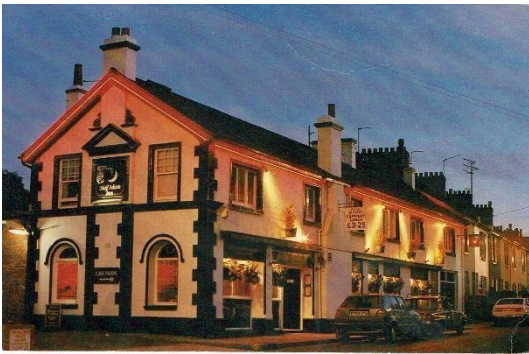


## A MUSICAL LIFE

**Our thanks to Brenda Crispin, who has provided us with her lovely memories of entertainment in Torbay over 40 years**

We moved as a family to Devon in 1960. My husband, Frank, and our two young sons had joined forces with my mother, father and sister to open a butcher's/grocer's in Preston. We were the first 'supermarket' in the Bay – C&C Stores. Our shop was at the corner of Paris Road and Torquay Road, opposite Preston Park, and is now a kitchen shop. Our business lasted seven years before we closed, mainly due to the creation of the new one-way system through Preston and the opening of larger stores nearby, who were able to undercut us. Frank took a management job at Tesco's, where I also worked part time to make ends meet.

Frank and I had always played music in bands. We had a successful three-piece band in London, the Starlight Trio. I played piano, Frank played the drums, and Frank's friend, Stan, played the trumpet. Stan had previously played with the Ever Ready Factory Band and a Salvation Army Band, and we were sad to say goodbye to him when we moved to Devon.



The owner of the Half Moon Inn used to buy cheese and cold meats from us, and on learning of our musical background he asked us to play on a Saturday. Firstly, just myself with another chap on the drums, and then after he left, Frank stepped in. We were very thankful that my parents, but mostly my sister Pauline, were able to babysit our young children because without their help we wouldn't have been able to both forge successful musical careers. Pauline's babysitting duties continued for many years. In those early days, the Half Moon Inn was a pub and a

B&B. It was very busy. We played popular music of the late 50's and early 60's. I recall they had a singing waiter and a weekly meat raffle – we supplied the meat!

Around Christmas time, the owner of the New Pier Inn on Paignton harbourside booked us for a few gigs – we went down well, and were asked back for the whole of the next year's summer season. I was playing the house piano, which took a real beating as holiday-makers were encouraged to play it. There were a couple of lads who thought they were Chas and Dave, who regularly got up to sing a few songs. The pianist was especially heavy handed! Frank's drum set was also damaged and our mikes were dropped by drunken holidaymakers. We enjoyed the time playing there, but declined to do the following season to the surprise of the proprietor!



At that time, we never had a band name or an agent. C&C Stores was our main business and with the arrival of our daughter, we mainly played one off events around the Bay. Live music filled the air in the sixties. Torbay, being a holiday destination, was full of hospitality venues and every hotel or guest house had a band or some sort of musical act.

The pianos I was being asked to play were of dubious quality, and it was obvious we needed a more reliable keyboard – so we forked out and bought a Telstar organ. We bought it from a music shop near the Co-op at the top end of Palace Avenue, Paignton, run by a Mr Jeavons. It turned out that Mr Jeavons was the owner of Beverley Park Holiday Camp, and he booked us to play at

the camp. We played three seasons in the Starlight Bar and thoroughly enjoyed our time there. Mr Jeavons was a brilliant host, providing prizes for games and always smiling. We were still a duo at this stage, but met a double bass player at the camp called Dave. Dave was a barman at night and a health inspector by day. The next summer season, we created a trio with Dave and names ourselves 'The Blue Tones'.



We joined the Lionel Digby Agency. This was from the mid 1960's to the beginning of the 1970's. Lionel was an entrepreneur/agent. I can remember once being at his fancy dress emporium in Market Street and trying on loads of boots. "What size are you Frank? Try those on Frank, are they a bit tight? OK, mark them as size 8". I believe those boots and some of Lionel's army uniforms were used in the making of a music video. Lionel always had some



enterprise on the go.

