

*Tony Hancock*

# Archives Magazine

ISSUE 3  
Oct 2010

## 'PLAYBACK' Spring 1967

edited transcript from  
the David Frost  
Interviews -  
Tony Hancock

**HANCOCK PLAYED  
HERE**

*A feature article with sound bites  
from a newly discovered interview  
with Tony Hancock*

The Online Magazine of the Tony Hancock Archives

### Introduction

Of the interviews he gave, Tony Hancock is perhaps best remembered for his appearance on John Freeman's 'Face to Face' series in 1960. Although fairly mild by today's standards, the grilling he received from John Freeman, and the probing, personal nature of the questions, shocked the audience of the day, many of whom thought the interview should not have been broadcast.

The publicity and furore over Hancock's 'Face to Face' appearance, has perhaps served to overshadow the fact that he gave a number of interviews during his life. One in particular, given just over a year before his death, forms the first part of this, our third on-line magazine.

The interview in question was a two part affair delivered over the evenings of 19 and 20 January 1967. On these dates, Tony Hancock was the subject of 'The Frost Programme' (Associated Rediffusion, 1966-1968 and 1972-1973, revived for Carlton TV in 1977 and 1993).

Hosted by David Frost, the series was to establish Frost as a hard-hitting TV interviewer. An episode from the series later in 1967, in which Frost confronted Dr Emil Savundra, former head of a collapsed insurance company, resulted in national headlines and is commonly regarded as one of the first examples of 'trial by television'. At the end of the show, members of the audience cheered Frost for his grilling of the unapologetic fraudster.

The interview with Hancock was a much milder affair however, and captures a reflective Hancock, talking not only in quite familiar terms at that time about wanting to 'move on' in his career, but also thinking back to his father Jack, who had died when he was just eleven years old.

The second part of our magazine covers a period later in 1967 when Tony Hancock went out to Aden to entertain the troops stationed there. We are indebted to sapper Tony Fortnam, an Aden veteran, who has generously shared with us a number of photographs he took of Hancock performing. These are reproduced towards the end of the magazine. Tony recalls that the show he saw was staged on the R.A.F camp at Khormaksar in the blistering afternoon heat – despite which, Hancock performed wearing a suit and tie! We also owe many thanks to another veteran of the campaign, medic Stuart Burnett, who was also based at Khormaksar, for sharing his memories of Hancock performing there. In addition to these memories and photographs, we also include a link to a rare recording of Hancock being interviewed with Hughie Green and Yvonne Marsh shortly after their arrival in Aden. We do hope you enjoy reading about this less well known period of Hancock's life, and the rare material we have gathered together.

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## HANCOCK ON THE FROST PROGRAMME ASSOCIATED REDIFFUSION TV 1967

The Frost Programme was a British talk show that was revived four times: 1966/68 1972/3 1977 & 1993.



Sir David Frost

The essence of each programme was its topicality and spontaneity. From the very first, when an already lively talk between David Frost and Robert Morley, on the subject of teachers' pay, really boiled over after some people in the audience decided to join in, the studio audience were always encouraged to feel themselves able and free to take part in what was going on. Each Frost Programme was a unique, freewheeling, unscripted piece of television, not an illustrated lecture.

There was much that is impossible for any written article to recall - the mischievous inventor with his automatic clothes line whizzing his wife's washing to and fro across the studio; Frost's tolerant despair at the talking birds that hopped chirpily from perch to perch, but resolutely refused to talk; the bland pleasure on John Betjeman's face when someone in the audience volunteered to recite a love poem; the tempestuousness of Quintin Hogg; the geniality of Denis Norden; the cool, steady sexiness of Françoise Hardy.

However, much of the series consisted of candid, unrehearsed conversation. Mr George Brown, the Foreign Secretary, said: 'It really is odd to be discussing things as frankly as this with you in front of an audience'. Nevertheless, yielding sometimes to Frost's persuasive questions; sometimes to his inviting pauses; as much as anything to his readiness to listen to them, Mr Brown, and many others, did talk; and did talk frankly.

### **Tony Hancock Interviewed by David Frost 19/20 January 1967 (*part transcript*)**



*" You can have the funnel down the trousers and the water poured down so long as it's not you."*

*(Tony Hancock)*

**Frost:** In my opinion, we don't have enough of Tony Hancock on television. And I always get the impression that's slightly because he puts a great deal more effort into it, or it takes a lot more effort from him, than other people's comedy half hours. Tony is comedy hard work, in fact?

