

The "Meteors" 1961-1968

My name is John Forster and I've been playing the guitar professionally for over forty years. Since I stopped playing in 2001 I now concentrate on teaching and repairing the guitar, so I thought it time for me to write down some of the many funny experiences I've had on the music scene.

In 1961 I joined a local bunch of lad's from Maryport and we formed "The Meteors". We never made it to the big time and we were never very famous, but that didn't stop us from having a great deal of fun together.

This is a small collection of the many funny adventures I've had with my music and I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I've enjoyed, both writing it and experiencing it.

Also I would like to dedicate this book to the memory of Ted and Barry who are sadly no longer with us, and of course without them both, "The Meteors" would not have been born.

Sincerely

John Forster

The Rise and Fall of The *METEORS*

The 4th of September 1943 was to be one of the best days of my life, I don't remember too much about it because I wasn't very old at the time, in-fact I'd only just arrived into the world at the "Cottage Hospital" in Maryport. I'm sure it must have been a great relief to my mother Vera who'd been fighting with me for the past nine months. My dad John, had been fighting too, but his problem was with those German chaps. I wasn't too well after making my debut via the stork, and it appears that I'd managed to catch some mysterious horrible disease on the way. I was covered from head to toe in large red blobby things, which in turn were covered with bandages, so it must have been something very nasty indeed. It turned out that it was nasty enough for my dad to be called home on compassionate leave because I was to be christened straight away before I expired after only just arriving. So!, I was duly christened "John Bell Forster" and everyone waited for the worst to happen. But it didn't! It seemed like someone upstairs must have changed their mind and didn't want me to be returned so fast, and thank goodness I wasn't!

I recovered from the *whatever* it was I had, and apart from the large scar down my leg where something was removed, I made a full recovery. We never found out the name of the whatever, but it doesn't really matter because I probably couldn't pronounce it anyway!

It seems that after all my early downs and up's I was, after all destined to go forth in life and become, not only a little older, but eventually a "METEOR". Although I would have to wait a year or two before that great event took place, eighteen to be exact, but I new I could live with that!

Right then! As soon as I can walk and talk I'd better make a start I thought! Apparently by the way, the *talk* part came well before the walk, and as my wife often reminds me, I haven't really stopped talking since.

I assume I did the entire nappy bit, the potty training, plus all the other things that toddlers do, so I needn't go into details about all that stuff.

I grew up at 21 Fleming Square in Maryport where we lived next door to a Mr Joe Porthouse with whom my dad had been apprentice too as a joiner. I called him Do-Do for some reason! I can't remember too much about him other than he was a tall friendly looking fellow who always seemed to wear, the then obligatory flat cap, but apparently he was to treat me just like his own nephew and he was very good with me.

My earliest recollections on the music side would be of me tying a piece of string onto the doorknob, then pulling it with one hand while twanging a tune out of it with the other hand. I would do something very similar too, only this time with the aid of some knicker elastic. I'd fix it to the chair arm and gradually move away as I plucked it. This worked pretty well most of the time providing that you didn't overdo the length of the pull, otherwise you ended up being knocked over by a flying chair, which did not amuse the recipient of the missile as it usually ended up with plasters or bandages and a sore behind for me. When I ran out of tunes to play, or got fed up with being felled by the chair, I discovered that this set-up could also be used as a catapult. All went extremely well until this action was abruptly halted when I once tried to aid the flight of our budgie!

"I was amused, but the budgie wasn't"! Although he did nearly break the sound

barrier,,,,, and his neck!!!

Another one of my favourite musical experiments was to fill jars and bottles with different amounts of water, and using my mothers best wooden knitting needles I would knock three shades of stuffing out of them while playing all my favourite songs like “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star”, “Bah! Bah! Black sheep” and Beethoven's 5th! That worked well too until I got caught and all knitting needles were confiscated, indefinitely! It may seem a little primitive, but at least I was making some sort of music, and I'm sure it must made a contribution to my keen sense of pitch and rhythm. By the time that I was eight, J&V Forster had had enough of my bottle bashing etc., so how on earth could they stop me from making all this din? They wouldn't dare to confiscate my knickers elastic for fear of prosecution!

How they did eventually stopped me was by arranging for me to have violin lessons. Yak!

My parents would often take me to many of the local concerts and recitals to encourage, and broaden my musical outlook, as they would tell me on a quite regular basis. My musical outlook was that, while I did love the violin, I preferred it more if someone else was playing it. Although it was and still is one of my favourite instruments, I didn't really want to play one. So, taking my thoughts into account, and much deliberation on their part, I was duly sent for violin lessons. My cousin Eileen was to be instructed on the pianoforte by “Miss Eva (Knucklebasher) Nicholson” a very popular teacher who lived in Lawson St, although I don't think she was too popular with some of her pupils, but she did get some very good results from them nevertheless. And so as not to be outdone, little John would be plonked on the fiddle.

Yak! Again!

I wasn't old enough to leave home just yet, even though I'd tried to. My mother once told me that I'd packed a case one-day and said that “I was off“, because I'd had enough and nobody loved me. I didn't realize until she asked me where I was going to that I hadn't anywhere to go. The only place I knew apart from our house was Do-Do's, and that was only next door so that was no good, so I would just have to grin and fiddle it somehow!

At the tender age of 11, I came to the conclusion that after 3 years of tuition on the



violin I was not to be Maryport's answer to Yehudi Menuhin. I'd made an appearance a few times at Camp Road Junior School, playing the tambourine in Miss Lister's [Back row on left] percussion band. I also played the violin on concerts and churchy type events and the likes. Even though I could read the music OK and was pretty *nifty* with fingers I just could not get my violin to sound like a violin. Essential qualifications for a violinist I thought. The sound I produced was more akin to doing

something extremely naughty to a cat with a corkscrew. “You must use vibrato,” my music teacher would say. No! I've got that slightly wrong, he would scream, “Use Vibrato boy, Flat of the bow, Vibrato, Vibrato”. The aforementioned ‘HE’, was Mr Harry Horseman my music teacher, a man that could put the fear of God into me at 500 paces, and not the kind of man you would like to meet on a dark night, or even a light night. I don't know if it was because he was large or because I was small, but he looked

like a giant to me, beard and all. If ever there were to be a Henry VIII look-alike competition old Harry would have won hands down. He looked more like Henry VIII than Henry VIII. To make matters worse as well as having private lessons off this monster, I also had the pleasure of him when I was promoted to Netherhall School. He was one of those teachers who called everyone Boy! "Come here Boy" "sit Boy" I uses to hate being called Boy, mind you I've been called a lot worse than that since then but that's not the point. I remember standing outside Harry's house in Fleming Square with my music in one hand and my fiddle in the other, knees knocking, cold sweat, cold hands, and cold feet. You could see my knees knocking because I used to wear short trousers at that time. Yes! There I was ready for my weekly ordeal with mad Harry. For anyone who is not familiar with the terminology regarding the violin and vibrato here is a brief explanation. Vibrato is achieved by holding the violin under your chin and tight onto your left shoulder. In theory you should now be able to wobble your left hand while playing a note thereby making the note more pleasant on any ears that are within striking distance. In theory too you should also be able to take your left arm away leaving the violin suspended with no visible means of support. In practice however, owing to my slight stature at the time, when I took my left arm away my fiddle would sort of plummet in a downward direction. This left me with two options to overcome this problem. The first was to play the fiddle against a wall where a slot could be cut, which would allow me to place the neck into it. This would not look good if I were playing with the London Philharmonic I thought! The second option was to pack it in. After much deliberation and taking every thing into consideration i.e., how could I transport my own personal wall, would it be better to build a wall for each venue, how much were bricks, cement, sand, all sorts of problems could arise.

It looked like my only choice was my second option, so I gave the classical scene a miss, politely told Harry where to put the bow, and hung my fiddle up forever. A sad day for Harry, but a great relief to music lovers.

This gave me the opportunity to take a more serious interest in my second instrument the guitar. This serious interest in the guitar had an even more serious problem, which could easily be resolved by me actually owning a guitar. I must have twiddled on at my parents for months for one but every time I thought I was winning I still got a No! Wait until your birthday. This was January and I was born in September, I couldn't wait that long for one. If only my dad had got frisky nine months earlier I would have a guitar by now. What was this poor boy to do? Well! If I couldn't buy one the next best thing was to make one. This idea came from the handicraft teacher at Netherhall School, a nice man called Mr Telford. I think he sparked off my interest in the guitar because he owned the most gorgeous guitar I'd ever seen. I wanted one just like that and I wanted it, now!

It was a large Jazz guitar that I would have gladly swapped all my stamp collection for. The sound it made equalled its good looks, and in the lunch break he would allow me to go and listen to him play, and even have a go on it, if of course my hands were clean. We would talk a lot about my interest in guitars and music, for until now I thought a guitar was a guitar and an electric guitar was an electric guitar and an acoustic [*cow stick*] was for hitting cows with, but now thanks to Mr. T, I'm learning musicians talk. Wonderful thing this education! So with the help of Mr. Telford, a few bits of wood, nails, saw and glue, we set about making a guitar. I thought it shouldn't take long to knock one up, so off I knocked. I can't remember how many man and boy hours it took to make this masterpiece but I do recall how long it took to fall to pieces. Three weeks, two days, five hours, seven minutes, GMT. The poor thing was never in any shape, form, or size related to the one that Mr. T owned. The only slight resemblance was that they were

both made out of wood, although that was only detectable by using a magnifying glass or better still an axe. After this disaster I moved to another disaster area namely my Dad's workshop to attempt another "Mission Impossible" with a Hobby's guitar kit. Everything you needed to make, (as the advert said), "A Professional, Fully Working, Guitar for the serious student, complete with full instructions". This is for me I thought, I may not be professional yet but I was fully working and could be serious in the right situation if prompted, and I was prompted quite often. So, off went the £10 and a week later came "The Kit". "Now for it, lets find the bench and get cracking". The bench by the way used to disappear from time to time and become completely invisible to the naked eye, a phenomenon that still exists in my workshop today. Spooky isn't it? Anyway when the bench finally made an appearance the box was opened and all the various bits were spread out and lined up on parade for full inspection. This didn't take us very long for it consisted of four pieces of plywood for the top bottom and sides. A longish bit of wood for the neck that looked like a Long John Silver cast off, a small piece for the bridge, (or even a toe for the wooden leg), a length of wire for the frets, six strings and six wooden tuning pegs. Oh yes I nearly forgot, two sheets of paper, which contained the "Full (idiot proof) Instructions". I think that the strings were included in the kit just to give you a sense of hope on the off chance that you actually completed this pack of bonfire fodder. Apart from the fact that it came in a box, or was it a coffin? It bore a strange resemblance to how my first guitar ended up; scrap. Should we attempt a guitar? or would a one-legged coffee table be less challenging. In the end we plumped for the guitar simply because we didn't know any one-legged coffee drinkers at the time, come to think of it, I still don't know any.

So off we whittled, off came the shavings, sawdust and splinters, on went the plasters, and out came the tweezers to remove the afore mentioned splinters, and out came my mother to complain about the strange noises and slightly blue language. Eventually the day arrived to put the strings on and play the "Hobbies Guitar" for it also came with "idiot proof" instructions on how to fire this monster up. After a few dismal attempts to get it started I decided that it should be fired in the direction of the nearest refuge tip, or perhaps burnt at the stake would suit it better. This was definitely a "Joan of Arc" model, and should be dealt with in the same way. So we cremated it and spread the ashes on my copy of the Hobbies "idiot proof" instructions.

After this second attempt I came to the conclusion that I wanted one that was real, the like of what the big boys played.

There was an advert in most of the newspapers that read something like "You too can play skiffle, just like Lonnie Donegan". Lonnie Donegan, my hero, I'll join. Only £12.19.6p including free chord book and song sheets, or I should say sheet. This is for me I thought, No! Not again my Mother thought, so the next few days had me trying to persuade my mother to let me have another early birthday present and the next two Christmas presents all rolled up together, 'cos I wanted it now! I found it a lot easier working on my mother than on my Dad because he was the originator of the proverb, "you can't get blood out of a stone". My mother finally gave in and the guitar was sent for. Three agonising weeks went by but at last it arrived, my first real guitar. "That's a rather small box for a skiffle player" I thought!. I know Lonnie Donegan isn't very tall but I didn't think he was a midget. Maybe it has a detachable neck, or maybe the neck was on a hinge, or maybe even Lonnie Donegan has a detachable neck or hinge. Could it be that they would send the other half-next week? No, surly not, I was getting rather too carried away in the excitement so the only way to really find out was to open the box. I undid the string, ripped off the paper and unveiled its contents. My own personal

Lonnie Donegan skiffle guitar with song and chord sheet was before me. My dream had come true there it was in its full glory, all 2ft 6" of it. The top was made out of a bright yellow plastic, and the sides were made out of an even brighter, but red plastic. The frets were plastic; as were the tuning pegs, but at least the strings were made from nylon. They must have run out of plastic when they made those. Would I need a pair of sunglasses to play this, or should I sue them for misrepresentation i.e. selling an overgrown ukulele off as guitar. If I sued them I could buy a proper guitar that didn't require dark glasses. Nevertheless, even though it was rather on the petite side, it did look more like a guitar than anything else I owned, or had tried to make.

I would practice before I went to school, practice at lunchtime, practice before tea, during tea, after tea, all night, every night, seven days a week. I'd even practice before I practised. What dedication I thought. What an idiot my parents thought. It was rather like having a Trappist monk as a son. Practice makes perfect I'd say. Practice makes a ***** awful noise would be the reply.

Eventually, after months of dedication plodding through my free Lonnie Donegan song and chord book, I was making noises that resembled tunes, much to anyone who was in earshot's delight. This of course included me, because I was the nearest of all.

It didn't seem to take me too long before I needed new material, so I bought "The Lonnie Donegan song book Vol.2". This would take me to something a bit more taxing, and on to such well known numbers as "Cumberland Gap", "Dead or Alive", "Ain't no more Cain on the Brazos", and loads more memorable melodies. What should I tackle first? Dead or Alive? No, that sounds like a comment my mother would make regarding my condition in the morning, "Ain't no more Cain on the Brazos"? No, I'm not sure what a Brazos is either, sounds like one of those things that girls wear, No!, I couldn't have any of that, well not yet anyway. "Cumberland Gap"? Yes, that's the one, keep it local I thought, maybe John Peel used to sing it, or maybe he wrote it, who knows? Who cares? Anyway enough of this, back to the story. As you may well imagine I soon came across a few minor problems with my new bright yellow/red mean machine, six of which were the strings. I soon found out that the strings on my guitar were a lot different to the strings on a normal guitar. All of mine were the same thickness and two foot long, while a normal guitar had strings that were all of a different thickness' and were three foot long. Fate had struck me down once more. But then my Daddy came to the rescue with the aid of one of his wartime souvenirs, which turned out to be a length of parachute cord. Some Daddy's brought medals back, or helmets, uniforms or knives. Not mine, he must have had a premonition in 1943 that in the mid 1950's his little boy would be in dire need of parachute chord. We found out that if you took the outside layer off a length of parachute cord, it was made up from even smaller pieces, about the thickness of guitar string size pieces. Even though the inside cords were all the same thickness, you definitely couldn't snap them. That must have been a very reassuring thought while jumping out of a Lancaster bomber during the war. Still it did do the trick. The para-strings worked pretty well really, but the main problem that arose was that they cut into your fingers something rotten and made them bleed, so we were back at the Elastoplasts stage as referred to on page three, only this time without the tweezers, but still as painful. So anyway, my claim to fame is that I did learn to play



Guitar on a parachute cord.

I would set off to school most days with a plaster on at least two of my fingers due to the amount of practice I had done. The more practice I did, I would of course have needed more plasters. I know for sure that we spent more money on plasters than we ever did on strings. This was a tad inconvenient but at least it stopped me from picking my nose, and it also helped keep the bullies at bay, because in those days they didn't usually pick on a semi-injured potential guitarist, especially when he had plasters on each finger.

Grandfather Jack Bell, who was a winding, engine-man at the old long gone pit at Risow. He would sit me on his knee and bounce me up and down like he bounced the cage up and down the pit shaft while singing endless chorus's of "Ride a Cock Horse" and something about a "Bumping Galloping Major". I suppose that must have had some effect on my timing, and even a greater effect on my backside. Another theory is that I am a direct descendant of one of the lesser-known Masai Warrior Rhythm Aces reincarnated to save the world from the after effects of an evening of Folk songs and Sea Shanty's. No! On second thoughts even though I may be nearly the right height my suntan is a bit on the pale side so I'll settle for the "Ride a Cock Bump" version.

