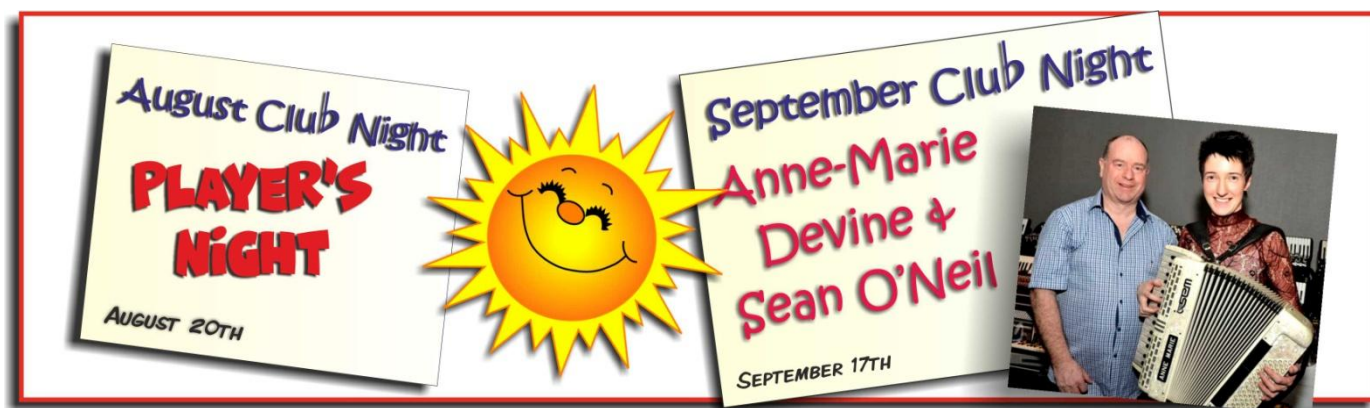


North Staffs Accordion Club

July-August 2024

No 513



HI EVERYONE

WE SEND A WARM WELCOME TO JOE AND MARY HILL WHO HAVE JOINED THE CLUB. THIS ADDS TO OUR EVER-WIDENING NETWORK OF TOWNS FROM WHICH WE HAVE MEMBERS INCLUDING WREXHAM, WARRINGTON, MACCLESFIELD (2), LICHFIELD (4), AND NOW TELFORD.

AUGUST CLUB NIGHT

Ignoring 'guest' and other special club nights, we alternate 'players' and 'theme' nights. The August club night on the 20th will be a 'players' night with an opportunity for you to play your party, or other favourite, pieces.

Over the last 18 months the attendance by members has been higher on the theme nights and we hope that next month we buck that trend.

SEPTEMBER CLUB NIGHT



We plan to host **Anne-Marie Devine** and **Sean O'Neil** from Ireland as our guests. They will come over to visit our beginners/improvers on the Monday and will be staying a couple of nights to perform at our club night on the Tuesday.

Anne-Marie is from Strabane in Northern Island. She is the All-Ireland Senior Accordion Champion from the 2012 National Accordion Championships and has a number of awards, including Music Personality of the Year 2010 by the Omagh District Council and a 1st class honours degree in music in 2019.

She performs with duet partner and teacher Sean O'Neill and they appeared in our '**Zoom**' based **Charity Concert** back in lock down days. Anne-Marie now owns her own business '**Up-Beat Music Tuition**' where she teaches accordion (including a number of our beginners' group), tin whistle, banjo, and many more classes.

CLUB COMPOSERS' COMPETITION

Open to club members: Get out your pen and paper or music notation software (e.g. MuseScore) and compose a piece of original music for the accordion. It can be of any length and be a solo or group piece. We give you several months to do this including the Christmas break with entries required in early January.

The one requirement is that it is played at a club night, preferably by, or including, you.

More details available from Steve Hughes



JUNE CLUB NIGHT

Numbers were down a bit for this session, but that did not dampen spirits for what turned out to be an evening enjoyed by all.

Mike Richards played the background music for the arrivals following which the players had the usual group playalong with song sheets for the audience. The theme for the event was '**Mode of Transport**', and 14 players took part in the solo/duets contributions. They did not appear to have trouble in finding pieces to fit the theme which included *Fly me to the Moon*, *Country Roads*, *The High Part of the Road*, *Riding on the Range*, *Rocket Man*, *Trains & Boats & Planes*, *Tijuana Taxi*, *Red Sails in the Sunset*, *Daisy, Daisy* (bicycle made for two), *Golden Coach*, *Donkey Serenade*, *Top Gun Anthem*.



