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**‘Beats Apart’: A Comparative History of
Youth Culture and Popular Music in
Liverpool and Newcastle upon Tyne,
1956-1965**

Jonathan Paul Watson

PhD

2009

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Youth Culture and Popular Music in
Liverpool and Newcastle upon Tyne,
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Jonathan Paul Watson

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fulfilment of the requirements of the
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Abstract

This study explores the themes of continuity and change in twentieth-century British cultural history, particularities of place and regional identity in the North of England, and the cultural transfer of North American popular music in Britain between 1956 and 1965. By means of a comparative historical investigation of youth culture and popular music in Liverpool and Newcastle upon Tyne, the work engages with existing debate among historians surrounding the nature and extent of cultural change for the period usually referred to as ‘The Sixties’, and whether or not it is possible to speak of a ‘Cultural Revolution’. Spanning the years between the initial impact of rock ‘n’ roll and the immediate aftermath of the Beat Boom of 1963-64, a phenomenon described by one commentator as representing ‘perhaps the North’s greatest single cultural ‘putsch’’, the thesis examines the role of urban and regional identity in the process of cultural production, reproduction, and consumption. Theoretical insights derived from the associated disciplines of sociology and cultural studies are employed which offer an opportunity for a novel and dynamic analysis and interpretation of the empirical historical evidence. This research is especially pertinent at a time when historians are increasingly looking to the regional and inter-regional, as opposed to the national and international, for explanations of continuity and change. There is a burgeoning interest in the history of popular culture inspired by the transition of post-modern society from one of production to consumption. Cultural and economic theorists have called for more historical investigation to inform current debates regarding the post-modern city’s ability to attract a ‘creative class’ as a means towards urban regeneration. This study informs these debates by bringing the above themes together in a unique historical analysis of cultural continuity and change, Northern identity, and popular music.

Acknowledgements

This study represents the culmination of several years' research that was originally inspired by a Master's course in British Regional History run jointly by Northumbria University and the North East England History Institute (NEEHI). Work on the resulting thesis allowed me to bring together in one study, three areas of particular interest; twentieth-century British cultural history, 'Northern' regional history, and popular music. This was achieved by means of a comparative study of youth culture and popular music in Leeds and Newcastle upon Tyne between 1956 and 1963. The positive feedback I received from those generous enough to offer constructive criticism of the thesis provided the motivation for this work. It was felt that a much more substantial study was justified, and that Liverpool was the ideal object for comparison with Newcastle in such an expanded work, not least for the obvious reason that the city produced Merseybeat and the Beatles.

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

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Signature:

Date:

Contents

Introduction	7 – 19
Chapter 1: The Historical Context	20 – 45
Chapter 2: Culture and Northern Identity	46 – 75
Chapter 3: Youth Culture, Music Culture	76 – 118
Chapter 4: Popular Music in the North of England	119 – 151
Chapter 5: Youth Culture and Popular Music in Liverpool	152 – 202
Chapter 6: Youth Culture and Popular Music in Newcastle upon Tyne	203 – 253
Chapter 7: Youth, Music and Cultural Revolution in the North	254 – 294
Conclusion	295 – 305
Bibliography	306 – 316
Appendix: Key to Maps	317 – 319
Maps:	Figs. 1 – 8

Introduction

*'O thou North of England, who art counted as desolate and barren, and reckoned the least of the nations, yet out of thee did the branch spring and the star arise which gives light unto all the region round about.'*¹

Themes

This work sets out to explore the history of youth culture and popular music in the North of England between 1956 and 1965. Ultimately it is the intention to engage with the wider debate surrounding the extent and nature of cultural continuity and change in Britain as a whole during the period usually referred to as the Sixties. To this end, arguments put forward in the recent works of Dominic Sandbrook and David Fowler will be addressed. After reading Sandbrook's two volume history of Britain from 1956-1970 it was impossible not to be struck by the implication that youth and pop culture did not matter very much. He further suggests that the widely held impression that it did is the result of historians, authors and commentators paying 'extremely close attention to the affairs of a minority of well-educated, relatively affluent young people, precisely those people most likely to become writers, publishers, historians and so on.'² Similarly, Fowler claims that 'historical and sociological analysis of youth culture during the 1960s is based on a false premise: that pop culture was an expression of youth culture.' He argues that 'Mods were not products of affluent, 'Swinging London'', that 'the Beatles were not in any meaningful sense a reflection of youth culture during the 1960s', and that 'working-class youth were alienated' from middle-class pop stars.³ These arguments stem from a shared belief in the essential continuity of British cultural life from one period to the next and the dismissal of any notion that 'the Sixties' witnessed a 'cultural revolution', particularly one with working class youth at the forefront. The existence or otherwise of this 'cultural revolution' is the central theme of this study. Its aim, by focussing on the micro-histories of youth culture and popular music in Liverpool and Newcastle, is to offer a fresh perspective on a debate that has thus far been held at a national level.

The second major theme of the work relates to the question posed by Dave Russell in his, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*, as to 'the extent to which

¹ Edward Burrough, *To the Camp of the Lord in England*, (1655), in *The Memorable Works of a Son of Thunder and Consolation*, (1672), p.66, cited in, Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During The English Revolution*, (London, 1991), p.73.

² Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), preface p.xxiii.

³ David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c. 1920-c. 1970*, (Basingstoke, 2008), pp.197-98.

we can speak of a single ‘northern’ identity and whether regional patriotisms can hold their own against the often-conflicting demands of locality at one extreme and class and nation at the other.’ While Russell admits that he is concerned primarily with the constructed ‘North’, he insists that his ‘concentration upon cultural representation in no sense implies a rejection of modes of investigation rooted in the history of actual events’.⁴ It is by exploring some of the ‘objective realities’ of Northern urban and regional identity, particularly those pertaining to Liverpool/Merseyside and Newcastle/Tyneside, that some albeit provisional answers to the above question will be sought. There is however another reason why this line of inquiry should be pursued. It is the contention at the outset that there was *indeed* a cultural revolution, beginning in the mid-1950s with Northern working class youth at the forefront, and that their participation was closely associated with the cultural transfer of North American popular music. A further aim is to ascertain whether or not Northern, regional or urban identity played a part. In other words, did the reception of jazz, blues and rock ‘n’ roll, and the subsequent indigenous production of skiffle, beat and rhythm and blues differ between Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds or any of the major towns and cities in the North? Was there anything especially ‘Northern’ about the phenomenon? Answers to these questions and those relating to the ‘cultural revolution’ debate will be pursued by means of an historical investigation of the young people being impacted upon.

As Liverpool and Newcastle provide the focus, some justification for their choice as objects for comparison must be given. For a study which sets out to examine the role of youth culture and popular music in a cultural revolution that began with the advent of rock ‘n’ roll in 1956, Liverpool was the obvious choice. As Sara Cohen pointed out when making a similar justification, ‘Liverpool was chosen as the location for the study because of its history of involvement and achievement in rock music.’⁵ What is more, given that the second major theme concerns Northern regional/urban identity, Liverpool also appears ideally suited to an investigation of this nature owing to its well-established ‘Scouse’ character. Liverpool produced ‘Merseybeat’, a phenomenon described by Russell as perhaps representing ‘the North’s greatest single cultural ‘putsch’’, whilst adding that ‘Manchester was also extremely fertile’ and ‘the Animals gave Newcastle its first nationally prominent pop music stars.’⁶ The

⁴ Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*, (Manchester, 2004), p.4.

⁵ Sara Cohen, *Rock Culture In Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making*, (Oxford, 1991), p.4.

⁶ Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*, (Manchester, 2004), p.213.

Animals were not a beat group however, but an R&B group who found success in the wake of the Beat Boom as part of the largely London-based rhythm and blues scene. This raises the intriguing question of ‘where were the Newcastle beat groups?’ or for that matter ‘was there a Liverpool R&B scene?’ One reason why Liverpool and Newcastle have been selected then is because they both produced popular music that achieved national recognition but importantly, they made music that was significantly different.

Overall though, at first glance similarities may appear more obvious than differences. Two port city/regions with a working class heritage where traditional forms of male employment, casual labour on the docks in Liverpool and shipbuilding and heavy engineering on Tyneside, were, during the period in question, still dominant but in terminal decline. Their social structure might be presumed to be similar, and both were certainly experiencing the same dislocations as the result of housing clearance programmes. Many long-established inner city working class communities were in the process of being uprooted and dispersed to overspill council estates and New Towns. If the culture was predominantly that of the working class then a common predilection for pubs and social clubs, cinemas, ballrooms and football might also be supposed. Then again, ‘Scouse’ and ‘Geordie’ are equally strong but very distinctive identities and the reasons for this must be explored.

Method and Theory

The choice of Liverpool and Newcastle is compatible with John Breuilly’s recommendation that when taking the comparative approach, ‘There is no point in studying events which have nothing in common but nor is there in studying events which do not differ significantly’.⁷ Whilst the methodology adopted is based on the comparative method it should be stated at the outset that it is not the intention to identify all the similarities and differences between Liverpool and Newcastle and certainly not between Merseyside and Tyneside. Rather, the idea is to introduce the concept of ‘cultural transfer’ as a means by which to limit the analysis of similarities and differences to those that pertain to the reception of North American popular music. This means the cultural transfer of jazz, blues, rock ‘n’ roll and rhythm and blues. Because it is the argument here that youth and pop (as opposed to popular) culture were at the forefront of the North’s cultural revolution, an exploration of the impact of this transfer on the young people of Liverpool and Newcastle ought to provide some answers to

⁷ John Breuilly, *Labour and liberalism in nineteenth-century Europe: Essays in comparative history*, (Manchester, 1992), p.3.

the questions raised through engagement with the central themes of the work. It should become apparent as progress is made that the comparative method when applied in this way is the most compatible with achieving the study's stated aims.

Theoretical insights drawn from the disciplines of sociology and cultural studies will be employed. This includes the work of Peter J. Martin who insists that 'An adequate understanding of music in modern culture...must go beyond the music itself, seeing it as a part – perhaps an essential one – of a much wider cultural configuration.' His suggestion that 'the meaning of popular music is to be found in, and only in, the uses to which it is put' will be tested against the historical evidence.⁸ As will his suggestions for the application of the concept of 'collective creativity', an idea Martin borrows from Howard Becker whose work on 'art worlds' provided a new approach to the sociology of art.⁹ Similarly, by applying Jason Toynbee's concept of 'social authorship', an adaptation of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural production, it will become possible to offer fresh insights into the creativity of individual agents. The way musician-agents become disposed 'to play, write, record or perform in a particular way'.¹⁰ The sociologist Margaret Archer's work on the place of culture in social theory provides the inspiration for the overarching theoretical approach of the thesis. According to the blurb for *Culture and Agency*, her most comprehensive treatment of the subject:

People inescapably are shaped by the culture in which they live, while culture itself is made and remade by people.

*Margaret Archer provides an analysis of the nature and stringency of cultural constraints and the conditions and degrees of cultural freedom, and offers a radical new explanation of the tension between them.*¹¹

Her conceptualisation of the interplay of cultural dynamics enables an examination of the role of human agency in the production and reproduction of culture, and the analysis of patterns of cultural continuity and change. The insights of these and other scholars whose work has a bearing on the history of youth culture and popular music will be explored at greater length –

⁸ Peter J. Martin, *Sounds and society: Themes in the sociology of music*, (Manchester, 1995), pp.272-75.

⁹ Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, (London, 1982).

¹⁰ Jason Toynbee, *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions*, (London, 2000), p.36.

¹¹ Margaret Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, (Cambridge, Revised ed., 1996).

and in greater depth – at appropriate points in the historical narrative. Those of Martin, Toynebee and Archer in particular, are vital for the purposes of analysis and interpretation.

Context and Content

It is important to begin by placing all of the above in the proper historical context. This will be done in the opening chapter which explores aspects of Britain's post-war social, cultural, economic and political condition during the period spanning the Suez Crisis of 1956 and the onset of Beatle-mania and the Profumo scandal of 1963. However, any argument for or against the notion of a cultural revolution beginning in the mid-fifties ought to take place against the backdrop of the post-war years of austerity. After all, it was Britain's emergence from these years that created a climate in which, as Sandbrook observes, 'confident dreams of a prosperous future were intermingled with gloomy fears of national decline.'¹² This is also the place to offer some justification for the chosen timeframe which is related to the regional dimension of the work as much as to the more conventional considerations based on national or even international history. In addition, the main arguments put forward by historians concerning the nature and extent of continuity and change for the period are introduced. The often ambivalent attitude of the authorities and the media towards youth are discussed especially in relation to Teddy Boys, the impact of rock 'n' roll, the emergence of skiffle and the disruption caused by National Service. Owing to the post-war 'bulge' or 'baby boom' youth was a growing category both in terms of actual numbers and as a proportion of the population. 'Youth' as a social category was portrayed as both a symbol of economic optimism and as a threat to the social order and, as the chief beneficiaries of Macmillan's 'affluent society', it was working class youth that became the focus. Jazz singer and cultural commentator, George Melly recorded his observations regarding the rise of pop culture and its relationship with traditional popular culture, as did the champion of Northern working class culture, Richard Hoggart. Their views and reflections are presented here because they convey many of the widely held concerns of the period. As Sandbrook argues, 'many people in the fifties were suspicious of American cultural imports, of mass entertainment and popular culture, of the effects of prosperity and mobility on traditional customs and communities.'¹³ It was with these concerns, and amidst the actual events of social

¹² Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), preface p.xxvi.

¹³ *Ibid.* p.453.

transformation, that the North of England stood poised (unwittingly) on the brink of its biggest ‘cultural moment’.

Chapter Two is about defining ‘the North’. The aim is to explore Dave Russell’s imaginary North and to examine some of the ways in which scholars have attempted to define regions. Contemporary perceptions of the oppositional construct of North versus South, of regional and urban cultural identity are interpreted in an effort to answer Russell’s question as to the extent it is possible to speak of a single Northern identity. Particular emphasis is placed on Merseyside/Liverpool and Tyneside/Newcastle and evidence that might reveal the nature of self-representation at the regional, civic but also at a personal level. The hope is that something can be gleaned of the objective reality of identity as it was experienced – how the people of Liverpool and Newcastle saw themselves in relation to other major cities including of course London. At a time when it was no longer possible to muster the political, economic and commercial capital of their Victorian prime, Northern cities increasingly resorted to mobilising what cultural capital was at their disposal in an effort to offset the overwhelming advantages of London and the South East. How Liverpool reacted as the former ‘Second City of Empire’ by evoking both former glories and a sense of ‘otherness’ exemplified by ‘scouse’ identity, what John Belchem terms ‘Merseypride’ and ‘Liverpool exceptionalism’, these are the themes for discussion together with Liverpool’s longstanding Celtic and American connections. There is consideration of the perceived sense of isolation felt by the North East as a region, not only from a neglectful and ignorant South, but also from a somehow almost imperceptibly distant ‘Near North’. The historical fact of Newcastle as regional capital and the implications this may have had for ‘Geordie’ identity are addressed.

The transatlantic origins of youth culture, the emergence of the ‘teenager’, the history of North American popular music, and its reception in Britain are the focus of the next section. Some of the continuities in the historical trajectory of youth culture and the attitudes and responses to youth as a category in American and British society beginning in the late nineteenth century are broadly traced with particular reference to John Savage’s comprehensive survey of the subject, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875-1945*. Savage ends his study at the point he calls ‘Year Zero’, 1945, just as ‘America’s latest product was coming off the production line.’

The post-war spread of American values would be spearheaded by the idea of the Teenager. This new type was the psychic match for the times: living in the now, pleasure-seeking, product-hungry, embodying the new global society

*where social inclusion was to be granted through purchasing power. The future would be Teenage.*¹⁴

The development of British youth culture up to and beyond the impact of rock 'n' roll in 1956 is presented in such a way as to highlight the inherent complexities in the relationship between youth culture, the technologies of production and consumption, the music business and the media, and popular music. The reception or cultural transfer of jazz, blues and rock 'n' roll in post-war Britain is then charted with an emphasis on the peculiarly British experience with regards to the importance of recorded music and the associated problem of 'authenticity'. Various scholarly approaches to popular music and its place in society and the complicated relationship between commercial and artistic interests are considered from the early condemnatory appraisal of Theodore Adorno to the considerably more balanced assessment of Ian MacDonald. The chapter ends with an attempt to place the various post-war developments in British popular music in their historical, social and cultural context. The aim is to provide an introduction to the process by which British jazz produced an offshoot called 'skiffle' and how, when combined with the impact of rock 'n' roll, they gave rise to the Beat Boom and the closely associated Rhythm and Blues Movement.

Chapter Four is concerned with narrowing the focus to popular music in the North of England. Using mostly secondary sources, the jazz, skiffle, beat and R&B scenes of several major Northern cities are described. The evolution of these scenes in Manchester, Sheffield, Bradford, Leeds and Hull, the emergence of key venues, personalities, musicians and performers is traced with a view to identifying particularities of place and any specific factors that may have contributed to the distinctive character and development of each. Inter-city rivalries and collaborations are sought which may shed light on a city's self-image and the connection between urban identity and the consumption and production of popular music. There is also some consideration of the attitudes and responses of civic authorities – councils, magistrates, police, and local media – in their encounter with the completely new phenomenon of pop culture. Lastly, there is a brief exploration of the infrastructure available at the local level to individuals and groups seeking wider recognition such as recording studios, radio and television stations, printed media, and the availability of premises suitable as venues. It will become apparent that some towns catered for the Beat Boom much better than others. The aim is to answer the question of just how and why individuals or groups of

¹⁴ Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875-1945*, (London, 2008), p.465.

individuals came to perform American popular music and to create music inspired by it in the North's towns and cities in the particular way they did.

The bulk of empirical evidence is presented in the following two chapters dealing specifically with Liverpool and Newcastle. This is where the story of youth culture and popular music in these city/regions is told in the form of an historical narrative drawing on a broad range of primary and secondary material. They are treated separately so as to allow the reader the opportunity to fully appreciate the particularities and generalities pertaining to the cultural transfer of American popular music in each case. The final chapter brings together the similarities and differences identified – the findings of the research – with the theoretical perspectives of Martin, Toynbee and Archer. There will then be a concise reiteration of the trajectory of the thesis from which conclusions will be drawn.

Sources

Before progressing there are two points of concern that ought to be addressed. The first requires a brief discussion of sources. Besides documentary evidence retrieved from the archives of the relevant local authorities, the majority of primary material comes from contemporary periodicals. This is of course usual in an historical investigation of this type. However, many of the points raised and argued in the deployment of this evidence will be backed up by the frequent use of oral testimony given, either in interviews with other writers, or in several cases in conversation with the present author. Just as the views and observations contained in newspaper reports of the day must be treated with caution, so should the reminiscences of participants, often recorded many years after the fact, be subjected to rigorous scrutiny. 'Answers' or conclusions cannot be based on recollection alone, therefore the application of oral testimony has been restricted to providing support and added 'colour' to the empirical evidence. Nonetheless, as Eric Hobsbawm has written, although 'What the contemporary observer sees is not necessarily the truth...the historian neglects it at his peril.'¹⁵ So too, it might be argued, does the historian risk excluding a valuable resource by dismissing oral history. John Tosh suggests that 'Oral history promises a sense of place and community accessible to ordinary people, while at the same time illuminating broader features of social history', attributes which would indeed make it a valuable resource for this study. Yet its use does 'present major difficulties'.

¹⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, (Revised edition, London, 1999), p.1.

*The problems which arise from the oral method are perhaps most evident in the research project conducted by a professional historian. It is naive to suppose that the testimony represents a pure distillation of past experience, for in an interview each party is affected by the other. It is the historian who selects the informant and indicates the area of interest; and even if he or she asks no questions and merely listens, the presence of an outsider affects the atmosphere in which the informant recalls the past and talks about it.*¹⁶

Tosh argues further that with or without the presence of the interviewer, the informant is not ‘in direct touch with the past. His or her memories, however precise and vivid, are filtered through subsequent experience.’ This study draws on some of the hundreds of interviews conducted by Merseybeat expert Spencer Leigh and does so unapologetically because the interviewees were not responding to the specific concerns of this work. Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that many of the participants in Merseybeat have been interviewed too often and ‘their anecdotes worn smooth as pebbles in a stream.’¹⁷ Therefore, the decision was taken to interview Spencer Leigh himself regarding some of the specific points of interest, and his comments and suggestions have been included in support of certain arguments.

Because the popular music of Tyneside and Newcastle during this period has never been the subject of a major historical survey it was necessary to interview certain key figures in order to achieve balance for comparative purposes. However, it should be admitted that even these few interviews were conducted reluctantly as the present author is of the firm conviction that all oral testimony is fundamentally unreliable, especially when the interviewee is recalling events that took place half a century ago, but also because the interviewer cannot help but influence the direction of the interview albeit often unconsciously. The oral evidence that was obtained has been incorporated in accordance with the advice of Tosh who insists that the problems involved ‘are not grounds for having nothing to do with oral history. What they suggest is rather that oral evidence, like all verbal materials, requires critical evaluation, and that it must be deployed in conjunction with all the other available sources.’¹⁸ Indeed, the testimony of those interviewed by this author has only been incorporated where it could be corroborated by contemporary sources. Although Michael Brocken takes a more positive view as to the value of oral history he does acknowledge that there are ‘several difficulties’ experienced by the historian including ‘inflation of the importance of the recounting figure;

¹⁶ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, (Revised third edition, London, 2002), pp.301-303.

¹⁷ Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), p.17.

¹⁸ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, (Revised third edition, London, 2002), pp.305-306.

centrality of selected discourses; axes to grind; the false premise of attempting to show ‘how things actually were’, and so on.’ He also concedes that ‘oral sources have an inescapable element of hindsight and indeed nostalgia about them.’¹⁹ For the above reasons corroboration is deemed to be vitally important, and this is why directly obtained oral testimony has been kept to a minimum in this study. That said, it might reasonably be argued that this work contains abundant examples of oral testimony in the form of contemporary interviews given to the various periodicals, interviews and recollections given to other writers (some contemporary and many much closer in time to the period they describe), and several autobiographical accounts – all of which were *not* influenced by the present author or his interests. While others are entitled to disagree, this decision was made in the belief that a severely sceptical approach to oral sources should be maintained and that they will be deployed and given weight in the above order with interviews conducted by the author last in preference and used only to illustrate points made using more reliable evidence. This approach has been adopted in the belief that it will facilitate a more disinterested and accurate account of historical events.

The second point that needs to be addressed is that of the relative absence in this work of women. On one level it is possible to put forward an explanation based on the fact that there were comparatively few female performers involved in Skiffle, Beat and R&B. Somewhat belatedly Bill Harry has attempted to redress the balance in his most recent publication by devoting a whole chapter to the subject. Harry does well to bring to the reader’s attention the many other female singers and girl groups, besides Cilla Black, who were active on Merseyside before, during and after Merseybeat. He told Paul Du Noyer:

*There were so many girl groups. People say there were no female acts on Merseyside, but I have listed over 50 of them in Liverpool, a tremendous amount. And of course the Liver Birds became very big in Germany, where they stayed and had hits. And all the Liverpool groups going to the US bases in France had to take a girl singer. So all these office girls, typists, you name it, were suddenly going over to France to sing with the local groups.*²⁰

It is nevertheless the case that girls/women remain largely absent from accounts of the popular music of the period. As Angela McRobbie points out, this is also true of ‘most youth

¹⁹ Michael Brocken, *Other Voices: Hidden Histories of Liverpool’s Popular Music Scenes, 1930s-1970s*, (Farnham, 2010), pp.81 and 104.

²⁰ Bill Harry quoted in, Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), pp.82-83. Harry’s chapter is entitled ‘The Liver Birds’ in, Bill Harry, *Liverpool: Bigger Than The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2009).

cultural discourses, [where] girls are allowed little more than the back seat on a drafty [sic] motorbike.²¹ When Sara Cohen embarked on a study of rock music in Liverpool during the 1990s she encountered a similar problem.

When I first began my research I was particularly determined not to ignore women who, in several earlier studies of youth and popular culture, had been treated as socially insignificant, peripheral, stereo-typed, or even invisible. I thought it likely that women in mixed social groupings would be subordinate to activities and styles determined by men, but was concerned to look out for ways in which some of them might play a more active or aggressive role than might be expected, or might manipulate male forms and styles to their own advantage. I was astonished, however, to find an overwhelming absence of women in the rock music scene on Merseyside, not only in the bands themselves but in the audiences and many of their social activities.²²

Although Harry has shown that there were many more female performers on Merseyside than has generally been acknowledged during the 1950s and '60s, they were a minority. The evidence for Newcastle and Tyneside contains even fewer examples. However, there is a major difference between the rock scene that Cohen observed in Liverpool during the nineties and those of Liverpool and Newcastle during the period under scrutiny here in that ample evidence exists for significant numbers of girls/women in the audiences of jazz, skiffle, beat and R&B clubs. It is in this capacity, as active participants in the social milieu of youth and pop culture that women feature prominently in this study. The particularities of male and female participation in the associational culture of young people should be the subject of further research but can only be touched upon here. Reflecting the prevailing climate of gender relations in the fifties and sixties, Frith and Horne point out that 'To make music 'seriously', from rhythm clubs to rhythm 'n' blues, was to be a man; to giggle and scream and sigh was to be a woman.' Art colleges had equal numbers of male and female students yet, as Elizabeth Wilson recalled, 'would-be female bohemians in the late 1950s and early 1960s' aspired not to be 'a Great Artist but a 'Great Artist's Mistress''.²³ Whilst it is the case that the majority of female members of the 'in crowd' were girlfriends of musicians and their male coterie, all accounts describing the coffee bars, dance halls and clubs of the period do reveal the presence of girls in significant numbers. Indeed, it is difficult to believe that any 'scene' would exist for long without them, and theories of a public realm for boys and a

²¹ Angela McRobbie, 'Settling Accounts With Subcultures', in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (eds.), *On Record: Rock, Pop, & the Written Word*, (New York, 1990), p.67.

²² Sara Cohen, *Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making*, (Oxford, 1991), pp.201-202.

²³ Elizabeth Wilson, *Mirror Writing*, (London, 1982), pp.71-72, cited in Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop*, (London, 1987), p.92.

private bedroom culture for girls greatly oversimplify the issue. As Bill Osgerby has written, ‘Instead of simply sitting in their bedrooms since 1945...teenage girls have actively participated in numerous public arenas.’²⁴ The meaning of the terms ‘youth’ and ‘young people’ will vary according to context throughout the course of this work but it should be remembered that, where appropriate, a female presence is implied.

‘Scenes’

Besides being conceived as a response to the arguments put forward by Sandbrook and Fowler, and as a means towards a greater understanding of the role of regional and urban identity in the historical process, what follows is also an attempt to answer the call for more historical investigation to inform current debates surrounding the post-modern city’s ability to attract a ‘creative class’ as an important part of regeneration. As Mark Jayne has observed:

*The transformation of city cultures is complex and demands contexts (and historical accounts). The debate on the relationship between consumption and urban regeneration needs to recognise that place as well as space ‘makes a difference’.*²⁵

It is hoped that this study can bring something to that debate. Ultimately however, the inspiration for the work is derived from a fascination with the subject which began as a teenager in Bradford in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The present author was actively involved as a musician and songwriter in various so-called post-punk groups in a remarkably thriving local popular music scene. What was particularly intriguing at that time was the apparently spontaneous and haphazard way in which the whole thing – venues, clubs, groups, audience – came together, and, after a few years, how the ‘scene’ seemed to disappear just as mysteriously. As one of the co-founders of Eric’s, an iconic Liverpool club of roughly the same period put it: ‘It’s a fascinating thing, the way scenes develop. In different cities, at different times, to different degrees, you have locations where a curious interaction takes place between opinion leaders, fashion, music enthusiasts, subversives and conformists, a melting pot.’²⁶ Of equal fascination was how, within the ‘melting pot’ of the Bradford scene, there existed a number of cliques, often associated with one or more local group, each of whom were convinced that theirs was the ‘authentic’ sound or style. Often, lack of this perceived authenticity would hinge upon the smallest detail of sound, style, or even of dress

²⁴ Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), p.57.

²⁵ Mark Jayne, *Cities and Consumption*, (London, 2006), p.211.

²⁶ Pete Fulwell, quoted in Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), p.124.

and hairstyle. The seriousness with which musical and style positions were maintained and defended approached something like political zealotry as did the justifications for this group or that group being included in the canon of acceptably authentic local and nationally prominent groups of that and earlier periods. Qualification for this select body of ‘authentic’ artists also often depended on what, with hindsight, now seems the naive and idealistic conviction that a group’s artistic integrity should remain uncompromised by commercial considerations. Commercial pop music was anathema or not to be taken ‘seriously’. With time and experience, this writer has broadened his views and is now of the opinion that popular music of all genres can be divided quite distinctly only between what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’; a judgement which is of course, entirely subjective. However, it is part of the aim of this study to look for evidence of these attitudes and convictions in the youth culture of Liverpool and Newcastle between 1956 and 1965, but before these can be explored in detail, the historical context must be provided.

Chapter One: The Historical Context

‘Periodization’

Historians must of necessity make a decision as to the time-frame within which the subject under investigation can be most adequately explored, and although the very nature of the subject will most likely suggest broad parameters, ‘periodization’ nevertheless remains unavoidable. In *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-91*, Eric Hobsbawm refers to the years 1945-73 as a ‘Golden Age’, at least for the developed capitalist countries of the West. If 1945 marked the end of the ‘catastrophe’ of two world wars separated by an economic depression, 1973 signified the beginning of an age of ‘crisis’ in which the politics of consensus were abandoned in the face of renewed economic instability.²⁷ As Arthur Marwick has pointed out, most economic historians of post-war Britain have also taken 1945 as the starting point for ‘one long period of economic recovery’ that ended with the international oil crisis in 1973. Marwick, having a particular interest in post-war social and cultural history, chooses to identify the years 1958-74 as ‘of outstanding historical significance in that what happened during this period transformed social and cultural developments for the rest of the century’. In delineating their time-frame historians are acknowledging that:

*...particular chunks of time contain a certain unity, in that events, attitudes, values, social hierarchies within the chosen ‘period’ seem to be closely integrated with each other, to share common features, and in that there are identifiable points of change when a ‘period’ defined in this way gives way to a ‘new period’.*²⁸

If these considerations constitute one aspect of ‘periodization’ then another, which is also to a large extent determined by the nature of the subject under investigation, is its geographical scope. What appears to the historian as important in one place at a particular time may seem to be of little consequence in another. In terms of geographical space it is the North of England in general and the city/regions of Liverpool and Newcastle in particular that are the subject of this inquiry, but in order to make that inquiry meaningful as history it should be first located in a broader context.

²⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-91*, (London, 1994).

²⁸ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958- c. 1974*, (Fourth Edition, London, 2003), p.8, p.5.

Marwick sets out to justify his choice of 1958-74, what he calls ‘the long sixties’, in terms of a wide ranging survey encompassing the social and cultural history of Britain, France, Italy and the United States. His aim is to assess whether or not in this period there occurred a ‘cultural revolution’. Marwick’s study is a comparative history of ‘the sixties’ at the level of the nation state with a time-frame chosen with this in mind. Similarly, Hobsbawm chooses to demarcate his ‘Golden Age’ in order to facilitate what is essentially a political and economic (with some reference to cultural developments) overview of the ‘short twentieth century’. Dominic Sandbrook, in offering the most recent in depth survey of the period, opts for the years 1956-70 because as he says the choice reflects ‘the specifically British experience that is the subject of [his] book’. ‘It would be odd’ he asserts ‘to start in 1958 and not in 1956 – the year of the Suez crisis, the film *Rock Around The Clock*, the play *Look Back in Anger*, and so on.’ In order to ‘emphasise [his] central theme of continuity’, Sandbrook makes clear his intention to inform his history by way of ‘diversions’ into the early 1950s ‘or even further back.’²⁹

The reasons for outlining some of the justifications given by these historians for their choice of time-frame are twofold. Firstly as a preamble to an explanation of the criteria employed in the selection of the time-frame adopted here and secondly as a means of introducing the major works that will be drawn upon to provide the historical context for this study. In addition, these works contain the arguments that form the basis of the historical debate as to whether (or not) Britain experienced a ‘cultural revolution’ during the period in question. The aims of the present chapter are therefore: to justify the chosen time-frame, to provide the historical context, to identify and interpret current debates surrounding the notion of a ‘cultural revolution’, and to suggest ways in which a comparative study of the ‘micro cultures’ of Liverpool and Newcastle upon Tyne might inform those debates.

In both a political and an economic sense 1956 was the year when Britain reluctantly came to the realisation that it had been punching above its weight since at least 1945. Peter Hennessy cites *Holiday*, a promotional film shot in Blackpool by British Transport Films, with its imagery of steam trains and the heyday of the British seaside resort, as the encapsulation of a more innocent, stable society pre-Suez. For Hennessy, ‘From the Suez summer and autumn of 1956, illusion after illusion was reluctantly and sometimes painfully shattered for the

²⁹ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), preface pp.xxiv-xxv.

settled people on that *Holiday* beach and those who governed them.³⁰ Hobsbawm remembers the general feeling that, ‘Britain was no longer a major empire or a world power, and after Suez nobody believed that it was.’³¹ The *Daily Herald* exclaimed: ‘A squalid episode ends in a pitiable climb-down...Our moral authority in the world has been destroyed.’³² Sandbrook acknowledges that the majority of historians would agree that Suez marks a watershed in twentieth-century British history, but also observes that, ‘To many people, Britain felt like a country on the verge of an exciting new era of opportunity and possibility; to many others, it felt like a country on the brink of a descent into materialism and madness.’³³

In terms of the social and cultural history of post-war Britain also, Hobsbawm appears to agree with Sandbrook that 1956 represents a watershed. In his autobiography, when reflecting on the social and cultural changes in Britain as experienced in his lifetime, Hobsbawm states categorically that ‘The history of the island in the twentieth century divides sharply into two halves – to put it in a phrase, before and after the simultaneous shocks of Suez and rock and roll’.³⁴ Marwick’s choice of 1958 as the beginning of his ‘long sixties’ having more to do with the international scope of his study need not be of concern here, but in terms of the British experience, his suggestion that developments associated with ‘the growing power of young people’ should be attributed to ‘a point of change around 1958-9’ does not, as he claims, appear to ‘make great good sense’.³⁵ Although it is possible to argue in a broad sense that the material benefits generated by post-war economic recovery did not filter down to a majority of the population until the early 1960s, contemporary sources provide ample evidence that suggests the so-called ‘teenage revolution’ was already well underway in 1956.

In any case, as the reception of North American popular music is the ‘lens’ through which the major themes of this work are to be brought into focus, the year 1956 qualifies as the obvious starting point for several reasons. Not least because it was the year that Lonnie Donegan’s *Rock Island Line* launched the national skiffle craze, Elvis Presley entered the British charts

³⁰ Peter Hennessy, *Having it so Good: Britain in the Fifties*, (London, 2006), prelude p.xvii.

Interestingly, Chris Barber’s Traditional Jazz Band provided the soundtrack.

³¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life*, (London, 2002), p.86.

³² *Daily Herald*, November 7th, 1956, in Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), p.1.

³³ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), pp.29-30.

³⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life*, (London, 2002), p.86.

³⁵ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958- c. 1974*, (Fourth Edition, London, 2003), p.8.

for the first time with *Heartbreak Hotel* and *Hound Dog*, and the film *Rock Around the Clock* brought rock 'n' roll to the nation's attention in the form of sensational newspaper headlines denouncing the over-exuberant reaction of (a minority of) teenage fans in cinemas up and down the land. *The Times* joined the debate in a series of articles exploring the connection between rock 'n' roll and violent behaviour at some London screenings of *Rock Around the Clock*. No less a personage than the Bishop of Woolwich contributed a letter to the editor expressing the view that, while 'Censorship or banning of films is undesirable', other towns should consider taking action so as to avoid the outbreaks of 'rowdiness' witnessed in south London.³⁶ The country's leading music periodical, *Melody Maker*, staffed by such bastions of the old guard as ex-bandleader and BBC disc jockey Jack Payne, worried 'Should We Surrender To The Teenagers?' in an article urging the BBC not to pander to the tastes of teenage fans of rock 'n' roll and the likes of Elvis. This was clearly an admission that something was up, and despite the fact that the *Melody Maker*, this 'champion of old people's music...tried to ignore it, tried to decry it, tried to belittle it...rock 'n' roll spread through their domain like cancer.'³⁷

Although not dealing exclusively with popular music, the *Liverpool Echo* ran columns with titles such as 'Teenage Topics' and 'Teenagers' Week-End' throughout 1956,³⁸ while the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* reported in an article entitled 'Rock 'n' Roll music has hit Tyneside' that 'In the North-East the music shops have had hundreds of requests for rock 'n' roll records. The managers of bars with juke boxes know that they are on a best seller if they have a record with the Presley stamp on it.'³⁹ It would be possible to provide many similar examples, not least relating to skiffle, which emerged almost simultaneously with rock 'n' roll as contender for 'youth cult of the year'. In July, the young blues aficionado Alexis Korner contributed an article to *MM* entitled 'Skiffle or Piffle?' in which he decried the

³⁶ *The Times*, September 12th, 1956, p.4, September 14th, 1956, p.9. It is worthy of note that the third article in this series from 'Our Special Correspondent', dated September 15th (p.4), contains a sober-minded rejoinder to the Bishop contesting his claim that 'the hypnotic rhythm and wild gestures' of the film 'have a maddening effect on a rhythm-loving age-group'. Comparing the majority of revellers who took to jiving in the streets after the film to those of an earlier generation inspired by the Lambeth Walk, the correspondent blames recent press reports of rock 'n' roll riots in the US for the small number of violent disturbances and suggests that if the film had been shown in dance halls instead of cinemas, no trouble would have occurred. An early example of media inspired 'copy-cat crime' perhaps, but an indication of the perceived strength of American influence nonetheless.

³⁷ *Melody Maker*, June 23rd, 1956, p.5, and Pete Frame, *The Restless Generation: How rock music changed the face of 1950s Britain*, (London, 2007), p.176.

³⁸ *Liverpool Echo*, January 28th, 1956, Saturday Supplement p.4, September 8th, 1956, Features p.4, September 13th, 1956, Features p.6.

³⁹ *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, June 13th, 1956, p.3.

bastardization of the original music at the hands of ‘a movement which has become the joy of community songsters and a fair source of income for half the dilettante three-chord guitar thumpers in London.’⁴⁰ There had been Teddy boy style for a couple of years, and with the advent of skiffle suddenly everyone (mostly boys) wanted to be in a group, but it was not until rock ‘n’ roll that rebellious youth found its soundtrack. If 1955 is the best candidate for the year when rock ‘n’ roll took the US by storm, 1956 was undoubtedly the year when the music captured the imaginations of significant numbers of young people in Britain for the first time. In the words of Iain Chambers, ‘1956 is the year when it begins.’⁴¹ As if to prove the point, at the beginning of February 1957, during a debate on the subject in the House of Lords, it was suggested that Lord Mancroft ‘might like to remind the Home Office that rock-‘n’-roll has burst upon this country. It might be news to them.’⁴²

As regards an appropriate point in time to bring this study to a close, it is again helpful to look to the justifications given by the afore-mentioned historians for their choices. Unfortunately, Hobsbawm is not much help, having brought his ‘Golden Age’ to an end, predictably enough for a Marxist historian, for economic reasons in 1973, and in his memoirs opting simply to divide the century into ‘before’ and ‘after’ Suez and rock ‘n’ roll. Marwick and Sandbrook are in agreement that the end of 1963 is a suitable point for their purposes. Marwick seeks to assuage adherents of the argument – ‘perhaps unduly influenced’ he claims ‘by the poet Philip Larkin’s declaration that “sexual intercourse began in 1963”’ – that the sixties began in that year, and ended in 1968/9. He sets out to achieve this by dividing his ‘long sixties’ into three ‘sub-periods’: 1958-63, 1964-68/9 and 1969-74. These sub-divisions seem reasonable enough, but once again they are designed with the international perspective of the work in mind.⁴³ Sandbrook’s justification, whilst corresponding to the division between Marwick’s first two sub-periods, ‘First Stirrings of a Cultural Revolution’ and ‘The High Sixties’, does so for reasons of British history including the fact that 1963 was the year of ‘Beatle-mania’. He chooses to conclude the first part of his two-volume contribution at the

⁴⁰ *Melody Maker*, July 28th, 1956, p.5. Korner took the commercial success of skiffle as proof of its lack of artistic merit. The very fact that huge numbers of teenagers were sufficiently inspired to pick up guitars for the first time he somehow interpreted as a threat, but one that had to be acknowledged. This theme of the antagonism between the ‘authentic’ and the ‘commercial’ in popular music will be returned to.

⁴¹ Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: pop music and popular culture*, (Basingstoke, 1985), p.18.

⁴² *Melody Maker*, February 9th, 1957, p.2. The debate was about whether to grant permission for cinemas to take out seating so as to become dance halls in the aftermath of the *Rock Around The Clock* ‘disturbances’.

⁴³ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958- c. 1974*, (Fourth Edition, London, 2003), p.8.

end of 1963 partly on the grounds of national politics, on the eve of Labour's general election victory, and partly because, in his view, this is the point that marks 'an approximate crossover between the worlds of skiffle, duffel coats and espresso bars on the one hand, and the world of the Rolling Stones, mini-skirts and discotheques on the other.' Were this a study of British popular music culture as seen from a national perspective, then 1963 would fit the bill, marking as it does the zenith of the 'Beat Boom' and the consummation of the first phase of indigenous rock 'n' roll. However, the particular demands of this inquiry call for the time-frame to be extended to the end of 1965 for the following reasons.

Firstly, although 1963 was the year that the Beatles and other Merseyside groups headed for London, the music scene in Liverpool did not shrivel up and die overnight. Similarly, when the Animals left Newcastle for the capital early in 1964, it was some time before the full effect of their absence was felt on the music scene there. The most appropriate point at which the line can be drawn for the purposes of this study is marked rather succinctly by a letter to the editor of the Newcastle *Evening Chronicle* at the beginning of March 1966 with the headline 'Newcastle's Faded Pop Scene', and a piece in the Liverpool *Music Echo* of the same month entitled 'Cavern: The Last Good-Byes'. In the letter to the *Chronicle* its author lamented the North East's lack of success in the wake of the Animals and urged the region's groups to 'try to capture the Southern attention by putting some more go and variety into our pop scene by using a little more imagination.'⁴⁴ In the *Echo* article it was announced that the venue had been forced to close its doors after going into liquidation. Its owner, Ray McFall, had received a telegram from Brian Epstein in London which read: 'The Beatles, Gerry and the Pacemakers, Bill [presumably Billy J Kramer], Cilla and the Fourmost and myself send best wishes and also regrets and sympathy about Cavern news. Regards and good luck in the future from us all.'⁴⁵ While perhaps only a blip in the greater scheme of things as far as the world of popular music was concerned, these events marked the end of an era for the music scenes of Newcastle and Liverpool, and bearing in mind that very often a great deal can be learnt about a particular phenomenon by its absence, following events up to the end of 1965 appears to make sense. Why the Cavern was forced to close may prove to be of equal significance for this study as the reasons for its enormous popularity in the first place.

With the time-frame established, it is possible to progress to a discussion of the historical context. Besides reference to certain primary sources, this will involve a degree of analysis

⁴⁴ Newcastle *Evening Chronicle*, March 2nd, 1966, p.8.

⁴⁵ *Music Echo*, March 12th, 1966, p.12.

and interpretation of the existing literature – something of an exercise in historiography – with the added aim of teasing out the nuances of the debate among historians regarding the rather nebulous term ‘cultural revolution’, at least insofar as it is of relevance here. It should already be obvious that the temporal limits of this study preclude a full appraisal of the debate. Much of what is referred to as the ‘counter-culture’, and most of ‘the activists, student protesters, hippies, yippies, Situationists, advocates of psychedelic liberation, participants in be-ins and rock festivals, proponents of free love [and] members of the underground’ associated with it, is/are located in Marwick’s ‘High Sixties’.⁴⁶ It is the period of his ‘First Stirrings’ that is at issue here albeit with tacit acknowledgement that the roots of most if not all of the above phenomena can be traced from the apparently less radical achievements of their predecessors.

Taking heed of the cautionary concluding passage of Mark Donnelly’s work on the sixties, which warns that ‘Thinking in...dialectical terms [‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘swinging’ or ‘cautious’] about an amorphous entity like the sixties will only produce more sterile debates about the ‘myth’ or ‘reality’ of the period’, it is hoped that the particular approach adopted, a comparison of ‘micro-histories’, will uncover the ‘objective realities’ as they are revealed by the historical sources. Donnelly contests that ‘Recent attempts at the ‘sixties never mattered that much’ revisionism are as contingent and situated as the more affirmative readings of the sixties, as are the apocalyptic conclusions of those who hold the sixties to account for the ills of modern society’. Moreover, he suggests that it would be more profitable for the historian to ask why ‘contending readings’ of the period achieved prominence at certain times.⁴⁷ In partial accord with Donnelly, it *is* the intention to consider the possibility of bias, intentional or otherwise, in the arguments considered here. Whilst moving forward cognizant of the fact that his relativism can promote a healthy scepticism as to the motives of historians and cultural commentators on the sixties, and the ‘linguistic turn’ notwithstanding, surely it was the intention, at least of the historians whose job it is, to base their accounts on an objective appraisal of the sources. If not, and historical writing is to be judged merely as a collection of ‘contingent and situated’ interpretations, then it would appear to amount to little more than an elaborate intellectual game with very little at stake. Self-defeating philosophical arguments about the nature of objectivity aside, it is hoped that the use of sources that have not hitherto been brought to bear in the wider debate, will confer the advantage of a fresh perspective.

⁴⁶ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958- c. 1974*, (Fourth Edition, London, 2003), p.10.

⁴⁷ Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics*, (Harlow, 2005), pp.196-97.

Engagement with the arguments put forward by historians is a two-way process as far as this study is concerned. Firstly, one of the themes running through the work concerns the extent to which a comparative historical analysis of the youth and music cultures of Liverpool and Newcastle upon Tyne between 1956 and 1965 can inform the wider debate about processes of continuity and change. Expressed as a question: Was British youth at the forefront of a cultural revolution that began in the mid-1950s? And secondly: What implications might the conclusions drawn from this inquiry have for the other central theme, relating to the importance of cultural tradition and regional/urban identity in the reception of North American popular music in these two cities? Prior to further consideration of these questions, the historical context of the debate must first be established.

Post-war Austerity

As Sandbrook has suggested, one way of assessing the social and cultural developments in Britain from the mid-1950s onwards, momentous or otherwise, is to set them against the backdrop of the preceding decade. The eminent historian A. J. P. Taylor sets the scene well enough at the end of his *English History, 1914-1945*.

*In the second World war [sic] the British people came of age. This was a people's war. The British people had set out to destroy Hitler and National Socialism – 'Victory at all costs'. They succeeded. The British were the only people who went through both World wars from beginning to end. Yet they remained a peaceful and civilized people, tolerant, patient and generous. Traditional values lost much of their force. Other values took their place. Imperial greatness was on the way out; the welfare state was on the way in. The British empire declined; the condition of the people improved.*⁴⁸

Marwick describes Britain in the years from 1945 to 1950 somewhat lyrically as laying 'in a crepuscular zone with the shadows of night as firm upon the landscape as the heartening hints of the rising sun.' The shadows were largely those cast by the war as many aspects of people's everyday lives continued to be affected, both by the continuation of war-time conditions until as late as 1950, and the rationing and other controls that in some cases persisted into the new decade.⁴⁹ In the words of David Kynaston, the country in 1945 contained 'Suits and hats, dresses and hats, cloth caps and mufflers, no leisurewear, no 'teenagers'. Heavy coins, heavy shoes, heavy suitcases, heavy tweed coats, heavy leather

⁴⁸ A J P Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945*, (Harmondsworth, 1965), p.727.

⁴⁹ Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, (New Edition, London, 2003), p.3.

footballs, no unbearable lightness of being.’⁵⁰ The glimpses of sunlight were in part the reflection of a sense of optimism generated in many quarters by the belief that the sacrifices made for victory in the ‘people’s war’ ought ultimately to result in a more egalitarian society based on a new ‘social consensus’. It was hoped that centralised economic and social planning, as carried out by the newly elected Labour Government, would deliver the prosperity, security, and social welfare provisions that had been promised and many felt were justly deserved. Despite the conditions imposed in return for much needed American loans precipitating the first of a series of sterling crises in 1947, the Government doggedly pursued the policies designed to fulfil these expectations. Full employment, adequate housing, opportunity in education, the welfare state including the National Health Service, with universal access from ‘cradle to grave’, were, party political differences as to means aside, the virtually unanimously agreed upon ends of government throughout the period under review.

Diversification of industry, particularly in designated ‘development areas’ including Merseyside and Tyneside, was to be accompanied by the construction of New Towns, while the resumption of slum clearance in the central areas of the larger cities, in some cases assisted by the Luftwaffe, would make way for the (often radical) urban redevelopment to come. Eighty per cent of Britain’s population in the early fifties lived in towns and cities, half of them in Greater London and the six other conurbations of the West Midlands, South-East Lancashire, Merseyside, the West Riding, Tyneside, and Clydeside. There was a general movement of population from rural to urban areas and away from older industrial centres towards the newer industries in the West Midlands and the South East. Partly as a result of the immediate post-war ‘baby boom’, this decline in the population of the ‘development areas’, a feature of the depressed interwar years, was at least temporarily abated. In the field of transport, the age of the private car was only just beginning, taking off in the middle 1950s, but in towns buses and coaches steadily superseded trams and trolley buses, accounting for almost half of the passenger transport market by 1950, and clocking up the vast majority of the road miles that now made up 75% of all those travelled. Nationwide travel by road compared to rail was slow and the infrastructure obsolete. The construction of the first motorway was not even announced until 1955, and the journey from London to Edinburgh beginning on the old A1, took an entire day.⁵¹ The jazz/blues singer and journalist

⁵⁰ David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945-51*, (London, 2007), p.19.

⁵¹ Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, (New Edition, London, 2003), pp.4-16.

George Melly, who toured extensively at the time, remembered it as ‘a jogging blur of half-sleep after transport cafe meals [and] the jumping print of paperbacks’.⁵² Nevertheless, alongside the very real privations and the often retrospectively perceived drabness of a period forever ‘black and white’, there were also the first signs of economic recovery. If, as Kynaston suggests, the six years to 1951 were in some respects more difficult than those of the war, then at last the end of ‘austerity Britain’ was in sight.⁵³

Marwick maintains that whilst in terms of political history the beginning of thirteen years of Conservative rule in 1951 might be construed as a turning point, for the social historian, ‘it would...be true to say that the main themes of the late forties continued to be worked out in the early fifties.’⁵⁴ Rationing was one of those themes and a central one in the picture of austerity painted by the Tories in the run up to their election victory. Until the end of clothes rationing in 1949, it was observed that the rich were often conspicuous in that they were the only stratum of society who could afford to inject some colour into their wardrobe. Fifties singer Marty Wilde recalled that, ‘You were brought up with three colours – grey, brown and black. They were all colours I associate with the war. Almost everything was grey. It wasn’t until the Fifties that all colours started to come in clothes, colours of cars...T-shirts – it was the age of the T-shirt. We had a sense of freedom. Fantastic hairstyles as well were coming in...’⁵⁵ The de-rationing of clothes can be seen as symbolic of, not only a new economic, but also a cultural optimism that was equally reflected in attitudes towards that other staple requirement – food.

From 1940 until the middle of 1954 when it ended, ‘food was the roughage of politics in its rawest form.’⁵⁶ According to Christopher Driver, ‘by 1955, the British diet had completed its post-war recovery and the contemporary food scene was beginning to take shape’, even if it was, ‘British to the last chip’. There were however, starting in London and spreading to the provinces, the first signs of the cosmopolitan future of British cuisine in the form of the Italian trattoria whose establishment marked the beginning of the nation’s predilection for spaghetti ‘Bolognese’. Wimpy opened its first outlet in 1954 offering American cuisine – hamburgers, milkshakes – to those ‘eager to emulate the heroes of American films’; a new

⁵² George Melly, *Owning Up: The Trilogy*, (London, 2000), p.464.

⁵³ David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945-51*, (London, 2007), p.633.

⁵⁴ Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, (New Edition, London, 2003), introduction p.xii.

⁵⁵ Marty Wilde speaking in *What Has Become of Us?*, programme 3, ‘The Last Roar’, Wide-Vision/Channel 4 Television, first broadcast December 11th, 1994, quoted in, Peter Hennessy, *Having it so Good: Britain in the Fifties*, (London, 2006), p.19.

⁵⁶ Peter Hennessy, *Having it so Good: Britain in the Fifties*, (London, 2006), p.9.

kind of clientele according to its managing director – ‘young people’.⁵⁷ Mirroring these developments was the appearance of new Italian-style ‘coffee bars’ or ‘milk bars’ as they were still sometimes called after an earlier fad. The Gaggia machine made it possible to experience ‘drinkable coffee in a public place...whose Festival of Britain colours, false ceilings, potted plants, and engaging flimsiness encouraged the young to believe that austerity had been banished at last.’⁵⁸ When this new Italian-influenced environment became the preferred destination of the day’s youth and was complimented by that conspicuously American cultural icon – the juke box, social critics sat up and took note.

Mass Culture Criticism and National Service

Richard Hoggart wrote *The Uses of Literacy* between 1952 and 1956 during which time, as an Extra-Mural Tutor in English at the University of Hull, he encountered those he referred to as ‘juke box boys’ in a milk bar in Goole.⁵⁹ In what amounts to one of the first serious attempts at mass culture criticism in this country, Hoggart described with obvious distaste the clientele of this ‘regular evening rendezvous’, mostly ‘boys aged between fifteen and twenty, with drape suits, picture ties, and an American slouch.’ Living in ‘a myth-world compounded of a few simple elements which they take to be those of American life’ they put what money they had into keeping the juke box playing catchy American vocal records that ‘have the kind of beat which is currently popular’ thereby abandoning any sense of purpose ‘to the debilitating mass-trends of the day.’ Along with glossy mass-produced publications and other forms of mass-entertainment, Hoggart cited this particular form of social interaction as indicative of the ‘cultural debasement’ which he claimed posed a serious threat to what he called the ‘older’ attitudes of working-class life. Lamenting the erosion of a certain ‘moral fibre’ that prevailed during his formative years in a working-class district of Leeds between the wars, he speculated as to whether these ‘directionless helots of a machine-minding age’ might not be of ‘poorer intelligence or from homes subject to special strains’. He wondered if the loss of the ‘steady effect of home, of the web of family relationships’ had a similar effect upon those in National Service, exposed to the sensational literature of comics, crime novels and ‘picture-dailies’. Adolescents with two years and money to spend in an attempt to alleviate what one soldier described as ‘life like a permanent wank inside

⁵⁷ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), p.138.

⁵⁸ Christopher Driver, *The British at Table, 1940-1980*, p.59, quoted in, Peter Hennessy, *Having it so Good: Britain in the Fifties*, (London, 2006), pp.13-14.

⁵⁹ David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c. 1920-c. 1970*, (Basingstoke, 2008), Notes p.251.

you' were, 'in the moral climate of Service life', likely to be impelled 'towards sexual adventures', as a result of which, according to Hoggart, they were less likely to pick up 'older, neighbourhood rhythms' on their return.⁶⁰ On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that the experience benefited the less well educated. At a conference on industry and National Service attended by senior representatives of no less than six Ministries, it was reported that an Army personnel selection officer had given Mr. Birch, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Defence, 'rather a depressing account of the general standard of recruits' reading and writing' but was assured that 'the Army training scheme...succeeded in raising 90 per cent of the illiterate recruits to reasonable standards.'⁶¹ Contemporary assessments of the social effects of National Service were ambivalent.

From 1945 to 1960 the government called up approximately 2.3 million young men for what have been called geo-political purposes; the urgent need to fulfil the military commitments of a far-flung if shrinking empire around the globe. Fuelled by the widely held belief that Britain should continue to assume a leading role in international affairs it was extended to two years following the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. This was for many a burdensome and often tedious interlude before the return to civilian life and the assumption of adult responsibilities. George Melly observed⁶² that the prospect of the 'call up' was an important factor insofar as attitudes among male teenagers were concerned: 'Between leaving school and going into the army, they could live out a fantasy life, their pockets full of money from a dead-end job.'⁶² Although it came to be an opinion held in some quarters following its abolition it was not generally thought at the time that National Service was a cure for delinquent youth.⁶³ It was the opinion of a Finchley youth club leader that the insecurity created by the prospect of conscription between the ages of 15 and 18 was 'mainly responsible for the "Edwardian" and gang warfare', and 'the sooner the conscription age is made 20 years [when a 'lad' is 'far more amenable to discipline'], and reduced by six months, the hooliganism will become less and less.'⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, (Harmondsworth, 1957), pp.246-49, Peter Chambers and Amy Landreth (eds.), *Called Up*, (1955), quoted in Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, (New Edition, London, 2003), p.51.

⁶¹ *The Times*, March 18th, 1954, p.4. When asked if the standard of arithmetic was equally bad, the officer replied that 'they could all count very well, and his explanation, said Mr. Birch, was in one word – "Darts."'

⁶² George Melly, *Owning Up: The Trilogy*, (London, 2000), p.517.

⁶³ David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945-51*, (London, 2007), p.369.

⁶⁴ *The Times*, May 8th, 1954, p.7.

As it became obvious that there was an increasing need for the armed services to become more professional it was they who expressed their reluctance ‘to become an adjunct of the welfare state or the penal system or a kind of moral rearmament in uniform’, real or imagined.⁶⁵ Marwick remains undecided as to whether National Service helped to preserve the social order rather than disrupt it as Hoggart feared, but he accepts as ‘probably true’ the notion ‘that once a Teddy boy had been called up he probably ceased forever to be a Teddy boy’. Although he concludes that the experience of conscription contributed to ‘that slightly archaic quality’ of post-war British life, Marwick contends that ‘Its abolition in 1960 very much fitted into the exuberance and libertarianism of the new age.’⁶⁶ This is typical of the phraseology employed by Marwick in his history of the period and provides an example of what Sandbrook sees as his general approval of the social and cultural developments associated with the sixties. It is, according to Sandbrook, like the writing of ‘many other nostalgic veterans of the period’, indicative of the tendency to emphasise change at the expense of continuity.⁶⁷ Whether historians and commentators of Marwick’s ilk are guilty of this tacit approval, and what implications it might have for the debate concerning the existence of a cultural revolution will be discussed as the study progresses, but the historical context should perhaps be more firmly established before these arguments are expanded further.

Americanisation, Youth Spending Power, and Class

The unexpected impact of *The Uses of Literacy* in certain ‘elevated’ circles highlights the level of concern about American ‘cultural imperialism’ and its influence on all areas of British cultural life. But perhaps it was because the arrival of rock ‘n’ roll, blues, and country in the 1950s was associated with the tastes of the lower classes that middle and upper-class observers feared for the nation’s morals; particularly as it was noted in 1959 that ‘not far short of 90% of all teenage spending is conditioned by working-class taste and values.’⁶⁸ This concern was not restricted to left-leaning intellectuals but was expressed in many contemporary newspapers of the period. In a letter to the *Newcastle Journal* from 1961 under the headline ‘Americanisation – or not?’, the author expresses his dismay that, ‘Not

⁶⁵ Peter Hennessy, *Having it so Good: Britain in the Fifties*, (London, 2006), p.83.

⁶⁶ Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, (New Edition, London, 2003), p.51.

⁶⁷ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), preface p.xvii, p.xxiii.

⁶⁸ Robert Colls, *Identity of England*, (Oxford, 2002), p.189. Mark Abrams, *The Teenage Consumer*, (London, 1959), p.13, quoted in, Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), p.26.

only are we becoming the 51st US State economically and politically, but our ancient culture is in danger of being submerged under a barrage of American publicity.’⁶⁹ Views on the subject of American influence were not however, unanimously negative, especially when it was associated with increasing affluence. In one report from 1957 it was estimated that ‘Between the ages of 15 and 30, approximately three million young women have £15 millions [sic] a week to spend’, and according to the ‘fashion controller’ of one large store, ‘with the levelling up of family incomes, on lines not unlike those of the United States, the social picture in this country has changed’.⁷⁰ But it was without doubt amongst the young that American cultural penetration was most widely celebrated, ‘as the teenage male hero of Colin MacInne’s *Absolute Beginners* [1959] put it: it was uncool to be “anti-American”’.⁷¹

It should be remembered that Hoggart’s concern was the preservation of what he believed to be deserving in a specifically ‘Northern’ working-class culture, and that once the new youth culture had become thoroughly embedded in Britain by the late sixties, he grew equally perturbed by the realisation that the youth of Leeds were dressing in styles dictated by metropolitan ‘taste leaders’. At this stage, in his view, youth culture in Britain was developing from a London-centric idea that reached the provincial towns and cities by a process of osmosis.⁷² Robert Colls argues that in his assessment of the influence of the American milk bar, Hoggart suffered a lapse in his otherwise ‘fine judgement’ of working-class culture. He failed to understand that in imitation of all things American, working-class youth in particular found a way to transcend, what were in the 1950s, still formidable class boundaries.⁷³ This argument appears convincing from a twenty-first-century perspective but benefits considerably from the gift of hindsight. At the time Hoggart was writing there was no way of knowing what the long term effects of the mass market and American cultural influence were likely to be. Commentators from either left or right could not predict the creative explosion of youth culture in the early sixties that propelled scores of provincial lads and lasses into the national spotlight, nor the accompanying consumer flood tide. What makes Hoggart’s work of special significance for this study is his sensitivity to the delicate

⁶⁹ *The Journal*, August 4th, 1961, p.6.

⁷⁰ *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury*, September 24th, 1957, p.4.

⁷¹ Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: pop music and popular culture*, (Basingstoke, 1985), p.7.

⁷² Richard Hoggart, ‘Proper Ferdinands?’ in *The Permissive Society: The Guardian Inquiry*, (London, 1969), p.78, cited in, David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c. 1920-c. 1970*, (Basingstoke, 2008), p.125.

⁷³ Robert Colls, *Identity of England*, (Oxford, 2002), p.190.

balance between 'old' and 'new' in the culture of working-class communities in the North of England.

It could be argued that the female members of the 15 to 18 age group held similar expectations to those of their male counterparts. These years for them were equally likely to be ones of relative affluence, brought to an end, not by National Service, but in all likelihood by marriage and/or pregnancy. In fact, young couples did tend to marry earlier than previous generations in the post-war years but compensated for any shortening of the life-span of their youth with increased visibility. Statistically there was a rise in both actual numbers and the percentage of the population who were under twenty in the 1950s and '60s. In addition, it was thought that higher living standards were the cause of earlier maturity, and educational reform, including the raising of the school leaving age to 15, swelled the numbers of those who were officially classified as adults-in-waiting. All these factors contributed to the visibility and 'conceptualization of 'youth' as a discrete social entity with its own needs and problems.'⁷⁴ Whilst they did not constitute the whole of British youth, 15-18-year-olds leaving school without qualifications or a chosen career path might be regarded as a 'relatively homogeneous cultural group', and even the 'cultural pace-setters' as their buying power increased from the mid 1950s onwards. This category of largely unqualified working-class youth with disposable income and leisure time on their hands became increasingly identified during the 1950s by both the rapidly expanding leisure industries designed to cater to their every whim, and social commentators and journalists with an often alarmist agenda decrying the latest example of 'juvenile delinquency' as further indication of the nation's moral and cultural decline.⁷⁵ These developments were accompanied by a corresponding disintegration of the traditional working-class community. As the inner city slum areas were cleared and people relocated to new sub-urban housing estates, distances between home and work, home and leisure, and parents and teenagers increased. The sociologist Simon Frith noted that, 'Teenage culture thus filled the gap.'⁷⁶ Chambers, echoing Hoggart, asserts that an older 'working-class insularity [was] being prised open. A less precise, more amorphous popular urban culture was relentlessly taking root.'⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), pp.18-19. For population figures see Table 3.1: Growth of UK youth population, 1951-1966, p.18.

⁷⁵ For the contents of this section I am grateful for the comments and suggestions of Mike Sutton at Northumbria University, in correspondence with the author, April 13th, 2007.

⁷⁶ Simon Frith, *The Sociology of Youth*, (Ormskirk, 1984), p.11.

⁷⁷ Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: pop music and popular culture*, (Basingstoke, 1985), p.7.

As discussed earlier, where disagreement with Marwick occurs is in his insistence that the last two years of the '50s marked a 'critical point of change'. It is the contention here that the 'profound developments – particularly of growing spending power in all sections of society, not least among the young, and in the provinces – which were to bring about a transformation in British social life' had already begun by 1956.⁷⁸ After all, it was in July 1957 that Harold Macmillan declared that 'most of our people have never had it so good'. *Liverpool Echo* journalist, Diana Pulson, spent one week-end in September 1956 asking Merseyside teenagers how they liked to spend their time. She found that they 'spent most of the week-end out of their homes' and particularly enjoyed the 'new style coffee bars scattered round the city' where they would meet before spending Saturday afternoons shopping or engaged in sport. Despite returning late after a Saturday night dance, hundreds of teenagers would be up on Sunday morning for church followed by 'yet another cup of coffee, with perhaps a record session at a friend's house thrown in'. While many took advantage of the facilities of youth club organisations, others preferred to spend the afternoon 'shop window gazing' before going to the pictures on Sunday evening. Seventeen-year-old shorthand typist Diane Peacock from Anfield declared that "We would rather make our own amusement than belong to a club", with fifteen-year-old accounts clerk Rosemary McCreith of Liscard adding, "We like to dance and go to the pictures and do what we like...we are never bored." Pulson discovered over 400 teenagers crammed into a room on Dale Street jiving to 'hot jazz' and 'beating time to the music (I was told it was traditional jazz) with an almost frenzied air.' Although they would have to be up for work in the morning, this was how 'Merseyside's teenagers thoroughly enjoy their week-ends.'⁷⁹ Rock 'n' roll may not yet be the soundtrack but spending power and wilful independence are clearly in evidence. This account does acknowledge the influence of family, work, church and the various youth organisations in young people's lives but somewhat belies, not only Marwick's timing, but also the notion that 'For the children of the 1950s, there would be – for better or worse – no escape from the tough, tender, purifying embrace of family Britain.'⁸⁰

Jon Savage's study of youth traces deep trans-Atlantic continuities in the development of the teenager 'through an intricate ecology of peer pressure, individual desires, and savvy marketing'. He argues that 'The Allies won the war at exactly the moment that America's latest product was coming off the production line. Defined during 1944 and 1945, the

⁷⁸ Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, (New Edition, London, 2003), introduction p.xii.

⁷⁹ *Liverpool Echo*, September 8th, 1956, Features p.4.

⁸⁰ David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945-51*, (London, 2007), p.633.

Teenage had been researched and developed for a good fifty years, the period that marked America's rise to global power.' In Savage's view 1945 offered a '*tabula rasa*' and youth represented hope in the form of the teenage consumer. The mass society of America's future 'would be ordered around pleasure and acquisition'.⁸¹ The teenage consumer began to loom large in the predictions for Britain's future too. As Bill Osgerby has pointed out, 'youth' as a category has been utilized in its 'capacity to play a metaphorical role in the ways sense is made out of more general social developments, especially at times of dramatic social transformation.' He argues that this was certainly the case in the post-war era when a great deal of research was carried out at a national and local level into the relationship of youth to social change. This culminated in the Albermarle Report on youth services in 1960, co-authored by Richard Hoggart, which concluded that 'the "problems of youth" are deeply rooted in the soil of a disturbed modern world.'⁸² Less concerned with juvenile delinquency was Mark Abrams' study of teenage spending patterns which confirmed the newly affluent working class as the arbiters of taste. This dual role of youth as a social problem and a source of economic optimism was a pattern that was replicated on both sides of the Atlantic.

At the same time, the conviction held in some quarters that the affluent society was becoming a classless society was clearly unfounded. This was a working and lower middle-class phenomenon while 'A significant middle-class presence was not felt within British youth culture until the mid-1960s'. This was because middle-class youngsters stayed in school longer and generally looked forward to receiving their material rewards later in life, what was known as 'deferred gratification'. As one public schoolboy recalled, 'There was no space in between being a boy and becoming a man for any distinctive style or assertion of identity.'⁸³ It is interesting to note that although Abrams found working-class boys spent more than their middle-class counterparts, the opposite was true of girls. The important point to recognise is that there was a tendency at the time to categorise all of youth as one homogeneous group ignoring variations between gender, class and region. This, coupled with the fact that

⁸¹ Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875-1945*, (London, 2008), p.465. The significance of the continuities in youth culture highlighted in the work of Fowler and Savage are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three: Youth Culture, Music Culture.

⁸² Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), p.32, Ministry of Education, 1960, p.2.

⁸³ Peter M. Lewis, 'Mummy, matron and the maids: feminine presence and absence in female institutions, 1934-63', in Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds.), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800*, (London, 1991), pp.179-80, quoted in, Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), p.32, Ministry of Education, 1960. p.27.

Abrams' teenagers included those who remained single up to the age of twenty five leaves his statistics, and the conclusions he draws, open to question.⁸⁴

The work of David Fowler has drawn attention to the fact that in Britain there was already a thriving teenage culture in the interwar years. His study of Manchester, where high levels of working-class youth employment, both male and female, created affluence and leisure time, concluded that 'spending patterns and lifestyles were not unlike those of 1950s teenagers.'⁸⁵ This is not in dispute here, but the particular constellation of factors that produced the youth culture of the mid to late 1950s was missing. The process by which American popular culture exerted a steadily increasing influence on British culture from the late nineteenth century *was* arguably interrupted by the Second World War. But the war, in its latter stages, also brought American culture closer. What is indisputable is that the process intensified enormously once the restrictions and privations of the immediate post-war years were lifted. There were now more young people and they were recognised as a cohesive social group who could be targeted by industries whose technological innovation had made possible the standardisation and dissemination of the resulting cultural products faster and further than ever before. Among the products associated with the affluent teenage consumer were transistor radios, portable record players and vinyl records. The introduction of the 7" 45rpm record in 1952 heralded, not only the first British singles chart, but that format's domination of the market to the extent that it accounted for 80% of sales by 1963.⁸⁶ Between 1956 and 1971, the percentage of homes with a refrigerator increased from 8% to 69% and television sets, 'a rarity in the early 1950s', were in 75% of homes by 1961. It had become clear to 'the vast majority of the British people...that at last the country seemed to have entered into the kind of high-spending consumer society long familiar from American films.'⁸⁷

'The Establishment'

In January 1957, Harold Macmillan had succeeded Anthony Eden whose health had been broken by the Suez crisis. A year later *The Economist* commented dryly that the Conservatives would have difficulty in 'trying to project in 1958 a Prime Minister obstinately

⁸⁴ Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), p.32, Ministry of Education, 1960. pp.25-26.

⁸⁵ David Fowler, *The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage-earners in Interwar Britain*, (London, 1995), p.169.

⁸⁶ Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), p.38.

⁸⁷ Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, (New Edition, London, 2003), pp.85, 91.

determined to reflect 1908.⁸⁸ This represented a dichotomy that became increasingly pronounced over the ensuing seven or so years of his premiership. A. J. P. Taylor had first coined the term ‘the Establishment’ as a description of ‘the matrix of official and social relations by which power is exercised’. This definition was taken up by critics of a government they regarded as the epitome of ‘an undemocratic, impenetrable and incompetent political elite’. It is true to say that this criticism was largely a reflection of the anxieties of intellectuals post Suez, but the theme was so enthusiastically driven home by journalists and publishers from 1957 to 1964, that its effect upon a wider audience was palpable. The perception of the ‘old school tie’ network was clearly not without foundation when it could be demonstrated in 1962 that a large proportion of the heads of government, the Governor of the Bank of England, the Ambassador to the US, seven heads of merchant banks and the owners of certain large national newspapers including *The Times* were descended from four Victorian peers.⁸⁹ While the rising tide of affluence in the second half of the 1950s helped to distract public attention from the fact, the increasing discrepancy between the attitudes and behaviour of ‘the Establishment’ and the aspirations of a modernising society was becoming blatantly evident.

This did not go unrecognised, and in his capacity as Home Secretary, Rab Butler oversaw several pieces of legislation relating to censorship, drinking and gambling, designed to reflect a changing moral climate, what he called a loosening of the ‘Victorian corsetry’.⁹⁰ However, this could not disguise the indifference (particularly Macmillan’s) of a government and an establishment that was still preoccupied with the nation’s dwindling status as an arbiter of world affairs. This was perhaps inevitable given the predominance in positions of power of men with public school backgrounds whose outlook was shaped by Victorian or at least Edwardian notions of empire. Nonetheless it only served to emphasise the gulf between ‘the Establishment’ and the majority of those they governed. The two most notorious examples of mutual incomprehension were the *Lady Chatterley* (1960) trial and the Profumo scandal (1963). The former, resonated not so much as a result of the salacious nature of Lawrence’s novel or the outcome of the trial, but for the unfortunate statement made by the prosecuting counsel. In asking the jury: ‘Is it a book that you would wish your wife and even servants to

⁸⁸ *The Economist*, February 15th, 1958, quoted in, Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), p.73.

⁸⁹ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), pp.560-67.

⁹⁰ Peter Hennessy, *Having it so Good: Britain in the Fifties*, (London, 2006), pp.511-13.

read?', he not only confirmed how hopelessly out of touch his profession and his class were with modern society, but also (unconsciously?) implied that it was the fact that Lady Chatterley chose to have an affair with the gamekeeper that was the real cause of offence. The Profumo affair had all the ingredients of a theatrical farce in which the contradictions and preoccupations of society at the time were reflected. It had call girls, West Indian drug dealers, homosexuality, Cold War espionage, the landed aristocracy, and a government minister caught with his trousers down. In the House of Commons Harold Wilson skilfully turned what began as an issue of national security into 'an indictment of the degenerate moral tone of Macmillan's Britain.' 'Profumo' was the last in a series of spy scandals all of which focussed attention on the contemporary issues of 'homosexuality, materialism and political nepotism.' Dominic Sandbrook is surely correct when he maintains that the affair 'brought to a head existing anxieties about post-war social and cultural change and crystallised the growing public discontent with the Macmillan government.'⁹¹

From Suez onwards the Conservative government continued to lose face in its increasingly desperate attempts to shore up the country's international prestige. British dependence on the United States was demonstrated in 1961 when it was realised that an independent nuclear deterrent was not a financially viable option, and again in 1962 when the Cuban missile crisis further highlighted Britain's impotence in world affairs. Even the belated realisation that entry into the Common Market would prove economically advantageous resulted in the alienation of Commonwealth trading partners and the humiliation of de Gaulle's 'Non'. Caught between the undermining of its image as the party of 'national greatness' and the loss of moral authority that followed the Profumo affair, the Conservatives were in turmoil by the end of 1963. Their misery was compounded by signs that the 'age of affluence' was coming to an end amidst an economic downturn that culminated in the balance of payments crisis of 1961. The decision to appoint the 14th Earl of Home as Macmillan's successor 'seemed to confirm the icy grip of the past in governing circles' prompting Harold Wilson's observation that 'We are living in the jet-age but are governed by an Edwardian establishment mentality.'⁹²

⁹¹ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), p.661, p.678.

⁹² Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed (eds.), *Cultural Revolution? The challenge of the arts in the 1960s*, (London, 1992), pp.16-30. Harold Wilson, *The New Britain: Labour's Plan*, (Harmondsworth, 1964), p.9.

Labour's election victory in 1964 is of consequence for this study only in that it reflects the electorate's disillusionment in the face of the Tories' inability to meet the needs of the newly emerging society. As a plain-speaking down-to-earth Yorkshireman Wilson appeared to personify the antithesis of the out of touch grouse-shooting Edwardian aristocrat. Two further aspects of the image that Wilson cultivated were deliberately calculated to exploit the prevailing mood. First, in expressing his preference for tinned salmon and pipe-smoking, 'Like the actors and writers of the New Wave, or even the members of the Beatles, he projected himself as a cheeky outsider with self-consciously 'ordinary' tastes.' And second, his rhetoric of modernity, his 'white heat' of the 'scientific revolution', was aimed at the young professional middle-class voters whose support he needed to oust the Conservatives. This combination proved hugely successful in convincing 'contemporary observers...that here was a modern, professional politician with his roots in the North and his mind on the future.' The man of the moment, the grammar school boy made good, was nonetheless an alumnus of Oxford who preferred to smoke cigars in private.⁹³ As he prepared to lead the country into the classless technological age of the swinging 'High Sixties', he was presumably unaware that his enormous popularity would be as fleeting as the nation's taste for gritty Northern humour.

Pop and Popular Culture

Writing in 1965, George Melly noted that what was novel with hindsight was that the 'new audience, the multitude outside, the secret society preparing a revolution in 'the Two Is', Old Compton Street, were sixteen or less.' Although cocooned in the relatively un-commercial world of 'revivalist' jazz and unaware of it at the time [1956] he recalled that, 'What was different about the teenagers was that they were young first and foremost, and that everything they did and said, everything they liked or rejected, was useful in that it identified them *as a group*.' For Melly, what was remarkable, and this is a point of some significance for this study, was that 'the invention of the teenage thing was initially the work of the teenagers themselves.' Melly's keen observation of what was for him a recent phenomenon has subsequently been corroborated and expanded upon by more recent scholars of the period. Amongst these Dick Bradley, who argues that the reaction of young people 'was *not predictable* in the terms of mass culture criticism', that in fact they 'selected from the range of mass-cultural commodities those which could be altered by use, whose meanings could be

⁹³ Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties*, (London, 2006), pp.4-5.

inflected and even expropriated, to give expression to their concerns. Music was the chief of these.⁹⁴ It should have become apparent by this stage that the question of whether these teenage consumers were active or passive participants in this process was a source of considerable debate at the time and has remained so up to the present. This issue is closely related to the central theme of identity and will be dealt with in the appropriate place. Where contemporary sources and historians agree is in their acknowledgement that something new was happening. Where the historians disagree is not so much over whether what happened was a good or a bad thing but rather the extent to which it might be called a ‘cultural revolution’ at all, and the extent to which any changes were of lasting significance. It seems the problem lies in how ‘cultural revolution’ is defined.

The associated value-laden baggage that the term has become encumbered with makes any attempt at a definition, and thereby any answers to the above questions, fraught with difficulty. A good starting point is to make a distinction between what is meant by popular culture and pop culture. This is how George Melly began his survey of ‘The Pop Arts’, first published in 1970, in which he suggests that:

Both popular and pop culture are of working-class origin, and both arose out of a given situation both social and economic. The principal difference is that popular culture was unconscious, or perhaps unselfconscious would be more exact, whereas pop culture came about as the result of a deliberate search for objects, clothes, music, heroes and attitudes which could help to define a stance.⁹⁵

British popular culture, he continues, despite regional variations and adulteration due to the growing influence of the mass media, developed gradually ‘from a settled if frequently deplorable environment.’ As has been related, pop culture was the product of a combination of factors including the disruption of traditional working-class patterns during the war, and the availability of well-paid dead-end jobs to large numbers of often inadequately educated adolescents with time on their hands and a home-spun version of the American dream on their minds, determined to make the most of it before the inevitable advent of conscription and/or the responsibilities of married life. Pop culture’s working-class origins, he argues, were the cause of its ‘rank if vigorous’ first flowering in the shape of rock ‘n’ roll. Writing from the vantage point of the late sixties he concluded that what made British pop culture of especial significance was the way in which it had transcended its origins and ‘permeated all

⁹⁴ Dick Bradley, *Understanding Rock ‘n’ Roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, (Buckingham, 1992), pp.96-97.

⁹⁵ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, (London, 2008), p.1.

strata of society' to the extent that it 'succeeded in blurring the boundaries between itself and traditional high culture.' This is a bold statement that cannot be substantiated here in full owing to the temporal and geographical constraints of this study. Melly's 'pop culture' is a broad church that incorporates the visual arts and literature as well as the early sixties satire boom which, although ostensibly hostile to it, he nevertheless sees as being part of it. With the exception of an acknowledged influence exerted by the visual arts and the American Beat poets and their British disciples upon the nascent music scenes that form the substance of this history, in a 'Northern' context, Melly's London-centric church is too broad. In accordance with his claim that pop music 'has always formed the heart of' pop culture, it is the aim to demonstrate as far as possible that developments in British pop culture did indeed constitute a form of cultural revolution beginning with rock 'n' roll and 'skiffle' in the middle 1950s. By the mid 1960s this 'revolution' *was* poised to permeate all strata of society through the increasing involvement of middle-class artists and intellectuals as pop culture briefly coalesced around the people and places associated with 'swinging London'. The significant point for this investigation is that this pop culture, much of which originated outside and independently of London, 'presents, with an honesty based on indifference to any standards or earlier terms of reference, an exact mirror of our rapidly changing society, particularly in relation to its youth.'⁹⁶

The phenomenon being explored was not 'popular' in terms of popular culture as it has been defined here and nor was it popular in the sense that it attracted widespread criticism and condemnation throughout the period because it was recognised that it was subject to the exploitation and manipulation of the culture industry that expanded alongside it. This was a complicated relationship that must be analysed in due course. Nor was pop culture popular with the majority of those committed to jazz or within the relatively insular world of folk music where it was rightly perceived as a 'permanent seductive threat to many weak but talented adherents of the ethnic canon.'⁹⁷ Pop culture did come to impinge upon these worlds as it did upon the visual arts, film, TV, radio and literature (in the case of radio and television not without considerable resistance from the BBC), and was in turn influenced by developments in these fields. The interplay of these and other relationships can and will be traced in microcosm as the story of pop culture in Liverpool and Newcastle upon Tyne unfolds.

⁹⁶ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, (London, 2008), pp.2-5.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p.3.

In making this distinction there is also the added advantage of being able to analyse and interpret the shifting nature of the relationship between the older popular culture and the new pop culture as experienced by those who lived through their teens and early twenties between 1956 and 1965. It provides a useful conceptual tool that will be used in conjunction with the comparative method which will aim to identify some of the similarities shared by, and some of the differences between Liverpool and Newcastle as that experience was lived. Furthermore, approaching the ‘cultural revolution’ in this way makes it possible to tackle the issues raised in the wider historical debate by focussing on pop culture as defined by Melly:

*Pop culture is for the most part non-reflective, non-didactic, dedicated only to pleasure. It changes constantly because it is sensitive to change, indeed it could be said that it is sensitive to nothing else. Its principal faculty is to catch the spirit of the time and translate this spirit into objects or music or fashion or behaviour. It could be said to offer a comic strip which compresses and caricatures the social and economic forces at work within our society.*⁹⁸

If, as Osgerby asserts, it is true that after 1945 young people became ‘an important (possibly the *most* important) ideological vehicle for the discussion of wider shifts in social relations and changes in British cultural life’, and that popular music was central to their experience, then Sandbrook’s main thesis can be tested by engaging with these themes.⁹⁹ Whilst acknowledging his observation that ‘young people formed merely one demographic among many’, it is arguable that pop culture can act as a mirror that reflects these changes. His insistence that ‘the millions of people who passed through adolescence in the late 1950s and 1960s should not all be judged by the antics of a wealthy and well educated minority’, that they were ‘after all...also the estate agents, loss adjusters and car-park attendants of the seventies’, may on the face of it seem like a plea on behalf of the common man (and woman).¹⁰⁰ However, does this not preclude the possibility that there were young people, not necessarily wealthy or well educated, and perhaps hitherto overlooked by historians, who participated in and contributed to the social and cultural changes as they occurred? Could not some of these changes have had a lasting and significant impact? Marwick obviously believes they did. Analysis of this debate will also provide an opportunity to test Margaret Archer’s assertion that during certain discontinuities in the relationship between structure and culture, individual agents or groups of people can exert considerable influence on their

⁹⁸ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, (London, 2008), p.3.

⁹⁹ Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), p.32.

¹⁰⁰ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), p.434.

culture and even bring about structural change. Sandbrook claims that as he is ‘probably the first historian to write about the period whose earliest memories only just encompass the years before Thatcherism, [he has] very little interest either in celebrating an exaggerated golden age of hedonism or liberation, or in condemning an equally exaggerated era of moral degradation and national decline.’¹⁰¹ If this statement is intended to establish his credentials as a more ‘objective’ historian than his predecessors does it not also open him up to the accusation: ‘He should’ve been there’?¹⁰² Some provisional answers to the initial question, ‘Was British youth at the forefront of a cultural revolution that began in the mid-1950s?’ will be attempted with the above qualifications in mind.

Of course, as the focus of this investigation is that part of any such cultural revolution that occurred in the North of England over the period leading up to what Dave Russell describes as ‘perhaps the North’s greatest single cultural ‘putsch’’, it becomes necessary to consider how and why this should be the case. How and why did so much of the new music emanate from the North? Moreover, as Russell points out, ‘The extraordinary talent and success of the Beatles has inevitably drawn attention to Liverpool...but Manchester was also extremely fertile, at least in commercial terms, producing the Hollies, Freddie and the Dreamers, Herman’s Hermits...while the Animals gave Newcastle its first nationally prominent pop music stars.’¹⁰³ Indeed, the Yorkshire cities of Sheffield, Leeds, Bradford, Hull and York boasted their own independently thriving music scenes to a greater or lesser degree as did Glasgow and Edinburgh. Whilst for expediency’s sake, the Scottish cities will not feature in the ensuing history, most of the major – and some minor – urban centres in the North of England that experienced the socio-cultural phenomenon that accompanied the reception of jazz, skiffle, rock ‘n’ roll, beat and R&B are the subject of this study. Before the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of that phenomenon can be explored in depth, the next chapter will look at ‘The North’ as an historical entity both real and imagined, from within and without, and offer some provisional suggestions as to why the North in general and Liverpool and Newcastle in particular became culturally ‘significant’ and even dominant in the national imagination for a

¹⁰¹ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), preface p.xx.

¹⁰² This is the title of *The Observer* review of *White Heat* which commented that ‘He seems not to have noticed that he is chronicling a period within living memory of quite a handful of people.’ Adam Mars-Jones, *The Observer*, July 30th, 2006, retrieved from <http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/history/0,,1833133,00.html>, 31/08/06.

¹⁰³ Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*, (Manchester, 2004), p.213. Newcastle’s first nationally prominent pop music stars were actually Bruce Welch and Hank Marvin of the Shadows, however, their origins were not widely known at the time.

few short months from 1963 to '64. This is not to imply that London, the Midlands, and the remainder of the British Isles were in any way excluded from proceedings. Rather it is to argue that there was something peculiarly and – to London at least – something altogether unexpectedly 'Northern' about much of the 'revolution' in popular music that needs to be accounted for.

Chapter Two: Culture and Northern Identity

It was suggested in the previous chapter that once the time-frame had been established and hopefully justified, the next step in what might be called (after Marwick) ‘periodization’ involves identifying geographical parameters. After the temporal, the spatial limits of the investigation. In this case it might seem fairly obvious that the objects of study and comparison are the port cities of Liverpool and Newcastle upon Tyne. However, because this is an attempt to trace the historical development and consequences of constructs as notoriously amorphous as ‘culture’ and ‘identity’, some discussion of their wider definition and interpretation must be entered into. This is because throughout history notions of ‘The North’ and ‘Northern-ness’, and the competing claims of region and locality within it, have been continually contested and evolving. Moreover, it will be argued that representations of the same by the state, organs of the media, and those found in literature and the arts have rarely and most often only partially corresponded to the ‘objective realities’ as experienced by ‘Northern’ people. Spaces occupied by culture and identity, both actual and perceived, are not permanent and boundaries both real and imagined are forever blurred at the edges. What follows is an attempt to establish the ‘who’ and the ‘where from’ of the human beings that are the subjects of this work, in an effort to get to grips with the complex matter of their culture and identity. Ultimately the aim will be to understand how the people – and particularly the young people – of Liverpool and Newcastle saw themselves in the 1950s and ‘60s and how, and to what extent, their identity was expressed in their associational culture (leisure time) and creativity – their reception, interpretation and composition of popular music. In short, how they listened, danced, played and sang – consumed and produced – popular music and how much, if at all, being from Newcastle or Liverpool mattered in that.

