

We started to rehearse, but it was not the conventional beginnings that a young group starting out goes through. For one thing, we didn't do covers, except for 'Then I kissed Her,' which got changed almost immediately to 'Then I kicked Her;' but believe me; there was no political or social agenda or trying to say something 'sexist,' or some such bollocks.

We got the gear around in the van that Nigel used at work. He always insisted that he was a television engineer; I doubted it then as I do now. We did a few rehearsals, doing 'our sound.' Not one of us had experience of playing in groups, and looking back our perception of what would be acceptable was a little off centre. "We're better than we sound," was my answer one night to a couple of people in another group who had come to rehearse at the same hall as us. "It's not what you think it sounds like," I think was Pete's response; this became a familiar line of defence throughout the coming few years.

We did not have a name, but I always knew what the group should be called. There was a man, Paul, called 'Paul the coal man' who used to be a regular in our local pub The Coach and Horses. He was a massive bloke and I always thought of him as a great character. He often told me to, "shake the hand that shook the hand of the great Reg Dwight." He would then spit on his great mitt and hold it out for me to shake.

It appealed to me, Paul a bear of a man, always in his coal delivering clothes, proudly telling the tale of shaking Elton John's hand in a pub not far from where we come from. He used to call over to Pete and me, "The Lurkers, always in the corner, come on out of there and stand at the bar," waving a great arm at us and laughing. This large man's skin and clothing was dusted permanently from the dirt of his coal sacks. He was an imposing man who was a known drinker in various places. It seemed to me he was alone, gregarious, a hard man, physically if needed, far beyond the limits of the average nasty bastard 'hard man,' but he enjoyed the smiling side of a person's face. I would think as dark as his clothes, and a big man who can spot and share the feelings of the small man.

Pete wanted to call the group The Chains. I told him if we were called that I wouldn't be part of it. The Lurkers it was.

Our first gig was at Uxbridge Technical College, sometime in late 1976. It was the first time for all of us and we had no knowledge of the music etiquette, not knowing the rules so to speak. 'Lambs' might have been a better name.

We supported Screaming Lord Sutch, and we were lucky to have such a nice person to play with on our first outing. He must have thought 'we've got a right lot here,' but he was supportive in letting

us use their gear and moving stuff around the stage for us; things that I was to learn was a point of power for most of the silly fuckers that inhabit 'rock n' roll' with its pecking order and people vying for a position within its structure. Certain roadies I met along the way have exhibited all that is bad in the nature of us humans.

It was a 'home' gig for us, but not that it mattered.

The set lasted twelve minutes. Dave, Lord Sutch, said to me, "Is that it?"

"Yeah," I said.

"I thought it was one song," he said.

He asked us to play some more.

I told him we didn't know any more, and besides that, I was knackered. But, given a short rest we blasted through the same numbers again, and if I remember rightly it was in a shorter amount of time. 'Practice makes perfect' I thought.

Some 'local' people had come to see us; they didn't like it, of course.

Most were interested in the conventional rock scene; a kind of denim jacketed weekend rebel type of thing. It was the suburbs, they most probably wanted 'Free Bird' or 'Clapton' and the usual merge of white people whining through tunes they'd nicked from black people, having 'intellectualised' it, conveniently leaving the black person out of the formula and only to be allowed in as an act of tokenism when time and place permitted. It all left me as cold and with as much feeling as morgue marble.

And these people were very unforgiving to the 'punk scene' and us, as they saw it derail, devalue, and debunk their music and demoralise and destroy their ego. Good.

There were some well publicised scorn coming from the 'old wave.' Rick Wakeman is a known example, and I imagined him having friends who are most probably newscasters and journalists from local BBC television, doing programmes called 'Look Aylesbury, to manor house land', with the king, or 'Wizard', with his culture that is the cutting edge of conventionality. The sort of thing which is carried on today by those 'rascal rebels' who cook food on television and are more than welcome at dinner parties where 'discussions' take place about bull fighting, hanging, shooting animals; money and power.

Anyway, excuse me there.

We encountered those jumping on the 'punk scene' as it grew roots in changing fashion. They chopped their music to a 'minimalist' sound, many adopting fake cockney voices, but letting

slip the words, 'right,' 'cool' and 'sure' in their native student monotone.