Mike Richards



Miriam Umpleby with Geoff & Jacqui

John Plumb was first to get up and opened with *Horsey, Horsey*, telling us that this was a song they sang when he was a boy in his father's car as they drove through France, fleeing the Germans during the occupation of the country. (John celebrated his 90th birthday at last month's club night)

We like a bit of instrumental diversity, and this was given by Charlie Walker who sang a hilarious song called *The Tourist Complaint*, with ukulele accompaniment.

Miriam Umpleby is always up for something different and this time she had enlisted Jacqui Flather and Geoff Capewell to 'do the moves', as she sang and played *We're a Couple of Swells* getting them walking 'down the avenue', dancing, skipping etc. It was good fun.



Rosie Galley and John Corden

Derek Wilton, an instrumental diverse regular, played *The Runaway Train* and *Last Train to San Fernando* on his harmonica.

Rosie Galley and John Corden played *Blue Skirt Waltz*; *Apple*, *Peaches*, *Pumkin Pie Polka* & *Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain*. For each one of these Rosie gave a convoluted and ridiculous account of how they justified the piece complying with the theme. She managed to get the audience in stitches but I'm afraid she doesn't get the highlighting.

New member, Joe Hill, gave superb renditions of *Donkey Serenade*, *Blaze Away* and *From Now On*. It was great to see him and wife, Mary, and they made light of the fact that they had travelled all the way from Telford, which Google Maps tells me is one hour's drive away. Another couple with a similar journey were on next as a duet. Elizabeth Brixton and Amanda Hilmarrson-Dunn both from the Lichfield area gave a lovely performance of *Eileen's Waltz*, *Harmonica Tricks* and *The Jazz Suite*. Amanda has been abroad a lot and has difficulty in getting to our club nights. Elizabeth is a regular at our bend rehearsals but not normally to club nights, so it was good to have them with us. The performance sounded very well-rehearsed despite the fact that they have little time to do so.



Amanda Hilmarrson-Dunn & Elizabeth Brixton



Joe Hill

Following a rendition of *The Top Gun Anthem*, Steve Houghton played *Trains & Boats & Planes* with the lyrics sung by Cathryn. The last number was *Bayernmade* for which they displayed the words for the audience to follow. The words, however, were in German which gave us great difficulty!

Mike Richards had started the event and he was given the task of ending it which he did with a rendition of *Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree* and *Whip Jamboree Whip* with backing track and vocals. A nice end to another lovely club night.

A TOUCH OF SPICE

Tony Britton

Twice a Tuesday night at the North Staffs Accordion Club and in walked Helen Rich, Chris Green, Glenda Reid and Diana Tonge. I had my suspicions that they were the mafia, as they carried large boxes and Helen had a violin case under her arm. Phew! We breathed a sigh of relief when out came the accordions, Chris's flute and Helen's violin with bow in hand.



Yes, it was our July 2024 club night with guest players **Accordion Spice** looking resplendent in their polka dot blouses. I would love to play accordion with them, but unfortunately, dusky pink (paprika spice) wouldn't suit me. They entertained us with a wonderfully varied programme of quartet music in both halves of the evening. They played a mixture of upbeat accordion marches and easy listening popular tunes including a couple of flute and violin pieces:

Orfeo March, Valse Gitane, Grus, Kevana, Suo Gan (flute), El Relicario, Sarah (violin), Memory, The Last Waltz, Unity March, Schuhplattler, Ekenas (Tyrolean Dances), Scottish Waltz medley (violin), My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean, Over the Sea to Sky (arranged by Wendy Farran), Two Plus One (Pete Willis, Weaver valley), Speak Softly Love, and Waltz No 2

Just as we were fully absorbed in the music, it was time for our traditional break with raffle prizes generously donated and many purchases of tickets. The more tickets you buy the better the odds, and this was born out by Michael Ross who had 5 winnings, but kindly gave the rest of us a chance by only taking one prize. And then came our £10 member attendance draw, won by member number 6 - Joan Brown - a very supportive member of our club nights.



The second half got off to a good start with two club players, Norman Brown (playing *Athenry, Blue Moon, The Old Spinning Wheel*) and Paul Hobbs (playing *Sweet Georgia Brown, Battaglione, I Believe*), both very popular players.

