

Lynn News, Friday 8th July 1955

Night of songs and laughter

FUN AT THE TILDEN SMITH WHEN BBC RECORD SONGS BY 'OLD SALTS' OF LYNN

Two hours of rollicking fun were had at the Tilden Smith public house in North End, Lynn on Monday night. In fact it was the best entertainment seen in this town for many a day.

London may have the Victoria Palace and the *[illegible]* performance, but Lynn follows close behind with the Tilden Smith and the "old salts" of the fishing fleet.

The historic old pub, traditional haunt of the fishermen of Lynn for nearly ninety years, was crammed to capacity with blue-jerseyed customers and others who had come to watch the fun.

Drinks were on the BBC and all present made the most of this generosity. Mr Steve Rake, the landlord, had one of the busiest nights of his career dashing to and from through the tobacco-laden atmosphere carrying jugs of beer to meet the demands of a clientele that seemed more thirsty than usual.

The occasion was a recording made by the BBC.

This was arranged by John Seymour, the author of travel books, who is at present exploring the rivers and canals of East Anglia collecting material to supplement a radio programme to be broadcast later this year and also form the basis of his next book.

Mr Seymour, who has done a good deal of freelance work for the BBC in the past, is being assisted in this programme by Francis Dillon, the producer of "Country Magazine" and other popular radio programmes.

Big Night

Mr Seymour seeks the contacts in his meanderings about the coast and where he hits on a good story – like the Tilden Smith – he teams up with Francis Dillon, who attends to the producing side. So intrigued was Mr Seymour by the individuality of some of the characters he found in the Tilden Smith and their knowledge of old songs, long forgotten, that he returned with Francis Dillon on Monday to make a complete recording.

Excitement stirred the "regulars" sitting around the smoky walls as Francis Dillon took his stance in the centre of the room, microphone in hand. They watched him expectantly over their pints of mild.

This was going to be a big night in the history of the Tilden Smith. Those who could not get inside peered in through the windows from outside.

The first song came from 89-year old Charlie Fysh, the oldest fisherman in Lynn. Now everyone knows Charlie and everyone knew this was going to be good. It was. It had been carefully explained to Charlie beforehand that he would have to leave out of the song certain words that might be considered offensive to the more aesthetically-minded listeners of the BBC.

Even so, some of the banned words crept in and were received with gleeful appreciation by the **less aesthetically-minded patrons of the Tilden Smith. What the BBC is going to do about it is their affair.**

Charlie stood there stiffly to attention, his cap perched at a jaunty angle and his good eye making up in brightness for the one that was obscured by the familiar patch.

'Ole Johnnie'

The microphone was thrust before him and he started away on the first line of 'Ole Johnnie Bowker.' Then there was a flash as someone took a picture of him. Charlie stopped abruptly. "What the ----- was that?" he snapped. "Never mind about that, keep on singing," said Francis Dillon. "Never mind about it? Oi nearly broke me braces when it happened," complained Charlie.

So Charlie started again and this time sang all the ...

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Fisher Fleet 'stars' for BBC

... verses, everyone else who had not been rendered incapable by laughter coming in with the chorus. When he came to the last verse, Charlie faltered a moment and said "----- me! I can't remember what comes next!" The microphone was hastily switched off.

"Old Johnnie Bowker" is a delightful story set to tune. It concerns a man who had a wife who broke her leg. He called in the doctor who examined her and prescribed that the injured limb should be rubbed with gin. One of the choicest verses goes:-

*So Ole Johnnie Bowker he thought it were a sin,
To rub his wife's leg with the gin,
So he poured the gin down his old throttle
And rubbed his wife's leg with the empty bottle.*

Tom next

The next rendering was given by 70-year-old Tom Benefer. There was something almost Churchillian in Tom's stance as he stood there, cap pulled low over his eyes and jaw thrust aggressively forward. His bulk was tightly clad in a blue crew-necked jersey, dungarees and carpet slippers. He sang "I'm a harum scarum fisherman hailin' from King's Lynn town".

George Smith was next with "Golden Slippers" and "The Drunken Sailor". Everyone had by this time become thoroughly carried away by the fun of the moment and George got a crashing chorus at the end of each verse, the singers beating time with tankards and glasses.

For those who were exhausted with laughter there was no relief. Sixty-two year old "Bob" Chase, son-in-law to Charlie Fysh, took the stage next and sang "Hanky Twanky" – all about a chap who stabbed his wife with the bread-and-cheese knife because she beat him up one night when he came home tight.

Their duet

George Smith and Tom Benefer then sang a duet entitled "Yellow Handkerchief". Then, to give the younger hands a look-in, a recording was taken of "The Cow Jumped Over the Moon", sung by Brian Bone.

After the recordings had been taken, they were played back in the recording car which stood outside. Everybody thronged out to hear the result of their efforts. They were not disappointed. It sounded as good as it had sounded inside.

A loudspeaker was placed on top of the recording car for all to hear and in no time the crowd was swelled by passers-by who stopped to listen. There was a yell of laughter when “Old Johnnie Bowker” came over with beautiful clarity, salted with Charlie Fysh’s remarks.

And the pub?

And so ended a most enjoyable evening. But a word about the Tilden Smith, which after all, is a strange name for a pub. The story goes that in the early sixties there was a man who owned a vessel which traded around

Picture captions:



HERE THEY ARE! Three of the saltiest of the “Old Salts” of the Tilden Smith. Nearest the camera is 89-year-old Charlie Fysh – fisherman all his life. Next to him is 70-year-old Tom Benefer and beside him, looking very much at peace with the world, is George Smith, who is also 70. You can’t teach ‘em anything about cockles, shrimps or singing – as a BBC recording team found on Monday.



“IT NEARLY BROKE ME BRACES” was Charlie Fysh’s complaint when the picture [above] was taken at the Tilden Smith. The flash of the camera startled him and he had to start his rendering of “Ole Johnnie Bowker” all over again. Recording Charlie’s song is Francis Dillon, of the BBC, while John Seymour, the author of travel books who organised this feature for the BBC looks on (extreme left).