

Memory Lane By Craig Fleming

From taboo to tangos

GLAMOUR, Movement, Fascination.

Or, as playwright George Bernard Shaw once described it: A very crude attempt to get into the rhythm of life.

We're talking about ballroom dancing and there's plenty of it going on until Friday at the 84th annual Blackpool Dance Festival.

From social taboo to social activity and Olympic sport, its metamorphosis has taken 100 years – little of which has been recorded. Until now.

Who were the people who moved this field of dance to where it is today, loved by millions? This is the central question of a £105 a time coffee table book – *Ballroom Icons* (inset above) – which Canada-based German-born dance teacher and adjudicator Brigitt Mayer-Karakis has been working on for the last seven years.

The book, about people and their enthusiasm and tenacious love for ballroom dancing, was finally unveiled at the

festival in the Winter Gardens last night at a glittering reception when the guest speaker was British Dance Council president Bryan Allen.

Described as a journey through the lives of dancers, doers and devotees of the ballroom world, this limited luxury edition of 2,500 books, no doubt soon to become a collector's item, comes in a beautiful dark linen box with embossed print.

There is a fold out with over 200 vintage pictures from the icons in action in their time, dating back to 1910, with testimonies from former world champions about their favourite icons.

Brigitt says: "Living in this field of dance for so long, it was my vision to create a book that through its format is a piece of art, and through its content a true and intriguing documentation of ballroom dance history. I hope that it is also a pleasure to read."

A familiar local face in the book is Gill MacKenzie, who joined the Blackpool



DANCE FEVER: Blackpool Dance Festival organiser Gill MacKenzie against the backdrop of an empty Empress ballroom in 1998. This week it is alive to the sound of music for some of the best dancers in the world

Tower Company publicity department in 1973 and, worked for successive owners Trusthouse Forte Leisure, First Leisure and Leisure Parcs.

Organiser of the Blackpool Dance Festival organiser from 1981 until her retirement in 2004, Gill is featured in pictures and words over four pages as the story of the festival unfolds, from its early years as very much a north of Eng-

land championship to its world status today. This year's event sees a total of 122 British couples and 1,685 foreign couples from a total of 58 countries taking part in the various Amateur, Senior and Professional Ballroom and Latin events.

■ *Ballroom Icons* is available, UK price £105, from Dancesport International. E-mail info@dancesport-international.com or ring (0208) 664 8188



This day

100 years ago

THE Blackpool Lodge of the Theosophical Society complained that the noise of roller skaters and an accompanying orchestra from the Swiss Rink below ruined their "lengthy and lucid" lecture on reincarnation at the Metropole Assembly Rooms.

JACQUES Inaudi "the human phonograph and lightning calculator" showed his powers to an invited Blackpool audience.

THE management of The Palace reported a good response to the patriotic offer of free admission on Empire Day to members of the Blackpool Artillery and Yeomanry.

50 years ago

BEFORE considering several speeding summonses, Blackpool magistrates adjourned the court to see the police radar check apparatus in operation at Squires Gate.

CHILDREN at St Bernadette's Infant School, Bispham thought Martians had landed when an Air Ministry balloon with parachute and "an umbrella arrangement of tubes" fell out of the sky and exploded near their playground.

MOST of the stars announced for June's Royal Variety Performance were drawn from Blackpool's summer show line-up, ranging from Dickie Henderson to Marion Ryan.

25 years ago

WYRE Coun Harry King accused Coun Jack Davis of being parochial by branding the cost of a five-day "educational" trip to an Edinburgh planning school, complete with first class rail travel, an insult to ratepayers.

FYLDE Voluntary Care Association appealed for more volunteers to help people cope with problems and turn offenders from crime.

EMPLOYERS and workers at Blackpool's troubled transport department welcomed a 12-point "peace plan" prepared by industrial conciliation service ACAS.

Welders forge out careers in showbusiness

AT the height of their popularity, comedy double act Cannon and Ball played to more than one million people through their 1985 summer season, UK tour and pantos.

And the star duo certainly conquered Blackpool in 1980 with a record-breaking North Pier summer season.

The duo were former workmates in a Lancashire engineering factory in the early 1960s. By day they were welders, Robert Harper and Tommy Derbyshire, but by night they became a singing duo called The Harper Brothers.

It soon became evident that Bobby had a natural flair for comedy, with Tommy the perfect straight-faced foil. As the comedy content grew stronger, so did their popularity and the name change, four years after they started out, certainly helped.

Their first TV appearance was in 1972 in the variety show *The Wheelers and Shunters Social Club*. Since then the rest is pure show-business history.

The Cannon and Ball Show was first shown in 1979 and further series followed each year through to 1988, along with top TV-rating Christmas and Easter specials. The boys were back top billing in Blackpool with summer seasons at the Opera House in 1985 and 1987.

By the 1990s, the duo were seeking a change in direction and appeared in their own sitcom *Cannon and Ball's Playhouse*, the spin-off series *Plaza Patrol* and their game show *Cannon and Ball's Casino*.

However they remained loyal to their Lancashire roots and starred at the North Pier in



★ Seaside stars ★

This week's spotlight falls on Cannon and Ball

ROCK ON TOMMY: The comic duo outside The Winter Gardens in 1985

1991 and the Opera House again in 1994. Two years later they headlined a *Rock With Laughter* season at the Grand Theatre.

Blackpool had certainly become their second home, when in 1999 they returned to headline the Grand's summer show. Family man Bobby lives in St Annes. In more recent times they have continued to find success as a comic duo in theatre and pantomime, along with numerous cameo appearances on TV. The pair also revived a touring version of the theatrical farce *Big Bad Mouse*.

Canon and Ball will be back at the Opera House as part of a *Best of British Variety Tour* on August 14, 21 and 28.

■ Cannon and Ball appear in the Gazette's new book *Blackpool's Seaside Stars*, which is packed with profiles of those showbusiness greats, together with many rare pictures from our archives – of celebrities at work and play – sprinkled with your reader memories.

The hardback book is out in June, priced at £14.99. To order, call (01253) 361862.



MISSING YOU ... your chance to go down Memory Lane and make contact again with loved ones and old friends

I AM working with a colleague – herself the child of a war-widow – to research and establish the living standards of those women married to servicemen who died in the Second World War.

Were you the child of anyone in these circumstances?

Have you any knowledge of their income, pensions, official or otherwise, poverty level etc. The subject seems to be largely ignored in the standard literature and we hope to fill this gap.

HELEN D MILLGATE
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■ If you are searching for someone contact Missing You with details, enclosing a photograph if possible and send to: Craig Fleming Missing You, at the address below