

BRITISH ENTERTAINERS WHO SERVED IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

During World War II, the entertainment industry changed to help the war effort. Often the industry became more closely controlled by national governments, who believed that a supportive home front was crucial to victory. Through regulation and censorship, governments sought to keep spirits high and to depict the war in a positive light. They also found new ways to use entertainment media to keep citizens informed.

Government censorship of mass media was enforced because of fears of threats to national harmony and security. The most popular forms of entertainment were radio, film, and music. Together these aimed to keep citizens entertained, informed about the war effort, and motivated. Broadcast radio was an especially powerful communication tool.

Radio

In comparison to television, radio was a much more affordable form of entertainment. Because of this, the radio was the most popular form of entertainment during World War II. Radio stations fuelled propaganda and reached a countless number of citizens. Many shows popularized and quickly gained influence in certain countries. Radio broadcasts, like other forms of entertainment at the time, were regulated by the government and were pushed to keep citizens informed about war efforts and to encourage citizens to help the cause.

An example of a popular radio program is Tommy Handley's 'It's That Man Again', (always referred to as 'ITMA'), which continued airing throughout the war in Britain until 1949 and is still remembered today. Comedian Tommy Handley utilized his radio broadcasts to keep citizens informed about the war efforts and to keep the spirits of Britain high during this time of hardship. It's That Man Again garnered substantial influence - up to 40% of the British population listened to this show during World War II. The show's last broadcast occurred on January 6, 1949, with Handley passing away only three days later. To further demonstrate the show's influence, two memorial services were held in his honour, with thousands of listeners present at the funeral grounds.

Like the BBC, other broadcasting companies also attempted to keep civilian spirits high and expressed certain opinions on the war. Hosts of radio programs took sides regarding the war; for example, the Voice of Russia, the government's international radio broadcasting station, expressed the country's opinions and eventually targeted the United States. Radio programs were broadcast in up to twenty-three different languages, which widened the appeal of these stations.

Film

The film industry during World War II was an important source of communication to the people on all sides. At this time the cinema was the most popular form of entertainment. It was used to entertain, lift spirits, motivate and inform the audience. This made films an important means of distributing propaganda. Governments used film to influence the public to support the war effort in their everyday lives and to justify their actions. Films were therefore a powerful force which unified nations. New films that were shown in cinemas were often informative of a country's war efforts or the progress of the war itself. Furthermore, the government released additional films that were designed to model the desired human behaviours and actions during the war. These government films often suggested methods of coping with the loss of families and homes and to inform the audience to caution the presence of enemy spies.

Though Television had first been publicly demonstrated in London in 1926, only few people owned television sets because of its price and scarcity. Since most citizens did not own televisions, they relied on cinemas to keep informed and educated. Cinemas of Europe and the United States were, as stated, mostly regulated by governments. Films made during this time period were more realistic than escapist, in contrast to entertainment during the Great Depression that followed the Great War.



Britain

The film industry in Britain during World War II was highly important to the country and had a massive impact on the citizens. Two days after Britain declared war on Germany the government ordered that all public entertainment places to close which included "4300 cinemas". Within two weeks, this was revoked and far from being afraid to go to the cinema the attendances grew steadily. "Cinemas thrived in wartime, and attendance figures surged upward from an average of just under twenty million weekly admissions in 1939 to over thirty million weekly admissions in 1944 and 1945. In a country with a population of forty-eight million people. This is a clear indication of the part that films played in the lives of the ordinary people to either escape reality. Statistics show that "The Wartime Social Survey", conducted in 1943, found that 32% of Britons went to the cinema frequently (defined as once a week or more) and another 38% attended occasionally (defined as once a fortnight or less)". Therefore, more than half of the British population were regular cinema goers. There were many reasons why the cinema was so popular. During this time everybody was employed but food was rationed and not everyone especially women wanted to spend their time in pubs. Therefore, a cinema was a secure and warm place to go to where a person could escape their own homes which often had lodgers living with them and spend their money.

Propaganda



Propaganda was also prevalent in the British film industry movies such as *In Which We Serve*, *The First of the Few*, *Went the Day Well?*, *Pastor Hall*, *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing*, *Journey Together*, *The Silver Fleet* and *The Way Ahead* were made. The film *Miss Grant Goes to the Door*, showed audiences how to recognize German spies, how to hide Ordnance Survey maps from enemies, and how to be of aid to soldiers and sailors – women were encouraged to knit socks and mittens for sailors. This film further reminded citizens that "Cromwell" was the code word to signify the invasion of Britain. Some of the propaganda films made in Britain were sponsored by the government to be featured films with a

message to motivate the audience. Even Though television had been invented, it was in its infancy and very few people had a television set. The only home entertainment for most people was a radio or a gramophone.

Hollywood.

When the USA entered the war on 8th December 1941, it became a big year for Hollywood because they had to arrange their future productions to include both communication and propaganda of the ongoing results of the war. The main focus being that they still wanted to make films of their own historical phenomena and a spread of US culture. The war films made focused mostly on the "desperate affirmation" and the "social tensions" as they wanted to make sure that they explain these objectives. The US war films were good and bad, many of them showed the different lives of the people during the war. The importance of these films and as studies have mentioned, is the influence behind these films. Furthermore, war films showed a lot of information about the war and the life of their families just like the film *Since You Went Away*.

When the US government reviewed the content of the feature films they became more interested in the political and social significance messages in the films. With the growth of the film industry came the growth of the influence of Hollywood celebrities. Hollywood stars appeared in advertisements and toured the country to encourage citizens to purchase war bonds to support their country in the war.

Propaganda

The film industry during war was able to communicate with large audiences. In this way, it was a very powerful source of mass communication and could be used for propaganda purposes. A great deal of explicit and implicit propaganda took place within the film industry. The film industry stereotyped Hitler and the Nazis as cold-hearted with an authoritarian regime. For example, the movie 'Beast of Berlin'. was shot in less than a week and was the first Hollywood film to show the brutal treatment of resisting heroes in concentration camps at the hands of vicious Gestapo officers and this was the first film to depict life in Germany under Nazi Rule.

Following USA entering the war more films were made to reinforce an image of the Nazis as "Army officers as impeccable aristocrats, cold, aloof and efficient, Gestapo men as clever and merciless.... And the German soldier

as efficient, disciplined, and unswervingly patriotic". This was a strong image of a military regime which did not respect the individual or democracy.

Hollywood did not just focus on stereotyping Nazis but also in raising the moral of the people. Movies that depict "war" reinforced the message that the war would not be permanent and that a better world and society would be created in the end. Hence, they were aimed at keeping the moral of the nation high and convincing the people that the war justified and righteous. For example, movies like *The Story of G.I. Joe*, *Dive Bomber*, *'So Proudly We Hail!'* and *'Sahara'* all displayed the humanitarian principles of the allies in contrast to the brutality of the enemy and gave justification to the public to fight the war.

Film historian Arthur F. McClure states that these motivational films had two purposes: "to give unity of purpose for the war itself and to give strength of purpose to the people on the home front". Propaganda not only was used to create an impression of an evil Nazi enemy but also to instil in the people the justification of the war they were in and Hollywood provided this in its film production.

Censorship

Theatre attendance was at an all-time high and Hollywood's most profitable times. For the United States, the propaganda agency that coordinated actions with the film industry was the Office of War Information. The agency worked with film makers to record and photograph wartime activities while regulating its content. The agency worked to display the war in a positive light and censored negative content like pictures of soldier insanity and casualty; pictures of American casualties were banned from being published until 1943.

Hollywood was controlled by the government through the United States Office of War Information (OWI). A branch of this organization, The Bureau of Motion Picture informed Hollywood about key issues which the government wanted the industry to promote. Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black stated in the book *'Hollywood Goes To War': How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* highlighted how "From a mixture of patriotism and the profit motive, Hollywood became a compliant part of the American war machine". The film industry cooperated with the government and included the required ideas within the films but the government was constantly suspicious of Hollywood and kept an FBI investigation of all activities.

In 2008, documents published by the National Archives leaked to the public regarding the involvement of numerous Hollywood celebrities with the Office of Strategic Services during World War II. Some 750,000 documents reveal that famous American public figures were actually spies for the Office of Strategic Services. These celebrities include celebrity chef Julia Child and baseball player Moe Berg, who were hired to gather information required by the US military's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Germany

Films in Germany also played a dominant figure in propaganda during World War II in Germany. The war was a blow to Germans film centres. The film industry in Germany was controlled by the Nazis which was the greatest political party at the time. The Nazis ordered the closure of cinemas but were reopened later under their control. Like the people of Britain and the USA, the German people relied on the industry to acquire news and be entertained.

As mentioned, the film industry was initially the source of information for the nation's citizens. The broadcast helped them understand what was happening in the world. On taking control, the Nazi party ensured that what they wanted to be known. Films depicted messages which provided people with information against the Jews. It tried to explain how Jews were bad people and "why they looked like rats". Spreading diseases, making the nation dirty, ensuring that the populous hated the Jews and collaborate in fighting them.

The nation's values were disrupted where people were expected to follow the iron fist and what was provided on the films rather than what rotated around their way of life and cultural practices. The film industry was filled with lies and negative information meant to destroy people's relations and give Nazi more support. Propaganda was evident in the German film Industry, films such as *Der Marsch zum Führer* and *Menschen im Sturm*. These films showed the nationwide march of Hitler Youth to Nuremberg for the Nazi Party Rally. Also, it showed the justification of Germany's invasion of Slovenia. Fritz Kirchhoff was a director who showed anti-British propaganda in his films. Kirchhoff directed *Attack on Baku* (1942) which was filmed in Germany intending to show messages against the British while including patriotism.

Patriotism was evoked by the means of utilizing the German literature of the 19th century. The nation was already well-read on most of popular German writings of that period. It was the task of Nazi cinema to strategically target the population, in this case the German nation and convince them to visit theatres. The profit from the sales was ever-growing and came in handy for the means of mobilizing the nation. One of the last movies directed during

Government involvement in the music industry

Government agencies pushed music producers to record more patriotic and uplifting songs. The Office of War Information especially pushed for this following the bombing of Pearl Harbor in the United States. In her book *God Bless America*, Kathleen E.R. Smith states that only twenty-seven war-themed songs had reached the top ten charts during the span of the war.

This suggests that these patriotic war-themed songs, pushed by the government, did not sell well. Billboard archives suggest that the public preferred escapist and light-hearted songs. Female singers became more prominent by singing songs expressing the war from the woman's point of view, illustrating feelings of separation and loneliness. Furthermore, as musicians joined the military, larger bands shrunk and often disbanded, creating a trend towards soloists and smaller music groups.

Musician contributions to the war

Many musicians contributed to the war effort. Glenn Miller enlisted in the army to perform in the United States Organization, in which he established the Army Air Force Band. Musician Irving Berlin assisted in the war effort by creating the "This is the Army" musical, raising millions by playing on Broadway and for the US troops.