I didn't like school much; in fact I didn't like school at all. I was a rather skinny lad and I also had a bad lithp, tho of courthse I was thometimeths picked on becauthse of it. I wasn't the sporty type at all, and I certainly wasn't the right build to play rugby. I think some of the sports teachers thought you were a bit on the Willie Woofter side if you didn't like getting your teeth kicked in three times a week all for the good of the school. Masochists! While on the subject of my school days, the only thing I did enjoy apart from the music was PE. Now if you recall my previous comment on my slight of build, PE would not be an obvious choice to be my second favourite subject. Why PE? Well it was one subject I could wangle out of thanks to my keen musical ear. For some reason the school had a very big thing going at the time with, of all things, the making of xylophones. God only knows why, but they did. Did the teachers have an illegal export business going on, shipping xylophones to some deprived third world country?, perhaps the local timber supplier was in the same lodge? Or did someone need an awful lot of sawdust and shavings for his chickens? Who knows? I never did find out.

Hundreds of the damned things must have been made in one shape or another, and believe me there were some very odd shapes being made. Shapes that would put a smile on any little girl's face. They would have small boys cutting slices off pieces of wood trying to tune them in, so another xylophone could be born. Tommy would be trying to make a C#, while Jimmy was going for an F, Billy was going for a P, and the teacher once again was going for the first aid box and the Valium. I was eventually put in charge of this venture because I seemed to be the only one that could actually cut a piece of wood to the correct musical pitch without removing an essential part of the anatomy. I don't think that I was made chief wood tuner because I was a genius, it was more like I didn't really have much competition, and in fact I didn't really have any competition. The final straw came after two of the cloth eared carpenters thought that the only way to make a Bb was to hit it on the head with a stick.



The wood that was wasted must have made a considerable contribution to the situation that the rain forests are in today. Anyhow, it seemed that I was the only one that could save the face of the school and keep the endless supply of xylophones in production. Besides, and even more important, I could skip nearly any lesson by lending my services

to the woodworking department, and I did make full use of this facility. Any PE or games lesson would find me in the workshop behind the stage whittling away merrily at a piece of mahogany. I never enjoyed school at all, in-fact I can't remember ever learning anything of any importance other than how to make xylophones. *Has anybody the faintest idea why we had to continually learn about logarithms?* Thought not!

Would you believe that every afternoon for at least six months, was taking up with the entire school picking stones from the field so that it could be seeded for the new playing field! That was no way to treat a potential super-guitarist; I could have damaged my fingers, forever! But the good news was that I didn't, and the other good news was that I was free from school, and now I could learn something useful at last!

The next 12 months or so were taken up with more serious study. Every spare moment I had would find me playing the guitar. My only ambition was to be a guitarist, so first of all I learned to play the three common chords in all of the keys, and I soon found out that most of the song at the time only had three chords anyway. That is something that really hasn't changed all that much. Three chords and I was on my way. I didn't know where, but at least it was a start. After many hours of practice and frustration I began to work out songs with four or even five or more chords in them, this was very advanced stuff you know. I can't remember having any problem playing a rhythm to a song once I'd mastered the chords. I found that the rhythm came naturally as though I have an in-built sense of timing. I put this down to some extent, not only to my previous musical ventures but to my

My best friend at the time was a lad called Geoffrey Allot, he was a tall blond curly haired gangly soul with not a lot up in the brains department. His father was one of the boss men at the now long departed "Bata" shoe factory in Maryport. The family had moved to Maryport from Tilbury, so he sawta tawked a bit funny like. He didn't talk efforts with my first prodigy. I was 1000% sure of no competition from Geoff in the world of music. I must add that he did get a job as a painter at the Bata factory and was last seen painting the inside of a chimney with whitewash. I rest my case!.

Geoff and family, including "Bruce" the magnetic sex machine returned back to London so that gave me more time to study the guitar, and keep a check that all my body parts were still intact, and not in the dog.

There was one local guitar teacher in Maryport who lived just around the corner but I could nearly play as well myself. The only reason he taught guitar was because he had one, and not for his ability to play one, so I decided to pass on this and learn myself the hard way. What a trouper, more like what a pillock. I would play along to records, or the radio, TV, oh yes we had a TV, it may not have worked, but we had one, mainly to keep a proper the like of what we did. His Dad was an ex army storm trooper or something, and he could put the fear of God in you at five miles just by blinking an eye, you could actually hear it close, so you can imagine what effect he had when he was standing right beside you. As for Geoff's mother, well I could hardly understand a word she said half of the time. She talked at the speed of light, if not slightly faster. Einstein said that nothing travels faster than light, but he'd never met Mrs. Allot. They also had a Bull Terrier called "Bruce". "Bruce" what a name for a dog. Mind you that's not the name I called it most of the time. It was one of those magnetic type dogs that would stick to your legs or any other part of your anatomy that it could reach, and then it would commence doing a fertility dance at great speed, it was in-fact about the same speed that Mrs. Allot talked. Bruce was as strong as an ox, and weighed about the same. It was built like a brick outside toilet, and really took some shaking off once it had you in it's grasp, I think it really liked the shaking off part the best, because I'm pretty sure

that this mutt could smile.

I befriended this slow walking, slow talking disaster probably because I thought that his height would deter any would be villains of the time, who could be lying in wait to pounce on a future superstar, and hold him to ransom for the chord sequence to Summertime Blues. My plan must have worked because I never was held to ransom. Geoff, to say the least wasn't very musical, so I couldn't pick his brains at all. In fact you couldn't pick his brains with a pin. He did however persuade me to try to teach him a few chords. Try, and few, are the two prominent words that stand out like Chapel hat-pegs regarding my vase of flowers on but it looked good. The best choice of pop music was on radio Luxembourg, which is why I only learned to play half of the songs, because the other half would be lost in a cloud of assorted squelches and crackles. If you struck lucky and had the use of an ear trumpet, and providing the weather was fine, it was, eventually possible to decipher the songs. That was an art in itself, and most of the time it was more difficult than playing them. I would play along with anything at all; I just had to play. Sometimes I would practice until my fingers were cut on the metal strings. Was this dedication or should I be joining Geoff painting the inside of chimneys?

After learning a few scales I found it not too difficult to play and make up melodies. If I heard a tune I could more or less get the gist of it without a lot of effort. I still can't understand why or how it is possible to do this. It's got to be a gift from the great bandleader upstairs. No I haven't got Glen Miller in my loft.



Both my parents were quite musical. My mother played the piano even though we didn't have one, and my father played the French horn and the cornet, which unfortunately we did have. He didn't play them both at the same time though, even if from time to time it sounded like he was. Before the war he used to play the cornet in the "Solway Silver Band", that's him on the top row, third in from the right. After the war

he played the French horn in the local amateur operatic orchestra, so for six months or so while the operatic society was running, we, and any poor soul coming within earshot of our house would be subjected to a musical extravaganza containing a mixture of "Songs from the shows" on the horn, and the latest top 10 on the guitar, and on top of that my mother was usually telling one of us to "put a sock in it". I assumed that the putting in of the sock would be referring to the horn rather than the guitar, because there are more places to stick it in, on a horn. What a mad house it must have been. It was a pretty effective combination though and it did chase away any lingering mice that may have strayed too close. Did you know that its possible to stuff 29 mice into a French horn???, providing of course you alternate their heads and bums and bung the other end up. No! Oh well, at least you have learned something today!

I never fancied playing the French horn for two reasons. Firstly I didn't fancy my face going the same colour as a constipated beetroot while trying to force some wind into it, and secondly, there was something slightly off putting about having to stick your hand up its back-end while blowing into the opposite end. It was like page 36 in the Karma

Sutra, so someone told me. Anyhow you can't chew a mouthful of chips and blow the French horn, or even an English horn at the same time, but you can on a guitar. Another plus for the little devil!

Initially, I don't think my parents were too keen on me taking up the guitar as seriously as I did, and playing, as my mother called it "*monkey music*", "if that's singing, I'm a monkey's uncle" was another of her favourite sayings for most of the pop music. What the monkeys had to do with anything who knows! I do know the Monkey's became very famous some years later, but she couldn't have known that in 1958.

Mind you, she did have a crystal ball, or was it a glass eye!!!!

The time. 1960. The place. The loosely named and constructed workshop behind my father's electrical shop. I had just discovered that if I were to stick a rubber suctioned contact mike onto the body of my £5 acoustic guitar, and then connect the other end to the gramophone socket on one of the old valve radio's, I would have an instant electric guitar at a very low cost. Unfortunately, the very low cost was matched by the very low volume, and a very loud hum. I could have coped with these two factors in reverse, i.e. loud volume, small hum, but the order in which they did arrive was not at all acceptable, so something had to be done about it. If the volume of an electric guitar is no louder than an acoustic guitar, it rather defeats the whole object of calling it an electric guitar. This drove me to my Mark II model. The ultimate noise machine was nigh. I found that by connecting the output of one radio to the input of another would result in more volume than I could cope within the confines of a small, but perfectly formed workshop. Yes, I had more power than ever but only for the short time it took to blow the mains fuse in the shop. Who needs an electrical shop without any electricity? That's what my Dad shouted, or it might have been some other words, xxxxxxxx **** xxxxxxxx lots of words really. "If you see sparks don't touch it, you can't see electric you know", I was told by my father. Very sound advice indeed!. "*I could see electric*", I said, it was jumping all over the place until the fuse went and blew. Once things had cooled down and the smoke and sparks had cleared, the fuse was revitalised thanks to our trusty box of Pifco fuse wire, only 6d a card, 5-15 and 30 amp. If you must blow fuses you couldn't be in a better business than having your own endless supply of fuse wire. We had no money but boy did we have fuse wire.

Once you had got used to the continuous hum and frequent explosions it wasn't too bad for my 2nd attempt. One other small problem I encountered with this set up was that as well as amplifying the strings, it would also amplify the body of the guitar, thus making it the first guitar with a built in rhythm unit. It may have sounded like someone kicking a damp cardboard box with a pair of size 12 wellies, but I thought it was well before it's time. Another thing I couldn't cure was the fact that every time I played certain chords, various things would move around the workshop. An A7 chord for instance would move the boxes of screws on the second shelf something rotten, while an E minor would shift the complete shelf and most of the surrounding articles. Strange how the vibrations of a Bb made me want to go to the toilet, I must have a Bb bladder or something. An Eb chord produced something I don't want to talk about at all. My favourite chord though was a diminished chord. When played at a reasonable volume, it not only caused the hooks in the pegboard to shake and thereby deposit their assortment of miscellaneous pre-packed items all over an already untidy workshop, but it would also invariably cause my mother to shout downstairs things like, " John, I think your guitar's a bit out of tune", or " You wont find a tune with that *thing* in it ", or some other reference to the aforementioned monkeys again.

After a while it got rather tedious repairing fuses and having to continually pick up

boxes of screws and other un-guided missiles that had been launched by the din I was creating, so I was banished from the DIY amplification department, for the time being anyway.

After a while I managed to buy a second, or even third hand “Hofner” Senator guitar. Brand new they were 28 guineas, so I suppose I must have paid around £15, or even 15 guineas. Oh yes, guineas, that was when we used real money and not the, by far easier system that we use today. We must have been clever to work out the old £sd or Lsd.

I should add for the benefit of any young person who may have had the misfortune to read this saga, that the Lsd. I refer to, was the currency and NOT the substance that unfortunately is probably readily available in your local high street. It did have a pick up and a couple of controls, [*I'm back to the guitar now by the way*] but they didn't concern me too much, because as I'm sure I may have mentioned, I didn't have an amplifier did I?

It was a nice old guitar though and much better than any of my previous pieces of firewood. I made a lot of progress with my music on that guitar, mainly because it was a real one that was made by a real qualified luthier who had probably had years of training, and anyhow it was the only one I had. I must have made more than a lot of progress, because seeing as how I was now working in the shop for money, albeit not a lot of money, I was allowed by my mum and dad to get into the realms of hire purchase and buy a new, well newer'ish guitar and an amplifier.

Buying musical instruments in 1961 wasn't very complicated, in fact you only had two choices, first choice was to head for J.P.Dias in Carlisle, second choice, well there wasn't one, so with my old Hofner in hand, or I should say in case, off I went on the train to see what sort of deal I could get from Mr Dias.

When you went upstairs it was like entering Aladdin's cave. It was packed full of musical things that you'd only seen in catalogues and weren't sure if they really existed. Oh yes, they did really exist, and for a price, old J.P. would let you have one, or seeing as how he was such a nice man and liked to do you a favour, he would try to sell you two. After spending all day and all my money on the deposit, I chose an “Hofner Futurama” guitar, with case, and a Watkins 15-watt amp, with handle, all fully guaranteed until you got home. That was a carrying handle, not a starting handle by the way. I didn't realise how heavy they were until I was half way back to the station when I felt sure that my arms had grown at least another six inches. I encountered a similar feeling when I left the station in Maryport to go home to 109 Crosby St. The gear was suddenly scraping on the ground. Maybe my arms *had* really grown longer, or could they have heightened the pavement while I was in Carlisle ??? I didn't care too much because I now owned my very own professional set up.

Now I was ready for anything, once my arms had shrunk back to size.

I suppose it must have been in early 1962, I was in the workshop practicing the latest Shadows recording of “Wonderful Land” on my recently purchased “Hofner



Futurama” guitar and “Watkins” 15watt amp. [*That's me on the left with my new gear in our shop*]. The Shadows always use lots of echo, and you really needed it for the middle section of Wonderful Land, but I didn't have any echo or reverb and would have given my right arm for a “Binson” or a Watkins copy cat, well maybe not an arm, but I would have considered a leg. I even considered selling my amp for an echo unit, but that would sort of defeat the object a

little. While I was giving it the full 10 watts through my mighty Watkins amp, I must have caught the attention of a passing rhythm guitarist, who promptly started knocking on the door of my rehearsal rooms, all right then, workshop. Behind the knock was a friendly little soul clad in motorcycle look-alike gear and wearing a large smile and an even larger crash helmet. The matching smile and helmet were tastefully complimented with a some sort of black PVC over-trousers and a not so black jacket, and boots which sported a selection of various colours and an even larger selection of various brown stuff that you didn't want to know about. Goodness knows how he ever got into this space suit, and an even bigger mystery was how he ever got out of it, that is if he ever did!! He must have had to give himself a lot of notice before venturing to the toilet. I thought the Martians must have landed on an very old ex-*[anything that could possibly rattle, rattled,]* army motorbike, and he was about to say those immortal words, "Take me to your leader", but instead he said "That sounds good to me mate, even if you don't have an echo, do you want to join our group"? Yes! "Where do I sign", I said to the little Martian. You don't have to sign anything mate, just be at the youth club in the Wesleyan chapel rooms on Back Brow at 6.30 and we'll have a bash. This was my first close encounter with John Voce, who was to turn out to be, not only my best friend, but also my best man when I got married. He was a smashing lad, who would do a good turn for anybody, anytime. I don't remember hearing anyone ever saying anything bad about him, except when he played the wrong chord, which wasn't very often. Later we all affectionately called him la'rl Ted. You probably wouldn't have thought of this but the name la'rl Ted came about because of two main reasons, firstly his middle name was Edward, and secondly, he was a bit short in the height department.

Clever stuff what!!

That same evening saw me trundling up the hill with my gear in each hand. At least if they sack me it's all-downhill on the way back, I thought! It also crossed my mind that if I was in such great demand, somebody else besides me should be carting this gear up Wood Street. Anyhow mustn't grumble, the audition must go on.

Nervous? Me? No, petrified was more like it. I was soon put at ease though by the rest of the bunch. The bunch being; Alan Lyall, a drummer with not a lot of drums. Barry Nixon, a bass player with no bass or amplifier. John Voce, a rhythm guitarist without an electric guitar or an amplifier, and Jerry Bell, a vocalist without, you've guessed it, no microphone or amp. Was I needed in the band because of my musical ability or simply because I was the only one with an amplifier??? I never really found out!

Barry had the best excuse for having no bass gear, for up until my arrival on the scene Barry had been the lead guitar, but because of my extensive knowledge of chords, [Barry knew 10 and I knew 14ishh] he was demoted to bass guitar, which I believe is nearly on a par with being a drummer. [Only joking Alan]. This was a blow from which I'm sure Barry never really fully recovered. Also in the middle of this merry throng was Reg Nixon, Barry's dad, who was to turn out not only to be our guide and mentor, manager, musical advisor, agent, and supplier of beverages etc, etc, but more importantly, the man with the transport. The transport being by the way, a builder's pick up truck. A very dirty builder's pick up truck that we had to clean out every time we used it. I'm sure there will be further references later to the mean machine as this saga gathers momentum.