Accordion Spice then took to the stage and completed a very enjoyable evening, playing:

Mit Harmonika, Dublin Airport, Mayofus, Highland Cathedral, La Paloma, Rhythmic Ramble, Calon Lan, Windsor March, Halsin Til, Moon River, Sun of Jamaica, Amazing Grace (flute), When the Saints go Marching in, Under the Bridges of Paris

If you missed their playing, you can find a recording of their version of 'Memory' from Cats on the club's YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/@accordiontvnorthstaffs/videos>

CONGLETON BANDSTAND Sunday 21st July

Glenda Reid

Just before 1pm, the members of the band began to arrive and waited in convoy for the park attendant to remove the barriers and lead us into the park. This gentleman walked in front of our line of vehicles all the way to the bandstand and organised our parking in neat rows. It reminded me of the early days of motorised vehicles when they had to travel at 4 mph and a person had to walk in front of them.

As we unloaded our gear, we had a chance to look around at the beautiful setting. The bandstand was situated uphill, overlooking verdant grassy slopes stretching into the distance. There were immaculate flower beds, woodland walks, extensive play areas and a pavilion serving food and drink

We began our programme a little earlier than planned. We were limited in numbers, so producing volume in this open air environment was the major concern, especially with a downhill audience... Advice: forget dynamics, engage master coupler and extend bellows with as much vigor as can be mustered. Not exactly what our MD had been advocating during our previous weeks of practising.

Initially we had a small audience, (mainly our fan club), seated in prime position in front of the bandstand. Gradually others joined their ranks, collecting chairs from the park attendant and settling down to listen.

The weather was ideal, a comfortable temperature and little wind to disrupt the placement of music and our new banner. Our MD did battle with a temperamental microphone but managed his usual introductions, (minus the jokes) and we launched forth with our programme.

At half time there was quite a crowd gathered enjoying the music, a lovely day, and a very pleasant venue. Several people came to speak with us, wanting to know various details about us and accordions. We left a couple of 'minders' on the bandstand to watch over our precious instruments and took the short walk to the pavilion where we were supplied with tea and coffee.



The second half began, us all understanding our sound levels, (we're not a brass band) and it was a major physical workout, with our MD still wanting 'more'. The programme was adjusted due to time factors and missing key players and we finished just as there was a slight decline in the weather, a few light spots of rain and a breeze. As our MD concluded his address to the audience, the microphone failed completely and he bowed out graciously.

It was an enjoyable afternoon with lots of laughter and chatting. Comments from the grassy embankment were positive so a good time was had by all and we were told that we would be invited back next year. We packed away our equipment and drove carefully out of the park feeling physically very tired. Band practice after this should be a doddle.

ST AUDRIES BAY ACCORDION WEEK

Elizabeth Brixton

Last week I had the good luck to join a group of familiar and new faces at the 2024 St. Audries Bay Accordion Week, and what a week it was. The teaching team was not only talented but highly organized and efficient. We had Sammie Peckover-Mitchell, Lisa-Lee Leslie, Andrew Purkiss, Robin Hyland and Caroline Hussey, for Mixed Ability, Vintage, Higher Intermediate, Scottish and Elementary respectively. There was a wide variety of music to suit all tastes and levels and it was good to get used to different styles of conducting.

One whole day was given over to 'Master Classes' which covered Improvisation, Performance, Know your Accordion, Bellows Technique and Creating a Scottish Sound. On Wednesday we had the ceilidh with Caroline, Andrew and Robin, backed up by percussion. On other nights there was an on-going quiz about the tutors with a hilarious 'spot the deliberate lie' competition.



Every night the people who wanted to perform gave us a selection of their chosen pieces, putting into practice what they learned from the master classes. On most nights the tutors took turns playing for us, reaching heights most of us can only dream about. It was also a delight when Lisa Purkiss joined husband, Andrew, and they gave us some lively performances on button accordion and treble recorder.

There were also nightly busking sessions outside the sun lounge for those who could play without the dots and, when that came to a close, all were welcome at the bar where the wonderful Harry Hussey was leading the entertainment.

The week culminated in an excellent concert with each orchestra performing their party pieces and a stunning performance by the Advanced Orchestra conducted by Lisa-Lee.

All in all, we had a marvellous week; I will remember it for the enjoyment of playing, the company and because we laughed so much. Roll on 2025.

ODE TO ST. AUDRIES

By Elizabeth Brixton

When retirement arrived, no more stress, no more strife,
I wondered just what I could do with my life.
There was knitting or patchwork or Townswomen's Guild,
But nothing appealed that would make me fulfilled.