To begin with, however, as with the debate surrounding the posited ‘cultural revolution’, so the scholarly arguments and the conflict between perceptions and realities of the North and ‘Northern-ness’ should be placed in historical context. This will involve engagement with Dave Russell’s *Looking North* and the question he poses as to ‘the extent to which we can speak of a single ‘northern’ identity and whether regional patriotisms can hold their own against the often-conflicting demands of locality at one extreme and class and nation at the other.’ And, with the aid of selected primary source material, this will lead via an examination of some of the ‘objective realities’ (eschewed by Russell) of Northern urban existence between 1956 and 1965, to some provisional answers to the related question: ‘Can the North be best described as a coherent geographical/cultural region with its own identity or

as a composite of numerous, sometimes antagonistic, identities manifest at county, city, or even neighbourhood level?’¹⁰⁴

An attempt has already been made to differentiate between ‘popular culture’ and ‘pop culture’ following George Melly’s definition and it is the intention to preserve that distinction in a Northern context. For the most part this will temporarily preclude any substantive analysis of ‘pop culture’ which will be undertaken in the next chapter. However, it should be remembered that the term ‘pop culture’ will be employed throughout as denoting those ‘objects, clothes, music, heroes and attitudes which could help to define a stance’, one that was *new* and *particular* to the predominantly working-class teenagers of the North and of the period. Beginning with Melly’s dictionary definition of ‘popular’ as ‘adapted to the understanding, taste or means of the people’, it is necessary to explore the relationship between *Northern* popular culture(s) and the increasingly centralised but ever more widely disseminated ‘national’ parent culture.¹⁰⁵ This will hopefully make it possible to reach some conclusions, albeit tentative ones, about the nature of Northern identity (identities) as it/they were manifest before and after the advent of pop culture. In *An Agenda for Regional History*, Bill Lancaster stresses ‘the need to see the [any] region as consisting of people and space that is frequently in flux in a series of internal relationships with individual groups and processes and externally interacts with metropolitan, national and transnational forces.’¹⁰⁶ Only by exploring the complex interrelationships between elements of ‘official’ national culture, the various localised forms of popular culture, and the often altogether alien pop culture will it be possible to gain an understanding of how group identities were forged within a distinct youth/pop culture which constituted *their* contribution to the putative ‘cultural revolution’. By way of preparation for this task there must first be an attempt to disentangle reality from myth.

Defining Regions

For the sake of convenience it makes sense to establish from the outset the geographical boundaries of what is meant by ‘the North’ whilst acknowledging that the boundaries were

¹⁰⁴ Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*, (Manchester, 2004), p.4. To be fair to Russell it should be noted that his intention is to explore the ‘constructed North’ which ‘in no sense implies a rejection of modes of investigation rooted in the history of actual events...’, p.4.

¹⁰⁵ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, (London, 2008), p.1.

¹⁰⁶ Bill Lancaster, ‘The North East, England’s most distinctive region?’, in Bill Lancaster, Diana Newton and Natasha Vall (eds.), *An Agenda for Regional History*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007), p.24.

and remain blurred. It is not the intention to enter into the complex arguments surrounding the various definitions that have been put forward, but sufficient to note their existence and to accept that each has its merits according to the purpose for which it was defined. For the purposes of this investigation, the following dicta from Edward Royle will be observed:

Regions are assumed to exist, and the historian must therefore seek out their meaning and identity, unstable, fluctuating and ambiguous though these meanings and identities are.

The historian...is – or should be – concerned primarily with the view from the bottom, what a region means (if anything) to the person who lives there and how this is expressed in human activities. Region historically, therefore, is not a fixed concept, but a feeling, a sentimental attachment to territory shared by like-minded people, beyond the local administrative unit but possibly not – or not always – extending so far as the boundaries of a more distant administrative unit. It is an imagined community no less than the nation is...¹⁰⁷

This prescription would no doubt meet with the approval of the anonymous student who, alongside a paragraph concerned with the difficulties involved in defining the North East as a region in the book from which the above quotation is taken, has written in the margin, ‘But Geordies still know who we are!’ For this study the area combining what have been called the ‘seven historic counties of Cheshire, Cumberland, Durham, Lancashire, Northumberland, Westmorland and Yorkshire’ will suffice as representing ‘The North’ in general.¹⁰⁸ Questions about how much Berwick upon Tweed is English or Scottish and whether Nottinghamshire is really the North need not be of concern because a certain amount of fuzziness at the edges is permissible when discussing imagined spaces.

Similarly the ‘North East’ can be taken to incorporate an area roughly corresponding to that of the counties of Northumberland and Durham. The term came into use in the 1930s to denote one of the ‘Special Areas’, a political and economic construct designated in recognition of the decline in the region’s staple industries and its attendant social problems. Despite its origins as part of what Colls describes as ‘The state’s capacity to draw the regions into a discourse of decline’¹⁰⁹, the ‘North East’, as numerous examples of its use in the Newcastle press of the 1950s and ‘60s by journalists and readers alike will attest, became widely accepted as a descriptive term for the region and will be used here. Within this region

¹⁰⁷ Edward Royle, ‘Regions and Identities’, in Edward Royle (ed.), *Issues of Regional Identity*, (Manchester, 1998), pp.2-4.

¹⁰⁸ Dave Russell, ‘Music and Northern Identity, 1890-c. 1965’, in Neville Kirk (ed.), *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of ‘The North’ and ‘Northernness’*, (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 23-24.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Colls, *Identity of England*, (Oxford, 2002), p.322.

Newcastle stood throughout the period, as it arguably had done since at least the eighteenth century, as the regional capital. Its influence extended well beyond its political boundaries to encompass industrial Northumberland north of the Tyne and south of the river ‘into pit-village Durham as far as that maddeningly undefined border where Sunderland loyalties take over.’ There is also the historical link with Cumbria whose inhabitants have traditionally gravitated towards the city by virtue of economic ties through iron and coal from the nineteenth century, to shopping in the twentieth.¹¹⁰ Newcastle’s cultural dominance is of particular significance for this study and it should be noted that many young people were drawn there, from Tyneside and beyond, to participate in the various cultural activities on offer. For this reason the ‘North East’, ‘Tyneside’, and ‘Newcastle’ will be used interchangeably as descriptors in what follows.

Locating Liverpool in the wider North West region is more problematic. John K. Walton has drawn attention to the fact that, ‘notions of ‘the North West’ as a regional descriptive or analytical category in England have a very limited pedigree’, with ‘nothing to match the impetus to territorial myth-making that is afforded...by Northumbria.’¹¹¹ It appears that the more recent usage of the term originates in the language of planning from the 1960s but there is nothing to suggest that it would resonate with the afore-mentioned ‘view from the bottom’ and will therefore be discarded for present purposes. Furthermore, as John Belchem asserts in the preface to *Merseypride: essays in Liverpool exceptionalism*:

*Located at the intersection of competing cultural, economic and geo-political formations, Liverpool defies ready historical categorisation. In its Victorian heyday a kind of ‘city state’ dedicated to commerce, culture and civilisation – the would-be ‘Florence of the north’ – Liverpool defined itself against industrial Manchester and in rivalry with commercial London. In the north of England but not of it, Liverpool (and its ‘sub-region’ of Merseyside) was (and has continued to be) highly distinctive, differing sharply in socio-economic structure, cultural image and expression, political affiliation, health, diet and speech from the adjacent industrial districts.*¹¹²

Specifically those claims relating to ‘cultural image and expression’ will be tested here against the empirical evidence for the period 1956-65, but for the time being it is enough to

¹¹⁰ Bill Lancaster, ‘Newcastle – capital of what?’, Rob Colls and Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism*, (2nd edition, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2005), pp.56-57.

¹¹¹ John K. Walton, ‘Imagining regions in comparative perspective: the strange birth of North-West England’, in Bill Lancaster, Diana Newton and Natasha Vall (eds.), *An Agenda for Regional History*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007), p.292.

¹¹² John Belchem, *Merseypride: essays in Liverpool exceptionalism*, (Liverpool, 2000), preface pp.xxx-xxxii.

bear in mind that, with the exception of ‘North West’, which is not comparable to the ‘North East’ for the reasons outlined above, ‘Merseyside’ and ‘Liverpool’ will be employed as ‘Tyneside’ and ‘Newcastle’ according to context.

The North/South Paradigm

Culture in a general sense has been defined at the outset in accordance with Marwick as, ‘the network or totality of attitudes, values and practices of a particular group of human beings’. Usually interpreted by historians at the level of the nation state culture is also often understood to encompass the arts, whether ‘highbrow’ or ‘popular’. Examples of highbrow culture would include opera, ‘fine art’ painting, and a certain kind of literature or poetry; whereas popular culture is generally thought to consist of ‘lesser’ artistic works such as pulp fiction, films, popular music or even football matches.¹¹³ Although perhaps less (overtly) so in the twenty-first century, up to and including the fifties and sixties commentators were acutely conscious of the divide and routinely employed the rhetoric of culture to delineate class. Access to, and appreciation of, highbrow culture had long been presumed to be the prerogative of society’s elite by virtue of cultural tradition – though increasingly aspired to by the middle classes. Lowbrow popular, or plebeian, culture was either created by, or commercially manufactured for, the working classes and generally regarded as inferior. The oppositional nature of this split definition has, not infrequently, in the past found expression in the now familiar paradigm of ‘North versus South’. A continuity can be traced from at least the sixteenth century, from a cartographer’s depiction of the North ‘as a site of rebelliousness; a barbarous region’, through Defoe’s ‘crossing of the Rubicon’ at the River Trent¹¹⁴, to nineteenth and twentieth-century travel writers, who, when crossing from south to north, crossed from ‘service to manufacture, from rural to industrial, from feminine to masculine, from middle class to working class.’¹¹⁵ For a long time then the North has been portrayed as somehow ‘other’. If it is true, as Lancaster maintains, ‘that regions are constructs that are created both by people who live in them as well as those who observe them externally and that it is the act of reflection on this process that constitutes the formation

¹¹³ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958- c. 1974*, (Fourth Edition, London, 2003), p.11.

¹¹⁴ Stuart Rawnsley, ‘Constructing ‘The North’: space and a sense of place’, in Neville Kirk (ed.), *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of ‘The North’ and ‘Northernness’*, (Aldershot, 2000), pp.5-6.

¹¹⁵ Robert Colls, *Identity of England*, (Oxford, 2002), p.261.

of the region'¹¹⁶, then to what extent does 'The North' as a region in this sense exist? Can it be said to exist as an objective reality or only as an oppositional construct to 'The South'? Or might it just be the case, as the alien said in *Doctor Who*, that 'Lots of planets have a north'?¹¹⁷ More to the point, did 'The North' exist between 1956 and 1965?

The answers to these questions can be pursued by tracing the history of the North/South paradigm from the mid-nineteenth century when the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation combined to form the political, economic and social landscape of the North that remained recognisable for the next century or more. In a similar way to which 'youth' as a category was used as a vehicle for the expression of contemporary concerns about the rapid social and cultural developments of the fifties and sixties, so definitions of North and South were juxtaposed as a means by which any number of issues might be cast in sharp relief. Moreover, Rawnsley has argued that the work of historians and geographers has shown how within the North, 'Far from negating regional economies and cultures, the 'Industrial Revolution' actually intensified them' leading to 'a regional coherence centred round towns such as Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle and Bradford, which became foci for economic growth.'¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Sarah Cohen has identified rivalries, as they existed within the Liverpool music scene of the 1980s, expressed as 'Wirral vs. Liverpool, north Liverpool vs. south Liverpool [and] Liverpool city centre vs. the outskirts.'¹¹⁹ Did these intra-regional rivalries exist in the period in question? Likewise, will the sources reveal any evidence of a mid-twentieth-century cultural equivalent of the nineteenth-century political struggles of Gateshead, South Shields and Tynemouth 'against the over-mighty self-interest of the principal regional centre'?¹²⁰ To complicate matters even further issues of gender,

¹¹⁶ Bill Lancaster, 'The North East, England's most distinctive region?', in Bill Lancaster, Diana Newton and Natasha Vall (eds.), *An Agenda for Regional History*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007), p.24.

¹¹⁷ *Doctor Who*, (2005), quoted in, Stuart Maconie, *Pies and Prejudice: In Search of the North*, (London, 2008), title page.

¹¹⁸ Stuart Rawnsley, *op. cit.*, p.6. The works cited are, E. P. Thompson, *The Making of The English Working Class* (1968) and, J. Langton, 'The industrial revolution and the regional geography of England', *Institute of British Geographers Transactions*, (1984). Liverpool was centred round the commercial activity of its docks not industrial specialization. Similarly, as Bill Lancaster has stated, 'Newcastle is not an industrial city' but has functioned as a commercial and retail centre, the industry having traditionally taken place 'outside the city walls.' Bill Lancaster, 'Newcastle – capital of what?', in Robert Colls and Bill Lancaster, *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism*, (2nd edition, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2005), p55.

¹¹⁹ Sarah Cohen, 'Identity, Place and the 'Liverpool Sound'', in, Martin Stokes (ed.), *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, (Oxford, 1994), p.124.

¹²⁰ Norman McCord, 'The regional identity of north-east England in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries', in, Edward Royle, *Issues of Regional Identity*, (Manchester, 1998), p.109.

class and ethnicity cut across all of these constructions of identity and are woven into the cultural fabric both real and imagined. A thorough examination of inter and intra regional identities of the real and imagined North is beyond the scope of this study. Even a comprehensive survey of the subject for the years 1956-65 could run to a book. Nevertheless, a concise treatment of the most relevant aspects of the interplay between these variously constructed identities at a national (North versus South) and regional (county/city rivalries) level should be attempted not least because an awareness of their complexity will allow greater explanatory purchase as evidence of their existence comes to light. This must take place before a more detailed investigation of Liverpool/Merseyside and Newcastle/Tyneside identities can be undertaken.

Anthony Sutcliffe has made the observation that by the beginning of the twentieth century, what he calls the 'urban variable' had:

*...declined in importance, as was indeed to be expected in a society that was now, in effect, completely urbanised. As the State took over the city, the city disappeared. However, the urban variable, particularly as expressed by the large city, had arguably played a central part, between 1850 and 1914, in moving Britain towards the highly interventionist State apparatus...that we know today.*¹²¹

Although he was writing in 1983 when urban historians were understandably preoccupied with the relationship between the state and the country's blighted (particularly northern industrial) inner cities, his contention that the big city, at least in comparison with the heyday of Victorian civic pride, had ceased to count as a relatively autonomous economic, political and even social entity, is of relevance here. His study suggests that this was a trend that continued up to and beyond the fifties and sixties. This thesis, which he grounds in the historical realities of 'the railway revolution [which made] towns and cities more accessible to each other' and the state subsidization of slum clearance, housing and unemployment which began with the Liberal reforms between 1905 and 1914, carries implications for this study. What Sutcliffe identifies as the late Victorian and Edwardian 'urban crisis' was expressed within an intellectual climate that exhibited 'a distinct tendency to relate Britain's social and economic problems to its cities.' Although London was singled out as the 'extreme manifestation of an independent urban variable', in critiques dealing with the 'intrinsically urban crisis' such as Ebenezer Howard's *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (1902),

¹²¹ Anthony Sutcliffe, 'In Search of the Urban Variable', in, Derek Fraser and Anthony Sutcliffe (eds.), *The Pursuit of Urban History*, (London, 1983), p.263.

could be found a ‘much broader and diffuse current of thought which was prone to identify distinctly urban variables within regional and national processes of change.’¹²² It can be argued that a certain kind of national discourse emanating from the metropolitan centre and combined with older stereotypical cultural representations of ‘The North’ as a barbarous and rebellious place, gained momentum over the hundred and fifty years or so from the 1840s, with the result that the North usually only attained prominence in the national imagination when it was ‘suffering from...intense economic difficulty’; when ‘troubled or troublesome.’ Russell maintains that such periods of Northern cultural prominence occurred in ‘the 1840s and earlier 1850s; the 1930s; the years 1957 – c. 1964 and the 1980s.’¹²³ Significantly, the third period, he argues, is the exception, marking the only definable era when Northern culture was depicted in a largely positive light. This prompts the question of whether, firstly there is any evidence of Sutcliffe’s decline in the importance of the urban variable, not in a political, economic and social but a cultural sense, between 1956 and 1965, and secondly of a cultural prominence of the North perceived as something positive during those years.

Evidence garnered from the Northern press suggests that, amongst journalists and cultural commentators at least – and perhaps unsurprisingly – debate did not focus on the relationship between North and South but on that between the individual cities represented by each newspaper and London. There was however, the odd exception. In an edition of *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury* from April 1958 in an article entitled ‘London and the provinces are closer in thought’, its author asked, ‘Are we provincials any longer conspicuously provincial in the contemptuous sense of the word?’ The columnist, William Linton Andrews, claims a degree of impartiality having been born in Hull, educated in London and employed in Fleet Street, but now resident in Leeds.¹²⁴ Written at a time when the arguments contained in Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy* were in wide circulation this article offers an alternative, more or less conciliatory, and even optimistic perspective and deserves quotation at some length. It should be noted that although the term ‘provinces’ could apply as much to Bristol as Bradford, it is presumably the North he has in mind when he writes:

...I am deeply interested in the spread of the mass media of enlightenment and entertainment. The popular papers and women’s magazines and their advertising, the cinema, radio and television – especially television – seem to

¹²² Anthony Sutcliffe, ‘In Search of the Urban Variable’, in Derek Fraser and Anthony Sutcliffe (eds.), *The Pursuit of Urban History*, (London, 1983), pp.257 and 241.

¹²³ Russell, ‘Music and Northern Identity, 1890-c. 1965’, in Neville Kirk (ed.), *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of ‘The North’ and ‘Northernness’*, (Aldershot, 2000), p.33.

¹²⁴ Andrews was then editor of *The Yorkshire Post*.

me to be drawing London and the provinces closer together. Far more than ever before people of the fields and the factories and the desks are thinking much the same thoughts, talking to a large extent about the same people and the same events. There is some danger of an approach to that standardisation which Mr. J. B. Priestley has described as Admass. Some people would shake our nerves with a nightmare of Admass in Subtopia.

Need we be afraid? A new kind of England is building up, in some ways worse than the one we have known but in other ways much better. I do not think the provincial tradition is in any danger in spite of the growing urbanisation and the much-deplored evils of the cities. Mighty London will always draw greatly on provincial talent, but there will always be plenty more to draw on. The benefits of London's wealth and culture should spread more easily to the provinces. There will, I think, be a happier inter-penetration of town and country, London and the provinces. I expect people will use the word provincial in the contemptuous sense less and less. We are all getting to know each other better, and that, in this warm-hearted England of ours, is something to be thankful for.¹²⁵

Unfortunately, W. L. A. comes no nearer to defining exactly what the 'provincial tradition' is than an acclamation of 'the neighbourly ways of my own Yorkshire'. He is far more precise in his definition of 'provincial' in the 'contemptuous' sense. Presumably those 'culturally superior' (Southerners?) might apply the word derisively when 'our surroundings betray us into a certain narrowness, illiberality or lack of polish or enlightenment.'¹²⁶

Provincial 'traditions' notwithstanding, use of the North/South paradigm was more often reserved for issues of politics and economics, particularly when related to economic decline and political intervention from Whitehall. Occasionally however, an article does contain references to 'The North', in this case used interchangeably with the 'North East', with regard to its political, economic *and* cultural relationship with the South. In 1958, Newcastle's *Sunday Sun* asked, 'Is life too dull for them in the North?' in a report that claimed Whitehall, and the Board of Trade in particular, was concerned about the growing numbers of young men from the region who were migrating south. Its author declared that,

¹²⁵ *The Yorkshire Post*, April 8th, 1958, p.4.

¹²⁶ *The Yorkshire Post*, April 8th, 1958, p.4. It is worth noting perhaps that the paper harboured pretensions of representing a wider Yorkshire which were never justified in terms of circulation but may in part account for the author's confidence in speaking for a wider 'North' of the provinces. It is also interesting that he uses the word 'surroundings' here. In view of the fact that the article contains many references to the distinctive attractions of the Yorkshire countryside – 'Cycling among the Surrey hills had its laborious attraction, but how could it stand a moment's comparison with walking over the Haworth moors...or swimming in the sea?' – it is tempting to surmise an identification with Vidal de la Blache's 'pays' and his 'community of habits'. Perhaps more likely he is referring to 'parochial' habits in politics, society and culture.

¹²⁶ *Newcastle Sunday Sun*, August 8th, 1958, p.6.

‘London, of course, is the main attraction. To the provincial young man it offers – he thinks – glamour, bright lights, more money...and limitless opportunities.’ Thus far the piece is typical of countless articles on the theme of the decline in staple industries and central government attempts to stem the flow of labour to the South by relocating new businesses in the North with the aid of financial incentives and investment. This item differs in that it identifies cultural factors as an important reason for the exodus. The journalist reflected that, ‘Perhaps it is the feeling that the North-East is a backwater, a forgotten part of Britain. And Newcastle, Sunderland, Middlesbrough – any big Northern town – can seem drab and dull after a stay in London.’ He goes on to suggest why this might be so: ‘They are virtually dead after ten o’clock at night, and however hard arts and entertainments enthusiasts may try to provide cultural and other amenities on their own doorsteps, the feeling remains that these are little more than crumbs from the rich man’s table.’¹²⁷

As has been suggested, more common were articles invoking ‘The North’ as a region of political and economic dependency on the South typified in headlines such as, ‘Does the North plead poverty too much?’ Interestingly though, the term it seems is often used in a vague undefined way when the piece is actually concerned with a quite specific region or urban area within a wider North. The above headline actually belongs to an item pertaining to the North-East and the question of whether ‘The Jarrow March Mentality Holds Us Back.’ Whilst remonstrating with the leaders of local government, the tone is both defiant and cautiously optimistic in proclaiming that, ‘The ordinary people, in Jarrow and everywhere in the North-East, are utterly disinterested in pleading poverty, in harking back to the bad old days, and in maintaining the mentality of the March to London which, however brave a gesture it may have been in the horrible 1930s, is completely out of keeping with the hopeful 1960s.’¹²⁸ Readers’ letters sometimes expressed more vociferous views, in one case going so far as to insist that, ‘this land of ours is becoming split into two parts – mainly due to the unemployment situation in the North (and particularly in the North-East). In my view we have always been two separate peoples.’¹²⁹ The oppositional nature of the North/South construct, at least in political and economic terms, is very much in evidence on the pages of much of the Northern media.

¹²⁸ Newcastle *Sunday Sun*, March 3rd, 1962, p.8.

¹²⁹ Newcastle *Evening Chronicle*, January 25th, 1963, p.8.

In contrast, it is noticeable that the Liverpool press whilst containing examples of writing that convey annoyance at London's self-satisfied sense of cultural superiority, did not seek to cloak its grievances in the language of the North/South divide. Those coming out in defence of Liverpool seem to have had the confidence to take London on 'city to city' in cultural matters at least. And not just London; there is a definite sense of that Liverpool 'exceptionalism' that in recent times has been (mis-)interpreted by politicians and some sections of the national media as self-pity. Under the headline 'Why Is It Always Vicious Liverpool?', a review of the television play 'No Tram To Lime Street' complained that 'Viciousness, violence, drunkenness and most of the other crimes in the calendar appear to be the monopoly of this Merseyside parish of ours...why don't we see anything depicting the seamy side of life in other ports such as Southampton, Bristol, Hull and the rest?'¹³⁰ Liverpoolians struck back at their city's critics no matter how distant the antagonist. At the height of American 'Beatle-mania' the *Houston Post* published an article which ran as follows:

Ordinarily if anyone had ever thought to associate any sound with Liverpool's River Mersey, it would have been a mixture of ships' whistles moaning over Britain's toughest and grimmest port city, and the gurgle of sewage flowing down the Mersey out to sea.

So incensed was '16-years-old Sandra Stanley, of 5 Harrington Road, Liverpool 21' on receiving a cutting from her American pen-pal, that she immediately wrote to the paper in defence of her native city. After her letter was published in the offending paper it was reported that 'she has had letters of congratulation from people in Texas applauding her staunch loyalty.'¹³¹ It appears that the former 'Second City of Empire' was prepared to fight its corner.

It ought to be acknowledged that there is one other category of journalistic writing that regularly used the North/South paradigm as its basis. This took the form of reported reactions to the real or imagined physical confrontation between the 'Southerner' and his 'Northern' counterpart in the other's natural habitat. Invariably patronising in tone and conveying all manner of stereotypical baggage, this kind of writing might nevertheless be interpreted as an example of that 'sense outside the metropolis that the provinces inhabited a world morally superior to that of the capital...a core nineteenth-century mentality and one that

¹³⁰ *The Liverpool Echo*, October 30th, 1959, p.2.

¹³¹ *The Liverpool Echo*, March 20th, 1964, p.2.

was endlessly reinforced and reshaped in the twentieth.¹³² A typical headline for this sort of article would be, ‘A Southern exile comes North and finds THE TRUE MEANING OF “NEIGHBOURLINESS”’, which goes on to extol the virtues of the ‘homely’ Northern housewife who bids the stranger, “come on in to us...the kettle is just on the boil and I’ve some sandwiches fettled.” The Southerner in question, in this case the article’s author, Frank Durham, confesses his ‘amazement’ and concludes that, ‘If this is neighbourliness, then the North has an export that would be well worth while sending to my home territory.’¹³³ In a similar vein, a Northern commuter on the London to Edinburgh train reported that a woman he took to have emanated from Kensington, upon crossing the Tyne, exclaimed, ‘Ooh, what a lot of lights. I never expected to see so many lights up here.’ So vexed was the correspondent that he felt impelled to write: ‘Yes pet, we do have electric lights up here. And shops. And theatres. Just like London’, before concluding that, ‘Her fatuous incredulity at finding most of the signs of civilisation 300 miles north of the gin-and-tonic belt gave me a pain.’¹³⁴ Whether or not these accounts are based on real experience is incidental to the fact that they fit neatly into Russell’s table of commonly held internal and external conceptions of ‘the North’.

External

(especially southern)

Images of the North

Homely

A breed apart

Northern self-image

Friendly/hospitable

A breed apart

Northern images of the South

Unfriendly/unsociable

A breed apart¹³⁵

If nothing else, these articles show that long-ingrained clichés were alive and thriving and, indeed it seems, being encountered and enacted in everyday life.

County rivalries do not appear especially significant in cultural terms during this period;¹³⁶ retaining a strong resonance mostly in certain sports whilst a city’s cultural identity was

¹³² Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*, (Manchester, 2004), p.25.

¹³³ Newcastle *Sunday Sun*, June 23rd, 1957, p.4.

¹³⁴ Newcastle *Evening Chronicle*, October 29th, 1964, p.8.

¹³⁵ Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*, (Manchester, 2004), p.37, Table 1. This is an extract from the full table.

¹³⁶ With the partial exception of radio and television which is discussed below. And from the article already quoted, *The Yorkshire Post*, April 8th, 1958, p.4: ‘We may like to sentimentalise about our ancestral, honest-to-goodness local traditions. We in Yorkshire enjoy Northerner’s friendly little jibes at Lancashire, but that is nearly all fun and has no more factual foundation or substance in it than

apparently deemed too important an asset to be defended from within a wider 'North'. 'Defended' is the right word too, because throughout the period, and even amidst the sometimes celebratory reportage occasioned by the early sixties 'Beat Boom', there is a sense that what is particular about the indigenous culture was somehow under attack from somewhere not explicitly defined. It appears almost as though Northern cities were fighting a rearguard action against the decline of Sutcliffe's 'urban variable' and, being increasingly less able to deploy their traditional political, industrial and commercial resources, were obliged to take refuge in what cultural capital they could muster. It might be argued that this marked the beginning of a trend for 'cultural heritage' that has continued up to the present. Allied to this is an implicit deference, of the kind exhibited in the *Yorkshire Post* article quoted above, which acknowledges both the centripetal *and* centrifugal power of London as the hub of the nation's cultural activity.

Evidence for the use of cultural assets as a defensive strategy can be found in local newspaper articles of the period but they are not always concerned with the perceived threat of London's cultural dominance. As early as 1960, *The Yorkshire Post* was asking of Leeds, 'Should the city take steps to publicise abroad its products and attractions as a tourist centre?' It had been pointed out to the members of Leeds Publicity Club by the Director General of the British Travel and Holidays Association that Birmingham 'openly used the Shakespeare country as part of its attraction.' Although its author admitted that there were likely to be reservations of the 'we don't want to make ourselves ridiculous pretending our grimy city is a holiday resort' variety, it was held that Temple Newsham, The Headrow – 'a noble street' – and The Triennial Musical Festival might draw visitors. It was noted that, 'in its slum clearance and housing development [Leeds] has shown vigour and imagination: as a shopping centre it is the envy of many other cities.' The article concluded that, 'much more should be done to let the outside world know the contribution which this great and rapidly expanding Yorkshire city is making to industrial, social and scientific progress in the 20th Century.'¹³⁷ Serious thought then, was being given in Leeds to the idea of mobilising cultural assets for economic ends in direct competition with other cities, not necessarily London, and not in the context of a wider 'North'. City rivalries must be the subject of the next section.

there is in mutual belittlements by Oxford and Cambridge or Leeds and Bradford wits in after-dinner speaking.'

¹³⁷ *The Yorkshire Post*, May 18th, 1960, p.6.

Which North? City Rivalries

Stephen Caunce has proposed a further division of 'The North' of England that recognises a coherent 'Near North' based upon 'an intense but discontinuous urban belt [that] stretches across Britain's narrow waist, from Liverpool to Hull'. Although it is not made explicit this would suggest a 'Far North' which would include the historic counties of Northumberland, Durham, Cumberland and Westmorland but also much of agricultural North Yorkshire or indeed anywhere north of the intense economic concentration along much of what is today the M62 corridor. Incorporating South Yorkshire and the industrial north of Cheshire, Caunce claims that this essentially east-west orientated near North can be shown to exist geographically, geologically, and increasingly from the eighteenth century economically, as an historically traceable integrated system. Well before the construction of the M62 motorway, which in any case post-dates the period under review, he argues that 'The Pennines have...never been the obstacle to economic activity that might be thought'.¹³⁸ Moreover, in terms of a 'functional unity', and in contrast to Tyne and Wear which is 'an instance of a genuinely isolated region' with a recognised regional capital in Newcastle, the near North never developed a:

...conventional urban hierarchy headed by a regional capital...to formalize relationships between its various components, and internal rivalry is widespread and apparently endemic. Lancashire and Yorkshire almost epitomize the concept of regional competition with their spurious but much relished rhetoric of a perpetual War of the Roses. Liverpool and Manchester often seem deadly enemies, and Leeds vies with Bradford and Sheffield east of the Pennines. The myriad smaller towns have always relished a multiplicity of local antagonisms and resisted formal incorporation into wider local government groupings before the general administrative reorganization of 1974.

And yet, Caunce maintains that in spite of these factors, the near North managed to achieve what Glasgow and Birmingham, each with a larger population than any single urban centre in the North of England, could not, so that by the mid-nineteenth century 'contemporaries saw this near-northern region as a serious rival to the metropolitan south-east's ancient demographic, commercial and political primacy within Britain'.¹³⁹ His argument suggests

¹³⁸ Stephen Caunce, 'Urban Systems, identity and development in Lancashire and Yorkshire: a complex question', in in Neville Kirk (ed.), *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of 'The North' and 'Northernness'*, (Aldershot, 2000), pp.49-56.

¹³⁹ S. A. Caunce, 'Northern English industrial towns: rivals or partners?', *Urban History*, 30, 3 (2003), p.339. Caunce notes that, 'The frequent assertion that Manchester became the capital will not stand

that this was achieved as much *because* of the intense rivalries that existed as despite them. What is more, whilst Counce admits that the term ‘Near North’ is his own creation, made necessary by the fact that ‘no coherent identity has ever been [formerly] recognized’,¹⁴⁰ for the region, he contends that this uneven urban conglomeration comprised of distinct but interconnected conurbations also contains ‘lesser groupings of strong local significance [so that] one of the definitive traits of the Near North even today [2000] is a set of strong and very local identities that nest inside each other like Russian Dolls, exemplified by micro-dialects and intricate accent differences.’ This is suggestive of differences of identity at a very local level, in the sense of ‘local’ as opposed to ‘regional’, meaning anything from large cities to groups of towns and still smaller collective identities. It is also, he insists, a process in which ‘cultural affinities’ have historically often vied with and outweighed economic ties which can explain why no coherent regional identity emerged.¹⁴¹ Indeed, so resilient have these affinities proven to be, that they withstood the housing boom of the 1950s and ‘60s when the physical boundaries of many hitherto independent townships were subsumed within expanding conurbations.¹⁴² It is argued that this cultural independence is typified by the reluctance of the citizens of major Northern towns to travel to a neighbouring city centre because leisure and shopping opportunities are not perceived as being of a significantly higher quality. In other words people from Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester would sooner make the trip to London than a short journey within the near North.¹⁴³

Convincing as Counce’s case is for an integrated ‘Near North’ in an economic sense, it is his observations concerning this ‘set of strong and very local identities’ that are significant here. In terms of the relationship between local, sub-regional and regional identities, Russell maintains that ‘it is hard to disagree with John Marshall’s claim that the “most keenly felt sense of place is in the main the local, not regional”. Loyalty to sub-region and perhaps

examination: it exercised no authority outside its own part of Lancashire, and little influence across the Pennines.’ The same might be said of Leeds’ position within Yorkshire.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.339.

¹⁴¹ Stephen Counce, ‘Urban Systems, identity and development in Lancashire and Yorkshire: a complex question’, in Neville Kirk (ed.), *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of ‘The North’ and ‘Northernness’*, (Aldershot, 2000), p.49.

¹⁴² S.A.Counce, ‘Northern English industrial towns: rivals or partners?’, *Urban History*, 30, 3 (2003), p.353. This was particularly evident in Manchester and Leeds.

¹⁴³ Stephen Counce, ‘Urban Systems, identity and development in Lancashire and Yorkshire: a complex question’, in in Neville Kirk (ed.), *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of ‘The North’ and ‘Northernness’*, (Aldershot, 2000), p.49.

especially to region, is generally far thinner than that to both the locality and the nation.’¹⁴⁴ As engaging as the postulations of scholars of regional identity may be, of more material concern is the existence (or not) of any evidence in the historical record for the period that supports this notion of intense local rivalries and identities. These themes can be explored by examining the sources for Liverpool and Newcastle which, at the same time, will hopefully lead to an understanding of the interplay of local and regional identities as they existed between 1956 and 1965 in these particular city/regions.

Liverpool and Merseyside Identity

Writing about Liverpool in 1958, the city of his birth (1895) and his home up to the outbreak of the First World War, the ‘eminent historian’ Sir Charles Petrie harked back to the early years of the century when, ‘We were not prepared to take our orders from London, and with other provincial centres, such as Manchester and Birmingham, there was the keenest rivalry.’ In a potted history of the highs and lows of Liverpool’s twentieth century thus far for one of a series of articles entitled ‘Why I Love Liverpool’, Petrie identifies the city’s ‘resilience’ and ‘progressive outlook’ based on ‘civic pride’ and a ‘capacity for assimilation’ as the reasons for its post-war recovery and continued success; ‘qualities’ he adds ‘which are lacking in so many cities comparable with Liverpool.’¹⁴⁵ The piece is sub-titled, ‘Look forward with hope: THIS CITY OF VISION’, and while resilience and civic pride are attributes to which all Northern cities laid claim, it was in a vision that was both forward-looking and global that the ‘great and the good’ of Liverpool appeared to identify the city’s uniqueness.

In another article of the same series, Dr George Chandler, the City Librarian, wrote that ‘Liverpool is uniquely a microcosm of the world, and its partisan social, religious and political groups all add to the virility of the...scene. It is alive. Its liveliness is rooted in its historical links with the rest of the world.’ Chandler believed that this ‘liveliness’ sprung from the cosmopolitan nature of Liverpool resulting no doubt from that ‘capacity for assimilation’ that had brought Welch, Scots and Irish, not to mention Chinese ‘and the coloured children in their Sunday best [who] add a touch of variety to Liverpool’s streets.’ Curiously even the seedier side of Liverpool life was presented as a cultural asset. Whilst he

¹⁴⁴ J.D. Marshall, *The Tyranny of the Discrete*, (Aldershot, 1997), p.105, quoted in Dave Russell, ‘Culture and the formation of northern English identities from c.1850’, in Bill Lancaster, Diana Newton and Natasha Vall (eds.), *An Agenda for Regional History*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007), p.274.

¹⁴⁵ *Liverpool Echo*, March 11th, 1958, p.6.

felt that ‘the intermingling of different races, classes and creeds has, unfortunately, its darker side’, nonetheless, ‘the liveliness that is such a feature of Liverpool is absent from many cities that have not Liverpool’s vice.’¹⁴⁶ Prominent Liverpudlians then, were keen to celebrate the cosmopolitan nature of their vibrant port city and even to vest a certain amount of civic pride in the less reputable aspects of its cultural heritage. Arguably there are echoes here of that ‘otherness’, that ‘apartness’ expressed as ‘Merseypride’ which John Belchem insists is so crucial to Liverpool’s identity. The ‘qualities’ attributed to the city are at once redolent of ‘a seafaring cosmopolitanism which made Liverpool, the gateway of empire, particularly receptive to (unEnglish) foreign ideas...and to American popular music’, but also of ‘The ‘community’ mentality of the Scottie-Road ‘slummy’ – the ‘scouse’ identity cherished by those clustered around the main artery of Scotland Road.’¹⁴⁷ Indeed, Belchem’s notion of ‘Liverpool’s private celtic empire’ co-existing with a broader outward-looking essentially trans-Atlantic culture is attested to in Chandler’s article. The librarian observed how:

Liveliness and variety also characterise the range of classes and types of Liverpolitans and Liverpudlians, each type being sufficiently numerous to have its own habitat and a dress more distinctive than its counterpart in other English provincial cities. In Liverpool’s business quarter bowler hats and black Homburgs are more frequently seen than in Manchester or Birmingham; the tradition of the Liverpool gentleman is still strong. At the Blue Coat Society of Arts, the Art School and on William Brown Street, beards, suede shoes, duffel and draped overcoats testify to the city’s deep-seated addiction to the Arts. Liverpool’s Georgian area specialises in exotic dress and Teddy boys.

*In Bold Street you can still see women as elegant as in Oxford Street, while in the markets and in London Road the flower girls, barrow boys and scousers have their own characteristics. It is true that there is some variety in most large cities but nowhere outside London will you find such distinctive variety of classes as in Liverpool...Irishmen, Welshmen, Scots, Manxmen, Englishmen and foreign-born all share a pride in their city, be they Catholic or Protestant.*¹⁴⁸

Despite its length, this extract is worth reproducing verbatim not least for the richness of description it contains of Liverpool life and culture in 1958. Besides the ‘Liverpolitans’ and ‘Liverpudlians’ seemingly corresponding to Belchem’s co-existing cultures there are all manner of scousers, art school beatniks and Teddy boys each with a claim to a particular

¹⁴⁶ *Liverpool Echo*, March 13th, 1958, p.8.

¹⁴⁷ John Belchem, *Merseypride: essays in Liverpool exceptionalism*, (Liverpool, 2000), preface p.xxxi.

¹⁴⁸ *Liverpool Echo*, March 13th, 1958, p.8.

patch of the central Liverpool urban environment. Cutting across this complex of identities are class, ethnicity and gender; from barrow boys to businessmen, Catholic Irish to Protestant Welsh and English, flower girls to ‘elegant’ ladies. Once again it is evident that the confidence of the former ‘Second City of Empire’ had not entirely dissipated. It is claimed that in many respects Liverpool could only be rivalled by London, and that other implicitly ‘lesser’ provincial cities were lacking in their variety and distinctiveness in almost every department up to and including their propensity for vice. Even the column’s title, ‘Liverpool: It’s The World In Miniature’¹⁴⁹, suggests the veracity of Belchem’s assertion that Liverpool is ‘In the north of England but not of it.’¹⁵⁰

Admittedly, in view of Edward Royle’s injunction concerning the need for the historian of regional, and presumably local or national, identity to work from ‘the bottom up’, this panegyric from someone who was obviously a member of the upper reaches of Liverpool society ought not to be taken at face value. However, while on one hand his account of the city’s cultural cosmopolitanism might be taken as another example of the promotion of cultural assets to mask Liverpool’s waning political and economic independence (the declining urban variable), on the other, much in his depiction chimes with contemporary descriptions and the observations of historians. Moreover, it should be remembered that between 1956 and 1965, the urban landscape of Liverpool was in the throes of dramatic upheaval. Slum clearance programmes in and around the central area were transforming or eradicating completely many traditional working-class areas and dissolving boundaries long associated with particular ethnic, religious, and sectarian cultural identities.

The veteran Labour MP for Liverpool Exchange ward, Bessie Braddock, wrote in 1963 that, ‘So much of Liverpool’s slums have gone that the remainder stand out all the more clearly.’ Fifty thousand people had already been relocated eight miles from the centre on the Kirkby estate by 1959.¹⁵¹ In terms of Counce’s ‘set of strong and very local identities’ the significance of this disruption cannot be overestimated, indeed, although this was a pattern that was repeated in all the major Northern cities throughout the decade, the effects of the dilution of that peculiarly Irish scouse identity personified by the ‘Scottie-Road slummy’ at

¹⁴⁹ This use of ‘cosmopolitanism’ to promote Liverpool was repeated most recently in the Capital of Culture 2008 bid – ‘the world in one city’.

¹⁵⁰ John Belchem, ‘A city apart: Liverpool, Merseyside and the North West region’, in Bill Lancaster, Diana Newton and Natasha Vall (eds.), *An Agenda for Regional History*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007), p.218.

¹⁵¹ Jack and Bessie Braddock, *The Braddocks*, (London, 1963), pp.121-22.

the core of the city were arguably amongst the most profound. The sentiments expressed by a woman who had recently occupied a new house in Kirkby in the late '60s conveyed the opinion of many that, 'They should have moved whole streets together from Liverpool to Kirkby instead of throwing people together from different streets – communities would have been kept intact.'¹⁵² A doctor on one estate identified what he called 'suburban sickness' affecting young women looking after young children, who 'might not see anyone to talk to all day.' It should be pointed out that despite a widespread longing, especially amongst older people, for the sense of community that was lost, very few people wanted to abandon their new homes and return to the slums. Mrs Alice Jones told the *Echo*, 'The people who want to go back couldn't have lived like we lived, in a rat-hole.'¹⁵³ Nevertheless, there was a definite sense that something was being lost as well as gained, something as intangible as community and identity. Interviewed in 1958, the Scotland Road-born 'crooner', Frankie Vaughan, who had recently been voted 'Show Business Personality of 1957' by the Variety Club of Great Britain, lamented that, 'the district where I was born, once teeming with exciting humanity, is now almost desolate – drab, decaying, with bricked up houses.'¹⁵⁴ Vaughan also discussed his regret at the demise of the overhead railway – the 'dockers' umbrella' – closed in 1956, and in the same year the forced relocation of Codman's Punch and Judy show from its traditional patch on Lime Street and the closure of Paddy's Market as part of the latest attempt to clear the centre of barrow boys and street traders. This was all done in preparation for the celebrations planned to mark Liverpool's 750th anniversary, but also to inaugurate a 'wave of urban renewal' inspired by the civic confidence born of 'a city experiencing a significant economic revival with unprecedented levels of affluence for a great many of its citizens' – symbolised by Epstein's statue for Lewis's department store – 'Liverpool Resurgent'.¹⁵⁵ The important point is that many of Liverpool's diverse and deeply entrenched identities were in the process of transition in the period beginning in 1956. These identities were no longer as fixed or certain as the city librarian, Dr Chandler's portrayal might suggest.

¹⁵² R. Meegan, 'Paradise Postponed: The Growth and Decline of Merseyside's Outer Estates', in P. Cooke (ed.), *Localities: The Changing Face of Urban Britain*, (London, 1989), p.203, cited in, John Murden, 'City of Change and Challenge: Liverpool since 1945', in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), p.417.

¹⁵³ *Liverpool Echo*, December 12th, 1960, p.14.

¹⁵⁴ *Liverpool Echo*, March 8th, 1958, '4 pages for the week-end', p.1.

¹⁵⁵ John Belchem, 'Introduction: Celebrating Liverpool' and John Murden, 'City of Change and Challenge: Liverpool since 1945', in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), pp.48, 402.

Nonetheless, although identities were being decentred and dispersed, that does not mean they were disappearing. Those Liverpudlians, whackers or scousers who were transplanted managed it seems, if not to take their communities, then to take their identity with them. Writer, broadcaster, and ‘deeply committed Liverpudlian’ Frank Shaw provided an illuminating insight into the distinction between ‘Scousers’ and the ‘Liverpolitans’ he clearly despised:

The Scousers, whackers, Frisby Dykes, Dicky Sams, even with their vile catarrhal accent (in which they can be truly witty; it's the Irish in them), are my sort.

From those vile slum houses stretched along the waterfront, ugly warrens facing our lovely Mersey, comes a strange and lovely quality, of courage and humour and friendliness, which I find ever-refreshing. I hate our soul-killing garden suburbs.

They are greater folk than the Cockneys, just as our city is not just a provincial seaport but a second metropolis.

The Poles, the people of our great parks and fine houses, the Tunnel, the Cathedral, the airports and the big new trading estates and wide roads, are such that you could meet everywhere; they say, through their noses, just what you would hear in Southampton or New York. Their minds keep in the ready-made rut, their customs are copies, their life a mimicry.

They support the clergy, join secret societies, have a dinner-suit in the wardrobe, have gardens, cars, ulcers, ambition and a forgetfulness of death like anyone anyplace. You can keep them.¹⁵⁶

Shaw then, clearly identifies two ‘Liverpools’ separated by class and socio-economic status, geographical location, ethnicity, religion, habits, humour, accent, and all-round world view. Set alongside this depiction there is Belchem’s Liverpool, transformed by ‘long distance immigration...setting it apart from its environs: [where] through Celtic and other inputs, scouse was to evolve as a new and different culture, alien to the inhabitants of surrounding parts of Lancashire and Cheshire.’¹⁵⁷

In addition, and in spite of the city fathers’ propensity for talking Liverpool ‘up’ in the local press, it is necessary to acknowledge the part played by the often negative constructions of Liverpool, and more particularly working-class or ‘scouse’ identities, both internal and external. As Belchem has pointed out, these ambivalent representations have very often been

¹⁵⁶ Frank Shaw, *My Liverpool*, (Liverpool, 1971), p.15.

¹⁵⁷ John Belchem, ‘A city apart: Liverpool, Merseyside and the North West region’, in Bill Lancaster, Diana Newton and Natasha Vall (eds.), *An Agenda for Regional History*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007), p.222.

articulated in debates surrounding the origins and nature of the scouse accent. He maintains that the ‘images, myths, and stereotypes’ that have persisted even into the twenty-first century and entered the national psyche through endless repetition in assorted media, can be traced back to the 1880s when the ‘demonisation’ of the Scotland Road district began. The classic scouse stereotype was built around the notion of the feckless Irish slum dweller, too lazy and lacking in motivation to find regular employment or move on to the New World like so many of his compatriots who passed through Liverpool in the wake of the Potato Famine.¹⁵⁸

During the 1950s and ‘60s, professional flautist and author of *Lern Yerself Scouse*, Fritz Spiegl, along with fellow Liverpudlian ‘culture broker’ Frank Shaw, attempted to rehabilitate the image of the ‘scouser’: Shaw in celebrating the language and accent, Spiegl by collecting and presenting traditional Liverpool folk songs. Their efforts were seen to be in tune with those of local government and the Chamber of Commerce during the 1950s when there was a concerted effort to attract new industry and investment to Merseyside. However, despite the assurances of Jack Braddock, Labour council leader, that the city’s workforce had shown remarkable adaptability to the unfamiliar forms of employment in the factories of the new industrial estates, the old stereotypes quickly re-emerged when firms began to close. It was suggested that difficulties arose ‘as the independent culture and mindset of the docker were translocated into the new industries.’ In actual fact, according to John Murden, ‘one of the great failures of the industrial relocation programme was the lack of jobs it provided for the archetypal unskilled male ex-docker who dominated the remaining unemployed of Liverpool in the 1960s.’¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, regardless of the ‘real’ reasons for the closures, which were rooted in short-sighted investment policy and perhaps in part in the very myth of ‘celtic truculence’ itself, the label of ‘scouse militancy’ in industrial relations stuck.¹⁶⁰

Looking back from the 1980s, the decade that represents the nadir of Liverpool’s economic fortunes, Spiegl lamented that the accent had become ‘more associated with militant shop stewards on television than comedians of old.’ What Belchem termed his once ‘innovative celebration of culture from below’ had long since mutated into nostalgia for a scouse heritage

¹⁵⁸ John Belchem, *Merseypride: essays in Liverpool exceptionalism*, (Liverpool, 2000), pp.56-57.

¹⁵⁹ John Belchem, ‘Introduction: Celebrating Liverpool’ and John Murden, ‘City of Change and Challenge: Liverpool since 1945’, in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), pp.49-50, 410.

¹⁶⁰ John Belchem, *Merseypride: essays in Liverpool exceptionalism*, (Liverpool, 2000), p.55.

that displayed a deep ‘hostility to modernity.’¹⁶¹ Spiegl wrote that, ‘While the good, old-fashioned Scouse people have lost none of their charm, wit and friendliness, those disposed to evil-doing have, alas, got worse.’¹⁶² What is of particular interest for the purposes of this investigation is his argument, which echoes similar ‘Thatcherite’ denunciations of the ‘cultural revolution’; that the rot set in during the sixties. Indeed, much of the blame it seems lies with the Beatles, who, ‘As hero-worshipped drug-abusers...stand condemned along with other exponents of the Mersey sound, and the accompanying (but soon southern-based) ‘professional scousers’, the novelists, poets and playwrights of the 1960s Mersey boom.’ In this way, Belchem argues, the ‘heritage scouse’ of Spiegl and his ilk ‘has thus reinforced external perceptions of ‘self-inflicted’ decline in Liverpool’.¹⁶³ It should be fascinating to observe as these themes are developed in subsequent chapters, which of the many available ‘scouse’ identities the young people of Liverpool adopted most readily, or perhaps appropriated interchangeably according to purpose, time and place.

The picture of Liverpool and the surrounding Merseyside region that has emerged thus far is one in which this ‘long distance in-migration’ of largely Celtic peoples did indeed appear to set the city and region apart. All the more so because, unlike the other Northern conurbations that ‘grew out of conglomerations of small towns and villages, augmented by short-distance rural in-migration which tended to reinforce their culture, character, status (and speech patterns) as regional centres’¹⁶⁴, Liverpool expanded outwards into a virtually unpopulated cultural vacuum until it reached ‘the fault line between ‘Scouser’ and ‘woollyback’’.¹⁶⁵ In the words of Liverpoolian music journalist and author, Paul Du Noyer, Liverpool is ‘deeply insular, yet essentially outward-looking: it faces the sea and all the lands beyond, but has its back turned on England.’¹⁶⁶ As the sources have shown, within Merseyside there existed a

¹⁶¹ John Belchem, ‘Introduction: Celebrating Liverpool’, in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), pp.49-50.

¹⁶² Fritz Spiegl, *Lern Yerself Scouse, vol.4: Scally Scouse*, (Liverpool, 1989), pp.5-10, quoted in John Belchem, *Merseypride: essays in Liverpool exceptionalism*, (Liverpool, 2000), p.53.

¹⁶³ John Belchem, *Merseypride: essays in Liverpool exceptionalism*, (Liverpool, 2000), p.54.

¹⁶⁴ John Belchem, ‘A city apart: Liverpool, Merseyside and the North West region’, in Bill Lancaster, Diana Newton and Natasha Vall (eds.), *An Agenda for Regional History*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007), p.222.

¹⁶⁵ Stuart Maconie, *Pies and Prejudice: In Search of the North*, (London, 2008), p.61. Maconie suggests that, ‘If you want to be specific...’woollyback’ means those sooty Lancashire textile towns to the east and north of Liverpool. Wigan is the crucible of all things woollyback.’ Maconie, *op. cit.* p.59. For a light-hearted attempt to account for the origins of the term, pp.59-60.

¹⁶⁶ Paul Du Noyer, *Liverpool, Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2002), p.5.

rich diversity of culture and deep-rooted identities which were in the process of considerable disruption and transition during the period under investigation.

Newcastle and North-East Identity

As in the sources for Liverpool and Merseyside, when examining those relating to Newcastle, Tyneside and the North East it is possible to detect a self-conscious sense of cultural isolation. What is noticeable is that while there is evidence to be found in the local newspapers of resentment at the often ‘just plain wrong’ perceptions of (nearly always Southern) outsiders about the region, the North East and Newcastle are defended and portrayed in a far less bullish manner than was customary on Merseyside. In response to the recent appointment of George Chetwynd as director of the North-East Industrial Development Council, and his fears that key workers from London might be persuaded from taking up posts in the region because of their wives’ concerns about moving to an area that was ‘uncivilised’, Newcastle’s *Sunday Sun* decided to find out what said housewives really thought. The journalist duly reported that their ‘staggering misconceptions’ included the following: ‘If the North-East built ships it must be on Merseyside because Tyneside is in Scotland. The Geordies live in Scotland too.’ Also, ‘People who live in Newcastle are called “scouses”. It is always raining in Newcastle.’ The article concluded that ‘almost without exception the ordinary married woman living in London is abysmally ignorant of the area. As far as she is concerned the North-East of England might be a foreign country.’¹⁶⁷ This none too serious and woefully unscientific journalistic exercise partially disguises the fact that perhaps *the* major theme in local newspaper coverage of matters pertaining to culture and identity was one that expressed anxiety about the North-East region as a whole – not Newcastle in particular – being isolated and consequently misunderstood and overlooked. As undisputed regional capital, Newcastle – the city, did not feel the need to defend itself from or promote itself over neighbouring rivals as did Liverpool and Manchester or Bradford and Leeds. When debating external perceptions of the region Newcastle’s newspapers and many of their readers appeared comfortable throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s in speaking as ‘Geordies’ for the wider North East usually in dialogue with the South and invariably London. Perhaps unsurprisingly given that the underlying theme was generally economic inequality, the North-East’s contribution to this dialogue often adopted a defensive tone. Eager to dispel external images of a region spoilt by slag heaps and populated by the

¹⁶⁷ Newcastle *Sunday Sun*, January 21st, 1962, p.1.

undernourished unemployed, its residents invoked the character of its people and the beauty of its countryside; cultural and physical assets Southerners ought but failed to appreciate.

In his letter of reply to the *Sunday Sun* piece, the afore-mentioned George Chetwynd stated that, 'In the great depression, many North-East folk were forced to go South in search of work and must have helped, unwittingly, to spread through their contacts, a gloomy impression of the place they had left behind.' Seemingly then, Southern misapprehensions about life in the North East were the fault of North-Easterners themselves, but nonetheless, the paper had 'raised a point which is vital to the region', the fact that 'What we are like, and even where we are, is a matter of complete ignorance to many.' As it was his job to bring new industry and skills to the region he assured the reader that he would be dealing with 'the problem of educating the Southerner...no simple task', by explaining that, 'We are not a far off, unsightly land of depression, but are richly endowed with natural beauty, with lovely coastline, valleys and moors.'¹⁶⁸ Readers' responses ranged from earnest suggestions as to how Southerners might be better educated, to encomia extolling the virtues of a Northern education. Viewed with the benefit of hindsight, a remarkably foresighted example of the former came from someone who described himself as 'a Novocastrian resident in London for 26 years' who proposed a four-point plan to 'remove these misconceptions about the North-East.' He called for 'network documentary programmes on BBC and ITV about the North-East' and 'Publicity posters in British Railways and London Underground stations', but once again the only positive characteristics of the region he could name were its 'beauty spots' which he felt should be publicised with the help of the British Travel and Holidays Association.¹⁶⁹ There are many other examples in which the region's rural and coastal peculiarities are served up and celebrated presumably for the perceived lack of much else of cultural value. Those aspects of an essentially working-class cultural heritage and identity that are so readily acknowledged and promoted by the culture industry of today were apparently not then, at least not in the local press.

Admittedly, the insights of highly paid bureaucrats, newspaper journalists and the largely professional middle-class readership who most often responded to these articles cannot be taken as wholly representative of the culture and identities to be found in the North East, Tyneside or Newcastle. It should also be acknowledged that this type of discourse tended to be aired publicly when there was economic anxiety as in the early 1960s when many 'baby

¹⁶⁸ Newcastle *Sunday Sun*, February 4th, 1962, p.6.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p.6.

boomers' entered the job market and opted to move south in search of higher wages and greater job security than the ailing indigenous manufacturing industries could offer. However, the general tendency of the North East to compare and contrast itself with the South East rather than any other part of the country is surely indicative of a sense of political, economic, and cultural isolation even from the 'Near North' and provides no evidence of a consciously recognised 'Greater North' in the region. When people in the region used the term 'The North' they were usually talking about the North East.

It now becomes necessary to look for evidence as to the nature of culture and identity within the North East, and particularly within Tyneside and Newcastle in an attempt to discover the region 'from below'. Bill Lancaster has stated that, 'Newcastle is the capital because it lacks rivals and has historically been allowed to impose its cultural imperialism upon the region.'¹⁷⁰ Gateshead has always struggled to assert itself and the nearest serious rival, Sunderland, though rivalry certainly existed – notably in shipbuilding and football, has never been able to compete either commercially or as a cultural centre. Indeed, it has been argued that the oft-cited animosities between the cities' football fans and the resultant wider Tyne/Wear tensions have their origins in post-1960s hooliganism, which would make them meaningless here.¹⁷¹ Sunderland, when mentioned at all in the Newcastle press, is portrayed in a generally positive light, as are all other towns in the region. It seems likely that a less hostile form of rivalry was more common for the period, the ubiquitous territorial disputes between gangs of Teddy boys notwithstanding, which in any case were usually conducted at a more local level. As good an example as any of the way in which the language of Geordie/Mackem antipathy could be employed comes from Eric Burdon's use of it to describe the competitive nature of his relationship with Alan Price in the Animals, an avowedly Newcastle group:

*Alan was not a native son, which means he was from the twin city of Sunderland. This meant Alan supported the Sunderland football club instead of Newcastle's United. And he drank Sunderland's Double Maxim beer rather than the famous Newcastle Brown. As petty as this sounds, in terms of the Newcastle of my youth, this was quite a distinction.*¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Bill Lancaster, 'Newcastle – capital of what?', Rob Colls and Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism*, (2nd edition, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2005), p.57.

¹⁷¹ Bill Lancaster, 'The North East, England's most distinctive region?', in Bill Lancaster, Diana Newton and Natasha Vall (eds.), *An Agenda for Regional History*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007), p.33.

¹⁷² Eric Burdon with J. Marshall Craig, *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood*, (New York, 2001), p.12. According to Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks, The Story of the Animals: Newcastle's Rising Sons*, (London, 2001), p.16, Price was born in Fairfield, County Durham. *The Newcastle Evening*

Most likely he was using this as a device with which to conceal deeper feelings in much the same way as a Yorkshireman might account for another's shortcomings by his being a Lancastrian. Without wishing to pretend to any knowledge of psychology, it seems probable that such macho posturing amounted to little more than a means of avoiding direct personal confrontation. Nonetheless, as Lancaster has suggested, the rivalry between Sunderland and Newcastle 'is rooted in two places in the *same* region and its existence does not deny, but rather reinforces the reality of the region.'¹⁷³

As the Tyneside conurbation expanded as both an industrial and urban complex throughout the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, what Michael Barke called 'a multiplicity of small local authorities' emerged that were both mutually antagonistic but also resentful of Newcastle Corporation's hold on the globally significant coal trade. Thus, whilst economic coherence along the banks of the Tyne 'hinted at unity...the river also served to separate' and exacerbate 'petty' political rivalries.¹⁷⁴ Bill Lancaster has pointed out that contrary to popular misconception, while it is true that 'the city became fat on the region's muck and toil', Newcastle was not an industrial centre but thrived as a centre of commerce and consumption.¹⁷⁵ This is the most important factor when explaining the city's status as capital, not only of the region, but also of its culture. Jarrow-born writer, Alan Plater, is surely right when he says that 'Geordies don't live in Newcastle; they live in Heaton, Byker or Gosforth'¹⁷⁶, and for that matter you could include Whitley Bay, Tynemouth and South Shields, but for all that these local identities can be said and proven to exist, Newcastle provides the centripetal cultural force that binds those identities together (See Appendix, Maps: Fig. 2).

This wider Geordie identity and the popular culture that was both its source and its product was unarguably working class, having developed through the process of industrialisation and nurtured in the very male environments of the pit, shipyard and engineering works. This was

Chronicle, August 8th, 1964, Leisure Guide p.ii, notes that he was a pupil of Jarrow Grammar School where his parents still lived, and attests to the fact that he supported Sunderland FC which would not be considered unusual for someone from Jarrow – on Tyneside but the south side – then or now.

¹⁷³ Bill Lancaster, 'The North East, England's most distinctive region?', in Bill Lancaster, Diana Newton and Natasha Vall (eds.), *An Agenda for Regional History*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007), p.33.

¹⁷⁴ Michael Barke, 'Newcastle/Tyneside 1890-1980', in George Gordon, *Regional Cities in the UK 1890-1980*, (London, 1986), pp.117-21.

¹⁷⁵ Bill Lancaster, 'Newcastle – capital of what?', Rob Colls and Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism*, (2nd edition, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2005), p.55.

¹⁷⁶ Alan Plater, Foreword to, Sid Chaplin, *The Day of the Sardine*, (Hexham, 2004).

still very much the case in the 1950s and '60s, although employment patterns were changing. In comparison with Liverpool's traditional casual labour force exemplified by the Irish or 'scouse' docker, Tyneside was conspicuous for its organised, skilled and semi-skilled labour. Also, aside from older historical factors such as the survival of Catholicism amongst the landed gentry, the organised and formal nature of much of the North-East's traditional employment structures may to some extent account for the relatively untroubled integration of Irish immigrants into the region from the mid-nineteenth century. Until recently this was an overlooked aspect of Tyneside, and indeed Irish migration history, however, a recently published study has shown that although Irish 'entry into unions was delayed by their [subordinate] position in the workforce and by combined socio-religious factors, when the opportunity...emerged...on the shop floor...Paddy met Geordie on terms not untoward.'¹⁷⁷ To be sure, much further research would be needed in order to establish how far assimilation extended into the region's associational culture, epitomised by its prodigious network of social and working-men's clubs, but as a recent estimate put the percentage of turn-of-the-millennium Tynesiders of Irish descent at more than 20%, it must have been quite some way.¹⁷⁸ All of this is to make the point that, perhaps because sectarian tensions and violence did not feature in the Irish experience in the North East to the extent that they did most notably in Liverpool and Glasgow, 'Irish-ness' was nevertheless still very much an element of Tyneside/Newcastle's cultural heritage if markedly less visible than its 'scouse' counterpart.

During the late 1950s and particularly through the '60s Newcastle and Tyneside underwent similar upheaval to all other major Northern cities. Employment in the region's traditional industries had become less certain or secure and slum clearance projects radically altered and sometimes erased longstanding neighbourhood loyalties. The most prominent and controversial figure in this period was undoubtedly the Labour councillor T. Dan Smith who, in 1958, appointed Wilfred Burns as Newcastle's Chief Planning Officer with a brief to produce a comprehensive redevelopment plan for the city.¹⁷⁹ Both were influenced by the utopian ideals of Le Corbusier and intended their proposed 'Brasilia of the North' as

¹⁷⁷ Roger Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie: The Irish in County Durham and Newcastle 1840-1880*, (Sunderland, 2005), p.142. The research was actually carried out for a Durham University Masters' thesis in the 1970s but not published until 2005.

¹⁷⁸ David Byrne, 'Immigrants and the Formation of the North East Industrial Working Class', *North East Labour History*, 30, (1996), cited in Bill Lancaster, 'Sociability and the City', in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle Upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001), p.329.

¹⁷⁹ David Byrne, 'The Reconstruction of Newcastle: Planning since 1945', in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001), p.343.

symbolic of a resurgent Newcastle of raised walkways and underpasses segregating pedestrians and traffic amid high-rise tower blocks.¹⁸⁰ At a time when the notion of ‘planner as expert’ in all things from road engineer to social engineer was widely accepted, Burns felt no compunction in stating that, ‘It is our belief...that social rehabilitation as well as physical revitalization is required if urban renewal is to be fully effective.’¹⁸¹ In practice this meant that many working-class communities were broken up and shipped out to peripheral estates and New Towns with significant consequences for the coherence and continuity of local culture and identities with longstanding attachments to particular central areas such as Shieldfield, Byker and Scotswood Road. As Brian Bennison points out, the traditional association between the working man, pub, and neighbourhood was especially affected during the 1960s when disappearing sign-boards were also symbolic of more fundamental change: ‘gone were the *Gun*, the *Rifle*, the *Hydraulic Crane*, the *Moulders*, the *Shipwrights* and the *Mechanics*, and in came names indicative perhaps of a more refined past, the *Runnymede*, the *Turnpike* and *Howlett Hall*.¹⁸²

This is not to suggest that Smith and his fellow councillors weren’t genuine in their aspirations towards a more ‘modern’ and prosperous Newcastle. In fact Smith’s enthusiastic promotion of regionalism can, with hindsight, be viewed as remarkably prescient in his recognition of the need to recast the region’s depressed heavy industrial image to ‘reflect the consciousness of an age of increasing leisure.’¹⁸³ However, it is also surely somewhat ironic that his equally enthusiastic calls for a celebration of Newcastle’s popular culture to mark the 1962 centenary of the Blaydon Races came at a time when the communities along the route the parade was scheduled to take were rapidly disappearing. Thus, as the *Evening Chronicle* reminded its readers, the places recalled in the famous song such as Scotswood Road and Paradise contained ‘nothing to sing or laugh about...streets that are crumbling in decay...almost as if they were trying to get away from it all.’¹⁸⁴ Some ratepayers were not convinced that the Council had its spending priorities right; in arguing against rate increases

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Faulkner, ‘Architecture in Newcastle’, in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001), p.244.

¹⁸¹ Wilfred Burns, *Newcastle: A Study in Replanning at Newcastle upon Tyne*, (London, 1967), p.68.

¹⁸² Brian Bennison, ‘Drink in Newcastle’, in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001), p.187. Armstrong’s engineering works produced armaments hence ‘the *Gun*’ etc.

¹⁸³ T. Dan Smith, *An Autobiography*, (1970), p.80, quoted in Natasha Vall, ‘The Emergence of the Post-Industrial Economy in Newcastle 1914-2000’, in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001), p.65.

¹⁸⁴ *Evening Chronicle*, June 9th, 1962, quoted in Bill Lancaster, ‘Sociability and the City’, in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001), p.338.

to fund ‘luxury class homes’ in outlying North Kenton when the waiting list for council housing remained inordinately long, the question was asked as to whether ‘these fantastically costly schemes...of our civic leaders’ were the product of ‘an honest sense of responsibility and local pride.’ It was suggested that, ‘instead of the Blaydon Races...“Why Not Take All Of Me”’ ought to be ‘the signature tune for the city bells.’ Whether lambasted by his detractors as ‘Fuehrer’ or acclaimed by admirers as ‘Mr. Newcastle’ Smith remains an ambiguous and contradictory figure for historians.¹⁸⁵ Nonetheless, in spite of his subsequent fall from grace, his contribution, and that of certain others ‘who served as impresarios of the post-war Geordie cultural revival’¹⁸⁶, must be deemed integral to what Lancaster has called a ‘1960s renaissance of [North-East] cultural awareness [which] witnessed an unprecedented degree of affinity between politics and culture.’¹⁸⁷

In view of all that has thus far come to light it is possible to put forward some tentative suggestions in answer to the questions that this chapter has raised. Much fuller answers will hopefully become possible as the themes of culture and identity are pursued through subsequent chapters but it is as well to pause for a moment and take stock. Amongst civic leaders, cultural commentators, journalists and their readers in the North it has been shown that an awareness of the wider region did exist in the 1950s and ‘60s. However, in accordance with John Walton, it can be argued that ‘a wider and more nebulous entity called ‘The North’’ was most often invoked when Northerners were ‘presenting themselves to others’.¹⁸⁸ This is not to deny the existence of ‘a sense of pride in belonging to something individuals call the ‘North’’, something which as Russell observes, ‘is an insistent part of the historical record.’¹⁸⁹ Nonetheless, it is the contention here that any identification with this wider ‘North’ is secondary to sub-regional and local identities and was generally applied in opposition to the ‘South’ as illustrated in the usage of the North/South paradigm in the

¹⁸⁵ *Evening Chronicle*, February 10th, 1965, p.6.

¹⁸⁶ Bill Lancaster, ‘Sociability and the City’, in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001), p.337.

¹⁸⁷ Bill Lancaster, ‘The North East, England’s most distinctive region?’, in Bill Lancaster, Diana Newton and Natasha Vall (eds.), *An Agenda for Regional History*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007), p.38.

¹⁸⁸ J. K. Walton, *Doing comparative social history: north-west England and the Basque Country from the 1830s to the 1930s*, (Lancaster, 1996), quoted in Dave Russell, ‘Culture and the formation of northern English identities from c.1850’, in Bill Lancaster, Diana Newton and Natasha Vall (eds.), *An Agenda for Regional History*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007), pp.274-75.

¹⁸⁹ Dave Russell, ‘Culture and the formation of northern English identities from c.1850’, in Bill Lancaster, Diana Newton and Natasha Vall (eds.), *An Agenda for Regional History*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007), p.275.

examples given above. Even in this context 'The North' was seemingly most often used as a term of convenience when referring to a specific sub-region or locality and to the North East in particular. Aside from this oppositional construct of 'The North' the wider North might be said to exist by virtue of the rivalries within it just as Lancaster claims the coherence of the North East is attested to by that between Sunderland and Newcastle. In this sense it does appear that the North is best described as a composite of numerous, sometimes antagonistic, identities manifest at county, city, and even neighbourhood level. As such 'The North' existed between 1956 and 1965, as did the 'Near North', the North East or Merseyside, both because of and in spite of the diversity of identities and rivalries each contained. Just as it has been suggested that Liverpool is 'in the North of England but not of it', so it could be claimed that Newcastle, Tyneside and the North East more widely are in the North of England but isolated from it.

As to the remaining components of Russell's initial question, the issue of national identity lies beyond the brief of this study although that of class, and for that matter, those of ethnicity and gender are inextricably entwined with and cut across both the imagined spaces and objective realities of Northern culture and identity. In order to explore these complexities further it will become necessary to progress to a study of the interplay between Melly's 'popular culture', some Northern aspects of which have been described here, and the 'pop culture' which, despite its having deep roots in the British cultural experience, made such an unprecedented impact in the period after 1956. Before this can be accomplished, the roots of youth culture and pop culture must be examined.

Chapter Three: Youth Culture, Music Culture

It is not the intention in this chapter simply to repeat what has been recorded elsewhere in innumerable publications of varying quality, namely the history of British youth and music culture between 1956 and 1965. Besides being well rehearsed at a national level its history will be addressed in this study at the regional/urban/suburban/local level in the chapters devoted to Liverpool and Newcastle and need not be reiterated here. The relevant academic works on the subject will inform what follows, as will many of those written by less scholarly writers; the aim being to broadly trace the origins of youth and popular music culture on both sides of the Atlantic so as to arrive at an understanding of their condition in Britain circa 1956. The word ‘condition’ being used in the sense of the dictionary definition, ‘a state of affairs that must exist before something else is possible’. A further aim is to resume engagement with the arguments outlined in the opening chapter which will necessitate discussion of the period as a whole but should nevertheless remain readily comprehensible in the context in which they are presented. The object of the concluding section is to provide a brief chronological overview of the developments in British popular music making between 1956 and 1965 whilst at the same time introducing the theoretical perspectives of certain scholars from the fields of musicology, sociology and cultural studies in order to assess their usefulness in the analysis of those developments.

It has thus far been suggested that for analytical purposes the use of George Melly’s distinction between ‘popular culture’ and ‘pop culture’ can be useful as it provides a conceptual ‘way in’ to an exploration of the problematical field of culture and its relationship with economic and social – structural – forces in the process of historical change. An examination of this relationship will in turn lead to a consideration of the interplay between structure and agency and culture and agency in that process. In short, at the appropriate juncture it will become necessary to address certain theoretical issues as a means to explain and account for the part played by human agency in the process of social and cultural continuity and change – how individuals and groups of individuals can make a difference – or not. It will be argued that for the period 1956 to 1965 the development of ‘pop culture’ as defined here was an integral part of that process, as was ‘popular culture’ and, for this study, particularly those elements of it that constituted *Northern* popular culture and the various identities that were the subject of the previous chapter. The following section is therefore concerned with defining and interpreting ‘pop culture’ and to some extent with what might be described as the reciprocal influences between it and ‘popular culture’. It should be

remembered that these terms are employed here as conceptual tools in the interests of analytical clarity, the efficacy of which should become apparent in the ensuing discussion of youth and music culture.

Once again it is the intention to trace the origins of youth culture and the music culture of young people both in order to provide the historical context for the emergence of pop culture and as one means towards answering the broader question of ‘cultural revolution’ – yes or no. To begin with, this will involve an engagement with the points raised by Melly in his account of British pop culture beginning in the mid-1950s with his argument that:

It was against a great deal, but for nothing. It was parasitic rather than creative, and motivated by material envy. The explanation for this unpromising start lies in another important difference between the two cultures. Popular culture, although naturally subject to regional differences and increasingly corrupted by the early mass media and the spread of gentility, had grown slowly and naturally from a settled if frequently deplorable environment. Early British pop was confined entirely to cosmopolitan working-class adolescents. The soil it sprang from was poor and sour, enclosed on one side by a brief and inadequate education, and on the other by conscription into the forces. The seed had been planted during the war when circumstances had broken down the old working-class patterns, and it was fertilized by the big money from dead-end jobs. It is therefore hardly surprising that its first flowering should have seemed rank if vigorous. It was called Rock ‘n’ Roll.¹⁹⁰

From these inauspicious beginnings he claims that by the time of writing the introduction to *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, at the end of 1966, ‘whereas the old popular culture altered very slowly and appealed throughout its long history to basically the same class, pop has rapidly permeated all strata of society, and at the same time succeeded in blurring the boundaries between itself and traditional or high culture.’¹⁹¹ These are bold claims, and in the context of this inquiry ones that raise significant points of contention, not least with the argument that forms the central thesis of Dominic Sandbrook’s recent history which, in its insistence that commentators and historians of the period have privileged change at the expense of continuity, somewhat ironically echoes John Lennon’s acerbic conclusion that ‘nothing happened [in the sixties] except that we all dressed up.’¹⁹² In a related argument, David Fowler takes issue with Melly and other ‘middle-class ‘with it’ journalists and

¹⁹⁰ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, (London, 2008), p.2.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* p.2.

¹⁹² Jan Wenner (ed.), *Lennon Remembers: The Rolling Stone Interviews*, quoted in Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), preface p.xxiii.

academics' of the sixties who he maintains have 'misled both historians and sociologists into thinking that youth culture is a product of the 1950s and 1960s.' Moreover, Fowler insists that as a consequence, 'historical and sociological analysis of youth culture during the 1960s is based on a false premise: that pop culture was an expression of youth culture.'¹⁹³ In order to show that 'the 1960s never really saw a monolithic youth culture come to fruition in Britain' there are 'two powerful myths' that he insists must be debunked. The first concerns the notion 'that the Beatles created a cohesive youth culture', the second 'that British youth culture of the 1960s suddenly became 'classless' due to the impact of pop music.'¹⁹⁴ Despite the fact that the arguments he develops are historically located in the later 1960s it should become apparent that the questions they raise are of some significance for this work.

For both these historians then, continuity is the key to how in Fowler's judgement, 'youth culture developed in Britain over the course of the twentieth century by organic means', and did not simply appear in the mid-1950s as the 'myths of the novelty of 'postwar youth' [that] still survive in the works of reputable historians' suggest.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, as he sets out to rescue from 'the enormous condescension of innumerable historians...the lives of the kind of people...for whom the sixties might conjure up memories not of *Lady Chatterley*, the Pill and the Rolling Stones, but of bingo, Blackpool and Berni Inns', Sandbrook claims he is seeking to redress the imbalance brought about by the many books on the period that have portrayed youth culture as the exclusive province of 'a minority of well-educated, relatively affluent young people, precisely those people most likely to become writers, publishers [and] historians' themselves.¹⁹⁶ Initially at least, this argument appears to take up themes explored in the earlier work of Dave Harker who pointed out that the very fact that the soundtrack to *The Sound of Music* comfortably outsold and outstayed anything released by the Beatles – a fact that had been overlooked by popular music critics of all professions and disciplines – substantiated his wider argument that 'The people...have been left out of the 'popular'.' Harker felt that something should be done to rectify a situation in which 'the musical practices and tastes of most people – the working class – are marginalised or ignored in even

¹⁹³ David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c. 1920-c. 1970*, (Basingstoke, 2008), pp.196-97.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* pp.166-67.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* pp.197-98.

¹⁹⁶ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), preface pp.xxiii-xxiv.

the better critical accounts of periods like the 1960s.¹⁹⁷ Ultimately, it is hoped that a comparative historical study of the youth and popular music cultures of two such essentially working-class cities as Liverpool and Newcastle will not only prove to be an extremely rewarding means by which to test the veracity of the competing claims outlined above, but also that it will succeed in establishing an empirical basis upon which a peoples' history of the youth and popular music culture of the period can be founded. However, before focussing in on particular micro-histories it is necessary to define and account for these phenomena in a broader more generic sense – beginning with youth culture.

A Brief History of Youth Culture

A question that is implicit in the investigation of the impact of North American popular music in the North of England from 1956 is 'what or who exactly was being impacted upon?' What kind of youth culture existed in Britain prior to 1956 and of what was it comprised in terms of internal and external influences during the various stages of its development? There must follow a brief analysis of the history of youth culture in Britain. In *Teenage: The Creation of Youth 1875-1945*, Jon Savage has written what is probably the most comprehensive history of American and Western European youth culture to date. He chronicles its development only as far as 1945, which in terms of the American experience makes sense he maintains – assuming there is to be a second volume forthcoming – because by the end of the war a watershed had been reached in that country. The conclusions he draws from his observations of youth culture and the ways in which it was perceived in the US at that time highlight a number of salient points for an appraisal of British youth culture:

*The Allies won the war at exactly the moment that America's latest product was coming off the production line. Defined during 1944 and 1945, the Teenage had been researched and developed for a good fifty years, the period that marked America's rise to global power. The post-war spread of American values would be spearheaded by the idea of the Teenager. This new type was the ultimate psychic match for the times: living in the now, pleasure-seeking, product-hungry, embodying the new global society where social inclusion was to be granted through purchasing power. The future would be Teenage.*¹⁹⁸

Taken out of context this extract might at first glance appear as some sort of manifesto for American post-war economic and cultural imperialism, and on one level it could be argued

¹⁹⁷ Dave Harker, 'Still crazy after all these years: what was popular music in the 1960s?', in Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed (eds.), *Cultural Revolution? The challenge of the arts in the 1960s*, (London, 1992), pp.236-54.

¹⁹⁸ Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875-1945*, (London, 2008), Introduction p.465.

that that is precisely what it is, and what is more, that whether it was planned or not, it worked. On another level however, the actual historical development of a ‘Teenage future’ based on mass consumption has provoked debate and endless theorising amongst intellectuals – historians, sociologists, musicologists, cultural studies experts, and authors and commentators of every hue. As a result one of the central concerns of this study lies in the tensions between the notion of post-war British youth culture, with pop culture in the vanguard, as a productive, creative and unprecedented force for social change, and the idea that the development of youth and pop culture consisted of little more than the continuous economic exploitation and passive consumption of teenagers. Clearly there is much ground to be explored in the space opened up by these opposing viewpoints. Indeed, analysis and interpretation of the historical relationship between the pop music/entertainment/leisure industries and youth culture is vital to an understanding of post-war British society, a period during which, as Osgerby asserts, ‘youth’ became institutionalised as a social category and came to be viewed as a ‘spectacle’ associated with the emergent consumer culture, simultaneously a ‘problem’ and the embodiment of a new economic optimism.¹⁹⁹ There is a further tension that needs to be acknowledged between youth as a social construct – ‘a subjective set of cultural characteristics shaped by the social, economic and political conditions of a particular historical context’ – and as objective reality. As youth cannot exist objectively as a category beyond being a ‘physiological stage in the process of human development’²⁰⁰ it becomes important, not only to assess and interpret the use of youth as a category in the historical sources, but also to try and identify the actual young people who were being labelled. Before this can be done it is necessary to uncover something of the pre-history of the teenager.

Bill Osgerby has shown that the recurring themes of high wages for young workers who opted to take short-term casual jobs rather than those with long-term career prospects, the subsequent squandering of time and money on cheap literature (‘penny dreadfuls’), gambling and the music hall and the allegedly related problem of juvenile delinquency, were already Victorian and Edwardian concerns. ‘Youth culture’ as it was then perceived was from the beginning associated with the gradual increase in leisure time and disposable income of the urban working class as was ‘the nascent entertainment industry’ which began to provide ‘a

¹⁹⁹ Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), Chapter Four.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p.2.

range of goods and entertainments geared to the recreation and interests of young people.’²⁰¹ The Teddy boys of the 1950s were not the first example of teenage sartorial display as is evident from descriptions of the late nineteenth-century fashion for ‘the union shirt, bell-bottomed trousers, the heavy leather belt, picked out in fancy designs with the large steel buckle and the thick, iron-shod clogs’ favoured by gangs like the ‘scuttlers’ in Manchester or Birmingham’s ‘peaky blinders’.²⁰² During the exceptionally hot August bank holiday of 1898 disturbances in London involving ‘drunkenness, fighting, street robberies, and assaults on the police’ were sufficiently serious and widespread for the press to coin the term ‘hooligan’ with its obvious ‘pejorative Irish associations’ to describe any urban youth of working-class origin, often in hooligan ‘uniform’, engaged in gang related crime of any kind.²⁰³ Hobsbawm maintains that ‘between 1870 and 1900 the pattern of British working-class life which the writers, dramatists and TV producers of the 1950s thought of as ‘traditional’ came into being’, but this should not obscure what contemporary social surveys revealed of the often ‘horrifying...picture of a working class stunted and debilitated by a century of industrialism.’²⁰⁴ For this reason it should be remembered that whether it was the ‘Growler Gang’ in Manhattan, the ‘Apaches’ in Paris or the ‘High Rip’ in Liverpool, these were mostly desperately poor young men who ganged together to engage in petty crime as a means of subsistence.

Although their violent territorial disputes and displays of ‘uniformed’ solidarity might suggest continuity with 1950s Teddy boys, any similarities must be measured against the enormous economic and above all social transformation that occurred in the intervening period. Likewise, despite Osgerby’s claims for ‘a clearly discernible youth leisure market’ and a rudimentary entertainment industry emerging to service it, the evidence he provides amounts to little more than proof of working-class disposable income. The nineteen-year-old Manchester lad who, in 1905, had enough left out of the wages he received from his job at the iron foundry to spend on ‘clothes, gambling and the music halls’ does not constitute proof of

²⁰¹ Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), p.6.

²⁰² Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum*, (Harmondsworth, 1973), p.155, quoted in Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), p.7. The girlfriend of a ‘scuttler’ would also be distinctively attired ‘in clogs and shawl and a skirt with vertical stripes.’ According to Savage the term ‘scuttler’ from ‘scuttling’ originates in Lancashire where it ‘denoted the territorial fights enthusiastically held by neighbourhood gangs’, Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875-1945*, (London, 2008), p.43.

²⁰³ Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875-1945*, (London, 2008), p.44.

²⁰⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, (Revised edition, London, 1999), p.142.

a youth culture, particularly in view of the fact that all these activities could be said to be typical of working-class popular culture more generally.²⁰⁵

In America and Europe, late nineteenth-century press attention was focussed not on youth culture but on youth crime. Juvenile delinquency was portrayed as ‘a disturbing new phenomenon that brought savagery, if not actual war, right into the heart of the community.’ Views as to the solution to the problem ranged from ‘the improvement of inner urban conditions’ to ‘a swift despatch into the army, or, even better, the darkest colonial corners.’²⁰⁶ North America was faced with the most severe youth crime problem as a result of the massive growth of its urban population from 14 to 42 million between 1880 and 1910, a process described by a contemporary educationalist as ‘a revolution as rapid, extensive, and complete as any in history’ and a revolution in which, Savage insists, ‘youth was at the sharp end.’²⁰⁷ Just as the US authorities struggled desperately to cope with the social repercussions of this influx, so too in late nineteenth-century Britain where ‘urban industrial expansion still outstripped the spontaneous or planned attempts at urban improvement’²⁰⁸ the peculiarly ‘urban problem’ of youth became perpetually equated with and emblematic of wider social problems. From the ‘scuttlers’ to the Teddy boys and beyond this has remained the case.

Savage begins his account with a quote from an interview with John Lennon from 1966 in which he makes the telling observation: ‘America used to be the big youth place in everybody’s imagination. America had teenagers and everywhere else just had people.’²⁰⁹ Presumably Lennon was talking about his own and his contemporaries’ imaginations as they passed through adolescence in 1950s Liverpool, but the fascination of British youth with all things American and therefore ‘modern’ had a long history even then. Recalling his teenage years in Newcastle the author Jack Common wrote that during the ‘dark days of the deadlocked Great War One, a curious emigration was taking place. The popular imagination was now emigrant to America and the moving-picture was its Mayflower.’ Coming from his novel *The Ampersand* which was first published in 1954 on the eve of Britain’s love affair

²⁰⁵ C. E. B. Russell, ‘Manchester boys: sketches of Manchester lads at work’, cited in Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), p.6.

²⁰⁶ Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875-1945*, (London, 2008), p.48.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p.36. The educationalist was John Dewey.

²⁰⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, (Revised edition, London, 1999), pp.136-7. Hobsbawm provides some statistics: ‘London grew from just over two million inhabitants in 1841 to just under five million in 1881; Sheffield from 111,000 to 285,000, Nottingham from 52,000 to 187,000, Salford from 53,000 to 176,000, though already the Lancashire cities grew more slowly.’

²⁰⁹ ‘John Lennon’ in, *The Beatles Anthology*, (London, 2000), p.10, quoted in Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875-1945*, (London, 2008), Introduction p.xiii.

with rock ‘n’ roll his evocation of what America meant to the cinema-goers of 1918 is worthy of fuller quotation:

*America was then a bright land, far, far away, the Golden West, the reborn Atlantis. There was the larger, truer, simpler democracy that England for all its revolutions and natural insurgence had never quite managed to make. America had fun, we all believed. Even its rich men were happy and unafraid; its poor could strike it lucky or be sure of a handout. A good rough working-class kind of a world run openly to a gambler’s set of rules and tempered by a late-Victorian sweetness – that was our America of the dark final winter of World War One.*²¹⁰

The next forty-odd years would witness an ever-increasing identification with the ‘American dream’ as talking pictures, mass-produced literature, 78rpm ‘shellac’ records and gramophones, the ‘wireless’, 45rpm ‘vinyl’ singles and LPs, record players, transistor radios, and eventually television – despite depression and war and the dogged resistance of the BBC – brought Britain and especially a large proportion of its youth over several generations closer to its source. Over the same period, the process of research and development of the American teenager proceeded apace alongside these technological innovations that were so crucial to the emergence of mass production for mass consumption.

There were two connected developments for Savage that gave notice to a world as yet uncomprehending of a fundamental shift in the evolution of American thought which were to have profound economic, social and cultural implications, not only for the US, but for all societies coming increasingly under its influence as the twentieth century progressed – arguably none more so than Britain. The first development was represented by the event that was the 1893 Chicago Expo which was visited by a quarter of the country’s inhabitants and was ‘above all, the international launch of America, its industry, its culture, and its perception as a way of life to rival Europe.’ The site on which it took place was known as the White City, the splendour and other-worldliness of which provided the inspiration for the Emerald City in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and bore testament to the nation’s ‘ability to create tangible dreams out of thin air.’²¹¹ For Savage, the White City was symbolic of a new America that emerged as the ‘old certainties’ of Protestant salvation in the next life gave way to a desire for instant gratification in this one. He argues that, ‘In the drive to materialism, the experiences and desires of the country’s internal migrants, fleeing the bleak depression of

²¹⁰ Jack Common, *Kidder’s Luck and The Ampersand*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1975), p.187.

²¹¹ Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875-1945*, (London, 2008), pp.50-51.

a collapsed rural economy, and its second-generation immigrants, freed from the static European world of their parents, were of vital importance.²¹²

The second development grew out of the institutional and academic response to the problem of juvenile crime and the recognition of ‘adolescence’ as a distinct period that ‘was not just biologically determined but socially constructed.’ The genetic psychologist G. Stanley Hall, who had organised the 1893 Expo’s educational event, a three-day conference on ‘Child Study’, coined the term ‘adolescence’ and published his colossal study of the subject under that title in 1904. Savage credits Hall’s *Adolescence*, which reached an audience beyond academia, with opening ‘up America’s eyes to this omnipresent but ill-defined state’ whilst simultaneously presenting ‘to America a vision of itself as a young country that would be a beacon for the forthcoming century.’ His work sought to impress upon the nation’s institutions the need for adolescence to be considered as ‘a safe haven from the insistent demands of industrial society’. In fact, he argued, the degree to which America would be regarded as ‘civilised’ in the twentieth century could be measured in part by its willingness to increase the length of the ‘probationary period’ of adolescence. In a statement that can only be described as prophetic Hall proclaimed that, ‘The very fact that we think we are young will make the faith in our future curative, and we shall one day attract the youth of the world by our unequalled liberty and opportunity.’²¹³ The process by which ‘dreams came to define America’ and the significant role played in that process by a newly defined adolescent youth, both actual and perceived in the period leading up to 1945, although not of direct concern here, had undeniable consequences for British society and youth culture.²¹⁴ As these developments in American thought permeated society they gradually became synonymous with the cultural values that, as Savage has suggested, were by 1945, a decade or so of post-war austerity away from captivating Britain.

