

No I don't like where you come from, it's just a satellite of London: High Wycombe, the Sex Pistols and the punk transformation

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Abstract:

The journey from proto-punk to punk occurred at high speed in many of London's satellite towns. Among these, the town High Wycombe in the home counties offers a narrative that can trace an involvement from the earliest stages as a result of performances by leading British punk group the Sex Pistols. This paper explores three Sex Pistols-related events that are used to map three clear phases of the proto-punk to punk transformation. The first wave notes the blurred lines in the fluid symbiotic relationships between proto-punk in London its satellite towns. Drawing on Crossley, I note that London's networked punk 'music world' (Crossley 2015: 98-122) was reliant on both cultural commuters and activities in the provinces. I propose that a further, fluid notion of transivity that shows the relationship between local and 'commuter' punks is needed. The second wave shows the damaging aspect to High Wycombe's punk identity as, due to its close proximity to London, many of its key actors would move to the capital as soon as they were able to. They escaped from the 'boredom' of High Wycombe – the commuter town – to go to the 'excitement' of cosmopolitan London to live their dreams. As Rotten claimed: 'As bad as it was in London for young people, they had nothing at all in the satellite towns. No social scene, nothing' (Haslam 2015: 233). The third wave reveals a moment of class and regional cohesion, through which a High Wycombe Punk identity emerges during the summer of 1977. This occurs among the first and second wave participants who remained and the newer school-aged punks. Finally, the paper introduces the local punk terrain beyond the timeline under investigation. Here, regional and class difference became played out through violent interactions between Wycombe punks and skins, and punk scenes from other towns. Here we see the assertion of Wycombe Punk as a type.

Keywords: Sex Pistols, punk 1976, satellite, proto-punk, Wycombe Punk, skinhead revival, Xtraverts, post-punk

Punk, in a funny way was about growing up in a suburban town and doing your own thing, it wasn't so much about being in London. Maybe that's why it was important. (Stephen Jones 2017)

The history of UK punk has been a site of struggle since before the emergence of a clearly defined subculture in late 1976. The popular music press initially sought to reduce UK proto-punk's messy emergence to a teleological progression from great creative visionaries (McLaren, Westwood, Lydon etc.) to great events (*100 Club Punk Special*, Lesser Free Trade Hall etc). This progression became represented in a proto-punk narrative that focused on London, McLaren, Westwood and the Sex Pistols (Hebdige 1979; Marcus 1989; Savage 1991; Nehring 1993).

The vital role the London suburb of Bromley played in the emergence, development and dissemination of the proto-punk period has been well documented. However, the wider role of the capital's satellite towns and their place in the narrative of early UK punk has been largely unexplored, beyond their role as minor locations in the Sex Pistols' early biography. Sabin (1999) may have complained; 'how many more times must we hear the Sex Pistols story?' (1999: 2), but their biography is synonymous with the emergence and dissemination of British punk (Worley, 2017: 3) and is inextricably bound to a satellite punk story as the band 'picked up support from London's dormitory towns' (Savage, 2005: 145) through their early gigs.

This paper uses three dates in the period between February 1976 and August 1977 in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire to map the growth of proto-punk to a self-identifying local punk identity. Early gigs by the Sex Pistols and their mediation offers a prism through which we are able to see UK punk's emergence and growth in High Wycombe and surrounding areas. The growth of regional punk can be seen within the time frame as three waves. The first wave can be seen as an acknowledgement and engagement of art school students who considered themselves to be the band's contemporaries, together with the conversion of small numbers of music press aware fans and a link to music industries personnel such as promoters. The embrace of local musicians, curious music press consumers and the emergence of both self-identifying punks and punk bands typify the second wave. The third wave can be seen through the clear emergence of a mainstreamed idea of punk, the claim to a local punk identity and the ideological dominance of specific people and bands.

The key dates within this study are: Friday 20 February 1976, when the Sex Pistols performed at High Wycombe's Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education; Thursday 2 September 1976, the band's gig at the Nags Head pub; and Wednesday 17 August 1977, when the band were widely rumoured to be returning to the Nags Head as part of the S.P.O.T.S. tour.

The first of these gigs has been a site of punk mythology as a part of the Sex Pistols biography (Savage, 2005: 152-154; Ogg, 2006: 495; Strongman, 2007: 110-111; Parker & O'Shea 2011: 67; Heylin, 2016: 61-63; etc.). It was following this gig that Buzzcocks formed, and the Sex Pistols' first Manchester Lesser Free Trade Hall and 100 Club dates were booked. With the exception of Worley's exploration of the emergence of a Norwich punk scene (Worley, 2016) and Savage's brief consideration of local St Albans audiences (2005: 190) there has been little investigation into people at the band's earliest gigs.

That these gigs converted audiences in their wake has been seen as a given.

