

**THE  
WEST'S GREATEST  
ROCK SHOWS**

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**1963-1978**

**LOST, FORGOTTEN AND PREVIOUSLY  
UNTOLD EYE-OPENING TALES FROM  
THE GIGS YOU'LL WISH YOU'D SEEN**

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**TRIGGER WARNING:**

This book contains sex, drugs  
and rock'n'roll

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To the late Al Read and Freddy Bannister, without whom many of these great shows would never have happened.

Also to Sue, who continues to put up with me even though I once abandoned her in the St. John Ambulance tent after she passed out at the Monsters of Rock festival, because I didn't want to miss a minute of Slayer.

(Hey - they were playing *Raining Blood*.)

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# INTRODUCTION

On October 7, 1987, I went to see Guns n' Roses at the Colston Hall. It was one of just five UK dates on the *Appetite For Destruction* tour. This turned out to be the only UK tour by the band's classic line-up before they hit the stadiums and imploded. The Hall was half-full and the only other hack there was the *Bristol Post's* 'pop correspondent'. He was not impressed, writing that these "foul-mouthed rockers" would not be welcome in Bristol again. When I tried to do the Jon Landau "I have seen the future of rock and roll" thing on my then editor, he turned down my offer of a review because he'd never heard of Guns n' Roses. If memory serves, he was more interested in a band called The Woodentops, who were deemed to be The Future of Indie for at least the next ten minutes. Six months later, the Gunners were the biggest band in the world. In his interesting and perceptive book *Uncommon People: The Rise and Fall of the Rock Stars*, David Hepworth writes: "It remains the case that when fashion editors think of a rock star they think of Axl Rose in 1987. Nobody has ever looked more the part."

Anyhow, I can occasionally wow impressionable young people with the story of how I was actually at this show, bootleg recordings of which can be found across the internet - and, indeed, how I saw Queens of the Stone Age at the Fleece (half-full) and Nine Inch Nails at the Bierkeller (about 300 punters, including Island Records boss Chris Blackwell). But if an even older, gnarlier rocker is present, he or she will invariably say, "That's really great. But I remember seeing David Bowie supported by Thin Lizzy at the Locarno/Jimi Hendrix at the Colston Hall/Pink Floyd at the Corn Exchange."

So that's me well and truly trumped, then. Bastards! If I had a time machine, I wouldn't be bothered with the Battle of Hastings, the birth of the

alleged baby Jesus, and all that guff. I'd nip back and witness rock history being made. I once calculated that the optimum year in which to be born was 1950. That way you'd be hitting your teens just as The Beatles turned up to change the world, be old enough to enjoy all the free love of 1967, and then savour the incredible flourishing of creative music at a time when baffled but wealthy record companies were chucking money at bands and giving them plenty of time to find their feet.

Nostalgia for other people's youth is a concept for which there ought to be - and probably is - a German word. Speak to those who were there and some will acknowledge their immense good fortune at finding themselves in the right place at the right time. Others will insist that it was all awful, and it has to be acknowledged that not every one of these is a sad, bitter old git or ghastly trend-chaser eager to be down with the kids by disavowing the unfashionable music of their youth. But the yearning for this possibly mythical past now seems to transcend generations. I've often found myself talking to teenagers who also wish they'd been around to savour 1972.

Indeed, you can continue to hear the music of The Beatles, the Stones, Pink Floyd, Genesis, Fleetwood Mac, AC/DC, The Who, Thin Lizzy, Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, Frank Zappa, David Bowie, Deep Purple, T. Rex, Black Sabbath, Roxy Music, Bob Marley, Queen, Steely Dan and many, many more performed live locally by the plethora of covers bands/tribute acts (delete according to prejudice) who make a comfortable living from keeping it alive. While there are performers paying tribute to everyone from Amy Winehouse to Nirvana and Rammstein, the market remains dominated by music from the sixties and seventies. Some of the bigger acts - such as the Bootleg Beatles, Illegal Eagles, Australian Pink Floyd and The Musical Box - play to crowds the same size as those pulled by the original bands half a century or more ago, occasionally in the same venues. Make of the tribute act phenomenon what you will, but it can't be denied that the music continues to appeal to audiences of all ages.

So if I had that time machine, these are the local gigs I'd go to. Just a few clarifications before we start. I'm not suggesting for a moment that this is a definitive collection of the Greatest Gigs That Ever Happened Round These Parts. It's limited to a 15-year period and concentrates on rock, specifically classic rock, metal, prog and their precursors - plus those jazz, folk, blues, soul and occasional reggae artists with crossover appeal. Maybe a legendary



trad jazzer pitched up to tootle and parp his way through a gig at some long demolished local venue back in the 1950s. Or perhaps a disc jockey played a record particularly well at a rave in 1991. But I wouldn't know about that. If your taste is for indie, punk, world music or trip hop, no doubt your list will be very different. So feel free to compile your own, or consult those who have written far more authoritatively and with much greater enthusiasm for these genres than I could ever muster. The local punk and new wave movements, for example, have been superbly chronicled by Mike Darby's excellent Bristol Archive Records.

Anyone who's ever read a rock biography will be familiar with the sentence that reads: "Band/artist X then embarked on a 19-date UK tour before returning to the studio to record their next album." But hang on a minute. What happened on that tour? How did they go down in the regions, away from the metropolitan tastemakers? What sort of venues did they play? How much naughtiness did they get up to on the road? Focusing on the thriving scene in Bristol, Bath and surrounding areas, I've set out to answer these questions and more by delving into the regional and student press, none of which has been digitised, and quizzing band members, promoters and punters. It's astonishing how many incredible stories about major stars have been lost, forgotten or simply never told before. In these pages, you'll find accounts of stage mishaps, petty officialdom, eccentric promoters, multiple instances of rock'n'roll misbehaviour and several riots (including the UK's first outdoor pop riot). And, of course, that great local pre-internet rite of passage: camping out overnight at the Colston Hall to secure front row seats for your favourite band, from rebellious schoolgirls in 1964 to teenage heavy metal fans in 1978.

Along the way, you'll be plunged into the sights, sounds and - oh, yes - smells of the sixties and seventies regional club scene. There's the Corn Exchange, where rock history was made on multiple occasions in the 1960s; the Granary Club, Bristol's vibrant, pleasingly lawless counterpart to London's Marquee; and the extraordinary, none-more-seventies Boobs, where you could have seen artists as diverse as Quo, Faust and Bob Marley and the Wailers performing alongside plastic palm trees - and still have change from a quid. It all amounts to a very different prism through which to view rock history.

