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## Bert Cobb and the Serenaders (and Bluebirds)

by Rita Cobb

Two photographs from before WW2, contributed by Rita Cobb in March 2012



**Standing** - Ron Cox, Keith Holland, ?, ?, Sidney Brooks, Lena Odell, Bert Cobb, Jack Glenister, Peggy Cox, ?, ?.

**Sitting/kneeling** - Maurice (Mo) Odell, Bill Woodley, Arthur Hyett, Daphne Lovell, ?.

1937/8



**Standing** - Arthur Hyett, Lena Odell, Ron Cox, Peggy Cox, (?), Bert Cobb  
**Kneeling** - (?), Sidney Brooks, Steve Coates, (?)  
**1933/4**

In 1933, **Bert Cobb**, of Gustard Wood, started a concert party. He was a keen theatregoer at the Grand Theatre, Luton. There, he saw the Reviews of the day. There was another concert party in Wheathampstead at the time, but Bert wanted his to be fast moving like the professionals. Also he wanted to run it himself.

He collected together many of his school friends, who were willing to try anything, singing, dancing, and acting in sketches. At that time, people were used to having their party pieces so the next stage for them was to do them in front of the villagers. **Mexican Music** was very popular. Quite a few of the group played musical instruments, especially the piano accordion. Bert decided the main attraction would be the **Piano Accordion Band**. They took the name the **Serenaders** after their signature song 'Serenade in the Night'. This was the time of the big bands, so everyone in the show was in the band. Bert wrote the sketches, arranged any dances and decided practically everything. His friend **Arthur Hyett** did the bookings.

They rehearsed at the **Robin's Nest**, Gustard Wood. They made all of their costumes. The Mexican ones entailed making their own Valencia hats of card and black lacquer. They played at Wheathampstead and all the surrounding villages.

**Pre-war Serenaders** were **Arthur Hyett, Lena Odell, Maurice Odell, Sid Brooks, and Daphne ?, Ron Cox, Bill Woodley, John Warner, Jack Glenister, Keith Holland** and more.

**Ron Cox** and **Maurice Odell** were the comedians.

In 1946 Bert met with his old friends and yes they would start up the **Serenaders** again. They hired the **Church Room** (in Bury Green opposite the old junior school). During the War Bert had written many more sketches. His daughters **Pat** and **Rita** had been to dancing schools so there was another turn for the show. Younger people were

interested later, children friends of his daughters also joined and learnt to dance. Bert now arranged the dances too. The first show after the War had a Hawaiian theme (Picture) any one who wanted to join, Bert always said yes. He gave them the chance of either on the stage or behind. For the next twenty years or so (until TV) he ran these shows in Wheathampstead and the surrounding villages. The shows were for **charity** and the **Memorial Hall**. Many of the older people will remember.



**The Serenaders 1946.** (Photo and names by Rita Cobb)

**Back Row** - Maurice (Mo) Odell, Lena Odell, Ron Cox, Les Sherrick, Bert Cobb, Unknown, Arthur Hyett, Joyce Sherrick, Mrs Jordan.

**Middle Row** - Geoff Odell, Jessica Tomlin, Joyce Cowan, Peggy Cox, Margaret Dear, Johnny Warner.

**Front Row** - Rita Cobb, Christine Beadle, Patsy Cobb

In the Sixties up until his seventies, Bert continued, not with the **Serenaders**, but with the **Bluebirds**. These were young girls of the village. He would teach them to dance, arrange the music on tape. They would go round the hospitals and retirement homes give dancing displays. If any girl wanted to learn how to dance and become a **Bluebird** they were welcome. There are many women locally who were **Bluebirds** with the great memories like those of us in the **Serenaders**.

*p.s.*

*Bert's father, Herbert was in the Gustard Wood **Minstrel Group** organised by **Miss Robins** before the First World War. My Grandfather Herbert Cobb played the concertina and did some ventriloquism. Dad (Bert) was born in 1909 at Gustard Wood and went to school there until he was about 9 I think and then went to St Helen's in Wheathampstead. He was a gardener. During the War he was in the RAF. He was also known in the village as an artist.*

*contributed - April 2007*