

Thornborough & Thornton WI report March 2015

Victoria Molnar Brown stood in at short notice with an Accordion Adventure, as the scheduled speaker was unwell. After setting up the wooden music stand made by her father, putting on her accordion and a brief comment that her son had been playing with the instrument earlier, without any introduction, Victoria launched straight into a very jolly piece. She then introduced herself; she hoped to entertain us with different styles of music and by showing us how the accordion works; she has been playing for nearly thirty years, since age seven, is studying to be an accountant and has a two year old son. She finds playing an escape.



This accordion has buttons not keys; the black and white buttons correspond to a piano keyboard and as the buttons are smaller, more can be fitted in which helps someone small like Victoria reach them. The first tune was Italian; most known pieces are French in sound like the themes *to Allo, Allo* and *Bergerac*. Victoria played a very French sounding piece called *Corinne* followed by a mellower one, which is one of her favourites. Music with a folk background may also be played on the accordion such as Scottish and Irish jigs. Victoria plays in a barn dance band and gave us a rendition of some examples during which people were tapping their feet.

Victoria has had this accordion fifteen years without any maintenance or tuning. It is a good one and would cost around £8,000 today; it is possible to pay as little as £100. Most are made in an Italian village. Living in Pitstone as a child, a local resident offered to teach accordion at the village school. Victoria showed an interest and when this didn't diminish her parents agreed to fund one starting with a very small instrument. As she became more proficient and entered competitions she needed more gadgets.

Accordions are operated by bellows inside. There are low, medium and high reeds and the player uses hard and soft pull and push actions making soft or loud sounds that keep going until the push/pull stops; the culper buttons working the reeds. There are three buttons on the top that can be operated using the chin. Victoria demonstrated with a piece called *Melody Style* played in three different ways; simple, an octave up with chords and finally with embellishments.

The operation of the bellows push & pulls can be compared to how a singer chooses when to breathe in and out. Victoria demonstrated with *Moon River* – basically the player knows when it feels right. On the other side of the accordion is another set of keys that can be used to play chords or individual notes; the latter allows two different tunes to be played at the same time. Victoria demonstrated playing *Dixie* and *Yankee Doodle Dandy!*

We were then treated to a concert of tunes from around Europe including a Spanish Gypsy Dance, a piece from Hungary, being her father's homeland, a Russian tune - The Lark, Mozart's very well-known *Turkish March*, Strauss' *Trish Trash Polka* and finally, after thanking us for listening to her, Victoria played Figaro's Aria from *The Barber of Seville*.

Pam King gave the vote of thanks, commenting on the foot tapping, audience eyes fixed on the playing and ending with the question "I wonder what it was like living in Pitstone with all those children playing accordion?" Wry smiles from all parents with memories of their offsprings' early attempts to master a musical instrument.

Tracy Sapwell