

## Swansea Sound

By Geoffrey Clarke

This novel is a work of 'faction', that means it is a combination of fact and fiction. Any similarity to incidents, events, famous personalities, or places in this book is either intentional, or otherwise haphazardly the product of the author's imagination, so to speak. Resemblances to actual persons either dead or alive are purely intentional, but the protagonist Watkin Davies, Mervyn Jenkins, Watkin's wife Diane, Cliff and others are imaginary, but probably induced autobiographically in the author's mind by a process of the assimilation of ideas.

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The writer asserts his right as the author of this work.

The author recognises his sources as Ryan Davies and Ronnie Williams, Max Boyce, Frankie Howard, Tony Hancock, Syd James, Spike Milligan, Eric Sykes and Hattie Jacques, Harry Secombe, TT (Terry) Thomas, Jimmy Edwards, Tommy Cooper, the fastest milkman in the West, Benny Hill, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett, and that inimitable joke collector of all time – Bob Monkhouse. Although too risqué for the period, I have included some material from Les Dawson, particularly about Watkin Davies's mother in law. Quite out of time, I have been influenced, too, by Rhod Gilbert, the contemporary Welsh comedian and broadcaster.

Congratulations are due to Sir Tom Jones, Dame Shirley Bassey and now to Sir Gareth Edwards on his knighthood, June 2015.

## Chapter 1.

Mervyn Jenkins from Dunvant, near Swansea, was a big, barrel-chested Welshman with a round face, grey hair and a goatee beard that needed trimming. He was corpulent, but not unfit. Married, with two boys, Ralph 15 and Chris 13, he had been in the business of sound systems for a long time. Business had been good for a while with installations of stands, stadium seating and sound equipment, and he had been busy all week erecting a stand at a local football club. By Saturday of that week, he needed to get the sound system working properly at the Swans ground in time for the key match with Reading.

‘There ew are, Watkin’, he said. ‘Go down the Vetch Field and see to the sound system at the Swans stadium’.

‘But I’m not on shift today, Merv’ he replied.

'Never mind, I'll pay you extra, you jus go down the Vetch and work on them loudspeakers.'

Watkin Davies goes down to the stadium and spends the morning fiddling with the loudspeakers on makeshift scaffolding put up the night before.

'Don't get shaky on them planks, Watkin', the foreman cries out.

And Watkin carries on with the job regardless of the weak walkways and the dodgy, thrown up scaffolding, the usual cigarette in his mouth.

Arthur Birtwhistle, a round faced jovial man, has the tea café in a caravan trailer parked at the back of the stands. He's hoping to make a big hit from today's match.

'Get that urn ready by half-time, Edna.'

'O K, Arthur', she replies.

At the 45 minute whistle, hundreds of plastic cups of tea are ready from the massive boiler and the huge, brown teapots. Pies, pasties, chips, pizza are all sold in huge quantities to the pressing crowd of spectators.

At the end of the match, Arthur counts the takings. He has made a fortune from selling tea, milk, sugar and boiling water in their thousands. He plans to buy a hotel in Mumbles with the proceeds. He's soon into

the multimillionaire property business in hotels and catering. He takes over the Langland Court hotel in Mumbles at a knock down price.

The next job for Watkin the following Saturday is the stadium seating at Maerdy rugby ground.

Mervyn gets a call from the Health and Safety inspector asking about the safety of the stadium terracing that they've put up and 'when you finish putting them up we'd like to inspect them,' he says. It's just wooden boards from plywood and not nearly strong enough to pass the inspection.

So Mervyn tells Watkin:

'Go down to the Maerdy stadium and dismantle the stand at the field and take all the plyboards over to Maesteg and put them up there'.

Watkin does as he is told and goes over to Maesteg in the spare Swansea Sound van and puts them up over there.

The inspector, a thin, wiry individual with large, prominent glasses, is bemused to find there is no stand seating at Maerdy rugby stadium as planned, but does not pursue the matter any further. 'I didn't find any structures you'd put up at the Maerdy ground, but I suppose you'll get round to it, Mr Jenkins,' he says over the phone. Merv is once again one

step ahead of the game, and can carry on in the business of stadium seating and sound systems.

