

# 3 I hit the town with my Old Spice, Lucky Strike and a Zippo lighter

GREATER communication across the Atlantic had opened Scotland's ears to new music, including the rock'n'roll which was beginning to make an impression in via Elvis' 'That's All Right Mama', Bill Haley's 'Crazy Man, Crazy' and Big Joe Turner's 'Shake, Rattle And Roll' and an increasing number of follow-ups.

**FRANK FERRI:** The right-hand side in front of the Palais stage was considered the Yankee corner, where the Americans from Kirknewton airbase would congregate and attract the bottled-blondes looking to marry a Yank for a better life in the States – much to the envy and anger of the local lads. Generally speaking, if a local lad asked these girls to dance, they got a knock back. After a 12-month trip to the United States during my merchant navy days I had developed an American accent that I could slip into quite comfortably. Dressed in the clothes I'd bought in America, I could pull the birds in this disguise easily. I had some Old Spice too – all we usually had was Imperial Leather, and leather was exactly what it smelled like. I hit the town with a liberal spray of Old Spice to my face, a packet of Lucky Strike cigarettes and a Zippo lighter in my pocket. Unfortunately I can't detail the results it produced in a family publication ...

Once again change was very much on the cards, although no one knew what that change would be. In the end, it came to Scotland from England rather than the USA – although it was caused by a Scotsman. Lonnie Donegan was a member of Chris Barber's jazz band when he decided to make use of some recording time which had been booked and paid for, but wasn't needed. He grabbed a banjo and recorded rough versions of what he called 'American folk music': simple songs with a few basic chords that almost anyone could play.

It became known as skiffle music and Donegan became known as the founding father of pop. But Lonnie wasn't trying to found anything. He once said: 'In Britain we were separated from our folk music tradition centuries ago, and we were given the idea that music was for the upper classes. They said you had to be clever to play music. When I came along

with three old chords people thought if I could do it, so could they. They were right – it was the reintroduction of folk music.'

The result was the skiffle craze as guitar sales in the UK soared from 50,000 in 1950 to over 200,000 five years later. Suddenly, all over Scotland kids were making basses from tea-chests, drumkits from washboards and putting simple ditties together. And even more astonishingly, they were being paid to do it.

**ROY KITLEY:** When I was 15 I set up the Pythons Skiffle Group. We cribbed the name from the Vipers, one of the big groups of the time. We were kept really busy with cinema gigs, church socials, parties and dances. It really did happen overnight and suddenly there were thousands of groups, sometimes several in one street, and the rivalry was pretty fierce.



Roy Kitley's Pythons were in demand from the moment they formed the band in school

**PETE AGNEW:** Long before we were Nazareth I formed the Spitfires with some mates from school. We borrowed their big brothers' acoustic guitars and I sang. You couldn't really hear anything because it was acoustic guitars on stage. I could sing the tune so I just ignored the guitarists and sang 'That'll Be the Day'.

There was these young guys from Kirkcaldy – one of them was playing chords and I thought, 'That's what it's supposed to sound like! I'm going to get a guitar and learn how to do that.' So I got one and began learning ... I was mucking about and I started finding chords – a G, then a C, then a D, and I called them one, two, three and so on.

Later I was playing with my mate who'd been to guitar lessons. I was saying, 'Play a three,' and he was saying, 'What are you talking about? That's a D!'

He showed me this chord book where it was all there, telling you how to do it. I could have worked it all out in a week! Talk about young and stupid! We still muck about in the dressing room – 'Play a four!' That's an E, by the way.

Elsewhere in the UK, a young man by the name of Lennon put together a skiffle group called the Quarrymen, while a lad called Reg Dwight began enjoying his piano playing more as he listened to skiffle, and a kid named Brian May decided to invest in a guitar. But the vast majority of that musical outpouring was still amateurish and haphazard – so who was listening to it? That new invention: the teenager. Spurred on by the American influence



Bill Haley and his Comets had been playing the circuit for some years before they exploded with the rock'n'roll revolution. Right, a British poster from an early 1960s tour, by which time Haley's star was on the wane



teenagers were inventing their own scene, their own way of talking, and even their own way of dressing.

**ANDY DUFF:** The first time I got a Teddy boy suit I couldn't wait to get fronted up to Stewart's. But I was met at the door by the owner, who in no uncertain manner made it clear no bloody Teds were going to be allowed in. Being a big-mouth, I said: 'Stuff your old dance rules – we'll go to the Cavendish instead'. He told us he'd give us five pounds if we managed to get in, so off we went ... and we did get in! We went back and the owner did give us the fiver. You could say that was the start of Teddy boys at Stewart's – and we fitted in fine.

