

Ray Hubbard was born in 1933 at Langmere, South Norfolk, a true countryman who has spent his life playing music, singing songs and entertaining across East Anglia.



Rushall 1980s

Ray's parents Henry and Agatha were both brought up near Diss. Henry wanted to become a horseman when he left school, but couldn't get a job on a farm so went to work for a builder who was based in Dickleburgh Street. The builder also owned a smallholding on Dickleburgh Common where he kept his horses. This was next-door to where Henry was born and still lived. So he got a job looking after the horses and taking them down to the builder's yard each morning and bringing them back each night. He was then apprenticed to well-building and they would sometimes go as far as Garboldisham or Loddon. They would use a wagon pulled by a Suffolk horse to take the well building gear and the men who would sleep there for the week. They also used the horse and wagon to get sand from nearby gravel pits and to get bricks for lining the well from a local railway station.

Ray remembers lots of music at home, "Well it was in the days before television." His father played the accordeon, as did his mother. They also both played the mouthorgan, and his father could play the mandolin. "So it was Saturday nights, not so much during the week. It was get the musics out and have a sing-song. I suppose I wanted to play from just about when I was born." He always remembered music in the house even when they moved to Dickleburgh in 1949, two years after his sister Jill was born. She was taught to play the piano and also had an accordion, but never really took that up. His mother also sang out in local village halls like Brome, Hoxne and St Edmund's Hall.

Some of Ray's earliest musical memories were when he visited his grandfather and grandmother on his mother's side. His grandfather played the concertina and was also a steel quoits player and would often take his concertina with him for an after match sing-song, particularly to Oakley Green Man and Billingsford Horseshoes, where the quoits bed was just behind the pub next to the



Ray's grandparents, Harry & Maria Pentney

windmill (see cover photo). Ray remembers being taken as a youngster by his mother to see his grandfather play quoits. His grandmother played the mouthorgan and he recalls that it was kept in the knife and fork drawer underneath the table. It was always, "Come on Granny, get the mouthorgan" and she did, and that was that". His grandfather took more persuading however, and wouldn't get up and get his concertina from the cupboard behind his chair - grandmother would have to get it out and then he would play it.

Ray's grandparents on his father's side weren't musical as far as he was aware, but his uncles were, and so there was always an accordion there standing on the top of the chest of drawers alongside the gramophone and it was that accordion that his father learned on, alongside his brothers. Ray remembers that they would go up to their house and his uncle would play the accordion and then he would put a record on the gramophone and would dance Ray around the table. His grandmother, who was getting old then, would say, "Now you can cut that out now George, he don't want that, he'll hurt himself." But he carried on and would say, "You're all right, ain't you boy?"

During the war, when Americans came to Thorpe Abbots aerodrome, the local women did their washing for them and the servicemen apparently preferred this to their laundry on the base. Ray remembered, "The two that came to our house were a little bit religious, so they wouldn't go to the pub, so they'd come Saturday nights, bring their washing and stay and then we used to get the accordions out and have a sing-song. One of them sent home and his mother sent me an American hymn book with gospel songs in it. They'd invite us to go up for parties when they had various celebrations."

When Ray started school in Dickleburgh he was surprised to find that music was a strong part of the curriculum. In the infants class they had a percussion band while



Ray, aged two, with his father and his first horse

the teacher played the piano and then, as they progressed through the school, the head teacher took them and she was very keen on country songs. She also had an enthusiasm for country dancing and taught them maypole dancing and sword dancing as well as local stepdancing. They competed in dance competitions in Norwich where they won many certificates. Ray remembers, "Yes we stepdanced on the wooden floors at school. We used to have hobnailed boots in those days, but I got wrong because I went home and said that she wanted us to have plimsolls for the Maypole dancing and my father said, "You'll go to school in your boots, I can't afford plimsolls for dancing. You're not a dancing man."

While Ray was a youngster his own enthusiasm for horses grew, "Well the craze was there right young, I was only a tot and every time a stallion came past, mother would take me to the gate." Where he lived he didn't have to look far to see one, in fact he remembered that he could see working Suffolks out of every window of their house. The local farmer, Mr Saunders, also hired another farm just the other side of Ray's house called Oak Farm. He would



Mr Saunders at Oak Farm, with Ray standing at the back - 1940s

pass their gate every day and one day Ray waited for him and asked if he could have a Saturday job on the farm. "I'll let you know," came the farmer's brisk reply. The next day he came past and told his mother that Ray should be there at seven on Saturday. He got there at quarter to seven and Saunders said, "Hello boy, you're alright, you're early. You keep this up, we'll get on." The farmer then told Ray that he was going to have his breakfast and set him the task of chopping sticks. This didn't please Ray and he remembers, "Well I nearly runned home - I didn't want to be chopping sticks in an old shed. I wanted to be with the horses." When the farmer

returned they went to Oak Farm in the pony and cart to feed the bullocks and gradually Ray was allowed to work with a horse.

