WHAT'S ON

# 40 years on, the never-before-seen pictures of the Sex Pistols in Caerphilly

The band terrified councillors and Christians when they rolled into town in 1976

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By James McCarthy
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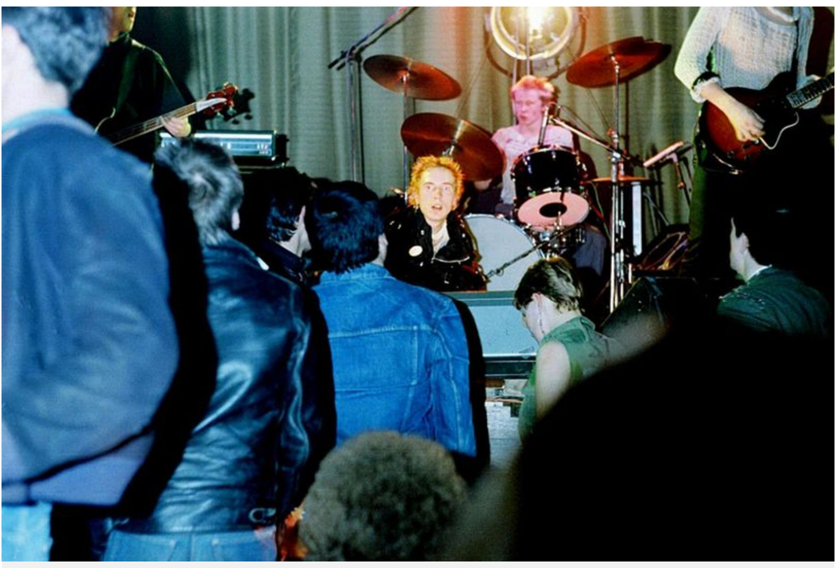

**Straight down the lens - Johnny Rotten fronts the Sex Pistols in Caerphilly in 1976** (Image: Dave Smitham)

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Sneering from the stage as carol singers picketed outside, these pictures show the Sex Pistols' 1976 Caerphilly gig.

Fan Dave Smitham took the snaps as the band tore through their then unreleased album Never Mind The B******s.

"I tried to go and see them at the 100 club but missed them," said Dave, now 63, who was studying in London at the time.

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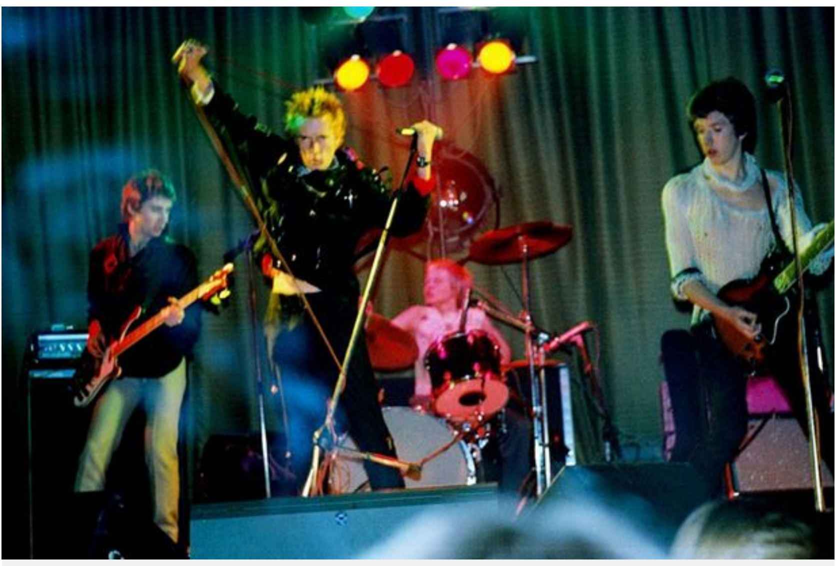
The pictures come as former Sex Pistols frontman John Lydon celebrates his 60th birthday on Sunday, January 31.

"I didn't have many connections in South Wales but kept my eyes on the NME for information," the retired artist said.

"I missed them at the Stowaway Club in Newport, all the South Wales punk gang were there."



**'Never seen anyone like Johnny Rotten before or since'** (Image: Dave Smitham)

## Caerphilly was terrified of the Pistols

The punk scene was still barely formed.

"It was something different because punk had not really formulated in the press," Dave said.

"These were just people into clubs and buying clothes regularly, going to London to buy clothes.

"They were into Roxy Music and Bowie and knew that the Pistols were coming to Wales because of their connection with Malcolm McLaren's shop, Sex."

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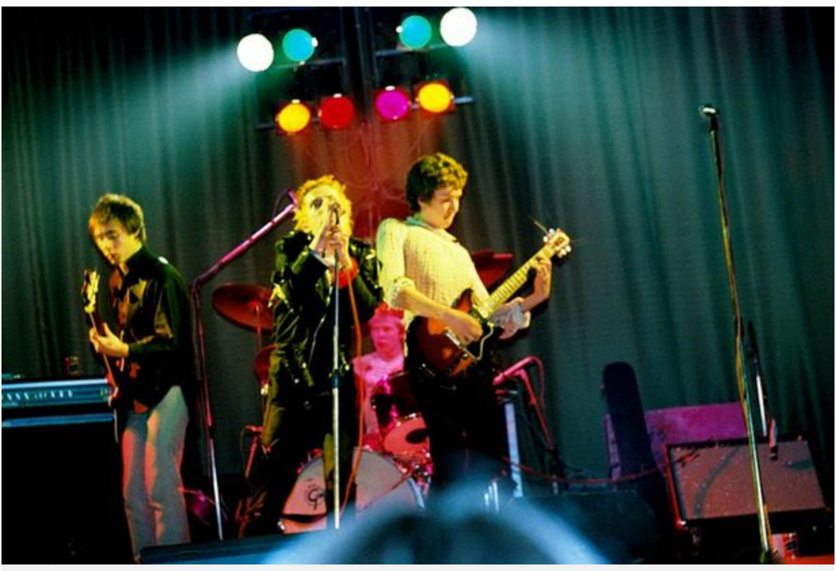
Caerphilly residents had no idea what to expect from the Pistols. They were terrified.

