

*"Our Gracie"—and "Sally" brings to thousands a moment of nostalgia*

# LASSIE FROM LANCASHIRE SWITCHES ON THE LIGHTS

**T**O the tumultuous applause and cheers of a crowd estimated to number more than 10,000, Lancashire's most famous lassie, Gracie Fields, last night switched on Blackpool's six miles of autumn illuminations.

The crowd, which filled Talbot-square and stretched up Talbot-road and on to the Promenade, left no doubt of the affection in which they held Gracie as she came on to the platform outside the Town Hall, accompanied by the Mayor (Ald A. Ashworth, JP).

A few seconds before, the Square had been resounding to cries of "We want Gracie."

Many of those who greeted her with such obvious affection belonged to the generation that were recalling her younger years and a few of their own memories as well.

And when, in response to demand, after promising just one song, she sang "Sally," there were tears of nostalgia in many eyes.

*"I am really proud to be here. I love you all," she told them.*

## Portrait

When Gracie had pressed the switch that brought to life the six miles of brilliant fairyland that is Blackpool at illuminations time, two fireworks exploded and, immediately above her, over the main entrance to the Town Hall, a tableau bearing her portrait surrounded by depictions of some of her famous songs flashed on.

The evening began with music played by the band of the 1st Battalion the Lancashire Regiment (Prince of Wales Volunteers). Soon the crowd in the Square, with ex-Blackpool and England footballer Stan Mortensen as MC, was joining enthusiastically in the singing and fun.

Then, at 8-25, Tower organist Reginald Dixon ("Mr Blackpool himself," Mr Mortensen called him) took over, playing a selection of Gracie Fields' songs on an organ on the platform.

## Fanfare

Shortly before Gracie was due to arrive, the crowd had begun to chant, "Two-four-six-eight! Who do we appreciate... G-R-A-C-I-E!" This was followed by cries of "We want Gracie!"

Then, to the strains of a fanfare from the band, Gracie, wearing a short fur coat over a black dress, walked on to the platform, accompanied by the Mayor. Her husband, Boris Alperovici, had preceded her by a few seconds.

Ald Ashworth recalled that in June he had met Miss Fields on the occasion of her visit to open Brindle Lodge Home for Old People. He was not then aware that he and the Mayoress would be privileged to meet her a second time during their year of office.

"For years we in Blackpool have looked forward to the time when Miss Fields would be able to officiate over this most important event," he said.

"We are pleased tonight that that ambition is being fulfilled, and that her husband Boris has found it possible to accompany her."

## A song

It was proper that this 1964 spectacle should be inaugurated by one of the most popular figures in show business.

"She is a real Lassie from Lancashire."

Thanking the crowd for their welcome, Gracie said that she would be glad to sing any song they wanted. But she begged them to remember that she had not been working in the theatre for six years and wished to conserve her voice for tomorrow's concert at the Opera House.

"Remember, I'm 66—not 36. So just one song."

*And, of course, by popular acclaim it was "Sally"—sung with as much beauty and mellowness as ever—and which drew a tremendous ovation.*

## Gifts

After the switch-on, the Mayor referred to Gracie having during her career given pleasure not only to the people of Britain but to folk throughout the world.

He presented her with an inscribed silver plate to be fixed to the side of an electric hostess to be presented on behalf of the Corporation, and a four-foot-long, arm-thick stick of Blackpool rock, running through which were the words "Our Gracie," from a local confectionery company.

Then, smiling and radiantly happy, with a friendly wave and saying "Cheerio and God bless you all" to the crowd

Gracie left the platform and re-entered the Town Hall.

Afterwards she insisted on meeting the regimental bandmen, whose last public engagement this was before they leave for Swaziland next week.

Later she travelled with a civic party in a decorated tram to the Imperial Hotel, where a civic supper was held



*AT THE ORGAN.—Blackpool Tower organist Reginald Dixon played a selection of Gracie Fields' songs on an organ erected on the platform for the switch-on of the Lights.*

*"When  
Blackpool  
is calling..."*

**O**NE of the crowning points of the evening was when Gracie sang, to the tune of "Volare," these words about how she was finding life as a "veteran" entertainer:

*I love you, I do, honest, and true;*

*The over-sixties life is divine, now I'm having a wonderful time;*

*Though I should be retired I still get inspired,*

*When Blackpool is calling without any warning, I go.*

*For 50 odd years I have sung every song that you know.*

*I love you, I do, I love you, honest and true;*

*For the beautiful home by the sea, you have all helped to build up for me;*

*For without you where would I be; most certainly not in Capri.*