Academically Ray was bright and gained a place at Diss Grammar School, but he wasn't keen on his first musical experience there. His music master would sit in his gown with his feet up on the table, smoking a cigarette. Every lesson he would play the class extracts from Gilbert and Sullivan. "It was the same old tune every week," complained Ray. The first teacher finally left and a Mr Pursehouse took over the music. Ray remembers that he was a country singer who went around village halls entertaining with his brother. "So then we got singing 'Good King George the Farmer' and all songs like that. We were right up to speed with it then. He used to laugh at me because I was a bit broad Norfolk, and he'd say "Well you know you'll have to talk posh when you're here, but don't ever lose that dialect!" He used to sing in dialect himself. The only time music was not so popular with Ray was when he got older - his father bought a piano and Ray was given lessons and his father insisted that he did half an hour every night when he came home from school. "So I'd wet a piece of newspaper and put it on the clock where the half hour finished so I'd make sure I didn't do no more than I had to. But I've never regretted learning to play."

Ray continued to work on Mr Saunders' farm whenever he could and he remembers, "I never forgot one occasion when I was right young. A roller rattles on the road and upsets the horses sometimes. He had the horseman take the horse and the roller to the field. Took me in the pony and cart and left me there. I was so frightened I wasn't going to finish that I kept that poor old mare going as quick as I could to get it done. Then I had to stand there and wait for three quarters of an hour before he came and picked me up, because I was so worried I wasn't going to get finished and I'd get wrong about it."

"I used to lead in the harvest field and take wagons home when I was nine and ten years old. I'd take empty ones back and we used to work late, nine, half past nine, ten some times if that was a nice night," he recalls, "I always remember one night, I would lead the middle wagon when it was getting dusk. The farmer would be in front with one wagon; the horseman would be coming with the last one. We always used to use three. The farmer turned into the gate and I turned in the gate and didn't know what had happened. Suddenly the mare pulled up and there was a loud noise and

when he heard it, he said, "Whatever was you doing boy?" but the horseman saved me, he said, "That was not that boy's fault." What had happened, is the gate had swung between the front and the back wheels. It had pushed up tight so the mare couldn't move and that had swung the wagon so that the back wheels were over this big ditch, hanging on the gate. They took the mare out and borrowed another wagon and got that off. But it wasn't my fault, thank goodness."



Scotland Yard, Rushall - 1950s

Back at Diss Grammar School, Ray was doing well and had passed his exams. He had decided that he wanted to become a horse vet and got an interview at veterinary college. The problem was they wanted £400 for him to do the course. He was leaving school so he hadn't got that sort of money and nor had his father. When he went to work on Saturday morning his boss asked how he had got on and he told him about the money and that he didn't know what to do. Mr Saunders suggested that he should work for him permanently, saying, "Well you can come here and you can do horses, bullocks and pigs and when you are twenty-one you can run the farm for me!" The horseman on the farm was forced to retire early due to health problems caused by ill treatment in a First World War German prisoner-of-war camp so Saunders took over his duties, while teaching Ray all he knew, including how to plough and how to use a Smyth drill which he reckoned he could turn on a sixpence. Ray became head horseman when he was seventeen and he is still proud that he did so at such a young age. The Saturday after Ray's twenty-first birthday the men were paid by Saunders on the farm and he told them "Right, he'll be paying you next weekend, if you want to know anything, ask him."

In 1954 Ray wed his childhood sweetheart Pamela, who had lived just up the road

from him in Langmere. In fact she was the daughter of the retired horseman at Langmere Hall. They moved to Rushall to live in the house that belonged to the farm, which was the horseman's house, then moved to Dickleburgh because the house on the farm had no electricity or water.

One of their common interests was the Scouts and Guides movement, in which they both became leaders. They went to the royal estate at Sandringham in 1948 where they took part in a large camp fire and throughout their married life they continued to be involved including performing at the Albert Hall in the 1960s. They led the English contingent at a large international camp fire entertainment in Holland in 1969 as well as making several visits to the Scouting headquarters at Gilwell Park in London.

Ray and Pamela started the Concert Party that was known as 'Norfolk Bred' and which of course gave us the name for this album.