Post-war British Youth Culture

As was discussed in the opening chapter, there was a process, summarised by Osgerby, through which ‘demographic shifts, the expansion of secondary education and the youth service and the introduction of National Service all combined to enhance the ‘visibility’ of young people as a distinct social category throughout the 1950s and 1960s.’ Adding to this visibility was the spending power that new semi and unskilled forms of employment offered

²¹² Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875-1945*, (London, 2008), p.54.

²¹³ *Ibid.* pp.66-73. G. Stanley Hall quoted on pp.72-73.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.54. Savage traces these developments in considerable detail.

to a broad section of working-class school leavers amongst whom the first post-war expression of youth culture as style was the Teddy boy. Osgerby maintains that contrary to the commonly held belief that the Teddy boy style was exclusively the result of a working-class adaptation of a minority middle-class predilection for 'Edwardian' gentlemen's attire from circa 1950, it should equally be regarded as a combination of American styles that caught on during the 1940s. It was 'a look that was inspired by the iconography of the Chicago gangster and the zoot-suit styles imported with the arrival of GIs during the war', a mode of dress that was associated in the press and public imagination with the 'spiv' or 'cockney wide-boy' so emblematic of 1940s black-marketeering. By the late forties a connection had been established by academics, and thereby informed public opinion, between the 'spiv' and a certain type of working-class youth prone to acts of delinquency as a result of 'a breakdown in processes of socialization' brought about by the war.²¹⁵ By the early 1950s with the emergence of Teddy boys, initially in south London, the authorities and the press were once again grappling with the dual concerns of youth as both criminal and product of new found affluence. In 1956, the American influence upon Teddy boys, their attitude and appearance, was compounded by their adoption of rock 'n' roll and the slide in moral and cultural standards that this was held to represent in certain quarters.

If it is to be accepted, as Melly insists, that the Teds whose gangs became a feature of 'the tougher metropolitan areas', who 'were not criminal in the old sense...not out for gain' but 'for whom violence was an end in itself', were actually few in number, then the question arises as to who were the 'cosmopolitan working-class adolescents', the pioneers of British pop culture? The answer it seems lies in the fact that the majority of young males who adopted some aspect of Teddy boy style did not, contrary to the many exaggerated press accounts, aspire to acts of vandalism and gang warfare. Recourse to the extant documentary evidence in the form of newspaper articles that eschewed the 'moral panic' approach in favour of a more level-headed discussion can shed light on the subject. Perhaps unsurprisingly *The Times* contains examples of some of the more reasonable and dispassionate reporting on Teds and rock 'n' roll, helpfully pointing out that the film *Rock Around the Clock* had been shown in almost 300 cinemas before any disturbances were reported. The newspaper's special correspondent suggested observers might conclude that 'Had there been no stories from America of "rock 'n' roll" riots...then it is most unlikely that

²¹⁵ Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), pp.22, 9-10.

there would have been any disturbances in the cinemas or streets of this country.’²¹⁶ Newcastle’s *Evening Chronicle* recorded that a Mr. Rockett, the Northern District Manager for the Odeon and Gaumont circuit, had described ‘recent Press reports of rock ‘n’ roll disturbances in cinemas as “completely and utterly untrue. It is a fact,” he said, “that there was no trouble of any kind when the film ‘Rock Around The Clock’ was shown some weeks ago in Newcastle, then later in Whitley Bay, Middlesbrough, Darlington and Sunderland.’”²¹⁷ After being despatched by the *Sunday Sun* to watch the film in Bethnal Green, ‘in the heart of the Teddy Boy heaven – London’s East End’, its journalist concluded that ‘this whole “Rock Around the Clock” business is beginning to smell strongly of a publicity stunt’, having witnessed nothing more than ‘an occasional “Yippie,” a moan or three and a few delighted squeals.’²¹⁸ The reaction of the country’s various local authorities’ Watch Committees ranged from an outright ban, through allowing individual cinema managers to exercise their own discretion, to no action at all, and while some jiving in the aisles, seat slashing, and arrests did occur it was at least considered at the time that the newspapers themselves might have caused much of the hysteria. This was certainly the opinion of ‘Three Disc Spinners’ from Newcastle who, in a letter to the *Evening Chronicle*, blamed the press for publicising hooliganism and insisted, ‘Every ‘bopper’ who likes to rock...should not be classed as rowdy and irresponsible nitwits.’²¹⁹

That said, on the very same page of the above issue of *The Times* there was a headline that read ‘U.S. SCENES RECALL “JUNGLE BIRD HOUSE AT THE ZOO”’ (a reference to the pre-Beatle-mania reaction of Elvis Presley’s largely female teenage audience), in which it was reported that:

The “Rock ‘n’ Roll” fad – most people are convinced it is no more than that – pursues its frenzied course amid scenes of mob hysteria among the less inhibited of American adolescents that can sometimes bring in the riot squads.

*Social workers, seeking a connection between its jungle rhythm and juvenile delinquency, concede that most trouble can be attributed to the craze for “Rock ‘n’ Roll” among the young “hoodlum” elements.*²²⁰

This time the paper’s Washington correspondent took the more usual approach, even commenting that the newly wealthy Presley had bought ‘hundreds of the violent sports shirts

²¹⁶ *The Times*, September 15th, 1956, p.4.

²¹⁷ Newcastle *Evening Chronicle*, September 18th, 1956, p.9.

²¹⁸ Newcastle *Sunday Sun*, September 16th, 1956, p.7.

²¹⁹ Newcastle *Evening Chronicle*, September 13th, 1956, p.19.

²²⁰ *The Times*, September 15th, 1956, p.4.

he affects'! Media sensationalism and exaggeration in matters concerning youth was a further manifestation of the way in which 'people projected onto the teenager their own fears about the modern world', anxieties about 'the decline of traditional authority, the instability of the family, the break up of settled communities, the uneasiness of class identities'.²²¹ Just as in the US where 'Many Americans believed that rock 'n' roll was an irritant that provoked conflict between parents and teenagers and increased antisocial behaviour'²²², so too in Britain social scientists talked of a 'generation gap', a process by which, since the end of the war, 'the supposed acceleration of social and cultural change...was creating such new and different conditions for the socializing of the young that they came to seem largely incomprehensible even to their own parents and teachers.'²²³

While the Teddy boys and rock 'n' roll came to symbolise society's wider anxieties concerning youth, and particularly working-class male youth, for the majority of young people who were not willing or courageous enough to adopt the lifestyle wholeheartedly, the most important effect lay in what was arguably the first truly popular instance of that most vital of connections in all subsequent youth culture styles – between pop music and clothes. Especially in its American associations, as Ted style moved 'rapidly outside London and into the provinces it gave a fresh and richer sense to the leisure institutions of Saturday night, whether it was in the dance halls and youth clubs or merely out on the streets hanging about.'²²⁴ In the words of George Pearson, who was a teenager in the North East at the time, 'To be a young man in 1955, and to aspire towards even a semblance of style, was to be a Teddy boy.'²²⁵ To many a 'weekend Ted' the hairstyle, clothes and music offered the possibility of at least a temporary escape from what Melly describes as 'a system of education which denied any creative potential and led to dead-end jobs and obligatory conscription; of a grey colourless shabby world where good boys played ping-pong.'²²⁶ Just to illustrate that this was not entirely a working-class phenomenon, it is well documented how the very middle-class Aunt Mimi, guardian of John Lennon, reacted with horror when in

²²¹ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), pp.425-26.

²²² Glenn C. Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'N' Roll Changed America*, (Oxford, 2003), p.99.

²²³ Dick Bradley, *Understanding Rock 'n' Roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, (Buckingham, 1992), p.86. Bradley states that the term 'generation gap' was 'another 1950s invention...coined and promoted chiefly by social scientists such as Margaret Mead.'

²²⁴ Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: pop music and popular culture*, (Basingstoke, 1985), p.28.

²²⁵ George Pearson, *Sex, Brown Ale and Rhythm & Blues: The Life That Gave Birth To The Animals*, (Darlington, 1998), p.10.

²²⁶ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, (London, 2008), p.37.

his mid-teens he took to sporting a quiff and sideburns and wearing drainpipe trousers (an indication that the style was still current in Liverpool in 1957-58).²²⁷ According to *The Times* Aunt Mimi's was a 'Contemporary Dilemma' faced by parents of children who suddenly insisted on cultivating 'a halo of well-greased curls, known to the informed as a "Tony Curtis" cut'. Judging by the fact that Brian, the object of concern in this article, had recently had 'drainpiped' at his own expense a pair of trousers that had cost his parents £13 it might be assumed that his was not a typically working-class background. However, after admitting to being worried about how his job prospects would be affected by his appearance, the correspondent reflected that they could not 'help wondering, sometimes, if part of the disapproval the Teddy Boy has aroused comes from the fact that here, for perhaps the first time in history, working class youths have introduced a fashion instead of waiting to adopt the cast-off fashions of "their betters."'”²²⁸ This observation is notable because it shows a contemporary awareness of the novelty of 'creative consumption' among 1950s youth that most commentators have acknowledged only with hindsight.

In one of a series of articles exploring the way in which teenagers in the North East spent their leisure time in 1955, Newcastle's *Sunday Sun* declared:

*If you picked out 100 teenagers and young people in their early twenties from different parts of the North-East and asked them how they spent their Saturday night, it's a safe bet that about 90 per cent. would list dances, pictures, public houses or just hanging around amusement arcades and coffee bars.*²²⁹

Harry, a nineteen-year-old apprentice left work in 'greasy overalls' only to appear two hours later in his best suit 'an eye-blinking shade of purple with a fur collar and turned-up cuffs...a boot-lace tie and drain-pipe trousers'. Rather than going to dances or the cinema, Harry and his mates hung around the amusement arcade listening to the latest records on the juke box. Apprentice printer George Pearson and his friends would scour the seedier pubs of Newcastle in search of 'good juke-boxes (i.e. those with the most rock 'n' roll) such as the Golden Tiger on Pilgrim Street where 'you could play 5 records for a shilling.'²³⁰

The juke box, that quintessential expression of American cultural influence, became the focus, not just for those young people who were desperate to hear the rock 'n' roll records

²²⁷ Alan Clayson, *John Lennon*, (London, 2003), p.22.

²²⁸ *The Times*, March 11th, 1957, p.13.

²²⁹ Newcastle *Sunday Sun*, January 1st, 1955, p.2.

²³⁰ George Pearson, *Sex, Brown Ale and Rhythm & Blues: The Life That Gave Birth To The Animals*, (Darlington, 1998), p.24.

that otherwise could only be heard intermittently on Radio Luxembourg or the American Forces Network, but also for the press and the various authorities concerned with youth as a 'problem'. The arrival of the juke box in Britain actually pre-dates that of rock 'n' roll. Adrian Horn's work on the impact of juke boxes in Britain reveals that prior to World War II, the few machines that were imported from America were mostly employed in amusement arcades and fairgrounds, and thus 'absorbed into a tradition of cheap mechanical entertainments enjoyed by the working classes.' In the post-war period up to 1959 American 'luxury' goods were not imported and a British juke box industry was established beginning in Blackpool in 1945. As Horn states, 'by 1960 the youth cafe had become part of the British social fabric' where the juke box provided 'a window to a glamorous, more American world.'²³¹ Irrespective of its musical content, the *Daily Mirror* recognised the juke box's symbolic value. In a markedly defensive tone the paper declared: 'What the British Think of the Yanks: We dislike the fun you make about our domestic habits, the way you despise us for being dull. A cup of tea is more enjoyable to us than the garish delights of the juke box.'²³² In sensing a threat to the national culture this piece chimes with Hoggart's views and is representative of that influential but ultimately impotent form of cultural nostalgia which was 'contemptuous of the sleek, commercialised culture of the modern world', a view that was espoused by commentators of both the political left and right.

The Watch Committees whose permission was required in the granting of licenses were preoccupied with the more prosaic matters of under-age drinking and noise pollution. However, there is ample evidence of the paternalistic nature of their judgements which were entirely in keeping with that era of Conservative rule when it was still taken for granted that 'the Establishment' and the BBC knew what was best for the lower orders. As Horn points out, 'juke boxes helped the spread of undiluted forms of American popular music by circumventing broadcasting restrictions imposed by the BBC.'²³³ There are numerous instances in the Leeds Watch Committee minutes of licenses being granted 'subject to condition excluding 'juke-box' or coin operated electric record player' or when a juke box is permitted 'Subject to condition that public music shall cease at 6p.m.'²³⁴ The Chief

²³¹ Adrian Horn, *Juke box Britain: Americanisation and youth culture, 1945-60*, (Manchester, 2009), pp.187-92.

²³² *Daily Mirror*, May 11th, 1954, cited in Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), p.457.

²³³ Adrian Horn, *Juke box Britain: Americanisation and youth culture, 1945-60*, (Manchester, 2009), p.188.

²³⁴ City of Leeds – Watch Committee Minutes – Jan. 1958 to Dec. 1962, pp.22, 27, 82, 93.

Constable's assertion that juke boxes 'attract noisy and destructive people' and were 'a possible cause of a marked increase in teenager drunkenness' prompted *The Yorkshire Post* to investigate. It found that in 1958 there were only twelve public houses in Leeds that had one, and those that did, like the Black Lion were satisfied that the young people who used them did not get drunk but spent 'their money on records rather than on beer.' The landlord of the Dolphin commented that 'Vicar Lane might almost be called Tin-Pan Alley' but didn't think that 'juke-boxes have any effect on drunkenness or rowdiness.'²³⁵ The manager of a Newcastle pub explained how 'Rock 'n' roll fans will go anywhere to listen to this type of music, whether it be the cinema, the dance hall, or the pub', and as admission to the pub was free they were going there in increasing numbers. Mr. Russell J. Storey, vice-chairman of Newcastle licensing justices, and indeed chairman of the National Licensing Committee of the Magistrates Association, believed that 'if a public house had a licence for live music, the type of music could be restricted' whereas 'if it is a licence for reproduction by gramophone records...the manager can play what he likes.' Clearly, in Mr. Storey's opinion, even bar managers were not to be trusted to provide the 'right sort of music' and, what is more, his opinion counted at a national level.²³⁶

Bearing in mind that the Chief Constable of Leeds changed his mind in the space of six weeks as to whether juke boxes affected the frequency of under-age drinking one way or the other, and the unreliability of judging its instance by the number of arrests of young people for drink related offences, it seems fair to conclude that the connections made between rock 'n' roll, juke boxes, teenage drinking, and criminality say more about the priorities of the authorities, the press, and society at large than they do about the actual cultural practices of young people. Furthermore, it should be remembered that most environments where young people congregated to listen or dance to popular music were not licensed to sell alcohol and indeed drinking was not then deemed a prerequisite for the enjoyment of either. Whether in Liverpool's Cavern, the Two Is in Soho, or the 'Young Set' sessions at Newcastle's Club A' Go Go it was the music that counted. Recalling Tyneside's coffee bar culture in the early 1960s, Bill Lancaster described how the juke box was still the focal point of social interaction; how music and clothes expressed identity. The diversity of the clothes worn and the music selected were a reflection of the developments in fashion styles and popular music that had occurred since 1956. The clientele ranged from Brylcreemed Teds playing Little

²³⁵ *The Yorkshire Post*, February 7th, 1958, p.4.

²³⁶ *Newcastle Sunday Sun*, March 17th, 1957, p.9.

Richard, groups of young factory girls – Billy Fury, through grammar school girls – the Beatles, to trainee draughtsmen in Italian suits – Dave Brubeck.²³⁷

In a relatively rare example of non-partisan reporting *The Yorkshire Post* described the lunchtime sessions at a Leeds dance hall where, ‘shop girls, office boys, clerks, receptionists and typists’ spent ‘at least an hour dancing to the latest Rock ‘n’ Roll records.’²³⁸ The paper announced with apparent pride that, ‘More than most other cities in England, Leeds has played a part in giving Rock ‘n’ Roll its head...providing lunch-time sessions at threepence a time.’²³⁹ Upwards of a thousand young people regularly attended these daytime dances including many ‘Teddy boys’ yet only four members of staff were required for their supervision and no trouble had occurred thus far. There is ample evidence in the sources confirming that dance halls and cinemas continued to attract thousands on week-end and mid-week nights throughout the period and that violence, though not uncommon especially when alcohol-related, did not spoil the party for the majority. It should however, be pointed out that as late as 1962 many venues such as the Majestic Ballroom in Newcastle, which also promoted dances in the lunch-hour, still did not feature rock ‘n’ roll music on a regular basis. Eric Burdon (later of the Animals), who was at the time still learning his trade, recalled a prominent sign which read ‘No Jivin’’, and a DJ who might occasionally ‘play some real American rock ‘n’ roll, which in 1962 was something we could normally only hear on jukeboxes down at the coast.’ He remembered it as ‘a great place to hang, as pretty local office girls liked to congregate there for lunch’, but the evening dances, which he only attended on account of his being persuaded to enter a talent competition, he described as the natural territory of the ‘straight crowd.’²⁴⁰ Whilst for the majority of young ‘straight’ people Saturday night meant the dance hall, according to Burdon’s band-mate, John Steel, in the mid ‘50s, ‘Jazz was the dance music...trad jazz – for young rebellious type persons. It was either that or go to the Mecca ballroom type places where you danced to watered-down swing. If people wanted to jive you’d jive to jazz.’²⁴¹ Burdon and Steel belonged to a minority for whom the dance halls and the ‘swing orchestras’ that had remained relatively unchanged since the thirties held little or no appeal. Once this minority, who unbeknownst to themselves represented a sizeable but as yet unconnected constituency nationwide, became enthused and

²³⁷ Bill Lancaster, ‘After Coffee at Sapparetti’s’, in *Northern Review*, Vol.4, (1996), pp.49-55.

²³⁸ *The Yorkshire Post*, December 18th, 1956, p.4.

²³⁹ *The Yorkshire Post*, January 30th, 1957, p.10.

²⁴⁰ Eric Burdon with J. Marshall Craig, *Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood*, (New York, 2001), pp.10-11.

²⁴¹ Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks – The Story of the Animals: Newcastle’s Rising Sons*, (London, 2001), p.12.

empowered by skiffle and rock 'n' roll from 1956 onwards, it became inevitable that venues would have to adapt to survive.

The youth clubs which offered the main alternative to these forms of recreation were described in Newcastle's *Sunday Sun* in 1956. One such club in North Shields 'attracted hundreds' every night of the week except Saturday when 'most young people want to go out'. Assistant secretary, Mr. Gordon Dodd, explained that 'The kind who do come here on a Saturday are often the quiet, reserved sort who enjoy a game of badminton, table tennis or snooker with their friends.'²⁴² The article also noted that particularly those youth organisations associated with churches had recently begun putting on their own Saturday night dances in the hope of retaining some of those who unfortunately 'go to dances and these amusement places and get into trouble.' Needless to say, when it was suggested to the aforementioned Teddy boy, Harry, that he might attend such an institution, it 'just brought a laugh.'

Iain Chambers, in the chapter of his book entitled, 'A Formative Moment, 1956-63', concurs with Melly that aside from certain 'wayward elements in the grammar schools...early pop was largely to be found within working-class youth culture.' He maintains that it was rare for grammar school boys, and even more so for girls, to be in a position to 'surmount the cultural barriers of their school, family and social situation and turn to the despised sounds of pop.' More common was the attitude of the grammar school girl from a 'northern industrial town' who confirmed that while:

*The coffee bars and snack bars etc., are the main congregating grounds for other teenagers...I personally do not patronise these establishments, preferring to drink hot Nescafe at home than cool insipid liquid to the blaring of a juke box at eight pence a time in a howling hole of humanity.*²⁴³

As unlikely as middle class and grammar school boys and girls were to become involved in the cultural milieu of rock 'n' roll such as it existed in the middle 1950s, a proportionately larger number of their class became increasingly involved in the then somewhat more rarefied circles whose passion was for 'trad' jazz and the associated idioms of folk and blues music. The wider cultural implications of what were still decidedly esoteric musical interests were not realised until the early sixties but from the mid-fifties, initially through the 'skiffle

²⁴² Newcastle *Sunday Sun*, January 1st, 1956, p.2.

²⁴³ Quoted in Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: pop music and popular culture*, (Basingstoke, 1985), p.29.

craze' and the 'trad boom', home-grown musicians from a variety of social backgrounds did manage to achieve a broad if fleeting appeal. The process by which the various forms of predominantly black American jazz, blues and folk underpinned the peculiarly British skiffle craze and how, when these elements were combined with rock 'n' roll, they powered the Beat Boom and Rhythm and Blues movement of the early sixties is the subject of the next section. This process, which occurred simultaneously as the mainstream British audience for popular music was increasingly being presented with home-grown (albeit rather tame versions of) rock 'n' roll performers who often shared their working-class origins (Tommy Steele, Billy Fury), presaged the emergence of a truly indigenous pop culture that was entirely without precedent.

Pop Culture, Youth Culture, and Class

Before the development of that pop culture can be properly examined it is necessary to engage more fully with the arguments contained in Fowler's contribution to the history of British youth culture. This means addressing the two afore-mentioned 'myths' he insists must be challenged. The first concerns his assertion that historians who suggest that 1960s youth culture 'suddenly became 'classless' due to the impact of pop music' are mistaken. Fowler cites Marwick as chief among the guilty and refers to a section of the latter's *The Sixties* where he is alleged to have made this claim. On close inspection however, it becomes clear that Marwick makes no such claim and in fact at one point states quite categorically that British youth 'subculture', whilst 'not exclusively working-class (as it was not 'classless')' was nonetheless, as the Albermarle Report and the work of Mark Abrams suggested, largely driven in the early 1960s by working-class attributes.²⁴⁴ Perhaps Fowler is taking issue with Marwick's observation – in accordance with Melly – that 'by the end of 1963 British youth subculture had knitted together so effectively that there were very definite, and highly liberating, patterns of behaviour and forms of self-presentation associated with it [which] were now beginning to influence the wider culture.' However, again Marwick cautions that

²⁴⁴ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958- c. 1974*, (Fourth Edition, London, 2003), p.60. Mark Abrams was the author of *The Teenage Consumer* (1959) and the Report of the Albermarle Committee on the youth services was published in 1960. Marwick uses the term 'subculture' in much the same way as 'pop culture' is used here as separate from the popular or wider culture. In Marwick's case because he does 'not believe that there was a 'youth culture' which ever became completely independent of, or alternative to, the larger culture involving parents, educational institutions, commercial companies, technologies and the mass media.' For present purposes 'pop culture' can be taken as comprising certain elements of what has been called youth culture in what might be described as a dialectical relationship with commercial companies, technologies and the mass media. See below and *ibid.* p.11.

‘this subculture was far from monolithic’ and provides the example of ‘upper class’ Marianne Faithfull’s account of how ‘Rock ‘n’ roll in the early sixties didn’t have the hip reputation it eventually acquired.’ At least not in the coffee bars and folk clubs of Reading that she frequented, where ‘Jazz was hip and blues were hip [and] Rock ‘n’ roll at the time meant Billy Fury and guys with bleached blonde hair.’²⁴⁵ In other words, rock ‘n’ roll was considered to be commercial music for the (working class?) masses and therefore ‘un-hip’ by Faithfull and her middle and upper-class acquaintances. Thus, Marwick explicitly repudiates the notion of there being either a ‘monolithic’ or ‘classless’ youth culture in the early sixties. There appears therefore to be no conflict on this issue between Marwick, Fowler or indeed the position adopted here, nonetheless, there are grave flaws in the arguments Fowler deploys to make his point.

To support his case against those historians Fowler believes advocate a classless youth culture brought about by the advent of pop culture he cites the example of mid-sixties ‘Swinging London’ where ‘there were, in fact, two youth worlds’:

Firstly, there was the world of working-class teenagers; who continued to spend their leisure time in the venues that their parents and grandparents had used in the 1950s and right back to the 1930s. The ‘palais de danse’ were still the main meeting places for suburban working-class youth of 1960s’ London, who simply could not afford to attend the ‘Swinging’ discotheques of London’s West End. Secondly, there was a middle-class and upper middle-class youth sub-culture, centred on the West End discotheques, restaurants and shopping districts of West London. Thirdly, the most celebrated youth icons of the period – among them Mick Jagger and Keith Richards – were not in reality representative of youth culture in any meaningful sense. They were physically and mentally detached from the teenagers who bought pop records...²⁴⁶

This is all very well however it might be argued that Fowler has missed the point – several in fact. First, when discussing certain phases such as ‘Swinging London’ (c. 1965-67), his insistence on using the term ‘1960s’ is misleading as it implies that what he is describing pertained throughout the decade. Jagger and Richards were not detached either mentally or physically from teenagers in 1963 when, arriving unexpectedly at Liverpool’s Cavern after a show in Manchester they were besieged by fans requesting that they demonstrate ‘the Nod’, a dance they had apparently introduced to the nation via the TV programme ‘Ready, Steady, Go!’ Jagger enthused: ‘Some of the girls in the Cavern already knew it...So we were all very

²⁴⁵ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958- c. 1974*, (Fourth Edition, London, 2003), p.77. The last quote is from Marianne Faithfull, *Faithfull*, (1964), p.13.

²⁴⁶ David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c. 1920-c. 1970*, (Basingstoke, 2008), pp.189-90.

much in demand on the dance floor.’ The reporting *NME* journalist concluded that the ‘explanation for the Rolling Stones’ widespread popularity in the North undoubtedly lies in their style – which is raw, exciting, down-to-earth, and strongly r-and-b flavoured. This is the music Liverpool loves. It’s closer to their own Mersey beat than anything else.’²⁴⁷ Fowler ignores the fact that the Rolling Stones were initially part of, and the product of youth culture.

Second, whilst admittedly Jagger and Brian Jones shared a middle-class background, Fowler fails to mention that Richards, Wyman and Watts were all working-class, as were many of their contemporaries in the Beatles, the Animals, etc. The very fact that someone like Eric Burdon from the solidly working-class Walker area of Newcastle could frequent an exclusive club like the Scotch in St James’ during the mid-sixties where John Lennon might be observed catching the ear of Princess Margaret,²⁴⁸ was a sure sign that pop had, as Melly insisted, ‘rapidly permeated all strata of society’. These were Chambers’ wayward grammar school and art school kids, who were, though not uniformly of working-class origin, certainly aware that they had somehow ‘made it’ and in so doing had managed to escape what for many of them would otherwise have been a comparatively dreary (provincial) existence. And third, Fowler’s account is entirely London-centric. Using the Rolling Stones and their milieu during the ‘Swinging London’ era *after* they had achieved mainstream success as an example of pop culture’s detachment from working-class youth is hardly the best means by which an investigation into the class composition of British youth culture should be conducted.

That the Beatles and the Rolling Stones should ‘hang out’ in West End discotheques and exclusive drinking clubs is hardly surprising considering they had made a lot of money very quickly and the fact that by the mid-sixties they were not able to enjoy a ‘normal’ night out without being mobbed. It is a mistake to divide the youth and pop culture of the mid-sixties conveniently between working-class suburban ballrooms and middle and upper class West London night clubs. Soho had long been a magnet for all kinds of bohemian types from across the social spectrum, and from the mid-fifties its espresso bars and jazz and skiffle cellars were thriving.²⁴⁹ The Two Is was arguably the home of British skiffle and rock ‘n’

²⁴⁷ *New Musical Express*, November 11th, 1963, p.9.

²⁴⁸ Eric Burdon with J. Marshall Craig, *Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood*, (New York, 2001), p.48.

²⁴⁹ In his account of ‘Gangs & Gun-Crime in 1940s London’, Paul Willetts states that ‘During the immediate post-war years, Soho was, thanks to its large French, Italian, Jewish, and Greek communities, famed for its lively, cosmopolitan ambience, an ambience found nowhere else in London...Archer Street was the informal musicians’ employment agency where a loud, gossiping

roll. The R&B movement began there also, evolving into the Mod phenomenon focussed on clubs like the Scene, the Flamingo and the Marquee. Thanks initially to the pioneering work of people like Chris Barber, Alexis Korner, Cyril Davies and Long John Baldry, the London R&B and Mod scenes flourished and found a home in Soho, partly due to its reputation for vice which implied a relaxation of 'the rules', but also because some clubs opened all-night. Marlborough schoolboy David Wright, who along with the teenage Nick Drake hitch-hiked in to the capital for weekends spent at the Flamingo and the Marquee recalled Soho in 1965 as 'like a slash of vermilion lipstick across the grey face of London.'²⁵⁰ When the Scene was raided by police searching for drugs at 3am on a Sunday morning in 1964 they interrupted 300 teenagers 'most of them under eighteen' who had spent ten shillings each to dance until 6am. According to a *Daily Mirror* reporter, 'hundreds of teenagers who had spilled out of other clubs when the news broke, circled the main entrance' and when the police started loading people into buses 'they were greeted by hooting and a flurry of four-letter abuse from the crowd.'²⁵¹ In January 1966, the same paper reported that teenagers 'flock twice a week to dance the night through...at the Flamingo Club in London's Soho' in an article exploring West End club land entitled 'The All-Nighters'.²⁵² From 1964-66 it was possible to see the Rolling Stones, John Mayall, Zoot Money and his Big Roll Band, Chris Farlowe, the Spencer Davis Group with Steve Winwood, Georgie Fame, the Animals, the Yardbirds, Rod Stewart, Manfred Mann and the Who; all in packed clubs with teenagers from all over London and beyond. This is not the segregated youth culture that Fowler claims existed nor does it demonstrate the detachment of pop culture from youth culture.²⁵³

Fowler's attempt to debunk the second 'myth', 'the idea that the Beatles created a cohesive youth culture', provides another example of his missing the point. As with the Rolling Stones, the most significant factor in the trajectory of the Beatles' success story is that they

throng convened each afternoon. And Charlotte Street was associated with the bohemianism that permeated the pubs, restaurants and cafes of what was dubbed 'North Soho'. Paul Willetts, *North Soho 999*, (Stockport, 2007), p.11.

²⁵⁰ Patrick Humphries, *Nick Drake: The Biography*, (London, 1997), p.39.

²⁵¹ *Daily Mirror*, December 7th, 1964, pp.16-17.

²⁵² *Daily Mirror*, January 5th, 1966, p.7.

²⁵³ See Jonathon Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counterculture*, (London, 1998), pp.41-42. 'Like Teds, the Mods emerged from the London outer suburbs: Tottenham, Ilford, Stamford Hill. But unlike the unlettered Teds they were more middle-class, often Jewish, the sons of middle-management, small businessmen or some equivalent.' And 'It was these Mods who crowded into the West End, to the Flamingo, the Scene or the Marquee...Of the major clubs the Flamingo, already popular among expat black GIs, was the most exotic...but the Scene, once home to the old Cy Laurie Jazz Club, was considered the apogee of Mod aspirations. Sited in Ham Yard, a tiny Soho cul-de-sac off Great Windmill Street, it drew Mods from across London and beyond.'

were the *product* of youth culture not its sole creators. It is one of the central arguments of this thesis that the strength and originality of pop culture in this period was derived from the fact that its creative artists were also members of its audience and were equally as engaged in its consumption as its production. Citing official fan club membership statistics or the fact that during the era of Beatle-mania (circa 1963-65) their core audience consisted of the ‘pre-teenage or early – mid-teen girl’ as evidence that they did not create a youth culture is, in any case, a questionable approach towards debunking the ‘myth’ even if the exercise was valid to begin with.

In his efforts to separate pop culture from youth culture, and students in particular, he is surely going too far in trying to support the central argument of his book, that ‘university students are the only group who could have generated a cohesive Youth Culture in Britain.’ An arguably spurious contention which does not convince, particularly in his insistence that university students provide *the* continuous thread that holds twentieth-century youth culture together.²⁵⁴ Although ultimately it might be argued that debates such as these boil down to a matter of definition (‘what is youth culture?’), it is the firm belief that the historical development of British youth culture between 1956 and 1965 can be traced on a much surer footing by focussing on *all* those involved in the consumption and creative reproduction of pop culture. Furthermore, it is held that a comparative study of the impact of American popular music on the micro youth cultures of Liverpool and Newcastle, and thereby the origins within those cultures of groups like the Beatles and the Animals, will reveal a great deal more about British youth culture as a whole than a superficial analysis of Mick Jagger’s middle-class detachment or the Beatles’ female adolescent fan-base. It is not expected that, contra Fowler, this will somehow prove that ‘youth culture is [entirely] the product of the 1950s and 1960s’, though it may well prove to be the case ‘that pop culture was [indeed] an expression of youth culture.’²⁵⁵

The Leisure/Entertainment Industries

The next step in this investigation is to place the various developments in popular music – jazz (traditional and modern), skiffle, rock ‘n’ roll, beat, rhythm and blues – in their historical, social and cultural context. This cannot be done without also exploring the complex relationship of those developments with the leisure/entertainments industries that

²⁵⁴ David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c. 1920-c. 1970*, (Basingstoke, 2008), p.167.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.* pp.196-97.

adapted and expanded to cater for the youth market. As Hobsbawm argued in his essay ‘On the Reception of Jazz in Europe’ the discussion must begin, ‘like all historical analyses of society under modern capitalism, with technology and business’.²⁵⁶ However, as the technologies of production and consumption, the music business and the media, and popular music have a history in Britain that pre-dates the arrival of rock ‘n’ roll in the mid-fifties, a brief excursion into that history must be made.

Beginning with technology, business and the media, it should be obvious that the evolution of cinema, radio and television broadcasting, the manufacture and distribution of recorded music, and innovations in the field of musical instrumentation were of crucial significance for British (and American) society and culture in the twentieth century, not least as far as popular music is concerned. The history that is the subject of this study would read very differently had these technologies not reached the various stages of development they had and did through 1956-65. In his book *Understanding Rock ‘n’ Roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, Dick Bradley has described how a ‘veritable revolution of techniques’ took place and that:

This revolution can be placed in time; despite earlier successes, the recording industry was reduced to a tiny shadow of its old self during the Depression and the Second World War, and the modern industry took shape in the late 1940s and 1950s, when new materials (vinyl) and techniques (‘hi-fi’, tape and later stereo) were developed. Radio has been established since the 1920s but was transformed in the late 1950s and early 1960s by the arrival of the portable or transistor radio. Transistorization represented a further development in sound quality too. And TV became established in the 1950s. We can see clearly that the period of rock ‘n’ roll was also a period of great change and accelerating development for the techniques of the music industry and their social dissemination; one of the decisive periods of the century...²⁵⁷

Moreover, Bradley argues that although ‘the commodity form and the profit principle were already virtually ubiquitous by the nineteenth century’, in economic terms the modern music business differed to the greatest degree in ‘scale’ and ‘market’ as well as ‘technique’ from that of any earlier era. The phenomenal growth of the music industry was achieved because

²⁵⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion, and Jazz*, (London, 1998), p.265.

²⁵⁷ Dick Bradley, *Understanding Rock ‘n’ Roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, (Buckingham, 1992), p.82.

technological developments made it possible to penetrate, through radio, records and eventually television, the working-class market that had hitherto been largely inaccessible.²⁵⁸

To give some sense of the extent of this penetration it is worth providing some statistics. When restrictions on hire purchase were relaxed in August 1954 consumer spending increased by roughly 8% in a year and ‘Between 1950 and 1959, average consumption per head was to rise 20 per cent, as large an increase in just nine years as there had been in the entire inter-war period.’ The growth of hire purchase was especially evident in durable goods such as televisions and vacuum cleaners to the point where the chairman of a leading Oxford Street store felt able to declare to stockholders in 1958 that ‘The whole nation has taken to buying nearly everything on the instalment plan.’²⁵⁹ Following Lonnie Donegan’s virtually single-handed popularisation of do-it-yourself skiffle music, the managing director of a national retail outlet proclaimed that in 1957 the demand for guitars ‘is so great that no country in the world can hope to keep up with it. At the moment I have 20,000 on order and I wish I could get more. I estimate that this year over 250,000 will be imported into this country, compared with about 6,000 in 1950.’²⁶⁰ Throughout the mid-1950s 1,500,000 radio sets were being manufactured in Britain annually. This statistic was doubled by 1961 following the advent of the transistor which prompted an increase in sales that persisted into 1964.²⁶¹ The number of combined radio and television licences issued rose from 4 and a half million in 1955 to over 13 million in 1965, a dramatic increase that was accompanied by a fall of two-thirds in cinema attendances over the ten years from 1950 to 1960.²⁶² Sales of the recently introduced (1948) seven inch 45rpm single soared from four to sixty-one million between 1955 and 1963.²⁶³ Whilst it should be acknowledged that these developments were by no means entirely fuelled by the burgeoning youth/pop culture it does seem fair to suggest that the enormous increase in demand for guitars and 7 inch records demonstrates an unprecedented appetite amongst young people for both the production and consumption of popular music. Admittedly much of the music being bought was of the Tin Pan Alley

²⁵⁸ Dick Bradley, *Understanding Rock ‘n’ Roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, (Buckingham, 1992), pp.81-82.

²⁵⁹ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), p.106, 114.

²⁶⁰ Ben Davis, quoted in Chas McDevitt, *Skiffle: The Definitive Inside Story*, (London, 1997), pp.6-8.

²⁶¹ Dave Harker, *One For The Money: Politics and popular song*, (London, 1980), p.66.

²⁶² Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V*, (Oxford, 1995), Appendix A, and p.185.

²⁶³ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), p.456.

commercial pop variety but *Rock Around the Clock* was, nevertheless, the first record to sell more than a million copies in Britain. The thirty to fifty thousand groups that were estimated to be in existence by 1957 were far more likely to be busily engaged in mastering Leadbelly songs via Lonnie Donegan recordings or deciphering the lyrics to Chuck Berry records than in imitating the crooners Frank Sinatra and Dickie Valentine who were top of the *NME* readers' poll at the end of 1956.²⁶⁴

The beneficiaries of the boom in record sales were the four major recording companies, EMI, Decca, Pye and Philips, all based in London. Until the commercial take-off of rock 'n' roll and skiffle in 1956 which was brought about by the arrival of working-class teenagers into the market place these companies had relied on the rather more affluent adult market whose consumers 'favoured swing, big-band music, American and pseudo-American crooners, and romantic ballads...on 78rpm gramophone records.'²⁶⁵ They heard these records on the BBC's Light Programme on shows such as the 'Billy Cotton Band Show' and 'Two Way Family Favourites' which, despite longstanding agreements with the 'Big Four' whereby the BBC was paid to plug their records, strongly resisted anything to do with rock 'n' roll.²⁶⁶ A combination of the BBC's paternalism and Musician's Union protectionism kept it off the airwaves. This meant that those desperately trying to hear rock 'n' roll tuned in to Radio Luxembourg or the American Forces Network. Unashamedly commercial – 'the record companies bought half-hour chunks of air-time on Radio Luxembourg and plugged all their latest records' – the station provided 'a lifeline without which the development of rock music in Britain would have been all but stifled.' Under this 'legal payola system' the legendary DJ Alan Freed, who had done so much to popularise rock 'n' roll on radio and television in the States – where, for his services he was eventually ruined in the US payola scandal – airmailed a 30 minute show from New York which was broadcast once a week. According to Pete Frame:

For the rock 'n' roll cognoscenti, this became the most important half-hour of the week. He played Chuck Berry, he played Fats Domino, he played Nappy Brown, he played records from the American chart. He played records by Little Richard when they were still unobtainable here.

²⁶⁴ Estimated number of groups in Chas McDevitt, *Skiffle: The Definitive Inside Story*, (London, 1997), p.6. Sinatra and Valentine were voted 'Outstanding American Male Singer' and 'Outstanding British Musical Personality' respectively, *New Musical Express*, November 23rd, 1956, p.8.

²⁶⁵ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), p.456.

²⁶⁶ Dave Harker, *One For The Money: Politics and popular song*, (London, 1980), p.68.

*Alan Freed was beaming out of our radios, playing our music. How one prayed for optimum atmospheric conditions so the wavering signal didn't fade. How we cursed when it did.*²⁶⁷

While Radio Luxembourg and the American Forces Network ('blues, jazz, gospel and big band') broadcast the genuine article across Europe²⁶⁸, in Britain it was television that reacted first to the new music.

Rock 'n' roll found an unlikely champion in the Oxford graduate turned TV producer Jack Good who succeeded in bringing it to British television screens in 1957 with the show '6.5 Special'. Scheduled for broadcast during the 'toddler's truce' between six and seven o'clock on a Saturday evening, it was a show that marked a big step for the BBC but actually delivered little for teenagers besides the regular appearances of the British rock 'n' roller Tommy Steele and skiffle star Lonnie Donegan. Frame describes it as a jumble of 'trad-jazz bands, unimaginative vocal groups, weedy comedy sketches, discussions on make-up and cookery, and ersatz rock 'n' roll', but it was a start.²⁶⁹ Good moved to ITV in a bid for greater artistic control and produced 'Oh Boy!' in 1958 after which there followed a bout of tit for tat exchanges between the rival television stations involving several variations on the theme of 'teenage audience dancing round pop singer in the studio' until some sort of credibility was finally achieved in 1963 with ITV's 'Ready, Steady, Go!' Melly insists that 'RSG' was an important breakthrough. It plugged in directly to the centre of the scene and only a week later transmitted information as to clothes, dances, gestures, even slang to the whole British teenage Isles...It made pop work on a truly national scale.'²⁷⁰ The introduction back in 1952 of a supposedly 'national' chart by the *New Musical Express*, which was at the time in the process of realigning itself towards a teenage market, might arguably constitute an early example of this tendency, however, as Sandbrook points out, as well as being inaccurate, it provided little more than 'a reasonably reliable impression of the conservatism of British musical tastes in the mid-fifties.'²⁷¹ Dick Bradley insists that 'There was no

²⁶⁷ Pete Frame, *The Restless Generation: How rock music changed the face of 1950s Britain*, (London, 2007), pp.217-18.

²⁶⁸ Dave Harker, *One For The Money: Politics and popular song*, (London, 1980), p.67.

²⁶⁹ Pete Frame, *The Restless Generation: How rock music changed the face of 1950s Britain*, (London, 2007), p.219.

²⁷⁰ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, (London, 2008), pp.187-88.

²⁷¹ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), p.457. The Top Twelve chart was based on the American *Billboard* chart and was compiled by 'the magazine's publisher Percy Dickins and his staff telephoning fifty-three record shops in the major cities and asking for their most popular singles.' *Ibid.* p.457.

favourable discussion of rock 'n' roll or Beat (until around 1962 or 1963) in the Press or on television.' Of the three music papers:

*Melody Maker was mainly a paper for musicians and jazz fans, though it began to change in the early 1960s. And New Musical Express, though it concentrated mainly on 'chart-pop', gave almost no attention to criticism, analysis or history writing, being content mainly to praise what was popular and review what was new in a trivial vein; Record Mirror was not much different.*²⁷²

Overall though, it was during the period under scrutiny that the media increasingly came to imbue in its viewers, listeners and readers what Osgerby describes as a 'national cohesion or sense of a nationwide stylistic identity.'²⁷³

The Reception of North American Popular Music

The popular music(s) that constitute the subject of this study all originated, or at least evolved into their recognisable forms, in the US, or more specifically in the southern states of that country. First jazz, blues and gospel migrated north in the early twentieth century along with their African-American practitioners as part of the great rural to urban movement of poor black *and* white workers that began with the First World War. Harker relates how 'As early as 1914, Henry Ford was offering five dollars a day for assembly-line workers, irrespective of a man's colour.' According to Glenn Altschuler, 'Between 1940 and 1960, three million blacks left the states of the Old Confederacy' as a result of the 'Great Boom' in the US economy.²⁷⁴ And just as economic and technological developments affected 'all other aspects of culture', so too did they transform popular music in the emerging black communities of Chicago, Washington, Detroit, New York and Philadelphia.²⁷⁵

This is not the place to chart the American evolution of the music that came to have such a profound effect on British culture, however, it should be stressed that in the process of becoming distinctively urban, both black (jazz, blues) and white (hillbilly) musical styles became increasingly subject to 'commodification' and 'electrification'. The importance of the transition from the un-amplified voice via the megaphone to the microphone, the acoustic to the electric guitar, the evolution of recording techniques and the subsequent reproduction

²⁷² Dick Bradley, *Understanding Rock 'n' Roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, (Buckingham, 1992), p.90.

²⁷³ Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), p.40.

²⁷⁴ Glenn C. Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'N' Roll Changed America*, (Oxford, 2003), p.11.

²⁷⁵ Dave Harker, *One For The Money: Politics and popular song*, (London, 1980), p.37.

of those recordings on, first shellac, and later vinyl discs via proliferating radio stations, juke box plays, and gradually more portable record players cannot be overstated. It was somewhere in the midst of this transition that the musical forms that sprang from the blues became known collectively as rhythm and blues, those from hillbilly music as country, and the fusion of elements of both as rock ‘n’ roll.²⁷⁶ During the fifties small independent record companies sprang up all across the US to provide an outlet for new forms of popular music that the major record companies were for various reasons reluctant to promote. Although, as writers on the history of black American music have demonstrated, the central issue in the relationship between rhythm and blues, rock ‘n’ roll and the entertainment industry there was race related in a way that simply did not apply in Britain,²⁷⁷ in many respects institutional reaction to the new music followed a similar pattern. Broadly, this amounted to incomprehension leading to condemnation and vigorous efforts being made to ignore or ban it until recognition of its economic potential resulted in a desperate scramble to acquire the greatest market share. This is the point at which, to borrow Melly’s colourful metaphor:

Commercial exploitation advances towards it holding out a bucketful of recording contracts, television appearances and world-wide fame. Then, once the muzzle is safely buried in the golden mash, the cunning butcher nips deftly along the flank and castrates the animal. After this painless operation, the Establishment realizes it is safe to advance into the field and gingerly pats the now docile creature which can then be safely relied on to grow fatter and stupider until the moment when fashion decides it is ready for the slaughterhouse.²⁷⁸

The earliest example of ‘big business’ appropriation and commodification of a genuinely grass roots musical form was that of jazz which was gradually watered down in the first half of the twentieth century from its vibrant beginnings in the red light district of New Orleans to the commercially successful but comparatively soulless ‘Big Band Swing’ which persisted in

²⁷⁶ See Glenn C. Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock ‘N’ Roll Changed America*, (Oxford, 2003), p.11. ‘After World War II, the industry substituted rhythm and blues for the harsher-sounding “race records” as the term for recordings by black artists that were not gospel or jazz. But R&B also emerged as a distinctive musical genre, drawing on the rich musical traditions of African Americans, including the blues’ narratives of turbulent emotions, and the jubilation, steady beat, hand clapping, and call and response of gospel. Rhythm and blues tended to be “good time music”, with an emphatic dance rhythm.’ For a detailed discussion of the American popular music styles that constituted rock ‘n’ roll see Charlie Gillett, *The Sound Of The City: The Rise of Rock and Roll*, (Revised Edition, London, 1994), pp.23-35. One of those styles was Memphis ‘Rockabilly’ or ‘Country Rock’.

²⁷⁷ For an authoritative account of the issue of race in American popular music see, Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, black consciousness and race relations*, (London, 1998).

²⁷⁸ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, (London, 2008), pp.37-8.

Britain's dance halls even into the 1950s.²⁷⁹ The fact that jazz was then given a new lease of life on both sides of the Atlantic by a revivalist movement and the advent of be-bop or modern jazz only serves to reinforce the cyclical nature of the process. The now somewhat commonplace notion that innovation in popular music at the grass roots level is then commodified into mediocrity only for the process to be repeated does have a bearing on this work in that at least two such cycles can be identified as occurring between 1956 and 1965.

An analysis of the process by which 'the pop idol, originally representing a masculine rebel, is transformed into a masturbation fantasy-object for adolescent girls' and thereby made 'safe', may reveal much about the relationship between 'the Establishment', the entertainment industry and youth and pop culture.²⁸⁰ Analysis of that relationship's cyclical nature might similarly provide insights into processes of historical social and cultural continuity and change. Linked to these concerns is an issue which represents a peculiarly British complication in the reception of American popular music styles – that of 'authenticity'. The particular way in which the above relationships developed in Britain over the twentieth century involving, most significantly, the Musician's Union and the BBC, lead to a curious situation whereby said reception was 'distorted' for want of a better word by lack of exposure to live and recorded American jazz, blues and rock 'n' roll music. This gave rise to a uniquely British phenomenon beginning with 'rhythm clubs' where small groups of jazz lovers would meet to play their precious (rare) imported records. According to Roberta Freund Schwartz, 'As recordings were the only way British jazz fans could hear American innovators of the genre, records themselves took on a fundamental importance.' British record collectors thus not only became 'in many respects the custodians of jazz history' but also 'a valued asset to any rhythm club' with 'a certain degree of authority in the jazz community.'²⁸¹ And it was through these clubs, which numbered around a hundred by 1935, that this community spread and expanded all over the country. As Hobsbawm has noted, in

²⁷⁹ Writing in 1958, David Boulton described how, 'the large dance orchestras became identified as the "Swing Bands", and when, ten years later, reaction set in against the whole conception of jazz current in the late '30s, the term became one of contempt – a synonym not of "good" but of "commercial". Now that this reaction has moderated and the old "Swing Bands" are no longer cursed so vehemently as they were in the early crusading days of the New Orleans revival, the word has once again become part of our vocabulary.' David Boulton, *Jazz In Britain*, (London, 1959), p.68.

²⁸⁰ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, (London, 2008), p.38.

²⁸¹ Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom*, (Aldershot, 2007), p.15. Freund Schwartz lists Northern rhythm clubs in Bradford, Bridlington, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and York. *Ibid.* p.8.

London they appeared ‘not in middle-class quarters like Chelsea, Kensington or Hampstead, but in the outlying districts like Croydon, Forest Gate, Barking or Edmonton.’²⁸²

As Freund Schwartz points out, ‘The British dependence on recordings did have negative repercussions as well’ in that a false impression of the nature of American jazz was gained as a result of the music being taken out of its live context, by the ‘limitations of early recording technology’ and because ‘the commercial recording industry exerts tremendous influence over which artists and styles are available.’ In an edition of *Hot News and Rhythm Review* from 1935, Eric Ballard wrote that:

*We, in England are handicapped in our appreciation of jazz by the fact that we only know records. Often I have an uneasy feeling that our horizons are limited, a feeling that in the sea of talent there must be many fish as good as these that have swum our way but of which we have no knowledge.*²⁸³

What is significant for this study is that the peculiarly British dependence on ‘reception via recordings’ had an enormous influence on the reception and later the indigenous reproduction of, not only jazz, but also skiffle, rock ‘n’ roll, beat and rhythm and blues. The importance of records in the dissemination of American popular music styles, and the limitations on their reception the medium imposed, must not be underestimated. Equally the role of the collector or ‘connoisseur’, whether it was brothers Ken and Bill Colyer, pioneers of British New Orleans-style jazz and inaugurators of skiffle²⁸⁴, Bob Wooler, resident DJ at Liverpool’s Cavern, or Alexis Korner, originator of the London rhythm and blues movement, must be recognised as pivotal. In the words of Liverpool broadcaster and author Spencer Leigh, ‘It can just be one collector or individual that helps to shape the music of a particular area.’²⁸⁵

From the rhythm clubs of the 1930s onwards there developed a British tradition for the ‘serious’ appreciation of popular music that was nurtured and spread by a relatively small but influential number of individuals. These ‘custodians’ of jazz history whose passion was for ‘traditional’ New Orleans jazz and rural, usually Mississippi delta folk/blues, were invoking the same arguments as those of Ewan MacColl and Bert Lloyd, left wing *aficionados* of the post-war British folk revival. Fiercely opposed to commercial interests and keen to preserve

²⁸² Eric Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion, and Jazz*, (London, 1998), p.270.

²⁸³ Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom*, (Aldershot, 2007), pp.10-16. Eric Ballard, “Editorial”, *Hot News and Rhythm Review*, 1/6 (September 1935), p.20, cited in *ibid.* p.16.

²⁸⁴ Bill Colyer recalled, ‘I didn’t invent the word...but I sure as hell put it in the language.’ Quoted in, Spencer Leigh, *Puttin’ On The Style: The Lonnie Donegan Story*, (Folkestone, 2003), p.29.

²⁸⁵ Spencer Leigh, interview with the author, May 31st, 2009.

and popularise an oral British folk music tradition, the revival's success 'owed much to the Labourist ideology of post-war Britain, as well as to an elitist attempt to reject commercial popular song.' Although, as Harker has stated, 'the milieu which gave rise to the revival was decidedly unproletarian, chiefly London based (or London-oriented), and dominated by intellectuals' many of whom 'were members of...the various cultural organizations sponsored or supported by the CPGB' (Communist Party of Great Britain), its leading protagonists attempted to 'win back this [folk] form of genuinely popular song for the people as a whole.'²⁸⁶ The national success of the folk club movement resulted in the cultivation of the, often politically, purist anti-commercial atmosphere and attitudes that would eventually lead to the infamous 'Judas' accusations levelled at Bob Dylan for his allegedly 'commercial' use of electric instruments on his 1966 British tour. In the British reception of North American popular music styles, particularly during the period in question, considerations of non-commercial 'authenticity' were often taken very seriously.

In the early 1950s, fractures appeared in the post-war British jazz revival, as George Melly recalled:

What the revivalists thought of as 'New Orleans Jazz' was the music of Armstrong, Morton and Oliver – New Orleans musicians but based on, and recorded in, Chicago during the Prohibition era.

What the traditionalists meant by New Orleans Jazz – for both schools claimed the same name – was the music played by musicians who had never left the city, and whose style was presumed to have remained unaltered since the first decade of the century.²⁸⁷

Ken Colyer was undoubtedly the leading proponent of the latter faction, but although he was unusually committed, in that he went so far as to join the merchant navy in order to play with surviving jazzmen in New Orleans, his purist approach was too restrictive with the result that revivalist/traditional jazz was popularised under the 'Trad' banner by the more inclusive Chris Barber and commercialised in the early sixties by Kenny Ball and Acker Bilk. Similarly, the skiffle sessions that Colyer had introduced to provide a change of style and tempo (or to give the horn players a rest) were originally intended as a light-hearted but genuine tribute to 'authentic' bluesmen such as Big Bill Broonzy and Leadbelly before they were recorded, first by Colyer, then by Chris Barber with Lonnie Donegan on guitar and

²⁸⁶ Dave Harker, *One For The Money: Politics and popular song*, (London, 1980), p.149.

²⁸⁷ George Melly, *Owning Up: The Trilogy*, (London, 2000), p.514.

vocals – a spontaneous act which eventually and inadvertently launched the skiffle craze of 1956.²⁸⁸

To complicate matters further there was modern jazz, or ‘Bebop, [which] was the invention of a small group of American Negro musicians based in New York who, during the 40s, deliberately set out to extend the harmonic and rhythmic possibilities of jazz.’ Melly describes how, in imitation of Charlie Parker *et al* – ‘Cool, hip, ironic...prepared to go a long way to prove their detachment’ – their British disciples wore dark glasses, used pot and pep pills, ‘Yet being both white and British, they were as far removed from their idols as the revivalist was from his.’ British modern jazz players were often professional musicians who in many cases, Melly claims, had experienced the music live in New York when on shore leave from ‘Geraldo’s navy’ (named after the bandleader who held the contract for entertainment on transatlantic liners after the war).²⁸⁹ It was not uncommon for musicians in dance hall ‘Swing Bands’ to engage in a spot of ‘moonlighting’ in modern jazz clubs after hours as it was music that not only required more expertise than was exhibited by the majority of beer-swilling amateur revivalists, it was also ‘cool’.

So, in Britain there was a tradition beginning in jazz of a ‘serious’ approach to popular music, not only amongst the musicians, but among a sizeable minority of its fans. This seriousness manifested itself in all forms of jazz, in blues and folk music through skiffle and even, at a time when the established music press either ignored or ridiculed it, in an appreciation of rock ‘n’ roll. Jazz columnist Tony Standish wrote a review of Chuck Berry for the *Jazz Journal* in 1958 in which he insisted that his music:

Fills a place in popular Negro music once occupied by Bessie Smith, Leroy Carr, Kokomo Arnold, and Tampa Red. His is the sort of music the Negro

²⁸⁸ According to Chris Barber, ‘The word ‘skiffle’ was taken from an old Dan Burley record. He was an American Negro who edited a black newspaper in Chicago and was a very good rent party pianist. It was back-room music, rent party music, casual and not self-conscious.’ Quoted in Spencer Leigh, *Puttin’ On The Style: The Lonnie Donegan Story*, (Folkestone, 2003), p.29. Leigh adds that ‘Dan Burley’s ‘Skiffle Blues’ dates from 1946, but there are earlier examples of the word, ‘Chicago Skiffle’ (1926) by Jimmy O’Brien’s Washboard Band and a compilation of snippets from other records, ‘Hometown Skiffle’ (1929), featuring Blind Lemon Jefferson and the Hokum Boys.’ *Ibid.* p.29.

²⁸⁹ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, (London, 2008), p.24. George Melly, *Owning Up: The Trilogy*, (London, 2000), p.514.

*listens to today...and like it or not it is the music that undeniably retains much of the vitality of the blues from which it evolved.*²⁹⁰

Freund Schwartz suggests that the ‘serious and studious approach to jazz, one that would ultimately be transferred to the blues, may have also been related to the way in which the music was received’ – via recordings.²⁹¹ Theodore Gracyk argues that ‘In oral tradition, anything irrelevant to the present’ is discarded, and:

*As a result of this artistic amnesia, the reconstructed history of an oral tradition is largely speculation. Such is the case with the early history of jazz and blues. These oral traditions may be the roots of rock, but they are precisely what mass art replaces. The conversion from folk tradition to mass art generates a very different form of cultural memory, in which our documentation of a “frozen” past comes back to haunt us in the guise of authenticity.*²⁹²

This was particularly the case in Britain where, as noted earlier, the musicians and audience were only rarely able to access American artists live so that Gracyk’s ‘frozen documentation’ became the source of heated debate in questions of authenticity.

Despite the fact that the twenty-year-old feud between the British Musician’s Union and the American Federation of Musicians came to an end in October 1955, the chance to see American artists performing live remained rare, especially outside London. This was because the Musician’s Union continued to insist that visits should be conducted on an exchange basis with equal pay for British artists touring the States – something very difficult to arrange given the comparative lack of demand there. Nonetheless, jazz fans who had waited two decades for the return of Louis Armstrong were finally rewarded in 1956 whereafter there followed a steady stream of the music’s greats. Blues fans were able to catch the likes of Big Bill Broonzy, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, and Muddy Waters who, with the exception of Broonzy, were invited to the UK at the instigation of leading jazz bandleader Chris Barber through the auspices of the National Federation of Jazz Organisations between 1955 and 1958. Fans of rock ‘n’ roll meanwhile were reduced, until the early sixties, to visits by Bill Haley and his Comets and Buddy Holly & the Crickets unless they were lucky enough to see one of the three shows Jerry Lee Lewis performed

²⁹⁰ Tony Standish, review of “Beautiful Delilah” b/w “Vacation Time” by Chuck Berry, *Jazz Journal* 11/10 (October 1958), p.12, cited in, Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom*, (Aldershot, 2007), p.62.

²⁹¹ Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom*, (Aldershot, 2007), p.14.

²⁹² Theodore Gracyk, *I Wanna Be Me: Rock Music and the Politics of Identity*, (Philadelphia, 2001), p.29.

before the scandal of his marriage to his thirteen-year-old cousin forced him to cancel the remaining dates and head back to the States.²⁹³

When American performers did arrive, their reception could be ambivalent. Louis Armstrong appeared in Britain in the 1930s unaware that his audience expected the perceived authenticity of his ‘Hot Five’, and ‘Hot Seven’ periods only to be disappointed by his performance. One critic noted that ‘He seems to have come to the conclusion that a variety artist’s only mission in life is to be sensational...to sacrifice all art to crude showmanship.’²⁹⁴ Apparently all went well once Armstrong became attuned to the expectations of a British audience. Big Bill Broonzy, on several visits during the 1950s, likewise abandoned his more recent Chicago style ‘aware that white audiences interested in “blues folk songs and ballads” would want to hear an older repertoire performed in a less polished style’. Broonzy cannily played up his ‘authenticity’, fostering the belief that he was the last real bluesman, explaining to the *Melody Maker* his inability to find any accompanying musicians with the remark: ‘I guess they’ve all been shot.’²⁹⁵ Muddy Waters’ reception in 1958 provides another example of the ‘mistaken expectations’ of British jazz audiences when he used what was then the unfamiliar sounding electric guitar to deliver the contemporary urban Chicago blues. Though the negative response of a minority among the audience who witnessed the tour should not be exaggerated, Waters himself was sufficiently affected to ensure that when he returned in 1962, he was prepared. What he did not realise was that in the intervening period rhythm and blues had become popular with a younger audience who ‘shared none of the older generation’s problems with loud guitars and...wondered why the king of the Chicago blues was playing acoustic.’ According to Val Wilmer, ‘Back at his London hotel after the concert he sat shaking his head in disbelief...Just what did they want these white folks?’²⁹⁶ Just as Freund Schwartz suggests that ‘reception via recordings’ had the effect of detaching jazz

²⁹³ Pete Frame, *The Restless Generation: How rock music changed the face of 1950s Britain*, (London, 2007), Chronology, pp.440-86. Haley first toured Britain early in 1957, Holly and Lewis in 1958.

²⁹⁴ *Melody Maker*, August 5th, 1933, cited in, David Boulton, *Jazz In Britain*, (London, 1959), p.64.

²⁹⁵ Yannick Bruynoghe, “Meet Bill Broonzy”, *Melody Maker*, August 11th, 1951, p.9, cited in, Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom*, (Aldershot, 2007), p.41.

²⁹⁶ Val Wilmer, ‘The First Time I Met the Blues’, *Mojo*, (n.d.), pp.84-94, quoted in, Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom*, (Aldershot, 2007), p.148.

‘from its historical position in African American culture’, the historical position of the blues could it appears be similarly obfuscated.²⁹⁷

Authenticity, Adorno, and ‘Art as collective action’

All of the above is intended to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the development of both the serious appreciation of jazz, blues and rhythm and blues (and by association, to a certain extent rock ‘n’ roll) and issues surrounding notions of *perceived* ‘authenticity’. As Freund Schwartz has observed:

*The notion of authenticity occupies a central position in British debates about the worth, appropriation and commodification of African American music. In his Philosophy of Music Theodore Adorno coined the term “authenticity” to describe musical works that “forged their own internal consistency while acknowledging the historical nature and social function of the material.” However, in critical discourse in Britain the idea of authenticity mostly evaluated extramusical relationships to an idealized notion of reality: how it was imagined the music of rural African Americans ought to sound. In the early 1950s authenticity was an aesthetic whose parameters were in constant flux, updated and refined by each new experience with the blues and its performers. Sincerity, emotional connection to the material and disregard for commercial appeal – whether real or perceived – were its most important characteristics, though personality was also significant. The musical qualities of authenticity were not yet established but a rawer, more untutored approach was valued over polish and technique.*²⁹⁸

It might be argued that notions of authenticity have continued to inform debates about the place of popular music in British culture and society ever since, manifested in discourse as to the merits of the indigenous skiffle, rock ‘n’ roll, beat, and rhythm and blues music found, not only in the pages of the *Melody Maker* and the *New Musical Express*, but in critical appraisals of pop culture of which Melly’s *Revolt Into Style* was among the first. Adorno’s dismissal of popular music (contained in his major article ‘On popular music’ written in 1941) which stemmed from the ‘mass culture criticism’ of the Frankfurt School, is significant in that not only did his ideas chime with those of cultural commentators in 1950s Britain (Hoggart *et al*), but they have also formed the basis, or at least the starting point, for much of the subsequent analysis by scholars in the fields of musicology, sociology and cultural studies that will be drawn upon for the theoretical framework of this study. In view of the fact that the historical development of the British reception and reproduction of the various forms of

²⁹⁷ Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom*, (Aldershot, 2007), p.16.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p.40.

popular music discussed thus far will inevitably be repeated in the ensuing chapters, it is the intention to conclude this one with a brief rehearsal of its essential features whilst at the same time introducing some of the theoretical perspectives employed by recent scholars keen to explore the relationship between society, culture and popular music.

This chapter has been concerned with identifying British youth and pop culture as it was being impacted upon from 1956 onwards. Thus British youth culture in the mid 1950s has been situated in its historical context with reference to the deeper transatlantic continuities in the reception of ideas, styles and technologies, a process that will henceforth be termed 'cultural transfer'. It should be obvious by now that it is a key premise of this study that American popular music was the chief cultural product being transferred between 1956 and 1965. This would apply even when the so-called 'British invasion' established the transfer as a reciprocal process when the Beatles touched down at JFK airport in February 1964.²⁹⁹ Something of the historical transatlantic development of the music – jazz, blues, rock 'n' roll, rhythm and blues – has also been presented in the hope that it will facilitate an understanding of the complexities involved in its reception in Britain. What follows is an attempt to broadly sketch the progress of the afore-mentioned 'cultural transfer' post-1956 whilst introducing some of the theoretical viewpoints of scholars interested in the relationship between popular music and society.

Jazz was of vital importance in the history of British popular music for several reasons. Despite its being assimilated into the mainstream of Denmark Street (Tin Pan Alley) pop at various times in its twentieth-century history jazz has, nonetheless, consistently offered an alternative to it. Linked to this is the fact, discussed above, that jazz encouraged the serious appreciation of popular music and introduced, along with the second folk revival, the crucial if stubbornly intractable problem of 'authenticity'. That peculiarly British reverence for the shellac then vinyl record and the importance of collectors in the dissemination of blues and rhythm and blues also had its origins in the world of jazz. The post-war jazz and folk revivals lead to what was in the mid-1950s an esoteric interest in the African-American blues tradition which eventually produced the rhythm and blues movement but more immediately generated the skiffle craze in 1956 which inspired the early sixties 'Beat Boom'. Many of the jazz clubs that sprang up all over the country later became important venues for beat and rhythm and blues music. Informal dancing or 'jiving' to a live band or group also began in

²⁹⁹ It might be argued that Lonnie Donegan had begun this process back in 1956 when 'Rock Island Line' was a top ten hit on the US Billboard chart.

jazz clubs. Whilst acknowledgement of all these factors must be made it is also necessary to point out that by the early sixties, just as ‘trad’ jazz reached its commercial apogee, it was regarded as a spent force by many of the young people who are the subject of this study. At the time when the Beatles were sharing the bill at the Cavern with ‘trad’ outfits such as the Merseysippi Jazz Band, John Lennon was referring to the jazz musicians who disappeared to the pub whenever the younger beat groups went on stage as ‘Those old bastards’. It is doubtful he was alone in regarding them as an obstacle to musical ‘progress’.³⁰⁰

In view of the importance of jazz in the development of twentieth-century popular music it is somewhat strange that Adorno’s Marxist critique of what he deemed ‘non-serious’ music should target that music specifically. However, as Peter J. Martin has observed, there are historical reasons for this which must be clarified before it is possible to move on. According to Martin ‘it is clear that by ‘jazz’ he [Adorno] did not mean the improvised music which emerged from the African-American tradition’ but the commercialised jazz music of the inter-war years.

*For Adorno, then, jazz was the ‘sweet’ music of the big dance bands and broadcasting orchestras: precisely the music from which the ‘hot’ jazz players and their early fans sought to distance themselves. Indeed, it is ironic that Adorno’s critique of commercialised popular music has regularly been matched, and surpassed, by the vitriolic condemnation of it which has emanated from jazz purists.*³⁰¹

What was essentially a decidedly pessimistic rebuttal of Western positivist philosophy in response to the emergence of totalitarian regimes in both ‘capitalist’ and ‘communist’ Europe at the time, was the product of the ‘Frankfurt School’ whose disillusionment with the two ‘orthodox ideologies’ drew them closer to the ideas of Weber ‘who sought to explain why class-based social conflict, while possible, was unlikely to produce a revolutionary transformation, who saw no purpose or ultimate destination in human history, and who feared the ‘iron cage’ constructed out of the ‘inexorable rationalisation of human activity.’³⁰² Adorno expressed his ideas on these themes in terms of music and its relationship to society. It was in the repetition and standardisation of popular music that he detected the formulaic properties found ‘in any other sphere of the industrial production of commodities.’

³⁰⁰ Merseysippi clarinettist Don Lydiatt quoted in, Spencer Leigh, *Sweeping The Blues Away: A Celebration of the Merseysippi Jazz Band*, (Liverpool, 2002), p.116.

³⁰¹ Peter J. Martin, *Sounds and society: Themes in the sociology of music*, (Manchester, 1995), p.97.

³⁰² *Ibid.* p.83. Martin quotes A. Mitzman, *The Iron Cage*, (New York, 1985), p.3, ‘inexorable rationalisation of human activity.’

*Indeed, Adorno detects this pattern of repetition in all aspects of mass culture, in, for example, the rise and fall of singers and film stars: new names must keep appearing to sustain the illusion of novelty. Appearances proclaim innovation, choice and freedom; the reality is standardisation, conformity and the crushing of the individual by the collectivity.*³⁰³

Worthwhile, or ‘serious’, music on the other hand Adorno believed, like all great art, should express ‘the realities of the social totality with all its inherent contradictions.’ The real issue was whether or not the work ‘negated’ or ‘affirmed’ society, popular music being dismissed because, unlike critical theory and certain ‘serious’ orchestral works, it was ‘overwhelmingly affirmative, accepting society’. In a way not dissimilar to Marxist ‘false consciousness’, popular culture and popular music deceived people into becoming reconciled to a society that Adorno despised and for that reason it was possessed of ‘little aesthetic merit.’³⁰⁴ Perhaps unsurprisingly, Adorno’s approach – ‘negative dialectics’ – has been heavily criticised particularly by music sociologists who are disdainful of the fact that his music sociology ‘almost completely by-passes the need for empirical work.’³⁰⁵ As Martin suggests:

*...for all his theoretical virtuosity, it is far from clear that Adorno did in fact provide a coherent account of the relationship he claimed between musical and social structures; indeed in his unremitting efforts to relate the whole to the parts he leaves unresolved the familiar problems in any attempt to explain individual action in terms of macro-sociological structures.*³⁰⁶

As will become apparent, the sociology of music has moved on but it should be noted that in the field of musicology too the traditional preoccupations of ‘works, great works, great composers’ have more recently been augmented by the ‘new’ musicologists interest in ‘music’s role as a social medium.’³⁰⁷ It is therefore once again somewhat ironic that they should adopt Adorno’s ideas, or what Martin describes as ‘a distinctly ‘old’ version of sociology, in which musical forms somehow articulate or represent ideological formations.’³⁰⁸ In accordance with Martin it is for present purposes the belief that:

Sociologically, the task is not – as Adorno saw it – the ‘deciphering of music’ so as to show how it is determined by the social circumstances of its production, but rather to understand the processes by which sounds are creatively organised, and invested with meanings by listeners, musicians,

³⁰³ Peter J. Martin, *Sounds and society: Themes in the sociology of music*, (Manchester, 1995), p.94.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p.91.

³⁰⁵ Tia DeNora, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology*, (Cambridge, 2003), p.34.

³⁰⁶ Peter J. Martin, *Sounds and society: Themes in the sociology of music*, (Manchester, 1995), p.112.

³⁰⁷ Tia DeNora, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology*, (Cambridge, 2003), p.35.

³⁰⁸ Peter J. Martin, *Music and the sociological gaze: Art worlds and cultural production*, (Manchester, 2006), p.7.

*composers, critics, promoters and so on. It is thus not so much a matter of taking meanings out, so to speak, as of seeing how they get put in.*³⁰⁹

In challenging scholars to explore the relationship between music and society Adorno was undoubtedly a pioneer, however, it is by employing the concept of ‘art worlds’ and ‘art as collective action’, terms coined by the sociologist Howard S. Becker, that it is hoped a theoretical framework can be established that will facilitate this historical inquiry. Whereas for Adorno ‘Large scale economic concentration institutionalized the standardization [of popular music], and made it imperative’ with the result that ‘innovations by rugged individualists have been outlawed’³¹⁰, for Becker, ‘Innovators who command the cooperation of everyone needed for the activities the innovation requires have an art world at their disposal, whether they take over existing institutions, replacing the people who formerly made use of them, share the use of those facilities, or simply create an entirely new network.’ What is more, Becker explicitly states that rock ‘n’ roll musicians provided a classic example of this process in operation as they infiltrated the art world occupied by conventional dance bands and the popular record business as it existed in early 1950s America. Innovations in art worlds, he argues, can last if those involved accept them as the basis for cooperation or incorporate them into the existing way of doing things – ‘Changes can occur piecemeal and peacefully, almost unnoticed, or occasion substantial conflict between those who stand to profit and gain in public esteem by the change and those who will lose.’³¹¹ Martin takes Becker’s ideas as his starting point and attempts to take things further by suggesting that the ‘true’ meaning of popular music is not the important issue, but rather the ‘meaning(s)’ that young people invest in it as they construct and reproduce their own culture through collective action. Moreover, Martin maintains that the historical importance of popular music lies in its providing ‘a sense of who you are and where you belong’, and that the quest for a sense of belonging, meaning and identity is a response on the part of individuals to the loss of community and a perceived isolation and powerlessness in modern society.³¹²

It might be argued that in early 1950s Britain art worlds existed for mainstream popular music, traditional, mainstream and modern jazz, and that from the initially esoteric art worlds

³⁰⁹ Peter J. Martin, *Sounds and society: Themes in the sociology of music*, (Manchester, 1995), pp.124-5. The quotation ‘deciphering of music’ is attributed to Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, (New York, 1976), p.223.

³¹⁰ Theodor W. Adorno (with the assistance of George Simpson), ‘On Popular Music’, in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (eds.), *On Record: Rock, Pop, & the Written Word*, (New York, 1990), p.306.

³¹¹ Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, (London, 1982), p.309.

³¹² Peter J. Martin, *Sounds and society: Themes in the sociology of music*, (Manchester, 1995), pp.274-75.

that were nurtured in different parts of the country within jazz – amongst those passionately interested in the African-American blues/folk idiom – there developed, in combination with an equally passionate desire to play authentic American rock ‘n’ roll among a new, younger generation who had given up hope of seeing and hearing much of the original version, new art worlds fuelled by the do-it-yourself ethos of skiffle to produce in the early 1960s the beat and rhythm and blues scenes. Whether or not, as Martin asserts, young people were searching for new meaning and identity in response to a loss of community will be one of the questions that the next three chapters will attempt to answer.

Similarly, the ideas of Jason Toynbee who proposes a theory of ‘creativity as social authorship’ that ‘produces thick texts which speak of the social lives of people, particularly oppressed people, but which also promise the possibility of change’ will be applied with the aim of reaching a greater understanding of the inner workings of art worlds and the capacity for individual creativity within them. Like Martin, Toynbee stresses the role of human agency in musical creativity but agency that is constrained by given possibilities. Martin’s sociological approach founded upon Becker’s ‘art worlds’ and ‘art as collective action’ combined with Toynbee’s forceful arguments against the tendency towards the ‘deconstruction of authorship’ in his own field of cultural studies will underpin the ensuing historical narrative. Their shared concern for exploring the often ambiguous relationship between the music business/industry and those who create and consume its products and the technological innovations that have revolutionized those products is of especial significance when dealing with provincial cities. The business was done in London but the radios, televisions, record players and records, and guitars that became available to the newly affluent young enabled their participation in, and unprecedented influence on, that business for the first time. Again, like Martin, Toynbee builds his arguments both upon and in contradiction to those of Adorno. He sees what he calls ‘the market’ as representing ‘an ambivalent, but extremely important, threshold of success’:

Musicians aspire to enter market relations, to make large amounts of money, to become stars, and therefore commodify themselves. Yet at the same time the market is held to corrupt the non-commercial values to which successive corps of music makers from swing to techno have subscribed. The tension between such conflicting attitudes to the market suffuses the discourse and practice of music-making.

Toynbee claims his thesis ‘turns upside down the commonly held view that art is the defenceless victim of commerce.’³¹³ The tension he describes which was alluded to earlier in the discussion of authenticity is given space within his theoretical framework which will in turn inform what follows.

In addition to these theoretical insights, there are two more scholars of popular music whose ideas will be brought to bear here. First there is Dick Bradley’s contention that ‘the view which sees the period 1955-63...as a mere ‘background’ to later Beat, and other later styles, is heavily distorted by an almost fetishistic attention to the charts (i.e. the success of The Beatles etc.).’³¹⁴ This study can go some way towards remedying this unfortunate state of affairs by the simple virtue of its particular mode of inquiry. The music scenes in the North of England and Liverpool and Newcastle were not, for all but the last three or so years of the period, especially influenced by the vagaries of the national pop charts. The two port cities’ newspapers did in fact publish their own pop charts based on local record sales. Bradley’s complaint also implies the need for more emphasis to be placed on the peculiarly British skiffle craze which can again, arguably be best achieved through a comparative historical investigation of its impact and influence upon the developing music scenes in Liverpool and Newcastle rather than by reproducing the statistics for the number of skiffle groups in the country, guitar sales, or in recounting the meteoric rise to fame of its figurehead Lonnie Donegan. As *The Times* observed in 1957, skiffle ‘has encouraged large numbers, of young men and women to create their own popular music – a phenomenon which, even as recently as ten years ago, few sociologists or musicians could have foreseen.’³¹⁵ It is precisely this phenomenon and those young men and women who constituted the particular art world or music scene that generated the beat music of Liverpool and the rhythm and blues scene in Newcastle that are the focus of this investigation.

Second of the popular music scholars whose ideas will complement those of Martin and Toynbee in informing this work is Ian MacDonald. His convincingly argued thesis proposes that the period from the mid-fifties to the present day witnessed a transition from ‘popular music’ to the ‘people’s music’ the most significant result of which was a deterioration in the quality of the music due to ‘democratising technology’. He argues that:

³¹³ Jason Toynbee, *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions*, (London, 2000), p.3.

³¹⁴ Dick Bradley, *Understanding Rock ‘n’ Roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, (Buckingham, 1992), p.12.

³¹⁵ *The Times*, July 17th, 1957, p.5.

*...the truth of the matter is that, in the four-decade course of the shift from the pop music industry to the industry of the people's music, standards fell as the inevitable result of widening popularisation. The more the audience participated, the more the focus of the music being made became diffused and generalised. Evidently, a certain balance is required between tutored professionalism and spontaneous amateurism. The best professionals of former times [pre-1960s] were the most freely inspired; the best of the amateurs who began pouring into the industry around 1963 adhered to high formal standards in rivalry with the erstwhile professional incumbency. In the decades that followed, sliding standards produced a vicious cycle of decline. Focus and concentration gradually deflated from a pop music too popular for its own good.*³¹⁶

Whilst remaining sympathetic to much in this argument it might also be prudent to offer a less pessimistic alternative which suggests that rather than popular music undergoing a perpetual decline it is instead subject to cyclical episodes. As Martin asserts, 'cultural products and patterns must be understood as, above all, the outcome of constantly dynamic processes of conflict and competition.' It seems reasonable to suggest that this conflict and competition in terms of popular music should manifest itself in the machinations of the music industry and the mass media. As Harker maintains, 'Under capitalism, it will remain the case that most artists (if not most of the audience) will have to be content to succumb to the commercial sausage-machine, and be compensated with cash.'³¹⁷

That said, it is still the case that 'Rock 'n' roll songs and their singers were widely portrayed in the mid-1950s as a threat to the values of civilised society' in exactly the same way as punk rock elicited moral outrage two decades later, and rave culture more recently. These are 'instances of movements in popular music which have generally been understood as expressing explicit opposition to the 'dominant ideology.'³¹⁸ The argument here is that these recurring periods when popular music briefly becomes the people's music correspond to the sociologist Margaret Archer's belief that during certain discontinuities in what she calls the 'morphogenetic' sequences of structure and culture, individual agents or groups of people can exert considerable influence on their culture and even bring about structural change, if only temporarily. Two, three, maybe as many as four such moments might be posited between 1956 and 1965, beginning with rock 'n' roll, through skiffle and the Beat Boom, to rhythm and blues. Although it is perhaps more realistic to narrow this down to two as the energy and creativity unleashed by the first two movements undoubtedly provided the inspiration for the

³¹⁶ Ian MacDonald, *The People's Music*, (London, 2003), pp.199-207.

³¹⁷ Dave Harker, *One For The Money: Politics and popular song*, (London, 1980), p.111.

³¹⁸ Peter J. Martin, *Sounds and society: Themes in the sociology of music*, (Manchester, 1995), p.262.

latter. Conversely, in terms of the British experience, the years 1958-60, when the initial impetus of skiffle and rock 'n' roll was absorbed by the music industries, and the years following the success of the beat groups and the Beatles in particular, and the R&B groups after them – their commercialisation before the emergence of sixties counter-culture – correspond to Archer's 'morphostatic' sequence or 'conjunction' between structure and culture and result in her 'reciprocal influences'.³¹⁹ It might also be suggested that this be regarded as an example of Weber's 'elective affinity', 'the relationship of ideas to interests'; in this case musical creativity to the music business.³²⁰ In other words, periods when musical authenticity was sacrificed to commercial interests. Or as Eric Burdon put it: 'I'd already felt uncomfortable when he (manager Mike Jeffery) and Don Arden forced us to wear shiny suits...The kids would have loved us as we were, raw, animal-like scruffs from Newcastle.'³²¹ Thus the initial burst of creativity that is the people's music – rock 'n' roll, skiffle, beat music, rhythm and blues, punk rock etc. – becomes subsumed by commercial interests in a cyclical pattern. Hence the particular importance of the years under discussion, because in the fields of youth culture and popular music this process can be demonstrated as occurring, arguably, at least on the scale it did, for the first time.

The theoretical insights outlined above will be employed as a means by which the impact or 'cultural transfer' of North American popular music in the North of England, and more particularly Liverpool and Newcastle, can be analysed and interpreted with a view to answering the questions so far raised. This exercise will begin with an overview of popular music as it developed in the North of England as a whole.

³¹⁹ Margaret Archer, *Culture and Agency: the place of culture in social theory*, (Cambridge, 1996), p.315. The precise meaning of the terms employed by Archer will be clarified as the study progresses.

³²⁰ Richard Swedberg, *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts*, (Stanford, 2005), p.83.

³²¹ Eric Burdon, *I Used To Be An Animal But I'm Alright Now*, (London, 1986), p.68.

Chapter Four: Popular Music in the North of England

Taking up where the last chapter left off it is as well to begin the appraisal of the popular music scene in the North of England between 1956 and 1965 by re-engaging with Ian MacDonald's thesis that popular music in this country has, since the end of the sixties, undergone a qualitative decline in the process of becoming the 'people's music'. The issue of 'decline' is a subjective one and therefore need not be of concern for the time being. However, as he insists that the process by which popular music became the 'people's music' commenced in 1956, his arguments and observations regarding the period that followed must be. Moreover, upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that MacDonald does in fact subscribe to the notion of a cyclical pattern in popular music history, a pattern that is to a large extent formed by broader social and cultural forces. He states that, beginning with rock 'n' roll, there have been periodic outbreaks of rebellion in popular music and:

What's more to the point is that such eras of rebellion come and go, being attached to wider social signifiers and deeper cultural upheavals than can be accounted for in purely creative terms. The creativity of rock music rides on a social background and takes much of its cut and colour from what's going on in the wider world.

For him 'the main feature of the writing in [*The People's Music*] lies in its espousal of this temporal aspect and the proposition that popular music is a product of society first, a rebel festivity second (and always in passing).³²² Furthermore, and in accord with the views expressed by Dick Bradley noted earlier, MacDonald is of the firm belief that 'Cultural impact isn't measured by quantity of sales but by the quality of those impacted upon.'³²³ With these considerations in mind it is the intention in this chapter, largely through the use of secondary source material, to present an account of the music scenes in the major, and some minor, towns and cities of the geographical region described in chapter two. In so doing, hopefully something of the process by which the audience came increasingly to participate in music-making and their 'quality' as they were impacted upon by the various North American popular music styles will be revealed. In addition, it is hoped that something of the distinctively Northern character of these music scenes and the relationship between the various separate identities, the existence of which was postulated in chapter two, might also be gleaned. Finally, whilst serving as an introduction to the considerably more in depth analysis that will follow in the chapters devoted to Liverpool and Newcastle, the ensuing

³²² Ian MacDonald, *The People's Music*, (London, 2003), introduction pp.vii-viii.

³²³ *Ibid.* p.117.

discussion will also provide an opportunity to further explore the theoretical insights introduced above. Martin's extrapolation of Becker's work concerning 'art worlds' and 'art as collective action' and Toynbee's notion of 'creativity as social authorship' will be considered in relation to the historical process at work in the social and cultural milieu of popular music in the North of England spanning the 1950s and '60s.

The North's Cultural Moment

In the discussion of Dave Russell's work, *Northern England and the national imagination*, it was pointed out that of the four distinct periods during which the North 'has enjoyed, if that is the correct word, an especially prominent share of [cultural] representations within the national culture', he identified the years 1957-c.1964 as the exception in that the depictions were largely positive. He argues that this was a time when 'the urban/industrial North felt good about itself' when 'northern literature, film, television and popular music penetrated the national culture to an extent hitherto unknown.' For Russell, it was the authors and dramatists of the 1950s who were responsible for the first wave of this 'cultural moment'. Beginning in 1957 with the publication of John Braine's *Room at the Top* and Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* there occurred a 'northernisation' of the national culture spearheaded by the so-called 'angry young men' and what became known as the 'kitchen sink' school of writing.³²⁴ Though comprising a relatively small body of work based on novels and scripts with a Northern setting, films such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *A Taste of Honey* were noted for 'the use of black and white photography, desolate urban/industrial settings and jazz influenced scores as well as a concentration on sex, class and generational conflict.' In attaining both critical and commercial success, Russell maintains that these films 'placed the region at the core of a significant moment of cultural change and creativity.'³²⁵ Sean Egan, the Animals' biographer, states that Eric Burdon was one among many of his generation who were influenced by the 'northern realist' storylines of these dramas. Their heroes 'were young, working-class men who were determined to have a better life than their fathers had and were contemptuous of the "Not for the likes of us" supineness that had hitherto prevented the British proletariat from getting its fair share.'³²⁶

³²⁴ Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*, (Manchester, 2004), pp.28-33. Besides being a pioneering work of mass culture criticism Hoggart's work was also an autobiographical account of working-class life in Leeds.

³²⁵ *Ibid.* pp.183-84.

³²⁶ Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks – The Story of the Animals: Newcastle's Rising Sons*, (London, 2001), p.11.

While his claim that Burdon was driven to become a professional singer more by the determination that these films inspired than by his love of the blues seems doubtful, the appeal of the swagger and attitude displayed by their leading men for many young working-class Northern males does not.

With the establishment of a regional network for commercial television beginning in 1955 ‘the North had the potential to portray itself to the rest of the nation on its own terms far more easily than in the past’, a development that gave rise to the iconic *Coronation Street* and the BBC’s response, *Z Cars*.³²⁷ Of particular interest here are two observations that Russell makes in connection with this cultural moment, the first being that the southern scriptwriter for *Z Cars*, Troy Kennedy Martin, ‘was attracted and ‘frightened’ by the North, claiming that in its new towns ‘one felt the rawness of the “Wild West”’.³²⁸ The series was set, ostensibly at least, on the newly populated Kirkby estate on the outskirts of Liverpool. His second observation is that for young film-makers eager to confront the London-centric, middle-class attitudes of the established British cinema, the North represented ‘the ‘authentic’ England, for once privileged over the comfortable South, where cinematic traditions could be refreshed and post-war class relations and the rigidity of moral codes probed and sometimes challenged.’³²⁹

The points Russell raises here prompt the suggestion that this combination of a sense of a new pioneering spirit to be found on the overspill housing estates erected to re-house the inner-city Northern working-class, and the notion that the North was being equated with ‘authenticity’, might somehow have a bearing on the region’s reception of, and relationship with, North American popular music. Did the grain of truth contained in certain deep-seated representations of the North, its masculinity inspired by back-breaking manual labour, its

³²⁷ The case of commercial television in the North East provides another example of their being good grounds for the perceived isolation of the region from the ‘greater North’, as related by Natasha Vall: ‘The rise to dominance of ‘the North’ in television during the 1960s was to become synonymous with the development of Granada, the company that was awarded the licence to broadcast in 1956. In its first celebratory history Tyne Tees Television recorded how ‘viewers in the North East, well accustomed to finding themselves near the end of the queue’, were to wait until 1959 before sampling this new form of representation.’ Natasha Vall, ‘Regionalism and Cultural History: The Case of North-Eastern England, 1918-1976’, in Adrian Green and A. J. Pollard (eds.), *Regional Identities in North-East England, 1300-2000*, (Woodbridge, 2007), pp.192-93.

³²⁸ Quoted in S. Laing, ‘Banging in some reality: the original *Z Cars*’, in J. Corner, *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History*, (London, 1991), pp.125-44, cited in Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*, (Manchester, 2004), p.190.

³²⁹ Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*, (Manchester, 2004), p.184.

resentment of economic exploitation by the South, or the propensity for wry down-to-earth even gallows humour, render the region's youth more susceptible to a music largely founded in the lamentations of the African-American blues tradition? It will become apparent that, particularly in areas of the North where there arose a strong affinity with blues and rhythm and blues music, just such a claim has been made, and from more than one source. This issue will be investigated here and in subsequent chapters along with the idea that these same Northern characteristics were a factor in the reception of the resulting music made in the North by audiences in the South, especially London.

