

= Kenneth Horne =

Charles Kenneth Horne , generally known as Kenneth Horne , (27 February 1907 ? 14 February 1969) was an English comedian and businessman . He is perhaps best remembered for his work on three BBC Radio series : Much @-@ Binding @-@ in @-@ the @-@ Marsh (1944 ? 54) , Beyond Our Ken (1958 ? 64) and Round the Horne (1965 ? 68) .

The son of a clergyman who was also a politician , Horne had a burgeoning business career with Triplex Safety Glass , which was interrupted by service with the Royal Air Force during the Second World War . While serving in a barrage balloon unit he was asked to broadcast as a quizmaster on the BBC radio show Ack @-@ Ack , Beer @-@ Beer . The experience brought him into contact with the more established entertainer Richard Murdoch , and the two wrote and starred in the comedy series Much @-@ Binding @-@ in @-@ the @-@ Marsh . After demobilisation Horne returned to his business career , and kept his broadcasting as a sideline . His career in industry flourished and he later became the chairman and managing director of toy manufacturers Chad Valley .

In 1958 Horne suffered a stroke and gave up his business dealings to focus on his entertainment work . He was the anchor figure in Beyond Our Ken , which also featured Kenneth Williams , Hugh Paddick , Betty Marsden and Bill Pertwee . When the programme came to an end in 1964 , the same cast recorded four series of the comedy Round the Horne .

Before the planned fifth series of Round the Horne began recording , Horne died of a heart attack while hosting the annual Guild of Television Producers ' and Directors ' Awards ; Round the Horne could not continue without him and was withdrawn . Since his death the series has been regularly re @-@ broadcast . A 2002 BBC radio survey to find listeners ' favourite British comedian placed Horne third , behind Tony Hancock and Spike Milligan .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life = = =

Kenneth Horne was born Charles Kenneth Horne on 27 February 1907 at Ampthill Square , London . He was the seventh and youngest child of Silvester Horne and his wife , Katherine Maria neé Cozens @-@ Hardy . Katherine 's father was Herbert Cozens @-@ Hardy , the Liberal MP for North Norfolk who became the Master of the Rolls in 1907 and Baron Cozens @-@ Hardy on 1 July 1914 . Silvester , a powerful orator , was a leading light in the Congregationalist movement , as minister at the Whitefield 's Tabernacle , Tottenham Court Road from 1903 and , from 1910 , chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales . Between 1910 ? 14 he was the Liberal MP for Ipswich .

By 1913 Silvester was suffering from continual poor health . He resigned his position at the tabernacle on medical advice in January 1914 , and intended to resign his parliamentary seat . On a speaking tour of the US and Canada he lectured at Yale University , and then took the ferry to Toronto ; as it entered the harbour , he collapsed and died , aged 49 ; Horne was aged seven at the time . From September that year Horne attended St George 's School , Harpenden as a boarder ? the seventh of the Horne children to attend the school . Although he was not strong academically , he developed into a good sportsman , representing the school in rugby and cricket , and during the summer holidays took part in the Public Schoolboys Lawn Tennis Championship at Queen 's Club ; in his final appearance in 1925 he was knocked out by the future Wimbledon finalist Bunny Austin .

Horne enrolled at the London School of Economics in October 1925 , where his tutors included Hugh Dalton and Stephen Leacock ; he was dissatisfied with his time at the university and called Leacock " one of the most boring lecturers I ever came across " . During the general strike in 1926 volunteers were asked to enlist at the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies to take over the essential services ; Horne joined and spent two days driving a London bus before the strike was called off . Through the influence and generosity of an uncle , Austin Pilkington of the Pilkington glassmaking family of St Helens , he was able to enrol at Magdalene College , Cambridge in

October 1926 . He committed himself to the sporting side of life and represented the college at rugby , and in the relay team alongside the future Olympic gold medallist Lord Burghley . He also played tennis for the university , partnering Bunny Austin . Distracted by his athletic exploits , he neglected his studies and was sent down in December 1927 .

Austin Pilkington was aggrieved at Horne 's failure to make the most of the opportunity he had provided , and decided against offering the young man a post in the family firm . Despite the disappointment , through his contacts within the industry , he secured for the young Horne an interview with the Triplex Safety Glass Company at King 's Norton , a district of Birmingham . Horne 's sporting record commended him to the manager of the Triplex factory , and he was taken on as a management trainee on a modest salary . In September 1930 , despite his unimpressive finances , he married Lady Mary Pelham @-@ Clinton @-@ Hope , daughter of the 8th Duke of Newcastle . The marriage was happy at first , but had broken down by 1932 . Mary applied for an annulment in November 1932 ; she declared the reason was " the incapacity of the respondent [Charles Kenneth Horne] to consummate the marriage " , which was dissolved in 1933 , although the two remained on friendly terms thereafter .