But then I discovered the accordion sound,
Much better than anything else that's around,
Far sweeter than fiddles or whistles or drums,
And no bows are needed, just fingers and thumbs.

So I mortgaged the house and I sold off the car
And pinched all the coins that we'd saved in a jar.
I bought a Brandoni, all posh in its case,
Was determined to play it so's not to lose face.

It had buckles and straps, both long ones and short
And bellows in which all my wobbly bits caught.
I squeezed and I pulled and forgot to draw breath,
And the noise that I made scared the cats half to death.

There were black keys and white ones and buttons galore
And we know, after sixty, one's memory is poor.
I just couldn't do it, alas and alack –
I needed a teacher, there was no going back.

So on came The Team with their wit and their skill,
They cornered their prey and moved in for the kill.
They told me to travel to Saint Audries Bay
Where all would come clear by the end of each day.

They taught me my scales and my D sharp diminished,
The majors and minors and STILL we're not finished.
My survival techniques are now second to none.
I still can't play music, but find it good fun.

I've learned about triads and circles of fifths,
And dominant thingys and tonics and rifs;
And roots and inversions and finding the key,
Which is, I'm afraid, still a great mystery.

I've tried to perform and I've smiled - how I've smiled,
Though my brain is on fire and my fingers go wild.
They race up and down and get tied in a knot.
By the end of each piece I have quite lost the plot.

So here we all are in the wind and the rain.
I'm working so hard that I've gone beyond pain.
At the end of each day I'm collapsed in a heap
Doing scales and arpeggios in bed, in my sleep.

But when the week's ended and we've run out of time,
The lessons all done, it's the end of the line.
We'll forget all the agony, horror and pain
And long for next year when we'll do it again.

KEIGHLEY STATION

Glenda Reid

I was recently asked by Harry Hinchcliffe (MD of Craven School of Music, Yorkshire), to play with his Thursday Night Group (TNG), on the station at Keighley. He was short of players for this event on Saturday 13th July.

The KWVR first opened in 1867 to transport coal and textiles to the local mills. It is the only complete, preserved standard gauge branch line in the world. The track is 5 miles long and the journey on the steam train travels to Oxenhope and returns to Keighley. It runs on certain days and visitors can travel there and back.

The TNG group was to play on the station as the train arrived and visitors boarded. Then later, they would welcome the train and its passengers back.



I have played in some strange places in my life, but never on a railway platform. I had never rehearsed with this group or met them and I only received the music the day before. However, I arrived at the appointed time and was warmly welcomed by a lovely group of people who totally organised me.

As the group set up, there were plenty of people waiting for the train. As it pulled into the station, we began playing. Surprisingly, no-one seemed in a hurry to board and were very interested in us. There was a collection bucket in aid of Cancer Research and there were plenty of donations being made. The train remained in the station for 20 minutes and then departed on its short journey. It was amazing to see how full it was and people waving out of the

windows singing as we played 'Danny Boy'. The group then took a break to wait for the train's return.

It was during this break that I realised the value and importance of being part of this kind of activity, to the people playing the music. All had left their youthful days behind and the majority was relatively new to music making. Some had only begun within the last two years. We had a recorder, a bass guitar, acoustic guitar, 12 bass accordion plus bigger ones. One lady had an amplified keyboard and played single bass notes with one finger. I noted that she had the note names on a strip of card fastened to the keyboard. The lady next to me didn't play 'The Mexican Hat Dance'. She said she couldn't play that quickly. I then added the word, "YET".

Many of the group were in the early stages of playing their instruments but all added something to the overall effect. The music was not difficult and was easy listening, but it sounded pretty good to me and obviously to the passengers on the station. This mixed ability group were joyful, excited and were experiencing offering something to the bigger picture. Their weekly rehearsals were a big part of their lives.



When the station master announced the return of the train, we resumed playing. There was a lot of noise from steam, the bell, guards shouting, doors banging, announcements etc. and 'the band played on'. The excited passengers seemed pleased that we were still there and hung around singing and listening.

And then the train was gone and it was all over.

So, never underestimate the power of music.

