

## in brief

### Fun for the family at garden centre

A FAMILY fun day is set to entertain youngsters. The event at Barton Grange Garden Centre will be held from 10am to 4pm today. Children are being invited to go along in fancy dress and join games and competitions. There will be face painters, puppet shows, a fancy dress competition, a treasure hunt, paper flower making, an owl display and a reptile show. For more information call (01995) 642900.

### Sherlock on screen

SHERLOCK Holmes is back on the big screen in Garstang. The cinema night at the Crofters Hotel, takes place on Sunday. The screening – on an 18ft screen with Dolby surround sound – will start at 7pm and tickets cost £4.50 per person. There will be an interval and popcorn. For more information call (01995) 604128.

### Band to play

THORNTON Cleveleys Band will perform at Thornton Little Theatre of Sunday at 8pm. Tickets cost £4 for adults and £2 for children. For more information call Judith Thorpe on (01253) 851682.

### Libyan discussion

LIBYA will be the hot topic of the next meeting of the International Travel and Holidays Association. The talk at 7.30pm on Wednesday will be held at the concert hall in Blackpool Sixth Form College. Annual membership is £10 and visitors may pay on the door for a fee of £3 per meeting. A Glimpse of Libya will be presented by Mo Holland from Voyages of Discovery. For more information call Joan Gaffney on (01253) 700799.

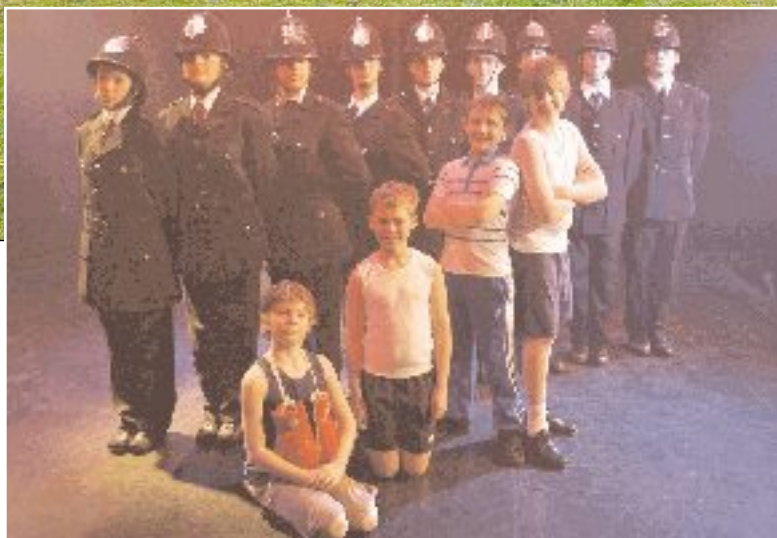
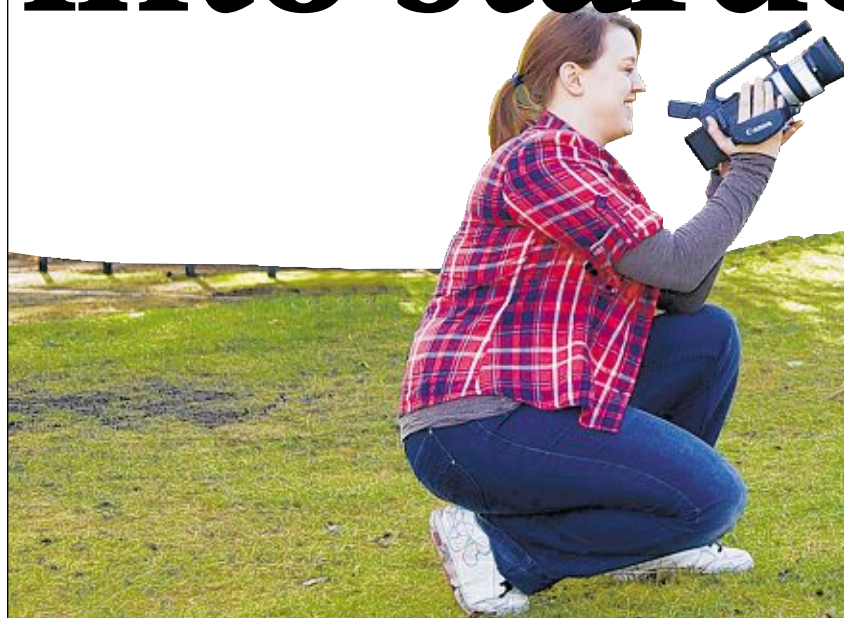
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Schoolboy takes on a dream role and sets sights on West End

# Tom's dance into stardom

**STAR JUMP:**  
Tom Atkinson, 11, as Billy Elliot is filmed by Blackpool and The Fylde College student Lucy Richards with (inset, below) the Clifton Academy cast

Picture:  
KEVIN  
WALSH



By HELEN STEEL

A YOUNG dancer's career is reaching new heights after getting the chance of a lifetime.

Billy Elliot tells the story of a northern boy who fulfills his dancing dreams by being fast tracked to London's West End.

And that's what 11-year-old Tom Atkinson hopes to do, after landing the lead in the smash hit musical to be staged at Lowther Pavilion in May.

Producer of the show, Clifton Academy, has won a place in a competition which could see the group perform at the Victoria Palace Theatre in London, home to the Tony award-winning West End version of the show.

The theatre academy, on Clifton Drive South, St Annes, is one youth group chosen to compile a DVD of its rehearsals, with the top 10 chosen to perform at the Palace in July.

There is also the possibility of outstanding youngsters being plucked from obscurity to perform full-time at the West End.

Tom, from Weeton, who attends the

Dance Place in Blackpool, said: "It's amazing that I'm playing Billy, but even better that I've got the chance to perform it in front of West End producers.

"I love dancing, I've done it since I was three and I love ballet, tap and modern. Sometimes other boys make fun of me a bit, but I just ignore them.

"It's my dream to perform in the West End, and the rehearsals are so fun."

Rehearsals for the show are well under way and the cast today sent off their DVD to London producers, showcasing their showstopping version of musical number Solidarity.

Under the scheme, the Billy Youth Theatre appeal, 100 other companies who have secured the rights to the musical will send their DVD excerpts to West End producers.

Ten lucky companies picked by the producers will then take their show to the Victoria Palace, to perform excerpts for a gala performance, while producers look on, scouting for fresh talent for their London show.

Another youngster, who narrowly missed out on in the West End Show when he auditioned previously, is hoping to get lucky second time round.

Owen Broughton, 11, who attends Clifton Academy, said: "I auditioned for Billy's friend, Michael, in 2008 and I got down to the last six.

"At the time, they said I was too tall, but you never know, Billy might be taller this year which means my height might not matter.

"It will be brilliant to get the chance again."

Producer Peter Taylor said the team

are still looking for additional chorus members. He said: "It's turning out to be a fantastic show and the chance of a lifetime for the cast.

"The lead characters are all excellent but we still need a few smaller parts.

The production takes place at Lowther Pavilion from the May 19 to May 22.

■ For further information, visit [www.billyelliott-themusical.co.uk](http://www.billyelliott-themusical.co.uk), or contact Peter Taylor on 07810 222983.

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