That night, the scaffolding boys and Watkin go out on a pub crawl for a few pints of local bitter. They call at 'The Mermaid', 'The George', 'The Rock and Fountain', 'The Beaufort Arms' and the 'Swansea Jack'. Watkin ends up pretty squishy at home with his family, after collecting a number of souvenirs from outside the 'Swansea Jack'. He has a pub sign of the Swansea Jack, a red traffic bollard, an old dog's blanket and a gate latch in the back of his dad's Morris Minor 1000 with wooden side panels.

His Dad says angrily:

'What are these for Watkin? You were drunk, again, last night. What's going on?'

'Oh, they're only a few leftovers from the Maerdy rugby ground. I'll take them back tomorrow.'

'And on your twenty-first you were drunk. Ron Runcible and Nelly Nelson trashed your bedroom and Ron smashed the chandelier at the Langland Court Hotel do, didn't he? Nelly and that Gibson fellow were drunk and running round with an inflated condom tied to the aerial on their car. We gave you the scope by going out for the evening, and when we came back my Morris 1000 had been taken, our bedroom furniture piled up in the passage and our dining room walls covered with trifle.'

You were chucked out of a dance at the University that you'd gate crashed and one of the new members of your gang passed out, so you put him to bed in Brynmill. I heard that you saw a van rocking a bit so you went and rocked it a bit more, then you beat it back to your cars. Then you were off to Colin's place for a game of football in the Tudor Hall.'

'I know, Dad, but you're only young once. I bet you would've done it when you were young.'

And he gets away with it, once again.

The following morning Watkin shakes out of it and goes to a job for Mervyn on a sound system at the St Helen's Road stadium. Over a quiet pint in the 'Cricketer's' at lunch time Watkin recalls the memories he had at the St Helen's ground.

'Do you remember the time Garfield Sobers hit six sixes for Nottinghamshire against Glamorgan?' he asks his pals.

'It was at the end of the season in the game against Glamorgan that the Nottingham skipper, Sobers got into exciting, rumbustious form. Notts are 308 for 5 in their first innings, when Sobers decided it was time to get some quick runs before declaring the innings and give his bowlers an opportunity to win the match,' Watkin recalls.

‘Malcolm Nash was the outmatched, county level player whose round the arm, left handed bowling didn’t even trouble the left-hander Garfield. He hit the first few for sixes, with the third landing in a garden behind the pavilion. The fourth is another big six. And then it looked as if he could go for the record of 36 runs in an over. On the fifth ball he makes a terrific hit and is caught but dropped over the boundary by Roger Davies for another six.’

Watkin is one of the many spectators calling out for a six, because it lands behind the boundary rope laid at the edge of the field just in front of him. The last ball results in a final six and Watkin is jumping up with his hands in the air to celebrate the historic record breaking achievement of *Sir* Garfield Sobers, as he is later knighted by the Queen. His score of 36 runs in an over broke a 57-year-old record of 34 runs, held by Ted Alleston.

‘And Clive Lloyd scored the fastest double-century on record when batting for the West Indians against Glamorgan in 76’, Watkin recalls.

‘It was at the St. Helen’s ground that a ball travelled the furthest in history – eighty miles’, Watkin recounts, finishing his jar.

‘A player had hit a ball beyond the stadium at the Mumbles Road end and it landed’, says Watkin, ‘in a goods wagon travelling on the LNWR railway line alongside the Mumbles Road.’

‘The Llanelly Railway, supported by the LNWR, opened a single line from Pontarddulais to Swansea in 1866,’ Watkin explained.

‘Leaving the terminus at Swansea Victoria, the lines from the South Dock came in from the left. with the Swansea and Mumbles Railway parallel to it, but approaching Blackpill it crossed over the tramway on a stone bridge and turned North’, Watkin recounted.

‘It carried on to the Clyne river, with views of the Clyne Lake, Killay, under the arches to Dunvant, passing alongside the Dunvant Arms pub’ he said. ‘Departing Gowerton, it bridged the GWR main line and the Afon line, now all abandoned or turned into cycle lanes’, regretted Watkin with a sigh.