To step back into the sixties, particularly the early part of the decade,

would be quite a culture shock for those of us used to our favourite bands playing three hour wig-outs at ear-splitting volume accompanied by retina-frazzling lightshows. These days, all but the most extreme rock bands attract all-ages audiences. Back then, older generations tended to be aghast and punters over the age of 25 were generally thin on the ground. Then there were those exotic gangs of yesteryear to contend with, ranging from the Teds to the Mods, who could be vocal in their disapproval of acts that failed to conform to their particular subcultural requirements. And they had plenty to disapprove of, as the Colston Hall's programme was filled with package tours, many of them absurdly mismatched - none more so than the mind-boggling Walker Brothers/Jimi Hendrix/Englebert Humperdinck show. What's more, the sound was crap, the lighting basic and there were two houses each night. The combination of under-powered amplification and over-excited teenage girls meant that your chances of hearing anything played by the likes of The Beatles or Stones were slim indeed.

Another surprise for modern audiences might be the youthfulness and social backgrounds of many of the sixties acts. Today, we're used to what seems like a monoculture of posh musicians with stage school educations, often in their late twenties and early thirties, whose ambitions extend no further than to make tasteful music that never threatens to quicken the pulse but secures them fawning colour supplement profiles, a slot on *Later... With Jools Holland* and a Mercury Prize nomination.

When Stevie Wonder first played Bristol, he was fourteen years old. Steve Winwood was fifteen. Gary Moore was sixteen. Many of the most raucous and thrilling rock groups turning up at the Corn Exchange and Bath Pavilion were still in their late teens. Those working behind the scenes were often not much older. Joe Boyd told me he was "a very green 21-year-old" when he made his debut as a tour manager at the Colston Hall at the start of 1964's American Folk, Blues and Gospel Caravan jaunt, finding himself thrown in at the deep end on a mission to corral the much older, often cantankerous and frequently feuding artists.

A large proportion of the early bands were working-class kids taking full advantage of the social mobility afforded by what became the Swinging Sixties. Indeed, nice, well brought up middle-class boys who chose not to fake it like the Stones often found themselves very much in the minority. The young Reginald Dwight, for example, who slogged round the same

circuit with Long John Baldry's Bluesology and went on to become one of the biggest stars of the seventies, often found himself feeling distinctly uncomfortable among the ruffians. "In the six-strong line-up, fat Reggie was the odd man out - quiet, neat and self-contained, inhabiting his own little patch of order amid the travelling chaos," writes Philip Norman in his definitive biography, *Sir Elton*.

There was also a great deal more racial diversity than you might perhaps expect. Virtually all of the great black artists who laid the foundations of rock played shows in Bristol during the 1960s. Lippmann and Rau's annual touring American Folk-Blues Festival brought astonishing packages to the Hall Formerly Known as Colston, building up a large and loyal audience through the decade and beyond. Acts ranging from Screamin' Jay Hawkins to Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker also performed in local club venues, although details tend to be poorly recorded because these musicians were of less interest to the local press than white beat boom combos. And as we shall see, on one memorable occasion the Ike and Tina Turner Revue played shows in Bath and Bristol on the same evening.

The prevailing view in the early days was that pop music was just a passing fad and it wouldn't be long before audiences saw sense and went back to the crooners. To make as much loot as possible before everything went tits-up, promoters crammed as many bands as they could onto the big Colston Hall bills, sent each act on stage to play a couple of hits and then promptly hauled them off again. There was always the danger of missing your favourite band if you turned up late or went for a swift piss. Even musical giants like Chuck Berry and Jimi Hendrix were granted as little as 20 minutes for their headline performances, while openers frequently got just eight minutes. There must have been someone standing at the side of the stage with a stopwatch.

The world of pop was also so volatile that bands' fortunes often changed markedly between a tour being booked and it actually taking place, leading to enormous backstage rivalries. As we'll see, many of the biggest names in rock started out on these tours. David Bowie, for example, was at the bottom of the bill for two Colston Hall packages in 1969. At the first of these he didn't sing a note; at the second he was heckled.

If you're wondering why acts like The Who, The Move, Pink Floyd and

David Bowie did so many gigs in Bristol during this era, often separated by just a few weeks, that's because they were playing to completely different audiences. Venues like the Locarno, Granary and Corn Exchange were open to everyone, but for a long time only students were permitted access to the Victoria and Anson Rooms. This was rigorously policed in order to keep the oiks out. Local papers would occasionally carry angry letters from ordinary gig-goers who'd been repulsed along with the rest of the riff-raff, demanding to know why these shows were publicised. The standard reply was the rather optimistic one that students might be avid readers of the *Western Daily Press*. To save the University of Bristol and/or University Union the bother of issuing a press release in response to this, here's one I made earlier: "Wouldn't happen today... community engagement... diversity... inclusion... blah blah..."

What's particularly striking about the seventies is how diverse rock became. Let's take one genre by way of example. Sadly, just as the terms 'indie' and 'alternative' are now used as cynical branding exercises to confer unearned moral and artistic superiority upon bland music that is neither independent nor the alternative to anything, so 'prog' has too often been devalued by self-appointed arbiters to apply to a narrow range of music played in a specific style. Flip through these pages and you'll be reminded that a glorious panoply of acts were originally united, often somewhat uncomfortably, under this broad banner, from ELP, Yes, Pink Floyd and King Crimson to Magma, Gentle Giant, Soft Machine, Roxy Music, the Mahavishnu Orchestra and the great Krautrock explosion. While today's purists would only acknowledge bands operating in the same musical postcode, these people don't even occupy the same artistic continent.

There's another reason for compiling this book now. Each time the local press writes about The Rolling Stones in Bristol, an intern is dispatched to unearth the old story about Mick Jagger being denied entry to the Grand Hotel restaurant in January 1964 because he was improperly dressed. This might indeed have happened, although it's a yarn that bears all the hallmarks of an Andrew Loog Oldham publicity stunt. But there are some much more interesting local stories about the Stones, as we shall see. The trouble is that the people who are able to give us these first-hand accounts are, not to put too fine a point on it, dropping like flies. Indeed, *Classic Rock* magazine sometimes devotes more space to obituaries than it does to live reviews.