Impact of the war

Because of the war, fifteen million people "crossed county lines" and brought about the spread of different music styles like country music and African-American styles. Even the war itself influenced the music industry through its technology. Germany's magnetic tape technology became a staple in music production for independent producers after it was captured by the Allies. Magnetic tape sound recording allowed for independent producers to produce high quality sounds without the assistance of major labels.

Dance

The evolution of music brought about new sounds such as jazz and swing music. These sounds translated to new dances. Jitterbug dancing grew in popularity. The Jive, which was taken to England by American troops, eventually became a dance of the International style of Ballroom dance.

ENSA (ENTERTAINMENTS NATIONAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION)

Vera Lynn



Dame Vera Margaret Lynn CH DBE OStJ (20 March 1917 – 18 June 2020), as previously mentioned, was an English singer, songwriter and entertainer whose musical recordings and performances were very popular during the Second World War. She is honorifically known as the "Forces' Sweetheart," having given outdoor concerts for the troops in Egypt, India and Burma during the war as part of the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA). The songs most associated with her include "We'll Meet Again", "(There'll Be Bluebirds Over) The White Cliffs of Dover", "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square" and "There'll Always Be an England".

She remained popular after the war, appearing on radio and television in the United Kingdom and the United States, and recording such hits as "Auf Wiederseh'n, Sweetheart" and her UK number-one single "My Son, My Son". Her last single, "I Love This Land", was released to mark the end of the Falklands War. In 2009, at the age of ninety-two, she became the oldest living artist to top the UK Albums Chart with the compilation album 'We'll Meet Again': The Very Best

of Vera Lynn. In 2014, she released the collection *Vera Lynn: National Treasure* and in 2017, she released *Vera Lynn 100*, a compilation album of hits to commemorate her centenary—it was a No. 3 hit, making her the first centenarian performer to have a Top 10 album in the charts. By the time of her death in 2020 she had been active in the music industry for 96 years.

Lynn devoted much time and energy to charity work connected with ex-servicemen, disabled children and breast cancer. She was held in great affection by Second World War veterans and in 2000 was named the Briton who best exemplified the spirit of the 20th century.

Arthur Askey

Arthur Bowden Askey, CBE (6 June 1900 – 16 November 1982) was an English comedian and actor. Askey's humour owed much to the playfulness of the characters he portrayed, his improvisation, and his use of catchphrases, which included "Hello playmates!", "I thank you" (pronounced "Ay-Thang-Yaw"), and "Before your very eyes". He was short (5' 2", 1.58 m), with a breezy, smiling personality, and wore distinctive horn-rimmed glasses.

Askey served in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in World War I and performed in army entertainments. This would prove an excellent training ground for his future career in showbusiness.

After working as a clerk for Liverpool Corporation's Education Department, he was in a touring concert party, the music halls and was in the stage company of Powis Pinder on the Isle of Wight in the early 1930s before he rose to stardom in 1938 through his role in the first regular radio comedy series, *Band Waggon* on the BBC. *Band Waggon* began as a variety show, but had been unsuccessful until Askey and his partner, Richard Murdoch, took on a larger role in the writing. During the Second World War Askey starred in several Gainsborough Pictures comedy films, including *Band Waggon* (1940), based on the radio show; *Charley's (Big-Hearted) Aunt* (1940); *The Ghost Train* (1941); *I Thank You* (1941); *Back Room Boy* (1942); *King Arthur Was a Gentleman* (1942); *Miss London Ltd.* (1943); *Bees in Paradise* (1944); *The Love Match* (1955) and *Make Mine a Million* (1959). His last film was *Rosie Dixon - Night Nurse* (1978), starring Debbie Ash.



In the early 1930s, Askey appeared on an early form of BBC television—the spinning disc invented by John Logie Baird that scanned vertically and had only thirty lines. Askey had to be heavily made up for his face to be recognisable at such low resolution. When television became electronic, with 405 horizontal lines, Askey was a regular performer in variety shows. In the late 1940's, Arthur Askey participated in a BBC radio show called *How Do You Do* in which listeners could write into the BBC asking for him to come and broadcast a show from their homes, twelve shows were broadcast with Arthur, his daughter Anthea and special guests, as well as a surprise guest each week which was revealed some time throughout the programme.

The theme of each show was worked around the occupation of the family from where it was broadcast. This was broadcast on the *Light Programme*. Only one of the shows was recorded onto acetate discs, which are now held at The British Library. Askey made four appearances on the BBC Radio series *Desert Island Discs* in 1942, 1955, 1968 and 1980 and he shares the record for most appearances on the programme with David Attenborough.

Askey's recording career included "The Bee Song", which was an integral part of his stage and television act for many years, "The Thing-Umy Bob" and his theme tune, "Big-Hearted Arthur" (which was also his nickname). In 1941 a song he intended to record, "It's Really Nice to See You Mr Hess" (after Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess fled to Scotland), was banned by the War Office. A collection of Askey's wartime recordings appear on the CD album *Band Waggon/Big Hearted Arthur Goes To War*.

Gracie Fields



Dame Gracie Fields DBE OStJ (9 January 1898 – 27 September 1979) was an English actress, singer, comedian and star of cinema and music hall who was one of the top ten film stars in Britain during the 1930s and the highest paid film star in the world in 1937. She was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) and an Officer of the Venerable Order of St John (OStJ) in 1938, and a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) in 1979.

Fields made her first stage appearance as a child, in 1905, joining children's repertory theatre groups such as "Haley's Garden of Girls" and the "Nine Dainty Dots". Her two sisters, Edith Fields and Betty Fields, and brother, Tommy Fields, all went on to appear on stage, but Gracie was the most successful. Her professional debut in variety took place at the Rochdale Hippodrome theatre in 1910, and she soon gave up her job in the local cotton mill, where she was a half-timer, spending half a week in the mill and

the other at school.

She came to major public notice in *Mr Tower of London*, a show staged in London's West End. Her career accelerated from this point, with dramatic performances and the beginning of a recording career on His Master's Voice (HMV). At one point, Fields was playing three shows a night in the West End. She appeared in the Pitt production *SOS* with Gerald Du Maurier, a play staged at the St. James's Theatre.

Fields' most famous song, "Sally", which became her theme, was worked into the title of her first film, *Sally in Our Alley* (1931), a major box office hit. She went on to make a number of films, initially in Britain and later in the

United States (when she was paid a record fee of £200,000 for four films). Regardless, she never enjoyed performing without a live audience, and found the process of film-making boring. She tried to opt out of filming, before director Monty Banks persuaded her otherwise, landing her a lucrative Hollywood deal. Fields demanded that the four pictures be filmed in Britain and not Hollywood.

The final few lines of the song "Sally", which Fields sang at every performance from 1931 onwards, were written by her husband's mistress, Annie Lipman. Fields claimed in later life that she wanted to "Drown blasted Sally with Walter with the aspidistra on top!", a reference to two other of her well-known songs, "Walter, Walter", and "The Biggest Aspidistra In The World". The famous opera star Luisa Tetrazzini heard her singing an aria and asked her to sing in grand opera. Fields decided to stay "where I knew I belonged."

In 1939, Fields suffered a breakdown and went to Capri to recuperate. World War II was declared while she was recovering in Capri, and Fields – still very ill after her cancer surgery – threw herself into her work and signed up for the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) headed by her old film producer, Basil Dean. Fields travelled to France to entertain the troops in the midst of air-raids, performing on the backs of open lorries and in war-torn areas. During the war, she also paid for all servicemen and women to travel free on public transport within the boundaries of Rochdale.

Following her divorce from Archie Pitt, she married Italian-born film director Monty Banks in March 1940. However, because Banks remained an Italian citizen and would have been interned in the United Kingdom after Italy declared war in 1940, she went with him to North America, at the suggestion of Winston Churchill who told her to "Make American Dollars, not British Pounds", which she did, in aid of the Navy League and the Spitfire Fund.

She and Banks moved to their home in Santa Monica, California. Fields occasionally returned to Britain, performing in factories and army camps around the country. After their initial argument, Parliament offered her an official apology. Although she continued to spend much of her time entertaining troops and otherwise supporting the war effort outside Britain, this led to a decline in her popularity at home. She performed many times for Allied troops, travelling as far as New Guinea, where she received an enthusiastic response from Australian personnel. In late 1945, she toured the South Pacific Islands.

George Formby



George Formby, OBE (26 May 1904 – 6 March 1961) was an English actor, singer-songwriter and comedian who became known to a worldwide audience through his films of the 1930s and 1940s. On stage, screen and record he sang light, comical songs, usually playing the ukulele or banjolele, and became the UK's highest-paid entertainer. During the Second World War Formby worked extensively for the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA), and entertained civilians and troops, and by 1946 it was estimated that he had performed in front of three million service personnel. After the war his career declined, although he toured the Commonwealth, and continued to appear in variety and pantomime. His last television appearance was in December 1960, two weeks before the death of his wife Beryl. He then surprised people by announcing his engagement to a school teacher, Pat Howson, seven weeks after Beryl's funeral, but died in Preston three weeks later, at the age of fifty-six; he was buried in Warrington, alongside his father.

At the outbreak of the Second World War and over the course of five months, Formby requested to sign up for ENSA, but was denied; Dean relented in February 1940, and Formby was signed on a fixed salary of £10 per week. He undertook his first tour in France in March, where he performed for members of the British Expeditionary Force.

The social research organisation Mass-Observation recorded that Formby's first film of 1940, *Let George Do It!*, gave a particularly strong boost to early-war British civilian morale. In a dream sequence after being drugged, Formby's character parachutes into a Nuremberg Rally and punches Hitler.

According to Richards, the scene provided "the visual encapsulation of the people's war with the English Everyman flooring the Nazi Superman". The scene was so striking that the film became Formby's first international release, in the US, under the title *To Hell With Hitler*, and in Moscow—where it was released in 1943 under the title *Dinky Doo*—it was shown to packed houses and received record box-office takings for over ten months. The critics also praised the film, and the *Kinematograph Weekly* called it Formby's "best performance to date", and the film, "a box office certainty".

Formby's ENSA commitments were heavy, touring factories, theatres and concert halls around Britain. He also gave free concerts for charities and worthy causes, and raised £10,000 for the Fleetwood Fund on behalf of the families of missing trawlermen. He and Beryl also set up their own charities, such as the OK Club for Kids, whose aim was to provide cigarettes for Yorkshire soldiers, and the Jump Fund, to provide home-knitted balaclavas, scarves and socks to servicemen. Formby also joined the Home Guard as a dispatch rider, where he took his duties seriously, and fitted them around his other work whenever he could.

