



Down In The Sewer (part one)

The Burning Up Times



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Burning Up Times is published when it's ready. It is available free of charge from the website and you are free to distribute it to whoever you want. Issue three, Down In The Sewer, May 2008. © Planet Earth **Editor:** Gary Kent **Production Editor:** Dominic Pilgrim **Webmaster:** Ian Keiller

Special thanks to: Arturo Bassick, Jet Black, Mickey Bradley, Barry Cain, Garry Coward-Williams, Alan Edwards, Chris Gabrin, Ronnie Gurr, Martin Rushent, Sil Willcox and to Rats and Heroes combined. **Contributors:** Adrian Andrews, Paul Begg, David Boyd, Bry, Owen Carne, Claireinblack, Paul Cooklin, Joe Donnelly, Paul Gunter, Scott H, Glyn Havard, Alan Hillier, Steve Howard, Gary Kent, Simon Kent, Doug Kerr, Donald MacKay, Mark McKay, Davy McLaughlin, Graeme Mullan, Paul Munden, Ian Murdock, Adam Neil, Sean O'Neill, Paulinblack, Alan. Phillpot, Adam Pigeon, Spizz, Barry Spooner, Paul Wilkinson, Brian Young. Please accept our apologies to anyone we have inadvertently left out.

This issue is dedicated to Stranglers fan and Strangled PDF contributor Stephen Reid.



The **Burning Up Times**
Issue three
May 2008

Down In The Sewer

Part one

Editorial

Fittingly, 2008 is the Chinese Year of the Rat. So we would like to welcome you to issue three of The Burning Up Times – celebrating The Stranglers' 1977 albums, Rattus Norvegicus and No More Heroes. We have split No. 3 into two halves: 'Down In The Sewer' part one – with part two following imminently. After all, the band did almost that with Rattus and Heroes LPs, didn't they? For your information, your very own Stranglers PDF has been created by Stranglers fans and took almost a year to produce due in part to the sheer wealth of content kindly supplied by contributors far and wide. It has been an amazing journey to publication: Internet scouring, trawling old newspapers and books – not to mention traipsing the streets of the capital for the locations section – while tracking down and grilling the likes of former Stranglers publicist Alan Edwards, producer Martin Rushent, erstwhile band associate Garry Coward-Williams and also journalists of the day such as Ronnie Gurr and Barry Cain. Everyone had a story to tell. Enjoy reading this celebration of the year The Stranglers were THE hottest act of 1977 with three hit singles and two hit albums – and JJ became NME's Stud of the Year! A very big 'thank you' to everyone who helped

You've been informed

20 Stranglers factoids

1 Rattus Nowayicus: Originally, our favourite band's debut album was to be have been a live one: a 1976 recording from the Nashville was selected, but those concerned deemed the tape to be of inferior quality. Once Grip and London Lady were laid down at TW Studios, the rest of the tracks followed to form The Stranglers IV Rattus Norvegicus, and more.

2 The band performed to a captive audience at Chelmsford Prison in Essex on 30th July 1976. The Sex Pistols followed suit seven weeks later. Both gigs were a cell-out...

3 Early days saw the band based above Jet Black's Jack Pot off-licence in Guildford, Surrey, before moving to a semi-detached house at the end of 1974 to nearby Chiddingfold: neighbour and landlord Mr. Ruben once dumped the band's belongings in the front garden only for them to return and move them back in. He neglected to change the locks.

4 Before Jet registered The Stranglers as a company on 11 September 1974, the band were called The Guildford Stranglers, and jokingly, The Chiddingfold Chokers.

5 In 1975, the band started a Sunday night residency at Islington's Hope & Anchor. First night, the cellar bar contained one solitary audience member.

6 Also in 1975, The Stranglers performed at the Railway Inn, Redhill, Surrey. The cassette recording entitled The Nob is in reference to what the locals called the venue: the picture

of a steam train at the entrance showed the locomotive's name plate as No.13 – mistakenly taken for Nob.

7 Rattus Nowayicus: in typical Punk fashion, Dead On Arrival was the original handle for Rattus.

8 Classically trained guitarist JJ Burnel started his bass-playing career by purchasing Hugh Cornwell's Sweden-bought Fender Precision for £35. JJ's first band rehearsal was in April 1974.

9 When Stranglers producer Martin Rushent chose TW, he discovered the in-house engineer – Alan Winstanley – had already recorded their early demos of My Young Dreams, Wasted and Strange Little Girl.

10 Strange Little Girl quickly vanished from the live set for faster, more powerful tunes. In 1982, when it was redone, it got to number 7 in the UK chart.

11 Rattus Nowayicus: We all know The Stranglers worked fast during the Rattus session, recording half the next album at the same time. Meanwhile, a couple of miles away in Notting Hill, reggae legend Bob Marley was on a similar tip: exiled in London after a failed assassination attempt back home in Jamaica, he not only recorded his Exodus LP, but also the entirety of its follow-up, Kaya.

12 So Grip and Peaches were the first brace of singles in '77. Hanging Around was mooted for the third single had Something Better Change not got the nod.

13 Peaches, Something Better Change and No More Heroes peaked in the pop charts at 8, 9 and 8 respectively. Grip stalled at 44.

14 JJ wrote Go Buddy Go at school, putting to good use the cool bass run of Hey Joe by Jimi Hendrix.

15 Hugh based the fantasy lyrics of School Mam from when he was a college supply teacher; it was originally called School Man.

16 Early critiques drew a comparison to The Doors, particularly with Dave Greenfield's Hammond organ sound. Both Hugh and JJ were huge Doors fans, according to Hugh's book, Song By Song. Surprisingly it was Dave who hadn't heard them. He was more into the Beach Boys and progressive rock.

17 Pipe-smoking Dave joined in 1975 after his aunt spotted an ad in Melody Maker: 'Keyboard/vocal man for soft rock band. Mostly original material. Good gear essential. Accommodation available. Recording contract.' Was 'good gear' a euphemism, perhaps?

18 Rattus Nowayicus: Rattus soared to the number 4 spot, spending a total of 34 weeks in the charts. During this time, No More Heroes was released, peaking at 2 in its own 19-week sojourn.

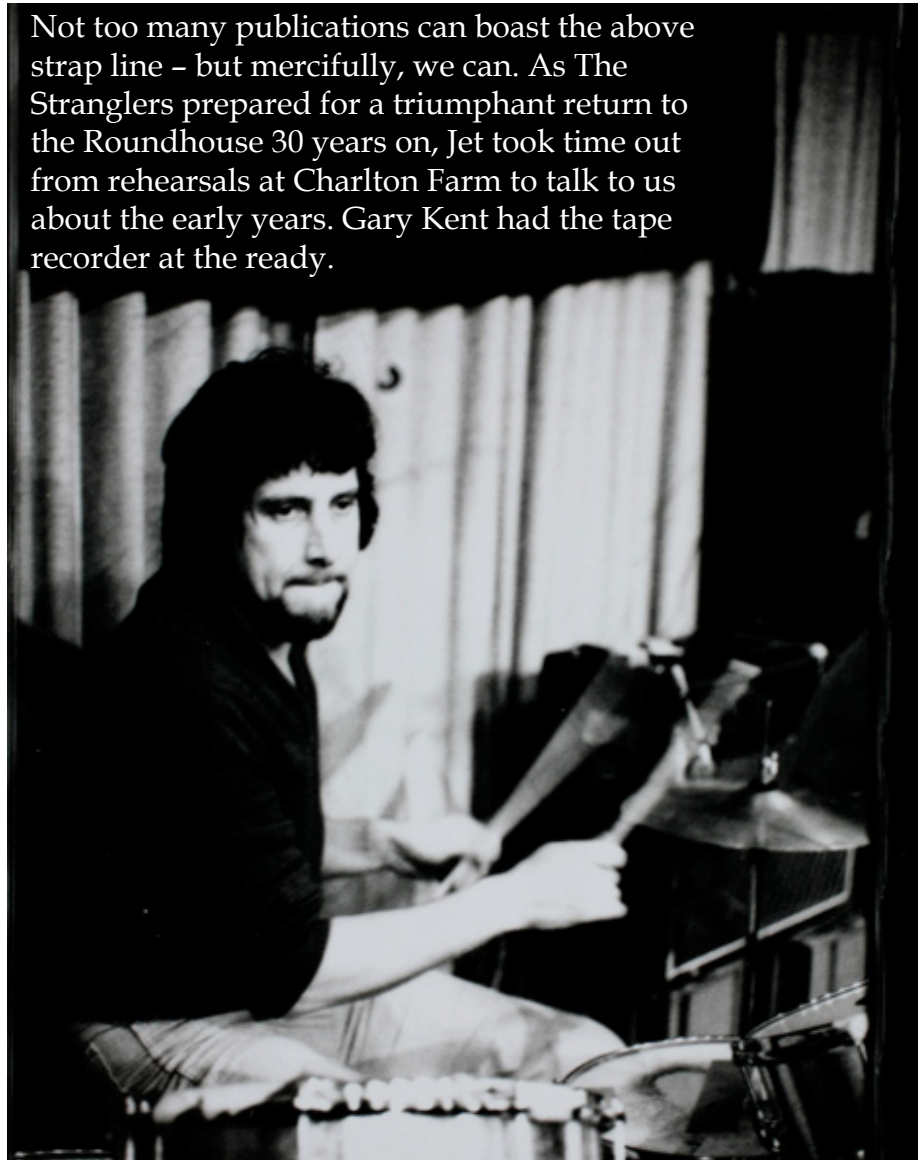


19 Brighton-born Dave and Essex-boy Jet are the out of townies of the band: north Londoner Hugh was born in Tufnell Park and JJ in Notting Hill, west London

20 Final factoid: Jet Black is not his real name,

The Jet Black interview

Not too many publications can boast the above strap line – but mercifully, we can. As The Stranglers prepared for a triumphant return to the Roundhouse 30 years on, Jet took time out from rehearsals at Charlton Farm to talk to us about the early years. Gary Kent had the tape recorder at the ready.



Hacks...

How do you view the Jon Savage 'version of history' that seems to permeate much of the popular media at the moment, where the Stranglers barely get a mention? And does it matter?

Well, we're still here, so maybe it doesn't matter. But a lot of people have noticed his version of history and know that it's bullshit.

Was the bad relationship with the media a deliberate publicity ploy?

On our behalf, or his?

Yours.

No. We just took it as it came. We found a lot of people just loathed us and so we kind of responded with loathing from our side.

Where did this emanate from originally. Was there one specific incident?

Well I think the Jon Savage thing, yes. According to JJ, it emanates from him thumping him, or trying to thump him some years ago for slagging him off in the press or something. I mean, I only have second hand information about that incident. I certainly wasn't there when it happened, or wherever it happened. But JJ swears blind he's never forgiven him for it and that's his version of the story. I mean, why the rest of the band had to be dragged into it, I don't know.

Did you have a healthy relationship with

any journalists at the time?

There were one or two who took us for what we were – a band that was trying to make a career in music – and we gave them due respect. But a lot of people came along to talk to us with a massive chip on their shoulder because of preconceived notions about what we were, influenced, very often, by other sectors of the industry.

What writers became public enemy No 1?

Specifically for us?

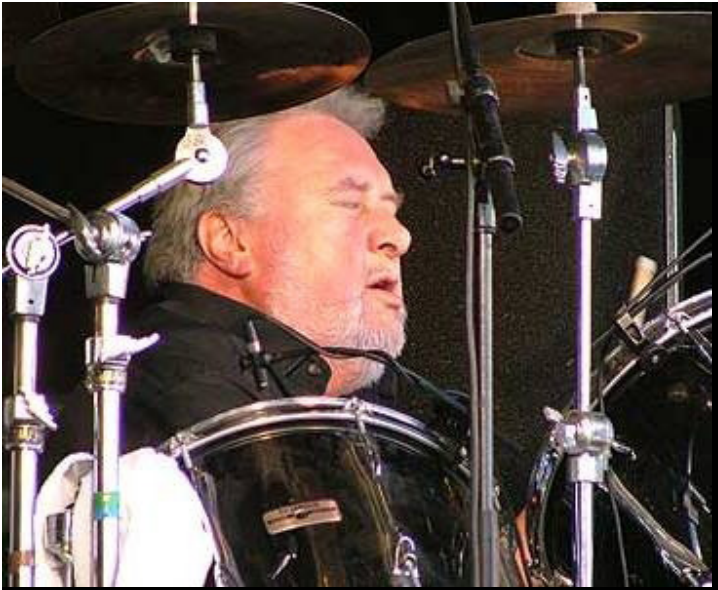
Yes, who were these writers with misguided preconceptions?

To be absolutely truthful, I don't actually remember, I think Julie Burchill was. But I mean, I don't have a direct recollection... you're asking me to recall something 30 years old and my memory about details of 30 years ago is a bit foggy now, you know what I mean? If I was to wade through the massive tomes of press cuttings that we have, then I'd probably give an answer to you. But I haven't got three weeks to do that.

Do you remember the Dingwalls fracas, in the car park?

Yes, that was kinda memorable, yeah.

Was that incident pivotal in ostracizing The Stranglers from the Punk fraternity – because you clearly were part of it, weren't you?



I suppose it did. But I mean, it's just a guess. I've got no way of making a direct link to that as a causal factor in anything. But you have to assume some people were impressed or unimpressed by that.

Glen Matlock had a Stranglers anecdote where the Pistols were outside a pub once and JJ went past and said 'Hi,' and bass player Glen said 'Hi,' back. Johnny Rotten leaned towards Glen and said; 'Don't talk to him.' So do you think maybe it became uncool to like The Stranglers at some point?

Well it certainly was within certain sectors. I have no information about the incident you are referring to, but it was very much a 'them and us' situation. That was the vibe I got. We did actually do one gig with the Pistols at the Assembly Halls in Walthamstow, many years ago, and they clearly didn't wanna mingle with us. Our attitude at the time was that these

guys were hugely funny. What they were doing was being taking very seriously by sectors of the media and we thought it was quite a hoot what they were doing. But they clearly didn't wanna rub shoulders with us at that particular time. But that's the only contact I can actually recall.

But there must have been a point when all

these bands of the new wave were pally, fighting a common cause?

Well I can tell you that all of the so-called Punk bands of the time – and I don't include ourselves in that as I've always taken the view that we were never a Punk band – used to have a great deal of admiration for us, and still do. It was just a very few, like the Pistols and The Clash who felt it was not cool to like us anymore. Joe Strummer, God rest his soul, was a real good mate of ours right up until the beginning of The Clash, and he used to hang out with us quite often and say; 'God – I wish I had a band like you guys,' and stuff like that. And all the bands used to treat us with total respect. So it was a very minor element of the so-called movement that really didn't think it was cool to be seen with us.

Musically, who was more interesting – the

Pistols or The Clash?

Musically... I couldn't tell you.

Gigs...

After the Jack Pot in Guildford and the semi in Chiddingfold, you all lived separately by 1977. So where were did you rehearse?

After Guildford we moved into Chiddingfold, then there came a point when we started to get proper gigs. By that, I mean gigs where people wanted to see innovative, contemporary bands, mostly in London. Suddenly there was a bit of a cash flow for the first time. Then we all moved out of Chiddingfold because we felt a real need to be nearer London and indeed we were all living separately. Mostly with friends and relations. We had a place owned by our then managers who had a room in west London, and that's where we did most of the stuff.

There was a distinct change in style/speed/aggression in your music between 1976 and 1977. Of course, Punk came along – but was there one band/one song that you encountered that made you think: right – this is what we'll do.

No. Up until '77, we couldn't get proper pub rock gigs. We were doing weddings, bar mitzvahs, working men's clubs and having to do some pop chart numbers and we weren't anything like what we were in '77 on. But slowly we started to slip in our growing repertoire – stuff that ended up on Rattus – and those kind of audiences really didn't like it with a vengeance. We never got repeat gigs because we just weren't liked, and it wasn't until late '76-'77 when we started getting into these

pub rock gigs where we could finally drop all these pop classics and stick to our own repertoire and remain liked by the audiences. So, from that point on, the only change was that we were suddenly not doing pop songs. We were only doing Stranglers songs and we were playing the songs that we wrote. And we wrote what we felt we were able to write, and would never, at any point in our career set out a goal and try to write a genre to fit that goal. We just wrote the songs that came to us when we woke up in the morning and we played them by the evening. So there was never a game plan. I don't think we were ever clever enough. Y'know, we just wrote a song and said; right, there's another one, and it was as simple as that.

The London gig scene circa '76 with pub rock bands like Dr. Feelgood etc., was it a vibrant scene?

Oh yes. It's difficult to overestimate it – it's easy to underestimate the importance of that. The pubs were actually packed with people; beer, by today's standards, was comparatively cheap and the drink-driving thing – I don't know if it had started by then – but if it had, wasn't of any importance. And so the pubs were full of happy people with money in their pockets. And it's quite different to anything you can find anywhere in this country today. The pub owners and landlords were guaranteed a full house almost every night, no matter who played. And so in that sense, we were immensely lucky to have been striving to create a career at that point and also at the same time, actually getting through the door as it were, and getting the exposure that we got.

Could you see the writing on the wall for these old acts?

Well of course, at the time, we never thought in those terms at all. First of all, we were far too busy. We were certainly aware of all the bands like the Feelgoods, and we kind of admired them, we'd all been to see them and thought; yeas, these are quite interesting, and they were doing things nobody else was doing – but it didn't really go much deeper than that. I mean, our main preoccupation was writing songs and playing them at gigs. And we were never a band sitting around playing records. We were out there doing it. And so in that sense, we were very self-centred and concentrated on the creation of our own career.

The Nashville Rooms – you played there a lot in the early days? What did you like specifically about the place?

Well, it was unique in that it was one of the few pubs in London that actually had a proper stage, and quite a big one at that, for a pub. I'm not sure what the capacity was – it must have been between 800-1000 on a busy night, and that was like crammed in like sardines – but it was always packed with people who really wanted to see us, so that's why we liked it I suppose. All foregoing gigs at that period had been much smaller than that, and here, all of a sudden, were we not only allowed into a much bigger, and in many respects, a more plush venue, but it was heaving with people. In fact, every night there were queues round the block and it was immensely exciting for us, and the audience.

Your debut LP was mooted to be a live Nashville recording – what was wrong with the recording to get rejected?

I'm not sure now, but I remember doing



recordings at the Nashville and hated the way it was all coming together. I think what we'd been asked to do was not within our gift to deliver. We were essentially a live outfit that thrived on being live and here we were being asked to do studio recording techniques and stuff and it didn't seem to gel with what we were delivering and what the public wanted. So we didn't want to record what

didn't fit into that category. That's all I can think of about that.

Tell us all the nerdy anorak stuff about your drum kit you were using in 1977. What about now – and what's the main differences?

The main differences. Erm... well it's a subject that really I never talk much about

simply because, to me, when people say 'what drums do you play?' I say black ones! And the reason for that is – it's only partly a joke, because to me it's not very important what drums you play because these days most of the sound the punter hears is controlled by the sound desk and electronics through which all the sounds go. And to me, if I had a drum kit made out of cardboard boxes, I would probably sound not much worse than I do with a proper drum kit. So I know a lot of drummers who spend a large part of their life talking about their drum equipment, and I never do because it's a matter of total inconsequence to me. It's what I do with them and what I do in relationship to the song, to me that is interesting, not the tubs that I thump.

How did you manage to get all the band – plus equipment in an ice cream van?

With a great deal of difficulty! You must realise that in those days, we didn't have much equipment and we did literally use up every square inch of the thing – we perfected the art of packing it in, and the guys used to lie on top of it, inches away from the inside of the roof of the vehicle. So we didn't have a lot of gear, but what we had just about fitted. Of course, we couldn't do that today, but mercifully, we don't have to.

Why did you sell it?

Well I kept it until about five or six years ago and I finally got rid of it because it had been sitting around in my yard just deteriorating. I hadn't actually used it for a decade, and I took a close look at it one day and thought; this is ridiculous. It's gonna end up a pile of scrap on the floor if I don't get rid of it. So I sold it off to some

guy in the ice cream business who was really excited and was gonna put it back into use as an ice cream vehicle. I think he was somewhere up in the Midlands. I could probably supply you with an address.

How did you manage to secure the Scout Hut to rehearse in – it was cheap too, wasn't it?

Well it was not far from the off-licence, as you may know. So we just made enquiries of that and many other places and that was one that was prepared to play ball with us. It just came about because it was close at hand and the people were prepared to let us use it.

Studios...

You recorded some demos at Foel studios on Wales, what sticks in your mind about that session?

I remember going there. I remember that well. But I have no actual recollection of what we recorded there.

What were your first impressions of TW studios?

Well, for us it was really big time. It was just a very low-status studio at the back of a laundrette in west London. It was, by modern standards, poorly equipped. But it had somehow, a rugged necessity that we required. Perhaps more importantly, the people who were running it and manning the desk, seemed to gel with what we were trying to do which was a major factor in how those two albums came together.

When I interviewed Martin Rushent, he described you as the nicest man on earth.

So what was he like?

Oh that's a bit embarrassing... [laughter] What was he like? Well, he was enormously funny at times. He's one of these people who spends most of his days telling you jokes of dubious humour. But I mean, he tries hard, and he was very affable and amiable. I liked him but it kinda went sour and I don't know precisely why, but he seemed to tire of what we were doing with the Meninblack thing. He didn't see it at all and said 'I really don't want to work on this' and it all kinda went wrong. And I don't think the relationship was helped by the fact that he lent JJ his Jaguar and JJ smashed it up! [more laughter]

"It was all done incredibly fast. Everything we did was fast in those days. We never got into what you might call modern recording techniques until some while later."

It must have been frustrating to see Grip underachieve in the charts. Was it? Or were you indifferent to chart success?

Well, no it was something totally new to us. We were certainly excited when it suddenly appeared in the chart. But we were equally underwhelmed when it should have gone up in the following week when suddenly it vanished completely, and it somehow had been rigged. The idea it was a misprint doesn't really ring true.

Can you remember if Something Better Change was recorded in the first TW session – to be saved for Heroes?

Oh God, I couldn't tell you! Far too much detail. After 30 years I really couldn't tell you.

After laying down Peaches, was there a point when you all realised: wow, this is the one!?

No, but funnily enough, as we rehearsed that and played it round the early gigs and the working men's clubs, it was just another very simple and basic song. But because it was so simple and basic, I think most of the band were not very excited about it! Our manager at the time said, this is a great song. We thought this guy's nuts. But now of course, when you see every bass player in the kingdom mimicking that riff, we kind of realise maybe it did have something.

Following the successes of Rattus and Peaches – how did July's Heroes session compare?

As best as I can recall it, it was just get in there and do some more and it was just like a continuation of the first session. That's the only thing I can recall about it, I can't recall anything that was any different. We just went back in there and went, one two three... and off we went, you know.

Because Rattus songs were written already, would I be right in saying the Heroes session had songs that required rehearsing before recording?

Oh no, that never happened until quite a while later. We still had a pile of songs we

wanted to record but as you know the first session we did Rattus and half of Heroes, not knowing that it was going to be 1½ albums as we were just recording songs, and we were gonna cull an album from it. And when we were done, we had so much left for the second album, we thought, gosh – finishing this is gonna be a piece of piss. So we just went straight back in and carried on and finished it. It was all done incredibly fast. Everything we did was fast in those days. We never got into what you might call, modern recording techniques until some while later.

Peasant In The Big Shitty is in 9/4 time signature...

I haven't counted it lately!...

...and it's completely off the wall. How did you come up with that?

It was one of those odd ones. I think it was just the riff [sings; da der, da der, da der...] – that was all we had at first. We were just playing around with that in a room once, for ages, and once we'd nailed that riff down, and we'd all agreed 'yeah – that's the riff' it carried on from there and the rest just sort of emanated naturally as songs seemed to do in those days. We'd just sit down at rehearsals and start working on an idea and it wasn't a song idea, it was just some chords. I mean, Rattus [Sewer] famously, was about six different songs stuck together. It started off with the first little bit, played that, and it was about twenty bars long and another week, we'd add this little bit on the end and we'd do another eight bars, and that's how songs came together in those days. It wasn't part of a game plan where we sat down and designed what we were gonna do. We just walked it and did it.



In your opinion, how does Rattus compare to Heroes – musically and artistically?

I don't know – I never play them. Well, I play the songs. I've also thought they were very similar, but I've never been very much good at being my own critic.

Lyrically, Rattus courts controversy with Ugly, London Lady (to a degree) and Sometimes and Heroes has I Feel Like A Wog and Bring On The Nubiles. Was there a collective consciousness to provoke the public?

Yes, there was a bit. Yes, we wanted to be lyrically outrageous. That was one thing you could attribute a bit of planning to because when you're writing lyrics, you say, wow – that's a bit close to the knuckle and stuff like that but then you'd say, fuck it. That's what I want to say. So there was a bit of discussion about that, whereas there was much less discussion about the music.

And had it served its purpose by the following LP Black & White?

I couldn't give you one lyric off the cuff now.

In The Shadows, and 5 Minutes effectively point to a harder-edged musical direction. Was this a conscious decision to evolve, or a natural process?

