to appear, to the moment the strains of *At the Ball* fade away, this production holds the audience spellbound. I should know, as I saw five of the six performances at the Pomegranate Theatre, Chesterfield! On the Friday night around forty Sons of the Desert, some of whom approached the play with trepidation, were in the week's largest audience. Members of Brats, Early to Bed, Be Big and Busy Bodies Tents were present. With such a contingent of aficionados the message to the actors could have been, as Silas D Wilcox *might* have said, "You'd better be good!" Well, they were!

On stage for over one hour and forty-five minutes, the two actors took us from both stars' births to their deaths, with many familiar gags along the way and some new ones thrown in for good measure. On the stage were just two chairs, two baskets, a platform, a hat stand, a clothes rail and some curtain material. Oh, and a piano, expertly played by Musical Director Andy Collyer. It would be an insult to call his contribution an accompaniment – it was as essential to the play's success as the Hatley/Shield music was to the Hal Roach films. *And* he had one of the funniest moments in the whole play, which I won't spoil for you here, in case you're lucky enough to catch it.

Laurel and Hardy have died. But "Laurel and Hardy can never die," says Ollie, starting a series of "flashbacks" from the very beginning, with Peter Duncan transforming into Ollie's mum, fussing over the infant. Damian Williams struggled to overcome a sore throat all week, but began a repertoire of songs with one from Ollie's days "on the run" with the Coburn Minstrels. Tony the barber is another of Peter's roles, liberally applying the shaving cream to Damien, uttering

Theatres in Yeovil, Peterborough and Chesterfield presented the play last November, on a three week tour. Peter Duncan played Stan and Damian Williams was Ollie

the immortal words "nice-a-babee". With "Babe" now entering the movies we switch to Stan's early life and Damian's chance to show his versatility as Mr Pickard and then Stan's father.

The pace of the show is fast, but someone unfamiliar with the story told me they could easily follow it. A serious sequence, with Damian's Joe Rock telling Stan to ditch Mae Dahlberg, gives

way to a hilarious scene where Damian now plays the Australian actress. Familiar songs and dialogue add to the warm atmosphere as Peter Duncan's Leo McCarey tells Damian's Hal Roach of his new team. Hal will claim the credit, of course.

The first half closes with some superbly executed slapstick albeit

in a situation Laurel and Hardy never filmed (together, at least). A stepladder appears, then some wallpaper, then some paste and lots of it! I think you can guess the rest. The timing is brilliant, it's very funny and the children in particular loved this spectacular and messy ending to the first hour of fun.



Cleaned up and in impeccable sailor suits, the two actors positively bound onto the stage singing an original number before going into the “soda, soda, soda” routine from *Men o’ War*. With no supporting cast the two actors brilliantly use mops as the two flirtatious young ladies, to surprisingly good effect. The Boys are now at the top of their profession and the play begins to get more serious, concentrating on their private lives, the contractual difficulties with Hal Roach (this time played, in turn, by both actors) and the declining fortunes as they enter the forties. There is still time for Peter Duncan to play briefly Myrtle, Babe’s second wife, and even more briefly (blink and you miss it) Charlie Chaplin.

As the Boys sing about growing older and reminisce about their lives and careers, the two actors expertly change the mood of the performance. Damian’s portrayal of a dying Oliver Hardy certainly brought a tear to my eye and when it was Stan’s turn to die, Peter accurately delivered Stan’s real line, “If anyone has a long face at my funeral, I’ll never speak to them again.” With both actors in their baskets and their characters dead, the play appears to be over, but it actually finishes on a happy note with the actors performing the song and dance *At the Ball* from *Way Out West*. A perfect ending and the forty Sons gave them a well-deserved standing ovation.

I saw this play in 1991 in a production by the Hull Truck Theatre Company in Hull and I remembered it as more serious than this production. I really cannot fault this production at all, everyone I spoke to enjoyed it and everyone connected with it deserves congratulations. It’s as near as you’ll ever get to seeing Laurel and Hardy in the flesh!

The play doesn’t mention the UK tours, which is a pity, and the last appearance mentioned is the unfortunate *Atoll K*. Tom McGrath based the play mainly on John McCabe’s 1976 book *Mr Laurel and Mr Hardy* and much more material has been published since so the omission of the tours is understandable.

Director Patric Kearns is hoping to take the play on a longer tour in 2003. If it comes anywhere near you, whether you’re a fan or not, don’t miss it!



Worst film?

For many years, both *Atoll K* (1951) and *The Big Noise* (1944) had reputations for being Laurel and Hardy’s worst film. Amongst film scholars and Laurel and Hardy buffs like myself, *A-Haunting We Will Go* has definitely taken over that mantle in recent years. So why is *A-Haunting We Will Go* so dismal?

Firstly, Laurel and Hardy the actors are not allowed to play Laurel and Hardy the characters throughout. The naive, likable innocents they established at the Hal Roach studios are virtually non-existent; they are forced to play irritating, doltish nit-wits with whom we are not called to sympathise – the exact reverse philosophy from what applied with their Roach films.

Secondly, Fox saddles them with a tenth-rate gangster melodrama in which they would have been better off not appearing; much of the dialogue is straight, unfunny exposition with supporting characters that are far too tough and nasty to be funny.

Thirdly, Alfred Werker, a solid director of melodramas, is totally out of his depth with comedy, and it shows starkly in this film.

And finally, the title is misleading; haunting has nothing to do with the plot, and nothing of its description turns up in the film.

The only mildly amusing moments occur within a train sequence featuring Dante the magician (who easily gives the film’s most assured performance); Stan and Ollie, though, look embarrassed and bored with the film’s content – as they should be. It’s my candidate for their worst film.

Jonathan Hayward

Al Hirschfeld

Born on 21st June, 1903, theatrical caricaturist Al Hirschfeld died on 20th January, 2003. We know him best for his depicting of Laurel and Hardy on a USA 29 cent postage stamp in 1991. *The Times* (22.01.03.) said he will be remembered for “his witty, though never malicious, characterisations of theatrical and film actors, conveyed with exquisite sense of line.”



The Laurel and Hardy home cinema

Reviews by Willie McIntyre

DVD reviews

All the DVDs reviewed are region 2 (suitable for playing in Europe, including the UK) or region-free (likewise suitable).

I have selected another three disks in the Kinowelt series of Laurel and Hardy DVDs, which as usual contain top quality prints. The sound films are dubbed in the German language and are also in their familiar English language versions, with optional subtitles in German. Prices vary but are around €25.00 in stores in Germany and via Amazon.de, who often have bargain offers.

Unfamiliar background music (unfamiliar to me, at least) is intriguing on some of the dubbed films.

