

Brunel bands

A social history project

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As part of our 50th anniversary celebrations, Brunel University Library has begun a project aimed at documenting all the bands that have played at the university over the last fifty years. Using eye-witness accounts, music press adverts and reviews and back issues of the student magazine, *Le Nurb*, we want to create an exciting and informative work; an accurate document but also, perhaps more importantly, an enduring and interactive social resource. One of the newest of the 'traditional' universities, Brunel has always championed innovation and creativity. In honour of that spirit, we felt that this project was a great opportunity not only to celebrate our amazing pedigree as a music venue, but also to bring together former students and local residents in creating something fresh and exciting that will still be of value long after this special year has drawn to a close.

The Sex Pistols performance at Brunel in December 1977 – this is probably the most notorious and well-documented Brunel gig. But they are just one of an incredibly impressive roster of artists and bands we know to have played either at Brunel or at events organised by students of the university. Here's a short list plucked from the top of my head:

Genesis (who played many of their earliest gigs on the emerging Uxbridge campus)

Fleetwood Mac

Howlin' Wolf

The Who

Elton John (who also turned up to deputise when the scheduled band failed to show up at what became the Runnymede campus in 1978)

The Kinks

Fairport Convention

Suzi Quattro

The Stranglers

Joy Division

The Undertones

The Pretenders

UB40

The Stone Roses

As you can see even from this small sample, the list of artists is wonderfully diverse, and these are just some of the better-known bands and artists that we know about.

The full scale of this undertaking didn't really hit us until my colleague, Tim Harris, and I began the work of compiling a simple working chronology of the gigs last autumn. Barring a few random gigs documented online, anything pre-1978 was a complete blank to us at the outset. Despite Brunel having received its Royal Charter in June 1966, the university's main Uxbridge campus was still very much a work in progress going into the 1970s, so we were doubtful that we'd ever get much information on what, if anything, went on in that exciting musical period.

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<u>DANCES</u>		Fri. Dec 13th	XMAS PARTY.
7.30—11.30 in the refectory building, UXBRIDGE site, except where otherwise stated.		BONZO DOG DOO DAH BAND (Provisionally) & NASHVILLE TEENS & A. N. OTHER.	
Fri. Oct. 4th NICE & STRAWBERRY JAM		• • •	
Fri. night Oct. 18th/19th All-Niter (12-30a.m-7.00a.m) at Lyceum Ballroom, Strand, W.C.2.		<u>CLUB NIGHTS</u>	
WHO; CRAZY WORLD OF ARTHUR BROWN; ALAN BOWN; ELMER GANTRY; JETHRO TULL;		8.00 to 11.00, in the ACTON bar, in conjunction with the Bar Committee. (admission cheap!)	
Fri. Nov 1st HALLOWE'EN SCENE CHRIS FARLOWE and the THUNDERBIRDS & JEEP WRONGLE		Fri. Oct 11th BLUES NIGHT with DUSTER BENNETT — the incredible one man band & DISCS.	
Fri. Nov 15th at ACTON site. TIMEBOX & EPISODE (6)		Fri. Nov 8th TONY CHARLES and the CARIBBEAN ALL STARS STEEL BAND.	
Fri. Nov 29th SIMON DUPREE and the BIG SOUND & THE KOOL		Fri. DEC 6th AN EVENING WITH JOHN PEEL	
<u>U = Uxbridge; A = Acton; L = Lyceum; See Back of Card.</u>			
Fri. Oct 3rd. (U) NOEL REDDING'S FAT MATTRESS; MANDRAKE; WELCOME.		Fri. Nov 21st. (A) THIRD EAR BAND; MAGNA CARTA.	
Fri. Oct 10th. (A) JIMMY REED & BAND; JADE.		Fri. Nov 28th. (U) PINK FLOYD; OPUS 31 by GRACIOUS.	
Sat. Oct 18th. (U) ALAN PRICE; EVOLUTION; WALTER SLADE.		<u>RAG WEEK INCLUDES:-</u>	
Fri. Oct 24th. (L) (All Night) FLEETWOOD MAC; HOWLING WOLF; DEEP PURPLE; KEITH RELF'S RENNAISSANCE; AARDVARK; ANDROMEDA.		Fri. Dec 5th. (L) (All Night) FAMILY; YES; MARSHA HUNT; ATOMIC ROOSTER; SPIRIT OF JOHN MORGAN; EDGAR BROUGHTON. STEAMHAMMER.	
Sat. Nov 1st. (U) CARAVAN; IDLE RACE; SCREW.		Sat. Dec 13th. (U) JON HISEMAN'S COLLOSEUM; JIGSAW; CLASSICS.	
Fri. Nov 7th. (A) ALAN ELSDON JAZZ BAND.		<u>EVERY TUESDAY AT ACTON BAR FREE AUDITION NIGHTS.</u>	
Sat. Nov 15th. (U) GRAHAM BOND INITIATION; JOHN LEE HOOKER; FAILED HERITAGE. LEE HOOKER; STACK.		<u>ALTERNATE WEDNESDAYS DISCOS AT UXBRIDGE - PHONE UNION FOR DATES.</u>	

