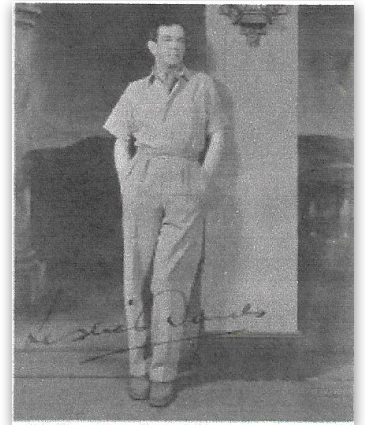


LESLIE BANKS CBE 1890 – 1952

Famous Stage and Film Actor



Leslie Banks, CBE (9 June 1890 – 21 April 1952)

was an English theatre and cinema actor, director and producer.

Born in West Derby, England, a suburb of Liverpool. His parents were George Banks and Emily Banks nee Dalby.^[1] He studied at Trinity College in Glenalmond and Keble College, Oxford with the intention of becoming a parson but decided against this.

He joined F.R.Benson's Company and made his acting debut in October 1911 at the Town Hall, Brechin, playing Old Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice*. He then toured the US and Canada with Henry V. Esmond and Eva Moore 1912-1913. Returning to London, he appeared for the first time on the West End stage at the Vaudeville Theatre on 5 May, 1914, as Lord Murdon in *The Dangerous Age*.

When the First World War broke out, he served with the Essex Regiment 1914-1918. He received injuries that left his face partially scarred and paralysed.^[3] In his acting career he would use this injury to good effect, by showing the unblemished side of his face when playing comedy or romance and the scarred, paralysed side of his face when playing drama or tragedy. After the war, Banks joined the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. He returned to London in 1921 and established himself as a leading dramatic actor and West End star known for his powerful yet restrained performances.

Working in both London and New York, he won transAtlantic fame and it was when he was in New York that Kenneth Macgowan persuaded him to go to Hollywood and make his stage debut there in *The Hounds of Zaroff* in 1932.

His first important film role was in the movie version of the story, re-titled *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932) as a diabolical "human hunter" with Joel McCrea and Fay Wray and for the rest of his career he divided his time between Britain and the United States, and between film and theatre. His other film roles include Alfred Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), *Fire Over England* (1937), *Jamaica Inn* (1939), Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* (1944), and David Lean's *Madeleine* (1950).

His theatre roles included *Eliza Comes to Stay* (his American debut in 1914), Captain Hook in *Peter Pan* (his New York debut in 1924), Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1937) the schoolmaster in *Goodbye, Mr Chips* (1938), and James Jarvis in the Kurt Weill musical *Lost in the Stars* (1950) . He married Gwendoline Haldane Unwin in 1915 and had three daughters: Daphne, Virginia and Evangeline. He was made a CBE for his services to theatre in 1950, the year in which he made both his final stage and film appearances.

- *The Most Dangerous Game* (1933)
- *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934)
- *Red Ensign* (1934)
- *Sanders of the River* (1935)
- *The Tunnel* (1935)
- *The Night of the Party* (1935)
- *Fire Over England* (1937)
- *Jamaica Inn* (1939)
- *The Arsenal Stadium Mystery* (1939)
- *The Big Blockade* (1940)
- *21 Days* (1940)
- *The Door with Seven Locks* (1940)
- *Neutral Port* (1940)
- *Cottage to Let* (1941)
- *Went the Day Well?* (1942)
- *Ships with Wings* (1942)
- *Henry V* (1944)
- *Mrs. Fitzherbert* (1947)
- *The Small Back Room* (1949)
- *Your Witness* (1950)
- *Madeleine* (1950)



I visited **WORTH MATRAVERS** near Swanage on 13th February 2004 and located the grave of Leslie James Banks (1890 – 1952) high in the churchyard of the St. Nicholas.

The local shopkeeper was most helpful in giving a copy of stories of the village in the 1920's-1930's, which are included.

