

A Time to Remember

St. Dunstan's 75th Anniversary





Ready to enjoy themselves at the Palace are (l-r) Mrs. Valerie Hardy, Mike Tetley, Mr. and Mrs. Ted John, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Taylor and Mr. and Mrs. Bill Shea.

A Time to Remember

The celebration of St. Dunstan's 75th Anniversary on 1st August was the culmination of months of planning but one thing that could not be planned was the weather. On the morning of the great day a clear blue sky over the Gardens of Buckingham Palace, as the Royal corgis had their morning stroll, removed the fear of rain. It was already warm and in the afternoon temperatures in the open were certainly in excess of the nineties fahrenheit!

All told some 750 people came through the Grand Entrance of Buckingham Palace. As they passed into the Bow Room on their way to the Terrace and the Gardens, St. Dunstan's Presi-

dent, Mr. Colin Beaumont-Edmonds and his wife, Joyce, with the Chairman, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry Leach with Lady Leach and Captain Michael Barrow, Gentleman Usher representing Her Majesty The Queen, were there to welcome them.

Then it was out into the bright sunshine and searing heat of a summer afternoon to end all summer afternoons. Everyone rushed to the nearest shade — the trees down by the lake were very popular — to await the arrival of Her Royal Highness Princess Alexandra and her husband, Sir Angus Ogilvy with the Princess's Lady-in-Waiting, Miss Mona Mitchell.

Prompt at 2.30 they emerged on the Terrace accompanied by the President and Chairman with their wives and Captain Barrow. Their arrival was signalled by the National Anthem played by the Band of the Coldstream Guards.

"The spirit of St. Dunstan's was very much alive"

The Royal couple separated and made their way among the groups assembled, chatting, often at length, with whomever they met. Princess Alexandra, elegant in a red and white patterned dress with white, brimmed hat and gloves, charmed everybody with her real interest and thoughtful questions. An ex-seviceman himself, Sir Angus was enthralled by the stories he drew from St. Dunstaners and earned the gratitude of everyone on his side of the lawn when he picked up a chair and led them into the shade of the trees. Despite the heat, he and Her Royal Highness spent an hour and a half among the guests until their departure some little time after four.

Before she left, Her Royal Highness graciously accepted a bouquet presented by Joyce Beaumont-Edmonds and a picture framed by a St. Dunstaner, presented by Colin Beaumont-Edmonds. During the presentation the Band of the Coldstream Guards played a waltz, 'The Joy Bells of Peace', orchestrated for St. Dunstan's by its Director of Music, Major R.G. Swift.

The story behind the presentation and the music that accompanied it goes back to 1919, when this waltz was sold in aid of St. Dunstan's at two shillings. The score was sold in a colour cover which announced that: 'Copies have been graciously accepted by Her Majesty The Queen and Queen Alexandra.' The last named was, of course, St. Dunstan's first Patron and it seemed appropriate to present a framed, colour reproduction of the cover to her namesake and great grand-daughter on our Anniversary. Princess Alexandra is herself a pianist and asked for a copy of the score which has now been sent to her.

Tea in the marquee followed the departure of the Royal Party, while the Len Arthur Swing Band played the foot-tapping music of the 30's and 40's from the repertoires of Glenn Miller,



Her Royal Highness, with William 'Russ' Crombie and his wife, Mary.

Sir Angus Ogilvy meets St. Dunstaner Marjorie Ball and her sister, Dorothy.



Cover Picture: Two very important ladies, Her Royal Highness Princess Alexandra and Dame Vera Lynn, chat with Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry Leach at Buckingham Palace.



Dame Vera Lynn accepts a bouquet from Guy Bilcliff.

Benny Goodman and other big bands of that era. Alan Dell, presenter of B.B.C. programmes 'Sounds Easy', 'Dance Band Days' and 'Big Band Era' on Radio Two came along to comper the show and introduce one of Britain's top singers, Angela Christian.

*"We met a footman with the
Corgis so I shook paws"*

The afternoon's entertainment was brought to a finale by Dame Vera Lynn, who soon had the audience singing along with her songs from the programme she sang only a few days before for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother. How the words of those war-time songs have stayed in the memory! No-one had any trouble remembering 'Roll Out the Barrel', 'Yours', 'The White Cliffs of Dover' and the song that has become Vera's own: 'We'll Meet Again'.