Kinowelt will release all the available Laurel and Hardy shorts and features on DVD before the end of 2003. *The Bohemian Girl* is the latest release, bringing the total so far to nineteen. This has the familiar footage of Laurel and Hardy in Tynemouth and Edinburgh in 1932 as a welcome "bonus". Stand by for *Hog Wild*, *The Hoose-Gow*, *Angora Love* and *Two Tars* on the next release.

Beau Hunks (1931) 36 minutes / *Twice Two* (1933) 20 minutes / *Me and My Pal* (1933) 19 minutes. b/w. Distributed by Kinowelt. Price: see above.

In *Beau Hunks* Stan and Ollie join the French Foreign Legion. They make poor soldiers and the laughs are plenty in this well-paced "featurette". Ollie sings in English even in the German version. And it is amusing to see Charles Middleton bellowing in German.

Laurel and Hardy play themselves and their respective twins at a dinner party in *Twice Two*.

In *Me and My Pal* Ollie is preparing for his wedding, aided by Stan, who brings along a jigsaw puzzle, which proves to be irresistible. The print is scratched throughout, but is fine and sharp.

Bonus items are *Sugar Daddies* (1927), lasting 17 minutes, which is worn and scratchy, *Sailors Beware* (1927), 15 minutes, and *Crazy Like a Fox* (1926), 21 minutes, which is from the same master as the Stonevision Entertainment version reviewed below, but with sound which is more appropriate. Also included, under the title *One Moment Please*, is the infamous, three-minute 1956 colour home movie also known as *Stan Visits Ollie*.

Trivia buffs might be stirred to read a caption in the very middle of *Sugar Daddies*, in which Ollie says to Stan, "A fine mess you've made of things." He doesn't say, "nice mess".

Their Purple Moment (1928) 22 minutes / *County Hospital* (1932) 18 minutes / *One Good Turn* (1931) 20 minutes / *Double Whoopee* (1929) 18 minutes. b/w. Distributed by Kinowelt. Price: see above.

The Boys "hold out" on their wives and have a night on the town with two floozies in *Their Purple Moment*.



Stan visits invalid Ollie in *County Hospital*. Play the German dialogue option and hear Billy Gilbert blustering in German! The silly Englishman (William Austin) is even more amusing when dubbed into German.

One Good Turn sees Stan and Ollie trying to help an old lady, who has helped them. A couple of misunderstandings about cash add to the fun.

In *Double Whoopee* the Boys are doorman and footman at a posh hotel. Their ineptitude upsets guests and management.

Bonus items include seven minutes of *Leave 'Em Laughing* (1928) and six minutes of *Bacon Grabbers* (1929), plus a trailer for *A Chump at Oxford* (1940).

Going Bye-Bye! (1934) 21 minutes / ***Them Thar Hills*** (1934) 20 minutes / ***Tit For Tat*** (1935) 19 minutes. b/w. Distributed by Kinowelt. Price: see above.

A criminal threatens the Boys, who prepare to leave town in *Going Bye-Bye!*

Next they are on vacation in a caravan and entertain a visitor in *Them Thar Hills*.

Rivalry between Stan and Ollie and the shop-keeper next door escalates into a spree of destruction in *Tit For Tat*. There are some crackles on the soundtrack.

We have a bonus 13 minute TV tribute to the Boys with lots of colourised clips, but with only a German commentary.



Classic Comedy Shorts vol 4. b/w. Distributed by Stonevision Entertainment. Price: see below.

This DVD is not as readily available as others in the Stonevision series, but can be found occasionally in stores. The lack of availability is difficult to explain as the disk is more appealing than some others in the range. Throughout the DVD the music matches the action and there are some appropriate sound effects, though crackles and hisses are very noticeable. There are appearances of Hardy (without Laurel) and lengthier appearances of Laurel (without Hardy) in prominent examples of their “solo” films.

The Stonevision DVDs can be found in stores at £18.99 each, but shopping around is recommended as they have been seen at a small fraction of that cost.

Should Sailors Marry? (1925) 22 minutes
Clyde Cook is a sailor, whom Fay Holderness marries in the hope of earning some money through an insurance scam. We are seventeen minutes into the film before Oliver Hardy appears, whereupon interest picks up – but not for long!

Hardy is a doctor who examines the sailor for insurance purposes. There are antics on some lofty girders, preceding *Liberty* and inviting comparison. Low on laughs and a little tedious.

Short Kilts (1924) 21 minutes

A quaint film set in Scotland, with many amusing moments, heavily reliant on slapstick. Stan Laurel has the star billing, but contributions from his counterpart James Finlayson are just as outstanding, in a story of love and feuds between the MacGregors and the McPhersons.

Fluttering Hearts (1927) 22 minutes

Charley Chase is at his best here. He is a wealthy “lounge lizard”, but, to woo his girl (played by Martha Sleeper), he takes a chauffeur’s job for her father. Hardy plays Big Bill, who blackmails the dad and much of the action revolves around Charley trying to retrieve incriminating letters from Bill by manipulating a dummy lady.

The Soilers (1923) 10 minutes

In the old West, Fin tries to take a gold mine from Stan. A punch-up between Stan and Fin constitutes a large part of the film. This burlesque has acquired cult comedy status in at least one tent, largely on account of the effeminate cowboy who wanders in and out of the scenes. A cut-down of a two-reeler.

Crazy Like a Fox (1926) 23 minutes

Charley Chase falls in love with Martha Sleeper (again!). He pretends to be crazy in order to escape a prearranged marriage, not realising that his new love is the same person as the girl to whom he is betrothed. Hardy appears for only a few seconds, in a chance encounter with Chase.

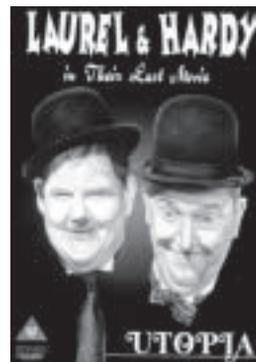
Utopia [aka *Atoll K*] (1951) 82 minutes. ***The Stolen Jools*** (1931) 19 minutes. b/w.

Distributed by Stonevision Entertainment. Price: see above.

Utopia is a poor print, with bleached highlights. The supporting stars’ dialogue is dubbed, not very well. Stan and Ollie look old and Stan looks ill, as indeed he was.

In this, their last movie, the Boys land on a desert island. Uranium is detected, which brings a threat to the castaways’ happy lifestyle.

Unfairly dismissed by some scholars, the film has some good gags, but overall disappoints.





Looking older in Utopia

In *The Stolen Jools* Moira Shearer's jewels have been stolen and over fifty Hollywood stars, including Laurel and Hardy, are interviewed as suspects. This fine novelty item was made to raise funds for a tuberculosis sanitarium. The print is fair, but the sound level is low and is distorted for about a minute.

The ten-minute bonus film *First Flying Machine* is actual footage of early aviation exploits and has no connection with Laurel and Hardy.