In concluding that the 'Merseysound' of 1963...provided a distinct second phase of this northern cultural moment, building on the successes of 1957 and beyond', Russell acknowledges the importance of popular music in contemporary perceptions of the North.³³⁰ However, remembering that he is consciously restricting his investigation to perceptions rather than 'objective realities' his concern is understandably with the moment (1963) when the whole country became aware of this Northern musical phenomenon. While the music may have appeared to spring fully formed into the national consciousness in 1963, it was rather the product of several years' gestation. Therefore what follows is an attempt to chart the development of the North's music scene beginning with the arrival of rock 'n' roll and the emergence of skiffle from out of the jazz scene in 1956.

British Popular Music in 1956

It should be remembered that the British popular music scene of 1955-56 was, according to the *NME*'s '1955 Music Charts League Table', dominated by songs of the Tin Pan Alley variety from both sides of the Atlantic. The paper declared that 'In the past twelve months Britain has produced enough top recording stars to enable this country to hold its own with rival attractions from America', while the 'Top Selling Artists (Britain)' category included such home-grown luminaries as Ruby Murray (No.1), Jimmy Young, Dickie Valentine and Alma Cogan. Bill Haley, whose 'Rock Around the Clock' had reached Number 1 in November 1955, was the Number 12 best seller and represented the only 'rock 'n' roll' performer. It is possible to glean from contemporary charts and popularity polls the general preferences of the audience for popular music of the period, but because it is not possible to know exactly who was buying the records or voting in the polls, it is necessary to remain

³³⁰ Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*, (Manchester, 2004), p.28.

cautious as to what they can reveal about the musical tastes of young people. Although the *NME*'s Readers' Poll at the end of 1956 showed Frank Sinatra to be the 'Outstanding American Male Singer' with Elvis Presley in third place and Dickie Valentine as 'Outstanding British Musical Personality' ahead of Lonnie Donegan, the votes cast were a mere 12,006 to 6,490 and 5,131 to 2,825 respectively.³³¹ Perhaps of more cultural significance is the report in the same paper from earlier that year which recorded that 'For the first time in the history of pop songs in Britain, a song has been made by juke boxes – ably assisted by Radio Luxembourg and [DJ] Jack Jackson.' It was noted how:

HEARTBREAK HOTEL was first brought to the notice of teenagers through juke boxes, and caught on that way. Even before dance orchestrations were available, hundreds of fans all over the country asked for it. Juke boxes can promote songs and promote music sales.³³²

Arguably, this extract gives a truer indication of the prevailing trends amongst young people in 1956, when radio and juke box plays and record sales and chart position were fast becoming the means by which it was possible to stimulate sales and gauge the success of a song or an artist. The days when sheet music sales, 'reflecting the importance of public performance rather than private entertainment', and the willingness of dance bands to 'orchestrate' a song for their repertoire provided the acid test of popularity were over. Sandbrook suggests that the continued appeal of American crooners like Dean Martin and Perry Como was due to their being 'associated with wealth, luxury and glamour', rare commodities in early 1950s Britain, and that the enduring success of 'orchestral pieces and British sentimental ballads' reflected the fact that 'War-weary audiences evidently appreciated the reassuring sound of comfortable voices and a familiar style.'³³³ Whilst this may be true for a wider and perhaps older audience, there was a new and younger audience for popular music whose own idealised version of the American dream owed more to James Dean and Marlon Brando and to Elvis Presley – the audio-visual personification of youthful rebellion.

As more American rock 'n' roll artists infiltrated the comparatively staid British pop charts, various London-based impresarios began to 'discover' British working-class rock 'n' rollers in the hope that they might compete. The problem was that, with the partial exception of

³³¹ *New Musical Express*, November 23rd, 1956, p.8.

³³² *New Musical Express*, June 8th, 1956, p.2.

³³³ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), p.457.

Billy Fury and Johnny Kidd's Pirates, they weren't very good at it. For the most part British rock 'n' rollers simply lacked the authenticity of the Americans, but nevertheless, throughout the second half of the 1950s, beginning with Tommy Hicks (Tommy Steele); Harry Webb (Cliff Richard), Reg Smith (Marty Wilde), and Ronnie Wycherley (Billy Fury), to name but a few, were plucked from obscurity and provided with an image, material, a recording contract and a hectic touring schedule. Of some significance for this history is the fact that Tommy Steele was first noticed in the Two Is coffee bar in Old Compton Street, Soho, a venue which is simultaneously associated with skiffle *and* (the birthplace of) British rock 'n' roll. The future Shadows Hank Marvin and Bruce Welch became regulars there shortly after arriving in London from Newcastle in 1957 and as former skifflers aspiring to be rock 'n' roll stars made contact with Cliff Richard who also inhabited London's coffee bar milieu. Despite their rock 'n' roll inclinations all four of these British stars began in skiffle groups and although Marvin and Welch left Newcastle, and Fury left Liverpool, so early that they must remain peripheral to the story of the music scenes that developed there, the fact that it was a combination of skiffle and Elvis Presley that inspired their careers only serves to confirm the far-reaching impact of each in 1956.

Glasgow born but London resident Lonnie Donegan almost single-handedly popularised skiffle music when his version of American folk/blues singer Huddie 'Leadbelly' Ledbetter's 'Rock Island Line' entered the national chart peaking at Number 8 in January 1956. In Liverpool, John Lennon's 78rpm copy was played so frequently that he chipped the centre taking it on and off the record player.³³⁴ George Harrison recalled, 'I have a lot to thank skiffle for. Without it being so simple I may not have put in so much time with the guitar...and without the guitar I would not have had a career!' He also remarked that 'Being in a skiffle group allowed me to meet other musicians and get the feel of playing in small clubs and coffee houses.'³³⁵ The Animals' drummer, John Steel, was unequivocal:

It seemed like a spontaneous thing. I've always said it was skiffle that did it. When Lonnie Donegan recorded 'Rock Island Line' that's when everybody realised that 'I can do that'. Three chords on a cheap guitar. And when Elvis Presley came out with 'Heartbreak Hotel' and sounded so black, that's when

³³⁴ Spencer Leigh, *Puttin' On The Style: The Lonnie Donegan Story*, (Folkestone, 2003), p.37.

³³⁵ George Harrison, from the foreword to, Chas McDevitt, *Skiffle: The Definitive Inside Story*, (London, 1997), p.viii.

*everybody realised, 'Well fuckin' hell why can't us white kids play blues, play rock and roll?'*³³⁶

Steel was also an ardent devotee of trad jazz which in 1956, before skiffle and rock 'n' roll, appealed to teenagers whose passion for music extended beyond the comparatively formal ballroom 'swing' orchestras. To derive equal pleasure from trad jazz, skiffle and rock 'n' roll was not something that was then considered unusual, genres of popular music were not endlessly sub-divided and compartmentalised as they have since become. Recalling his formative years in Newcastle, Hank Marvin has spoken of how he was influenced by both jazz and rock 'n' roll guitarists. He has described how:

*Because I'd been brought up on trad. jazz, which is much more closely related to rock 'n' roll in that both have an obvious heavy beat compared to modern jazz, which sometimes can be very subtle, I sometimes found it difficult to tap my toes to modern jazz, and the strong rhythmic beat of rock 'n' roll immediately got through to me and to millions of young people.*³³⁷

Coupled with the fact that his first experience of playing before a live audience was as a sixteen-year-old in the Crescent City Skiffle Group using his first guitar which was a birthday present from his father, the above quotation makes Brian Rankin's (as he was then known) experience typical of, if not millions, then certainly many thousands of British teenagers of the period. Many of the leading figures of the Beat and Rhythm and Blues movements began in this way and the progression from skiffle to rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues seemed quite natural as teenagers became more musically proficient.

Manchester

As in London, it was the coffee bar Gaggia machine and juke box that provided the first point of social contact for many Northern teenagers in the mid-fifties. Alan Lawson writes in his account of the Manchester scene at the time that 'the coffee bar was probably the first tangible sign of social emancipation' as 'Many young people had their first taste of social mingling at youth clubs, and their first experience of supposedly adult behaviour at coffee bars.' By 1958 there were 'dozens' of coffee bars in Manchester including the 700 Club, the Raven, the New Astoria and the Oasis. These venues were the hubs of the social scene while

³³⁶ Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks – The Story of the Animals: Newcastle's Rising Sons*, (London, 2001), p.13.

³³⁷ Chris Phipps, John Tobler, Sid Smith, *Northstars*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2005), p.125.

the youth clubs were ‘the incubators for the hundreds of groups which emerged.’³³⁸ Once again it is Lonnie Donegan who is credited as the catalyst by many of the city’s musicians including John “Butch” Mephram, bass player for seminal Manchester groups Johnny Peters and the Jets, The Fourtones, and The Coasters, who claims that he ‘inspired everyone to buy a guitar’. ‘Without Donegan’ he insists ‘I’m sure you wouldn’t have seen the musical explosion of the early sixties.’³³⁹

As Manchester’s nascent skiffle groups honed their skills and began performing at church halls and summer fetes, the more traditional venues slowly began to adapt to the demands of teenagers. The flexibility afforded by 45rpm records meant that disc jockeys could be employed to cater for their musical tastes and the Mecca circuit’s Plaza ballroom introduced lunchtime dance sessions where the normal requirements of the strict tempo evening dances were relaxed. According to Lawson, ‘initially the Plaza was purely record based’ with Jimmy Savile the resident DJ, but live groups were gradually introduced and the fact that the lunchtime dances were so popular, attracting ‘massive audiences’, lead inevitably to evening sessions. In the late fifties the Plaza on ‘Saturday nights used to be a magnet for kids all over the area’ Lawson recalls, ‘and it provided a gateway into the pleasures of Manchester for thousands.’³⁴⁰ During the early sixties those groups that had outlasted the skiffle craze and were sufficiently driven to persist in their ambition to become rock ‘n’ roll stars found the opportunity to perform at clubs with a long established reputation for jazz. Lawson relates how ‘Manchester had a thriving jazz scene during those years [1958-61] and its life blood was the jazz club, particularly the cellar variety. Places like The Thatched House, Club Southside, and The Regency Club on Cheetham Hill Road’. Clubs such as the Oasis, formerly the 2Js jazz club, made its reputation by embracing the beat groups, and the Twisted Wheel, previously ‘a beatnik-type cafe called The Left Wing’, became the home of Manchester’s R & B scene.³⁴¹

C. P. Lee maintains that Manchester’s love of jazz came about as the direct result of its proximity to the American Air Force base at Burtonwood 25 miles west of the city. Tosh Ryan, sax player in the Victor Brox Blues Train, remembers:

³³⁸ Alan Lawson, “*It Happened In Manchester*”: *The True Story of Manchester’s Music, 1958-1965*, (Bury, 1992), pp.8-11.

³³⁹ John Mephram quoted in *ibid.* p.5.

³⁴⁰ Alan Lawson, “*It Happened In Manchester*”: *The True Story of Manchester’s Music, 1958-1965*, (Bury, 1992), pp.12-14.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.20.

*It was a massive camp – that changed dance hall music quite radically I think because you got Americans bringing albums over, you got Americans who were playing in bands at weekends, that includes dance band music, moving from dance bands to Jazz, small groups. From Jazz things developed through the late 1950s into the early 1960s, into the new Rock ‘n’ Roll.*³⁴²

In addition Lee cites the West Indian and African immigrants of Moss Side as contributing ‘a fresh musical impetus’ which is encapsulated in Victor Brox’s recollection of a night in The Nile Club when musicians from both communities could be found performing with the Eric Deane Orchestra. He recalls that ‘Amongst the Africans you had Fela Kuti who was playing fourth trumpet; amongst the West Indians you had Lord Kitchener who was playing string bass.’ For Lee all these factors made for a ‘richness of musical talent’ on the Manchester jazz scene.³⁴³

The accounts of Lawson and Lee highlight the importance of not only certain venues but also key personalities at various stages in the development of the Manchester music scene. Lee stresses the importance of three figures in particular; Danny Betesh, John Mayall and Paddy McKiernan. Betesh was a promoter throughout the 1950s but he really found his calling when he established Kennedy Street Enterprises in the early 1960s which represented the cream of Manchester’s beat groups; Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders, Herman’s Hermits, The Hollies and Freddie and the Dreamers. John Mayall was a fanatical collector and devotee of blues and rhythm and blues music. Bruce Mitchell, drummer for Victor Brox remembered him thus:

*John was a very unusual sort of guy, and had marvellous energy for all his obsessions. He ran reel-to-reel tape recorders to a tuner, and taped all the important AFN shows, and he’d annotate his tapes. He was an important focus for us. His house was the only place we could hear our kind of playlist.*³⁴⁴

Mayall was a regular performer on the Manchester club scene until his departure in the early sixties, at the invitation of Alexis Korner, for London’s emerging R & B scene where he continued to be highly influential with his band the Bluesbreakers. Paddy McKiernan was, according to George Melly, ‘Unlike most of the promoters in those days’ [the 1950s] because ‘he believed in jazz *as a business* [his italics]. He didn’t just run a jazz club. He was the

³⁴² Tosh Ryan quoted in, C. P. Lee, *Shake Rattle and Rain: Popular Music Making in Manchester, 1955-1995*, (Ottery St. Mary, 2002), p.25.

³⁴³ Victor Brox quoted in *ibid.* p.26

³⁴⁴ Dave Haslam, *Manchester, England: the story of the pop cult city*, (London, 1999), p.83. AFN – American Forces Network.

director of ‘The Lancashire Society for the Promotion of Jazz Music.’³⁴⁵ He was a leading promoter in the city during the 1960s and is credited with introducing genuine blues artists (John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters) to Manchester with his concerts at the ‘usually staid’ Free Trade Hall.³⁴⁶

Added to these key figures should be Adrian Barrett who worked for his father in the family’s musical instrument repair shop, a place described by Lawson as ‘a pivot around which so much of Manchester music swung.’ Barratt is regarded by many of the musicians who benefited from his acquaintance as ‘the godfather of the Manchester music scene.’³⁴⁷ He allowed musicians to hold jam sessions in an upstairs room where, amongst others, the Hollies first came together. He recommended musicians to one another, introducing Freddie Garrity and Derek Quinn who became Freddie and the Dreamers. Most of all Lawson claims, ‘there developed at Barratts [sic] an unusual sense of community. It became a place to meet and a forum for debate and a gossip-shop, and as the premier music shop in the city it was a place to hang out.’³⁴⁷

Jimmy Savile spent three-and-a-half years in Manchester between 1959 and 1963 where, as recounted above, he transformed the fortunes of Mecca’s Plaza ballroom with his lunchtime ‘jive sessions’. Whilst it appears he did very little for the live music scene, the self-proclaimed originator of the dance hall disc jockey undoubtedly struck a chord with Manchester’s teenagers and – ‘at a time when dancing to live bands was the norm and the idea of dancing to records, he recalls, was ‘literally laughed at’ – he did a great deal to popularise what he called ‘the new music’.³⁴⁸ Another future household name, Dave Lee Travis, began his DJ-ing career at the Oasis, going on to stints at the Plaza and the Bodega before becoming resident at the Manchester Cavern when it opened in May 1964.³⁴⁹ Both DJs cultivated their flamboyant reputations during their time in Manchester. These are just some of the most prominent and influential characters inhabiting the ‘art world’ that was the Manchester music scene between 1956 and 1965. Likewise, the venues mentioned, although among the most successful, do not reveal the true scale of the scene there, particularly in the

³⁴⁵ George Melly, *Owning Up: The Trilogy*, (London, 2000), p.407.

³⁴⁶ C. P. Lee, *Shake Rattle and Rain: Popular Music Making in Manchester, 1955-1995*, (Ottery St. Mary, 2002), p.32.

³⁴⁷ Alan Lawson, “*It Happened In Manchester*”: *The True Story of Manchester’s Music, 1958-1965*, (Bury, 1992), p.37.

³⁴⁸ Dave Haslam, *Manchester, England: the story of the pop cult city*, (London, 1999), p.87.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.96.

years after the Beat Boom. Lawson's account covers the period 1958-65 for which he lists almost two hundred venues and over seven hundred groups.³⁵⁰

The authors of the three works drawn upon here are understandably, as Mancunians, keen to portray their city and its music scene as having made a significant contribution to British popular music, especially when it comes to comparisons with Liverpool. Lawson's is particular because it deals exclusively with the beat and rhythm and blues era – meaning The Cavern and the Beatles. The cover of his book makes the point immediately, with the 'Manchester' of the title superimposed over 'Liverpool'. Indeed, at times he seems a little too determined to assert Manchester's importance and arguably stretches credulity when, in his conclusion, he writes:

*Many of the groups included in the book lived and worked and played in the area, often within a loud drum roll of the Mersey. Many of the clubs mentioned in this book used to lie within a stone's throw of the Mersey. Not in Liverpool. In Manchester. So how valid is even the term, 'Merseybeat'?*³⁵¹

Nonetheless, the book is generally even-handed and raises some interesting points concerning the relationship between the two cities. In recollecting his involvement with one of Manchester's early beat groups, The Powerhouse 6, Peter Tattersall, recalls how their lead singer had a relative in the navy who brought back records from the States thereby giving them access to a lot of material that was then unknown in the UK. Lawson then goes on to describe how a similar scenario has often been, mistakenly, applied to account for the emergence of the 'Liverpool Sound'. Contrary to what he refers to as the 'media hype [which] portrayed the city as a major port', Lawson claims that the port of Liverpool was in 'gradual' decline during the fifties. Furthermore, he argues that the popular image of 'sailors [Cunard Yanks] leaping off-ship with arms full of unknown American records on strange, exotic labels' is similarly misleading because Liverpool was no longer the centre for transatlantic shipping it once was. In fact, many of the vessels that did put in to Liverpool continued on to Manchester through the Ship Canal and unloaded in the Trafford Road area of Salford known as 'The Barbary Coast'. According to Lawson, although 'Records were not part of the large official cargoes...there are many local people who still proudly own American singles from the mid-fifties which came to them via the Ship Canal.'³⁵²

³⁵⁰ Alan Lawson, *"It Happened In Manchester": The True Story of Manchester's Music, 1958-1965*, (Bury, 1992), pp.136-49.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.* p.135.

³⁵² *Ibid.* pp.21-22.

Unfortunately, he does not provide any evidence to back up this claim which may constitute little more than another example of attempted ‘one-upmanship’ on behalf of Manchester over its rival, but the questions he raises concerning the origins of the so-called ‘Liverpool Sound’ will be returned to.

Contemporary evidence of a Mancunian desire to claim a share of the credit for innovations in popular music comes in a letter to the *Melody Maker* from August 1956. In a riposte to Alexis Korner’s article claiming that London was the birthplace of British skiffle and its founder Ken Colyer, one Alan Stevens opined, ‘Well, well, well! More Southern dogmatic statements’ before contesting that:

Eight years ago [1948], in the days when Colyer was dreaming of New Orleans while cleaning carriages on the London Underground, the Smoky City Stompers, pioneers of revivalism in Manchester, formed a hokum offshoot called the Tasle Alley Washboard Beaters.

After setting the record straight by providing an account of how the earliest exponents of skiffle in the country hailed from Manchester he concludes his missive by reminding readers that ‘it all goes to prove again the truth of the old adage that what Manchester does today, the rest of the country does tomorrow.’³⁵³ Eight years later at the height of the Beat Boom, the same paper ran a feature entitled ‘LIVERPOOL v MANCHESTER’ in which it was alleged that ‘Forty miles from Liverpool, a beat battlefront is forming, with guitars instead of guns. Target? Britain’s Pop 50 and Liverpool’s powerful reputation as the North’s beatiest city.’³⁵⁴ The article goes on to list the relative achievements and emerging talents of the two cities but ultimately reveals itself to be a concoction of the Southern media. This conclusion is supported by Pauline Clegg, manager of Manchester’s premier beat venue, the Oasis, who recalled that initially at least, ‘There was lots of intermingling between Liverpool and Manchester in those days but then the media created a sense of rivalry.’³⁵⁵

Further insights into the relationship as perceived from Manchester can be gained from Oasis co-owner Rick Dixon and manager cum agent Ron Stratton. In his capacity as promoter Dixon visited Liverpool on a fairly regular basis to discuss business with Brian Epstein which, Lawson suggests, qualifies him to pass judgement on the relative merits of the cities’ groups. In Dixon’s opinion, Manchester groups ‘were [generally] more sophisticated than the

³⁵³ *Melody Maker*, August 11th, 1956, p.7.

³⁵⁴ *Melody Maker*, June 1st, 1963, pp.8-9.

³⁵⁵ Alan Lawson, “*It Happened In Manchester*”: *The True Story of Manchester’s Music, 1958-1965*, (Bury, 1992), p.132.

groups in Liverpool.’ Stratton believes that ‘economic factors’ can explain differences between their music scenes because, ‘As a city Liverpool was much worse off than Manchester, and even back then they had a large pool of unemployed youngsters. For many of them rock ‘n’ roll was the only way out.’ As to whether these statements convey more of a sense of Mancunian prejudice than discernable fact will require further investigation, but Lawson does offer support for John Belchem’s assertion when he affirms that ‘in those days Liverpool was like a city apart. Nothing like as cosmopolitan as Manchester and a very insular and parochial place.’³⁵⁶

Sheffield

In his account of the Sheffield scene from 1955-1975, *Not Like A Proper Job*, John Firminger recounts the familiar early 1950s story of a city beleaguered by post-war austerity whose centre was slowly recovering from the effects of the Blitz. Pubs shut at 10pm and street lights went out at midnight. Live music consisted of tap room piano sing-alongs or dance hall big bands and Sheffield, like most provincial towns and cities, ‘was a musical backwater.’ Firminger, who served for a time in the ranks of one of the city’s leading musical exports, Dave Berry and the Cruisers, contends that:

*Unlike other big northern cities such as Manchester or Liverpool, Sheffield was geographically isolated. Both Lancashire cities were ports, Manchester being linked by the ship canal, and had historic and cultural links with the east coast of North America. They also had huge influxes of Irish immigrants which were to have a strong influence on musical input. It always took Sheffield that bit longer to catch up – but it also led to the city creating its own unique take on musical trends, as well as developing its own.*³⁵⁷

One theme that runs through the story of Sheffield’s music scene is a lack of venues, and of equal importance, an almost complete absence of (legal) nightlife after the pubs and ballrooms closed. Aspiring jazz guitarist Derek Bailey bemoaned the fact that there were only two jobs to be obtained for a professional musician in the city during the early fifties; in the Regent Cinema’s Green Room restaurant and at the City Hall. These were big band swing outfits, from one of which he remembered being fired for playing a modern jazz solo, but the scarcity of work forced him to leave Sheffield in 1957. Another problem was the level of musical ability. Of his time in a jazz trio that took up residency at the Green Room

³⁵⁶ Alan Lawson, “It Happened In Manchester”: *The True Story of Manchester’s Music, 1958-1965*, (Bury, 1992), pp.57-59.

³⁵⁷ John Firminger & Martin Lilleker, *Not Like A Proper Job: the story of popular music in Sheffield, 1955-1975*, (Sheffield, 2001), p.7.

in 1956 Bailey reflected that ‘It was a terrible band’ whose ‘level of incompetence would not have been tolerated anywhere else other than Sheffield.’ The city, he insists, ‘did have a reputation among working musicians as being the arsehole of the musical universe.’ Although Bailey and fellow jazz enthusiast and drummer, Tony Oxley, did return after establishing their reputations elsewhere, making them among the first home-grown jazz musicians from Sheffield to do so, their abiding memories of the city at the time are not positive. Oxley, who remains uncertain about whether ‘All that metallic noise...had some influence on my drumming’ was certain that the environment did have a detrimental effect on his health. He attributes his bronchitis to Sheffield’s industrial pollution and describes how ‘We always seemed to be fogged in.’³⁵⁸ It will become apparent that those who persisted in their passion for modern jazz often remained unacknowledged in their home town whilst earning international acclaim in the field, and Bailey and Oxley provide a case in point. They performed as a trio, with bass player Gavin Bryars, every Saturday lunchtime at the Grapes pub from 1963 to 1966. Nonetheless, Firminger maintains that despite their quite probably appearing on more records than all the musicians mentioned in his book combined, and pioneering the kind of playing that gave rise to Sheffield’s reputation as a centre of musical improvisation, while beat music was dominant in Sheffield their residency ‘went almost unnoticed’ beyond a small circle of jazz devotees.³⁵⁹

Otherwise, Sheffield’s music scene developed along similar lines as elsewhere beginning with the do-it-yourself ethos that resulted in the opening of Club Basie in the stables of an erstwhile coaching inn, the Black Swan. By 1958 the club boasted 900 members and a resident band of beboppers called the Savoy Quintet who were prominent on the Sheffield jazz scene before succumbing to the popularity of trad jazz and the incessant squabbles between ‘dirty boppers’ and ‘Mouldy Figges’ – derogatory epithets applied to members of the opposing faction. The problem with the jazz scene was that teenagers were excluded on account of its clubs being on licensed premises. Nevertheless, as in other cities, trad and then skiffle were important for the development of the scene not least, as Dave Berry remarked, because ‘Trad and skiffle musicians didn’t have to read the notes like dance band musicians.’³⁶⁰ A notable feature of Sheffield’s skiffle experience was the practice of booking

³⁵⁸ John Firminger & Martin Lilleker, *Not Like A Proper Job: the story of popular music in Sheffield, 1955-1975*, (Sheffield, 2001), pp.8-9.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.* pp.232-33.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.* pp.11-13. The Black Swan was later rebuilt and became one of the city’s premier venues of the 1960s.

groups to play on Sunday nights in cinemas so that it was possible to hear Ricky and the Rebels at the Regal, Plaza, Adelphi or Globe in the Attercliffe area thrashing out a version of 'He's Got The Whole World In His Hands' to hundreds of enthusiastic teenagers over the house PA. Skiffle contests were ubiquitous from 1957-58 at both local and national level and the occasion of Sheffield's hugely popular annual fair at Farm Grounds provided, not only a rare opportunity to hear the latest hits blasted out at maximum volume amidst the waltzers and dodgems, but also the contestants in the *Sheffield Star's* talent show.³⁶¹

The sources for Manchester and Sheffield attest to the abundance of job opportunities throughout the period, as they do (predominantly) for all the Northern towns and cities under scrutiny here. This high level of employment and relatively easy credit terms (the 'never-never') undoubtedly enabled many skiffle musicians to equip themselves with electric guitars and amplification, full drum kits, and often a van for transport to and from bookings. In turn, these acquisitions combined with a certain amount of dedicated practice and lifting of chord shapes and lyrics from records made it possible to play rock 'n' roll. In Sheffield this process was given a further boost by Buddy Holly, Eddie Cochran and Jerry Lee Lewis who gave concerts at the City Hall in 1958, although these rare exceptions aside, 1958-60 is best characterised as a period during which: 'Deprived of 'live' visitations from...star performers, the youth culture in Britain fell back on its own music-making resources.'³⁶²

Firminger identifies 1958 as the moment when 'Sheffield had finally caught up, and local bands started playing all over the city.' Beginning in late 1959, teenagers were able to attend the Saturday morning Teenage Shows at the Gaumont Cinema where for two years Harry Murray the manager 'ran a whole series of concerts...which featured every band in Sheffield that was any good' before an audience of up to 1,600.³⁶³ Gradually ballroom managers and landlords began to appreciate that there was a market to be exploited and teenage dances and pub bookings for local groups increased but it wasn't until Terry Thornton, draughtsman and part-time pianist, opened Club 60 in October 1960 that Sheffield's teenagers had their first live music venue. After a failed attempt to promote modern jazz the club became a 'pop' venue billed as 'Sheffield's answer to the Cavern' – it was in a pub cellar – with Dave Berry

³⁶¹ John Firminger & Martin Lilleker, *Not Like A Proper Job: the story of popular music in Sheffield, 1955-1975*, (Sheffield, 2001), pp.15-17.

³⁶² Dick Bradley, *Understanding Rock 'n' Roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, (Buckingham, 1992), p.72.

³⁶³ Dave Berry quoted in John Firminger & Martin Lilleker, *Not Like A Proper Job: the story of popular music in Sheffield, 1955-1975*, (Sheffield, 2001), p.23.

and the Cruisers in residence on Saturday nights. Other local lads on the make included Jimmy Crawford and the Ravens and Vance Arnold and the Avengers; Crawford holding the distinction of becoming the city's first chart entrant in 1961 while Arnold was an early incarnation of the gravel-voiced Joe Cocker.³⁶⁴

By late 1962 Thornton had competition in the form of the Stringfellow brothers, Geoff and Peter, who opened the Black Cat just as Thornton moved to a new venue, the Esquire. Firminger recounts how 'Stringfellow's Black Cat catered for fairly straightforward pop and beat bands [while] the Esquire was more jazz, r'n'b and blues.' These were among the key venues and personalities during Sheffield's beat and rhythm and blues years and although the commitment of Thornton and the Stringfellow's to the city's music scene is not in doubt, a persistent lack of venues hindered the development of the music scene as the era of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones progressed. Though not unique to Sheffield, there was also a perceived dearth of originality in the local groups which proved irksome to those trying to put the Steel City on the musical map. Following a concert by Screaming Lord Sutch in 1962 there emerged a cluster of home-grown horror acts including Count Lindsey III and his Skeletons, Frankenstein and the Monsters, and Quasimodo 'Hunchback of Notre Dame' but, for Thornton, what was more worrying were 'the multitude of groups who copied the Beatles and Stones in both their music and appearance – hey look, there's Ringo Starr – oh no it's Bill Bloggs from Barnsley'!³⁶⁵ Thornton believed that, apart from Dave Berry and Joe Cocker, the local groups simply weren't very good, in fact 'you could band them all together and there would still be nothing much new to emerge from them.' The *Sheffield Star's* music supplement, *Top Stars Special*, blamed working men's clubs:

Rightly or wrongly, the teenage clubs tend to go for the outside product and are hardly nurseries of home talent in the way that the Cavern was. The danger is that in the present situation too many groups are shying away from the music they really like and which they excel at, and are being forced against their tastes into the cosy world of the working men's club. The group rat race in the Sheffield area is too great for them to survive in any other way. It is difficult to see a group with the talent of the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Manfred Mann or the Animals ever arising on a Sheffield circuit composed of

³⁶⁴ John Firminger & Martin Lilleker, *Not Like A Proper Job: the story of popular music in Sheffield, 1955-1975*, (Sheffield, 2001), pp.32-38.

³⁶⁵ Terry Thornton quoted in *ibid.* p.71. This section is based on Firminger's account pp.43-71. Stringfellow went on to open the Blue Moon Club in 1963, the Mojo, a blues club in 1964, and promoted big name acts at the City Hall. He is also notorious for never tiring of reminding people that he was the first to promote the Beatles in Sheffield.

*the WMC. And there is precious little elsewhere for a group of this type to develop their talents.*³⁶⁶

Peter Stringfellow was scathing about Sheffield's beer culture, arguing that it was the cause of a lack of ambition and an acceptance of 'fifth-rate pub entertainment'. It was not surprising that the city did not produce first-rate artists when its young talent was nurtured in this atmosphere he insisted. What is more, he was sure that:

*Part of our failure to establish ourselves is lack of pride in the town. Other towns, Liverpool for instance, have a fierce pride in their town. Sheffield has nothing like that and it holds us back in everything. And attitudes are just the same as they were 20 years ago.*³⁶⁷

By 1965 he was no longer booking many local acts preferring to play records instead. Evidently both Stringfellow and the *Star* reporter were of the opinion that Sheffield's traditional popular culture was an obstacle to the progress of its pop culture. Perhaps these factors can explain the reason why from 1963 onwards, when record companies flocked to Liverpool in search of the next Beatles or looked to Manchester for another Hollies, in the words of John Firminger, 'Sheffield didn't get a look in'.³⁶⁸ When London A & R (artists and repertoire) scouts did eventually take in the Sheffield scene thanks largely to Stringfellow's efforts at the City Hall showcases, the results in terms of commercial success were mixed. EMI signed the Knives and Forks who released only one unsuccessful single, Tony Hatch took the Sheffields to Pye and produced three singles without a hit, leaving Mickie Most produced Dave Berry and the Cruisers with the distinction of being the only successful Sheffield beat group.³⁶⁹ Perhaps the Sheffields' story may have ended differently had not the self-penned 'Steel Drivin' Man' been held back as a single for 'unknown reasons' despite Hatch's belief that the song, about Sheffield steel workers, was unlike anything then recorded by an English group and a certain hit. Instead the (record company?) choice of a cover of Muddy Waters' 'I Got My Mojo Working' was handicapped in its chart potential by the fact that a possible career-changing appearance on 'Ready, Steady, Go!' was cancelled because the guitarist dropped a piano on his foot! Added to these setbacks was the disappointing reception of their jazz/beat arrangement of 'Skat Walking', a cover of a 1954

³⁶⁶ John Firminger & Martin Lilleker, *Not Like A Proper Job: the story of popular music in Sheffield, 1955-1975*, (Sheffield, 2001), p.71.

³⁶⁷ Peter Stringfellow quoted in *ibid.* p.71.

³⁶⁸ John Firminger & Martin Lilleker, *Not Like A Proper Job: the story of popular music in Sheffield, 1955-1975*, (Sheffield, 2001), p.55.

³⁶⁹ Alan Clayson, *Beat Merchants: The Origins, History, Impact and Rock Legacy of the 1960s British Pop Groups*, (London, 1995), p.117.

Miles Davis recording of Milt Jackson's 'Bag's Groove', described by Alan Clayson as a 'brave updating [that] had no precedent in a pop context.' According to Clayson:

*Too clever for the charts, the Sheffields were to be commended for overlooking outright commercial concerns, but such an uncompromising stance provoked a tailing off of engagements, and this promising group disintegrated in 1965.*³⁷⁰

Evidently there was at least one Sheffield group for whom originality proved to be a disadvantage. The decision of one member to quit in favour of the security of a 'proper job' was also an all-too-frequent occurrence, and, as will become apparent, the combination of record company indifference and the self-destructive tendencies of many groups often made for short-lived recording careers before the inevitable disbandment or a rapid return to the confines of the local 'art world' or scene.

Bradford

For many of the citizens of Bradford and Leeds the rivalry between the two cities is and seemingly always has been a fact of life dating back to some long forgotten point of origin in the battle for pre-eminence in the textile trade. In purely economic terms this battle was already decided in favour of Leeds by the 1950s due to superior communication links with the rest of the country via rail and road, a fortuitous rather than foresighted inclination towards industrial diversification, and the emergence of the city as a centre for financial services. *The Yorkshire Post* was able to claim in 1960 that 'Leeds is riding high on a prosperity wave unequalled since the golden days of 1956 and 1957' while 'the number of jobs waiting to be filled is double that of 1956, when we 'never had it so good.'³⁷¹ Bradford's textile trade was not yet however in terminal decline, as evidenced by the need to attract large numbers of Indian and Pakistani workers for the mills after 1955. The labour shortage was caused by the availability of jobs in other sectors and the fact that 'Parents of juveniles, on whom the industry relied heavily, were reluctant to put their children into an industry which had experienced such dark and insecure days in their own lifetimes.'³⁷² Derek Lister, rock 'n' roll DJ in Bradford at the time and author of the history of the music scene

³⁷⁰ Alan Clayson, *Beat Merchants: The Origins, History, Impact and Rock Legacy of the 1960s British Pop Groups*, (London, 1995), p.157.

³⁷¹ *The Yorkshire Post*, May 24th, 1960, p.8.

³⁷² Gary Firth, *A History of Bradford*, (Chichester, 1997), p.129.

there between 1959 and 1965, remembers it as a period when ‘the *Telegraph & Argus* situations vacant column was overflowing.’³⁷³

According to Lister, the Bradford music scene was centred on half a dozen dance halls situated within easy walking distance of each other in the city centre with Top Rank’s Gaumont and Majestic ballrooms proving most popular until the rival Mecca organisation opened its own dance hall just outside the city centre in Manningham. The main drawback of the reliance on venues run by national organisations was the turnover of managers who were often installed with instructions to implement the latest whims of head office. Lister’s account of his years as a DJ at the Top Rank halls contains many instances of his having to cope with some new manager determined to replace him with Bingo or insisting he cut back his expenditure on the latest records or the booking of local and national acts. He tells the familiar story of groups emerging from skiffle in the late fifties, the most talented of which graduated to supporting the visiting established stars of the day or headlining the dance halls themselves on the nights between. Lister recalls how ‘The local groups exported this talent to other parts of the country, and in some cases nationally, but they were never recognised with a title like the ‘Bradford’, or the ‘Yorkshire Sound’.³⁷⁴

Mike Sagar and the Cresters were arguably the most successful Bradford group, managing to secure a record contract with EMI, however, despite the inevitable move to London they failed to chart with their single releases and eventually returned to the North. A young singer by the name of Pauline Matthews was winning talent contests and performing on the local scene with a group called the Crusaders in the early sixties before embarking on a career that qualifies her as one of the city’s most recognised musical personalities under the name Kiki Dee. Lister formed his own group when he was demobbed in 1958 playing under the name Dal Stevens and the Four Dukes and even recording a ‘demo disc’ of Jerry Lee Lewis’s ‘A Whole Lot A Shakin’ Goin’ On’ which he recalls being ruined by their Yorkshire accents. The fact that there was a dedicated recording studio, Excel Records of Shipley, in Bradford in 1959-60 is somewhat surprising as most other Northern cities do not appear to have had such

³⁷³ Derek A. J. Lister, *Bradford’s Rock ‘N’ Roll: the Golden Years, 1959-1965*, (Bradford, 1991), p.50.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p.2.

facilities at that time – Sheffield celebrated the opening of its first independent studio, Unit 19, in 1966.³⁷⁵

It is tempting to conclude from Lister's account that Bradford groups were essentially purveyors of rock 'n' roll and chart covers typical of the beat years although his contention that his departure from the Majestic in 1965 marked the 'end of an era', just as R & B and Mod style were taking over, might suggest that Bradford embraced the change. The Dungeon with its 'blacked-out windows' appears to have catered for R & B, playing host to Long John Baldry & His Hoochie Coochie Band in September 1964, the year it opened. However, the fact that the resident band was the Leeds R & B group the Blue Sounds (see below), does not suggest the existence of proficient Bradford groups in the genre. There was also a short-lived venue called The Little Fat Black Pussycat Club which featured all-nighters and an appearance on its opening night – August 14th, 1964 – by the Pretty Things. The club closed after nine months or so due to the familiar police concerns about overcrowding and the 'potential' misuse of drugs, which is an indication that R & B was popular in the city but once again, evidence for local groups is thin on the ground.³⁷⁶ Finally on the subject of Bradford's music scene, of some significance is Lister's observation that:

What most groups required in those days were the entrepreneurs like Brian Epstein: someone to encourage, organise, and financially back them.

I am sure that if Bradford had been more organised, with people to back local groups, then the Bradford scene may have developed long before the Mersey sound was ever heard of.³⁷⁷

This is obviously a highly subjective statement but his point about the role of entrepreneurs should be borne in mind.

Leeds

Leeds is problematic for the simple reason that no-one has as yet published an account of the music scene there. Some research was undertaken by the present author for a Master's thesis

³⁷⁵ Derek A. J. Lister, *Bradford's Rock 'N' Roll: the Golden Years, 1959-1965*, (Bradford, 1991), pp.14-17 and John Firminger & Martin Lilleker, *Not Like A Proper Job: the story of popular music in Sheffield, 1955-1975*, (Sheffield, 2001), p.73.

³⁷⁶ Gary Cavanagh with Matt Webster, *Bradford's Noise of the Valleys: A History of Bradford Rock and Pop, 1967-1987*, (New Romney, 2009), p.3.

³⁷⁷ Derek A. J. Lister, *Bradford's Rock 'N' Roll: the Golden Years, 1959-1965*, (Bradford, 1991), pp.24, 43, 114. According to Lister, Bradford artist David Hockney is reputed to have painted a mural on the walls of the Student Club which was located in a cellar and 'was well established before the so-called [Liverpool] Cavern.'

which tended to indicate that for the wider ‘collectivity’ of popular music enthusiasts, those who participated as members of its audience, the Leeds experience was not markedly different to that of other provincial cities. There are reports in *The Yorkshire Post* of well attended jazz clubs and concerts, and it was noted above how Leeds dance halls had enthusiastically provided for those wishing to attend lunchtime rock ‘n’ roll dances. Chas McDevitt recalled Leeds as ‘one of the livelier spots on the one-night-stand circuit’ when he was touring with his skiffle group in the mid to late 1950s.³⁷⁸ Jimmy Savile relates in his autobiography how, upon his return to Leeds in 1963, he transformed the fortunes of the Mecca in his home town whilst simultaneously acquiring a show on Radio Luxembourg, a column for the *Sunday People* and a job presenting the new BBC show ‘Top of the Pops.’³⁷⁹ Savile however, being entirely immersed in his own hunger for self-promotion does not appear to have supported the local groups in any meaningful way in (either Manchester or) Leeds and evidence of an ‘art world’ there, of the people and infrastructure that constitutes a music scene, is again thin on the ground.

There is evidence to suggest that the Leeds jazz scene was thriving during the fifties especially amongst students at the University and Art College. There are references to the Studio 20 bar/restaurant on Briggate in the city centre, run by Bob Barclay, tuba player in the Yorkshire Jazz Band, which claimed to be the oldest semi-professional jazz band in the country, having formed in 1948. They played regularly at the Rhythm Club and the Oasis on Boar Lane and appear on the bill of the Town Hall jazz concert during rag week in 1957.³⁸⁰ Studio 20 is listed in Mike Dewe’s, *The Skiffle Craze*, as the only venue for skiffle in Leeds for 1957 besides the Mecca which suggests that it was at least a prominent venue on the circuit and indeed, Chas McDevitt remembered it on account of the boozy after-hours jam sessions held there.³⁸¹ Michael Chapman, a ‘folk/rock/blues/jazz guitarist’ more usually associated with Hull, spent his teenage years in 1950s Leeds where he recollected the influence of a certain Ed O’Donnell at the Art College. O’Donnell was a jazz trombone player who was ‘very much into the New Orleans, Kid Ory thing and he had a great band with an almost modern rhythm section’ that Chapman ‘borrowed’ to back his own modern jazz trio. Besides having apparently ‘made a record’ with Ken Colyer, O’Donnell was

³⁷⁸ Chas McDevitt, *Skiffle: The Definitive Inside Story*, (London, 1997), Introduction, p.xviii.

³⁷⁹ Jimmy Savile, *As It Happens*, (London, 1974), p.55.

³⁸⁰ *The Yorkshire Post*, May 30th, 1957, p.6.

³⁸¹ Mike Dewe, *The Skiffle Craze*, (Aberystwyth, 1998), p.138 and Chas McDevitt, *Skiffle: The Definitive Inside Story*, (London, 1997), Introduction, p.xviii.

important as one of Freund Schwartz's 'custodians of jazz history' and for Chapman 'a major influence because I'd go back to his house and he'd play me Jimmy Rodgers and Leadbelly records, which was astonishing because this whole new world of music suddenly opened up to me.'³⁸²

Without wishing to draw any firm conclusions it is possible to detect something of an elitist attitude amongst the Leeds University students with regard to rock 'n' roll. In an article for the student magazine *Counterpoint* entitled 'Pop comes to college' from 1958, its authors announced that 'One of the easiest ways to get a laugh is to mention Rock 'n' Roll', before conceding that 'The performers are laughing right back, in fact they are laughing all the way to the bank' and concluding on a more conciliatory note by admitting that 'the more advanced one becomes in the appreciation of music, the more tolerant one should become of other people's likes and dislikes. Not the reverse, which would seem to be the prevalent attitude in the Union. Let there be an end to this musical snobbishness!'³⁸³ This might imply a general disdain for the products of 'mass culture' at the Union which would be in keeping with the inclinations of many intellectuals and academics of the period but whether or not this was reflected in 'town and gown' relations and/or the level of participation by students in the Leeds music scene more generally can only be a matter for conjecture without further research. Unfortunately, the scant sources for Leeds covering the beat and R & B years reveal little more.

On the BBC Leeds website there is a section entitled 'Leeds' Musical Heritage: 1960s' which is perhaps revealing in so far as there are only four entries and one of those is the Cresters, described by Lister as 'Probably Bradford's most well known top group of the Sixties.'³⁸⁴ The Cherokees are listed as 'a five piece beat band' who reached Number 33 with 'Seven Daffodils' in 1964 but failed to chart with any of their further three singles for Columbia despite being under the aegis of successful producer Mickie Most. The Outer Limits were formed from a 1950s skiffle group the Three Gs Plus One via a Shadows inspired instrumental group called the Tremmers and released one single for Deram and another for Instant, a subsidiary of the Immediate label – neither charted although the former apparently

³⁸² Michael Chapman quoted in Ray Moody, *The Sounds of the Cities 'Nearly Famous': The Rock Music Scene in Hull and the East Riding, Scarborough, York, Scunthorpe and Grimsby During the Swinging Sixties*, (Filey, 2001), pp.149-50.

³⁸³ K. Brown and A. Rogers, 'Pop comes to College', *Counterpoint*, April 1958, Vol.1, No.1, pp.17-18.

³⁸⁴ Derek A. J. Lister, *Bradford's Rock 'N' Roll: the Golden Years, 1959-1965*, (Bradford, 1991), p.121.

‘became a favourite on the Northern Soul scene’.³⁸⁵ Clayson includes Leeds’ Blue Sounds amongst a plethora of provincial beat groups – ‘prosaic in name and style’ – but offers no further details. Fortunately *Mersey Beat* provides some intriguing information which once again suggests a dearth of club venues in Leeds. Formed early in 1964 and consisting of students and graduates of Leeds University – prompting the paper to describe them as ‘Britain’s most intellectual beat group’ – the Blue Sounds apparently had ‘a large following in Yorkshire, particularly in Bradford where they are resident at the Dungeon Club, owned by their manager, Don Read’.³⁸⁶ Claiming to be Leeds’ only R & B group at the time (March 1964), they informed the paper that they had received their first break at Club D (a Leeds venue or the Dungeon?) before stating that:

...Leeds is ready for R & B and...the scene there could improve if groups and readers in Leeds sent regular news of activities in the city to ‘*Mersey Beat*’.³⁸⁷

There is no evidence that their advice was heeded, however, Clayson also makes mention of Crazy Tymes, a Leeds ‘bluebeat’ group who were presumably hoping to benefit from the short-lived craze for the Jamaican style sparked by the chart success of Millie’s ‘My Boy Lollipop’ in spring 1964.³⁸⁸ In one of their regular round-ups of the provincial scene, *Music Echo* (formerly *Mersey Beat*) finally supplies the name of a Leeds club venue in a piece about Todmorden group the Keys – a Georgie Fame influenced combo – who in 1965 had residencies at the Market Tavern (Bradford), the Big Daddy Club (Halifax), the Troutbeck Hotel (Ilkley) and the Cro Magnum in Leeds.³⁸⁹

It need not necessarily be the case that the relative lack of commercial success for Leeds groups is indicative of a music scene that was less than thriving. As Lister maintains for Bradford, it might simply be that no entrepreneurs emerged with the energy and financial backing necessary to engender the wider recognition of Leeds’ talent. Possibly there were insufficient club venues which in other cities performed the function of a nucleus around which a vibrant scene materialised. And lastly the creative co-operation between ‘town and gown’, whether university or art college, that appears to have been a significant factor in the

³⁸⁵ BBC Leeds – Leeds’ Musical Heritage: 1960s, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/print/leeds/content/articles/2008/08/20/music-leeds-artists-196>, retrieved 13/12/2008.

³⁸⁶ *Mersey Beat*, August 13th, 1964, p.4.

³⁸⁷ *Mersey Beat*, February 27th – March 12th, 1964, p.11.

³⁸⁸ Alan Clayson, *Beat Merchants: The Origins, History, Impact and Rock Legacy of the 1960s British Pop Groups*, (London, 1995), pp.158-60.

³⁸⁹ *Music Echo*, March 27th, 1965, p.2.

dynamism of music scenes elsewhere may have been absent or less common in Leeds as alluded to above. For the time being this must remain speculation as far as Leeds is concerned although the questions it raises regarding the emergence of the particularly vigorous music scenes in Liverpool and Newcastle will be returned to in due course.

Hull, Rochdale, and the Response of Local Authorities to Developments in Pop Culture

Ray Moody offers an account of the beat and R & B years in Hull, Scarborough, York, Grimsby and many smaller towns besides from whence there emanated such future rock and pop notables as Mick Ronson and Robert Palmer. Prior to his achieving pop star status in the mid-seventies as a member of David Bowie's Spiders From Mars, Ronson was a Corporation Gardener for Hull City Council. His musical apprenticeship was served in a beat group called the Insects and R & B outfit the Mariners. Allen (Robert) Palmer was the singer in the Mandrakes, an R & B act formed in 1965 when in their last year at school who rapidly graduated to regular bookings at Scarborough's top venues the Spa and the Olympia. Moody notes how 'The early rock music scene in Hull mirrored the national scene perfectly' as rock 'n' roll then skiffle eventually lead to the Beat Boom of the early sixties. He explicitly states that this was inspired in Hull by the success of the Beatles but what is interesting regarding the impact of the phenomenon there is the support it was given by the City Council.³⁹⁰

Evidence of positive local authority involvement during the development of the North of England's urban music scenes between 1956 and 1965 is not plentiful. Indeed, the relationship between local councils and the police on one hand, and young people and those who established venues and promoted events to cater for them on the other, was most often tense at best in Northern towns and cities. *Top Stars Special* described the problem as it affected Sheffield in May 1963:

Entertainment-wise, Sheffield just doesn't appear to be on the map. The plain fact is that young people in this city just don't seem to get any encouragement. There's no doubt that a few more clubs like the Esquire and the Black Cat would be welcomed by the teenagers who have been used to spending their spare time either at the cinema or coffee bars. Take a walk round any back street in Manchester and there are cellar clubs like the Oasis and the Three Coins where kids can jive, twist and generally let their hair down.

³⁹⁰ Ray Moody, *The Sounds of the Cities 'Nearly Famous': The Rock Music Scene in Hull and the East Riding, Scarborough, York, Scunthorpe and Grimsby During the Swinging Sixties*, (Filey, 2001), pp.11-12, 304, 413.

Yet for some strange reason, Sheffielders, especially the powers that be, are suspicious of these clubs. The few who have opened clubs find themselves haunted by the police, who seem to expect trouble. And those who have tried to open likely-looking premises find a curious difficulty in getting permission from the authorities. Maybe half the trouble is the lack of suitable premises near to the city centre, yet there is no doubt that there are disused warehouses and cellars which could be converted at very little cost. But people who try to open them up meet with a blank wall of disapproval.³⁹¹

The Esquire was raided by the police four months later during which the 500 teenagers present were required to give their names and addresses and the bar, selling orange juice, was closed.

According to C P Lee, the demise of the club scene in Manchester which took place from 1965-66, was precipitated almost entirely as a result of the Chief Constable's Annual Reports of 1964 and 1965. Space precludes consideration of Lee's discussion concerning (unsubstantiated) allegations of police corruption and collusion with Manchester's criminal underworld. However, the report is significant because it not only reveals the attitude of the police to the advent of teenage pop culture in the city, but also because it led to the Manchester Corporation Act of 1965 with ramifications for the night-time economy of the nation. Lee relates how in a chapter of the report entitled 'Social Behaviour' and its appendix 'Coffee Beat Clubs' the Chief Constable set out the problems he associated with unlicensed private members clubs for teenagers and suggested 'remedies' to be adopted by every local authority in the country. What is remarkable is that it contained an analysis of the rise of youth and club culture from the mid-1950s acknowledging increased affluence, American influence – including the introduction of the juke box – and the growing importance of pop music in the lives of young people. The main problems he identified were the exploitation of teenagers by unscrupulous proprietors, the absence of a need for a music or refreshment license, the inability of the police to enter premises without a warrant and the consequent likelihood of drug dealing and/or consumption going undetected. Chief Constable McKay appeared on local BBC television to present his case before submitting his report to the Watch Committee in April 1965 after which he delivered his findings to the Committee of the House of Commons thereby convincing MPs to pass the Act in August of that year. Lee describes how as a direct result of McKay's campaign and action taken under the provisions

³⁹¹ Cited in John Firminger & Martin Lilleker, *Not Like A Proper Job: the story of popular music in Sheffield, 1955-1975*, (Sheffield, 2001), p.56.

of the Act, by the end of 1968, there remained 'only two city centre venues [that] catered exclusively for young people, The Magic Village and The Twisted Wheel.'³⁹²

With the introduction of the Entertainment Licensing Act shortly afterwards Peter Stringfellow and Terry Thornton came under increasing pressure in Sheffield. The Mojo, Stringfellow's blues club and centre of the city's vibrant Mod scene, was refused renewal of its licence when the police produced a local drug dealer as a witness. Firminger chronicles the closure of each of the main venues as it unfolded until by the end of 1967 virtually all had disappeared.³⁹³ This was probably not what MacDonald had in mind when he talked of wider social forces influencing the development of popular music however on a local level at least it seems likely that the closure of venues had a disruptive effect. Most commentators would agree that the Manchester music scene did not recover until the mid to late eighties. To what extent pop culture as a whole was affected by these events remains open to conjecture and before reaching the conclusion that the police and local authorities were responsible for the end of the Beat and R & B booms in Manchester and Sheffield it might be worth considering the words of Mick Wilson of Sheffield group McCloskey's Apocalypse:

*The best years were '62 and '63. Every pub that had a concert room had a band playing every night. Sheffield was absolutely crawling with live music, just as much as Liverpool or anywhere else. By 1964 gigs were much harder to come by. It was a craze like hula-hoops. It was just flavour of the month for two years. Everybody was in a beat group. The market was flooded and people got fed up of it.*³⁹⁴

In contrast to the attitude of the police and local authorities in Manchester and Sheffield, Hull City Council actually promoted 'Beat Nights' in the city's East and West parks from mid-1964. Two groups a night twice a week would appear at the open-air theatres there introduced by a compere from the Parks Department.³⁹⁵ Another seemingly rare instance of a council taking an enlightened approach to teenage activities comes from Rochdale where town hall dances were organised during the early sixties. In 1963 a Teenage Advisory

³⁹² C. P. Lee, *Shake Rattle and Rain: Popular Music Making in Manchester, 1955-1995*, (Ottery St. Mary, 2002), pp.69-82. Lee states that the Chief Constable's Report of 1965, or more specifically the chapter and its appendix referred to, was a reprint of an article from *The Police Journal* written by a Manchester Chief Superintendent .

³⁹³ John Firminger & Martin Lilleker, *Not Like A Proper Job: the story of popular music in Sheffield, 1955-1975*, (Sheffield, 2001), pp.82-85.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p.86.

³⁹⁵ Ray Moody, *The Sounds of the Cities 'Nearly Famous': The Rock Music Scene in Hull and the East Riding, Scarborough, York, Scunthorpe and Grimsby During the Swinging Sixties*, (Filey, 2001), pp.12-13.

Committee was set up under the auspices of the controlling Labour Party which included teenagers from local schools and youth clubs. As a result a jazz club was established which was followed in 1964 by a beat club called the Lower Chamber Club where live music was provided by local groups and visiting acts from Manchester. The project proved so successful that Saturday night dances at the Fire Station Hall were sanctioned, a Councillor Clarke claiming that ‘it was a sign of things to come for the town. The time was coming fast when the youth of the town would say they had no need to go out of Rochdale for entertainment.’³⁹⁶

Northern Popular Music in the Local and National Media

Of further note is Councillor Cyril Smith’s comment that he was pleased to see the journalist responsible for the *Rochdale Observer*’s ‘excellent teenage column’ had agreed to serve on the committee as he was a person ‘in contact with teenagers and with a point of view to express.’³⁹⁷ The role of local newspapers in supporting the music scenes in some Northern towns and cities appears to have been significant while in others popular music was virtually ignored. The *Sheffield Star*’s *Top Stars Special* supplement has already been noted and was pioneering in its coverage of popular music other than jazz, developing from a Saturday night ‘Teenage Page’ which began as early as 1960. The *Hull and East Yorkshire Times* was comparatively late, only starting its ‘Teen Scene’ feature at the end of 1964. Around the same time it was possible to keep abreast of local groups and forthcoming live dates in the Scarborough *Mercury*’s ‘Youth’ column or the ‘On The Steelbeat’ feature in the *Scunthorpe Star*. In addition there were beat magazines, by far the most successful of which was Bill Harry’s *Mersey Beat*, first published in 1961, but Manchester’s *Beat Scene* which emerged from the Oasis Club’s folded newsletter to run for eight monthly issues from 1963-64, York’s *Ousebeat*, and even the single edition of Driffield’s *Beatcomber*, all attest to the thirst for information about local beat groups in the early sixties.³⁹⁸ The market for them also reflected the lack of coverage given to Northern popular music in the London-based national music

³⁹⁶ *Rochdale Observer*, October 10th, 1964, p.25, quoted in Emma Aadahl, ‘Youth Culture in Rochdale and Newcastle, 1958-64’, unpublished undergraduate thesis, Northumbria University, 2005, pp.36-38.

³⁹⁷ *Rochdale Observer*, October 5th, 1963, p.1, quoted in Emma Aadahl, ‘Youth Culture in Rochdale and Newcastle, 1958-64’, unpublished undergraduate thesis, Northumbria University, 2005, pp.36-38.

³⁹⁸ Ray Moody, *The Sounds of the Cities ‘Nearly Famous’: The Rock Music Scene in Hull and the East Riding, Scarborough, York, Scunthorpe and Grimsby During the Swinging Sixties*, (Filey, 2001), pp.36-37 and Alan Lawson, “*It Happened In Manchester*”: *The True Story of Manchester’s Music, 1958-1965*, (Bury, 1992), pp.92-93.

press. Until 'Beatle-mania' and its aftermath of Northern (albeit short-lived) chart domination the *Melody Maker* contented itself with a slender column devoted to jazz clubs and musicians entitled 'News from the Provinces' while the *NME*, although not dealing exclusively with jazz, ran an equally cursory regular feature called 'Northern News'.

Throughout the period 1956-65 radio broadcasting in Britain was a monopoly in the hands of the BBC. With the afore-mentioned exceptions of Radio Luxembourg and the American Forces Network this meant that the opportunity to hear the latest 'pop' music and particularly anything associated with rock 'n' roll was severely curtailed by the BBC's paternalistic attitude and its predisposition towards so-called 'high culture'. What is more, despite there being centres for regional broadcasting in Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle, located in a wider BBC 'North Region', the very notion of broadcasting popular music that was specific to a Northern town or city would have been inconceivable. Although the BBC's North Region Controller proclaimed in 1953 that 'If we did not devote as much time as we do to outside broadcasts and to the exploitation of local talent in a dozen other cities [other than the three above], and twenty times that number of important towns and boroughs, we should be failing miserably in our job'³⁹⁹, he could not have anticipated the Northern Beat Boom a decade hence which was not in any case well served by BBC Radio on a national let alone a regional scale. Russell describes the 1950s as 'a key decade for the North on air', citing the popularity of Wilfred Pickles' 'Have a Go!' (1946-67) and comedy shows such as the 'Al Read Show' (1951-68) and 'The Clitheroe Kid' (1958-72) whereas by the 1960s television had become the medium best able to 'define the national culture'. He argues that as the sixties progressed:

*'Have a Go!' increasingly set the 'old' North against the new brands of Liverpool and the fictional and cinematic North of the 'Angry Young Men', in an almost elegiac counterpoint that associated it with the past without ever connecting to the power of that past in the way of ITV's Coronation Street.*⁴⁰⁰

At the beginning of 1960 a BBC survey found that half the population were watching television during peak hours⁴⁰¹, and as has been related above, both the BBC and ITV produced shows designed to acknowledge the new teenage market beginning shakily with

³⁹⁹ Donald Stephenson quoted in Asa Briggs, 'Local and Regional in Northern Sound Broadcasting', *Northern History*, (1975), p.183.

⁴⁰⁰ Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*, (Manchester, 2004), pp.140-41.

⁴⁰¹ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V*, (Oxford, 1995), Chronology p.1026

'6.5 Special' in 1957 leading eventually to 'Ready, Steady, Go!' (1963) and 'Top of the Pops' (1964). ITV was founded on a regional footing and Manchester based Granada began transmitting in 1956 across Yorkshire and Lancashire. The North East had to wait until 1959 before Tyne Tees began broadcasting, while the resentment caused by Manchester's position as Northern media capital was not assuaged until Yorkshire Television opened in Leeds in 1968.⁴⁰² Although several episodes of '6.5 Special' were broadcast from outside venues such as the Tynemouth Plaza in January 1958⁴⁰³, it was not until the Beat Boom that local groups gained access to television. C. P. Lee relates how 'Granada TV, championed by the legendary producer, Johnny Hamp', gave regional exposure to Liverpool and Manchester groups on shows such as 'Scene At Six Thirty'.⁴⁰⁴ With both Granada and the BBC's Northern headquarters operating from Manchester the music scene there (and to a certain extent that of Liverpool) was ideally placed. However, TV coverage of the local beat scenes elsewhere was patchy at best and not always welcome either. Firminger describes an episode in 1965 when the BBC shot part of a film documentary called 'The Long Journey' 'depicting modern youth on the move in Sheffield and four other cities.' Peter Stringfellow, whose Mojo club was one of the locations chosen, was unhappy with the results. He claimed to be 'horrified with the beatniks and scruffy teenagers selected for interview from coffee bars and clubs in Sheffield. The producers of the film seemed to have deliberately chosen the worst types and painted the worst possible picture of Sheffield teenagers.'⁴⁰⁵ Firminger does not specify whether the film was intended for broadcast nationwide but nonetheless, as Briggs has noted, the BBC in London granted regional programme makers 'little access to the national television network' and they were generally regarded as 'amateurs playing in a professional league'.⁴⁰⁶

Incomplete 'Art Worlds'

The foregoing account of popular music in the North of England has attempted to bring together the major factors that were crucial to the development of the individual music scenes in several of the towns and cities there between 1956 and 1965. Most of these they shared in

⁴⁰² Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*, (Manchester, 2004), pp.188-89.

⁴⁰³ Newcastle *Sunday Sun*, January 19th, 1958, p.7.

⁴⁰⁴ C. P. Lee, *Shake Rattle and Rain: Popular Music Making in Manchester, 1955-1995*, (Ottery St. Mary, 2002), p.30.

⁴⁰⁵ John Firminger & Martin Lilleker, *Not Like A Proper Job: the story of popular music in Sheffield, 1955-1975*, (Sheffield, 2001), pp.65-66.

⁴⁰⁶ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V*, (Oxford, 1995), p.661.

common including relatively high levels of employment and disposable income amongst young people, entrepreneurs whose desire to make money was largely tempered by a genuine enthusiasm for the music and a drive to find venues for its expression, as well as a local pride exhibited by musicians and audience alike in the scene and the music that sprang from it. Consideration has also been given to some of the obstacles that had to be overcome to a greater or lesser degree such as the opposition of local authorities and the police as happened in Manchester and Sheffield in particular. Differences have been identified; Manchester's self-assurance is palpable when contrasted with Sheffield's insecurity and sense of isolation. The scenes in Hull and Rochdale received some assistance from the authorities in stark contrast to the apathy and/or antipathy encountered elsewhere. Moreover, it has been shown for most of the towns and cities that there was a willing audience and sufficient musical talent to establish a scene whether for jazz, rock 'n' roll, skiffle, beat or rhythm and blues and that the supporting infrastructure of venues, entrepreneurs, managers, agents, promoters etcetera was in place albeit at a local level. All the sources, with the exception of those few extant for Leeds, refer to a sense of community based around the venues – coffee bars, dance halls, clubs – local musical instrument shops and record shops such as Violet May's in Sheffield which was 'a regular port of call for both musicians and fans alike'.⁴⁰⁷ What was missing however, apart from during the period of eighteen months or so following the Beatles' breakthrough at the beginning of 1963, were several key ingredients of an art world that were necessary for the music scenes of Manchester, Sheffield, Bradford, Leeds, Hull, Rochdale *et al* to remain sustainable. As Howard S. Becker has observed:

*Several difficulties arise in creating a new art world to ratify work which finds no home in existing art worlds. Resources (especially financial support) have been allocated to existing artistic activities, so that one needs to develop new sources of support, pools of personnel, sources of materials, and other facilities (including space in which to perform and display works). Since existing aesthetic theories have not ratified the work, a new aesthetic must be developed, and new modes of criticism and standards of judgement enunciated. To say that these things must be done, however, raises an interesting definitional question of the kind philosophical analysis provokes. How much of the apparatus of an organized art world must be created before the work in question will be treated seriously by a larger audience than the original group who wanted to create the new world?*⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁷ John Firminger & Martin Lilleker, *Not Like A Proper Job: the story of popular music in Sheffield, 1955-1975*, (Sheffield, 2001), p.42.

⁴⁰⁸ Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, (London, 1982), p.157.

To a varying extent resources were limited in Northern towns and cities. With the partial exception of Hull and Rochdale they had indeed been allocated to ‘existing artistic activities’ – usually those the civic authorities invested with what Pierre Bourdieu described as ‘cultural capital’ – orchestral performances of the works of ‘classical’ composers, theatre productions and the halls and theatres they required.⁴⁰⁹ Mainstream jazz was also beginning to be accepted as a respectable musical form, although often reluctantly, and was increasingly granted the use of council venues and given space on the programmes of council sponsored music festivals (see below). However, for beat groups to achieve national recognition and success they would either need the help and financial support of a local entrepreneur or else they must move to London. As Pauline Clegg, erstwhile manager of Manchester’s Oasis club, has stated, ‘The big thing that Liverpool had was Brian Epstein. He had the money and that gave him influence.’⁴¹⁰ Furthermore, unlike in the post-war United States where independent radio stations and record labels (many with in-house studios) proliferated that could propel little known acts from out of the way places to national acclaim, provincial Britain was beholden to the BBC and the ‘big four’ record companies in London. The best that could be achieved in a recording studio in the North was an acetate demo recording which could then be used in an attempt to secure a contract in London. Newcastle’s Morton Sound Studios was probably superior to most in that Hilton Valentine’s (future Animals guitarist) group the Wildcats were able to produce an acetate LP there in the early 1960s and the city’s leading modern jazz players, the EmCee Five’s recording (1961), not only got them a record deal, but was deemed of sufficient quality to be released as it stood.⁴¹¹ In addition, and despite the brave attempts by *Mersey Beat* and other local papers, the arbiters of what was rapidly becoming a national music taste were writing and broadcasting from the capital whether in the pages of the *New Musical Express* or on the panel of ‘Juke Box Jury’. Becker’s ‘new aesthetic’ and ‘new modes of criticism and standards of judgement’ were being formed in London and the art world ‘apparatus’ that was required in order for the new

⁴⁰⁹ Roy Shuker, *Popular Music: The Key Concepts*, (London, Second Edition 2005), p.64. ‘Bourdieu (1984) showed how ‘taste’ is both conceived and maintained in social groups’ efforts to differentiate and distance themselves from others, and underpinning varying social status positions. Music has traditionally been a crucial dimension of this process.’ *Ibid.* p.64.

⁴¹⁰ Quoted in Alan Lawson, *“It Happened In Manchester”*: *The True Story of Manchester’s Music, 1958-1965*, (Bury, 1992), p.132.

⁴¹¹ Reference to the Wildcats in Alan Clayson, *Beat Merchants: The Origins, History, Impact and Rock Legacy of the 1960s British Pop Groups*, (London, 1995), p.69. The EmCee Five’s recording is discussed in the sleeve-notes to ‘Bebop From The East Coast’ 1960/1962, Mike Carr/ The EmCee Five, Birdland Records, (Birdland MC596, 1996).

music, that was largely being created in the North, to be ‘treated seriously by a larger audience’ also existed in the South.

The art worlds that existed in the North of England from 1956 to 1965 were then, limited and incomplete. No serious artist/musician, not even in Liverpool at the height of Merseybeat, could feel able to satisfy their artistic ambitions without leaving their home town. But it was arguably the experience of living in that town that inspired and informed the music that was being produced. Answering the question of just how and why individuals or groups of individuals came to perform American popular music and to create music inspired by it in the North’s towns and cities in the particular way they did is a stated aim of this study. It is also part of the objective to suggest how the popular culture and distinct identity of a place might somehow be articulated through that creativity. Jason Toynbee offers a means by which these themes can be explored when he borrows the concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘field’ used by Bourdieu in his investigation of nineteenth-century French literature and art. He sets out to construct a model that can facilitate the understanding of how creativity in popular music – including ‘all stages of music-making from ‘writing’ through ‘performance’ to ‘production’ – constitutes a mode of cultural production that ‘is located both in its own particular domain and in larger social relations at one and the same time.’ In so doing he attempts to rescue the notion of the musician as ‘creator’ from the dichotomy that exists between the romantic view of the artist as inspired originator of ‘pure’ art on the one hand, and the negation of artistic creativity suggested by Barthes’ ‘death of the author’ on the other.

I want to suggest that people who make popular music are creators, that is agents who make musical differences in the form of texts, performances and sounds. Crucially, though, the musical creator is restricted in how much difference s/he can make at any given moment. In other words the unit of creativity is a small one.⁴¹²

The word ‘habitus’ is defined as representing a ‘constellation of dispositions, acquired mostly in the early stages of life, which informs subjectivity and therefore action. In effect habitus is a mediator between social relations – class, race, gender, education and so on – and what people do – their ‘practice’.’ It is the proposition here that it should be possible to add to the constituents of habitus elements of popular culture and specific Northern identity. For Toynbee the key aspect of habitus is ‘the way it disposes musician-agents to play, write, record or perform in a particular way.’ In Bourdieu’s terminology this amounts to a

⁴¹² Jason Toynbee, *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions*, (London, 2000), p.35. This section is based on pages 34-42 of the same work.

‘strategy’ which is then ‘deployed in a particular field...a ‘space of positions’ governed by rules which are proper to it. It is also a system of power relations in that agents struggle for dominant positions by mobilizing their accumulated ‘capital’, in other words quantities of power and prestige, be this cultural, economic, social or any other type current in the field’ – in this case the field of cultural production. For Bourdieu, there is a struggle between the group whose values embody the most economic and social capital and the avant-garde who are engaged in an attempt to ‘overthrow the establishment’. This would appear to be similar to the struggle that takes place when one art world supersedes another in Becker’s schema. The important point is that cultural production ‘takes place at the intersection of habitus and field.’ Toynbee’s model of creativity will be returned to in the final chapter where it will be possible to explore its explanatory power in greater depth following the detailed investigation into cultural production as it occurred in Liverpool and Newcastle. However, there is one further point regarding his theoretical approach that should be outlined.

It was briefly discussed above how, contrary to the views of Adorno, Toynbee does not subscribe to the view that ‘art is the defenceless victim of commerce’. Instead he posits ‘a certain institutional autonomy [IA]...which enables musicians to exert a large degree of creative control.’ He claims that one aspect of this, which chimes with MacDonald’s thesis of ‘the people’s music’, is derived from the 1930s swing band’s ‘lack of dependence on any single media outlet – radio, record company, live circuit’ and later, with the onset of rock ‘n’ roll, ‘more by audience demand.’ The second key element of IA is what he calls ‘the institution of the proto-market in local and small-scale music scenes [which] the industry cannot ignore...because this is where new talent and styles emerge.’⁴¹³ It is within these local music scenes then that a large proportion of creative autonomy is retained. If not necessarily the first instance of musical creativity nurtured at the local level coming to exert considerable influence on the music business of the day, Liverpool nevertheless offers what is unarguably the most celebrated example and it is in the exploration of this process that it will become possible to get to grips more thoroughly with the themes and issues considered thus far.

⁴¹³ Jason Toynbee, *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions*, (London, 2000), introduction, p.xxi.

Chapter Five: Youth Culture and Popular Music in Liverpool

In addition to providing a loosely chronological historical narrative of the development of youth culture and popular music on Merseyside between 1956 and 1965 it is the aim of this chapter to explore certain social and cultural aspects of the region and the city of Liverpool in particular. This must be done for the following reasons. First, to build on what has gone before pertaining to the peculiar culture and identity of Merseyside and Liverpool it is necessary to establish the relationship between popular culture and the emerging pop culture of the time. In other words, what made Liverpool's reception and reproduction of North American popular music unique? Secondly, in order to trace the broader social and cultural factors that may also have affected the outcome of this process such as youth (un)employment, social structure, geography, and ethnicity. Lastly, because it is vital to this study that the similarities and differences between Liverpool/Merseyside and Newcastle/Tyneside, most importantly those that are relevant to the cultural transfer of North American popular music, are clearly identified before any meaningful comparative analysis can be attempted. By proceeding in this way it should become possible to offer some provisional answers to the questions relating to the central themes of this work. To begin with, some consideration should be given to the pre-history of youth culture, popular music, and entertainment/leisure activity on Merseyside so as to provide the background against which any 'cultural revolution' beginning in 1956 might be assessed and to identify any earlier developments or features that may be particular to the city/region.

A Pre-History of Merseyside Youth Culture, Popular Music, and Entertainment

Theatre, Music Hall and Cinema

Prior to 1956 it is difficult to associate 'youth culture' with particular forms of popular music, entertainment and leisure activities in Liverpool or anywhere else – largely because youth and youth culture were not then recognised as a separate category within wider society. Certainly many young people attended music hall, the cinema and dance halls but it does not appear that these activities were considered to be exclusively for the young. James J. Nott cites the findings of *The Social Survey of Merseyside* from 1934 when he writes that:

[In Liverpool] there was a sharp decline in the popularity of music hall but it seemed to maintain a stronger attraction for younger audiences than in London. In 1913 there were eleven theatres and music halls in Liverpool. By 1934...nearly half of these had closed, with only three music halls and three

theatres left. At those surviving audiences were greatly reduced. In other parts of Merseyside there were another seven theatres remaining, six of these were music halls.

*Average weekly attendance at Liverpool theatres was estimated at about 50,000 persons, or just under 6 per cent of the total population. On Merseyside, the audience was greatest amongst clerks, shopkeepers, and shop assistants (class B), as manual workers (class C) preferred the cheapness of the cinema. The Merseyside audience for cinema was also predominantly young.*⁴¹⁴

During the interwar years then, young – lower middle class – people on Merseyside appear to have retained an interest in music hall that was somewhat at odds with metropolitan trends, whilst working class youth opted for the cinema, partly on economic grounds. There were also economic reasons for the closure of music halls as audiences declined and the entertainment circuits realized that they could cater for the growing demand for cinema, which was much cheaper to run, by converting existing premises.⁴¹⁵ A. J. P. Taylor cites figures for Liverpool when describing cinema during the interwar period – ‘the essential social habit of the age’. Forty percent of the city’s population attended once a week, one quarter of it twice.⁴¹⁶

Dance Halls

To these venues for popular entertainment must be added the dance halls of which there were more than ten on Merseyside in 1934 according to Nott, ‘a number larger than most, in a city where dancing was one of the most popular pastimes.’ The Grafton Rooms, the Locarno, and the Rialto were the major halls during the 1930s when dance bands were at the height of their popularity.⁴¹⁷ Thanks to Caradog Jones’ *Social Survey*, something can be gleaned of the age, gender and class of audiences at these major dance halls. Liverpool, and particularly the Grafton, pioneered ‘Old-Time Dancing’, which, according to Michael Brocken, was developed into a ‘burgeoning scene by re-orchestrating many Victorian and Edwardian measures to suit modern instrumentation and syncopation.’ Brocken adds that, ‘This new/old ‘scene’ scarcely touched London, demonstrating that the musical ‘cabal’ of the Metropolis was probably far less in touch with popular musical activity across the regions

⁴¹⁴ James J. Nott, *Music For The People: Popular Music and Dance in Interwar Britain*, (Oxford, 2002), p.118. Nott cites D. Caradog Jones, *The Social Survey of Merseyside*, (Liverpool, 1934).

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.119.

⁴¹⁶ A J P Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945*, (Harmondsworth, 1965), pp.392-93.

⁴¹⁷ James J. Nott, *Music For The People: Popular Music and Dance in Interwar Britain*, (Oxford, 2002), p.158.

than it thought it was.’⁴¹⁸ These events were staged two nights a week and drew their audience from across Lancashire. Nott states that on ‘these evenings, older patrons, middle age to old age, would rub shoulders with the young.’ Nonetheless, he maintains:

...many dance halls were ‘made their own’ by the younger crowd. Dance music and jazz were the music of the younger generation. This is not to say that these types of music did not enjoy popularity across the age range; they did. However, the newer forms of music, such as swing and hotter jazz music, found their most enthusiastic followers among the young.

*Dressing in the latest styles, with hairstyles and mannerisms copied from popular films of the day, marked out the younger dancers from the older ones.*⁴¹⁹

The *Social Survey* found that dancing was an activity enjoyed much more by women than men, with 20 per cent of women regularly participating as opposed to only 7 per cent of men. This doesn’t mean that men did not frequent dance halls in large numbers, if only to watch young women dance, or perhaps in the hope of meeting their future spouse. However, men who enjoyed dancing tended to come from classes A and B, that is, professional and managerial, and clerical and retailing occupations. Women were from classes B and C (manual) in equal proportion. The ‘regularity with which working-class girls dance’ was noted beside the rather condescending observation that ‘dances are particularly popular in the slums.’⁴²⁰ The young people who attended a ‘better’ palais-de-danse such as the Grafton Rooms, were, according to its manager, girls who worked in ‘Littlewoods, Vernons, and Ogden’s Pools. The boys are mainly in shops. They are not labouring workers.’ They might be described as a lower middle class clientele and the Grafton Room’s manager believed this was because labourers were ‘too tired after a hard day’s work.’ Nott argues that the different social classes did not mix at dance halls but rather that each hall ‘catered for its own section of society.’⁴²¹ Brocken writes that besides the ‘luxurious establishments’ there were ‘a few smaller halls in each district catering for local dances once or twice a week. In fact every community enjoyed some kind of meeting hall or rooms that could be given over to dancing.’ These include names that became familiar to a later generation when they were given a new

⁴¹⁸ Michael Brocken, *Other Voices: Hidden Histories of Liverpool’s Popular Music Scenes, 1930s-1970s*, (Farnham, 2010), pp.40-41.

⁴¹⁹ James J. Nott, *Music For The People: Popular Music and Dance in Interwar Britain*, (Oxford, 2002), p.182.

⁴²⁰ D. Caradog Jones, *The Social Survey of Merseyside*, (Liverpool, 1934), iii. 277-8, cited in, James J. Nott, *Music For The People: Popular Music and Dance in Interwar Britain*, (Oxford, 2002), p.184.

⁴²¹ Mass-Observation Archive: Music, Dancing, and Jazz: 5/F A. H., ‘Manager Grafton Rooms Liverpool’, 18 May 1939, p. 2, quoted in, James J. Nott, *Music For The People: Popular Music and Dance in Interwar Britain*, (Oxford, 2002), p.179.

lease of life in the early days of Merseybeat, such as Garston Baths, Blair Hall, and Holyoake Hall. Some of them were regarded as disreputable including Daulby Hall which was apparently frequented by the ‘wrong sort of girls.’ Nevertheless, Brocken thinks it arguable that these venues had become ‘institutionalised by the 1950s, making the rapid implementation of rock ‘n’ roll far less difficult than might at first be expected.’⁴²² It also seems reasonable to suggest that some of the more ‘disreputable’ of these dance halls, along with certain cinemas, known locally as ‘flea pits’, would have witnessed the territorial disputes between the rival gangs that Michael Macilwee maintains continued to exist throughout the austerity of the interwar years. Macilwee proposes some continuity, via these gangs, between those of Victorian Liverpool – such as the Cornermen and the High Rip from the poorer central wards of Scotland and Vauxhall who perpetrated intimidation, drunken violence, and robbery on each other as well as the more respectable citizenry – and the gangs of Teddy boys who engaged in similar acts in the 1950s.⁴²³ Indeed, it does seem unlikely that the Teddy boy gangs on Merseyside sprang from nowhere or that the adoption of new clothes and hairstyles fomented a gang mentality hitherto repressed or unnoticed by the authorities. More research on pre-1950s gang culture in Liverpool is needed.

Returning to the swing bands and dance halls, Brocken goes on to suggest that:

...during WWII (and despite the indisputable popularity of the London-based dance bandleaders on BBC radio) the status of these BBC-supported bands began to wane somewhat in favour of popular vocalists, a new wave of US bands such as those led by Glen Miller and Artie Shaw, and (for some) Dixieland Jazz (a genre many dance band musicians tended to play in jam sessions). By the end of hostilities in 1945 it became evident that the days of the dance bands were drawing to a close.

*The emergence of new sounds in the UK during the war (ostensibly those broadcast by American Forces Network radio), and the need for people in the post-WWII era to start afresh, coupled-with technological developments in vinyl, tape and broadcasting made these pre-war sounds somewhat archaic, and representative of a bygone era in British popular music.*⁴²⁴

Although, by the 1950s, swing bands – and dancing to them – were past their peak in popularity, dance halls and their resident bands did co-exist in Liverpool with the rise of the

⁴²² Michael Brocken, *Other Voices: Hidden Histories of Liverpool’s Popular Music Scenes, 1930s-1970s*, (Farnham, 2010), pp.45 and 53.

⁴²³ Michael Macilwee, *The Gangs of Liverpool: From the Cornermen to the High Rip: The Mobs that Terrorised a City*, (Wrea Green, Lancs., 2006), p.261.

⁴²⁴ Michael Brocken, *Other Voices: Hidden Histories of Liverpool’s Popular Music Scenes, 1930s-1970s*, (Farnham, 2010), p.40.

trad jazz revival, skiffle, and rock 'n' roll in the second half of the 1950s. One of Brocken's key concerns in the above-quoted work is to warn against the danger of 'romanticizing and reifying periods of time' and what he describes as 'the propensity for Beatles' [and indeed rock] historians to replay reductive linear narratives.' By bringing to light his 'hidden histories of Liverpool's popular music scenes' he wants to remind the reader that 'different people with different motivations inhabited different [musical] places in Liverpool at different times.'⁴²⁵ Liverpool skiffle, Merseybeat and the Beatles emerged from an enormously complex combination of economic, social, technological, cultural and musical developments – in local, national, and international trends and styles in different places at different times both within and beyond Merseyside. Brocken takes his cue from the earlier work of Ruth Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians* of Milton Keynes, which stresses 'the overlapping worlds of classical orchestras, church choirs, brass bands, amateur operatic societies, and amateur bands playing jazz, rock, folk, and country.'⁴²⁶ Finnegan, as does this work, borrows Becker's term 'art worlds' to conceptualise these overlapping worlds, which she claims is useful as it 'points us to the sustained and systematic notion of what otherwise might look haphazard and individual.'⁴²⁷ Brocken traces the pre-history of dance band music, country, folk, jazz, and the venues and institutions associated with these musical forms from the 1930s. Something of that pre-history will be related here in the following sections including, where relevant, links between these 'art worlds' and youth culture.

Country Music in Liverpool

Brocken points out that despite the mythology surrounding the Cunard Yanks returning to Liverpool with obscure American records, including country music, and the claim of Hank Walters that he was the originator of country in the city (see below), the music was already familiar there. He argues that sailors did return with country records but that they were simply responding to consumer demand for items that were already well known but not easily obtainable. That said, he continues:

...at the Robert Shelton Recorded Music Archive at the Institute of Popular Music, University of Liverpool, there are British releases of such country music stored in the 78 rpm collections. For example, Jimmie Rodgers'

⁴²⁵ Michael Brocken, *Other Voices: Hidden Histories of Liverpool's Popular Music Scenes, 1930s-1970s*, (Farnham, 2010), pp.33 and 53.

⁴²⁶ Ruth Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town*, (Cambridge, 1989). The quote is taken from the cover blurb.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.* p.180.

*material was released on Zonophone prior to its merging with Regal and such 78s, donated to the IPM in their original bags, displayed the names and addresses of local stores such as Struthers, Davies' Arcade, and Lewis'. The rarity of such hillbilly material is perhaps somewhat exaggerated in Liverpool to compensate for the romantic language of the Cunard Yanks.*⁴²⁸

Likewise, Brocken suggests that Walter's claim refers to his pioneering live country music and that recorded country 'was not unfamiliar to the ears of many Liverpool people by the immediate post-WWII era.' He cites the testimony of several Liverpudlians who recalled the popularity of the music during the interwar period, including broadcaster Clive Garner who remembered a 'short' film of Jimmie Rodgers called *The Singing Brakeman* of 1929 being 'a popular feature of local cinemas throughout the 1930s'. Brocken's own father related his enjoyment of late thirties cowboy films, some of which featured Gene Autry, 'the singing cowboy'. But it was during WWII and its immediate aftermath, when country music could be heard on AFN radio and Liverpudlians came into close contact with US airmen, that Liverpool's perception of itself as already closer to America than the rest of the country was made more 'real' and in the form of country music made manifest in an affinity that was 'less the Deep South and perhaps more the ('Wild') West.'⁴²⁹

The appeal in Liverpool of the sentimental ballad has been remarked upon along with a reputation for producing successful comedians, and indeed rising stars like Ken Dodd did manage to combine comedy and sentimentality, simultaneously continuing in the comic traditions of Arthur Askey and Tommy Handley whilst scoring irregular chart hits, the most well-known of which was the 'schmaltzy' 'Tears' – the best-selling record of 1965. Spencer Leigh has pointed to Lonnie Donegan's remark that his rendition of the country weepie 'Nobody's Child' had a 'great effect in Liverpool whereas no one would take much notice of it in London.'⁴³⁰ This combination of sentimentality and comedic wit are Liverpool characteristics that have more recently attained the status of cliché, sometimes – especially since the economic debacle of the eighties – traits interpreted by outside observers as tending towards self-parody and/or a propensity for self-pity. This was not the case during the 1950s and '60s when they were considered positive attributes and an integral part of Liverpool culture's charm.

⁴²⁸ Michael Brocken, *Other Voices: Hidden Histories of Liverpool's Popular Music Scenes, 1930s-1970s*, (Farnham, 2010), p.112.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.* pp.113-14.

⁴³⁰ Spencer Leigh, *Sweeping The Blues Away: A Celebration of the Merseysippi Jazz Band*, (Liverpool, 2002), p.39 and Spencer Leigh & John Firminger, *Halfway To Paradise: Britpop, 1955-1962*, (Folkestone, 1996), p.118.

The sentimental aspect of the 'scouse' identity may also help to explain the popularity of country music. The teenage Ronnie Wycherley was a Liverpool Teddy boy in the mid-fifties who, besides having developed a passion for rock 'n' roll, busily absorbed the country music of Hank Williams because, as he later recalled, 'the lyrics of pop songs then weren't very deep: they weren't the broken-hearted type of lyrics I enjoyed.'⁴³¹ At the time Liverpool was referred to in some quarters as 'the Nashville of the North' due to an appreciation of 'country and western' music that had evolved partly through sailors bringing back records from America. Apparently, Wycherley was introduced to the music in this way by his seafaring uncle.⁴³² According to his biographer, Spencer Leigh, when Ronnie Wycherley became Billy Fury he carried over this country influence into the best of his own compositions which were otherwise more obviously inspired by rock 'n' roll.

Liverpool's enthusiasm for country music can be further explained by the relative ease with which local musicians gained access to the American air base at Burtonwood. Joe Butler, who began performing in 1958, recalled that 'They used to have country on regularly there. They used to bring bands in from the States and various musicians went into the base.' Another local musician, Kenny Johnson, remembered a juke box featuring records by Ernest Tubb, Web Pierce and Hank Williams. Bernie Green, whose group the Drifting Cowboys played a twice-weekly residency in the Servicemen's Club at Burtonwood felt that the base did much to encourage their efforts – 'At the time (the U.S. airmen) couldn't believe it because we sang in an American style. We got on like a house afire. They in their turn gave us a load of records, so the learning material was endless.'⁴³³ Besides benefiting from the importation of records by local merchant seamen – 'Cunard Yanks' – and the proximity of Burtonwood, Liverpool's country scene was also the product of an affinity for group singing that was an ingrained feature of the city's popular culture. As Hank Walters, 'Father of Liverpool Country' and founder of the Dusty Road Ramblers put it, 'Country music could be sung by a whole load of people, and that's what they like here.'⁴³⁴

⁴³¹ Billy Fury quoted in Spencer Leigh, *Wondrous Face: The Billy Fury Story*, (Folkestone, 2005), p.15.

⁴³² Spencer Leigh, *Wondrous Face: The Billy Fury Story*, (Folkestone, 2005), p.15.

⁴³³ Joe Butler and Bernie Green quoted in Kevin McManus, *'Nashville of the North': Country Music in Liverpool*, (Liverpool, 1994), p.4.

⁴³⁴ Hank Walters quoted in *ibid.* p.4. Walters (pp.1-2) describes a 'Cunard Yank' as 'a guy who went to the States for ten days and came back with an American accent, loud ties and a baseball cap. But they also brought records back with them.'