By this point, we'd got through all the songs that we'd acquired from '74 to '77 and we were having to sit down and write songs for an album, which we'd never done before. And so, partly because of where we were in our evolution, within our environment, the process by which we

got songs together had slightly changed. That in itself, had some effect on how songs came out. It would be very difficult to rationalize that and describe precisely the process, except to say it's the way music evolves. Not only your ideas but your abilities and sensibilities – your environment – all play a part in how music comes together. We were in different times, it's as simple as that.

Are there any tunes you brought to ring yourself in these early years?

Yes, but it wasn't until much later on that any of mine appeared on any records.

Psyche...

You must have felt pressure to not only perform, but be the bands' chief organiser and linchpin?

No, I just did what I felt came naturally. My philosophy in the early days was everyone in the band – 'cos we've always been a very democratic band, everyone is a business equal and an artistic equal – and the philosophy has always been everyone should do and contribute what they're good at. Only occasional times when there have been lapses from that when people tried to do things they weren't actually good at, we encountered a few problems. So early on, I thought if I was the best at doing certain things, I made sure I did them, and exactly the same for everyone else but different in each case.

It might be said you and JJ are as polar opposites, not least astrologically. Would you describe it as a sometimes fraught relationship – and compared to nowadays?



Well it was tumultuous at the beginning. We were more than polar opposites for years. JJ's attitude and comparative youth, compared to me, were natural barriers. We often didn't see eye to eye on most things other than, ironically music. So there were many difficult times but finally JJ has matured and we see much more eye to eye these days.

In [the book] No Mercy JJ is described as a schizo. Was he?

Well I think he's always been a bit schizoid, yes. I don't know what that is, but it might simply be the deep influence of French culture on his psyche, and as you know, the French do and think the complete opposite to Brits, so I think

unbeknown to him he has this kind of schism in his personality when one day he's wearing a beret, and the next day he's wearing a trilby. Do you know what I mean?

Then and now...

Not long ago I interviewed Chris Gabrin which lead to him doing your Roundhouse promotional shots at Holborn Studios. How did that session compare to his '77 one – and do you find these things interesting, or just a necessary part of promotion?

No, I think all the band have always felt pretty dreadful about photo sessions, we all hate them. Loathe them is a better word. But they're a necessary evil and people want photos and we have to provide them. The only thing I can say about working with Chris old and new, is he's pretty good at his job and knows you don't want to hang around wasting the day

just pulling faces and just gets on with it, and that's appreciated. So we were pleased to see him and work with him again which is more than I can say about a lot of other photographers who seem to take forever, and you'd be standing there for so long when they decide to pull the shutter, you have to blink [laughs]. But he gets on with it and he lets you know when he's gonna pull the shutter and that really helpful. So generally speaking, none of us want to do photo sessions, but if we have to do them with Chris, I think people are quite relieved.

Was there a pivotal time when you suddenly thought: I can make a full-time professional career out of music?

Not really, huh, I suppose now I could say that! [laughter] But it's taken a long time. I mean, for many, many years we were all aware that this was a very precarious profession to get into and it still is. And you see people dropping like flies. I think the reason we're still here, in part at least, is that, contrary to popular conceptions, we've tended to make long term career decisions rather than quick fast-buck ones. And we've never been into stuff just because it makes money – but is it a good career move? Because we want it to be what we, in fact, are – a band with a career in music. And the idea of an 18 month career never appealed to me.

Could you ever imagine the band continuing for this long, and have you come close to throwing in the towel?

No, never. Not at any point. It always seemed improbable. With each new success, came equal amounts of astonishment.

Was there ever a time when you almost threw in the towel?

Not really. There have been frustrating moments, where I might have thought, is there any point? But I soon recovered from those and in fact, the greatest spurs to achieving more and better things was a degree of failure or disappointment. We seem to regroup and recover from our adversities quite well and whenever we were backed into a corner, we came out fighting. And that's quite good because a lot of other people would have just thrown in the towel.

Looking back, what do you think really changed in the world after 1977?

How long have you got? Musically, the industry got ever more greedy and ended up chewing up its own arse. It's in terrible chaos and I don't how we would go about starting now. How young bands do it now is a complete mystery to me. The industry is in complete turmoil and I think it's more important than ever to be a known band to have any chance of making a living.

You're rehearsing today. Is that for the Roundhouse gig or those next week?

We've just started rehearsals this week, although I'm not gonna tell you anything about the Roundhouse gig. But I can tell you it will be really similar to what we were doing at the time. But we've got in mind our work for the rest of the year and we're trying out some new oldies and some new newies and we're just experimenting to see what we can put in our final set list.

What are your plans for the ensuing year? To perform live still? Or just record perhaps?

Are you talking about me or the band?

You.

Me? Well I'll probably carry on until I drop. As you get older, everything about this business becomes quite tiresome except for the gigs. The gigs are always exciting and when you've done a gig, you know why you're doing it. But all the travelling, hanging around at airports and hotels, you know we could all do without. It's just no fun at all. But after you get home from a great gig, you think; God, that was worth it. And that's why you do it.

Pyros Chronos ponders a rare peach –

Go Buddy Gone

HAVE YOU NOTICED the number of Strangers' listings on Ebay described as 'rare'? The scarcity prefix ('uber-rare' too!) can lure the eyes, but the hype is not always what it seems. According to Record Collector, 'Peaches & Go Buddy Go' with the original "Blackmail" sleeve art is in the ultra-rare category. This is due in part, to it's below par artwork.

The Strangers' second single of 1977 features Chris Gabrin's earthy shot of the band with Kevin Sparrow's brilliant logo. So far, so good. The titular lettering – 'Punked-up' in blackmail demand format – is fine, on a Sex Pistols' record! UA's schoolboy marketing ploy to align with the summer's biggest popular culture phenomenon fell flat, and the men from Del Monte... sorry, The Strangers, said no to it. UA agreed, and all they had to do was cast the pressed-up copies towards the direction of the pressing plant burner. It is thought one member of staff alone stashed their very own cache of fifteen

copies, and today, it is believed there are somewhere between 20 and 25 in circulation worldwide. Such low numbers obviously means big money is exchanged, and value depends on the price anyone is prepared to pay. But if the successful EBay sale last January is anything to go by, it's worth a staggering... wait for it... £800!. A September 2007 sale saw 17 bids over 10 days where it finally went for £151.

A piece of plastic worth that amount of hard-earned cash is beyond comprehension for many of us who, first time round, settled for whatever our record shop had. In my case, it was the plain white paper sleeve. Checking my old collection of 45's reveals two in the plain, and three from the second pressing, which feature a glossy card cover and a shot of a juicy looking peach with a pair of pink undercrackers being yanked by a fruity male digit. Five copies of the same tune makes me think I wore them all out one by one, although one particular platter has the added quirk of an extra label lightly

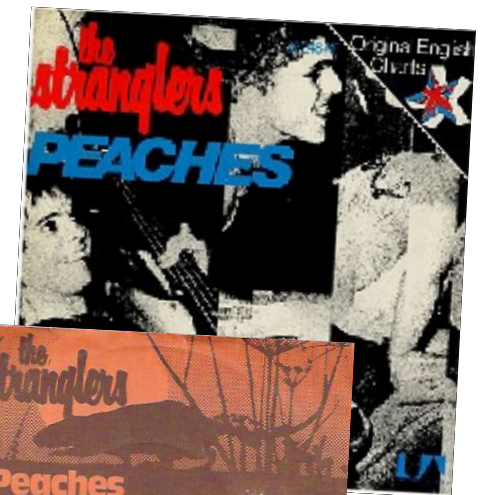
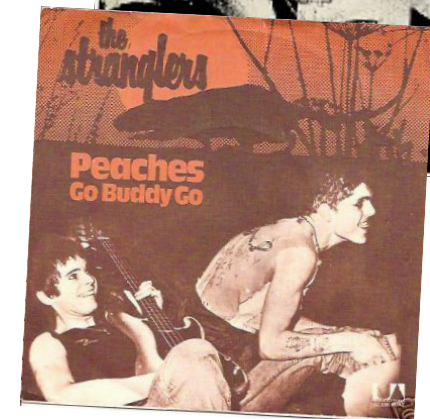
stuck over the first. Offers, anyone?

Let's not forget this track was Top 10 in '77 and while it included the word 'bummer', it also undoubtedly fanned the flames of misogynistic indictments with its gynaecological reference too. The filtered radio-play edit comes with an accompanying sticker declaring 'Catalogue number for commercial copies is UP 36248' – a snip at £500 – plain sleeve or colour. Sadly, all five of my Peaches are not for transmission, so the drinks are not on me. Other rarely spotted oddities elsewhere on the 'net include New Zealand's plain 'Festival' sleeve (K 6830) which, although it doesn't warrant much money, £80 has been known to exchange hands for its German counterpart (UA 36248AT) with its Punk-looking sleeve featuring a solitary Strangler; a chuckling JJ in onstage mayhem. Very Punk. A Dutch version went on sale late 2007 as well. Unfortunately for the seller, the 'Buy It Now' option for £125 was not taken up by shrewd Ebayers.

That's all I can say on Peaches, apart from a Paul-sung resurrection in 2004 which backed the Big Thing Coming single. Recorded two years prior, a management promo appeared at the time with a typo of the producer's surname

– Wallis instead of Wallace, in the credits. Post Norfolk Coast also saw EMI's compilation, 'Peaches, The Very Best of The Strangers', which obviously included Peaches, and just in time for Fathers' Day too. It has been said The Strangers have issued unsubtle record sleeves, whereas here, EMI show a shot of an open can of peaches which serves to define the meaning of the song on another level. And in 2007, the song lives on: dance act the Dub Pistols release their own version of Peaches with updated colloquialisms in 21st Century vernacular – but minus bummer and clitoris.

References: Internet; Record Collector (2002) No. 270; The story of the original peaches sleeve. (1994) Strangled Vol. 2 No. 14.



In the days before their recording contract, The Stranglers' promotion was minimal. With few posters or press ads for gigs, finding out about the band was purely accidental. **Garry Coward-Williams** was one who chanced upon them on a cold autumn night in 1975 supporting at the Nashville. He photographed the gig, and others, soon becoming part of the family: The band called him their 'first fan'. He introduced Dagenham Dave to the band, and was a regular in the legendary ice cream van. In 1976, he was the band's roadie in an intense 15-month period before leaving to pursue a career in photography. Garry recently watched The Stranglers at their Roundhouse 30 year anniversary concert and mused; "They always had technical problems when they played here...". **Man-theyloveto hate** met up with the fan Hugh christened:

Chiswick Charlie

When did you become interested in photography?

I became seriously interested when I was in the 5th form at school and they had an SLR camera and darkroom/enlarger set-up. I had absolutely no idea of what I could do in life. But the minute I got into photography I knew where my future lay.

Who was the first band you photographed live?

It was The Stranglers. They were supporting Vivian Stanshall formerly of the Bonzo Dog Do Dah Band sometime in Sept 1975 at The New Nashville Rooms, which was later condensed to plain The Nashville. I took the camera to get pictures of Vivian as I was a massive fan of his work. In those days the venue was like a night club with table at the front of the stage with table lamps on. The minute The Stranglers hit the stage I was totally taken with them, they had an extraordinary charisma. They were also the scruffiest group I had ever seen with the most wrecked-looking guitars and equipment. I just had to take some pictures and that

was how I met them. Hugh approached me as I was leaving the venue and asked if they could see the pictures. I said fine, if he would introduce me to Viv Stanshall – which he did. Viv was sitting backstage, which was actually a tunnel passageway leading to the stage, with Madeline Bell and Doris Troy who had sung on his last album *Men Opening Umbrellas Ahead*. Hugh gave me the phone number of the band's squat in Chiddingfold and that was the start of the relationship. From then on for the next 18 months or so they were the major thing of my life and I saw literally hundreds of performances.

What were your first impressions of the band live?

After my initial shock about the way they looked and how knackered their equipment was, I soon really liked what they were playing. They were very charismatic and they had great, very melodic original songs. They had a distinct sound – I'd never heard anything like it and they were clearly very tight and competent as musicians. There was something very challenging about the way



Live at the Nashville, 1976 © Garry Coward-Williams



Hugh at the Nashville, autumn 1975 © Garry Coward-Williams

they looked and their presence on the stage, with Jean and Hugh wearing leather jackets – they looked like benign intellectual bikers! However, they weren't threatening – there was aggressive tension, just a sort of dark brooding vibe. Jean was quite static in those early gigs and Hugh was essentially the front man. I particularly remember liking Hugh's guitar sound.

And as individuals?

Hugh stood out very much at the beginning. It appeared to be his group – he seemed to be the leader, certainly he was the main focus. Jean was more subdued at that time. It was a while before I got to know Jet and Dave

Were you close to any particular member?

Initially Hugh, then Jean and then Jet. Dave spent any spare time in Brighton, so outside of the gigs I would not see much of him. Certainly as time went on it was Jet and Jean that I spent the most time with, but I loved them all dearly. They became my family.

In the early days, the band gave nicknames to all their friends. Who gave you your nickname and why 'Chiswick Charlie'?

Hugh was the one who gave out the nicknames and I got mine because I lived in Chiswick. Dagenham Dave got his because he once worked at the Ford plant in east London. Hugh originally called the Finchley Boys – the Finchley Freds. There was my friend Duncan who became Duncan Doughnuts.

Was there a moment when you realised that the band were something special?

The second time I saw them. It was then that I was totally sold on them

You first saw the band shortly after Dave had joined. Did you notice the 'Stranglers' sound developing?

Obviously, I didn't know what they were like pre-Dave, but I did see the band develop their set from the early gigs in autumn 1975 to the beginning of 1977. They were very melodic, if not a little romantic in 1975 with songs like Strange Little Girl and I've Got Myself to Blame, but as the momentum started to kick-in with the New Wave movement their songs became harder and faster. Having said that, from my view, I loved every new song they wrote at that time, but I equally missed songs like Promises when they were dropped from the set.

As a professional gigging musician, how did Dave react to the more youthful antics of JJ and Hugh?

I remember a gig once where Dave walked off stage. Jean was singing Go Buddy Go but couldn't be bothered to sing the lyrics properly and was just pissing about. Dave stood up, shut the lid on his split Hammond and just walked off the stage. I think he was upset at this unprofessional approach to musicianship!

How did the band change with the advent of Punk?

There's a real question if Punk was a good thing for them. They were extremely melodic at the beginning. Then all the songs started speeding up, they became

aggressive and hard and they lost a lot of their melody. I do think it's a bit of a shame that some of the more melodic stuff got trampled over or dropped from the set. Goodbye Toulouse was initially slower, was then dropped from the set and when it reappeared, it had speeded right up.

As someone who was there in 1975, can you confirm if JJ wore drainpipe jeans or flares? Did you ever see Jet with bleached hair?

Hopefully Jean will forgive me for this, but he wore bell-bottomed jeans when I first saw him. I think Hugh always had straight jeans. No I never saw Jet with the bleached look.

Which other Punk bands did you photograph in that period?

Eater, because my best mate was in the group, The Vibrators, who I got to know because they regularly supported the Stranglers at the Nashville throughout 1976 and the Damned.

Do you feel that your involvement with photographing the Punk era has helped you in your career?

I didn't take as many pictures as I should have. Once I became a part of the scene, both with the Stranglers and the new wave movement generally, I was enjoying myself too much and didn't want the aggro of carrying the kit around. Big mistake, but there you go.

What was your relationship with Dagenham Dave?

He became my friend. I met Dave in the summer of 1976 when I had become a

Stranglers roadie for the princely sum of £2 per night. He came up to me when I was packing the kit away after a gig at the Golden Lion in Fulham. He thought the band were great and I suggested he talk to them. He then became obsessed with them just like me. He became their new Number One fan, which was fine. I wanted everyone to like them. Dave became a part of the family and everyone got on really well.

How did you feel about the arrival of the Finchley Boys at the Torrington gig in late '76?

That must have been one of the few gigs that I didn't go to, but the next time I saw the band they were talking about the Finchley Freds. At first I thought great, some new converts, but when I met them at the next Nashville gig it was clear that they were not interested in being friendly. In fact they were actively hostile. They appeared to have this gang mentality thing, I got the feeling they were not music fans as such. Anyway, the next time I saw them was at the 100 club gig when they had a really nasty fight with Dagenham Dave. This incident was the beginning of the end for Dave and they then became the Number One fans.

What exactly happened to spark the fight?

Lots of people including the Finchleys were pogoing and Dave tried to join in with them, which he wouldn't normally do. Suddenly, the punch-up starts with Dave versus six or more and he gave them a good run for their money, as he was a hard, hard man. I was surprised that the band carried on playing and watched the events from the stage. I feel guilty that

I just stood and watched, but there was nothing that I could do (*note: GCW was only about 16-17 at the time*). I just stood there with Brenda, Dave's girlfriend. It was awful, I can still picture it today. Dave took a real beating and had a fractured skull. It was the band's Altamont.

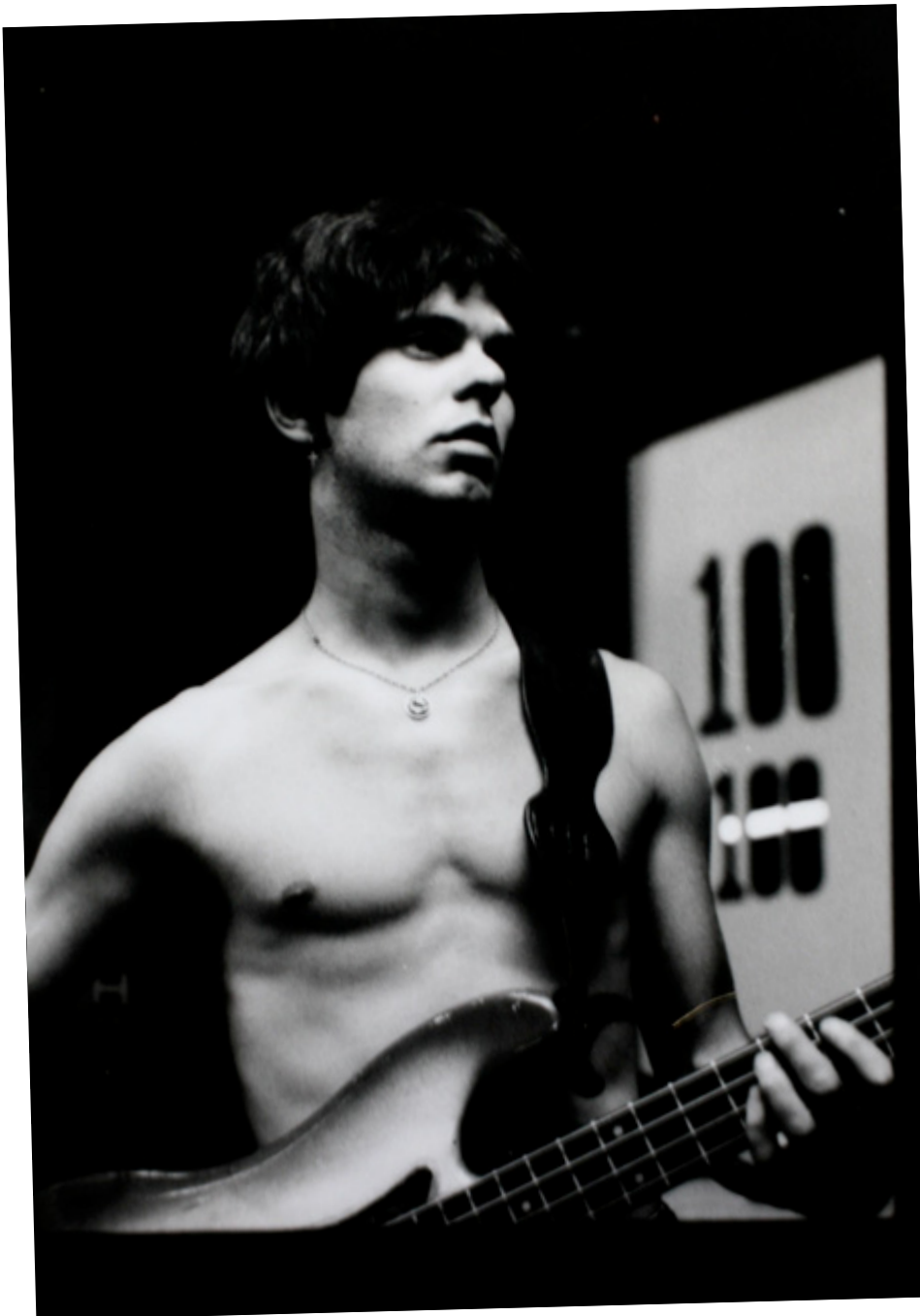
Do you think the Stranglers were actually Punk or bandwagon jumpers?

In reality everyone apart from the Sex Pistols were bandwagon jumpers. The Stranglers and everyone else around at that time were part of a new wave of gritty, down-to-earth music largely based on rock and roll. However, once the Sex Pistols and an embryonic Clash got publicity on Janet Street Porter's Sunday magazine programme and the media had a name 'Punk' then everyone had to take that



Jet with Garry at the No Mercy book launch

route, it was the only direction. Punk was really a description of New York's underground bands like the Ramones, but in Britain we took the name and created



JJ, 100 Club soundcheck, July 1976 © Garry Coward-Williams

the style of clothes. Certainly, it was then that the songs, like Grip and Toulouse, started speeding up.

Was the Stranglers vs. Pistols/Clash 'fight' at Dingwalls simply macho-posturing or a refection of building divisions in the movement?

There were definitely punches thrown in the venue which is why they both got chucked outside and me, Jet and Dagenham Dave all rushed out. Jean and Paul Simonon just squared up to each other for a bit and we looked on. The only element from the Sex Pistols was a voyeuristic Johnny Rotten, who was smashed into the side of the Sex Pistols' van by [Dagenham] Dave to make sure that he did not take part.

When did you become aware of the Pistols?

The first time we met the Pistols was in June 76 at Walthamstow Assembly Hall. Top of the bill was Ian Dury, then The Stranglers and then the Sex Pistols. It cost 50p to get in and about 16 people turned up. I remember seeing them get out of this transit van, we had heard of them and it was clear that they were the nearest thing we had to any competition. It was like a scene from West Side Story, we were sizing them up and they were sizing us up. Steve Jones came into our dressing room and had a chat and after he left Jean reckoned that he was the tough one. There was never any friendship with the Sex Pistols that I knew of.

From early interviews, it's clear that initially the Punk movement was like one big, happy family. When did it start to fragment?

I am not sure that is right, but there was a commonality of cause, in that we believed that music could be more simple. There was a general feeling of change in the air, possibly similar to what Liverpool was like in 1961/62. Some bands were very friendly like the Stranglers and the Vibrators, although the latter now claim that this relationship damaged their credibility with the press who were very pro-Clash and certainly anti-Stranglers. The Clash and the Pistols played the game of being elitist. I know that the Clash were told by their manager Bernie who they could or could not associate with and the Stranglers were in the not camp. This was particularly strange because Joe Strummer had been a friend and fan of the band as he came to see them play countless times when he was in the 101ers and I counted him as a pal. But you can see it from Bernie's point of view, I mean, Punk with a Hammond organ played by a bloke with long hair and a goatee and a 36-year-old drummer with a beard? And they wrote songs like Strange Little Girl? No, in the Clash/Sex Pistols camp we were decidedly not of the right recipe. That is, not to say that Jet's contention that the band were the original punks is wrong, but simply that their faces and music didn't really fit. Only Jean had, to some degree, the Punk look/feel/aggression. It was during this time that I do recall some tension between him and Jet. The funny thing is that the Clash went on to become a stadium rock band.

You were present at so many legendary gigs, were there any that were especially memorable?

The Stranglers, when the PA worked, which it often didn't, were very consistent

in their performances, so it was always brilliant. I did particularly like seeing them at the Red Cow and the Hope and Anchor as it was more intimate and they did two sets. Although I have very fond memories of the Roundhouse gigs with Patti Smith. I had a lovely chat with her during the sound check and then the Ramones/Flaming Groovies. There was the time we played some gig in East London and someone shouted out for Tie a Yellow Ribbon and the band went straight into it! They also used to do the David Gates song If, immortalised by Kojak, and sung by Jet, but I never heard them do that. I remember getting a private performance at Jet's house when they were rehearsing for the La Folie tour. It was just them and me in this room and they ran through the whole gig – it was fantastic just like the old days.

Are there any unreleased tracks from those days that stick in your mind?

I've Got Myself to Blame, Promises and Highway

How did you feel as the band's success grew?