Lionel got me a job with Circus Hoffman. The Circus was touring the UK and by the time it got to Torbay, it had lost most of its musicians – a clown had run off with the trapeze artist, the bear tamer had left and the remaining musician, the organist, had had his arm mauled by the lion when he'd put his hand into the lion's cage whilst drunk!! Hence my involvement. It was a very surreal gig. I was picked up by the clown in a truck with zebra stripes on it, which stank of animals, and driven to Dartmouth. The big top leaked on the keyboard (which didn't work) so Frank had to drive over with our keyboard. From then on, we played as a duo. The strangest things happened. The lion tamer had to deal with the bears. He was very dubious of them, much more than with his lions. They weren't big bears, but they weren't happy bears. They were put on small motor bikes which were set to go round in circles inside the ring. Every time they passed the lion tamer, they growled at him. He looked terrified. There was an elephant which not only performed in the ring, but also helped to raise and lower the big top. The Circus lost so many performers; people were doubling and tripling up. The strong man was a drummer, and also performed a bare back riding act. Apparently when the Circus started in Southend, it was a big concern, but by the time it had got to the far flung Southwest, it was very depleted. Nowadays, of course, we wouldn't dream of keeping wild animals in small cages and getting them to perform, but this was the 1960's and fortunately now confined to memories.

We had a residency at the Tembani on Preston Seafront. At the time, the Tembani was an hotel with a lovely ballroom. It also had a nightclub, Penelopes, which had a cave bar atmosphere beneath the Hotel. We played ballroom dancing and very often the owner/manager, Mr Christmas, invited the foreign students in. What they made of it, I have no idea. On one occasion we were playing a quickstep "Help Yourself (Tom Jones)" when the holding pin fell out of Frank's drum stool and he dropped down to the ground – miraculously he kept singing and drumming. The foreign students thought we'd planned it, and there was uproar. Following that incident, word got round and the venue was full for the summer season. We taught the students the Gay Gordons, St Bernards Waltz, Square Dances and many other fun dances. I can imagine small groups of German and French people still dancing away in their own countries to this day. Mr Christmas used to give us sausage rolls for break time. They were from the local bakery, but were a bit stale, cold, hard and inedible! The Tembani "Blue Tones" were a four or five piece by then. We had a

trombone and trumpeter player join us. Some of the songs we used to play were House of the Rising Sun (The Animals), She Loves You (The Beatles), It's Now or Never (Elvis) and Unchained Melody (Righteous Brothers).

Following the end of the Tembani residency, we played at the Waterside at Three Beaches with just the trio, and Ayreville Holiday Camp on the Totnes Road. We used to take our children with us occasionally, and they joined in the games and dances and became very competent twisters – “Twist again, like we did last summer”.

Some of the Paignton hotels and venues we played in around the Bay in the 70's were Sun Hill, at Goodrington, The Redcliffe Hotel, The Esplanade (then Hydro), and in Torquay, The Palm Court, Hunter's Moon, Carol's Court – in fact, we played in most of the hotels and small venues in the Bay.

We played at The Gleneagles and saw for ourselves the man who John Cleese based his character, Basil Fawlty, on – Donald Sinclair. He would sit behind the bar and glare at everyone. He didn't like our Bassist, Dave, as Dave never bought a drink. On one occasion, Dave ordered a pint of water and nearly had it thrown over him. Mrs Sinclair was the spitting image of Sybil, aka Prunella Scales.

The owner of The Palm Court, Mr TE Harrison, also owned the Parkham Hotel in Brixham. We had a residency at the Parkham for a number of years until about 1980, and we played all sorts of music. By then Dave, the bassist, had left

and we had Gordon, a trumpeter, followed by John, a guitarist, and then Terry, a guitarist, who played with us for the longest time. Later our eldest son, David, also a guitarist, filled in for Terry when unavailable. The residency at the Parkham allowed Frank to leave his butchery job at



Tesco's, as we were then playing 7 nights a week. Frank was also taking on maintenance jobs, repairs and decorating at the hotel. The owners were then the Bryants and Whites, and they were very good at generating income. At that time, Brixham fishing fleet used to spend all their well-earned cash at the hotel, and it was a gold mine. The Bryants and Whites sold the hotel at its height of popularity, and invested in a tennis training facility in Florida, which was also very successful. The Parkham no longer exists; it's a block of flats now, as are so many of the other small hotels we used to play in.



Our last major residency was at the Derwent/Victoria in Belgrave Road, Torquay. There was a captive audience of coached-in holidaymakers, and we thoroughly enjoyed playing so close to home. From the 80's through the 90's we played various functions and holiday camps as well as hotels, and we had several different agents – Trevor George, Nightlife Agency and Neil Glover to name a few.

We enjoyed many more years playing around the Bay before retiring in 2000 after Frank broke his shoulder. Our guitarist Terry had decided to retire the previous year, so the time was right. We still play music together, as our children and their children are all competent musicians. We never need to book a band for our family do's!