



# Museum News

Steyning Museum Newsletter

April 2011

## Museum Diary

- 26.03.11 Annual General Meeting  
Penfold Hall  
2.30 pm
- 09.04.11 Spring Coffee Morning  
Penfold Hall  
10.30 - 12.00
- 30.05.11 Museum Stall at  
Country Fair  
High Street
- 13.08.11 Garden Coffee Morning  
Jarvis, Jarvis Lane  
10.30-12.00
- 29.10.11 Autumn Coffee Morning  
Penfold Hall  
10.30 - 12.00

## 200 Club

### February Draw:

- 1<sup>st</sup> prize = Anne Stone (£35)  
2<sup>nd</sup> prize = Ian Ivatt (£25)  
3<sup>rd</sup> prize = Mr Porter (£15)

### March Draw:

- 1<sup>st</sup> prize = Mary Townsend (£35)  
2<sup>nd</sup> prize = Vera Gardner (£25)  
3<sup>rd</sup> prize = Alan Dow (£15)

## Benefit Concert

I have mentioned before the need the Museum has to boost our income in these challenging economic times. (The Museum accounts for last year include, for the first time, some red ink). Gill Kille and her helpers have been planning new ways of raising funds, and the December newsletter reported on the very successful clothes swap event. Gill and her helpers have again organised a very successful fund raising occasion in the benefit concert on 5<sup>th</sup> March. I'll let her give her own report below and thank her for masterminding such a successful event.

*Well, what a success!! We had a dry (if a rather*

*chilly) day for a truly delightful, uplifting concert featuring two well-known local choirs, Kaleidoscope and Cantatrice, conducted by Zöe Peate.*

*The varied choice of songs hit just the right note (excuse the pun!) and the audience were invited to join in with a rousing chorus of a Zulu marching song, Syahamba, - sung in English!*

*Over 230 people generously supported the event and filled the Church, with standing room only at the back. We raised £1,516 net for the Museum, so a very big "thank you" to all the Friends and their friends and families who came along.*

*Our thanks must firstly go to the Revd Canon Dr Paul Rampton for kindly allowing us free use of the Church. A very big vote of thanks goes to Zöe and both the choirs for providing such an entertaining concert to help the Museum and to Zöe for her help in boosting ticket sales amongst friends and families of the two choirs. Thanks are also due to all the Stewards at the Museum and the Steyning Bookshop who sold tickets. Also to be thanked are our 'team' of cake makers, who deserve special thanks for their time and generosity, those on the door of the Church, the helpers serving tea and cake afterwards and the helpers washing up and clearing away crockery, etc., not forgetting all the publicity work beforehand from those behind the scenes!*

*The concert was rounded off with tea and home made cakes in The Steyning Centre, which was most welcome and helped to warm everyone up. Thankfully we didn't run out of cakes and even managed to sell some at the end raising another £16.50 for the Museum. To see the queue stretching from the car park to the Steyning Centre for tea was unbelievable – but we coped!*

*It will be a hard act to follow, but it is hoped to have another successful fund-raising event in the not too distant future - and we will keep you all posted!*

## Rye Museum Visit

The Museum website, so well operated by Lynda Denyer and Doug Thompson, is proving to be a very good advert for us. We are now

having many more enquiries about family history from people who have seen the website, and more general visitors are coming through the door after spotting what we have to offer in the pages of the site. Other museums are also taking an interest after being impressed by what they see on the web. One group who visited on 21<sup>st</sup> February were the directors from Rye Museum and they were particularly interested in how, as volunteers, we managed and financed the Museum. Their leader sent a letter expressing their warm thanks for the welcome they were given and "admiration for the calibre and effective teamwork " they found in the running of the Museum and she said they took back many ideas to work on.

### **Spring Coffee Morning**

If you have received your newsletter in time to be reminded, don't forget the coffee morning in the Penfold Hall on 9<sup>th</sup> April from 10.30 till 12 noon. There will be stalls for cakes, preserves and chutneys as well as plants and bric-a-brac, so please bring along your contributions. Gill Kille would be pleased to receive a note at the Museum about offers of cake making.

### **Gert and Daisy Exhibition**

Elsie and Doris Waters were well known as entertainers on radio and in film, especially during World War II. Their comedy act centred around the two characters Gert and Daisy, with frequent references to their fictional husbands, Bert and Wally. Their later years were spent living in Steyning and the Museum is fortunate in that we were bequeathed some of their personal possessions which have featured in past exhibitions. A few months ago the Museum was contacted by the executor of the estate of a nephew of Elsie and Doris. He had died leaving a large collection of personal items belonging to his aunts. Knowing of the connection Elsie and Doris had with Steyning, the executor asked whether the Museum was interested in acquiring any of the sisters' large collection of material from their performing days. Chris Tod went up to London equipped with suit cases and brought back as much as he could carry of the letters, songs, records, photos, show scripts and posters which were on offer. What emerged from the cases on his return proved to be an invaluable archive of the sisters' life and work.