Formby continued filming and his second film of 1940, *Spare a Copper*, was again focused on an aspect of the war, this time combating fifth columnists and saboteurs in a Merseyside dockyard. Cinema-goers had begun to tire of war films, and his next venture, *Turned Out Nice Again* returned to less contentious issues, with Formby's character caught in a domestic battle between his new wife and mother. Early in the filming schedule, he took time to perform in an ENSA show that was broadcast on the BBC from Aldwych tube station as *Let the People Sing*; he sang four songs, and told the audience, "Don't forget, it's wonderful to be British!" Towards the end of 1940 Formby tried to enlist for active military service, despite Beryl informing him that by being a member of ENSA he was already signed up. The examining board rejected him as being unfit, because he had sinusitis and arthritic toes. He spent the winter season in pantomime at the Opera House Theatre, Blackpool, portraying Idle Jack in *Dick Whittington*.

When the season ended the Formbys moved to London and, in May 1941, performed for the royal family at Windsor Castle. He had commissioned a new set of inoffensive lyrics for "When I'm Cleaning Windows", but was informed that he should sing the original, uncensored version, which was enjoyed by the royal party, particularly Queen Mary, who asked for a repeat of the song. King George VI presented Formby with a set of gold cuff links, and advised him to "wear them, not put them away".

At the end of August 1941 production began on Formby's first film for Columbia, *South American George*, who took six weeks to complete. Formby's move to an American company was controversial, and although his popular appeal seemed unaffected, his "films were treated with increasing critical hostility", according to John Mundy in his 2007 examination of British musical film. The reviewer for *The Times* wrote that the story was "confused" and considered that "there is not sufficient comic invention in the telling" of it.

In early 1942 Formby undertook a three-week, 72-show tour of Northern Ireland, playing to troops but also undertaking fund-raising shows for charity—one at the Belfast Hippodrome raised £500. He described his time in Ulster as "the pleasantest tour I've ever undertaken". He returned to the mainland by way of the Isle of Man, where he entertained the troops guarding the internment camps. After further charity shows—raising £8,000 for a tank fund—Formby was the associate producer for the Vera Lynn film *We'll Meet Again* (1943). In March he also filmed *Much Too Shy* which was released in October that year. Although the film was poorly received by the critics, the public still attended in large numbers, and the film was profitable.

In January 1944 Formby described his experiences touring for ENSA in Europe and the Middle East in a BBC radio broadcast. He said that the troops "were worrying quite a lot about you folks at home, but we soon put them right about that. We told them that after four and a half years, Britain was still the best country to live in".

Formby went to Normandy in July 1944 in the vanguard of a wave of ENSA performers. He and Beryl travelled over on a rough crossing to Arromanches giving a series of impromptu concerts to troops in improvised conditions, including on the backs of farm carts and army lorries, or in bomb-cratered fields. In one location the German front line was too close for him to perform, so he crawled into the trenches and told jokes with the troops there. He then boarded HMS *Ambitious* for his first scheduled concert before returning to France to continue his tour. During dinner with General Bernard Montgomery, whom he had met in North Africa, Formby was invited to visit the glider crews of 6th Airborne Division, who had been holding a series of bridges without relief for 56 days. He did so on 17 August in a one-day visit to the front line bridges, where he gave nine shows, all standing beside a sandbag wall, ready to jump into a slit trench in case of problems; much of the time his audience were in foxholes. After the four-week tour of France, Formby returned home to start work on *I Didn't Do It* (released in 1945), although he continued to work on ENSA concerts and tours in Britain.

Between January and March 1945, shortly after the release of *He Snoops to Conquer*, he left on an ENSA tour that took in Burma, India and Ceylon (the last is now Sri Lanka). The concerts in the Far East were his last for ENSA, and by the end of the war it was estimated that he had performed in front of three million service personnel.

Tommy Cooper

Thomas Frederick Cooper was born on 19 March 1921 at 19 Llwyn-On Street in Caerphilly, Glamorgan.

After school Cooper became a shipwright in Southampton. In 1940 he was called up as a trooper in the Royal Horse Guards, serving for seven years. He joined Montgomery's Desert Rats in Egypt. Cooper became a member



of a Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (NAAFI) entertainment party, and developed an act around his magic tricks interspersed with comedy.

One evening in Cairo, during a sketch in which he was supposed to be in a costume that required a pith helmet, having forgotten the prop Cooper reached out and borrowed a fez from a passing waiter, which got huge laughs. He wore a fez when performing after that, the prop later being described as "an icon of 20th-century comedy".

On 15 April 1984, Cooper collapsed from a heart attack in front of millions of television viewers, midway through his act on the London Weekend Television variety show *Live from Her Majesty's*, transmitted live from Her Majesty's Theatre in Westminster, London.

Joyce Grenfell

Joyce Irene Grenfell OBE (10 February 1910 – 30 November 1979) was an English singer, actress and writer. She was known for the songs and monologues she wrote and performed, at first in revues and later in her solo shows.

Born to an affluent Anglo-American family, Grenfell had abandoned early hopes of becoming an actress when she was invited to perform a comic monologue in a West End revue in 1939. Its success led to a career as an entertainer, giving her creations in theatres in five continents between 1940 and 1969.

In 1927 she had met Reginald Pascoe Grenfell (1903–1993), a mining executive and later a lieutenant colonel in the King's Royal Rifle Corps. They were married two years later at St Margaret's, Westminster and remained together until her death 50 years later. They were a devoted couple: Reggie Grenfell looked after his wife's financial and business affairs, and his encouragement gave her dedicated support. After she became a celebrity she unobtrusively made sure that he was never seen as a mere adjunct to her. They were unable to have children of their own.



During the Second World War Grenfell wrote for and appeared in three more West End revues: *Diversion* and *Diversion No. 2* at Wyndham's Theatre in 1940 and 1941, and *Light and Shade* at the Ambassadors in 1942. In early 1942 she met the composer Richard Addinsell. Together they wrote many successful songs including "I'm Going to See You Today" and "Turn Back the Clock", which, in the words of the biographer Janie Hampton, "aptly caught the public mood".

In 1941 Grenfell appeared in her first film role, as the American mother in Carol Reed's short documentary *A Letter from Home*. She made three more films during the war. For BBC radio, together with Potter, she wrote and starred in an occasional radio series called *How to ...*, which ran intermittently from 1943 until 1962 offering humorous advice on how (and how not) to do things. In 1943 she made her only attempt at acting in a stage play: she resigned from the cast of a West End production of the American comedy *Junior Miss* after the first three days of rehearsal, finding that onstage she could only perform looking straight at an audience, and could not "act sideways", although she found some film acting

roles "fun to do".

In the later years of the war Grenfell toured in the UK for ENSA, sometimes with Addinsell accompanying her at the piano. In late 1943 the head of ENSA, Basil Dean, invited the two to tour troop camps and hospitals in North Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere. Addinsell's health was too fragile to permit him to accept, and Grenfell recruited Viola Tunnard, later better known as a close colleague of Benjamin Britten. In 1944 and 1945 they performed in Algeria, Malta, Sicily, Italy, Iran, Iraq, India, and Egypt.

In October 1979 she became seriously ill and died a month later, on 30 November 1979, just before her golden wedding anniversary. She was cremated at Golders Green Crematorium on 4 December and her ashes scattered there. On 7 February 1980 a memorial service was held at Westminster Abbey.

Tommy Trinder

Thomas Edward Trinder CBE (24 March 1909 – 10 July 1989), known as Tommy Trinder, was an English stage, screen and radio comedian of the pre- and post-war years whose catchphrase was "You lucky people!"



He left school early for a job as an errand boy, but by the age of twelve, was on stage. He toured South Africa with a revue company in 1921 and appeared as a boy vocalist at Collins' Music Hall the following year. Minor successes in music hall, revues and working men's clubs followed. By 1926, aged seventeen, Trinder was the star of Archie Pitt's travelling variety comedy shows.

National recognition began to come in 1937 with the revues *Tune In* and *In Town Tonight*. By the time of the Second World War he was one of Britain's foremost entertainers (a position he would maintain until the 1960s) and his shows brought welcome relief during the darkest days of the war.

Ealing Studios signed him up to films during the war. His most famous was the comedy *Sailors Three* in which he, Claude Hulbert and Michael Wilding capture a German pocket



battleship.

He also took straight acting parts in *The Foreman Went to France*, *The Bells Go Down* (a tribute to the work done by firemen in London during the Blitz); and *Bitter Springs* about a family fighting to make a new life in the Australian Outback.

He is believed to have originated "Trinder's Impossibility"— a "bar bet" where the mark is presented with a ten shilling note, partly torn through in two places at right angles to the long side and challenged to hold the two corners of the torn edge and tear it into three pieces. It cannot be done. He was a lifelong devoted supporter of Fulham Football Club and was chairman of the club between 1959 and 1976.

He was a proud and active member of the exclusive entertainment fraternity, the Grand Order of Water Rats, serving two non-consecutive terms as its "King Rat" in 1963 and 1965, respectively. He was also President of the Lord's Taverners cricketing charity in 1956.

Ralph Reader

William Henry Ralph Reader CBE (25 May 1903 – 18 May 1982), known as Ralph Reader, was a British actor, theatrical producer and songwriter, known for staging the original *Gang Show*, a variety entertainment presented by members of the Scouting movement, and for leading community singing at FA Cup Finals.

In 1932, still in Scouting, he anonymously staged his first all-Scout variety show at the Scala Theatre, London. The *Gang's All Here* featured 150 Boy Scouts from London's East End, performing sketches, songs and dance numbers. The three performances were well received by public and critics. The following year *The Gang Comes Back* at the Scala played to capacity houses and the public and press began referring to "The Gang Show".

In 1934 that became its title and Reader acknowledged he was their producer. Besides the Gang Shows, in 1936, Reader wrote and directed a dramatic pageant called "The Boy Scout" with a cast of 1,500 Scouts at the Royal Albert Hall. In the same year, he wrote and played the lead in a feature film called "The Gang Show" which premiered at the Lyceum Theatre, London in April 1937. In November 1937 "a bunch of Boy Scouts", as one writer described them, became the first amateurs to appear at a Royal Variety Performance. They shared billing with Gracie Fields, George Formby and Max Miller.

Through the prewar Gang Shows, Reader became friends with Air Commodore Archibald Boyle, the deputy director of RAF Intelligence. The German Ambassador, Joachim von Ribbentrop, attended the 1938 London Gang Show and invited Reader to visit the Hitler Youth Movement in Germany. Boyle persuaded Reader to become an Intelligence Officer in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve with the rank of Flight Lieutenant, although the diplomatic situation had deteriorated before he could take up von Ribbentrop's invitation.

On the outbreak of war, Boyle sent Reader to France for undercover work, in the guise of running a concert party, for which some former Gang Show members were recruited into the RAF. The show was entitled "Ralph Reader and Ten Blokes from the Gang Show" and, besides allowing Reader to complete intelligence tasks, had a positive effect on morale. On returning to England, Reader was ordered to expand the Gang Shows, while his visits to RAF stations allowed Reader to monitor subversive propaganda which was a concern of the RAF high command. Reader eventually raised twenty-four RAF Gang Show units and two female WAAF units with a total establishment of four hundred serving personnel. The RAF Gang Shows toured every theatre of war, from Iceland to Burma.