We would often practice either at Barry's home in Seaton or in Reg's workshop in Wood St, Maryport. Both of our regular rehearsal rooms had there own peculiar character and charm. The peculiar character in the workshop was Reg, and the charm was....!! Well there wasn't any. The workshop was usually heavily laden with building type things, shovel's and pick's, sand and cement, bags of plaster, hammers, nails, wood,

bits of pipe, various sizes of boxes packed with various sizes of extremely useless rubbish and last but not least, Barry's grandmother. Most of which (including the grandmother) we had to manhandle out of the way before we could get the gear set up. I can still picture the old dear standing at the top of the steps just when we were in mid swing and shouting, "Barry!!! Barry!!! Come on your teas gonna git cold, an will yer turn them gitar things doon a bit, am tryin' ta lissen ta Mrs Dale ont' wireless", and Barry would reply in dulcet tones, "yes dear grandmamma, I shall be with you immediately, if not before", he didn't really say that but it roughly translates into something like it. Notice the roughly?

Yes, many a good time was had in the old workshop, trying to do our thing amongst the debris. I'm sure my mother thought I'd got a part time job as a builder on my return from a session in the Wood Street studio, because I was all nice and polished when I went out to play what was assumed to be a clean and wholesome way of putting an evening in, but on my return I would more often than not be covered with sand and plaster, and other unknown substances that my mother called PAGG.??? Don't ask me!!, but anything that was hard to remove, was PAGG ??? 'cos mi mam said so!! So there!!

From the word go we all got along very well. This was probably due to the fact that we all or nearly all had the same sense of humour and were quite mad. It's a pity that the Goons had already been born, because we would have made good candidates when we got into full swing. If we couldn't be the Goons then we would have to be something else, and that something else was The METEORS, or as it was to appear later on our personalised notepaper "The METEORS GUITAR GROUP" Members of the Musicians Union. That would show everyone that we meant business. The later came much later though as there were more important things to buy than personalised notepaper at that moment in time. Things like drums, amps, bass guitar, plectrums, oh yes and learning songs etc.

We all seemed to have the same tastes in music (and Chinese food), and we didn't argue much as to what to play, mainly because we didn't know much. Mind you what we wanted to play and what we could play weren't necessarily the same, but we did our best.



The Nixon family lived at Sunnysides, Seaton. There was Daddy Nixon, (Reg). Mammy Nixon, (Mary), and bass Nixon, Barry, oh yes and one other thing lived there, Reg's pride and joy his saxophone. For fear of getting sued by some long lost Nixonian I shouldn't comment too much on Reg's sax playing, but the noise he could manoeuvre out of this implement had to be witnessed at first hand. I can only describe it as indescribable. You could

almost taste it. Rather like a three-year-old gorgonzola and cabbage water stew, only worse. It was rumoured that Reg and his sax had a part time job extracting confessions from suspected felons of the day. It was also rumoured that after hearing Reg and the sax thing, that while on a trip to Blackpool, two nuns confessed to trying to ride a moped up the Big Dipper dressed as Geisha girls, wearing kiss me quick hats and singing "We shall overcome".

At one time doctors were inundated with people wanting wax put in their ears. What power that sax could wield!

I'm just repeating what I heard you know, so these stories could be a little exaggerated, if not a total fabrication. It all depends on if you ever heard Reg play.

Joking aside, although Reg may not have been the worlds greatest sax player he was OK and certainly helped to get the Meteors into orbit.

Now Reg was known to partake in a beverage or 10, so he kindly offered to put himself

out of his way and look for some work for us. He relentlessly soldiered on and visited every pub and alehouse this side of the Atlantic, twice, and eventually got us a prime booking in the Brewery House pub in Little Broughton. Live on stage at 8.30. By this time we must have had a repertoire of at least ten songs and instrumentals. That would be 3½ numbers per spot X 3 spots = 10½ songs. We were ½ a song short, we'll make something up, nobody will notice. What I do remember about this gig was that I was absolutely petrified, I wouldn't stand up and play, I hid behind the speakers all night, what a wimp. When we got paid at the end of the night I also remember thinking what an easy way to make a few bob, we played all night and got 5/- each. I was in the Brewery House a couple of years ago and was rather disappointed to see that there was no brass plaque on the wall to commemorate the birthplace of the Meteors. *I suppose somebody must have pinched it and put it on E-bay!!!*

Another prime venue Reg negotiated was the Crown Inn in Senhouse St Maryport, or as it was better known "Minshaws". A pub that had it's singing room out of sight at the back, with no neighbours on either side and no closing time. Nobody seemed to enter and leave on the same day, or even in the same week. I think you got beamed in and out somehow, or maybe it had a secret tunnel.

Like most pubs at time it had a piano in the corner with a matching piano player. Singalongs were the order of the day and there would be no shortage of singers to get up and have a go. Reg's cousin Jackie Nixon would sometimes play the piano and we would join in. Eventually we became quite good at it and earned ourselves quite a reputation for backing singers and being able to play almost anything the singer would come up with. This was quite unusual for a pop group to do, and it's where I really learned how to play. You didn't know the tune, and half the time they didn't know it either, so between us we managed to churn something out that could quite possibly resemble whatever it was they were trying to sing in the first place. Did you follow that??

If you did then try this.

I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realise that what you heard is not what I meant.

That's enough of that, back to the story.

There were some very good singers and entertainers around and because, nearly every pub had a piano, a lot of good local talent was always available. There was never a shortage of volunteers to man the microphone or even *woman* the microphone.

Talking about good local talent, it was about this time when I had my first taste of the same. Barry's girlfriend at the time was the local vicars daughter, called Midge. I can't remember why she was called Midge, I don't think she was christened Midge, and she didn't look like a midge, although she did seem to dart around a lot. Anyway the Midge had a friend, who for the sake of this saga I shall refer to as Petunia, (*mainly because she did ask me not to mention her real name*), and I rather had the hot's for *Petunia*, lots of hot's in fact, if you get my drift. Now both of the girls used to knock around with us and help carry the gear and scream when we played, just like real fans were supposed to do. They would rip our shirts off, and cut off locks of our hair and camp outside our houses and..... No they didn't really, the last paragraph is a complete fabrication and resembles nothing like what happened, I just thought I would fantasise for a couple of minutes. Good harmless fun, and all in the mind.

That was the problem; it *was all in the mind*. I wanted to have a share of the good harmless fun but preferably somewhere else. The somewhere else turned out to be just a couple of streets away. Because *Petunia*, of 'I had the hot's for' fame, lived not too far away, and seeing as I did rather fancy her a lot, I did eventually pluck up the courage to

take her home one night. It must have been a rare treat for the *Petunia*, because apart from my mother and my cousin Eileen, [*who don't really count*], I'd never been alone with a fully grown female woman before, so waiting for me to find first gear must have seen like an eternity for *Petunia*. I should have been issued with L-plates. I'm not saying *Petunia* had had a bit more experience than me, but if she'd only snogged one, it was 105% more than I had. The nearest I'd been in the suction department was with a Jaffa orange.

Anyhow, after a lot dithering about, and me talking a load of old cobblers, as you do on a first date, it came to pass that I had my first kiss with *Petunia* in the back lane of Mill Street. I can still remember it as if it were only yesterday. If this is what heaven is like I'll join now please, book me a ticket. It tasted salty, very special, very nice, but very salty like a bag of Cueto's [pronounced Kwaito's] chips. This in no way has any reflection on the quality, execution, overall content or marks out of 10, because at that time the marks out of 10 were standing at 57. Maybe everybody's kiss tasted like that, I certainly didn't know. In fact not only did I have my first salty kiss, but I had my second one too, only with rather less salt this time, and just like a second portion of Cueto's chips you start to get used to it. A time interval of approximately 4 minutes came between snog 1 and snog 2. This is how I first came to find out about the technique of breathing through my ears while creating as much suction as possible through the mouth, and curling your toes at the same time. A rather similar operational principal, to the sludge pump I believe, without the toes of course. I suppose it could have been something to do with the salt content that may have added to the sustainability of my first close encounter, because I think I read somewhere that salt does something to your metabolics, at least I think that's what it said. Who cares?? I was having fun.

Did you know that the combined suction power of a first kiss is equal to the amount required to remove the lino from a 20-year-old kitchen floor. Absolutely awesome when you think about it!

Anyway! Just as I was getting into overdrive for the third marathonic smacker, who should land up at the end of the lane but my Dad. I might have been out of breath and near a state of collapse, but my *Dad* turning up at crunch time. What a nerve, what a liberty, what a pity. He greeted me with a, "and what do you think your up to me lad?" At least he said *what* and not *where*. "Nothing dear daddy" I replied, "I'm just seeing *Petunia* home". "Well you can see her home from here, in-fact you're leaning on the back of it, come on get yourself moving". I took his reply as meaning *not* to carry on, but to say goodnight and point my size 7's in the direction of 109 Crosby St, and quickly. Quickly turned out to be another 20 mins because I hadn't quite lost all of my momentum, and it does not do you good to switch off without putting the boiler out first. So off I eventually trotted, with something to think about other than guitar chords and Meteor type things. Apart from the obvious thoughts that I pondered that night, was the rather worrying notion has to how long would it be until my lips went down. I bet I could have played three trumpets and a saxophone all at the same time that night, and still have room to whistle, if I'd only had the strength.

Anyhow down they did go, [not both at the same time though] and up I did go to my small four poster bed, cuddling my little teddy bear, drinking my hot chocolate, and thinking of *Petunia*. What a pretty site. I called it a four-poster bed by the way, not because we lived in the Forster country mansion, but because the holes in the mattress were covered with four posters. Actually there were only three posters, but who's ever heard of a three-poster bed???

I must have made a lasting impression on the *Petunia* that night, an impression that lasted her all the way until the next day, because that was it, finito, all over, don't call

us. Spurned with my first attempt I found solace with the thought that it could have been my dad's actions that night and nothing to do with me at all. I must ask her sometime, that is of course if after reading this she ever speaks to me again.

As the great bard himself once said "tis better to have loved and lost, than to play bass guitar in a country band". Oh yes he did!!

The next day brought the merry band together again in Reg's rehearsal room, *Petunia 'n' Midge* an'all. We were still friends even if I wasn't allowed to touch, but I could still sneak a peek with one eye.

[If you alternate the viewing eyes fast enough it still gives a full image you know!!]

Anyhow once we had shifted the sand and cement again, and Barry's granny, we could, eventually get quite a lot of songs done in one night. The rehearsal would usually start with some serious work like, "who knows the middle bit for that Joe Brown thingy"? Or "What's the chords for I remember you"; anybody got a plec? Or one cry that was more regular than a dose of sennapods, was "Who's been eating the beans again". No one would ever admit to that one. We would all use the, innocent till proven guilty ploy, but Barry and his taste for the oriental cuisine was always first in the firing line, no come to think of it, he wouldn't be would he, if you get my drift.

Alan, the drum man, had a varied selection of two speeds, and two styles you could choose from. One tempo was stop, and the other was go. And go he certainly did. 90 mph in second gear. As for the choices of the two styles, The first one went thump, thump, thump, four beats on the bass drum and various clatters on whatever he could find to clobber. The alternate style Allan offered was four beats on whatever he could find to clobber, with of course various embellishments and accompaniments on whatever he could reach. Then came the next minor details. Once we got him fired up and working on all four cylinders, we couldn't stop him speeding up, and then when we suggested for him to slow down a bit please, he would grind to a standstill, and shout "well you did say slower, eh". Allan's favourite two words, "eh", and "yer wot"

To be fair though, Alan was slightly deaf in one ear and a little hard of hearing in the other, so if you consider this, plus the fact that at that time his sense of rhythm was to say the least, a little on the lacking side, we did have a major problem.



Alan's hearing problem was probably caused by the bags of flour he had to hump about at Jos' Brews, the local wholesale grocers in Kirby St. Most of the flour seemed to end up either in Alan's ears, or on his glasses. If you ever called to see him at work, he would make an appearance from behind the shelves, flour in hand and ear, looking like Scott of the Antarctic, with matching sub-zero look-alike glasses. What a frightening sight for a young lad to witness! Still, with a little encouragement from the boys and a lot of choice words, plus the acquired knack of not listening to him while he was playing, or even at all, we eventually steered Alan and his tempos somewhere in-between wherever it was they both happened to be. This of course could have been anywhere, but it was usually approaching the point of no return. I hasten to add that the in-between I referred too before, was not the in-between the Elizabeth and Senhouse docks, even though one member of the band who shall forever remain nameless had suggested it, but he did play the bass!

Alan did however become a very competent drummer and singer and the Meteors would not have been the same without him, or his van. *Besides, we didn't know any more*

drummers.

Somehow it didn't take long to sort enough numbers to play live on stage, or more like, live in pub if Reg' had his way. Now we started to get real bookings, with real money, playing at proper dances and clubs. This made a change because in the past Reg had usually negotiated the fee in draft bitter, i.e. approximately 10 pints per hour and all the crisps we could eat. I was the only non-drinker in the band so it was not a good deal for me, except for the crisp part. As the saying goes, man cannot live by crisps alone, [not even the Smiths ones with the extremely salty blue one], so the money was a much better deal for me, even though the rest of them seem to spend their share on draft bitter.

One of our first bookings on a proper stage with lights and lot's of people was a charity concert in aid of Maryport Boys' Club. It was held in Netherhall School on Sunday October 28th 1962 at 7.30, admission 2/-, programme's 3d.

What a memory I must have!! No, I still have the programme!!

There were a host of other acts on the bill including Dearham Silver Band, Alicia Willis singing "Come back to Sorrento", Arthur Robinson doing a monologue, and Ken and Winifred doing whatever Ken and Winifred's did???. That concert was the only time I'd ever enjoyed being in Netherhall School. I'd nothing against the school as long as I wasn't in it at the time. I think I may have mentioned earlier that given the choice I wouldn't have joined at all, at all, at all. Anyway, a great and profitable night was had by all, except for the acts, who didn't get paid because it was for charity, so they only had a great night.

About three months later we were in a competition with some of the aforementioned turns. This time it was in another place I didn't care for much, my old junior school in Camp Road. The reason I didn't like it is the same reason given nine lines above.

"Cock O' The Border" was the name of the show which was organised by Border TV to show off all the local talent. We only entered because we thought it involved a different kind of local talent. Those who were chosen to appear on the TV show were The Ellenborough Jolly Boys who had raised loads of money for various local charities, The Dearham Borders, who were a dance troupe. Alec Penn who taught me at Camp Road School, unaccompanied folk singer. Mr Magic, Maurice Thompson, and everyone's favourite Sid Wilson and Harold Clemence playing on two pianos. John Holmes was the compare and he had the task of consoling the losers, or I should say, those who came second. Those who came second were us, The Maryport Male Voice Choir, The Ian Foster Trio. Alicia Willis. Stephen Bedford. Kenneth McMinn, and Barry Best. Robbed we were, but we couldn't have come second with a better bunch!!

Our star booking in 1962 was when we started to play was the Hippodrome in Workington, affectionately known as the "fleapit". This gig apparently came about because the leader of the resident Hippodrome dance band, a chap called Bobby Key, heard us playing in some pub or other, or come to think of it, it may have been another pub, anyway he asked our manager Reg, if we, (the Meteors) would like to fill in while the band had a break, (a break to most musicians is when they partake in a little liquid refreshment). The full title of the band was "Bobby Key and the Keynotes". What a great name for a musician I thought, it even made me think of changing my name to something like Cliff Crotchet, Mantovani Minim, or Englebert Plectrum, but somehow they didn't have the same ring about them, so I gave up on that idea in action.

The band was very good and it gave us the chance to listen to experienced musicians at work, and play. That made a change!!!

I've always enjoyed the sound of the Big Band, and I still think it will take some beating, whoops their goes another pun. You can learn also listening and watching other

musicians play whatever instrument they are playing, you should still be able to steal some idea's from them and learn something. One exception to this golden rule would be bagpipes. Bagpipes, I don't think anyone can learn anything by listening to those implements of torture. As you probably guessed I'm not a big fan, or even a small fan of those creatures, and I think that they should all be either drowned at birth, or lagged. Either of these options would be fine.

Thankfully they did not have bagpipes in The Keynotes, which to my mind was a great asset in a dance band, unless of course you were a dance band north of the border when a large hairy man usually called Jimmy would be pumping up a lone bagpipe, and an even smaller, but equally hairy man usually called Oor Wullie, would be pounding a fling or something akin to it on a kettle drum, whilst an equally hairy woman usually called Morag would be squeezing the living daylight out of an accordion, trying her best, as most female accordionist do, to not get there gazonkas in the way, which I believe is a very painful experience indeed.

I think I should return south of the border, not down Mexico way but to the good old Hippodrome.

One of the first things I recall on our maiden voyage to the Hippo, was the arched shaped stage. This was obviously designed to push the sound out into the hall, but I thought, what was the six-inch hole, which was bored in the ceiling doing, what great architectural function did this provide? I couldn't remember seeing one in the Albert Hall, or in St Paul's cathedral, but then again I haven't been to either places so that could be the reason. My curiosity got the better of me and I asked one of trumpetists, Excuse me sir I said, " Why is there a hole in the ceiling"?

