

Did you hear the one about the Clock Inn for Comedy?

Comedy – it’s a funny old business. Not least for those giggle inducers who travel its circuit to raise our spirits and make us smile. But 2020 had other plans for us all, and funny it certainly hasn’t been.

With no shows to talk about for the foreseeable, Sammy Jones decided to prod the past with a look back into the archive...

Plenty of household names have passed through Milton Keynes to perform to sell-out audiences at Milton Keynes Theatre. But getting to that level takes a lot of work. Evenings spent eating up motorway miles, grabbing service station pasties for nutrition and performing in front of stony-faced punters is all part of earning your stripes.

A couple of decades ago, the Clock Inn at Shenley Church End welcomed many fresh faced newbies to the stage. Microphone in hand they would step out and hope to turn the collective audience frown upside down. Luckily, Shenley clientele craved their comedy fix, so an eager audience was usually on hand.

I can recall a few fab nights out in the decidedly snug confines of the venue, which had an audience capacity of just 100!

Chris Kemp was the promoter of leading music venue The Pitz at the time when he took on the Clock Inn for Comedy nights too: “The comedy stage housed the likes of Phil Jupitus, Al Murray, Jenny Eclair, Jo Brand and a horde of other now famous mega comedians. These were all purchased for the grand price of £120 a show, which included two comedians and no rider,” he remembered.

In the autumn of 1995, comedians stepping out included Sean Lock, Alistair McGowan, Bill Bailey and Simon Pegg.

It’s fair to say they’ve all done pretty well since; a team host on Channel 4 comedy panel show 8 of 10 Cats, a BAFTA winning actor and impressionist, an actor and musician, and a Hollywood star whose credits include *Mission: Impossible!*

Tickets for those performances were hardly wallet busting either – just three quid got you in and seated.

Dave Gorman, ‘The BAFTA winning writer of BBC’s *Mrs Merton Show,*’ and Paul Foot on the same bill would’ve set you back a fiver in 1997.

A young Milton Jones was also working the circuit then, and in November that year Andrew Maxwell played with a ‘new act’ in support called Peter Kay.

Wonder what happened to him?!

Long before he hit the big screen in movies including *Sex and The City 2* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End*, Omid Djalili showed his funnies at

the venue, and Al Murray was a familiar name at the haunt, even delivering an Edinburgh preview of his *Pub Landlord* show.

The Clock Inn was a circuit fixture and many acts appeared time and again, but every so often a new face would take

attention. In the fall of 1999 tickets to see Noel Fielding were £4. Noel was back a couple of months later with Julian Barrett with ‘*The Boys from the Boosh.*’

That little project worked out rather well, didn’t it?

That same season saw the arrival of Chris Addison, who went on to star in *The Thick Of It* and *Doctor Who*. He directed the 2019 comedy *The Hustle*, starring Rebel Wilson and Anne Hathaway, and earlier this year oversaw *Breeders*. Addison, writer Simon Blackwell and co-star Martin Freeman created the brilliant Sky One delivery.

Tony Law and Ross Noble hit the stage for the summer season in 1999, and Noble’s set is embedded in our memory; when our companion chose to visit the little boys room just as soon as Ross began his set, it meant we were targeted for the rest of his performance!

As the new millennium got underway, Richard Ayoade (who would make his name a few years later in *The IT Crowd*), Catherine Tate and Jimmy Carr all came through as support acts. Would you have dared heckle the king of the put down?

The lack of live entertainment just now is no joke, but back in the day, comedy at the Clock Inn really was a funny old game!



Al Murray aka Pub Landlord
Pic by Sammy Jones



Sean Lock
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