In his short but informative account of the early years of country music in Liverpool, Kevin McManus describes how the small number of groups that formed in the early to mid-1950s came to generate an audience large enough to justify their own club. Though not necessarily the first, from 1957 the foremost country music club was the Black Cat run by Hank Walters and his band (See Appendix, Maps: Figs. 3 and 3.3). McManus also relates how country and skiffle were mutually influential in Liverpool which gave rise to outfits like the Eddie Clayton Skiffle Group, featuring Richie Starkey (Ringo Starr) on drums, and several others notable in that they contained future luminaries of the Merseybeat scene.⁴³⁵ There was Ronnie Wycherley's best friend, Billy Hatton, and Brian O'Hara (both later of the Fourmost), the latter in Gerry Marsden's Skiffle Group who were 'connected genealogically to Hank Walters' bunch'. Edward 'Kingsize' Taylor was in the James Boys, and the Searchers, who besides taking their name from a John Wayne film, began life backing the country-influenced singer Johnny Sandon – before he left to form the Remo Four.⁴³⁶

After the Black Cat country spread to other venues such as Ossie Wade's (Walton Lane Social Club) and the 21 Club,⁴³⁷ to the point where, 'On any given weekend, you could guarantee that plenty of the 300-odd venues affiliated to the Liverpool Social Clubs Association had booked The Dusty Road Ramblers, The Hillsiders, The Ranchers or any other band from a legion of outfits also playing the kinda music folk like a-tappin' their boot-leather to.'⁴³⁸ At the Cavern circa 1960 it was possible to find country music sharing the bill with both jazz bands and the nascent beat groups. For example, the Red River Jazzmen with Little Bernie and the Drifting Cowboys, and the Swinging Blue Genes billed alongside Johnny Goode and the Country Kinfolk.⁴³⁹ As the younger musicians progressed from skiffle to beat many of them would frequent the Black Cat as members of the audience, as Walters told Spencer Leigh in 1981:

Some of the groups used to come in for a bevy [sic] when they were just getting going. All the Beatles came to The Black Cat and I used to tell them

⁴³⁵ Kevin McManus, *'Nashville of the North': Country Music in Liverpool*, (Liverpool, 1994), pp.9-10.

⁴³⁶ Alan Clayson, *Ringo Starr*, (London, 2003), p.31 and Dave McAleer, *Beatboom! Pop Goes the Sixties*, (London, 1994), p.34.

⁴³⁷ Kevin McManus, *'Nashville of the North': Country Music in Liverpool*, (Liverpool, 1994), p.11.

⁴³⁸ Alan Clayson, *George Harrison*, (London, 2003), p.34.

⁴³⁹ Spencer Leigh, *The Cavern: The Most Famous Club in the World*, (London, 2008), pp.49, 54.

*that I could hear bits of country in what they were doing. They were listening to us, so we must have influenced them.*⁴⁴⁰

Leigh also points to the number of country songs that were present in the repertoires of Merseybeat groups and insists ‘There was a great country/pop crossover in Liverpool.’⁴⁴¹

The editor of *Mersey Beat*, Bill Harry, wrote in 1965 that:

Locally, the Mersey C&W scene is thriving – but it has always attracted a large following on Merseyside. Before the emergence of THE BEATLES and the boom in the Beat Scene here, the C&W scene was very active and there were numerous groups and clubs for this specialised music. At the time, it was believed that there could be a big national breakthrough for Mersey C&W groups – but this never happened.

*The groups and fans of this music are very enthusiastic, almost fanatical in their dedication – however, they are not prepared to help themselves. In fact, the Mersey C&W Scene is almost a clique.*⁴⁴²

Harry went on to accuse Liverpool’s country groups of lacking originality which made it impossible for them to ‘add anything to the British Music Scene as Beat has done’. He may have missed the point however if they had *already* influenced the beat groups, thereby adding a unique Liverpool country music ingredient to the Merseybeat sound. According to McManus, ‘Elsewhere in the UK, country music was almost invisible’, whereas in Liverpool it was undoubtedly an important element of the musical mix and another connection, along with jazz, blues and folk, between Merseyside and America’s southern states, and another influence that pre-dated rock ‘n’ roll.⁴⁴³ John Lennon reportedly said that ‘the first guitar he’d ever seen was being played by a Liverpool man in a cowboy hat’ and Billy Fury was adamant that ‘Actually, in Liverpool, everybody used to play country and western.’ Paul Du Noyer, an author and music journalist who was born and grew up in the city suggests ‘There are probably various reasons for country’s appeal to Liverpoolians: it’s gritty but sentimental,

⁴⁴⁰ Spencer Leigh, *Country Music Round Up*, May 1981, p.16, cited in Kevin McManus, ‘*Nashville of the North*’: *Country Music in Liverpool*, (Liverpool, 1994), p.12.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.12.

⁴⁴² *Mersey Beat*, January 30th, 1965, p.2. In the *Music Echo* (formerly *Mersey Beat*), July 10th, 1965, p.12, Harry modified his views somewhat in an article entitled ‘Liverpool’s Big Country Revival’ writing that ‘Country & Western music has always been strong on Merseyside. Over two years ago it was growing in strength, there were over 40 C&W groups and numerous clubs. For a while it seemed to wane, perhaps overshadowed by the tremendous vitality of the beat scene but recently it has flexed its muscles again and seems to be far stronger, more durable and better organised.’

⁴⁴³ Kevin McManus, ‘*Nashville of the North*’: *Country Music in Liverpool*, (Liverpool, 1994), p.10.

it has deep Celtic roots [and] it's within reach of amateurs' which is why it was not surprising that skiffle 'proved wonderfully compatible with Liverpool's country leanings'.⁴⁴⁴

Liverpool Folk Music

Du Noyer raises an interesting point regarding the influence of the folk tradition on Liverpool music-making which further suggests that cultural affinities were shared with Celtic neighbours and the 'New World' rather than the 'Old World' folk roots of inland rural England. Merseyside skiffle groups were much more likely to include 'The Leaving of Liverpool' or 'Maggie May' in their repertoire alongside the obligatory Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie offerings. As he explains:

Liverpool's own folk music was shaped by the nearness of the Celts and the dominance of the sea. And what's remarkable is the extent to which it's always been sung by actual folks, as opposed to white-collar hearties and weekend woollies.

*Not so much rooted in the land as tossed by the sea, the folk music of Liverpool is naturally more surf than turf in flavour...But it never entered the bloodstream of British rock in the same way as the rustic folk styles of England, which were adapted by Bert Jansch, Fairport Convention and Nick Drake [et al]. As usual, Liverpool and England seem eerily disconnected, while Uncle Sam lives just the other side of Ireland.*⁴⁴⁵

That said, it was the Spinners – 'only one-quarter Liverpudlian' – who came to represent Liverpool folk music on the national stage. They emerged via the Rivington Ramblers and the Gin Mill Skiffle Group, skifflers who were in a minority that eschewed rock 'n' roll in favour of folk.⁴⁴⁶ Washboard player Mick Groves was the president of Merseyside's Lonnie Donegan fan club which helped launch the Liverpool branch of the Skiffle and Folk Music Club – Northern branches included Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield – where young people were encouraged to participate in the music instead of engaging in the usual hero-worship. Groves started the Liverpool branch at the Cavern in 1958 before moving to the basement of Sampson and Barlow's in London Road where, with the demise of the skiffle craze, it became the Spinners' Triton folk club (See Appendix, Maps: Figs. 3 and 3.3).⁴⁴⁷ As Leigh maintains, this 'was very influential' although he 'always felt with the Spinners and Jackie and Bridie and Bob Buckle and the others, you could tell that a lot of these people had been

⁴⁴⁴ Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), pp.58-60.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.* pp.56-57.

⁴⁴⁶ Alan Clayson, *George Harrison*, (London, 2003), p.35.

⁴⁴⁷ Spencer Leigh, *Puttin' On The Style: The Lonnie Donegan Story*, (Folkestone, 2003), p.57.

school teachers. There was a tendency to lecture the audience.⁴⁴⁸ Just as likely to perform ‘The Lincolnshire Poacher’ as ‘Fried Bread and Brandy-O’, and taking their name from Lancashire’s staple cotton industry, the Spinners nonetheless became a Liverpool institution, to which the longevity of their annual show at the Philharmonic attested.⁴⁴⁹ That said, in terms of continuity with Liverpool’s folk tradition, as Michael Brocken points out, the Spinners’ ‘musical specialisms tended to be based around nautical songs: sea shanties, halyard songs...and they owed a debt of gratitude to Stan Hugill, one of the last remaining shanty-men in the country, who lived in Hoylake and occasionally performed as [their] guest.⁴⁵⁰ Folk music was not however a major influence on the groups that emerged from skiffle in the late fifties whereas jazz, and the scene that sprang up around it was vital in that it provided the ‘art world’ infrastructure upon which the Beat Boom was based. For this reason the story of jazz in Liverpool is of much greater significance.

Liverpool Jazz

Jazz appreciation on Merseyside can be traced back as far as the touring minstrel shows of the late nineteenth century. Brocken relates how the demand for jazz continued to grow through the 1920s aided by the expansion of radio, the relative affordability of records, and the widening circulation of a supportive music press. The visits of Louis Armstrong in 1932 and especially Duke Ellington the following year were landmark occasions. He performed a week-long residency at the Liverpool Empire followed by a guest appearance at the Grafton Rooms, apparently in keeping with local tradition. Such was the demand for ‘the Duke’ that ‘the West Derby Road area surrounding the venue was completely blocked’ by the crowds. For some time after this visit the *Melody Maker* ‘regularly previewed’ the ‘weekly meetings of the 40-strong Liverpool Ellington Society.’⁴⁵¹ Brocken:

...by the mid-1930s touring bands, record recitals, radio, and theatres had all helped to create a lover of jazz who was interested in the history of the music via a connoisseurship.

⁴⁴⁸ Spencer Leigh quoted in Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), p.56. Bridie Gallagher and Jacqueline McDonald were indeed school teachers, described in *Mersey Beat* as ‘The two folk singing Liverpool teachers’, see *Mersey Beat*, May 8th-15th, 1964, p.10.

⁴⁴⁹ Spencer Leigh, *The Cavern: The Most Famous Club in the World*, (London, 2008), p.30, and Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), p.56.

⁴⁵⁰ Michael Brocken, *Other Voices: Hidden Histories of Liverpool’s Popular Music Scenes, 1930s-1970s*, (Farnham, 2010), pp.162-63.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.* The following section is based on Chapter 3, Jazz, the Cavern, and skiffle, pp.55-65.

So record recitals, a.k.a. Rhythm Clubs in Liverpool began to take on specific and recognizable forms. There would be a master of ceremonies who would also provide information about artists and contextualize the music. After the break musicians might begin to play.

Via these Rhythm Clubs sessions, actual musical performances of 'New Orleans'-style jazz took place in Liverpool in the decades before and during WWII, and the music came to represent an invented 'tradition' in the city. Even to this day the majority of jazz performed in Liverpool is of this 'trad' variety.

It was from two such rhythm clubs that the most celebrated and durable of these Liverpool 'trad' jazz bands emerged in 1949. The Merseysippi Jazz Band (MJB) was the product of the Crosby and Wallasey Rhythm Clubs and became the mainstay of the Liverpool jazz scene throughout the 1950s and beyond. They held residencies and hosted touring bands at the Tivoli Theatre (New Brighton), Picton Hall (William Brown Street), and the Temple Restaurant (Dale Street), before becoming the resident jazz band at the Cavern when it opened in 1957. Although initially this post-war 'trad' revival consisted of a rather exclusive social group of aficionados, by the mid-1950s its popularity as an alternative to the dance halls amongst a certain element of Liverpool youth was in evidence, as is attested to earlier in this work by the enthusiastic response to the Temple Restaurant jazz nights reported in the *Liverpool Echo*.

In February 1957 the *Echo*'s George Eglin asked readers to 'Consider these basic facts about jazz in this jazz-mad city':

In less than a month the new home of jazz that has been created in a cellar in the land of the fruit warehouses has attracted 12,000 members.

*Rapt-eyed youngsters gather seven nights a week and some of them give up their lunch on two days to listen to the music that was born many years ago in New Orleans.*⁴⁵²

The Cavern was conceived by Alan Sytner, the son of a well-respected Jewish doctor, and was inspired by teenage visits during the school holidays to Le Caveau, the renowned Paris jazz club. Opened in 1947, Le Caveau hosted many of the top names in jazz in a cave-like cellar club which, for the young Sytner, represented all that was glamorous about post-war Parisian nightlife. Wishing to combine his love of jazz with the opportunity for making money he first established the 21 Club on Croxteth Road. Whilst successful, it had always been his intention to find a place in the city centre with the potential for the kind of

⁴⁵² *Liverpool Echo*, February 2nd, 1957, p.6.

atmosphere he had experienced at Le Caveau, somewhere he could open seven nights a week so as to make it economically viable. The idea was ‘to bring the Left Bank to Liverpool.’⁴⁵³ A month after it opened Eglin visited the Cavern (on Mathew Street. See Appendix, Maps: Figs. 3 and 3.2) where he was told by Sytner that ‘Jazz in Liverpool is not a new craze. There were jazz sessions before the war, and the first club was formed in an upstairs room of a Dale Street restaurant (the Temple) about 1950.’ This had begun as something akin to a rhythm club where jazz aficionados gathered to listen to records, but rapidly expanded to an audience of around 200 enthusiasts eager to spend their weekends jiving to live trad jazz. Its Sunday evening session run by the MJB was known as the West Coast Club and other clubs soon followed including the Muskrat, 21, University Rhythm and Embassy clubs in Liverpool and the Wallasey and Riverside clubs on the Wirral.⁴⁵⁴

It is interesting to note that in Eglin’s view rock ‘n’ roll was nothing more than a passing jazz-related fad that was unlikely to survive the skiffle craze. It must have seemed ironic to him a few years later when it became apparent that skiffle was in fact the conduit through which rock ‘n’ roll re-emerged as *the* dominant force in popular music. Nonetheless, at the Cavern in 1957 rock ‘n’ roll was strictly taboo. Colin Hanton, drummer with the Quarry Men recalled that when they made their debut there in August, John Lennon was passed a note by the management during their performance admonishing them for slipping the odd rock ‘n’ roll number into their skiffle repertoire. Already there was a noticeable rift between the skiffle groups that had emerged from jazz bands and the younger element that ‘did not know of the jazz tradition’ but were ‘taking their cue from Lonnie Donegan’s records’.⁴⁵⁵ John Lennon believed that jazz and Liverpool jazz bands in particular were holding the Beatles back as they began to gain in popularity in Liverpool. During an interview with the present author, Spencer Leigh was able to shed light on this issue by suggesting that there is an overlooked but important reason why Lennon may have felt so strongly – besides the fact that they held each other’s music in such obvious disregard. He explained that:

[The Merseysippi Jazz Band] which is the first band to play the Cavern...often played on the same bill as the Beatles, and I only discovered quite recently

⁴⁵³ Spencer Leigh, *The Cavern: The Most Famous Club in the World*, (London, 2008), p.18.

⁴⁵⁴ *Liverpool Echo*, February 2nd, 1957, p.6. Also see above p.35 for evidence that the Dale Street jazz club was still going strong in September 1956. There is an advertisement for ‘Liverpool’s Original Home of Jazz...The Temple Restaurant and Bars, Dale Street’ in *Mersey Beat*, November 1st-15th, 1962, p.7.

⁴⁵⁵ Spencer Leigh, *The Cavern: The Most Famous Club in the World*, (London, 2008), p.32. The quotation comes from Dave Jamieson, sometime road manager of Rory Storm and the Hurricanes.

*that when the MJB played on the same bill...they actually had to top the bill and I wondered why...when the Beatles were already getting a reputation in Liverpool and the answer is, they were members of the Musicians Union and the Beatles didn't join until 1963. Members of the MU are not allowed to be on a bill underneath someone who isn't a member of the Union.*⁴⁵⁶

This must have rankled with the beat groups who were increasingly pulling in the majority of the audience, but before the rise of 'beat' or 'rhythm' groups it was jazz (and to a lesser extent country) that attracted the 'in crowd' in Liverpool while the young ex-skifflers were still honing their skills in suburban dance halls. And it should be acknowledged that even during the couple of years or so of uneasy co-existence when jazz was gradually being edged out of its own venues by the beat groups it still managed to retain a loyal if diminishing audience.

The jazz column of the *Liverpool Echo*, which ran from November 1957 to March 1959 provides enough evidence to confirm that the post-war jazz revival was as lively in Liverpool as anywhere else in provincial Britain. The column was called *Mersey Beat*, which was somewhat ironic considering it would later be the title of the publication celebrating the music that supplanted jazz as well as the media-coined term for Liverpool music.⁴⁵⁷ In 1958, its author, who wrote under the pseudonym 'Jazzman', reflected on the fluctuating fortunes of jazz venues in the city:

Why cast gloom by thinking of the many little jazz clubs that have flourished then faded on Merseyside in recent years? Many will recall with nostalgia the 21 Club, the Chez Bolden, the Tishamingo, the Kinkajoo, the Britannic, the Hot Club of Liverpool and the Muskrats Jazz Club. These are but a few.

To be in the swing and note the newest little place that is the rave demands an energy and ear to the ground that even someone paid to keep up to date in these matters cannot always muster.

*Thus while we have noted this year already the reopening of two clubs at the Temple, the new Crosby Club and the quick growth of the Crofters, we still have not found time to visit new places like the Attic and the Morgue, where skiffle holds sway.*⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁶ Spencer Leigh, interview with the author, May 31st, 2009.

⁴⁵⁷ Bill Harry claimed to have come up with the term 'Mersey Beat' but he must surely have been aware of the column which predated his publication by almost four years, particularly in light of his original intention to found a jazz paper. For Harry's account of how he got the idea see, Bill Harry 'The Birth of Mersey Beat 5', <http://www.triumphpc.com/mersey-beat/birth/birth5.shtml>, retrieved 28/01/09.

⁴⁵⁸ *Liverpool Echo Weekend Supplement*, March 22nd, 1958, p.2. It is a further irony that the originator of the term Mersey Beat, 'Jazzman', was actually Steve Voce, a jazz critic who made no

Most of these clubs were founded by an individual or a group of individuals who would hire a venue for one night of the week only, so the Cavern's opening represented a landmark as it was Liverpool's first jazz club with permanent premises. By the time Liverpool's premier trad jazz ensemble, the Merseysippi Jazz Band, gave up their residency there in May 1959 and moved to the Mardi Gras – a considerably more salubrious establishment with an alcohol licence (See Appendix, Maps: Figs. 3 and 3.3) – the Cavern was only six months away from the end of Sytner's tenure and a year away from the abandonment of its jazz-only policy under new owner Ray McFall.⁴⁵⁹ Jazz had by then also become semi-respectable, with local and visiting bands regularly appearing at one of several municipal venues across the city including the Picton Hall and the Philharmonic Hall, the latter engaging the Merseysippis to perform in a 'Jazz Jamboree' on the occasion of the 750th Anniversary Charter Celebrations in June 1957.⁴⁶⁰ The jazz scene then, was important because it paved the way for the Beat Boom by establishing an informal network of musicians and their audience in city-centre and suburban venues run on a semi-permanent and then a permanent basis by enthusiasts of the music. Alan Sytner proclaimed, albeit with some exaggeration:

*Without me, no Cavern: without me, no Beatles: without me, none of those bloody things really. If there had not been a Cavern, none of this would have happened. The talent came out at the Cavern, there was nowhere else...the Cavern created a precedent. People opened the Mardi Gras and the Iron Door and all the others, but they didn't think of it for themselves: they looked at the Cavern and created an alternative...If [the Beatles] had been playing in church halls in Maghull, would anyone have taken any notice?*⁴⁶¹

He is taking too much credit, and passing judgement with the enormous benefit of hindsight, but it cannot be disputed that the Cavern would not have existed were it not for his love of jazz. Unfortunately his penchant was for modern jazz, and the losses he made on the one night a week devoted to it – there was one night for skiffle and three, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, for trad jazz – contributed to his decision to sell his interest in the club to Ray

secret of his hatred of rock 'n' roll. See Spencer Leigh, *The Best Of Fellas: The Story of Bob Wooler*, (Liverpool, 2002), p.96.

⁴⁵⁹ Spencer Leigh, *Sweeping The Blues Away: A Celebration of the Merseysippi Jazz Band*, (Liverpool, 2002), p.118 and Spencer Leigh, *The Cavern: The Most Famous Club in the World*, (London, 2008), pp.46 and 54. The Mardi Gras was run by another Liverpool club owner and promoter cum beat group manager, Jimmy Ireland who, besides also owning the Downbeat Club, a licensed over-18s venue for jazz and then beat music, was manager of 'the Swinging Bluejeans, the Escorts, Earl Preston's Realms, Cy Tucker's Friars and Billy Kinsley's the Nameless Ones'. See Bill Harry, *Liverpool: Bigger Than The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2009), pp.82-84.

⁴⁶⁰ *Liverpool Echo*, May 17th, 1957, p.10.

⁴⁶¹ Alan Sytner, quoted in Spencer Leigh, *The Cavern: The Most Famous Club in the World*, (London, 2008), p.44

McFall, a clerk with the firm that handled the Cavern's accounts, in September/October 1959. McFall declared that he intended to 'put Liverpool on the map as the leading jazz centre in the country outside London' but soon came to the realisation that:

*The club's fortunes were going down and there was a tremendous interest for beat music. Skiffle had come and gone and I felt that I had to introduce beat music steadily, which worked very well. It took two or three years for jazz to be phased out and some bands like Acker Bilk's retained their popularity.*⁴⁶²

The uneasy co-existence of jazz and rock 'n' roll/beat groups is further attested to in Leigh's account of the Cavern, especially before McFall's change of policy. Johnny Guitar of Rory Storm and the Hurricanes remembered duffle-coated trad jazz fans throwing pennies at them when they burst into an unscheduled rendition of Jerry Lee Lewis' 'Great Balls Of Fire' – a performance for which they were fined ten shillings by a disgruntled McFall. The only group that managed to maintain a foot in both camps was the Swinging Bluegenes who were 'a hybrid in both repertoire and instrumentation, being not quite a jazz group and not quite a rock 'n' roll band.' Nonetheless, on 25th May 1960, following the financial failure of a recent jazz festival, the Cavern presented its first 'Rock Night' featuring Cass and the Cassanovas (later the Big Three) and the triumphant return of Rory Storm. This was followed by the introduction of lunchtime beat sessions in October which were intended to draw young working people during their lunch hour.⁴⁶³ By then, the club was on its way to becoming Liverpool's first city-centre beat venue, and that despite the fact that in two years it had accumulated a membership of 25,000 based on what was virtually a jazz-only policy.⁴⁶⁴

Rock 'n' Roll on Merseyside: Press, Promoters, and Venues

The *Liverpool Echo* entered 1956 with youth and popular music very much on the agenda. In January it was reported that Mr. A. H. Downward, youth employment officer for Bootle, was warning school-leavers that 'There are no openings for boys who arrive for an interview wearing draped suits, narrow trousers and shoe string ties.'⁴⁶⁵ In February 'a running fight among 300 Teddy Boys along Stanley Road, Bootle' prompted a series of articles on the problem of hooliganism and the danger that rock 'n' roll presented for young people in

⁴⁶² Ray McFall quoted in *ibid.* pp.46-47.

⁴⁶³ Spencer Leigh, *The Cavern: The Most Famous Club in the World*, (London, 2008), pp.51-58. As they mutated from a jazz/skiffle outfit to an outright beat group the name was modified from the Bluegenes Skiffle Group through the Swinging Bluegenes to the Swinging Blue Jeans. See Dave McAleer, *Beatboom! Pop Goes the Sixties*, (London, 1994), p.38.

⁴⁶⁴ Spencer Leigh, *The Cavern: The Most Famous Club in the World*, (London, 2008), p.43.

⁴⁶⁵ *Liverpool Echo*, January 20th, 1956, p.7.

Liverpool.⁴⁶⁶ The police, the clergy and even a family doctor joined the debate, the latter going so far as to attend a screening of ‘Rock Around the Clock’ where he claimed to have witnessed teenagers performing ‘horrid contortions all over the place’ amid howls and yells and the smashing of cinema seats.⁴⁶⁷ As a result of this experience the good doctor felt compelled to deliver the following diatribe on the evils of modern youth:

*In this neurotic age it is youth all over the world which foments every trouble. The killers of Cyprus are mostly kids. The rioters of Athens are students. The “army” building up in Egypt are teenagers. Just as it was the youngsters of Germany who supplied manpower for the beastly machine of Nazism.*⁴⁶⁸

Although going so far as to blame teenagers for every contemporary international crisis and a world war besides was unusually excessive, this hysterical overreaction to the film and its reception was typical of press reports in local and national papers. It was however acknowledged by the Chief Constable of Bootle that the worst trouble ‘was due to irresponsible people outside the cinema who gathered waiting for something to happen’, an admission which illustrates the pervasiveness of the furore whipped up by the media.⁴⁶⁹ Four days later it was announced that the Liverpool Theatres and Public Entertainments Committee had voted unanimously to ban the film at twenty of the city’s cinemas.⁴⁷⁰ Future Cavern DJ Bob Wooler, who saw the film at the Gaumont cinema, was insistent that the newspaper reports were nothing but hype, and was adamant that ‘Despite what some claim to remember...any riots in Liverpool for *Rock Around The Clock* are a myth.’⁴⁷¹

And despite the Council’s action the enthusiasm for rock ‘n’ roll in Liverpool remained undimmed as is demonstrated by the almost constant presence of records by Bill Haley and Elvis Presley in ‘Liverpool’s Own Top Three’ – the *Echo*’s truncated weekly chart based on sales in local record shops – from mid-1956-57. Skiffle records, especially those of Lonnie Donegan, also featured regularly. Equally popular in the ‘Top Three’ was home-grown crooner Frankie Vaughan, who spent a few days that summer re-visiting old haunts in preparation for a film ‘about a boy from a Northern slum area [Scotland Road] who makes good’. By 1956 Vaughan was a star on both sides of the Atlantic but turned down an offer

⁴⁶⁶ *Liverpool Echo*, February 24th, p.13, May 4th, p.9, September 13th, p.6, 1956.

⁴⁶⁷ *Liverpool Echo*, September 13th, 1956, p.6.

⁴⁶⁸ *Liverpool Echo*, September 13th, 1956, p.6.

⁴⁶⁹ *Liverpool Echo*, September 11th, 1956, p.5.

⁴⁷⁰ *Liverpool Echo*, September 15th, 1956, p.7.

⁴⁷¹ Bob Wooler quoted in Spencer Leigh, *The Best Of Fellas: The Story of Bob Wooler*, (Liverpool, 2002), p.54.

from ‘a major American company’ to make the film which he claimed ‘should do for the North what Ealing Studio’s “The Blue Lamp” did for the South’.⁴⁷² The result was ‘These Dangerous Years’, exploring the topical theme of juvenile delinquency within 1950s’ Liverpool Teddy boy culture.⁴⁷³ Also hailing from Liverpool were Lita Roza and Michael Holliday who, along with Vaughan, represented the city’s contribution to British popular music before the advent of skiffle and rock ‘n’ roll. All three were firm favourites in their home town during the 1950s although they had already made the inevitable move down south.⁴⁷⁴

It should be stressed that the Liverpool rock ‘n’ roll scene was not initially an inner city phenomenon (See Appendix, Maps: Fig. 1 – The social geography of popular music activity on Merseyside). Bob Wooler, who is widely held to be the first rock ‘n’ roll DJ on Merseyside recalled encountering the music in 1956 at the Garston Park fairground where he heard the Crew Cuts’ ‘Sh-Boom (Life Could Be A Dream)’ and the Platters’ ‘Only You’ being played at loud volume. According to Wooler, ‘Commentators overlook the importance of fairgrounds to the development of rock ‘n’ roll in the UK. Rock ‘n’ roll records always sounded good at fairgrounds and teenagers would stand around listening.’ He was also adamant that ‘The action was out in the suburbs and it was only later that they [rock ‘n’ roll groups] came into Liverpool.’⁴⁷⁵ Groups were playing in an assortment of dance halls and clubs on the outskirts of the city such as Litherland Town Hall, Garston Baths and the Grosvenor Ballroom in Wallasey. Some of the earliest rock ‘n’ roll dances were promoted by Wally Hill at the Winter Gardens in Garston during 1958 where Wooler would play a handful of ‘Top Twenty’ records in between groups, but continual outbreaks of violence forced them to move to Holyoake Hall, Wavertree in 1959, although the gang warfare was only contained there by employing a high ratio of bouncers to punters. Hill recalled the ‘odd knife’ being thrown and an incident involving a ‘docker’s hook’ while Wooler has recounted how the chairs at the Aintree Institute ‘were batoned [sic] into fours so they could not be thrown at the stage – but it does appear that the bouncers usually got the upper hand.’⁴⁷⁶ It is worth noting here the contemporary observations of Colin Fletcher who claimed that many Beat groups in

⁴⁷² *Liverpool Echo*, June 30th, p.3 and July 1st, p.8, 1956.

⁴⁷³ Spencer Leigh, *Wondrous Face: The Billy Fury Story*, (Folkestone, 2005), p.33.

⁴⁷⁴ For the Liverpool roots of Lita Roza, who is, perhaps unfairly, best remembered for her version of ‘How Much Is That Doggie In The Window?’, a song she despised, see *Liverpool Echo Magazine*, January 21st, 1956, p.1. For Michael Holliday see ‘Why I Love Liverpool’, *Liverpool Echo Weekend Supplement*, March 15th, 1958, p.1. For Frankie Vaughan, *Liverpool Echo*, June 30th, 1956, p.3.

⁴⁷⁵ Spencer Leigh, *The Best Of Fellas: The Story of Bob Wooler*, (Liverpool, 2002), pp.54-57.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.* pp.60-61 and 78-79.

Liverpool developed out of the gangs who frequented these dance halls, and that violence decreased as their energy was redirected into supporting ‘the group’. Fletcher describes the process thus:

What mattered now was not how many boys a gang could muster for a Friday night fight, but how well their group could play on Saturday night...the Park gang literally nursed its group. To enable the group to buy microphones and speakers a system of ‘shares’ was set up which were to be repaid from the group’s earnings...The trusted ‘spiritual’ boys became the director and manager respectively. The electrical apprentice acted as an on-the-spot repairer...Girls too assumed a new role – they became the seamstresses.⁴⁷⁷

Despite the trouble, with jiving still not permitted in the city-centre ballrooms and no venues there catering for rock ‘n’ roll groups, the suburban dance halls thrived. Competition was fierce as promoters like Sam Leach, Brian Kelly, Doug Martin, Ralph Webster and Hill jostled to get the best groups for the lowest price. It seems there existed something of an unofficial code of conduct by which promoters agreed not to put on shows at venues on one-another’s ‘patch’. However, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence relating the devious tricks that were employed to gain a competitive advantage. Tactics included double-booking groups, attempting to sign them up exclusively, or simply stealing each other’s ideas; Wooler’s ‘Twisterama’ night in Southport and his ‘Operation Teen Beat’ at Hambleton Hall were promotional devices allegedly appropriated by Leach for his own ‘Twisterama’ night and ‘Operation Big Beat’ at the Tower Ballroom in New Brighton.⁴⁷⁸

Leach claims he was introduced to the Liverpool club scene on July 6th 1957 when he rented a garage in Walton which he opened as the Attic Club to promote a skiffle group called the Blue Diamonds, a date he is keen to point out that is doubly significant owing to the fact that the Quarry Men were also playing the village fete at Woolton – the day when Lennon first met McCartney. Presumably the Attic Club was one of the two ‘new’ clubs where ‘skiffle holds sway’ mentioned above in the article by ‘Jazzman’. Leach started it as an alternative to jazz nights at the Cavern where ‘he didn’t like going...because they weren’t my kind of girls – they were beatniks.’⁴⁷⁹ The other club, the Morgue, must have been that opened by Rory Storm (then still Alan Caldwell) as an outlet for his group, Al Caldwell and his Texans, a place described by Spencer Leigh as having ‘played a crucial role in Liverpool beat music

⁴⁷⁷ Colin Fletcher, ‘Beats and gangs in Merseyside’, in T. Raison (Ed.), *Youth in New Society*, (London, 1966), p.158, quoted in, Dick Bradley, *Understanding Rock ‘n’ Roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, (Buckingham, 1992), pp.57 and 76-77.

⁴⁷⁸ Spencer Leigh, *The Best Of Fellas: The Story of Bob Wooler*, (Liverpool, 2002), pp.77 and 84.

⁴⁷⁹ Spencer Leigh, *The Cavern: The Most Famous Club in the World*, (London, 2008), p.31.

during its short life'. The significance of the Morgue Skiffle Cellar lies in the fact that it was established, decorated and run by the teenagers themselves in the basement of a large semi-derelict house formerly occupied by retired nurses. In that respect it was similar to the Casbah Coffee Club which opened in August 1958 in the cellar of drummer Pete Best's family home under the watchful eye of his unusually tolerant mother, Mona. The Morgue was in Oakhill Park and the Casbah in West Derby Village – again suburban settings – and both were venues for the Quarry Men and other nascent beat groups.⁴⁸⁰ The new generation of skiffle/rock 'n' roll groups were not waiting around for the ballrooms and jazz venues to accept them; they were already creating their own scene.

Besides sharing a common desire to make money, promoters in Liverpool in the early 1960s could be divided between those, like many of the dance hall managers who cared nothing for the music, and those, like Leach, who were avid adherents. Between his debut with the Attic Club and the Operation Big Beat shows he promoted during 1961 and '62, he was in his early twenties which was young enough to participate in the scene. He has stated how he 'was not blessed with wealthy parents – I lived on a council estate...I was just an ordinary Liverpool lad with nothing going for me except an unbridled passion for the music...and a talent for getting things done.'⁴⁸¹ Leach was just one of several key personalities who were prominent in the launch of the Liverpool Beat Boom and an assessment of their contribution is integral to an understanding of its development.

Besides Lonnie Donegan and the early American rock 'n' roll stars, mention should be made of another inspiration for young people on Merseyside during the early fifties. According to Graham Turner this was the influence of the various youth organisations, youth clubs, and the work of one man in particular, Philip Bailey. From 1944 Bailey was involved in promoting the musical education of young people, first through the mixed clubs, and then the boys' clubs in Liverpool. Such was his success that he was employed by the Corporation who paid half his salary thus making him 'available to any youth organization which had its headquarters in the city.' Turner states that 'he was probably the only Youth Music Advisor

⁴⁸⁰ Spencer Leigh, *Twist And Shout: Merseybeat, The Cavern, The Star Club and The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2004), p.25 and Mark Lewisohn, *The Complete Beatles Chronicle*, (London, 1996), pp.16-17. Although Leigh states that 'it opened in March 1959 and closed the following month' he is, for once, mistaken as the *Echo* article is dated March 1958 when the Morgue was 'new', as is confirmed by Mark Lewisohn who provides the exact dates – March 13th to April 22nd 1958.

⁴⁸¹ Sam Leach, *The Birth of The Beatles: The Rocking City*, (Gwynedd, 1999), pp.16-18.

to any Corporation in the country.’ This was work that Bailey had been engaged in since the 1920s when, he recalled:

...they were far more interested in vocal music and choirs. Later on there was a demand for piano classes and a bit of violin work. Before the war, we had harmonica bands, and then perhaps they’d add drums and a cymbal.

Most of the skiffle groups began in our clubs...I started a lot of them myself. When any youth club wanted a group to get together, they’d say, Mr. Bailey, would you come along and help?’

Then we ran a lot of courses on guitar-playing in the Liverpool Boys’ Association. We started just as soon as there was a demand in the late ‘40s and early 50s’, so that guitars were well-known here long before you heard them on a big scale elsewhere. We were able to provide the facilities they hadn’t got anywhere else.

*If you want to blame the Mersey Beat on anyone...I suppose you can blame it on me.*⁴⁸²

Among Bailey’s students at the Florence Institute on Church Street was a young Gerry Marsden later of Gerry and the Pacemakers fame. If it is true that most of the Liverpool skiffle groups started in youth clubs under his tuition then Bailey must surely have been a major influence.

Before progressing, it is worth returning to a consideration of Merseyside’s youth culture more generally – ordinary Liverpool lads and lasses – and their relationship with pop and popular culture as the Beat Boom dawned at the turn of the decade.

The Social Geography of Merseyside

As Paul Du Noyer describes it:

*In Billy Fury’s day Liverpool was less the Gateway of Empire than the Tradesman’s Entrance. In the pomp of its Edwardian prime the port had been a genuine marvel; its splendid waterfront a grand backdrop to the comings and goings of the fashionable and the fabulous. By 1960 it lacked the glamour of those great days. Liverpool was left to get on with its mundane business. Nobody really gave it a thought. Even its football teams languished in obscurity. If the town produced national entertainers, they were simply from ‘somewhere up North’.*⁴⁸³

⁴⁸² Quoted in, Graham Turner, *The North Country*, (London, 1967), pp.151-52.

⁴⁸³ Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), p.14.

At first glance, a less auspicious set of circumstances and a more unlikely environment for the imminent explosion of pop culture is hard to imagine.

In his essay 'Living in Liverpool: The Modern City', Colin Pooley suggests that over the past two hundred years, despite overall improvements in standards of living, health and housing, much else in the 'patterns and processes of inequality in everyday life have changed remarkably little.' For 'most Liverpudlians', he argues, it is 'a depressingly familiar picture' that certain areas of the city, however many times they have been redeveloped, continue to experience intractable 'social and material problems.'⁴⁸⁴ While space precludes an in-depth analysis of the social structure of Liverpool and the surrounding region for the period, it is important to set the narrative of Liverpool's youth culture and popular music in a wider social context. This must be done because social structure has significant implications for the formation of Merseyside's distinctive culture and identity. As Belchem has observed, the chief characteristic of Liverpool's demographic was its 'remarkable pattern of in-migration'. Then, 'As it grew from the central waterfront, Liverpool expanded outwards in a cultural vacuum, as it were, urbanising an area largely without previous geographical and occupational identities.' A corollary of this process was 'another distinctive feature: urban segregation.'

*As historical geographers have shown, Victorian Liverpool emerged in precocious manner as the prototype of the modern twentieth-century city with distinct social areas. The 'collar gap' widened as clerical workers took advantage of by-law housing and transport improvements to move out to new suburbs. Within the working class, residential location was a similar compromise between proximity and a suitable residential area in terms of cost (often linked to position in the family life cycle), social status and ethnic affiliation. The inner residential suburbs were favoured by skilled workers and by Welsh and Scottish minority groups. A large proportion of the unskilled and semi-skilled working class clustered close to casual labour markets of the city centre and the waterfront, areas associated with the Irish.*⁴⁸⁵

During the period 1956-65 out-migration continued from the central areas, the difference being that inner-city slum clearance was beginning to disperse the core working-class casual

⁴⁸⁴ Colin G. Pooley, 'Living in Liverpool: The Modern City', in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), pp.173-74.

⁴⁸⁵ John Belchem, 'An accent exceedingly rare': Scouse and the inflexion of class, in John Belchem, *Merseypride: essays in Liverpool exceptionalism*, (Liverpool, 2000), pp.41-43. The work of historical geographers Belchem refers to is, R. Lawton and C. G. Pooley, 'The Social Geography of Merseyside in the Nineteenth Century', Final report to the Social Science Research Council (Dept. Of Geography, University of Liverpool, 1976).

unskilled and semi-skilled population to outlying overspill estates such as Kirkby and New Towns like Runcorn and Skelmersdale. In addition, the traditional skilled working-class and middle-class inhabitants of many of the older once fashionable inner suburbs – Toxteth, Everton, West Derby – had moved out, leaving Toxteth in particular to become the isolated ‘black’ ghetto area it remains to this day.⁴⁸⁶ A large proportion of the population of Merseyside was therefore in something of a state of flux in which the old demarcations of Irish Catholic north – Protestant south, Liverpoolian working class ‘inner’ – Liverpoolian middle class ‘outer’, were becoming less certain. In the main however, the family of an established middle-class businessman living in a large three-storey terraced house in Sefton Park, as George Melly’s did, would have little contact with the residents of the adjacent Dingle, the ‘slum’ district where Ringo Starr grew up. Pooley has stated that ‘during the peak of famine migration some 580,000 mainly destitute Irish passed through the port of Liverpool and, although some quickly re-embarked for North America, many settled in the city.’ In 1851, 22.3% of Liverpool’s population was registered as born in Ireland, by 1951 the figure was 2.3%.⁴⁸⁷ Nonetheless, Irish identity was undoubtedly the main ingredient ‘in the vernacular of the central areas, ‘slummy’ scouse [which] flourished in a nodal position at the heart of the Merseyside communications network and the main labour market.’ According to Belchem, from there ‘the wit and humour...soon spread from the waterfront to the commercial offices.’⁴⁸⁸ Three of the four Beatles could claim Irish ancestry, but growing up in respectable suburban Woolton John Lennon did not speak ‘scouse’. Although he cultivated a Teddy boy image and ‘came on as the Poor Honest Wacker – a working-class hero’, it was only once he began attending art college that he ‘started speaking in florid Scouse.’⁴⁸⁹ Lennon is just the most famous example of the process by which ‘the vernacular of the central waterfront’ emerged ‘as a lingua franca.’⁴⁹⁰

Although it was the case that the late fifties and early sixties witnessed an overall improvement in standards of living and employment prospects, the situation was complicated by housing clearance and industrial diversification projects that were often insufficiently well planned. The port of Liverpool did experience something of a recovery in trade brought

⁴⁸⁶ Colin G. Pooley, ‘Living in Liverpool: The Modern City’, in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), p.180.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p.187 and Table 3.4, p.249.

⁴⁸⁸ John Belchem, ‘An accent exceedingly rare’: Scouse and the inflexion of class, in John Belchem, *Merseypride: essays in Liverpool exceptionalism*, (Liverpool, 2000), pp.45-46.

⁴⁸⁹ Alan Clayson, *John Lennon*, (London, 2003), p.31.

⁴⁹⁰ John Belchem, ‘An accent exceedingly rare’: Scouse and the inflexion of class, in John Belchem, *Merseypride: essays in Liverpool exceptionalism*, (Liverpool, 2000), p.46.

about by the improving fortunes of the wider national economy in the early sixties, but in terms of manpower the decline was terminal. In an audit carried out by the City Council in 1966 it was recognised that the inner-city workforce, much of which was in the process of being relocated to overspill estates, was ill-prepared for change. The audit stated that ‘In all aspects of life – housing, employment and social class – it was a static population. Standards of education and training did not equip the working population to tackle the problems of obtaining new jobs, many of which are in the new light industries of the type attracted to new towns.’⁴⁹¹ In contrast to the much vaunted image of unlimited job opportunities and unprecedented youth spending power that appears to hold true for cities like Manchester and even Bradford, the picture in Liverpool was more mixed.

The Demographics of Youth on Merseyside

In an earlier chapter it was noted that the post-war ‘bulge’ or ‘baby boom’ had resulted in there being a high proportion of teenagers in the population during the late 1950s and 1960s. Scrutiny of the census returns for the county of Lancashire from 1951 and 1961 reveal demographic changes in the age cohort 14-20. The overall population of Liverpool County Borough (See Appendix, Maps: Fig. 7) declined over the period by 45,088 and stood at 745,750 in 1961 while the number of individuals in the 14-20 age group actually fell by 2,519, from 84,569 in 1951 to 82,050 in 1961.⁴⁹² It is likely that a significant proportion of this number moved out of the central area to outlying districts. As the commentary on population change in the 1961 census explained: ‘The largest increase in population occurred in the area now forming Kirkby U.D. [Urban District] whose population grew from 3,145 to 52,088 due to overspill from Merseyside.’ Of these, 5,320 were aged between 14 and 20. Without exception, the remaining boroughs and districts of Merseyside witnessed an increase in the number of teenagers. The figures are as follows:

Number aged 14-20	1951	1961	Increase
Bootle County Borough	7,888	9,285	+ 1,397

⁴⁹¹ Liverpool City Planning Department, *Social Survey: A Study of the Inner Areas of Liverpool*, (Liverpool, 1966), p.15, quoted in John Murden, ‘City of Change and Challenge: Liverpool since 1945’, in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), p.416.

⁴⁹² All statistics cited in this section are taken from the General Register Office, Census 1951, England and Wales – County Report: Lancashire (London HMSO, 1954), Table 23 – Ages (single years) under 21, pp. 206-211. General Register Office, Census 1961, England and Wales – County Report: Lancashire (London HMSO, 1964), Table 7 – Age (single years) under 21, pp. xv, 51-58.

Crosby Municipal Borough	4,684	5,832	+ 1,148
Huyton with Roby U.D.	7,057	7,488	+ 431
Litherland U.D.	2,015	2,820	+ 805
Orrell U.D.	740	1,032	+ 292
Prescot U.D.	1,067	1,271	+ 204

Despite the decline in Liverpool central area, when the teenagers of Kirkby are factored in, there was a total increase on Merseyside (excluding the Wirral) of 7,678. Although it cannot be claimed that these statistics constitute definitive causal evidence for the growth and popularity of the suburban ‘jive hives’, it is interesting to note that the urban areas where many of these venues were located (See Appendix, Maps: Fig. 1) had experienced a significant increase in their teenage population in the decade preceding Merseybeat. The 1961 commentary on population states that ‘The relatively small rise between 1951 and 1961 [the population of Lancashire increased by 11,563] reflects the fact that the excess of births over deaths was only slightly in excess of the outward movement of population from Lancashire.’ Despite this outflow the proportion of 14-20-year-olds rose substantially in the suburban areas of Merseyside covered by the census for Lancashire. Graham Turner, in his 1967 survey of Northern England, cites a 1951 study which found that of 157 towns with a population of over 50,000, Huyton with Roby, Bootle, and the city of Liverpool came first, third and fifth respectively in having the highest percentage of under-fifteens. At the time he was writing, half of Kirkby’s 60,000 inhabitants were under twenty-one.⁴⁹³

Youth Employment

An appraisal of the employment situation for the youth of Liverpool can be made by consulting the Council’s statistics for the period and by examining articles on the subject in the local press. It is the intention to focus on the early sixties in order to gauge the extent of the problem of unemployment amongst young people on Merseyside during the years of the Beat Boom. There are two primary reasons why this should be done. Firstly, to test Ron Ellis’s assertion that in Liverpool at the turn of the decade ‘jobs were scarce, so playing in a group was an attractive alternative (and in many cases supplement) to the dole for many

⁴⁹³ Graham Turner, *The North Country*, (London, 1967), pp. 147-48. No source is given for the study.

teenage boys.⁴⁹⁴ And secondly, to discover whether or not there were underlying economic determinants at play in the growth of the music scene.

The Youth Employment Bureau's statistics for the period 1956-65 reveal that there were two surges in unemployment rates, the first in 1959, and then following two years of improvement, during 1962 and '63, after which the Merseyside economy picked up once again. It should be remembered that the traditional casual nature of employment among much of Liverpool's male workforce had historically lead to a level of residual unemployment that was higher than elsewhere in the country. These high rates were acknowledged by Jack Braddock, then the former Labour council leader, at the opening of Ford's new Halewood plant in May 1963. He (with hindsight) rather hopefully declared, 'this could be the beginning of the end of the vast numbers of unemployed we have been carrying here for so long.' The problem was that most of the new jobs were semi-skilled and firms like Ford 'actively discriminated against the very young, dockers, seamen, the unemployed or anyone from industries with a history of trade union activity.'⁴⁹⁵ The Youth Employment Sub-Committee met in June 1958:

*...to consider the difficulties that are arising in the Kirkby, Huyton and Prescott areas owing to increasing unemployment amongst young people. The present position and the future problems which were likely to arise from the transfer of families from Liverpool into the County area were discussed at considerable length...*⁴⁹⁶

Particular emphasis was placed on the problem of finding skilled work for boys. Already, during what was described as the 'Worst Period Since [the] War' – February 1957 – the *Liverpool Echo* had announced that 'Bootle teenagers, faced with a jobs shortage, are going back to school rather than waste time hanging about waiting for vacancies.'⁴⁹⁷ In September 1956 the *Echo* reported that girls who were employed had little disposable income. In an article with the headline 'Teenagers Have A Job To Make Ends Meet' it was explained that:

⁴⁹⁴ Ron Ellis, Foreword to Spencer Leigh, *Twist And Shout: Merseybeat, The Cavern, The Star Club and The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2004), p.xii. Ellis was a manager and agent for Liverpool groups during the sixties.

⁴⁹⁵ Merseyside Socialist Research Group, *Merseyside in Crisis*, (Manchester, 1980), p.9, in John Murden, 'City of Change and Challenge: Liverpool since 1945', in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), p.409 and *ibid.* p.410.

⁴⁹⁶ Minutes of the Liverpool City Council Youth Employment Sub-Committee, June 24th, 1958.

⁴⁹⁷ *Liverpool Echo*, February 1st, 1957, p.7.

Like most teenagers, shorthand typist Dorothy McNally aged 16, of 81 Lovel Road, Liverpool 19, gives her mother two-thirds of her wages. This leaves her with £1 a week, but her mother pays her lunches and fares.

Dorothy is a dance fan and spends 6s 6d each week attending two "hops". A trip to the cinema, where she buys a 2s 6d seat, plus 5s worth of cigarettes completes her spending spree for the week.⁴⁹⁸

The report concluded that 'Although wages earned by teenagers to-day are generally 200 per cent higher than they were pre-war, young folk on Merseyside – in my opinion at least – have a struggle to make ends meet.' Three years later the Youth Employment Committee stated in its yearly review that the nationwide trade recession 'which had existed for many months' had resulted in the total number of Merseyside unemployed almost reaching 30,000. In the section entitled 'Future Trends' concern was expressed that the number of young people entering the job market in 1962 was expected to have risen 50% on figures for 1956 due to the 'bulge' caused by the post-war baby boom. It was also stressed that 'Liverpool is not an industrial City...only about 20 per cent of school-leavers enter industrial work leading to skilled employment compared with an average of 35 per cent throughout the country.'⁴⁹⁹ A significant improvement was recorded for 1960 and '61, but then, from a combined total of 390 boys and girls unemployed as of June 1961, the numbers soared to 1,308 and 1,750 for June 1962 and '63, before decreasing once again to 758 and 504 for the same month in 1964 and '65.⁵⁰⁰

Although too much weight should not be given to statistics in isolation the unemployment trends they reveal are confirmed by contemporary newspaper accounts of the real impact of joblessness on young people. In Huyton, the constituency of Harold Wilson, who was then poised to become leader of the Labour Party, it was reported that:

A piece of land off Althmoor Road is the rendezvous for about 100 young men who are on the dole. Their iron-hard pitch is also community centre-cum-club-cum-anything else that helps to while away their time.

When the afternoon kickabout first started, only a few of the local unemployed took part. But unemployment got so serious that the game became an organised affair. Numbers grew, and from each £2 17s 6d dole packet came a few coppers for a ball.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁸ *Liverpool Echo*, September 24th, 1956, p.8.

⁴⁹⁹ City of Liverpool: Report of the Youth Employment Committee for the year ended July 31st, 1959.

⁵⁰⁰ Liverpool City Council, Youth Employment Sub-Committee Report on the Register of Unemployed, June 23rd, 1964 and June 29th, 1965.

⁵⁰¹ *Prescot and Huyton Reporter*, February 8th, 1963, p.9.

There is a certain poignancy existent in the plight of these young men who were competing for a place in the Huyton 'Jobless XI' at the start of the year in which Merseybeat was set to dominate the national charts. Twenty-four-year-old father of three Ronald Inskip told the paper, 'I have tried everywhere for a job, but just can't get one. If there was work, I would be working.' The youth unemployment figures for 1956-65 show that, actual numbers notwithstanding, there were two to three times as many boys looking for work as girls for the entire period. This state of affairs gives credence to Ellis's suggestion that joining a group was seen by boys as a way out, an idea that is supported by Peter Aughton who contends that the explosion in the numbers of rock 'n' roll groups on Merseyside was the result of 'Gangs of adolescents aimlessly roam[ing] the streets in search of something to do and looking for a means by which to express themselves.'⁵⁰² It is impossible to make an accurate assessment as to whether economic factors contributed to the Beat Boom in Liverpool – increased disposable income for some must have contributed – or of the extent to which high levels of unemployment among young men may have played a part. Spencer Leigh is adamant that unemployment was not a problem among beat group members who would often give up jobs to go to Hamburg and quite easily find another on their return. He explains that:

In the 1980s, you could certainly think of groups that came out of unemployment...but you haven't got that in Merseybeat, you've got these people with nine to five jobs. Les Braid of the Swinging Blue Jeans was a joiner...Kingsize Taylor was a butcher's boy, Ray Ennis [also of the SBJs] was actually the manager of a hi-fi shop in West Derby.

One of the reasons that the Beatles could do the lunchtime sessions at the Cavern...is because they were one of the few bands on Merseyside that didn't have day jobs. There were quite a few key bands...who never played a lunchtime session at the Cavern simply because they were working.⁵⁰³

Even so, it is a fact that rates of unemployment remained consistently higher than the national average. During the years 1960-61 when there was an improvement, when 'employment prospects were so good that no further applications for assistance [from the Board of Trade] would for the moment be entertained' the unemployment rate on Merseyside fell from the 1959 figure of 4.5% to 3.5%, while the national rate fell from 2% to 1.5%.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰² Peter Aughton, *Liverpool: A People's History*, (Lancaster, revised edition, 2008), p.272.

⁵⁰³ Spencer Leigh, interview with the author, May 31st, 2009.

⁵⁰⁴ *Liverpool Echo*, November 24th, 1961, p.11. Through the Board of Trade, the Government had approved a total of £13,500,000 in grants and loans to solve unemployment on Merseyside since 1960.

Liverpool 8

Paul Du Noyer provides a concise description of the geography and social composition of the ‘bohemian district just up the hill from the town centre’ that was Liverpool 8 (See Appendix, Maps: Figs. 3 and 3.4):

Beginning at Hardman Street, the quarter encompassed two Philharmonics (the pub and the concert hall), the Art College and University, fanning out through wide, handsome streets of Georgian houses around the Anglican Cathedral. While locals always referred to the area by its postal name...one day it would be globally known by its Domesday Book title: Toxteth.

Sloping down to the South Docks, Toxteth was the most exotic vestige of Liverpool’s history. It contained the oldest Chinatown in Europe. There were shops and drinking clubs to cater for every race on earth. There was a sexy, disreputable atmosphere you did not encounter in ordinary Liverpool. And the college element brought yet another flavour. As in London’s Notting Hill Gate, the cheap flats of Liverpool 8, and the sense of its separation from English respectability, attracted young and rootless intellectuals. The ready availability of drugs did no harm, either. In the imaginations of suburbia’s most adventurous escapees, like Lennon, McCartney and Stuart Sutcliffe, Liverpool 8 represented glamorous non-conformity.⁵⁰⁵

As art students, John Lennon and Stuart Sutcliffe were perennially short of money and prone to spending long hours in the ‘Jac’ (The Jacaranda, see below), the Philharmonic or Ye Cracke, pubs situated on or around Hope Street and the Liverpool College of Art. Nearby was the flat they occupied on Gambier Terrace, a dilapidated row of converted town houses that were once the fashionable homes of Liverpool’s business elite. The intellectual atmosphere of Liverpool 8, which not only embraced the bohemian life-style but also incorporated the black clubs, brothels and illegal drinking dens (‘shebeens’) of Upper Parliament Street is well conjured by fellow art student Bill Harry who remembered a typical gathering in Ye Cracke:

I’d seen John’s stuff [art work], which was very wacky and English; you could see the influence of the Goons. We knew all about Ginsberg and the angry young men, but you don’t copy someone else’s experiences, you should do your own stuff. We thought Liverpool had so much history and character that it was just as romantic as anywhere else. So we made a vow to make Liverpool famous: John with the group, Stuart and Rod Murray with their painting, and I’d do it with my writing.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁵ Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), pp.99-100. By ‘globally known’, Du Noyer is presumably referring to the notoriety of Toxteth in the wake of the 1981 riots.

⁵⁰⁶ Bill Harry quoted in *ibid.* p.242.

This account is interesting because it demonstrates a conscious decision to adopt and cultivate a romantic notion of Liverpudlian identity and besides, as Du Noyer points out, ‘In those days it took some nerve – or several pints of Higson’s – to conceive a romantic vision of Liverpool’.⁵⁰⁷ It also illustrates the influence of the wider national popular culture and an interest in poetry and literature that perhaps might normally be presumed to be the province of metropolitan beatniks and intellectuals. Art school bohemian types in Liverpool 8 like Lennon and Sutcliffe – and by association George Harrison and Paul McCartney – could not help but absorb elements of a beatnik culture which, in the words of Alan Clayson, ‘was as North American as the pop charts.’ McCartney in particular was enthusiastic, and he would later surprise some of his trendy new bohemian acquaintances in London who were impressed that a ‘working-class’ provincial boy should be familiar with the works of Kerouac, Corso, Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti. Liverpool beatnik Johnny Byrne described how in 1961:

*I fell in with a group of people who, like me, were absolutely crazy about books by the beats. We were turning out our own little magazines. In a very short time, we were into jazz, poetry – straight out of the beatniks – and all around us were the incredible beginnings of the Liverpool scene.*⁵⁰⁸

The underground scene from which the poets Adrian Henri, Roger McGough and Brian Patten would later rise to prominence, and which provoked the visiting Ginsberg to proclaim somewhat after the fact in May 1965, that ‘Liverpool is at the present time the centre of consciousness of the human universe’, was clearly already in evidence.⁵⁰⁹ Although many of the better known activities and achievements of the underground literary scene fall beyond the timeframe of this study it seems there were reciprocal influences between it and some of those involved in the beat scene during these formative years. McCartney’s brother, Mike, who went on to form the successful satirical comedy-pop group Scaffold with McGough and John Gorman, recalled that:

We attracted this underground movement: Ginsberg and the beat poetry was getting to Liverpool then. Merseybeat was going on at the same time. We’re doing this up in Hope Street, our kid and the beat groups were down

⁵⁰⁷ Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), p.243.

⁵⁰⁸ Television scriptwriter Johnny Byrne quoted in Alan Clayson, *Paul McCartney*, (London, 2003), p.45.

⁵⁰⁹ John Murden, ‘City of Change and Challenge: Liverpool since 1945’, in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), pp.421 and 426. Henri was also a noted pop artist.

*in the centre of town, in the Cavern. We're near the art school and the university. That's your marketplace. So our thing was different: it was poetry, art, comedy, rhythm and blues. We'd go into town to see the Beatles and sometimes they'd come up to see us.*⁵¹⁰

There were two Henri inspired 'happenings' at the Cavern in 1964 and '65, the first of which, 'Bomb', was described in *Mersey Beat* by the Clayton Squares saxophonist, Mike Evans:

The Cavern was in complete darkness. Somehow 350 teenagers had been jammed between the arches and the pillars. Suddenly there was a huge explosion, girls screamed while the lights flickered and we broke into our first number, 'Danger Zone'.

*The stage was then taken over by Adrian Henry [sic] who read a poem fittingly entitled "Frank and Bombstein".*⁵¹¹

The screaming girls may still have been in evidence but the object of their hysteria was a different phenomenon entirely. These 'happenings' were 'directly political in implication' and the Clayton Squares belonged to the so-called 'second wave' of Merseyside groups who were influenced by the largely London-lead Rhythm and Blues movement that was then in vogue.⁵¹²

Scaffold had chart success, most notably with their 1968 Christmas No.1, 'Lily the Pink' but grew tired of their reputation for 'silly' songs and much preferred to perform the blend of poetry and satire that had made them a popular attraction on the fringe theatre circuit.⁵¹³ Henri formed a 'poetry rock' group called the Liverpool Scene who were a supporting act for Led Zeppelin and performed at the 1969 Isle of Wight festival (shortly before their demise). However, it was not music but poetry that cemented the reputations of Henri, McGough and Patten when their poetry collection, *The Mersey Sound*, was published in 1967 to critical acclaim and, for a book of poems, remarkable sales. The *Daily Worker* rather mournfully declared it 'the voice of 80,000 crumbling houses and 30,000 people on the dole'.⁵¹⁴ George Melly observed that 'Liverpool 8 had a seedy but decided style; its own pubs and meeting places; it was small enough to provide an enclosed stage for the cultivation of its own legend'

⁵¹⁰ Mike McCartney alias McGear quoted in Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), p.103.

⁵¹¹ *Mersey Beat*, December 19th, 1964, p.10.

⁵¹² Adrian Henri quoted in John Murden, 'City of Change and Challenge: Liverpool since 1945', in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), p.427.

⁵¹³ Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), p.104.

⁵¹⁴ *Daily Worker*, October 24th, 1967, cited in John Murden, 'City of Change and Challenge: Liverpool since 1945', in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), p.428.

and the antics of its inhabitants – artists, students, beatniks, poets and dropouts – undoubtedly added a further piquancy to Liverpool’s cultural and creative melting pot.⁵¹⁵

In the words of Alvin Christie, a musician of mixed Jamaican and Liverpudlian descent who grew up in the area during the fifties and sixties, ‘The endemic racism that existed in Liverpool at that time, served only to ‘corral’ black people into the district of Toxteth.’⁵¹⁶ This might explain why Bob Wooler was of the firm opinion that:

*In reality, there were very few black musicians among the beat groups – the Chants, Steve Aldo and Derry Wilkie come to mind – and rock ‘n’ roll wasn’t being performed in the black clubs around Upper Parliament Street. To say that the black musicians in those clubs despised rock would be the wrong word, but they certainly looked down upon it. They favoured jazz and the ‘beat’ in Mersey Beat is not to be found there.*⁵¹⁷

In terms of the Beat Boom arguably the most significant contribution made by Liverpool’s black musicians was that of the Royal Caribbean Steel Band who were resident at the Jacaranda until spotted by Bruno Koschmider and lured to Hamburg. It was supposedly their letters to Allan Williams, enthusiastically relating how much money there was to be made that convinced him to send Liverpool groups there.⁵¹⁸ On the Beatles’ first trip to Hamburg in 1960 Williams travelled with his occasional business partner Harold Phillips a.k.a. ‘Lord Woodbine’, a Trinidadian of legendary reputation and one of Liverpool 8’s most colourful characters. Builder, decorator, part-time barman, musician, and club manager, Phillips owed his title to the permanent presence of a cigarette between his lips.⁵¹⁹

The Chants were influenced by the black American servicemen who regularly visited Toxteth from Burtonwood, bringing the doo-wop vocal group style into the area, but also by Jamaican and African sounds. Founding member Eddie Amoo was inspired by the appearance of Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers at the Liverpool Empire which he witnessed aged eleven. They quickly gained the admiration of the Beatles who performed as their backing band

⁵¹⁵ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, (London, 2008), pp.236-37.

⁵¹⁶ Bill Harry, *Liverpool: Bigger Than The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2009), p.148. It should be noted that the term ‘black’ is used in a generic sense whilst recognising that it represents many African and West Indian nationalities and ethnic groupings. ‘Black’ was used both as an ‘offensive’ collective term by white racists and as a ‘defensive’ term by ethnic groups for the purposes of solidarity. See, Diane Frost, ‘Ambiguous identities: constructing and de-constructing black and white ‘Scouse’ identities in twentieth century Liverpool’, in *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of ‘The North’ and ‘Northernness’*, (Aldershot, 2000).

⁵¹⁷ Spencer Leigh, *The Best Of Fellas: The Story of Bob Wooler*, (Liverpool, 2002), p.123.

⁵¹⁸ Allan Williams & William Marshall, *The Man Who Gave The Beatles Away: The amazing true story of the Beatles’ early years*, (Sevenoaks, 1976), pp.104-6.

⁵¹⁹ Bill Harry, *Liverpool: Bigger Than The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2009), p.132.

several times before Brian Epstein became their manager and they were signed to the Pye record label. Unfortunately, despite the backing of Liverpool MP Bessie Braddock, Epstein's lack of commitment and the fact that neither London record companies nor the audience were yet ready to accept black British acts meant they did not break through. It took Amoo fifteen years before he achieved major success with the Real Thing in the mid-seventies.⁵²⁰ It should be remembered that although many Liverpool beat groups were influenced by, and covered Motown records, it was not until EMI took over their UK distribution from the obscure Oriole label that soul music really took off. This and poor promotion explains why the first Motown tour of Britain was not a success.

Overall it seems Bill Harry is right to suggest that 'black artists on Merseyside travelled a different route than those of the rock and roll kids who created the Mersey Sound.' But this was hardly surprising considering that even venturing out of the Toxteth area risked a beating or being arrested and 'given a choice of offences – drunk and disorderly, loitering with intent or urinating in the street.'⁵²¹ According to Diane Frost:

*The historical confinement of Liverpool's black community has added to their marginalization on the fringes of Liverpool life. And while black people in other English cities are today confined to certain areas, they are not overwhelmingly concentrated in such a narrow geographical confine.*⁵²²

Frost states that 'White Liverpudlian women who married black men became part of the black community in which they settled.' When visiting relatives or the town centre they were often subjected to aggressive verbal abuse.⁵²³ Although commentators do attest to the vibrant cosmopolitan and mostly harmonious atmosphere of Liverpool 8 in this period, the situation of Liverpool's beleaguered black community is probably best summed up by Belchem and MacRaild who argue that: 'Outside L8...Liverpool was falling behind nascent multicultural Britain, left stranded by the ebb-tide of imperial trade.'⁵²⁴

⁵²⁰ Bill Harry, *Liverpool: Bigger Than The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2009), pp.129-36, and Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), pp.84, 112.

⁵²¹ Bill Harry, *Liverpool: Bigger Than The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2009), p.129 and Rita Martelli quoted on p.145.

⁵²² Diane Frost, 'Ambiguous identities: constructing and de-constructing black and white 'Scouse' identities in twentieth century Liverpool', in Neville Kirk (ed.), *Northern Identities: Historical Interpretations of 'The North' and 'Northernness'*, (Aldershot, 2000), p.204.

⁵²³ *Ibid.* p.206.

⁵²⁴ John Belchem and Donald M. MacRaild, 'Cosmopolitan Liverpool', in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), p.388.

Allan Williams

In the edition of (Bill Harry's) *Mersey Beat* for 19th October 1961, Bob Wooler provided a list of 273 rock 'n' roll groups in the city, of which he claimed to have seen 185. He reckoned that around 125 of these groups were functional at the time of writing, adding that in 1958 there were, in his estimation, only seven 'rock dances' a week handled by four promoters whereas by late 1961 there were 57 events being organised by 32. Assuming Wooler's accuracy can be relied upon, and Spencer Leigh testifies to his fastidiousness in this regard, this is indisputable evidence that the beat scene in Liverpool was not predicated upon the success of the Beatles as some commentators have previously suggested. Nonetheless, two years later after their initial breakthrough the number of groups did rise to over 400 and names of the 'Rikki and his Red Streaks' variety (in imitation of Bill Haley and his Comets *et al*) had given way to names devised in imitation of the 'Fab Four' such as the Hornets, the Moths and the Teenbeats.⁵²⁵

It was during 1960 that the new beat groups really began to infiltrate city-centre jazz venues, a process that may have been accelerated by the arrival of the biggest rock 'n' roll promotion to visit Liverpool thus far: Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent at the Liverpool Empire from 14th-20th March. This was a touring package show organised by Larry Parnes, the London impresario who guided the careers of Billy Fury and a host of other watered down British Elvis 'wannabes'. The success of this event did not go unnoticed and resulted in a local entrepreneur, Allan Williams, arranging a return show to be jointly promoted by himself and Parnes at the Liverpool Stadium in May. Owing to the tragic death of Cochran in a car accident at the end of the tour the show was almost cancelled but Parnes and Williams were determined to proceed with Vincent alone topping a bill bolstered by acts from the Parnes stable and the hastily assembled cream of the Liverpool groups. Before Cochran's untimely death the bill was to have consisted of:

Cochran, Vincent, Davy Jones (not the Monkee-to-be but a black American rock and roll singer), the Viscounts, Colin Green and the Beat Boys (including Georgie Fame), Peter Wynne, Lance Fortune and Nero and the Gladiators, plus Liverpool groups Cass and the Cassanovas (Cassanovas deliberately mis-spelt after the name of the group's leader, Brian Cassar) and Rory Storm and the Hurricanes.

⁵²⁵ Spencer Leigh, *The Best Of Fellas: The Story of Bob Wooler*, (Liverpool, 2002), pp.107-108. As there were a number of groups that appeared twice due to name changes, the actual total was 249. The full list is reproduced in *ibid.* pp.109-112.

In Cochran's absence, to this already packed programme were added:

*Parnes artists – Julian 'X' and Dean Webb – and more local acts: Gerry and the Pacemakers, Wallasey group Bob Evans and his Five Shillings, Mal Perry, and the Connaughts.*⁵²⁶

This was a significant event for the Liverpool groups not least because Gene Vincent was as close to the authentic American rock 'n' roll star as any of them had come. But also because it brought them to the attention of Parnes and a much bigger audience than they were accustomed to at the suburban weekend 'jive hives'. This was the first of several important developments in the Merseybeat scene that were instigated by Williams, by all accounts an affable if somewhat pugnacious wheeler and dealer who had opened a small coffee bar called the Jacaranda in Slater Street not far from the bohemian Liverpool 8 area (See Appendix, Maps: Figs. 3 and 3.1). According to Williams, 'Artists, musicians, pimps, beggars, ordinary layabouts and all the rag-tag-and-bobtail of Liverpool 8 soon made it their headquarters' – including the recently re-named 'Beatals'.⁵²⁷ They had watched the Vincent concert as members of the audience as they had no drummer and probably because they were not then considered by Williams to be sufficiently competent to take part. They were however already well acquainted, as Williams was with many of those who 'lazed their days away in the Jac.'⁵²⁸

Hamburg

Amongst Allan Williams' several haphazard but significant achievements including the Jacaranda, the Blue Angel and the encouragement he provided to struggling beat groups, his role in establishing the Hamburg connection is probably of most consequence.⁵²⁹ Whilst this

⁵²⁶ Mark Lewisohn, *The Complete Beatles Chronicle*, (London, 1996), p.18. Among the other singers that were given melodramatic stage names by Parnes were Duffy Power, Dickie Pride, Vince Eager, Marty Wilde and, along with Billy Fury, originating from Liverpool, Johnny Gentle.

⁵²⁷ Allan Williams & William Marshall, *The Man Who Gave The Beatles Away: The amazing true story of the Beatles' early years*, (Sevenoaks, 1976), p.14. Lewisohn credits Stuart Sutcliffe with the idea for the 'Beatals' which became the Silver Beetles before they settled on the Beatles shortly before their first trip to Hamburg in August 1960. See also Mark Lewisohn, *The Complete Beatles Chronicle*, (London, 1996), pp.18 and 22.

⁵²⁸ Allan Williams & William Marshall, *The Man Who Gave The Beatles Away: The amazing true story of the Beatles' early years*, (Sevenoaks, 1976), p.15.

⁵²⁹ The Blue Angel was opened by Williams in March 1961 as a night club offering cabaret and late night drinking. Initially it was his intention to exclude the local music scene in an attempt to 'build an affluent and sophisticated clientele'. When this proved unsuccessful he relented and 'the Blue' as it was known locally became the after-show drinking spot for musicians, theatre companies and cabaret stars. According to Bill Harry, 'Each night there were up to thirty members of the various local

is not the place to repeat the overworked story of the Beatles' rise to world domination, nor the details of the events that unfolded in Hamburg, it is necessary to consider the contemporary accounts and the more recent conclusions of commentators as to the contribution that the German experience made to Merseybeat. Glasgow rock 'n' roller Alex Harvey, who was active on the British circuit from an early stage having been voted Scotland's answer to Tommy Steele in 1957, served his time in Hamburg during 1963 and offered his insightful views on the subject in an interview he gave to fellow Scottish pop star B. A. Robertson many years later. He recalled that by the late fifties rock 'n' roll was perceived by its British adherents to be in a parlous state as Chuck Berry was in jail, Elvis was in the army, Jerry Lee Lewis was in disgrace and Little Richard had got religion. In Harvey's words 'there was nothing there to get the teeth into.' Ray Charles' 'What'd I Say' offered a lifeline which, according to Harvey, acted as a 'rallying point.' In his perhaps overly romantic version of the story it was then that all those who still believed in the power of rock 'n' roll decamped for Hamburg. When asked 'why Germany?' he replied:

Well now here you got an amazing thing, now you could get psycho-analysts, psychologists, geographists [sic] try to figure out what happened here. I've got my own thing. Hamburg was like to rock 'n' roll like New Orleans was to jazz, it happened to be there. You consider Britain at that time was well drab, really, I mean if you got a fish supper after 12 o'clock that was really having a big night. I mean, somebody may be able to get a half bottle of wine on a Sunday – wow! Exotic!

But then suddenly – simultaneously – it was discovered you could go to this place, Hamburg, where it lived 24 hours a day...and you could actually be in the same club [the Star Club] and play with...Ray Charles, the Everly Brothers, Bo Diddley, the Ink Spots...Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry...⁵³⁰

The actual reasons why Hamburg became the destination for so many British beat groups in the early sixties are somewhat more prosaic, the most obvious being that there was a market for rock 'n' roll in a cosmopolitan port city frequented by so many American servicemen. British groups were also considerably cheaper than American acts however, Harvey is arguably correct in identifying a certain spirit of adventure. The convoluted chain of events, coincidences and chance meetings involving Allan Williams, Bruno Koschmider, and the Jacaranda and the Two Is coffee bar that explain how the groups came to play there are well

groups down at the Blue.' See Bill Harry, *Liverpool: Bigger Than The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2009), pp.88-90.

⁵³⁰ Youtube video excerpt posted by BY119ROCK, 2007, Alex Harvey Interview: Part 2, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59W2x1IG>, retrieved 5/8/2009. For Alex Harvey and the story of Scottish rock 'n' roll see Martin Kielty, *Big Noise: The Sound of Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 2006).

documented elsewhere, the important consideration here is what if anything did the Hamburg experience contribute to the development of the Liverpool music scene?⁵³¹ This is a contentious question.

The main protagonists in the debate, as they are on many issues associated with Merseybeat, are Bob Wooler, Bill Harry and Allan Williams. Williams has stated that ‘it was not Liverpool that made the Beatles, but Hamburg’, to which Wooler retorted:

*If Hamburg is so magical that it transforms groups, then how come it didn't transform the Big Three, Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, Derry and the Seniors, Kingsize Taylor and the Dominoes, Gerry and the Pacemakers and all the other groups that went there? I saw these groups before they went and I saw them when they returned and I would see no great difference.*⁵³²

Williams insists that the reason for this is that the Beatles were not an established or very competent act before they went there whereas the others already had their acts honed. Spencer Leigh believes they acquired a rock ‘n’ roll ‘swagger’ in Hamburg and learnt to be ‘cool’.⁵³³ Harry has insisted that ‘Hamburg’s importance has been exaggerated by nearly every author’, contending that the music scene there was tiny and inconsequential in comparison to Liverpool’s large thriving scene.⁵³⁴ It is as well to be cautious when attempting to evaluate the long-held and entrenched opinions of Merseybeat veterans on subjects such as this, particularly in view of the fact that, with all due respect, they are, or in Wooler’s case were, not immune to the accusation of overplaying their role in events. Harry and Wooler had no part in Hamburg – Williams did.

Someone Wooler was prepared to acknowledge as an important influence on the Liverpool groups was Tony Sheridan, a rock ‘n’ roll guitarist from Norwich of some considerable skill who preceded them in Hamburg following his ‘discovery’ by Koschmider in the Two Is. Besides providing an example for many a novice beat guitarist he has been credited with inspiring the stance – legs apart – adopted by Lennon and Tony Jackson of the Searchers and

⁵³¹ For an account of the Hamburg episode see, amongst others, Allan Williams & William Marshall, *The Man Who Gave The Beatles Away: The amazing true story of the Beatles’ early years*, (Sevenoaks, 1976) and Spencer Leigh, *Twist And Shout: Merseybeat, The Cavern, The Star Club and The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2004).

⁵³² Spencer Leigh, *The Best Of Fellas: The Story of Bob Wooler*, (Liverpool, 2002), p.72.

⁵³³ *Ibid.* p.72.

⁵³⁴ Spencer Leigh, *Twist And Shout: Merseybeat, The Cavern, The Star Club and The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2004), p.51. Harry was of the opinion that ‘The groups loved Hamburg because booze was available 24 hours a day and it was completely uninhibited. This is why they have so many stories about Hamburg, but the music scene was virtually nothing.’

the ‘armpit high’ guitar position that became associated with Gerry Marsden on stage.⁵³⁵ It is worth considering the opinion of Alex Harvey who had no axe to grind on the subject of Hamburg’s influence on Merseybeat. He was in no doubt that the no-nonsense ‘four to the floor’ drum pattern that was synonymous with beat music was the product of tired drummers who omitted the fills and rolls after long sessions in the Hamburg clubs. He also believed that when ‘ suddenly you had to play six, seven hours a night...if you couldn’t sing before, you had to start singing then, whether it was unison or harmony or whatever’.⁵³⁶ From 1960 onwards countless beat groups played in Hamburg or toured the many US forces bases around Europe, and while the influence this had on Merseybeat is impossible to gauge, it seems reasonable to assume that, if nothing else, the experience improved them considerably as musicians and performers. Perhaps it is telling that at the time of the Beat Boom, Bill Harry was prepared to describe Hamburg as ‘The Other Merseyside’ and a ‘Second Liverpool’ which would suggest that he has had his reasons for playing down its importance since.⁵³⁷

Cunard Yanks

Harry, Williams, Wooler and Sam Leach later became regular fixtures on the Beatles convention circuit where they would air their disagreements about the importance of subjects such as Hamburg or the Cunard Yanks in a generally good-natured atmosphere of nostalgic bonhomie although personality clashes and the occasional bruised ego, not to mention fading memories, must leave their accounts and opinions of the Merseybeat years open to question. And yet their proximity to people, places and events that were central to the Liverpool experience of those years also makes their reminiscences, many of which have been published, an invaluable resource, particularly when they can be corroborated by the extant primary documentary evidence or the research of more disinterested parties. This is certainly the case when it comes to a discussion of the origins of Liverpool’s love affair with rock ‘n’ roll and the alleged role played by the so-called Cunard Yanks. The near mythical status of these Merseyside merchant seamen and their supposed introduction of rock ‘n’ roll to Liverpool via records brought back as gifts for friends and family from trips to the US has

⁵³⁵ Spencer Leigh, *The Best Of Fellas: The Story of Bob Wooler*, (Liverpool, 2002), p.72.

⁵³⁶ Youtube video excerpt posted by BY119ROCK, 2007, Alex Harvey Interview: Part 2, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59W2xIG>, retrieved 5/8/2009.

⁵³⁷ *Mersey Beat*, October 10th-24th, 1963, p.9, and June 25th, 1964, p.3.

been questioned and not just by Alan Lawson in his account of the Manchester scene cited above.

Both Wooler and Harry have repeatedly refuted the Cunard Yanks theory which is of significance for this study because it purports to explain the early reception and particular style of rock 'n' roll on Merseyside. Harry insists that the notion first appeared in the 1970s when writers 'began to suggest that the reason Liverpool groups were different from groups in other parts of the country was that 'Cunard Yanks' brought them records that couldn't be obtained elsewhere in Britain.' This, he says, is a myth and in fact 'the maritime heritage had no direct influence on the development of the Mersey sound.'⁵³⁸ The openness afforded by Liverpool's transatlantic shipping lanes to the cultural transfer of North American popular music is attested to by various accounts of Cunard Yanks bringing back jazz and country records in the forties and fifties. However, according to Spencer Leigh:

Now it's often said that the Liverpool bands were influenced by the 'Cunard Yanks' – people who came in from New York with these records – but I myself have never found any proof of this because every single cover version by a Liverpool band was of a record that was already released in this country.

*If you take someone like Charlie Feathers...whose records weren't released here and are now regarded as seminal rockabilly records, nobody covered Charlie Feathers songs because they didn't hear them. They were released in the States. These sailors wouldn't know what to buy anyway so why would they buy Charlie Feathers – they didn't.*⁵³⁹

Bob Wooler, despite acknowledging that the Searchers' John McNally did receive some country records from his merchant seaman brother, was equally adamant that 'there is no evidence, I repeat, no evidence, that the beat groups were performing songs that were brought over from America by the Cunard Yanks.'⁵⁴⁰ Johnny Byrne (Johnny Guitar) of Rory Storm and the Hurricanes added weight to the argument when he told Harry, 'That's a myth about the groups receiving copies or having records from 'Cunard Yanks'. We certainly never got any material this way and I doubt that the Beatles did. Most group material was gleaned from the records (although some on limited release) that were issued at that particular time (1958-1961).' Chris Huston of the Undertakers recalled that they got most of their repertoire by spending hours 'searching through piles of records on the stalls and flea markets every time we went down to London. They were apparently records that had come, mostly, from the PX

⁵³⁸ Bill Harry 'The Birth of Mersey Beat 3', <http://www.triumphpc.com/mersey-beat/birth/birth3.shtml>, retrieved 28/01/09, p.1.

⁵³⁹ Spencer Leigh, interview with the author, May 31st, 2009.

⁵⁴⁰ Spencer Leigh, *The Best Of Fellas: The Story of Bob Wooler*, (Liverpool, 2002), p.124.

(post exchange) stores on the American Air Force bases.’ In any case, as Harry points out, ‘at the time when the Mersey scene began to flourish, the Cunard ships had long since been rerouted to Southampton’, and passenger liners had stopped using the port.⁵⁴¹

Sam Leach suggests that Edward ‘Kingsize’ Taylor was responsible for introducing many of the latest rock ‘n’ roll songs to the other Liverpool groups as he was on the mailing list of American independent labels, thus many musicians would attend his concerts with the Dominoes to hear what was ‘new’.⁵⁴² Therefore, while it seems likely that some rock ‘n’ roll, rhythm and blues and what would now be termed ‘early soul’ records may have arrived in Liverpool via merchant seamen, this was not the reason for either the early reception of the music there or any distinctive Mersey sound. If anything, what was distinctive, at least in the choice of repertoire made by Liverpool groups before they came to the notice of the London-based record companies, was a kind of competitive ‘obscurism’ in that groups would deliberately select a B-side rather than covering the obvious hit. A further insight into the process is offered by Spencer Leigh who compiled a list of over 400 songs covered by Merseybeat groups, the vast majority of which he states, would have been easily obtainable from Brian Epstein’s NEMS (North End Music Stores). He noticed the preference for obscure songs by relatively obscure artists such as Arthur Alexander – ‘Anna (Go To Him)’, ‘A Shot Of Rhythm And Blues’ – and the Shirelles – ‘Boys’, ‘Baby It’s You’. Wooler observed that ‘The Beatles wouldn’t do the Shirelles’ ‘Will You Love Me Tomorrow’ which was so well known. They did the other side, ‘Boys’, instead.’⁵⁴³

In fact Leigh is convinced that the groups heard the records they covered ‘primarily in NEMS’, he explained:

Brian Epstein decided that he would get every single record that came out in this country, every single one and there were about 60 or 70 singles released every week and they were all in NEMS. I mean I know myself ‘cos I went in NEMS as a youngster and I liked the American originals too. They’d actually let you hear them in the booths but Epstein loved it if you actually asked for a record by number, if you said to him I’ll have ‘Top Rank JAR527’ he liked that very much. He knew all the numbers himself so he was a superb record retailer and he got all these records in, and the proof of the fact that they learnt these songs from the records is if you listen to some of the cover versions, they get the words wrong. ‘Some Other Guy’ is a very good

⁵⁴¹ Johnny Byrne and Chris Huston quoted in Bill Harry ‘The Birth of Mersey Beat 3’, <http://www.triumphpc.com/mersey-beat/birth/birth3.shtml>, retrieved 28/01/09, p.2.

⁵⁴² Sam Leach, *The Birth of The Beatles: The Rocking City*, (Gwynedd, 1999), p.22.

⁵⁴³ Spencer Leigh, *The Best Of Fellas: The Story of Bob Wooler*, (Liverpool, 2002), p.124.

example. If you listen to 'Some Other Guy' by Richie Barrett and then listen to the Big Three's version they don't sing the same words and the reason quite simply is they'd only heard it a couple of times in NEMS. And I mean Epstein and co were often chasing the groups out because...they were annoying the regular customers, they weren't gonna buy anything.⁵⁴⁴

Brian Epstein, NEMS, and the *Mersey Beat* Newspaper

Brian Epstein was the eldest son of an upper middle-class family belonging to the long-established Liverpool Jewish community. His complicated and largely unhappy private life which seems to have been, at least to some degree, the result of an inability to come to terms with his homosexuality, was hidden beneath what all who knew him describe as a thoroughly charming and sophisticated demeanour. By 1960 it appeared that after completing his National Service and a rather unsuccessful spell at RADA he had committed himself to the family business which was about to open a new branch in Whitechapel, central Liverpool (See Appendix, Maps: Figs. 3 and 3.2). The day before, a full page of the *Echo* was devoted to the new store with the headline 'Liverpool's New Store With An Accent On Records' and an announcement that Anthony Newley, who was appearing at the Empire, was to perform the opening ceremony. The piece emphasised the respectability and long-standing business reputation of the Epstein's in the city and commented that the family 'is fortunate in having two young men of imagination' – Brian and his younger brother Clive – to run the new store.⁵⁴⁵

Vera Brown, an early fan of the Beatles, recalled of NEMS that 'We were there to meet friends rather than buy a record and Brian knew this. So he would say, 'Well, come on, enough.' Brian was somebody you would look up to – somebody important.' Alistair Taylor, Epstein's personal assistant remembered, 'Saturday afternoons...when all the kids used to come in and it would be packed.' Taylor also recollected Epstein's uncanny ability to sense when a record was going to be a hit which was all the more remarkable considering 'he didn't like pop music at all or jazz.'⁵⁴⁶ Aspiring artist, Yankel Feather, who bought records from Epstein for a small club he ran, described him at the time as someone who was 'very sure of himself', who thought, 'I'm Brian Epstein, I'm rich, there aren't very many people in

⁵⁴⁴ Spencer Leigh, interview with the author, May 31st, 2009.

⁵⁴⁵ *Liverpool Echo*, May 30th, 1960, p.6. Anthony Newley was then a successful singing star noted for his 'pseudo-cockney vocal style', see Alan Clayson, *Beat Merchants*, (London, 1995), p.133. The details of Epstein's background are taken from the first two chapters of, Deborah Geller, *The Brian Epstein Story*, (London, 1999).

⁵⁴⁶ Vera Brown and Alistair Taylor quoted in Deborah Geller, *The Brian Epstein Story*, (London, 1999), pp.30-31.

Liverpool, if anybody, like me. I know things nobody else knows. I come from a wealthy family. I'm powerful. I can do things.'⁵⁴⁷ What exactly it was that spurred him to 'do things' beyond the competent running of the record retailing department at NEMS will always remain something of a mystery, however, it seems probable that the account he gave of the reason for his first visit to the Cavern in his 1964 autobiography, *A Cellarful of Noise*, was something of a convenient half-truth.

Although debunking Beatles' myths is not the purpose of the exercise here, owing to the fact that Brian Epstein's role was pivotal in the phenomenal success of Merseybeat, his awareness of the wider Liverpool music scene before he became involved with the Beatles should be of more than passing interest. The oft-cited and much disputed claim that a certain Raymond Jones sparked the 'Nemperor's' interest in the group – a claim which also originated from his autobiography – was settled when, through information obtained from Bob Wooler, Spencer Leigh tracked down the legendary character who had asked Epstein for a copy of 'My Bonnie' by the Beatles in October 1961 and interviewed him for BBC Radio Merseyside. Jones confirmed that when he was asked by Epstein who the Beatles were, he had replied 'They are the most fantastic group you will ever hear.'⁵⁴⁸ Bill Harry, who had launched the fortnightly *Mersey Beat* magazine that July, many copies of which were sold through NEMS, remembered:

Brian Epstein invited me to his office for a sherry and wanted to discuss the groups he'd read about in 'Mersey Beat'. He was incredulous that such a thriving music scene existed all around him, which he'd been unaware of. He was also amazed at the number of young people who came into his store just to buy copies of the paper.

*Whether Raymond Jones went into NEMS to ask for the record or not is beside the point. I had been discussing the group with Epstein for months and he had read all about them in 'Mersey Beat' as they were the group I plugged most in the paper.'*⁵⁴⁹

Harry's newspaper appears to have galvanized Epstein just as it did the whole Mersey scene. Furthermore, the unlikelihood of his being unaware of the Cavern which was 'less than 100

⁵⁴⁷ Deborah Geller, *The Brian Epstein Story*, (London, 1999), p.27.

⁵⁴⁸ Spencer Leigh, *The Best Of Fellas: The Story of Bob Wooler*, (Liverpool, 2002), p.155. According to Epstein's American business partner, Nat Weiss, it was NEMS' press officer Derek Taylor who 'named him the Emperor of NEMS, contracted to Nemperor, which became their cable address and the name of various companies afterwards.' See, Deborah Geller, *The Brian Epstein Story*, (London, 1999), p.84.

