

20,000 SONGSHEETS AND COUNTING...

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Work to catalogue the songsheets that make up a key element of the Hudd Music Hall archive started early in 2012 and to date a team of volunteers have catalogued a staggering 20,000 and there are still more to do! Amongst the gems are

Songs celebrating national events such as:

- “Amy” a 1930 song commemorating the England to Australia solo flight by Amy Johnson;
- “That's how I found the Pole”, 1908. A comic ‘patter’ song inspired by Sir Ernest Shackleton's Nimrod Expedition;

Songs which give voice to Britain during the First World War for example:

- Recruiting songs such as “Your king and country want you”, 1914. Sales of the song sheet raised money for Queen Mary's "work for Women Fund" which provided employment for women whose husbands were fighting overseas
- Sarcastic takes on different war experiences, for example: “War Office Cuthbert”, 1918 – a wry look at people who had ‘cushy’ office-based war jobs while other people were up to their necks in the fighting;

Songs which give social or political comments about society including:

- “While London’s fast asleep”, 1896. A serious sad song which outlines the big differences between the haves and the have not’s in the capital city:

“There's a lot of wealth and happiness in London

There's lots of starving misery as well”

And of course lots and lots of innuendo! “With my little wigger wagger in my hand” (1909) a particular favourite!

The team have also unearthed some interesting links to East Anglia, such the prolific songwriter Clifford Grey who led an extraordinary life - writing many popular songs including: “If you were the Only Girl in the World” (1916). In 1920 he went to America and invented a new persona – Tippi Grey – and won gold medals in the 1928 and 1932 winter Olympics as part of a five man bobsleigh team! He then went on to Hollywood and made films between 1939 – 41. He came back to the UK during the Second World War, having joined ENSA (Entertainment National Service Association) and was entertaining in Ipswich in 1941 when a bomb raid brought on a fatal heart attack. He is buried in Ipswich Cemetery.

The work is being carried out as part of the Hudd Music Hall archive project which is aiming to bring the glory days of Music Hall and Variety alive by cataloguing and organising the unique archive and collection of memorabilia assembled by the Suffolk based actor, performer and writer Roy Hudd. Commenting on the archive Roy Hudd said: “I have been collecting the archive for over 50 years. Each item, each song sheet or poster tells a unique story which is as relevant today as when it was performed. I want the archive to live and to be enjoyed; this project is making that happen.”

The project is being led by Suffolk based heritage consultants Oakmere Solutions Ltd on behalf of Suffolk New College and is being supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The cataloguing work is being undertaken by a team of up to 19 volunteers recruited and trained by Oakmere Solutions with support from the Suffolk Records Office. Oakmere director Dr Sharon Goddard said: “The project has benefitted enormously from the contribution of a dedicated, knowledgeable and highly efficient band of volunteers who have worked tirelessly to discover the rich resources of the archive and begin the process of making these available for use and enjoyment”.

The project will make the catalogue available on-line and will hold an exhibition in the late summer. Planning to make the archive more publically available in the future is also underway.