Sadly, some of those with key roles in the local sixties and seventies music scene are also no longer with us to share their memories. I was fortunate to be able to speak to two of them, promoter Freddy Bannister and Granary entertainments manager Al Read - both of whom were generous with their time and stories - when I wrote for local what's on magazine *Venue*.

What's more, when the Colston Hall's website underwent one of its many anniversary revamps, a half-hearted historical timeline was introduced. This, frankly, was a travesty, littered with incorrect dates and missing shows of enormous significance. The unfortunate impression given was that the hall's management - or, more likely, their highly remunerated consultants - either didn't know or didn't care about the musical history that was made within its walls. I can only hope that this book will go some way towards correcting that.

It's also instructive to go back and see how these shows were reviewed by the local press. Given the speed of change in what would now be referred to as youth culture, we should perhaps not be too harsh on the hacks whose verdicts seem hopelessly wrong. Back in the early to mid sixties, general entertainment journalists were struggling to come to terms with the notion that pop music and its screaming teenage audiences were here to stay - for a while at least. They seem to have decided that the best thing to do was to treat it as an exotic and slightly hairier branch of showbiz. The young lads - and they were mostly lads - who play this music might look a bit odd, but they're generally clean and pleasant and have some jolly tunes that aren't too far removed from the output of Tin Pan Alley.

No doubt the fact that the first wave of baby boomers had disposable income available to spend on news of their teen idols helped to spark the papers' interest in all things pop. On a good day, the *Bristol Evening Post* sold as many as 120,000 copies, reaching virtually every household in the city, and could afford to hire young reporters to help cover the pop beat. Indeed, the paper boasted of having its own Beatle in the form of mop-topped Roger Bennett, who was dispatched to hang off the Fabs' every word. The rival *Western Daily Press's* Thursday *Teenpage* embarked on a seemingly ceaseless quest to find the hairiest groups coming to town. *Hairiest Yet!* screamed a 1964 headline, triumphantly announcing the arrival at the Corn Exchange of a band who were "even hairier than the Stones". The combo in question? The Birds, featuring 17-year-old future Stone Ron Wood.

Bristol United Press's lesser-known weekly *Week-End* magazine, meanwhile, held out against the barbarian hordes well into 1965. Pitched at an older readership (competition headline: Win the Wife a Washing Machine), this boasted a weird mix of picture spreads of society events, lifestyle guff and lurid *News of the World*-esque reports (pornography, the occult, ghosts/poltergeists, gruesome historic murders, etc). In September 1963, it mounted an investigation into the 'peculiar existence' of the beatnik (*Rebels in Ringlets*), as part of which reporter Mike Dornan donned a wig and clutched an acoustic guitar, looking remarkably like Neil the hippy from *The Young Ones*. He then set off into the night in the hope of being roundly abused by salt-of-the-earth Bristolians. Alas, he was to be disappointed, as few seemed to share the often splenetic weekly's prejudices.

"No-one made the slightest effort to throw me out," Dornan opined: "In one of the city's most respectable bars, when the barmaid asked me to stop playing my guitar, she was shouted down by cries of 'He's all right', 'He's a good 'un', 'This gentleman is entertaining us.'" Everywhere he went, people bought him drinks and, on one occasion, a full meal. Interestingly, *Western Daily Press* reporter Maurice Fells tried the same gambit three years later, with much the same result. In a Gloucester Road café, he was given a meal on the house. At a pub in the centre, the landlord offered him a free drink. The small price to pay? "Girls looked, giggled, men wolf-whistled, middle-aged ladies said my hairstyle was 'disgusting'."

*Week-End's* attitude towards popular music is best summarised by a review of *Top of the Pops*, "the BBC's stamping ground for the long-haired shakers", which was published in March 1964. The show was described as a "ritual parade of the odd noises that pass under the title of pop" performed in front of a "jerking, twitching throng of teenagers... a crowd of cave man cuts, cowboy hats and sloppy looks... As for the pop tunes, whatever tune they had was drowned in discordant howling and stamping."

This wasn't just the view of pipe-smoking old squares. Before rock music swept it away virtually overnight, trad jazz was where it was at, daddy-o. It's hard to over-emphasise how huge the scene was locally. And the jazzers weren't going to go down without a fight, deploying their full armoury of snobbery and condescension. Nowhere was this more evident than in the student press, whose early sixties music coverage was dominated by jazz, with a side-order of folk (whose adherents were usually at war with

one another over their arcane differences). In November 1963, Bristol University's student newspaper *Nonesuch News* attached a metaphorical clothes peg to its nose and ventured into the vulgar world of popular culture for a series of important articles. First up was pop music: "A natural reversion to primitivism for the lower orders and a nice novelty for the sophisticates." The uncredited, lip-curling author acknowledged teenagers' enthusiasm, enjoyment (or "mass-produced self-expression") and sense of ownership of the music pushed by "unscrupulous elements among their elders and betters", but warned of its "degrading, prostituting effect... The danger here is that... they start a disintegration of society as a whole; until the sound of their own music is a war cry." Hmm... on reflection, perhaps they could be onto something.

Local TV made an occasional stab at covering the local and national pop scene too. By far the most successful and longest running show was the *Discs A-Go-Go* groovy pop programme, a regional counterpart to Rediffusion's London-based *Ready, Steady Go!* from Television West and Wales (TWW) - forerunner of HTV and ITV West. Many of the bands appearing at the Corn Exchange would nip along to the Bath Road studio while they were in Bristol to perform or mime to their latest hits. Sometimes this would cause problems. The Byrds were so busy looking fab for the cameras in August 1965 that they didn't finish recording until 9:30pm, which meant they were greeted by some very disgruntled punters when they finally arrived on stage.

Presented by Kent Walton, who later became ITV's voice of wrestling, the weekly half-hour show was launched in 1961 and broadcast at 7pm every Monday. Jazz acts dominated until pop came along. Hordes of local teens would turn up to dance for the cameras and each would be rewarded with a badge bearing a jolly grinning fox logo. The cartoon fox had been created by Harry Hargreaves and was named Gogo - the proprietor of "the gayest coffee bar in town".

