

KYRLE PROBUS CLUB 7 JULY 2016

Visiting entertainer Matthew Sproston presented a sparkling musical review of the 'Life and Songs of George Formby' at a meeting of Kyrle Probus Club on Thursday 7 July.



Members heard that Formby, who recorded over 230 songs with his ukulele, and starred in 21 hit films, was Great Britain's top film star during the 1939-45 Second World War.

He entertained an estimated three million troops overseas.

Although the BBC considered some of his songs a little too risqué for the airwaves, he was awarded an OBE in 1946 for his work in the war zones, which provided a great tonic for Britain's forces overseas.

Matthew, who performed a range of Formby songs on his own ukulele at the meeting, said Formby, the eldest of seven children, was blind at birth. But he miraculously recovered his sight when his mother took him on a trip to New Brighton.

His early attempts at a show business career were a 'disaster' Matthew said. His fortunes changed for the better, however, after he met and married his first wife Beryl, a shrewd woman who became Formby's manager and guided him carefully to success.

Formby never had a ukulele lesson, but his early black and white films were an astronomical triumph. His first hit, 'Chinese Laundry Blues' in 1932, was followed by a string of popular songs including 'When I'm cleaning windows', a favourite of the Royal family, and the Golden Oldie 'Leaning on a Lamppost.'

After Beryl's death in 1960 Formby became engaged to 36-year-old Pat, but suffered a fatal heart attack on 6 March 1961 at the age of just 56, before they married.

Some one hundred thousand mourners lined the funeral cortège route and statues have been erected in his memory in Wigan, where he was born, and in Douglas, Isle of Man, one of his film locations.