You can see some of that archive in a new exhibition which Chris, helped by Andrew Woodfield, has put together. They have set a starting date of 15<sup>th</sup> April, so please come along.

### **End Piece**

Having looked at some of the Gert and Daisy material, I was interested to come across a diary of their journey to India in 1944 to entertain the troops. I have made this the subject of the end piece this month.

One of the important ways of keeping up morale among the troops stationed abroad for so long in World War II, was for well known entertainers to provide live shows. This was done through E.N.S.A., and Elsie and Doris Waters, (as Gert and Daisy) were among those who undertook long, and sometimes hazardous journeys, to lay on entertainment. The two week journey to India entailed them making their first trip by air in several stages.

It is interesting to read how they coped with the rigours of such a journey, and heartening to learn how they willingly gave of their time to talk to, and encourage, the servicemen in hospitals on their way. The diary entries are too long to recount in full in a newsletter article, so I have taken excerpts to give a feel of the whole. Some names are not given in full or are nicknames, which can be confusing, but we can still understand what is going on. Any text I have added is written in italic script.

This is only one of several tours the sisters made during the war, but their humour and resilience still shine through despite a tiring routine of repeated performances, often in makeshift venues. It is also interesting to note that after four years of wartime rationing and shortages, how often food features in the account.

For anyone who is not familiar with the sisters, Elsie Waters was Gert or Nan, and Doris, who seems to be the diary writer, was Daisy. They had four older brothers and all the siblings were musical and learned to play musical instruments. Jack Warner, well known as an actor himself, was one of the brothers.

Tony Kettelman (Editor)

## **Elsie and Doris Waters and the Tour to India 1944**

*The diary begins at the point when the sisters are waiting to make their first flight.*

**January 31<sup>st</sup>** We're told to stand by, but didn't go.

**February 1<sup>st</sup>** Same again - busy making final preparations. If we were not going for another month we still should not be ready.

**February 2<sup>nd</sup>** Left 9.5 from Paddington. George came to see us off and Jean came just as we were leaving.....

Bill got on at Reading and came to Bristol with us..... A naval lieutenant noticed our Glastonburys and said that in his opinion half the battle was keeping one's feet warm in the air. He also told us that he was never sea-sick but could not fly without being ill. He asked if we had flown before and recommended some stuff called "Vasano" which he said was marvellous.

We were met at the station (*Bristol*) by the B.O.A.C. (*the air line*) bus and taken to the Grand Hotel for lunch. A fearful muddle because the train was late and the head waiter had let all the tables, but we managed to get some and were taken to the airport..... After a long wait, a very self conscious youth in BOAC uniform was helped in with a chair, of the type we were going to sit on in the plane, and said "Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to claim your attention for reasons of security". He then proceeded to show us how to turn the seat of the chair into a life-belt in case we came down in the sea. He struggled and struggled saying, "You just undo the straps like this - like this-", but nothing happened and in the end *he* had to get about four men and a boy to help him with it.....After another long wait we were told that we couldn't fly that day because of bad weather and that half of us were to be put up at Wells and the other half at Glastonbury.....

**February 3<sup>rd</sup>** We were told to be ready to go back to the airport at 1 o'clock.....We had an early lunch. Mr Ackner had told us not to have anything but weak tea, toast and honey before we went on a flight, so bearing his advice in mind we had soup, Cornish pasty and suet pudding with treacle on it.

The bus called for us again at 1.30 and we went back to the airport. For the first time in our lives we got in an aeroplane, a Hudson, and were told to fasten our seat belts because it was going to be "bumpy". They revved the engines up one at a time and the noise they made sounded so healthy that it calmed our fears a bit and quietened the butterflies which seemed to have taken charge of our stomachs.

*It was only a short trip as far as an RAF air field at Newquay from where they were taken to the Great Western Hotel.*

We found the place had been taken over by the Americans and had our dinner with them. It

was like being in another country already. We had real tomato soup, lashings of jam, cream and butter were on the table, meat, and we finished our meal with pineapple pie.