No, I suppose we were oddballs from suburbia.

My rebellion was not the social one but one of dealing with mental illness; played out to what I imagined was a receptive social setting, having a struggle to identify and punk gave me a platform, except it was not how it is formally understood.

#

We started to rehearse in a basement of a record shop down the North End Road in Fulham. The shop was one of a few shops called Beggar's Banquet; Martin Mills and Nick Austin owned them.

I think they got the idea from Richard Branson, it was a kind of student appeal of selling and buying second hand records, the records graded as to their quality. The manager of the shop in Fulham was Mike Stone.

Mike was twenty eight years old at the time, of course, I thought him an old bloke, he was an old mod and his favourite group was The Who. For some reason he saw a Pete Townsend quality in Pete Stride's music. If I remember rightly Mike was soon to get himself married, and as they say 'settle down.'

The Lurkers inspired in Mike an impetus to get involved with a group, something he had always wanted to do. I think he had done some deejaying; having a life long interest in music and managing a shop seemed to be the ceiling to his involvement. He came from the North, Leeds, and had plans of going back up north, but unlike most people of his age who were involved in music he saw the punk development as exciting. What with his memories of The Who and his energy as a sixteen year old youth in Leeds, he was a man denying the 'whack' in himself. To most people we sounded like a row, but Mike saw a place in the music world for us.

He asked his two bosses to come down and listen to us, explaining to them what was happening in the music scene. They didn't seem interested, and didn't really know what was happening. In their thinking, Ry Cooder, Joe Walsh and having a clap and sing along with Bread was an adequate cultural offering required for an 'intelligent' youth rebellion.

But Mike persisted, he bought an old Bedford van and offered his time to drive around the gear and us, Nigel had left his job so the van also went.

Mike would have started up his own label if he had the money, but as it was he had faith. I should think that if we didn't meet Mike, we might not have got a recording contract because we were not the aspiring art school bunch, and we were not the opportunistic proficient musicians seeing an angle to grind their axe, man.

We played a couple of places like The Roxy, which was a salient venue in the emerging punk scene. It was whilst we were playing there that Arturo saw us play. Mike told us that he knew a bloke who liked the group; things were not working with Nigel I am sorry to say. It was a couple of

things; he didn't seem to hit it with the music, different 'influences,' put it like that. Nigel left and formed his own group; he always had his ideas of how things should sound and wrote his own stuff. Anyway, we're all inadequate lunatics, it was dealt with like adults of course, and then Arturo joined.

*

I would go straight to rehearsals from working in the garage wearing my Esso shirt; so Art called me 'Esso.' At a few places we played people used to shout out 'Esso Blue;' it was a long time ago, and the memory of the Esso advert was still in people's minds, it stuck, Manic Esso it was. Mike asked Martin and Nick to manage us and try to get us a record contract; they eventually agreed to 'manage' us, but getting us signed was not as easy as Mike thought.

We might have been one of the first punk groups but there was a spilling of 'proper' groups into the scene.

The Lurkers were anomalous and did not translate, unlike groups that simply changed their hairstyle and the chords to their songs. They were 'presentable.' When the thing clicked to mainstream these people had the ability to offer a breadth and willingness to change style in order to adapt. And it wasn't just our music that was 'quirky,' Mike could not believe that nearly all of us went to the same school and lived with our mums in suburbia.

I thought having Art in the group might give us credence in the eyes of the music types. He had been down in Wales after being depressed and bored in his native Fulham area; got even more bored whilst slipping into the dullness of an outlying hippy idea and returned to London on hearing the change in the music. But, he came back to London and lived with his mum.

Crazy guys those punk rock demons.

When going to some of the gigs we felt the outsider amongst the 'outsiders' in rock music. Sometimes, Generation X used to rehearse down 'our basement' in Fulham. They were conscious of their behaviour, mindful to their duty to fashion. Many of the groups had histories in music; this was for many just another beat, a change of jacket and trousers, that's all.