**HANCOCK:** *If they don't laugh, very!*

**FROST:** But is it hard work to you, even when it's going well?

HANCOCK: *Well it just depends. I've been criticised quite a lot because I try to move on. And the British public, though very loyal in many ways, are very resilient to change. But comedy is such a fascinating art that you cannot stay static and just collect the cheque. It's very good for the bank but after a time you must experiment to a certain extent; and I think people resent this until they get used to your new way of presenting comedy.*

**FROST: You made your Hancock's Half Hours five years ago, and then last year they were repeated, and they were still a great success. How do you think you have changed since then in your approach?**

HANCOCK: *My attitude to comedy hasn't changed at all, but your approach does alter gradually as you go along. I mean it took me ten years to go on a stage without a hat on! It was some sort of protection.. Like a clown's mask. You know, when you've got the mask on then you can have the funnel down the trousers and the water poured down, and it's not you. While I had this hat on, it wasn't really me doing it. Then, gradually, as you go along, I think you shed these things until you are confident enough to be yourself.*

**FROST: Who would you say most influenced you in becoming a comedian?**

HANCOCK: *Well, my father was a semi pro. I don't think they liked him very much, actually, but that's understandable because his first joke was: 'Put the Rolls in the garage, Harvey, and don't forget to butter them'. Not a very good start, but if they let him get to his finish, he used to close with 'First Long Trousers'. And then there wasn't a dry eye in the house. Haven't you ever heard it? I can't remember it, I'm pleased to say. It's a real tear jerker.*

**FROST: Is it? Will anyone at home who knows 'First Long Trousers' send it in, please. Did he top bills anywhere?**

HANCOCK: *Only once, at St Peter's Hall, which is about half the size of this studio. In those days, a semi-professional entertainer used to wear one of those collapsible top hats and a monocle, always! There was only one entrance to the hall -through the front. And he was refused admission, in spite of his gear, because he hadn't got a ticket! He explained that he was top of the bill, and they said 'Sorry, no ticket, no entry'. So he was out. In the end, he climbed through the lavatory window. The show must go on, you know. But it didn't go on with him again; he never got a return date. Then there was Sid Fields. If a sketch is announced in a funny way, or it's obviously going to be a strange situation, I'm half way there already. And Jerry Desmond would come on and say, 'Now ladies and gentlemen, with great pleasure I would like to introduce England's leading exponent of the tubular bells, Mr Eustace Bol-linger'. And Sid would come on with two mallets, and a terrible wasp waistcoat and bicycle clips - which have always seemed to me to be funny anyway. He used to say to the musical director, 'What do you think I should play?' And he'd say: 'Why don't you play Beethoven's 15th movement of the 7th symphony in E flat*

*minor with the modulated key change to G flat major'. And Sid had a good long look at him, and then he got hold of one of these mallets and said, 'Yes, I thought you'd suggest something like that', and tried to belt him with this stick. Then the orchestra all rose up and tried to clout him with their violins, so nobody was in any doubt as to what the relationship was for a start! Then a voice from the box said, 'Maestro'. But Sid knows it's not true. That was the beauty of it.*

*Anybody calling him maestro, he knew the man was a fool. And on a table by the side he'd got a ludo set, a toy fire engine, a toy poodle - by the side of these tubular bells - and this bloke in the box says: 'Maestro, what's all the junk on the table?' 'Junk?' 'Yes, what is all that junk on the table?' 'That's not junk', says Sid. 'That's prizes!' That paralysed me. You could just imagine him sort of cycling up from Sidcup or somewhere, with his clips on and all this gear on his bike. Most of it is in your own imagination. Like any great comic, Sid relied a great deal on the imagination and warmth of his audience.*

(A viewer sent in a copy of 'First Long Trousers,' and the following night. ...)

**FROST: Tony, do your worst! Let's see how you measure up to your old dad.**

HANCOCK: *Right. This is what's known in the trade as a bit of pathos and I don't want a dry eye in the house ...*

*Say, young fellow, just a minute  
These are your first long trousers eh?  
Your little grubby knee breeches are for ever put away  
And your little skirts are gone  
And the shirts and cuffs of manhood  
And you've got long trousers on  
Gee, you look well in them sonny  
I can't believe my eyes  
It doesn't seem a year ago since you were just - this size  
A little pink cheeked youngster  
Why, you toddled more than ran  
Every night to meet your Daddy  
Now you've got long trousers on*