The Wizard of Oz (1925) 85 minutes / *Hustling for Health* (1919). b/w. 15 minutes. Distributed by Stonevision Entertainment. Price: see above.

The Wizard of Oz has very little resemblance to the familiar story by L Frank Baum. Larry Semon stars and Oliver Hardy (without Stan Laurel) has a supporting role. The fairy tale, about a foundling who is really royalty, is much too long and I found it boring in parts. The print is dark, poorly framed and prone to jumping. The background music is random.

Hustling for Health is identical to the "bonus" item on the DVD of *March of the Wooden Soldiers*, reviewed in *Bowler Dessert 60*, on page 53.



The Flying Deuces (1939). b/w. 71 minutes. Distributed by Delta Entertainment. Price £9.99.

In France, Ollie falls in love, but his girl is already engaged to be married. To forget her, he joins the Foreign Legion, along with Stan. Disillusioned, they try to escape.

The print is only fair and there are scratches and splices, often obtrusive. There is an introduction by Tony Curtis and the original theatrical trailer for *Laurel and Hardy's Laughing 20s*.



Will Hay

Dean Carroll writes, "Following on from David Wyatt's talk on *The Will Hay Connection* at last year's Laurel and HarDay, I thought some of our readers might be interested to learn that virtually all of Will Hay's films are available on home video. DD Video has released seven titles on video, all of which can be ordered through HMV."

Nick Rich tells us that Cinema Club has lost the rights to its nine Will Hay titles on video and DVD. Carlton Visual has taken over. Write to Fran Carloni, Carlton Visual, 5th Floor, 35-38 Portman Square, London, W1A 0NU. Tel 020 7612 7220. E-mail fran.carloni@carltonvisual.com.

Tony Hillman points out that in the Will Hay film *Radio Parade of 1935* Ted Ray is seen playing his violin and plays part of the *Ku-Ku* theme, making a face like Stan. He stops playing and says, "It must have been two other fellas."

David Wyatt writes, "I've just found another Laurel and Hardy / Will Hay connection. The box for the newly released video of Will Hay's *Dandy Dick* has several stills on the back cover, including one featuring Fin. No, he's not in it – it's from the wrong film! All together. . . Doh!"

Videos

◇ HMV shops in the UK have a three-cassette VVL video package of *Sons of the Desert*, *Way Out West* and *Saps at Sea* (all black and white) on sale for £13.99.

◇ Nostalgia Family Video in the USA has released a collection of ten video tapes, each with four short sound Laurel and Hardy films. Feature films are available on additional tapes.

The Laurel and Hardy Charity Fund

It is with great pleasure that I am able to tell you that we have recently donated to the following charities:

Stroke Association (£500)
British Heart Foundation (£500)
Cancer Research UK (£500)

These charities are for acute illnesses. Julian Tighe died of a stroke, Barrie Finney died of a heart attack and Peter Elkins died of cancer.

We have also donated to:

ME Association (£100)
NSPCC (£100)

The total is £1,700. Cash now in hand is £227. Copies of letters of appreciation have been sent to *Bowler Dessert* and Laurel and Hardy magazines. Also to Del Kempster, Roger Robinson and Barry Boyd (with whom I am able to discuss the charities).

Since the Charity Fund was started in 1986 until the present we have donated £18,962. All the charities we have supported are not supported by the Government, nor by the National Lottery. It is interesting to note that this also applies to all those people who have fought for our country and suffered the consequences (for example those at St Dunstan's Caring for Blind Ex-servicemen and Women). Simon Weston has highlighted this and I think this is very upsetting.

However, these are my thoughts and those of many people, I am sure. At least we, the Sons, are doing our best.

Thank you so very much for continuing to support our Laurel and Hardy Charity Fund.

With love and thanks to all the Sons.

Nancy Wardell



◇ It was a great pleasure to receive your letter, enclosing a cheque for £500 from the Laurel and Hardy Charity Fund. I would be most grateful if you could pass on my sincere thanks to your members.

I am so sorry to hear that one of your members, Julian Tighe, was taken at such a young age. Although stroke is often thought of as an older person's condition, in England and Wales alone around 10,000 under the age of 55 suffer a first stroke every year, of whom around 1,000 are under 30.

Steve Holdsworth, Stroke Association

◇ Thank you so much for your kind donation of £500. We are most grateful to you all for this support of our work. Your donation will be used to fund vital research into the causes and treatment of cardiovascular disease, education of the public, rehabilitation, and the provision of essential life saving cardiac care equipment.

Kathy Evans, British Heart Foundation

◇ Cancer Research UK is the world's largest independent organisation dedicated to cancer research. We are committed to curing cancer by understanding its causes and investigating how best to prevent and treat it.

We also fund research aimed at providing the best possible support and information to cancer patients and their families. We fund the research of over 3,000 scientists, doctors and nurses based throughout the UK.

Please accept my warmest thanks for your kind support.

Irene Street, Cancer Research UK

◇ Thank you very much for choosing our charity for your support. You can be assured that this contribution will be used to help further the work of the Association in supporting people who are affected by this still greatly misunderstood condition.

Val Hockey, ME Association

◇ Your kindness will help your local Child Protection Team to ensure that children in your area can look forward to a future free from neglect and abuse. The NSPCC works with over 6,700 children every day of the year.

Each week, at least one child dies following cruelty and 600 are added to child protection registers. The NSPCC Child Protection Helpline will answer 118 calls on an average day.

Your kindness will enable us to fulfil our mission to end cruelty to children.

Helen Lumb, NSPCC

Dramatic finale at the riverside

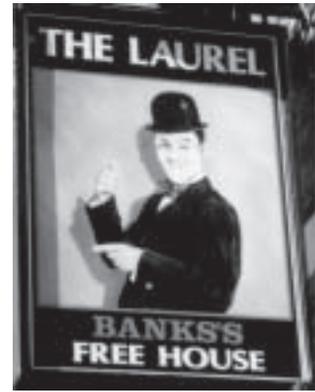
Bud McDonald was Buddy in *Our Gang*. He told Richard Bann, “Oliver Hardy showered us with attention. We kids used to roam all over that studio – what a great playground – and when we weren’t busy filming we could sneak onto the stages where Laurel and Hardy or Thelma Todd or Charley Chase were working. We knew to keep quiet. We had to keep quiet on our own sets. Laurel and Hardy were both nice men. Stan Laurel was the first person I knew with a British accent. He was certainly different from others – odd, I thought, but fun to be around.”