Among the artists who appeared over the next four years were The Moody Blues, The Kinks, The Yardbirds, The Animals, The Pretty Things, Donovan, The Beach Boys, Simon & Garfunkel, Ben E. King, Bo Diddley and, ahem, Gary Glitter (pitching up on the very first show in his unsuccessful first incarnation as Paul Raven).

Occasionally, ructions occurred. In 1964, Mandy Rice-Davies made a

short-lived attempt to cash in on her Profumo affair notoriety by becoming a pop singer. Cilla Black was the big *Discs A-Go-Go* star of the week when Rice-Davies turned up unannounced at the Bath Road studio on the arm of local music promoter, journalist and general man about town Terry Olpin. The entire audience promptly turned their backs on the chirpy Scouse popstrel, who had to suffer the indignity of watching Rice-Davies sign autographs all evening. Flying into a rage, vengeful Cilla made a formal complaint to TWW management, which got Olpin fired from his role of selecting dancing girls for the show. He went on to found a local property rental empire. Fifty-five years later, Mandy's story was told in the 2019 BBC drama *The Trial of Christine Keeler*, which was shot on location in Bristol.

Alas, every single episode of *Discs A-Go-Go* was subsequently wiped. Yep, even the 1962 edition with The Beatles miming to *Love Me Do*. The only surviving show is a one-off edition broadcast in 1968 as part of an evening of programmes shown to mark the loss of TWW's franchise.

*Discs A-Go-Go* had initially been commissioned for a trial five-episode run. But it proved such a success that TWW managed to flog it to several other regional franchise holders, including Anglia, Ulster and Westward. Late in 1965, management made the foolish decision to replace their hit with a revamped programme boasting a bigger budget and taking a wider look at teenage life and fashions. It also had a local talent contest, painfully titled *Popportunity Now*.

Launched at 6:30pm on December 22, 1965, *Now!* was billed as "a swinging, trend-setting show". Musical guests on the first programme were Tom Jones and PJ Proby, while the host was a young man making his TV debut. His name? Michael Palin. He was joined by actress Wendy Varnals, who would later be strangled and decapitated by Peter Cushing in the 1968 Brit horror *Corruption* ("This is not a woman's picture! No women will be allowed in alone!").

Eight days later, the *Western Daily Press* published a damning and occasionally rather cruel takedown of the show, framed as a "tip to TWW programme controller Bryan Michie". Tony Crofts reckoned it "ought to forget about swinging right away, and perhaps it should not try too hard to be trend-setting, either." He didn't like the arrangement of the audience ("sitting glumly in leggy, spoggy rows on amphitheatre seats"), the dancers ("one of the girls is just too big and beefy for her shift") or the presenters



(“Wendy Varnals must go”). Palin wasn’t mentioned by name, but the one element that Crofts did enjoy was the cracks at the music press and pop stars - especially “a piece about the syrupy thanks of the Melody Maker poll winners”, which made him laugh out loud. This sounds positively Palin-esque, but we’ll never know because - you guessed it - the shows were wiped.

A few clips of Palin’s filmed insert comedy skits survived, however. In the 2018 BBC documentary *A Life on Screen*, he recalled of *Now!* “Tom Jones was just starting. He’d come on every other week. [Not actually true. Records reveal that he was on the first and 15th shows.] Eric Clapton was there regularly... Although it may not have been the greatest show ever, it did pay me £30 a week and I got married in 1966 on that.”

In 2023, Bristol’s Slapstick festival of classic and silent comedy unearthed some more clips for its *Michael Palin: Beyond Python* event with the great man himself. One of these had him larking around the streets of Clifton in drag to the strains of *Second Hand Rose*.

One show was co-presented by Scouse comedy, poetry and music trio The Scaffold, who went on to have huge hits later in the 1960s with *Thank U Very Much* and *Lily the Pink*. “I don’t know how they heard of us - maybe it was because of the Edinburgh Festival,” mused Scaffold member Mike McGear - aka Mike McCartney, younger brother of Beatle Paul - when I spoke to him after The Scaffold’s reunion at Slapstick.

Mike, who rather disarmingly continues to refer to his illustrious sibling as “our kid”, doesn’t recall The Scaffold performing on the show. Instead, they were there to introduce bands and film some comedy sketches. “There was one where we had to chase a pound note as it floated through the streets of Bristol. I can’t remember the payoff. Another one had Roger McGough snogging a bird.”

Palin, he recalls, was “just a young lad from Sheffield who was able to show off and do links - and so were we, so we got on very well.”

The Scaffold were in Bristol for a couple of days to film their contributions and were particularly keen to hit the pub and sample the local beverage... scrumpy. Young Mr. Palin was equally keen to warn them off. “He said, ‘Look this is serious stuff. You need to start off with half pints.’”

It wasn’t long before the trio were necking pints and swiftly became the worse for wear. “The last thing I remember is someone saying: ‘I’m a policeman...’”

*Now!* clearly had no trouble attracting major stars. Stevie Wonder, Lulu, Jimmy Cliff, The Yardbirds, Wilson Pickett and the Everly Brothers all made their way to the TWW studio. On what must have been a memorable occasion, The Animals and Arthur Mullard appeared on the same show. But in July 1966, after a little more than six months, *Now!* was canned. Palin departed for pastures new, joining forces with his old Oxford University chum Terry Jones to write for *The Frost Report*. Varnals went on to co-present with Barry Fantoni the BBC's national yooof programme *A Whole Scene Going* ("... reflecting the tastes and times of Britain's under twenty-ones"), a short-lived rival to ITV's hit *Ready Steady Go!* TWW, meanwhile, had one last bash at a pop show. The USP of *Herd at the Scene*, launched in September 1966, was that the pop groups would introduce their own music. It lasted for three episodes.

Just a few short years later, 'underground' bands turned up, attracting an entirely different type of punter. Those beat boom acts were faced with the prospect of hanging up their matching suits or updating their style and sound dramatically. The Traffic and Walker Brothers/Jimi Hendrix package shows at the Colston Hall in 1967 are striking examples of this existential crisis at play.