*Are you all right? Because I'm a bit choked. I doubt if I'll finish this.*

**FROST: I was slipping away there myself, but do what you can.**

HANCOCK: *All right. Last verse ...*

*Oh, I don't know how to tell you  
But I want to, yes I do  
That your mummy and your daddy both  
Are mighty proud of you  
And we're going to miss the baby  
That from us this day has gone  
But that baby we'll remember  
Though he has long trousers on*



*And do you know, sometimes my old dad used to get the bird with that! Marvellous, isn't it?*

**The Frost Programme was a Rediffusion Television production**



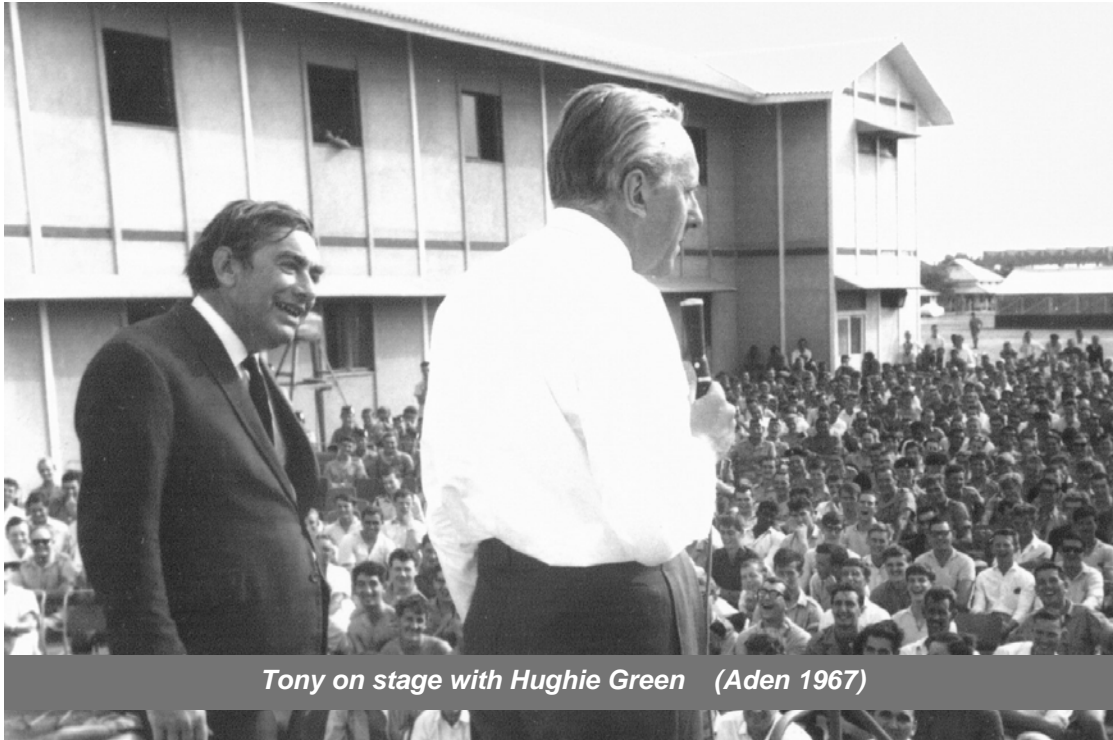
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**PLAYBACK 1 SPRING 1967 TALKING WITH FROST  
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# HANCOCK PLAYED HERE

*Researched & written by Elaine Schollar*

## **NUMBER ONE - ADEN**



*Tony on stage with Hughie Green (Aden 1967)*

1967 was to be quite a busy year for Hancock. Early this year he was interviewed about stand-up comedy by another well-known interviewer, Alan Whicker, for 'Whicker's World'. Sadly, at time of writing, no recording of this is known to exist. In April 1967, Tony began recording for ABC – TV's 'Hancock's' series. He appeared in cabaret in June and July; recorded 'The Blackpool Show' at the ABC theatre; and then also in July of 1967, he responded to a plea in the Express newspaper for celebrities to go and entertain the troops stationed out in Aden. This experience forms the second part of our magazine.