"It was like a spaghetti western when we arrived," Dave said.

"All the pubs were barricaded."



**Sex Pistols play Caerphilly 1976 - one of their few UK appearances after the Grundy affair** (Image: Dave Smitham)

## The Clash, the Pistols and Johnny Thunders for £1.75

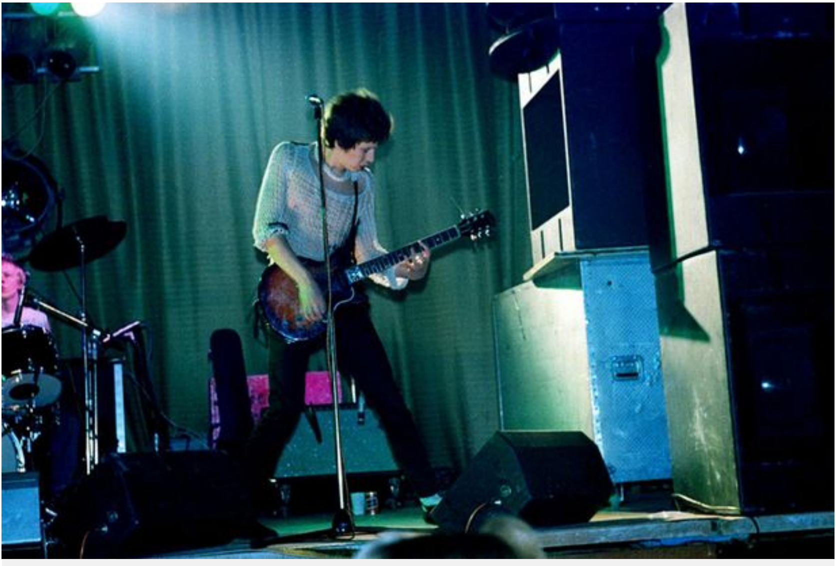
Outside carol singers and councillors voiced their moral outrage at the arrival of the Anarchy in the UK tour.

"I missed the carol service because I went to visit a cousin," Dave said.

"But I went in and experienced The Clash and Johnny Thunders and the Sex Pistols for £1.75.

"My memories of The Clash is just they were like barking dogs. They were the first proper punk band I had seen.

"I'd seen The Stranglers and Patti Smith but this was different."



**There were only about 50 people in the audience that night** (Image: Dave Smitham)

## 'Never seen anyone like Johnny Rotten before or since'

Punk gigs were not like other shows the then 24-year-old Dave had been to.

“There was always a perceived barrier between audience and performer,” he said.

“But here you got the impression that the barrier was flexible.

“You felt threatened but continued to enjoy it,” Dave said.

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“If you could see Johnny Rotten at the time there was a malevolence that suggested there was no barrier between him and the audience.

“I’ve never seen anyone like him before or since.

“I’ve seen Public Image and John Lydon is still a great performer but he has polished his act a bit.

“But at that time he did feel dangerous.”

**The pictures are a "document of an event".** (Image: Dave Smitham)

## Steve Strange was in the crowd

In a few years, fashion had tightened its grip.

“The whole punk thing was not yet what it was two years later, with coloured mohawks and that sort of thing,” Dave said.

“There was a lot of hand painted army surplus clothes there, and a few people who had bought clothes in London.”

Visage star Steve Strange was in the crowd.

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“He looked bizarre in tight black clothes with chains hanging off them,” Dave, from Cardiff, said.

“In one way these pictures are a document of an event and in that way they are unique.

“And as photos, there is one of them that is really good.”

**The Sex Pistols as the wold came to recognise them**

## 'I was there'

Mark McCarthy – manager of Merthyr rockers Pretty Vicious and dad of guitarist Thomas McCarthy – was also there.

“The show was amazing,” the 56-year-old said.

“The first band was The Clash, which was great in itself, then there were the Heartbreakers and the Pistols who were just something else.

“I’d never seen them before. It was December 1976 and I was 16 at the time.”

**Read more:** The moment Pretty Vicious played on after Paris attacks

He only heard about the pictures recently.

“I didn’t think anyone had taken photos of the show and they are great shots,” he said.

“It brought the memories back.”

**Happy birthday, Johnny! Rotten - alias John Lydon - turns 60 on January 31, 2016** (Image: Dominic Lipinski/PA Wire)

## Only 50 people in the crowd

He remembered they played tracks including God Save the Queen, Anarchy in the UK, Pretty Vacant and Bodies.

“They played everything that was on Never Mind The B******s,” father-of-two Mark said.

“There were not a lot of people at the gig, probably no more than 50, because punk was not a big thing that was happening in Wales.

“It was not mainstream. It was a handful of people from Cardiff and Merthyr and Bridgend who were into that stuff.”

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