Using these gigs, I argue that High Wycombe had a strong proto- and punk network. It had its own clearly defined loci of venues, pubs, bands, clothing market-stalls, schools and an influential college. Furthermore, it had key actors including musicians, promoters, artists, fashion designers and fanzine producers. However, the town's punk identity was initially undermined through its close proximity to London. High Wycombe presented itself as a cultural commuter scene with many proto- and first wave punks defining themselves through activities in both their hometown and the capital. Despite an early embrace of punk, the formation of a clear High Wycombe punk identity took some time.

It should be noted that no publicly available recorded evidence exists of the first gig under investigation, although Paul Morley (2008) claims future Buzzcocks members Howard Devoto and Pete Shelley taped the Sex Pistols' performance and studied it 'extremely closely, as if it were a scripture, a series of codes to decipher' (2008: 63-64). The second Sex Pistols gig considered here was filmed by a French TV company and the performance of 'Anarchy in the UK' was used in the film *The Filth and the Fury* (Temple, 2000). Only the visuals were used, with sound dubbed from the Screen On The Green gig on 29 August 1976. This investigation is primarily constructed through journalistic accounts, personal testimonies in print and online, and through participant interviews. It is worth noting that Gavin Watson photographed High Wycombe's post-1979 skinhead communities extensively and helped codify that scene. Although he also

photographed punks of the same post-1979 period – in so doing revealing aspects of the relationship between punk and skinhead cultures in the town at that time – he wasn't active during this pre-punk phase. The High Wycombe, Marlow and Aylesbury punk scenes from early 1978 were documented by Colleen Watts, whose photographs have been used extensively online and in posthumous record releases. However, neither Watson nor Watts were active during the pre-punk period under investigation and therefore neither attended or documented either of the Sex Pistols gigs.

Proto-Punk Diaspora

Respected retrospective analyses of the proto-punk period have argued for the primacy of a small selection of key people, styles and places in the early UK punk story (Hebdige 1979; Marcus 1989; Savage 1991; Nehring 1993). Hebdige distils punk authenticity through consumption practices that prioritise the authenticity of the capital city and its key actors. He argued that once 'the original innovations which signify 'subculture' are translated into commodities and made generally available, they become "frozen"' (1979: 96). Lohman notes that Hebdige set up a hierarchy that 'recognised only those punks who shopped in London's Kings Road as 'original' punks' (2017: 28). She further argues that such a position denied regional punk the agency to produce its own meanings, therefore rendering it subordinate to a small group of meaning makers in London. Cobley (1999) argues that Savage's widely celebrated account *England's Dreaming* dismisses the punk story beyond London and its suburb of Bromley. He argues that the book presents a story in which 'King's Road supplants Bloomsbury and, instead of what Virginia said to Leonard, we are offered what Vivienne said to Malcolm as the authentic and original meaning of punk rock throughout the land' (1999: 170). Indeed Savage's main acknowledgement of activity beyond London is limited to early Sex Pistols gigs (2005: 144-145 & 153) as they 'picked up support from London's dormitory towns' (2005: 145) and a brief coverage of the Manchester punk scene.

This is not to say that punks in the provinces have been ignored. More recent work has shone a light on a regional punk diaspora (Bestley, 2012: 41-71), through which punk's migration from capital city out to the regions can be viewed. Worley (2017) argues that 'the Sex Pistols' cultural intervention was interpreted and reimagined through the urban, socioeconomic and cultural landscapes of places like Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, Bristol and Coventry' (2017: 9). Regional meanings of punk were thus formulated. A brief survey of the mediation of a regional punk diaspora reveals numerous journalistic representations of Manchester as punk's second city (Haslam,

2000: Morley 2006; Owen, 2015; etc.). Radio and television documentaries have focussed on northern industrial cities such as Huddersfield, Northallerton and Manchester (Temple, 2013; Hodkinson, 2016; etc.), while serious studies have explored punk life in spaces as disparate as Southampton, Brighton, Wigan, Belfast and, again, Manchester (O'Brien, 1999: 186–198; Medhurst, 1999: 218-231; Cobley, 1999: 170-185; Albiez, 2006: 92-106, etc.).

Much of the work into regional punk practices outlined here has observed locations that are geographically distanced from London in periods after a punk subculture had gained some self-defining clarity. However, there has been little investigation into the satellite towns that lay just beyond London's suburbs. Those towns which were close enough to the capital to enable easy access to, and eventual impacts on London's cultural shifts, but too far away for its proto-punks to be central to the key networks. Through investigation into the Sex Pistols' interactions with High Wycombe, it is also possible to see how both the narratives around the band began to form and how the formation and dissemination of proto- and early punk took place in London's commuter towns.

