## Summer in Aberystwyth – seaside entertainment in 1922 Anne Goulden

In the summer of 1922 Owen Clark was struggling with his Giant Illusions act. Claude Chandler was having an equally difficult time with his version of David Devant's Revue of Magic. Chandler had two seasons at St George's Hall, in the spring and autumn of 1922. His manager was Charles Glenrose.

That summer, Chandler was in Bognor and Glenrose was in Aberystwyth. Glenrose was managing the Quarryette, a failing attraction owned by a widow named Mrs Graham. The information which follows is extracted from letters which Glenrose wrote to Chandler.

The first letter is dated 29 April 1922. There is no information about Owen Clark, but Glenrose's comments about the Quarryette may be of interest.



(Opposite Queen's Hotel),

Proprietress: Mrs. C. GRAHAM.

General Manager: Mr. CHARLES GLENROSE.

QUEEN'S ROAD,

ABERYSTWYTH.

An offer in this letter must not be deemed a contract.

Bill and Programme matter to be sent to Charles Glenrose, 37, Marine Terrace, 21 clear days before date of opening.

37 Marine Terrace.

Aberystwyth. Cardiganshire.

29/4/22

Dear Mr Chandler,

Letter dated 29 April 1922, extract 1

Thanks for your enquiry. Yes, things are going well here. Am up to my eyes in work. To raise money I am running dances each Wednesday from 8 till 11 - had my first last Wed. and it was a big success. We had 64 couples (128 people) on the floor at 2/- per head. My actual expenses was £3;7.9 including an orchestra of 4, very good too, profits were therefore £9.11. and further profit of 16/6on refreshments = a clear nett profit of over £10 on the night, not too bad. Next week I believe will be bigger. Why I started this stunt last week was because I heard an opposition (and there are a few) intended doing so at "The Elysian Grove" starting from tonight, so I got busy and have engaged the Orchestra (Ahem) (the only one in the town, apart from the Town Band, which will occupy the Bandstand on the Prom.) for the whole season - I was just a few hours ahead of them a near thing, but I "clicked". I am running these dances after Wmit-Monday's opening every Tues. Wed and Thurs, after the usual show, shall ring up at 7-45 and down at 9-45, dancing from 10 till 11-15. It will

Letter dated 29 April 1922, extract 2 (part a)

be work but I am down here to make money for the widow-lady and recover part, at least, of her previous losses.

Am having the Pav. painted, lavatories put in and the dressing rooms made habitable. Outside, I am having the ground levelled and turfed and with shrubs and gree plants, flowers etc I am hoping to make it look very attractive. Everyone told me that soil and turf was absolutely unprocurable; -I've over 100 loads of soil and the ground now and hope to start a man cutting turf & carting it to the Pav. by Tues. latest. Funny how these cockneys get what they want, look you. Some work though and little time and less money to do it with, but I think I shall squeeze through.

Opposition this year will be greater than ever, I hear, but I'm not daunted, I'm going to win through, if it is humanly possible and I am very keen to make a success here as I have an idea that Mr Devant thinks I shall fail in this town and if I DID fail I should feel - - well - nevermind, I'm not going to fail.

Letter dated 29 April 1922, extract 2 (part b)

The news of Owen Clark's impending visit to Aberystwyth is in Glenrose's letter of 12 May 1922 (extract 1, below). The letter gives further information about Glenrose's activities at the Quarryette (extract 2, below).

I hear Owen Clark comes to the Pier here for a 16 weeks season. On, my! How many tons of stuff is he bringing I wonder? When I last saw him in Town he told me he was going on a 20 weeks tour, after finishing at "The Hall" is this 16 weeks of it? Lovely tour!

Jule Glenne the

Letter dated 12 May 1922, extract 1

Yours sincerely

P.S. Am really up to my eyes in work. Have the painters and decorators in, also having water and gas mains run in, and lavorities and kitchens built. The grounds and beginning to look nice with turf and green plants etc, and what with looking after this, and having bill-boards built, and chairs battened together, and incindentally running dances you can judge I'm pretty busy.

Letter dated 12 May 1922, extract 2

In his letter of 21 June 1922, Glenrose wrote about competing attractions in Aberystwyth.

There is much opposition here. FOUR resident
Parties, in addition to The Collseum, Band, Chara-bancs Motor &
other Boating to say nothing of A huge Musical Festival which starts
a series of 25 Concerts on Friday next, but despite this, we opened
fairly well Whit week, and have gone up each week since, whilst the
Collseum has CLOSED DOWN, and the Company, a Revue "Helloe Charite"
which opened there on Whit Monday, took £7 for their share and was
STRANDED in the town, not being able to travel to Chathem there next
date. I felt very sorry for them, but glad to feel that I am keeping
our end up in spite of everything. Of course the Season does not
start until July, but nevertheless I have broken records for the first
three weeks of last season a month before the season opens, so that
is not so bad. I really think my policy is the right one, and I have
the confidence of the town and councillors, so am really expecting to
come out on the right side. I sincerely hope so.

Letter dated 21 June 1922

In July 1922 David Devant visited Aberystwyth and saw Owen Clark's show. His opinion, as reported by Charles Glenrose in his letter of 20 July, was that it was "not of the best". Devant may have been biased by the fact that Claude Chandler's version of his show was in competition with Owen Clark.

I expect you know that Mr Devant and family are here. They are in their second week, and will, I think be staying for some little time. He seems very anxious that I write out for dates, but I am holding my hand until I hear from you but perhaps I shall be doing no harm if I send a few feelers out, what do you say? I thought of writing to a few places round London such as Richmond, Kingston Aldershot etc; the latter two would have to go through Adam's Agency, and I dont think they would pay more than £100, but that would keep us going, and might be worth your while, until things got settled a bit with the tours. Please let me hear from you as soon as possible

Lloyd George has been here three days this week and played "heck" with the business, but we shall survive I guess.

Owen Clarke is here, and his show is NOT of the best, that is not my opinion, as I have not seen it, but it is "D.D's" and that is good enough for me to go on. Mr Devant says plainly that he thinks there is a fortune in your show and has great hopes of the future.

A great pity the new illusion has failed to fructuate, and lucky that you did not forego your present contract for that, there is something in luck, after all.

Letter dated 20 July 1922

On 16 August 1922 Glenrose wrote to Chandler to say that "Mr Devant left here last Saturday after a stay of five weeks." He had bad news about his own season in Aberystwyth.

The season here has turned out badly, so far, but, even so I should be able to pay my way and make a profit but for the load of debt left fromm last season which I have had to shoulder. I shall be very glad when Sept 2 rd arrives when I shall be able to throw off the responsibility. I am trying to sell the place for Mrs Graham in which case I may be able to pick up back salary if not the chances are not favourable, but I usually stick to what I undertake.

Letter dated 16 August 1922- extract 1

He had been equally unsuccessful in his attempts to obtain bookings for Chandler's version of Devant's Revue of Magic. He offered the following explanation.

the whole fact of the matter is, Managements have been so badly "let down" by others attempting to follow big illusionists that they are sty of booking. The followers of Lafavette, Ching Ling Soo, and others all being failures, you cannot wonder that they will take a little time to realise that the seeming impossible has happened in your case.

Letter dated 16 August 1922- extract 2

Managements may also have been put off by the fact that Chandler wanted £150 per week for the act. This was a very high salary for a well-worn act presented by a young, relatively unknown performer.

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