It was great. I loved them and wanted everyone else to love them too. For the last year or so it was like being a disciple in a movement and when it took off and they became a household name it was just great. I always believed it would happen. I had total faith in them and I remember once telling them that one day I would be watching Go Buddy Go on Top of the Pops. They laughed, but it did happen, so it was fantastic like a dream coming true. Of course, the downside was that I could never be as close to them as I was in the early days. You could never go back to

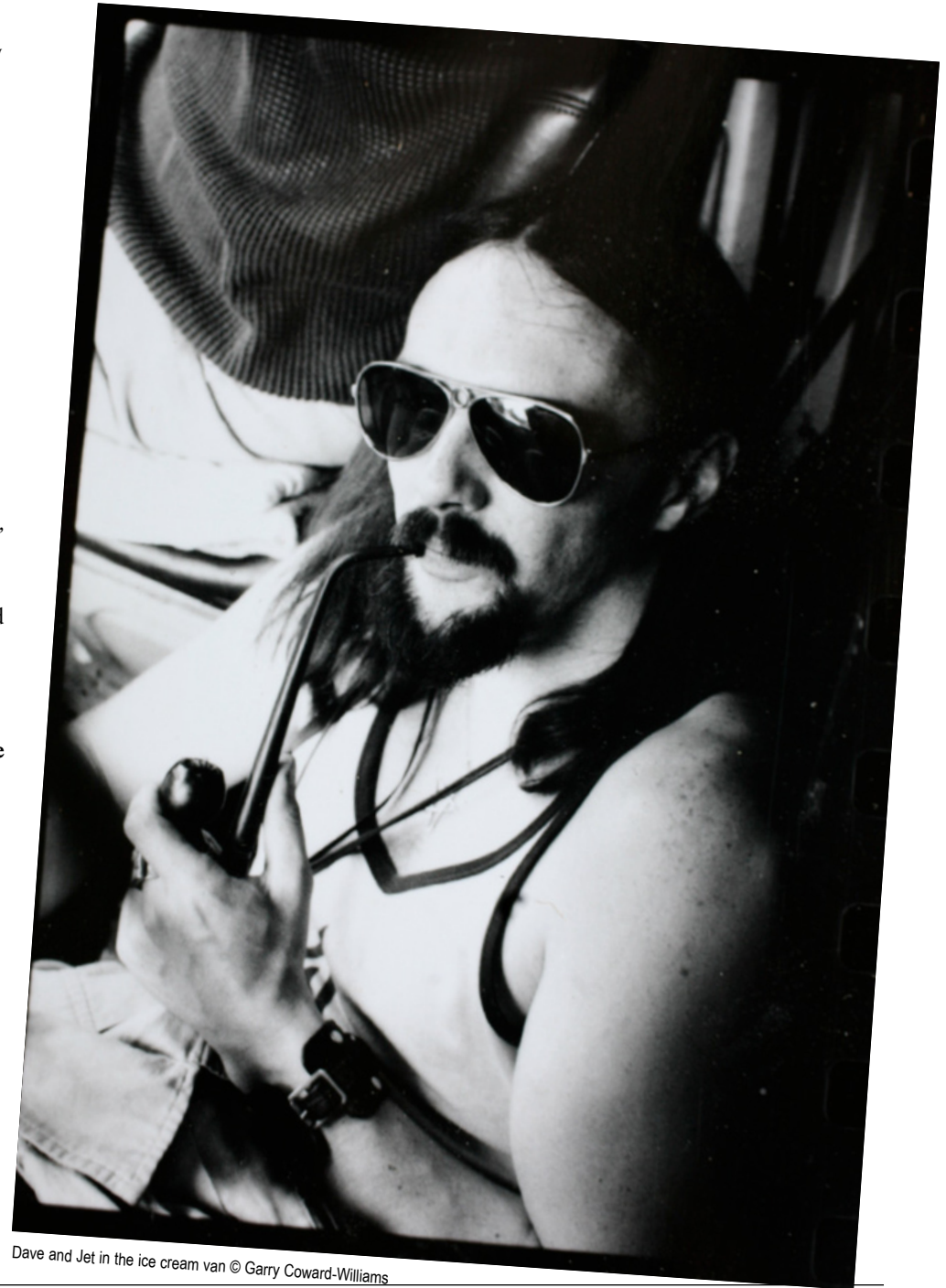
that point when it was just us and nobody knew who they were.

Any memorable characters from those early days?

The original roadie Dick Douglas, the main manager Dai Davies, Joe Strummer, prior to the Clash, when he was allowed to be a friend of ours. Chrissie Hyndelleg as Hugh called her. There was some character called Martin who used to get up on stage and make himself sick. A character called Carey Fortune who took over my role as roadie and later ended up being the drummer of Gene October's Chelsea under the name of Boy Carey. Bob Gibbs, who went to my school, but ended up being the Stranglers' sound engineer with me as his sidekick. Somehow he managed to really get on people's nerves and in the end they got rid of him which left me as the sole member of the road crew.

There's a photo in 'No Mercy' that you took of Hugh recording Grip at Riverside studios in London in '76. Were you present at any other recording sessions?

Yes, I was there for the recording of the slow version of Grip and Peasant in the Big Shitty. I was also present at one of the sessions for Black and White. I had run into Jet one night at Dingwalls and he invited me along to TW Studios in Fulham the next day. I saw them do backing vocals for Death and Night and Blood. Also I saw the Swedish language vocals being done for Sweden, Hugh wrote them out phonetically and remember Jean laughing at some of the words. I also heard the vocals for the original version of Threatened in which Jean, fresh from seeing Star Wars says



Dave and Jet in the ice cream van © Garry Coward-Williams

The Stranglers 1975 set list
(not in order)

Goodbye Toulouse
Strange Little Girl
Peaches
Promises
Jeanie, Jeanie, Jeanie
Tomorrow Was The Hereafter
Money
Princess Of The Streets
Go Buddy Go
Walk On By
Mean To Me
Fun, Fun, Fun
I've Got Myself To Blame
Choosey Suzie
I Saw Her Standing There

"Help me Obi-Wan Kenobi, may the Force be with you" rather than "Bring me a Piece of My Mummy"!

In those early days, did you envisage the band's longevity or success?

Yes, absolutely

On occasion, you helped on the mixing desk. Did you ever consider doing it full time?

No, because I didn't have a clue what I was doing!

Why did you drift away from the band on the brink of them hitting the big time signing to UA?

I didn't actually drift away, I decided to stop working for the group so I could pursue a career in photography. I realised that when you work for a band, you become a part of their life. In effect, your life revolves around theirs and whilst I was probably quite good at aspects of my job, particularly when I worked the lights at the Nashville, it was never going to be a full-time career for me. I always thought that it was a wise decision, although I clearly missed out on a lot of fun when they became really big, but it would never have been the same as it was in the summer of 1976, when we were all packed into Jet's ice cream van. I loved that time and I loved them, but my time and my moment had come to a close. It stopped when it was still good and it also meant that I never fell out with them.

What are your overriding memories of that period of your life?

They were the happiest days of my life. I feel genuinely blessed to have known the band at that time both as a close friend and, most importantly, their first real fan. Jet told me once that I was the first person who believed in them that they didn't already know. I was the first one from outside to say 'you're great' and go to all the gigs. I think I got the best treatment any fan could get from a band. They used to pick me up from Turnham Green tube station in the Ice Cream van and take me to the gigs, and then after the show they would drive me home! No wonder I thought they were great! Of course there is also the music, and I loved the songs and the way they performed them. I just loved

everything about them.

Do you still see the band now? Have they changed at all?

I have seen them from time to time since I left in late 1976. They have always given me tickets or got me backstage passes if I ask for them. I did some work for Strangled magazine in the eighties, notably interviewing my old friend from the Vibrators, John Ellis, who went on to join the group. It was odd John joining, because I always thought he would be good in the band and I knew he was a big fan of the group even in 1976. Of course Hugh leaving was a massive

The Stranglers 1976

(By 1976, there were some new songs added, roughly in this order)

School Mam

Bitching

Down In The Sewer - first section

Down In The Sewer - end section added

Get A Grip On Yourself

Peasant In The Big Shitty Highway

Sometimes

Hanging Around

Something Better Change

Ugly

Straighten Out

London Lady

blow and whilst Paul Roberts was great and a very nice chap – he came from Chiswick too – I have always felt that the band have never been right without Hugh. Equally, I think Hugh has never been right without the rest of the group, but I guess I would think that wouldn't I? They always seemed so close to me and they had been through so much. I remember going to see them rehearse at Jet's house just after La Folie came out and before the release of Golden Brown. We got together to go through my old pictures for an article in Strangled about the old days and on the way to the pub I made a remark about Hugh's quirky guitar style, which would have been quite normal in '76. The response was deathly silence. They had become so bonded through their experiences that they were a completely tight unit.

In terms of relationships, Dave hasn't changed at all and is still as friendly as ever. In fact the last time I saw him he invited me to spend a weekend at his place in Cambridge. Jet hasn't changed either and Jean always says hello, it's always great to see them. I haven't seen Hugh since the split and I would love to put that right.

And finally; what happened to that first set of shots from the Nashville?

It breaks my heart but I don't have them. They weren't very good shots. That's how I came to photograph the band again. I rang Hugh, explained that the pictures were not as good as they should be and we agreed that I would shoot them again at their next gig. Again that was at the Nashville a few weeks later, so the pictures were just the same. The portrait of Hugh was taken on that second session in the backstage corridor. That was really the start of my involvement with them.

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN a triumphant year for The Stranglers, but for bootlegs, 1977 was a lean one.

It's not too surprising if you take into account the band only released Grip in the February and the fan base took a while to build up. Rattus and Peaches broke the band, and by the summer The Stranglers were on everyone's lips. So, unofficial recordings are lacking, with a strike rate of just 11%*. But it has to be said, there are a couple of real gems to compensate. The set list around this time was (obviously) made up almost entirely of Rattus and Heroes, their best material, but predictable. Considering the number of gigs they performed, it's understandable the band grew tired quickly of playing them by 1979. Here's a brief run-down of the 'readily' available material in circulation.

* Strike Rate

The number of bootlegs available as a percentage of the total number of gigs played in any given period. In 1977, it's difficult to be accurate, but the band played 140 catalogued gigs and probably a fair few more that have gone unrecorded! With just 16 boots available, 1977 has a very poor boot strike rate of just over 11%. The Meninblack period, by contrast, has a strike rate of 28%.



The taped crusaders!

Ice Cube takes a look at the bootlegs from 1977

Queen Margaret University Glasgow, 12.02.77

On listening to this again I was pleasantly surprised at the reasonable quality of this audience recording. Mind you, I recently transferred it from a 'hissy' tape and this has probably helped. Some funny stuff from Hugh to the audience; remarking that he doesn't understand the dialect! Hanging Around is cut on my copy which is a bit annoying.

11 tracks. Rating: worthwhile, but only just.

Falkirk, ?13.02.77

Again, sounds better for having been lifted off an old tape but that ain't saying much! One for the sad completist really with pretty ropey sound throughout.

The sound quality drops sharply after the second track (London Lady) and the rest of the gig sounds completely different, which makes me doubt the authenticity of the recording.

6 tracks. Rating: average/worthless.

Rock Garden Middlesbrough, 24.02.77

An absolute gem which has only very recently surfaced. People who record and make this sort of stuff available (for free!) should be knighted for services to popular music culture, but hey I'm straying off the topic...this is just brilliant. Great sound for such an early audience recording. Grip (the single) had been released only a few days earlier. Super interaction with a crowd that sound completely indifferent! Even Jet engages with his adoring public



along the lines of 'Shut up, cunt!' A broken string, a power cut, classic banter, it has it all! Great version of Bitching too.
12 tracks. Rating: essential!

The Roundhouse, 16 or 17.04.77

Good audience recording of considerable interest and merit. A lively set – Rattus was released two days later – and No More Heroes is introduced as “a new number... whatever happened to the heroes”. Also includes a reference to the recent suicide of Dagenham Dave.

13 tracks. Rating: recommended!

Radio One In Concert, Paris Theatre, 23.04.77 or ?05.77

Very neat recording of great quality. I recently downloaded a far superior version and put my rosey old copy on cassette in the bin. The date is a bit of a puzzle, I'm not really sure when this was recorded and then broadcast. There is a poignant dedication to Dagenham Dave which would suggest that 23/4/77 may not be too far off the mark. Marvellous version of Sometimes which is barked out very confidently by Hugh.

6 tracks. Rating: recommended!

Capital Radio Session, April 77

A 'Your Mother Wouldn't Like It' session at London's Capital Radio 194. This session (unlike the two BBC John Peel sessions) has never been released and perhaps has not even been heard by a great number of fans. Recorded around the release of Rattus, it contains great live in the studio versions of Hanging Around, Goodbye Toulouse, I Feel Like A Wog, No More Heroes and Dagenham Dave. My copy plays a wee bit fast and despite the dodgy sound quality this session is recommended.

5 tracks. Rating: recommended!

The Rattus Tour starts on 11th May 1977 at Twickenham Winning Post. This tour takes in a huge number of gigs (about 37) and reaches a climax at the Roundhouse on 26th June with two sets. Sadly there is only one (very poor) recording in circulation from this legendary tour. Come on JJ or Jet the time is right to release something appropriate from the secret bunker!

Electric Circus Manchester, 05.06.77

Crap audience recording. We get a loud 'fucking hell' straight into the mic after the opening track of Grip. Poor quality sound throughout which is a crying shame. Otherwise this sounds like a very lively gig. Dagenham Dave gets yet another name check in his hometown. Last track, Something Better. Change cuts off very early.

**14 tracks (but possibly not the full set?).
Rating: average.**

The Roundhouse April 1977
Dagenham Dave
School Mam
Peasant In The Big Shitty
Straighten Out
No More Heroes
Peaches
I Feel Like A Wog
Hanging Around
Ugly
London Lady
Down In The Sewer
Grip
Something Better Change

Rock Garden Middlesbrough
24.02.77
Grip
Sometimes
Bitching
School Mam
Peasant In The Big Shitty
Straighten Out
Hanging Around
Ugly
London Lady
Down In The Sewer
Something Better Change
Go Buddy Go

Stockholm August, 1977

Another crap audience recording. Really only remarkable for the first bootleg appearances of Bring On The Nubiles, Dead Ringer and 5 Minutes. Peaches gets a huge roar from the crowd which is rather suprising for a European audience. Otherwise a great set list, just a shame

BBC Radio One In Concert,
Paris Theatre, May 1977
Sometimes
Dagenham Dave
Peaches
I Feel Like A Wog
Straighten Out
London Lady

Electric Circus, Manchester
05.06.77
Grip
Sometimes
I Feel Like A Wog
Dagenham Dave
School Mam
Peasant In The Big Shitty
Peaches
No More Heroes
Hanging Around
Straighten Out
London Lady
Down In The Sewer
Ugly
Something Better Change

Canterbury Odeon 25.09.77
Ugly
Straighten Out
Bring On The Nubiles
Sometimes
Dagenham Dave
Dead Ringer
Hanging Around
Something Better Change
Bitching
I Feel Like a Wog
Five Minutes
Burning Up Time

Liverpool University
14.10.77
Soundcheck: English Towns
Bring On The Nubiles & No
More Heroes.

No More Heroes
Ugly
Bring On The Nubiles
Sometimes
Dagenham Dave
Dead Ringer
Hanging Around
Five Minutes
Something Better Change
I Feel Like a Wog
Straighten Out
Burning Up Time
London Lady
Grip
Down In The Sewer

about the poor sound quality.

16 tracks. Rating: average.

Paradiso Amsterdam,

02.09.77

Great audience recording with decent sound quality. Hugh messes up the lyrics on Heroes and London Lady is stopped and restarted. It sounded to be a pretty lively gig with chants of "we want more".

16 tracks. Rating: recommended!

No More Heroes LP is released on 16th September and the tour kicks off on the 23rd at Cambridge Corn Exchange and extends through October and November. The Paradiso gig on 27th November forms the last 'documented' gig of 1977. Thankfully, this tour throws

up far more boots, including some very interesting specimens.

The Odeon Canterbury,

25.09.77

Excellent quality – one of the best audience recordings of 1977. A clear mix with no distortion which sounds even better on CD, rather than an old C90!

Great version of Something Better Change and Bitching with JJ in great voice. Hugh tells the audience that they don't need seats but later this is followed up with a request to stop spitting! 5 Minutes is introduced as a "new number" and JJ gets a bit lost with his vocals.

12 tracks. Rating: recommended!

Liverpool University,

14.10.77

Another excellent audience recording which contains a few interesting extras. Here we get 3 tracks from the pre-gig soundcheck; English Towns, Nubiles and Heroes! The recording is cut off in

Stockholm August 1977
Grip
Ugly
Straighten Out
Bring On The Nubiles
Peaches
I Feel Like a Wog
Dagenham Dave
Hanging Around
Dead Ringer
Sometimes
No More Heroes
Something Better Change
Burning Up Time
London Lady
Down In The Sewer
Five Minutes

places but it remains fascinating. English Towns was apparently never played live by the original line up – and when it breaks down, we also get a few moments of 'jamming' – with an excerpt from In The Shadows! The gig itself sounds very lively, with Jet speaking to the audience. Sometimes is stopped by the spitting and JJ gets a little lost during 5 Minutes. Great stuff.

15 (+3) tracks. Rating: recommended!

Sheffield Top Rank,

19.10.77

Audience recording. Coming just a few days after Liverpool University, this is another belter. Raw and lots of energy here. Great version of Nubiles and Hugh moans again about the spitting. A typical set for the tour being very similar to Canterbury and Liverpool. JJ is still coming to terms with 5 Minutes lyrics and Hugh barks out the intro to Straighten Out in the manner of a Regimental Sergeant Major! After a blistering London Lady, the band exit the stage and we

Top of the boots

- Rock Garden, Middlesbrough
- Radio One, Paris Theatre
- Canterbury Odeon
- Liverpool University, or
- Sheffield Top Rank
- Roundhouse 5th or 6th Nov.
- Hope & Anchor

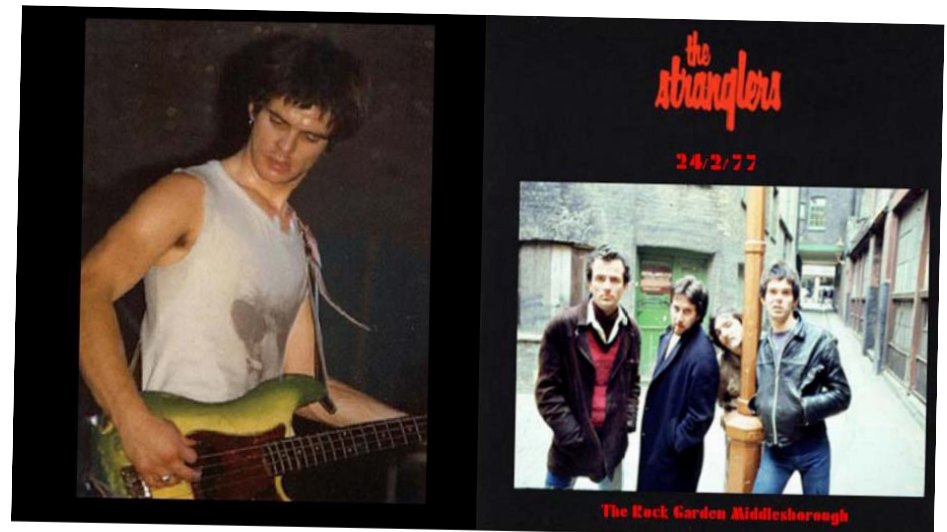
get the first ever chant of 'Stranglers, Stranglers, Stranglers' to be captured on a boot: how cool is that? The band return for Peaches and Grip.

15 tracks. Rating: recommended!

The Pier Hastings,

29.10.77

A much rougher audience recording but worthwhile and with some interesting moments. The crowd sound rather



Paradiso Amsterdam 27.11.77
 No More Heroes
 Ugly
 Bring On The Nubiles
 Sometimes
 Dead Ringer
 Dagenham Dave
 Hanging Around
 Five Minutes
 Burning Up Time
 I Feel Like a Wog
 Straighten Out
 Something Better Change
 London Lady
 Peaches
 Grip

subdued and a storming version of Dead Ringer is greeted with a ripple of polite applause. JJ seems to be coming to terms with 5 Minutes – but there are still some Burnel ad libs at the end. The quality of this recording deteriorates and Down In The Sewer is cut in several places.

11 tracks. Rating: worthwhile.

The Roundhouse,

05 or 06.11.77

The band perform five consecutive nights at The Roundhouse (2nd to 6th November) and the bootleg releases London Ladies and Rattus Britanicus cover parts of these shows – with from the 5th few finding their way on the official Live (X Cert). This boot is a gem straight from the mixing desk and super quality reigns pretty much throughout. Probably the full set, although whether this is from the 5th or 6th November remains very unclear. Great opening with Heroes followed by a powerful Ugly. Contains Hugh's classic line 'did someone say

wanker?' before Dead Ringer. We also get an early version of In The Shadows. They should have released a full gig from one of these nights at The Roundhouse rather than the cobbled together X Cert. Never too late, eh?

18 tracks. Rating: essential!

Hope and Anchor,

22.11.77

Considered by many to be the ultimate Stranglers gig, this was for many years a 'bootleg' before it was sensibly released by EMI in 1992. The set contains just about everything (and more!) from the first two albums. It's now very rare (deleted, even?) and consequently goes for silly money such as £20+ on eBay. Record moguls take note: there's a market for this stuff, so how about a few more releases from the vaults? Top marks EMI for the artwork.

19 tracks. Rating: Essential

The Paradiso Amsterdam,

27.11.77

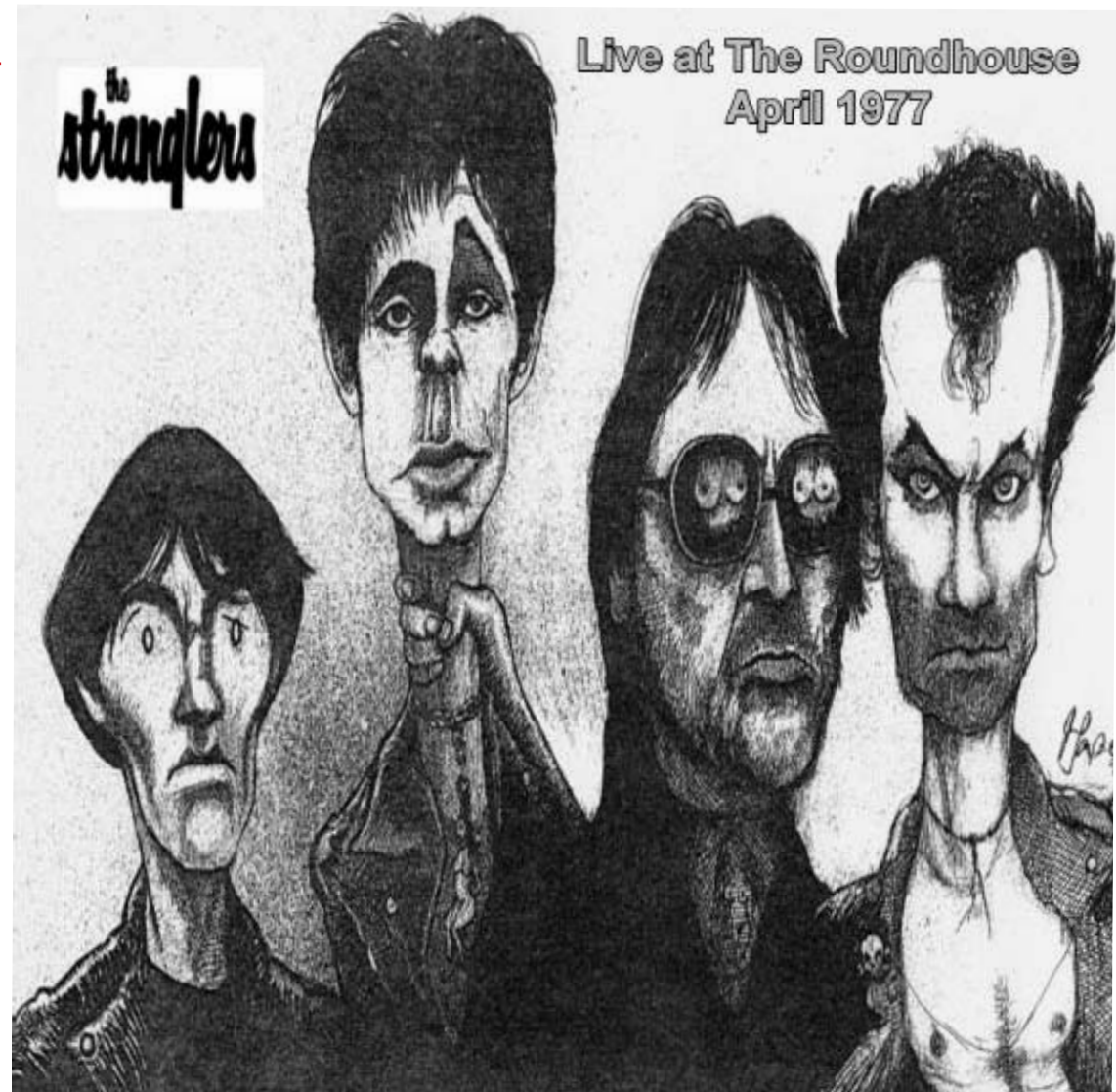
The final offering of the year: an audience recording and very good quality it is. After a dodgy start, the sound improves quickly with a blistering version of Heroes as the opener. Hugh informs the audience they are making history as they are all on Candid Camera, and the band rattle through the set at tremendous pace and on top form. Excellent and clear,

(the keyboards on Nubiles almost drowns Hugh out at one point) and JJ goes for it on 5 Minutes, with a few new lines at the end. Great stuff from start to finish.

15 tracks. Rating: recommended!



Ice Cube would like to say a big thanks to Mad Hatter & Rodney Blackstaff for their help and words of wisdom.