I then approached an elderly couple both born in the village. Mrs. Gillespie nee Corben told me that Leslie Banks used to visit Worth Matravers regularly in the 1920's before purchasing Lobster Cottage and the adjacent Church Cottage overlooking the churchyard in 1937. Leslie and his wife Gwendoline and their three daughters spent each summer at Worth Matravers and were very much involved with the life of the village. He was second 'mine host' in the Square and Compass Inn and was friendly with the Newman family. Mrs. Corben had originally lived in Church Cottage and looked after the cottage when Mr. and Mrs. Banks were away. The daughter, Mrs. Gillespie, remembered happy times traveling in the chauffeur driven car belonging to Leslie Banks. She remembered him a pleasant man very much in love with the village and that a daughter, Evangeline, married to the actor Tenniel Evans, had visited her last summer. A granddaughter had until recently been married to Rowan Atkinson.

I then approached the Square and Compass Inn close by as it was closing and was allowed to enter the bar and view the photograph taken in 1935 of Leslie Banks sitting outside the inn with Mr. Newman, the present owner's grandfather.

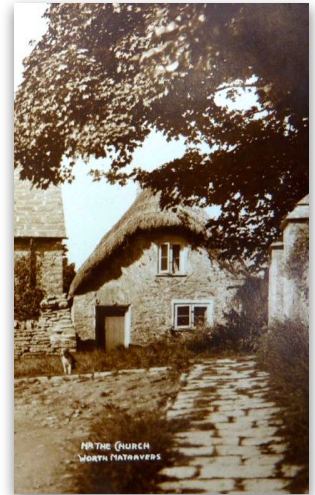
The one point not proven on my visit was whether Leslie James Banks, born in West Derby, was connected to famous Bankes family of this area. Mrs. Gillespie was fairly certain that he was not but the present occupier of Church Cottage took the opposite view and stated that the Bankes family had originally owned the group of cottages.

Altogether a rewarding day spent in a delightful village in search of a great actor.

Howard J. Dalton



Church of St. Nicholas, Worth Matravers



Lobster Cottage

The church was commenced in 1100, added to in the fourteenth century, and restored in 1869. **Church Cottage**, home of Leslie Banks and his family for many years from the 1930's onwards, stands next to the church. They also bought the adjacent **Lobster Cottage**.



Situated high in the churchyard is the grave of Leslie Banks and those to the Newman family



The grave of Leslie James Banks, Actor, 1890 – 1952, and his wife Gwendoline 1892 – 1984

Leslie was born 9th June 1890 at West Derby, Liverpool, and died 21st April 1952 in London.

He married Gwendoline Haldane nee Unwin.



View towards Langton Matravers from Worth



The grave of Edwin and Mary Corben. Mary was for many years housekeeper to the Banks family

Address	House No.	Name	Sex	Date of Birth	Age	Occupation
This record is officially closed.						
	4	Harper Sarah E R	F	1 Oct 97	S	Teacher in Elocution
	5	Harper Rebecca	F	25 May 57	W	Unspecified
Stoneleigh	62	1 Gellinek Lionel	M	30 Mar 98	M	Barrister-at-Law
		2 Gellinek Lydia	F	7 Jan 02	M	Private Means
Church Cottages	63	1 Banks Leslie J	M	9 Jun 90	M	Actor
		2 Banks Gwendolyn	F	13 Oct 92	M	Private Means
		3 Banks Daphne M	F	15 May 16	S	Artist
This record is officially closed.						
	5	Hettle Olive C.	F	5 June 85	S	Managing Director of Dressmaking Business
	6	Parbin Edith	F	25 Sep 70	M	Unpaid Domestic Duties
Honeysuckle Cott	64	1 Hooper Charles A	M	19 Mar 03	M	Road & Lane Stone Quarryman Heavy Worker
		2 Hooper Kathleen J	F	20 Oct 04	M	Unpaid Domestic Duties
This record is officially closed.						
This record is officially closed.						
This record is officially closed.						
	3	Steele Derek R	M	27 Mar 52	S	Butler

1939 Census for Worth Matravers showing the Banks family living at Church Cottages

Excerpts from *Thoughts on Village Life*

“The village was like a family, we all knew each other well and we were all equal” said Mrs. Olive Miller, born and brought up in Worth. Perhaps because most villagers owned their cottages, this feeling of equality and independence has been very strong in Worth. The village was part of the Rempstone Estate until July 1919, when Captain Marsden sold it to Brights of Bournemouth, who, in September the same year, held an auction to sell off the village lots. Many bought their own cottages”.

Leslie Banks and his family stayed regularly in Worth before living at Church Cottage and buying Lobster Cottage in 1937. Everyday life was primitive.