By 1944, Gang Show units were estimated to have travelled 100,000 miles and entertained 3,500,000 servicemen. Some of those who served in the RAF Gang Shows would later become well known entertainers, such as Peter Sellers, Tony Hancock, Harry Worth, Dick Emery and Cardew Robinson. For his services to the Royal Air Force he was awarded an MBE (Military Division) in 1943.

Desmond Llewellyn



Desmond Wilkinson Llewellyn (12 September 1914 – 19 December 1999) was a Welsh actor, best known for his role as Q in seventeen of the James Bond films between 1963 and 1999.

With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, a 25 year old Desmond Llewellyn took a break from his stage career and joined the British Army. He was soon commissioned a second lieutenant, serving in the Royal Welch Fusiliers.

Deployed to France with the British Expeditionary Force, he was captured in the massive German attack on France in May-June 1940, and spent the remainder of the war as a Prisoner of War in Germany. He spent some time at Colditz Castle and was

held in Camp Oflag IX-A/Z near Hesse in Germany.

Desmond was fortunate enough to be in a position to participate in acting roles with the other prisoners, putting on entertainment shows, and polishing his acting skills along the way. In 1942, while at Eichstatt, he participated in the world premier staging of Noel Coward's "Post Mortem" with his fellow prisoners. Llewellyn was mentioned in the King's College collection of fellow prisoner Captain Bobby Loder.

Llewellyn was driving alone to a book signing event when his Renault Megane was involved in a head-on collision on the A27 near the village of Berwick, East Sussex. Despite attention from a doctor called to the scene, and being taken by helicopter to Eastbourne District General Hospital, he died shortly thereafter at the age of eighty-five.



Workers Playtime.



Workers' Playtime was a British radio variety programme transmitted by the BBC between 1941 and 1964. Originally intended as a morale-booster for industrial workers in Britain during World War II, the programme was broadcast at lunchtime, three times a week, live from a factory canteen "somewhere in Britain". Initially, it was broadcast simultaneously on both the BBC Home Service and Forces Programme, then from 1957 onwards solely on the Light Programme. For all its 23 years each show concluded with the words from the show's producer, Bill Gates: "Good luck, all workers!"

The programme had the support of the government because the shows were seen as supporting the war effort on the home front. Workers' Playtime was a touring show, with the Ministry of Labour choosing which factory canteens it would visit.

Throughout World War II, Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour and National Service, would appear on these shows from time to time to congratulate the workers and exhort them to greater efforts. When the war ended it was realised that the show had worked, which meant that Ernest Bevin wanted Workers' Playtime to continue to raise the morale of the workers, whilst the government rebuilt Britain and the British economy. The BBC, for its part, was very happy to continue with a show which had proved a national success even if it did mean transporting crew, cable, microphones, two pianos, a producer, two pianists and a group of variety artists up and down the country three times a week.

Variety Bandbox

Variety Bandbox is a BBC Radio variety show transmitted initially in the General Forces Programme and then the Light Programme. Featuring a mixture of comic performances and music, the show helped to launch the careers of a number of leading British performers.

Presented by Philip Slessor, it became a feature of Sunday evenings for more than eight years between February 1944 and September 1952. Hosting duties would later be taken over by Derek Roy.



Amongst those who launched their careers on the show was Frankie Howerd, who first appeared on Variety Bandbox in 1947 following a provincial tour. Howerd was to become a fixture of the show and honed his catch phrase-driven comedic style in these appearances. Tony Hancock also featured on the show early in his career. March 1950 saw the debut of a fortnightly series within the show called Blessem Hall which featured several characters voiced by a young Peter Sellers in one of his earliest performances, alongside Miriam Karlin.

Arthur English, who debuted on the show in 1949, also gained prominence through his broadcasts and was for a time 'resident comedian' on the show, despite his tendency

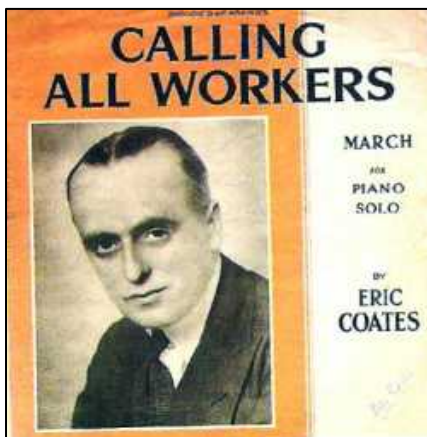


to upset the producers by also including visual gags in his act.

The show also provided Bill Kerr with his first break in the UK whilst Max Wall was a regular performer on the show. Although not a performer on Variety Bandbox, Eric Sykes began as a scriptwriter on the show. As well as comedy Variety Bandbox also featured big band music with the likes of Ted Heath, Geraldo, Ambrose, Woolf Phillips, and Joe Loss all leading their orchestras.

Music while you Work

Music While You Work was a daytime radio programme of continuous live popular music broadcast in the United Kingdom twice daily on workdays from 23 June 1940 until 29 September 1967 by the BBC. Initially, the morning edition was broadcast on the BBC Home Service at 10:30am, with the afternoon edition at 3pm on the Forces/General Forces Programme - and after the war on the BBC Light Programme. Between August 1942 and July 1945, a third edition was broadcast at 10:30pm for night-shift workers. The idea that by playing non-stop popular/light music at an even tempo would help factory workers become more productive.



The programme originally consisted of live music (light orchestras, dance bands, brass and military bands and small instrumental ensembles). In order to make studios more available during the day, it was decided in 1963 that the shows would be pre-recorded (often in the evening or on Sundays). The programme began and ended with its theme tune, "Calling All Workers" by Eric Coates. Many combinations made hundreds of appearances, notably Troise and his Banjoliers, Cecil Norman and the Rhythm Players, Bernard Monshin and his Rio Tango Band, Anton and his Orchestra, Bill Savill and his Orchestra and Jack White and his Band.

Although the programme became very popular with domestic audiences and later with motorists, it was aimed first and foremost at the factories, and strict rules were applied: predominantly familiar pieces, nothing lethargic, consistent volume, avoidance of overloud drumming (which could sound like gunfire), and generally cheerful programmes to which workers could whistle or sing. Jazz was discouraged as, by its very nature, it often deviates from the melody, which had to be clear at all times. The song "Deep in the Heart of Texas" was banned from the show, because of the potential danger of production line workers taking their hands away from their work or banging their spanners on the machinery to perform the four hand-claps in the chorus.

Music While You Work ended in 1967 when the BBC Light Programme transformed into BBC Radio 2. It was revived for a week to mark the BBC's 60th anniversary in October 1982 and then as a regular part of Radio 2 from January 1983 to January 1984. There were two short revivals in 1990 and 1991, and a final one-off programme in 1995. The concept of the programme was evoked during BBC Radio 3's "Light Fantastic" 2011 season with a live broadcast of light music from a factory in Irlam performed by the BBC Philharmonic, reminiscent of Music While You Work and Workers' Playtime. This one-off programme differed from the original series as it was staged before an audience and the items were announced.

Stars in Battledress (SiB)

This was an organisation of entertainers who were members of the British Armed Forces during World War II. In order to get concert parties to forward areas, Stars in Battledress was formed. Talent existing in serving members of the army and ATS was transferred and sent to perform in any location, even on the edge of a battlefield. Colonel Basil Brown, together with Major Bill Alexander and Captain George Black (son of the impresario George Black) started up the organisation. As all the members of the concert parties were in the Armed Forces of Britain, there was no restriction of the location of concerts. Stars in Battledress encompassed all three services.

SIB was directed during the war by Frank Chacksfield. It also included the popular band leader Bert Firman. Stars in Battledress is frequently referred to as an Army "concert party troupe." It was very much more than that and had a considerable number of companies performing at various locations at the same time. Its official title was the War Office (forerunner of the Ministry of Defence) Central Pool of Artistes which was based in Upper Grosvenor Street, London. This was the first war in which there was an official military entertainment unit. Shows rehearsed at studios nearby and went on a shake-down tour of units, including AA sites, in the London area before going out on more extensive tours abroad or in the UK. Only other ranks were allowed to be in the cast. Officers had to be producers.

Charlie Chester



Comedian, Sergeant Charlie Chester, was a major performer and in charge of the script-writing department. He was reputed to have taken a company abroad on the heels of the troops in the D-Day landings.

Among his company was Arthur Haynes who had developed his comic skills while serving in the Royal Engineers, and with whom he did a double act. While near Caen, northern France, Arthur pointed to a trench full of mud and scores of tiny frogs. He told Charlie: "Nothing would get me into that." At that moment, a German plane appeared, raking the ground with its machine guns and Arthur promptly dived into the trench from which he emerged covered in mud and frogs.

Haynes joined Charlie in the BBC radio series *Stand Easy* which developed from the Army show and ran from 1946 to 1949 and Arthur went on to further success including the Arthur Haynes show in the early sixties.

Frank Chacksfield



Francis Charles Chacksfield (9 May 1914 – 9 June 1995) was an English pianist, organist, composer, arranger, and conductor of popular light orchestral easy listening music, who had enormous success in Britain and internationally in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Chacksfield was born in Battle, East Sussex, and as a child learned to play piano and organ. He had appeared at Hastings Music Festivals by the time he was fourteen, and then became deputy church organist at Salehurst. After working for a brief period in a solicitor's office he decided on a career in music, and by the late 1930s, led a small band at Tonbridge in Kent.

At the beginning of World War II, he joined the Royal Army Service Corps, and, following a radio broadcast as a pianist, was posted to ENSA at Salisbury where he became the arranger for Stars in Battledress, an armed forces entertainment troupe, and shared an office with comedian Charlie Chester.

Kenneth Connor



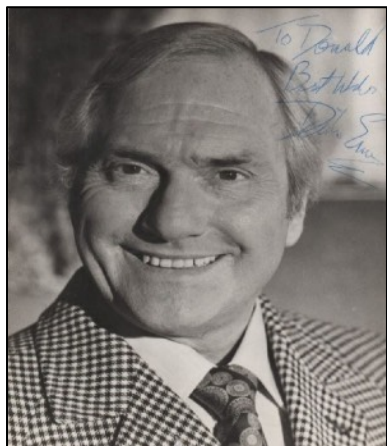
Kenneth Connor, MBE (6 June 1918 – 28 November 1993) was an English stage, film and broadcasting actor, who rose to national prominence with his appearances in the *Carry On* films.

During the Second World War, he served as an infantry gunner with the Middlesex Regiment but continued acting by touring Italy and the Middle East with the Stars in Battledress concert party and ENSA. Earlier in the war in 1941 he was performing as a comedic entertainer in a concert party name the "Tam o Shanter's" as evidenced by a programme from the concert at the Summer Theatre at Felixstowe dated Saturday 5th July 1941.