Having spent several years serving up a bizarre mix of enjoyably snarky commentary on pop groups in town and a somewhat creepy obsession with very young teenage girls, the *Western Daily Press's* *Teenpage* took a different tack, reacting violently against hippies, psychedelia and 'flower power'. In a long editorial published on March 16, 1967, Ray Wood predicted that "the much-vaunted, earth-shattering trend of '67, psychedelic music, is going to be nothing but a great big light-flashing flop." Alluding to The Rolling Stones' Redlands drug bust a month earlier, he voiced disapproval of the music's 'pushers' and their attempts to "convey a turned-on feeling, representing the effects of hallucinogenic drugs". What's more: "Bringing drug terminology into pop lyrics had not helped the general show-business image, either." Fortunately, he foresaw an end to this nonsense, observing that "psychedelic music has caught the backlash and looks like losing out during a general cleaning-up of the pop world."

*Teenpage's* Canute-esque campaign against psychedelia continued with a broadside against Pink Floyd on April 13, 1967 ("I have never, ever heard such a load of noisy, boring monotonous rubbish hiding under the name

of music,” raged roving reporter Brian K. Jones in his *Long Thin Column*). Even the Fabs weren’t immune. On June 22, Mr. Jones took aim at *Sgt. Pepper*, which contained, in his view, “just four worthwhile tracks”, the rest being “psychedelic nonsense”. “Please, Beatles,” he concluded, “get back to the lyrics and melodies of the *Can’t Buy Me Love* class. I just dread to think what your ‘progression’ will give us next.”

In 1968, he described Tyrannosaurus Rex’s debut album (deep breath) *My People Were Fair and Had Sky in Their Hair... But Now They’re Content to Wear Stars on Their Brows* as “the biggest load of rubbish I have ever heard”, prompting a bumper postbag of complaint. The big news of that eventful year, as far as he was concerned, was the short-lived rock’n’roll revival that saw portly, square-looking Bill Haley and his Comets arrive at the Locarno on May 23, more than a decade after his big hits. It’s almost as though Bob Dylan wrote *Ballad of a Thin Man* specifically for this very Mr. Jones. To be fair to him, however, Jones eventually calmed down a bit when psychedelia gave way to progressive rock and heavy metal. He even found some nice things to say about Marc Bolan’s glam rock makeover with T. Rex.

Meanwhile, something rather more interesting had been happening a little further down the page, though it only lasted for nine months in 1967. The paper’s folk correspondent Gertrude (yes, just Gertrude) branched out from trad hey-nony-nony stuff to incorporate blues. Before long, she was also singing the praises of the Incredible String Band and Mothers of Invention, while expressing the hope that Bristol could soon boast a hippy club in the mould of London’s UFO. Her *Folk Spot* column was also rebranded as *The Flowerpot* (“folk, blues and beyond”). “One great aspect of the underground Beautiful People scene is the mixing of so many art forms (i.e. pop, folk, blues, poetry, creative dance, light shows) from so many different cultures and the total involvement of all participants,” Gertrude enthused on July 27. Perhaps she should have rolled one to relax her uptight colleagues.

The *Bristol Evening Post* seemed similarly confused and appeared to suffer something of a crisis in trying to work out what was going on. But at least the paper made an effort. They’d noticed that tastes were changing and changing fast. A case in point was Herman’s Hermits who would once have packed the Colston but attracted only “a smattering” of fans to their

disastrous 1969 show, while 'underground' bands Jethro Tull and Ten Years After were "outstanding successes". The Hall's Entertainments Manager, Kenneth Cowley, took a suitably progressive approach, describing underground music as "maturer, deeper. Pop is better for it." The *Post* noted that while "hippies arouse deep feelings of hatred among the respectable public," the Colston was welcoming them with open arms. "They certainly look very odd," conceded Mr. Cowley, "but they don't come to take part in the frenzied fan worships we used to see not so long ago. They are extremely polite."

By 1969, *Teenpage* had a new editor, Penny Weston, and broadened its horizons slightly. But some of these features were quite jaw-dropping. On January 2, 1969, for example, Ms. Weston introduced readers to Bristol's latest exciting competitive dating game: Blacklisting. The rules were very simple. White teenage girls hang out in local West Indian clubs trying to notch up as many 'coloured' boyfriends as possible. Naturally, the 'coloured' lads were delighted. But all the girls interviewed opted for anonymity. 'Attractive blonde shop assistant' Gillian, 17, said her dad would beat the living daylights out of her if he found out: "He's worse than Alf Garnett."

"They are more domineering and independent than other boys," swooned another girl of her many dates. "But I would not marry one as I feel they are unreliable and lazy."

Oh...

Later that year, *Teenpage* found an imaginative way to combine its two greatest obsessions: pop music and fruity teenage girls. They'd actually held a Teenpage Ball the previous year, but this was a much bigger one. Taking place in the swanky Mayfair Suite in the New Bristol Centre, it took the form of a beauty contest combined with a concert featuring the UK's hottest new band. The band in question? Deep Purple, fresh from the Albert Hall, where they'd performed Jon Lord's *Concerto For Group and Orchestra*. This had much to commend it, but was not widely noted for its teen appeal.

The lively, occasionally bizarre *Teenpage* was mothballed and long-serving reporter Brian K. Jones pensioned off in June 1971. In its place, the paper launched a twice-weekly column titled *Oyez!* (WDP executives clearly taking the view that a term used as a call for silence by crusty court officials would prove irresistibly appealing to the region's pop kids). This lacked all the spark and fun of its predecessor and was mostly concerned

with local bands of no consequence. By the mid-seventies, the *WDP* seemed to have lost interest in popular music altogether.

For the student press of the late sixties sit-in era, gigs (or ‘dances’ as they were usually described) had become ‘happenings’ or ‘freak-outs’ - with the ubiquitous John Peel frequently wafting around backstage - or even revolutionary acts in which The Kids took on and were often beaten down by The Man. See, for example, the very different ways in which the great Small Faces riot at the Colston Hall in 1968 was reported.

It’s important to remember that not all audiences got the memo about the underground takeover. While groovy scenes were developing in Haight-Ashbury and Carnaby Street during the Summer of Love, it took a long time for these to penetrate the English provinces. There’s a great photograph from the *Daily Mirror* of Jimi Hendrix’s first Bristol show in February 1967. Across the pond, 30,000 freaks had just gathered for the Great Human Be-In in Golden Gate Park, long-haired kids were being hassled by the pigs on Sunset Strip and the peacocking Beautiful People were gearing up for June’s Monterey Pop Festival. But the *Mirror*’s snap, taken from behind Hendrix to show the Locarno audience, reveals that Bristol’s teens were dressed as though it was still 1963. And even into the late sixties, when ‘serious’ former teen idols like Steve Winwood were bloviating about their move into more progressive music, they continued to be drowned out by battalions of screaming teenage girls at the Colston.

