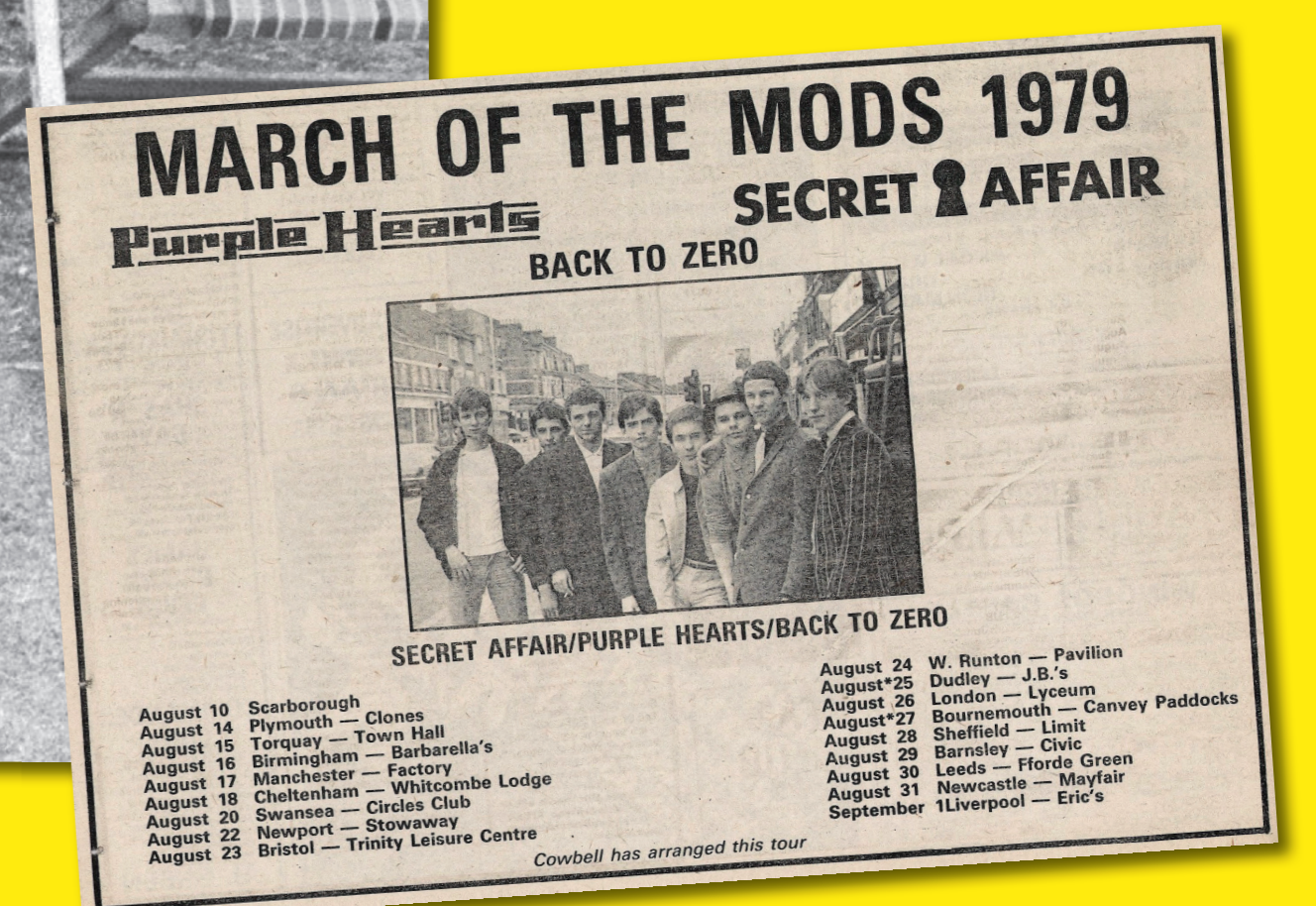


# SAWDUST CAESARS



By all accounts this second ‘secret’ gig was a frantic siege, with lengthy queues and a desperate scramble resembling a rugby scrum to get through the doors into the limited confines of the Penthouse. Once inside, the crowd knew what to expect from the band and lapped it up. Incendiary lyrics and a bludgeoning of nihilistic aggression was reciprocated with a hail of phlegm, an act of approbation.

Just over a year from the first gig and punk was the rising subculture. Zips, safety pins, torn blazers and spiked hair were the subcultural sartorial markers of a new DIY phenomenon. Punk became another tribe that loved to flock to the seaside.

Glen Matlock recalled the sign outside the Huntsman Hotel, shortly before he and Rotten were ignominiously ejected in 1976: “No Long Hair, No Bedrollers, No Bikers, No Skinheads”. It is something of a lost, local term - but bedrollers refers to mods who carried sleeping bags on the rear of their scooters. The sign sums up a pre-punk roll call of subcultures that clustered at the seaside to swan around, let off steam and occasionally square up to each other.

These subcultural tribes were the “Sawdust Caesars” as christened by the judge sentencing the participants in the mass mods-v-rockers brawls of the 1960s. The British seaside resorts became battlegrounds for the day, establishing a moral panic, and Scarborough was no exception. The regular visitors that we see in the Scarborough Bank Holiday documentary would look on in horror.

Music scenes and subcultural strands have survived and thrived at the seaside. Scenes would revive, seemingly out of very little. There was the founding of a Scarborough scooter club - the Castle Coasters - in that long hot summer of 1976. Thankfully, skirmishes are now few and far between. Even punk fitted in, with glam and teenybopper paraphernalia replaced by supersized punk mirror badges and risqué tee-shirts. Sex Pistol Steve Jones famously sported a knotted handkerchief on his head - a playful reference to the working-class tradition of slumping in a deckchair.

And today, the seaside beat goes on. Resorts like Blackpool, Margate, Morecambe and Scarborough now host part-nostalgic part-current weekend punk festivals, alongside scooter rallies, retro-raves and rock’n’roll festivals.

Top: Teds goofing around at the seaside in 1976 photographed by Chris Steele-Perkins, scootering and mod revival scenes in Scarborough  
 Above right: The Sex Pistols – minus Johnny Rotten – return to Scarborough in 2026  
 Bottom: Scarborough’s popular punk festival draws in an old and new crowd – photographs by Mike Willby