The cast autographed the programme suggesting a final performance for the concert party with Kenneth signing it "All the best Ken Connor".

While waiting to be demobbed in Cairo, he received a telegram from William Devlin asking him to join the Bristol Old Vic Co. where he gained a solid grounding in the classics.

Dick Emery



During the Second World War he was called up to the RAF and rose to the rank of corporal. However, because of family problems, he returned to London, joining the chorus line of The Merry Widow at the Majestic Theatre. He was recruited by Ralph Reader into the RAF Gang Show to entertain air and ground crew at bases in Great Britain.

At this time he created Vera Thin (the Forces' Sweetheart), loosely based on Vera Lynn, later saying, "I was better in drag than combat gear". After D-Day, his unit toured forward airbases.

During the Second World War he was called up to the RAF and rose to the rank of corporal.

Bryan Forbes

Bryan Forbes CBE (22 July 1926 – 8 May 2013) was born John Theobald Clarke on 22 July 1926 in Queen Mary's Hospital, Stratford, West Ham, was an English film director, screenwriter, film producer, actor and novelist, described as a "Renaissance man" and "one of the most influential figures in the British film industry".



Forbes trained as an actor at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art from age 17, but completed only three terms. He completed four years of military service in the Intelligence Corps and Combined Forces Entertainment Unit, during which time he started to write short stories.

After completing his military service in 1948, following British Equity rules, he was obliged to change his name to avoid confusion with actor John Clark. Forbes began to act, appearing on stage and playing numerous supporting roles in British films, in particular An Inspector Calls (1954) and The Colditz Story (1955)

Nat Gonella

Nathaniel Charles Gonella (7 March 1908 – 6 August 1998) was an English jazz trumpeter, bandleader, vocalist, and mellophonist. He founded the big band The Georgians, during the British dance band era.

After a short spell as a furrier's apprentice, his professional career began in 1924 when he joined Archie Pitt's Busby Boy's Band, a small pit orchestra and touring review band. During his four years with the band, he discovered the music of Louis Armstrong and Dixieland jazz. He transcribed Armstrong's solos and learned them by heart. Beginning in 1928, Gonella spent a year in Bob Bryden's Louisville Band before working with Archie Alexander and Billy Cotton. Cotton's band allowed him to record his first solos and to explore scat singing.

Gonella's reputation grew when he formed The Georgians in 1935. The band took its name from a popular version of the song "Georgia on My Mind" that he recorded for Lew Stone in 1932 and which became the trumpeter's signature tune. The Georgians began as a band within Stone's shows before setting up as an independent unit. He became a headline act on the variety circuit before the outbreak of World War II.

He joined the army in 1941, and was recruited into the Stars in Battledress campaign, touring allied camps in Europe and North Africa. Whilst in Europe and North Africa Gonella served as the personal servant or "batman" to Major Alexander Karet and once the war had ended was offered the position as personal Butler to the Major, but he politely refused to pursue his music career.

He reformed his band after the war, but the economic and musical climate was changing rapidly at that time. He flirted briefly with bebop, acknowledged that it was not for him, and returned to the variety stage during the 1950s, touring with the likes of the comedian Max Miller.

Emanuel Hurwitz



Emanuel Hurwitz CBE (7 May 1919 – 19 November 2006) was a British violinist. He was born in London to parents of Russian-Jewish ancestry. He started playing the violin when he was five years old, and took up a scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music at the age of fourteen; he was much later a professor there. During the Second World War he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps playing the violin in Stars in Battledress.

In
1946,
he



founded the Hurwitz String Quartet. In 1948 he became leader of the English Chamber Orchestra when it was first founded – at that time known as the Goldsbrough Orchestra. He was principal violinist of the Melos Ensemble 1956-1972. Their recordings of chamber music for both woodwinds and strings were reissued in 2011, including the works for larger ensembles which were the reason to found the ensemble, such as Beethoven's Septet and Octet, Schubert's Octet and Ravel's Introduction and Allegro, played with Osian Ellis (harp), Richard Adeney (flute), Gervase de Peyer (clarinet), Ivor McMahon (violin), Cecil Aronowitz (viola) and Terence Weil (cello). He was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 1978.

Janet Brown



Janet McLuckie Brown (14 December 1923 – 27 May 2011) was a Scottish actress, comedian and impressionist who gained considerable fame in the 1970s and 1980s for her impersonations of Margaret Thatcher. Brown was the wife of Peter Butterworth, who was best known for his appearances in the Carry on films. Butterworth died in 1979 and Brown never remarried.

During World War II, Brown enlisted in the Auxiliary Territorial Service, and was the first female performer to take part in Stars in Battledress.

She entered British film as an actress in 1948, notably in Folly to Be Wise (1952), and then appeared in several British television series, such as The

Eric Barker Half-Hour (1952), How Do You View? (1952-1953) and Friends and Neighbours.

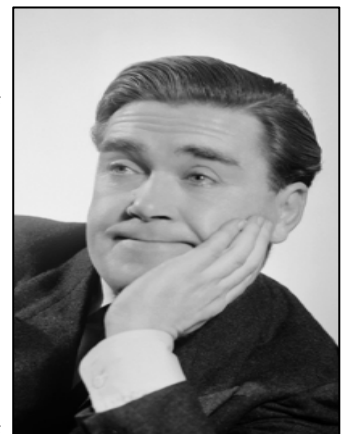
Peter Butterworth

Peter William Shorrocks Butterworth (4 February 1915 – 17 January 1979) was an English actor and comedian, best known for his appearances in the Carry On series of films.

He was also a regular on children's television and radio, and was known for playing The Monk in Doctor Who. Butterworth was married to the actress and impressionist Janet Brown.

Before his acting career started, Butterworth served as a lieutenant in the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm during the Second World War. While flying in an attack on the Dutch coast off Den Helder in 1940 his Fairey Albacore was shot down by Messerschmitt Bf 109s killing one crew member and wounding the other. After a forced landing on the island of Texel he was captured, becoming a prisoner of war (POW). Sent to the Dulag Luft POW transit camp, at Oberursel near Frankfurt, he later escaped in June 1941 through a tunnel. He travelled twenty-seven miles (43 km) over three days, before a member of the Hitler Youth captured him. Afterwards he joked that he could never work with children again. Two other attempts to escape were made during his time there, but he never got beyond the camp grounds. He was subsequently sent to Stalag Luft III, near Sagan, the scene of The Great Escape.

Whilst at Stalag Luft III he met Talbot Rothwell, who later went on to write many of the Carry On films in which Butterworth was to star. Having never performed in public before his imprisonment, Butterworth formed a duo with Rothwell and sang in the camp shows. They delivered a song which Rothwell



called "The Letter Edged In Black". The performance was followed by some comic repartee which, according to Butterworth's account, provoked enough boos and hisses to have the desired effect of drowning out the sounds of an escape tunnel being dug by other prisoners' escape party. After the war, Butterworth kept a photo of the concert party line-up, something which offered inspiration to him when starting a career in acting.

Butterworth was one of the vaulters covering for the escapers during the escape portrayed by the book and film *The Wooden Horse*. Butterworth later auditioned for the film in 1949 but "didn't look convincingly heroic or athletic enough" according to the makers of the film.

Within the same camp as Butterworth and Rothwell were the future actors Rupert Davies and John Casson, who was the son of Lewis Casson and Sybil Thorndike. All five remained very close friends after the war ended and they all appeared on *This Is Your Life* when Butterworth was a subject of the programme in 1975.

Jon Pertwee

John Devon Roland Pertwee (7 July 1919 – 20 May 1996), known professionally as Jon Pertwee, was an English actor, comedian, entertainer and cabaret performer. Born into a theatrical family, he served in the Royal Navy and the Naval Intelligence Division during the Second World War. In his early career he worked as a stage comedian, which included performing at the Glasgow Empire Theatre and sharing a bill with Max Wall and Jimmy James.

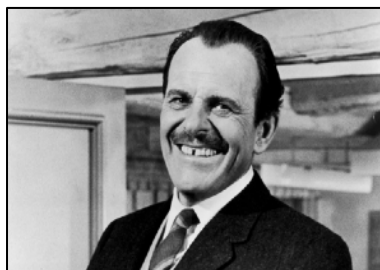


During the Second World War, Pertwee spent six years in the Royal Navy. He was a crew member of HMS Hood and was transferred off the ship for officer training shortly before she was sunk by the German battleship Bismarck, losing all but three men in May 1941. Later, he was attached to the highly-secretive Naval Intelligence Division, working alongside future James Bond author Ian Fleming, and reporting directly to Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Deputy Prime Minister Clement Attlee. In an interview conducted in 1994 and published in 2013, he said, "I did all sorts. Teaching commandos how to use escapology equipment, compasses in brass buttons, secret maps in white cotton handkerchiefs, pipes you could smoke that also fired a .22 bullet. All sorts of incredible things." During his time in the Navy, Pertwee woke up one morning after a drunken night out while in port to find a tattoo of a cobra on his right arm.

After the war, he began to work as a comedy actor on radio." On 15 November 1948, at the Wood Green Empire, he was billed as "The Most Versatile Voice in Radio". From 1959 to 1977, he performed the role of the conniving Chief Petty Officer Pertwee in *The Navy Lark* on BBC Radio. The fictional ship in the series HMS Troutbridge almost shared its name with the real HMS Troubridge whose commanding officer was a relative of Pertwee's who wrote to the BBC to provide details of comic incidents on the ship which were then used in *The Navy Lark*'s scripts.



Terry Thomas



Terry-Thomas (born Thomas Terry Hoar Stevens; 10 July 1911 – 8 January 1990) was an English comedian and character actor who became known to a worldwide audience through his films during the 1950s and 1960s.

Born in London, Terry-Thomas made his film debut, uncredited, in *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933). He spent several years appearing in smaller roles, before wartime service with Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) and *Stars in Battledress*. The experience helped sharpen his cabaret and revue act, increased his public profile and proved instrumental in the development of his successful comic stage routine. Upon his demobilisation, he starred in *Piccadilly Hayride* on the London stage and was the star of the first comedy series on British television, *How Do You View?* (1949). He appeared on various BBC Radio shows, and made a successful transition into British films. His most creative period was the 1950s when he appeared in *Private's Progress* (1956), *The Green Man* (1956), *Blue Murder at St. Trinian's* (1957), *I'm All Right Jack* (1959) and *Carlton-Browne of the F.O.* (1959).

In 1937, Terry-Thomas met the South African dancer and choreographer Ida Florence Patlansky, who went by the stage-name Pat Patlanski, while she was auditioning in London for a partner for her flamenco dancing act. Patlanski was keen to employ Terry-Thomas as a comedian rather than a dancer, and they established a cabaret

double-act billed as "Terri and Patlanski", which was immediately popular with audiences. The couple married on 3 February 1938 at Marylebone Register Office.

The Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) was formed in 1938 in order to provide entertainment to the British Armed Forces; Terry-Thomas and Patlanski signed up in 1939 and during the Phoney War were posted to France, where they appeared in a variety show. From early in their marriage, Patlanski had started having affairs, a move which prompted Terry-Thomas to reciprocate; he made sure he was sent on tour to France where a girlfriend was due to perform, although Patlanski accompanied him on the trip. During the tour, Terry-Thomas ensured Patlanski was sent back to the UK to enable him to continue his affair. On his return to Britain, he continued with his solo variety act, while also acting as the head of the cabaret section of ENSA at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, where he clashed regularly with his counterparts running the drama sections. Terry-Thomas aimed to produce "good shows, sophisticated, impeccable and highly polished".

In April 1942 Terry-Thomas received his call-up papers; he later wrote that "it would have seemed rather rude and ungrateful to refuse"; as a result, he left ENSA and reported to the Royal Corps of Signals training depot in Ossett, West Riding of Yorkshire. Within two weeks of his arrival he hired Ossett Town Hall and staged a concert, which included a freshly written sketch about his feet, which had been suffering in his army boots. After basic training he was promoted to the rank of corporal and he applied for a commission. He was turned down because training had caused a duodenal ulcer, and his hearing was still problematic.

Terry-Thomas continued to appear in cabaret and variety shows while in the army, including at the Astoria Cinema in York, where George Black saw him. Black established the entertainment troupe, Stars in Battledress, which was composed of entertainers who were serving in the forces, and he invited Terry-Thomas to join. In February 1943 he appeared in his first Stars in Battledress show at London's Olympia, where he introduced the sketch "Technical Hitch". This involved him portraying a harassed BBC announcer introducing records that are missing. In order to cover up for the absent records he would use his vocal range of four and a half octaves to mimic the singers; he included "impersonations of Britain's clipped crooner Noël Coward, the African-American bass-baritone Paul Robeson, the Peruvian songbird Yma Sumac, the Austrian tenor Richard Tauber and ... the entire Luton Girls' Choir". The show went on a national tour, with the stand-up comedian Charlie Chester as compere, during which Terry-Thomas refined and polished his act and finished as "one of the most prominent and influential members of Stars in Battledress".

Terry-Thomas, along with his Stars in Battledress unit, travelled through Britain and Europe on a tour that lasted several months. After the tour, and with his demobilisation approaching, he took compassionate leave in order to have free time while still receiving army pay. Terry-Thomas finished the war as a sergeant, and was finally demobbed on 1 April 1946. The ENSA and Stars in Battledress tours of Britain and Europe had raised Terry-Thomas's profile and, by October 1946, he was appearing alongside Sid Field in Piccadilly Hayride at the Prince of Wales Theatre, London. The show was described by Graham McCann as "the West End's biggest money-spinner for years".

Within three weeks of starting his run, Terry-Thomas was invited to appear at the Royal Command Performance on 4 November 1946 at the London Palladium.

Cardew Robinson.

Douglas John Cardew Robinson (14 August 1917 – 28 December 1992) was a British comic, whose career was rooted in the music hall and Gang Shows. Born in Goodmayes, Essex, Robinson was educated at Harrow County School for Boys. He enjoyed acting in school productions and loved the books of Frank Richards, featuring Billy Bunter of Greyfriars and the weekly magazine *The Gem* with the adventures of Ralph Reckness Cardew of St Jim's. In the early 1930s, while at Harrow County School, he wrote for the school magazine, the 'Gaytonian'.

On leaving school, he took a job with a local newspaper, but it folded and he then joined Joe Boganny's touring Crazy College Boys, which opened at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London. However, Robinson knew that he required a more traditional training and went into repertory theatre, where one of his roles was as the monster in an adaptation of *Frankenstein*. It was while serving in the RAF during the Second World War that he created his 'Cardew the Cad of the School' character. Promoted to flight-sergeant and put in charge of the show, Robinson toured France, Belgium and the Netherlands.



After the war, he appeared with the commercial production of the Gang Show in variety theatres. He began in variety and also played the character on radio and stage and later in a film, *Fun at St. Fanny's*. 'Cardew the Cad' became a cartoon strip in *Film Fun*, a children's comic of the period.

Robert Rietti



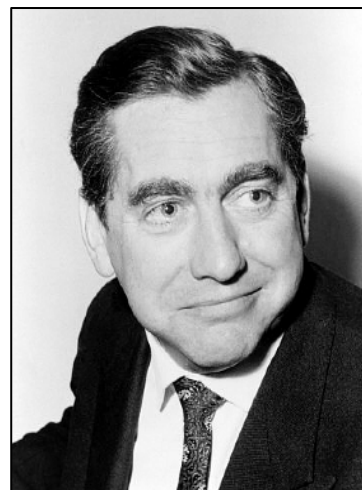
Robert Rietti, OMRI (born Lucio Herbert Rietti; 8 February 1923 – 3 April 2015), was an English actor, voice actor, playwright and recording director of Anglo-Italian descent. With over two hundred credits to his name, he had a prolific career in the American, British and Italian entertainment industries. He was prominent in post-production dubbing both foreign and domestic, often overseeing the English-language dubbing of foreign actors' dialogue. He is known for his dubbing work in the James Bond series, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Once Upon a Time in America*, and *The Guns of Navarone*. Rietti was also active on the stage. At the age of twelve he played Jonathan across Elisabeth Bergner in James Barrie's last play, *The Boy David* (1936), which dramatized the Biblical story of King Saul and the young David. Altogether, in his boyhood years he acted in eighteen films and over one hundred and twenty plays.

His successful career on the stage and in motion pictures was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War. Rietti and his brother, being Italian, were interned at Ascot internment camp. He later joined the Rifle Brigade, but accepted the army's request for him to head "Stars in Battledress", a group of young actors, which included the young Peter Ustinov and Terry-Thomas, who toured England, and were flown throughout liberated Europe, to entertain Allied troops. In 1945, John Gielgud invited him to join his production of *Hamlet* for troops in the Far East. After the war, he returned to work in the theatre, films, radio, and the latest medium, early television.[]

Tony Hancock

Anthony John Hancock (12 May 1924 – 25 June 1968) was an English comedian and actor. In 1942, during the Second World War, Hancock joined the RAF Regiment. Following a failed audition for the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA), he ended up on the *Ralph Reader Gang Show*. After the war, he returned to the stage and eventually worked as resident comedian at the Windmill Theatre, a venue which helped to launch the careers of many comedians at the time, and took part in radio shows such as *Workers' Playtime* and *Variety Bandbox*.

In 1954, he was given his own eponymous BBC radio show, *Hancock's Half Hour*. Working with scripts from Ray Galton and Alan Simpson, *Hancock's Half Hour* lasted for seven years and over a hundred episodes in its radio form, and, from 1956, ran concurrently with an equally successful BBC television series with the same name. The show starred Hancock as "Anthony Aloysius St John Hancock", living in the shabby "23 Railway Cuttings" in East Cheam.



Peter Ustinov.



Sir Peter Alexander von Ustinov CBE FRSA (16 April 1921 – 28 March 2004) was a British actor, filmmaker and writer. He was a fixture on television talk shows and lecture circuits for much of his career. An intellectual and diplomat, he held various academic posts and served as a goodwill ambassador for UNICEF and president of the World Federalist Movement.

Peter Alexander Freiherr von Ustinov was born at 45 Belsize Park, London, England. His father, Jona Freiherr von Ustinov, was of Russian, German, Polish, and Ethiopian and Jewish descent. Peter's paternal grandfather was Baron Plato von Ustinov, a Russian noble, and his grandmother was Magdalena Hall, of mixed German-Ethiopian-Jewish origin. Ustinov's great-grandfather Moritz Hall, a Jewish refugee from Kraków and later a Christian convert and collaborator of Swiss and German missionaries in Ethiopia, married into a German-Ethiopian family. Peter's paternal great-great-grandparents (through Magdalena's mother) were the German painter Eduard Zander and the Ethiopian aristocrat Court-Lady Isette-Werq in Gondar.

Ustinov's mother, Nadezhda Leontievna Benois, known as Nadia, was a painter and ballet designer of French, German, Italian, and Russian descent. Her father, Leon Benois, was an Imperial Russian architect and owner of Leonardo da Vinci's painting *Benois Madonna*. Leon's brother Alexandre Benois was a

stage designer who worked with Stravinsky and Diaghilev. Their paternal ancestor Jules-César Benois was a chef who had left France for St. Petersburg during the French Revolution.

Jona (or Iona) worked as a press officer at the German Embassy in London in the 1930s and was a reporter for a German news agency. In 1935, two years after Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, Jona von Ustinov began working for the British intelligence service MI5 and became a British citizen, thus avoiding internment during the war. The statutory notice of his application for citizenship was published in a Welsh newspaper so as not to alert the Germans. He was the controller of Wolfgang Gans zu Putlitz, an MI5 spy in the German embassy in London, who furnished information on Hitler's intentions before the Second World War. Jona was possibly the spy known as U35; Ustinov says in his autobiography that his father hosted secret meetings of senior British and German officials at their London home. Ustinov was educated at Westminster School. One of his schoolmates was Rudolf von Ribbentrop, the eldest son of the Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, who was the German Ambassador at the time and residing in London.

In 1939, he appeared in *White Cargo* at the Aylesbury Rep, where he performed in a different accent every night. Ustinov served as a private in the British Army during the Second World War, including time spent as batman to David Niven while writing the Niven film *The Way Ahead*. The difference in their ranks—Niven was a lieutenant-colonel and Ustinov a private—made their regular association militarily impossible; to solve the problem, Ustinov was appointed as Niven's batman. He also appeared in propaganda films, debuting in *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (1942), in which he was required to deliver lines in English, Latin, and Dutch. In 1944, under the auspices of Entertainments National Service Association, he presented and performed the role of Sir Anthony Absolute, in Sheridan's *The Rivals*, with Dame Edith Evans, at the theatre in Larkhill Camp, Wiltshire, England.

Frankie Howard.



Francis Alick Howard OBE (6 March 1917 – 19 April 1992), better known by his stage-name Frankie Howerd, was an English actor and comedian.

His first stage appearance was at age 13 but his early hopes of becoming a serious actor were dashed when he failed an audition for the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

He began to entertain during World War II service in the British Army. It was at this time that he adapted his surname to Howerd "to be different". In 1944 he became a bombardier in Plymouth, was promoted to sergeant, and on 6 June 1944 was part of the D-Day effort but was stuck on a boat off Normandy. Despite suffering from stage fright, he continued to work after the war, beginning his professional career in the summer of 1946 in a touring show called *For the Fun of It*.

Spike Milligan.



Terence Alan "Spike" Milligan KBE (16 April 1918 – 27 February 2002) was a British-Irish actor, comedian, writer, musician, poet, and playwright. The son of an Irish father and an English mother, Milligan was born in India, where he spent his childhood, relocating to live and work the majority of his life in the United Kingdom. Disliking his first name, he began to call himself "Spike" after hearing the band Spike Jones and his City Slickers on Radio Luxembourg.