Sir Henry Leach thanked Dame Vera and St. Dunstan, Guy Bilcliff presented her with a bouquet. The Chairman also thanked Len Meredith, leader of the Len Arthur Swing Band and revealed that Len had been a shipmate of young midshipman Leach in the Royal Navy, He introduced Captain Michael Barrow who gave a



Her Royal Highness with Harry Wheeler.

message of greeting from Her Majesty The Queen.

So, with the National Anthem, phase one of the celebrations ended and guests passed once more through the Palace on their way to Colin Bentley's coaches which waited in the Quadrangle to take them to the Hilton and Inter-Continental Hotels for a brief respite before the celebration dinner.

At 7.30, after welcome showers, with renewed finery for the ladies, the company re-assembled at the Hilton for drinks before dinner in the Foyer of the Grand Ballroom, where the conversation buzzed with the anecdotes and impressions of the afternoon at the Palace. Soon after eight, all 700 plus were seated for dinner in the Grand Ballroom itself, one of the few rooms in London capable of catering for such numbers.

After proposing the Loyal Toast, Sir Henry Leach first read out a message sent to our Patron, Her Majesty The Queen. Her Majesty was pleased to reply, 'Please convey my sincere thanks to all members of St. Dunstan's for their kind and loyal message of greeting sent on the occasion of their 75th Anniversary dinner tonight. As Patron, I receive this message with much pleasure and send my best wishes to you all for a successful evening. I hope, despite the

heat, that everyone enjoyed themselves in the garden of Buckingham Palace this afternoon.' It was signed, Elizabeth R.

Special welcomes were extended to Tim Sheeres, President of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Jim Sanders, Executive Director of the Sir Arthur Pearson Association of War Blinded in Canada and The Reverend Canon Michael Norman, Chairman of St. Dunstan's Association for South African War-Blinded Veterans, and their wives. Michael Norman brought this greeting: 'On the occasion of our 75th anniversary, I would like to bring to all St. Dunstaners the greetings and best wishes of all South African St. Dunstaners. I would also like to express the deep appreciation and gratitude which we all feel for the continued interest and support which St. Dunstan's in Britain so readily gives to us.'

There was a warm round of applause when Sir Henry referred to the presence at dinner of Dame Vera Lynn, 'Who sang so beautifully in the afternoon', and her husband, Harry Lewis. The Chairman also mentioned John Brunel Cohen, Chairman of The 'Not Forgotten' Association, who had celebrated their 70th anniversary the day before.

Sir Henry told the guests that a commemorative reunion was being held in Western Australia on this same day and the following message had been received from St. Dunstaners throughout Australia: 'On behalf of our President, Harry Leggo, and all the members of The Blinded Soldiers of St. Dunstan's, Australia, I am writing to convey our warmest greetings and best wishes to St. Dunstan's for their 75th anniversary celebrations. With our kindest regards to all, Yours sincerely, Alan Dean, Secretary.'

*"The right sort of music
for us wrinklies"*

The Chairman then read a message from New Zealand, which he and Lady Leach had recently visited for their St. Dunstan's Reunion. 'May I ask you to pass on to the Council and all St. Dunstaners, the good wishes of all New Zealand St. Dunstaners on the occasion of your 75th anniversary celebrations. Bob Sadler, Representative.'

A final and very special welcome was extended to 'Little Ruby', Mrs. Ruby Crane, who



Princess Alexandra receives the picture from Colin Beaumont-Edmonds.

*"It is a day that will remain
in our memories forever"*

Angela Christian sings with the Len Arthur Band.





Sir Angus Ogilvy chats with Richard Bingley, Norman and Bertha Drew.

A moment to cherish for St. Dunstaner, Dorothy Martin.



Frank and Charlotte Howe with full St. John escort.



featured on the back of the Programme as the small girl who had led St. Dunstaners, hand in hand, around the Regent's Park training centre in the days of the First World War. 'It is my great pleasure to present to her, on behalf of us all, a St. Dunstan's brooch.'

"We were, indeed, treated royally"

Sir Henry continued, 'This is a famous and unique occasion. It is famous because 250 men and women, blinded on war service, together with wives, widows, escorts, guests and officials are gathered in our capital city to celebrate their anniversary.

'It is unique because it marks three-quarters of a century of courage, resolution and success in leading normal, useful lives despite the great handicap of blindness, and in some cases, other dreadful handicaps as well. It makes us fortunate, who have been lucky enough to retain our sight, albeit with a little artificial help when confronted by the telephone directory, feel very humble and very proud of you.