Bann said to McDonald, “We have a shooting script and one still photograph to document the scene you filmed with Laurel and Hardy for an ending sequence of *Pardon Us*, which was cut. Stan and Ollie were shown as old men, with beards, fishing by a picturesque river. It was actually the Ballona Creek in Culver City, not far from the Hal Roach studios. Ollie is in a wheelchair, Stan is fishing. You are one of the two boys they advise in their old age about their misspent youth and lives. Stan concludes, ‘It all goes to prove that you can’t be too careful.’ At least that is what the script calls for. Then he moves the stone acting as a brake holding Ollie’s wheelchair. Down the incline Ollie careers into the river as you and Stan and the other *Our Gang* kid, Bobby Mallon, watch in stunned silence. Presumably, Ollie flails around in the creek, or maybe drowns! It is not the kind of climax Hal Roach liked, which probably explains its excision. You are the only one around today who might possibly have seen this footage. We did a reconstruction, using all the 35mm elements we could find, and there are some different versions of *Pardon Us* extant, but not with this ending. We know it was shot, but there isn’t even a record that shows it was saved beyond the day somebody, and probably Roach himself, decided that ending was not going to be satisfactory.”

Bud McDonald said, “No, I never saw that, and I can only vaguely remember what you are describing. We are talking about a long time ago.”



Dudley Laurel



On a recent trip to the West Midlands, Dave Simpson spotted a pub called *The Laurel*. It is on the Stourbridge Road in Dudley.



Some record

Terry Weir’s granddaughter, Frances, is very proud of the fact that she has attended eight Gala Days in Ulverston. “Not bad for an eight year old,” says Terry, and adds, “Annabel is a little way behind with four visits but then she is only three years old.”

Derek Simmonds

Derek Simmonds of Derann Film Services died on 19th September.

Derann was founded way back in 1964, named after the husband and wife team of Derek and Anne. Cinema projectionist Derek started hiring out 8mm films from a bedroom at their Stourbridge home and the business started to grow. In time Derek realised that it was the selling of movies, not renting, that would put Derann on the map and among the thousands of releases on their shelves was often a range of Laurel and Hardy films. Based in Dudley, Derann is now the world’s biggest super 8 film distributor.

Derek leaves a widow, Anne, and sons Adrian and Steve.

Jerry Tucker collection

I had the privilege of visiting the Library of American Broadcasting at the University of Maryland to view holdings of memorabilia items donated by Jerry Tucker (Schatz). Jerry was a child film star at the Hal Roach studio, appearing in Our Gang movies, numerous feature films, and in one of the very best Laurel and Hardy films, *Babes in Toyland*. Jerry has been a joy to see at Sons of the Desert International Conventions – always happy, with a bubbly personality, and an infectious smile to make everyone feel good.

I contacted Jerry and asked about how he had selected my *alma mater*, the University of Maryland, for his donations. Jerry told me that it all started some years ago when he received a call from a man who had bought “a lot of things about Jerry Tucker” at a garage sale. It turned out that an aunt of Jerry’s had died and her children sold some things and the rest they dumped, including old pictures of Jerry that he had given to his aunt over the years. Jerry and his wife, Myra, decided that, when they passed away, that was not going to happen to the wonderful pictures and mementos about Jerry’s career that his mother had so diligently saved. Jerry found out about the Library of American Broadcasting and decided to send all of his memorabilia there.

I contacted the Library and made arrangements to go and view the Tucker memorabilia on 25th September, 2002. It was a wonderful experience.

Specific information on Jerry’s memorabilia can be found at www.lib.umd.edu/UMCP/COLLECTIONS/schatz.html. If you would like to see some photos I took while doing this research, they can be found at <http://userpages.umbc.edu/~aderco1/tucker>.

Gino Dercola



A scrapbook, one of the many Jerry Tucker exhibits

Curios and oddities



This Block-Heads lobby card (in colour!) shows the photo (in black and white!) that Ollie sees in the newspaper, alerting him to Stan’s return. In the film the close shot of the photo is too short (two seconds!) to take in the grins on the observers’ faces. [Collection: Siep Bousma]

The Laurel and Hardy bookcase

Assemblages archived

SONS OF THE DESERT: THE CONVENTIONS

by Savannah Furman

Published by Furman Press.

328 pages (274 x 250mm). 2002.

Price \$20 (US) plus \$5 for shipping to the UK.

ISBN 0-9719085-0-8. Paperback.

Savannah's book is to be admired for its spirit. It details twelve International Conventions, starting with the 1978 gathering in Chicago and finishing with Sea-Tac 2000.

There are hundreds of photographs, which bring the text to life and the semi-informal way of documenting the conclaves, peppered with first-hand accounts and amusing yarns, works well. The contributors are many and the whole book conveys the very essence of the Sons – the sense of fun and camaraderie. Are there errors? Well, yes, inevitably, and they detract from the book as a historical record. But this is a celebration of past celebrations, sprinkled with wit and nurtured with love. Enjoy the euphoria it generates. Above all, marvel at the courage to produce such a tome.

Willie McIntyre



◇ To purchase, send a money order to The Furmans, PO Box 260141, St Louis, MO 63126, USA. E-mail: sfurman@mindspring.com.

Quick as a flash



Paul Allen was on a flying visit to Redcar last autumn. With a little time to spare, he walked along the seafront and met two friends!

Without his own camera, quick-thinking Paul bought a disposable one and then persuaded a passer-by to take a photo of himself together with the Stan and Ollie metal silhouettes.

Roobarb and Ku-Ku?

Grand Sheik Antony Waite says in his *Whoopee!* magazine, "At work I was asked if the theme tune to *Roobarb and Custard* was the *Ku-Ku* song speeded up? I must admit it sounds similar."

Harry in Harlem

How fitting it was that the irrepressible Harry Ingle was at the opening of the Laurel & Hardy Museum in Georgia last year. Harry was born in Ulverston and still lives there. A report in *The Perry Winkle* says, "Harry has never been short of anecdotes as the local television station soon found out when they interviewed him. As a founder member of the Berth Marks Tent in Ulverston, Harry is delighted that Ollie's home town now also has its own Laurel & Hardy Museum."

Marvellous music

That marvellous musician Le Roy Shield, who wrote so much of the catchy background music for the Hal Roach comedies, also wrote the Our Gang theme song, which was entitled *Good Old Days*. This tune can be heard in *Pardon Us* when Fin is trying to educate Stan and Ollie in the "Big House".

Easie contest

Birmingham's Laughing Gravy Tent had its Kneesie-Earsie-Nosey championship in August. Vincent Byrne won the children's heat and Pat Finney won the adults' section.

Quiz challenge

The Early to Bed Tent's Seventh Anniversary meeting in Chesterfield in September featured the first leg of the annual inter-tent quiz against the Sheffield Brats Tent. The home tent's team of Shaun, Alex, Ashley, Bob and Amy scored 17 points and the Brats' team of Michelle, Kevin, Stewart, Rick and Duncan scored 15. The quiz was an observers' quiz on *Block-Heads* so all contestants received a tin of beans! The attendance was an excellent twenty-nine.