I had the 'one beat,' the drummer of Generation X pointed this out to me as he popped along with his rocky, funky sounding offbeat, double up, flange out; bit like being in the company of

some boring fucker who is a fan of Phil Collins, and when I think of it, I most probably was.

"The Lurkers?" "Who are they?" "Where are they from?" Those became familiar comments; but I was undeterred. I remember the drummer of Slaughter and The Dogs in our early days down The Roxy taking the piss about my snare drum playing. He said, "Do you like John Bonham?" "Yeah," I said, making out I knew something, when I didn't know the "sound" and didn't fucking care, silly fuckers.

Looking back, I remember Pete never having any spare strings, for groups playing in places in 'town' there would be planning and a sense of performance. I remember Paul Weller, when playing down the Red Cow with The Jam, giving Pete some strings, and Paul's Dad asking if we needed a spanner or something for the drums, they must have thought 'here come the cowboys from way out west.' They were organised; we just stumbled into the scene, grinning, saying all the wrong things and not having a clue; looking back, they were good to us. I remember Paul Weller's dad asking me if we changed into stage clothing, this confused me, we moved from the bar to the stage and back to the bar again; The Jam had their suits in sealed bags, they were an 'act,' and very good at it they were as well. We might have appeared arrogant in our shrugging off such matters as unimportant, but the fact was we didn't understand one needed strings, and all that stuff.

So getting a record deal was hard. A and R guys had groups like 'Renaissance' playing on their personal deck, they clipped their flares and beards in the afternoon, and they did not pow wow with 'outsiders.' When meeting us there were no terms of reference, and our music did not speak in broad contemporary statements but rather in a claustrophobic naivety, with songs having a natural acceptance that 'girls' were objects and connected to anxiety and shooting people.

Martin Mills and Nick Austin formed Beggars Banquet Records Ltd and signed us up.

A charitable act.

#

We went into a small recording studio, I think it was near Heathrow airport, and recorded 'Shadow' and 'Love Story' in a couple of hours, and I think we were playing that evening.

What I do remember was the English branch of The Eagles fan club that owned and worked in the studio.

There was no humour or enthusiasm on their part, just a near disgust and regarding us as an irritant that was not to be taken seriously.

Yet, in a matter of months the beardy boring brigade was to suffer a gross intrusion into their cosy world of 'bean bag rock' as the 'punk sound' gave 'music' a good kick up the arse.

We started playing the pubs and various places in London that was accommodating the punk scene, like The Vortex, The Kensington, The Nashville and The Roundhouse.

One evening during the week we played with The Police down the Marquee. There were people down to see us, but there wasn't for The Police, save for a few 'professional' looking people. They had a different guitarist then and they had not adopted the 'reggae' influence. They sounded like a traditional group of 'musicians' doing a switch of fashion to change direction in their career, gelling up their hair etc. I knew sod all, about most things, and showed my great perceptive powers and judgement when speaking to their drummer Stuart Copeland in the bar. He was, and is I suppose, tall, and American; before The Police he played in a group called Curved Air with whom he had minor success. I later found out his family were connected and occupied positions in this great society of ours, so I expounded my massive insight when he asked me what I thought of his group.

I told him, "Well mate, I'm not being nasty or anything, but you won't get anywhere with a name like The Police."

"Oh, why's that?" He asked, leaning back in a confident manner. I rambled on about something. He watched me in a judgmental way, as if he thought it 'interesting,' maybe to tell one of his well heeled friends, say a psychoanalyst, at one of his dinner parties.

They had a purpose about them; they drank cartons of orange and seemed like the 'bright boys' at school. They were.

Unlike The Lurkers, the other groups were not coming out of the starting blocks so to speak, The Damned, The Jam, The Pistols etc. Their music had a traditional rock structure, and as I said

experience and influence from playing standards to learn their 'craft.' I used to tell people Mo Tucker was a good drummer when we were accused of not being very good, saying I'm not interested in being judged in the boring 'debate' of who is and isn't 'a good player man;' or I said some such bull as a feeble defence for not being able to play a conventional 'rock' drum pattern.

But, all the same, we were not very 'good.' We were just learning. Anyway, that's my excuse; 'it's better than you think it sounds.'