He was the earliest-born and last surviving member of the Goons. Milligan parlayed success with the *Goon Show* into television with *Q5*, a surreal sketch show credited as a major influence on the members of Monty Python's *Flying Circus*.

Milligan wrote and edited many books, including *Puckoon* (1963) and a seven-volume autobiographical account of his time serving during the Second World War, beginning with *Adolf Hitler: My Part in His Downfall* (1971).

During most of the late 1930s and early 1940s, Milligan performed as an amateur jazz vocalist, guitarist, and trumpeter before, during and after being called up for military service in the fight against Nazi Germany, but even then he wrote and performed comedy sketches as part of concerts to entertain troops. After his call-up, but

before being sent abroad, he and fellow musician Harry Edgington (1919–1993)(whose nickname 'Edge-ying-Tong', inspired one of Milligan's most memorable musical creations, the "Ying Tong Song") would compose surreal stories, filled with puns and skewed logic, as a way of staving off the boredom of life in barracks.

During the Second World War, Milligan served as a signaller in the 56th Heavy Regiment Royal Artillery, D Battery (later 19 Battery), as Gunner Milligan, 954024. The unit was equipped with the obsolete First World War era BL 9.2-inch howitzer and based in Bexhill on the south coast of England. Milligan describes training with these guns in part two of *Adolf Hitler: My Part in His Downfall*, claiming that, during training, gun crews resorted to shouting "bang" in unison as they had no shells with which to practise.

The unit was later re-equipped with the BL 7.2-inch howitzer and saw action as part of the First Army in the North African campaign and then in the succeeding Italian campaign. Milligan was appointed lance bombardier and was about to be promoted to bombardier, when he was wounded in action in the Italian theatre at the Battle of Monte Cassino. Subsequently, hospitalised for a mortar wound to the right leg and shell shock, he was demoted by an unsympathetic commanding officer (identified in his war diaries as Major Evan "Jumbo" Jenkins) back to Gunner. It was Milligan's opinion that Major Jenkins did not like him, because Milligan constantly kept up the morale of his fellow soldiers, whereas Jenkins's approach was to take an attitude towards the troops similar to that of Lord Kitchener. An incident also mentioned was when Jenkins had invited Gunners Milligan and Edgington to his bivouac to play some jazz with him, only to discover that the musicianship of the gunners was far superior to his own ability to play "Whistling Rufus".

After hospitalisation, Milligan drifted through a number of rear-echelon military jobs in Italy, eventually becoming a full-time entertainer. He played the guitar with a jazz and comedy group called The Bill Hall Trio, in concert parties for the troops. After being demobilised, Milligan remained in Italy playing with the trio but returned to Britain soon after. While he was with the Central Pool of Artists (a group he described as composed "of bomb-happy squaddies") he began to write parodies of their mainstream plays, which displayed many of the key elements of what would later become The Goon Show (originally called Crazy People) with Peter Sellers, Harry Secombe and Michael Bentine.

Milligan returned to jazz in the late 1940s and made a precarious living with the Hall trio and other musical comedy acts. His first success in radio was as writer for comedian Derek Roy's show. After a delayed start, Milligan, Peter Sellers, Harry Secombe and Michael Bentine joined forces in a radical comedy project, The Goon Show. During its first season the BBC titled the show as Crazy People, or in full, The Junior Crazy Gang featuring those Crazy People, the Goons!, an attempt to make the programme palatable to BBC officials, by connecting it with the popular group of theatre comedians known as The Crazy Gang.

Harry Secombe.

Sir Harry Donald Secombe CBE (8 September 1921 – 11 April 2001) was a Welsh comedian, actor, singer and television presenter. Secombe was a member of the British radio comedy programme The Goon Show (1951–1960), playing many characters, but most notably, Neddie Seagoon. An accomplished tenor, he also appeared in musicals and films – notably as Bumble in *Oliver!* (1968)

After leaving school in 1937, Secombe became a pay clerk at Baldwin's store. With war looming, he decided in 1938 that he would join the Territorial Army. Very short sighted, he got a friend to tell him the sight test, and then learnt it by heart. He served as a Lance Bombardier in No.132 Field Regiment of the Royal Artillery. He referred to the unit in which he served during the Second World War in the North African Campaign, Sicily, and Italy, as "The Five-Mile Snipers". While in North Africa Secombe met Spike Milligan for the first time. In Sicily he joined a concert party and developed his own comedy routines to entertain the troops.



When Secombe visited the Falkland Islands to entertain the troops after the 1982 Falklands War, his old regiment promoted him to the rank of sergeant – 37 years after he had been demobbed.

He made his first radio broadcast in May 1944 on a variety show aimed at the services. Following the end of fighting in the war but prior to demobilisation Secombe joined a pool of entertainers in Naples and formed a comedy duo with Spike Milligan.

Michael Bentine.



Michael Bentine, CBE (born Michael James Bentin; 26 January 1922 – 26 November 1996) was a British comedian, comic actor and founding member of the Goons. His father was a Peruvian Briton. In 1971, Bentine received the Order of Merit of Peru following his fund-raising work for the 1970 Great Peruvian earthquake.

He grew up in Folkestone, Kent. He was educated at Eton College. With the help of speech trainer, Harry Burgess, he learned to manage a stammer and subsequently developed an interest in amateur theatricals, along with the Tomlinson family, including the young David Tomlinson. He spoke fluent Spanish and French. His father was an early aeronautical

engineer for the Sopwith Aviation Company during and after World War I and invented a tension meter for setting the tension on aircraft rigging wires.

In World War II, he volunteered for all services when the war broke out (the RAF was his first choice owing to the influence of his father's experience), but was initially rejected because of his father's nationality.

He started his acting career in 1940, in a touring company in Cardiff playing a juvenile lead in *Sweet Lavender*. He went on to join Robert Atkin's Shakespearean company in Regent's Park, London, until he was called up for service in the RAF. He was appearing in a Shakespearean play in doublet and hose in the open-air theatre in London's Hyde Park when two RAF Police NCO's marched on stage and arrested him for desertion. Unknown to him, an RAF conscription notice had been following him for a month as his company toured.

Once in the RAF he went through flying training. He was the penultimate man going through a medical line receiving inoculations for typhoid with the other flight candidates in his class (they were going to Canada to receive new aircraft) when the vaccine ran out. They refilled the bottle to inoculate him and the other man as well. By mistake they loaded a pure culture of typhoid. The other man died immediately, and Bentine was in a coma for six weeks. When he regained consciousness his eyesight was ruined, leaving him myopic for the rest of his life. Since he was no longer physically qualified for flying, he was transferred to RAF Intelligence and seconded to MI9, a unit that was dedicated to supporting resistance movements and helping prisoners escape. His immediate superior was the Colditz escapee Airey Neave. At the end of the war, he took part in the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. He said about this experience:

Millions of words have been written about these horror camps, many of them by inmates of those unbelievable places. I've tried, without success, to describe it from my own point of view, but the words won't come. To me Belsen was the ultimate blasphemy.

Army Kinematograph Service

The Army Kinematograph Service (AKS) was established by the British government in August 1941 to meet the increasing training and recreational needs of the British Army during the Second World War. Created by the newly established Directorate of Army Kinematography, whose remit was "to be responsible for providing and exhibiting all films required by the Army (at home and abroad) for training, educational and recreational purposes", it expanded over the next few years to become the most prominent film production and exhibition section for a major part of the British Armed Forces.

Pre-1939, it was part of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps based at Aldershot in Surrey, and had been responsible for making and exhibiting training films for the Army. In 1940 it was transferred to Wembley Studios (the 20th Century Fox Studios requisitioned for the war) to continue its activities. In August 1941 it was absorbed and expanded into the AKS. Thorold Dickinson was Head of Production (a role acquired partly through his involvement in the making of the highly successful 'The Next of Kin' in early 1942, a film requested by the War Office and made at Ealing Studios), and he was initially instrumental in recruiting many of those who had been involved in the film industry. The result has been described as "a roll call of many of the finest film technicians whose skills were reflected in the quality of AKS training films" and some fairly well-known names contributed, others developing skills that assisted their post-war eminence; Eric Ambler, Roy Ward Baker, Thorold Dickinson, Freddie Francis, Carol Reed, Peter Ustinov and Freddie Young to name but a few.

The British Army in Italy 1944 Entertaining the troops: Cinema was a popular form of recreation for men and women in uniform. Potential audience members (Corporal F Spink, Driver A J Harvey, Sapper E Thomas, Sapper J. Dymott, Driver J Waite and Private H Gibson) talk with Corporal M.A. Moyse of the Army Kinematograph Service (AKS) at the entrance to the Anzio Ritz, a small dug-out cinema created for Fifth Army troops on the heavily-shelled Anzio Bridgehead in Italy, March 1944.



The Directorate of Kinematography (DAK) started in April 1941 with only two branches. In October 1941, it moved to Curzon Street House, London W1 where it was based for the duration of World War II.

In November 1941 it requisitioned the Curzon Cinema partly to meet its own screening needs, but also as a showpiece cinema for the services and for those of other government departments. By mid-1942 DAK had increased to five branches to deal with the growing demands of the war, covering such areas as policy, planning and production, finance, distribution and exhibition. In 1944 it assumed full responsibility for cinema facilities in North Africa, the Mediterranean area, the Far East and in 1945 it took over the cinema activities of NAAFI and ENSA. The centralisation of activities under DAK meant an increasingly efficient supply of cinema facilities to the Army at war, worldwide.

With the establishment of the AKS and its much improved production resources, the Army's

increased needs could be more efficiently met; production units could be ordered out on location, at home and abroad; there was greater security when making films on subjects that were deemed secret; high-priority films could be rushed through as necessary. What became an enormous output of films gave opportunities to young and relatively inexperienced film personnel which they were unlikely to have received in peacetime, at least over such a short period. For example, Freddie Francis entered as a camera assistant and subsequently covered everything from writing to directing, Roy Ward Baker entered as a production manager and spent most of his time directing, Peter Newbrook – a later president of the British Society of Cinematographers – began as a cameraman and became a director. This was all in the space of a little more than three years.



The films produced covered a broad range of topics and were delivered in a wide variety of styles; from straightforward technical films on a subject such as a 6 pounder gun through to specialised medical films, "careless talk", street fighting, post-war jobs, food in the mess (*The Soldier's Food*, 1942 starring Ronald Shiner), and problems faced by new recruits.

