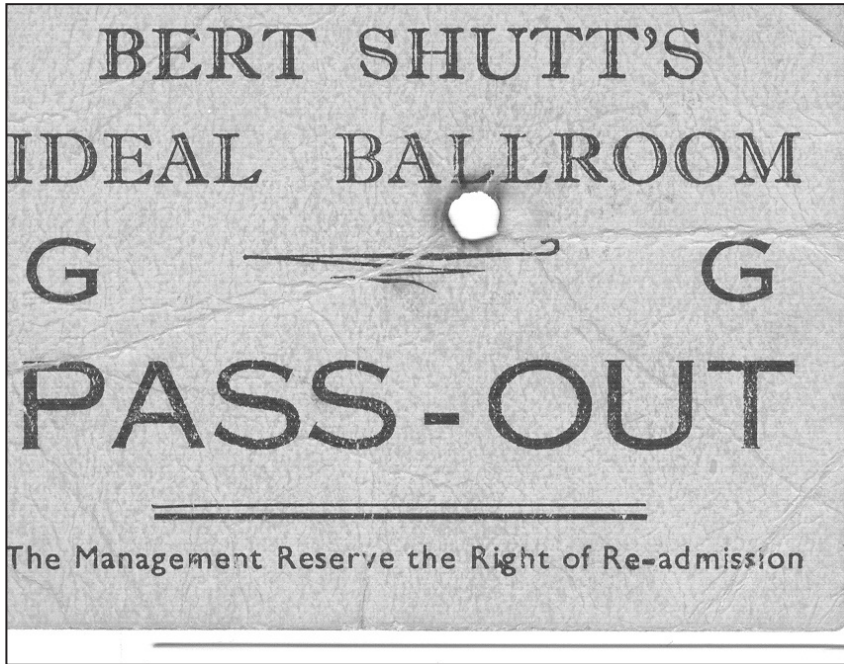




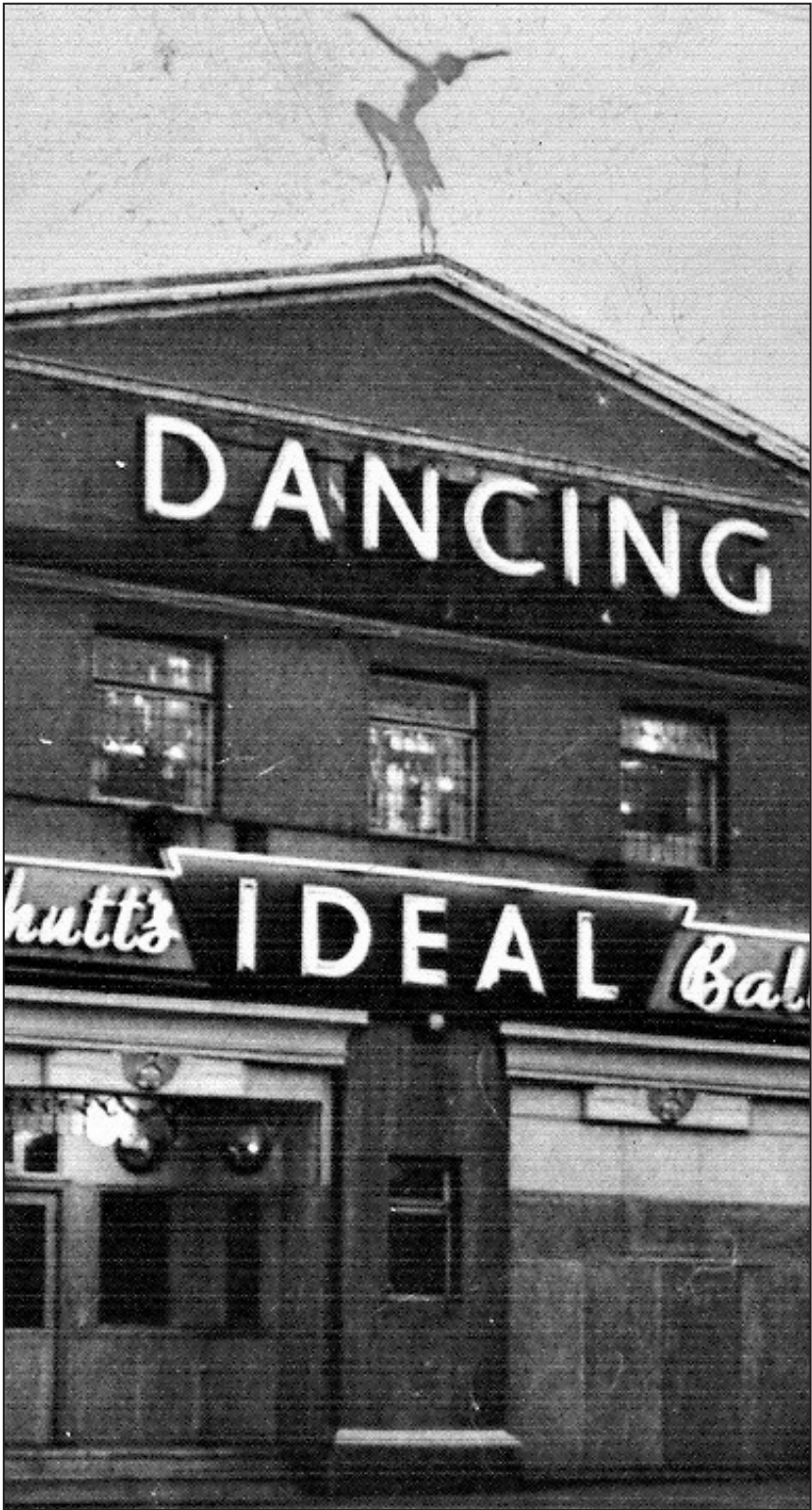
Stan Pearson, T&A journalist who reported on local venues and artists, and singer Vince Eager.