⁵⁴⁹ Bill Harry 'The Birth of Mersey Beat 3', <http://www.triumphpc.com/mersey-beat/birth/birth5.shtml>, retrieved 28/01/09, p.2.

yards from his store⁵⁵⁰ has been remarked upon and indeed, his alleged ignorance has been flatly contradicted by Alan Sytner who has insisted that ‘The famous story of Brian Epstein coming down into this murky gloomy place and having his mind blown by the Beatles is absolute crap. He had been to the Cavern lots of times previously.’⁵⁵¹ Apparently he was an infrequent visitor with a group of ‘middle-class’ friends on Sunday jazz nights. Aside from suggestions that there may have been some homo-erotic motivation behind his interest in the Beatles, it is arguable that the reason for Epstein’s involvement in Merseybeat was rather more mundane and is in fact given by him in *A Cellarful of Noise*. He wrote that:

*By autumn 1962 (sic), the store was running like an 18-jewelled watch. It was showing good returns and the ordering and stocking systems were so automatic that I was, once again, becoming a little restless and bored. Life was getting too easy.*⁵⁵²

Since what most observers regard as the turning point in the Beatles’ career, their appearance at Litherland Town Hall in December 1960 – when by all the interested parties’ admissions they had been transformed by their experiences in Germany into the ‘real deal’ – they had reached as far as it was possible to get in Liverpool. When Epstein saw them at the Cavern almost a year later, they too were becoming ‘a little restless and bored’, fearing that, in show-business terms, the isolation of Liverpool was proving a handicap to progress. This isolation was demonstrated when Sam Leach’s promotion, ‘Operation Big Beat’, at the New Brighton Tower Ballroom (See Appendix, Maps: Fig. 1) on November 10th, 1961 attracted an audience of over 3,000, only to be completely ignored by the national music press and even the local newspapers.⁵⁵³ The fact that Merseybeat was in full swing went virtually unnoticed beyond Merseyside.

Merseybeat

In January 1962, shortly before Epstein officially became the Beatles’ manager, *Mersey Beat* published its popularity poll, the top ten of which is worth reproducing as it contains a who’s who of the Liverpool beat scene in that year:

⁵⁵⁰ Bill Harry ‘The Birth of Mersey Beat 3’, <http://www.triumphpc.com/mersey-beat/birth/birth5.shtml>, retrieved 28/01/09, p.2.

⁵⁵¹ Spencer Leigh, *Twist And Shout: Merseybeat, The Cavern, The Star Club and The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2004), p.25.

⁵⁵² Extract from *A Cellarful of Noise* published in the *Liverpool Echo*, November 28th, 1964, p.4. Epstein’s autobiography was serialised in the paper throughout November and December 1964. The year was obviously 1961 not 1962.

⁵⁵³ Mark Lewisohn, *The Complete Beatles Chronicle*, (London, 1996), p.36.

The Beatles
Gerry and the Pacemakers
The Remo Four
Rory Storm and the Hurricanes
Johnny Sandon and the Searchers
Kingsize Taylor and the Dominoes
The Big Three
The Strangers
Faron's Flamingoes
The Four Jays (later the Fourmost)⁵⁵⁴

Would be entrepreneurs, managers and promoters such as Allan Williams, Sam Leach, possibly Brian Kelly, and even Bill Harry had toyed with the idea of taking on the Beatles as they were now widely regarded as the most commercially promising group in Liverpool but they either lacked the resources or the commitment to succeed in the job. Someone was needed with the credentials to make London take notice, and despite his inexperience, Brian Epstein certainly had the necessary department and social background to enable him to be taken seriously by the kind of people who ran the London record companies of the day.⁵⁵⁵

Once again, the details of the Beatles' failed Decca audition in January 1962, and Epstein's eventual successful acquisition of a recording contract with EMI's Parlophone subsidiary in May/June are well known. A month after the Beatles returned from the third of their gruelling Hamburg stints and their first venture into EMI's studios in June, Bill Harry announced that the 'first year of *Mersey Beat* has been a voyage of discovery. Sailing uncharted waters, mapping virgin territory, the passage has been rocky, exhilarating, fruitful, successful, but hard work all the way!' He could just as easily have been describing the growth of the Merseybeat scene itself as the Beat Boom in Liverpool really got underway. Harry stated that, 'As Merseyside's only entertainment paper, we have been able to provide a coverage of the local entertainment scene to an extent which has never been attempted before.' He also described the paper as the only 'voice for Northern entertainers', which was

⁵⁵⁴ Spencer Leigh, *Twist And Shout: Merseybeat, The Cavern, The Star Club and The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2004), pp.66-67.

⁵⁵⁵ It is immediately possible to understand how George Martin and Brian Epstein might have found common ground, whereas their relationship with the individual members of the Beatles is, perhaps more perplexing.

true at that time, when the burgeoning music scenes in Northern towns were almost completely ignored in the pages of *Melody Maker* and the *NME*, and even the *Liverpool Echo*.⁵⁵⁶ For this reason the paper's importance in the early years of the beat scene cannot be underestimated, and indeed, according to one of its contributors, Bob Azurdia, 'Without *Mersey Beat* the whole explosion wouldn't have happened in the same way. *Mersey Beat* reported the trends and told you where the groups were playing. *Liverpool Echo* only had paid advertisements and they were generally for the major halls, rather than the clubs.'⁵⁵⁷

The *Echo*'s weekly 'Off The Record' column written by 'Disker' was restricted to record reviews and featured no local music content until the 'Beatle-mania' damn burst at the beginning of 1963. This can be explained to some extent by the fact that its author was Tony Barrow, a Liverpool born publicist for Decca, who sent his reviews up from London extolling (amongst others) the virtues of Paul Anka, Neil Sedaka or Bobby Darin.⁵⁵⁸ Thus, whilst *Mersey Beat* furnished the youth of Liverpool and the surrounding area with a wealth of information on the beat scene throughout 1962, the *Echo* contributed articles on the 'Tombstone Gang' who fought a running battle involving sixty youths in Birkenhead or the 'disquieting' news that drunkenness in Liverpool had risen by a third making it 'England's No.1 Problem City'.⁵⁵⁹ One article is worthy of note however, as it reveals how little the preoccupations of teenage girls had changed since 1956. The sixteen-year-old interviewed from 'a tough area of Liverpool' who had left her Secondary Modern at fifteen was presumably not yet aware of *Mersey Beat* as she complained, 'Why won't someone write about the good things teenagers do instead of always moaning about the way we dress and the way we dance?' Reporter Sara Sadler described how the girl with 'unnaturally flaming hair...back-combed to an unbelievable height' lived in a home that had:

...no bathroom, but she is always clean and fresh in person and clothing. Her life is a conglomeration of a routine job amongst her mates, deftly performing her manual tasks at a conveyor belt, swaying to the rhythm of the latest pop records and shouting news and jokes above the noise of machinery; and

⁵⁵⁶ *Mersey Beat*, July 12th-26th, 1962, p.2.

⁵⁵⁷ Bob Azurdia quoted in, Spencer Leigh, *Twist And Shout: Merseybeat, The Cavern, The Star Club and The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2004), pp.65-66. Leigh mentions a rival paper in Liverpool called *Combo*, which was apparently in colour, but if any copies still exist they do not appear to be in the public domain. See Spencer Leigh, *The Best Of Fellas: The Story of Bob Wooler*, (Liverpool, 2002), p.103.

⁵⁵⁸ *Liverpool Echo*, November 10th, 1962, p.5. The Beatles' 'Love Me Do' is listed at No.3 in the 'Liverpool Top 5' in the same edition, slipping from No.2 where it had entered the week before. This does not elicit any comment from 'Disker'.

⁵⁵⁹ *Liverpool Echo*, July 14th, 1962, p.1, July 18th, 1962, p.10.

*leisure hours filled with help for mum, chattering and giggling with her mates, listening to records, twisting and jiving in the dance halls, washing and styling her hair...*⁵⁶⁰

Like her 1956 counterparts she gave the bulk of her wages to her mother leaving the balance, 'often surprisingly small', for 'cosmetics, the dance, the pictures, sweets, records and nylons.' It would have been interesting to know which dances and records she spent her money on but unfortunately this information is not forthcoming. She would certainly have had a great deal of choice as to which groups she could hear and the dances and clubs she could attend, even without being eligible to drink alcohol.

Bill Harry took time out to interview Manchester's Dakotas – before they teamed up with Liverpool's Billy J. Kramer – when they appeared on one of the periodic 'Riverboat Shuffles' organised by the Cavern aboard the Mersey Ferry the Royal Iris. They told him that:

Despite the fact that Manchester has T.V. and Radio studios...a group has more chances in Liverpool. In fact, the studio people come to Liverpool to hear the groups.

Liverpool is the biggest area for Rock. The crowds are more appreciative, they respond and produce an infectious atmosphere, which, we have found has helped us to play better. If the group is bad, the audience will let them know it...

*In Manchester and other parts of the country, the audience seem only interested in top twenty numbers. Produce a carbon copy of a top twenty number and the crowd is satisfied. Yet, on Merseyside, a group can play in their own individual style whatever numbers they are interested in – and the audience will judge them on their own merit.*⁵⁶¹

In November Harry declared his sympathy with the Beatles' avowed intention to 'get away from the Liverpool tag in the near future', in their search for wider acclaim. This was no doubt a response to the relatively lukewarm reception of 'Love Me Do' and before they discovered that their Liverpool humour was a positive advantage, especially when delivered in a 'scouse' accent. Harry also noted that George Martin had given them 'a really terrific blues sound' which would stand them in good stead if as many people predicted, rhythm and blues was going to be 'the next big trend'. Revealing just how far they had now come, one of their heroes, Little Richard told Harry, 'Man, those Beatles are fabulous. If I hadn't seen them I'd never have dreamed they were white. They have a real authentic Negro sound.'⁵⁶²

⁵⁶⁰ *Liverpool Echo*, July 26th, 1962, p.4.

⁵⁶¹ The Dakotas, interviewed in, *Mersey Beat*, August 23rd – September 6th, 1962, p.2.

⁵⁶² *Mersey Beat*, November 15th-29th, 1962, p.9.

This was high praise indeed, with the caveat that they had recently affirmed their mutual admiration in Hamburg.

In a *Mersey Beat* editorial of the same month entitled 'The Rat Race', singer Johnny Sandon divulged his views as to the current state of the Liverpool scene. In his opinion:

*The friendliness and comradeship between different groups seems to have lessened...Members of different groups used to meet quite frequently in certain Liverpool pubs and have a laugh and a drink together...All that seems to have gone.*⁵⁶³

It was reported that certain unnamed promoters, managers and groups were conspiring to outdo each other whilst a number of unscrupulous individuals were trying to make 'quick money from the local scene, spoiling it in their attempts':

*For, in their excitement and greed, they forget the most important people of all. In their blindness they are ignoring the youngsters who attend dances – and they are the people who count. Without them there would be no entertainment scene. The survival of groups, promoters, agents, managers – all depends on Merseyside youngsters.*⁵⁶⁴

It seems that there was already an awareness of Merseybeat becoming a victim of its own success although the article is essentially a plea for solidarity and a critique of sharp practice amongst small-time entrepreneurs and the amateurishness of many Merseyside groups in what was as yet a very parochial night-time entertainment world.

A good example of the extent to which *Mersey Beat* brought coherence to the music scene on Merseyside, in both a notional and practical sense, is provided by the *Mersey Beat* Awards Show held on December 15th at the Majestic Ballroom, Birkenhead (See Appendix, Maps: Fig. 1). The show followed a regular Saturday night appearance by the Beatles and featured the popularity poll 'Top Ten' (see above) performing one number each prior to a succession of rather self-congratulatory awards being presented by and to prominent members of the Liverpool in-crowd. The Beatles were awarded 'a special shield', presumably for heading the poll, before the Blue Mountain Boys and Johnny Sandon were given an award by compere Bob Wooler 'in recognition of their services to country-and-western music.' Wooler himself then received 'The G.B. Entertainments Award For An Outstanding Contribution to the Local Entertainments Scene', Bill Harry was presented with a 'Special Award' by Joe Flannery, manager of Lee Curtis and the All Stars, and Brian Epstein handed

⁵⁶³ *Mersey Beat*, November 29th-December 13th, 1962, p.2

⁵⁶⁴ *Mersey Beat*, November 29th-December 13th, 1962, p.2.

the ‘NEMS Enterprises Award’ to Billy Kramer and the Coasters as the ‘Top Non-Professional Group’.⁵⁶⁵ All the clique were present, and as incestuous as it may seem, this was a genuine if somewhat conceited celebration of the previous year’s achievements. The conceit was also arguably deliberate and intended to send a message to what remained an uncomprehending national media. This was the apogee of the self-contained Merseybeat scene. Just as Harry was declaring in yet another editorial, ‘London – You’ve ignored the North long enough – Now we’re going to do something about it!’, the national music press finally published the first substantial articles on the Beatles as a Northern phenomenon upon the release of ‘Please Please Me’.⁵⁶⁶ The *NME* announced, ‘So far it seems that only Northern fans and visiting American stars have appreciated their talents (the Crickets went overboard when they heard them) but “Please Please Me” will change everything.’ Readers were reassured that success would not go to their heads however, as it would no doubt be a long time before they would forget ‘the time they provided the music for Janice the Stripper in a Liverpool nightclub...’⁵⁶⁷ Whilst the *Melody Maker* asked ‘Has Trad Jazz Had It?’, the *NME* proclaimed ‘the first big pop trend of 1963 – Groups Are In!’⁵⁶⁸

From this point onwards, the Merseyside groups and singers that signed management contracts with NEMS and/or record contracts in London ceased for all intents and purposes to be Liverpool acts. As the Beat Boom exploded on the national and then the international stage the British media and for that matter, *Mersey Beat*, began to ask ‘Why Liverpool?’ and ‘Is there a Liverpool Sound?’ The latter question was put to the new manager of the aforementioned Majestic Ballroom, Kim Batty, who was of the opinion that:

There is no doubt that there is a definite Liverpool sound – it is the Mersey Beat! Having recently arrived from down South and having visited several Merseyside Ballrooms recently I am able to make a comparison. The sound here is more solid, it’s got atmosphere in it. No matter which group is playing they find that they have the full support of the audience – even the newer groups follow the style of top Merseyside groups and not that of national recording stars, thus the local sound is maintained.

Faron’s Flamingos’ manager, Jim Turner, agreed adding:

⁵⁶⁵ *Mersey Beat*, January 31st-February 14th, 1963, p.2. This must have been an uncomfortable event for former Beatles drummer Pete Best who was appearing with Lee Curtis and the All Stars.

⁵⁶⁶ *Mersey Beat*, January 31st-February 14th, 1963, p.4.

⁵⁶⁷ *New Musical Express*, February 1st, 1963, p.9.

⁵⁶⁸ *Melody Maker*, July 28th, 1962, pp.8-9 and *NME*, February 15th, 1963, p.2. As most of its journalists were jazz aficionados, the *Melody Maker* accepted the decline in its popularity with great reluctance.

*Music that most of the groups play in the rest of the country, particularly down South, is mostly a copy of The Shadows style and by no means such a solid beat that is to be found with the Liverpool groups. Music from Southern groups sounds anaemic and lacks the depth of quality that is found up here.*⁵⁶⁹

On the following page of the edition of *Mersey Beat* in which the above quotations appeared there is a full page advertisement featuring the Beatles modelling ‘Lybro’ jeans with the slogan ‘Go Merseyside! Go Lybro! Say the Beatles’. Coming from Liverpool was now fashionable.

There is no need to recount here the details of the Beat Boom for reasons which should be obvious – not least because by the beginning of 1964, NEMS, the Beatles and many other Merseyside acts had relocated to the capital. Suffice to say, as Sam Leach has, that ‘for 51 of the 60 weeks between April 1963 and May 1964, there was a Merseybeat record at Number 1’.⁵⁷⁰ Reflecting on the move in a BBC interview in March 1964, Epstein stated:

I’ve moved to London with great reluctance because I like Liverpool and I like its people. I owe the city quite a lot, but the trouble was it was becoming almost impossible to organize my own life and to do the best that I could for the artists. The artists perform often in London and they make their records in London. So I suppose I was forced into it.

Alistair Taylor recalled that:

*We had to go to London. Brian decided that, whether we liked it or not. It wasn’t falling out with Liverpool or not liking Liverpool but everything happened in London. I don’t think Liverpool’s really forgiven him yet.*⁵⁷¹

The questions of ‘why Liverpool?’ and ‘was there a Liverpool sound?’ will be returned to in the concluding chapter, and owing to the fact that the post-Liverpool trajectories of the commercially successful beat groups – not to mention the countless publications exploring the minutiae of the Beatles’ career – are not directly relevant to the issues under consideration, all that remains is to consider what became of the Liverpool scene after the initial exodus.

⁵⁶⁹ Both quotations are from, *Mersey Beat*, May 9th-23rd, 1963, p.2.

⁵⁷⁰ Sam Leach cited in, Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), p.65.

⁵⁷¹ Both quotations are taken from, Deborah Geller, *The Brian Epstein Story*, (London, 1999), pp.79-81. When NEMS moved to London the acts on their roster were: the Beatles, Gerry and the Pacemakers, Billy J. Kramer and the Dakotas, Tommy Quickly, the Fourmost, Cilla Black and Sounds Incorporated. Gerry Marsden remained a Merseyside resident despite his commitments.

At the height of ‘Beatle-mania’ *Mersey Beat* was of the opinion that there was a ‘Civil War – 1963’ declared by ‘London VIPs’ who had suddenly developed a ‘hostile attitude towards Northern artistes’. The paper complained that the national music press, which had ignored Merseybeat for so long but had recently been forced to recognise and even praise the Liverpool sound, were already turning against it. It was even alleged that DJs were refusing to play records by Liverpool groups. In what amounts to a rambling invective with somewhat paranoid overtones the editorial fulminated:

*‘How can we take the attention away from Merseyside?’ must have been the next thought, for suddenly the papers shrieked, “It’s all happening in Birmingham!” “There’s a new Manchester noise!” “The scene will explode in Glasgow!” “And now – the London sound!” Anything to halt the fantastic attention Merseyside was gaining.*⁵⁷²

Although it was true that the national media were beginning to focus on the beat scenes in other cities, the real purpose of *Mersey Beat*’s diatribe seems to have been to promote the next crop of Liverpool groups including the Searchers, the Undertakers, the Remo Four, the Flamingos and the Chants. The Searchers were in fact one of the few who were successful in the Beatles’ wake, however, as early as August 1963 they hinted in an interview for the *NME* that ‘Merseyside may not be the inexhaustible source of talent that we have been led to believe. It may in fact have been worked dry, leaving only young and inexperienced groups and singers trying to emulate the success of the Liverpoolian breakthrough!’⁵⁷³ This was a view shared by Bob Wooler who believed that the lack of originality had resulted in a loss of individuality and was a contributory factor, along with groups becoming greedy – assuming they could command a higher fee on the strength of coming from Liverpool – in the decline of the scene.⁵⁷⁴ By early 1965, after gradually increasing the range of its coverage, *Mersey Beat* announced that, ‘In order to be better able to serve the groups of Merseyside and the North MERSEY BEAT is to change its name to MUSIC ECHO and embark on a broader policy.’ Bill Harry promised to keep Merseysiders up to date with local developments in the new weekly paper but a strong indication of the way the wind was blowing was given by the dwindling space allocated to the ‘Mersey Beat’ column as it now was, and the inclusion of a small section entitled ‘Mersey Briefs’.⁵⁷⁵ Whilst a July edition of the *Music Echo* reported the view of the then ex-Searcher, Tony Jackson, that ‘the way things are going it looks as if

⁵⁷² *Mersey Beat*, July 4th-18th, 1963, p.2.

⁵⁷³ *New Musical Express*, August 9th, 1963, p.3.

⁵⁷⁴ Spencer Leigh, *Twist And Shout: Merseybeat, The Cavern, The Star Club and The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2004), p.180.

⁵⁷⁵ *Mersey Beat*, February 13th, 1965, p.2.

the beat scene in Britain is dying' on the same page that it revealed that the Cavern was 'in difficulty', the fact was that, as the *Melody Maker* had proclaimed over a year earlier, there had been a 'Massive Swing To R&B'.⁵⁷⁶

Although Liverpool did produce several R&B groups, most notably the Downliners Sect, the Escorts and the Clayton Squares, as Paul Du Noyer maintains:

*The Merseybeat acts were mostly working class lads, whose values were those of traditional entertainers. They never had the scholarly obsession with obscure blues that Jagger, Richards and the others had; they liked the bright, accessible pop of Tamla Motown and the Brill Building. They had no interest in the emerging 'counter-culture'; their roots were in semi-pro show business. When pop became rock and rock went weird, around 1966, the Liverpool groups were left behind. And with the rise of DJ-dominated discos, the beat groups weren't even needed for dancing to. They faced oblivion or exile on the chicken-in-a-basket circuit. Cream and the rest became rock gods; the Swinging Blue Jeans became a good night out in Widnes.*⁵⁷⁷

Spencer Leigh concurs, noting that the 'interesting thing about Liverpool is that the blues passed it by'; the jazz musicians were interested when Muddy Waters played the city but the beat musicians were not, the defining moment for them was Buddy Holly's visit in the late fifties.⁵⁷⁸ Despite the *Music Echo*'s plea that 'Groups should stick to beat – not change to cabaret bookings' (appropriately enough in the edition for January 1st, 1966), the bandwagon had rolled on. It is perhaps also befitting and at the same time also ironic that Ray Davies, song-writer for one of the leading London R&B groups, the Kinks, should write the elegy for the Merseybeat scene. He told the BBC in a recent interview that "Waterloo Sunset" was originally going to be called 'Liverpool Sunset' but I saw the end of the beat era. The emphasis had moved to London so I changed the title.⁵⁷⁹ That said, whilst it may be the case that attention had turned towards the R&B scene in London, it would be mistaken to assume that the blues had passed everyone by. In Newcastle upon Tyne the jazz scene had given birth to a small yet highly charged rhythm and blues scene with a vitality that was as unsurprising to those 'in the know' as the emergence of Merseybeat.

⁵⁷⁶ *Music Echo*, July 24th, 1965, p.12 and *Melody Maker*, April 18th, 1964, p.9.

⁵⁷⁷ Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), pp.98-99.

⁵⁷⁸ Spencer Leigh quoted in *ibid.* p.98.

⁵⁷⁹ Ray Davies interview, *The One Show*, BBC1, May 29th, 2009.

Chapter Six: Youth Culture and Popular Music in Newcastle upon Tyne

At this point it would seem appropriate to present a concise recapitulation of the several themes of the study and the questions that have arisen thus far. The aim being to clarify the issues under investigation before introducing the comparative methodology which, as was determined at the outset, is the means by which any provisional answers or conclusions will be drawn. It has been argued that an analysis of the ‘micro-histories’ of Liverpool and Newcastle upon Tyne between 1956 and 1965 might reveal aspects of the posited cultural upheaval that yet another national history would not. It is the contention that the emphasis here on the ‘cultural transfer’ of North American popular music can simplify the often over-complicated process of comparative analysis and interpretation by limiting the selection of similarities and differences between the two cities to those that were affected by or had an effect upon its reception and/or its local reproduction.

In attempting a focussed comparative examination of what Osgerby has called ‘micro-heritages’, which, ‘Confined to their own region and locality...have usually wielded limited influence over national trends and so have attracted little attention from cultural theorists and historians’, it is the intention to offer a fresh perspective and explanatory purchase on the issues raised by the arguments of Sandbrook and Fowler.⁵⁸⁰ What is in question is the validity of the former’s insistence on stressing the wider continuities in British society and culture and their shared assertion that, contra Melly, pop culture was not an expression of youth culture but the product of a minority of young, privileged London-based artists and intellectuals – to which must be added Fowler’s patently absurd suggestion that ‘university students are the only group who could have generated a cohesive Youth Culture in Britain’. By observing Melly’s distinction between ‘pop’ and ‘popular’ culture it should be possible to gain an understanding of their interaction and inter-penetration at a local level and to reach some provisional conclusions as to the extent and influence of Counce’s ‘set of strong and very local identities’ upon youth and pop culture as it was both consumed and produced. Any conclusions must also be drawn from what can be discovered of the ‘objective realities’ of Northern identities rather than the often oppositional constructs of the North described by Russell that appear to have so readily suffused the ‘national imagination’.

Finally, in response to Harker’s leftist critique of accounts of the sixties that he claims have marginalised ordinary working people, a view that nonetheless chimes with Sandbrook’s

⁵⁸⁰ Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford, 1998), p.170.

much less class-orientated thesis, an argument can be made as follows: that contrary to the claims of Sandbrook, Fowler and Harker, who are open to Bradley's accusation that they put too much emphasis on the chart performance of the Beatles, Rolling Stones etc. – neglecting 'the social roots of both music making and listening' – there did emerge a vigorous and dynamic if not necessarily cohesive youth driven pop culture – and not just in London.⁵⁸¹ It is also the contention that this can be demonstrated by focussing on the hitherto neglected social *and* cultural roots of 'music making and listening' in Liverpool and Newcastle. This approach enables an engagement with the arguments of Sandbrook and Fowler that is not only built upon strong empirical foundations, but also the theoretical insights of Martin and Toynebee who advocate the idea of 'music as social action' and the possibility of 'institutional autonomy' in the face of Harker's 'commercial sausage-machine'. This engagement will in turn lead to an assessment as to whether Margaret Archer's theory of cultural change and the possibility that human agency can, and did, at certain historical 'moments', bring about the kind of 'cultural revolution' so vehemently denied by Sandbrook.

These points are worth reiterating before progressing to the history of youth culture and popular music in Newcastle so that the reader may consider their implications whilst hopefully pondering the similarities and differences with Liverpool as they emerge. It should also be remembered that all of the above themes, questions and arguments will be considered in the light of, and informed by, the comparative nature of this work. The impetus for the adoption of the comparative method and the concept of cultural transfer comes from the work of Michael Miller who has focussed on the cross-national phenomenon of containerisation in his investigation of European ports which allowed him to trace the histories of individual shipping firms and the fluctuating fortunes of ports within the wider context of globalisation.⁵⁸² In this instance, whilst the fact that Liverpool and Newcastle are ports is not without significance for this study it is rather the idea that 'containerisation' and 'globalisation' in Miller's methodology correspond to the cultural transfer of American popular music and the debated 'cultural revolution' that is of interest. In a similar way to which Miller has used the process of containerisation in order to focus his comparisons, so comparisons between Liverpool and Newcastle can be limited to generalities (what is similar)

⁵⁸¹ Dick Bradley, *Understanding Rock 'n' Roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, (Buckingham, 1992), p.12.

⁵⁸² Michael Miller, 'Comparative and Cross-National History: Approaches, Difficulties, Problems', in Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*, (New York, 2004), p.116.

and particularities (what is different) that pertain to the cultural transfer of North American popular music. This is a device employed to mitigate the problems and complexities involved in establishing the ‘multiple lines of causality’ that social scientists, and increasingly historians, have encountered in contemporary applications of the comparative method. Put another way, this method allows the historian to assess what the cultural impact of North American popular music can reveal about the similarities and differences between Liverpool and Newcastle rather than what *all* their similarities and differences might reveal about the impact of popular music – a considerably more complicated endeavour. The theory and methodology outlined above can then be brought to bear on the research findings, and the central themes of the study and the questions raised addressed in greater depth. Obviously however, before that exercise can be attempted the second object of comparison – youth culture and popular music in Newcastle upon Tyne – must be examined for the corresponding period, 1956-65.

A Pre-history of Tyneside Youth Culture, Popular Music, and Entertainment

Music Hall and Cinema

According to Lyall Wilkes, who wrote the introduction to the 1975 reprint of Jack Common’s two autobiographical novels recounting his formative years in Newcastle during the first three decades of the twentieth century, ‘[Common] catches the very sound and sight of growing up on Tyneside fifty years ago.’ He further expresses his belief that the books ‘will be enjoyed as long as there are people on the banks of the Tyne who retain an interest in their past and value what makes their region unique.’⁵⁸³ Indeed, there is much to be gleaned from the novels concerning the political, economic, and social climate of the times (and place). For the period he describes, as with Liverpool, it is difficult to ascribe any youth culture as understood in the post-WWII sense to a particular form of popular music or entertainment. Common does however, capture a cultural moment when an audience brought up on music hall entertainment had not yet become accustomed to cinema-going. His father takes the young hero to a pre-WWI ‘picture-hall’ where, during the silent picture:

I yelled and stamped on my seat, and was often in danger of falling into the next row or knocking somebody’s hat off, all of which amused my father immensely. Most of the audience made some noise or other. You see, they were recruited from the music-hall and the melodrama; they had not yet learnt

⁵⁸³ Lyall Wilkes, Introduction to, Jack Common, *Kidder’s Luck and The Ampersand*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1975), p.x.

*the separate and introverted enjoyment so proper to the Art of the Cinema. The fact that the pictures were silent gave everyone a natural right to comment as and when and how.*⁵⁸⁴

The clientele are of mixed age, gender, and seemingly class, as ‘stout matrons in cloth caps and shawls and heavily moustached blokes in mufflers and celluloid dickies’ – ‘these worthies’ – occupy the ‘better seats’. On another occasion he is given a ‘treat’, a visit to the Pavilion, where he witnesses Fred Karno’s Mummie Birds featuring Charlie Chaplin.⁵⁸⁵ The Newcastle Pavilion was built in 1903 on Westgate Road as part of the Barrasford Circuit, founded by Newcastle publican Tom Barrasford in competition with the Moss and Stoll Empires combine.⁵⁸⁶ The late Victorian and early Edwardian period was one of extravagant building projects on the part of private individuals eager to exploit the popularity of the Northern music hall.

In Newcastle, besides the Pavilion, there were older halls such as Balmbra’s (Bigg Market) of Blaydon Races fame, and the Gaiety Theatre (Nelson Street). Balmbra’s was one of several local music halls that gave voice to Tyneside songwriters and performers George Ridley, Ned Corvan, and Joe Wilson during the mid-nineteenth century. According to Lancaster, at a time when ‘Newcastle’s emerging music halls adopted a distinctly local style [these] songsmiths helped form England’s most distinctive regional culture.’⁵⁸⁷ In *The Music Halls of Newcastle upon Tyne*, Annette Benoist suggests that in the city ‘there existed a general desire for a species of amusement which the theatre did not supply.’ Alongside the drive for self improvement and rational recreation conducted by those who deemed themselves socially superior, a plebeian ‘Geordie’ culture flourished. The fortunes of the Gaiety Theatre illustrate this tension in Newcastle, as Benoist has shown:

Grainger built the Gaiety Theatre in Nelson Street in 1838 and when it opened it presented...the biggest names of classical music and drama at that time. At first more stately and dignified concerts, lectures and exhibitions were held there and originally it was called the Lecture Room. It was in 1861 that Dickens gave three readings at the Gaiety...In 1879 it became the New Tyne Concert Hall [and] six years later the so called entertainment was let in. Moving pictures were shown...in between its music hall turns in 1911...This innovation was heralded by a huge advertisement...noting it the most

⁵⁸⁴ Jack Common, *Kidder’s Luck and The Ampersand*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1975), p.47.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p.50.

⁵⁸⁶ G. J. Mellor, *The Northern Music Hall*, (Newcastle upon Tyne and Middlesbrough, 1970), pp.157-63.

⁵⁸⁷ Bill Lancaster, ‘Sociability and the City’, in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001), p.329.

*luxurious hall in the North, tip up chairs for all and live motion pictures of the world augmented with refined vaudeville.*⁵⁸⁸

Many halls were later converted into cinemas – at first silent, followed by the ‘talkies’. The demand for music hall faded after WWI as the audience for cinema exploded during the twenties and thirties. The fate of the Gaiety was typical of many old halls, in Benoist’s words, having become ‘a little second rate theatre when it died a death in 1949’. However, many of these venues (the ‘Hippodromes’ and ‘Empires’) continued as cinemas, dance, and bingo halls in Newcastle (and Liverpool) into the 1950s and ‘60s, surviving as familiar landmarks in rapidly changing communities.

Home Music-making and Street Culture

The central character of ‘Kiddar’ (Common) makes few references to popular music as he reaches adulthood in the early 1920s, other than to the music-hall ballad and the musical activities of his ‘eccentric’ uncle – socialist, vegetarian, and ‘crank’. Common:

*He was a musician by right. The old Northumbrian tradition is that the youngest son of the family, the one least needed for work or for war, should be the minstrel. In obedience to it, when [his uncle] Robin was old enough my grandfather made him a fiddle and a set of Northumbrian pipes...That fit the lad up for playing at a curran supper or amusing the ingle-neuk [sic] of a winter’s night.*⁵⁸⁹

As cinema did for music hall, music-making in the home was largely replaced with radio during the interwar years, gathering round the piano in the parlour with listening to the radio set. Any sense of a youth culture in the working-class Heaton area of Kiddar’s childhood and adolescence consists of growing up on the streets and fighting fairly harmless territorial disputes with rival gangs for control of this street corner or that. These gangs broke up when it was time to begin courting girls. Common recounts a local ‘institution’ known as ‘The Walk’ where adolescents would promenade in (same-sex) pairs along:

...the road between the cemetery and the village of Longbenton...on Sundays, came a steady drift of couples from the populous streets of Byker, Heaton and Walker. Two of a sex the couples came, their ages fourteen and upwards, but not very upwards: maturity had no place here.

⁵⁸⁸ Annette Benoist, *The Music Halls of Newcastle upon Tyne*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1993). There are no page numbers in this work. The information referenced comes from the chapter entitled ‘The Newcastle Halls’.

⁵⁸⁹ Jack Common, *Kidder’s Luck and The Ampersand*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1975), p.137. According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* an ‘ingle-nook’ is ‘a space on either side of a large fireplace’.

'Flapper' was the favourite word of the period to describe the gay teen-age girl. Many were humdrum; most were nice. The same urge swept a whole cross-section of youthful femininity towards the harmless encounters of the 'Walk'.⁵⁹⁰

Although admittedly the semi-fictional reminiscences of one man writing in the 1940s and '50s about his youth in Newcastle after WWI hardly constitutes sound analytical history, its inclusion ought to be excused because there is no better way to convey the importance of the streets of Tyneside for its youth before the advent of mass culture. The cinema, the dance hall, and the milk or coffee bar (simply cafes in the 1920s), were not any of them as yet spaces considered, or actually, the sole province of youth.

Dance Halls

Frederick C. Moffatt writes that the Oxford Galleries 'was the place that really catered for the ordinary dancers of the entire North East of England, and was the place where thousands of couples met and married.' It was also host to 'almost all the famous bands and personalities of the past 70 years [before 1995], even Paul Whiteman and Louis Armstrong. Almost every leading British band of the great days of big bands played there.' He lists the numerous dance bands in residence between its opening in 1925 and 1960 when it was bought by the Mecca organisation and became a night club so as not to provide competition with the new Mayfair ballroom they were then building. For those who preferred an even more formal atmosphere than the ballrooms, afternoon and evening 'Tea Dances' were popular during the interwar years, held at local restaurants and tea rooms: Tilley's, Lockharts, Binns and Fenwicks. North-East musicians learned their trade in dance halls, tea rooms and cinema pit orchestras. Moffatt asks: 'What then, about the young lads and lasses who did not want to attend the tea rooms?' Apparently 'they had plenty of choice'; apart from 'the Oxford', there were the Heaton Assembly Rooms in the East-end and the Brighton Assembly Rooms and the Milvain Ballroom in the West-end of the city – predominantly working class areas.⁵⁹¹ In his survey of interwar dance halls on Merseyside, Michael Brocken notes that 'Old Tyme' dancing – a predominantly provincial fashion that attracted large audiences in Liverpool and

⁵⁹⁰ Jack Common, *Kidder's Luck and The Ampersand*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1975), p.204.

⁵⁹¹ Frederick C. Moffatt, *Dance Hall Days: A Look at Local Dance Halls and Bands of Yesteryear*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1995), pp.4-5. 'The exact sequence of resident bands is open to argument, but from various sources, it appears that after the [London] Sonora band there was a Dixieland band, Percy Bush, Ted Newman, "Kendal and his band", then came the well known Peter Fielding about 1934 and remaining for 14 years before going to Belle View. Phil Richardson played there, and then came George Evans with his famous "Symphony of Saxes", remaining for years until Don Smith took over.'

elsewhere in Northern England – was equally popular at the Oxford Galleries in Newcastle.⁵⁹² Presumably, as with the Grafton Rooms in Liverpool, these events were attended by an audience of mixed age range as Saturday nights were increasingly becoming the preserve of a younger clientele. By the early 1960s, as Moffatt relates:

When Mecca built the Mayfair, it was looked on as the premier dance hall, especially when Jimmy Bence was in residence. And for a while it was successful, but never like the Oxford Galleries. It was the wrong time – a time for change, – such as the Dolce Vita nightclub which opened next door, plus a variety of clubs, good and bad, all over the city. Groups sprung up like mushrooms, mostly noisy and brash. A new age.

When the old Westgate Cinema closed down, it became a ballroom named the Majestic, and although it had a certain amount of success, with Wilf Reay and his band, it soon became a victim of the great God Bingo.⁵⁹³

Besides revealing his prejudice in favour of dance band music here, the author is not entirely accurate. Like so many of the nation's dance halls, before succumbing to bingo, the Majestic was to feature prominently in the Beat Boom to come.

Teddy Boys and Rock 'n' Roll on Tyneside

At the close of 1955, Newcastle's *Sunday Sun* ran a series of articles that 'turned the spotlight' on the region's youth and found: 'FOR TEENAGERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE VILLAGES, TOWNS AND CITIES OF THE INDUSTRIAL NORTH-EAST SATURDAY NIGHT IS CARNIVAL NIGHT'.⁵⁹⁴ It was reported that:

Regardless of the hooliganism and Teddy boy battles Tyneside's young people are still attracted in thousands to the dance halls and cinemas every Saturday night.

To the cinemas they go to watch and imitate their idols and to the ballrooms they crowd for – maybe a chance meeting with their partner for life.⁵⁹⁵

Two months later in an article entitled 'Too much leisure and money', the familiar concerns about underage and excessive drinking were expressed by the police and local magistrates. The Chief Constable of South Shields believed, 'The main causes are the present high wages given to young people, more leisure time available to them and the fact that it is not directed

⁵⁹² Michael Brocken, *Other Voices: Hidden Histories of Liverpool's Popular Music Scenes, 1930s-1970s*, (Farnham, 2010), p.42.

⁵⁹³ Frederick C. Moffatt, *Dance Hall Days: A Look at Local Dance Halls and Bands of Yesteryear*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1995), p.6.

⁵⁹⁴ *The Sunday Sun*, December 11th, 1955, p.2.

⁵⁹⁵ *The Sunday Sun*, December 18th, 1955, p.4.

into the best channels.’⁵⁹⁶ If the traditional fears surrounding the drunken juvenile delinquent were seen by the authorities as being compounded by high wages and increased leisure time, and if the hooligan had a recognisable uniform, that of the Teddy boy, then the arrival of rock ‘n’ roll provided the rebellious soundtrack.

In the North East as elsewhere, the local newspapers of the mid-to-late-1950s are littered with reports of the allegedly alcohol-fuelled violence perpetrated by Teddy boys, and the juke box was usually in the background. Indeed, juke boxes were a controversial issue and frequently blamed for encouraging underage drinking. The Chief Constable of Tynemouth refused to grant licences for juke boxes because he believed they ‘created disorder’.⁵⁹⁷ In one report, an ‘undercover’ journalist described an unnamed Newcastle pub as a ‘ghastly place’ where Teddy boys and girls gathered ‘night after night’ in the ‘shadow of the juke box’ where, ‘the girls chewed gum in between sinking draughts of ale and long pulls at the cigarettes. The boys – pints were their choice – had loud laughs and beat time to the rock ‘n’ roll stuff with cheap, flashy signet rings.’⁵⁹⁸ This media ambivalence towards the North-East’s youth was typical of the period – lurching from ‘good-time kids’ to ‘violent louts’ – and should not be given too much credence as arguably once again it reveals more about the prejudices of the authorities than it does about the actual cultural practices of the region’s young people.

Despite the press commotion Newcastle Watch Committee did not take action to ban ‘Rock Around the Clock’ although, much to the consternation of many fans, those of Gateshead, South Shields and Tynemouth did (See Appendix, Maps: Fig. 2 – Newcastle and Tyneside). Eighteen-year-old shorthand typist Hazel Forbes, of Heaton, Newcastle complained:

*I think it’s a shame that the film should be banned or taken off by cinema managers. I wanted to see it because I like ‘rock n’ roll.’ It makes me feel alive, but it doesn’t make me want to go berserk.*⁵⁹⁹

George Pearson, an apprentice printer from a Northumberland pit village, recalled 1956 as a ‘seminal’ year for rock ‘n’ roll with hits for Elvis Presley, Little Richard, Fats Domino and Carl Perkins besides the already familiar figure of Bill Haley. He also remembered it as the year when the more discerning in both fashion and musical taste discarded their drape jackets in favour of Marlon Brando’s black leather jacket or James Dean’s red windcheater. For those who developed a taste for jazz alongside their passion for rock ‘n’ roll – many of whom

⁵⁹⁶ *The Sunday Sun*, February 12th, 1956, p.5.

⁵⁹⁷ *Evening Chronicle*, April 17th, 1956, p.11.

⁵⁹⁸ *Evening Chronicle*, August 4th, 1956, p.6.

⁵⁹⁹ *Sunday Sun*, September 16th, 1956, p.7.

would go on to form the nucleus of Newcastle's jazz influenced rhythm and blues scene – the next step was Freeman's army stores for lumber jacket, blue jeans and cowboy boots.⁶⁰⁰ It does appear however, that to be thus attired in 1956-57 meant belonging to a very small minority and a habitu  of venues somewhat off the beaten track and not frequented by the vast majority of Newcastle's youth – places such as the Newcastle Jazz Club, held on Tuesdays in the Celebration Hall at the Royal Arcade.⁶⁰¹

Otherwise the Teddy boy style clung on well into the 1960s, particularly in Tyneside's outlying and relatively isolated communities. This tendency to hold out in the face of sartorial progress is attested to in Dave Douglass' retrospective account of an encounter with a group of pit village Teds. He recounts their reaction to his mid-sixties mod attire and how 'the city clothes, me quasi-mod jacket, me high collar, the tie stud, the ankle-swingers and Cuban heels identified me at once as a 'toonie', roughly equivalent to a 'soft shite'', while the Teds 'stood, Neolithic and terrifying in...drapes, with the still oiled hair in the Elvis sweep, the black crepe shoes and brass buckles, dayglow [sic] socks, big studded belts.'⁶⁰² Despite being forced to negotiate the Teddy boy-inspired territorial disputes in his home town of Washington Bryan Ferry has described how, around 1960:

*When I worked in Newcastle – at sixteen years old I suppose – a lot of great Teddy boys used to come into Jacksons, where I worked on Saturdays. And I used to advise them on suits. My main job was to write down measurements as the tailor measured them and called them out; he had special books to take down all the measurements, and you had to do all kinds of specific things with them: ask them how many buttons they wanted and what sort of lapels. Sometimes they were just dead straight suits, and other times these fancy things which the Teddy boys would invent: wanting to have velvet piping, or a certain number of buttonholes. It was quite interesting.*⁶⁰³

Ferry was interested in clothes and fashion from an early age and besides working for Jacksons, which was regarded as 'one of the best High Street tailors' – catering for the city's businessmen as well as its Teddy boys – he recalls a rather more downmarket but also more

⁶⁰⁰ George Pearson, *Sex, Brown Ale and Rhythm & Blues: The Life That Gave Birth To The Animals*, (Darlington, 1998), pp.18 and 22. Brando's leather-jacketed biker image was first seen by British teenagers in April 1955 when *The Wild One* was finally granted a certificate which had been denied since 1953. The red windcheater was worn by Dean in *Rebel Without A Cause* which was released in March 1956. Both were given an X certificate. See, Pete Frame, *The Restless Generation: How rock music changed the face of 1950s Britain*, (London, 2007), pp.454 and 461.

⁶⁰¹ George Pearson, *Sex, Brown Ale and Rhythm & Blues: The Life That Gave Birth To The Animals*, (Darlington, 1998), p.13.

⁶⁰² Dave Douglass, *Geordies – Wa Mental*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2000), p.203.

⁶⁰³ Michael Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model: Becoming Roxy Music*, (London, 2007), p.33.

‘outlandish’ outlet called City Stylish which stocked Teddy boy gear and ‘pointed Italian shoes’ and ‘extreme Italian suits’. During the latter half of the fifties sharp Italian clothes were worn by fans of modern jazz like Marcus Price who, after National Service, ran his eponymously named Percy Street shop as part of the family business. He remembered that, although when he started in the mid-fifties he sold flat caps, Newcastle ‘was starting to leave that image behind’. Marcus Price would eventually become, in Ferry’s words, ‘a shop for top-end Mod clothes’, but at the turn of the decade its owner was ‘a great jazz aficionado...part of the jazz scene – a very cool scene.’⁶⁰⁴

In terms of progression through musical styles and access to the various available venues, initially at least, the Newcastle scene developed along similar lines to Liverpool. A multitude of skiffle groups formed and mostly disbanded in Lonnie Donegan’s wake, a number re-emerging as rock ‘n’ roll outfits once they had ‘gone electric’ and learned to play. To begin with, as in Liverpool, Newcastle’s ballrooms were reluctant to book the young amateur rock ‘n’ roll groups which meant that they were forced to serve their apprenticeship in youth clubs and church halls before proceeding to semi-professional bookings in pubs and working men’s clubs in the surrounding districts of Tyneside. Brian Rankin (Hank Marvin) served his musical apprenticeship in the Crescent City Skiffle Group before joining school friend Bruce Welch in the Railroaders because, due to their more commercial approach, ‘they got a lot of work in working men’s clubs and won prizes in competitions.’⁶⁰⁵ Welch regularly attended concerts at the Newcastle Empire including those given by Bill Haley, Lonnie Donegan and the Chas McDevitt Skiffle Group. During McDevitt’s week-long engagement in August 1957 he was invited to hear the Railroaders perform at a friend’s wedding reception in South Shields whereupon he was sufficiently impressed to offer them an open invitation to London and to tell the *Sunday Sun* that ‘It is something new to listen to skiffle in the North-East, I am pleased to be here.’⁶⁰⁶ According to Welch:

We wanted to be Lonnie Donegan, we wanted to be Elvis, we wanted to be Buddy Holly. But how could we do it? We knew we couldn’t do it from Newcastle, because you couldn’t do it in those days; you’re talking about

⁶⁰⁴ Bryan Ferry and Marcus Price quoted in, Michael Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model: Becoming Roxy Music*, (London, 2007), pp.38-39.

⁶⁰⁵ Chris Phipps, John Tobler, Sid Smith, *Northstars*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2005), p.124.

⁶⁰⁶ McDevitt, *Skiffle: The Definitive Inside Story*, (London, 1997), p.203 and *Sunday Sun*, September 9th, 1957, p.5.

1957 and early '58. We left in April '58. So we left school early, we didn't even sit our GCEs.⁶⁰⁷

Playing in an endless round of 'Go-As-You-Please' competitions had already lost any appeal and compared with Newcastle London appeared 'like Hollywood' to the future Shadows who quickly established themselves at the Two Is from where they launched their careers.⁶⁰⁸ Perhaps it was because they left the North East just as the vibrant scene in Newcastle was beginning to emerge that they have never really been rightly acknowledged as the city's first rock 'n' roll stars.

Other examples of young Tyneside rock 'n' rollers included Chas Chandler's group the Kon-tors and the Gamblers, both groups mixing rock 'n' roll favourites with current pop hits in order to satisfy a wider audience.⁶⁰⁹ The career path of the Animals guitarist Hilton Valentine is also typical of the pattern. In 1956 at the age of thirteen he formed the Heppers skiffle group which by the time he was sixteen had evolved into the rock 'n' roll band the Wildcats. After gaining something of a reputation playing in working men's clubs and dances in small east-coast towns like Whitley Bay and Cullercoats, they won the North Shields 'cinema group skiffle competition' which earned them their first Newcastle booking at the Majestic Ballroom (See Appendix, Maps: Figs. 2 and 4). Valentine told the *Evening Chronicle*, 'We play regularly at a Whitley Bay dance, but it will be quite an experience to play from the stage of a big ballroom.'⁶¹⁰ Whilst he recalls going 'up to the "town" with me mates quite regularly to see bands like the Gamblers play' he remembers 'thinking that playing Newcastle was something to strive for' and that the Majestic booking 'sure felt like the big time to us!'⁶¹¹ Meanwhile, The Gamblers who were arguably the city's leading exponents of chart-based pop in the early sixties were engaged for what would become a two-

⁶⁰⁷ Chris Phipps, John Tobler, Sid Smith, *Northstars*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2005), p.205.

⁶⁰⁸ 'Go-As-You-Please' competitions were talent spotting events for the working men's club circuit. The 'much celebrated mixture of song and alcohol, domino cards, twisted handkerchiefs and indifferent acoustic engineering they call a go-as-you-please.' See, Brian Bennison, 'Drink in Newcastle', in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001), p.188.

⁶⁰⁹ The spelling of the 'Kon-tors' is taken from a photograph of the label of an acetate they made at Morton Sound Studios that appears in, Anna Flowers and Vanessa Histon (eds.), *It's My Life! 1960s Newcastle*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2009), p.42. The spelling varies in other secondary publications e.g. the 'Kontours' or the 'Kontors'.

⁶¹⁰ *Evening Chronicle*, June 25th, 1960, p.5.

⁶¹¹ Hilton Valentine, in correspondence with the author, February 10th, 2009.

and-a-half year residency at the Majestic which also began its lunchtime jive sessions around this time.⁶¹²

The Newcastle Jazz Scene

The post-WWII trad jazz revival had, as in most cities by the middle fifties, resulted in the establishment of city-centre jazz clubs including the afore-mentioned Newcastle Jazz Club, the New Orleans Jazz Club and the Student Jazz Club run by ex-army and university student Mike Jeffery (For the location of key sites in Newcastle see Appendix, Maps: Fig. 4).⁶¹³ George Pearson, who in 1957, began to attend Newcastle College of Art and Industrial Design one day a week as part of his apprenticeship, had recently become a member of the Newcastle Jazz Club whose founder, Alan Brown, besides booking local bands like the Panama Jazzmen, encouraged members to borrow books on jazz from his personal collection. Teenagers Pearson and future Animal Chas Chandler joined ‘a broad cross section of types, ages and modes of dress’ consisting of ‘many different professions and social classes’ with ‘two things in common, their love of the music and their ability to jive.’ Pearson recounts how ‘jiving’ was vital to the popularity of the music, having been introduced by American GIs during the war and spreading to the provincial cities from London, where it ‘found its main expression in the jazz clubs.’ He also suggests that each city developed its own style and claims that the Newcastle Jazz Club audience were heavily influenced by the ‘frenetic dancing style’ of ‘the black crew members of an American merchant ship called the Bermuda Star’ who frequented the club on their bi-annual visits to the city.⁶¹⁴

The New Orleans Jazz Club was founded in 1955 by members of the Vieux Carre Jazzmen lead by banjo player Pete Deuchar who had recently left his band in Wolverhampton to return to Newcastle where ‘the jazz scene was a little brighter.’ The Vieux Carre took up a Friday night residency once the club established a permanent address at the Central Labour Club on Melbourne Street in the dilapidated Shieldfield area to the east of the city centre. For a couple of years until his departure for London the big bearded frame of Deuchar was ‘as familiar on the Newcastle scene...as the ales which his grandfather’s brewery purveyed’, but

⁶¹² *Evening Chronicle*, May 23rd, 1963, p.11.

⁶¹³ In their biography of Jimi Hendrix, whom Jeffery would later manage along with former Animal Chas Chandler, Harry Shapiro and Caesar Glebbeek state that Jeffery graduated with honours in languages and sociology. See Harry Shapiro & Caesar Glebbeek, *Jimi Hendrix: Electric Gypsy*, (New York, 1995), p.120.

⁶¹⁴ George Pearson, *Sex, Brown Ale and Rhythm & Blues: The Life That Gave Birth To The Animals*, (Darlington, 1998), pp.14-15.

the band continued and were joined by the Mighty Joe Young Band who took the Saturday night spot.⁶¹⁵ Together with the Panama Jazzmen these were the leading practitioners of trad jazz at the time and besides occupying residencies at the city's jazz clubs they would support the top visiting American and British jazz acts who began to appear regularly at the City Hall – Louis Armstrong was apparently capably supported by the Panama Jazzmen in May 1956.⁶¹⁶ The New Orleans club had the additional advantage of a drinks licence but was generally perceived as a place where jazz was taken seriously and there was no dance floor for the jive enthusiasts.

Richard Cook was a student at King's College during the fifties who remembered the decade as 'divided neatly' between the first half 'when nothing much happened' – a cultural hangover from the forties – and the feeling during his final year towards the end of 1954 that 'the place was full of exuberant and confident strangers' with 'a growing interest in jazz.'⁶¹⁷ Cook claimed to have been escaping 'the banalities of working-class life on Tees-side' whereas his contemporary at King's, future playwright Stanley Eveling, was fleeing the more immediate poverty of his Geordie upbringing having gained access to the College by virtue of a government pledge to provide a university place to any member of the armed forces with a minimum qualification. Eveling recalled:

All Geordies of that era knew that to work is worse than not to work given the sort of work that they were nearly always given to do, and a few of them also liked reading.

So I went...straight to Kings College in Newcastle, not because that was the best place for me to go but because that is where we went. My theory about this choice is that Geordies of the vintage and class to which I was tethered never supposed that they would become anything.⁶¹⁸

Despite this 'ideological diffidence', the presence of ex-servicemen and students fresh out of school no doubt made for a 'more than usually diverse mix of age and experience.'⁶¹⁹ Eveling identified a number of students from the early fifties who went on to become 'famous' including Norman Sherry (biographer of Joseph Conrad and Graham Greene) and his friend Ian Carr. Several notable figures at King's and in Newcastle society more

⁶¹⁵ *Evening Chronicle*, November 27th, 1965, Pop Parade, p.ii, and September 17th, 1965, p.14. Deuchars was and still is a Newcastle beer.

⁶¹⁶ *King's Courier*, May 24th, 1956, Vol. 9, No. 2, p.2.

⁶¹⁷ Richard Cook, 'Garlic and Keystone Burgundy: Student Life in Newcastle During the 1950s', *Northern Review*, Vol.4, (Winter 1996), pp.20-28.

⁶¹⁸ Stanley Eveling, 'Fame As No Spur', *Northern Review*, Vol.4, (Winter 1996), pp.30-31.

⁶¹⁹ Alyn Shipton, *Out Of The Long Dark: The Life of Ian Carr*, (London, 2006), p.17.

generally served in the Army – if they were from the North East quite possibly in the Northumberland Fusiliers or the Durham Light Infantry – or the RAF, either as regulars or on National Service, often as officers and it is tempting to speculate that the peculiar loyalty and camaraderie engendered by service life may have continued as a feature of civilian relationships. King's student and jazz trumpeter Ian Carr and artist Gerald Laing forged a life-long friendship in the forces as officers in the Northumberland Fusiliers, but experience of National Service was widespread and must have coloured the relationships of many including Ian's brother Mike in his collaboration with Malcolm Cecil after both served in the RAF. The Carr brothers' enormous influence on the jazz scene in Newcastle must be considered in some detail.

Ian Carr and his younger brother Mike spent their early childhood in South Shields before moving to rural County Durham where they received a public school education in the picturesque historic town of Barnard Castle. Their father was largely absent due to his efforts to maintain the family's 'lower middle class' status through the food importation business he had established after leaving the RAF in 1945. Encouraged by their mother, the brothers pursued their passion for music; Mike making rapid progress on piano, Ian teaching himself trumpet. Both boys sang in the church choir while Ian recalled the inspirational teaching of his English master, Mr Snodgrass, as having a profound influence. Snodgrass instilled in Ian a love of English literature and poetry, and also shared his growing interest in jazz, loaning him records by Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven. He remembered 'surfing the radio for jazz from abroad in those days' and bus journeys into Darlington to buy records when they could not be borrowed from friends. Interestingly, he also recalled that, as well as immersing themselves in early and contemporary jazz, 'We were hooked on the blues', listening to Pine Top Smith and Sister Rosetta Tharpe and 'Boogie woogie we liked a lot. These are great foundations. People that began with bebop often didn't get that, and you can hear it in their playing that they didn't.'⁶²⁰ This deep appreciation of the blues that was held by many of the key figures in Newcastle's jazz scene was of major significance in its development and helps to explain how it was able to incorporate, inspire but also co-exist with the up and coming rhythm and blues scene in the early sixties.

The Carr brothers had strong ties to the North East, their great grandfather had been a principal at St. Bede College at Durham and their grandfather had studied at King's where

⁶²⁰ Alyn Shipton, *Out Of The Long Dark: The Life of Ian Carr*, (London, 2006), pp.1-14.

Ian arrived to study English literature in 1952. At King's, Ian formed a modern jazz quintet – including his non-student brother on piano – which held the distinction of supplying the only modern jazz at the inter-university jazz band competition held in Liverpool in 1954. At this time the renowned poet, performance and pop artist to be, Adrian Henri, was an art student at King's who 'played a mean washboard with the college trad band'. Carr recounted how during the concert Henri, in what must have been his first 'performance' in Liverpool, got 'so carried away, that at one point he hung by his hands from the overflowing circle gallery, resplendent in purple shirt and suede brothel-creepers, kicking his legs about excitedly.'⁶²¹ According to Carr, Henri's reaction reflected the novelty of hearing modern jazz at the time. His biographer, Alyn Shipton suggests that, 'Compared to the burgeoning nightlife of the Newcastle to which Ian returned in the 1960s, there were no jazz clubs or coffee bars with live music during his undergraduate years.' With limited outlets, jazz for the Carrs was restricted to a hobby before they were both called up for National Service in 1956.⁶²² When the jazz scene in Newcastle did begin to emerge from the mid-fifties onwards it was led by the trad jazz exponents, the Vieux Carre and the Panama Jazzmen, along with the increasingly mainstream – leaning towards the music of Duke Ellington and Johnny Hodges – Mighty Joe Young Band. This is the scene, based on the New Orleans Club and Jeffery's University Jazz Club, that began to attract a younger generation of fans inspired by skiffle and rock 'n' roll, but equally intrigued by the blues roots of jazz and the social opportunities afforded by the ability to jive.⁶²³

Like most universities at the time, King's, which was then still part of Durham University, was musically in thrall to the trad jazz revival and the on-campus jazz club was already well established by 1956. The students held 'stomps' in the Union refectory and organised 'shuffles' during rag week – boat trips along the Tyne at which local trad bands or the college's own Blue Star Stompers played. The Stompers became the Quaysiders, were resident at the Union, and represented the College at the inter-university jazz contests held in Liverpool (1957) and Manchester (1958).⁶²⁴ It appears that relations between the Jazz Club and the College authorities, and even some fellow students, were somewhat strained. After its 'stomps' were suspended owing to an incident where beer bottles were smashed in the

⁶²¹ Ian Carr, 'Novocastrian Jazz 1950s And Early 1960s', *Northern Review*, Vol.4, (Winter 1996), p.11.

⁶²² Alyn Shipton, *Out Of The Long Dark: The Life of Ian Carr*, (London, 2006), p.21.

⁶²³ Ian Carr, 'Novocastrian Jazz 1950s And Early 1960s', *Northern Review*, Vol.4, (Winter 1996), p.14.

⁶²⁴ *King's Courier*, October 11th, 1956, Vol. 9, No. 3, p.3 and May 9th, 1957, Vol. 10, No. 1, p.6.

refectory, a letter was received by the college paper, the *King's Courier*, an extract from which read:

*What sort of students spend their time shuffling and stomping? Have they ever stopped to listen to the noise, and to look at fellow revellers dispassionately? Have they ever considered the gross spectacle, as the seething mob jerks and jigs to the provocative rhythm that by its browbeating monotony reduces all to the same level of incipient depravity. That this gives an opportunity for relaxation...is a well known contention. The "N.U.S. News" feels that students who attend Jazz Stomps are saved from nervous breakdown: it seems that those who are weak-minded enough to find their studies more than they can bear, find great recompense in this happy pastime.*⁶²⁵

Clearly trad jazz was not to every student's taste. A second year Agriculture student agreed but interestingly revealed the prejudices of some at King's towards Newcastle's general population. He complained:

*Having paid 4/6 for something which was said to be "Dancing 8-12", we were treated to a Jazz Concert in which a male, "Straight from the Bigg Market" [traditionally the heart of Newcastle's plebeian drinking culture] sang. The dancers are, I suppose, to be forgiven for bopping, they could do little else to the rhythmless noise. I heard one Fresher say, "I never expected to see this at King's." I would like to add that I never expected to see Teddy Boys at King's, but I have.*⁶²⁶

It is equally intriguing that the caption for this missive was 'This Rock 'n' Roll!' As the band was reported to feature a trumpet player and no evidence appears to exist for a rock 'n' roll group in Newcastle as early as 1956 it is tempting to conclude that the author's snobbery was matched only by his ignorance of popular music. All of this is intended to illustrate the attitude of students at King's to jazz – obviously a sizeable minority were enthusiasts – and the relationship between 'town and gown'. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that throughout the period, whilst students did venture off campus to participate in the Newcastle scene, they often did so with some trepidation.

Perhaps owing to the difficulties of promoting jazz at King's, former student Mike Jeffery opened the University Jazz Club some time in 1957 at the Cordwainers Hall above the Gardeners Arms on Nelson Street – close to the notorious Bigg Market. This venture was the beginning of what Jeffery believed would be a lucrative involvement in Newcastle's club scene, as is indicated by Pearson's observation that, although ostensibly 'under the aegis of

⁶²⁵ *King's Courier*, November 8th, 1956, Vol. 9, No. 5, p.8.

⁶²⁶ *King's Courier*, November 8th, 1956, Vol. 9, No. 5, p.3.

the university, the profits all went to Jeffries [sic].⁶²⁷ According to Eric Burdon, who was regularly in attendance, ‘The best of the north-eastern music scene was represented at the club. It attracted a cross section of Student Union and street people.’⁶²⁸ The Sunday night venue had no alcohol licence and was therefore accessible to a younger crowd which Pearson remembers as ‘more of a non-jazz audience with a preponderance of female refugees from the ballrooms’ keen to take advantage of the dance floor.⁶²⁹ To his credit Jeffery continued the policy of providing access to teenagers under the legal drinking age even when he opened clubs that catered for an older audience, dividing the evening between ‘the Young Set’ and the late and often all-night sessions that followed. In this respect, whether motivated by profit or not, he did much to cultivate the Newcastle scene over the next six years.

Jeffery’s next project was the short-lived Marimba Coffee House (High Bridge Street. See Appendix, Maps: Fig. 4), opened in the second half of 1959, which was advertised as a ‘rendezvous created by students for students’. By day it served Italian food and ‘Snack Luncheons...to suit [the] student’s pocket and appetite’ but became a private membership club by night officially operating from eight until midnight while in reality often hosting all-night jazz sessions.⁶³⁰ These featured resident modern jazz quartet the EmCee Four lead by Mike Carr on piano and vibraphone who, having recently returned from National Service, had gathered around him a group of potentially world-class musicians including drummer Ronnie Stephenson and Gary Cox on tenor sax. According to Mike Carr this group, who would put their ‘Bebop from the East Coast’ on the British jazz map, first began performing at the Marimba. Carr recalled how:

It was just at that time that I met somehow Ronnie Stephenson and Gary Cox who used to drink in the pub opposite the Oxford Galleries somewhere, so I met them, and Mike Jefferies [sic] got the Downbeat. Actually before he got the Downbeat I think he used to have the Marimba Coffee House and we used to play there first, that’s what happened, that’s how I met him [Jeffery] actually, ‘cos he got that club.

By the time Mike’s brother Ian had returned from his own National Service – and a spell ‘bumming around happily’ in Europe – to join the group on trumpet in 1960, thus making it

⁶²⁷ George Pearson, *Sex, Brown Ale and Rhythm & Blues: The Life That Gave Birth To The Animals*, (Darlington, 1998), p.37.

⁶²⁸ Eric Burdon, *I Used To Be An Animal But I’m Alright Now*, (London, 1986), p.22.

⁶²⁹ George Pearson, *Sex, Brown Ale and Rhythm & Blues: The Life That Gave Birth To The Animals*, (Darlington, 1998), p.37.

⁶³⁰ The information on the Marimba is taken from an advertisement that appeared in the *King’s Courier*, October 1st, 1959, Vol. 12, No. 3, p.9. It was claimed that the Marimba was ‘Newcastle’s first and only coffee bar’.

the EmCee Five, Jeffery had opened the larger Downbeat club in a disused upstairs warehouse in Carlisl Square.⁶³¹ Mike Carr again:

So anyway, that's when the EmCee Five started and we were every Saturday night down there [at the Downbeat]. I got together with Ronnie Stephenson and Gary Cox when they finished every Saturday night at about 11.30 at the Oxford Galleries [playing in the Don Smith Orchestra]. So Ronnie used to get his drums down in the car and we'd get straight down to the Downbeat...and we used to play until about 3 o'clock in the morning and it was packed out. It was really good and it was another big success for Mike Jefferies [sic].⁶³²

With the demise of the Marimba and the transfer of the EmCee Five to the Downbeat, all the contemporary jazz forms were represented on a scene that was, in Ian Carr's recollection, 'buzzing with vitality' and judging by the recorded memories of many of the participants the highlight was undoubtedly the Saturday night residency of the EmCee Five. Owing to the regular introduction of original compositions by Mike Carr and Gary Cox there was a feeling that new ground was constantly being broken and the Downbeat:

...was always packed with young men and women, electric with expectation both musical and perhaps sexual. It was a heady mix. But the EmCee Five had a group cohesion and passion that was rare, and it was thrilling to be involved in that sweating, beaming, ecstatic music-making in the small hours of the morning with such an appreciative crowd of young fellows and pretty girls.⁶³³

The scene was also unavoidably incestuous as there were so few venues, and despite George Pearson's observation that the trad and modern jazz audience were divided into 'two camps that did not mix and despised each others [sic] taste in music', those with more eclectic tastes and particularly the established and aspiring younger musicians were seemingly happy to venture across musical boundaries which in other cities, and possibly in Liverpool especially, does not appear to have been the case.⁶³⁴ From the moment Eric Burdon enrolled at the Art College to begin training as a commercial artist in 1957 aged seventeen he began to infiltrate the jazz scene, pestering among others the Mighty Joe Young Band to let him up to sing the odd blues number. Burdon has stated how 'It was unheard of then for jazzmen to allow young rock-influenced punks like me to clamber on stage. But I got along with the band, as

⁶³¹ Ian Carr, 'Novocastrian Jazz 1950s And Early 1960s', *Northern Review*, Vol.4, (Winter 1996), p.14.

⁶³² Mike Carr, interview with the author, February 18th, 2009.

⁶³³ Ian Carr, 'Novocastrian Jazz 1950s And Early 1960s', *Northern Review*, Vol.4, (Winter 1996), p.13.

⁶³⁴ George Pearson, *Sex, Brown Ale and Rhythm & Blues: The Life That Gave Birth To The Animals*, (Darlington, 1998), p.185.

my jazz background had turned me on to Count Basie and Joe Turner.’⁶³⁵ What was perhaps more unusual was that someone of Burdon’s age should have a jazz background at all. Mike Carr recalled that Burdon employed his artistic talents to design the cover for the EmCee Five’s first record and that:

At the Downbeat Club he was always coming down to sit in and sing a blues with us. And there was one occasion when I had to go to do a little gig in Redcar and I said “would you like to come to Redcar with me tomorrow Eric...if you come I’ll buy you a few pints and I’ll give you ten bob as well”, and he came and we had a really good night.

*Eric was always good, he was a great enthusiast and he was steeped in the blues. He was a genuine article, he was really good.*⁶³⁶

As an early member of the coterie of young jazz beatniks with a penchant for rock ‘n’ roll that began to coalesce around Newcastle’s small but vibrant jazz scene from 1957, Pearson was in a position to witness Burdon and fellow art college student and jazz fan, John Steel, make their first tentative steps as performing musicians. He was also party to the escapades of what later became the nucleus of the Animals’ Newcastle following, the Squatters, who gained a degree of notoriety for their drunken and sometimes violent antics on weekend camping trips to small Northumbrian market towns.⁶³⁷ Burdon described the Squatters as ‘a motorcycle gang...without the motorcycles’ but their significance lay for him in the fact that they were a ‘gang’ that were ‘among the first [of his contemporaries] to embrace American music’. What is more, the inspiration for their outlook and quite possibly the camping trips was the work of the American Beat writers, Kerouac, Ferlinghetti, Ginsberg and Burroughs who seemed to them to have a connection to the music.⁶³⁸

All of this is to make the point that, far from being the exclusive province of London bohemians or jazz-loving university students, or for that matter King’s College art students, beat poetry and literature, ‘kitchen sink’ drama, continental film and fashion were all eagerly absorbed by these bright but otherwise ordinary Tyneside lads and lasses. Though admittedly comprising a minority of young people as a whole, these working and lower-middle class grammar school/art college students, apprentices and office workers were of a questing, questioning disposition. Whether Pearson, Burdon and Steel’s sojourn on Paris’ Left Bank in

⁶³⁵ Eric Burdon, *I Used To Be An Animal But I’m Alright Now*, (London, 1986), p.20.

⁶³⁶ Mike Carr, interview with the author, February 18th, 2009.

⁶³⁷ George Pearson, *Sex, Brown Ale and Rhythm & Blues: The Life That Gave Birth To The Animals*, (Darlington, 1998), pp.45-57.

⁶³⁸ Eric Burdon with J. Marshall Craig, *Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood*, (New York, 2001), pp.5 and 14.

1960 or Lennon's decision to blow his £100 twenty-first-birthday inheritance on a hitchhiking holiday to Paris with McCartney in 1961 – not to mention the Beatles' eagerness to explore Hamburg – it signifies what was for the time, an adventurousness and wilfully independent curiosity of spirit long before London loomed large in any of their lives.⁶³⁹

After abandoning their initial intention of performing as a trad jazz outfit upon the realisation that Burdon was just as unlikely to master the trombone as Steel was the trumpet, the Pagan Jazzmen, who then featured the future Gamblers Jim Crawford and Alan 'Blackie' Sanderson, decided instead to pursue their evolving passion for rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues as the Pagans.⁶⁴⁰ Following the departure of Crawford and Sanderson and the acquisition of pianist Alan Price, with Steel on drums and Burdon rapidly discovering his remarkably authentic blues vocal style, the group became the Kansas City Seven – with horn section – before shrinking to the Kansas City Five in time to take up a Friday night residency at the Downbeat.⁶⁴¹ With obvious satisfaction Burdon recalled that the inner circle were accorded certain privileges at the Downbeat in that 'There was a special club within a club downstairs, where Dave Finlay [the manager] would allow musicians and their girlfriends to get strung out on uppers and Newcastle Brown Ale.'⁶⁴² To further emphasise the creative participation of teenagers in the venues they frequented it should be noted that Jeffery enlisted an art college friend of Eric Burdon's by the name of Joe 'Tut' Pharoe to paint the Marimba's illuminated sign and also the interior of the Downbeat, which he decorated with murals based on the novels of Steinbeck. Later Burdon painted a 'huge mural' depicting jazz musicians behind the stage at the Club A' Go Go, where also Bryan Ferry claims to have assisted his friend David Sweetman – the future 'distinguished critic, poet, dramatist, restaurateur and film-maker' – to paint 'a New York skyline in fluorescent paint'.⁶⁴³

⁶³⁹ George Pearson, *Sex, Brown Ale and Rhythm & Blues: The Life That Gave Birth To The Animals*, (Darlington, 1998), pp.156-71 and Julia Baird, *Imagine This: growing up with my brother John Lennon*, (London, 2007), p.169.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.* pp.40-44.

⁶⁴¹ Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks – The Story of the Animals: Newcastle's Rising Sons*, (London, 2001), pp.16-17.

⁶⁴² Eric Burdon, *I Used To Be An Animal But I'm Alright Now*, (London, 1986), p.39. This preferential treatment must have been welcome as he later claimed that as a teenager he had once resorted to hiding under the stage in order to witness an appearance by Ronnie Scott. For simplicity's sake the above account of the future Animals' development condenses the years from 1957-61 when the Kansas City Five took up their residency at the Downbeat.

⁶⁴³ George Pearson, *Sex, Brown Ale and Rhythm & Blues: The Life That Gave Birth To The Animals*, (Darlington, 1998), pp.82, 142, 218 and, Michael Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model: Becoming Roxy Music*, (London, 2007), p.49.

As 1960 began the *Chronicle*'s 'Jazz Corner' announced, 'Tonight is an auspicious occasion for Newcastle jazz. It sees the first ever all-night session. PLACE? The new and thriving Downbeat Club in Carloli Square.'⁶⁴⁴ The session was organised by Malcolm Cecil, then bass player with the EmCee Five who featured along with the River City Jazzmen. Cecil was already something of a jazz veteran having toured with Ronnie Scott and Tubby Hayes and he became an influential presence on the Newcastle jazz scene for the duration of his National Service at the RAF's Catterick Camp.⁶⁴⁵ A week later the same column predicted that the year would witness 'a continued swing in the North-East, once a "trad" stronghold, towards modern jazz.' As a result, its author Geoff Phillips felt that the New Orleans Club was going to 'have its work cut out to retain its long-held position as Tyneside's premier jazz centre.' The Downbeat's success he put down to its providing 'traditional, mainstream and modern jazz in pleasant surroundings' while he feared that the Newcastle Jazz Club would not last twelve months due to 'dwindling audiences and possible demolition of the Royal Arcade' – his fears were realised on both counts.⁶⁴⁶ By March the Downbeat had acquired an alcohol licence prompting Mike Jeffery's promise that there would be 'an even stricter watch for any doubtful types' and his comment: 'A licence is hard to get – but easily lost.'⁶⁴⁷ The gradual demise of trad jazz foreseen by 'Jazz Corner' provoked the May headline 'Jazz fans are restless' and speculation in the 'Young and 20' column about the music's future in the city:

The clubs have found their level, with a hard core of Trad fans congregating at the New Orleans Club, the more fashionable "set" at the Downbeat Club, and the younger element congregating at Nelson Street.

I think that the fans are becoming tired. They may like New Orleans jazz, but they can get enough of the same tunes played night after night. So there is a tendency to creep away from Melbourne Street to the bright lights of the City Centre "to see what gives at the Downbeat tonight."⁶⁴⁸

The article called for more cooperation between venues and groups so as to revitalise the complacent scene, suggesting that hopefully 'the drift of bands from Newcastle to play in

⁶⁴⁴ *Evening Chronicle*, January 2nd, 1960, p.11.

⁶⁴⁵ Alyn Shipton, *Out Of The Long Dark: The Life of Ian Carr*, (London, 2006), p.40. Cecil 'was ultimately to become a significant figure in the popular music world, becoming firstly a pioneer of synthesizers, and secondly, after emigrating to the United States in 1967, a long-term colleague of [producer for] Stevie Wonder.' His place was taken by John O'Carroll, who played in the Don Smith Orchestra with Stephenson and Cox.

⁶⁴⁶ *Evening Chronicle*, January 9th, 1960, p.11.

⁶⁴⁷ *Evening Chronicle*, April 2nd, 1960, p.6.

⁶⁴⁸ *Evening Chronicle*, May 7th, 1960, p.6.

Durham, Sunderland, Stockton and Darlington should force [some healthy] competition.’ Judging by the swift and partisan response of readers who joined the debate it is clear that in the opinion of some jazz fans rivalry did exist. A certain G. J. Herrick wished to assure readers that, ‘Last week the New Orleans Club was so packed on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights that members had to be turned away.’ Furthermore, as there were ’12 working bands in Newcastle – a figure second only to London and Manchester’, he or she was of the opinion that both venues were entirely sustainable, that attendances demonstrated the fact that members obviously enjoyed listening to the ‘same tunes night after night’, and that the impossibility of cooperation between certain Newcastle bands was in any case ‘well known’. New Orleans patrons were adamant that the Downbeat ‘represents no danger’ while an anonymous spokesperson for the Downbeat was sure that a number of people had permanently switched allegiance.⁶⁴⁹ This intriguing slice of gossip from Newcastle club-land illustrates that friction did exist between rival venues and bands who, when pushed, were not above invoking that old trad versus modern chestnut.

Mid-1960, three developments were reported in the *Chronicle* that would have profound implications for the future of the Newcastle scene all of which were at the instigation or at least originated in collusion with Mike Jeffery. The first appears, with the benefit of hindsight, to be a conspicuously prescient call on Jeffery’s part for a Newcastle rhythm and blues group. The article read:

Mike’s suggestion is for a rhythm and blues band – note “rhythm and blues” as opposed to “rock”.

The line-up for this would probably be a good blues vocalist, a thumping piano and a couple of guitars – possibly electric. A tenor sax would also be a good addition...

This may seem a rather startling idea, but anyone who has ever heard any Muddy Waters records knows what an exciting and listenable form of jazz R and B is.

I am all for Mike’s idea, and I think that house-room would probably be found some night at the Downbeat for such a group. So, blues fans. How about it...?⁶⁵⁰

Apparently it was a ‘plan’ Jeffery had been ‘turning over in his mind for some time’, which, given how early this was, and in light of subsequent events seems quite astonishing. The

⁶⁴⁹ *Evening Chronicle*, May 14th, 1960, p.6.

⁶⁵⁰ *Evening Chronicle*, May 21st, 1960, p.6.

second was Jeffery's decision to begin promoting London-based jazz bands at the Downbeat beginning in June with modern jazz outfit the Joe Harriot Quintet. Readers were reminded that 'This will be the first time that any London jazz band has played a club date in Newcastle', a 'bold step' and a precedent for which Jeffery should be applauded 'heartily'.⁶⁵¹ More importantly however, it was an indication that Jeffery was growing in confidence and keen to establish contacts in London. Third and finally, just as Clem Avery's (trad) jazz band 'walked out of their Tuesday night Downbeat session' due to poor attendances, and Hughie Aitchison and Ronnie MacLean vowed to 'struggle on' at the New Orleans despite an audience of 'a dozen or fewer', Jeffery announced that the Downbeat would begin Saturday afternoon 'record sessions' in a bid 'to capture teenagers'. It was explained that:

This may seem like the death blow to the "jazz spirit" to many people but Mike Jeffery says that the sessions will be about 90 per cent jazz and 10 per cent pop.

*He has high hopes that the teenagers will be lured in by the promise of pop – and will emerge converted to jazz.*⁶⁵²

Given Jeffery's apparent ability to sense a change in wind direction it is probable that he was aware the percentages were likely to alter in favour of 'pop' and the number of converts prove negligible.

In the recollection of Ian Carr, 'By the beginning of 1961, it became clear that some kind of general artistic flowering was happening in Newcastle' what with the EmCee Five drawing in the jazz crowd and the Kansas City Five, in line perhaps with Jeffery's 'plan', becoming increasingly popular with the younger rhythm and blues audience.⁶⁵³ To add to the growing feeling that the North East might not be so culturally isolated after all some of the leading jazz musicians of the day took to turning up at the Downbeat for impromptu jam sessions after appearing at the City Hall. Future BBC Radio producer John Walters, then a King's student and trumpet player with the Mighty Joe Young Band, reported in his jazz column for *The Journal* that John Dankworth had hailed Newcastle as a 'little Chicago' after his entire

⁶⁵¹ *Evening Chronicle*, June 11th, 1960, p.6. In the edition for August 13th, 1960, p.6, after the first two concerts had taken place the paper declared that contrary to the notion that the Downbeat is just a 'hanger-on' to the popularity of the jazz boom, 'Mike Jeffery is doing all he can to bring good jazz to Newcastle. Long may he flourish!'

⁶⁵² *Evening Chronicle*, October 21st, 1960, p.12, and November 25th, 1960, p.16.

⁶⁵³ Ian Carr, 'Novocastrian Jazz 1950s And Early 1960s', *Northern Review*, Vol.4, (Winter 1996), p.14.

band had shown up for one such session.⁶⁵⁴ The *Evening Chronicle* reported that ‘members of the [Dankworth] band were still playing at four and five o’clock on Tuesday morning.’⁶⁵⁵ On another occasion, the Emcee Five played into the ‘wee small hours’ with members of Count Basie’s band who declared Ronnie Stephenson ‘a great little drummer’ before leaving him to a standing ovation at 3.30am.⁶⁵⁶ To an outsider, as Hilton Valentine still was at that stage:

Yes, I do remember it as being a jazz scene, but I went up there [Newcastle] to see the rock and roll bands, not the jazzers. Having said that, there was a fine line between the jazzers and those that liked and played the blues.

[The Downbeat audience] were something of a clique I suppose, but I guess that can be said of any group that goes to hear a particular sound. They were into more jazz and r’n’b than main street pop...

...it just seemed that those from the University crowd were the ones that were “different” and I imagine that it was the same as other university crowds. We thought of them as Beatniks.⁶⁵⁷

Focussing on Newcastle’s intimate group of jazz musicians, the emergent rhythm and blues clique and their fellow travellers of the early 1960s is to focus on a much smaller scene than that which developed more or less contemporaneously in Liverpool. To a large extent this is unavoidable. First because if there is truth in the unsubstantiated claim made by Tremlett in his biography of the Who, that in 1963 of 20,000 groups in the country, there were 400 in Liverpool and 600 in Newcastle, it is surely incredible that besides the Animals none, with the partial exception of the Gamblers, should ‘make it’ beyond the confines of Tyneside.⁶⁵⁸ Second because, although it would be possible to compile a list naming perhaps 100 groups emanating from the wider North East from the cuttings of local newspapers for the first half of the sixties, it seems likely that the vast majority of these 600 groups, if indeed they existed, were formed in the wake of Beatle-mania and progressed little further than the nearest church hall or working men’s club. Similarly, following the success of the Animals and their subsequent departure to London in 1964 there emerged several rhythm and blues groups

⁶⁵⁴ *The Journal*, December 6th, 1963, p.6. This was a retrospective piece lamenting the departure of Mike Carr from the city.

⁶⁵⁵ *Evening Chronicle*, February 10th, 1961, p.7.

⁶⁵⁶ Ian Carr, ‘Novocastrian Jazz 1950s And Early 1960s’, *Northern Review*, Vol.4, (Winter 1996), p.16.

⁶⁵⁷ Hilton Valentine in correspondence with the author, February 10th, 2009.

⁶⁵⁸ G. Tremlett, *The Who*, (London, 1975), p.14, cited in Dick Bradley, *Understanding Rock ‘n’ Roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, (Buckingham, 1992), p.73.

hoping to catch the spotlight as, for a fleeting moment, it passed over the Club A' Go Go before disappearing – as fast as the Animals had done – back down south.

Newcastle City Council Cultural Activities Committee

In September 1956, the City Council's Cultural Activities Committee met to discuss their apparent failure to encourage 'culture' in Newcastle beyond the nominal sums allocated to a select group of amateur dramatic and choral societies and the occasional visiting orchestra. The ensuing debate is of interest in so far as it illustrates the councillors' understanding of what constituted 'culture' and the relative positions of jazz and rock 'n' roll within the cultural hierarchy. Councillor Fletcher declared that whoever had given the committee its title, 'for the encouragement of cultural activities', must have had a sense of humour'. It was not enough, he continued, for the Committee to meet twice a year to 'dole out' £1,000 to a handful of organisations as he believed that 'It is not everyone whose cultural orbit is bounded by St. James' Park on a Saturday afternoon and rock 'n' roll music the rest of the week' and they would do better to sponsor a brass band contest or hold organ recitals in the City Hall. Councillor Smith concurred, bemoaning the fact that the hall had recently been sold out for a Humphrey Lyttleton concert – 'because his music is easy to understand' – and that their task was to encourage an interest in the works of Beethoven and Mozart for which it was necessary to 'have an elementary appreciation of music.' Councillor Cowan acknowledged the fact that 'the Newcastle Glee and Madrigal Society [was not] the effective answer to rock 'n' roll', but felt that an interest in the arts and culture should be stimulated through education for which there was already a substantial budget and that culture, 'the attitude of one's appreciation towards the art of living...is not a matter for the Council.'⁶⁵⁹

Essentially then, the Council was firmly in favour of 'high culture' but lacked the funds for its adequate support whilst rock 'n' roll was deemed to occupy a position at the bottom of the cultural pile along with football. Jazz ranked a little higher although the Committee thought its chief utility lay in the possibility of promoting jazz concerts in order to 'subsidise the classics'.⁶⁶⁰ This was to remain the Council's official policy for the period under discussion even when, after 'considering its position' for three years, it eventually decided to contribute funds and facilities to the Tyneside Arts Festival which had been organised unilaterally by

⁶⁵⁹ Committee for the Encouragement of Cultural Activities, September 19th, 1956 – Proceedings of the Newcastle Council, 1956-57, pp.334-40.

⁶⁶⁰ Committee for the Encouragement of Cultural Activities, September 19th, 1956 – Proceedings of the Newcastle Council, 1956-57, p.481.

King's College since 1958. Despite the usual bureaucratic platitudes about putting 'Newcastle on the map [as] Edinburgh has done with its musical festival' and how 'Teenagers should not be omitted, and a jazz concert should be included', it was not until the Council was approached by Ian Carr that they agreed to him promoting a concert at the City Hall as part of the expanded festival planned for 1961.⁶⁶¹ In an attempt to establish the music's credibility Carr had formed the Newcastle Jazz Committee as 'a pressure group to fight ignorance, bigotry and the people who refused to allow jazz to take its rightful place in the artistic life of the community.'⁶⁶² The committee which was chaired by John Walters purported to represent the hundred or so working jazz musicians in the area and was the product of an unofficial meeting convened by Carr to discuss the possibility of 'putting Newcastle more firmly on the map as a cultural centre.' In attendance were the aforementioned councillors, Ted Fletcher and T. Dan Smith, plus local writer, novelist and champion of North-East culture, Sid Chaplin. Unfortunately nothing much else came of this informal get together other than Fletcher's apparently sincere if impractical suggestion that the EmCee Five be paid £70 per man a week out of the municipal coffers to stay in the region.⁶⁶³

Carr reported to the Council that the jazz concert he'd promoted at the City Hall as part of the 1961 festival was a popular success but a commercial failure.⁶⁶⁴ His subsequent treatment by the Cultural Activities Committee is indicative of their attitude to the whole enterprise which they had rather gratefully agreed to on the proviso 'that the musicians were prepared to take part in the Concert for whatever profit may arise from the Concert, and failing that, free of charge.'⁶⁶⁵ When he requested financial assistance from the Committee to cover his losses and to reimburse some of the musicians, 'Mr. Carr' was informed of their decision that his

⁶⁶¹ Committee for the Encouragement of Cultural Activities, September 19th, 1956 – Proceedings of the Newcastle Council, 1956-57, p.339 and Conference of the Cultural Activities Committee and Cultural Societies, May 14th, 1959 – Corporation of Newcastle upon Tyne, General Committee Minute Book, No.20, p.131.

⁶⁶² From an undated article in *The Journal* entitled 'Men With A Mission', 1962, cited in, Alyn Shipton, *Out Of The Long Dark: The Life of Ian Carr*, (London, 2006), p.51.

⁶⁶³ Alyn Shipton, *Out Of The Long Dark: The Life of Ian Carr*, (London, 2006), p.51. Apparently Ian Carr was moved by T. Dan Smith's deep-felt desire to transform Newcastle's urban landscape – Smith read poetry on the subject – Chaplin was less sympathetic 'murmuring that if Smith's preferred high-rise solution was really about the creation of 'vertical villages', then by rights they would have a pub and a church stuck on top.'

⁶⁶⁴ Meeting Re Arts Festival 1961, June 15th, 1961 – Corporation of Newcastle upon Tyne, General Committee Minute Book, No.20, p.482.

⁶⁶⁵ Cultural Activities Sub-Committee As To Arts Festival, October 20th, 1960 – Corporation of Newcastle upon Tyne, General Committee Minute Book, No.20, p.318.

‘application for the musicians fees be declined.’⁶⁶⁶ Although the inclusion of jazz concerts in the 1962 Centenary of the Blaydon Races celebrations suggests that jazz had become semi-respectable, or at least it had become politically expedient to include it as a token gesture to a growing teenage constituency, the music was no longer at the cutting edge of youth music culture which was in the process of moving on to the sounds of home-grown rock ‘n’ roll in the shape of beat and rhythm and blues. While jazz was gradually if begrudgingly acknowledged as ‘art music’, and skiffle had been tolerated as a relatively harmless juvenile craze to be permitted in youth clubs, rock ‘n’ roll and its offspring were never given official sanction or recognised as anything other than a nuisance by the authorities in Newcastle and Tyneside.

