

## **The DOWNBEAT CLUB and Jazz in Gosport - 1950s to mid-1960s**

The earliest recollection we have of Jazz in Gosport comes from long-standing Gosport Jazz Club member, Maurice Kemp, who remembers jazz record recitals at Privett School before the scene moved to Gosport Community Association Bury House, (before the Thorngate Halls were built by the Association, opening in 1960). He also recalls the Downbeat Club started in 1957 by Vic Brown and a few others.

Maurice says that "Live bands were gradually introduced both Traditional and Modern using local groups and occasional big names, on roughly every two weeks. Big names I remember were Kenny Ball , Terry Lightfoot, Bob Wallis, and the entire Jonny Dankworth Orchestra in 1962. Modernists he remembers were Joe Harriott and Bert Courtney with Ginger Baker (Cream) on drums.

One day jazz festivals were held at Easter with local and visiting Jazz musicians between the years 1960 to 1963. By then, however, the music scene was changing with the arrival of the Fab Four, jazz was no longer as popular, but I believe it carried on for awhile with local Groups."

Following from this we managed to contact Vic Brown who now (December 2016) lives at Waterlooville and who confirms being part of founding the Downbeat Club in 1957 at Bury House with colleagues, Vic being Chairman. It rapidly expanded as a trad. jazz club and they once had an attendance of 300, taking over the whole of the ground floor of the House and even held a Jazz Band Ball at Lee Tower. They had a 'modern' night once a month (that featured the likes of Tubby Hayes on tenor sax, Vic Ash on clarinet and Bill Le Sage on vibes and Ginger Baker, Eric Clapton and Jack Bruce as 'Cream').

Trad. names included Alex Walsh, Gerry Brown, Monty Sunshine, Mick Mulligan with George Melly and Chis Barber and Otilie Paterson with the Clyde Valley Stompers. The Club also used local trad. bands including Vieux Carre and Summa Cum Laude whilst the local 'moderns' included the blind pianist Bill Cole and his quartet.

Vic says that the average attendance was 250 to 300 in the Thorngate Theatre but on Maundy Thursday in 1961 Kenny Ball appeared and the Club held that in the Thorngate Ballroom and squeezed in just over one thousand! The Band cost £45 and admission was two shillings [10p] and it was a good night all round!

A remarkable feature of the Downbeat Club was that it was 'dry', and the local hostelrys of the Harvest Home and Wiltshire Lamb did a roaring trade on Thursday evenings. Vic says that the only time they had a bar was for the visit of Johnny Dankworth with the band in the ballroom and the bar in the theatre.

The transition came with more modern 'popular' music and there were appearances by Georgie Fame, Long John Baldry, Lulu, The Hollies, Rod Stewart (three times), Eric Clapton and Manfred Mann, etc. Vic says that the Club gradually wound down in the mid-1960s.