When Horne 's first marriage was dissolved , he was sought out by a former girlfriend , Joan Burgess , daughter of a neighbour at King 's Norton . Unlike his first wife , she had much in common with him , including a liking for squash , tennis , golf and dancing . A month before her 21st birthday they were married , in September 1936 . Joan became pregnant soon after the wedding , and in July 1937 a baby boy was delivered ; he was stillborn .

= = = Service in the RAF = = =

In 1938 Horne enlisted in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve on a part @-@ time training scheme . He was commissioned as an acting pilot officer in No. 911 (County of Warwick) Squadron , a barrage balloon unit in Sutton Coldfield , and was called up into the RAF full @-@ time on the outbreak of war . In the initial months of the conflict ? the Phoney War ? Horne 's duties were undemanding , and he formed a concert party from his friends and colleagues . In November 1940 he was promoted to flight lieutenant , and to squadron leader a year later . In early 1942 the BBC producer Bill McLurg asked whether the RAF station at which Horne was based could put on an edition of his programme Ack @-@ Ack , Beer @-@ Beer . Horne was ordered to put on the show , and he made his broadcasting debut on 16 April 1942 , as the compere . Although the standard of the talent on the show was not high , McLurg was impressed with Horne 's presentation , especially the way he hosted the programme 's quiz ; he invited Horne to be the programme 's regular quizmaster , a role the latter fulfilled on over fifty Ack @-@ Ack , Beer @-@ Beer quizzes over the next two years . In January 1943 he became one of the show 's regular comperes and presented the entire show for the first time .

In March 1943 Horne was posted to the Air Ministry in London with the rank of wing commander . Continuing to broadcast on Ack @-@ Ack , Beer @-@ Beer , he also began to write sketches for the programme , and make broadcasts on other shows , including the Overseas Recorded Broadcasting Service (ORBS) , to be transmitted to British forces in the Middle East . His work with ORBS brought him into contact with Flight Lieutenant Richard Murdoch , who he jokingly introduced in one broadcast as " the station commander of Much @-@ Binding @-@ in @-@ the @-@ Marsh " ; with a great deal in common in their backgrounds and a similar sense of humour , the pair quickly formed a friendship . Horne informed Murdoch of a squadron leader vacancy in his section at the Ministry , and Murdoch became his colleague . Murdoch , a professional actor and entertainer for 12 years before the war , recognised Horne 's talent as a performer , and used his contacts to secure him more broadcasting work .

Ack @-@ Ack , Beer @-@ Beer came to an end in February 1944 when the BBC decided to direct their programming at the general armed forces , rather than the barrage balloon crews . A month later Horne and Murdoch had expanded the idea of the remote and fictitious Royal Air Force station , Much @-@ Binding @-@ in @-@ the @-@ Marsh . The pair took the idea to the BBC producer Leslie Bridgemont who was responsible for the show Merry @-@ go @-@ Round , which featured ,

in weekly rotation , shows based on the Army , Navy and RAF . Bridgmont included a Much @-@ Binding @-@ in @-@ the @-@ Marsh section in Merry @-@ go @-@ Round on 31 March 1944 ; Horne played " an officer so dim that even the other officers noticed " , with Murdoch as his harassed second @-@ in @-@ command and Sam Costa as an " amiable chump who always got things wrong " .

During 1944 Horne met and fell in love with Marjorie Thomas , a war widow with a young daughter . He was divorced in early 1945 , and he and Thomas were married in November that year , three months after he had been demobilised .

= = = Postwar , a double career : 1945 ? 58 = = =

On his return to civilian life , Horne resumed working at Triplex , and was promoted to the position of sales director . Despite his subsequent joint career in broadcasting and business , his commercial activities always took precedence . He declared that his work on radio was only a hobby , and that he would give it up before his business career . He combined his two roles by working full @-@ time , and writing scripts with Murdoch at weekends .

Much @-@ Binding @-@ in @-@ the @-@ Marsh had gained sufficient popularity over its run of 20 Merry @-@ go @-@ Round episodes to be given its own 39 @-@ week series beginning in January 1947 . With the coming of peace , the supposed RAF station became a civil airport , and the show continued much as before , written by and starring Horne and Murdoch , with Sam Costa . Maurice Denham ? described by Murdoch as a vocal chameleon ? joined the cast and played over 60 roles . The programme became popular , with audiences of 20 million , and ran for four series until September 1950 .