The Early to Bed Tent returned the visit, to the October meeting of the Brats Tent in Sheffield. The second leg of the quiz was based on *Way Out West* and the Brat's team won a thrilling contest by one point. The Early to Bed team were therefore awarded the Julian Tighe Memorial Trophy by the narrowest of margins.

Grahame Morris

Bob Monkhouse's thanks

Bob Monkhouse has said how much he enjoyed the Avalon Boys' album. In a letter he tells me he loves every track on the CD. He wrote to me after I sent him a "get well" card which had been signed by those present at the Helpmates meeting in June, together with members of the Hats Off Tent. The Avalon Boys had given me a copy of the album to send to Bob.

Howard Parker



On the lighter side

With the sight of Peter Brodie winning first prize at the Southend-on-Sea convention last year still in his consciousness (not Paul Brodie as stated in your last *Bowler Dessert*), Tony Traynor spotted an item in *Starmag* (28.09.02). . . .

A famous superstar DJ was so "tired and emotional" that sunrise found him in a hotel lobby, naked apart from a lampshade on his head, shouting, "I'm a lamp! I'm a lamp!"

"What are you? Some kind of crazy guy?" asked the perturbed hotel porter.

"Crazy? I'm not the one that's talking to a ***** lamp," replied the DJ.

Left: Peter Brodie, photographed by Fred Terris

Roger reports *continued from page 11*

times have I cut off the end of a film? Mind you, in the case of *Their First Mistake*, I think Hal Roach did just that in 1932. This video recording was, of course, long before Richard Virgin released the Laurel and Hardy films on his Branson label. I did also dally and dilly with the *medium* screen in the form of standard and super 8 home movies. But it was always such a palaver getting out all that equipment for just me. Surely there were other fans out there, somewhere?

Through the McCabe books I had learned of the Laurel and Hardy appreciation society in America but I hadn't a clue how to join in the UK. Never mind being a Son of the Desert, I felt alone in the desert. Then the breakthrough came in 1989 – a letter from Grand Sheik Laurence Reardon in the *Radio Times* and my wonderful journey in the Sons of the Desert commenced. It has taken me through the Helpmates, the Live Ghost and the Saps at Sea Tents, with the ever-reliable *Bowler Dessert* as my guidebook. The magic of Laurel and Hardy will live forever if the Sons have anything to do with it. How can you explain the fun and the laughter and, above all, the friendship to someone outside of our family? I'll tell you in two words: im-possible. The Sons of the Desert is the key to the longevity of Laurel and Hardy. That reminds me. . . . where is my car key?

Roger Robinson

Twin pleasures

It made Dougie Brown's day when *The Herald* (23.10.02.) had a heading which combined his two obsessions – Laurel and Hardy and Partick Thistle. The heading proclaimed, "Laurels go to Hardie as Thistle's late push pays off." The score was Partick Thistle 1, Dundee 0, the scorer being Martin Hardie.

The pattern better than the copy



Drawing by Jean Poulain

Life citation

The Archive Hour (Radio 4, 28.09.02.) celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of *This is Your Life*, which, for the record, actually started on radio in 1948. Jane Anderson in *Radio Times* noted, "In the case of Oliver Hardy, featured tonight, he was so shocked that he couldn't eat for a week. Hmmm."

Coconut proof



Blotto Online continues to delight with rare photographs. This one, from June, 1935, shows Laurel and Hardy when they visited the famous Los Angeles supper club, the Coconut Grove. Their presence contradicted rumours that the twosome had split.

Glasgow roots

Sheila Duffy wrote in the Glasgow and West of Scotland Family History Society's newsletter (June, 2002) about a booklet called *Mount Florida – Buildings and Blethers*, by Jean Baird Rafferty:

Titbits of information such as "Did Stan Laurel really go to Queen's Park School?" are fascinating. To answer that question, yes, Laurel was born Arthur Stanley Jefferson, in Lancashire, but moved to Glasgow when his father was appointed Manager of a local music hall in the early years of the 20th century. The Jefferson family lived at 10 Ethel Terrace and "Stan Laurel's" mother is buried in Cathcart cemetery.

In the following (October) issue of the magazine Brian Henderson wrote:

Arthur Jefferson was actually Manager of the Old Metropole Theatre in Stockwell Street. Not sure of dates. But I understand that the young Stan made his first theatrical appearance at Pickard's Panopticon. Incidentally, a George Gordon Jefferson was Acting Manager at the "Old Met" around the same time as Arthur Jefferson was General Manager. Another family member?

Yes, indeed – George Gordon was Stan's elder brother. Alex Hall wrote:

The Metropole had been the Scotia until 1897. "Laurel", after a year at Queen's Park School, went to Rutherglen Academy, completing his education there in 1906, age 16.

CD centre

Reviews by Willie McIntyre

Golden Age of Comedy: Laurel & Hardy 60 min 19 sec. PLS CD 602. (2002). Price £3.00.

We have here three very clear recordings, repackaged and with crackles removed.

Mr Slater's Poultry Market was recorded live for NBC Radio on 6th March, 1944. It was intended to be the first of a series of half-



hour shows, but it was not transmitted and was unheard for years until it was rediscovered in the 1990s.

The Marriage of Stan Laurel is part of a 1943 radio broadcast with Laurel and Hardy, Patsy Moran, Edgar Kennedy and Lucille Ball.

Television's *This Is Your Life*, introduced by Ralph Edwards, spotlighted Laurel and Hardy on 1st

December, 1954. This soundtrack version works surprisingly well on a session which is considered to be less than successful.

◇ Your editor has this CD in stock. Add £1.00 for p&p.

Laurel and Hardy Rare Recordings 62 min 31 sec (2002). Price € 15.00.

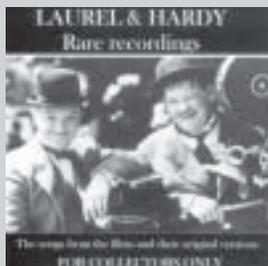
This new CD in the Dutch series *Songs for Cuckoos* has twenty-nine tracks, all with a Laurel and Hardy connection. Some of the tracks were recorded by famous dance bands from the same era while others are more obscure, such as the band that made the only commercial recording known to exist of *Smile When the Raindrops Fall* – recorded by Lew Reynolds and the Flexo Recording Orchestra in 1932. The Beau Hunks Orchestra based its version of the song on this old and obscure record.

Bart Tijmensen explains, “Even though I’ve tried to locate the best possible sources, the sound quality can vary, but most of the tracks sound quite good, considering

that they are almost seventy years old.”

To obtain this CD send €15.00 in notes to Bart Tijmensen, Struisenburgdwarsstraat 95B/1, 3063 BS Rotterdam, Netherlands. Or send an e-mail to bart@bmtijmensen.myweb.nl for alternative arrangements.

