

# ECCENTRIC SLEEVE NOTES

## POST PUNK INTERVIEWS & PHOTOS

### NEWCASTLE RECORD SHOPS

In 1978, I started a regular Saturday circuit of the record shops in Newcastle. It continued till about 1981 when I left school and my routines changed. Not that I've ever stopped buying records... but this is what it was like back then.



In just 3 years, buying records changed me from this...



...to this!

By the late 1970s Eldon Square had taken its hold on Newcastle city centre and proclaimed it was the shopping destination that offered everything. But, outside its huge air blasting doorways, there was plenty of prime space in good use. It took me a while, but I gradually discovered a whole other world away from chain stores and branding that formed, what I came to recognise as, some kind of Saturday circuit of record shops that I would tread each week throughout my early teens.

Early 1979, I was 13: so far I had dabbled with buying a few singles, but now it was time to get serious... I wanted to buy albums! 'Plastic Letters' by Blondie and 'Armed Forces' by Elvis Costello & The Attractions. I looked in all the shops to find the cheapest copies... Callers for Blondie and Windows for Costello. I would love these records and play them repeatedly and soon started shopping around to buy the bands' earlier releases.



Listen Ear (Ridley Place)



Handside Arcade

- Home
- Shop
- +ESN Back Issues
- +ESN 'The Lads'
- Newcastle in the 1980s
- Newcastle Alternative Clubs
- Newcastle Record Shopping**
- Newcastle Locations
- +Newcastle Bands (Gallery)
- Treatment Room
- Neon
- Monoconics
- Barbara Shaum (New York)
- Toot (Nigel Lewty RIP)
- dumdum SCORE
- Viv Albertine (Slits)
- Gang of Four
- Penetration
- Neale Floyd (Penetration)
- Dave Ruffy (Ruts)
- Don Letts
- Julien Temple
- 'Rough Cut' film
- George Melly
- Post Punk Videos
- +Said Liquidator
- Said Liquidator 33 Songs
- Said Liquidator 139 Gigs
- Said Liquidator 44 Rejections
- +Post Punk Britain Radio
- Punk Posters

## Home of the Kard Bar

Jukebox

Contact

I quickly realised that WH Smiths, Boots, John Menzies and Woolworths - who all had sizeable record sections at the time - only stocked the charts. Also, it was much harder to get a single in the picture sleeve from these shops - the sleeve was such an important part of owning a record. I didn't want a single by Blondie or even the Boomtown Rats in a plain sleeve. You had to be careful in Woolworths. Even if they did have the picture sleeve, they had a bizarre way of displaying singles. It must have been somebody's job to punch a hole in the top left corner of each sleeve: they displayed their singles like they displayed their sweets... dangling on spikes! Callers, who had a serious record department, were far from faultless. If you bought their last copy of a single, the picture sleeve would be folded down one edge so it could be squeezed into a seven inch cardboard sleeve and shelved behind the counter. This probably helped with their stock reordering system, but not so good for the buyer.