However, when it came to drinking beer, and being consistent about the business of having a drink, we had an edge on many. I might not have been in groups playing standards in pubs, but I had been in pubs everyday of my life from fifteen years of age honing another artistic craft.

But when it came to drinking shipments, Howard Wall was surely a true master of the discipline. Always approaching the session in an understated manner, quietly spoken, a keen eye to detail and always considered that money spent on food was money wasted. One evening down The Nashville, a pub next door to West Kensington station that we played regularly, Howard started about six o'clock, that being the evening opening time in those days, downed nineteen pints of Extra Special Brew, ESB at that time was considered a strong drink, and complained that the last bell was being a burden, as if stopping him popping out for a chat and a pint.

I don't think we drank a lot because of being nervous of playing, not on my part anyway, it was more to do with an idea of missing out on going out for the night and having a drink. Playing the drums in a pub wasn't going to get in my way, and looking back I see that the drink thing did hold Howard, Pete and myself back, in place, to one side, or whatever.

I didn't think about it, but four pints would have to be next to my kit for me to feel ready to play, and gigs were often held up whilst drinks were brought from the bar and having to be paid for with the soggy note from my sweat soaked jeans. At times it was frustrating, trying to get a drink from my position behind the drums, an aspect of playing in a group which I would tell people who had come to see us, the music was often towards the back of priorities. Mistakes or cock ups were grinned away, as having a good night was seen as having greater importance than such boring, poncy, post-mortem trials of who played a bum note, and was it in time. Fuck me; I would have joined a real group if I wanted to be bored to death.

Talking of ESB reminds me of the front cover of our first single, Shadow. It was a photograph of us standing outside the Red Cow pub on a night that we were playing down there. I was standing there holding my drink as the photo was taken and a group of children about eight years of age came walking by making remarks and being cheeky. Then one little girl asked if she could have a swig of my drink, I handed her my mug which was over half full of ESB, she downed the lot then gave me the empty glass and walked off sniggering with her mates. On the cover I'm looking at the empty glass, contemplating my lost drink as the photo is taken. Another one of my successful dates. She's most probably still alive, had a few kids, seven marriages, and I am still lamenting about that lost drink.

Arturo, (Art) and myself did not present a physical image fitting the decadent, posturing, fashionable, starving, lean, precious artist at the cutting edge of trendy fashion having his gaunt, delicate self and ego coaxed by his agent and loved one from his attic to a waiting public. I suppose to the 'arty' crowd we were seen as having an image of 'buffoon rock,' not the crazy rock and rollers. One gig we played in the north of the country, Accrington working man's club I think, Art spotted that they were selling pies for twelve pence each. It was too good a bargain to miss; we had six each before going on to play.

'Comfort' food has played a big part in it all for me, and has been a shared theme in my relationship with Art over the years. On getting to know Art we found that we had some things in common. Although I am sure Art told me that he was a Fulham fan when we first met, it transpired that he is in fact a Chelsea fan. He comes from the Fulham area; his dad came from the same area in Fulham as my dad. Also, Art had bunked off school to see Chelsea in the F.A. Cup replay against Leeds at Manchester in 1970. I went with two mates from school, although being a Fulham supporter, and bought a fifteen shilling standing ticket on the train for thirty shillings; that's seventy five pence and £1.50p in 'new' money. It didn't leave me with much money and we tried to sleep on the floor at Euston when the train got back to London, and from there I had to bunk the train fare back home when the underground trains started in the morning, except I didn't go straight home but to the newsagents where I did a paper round. I told the man who ran the shop that I had been to 'the game' the night before, but he wasn't interested. On leaving the shop I found an old shopping trolley and put my papers in that, it made the job easier as the bag was heavy. Now, there was a school in the road that I did my paper round, and all the young yobs came by me shouting insults at the odd boy pushing the shopping trolley; I told them

that I had been to 'the game' the previous night, but they started chanting derisive remarks as they didn't believe me.

Part of the dress worn at that time for the young skinhead included a Harrington jacket. They were usually black, some dark blue, dark green or a Prince of Wales check. Art told me that he had a canary yellow Harrington which obviously stood out. I thought this might be significant, as my Harrington was pink; a pink jacket was not what one would imagine residing comfortably with the 'skin' culture. Yet, years later the skin fashion was to be embraced by certain 'gay' men to project that masculine 'geezer' image.

