Young Offenders: Punk in Norwich, 1976–84

Dedicated to Jon Vince
Norwich doesn’t tend to feature in the larger story of British punk. Where Manchester, Sheffield, Glasgow, Leeds, Bristol and Liverpool each garnered interest from a London-centric music press keen to trace the fractured strands of punk’s diaspora, so Norwich flickered only briefly into the media-focus of the early 1980s. As The Higsons put the ‘punk back into funk’, and as John Peel picked up on the band’s contribution to the Norwich: A Fine City compilation (Romans in Britain, 1981), so talk of a Norwich ‘scene’ momentarily found its way into the ‘inkies’. Predictably, of course, the rest of the world looked away – uninterested in the ‘sound of the eastway’ beyond the novelty of a band with the word ‘Farmers’ in their name and a song that espoused the joys of the ‘country’.

Norfolk Will Rise Again

Back in the real world, Norwich was touched by the hand of punk in ways similar to other corners of the nation. The hole torn in the cultural fabric by the Sex Pistols in 1976–77 allowed for young misfits and malcontents to rally to the standard and force their way through. Friendships were forged over mutual understandings and common disaffections; maybe the experience of seeing the Sex Pistols at West Runton Pavilion in August 1976, or a year later at the Cromer Links Pavilion on Christmas Eve 1977. Maybe the shared disappointment of not seeing the Pistols on the first date of the ‘Anarchy Tour’ scheduled for the UEA on 3 December 1976, or a joint appreciation of buying ‘New Rose’, ‘White Riot’ and ‘One Chord Wonders’ from Ace Records on Lower Goat Lane. For Jon Vince and Jon Fry, both Runton veterans, punk confirmed things they already knew about rock ‘n’ roll. But it also added a sense of impetus, the urge to ‘do it yourself’ that turned punter into performer. So it was that they formed a band – Der Kitsch – and, on a cold night in early 1978, commandeered the Old Woolpack off Colgate to serve as Norwich’s first punk central.
the city, primarily on account of Vince's acerbic vocals and Fry's tendency to get into fights with either the audience or the band's drummer (Tony Mills). Not to be deterred, they later headlined the Boogie House, getting banned in the process, before causing a stir at a RAR gig held at the university - in fact Der Kitsch got banned from more less everywhere they played. Others soon joined the fray: The Painkillers, Running Dogs, The Stoats and Right Hand Lovers, The Needles from Gorleston-on-Sea, The Privates from Ipswich. It was only when the young punks frequenting the pub gave it a reputation for under-age drinking that time was called to move on. By which point punk's always tenuous coherence was beginning to fragment into the tribal rivalries that defined the late 1970s and early 1980s …

No more rock 'n' roll for you
"The 3Cs was booked by 'Rusty' in 1977 as a 16th birthday party for his girlfriend. We - Der Kitsch – were brought in to play to about a hundred punks. We had no idea, but a rock 'n' roll festival was being held on the same night, just around the corner at St. Andrews Hall. First off, a group of about a dozen teds came in and it appeared to all be quite light hearted. In fact, we offered to play some rock 'n' roll for them. I played a rock'n'roll bassline (sort of:-), but soon a shout went up to 'play punk ya cunts, play punk ya cunts' – so we went back to playing our set. The teds left and we thought that was the end of it, until 20 minutes later and a group of about 50 full-grown men burst in armed with clubs and knives. The first thing they did was lift our makeshift stage up at one end tipping the band off stage in the process. I was left to wade in with my guitar trying to clear my way through to the safety of a small room we had requisitioned as a dressing room. There were only about a dozen punks of an age to really fight back, people like me, Kevin Whymer, Milly, Chaps, Blade, Beermat, Tony Ager and Tucker. It was carnage; the teds didn't mind attacking girls and young kids. One girl was hospitalised with what were long term injuries. The hate was unbelievable, obviously fired up by the national press of the day and tales of Kings Road battles between punks and teds. Even then, the policeman who turned up took great pleasure in telling me we weren't a priority and he didn't care if we all killed each other. It's fair to say the teds had an easy victory and were obviously happy with their work – so much so that they'd occasionally make ‘flying raids' on the Woolie over 1978."

Jon Fry

A bit of fuckology ...
And then there were students. The UEA's place in punk folklore is usually reserved for its banning the Sex Pistols, but the university conspired to provide input into Norwich's punk milieu. Early on, the Right Hand Lovers formed in 1977, a band that regularly played in the city and included Paul Whitehouse and Charlie Higson in its ranks. So the story goes, Higson turned up in Norwich with blue hair and a leather jacket bearing his nickname 'Switch'. But where Whitehouse soon had enough and returned to London, Higson adopted the funk influences that infused (post-) punk in the later 1970s to provide the centre-piece of the Fine City compilation.
in 1981. Simultaneously, the UEA filtered the politics of the time through the Rock Against Racism events organised by Nick Rayns and others, before the early 1980s saw Serious Drinking combine activist politics with a series of records that found 'love on the terraces' and prepared for revolution only after the pub doors had shut. The free beer mat that came with their album remains a collectors' piece.

