

Nostalgia

PETE CHAMBERS'S BACKBEAT – a weekly look at the local music scene of the past.

IT WAS A CASE OF NEVER MIND THE DEADLOCK WHEN THE LANCH POLY DECIDED NOT TO PAY THE CLASH AND

The giants of punk rock the Lanch bar

IMAGINE this outrageous scenario, The Clash and The Sex Pistols, the world's most infamous punk rock bands, both playing on the same bill at Coventry's Lanchester Polytechnic.

You are probably thinking in what parallel universe this all took place? Crazy as it may sound this all really happened in Coventry on November 29, 1976 – 30 years ago tomorrow to be exact.

This was just 48 hours before Bill Grundy's infamous "say something outrageous" interview that famously ruined one career and helped to create another.

Just 48 hours later on December 2, 'The filth and the fury' headlines would kick in, and popular music would never be the same again.

But just before all that happened there was the Lanchester Polytechnic gig.

Punk had arrived big time in Coventry.

This was just before punk became a household name. So local NUS representatives at Coventry's Lanch, were confused where Strummer and Co and Rotten and Co stood politically. Songs such as The Clash's White Riot and The Sex Pistols' God Save the Queen (this was its first ever live airing under the working title No Future) were considered fascist anthems by the unsuspecting students' body, so subsequently payment for the gig was withheld.

Phil Dunn was the then president of the Lanchester Students' Union. I asked him what he remembered of the night: "It was an intense evening all ways round," replied Phil.

"It was the days of tuxe-



■ WILD THINGS... The Clash when they performed at the Lanch, Joe Strummer and drummer Terry Chimes (above), Paul Simonon (inset right), Mick Jones in Union Jack shirt with Joe Strummer, and (far right) The Sex Pistols' Johnny Rotten.



doed, bow-tied security men who could be a bit tasty. They were being confronted by all these punks in bondage strides, ripped T-shirts and chains. Some punks were wearing stuff like Myra Hindley is innocent T-shirts to wind people up.

"The tension began to build. When the band came on the stage it was pretty electric, with wild pogoing. It felt like the coming of something, like an event. There was a few back-stage dressing room problems, not with damage but lots of empty bottles of Benylin being found afterwards."

(Along with glue, Benylin cough medicine was the cheap and cheerful punk rock stimulant of choice.)

"It was the treasurer who had heard the lyrics and deemed them racist and fascist, and refused to sign the cheques," continued Phil. "At the end of the gig there was this stand-off, with the bands down by the stage and the Students' Union at the back of the hall. Johnny Rotten came up to me and declared: 'We're not the fascists, you are the fascist,' or words to that effect, and I think it was The Clash's Mick Jones who told us that we would "never have a

band play in this place again". "Despite the treasurer's feeling we all knew that the contract had stated that this sort of thing may happen, and we had to pay them. We basically gave them the petty cash to get home or whatever and sent the cheques the next day. Despite all this there was no actual trouble that night as such, and the gig went down really well."

In truth these guys were of course anything but fascists and we would soon learn that hearts of pure socialism beat under their hand-painted pin-clad punk attire (certainly in The Clash's case).

The Clash were on first (for they were only the support band, and this was only the 20th time they had played as The Clash). Strummer with blond hair and paint-spattered army fatigues, Mick Jones in Union Jack shirt and black tie, Paul Simonon looking cool as always in red graffiti white shirt and tie and Terry Chimes in red shirt.

While the Pistols were far more conservative in their dress with much of the band wearing black tops with Johnny Rotten in a reasonably plain dark blue rubber jacket.

Kevin and Lynda Harrison,

soon to front one of Coventry's most inventive bands The Urge, were at the concert with Roddy Radiation of the Specials.

"We got there early," said Kevin, "and heard The Clash sound-check. Roddy and I hit the bar with Joe Strummer for light refreshments, I had a good chat with Joe about the state of the country, and the price of life and Joe held his arm around me as we strolled through the crowd. I'd just been Joe's best mate for 20 minutes or so.

"The Sound of the Westway hit the stage. The songs were mostly from the soon-to-be-released first album – White Riot, Janie Jones, I'm So Bored with the USA, What's My Name, London's Burning – this still ranks as one of the best ever gigs I've seen! Afterwards Rodd and I had more refreshment and banter with Joe and he invited our little party of four into the backstage dressing room.

"In one corner stood alone was Johnny Rotten who kept aloof from the rest and was strenuously blowing his nose on his fingers and flicking the results on the floor. When the Pistols got on stage and started up the riff from Pretty Vacant, it was powerful stuff and the Pistols were tight and well drilled to cut to the bone, a shock for all the knockers who said they couldn't play.

"Out near the front there was a hardcore group of pogo dancers where we were and one big klutz lurched in Lynda's direction and backwards onto her foot. I can remember hearing Bodies, and Anarchy in the UK followed by God Save the Queen, but Lynda was by then in no way fit to carry on, she subsequently passed out with pain. And she remembers coming round shouting 'no I'm not going! I

THE SEX PISTOLS

PopTrivia

– PUNK AT THE LANCH

■ JOE STRUMMER sent a telegram of support when students at the Lanch occupied the main administration building over budget cuts.

■ COVENTRY-born Steve Connolly was a roadie with The Clash, and was instrumental in The Specials meeting Bernie Rhodes and

landing a support slot on the On Parole tour.

■ PHOTOS courtesy of Black Market Clash at <http://homepage.mac.com/blackmarketclash>

■ WITH Thanks to Kevin and Lynda Harrison, Dave's wife Kathy, Phil Pilkington and Phil Dunn.



need to see the Pistols'."

Both The Clash and The Sex Pistols would famously return to the city (The Clash to Tiffanies November 8, 1977, back to the Lanch January 26, 1978, and Tiffanies February 7, 1980. The Pistols at Georges on December 17, 1977). Both bands would make a bigger impact on their return concerts, as more and more tired

old glam rockers, stopped deriding punks and joined them.

So in the space of a few months the punk phenomenon took hold and a year later British and Irish culture was full of bin-bags, safety pins and black-lipped attitude, with a million punks screaming for anarchy, even if they had no idea what anarchy was.

For more Backbeat information go to www.covmusic.net
Contact Pete at backbeat@covmusic.net

Did you see the Sex Pistols, the Clash or one of the other top punk bands in Coventry? Were you a punk in the 70s or 80s?

Write in and tell us your story to John West, Punk Memories, Coventry Telegraph, Corporation Street, Coventry CV1 1FP or e-mail john_west@mrn.co.uk