.....we were taken down to the airfield again at 11.30. We found we were going in a twin-engined D.C.3. And took a look at our companions. They were a Free French Naval Lieutenant, another Frenchman in civilian clothes, M. Oberle, and a girl in the Civil Service going to Algiers, Nan and me. Just before they slammed the iron door, a B.O.A.C. official came in and said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, you are going to Gibraltar". We were told to fasten our seat belts again, the pilot came round to see that the black-out was quite secure, *(to hide them from the enemy)* they brought in thermos flasks full of coffee and milk, handed us each a cardboard box with more food in and finally put out all the lights in the aircraft and started the engines.....

*After some time Doris peeped round the blackout and saw* smoke and flames coming from the engine on our side but didn't mention it because I thought it was all part of it. When we were about an hour and a half from Gibraltar the pilot came through to speak to us again. He was very calm and charming and said, "I'm afraid I've got some bad news for you. One of the engines is cutting out - will you get your life belts on".....We didn't know anything about our fellow passengers until this happened - but in a flash we knew quite a lot about them.....

We got to Gib. at 8.o'clock with two gallons of oil in one engine and the R.A.F lads said they still didn't know how we got there.

**4<sup>th</sup> February** We queued up for our breakfast at a canteen. We were very small fry , right from the very beginning - had to wait until all the Naval and Military personnel had passed the customs and Security at the airport, because we were only civilians.. We had white bread for the first time for goodness knows how long - it looked quite strange. We also had two eggs on a plate and outside we found fruit-sellers with enormous baskets of tangerines with stalks on. ....

We took off again at 12. o'clock, after they had mended the plane. Nan didn't like that much and thought she didn't like getting on the same plane much. We were given a cardboard box again with a banana, some chocolate and a piece of chewing gum in lieu of lunch.

Coming along the north coast of Africa the pilot flew in and out of all the little coves at about 200 feet. The second pilot was chatting to us at the time and said, "This is against regulations - he should be flying at 1000. "I'll go through and tell him". He did, but it didn't make any difference.

.....We got to Algiers at 3.20 and waited for an hour and a half on the airfield for transport - good old E.N.S.A. Finally a Lieut. Walker appeared who told us they had phoned the wrong office! He took us to E.N.S.A. office and headquarters where we met Nigel Patrick and a Mrs Lawrence. She took us to the Town Major's office to get a permit for a room and we were then taken to the Aletti Hotel

It must have been wonderful in peacetime but very poor now. They were short of everything, no cutlery, half the windows out and cardboard stuck in, no curtains- in fact it was rather like living in an empty house..... The entire hotel was taken over by the British and Americans and we had our dinner in the mess, which was the former dining room. The meal was a mixture of American and

English cooking and was quite horrible.....

There were no sheets or blankets, just a coarse sort of counterpane which had to do duty for the two, and it was so bitterly cold we went to bed with practically all our clothes on at night.

**5<sup>th</sup> February** .....We ordered our petit dejeuner as usual in our bedroom, but all we got was some very dark bread and some coffee with no milk or sugar.

(*Nigel*) Patrick told us that they expected us to go straight through to Cairo but as we were here would we do a show.... We...asked if they had a pianist. They produced a girl from one of the E.N.S.A. shows and we rehearsed for an hour and a quarter with her, but finally had to give up as hopeless. She could not read music and had no idea of our music at all.....If Leslie Henson could fly four chorus girls and his chauffeur out, why not our pianist? The more one sees of E.N.S.A. the bigger racket it becomes.

We suggested that as we could not do any shows we could at least go round the hospitals and talk to the boys. Joyce Grenfell rang up and said that the boys at the 95<sup>th</sup> General Hospital could do with some fun, so we went there next day.

**6<sup>th</sup> February** We only had coffee this morning because the bread was so awful.....

At lunch today we had a rather doubtful rissole wrapped in a cabbage leaf, tinned turnips, tinned potatoes, chipped, spinach, pineapple and cheese salad. Some Americans had all this and a large slice of bread and butter and jam which they munched at the same time - there was also cocoa to drink with it. I couldn't face this at all and in the end had white bread and butter and cocoa - which was a real treat for us.

Met Bill Linnet and some of the "Quiet Week End" people, and muscat out of glasses which are really the bottom halves of beer bottles. Rather nice - we must try to get some. In the afternoon went up to the Hospital to talk to the lads. Huge wards, sixty men in each. All surgical cases, most very cheerful, but one or two rather down. Only managed to get through S.1 and S.2. they asked so many questions. Told them "Three Bears" and did some Gert and Daisy and said we would go back next day.