God Save the Sex Pistols ...

"It was the night before Christmas 1977 and not a sound was to be heard except for the glorious mayhem that was Rotten, Vicious, Cook and Jones. The Sex Pistols had returned to the windswept cliffs of the North Norfolk coast, this time on the 'Never Mind The Bans Tour'. As we left The Champion pub (then our only port of welcome in the fine city), the hired minivan became crammed with more bodies than seats - a ragamuffin bunch of misfits, nonconformists, music lovers and thrill seekers, setting off to see what the tickets stated was "The Most Famous Band in the World". £1.75p!! Available only from The Cromer Cinema box office in advance.

The Links Pavilion was a dancehall from the '60s and '70s. It had once vibrated to the sounds of The Who, The Sweet, Bowie and Thin Lizzy, but had not staged a live event for nearly two years. It was a dilapidated, crumbling, rotting corpse of a space, dragged back to life for one night only to play host to the final nail in its coffin. For the Sex Pistols were its death knell: the pavilion burnt to the ground in April.

As for the audience, they were drawn from the four corners of Norfolk. Around 500 people pulled like moths to a bright light to witness the music of now, the music of our generation, the stripped back, naked, no nonsense rock 'n' roll that was punk.

The gig started with 'God Save the Queen', the Pistols' anthem for the Jubilee year of 1977, a thundering call to arms to the nation's disillusioned youth. 'I Wanna be Me', 'Seventeen', 'New York', 'EMI', 'Bodies', 'Submission', 'Belsen Was a Gas', 'Holidays in the Sun', 'Ko Feeling', 'Problems' and 'Pretty Vacant' all followed, before the band delivered 'God Save the Queen' for a second time and 'Anarchy in the UK'. The crowd loved it!! Some were in awe while others danced - pogoing and spitting were the order of the day. The gig was very much a case of preaching to the converted, as most of the songs were from the Never Mind the Bollocks album that had been released two months earlier and memorised off by heart. In between, the band sometimes stopped briefly to swig beer and throw the cans grenade like at the audience. This went down a storm and also gave Sid an opportunity to cut his already heavily scarred bare chest with a broken bottle whilst strutting around the stage half grinning and half snarling. The set finished with an encore of 'No Fun' and 'Liar', completing the hour allocated by the promoters and local council.

Contrary to expectations, the gig had passed without trouble as the punters drifted away and melted into the cold December night. We knew we had witnessed something special. The Sex Pistols star had burnt bright, lighting the way for many groups to follow.
But as we teenage kids walked home that night, we had no idea that it was all about to crash to earth. Christmas day 1977 would see the last gigs ever performed by that particular Sex Pistols line up in the UK (in Huddersfield for the striking firemen). I have seen a thousand bands and groups since that Christmas Eve as a 17-year-old, but few if any have left me with such a profound memory or had such an impact on my life. As many have said before me, seeing the Sex Pistols was truly a life changing experience…"  

Pete Strike  

In memory of the GALLENT men and women of this fine city who served in the Great Punk War ….

'Sadie', Joanne, Mandy and Heather, Duncan, Dave Black and Jonathan Hill, Susan Turner, Little Sue, 'Beano', 'Chaps', Babs, Milly and Trevor Rix (the Kings Road punks), Tom Stocker, Brian Lake, Mark Witty, 'beaver', 'cockney', 'blade', 'beermat' and Tucker, Pinx Louise, Karen and Liz Wellstead, Tony Ager, Rusty, Olly, Prem Nick, Cathy King, Jennie Holmes, Tina Lake, Johnny Appel, Julie Wymers, Willis Wilson, Steve Hamnell, Mick Smith, Gibbon, Wally, Westy, Nick Purvis, Collette 'concrete' Bristow, George McKay, Tim Perkins, Steve and Kay Wymers, 'switch', Higson, 'Louie the hat' and Angie from the UEA, Con and Dan O'Donaghue, Dave Comer, Mark Waters, 'Black Steve', Gary 'Adam' Ant, Nicole, Jo English, Andy Hayward, Vince Smith, Bob Masters, Billy Wisn, Kenny Smith, Gary Harrison, Andrew Wells, Paul Hammond, Nick Harrison, Francis (from the cover The Wall's 'Exchange'), Zak, Chainaw and Cyl, Marcus, Dave Kinnon, Paul Webster, Richard Gibson, Jayne Halchay, Andy Hearnshaw, Jem Moore, Billy Mason, Paul 'Rat' Strong, Terry Barban, Paul Greener, Shelly Cullum, Lesley 'Cash' Halstead, Bones and Janan, Donna and Binky, Trudy and Debbie.
On the evening of December 1st 1976, the Sex Pistols appeared on ITV's Today programme. During their interview with the show's host, Bill Grundy, the band and their companions swore ... a lot. In those innocent days, it was the kind of behaviour to earn tabloid headlines. The publicity coincided with the group's first national tour, due to start at the University of East Anglia on two days later. UEA's Vice-Chancellor of UEA, Sir Frank Thistlethwaite, acted quickly. He cancelled the concert. The University's Information Officer explained: 'The university cannot be satisfied that this concert would go off peacefully.'

