



Why Dame Vera is still top of the pops in Nantwich

Thanks for the Memory 24th March 2014 | Pauline Rawsterne

Forces' sweetheart Dame Vera Lynn is the all-time favourite music star amongst people with dementia in Nantwich, according to the local museum staff.

The White Cliffs of Dover – which was recorded in 1942 a year after the Battle of Britain – and other songs by Dame Vera are the biggest hits with members of the Nantwich Museum's Dementia Friendship Group.



“Everyone in the group has different tastes in music, from opera and classical to more modern beats, but Dame Vera has proved the most popular,” says museum manager Kate Dobson. “Perhaps it's because the songs are so evocative.”

Kate and her group of volunteers host monthly tea parties which allow people with memory loss to journey back into the past – while making friends and having fun along the way. While many museums run reminiscence sessions, most are aimed at the elderly. Nantwich is unusual in running a group specifically for people with dementia, says Kate.



The group started six months ago. “It's a completely new way of working for us and we are not experts by any means, but we have had training from the Alzheimer's Society,” she adds. “We were nervous at first we'd say or do the wrong thing but we needn't have worried, it's a very relaxed atmosphere.”

Each session has a different theme each time but music has proved particularly popular and has the added benefit of encouraging participation by people with limited speech. Other activities have included biscuit decorating and crafts.

However things don't always turn out as expected. “We did holidays one month and thought everyone would talk about the seaside when in fact their memories were of more far-flung and glamorous locations like America and Australia. It turned out the group were very well travelled and one member was a former professional ice hockey player who had toured the world.”

The museum's permanent exhibitions also attract some interest, in particular the collection of Victorian boots and shoes as some members can recall their parents wearing similar footwear. Amongst the temporary exhibitions, photography has proved a talking point, particularly a display by the local camera club. The museum has also commissioned a unique 'object dialogue box' from artist Karl Foster which will be revealed soon, and which contains objects linked to the items in its collection.

Not all reflections are happy though. "One time we had an exhibition of children's drawings which included a picture of the outside of a house," adds Kate. "One man pointed to the closed doors and told us, 'That's how dementia feels'.

"People do get emotional and can go from happy to sad within the space of a couple of hours. The good thing is that everyone wants to come back."

Our Dementia Friendship group provides support to many people locally. The 'Thanks for the Memory Big Band Concert' on May 11th is raising funds to assist us and the Alzheimer's Society. Your support is really appreciated.

Kate Dobson - Museum Manager

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