### **Aden**

By way of historical background, Aden is a seaport city in Yemen, located at the eastern approach to the Red Sea. The port had come under British control in 1839, but by the 1950s, Britain was facing increasing pressure from the National Liberation Front (NLF), which was very much opposed to British rule. Armed resistance began with a grenade thrown at the British High Commissioner in December 1963, which triggered what became known as the "Aden Emergency". The British Government said it would give the area independence, but still promised to keep a troop presence, but the security situation deteriorated as the NLF and a rival faction, the Front for the Liberation

of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY) starting fighting to try and secure the upper hand. In January 1967, there were riots between the NLF and FLOSY supporters in the old Arab quarter of Aden town. British troops tried to pacify the situation, but failed, and this conflict continued until mid February. During this time there were as many attacks on the British troops by both sides as there were against each other.

As you might imagine, morale for the troops stationed here was low, and when word got back of the lack of entertainment for them, the Express launched its appeal.

Hancock was on the first flight to head out to entertain the troops, which left on Tuesday 18 July 1967. He was accompanied by Hughie Green and the singer Yvonne Marsh (sister of actress Jean Marsh). On arrival in Aden, they were interviewed about how they got involved in the venture, and their experiences in troop entertainment. Extracts from this recording can be heard here.

<http://www.tonyhancockarchives.org.uk/gdae4r79knbfcds34569kuhybvfdde321/soundbites.htm>

The Daily Express report of the first show (19 July 1967) records the rapturous welcome the stars received. Hughie Green was followed on by Yvonne Marsh, and thanks to donations from Sir William Butlin and National Savings, Hughie was able to play a game of 'Double Your Money' for the lads. This was a quiz show he hosted and which had been running continuously on ITV at that time since 1955.

Tony's performance included his portrayal of Robert Newton as Long John Silver, Charles Laughton in 'Mutiny on the Bounty' and a rendering of singer Maurice Chevalier. Unfortunately, whilst Hancock was performing, the skies opened and a torrential downpour – the first rain in Aden since 1 April of that year - cut short the show by some 40 minutes!

Footage of the performance on the final day of the tour was included in Hughie Green's television show the following weekend, but sadly, at time of writing, no video recording is known to exist.

Some time ago, THA Archivist Jeff Hammonds made contact with a veteran of the conflict, Stuart Burnett, who kindly shared his memories of seeing Hancock at this time. Stuart was an RAF medic on a two year tour of Aden, who was based at RAF Khormaksar. He recalls: "In 1967, Tony Hancock was heading the bill with Hughie Green and Yvonne Marsh for a Forces Concert. As I was a medic in the medical centre, and the centre was used as the dressing rooms, I had the opportunity to meet Tony, Hughie and Yvonne before the show. Tony asked me about my service with the RAF, how long I had been in Aden and how long before I returned home. He was very willing to meet and speak to the service personnel and I asked him about his trip out there, his flight etc. As I recall there was big turn-out for the show consisting of army and RAF personnel. Tony performed a 'stand-up' routine. Unfortunately, in comparison with the show Bob Monkhouse put on, this show was a little disappointing. Tony Hancock was not his usual witty self and came across a little subdued during the performance. As a result was sadly heckled. In addition to his performance at RAF Khormaksar, I believe he also did a concert at RAF Steamer Point in Aden and possibly others on the Army Lines."

Aden was a dangerous place to be. Prior to the entertainers' arrival, there were reports of four Arabs having been killed and one seriously wounded in 17 security incidents during the space of twenty four hours, (CONTINUED ON PAGE) 9

The report of the second day's Aden show is reproduced below [Daily Express, 20/7/1967]

**DIALLING THE WORLD** EXPRESS FOREIGN SERVICE REPORTING LAST NIGHT



## Hancock & Co. give the troops a ball

**I**T was a rapturous two hours today for the lucky 600 who escaped from the searing heat of Aden into an air-conditioned concert hall.

They were chosen by ballot from 2,000 soldiers at a bleak desert spot beside an oil refinery to enjoy a show that brought the glitter of London's West End to unlovely little Aden.

The British Petroleum Company lent the hall. And stars Tony Hancock and Hughie Green headed a cast which flew out without fee to give free entertainment to the troops.

The troops—whose plea for top-star entertainment like the Americans get in Vietnam, was passed on by the Daily Express—certainly appreciated it. Laughter shook the building.

Said 21-year-old Royal Marine Commando Ron Findley, of Ayrshire: "It

From STEPHEN HARPER  
Aden, Wednesday

was like being at home and having a show come to life-size out of the TV screen.

Said Captain Roland Fahey, of Yelverton, Devon, who had a job—stutling down the numbers to fit the hall: "Maybe the unlucky ones will have another chance later."