The decision divided UEA's Students' Union. There were the fans who were disappointed by the cancellation, and who called a motion of 'no confidence' in their President. The President himself, on the other hand, was less concerned about whether the decision was right, but what the cancellation meant for his union's autonomy and finances. It owed the band their £750 booking fee. In the end, the V-C agreed that the university, rather than Union, would bear the cost of the cancellation. That was end to the story, and to UEA's role in the history of punk. However, there is a footnote. In the UEA archives, there is a press cutting of a review of the Pistols' performance at Leeds Polytechnic. Scribbled in the margin are the words: 'I take it that we can now await the immediate demise of Leeds Polytechnic as an educational establishment.'

John Street
I'll fight on, says injured protestor

PUNK protestor Claire Cassam was nursing an injured leg today after being trampled by a horse during an anti-hunting demo at Little Plumstead.

Six-year-old Claire—a daughter of the director of Norwich social services Mr. Emina Cassam—was knocked down by a horse as she tried to dissent a group of animal rights protesters.

She said Norwich and Norfolk Hospital had originally diagnosed a broken leg but subsequently decided it was only very minor. "It's still painful and I can't walk on it," she added.

She added: "One of our women was on a campaign against animal cruelty, but she was injured and had to leave."

She was injured several times today, including one incident where she was thrown to the ground by a horse. "It was frightening," she said.

She added: "I was at the demo when the horse jumped over me. The horse kept on jumping and I was unable to move."}

Train ride of terror with punks, court told

PUNK rockers and "other music lovers" battered two train carriages into "a complete shambles," Norwich Crown Court heard today.

Mass destruction "spread like a wildfire" was the train ride as it moved to Norwich from Cambridge. Doors and windows were smashed, toilet sititng out and steam came to burst pipes and other "over Isaac".

"Other passengers had to leave, and even the guard gave up policing the train because he found it too dangerous," the court heard.

The last night destruction of May was described today during the trial of the four Norfolk youths accused of causing the train ride.

They said the group had been inspired by the punk rock music they had heard, and that "it was like a".

The judge would have to decide if the group had acted "under the influence of a" or "under the influence of a"

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"The jury would have to decide if the group had acted 'under the influence of a' or 'under the influence of a'"
It was easy, it was cheap … Very few of the city’s early punk bands made it onto vinyl. Der Kitsch never released a record, despite label interest; The Painkillers, whose Jon Ward and John Thirkettle would work their way through numerous Norwich bands, imploded into fragments; the Right Hand Lovers became but a footnote in comedy history. The Toads eventually transformed into Silent Noise, who did release a punk-pop single on their own Easy Records in 1979 (‘I’ve Been Hurt (So Many Times Before)’). Not dissimilarly, the Beaders found time to release ‘Ulysses’ b/w ‘Gotta Know You’ on EE Records in 1980. The Crabs, too, made it from Yarmouth to play at The Roxy and Vortex in London in 1977. Led by Tony Day (aka Tony Diggines), they even managed a Peel session and contributed a track to the Farewell to the Roxy album released by Lightning Records in 1978. More typically, however, those who survived in the early punk wars preferred to retain their mystique. Like lipstick traces on a cadged embassy number one, they left behind only rumour and hearsay; a silence ruptured intermittently by scratchy downloads and battered cassettes buried in dusty lofts.

Where were you? Before the Woolpack and, later, The Jacquard provided space for bands to play, Norwich’s early punk gigs took place across the ever-shifting terrain of the city’s music scene. Peoples on Westlegate, known as the Boogie House from 1978, put on gigs as it welcomed various ‘next-big-things’ from outside Norwich; the punk nights held there in 1977–78 offered respite from the hostile discos of Tombland. Premises, the forerunner to the current Arts Centre, opened in 1977 on St Benedicts, while support slots at the UEA and in the UEA Barn became common. St Andrew’s Hall would, on occasion, host bands visiting Norwich as they teetered on the verge of ‘making it’; West Runton served as a port of call for touring bands until 1983 (and a cold night sleeping in the train station for many a dedicated (punk) city rocker unable to get a lift to and from the north coast to see Siouxsie and the Banshees, Joy Division, The Ruts and others). Smaller gigs were held at the 3Cs and in places such as Whites and the Prince of Denmark. Come the 1980s and the Gala Ballroom had re-emerged as a key venue in the city, allowing Paul Castles to post regular gig reviews of the great and the not-so-good to the short-lived Punk Lives magazine of 1982–3. In between, Norwich’s punks organised themselves, finding rehearsal spaces in warehouses or under the Freewheel anarchist bookshop, blogging gigs in pub backrooms and, via Jonty Young’s Cauldron nights, requisitioning deserted buildings to make their own fun amidst the rubble.