Soon after that night a redheaded girl came in. Man, she was gorgeous and well stacked – did she turn heads! It was quite fun to see the boys racing to get the first dance with her. Believe it or not, at the time she didn't really interest me ... but I bet my mates two and six that when the first ladies' choice was announced, she'd ask me.

Sure enough, that's what happened. You should have seen the looks on my mates' faces. Little did they know she lived round the corner from me and I was just about the only familiar face in the room. Little did I know she would wind up being Mrs Jean Duff!

**COLIN DUNCAN:** I couldn't have cared less about the bands in the town hall at Huntly – and I wasn't the only one. The band played from about half past eight until nine then half past nine until ten, and chucking-out time was about half ten. But while the band was on the floor was half-empty because people were away getting a cup of tea or whatever. It all changed when the band came off and the DJ came on, though – because nine until half-nine was 'action time' where they played all the smoochy numbers. The lights would go down and you'd get yourself a partner as soon as possible, then you'd go for a break again at half-nine when the band came back, ready to get into action again at ten – and not very often with the same partner.

For the first time an age group had its own fashion sense. The Teddy boys would be followed later by mods and rockers, hippies, punks, metalheads, goths and many more. But in the late 50s it was everyone's aim to style your hair in the duck's-arse quiff, slip on a bootlace tie and maybe – just maybe – own a Vauxhall Cresta.

Sadly, with all the pent-up emotion and energy from a new wave of kids whose parents didn't understand them, violence was bound to come into the story. If you take it in the context of how many thousands of people were suddenly out at the dancin' compared to how many had been there in the past, it doesn't seem too incredible. If you also take into account how many communities were meeting who had never met before, it seems even more understandable.

But that was without the intervention of the press, who couldn't refuse the opportunity to write sensational headlines. After the 1953 murder of John Beckley in London by a group of young men the papers labelled Teds, the stories continued, 'Edwardian suits, dance music and a dagger!' 'A Teddy boy stabbed a barber outside his shop with an 18-inch meat knife after the barber asked a group to move away from his shop.' 'Four boatloads of Teddy boys took up action stations on the lake last night when a 25-strong rival gang formed boarding parties ashore. The youths scattered as three squad cars arrived.' 'I witnessed a gory razor fight between two Teddy boys in a crowded park – at least a hundred youths and adults flocked to enjoy the 'fun' yet not a hand was raised to stop the battle until one boy fell to the ground almost unconscious.'

*The Blackboard Jungle*, billed as 'the most startling movie in years', was attached to the Edwardian fashion movement as a vicar told the *Daily Mirror*: 'The Teddy boy has no allegiance to party, class or workmates, or to a society that is too complex for him. He has retreated into a private world. He takes the Welfare State for granted. His mind is doped and his instincts stimulated by the illusions of the cinema.' The holy man ended by observing they needed more vitamin C.

In Scotland two particular headlines serve as examples of how things weren't quite the way the papers said: 'Riot at town hall' and 'Battle of Wallyford' – one of which was completely made up, and one which only took on some truth because its publication made it happen.

**BILL ALLISON:** Paisley Town Hall was always a favourite with us. Band night was usually Saturday – Jimmy McCracken was a regular – and there was a talent contest every Sunday. That Sunday we had the Ricky Barnes All Stars playing instead.

The hall was all seated except for a space between the front rows and the stage – all the girls used to crowd in there to dance. It had been raining so there were handbags and umbrellas placed on the stage. The hall manager wasn't bothered about all the stuff being put on the stage – it was being *placed* there, not thrown. The bouncers and the bands weren't bothered either.

The All Stars were great. They did a song called 'Skin Deep' which had a drum solo, and like many bands to this day, the rest of the musicians went off stage while the drummer did his bit. They came back on, finished the set, everyone clapped, and that was that.

Next day I picked up the paper and saw the headline 'Riot at Town Hall' across the front page. The article went on about items being thrown onto the stage, but the nearest thing to that was all the umbrellas and bags that had been placed on stage. Then it said the band had walked off in disgust, when they'd just gone off during the drum solo.

The story about a riot always bothered me – it just wasn't true, and it reflected badly on the people of Paisley. I suppose it must have been a publicity stunt, or maybe just a really quiet day for the paper. But it just didn't happen.