**7<sup>th</sup> February** Got up and phoned E.N.S.A., but no news of our passage yet. Bought some malmaisons for the Sister and went back to do S.3. ward, and our driver M. Grassin, took us to the "Oasis". Met Archie Watson coming down the stairs and he managed to get us a table.....Soup, evil fish and vegetables, half of which we didn't eat, and tangerines which were lovely. He walked back with us because it is very dangerous to be out late at night. The Arabs are filthy and are very badly treated by the French who do nothing for them. Went to bed.

**10<sup>th</sup> February** Went to 95<sup>th</sup> Hospital in the morning and saw around the tent ward. Hopeless to do a show. Too long and they'd never hear us. We wrote messages home for them, talked to them and went back to the Officers' ward and talked to them again, and did them a turn. Awfully nice

blokes.....missed our dinner altogether and had a tangerine each and a piece of chocolate. The food's awful. Rissoles, spinach, turnips with white sauce, fried potatoes, pineapple and cheese salad all on the same plate.....Sat and talked to a Brigadier on the staff .....*who* said what a wonderful general Alexander is.

**11<sup>th</sup> February** Went to 95 again this morning in the smaller wards downstairs. One poor Canadian so badly burned on both arms and chest. It makes us so furious to see them all maimed and mangled. Said, "How's your eye?". "Oh I'm going to have it out its no good to me." So cheerful too. A boy from Tooting. Had lunch and then went to Maison Carre for the R.A.F. Everybody had been there, T.(*Tommy*) Trinder, Stainless (*Stephens*) etc. We only had time to do three wards, and promised to go back tomorrow.....when we got back to the Aletti we found a letter saying be ready to go at 6 o'clock.....

**12<sup>th</sup> February** Got up and were called for at ten past six and took off about 7.30 in a Dakota troop carrier. We were glad of our air cushions. All Army, Navy and Air Force personnel. We were the only civilians and women. Stopped at Castel Benito for a spam sandwich and tea. Am just writing this over the gulf of Tunis. Are going straight through to Cairo and expect to be there... at 6.30. We got there at 8.30.....Nobody to meet us. Aerodrome a wonderful sight in a lovely moon. Taken to V.I.P. offices and had tea then taken to the Continental Hotel.....

**13<sup>th</sup> February** Got up at ten and .....went to the E.N.S.A. offices.... and saw Rex again..... Rex asked us when we would like to start work. We said, "Tonight" and he arranged for a rehearsal with Bobby (*Alderson - their accompanist*) at 3.....Rex called for us and took us to lunch at Eddie's with Colonel Warren. After took us to Groppi and bought us most lovely chocolates, sugared almonds and candied fruits. Tried over numbers with Bobby, had tea and were ready at 5.30.....Went to R.A.F. Hospital at Abasir. Campbell and Wise, Avril Angers, Brock Sisters and others. Then went to Abessya barracks to R.E.M.E. Wonderful audience at both places, and afterwards went to a Private Mess. What a spread!

**14<sup>th</sup> February** Got up at Ten, and took pearls to be re-threaded at Goldstein.....Went back for Press conference. Very heavy going, except for Brigadier General Tatlow. Had lunch with Smith, Lancaster and two reporters. Sheer waste of time. Then had a very short rest and dressed to do two shows at Mena Camp. Wonderful audience again , and all said it was the best show they'd ever had.... We saw pyramids by moonlight and got to bed very late again.

**15<sup>th</sup> February** Called for at 10.30, and taken to a very old mosque in the native quarter.... Filthy dirty streets, full of tiny shops with Arabs working. Very short rest and told to be ready to be weighed by 4. o'clock.....there was a chance of our leaving today at 6.0. I think we should have died we were so tired, but thank goodness we have to go tomorrow instead.....we had a quiet dinner with

Colonel Warren and Lanky. Not bad. Soup meat, rice and artichokes. They hardly ever give you a potato. Ice cream rum baba and fruit and bananas and tangerines after.

**16<sup>th</sup> February** Had a call at five. Two boiled eggs for breakfast. Called for at ten to six, and taken to Cairo West and introduced to Sir Keith Park who had his own private plane with bathroom etc. Ours was a troop carrier again. Absolutely full of luggage. All officers travelling except us, one Sikh, one Gurka and I don't know what the others are. Came down at Habbaniyah about 2.0' clock.....Most amazing aerodrome in the middle of the desert. Had wonderful lunch, soup, steak and onions, and fruit salad. Went round Hospital in afternoon and offered to do two shows for them. Only just time to get changed, and went along to the Cinema. Beautiful stage and dressing rooms..... first show at 6.0. Second at 8.30.....the show lasted about one and a quarter hours. The place was packed and a wonderful audience. They have had many disappointments there. George Formby was going and didn't - Josephine Baker etc. They have had Jack Benny, Larry Adler and thought Adler the funnier of the two. Denis Noble & Co wouldn't do a show because they said they were too tired. They had arrived in the morning too. D.N. also reminded the A.O.C of the big contracts they had all given up to come out. I wish these people would stop at home. They do more harm than good.....