Let Bart know if you want your CD labelled or not, because, as he says, “sometimes a labelled CD-R does not play properly on very sensitive players.”



Babes in Toyland 64 min 15 sec. SFCD33546 (2000). Price £5.95.

The first thirteen tracks (lasting more than half the total duration of the CD) are from *Babes in Toyland* and make a pleasant potted version of this musical. *Don't Cry, Bo-Peep* and *March of the Toys* are included. As a bonus there are fourteen tracks from different films, ranging from songs like *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* to dialogue tracks like *Turn on the Radio*. The 1932 dance version of Laurel and Hardy's *Ku-Ku* theme music is also included. Some tracks have misleading titles. For example, *When the Mice are Away* is two musical segments. The CD is made in Spain and marketed by the Sound Track Factory. I bought my copy through Amazon on the Internet.



Sing Along with the Boys 42 min 58 sec. Southstar SS-LAHS. Not for sale. (2002).

In the goodies bag at Nashville was a CD. Convention boss Steve Brown had musicians record a backing-only track for familiar Laurel and Hardy songs. Printed in the sleeve notes were all the words of the songs so that the CD can be used for karaoke. Prior to each karaoke track is the original version from the film.

Bill's treasures

Bill Spalding noticed Stan Laurel in a (cropped) photograph in the book *Before Your Very Eyes*, an autobiography by Arthur Askey.



Stan Laurel, Sid Field, Val Parnell, Danny Kaye and Arthur Askey, rehearsing a Royal Command Performance in 1947

Text in the book read, "One night I spotted Stan Laurel in the audience and at the end of the show I made him come up on the stage. This he was very reluctant to do, until I pointed out that he would be mobbed if he didn't. He made a speech, saying it was the first pantomime he'd attended since he saw one at Blackburn in 1910, and he had tears in his eyes and a break in his voice as he reminisced. He was a lovely fellow and sat in my dressing room afterwards until three in the morning just chatting away. I had lunch



with him and his wife (I forget which number she was!) the following day, and for years afterwards, we kept up a correspondence – he was a compulsive letter writer. My grandchildren now watch old comedies on the television: they love Chaplin, Lloyd and Keaton, even have a chuckle at Gran'pa, but to them Laurel and Hardy are the tops."

Mannikin Pis

Bill shares with us (left) one of a set of eight coloured postcards, attached in concertina fashion and in portrait format. They were sold as a "Souvenir of Brussels" and are a little rude, featuring the (in)famous little boy Mannikin Pis. Only one of the eight postcards included Laurel and Hardy.

Star quote

Impressionist Alistair McGowan said, "When I was a kid, Laurel and Hardy films seemed to be shown every summer holiday and every Christmas. I watched them all – again and again. More than anything these films made me want to act and to make people laugh. I suppose I really wanted to be Stan Laurel or Oliver Hardy."

Chorlton chuckle

Bill was browsing through a book called *Ragtime to Wartime: The Best of Good Housekeeping: 1922-1939*. In it, from 1935, was a reproduction (below) of a postcard featuring Laurel and Hardy. Bill says, "I am a little bit annoyed because about seven or eight years ago I bought a few postcards which had been remaindered at The Works in Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow. They were all Shell cards and had punning references to real place names with their locations on a map. Unfortunately the Laurel and Hardy one was not among them. In this picture the little box beside the black blot contains the name Chorlton-cum-Hardy. The original may have been a poster before it was a postcard."



If only

At our January Saps meeting we showed the great sketch from *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* in 1961 of Norman Wisdom and Bruce Forsyth as inept decorators. This is the sketch that, if the Laurel and Hardy management allowed, Stan was more than happy to perform with Norman in 1947 when his partner was indisposed. Understandably, Ben Shipman, the Boys' manager, didn't want to risk one of his stars being injured in the slapstick sketch with the up-and-coming Norman Wisdom. Seeing the sketch again on video at the Saps meeting, you couldn't help but wonder, "If only".

Roger Robinson

Charles Rogers

In the press an item dated 22nd December, 1956 read. . . .

Mr Charles A Rogers, a London born actor and script writer, was killed at Studio City, California, on Thursday night when his car over-turned, it was reported today. He was 58.

Son of Mr Charles Rogers Senior, who wrote and produced stage melodramas in England, he went on the stage in England at the age of 17.

He went to Hollywood some years ago as a film script writer and wrote most of the scripts for the Laurel and Hardy comedy films.

Non-events

Events that never made it to last year's Nashville convention:

Beau Hunks Hundred Yard Dash

Contestants hobble barefoot across a field of carpet tacks to win valuable prizes courtesy of Dr Scholl.

Helpmates House Cleaning Triathlon

Contestants try to clean house while being pelted with water, soot and flour. First one finished gets marmalade for breakfast.

Mark in Beijing



Mark Johnson, Vice Vizier of the Brats Tent, visited TGI Friday's restaurant in the Friendship Hotel in Beijing last year

Dazzled

Antony Waite has been in touch with Jaz Wiseman, from the Persuaders' fan club, The Morning After. Says Antony, "I asked him if there were any Laurel and Hardy references in his favourite television series and whether he liked the Boys. To my surprise he works for a company that helps Slow Dazzle in the design of its Laurel and Hardy calendars."

Jaz said, "I do like Laurel and Hardy, although I haven't seen any of their films for years. I think my favourite Laurel and Hardy film would have to be *Saps at Sea*, but I don't think I've seen all of them."

When asked if there is any Laurel and Hardy reference in *The Persuaders*, Jaz said, "There is a bit. Tony Curtis regularly called Roger Moore 'Stanley' in a reference to Laurel and Hardy, during filming."

Hard to get?

Bill Crouch found a photograph (below) of James Finlayson in an old book entitled *The Warner Brothers Story*. It comes from the film *Hard to Get*, which was described as "a modest success". It starred Dorothy Mackaill, shown in the photo with Finlayson and Jack Oakie.