That said, we should also bear in mind that many local venues had strict dress codes throughout the sixties and beyond. The Locarno only lifted its code in June 1970 with the launch of its progressive rock series, the announcement that audiences could now wear what they liked being a major selling point. Over at the Top Rank (later Papillons, Romeo and Juliets, Syndicate, Odyssey, The Works and, currently, SWX), punters had to wait until 1972 for the dress code (including the ties-only rule) to be relaxed under new management. Similarly, the start of the new weekly Boobs night at Tiffany’s that March was marked with an announcement that “for these special performances there will be no limitations on dress”.

The development of more sophisticated and powerful amplification equipment also proved a matter of concern to the old guard of journalists. Few *Post* reviews of seventies rock shows at the Colston Hall failed to remark that the awful racket was way too loud, seemingly heedless of the

only sensible thing Ted Nugent ever said: "If it's too loud, you're too old!"

There are those who claim that a similar revolution to the underground takeover took place in the late seventies with the advent of punk. I would argue, controversially, that this has been grossly exaggerated and does not bear close scrutiny. That's not to deny the cultural significance of the punk movement. It's also true to say that there were some big tours by major punk acts, especially in 1977. At the same time, record companies made life very difficult indeed for mid-level bands, while rising acts who declined to conform to the new orthodoxy - such as Iron Maiden, Def Leppard and Diamond Head - had to bide their time until their popularity could no longer be ignored. Technically, all three started out as indie acts, since their earliest recordings were DIY releases on their own labels.

But the prevailing narrative that claims 'boring old farts' were seen off by the filth and the fury overnight during punk's Year Zero runs up against some inconvenient facts. As we shall see, the likes of ELO, AC/DC, Thin Lizzy, UFO, Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow, Steve Hillage, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Hawkwind, Fleetwood Mac and Rush all did a roaring trade locally during the punk years. On one night in 1977, Peter Gabriel and Camel played sell-out gigs in Bristol on the same night, at the Hippodrome and Colston Hall respectively. What's more, the charts were full of disco and soft rock, with punk barely registering. Major acts like the Stones, Bob Dylan, Queen, Led Zeppelin and even the disgraced Eric Clapton actually increased their audiences during the punk years. Even more gallingly for those expectorating revolutionaries, each of the apex prog bands (Yes, Genesis, ELP, Pink Floyd) were completely unaffected and enjoyed their biggest hit singles long after the movement's 15 minutes had expired. And globally, five of the top ten biggest selling albums of all time were released in 1976 and 1977. None of these were by The Clash. In fact, they were by the Eagles (twice), Fleetwood Mac, The Bee Gees and Meat Loaf. Furthermore, back in 2020 the BPI compiled a chart of the most streamed songs from 1977. The top six places were taken by ELO, Fleetwood Mac, Queen and Bob Marley. Not a single punk recording registered in the top ten. When the Official Chart Company undertook a similar exercise in 2022, it was found that the most-streamed songs from 1976 and 1977 were both by Fleetwood Mac - *Go your Own Way* and *Dreams* respectively. (Indeed, the OCC's year-by-year analysis revealed a striking disparity between the views of

self-appointed tastemakers and actual popularity, with the critically reviled likes of Journey, Toto, Bon Jovi and Bryan Adams - artists whose music could only be heard in rock clubs and on specialist radio shows on release in the early 1980s - now taking their places among the nation's favourites.)

The truth is that the music punk was supposed to wipe off the face of the earth not only survived but remains in rude health today. This isn't something that can be said of trad jazz or the beat boom acts who failed to evolve in the late sixties.

This will earn me few friends, but you may be forgiven for detecting a certain disdain for national music journalism. The experience of wading through piles of old inky serves as a reminder that, with some notable exceptions, many hacks were more interested in posturing than writing about music - a phenomenon that became supercharged in the punk years. Many of their judgements have not aged well. These days, for example, the brilliance of Led Zeppelin goes virtually unchallenged. During their lifetime as a band, however, they were subjected to relentless bile and hatred. What's more, the most influential band of all time, Black Sabbath (step outside if you want to argue), were widely treated as a joke and, bizarrely, in some quarters AC/DC were considered to be a punk act. It's amusing to see some of the writers concerned continuing to ply their trade, having quietly 'updated' their opinions.

'I May Be Old, But I Got to See All the Cool Bands' reads the T-shirt stretched across the beer belly of many a smug old rocker. There are few experiences more unedifying than being cornered by a greybeard bore who hasn't been to a sweaty club for decades but is happy to pontificate *ad infinitum* about the supposed 'death of rock'.

Personally, I prefer the rival Homer Simpson design: 'Never Too Old to Rock!' To be clear: this book is not intended as an endorsement of the nostalgic view that everything was much better in the Good Old Days. It might have been tempting to reach that conclusion in the 1980s - acknowledged by all but Dylan Jones as the grimmest decade since the advent of rock - but there's no shortage of great music being made today by artists who face very different challenges to those experienced by their forebears. You might have to look a little harder to find it, but for my money the most adventurous, creative and exciting music can be found in the fields of global metal, extreme metal and modern prog. And the standard

of musicianship displayed by these young bands is quite astonishing.

Similarly, while we have lost many great venues since the 1960s and 1970s, we have also gained others that are run by enthusiasts with a genuine - horrible buzz term alert! - passion for music. In Bristol, the Exchange, Thekla, Fleece and Louisiana spring to mind.

Finally, if you're looking for sneery, 'ironic', distancing phrases like 'dad-rock' or 'rawk', which are routinely used by a certain breed of snooty journalist who imagine themselves to be above this sort of thing, you're reading the wrong book. Bands have been selected for inclusion because I really like their music (or because there's an entertaining and/or illuminating story attached). Even Uriah Heep. *Especially* Uriah Heep.

