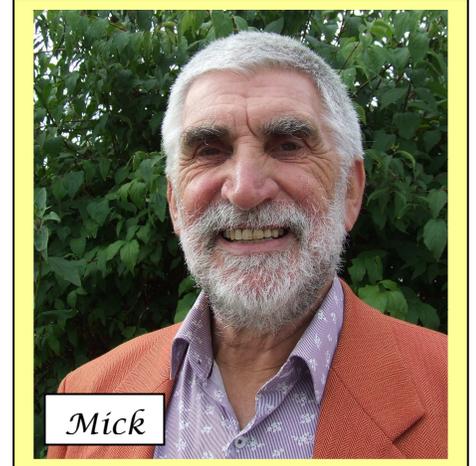


# WHEN VARIETY WAS THE SPICE OF LIFE

*Mick Hawes (1964-1967) shares his memories, and those of Cameron Newark (1962-1965), of their involvement in a Keswick Hall institution – **The Variety Show.***

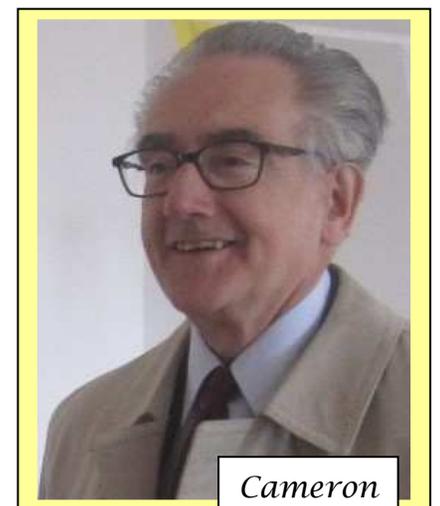
Just before we went home for Christmas, at the end of my first term, I made my Keswick Variety Show debut. The drama group's contribution was a spoof of a local television news programme with my contribution being a weather forecast. I called myself Michael Blunt – Anglia Television's regular weatherman at that time being the mustachioed Michael Hunt. I recall that the show also included singers, musicians and sketches with Keswick's then premier group 'Johnny Zero and The Countdowns' doing a set. The show was compared by Cameron Newark, then in his third year, who performed magic tricks and a vent act with his dummy Gerry Lime.



The Variety Show appeared to have been quite well-established, so I contacted Cameron, a regular attender at the annual Keswick College reunions, to ask if he knew of its origins and for his memories of the shows in his earlier years.

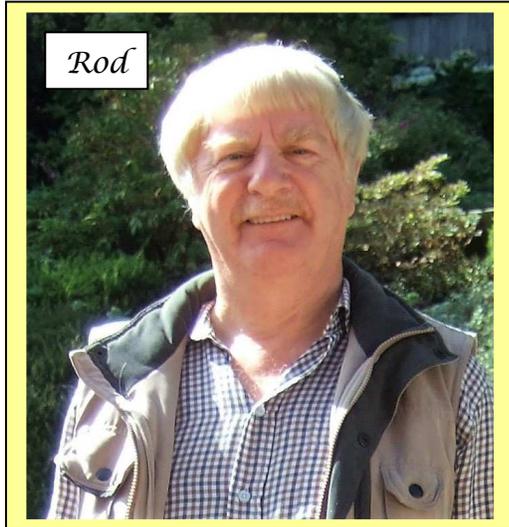
Cameron writes: “It was in the second year that men had been admitted to Keswick and I joined the social committee. I got the impression that there had been a show the previous year. I took part in a show on a Saturday evening either just before or just after Christmas 1962. Having grown up in Gorleston and Great Yarmouth I frequently attended the summer shows and developed an interest in entertainment, particularly specialist acts”.

Cameron continues, “In my first college show, I did my conjuring act. I had a balance of card tricks, audience participation and apparatus I had made myself. I also brought tricks, routines and apparatus from two firms in London who specialised in magic – Ellisdons and Gamages. My tricks were interspersed with jokes some of which were considered risqué at the time. For example, I said I came from a poor family we all had to make wooden clothes pegs and then sell them to the gypsies. We couldn't afford laxatives so when I was small my parents sat me on the potty and told me ghost stories. For my big finish I asked if the well known song 'I'll be seeing you



in all the old familiar places' was written by the person who designed transparent nightwear”

“During the rest of the weekend, I thought I ought to see Miss Duff the long-standing college principal. So on the Monday morning, off I went and apologised for the rather crude jokes. I think she appreciated me going to see her and said that I ought to keep to the conjuring which she thought was very good. In my next show, I dropped most of the comedy and introduced some



ventriloquism which I had been rehearsing for a few months. Another regular act throughout the three years was the female singing trio 'The Gurney Girls' – Rosemary, Helen and the late Maureen Cope. I remember your act with Rod Cross in my last show in summer 1965.”

So this is where I briefly I take up my memories again. At the Christmas show, Cameron had needed to find an assistant from the audience and with the often used, “Number of rows back and seats across” method, he had “chosen” Rod. Cameron and Rod, as well as myself, all resided in the same hostel, H3 East. I don't think it was a fix but it gave me an idea for an opening for

the summer show. I came on, asked for assistance, made up some complicated row and seat combination and Rod immediately ran up on stage. I'm not sure if anyone else remembered the connection but it worked for me! Rod and I then compered the show.

Cameron recalls part of our act which was the old suitcase 'running' joke whereby one person comes on and when asked says, “I'm taking my case to court.” The second time, he is also holding a chair or a pair of steps and says, “I'm taking my case to a higher court.” The third time, empty-handed and looking desolate, his response is, “I lost my case!” That joke was told to me by a mature student whose name I can't recall. If it was you and you are reading this – own up and take your share of the blame!

Our more original contribution was a spoof of the then unlikely hit record ‘Deck of Cards’ performed by Wink Martindale. While his version was set in a church during the North African campaign, where a bunch of young soldier boys had been on a long hike, ours was in the college chapel during a long teaching practice.

By that show, the college had two bands and each half of the show was opened by the up-and-coming Bill of Rights and ended by the aforementioned Johnny Zero and The Countdowns.

I asked Cameron if he felt his experience in the Variety shows and his magic or

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his vent skills had been useful. Cameron said, “I found that it helped in the early days of my teaching career. It helped to increase confidence in gaining the attention of the class by the voice. In entertainment, no two audiences are the same and it is just the same in the classroom – each day is different. It often helped in my teaching of junior school children and I devised a topic about the history of well known magicians such as Harry Houdini and Chung Ling Soo”

Meanwhile I myself can only muse on what happened to the Mick and Rod double act. It is one of those vagaries of show business. I can only assume that in a parallel universe, the names of Cannon and Ball, let alone Ant and Dec are unknown.

Mick Hawes  
1964-67