Barry Cain, former rock journo and '77 Sulphate Strip author was there at Punk's conception. He revelled in the excess, drugs and rock 'n' roll. Today he is in a confessional mood. Gary Kent meets him in a north London church.

Cained and able

BARRY CAIN made his name as a Record Mirror staffer in the late 1970s where he rubbed shoulders with, and reported on, a wealth of Punk glitterati. While maintaining a respectful distance from fellow scribes of the day – media names that today roll off the tongue – it was Barry who quietly got closest to the core players of Punk... including The Stranglers.

He first caught them live at Dingwalls in 1976 during Punk's nascence and cites them as central to the movement – something some of the self-conscious so-called Punk expert music consultants cunningly, and wilfully, forget. He got to know the band well, Hugh in particular, and The Stranglers invited him on tour to places such as Amsterdam, Paris, Reykjavik, Kyoto and Rome. He even became their PR for a while.

Married with three children, and living in a cosy north London abode, he has recently published a book – '77 Sulphate Strip – where he revisits the main Punk players of the zeitgeist. It's a gripping account of excess, drugs and rock 'n' roll: highly recommended reading.

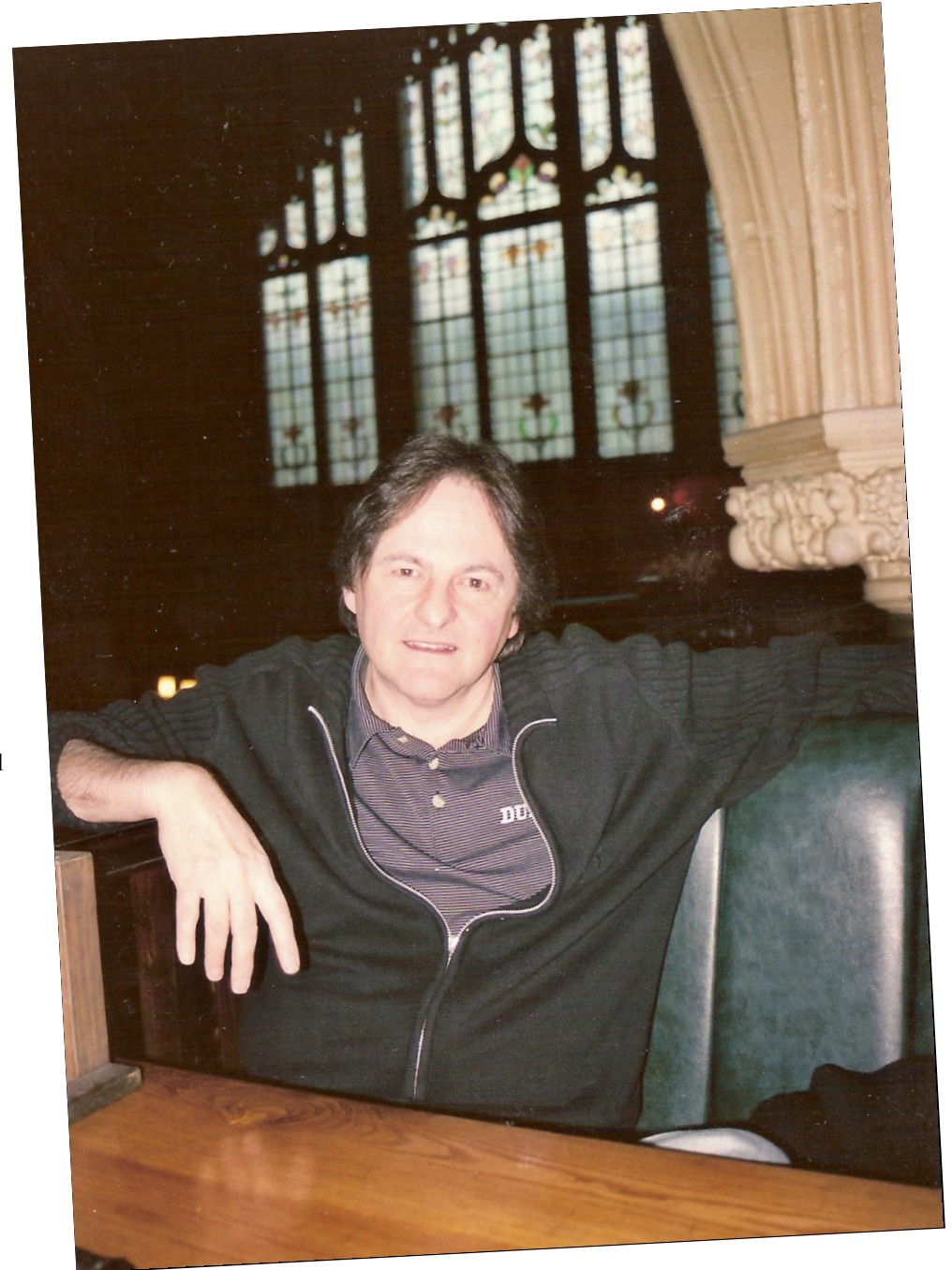
The Burning Up Times had to meet him. Several emails later, a date is set. I recall Barry's name cropping a year back in the Hugh Cornwell interview I did in a Notting Hill café; it was just before Hugh tucked into his lasagne that I passed some Stranglers photographs

dating from 1980; Hugh noticed slim, hirsute Barry alongside him ordering ice creams in one of them. There he was again, pictured in a sound check hiatus, days after the band were released from prison in Nice. Interestingly, he also pops up at Pentonville to meet a liberated Hugh with Jet and Hazel O'Connor, so it's not surprising Barry got the job of transcribing Hugh's prison account in Inside Information.

Armed with my trusty recorder and camera, I get to Muswell Hill Broadway on a cold and damp autumnal Monday. I'm late, courtesy of some atrocious North Circular traffic, curtailing plans to purchase the author's brand new book. All is not lost because my copy comes later.

I reach the rendezvous: it's an ex-church, now baptised O'Neill's. I step inside, aiming towards an oak-topped bar in place of the erstwhile altar: it hasn't altered much... I search for Barry: that's him in the black duffle coat, on the mobile, wondering where I'd got to.

He's taller than the pictures, and younger than his years. The beard's gone. He's friendlier than I imagine – certainly not your hard-nosed, hard-drinking rock hack of yesteryear. We shake hands, swap parking and traffic congestion small talk, and take our holy communion upwards and park ourselves in the darkened pews overlooking the beery lunchtime congregation. Hallelujah!



Barry Cain, Muswell Hill, 2007



In your book, you name The Stranglers in your Famous Five Punk bands alongside the Sex Pistols, Clash, Jam and The Damned.

Were The Stranglers really Punk? And why is it, three decades on, the Punk literati consistently sideline them in their Punk recollections?

Those five bands were all totally different musically. The Stranglers were part of the core movement at that time and were far and away the best musicians. Their musicianship was just fantastic. Live, they were sensational. The structure of their songs, the way they performed them, the way they moved. Plus, they were older than the others – especially Jet... How old is he now?

Sixty-nine.

Wow! And he's still going strong. The Strangers were as important to the movement as The Clash and the Pistols because they were just as responsible for, and at the forefront of, the whole new order. Simply by the way they were, particularly with journalists – which I thought was great! After all, there were a lot of arseholes amongst journalists then, there really were.

Do you want to name names?

No, I don't like to, really. It wouldn't be fair because maybe they've since turned into nice people. I guess it's inverted snobbery on my part. I came from a different background than ninety percent of the other music journalists. I was a working class guy born and bred in the

Angel, Islington, and they were middle class who'd never felt the touch of a three-piece mohair suit on their flesh.

And The Stranglers baited these middle class rock writers.

I don't think class had anything to do with it. I mean, The Stranglers were a bit more middle class than a lot of the bands, weren't they? Graduates, backgrounds with solid structures. The Pistols were definitely the most working class guys of all the bands. The Clash – apart from Strummer – were working class. The Damned? You never really knew. They came from Croydon way and that whole area is a mystery to me. Hugh went to William Ellis school on Parliament Hill Fields and grew up in Kentish Town which wasn't as salubrious in those days. But you get the impression his was a fairly comfortable upbringing. The Jam were working class made good from Woking.

The Strangers music was so different, so in tune to that era, that I can't understand how people would dismiss them. They were an integral part of Punk, and by Punk I mean not just the music, I mean the feel, the attitude. They were as responsible for that as anybody else, despite John Lydon's protestations that they were bandwagoneers. Maybe they were at the outset, but it wasn't long before they were sharing the reins. I mean, what about that 'Fuck' T-shirt Hugh wore at the Rainbow in the very early days? That got so much publicity and helped Punk evolve.

The Strangers were classed as a Punk band then so why shouldn't they be classed as a Punk band now? Punk wasn't just spiky hair, ripped tee shirts and sulphate. It was a moment – one of the most magical moments in pop history.

For me It was a moment made up of the Famous Five bands (six when Johnny and his Heartbreakers got it right), a moment forged on the streets of London, my city, my manor. I guess those bands meant more to me than anything. I was never really a big Who or Stones fan. They were London but they were showbiz. This was something different, more real. And The Stranglers were an integral part, taking the flak for a lot of others. I mean, Hugh went inside. I don't recall any of the other bands doing time.

Yeah and The Clash got fined for shooting pigeons...

Yeah – but what members of the Punk club went inside?

Only Sid Vicious when he was up for murder...

Shit, Sid. He was on remand though so it doesn't count... Hugh was banged up for heroin, and they made an example of him because of the whole Punk thing.

On that subject, Hugh told us in last year's BUT interview he hadn't taken heroin when he was found in possession of it. Is that true?

Maybe. When I wrote Inside Information with Hugh he said he dabbled in smack but certainly wasn't addicted. He didn't use needles but snorted it. It wasn't as if he was dealing or having loads of it on him at the time. He wasn't a junkie, he was a pop star. It was a total miscarriage of justice when they banged him up. Of course now I've seen him [Barry interviewed Hugh in January for his book] he's really changed his act, hasn't he? He hasn't touched drugs for donkeys years.

Do reformed drinkers and drug users become less exciting, in your eyes?

Only because I've become less exciting in my eyes. Hugh's all right, y'know. He's a charming man, a lovely guy. I always had a lot of time for Hugh. He freely admits to the whole drug thing at the time and he's quite open about it. But we are talking thirty years ago. We've all got skeletons dangling on hangers alongside our suits. When I interviewed him for RM a lot of it was about drugs. Hugh laughs now when he reads it, and he doesn't care about admitting it.

Well, he'll live longer, longer than Joe Strummer.

Hugh told me when he stopped. He smoked some skunk about fifteen years ago in America. He'd never tried it before and he hated the experience and he's never dabbled in any form of drug again.

I last saw Hugh live at The Scala. Did you see that?

November 2006, yes.

He was great. I was surprised. I'd been a bit wary. He had a lot to live up to in my mind – I'd never seen a bad Strangers gig. I'd seen a bad one by The Clash and several from The Damned, but never The Strangers or The Jam or The Pistols. The bad Clash gig was also their biggest up until then – the Mont de Marsan festival in August 1977 alongside The Feelgoods, The Damned, The Jam and The Boys. I'll always remember The Clash coming onstage and pausing for about a minute, just staring at the crowd, psyching them out. It was really cool, but then they went into one of the worst gigs they ever played. I told them the next day and they agreed.

'77 Sulphate Strip by
Barry Cain.

"57 varieties of talk
soup." - John Rotten.

"Cain was there from
the start when only
six people were in the
audience." - Rat Scabies.

"A gripping account
of excess, drugs and
rock 'n' roll: highly
recommended." - The
Burning Up Times.

They appreciated my candour. I didn't give a fuck what I said to them at that moment because I hadn't slept for two days as a result of taking inordinate amounts of French speed cut with bleach.

You got on well with them?

Yeah. In an arms length kinda way I got on with all the bands. I don't know why. Maybe it was a London thing. I met The Clash at Rehearsal Rehearsals in Camden Lock about March '77 for an interview. I'd already reviewed a gig of theirs at a Pakistani cinema in Harlesden and met Joe one night when we were both trying to blag our way into a Ray Davies aftershow party. He heard me say my name to the doorman and said 'You're the guy who wrote that review.' I thought, shit, I bet he fucking hated it. 'I really liked it.' After that I always thought of him as one of the good guys, with a discerning nose for great writing! But when I went to interview the band in Camden Lock the four of them had a gun – probably an air gun – and they

were passing it around.

Do you think they were trying to out-vibe you?

I think so. Kind of a tricky intimidation. I thought fuck but I never showed fuck and I think they kinda respected that. Then I really got on well with them. A year later, I was standing in a bar and Joe came across. I'll never forget it. He said he thought I was the most unique writer in the music press. I had great respect for Joe. How couldn't I after that?

That first interview with Hugh. How did that come about?

It was through Alan Edwards who was doing their PR. I got very friendly with Alan. Before I joined Record Mirror, I was the Entertainments Editor of the Southeast London Mercury in Deptford and I was always speaking to Alan on the phone. It turned out we shared the same interests in music, football, humour and most other things. At the time, he was handling Alvin Lee, who was a hero of mine. This was during the long, hot summer of '76 and he asked me to come down to Pinewood studios to interview Alvin. It was a dream come true. Alan was always a bit of a dream-maker for me. Alan and I really gelled and thanks to him I saw some strange, crazy places. Alan and Keith [Altham, Alan's former publicist boss] then helped me get the job on RM. There was an editorial vacancy and they said I should apply for it and put in a word for me. It was Alan who put my name on the guest list for my first Stranglers gig at Dingwalls in '76 and that's where I met Hugh. He was more or less the spokesman for the band at the time, the one doing most of the interviews. It was later when

JJ got involved in doing the interviews as well.

RM carried its first Punk interview – me talking to Hugh – a few weeks after the Anarchy In The UK debacle. I remember when the plugs were pulled on that tour. Alan and I were in Zurich covering John Miles when we heard the news. It was a strange sensation because it was like the world as we knew it was coming to an end. I mean, John Miles, this 'old fart' who was a great musician and his ilk who had dominated the airwaves for a decade were on the way out and this new order of dubious musicianship and dodgy sneers was coming in.

I'd been on RM six weeks when Alan organised a night on the town with Hugh, as you do. So Hugh picked me up in a Ford Granada, which I think was laid on by the record company and had a chauffeur, at my flat in Islington where I lived with my mum and dad. So I'm getting in this car with Hugh, and there's my mum and dad looking out the window, waving.

"Is that your mum and dad?" Hugh asks.

"Yeah." I say, almost apologetically

And Hugh says: "Cool." I loved him for that one word.

You still lived with your parents?

Well, my mum and dad lived in the middle of London, so why would I want to live anywhere else? Washing done, bed made, egg and bacon sarnies in bed at the weekend. It was like a hotel with love. And in those days you didn't think about getting a pull while driving, so I'd get in my car and head down to the Marquee, The Nashville, The Greyhound and end up shitfaced. Always finished the night in

the Speakeasy. That's where everyone used to hang out. London was one big party nearly every night of the week. You'd get on the guest lists, you'd see gigs, you'd go to record company receptions when they were awash with money. It was a magical time to be a music writer. You didn't need any money in your pocket to get pissed, eat like a king and see the best bands in town. Music writers were the ultimate liggers.

And there were lots of drugs too?

Oh yeah. Of course, that's why I called the book '77 Sulphate Strip'. Punk was all about speed. Speed would keep you awake so you could party all night. But when coke came into the mix, things changed. It was the



death knell for Punk. Speed was cheap but a gram of coke cost a small fortune. After Mont de Marsan, the bands were no longer part of the movement anymore, they were bands in their own right, boyz to men. Their music diversified even more. They all paddled in the Punk sea before drying in between their toes and shuffling off into their own sunsets. That's why '77 was the year. After that it was all over, ashes to ashes, sulphate to coke. I remember seeing two roadies deliver this huge bedroom mirror with four lines of coke that stretched the length of the glass to Dr. Feelgood's dressing room at Mont de Marsan and that's when I thought this is not what it's all about anymore. Then a gram of coke cost more than it does today. Thirty years ago it was £60 – that was a week's wages. It's about £40-50 a gram now, apparently, so they tell me. Punk was all about having a quick line of speed and going out and jumping up and down and having a shitload of beers and, crucially, having a laugh. Punk was about having a fucking good time, having a great night out. No one should tell you any different. You know those books about Punk, like England's Dreaming [by Jon Savage] are all very well-presented documents analysing the pertinence of Punk in turbulent times, but that wasn't what Punk was to me. Okay, it had some political overtones, but most of the fans didn't give a toss about that. They wanted the excitement and the sulphate guitar and the passion. Punk helped you forget everything which is exactly what music should do. It was something to behold. When coke came in the passion went out. Coke and passion could never get it on together as a couple.

Did you personally ever progress from coke? Heroin, for example?

Never touched smack. Not for the want of trying. If it had been there – if I'd been with say Hugh one night and it was available then I would've definitely tried it. I was always game for anything back then when my liver was smaller and my kidneys actually fucking worked. I was from the acid generation after all.

Does acid really alter your mind?

Changed me completely. All of a sudden you're introduced to this whole new world you didn't know existed – a parallel universe with knobs on – and you realise that there's so much more to life than marriage, kids, mortgages, Arsenal, God. I'm glad I took acid and I'd recommend it to anybody. I guess that's why people like me don't run the country.

So Hugh picked you up in the Granada. What happened next?

I got in the back with Hugh and was promptly handed a big, fat joint. When we finished that the driver produced some speed. We went to the Nashville that night and Dingwalls and the Speakeasy too and I wrote it up for RM who had never carried anything like that before. You see, it was a real pop magazine with David Soul and Abba on the cover and the writers were made up of a Scottish girls from the D.C. Thomson Jackie school of journalism like Roz Russell and Sheila Prophet and the readers were Bay City Rollers and Queen fans. Hugh talking about drugs and hedonism was totally subversive for a magazine like RM and that's what made it so great. Hugh was very good at coming out with the right quotes at the right time. Hugh was the guy I got to know first in the band. The others were very polite and JJ was a bit of a figure – you couldn't



help but be a little wary of him what with the tales of violence involving journalists. It was only towards the end of '77, '78 that I got to know him and I really liked him. There was a kind of mutual respect and I had a lot of time for him.

The Stranglers did a gig in France around April '77 about 100km outside Paris and the idea was to go hitch-hiking with Hugh to their next gig. In Paris. The gig itself was a disaster, there were only about a dozen people that turned up so they cancelled it. We all went back to the hotel, and I remember having my first real conversation with JJ which began after he came out of the toilet in the hotel room. He told me how embarrassed he'd get if there were people in the next room when he was having a slash so he always pissed on the side of the bowl because he didn't want anyone to hear the sound of water on

water. And I was exactly the same...

Like in the King & I – Yul Brynner turns the radio on in the bog so Samantha Eggar can't hear him piss!

Oh really? [LOL] Anyway, the next day Hugh and I hitch-hiked with a photographer to Paris. Hugh and I shared a tab of acid in preparation for the journey. It was bizarre. We had a whole centre spread in RM. We even got him lying on a grave of an old World War One soldier.

What's the secret of reporting while off your tits on drugs?

I was a trained journalist. I used to do all



my interviews in shorthand. Yes I was out of it, but we had a photographer who wasn't. Hugh would be dropping his trousers as cars went by until we eventually got a lift. We did a photo session with some blood

capsules I had with me. Hugh was supposed to have been killed in a car crash and we took pictures of him in the car with blood pouring from his mouth. But the pix never came out. So when we got back to London I organised another shoot, this time in a breakers yard round the back of Kings Cross station. I found the same model of car, took Hugh down there with photographer Paul Cox and re enacted the whole thing again, only better – and again it didn't come out! Hugh got very freaked out by that. I saw The Stranglers play a shitload of times in '77 culminating at the Paradiso in Amsterdam where they got involved with the local Hell's Angels. We had an amazing, and terrifying, night. Alan was there and they also invited Bob Hart who was then the pop columnist on The Sun plus a photographer. The gig was very violent. The Angels were hurling fans off the stage. Backstage after the show in the dressing room, they locked the door. Then there was a knock, and there was this guy outside saying 'Can I come in?' but the Angels who were inside with us refused to open the door and he went away. But he came back with an axe and smashed the door down.

You've seen The Shining, then?

Actually, I remember now it was the wall next to the door he knocked through, and he just walked in through it and said hullo! After that the Angels took us back to their own clubhouse on the outskirts of Amsterdam which was paid for by the Dutch government. It was the most bizarre evening. I remember there was a film playing of a girl getting gang-banged on some snooker table. I then realised it was filmed on the table we were leaning on! Someone told me this guy on the screen who was doing it was a lunatic. I turned round when the lights went back on and there, to the right of me, was this lunatic! A guy then came over to me and Alan with a revolver, held it to Alan's head, and pulled the trigger. It clicked. So Alan's gone white, and this guy's just walked off laughing. We thought there couldn't have been any bullets in it – until the guy starts firing it over the other side of the hall – Russian roulette. It was like we were in a movie. Edge of your seat stuff, rollercoaster terrifying – but I wouldn't swap those experiences for the world.

How old were you then?

Twenty-three. We went out the back and they were doing wheelies on their bikes. They had a machine gun on a tripod, and across the way was this partly-built prison. The authorities couldn't complete the building because every time the builders appeared on the scaffolding, the Angels would fire the machine gun at them! It was remarkable. And these were the designated bodyguards of The Stranglers in Amsterdam. Scary stuff. One minute we're talking, next minute Jean Jacques shoots through the clubhouse on a motorbike.

So JJ was keeping up with the Angels?

Yes he was, but he could do.

There are photos from that night where JJ is wearing make-up though?

Yes, but he had a lot of front about him. He didn't give a toss about anyone or anything and I liked that about him. In his way, JJ was the epitome of Punk '77.

Were the others involved in these violent scenes?

Well, Dave had his girlfriend (or was she his wife?). She was diminutive with long hair and she was around quite a lot. Jet was Jet – a real laid-back character. Dave and Jet were really nice guys and although I got to know them quite well, I think they were always wary of journalists. But through Alan I was accepted. In '78 I left Record Mirror and teamed up with Alan running a PR company – Modern Publicity – from a squat in Covent Garden. We did the PR for The Stranglers and I got to see the other side of the band, from a business angle. I helped to organise a big trip to Iceland where the band played a couple of shows to promote their new Black and White album. Iceland was the perfect choice to promote such a bleak album, but it was also the most violent place I'd ever seen. I'd had this idea of delivering the invite to the journalists – there were about 25 altogether – on an old piece of cloth placed inside an empty Black & White whisky bottle like it was sent from a desert island. I went down to the Black & White whisky factory in London for all the bottles. A lot of drink was consumed on that trip. We were accosted by the locals as soon as we got off the plane because no one knew who

was in the band and who wasn't. They didn't know what The Stranglers looked like and someone mistook me for Jet! After all, we were the only two people on the plane with beards. They did two gigs there – and they were the most violent gigs I've ever been to before or since, even beating the Paradiso. I've never seen such fighting. The locals all drank bottles of spirits at the show – you couldn't get a beer – got pissed up and then fight, ripping pieces out of each other. Ambulances were lined up outside before the show even began because they knew they were gonna have such trouble. There was blood everywhere. Those shows were absolutely amazing. Unbelievable. I ended up spraining my ankle and JJ had to push me around in a wheelchair and one Fleet Street journo nearly died of alcoholic poisoning. You couldn't make it up.

Pallying up with Punk's key players, did that open doors for you as a writer?

I was never really that pally with anyone. I was never a sort of bloke who would get their home phone numbers or anything. I always kept them at arms length. A lot of the other journos wanted to be a part of it all, hanging out and name dropping. The bands were doing their thing and I was doing mine, and I was quite happy with that. It was a professional relationship. But you were always bumping into them at receptions and gigs. Don't forget, it's not like it is now. '77 was an incredible time to be in the music business, The record companies were flush with money. The receptions they threw were just incredible and everyone would go. This was your social life because you were forever out ligging. It was one big non-stop party. Before that, it was all about bands like Yes and it was shit. Music was



shit in the seventies. All of a sudden Punk came along and to be involved in it was a privilege. I just thank my lucky stars that I knew these people and more importantly, saw them play. For me, it was more about the music. That was what I was there for. People like Johnny Thunders – you'd see him play one good gig in ten, and it was worth it to see that one. Fantastic. The Stranglers were always of the highest standard. I never saw them play a bad gig. It was always an event when The Stranglers were around.

In your book, you reconvene with Hugh, Rat Scabies and John Rotten. How was the Jungle celebrity Sex Pistol?

Seeing John again after twenty-eight years. Wow. I went over to his house in Marina del Ray. It was hard work trying to get hold of him for the book because he doesn't use the Internet at all. So I got a fax number for Rambo, who's a kind of manager from Finsbury Park but who lives in the US. Rambo responded to my fax request and rang me. It turned out we knew the same people, the same streets from years back and that's how I got the interview. I went over and spent the whole day with John mainly in a sushi bar overlooking the Pacific, with John in his shorts knocking 'em back, he didn't eat much. We both got absolutely ratted on saki and John smoked fags like a kipper. Then he took me back to his house which was Mae West's old place. It was kinda weird and it's haunted by Mae West's ghost apparently. John's got the house next door as well. Mae West bought it for Rudolph Valentino who she fell in love with. But it was unrequited love because he was gay. So her wailing ghost roams the place. It was a memorable day.

