



### 'Seen and Heard: Victorian Children in the Frame'

This exhibition at London's Guildhall Art Gallery which runs until 28 April, tells the story of a period where social revolution saw history's forgotten children perceived and individualised for the first time.

It features the 'rags to riches' story of Connie Gilchrist, pushed into Victorian child stardom by her ambitious mother. Connie later became the Countess of Orkney and lived in Stewkley at Tythe House for 53 years until her death in 1946.

Born in 1865 in the slums of Agar Town behind King's Cross Station in London, Connie Gilchrist became a child artist's model, actress, singer and dancer. At a very young age, she attracted the attention of Victorian painters, Lord Frederic Leighton and James McNeill Whistler, the writer Lewis Carroll, and aristocrats, Lord Lonsdale and the Duke of Beaufort.

In the 1880s, Gilchrist appeared on stage performing vaudeville and Victorian burlesque at Drury Lane; at London's Gaiety Theatre, where she became known as the 'original Gaiety Girl', and toured America.

Connie Gilchrist was the mistress of two British aristocrats. The 4th Earl of Lonsdale bequeathed her a London house and sizeable legacy amid some scandal. Her second benefactor, the 8th Duke of Beaufort, became her adoptive father. In July 1892, he is said to have stood in for her father, when Gilchrist, aged 27, married Edmond FitzMaurice, 7th Earl of Orkney, at All Souls Church, Langham Place.

Though a Scottish peer, Orkney owned no property or other title there, but had inherited revenue-earning land in Ireland and an estate in Buckinghamshire. After their marriage, being excluded from British upper class society at the time, the couple quietly retired to Tythe House. This never seemed to bother Connie who, as the Countess of Orkney, settled into country life and threw herself into generous work for local charities. The Orkneys became friends of Baron Rothschild's family, and established a hunting lodge in the grounds of Tythe House, employing local young lads, some of whom were to accompany Lieutenant-Colonel Lord Orkney to war in 1914. The Orkneys became distinguished village figures after the Great War. He was Parish Council Chair and the driving force behind the Village War Memorial project in 1921.

Gilchrist died at Tythe House in May 1946 after 53 years of marriage to Lord Orkney who survived her until 1951. Their only child, Lady



Connie Gilchrist posed as the young child for Leighton's 'The Music Lesson', 1877



Connie Gilchrist, Countess of Orkney

Mary, predeceased her father by 10 months. They are all interred in the family grave in the south-east corner of St Michael's churchyard.

### A Welcome Country Craft

The ancient country craft of hedge-laying was welcomed back to the centre of the village just before Christmas when John and Phyllis Height of Ivy Lane employed local craftsman, Andy Malleson, to lay their hedge in the traditional country style.

The Hawthorn hedge, which forms their boundary with Ivy Lane, had become unwieldy and difficult to maintain. The Heights told the Grapevine that they believed the hedge had last been laid in the early 1970s when retired local farmers, Mr and Mrs Charlie Faulkner lived there. They are delighted with Andy's craftsmanship and pleased to sustain their green and natural boundary. Andy is no stranger to Stewkley, being the son-in-law of local artist, the late, much-loved Barbara Ginn.

Bordered by Ivy Lane or 'Back Way', the hedge goes back beyond living memory. It originally formed the south-east boundary of the long garden which belonged to the thatched cottages of No. 1 and No. 3, Ivy Lane.

A 1924 Ordnance Survey Map shows the two parallel gardens of 1 to 3, Ivy Lane and 24, High Street North, running down to the end of Ivy Lane. They were sold in the early 1960s to provide the land on which to build a retirement bungalow for the Faulkners, home to John and Phyllis since 1994.



### FROM THE GRAPEVINE 10 YEARS AGO...

From February 2009, the village mourned the deaths of 'Stewkley Man' Frank Keen, and of coach business brothers Barry and Brian Robinson...Nature Notebook reported a scene in Ivy Lane reminiscent of Hitchcock's 'The Birds' as the icy Winter saw flocks of blackbirds clearing cotoneaster berries and windfall apples; and a Great-Crested Grebe false landing on the High Street...John Flewin looked back on the 40th Anniversary of the Third London Airport Campaign in 1969...the Parish Council raised concerns with AVDC about a proposed Rock and Roll Concert on Littlecote farmland in June...Stewkley singer-songwriter Chrystina Tomlin and her band topped the bill at a Saturday Night Gig in the Village Hall which raised £420 for Hall funds...and football matches throughout December were cancelled due to wintry weather.

### FROM THE GRAPEVINE 20 YEARS AGO...

From February 1999, retired local builder Gerald Smith, with his team of John Kemp and Joe Whitehead-Nudd had won first prize for the restoration of the cottage at 22, High Street North in the Restoration section of AVDC Design Awards...young Martin Scrivener scored a hat-trick as Stewkley FC beat Silverstone 4-1...Stewkley Rights-of-Way Association met to show concern about the proposed Countryside Bill...the Short-Mat Bowls team were top of the Vale League...the Parish Council was fiercely opposing any threat to the continued existence of Stewkley Library...the Scottish Country Dancing Club was about to resume in the Methodist Church Hall...and the 1st prize won in the Recreation Ground Xmas Draw was a 14" portable colour TV!