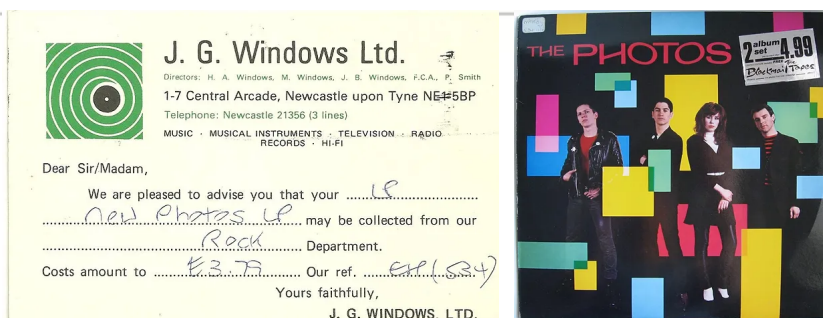


Slits LP advert from Sounds



The Police appearing in-store at Virgin, 1979

As I approached 14, after repeated late nights listening to John Peel, I developed a taste in music that couldn't be satisfied by shops that sold records as a side-line. It had to be a specialist shop. Despite being in Eldon Square, on High Friars, Virgin Records was an early favourite. It was really dark inside and had a spiral staircase going to a gallery section... but it was really dark! The walls were painted black and the only lighting seemed to be thin beams of light illuminating the record displays. It was stunning. Probably a shoplifters', and certainly the antithesis of the fluorescent lighting in other shops. Virgin had wire display bins heaped upwards with new releases. In March 1979, that's where I found (and paid for!) a new twelve single by Graham Parker and the Rumour. Later that year, the store expanded and changed beyond recognition - it became much brighter and was all on one level. They still had amazing displays though. When Public Image released 'Metal Box' - in a flat round tin - they had so many copies spread out that it reminded me of the cake stands in the kitchen section at Fenwicks. In September 1979 Virgin took out a full-page advert in Sounds announcing that limited copies of the new Slits LP 'Cut' sold around the country in their shops would be signed by the band. I made sure I was one of the first in the shop that Saturday! Chasing down the sudden explosion of limited-edition records in 1979 became quite a challenge. I would seek out records like the Members 'Sound of the Suburbs' in clear vinyl; the Skids 'Into The Valley' on white vinyl and even an orange triangular shaped disc by John Cooper Clarke. (Thankfully, it had a record player friendly circular section in the middle that was exactly seven inches.) Fittingly, the record was called 'Gimmix'. By the time records were released commenting on the trend, clearly its time was almost up.



**One way to ensure you got a limited edition was to pre-order it at Windows... they put your name on a sticker in the corner of the LP and sent you a postcard to say they had it. (This one, from 1980, had a 10p stamp on it.)**

By late 1979, my Saturday routine was set. Get on the bus at Wickham Front Street by 9:30am. Arrive at Marlborough Crescent and then a hurried walk to Virgin for 10am. I might stop off at HMV at the bottom of Northumberland Street. Not so good there though. Probably better to go a few hundred yards up and straight into Callers. Although it was a department store selling furniture and holidays, they had a large and well-run record department. They were fantastic for limited editions: the freshest ones would be in small, quickly dwindling, piles on the floor behind the staff. The staff seemed quite disdainful of the music I liked - as if it was trifling. Later, I learnt they were great authorities on American soul music. They also stocked an excellent range of 60s music that I had yet to discover. That was for later. Right now, it was full pelt to Listen Ear on Ridley Place to find out what was brand new. (The location was later taken by Volume Records in about 1983.) This shop was small and very different to the others because it didn't stock the top 40 singles as a matter of course - only the ones they liked. Listen Ear specialised in the punk and new wave (now referred to as post-punk) records that consumed me when I heard them on John Peel's show. This was the place to buy the Glaxo Babies, Neon Hearts and the Mekons. They stocked gig tickets and fanzines too. Fanzines turned out to be independent music magazines, often produced locally. They were largely amateurish looking things photocopied onto A4 sheets, but all the more interesting for that and had interviews with bands less likely to be written about by national publications.



**Listen Ear singles bag**

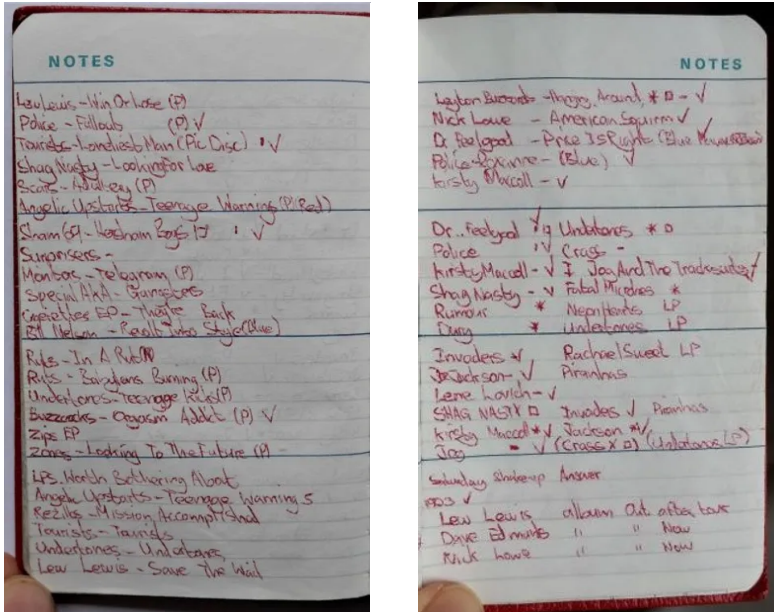


**Jam appearing in-store**

Listen Ear was run and owned by people who were really into this music. It had a much more relaxed feel than the other shops and they didn't seem to mind if you hung around, leaning on their racks, waiting to see who came in. Later in the day, as the crowds appeared, you'd shuffle around in what standing space there was. I took a breather here and chatted to familiar faces from previous weeks. 'Siouxsie Fan' was somebody I saw most weeks. She was always friendly and after a while I got to know she was called Stella... That's when I started to recognise there was a circuit that many of us were treading each Saturday. It was during these conversations that you heard about new releases coming up or something you might have missed in a previous shop... then you'd dash back! It wasn't a complete love-in though... I was in Listen Ear in late '79 and met up with Toot, my punk schoolmate. There was a white

