

All things



and



Once again, our committee, and especially Jean Elmer, came up with just the thing to lighten our mood in these days of gloom and doom. Our January talk, by Christine and Peter Padwick, was, as Jean put it, more of a performance than a talk, and what a lovely and talented couple they are. And they use their talents to raise money for charities; Cancer Research in this case.

Most of us are old enough to remember the olden days when swear words were, like a “glimpse of stocking” “looked on as something shocking”. It’s hard to believe now that George Bernard Shaw caused outrage by having Eliza Doolittle say “not bloody likely” in Pygmalion. And as Philip Larkin tells us, “sexual intercourse began in 1963 ... between the end of the “Chatterley” ban and the Beatles first LP”. I was a young library assistant when “Lady Chatterley’s lover” was freed from ban, in 1960, and we were solemnly warned that the public would be asking us for copies for loan, and not to be shocked or judgmental. Romantic encounters in films in earlier days were chaste kisses, with at least one of the actors’ legs firmly on the floor in bedroom scenes, and it was 1968 before theatre censorship was abolished and we were queuing up to see productions such as “Hair” and “Oh! Calcutta” and a naked Diana Rigg in “Heloise and Abelard”. Come on! Not just me.

My parents had an LP of Max Miller, and I remember them and their friends falling about with laughter at his double-entendres, rather like those of Marie Lloyd in earlier music hall days. How innocent they seem now. If anything, we would frown at some of their sexist and racist attitudes, rather than the innuendos.

My scribbled notes do not begin to cover even a small part of Christine and Peter’s entertaining talk, from the first film of a belly dancer in 1897, what-the-butler-saw slot machines, through the BBC censorship under John Reith, the film classifications of John Trevelyan, dear old Mary Whitehouse, and taking in such unlikely bed-fellows as Workers’ Play-time, Round the Horne, George Formby, Eartha Kitt, the Beatles and Cliff Richard. Even Very Lynn got a mention, as Winston Churchill thought she was “too slushy”.

After the talk I found myself reflecting on past attitudes and comparing them with today’s, particularly when I watched a television drama a couple of days later which had F and C words in almost every sentence, to say nothing of explicit sex scenes. Shocking? Rather boring, I thought. Have we changed for the better? I wonder.

Jean Austin

Jan 2021