Gary Lane and the Rockets in rehearsal.



One of the venues where the group played.



Bradford's Ideal Ballroom.



The Majestic ballroom in Bradford pictured in 1962.

HOW THE TRAVELLERS BECAME GARY'S ROCKETS

DEREK AJ LISTER
looks back at
Bradford group
Gary Layne and
the Rockets

THIS group started as skiffle group The Travellers in the late 1950s, when friends at Bolton Villas Youth Club got together. One had just got a guitar for Christmas, another made a bass out of a tea chest and somebody got a washboard - and The Travellers were born. Soon they added another guitar, then a drum, and a home-made bass replaced the tea chest: it was now a rock 'n' roll group. The line-up was Gary (Lynn), Tottle (Gary Layne), vocals, Ian McCallum, lead guitar, Robert Riley, bass guitar and manager, Malcolm Egginton, rhythm guitar, and Ian Brogden, drums.

In the early days, as the band moved from skiffle to rock 'n' roll, two other friends from the youth club played major roles: David Carling, bass, in 1958, and Ronnie Taylor, lead guitar, 1958-9. Without their participation, the group would never have formed. Soon the group began playing at youth club dances in Wrose and Bolton Lane. As the venues grew in size and the gigs increased, equipment was upgraded, and practising became routine - usually in each others' homes, to the dismay of neighbours. Weekend performances were the norm, relying on parents to provide transport. Soon semi-professional, they rented a practice room at the New Inn at the top of High Street, Idle, upgraded their equipment, chose stage attire - red suits - and developed choreographed stage movements.

As the band developed they moved on from venues like the Gaumont in Bradford and Lakean in Shipley to the Mecca ballrooms (Locarno) in Bradford, Burnley, Wakefield and Leeds, and Top Rank ballrooms in Rochdale, Huddersfield, Leeds and Bradford (Majestic). With The Travellers not seen as a distinctive enough name, and it being common practice to use the vocalist's name with a group name, they chose Gary Layne (from Gary Lynn) and the Rockets (since it was the era of the space race).

By 1961 they were providing their own transport, expanding to South Yorkshire, playing at dances in mining areas around Barnsley and Doncaster and steel areas of Rotherham and Sheffield. As well as major dance halls they played miners' welfare halls. They also played at the US base at Menwith Hill, miles from anywhere, where they wanted an all-night dance - but there were no girls! This minor detail was solved by sending coaches to Harrogate, Leeds and Bradford for the missing ingredient.

From 1962 the group was fully booked for more than a year in the whole of the West Riding of Yorkshire and East Lancashire, from the Imperial in Nelson to Burnley, the Co-op Hall in Darwen, Rochdale, Palins and the YMCA in Halifax, the Regent in Huddersfield, South Yorkshire, the Empire in York, venues in Harrogate, Ripon and



Gary Lane and The Rockets were a major part of Bradford's rock 'n' roll scene. Images: Derek AJ Lister

Skipton, numerous town and village halls, including Cleckheaton, Dewsbury and Yeadon, as well as major venues in Leeds and Bradford, of which the Bradford Mecca, the Locarno ballroom, with its famous revolving stage, was the jewel in the crown.

The group was now stretched to its geographical limit. Further development would have meant going on the UK tour circuits operated by various promoters, which the Yorkshire area was sadly lacking. To do this would have meant going full-time, and no doubt moving out of the area. Even so, occasional performances were made on some of the national circuits, notably at the North Pier, Blackpool.

While the group was primarily a dance band, on nights when there were no dances they continued to perform at clubs in the Bradford district, such as Laisterdyke, Lilycroft, Great Horton, Princeville, Clayton and Cullingley working men's clubs, and further afield in Morley, Kippax, Hanging Heaton, Garforth and Batley, and the Corner Pin in Barnsley - where they were greeted with words to the effect that if you were all right you might get out in one piece! They survived to play another day.

The club scene increased to compensate for the reduction in dance hall venues, with such places as the City Band Club (Bradford), Bramley Band Club and the Railway Club (Bradford), political clubs such as Idle and Shipley Conservatives, East Ward Labour and East Bowling Unity Clubs (Bradford) and the Irish Democratic Club in Batley. Sporting clubs such as

Laisterdyke, Windhill and Idle cricket clubs, Sandal RUFC (Wakefield), the Old Thornesians RUFC (Thorn, Doncaster) and the University of Bradford Students' Union. A notable new dance hall was the Mecca in Leeds, and the group also performed at the ice-skating rinks in Leeds and Bradford.

Gary Layne and the Rockets were a stand-alone group that rarely performed with other acts. There were a few exceptions, however, when they performed with notable acts such as the Four Pennies in Blackpool, and Rod Stewart and Long John Baldry at Bradford University. In Ilkley they even shared equipment with the Nashville Teens.

The five-piece group had a stable line-up during the heyday of Bradford's rock 'n' roll scene (1959-66), but as the scene began to fade in the mid-1960s most band members moved on to pastures new. They were replaced by others including, on vocals Kevin Woodward and Richard Jennings, Warwick (Ricky) Moore on bass guitar, and David Wiltshire on rhythm guitar. Some dates were played in 1970, but as members left it became more difficult to replace them.

From a five-piece the group changed to a four-piece then just three, until in 1970 it was no more and faded away into memory - but what a memory!

● Derek and musician Reuben Davison profile singers, bands and musicians from Bradford's 1950s and 60s music scene on their website: www.whenbradfordrocked.co.uk



Drummer Ian Brogden.