They had both been involved in the church choir from when they were young and Ray eventually became choirmaster. The church needed some funds to have the bells renovated at the foundry and have them re-hung, which was going to be an expensive exercise. Ideas were asked for, to raise funds, and Ray came up with the idea of a concert party with the choir members contributing. The news of the concert party spread and soon they were being asked to perform in other villages, sometimes going out two or three times a week. They even brought in the services of the local bus company, Chenery's, who offered to take them anywhere in the area, with all their props, for £2 a trip.

The Concert Party was a variety show with a changing cast depending on where they were travelling to, but regulars included Ray Leader on accordion and Revis Leader on drums. There would be anything from a skiffle group to a lady who did monologues. Ray wrote sketches and performed in a number of roles including ventriloquist, one-man band and soloist on the musical saw - not forgetting his accordeon playing, which often knitted the proceedings together.

When they were in the Shelfhanger area Ted Laurence would be picked up by the bus party. Ray remembers, "I'd let him know. Write a letter to him 'cos there was no telephones. He'd be standing at his gate ready to be picked up and we'd drop him



Ray Hubbard

presents

“NORFOLK
BRED”

(Third Season)

Programme



Ray in 'Norfolk Bred' Concert Party roles in the 1960s
Ventriloquist, musical saw, one-man band and a duet with his wife Pamela

off there on the way home.” Ted was a fellow horseman and a great performer, who can be heard on VT154CD 'Good Hearted Fellows'. Ray would also meet up with Ted at other times, particularly in the Fighting Cocks in Winfarthing where they would sing and play together.

Another regular with the concert party was concertina and accordion player Albert Rose from Yaxley, who could only come when they were travelling south down the A140 into Suffolk. He was a well-known local character who is mentioned several times in the 1985 book 'Many a Good Horseman' by John Howson. Ray remembers, “He was a little short stubby fat chap who always wore a bowler hat, even on the stage, and a bent down collar and a big sort of tie thing in front and a watch chain in his waistcoat. He used to tickle me because we'd have the things at the back of the stage ready to go on and he always locked his accordion case and always locked his concertina case and the minute he came off they went in the case and were locked. The keys were on his watch chain, but he was very proud of his silver-ended concertina that he used to play in Rickingham Silver Band, alongside his father.” Again Ray also met Albert at other times, particularly on Saturday nights when a local farmer would pick them up and take them to Occold 'Bottles' to play. “In spring time I went to his cottage and Albert said, “Would you like some cabbage plants?” He'd got no end there. So I'd say “Thank you, Albert” and then when he wrapped them up in newspaper he'd say, “That'll be 1/9d” or something like that.”

Ray also continued to entertain in pubs: “I used to cycle to the Scole Inn with a piano accordion on my back and a little accordion on my handle bars.” Along with the Leader brothers, Ray used to play in several pubs on a regular basis. Thursday night was the Scole Inn, then on other nights they'd go to Dickleburgh Crown, Rushall Half Moon and a couple of pubs in Harleston. Often there would be Thrift Club payouts and they would be asked to play afterwards. At Thorpe Abbots Red Lion they would gather and Vic Steggles would always sing 'You're the kind of girl that men forget' and there was a fair bit of stepdancing and two chaps would do a broom dance.

Ray was church organist at Rushall for 39 years, a job he was asked to do when the original organist (who was also a member of the concert party) got married and moved to Norwich where he worked as an organ builder. Ray also provided entertainment for Steward & Patteson's brewery in Norwich and Donald Steward

would come and pick him up and take him and his wife to the brewery. They did offer him a job at the brewery stables driving the horses around Norwich. "I said I'd think about it, but I thought, no, these are my horses here. I've got them to look after." Ray was glad he made that decision because the brewery closed eight years before he actually finished with horses. They gave their last three horses to Adnams' Brewery of Southwold.

Ray finished his career as a horseman in 1966. The farmer had died and the farm was sold. He tried to find other farm work, but as he couldn't drive a tractor he wasn't wanted. He went into the building trade, working first for Rackham's of Diss. This involved an eight-mile bike ride each day, which after a hard day's work was too much so, he and his wife moved to Diss. He lived there until Pamela died and then got a bungalow back in Dickleburgh.

In later life Ray continued to show other people's horses in the ring, particularly at the Suffolk Show and the Suffolk Horse Society's Suffolk Spectacular. He also became a judge for different classes, and for harnesses, vehicles and ploughing matches.

Ray Hubbard has seen a lot of changes in his life both in the countryside and musically. In recent years he has performed with the 'Old Hat Concert Party' and has appeared at Sidmouth Folk Festival in Devon and the Keith Summers' Festival in London. He still entertains in local pubs and village halls, often raising money for the Suffolk Horse Society, and over the years he has accumulated a remarkable collection of working horse memorabilia. Most of this is housed in the Suffolk Horse Museum in Woodbridge and he is now much in demand to present his fascinating talk on the life of a horseman, which he illustrates with songs, tunes and artefacts from his collection.



