

Sheila Hodgson

Sheila was a prolific and successful writer of radio and television dramas during the 1950s to the 1980s and one of her plays was directly responsible for a startling transformation in the life of the clarinetist Acker Bilk.

Sheila Hodgson was born in Beckenham, Kent, in December 1921 where she spent most of her life. Her father Stuart Hodgson was the last editor of the Daily News, a great campaigning left-wing newspaper. During the Second World War she toured with ENSA, later gaining invaluable stage experience with a variety of small repertory companies.

Her first plays were for the stage before joining the BBC as a scriptwriter at Television Centre, then, after six years, she moved to ATV, writing medical tear-jerkers for Emergency Ward 10.

In 1961 she wrote a children's thriller serial for ATV about sinister goings-on along the South Coast. She called it *Stranger on the Shore*. ATV used a moody piece, *Jenny*, by the jazz clarinetist Acker Bilk as the serial's theme. When this was released as *Stranger on the Shore*, it spent nearly a year in the pop charts including three weeks at No 2 (only Cliff Richard's *The Young Ones* kept it from the top spot), and it transformed Bilk's career.

Towards the end of her own career she became fascinated by the supernatural, successfully adapting stories by Algernon Blackwood and M.R. James.

Sheila Hodgson died in December 2001.

Local people living in Cromwell Road today used to call Sheila 'Dancing Dolly' for her lively looping way of walking, always appearing to be so busy, which of course she was. Her talents and zest for life may have been infectious. In Cromwell and adjacent roads were the homes of other 'Beckenham's Famous' such as Julie Andrews, Elmer Cossey, John Mann and Mollie & Geoffrey Russell-Smith



The postcard above (courtesy of the Nancy Inman collection) shows the Croydon Road in the 1940s with the entrance to Cromwell Road on the left. The brick wall and pillars show the location of Sheila Hodgson's house, now replaced by a block of flats.