HOW I CAME TO PLAY THE ACCORDION

by Charlie Walker

My name is Charlie and I joined the accordion club in March 2023. I must say what a tremendous supportive atmosphere the club has provided for me. In particular Steve and Tony are so productive in their support materials and help at our practice sessions for beginners/intermediate and I feel I have learnt a great deal through their encouragement. The extra subsidised sessions with Anne-Marie in Northern Ireland were a very useful development and although I haven't continued with them, I feel that she gave me some really useful tips to keep me on the right track with my practice. I would also thoroughly recommend the club night sessions as there have been some amazing visiting musicians to entertain us



along with the club orchestra and individual performances. I know there will come a time when I will attempt to play the accordion at one of these and not fall back into my ukulele comfort zone!

Just a short description of how I started with the accordion - my son's wife's granddad called Alf was a very good musician and I used to take him to the folk sing-arounds where he would do a performance either on the harmonica or with a song from an opera. He also had an accordion and when he died I was offered a chance to buy the accordion and during lockdown I enjoyed finding chords for songs. When I took it to the accordion club last year, I think the general reaction was that it was a cut down Chinese copy accordion with only two voices which would rather limit my progress and the next week a huge Italian 120 bass accordion was produced for me to take away and I am so pleased that after the three months loan, I was able to buy it for a very good price.

My ambition in accordion playing is to be able to play morris tunes and folk songs fairly well and maybe one day go to care homes to see if they will enjoy singing along to well known tunes. Actually, at the moment, I am very happy to enjoy playing at home mistakes and all!

Well, Sally is out and I'm going to select the master stop and middle bank on the bass and make a lot of noise while I have the opportunity! Thank you accordion club - what a great institution. Rock on!

PLAYING BY EAR Steve Hughes

From a personal point of view there is nothing more enjoyable in music than joining in spontaneously with others in playing a piece of music without having to get copies of the music. This we apply in our monthly Playing for Pleasure (P4P) sessions where a player who performs a piece can invite the other players to join in, by ear, in another rendition. Over time those accompanying increase their skill in doing so without having to rely on sheet music.



Photo - July 2024 P4P members l to r: Paul Hobbs, John Corden, Steve Hughes, John Plumb, Betty Nixon, Geoff Capewell and Ken Marek.

In his book 'How to Play by Ear Correctly ...' Colin Aston gives the following quote:

To compose your own music or improvise you need to be able to play without written music; you need the ability to play by ear, it is the most neglected study in modern music education. It is also important in playing other composers' music as a large percentage of modern music cannot be written accurately with the present notation - it is played by ear!

Wikipedia's contribution: *Playing or learning by ear is the ability of a performing musician to reproduce a piece of music they have heard, without having seen it notated in any form of sheet music. It is considered to be a desirable skill among musical performers, especially for those that play in a musical tradition where notating music is not the norm.*

It is a misconception that musicians who play by ear do not have or do not require musical education, or have no theoretical understanding of the music they are playing....

Blues, pop, jazz, and many forms of non-western music are fundamentally rooted in the concept of playing by ear, where musical compositions are passed down from generation to generation.

HILL TOP METHODIST CHURCH, BIDDULPH MOOR

The North Staffs Accordion Band performing at Hill Top Methodist Church, Biddulph Moor, as part of the Biddulph Festival on Saturday 6th July, 2024.



Diary

Club Nights at Bradwell WMC ST5 8JA (normally third Tuesday of the month)

August	Player's Night
September	Guests - Anne-Marie Devine & Sean O'Neil
October	AGM/Band
November	Guest – John Morgan
December	Christmas Party
January	Bisous - Basin Street Jazz & Blues

Beginners/Improvers at Bradwell WMC

August	12th	
September	2nd	16th
October	7th	21st
November	4th	18th

Band rehearsals at Bradwell WMC	Tuesdays except 3 rd
Playing for Pleasure at the Boat Club, Endon	Second Thursdays 2 pm.
Band at Potteries Centre, Hanley	Saturday 17 th August
Band at Boat Club, Endon	Saturday 21st September
Knutsford Accordion Day	Saturday 10 th May 2025

External Events

Midland Accordion Festival	November 8 th , 9 th and 10 th
Stockport AC's charity concert	Broken Cross Club, Macclesfield. Dec 1st, 2pm

Club Contacts

President	Peter Cowie	
Trustees: Chair	Steve Hughes	07939 362294
Acting Secretary	Steve Hughes	07939 362294
Treasurer	Tony Britton	07923 580760
John Corden, Jacqui Flather, Rosie Galley, Betty Nixon, Ron Rhodes		

Web address: www.northstaffsaccordionclub.com
Club Email: info@northstaffsaccordionclub.com

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