label LP playing. Kevin, working behind the counter, asked Toot a little pointedly, "Do you like this?"

"Nah," Toot replied. There was a pause, then Toot resumed, "When's the new Clash album coming out?" I cringed. The music was new to me too, but I recognised Joe Strummer's singing. The LP turned out to be an advance copy of the Clash's 'London Calling'. Toot walked right into that one.



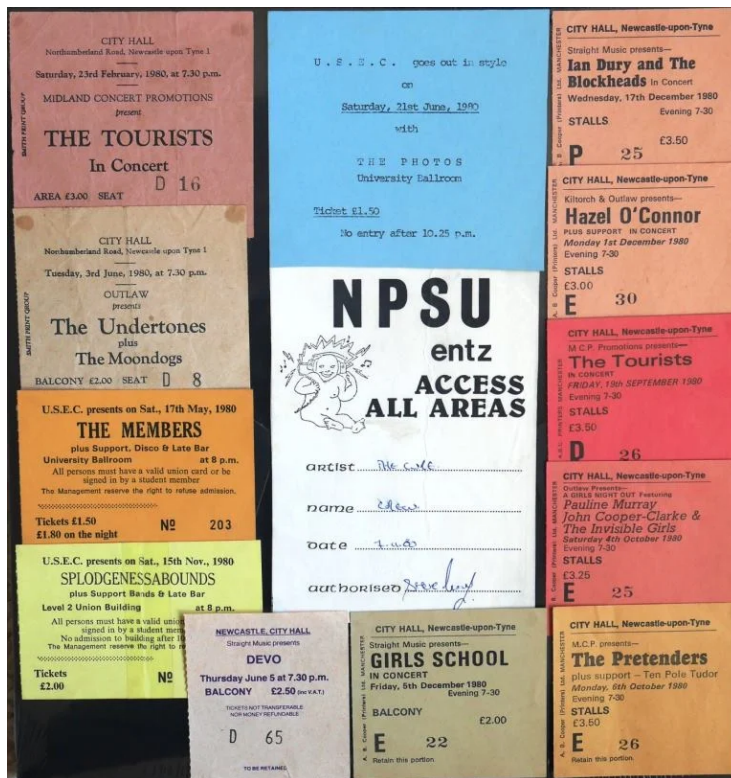
From my 1979 Diary: planning which records to buy next!

Each Saturday, later in the day when my money was low or all gone, I'd already be planning what to buy the next week. JG Windows was always a good place for that... they were the only shop with listening booths. They were two of them... in the basement on the left as you walked in. Each was big enough for one person. I asked to listen to the Cure's first album and then stepped under the small fibreglass enclosure shaped like a bubble. It wouldn't have looked out of place at the airport with a phone under it... except these were very scruffy; the plastic might have once been transparent, but was now quite yellow. The walls were white plywood with small shallow holes to trap the sound - two speakers mounted in the walls. But that enclosure must have had special powers of persuasion because everything I listened to I eventually bought. Despite the booths being so small Neil Tweddell recently recalled watching Mike Atherton go in there with two girls - they had lots of blonde hair. Mike had lots of hair too... The three of them and their hair completely filled the bubble. When the music began they shook about frantically! The screws came loose and the plastic clattered from side to side. Miraculously, when they left, it was still on the wall... maybe a little lopsided.