"Well me lad" he said, in a tone that only a mature trumpetist could make, " that's big Harold's hole" he said, "oh" I said, in a way that only a young innocent lead guitarist could make, did I want to get into this line of enquiry I thought, "I lad", he went on to explain, "It's where big Harold stans with his double byass ya see, and his byass is bigger thant ceiling so it's bowered a woll init awart yers". Later on when the band started to play we watched in awe as big Harold played away with the top of his bass stuck in the hole he'd made, and every now and again he would spin it around with no visible means of support never missing a beat, and sometimes never missing the trombone player in front of him. A magical sight to behold, and a trick that Paul Daniel's would have been proud of.

The bass player was Harold Clemence, a very good bass player and pianist/organist who I was to have the pleasure of playing with some years later, and some years later still, I was to play with his son Andrew, both I must add, very good musicians and great fun to work with, I've had many a good laugh with both of them.

I've found that most musicians usually do have a good sense of humour, you've got to have one to do this for a living, setting off three hours before a gig, getting in at two/three a clock in the morning, up the next day at the crack of noon, must be mad, and some of them are you know!

Up until that point our gear consisted of the following motley items.

- 1 Watkins 15 watt amp (lead - bass and vocals) -Me and Barry
- 1 Selmer 4 watt amp (rhythm guitar and vocals) -Ted and anybody
- 1/2 set of drums, 3 sticks and nearly 1 full pair of brushes -Alan
- 1 Fidelity tape recorder Mic, -anybody
- 1 Dynamic (crappy) Grampian Mic, -Jerry
- 1 Bird cage stand (used as Mic,stand) -anybody and Mickey the budgie

1 Futurama guitar with dodgy pickup switches held together with matches (lead)-Me
1 Unknown 6-[sometimes 5] string thing with Hofner pick up. (Rhythm guitar) -Ted
1 Watkins Rapier 6 string, (used as a bass) -Barry, playing only on bottom 4 strings.

TED. ME. ALAN. BARRY.



**How about this for Hi-tec equipment!!
This was taken in 1962 ish!**

What an awesome sound we must have produced with that gear. I would think that even old Steptoe or even J.P.Dias (as you may recall), proprietor of music shop extraordinaire in Carlisle), would have been hard pushed to take it off your hands as they say. I bet if you turned up at a gig today with that lot you would be sent on your way without striking a single note, let alone a double note. That reminds me talking about notes, our fee was increased in the Hippo' because we were now the "resident band". This didn't necessarily mean that we would have any more money in our pockets, but what it did mean was that we were able to get into debt, and hire purchase and all that stuff. And so it came to pass, that like most of the local bands of the day, we went forth towards the bright lights of Carlisle, and down Botchergate, and turned left, and went upstairs into the magical world of J.P. Dias' music shop. What a second time experience that turned out to be, everything the young musician dreamed about was either hanging on the walls, inside a glass case, laying on the floor, being played by some poser, or was pushed out of site in case you nicked it. J.P. had the uncanny knack when you were trying to part ex, something, of writing an amount down on a piece of paper, sticking it out of site, and asking you how much you expected to get for your valuable piece of equipment. Whatever figure you said you thought it was worth he would always produce the paper with a lower amount on. I don't know how he managed it but I certainly never saw him loose on that trick. It didn't matter what you took in, he would say it wasn't a good seller, or you don't see many of those about these days, even though you probably bought it from him only a few weeks earlier. After trying to negotiate a lost cause JP, convinced me that I needed to have one of the latest Selmer amps, which did everything but make the tea. He told me the amp was a Twin Selectatone 50 watt undistorted output, 2 channels, 4 inputs, two tone croc-o-hide finish, rubber castors, 6 push button tone controls, tremolo, reverb, exclusive Selmer "Blinking Eye" (*patent applied for*) thingy, 2X12" speakers, double footswitch, waterproof cover, optional folding legs, the only thing it lacked was automatic transmission, but I'm sure old JP would have arranged it if I'd insisted. " Would I need a licence and have to pass a test? " I asked, No! just give me £15.00 deposit and 18 monthly payments of £8.7..2d. or if you wish 12 monthly payments of £11..17..7d .
So after deliberating I decided on the other option of 24 payments of £6..12..0d.

Now that we were getting quite a lot of work, we thought that our stage appearance was rather on the shoddy side, so off we trotted to Redmayns the gent's outfitters in Maryport, and got togged out with the latest stage dress of the day. After many seconds of deliberation we plumped for trousers with black and grey checks, made from some shiny type material, black shirts with a white band on the collar and cuffs, and for Jerry a black shirt with a wide black and white frilly bit down the front. Not the type of shirt

you would wear while eating tomato soup, but saying that I don't ever remember Jerry eating any kind of soup while singing.

We chose to have black shirts because we all thought that they would look rather smart for not only The Hippodrome, and all the large venues we would be playing, but to be honest, the most important positive feature was that they wouldn't show the dirt so much.

The "Hippodrome" was to be our first gig in a proper dance hall, because at the time the it was a proper dance hall, the Mecca of the north, well maybe not quite but it felt like big time to us.



Jerry & The Meteors Plus JF Hippodrome 1963

It was a great place to play, good for sound, and good for dancing so I'm told, (I don't dance you see), and good for other things on a dance night for a couple of bob (2/- or 10p if you're A.D. after decimalisation). Another attraction for me at the Hippo' came some time later. It was nothing to do with dancing or music, but it was in the shape of a girl of the opposite sex. Yes! I rather fancied the girl that worked in the cinema ticket office. She was, and probably is still called Ann. A very nice girl that somewhat reminded me of Nana Mouskouri. I think it was her black hair and the fact that she wore the same type glasses. Thank goodness she didn't talk or sing the same though. "What was a nice girl like that working in a place like this?" I thought! Probably for money! Later on we all got quite friendly with Ann and her mate Audrey, [No! not that friendly] but alas, I was too shy at the time and I didn't make passes at *this* girl who wore glasses. What a shy innocent boy I used to be!

Reminiscing time over, back to the story!

Thursday night [I think!] was the night when all the young jolly sailor boys would come ashore after parking their luggers or whatever, in Workington harbour. Returning after sailing one or two of the seven seas for many a month and many a nautical mile. They would dash down the gangplank and locate one or two of the local young maidens who would be waiting in the soft drinks department of the Hippodrome, and there they would be politely asked if they wished to stroll outside for a breath of fresh air and talk about seafaring things, like knots, yard-arms, barnacles, and how much an anchor

weighs, all good clean fun I'm told. Yes, many a main brace was spliced outside the old Hippo on a Thursday night, and even inside that wondrous emporium too. By the way *my* main brace was not spliced for some considerable time after the Hippodrome days. I just thought I'd mention it!

Where was I? Oh yes a great place for sound. The stage was arched shaped at the back and as I've already mentioned this was to push out the sound, which was a great help to us at the time because of our initial lack of essential equipment. i.e., The Little Giant, which produced a massive 4 watts, and my trusty Watkins, 15 watts. This powerful 19 watt combination could, on a normal stage, reach about 3foot into the audience, but with the added advantage of an arched stage we could reach at least 3' 6" which of course in turn meant another row of people, provided that their heads were no wider than 6". Mind you to be fair some of our sound did get rather tied up in the beehive hair doo's that the girls had planted on the top of their heads. Even when we pushed our sound up to it's full 19-watt capability, it still had a heck of a job penetrating the 3 cans of Harmony hair spray that was nestling on or in 50% of the audience's barnett's. After a while we discovered that this strange effect could be compensated for, by aiming the speakers in certain directions. The direction we aimed for was at the heads of the boys, because we found that the sound was sliding off the heads of the guys who were using mega amounts of Brylcream, and at that time at least all of them were using mega amounts of it. We found that the sound could travel at least an extra 20 paces off each greasy head in any direction. North, South, East, West, it didn't care, and it also had the power to leave skid marks on anything that got in it's way, which could be quite dangerous really if you were stood standing with your mouth open yawning at the band, or sucking a toffee apple, though I do admit that not many toffee apples were sucked in most of the dance halls that I've been to, with the exception of Blackpool of course. We had to make careful adjustments to our, *hi tech* sound system to allow for the Brylcream factor, and this is a useful fact to bear in mind when entering the world of show business for the first time. I wonder if the management at the Hippo' ever employed a ceiling, wall and floor Brylcream remover, must have done I suppose, there was no trace of it the following week!

After a few weeks of spelling the band off we were approached by the manager of the Hippo' who said he wanted to change the style of music, and that he intended to get a new line up for the weekly dance. What he really meant was why should he pay a pittance to the ten members of the Keynotes when he could pay half a pittance to the five members of the Meteors. Nevertheless we were grateful that the job was offered to us, and after we deliberated for at least 3 seconds we said "yes please oh master" or words to that effect. This offer was rather embarrassing because we got to know the band quite well and they had been very friendly and helpful, and Bobby the bandleader was the one who got us the job there in the first place. They'd been the resident band there for a lot of years so it must have come as quite a shock to get the big elbow, especially to an inexperienced pop group. In-fact one leading light of that band has never spoken to me since. It must have really rattled his baton. But as they say, all's fair in love and music and having no conscience at all we took on the job. Brylcream an'all.

It was around this time that Alan decided that he needed a full kit of drums and not the Mickey Mouse variety that he had been pounding on since the birth of the Meteors. Besides he was now nearly using two hands and sometimes a foot, though not necessarily all at the same time. I cant say that we missed his old drum kit, especially the bass drum, it was about the same size and colour as a tractor rear wheel and made a very similar noise, although I do admit that the noise it did produce went down very

well at the Young Farmers dances, and was in great demand at harvest time, I suppose it was a noise that they could relate to, and feel at home with. It was even rumoured that some of the aforementioned Young Farmers were known to enquire as to what pressure he used, and was it a Dunlop or a Goodyear. You can't rival the logical thinking of a young farmer can you? Thinking back I've now come to realise that if Alan had played a drum solo in "We plough the fields and scatter", or "Bringing in the sheaves" 60's style, we would have been mega stars by now. That's where we went wrong, isn't hindsight a pain up the butt???.
Anyway back to the saga.

The old "Workington Reds Club" was a great booking to play, you were always sure to have a great time in there. It would be packed to the hilt on a Saturday night by 7:30. The boiler seemed to be wedged at a constant temperature of app, 110°, which in-turn allowed the ale to flow at the same speed as the sweat. The cleaners who would come in the next day didn't have to sweep up, they just donned their wellies and mopped the place out. We could storm the Club every time we played it, even though we were basically playing the same material as the last time. Jerry's killer number at the time was the Frankie Lane song "Jezebel". It would go like a bomb everywhere we did it, and we did it everywhere. Jerry was even christened "Jerry Jezebel" by our followers. Oh yes!, we had followers,,,, especially the tax man!. My killer instrumental was a classical piece that we mutilated by rocking it up something rotten. It was called "Czardas", pronounced "Czardas", written by someone called Monti. I don't know much about this Monti except that he wasn't the Monti one that was in the army. This Czardas jobby started really slow at the beginning and gradually speeded up to what us musicians call "tempo de clappers", which roughly translated means, "it goes like merry hell". Now! Providing I hadn't dropped or wore my plectrum out, and Alan was still conscious, when we reached warp factor six, and with a bit of luck, we would all stop at the same time, only to engage first gear once again to have an action replay of the whole number right from the slow movement. On reaching the "tempo de clappers" section for the second re-run, invariably we would have gained quite a considerable increase in the overall momentum. This would have a sort of knock on effect, which led to the following charade. Sparks and fingerprints could be seen coming off my fingers, sticks would fly in all directions via Alan, Ted on rhythm resembled someone scrubbing his all arm on a washboard, and Barry just swore.
But it was a cracker when we got it right, and sometimes we did!!

The "Empress Ballroom" in Whitehaven started to run a dance on Saturday afternoons especially for the young ones. I think that if you were over twelve you weren't allowed in. Because the little ones didn't know any difference they thought that we were a famous band and we would get mobbed each time we landed up. What a fabulous time we had with those kids it was brilliant. Very noisy!, but brilliant. We almost spent as much time signing autographs as we did playing. I remember well one little girl that went there when we played. She would be about nine or ten I suppose, and she would stand and look all googly eyed right in front of where I was standing on the stage. I would give her a smile and a wink now and again and she would smile back and then go all coy and start to blush. One afternoon at break time I decided to go over to talk to her. I can see her now as she stood there wearing a bright red coat with six large silver buttons on the front of it. I remarked about how smart she looked and how I really liked the silver buttons. Quick as a flash she pulled one off and handed it to me. "I can't take that", I said, "You'll get into trouble when you get home". "I don't mind," she said

and she insisted that I took it, so I did. I told her that I'd stick it onto my guitar for the next time we were playing there, just to remind me of her. Her face went from pink, to a bright red. Her eyes lit up as she replied with a shocked... "You will!"

The following day I glued the button onto my guitar ready for our next visit to the "Empress". Two weeks later we were there again. The delight on that little girls face when she saw it, she was over the moon, for a "Meteor" has one of her buttons on his guitar. That was a special moment, one I'll never forget. And do you know I had that button on my guitar for at least the next twenty years.

Nice story don't you think!!! And it's quite true.

We all travelled together in the Reg's pick up truck with the exception of Jerry, who travelled in style on his motor bike, and who would consistently appear at a gig half an hour after all the gear had been set up and make an exit half an hour before it finished. This caused a slight rift with the band, which finally came to a climax one night after playing a gig in Fletchertown. Off he roared on his bike while we were doing the last number and after which we would have the joy of packing the gear up. In his haste to flee the fans and autographs, he forgot to negotiate the sharp 90-degree bend at the bottom of the hill and ended up in a field. Not too much damage was caused I'm glad to say, just a titchy bit of embarrassment, and a sore backside. It was about this time that Jerry decided to call it a day and hang his black and white shirt up forever.

The Meteors were now a four-piece band. A Meteor had fallen.

Funny enough we had another falling Meteor fell at the same venue in Fletchertown. This time it was Alan's turn to fall, and fell he certainly did. The stage at this venue was constructed from wooden trestles, a piece of string and a lot of good luck. The luck and string part disappeared that night as well as poor Alan. It was halfway through a number that we noticed the flash and fireworks display that preceded the large crashes, and the even larger swear words. In the microsecond of time it took the flash to flash, we caught a glimpse of most of Alan disappearing through the trestles in one direction, while all his drums were vanishing in every other direction. Only one piece of his drum kit didn't go through the stage, and that was the large crash cymbal that went through the main power cable, blowing the mains fuse as it travelled in a downward direction. In the ensuing total darkness, the deadly silence was only broken by the sound of Alan trying to remove the twisted remains of his drum kit from out of the trestles, and with more caution, from out of his person. OOOOOh Nasty!!!!. There was an occasional scream from some of the girls, but we put that down to some of the over anxious boys who probably were thinking that all their birthdays had come at the same time, i.e. pitch black with a bird. Then all hell was let loose as we all tried to *see the light*; it was just like a gospel meeting. Eventually a torch was found and someone fixed the fuse and on came the power once again, and we all shouted, "*Hallelujah, it's a miracle I do see the light*".

It was a gospel meeting after all. Then we all viewed the damage to the offending cymbal. Three inches long, that's the size of the piece that was removed from the cymbal by the lightning strike that night. The shape of the damage resembled either, one of the islands in the Outer Hebrides, or a camel with three humps and a mushroom on it's head, it all depended on which way you looked at it. And whichever way you looked at it, it was not a pretty site, but it didn't deter Alan, and consequently the island/camel/mushroom saga became quite a talking point with Alan for years to come. Just like an old soldier showing his war wound, Alan would proudly boast about *that* night in Fletchertown, and would produce his war torn cymbal [from wherever it was

he kept it] just like a magician for all to see, to prove the dastardly deed.

We had to stop him accosting complete strangers on the street saying things like “would you like to see the damage on my clanger” or “It might be damaged but it still works misses” We all new what he was referring to but somehow they got the wrong end of the stick, so before Alan got the right end of the stick, we had to restrain him with common sense and reason, or even both, whereby Alan would of course reply with, eh!! Or yer-wot!!!!!!!

Fletchertown didn't have the same appeal after that little episode and we didn't have the same appeal to the management.

Barry had now become our lead singer, not necessarily because he had the best voice, but he was the only one who had the bottle for it. I certainly hadn't. We all chirped in with a few songs and harmonies, but Barry was to do most of the singing for a while.

We didn't have a lot of songs we could sing at first, but we did find out that providing you started with the first line of a song that everyone new, and finished it with the last line of a song that everyone new, what went on in the middle wasn't too important. This was a policy that we used a lot and it nearly worked every time. If you got a complaint you'd just say “have you not heard the latest Peruvian version that's just about to hit the charts???”. ----- Cough -----[In Peru]

When we weren't working we would all go and spy on one of the many other local bands, as you do, mainly to suss out the opposition and to pick up tips, verbal abuse, and maybe even a booking. Quite often we would go to see Joe Semple and The Avengers in the now departed Prince Regent pub in Maryport.