The city is our playground “The Cauldron started in the early 80s. I was sharing a house with Wellie off Unthank Rd, when Paul ‘Hammy’ Hammond came round with the idea of starting a nightclub in a disused building. Late one night we walked through the city looking for a venue and found that the Shrub House had become derelict. We gained entry through the cellar, changed the locks and cleared the space. There was no electricity, no Wellie but about rewiring most of the building which was then plugged into a generator. Friends came to help us decorate the cellar and The Cauldron was born. We printed up hand-drawn flyers; upstairs we made beds from charity shop stuff to pretend that we lived there. Our story, for legal reasons, was that we had squatters’ rights and were simply holding a housewarming party. People were nervous about it and some thought it was ‘too dodgy to go’. But the first night was packed with about 250 people. Wellie and I DJ’ed; Hammy was on the door. It cost 50p to get in and, if I remember rightly, we closed about 8am the following morning. We used the same venue 3 times before the brewery closed us down, but not before had a visit by the police. We were down in the cellar and the lights went out, leaving the Sergeant standing next to a mannequin dressed as a witch; he screamed. Some years later the local press quoted that we were ‘part of a devil worshiping cult’.

The next Cauldron was on Wensum Street. It was a stunning room with a balcony and built to host classical music in the
and thereby added to the subcultural fissions engendered by punk's arrival.

As a shop, Backs was small and tight. The racks were filled discerningly; punk, post-punk, proto-punk and reggae records providing a musical archive to set against the established pop narratives formed in the period to 1977. Behind the counter, the wall was decorated with 7" singles, their sleeves often as intriguing as their contents – a further ramification of punk's cultural assault. These were records hard to find in the city HMV – nuggets of DIY spawned at the grass-roots; the Small Wonder listings in the music press made manifest; one-off singles in hand-folded sleeves or the first releases of soon-to-be established names (4AD, Factory, Mute etc). By the early 1980s, electro and hip-hop records began to nestle next to the divergent punk forms, a seemingly never-ending trail of innovation and originality served by Paul Mills, Pete Keeley and others – spreaders of the teenage news, whose recommendations were rarely, if ever, wrong.

... Go and do it

Backs soon turned to wholesale and distribution, establishing links with London's Rough Trade and thus the fulcrum of the emergent independent label boom of the late 1970s. As punk's initial impact rippled out of the capital, so bands formed and, following Buzzcocks' lead, self-pressed records were manufactured and distributed from the backs of cars or via small regional distributors. This, over time, would be co-ordinated by Rough Trade's Richard Scott into a nationwide network. Access, agency and demystification: Backs covered distribution for the eastern region – part of a Cartel whose point and purpose was to provide an alternative to the major label hegemony that had strangled pop culture in the mid-1970s.

The Backs label itself was launched in 1982, releasing records by local groups such as the Farmer's Boys, Testcard F and Gothic Girls, and cassette compilations (Reel) that included local punk bands such as Serious Drinking, The Crabs, The Disrupters, Vital Disorders and Baptism of Fire. Already, by
St. Andrews Hall, Norwich

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At 8 p.m.

Adam

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£1.60 on door
and Ian became fractured pretty quickly. Rough Trade decided they didn't have the same ethos and beliefs – they saw Johnny as a conservative Daily Mail reader. At one point, Richard Scott sent me cash in an envelope for a train fare to York, where we went for a walk along the river to discuss pulling distribution from Backs and setting me up in business in Cambridge. This never happened (I was 21 at the time and certainly didn't want to go to Cambridge). Eventually in '86 I had a disagreement with Johnny over an Eton Crop release, walked out and went on holiday. On my return I found that Richard Scott wanted me to start at Rough Trade the next day. So off to London I went with a bag of clothes, no money and nowhere to live… 25 years later back, I'm back in Norwich and back at Backs."