In March 1948 Horne appeared with Murdoch in six episodes of the BBC Television comedy series Kaleidoscope . In June that year he and Murdoch again appeared on television in a one @-@ off sitcom , At Home , which they wrote . The following year Horne began his connection with Twenty Questions , an association that lasted , on @-@ and @-@ off , for 20 years . By the fourth series of Much @-@ Binding in 1950 , the listener figures had declined to a level that concerned the BBC and they decided against a fifth series . Rather than wait to see what other offers of work would come in from the Corporation , Horne and Murdoch signed the comedy to a 35 @-@ programme series on Radio Luxembourg between October 1950 and June 1951 . The programme was poorly received on the commercial channel : Murdoch observed that " it wasn 't really a great success ? even my mother said it was rotten , and she was my greatest fan " . After one series , the show returned to the BBC in 1951 ? 52 , although renamed as Over to You . Murdoch and Horne again appeared together , in April 1952 , on Desert Island Discs .

In 1954 , after nine years in his senior position at Triplex , and 27 years at the company , Horne accepted the position of managing director of the British Industries Fair , a government @-@ backed organisation promoting British goods worldwide ; he took up his position in July 1955 . Much of the work involved liaising with foreign buyers and delegations , and he accompanied the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh on visits to the annual fair . In 1956 the government withdrew its funding and the BIF closed . Horne received several attractive job offers , and chose the post of chairman and managing director of the toy manufacturers Chad Valley , where he was a success . In September that year he and Murdoch appeared in a one @-@ off television programme Show for the Telly .

In January 1957 Horne appeared as the compere on the popular Saturday evening comedy and music radio show Variety Playhouse , initially for a run of four months , but soon extended until the end of June . He also began to write a weekly column for the women 's magazine She , and to appear in an increasing number of other programmes . After his work on Variety Playhouse had finished , he and the programme 's writers , Eric Merriman and Barry Took , prepared a script for a pilot episode of a new show , Beyond Our Ken . The show , in which Horne was joined by Kenneth Williams , Ron Moody , Hugh Paddick and Betty Marsden , was broadcast in October 1957 .

= = = A single career : 1958 ? 69 = = =

The pilot episode of *Beyond Our Ken* was well received by the BBC , and they commissioned a series to start in April 1958 . On 27 February that year ? his 51st birthday ? Horne suffered a debilitating stroke and was totally paralysed down his left @-@ hand side and lost the power of speech . He underwent a course of intensive physiotherapy and was able to return home after two weeks . His voice returned when , during heavy massage on his left thigh , a sharp pain led to him shouting " You bugger ! " at the physiotherapist . His doctor told him that the stroke was caused by the stress of combining a full @-@ time business post with his broadcasting work . He also told Horne that when he had recovered he would never be fit enough to continue as before . Horne considered that it was not the physical problem of combining his two careers , but the mental strain of problems in his business life ; accordingly he decided to give up commerce and concentrate on a career in entertainment . Because of the stroke , plans for *Beyond Our Ken* were suspended .

In April 1958 Horne eased himself back into broadcasting as chairman of *Twenty Questions* . This evidence of his recovery was sufficient for the BBC to begin recording *Beyond Our Ken* in June , in preparation for the broadcast of the first series between July and November . *Beyond Our Ken* was written around the imperturbable establishment figure of Horne , while the other performers played a " spectrum of characters never before heard on the radio " , including the exaggeratedly upper class Rodney and Charles , the genteel pensioners Ambrose and Felicity , the cook Fanny Haddock ? a parody of popular TV cook Fanny Cradock ? and the gardener Arthur Fallowfield . The first episode was not well received by a sample audience , but the BBC decided to back Horne and his team , and the initial six @-@ week contract was extended to 21 weeks . Before the series came to an end a second had been commissioned to run the following year . After the first series Moody was succeeded by Bill Pertwee ; Took left after the second series , leaving Merriman to write the remaining programmes on his own .

The second series of *Beyond Our Ken* followed in 1959 ; a third in 1960 . Horne also continued his work in television , hosting his own series , *Trader Horne* , and appearing on a number of other programmes . In April 1961 he made his second appearance on *Desert Island Discs* , this time unaccompanied by Murdoch . In October that year ? three weeks after the fifth series of *Beyond Our Ken* began recording ? Horne appeared as the anchorman on a new BBC television series , *Let 's Imagine* , a discussion programme which ran for 20 editions over 18 months . He was the subject of *This Is Your Life* in February 1962 , hosted by Eamonn Andrews , in which guests included friends and colleagues from his connections in business and entertainment . In June 1963 he began *Ken 's Column* , a series of 15 @-@ minute one @-@ man programmes for Anglia Television .

