

# Bob Hope Visit to the Theatre in Eltham following his Benefit Performance at The London Palladium - August 1991



**SPEECHLESS:** The veteran comedian was visibly moved to receive gifts from teenagers Olivia Clackett and Karl Sawyer. Also pictured are Bob's grandson, Zachary (right), and theatre chairman Nick Bartlett. DB4651/7

## OVER 'ERE

### BOB

COMIC legend Bob Hope said *Thanks For The Memory* when a pensioner he visited on his last trip to Eltham shouted: "Over 'ere Bob!"

The town's most famous son, who was visiting the Bob Hope Theatre, which he rescued from closure nine years ago, walked straight over to Florence Ching and said: "It's you. How are you?"

Mrs Ching lives in the house where Bob, 88, was born. When he last came home in 1982, he spent 90 minutes with Mrs Ching, borrowing the deeds to her house, which has his father's name inscribed on them.

Mrs Ching was waiting for her idol's return at the theatre in Wythfield Road, Eltham, on Tuesday night and said: "He came straight over and seemed pleased to see me."

Story by  
ADAM  
GILLHAM



**WHO'S THAT:** Bob Hope, alongside the theatre's Nick Bartlett, responds to calls from his Eltham audience. DB4651/6

### Flo joy as comedian renews friendship

wife Dolores and grandson Zachary, 21, caused a few laughs after seeing a bronze bust of him which has been with the theatre since 1982 and has pride of place in the bar.

He joked: "I just wish they would fix this bust. It's a horrible looking thing. I would love to take a chisel to it."

Bob saved the theatre from closure by buying the freehold after hearing it could close. Management were so grateful they named it after him.

Since then he has donated more than £100,000 for improvements and renovation work.

Last Sunday's gala performance at the London Palladium, which he staged to raise cash for the theatre, will safeguard it for years and go towards making it one of the best little theatres in London.

"I am going to do my best to keep this place going, believe me. Thank you for all the hard work you have done over the years here."

The stage and screen legend was left speechless when he was presented with a picture of the theatre and a golf putter by 16-year-old Karl Sawyer, of Katherine Gardens, Eltham, and Olivia Clackett, of Westwood Side, Bexley.

He then unveiled a plaque officially opening the new extension, which will house a new bar and other facilities.

Bob told the *Times* after the show: "I hope the people of Eltham will enjoy this theatre. They have done a good job here and things can only get better."

**Enjoyment**

"I hope it will bring a lot of enjoyment to a lot of people."

But the comic, accompanied by

## Favourite son says nose needs chisel

A standing ovation greeted Eltham's favourite son Bob Hope in the auditorium of the theatre named in his honour.

The 88 year old star was cheered and applauded in an atmosphere akin to a royal visit.

And he declared: "I have got to come back here and do a show, don't I? I will be back. You can bet on that."

Arriving with his wife Dolores and grandson Zachary, he greeted a 100-strong crowd in Wythfield Road last Tuesday night.

Shown on to the stage by theatre chairman Nick Bartlett, he was presented with a framed picture of the building by New Stagers Olivia Clackett

and Karl Sawyer. He said: "It is wonderful to be here. The theatre looks so good."

"I want to thank Nick for all the work he has done over the years here. We will

try to keep this place going, believe me."

But Hope didn't think much of his bustling standing in a place of honour in the theatre bar.

"It makes me look

drunk. I would like to come back and re-chisel that nose."

Hope said he had been made a "baby rat" by the order of water rats, a British show business charity.

"I have been called a rat by a lot of people in my life, but this time it's official."

Congratulated on being married for 57 years, he replied: "I was born married!"



A plaque to mark the opening of the theatre extension is unveiled by the famous comedian.



Bob Hope is greeted by well-wishers yesterday outside the tiny theatre named after him in his birthplace, Eltham, in south-east London

THE residents of Eltham, south-east London, turned out in scores yesterday to see Bob Hope, the veteran comedian, visit the theatre a few hundred yards from the terraced house where he was born, that he helped to save.

Mr Hope, 88, gave nearly £60,000 towards the renovation of the Eltham Little Theatre which faced closure in 1978.

Since then the theatre, now renamed the Bob Hope Theatre, has staged amateur productions of everything from musicals to Shakespeare.

## Bob brings cash hope

Proceeds from a London Palladium gala by Mr Hope on Sunday will also go to the 200-seat theatre.

The amount raised on Sunday has not yet been worked out, but Hope told the people of Eltham: "We made a lot of money and that's going to keep this place going for quite a while."

A crowd gathered to greet the star, his wife Dolores and grandson Zachary. He told the delighted people of

the area he left when he was four: "I have got to come back here and do a show, don't I?"

The theatre's chairman, Mr Nick Bartlett said: "We are enormously grateful to him. How can you thank someone adequately for the incredible generosity he has given us?"

The theatre presented golf fanatic Bob with a putter and a framed picture of the building that bears his

name. Outside the theatre, Bob had a special word for Mrs Florence Ching, who since 1942 has lived in the house where he was born.

The comic went to the house and met Mrs Ching and her husband Jack in 1980.

The actor, who earlier in the day had been initiated into the Grand Order of Water Rats, the show-business charity, showed that the years had not dulled his mastery of the comic one-liner when he added: "I have been called a rat by a lot of people, but they made it official."