**17<sup>th</sup> February** Left 8.30 and arrived Bahrain at about 3.0. Most lovely journey. The sea a real turquoise. The airfield is on an island and joined to the mainland by a causeway, only opened two years ago..... The police are all native and wear beautiful turbans - very proud of the themselves. The Squadron Leader of Persia (Chase) was on the airport to meet us, and invited us all to stay with him.....We offered to do a show and he was delighted.....Feeling very tired after lunch but managed to get a rest until five.....Got up and went round the Hospital. The R.A.F. have a wing but the natives are looked after too and very well. They were a bit suspicious at first, but go there readily. The main thing they admire is that 99% of every English men keep their word....(*the show*) was held in a hut and only about 120. A little stage and piano, hut made of rushes. Everyone enjoyed it.....

**18<sup>th</sup> February** Up early at 5.30.....and down on the airfield by ten to seven....we were soon in the air. The four Indians greeted us with broad grins and laughter. Apparently they were at the show last night.....Ran into bad weather and one hour from Karachi had to turn back .. Landed at Jiwani in Baluchistan..... we were not the only ones weatherbound and the tiny station had about fifty unexpected visitors. Squadron Leader Speedy was there to meet us and made us very welcome put us up in the Officers quarters. Half a biscuit tin to wash in and no pillows. Had lunch and a little rest, and as all could not come to one show because of guard, we gave two shows. One at 7.30 and one at 9.30.....

**19<sup>th</sup> February** Had cup of tea at 8.0 and got up to breakfast at 9.30. Bacon and egg. Sun shining and a beautiful day..... When we got to the airfield the lads had written in the sand "Ta Ta Gert and

Daisy All the best Stainless” just in front of the steps. Lovely scenery, very blue water, and have passed an uninhabited island. And a real isthmus. Have just been told another three quarters of an hour to Karachi. Hand smothered in ink again. It’s the altitude - all fountain pens leak in mid air. Got to Karachi and went through customs & Quarantine.....when we went to have a cup of tea in the canteen the Indian boy behind the bookstall asked if we were the same Memsahibs he had seen on the pictures. He had seen “Gert and Daisy’s Weekend” at the Regal in Karachi. Stainless very officious, bought two fountains pens. We went in our own taxi which had a puncture half way. The road was very dusty but we had our first taste of Indian camels, beautiful bright turbans and brass pots, and one man riding a very restless horse with just a saddle blanket and bridle. Amazing!.....Lieut Jack Warner turned up R.N.V.R. Charming bloke - Stainless taking charge as usual. We’re getting very tired of it. J.W.. In charge of all Naval Entertainment, in India. The boys have had hardly any shows at all.....a colonel came in who is in charge of the Hospital here and asked us to do a show tomorrow for them at seven o’clock. Said we would of course. One of the B.O.A.C. pilots has offered to take some letters back, and so after we had a rest and some dinner - marvellous! - prawns and beautiful meat and vegetables and ices, we wrote letters until 1.30. Wanted some cigarettes. Gert went to the kitchen and saw a dark turbaned figure with a cigarette behind his ear. She made signs, but he couldn’t understand and in the end we showed them - there were two of them by then - an empty packet and held two fingers up and gave him a five rupee note....They flew off like scalded cats and came back with the cigarettes and the change. We gave them one rupee each, and thought they were going to knock their heads on the ground. Went to bed very tired.

*Unfortunately, the diary ends at that point, but we do have many letters sent by the troops to Elsie and Doris from India which paint a picture of how welcome they were made to feel. The troops were grateful to have a contact with home through two famous performers, and are warm in their appreciation and enjoyment of the shows. The care the sisters showed towards the troops and their willingness to give of their time, is revealed in letters describing such acts as visiting the families of some of the serving men when they returned to England after the tour, and in the fact that they kept in contact through Christmas cards and small presents such as a scarf or cigarettes. The cigarettes were particularly appreciated as the men didn’t care for the Indian ones.*

*The sisters’ part in maintaining morale at home and abroad was given recognition in 1946 when they were each awarded an O.B.E.*

Tony Kettelman