High Wycombe

Located in the highly affluent county of Buckinghamshire, the town itself appeared to outsiders to be in direct opposition to Coon et al's claims for punk's working class heritage. From the perspective of the left-leaning late-1970s ideological music press, post-industrial northern towns like Manchester were a perfect cultural homeland for the punk scene's social narrative. High Wycombe seemingly wasn't. Huq (2008) outlines common associations of suburb and city in which the suburbs are depicted as, among other things, white, quiet, aspirational, conformist. The city on the other hand is presented as a space with ethnic mix, noise, multiple deprivation and decay, and bohemian attitudes etc. (Huq, 2008: 38). Ron Watts argued that most of Wycombe's punks were 'middle-class kids playing at being rebels. Wycombe's a nice place to live, it's no concrete jungle. It's hard to present yourself as the authentic voice of the streets when your father's a bank manager, your mother's a headmistress and you live in a nice semi in the suburbs.' (2006: 180). Watts' comment was typical of the popular notion of punks from the home-counties. To an extent, this was indeed the case. James outlines the impact of punk on affluent towns on the edges of High Wycombe, noting that among his own group of punk friends were the children of head teachers, area managers and company directors. In fact among his own punk network were multiple Olympic gold

medallist Steve Redgrave, as well as Roald Dahl's grandson who was one of two punks from Eton College (James, in press).

As with many similar towns however, High Wycombe contained high levels of deprivation linked to long-term, generational unemployment. As a town it was dominated socially and economically by the furniture industry that went into decline in the late 1970s. The area subsequently experienced considerable unemployment and social problems, particularly in those places in the outreaches of High Wycombe, such as Castlefield, Micklefield, Terriers and Totteridge, which Gavin Watson has described as 'bleak' (2008: 11). These areas not only housed a large number of the population of white indigenous unemployed, but were also home to significant numbers of Caribbean (Vincentian) and Pakistani immigrants. Furthermore, the town also included a large population of Jamaican immigrants also living in these poorer areas. Socially and culturally, High Wycombe had much in common with the areas of London that the members of the Sex Pistols had grown up in. Indeed, suburban spaces such as High Wycombe proved as potent a breeding ground for punk as inner city London. It was similarly a space where punks and Rastafarians found a common ground. One of the few pubs that was welcoming to young punks was a Jamaican-owned hostelry, the Red Cross Knight at Temple End, close to the town centre. 'It was one of only two pubs in Britain that had a black publican. The other one was in London,' states Adrian Sherwood of On-U Sound fame, who first started DJ'ing aged 13 at soundsystem clashes in the Newlands Centre. The bar on the right hand side of the Red Cross Knight was frequented by members of the Jamaican community. The soundsystem played an endless lover's rock soundtrack including the work of local producer Clement 'Clem' Bushay, best known for Tapper Zukie's *Man A Warrior* (1973). Crucially, punks were accepted and, in a shift that can be viewed as colonialism to post-colonialism (Adams, 2008: 469-488) became advocates of reggae and Rastafarianism.

Another important aspect of High Wycombe's socio-cultural terrain was the central position of Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education. The college boasted two venues: the town centre student union bar situated in a car park separate to the college, and a larger hall space within the college's main building where the Sex Pistols first played. The fact that the Sex Pistols gig took place in a Further Education institution with an art foundation course that was a feeder for St Martin's and Chelsea art schools cannot be understated. 'We were at High Wycombe because it was an art school,' (Matlock, 2017). Common to many liberal art colleges in the 1970s, High Wycombe had

a reputation for developing creative expression among its students. Unusually, it was an approach that extended to teaching in the furniture department too. Former furniture design student Jonathan More explains: 'One of our tutors was Lucian Ercolani, of High Wycombe's Ercol Furniture company. He really encouraged a free-thinking environment. I thought I was there to learn to create dovetail joints, but instead I was allowed to make pretty weird things. The atmosphere that the Sex Pistols conjured certainly inspired this' (More, 2018).

Friday, 20th February 1976

Friday 20th February 1976. High Wycombe's Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education brought its rag week to a close with a Friday night student disco and a gig headlined by Screaming Lord Sutch and the Savages. Support came from the Sex Pistols, who had turned up 'very late' (Lassen, 2018) 'unheralded and unannounced' (Savage, 2005: 145) and were playing what was only their twelfth gig. Their fee for the gig was one crate of beer, although social secretary Tony Wilkins, who booked the band, has subsequently claimed he knocked their fee down to half a crate of Carlsberg (Lewis, 2016). The band sounded 'unbearably mid-range, just a cacophony, but really exciting' (Sawney, 2018). They played for no more than fifteen minutes (Jones, 2017; Lassen, 2018) with a set that certainly included 'No Fun' (Boon, 2018). Reports that the band also debuted 'New York' and 'Submission' (Parker & O'Shea, 2011: 66) are unlikely, due to the brevity of band's set. Their performance endured a number of interruptions from the audience and organisers. Rotten's aggressive, anti-student taunts and destruction of a microphone resulted in someone picking him up 'by the back of his belt and scruff of his neck,' and throwing him 'into the sparsely filled "auditorium" like a small sack of potatoes' (Lewis, 2016). Rotten subsequently denied smashing the microphone (Lewis, 2016; Parker & O'Shea 2011: 67; Heylin, 2016: 62; Boon, 2017). The disruption resulted in the DJ trying to put a record on as the band's performance of 'No Fun' came to a shambolic climax. 'Rotten just shouted "fuck off we'll do what we want"' (Lassen, 2018). The power was pulled and the student union DJ started playing, 'something by Jackson 5, or whatever... and there was absolute uproar because by this time there was a whole load of us that wanted the Sex Pistols and there was a whole load of them that wanted Jackson 5, and then suddenly someone backstage worked out how to get the Pistols back on, and they were plugged back in, we got more of them' (Raycroft, 2018). Following one more song the band were finally cut short by the Social Secretary Tony Wilkins, who pulled the plugs once and for all. The DJ, Assistant Social Secretary Patrick Graham, replaced the band with a disco track, announcing: 'Oh yer, in the NME they say "we're