Detail of Brunel student union gig card. Late 1960s

But as we were later to discover, a lot of student activity continued at the Brunel College in Acton and even in the absence of their own campus facilities the ever-resourceful Union of Brunel Students was not afraid to book such prestigious (and potentially hard-to-fill) London venues as The Roundhouse, The Lyceum Ballroom and The Royal Albert Hall. At these almost mythical-sounding 'midnight raves', students enjoyed eye-wateringly tempting line-ups for those with the reserves of energy to stay up until the early hours. It was not uncommon for the last act to go on at 7 am! As just one example, if you'd been lucky enough to get a ticket to the Midnight Rave at the Lyceum on 24 October 1969, you'd have been able to see Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac, Deep Purple and legendary blues artist Howlin' Wolf... plus three other pretty decent bands and a light show!

The initial scarcity of research information at our disposal led to a somewhat scattergun approach to documenting the gigs, with each of us working our way through a box of student magazines which between them spanned about just one decade of Brunel's half-century. Consequently, we decided to present the data in a blog format in the first instance, rather than chronologically. This has allowed us to write and publish the research immediately and from across the whole half-century we were concerned with documenting. Using tags, we could effectively index the posts according to artist and year so that, over time, we would have a searchable resource that could be cross-referenced as needed.

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But perhaps more importantly, blogs and wikis are the perfect media for an inherently collaborative exercise such as this. We've not only been able to allocate administrative privileges to all the main contributors who've subsequently come forward, meaning we can all add to or correct each other's work, but also the comments section has allowed us to incorporate contributions from... well, anyone who has something to say! So the project is being undertaken in a really good spirit of openness and inclusion that we hope will embolden even more people who were at some of the gigs to take part, even if it's only through the comments. So in terms of outreach and community engagement, the project has already been a greater success than we'd ever have dared to dream.

Thanks to the various social media channels we've opened we're now beginning to build up a substantial network of sources. As we'd suspected, the university's gigs were an important contribution to the social life of the local as well as the student community and through publicising the project on local residents' groups on Facebook as well as through the alumni office and Friends Reunited and our own Brunel bands Facebook page, we've been positively inundated with memories. People have also taken the time to send us important research materials such as scans of concert tickets and so on. It's taken a while to get to this stage, but we now have a growing audience for the project and our blog posts outside the university. It's been really rewarding to see so many people coming forward with such a wonderful store of memories.

Such is the volume of material to which we now have access, we hope to be able to present a fairly complete timeline of the history of live bands at Brunel when the university formally celebrates its half-century this July. To this end, we've been asked by the organisers to host a presentation of our findings at Brunel Rocks, a celebration of 50 years of live music at the university. Our presentation, followed by what promises to be a lively and entertaining audience discussion and the possibility of a live performance by one of the artists who graced the stage here, should make for a really exciting conclusion to the Brunel bands project.

In conclusion, a few words of thanks. We've been incredibly lucky to have enjoyed the co-operation of, or contributions from, the following people and organisations: Becky Collins and her colleagues at the Union of Brunel Students, who have allowed us unlimited access to their archive of back issues of the Brunel student newspaper, *Le Nurb*. John Bates, a former student at Brunel and now a member of staff, has painstakingly pieced together an incredible timeline of gigs and has his own photographic collection covering much of the period in which there's been live music at Brunel. We are enormously grateful for his generosity in allowing us access to his incredible knowledge and research. Andy Furlong, Graham Matthews and Bryan McAlley, are all former Brunel students who have contributed fantastic first-hand accounts, insights and corrections for which we are, again, hugely thankful. Bryan has furnished us with one of the most remarkable stories we've published so far. In 1973, whilst he was president of the students' union, Bryan was able to secure the services of legendary jazz violinist Stephane Grappelli. Andy Furlong's contribution – when he's been able to drag himself away from the small matter of organising the affairs of the Institute of Chemical Engineers – has been hugely important. Andy has not only devoted tremendous energy to devising the Brunel Rocks event but also selflessly volunteered to spend a day at the British library poring over the classified sections in their back runs of *New musical express* and *Melody maker* – well, it's a tough job, but someone's got to do it... We'd also like to thank Professor Dany Nobus for inviting us to participate in the Brunel Rocks event, Rob Wannerton, Sarah Gardner (Customer Services) and Katie Flanagan (Special Collections) in the library here at Brunel and everyone at the Brunel50 webpage for all their continuing enthusiasm and support for what we're doing.

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To find out what progress we're making on the project, please visit the Brunel bands blog at <https://brunelbands.wordpress.com/> We also have a Facebook page which is proving a valuable source of information from and a social space for former students of the university and local residents at <https://www.facebook.com/brunelbands/>

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