What about Hugh? Had he changed a lot through the three decades you knew him?

The last time I met him was around '89-'90 when I sold a pop mag I'd started – Pop Shop – to Robert Maxwell. At the time I had to go over to Maxwell's as editor and while I was there, CBS asked me if I'd write a press release for The Stranglers, which involved interviewing them all individually. I met Hugh, who I'd not seen for a while, in a Greek restaurant in Camden Town, and I remember thinking this wasn't the Hugh I remembered. This was just before Hugh left the band. You could see he wasn't quite right. He was circumspect and suspicious and even aggressive at times I was saying; 'Come on Hugh, what's this all about? We're mates.' And he was saying: 'Why are you asking me that?'

Did you see his final Stranglers gig?

I did. I was there at Ally Pally. It was strange, wasn't it? A very odd gig.

It was. I was there at the front. Eye contact was minimal. They were doing their own thing, no interaction. I turned to my girlfriend at the time, my wife now, and said that's a band about to split up.

That probably was the worst gig I saw The Stranglers play. But it still wasn't bad.

You missed the 30th anniversary gig at The Roundhouse?

Did they play The Roundhouse? Ah, I missed that!

They dug out the November '77 set list. But midi software Gremlins forced the band to restart the gig eight songs already

in. The DVD should be good though. I'll buy you one for Christmas.

I haven't seen them for a long, long time. What are they like now?

Shit hot. Hugh said in the interview if Paul Roberts had stayed another month, he'd have been in The Stranglers as long as Hugh was. Anyway, now the chemistry is back as The Stranglers IV, as such.

So when's their next gig?

Some Belgian acoustic dates. But The Roundhouse was the biggie. They're a shit hot live act.

It doesn't surprise me. I should imagine JJ's still got it. What's he like now? When did you last see him?

It was on the day of The Roundhouse gig. His car pulled in front of us as we walked down to Chalk Farm. He was quite chipper. He usually is.

I'd like to see him actually, I haven't seen him since The Forum in Kentish Town in the mid-nineties. I remember going on a Japanese tour with the band in '79 and the fans loved his look. This was when he was well into his Karate thing, going for one of those Dans. Desperate Dan... does he still do Karate? Around that time, I was contacted by Frank Warren, the boxing promoter. Frank grew up in the same flats as me and he was putting on unlicensed boxing matches at Finsbury Park. He knew I was into The Stranglers and got in touch with me to find out if he could get JJ to box at one of these matches down at the Rainbow. So I took JJ down to meet Frank at Vic Andretti's, an ex-world champion boxer who had this flash burger bar in

Hackney Road, down the Shoreditch end. We all had lunch there together and talked about this match. Frank had it all lined up, and JJ was interested, but it didn't happen. Interestingly enough, Frank was promoting Lenny MacLean for the fights. I often wonder if JJ was to have fought him. That would have been some match. I'd forgotten about that until today.

He would have cained JJ, wouldn't he?

Naah. I'm sure they would have looked after him. It was more a promotional idea, a gimmick.

How did you get into writing? And do you see yourself ever not writing?

I started out court reporting at Marlborough Street Magistrates Court in Soho working out of an old Dickensian office – sitting in court writing long hand. If I had a story I thought was of national interest, I used to come out of the court and ring up the copy desk of each of the national papers to try and sell them the story. If they went for it, I'd have to write it up in their style. Then you'd have to rush back in court to sit through the other cases. That night you'd be writing up six or seven articles and sending off shame through the post to local papers. I went to Pitman's College twice a week to learn shorthand. Then I worked on the Gloucester Citizen for a couple of years to do my indentures. I eventually joined RM in November '96 working in the same office in Benwell Road (coincidentally where John Lydon grew up) and the record that was forever on the turntable was the Hotel California album. You'd go out at lunchtime and have three, four, five pints and come back and there'd be people falling asleep at their desks.

Record company PRs would wine and dine you. It was life de luxe. There were four weekly music papers each selling well over 150,000 copies. Now there's only one left – NME.

And the glossy, pricey magazines, like Q...

But these days it's all lists, lists of things that have been and gone. Records are not really selling much anymore and that's why all these bands have to come out of the woodwork to make money. I went down to Brixton on Wednesday to see the Pistols...

Weren't they great!?

Yeah, they were. The sound was amazing and they played so much better than they did back in the day. There's more money there now. And Brixton Academy was rammed. I really didn't want to see them live again. The Pistols were more about youth than any other band but now they're all 50-plus. It would be nothing more than a cynical cheap holiday in other people's misery, a gold-coated slab of hypocrisy – they would be metamorphosing into the very bloated rock star personas they so roundly condemned in 1977. But the moment they opened with Pretty Vacant, I started to get it. It wasn't about anarchy anymore, how could it be? It was about nostalgia. English nostalgia perpetrated by an Irish lad with the voice range of a god. The Pistols were the soundtrack to a generation, and that generation, now numbed by mortgages and broken marriages and kids and unfulfilled ambition and baldness – such baldness! – don't want to relive their memories at home via a CD and a few cans of beer. They want to be with their heroes, to



celebrate the moments, to get juiced up and multiply, to revel in their Englishness for an hour or so. They'd rather spend thirty quid on a concert than £10.99 for a CD. The Pistols were paying their dues, it was as simple as that. And it's about time the class of '77 took a leaf out of their dog-eared book. Stand up The Jam. Surely it's your duty to go back in the city with Weller at the helm. It's verging on the criminal to continue to deny your fans the chance of ripping it up to Town Called Malice and Going Underground. The Stranglers too ought to be ashamed of themselves. Acolytes of the golden brownies deserve more, like a full blown reunion tour garnished with Peaches and that swirling keyboard whirligig sound. Likewise The Damned, whose new rose has all but withered. They could fill out barns across the country, such was their



It's duty now is to massage the memory, to be a chute for all the shit we've managed to collect over the last thirty years. To be live, just to prove we're not dead. On the packed tube home I overheard a guy say to his mate. 'I was really choked they didn't sing Who Killed Bambi.' Like the song says that introduced the Sex Pistols to Brixton – They'll always be an England.

Nowadays I have a cruise magazine which I started about eight years ago, travelling all over the world reviewing cruise ships. Nice.

All the bands loved RM because it was poppy, and they all regarded themselves as pop bands. If you talk to John Lydon now, he'd tell you it was all about having a good time and being in a pop band. They used to laugh themselves silly at some of the pomp and circumstance stuff that was written about them at the time. There

invariably follow. Sadly, due to contractual complications, the book still hasn't seen the light of day. But it's pretty explosive stuff. I eventually went into publishing and started up Flexipop magazine in 1980. We used to have an exclusive track recorded on a flexi disc on the cover of each issue and had bands from Genesis to The Jam. I remember organising an interview with Hugh and JJ for the mag. While we were waiting for them, I had this idea of a picture for the cover with the two of them covered in carnations. So I went to a nearby florist off Tottenham Court Road to see if I could just borrow them, but they wouldn't have it. I ended up buying loads of these flowers but Hugh and JJ were three hours late. There was no time for the interview and the carnations were wilting. But somewhere out there are pictures of them lying on the floor in a sea of red carnations.

Was '77 and Punk a tough act to follow?

It was the best year of my life. Oh dear, does that sound too sad for words...?

If you weren't there, Britain in the 1970s was a fairly bleak place, socially and culturally. Dogged by political and industrial unrest, the country suffered strikes, power cuts, the three-day week, and inflation at a whopping 10%. If that wasn't bad enough, there were bad haircuts, tank tops and streets were strewn with litter – thanks to the bin men's dispute. **Steve Howard** and **Gary Kent** look back on a disorderly year

When two 7s clash



Seventies Britain: author Jonathan Coe described it as a place where 'everything was brown'. But there was one great hope all that might change by 1977, There was, after all, the Queen's Silver Jubilee. Instead, the

nation's disaffected youth, who got their kicks from football terraces, were soon awakened to a brand new musical and cultural revolution; Punk.

The Sex Pistols would later attempt at usurping the Queen's celebrations; oddly enough, it all started with ITV's Today news programme when Bill Grundy interviewed the Pistols after rock band Queen cancelled. Telly audiences were still in shock after the swears' liberation from EMI just six days into January. Meanwhile, The Clash played the opening night of London's new watering hole, the Roxy in Covent Garden.

The press caught on quick to Punk's bondage coattails. JJ Burnel added fuel to the fire in NME, saying; "We are due for tyranny. You may laugh but it is going to happen". The plug gets pulled on The Stranglers at the Rainbow gig when

officials spot Hugh's 'Fuck' shirt. They launch Grip which peaked at 44 by which time they were back in the studio laying down more tunes. Rolling Stone Keith Richards was fined £750 for cocaine possession, and Bob Marley arrives in west London to cut new material.

Former Home Secretary Roy Jenkins announced he was leaving Westminster to become President of the EC in Brussels. In the States, Gary Gilmore, the convicted murderer, was executed by firing squad in the Utah State Prison – the first execution in the US for almost a decade. The 36 year old was sentenced for the murder of a motel clerk in Utah. Two people received Gilmore's corneas within hours of his death – inspiring the Adverts' single Gary Gilmore's Eyes for their Top



Gary Gilmore

20 slice of Punkmania. David Soul of Starsky & Hutch fame topped the singles chart with Don't Give Up on Us, and the month ended with a Slim Whitman single, apparently. Jimmy Carter becomes the 39th President of the USA, and Australia suffers their worst rail disaster near Sydney, where 83 people died.

February, and it's the Sex Pistols again: bass player Glen Matlock was replaced by John Rotten's bass neophyte Sid Vicious. The Damned released their eponymous debut album and Keith Richards was back in the news: he was arrested in Canada for possession of 22 grams of heroin and 5 grams of cocaine. Some people never learn. Music hadn't improved either: Julie Covington's Don't Cry for Me Argentina and Leo Sayers' When I Need You topped the charts, together with 20 Golden Greats by The Shadows.

In March, film director Roman Polanski was charged with raping a 13 year old girl at the home of Hollywood star Jack Nicholson. Polanski was charged with rape, sodomy, child molestation and giving drugs to a minor. Nicholson's girlfriend Angelica Huston, was also arrested, after she was found to be in possession of a small amount of cocaine. Stephen Spielberg's Close Encounters of the Third Kind was released. Space shuttle Enterprise takes its maiden flight

atop a Boeing 747. In Westminster, political uncertainty continued as Labour survived a vote of no confidence in the House of Commons thanks to support from the Liberals: 13 of them voted in support of the government after a deal was made between Prime Minister James Callaghan and David Steel, their leader. The government won the vote, which was motioned by the Conservatives in a close call.

Abroad, tragedy struck when two jumbo jets collided on a runway in Tenerife killing 583 people in the ensuing blaze making it the world's worst aviation accident in history – even to this day. Controllers of the KLM and Pan Am jumbos had earlier diverted the planes after a terrorist bomb was discovered at Las Palmas.

You couldn't keep the Sex Pistols out of the papers, this time, because they were sacked (again). A&M let them go after just one week after their publicity-seeking signing at Buckingham Palace. The aftermath included trashing A&M's offices in a drunken rampage. The Pistols were £75,000 richer, adding to the £50,000 EMI pay-off back in January. The Shadows remained top of the album charts while Manhattan Transfer hit No. 1 single with Chanson d'Amour. Meanwhile, The Clash released their debut 45 – White Riot. The Police played their first gig as support to Wayne County & the Electric Chairs at the Roxy.

In a relatively quiet month, April saw Red Rum win the Grand National for a record third time. The charts were now taken over by Abba as they topped both singles and albums with Knowing Me, Knowing you and Arrival respectively. The Stranglers released their debut LP, Stranglers IV, Rattus Norvegicus, and in days achieved the Number 4 spot. The



Damned became the first Punk band to play in New York where exclusive nightclub Studio 54 also opened its doors for the first time. 'Power to the people' was on everyone's lips: the BBC's new comedy sit-com, *Citizen Smith*, saw work-shy Wolfie, played by Robert Lindsay, and his Marxist freedom fighter comrades of the Tooting Popular Front. London Transport launches the new silver buses celebrating the Queen's Silver Jubilee.

In May, they were back. You guessed it. The Sex Pistols, now signed to Virgin, released *God Save The Queen* in time for the royal revelry. Mass outrage and a BBC ban lead to a blankety-blank space at the Number 2 slot, lasting several weeks. Rumours is, it outsold Rod Stewart's Number 1, *I Don't Want To Talk About It*. Malcolm McLaren's art school chum Jamie Reid did the artwork – a safety pin through the Queen's beak – an enduring, iconic image.

Sport-wise, England cricket captain, Tony Greig was sacked for signing up players to Aussie media tycoon Kerry Packer's commercial cricket 'circus'. Thirty five of the world's best cricketers were signed to play in a series of internationals in Australia following their Cricket Board's decision to turn down his offer of AUS\$1.5m a year for television rights to screen Australian Test matches and Sheffield Shield cricket on his Channel 9 station. Back home, in football, Liverpool won the First Division title and the European Cup beating German side Borussia Monchengladbach 3-1 in the final. The Anfield side were however denied a treble by their great rivals Manchester United who beat them 2-1 in the FA Cup Final at Wembley. United's triumph completed a remarkable renaissance under manager Tommy Docherty. The club had suffered Division



Red Rum, Tommy Docherty, Tony Greig

Two relegation two years before and here they won their first trophy since 1968. However, in early July, manager Docherty was sacked following his affair with the wife of club physiotherapist.

Warsaw (later to become Joy Division) played their debut supporting the Buzzcocks. France won the Eurovision Song Contest, an Aeroflot plane crashed in Cuba killing 69 people, and *Star Wars* opened becoming the highest grossing film at the time.

June was dominated by the Jubilee as one million people lined London streets to watch the royals on their way to St Paul's to begin the revelries. Millions more tuned in to tellies and enjoyed street parties. Anarchy in the UK indeed! The Sex Pistols celebrated with a doomed boat party on the Thames and eleven people were arrested as they become public enemy number one. Within weeks Johnny Rotten was razored outside a Stoke Newington pub and Paul Cook was beaten up at a tube station. Punk was becoming increasingly plagued by violence, and The Damned, The Jam and of course, The Stranglers all had concerts cancelled as a result of violence at these gigs. But it wasn't just Punk that evoked the physical side of man: Wembley Stadium saw Scottish fans invade the pitch and famously demolish the goal posts and rip up turf following their 2 – 1 victory over old enemies, England in the Home Nations Championship. With further mayhem in the West End, the writing was already on the wall for the tournament: it was cancellation in 1984.

A rejection of trade union recognition at Grunwick Film Processing Laboratories in Harlesden was one of the key labour disputes of the 1970s. Mass multi-picketing led to conflict with the police following the sacking of a third of the



The Grunwick dispute

Asian female employees when they were refused the right to join a union. In June and July, violence broke out frequently. The dispute went on for almost two years.

The first Apple II computers go on sale and skate boarding became the latest craze.

July sees a wealth of dads in horror seeing the Sex Pistols do 'Pretty Vay-cunt' on TOTP and The Stranglers too, mucking about miming to Go Buddy Go, over Peaches, despite its radioplay version in the Top 10. Gay News' editor Denis Lemon was found guilty of blasphemous libel in the first case of its kind for more than 50 years. The case was brought as a private prosecution by the secretary of the National Viewers and Listeners Association, Mary Whitehouse. She objected to a poem and illustration published in the paper about a homosexual centurion's love for Christ at the Crucifixion. Something Better Change is released, meeting Peaches on its chart descent.

On the 16th August, the King of Rock 'n' Roll, Elvis Aaron Presley died at the

age of 42. He was discovered slumped in a bathroom at his Gracelands mansion in Memphis, Tennessee. He was pronounced dead on arrival at the Baptist Memorial Hospital. Tennessee state pathologist Dr. Jerry Francisco, revealed the singer died due to a cardiac arrhythmia. There was speculation of a cocaine and barbiturates overdose. Thousands gathered to file past Elvis' corpse-in-state and world sales of his records rocketed him back into the charts. Way Down just missed the top spot to I Feel Love by Donna Summer.

With the 'King' dead, the Queen was active, visiting Northern Ireland for the first time in 11 years as part of her Jubilee tour. 32,000 troops and police were on duty in a massive security operation to date after The IRA threatened to give the Queen "a visit to remember". A 25 hour power blackout in New York leads to looting and disorder. Elsewhere Sid Vicious was fined £125 for possessing a flick knife at a gig while Bachman Turner Overdrive, purveyors of Dad Rock classic You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet announced they were splitting.

One month on from Presley's demise, The Stranglers release No More Heroes – and Marc Bolan of T-Rex is killed in a collision with a tree in southwest London. Bolan's Mini – driven by girlfriend Gloria Jones of Tainted Love fame – collided with a tree in southwest London. Bolan died instantly.

In South Africa, black activist Steve Biko died in police custody, following an injury to the head. His funeral was attended by more than 15,000 mourners. At the Geneva Car Show, Porsche launch the 928. The Texas Commodore PET computer goes on sale, and Voyager 1 is launched. Meanwhile, on television, ITV's The Krypton Factor launched its quest to find 'the cleverest, fittest, and most



Bolan crash site

dextrous Briton. The show went on for an 18 year search. Space's Magic Fly topped Elvis from the top of the UK singles and stayed there for a month.

October saw news dominated by politics and scandal, making a change from the Pistols: former Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe denied any involvement in a plot to kill his one time friend Norman Scott and suggestions that he had a homosexual relationship with the former male model. It was to take a month long court case in 1979 to clear his name.

Footballer Pele played his last game for New York Cosmos. Three members of rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd were killed in a plane crash in Mississippi. One who survived was shot by a suspicious landowner as he navigated a crocodile infested river. Rat Scabies left the Damned for the first time and David Bowie released his Heroes LP. The Stranglers cemented their status as Punk's most commercially successful band with the prompt release

of LP follow-up, No More Heroes. It goes in at Number 2. Hugh Cornwell: "We are up singing No More Heroes whilst thousand of kids are in front of us going crazy. It's almost as if we are perpetuating the myth we set out to destroy." The myth was taking some destroying as Diana Ross topped the LP charts for a month while David Soul and Baccara shared the list of top-selling 45's.

In November there was more unrest in the UK as firefighters struck for the first time in pursuit of a 90% pay increase. The Army stood in and used their Green Goddess fire engines for the first time since WWII. The dispute ended when the firemen settled for a 10% pay increase. Beverley, the man-hungry middle class aspirant orange goddess played by actress Alison Steadman, stole the show in Mike Leigh's Abigail's Party which was transmitted as part of BBC1's Play For Today on November 1st.

A good year for the Royals continued with Princess Anne giving birth to master Peter Phillips who had the distinction of being the first royal baby to be born a commoner for more than 500 years. History was made as the president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, became the first Arab leader ever to visit Israel.

The worst storm Athens suffered caused havoc, killing 38 people, British Airway's Concorde begins a regular London-New York supersonic service. Bread held album top spot and Abba, the singles with The Name of The Game. Meanwhile, The Stranglers sell-out the Roundhouse Theatre in Camden for a record-breaking five consecutive nights.

As winter hit hard during December, Nottingham's Virgin Records window display was deemed indecent for advertising the long overdue Pistols LP. Holidays in the Sun was banned

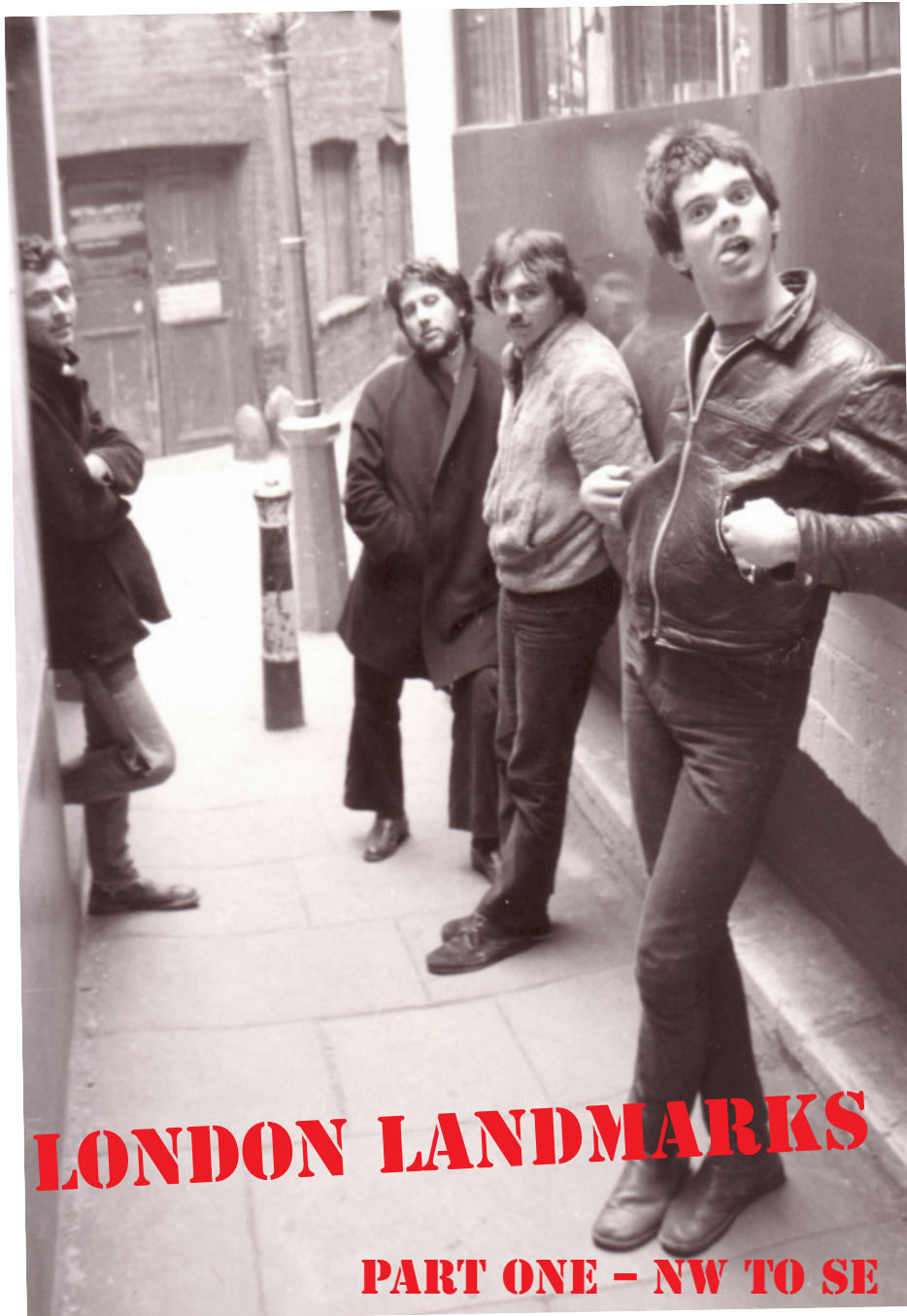


Green Goddess

and Sid Vicious was arrested for drugs possession. Film-wise, Charlie Chaplin died in Switzerland, Star Wars came out on Boxing Day and on New Years Day, Saturday Night Fever.

In the final weeks of 1977, The Stranglers, meanwhile, took off to a remote farmhouse to work on their future third opus. The pop charts were topped by Wings' Mull Of Kintyre and compilation LP, Disco Fever. Many might have wondered what happened to Punk along the way?! Thankfully, the cultural significance still reverberates loudly across the world to this day, in fashion, music and media. Long live Punk. However corporate it became.





The studio The Stranglers lay down Rattus and Heroes is just one location **Gary Kent** sets out to track down for The Burning Up Times' landmarks odyssey. En route, he ends up having a pint in the Nashville Rooms and another in the Coleherne – the gay pick-up joint name-checked in Hanging Around – and gets some unrequited male attention for his trouble!



William Ellis School, Highgate Road, NW5

'Rather of use than fame' is Hugh's grammar school motto, until he typically rewords it; 'rather u than me'. Nevertheless, 90% of pupils achieve university places in his final term. Fellow alumni include Sex Pistols' film maker Julian Temple, Madness producer Clive Langer, Madness bass player Mark Bedford and Fairport Convention's Richard Thompson who teaches Hugh bass in the combo they call Emil & The Detectives. Hugh's 5th solo album, Beyond Elysian Fields, derives from the location of the US recording studio rather than Old Elysians, the collective noun for the school's former pupils.



Dingwalls, Middle Yard, Camden Lock, NW1

One-time Dingwalls timber yard on the Regents Canal, it's here the infamous courtyard face-off between The Stranglers and The Clash/Pistols takes place. It's perhaps, pivotal in ostracising the band from Punk's young pups. Or was it all a publicity stunt? You decide. London Lady contains several lines of vitriol aimed at, it is thought, a music scribe of the day. Nevertheless, futile rebranding as Lock 17 in the 90s is confusing and short-lived, and fails to erase or match the venue's R&B heyday of the 60s and 70s. Thankfully, this is now a cool music venue following a refurb.