not into music, we're into chaos..." and I think we know what they mean. Har har' (Savage: 153).

Among the band's entourage in High Wycombe were Malcolm McLaren, tour manager Nils Stevenson, Bernie Rhodes, Sid Vicious, *SEX* employees Jordan and Helen Wellington-Lloyd, and future member of the Nipple Erectors Shanne Hasler. Significantly, in terms of punk mythology, the audience also included Howard Devoto (nee Trafford) and Peter Shelley (nee McNeish), who had travelled down from the Bolton Institute of Technology. Their friend Richard Boon had also travelled from nearby Reading University. The threesome had met up at *SEX* that afternoon to try and find out more about the Sex Pistols after reading the debut review of the band two days earlier in the *NME*. The review itself was of the band's support slot with Eddie and the Hot Rods at the Marquee. Spencer barely mentioned the headliners, instead championing 'a quartet of teenage misfits from the wrong end of various London roads...' (Spencer 1976: 31) who declared themselves to be into 'chaos' rather than music.

Another notable attendee to the High Wycombe gig was promoter Ron Watts, who was there to meet the college social secretary to discuss booking a stripper for them (Watts 2006: 145). His own band Brewer's Droop, featuring High Wycombe resident Mark Knopfler on guitar, had played the Rag Week a few days earlier, as had Hatfield & the North, and Kilburn & the High Roads featuring Ian Dury, who himself had been a pupil at High Wycombe's Royal Grammar School.

The impact the gig had on the Devoto, Shelley and Watts was significant to both the Sex Pistols' development and the dissemination of punk. Boon states: 'We'd never seen anything like it. It was a gig that changed and/or ruined our lives, thereafter. Howard, Pete and I went to Welwyn Garden City for Pistols opening for someone else (on the following evening). Not so dramatic...' (Boon, 2018). Indeed, Boon was so enthralled by the gig that he booked them to play at Reading University's Art Exchange event on May 30, 1976 where Rotten greeted the 20-strong crowd with the statement: 'Art students? We've seen your paintings...' (Worley, 2016). Post-High Wycombe, Shelley and Devoto were moved to form the Buzzcocks and invited the Sex Pistols to play at their college in Bolton. However, when this venue proved to be unavailable they shifted the booking to Manchester's Lesser Free Trade Hall in June 1976. Buzzcocks were penciled in as support. Boon took on the role of their manager.

Ron Watts' presence at the High Wycombe gig would also be significant for the crystallization of punk. A few days after the gig, Malcolm McLaren approached Watts to book the band to play London's 100 Club. According to Watts, 'McLaren couldn't believe I'd already seen the band and still wanted to book them' (Watts, 2009). Despite knowing the Pistols had already been banned from almost every other venue in London, Watts gave the band a one-off gig on March 30, 1976 followed by a Tuesday night residency starting May 11, 1976. 'I hadn't seen anything at the High Wycombe gig I didn't think I could handle' (Watts 2006: 147). Ron Watt's endorsement of Sex Pistols and the bands that emerged around them culminated in the *100 Club Punk Special* on 20 and 21 September 1976.

Much of the narrative that has emerged around the first Sex Pistols gig in High Wycombe has been through the binary of cosmopolitanism versus provincialism (Savage, 2005; Parker & O'Shea 2011; Heylin, 2016). Historian Paul Lewis' claim in his overview of the gig that 'there was no 'punk scene' in Wycombe at the time' (Lewis, 2016) is misleading as, in fact, at this time there was no more a self-identifying punk rock scene in evidence in London than the one that had attended the High Wycombe gig. The sixty strong audience at the first 100 Club gig (30 March, 1976) consisted of Westwood and McLaren, Jordan and some of the *SEX* crew, 'a few hippies, straights, passers-by who wanted to see whatever was on at the 100 Club and some curious gig-goers wondering what the Sex Pistols was all about' (Savage 2005: 148). The first High Wycombe gig included a similar audience make up – but with fans of disco and soul instead of tourists. Shanne Hasler's depiction of the High Wycombe venue being 'packed with people sitting cross-legged on the floor, students with long hair and joss sticks, shouting abuse at the (the Sex Pistols)' (Heylin, 2016: 62) is similarly misleading, as it implies a homogenised mass. Indeed, the local audience make up has particular significance to the High Wycombe punk narrative, as the tensions between those subcultures that were present would offer a forewarning of how local subcultural groups would respond to punks in the town.

