

ENTERTAINMENT IN THE 1950's



The Odeon, Epsom High Street (Demolished in 1972)

At the beginning of the decade I was living with my parents at Walton-on the Hill, a small village in Surrey where I was born. I had just started a 5 year apprenticeship in the Printing Trade. Each working day I would walk across Walton common and catch the train from Tadworth Station to Purley and walk down to the Brighton Rd and get on the tram to South Croydon where I worked.

My great interest in those days were going to see Chelsea's home games at Stamford Bridge, and listening to and collecting 78rpm records of the popular stars of the day. Every Saturday when Chelsea were at home I would catch the 406 bus from Tadworth to Epsom and go into Marshall's Fish and Chip shop which was next door to the Odeon Cinema and have a fish and chip dinner. Then take the 93 bus to Wimbledon and take the tube train up to Fulham Broadway to Chelsea's home ground. In those days Chelsea attracted some massive crowds. It was not uncommon to have 70 or 80 thousand spectators at a match. There was always an exciting atmosphere and never any hooliganism. I saw all the stars of the day and I was there on the day they clinched the First Division Championship for the first time.

In those days it didn't cost you a fortune to go to a match or go to a variety theatre. One weekend my friend and I took the train to The Valley where Chelsea were playing Charlton, saw the game, came out and then took the train to London. We went into J Lyons Corner House and had 3/9d Egg and Bacon Brunch then on to the Prince of Wales Theatre to see a variety show and catch the train back to Tadworth all for less than £1.

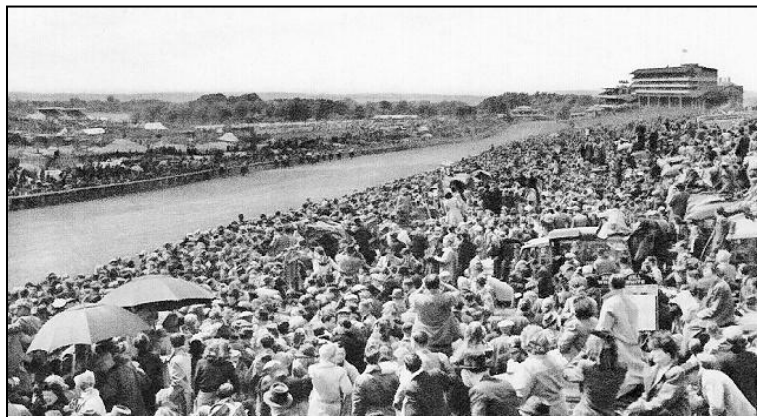
In the 1950's the "News of the World", who owned Walton Heath Golf Club where I lived, each year would stage the National Match Play Golf Championship. This event attracted all the major golf stars from all over the world. Henry Cotton, Bobby Locke, Dia Reese and many others. Walton Heath Golf Club had been constructed on common ground which prevented them from closing it in with fences. So when there



Lyons' Corner House, Piccadilly, London 1953

was any event on there the general public could walk around the golf courses and watch the matches for free. The Golf Club was also another interesting source of revenue for the local villagers. The club had what they called a caddy shed and a caddy master.

Villagers could go down to the shed and wait until a member or a visitor to the club wanted a caddy to carry their clubs around the golf course. The caddy master would allocate the jobs. You would then pay a fee of a penny to him and once you had completed the 18 hole round carrying the members clubs you could expect to be paid 10 shillings.



Derby Day c1950

Derby week was another major event for the people who lived in the Epsom area. The week started with Show Out Sunday on the Downs. There would always be two fun fairs and on the Sunday there was such a carnival atmosphere with escapologists trying to escape from straight jackets, fire eaters, tipsters including Prince Monolulu, wall of death motor bike riders, boxing booths and all the fun of the fairs. Not only were there gypsy fortune tellers but many lorries came down from the Potteries selling crockery and china ornaments off of the back of the lorries.



Ras Prince Monolulu - real name Peter Carl Mackay

On the day of the Derby I would go and stand opposite the grandstand. There you could see all the celebrities going to the Paddock. I remember seeing Rita Hayworth the film star with (Prince) Aly Khan her husband. I then used to go over to the start. In those days there were no starting stalls and the jockeys had to make sure their horses were standing facing the starting tape and if the jockeys couldn't turn their mount around they would keep shouting at the Starter "No Sir" "No Sir" to make sure the Starter didn't start the race without them.



Bentalls department store Kingston.

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Another free source of entertainment was provided by the Bentalls Dept Store in

Kingston. Every Saturday they would feature either a sportsman or a trapeze artist or some other type of entertainer. The Bedser twins Alec and Eric the Surrey and England cricketers were there one Saturday demonstrating their skills in the nets. On another Saturday Victor Barna the World Table Tennis Champion challenged spectators to try and beat him with him sitting on a chair. In the centre of the store they would erect a trapeze and have a trapeze artist flying through the air above a safety net.



Epsom High Street c1963

As the decade progressed my pals and I decided we would like to learn to dance. So we decided to go down to Epsom and join the "Court School of Dancing", which was over Burton the tailors. The Court was a wonderful place not only to learn to dance but to meet many female dancers. It was there that I met my wife Joan. Once we had learnt to dance we would go to other dance halls such as the "Orchid Ballroom" at Purley, Epsom Baths, Wimbledon Palais, Dorking Halls and many other such venues.

In those days Big Band music was all the rage. The Ted Heath Band was the leading band in this country and whenever he was in our area we would go to see him. One of the main venues which he appeared at was the Davis Theatre Croydon. Not only did they put on concerts of big band music but many of the stars that had appeared at the London Palladium also came and gave concerts there such as Nat King Cole, Frankie Laine, Al Martino and many more.

I have so many happy memories of the 50's. It was a time before everything was commercialised. You could go to a show or a football game without paying a fortune to see it. We will never see the likes of those times again.

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