

BEHP 0654 S Edward Graham – summary.

Notes on BECTU Interview with Ed(ward) Graham, who played “William”

Clarification of date of birth,{not actually answered] and that Ed was adopted by Jack (a Blacksmith) and Hannah Graham (a millworker), born Darlington.

Started out with music, singing and dancing, and local choir, his parents sent him to Jean Hardy’s theatrical school. He entertained his parents and worked with Don Sorrento’s Accordion Band, doing tap and playing Salome (with “see-through” trousers). Most of this work was in concert party, Horton Working Mens Club, and army camps. Used to perform on a billiard table covered with a board.

Carroll Levis Discoveries, doing 2 shows a day in “second circuit” (eg York, Ashton-under-Lyme) theatres. Ed at 14 won, left f.t. education earning £3 a week touring (no fares but paid own lodgings and sent 10 shillings home) 52 weeks a year. And you got free cinema seats, free golf etc. His agent was Joe Collins (father of Joan and Jackie) who had power of attorney [as he was a minor].

Hadn’t read the William Books (preferred Arthur Ransome), went for audition with c 1000 others, narrowed down to c12 for screen test at Southall Studios for United Artists with Val Guest for Just William’s Luck.

Hugely enjoyable being William, still has scripts with his notes on. Roomed with one of the other “outlaws” in Brixton for a while. VG suggested Ed change his name to William. Loved studio life watching the plasterers and the photography, and got on really well with Garry Marsh and Jane Welsh, playing cards.

BREAK as Dave Wyatt queried warning light on sound level on camera.

He got on ok with the other outlaws,(Brian Roper was a bit superior as older) and discovered that There was time off set to play cricket and go to the races with Garry. Basically doing what young boys did AND getting paid for it.

Some night shoots, generally day was 8.15 – 5pm, 6 days a week. Stand-ins were used as well.

The second film was mainly set in Butlins and Bertram Mills Circus, so great fun having the run of the circus. Nora Philips taught Wm elecution (he noticed he reverted to his Durham accent on a few words)

Got on well with Val Guest. Film a big success on at London Pavilion for Christmas. Name in Lights.

Had a fan club run by a Mr Peck.

William Comes To Town – the second film – was a 4 week shoot. Wm was 17 by then (playing 11) and although it seemed that there was to be a series, no more were made. Wm was bitten by Marley the chimp (still has the scar). Brief reminiscence of AE Matthews, mentions Jon Pertwee, Garry Marsh, Katy Binda??

Then back into the Levis shows, but with billing. Leicester Palace, 20mins act, Blackpool. Has his joke book (1949) gives examples. Idea was to do half act in Wm character, half in evening dress. Built act up each night to get to right length.

He didn’t keep up with the other Outlaws except Jimmy Crabbe who worked in a tax office in Southend. He’s never met any of the other actors who played William.

He was offered £40 a week on the main variety circuit, it was just going so well, when his call-up papers arrived. When his national service was over he felt the [variety] theatres were closing and the night clubs were a bit unsavoury. [His national service was mainly in entertainment]

He got married (happily for 54 years) and auditioned at The Windmill, and got taken on as a dancer in musical parodies. Did some understudying too. Sustained a cartilage injury, but his old producer (Bill Ryan) recommended he had an operation and the Windmill theatre paid. He was back at work after 6 weeks.

Then ran a car showroom for 8 months, re-applied to Windmill and taken back on (as "Ed" Graham) until it closed in 1964. He was responsible for helping choreograph shows. Worked with Arthur English, Bruce Forsyth, Jimmy Edmondson (of Billy Cotton Band) Nicholas Parsons, Des O'Connor, Barry Cryer. Jack Douglas (Jack Roberts). Still gets invited to annual Windmill reunion, though hasn't attended lately.

Worked in 1960s in Divorce Me Darling (Sandy Wilson) at The Players Theatre, with choreographer Buddy Bradley, at Globe Theatre. Vic Hallem (?) Got him the Omo TV advert campaign, which paid £5000 a year for 30 days work. Did Junior Points of View (piece about gobstoppers) and worked on Ernest Maxim's Sunday Spectaculars as a Peter Gorden dancer, on BBC2. He was getting £100 a week advertising OMO and £110 every 2 weeks for the BBC. Got 3 days work (£150) for "Where the Spies Are", Val Guest, 1965 as a communications man in the secret service, with one line about a call coming in from Beirut with David Niven and John Le Mesurier. His hand appearing round a door was also used in the film.

By then he had 3 sons so he re-invented himself as a double act "Graham & Shackell" with Johnny Shack. Appeared on Opportunity Knocks (Les Dawson won) but it got them 3 years work in clubs, holiday camps. Also Crazy Horse, Paris; pantomime with Bruce Forsyth, Joe Brown in Streatham. Was offered a return to Paris. Bought a post Office in Kensington [Stratford Road]. for 8-10 years. The Just William society rediscovered him. He sold the PO bought a share in a wholesale business. In c1986 closed it.

Ran a magic shop (Dave Cooper, Tommy's brother) [D&Z's Magic Shop] in Slough for 2 years, then a sweetshop in Taplow Garden Centre. Retired at 65, and with family connections down there moved to Exmouth, buying house when it was just a plot of land, as opposed to the seafront flat they first looked at. Has 3 sons (one is a guitarist and boat builder) 10 grandchildren (who think he is a bit "old hat"). He encouraged his children to get proper jobs to fall back on.

DS 12.06.13