

Tonight, Maureen (Molly) Shucksmith – “This is your life”

Introduction

Welcome to Alvingham tonight. We hope that this evening you will all enjoy this celebration; a good excuse for a get-together.

As a means of introduction for some of our guests, we thought perhaps a suitable medium would be to attempt an amateur version of the well-known TV programme, “This is your life”, a sort of verbal “aperitif” – trusting you have all managed to get a liquid one.

You were born on 13th March 1928 at your home in Commercial Road, Louth, within sight of the Riverhead Methodist Mission which was to play an important part in your early life and where your mother was the organist. It was a Saturday, not Friday the 13th.

You were the third child of Fred and Chrissie Meanwell, a sister for Alec and Derek. You were christened Maureen Elizabeth.

With the musical background you had, it was not surprising that you showed ability and by the age of 5, you had learned your notes and progressed naturally. You cannot remember ever having a proper piano lesson as a child. By the age of 9, you played hymns at Sunday School.

You broadened your interest in music, being the youngest member of Mr (Papa) Tysons’ orchestra which made the first wireless broadcast from Louth Town Hall in 1936. You played the tambourine in the Toy Symphony. It is recorded that you showed your emotion at not having a new dress for the occasion and kind Mr Tyson bought you one.

The choir at the Mission in which you helped also gave concerts in various chapels and venues and you remember going to these and trying to emulate your senior when you got home.

You attended Eastfield Road Primary School and then moved on to Monks Dyke.

The War started before you left school, and for a while, the War was described as ‘phoney’, the odd air raid claiming attention.

After Dunkirk, the area became crowded with soldiers, particularly Guards Regiments who were posted here to hopefully repel a possible invasion.

Your parents gave hospitality and comfort to some of these men and you have maintained contact with a few even to the present time.

A uniform is attractive to most young girls and you were no exception; you couldn't make up your mind between the 6'6" Guardsman or the 5'1½" Scotsman in the Kings Own Scottish Borderers. However, you got a kilt (Hunting Macleod).

You left school and after a brief foray into business, you start to help your mother with her musical work.

Your brothers are called up to serve in the Royal Air Force, Alec being posted to the Far East.

Your progress on the piano is rather pedestrian until Miss Pamela Gauntlett, music teacher at the Girls' Grammar School, takes you under her wing and after what must have been fairly intensive work and practice, you take Grades VII and VIII successfully in May and November of the same year. This took you into the area of serious piano teaching and before long, you enter your first pupils into grades.

It is recorded that you again showed your emotions on getting the results.

By now, the late 1940s, you are having lessons yourself; in singing with Percy Thompson at Grimsby, elocution with Mrs Moncaster at Louth and piano with Dr Harold Dexter, organist at St James Church and Music Master at the Boys' Grammar School.

You compete in festivals at Grimsby, Cleethorpes and Market Rasen with varying degrees of success.

In the Louth Advertiser pre-Christmas 1947 edition, the Editor listed greetings to various town people and one quote mentioned Miss Maureen Meanwell – "a sweet singer of sweet songs".

You were now so busy that it was difficult for you to find time to enjoy the extra-curricular activities offered to a late teenage girl. However, you enjoy 'all the fun of the fair' with a farmer's son and your trophy for the evening was a glass tumbler won for coconut shying. You take it home to be greeted by an extremely annoyed mother for being late! The fate of the tumbler is not recorded!

This was an era of considerable musical talent in Louth and you were junior to the likes of Beryl Thornton, Joan Loughton, Sydney Smith and others.

You were always willing to sing, speak verse, play the piano and accompany others, for your own and other people's pleasure and to raise money for charities, etc.

Marriage and family intervened.

Moving to Alvingham did not prevent you from continuing to teach.

The post-war baby boom produced a lot of young people in the late 1950s and together with a group of older girls from Louth, you form the Alvingham and District Girls' Choir in their distinctive red skirts and white tops. They are immediately popular and in great demand locally, even as far as Ingoldmells.

However, you sustain a fractured left wrist whilst feeding chickens two days before Christmas, 1962. A rather unprofessional repair resulted in partial deformity, causing your morale to be at a very low ebb.

Surgical treatment at St James, Leeds, was extremely successful and after convalescence, your ability to play the piano was renewed almost 100%.

The Girls' Choir and Sunday School joined forces for the Sunday School Anniversaries and these became well known in the locality.

In 1966, whilst rehearsing, you generate so much heat that the chapel roof caught on fire, causing a strategic evacuation.

In the late 1960s, you joined the Louth Choral Society and since then, you have hardly missed a Monday evening practice during school term time to quench your thirst for singing.

By the 1970s, with the family complete and growing up, you have more time for teaching. Patricia and Maureen are married and you nurse your mother through her last illness.

In 1982, you form the Methodist Young People's Choir at Nichol Hill, the elements of which you inherited from Philip Chilvers. Your enthusiasm was reflected in these children almost 30 in number and for over 10 years, you performed in conjunction with the senior choir under your brother Alec's baton in regular concerts, raising money for churches and charities.

The Children's Choir gave special concerts for the 'Save the Children Fund'.

These activities were just a side-line to your main activity. You have helped and encouraged hundreds of children, with varying degrees of success, to find and provide enjoyment in playing the piano.

These young people here tonight will testify to the fact that your counting, conducting, beating, cajoling and singing has borne fruit and that their work and your endeavour has succeeded in their being able to enjoy and perform music.

They are your stars who will for a long time remember the hours you have sat with them and you will admire the dedication of their parents who for over ten years in some cases have brought their children for lessons.

Added posthumously:

Maureen Elizabeth Shucksmith's piano teaching career spanned 77 years, finally ending in the late 1980s.

There were many choirs over the decades tutored by Molly and all gave her and those listening much enjoyment. However, her last choir's success was very poignant. She was asked to tutor the children of North Cockerington C of E Primary School in a schools competition at the Lincolnshire Show. Molly conducted and a very young Stephanie (her granddaughter) accompanied. The cup was won, giving Molly one of the proudest moments of her conducting career.