'In saying these few words I am conscious of those others of our great family of St. Dunstan's who, for reasons beyond their control, are unable to be with us today. I am sure I speak for you all in saying we miss them and wish them well.' The Chairman named, particularly, Colonel Sir Michael Ansell, our immediate past President, The Marquis of Normanby, one of our Vice-Presidents, and Mr. Ion Garnett-Orme, immediate past Chairman, from whom a message was read out.

Sir Henry went on to pay tribute to the organisers of the occasion. There were many but three names stood out: David Castleton, Keith Martin and Bill Weisblatt. 'They are, I know, looking forward to a few hours sleep before they take charge of the final evacuation from London, which seems likely to have many of the ingredients of the evacuation of Dunkirk 50 years ago!'

The Chairman's toast for the evening was, 'Many Happy Returns!'

The guest of honour was Mr. Sandy Gall, presenter of *News at Ten*. 'How terrifying', he began, 'to have a live audience. I am only used to three cameras and one technician in the studio. I

regard it a privilege and pleasure to be here on your birthday. I have been much impressed despite only a brief acquaintance with a few of you before the meal.' He explained that his wife had accompanied him because of her involvement in a charity which she and her husband founded to provide artificial limbs for Afghan war disabled. Sandy Gall went on to recount several experiences in *News at Ten* involving Royalty, relevant in view of the day's preceding events.

Ray Hazan responded on behalf of St. Dunstaners. He pleaded forgiveness if his speech sounded a little slurred, 'I spilt some alcohol over my braille notes earlier on!' He went on to thank Sandy Gall, who had brought newsprint to life and had kept St. Dunstaners in touch with what was going on in the world. The management, catering staff and the Banqueting Manager, Mr. David Irving, were thanked and applauded. Ray gave grateful thanks to the husbands, wives, widows, families, escorts and staff, 'For we St. Dunstaners know that any success achieved, indeed life itself, would not be possible without their help.' His final thanks were to the great British public, 'Without whose support and generosity St. Dunstaners would not enjoy the benefits they cherish so much.'

He said that the family occasion provided an excellent opportunity to bring out the 'family album'. On page one was our Founder, Sir Arthur Pearson, whose brainchild it was, 'He has had many famous sons over the years, the most well-known being Lord Fraser of Lonsdale. We remember the first generation St. Dunstaners, men of the First World War, who were the real pioneers. They handed over the baton to the second generation, Second World War St. Dunstaners, who had achieved outstanding successes in the fields of employment, sports and recreation. It is up to the third generation, the post-war St. Dunstaners, to bear the torch aloft and uphold the good name of St. Dunstan's so ably laid down by previous generations.'

He concluded with the toast, 'We remember with gratitude our Founder, Sir Arthur Pearson, and coupled with the name of our guest of honour, I give you the toast: St. Dunstan's.'

Tim Sheeres then rose to bring the greetings of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. He explained how Colonel Eddie Baker, blinded in the First War, trained at St. Dunstan's and was then instrumental in setting up the



Mrs. Ruby Crane, 'Little Ruby', admires her St. Dunstan's brooch after receiving it from Sir Henry.

"I came home with such joy in my heart"

Captain Michael Barrow, Gentleman Usher, with Fred Galway.



CNIB. He conveyed the greetings of Euclid Herie, the Managing Director of CNIB. With his best wishes for the next 25 years, Tim presented the Chairman with a, 'Bionic, bi-lingual, bi-cultural Canadian Beaver!'

Jim Sanders began, 'Bill Weisblatt asked me not to bore you with a long speech. I assured him I could do it with a short one!' Jim read the inscription on a plaque, about to be presented by Gordon Stillwell, blinded in the Royal Navy but now resident in Peterborough, Canada, on behalf of The Sir Arthur Pearson Association. It read, 'We came to St. Dunstan's in despair. We became a St. Dunstaner and returned to Canada with renewed courage. In recognition and appreciation of our new-found courage, we formed the Canadian branch of our St. Dunstan's family. Today we share the pride of 75 years of unflinching service and look to the future with optimism, Signed: David M. Dorward, President.'

The formalities over, guests dispersed to bars, to transport home for those with shorter journeys or to bed for those staying overnight. The last of the 'evacuation' went on next morning — reasonably smoothly! A great occasion in the history of St. Dunstan's had ended.

Chairman and President bid farewell to Her Royal Highness.



Tim Sheeres presents a very special Canadian Beaver, with Jim Sanders applauding.

"May I book two places for the 100th anniversary celebrations?"

'What's next?' — Elizabeth Dacre reads the programme to Bill Griffiths.