Anyhow, years later Art told me that he had the video of the game and swears he can see himself holding up a scarf in the Stretford End.

I was close to Art when playing in the group, although all along I knew we were not what he wanted. He and I would have stupid arguments. One that has stayed with me is another memory exemplifying our interests and concerns on matters of lofty 'decadence.' One morning we all met at the shop in Fulham for the drive up to Barrow in Furness. Art had gone into the bakery and bought himself a pie. I asked if I could have a bite, and from then on, for most of the journey in the back of the Bedford van, a subject of severe gravity was bitterly debated. Art would not give me a bite of his pie. "You have the money, I have the money, I had the inclination," he said this maybe thirty times in that six odd hour drive. To question the use of the word "inclination" was never brought up during those hours of conflict.

During those early gigs we started to get a following; namely the 'Fulham Crew' with characters such as Max and Eddie, and there was also the 'Kingston Crew;' a crowd in part seeking their own reputation, but loyal to us, which when one considers some of the places we played it was very supportive.

The two first singles, 'Shadow' and 'Freak Show' sold well. As with other groups at that time if the same amount was sold today they would be 'top ten hits.' We did a few John Peel sessions, he seemed to be a Lurker fan, or said he was. The first session was in 1977; we recorded four in all and were pleased about them in all ways, from the engineering to John Peel playing them for us. It did seem a bit like a stuffy school, I mean the 'BBC' with its system and structure. The recording technology was a throwback with the young man working as a 'junior assistant' to the 'junior' of the 'main assistant' who in turn was the 'junior' to Engineer's Assistant, then the 'Engineer' with all eyes towards the 'Producer,' usually an 'outsider' brought in to do the session.

That being said, they got a good sound and were good to us. On an early session, whilst putting the delicate final touches to the ending of a song, Be My Prisoner I believe, Mike Stone rattled his car keys in front of the microphone telling the producer "A trick I learned from Phil Spector." The producer looked across the line of 'juniors' and 'assistants,' he watched their expressionless faces giving no response, he then looked back to Mike, and nodded slowly.

Those sessions were our main publicity. Young men across this land, and women I hope, but it was not my experience to meet many (hardly any) women who were Lurker fans, would lay in bed listening to the John Peel show with the excitement of knowing that they had access to a music that was different from the current contemporary scene. They had an identity with groups often having obscure sounding names, taping them and adding them to a personal library making up 'their' music.

It was great to meet some of these people at places we played, people having a deep knowledge of 'indie' music, asking me questions concerning the group on matters of such specific detail that I would more often than not stare at them, shake my head dumbly and ask if they wanted a drink.

Which most did not, being thoughtfully focused, drinking a half of shandy, or "just a coke, please."

A world of quiet people, ordered, with plans, schedules and dates, aside from the throng, watching on, noticing with a singular observation, not participating with the crowd, but inwardly empires were being built and destroyed. A record cover in a plastic bag in one hand, the other holding a small glass of coke, a light reflects on one lens of his glasses, I look again, and he's gone.

We were one of the groups from the early punk 'movement' that worked with an evangelical zeal, going to places that were untarnished territories, often suffering personal humiliation, ridicule and sometimes finding an attitude one would expect adopted for a party of visiting aliens.

It was summer 1977 and our 'on the ball' management, Beggar's Banquet, showed insight, imagination, and knowledge. A budding punk group on their hands beckoned the question, 'where should we send them?' Berlin? Paris? Milan? New York? Well, Manchester? Sheffield? Nah, we'll send them to the Isle of Arran.

Three nights on the Isle of Arran.

On arriving there we met a supporter of ours, a bloke called Walt Davidson. Walt was a keen photographer in his spare time; his main job was for the post office. Walt travelled alone far and wide, not only to see us but also taking his photographs of other groups; he was a good chap. His first line when meeting us was of his find in the back of a scout hut, which was to be our first gig. He had found, ironically enough, a pogo stick. Walt couldn't believe that we were playing there.