Their lead guitarist Jack Greenhow, played a genuine Fender Strat guitar, and I wanted it now! Or one like it, now! Owning a Strat' is on a par with having a knighthood don't you know! Everyone you knew seemed to either play in a band or they hung around with someone that did. Billy Steele and the Strollers were another Maryport band you could spy on. They would rehearse in a proper hall, the Palace Ballroom in Lower Church Street. I'd known Billy and drummer Robin Melville for years and had even asked Robin if they needed a guitarist for the band, but alas I was turned down in favour of John Manchester from Dearham. Fancy them picking an outsider! And so it came to pass that I was not destined to be a “Stroller” but a “Meteor“, which is a lot quicker! All the top chart bands would play the Palace and the Strollers and ourselves would appear as the support act. Billy got more work there than we did but we still had our fair share. One show that stood out was Emile Ford and the Checkmates. Freddie and the Dreamers were the support act and we were the supports, support I suppose, more like a truss!!. We went on first so we could drive the audience into a wild frenzy and have them fully primed up for Freddie and Emile, who would follow on as a bit of an anticlimax. I think we went down a little better than the Titanic, although no one seemed to take a blind bit of notice of us, they wanted the big boys. Big boys Freddie and the Dreamers were absolutely brilliant and rightfully stormed the place. He was darting about the hall like somebody with a double dose of Haemorrhoids, only a lot less painful. He would jump off the stage and run up the stairs to the balcony as fast as a whippet without the Haemorrhoids.

They were an excellent band too and played a few instrumentals that certainly caught my ear. When they eventually finished their spot it was the turn of Emile Ford and the Checkmates. When Emile came on in his bright yellow silk shirt the crowd went wild, which was rather odd really, because prior to that moment he'd been sitting quietly all on his own by the side of the stage all night and no one had taken any notice of him at all.

In the early 60's there seemed to be endless places to play, not only pubs, but also youth clubs, village halls, barn dances in barns complete with straw an'all. Without doubt some of the best gigs were in the likes of the "Tin Mission" in Workington, the old "Fox Club" in Fox Lane, Banklands, Seaton Welfare and the Westfield Welfare.

The Tin Mission was basically a tin hut with a mission and what seemed at the time to hold the entire youth content of Workington, and a few yards further. The Fox club was held in an upstairs room in Fox Lane, I can't remember what it was above but it doesn't really matter anyhow. What I do remember is the atmosphere that these gigs held, they were hot and sticky, dimly lit, the dance floor would be bouncing up and down in time to the music, (sometimes), and then you would have all the young talent of the day, and the odd one of yesterday standing at one end of the room eyeing the boys up, while at the other end of the room, some, if not all of the boys would be eyeing the girls up, and I suppose the odd boy would be eyeing the odd boy up too, but that's one path I don't care to take thank you very much.

Did you notice how the pitch of my voice went down an octave or two during the last few words? The audiences at these gigs were brilliant every time you played; I suppose they were Workington's answer to the Cavern Club in Liverpool.

I don't want to sound like some old nut doing the old "when I was a lad" routine, but I really don't think that through all the playing I've done since those days, and I have done a lot, that anything could compare to those gigs, nice people, happy days as they say.

It was while playing at these dances that I came upon one of the great mysteries of the universe and one or I should say two of which still to this day remains a closely guarded secret. The first was that why do girls always go to the toilet in two's? Is the answer to the first problem perhaps that they don't want to return from the loo with half of their skirt tucked into their knickers, so therefore they would need someone to act as a look-out to avoid this embarrassing situation. The other mystery is the lets dance around handbag phenomenon. Maybe the bags held a large dark secret, because if you ever caught a glimpse inside one, it held just about every thing else. The things that a girl can produce out of her handbag are mind-boggling. Only one thing can outstrip it, and that's how on earth do they get it all back in????.

Make-up assorted, lipstick, handkerchief, nail varnish, nail file, comb's, brushes, photo's, keys, mints, breath freshener, Vimto, hair lacquer, spare tights, spare knickers, and an assortment of things that they kept to themselves 'cos boys don't know about them, etc,etc,etc

Total weight outside the bag, 4stone 6lb

Total weight inside bag 8½ozs

Totally illogical Mr Spock!

Maryport Labour club was another place we would play. Jackie Nixon, Reg's cousin was the resident organist and we would busk along with him when the local singers were chirping away. I was to play there as resident guitarist with a few years later with both Jackie, and later still with Harold Clemence who I new from the Hippodrome days. Sometimes my friend Lar'l Ted would sit in too on rhythm and for extra ballast. It was well known at the time for the regular punch-up and chair throwing competitions, which were held there every Saturday night. Many's the time when the raucous started we would make a quick exit via the fire door, which was conveniently situated at the back of the stage. On a first come first served basis, we of course were in pole position to man the lifeboats. We knew, from past experience that whatever time the competition

started, it was very unlikely that it would end on the same day, therefore our services would not be required until the following week, so we would buzz off home! The same few troublemakers were banned every week, but owing to the failing eyesight of the dear old doorman, he wouldn't recognise them the following week and so they would all be let in again. Perpetual motion they call it!

Eventually the club was sorted out and they started to book some really good acts. A lot of them were speciality acts that unfortunately you don't seem to see these days. We had everything from fire-eaters to escape artists, hypnotists, magicians, mind readers as well as a host of singers. Sometimes they'd even put two acts on in the same night, which made an excellent evening and one that was most enjoyable to play for. I love challenge of backing artists, I think it's what I do best, and since those days I've certainly done a lot of it in various clubs around the county.

While I remember, I had a fan while playing in the Labour Club. Oh yes I did!!! Every week she would be sitting with her mates at one of the tables near the stage. She was very attractive with real blond hair, and was always very well dressed. With no disrespect to the club, she almost looked out of place in there, unlike her friends!!!! Rough, rough!! Anyhow! Every time I glanced over she would be staring at me, I think it was at me, but I suppose she could have been weighing up her getaway through the escape hatch at the back of the stage. No! It *was* at me she was looking at!. I gave her a smile while trying not to miss too many notes in the process. My smile and nod were duly rewarded and now I was on the receiving end of, a smile and a nod, but a smile and a nod plus a wink. Now they say that a nod's as good as a wink, so I concluded that that being the case, I must have had one smile, one nod and two winks in total. This must be an indication for us to make closer contact, for till then we had never made the "speakes" together. Bingo time at last I'll go and say hello to her, but wait!, she was stood up, she "walketh" my way, Oh heck!! I thought. Then just as she stood right before me in all her refined beauty she said, "Hey hizz thu frae Maryport marra!!" Hey nonny definitely NO!!!!!!

"If only she'd been a little couther, I thought!"

One of the most enjoyable dances we played was in the village hall at Threlkeld. It was a cracker of a gig to do. The place would be full up to the brim every Saturday night with what seemed to be the entire local population plus all the fell walkers and campers who were there for the weekend. What stands out most in my mind was the fact that nearly everyone would still wear there climbing boots while attempting to dance. What a sound and vibration that created. It was nearly as bad as the dreaded pick-up truck we travelled in, or on. The floor would be bouncing like the clappers, and this would send a shock wave towards the stage, which in turn would start us all swaying back and forth and up and down, so we always made sure that we had a good supply of Quells on hand for the Threlkeld experience. Better to be safe than sick as they say. It was like being on the Titanic in an earthquake with a party from the annual gathering of the British Clog Dancer's association. It was definitely not the place to be if you had a glass eye or wore a toupee or used a surgical appliance. Very strange objects were often to be seen rolling across the dance floor on a Saturday night. Another reason we looked forward to this dance was the fact you got food thrust upon you at the end of the evening, lots and lots of it. None of your sausages and bits of cheesy things on sticks type stuff, not a horse's doofer would be insight. We were supplied with real wholesome food, like pies with cow's horns stuck on top, gungey cream cakes the size of an ashbin lid; real home made teacakes the size of! Well somehow Dolly Parton springs to mind, can't think why!

There were jellies and trifles by the ton, scotch eggs laid that very day by a Scotsman, or more likely a Scotswoman, and an assortment of things that we weren't too sure what they were, but they tasted all right anyway. Desperate Dan would have had a Beano if he'd been invited. (Did you notice the clever word play with the last sentence)? No! OK then be like that.

Mrs Howe who organised the dance must have been baking eight days a week to end up with that amount of nosh. Hey! What a good title for a song that would be. A week to end up with! I think I'll work on that one. It's got to be a hit.

After every gig at Threlkeld we were all that full of grub that we vowed we could not eat another bite until at least breakfast on Sunday morning. Unless of course we went back via Workington where we had been known to partake in a little Oriental cuisine at the notorious Lin Fat's Chinese restaurant. Barry was the one who discovered this wondrous place, so he being a good natured soul, he invited us all to go and have a meal, if of course we all paid for our own, or if possible could we lend him a few bob so as he could join us. This was all new and exciting to me, for the only foreign food I'd ever had, was a Danish pastry and Turkish delight. Not necessarily at the same time though. Lin Fat's was not what you would call "full of eastern promise." It was more often than not full of dodgy looking characters that you would definitely not like to meet on a dark night, or even on a light one. What a dive it was. I can still smell the place even after all this time. I think that Mr Fat got the idea for the décor and lighting from the Hammer House of Horrors. Mind you the four remaining 40watt red bulbs that nearly lit the place up, did do a wonderful job of covering up most of the assorted slop marks on the presumably once white tablecloths. When you did eventually get your meal, which could be anything between 60mins and the following Thursday, it was not really advisable to be sitting too close to one of the 40watt red arc lamps that would be strategically placed to give very little lighting on your meal. The reasons being that you certainly didn't want to illuminated it too much, or even at all. Now how does that old Chinese saying go? Oh yes!, All food in coal cellar look same at midnight to a blind bat.

Well now! What were we to have off this large and sticky menu? [Even though most of the culinary delicacies seemed to be stuck onto it as a sample perhaps!] . Egg Foo Yuk didn't sound too good, while birds nest soup sounded worse. You could never be sure what the birds got up to before Mr Fat got his greasy little fingers into their once happy abodes. "You never see a toilet in a bird's nest you know!" Spanish omelettes sounded nice. Not Chinese I know, but Spain is a little nearer to China than Workington and anyhow it still sounded foreign.

Three of Lins special Spanish omelettes were ordered, while Barry, who had become quite a connoisseur in the tastes of the orient was more adventurous than the rest of us. He had gained a lot of practice in the art of decoding the menu allowing him to know well in advance what he was eating. Not so daft our Barry. To show off his new skill in the art of Oriental food procurement, he casually called the waiter Over, (actually he called him Ming!) just proves that he must have been on good terms with him, and ordered a No 34 with an extra portion of No2. 3 chop sticks, a single ticket for the toilet and a packet of Rennies. Why were 3 chopsticks on the order? Two were for eating the meal and the other, as Barry found out was just the right size to hold the top of his microphone stand together, ingenious or what?

Out of the four of us only Barry new the code for a No.34, but I think we all had a good idea what a No.2 was, it certainly smelt like it, even though it didn't actually look like it.

To be safe we thought that we would be better off sticking to our special Spanish omelettes. In case you wonder what a special Spanish omelette included as opposed to a

standard omelette, the answer is a plate, plus a fork and sometimes a knife, castanets, oh yes! And if you were really lucky, an egg.

It didn't seem to matter what you ate at this establishment it all tasted the same and it was all fully guaranteed to give you terrible, terrible wind. A wind that could have been an Olympic event. A wind that just couldn't be sniffed at. A wind that I haven't heard or seen since, and I have heard a lot. No wonder the Chinese are good at flying kites, God and Lin Fat only knows what went into the food, so we never enquired!

Meanwhile Barry had discovered a new party game that you could play with your friends, or when the vicar called for tea. It was a simple little game and you only needed four essential requisites. First, you need some friends, then a Lin Fat meal, then, you need approximately 30 to 40 minutes, and finally stage Four, a match, or box of matches. I won't go into too many details but I can tell you it's the funniest thing I think I've seen. The first time Barry performed this trick was just before we were to go onstage in the Princess Hall in Workington. The mc had introduced us over the microphone but unfortunately when we were going up the steps onto the stage Barry decided the time had come to demonstrate his latest party piece.

I can see him now shouting, "Get a match! I've got a notion! Get a match! Quick!" Unfortunately, somebody did.

Can you imagine the state we were in after the "Flash", we could hardly stand up never mind play. Anyhow after that display with the walking cyclone, Barry really didn't want to sit down anyway. Good job he didn't play drums, but he did have to sing "great balls of fire" that night. That song caused us to go into another uncontrollable hysterical outburst. Although Barry's now famous party trick didn't seem to do him too much harm, we did however notice that he did not ride a bike for at least a fortnight.

Yes, we had to make our own fun in those days.

From time to time you do have nights where things go wrong, like one night while we were playing at Westfield Welfare in Workington. This was the night when Barry and his shiny new fitted false teeth parted company. When he was singing our third number his teeth shot out in the audience direction, and were closely followed by Barry shouting "stand back I've lost me gnashers etc etc". The dance hall was absolutely chocker block, maybe two hundred or so, which would of course add up to four hundred feet clomping about give or take one or two depending how many legs they had. Even if you found them would you want to pick them up you could hear everyone thinking. "We could give a prize to the lucky finder", I said, "a sort of spot dance with teeth". This did not go down too well with Barry who didn't see the funny side. We all saw the funny side as well as Barry's backside as he scuttled across the floor like a demented ferret on heat. To everybody's relief Barry won the prize and he and teeth were reunited once again. I think the delay in finding them was probably due to the football game that some of the lads were playing at the bottom of the room, without a ball.

Somehow the teeth were never the same colour or shape again.

Barry was now starting to get a bit fed up with doing most of the singing in the band and said that he wanted to concentrate more on his bass playing and his love life. We all thought that a bit strange because he was doing rather well on both counts. It is a well known fact that the singer nearly always gets first pick of the opposite sex, while lead, rhythm, and drums are next in the pecking order, not that me and Ted were pecking much, or even at all. We all sang the odd song or two on our own just to fill in the time, but none of us wanted to front the band and take on the enormous responsibility of

handling all the girls.

Enter George “Jeep” Jones. Jeep was a big-hearted lad with matching stomach. Singer extraordinaire, and part time idiot, so we all knew that he'd would fit the bill. It's a pity he, or I should say we, didn't fit the second hand suits we bought though. Yes, one of us heard about, or read about them in the Exchange & Mart. Apparently a local band in Whitehaven were selling a complete set of stage attire. Would you believe that we thought it was a great idea and we actually bought them!!!. I think it was in The Whitehaven Civic hall that our suits were given their first and final command performance. What we all failed to notice was one, how bright the colours were, [Powder Blue and Pillar-Box Red], and secondly the size of them, [BIG]. The band we bought them off must have been all 6ft 8” bodybuilders, and we weren't. Poor Ted, he ended up with more turn-ups in his pants than pants, and both Barry and myself could have hid an elephant and two hippos down ours. Allan didn't matter much because he was of course sitting down on the drums so you couldn't see a lot of him except for the odd bright blue blur and matching language. Mind you he wouldn't have dared to stand up anyway without fear of even more ridicule. {Who said, “Is that possible??} And as for Jeep, in the pillar box number. He looked like a solar flare with a microphone. Our first number should have been “All Things Bright And Beautiful”. We looked like an act that would have been better suited [no pun intended] to appear in Billy Smarts circus with the clowns. The only thing we lacked was the red noses and a bucket of water, and we were more than lucky not to get both that night.



Jeep and the Meteors.

Jeep was the only one mad enough to wear the Red Suit

After acquiring all our new second hand hi-tech equipment, and a new second hand singer, (minus the dreaded suits of course, (except Mr Jones) we were ready for anything, Seaton Welfare, Siddick Welfare, Clifton, Lowca Legion, The Red's Club, The Bush, The Tow Bar at Nethertown, any of the major venues..

What we were not ready for was a trip to London to make a recording of one of my songs. Yes! Reg struck again with one of his less brilliant ideas. A local impresario

called John Henny from Whitehaven way, persuaded the Reginald, to organise a trip to a recording studio in Watford, and he would arrange some booking at a club in Moss side, Manchester that would finance the event.

Henny was to organise the bookings and recording session, while Reg organised the transport. No problem!!!

The transport was....., go on have a guess!... correct!---- The Pick-up

We would build a cabin out of tree wood and stick it onto the pick-up. We would cover it with a tarpaulin sheet, make a lockable door on the back, [just in case someone wanted to pinch it], insert five sleeping bags, a stove, a gas lamp, the gear, six tins of beans, matches!!!!, and of course, three Meteors. Two would be in the driving cockpit and the dispensable ones would travel in the hutch. The only thing it lacked was the chicken's. There could not so Beautiful" quite possibly have been chickens in there but we'd never have found them anyway. It looked like what it was, a mobile disaster just waiting to happen. We new we would be OK going down to London via Manchester because it's all downhill, but it could be rather dodgy getting back. We weren't too concerned about that because we would be rich and famous by then and could easily afford a proper transit van or even a chauffeur driven limousine. So, we would cast our fate to the wind and set sail on our great adventure at the crack of dawn sometime on Tuesday, or it could have been a Thursday, it doesn't really matter.



