

Sweaty, smoky and seriously good fun! From Cream to Queen, U2 to Bowie – Kingston played host to bands who went on to be the hottest ticket in town, and a few who didn't. Were you there? And if you were, can you remember it? Lynda Horsewood spoke to a few of you who can.

Kingston Rocks



Eric Clapton.

These days, getting to see top bands is a tricky business, with tickets selling out minutes after they go on sale. But at Kingston (then a Poly) during the 70s and 80s, it couldn't have been easier. Tickets from the Students' Union cost as little as 50p and if you were lucky, you saw a future phenomenon like Eric Clapton. If you weren't, you saw Chas and Dave.

Clapton, who studied art at Kingston during the early 60s, paved the way for future chart-toppers when he returned in 1966 with his new band,

Cream, to play a one-off gig at Penrhyn Road.

The vibe was casual and laid-back. "I got to chat to Cream afterwards," recalls Tod Wakefield, who was studying architecture at Knights Park. "I asked Clapton something really geeky about the strings he used on his guitar!"

Spanning musical genres from rock to jazz, and pop to punk, Kingston hosted some of the best in the business, including Bowie, Queen, Genesis, The Smiths, The Stranglers, New Order, The Pogues and Ian Dury. Our alumni have shared personal accounts of their musical youth at Kingston, stirring heartfelt, if sometimes rather blurry, memories...



Top left: Cockney duo, Chas and Dave. Bottom left: David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust era. Above: Freddie Mercury fronts an early Queen performance.

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The 70s – From glam to punk

On 20 February, 1971, new band Yes took top spot at Penrhyn Road, supported by the equally obscure Queen and their striking young singer, Freddie Mercury. "They were terrific!" recalls Philip Nisbett (Law, 1973). "Whoever was social secretary between 1970-73 did an exceptional job – I don't know what degree they got, but their future in the rock business must have been assured."

Their ability to spot new talent was impressive, as they also booked David Bowie and Genesis. Part of Bowie's 1972 performance at Kingston is featured on his album *Rarest One Bowie*.

Those were the days!

"Can you imagine? Just turning up and watching Genesis play?" says Laura

Marcus (Social Science, 1979). "I lived in Kingston from 1972 onwards and the Poly was a major music venue. Ah, those were the happiest days of my life!"

Not only did David Haskins (Architecture, 1975) see Genesis, his student band supported them. "Three of us from the School of Architecture were in a band called Cold Storage," he says. "Genesis were at one end of the Knights Park refectory and we were at the other, alternating numbers with them. We even shared a dressing room with Supertramp."

Robert Edwards (Applied Physics 1974) helped to hook up many of the bands' sound and lighting rigs to the Poly's facilities, including Queen. "The Students' Union technical committee – a small, select

"Ian Dury and the Blockheads did packed, sweaty, smoky, exciting gigs, great fun, and in the tradition of some great student nights out, a lot of it was a blur"

Lynne Bryant
(Fine Art, 1974)

Roy Wood of Wizzard



band of geeks, largely from the science department and of which I was proud to be a member – got free tickets in return," he recalls. His experience stood him in good stead as today Robert is a BAFTA award-winning sound supervisor working on *X-Factor* and *Britain's Got Talent*.

An early 70s night which stands out in several people's minds is the one when Rod Stewart tried to get in for free, during a Stone the Crows gig. "Rod, who'd arrived dressed up to the nines in a pink silk jacket, was dating lead singer Maggie Bell,"

recalls Mike Fry (Computer Science, 1974). "The bouncers, hardliners drafted in from the Poly's rugby team, were reluctant to let him in, but Rod charmed them into letting him backstage!"

Kingston students were among the last to see a live performance by Stone the Crows lead guitarist Les Harvey, who was electrocuted soon after on stage in Swansea.

The legendary Wizzard – whose *I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday* has made over 35 festive seasons since go with a



bang – appeared at the 1972 Freshers' Fair, much to Trevor Downer's delight (Languages, Economics and Politics, 1976). "But what sticks in my mind the most is the Students' Union Bar playing *Simon and Garfunkel's Greatest Hits* almost continuously," he recalls. "It takes me straight back to the white hut on the corner with its 16p-a-pint beer-soaked carpet."

When pop went punk, Kingston was among the first to book The Cure. Jonathan Reeve (Earth Science, 1981) was one of just 20 people who turned up to see them in 1979 at Gipsy Hill. "I bought Robert Smith a pint of beer at the first interval," he recalls.

But there was still room for a cockney-knees up, with Chas and Dave appearing at Penrhyn Road the same year. "They worked the crowd really well, but the highlight was a prize draw we'd blagged some goodies for," says compère Richard Miles (Production Engineering, 1982). Not all those early featured bands went on to fame and fortune – but they still bring back fond memories.