Watkin was like a guidebook when it came to details of the sporting events he’d seen with Swansea Sound Systems. Watkin told the group at the ‘Cricketer’s’ that on 10 April 1954, the St. Helen's field held its last international against New Zealand. The burly, huge farmers from the North Island brushed aside the short, wiry Welshmen and scored a massive victory. Watkin had been at the match as a schoolboy in a midweek game bunking off from school, and had been amazed at the speed and power of the All Blacks quarter backs and wings.

‘Their forwards were like Amazons and could ruck the Welsh boys out of the way with ease,’ he said.

It'd been a reminder to Watkin to develop himself physically as a player. 'I must work on my abs, my thighs, my biceps and my five-pack,' Watkin says. 'To never again experience such an humiliation from New Zealand,' Watkin explains.

They had wanted to keep Welsh international rugby at the St. Helen's ground and Mervyn Jenkins erected four floodlight pylons at the ground to try to influence the Welsh RFU to keep playing internationals there. 'The last international game was in that year, 1954', Watkin regretted.

There were even tennis matches on rare sunny days at the pavilion end of the ground on the grass court prepared specially on the cricket pitch area in front of the 70-odd steps leading to the clubhouse. Fifteen love, thirty love, forty love, Deuce, Vantage, Game etc were the terms that Watkin learnt as a youngster who with his Mum, Dot, a former nurse who was a great tennis fan, followed the matches played out there on the sandy grass.

'Swan Swan Swan sea sea sea All All All Whi Whi Whi ites ites ites again again against st st st Nea Nea Nea...'

Watkin is in the commentary box of the Neath rugby ground at the Gnoll trying to fix the sound system that's in a cabin at the top of the stadium, right at the back of the cloisters. The microphone is on and Watkin, and

his mate Cliff, are adjusting the sound level to bring it down to normal. He carries on not realizing that the mic is still on.

'Merv is a twat twat twat' 'He's not payin payin payin us enough'. He needs to get his act to to to gether gether gether', stutters Watkin.

'Cliff. D'you know my favorite place of all' he asks. (All on the open mic.)

'No. What's that, Watkin?'

Watkin, a strong Neath supporter, replies.

'Well, it's Fforestfach. 'Cos there's a sign there that says:

'Llanelli 9. Neath 12'

'Have you heard this one?'

'A ref comes on to the field and immediately sends a player off for deliberate handball', Watkin continues.

'Ref. You dunno what you're bloody doin', the player shouts.

'They all say that', the ref replies. 'OK boys; scrum down', he says.'

'Ryan Davies makes an appearance at the Top Rank in Swansea with his oppo, Ronnie Williams. The doorman stops him and asks him for his ticket.'

'My face is my ticket', Ryan says.

'What happened next?' Ronnie Williams said.

He punched it.'

By now the rugby crowd are falling about laughing, and Watkin has made himself into a standup comedian in front of the home side against the All Whites.

'Later this evening we're goin' to the Neath Fair' continues Watkin on mic.

'I'm goin' to fix up the sound for the boxing booth. I'm gonna see the bearded lady and the bare knuckle fightin'. I want to 'ave a go on the dodgems and try my luck on the 'oopla stall. We might end up with a few jars at the Castle Hotel, and I might even get lucky.'

'Watkin. The sound's still on, Mun.'

'Oh God', panics Watkin and hastily switches off the mic.

'The Neath Fair is an event which usually starts in the town centre on the second Wednesday of September every year, but in those days it was held on the recreation grounds on the Gnoll Park Road,' Watkin explains to Cliff. 'Before becoming the Victoria Gardens, the land on which it now stands went through many functions. It was owned by Henry John

Grant, the occupier of Gnoll House, a ruined former aristocratic home in the Gnoll Woods above the town', he informs him.

'The Fair lasted four days and covered the whole of the Rec' with attractions like the lions, the merry-go-round, sideshows and booths for various shows such as the two headed sheep and the genuine African Zulu.'

'Roll up Roll up!' announces the M. C. that evening over the loudspeakers hastily erected by the boys from Swansea Sound at the boxing booth.