Pete Keeley

My punk is bigger than your punk

When the Sex Pistols succumbed to their inglorious end, on 14 January 1978, punk did not so much die as detonate. In the aftermath, a range of musical styles and subcultural forms emerged from the debris, each staking claim as heirs to punk's 'true' meaning and purpose. Where Crass took up the Sex Pistols' call for 'Anarchy in the UK', so punk's Bowie-infused lineage evolved through the Banshees, Ants and UK Decay to what would eventually become goth. Across Britain, a flowering of subcultural revivals appeared on estates and the hedge-lined streets of suburbia, each one – be they mods, skinheads, rude boys or psychobillies – endeavouring to reignite a moment before pop lost its way to the pretensions of Sgt Pepper and the muso-dawdling of progressive rock. Some tried to freeze the punk moment forever, developing a generic punk sound and look that produced flashes of brilliance as it burrowed deeper into a mass of diminishing returns. Others took punk's promise to 'question everything' to its logical end, experimenting with sound and composition or eschewing pop lyricism in favour of short-hand treaties on the mechanisms of personal relationships, consumerism and capital. Still more dropped punk's original aesthetic but retained its statement of independendence to facilitate new sounds and new
pop that circumnavigated (and occasionally sought to infiltrate) the mainstream. In the fine city, a hundred flowers bloomed.

Serving on the front line ...

There are many brief histories that could be told. Punk threw up (literally!) multiple short-lived bands, formed with enthusiasm to play ramshackle gigs when and wherever they could. We could point to The Aborts, Autopsy, Distortion, Intensive Breeders, The Pits/Red Alert/Inferior Reality/Ulterior Motive, Raybox (from Ely) and Revulsion - punk die-hards reveling in a scene that would later spawn the more long-lasting Deviated Instinct. Coming in from Dereham, the Plastic Sandwiches gigged regularly in Norwich and released the single 'Bayonets and Colours' on Ellie Jay Records in 1981. Dissolute Youth, also from Dereham/Watton, morphed into The Ordinaires who fostered the Farmers Boys. Closer to home, the Falling Men travelled deeper into the vistas of post-punk.

Look harder and band names flicker in and out of existence across an incestuous local scene fostered by punk but diverse in its sound and image. Names such as Lick, Slick and Slide, The Stoats, The Outer Limits and Carl Gustav and the 84s, the latter led by Jon Ward, whose enthusiasm emboldened Norwich's punk diaspora. Footage of the 84s exists on youtube - Ward ranting 'I don't want to live with students' (a riposte to The Higsons' 'I don't want to live with monkeys') to a UEA audience. Less humorously, the 84s one-and-only single brought the band praise from the National Front; its title, 'I want to kill Russians', being fed to the NF's Bulldog magazine to become its Rock Against Communism 'track of the month'.

Not surprisingly, bands regularly swapped, lost and gained members. The Vital Disorders, formed initially by Mary Doogan in late 1979, passed through numerous line-ups as members left, emigrated or went to college. Somehow the band retained its mixed-gendered, multi-instrumental form to release four singles that combined Higson-style brass with punk's DIY ethos and astute lyrics aimed at Thatcherism, the cold war and sexual politics ('I'm not talking about prams...')

Playing with fire

Then again, punk's politics were always contested; organisations from the left and right both tried to lay claim to punk's intent. The influence of Crass, however, enabled those attracted to punk's inherent protest to adopt anarchism as more than just a symbol of self-expression. Not only did Crass' records dominate the independent charts of the period, but their politics fed into everything from CND activism, animal rights actions and anti-war initiatives that led to questions in parliament around the time of the Falklands War. In Norwich, the anarcho-punk banner was taken up most readily by The Disrupters, formed in 1980, and The Pits, who borrowed the banner, took it to the pub and left it there. Both had tracks included on Crass' Bulldog detector compilations, while The Disrupters also released their own records (and the records of others) on the Radical Change label inspired by Crass' example.

The Disrupters proved to be one of the most long-lasting Norwich bands, existing for eight years and releasing two albums. Live gigs often included the poems of Prem Nick (aka Nick Lake) as the group provided something of a hub for a burgeoning sub-scene within Norwich punk. Fanzines were produced; gigs were organised alongside others from the anarcho-punk network; political leaflets distributed. Indeed, the band's first single ('Young Offender') came with an insert that outlined the repressive mechanisms of the British state and stoked the EDP's Gabrielle Haycock to contact Backs to complain about 'obscenity' and incitement to 'civil disobedience'.

In fact, and no doubt to Ms Haycock's indignation, punk's anarchist politics did lead to action. From within the fine city, demonstrations were attended (particularly hunt sabbings or anti-vivisection protests) and political actions initiated, including a Stop Norwich campaign to coincide with the larger anarchist demos in London during 1983-84. The action targeted financial
the subculture that bore the band's name. As this suggests, their aesthetic drew on sexual fetishism, with imagery designed - along with Dieter Coulson's style and stage performance - to provoke, antagonise and entice. More than most bands, Gothic Girls exerted an influence beyond Norwich, touring with Sex Gang Children, headlining the Batcave and supporting Sisters of Mercy. At a local level, they pioneered a 'look' that became almost de rigueur in enclaves of the Jacquard during the mid-to-late 1980s.