Kard Bar record shop opposite the main shop  
(Handside Arcade)

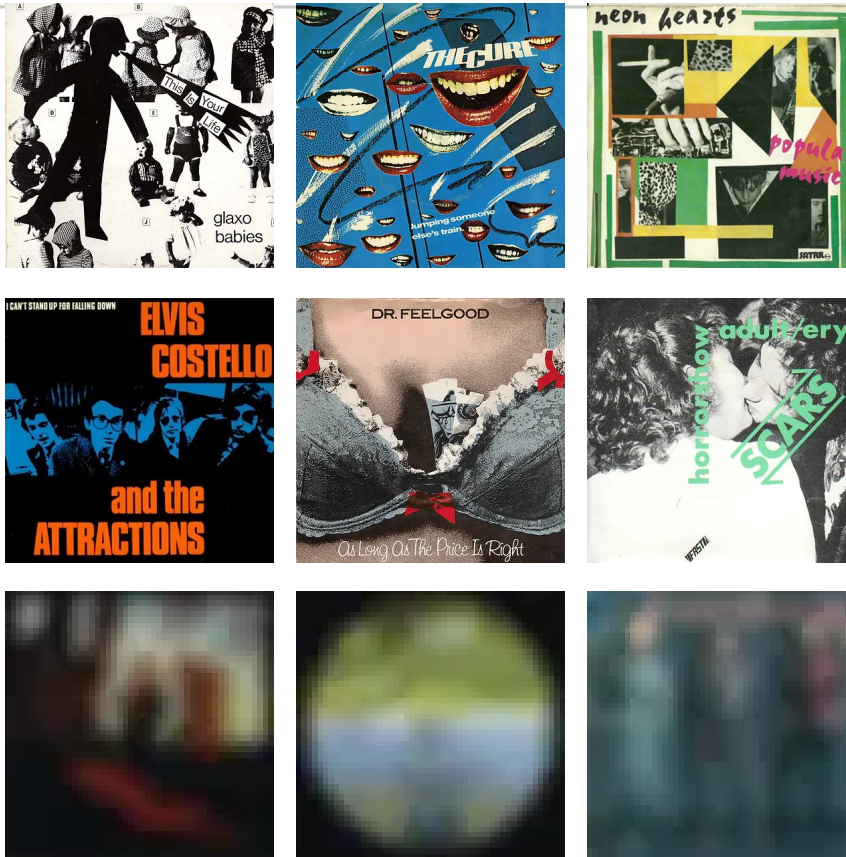
Records were my main interest, but occasionally I was tempted by the badges and posters in the Kard Bar, located in the Handyside Arcade. The arcade itself was surreal. It seemed to have moods. Its glass roof made it as dark or as bright as the day outside. There were street lights in the middle of the footpath. I'm not sure I ever saw them lit, maybe late afternoon in the winter. How did this place get here? [I know now it was a beautiful Edwardian structure. Over time, it adapted and, full of independent shops, it thrived during the 60s and was still doing good trade in the 70s and 80s.] I recall it as a wonderful place where tribes of punks, mods, hippies and heavy metal kids mingled freely. Aside from the main Kard Bar shop, for a while, they also had a record shop opposite that was rarely open - probably only on a Saturday afternoon... and then only if you nagged them to open it. While I was waiting to get in, I'd press my face against the window pane. Always a fantastic display of independent singles. So tempting. Sadly, and scandalously, in 1987, the Handyside Arcade was swallowed whole and regurgitated as a completely bland adjoin to Eldon Square.



**The bands I saw play Newcastle in 1980.**  
**To hear a radio show about them [click here](#)**

Some Saturdays, and you had to get your information on the grapevine to know about this; the routine would be turned on its head because there was a band you wanted to see coming to the City Hall. The place to start that day was in the box office queue on Northumberland Road. How far beyond the swimming baths entrance would the queue reach? If I went to get a ticket for Penetration and the street was full of heavy metal kids, then I'd probably arrived on the wrong day!

Many Saturdays, I'd have already been all the way round town once but found it too exciting to leave behind for a whole week so I'd revisit shops from earlier. Back to Virgin. Dig a little deeper in their racks. By 3pm it was bursting with black leather jacket punk boys. Standing away from the counters - all chat. If I still had any money left, I'd join the seemingly endless queue to buy singles.



### Some Favourite Singles from Virgin

My sense of there being a Saturday circuit of record shops that a number of us were treading each week was confirmed a few years later when I met people in clubs who had also been keen record buyers. More recently, it's been a topic discussed online. What we had in Newcastle probably wasn't unique, and likely typical of most major cities. [Contact Us](#) Probably also typical... when I left school, my visit to [Contact Us](#) the weekly ritual was broken. Aged 13 to 16, I had a good time. They were crucial years, after which I felt and looked very changed and I think very affected by my experiences.

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**SIMON McKAY**