'Who'll take on Jim Davies in a three round match, no holds barred and bare knuckles?'

Cliff steps up to the ring. They spar around for a bit and then Cliff throws a punch. Davies parries with his forearm and counterpunches Cliff on the chin in two quick jabs. After another wild lunge at the champ, Cliff is cut under the eye. There's red blood everywhere on his face. Swooning and swaying under a barrage of knuckle punches Cliff is knocked out by Davies in the first sixty seconds of the bout.

'Next. Next!' Calls Watkin.

And another hearty from the crowd steps up, only to be defeated in the first round by a barrage of expertly aimed punches to the chest and head that cause the champ no apparent effort.

The boys limp home after one or two at the Castle Hotel and then a final nightcap in the large, smoke filled, front lounge at the Mackworth back at Swansea High Street.

At the Swansea Uplands rugby field in Killay on the way to Fairwood Common, with one shaky trumpet-shaped speaker hanging from a telephone pole, Watkin goes over to see to the tannoy.

Merv says: 'Get that tannoy system fixed by one o'clock.'

But Watkin can only think about Diane who he has met the night before at the dodgems. She is a twenty one year old blonde with pretty eyes and shiny, waved hair, tied up by an elastic band in a pony-tail. She was wearing a pair of blue jeans and a tight top that emphasised her figure. Watkin thinks he's in love and spends the morning dreaming about her and wondering how he can arrange to meet her again.

Merv gets Watkin on the phone at the club and warns him that he wants the loudspeaker fixed ASAP, but there is a small bar at the club and

Watkin has ensconced himself on a bar stool with a pint glass of Felinfoel best bitter.

'Have you heard the one about the famous lecturer?' he asks the barman.

'He gave a lecture on sex' explains Watkin taking a pull of his pint.

'My idea is', intones the professor 'that the more often you have sex, the happier you are. Now to test out my theory I'm going to ask members of the audience how often they have sex.'

'Can those who have sex every night put up their hands.'

A large crowd of happy, smiling, jovial people put up their hands.

'OK. That seems to prove my point, but to test it out; can I ask how many people have sex twice a week?'

'A good number, but smaller amount of people put up their hands. They were not quite so smiley and happy.'

'So just to make sure; how many have it once a month?' And a smaller group of less cheerful and even dowdy persons indicated in the positive.

'Right. This seems to support my argument, but to be absolutely sure, let me ask how many people have sex once a year?'

And this badly dressed, unshaven man in a mackintosh at the back starts laughing and jumping up and down and gesticulating and shouting with his hands up in the air.

'What's this?' asks the professor.

'Tonight! 'Tonight!' the man screams.'

The barman finds it very funny and congratulates Watkin on his splendid joke.

The following week Watkin meets Diane at the Albert Hall cinema in Craddock Street. She's late for a seven o'clock date, but Watkin doesn't mind, because he's really keen on her. She turns up in a light grey coat in nylons and high heels wearing a knitted red dress that emphasized her figure, her blond hair worn down. 'You look smashing', Watkin says.

They manage to find a couple of seats in the back row of the stalls where Watkin soon puts his arm around his new girlfriend and gets up nice and close.

'Stop it, Watkin', she protests rather feebly.

And Watkin goes on trying to get the kisses that he's been yearning for since he met her in the dodgems where she was taking the money. She looked completely different from that day when dodging the dodgem cars in a pair of blue jeans, flashy red gym shoes and a skimpy top she

had just seemed sassy and energetic but a bit loud, as she called out to the drivers to pay their fare for the dodgems.

She feinted a defensive blow to Watkin, but he responded quickly with another hug. It ended up with Diane's makeup on his shirt and collar and a trace of her crimson lipstick on his cheek.

'See you next week at the Mumbles Pier ballroom for the dancing, eight o'clock on Saturday night.'

'Alright,' Diane agrees warmly and Watkin strolls back home in a form of junior ecstasy, the words of 'Summertime,' ringing in his ears.



In the summertime when the weather is high  
You can stretch right up and touch the sky  
When the weather's fine  
You got women, you got women on your mind  
Have a drink, have a drive  
Go out and see what you can find

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