It's a little different from the Hallway Children (the court was told)

"We were coming back from a UK Subs gig at the Corn Exchange and the trouble was the result of all day drinking and a large group of punks catching the late train back. It was one of those old-fashioned trains with separate compartments with windows and glass doors, so there was no shortage of stuff to break. From what I remember (and mentioning no names), it started as a bog roll fight then some fire extinguishers got let off, which led to things escalating quite rapidly. A compartment was on fire at some point and a toilet was thrown through a window. It got totally wrecked. Due to the lack of witnesses a lot of people got away with it. Some members of the public got off at the soonest opportunity and the conductor locked himself in the guard's van. There were arrests and a few up in court though. There was no justification for it really, but shit happens..."

Steve Hansell

Glass babies

Swimming blacker waters were Baptism of Fire and Gothic Girls, bands informed by punk's interest in the darker corners of the human condition. Baptism of Fire were headed by Jonty Young and typically compared to the likes of Sex Gang Children and Southern Death Cult. Remembered for coming on to 'Tomorrow Belongs to Me', their 'Inquisition' featured as part of Backs' Reel 3 (1984). Gothic Girls bore traces of the early Adam and the Ants and UK Decay, producing two singles and a mini-album for Backs (Lilac Dreams) that pre-empted the subculture that bore the band's name. As this suggests, their aesthetic drew on sexual fetishism, with imagery designed - along with Dieter Coulson's style and stage performance - to provoke, antagonise and entice. More than most bands, Gothic Girls exerted an influence beyond Norwich, touring with Sex Gang Children, headlining the Batcave and supporting Sisters of Mercy. At a local level, they pioneered a 'look' that became almost de rigueur in enclaves of the Jacquard during the mid-to-late 1980s.

Punk Antics and a Prison Break

"From what I can remember Baptism Of Fire were born out of chance one fine day in the early throes of summer '82 when Blakey turned up at 14 Neville Street. Jonty and I were living there with Bones and Janan: the 'Punk Zoo' being a regular drop-in centre for not only the Norwich punk fraternity but for punks from all over the place, stretching from Cambridge to as far afield as Bradford. Blakey was armed with a Roto Tom drum freshly purchased from Cookes Music, the spoils of a previous evening's rich pickings. Just as Malcolm McLaren described the Sex Pistols' Steve Jones as 'a brilliant cat burglar', so Blakey was a true life equivalent. His hero was Dennis The Menace from The Beano. Pulling the drum out from under his coat, he said to me 'Let's start a band, you be the singer'. Lakey, former guitarist from The Pits, then turned up and was in; later the same day Jonty came home and joined on bass. All done within the space of a few hours, though 'Stomping' Rupert Orton was then drafted in to add a bit of extra raw power.

We soon started gigging. One was a great slot on a UEA benefit gig for CND along with 2 other bands and the Vital Disorders headlining. We sound-checked and hit the UEA student bar a bit too early!!! Once on stage (playing under the slogan 'Bombs Not Jobs' ha ha), the organisers said we were going over our allotted time and sent in the bouncers to stop us. All hell broke loose ... I can remember jumping off stage and looking back to see half the crowd about to scale it. As the bouncer pulled Blakey from his drum stool in went his organisations, with slogans ('Barclays finance apartheid'), smoke bombs and broken nationwide and Sun Alliance windows provoking the EDP headline 'mob goes on rampage in city centre'. Some twenty young punks were arrested and charged with offences of riotous assembly and criminal damage. Of course, less constructive fun was also had, such as smashing up a train on the way back from a UK Subs gig in Cambridge. But The Disrupters took up punk's protest in a way that rubbed against the increasingly jaunty pop of many local bands and the city's UEA contingent.

..."
trademark headbutt and a massive fight broke out that carried on through the backstage doors and out into the foyer. After a good dust up it finally calmed down and we were promptly banned from the UEA. Thanks CND: peace and love!!!

Another great tale came with our support slot to the Lords of the New Church. Blakey was this time being detained at Her Majesty's Pleasure - an occupational hazard for Baptism Of Fire. Usually, Blakey's incarcerations were fairly short stints but this was a 3 & 1/2 year stretch. The week before the gig I was up at HMP Knox Road visiting Blakey on a VO. Well, the Lords of the New Church featured Brian James, formerly of Blakey's favourite band, The Damned. As I left, he gave me his infamous and perfectly replicated Dennis the Menace grin. By this time, Jonty and I had had to vacate Neville Street after our landlord was jailed for selling time-bomb switches to the PLO. His crew were selling the house before the state seized his assets, so we moved into 60 Wellington Road. It was there that we were watching Patrick McGoohan in The Prisoner when the back door opened and in walked Blakey. Initially we nonchalantly greeted him with an 'alright Blakey, how's it going?' but then instantly it dawned on us "hang on, ain't you supposed to be in the nick?" "Yeah boys, but I've popped out for the night". He'd got a few quid together by telling the other lads that he was going to hop over the fence and buy some tobacco!! In fact he'd decided to break out for the Lords Of The New Church gig. He hid with us for the next few days as the police searched for him, eventually getting through to the night of the gig without being apprehended. We sneaked him into the Gala through the back door, bringing him on stage for the encore. I introduced him as 'our special guest on drums for two songs, Dennis'. After the gig, he remained on the run for some months before finally being recaptured in the Elephant & Castle. ALL GOOD CLEAN FUN....HA HA!!!

