

# THE DISC JOCKEY PIONEER

## REMEMBER WHEN

IN the latest of his profiles of Bradford's rock 'n' roll heroes, DEREK AJ LISTER looks at the career of Garth Cawood:

It could be said that of the many names in the Who's Who of Bradford's rock 'n' roll era Garth Cawood is synonymous and the most remembered of that time, and beyond especially, with his group The Dingos.

Garth B Cawood was born in Idle in 1940. He attended Greengates Primary School and St Barnabas School in Heaton when the family moved to Victor Road. Later, when his parents took over the Tudor Ballroom, he attended Buttershaw School and the family later moved to Undercliffe. Garth was one of the UK's earliest ballroom disc jockeys. He started at the Tudor Ballroom, Dudley Hill, in the mid-1950s, using a radiogram, which held eight 78s rpm records. While the machine made the automatic change of discs Garth gave an introduction. It was primitive, but he became the forerunner of the modern disco DJ.

Leaving school at 15, he joined the Telegraph & Argus as a trainee press photographer. After four years he moved to well-known Bradford Photographers Eric's, in the Mechanics' Institute opposite the Town Hall. In the late 1950s he joined The Dingos skiffle group. Garth had seen them at his parents' ballroom, and while they were



clearly talented he quickly saw that their organisation wasn't so hot. At the end of each number, for example, there was no 'thank you' or introduction to the next song. Garth's arrival turned the Dingos into one of the most professional, entertaining rock 'n' roll groups in Yorkshire.

After a few years it was time to move on, he was in demand from the many package shows performing at venues around the UK. He became a top compere and friend of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Searchers and other top artists. He had DJ spots in the late 1950s at the Gaumont and Majestic in

Bradford, and was the first DJ at the new Mecca on Manningham Lane. In the mid-1960s he spent five years at Brigitte Bardot's club, Esquade, in St Tropez. In 1970 he was back in the UK as compere at the Savoy Club Wakefield, Batley Variety Club and Keighley Variety Club, all top cabaret venues. He

**Garth Cawood was one of the UK's earliest disc ballroom jockeys. He was a top compere on package shows and a friend of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Searchers and other famous artists**

lived at his parents' home at Sturgess Grove which became a travel stop for many artists of the time - including Tom Jones, Gene Vincent, Jess Conrad and Carl Denver. He was working with his own house band, The Mike Stuart Sound with a six days a week position at the Lyceum (Talk of Yorkshire). They moved to a four-day week at Keighley Variety Club. Garth and the band brought a theatrical illusion act to concerts - 'a showground experience with music'. Building on their success, he and business partner Stuart Reynolds purchased Keighley Variety Club, changing it to The Funhouse Bar and the Flying Dutchman Club in Leeds Road, Bradford changing it to Funny's, a fun club with continental overtones. The constant stream of guest stars included Garth's good friend Diana Dors and many of the Coronation Street cast. In 1984 they sold both businesses and Garth toured with the house band as Garth Cawood's Fun House. In the late 1980s Garth and Stuart formed Funhouse Productions, representing a formidable list of TV and theatre personalities. He organised the popular Bradford Rock 'n' Roll Reunion and 50 years on, still adds to the venue his favourite rendition of Johnny Preston's Running Bear. Garth lives in Calverley with wife Sandra and to date has no thoughts of retirement.

\* Derek AJ Lister and musician Reuben Davison profile figures from Bradford's 1950s and 60s music scene on [whenbradfordrocked.co.uk](https://whenbradfordrocked.co.uk)

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