Roundhouse Theatre, Chalk Farm, NW1

This former choo-choo turnaround was once the avant-garde and existential performance hip place-to-be in the 60s and 70s. But on US Independence Day in 1976, The Stranglers perform, backed by the Ramones and Flaming Groovies. It's a poor show, but promoter John Curd is unaware, and rebooks them to support Patti Smith. The crowd are hostile, until The Stranglers play that old favourite, Tits. In November '77 they do five consecutive nights here, breaking the record set by The Who and the Rolling Stones. By the 80s, it becomes Gilbey's store for their mother's ruin until it gets left for – err, ruin. 2007 saw The Stranglers return triumphant to a refurbished Roundhouse to celebrate their old record-breaker with a Heroes set list from three decades before. Just weeks before, I'm outside quietly snapping Chalk Farm's iconic arena when a clued-up mystery passer-by says: "November the fourth." Odd. The locale is referenced in Down In The Sewer: 'I should have stayed home on the Farm...' – Incidentally, the same line in Elton's Goodbye Yellow Brick Road.



Hampstead Heath, on the grass, NW3

A summer's evening on Hampstead Heath – and no sign of George Michael. But wait! This is 1977 – and there's the mock-up of Trotsky's tomb with JJ atop in a pose for a Stranglers shoot. The solitary member image is rejected for the Heroes wreath design is the simple red carnation wreath design is chosen, which writer Jon Savage describes as 'chintzy chocolate box'. The Red Cow incident is just around the corner, so to speak.



Rainbow Theatre, Seven Sisters, N7

In the 1960s, it's the Finsbury Park Astoria, the Art Deco hall where Chuck Berry appears with The Swinging Blue Jeans, Moody Blues and the Nashville Teens; once again, it's a young Hugh, with school pal Richard Thompson – this time, in the crowd. On 30th January 1976, The Stranglers support the Climax Blues Band at what is now The Rainbow, and Hugh sports a provocative T-shirt that reads 'Fuck'. Officials pull the plug following a tip-off after wearing it at Croydon's Red Deer, and viewed both times by a future Lurker called Arthur Billingsley. In the ensuing years, The Rainbow becomes an almost spiritual home for The Stranglers, and when Hugh is imprisoned in 1980 for drugs possession, two Easter gigs go ahead without him. Nowadays, it's home to the Kingdom of God.

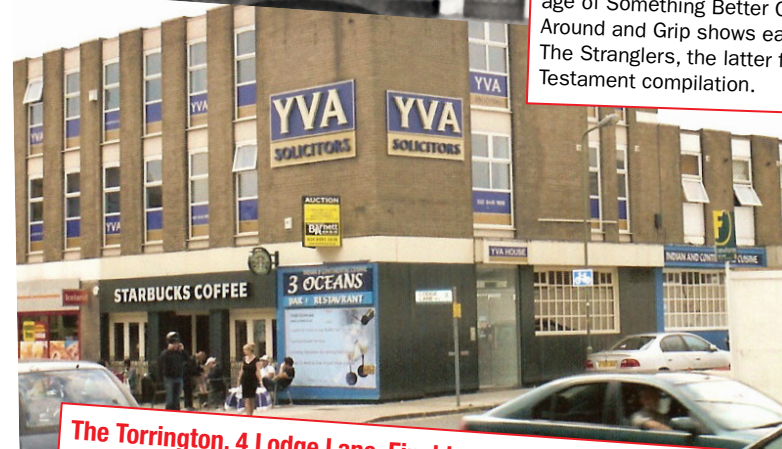
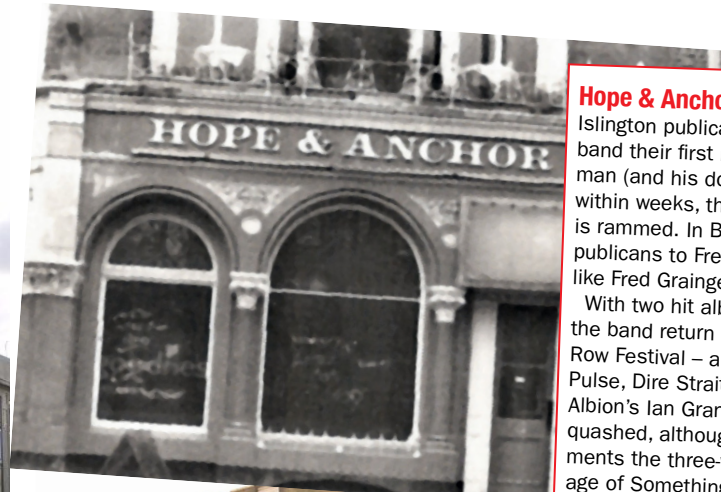
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Hope & Anchor, 207 Upper Street, N1

Islington publican Fred Grainger gives the band their first residency, and play to one man (and his dog). But word spreads, and within weeks, the 150 capacity cellar bar is rammed. In Bitching, JJ compares other publicans to Fred: "Why can't you all be like Fred Grainger..?".

With two hit albums under their belt, the band return for November '77's Front Row Festival – a fund-raiser starring Steel Pulse, Dire Straits and Shakin' Stevens. Albion's Ian Grant has video release plans quashed, although a live double LP documents the three-week festival. Video footage of Something Better Change, Hanging Around and Grip shows early Hope gigs by The Stranglers, the latter found in the Old Testament compilation.



The Torrington, 4 Lodge Lane, Finchley, N12

When the Finchley Boys stumbled upon The Stranglers' on 14th November 1976, the Torrington Arms was Finchley's prime gig spot. Today, it's a coffee shop and restaurant. Here's what the locals think of the transformation nowadays, sourced from a public reviewing forum:

"Shocking – this was one of the few real pubs in Finchley, with a back room which was almost an institution, the kind of place where you'd go to see your mates' bands play and where they used to have record sales. Now turned into yet another Starbucks. Who the hell gave planning permission for that?"

"I enjoyed an afternoon drinking session in The Torrington one Saturday, four years ago. I am sad to hear that it's now closed."

"The front has turned into a Starbucks, the rear part is going to be 3 Oceans Bar & Restaurant."

"They have only gone and turned it into a bloody Starbucks! Just what Finchley needs – another poncy coffee place."

Anyone for coffee?

Duke of Lancaster, Barnet EN4

Slightly off-radar, but still in my A to Z: Like the Fred's Hope & Anchor – Bill Phelan was another cool publican name-checked in Bitching. The band play a secret gig in January '78: According to Jet, it rained sweat that night. But by 2002, perspiration turns to demolition and now the landmark is commemorated in Tarmac to form a supermarket car park.



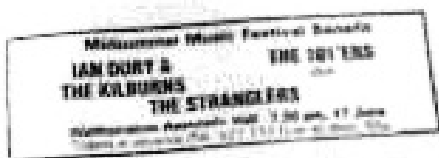
The above photograph shows the Torrington Arms Hotel which stood on this site c.1880. Records dating back to 1829 show that the house on this site was called The Torrington and was originally a Coaching Inn. Since then, although keeping its name, it has undergone several alterations and rebuilds. In 1830 it was also used as a booking office for coaches as well as being a G.P.C. The present building was erected in 1962 and between 1967 and years it featured both local bands and better known performers such as Paul Young, Ian Dury, The Stranglers, Georgie Fame, Dr John and The Average White Band.



Walthamstow Assembly Hall, Forest Road, E17

The date is 17th June 1976; the venue – the Town Hall's Art Deco complex as part of the Midsummer Music Festival. Headlining is artist Ian Dury with Kilburn & the High Roads who is based in next door's Waltham Forest College of Art under pop-artist Peter Blake. For the Kilburn's, it's their final curtain: it's also a bad week for Joe 'Woody' Strummer's squat-house pub act, the 101'ers; having just split, the Sex Pistols are late replacements, and the bottom-billed punks make an early impression on Jet Black, who reveals to The Burning Up Times:

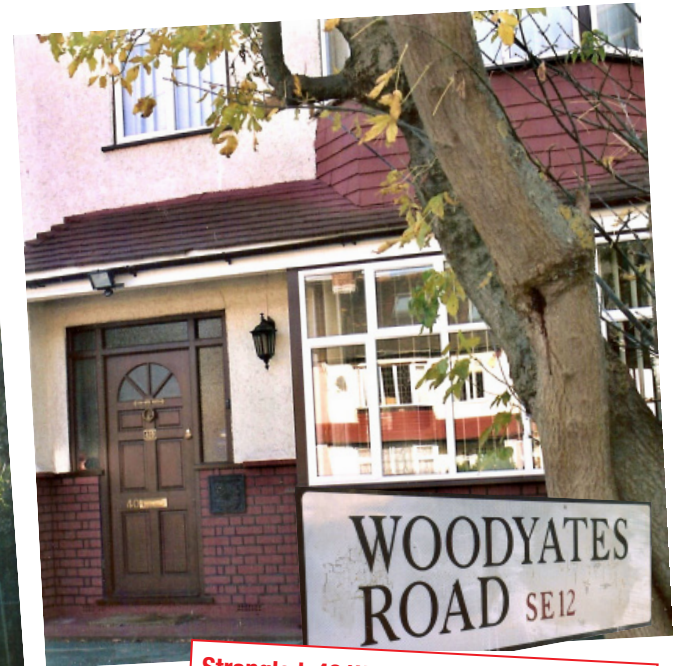
"They clearly didn't wanna mingle with us. Our attitude at the time was that these guys were hugely funny. What they were doing was being taking very seriously by sectors of the media and we thought it was quite a hoot what they were doing. But they clearly didn't wanna rub shoulders with us." Future music mogul Tony H. Wilson is in the crowd checking out Rotten's combo for cutting edge youf telly prog. So It Goes.



Forest School, Oakhurst Gardens, Snaresbrook E11

Days after their Roundhouse debut, The Stranglers play at this leafy east London school. Today's helpful staff are puzzled when their school archives reveal nothing of the event.

"It may have been a private function, booked in the summer recess." Alumni include ex-England and Essex cricketer Nasser Hussein and Eastenders' actor Adam Woodyatt. Former Strangler John Ellis is a current Forest parent.



Strangled, 40 Woodyates Road, SE12

From a fans' view, this unremarkable Lewisham semi was once the communications zenith of The Stranglers. Here, for two years, Tony Moon produces early Strangled magazines from his bedroom. He also publishes that famous caption: This is a chord, this is another, this is a third. Now form a band.' Taking his own advice, he forms Motor Boys Motor in the 1980s and today he teaches film studies at Southampton University.



The Old Knoll, Eliot Hill, Blackheath, SE13

Broccoli treetops and chimney pots poke the well-heeled skies of Blackheath. A swift half in the Hare & Billet cures my thirst and fires my quest for a crumbling country house. I buzz the buzzer in a vain attempt to recapture the shot, three decades on. I get an answer. "But why do you want to photograph my house?" "Where were you in 1977?"

"Ah... Rattus Norve... hang on." ... (continued overleaf)



The Old Knoll, Eliot Hill, Blackheath, SE13

The Old Knoll dates from 1798 and was dissected into two in 1903. Inside, the lobby is palatial: floor-tiled in mosaics and bordered by great stone columns encapsulating Georgian charm. Trevor Rogers' eerie red and green hue shot for *Rattus* is a fuzzy memory. The present incumbent scribbles a note: it's the number of the previous owner, antiques dealer Warner Dailley, who was here in 1977. As I leave, I call – but he's about to go out. All the same, he agrees to meet me at his home providing I can get there in thirty minutes. A South Circular gumball rally leaves me with a minute to spare.

"I registered The Old Knoll with a film location agent in 1975 when I moved in. The Stranglers' session was a stills session – the booking would have been between £200 and £500 – I can't recall precisely how much now. But it was a morning shoot."

At the forefront of Warner's recall, more famous house guests take centre spot: Mona Lisa, starring Bob Hoskins and Michael Caine; *Bad Timing* with Harvey Keitel and Julian Temple's famous Sex Pistols' film, *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*.

"We had problems with that one. They nearly set fire to the house when they lit the chimney for one scene. But with The Stranglers, well, they were unknown at that point, weren't they? So I'm afraid, it all passed me by. But after the album came out, I took more of an interest when my nephews and nieces, and their friends, found out about it. The props in the shot were all mine. They've all been sold over the years: the Grandfather clock, which was my grandfather's originally; the little girl mannequin and the spears too. The fox heads went to a Stranglers fan who came down from the Wirral, some years back."

Details are hazy, but Warner is sure The Stranglers had a good session:

"They must have, because they returned to do the *Midnight Summer Dream* video in 1986."



Tour of duty

Umpteen gigs and they still find time to record two hit albums! Here's The Stranglers' 1977 gig archive.

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| 02.01.77 Roundhouse, London | 29.03.77 The Roxy, London | 08.06.77 Plymouth Castaways | 10.10.77 Exeter University |
| 16.01.77 Maidenhead Skindles Hotel | 30.03.77 Darlington Incognito | 09.06.77 Torquay Town Hall (cancelled) | 12.10.77 Newcastle City Hall (Penetration) |
| 21.01.77 Royal College of Art, London (supporting The Adverts) | 02.04.77 Netherton Tow Bar Inn, Cleethorpes Winter Gardens | 10.06.77 Llandrindod Wells Grand Pavilion | 13.10.77 Manchester Apollo |
| 22.01.77 The Roxy Club, London (unconfirmed) | 08.04.77 Brighton, The Buccaneer | 11.06.77 Dunstable California Ballroom (replaced Southend Kursaal) | 14.10.77 Liverpool University (The Drones) |
| 23.01.77 Red Deer, Croydon (date approximated) | 11.04.77 Brighton, The Buccaneer (unconfirmed) | 12.06.77 Sheffield Top Rank | 15.10.77 Leeds Queens Hall (The Drones & The Saints) |
| 30.01.77 Rainbow, London (supporting the Climax Blues Band) | 14.04.77 Bristol (cancelled) | 13.06.77 Bradford St. Georges Hall Replaced Leeds Town Hall or Polytechnic | 16.10.77 Glasgow Apollo |
| 09.02.77 Woking Central Halls | 15.04.77 Bracknell Sports Centre (cancelled) | 14.05.77 Shrewsbury Tiffany's | 17.10.77 Carlisle The Market (the Rezillos) |
| 11.02.77 Aberdeen Robert Gordon Institute | 16.04.77 Roundhouse, London | 15.06.77 Newcastle City Hall | 18.10.77 Sheffield Top Rank (unconfirmed) |
| 12.02.77 Glasgow, Queen Margaret University | 17.04.77 Roundhouse, London | 16.05.77 Middlesbrough Town Hall | 19.10.77 Sheffield Top Rank (The Drones & 2.3) |
| 13.02.77 Falkirk, Minqui Hall | 20.04.77 Le Havre, France | 17.06.77 Doncaster Gaumont | 20.10.77 Birmingham Mayfair Suite (Steel Pulse) |
| 15.02.77 Newport Alexandra Club | 21.04.77 Dunkirk MJC, France | 18.06.77 Blackpool Imperial Hotel (cancelled, replaced Cheltenham Town Hall) | 21.10.77 Hanley Victoria Hall (Steel Pulse) |
| 18.02.77 Crawley Technical College | 22.04.77 Geneva Bluebird Disco, Switzerland | 19.06.77 Liverpool Empire (replaced Blackburn King Georges Hall and Nottingham Playhouse) | 22.10.77 Bristol Exhibition Centre (The Dictators) |
| 19.02.77 Southorpe Priory Hotel | 23.04.77 Geneva Bluebird Disco, Switzerland (unconfirmed) | 20.06.77 Stafford Top of the World | 23.10.77 Cardiff Top Rank (The Dictators) |
| 21.02.77 Canterbury Kent University | 24.04.77 Paris Theatre, London (recorded for Radio One In Concert) | 21.06.77 Stoke-On-Trent Victoria Halls | 24.10.77 Swansea Top Rank (The Dictators) |
| 22.02.77 University of Essex, Colchester (The Darned) | 25.04.77 Palais des Peenés, Paris | 22.06.77 Glasgow City Hall | 26.10.77 Brighton Top Rank (The Dictators) |
| 23.02.77 Newcastle Polytechnic | 27.04.77 Daysur Champs Epernay, France | 23.06.77 Cleethorpes Winter Gardens (replaced Bracknell Sports Centre) | 27.10.77 Bournemouth Village Bowl |
| 24.02.77 Middlesbrough Rock Garden | April/May Newport Roundabout Social Club, Wales | 24.06.77 Bristol Exhibition Centre (cancelled, replaced Wolverhampton Lafayette) | 28.10.77 Surrey University (The Dictators) |
| 25.02.77 Scarborough Penthouse | 07.05.77 Canterbury (Odeon?) Rattus tour | 25.06.77 St. Albans Civic Hall (cancelled) | 29.10.77 Hastings Pier Pavillion (The Dictators) |
| 26.02.77 Liverpool Erics | 11.05.77 Twickenham Winning Post | 26.06.77 Roundhouse, London (two sets, 4pm & 8pm) | 30.10.77 Reading Top Rank (The Dictators) |
| 28.02.77 Doncaster Outlooks | 18.05.77 Coventry Tiffany's | August? Rotterdam Festival, Stockholm | 31.10.77 Southampton Top Rank (The Dictators) |
| 01.03.77 Birmingham Barbarella's | 20.05.77 Brunel University, London | 27.08.77 Wilmot Youth Centre, London | 02.11.77 Roundhouse, London (The Dictators) |
| 02.03.77 Huddersfield Polytechnic | 21.05.77 Bleckley Sports Centre | 02.09.77 Amsterdam Paradiso Club, Holland | 03.11.77 Roundhouse, London (The Dictators) |
| 04.03.77 Wolverhampton Lafayette | 22.05.77 Croydon Greyhound (cancelled) | ??.09.77 Klippan, Sweden | 04.11.77 Roundhouse, London (The Dictators) |
| 05.03.77 Manchester Electric Circus | 24.05.77 Brighton Top Rank | No More Heroes tour | 05.11.77 Roundhouse, London (The Dictators support plus Pop Group) |
| 06.03.77 Egremont Tow Bar Inn, Cleveland | 25.05.77 University of Essex, Colchester | 23.9.77 Cambridge Corn Exchange | 06.11.77 Roundhouse, London (The Dictators) |
| 07.03.77 Hawick Town Hall | 26.05.77 Norwich, St Andrews City Hall | 24.9.77 Bracknell Sports Centre (the Only Ones supporting) | 09.11.77 Belfast Ulster Hall (Radio Stars support, concert cancelled at short notice by local council) |
| 08.03.77 Birmingham Barbarella's (unconfirmed) | 21.05.77 Cardiff Top Rank | 25.9.77 Canterbury Odeon | 10.11.77 Coleraine University of Ulster (Radio Stars) |
| 09.03.77 Wakefield Unity Hall | 28.05.77 Canterbury Odeon | 26.9.77 Oxford Polytechnic | 11.11.77 Dublin Trinity College (Radio Stars) |
| 10.03.77 York University | 29.05.77 Guildford Civic Hall | 27.9.77 Norwich St Andrews Hall | 12.11.77 Dublin The Stadium (cancelled?) |
| 11.03.77 Ulverston Penny Farthing | 30.05.77 Bournemouth Village Bowl | 28.9.77 Ipswich Gaumont | 13.11.77 Cork City Hall (Radio Stars) |
| 12.03.77 Liverpool, CF Mott College | 31.05.77 Wolverhampton Civic Hall | 29.9.77 Brunel Sports Centre | 14.11.77 Dublin Trinity College (Radio Stars) |
| 16.03.77 Swindon Affair | 01.06.77 Birmingham Barbarella's | 30.9.77 Crawley Sports Centre | 22.11.77 Hope & Anchor, London |
| 17.03.77 Ipswich Manor Ballroom (cancelled) | 02.06.77 Birmingham Barbarella's | 01.10.77 Southend Kursaal | 26.11.77 Paradise Club, Amsterdam |
| 18.03.77 Brighton Sussex Centre (replaced Egham Royal Holloway College) | 03.06.77 Cambridge Corn Exchange | 02.10.77 Dunstable Queensway | 27.11.77 Paradise Club, Amsterdam |
| 23.03.77 Plymouth Woods Centre | 04.06.77 Wigan Casino | 03.10.77 Leicester De Montford | |
| 24.03.77 Penzance Garden | 05.06.77 Manchester Electric Circus | 04.10.77 Coventry Locarno | |
| | 07.06.77 Taunton Odeon | 05.10.77 Carmarthen St Peters Hall | |
| | | 06.10.77 Malvern Winter Gardens | |
| | | 08.10.77 Bangor University | |
| | | 09.10.77 Plymouth Fiesta | |

Information provided by Jim Radley of www.meninblack.co.uk



Being there!

Two tales of Glasgow, plus one from Canterbury, and the Roundhouse

Glasgow City Hall

David Boyd was there, 22 July 1977

Rattus Norvegicus came along and changed my life. Then came the first John Peel session and I heard Something Better Change and I Feel Like A Wog. Next came the announcement in the press of a tour – with a date at Glasgow City Hall.

It was the first big Punk gig in Glasgow, but the venue was only about 800 capacity and more used to classical outings, and big bands played at the larger Apollo. With my mate David, we set out wondering if punks were going to be there. In the city centre we saw punks dressed up like the Sex Pistols, with safety pins through their mouths, a rarity for Glasgow! At the gig, we were taken aback by the amount of these serious punks. It was scary! It was a cauldron of excitement by the time we went inside. It was sell-out, and as we stood by the bar downstairs as support band London came on. John Peel played them, but they weren't very good. After the rush down the front, we witnessed pogoing for the first time. It was quite intimidating, a far cry to the likes of Yes at the Apollo.

There was a long gap until The Stranglers came on. The crowd chanted – and when they finally came on, they

looked great, and Dave wore his boiler suit. They looked like a Punk band should! They opened with Grip, and played most of Rattus and new songs that would later end up on No More Heroes. The pogoers jumped about wildly. All this was new and unknown as the threat of violence lurked in the air, and scuffles broke out. There didn't seem many bouncers either; perhaps the hall wasn't expecting any trouble? Hugh stopped playing for a while and asked the audience to stop. Half way through the set, there was a stage invasion. At first, they carried on playing and they seemed okay with it. There were no bouncers to be seen, and everyone just piled onstage. It was a shambles, and then the band walked off.

There was a long pause, and we were left wondering what was going to happen next. The stage was then cleared, and The Stranglers came back on and burst into Go Buddy Go, followed by Ugly. I remember JJ jumping around, and soon the stage was full of crowd once again. It was complete mayhem. The band walked off for the second and final time. Had they not abandoned the set, we would have seen Sewer too. The lights went up and mayhem returned outside. It was tremendous and exciting, but the stage invaders had spoilt it. It was, though, an interesting experience! #

Back home, I remember the next morning, coming downstairs for my breakfast. I'd just started working at a bank. My father said asked me if I'd been at The Stranglers concert at the City Hall. I replied I had, and he said: "I don't think that's a good thing for you, there's a lot of abuse in the press about that, there was a riot.. the police were called. What were you doing there? That's not going to stand you in good stead at the bank!"

The papers ran with the story and it was on the news. The Sex Pistols were banned from everywhere, and last night's trouble got The Stranglers tarred with that brush, and were in turn, banned from playing there. It wasn't the band's fault, after all, they didn't encourage the stage invaders to end the gig. The publicity they got was very bad – but great in another way: everyone knew who The Stranglers were, even my father.

Glasgow Apollo

David Boyd was there, 16 October 1977

This was the first time The Stranglers were due to play the Apollo, but the councillors enforced their ban. We were disappointed because the album was out, and there was a big hoo-ha with The Stranglers;



apart from the Pistols, The Stranglers were the biggest Punk band in Scotland. But the gig goes ahead! It was a sell-out! The councillors (or 'City Fathers' as they were called) announced the band would play, but they would be present – and if things got out of hand, they would end the gig. These were exciting times, especially reading about the band inside out in Sounds, NME and, of course, Strangled. We even knew about Jet's ice cream van! All that stuff had come to light and we understood the band much better. So by the time of the gig, we were extremely excited, but with slight trepidation. In the space of four months, the band had progressed from the City Hall to the 3,500-seater Apollo.

We were up in the balcony that night having seen what happened at the City Hall! Yes, wimps! We also chose not to wear safety pins in our noses! The view

was great and stage invasions were nil, probably due to the high stage – not to mention the bouncers each side of the stage itself! Edinburgh's Rezillos came on first and got a good reaction from the crowd.

Then we noticed these six councillors coming up into the balcony and sitting in the box like the Queen, just as the Rezillos came off, wearing their shirt and ties! They must have got a fantastic view! Then The Stranglers came on. Hugh says:

"The Stranglers love women and will continue to do so," and kicked off with No More Heroes. The response was tremendous, the place was just buzzing. At the end of Heroes, Hugh comes to the mike. "We've got some guests in here tonight. They're here to look after us and make sure everything is all right". He spoke for a while then said, "Let's see them."

So the lights go up and onto the councillors, who are looking decidedly uncomfortable now, not expecting this, and not expecting an articulate, intellectual guy to be speaking to them in a sort of political way – intimating "here are the prats" but not saying they were prats. It was a very clever speech. They got booed by the audience, obviously, and I think the penny dropped that they had maybe gone over the top. Hugh topped it off with; "....this one's dedicated to you. It's called Ugly!" After that, they probably saw the funny side, and I think they knew at that point that the band had more to it.