Experiments with glue ...

But punk meant more than just the music. Shared houses and squats provided space to plot, create and live out punk's dystopia; urban spaces were colonised, along Pottergate (in the Brown Derby), St. Benedicts, The Shiraleah or around the Guildhall. Drugs and glue, Wrecking Crews ... Most important, perhaps, were the fanzines that became synonymous with punk's sense of agency. Norwich produced a few. First up was Vomit, a one-off made by the O'Donaghues and Paul Strong in 1977 that comprised salacious stories and made-up interviews (due to there being a lack of bands to cover). Those around The Aborts and The Disrupters produced Rabid (Carl 'Billy' Youell), Shelters for the Rich (Steve Hansell) and Stay Free (Nick Smith) - scrappy collages of tabloid straplines, cartoons, scrawled text and typed-up interviews that reflected the urgency of the time as well as the spirit.

More 'high-brow' fare was served up by Antigen and Final Straw, both sold through the Freewheel bookshop. Antigen (by 'Dave and Kate') featured interviews with Crass and Poison Girls, interspersing them with political collages and essays on gender politics, animal liberation and links to the norwich Anarchist/Pacifist Group. Final Straw presented itself as a 'local alternative to the music press', covering norfolk and 'name' bands as they played in the city. Trouble hit, however, when its third issue featured a guide to making petrol bombs that led to a police raid on Freewheel and prosecution. There were others. Guy Holden's Barbequed Iguana served as the Jacquard's in-house 'zine during the early 1980s; The Black Hole covered Screen 3 and others; Totally Wired, started by Andy Harthorne in 1984, ran through to the 1990s as an essential guide to norwich's punk and independent scenes. From outside the city, Tox's Trees and Flowers 'zine was based in king's Lynn but gained a nationwide reputation for its coverage of punk's early 1980s. As elsewhere, 'zines served as an alternative press; a way of documenting and giving sustenance to local bands and scenes as they evolved, fractured and developed.
Mob goes on rampage in city centre

A MOB of 20 youths rampaged through the centre of Norwich this afternoon scattering shoppers and leaving a trail of damage that left police bewildered.

In all at least eight shops, pubs and building societies in London Street had windows smashed by the gang.

In addition paint bombs were hurled and a smoke bomb thrown at Barclays Bank Piccadilly branch. Police have confirmed that the mob ran away from Barclays and down London Street into Bedford Street.

"It was just like one big commando raid," said shop assistant Graham Gunawan, Alfie Swindon.

SCATTERED

Police said they had no idea what was behind the series of attacks - what described them as "clearly premeditated".

The gang of about 20 - scattered about shops and handicapped workers as they moved down the street, before splitting up near Jardine's.

The smoke bomb thrown into Barclays caused a small fire and damaged a carpet, a police spokesman said.

Shopkeepers, described how the group ran away, down the crowded city street.

"I have seen them in Sun Alliance thought they were firing when there three bricks came crashing through the windows.

Two in train vandalism trial are acquitted

Two defendants in the Cambridge-to-Norwich train vandalism case were acquitted yesterday on the direction of the judge at Norwich Crown Court.

Judge Frederick Beazley told the jury that the decision to acquit them was his and not his expression of opinion.

"These are the very latest in the series of attacks," he added.

The defendants were two members of the "Liberation Movement" - who had attack trains in London and were thought to be involved in the damage done.

"THEY WERE TERRORISTS," he added.

"One thing is clear," he continued. "They were not terrorists. They were not associated with the movement."

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Sick on you …

"Con and Dan O'Donoghue produced Vomit in 1977. I don't remember if there was ever any more than one edition. The thing was just dirty words and lies, made-up interviews, made-up sex … My tiny role in its downfall was that I printed the damn thing on my Dad's old hand cranked, drum loaded, stencil duplication machine. And while they got into all sorts of trouble for writing the shit, I got into much more serious trouble for spilling the gloppy black ink on my mother's floor and soft furnishings. I, and the massive duplication machine, were banished to the shed, which is where I stayed for the next year-and-a-half, listening to John Peel, disassembling and partially reassembling motorcycles. The Vomit incident only worked for me because my parents saw it as progress, at least I was finally interested in words, writing, doing something vaguely academic, which is why and how I got my hands on the duplicator and, more importantly, the ink and paper. So the parents were accessories to the crime. Even after the damaging of floor and soft furnishings, I was able to continue. My parents never troubled themselves to learn what was spurtng out, never knew and never cared… It only seemed to them as though the homework was finally getting done."