*Note: In 2020, the Colston Hall was 'rebranded' as the Bristol Beacon. Yes, it's not the greatest of names but at least it doesn't honour a dead slave trader. I've used the original name throughout, simply because that's what the Hall was called when these gigs took place.*



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# 1963

Sexual intercourse begins, if Philip Larkin is to be believed, as the sixties belatedly kick off after the coldest UK winter in living memory... This is the tumultuous year of the Profumo affair, the Great Train Robbery, the assassination of JFK, Martin Luther King Jr's 'I Have a Dream' speech and the launch of *Doctor Who*... In the world of music, it's all about The Beatles, who release their first two LPs and top both the singles and albums charts. Little known combo The Rolling Stones also put out their first single, *Come On*. It peaks at number 21. The game-changing *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* comes out in May, but isn't a hit in the UK for another year or so... Locally, the four-month Bristol Bus Boycott led by Paul Stephenson eventually forces the Bristol Omnibus Company to back down on its refusal to employ black and Asian workers... Tony Benn renounces his peerage and wins nearly 80% of the vote in the subsequent Bristol South-East by-election... Russell Pascoe, 22, is strung up in Horfield prison for murder, becoming the third-to-last person to be hanged in the UK... Florence Brown becomes Bristol's first woman Lord Mayor... On the big screen, *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* and *The Quatermass Xperiment* director Val Guest unleashes a smallpox epidemic in Bath in his minor apocalypse flick *80,000 Suspects*. But there were fewer cinemas in which to see it. Twenty Bristol fleapits shut their doors for good between 1956 and 1965. This year it was the turn of the Tatler, which closed with *My Bare Lady* (winner of the coveted Anatomy Award at the Paris Nudist Film Festival). It's now the site of the Old Market underpass.

## Gene Vincent

### Bath Pavilion, 8 April 1963

The birth of rock'n'roll is beyond the scope of this book, but less-than-

sweet Eugene Vincent Craddock's 1963 show at the Bath Pavilion acts as the perfect scene-setter, introducing many of rock's key characters. One of the original leather-clad, gun-toting, hotel room smashing bad boys of rock who became a template for generations of surly frontmen, Vincent had played in the west many times on packages with the likes of Sam Cooke and Little Richard. When Eddie Cochran perished in a car crash outside Chippenham on the way back to London after a gig at the Bristol Hippodrome in April 1960, passenger and tour mate Vincent hobbled away with a broken leg. Legend has it that the first copper on the scene was a Wiltshire police cadet named David Harman. He later claimed that he learned to play the guitar by sneaking into the evidence room and twanging away on Cochran's Gretsch over several evenings. Harman subsequently adopted the stage name of Dave Dee and enjoyed a string of hits with his chums Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Tich. That same Gretsch had been briefly carried for Cochran earlier on the tour by adoring fan Mark Feld, who, as Marc Bolan, subsequently died in - cue: spooky music - a car crash. And while we're digressing into Cochran lore, it's probably worth mentioning the longstanding rumour that he fathered a love child while in Bristol, though this is probably bollocks.

Anyway, Gene Vincent's Pavilion show was one of the earliest gigs staged in Bath by Freddy Bannister - the great unsung hero of local music promotion. He put on all the big music events at the Pavilion and on Wednesday nights at the Bristol Corn Exchange and was also the man behind both Bath festivals and the later, legendary Knebworth festivals. In the early sixties, Freddy was promoting gigs all over the UK, but always considered the Pavilion his flagship venue. "Because we had a Monday night, it gave us a chance to get bands that you couldn't normally get to work," he told me. "When people brought in Americans for a tour, Monday nights were pretty dead so we had our pick."

Vincent's manager at the time was the fearsome Don Arden - father of Sharon Osbourne and the fella who once allegedly dangled Robert Stigwood by his ankles from a fourth floor office window to dissuade him from poaching the Small Faces. Arden appointed a burly former wrestler and bit-part actor as the star's driver and minder. This was Peter Grant, who went on to acquire his own notorious reputation as the manager of Led Zeppelin. According to Mark Blake's suitably hair-raising biography

*Bring It On Home*, Arden issued Grant with the instruction: “Make sure that fucker gets to the shows in one piece and stays off the whisky”.

The identity of Vincent’s backing band at the Pavilion is unclear but by the time he played the Colston Hall in a package with Jerry Lee Lewis the following month he was being backed by The Outlaws. A bunch of top session musicians put together by producer Joe Meek (of *Telstar* fame), their ranks included keyboard player Chas Hodges (later of Chas & Dave), drummer Mick Underwood (later of Ian Gillan’s band) and an 18-year-old guitar prodigy from Weston-super-Mare named Ritchie Blackmore.

The Outlaws swiftly moved on and Mr. Be-Bop-A-Lula found himself back in Bristol playing a show at the Victoria Rooms on January 25, 1964, with his new backing band, The Shouts. University student paper *Nonesuch News* dispatched reporter Jo Holmes to review the gig by “one of the first exponents of rock” and grill him in his dressing room afterwards.

The show had been an eventful one with a certain amount of band nudity, which Jo described as their “strip and shout act” during which Vincent did “his best to seduce the microphone”. Apparently, this was the first time they’d performed such an outrage on stage. Post-show explanations ranged from “we felt like doing something shocking” to “[we] did it for laughs”. “It was the Bristol girls,” added the drummer (“his fleshy torso now more modestly attired in a string vest”).

Jo reported that Vincent “has the pathetic air of a cocker spaniel whose owner has just whipped him for no apparent reason. Moustached and taciturn, his manager [possibly Arden himself; Peter Grant appears to have been clean-shaven at the time] stood nearby, strategically placed (so we discovered) to enable him to communicate his displeasure in mysterious sign language.”

“Assuming the combined role of country boy and southern gentleman,” Vincent addressed her as ma’am and admitted that he was “kind of afraid of universities” because he thought students would be too intellectual to appreciate rock music. He also ventured his opinion of The Beatles (“an asset to rock’n’roll”) and talked about his formative blues influences, but refused to be drawn on ‘the colour problem’: “Being a Southerner, I don’t think you should ask me questions like that”.

## The Beatles

### Bath Pavilion, 10 June 1963

The Fabs played their first headline show round these parts a couple of months after the release of debut album *Please Please Me* and a week before Paul McCartney's 21st birthday. "I booked The Beatles a few months before they actually appeared," Freddy Bannister told me. "I remember thinking that their price was an absolute liberty. I think they were asking £250, when I could get more established bands for £100."