UK tent listing

All known 36 UK tents, their meetings and Grand Sheiks

Bacon Grabbers Tent of St Helens, Wigan and Manchester Central

Oasis 113, founded 18th Oct, 1989
Beer Engine, Poolstock Lane, Wigan, Lancashire. Monthly, first Wednesday, 8.00pm. Marble Arch, 73 Rochdale Road, Manchester 4. Monthly, third Wednesday, 8.00pm.
Norman Leigh, 112 Hatfield Road, Bolton, Lancs, BL1 3BL.
✉ normanleigh@bacongrabbers.co.uk
✉ neilevans@bacongrabbers.co.uk
✉ chrisscoffey@bacongrabbers.co.uk
☎ www.bacongrabbers.co.uk
☎ www.laurel-and-harday.co.uk
☎ www.laurel-and-hardy-museum.co.uk

Beau Hunks Tent of Nottingham

Oasis 236, founded 2000
Rose and Crown, Derby Road, Nottingham. Monthly, third Tuesday, 7.30pm.
Dave Scothern, 192 Melton Road, Stanton on the Wolds, Nottingham, NG12 5BQ.
☎ 0115 937 3196

Be Big Tent of Tameside

Oasis 26, founded 25th Feb, 1977
Greyhound, Burlington Street, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire. Monthly, last Monday (bank holiday meetings brought forward a week), 8.00pm.
Bob Hickson, 69 Bucklow Drive, Northenden, Manchester, M22 4WA.
☎ 0161 998 0607

Berth Marks Tent of Ulverston

Oasis 24, founded 5th October, 1976
Laurel and Hardy Museum, 4c Upper Brook Street, Ulverston, Cumbria, LA12 7BH. Open daily, February till December, 10.00am till 4.30pm.
Marion Grave, Crake Valley House, Greenodd, near Ulverston, Cumbria, LA12 7RA.
☎ 01229 861 614 ☎ 01229 582 292
☎ www.laurel-and-hardy-museum.co.uk

Blockheads Tent of Edinburgh

Oasis 103, founded 1984
Royal Oak, 1 Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Monthly, September till June, second Friday, 7.30 till 10.00pm.
Charlie Lewis, 70 Silverknowes Gardens, Edinburgh, EH4 5NG.
✉ charlie.lewis@scotland.gsi.gov.uk ✉



Key

☎ indicates home phone number ✉ indicates e-mail address
☎ indicates mobile phone number ☎ indicates website address
☎ indicates venue phone number
✉ indicates tent has a page hosted on website <http://www.sotd.org>

Blotto Tent of Tameside

Oasis 137, founded 1988
Stalybridge Railway Station, Buffet Bar, Platform One, Ramsbottom Street, Stalybridge, Tameside. Monthly, September till June, second Wednesday, 8.00pm.
Peter Brodie, 4 Wilson Crescent, Ashton-under-Lyne, Tameside, OL6 9SA.
☎ 0161 339 7355. ☎ 07702 056 556
✉ pbrodiegws@aol.com ✉

Bonnie Scotland Tent of Glasgow

Oasis 21, founded 3rd May, 1976
No fixed abode: irregular meetings.
Janice Hawton, 5 Tantalion Avenue, Gourrock, Renfrewshire, PA19 1HA.
✉ ex-directory
✉ chonzie@ukonline.co.uk ✉

Brats Tent of Sheffield

Oasis 80, founded 1988
New Crown Inn, Handsworth Road, Handsworth, Sheffield. Monthly, second Monday, 7.30pm.
John Burton, 337 Handsworth Road, Handsworth, Sheffield, S13 9BP.
☎ 0114 254 8151
✉ john-burton@supanet.com
✉ john.burton@sch.nhs.uk

There is no guarantee that Grand Sheiks or Webmasters update information regularly, so please contact Grand Sheiks if in doubt

Brats Tent of Stranraer Academy

Founded 1998
Restricted membership (school).
Stranraer Academy, McMasters Road, Stranraer, DE0 8BY. Every Friday during term, 12.55 till 1.15pm.
Dougie Brown, The Mill House, Seabank Road, Stranraer, DG9 0EF.
☎ 01776 702 870 ☎ 01776 706 484
✉ dsb1971@aol.com

Busy Bodies Tent of Stourbridge

Oasis 128, founded 1991
Stourbridge Cricket Club, High Street, Amblecote, Stourbridge. Monthly, last Wednesday.
Tony Bagley, 118 Orchard Street, Brockmoor, Brierley Hill, West Midlands, DY5 1HN.
☎ 01384 76869 ☎ 07753 831016 ✉

Call of the Cuckoos Tent of Clyde Coast

Oasis 166, founded 1993
No fixed abode: irregular meetings. Free monthly newsletter.
Willie McIntyre, 39 Bankhouse Avenue, Largs, Ayrshire, KA30 9PF.
✉ ex-directory
✉ bowler.dessert@virgin.net
☎ <http://freespace.virgin.net/bowler.dessert>

Chickens Come Home Tent of Lancaster

Oasis 210, founded 1998
Gregson Community Centre, Moorgate, Lancaster. Bi-monthly, usually last Saturday.
Bill Bailey, Piggin' Fine Mess, 17 Pennine View, Morecambe, Lancashire, LA4 4QB.
✉ wardbailey@ic24.net
☎ <http://freespace.virgin.net/david.wilkinson8/index.htm>

A Chump at Oxford Tent of Oxford

Oasis 111, founded 1989
Duke of York, Norfolk Street, Oxford. Quarterly: March, June, September, December, second Monday, 8.00pm.
Alan Kitchen, 26 Mayfield Road, Farmoor, Oxford, OX2 9NR.
☎ 01865 862 821
✉ alan.kitchen@excite.com

Come Clean Tent of Widnes

Oasis 71, founded March, 1987
St Basilis Parochial Club, Hough Green Road, Widnes, Cheshire. Monthly, third Tuesday, 8.00 till 11.00pm.
Eric Woods, Laurel House, 102 Hough Green Rd, Widnes, Cheshire, WA8 4PF.
☎ 0151 424 1552
✉ ericwoods@yahoo.co.uk

County Hospital Tent of Bradford

Oasis 36, founded 1979
ILP Club (Private Function Room), Leicester Street, Off Wakefield Road, Bradford. Monthly, first Friday 8.00 till 10.30pm.
Dave Thackray, 16 Westwood Avenue, Eccleshill, Bradford, BD2 1NJ.
☎ 01274 640 739 ☎ 07976 876 264
✉ dthackray@aol

Early to Bed Tent of Chesterfield

Oasis 193, founded 16th June, 1995
Spital Hotel, Spital Lane, Chesterfield. Monthly, third Sunday, 7.30pm.
Grahame Morris, Appleton Lodge, 87 Shuttlewood Road, Bolsover, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S44 6NX.
☎ 01246 824 523
✉ morrisofderbyshire@lineone.net ✉

Fraternally Yours Tent of Bristol

Oasis 152, founded 1992
Bristol Civil Service Sports Club, Filton Avenue, Bristol.
Irregular. Monday, 8.00pm.
Peter Andrews, 14 Mackie Avenue, Filton, Bristol, BS34 7ND.
☎ 0117 979 0205

Hats Off Tent of Derby

Oasis 119, founded 1990

Pastures Social Club, Mickleover, Derby.
Bi-monthly (commencing February),
third Wednesday, 7.30 till 10.00pm.

Howard Parker, 138 Smithfield Road,
Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, ST14 7LB.

☎ 01889 565 979

✉ howard.parker@talk21.com ✎

Helpmates Tent of Kent

Oasis 25, founded 1978

Events held in London or Holiday Inn,
Chatham. Irregular: see website or
magazine for dates.