The seventh series of *Beyond Our Ken* finished in February 1964 , with an average audience of ten million listeners per programme . In September that year Horne returned from holiday and was scheduled to appear in a number of programmes ; Eric Merriman objected to Horne 's activities , saying that Horne had been made into a star by the writer , and that " no other comedy series should be allowed to use him " . When the BBC refused to withdraw Horne from the second programme , *Down with Women* , Merriman resigned from writing *Beyond Our Ken* and the show came to an end . After some pressure from Horne to keep the remainder of the team together , the BBC commissioned a replacement series , *Round the Horne* , on similar lines . They turned to one of the original writers of *Beyond Our Ken* , Barry Took and his new writing partner , Marty Feldman . Horne remained the genial and unflappable focal figure , and the writers invented several new and eccentric characters to revolve round him . They included J. Peasemold Gruntfuttock , the walking slum ; the Noël Coward parodies Charles and Fiona ; the incompetent villain Dr. Chou En Ginsberg ; the folk singer Rambling Syd Rumpo and the " outrageously camp " Julian and Sandy . The resulting programme was described by radio historians Andy Foster and Steve Furst as " one of the seminal comedies to come out of the BBC " , while *The Spectator* described it as " one of the great radio successes " . The first series of *Round the Horne* , consisting of 16 episodes , ran from March to June 1965 . Horne 's role was to provide " the perfect foil to the inspired lunacy happening all around him " :

On 7 October 1966 , at the age of 59 , Horne suffered a major heart attack . He was much weakened , and was unfit to work for three months . As a result , he did not appear in the *Round the Horne* Christmas special . He returned to work in January 1967 to record the third series .

Round the Horne ran to four series , broadcast in successive years , and finished in June 1968 . Three weeks after the fourth series finished , the first episode of Horne A 'Plenty was broadcast on ITV . In a sketch show format , and with Barry Took as script editor (and later producer) , this was an attempt to translate the spirit of Round the Horne to television , although with different actors supporting Horne : Graham Stark , for example , substituted for Kenneth Williams and Sheila Steafel for Betty Marsden . The first six @-@ part series ran from 22 June to 27 July 1968 , the second (by which time ABC had become Thames Television) from 27 November to 1 January 1969 .

= = = Death and tributes = = =

Because of his heart condition , Horne had been prescribed an anticoagulant , but had stopped taking it on the advice of a faith healer . Horne died of a heart attack on 14 February 1969 , while hosting the annual Guild of Television Producers ' and Directors ' Awards at the Dorchester hotel in London . Presenting the awards was Earl Mountbatten of Burma ; an award had gone to Barry Took and Marty Feldman for their TV series Marty , and Horne had just urged viewers to tune into the fifth series of Round the Horne (which was due to start on 16 March) when he fell from the podium . The televised recording of the event omitted the incident , with announcer Michael Aspel explaining , " Mr Horne was taken ill at this point and has since died . " A memorial service was held at St Martin @-@ in @-@ the @-@ Fields in March that year .

After his death , Horne was eulogised in The Times as " a master of the scandalous double @-@ meaning delivered with shining innocence " , while The Sunday Mirror called him " one of the few personalities who bridged the generation gap " and " perhaps the last of the truly great radio comics . " In the December 1970 issue of The Listener , Barry Took recalled Round the Horne and said of its star :

" He was an unselfish performer , but it was still always his show . You just knew it . A Martian would have known it . His warmth tempered the sharpness of the writing ... To say that everyone loved him sounds like every obituary ever written ? nonetheless it 's true ... Horne was one of the few great men I have met , and his generosity of spirit and gesture have , in my experience , never been surpassed . I mourn him still . "

On hearing the news Kenneth Williams wrote in his diary that " I loved that man . His unselfish nature , his kindness , tolerance and gentleness were an example to everyone " . In The Sunday Times in February 1969 , Paul Jennings wrote of him : " If I ever knew a gentleman , it was Kenneth Horne He gave you his whole attention , his whole courtesy . And what a courtesy it was ! ... I knew him in the context of panel games , to which his marvellous unforced humour , spontaneous but beautifully timed , always added sparkle . "