Just in case you don't believe it really happened!

Notice we were waiving the white flag to surrender, but nobody took a blind bit of notice.

The day before our great escape we called at Cyril Martin's garage in John Street and had a fill up with petrol on the hand cranked petrol pump. Those type of pumps took ages and were rather hard work to operate, but we didn't care cos' Cyril was the one doing the cranking. I think we had change from the ten bob note we gave him to fill up the beast,,,,,,

My word petrol was cheap in those days!

Of course on departure day the pick up decided that it wanted no part in our venture and consequently it wouldn't start, even with the aid of the starting handle and a cuss.

Some of our parents and girlfriends were waiting on the corner of Crosby Street and

Wood Street to wave us a fond farewell, as was old Bob Harris the grocer with a pigeon on his head and one in each hand. "Don't ask 'cos I don't know why!" It was just as well that we were setting off from Wood Street, because the angle of the said street provided us with the momentum in a downward direction towards Netherhall Corner. We all said a silent prayer for the engine. Even Bob Harris removed the pigeon from his head as a sign of respect. Please Lord make it start, and don't let it stall at the corner. It did start, and we didn't stop at the corner, which was another blessing in disguise because stopping was a bit of a problem. Surely we wouldn't need to stop that much on our way to Manchester once we were heading the right direction!. Anyhow if we did overshoot Manchester then the next stopping place would be London or perhaps Dover. If the latter were the case we would just have to do our tour in reverse order instead, after we had been pulled out from the channel. Reverse, I seem to recall was a manoeuvre the pick-up didn't understand too well either. It would only do backwards when facing uphill, which was another minor obstacle to overcome.

"Divent fergit ya got-ta tern reyt at Kesik fer Manchester" proclaimed Alan, who was assigned to be first on sentry duty on the rear patio of the truck. What a pity it wasn't a dumper truck we thought 'cos we would have given it a test after that revelation. We did however manage to turn right at Keswick and what we also managed to do was to hit all of the 8,564 humps and bumps thereafter until we reached Manchester. Moss side here we come. We were to appear for two nights at The Rainbow Club in Moss Side. A quiet suburban area of Manchester, we thought. When we eventually found the Rainbow it appeared to be built alongside, if not, in a bomb crater. Wouldn't you have thought that would have filled it in by now, "struth, the war's been over for nearly twenty years" we chuckled. The only thing that had a chance of getting filled in that area was us! We didn't know that this was one of the roughest places in the universe. We all wanted our mammy's when someone told us that there had been eight stabbings, one murder, seventeen assaults, five muggings, [that must have been us], two rapes, twenty three car thefts, eighteen suicides, and a lost budgie, all within the last twenty-four hours, except for the budgie which had tunnelled out of its cage three days ago to do a fly past in our honour.

Home from home we thought!! Just like Moss Bay on a Saturday!!

The Rainbow Club was so called because it was decorated in the colours of the rainbow-ishh, i.e. black with red stains in various shades of a blood colour. The darker the red, the longer it had been there. A lighter shade indicated it was quite recent. One guy we talked to who was obviously an expert on the decor pointed to one blob and said, "that's where Arnold got his head done in", and "see them two long squelchy bits? That's Willie's leg prints" oh! And "that thing that's stickin' out of the [i] in Rainbow, that's Norman Clutterbucks nose, we all use it now as a sun dial, runs a bit slow though" "Heck look at the time, it's half past his left nostril I'll have to be going". "Take no notice of him" shouted a man who was playing tennis with a butterfly net and a stick of rhubarb on the bombsight "he's the local idiot"

We quickly secured our transport with a combination lock; any combination would open it, and made an even quicker entrance into the club. We noticed on the way in that the star attraction was not the Meteors but a guy called Russ Hamilton, who'd reached number 2 in the charts in May 1957 with a song called "We will make love". As well as having a big hit, he had an even bigger lithp. The words of the first line should have been.

"When the moon takes the place of the sun in the sky"

But what you got from the unfortunate Russ was, including impediment.

"When the moon taykth the plathe of the thun in the thky"

Whereupon everyone would fall about in rapture's, and make a B-line for the toilet. Including me for I had lost my lithp yearths ago, so I didn't care!

Well, if you can't laugh at somebody else who can you laugh at!!

He was a really nice guy though as he tactfully explained why we were not top of the bill, or for that matter anywhere near it, *even though we were staring right at it*. Not only had anyone heard of us, nobody had ever heard of a Mr Henny either. When we told him our tale of woe, he had a word with the management who took pity on us and gave us a couple of bookings with Russ. That was really good of them and probably wouldn't happen these days. It would be more like "snot our problem, yer not booked buzz off before we call a constable"

We spent two nights in the Moss Side campsite. I must say that we were pleasantly surprised at how quiet it was. Maybe everybody had been arrested and locked up, leaving us, and the bombsight as one, in perfect harmony, alone, together. How poetical!!!

The peace and tranquillity came to an abrupt end at 6.00am when we received a wake-up call on our front patio door via a large coloured tramp who's words are etched on my brain forever.

"Wanna cuppa tea boss," he said, as he produced a bigger than large teapot. But as large as the teapot was, it wasn't as big as his smile. It looked like it travelled all around his head and back again, twice. He was black black, as in pigment colour black, and a blacker still black from years of soap and water deprivation. What a friendly soul he was. When you think about the situation, here he was, a tramp, with no money, no anything, just a teapot and he was asking us if we would like a cup of tea.

I know it wasn't much but whatever he had he was prepared to share it. You don't get that everyday! Makes you think doesn't it!

Anyway we did share our beans with the old chap, no it wasn't because we were fed up at the sight and smell of them, and we bid him a fond farewell as we trekked down the highway once again in a London direction.

We found it was open when we arrived and as we had made good time we had the brilliant idea of turning up on the doorstep of EMI house and asking to see Norrie Paramor who just happened to be the musical director of that other group.... "The Shadows" and that other singer chap errr "Cliff Richard". Now first we had to find Trafalgar Square whereupon we would find EMI house, because as some one said, "it's on it, you can't miss it". Finding Trafalgar Square was not a problem, getting off it was. Ted was driving at the time and due to the large volume of traffic, plus the fact that he was in the wrong lane and nobody was prepared to move and let us out. We must have circled it at least fifteen times. It was like something off the Magic Roundabout. Florence/Ted managed to negotiate most of the traffic, bollards, pedestrians, and pigeons and we did eventually come into land right outside the main door of EMI House, more by good luck than anything else.

In we all went without anyone asking what we wanted or who we were. Up the two flights of stairs, said good afternoon to someone coming down, along a corridor and entered the reception. "Can I help you" said the receptionist. "Yes we would like to see Mr Paramor please" She sniggered a bit and said "I'm sorry but he's not in today, can you come back in 1986??" "What time is 1986 then?" I said, as I received a sharp kick in the rump from Barry. So, off we trotted along the corridor, down the two flights of stairs and into the entrance. We weren't in as big of a rush on the way out as we were on the way in so we took a little time to look at the photo's hanging on the wall. Look at all those posers, Cliff, The Shads, Adam Faith, and Billy Fury. Just a minute who's that on the end! Oh that's Norrie Paramor. That's Norrie Paramor. That's the fellow we said

good afternoon too on the way in.

What a bummer!

We were that close to stardom and we blew it!

And we were also very close to being mortally wounded and so a Meteoric deep depression was to set in. This state lasted for about twenty minutes when it was suddenly broken by the sweet smell of chips, which covered the pick-up like a shroud. Nothing much else covered it, so we stopped and partook in a little nourishment. “Five portions of chips with salt and vinegar a can of Coke and five straws and where are we please?” “Your in Soho mate”, said the chirpy chippy man. Soho! Soho! We’d all heard about that place and what it was famous for. The Two Eyes Coffee Bar, that’s what it was famous for, we must visit that notable attraction. That place was the birthplace of heaps and heaps of stars, and we could be next. It was while we were searching for the “Two Eyes” that Alan’s good one eye noticed that one or ten female woman were nonchalantly walking up and down the street touting their ware’s and other commodities. One of them gave Alan the nod and he came running up to us crying, “hey, I think she fancy’s me, she’s just winked”. Because to Alan’s logic, a nod was much more than just a wink. We then had to start to educate and explained to him the meaning of life and the occupation of the ladies, to which he replied, “yer wot, yer gotta give them money”. That soon knocked him back a tad, except for this mind-boggling phrase he was to utter, “Hoo mutch fur a tanners wurth missis”, as we all made off at great speed towards our transport.

Tomorrow was recording day in the Watford studio, so we thought it best to find out where and in which direction Watford was situated. The first thing we needed to find though was the map. Now one of us had looked at it as we had passed Preston, and somebody thought they’d used it to knobble a wasp somewhere near a garage, Ted swore blind that he’d had his dinner off it somewhere, but where it was now was anybody’s guess. After removing all the gear from the monster at a bus stop on the Edgware Road, we found it. It was stuck under the seven pieces of torn leather that masqueraded as the drivers’ seat giving it some form of support.

“What stupid pillock put it there” said Barry half a second before he remembered that He Did. So with map in hand, gear and Meteors loaded, pick-up started, of we went in a Northerly direction, or uphill, you could say. The road to Watford looked strangely familiar the nearer we got to it, this was because we had, albeit unknowingly, passed this way before and had gone through it on our way to London. When we arrived in Watford we must have asked at least 462 people where the LARS, studio was. No one had ever heard of it. In this situation what do you do??? Right pay a visit to the local chippy again. In we went and out popped a little Chinese gentleman of Oriental decent called Ming. “Wot yuw wann boys” he said in small Oriental tones. “Five bags of chips, salt and vinegar and where is the LARS recording studio please,” we said. “Oh yea, fiy bagza chi, zolavinya, no ploblem boys, sdudio it two doors up stleet on udder side of roa” he said. We found the other side of the road all right, and the two doors up but nothing resembled a studio, in-fact it resembled a slum. It was a slum, full of derelict houses and has-been shops, and we were stood outside one that unfortunately had the correct address. We finished off our chips, and wondered had we had our chips in both respects! Shall we knock or shall we just run away, or maybe even both?? A joint decision was made but in spite of it we, knocked and stayed. The door squeaked as it opened and so did we. The figure that stood before us beckoned us to enter using his right beckoning finger. I was sure that I’d seen this finger before doing the same motions only in an Alfred Hitchcock film. “We’re ready for you don in the cellar” Lurch said. “Come on down if the price is right” he added. The price was £20 for the

recording and 2/6 for each record thereafter. The £20 included one single that would be sent to my house, for quality control. The recording equipment consisted of a Grundig Tape Recorder and three microphones and a mixer. We had more recording gear than this back in Reg's workshop. Reg owned a Grundig recorder, we already had four microphones and my mother had a Morphy Richards mixer that seemed to be of more use than this load of tripe. Mustn't grumble; better make the best of it seeing as we were here in the bowels of Watford. The session lasted about an hour, that included the time it took to cart the gear in, set it up, tune it up, record my two songs, pack it all up, cart the gear out, throw it into the pick-up, and pay Lurch his well earned £20.

Possibly LARS may have stood for the Lurch Acmi Rip-off Studio!!

The record must have been pressed by hand and posted off to my home the next day because when we finally did arrive back some four days later, it had been and gone. Apparently it was so full of noise and scratches that my Dad sent it straight back, so none of us ever got to hear it at all. 700 odd miles for Nowt!!!!

Would I do it again????? NO! Not on your Nelly!!

Do I regret doing it????? Definitely Not! I wouldn't have missed it for the world. It was great fun!

And so it came to pass that we had the option of yet another rehearsal room. This was set in much more attractive and pleasant surrounding. Firstly because it was at Barry's home in Seaton and it was nice and quiet, secondly there wasn't quite as much sand and cement to kick around, thirdly there was no grandma to kick around, and last but not least the main attraction at Sunnysides was, the girls. Here we go again!

There were quite a lot of girls in Seaton at the time, maybe there still are I don't know. I don't look much now, well!!! Maybe I'll risk just one eye. There were three in particular that were available and ripe, and just ready for plucking, Jennifer, Sandra, and another one that did have a name but I can't remember what it was now. They were all very nice though, even the one that had a name that I can't remember. By this time I thought that Seaton and it's obvious attractions must be the hub of the universe, this is where it all happens, this is where it all begins, the big bang theory was having an action replay and was certainly working on overdrive for me I can tell you. For the first time I'd



seriously become aware of the opposite sex and had fallen madly in love with an ex girlfriend of Barry's, and he did have more than his fair share of ex-girlfriends. In fact he was well respected by some of the young Seatonian studs for having had more Xs than a football coupon, and that he could score 8 out of 10 anytime he chose too, and he chose too quite often.

Here we all are in Morecambe. Barry/Sandra/Me/Jennifer/Miss???:/Ted

Barry had only been going out with Jennifer for a short while when he thought he would trade her in for a newer model, namely the Sandra. This was my big chance to make my move, so when he'd finished doing whatever he was doing with Jennifer, I stepped in, or I should say stumbled in. Jennifer lived just down the road from the Nixons' and I thought that she was the most gorgeous thing on two legs. (Three legs would have been rather freakish don't you think?). Anyway she was the one for me. And so it came to pass that we actually went out together, well not out, out, but we did

have a snog or two. [It was two actually] I couldn't have made much of an impression on Jenny because that was it, two or three snogs [Ok It *was* two] and goodbye. Yet another don't call, me I'll call you. I called her all sorts, I was devastated, and this state must have lasted at least three and a half weeks. I moped around and played more bum notes than I usually did until Reg came up with one of his great ideas. What I needed was something to take my mind off this situation, so he insisted that a little musical education via the saxophone, it would cure everything and do us all the world of good, something like a dose of salts, with about the same effect on the bowels. And so it began, Reg's musical elixir of life, he would play all the hits of the 30's, 40's, and 50's, what's wrong with that you might think, "nothing!" I would say, except that sometimes it sounded more like the 1830's/40's/50's. He was to the saxophone, what Liberace was to heavy rock. To be fair though he did have a strong influence on our music and could be very critical at times. It was just what we needed, it might not have been what we wanted, but nevertheless we got it, and my thoughts, just like our great guru predicted, were gradually taken away off Jenny. After a few weeks of our musical education course with "sing-along a saxophone with Reginald", we all agreed that enough was enough, we just had to escape and sit in a darkened room for a week or so contemplating our navels, preferably with a member of the opposite sex. Once again we called on Barry's superior knowledge of the subject. Not about the navels, but girls. And as it happened he was, (surprise, surprise,) getting tired of Sandra, and both Ted and yours truly were getting interested in the same Miss B. So we both did the usual pruning and chatting up, and I won. It must have been the Old Spice that did it; it gets them every time you know! Now this time I had a real live girlfriend all to myself, one who I could walk out with holding hands, one who I could take home and meet my folks, (even though I had to return her back home not only in mint condition by 10pm, untouched by human hand) but more to the point one who's dad had a rather nice car, which he may at some point let us borrow. Yes I was flying again, cloud 9½, couldn't sleep, and couldn't eat, permanent stupor, bum notes; all the classic symptoms of cuckoo land once more.

Sandra was a very slim and very attractive girl with mainly blonde hair with black bits dyed at the roots, but sometimes she would have black hair with blonde bits dyed into the roots. It was rather like having two girlfriends for the price of one, a sort of buy one get one free. Hey! After all these years I've just had a thought....maybe Sandra had a twin sister. That's got to be it.....Sussed at last!



...Monday.....Tuesday.....Wednesday...

[It must have taken her ages to do that]

Sandra (or her twin sister) even hit the local newspaper one time regarding her hair which had turned from blond to a sort of rainbow colour overnight, or over the bathroom wash basin was more probable. Her mother was a nice little woman that looked and sounded like Dora Bryan, and she talked at the same speed too. (If you can remember Dora Bryan it's time you were in bed). I got on with her dad OK! providing

we weren't in the house, because as soon as we went indoors he'd stop speaking and go upstairs to sing to his cat. Yes, I did say sing to his cat! When I travelled up to Seaton I would often be on the same bus as her dad and we would have a good conversation, but once we got inside the house, it was silence is golden and cats chorus time.

We went out together for about eighteen months and even sort of got engaged. *Nothing too serious!*. We had some good times though but we weren't really going anywhere, especially as I didn't have my own transport, yet! As the sparks started to dwindle between us Sandra started dropping hints that she fancied someone else. Was I to be spurned once again? And me being even more into my prime? Well yes!! Just a tad, and a small tad at that, because I found that I was spending a lot of my time, and a little of my money, visiting a certain record shop in Workington called Northern Audio. The attraction in the shop wasn't the records that were just an excuse; it was the girl behind the counter, Lesley. She was definitely the cutest girl I'd ever seen, and I knew right away that this was the big one, even though she was only 5foot2. I know that she still is only 5foot2, because here we are in 2008 and we're still together.