The enthusiasm for jazz among King’s College students, especially those in the art department, has been established and the testimony of Pearson, Burdon and Steel has confirmed Frith and Horne’s assertion that jazz and blues were ‘essential art school listening’. Newcastle College of Art and Industrial Design offered a breathing space between the worlds of school and work and an atmosphere in which a serious appreciation of jazz and rhythm and blues could be developed. For Frith and Horne ‘Such seriousness was reinforced in the 1950s by the rise of modern jazz and its association with existentialism and the formal avant-garde.’ In their view the most important feature of the ‘trad’ versus ‘mod’ debate was that it demonstrated just how much the music mattered.⁶⁶⁷ There is also Francis Newton’s argument that the primary distinction between a jazz fan and a pop fan is that the former ‘is passionately ‘anti-commercial’ to the point where the mere fact that an artist attracts the larger box-office is regarded as *prima facie* evidence of musical treason.’⁶⁶⁸ This was a serious matter for musicians who were in any case also fans, however in reality there was little urgency in the need to resolve the tensions between authenticity and commercial interests as long as the Newcastle scene was just that – local. It could be argued that such concerns were a luxury that musicians of any social background could ill afford were they to harbour genuine ambition to succeed in their chosen field. Which is to suggest that, with the exception of those jazz players at King’s who dabbled in Newcastle’s nightlife whilst fairly secure in the knowledge that a good career beckoned, for those at the art college or working

⁶⁶⁶ Cultural Activities Committee, July 20th, 1961 – Corporation of Newcastle upon Tyne, General Committee Minute Book, No.20, p.490.

⁶⁶⁷ Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop*, (London, 1987), pp.56 and 77.

⁶⁶⁸ Francis Newton, *The Jazz Scene*, (Harmondsworth, 1961), p.223, cited in, Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop*, (London, 1987), p.77. Francis Newton was the *nom de plume* of historian Eric Hobsbawm which he used when writing about his second passion, jazz.

in apprenticeships or what they considered to be boring ‘dead end’ jobs, the unlikely possibility of success as a rock ‘n’ roll or rhythm and blues musician promised escape, and for that any contradiction between serious musical appreciation and serious ambition could be left ‘on the back burner’.

The Social Structure of Newcastle and Tyneside

Here it is necessary to pause and consider the social structure of Newcastle and Tyneside. Its chief mid-twentieth-century characteristics were inherited from the enormous and rapid industrialisation and urbanisation of the nineteenth century. In general terms ‘The dominance of local migration streams, along with a particular and narrow economic base, helped the creation of a distinctive urban-industrial culture’, which was still in place during the immediate post-1945 period. The distinctive features of the industrial North East remained coal mining, shipbuilding and engineering, staple industries requiring high levels of normally male skilled and semi-skilled labour. Despite the increased spending power and job opportunities, particularly for the young working class that occurred during the 1956-65 period, the overall pattern was one of decline in these staple industries and a consequent outflow of population – ‘usually of younger and more active people.’⁶⁶⁹

Although, as Briggs observed, from the mid-Victorian period ‘Newcastle, Gateshead, North Shields, South Shields, Wallsend and Jarrow made up a great new urban complex’ – Tyneside – Newcastle had always been its regional, commercial and cultural centre (See Appendix, Maps: Fig. 2).⁶⁷⁰ Bill Lancaster has described how the ‘relentless rise of the region’s ‘carboniferous capitalism’ took place outside the city walls’ while ‘Newcastle’s primary functions over the last two centuries have been commerce and consumption.’⁶⁷¹ This tendency was especially pronounced by the mid-1950s when the decline in manufacturing employment was counterbalanced by growth in the tertiary sector. Levels of male employment decreased in all industrial categories and female employment in service industries was the only area of growth.⁶⁷² In 1961, the percentage of Newcastle’s workforce employed in manufacturing was just under 29%, a large proportion of whom worked at the

⁶⁶⁹ Mike Barke, ‘The People of Newcastle: A Demographic History’, in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001), p.166.

⁶⁷⁰ Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, (London, 1963), p.28.

⁶⁷¹ Bill Lancaster, ‘Newcastle – capital of what?’, Rob Colls and Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism*, (2nd edition, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2005), p.55.

⁶⁷² Michael Barke, ‘Newcastle/Tyneside 1890-1980’, in George Gordon, *Regional Cities in the UK 1890-1980*, (London, 1986), pp.136-37.

Armstrong engineering works at Elswick in the city's west end or in the shipbuilding related industries that began at Walker in the east. Around 50% of the working population were employed in distribution and catering, bank and finance, communications and services – including the public sector.⁶⁷³ Newcastle was therefore predominantly a city of office and retail workers. Traditional working class enclaves in and around the city centre were in the process of being uprooted as part of the re-development plan. Swathes of nineteenth-century terraced housing were demolished and their communities dispersed to overspill sites such as Killingworth New Town and other large outlying estates – in east-end Byker alone approximately 5,000 households were relocated.⁶⁷⁴ The middle-class suburbs of Jesmond and Gosforth were left relatively undisturbed (See Appendix, Maps: Fig. 2).

Brian Bennison argues that re-development also had a cultural impact:

*The process was seen at its most dramatic in the Newcastle of the 1960s when many public houses were cleared away in the great wave of renewal that swamped working-class residential areas and the city centre. The mark of masculinity, adulthood and membership of a social group associated with a particular neighbourhood – identified by one researcher as the essence of traditional drinking in Newcastle – was progressively erased as scores of street corner pubs were demolished.*⁶⁷⁵

This may go some way to explain the fact that by the mid-1960s the national ratio of pubs to social clubs had fallen from 15:1 at the turn of the century, to 3:1. In Newcastle the ratio was 2:1 arguably due to the scale of demolition but also because the traditional associational culture of Tyneside skilled labour favoured the working men's club.⁶⁷⁶ It is tempting to infer from this tradition of organised associational culture that it may in some way have been responsible for the relatively unproblematic assimilation of Irish migrants to Tyneside in the nineteenth century in a way that did not occur in the casual labour market of Liverpool. However, without further research this can only be conjecture.

⁶⁷³ These percentages are taken from, Census of England and Wales, County Report Northumberland, reproduced in, Natasha Vall, 'The Emergence of the Post-Industrial Economy in Newcastle 1914-2000', in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001), Figure 3.2, Economic structure of Newcastle 1961-91 by rates of occupation, p.61.

⁶⁷⁴ Michael Barke, 'Newcastle/Tyneside 1890-1980', in George Gordon, *Regional Cities in the UK 1890-1980*, (London, 1986), pp.123, 134, 140.

⁶⁷⁵ Brian Bennison, 'Drink in Newcastle', in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001), p.187.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p.188.

The Demographics of Youth on Tyneside

Statistics taken from the censuses of 1951 and 1961 for the county of Northumberland show that the number of 14-20-year-olds increased significantly in all boroughs and districts including – unlike on Merseyside – the central county borough of Newcastle upon Tyne (See Appendix, Maps: Fig. 8).⁶⁷⁷ The figures are as follows:

Number aged 14-20	1951	1961	Increase
Newcastle upon Tyne C.B.	26,244	27,040	+ 796
Tynemouth C.B.	6,346	6,869	+ 523
Gosforth U.D.	1,797	2,555	+ 758
Longbenton U.D.	2,704	4,503	+ 1,799
Newburn U.D.	1,984	2,529	+ 545
Wallsend M.B.	4,470	5,265	+855
Whitley Bay U.D.	2,257	3,442	+ 1,185

Housing clearance programmes in central areas such as Shieldfield and Byker, which lay within Newcastle upon Tyne C.B., may explain the relatively modest increase in teenagers there and also the large rise in their numbers in Longbenton, one of several districts whose population was swollen through overspill. For Northumberland Administrative County as a whole there was an increase of 8,276 – from 71,948 to 80,224 – 14-20-year-olds between 1951 and 1961, 52,203 of whom were resident in the seven boroughs and districts listed above. Although there is evidence that social and working men’s clubs and church and village halls were used as venues by Tyneside groups, particularly in their formative stages, the network of suburban ‘jive hives’ and the promoters who ran them on Merseyside are simply not in evidence on North and South Tyneside. The dominance of Newcastle in the leisure/entertainment sphere is illustrated by a report that appeared in the *Evening Chronicle*

⁶⁷⁷ All statistics in this section are taken from the General Register Office, Census 1951, England and Wales – County Report: Northumberland (London HMSO, 1954), Table 23 – Ages (single years) under 21, pp. 66-67. General Register Office, Census 1961, England and Wales – County Report: Northumberland (London HMSO, 1963), Table 7 – Age (single years) under 21, pp. 16-20. Statistics for North Tyneside are provided only, as it was not possible to locate the 1951 census for County Durham. Nonetheless the available figures should suffice to demonstrate demographic trends.

during October 1964 which read: 'Wallsend teenagers are "fed up with the Saturday night migration" they have to make in search of entertainment. The town they say is dull and completely lacking in facilities for them.'⁶⁷⁸ Apparently Wallsend lacked even a cinema and a dance hall while 18-year-old Brenda Hartshorne complained: 'It makes you sick. There's really nothing unless you like bingo and whist drives. So every time you want to go out you go to the coast or into the City.'

Youth Employment

As in Liverpool, it is possible to show that the vast majority of Newcastle and Tyneside's young beat group members were also employed in some rather more conventional capacity. When groups were featured in the local newspapers it was customary to give name, place of origin, age and current or even former occupation if they had taken the risk of becoming professional. Groups did not usually 'go professional' until they were offered some kind of financial security which, as this nearly always required a record contract or a deal with a management or booking agency, invariably meant just before or when they moved to London. Thus, even as the Animals were celebrating their transatlantic hit record 'House of the Rising Sun' during the summer of 1964, the *Evening Chronicle* was careful to point out that Chas Chandler's first job was as 'an apprentice turner...with the Tyneside company of Blackett Charlton.' With the exception of Burdon all the Animals attended grammar school before Price became an income tax officer, Steel briefly sold wallpaper and paint in Bainbridge's department store, Valentine trained as a machinist with Thor Tools, and Burdon as a draughtsman for the North Eastern Electricity Board.⁶⁷⁹

The Gamblers turned professional at the end of 1962 on the strength of their residency at the Majestic and with the confidence instilled by their manager Jack Henderson who went on to secure them a lucrative tour of American Service bases in West Germany. Henderson told the *Chronicle* that 'In order to do this, the lads gave up jobs ranging from a salesman to a coppersmith' and 'they have poured all their savings into the purchase of a new van' for the forthcoming tour.⁶⁸⁰ In the aftermath of the Beat Boom and the success of the Animals and the Gamblers many North-East groups took the plunge and headed for London. Of the numerous examples for which there is evidence, two will suffice. First Shorty and Them

⁶⁷⁸ *Evening Chronicle*, October 20th, 1964, p. 7.

⁶⁷⁹ *Evening Chronicle*, 'Spotlight on the Animals', August 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd, and 29th, 1964, Leisure Guide, p.ii.

⁶⁸⁰ *Evening Chronicle*, February 22nd, 1963, p.9.

who, barring the fact that they do not appear to have had any guarantees before they left but still actually got a record deal, were typical of the phenomenon and provide further confirmation that these groups were not fleeing unemployment. In February 1964, Shorty and Them, from the Tyneside townships of Hebburn and Jarrow, packed in their day jobs – as a heating design technician, a fitter-turner, a store-keeper and a clerk – with the intention of making an impression in the capital. Following a chance meeting with the head of A. B. Entertainments, Brian Mason, who secured them a recording contract with the Philips subsidiary Fontana, and a busy schedule touring southern dance halls, they were back in Newcastle after only two months in London to promote their debut single, a version of Bo Diddley's 'Pills'. Mason had also negotiated an appearance on the BBC's regional flagship programme 'Look North' to be broadcast from their Newcastle studios and claimed to be in the process of booking them onto 'Ready, Steady, Go!' and 'Thank Your Lucky Stars'. Unfortunately after this brief flourish of publicity they seem to have disappeared as rapidly as they'd arrived – a fate that awaited the vast majority.⁶⁸¹

Also at the beginning of 1964, 'one of the North's leading pop groups', the Silver Dollars, announced that they would shortly be making 'the trip to Soho to see if they can gain some recognition.' They obviously felt that the time was right having come second in the 'Top Group of the North' competition held at the City Hall the previous year. John McNestry, civil engineer and bass player confessed:

We have no illusions about fame. We fully realise what a rocky road to success is like. That is why we are hanging on to our jobs although we have had many offers to turn professional.

*We intend to follow the example of the Dave Clark Five and only turn professional if we make some hit records.*⁶⁸²

Employment prospects for young people in the North East taken for the period as a whole were favourable, especially in Newcastle itself, where opportunities tended to be better than in the surrounding region because the economy was more mixed – retail and service orientated. In statistical terms unemployment figures as presented in the quarterly reports of the City Council's Youth Employment Officer show that the number of applications for assistance in finding work remained steady through the second half of the 1950s, and that the number of vacancies notified by employers tended to match or exceed demand except during

⁶⁸¹ *Evening Chronicle*, April 4th, 1964, p.1.

⁶⁸² *Evening Chronicle*, February 1st, 1964, p.5.

the summer months when the majority of school leavers entered the market. However, concern began to be expressed at the number of boys that were unable to find suitable work – the trade of their choice – due to there being insufficient apprenticeships and letters were sent encouraging the major firms in the area to provide more. The Youth Employment Sub-Committee was also anxious about the problems that might be created by the increase in the number of teenagers expected to enter the job market in the early sixties owing to the post-war ‘bulge’ or ‘baby boom’. These fears were justified. In September 1962 at a meeting of the Special Sub-Committee it was reported that:

Unfortunately the increase in school leavers has coincided with an increase in unemployment among older boys and girls and the number of vacancies, particularly for girls, has been lower than for the last five years. At one time there were 12 boys and 5 girls for every job. There has been a startling and unexpected deterioration in the position for girls.

For the first time since the beginning of September there have been several days when there have been no office vacancies for either 15-year-old or grammar school girls, and for the first time almost all retail vacancies have been filled and there is even a shortage of factory work. Five to six girls are being submitted to every job notified.

There have been insufficient apprenticeships and good training vacancies available for boys. Although the actual number of apprenticeships available has been about the same there have been more boys requiring them. The main problem is a general shortage of all types of jobs, particularly for the older boy.⁶⁸³

Nine months later it was recommended that the Committee’s chairman and the YEO should bring to the attention of the Minister of Labour ‘the demoralising effect of long periods of unemployment among young people.’⁶⁸⁴ Despite the alarm the director of the North-East Development Council, Mr. Chetwynd, reminded the Council that the unemployment problem in Newcastle must be considered in the context of ‘the whole of the region and against the background of national affairs. In fact [he said] the percentage of unemployed in Newcastle was not so high as in other parts of the region. The percentage for the region was, however, 3.7% compared with the national average of 2.1%.⁶⁸⁵ Translated into actual numbers there were 500 boys and 323 girls registered as unemployed in Newcastle when Chetwynd spoke,

⁶⁸³ Youth Employment Sub-Committee, Meeting of Special Sub-Committee, September 17th, 1962 – Newcastle upon Tyne Education Committee, Minutes 1962-63, Vol.LIX, minute 646.

⁶⁸⁴ Youth Employment Sub-Committee, July 2nd, 1963 – Newcastle upon Tyne Education Committee, Minutes 1963-64, Vol.LX, minute 449.

⁶⁸⁵ Youth Employment Sub-Committee, Meeting of Special Sub-Committee, September 17th, 1962 – Newcastle upon Tyne Education Committee, Minutes 1962-63, Vol.LIX, minute 647.

but when the July figures are considered, when the predicted boom in school leavers shows up the total number of unemployed was 1,803 rising to 2,046 for 1963 compared to just 1,245 in 1960.⁶⁸⁶

There was then rising youth unemployment in Newcastle and the surrounding region during the years of the beat and rhythm and blues boom although it appears that the majority of participants in the music scene were relatively unaffected. For the brightest and the most ambitious the problem seems to have been a lack of the right kind of jobs, a fact that was recognised in a newspaper article at the beginning of 1964 entitled ‘North exodus must stop at all costs’. Chairman of the Tyneside Productivity Association, Mr. Harry Ross, declared that ‘Every encouragement must be given to potential geniuses – the modern Swans, Stephensons, Parsons and Armstrongs – if we can find them’. Ross insisted that steps needed to be taken to prevent skilled labour and technicians leaving the North East for better pay and prospects in the South.⁶⁸⁷ Taken in this context the southward migration of the Gamblers, the Animals, Shorty and Them and the Silver Dollars *et al*, each containing individuals with a variety of skills, can be viewed as conforming to a general pattern consisting of the migration of skilled labour away from the North East.

King’s College, Art Students and the Newcastle Scene

Paul Usherwood has written that the basic design course at King’s College – run during the fifties and sixties by the London artists Victor Pasmore and Richard Hamilton – was an example of art being taught from a metropolitan perspective without there being ‘any real connection between the kind of art that students at King’s produced, or aspired to produce, and art produced outside the college.’ He argues that despite the fact that Hamilton later gained an international reputation as a ‘Pop’ artist, in 1961 ‘few in Newcastle outside the college...knew of his work either as teacher or practitioner.’ Nevertheless, Usherwood does acknowledge that it was the prospect of being ‘initiated into the mysteries of officially authorised ‘modern’, which is to say, ‘metropolitan’ art’ that attracted students and was the reason for the basic course’s national reputation. But he also insists that exhibitions of local art such as those organised by the Federation of Northern Art Societies at the city’s Laing

⁶⁸⁶ Youth Employment Sub-Committee, Meeting of Special Sub-Committee, September 17th, 1962 – Newcastle upon Tyne Education Committee, Minutes 1962-63, Vol.LIX, minute 646 and Youth Employment Sub-Committee, October 1st, 1963 – Newcastle upon Tyne Education Committee, Minutes 1963-64, Vol.LX, minute 449.

⁶⁸⁷ *Evening Chronicle*, January 16th, 1964, p.10.

Gallery were shunned by King's students who 'tended always to think of going to London rather than staying put in Newcastle.'⁶⁸⁸ Marian Scott is less dismissive of Hamilton's efforts in particular, citing the evening classes he gave to FNAS members at the Laing she insists that 'the radical approach to the teaching of art at King's did have a catalytic effect upon the cultural activities of the city itself.' However, when Pasmore helped a group of local amateur artists establish the Univision Gallery in the Bigg Market in 1957 – where exhibitions were held by both FNAS members and King's students with the aim of bringing the latest abstract work to the city – the *Sunday Sun* remarked somewhat facetiously, that 'None of the rock 'n' roll fans went to see it' and the opening night went unnoticed by the Teddy boys and girls across the passage who preferred to drink and listen to the juke box.⁶⁸⁹ Given the incongruity of abstract art and rock 'n' roll, at least as can be imagined in the minds of both students and Teddy boys and girls at the time, this seems hardly surprising. That said, the gallery's founders, Bill Smith and Harry and Alan Lord, together with 'abstract expressionist' Scott Dobson, did succeed in selling ten paintings to Bill Haley 'in their biggest deal to date' following his appearance at the Newcastle Odeon in February 1957.⁶⁹⁰ In general though, it appears likely that students' social activities had more impact on the wider population than their art. Usherwood has suggested that the later success of such King's alumni (and students of Hamilton) as Bryan Ferry and the playwright David Storey was 'probably more a consequence of the college's social mix and the open, enquiring attitude it engendered than of anything they learned from their tutors about art', which raises the question once more of the relationship between 'town and gown'. Having previously examined the involvement of King's students in the jazz scene it now becomes necessary to consider their participation in

⁶⁸⁸ Paul Usherwood, 'Art on the Margins: from Bewick to Baltic', in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001), pp.254-56. Critic and historian, and King's student at the time, John A. Walker recalled that 'Students tended to assume ...that the logical outcome of their time at King's was not so much design in the real world as abstract paintings and constructions in the approved Victor Pasmore manner.' See *ibid.* p.254. Hamilton taught at King's from 1953 to 1966. His most widely known work is the sleeve design for the Beatles' White Album. Another reason for the popularity of the course was that Newcastle (King's) and Reading were 'the only universities in England, outside London, where one could study fine art as an honours degree at that time.' See Michael Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model: Becoming Roxy Music*, (London, 2007), p.70.

⁶⁸⁹ *Sunday Sun*, August 11th, 1957, p.9 and, Marian Scott, 'Post-War Developments in Art in Newcastle: Was it a Golden Age?', *Northern Review*, (Winter 1996), Vol.4, pp.41-43.

⁶⁹⁰ *Sunday Sun*, February 2nd, 1957, p.5. Dobson was also a serious jazz fan and wrote a jazz column for the *Evening Chronicle*. He was a champion of Northern art, in 1965 calling upon Newcastle artists to 'stop aping London and go Geordie...Stay here, paint good pictures...and London will come here.' *Evening Chronicle*, June 7th, 1965, p.4.

the wider youth culture, specifically Newcastle's night life and the emerging rhythm and blues scene of the early sixties.

Scott has pointed out that Hamilton did encourage his students to look beyond the narrow confines of fine art by attending lunchtime 'bops' at the Majestic Ballroom thereby fulfilling 'a need for expression' and opening up 'new and exciting forms of social life.'⁶⁹¹ This is confirmed by the recollections of former students Rita Donagh and Mark Lancaster. Donagh:

*Peter Moore took us. He was a student who was a local boy, whose father was a piano player in Newcastle, and he discovered it. It was the place where American rock and roll was first heard in Newcastle. They were all wonderful dancers, the office girls, they would make long lines and do these incredible moves. I started at Newcastle in 1956, and then it was all about discovering these different things. By the early 1960s, the city had become quite famous for music...*⁶⁹²

Lancaster was Hamilton's star pupil and something of a style icon among his peers particularly after he returned from his first visit to New York in 1964 where he had swept the floor and stretched the canvases for Andy Warhol in his Manhattan studio. According to Marcus Price, Lancaster's 'personal style, and what he was interested in – were all cool.' Back in his foundation year, 1961-62, he was also a regular at the Majestic where:

*I was once refused entry [for] wearing Levi's, and had a big fight with the manager about it. But it was great, especially in the immediately pre-Beatles era, the twist era and after. There was nothing better to dance to than "The Wanderer" and "Take Good Care of My Baby" – and they would play them almost every time. They had three lunchtime sessions a week, for a shilling I think, and by far the majority there were not students, but boys and girls from the offices and shops...*⁶⁹³

Lancaster, originally from Yorkshire, became the beneficiary of Hamilton's New York connections, returning there to work with Warhol and Jasper Johns whilst establishing himself as a successful artist, but the existence of a direct link between the Big Apple's avant-garde and Newcastle in the early sixties is certainly remarkable even if very few people outside the college were aware of it at the time. On returning to Newcastle from his first trip to New York in 1964, Lancaster:

⁶⁹¹ Marian Scott, 'Post-War Developments in Art in Newcastle: Was it a Golden Age?', *Northern Review*, (Winter 1996), Vol.4, pp.39-40.

⁶⁹² Rita Donagh quoted in, Michael Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model: Becoming Roxy Music*, (London, 2007), p.69.

⁶⁹³ Mark Lancaster quoted in, *Ibid.* p.87.

*...put together a slide show for the school, with all the things I had photographed in New York, and music like that at the [Warhol's] Factory, such as Lesley Gore singing It's My Party, and ending with the taxi sequence with Moon River playing, because it reminded me, like all of New York in 1964, of Breakfast at Tiffanys [sic]. Images from America were still pretty rare, and some of the students, including my friends Stephen Buckley and Bryan Ferry, were impressed and affected by this experience.*⁶⁹⁴

Someone like Lancaster would have made an impression in the social circles he moved in and undoubtedly influenced Bryan Ferry who arrived at King's in 1964.⁶⁹⁵ Scott observed that Hamilton drew inspiration for his late fifties work from 'contemporary urban life and developments in technology and American mass culture'. The 'basic course' was intended to replace the 'hierarchical model with fine art at its pinnacle and popular art at its base' with 'the notion that art should be 'inclusive' not 'exclusive' and that every source of imagery was of value.' The lunchtime dances and later his visits with students to Morden Tower to hear poetry readings, from local poets to those 'connected with the American Beat Movement', further demonstrate Hamilton's encouragement of his students to participate in Newcastle's cultural life.⁶⁹⁶

Connie Pickard, who along with husband Tom, established Morden Tower in 1964, also attended the Majestic's lunchtime sessions when she was an art student. She recalled, 'it was when the Twist had just come in and we were all twisting like mad.' Pickard was one of the Jesmond bohemian set that included Hamilton, Lancaster, John Walters and many of those involved with the People's Theatre. They were predominantly students and staff from King's Art Department who did mix with Newcastle's general population at the Majestic and the Club A' Go Go, arguably exerting something of a stylistic influence in the process. That said, the overall student presence should not be exaggerated. As Pickard remembered:

*When I first went up to college I had no relation to the rest of the town. I was just like, in college. I had my little bed-sitting room in Jesmond, I didn't know much about the town at all. Most of the students were like that. They just didn't go into the town.*⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁴ Mark Lancaster interviewed by Gary Comenas, (2004), at

<http://www.warholstars.org/andywarhol/interview/mark/lancaster.html>, retrieved 3/10/2009.

⁶⁹⁵ Michael Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model: Becoming Roxy Music*, (London, 2007), pp.85-86.

⁶⁹⁶ Marian Scott, 'Post-War Developments in Art in Newcastle: Was it a Golden Age?', *Northern Review*, (Winter 1996), Vol.4, pp.38-39. Morden Tower was, and is, actually a remnant of Newcastle's medieval city walls.

⁶⁹⁷ Connie Pickard, interview with the author, October 14th, 2009.

Lastly on the subject of the Majestic, Bill Lancaster has observed that changes in dancing styles during the early sixties might be interpreted as symbolic of wider social and cultural developments as dances became more ‘democratic’ and ‘liberating’. Of the lunchtime dances he frequented from the age of fourteen (1962) he recalled:

*What struck me was, the Twist was just on the way out and the Shake-Blues thing was coming in...it was the early Beatles records that we were dancing to. Anybody could go in, even the blokes could just get on the floor and shake. Whereas the jive was a hard dance to do, you had to learn it and you really needed a girlfriend to do it properly...with the Twist and that, anybody could just do it.*⁶⁹⁸

The Social Geography of Popular Music in Newcastle

Physically, King’s could not have been better situated in terms of its proximity to Newcastle – squeezed between the top end of town and the open expanse of the Town Moor – and its night life, certainly once the Club A’ Go Go opened above the Handyside Arcade on Percy Street in 1962. The arcade would later house the hippie boutiques of the later sixties but for those who could afford it, Marcus Price was only a short distance up the street (For the location of key sites, see Appendix, Maps: Fig. 4). Price recalled that Percy Street was ‘a rough area of town’ but ‘nice during the day’.⁶⁹⁹ Ten minutes walk west from King’s through China Town was the Art College on the corner of Stowell Street and Bath Lane – and the Majestic. The Downbeat was a similar distance but heading towards the quayside where the Quay Club offered what Stephen Buckley describes as ‘an Eastern European atmosphere...like one’s fantasy of Berlin in the 1930s’. The Quay Club functioned as a venue for live beat and R&B music but ‘it was much more about having a drink’ and ‘there were visibly criminals about’.⁷⁰⁰ In the east end there was the New Orleans Jazz Club in Shieldfield for those who still preferred jazz, and in a roughly northerly direction away from the river the adjacent residential suburbs of Heaton and Jesmond. Here was the Corner House – a popular pub venue – and the People’s Theatre, and the heady whiff of bohemia intimated by Jesmond resident Mark Lancaster’s admission that ‘We had a little hash...after you had downed a few pints of Newcastle Brown Ale on a Saturday night.’⁷⁰¹ In 1965, complaints from residents prompted the University to announce a clamp-down on noisy

⁶⁹⁸ Bill Lancaster in conversation with Connie Pickard, interview with the author, October 14th, 2009.

⁶⁹⁹ Michael Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model: Becoming Roxy Music*, (London, 2007), p.49.

⁷⁰⁰ Stephen Buckley, who was then a King’s College art student shared the house formerly occupied by Mark Lancaster in Jesmond with Bryan Ferry, quoted in *ibid.* p.113

⁷⁰¹ Mark Lancaster interviewed by Gary Comenas, (2004), at <http://www.warholstars.org/andywarhol/interview/mark/lancaster.html>, retrieved 3/10/2009.

student parties. There were reports in the *Evening Chronicle* that groups of young people were roaming the area at night looking for parties to gate-crash.⁷⁰² With Jesmond the more up-market of the two this was student bedsit land, home of late-night parties and the equivalent in many respects of Liverpool 8, with the important exception that it contained no immigrant community.

According to George Pearson, what passed for an immigrant community in Newcastle in the early sixties was located in the west end, a small black and Asian enclave in the once affluent area of Rye Hill. Two members of the horn section of the Kansas City Seven, Ghanaians Danny Okpoti and Pat Odoi lived there while trying to make a living as the Black Cats on the Tyneside working men's club circuit. In Pearson's view, they had 'no choice but to live there, as racism was so ingrained that they would not have been welcome in many other parts of town.'⁷⁰³ It seems that the appearance of a black face on the Newcastle scene was rare enough for it to occasion some excitement, as in the instance of Eric Burdon's first meeting with Doreen Caulker who became his longstanding girlfriend and the inspiration for a rare self-penned song by the Animals.⁷⁰⁴ Although there were well established Yemeni and Bangladeshi communities in South Shields, black and Asian immigrants were very few on Tyneside at the time and therefore played little part in the popular music culture of Newcastle.

In May 1963 shortly before King's became Newcastle University the *King's Courier* declared that the college 'was fortunate in having a precinct so close to the heart of the city' which would enable the university 'to present itself as an integral part of the town.'⁷⁰⁵ If the university authorities were confident of the cultural benefits of such close proximity to Newcastle and its people, the same cannot be said for the author of the student guide to entertainment in the city. The guide observed that:

Newcastle is lamentably lacking in night life designed wholly or partly to appeal to the student. One is forced to choose the type of entertainment desired and then have one's fun among people of different age intellectual and income groups. This is a move which the average student hesitates to take for

⁷⁰² *Evening Chronicle*, November 22nd, 1965, p.7.

⁷⁰³ George Pearson, *Sex, Brown Ale and Rhythm & Blues: The Life That Gave Birth To The Animals*, (Darlington, 1998), p.127.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p.105.

⁷⁰⁵ *King's Courier*, May 23rd, 1963, Vol.16, No.21, Courier Special Supplement, p.8.

*he feels justifiably that he is different from his fellow Novocastrians; as part of a group the student can enjoy himself, alone he generally feels lost.*⁷⁰⁶

The diminishing appeal of jazz is attested to by the fact that the student run '61 Club, having gathered for a time at the Bridge Hotel and the short lived Muscle Inn, eventually found a home in the last remaining jazz club in the city, the New Orleans. Nonetheless, the clientele for the 'swinging jazz' on offer were described as 'mainly young with a high proportion of students.'⁷⁰⁷ The description given of the New Orleans Club at the end of 1963 is worth repeating because it serves as a reminder of the social and structural changes that were then taking place. The author relates that the club 'was once part of a row of terrace houses, however, most of the surrounding buildings have been demolished as slum clearance leaving the jazz club standing alone in a vista of rubble and refuse.'⁷⁰⁸ As a temporary survivor of the Shieldfield redevelopment scheme the club represented, both literally and metaphorically, Newcastle's last bastion of jazz. When it came to celebrate its tenth anniversary in new premises on Forth Banks in 1965, to many students the club had apparently become 'little more than a combination of name and rumour...Submerged in the gloom of Newcastle's back streets [and attended by] a motley conglomeration of personalities and ideas linked by a common interest in Jazz.'⁷⁰⁹ It might be argued that this had always been the case but the tone of the piece is redolent of the end of an era.

Of the remaining venues mentioned in the guide the Corner House in Heaton was noted for its live music although 'one's fellow customers are definitely 'rocker'', the Majestic ballroom was 'guaranteed to make a student feel middle aged' while the Oxford Galleries was 'as rocker as you can get so be careful about whom you ask to dance, since if she's 'taken' you get 'thumped'.' The Downbeat was defined as catering for those who liked to 'Twist' or 'Shake' which 'was once a jazz club but finding jazz less profitable than pop has transformed itself into a twist club with rock groups and records.' The Downbeat was recommended because once 'the sub-teens clear out around midnight' the age of the 'semi-mod' crowd that took their place 'was approaching that of a student. The music is good, rhythm and blues usually, and Saturday night sessions are the best with the Alan Price Combo.' Guys and Dolls was considered 'a poor rival to the Downbeat' and the Dolce Vita – 'The North's most luxurious night club' – was upmarket, expensive and therefore beyond the budget of the

⁷⁰⁶ *The Courier*, November 14th, 1963, No.6, p.6.

⁷⁰⁷ *The Courier*, November 16th, 1962, Vol.16, No.7, p.5 and November 7th, 1963, No.5, p.8.

⁷⁰⁸ *The Courier*, November 14th, 1963, No.6, p.6.

⁷⁰⁹ *The Courier*, October 20th, 1965, p.6.

average student.⁷¹⁰ Whilst it should be remembered that these are the observations of one student the guide is a fascinating snapshot of Newcastle club culture at one of the most exciting times for music in the city's history, just before the Alan Price Combo became the Animals. In fact they were already the star attraction at the Club A' Go Go, Jeffery's latest venture – opened in 1962, which for some unexplained reason had refused to cooperate with *The Courier's* guide.

At the end of 1963, John Walters wrote in his jazz column for *The Journal* that the prospects for a 'jazzy Christmas' in Newcastle were bleak. The New Orleans Club was closed as it changed premises and 'group of the year' the Alan Price Combo was apparently receiving 'offers' that meant they might leave for London any time soon; but significantly it was the imminent departure of Mike Carr that Walters felt most keenly. In his opinion the loss of 'our best local born jazzman' was a terrible blow for the city's jazz scene as there was 'nobody to replace him in the foreseeable future.'⁷¹¹ Having had several musicians poached by London band leaders including his brother Ian (to Harold McNair) and drummer Ronnie Stephenson (to John Dankworth) he had evidently decided it was time to move on. The EmCee Five had in fact played their farewell concert at the Club A' Go Go in the early summer of 1962 after which Carr had continued in residency there as the Mike Carr Trio. Walters detected the changing music scene and reflected on the implications in his column throughout 1963, describing how a concert at the City Hall by Chris Barber was 'barely half full', and remarking on 'the rumours that rhythm and blues will replace trad in the public favour.'⁷¹² He also lamented the fact that the Club A' Go Go had only rarely booked jazz acts in recent months and had concentrated instead on attracting a 'teen-beat' audience.⁷¹³

Mike Jeffery and the Animals

Jeffery was now the proprietor of two successful nightclubs with a reputation for promoting the best live jazz and rhythm and blues in Newcastle. Hilton Valentine, who, unlike Burdon, Steel and Price, had not developed his musical appreciation within the tight-knit jazz and blues circle in the city, was arguably better placed to retain some objectivity. He remembers Jeffery:

⁷¹⁰ *The Courier*, November 14th, 1963, No.6, p.6.

⁷¹¹ *The Journal*, December 6th, 1963, p.6.

⁷¹² *The Journal*, January 18th and February 15th, 1963, pp.8 and 12.

⁷¹³ *The Journal*, November 22nd, 1963, p.6.

...was very important to the music scene in Newcastle; especially because of the clubs he opened. The only places we knew about where bands were playing were in the old working men's clubs or church halls. So these new clubs completely opened up the scene for jazz, blues and r 'n' b. Mike Jeffery's clubs brought in American musicians as well as English bands from around the country.

Mike was a very well educated, suave, good looking, self starter. He wore shifty dark glasses, and I always got the feeling that he was in the secret service or something like that. I can't say that he did right by The Animals, but he did get us out there. Yes, we were ripped off, but it's 45 years later and people still know our music and recognize me. That might not ever have happened if it weren't for him.⁷¹⁴

Drummer John Steel recalled that during 1963 the Alan Price Combo had 'developed into the most original band in the area' playing 'very jazz-influenced, blues-R&B. If we played rock and roll, it was Fats Domino or Little Richard rather than Elvis Presley or [Eddie] Cochran. We were playing the black end.' Steel felt there had emerged in Newcastle an audience who rejected Cliff Richard and the Shadows in favour of Ray Charles, an audience of fifteen to sixteen-year-olds that just a few years earlier would have danced to jazz but were of 'that stream of kids who won't go in that pop direction. They want a bit more meat to it.' Valentine agreed, maintaining that the 'rest of the bands up here, including The Wild Cats [sic], were playing the stuff that was in the charts'; their audience may have been aware of Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley because they'd had chart success, but they were unfamiliar, as was Valentine, with Jimmy Reed and John Lee Hooker. In his view this was why their crowd consisted of 'beatniks and arty students' – people who took their rhythm and blues 'seriously'.⁷¹⁵

Just as the EmCee Five had performed at the Marimba before reconvening at the Downbeat for an all-night session, so the Alan Price Combo would appear at the Club A' Go Go then head for the Downbeat to play from midnight until 3am. According to Steel, who kept a

⁷¹⁴ Hilton Valentine in correspondence with the author, February 10th, 2009. Valentine's reference to the secret service is interesting as it seems that after National Service Jeffery signed on as a full-time soldier and was drafted into the Intelligence Corps. His father, Frank, told Harry Shapiro and Caesar Glebbeek during their research for a biography of Jimi Hendrix that Jeffery was stationed in Egypt and that he could speak Russian. Apparently he often told friends of his undercover work during the Suez crisis however, his army career is as shrouded in mystery as much of the rest of his life. If true, it would mean that Jeffery was deeply involved in both major turning points of Hobsbawm's twentieth century. Incidentally, Jeffery was the only son of Frank and Alice Jeffery, Post Office employees from Peckham, South London where Michael was born in March 1933. See Harry Shapiro & Caesar Glebbeek, *Jimi Hendrix: Electric Gypsy*, (New York, 1995), p.120.

⁷¹⁵ Hilton Valentine and John Steel quoted in Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks – The Story of the Animals: Newcastle's Rising Sons*, (London, 2001), pp.21-22.

diary, ‘Everywhere we played was absolutely jammed.’⁷¹⁶ In keeping with Jeffery’s policy of catering for younger teenagers the A’ Go Go was divided between two rooms, the ‘Young Set’, and the ‘Jazz Lounge’ providing late night entertainment for an adult clientele. There was a change of policy in mid-1963 as part of a concerted effort to keep abreast of changing tastes in ‘the year of the Beatles’ which meant that modern jazz was gradually faded out, but for a time the club could boast an eclectic mixture of black music styles that was arguably more vibrant than anywhere outside London. John Steel:

*We would be in the jazz lounge backing John Lee Hooker or Sonny Boy Williamson; I’ve backed people like Tubby Hayes and Tony Coe and as well as playing with Eric before we were called The Animals, I also played with Mike Carr at times, playing straight jazz, so there was this beautiful mix of music – modern jazz, R&B and authentic blues men coming over from America, with the new British music going on in the room next door. It was jumping, a fantastic atmosphere.*⁷¹⁷

One exponent of the new British music was London-based keyboard and saxophone player, Graham Bond. It is Bond whom Steel has credited with ‘talking to people’ on the London R&B scene as a result of which someone connected with ‘Ronan O’Rahilly’s people at the Scene Club’ travelled up to Newcastle to see the group and talk to Jeffery. It was following this development insists Steel, that Jeffery hastily produced a management contract which was quickly signed.⁷¹⁸ The upshot of this coming together of North and South was an agreement between Jeffery and the Yardbirds’ manager Giorgio Gomelsky that during the ten days leading up to Christmas 1963, the Animals, as they were re-christened for the trip, would appear at London R&B clubs, the Ricky Tik, Eel Pie Island and the Scene. In return, the Yardbirds, who had taken over the residencies at these clubs from the – now big time –

⁷¹⁶ Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks – The Story of the Animals: Newcastle’s Rising Sons*, (London, 2001), p.28.

⁷¹⁷ John Steel quoted in Chris Phipps, John Tobler, Sid Smith, *Northstars*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2005), p.162.

⁷¹⁸ John Steel quoted in Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks – The Story of the Animals: Newcastle’s Rising Sons*, (London, 2001), p.29. Bond was an accomplished jazz/blues musician who was widely regarded as one of the key figures in the nascent London R&B scene. Along with Alexis Korner and John Mayall, Bond nurtured the talents of future luminaries such as Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker during spells in his Graham Bond Organisation. O’Rahilly was ‘the son of a wealthy Irish industrialist and property owner’ who financed the pirate station Radio Caroline besides also being involved with the early London R&B clubs. See, Dave Harker, *One For The Money: Politics and popular song*, (London, 1980), p.79. Chas Chandler maintained that it was due to the circulation of the North-East produced one-sided 12” entitled ‘I Just Wanna Make Love To You’, usually referred to as the ‘Graphic Sound’ EP after the studio where it was recorded, that resulted in their reaching the ears of interested parties down south. See Egan, p.28.

Rolling Stones, made the journey north with Sonny Boy Williamson to appear at the Club A' Go Go.⁷¹⁹ John Walters reported in *The Journal*:

The A'Gogo's [sic] only jazzy attraction lately has been the Alan Price rhythm and blues group, and, like all good Newcastle jazzmen, they will shortly be making the London journey.

They have tour dates in London during December which are designed as a "shop window" for more permanent southern bookings. During their short absence our loss may be turned into our gain for Mike Jeffery has booked in the famous American rhythm and blues star, Sonny Boy Williamson, backed by a London group.

*At a time when groups like The Beatles and their followers are invariably introduced as exponents of rhythm and blues it should be an exhilarating experience to be exposed to the real thing.*⁷²⁰

The exchange was a success, culminating in the Animals' triumphant return to the Club A'Go Go for appearances both in their own right and as backing for Williamson on December 30th, 1963. This event marked the apogee of the Animals' relatively short lived spell as the top resident Newcastle group. Shortly afterwards Jeffery announced in *The Journal* that they would soon be releasing a record and touring with 'two top American stars.'⁷²¹ They had signed to the Don Arden agency who scheduled them for the Chuck Berry/Carl Perkins tour and were about to enter the studio with producer Mickie Most. The Animals moved to London in January 1964. Valentine reflected:

*We were playing in Newcastle, enjoying our music. Wanting to get out, take the music further and go to London – but we weren't thinking of being in the hit parade or anything like that. It just seemed to happen: click, click, click, click. You didn't have time to think about it.*⁷²²

Although, as Pearson recalled, Price and Chandler had formed the Combo because they were aware of the burgeoning London R&B scene – as was anyone who read *Melody Maker* or the

⁷¹⁹ Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks – The Story of the Animals: Newcastle's Rising Sons*, (London, 2001), p.30.

⁷²⁰ *The Journal*, November 22nd, 1963, p.6. It was somewhat disingenuous of Walters to cast the Merseybeat groups rather disparagingly in contrast to the 'real thing' whilst referring to the Alan Price 'rhythm and blues group' as 'good Newcastle jazzmen'. Perhaps, being aware of the jazz/blues roots of the Animals, Walters was prepared to vouch for their 'authenticity' and claim them for his beloved jazz.

⁷²¹ *The Journal*, January 30th, 1964, p.9. The following advertisement appeared in the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* on May 8th, 1964, p.2. 'City Hall Newcastle presents – May 23rd – Chuck Berry + The Animals, The Swinging Blue Jeans, Carl Perkins, King Size Taylor + The Dominoes, The Other Two + many more...!'

⁷²² Hilton Valentine quoted in Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks – The Story of the Animals: Newcastle's Rising Sons*, (London, 2001), p.38.

NME – it was the jazz/blues roots of Burdon, Steel and to an extent Price which were nurtured and practiced in the intimate and supportive atmosphere of Newcastle’s independent and vibrant jazz scene of the late fifties and early sixties that put them in the right place at the right time. Without this background and history they would not have been in a position to act so quickly on the information gathered on Burdon’s visit to London to check out Alexis Korner’s clique. Seeing the Rolling Stones support Bo Diddley at Newcastle Odeon merely confirmed that it was possible for young white Englishmen to become successful R&B musicians while the Beatles proved that Northerners could even lead the way. As with the Beatles, the subsequent career of the Animals is well documented elsewhere and is not of direct concern here beyond the influence of their success in producing a host of North-East R&B groups in their wake just as the Beatles had inspired so many beat groups before them. It will suffice to note that their second single, ‘The House of the Rising Sun’, made No.1 on both sides of the Atlantic during the summer of 1964 after which the group followed the Beatles and preceded the Rolling Stones in the so-called ‘British invasion’ of the USA.

‘Tyne-beat’?

Prior to the success of the Animals, in November 1963 the *Chronicle* announced that ‘The Tyne ‘Sound’ Goes On Record’ above an article recounting the Gamblers’ progress since they ‘appeared in Newcastle with the Beatles some years ago.’ After apparently winning over London audiences – ‘an achievement for a provincial group’ – they were about to release their first single for Decca, a version of the Miracles’ ‘You Really Got A Hold On Me’. Their manager Jack Henderson declared, ‘We have broken through the southern reserve. I am very proud of the boys.’⁷²³ After the minor success of their follow-up ‘It’s So Nice’ which reached No.27 in the *NME* chart a Gambler told the paper that theirs was ‘the sound that counts now. At this rate, it will soon be goodbye Liverpool’.⁷²⁴ They then became the backing group for Liverpool’s elder statesman of rock ‘n’ roll, Billy Fury, and appeared with him on stage, record, and television whilst attempting to emulate their predecessors the Tornados in maintaining an independent recording career. This was not to be however,

⁷²³ *Evening Chronicle*, November 8th, 1963, p.5. The Miracles song was a staple in the Beatles’ repertoire as were several Smokey Robinson compositions. The fact that the Gamblers performed it serves to illustrate that they were a beat not an R&B group. See also, Spencer Leigh, *Wondrous Face: The Billy Fury Story*, (Folkestone, 2005), p.102, on which ‘music fan’ Alan Fearby is quoted as saying, ‘I remember the Gamblers performing every week at the Majestic Ballroom in Newcastle and thinking what a talent they were. It was very unusual for a group to have a trumpet in its line-up and they were great.’

⁷²⁴ *NME*, April 10th, 1964, p.13.

perhaps because ‘their bright, lively visual act and...superb precision-timed comedy routines’ that were a feature of their live and television appearances did not translate onto record. After a couple of years their career, like Fury’s, was reduced to pantomime and the ‘chicken-in-a-basket’ circuit.⁷²⁵

Back at the beginning of 1964, Paul Ryan of Newcastle group the Streaks offered his views as to why Liverpool groups were so successful. Having just returned from the ‘beat city’ he told how ‘The kids are interested only in the local groups down there’ and accused Newcastle teenagers of behaving like sheep who only support well-known groups. He added that, ‘In Liverpool, most of the successful groups have been sponsored by rich businessmen. Can you imagine that happening here?’ Nothing would change he insisted unless the Gamblers or the Animals had a hit. With remarkable awareness for someone only nineteen he concluded:

There are about 200 groups on Tyneside, and many of them are really good, but there’s just no support for them.

There’s just no pop-consciousness in the area. People don’t realise what a good effect a few successful groups could have on the area. Liverpool has become a top teenage tourist attraction – and gained a lot of prestige.

*With the North-East crying out that it is neglected, this could be a big help to the area becoming nationally recognised.*⁷²⁶

Unfortunately, although the Animals were about to have hits and the Gamblers achieve success of a sort, Mike Jeffery, the entrepreneur most likely to answer Ryan’s call had already decamped for London and in any case was not of the disposition to follow Epstein in using the breakthrough of one group to launch the careers of the best of the rest in the North East. On the face of it the results of the *Melody Maker* readers’ poll published in September of that year appeared to bode well for North-East talent. The Gamblers were No.7 in the vocal-instrumental category with the Animals at No.10. Hank Marvin was voted British musician of the year and Susan Maughan from Consett in County Durham made No.7 in the female singers chart.⁷²⁷ In the same month the Downbeats from Spennymoor won a national beat group competition judged by Ringo Starr, Cilla Black, and Manfred Mann, and were rewarded with £1,000 and a two-year recording contract. The problem was that no-one

⁷²⁵ *Evening Chronicle*, April 4th, 1964, Weekend Leisure Guide, pp.ii-iii.

⁷²⁶ *Evening Chronicle*, April 6th, 1964, p.7.

⁷²⁷ *Evening Chronicle*, September 12th, 1964, p.2. Maughan was best known for her 1962 hit ‘Bobby’s Girl’.

outside the region was likely to associate this disparate group of artists with the North East. There was certainly no evidence of a coherent ‘Tyneside sound’.⁷²⁸

In belated recognition of the vitality of Tyneside’s music scene the *Evening Chronicle* launched ‘Saturday Pop Parade’ in October 1964 from where Albert Watson faithfully charted the fortunes of local music and musicians until the column disappeared without explanation at the end of the following year. A similar fate befell the 1964 ‘Geordie Beat’ tour featuring North-East groups the Delamares, Paul Ryan and the Streaks, the Satellites and Kim and the Kinetics. This was to be a national tour boosted by the addition of headline acts the Merseybeats and Manfred Mann. Organiser Keith Becket felt confident that ‘Tyneside could easily be another Liverpool as far as beat groups are concerned’ however his optimism proved unfounded as Manfred Mann pulled out before the tour had even begun and the Merseybeats ‘walked out in disgust because of the tiny audiences.’⁷²⁹ Albert Watson conducted the post mortem and concluded:

[Teenagers] took one look at the bill, reshuffled again, now headed by the Fortunes and the Naturals, and stayed away in their thousands. Finis.

*But for the young entertainers of the North-East the ordeal is not over. They have come back to unemployment and empty date books, and the realisation that a tour of this kind will probably never again take place.*⁷³⁰

The failure of this venture demonstrates the precarious nature of life in a beat group. Watson recorded the thoughts of a ‘dejected’ Keith Checkley of the Streaks who lamented, ‘I’ve never been so hard up...I’m looking around for a steady job.’

According to Mr. L. Harbron, manager of the Zephyrs, ‘Some of the best rhythm groups in the country can be found in the North-East but they never get the chance to prove it.’ He was frustrated by the fact that ‘talent programmes are continually being relayed to the screens from Manchester, but local artists never get a look in’ and urged *Chronicle* readers to write to

⁷²⁸ *Evening Chronicle*, September 30th, 1964, p.5. The Downbeats drummer Alan White, who was just sixteen at the time of the competition, went on to drum for the Gamblers with Billy Fury, Joe Cocker, Alan Price, the Plastic Ono Band, John Lennon (‘Imagine’ album), George Harrison (‘All Things Must Pass’) and Yes. See Chris Phipps, John Tobler, Sid Smith, *Northstars*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2005), p.245.

⁷²⁹ *Evening Chronicle*, August 24th, 1964, p.7, and October 3rd, 1964, Pop Parade, p.iii.

⁷³⁰ *Evening Chronicle*, October 3rd, 1964, Pop Parade, p.iii.

Tyne Tees Television requesting their own talent show.⁷³¹ Almost two years later ‘Pop Parade’ was expressing the same frustration:

A good start would be for the local television stations to show off the area’s talent. True, we’ve had a couple of quarter-hour shows, but they were far too short and the talent wasn’t chosen very well.

*Tyne Tees Television has more scope for this sort of thing than the local BBC station, but it should think big. A variety programme of at least thirty minutes, showcasing local groups, singers, comedians and soloists – make it so good that other ITV companies will want to network it.*⁷³²

There was an awareness of the problems facing North-East talent and even of the possible solutions but it seems no-one was prepared or able to come forward with the required resources. There were also signs that working men’s clubs, the chief source of regular paid work for the majority of beat groups, were losing patience. Clubs in Hebburn and Jarrow reported that members were walking out rather than listen to the groups and while they were keen to attract young members, teenagers did not spend enough to cover costs.⁷³³ Gateshead group the Denims gave an indication of the changing mood when they announced that after two years performing as a beat group they were ‘working up a cabaret act’ in order to secure night club bookings.⁷³⁴ In May 1965 it was reported that ‘The boom in the sale of single track records, especially recordings by the beat groups, is coming to an end.’ One of Newcastle’s leading retail outlets had registered a 20% drop in sales while the owner of another, Windows, agreed that sales had dropped ‘very substantially.’⁷³⁵ Later that month under the title ‘The big beat drive falters’, Watson rather gleefully declared that:

The days when semi-professional pop music could mean a bunch of long-haired, musically-ignorant lads making “twang-bang-oh-yeah” noises, with faces to match, are over.

*Now they are finding the going tough, the demand slackening. The yawns which have replaced the screams are not adequate reward for the hours of travelling, the late bed-times, and the sheer hard work of entertainment.*⁷³⁶

Meanwhile, throughout what the *Melody Maker* described as ‘The year of the Stones – With the Beatles in second place’, Jeffery’s clubs continued to thrive.⁷³⁷ By 1964 both the

⁷³¹ *Evening Chronicle*, November 11th, 1963, p.9.

⁷³² *Evening Chronicle*, September 11th, 1965, p.1.

⁷³³ *Evening Chronicle*, December 5th, 1964, p.5.

⁷³⁴ *Evening Chronicle*, October 22nd, 1964, p.5.

⁷³⁵ *Evening Chronicle*, May 10th, 1965, p.7.

⁷³⁶ *Evening Chronicle*, May 21st, 1965, p.8.

⁷³⁷ *Melody Maker*, September 12th, 1964, p.17.

Downbeat and the Club A' Go Go had dispensed entirely with jazz and were busily pursuing a policy designed to make the most of the Rhythm and Blues Boom. Presumably just before his departure for London, Jeffery spoke to a *Journal* reporter sent to investigate allegations of teenage immorality at the Downbeat made by a local clergyman. The reporter observed 'oddly dressed boys with their jeans, combat jackets and fringes...girls hidden inside duffel coats' dancing to loud music beneath large photographs of the Beatles. Jeffery insisted the club was 'proving creative and go-ahead' and claimed that 'the Downbeat – and places like it all over the country – are not just so-called dance clubs...but places where music and even dances are created.' He explained that it was this audience that had supported the Animals during their residency at the club and that the Downbeat was instrumental in their success, and yet this was 'the very place people were so ready to criticise.'⁷³⁸ At the Club A' Go Go, manager Myer Thomas was tipping the Junco Partners, the Downbeats and the Von Dykes as worthy successors to the Animals. According to Thomas, the Animals had 'started a terrific trend in the North-East' and 95% of the groups playing at the club were now R&B and what is more he believed the Newcastle audience to be 'connoisseurs in the R and B field.'⁷³⁹ The Junco Partners took over the Animals' residency at the club and were widely expected to follow in their footsteps but although prestigious tours with blues legends Howlin' Wolf and Freddie King followed they failed to break through nationally.⁷⁴⁰ A clue as to why this may have been the case can be found in an edition of *Pop Parade* from the end of 1965 in which Albert Watson declared:

...anyone would think there was a conspiracy against Junco Partners. Not only have they not appeared on television, but their disc, "As Long As I Have You" is not even being advertised in the trade Press!

I have yet to hear the record on radio, despite having heard a rival version several times, and it appears it's not being distributed very well.

"We've had loads of complaints from fans," the group told me. "They can't even buy the disc in Newcastle shops! We're a bit choked about the way it's being put out."⁷⁴¹

In the same article Watson echoed the views of Bill Harry in sensing that just as John Lennon believed that initially the Beatles had encountered prejudice from booking agents – 'When they heard we were from Liverpool, they thought we were straight from the docks with

⁷³⁸ *The Journal*, January 30th, 1964, p.9.

⁷³⁹ *The Courier*, October 10th, 1964, No.12, p.3.

⁷⁴⁰ Chris Phipps, John Tobler, Sid Smith, *Northstars*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2005), p.226.

⁷⁴¹ *Evening Chronicle*, September 11th, 1965, p.1.

sideburns’ – he was ‘seriously wondering whether this same community prejudice applies to the North-East.’

By 1965 the rhythm and blues scene had absorbed the style and accessories of the London Mod phenomenon. Dave Douglass remembered ‘rows of gleaming scooters’ outside the Club A’ Go Go and a few doors down Percy Street Marcus Price had become ‘A sophisticated, top-end Mod shop.’ Stephen Buckley who had a Saturday job there thought it ‘wonderful to meet all these kids who came in from Gateshead, and across the river, all the way up Tyneside, to visit Marcus’s shop.’⁷⁴² Bryan Ferry and his art student circle frequented the Club A’ Go Go, where he went on to perform regularly with his popular ‘up-market seven-piece R&B group’ the Gas Board. He later recalled:

The Club A-Go-Go was great. There was this marvellous Jewish man called Mia [sic] Thomas, who was the boss...He was like a Sidney Greenstreet figure – this big, big man in a double-breasted suit. He was a great character – really scary. And some quite hard men used to go there – like gangsters: dressed in mohair suits, with beautiful girls – the best-looking girls in Newcastle: quite tarty. It was really exciting – it felt really “It” to go there. Beautiful girls...⁷⁴³

For the next two years the club continued to host the very best of British and American acts – John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters, Wilson Pickett, Captain Beefheart, Cream, Jimi Hendrix, Rod Stewart, the Who – although it is probably fair to say that the atmosphere did not match the freshness and vitality of the Newcastle scene’s initial flowering. In the words of Junco Partner, Ronnie Barker:

Well the Club A’ Go Go only really had a period of about four years; that was its heyday, ’63, four, five, six, and the management changed hands round about ’67. And after that the artistic control or whatever you want to call it just went out the window, they started booking sub-standard acts.⁷⁴⁴

Even at the end of 1965 it is possible to discern the beginnings of what could arguably be described as the ‘rock generation’. The tight up-tempo exuberance of beat and rhythm and blues were about to give way to the looser psychedelic introspection of the cannabis and LSD inspired hippy era in which both instrumental solos and hair got a lot longer. How Liverpool

⁷⁴² Dave Douglass, *Geordies – Wa Mental*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2000), p.127, and Michael Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model: Becoming Roxy Music*, (London, 2007), p.42.

⁷⁴³ Michael Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model: Becoming Roxy Music*, (London, 2007), p.49.

⁷⁴⁴ Video clip posted by Junco Partners Official Myspace, 2009, Ronnie Barker and Dave Sproat talking about the Club A’ Go Go, excerpt from ‘Come In’, Tyne Tees Television, 1983, www.myspace.com/theofficialjuncopartners, retrieved 16/9/2009.

and Newcastle responded to the changes must be a subject for further research, however, for Eric Burdon, who wholeheartedly embraced the onset of hippy chic, its idealism and excess, by 1965 London was home and Newcastle was already 'like another planet'.⁷⁴⁵ Although Bill Lancaster was referring specifically to the period of the EmCee Four and Five's residency in Newcastle from 1958-62 when he evoked 'a golden era in the city's twentieth century cultural history', it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the 'golden era' be extended to include the vigorous rhythm and blues period that followed and was maintained for a while – even after the Animals departed – up to and including 1965.⁷⁴⁶

The point has now been reached where it becomes necessary to engage the theory and methodology, much of which has already been introduced during the course of the investigation, with the findings of the research.

⁷⁴⁵ Eric Burdon quoted in the *Evening Chronicle*, August 7th, 1965, Pop Parade, p.1.

⁷⁴⁶ Bill Lancaster, introduction to 'The Newcastle Jazz Scene in the Late 1950s and Early 1960s: A Photographic Essay', *Northern Review*, Vol.4, (Winter 1996), p.35.

Chapter Seven: Youth, Music and Cultural Revolution in the North

Now begins the task of bringing together the several themes of this study, the historical evidence as presented above, and the theoretical insights chosen for the purpose of explanation and interpretation. This will be done within the methodological framework of the comparative method, but comparison made using the conceptual tool of ‘cultural transfer’ which was selected because it is the approach best suited to achieving the study’s stated aims. Prior to engaging with the evidence in this way it is necessary to accomplish two things. The first involves further elucidation of the concept of cultural transfer and its place in the comparative method as this is the means by which ‘answers’ or conclusions will be reached. The second is to further explore the theoretical contributions of Martin and Toynbee and to extrapolate the ideas of Margaret Archer whose theoretical framework has thus far figured only in brief, if suggestive, glimpses.

The Comparative Method and Cultural Transfer

A comparative methodology applied to the micro-histories of Liverpool and Newcastle has been adopted on the grounds that it is a novel approach that can shed new light and offer a fresh perspective on a debate that has hitherto been conducted by historians at a national and sometimes an international level – namely that of ‘The Sixties: Cultural Revolution?’ This is to concur with the essence of Peter Baldwin’s view that:

*The most effective comparative histories are those which, eschewing generalizations, formulate arguments at a middle range about differences and similarities among a range of cases that allow us to understand the general issue at hand (World War One say, but not necessarily in this or that nation) better than had we limited our scope to one country only. At a minimum, good comparative histories should give insights into each particular case that would have remained unrevealed had they been studied in isolation. They juxtapose in order to isolate what is crucial, which is to say causal, and distinguish it from what may only be incidental in any given national context.*⁷⁴⁷

With what should be the obvious caveat that Baldwin is referring to cross-national rather than city/regional comparisons and therefore the arguments might be called close range, and between two as opposed to several cases, what he is suggesting nevertheless holds true for this study.

⁷⁴⁷ Peter Baldwin, ‘Comparing and Generalizing: Why All History is Comparative, Yet No History is Sociology’, in Deborah Cohen & Maura O’Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*, (Oxon, 2004), p.11.

The methodology was decided upon in the conviction that it ought to be compatible with the theoretical perspectives of Martin, Toynbee and Archer in facilitating an analysis of the relationship between culture and agency in the historical process of continuity and change. It should be added that whilst forgoing model building as in Weber's use of 'ideal types', both the theory and methodology employed are nonetheless compatible with the broadly Weberian thrust of the thesis. Bearing in mind Baldwin's dictum that 'No History is Sociology', there need not be any pretence at 'scientific' rigour in the application of theory and method to the history, but rather it is the intention to deploy the theoretical insights of these scholars with the aim of arriving at some, albeit provisional, answers to some historical questions; 'answers' that are hopefully to be found by engaging with the empirical research. Weber's influence does not extend to the application of his comparative methodology because this is an historical not a sociological investigation but instead stems from his insistence that 'Human beings...are evaluative beings, and in singling out certain aspects of reality according to those values, they create culture.' In the estimation of Richard Swedberg, compiler of *The Max Weber Dictionary*, 'culture should not be seen as one among several concepts in Weber's work, but perhaps as its most fundamental category.'⁷⁴⁸ In Weber's schema, 'individuals are genuine actors capable of interpreting their social realities and of initiating creative action.' Although no *a priori* causal precedence has been accorded to structure, culture or agency in the historical process being investigated here, it is the centrality of culture in his approach and his contention that individuals are not 'simply the 'products' of societal forces' that is the reason for the choice of theoretical perspectives and a methodology broadly compatible with Weber's.⁷⁴⁹

Almost thirty years ago Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers distinguished three methods of comparison which they termed 'Comparative History as Parallel Demonstration of Theory', 'Macro-Causal Analysis' and 'Comparative History as the Contrast of Contexts'.⁷⁵⁰ According to Kalberg, in the first instance, as in World Systems Theory, there is always an insistence on 'the causal priority of a single variable', in this case the international economy, while in the second, structural forces are privileged at the expense of other factors such as 'family, religious beliefs, or culture in general.' It is only in their third type of comparative

⁷⁴⁸ Richard Swedberg, *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts*, (Stanton, Ca. 2005), p.56.

⁷⁴⁹ Stephen Kalberg, *Max Weber's Comparative-Historical Sociology*, (Cambridge, 1994), p.25.

⁷⁵⁰ Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, 'The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry', *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, Vol.22, No.2, (1980).

logic, more often referred to as the ‘historical interpretive method’, that a multi-causal approach is advocated where case-specific causation can be ‘formulated from the fullness of historical detail and chronology of events.’ While Kalberg has argued that all three types of comparative logic identified by Skocpol and Somers are defective as he seeks to demonstrate the advantages of Weber’s comparative method *vis-a-vis* modern comparative scholarship, he was prepared to concede (in 1994) that ‘proponents of the causal analytic and the interpretive historical approaches have moved far in the direction of an historically-informed level of analysis.’⁷⁵¹

Charles Ragin has argued that there is no need to make the distinction between the causal analytic and the historical interpretive method because there is ‘no necessary contradiction...between doing empirically based causal analysis and interpreting cases historically.’ He maintains that both are important and that ‘regardless of which goal may take precedence, the underlying logic of case-oriented comparisons is roughly the same.’ As he points out, case-oriented comparisons in the social sciences invariably employ the logic of J. S Mill, notably his method of agreement and indirect method of difference.⁷⁵² Using the method of agreement for example, one constant, say the large number of beat groups in four cities in 1963, might be explained by another constant, high male youth unemployment, assuming all four cities ‘agreed on only this cause’. Mill identified the weakness of this method as stemming from ‘its inability to establish any necessary link between cause and effect.’ Thus, the fact that all four cities exhibited high male youth unemployment *and* a large number of beat groups does not necessarily prove that unemployment was the cause. There may well have been other reasons for the high instance of groups that are not immediately apparent such as the success of the Beatles or even something as fundamental as the realisation among young men that membership of a beat group attracted the opposite sex. Mill therefore concluded that ‘the only way to be certain that a cause-effect sequence has been established is to attempt to recreate it experimentally.’⁷⁵³ Mill called such an experimental design the method of difference.

⁷⁵¹ Stephen Kalberg, *Max Weber’s Comparative-Historical Sociology*, (Cambridge, 1994), pp.10-11.

⁷⁵² Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*, (London, 1987), pp.35-36. John Stuart Mill set out his ‘canons of experimental inquiry’ in *A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive* (1843).

⁷⁵³ Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*, (London, 1987), p.37.

Where ‘direct experimental manipulation’ is not possible – as in the present study – Mill recommended the use of the indirect method of difference ‘which attempts to approximate experimental design with nonexperimental data.’ Proponents of Weber’s comparative method (e.g. Kalberg) would argue at this point that it is both possible and preferable to pursue an investigation using the method of difference by contrasting ‘an empirical case with an imaginary case representing a theoretically pure [ideal type] instance of the phenomenon of interest...a type of thought experiment’. However, according to Ragin, ‘while attractive’, due to the theoretical nature of this method it is ‘not in the same class’ as the empirical methods of agreement and indirect difference. This is a complicated argument and not of direct concern here as the present comparison *is* based on empirical research, for which reason it is necessary to follow Ragin’s rationale a little further. Using the indirect method of difference, if it was assumed that high male youth unemployment was the cause of a high instance of beat groups it would be necessary to identify those cities where both were present. Once that has been established it then becomes necessary to identify cities where large numbers of beat groups were absent and thence whether high levels of male youth unemployment were absent also. Ragin states that ‘If all cases fall into the presence/presence or absence/absence cells of the 2 x 2 matrix’, then the initial hypothesis is supported. Mill reasoned that the latter cases – where both cause and effect are missing – ‘should also provide a basis for rejecting competing hypotheses.’ Hence, if in the cities where both a high instance of beat groups and high levels of male youth unemployment were present, evidence was also found for the influence of the Beatles’ success, then cases where both were absent ‘(ideally) should also display’ that influence. It would then be possible to discount the influence of the Beatles’ success because there was not a high instance of beat groups in those cities. Although in their most basic and abstract form Mill’s methods are logical and convincing enough, Ragin then sets out to demonstrate their flaws and limitations for sociological inquiry in such a way that equally, their usefulness in conducting an historical investigation of the type presently being undertaken becomes questionable.⁷⁵⁴

For Ragin, the main problem with both of these methods is their incapacity in dealing with ‘multiple causation’ or what he calls ‘conjunctural causation’. He argues that by ‘examining cases as wholes [and] differences and similarities *in context* it is possible to determine how different combinations of conditions have the same causal significance and how similar

⁷⁵⁴ See Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*, (London, 1987), pp.38-40.

causal factors can operate in opposite directions.’ Moreover, he suggests that the investigator should let ‘initial theoretical notions serve as guides in the examination of causally relevant similarities and differences’, as without them ‘the search for similarities and differences could go on forever.’⁷⁵⁵ This is precisely why, for present purposes, it is the intention to adopt the concept of ‘cultural transfer’ in order to simplify the comparative approach. In keeping with Baldwin’s maxim that history is not sociology and does not pretend to be ‘scientific’ this investigation will proceed by narrowing the focus by means of the historical concept of cultural transfer so as to limit the number of similarities and differences to those that pertain to the impact of North American popular music in Liverpool and Newcastle between 1956 and 1965. Rather than adopt a strict comparative framework within which to examine all the similarities and differences, to paraphrase Michael Miller whose essay informed the choice, it is better to pursue the historical story of cultural transfer across two regional/urban experiences.⁷⁵⁶ What is more, the insights of ‘theoretical guides’ – Martin, Toynbee and Archer – in sharing with Weber an insistence on the multi-causality of historical events, the centrality of culture, and a role for human agency, are entirely compatible with this methodology.⁷⁵⁷

Continuity and Change

In order to take Sandbrook to task over his assertion that ‘For all the Minis and mini-skirts, the sex, drugs and rock and roll, Britain in 1970 was still fundamentally the same country as it had been twenty, thirty or even a hundred years before’, this study has concentrated on the micro-histories of youth culture and pop (as opposed to popular) culture in Liverpool and Newcastle.⁷⁵⁸ So what can a comparison of the similarities and differences between these city/regions as revealed by focussing on the impact of North American popular music bring to the debate? Before attempting to answer this question it is first necessary to reiterate the three themes of Sandbrook’s work. His first and central theme as represented by the above quotation is that ‘the sixties revealed a fundamental continuity with older periods of British history’ and is related to his second argument that ‘ordinary people often reacted

⁷⁵⁵ See Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*, (London, 1987), pp.45-49.

⁷⁵⁶ Michael Miller, ‘Comparative and Cross-National History: Approaches, Difficulties, Problems’, in Deborah Cohen and Maura O’Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*, (New York, 2004), p.126.

⁷⁵⁷ Stephen Kalberg, *Max Weber’s Comparative-Historical Sociology*, (Cambridge, 1994), pp.9-10.

⁷⁵⁸ Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties, 1964-70*, (London, 2006), p.749.

to...developments in a much more contradictory, confused and apprehensive way than historians usually allow.’ His third theme concerns his conviction that commentators have allowed their own memories and experiences of the sixties to cloud their judgement with the result that they have disproportionately concentrated on the activities of ‘a minority of well-educated, relatively affluent young people’ to whom credit is mistakenly given for initiating a period of ‘staggering and unexpected change.’⁷⁵⁹

To deal with his second and third points first: his statement that the reaction of ordinary people to social and cultural developments was more contradictory and confused than is generally acknowledged is, on the face of it, an unproblematic one. What is problematic is his incessant use of statistics – the sales, viewing and attendance figures for mass popular entertainment – to ‘trump’ the achievements and influence of the minority ‘alternative society’. As the playwright David Edgar observed in his review of Sandbrook’s two volumes:

*Nowhere is it acknowledged that it was possible to watch both Dixon of Dock Green [conservative taste = continuity] and Z Cars [experimental realism = change], to spend time both in your bedroom and on the football terraces, to campaign for peace and shop at Biba, to smoke Gauloises and listen to the Searchers.*⁷⁶⁰

The mundane preoccupations and pastimes of the vast majority of ordinary British people are repeatedly stressed to emphasise continuity while the activities and interests of the minority are dismissed as relatively inconsequential so as to downplay the extent of any significant, meaningful or lasting change. Whilst conceding that there is some truth in Sandbrook’s claim that historians and commentators have been guilty of privileging ‘a minority of well-educated, relatively affluent young people’, particularly in their ‘London-centricity’, it is the contention here that a sizeable minority of young people, initially of predominantly working class origin, but increasingly from across a broad cross-section of society, were at the forefront of fundamental cultural changes with profound and long-lasting consequences. In support of his thesis that there was no ‘cultural revolution’ Sandbrook stands accused by Edgar of making ‘judgements [that] are as slippery as his statistics’. His statements are often contradictory regarding the role of youth and pop culture and diminish the persuasiveness of

⁷⁵⁹ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), preface pp.xxii-xxiii.

⁷⁶⁰ David Edgar, ‘Much like the 1950s’, *London Review of Books*, Vol.29, No.11 (June, 2007), p.1.

his central argument concerning the essential continuity of British society. Nowhere is this more in evidence than in his treatment of the Beatles. As Edgar states:

All of Sandbrook's rhetorical armoury is deployed during his frequent and often insightful references to the Beatles. Sometimes the band are a minority taste ('a large proportion of the population...remained completely indifferent to their music'), sometimes their majoritarian populism is used as a stick to beat the avant-garde (by contrast to New Wave cinema, A Hard Day's Night 'broke all records for a pop musical'). Warning that the Beatles were 'never universally or unconditionally popular', Sandbrook cites their debt to British comedy and music tradition as 'an excellent example of the underlying continuity of British cultural life. Now Abbey Road (apparently their biggest selling LP) is being outsold by The Sound of Music: now Sergeant Pepper is alternating with Abbey Road for seven months at the top of the LP charts. Reputedly baffling and confusing to many, Sergeant Pepper nonetheless proves that 'for musical range, lyrical dexterity and cultural awareness', the Beatles were unmatched ('no other group better captured the spirit of the 1960s').⁷⁶¹

Likewise on the subject of fashion, Edgar notes that 'In one paragraph, 'it is easy to exaggerate the impact of fashion in the 1960s': in the next, fashion 'genuinely became more important in the 1960s' as (among other things) 'a powerful metaphor for wider social and cultural changes.' In another example 'Interest in pop music and football is held to be inflated ('young people spent more time in their bedrooms or at church youth clubs than they did at rock festivals or on the football terraces'), but is also cited as mass popular entertainment to trump the bohemian counterculture.'⁷⁶² Sandbrook seems to want it both ways – the cultural importance of the Beatles, fashion and football is at once both over-exaggerated and yet symbolic of 'wider social and cultural changes.' This won't do. The main argument of this study is that youth and pop culture were central to the deep cultural upheaval of the period 1956-65, and whether this amounted to a cultural revolution can be better demonstrated by applying the novel approach adopted here.

Human Agency

It now becomes necessary to re-engage with Martin and Toynbee because their theoretical insights concerning 'collective creativity in the construction and reproduction of culture' and 'creativity as social authorship' are vital to an adequate explanation of the role of human

⁷⁶¹ David Edgar, 'Much like the 1950s', *London Review of Books*, Vol.29, No.11 (June, 2007), p.4.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.* p.4.

agency in ‘the North’s greatest single cultural ‘putsch’’.⁷⁶³ It is Martin’s argument that ‘the meaning of popular music is to be found in, and only in, the uses to which it is put.’⁷⁶⁴ In his exposition of Becker’s concept of ‘art worlds’ Martin suggests how:

*...the realisation of an artwork [or a work of popular music] involves establishing a working relationship (however fragile) among what are often quite large numbers of specialists, and an orientation to the conventions which have come to be the basis of their activities. It is these conventions, normally taken for granted, which are...the ‘commonsense’ principles which people have to take account of if they are to act effectively in the social order. Conventions can range from general fundamental principles, such as the use of the diatonic scale, to the smallest details of dress and demeanour, and it should be emphasised, as by Becker, that through them we can understand not only the production but also the reception of music.*⁷⁶⁵

Thus human agency within an art world is constrained by conventions. Similarly, in Toynbee’s application of the concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘field’, human agency and therefore musical creativity is constrained by ‘given possibilities’ – ‘the way [habitus] disposes musician-agents to play, write, record or perform in a particular way’.⁷⁶⁶ Derived from Bourdieu’s schema, in which those with the most social and economic capital are seen to be engaged in a struggle with the avant-garde over the accumulation of cultural capital in the field of cultural production, Toynbee’s theoretical perspective is not dissimilar to Becker’s conceptualisation of the way in which one art world supersedes another. This is precisely what happened in Liverpool and Newcastle when the rock ‘n’ roll and skiffle-inspired beat and R&B groups took over the ballrooms and jazz clubs from the professional dance bands and amateur revivalists in the early 1960s. This occurred at a time when the record companies and associated media and leisure industries in America had absorbed the first rebellious shock of rock ‘n’ roll and were producing sanitised teeny-bop records usually sung by someone called Bobby. As George Pearson recalled:

It was October 1958 and the music business was in the doldrums as far as rock and roll was concerned.

By Christmas of that year, Conway Twitty was topping the charts with, ‘It’s Only Make Believe’. February 1959 saw Shirley Bassey at the top and by March The Platters had dug up the old standard ‘Smoke Gets In Your Eyes’.

⁷⁶³ Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*, (Manchester, 2004), p.213.

⁷⁶⁴ Peter J. Martin, *Sounds and society: Themes in the sociology of music*, (Manchester, 1995), p.272.

⁷⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p.175.

⁷⁶⁶ Jason Toynbee, *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions*, (London, 2000), p.36.

*They may have been American, they may have been black, but it sure wasn't rock and roll.*⁷⁶⁷

These records infiltrated the British charts alongside the largely feeble attempts of indigenous rock 'n' rollers. As Harker observed, this led to a situation whereby: 'if 'they' wouldn't produce the music that 'we' needed, 'we' had to do it ourselves. Otherwise, like the remnants of the Teds in the provinces and in certain London districts, we were driven back to the musical roots which had helped form Teddy Boy culture.'⁷⁶⁸

On Merseyside and Tyneside following the initial impact of rock 'n' roll and skiffle hundreds of mostly working class boys spent several years learning to play their instruments by copying from records. These records, whether bought or borrowed, heard on radios and juke boxes, in halls and clubs being played by other groups, or in between by DJs, constitute the primary instrumental means by which cultural transfer was achieved and the new and vital element of the habitus of each potentially creative artist. According to Toynbee:

*On the subjective side is the orientation of the music maker towards the future ('what will I do next'), an orientation always informed by habitus and the weight of the past (for example: lower-middle class, art school educated, music lessons as a child). On the objective side are the positions in the field of musical production [e.g. rock 'n' roll], and in the field of works [rock 'n' roll guitar style]. Possibility arises from the fact that these spaces and positions, though carried forward by the inertia of history, are constantly being transformed as possibles are actively perceived, selected and shaped to produce future music. Possibilities only become possibilities in the ear of the music maker.*⁷⁶⁹

This is what Toynbee refers to as 'social authorship', a concept that has the 'advantage of treating popular music authorship in such a way...that it enables one to be sceptical about grand claims to creative inspiration without discarding the notion of agency.'⁷⁷⁰ Toynbee's theoretical framework also permits the idea that elements of popular culture and specific urban/regional identity might be among the 'possibilities in the ear of the music maker'. This point will be returned to, however once competence was achieved and a repertoire assembled, 'rhythm' groups as they were first called, quickly attracted an audience of their peers and took over the venues of Liverpool and Newcastle. In Liverpool this phenomenon occurred to

⁷⁶⁷ George Pearson, *Sex, Brown Ale and Rhythm & Blues: The Life That Gave Birth To The Animals*, (Darlington, 1998), p.72.

⁷⁶⁸ Dave Harker, *One For The Money: Politics and popular song*, (London, 1980), pp.74-75.

⁷⁶⁹ Jason Toynbee, *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions*, (London, 2000), p.42.

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p.46.

such a degree that eventually it came to the attention of the London-based music business and media, and the national Beat Boom was launched.

It is worth considering briefly a wider application of Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' in connection with an argument first put forward by Gareth Stedman Jones in his work on late nineteenth-century working class Londoners and what he termed their 'culture of consolation'. Stedman Jones argued that 'working-class Londoners embraced a depoliticized leisure culture, immune to middle-class influence, apparent in the music hall.' He examined the content of music hall songs in an attempt to discover working class attitudes to life and concluded that they exhibited a fatalistic 'comic stoicism', a passive acceptance of their plight which he described as a 'culture of consolation.'⁷⁷¹ What is of interest here is the suggestion that working class culture, for present purposes what might be termed popular culture, as identified by Stedman Jones was characterised by a lack of 'cultural capital'.

According to Randal Johnson:

Bourdieu defines cultural capital as a form of knowledge, an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts. He suggests that 'a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded'. The possession of this code, or cultural capital, is accumulated through a long process of acquisition or inculcation which includes the pedagogical action of the family group or members (family education), educated members of the social formation (diffuse education) and social institutions (institutionalized education).⁷⁷²

The more cultural capital an individual accumulates therefore, the greater the possibilities for the appreciation of works of art, literature, poetry, music etc. Could working class culture in the North of England during the post-war period be described as retaining strong elements of Stedman Jones' culture of consolation and a concomitant lack of cultural capital? Perhaps finding themselves unable to acquire cultural capital from family members, many of the baby boom generation born during the 1940s did so by seizing the opportunities opened up by grammar school, art college, or, for a lucky few, university. Institutionalised education such

⁷⁷¹ Andrew August, 'A culture of consolation? Rethinking politics in working-class London, 1870-1914', *Historical Research*, Vol.74, No.183, (February 2001), p.192. August is referring to Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Working-class culture and working-class politics in London, 1870-1900: notes on the remaking of a working class', in *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982*, (Cambridge, 1983), in particular pp.234-35.

⁷⁷² Randal Johnson, Editor's Introduction to, Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge, 1993), p.7.

as this would encourage an appreciation of less concrete, more abstract creative art forms – jazz, abstract painting, poetry and literature. This is not to condone cultural snobbery of the ‘high art’ versus ‘low art’ variety, but to suggest that among the generation who passed through their teens in the late fifties and early sixties, there existed a significant minority of working class background who acquired sufficient cultural capital to escape a culture of consolation, what Bourdieu called ‘the spontaneous materialism of the working classes’.⁷⁷³ This occurred just as working-class popular culture was itself being transformed by a new kind of Americanised materialistic culture. It might be argued that these developments combined to augur in a ‘culture of aspiration’ for which the cultural transfer of North American popular music provided the ideal soundtrack.

Associational Culture

It is possible to identify some of the concrete differences that existed in the habitus/artworlds occupied by the young people of Merseyside and Tyneside; differences that influenced the way in which pop culture was to develop. The tensions inherent in the encounter between working-class popular culture and the new youth driven pop culture on Tyneside are well illustrated by the sometimes fraught relationship of beat groups and working men’s clubs. According to Ted Elkins, author of *The History of Northern Clubs and Federation Brewery Ltd*, when Leslie Hutchison became Secretary and Chief Executive Officer of the Federation in 1960, he found that ‘looking after the interests of 500 clubs was an all absorbing task.’ Since the new Brew House had opened in 1957 there had been a ‘boom in North East club building and expansion’, while Hutchison’s appointment marked ‘the start of a fantastic decade in the growth of the brewery and a transformation of club life’. Elkins described the 1960s as an era that ‘brought a complete change in the type of people using clubs remembering how they were first formed by groups of miners, shipyard men and other working men.’ The Federation was receiving applications from ‘more groups of professional people and committees wanting to form church clubs, Catholic clubs, cricket and sporting clubs’ but Elkins singled out the Sunderland Boilermakers Club and the new Leam Lane Club for special praise because their ‘approaches hint at a classless society in clubs of the future.’

⁷⁷³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (London, 1984), p.180.

Breweries began to sponsor the bigger modern clubs with their spacious concert halls and comfortable lounges which in turn afforded greater access to women.⁷⁷⁴

Of the 500 clubs represented by the Federation, the majority were affiliated either to the Durham County or the Northumberland Branch of the CIU (Club and Institute Union) amongst whose chairmen and concert secretaries opinion was divided as to the desirability of some of these changes. Many shared Hutchison's view and 'regarded the concert room as a 'necessary evil – part and parcel of the modern trend'', but the evidence suggests that the majority settled for a compromise involving the continuation of traditional forms of entertainment whilst catering for a younger membership.⁷⁷⁵ Hazlerigg and District Victory Social Club was a typical example. Elkins noted that 'J. B. Morrison, its chairman in the 1960s, thought the club was 'very much with it! They had beat-groups to entertain the younger members, regular dinner dances, glamorous-grandmother contests and dyed egg and paste egg competitions at Easter.' However, as the sixties progressed beat groups became caught up in wider changes that affected the whole range of entertainment provided by the clubs. Throughout the period there was an ongoing debate surrounding the issue of how artists should be booked and paid. Traditionally, club entertainment was centred around the 'go as you please' which, 'in the old days, especially on Bank Holidays...merely meant that a line was drawn across the bar and those on one side of it had to entertain the rest with singing and dancing. It was not only popular but very cheap.'⁷⁷⁶ Club notices in the *Evening Chronicle* testify to the fact that their popularity was sustained well into 1965 with virtually every club holding a talent contest once a week. The 'go as you please' phenomenon had developed into 'big business' by as early as 1956, when the *Sunday Sun* announced:

*It is costing the wealthy social clubs and workmen's institutes of the North-East hundreds of pounds every week – just to entertain their members. For as the homely Go-As-You-Please competitions get more and more popular, clubs are having to raise their prize money to attract top-liners among the hundreds of amateur artists who earn themselves several pounds a week touring clubs.*⁷⁷⁷

As clubs modernised and expanded not only did audiences demand a higher standard of entertainment but entertainers started to demand higher fees. This problem was compounded

⁷⁷⁴ Ted Elkins Jr., *The History of Northern Clubs and Federation Brewery Ltd*, (Gateshead, 1970), pp.65-72.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p.67.

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid.* pp.130-31.

⁷⁷⁷ *Sunday Sun*, February 19th, 1956, p.6.

by the growing use of booking agencies which drove expenses up further and made it increasingly difficult to adhere to Hutchison's policy which required that 'concert rooms should be self-supporting', i.e. the price of admission and the profit from bar sales should be used to cover costs. There were fierce complaints about agencies 'who demanded top prices for local stars many of whom sang in return for free beer before the big Northern clubs boom began.'⁷⁷⁸

These developments affected beat groups because they could no longer rely on the often informal arrangements they had with concert secretaries. One 'young beat group manager...complained bitterly that North-East clubs are breaking "gentlemen's agreements" by seeking entertainers through large agencies.' Henry Kane, manager of Gateshead outfit, the Senators described their treatment by Felling Working Men's Social Club:

*About ten days ago we saw the cancellation in the paper. The club had got some professional artists through an agency. We then tried to get bookings through an agency but were told that they don't want beat groups, only professional cabaret acts. So where do we go from here? The agency is taking over more and more clubs who regard the professionals as a status symbol.*⁷⁷⁹

Kane added that 'If this trend keeps [up] the part-time groups like ours will have to start telling jokes and standing on our heads.' Some of the more traditional acts went so far as to blame the increased use of agencies on the groups. James Lamb, manager of the Highlanders told the *Chronicle* that 'the main causes of the trouble are the young "beat" groups who have not the same sense of responsibility as the older artists.'⁷⁸⁰ In other words, they were unreliable. The ambivalent attitude of social clubs towards the Beat Boom was still in evidence as late as 1965 and is illustrated by an article with the headline 'Pop and a pint? They can't decide' in which it was observed that:

*The question of whether beat and beer mix is involving social clubs in a controversy as loud (almost) as the music they are talking about. Ask any two club officials about whether beat groups are a good thing for clubland and you don't get two similar answers.*⁷⁸¹

Despite these problems, the evidence confirms that Tyneside beat groups relied heavily on social clubs for an income. The suburban 'jive-hives' that provided employment on

⁷⁷⁸ Ted Elkins Jr., *The History of Northern Clubs and Federation Brewery Ltd*, (Gateshead, 1970), p.67.

⁷⁷⁹ *Evening Chronicle*, September 15th, 1964, p.7.

⁷⁸⁰ *Evening Chronicle*, September 12th, 1964, p.5.

⁷⁸¹ *Evening Chronicle*, August 28th, 1965, p.4.

Merseyside, and the enthusiastic promoters who ran them, did not exist. Aside from the residency of the Gamblers and several others at the Majestic, it was not beat groups that took over the jazz clubs of central Newcastle, but the R&B groups. It is arguably the case that the North-East Beat Boom's encounter with Tyneside popular culture in the darts and dominoes, beer and bingo atmosphere of the social club contributed to the region's inability to produce beat groups with an original and cohesive style.

In Liverpool, 'Ozzie Wades' (Walton Lane Social Club) was the headquarters of the Merseyside Clubs Federation where Bill Harry remembered attending Sunday afternoon 'showcases' during which artists performed before club secretaries in a bid to secure bookings at any of the 300 or so affiliated clubs.⁷⁸² However, Merseybeat groups did not depend on the working-men's club circuit although they were influenced by the country music emanating from many of Liverpool's social clubs and pubs. John Kerrigan states:

*The Irish folk music which had been exported to the United States by the brothers, sisters and cousins of the Liverpool settlers transformed into one strand of American country music, was electrified into Country & Western, and subsequently re-imported into Irish communities throughout Britain over a hundred years later. If you went into any Liverpool Irish pub in the late 50s, the songs of Hank Williams and Patsy Cline were being performed alongside the traditional jigs and reels.*⁷⁸³

This largely Irish affinity for country music in Liverpool echoed the broad appeal of the professional showband in Ireland. Alan Clayson maintains that there were 'around 600 horn-laden showbands operational in Ireland in the early 1960s', providing an income and musical apprenticeship for future members of Them and Thin Lizzy among others. He describes the phenomenon thus:

*An entertainment institution peculiar to Ireland, the showband ruled the country's dance halls with a polished mixture of across-the-board favourites...in-song comedy and the onstage glamour of braided costumery and neat coiffure. Dressed as if they'd come direct from the set of Oklahoma!, colleens sat on strategically placed stools, looking patiently pretty whilst waiting their turns to display synchronised dance steps, add vocal counterpoint or even sing lead as a breath of fresh air in a sphere dominated by Guinness-swilling male bonding.*⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁸² Bill Harry, *Liverpool: Bigger Than The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2009), pp.60-61.