Paul Strong

Into the abyss …

From 1979, the Jacquard took over from the Woolpack as Norwich's premier punk hang out. Formerly a jazz and blues club, it had taken to holding a gay night that Jon Fry sourced as being potentially punk-friendly following the Woolie's demise. Thereafter, and despite various false-starts, over-ambitions and cultural shifts, the Jacquard held gigs and club nights that traced the diverse strands of post-punk's development through to 1992. By the mid-1980s, a night at the club looked like a proverbial gathering of the clans, with punks, goths, psychobillies and indie-kids occupying its alternative space. 'Faces' came and went; tensions arose and dissipated; bands formed and split. Others competed and complemented: the Grunt-a-go-go gigs at Santana's brought the underground to Norwich; the alternative nights held at Samantha's and Peppermint Park helped patent the late 1980s 'indie disco'. But the Jacquard pushed on through the Thatcherite 1980s, a time when music venues once more became scarce and punk's predicted no future felt prescient. Given such a context, the Jacquard served as testament to the impetus generated by punk's insistence that 'anyone can do it'. And if the rest of the world won't listen, then you just have to do it yourself …
A police career. Fact and fiction.

Some of us still think of even an old fashioned Mr Plod.

While others believe television and think every
spends his days in a hopped chase crooks with broke
The truth, as always, lies in between.

Unfortunately, life has changed too fast and crime too soon
Mr Plod to cope.

Today's policeman has support of the very latest
technological equipment and that is his job.

Still like his fictitious
he is involved with people, who cannot, or will not, help
2. He does not turn his back on someone is in trouble.
3. He defends a person even though he may disagree that person has to say.
4. And he does his best to keep peace for everybody within the rights of anybody.

It adds up to quite a tall order.

Which is why, when you join the Police, you'll go through training and give you the confidence.

And also why you are well paid. (Although you'll earn every penny)

If it sounds like I'm being flippant, please fill in the coupon and give you even more 
No reason.

The best paid.
Saturday Night beneath the Plastic Palm Trees

"Boyfriends were not only bound to want to share your hairspray, Crazy Colour and bleach, but sometimes eyeliner too. There would be serious competition for the mirror before a gig. Mod boys come a close second in mirror hogging. Physical contact also had its perils, more than once I lost a nose ring or earring only to find it stuck in my boyfriend's mohican in the morning. On average, for many years, I was going through one whole eyeliner and one whole giant can of Boots un-perfumed hairspray every week. Barbers refused to shave my mohican and most hadn't heard of Crazy Colour so we had to do each other's hair: lucky the ones who had creative and conscientious friends. The baths in the bedsit houses on Unthank Road must have been stained a gorgeous range of colours. With all this attention to "The Hair", it wasn't too weird to protect it from rain on the way to The Gala using plastic carrier bags: it was important to look immaculate on entering the venue. Bright hair, sticking up, shaved bits had to be neat, perfect make-up. On leaving, the opposite was true. Run, smudged make-up and floppy hair were the mark of a great evening, including time spent in the 'mosh pit'. Attention in the street was like no other when my hair was a pink puffball or blue mohican. Some people told me I was an outrage; others told me if they were 40 years younger they would be doing it too. One 'beer boy' shouted that my hair looked stupid and my make-up looked shit. I told him 'and you're a fat, ugly bastard, but I can wash my face and hair, what can you do?'

Apart from my offensive 'prick up your ears' Boy t-shirt and tendency to want to share the Sex Pistols with the Unthank Road shoppers by placing my speakers on the window sill of my bedsit, the other way to shock the public was by being helpful, polite and well spoken. This was 1983-ish and the public still weren't used to these strutting peacocks. I missed the chance to go to West Runton, so the Gala and The Jacquard were the places to be. Didn't really matter who was playing, these were our only venues in a city that housed 12 other clubs for the 'beer boys'. I felt quite possessive and protective over our places, including the Festival House and The Red Lion. And what a great mix of people made these their locals too. The Jacquard was a proper scruffy, smoky little club. We knew we had something special..."
The gig itself was fuckin' brilliant. The first band on were the Toxic Virgins. Unfortunantly I didn't see very much of them because I was talking to Crass about their garage L.P. But that I did hear on T.V. I liked. Poison Girls were next who did a very good set. Before they went on I asked the singer for an interview. She said she was loosing her voice and would talk to me after the gig. But unfortunantly I did not get a chance. Annie Anxiety was next who I did not like at all. I only heard one song, cos I went down the pub when I returned. Crass took the stage. They played a mixture of "stations" and "five thousand". They played a long set inc. banned from the Roxy! What a shame you pay / Funk is dead / Tired System / and many many more.

If death comes so cheap the same must be for life!

Design by Russ Bestley at W.Y.D.