She must be mad!!!!!!



← Lesley Fisher as was' Forster as is'. The only time I'd buy anything in the shop was when her boss was present, which wasn't too often I'm glad to say. I'd make all the excuses under the sun to pay a visit to Northern Audio (Les!), and after a few weeks I found that I'd ran out of them completely. I was really scraping the barrel when I would dash through to Workington just to ask her what time it was. There was only one thing for it,.....ask her out. It was Wednesday May 20th 1964 when we first went out together. I remembered the date clearly, mainly because Les has just told me. We went to Keswick and stopped off at Bassenthwaite Lake on the way back to fish!!! Well it was a sort of fishing!! And ever since that day Les's has had me hooked. The future Mother-in law 'Vera' was a different

kettle of fish! Or maybe I should have said a harder nut to crack! The word granite comes to mind. Would you believe it she didn't like me at all? In fact to save WW3 breaking out I would very often have to drop Les off 5 or 6 houses away just to avoid the verbal deluge of flack that I new would be fired in my direction. When I *was* eventually allowed to enter the Fisher bunker, Vera the Hun didn't speak to me for nearly two years. That was not a problem, a God send Yes!! A problem No!!

Mind you to be fair, the very first time I met Vera I had longish hair and I was wearing a black and white dog-toothed suite with winkle picker shoes and a tie that could only be described as LOUD, grey socks and matching clean underwear, because as my dear old Mother would often say "you never know when you could be knocked down by a bus"

Does this mean that a bus driver will only flatten people wearing un-clean undergarments ??

On reflection maybe I should have studied the 'How to impress your future Mother-in law' manual, instead of the 1964 'Who cares a toss' book which came free with the May edition of Tit Bit's or Fisherman's weekly or something like that!

End of Mother-in-Law bit! For fear of a haunting!!!!

We didn't take the girls to every gig; this was mainly for their own protection, not from

the punters but from us on the way back. Seriously though, some of the venues were guaranteed to end up like Madison Square Gardens as the night went on. I was once approached at a dance in Plumbland by a chap who, for some unknown reason had taken an instant dislike to me, and shouted “Hey izz thuw ganna evv me”. Thankfully I didn't have time to reply, but the 6'6” policeman standing behind him did, and he promptly removed the local idiot by his ears, and a friendly kick up the rump.

Wigton Market Hall was a place where you didn't want anyone to know that you came from Maryport. The reason for this was down to the Civil War situation that existed between the two towns, and they were hell bent on battling it out every weekend. Everytime we played the Market Hall the poster would say, “The Fabulous Meteors” from “*MARYPORT*”

We didn't need this at all we thought, as hordes of jobs eyed up the poster to see where their potential victims came from, and then eyed up their prey. Pray that's what we'll do. “Hey ar yu lot frae Maryport”. “No! No! The posters wrong,” we would say putting on a strong Scottish accent, “We're frae Annan way tha'nu” “Jimmi” and Barry would mumble something about “wee timorous beasties” and “things that go bump in the night” and other Rabbi Burns sayings. Rabbi Burns by the way is a seventh removed kosher cousin of the great bard Robbie Burns; I thought I should mention it to save any confusion. Another problem at Wigton Market Hall was that there was no place to hide while you took a break. You daren't talk to anyone in case you blew it with your dodgy accent cover, and you definitely would NOT go to the toilet for fear of execution, or worse. The best plan we found was to arrive really early to set the gear up, get changed when no-one else was around, get on the stage after going to the toilet first because you wouldn't get a second chance, climb on the stage and stay there till closing time, which by the grace of God, would not be long.

What we did for money!!!!

The worst slaughterhouse we played was believe it or not, in Windermere of all places. I admit that it was me who took the booking because I thought it would be “classy”. When we arrived we were surprised by the amount of people standing around, large people walking around in even larger white coats. Under there white attire lay tons and tons of muscles that were bursting out in all directions. After perusing their white garments Barry made this remark and aimed it in my direction “You've taken a booking in a nut house then!!!!” [A remark that was edged with a tinge of sarcasm.] No! It wasn't a lunatic asylum it was the local dance and these monsters were the bouncers. Somehow we felt somewhat safer as we thought who would be stupid enough to start any trouble with these Sumo wrestlers around. It seemed that everyone was stupid enough to. Kick off apparently started when the first note was struck, as were most of the people who were unlucky to be on the dance floor or the immediate vicinity thereof. The signal to stop the fracas was rumoured to be around three or four hours after the last note was struck. We never waited to find out, we would be long gone and tucked up in our beds long before the truce would be called. While we were making our strategic withdrawal you couldn't help but notice that the once “Daz” white jackets, were more akin to a “Redcoats” parade at Butlins. It was the most horrific so-called dance we ever played, and needless to say we didn't go back.

While thinking about punch-ups, Millom Market Hall comes to mind. You were always guaranteed an eventful evening there. Once you had found Millom and you stopped thinking,.. Why! You of course had to get the gear onto the stage. This task is normally quite easy, with the exception of the North East, where all concert rooms are up at least three flights of stairs, and are conveniently situated at the other end of the club. Nice one!!!!

The problem at Millom, wasn't getting the gear as far as the stage, it was getting it on. The stage was about eight-foot high and you had to access the demon with the aid of a ladder. It was the near 90° angle that put you off, for heights we likened not. You had to carry all your gear up this rock face without the aid of any of those clampy things that rock climber's use. The only time we had witnessed anything that closely resembled this task was when Everest was conquered some years before. Then as hours dragged by and we finally got the gear hoisted into position, we were the ones that needed to Ev-erest. [Sorry about that!]

There was a balcony at one end of the hall and it seemed the favourite trick of some of the high spirited lads would be to throw someone off it, possibly to see if they would stick into the ground. Although we would often witness this event, no-one ever managed to make the victim stick, and so the unlucky missile would be promptly rushed off to the nearest hospital at great speed to get his head realigned, only to return an hour or so later for an action replay.

[And you thought that I was daft!]

Making an exit from Millom missile testing area was made a lot easier because you just dropped the gear off the stage unaided by the ladder or any passing Sherpa's. It may seem a little drastic to push the gear off the stage in such an uncouth and irresponsible manner, but by the time that you'd played for three hours or so at that place you'd just had enough and you just didn't care anymore. Between that and the thoughts of the horrendous journey back along the cart track towards Whitehaven, you started to think that you should have heeded your mammy's advice after all and got a proper job.

We played a few gigs in Barrow, which was remarkably similar to Millom only with more miles, and Coney Fell in-between. "It would save petrol going by Coney Fell", said our transport manager. What we saved on the petrol was not the same amount, as we had to spend on the brake shoes the following day. Remember the brakes from the London trip?? Well they hadn't had anything done to them since that event.

Assuming you have not had the Coney experience in a brakeless pick-up, I can tell you that you're very lucky, and it is not recommended. As well as having to contend with the seemingly endless bends, hills, bumps, narrow bits that get narrower, basically no road, plus the herds of sheep factor, you get FOG. Just what you need in those conditions. One night on our way back from one of the Barrow Arena's it was of course, FOGGY. It wasn't foggy when we set off towards the fell, in fact it was a very clear night, but it lay in wait for us ready to strike when we reached the summit. Between the fag and exhaust fumes in the pick-up cab, plus the fog that was as thick as pea soup, we were not amused. We couldn't possibly put the ciggies out, it was our only form of heating, and we could do nothing about the exhaust fumes at that time of the morning, or at anytime, for it was terminal.

Yes!, once again we were in shtuck!!

It could have been the cold, because we were now running out of heat due to the depletion of the fags, or it could have been a morbid fear that had set in, but we all needed to go to the bathroom at the same time, a sort of joint wee, as us boys do. It's a kind of man thing!. There was no bathroom at hand but a very convenient wall that we could use as a convenience, of the public variety. So off we all shot behind the wall to join the sheep that had been warming it up for us. I don't know why we were all sheltering behind this fog bound wall because as far as we knew there was no one else for miles around, Baaaring the sheep. *Sorry!* Even if there were someone lurking they would be hard pushed to get a sighting of a flashing Meteor on that foggy night.



We did get rather worried with Barry though when he started to chat some of the sheep up, and he went missing for a while. When he came back with a wry smile on his face, he said, "I've only been looking for mushrooms, "why"!!!.

While we were all doing our various things the fog lifted slightly, and through it we noticed some headlights coming towards us. Barry had a great plan. "Wait until the car gets near and I'll tell you what to do". When the car got alongside us, the poor old dear who was driving it probably thought that we'd broken down, so just when he was about to get out of his car to see if we needed any help. We all jumped over the wall with our coats over our heads and made various ghostly screams and noises, after which the poor devil shot off in the fog like a rocket and disappeared, never to be seen again. Very cruel I know!!, but twas funny at the time.

We played at the "Seacote Hotel" in St Bees for a while. It was only for a short while and was curtailed quite abruptly by an overheard comment from Barry about the size of Mrs West's more than ample bosoms. Unbeknown to us she was working behind a screen when the incident occurred, and even though she never said anything to us, we didn't get anymore bookings, even so though, Barry was quite correct with his observations! "(Plural)". Before that event happened we thought that because the "Seacote" was rather posh, it would be the right time for us to pay another visit to "Redmayn's", as we'd almost paid for the other outfits by now. This time we were, for some unknown reason allowed more credit, so we decided to get togged out with two



suits each. One was to be a monkey suit, [evening dress], and the other one was styled on those Beatle chappy's, so we cleverly called them our "Beatle suit's".

We even had professional photographs taken by a professional photographer, as displayed on left.

Those "Burns" guitars that Barry and Ted played weighed a ton, as you can tell by the way that they are both sinking into the ground. The bass was exceptionally heavy and many a time Barry would fall over with

the sheer weight of it, especially after a jar or two of the amber nectar. I wasn't so daft!, my guitar was a "Hofner Verithin". It was a guitar that was made by "Hofner", and it was very thin! and very light too. And as you can see, Alan was still waiting for the rest of his drum kit to arrive, but at least he'd made a start and bought the sticks.

We wore the "Beatle" suits quite a lot until they started to loose their shape in the wash and we were all looking like the "Hunchbacks of Notre dam". Besides Barry had started to wear his suite while he was plastering walls and stuff so that didn't help his appearance at all. Ted had been seen removing combustion engines in his suite, so needless to say they were starting to look a tad worse for wear.

By now I was listening to all kinds of music as well as the pop we were playing. I'd started to buy quite a varied selection of guitar recordings, The Shadows, Les Paul, Chet Atkins, Django Reinhardt, to name but a few, and not forgetting one of my all time favourite musicians the great jazz guitarist Wes Montgomery. There were definitely NO "Bert Weedon" records in the collection. I never ever rated that guy at all! I think he plays so mechanical that he would be better suited to be driving on a JCB. I did once go to see him playing at Whitehaven though, only because I'd been given a free ticket. On the way through I thought that surely he cant be as bad as I think. But he was worse!

For a start he was well the worse from the whisky, and could hardly stand up. I don't think I've ever heard so many bum notes played in one night. He was dreadful!. For some reason he had a microphone placed right in front of him, probably to lean on when he tottered forward, and he continually grunted into it all the time he was, so called playing. I suffered about four numbers just in case he sobered up, but he didn't, he just got worse, so I made a quick exit and gave thanks that I hadn't paid to get in. It's really nice when somebody comes up to you after listening to you playing and they tell you that they've really enjoyed what you'd done, and that your the best guitar player they've heard, (this week?). It gives you a great feeling, only to knock you flat with a, "You just remind me of Bert Weedon" EEEKKKKK!!

We would often play at the Cosmo ballroom in Carlisle, which was a prize venue at the time. The manager Les Leighton liked us so he gave us a fair share of the bookings. The best one was when he booked us to support John Mayal and the Bluesbreakers. It was when Eric Clapton was playing with them and we were really looking forward to meeting him. Unfortunately it was when Eric was going through his 'high as a kite' period and although he played really well I don't think he knew he was there. He came in and walked straight up the middle of the dance floor, took his guitar out, tuned it, did the session, packed his guitar away and left, never speaking to anyone. *Maybe no one had told him he was playing on the same bill as the Meteors!*

Bit of a disappointment though!

Another place we played at was the Keswick Pavilion on a Saturday night, and that was quite an enlightening experience in more ways than one. Every Saturday night the local gladiators would come to entertain the crowds.

One of the other major hazards you had to overcome was caused by the fact that the stage sloped down towards the dance floor, and as our amplifiers had castors on them, (or as we would say, they were *castorated*), they would tend to roll forwards towards the unsuspecting punters. How did we stop the amplifiers rolling to the front of the stage? it was quite obvious really considering we travelled in a builders truck, building bricks were the cure, and so they became an essential part of our equipment at this venue. It must have looked a bit odd though, carrying all the gear in, plus half a dozen bricks, we should have called ourselves the Stones; although I think there was another band with that name. Another problem with that stage was that the microphone stands tilted forwards too, which meant that you had to lean forwards while trying to reach the microphone. This caused the backside of anyone attempting this feat, to stick out rather like "Max Wall" doing his silly walk. The side view of this strange phenomenon must have been something to behold. We must have looked like three inverted question marks having a night out. Alan on the drums had a lot to contend with too, he would spend half the night trying not to look like a giraffe giving birth while he attempted to keep all of the drums, and most of his essential parts all together.

Alan was more concerned about any damage that could arise from this contortion because he was the only one that was married at the time, so he was under strict instructions to take extra care in that department. Any further details should be addressed to Margaret, his misses. Yes! many's the time he would come sailing past the rest of us heading for the dance floor at a speed faster than he could play, sticks and bad language flying in every direction. We still managed to have some good nights at the Pavilion on a Saturday, even though it felt like you were on a permanently revolving stage. We had a better night on a Sunday though, because we weren't there.

It was a nice gig to play in the summer because it was right next to Keswick Park, and you got the fragrant aroma from all the various blossoms whooshing up your penk.

Even in the dance hall you could smell the apple and cherry blossoms, the lilac, the roses, the beer, the fish and chips, the vinegar, and even some sweaty punters. You could also listen to the sounds of dickey birds as they winged from tree to tree, busily doing what dickey birds do when they wing from tree to tree. Another noise often heard on a Saturday night was that of bottles and people, or sometimes people and then the bottles being thrown into the adjacent river. It didn't really matter in which order this ritual occurred it was just as damp either way when on the receiving end. Given a choice though, I suppose following the bottles into the water would have been a tad less painful because the water would be already parted, but as I've already mentioned, just as wet. A good punch up seemed to be an essential part of how some of the people celebrated there Saturday evening. Blood and guts, hair and teeth, arms and legs, wigs and winkle pickers were often seen whizzing across the floor. And that was only the girl's. God only knows what mayhem would have been caused if the lad's had joined in. At the end of the night the place took on an appearance more akin to a butchers shop than a dance hall. My girl friend nearly got her face re-vamped in this abattoir one night by one of the local she devils simply because she was my girl friend. I didn't fancy this local beauty any way, because as my mother used to say, "she had a face like a battered pluck", and besides, I was spoken for. By the way don't ask me what a pluck is, but a battered one sure sounds as though it could be a heck of a lot worse than the ordinary pluck. My dear old mother had more than her fair share of those mind-boggling delights. Anyone who wore a lot of make-up and donned a mini skirt was a brazen Hussy according to my Mam. If of course a man of male gender'ish donned the make-up and or mini skirt, he or she would be called a puff.

We did have a fan in Keswick called "Ronnie" something or other, who was that! way, but as far as I know none of the band member's subscribed to his club. He would turn up at nearly all of the gigs in the Keswick area wearing a bright red jacket and black, or to be more accurate, off black trousers and he would pretend to be one of us, while most people new he was one of them. He was a decent enough lad even though he did resemble a post box with legs, and he became quite handy at the end of the night for carrying out the gear, so we made him our chief Keswickian and surrounding area roadie, 1st class, affiliated.

Most of the time Barry was OK, but every once in a while he would suffer a brainstorm for no apparent reason. He wouldn't throw any insults our way, but instead he usually threw his guitar. After having a really good night in Maryport Labour ward, sorry Club, he picked his Hofner acoustic bass up by it's neck and flung it at great speed in the direction of the nearest wall, while letting rip with all his vast repertoire of naughty words, by which time we were well accustomed to. "Are you not happy about something Barry!" we said!. His reply was to the effect that the sound he was producing on the bass was akin to cow manure, and a lot of it!.



His actions that night resulted in me having to spend most of the following day sticking the jigsaw puzzle of guitar bits back together again for the gig on the following day.