Judge Dredd, Knights Park, 1970s
"They drew a capacity, nearly all-male, crowd, as rumour had it they were going to be accompanied by some "disco-a-go-go" dancers. Unfortunately these turned out to be men." **Donald Jones, Geography, 1977**

Let us entertain you

Landing the role of Kingston Polytechnic's social secretary in 1981 was right up Julian Hickman's street. Not only did he get to see the bands for free but it led him into his current career as a band tour manager for Island Trading.

The gig that stands out most in his mind is The Smiths at Knights Park in 1983. "The venue over-sold its 250 standing capacity, making it a hot and sweaty affair," he says. "With his National Health spectacles, hearing aid and gladioli hanging out of back pockets, Morrissey was a vibrant character who struck a chord with the student audience. And the

'Ents' card scheme left us money in the pot which meant we could put on Lloyd Cole and The Commotions for free"

Julian Hickman, Social Science, 1984, Kingston Polytechnic social secretary 1981-4.

Rachel Stanley took over as Social Secretary when Julian left in 1983, something she enjoyed so much that she went on to become full-time entertainment manager for the Poly when she finished her degree in 1986.

"I booked Courtney Pine, who'd already achieved notoriety on the jazz circuit, to

play a sell-out concert at the Penrhyn Road Bar," she recalls. "It got to half an hour before the start and he still hadn't turned up." In despair, Rachel went outside to check the queue – and found Courtney Pine waiting patiently at the back of it!

"Bands loved the quirky, cosmopolitan and fun student audience. We were as diverse as possible – from Geno Washington to Radiohead, Afrika Bambaata and drag act Divine. I loved it."

Rachel Stanley (née Shackleton, Sociology, 1986, Kingston Polytechnic social secretary 1984-6 and entertainment manager 1986-1994).

Morrissey of The Smiths.



"Morrissey made an immediate impact, dancing around the stage with his trademark gladioli hanging out of his back pocket"

Mike Quarmby (Applied Science, 1985)

"One gig I decided not to bother with was by an unknown Irish band called U2"

Ginny Warner (Modern Arts and English, 1983)

The 80s – From Morrissey to McGowan

While sharp-suited yuppies were earning loadsamoney and grappling with mobiles the size of bricks, Kingston students were treated to U2, The Smiths, The Pogues, Everything But The Girl and New Order, often booked for just £200. With a £10 'Ents' card, students could get into gigs for £1, leaving plenty of money for refreshments. Pogo-ing was in, even if it did mean getting soaked with beer. Jonathan Reeve (Earth Science, 1981) recalls the floor in Penrhyn Road bouncing "like a trampoline" during U2's appearance at the 1980 Freshers' Fair. "Someone from the Students' Union halted the concert and told everyone to stop before the floor collapsed!" "In hindsight a few autographs would have been a wise move," says Michael Smith (Applied Science, 1983).

November 1983 saw The Smiths appearing at Knights Park. "I came from a two-bit town up north where nothing ever happened, so it was a revelation to me to see anything, and so cheap, on your doorstep," says Mike Bennion (Graphic Design, 1985). "Billy Bragg was another great gig, just him, the roadie, one amp and a guitar."

Occasionally, gigs were frequented by unwanted visitors, which happened at the Rezillos Penrhyn Road concert in the early 1980s. "There was a really big delay due to



Maggie Bell with Stone the Crows.

some huge, tough-looking skinheads who turned up and climbed on top of the PA stack," recalls Gavin Johnson (Fine Art, 1984). "The Rezillos refused to start until they retreated, but the stand-off was finally broken when a well-known punk from Kingston Poly called Dominic climbed up and gave them some special handshake." With such a binding bond established, the Rezillos began their set. "Immediately the skinheads invaded the stage and all hell broke loose. The Rezillos were gone in a flash and the rest of us flooded out of the tiny entrance in seconds."

Social secretary Rachel Stanley (née Shackleton, Sociology, 1986) admits she bit off almost more than she could chew when

booking Shane McGowan of The Pogues in 1984. "He'd included a rider in his contract that we had to provide him with four bottles of whisky before the gig," she recalls. "I was so worried the performance would be a disaster that I decided on the spur of the moment to lock him in his dressing room, completely alcohol-free. You wouldn't believe the abuse that was hurled at me!"

"In 81, Nigel 'Dogsbreath' Smith and I used to spin records in the Gipsy Hill bar and get people to sing along with the mic. I reckon we invented karaoke."

Richard Miles, Production Engineering, 1982



An early U2.

"Do you have memories of your musical youth at Kingston which you'd like to share? Email us at alumni@kingston.ac.uk.