Later, Hugh even serenaded a female councillor, asking her to spread it all over his "peeling foreskin, baby". The crowd loved it! The gig was trouble-free; current Conservative MSP Bill Aitken admits he had a great night too! 5 Minutes was the encore, although we didn't know it then, it went down really well. They finished

with Sewer. It was fabulous; the best gig I've ever seen, plus all the circumstances surrounding the concert. The men in suits gave a clean bill of health for future Stranglers' gigs, although they did bring on a stripper the following year!

With thanks to Donald MacKay

Canterbury Odeon

Paul Begg was there, 25 September 1977

That date changed my life. Sounds melodramatic, I know, but it's absolutely true. I was 13 and, musically, not particularly knowledgeable. Neither of my parents were interested in music, so I only really heard stuff through my older sister and her friends, which mainly consisted of prog rock rubbish. At this stage, Punk had bypassed me. However, for once in my life, my older sister came in handy. Her boyfriend at the time came round to my house and announced that The Stranglers were playing at Canterbury Odeon, and as well as asking my sister if she wanted to go, he asked me too. Nice one, Rob! This was the No More Heroes tour having played here the previous May during the Rattus tour.

I remember as we approached the Odeon there were guys selling ripped t-shirts outside. It was all quite intimidating, being my first gig. I was in E8 in the circle and I've kept the ticket stub. The Only Ones supported, and were unbelievably



loud, and they hurt my ears. If they support is this loud – what are The Stranglers going to be like? I didn't know what to expect, and I didn't know much about them. But I came out of that concert knowing that this was the best thing I had ever seen. I immediately bought both Rattus Norvegicus and No More Heroes single, and then everything else. 30 years on, I'm just as passionate The Stranglers. I was privileged and lucky to have seen the band in 1977. Of course, I've seen them many, many times since and I know that no other band will ever come close to creating such excitement.

Roundhouse

Scott H was there, 4 November 1977

This year (2007) I'll be seeing The Stranglers at the Roundhouse exactly 30 years after they last played there. I was there that night. Since then I must have seen them play 55 times but the Roundhouse gig will always remain engrained in me. Back then I was a podgy 17 year old – but I had a cool bus driver coat festooned with punk badges. I was the minority at college: most were into Status Quo and Genesis with hair halfway down their backs, but me and a friend naively convinced five others to come with us. For them it may have been a chance to get pissed in London, making a change from Bexley Village, I suppose. For me, it was a chance to witness real London punks (and punkettes) and to witness the four men responsible for my sudden switch from Radio Caroline to John Peel with all manner of Punk and New Wave stuff. Capital Radio seemed Strangers-obsessed, particularly Nicky Horne who gave the Hope & Anchor gigs plenty of coverage (he liked the magnificent



Bitching.) Whenever those first chords of a Strangers song came on, I practically popped out of my skin, but Down in the Sewer was the one that always blared out at full volume out from my bedroom.

As for the Roundhouse gig – I'd love to say I can remember everything about it. But the reality is, all I can remember is the emotion I was left with... Waiting on the steps of the venue before it opened, standing mid-way up in the hall, sweating in the heat.

They came on, and went off all so quickly. Next thing, I'm standing at London Bridge station with just my mate and a group of soul boys come up, looking for trouble: I get a whack in the face, ending the night badly. That sort of thing happened at school discos too when people couldn't accept societal and musical transition back then.

Thirty years on through all the line-up changes, I'm less beers and mosh-pit and more one to savour The Stranglers! But seeing as November 4 is my 30th too, I might just return to the front and let down (what's left of) my hair!

He snapped The Stranglers in the 1970s and directed big budget videos for the likes of Wham, Madness and Culture Club in the '80s. **Gary Kent** caught up with photographer Chris Gabrin in the run-up to a recent Stranglers' photo session...

Lights, camera, action!



Chris Gabrin's CV reads like pop music's Who's Who. In fact, there aren't many pop artists from the 70s and 80s who escaped his camera lens. But his

early roots date back to The Stranglers and the Roundhouse days where he stage managed. He also took the photos for Grip and Peaches record sleeves.

To me, it seemed an obvious move to get Chris involved, following a recent sabbatical looking after his daughter, in the Stranglers' Roundhouse anniversary event in November 2007. So I called manager Sil – and last week, after a 30 year hiatus, Chris and the band were reunited for a photo session at Islington's Holborn Studio. [http://www.holbornstudios.co.uk/index_2.html] He also told me he was looking forward to seeing the band play on November 4.

Originally from Leicester, early years are spent in '50s Argentina. In the '60s at Bournemouth Art College, he gets a vacation job working for a known photographer.

After discovering a derelict loft space in a run-down part of King's Cross, Chris invests his time and money setting up his own studio and Hugh regularly drops in to smoke hash and listen to music. It was in 1976 Chris first meets The Stranglers.

What happened?

I needed some cash for setting up the studio. So I started doing bits and pieces – roadying for bands, that sort of thing. I met John Curd, promoter who ran Straight Music, who ran the Roundhouse, among other London venues. I became his stage manager at the Roundhouse. It was the best venue – not just in London, I mean the whole of the country. The stage was amazing. In the week, they used to have, not fringe theatre but, modern theatre, I should say. So you'd get there and find all the seats and the lights were all different, depending on what the director had wanted. So it was a complete surprise when you got there to set up. I just couldn't believe it when it closed down – all because one little old lady complained constantly about the noise. Of course, this was in the days of the old GLC, run by Ken Livingstone, Thatcher was in power. They gave me a decibel meter to hold at the side of the mixing desk to monitor the sound levels. Funnily enough, the highest peaks were when the crowd cheered or applauded. On Sundays, we'd regularly get 1,500 people in there.

And The Stranglers played there...

Back in the old ice cream van days! I really liked The Stranglers – so did John. They had a really good, tight sound. You

see, a lot of bands from that early Punk era were not at all together – they were mostly unprofessional a lot of the time. Not The Stranglers. I remember really getting into Dave's Hammond sound, as I liked The Doors too. I liked hearing his other keyboards too, but especially the Hammond. I then discovered Hugh and I shared an interest in Art House cinema. I kept bumping into him at The Electric in Portobello Road and The Scala, Kings Cross. So after meeting in a working environment, we became friends in an artistic environment. Then I told him about what other things I was doing – with photography.

The 'Grip' photo session come about from that?

I liked working with friends, people I knew. In those days I probably made a loss, most of the time. Especially when Stiff Records took off, I did all of their photographs because I knew Jake Riviera and Dave Robinson; it was favours for mates, really. So Hugh asked and I said yes. I knew Dai, the manager through Brinsley Schwarz as well. They came down to the studio early 1977.

How did the session go?

I found it very easy to work with them. Because we'd met and worked together

before at the gigs, we had a mutual trust which there has to be in the studio. In turn, they were relaxed with someone they knew behind the camera.

On the back of the record, there are four individual shots of the band. Were there any other photographs from that session we could see?

I'm not sure. In fact, I can't remember if we shot it in colour as well...

The sleeve shots are in black and white.

Yes – but in those days we sometimes did a colour set too. Newspapers only used black and white back then, but sometimes a set of colour was done as well. The record company gets the transparencies and they chose which ones to use and throw away the rest. I hold on to the negatives, so I may still have those – and I will have a look, but I can't say how good the resolution will be. I may still have a contact sheet. (He's right – see the next page).

What camera did you use?

I had two – a Nikon 35mm and a Hasselbad 120.







Hugh says he was a regular visitor to your studio where you smoked hash and played Parliament records?

Yes. Hugh and myself got funky up on Parliament.

You've since directed pop promos for a

myriad of well-known artists after photographing many stars from Punk and New Wave. How did you first get into that?

I've always been obsessed with films since the age of 12 or 13. I was studying Art at Bournemouth and I had a holiday

job working for John Garrett. He was one of the Top 10 photographers of the day. I then got an opportunity to work with him full-time. It was brilliant, and I learned both technical nous and discipline. One day I'd be shooting a Rolls Royce, then the next – a heap of frozen peas. Another day, it would be a naked woman.

With the arrival of Punk, what was it like living and working in such a creative, productive culture?

It was a really exciting time. I was from a sort of hippy background – too young to be a real hippy in the Summer of Love and all that, but I was into Brinsley Schwarz, who morphed into Graham Parker & the Rumour and Nick Lowe. I was listening to a lot of jazz too, Pere Ubu... The Ramones, The Doors... You see, I wasn't into musical barriers – as long as it wasn't chart stuff, crappy disco records, that sort of thing. But those days were very political times; a government that was about to land us with that woman Thatcher, had made it a police state: there was terrible unemployment, teenagers had no bloody future, no prospects. There was a lot of unhappiness – and out of that, Punk was born. And to this day, there has never been anything that can touch such a creative period in music culture.

Your photographs didn't appear on any other Stranglers records?

That's probably because it became such a busy time for me, what with stage managing the Roundhouse, and Stiff Records taking off like a rocket. I also did work for Chiswick too, all the indie people. I rarely worked for the big established companies because I suppose had this Punk/Indie attitude. Once, I was asked by a huge American company to photograph one of their new artists – just because I had photographed Elvis Costello, and he too had glasses, just like their new talent. Their rationale was that I knew how to take pictures of people who wore spectacles. I told them to stuff it straight away! But I did film 'Walk On By' with Hugh...



With Strangled's Tony Moon?

Tony was there, but Hugh directed it, I took charge of the camera, and John Mills edited it with Hugh and myself. I also did the Duchess sleeve in some church in Hampstead. I remember how difficult it was finding the place.

Wasn't that shot taken from a still of the promo?

No. The photo came first. They just

wanted a photo session at first but I think they liked the shot enough to choose the same location for the video. I wasn't involved for the Duchess video, but I did direct the Nuclear Device video.

That is one of my favourite Stranglers videos.

I'm glad you like it. We did it out in Portugal. The band previously cancelled a gig out there, and they arranged to return

to do another. I mean, the band would turn up with a huge lighting rig, and the promoter would show them to a solitary 13 amp socket! Anyway, because they were so ruthlessly true to their fans, they booked this other gig – and there was some spare time. So we went and filmed the Nuclear Device video down there. But because the gig had a big fireworks display, I wanted fireworks for the video. Bloody huge fireworks. So we got this dodgy-looking firework guy who had scars all over his face to drive down with these explosives over from England on his truck!

Was it 30 years since the last Stranglers' session?

Well, I did Hugh's video to White Room.

That is my favourite video ever!

Oh really? That was filmed at my studio in St. Pancras Way. I shared half the attic with a sculpture called Denis Masi. His studio was painted white, because sculptures want light, while my studio was black, because a photographer needs dark. We filmed it in the white room which had that unusual semi-circular window with the round windows each side. It was an old Victorian building owned by the Post Office. It's long gone now, though. I moved out soon after: my lease was coming up, and I was always expecting it to get knocked down for redevelopment. A friend moved in and ended up staying there another four years. In the meantime I bought a building with Denis in Shoreditch [sharing with photographer Pete Mackevitch, and The Garden Studio owner John Foxx in the basement] – before the area became poncey. I filmed there too, for Channel Four's 'The Tube'. I was the show's film director, but

the unions didn't allow me to take film cameras into the television studio, which was bizarre. So I ended up filming there, or I used a rented studio 100 yards from the TV studios. Bizarre!

White Room was a very different, and incredibly atmospheric, wasn't it?

It was done in the Nosferatu 1920s style using German expressionist lighting. It was very visual, and with my photographic background, I came up with some new tricks.

I'm going to have to watch that video tonight!

And so will I! Do you remember that shot of the snails, with the shadows? I really wanted snails – and this was before the Internet and everything, don't forget. We managed to find somewhere where we could get snails, so we picked up the phone and ordered them. It was someplace in Truro or something. Anyway, they sent them – by mail! We unpacked them, and surprisingly, they were all still alive.

The Stranglers' debut album was originally to have been a live release of December '76's Nashville Rooms gig. Would you have done the cover had it gone ahead?

Recording a live album was probably a lot cheaper than putting a band in a studio. Would I have done the cover? I suppose it's possible. But I never really did live stuff. I hated it. The lighting at concerts is always shit – unless you're The Who or the Rolling Stones, that is. You can't control it, you end up pushing the camera to the limit to get the shots. And of course, they move in and out of shot all the time,

whereas in a professional studio, I have more control over these things.

Did you ever see the band in the recording studio?

There was a studio in Fulham...

TW Studios?

That's right – with Martin Rushent. At the time, they were putting overdubs on Bring On The Nubiles.

What were Stranglers gigs like back in 1977?

I remember that first tour. Of course, there was a lot of violence. It was endemic, really. Punk was fairly aggressive. It was like a football crowd where 99% are well behaved, and the 1% are drunken louts spoiling it. But The Stranglers did not like being spat at. That was fact. The tabloid press were having a riot, and venues were trying to cancel gigs because of

all the hype. We'd get to hotels to find our reservations cancelled – it was almost as if we were about to eat their children or something!

Are you still in touch with Hugh?

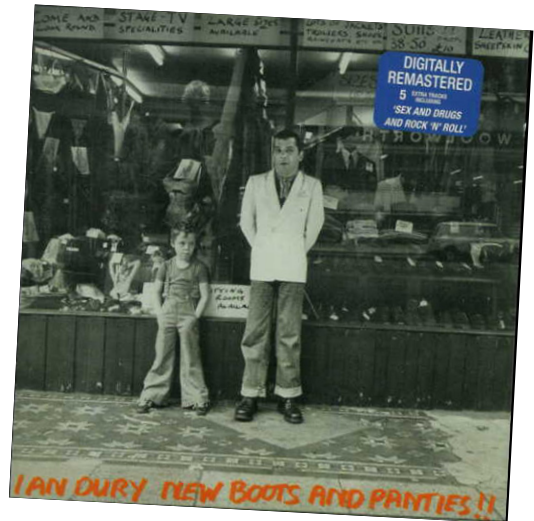
I moved out to Los Angeles for a time and I lost touch with a lot of people. So no, I'm not.

What are you working on nowadays?

I became a one-parent family, so I've not been in the game much, just bringing up my daughter. But I'm slowly easing myself back, now she's at college. I tend to sell my portraits through galleries.

With all the well-known names you've worked with over the past thirty-odd years, which artist stands out?

I suppose, Ian Dury. I'd known him from about 1972, when he was in Kilburn and the High Roads, but I'd never photographed him. He started recording New Boots and Panties, and played me some tapes. We ended up driving round Victoria looking for a good shot for the album's front cover – Peter Blake knew this old second-hand clothing shop that sold costumes from the surrounding theatres, and when he was a student, he used to go there to get cheap garb. We found it, and Ian stood in front of it for me. At the time he was going through a divorce, so that day, he had custody of his son, Baxter, who was with us. As Ian stood there, Baxter just walked in shot and stood beside him. Anyway, the following evening, Ian called round to my studio. It was no mean



feat for disabled Ian, who had scaled the five flights of stairs. He came into the dark room, and we looked at the contacts. We got to the one with Baxter in, and we both knew that that was the one for the cover.

Who are your photographer heroes?

Richard Avedon, Irving Penn and Bill Brandt. I said this in an interview the other day with ['well-known music glossy'] on famous album covers, and they asked for my all-time Top 3 photographers. Instead of Richard Avedon, they put David Hamilton – the name of an awful early '70s soft core porn director. I wasn't pleased at all!

St. Pancras Way studio contacts sheets graciously supplied by Chris Gabrin. © Chris' website can be found here: www.chrisgabrin.co.uk

Autographed Grip supplied by Andrew Robinson



The Stranglers in 2007. © Chris Gabrin

What Rattus and Heroes means to me

Bring on the new bile

Even though they were vilified by the media – mainly as they weren't part of the uber-trendy Rhodes/McLaren hipster coterie – The Stranglers were definitely one of the first and most important UK Punk bands. They'd been around the block and positively oozed bad attitude. Historically too they had been kicking out the exact same racket for ages and their 60s garage Punk definitely predated the Pistols. More significantly, as outsiders themselves – a role they positively relished – The Stranglers were the perfect band for the kids that didn't fit in: the cocky, gawky, dispossessed, nutters and psychos,

and plain oddballs. Pistols Punk was too picture perfect, too posey, too tied in to the fashionistas and wallowed in it's snobbery, vanity and elitism. To all the teenage ne'er do wells, thugs and nobodies on any UK street The Stranglers were the band they could call their own. Sure they were, at least to the casual observer, much safer image wise and musically than the Pistols – those second hand Doors keyboard riffs winning over many curious old timers and '60s throwbacks who still couldn't get their heads round the spirited thrashings of the Damned /Slaughter and their ilk.

Also the macho/sexist lyrics hit the spot for many a mixed up kid. Who

needs the situationist manifesto when you got neat hooks and grubby choruses like, 'lemmy lemmy fuckya fuckya'? It also wound up the squares and zealous PC idiots which had to be a good thing. Burnel and Cornwell looked good and sounded neat too. They had a brooding sleazy menace that the cartoon Punk bands lacked. However, the Stranglers were a love 'em or hate 'em outfit and personally I could never really get past the fact that two of the band looked like hippies and too many songs seemed designed simply for endless keyboard workouts.

But for me, it's the singles where Punk bands either shit or got off the pot. And despite their copious face fungus, The Stranglers made great singles. And Rattus with its free EP (which wasn't much cop) was pretty neat, notably Goodbye Toulouse. Heroes was like so many follow up Punk albums, much too hurried and lacklustre. It must have been a rush job put out by the record company wanting to make their money before Punk passed its sell by date.

But I never saw them play much. I did have a ticket for the cancelled Belfast gig in late '77 – and in London I got turned away from a packed Red Cow in 1978 when they played as The Shakespeares. Next time was with a horn section in cheesy matching waistcoats, a second guitarist too they didn't need while the band went through the motions. Here they were very popular in the early days of Punk. Maybe more dogmatic and fashion conscious compared to Stiff Little Fingers who played most of their first LP in it's entirety at their debut gig, while Pretty Boy Floyd and The Gems always had their

Stranglers' covers down pat. Rudi mangled Go Buddy Go once or twice but there were way too many chords for comfort!

*Brian Young (Sabrejets, ex-Rudi),
Belfast*

Ulster alternative

Rattus Norvegicus was my first intro to The Stranglers, played on a crappy hi-fi in my mate's bedroom. I think it was his brother's LP, before becoming 'ours'. It's a wonder it didn't wear through! Everything about this album intrigued me; the songs, the lyrics, even the sleeve. I would spend ages looking at the cover artwork – scanning ever inch, every detail – who were these people and, more importantly, what were they on? Not only were their tunes over-flowing with menace – the image they portrayed mirrored it to perfection. Then came their first Top Of The Pops appearance – Go Buddy Go. The Old Testament video is a treat to see this nowadays, but I still remember everything about this seminal TV appearance. JJ and Hugh had swapped guitars – JJ playing his bass lines on a Telecaster and Hugh strumming imaginary chords on JJ's Precision – as if to highlight the show's penchant for mimed performances.

Monsieur Burnel also did an excellent job of intimidating the unsuspecting 'prim and proper' crowd by nifty knee work. It was also exciting to see a band appear in what seemed to be regular street clothes, rather than the usual pre-fabricated stage gear donned by other bands – jumpers and jeans, with JJ's scuffed leather jacket having the zipper hanging off!! Never before had I witnessed such an



exhilarating performance – I couldn't wait to get into school the next day, meet up with my fellow punkster classmates and relive the experience again – it was the talk off the assembly hall that next morning. Soon enough I had my very own copy of Rattus – followed by Heroes, and before long, every single release was purchased – a habit that still goes on to this day. All this built up for one landmark occasion – a Thursday night in September 1978 at the Ulster Hall: Rattus' kick-starts, Go Buddy Go on TV goes up a notch, but I'll never forget my first live experience of the band. It's an event forever imprinted. I haven't missed a Belfast gig since. Rats All Folks!

Mully, Belfast

Jack Black's rack

I went to see High Fidelity at the cinema at Swiss Cottage with my cousins. There, on the wall of the record shop in the film was No More Heroes, so I shouted out: "STRANGLERS! NO MORE HEROES!" I made everyone jump. Also when Dick played Inflammable Material, I then shouted: "SUSPECT DEVICE!" Needless to say, my cousins haven't taken me to the movies again. But No More Heroes is a brilliant album – as good as The Meninblack I'd say.

Adam Pigeon, south London

Hardly dated

Fifteen years on from the release of Rattus and Heroes, I heard The Stranglers for the first time. The song was Something Better Change and I was barely out of nappies. But I was hooked. With whatever pocket money I managed to scramble together, I persuaded my folks to take me

to the nearest record shop so I could get my pre-pubescent hands on a Stranglers album. Now in 2007, as I place my ageing copy of Heroes onto my tired old Dual turntable, the music has hardly dated at all – sounding as fresh and alive as any other release from that era but most importantly, has there ever been a finer chemistry than the original line-up? I could sit here and rack my brains for more words but there wouldn't be any point.

Adam Neil, Cheshire

No strings, but they still cut it

I was only a young kid at the end of my glam rock obsession back in 1976-7 when I first encountered The Stranglers in the inky music press. I remember seeing what would have been some of their first promo pics and thinking how old, scruffy and mean looking they were, plus a couple of them had moustaches and beards which was not a Punk era plus point back then. No overpriced Seditionaries threads for these guys either, scuffed leather biker chic and afghan coats was more their thing. Eventually I heard the music which was swamped in Doors-style keyboards and the bass was literally in your face, these guys could play. I liked what I heard, it was different to the 1-2-3 chord thrash a lot of the new breed of multicoloured spiky tops were releasing, though I really liked that also. Punk bands on '70s telly were scarce, so The Stranglers appearances were essential viewing. JJ always looked cool with his low slung bass guitar, while Hugh sneered into his mic, spitting out the lyrics into your living room through the flickering screen. Dave and Jet were there as always in the background, solid as ever.



Rattus became a permanent fixture on a mate's stereo, and played it to death – until Heroes replaced it. Their '77 singles together with the first three albums were up there with the best that New Wave had to offer. I've always thought they tried too hard to be controversial, antagonistic, misogynistic in the media, but then again it never hurt their long-term career. Maybe its part of their charm? I saw them live for the first time in September 1978 at Ulster Hall in Belfast. They put on an excellent show and encouraged everyone to join them onstage for the final song which was Toiler, and so we happily obliged. A mate of mine nicked JJ's string jumper which he had discarded during the show then stupidly went backstage wearing it. Lets just say when JJ spotted he had his pride and joy, it didn't stay on my pal's back for long. I saw The Stranglers live again, minus Hugh, last year after a 28 year gap and they still cut it. I think its safe to predict that the Meninblack will be hanging around (sorry!) for a while longer.

*Joe Donnelly, Belfast
(ex-the Producers)*

Top dogs

The Stranglers are one of the all time greats, as I remember them right from the beginning, Rattus is a top class album.

Songs like Hanging Around, Peaches, and Princess of the Streets would still be in my Top 10 today. Different from the rest of the Punk that was around at the time – and the rat was a great logo – we all had it painted on our leather jackets. I now play in a Punk and Ska cover band called Doghouse – and we do No More Heroes and Peaches. When I hear The Stranglers, I think of my youth and have brilliant memories of that time. Although I think they lost it after Black and White and when Hugh departed, for me that was the end.

Ian 'Buck' Murdock, Belfast

Morbid fascination

A dark cold room. A single bare 12 watt light bulb, when lit, only makes the shadows darker where they fall. Did I mention it was cold? There's ice on the inside of the windows, so it must be winter, although it might be early spring. Could be autumn! You don't see that so much these days – bedroom windows caked with ice. It's the way I remember the setting for my introduction to an album or two that will stay with me till the day I die. Remember when you used to really concentrate on an album? The sleeve, with all it's mysterious iconography and imagery, especially when songs are cut deep into black vinyl grooves? I do. By the time I was really into The Stranglers Black & White was out, and it confirmed everything my tiny teenaged brain was already pretty certain of – this was the band for me. But it was the two albums preceding this that got their sharp claws in and dragged me along on the roller-coaster ride of a lifetime, a white-knuckle ride replete with swirling fairground organs no less. So, to me, Rattus Norvegicus (what a

fantastic title!) and No More Heroes were the one big Double Album sound-track.

I first heard them one after another then back over again, and listened to them that way for hours on end. I loved Punk, but this is what I had been looking for. Did I mention that this is what I had been looking for? From Sometimes through to School Mam then back again – what a ride. I sit back now and put the needle on... The whole band kick in together from the start. Jet is pounding the beat along at a steady rigid pace. Dave's runs up and down the keyboards at the breaks, JJ's relentless, incessant bass line, Hugh's erratic, spidery guitar solo leading into the instrumental middle – it's all the classic Stranglers trademark sound. The way the song returns from the instrumental break with the line, "You're way past your station...", the keyboards firing all over the shop, is perfect. "Morbidity" what a great line, delivered perfectly. It's got false stops – and even a quick roll on the skins. What an opener, what an introduction. I'm listening to it again now and, as always, I'm back there again, back in the dark where it all began for me."