= = Technique = =

Horne 's friend , Barry Took , considered that " Horne 's rich , fruity voice and warm patrician manner made him the ideal link man and that , coupled with a mischievous sense of humour , ensured that any programme in which he was involved was the better for his presence " . Horne attributed his voice and delivery " to ' the Grace of God ' , his grandfather Lord Cozens @-@ Hardy , the former Master of the Rolls , and the hard training of being ' a jovial chap among the golf and motoring fraternity ' . "

The obituarist for The Times highlighted Horne 's " remarkably skilful but very personal comic technique " of playing " a friendly good @-@ natured old buffer who was simply doing his best , apparently lost in wonder , at the glossier , more spectacular talents of those among whom he found himself " . The media analysts Frank Krutnik and Steve Neale see a similar role and consider that " Horne functioned , like [Jack] Benny , [Fred] Allen and [Tommy] Handley before him , as a ' stooge ' rather than a joke @-@ wielder , frequently switching roles between announcer and in @-@ sketch performer " .

In Round the Horne , as well as acting as link man , Horne also played other character roles in the film and melodrama spoofs , but always sounded exactly like Kenneth Horne . Referring to his ability

with voices , he commented that " between them Betty , Ken W. , Hugh and Bill Pertwee can provide at least 100 voices , and if you take me into account the figure leaps to 101 . " Williams reported that Horne had a card index mind , " in which there seemed to be stored every funny voice , every dialect , every comedy trick , which he knew that each member of the cast was capable of " , and would suggest a change in approach if a line did not work during rehearsals .

Graham Ball , writing in the Sunday Express observed that Horne " didn 't tell jokes in the usual manner , didn 't have a catchphrase and never resorted to blue comedy " . Ball also identified that Horne 's " stage character , that of a slightly bufferish English gent , was adored by middle- and working @-@ class audiences alike . His humour was original , almost underplayed , but the effortless delivery and uncanny timing concealed an almost anarchic sense of mischief . "

= = Legacy = =

By 24 February 1969 it had been decided that Round the Horne could not continue without its star . As a result , the scripts for Series Five (which Horne had jokingly suggested should be subtitled ' The First All @-@ Nude Radio Show ') were hastily adapted into a new series for Kenneth Williams called Stop Messing About , which ran for two series but was widely judged a failure and discontinued in 1970 . On the first day of recording the new show , Williams wrote in his diary that " I miss [Horne] dreadfully . I could weep for all that goodness gone from our atmosphere at the show " .

A successful stage show called Round the Horne ... Revisited opened in London in October 2003 , compiled by Series Four co @-@ writer Brian Cooke from original scripts and featuring Jonathan Rigby as Horne . The West End production ran until April 2005 and generated a BBC Four television film and an appearance at the 2004 Royal Variety Performance , with Rigby playing Horne again on both occasions . Subsequently there were three national tours , the first two of which took place while the London run continued ; in the touring version Horne was played by Stephen Critchlow , who also played him in a Julian and Sandy sketch recreated in the 2006 BBC television drama Kenneth Williams : Fantabulosa !

On 27 February 2007 (Horne 's centenary) , BBC Radio 4 broadcast a half @-@ hour documentary tribute entitled Sound the Horne , hosted by Jimmy Carr . The following year , on 18 September , another Radio 4 documentary was broadcast ; called Thoroughly Modest Mollie , this one focused on Horne 's frequent ghost @-@ writer , Mollie Millest , and featured Jonathan Rigby again as Horne . Rigby reprised the role yet again in a new stage show , devised this time by Barry Took 's widow Lyn , called Round the Horne ? Unseen and Uncut , which toured in 2008 @-@ 09 . Also in 2009 , an unbroadcast pilot script written by Horne and Millest in 1966 was produced by the same Radio 4 team as the Millest documentary . Called Twice Ken is Plenty and intended as a two @-@ man showcase for Horne and Kenneth Williams , the 21st century version was performed by Rigby and , as Williams , Robin Sebastian . The show was broadcast on 1 September 2009 .

Horne has been the subject of two biographies , Norman Hackforth 's Solo for Horne in 1976 and Barry Johnston 's Round Mr Horne : The Life of Kenneth Horne in 2006 . In 1998 Ernie Wise unveiled a blue plaque to Horne at BBC Broadcasting House . Editions of Beyond Our Ken and Round the Horne are regularly broadcast on the digital radio service BBC 4 Extra , and by 2006 over half a million copies of tapes and CDs of Round the Horne had been sold by the BBC . In a 2002 survey conducted by the BBC to find listeners ' favourite British comedian , Horne appeared third , behind Tony Hancock and Spike Milligan .

= = Career history = =

= = = Selected radio broadcasts = = =

= = = Selected television appearances = = =