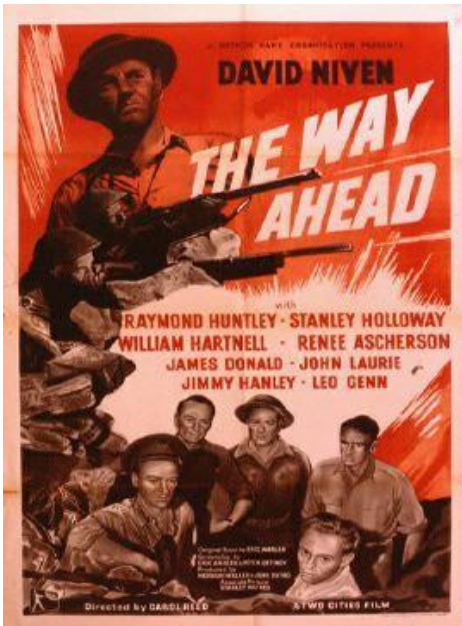
Ronald Shiner (*in 1953 – Innocents in Paris*)

The last topic was dealt with in a film called 'The New Lot'. Made in 1943 for the Directorate of Army Psychiatry, directed by Carol Reed and scripted by Eric Ambler (who in 1944 became the Head of Production at the AKS) and Peter Ustinov – both of whom appear in the film – it detailed the many different problems facing new recruits and the way they coped.

The cast of 'The New Lot' included Eric Ambler as the Bren Gun Instructor, Ian Fleming as the Medical Officer, Raymond Huntley, Geoffrey Keen, John Laurie, Bernard Lee, Bernard Miles, John Slater, Kathleen Harrison and Peter Ustinov. This AKS training film was "lost for fifty years, but was rediscovered by the National Film Archive of India in the 1990's.

Though at the time it did not have the wider impact of something like *The Next of Kin*, it is now considered a minor classic. Its influence was sufficient for it to be used as the basis for the 1944 feature film *The Way Ahead*. Between 1944-1946 a series of morale-boosting films were made on location in the Far East called *Calling Blighty*. These were filmed messages home from members of the "Forgotten Army" and provided a much-needed link between the UK and personnel stationed (and fighting) in places such as Burma, India and Ceylon.





By 1943 there were over a hundred mobile cinema units in the UK and approximately four hundred 16mm ones, but only one overseas, in North Africa. After the Allied landings in Italy and Normandy this expanded enormously, with a consequent demand on personnel and equipment.

Projectionists were trained at the Regent Street and Northern Polytechnics in central and east London, males at the former and females (who were part of the ATS) at the latter. The course was rigorous, lasting six weeks and ending with a trade test after which those qualifying had to undergo a further two weeks' training on petrol generators. Those who were deemed able were sent on a driving course and then on to a cine section.

A mobile cine section typically comprised around seven 16mm units and two 35mm units. The 16mm units operated out of 15-cwt Bedford trucks, carrying two projectors, a generator and a portable screen. The 35mm units used 3-ton Bedford trucks, as the equipment and film were much bulkier and heavier; additionally, the 35mm units had to carry their own collapsible fireproof projection box, owing to the high flammability of nitrate film. The two crew – a corporal and private – endured a nomadic

life, going almost daily to different venues and being "in the field" for up to a month at a time. During this period they not only had to make do with what they found to show their films – damaged buildings, barns and sometimes just the open air – but also depended on their location for food and billet. This sometimes meant going without and on occasions coming under fire.

Always distinct from other filmmaking sections of the armed forces – the Directorate of Public Relations retained control over this area – the AKS continued to provide much-needed cinema and production facilities up to the end of the war and beyond. Post-war it went through several name and organisational changes: in 1946 it became the Army Kinema Corporation (AKC) - retaining the, by then, archaic spelling of Kinema to differentiate it from the ACC, the Army Catering Corps - though camp cinemas bore signs reading AKC Cinema; in 1969 the Services Kinema Corporation (SKC), reflecting its then relationship with all three services; in 1982 the Services Sound and Vision Corporation (SSVC), responsible for all audio-visual services to the Forces.

Wartime songs that inspired some, and entertained others, include:

Vera Lynn's – *We'll meet again*.

*We'll meet again,
Don't know where, don't know when,
But I know we'll meet again
Some sunny day.
Keep smiling through,
Just like you always do,
'Till the blue skies drive the dark clouds far away.*

*So will you please say hello
To the folks that I know,
Tell them I won't be long.
They'll be happy to know
That as you saw me go,
I was singing this song*

*We'll meet again,
Don't know where,
Don't know when,
But I know we'll meet again,
Some sunny day.*

*We'll meet again,
Don't know where, don't know when,
But I know we'll meet again
Some sunny day.
Keep smiling through,*

*Just like you always do,
'Till the blue skies drive the dark clouds far away.*

*So will you please say hello
To the folks that I know,
Tell them I won't be long.
They'll be happy to know
That as you saw me go,
I was singing this song.*

*We'll meet again,
Don't know where, don't know when,
But I know we'll meet again,
Some sunny day.*



George Formby's - When I'm Cleaning Windows.

*Now I go cleanin' windows to earn an honest bob
For a nosy parker it's an interestin' job*

*Now it's a job that just suits me
A window cleaner you would be
If you can see what I can see
When I'm cleanin' windows*

*Honeymoonin' couples too
You should see them bill 'n coo
You'd be surprised at things they do
When I'm cleanin' windows*

*In my profession I'll work hard - But I'll never stop
I'll climb this blinkin' ladder - Till I get right to the top*

*The blushin' bride, she looks divine
The bridegroom he is doin' fine
I'd rather have his job than mine
When I'm cleanin' windows*

*The chambermaids' sweet names I call
It's a wonder I don't fall
My mind's not on my work at all
When I'm cleanin' windows*

*I know a fella, such a swell
He has a thirst, that's plain to tell
I've seen him drink his bath as well
When I'm cleanin' windows*

*Oh, in my profession I'll work hard - But I'll never stop
I'll climb this blinkin' ladder - Till I get right to the top*

*Pyjamas lyin' side by side
Ladies nighties I have spied
I've often seen what goes inside
When I'm cleanin' windows*

*Now there's a famous talkie queen
She looks a flapper on the screen
She's more like eightie than eighteen
When I'm cleanin' windows*

*She pulls her hair all down behind
Then pulls down her, never mind
And after that pulls down the blind
When I'm cleanin' windows*

*In my profession I'll work hard - But I'll never stop
I'll climb this blinkin' ladder - Till I get right to the top
At 8 o'clock a girl she wakes
At 5 past 8 the bus she takes
At 10 past 8 me ladder breaks
When I'm cleanin' windows*

When I'm cleaning windows (1936) was labelled "smutty" by the BBC and was just too risqué for the BBC and banned from the airwaves.

Arthur Askey's - *It's Really Nice to See You Mr. Hess (Thanks for dropping in Mr. Hess)*

*Welcome, little stranger, falling from the sky
Falling like the raindrops or the dew.
Are you out of danger? do you realize
Just what sort of welcome's waiting you?*

*Well, thanks for dropping in, Mr. Hess,
We've told your friends to note your new address.
They've heard you got her safety in Berlin and in Rome,
So put away your parachute and make yourself at home.*

*Thanks for dropping in, Mr. Hess,
Forgive the small announcement in the press.
Had you told us you were coming and informed us where you'd land,
We would certainly had a big reception nicely planned
With a carpet and some streamers and Jack Hylton and his band.
Thanks for dropping in, thanks for popping in, what nice surprise, Mr. Hess.*

*Nice and unexpected, just the way we like,
Strolling in as friendly as can be.
Soon we'll have ol' Adolf, jumping off his bike, calling in to have a cup of tea.
Thanks for dropping in, Mr. Hess,
We trust you haven't left behind a mess.
Perhaps you thought that someone there had taken you for a ride,
Perhaps you thought it safer here than on the other side.*

*Thanks for dropping in, Mr. Hess,
Don't tell us why you came, we'd like to guess.
Perhaps you've such a lot to tell us that you thought we'd like to know,
Perhaps you heard that bonny Scotland was a charming place to go.
Perhaps you even thought George Black might sign you up to do a show.
Thanks for dropping in, thanks for popping in, what a nice surprise, Mr. Hess.*



Gracie Field's - 'Sally'

*Sally, Sally, pride of our alley
Sally, Sally
Don't ever wander
Away from the alley and me
Sally, Sally
Marry me Sally
And happy forever I'll be*

*When skies are blue
You're beguiling
And when they're grey
You're still smiling, smiling*

*Sally, Sally
Pride of our alley
You're more than
The whole world too me*

*The skies were blue
When he met you, Sally
You were his gal
His little pal, so true
You came along
Made life a song, Sally
If he lost you
He wonders what he'd do*

*Sally, Sally
Don't ever wander
Away from the alley and me
Sally, Sally
Marry me Sally
And happy forever I'll be*

*When skies are blue
You're beguiling
And when they're grey
You're still smiling, smiling*

*Sally, Sally
Pride of our alley
You're more than
The whole world too me*



Joyce Grenfell's – 'I'm going to see you today'

*This is our red letter day
It's come at last, you see
Couldn't really be a better day
It's meant for you and me
This day we've been awaiting patiently
It is perfection to me, for.....*

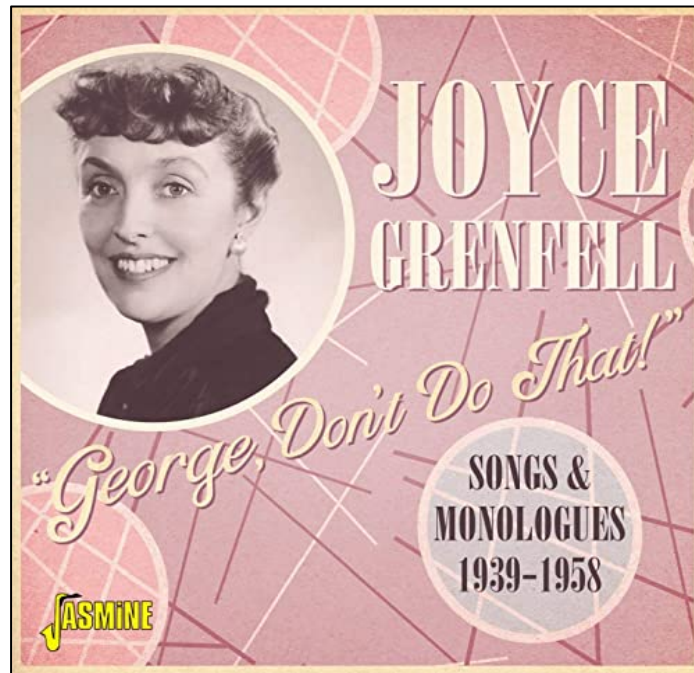
*I'm going to see you today
All's well with my world
And the people that I meet
As I hurry down the street
Seem to know I'm on my way
Coming to you*

*This is a beautiful day
I'm treading on air
And my feet have taken two wings
My heart with happiness sings
I'll see you today*

(Orchestral Break)

*And the people that I meet
As I hurry down the street
Seem to know I'm on my way
Coming to you*

*This is a beautiful day
I'm treading on air
And my feet have taken two wings
My heart with happiness sings
I'll see you today
I'll see you today*



Norman Bambridge
Basildon Borough Heritage Society
October 2021.