That night the High Wycombe crowd consisted of disparate groups of people, the majority of whom had bought tickets for the disco. Among the live music fans were blues rockers and Hells Angels who were there for Sutch, and a selection of 'curious' rock fans who had also been inspired to attend as a result of reading the *NME* two days earlier. Accounts of the High Wycombe show reveal a hugely divided audience reaction. Janice Raycroft, junior reporter for the local paper *Bucks Free Press* recalls: 'The audience was

completely divided. I was mesmerised. I was one of the people who felt myself sort of magnetised towards the front. My boyfriend was in the “boo, get them off” crowd. And there was the rest just “thinking what the hell was going on here” (Raycroft, 2018). Jim Lassen, who was charged with looking after Sutch’s equipment, describes a scene of bottles and insults being launched in the band’s direction as they played (Lassen, 2018). Stephen ‘Bruv’ Sawney recalls being shunned by many of his friends after buying Rotten a drink after the gig. ‘They were openly against him because they’d hated the Pistols so much. They felt so threatened. I’d never seen such an extreme reaction to a band before. That really excited me’ (Sawney, 2018).

Among the other ‘excited’ attendees were students Jonathan More, who would later create house outfit Coldcut and the Ninja Tune label and ‘Big’ Paul Ferguson, who would later become better known as the drummer of Killing Joke. At that time he was in a progressive rock band called Beowulf, that included Roy and Martin Jones, brothers of 80s pop star Howard Jones.

Some of the art school students present had close links to the London art and fashion scenes and were already informed by, and responding to, the cultural energy around the McLaren and Westwood’s *SEX* boutique. Not unlike the Bromley contingent this, albeit very small, group self-identified as Bowie and Roxy Music freaks. Among these was Stephen Jones, who would become a key actor in the new romantic scene and a renowned milliner. Another local with links to London’s proto-punk activities was Sharon ‘Charlie’ Green from nearby Marlow-on-Thames, who was a regular at Louise’s nightclub in Soho in early 1976 and would later become considered an ‘ace-face’ at the Roxy, featuring in numerous early photos.

Through the audience’s responses to this gig, we are able to see the immediate impact of the band on High Wycombe. The divisions became quickly solidified with a strongly anti-Pistols cohort among the disco fans. These same people would subsequently become extremely anti-punk once the subculture had become framed. The violent reaction to the band by the blues rockers became a regular feature in High Wycombe, eventually resulting in one key venue closing its doors to punk.

The embrace of proto-punk’s possibilities was also quickly evident. Many of the provincial ‘long-hairs’ noted in most depictions of this gig (Savage, 2005; Parker & O’Shea 2011; Matlock & Silverton, 2006; Heylin, 2016; etc.) would quickly adopt

Rotten's charity shop clothing chic and harshly chopped hair. The gig also acted as an inspiration for bands to form. Many of these were in name only, but some would eventually play live. These included The Un, who would change their name to Personal Hygiene for their solitary gig in support to Wayne County and the Electric Chairs at the Alexandria Club in Cardiff, 1977. Another fledgling band conceived in the aftermath of the college gig was The Pink Parts, which would eventually include Killing Joke's Paul Ferguson and Stephen Jones, who was, by September 1976, a student at St Martin's. Other members of the Pink Parts included former Pink Fairies guitarist Martin Stone, John Chiverton who would become a sculptor on *Spitting Image* and Chrissy Atkinson, who created costumes for *Game of Thrones* (Jones, 2018). They wouldn't play their first gig until early 1977.

Thursday, 2nd September, 1976

'For some reason the youth of High Wycombe... had an element of youth that were into the new scene much earlier than elsewhere.' (Watts, 2006)

Crossley (2015) points to the importance of the phenomenon of transivity to the growth of punk London (2015: 144). He suggests this occurs in the way that actors who are tied to each other tend to cluster, share contacts and then grow through the accidental contact of people 'bumping in to each other'. When applied to the highly mediated formations of the London punk canon it is clear to see how this transivity occurred through the foci of *SEX*, specific gigs, squats and art schools. A 'network of sound' based on High Wycombe in the proto-punk period would show similar activity to London: however it would also reveal a high degree of fluidity through commuter activities. Significantly this included members of the High Wycombe community with a strong claim to a place in London punk's formative years, such as Billy Watts, the original vocalist with an embryonic, pre-Strummer incarnation of the Clash (James, in-press). This would also highlight some of those present at the earliest Sex Pistols gig as being a part of the London network, but with a level of transivity associated with tourism. They simply didn't live their daily lives within the clusters of London's proto-punk activities until post-studies they moved to London to be a part of the capital's punk scene.