Of the gig itself, he had two clear memories: "Paul and John peering through the holes in the stage curtains, looking worried and asking me what sort of crowd it was. The other one is going on stage to do my normal plug for next week's gig. I walked out in front of the curtains and literally got pushed back by the yelling and screaming. I decided there and then not to do my announcement and just said 'Here's The Beatles.' The curtain opened and I walked back into The Beatles as they were playing, which is something that will always stick in my mind."

Bristol musician Mike Tobin was there for this historic show, and he didn't even have to pay to get in. "As my band The Magnettes were one of the local groups that Freddy Bannister used as a support act regularly (he even included a photo of us in his book), we always got in free to his gigs. So it was that me and bass player Pete Evans (RIP) were mingling backstage on this night. Pete was a boffin - every band had one - and The Beatles were having problems with their PA system, so he fiddled with it and fixed it for them. There were two support bands: Chet & The Triumphs from Bristol and the Colin Anthony Combo from Bath. They both did a slot each, then The Beatles came on and did a set. Amazing as it may seem, the two support acts came back on and did another set before the headliners returned for another finale."

The following month, the Fabs headed west again on their summer seaside tour, staying in room 49 at the Royal Pier Hotel. They played 12 shows over six days at the Weston-super-Mare Odeon between July 22 and 27. Local fan Sandra Woodruff (nee Blaken), 16, managed to get several Beatles autographs on an underpants card (no, really), as well as taking photographs of them at the hotel. In 2022, her collection sold at auction for £11,360.

While in Weston, The Beatles were filmed and photographed larking about on Breaan Down beach wearing striped Edwardian bathing costumes.

## **The Rolling Stones**

### **Bath Pavilion, 11 November 1963**

The Stones' first west country date on their very first headlining tour of the UK. Debut single *Come On* had been released in June, and this was local punters' first opportunity to see the Fabs' famously scruffy counterparts in the flesh. As usual at the Pav, the headliners played two sets. Support act tonight was Merseybeat act The Undertakers, fronted by a chap named Brian Jones, which must have been confusing. The Stones, meanwhile, returned to play the Corn Exchange on December 18.

## **The Beatles**

### **Colston Hall, 15 November 1963**

The Beatles had played to about a thousand people at the Colston back in March, low on the bill of a package tour. Eight months later, Beatlemania was in full swing when they returned for the first of their two Bristol headline shows. Martin Creasy's book *Beatlemania!* carries an extensive report of the shenanigans. Travelling up from Exeter, The Beatles hid in a Bedminster side street and phoned ahead to arrange an escort to the Colston. "Operation Get The Beatles into Colston Hall Safely was deemed a success," continues Creasy, "and the heat was off for at least a few hours until Operation Get them Out Again. There were literally hundreds of girls around Colston Hall for up to eight hours. Many had skipped work, risking the sack. The hall's famous red doors were now adorned with messages of love for various Beatles. Tickets were being hawked at inflated prices, along with Beatle photos, and local sweet shops sold out of jelly babies." [Trivia note: female fans used to pelt the Fabs with jelly babies after they foolishly remarked that these were their favourite sweets. Good job they didn't say gobstoppers.]

The *Bristol Evening Post* really went to town on Fab-mania ("They're here!" screamed the front page), revealing important details about the foursome's supper in their Exeter hotel the previous night (turkey, ham and Horlicks, apparently). Future *Radio Bristol* presenter Roger Bennett (billed as 'the *Evening Post's* Own Beatle' on account of his moptop) had been dispatched to report on their 'battle against boredom' while trapped in their dressing room. He also got to witness the hysterical scenes at the Colston Hall show. "They are intelligent enough to write their own numbers. They

are musicianly enough to play the right chords - and in tune too. And they are adult enough not to take the whole screaming affair too seriously,” revealed Roger, before making a startling confession: “My jazz friends will kill me for this... But I LIKE THE BEATLES.”

### **Carter-Lewis and the Southerners**

#### **Co-op Hall, November 1963**

This lot were an early Brummie rock group who would hardly be worth mentioning if it wasn't for the fact that their guitarist was a young session musician named James Patrick Page. Yep, that's right, the 19-year-old Mr. Zoso himself played at the Co-op Hall, which was situated a few hundred yards from the Corn Exchange. The hall itself was a low-ceilinged room up on the first floor, necessitating much inconvenience for grumbling roadies and band members alike who had to haul their gear up the stairs.

John Carter and Ken Lewis were a pair of old-school songwriters who'd been talked into forming the Southerners purely to promote their material. Page joined them very briefly, along with future Pretty Things drummer Viv Prince. The guitarist swiftly moved on, while the Southerners eventually reinvented themselves as The Flower Pot Men. We'll meet them again when they pop up at the Colston Hall in 1967.



# 1964

The first student protests against the Vietnam War take place in New York and San Francisco... Cassius Clay is crowned Heavyweight Champion of the World and announces his change of name to Muhammad Ali... Race riots break out in Harlem, Philadelphia and Chicago... Martin Luther King Jr is the youngest-ever recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize... Harold Wilson becomes PM after Labour defeat the Tories at the General Election... The House of Commons votes to abolish the death penalty... BBC2 begins broadcasting and *The Sun* newspaper is launched... Mods and Rockers battle in Brighton... The Beatles mount a hugely successful invasion of the USA... Dr. Robert Moog unveils his synthesizer... *Top of the Pops* and Radio Caroline go on air to delight the nation's pop kids... The Kinks, The Animals and The Rolling Stones achieve their first UK number ones with *You Really Got Me*, *House of the Rising Sun* and *It's All Over Now* respectively... Labour peer Lord (Ted) Willis makes a speech in the House of Lords dismissing The Beatles and Stones as “a cheap candy floss substitute for culture”... Future Bristol University chancellor Dorothy Hodgkin becomes the third woman to win the Nobel Prize in Chemistry... A fella named Bill Bailey is born in Bath...1 Redcliffe Street, aka the Robinson Building, aka the DRG Building, is completed, bringing the 1960s modernist dream to Bristol... Angela Carter graduates from Bristol University with a degree in English Literature. She goes on to become an award-winning poet, novelist and journalist, and opens a folk club in Clifton... In early March, The Beatles head west to film sequences for *A Hard Day's Night*. They can be seen larking about on the Taunton to Minehead branch line and at Crowcombe Heathfield station on the West Somerset Railway, where they run alongside the train shouting, “Hey mister - can we have our ball back?” The film is released in July. If that doesn't appeal, *The Beauty Game*