Rob Lewis, 63 Wollaston Close,
Parkwood, Gillingham, Kent, ME8 9SH.

✉ laurelandhardy@blueyonder.co.uk

✉ oxford0614@aol.com

🌐 <http://www.laurelandhardy.org>

🌐 <http://members.aol.com/oxford0614>

Hog Wild Tent of Bishop

Auckland

Oasis 190, founded September, 1994

Town Hall, Bishop Auckland. Monthly
(except January and August), first
Tuesday, 8.00pm.

Stan Patterson, "Dunluce", 2 Compton
Grove, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham,
DL14 6LX.

☎ 01388 605 844

Laughing Gravy Tent of Birmingham

Oasis 167, founded autumn, 1993

Bromford Social Club, Church Road,
Erdington, Birmingham, B23. Monthly,
first Thursday, 7.00 till 11.00pm.

John Ullah, 42 York Road, Erdington,
Birmingham, B23 6TG.

☎ 0121 628 6919

✉ j.ullah@lineone.net

🌐 <http://www.sotd.org>

Laughing Gravy Tent of Tingley

Oasis 47, founded 1981

Tingley Working Men's Club, Bradford
Road (near roundabout), Tingley,
Wakefield. Nine times a year: second
Monday, September till May, 8.00pm.

Graham McKenna, 5 Ryedale Way, Ting-
ley, Wakefield, W Yorkshire, WF3 1AP.

☎ 0113 2539 953 ✎

Leave 'Em Laughing Tent of Merseyside

Oasis 37, founded October, 1979

Ferndale Lodge pub, 15 Crosby Road
North, Crosby, Liverpool, 22. Monthly,
first Tuesday.

Tony Traynor, 89 Bedford Road, Bootle,
Merseyside, L20 2DL.

☎ 0151 476 6621 ✎

Live Ghost Tent of London

Oasis 179, founded 1994

The Pilgrim, 247 Kennington Lane,
London, SE11 5QU. Bi-monthly: see
website.

Del Kempster, 112 Tudor Drive, Morden,
Surrey, SM4 4PF.

☎ 020 871 54223.

✉ delkempster@hotmail.com

🌐 www.liveghost.com

Live Ghost Tent of Middlesbrough

Oasis 180, founded around 1992

No meetings at present.

Ian McLean, 1 Gosforth Avenue, Redcar,
Cleveland, TS10 3LH.

☎ 01642 492 159

✉ ian.mcclain@ntlworld.com

Men o' War Tent of Colchester

Oasis 70, founded 1987

Usually Manifest Theatre, Oxford Road,
Manningtree, Essex. Irregular, approx
5 per year. Dates in website/news-
letter. Saturday 7.30 till 10.30pm.

Paul Harding, 38 Kingsman Drive,
Clacton-on-Sea, Essex, CO16 8UR.

☎ 01255 429 887

✉ menowartent@hotmail.com

🌐 uk.geocities.com/menowartent

Midnight Patrol Tent of Potteries Staffordshire

Oasis 209, founded 1997

Venue under review

Antony Waite, 53 Garnett Road East,
Porthill, Newcastle-under-Lyme,
Staffordshire, ST5 8AP.

☎ 01782 613816

✉ vickynanthony@stokelaurelnhardy.
fsworld.co.uk ✎

Midnight Patrol 2 Tent of Wirral

Oasis 110, founded 1989

Stork Hotel, 41 Price Street, Birkenhead,
Wirral, Merseyside. Monthly, third
Monday, 8.00pm.

Gary (Stan) Slade, Lockley Castle,
1c Britannia Road, Wallasey, Wirral,
Merseyside, CH45 4RN.

☎ 0151 513 0322

✉ thetop@lookalikes.fsnet.co.uk

🌐 [http://www.laurel-hardy-lookalikes.
co.uk/thewirralbranch.html](http://www.laurel-hardy-lookalikes.co.uk/thewirralbranch.html) ✎

One Good Turn Tent of

Huddersfield

Oasis 200, founded 1995

Albert Hotel, Victoria Lane, Hudders-
field. Monthly, second Wednesday.

David Ian Barker, 52 Tom Lane, Crosland
Moor, Huddersfield, Yorkshire,
HD4 5PP.

☎ 01484 462 616

Pardon Us Tent of Gateshead

Oasis 243, founded 2001

Mount Hall, Eighton Banks. Inactive;
hopes to restart soon.

Ray Hall, Favells Gate, Galloping Green
Road, Eighton Banks, Gateshead, Tyne
& Wear, NE9 7XD.

☎ 0191 487 2614

✉ ray@favellsgate.co.uk

Saps at Sea Tent of Southend-on-Sea

Oasis 207, founded 1998

Railway Hotel, Clifftown Road, Southend-
on-Sea, Essex. Monthly, second
Sunday, 6.45 till 10.00pm.

Roger Robinson, 115 Neil Armstrong
Way, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, SS9 5UE.

☎ 01702 526 187

✉ sapsatse@waitrose.com (likely to
change) ✎

Second Hundred Years Tent of Bury/Radcliffe Manchester

Founded 2001

On hold – looking for new venue.

Steve Bartley, 22 Wolsey Close,
Radcliffe, Manchester, M26 3AG.

✉ StpBartley@aol.com

Their Purple Moment Tent of Stranraer

Oasis 115, founded 1989

Ruddicot Hotel, London Road, Stranraer.
Monthly, last Friday, 8.00pm (quiet
just now – contact Grand Sheikh).

Dougie Brown, The Mill House, Seabank
Road, Stranraer, DG9 0EF.

☎ 01776 702 870

✉ dsb1971@aol.com

Them Thar Hills Tent of Carlisle

Oasis 43, founded 1981 [Resting]

Melvin McFadden, Fairhaven, Grange
Gardens, Wigton, Cumbria, CA7 9DH.

☎ 01697 345 887

✉ melvin.mcfadden@btinternet.com

Tit for Tat Tent of Leicester

Oasis 232, founded 2001

Aylestone & District Conservative Club,
Saffron Lane, Leicester. Monthly, last
Tuesday, 7.30pm.

Ian Gamage, 25 Cottage Farm Close,
Braunstone, Leicester LE3 2XZ.

☎ 0116 223 4958

✉ iangamage@hotmail.com

You're Darn Tootin' Tent of Stockton-on-Tees

Oasis 183, founded 1995

Royal Hotel, West Street, Stillington,
Stockton. Monthly, third Tuesday,
7.30pm.

Anthony Gears, 1a South Street,
Stillington, Stockton-on-Tees,
Cleveland, TS21 1JN.

☎ 01740 630 942

✉ tony@egglescliffe.org.uk



This list was compiled by Grahame Morris (Grand Sheikh of the Early to Bed Tent), with considerable help from Anni. Please send Grahame any additions and alterations for inclusion in your next Bowler Dessert