This proximity to London posed a threat to the development of a High Wycombe scene, as many of the early audience would spend a large amount of their time at venues in the capital. Conversely, it was a feature of regional punk scenes that existed further away from the stereotypical punk 'centres' such as London and Manchester, that they were

able to develop more cohesively, in part because of their apparent 'isolation' and the need for the local punk community to cooperate in order to build a 'scene'. Many of the partisan members of the first gig's audience were contemporaries of the London scene and were subsequently responding to many of the same concerns and conditions. However, the next Sex Pistols gig in High Wycombe would reveal a second wave audience who were more clearly made up of the punk identified and punk curious. The band's dissenters were notable by their absence at this gig.

On September 2, 1976, eight months after that Wycombe College Sex Pistols gig, and 19 days before punk's coming of age gig, the *100 Club Punk Special*, the band would play at High Wycombe's Nags Head. The local punk audience had by then swelled, thanks in part to Ron Watts putting associated bands such as the Damned, the Vibrators and the Stranglers on at the pub in the intervening months.

'Ron Watts used to book bands to play at the Nags Head, Uxbridge College and 100 Club so it was like a little tour. Wycombe got all these punk bands really early on – even before the music press wrote about them' (Sherwood, 2018).

'It seemed like we were getting bands at the Nags before anyone else. I was a glass collector there and saw so many amazing early punk bands... It was a really influential time to be in High Wycombe' (More, 2018).

A French television company filmed the gig for a documentary that was never broadcast. Filming took place on one camera so the band had to play numerous takes of at least one song to provide multiple angles for the final edit (Watts, 2009). Some of the footage of the of the Sex Pistols performing 'Anarchy in the UK' at this gig was used in Julian Temple's *The Filth and the Fury* and clearly depicts locals Hugh Garrety, Adrian Campbell, Mark White, Carlton Mounsher and Kris Jozajtis (aka Kris Karisma). The latter three were members of local school band Deathwish.

Jozajtis explains:

(We) formed what became 'Deathwish' based around old R'n'B covers but conscious that something different was 'happening'. The pivotal moment for ourselves came when the Pistols played the Nags that September. We became 'punks' virtually overnight.' With Granada TV's *So It Goes* broadcast of the Sex Pistols performing 'Anarchy in the UK' only two days later, Deathwish set about

adding 'self-penned punk material plus a cover of "Anarchy" to our repertoire' (Jozajtis, 2017)

Crucially the younger members of the audience had already picked up on the style cues of punk presented through the media. The emergence of the term 'punk' had been a battleground in the USA over a decade earlier (Laing, 2015: 21-24, 55-56). The UK punk scene was only fully defined in the mainstream press as both genre and subculture some three weeks before the Nags Head gig via Caroline Coon's *Melody Maker* piece 'Punk Rock: Rebels Against the System' (Coon, 1976). Jozajtis' conversion was already being enacted by similarly minded youths throughout the UK.

On 30 October 1976, Deathwish would play at the Liston Hall in nearby Marlow-on-Thames. The emergence of self-promoted gigs in village halls and unusual spaces would become a clear and increasingly common expression of DIY activity central to the punk communities in the High Wycombe and beyond. Indeed, a similar story can be seen in towns across the UK. The gig itself became notable locally for fire alarms being set off as Deathwish played their cover of 'Anarchy in the UK'. For many of the gig's school age attendees this represented a first experience of both punk and the Sex Pistols' music. Among the audience at the Marlow gig and a subsequent regular at the Nags Head was Jon Fugler, who would later form electronic band Fluke. Within months a raft of young school aged punk bands such as Nagasaki Twist and Glas Vosicht had formed in the area. The headlining band's drummer that evening was a long-haired Dylan Jones (now editor of *GQ*) who would later claim to have been a roadie for Deathwish (Watts, 2006: back matter; Jones, 2009) and a member of art-punk band the Un.

The increased number of local self-defining punks at the Sex Pistols' Nags Head gig highlighted the existence of a commuter transitivity among actors who divided time between High Wycombe and London. Among these were Nigel Martin and 'Marmite' who, like Sharon Green, had already been regulars at Louise's and later The Roxy, Global Village and The Vortex. They would also become regularly featured in early photographs of 'London' punks. Marmite was a 'black Punk in Wycombe... He had black hair, with a silver zigzag stripe in it' (Watts, in Maddison 2006). Nigel Martin also worked a few Saturdays at *SEX* in 1975 and in 1976, was photographed there by *Honey* magazine (Martin, 2015). After a one-gig spell with Deathwish, he would form The Xtraverts in 1976, which featured Mark Reilly on guitar. Reilly was another High Wycombe local who was also present at the Sex Pistols' Nags Head gig and would become another oft-

photographed regular at The Roxy. In the 1980's he would become better known a member of Blue Rondo a la Turk and later as the main singer-songwriter in Matt Bianco.