Soldiers of the Queen's Dragoon Guards, unsung armoured car heroes of every action in desert and street battles were seeing their first real entertainment in a while. They go home in a few days' time.

**THEY CHEERED** when Hughie Green said he was honoured to be among the first to answer "your ad in the paper."

**THEY ROARED** when Tony Hancock listed countries where the army has taken over the government, adding: "Now you

know why Harold Wilson has kept you here so long? **THEY** went wild when glamorous singer Yvonne Marsh appeared—the only woman singled for praise around—provocative and alluring in a scarlet chiffon shorts dress.

Hancock's last joke before introducing her was one about the priest who said "It's a miracle" when Customs men discovered his bottle of Holy water was gin.

When Yvonne appeared somebody shouted: "It's another miracle." The house almost came down.

**BUT** outside the laughter-filled hall in the 86-degree heat the terror that is part of Aden life went on.

Two Arab policemen were killed in rioting at the village of Hiswa on the road back to Aden, and a dusk to dawn curfew was imposed.

**IN LONDON** hopes are on the upswing in Whitehall that Aden may, after all, reach independence on January 9 next year under a united, broadly based caretaker Government.

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8)

During his stay, Hancock was woken one night to the sound and sensation of the hotel he was staying in being shelled. He recounted this story on stage, and following this, and much to his surprise, the army henceforth gave him a twenty-four hour armed guard.

On his last day in Aden, "just two hours after comedian Tony Hancock visited gun positions in Aden's trigger-tense Crater district" a British soldier was shot dead (Daily Express, 22 July 1967). The Express reporter who accompanied the tour recounted how "the military had baulked at Hancock going into Crater to chat up the men who had been unable to get out to see any of the five shows he and other West End stars put on in heavily guarded camps. With only hours to go before taking off for home, he asked me to drive him there. His Service watchdogs relented and he was escorted by two Land Rovers. He spent an hour signing autographs, admiring tattoos – "They're blinking art galleries!"

After the hectic four day engagement, Tony returned home. Within a few days, he received a letter from E.B.Raybould, who was then Managing Editor of the Daily Express, thanking for his help in making the show in Aden such a resounding success. In another letter, Captain Brian Hart thanked Tony for coming to Aden - and thanking Tony for coming along for interview to AFBA.

When Hancock booked into a London clinic later that month, it was reported that he was "ill with nervous exhaustion after visiting Aden" (Daily Mail, 22 August 1967).

The British finally withdrew completely from Aden in November 1967.

**Tony in relaxed mood**



**Photograph copyright belongs to Tony Fortnam**

**Tony does his Quasimodo**



**Photograph copyright belongs to Tony Fortnam**

Tony as Maurice Chevalier



Photograph copyright belongs to Tony Fortnam

Aden photograph Album

Views of Aden



Tony Booked in at the Aden Rock Hotel(circled)