**STEWART CAMPBELL:** One Sunday night at Wallyford Miners' Club I was dancing with a girl and someone asked for an excuse-me dance. It was a done thing in those days, although you weren't supposed to keep doing it to the same couple. This guy had done it to me twice but I wasn't looking for any bother.



Stewart Campbell

Someone who'd been watching came up to me and said, 'Has he just cut in again?' and when I said he had, all hell broke loose.

I've no idea why ... I think it must have just been an excuse to get the guy, whoever he was. It turned into a massive fight but it was soon stopped by the bouncers. I remember one called Curly who kept the peace very well. We all went home and it was forgotten about – so we thought.

The next Thursday there was a fight at the Edinburgh Palais and my head was split open after a bouncer threw a chair. It had no connection with what had happened at Wallyford. It was just bad luck, that's all.

But then the paper ran a story about an Edinburgh gang planning to go to Wallyford that Sunday to avenge my injury. It was crazy – there just wasn't any truth – but that's what the paper said. They had a line like 'Gangs from Edinburgh are going to avenge gang leader Stew Campbell.' They even went to a café in the Kirkgate to interview some guys, and told him we were called the OMO Gang because we always wore clean white shirts. They even printed that!

And because it was in the paper, loads of guys got organised from Leith to go to Wallyford that Sunday. But Willie Merilees had police waiting everywhere. So when the battle started they came in and arrested almost everybody, and they were all charged at Edinburgh court in the High Street.



'OMO Gang' fashion

'Wee Willie Merilees' is a legendary character in Scottish policing. After showing immense bravery as a young man they changed the rules for him because he was shorter than regulation height, and by the time he retired he was a much-decorated chief constable. Along with single-handedly defeating the Teddy boy menace, as celebrated in a comic book of a few years later, he also broke up spy rings, caught murderers and set up a Christmas charity fund for the children of men he'd put in jail. One legend even has him pretending to be a baby in a pram in order to catch a suspect at Waverley Station.

But an Edinburgh firm of tailors pointed out: 'We sell long draped jackets, narrow trousers, "slim jim" ties, shirts with cut-away buttoned-down collars and whatever the modern youth

wants. Our business is sufficiently big to mean that if all our young customers were hooligans, the City of Edinburgh would require a police force double its current size.'

There's no doubt that violence was a part of the new culture. It was scary for some people from nice areas, but to other people it really was just a way of life and part of the night out.

**DAVE QUINN:** I can honestly only remember one fight in the dancin' in Glasgow back then, and I was out four or five nights a week, so I'm not sure it was as common as people say it was. But it was big fight, right enough – there were a big lot of Yanks down from Dunoon and they were dancing in the Locarno. A girl refused a dance from a Glasgow guy, and in those days you were meant to sit out the dance if you'd told a guy 'no'. Next thing a Yank asked her to dance and she went straight up. It just kicked off – the Glasgow guys had had enough. I left before it got really heated up, but everyone was talking about it for days afterwards.

**JOHN CLARKE:** In those days there were Teddy boys and there were Edwardians – both names are derived from the same source but the two styles were different in so many ways. Teddy boys were seen as boisterous, sometimes unfriendly, sometimes in large unruly groups, who were not generally accepted too well by the older generation. In contrast the Edwardians were dandy-boys, although they knew how to dress. They chose the best quality material and your suit took eight weeks to be made. In Edinburgh the Teddy boys used Jacksons in Leith Street while Edwardian young men favoured Burtons. Mind you, there were many great guys who were Teddy boys – so the few made a bad name for the many.

**CHRISTINE DOHERTY:** I remember the first Teddy boys appearing round the town in Kirkcaldy. You were supposed to ignore them but they looked so smart, and even though I suppose we were a bit naive there was something attractive about all that posing.

It was a few months before they were allowed into the Burma Ballroom – they wouldn't have been let in at all except there hadn't been any trouble in town since the fashion arrived. I'll admit we were a bit wild-eyed that first Saturday night when the Teds came in and started looking round the room. But I decided to take a leaf out of their book and act as if nothing bothered me.

One of them came right up towards me and I hoped I was still looking as if butter wouldn't melt. I didn't know what he was going to say but I didn't expect: 'Hey, are you lookin' for a boyfriend? Or a manfriend?'

I burst out laughing – and he started laughing straight after as well. In the end we had a great night and I saw him again a few times. He could really dance and he really did look smart.