“Leslie Banks, the actor, had an Elsan at the top of his garden, and it is reputed that in order to avoid having to close the door, he would hoist a red flag on the apple tree just in front to let the family know it was occupied!”

“Leslie Banks, the actor, had bought both Lobster and Church Cottage in 1937, and he and Mrs Banks had their bedrooms in Lobster, whilst the children (Evangeline, Daphne, and Virginia) slept at Church Cottage across the yard. Evangeline Banks, now Mrs Tenniel Evans, knows that a ghost lives in Church Cottage, ‘I remember, she said, ‘the

absolute terror I felt in bed one night, when I sensed a presence of something in the darkness, and something landed on the bed, just like a large cat. I felt it was evil and meant harm. This happened more than once. I think it came down the old stairs from the attic'. I am glad to say that this ghost has not been seen for many a long year!

Mrs Corben, who looked after the cottage when the Banks family were away, and who had lived there herself, told me a tall lady haunted the place, 'but was quite pleasant and did no harm. I got used to her'.

The gardens of Church and Lobster Cottages run along the churchyard, and before main drainage came, one had to go up the garden to the Elsan at the top. It was certainly spooky at night, 'We children always went up to the privy together at night'. Evangeline recalled, 'We were much too frightened to go alone with all those shadows and noises!'.



The Square and Compass Inn, Worth Matravers



The present Charlie Newman



Charlie Newman



Self portrait of Augustus John



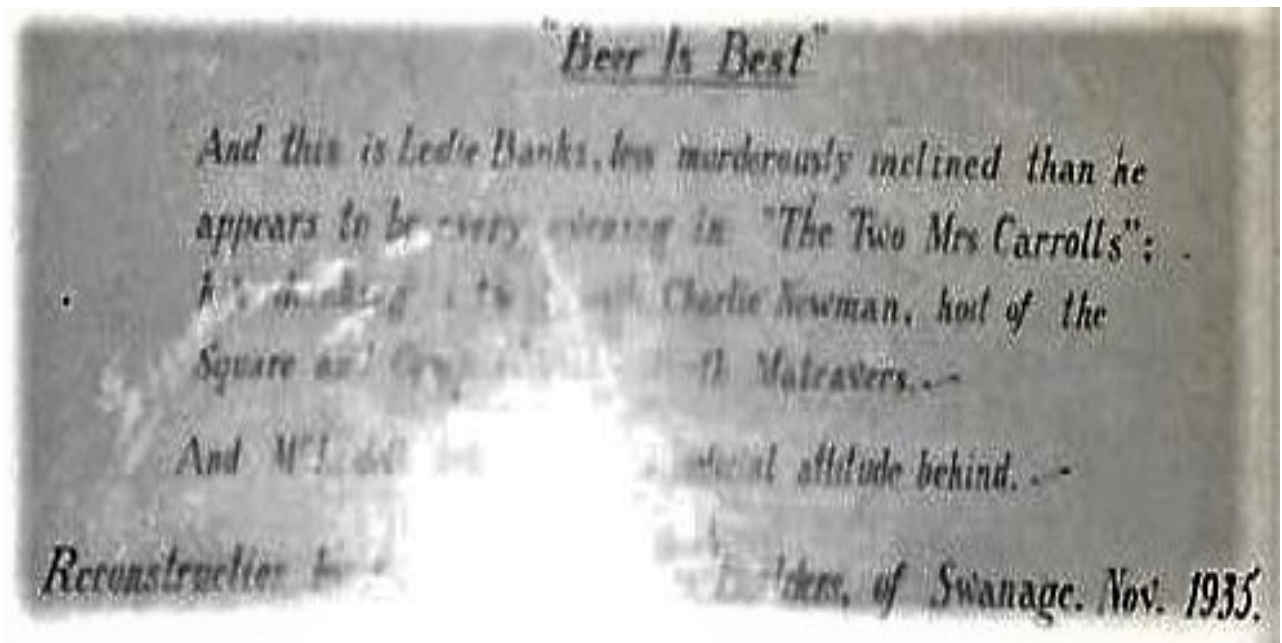
Leslie Banks & Charlie Newman



Leslie Banks & Charlie Newman enjoying a pint outside the "Square and Compass" in 1935



Leslie Banks and Lilian Harvey in *I Am Suzanne!* (1933)



If this still exists ... we'll find a better copy!