24 hour Armed Guard



View From Hotel Balcony



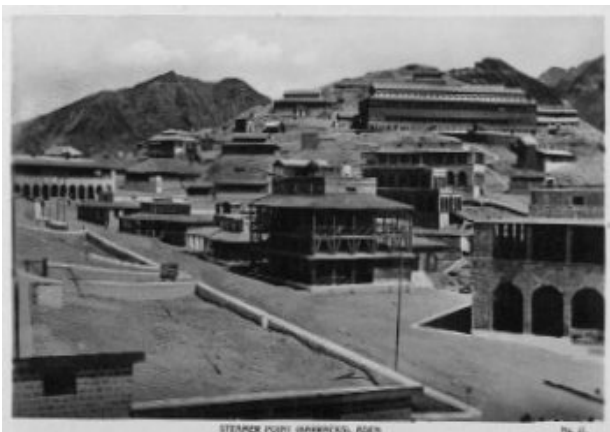
Sight seeing



RAF Khormaksar Main Gate



With the lads

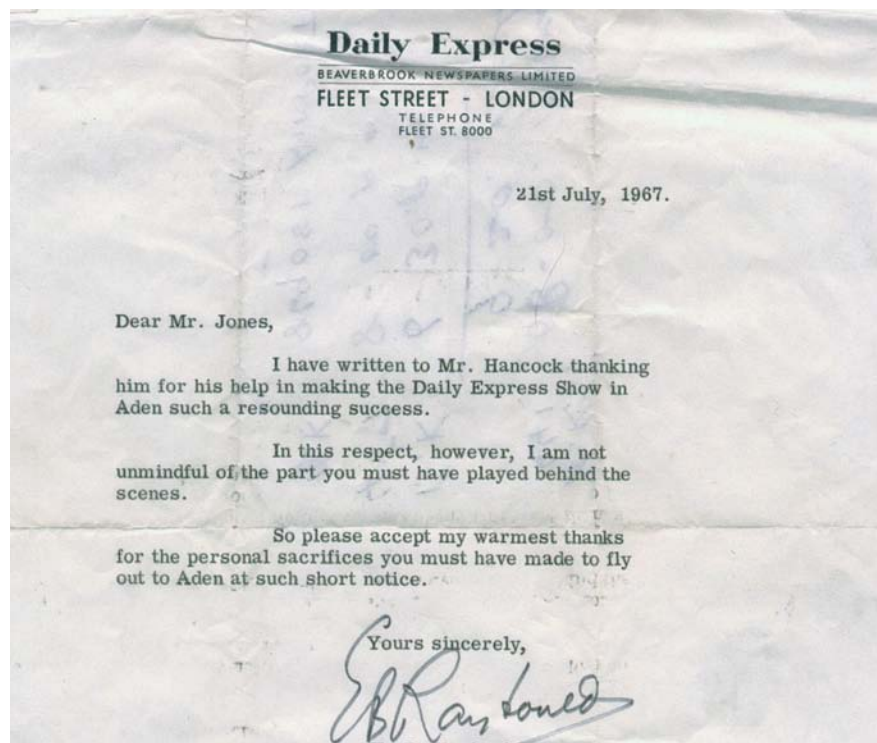
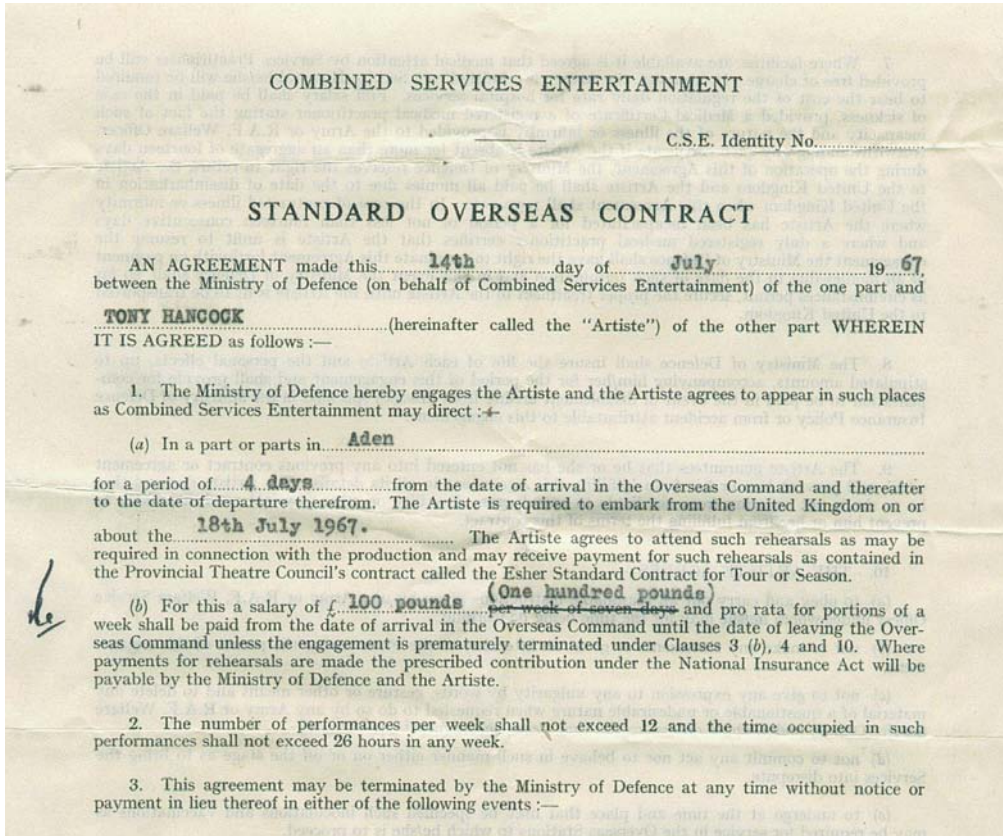


Steamer Point Baracks



On with the show

**Copy of Tony's Aden contract & letter of thanks from the Daily Express**



See more material@ [www.tonyhancockarchives.org.uk](http://www.tonyhancockarchives.org.uk)