The audience associated with the second Sex Pistols gig can be viewed as the 'second wave' of the formation of a local punk identity. It was a more clearly visually defined scene and included members of local punk bands that congregated around a very small selection of punk friendly pubs and venues, while some were also active participants in the London scene. Much of the new punk audience and the key local bands had emerged through the pub rock sound that had been a regular feature at the Nags Head. The period also saw a significant rise in school-aged punks who had been inspired by the media interest in the Sex Pistols and the framing of the punk subculture. Over the eighteen months following the second Sex Pistols gig, many of High Wycombe's key first wave proto-punks and second wave punks had moved to London to become part of punk-associated activities before taking defining roles in post-punk clusters. These included Stephen Jones and the new romantic scene; Mark Reilly and the Wag Club scene; Jonathan More and the art rock/ industrial electronic music scene; Dylan Jones and iD magazine; and finally Kris Jozajtis and Hugh Garrety (Folk Devils), Paul Ferguson (Killing Joke), and Majid Ahmed, Roy Jones with brothers, Martin and Paul (Red Beat) who would all become a part of the Ladbroke Grove post-punk squat network.

Wednesday 17 August, 1977, Nag's Head, High Wycombe

Midweek on a hot summers evening and a queue of punks stretched for 300 yards along the London Road, all hoping to get in to the Nag's Head's Blues Loft to witness the Sex Pistols performing on their infamous pseudonymous S.P.O.T.S. tour. The punk fraternity had grown significantly in High Wycombe thanks to punk's large scale media exposure and appearances by the Clash, Generation X, the Damned, Siouxsie & the Banshees and the Jam at the venue in the eleven months since the last Sex Pistols appearance. The young punks subsequently had an easily accessible live soundtrack to accompany the reports in the music press and mainstream media. Unlike the earlier gigs by the Sex Pistols in the town, the hopeful S.P.O.T.S. audience sported a clear punk 'look' and behaviours that drew heavily on the mediated styles of punk. It was the summer of the Queen's silver jubilee and punk was deeply etched into the concerns of the cultural mainstream. The band failed to appear.

In fact it was doubtful that the band would ever have been booked. Ron Watts had been forced to ban punk bands from the 100 Club in the wake of an incident at the punk

festival in which Sid Vicious threw a glass, hit a member of the audience and blinded her in one eye. Watts subsequently banned Vicious from any of his promotions. It is therefore unlikely he would have booked the Sex Pistols while Vicious was in the band. Two weeks after the rumoured S.P.O.T.S. gig, punk would also be banned from the Nags Head following high levels of audience violence at a gig by 999 and the Xtraverts. In the wake of the Bill Grundy show punks had started to attract violent reactions from other subcultures. In High Wycombe blues rockers and Hell's Angels exerted a huge presence at live music events and on 1 September 1977 decided to teach the punks a lesson. Nags Head Landlord Mick Fitzgibbons subsequently banned all punks from the premises. By this stage, however, Watts had also started promoting gigs at the High Wycombe Town Hall, which had a significantly larger capacity that could support the growing popularity of punk. Many of the smaller local bands also started to put on gigs in halls in surrounding towns and villages, while Nigel Martin would also start promoting punk gigs at High Wycombe's Multi-Racial Centre and the Newlands Centre.

The queue at the rumoured S.P.O.T.S. gig revealed a third wave of High Wycombe punks. By this stage High Wycombe had become a magnet for punks from neighbouring towns and villages. A favourite meeting point was the town's bus station and café which highlighted a transience among the High Wycombe punks. Despite their actual hometown, everyone congregating at the gigs, pubs, cafes and other 'punk friendly' spaces increasingly identified as Wycombe Punks. Among these existed a hierarchy that prioritised those earliest punks who had not left the town for new lives in London. Thus Nigel Martin and many of his friends became central to the town's punk subcultural activities. This group of friends hailed from the town's more deprived areas and included Mark Godard, 'leader of the Wycombe skins' (Watson, 2008: 128) among others.

The queue that formed for the S.P.O.T.S. gig clearly depicted a moment of subcultural cohesion, with a collection of punks that included the middle-class children of the managers and head teachers as depicted by Watts, alongside working class youth from the deprived areas of High Wycombe outlined here and later codified through Gavin Watson's punk and skinhead photography. The ritual aggression between neighbouring rival towns was briefly forgotten as punks congregated *en masse* as a way of belonging. Much of this temporary cohesion quickly became focussed around the Xtraverts and a growing sense of regional identity. This was manifested through high levels of graffiti

bearing their name and increased chanting of the band's name throughout sets by national bands.

