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REMEMBER WHEN...?

WHAT A NIGHT! GIG OF A LIFETIME FOR LOCAL GROUP

Derek A J Lister recalls the night a Bradford band played at a hip London venue

THE 2i's was a coffee house that was open from 1956 to 1970, and played a formative role in the emergence of Britain's skiffle and rock and roll music culture in the late 1950s.

Several major stars, including Tommy Steele and Cliff Richard, were first discovered at the 2is, on Old Compton Street in Soho, London, and our local group, Alan Knight and the Chessmen, also played there one Sunday in the summer of 1963.

The group comprised Alan Knight, aka Alan Lodge vocals, 16-year-old Ken Hickey drums, Roger Davis lead guitar, Harry Unsworth bass guitar, and John Whalley rhythm guitar. All were now on a trip of a lifetime, playing at the 2is coffee bar, that could lead them to be stars.

It was Roger who, through an agent, had made the booking for them to appear that Sunday evening in a warm summer, after the coldest winter for many years.

The Monday started off in the borrowed Bedford Transit van with Roger, Alan, and John picking Ken up in Manningham at 9am then over to Undercliffe to pick the last, Harry Unsworth, who was still in bed, he had completely forgotten!

It was after 11am when they all set off again to Wakefield, and after a few wrong directions were on the M1.

They had a few stops for a quick call, and cups of tea, arriving on the outskirts of London around five o'clock. No hotel for an overnight stopover; as this was a round 24-hour trip, they parked close to a park to all change into their smart matching suits white shirts, and collard neck ties.

At 6.30pm they were outside, and were expected, however no sign of the agent, seemingly, a normal practise, although an envelope was left for them with money, plus petrol money, which they would receive on the at the end of their sessions. The took all the instruments in, and had a few sandwiches, then set up the drums. Inside it was quite small inside, and it was in the cellar a much larger space with a long wooden floor for dancing and few chairs and benches, plus all soft drinks and coffee. It was mentioned that it was like The Olympus coffee bar in Bradford.

However, they all thought that the acoustics were good, as they tuned up. Two 50-minute spots were given at 8pm until 8.40, and 9.30 to finish at 10.20.

For their first session all seemed to go well with many dancing and sporadic applause. However on the second session their jackets, ties, and sleeves up, as it was too hot, but again it too went down well. At 10.20 they played their last number, finishing with general applause from the few remaining people in the cellar.

It was then a quick pack up of the instruments, as jackets, and ties were pushed into a bag having served their purpose. The van was retrieved from a side



The 2i's Coffee Bar was where many major acts were discovered in the 1950s and 60s. Pics: Reuben Davison

street, and all was packed in.

In the meantime, the envelope from the absent agent was handed over; the group having finished the contract, and in the envelope a few pound notes, which included petrol money. As they set off it was now dark, and Kenny Lynch, who had been there, gave them a wave as he drove past in a red sports car!

With not much traffic on the motorway, five very tired lads arrived back in Bradford at 4.30 in the morning, to be dropped off at their homes, and with no respite as all had a job to go to on that Monday morning.

Oh, to be a pop star.

*Derek AJ Lister has profiled many bands from that special period in Bradford's musical history in two books - Bradford's Rock and Roll and When Bradford Rocked. From 1959-1965 Derek was DJ at the Gaumont and Majestic dance halls, working under the name of Dal Stevens, and he met national and international stars and many local groups and singers. He had his own rock 'n' roll group, The Four Dukes.

Derek felt there was a need to record something of the lives, careers and times of these local groups, many of whom continued to perform as, nationally, the youth culture that had spawned them began to evolve.

"It was in 1965 when I decided my rock and roll world was being taken over by the beat boom, with Mod style and Beatle suits, and then the hippies," he wrote in When Bradford Rocked. "Music tastes changed

almost overnight. Now the songs and music that explored the ups and downs of teenage romance sung by the Tabs, Bobbies and Frankies were on the decline. It was at this time I decided to 'pack up my tent and steal away' from my rock and roll world."

But the memories remained with Derek and in 1980 he finally got down to writing about them.

Bradford's Rock and Roll began as a memoir of his years at the Gaumont and Majestic, in the heyday of Bradford's music scene. He took readers back to the bars, cafes and ballrooms of that era, and of meeting big names such as Joe Brown, Marty Wilde and Gene Vincent.

The book was popular and led to a series of rock 'n' roll reunion gigs featuring many local musicians from the late 1950s, early 60s. Derek later decided that these acts merited greater recognition, and painstakingly researched them, contacting as many as he could to find out where they were and what they'd been doing over the decades.

When Bradford Rocked, published in 2012, is a substantial, entertaining book encompassing dozens of local acts.

Now Derek's books have entered the digital age, with a website he has created in collaboration with Reuben Davison, who was in Bradford band, Solstice and has also written two Bradford-based books: In Loving Memory, about Undercliffe Cemetery, and An Edwardian Housewife's Companion.

* Visit www.whenbradfordrocked.co.uk



Singer Alan Knight with guitarist Roger Davis