⁷⁸³ John Kerrigan quoted in, Bill Harry, *Liverpool: Bigger Than The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2009), p.163. Harry simply refers to Kerrigan as a 'researcher' and provides no reference.

⁷⁸⁴ Alan Clayson, *Paul McCartney*, (London, 2003), pp.149-150.

The showbands were noted for their firm belief that ‘you couldn’t go wrong with Jim Reeves’, and despite being regarded by many as ‘old corn’, their undoubted popularity provides further confirmation of the Irish/Country connection. The Liverpool/Irish/Country connection is well demonstrated by the career trajectory of Michael Snow. The son of Irish immigrants to the city, Snow was a member of Merseybeat group the Barons from 1962-64 before spending six months with Waterford showband the Blue Aces. Following a stint with rock band Ferris Wheel in the late sixties he moved to Nashville in 1973 to pursue a career in song-writing and music publishing, eventually launching his own Irish Eye Records in 2000. Producing and performing with Celtic/American musicians and recording music that celebrated his Liverpool Irish roots he recently came full circle by participating in the Nashville Beatle-fest in 2004.⁷⁸⁵

Whilst it would be unwise to pretend that it was only the Irish or those of Irish descent who enjoyed and became involved in the country music scene on Merseyside, Liverpool’s reputation as the ‘Nashville of the North’ owed much to the Celtic predilection for the genre. As one Liverpool musician put it: ‘Before rock ‘n’ roll I’d been into Country and Western music. Actually, in Liverpool everybody used to play Country and Western: anything with some real lyrics about a bit of trouble, or a bit of heartache.’⁷⁸⁶ When skiffle arrived in 1956 it was therefore not surprising that the Liverpool variety would have country leanings. This is how country came to influence Merseybeat. It is not the intention to deny that there were many musical influences involved in the Beat Boom but to argue that there were differences of emphasis between Merseyside and Tyneside. Just as Johnny Dankworth invoked the Newcastle club scene’s proclivity for jazz and blues when he referred to the city as a ‘little Chicago’, so Liverpool’s inclinations were underscored by a letter to *Mersey Beat* from 1963 in which the author expressed her pride at hearing Nashville described as ‘a Liverpool with sunshine’.⁷⁸⁷

Despite the fact that Merseyside and Tyneside shared a predominantly working-class population, for historical and economic reasons the structure of employment was markedly different in certain key respects. Even into the 1950s and ‘60s it was the traditional forms of male employment that provided the focal point for the identity of both regions. In Liverpool

⁷⁸⁵ Bill Harry, *Liverpool: Bigger Than The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2009), pp.163-65.

⁷⁸⁶ Anonymous musician quoted in, Bill Harry, *Liverpool: Bigger Than The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2009), p.153.

⁷⁸⁷ *Mersey Beat*, July 18th – August 1st, 1963, p.2.

this meant the docks where the National Dock Labour Board remained the city's single largest employer with 60,000 workers. The 1960s was the last golden age for the Port of Liverpool before global economic recession, changing trading patterns and the full impact of containerisation precipitated decades of economic decline. Dock workers had always lived close to the waterfront. This was necessary because of the casual nature of the work. As Graeme Milne has written:

Dock work, no matter how skilled or specialized, was casual labour, with hiring stands operating in the morning and the middle of the day. This dictated all its characteristics, and not least its geography.

In such circumstances, living within walking distance of the docks was almost essential, and each dock developed what was effectively its own hinterland of dockers' houses in the streets across the dock road

*In the late nineteenth century, the best-paid dockers might make 35s a week – about the same as Britain's labour aristocrats, the Tyneside engineering workers – but with little job security or predictability of income.*⁷⁸⁸

Although by the 1950s conditions had improved to the point where a journalist for the *Sunday Express* was told in a dock canteen that 'a Liverpool docker's life today no longer comes under the heading of casual labour', the longstanding job insecurity associated with the docks undoubtedly contributed to a culture of instant gratification, of what Du Noyer calls 'the laugh-today-for-tomorrow-we-die sort.'⁷⁸⁹ This was also true of that other vital element of the dockside labour force, the merchant seamen. Milne maintains that while 'the popular image of sailortown assumes a feckless, rootless population of mariners' some of whom 'were violent drunks when on shore', sailors often had 'families and homes in Liverpool'.⁷⁹⁰ The 1960s was a time of regular work for merchant seamen who earned good money from a long voyage, but it was 'prosperity that the habits and customs of docklands meant was money that was there to be spent.' In the words of John Cornelius who grew up in Liverpool during the sixties:

In those days lots of kids' dads were sailors. Away for months...then all of a sudden coming home like a conquering hero, laden with presents...African

⁷⁸⁸ Graeme J. Milne, 'Maritime Liverpool', in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), p.303.

⁷⁸⁹ Quoted in, John Murden, 'City of Change and Challenge: Liverpool since 1945', in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), p.402 and Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), p.2.

⁷⁹⁰ Graeme J. Milne, 'Maritime Liverpool', in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), p.302.

*masks, bamboo whistles...Slamming taxi doors, dashing the driver a fiver.
Very impressive and loads of money.*⁷⁹¹

As with the dock workers, the onshore life of a mariner was characterised by the desire for instant gratification, what Matt Simpson describes as ‘a come-day-go-day attitude to life born out of the seafaring traditions of months at sea followed by a few days back home “blowing” pay as if it were an embarrassment.’⁷⁹² As Du Noyer observed:

*Life at sea was hard. When sailors are ashore their preoccupation is with entertainment. The port of Liverpool was made to supply Jack’s every need, whether it be for tarts or tarpaulin. Naturally the town was prepared to offer entertainment too. And that readiness became a civic tradition of the town, an acquired characteristic of its people that shaped their very nature.*⁷⁹³

For Du Noyer, this was the reason Liverpool ‘became the cradle of British pop’. As Bourdieu put it: ‘The hedonism which seizes day by day the rare satisfactions (‘good times’) of the immediate present is the only philosophy conceivable to those who ‘have no future’ and, in any case, little to expect from the future.’⁷⁹⁴ This is not to deny that such hedonism existed on Tyneside, indeed, Bill Lancaster has drawn attention to the distinctive mixture of solidarity and hedonism inherent in Newcastle’s working class popular culture.⁷⁹⁵ The traditions of skilled and semi-skilled labour on Tyneside were just as likely to give rise to a culture of ‘being-in-the-present which is affirmed in the readiness to take advantage of the good times and take time as it comes, [which] in itself, [is] an affirmation of solidarity with others’.⁷⁹⁶ Both were working class cities with a liking for strong drink and loud entertainment. It is rather to suggest that on Merseyside and in Liverpool particularly, the casual nature of much working-class life greatly exacerbated this tendency.

Culture and Agency

At this point it is necessary to engage more fully with Margaret Archer’s theoretical approach because, whilst hopefully enough of her schema has been revealed for its importance in this

⁷⁹¹ John Cornelius, *Liverpool 8*, (Liverpool, 2001), pp.13-14, quoted in, John Murden, ‘City of Change and Challenge: Liverpool since 1945’, in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), p.404.

⁷⁹² Matt Simpson quoted in, John Belchem, ‘An accent exceedingly rare’: Scouse and the inflexion of class, in John Belchem, *Merseypride: essays in Liverpool exceptionalism*, (Liverpool, 2000), pp.58-59.

⁷⁹³ Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), p.3.

⁷⁹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (London, 1984), p.180.

⁷⁹⁵ See Bill Lancaster, ‘Sociability and the City’, in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001), p.340.

⁷⁹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (London, 1984), p.180.

study to be readily apparent, the relationship between her ideas and the central theme of cultural continuity and change has not yet been properly explained. A much fuller exposition of the theoretical model she has presented is required. This could not be attempted earlier because it would have disrupted the historical narrative and its application would have made little sense to the reader without their first becoming familiar with the history. Margaret Archer's ideas regarding the relationship between structure, culture and agency are of direct relevance to the central theme of this thesis – the 'cultural revolution' debate – therefore her theoretical model must be properly introduced before the historical evidence is brought to bear. In *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, Archer argues for a reappraisal and a considerably more nuanced approach to the subject. It is her view that:

...in various sociological theories, culture swings from being the prime mover (credited with engulfing and orchestrating the entire social structure) to the opposite extreme where it is reduced to a mere epiphenomenon (charged only with providing an ideational representation of structure).⁷⁹⁷

At either end of this 'pendulum swing' but also at its mid-point, what for analytical purposes Archer calls the Cultural System (culture) and the Socio-Cultural (agency), are integrated in such a way as to preclude 'any theory of cultural development springing from internal dynamics.' This is due to the perpetuation of what she terms 'The Myth of Cultural Integration' which originated in the field of anthropology before being adapted to the needs of sociologists from Functionalists to Marxists as they sought to incorporate culture into their theories. In its earliest form, 'the Myth portrayed culture as the perfectly integrated system, in which every element was interdependent with every other – the ultimate exemplar of compact and coherent organization', as in the anthropologist's view of culture in primitive societies, something which both anthropologists and subsequently sociologists were somehow able to 'grasp intuitively'. While sociologists engaged in heated debate about the level of integration in the structural domain – 'institutional complementarity or contradiction' – they were seemingly happy to agree on the matter of cultural integration, thereby reinforcing the Myth.⁷⁹⁸

Archer identifies three variations of the Myth of Cultural Integration, the characteristics and deficiencies of which must be explained. First, 'Downward Conflation' in which 'the integrated cultural system shapes men and sweeps their interaction along with its logic.' It

⁷⁹⁷ Margaret Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, (Cambridge, Revised ed., 1996), p.1.

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.* pp.2-6.

assumes that culture is passively absorbed by social actors while ‘the implications of power, domination, choice and conflict at the Socio-Cultural level for the theory of cultural change are never considered.’⁷⁹⁹ Downwards Conflation was inherited from early sociologists and adopted by Functionalists and linguistic structuralists with the result that agency was denied any meaningful role. Its equal and opposite is ‘Upwards Conflation’ where ‘the properties of the Cultural System [are] simply pushed around by the dominant group or interests in society.’⁸⁰⁰ Archer credits neo-Marxism for administering the ‘shot in the arm’ to the Myth provided by Upwards Conflation in the form of the ‘dominant ideology thesis’ which she describes as a ‘rough treatment of Gramsci’s work’ on hegemony and the ‘ideological subordination of the working class by the bourgeoisie.’⁸⁰¹ Although not all Marxists are upwards conflationists – Althusser’s structural Marxism is of the downwards variety – it is they and particularly the Frankfurt School who are its main upholders and their fault lies in conflating the Cultural System [CS] with the Socio-Cultural [S-C] level by reducing the former to an epiphenomenon of the latter. This epiphenomenalism in the downwards and upwards versions of conflation is not exhibited by the third form, proponents of which:

...have nothing but censure for the central tenet of each version: for downwards conflation where the internal logical consistency of Cultural Systems generates uniformities in mentality and behaviour, thus reducing the actor to a Systematically programmed robot, and for upwards conflation where those dominant at the Socio-Cultural level produce a manipulated consensus, thus rendering most (if not all) actors the prisoners of hegemonic ideas. When culture is held to work surreptitiously ‘behind the back’ of every actor (downwards version), what is essentially lacking is the necessary role of human agency in actively constituting and reconstituting culture; when culture is seen as nothing but the imposition of one group’s world-view on others (upwards version), what is systematically evaded is the necessity of culture as the stuff of action at all, a fact that would have to be faced especially if domination and manipulation were ever overcome. In other words ‘culture’ should never be detached from human ‘agency’. It is neither a floating property which becomes possessed through internalization, nor is it a property created by one group which then possesses others through incorporation. In place of both, central conflationists basically want a concept of culture in which each and every actor is an active participant – never a passive recipient or an enforced receiver.⁸⁰²

⁷⁹⁹ Margaret Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, (Cambridge, Revised ed., 1996), p.31.

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p.98.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.* p.57.

⁸⁰² *Ibid.* pp.72-73.

In Central Conflation, because the CS and S-C levels are locked in a ‘conceptual vice’, ‘the two elements cannot be untied and therefore their reciprocal influences cannot be teased out in cultural analysis.’ What Archer’s conceptualisation of cultural dynamics does, and the reason for its adoption here, is replace these ‘myths’ of conflation with an analytical dualism that ‘permits contradictions and complementarities in the Cultural System to be examined in their interplay with different states of Socio-Cultural affairs.’⁸⁰³ Put simply, it makes it possible to examine and perhaps explain how human agents come to actively participate in the production and reproduction of their culture at certain historical moments.

Archer sets out to repair the damage that the Myth – in all three variants – has, in her opinion, inflicted upon previous attempts to incorporate culture into sociological theory. In order to better comprehend her solution to the problem it is necessary to gain a clear understanding of what the terms ‘Cultural System’ and ‘Socio-Cultural’ represent in Archer’s schema. The CS is defined as being ‘constituted by the corpus of existing intelligibilia – by all things capable of being grasped, deciphered, understood or known by someone’ at any one time. The temporal aspect is significant here in that there can only be one CS at any one time but it has been, is and always will be different at any other time ‘because of the growth of knowledge, elaboration of beliefs, accumulation of literature and so forth.’ The CS can be envisaged as a library of ideas that exist in logical relationship to one another while the S-C represents the ‘world of thought processes’ that exist in causal relationship – ‘causal relationships are contingent (they ‘may’ pertain) whereas logical relationships *do* pertain.’⁸⁰⁴ What Archer achieves through the use of this analytical distinction is a means by which the working parts of culture are granted a degree of autonomy so that their interaction in the process of cultural continuity (complementarities) or change (contradictions) can be recognised. This analytical dualism – ‘linking the CS and the S-C, the logical and the causal, or most basically of all, culture and agency’ – produces her ‘morphogenetic’ cycle of Cultural Conditioning – Cultural Interaction – Cultural Elaboration.⁸⁰⁵ This cycle is summarised in four propositions which need to be repeated here because they offer the most concise formulation of Archer’s theoretical approach.

⁸⁰³ Margaret Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, (Cambridge, Revised ed., 1996), p.99.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.* pp.104-105.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p.184.

- (i.) There are logical relationships between components of the Cultural System (CS).
- (ii.) There are causal influences exerted by the CS on the Socio-Cultural (S-C) level.
- (iii.) There are causal relationships between groups and individuals at the S-C level
- (iv.) There is elaboration of the CS due to the S-C level modifying current logical relationships and introducing new ones.⁸⁰⁶

With these propositions established it becomes possible to put forward an explanation of cultural dynamics. This is not the place for discussion of how Archer justifies the existence of logical relationships posited in the first proposition; it is sufficient to note that ‘analytically, at any given point in time, the items populating the CS realm have escaped their creators and have logical relationships with one another which are totally independent, at that time, of what the population notices, knows, feels, or believes about them.’⁸⁰⁷ That said, the remaining three propositions represent the ‘stuff’ of cultural dynamics conceptualised as a series of complementarities and contradictions manifest in the interaction between the CS and the S-C levels. Ultimately, what Archer hopes to achieve beyond the conceptualisation of the dynamics of cultural production and reproduction is the unification of structural and cultural analysis and the role of agency in both. In formulating the theory of morphogenesis in the sociological analysis of structure and culture she looks forward to the prospect of welding ‘a general theory of change from the two.’⁸⁰⁸ For present purposes however, analysis will be restricted to the autonomy granted to cultural dynamics by Archer’s theoretical position, which must be lifted from the purely abstract and tested against the substantive empirical evidence.

In their views as to the nature of cultural developments in post-war British society, and of youth culture in particular, Sandbrook, Fowler and Harker appear to have fallen victim to Archer’s Myth of Cultural Integration. Sandbrook generally favours a variant of Downwards Conflation in which a commonplace activity like gardening, by sheer force of the numbers

⁸⁰⁶ Margaret Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, (Cambridge, Revised ed., 1996), p.106.

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p.141.

⁸⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p.302.

engaging in it as their primary pastime, is of more cultural significance than rock 'n' roll.⁸⁰⁹ Then again, there are moments when he is caught in the 'conceptual vice' of Central Conflation where he is unable to disentangle the cultural dynamics at play and 'his desire to steer an even course between contradictory judgements leads [him] to hedge his bets on fashion, football and the Fab Four'.⁸¹⁰ Similarly Fowler is also keen to stress the 'organic' means by which youth culture developed in Britain over the twentieth century but he too is arguably guilty of Central Conflation. In his insistence that pop culture was not the product of youth culture and his claim that London's Mod culture was restricted to suburban working class dance halls and entirely detached from the middle and upper class West End discotheques of 'Swinging London', he displays an unwillingness to get to grips with a much more complex and nuanced interplay of cultural dynamics. Whether or not British youth culture originated in Cambridge University during the 1920s as Fowler argues, how that is connected 'organically' to Teddy boys in the 1950s he does not reveal. There is no consistent causal analysis.

For all their discussion of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, Teddy boys and Mods, Sandbrook and Fowler do not seriously consider the meaning of popular music in youth culture. What the music meant for young people. As Shaar Murray points out, 'When cultural revisionism implies that The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix or Bob Dylan *et al.* were the pied pipers leading sixties youth either forward or astray, the fact of the matter was that it was the audiences who were leading the artists.'⁸¹¹ This is why pop culture *is* the expression of youth culture and claiming that the Beatles and the Rolling Stones were detached from their audience in the middle 1960s and were therefore not an expression of youth culture amounts to cultural revisionism that equally misses the point. This is a serious omission, especially when made by those claiming to make authoritative statements on the subject.

As with most Marxist explanations of culture's place in society, and following on from the work of Adorno, Harker's views are those of an Upwards Conflationist. His concerns are with the authenticity inherent in the folk songs of ordinary working people, the means by

⁸⁰⁹ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), p.727. '...the 'greatest British hobby' in 1963, measured in terms of popularity, was not rock and roll music or anything even vaguely like it. It was something much more mundane: gardening.'

⁸¹⁰ David Edgar, 'Much like the 1950s', *London Review of Books*, Vol.29, No.11 (June, 2007), p.5.

⁸¹¹ Charles Shaar Murray, *Crosstown Traffic: Jimi Hendrix and Post-War Pop*, (London, 1989), p.43.

which creativity in popular music is compromised by the ‘commercial-sausage machine’, and the struggle of working-class youth culture against the hegemony of the dominant ideology. It might be argued that the contemporary cultural commentator Richard Hoggart was an Upwards Conflationist of a different but related hue, fearing for the future of Northern popular culture in the face of mass-marketing, Americanisation, and the pervasive influence of the national parent culture. What follows is an attempt to escape the Myth of Cultural Integration by employing Archer’s analytical dualism to the evidence gathered for this study.

The years 1959-63 constitute, within Archer’s framework, a period during which ‘contradictions’ emerged between the CS and S-C levels, when a particular but sizeable minority of Northern youth culture (S-C) became so disaffected with what was on offer that they deserted the mainstream, created their own culture and forced the record companies and media (CS) to radically readjust. This readjustment corresponds to the fourth stage in Archer’s formulation of cultural dynamics where ‘There is elaboration of the CS due to the S-C level modifying current logical relationships and introducing new ones.’ In the face of the enormous popularity of the Northern-inspired Beat Boom the London-based music industry and media did modify their logical relationships. Record companies, Tin Pan Alley publishing houses and their song-writers were forced to accept that groups, singers, and the audience were choosing which North American records they listened to, performed and recorded for themselves, several even having the temerity to write their own material – thereby introducing new logical relationships. According to Charlie Gillett:

*...by accident or design, the four British major labels between them recorded and released the vast majority of the hit records of the period [covering the Beat and R&B booms], and responded far more swiftly to the changing market than their American counterparts had done during the equivalent period of rock ‘n’ roll back in the mid-fifties.*⁸¹²

Gillett also points out that one of them, Pye, ‘was quicker than the other British major labels to realize that American labels preferred to release their product in Britain on their own labels, and captured Reprise, A&M and Vanguard among others.’⁸¹³ This gave Pye exclusive UK rights to American material and enabled them to cherry pick new songs for their acts, as when the Searchers scored a hit with an old Drifters B-side, ‘Sweets For My Sweet’ in 1963. New logical relationships were also introduced when traditional agent/impresarios like Don Arden and Larry Parnes were confronted with a new type of manager/entrepreneur, younger

⁸¹² Charlie Gillett, *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock and Roll*, (London, 1983), p.279.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.* p.282.

and much more 'in touch' with the acts they promoted. Brian Epstein and Mike Jeffery were among the first of this new type and they emerged in the North. The national music press had no option but to cater for the new teenage audience however much their writers despised rock 'n' roll and the home-grown beat music it had inspired. Even the BBC felt compelled to react with token 'teenage' television shows.

At a national level it is possible to propose that although discontinuities in the morphogenetic cycle first appeared with the advent of skiffle and rock 'n' roll in 1956, over the next two or three years the cultural system (CS) successfully readjusted without the need for major 'elaboration' other than by incorporation and sanitisation of the product. Thus Tommy Steele's transition from 'Rock With The Caveman' to the light entertainment of 'Little White Bull' and Cliff Richard's short lived dalliance with rock 'n' roll – 'Move It' – to the insipid 'Living Doll'. The Cultural System, what people took for granted, was that successful entertainers progressed to show-business. At the S-C level of youth and pop culture there was desertion away from the CS as a result of this process until by 1962 much deeper discontinuities were exposed as first the Beat Boom and then the R&B movement necessitated a radical elaboration before incorporation could be achieved and the process begin again. David Buxton has described how during the 1950s and '60s record companies developed the star system 'which enabled the record to accede to mass status'. The star system was created as a consequence of the fact that 'Monopoly capitalism needed to increase its consumers; markets had to grow horizontally (nationally), vertically (into the working classes), and ideologically (enhanced use values).'⁸¹⁴ As the beat groups were absorbed into this star system or (if unsuccessful) turned to cabaret, R&B established the foundations of rock culture which in turn became the soundtrack for the essentially middle class orientated 'counter culture' of the later sixties. It might be argued that each cycle of elaboration at the CS level was necessary to prepare the way for the next and in this way human agents were constantly producing and reproducing their culture. This is how by the late sixties, in Melly's view, British pop culture came to 'permeate all strata of society'. It is the contention here that this did happen as Melly suggests and that it could not have happened without the process of discontinuity at the S-C level which occurred particularly in the cities of the North of England and above all in Liverpool.

⁸¹⁴ David Buxton, 'Reading the Stars', in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (eds.), *On Record: Rock, Pop, & the Written Word*, (New York, 1990), p.431. 'The synonymy of denim jeans with relaxed, energetic, anti-puritan youth is an example of enhanced use value.' *Ibid.* p.429.

John Lennon revealed in a 1970 interview that he believed the Beatles' 'best work was never recorded':

*Because we were performers, in spite of what Mick (Jagger) says about us, in Liverpool, Hamburg and round the dance halls, you know, and what we generated was fantastic, when we played straight rock and there was no-one to touch us in Britain [but] as soon as we made it...the edges were knocked off. Brian put us in suits and all that and we made it very, very big but we sold out...the music was dead before we even went on a theatre tour of Britain...*⁸¹⁵

Although this statement was obviously coloured by Lennon's state of mind in the aftermath of the Beatles' acrimonious split it does provide an insight into the importance he attached to the groups' formative years in Liverpool. It also suggests that even before they had left Liverpool, Brian Epstein had been the instrument by which complementarities or continuity had been restored at the CS level as he prepared them for mainstream show business. This is Lennon's retrospective disillusionment which mistakenly disregards the enormous shock to the CS that the Merseybeat phenomenon delivered. Lennon's remarks about the Beatles' early live sound are repeated here as a reminder that they and many of the other Liverpool groups should not be judged solely on the recordings they made in 1963 and after – 'when the edges were knocked off'. The commonly held view that Merseybeat was soft pop compared with hard and therefore somehow more 'authentic' R&B is not shared by Cavern regulars. Liverpool playwright, Willy Russell remembered a different Beatles who:

*...embodied the black essence that I was hearing on Forces radio, it was not English pop, and that is why it hit...me like a sledgehammer. Six miles from where we lived was music that contained the same DNA as this stuff that made you want to jump up and down as though you had snakes in your pants. I hate the bullshit that the Stones were the great rock and roll band and the Beatles were a great pop band: come on, do me a favour. Anyone who heard the Beatles at the Cavern will tell you, they were the greatest kickass band ever. That raw Southern state, fighting, joyously angry black vein ran through it all.*⁸¹⁶

Nonetheless, whilst it is reasonable to argue that elaboration of the CS had taken place with regards to the Beat Boom by 1965, it was the Rhythm and Blues Boom that followed, of which the Newcastle scene formed a part, that laid the foundations for British rock culture. The argument that there *was* a cultural revolution in the early sixties, one that, after several years' gestation, exploded in the North spearheaded by youth and pop culture, can be pursued

⁸¹⁵ Youtube video excerpt posted by Ricky91993, 2009, John Lennon Rolling Stone Interview (1970): Part Five, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=784KHqc>, retrieved 5/8/2009. Jagger had claimed that the Beatles were never 'performers' as the Rolling Stones were.

⁸¹⁶ Spencer Leigh, *The Cavern: The Most Famous Club in the World*, (London, 2008), p.91.

by juxtaposing developments in Liverpool and Newcastle. To begin with, in an attempt to answer two questions, ‘was there a Liverpool sound?’ and the broader question of ‘why Liverpool?’

Cultural Revolution in the North

Wider economic, social and cultural developments, some with deep rooted continuities dating back to the late nineteenth century, such as the gradual emergence of the teenager, the entertainment and media industries, and advances in technology and communications, have been traced in preceding chapters. Throughout two World Wars and a depression, for British working-class youth in particular, everything perceived as modern, glamorous and therefore exciting was American. Whilst these cataclysmic events can be said to have disrupted the Americanisation of British culture, in some respects, technological progress for example, the wars, especially the Second World War accelerated the process in terms of direct exposure to American culture – the influence of Burtonwood air base on the popular music of Manchester and Liverpool being a case in point. Following the austerity of the immediate post-war years a particular constellation of factors precipitated the Northern cultural revolution: increased disposable income for working class youth, the consequent affordability of record players and records, transistor radios, the popularisation through skiffle of the guitar and its electrification, and again their affordability along with other musical instruments as a result of the easing of credit restrictions. The availability and dissemination of all the above facilitated by technological innovation and standardisation allied to developments in mass communication. The lifting of post-war privations led to an injection of style and colour into fashion at affordable prices. As a result of the ‘baby boom’ there were also unprecedented numbers of young people within a society that was being transformed. This undoubtedly contributed to the feeling in Northern towns and cities that, as the inner-city areas were cleared and people relocated to new suburban housing estates, distances between home and work, home and leisure, and parents and teenagers had increased. As Frith observed, ‘Teenage culture thus filled the gap’⁸¹⁷ – the generation gap – created by an older ‘working-class insularity being prised open. A less precise, more amorphous popular urban culture was relentlessly taking root.’⁸¹⁸ All of this with the added sense of, as Alan Price has put it:

The free and easy atmosphere that existed in the early sixties, mainly because National Service had finished and then we were all out on the loose and you

⁸¹⁷ Simon Frith, *The Sociology of Youth*, (Ormskirk, 1984), p.11.

⁸¹⁸ Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: pop music and popular culture*, (Basingstoke, 1985), p.7.

*didn't have John Bull standing there with his top hat on saying, 'Britain Needs You!' They didn't need us at all and it was such a happy release for us all – we were ecstatic.*⁸¹⁹

All these factors were common to Merseyside and Tyneside. What made Liverpool's reception of North American popular music and the response to it unique was the young people it impacted upon. Liverpool had always felt itself closer to America than the rest of Britain but otherwise, leaving Burtonwood aside, the means by which the transatlantic cultural transfer of popular music took place did not differ markedly between Merseyside and Tyneside. Once the myth of the Cunard Yanks is discarded, excepting the case of jazz and country music in the forties and fifties, it becomes clear that it was dissemination via radio and the purchase and lending of records that mattered in both regions. If the meaning of popular music is to be found in the uses to which it is put, then as Martin has suggested, young people responded to 'the loss of community, leading to the isolation and powerlessness of individuals in modern society' by searching 'for meaning, identity and a sense of belonging' in the music, and by creating their own. The young people of Liverpool and Newcastle reached for the 'affirmation of personal identity and a sense of membership in a larger collectivity' that participation through popular music offered and in so doing (re)created the music scenes in their cities.⁸²⁰ As the brightest and most creative among them cast around their habitus of 'given possibilities' in the process of cultural production, to select from it influences – music hall, comedy, etc. – that would supplement the cultural transfer of North American popular music to produce British rock and pop, is it not reasonable to suggest that these 'given possibilities', the conventions of their art worlds, might also include the peculiarities of Scouse or Geordie identity?

The Scouse wit and humour which Belchem describes as having 'spread from the waterfront to the commercial offices' and thus presumably to the inner suburbs – and during the period in question to the overspill estates via the dispersal of the inner city population – certainly inflected the lyrical playfulness of the Beatles and their banter during press conferences and interviews. Much less was made of Geordie traits in the national media following the Animals' success. Despite Hilton Valentine's observation that 'Once we moved out of Newcastle everything about us was 'Geordie'. People made that clear. It was definitely our 'mark''⁸²¹, the groups' response when quizzed about a 'Newcastle sound' was consistently to

⁸¹⁹ Alan Price, interviewed on the *Paul Jones Show*, BBC Radio Two, October 10th, 2009.

⁸²⁰ Peter J. Martin, *Sounds and society: Themes in the sociology of music*, (Manchester, 1995), p.274.

⁸²¹ Hilton Valentine in correspondence with the author, February 10th, 2009.

deny it. Eric Burdon told the *NME*, ‘All this business about getting together and playing because Newcastle is a hard, rough place is a load of rubbish. It’d have been no different if we’d come from London or anywhere.’⁸²² Alan Price concurred, telling *Melody Maker*, ‘All this talk about the Newcastle sound and the Liverpool sound – it’s a load of rubbish. All groups are different. We don’t draw inspiration from anyone in Britain.’⁸²³ They did refer to Tyneside on the B-side of their first single release for Columbia in 1964 on a re-working of ‘Gonna Send You Back To Georgia’, substituting Walker – the working-class area of Burdon’s upbringing – for Georgia however, ‘We’ve Gotta Get Out Of This Place’ arguably summed up his feelings more accurately.⁸²⁴ Although Lennon was initially resentful that their Liverpool origins held them back due to the preconceptions of the Southern music industry, the Beatles were keen to play up their whacky Scouse sense of humour once they realised it endeared them to the British public. All this may have been significant in the context of public image building in the music industry but it is arguably what groups and singers from Merseyside and Tyneside brought unconsciously or subconsciously to the style and content of their creativity – cultural production and reproduction – that can provide clues as to ‘why Liverpool?’ or ‘why not Newcastle?’

Enough evidence of Belchem’s ‘Merseypride’ has been uncovered by this study to provide a strong indication that the collective self-worth invested in Liverpool as the former ‘Second City of Empire’ was sufficiently intact for a fierce resistance to the notion of London’s cultural superiority to be maintained. This was reinforced by its sense of ‘otherness’ from the culture of surrounding Lancashire. If no longer economically or commercially, Liverpool at least felt itself culturally superior to Manchester and equal to London. In contrast, Newcastle, perhaps due to its historical position as capital of the North East had never felt the need to defend itself or its culture, or even to define itself in competition with London. The evidence suggests that Newcastle and Tyneside felt isolated from the rest of England but not ‘other’ as did Liverpool and Merseyside. The Celtic and especially the Irish essence of Scouse identity is undoubtedly both the main cause and the chief expression of that ‘otherness’ and an important ingredient of Merseybeat. It is not important whether individual beat group members were Irish or even had Irish heritage but that they were Scousers to

⁸²² *NME*, May 15th, 1964, p.14.

⁸²³ *Melody Maker*, July 4th, 1964, p.9.

⁸²⁴ ‘Gonna Send You Back To Georgia’ was originally recorded by Timmy Shaw. It was written by Matthews/Hammond Jnr. See, Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks – The Story of the Animals: Newcastle’s Rising Sons*, (London, 2001), p.41.

varying degrees which was incorporated into the way they played, wrote, recorded and performed as musician-agents. According to Paul Du Noyer:

If it's true, as one theory goes, that human speech began in song, then some accents are always trying to get back there. Liverpudlian is one of them. You could hear that sing-song musicality in the suburban, south Liverpool speaking voices of the Beatles, even their deadpan statements carried a lilt, not to mention timing, of metronomic precision. The north Liverpool dockland voice is harsher, faster, more threatening. It can sound like a rusty sub-machine gun, but it carries the driving beat that powered rock 'n' roll.⁸²⁵

This statement is of course highly subjective but if the Scouse accent is largely derived from an Irish, and to a lesser extent Welsh, influence it chimes with the longstanding belief in the musicality of the Celtic tradition. As does the influence of country music, the unison and harmony singing of which was carried into the beat groups. As Hank Walters stated, communal singing was important in Liverpool culture. Frank Shaw was adamant that:

Unless you realise that we are all minstrel boys, or girls, in the 'Pool you cannot understand us. To the world the Beatles may have seemed like a unique phenomenon. Not to us. It's the Irish and the Welsh in us. We are all singers in Liverpool. Even if we can't sing.⁸²⁶

No evidence has been uncovered to suggest that Tyneside beat groups were influenced by country music and the R&B groups which constitute Newcastle's distinctive musical contribution to the Northern cultural revolution were almost exclusively influenced by black American artists. Although the initial impetus of rock 'n' roll was the trigger for the explosion of beat groups on Merseyside and Tyneside and Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard, Chuck Berry and Ray Charles were the shared inspiration, the Liverpool groups tended towards obscure B-sides of black soul-pop such as the Shirelles, the Isley Brothers or Smokey Robinson and the Miracles. The Newcastle R&B groups embraced the blues. From the jazz scene that thrived in the Newcastle clubs of the late fifties and early sixties, particularly the bebop of the EmCee Five, a much bluesier feel was generated than anywhere on Merseyside at the time. Dave Douglass maintains that 'Blues, real black man's blues, was a cult on Tyneside among progressive teenagers' and claims there was a bond between the dispossessed and abandoned kids of the North East and the lives and struggles of black people in the US.⁸²⁷ John Steel explained that 'The North-East corner where we come from is a bit isolated from the rest of England', and in the 1950s 'it was still a very, very

⁸²⁵ Paul Du Noyer, *Wondrous Place: From the Cavern to the Capital of Culture*, (London, 2007), p.8.

⁸²⁶ Frank Shaw, *My Liverpool*, (Liverpool, 1978), p.63.

⁸²⁷ Dave Douglass, *Geordies – Wa Mental*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2000), p.115.

industrialised, heavy industry-type area where people still remembered the times from the Thirties. No different from a lot of the north of England but there'd always been a strong coal mining tradition, ship building – all the big dirty jobs.' This he believes was why 'We just had an instinctive emotional identification with black American blues.'⁸²⁸ In making the connection between the nature of industrial occupation and musical identification Steel raises an interesting point.

Might it be the case that the casual labour of Liverpool's waterfront not only produced the clustering of Irish immigrants responsible for the Scouse character but also the associational culture that evolved and thereby the distinctive features of music-making in Liverpool? As a counter-factual, if the organised skilled and semi-skilled labour and the equally well organised working men's club network into which it appears the Irish immigrants to Tyneside were assimilated had existed in Liverpool, would its music have sounded the same? This is conjecture, but the evidence shows that beat groups on Tyneside relied heavily on the social clubs for income; Mr. L. Harbron, manager of the Zephyrs, claimed to have seen beat groups playing at over 200 clubs in the North East.⁸²⁹ On Merseyside beat groups played the dance halls, the 'jive-hives', at events organised by any of the 32 promoters Bob Wooler reported were operating in late 1961. These were not entertainment committees but independent promoters cashing in on the Liverpool Beat Boom and the groups were playing the music they wanted, to an audience that wanted to hear it. Conversely, it is tempting to conclude that Tyneside talent was stifled and originality discouraged by the working men's clubs as Sheffield's had been in the opinion of Peter Stringfellow and the *Sheffield Star*. Groups were encouraged to perform chart hits and old favourites, and this is where they developed the comedy routines that many of them would fall back on once the Beat Boom was over. The evidence does suggest a link between the structure of labour, recreational and associational culture, and cultural production – music making – part of the dynamics of structure and culture.

It has been established that unemployment was not a major problem for either the musicians and performers or the audience for jazz, skiffle, rock 'n' roll, beat and R&B throughout the period. The baby boom and the decline in traditional forms of male employment – casual labour on the docks on Merseyside, heavy engineering and coal mining on Tyneside – did

⁸²⁸ Sean Egan, *Animal Tracks – The Story of the Animals: Newcastle's Rising Sons*, (London, 2001), pp.10-11.

⁸²⁹ *Evening Chronicle*, November 11th, 1963, p.9.

have an impact and unemployment in both regions was consistently higher than the national average. However, it should be remembered that Liverpool and Newcastle were not industrial cities and the wide range of occupations revealed in newspaper reports of groups and their audience shows that as well as apprentices and those in the more traditional forms of employment, there were many office and shop workers among the working and lower middle-class young people who attended the lunchtime rock 'n' roll sessions at the Cavern and the Majestic. Only 20% of Liverpool's school-leavers went into industrial work in 1962 and on Tyneside as a whole there was a shortage of apprenticeships for boys which caused many to leave the area in search of skilled work. Growth in both cities was in the service sector which meant better opportunities for girls in particular.

Added to this mix were the students of Newcastle's College of Art and Industrial Design and Liverpool College of Art, who although they were often bright and talented grammar school leavers stalling for time before entering the world of work, were nonetheless from the same working and lower middle-class backgrounds. Whilst it would be an exaggeration to claim that these art students alone contributed the 'style, image, self-consciousness – an *attitude* to what commercial music could and should be' to the Liverpool and Newcastle music scenes of their day, a claim made by Frith and Horne for British art school students in general, it is perhaps significant that two members of the Beatles (Stuart Sutcliffe, John Lennon) and the Animals (John Steel, Eric Burdon) did attend art college.⁸³⁰ Being an art student might have gained someone an 'arty' reputation, possibly even their being regarded as 'a bit soft', but they were not so different from most of the rest of the crowd that made up the scene at the Downbeat or the Cavern. Besides taking advantage of college facilities – rehearsal space, poster printing etc. – art college students put their skills to use producing art work for the various clubs they were involved with. Joe 'Tut' Pharoer painted the neon sign for the Marimba and decorated the interior of the Downbeat, Eric Burdon provided murals for the Club A' Go Go. Stuart Sutcliffe painted murals in the basement of the Jacaranda and Lennon added a few touches to Mona Best's Casbah Coffee Club.

At another level Lennon's art college friendship with Sutcliffe did inspire him to explore what Alan Clayson calls the 'hitherto self-suppressed "closet intellectual"' in his personality. Sutcliffe's sister, Pauline, recalled that Lennon 'debunked a lot of intellectual analysis...particularly when people found in his output roots in all sorts of literary and artistic

⁸³⁰ Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art Into Pop*, (London & New York, 1987), p.1.

figures that he would claim never to have been familiar with.’ In the opinion of Arthur Ballard, who was their general tutor, ‘It was Stuart who nurtured an interest in John to want to know more about things than he knew...he was educating him. Lennon wouldn’t have known a Dada from a donkey.’⁸³¹ Nonetheless, as far as another of his teachers Nicholas Horsfield is concerned, at the very least, ‘that year or two gave him the opportunity to develop within himself.’⁸³² This was also the aim of the experimental course in ‘basic design’ introduced by Victor Pasmore and Richard Hamilton at King’s College Newcastle. Marian Scott maintains that the basic course’s ‘free and experimental nature emphasised an open-minded approach and the personal development of each student.’ Derived from the Bauhaus school and its ‘principle of breaking the barriers between painting, sculpture and architecture’, the basic course evolved in Britain as follows:

*Its beginnings can be traced back to Camberwell and the Central where both Pasmore and Hamilton had taught prior to their appointment at King’s. Also teachers from Leeds College of Art were very much involved in its development. Harry Thubron and Tom Hudson, both born and educated in County Durham were, along with Victor and Wendy Pasmore, tutors on a series of Summer Schools held in Scarborough between 1954-1957 which could be regarded as prototypes for the subsequent “basic design” course in Newcastle and Leeds. These ideas were later used as the basis of the new Foundation Courses implemented as a result of the findings of the Coldstream Report on art education.*⁸³³

There is little doubt that an art college or university fine art department education inculcated in students an unusually broad conception of artistic possibilities, particularly when it involved exposure to Hamilton’s basic design course. Clayson claims that the ‘concept of a firm link between rock ‘n’ roll and art-college coursework is exemplified by The Beatles’ conscious musical progression’. This he attributes to Sutcliffe’s influence, while his sister Pauline believes he caused them to become ‘more self-consciously ‘arty’ – not just in the way they looked and sounded but the whole package. After Stuart’s death [from a brain haemorrhage in 1962], they achieved something quite extraordinary, in the sense of developing pop music as an art form whilst retaining mass appeal.’ Just prior to his untimely death, Sutcliffe was about to begin studying at Hamburg’s State School of Art under the tutelage of Eduardo Paolozzi, another pioneer of Pop Art, and one amongst a list of art-world

⁸³¹ Sutcliffe and Ballard quoted in, Alan Clayson, *John Lennon*, (London, 2003), p.38.

⁸³² Quoted in, Spencer Leigh, *Twist And Shout: Merseybeat, The Cavern, The Star Club and The Beatles*, (Liverpool, 2004), p.38.

⁸³³ Marian Scott, ‘Post-War Developments in Art in Newcastle: Was it a Golden Age?’, *Northern Review*, (Winter 1996), Vol.4, pp.37-38.

personalities Hamilton had invited to Newcastle thereby adding to the feeling that the art department there was ‘very well connected internationally...very ambitious and cutting edge...in its ideas about contemporary art.’⁸³⁴ Michael Bracewell has written that:

There is a tangible connection between aspects of the art education which [Bryan] Ferry et al. were receiving, and their espousal of an in crowd lifestyle. Summarised, the students were experiencing an opening-up of cultural identities, in addition to pursuing their different ideas with regard to actual art-making.

*At the same time, their awareness of witnessing, by way of Hamilton and his encouragement to absorb new ideas, a confluence of stimuli – including Hollywood films, pop music, new technologies, art history, design, pop imagery – would propose a vastly exciting range of possibilities.*⁸³⁵

This description of what an art school education offered its students is also perhaps as good a way as any to conceive of the contribution art students made to the pop culture of Liverpool and Newcastle – the reception and transmission of new ideas.

As for the influence of university students in general, discerning the extent of interpenetration between town and gown in Liverpool and Newcastle is problematic. Geographically, the universities of both cities were ideally placed to enable students to participate in the nightlife (For the social geography of popular music on Merseyside and Tyneside see, Appendix: Maps). In Liverpool the university bordered Liverpool 8 and was just up the hill from the city centre where the Cavern and Iron Door clubs were situated. The Mardi Gras Club was actually on Mount Pleasant one of the roads that ran uphill from Lime Street to join Hope Street, site of the College of Art and the Philharmonic Hall (and pub), and a five minute walk from the University. Newcastle University (King’s College until 1963) was even more central. The Club A’ Go Go was virtually on its doorstep and a sortie to the Majestic, the Downbeat, or the Quay Club would be no more than a ten minute hike from campus. For those living in Heaton or Jesmond bedsit land the walk home after a night on the town would not have been overly arduous. Merseyside’s suburban dance halls and Tyneside’s working men’s clubs aside, the actual area of city centre nightlife, adjacent university campus and nearby ‘bohemian’ district was a relatively compact space in both cities. The main difference being that there was no immigrant community in Jesmond and Heaton to compare with that

⁸³⁴ Alan Clayson, *John Lennon*, (London, 2003), pp.39, 75, 118 and Michael Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model: Becoming Roxy Music*, (London, 2007), p.127.

⁸³⁵ Michael Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model: Becoming Roxy Music*, (London, 2007), p.126.

of Liverpool 8. Not that the West Indian or African music of the area had much impact on Merseybeat.

Evidence for the involvement of university students in the music scene in Liverpool is thin. There is fleeting mention of a University Jazz Band playing the Cavern in the late fifties and the inter-university jazz band competitions of 1954 and 1957 were held in Liverpool. The existence of a student jazz band and a University Rhythm Club indicate that enthusiasm at the university for the trad revival was as great as anywhere else but no university student presence can be detected in Merseybeat. Art College student Bill Harry recalled regularly dropping by the university student bar and drinking with some of the students in the Marlborough next door to the Jacaranda however, to the knowledge of the present author, not one of the key figures in Merseybeat was a current or former student at the university. This is not to suggest that they did not frequent clubs in the city centre but it seems most likely that they would gravitate to the jazz concerts held in venues on and around Hope Street and poetry readings at Streates Coffee Bar, O'Connor's Tavern and Hope Hall (later the Everyman Theatre).⁸³⁶

There is considerably more evidence for the involvement of King's College students in the nightlife of Newcastle. What is harder to establish is the effect their presence had. The influence of former students Ian Carr and John Walters on the jazz scene is undeniable and the role of Mike Jeffery in opening several key venues crucial. But although Richard Hamilton's encouragement of his art students to experience Newcastle's wider culture by attending lunchtime dance sessions at the Majestic might be considered, for its time, a bold attempt to cross the class divide, just what exactly did these university students contribute? In view of Connie Pickard's remark that the majority of students didn't go into town at all and those who did were predominantly art students, it is tempting to conclude that whether they were twisting at the Majestic or shaking at the Downbeat and the Club A' Go Go, what they added was a certain style. After all, surely no other segment of Newcastle's youth culture would have been as acutely sensitive to the aesthetics of sartorial display – Mark Lancaster was reputedly, after Richard Hamilton, 'the coolest of the cool.'⁸³⁷ In fact it is striking that in the interviews conducted with former King's students for Michael Bracewell's

⁸³⁶ John Murden, 'City of Change and Challenge: Liverpool since 1945', in John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character & History*, (Liverpool, 2006), pp.426-27.

⁸³⁷ Bryan Ferry quoted in Michael Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model: Becoming Roxy Music*, (London, 2007), p.84.

account of Bryan Ferry's formative years on the Newcastle scene there is more discussion of what they were wearing than of the music they were listening to. This is not to deny that the presence of King's students in Newcastle's jazz and R&B clubs added something to the mix, only that the notion of their being in the vanguard of any cultural revolution should be dismissed. Ferry did make a direct contribution by helping to paint the Manhattan skyline mural at the Club A' Go Go where he was also the occasional DJ, and he did front the 'up-market' R&B group the Gas Board for a time. Ultimately then, despite limited evidence it seems reasonable to conclude that the presence of Liverpool University students was of less significance for Merseybeat than that of King's students was for the Newcastle R&B scene.

In a recently published book on the subject, David Fowler claims that 'the pioneers of youth culture in Britain were not teenagers, or Beatles fans, or Teddy Boys, but a small group of university students in the early 1920s'.⁸³⁸ From this premise he embarks on a revisionist account of British youth culture which aims to demonstrate that it was 'significantly shaped by youth of the middle classes', indeed, 'it was middle-class students in a limited number of universities who were the prime movers' during the interwar years. He goes further, suggesting that:

*Cambridge was, perhaps, the most significant city for Youth Culture between the Wars in that the pioneers of British youth culture, Rolf Gardiner for example, studied at Cambridge. Moreover, even after the Second World War the city continued to influence British youth culture.*⁸³⁹

It is not necessary to enter into an argument as to the significance of Rolf Gardiner and others of his ilk who were interested in youthful 'experiments in living', establishing international connections between youth movements, and leading 'musical' tours where mostly well-off Southern students experienced sword dancing with unemployed Yorkshire miners. Nor is it of vital consequence that Fowler's justification for the post-war influence of Cambridge rests on its connection with Pink Floyd and 'student pop star' Jonathan King. His insistence that 'the creativity of youth...has always been the central dynamic of youth culture' is also unproblematic, but his contention that 'university students developing their ideas about youth culture in Ivory Towers' were of equal consequence for the evolution of British youth culture as 'youth pop groups emerging from Northern cities during the late 1950s and early 1960s' is unconvincing.⁸⁴⁰ In trying too hard to claim a central role for university students, particularly

⁸³⁸ David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c. 1920-c. 1970*, (Basingstoke, 2008), p.196.

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.* p.9.

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.9.

Cambridge students, he loses his sense of proportion as well as his historical perspective. Although he admits there was ‘a hiatus in the story of British youth culture which leaves the period from the late 1930s down to the early 1950s, the era of the Teddy Boy, a void’, to argue that ‘people simply forgot about the earlier generations of youth who had been the first teenagers’ does not compensate for his inability to establish the continuity he seeks in order to debunk ‘the myths of the novelty of ‘post-war youth’’.⁸⁴¹ Fowler believes that ‘the heroic days of youth culture were the decade of the 1920s (for middle-class youth), the 1930s (for urban working-class youth cultures) and the 1960s (for student youth).⁸⁴² This study has demonstrated that university students did not play a vital role in the Northern cultural revolution on Merseyside and Tyneside between 1956 and 1965. It has however revealed the extraordinary creativity of working-class youth in that process. Where, it might be asked, was the creativity that Fowler insists ‘has always been the central dynamic of youth culture’, to be found in the urban working-class culture of the 1930s?

One very important factor in the Liverpool music scene from 1961 was the publication of Bill Harry’s *Mersey Beat*. Although there was competition between beat groups this paper undoubtedly generated the feeling of a cohesive movement which was felt by performers and audience alike. The conventional newspapers in Liverpool and Newcastle were satisfied that their jazz columns could cover popular music and simply did not pay attention to the local beat and R&B groups until after the Beat Boom became national news and the Beatles and the Animals *et al* had achieved chart success. In March 1964 *Mersey Beat* asked the question ‘Why Liverpool?’

Why did the fantastic Mersey Scene happen here and not in Nottingham or Burnley or Manchester or Newcastle or Bristol or in any other town or city in the British Isles? Why did Liverpool produce The Beatles; a unique cellar club such as the Cavern; a publication such as ‘Mersey Beat’; a D.J. such as Bob Wooler; Personalities such as Alan [sic] Williams, Les Ackerley, Ray McFall; Promoters such as Ralph Webster, Brian Kelly, Brian Epstein, Wally Hill and Doug Martin; Groups such as The Searchers, Gerry and the Pacemakers – and the 101 things that have put Merseyside on the international map. Why did it all happen on Merseyside?’⁸⁴³

Several local musicians were asked to respond including Rory Storm, ‘I’ve got no idea’, Alan Harding of the Chants, ‘there were too many groups for people not to notice’, and Adrian

⁸⁴¹ David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c. 1920-c. 1970*, (Basingstoke, 2008), p.197.

⁸⁴² *Ibid.* preface, p.xiv.

⁸⁴³ *Mersey Beat*, February 27th – March 12th, 1964, p.7. Besides managing the Iron Door, Ackerley informally represented the Searchers before they opted for London-based Tito Burns as their manager.

Barber formerly of the Big Three who felt, ‘It’s impossible to say. There are hundreds of reasons – the right people were in the right place at the right time.’ Allan Williams replied:

Years ago in Liverpool the dancing scene was controlled by promoters who were interested in Ballroom dancing. They would not entertain the youngsters who wanted to jive. Fortunately, a number of young promoters came along who wanted to give the youngsters what they wanted – and the scene developed from there.

Others thought youth unemployment, the experience of playing on the Continent, and Liverpool’s tradition of producing entertainers were major factors.

Certain characteristics of popular culture peculiar to Liverpool/Merseyside were influential in the development of a ‘Liverpool Sound’ and help to answer the question of ‘why Liverpool?’ These included scouse wit and humour, the tendency towards sentimentality, and the Celtic appreciation of group and harmony singing as demonstrated by the popularity of country music. Or even as Ross MacManus observed: ‘I think Liverpool singers and jazzmen have always had a propensity for thumping it out. Our violent Celtic temperament!’⁸⁴⁴ The testimony of contemporary commentators and the recollections of participants cited in this study confirm the general belief that it was the idiosyncrasies of the Merseyside and Liverpool character that had caused the Beat Boom to originate there. George Martin attempted to dismiss the notion of a ‘Liverpool Sound’ in an interview he gave to the *NME* early in 1963 just as Merseybeat was breaking through but actually inadvertently promoted the idea. After insisting that ‘you can’t possibly lump them all together under the heading of a “Liverpool Sound”’, he added, ‘I admit that there’s an affinity between them, a musical relationship’.⁸⁴⁵

The influence of North-East or Geordie popular culture and identity on youth and pop culture and hence the cultural production of popular music is harder to identify and can only be surmised. Any Celtic Scottish or Irish influence on the Tyneside music scene must also be a matter for speculation. Beyond Burdon’s remark that his urge to sing might have had something to do with his Scottish ancestry there is no evidence for it. There may be something to John Steel and Dave Douglass’ argument that there was an instinctive emotional identification with the blues owing to a sense of isolation and the muck and toil associated with heavy industrial labour but these views were expressed retrospectively and

⁸⁴⁴ Ross MacManus quoted in *Mersey Beat*, February 27th – March 12th, 1964, p.12. MacManus sang with the Joe Loss Orchestra at the Hammersmith Palais. He was also the father of Elvis Costello.

⁸⁴⁵ *NME*, June 7th, 1963, p.3.

contemporary evidence does not exist to support them. In fact the evidence confirms frustration at the lack of a ‘Tyne-beat’ or ‘Newcastle Sound’. Newcastle group the Delemeres took up residency at the Locarno Ballroom in Liverpool in September 1962 – before the Beatles’ national breakthrough – because they regarded the city as ‘the heart of rock’. According to *Mersey Beat*:

*The boys felt a little strange at first owing to the fact that the style of music in Liverpool was vastly different from that in Newcastle or Edinburgh. The group practised during every spare moment and found that after several weeks they had managed to change their style.*⁸⁴⁶

The Animals told the same paper that they were about to record a Bo Diddley inspired tune with lyrics that ‘tell the story of the Mersey Sound and the Liverpool beat scene.’⁸⁴⁷ The lyric they did record conveyed a potted history of R&B that included a tribute to the Beatles and their Liverpool origins implying that they, along with the Rolling Stones in the ‘deep south’, were the catalyst for British R&B.⁸⁴⁸ So while one Newcastle group was willing to work hard to achieve the Liverpool Sound its most successful was prepared to acknowledge Merseybeat as a major source of inspiration. Still, it is undeniable that there was a small but passionate audience unique to Jeffery’s Newcastle clubs, a scene that existed prior to the national vogue for R&B. George Melly was correct in his observation that:

...although R and B may have followed and supplanted the Liverpool Sound as a pop explosion, as an underground movement it was more or less a contemporary. It was a geographical rather than a temporal difference which separated them. While the Liverpool Sound was hatching down the Cavern and trying its wings in Hamburg, R and B was establishing its public in Soho, along the Thames Valley, and in certain provincial outposts such as Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Coming from a jazz background and having performed at the Cavern just as the beat groups were coming through Melly was able to make an important distinction – besides a geographical one – between Merseybeat and R&B. This was ‘the fact that the Liverpool groups were entirely separate from trad, whereas London-based R and B had seceded from it’.⁸⁴⁹ Although the Newcastle R&B scene developed relatively independently of its London counterpart until firm connections were established during 1963, it too emerged from jazz.

⁸⁴⁶ *Mersey Beat*, March 14th-28th, 1963, p.9.

⁸⁴⁷ *Mersey Beat*, July 16th, 1964, p.3.

⁸⁴⁸ The song was called ‘The Story Of Bo Diddley’ which appeared on their eponymous debut album in November 1964.

⁸⁴⁹ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, (London, 2008), pp.88-89.

Newcastle looked to London while Liverpool continued to enjoy its longstanding ‘freedom from metropolitan envy’.⁸⁵⁰ Liverpool remained the exception.

There are those who dismiss the idea that regional or urban identity and culture had any influence on musical style. The sceptical view is well expressed by Mike Brocken, lecturer on popular music at Liverpool Hope University:

There were very good bands around Glasgow, Newcastle, Birmingham, Richmond but the genres of music did differ. The scene around Newcastle had developed because someone had started a blues club. Alan Sytner started a jazz club which became a rock ‘n’ roll club and so the music in the Cavern was more rock ‘n’ roll than rhythm and blues. Newcastle was a different thing, it was an R&B club, and also in Richmond with Giorgio Gomelsky’s club.

*It was nothing to do with the city – the Liverpool sound, the Birmingham sound – but to do with the venues and the type of music that the owners wanted to be played at those venues. The Animals played R&B in the Club A Go Go. They went down well at the Cavern but they sounded very different.*⁸⁵¹

The idea that elements of Merseyside and Tyneside popular culture were incorporated into youth and pop culture, and the notion that individual agents such as musicians, promoters and club owners influenced musical style need not be mutually exclusive. Mike Jeffery did push for an R&B scene in Newcastle and for local groups to provide the focus, but this would not have been possible without the serious appreciation of the blues that the jazz scene in the city had nurtured. Alan Sytner had wanted a modern jazz club but the audience demanded trad, Ray McFall had wanted trad but a younger audience craved rock ‘n’ roll. Once again this raises the question of human agency and its place in cultural production.

Record companies and national music papers in the late 1950s had no sense that the small-scale music scenes of Merseyside and Tyneside were functioning as proto-markets where new styles and talent were being nurtured. The odd provincial star did emerge from time to time but nothing had ever occurred on the scale of Merseybeat. Even Brian Epstein claimed to be unaware of what was happening around him. To use Toynbee’s expression, this ‘institutional autonomy’ was a positive advantage that allowed creative freedom. The tremendous surge in musical creativity was generated by the disaffection among large numbers of young people with the products of the cultural system (CS). At the socio-cultural

⁸⁵⁰ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, (London, 2008), p.236.

⁸⁵¹ Quoted in Spencer Leigh, *The Cavern: The Most Famous Club in the World*, (London, 2008), p.123.

level (S-C) this resulted in new art worlds forming which by the early 1960s had coalesced around small city centre clubs in Liverpool and Newcastle run by entrepreneurs who recognised this disaffection and sensed a money-making opportunity. Regardless of personal relationships it was the profit-making potential of the beat and R&B groups that was the chief motivation for their involvement. The promoters and club owners were the ‘facilitators’ who made it possible for the music scenes to flourish. Being unusually ambitious, Brian Epstein and Mike Jeffery quickly realised that the limited infrastructure or incomplete art worlds of Liverpool and Newcastle could not sustain careers for either the groups or themselves and set about establishing the necessary London connections. This is one aspect of the way in which human agency played a crucial role in the North’s cultural revolution.

None of this could have happened however without the afore-mentioned surge in musical creativity generated by structural factors both social and economic – increased consumer spending power, the demographic growth in young people, technological innovation – combined with cultural factors – the emergence of the teenager as a recognised social category, the cultural transfer of jazz, blues, rock ‘n’ roll and rhythm and blues. The culmination of all these factors in the years from 1956-65 resulted in an environment where a large minority of predominantly working and lower middle-class young people were able to participate in an unprecedented level of collective creativity both as performers and audience. The cultural system represented by the London record companies and music media were so slow to appreciate the impact of North American popular music on teenagers, and relatively isolated Northern teenagers in particular, that contradictions appeared between the CS and the S-C levels. In times of cultural continuity, what Archer refers to as ‘Morphostatic Cycles’, complementarities between Cultural Conditioning and Socio-Cultural Interaction lead to Cultural Maintenance. Cultural change occurs when contradictions between Cultural Conditioning and Socio-Cultural Interaction lead to Cultural Elaboration – the ‘Morphogenetic Cycle’.⁸⁵² These cultural cycles are constantly interacting, not only with each other but also with their counterparts at the structural level. Due to fundamental changes in British society, contradictions at the CS and S-C levels became so severe after 1956 that cultural elaboration of a fundamental nature proved necessary. This was the cultural revolution of the 1960s. For young people arguably the most important manifestation of these contradictions was the explosion in popular music. This study has demonstrated how

⁸⁵² Margaret Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, (Cambridge, Revised ed., 1996), pp.290, Fig. 3 and 304, Fig. 4.

the young people of Merseyside and Tyneside put popular music to use and in so doing made a distinctly Northern contribution to the production and reproduction of culture. Through their socio-cultural interaction they were the human agents of their own cultural revolution.

Conclusion

Dominic Sandbrook's two volume history of Britain from 1956-1970 has questioned the hitherto widely held belief among commentators and historians that 'The Sixties', for good or ill, were a period of 'profound and far-reaching social and cultural revolution'.⁸⁵³ With the aim of providing a fresh perspective on questions of continuity and change raised by Sandbrook's argument this investigation has focussed on the impact of North American popular music on the youth culture of Liverpool and Newcastle upon Tyne between 1956 and 1965. It was during the second half of the 1950s that the foundations were laid for what Dave Russell refers to as 'the North's greatest single cultural 'putsch'', the Merseybeat phenomenon of 1963-64. Although, as Russell points out, the North's cultural moment was not restricted to the popular music of Liverpool as groups from Manchester and Newcastle also rose to national prominence. This study has gone further by suggesting that the commercial success and national recognition obtained by several Northern beat groups was in fact a symptom rather than the cause of a much more significant development whereby many thousands of young people throughout the North of England participated in a cultural revolution of their own making.

These developments in youth culture and popular music occurred in the particular political, economic, social and cultural climate of post-war Britain. The slow return to economic prosperity which disproportionately benefited young working-class wage earners, the increased availability of consumer goods, and the general lifting of the grey years of austerity was contrasted with the retreat from empire – culminating in the humiliation of Suez – the dislocation wrought by the burden of National Service, and the growing disillusionment with an over-privileged, out of touch and scandal prone Establishment. There was a sense that the general mood of the country was changing and that the long taken for granted deference to authority, to one's betters, ought to be earned and no longer automatic. By the beginning of the 1960s this attitude was being explicitly expressed even by some of the most privileged young people in England. In 1961, Cambridge University's Footlights Revue *Beyond the Fringe* opened in London launching the so-called 'satire boom'. It was perhaps most memorable for Peter Cook's impersonation of Harold Macmillan. Michael Paling recalled the show's impact:

⁸⁵³ Jeffrey Richards, quoted in Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles, 1956-63*, (London, 2005), preface p.xx.

*It is not easy nowadays to convey the sensational audacity, the explosively liberating effect of hearing the Prime Minister of the day impersonated, or judges, bishops, police chiefs and army officers mocked. It was shocking and thrilling, but it was done with such skill and intelligence that it could not easily be shot down, dismissed or shrugged off. It was all the more effective for coming from within. Peter's education and background were the very epitome of the Establishment. He knew what he was talking about.*⁸⁵⁴

The satirists were ostensibly hostile to pop culture but for George Melly they were, nonetheless, part of it. For him they represented 'an intellectual wing to pop culture which is conscious of standards and...of terms of cultural reference', whereas 'pop culture is for the most part non-reflective, non-didactic, dedicated only to pleasure'.⁸⁵⁵ The satire movement might instead be said to have run parallel to the rise of pop culture and both can be viewed as part of the process by which, to use the playwright (and scriptwriter for *A Hard Day's Night*) Alun Owen's phrase, 'the divine right of the establishment' was called into question.⁸⁵⁶

As the gap between the values of the Establishment and the aspirations of a rapidly modernising society grew ever wider it was youth that came to symbolise the growing optimism of the late fifties. In Pete Frame's account of 'how rock music changed the face of 1950s Britain' this was 'The Restless Generation', but it was not a classless generation, and contrary to David Fowler's assertion, nor did Arthur Marwick, cultural historian of the sixties, claim that it was. Through technological innovation, mass production and dissemination Northern working-class culture was penetrated as never before through printed media, radio, records and eventually television to such an extent that cultural commentators like Richard Hoggart became concerned for its survival. The Americanisation of British culture, especially working-class culture, was a theme that exercised the minds of the nation's moral guardians. The theme of youth as being simultaneously symbolic of social malaise and economic optimism was given much greater currency when many young working-class boys and girls adopted what they perceived to be the lifestyle choices of the American teenager. If 90% of teenage consumer spending in 1959 was geared towards working-class tastes then they were unquestionably also largely American tastes. These were themes with roots that could be traced back to the late nineteenth century, but added to the cowboys, gangsters and glamorous film stars so familiar to generations of cinema-goers, there was now the teenage rebel as personified by Marlon Brando and James Dean. In 1956, the film *Rock Around the*

⁸⁵⁴ Harry Thompson, *Peter Cook: A Biography*, (London, 1997), pp.111-12.

⁸⁵⁵ George Melly, *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts*, (London, 2008), p.5.

⁸⁵⁶ Alun Owen quoted in, Ian MacDonald, *Revolution In The Head: The Beatles' Records and the Sixties*, (London, 1994), p.25.

Clock and the records of Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry, Little Richard *et al* heralded the full-scale onset of rock ‘n’ roll. This was a revelation for teenagers brought up in the drab post-war urban environment of Britain’s provincial cities. When, in the same year, Lonnie Donegan emerged from what was then the comparatively esoteric world of jazz revivalism to popularise skiffle, he added the second key ingredient in the biggest mass outbreak of amateur music-making by young people that this country has witnessed – before or since.

With such a large proportion of the country’s working-class population residing in the urban centres of the North it is not surprising that the youth of Liverpool, Newcastle, Manchester, Sheffield, Bradford and Hull embraced the new music so enthusiastically. There is however, no evidence to suggest that they were conscious of it being a Northern phenomenon in the wider meaning – i.e. the historic seven counties – other than in terms of the oppositional construct of North versus South. As the headline of a 1963 Bill Harry editorial for *Mersey Beat* shows, the North was feeling confident and confrontational. It read: ‘London – You’ve ignored the North long enough – Now we’re going to do something about it!’⁸⁵⁷ Four months later the paper announced ‘Civil War – 1963’, and accused London of becoming ‘frightened – the scene up North was becoming too big.’⁸⁵⁸ Still, for all Harry’s posturing, the ‘North’ was Merseyside, and the South was London. The Animals did invoke the wider North in an interview they gave on the subject early in 1964 when Eric Burdon commented:

The North doesn’t really stand a chance – everyone eventually goes to London. The problem of London receiving the best talent the North has to offer is a major one that goes more deeply than groups or pop music.

Still it’s a pity that the North always loses out. It could have won the right to have major recording studios and other essential ingredients if this country had the same attitude as the Continent and was not so rooted down by tradition.

*If Liverpool got a recording studio I see no reason why the North couldn’t get on its feet. But it needs a lot of money and a lot of courage to invest in the North.*⁸⁵⁹

In October 1964, the paper ran a full page advertisement for Cavern Sound Ltd. Harry declared: ‘This is what we’ve been waiting for...the real thing...without having to go to

⁸⁵⁷ *Mersey Beat*, January 31st – February 14th, 1963, p.4.

⁸⁵⁸ *Mersey Beat*, July 4th – 18th, 1963, p.2.

⁸⁵⁹ *Mersey Beat*, May 29th, 1964, p.5. It is interesting that Burdon saw Liverpool and not Newcastle getting a recording studio as the North’s best chance, but then he was talking to *Mersey Beat*.

London for it'. Unfortunately, as he was well aware, virtually every group or artist to 'make it' out of the North was by then recording in London and attention had already shifted to the London R&B scene.⁸⁶⁰ In any case, it is doubtful whether the studio would have made much difference had it opened earlier because, despite the best efforts of Harry and to a lesser extent Granada TV, it was the fact that the record companies and the national media were based in London that mattered.

All the evidence uncovered by this investigation points to a Tyneside – Geordie – Newcastle identity; a Merseyside – Scouse – Liverpool identity, as having real significance in the 'objective reality' of everyday experience. How this manifested itself in youth culture and popular music is more difficult to assess. The Celtic propensity for 'belting it out' may have been in evidence among the jazz bands and skiffle groups on Merseyside; this and Scouse sentimentality, comedic wit and a predilection for group and harmony singing does appear to have contributed to the Merseybeat sound. Certainly all of these characteristics are reflected in the choice of American material performed and recorded by Liverpool beat groups. Spencer Leigh has compiled a list of over 350 songs covered by Liverpool acts up to 1967, of which 60% were originally recorded by black, and 30% by white, American rock 'n' roll, soul and pop artists. The remainder were standards with some folk and country music but no outright blues apart from a version of Sonny Boy Williamson's 'Good Morning Little Schoolgirl' by Ian and the Zodiacs. Besides revealing which North American styles were most popular on Merseyside in the years leading up to the Beat Boom and beyond, styles which were also arguably most compatible with the characteristics of Scouse identity, this list explodes the myth of the Cunard Yanks. In most of the hundreds of books about the Beatles and Merseybeat the idea is presented that these merchant seamen gave Liverpool groups the edge over those from other cities by bringing back records from the States that were unobtainable in the UK. As Leigh states quite categorically, 'it didn't happen. Many of the songs were obscure, but nearly all the originals were released in the UK and could be bought or ordered from NEMS.'⁸⁶¹ If this was so perhaps to some extent it *was* particularities of regional/urban identity that informed this choice of music as well as the nuances of its subsequent performance and the home-spun composition of the 'Liverpool Sound'.

However, as Michael Brocken warns, too often in rock histories of Merseybeat:

⁸⁶⁰ *Mersey Beat*, October 15th, 1964, p.8.

⁸⁶¹ Spencer Leigh, *The Best Of Fellas: The Story of Bob Wooler*, (Liverpool, 2002), pp.133-44.

*We are...sold an illustration of Liverpool – and its habitus – ‘providing’ the world with popular music as if it were a gift. This is an exclusive rather than inclusive image, selective rather [than] dispassionate, elitist, rather than democratic. Such apparently clearly defined musical legacies are problematic, for musical identity is difficult to locate and can never be secure.*⁸⁶²

Insisting that there is a direct causal connection between the Merseybeat phenomenon – including how the music actually sounds – and the afore-mentioned characteristics of ‘scouse’ identity – acerbic wit, sentimentality etc. – is of little explanatory value. Indeed, to some, attributing these characteristics to the people of Liverpool at all might be considered a trite and clichéd exercise. While cliché invariably contains an element of truth, Brocken is surely right to argue that any history of the Beatles, or for that matter Merseybeat, should avoid ‘formalistic narratives’ and acknowledge the significance of ‘other popular music histories concerning the city of Liverpool’ which he insists have hitherto ‘suffered from partial obscurity.’ Brocken’s argument is directed at Beatles’ historians but could just as easily apply to those of Merseybeat as a whole. He contends that:

*If we are to understand the cultural cauldron within which the Beatles and their music fomented, we must ensure that we do not narrow our own vision. The significance of the emergence of the Beatles in Liverpool is that it was surrounded by several sincere synchronic and diachronic creative spaces, which, in turn, reflected and refracted social mores and folkways. It is not that the Beatles were special people, or that Liverpoolians are special people – quite the reverse: we are all, to some extent, the Beatles...There has never been a cultural artefact that was unprecedented and like all of us, the Beatles [and Merseybeat groups] were a little of ‘this’ and a little of ‘that’ at one and the same time.*⁸⁶³

If Merseybeat had a ‘Liverpool Sound’ that was recognisable both to contemporaries and with hindsight to historians and twenty-first century listeners this is hardly surprising given that its practitioners shared similar cultural influences – including those of Merseyside. All of them were performing a repertoire consisting of songs selected from the same few hundred North American releases, in the same few venues, for the same audience. Very often group members themselves formed a significant part of that audience. Therefore it seems likely that sharing the same cultural milieu or ‘art world’ was the most important factor in forging a ‘Liverpool Sound’ rather than the peculiarities of ‘scouse’ identity. For this writer, ‘energy’ and ‘optimism’ are the words that spring to mind when hearing a compilation of Merseybeat

⁸⁶² Michael Brocken, *Other Voices: Hidden Histories of Liverpool’s Popular Music Scenes, 1930s-1970s*, (Farnham, 2010), p.5.

⁸⁶³ *Ibid.* p.33.

recordings from the early sixties, but of course this is purely a subjective observation. Ultimately, whether or not, and if so how, ‘scouse’ identity was integral to the beat music created and performed in Liverpool at that time is for the reader (listener) to decide.

It is most likely that the blues became a ‘cult on Tyneside among progressive teenagers’ as the result of Newcastle’s thriving jazz scene just as the R&B movement in London sprang from jazz. According to Eric Burdon, John Lee Hooker told him – after he had performed in Newcastle and they had subsequently become friends – that ‘we had a bond thicker than white or black because of where we were born – him from Clarksdale, Mississippi, and me from Newcastle, a gritty, working-class city he [Hooker] always said could have been situated right in the deep American South.’⁸⁶⁴ It may be the case that there was a strong identification with the blues on Tyneside due to the region’s gritty working class credentials but the same could be said of Sheffield or Birmingham or any of many other towns where the blues was embraced. The point is that it is harder to identify anything especially Geordie about the music that came out of Tyneside, be it jazz, beat or rhythm and blues. The evidence reveals that a lack of originality among beat groups was recognised at the time, the absence of a distinctive ‘Tyne-beat’ perhaps attributable to the stifling of creativity by the working men’s club circuit. To the ears of Cavern regulars the Animals sounded very different to Liverpool beat groups but they fitted seamlessly into the London R&B scene. Nevertheless, if Be-bop from the East Coast and Newcastle R&B did not convey ‘musically’ the characteristics of North-East identity they were nevertheless equally the product of a tight-knit, club based music scene and thereby an expression of the peculiarly Geordie hedonistic solidarity identified by Bill Lancaster as a key ingredient of Newcastle’s unique urban sociability.⁸⁶⁵

Other than George Pearson’s recollection of black American merchant seamen teaching the locals to jive at one of the city’s jazz clubs, the fact that Newcastle was a port does not appear to be a decisive factor in the reception of North American popular music. Liverpool’s more obvious connection with the American continent, not least as the result of Irish emigration, does seem to have made the city more receptive to the cultural transfer of a particular combination of North American popular music styles. Paul Du Noyer’s sense of Liverpool as ‘deeply insular, yet essentially outward looking’ with ‘its back turned on England’ was

⁸⁶⁴ Eric Burdon with J. Marshall Craig, *Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood*, (New York, 2001), p.53.

⁸⁶⁵ See, Bill Lancaster, ‘Sociability and the City’, in Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History*, (Chichester, 2001).

shared by many contemporary commentators. However, the cosmopolitanism that Liverpool proudly boasted is belied by the treatment of its ethnic minorities, especially those of African and Caribbean origin, whose 'ghetto-isation' in Liverpool 8 almost certainly contributed to their music featuring so little in Merseybeat. Tyneside and Newcastle did not share Liverpool's largely Celtic 'exceptionalism'. Perhaps owing to the tradition of organised skilled and semi-skilled labour, as opposed to Liverpool's history of casual employment, Irish and other migrants had long been assimilated into Tyneside working, social and cultural life. There is no evidence of any distinctive ethnic influence on popular music consumption or production in Newcastle. The city made no claim to being cosmopolitan, and while it may have felt isolated and somewhat neglected by the rest of England, particularly by the South, the young people of Tyneside looked to London as the cultural capital. Although Liverpool and Newcastle did possess confidence in their cultural singularity, ambitious young people in all Northern cities recognised London's centripetal attraction.

By focussing on the micro-histories of youth culture and popular music in Liverpool and Newcastle this study has provided the empirical basis for a history 'from the bottom up' in line with Edward Royle's dictum that historians should try to discover 'what a region means (if anything) to the person who lives there and how this is expressed in human activities'. The fluidity of regional and urban identity has been confirmed but also its existence as objective reality in the history of actual events; events that can inform the other major theme of this work concerning continuity and change, and the 'cultural revolution' debate. The use of comparison and the concept of cultural transfer have made it possible to demonstrate how youth culture underwent a dramatic transformation between 1956 and 1965, and how a significant minority of young people in Liverpool and Newcastle participated in a form of 'collective creativity' to construct new 'art worlds' in the production and consumption of their own culture. It has further been demonstrated how both audience and performers put popular music to use – the North American popular music of jazz, blues, rock 'n' roll, and rhythm and blues – in their quest for meaning and identity during ten years of rapidly accelerating social change. Identifying this process has not meant judging 'the millions of young people who passed through adolescence in the late 1950s and 1960s...by the antics of a wealthy and well educated minority', an accusation which Sandbrook, with some justification, has levelled against historians of the period.

This study has shown how the often neglected youth and pop culture of 1956-62 prepared the way, not only for the Beat Boom, but also the rock music of the later sixties which provided

the soundtrack to the so-called British counter culture. Importantly, it has also been established beyond question that, contrary to the view of David Fowler, the Beatles and the Animals *were* the product of youth culture as were all the artists that emerged from the towns and cities explored here. Fowler's unconvincing attempts to separate youth culture from pop culture have been comprehensively debunked by this historical investigation. His refusal to accept that pop culture was the expression of youth culture, and that both were at the forefront of a cultural revolution from the 'bottom up' between 1956 and 1965, is understandable only within his wider agenda, which may also explain his choice of 'anodyne' as an adjective to describe the first Beatles single, 'Love Me Do'.⁸⁶⁶ According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* definition 'anodyne' means 'unlikely to cause offence or disagreement but somewhat dull'.

This record had an enormous impact on many thousands of young people when they heard it for the first time. Ian MacDonald remembered its significance thus:

*LOVE ME DO was extraordinarily raw by the standards of its time, standing out from the tame fare offered on the Light Programme and Radio Luxembourg like a bare brick wall in a suburban sitting-room. Indeed, next to the standard pop output then strolling blandly up and down the 'hit parade' on Alan Freeman's Pick of the Pops every Sunday, it seemed almost primitive.*⁸⁶⁷

Either Fowler's 'tin ear' has clouded his judgement or he is so determined to promote his thesis – that university students are the only group who could have generated a cohesive youth culture in Britain – that he feels compelled to uphold the most spurious arguments in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Perhaps it is just a question of definition, of 'what is youth culture?' after all. Youth culture was the driving force of the 'cultural revolution' that Sandbrook and Fowler so readily dismiss. It began as a working and lower middle-class revolution amongst young people and pop culture became its most visible (and audible) expression. But as the sixties progressed pop culture did begin to permeate society as part of a much broader cultural upheaval. As MacDonald argues:

In the Sixties...socially liberating post-war affluence conspired with a cocktail of scientific innovation too potent to resist: TV, satellite communications, affordable transport, amplified music, chemical contraception, LSD, and the nuclear bomb. For ordinary people – the true movers and shakers of the

⁸⁶⁶ David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c. 1920-c. 1970*, (Basingstoke, 2008), p.181.

⁸⁶⁷ Ian MacDonald, *Revolution In The Head: The Beatles' Records and the Sixties*, (London, 1994), p.41.

*Sixties – these factors produced a restless sense of urgency headily combined with unprecedented opportunities for individual freedom. Abandoning a Christian world of postponed pleasure for a hungry secularism fed by technological conveniences, they effectively traded a hierarchical social unity in which each ‘knew his place’ for the personal rewards of a modern meritocracy.*⁸⁶⁸

He adds that this ‘mass shift to individualistic materialism came into full swing as The Beatles appeared, and the records they made in their early career reflect its mood with unselfconscious elation.’ That millions of Britons enjoyed gardening and fishing and visiting Butlin’s and Berni Inns is not in dispute, but surely it is perfectly reasonable to argue that these activities would have continued regardless of the profound changes in society and culture occurring at the time. This investigation has uncovered how these changes impacted upon hundreds if not thousands of young people on Merseyside and Tyneside and how they in turn participated in their own – and the North’s – cultural revolution.

It has been suggested by cultural and economic theorists that there is a need for more historical investigation to inform current debates surrounding the post-modern city’s ability to attract a ‘creative class’ as a means towards regeneration. This study represents a modest contribution.⁸⁶⁹ Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini have argued that in order to develop a more creative approach to city planning ‘we need to enrich the ‘scientific’ and quantitativist tradition with insight gained from more qualitative, human-oriented approaches – ranging from history and philosophy to religion and the arts.’⁸⁷⁰ According to Mark Jayne:

*...the creative and cultural industries have now become central to attempts to develop post-industrial city-centre cores. This sector is considered to be important not only because of its own burgeoning economic wealth but also because it creates a buzz within cities. The buzz is about creativity, entrepreneurialism and innovation. Such conditions are attractive not only to middle-class gentrifiers (or working-class bohemians; Milestone 1996), but also to capital and investment.*⁸⁷¹

Between 1956 and 1965 the attitude of the various local authorities in Northern towns and cities towards youth and pop culture ranged from outright harassment (Manchester) to mild encouragement (Hull, Rochdale). In Liverpool and Newcastle the official attitude was at best ambivalent except in matters pertaining to licensing and law and order. Most observers

⁸⁶⁸ Ian MacDonald, *Revolution In The Head: The Beatles’ Records and the Sixties*, (London, 1994), p.27.

⁸⁶⁹ See Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, (New York, 2002).

⁸⁷⁰ Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini, *The Creative City*, (London, 1995), p.22.

⁸⁷¹ Mark Jayne, *Cities and Consumption*, (London, 2006), pp.202-203.

would agree that the turning point in Liverpool coincided with John Lennon's assassination in December 1980. The city has since become increasingly adept at both the celebration and commercial exploitation of the cultural nostalgia inspired by Merseybeat. From the Cavern Quarter to the Beatles Museum it is possible to experience the artificially reconstructed ambience of Liverpool in the 1950s and '60s; to eat, drink and shop within a stone's throw of the Hard Day's Night Hotel after a guided tour in a Yellow Submarine. It is a phenomenon that undoubtedly contributed to the 'European Capital of Culture Award' for 2008. Albeit on a much smaller scale, Newcastle has belatedly indulged in some cultural nostalgia of its own in mounting the North-East Beat exhibition at the city's Discovery Museum in 2009.⁸⁷²

These forays into the promotion of pop culture – hitherto sedulously ignored by local authorities – as heritage are not surprisingly treated with scepticism by many of those who remember what really happened, and more importantly by young people trying to create a music scene of their own.⁸⁷³ The attempts of local authorities and even national politicians to associate themselves with pop culture have historically produced mixed results at best. Harold Wilson's award of MBEs to the Beatles in 1965 and more recently Tony Blair's flirtation with Britpop attracted howls of derision and accusations of political gimmickry from the press and public in equal measure. The reputations of both sides in this inadvisable dalliance are adversely affected due to the particularly British problem of 'authenticity'. Politicians can never be 'street smart' or 'cool' – artists can all too easily 'sell out'. The fact that authenticity is allegedly also among the most appealing characteristics of the North makes it doubly ironic perhaps that July 1966, the month that Wilson officially re-opened the Cavern, was also the month when his mishandling of the latest sterling crisis precipitated the collapse of his political reputation. Both the Cavern and Wilson failed to recapture former glories, and with the benefit of hindsight their mutual decline appears almost to symbolise the passing of the North's cultural moment.

Attracting a creative class to live and/or work in a city as part of the process of urban regeneration is a good idea in principle but planners and decision makers should be careful that young people with talent and their own ideas, those who actually produce and consume culture, are not excluded. If this study has demonstrated one thing conclusively it is that in

⁸⁷² The City of Newcastle upon Tyne Libraries & Information Service also recently published, Anna Flowers and Vanessa Histon (eds.), *It's My Life: 1960s Newcastle*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2009).

⁸⁷³ For an in-depth discussion of the problems and tensions encountered when local authorities become involved in promoting pop culture as heritage see, Sara Cohen, *Decline, Renewal and the City in Popular Music Culture: Beyond the Beatles*, (Aldershot, 2007).

order to be meaningful, youth and pop culture must develop from the bottom up; it must ‘belong’ to its audience and cannot be dictated from the top down. Cultural nostalgia has become an all-pervasive and vacuous distraction, a cash cow for the media and entertainment industries whilst simultaneously, as MacDonald argues:

*Pop music...has played a role in reinforcing the relaxation of goals and standards observable since the Sixties. Aside from the inescapable fact that this relaxation was to some degree willed by the majority, pop and its shatteringly sensationalistic cousins rock and disco have been as much colonised by technology as any other area of modern life. Its once flexible human rhythms replaced by the mass-production regularity of the drum-machine, its structures corporatized by the factory ethic of the sequencer, its vitality digitised to death and buried in multilayered syntheticism, pop is now little more than a soundtrack for physical jerks.*⁸⁷⁴

This is perhaps an overly pessimistic view as the cyclical nature of reproduction in youth and pop culture has so often produced unexpected results in Britain – the first and prime examples being Skiffle and the Beat Boom followed by R&B, Rock, Punk, Indie and Britpop – Reggae, Ska, Soul, Disco and Dance/Rave music – in all their permutations. These are just some of the labels ascribed by pundits, professionals and audience alike in the ongoing process of popular music’s compartmentalisation and commodification. In the present individualistic, digitised, fragmented twenty-first-century world of mass electronic communication it is difficult to see how the pop culture of urban youth could ever achieve the impact, originality and excitement of the Beat Boom. The broader structural and cultural conditions are inevitably much changed but the possibility will always remain as long as there are young people who are prepared to adhere to the veteran American singer/songwriter Lou Reed’s maxim that you can’t beat two guitars, bass and drums.⁸⁷⁵

⁸⁷⁴ Ian MacDonald, *Revolution In The Head: The Beatles’ Records and the Sixties*, (London, 1994), p.31.

⁸⁷⁵ Lou Reed, sleeve notes for the album *New York*, Sire Records, 1988.

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Appendix: Maps

Key to Maps

Fig. 1: The social geography of popular music activity on Merseyside – showing the (approximate) location of prominent suburban ‘Merseybeat’ venues.

1. ‘The Jive Hive’, St. Luke’s Church Hall, Crosby
2. Aintree Institute
3. Lathom Hall, Seaforth
4. Litherland Town Hall, Litherland
5. Orrell Park Ballroom, Orrell
6. Bootle YMCA, St. John’s Church Hall, Bootle
7. St. John’s Hall, Tuebrook
8. Casbah Coffee Club, West Derby Village
9. Hambleton Hall, Huyton
10. Knotty Ash Village Hall, Knotty Ash
11. Holyoake Hall, Wavertree
12. Aigburth Road leading to Garston and Garston Baths
13. Tower Ballroom, New Brighton
14. Grosvenor Ballroom, Liscard
15. Majestic Ballroom, Birkenhead

Fig. 3 and Figs. 3.1-3.4: The social geography of popular music activity in central Liverpool – showing the (approximate) location of key sites.

1. The Jacaranda (Slater Street) and The Blue Angel (Seel Street)
2. The Cavern, Mathew Street
3. The Iron Door, Temple Street

4. NEMS (North-End Music Stores) Whitechapel branch
5. Sampson and Barlow's, London Road. Site of the Black Cat Club (Country), the Cassanova Club (along with the Iron Door, one of Sam Leach's beat venues), and the Spinners' Triton folk club
6. Mount Pleasant. The Mardi Gras (jazz, and later beat venue) and Streates Coffee Bar
7. Hope Street. Site of the Philharmonic Hall and pub, the Art College, Hope Hall (later the Everyman Theatre), and focus of the Liverpool 8 'Bohemian' student culture.
8. Upper Parliament Street, Toxteth.

Fig. 4: The social geography of popular music activity in central Newcastle upon Tyne – showing the (approximate) location of key sites.

1. Newcastle College of Art and Industrial Design, Bath Street
2. The Majestic Ballroom, Westgate Road
3. The University Jazz Club (Mike Jeffery's first promotion), Nelson Street
4. Percy Street, site of the Club A' Go Go and Marcus Price
5. King's College (Newcastle University)
6. The Marimba Coffee House, High Bridge Street
7. Newcastle Jazz Club, Royal Arcade
8. The Downbeat Club, Carliol Square
9. The Oxford Galleries Ballroom
10. The New Orleans Jazz Club, Melbourne Street

Maps: Figs. 1- 8

Fig. 1: Liverpool and Merseyside. OS – 1: 63360 (1 inch – 1 mile). Sheet 100 (1964 ed.).

Fig. 2: Newcastle and Tyneside. OS – 1: 63360 (1 inch – 1 mile). Sheet 78 (1965 ed.).

Fig. 3: Composite of OS Sheets SJ 38 NW, SJ 39 SE, SJ 39 SW, SJ 38 NE (1956-1957) from which the blown-up sections (Figs. 3.1 – 3.4) are taken.

Fig. 3.1: Liverpool Central (Section).

Fig. 3.2: Liverpool Central (Section).

Fig. 3.3: Liverpool Central (Section).

Fig. 3.4: Liverpool Central (Section).

Fig. 4: Newcastle Central. OS Street Map (1962).

Fig. 5: Merseyside Conurbation Centre (1961).

Fig. 6: Tyneside Conurbation Centre (1961).

Fig. 7: Lancashire County Boroughs and Districts (1961).

Fig. 8: Northumberland County Boroughs and Districts (1961).