Many years later the annual Purbeck Film Festival commenced, showing films at various venues, and the present Charlie Newman showed interest in the venture. It has a regular feature to include “Charlie Newman’s favourites at the Square and Compass” and in 2006 the film chosen was..

‘WENT THE DAY WELL’ starring LESLIE BANKS, made in 1942

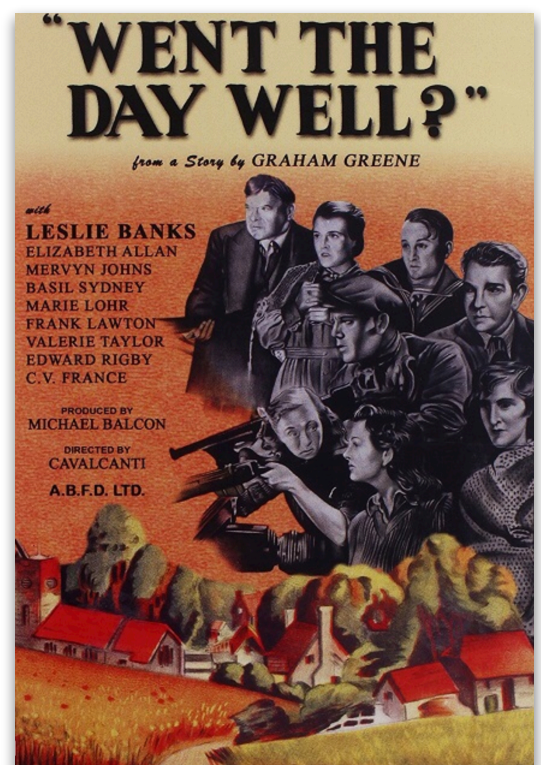


7.30pm - The Square and Compass, Worth Matravers - £4.00

WENT THE DAY WELL (Charlie Newman’s Desert Island Flick)

This frankly propagandist film made during WW II at Ealing Studios is a story of a small scale Nazi invasion in a quiet English village with a number of genuine shock moments. Presented in flash back it was Alberto Cavalcanti’s first feature length film. The gossipy female characters give a blackly comic edge. The star, Leslie Banks, was a family friend of the Newmans and a regular visitor to the Square and Compass. **For tickets visit the Square and Compass or call 01929 439220.** (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1942, 92mins)

2006





It was a memorable evening with those attending suitably dressed with a typical 1942 menu served..





**Leslie Banks in
The Most Dangerous Game**



**As 'Chorus' in Henry V
directed by Laurence Olivier
with Music by William Walton**



Leslie Banks died on the 21st April 1952 aged 61 years at his London home, 27 South Terrace, South Kensington, after suffering a stroke whilst out walking.

LESLIE BANKS WAS POPULAR IN PURBECKS

*Mine host 'act' at
Square and Compass*

ANNOUNCEMENT of the death of stage and screen actor Leslie Banks came as a great shock to the Purbeck village of Worth Matravers with which he had been associated for over 30 years.

Mr. Banks first came to Worth in 1920 when he rented a cottage there belonging to a well-known fishing family. Later he bought the property, and in recent years his home in the village was made up of two cottages, Thatched Cottage and Church Cottage.

For long periods every year he and his family stayed at Worth. His three daughters practically grew up in the village.

Mr. Banks frequently visited Charlie Newman's well-known inn, the Square and Compass, and during holiday season pressure he rolled-up his sleeves and acted as a second Mine Host.

He was extremely fond of the village, and he often recalled that when he first lived there he had to make the journey from Corfe Castle station by pony and trap.

PRIZED PICTURE

He entered wholeheartedly into the life of the village. Place of honour at the Square and Compass is given to a photograph of Mr. Banks seated outside the inn.

Mr. J. C. Pushman spoke for the villagers when he said: "We have sustained a very deep loss. There is no one who will ever take his place in Worth Matravers, for while he was a personality in himself he was one with all of us here."

Mr. Banks last appeared in Bournemouth in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, at the Pavilion in 1950. While he was here with *Life With Father*, in 1948, he presented the prizes for the Bournemouth Regatta pier-to-pier race.



27 South Terrace, Kensington South

The informant on the death certificate was Andrew Howell Wright who married Leslie's daughter, Virginia, in 1952.

The Bournemouth Daily Echo paid tribute to his local connection to the area and in particular to his long and close association to the village of Worth Matravers..



Leslie Banks 9 June 1890 - 21 April 1952