Ray presents his horseman's talk

The Songs, the Tunes & the Recitations

Oh, Joe, the Boat is Going Over

This is a song tune which has two word sets, but each has the same chorus. The most well known was written by John Read in 1887. This is a tune that has been played by just about every traditional musician in Norfolk and Suffolk.

Joe the Carrier Lad /Horsey, Horsey

'Joe the Carrier Lad' is often called 'Jim (or Sam) the Carter's Lad' and is a popular song with many country singers that has turned up all over England, while 'Horsey, Horsey' was written by Box, Cox, Butler and Roberts and published in 1937.

The Outing

This comic adventure probably dates back to the 1920s and was written, composed and performed by Frederick Chester and published by Reynold & Co.

Heel & Toe Polka

Another, well known East Anglian tune which starts with the tune to the nursery rhyme: 'One, Two, Three, Four, Five, once I caught a fish alive'. It is still used locally for the 'Heel and Toe' couple dance.

The Muck Spreader

A song which tells a story that seems have found a place in rural mythology in East Anglia, the West Country and in Ireland. Ray's version is usually called, 'Fling it Here, Fling it There', and the tune is that of the ubiquitous 'Thrashing Machine'.

Teamwork (recitation)

Ray thinks he wrote this out from a local newspaper with its subject matter appealing to his love of working with horses.

Bandy Bertha

Usually known as 'Riley's Cowshed' this song was written and composed by Stanley J. Damerell and Robert Hargreaves and was published in 1924. In that year it was recorded by the Grosvenor Dance Orchestra and since then there have been several recordings including, those by Adge Cutler, Clinton Ford and Bob Kerr's Whoopee Band.

Unidentified Waltz /Oh, Oh, Antonio /Bless Them All /Skater's Waltz /Toy Town

A set of waltzes which turns into a March. Ray always enjoys playing these on his Weltmeister melodeon which has particularly capacious bellows.

You Can't Tell Them Nothing, They Know

This a favourite of Ray's which he has performed for many years. He thinks he got it from the East Anglian Magazine.

Good King George the Farmer

This was written by L. Cranmer-Byng (1872- 1945) and published in 'Five Songs from Essex' in 1929.

Over the Garden Wall

Ray learned this from Bob Shipley who was a member of his concert party. It was written by L. Sarony and C. Harrington and popularised by the Jack Hylton Band with vocalist Pat O'Malley. They recorded it in 1930 on HMV B-5892.

Day at the Show (*recitation*)

Ray wrote this after visiting a horse show on a rainy day and seeing the humans sheltering in the horse boxes while the horses got soaking wet, standing out in the rain.

Has ya fa'r got a dicky, bor?

Written by Sheringham's Allan Smethurst who performed as 'The Singing Postman' and who attained pop star status in the 1960s with his quirky little songs about Norfolk life.

Sarah

Written by Fred W. Leigh and George Bastow, in the early part of the twentieth century. It was a popular song amongst country singers particularly in East Anglia and Sussex where it is often known as 'Sarey' although the 'Fo-dol -er-eye-day' chorus which Ray sings, and is included in the original sheet music, is usually left out.



Ray sings a song at the Traditional Music Day in Stowmarket, 2004

Waltz for the Veleta

A waltz popular in East Anglia for this 'Old Time' dance which, although having a continental title was composed in England by Arthur Morris in 1900.

Scaring the Crows Away

Ray learned this from a farmer, Fred Constance from Scole, who was a member of his concert party, as well as performing solo in local village halls and pubs particularly Scole Kings Head. The source of this song has eluded us.

Pudden'

A song from another local singer, Mr Durrant who was an auctioneer in Harleston. He preferred to sing with piano accompaniment and Ray would often oblige. Again a song which doesn't seem to have turned up anywhere else. It is very much in the style of the great music hall performer Harry Champion (1866 - 1942) but it does not seem to appear in his known repertoire.

The words of the songs on this CD
are available on our website
www.veteran.co.uk

Recordings:

The live recordings were recorded with an invited audience at Stradbroke Queens Head on 26th October 2006. Other recordings were made at Ray's home in Diss in 2007.

Photo credits:

Old photographs, back cover and 'Ray with Remus' courtesy of Ray Hubbard's photo collection.

'Presenting his horseman's talk' - John Halliday.

'Singing a song at the Traditional Music Day in Stowmarket 2004 - Paddy O'Beirnes.

(Front cover) Ray at Billingford Mill - John Howson



Ray with Suffolk gelding 'Remus' at the Museum of East Anglian Life, Stowmarket - 2001