He took another strop one night at Brigham. It was more or less an action replay with accompanying naughty's, but instead of only using a guitar and a wall to aim at, this time he used his guitar and a foot, and aimed them both at his speaker cabinet. This resulted in even more damage, for although all the pieces I'd manage to fix on the guitar after the Labour Club storm were still intact; all the other pieces that weren't broken then, certainly were now. Plus the fact that he'd punched a hole through both the speaker cloth, and one of the two loudspeakers. Any

damage to the foot was negligible, for he wore stout walking boots! After this costly affair I'm glad to say he calmed down a lot.

[Two months and three and a half days later]

The band were getting quite organised by now and we all had some decent gear and a decent girl friend so what could be lacking? Transport, that's what was lacking. We needed our own transport, and now. Transport that didn't need cleaned out before climbing into it, or hanging onto it as was often the case. The final straw came one Saturday while travelling to the dance at the Pavilion. I was to be picked up at home at 6.30, but at about 6.45 I heard this droning sound in the distance. Gradually it got louder and louder, was it the Queen Mary coming into Maryport harbour? Was it a German bomber who didn't know the war had finished in 1945? No! It was Barry and Ted in the pick-up with slightly less than no exhaust pipe on it. I recall someone having the bright idea that the two pipes that should have been permanently stuck together could be held in place by a piece of wire and an old beer can that had been left in the pick-up from the London trip. That combination could, with a bit of practice, be jiggled about a bit as to momentarily change the tone of this awful racket. The pitch of the din was variable, but not the overall volume, so on our arrival in Keswick none of us were able to hear a thing. Our delicate young ears, all struck down with the deafness, now we knew what Beethoven felt like. Makes you wonder if old Ludwig travelled from gig to gig in an old pick-up truck. Going by the age of it, it probably was the same truck. Deafness was not what you needed while attempting to play at a three-hour dance especially at the Pavilion; you had enough problems at this gig.

Our great saviour in our lack of transport department came in the shape of Allan. He bought a Comer van, a very old Comer van which we painted a most disgusting shade of green. On this disgusting shade of green we painted "THE-METEORS" in an even more disgusting bright yellowy orange. We carefully chose these two [nearly three] colours for two reasons. That's a reason for each colour you know!! Firstly we all thought it would be extremely eye catching, which it certainly was. The second reason was that because of the cost of the break shoes on the pick-up, we had no money to buy paint, so my dad had some paint left over from the 1914/18 war which he kindly donated free on the condition that we didn't take

any of it back. Somehow we did managed donated by my dad and did the van, leaving just the odd drain and road outside our Unfortunately I don't have a something related to this. =>



to use up all the 18 gallons manage to get most of it onto few gallons to sail down the shop in Crosby Street. picture of the van, but it was

When we were doing the yellowy orange painting it was rumoured that the streets of Maryport were paved with gold. This was started off by a colour-blind stranger who was visiting Bob Harris's in Wood Street, at three-o'clock in the morning for an unwrapped brown loaf, half a gallon of paraffin, a lettuce, and some firelighters, all of which would be stored on the same tray under the same counter. The poor soul had simply misunderstood the events and had mistaken the orange paint for gold.



Most of the residents of Maryport had at one time or another shared the Bob Harris experience.

←Bob was the Arkwright of Maryport. You could

buy anything from Bob provided it wasn't within the normal shopping hours. He would open up about 9 or 10 at night and close.....I don't know what time he closed because I was never up that late. It didn't matter what time you arrived back from a gig, you could be sure old Bob would be open, standing on his step watching the world go by. We thought he must be a vampire because you rarely saw him in full daylight. He was a likeable soul who was always good for a tale or two, and he could certainly tell a good story. Whether the yarns were true or not it didn't really matter. He was quite an odd character though and would often be heard asking a young lad to go through to the back of the shop to see his pet parrot and while they were there he would give them, as he called it, a *kittle*. "Now me bonny lad come and I'll give you a kittle", he would say. I leave the definition of a *kittle* to your imagination. I could tell you what it meant, even though I never had or wanted one.

Back to the van quick!! We had put so many coats of paint on it by now that we had to increase the tyre pressure by an extra 10lb to compensate for the extra weight. It had considerably grown in size too, and we were sure it was at least another six inches wide and four inches long. With all this extra armour painted on we felt quite safe and warm when we were on the move. It would only start with the aid of the starting handle and the choke pulled out 1¼". Not 1½", but 1¼". This was not a problem providing that two people were in attendance, but if you were on your own that was a problem. The choke would not stay out by itself, so by the time you'd pulled it out and sprinted to turn the handle, it had flown back in. The problem was ingeniously solved by Henry Lyall, Alan's dad, with a piece of copper pipe 1¼" long and a length of string. He hung the pipe in a convenient place whereupon when the van was to be stoked up, the pipe, 1¼" of it, would be placed over the choke knob which in turn held it at the correct distance, 1¼".

Sheer brilliance!!!!

I don't know why but Alan wasn't too keen on letting Ted or me use the van during the day, even though it was permanently parked outside our shop and Alan wasn't using it because he was at work.

So we would sometimes hot-wire it and borrow it from time to time, disconnect the Speedo and put half a gallon of petrol in just to prove that we weren't all bad. I don't think Alan ever knew!!.

The extra armour paint had its use one night when we were on our way back from The "Curwen Club" in Lowca. The road was very icy and Alan was only doing about 60mph when someone reminded him about the Lowca/Harrington crossroads, and pointed out that there was a large concrete bin, which was getting bigger by the second. By the time Allan had said, "yer-wot", the cry of the "wot" bit was hidden by the loud thud of a "Meteor" van hitting a solid concrete sand bin. How the two front seated Layall's didn't get decapitated is a miracle, because most of the gear in the van shot forward, as did the rest of us who were crammed in the back of it like sardines. It didn't take long for the van to stop once we had made contact with the concrete. "Mustev it abitta ice" said Alan, which was rather an understatement. We firmly pointed out that in pre accident order it ran, hit starter, hit accelerator, hit 60+mph, hit ice, hit bin. Eureka!., he didn't say "yer-wot", instead he grunted.. "eh?".

When we pulled ourselves out from in-between, underneath, and on top of the gear and the Lyall's, we found that on close inspection the shape of the bin had been redesigned, "Whoops", but the old van and all of it's contents and occupants didn't have a scratch anywhere. Except for the slight damage caused by a microphone stand to Ted's nether regions, but nothing that a good rub down with "Fiery Jack" wouldn't cure.

No-one offered to do that though!.

This is nothing to do with music but, talking about "Fiery Jack" reminds me of a true

tale about an aunt and uncle of my wife's. They were getting rather frisky with each other one night and in the rush to commence he'd unfortunately forgotten to wash his hands after using the dreaded "Fiery Jack" for his rheumatism.

"Say no more!!..... but, Ooo!,,, Nasty!!!



Alan the drummer/transport "costya" 6p a mile man, decided that a new form of transportation was due to replace the old, well past it's sell by date, knackered green goddess. A "Bedford Doormobile" no less, with sliding doors and real seats too. It was cream and brown with no rust to be seen. Before we asked, he said No!, to only two things. No! we couldn't paint it and No!, we weren't allowed to use it, except of course for Meteor business and a shortly to be negotiated new fee. Although it was new'ish, and it shone like the proverbial!!, and it was comfy and we could get all the gear stacked into it without the aid of a shoehorn, it had no character. Everything worked first time. The lights, brakes, choke, engine, no starting handle needed, it was too nice, and we were not used to this. I can't say anymore about it because nothing interesting ever happened with it. Maybe more interesting events took place inside it when Alan and his wife Margaret were aboard, I don't know, but I wouldn't of course repeat any of it even if I knew!, which I don't!.

We were once booked to play New Year's Eve at the village Hall in Mungrisedale, which is near Penrith. We'd never played there before so we were all looking forward to celebrating the New Year with a swing, besides the money wasn't too bad either. Because of the anticipated good night, we would take the girlfriends with us to join in with the festivities. It was one of those 9 o'clock to 1 dances which we loved to do so much!!!. We arrived early about 7:30 which would give us ample time to set up and get changed into our brand new "Meteor" suits. The caretaker of the hall was already there when we arrived and he was busy stoking up the boiler, which took centre stage slap bang in the middle of the dance floor. The only other time I'd seen this form of central heating was in the Curwen Club at Lowca, and if you remember that night ended in disaster. "Could this be an omen??" "No! We don't believe in all that stuff". It was now 8:30 and the total body count in the room was 8, including the caretaker, 9, if you included the stove..... It was now 9:00, starting time, and the total body count in the room was 8, including the caretaker, 9, if you included the stove. "You lads ed better start now", said Mr Caretaker, so we did. It was now 10:00 and the total body count in the room was 8, including the caretaker, 9, if you included the stove. Thank goodness it's 10:30, time for a break at last!!

It was now 11:00 and the total body count in the room was still only 8, including the caretaker, 9, if you included the stove.

If only he'd pay us off or something, or the stove would explode, anything would do, we wanted to go home. As midnight approached it was obvious to all except Mr Caretaker that, "NOBODY WAS COMING"

It was now 12:00 midnight and the total body count in the room was 8, including the caretaker, 9, if you included the stove, 10 with the shovel, and quite a lot more if you included the lumps of coal and the bucket. We wished everybody a Happy New Year

and plodded on until 1am. It took about three minutes to pack up the gear and load it into the van. I think that we still hold record for 200yds gear shifting competition and it does still appear in "The Guinness Book of Records". Three minutes to get the gear out and 60mins to get the money out of Mr Tightfist Caretaker. The conversation went rather like this.

Mr. Caretaker, referred to as C

Various members of the band, referred to as M

C "Now lads it's been a bad neyt, huu much wuz it 80 puns eh!?"

M "No, it was £100!"

C "No lad, av gorit doon fur 80 pun!"

M "No you have it wrote down on the contract you returned, £100!"

C "Ha u shuwer abute that marrer!"

M "Yes sir, it's written here in black and cow muck!"

C "Well a nivver, so it izz, now lets see huu much av got on ma!"

M "That sounds a good idea!"

C "A divent sapoze thal dey it fer 80 pun than!"

M "You *sapose* correctly Sir, NO WE WONT!"

C "O reyt marrer, lets see wot a cen dyur than!"

M "What you can dyur, sir, is give us the money, now please!"

At which point he produced a large bag from out of his trouser pocket, removed the handkerchief, mint ball, and the pieces of black shag that were attached to it, and preceded to count out the coins. No paper, just coins.

Up until the time that the moneybag made it's debut we all thought that Mr "Tightfist" Caretaker was slightly handicapped in the leg department, for he walkethed with a tilt to the left, but it was of course the 100 pun that had caused this leg impediment. No wonder he tilted, I don't think there was anything over a half a crown. It took as long to count the money as it did to play for it!.

What an unforgettable, miserable New Year that turned out to be!

Our new, New Year resolution was to vow never to go to Mungrisedale ever, ever, ever again,..... ever!!!!.

And we never did!!!! Ever!!

Now we were quite famous, we thought, why not broaden our horizons and get some bookings abroad,....so I rang Mr Gillchrist at the Market Hall in Annan and he gave us some bookings. It was quite a large venue with a stage that was obviously designed for theatrical events of the thespian type, because it had curtains, and lights, and pulley's for the scenery, dressing rooms with mirrors, toilets with seats and paper (non gloss and non news variety), it was the business. Everything was there except the electrical socket outlets. It wasn't that there weren't any sockets so much as, what were there were not the 5 and 15 amp sockets that everyone else used. Now I may not know my onions, but I do know my sockets, because WE had an electrical shop, and my brain was full of sockets, and all kindred information thereof.

I knew everything you could possibly know about sockets, I could have socketed for England, or even Scotland. 2amp 3pin, 5amp 2 and 3pin, the new flat pin 13amp, the D&S round pin 13amp with screw in fuse, the large 15amp 3pin, BC adapters, oh yes I new my stuff, but I was beaten with the site of this monster. It was about the size of a saucer and had about as much use. It had two offset flat pins, and one large round pin with a hole stuck in the middle for good luck. All the sockets in the place were special ones designed solely for stage lighting etc. When we asked the caretaker, [here we go again] if we could take one of these plugs off to wire onto our mains supply he would reply, Everytime with, "Nae you canny dae that laddie, Mr Gillchrist wouldna like it!!"

so what could we do!! As lead guitarist and chief electrician with the band I proceeded to do what every competent sparky would do and promptly whipped off our plug and with the aid of three matches, stuck the bare wires into the stage lighting socket. Job done!!!! To which the caretaker said, "Nae you canny dae that laddie, Mr Gillchrist wouldna like it!!"

Funnily enough, the worst supported dances that we had there were when we acted as the support band for some big names. The Overlanders, who had just had a big hit with the Beatles song "Michelle", fell victim to this venue, as did Adam Faith's backing band the "Roulettes". We still had a great time with both bands because owing to the lack of public support, we all just busked along together in one great jam session. For the uninitiated, a jam session has nothing to do with marmalade. Although we did play with those too, but it refers to the ability of group of musicians getting together and bashing away at something that they haven't the remotest idea of what it is, and then they hope that somehow they all finish at the same time, or thereabouts. Give or take an hour or so.

It's near enough for jazz as they say!!!!!!!!!!!!

Most of the time though, a jam session is a lot more fun to play than it is to be on the receiving end of!., because some of them can, and do, last for days on end.

It was now 1967 and we were all wanting to do something different on the music scene, Barry wanted to pack it all in and go to work in Germany, where he could concentrate on the fairer sex, in German. Alan was interested in club work as a resident compare/drummer & beer drinker. We took on another drummer for a while, John Goldie from Maryport who was really excellent and great fun to be with. We even enrolled a young lad from Distington called Glyn Davies to replace Barry on the bass guitar. Even though they were both good musicians and we all worked well together, somehow it wasn't the same as it used to be. The "Meteors" were falling. We'd had a good run and a lot of fun together, but we were growing up and needed to move on to other things. Ted was now more interested in tinkling about with old motorbikes and cars, although I'm pleased to say that we did stay very good friends and we still managed to play together quite often up until he sadly passed away a few years ago. Barry never really got back into the music scene at all and he unfortunately passed away early last year.

Now it was 1968 and I had married the cute little girl from Northern Audio on her 22nd birthday. I didn't want to be travelling so far to play and I wanted to do more with the Big Band and learn more about the business. For some time now on a Thursday night I'd been playing with "The Princess Rhythm Aces" in the Princess Hall in Workington, and I was asked if I would like to join the band. "Yes please!" I said. They were a treat to play with and great fun. This was my kind of music and I loved it.

I really enjoyed Thursday nights with only one exception. That was the time that Les arranged to come through with a mutual friend of ours called Chris. The Chris, was a big lad about 6'4", and he worked as a ladies hairdresser in town. He would often come into our shop and we would talk about music and swop records, and gossip etc, so over the months all became quite friendly. The plan was that before we set off to the dance one-week, Chris would make us all a meal. When Les and I arrived at his flat for the pre-dance meal, a veritable feast was laid before us. After the meal, (and very good it was too!.) Chris said that he would go and get changed and that he'd only be a couple of minutes.

When he finally returned we could hardly believe the apparition that stood before us, he was wearing the full Scottish regalia, kilt, sporran, dirk, haggis, you name it, he had one, maybe two, I daren't look. I was the one who would have to introduce this 6'4"

Scottish tourist attraction, to all the guy's in the band, who probably would offer some sort of verbal ridicule, perhaps!!!!.

You bet they did! He was a complete laughing stock, though some said he was the best act that had been in the Princess Hall for months. I was playing guitar with the band of course, so Les and the highland flinger were doing the entire dancing thing. While they were dancing I noticed a change in Les's expression, and I didn't find out the reason till after we'd dropped "Rob Roy" off at his flat. On the way home Les told me what had happened. Apparently when they were in one of the close clinch dance positions, Chris said that although he liked her a lot, he didn't fancy her. "Good, just as well" I said. Then he produced the killer line and went on to say that what he did fancy was ME!!! He had a crush on ME!!.

"Bring me the hose pipe Mother!!"

Needless to say we didn't visit Chris anymore, except to put "Ronnie" from Keswick's telephone number through his letterbox.

We weren't invited to the wedding, but I'm sure they made make a lovely couple.



It was while I was playing with the "Princess" band that I first met a guy who helped me no end with my music. A guy that didn't so much as tell me what to do, but every time I played with him something magic rubbed off. It came as quite a surprise one night when he asked me if I would care to join "The Cumbria Combo". He didn't have to ask me twice, I jumped at the chance, and thankfully I did a tremendous amount of playing with him in the following years. He gave me not only the confidence and encouragement I needed, but the inspiration to try to be a more competent guitarist.

You can't beat playing with the best.

That guy was the brilliant pianist and musician, Ray Collister.



But that's another tale!

Sadly! Ray passed away but I'm sure the old devil is up there tinkling away!