Much of the Xtraverts' authenticity came via an assertion of their punk identity through an association with the subculture long before it underwent a labelling process.

Furthermore, the band's claim for the region as an authentic site of punk's emergence became expressed through the notion of the Wycombe Punk as being more 'real' than London Punk. A key theme that emerges from Bestley's work is the hypothesis that 'beyond the capital city and its suburbs, punks asserted their regional identities and difference through the use of design and lyrics that prioritised and celebrated their non-London status.' (Bestley & Ogg, 2012; Bestley, 2012, : 41-71). The Xtraverts' regional identity became further expressed through lyrics that referred to local punk incidents. For example, the band's second single, 'Police State' (1978) was in reference to one particular officer of the law who took it upon himself to clean the streets of the scourge of punk. Indeed, an element of being punk in smaller towns such as High Wycombe was that the local youth and police officers knew each other by name.

No I don't like where you come from, it's just a satellite of London

Despite its largely working class population and high unemployment at this time, High Wycombe came to represent the epitome of everything that punk was represented as being at war with, simply by being a commuter-belt home counties space (Coon, 1976). By prioritising the supposed working-class regions, a narrative emerged that romanticised the importance of selected post-industrial towns. And yet, High Wycombe was exactly that; a post-industrial working class town. Throughout this article, I point to complex issues of class and the mediation of perceived class identity. The final stage of High Wycombe's complex journey from proto-punk to a regional punk identity suggests a temporary cohesion between classes, as those identifying as Wycombe Punks unified for a perceived common cause.

Greil Marcus suggests that his book 'is about a single, serpentine fact: late in 1976 a record called "Anarchy in the U.K." was issued in London, and this event launched a transformation of pop music all over the world' (1990: 18). This paper shows that in fact this transformation was already in full flow long before the release of that single. Of greater significance to High Wycombe was the band's two gigs in the town, their TV performance of 'Anarchy' on *So It Goes* and a cover version of the song performed by

local punk band Deathwish. Each of these events occurred before the single's release on 26 November 1976.

In the twelve months that followed the temporary cohesion among punks outlined in the third phase, the High Wycombe scene disintegrated into region on region violence as punks from Slough, Reading and Northampton would attend Town Hall gigs to take on the Wycombe Punks. Huge shows of bravado took place, as armies of punks walked through the town goading each other. This would climax in small scale fighting inside and outside the venue. The re-emergence of the skins would also have an impact as gigs became marred by continual outbursts of violence aimed initially at punks from outside High Wycombe and then against punks in general. Gigs had to be curtailed as members of the local skinheads took to the stage and attacked support bands. By May 1980 all punk gigs at the Town Hall were banned following an Adam and the Ants show which 'started off as another anti-punk mini-riot, initiated by the local skins sieg heiling and throwing chairs, but ended as a skinhead rout, as they had underestimated the turn out of London punks, actively encouraged by Adam' (Vague, 2013: 11). The Wycombe skins inflicted their revenge by attacking the London punks as they boarded their train home. It should be noted that throughout the gig, local punks that they recognized were spared any special attention. Similar events took place at gigs by the Xtraverts, whose following among local skinheads grew substantially in 1979. The band and many of their original friends and fans subsequently adopted the skinhead style. Sherwood notes:

I really disliked the Xtraverts crowd at that time. We put on the Slits with Creation Rebel and Moa Ambassa at the Town Hall in 1979. I don't know, but maybe we were worried about tickets sales, so we decided to book the Xtraverts too. We thought they'd bring in a few more people, but the kind of people they brought were just so different from the punks we'd become used to at the blues parties. These were more like Sham 69 yobs and a bunch of racist skins. They chanted and sieg heiled all through the Slits. I just didn't recognize that version of punk. (Sherwood, 2018)

The changing face of punk was of course being enacted throughout the UK as new post-punk subcultures started to emerge. Those fashion, art and furniture students who had attended that first Sex Pistols gig had, as already noted, moved to the capital to take their own influential places in a range of post-punk 'scenes'. The school-aged bands and their close entourages who were present at the second gig had done exactly the same.

But it was those who remained that came to define High Wycombe punk as site of second wave punk and early Oi. That the Slits and Siouxsie and the Banshees had a hard time was no surprise. High Wycombe's hardcore aligned themselves with the more direct and aggressive 'terrace' sounds of bands like Sham 69, Angelic Upstarts and UK Subs.

Looking back it would be too simplistic to say that the divide that occurred in High Wycombe was along lines of class. But, as shown in this paper, it was largely the middle class students and punks from more affluent local towns and villages who would move away. The punks that remained were predominantly from the same estates as the skins. They went to the same schools, hung out in the same parks, sprayed Xtraverts on multi-story car park walls together. Long before and after the brief 1977 punk cohesion, those punks and skins experienced 'boredom' together.

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