

Bovis, to life on Hi-de-Hi! I could have spent many hours pouring over the exhibits, not to mention a day or two rummaging through the extensive library of showbiz books, but there were Water Rats to meet.

King Rat is currently comedian and after-dinner speaker, Ian Richards from Norwich. It's his second term in the important role, and the responsibility comes with a hefty ceremonial collar which carries the names of all the previous King Rats. Although not at the gathering I was attending, Rick Wakeman, who lives in Norfolk, has also held the honour.

Everyone made me welcome. I lost track of the familiar faces who came to say hello. Comedian Duggie Brown, who featured in these very pages a few months back; then entertainer and agent Johnny Mans, who had the rewarding job of being Norman Wisdom's manager. I sat with Duncan Norvelle, who made his name in the 1980s with the cheeky catchphrase "Chase Me". These days he's made a remarkable recovery from a stroke and is back working around the country. In typical comedic style he told me he'd changed his catchphrase to "Push Me!"

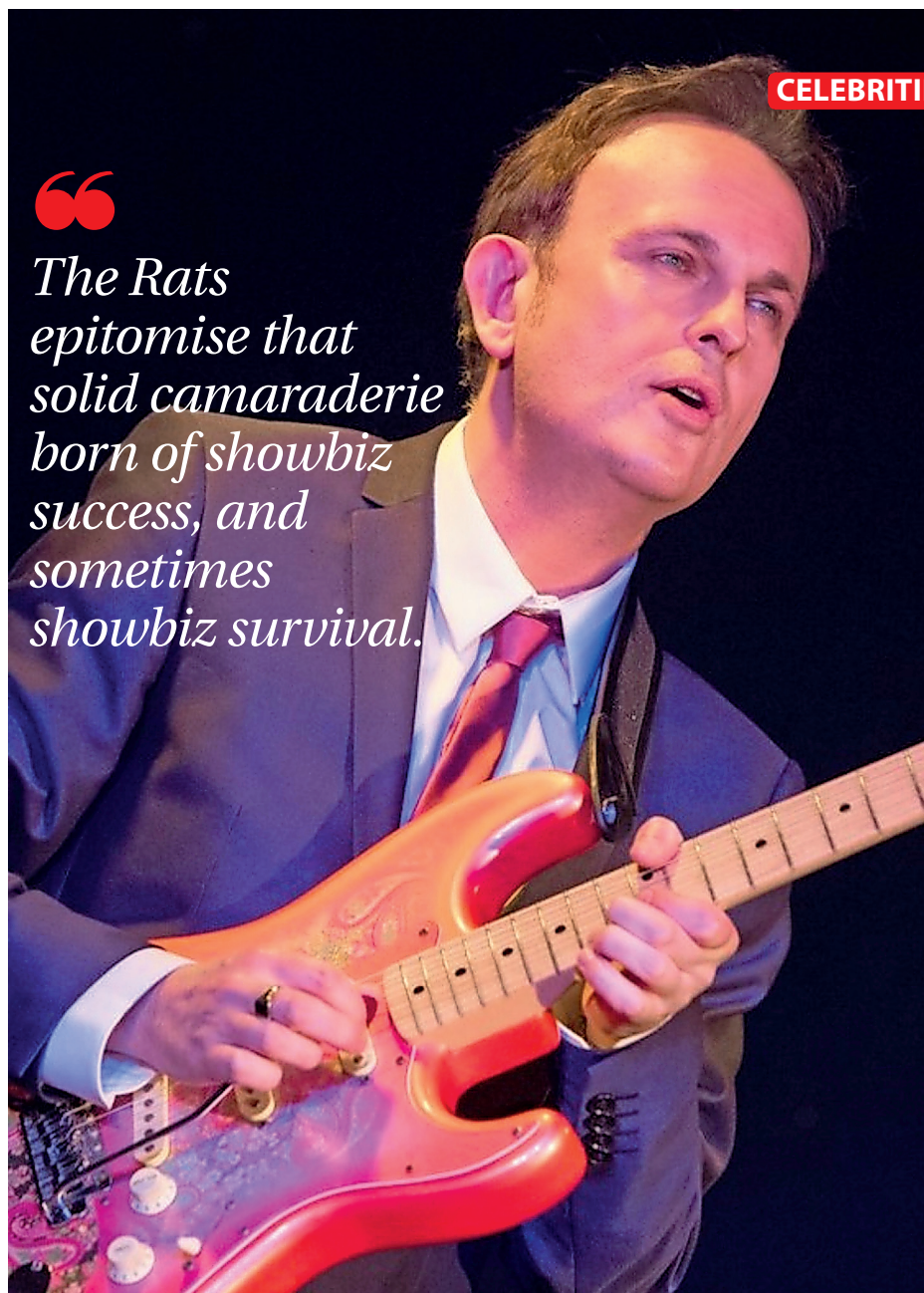
He's a recent inductee, as are TV cooks The Hairy Bikers. Comedian Kenny Cantor from Suffolk was also there. He's the fifth generation of his family in showbiz.

I bumped into actor Colin Spaul, who I felt I knew because he's been in so many TV series - from Z Cars through to Doctor Who. He chatted to me about his career and I asked about what I'd see him in next if I



David Clayton (right) at the Water Rats' gathering with King Rat Ian Richards, Kevin Dean and Duggie Brown. Photo: John McKenzie.

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Kevin Dean, in action.


switched on the TV. "Oh Blimey," he said and started reeling off a list. "I keep popping up on repeats all over the place." "I'll give you a wave!" I said. "I'll wave back," he laughed, picking up on the absurdity of what I'd said!

One thing was clear, the Rats epitomise that solid camaraderie born of showbiz success, and sometimes showbiz survival.

As we tucked into lasagne and a glass of bubbly after their lodge meeting to which, of course, I wasn't privy, ventriloquist Roger de Courcy stood up and proposed a toast to a newly inducted Companion Rat, Brian Meaden. Brian is in good company because some members of the Royal family are Companion Rats too. They're people who aren't directly in showbusiness. I was a tad disappointed Roger de Courcy's

favourite companion, Nookie Bear wasn't there. He probably isn't a member!

Having spent many years of my career with a foot firmly planted in showbusiness, I can't remember enjoying an evening quite so much. It was a joy to 'talk shop' with so many pros. Chatting to Kevin on the drive back, it is clear he's enormously proud to be in the Water Rats.

You must be proposed and there's something of a process to go through before you're accepted. Then, of course, it's hoped you'll take part in various fundraising shows. Considering the endless list of household names who are members too, the cast list is always impressive. 

Find out more about the Grand Order of Water Rats at the website: www.gowr.net