Davy McLaughlin, Glasgow

Rattus librarious

It's 1984. I'm 13 years old and living in a Northern Irish market town called Limavady. To say that nothing ever happened there would be fairly accurate – apart from black magic and a large paedophile ring! Oh, and Richard Branson's balloon landed there when he tried that round the world thing. My record collection in those days was fairly meagre, I had a couple of Adam & the Ants singles and an Eagles' Best Of. My tape collection was better in quality,



but not quantity. I taped the Gospel According to the Meninblack borrowed from Limavady library. This library was a focus point for me: it had lots of music books (my favourite was Pennie Smith's Clash photo book) but most of all I liked browsing the LPs. The covers were my own gallery, some sexual, some gaudy, some disturbing. I never had the courage to take any of these records out. Cassettes were easy. One of the sixth form told me The Stranglers were a great band once, that's when I got Meninblack one – which lead to... One summer's day I was flicking through the LP's when I came across four men in a haunted house. One in particular caught my attention. He had make-up on, and looked startling. The

guy next to him looked like that. Above it said; The Stranglers IV. I pulled it out; the rat on the back looked fucking ace. I hadn't heard a note but I had to have it. Back home, I hatched a plan to smuggle it out. Dad had the soundtrack LP of the Irish RM, but never played it. So I took it and placed it in a record shop bag and went back to the library with it, practically waving it about so the librarians saw me with it. I went over to the rack with the Rattus LP in, took it out of its protective sleeve, placed my dad's LP in, and slid the library's Rattus into my bag. I legged it out of there, sweating heavily. My parents were out which was handy as the only record player in the house was in the living room. I put on Rattus and a world opened

up to me that afternoon. I'd never heard anything like it, the songs were angry and brutal, the singing was harsh. It felt detached – it was sexual and threatening. But I played it all afternoon, and I later hid it under the bed. This truly was the greatest thing I'd ever heard and unaware of them being in the charts. So in 2007, why isn't it in these lazy lists we get month in month in the music press? The 13-year-old me would say that it's probably too dangerous, that's why.

Mark McKay, West Yorkshire

Brighton Belle

One evening in 1976 and I was a baby of 19, when most of the students on our landing seemed to have gone home for the weekend, my friend Helen and I were sitting in her room contemplating a trip into Brighton for a drink. We set out along the seafront in the wind, the cold and the dark when the heavens opened and we ducked inside a pub for a student half (that's one that lasts at least an hour). I have always been convinced that this was the Buccaneer but Helen remembered it as the Alhambra. Shows how time plays tricks on your memory but no matter, it was one of those pubs that abounded in Brighton in the Seventies, that had live music most nights a week.

The place was practically empty and the barman, keen to secure a bigger audience for the band warming up downstairs, persuaded us to part with 50p, an outrageous sum for an unknown band, we rarely paid more than 40p and often much less than that, and go downstairs (she said it was upstairs) and watch them. Having nothing better to do and knowing we could nurse those half pints for as long as we wanted in the dark, we went.



It wasn't a promising start. The soundcheck had stopped and there were very few people in the place, mostly blokes, but one was particularly noticeable. A tall gangly, dark eyed fidget who, a few minutes later, got up on stage with another even taller skinny bloke, a bloke who looked like an escapee from one of those bands that made concept albums and someone who looked like my dad. After about five minutes (no puns intended) it was obvious that this was no run of the mill pub outfit. I was amazed.

They had something that almost no other band I'd seen in an unprepossessing seafront pub had. Charisma, attitude, star quality, call it what you like. Shed loads of it. It just oozed from them. They could also play. I think that business about being able to play is a bit overdone. Most of the bands I saw pre-Punk were actually somewhere between competent and better than that but they lacked that certain

something.

I have no idea now exactly what songs they played and I'm now going to say something bordering on sacrilege. At the time, apart from a much better night out that we'd expected (dampened by having to walk home with no bus money after shelling out that 50p) and learning that they went by the rather unattractive name of The Stranglers, it didn't mean much. We saw live acts at least once a week and they were one of many so that single event didn't seem all that significant at the time. At our end of year college bash a few months before we'd been treated to the then unknown Jam, supporting Shakin' Stevens. But I was left with an indelible impression of this band that just wouldn't go away.

It wasn't long before I began seeing their name in NME and Melody Maker and so was able to follow them a bit, time and resources permitting. I was after all being paid by the state to get a degree and learn

how to be a teacher but the pull was too great to resist. I saw them in other places, not frequently and not obsessively but by the time Peaches was big and the first album came out I was totally hooked. I knew that they would be my favourite band of all time, even if they only lasted a while.

What I couldn't know then was that this passion would last for 30 years and so would they. I began to make a small contribution of my own in around the mid-eighties and up until it folded, writing for Strangled and helping out at the various offices when I could. Being a teacher meant that I had time to spare during the holidays and I would be in Kingston or Cambridge doing mail outs, answering letters and other odd jobs. I met some fascinating people while interviewing them for the magazine, my favourite being Glenn Fabry, who was completely off the wall but a writer's dream.

As well as the music, the most enduring and satisfying aspect of my association with the band has been all the friends I've made along the way. Some of these friendships and relationships have been transient as we go about our different lives and some will be lifelong. I met my husband at the gig at the Albert Hall, something that pleases the tall dark eyed gangly one, incurable romantic that he is. Sadly some have passed away, most recently Chris Winfield who I'll always remember for her wisdom and kindness, but I'm the richer for having known them.

I know in my head I'm actually still 19 in spite of the middle-aged woman who looks back at me from the mirror. Jean Paul Satre had his Madeleines to transport him back to another time and place. I have music. More importantly, I have THIS music. Music to which I have danced, sang, shouted, got pissed, laughed and cried.

So to all my friends in the Stranglers "family", let's celebrate this band like we were nineteen again. GO Buddies, GO!

Nichola Still, Western Australia

The party is over (and we're all going home)

The first time I heard Rattus, I was at a New Years party at the end of 1977. I was only 15 and shouldn't have been there, but had sneaked out when everyone was asleep, pinched a bottle of Ricca-donna (yuk!), and legged it to the party with my best friend. We spend the night listening to Abba's greatest hits, and the Eagles' Hotel California (both fine works), but then someone put on Rattus, and in the first few lines of Sometimes, I was lost. I can't begin to describe how I felt, but I can say that the hairs on the back of my neck stood up, and still do every time I hear that track. I had never heard anything like it, it was so hypnotic, yet harsh and brutal at the same time. I was completely blown away, and I just knew this band were going to be massive. I am transported back to that night each time I hear that song, and for me, its one of the defining memories of my life. Thirty years on, I still love the band, and although Sometimes is not my all time favourite – that memory is so special it will stay with me forever.

Claireinblack, Kent

Three minute heroes

My first memory of The Stranglers was listening to Radio One's John Peel, pioneer of Punk every week night on his 10 o'clock show. I had a pal who picked up on The

Stranglers and told me of a great track called London Lady, and another called Grip. We listened and discussed these tracks long before the album came out. Peelie also played their live session – aired before Rattus. He played Go Buddy Go too, which appeared later with Peaches. When that came out, they were getting well known. Before The Stranglers, I had long hair and flares, just like every other 20 year old then. I was into Santana and Led Zeppelin, (Santana at the Glasgow Apollo in 1975 were very good. Yes too!) but they were fucking boring as hell, man! Thanks to Peelie, the boring old farts went from our consciousness: 20 minute songs were boring – we wanted the three minute hits. Plus, Rattus changed my life...

David Boyd, Glasgow

Rattus 1, Heroes 0

I feel as though I have been unfair to the No More Heroes album over the years. My aural initiation into The Stranglers started relatively late in the day, being only 13 in 1977 but by 1981, I am pleased to report that I was hooked in a big way and started seeing them live on a regular basis. But why unfair to No More Heroes? It's quite simple really. A local friend of mine in Finchley was quite heavily into the band and lent me Rattus Norvegicus from memory, at some point in 1980. I remember taking the LP home and being bowled over from the minute the needle hit the vinyl. The opening strains of Sometimes grabbed me by the throat and this utterly refreshing sound did not let me go until the conclusion of hearing Hugh, eight tracks later, asking me not to be late in joining him in the Sewer. And I was listening to this album three years after it had been released ! Rattus made such an

impression on me that I played it over and over again. I started to dabble with No More Heroes (the same friend also lent me this LP) but I kept returning to Rattus as the No 1 album of listening choice. There are so many different ingredients to this album and each song appealed to me in a different way. There was humour, there was aggression, there was downright 'in yer face' music and lyrics which left me feeling entirely satisfied with each of the nine songs. And this album has stood the test of time. It is still as enjoyable to this day no matter what mood it might find me in. No More Heroes is without doubt a superb follow up album but caught off guard as I was in a moment of youth, Rattus did something that no album had done to me before. It made me think. There is one other thing about that glorious year of 1977. We all have regrets in life and one of mine is not having seen The Stranglers live before my first encounter with them at the Hammersmith Palais in 1981. That was a concert and an evening that I shall never forget. The Stranglers were playing big venues by 1981 but to have been able to see the original IV, live and in their earlier years, is something that those more fortunate than me can cherish.

Paulin London, London

Rattus 2, Heroes 0

I saw Peaches on sale in WH Smiths with my parents in 1977, and heard it playing – I was only 11. I got it a year later. Rattus, and other Punk/New Wave releases kicked the music industry up the arse when all there was were these dire prog rock bands like Yes and Genesis, and boring old farts like Elton John and Rod Stewart. It wasn't just the music that



attracted me and others to it – it was the style, the aggression and the fact that this was what youth need. Rattus has the best overall sound – better than The Raven – my all time fave Stranglers album: it's raw and powerful, and never bettered with all of today's technology... THAT bass, THAT guitar, THOSE drums and THOSE keyboards! The ingredients of a fantastic album which is surely one of the most powerful debut albums by any band over the last 30 years. Opener Sometimes is classic – summing it up in the first few words: someday I'm gonna smack your face – setting the tone for an angry album – even Princess Of The Streets – and no duff track. You can never tire of hearing Rattus. In Strangled in the Letters page, around the time of Hugh left, a fan stated it the best album every time he listened to it there was something new to hear. I agree, especially with Down In The Sewer

– and with Toiler makes up the two best Stranglers songs ever. No More Heroes.... That's a slightly different kettle of fish. The majority of tracks were leftover tracks from Rattus hence the release date being in the same year. The quality of the tracks are not quite up to Rattus standards apart from the obvious title track. That said, Bitching and English Towns are both very high up in the list of Stranglers' classics. The sound and production on NMH is very similar to Rattus and as I've said this is what makes these two albums sound so good even today 30 years later. It's been mentioned on the Punk Forums forum these albums should be re-mastered, or even re-recorded. NO FUCKING WAY!! I like them just the way they are thank you very much! The only down side for me about 1977 and these two albums was that I didn't get to see either The Stranglers or any of the other players in the Punk/New Wave league in concert. I had to wait five years for my first MiB gig! Where's my Tardis???

Simon Kent, Gloucestershire

Devolution man

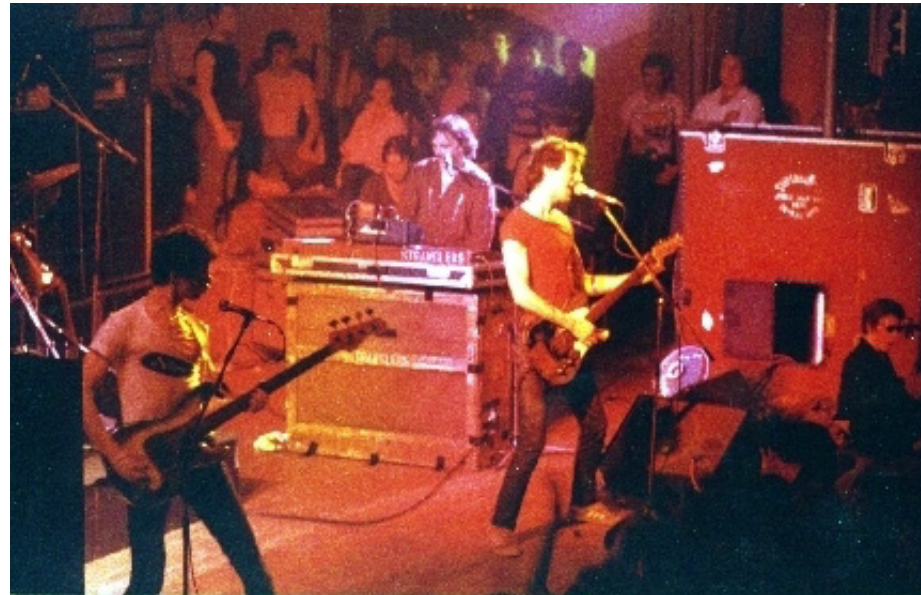
1977 – we had a street party to celebrate the Jubilee. I went on a school trip to France. That's about it. Oh, yeah I kept hearing about this new music phenomenon – PUNK ROCK! ... and the first Stranglers song I heard was No More Heroes. I went to a party at my ex-girlfriend's house. I still wasn't over her, but she was definitely moving on. Someone played No More Heroes single over and over, but I wasn't that impressed with the song to be honest, back then. Irritated, in fact. All it seemed to do was to provide a soundtrack to my jealousy as I watched my 'ex' snogging another lad! Unbelievable then that

Heroes turned out to be possibly the most important, most played, maybe best song ever as far as I'm concerned. Still not bored with it 30 years later. Despite not being a particularly passionate music fan in my early teens it was hard for me to ignore the new music that was coming through. I actually began to like some of this Punk rock. Particularly The Stranglers. After all, they were the biggest of the Punk bands weren't they? I thought Straighten Out and Pretty Vacant (eh? Ed :-/) were very good! Funny how I could never find the latter record in the shops though. Obviously not paying enough attention, the story of my life (true! Ed.) The record that impressed me most though was Down In The Sewer. My best mate's older brother had a copy of Rattus and we used to play it full bore on his radiogram, remember them? Part of the furniture! Sewer's brilliance combined with the power of the radiogram, what can I say? Things were never the same again. Since I've been a Stranglers fan I've always had the feeling that I was born two years too late. I really wish I could claim to have been there from the beginning and witnessed some of those early Stranglers gigs and the bad behaviour that was constantly making the news. But I can't. Bugger!

Barry Spooner, Nottingham.

Big brother says it's the band to hear!

1977 proved to be a watershed. I was born in 1963, and in my teens. I had fairly conventional musical tastes: Abba, ELO and Sparks: This Town Ain't Big Enough... was amazing on TOTP when it came out. They looked strange, very different, and maybe the keyboards triggered something?



Too young to appreciate cutting edge music, my musical tastes got a seismic jolt in '77 thanks to my older brother. Punk reared it's head and he knew all about the NME, Sounds, Record Mirror and I think, if my memory serves me correctly, Melody Maker was still living in the musical dark ages back then. His school friends were at that ripe record buying, gig-going age and brought records home.

Two struck a chord with me: Rattus and The Clash LP. I have never heard anything since that stopped me in my tracks and nagged the question: "what IS this?" The Clash album was raw, energetic and melodic. The Stranglers album was melodic in a different way – there was that keyboard sound for starters. Although having quite a varied tempo (London Lady versus Princess of the Streets) it maintained an aggression throughout. I was never struck that much with Ugly but Toulouse, Grip, Hanging Around, Sometimes and the grand finale of Sewer

just hooked me. The album cover too was striking. The outer and inner sleeves had a resonance, a difference, a certain darkness – the visual image together with the sound of the band just made sense to me. I had not read any of the trendy music press that picks and chooses their flavour of the month, it was a personal and instinctive choice of my own. Following my initial vinyl discovery, the momentum was maintained through 1977 as The Stranglers frequently visited the upper regions of the musical charts, which I used to avidly listen to on Radio 1 on Sunday evenings. Although being a massive hit, Peaches was never one of my favourites – perhaps because everybody else liked it? But I preferred some of the other singles and those early TOTP appearances such as Go Buddy Go, No More Heroes and Something Better Change were captivating to this adolescent. And what a B-side Straighten Out was! 1977 was it for me – when I really got into music,

when The Stranglers, The Clash and later the Jam were my big heroes. I collected press cuttings and started going to gigs – JJ's solo show at Digbeth Civic Hall in 1978 was my first. I didn't know how The Stranglers were perceived until I read NME but in some perverse way it made me like the band even more. It's fascinating 30 years on how history can apparently be re-written and re-evaluated. With recent Punk-style celebrations, The Stranglers have seemingly been air-brushed out from history. This may just be careless editing or possibly journalistic bias from those who may still bear a grudge. Maybe a combination of both?

Too young to fully appreciate 1977, I can only testify to what a pivotal year this was in terms of the person I was developing into and how profoundly it affected my musical taste from then onwards. Whilst some may care to argue that the Stranglers were too old, were too musical etc to be classed as truly Punk, we should not forget The Stranglers and '77's impact and cultural significance (pretentious, moi?) as it was at THAT time, and not just try to look back with revisionist glasses some 30 years later. Yes, hats off to The Ramones, Clash, Pistols and Damned, but it was equally The Stranglers' year: two hit albums, four Top 20 singles and TOTP too. More successful than most of their contemporaries in terms of record sales, if not in terms of credibility. And who says having a big brother has no benefits?

Paul Gunter, Hampshire

Shiny boots

My recollection of 1977 doesn't really count as my baptism of fire as far as The Stranglers are concerned, happened at



Wembley 1979 gig where they launched The Raven. But what I had, and still have, is a bootleg I play all the time: yesterday even, on the way home from work. It is a live recording of a 1977 Roundhouse gig.

Paul Wilkinson, Bedfordshire

Art for fcuk's sake

I got Heroes before Rattus. So for me, no matter how I face this, Heroes will always be on top: like that first kiss and first fcuk – that first one you can't forget in a hurry. You daren't.

Heroes sleeve art is better too: if I want a band with make-up on the cover like the one on Rattus, I'll buy a Kiss album, or a Visage CD. I know many may

disagree – especially over make-up here! Okay, so JJ leers like a quasi-androgyne, and was that supposed to be hip? They do say JJ wasn't happy about that, at the time, and complained – to be told it will all be alright in the final photo – until the art department ran out of budget. So they say. And what about Dave? How can he wear blusher on his chiselled cheekbones, like they really do need accentuating with Dave's extraordinary natural photogenia ...but don a moustache? Now that's perverse! Yes. Rattus looks old, especially with Jet's tired old undertaker's garb (flares to boot!) with Dave's hippy chique woollen jacket. It's actually Hugh who gets away with it: he actually looks cool there. Compare that to the Heroes sleeve and you will see how it hasn't dated. As someone recently pointed out on the Punk Forums

– how can a wreath date? Exactly.

Make-up? Flowers? Superb iconic imagery. Who says I looked into these album covers with forensic detail?! With Black & White literally round the corner, Heroes' songs point the way to a harder edge. Song-wise, Heroes once swings it once more: two (vain)glorious, anthem-like hit singles – and not a Revlon powder compact in sight! That's how The Stranglers in 1977 should be remembered. With a nice big, fat wreath, cosmetic-free. No More Eyeliner, in fact.

Gary Kent, London

Cover plus

October 1981 and La Folie is about to be released. I'm a 14-year-old testosterone-fuelled teenager, just coming of age. Thoughts about politics, religion and money all took a back seat as the only thing on my mind was girls, music and girls! Cue 'Cover Plus' by Hazel O'Connor playing on a friend's tape recorder, and a chance conversation with a pair of twins in the year above me at school: 'I likes that Hanging Around, I does! I wouldn't mind Hazel hanging around on my knob neither!' This was, bizarrely, my introduction to The Stranglers as one of the twins explained that it was a Stranglers' song. Next thing I knew, he had knocked up a C-60 tape with The Raven on one side and Rattus Norvegicus on the other. I played The Raven first, but will save my thoughts on that for a later time. And then Rattus...

Sometimes blasted out of my Binatone mono cassette player, and I'm hooked! What a fantastic opener! Dark, mean, menacing and dead cool for a moody teenager who lived in a village surrounded by greebos who all went to

a different school. I was different and so was this music! People might think I'm rock hard liking this and I could do the fancy Stranglers logo on my rucksack like many of the kids in the years above me at school. I could finally fit in! I drifted away sneering in admiration for my newly found favourite band. Things just got better as Toulouse raced away. Mean, melodic and lots of twiddley bits on the keyboards, which was cool, as I liked electronic music back then. Swiftly on to London Lady – Hang on, there's someone else singing this one! 'Plastic straw when you're off sick'? What's that all about then? Princess of The Streets put me in another quandary. Cool lyrics, didn't like the sound of the bloke singing it, but it was pretty cool, even though it was a bit of a slowy. I remember being quite glad when it finished and we went on to the whole reason for getting the tape – Hanging Around. At first I wondered where the saxophone was and came away totally unimpressed. I remember skipping back and listening again, marvelling at the keyboards and then thinking, 'Yeah, this is so much better than Hazel's version – but I'd still like to shag her!' Well, at that age you don't go very long without thinking about girls do you? Peaches – What the hell is that? Its slow, plodding and boring. Yeah, its got some swearing, but its pretty boring really. That was my thoughts on the song for about 20 years! Its only recently that I've acquired a taste for it! Grip blew me away! I really loved this song as it was fast, melodic and had lots of twiddley bits! I loved Hugh's vocals on this song. Everything just fitted together. Furthermore, the saxophone blares out, which made me think of doing naughty things with Hazel O'Connor again! Ugly starts off perfectly until JJ starts singing. I didn't really like the way he shouted the

lyrics, but at least he swore, which got extra points from a teenage rebel. The music was pretty damn good though. Deep bass (well, as much as Binatone allowed me) and twiddly bits were ace! Little did I know what was to come with Sewer – The greatest song known to man. This song has been my favourite by any group since the first time I heard it back in 1981. There was something familiar about it, it was multiple songs rolled into one, there was lots of tension and there was an awesome crescendo that left me gasping for more. Just like the crescendo with Hazel O'Connor in the fantasy world of a pubescent teenager's mind!

On to No More Heroes... It's now November 1981 and I've been a Stranglers fan for a month. I'm an uncool and moody teenager of 14 with a Stranglers logo on my school rucksack, progressed from C-



60s to LPs, and now La Folie's out. has hit the streets and the Head Boy at school has knocked me up a copy on a BASF tape that my Dad begrudgingly gave me. Cue a visit to my uncle and aunt's house... My elder cousin was a beautiful and popular girl who was in full blossom. She has always treated me as a younger brother and was proud to take me into her room to play me her latest musical purchases. She was a bit of a Mod and was into a band called The Graduate (which was a forerunner to Tears For Fears I think).

So I told her of my thoughts about The Stranglers and Hazel O'Connor

– well, the musical thoughts anyway! She then plucked out her copy of Heroes her older brother gave her. She said I could have it. She didn't like it, but I managed to persuade her to play it for me. I was shocked – it was a bit more Punky and edgy than The Stranglers I had grown to love. I really didn't like the album that much. I found Wog a bit too heavy and didn't really like the singing/shouting on Bitching. Dead Ringer was spoiled by Dave's vocal style. It just did nothing for me. Dagenham Dave came along and rekindled my interest. It was still a bit too guitary and not synth enough for me. Nubiles was cool though, especially after I had looked up the word nubile in the dictionary! I was a little embarrassed to listen to it in my 16-year-old cousin's bedroom, while she looked on at my leering grin. Something Better Change made me realise that these Strangler boys were real Punk rockers and not as melodic as I had found in later albums. No More Heroes on the other hand flicked on a switch in my head. I'd heard this before, liked it, but didn't know who it was by! This was the redeeming song of the album for me. It has been my second favourite song of all time by any band (closely following Sewer) ever since. Peasant was my least favourite song on the album as I don't like people being silly on vocals. This music was a serious business and there was no place for arsing around in my opinion! Burning Up Time was too aggressive for me until I realised what it was all about and then it became interesting. English Towns was another gem on the album that made me want to be a stud and find where thousands of Hazel O'Connor's lived! I didn't get to listen to School Mam until I got home. I thought this was okay, but a bit monotonous. My new found friends at

school thought it was the 'bees knees' but I've never really got into it. Although, as a teenager, I liked the thought of what was going on down on the parquet flooring. Although I must admit that I had to ask my parents what parquet flooring was!

Paulinblack, Gloucester.

Down in the newsagent

I was 13 in 1977 when one of my mates, who was older, bought No More Heroes LP. We bunked off school and played it in his living room. We'd give marks out of 10 for each track, add them up, and see which one was the best one. Nubiles usually won.

Then we discovered Rattus. We pooled our 50p's and got it, but one or two of our mates didn't rate it compared to Heroes. I really got into it, and the swearing in Ugly had us in fits of laughter. Our newsagent sold ex-juke box 45s and every Saturday morning new oldies arrived. We got down there and fought over Grip and Something Better Change – and this was at 6am. Of course, it was just the plain white sleeves, so we had to buy them again to get the picture sleeves.

When I got Peaches with the peach cover design, I stuck it at the front of my collection in the living room, and Mum went nuts. They went away for a weekend once, and stayed at home to paint one of the walls in my bedroom black, with a giant red Stranglers logo I made from a role of wallpaper. It looked great, but I then I started crapping myself when they returned. My Mum said nowt, so I carried on with the other walls with Stranglers posters and Stranglers clippings – the good old days! And here I am at it again in our spare room, aged 44.

Alan Baty, Newcastle Upon Tyne

