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Quadrophenia and Mod(ern) Culture

Edited by Pamela Thurschwell

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Quadrophenia and Mod(ern) Culture

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Big thanks, and love, to Jim Endersby who read my article and introduction, formatted my book, saved the index, and my life. Also for input and readings along the way, thanks goes to Geoff Gilbert, Keith Gildart, and Matt Worley. Suzanne Canally has seen me through all my Mod moments and supplied me with old copies of *Mojo* and *Uncut* when I needed them. My brothers, Adam and Eric Thurschwell, introduced me to the album and took me to see the movie for the first time, and for that I am grateful. Thanks to the mini-Mods in my life, Max and Katya Endersby. Thanks, obviously, to Pete Townshend and the Who, without whom, well, there wouldn't be a bleeding book, would there?

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Editor and Contributors

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Dressed Right for a Beach Fight

Pamela Thurschwell

At the final ceremony of the British summer Olympics in London, in 2012, fifty Mods revved into the O2 stadium on their Lambrettas and Vespas, delivering Kaiser Chief, Ricky Wilson to centre stage to perform the Who's "Pinball Wizard." The ceremony closed with the Who themselves performing "My Generation," "Baba O'Riley," and "See Me, Feel Me" from *Tommy*. The display at the Olympics, as Simon Wells has pointed out, showcases Mod as one of *the* cultural signifiers of British identity.[1] Sleeker, less threatening, and harder to make fun of than punk, more definitively British (while simultaneously stolen from Europe, America, and the West Indies) than Goth, Mod is a style that seems timelessly cool, even as it is also embedded in the very specific economic and cultural history of post-war Britain. As Richard Weight writes in his celebratory, *Mod: A Very British Style*, "Formed against a backdrop of American global supremacy and European decline, Mod was a uniquely British amalgam of American and European culture."[2]

It is arguable that Mod is the only twentieth-century style to spawn its own academic discipline. One of the founding texts of British subcultural

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studies, Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* is directly indebted to the stealthy manoeuvres of 1960s' Mods, whose complex relation to the dominant discourses of their day made them ripe for analysis, while also revealing them to be savvy and creative manipulators of their own image: "The mods invented a style which enabled them to negotiate smoothly between school, work and leisure, and which concealed as much as it revealed."[3] Hebdige's work on subculture took off from the energized, political, emerging field of Cultural Studies that developed in the late 1960s, which, as Sam Cooper, argues in his chapter in this book, "believed that politics happened on the dancefloor, in the café and in front of the television."[4] Thinking through and with Mod allowed Hebdige, Stanley Cohen, and the critics who followed them to reflect on a huge number of pressing social issues: changes to working-class culture and family relations; European influence in post-war British society; gender and sexuality (as refracted through Mod style that made men fashion arbiters and gave women chic short haircuts); the politics of resistance and compliance; race (in Mod's debts to black style and music); drugs; motor bikes; and crucially, juvenile criminality and rebellion. The beachfront battles during the bank holiday weekends of 1964, carried out by the Mods and Rockers at Brighton, Hastings, Bournemouth, Margate, and Clacton, made them into household names: "Sawdust Caesars" in the words of the judge in Margate who sentenced them.[5] It's more than a little ironic that at the 2012 Olympics Mods charged in on scooters celebrating their style as a proud signifier of British identity, when in the early sixties Mod was seen as a threat to the established order, a harbinger of the corruption of youth, and the potential downfall of civilisation: teenagers transformed into well-dressed "folk devils" sparked off a moral panic in the early 1960s at a moment when traditional British culture was in the midst of rapid change.[6] By the 2012 Olympics, Mod had definitively lost its menace, and, although the not very Mod amalgam of songs played at the ceremony doesn't indicate it, a large part of that journey to the centre of British culture was due to the ongoing effects felt from the album and film *Quadrophenia*.

Mod, as an identity is a treasure trove of cultural paradoxes, a chocolate box for academics who like sharp suits and soul songs mixed in with their Pierre Bourdieu. What has been less acknowledged is the many ways in which the continuing circulation of the idea of Mod in contemporary culture has relied on its most potent and brilliant representation: the soundtrack, story, and film that charts it all out. The Who's 1973

album *Quadrophenia* and Franc Roddam's 1979 cult classic film based on the album are now inseparable from Mod identity, and in part responsible for the style's staying power. If Mod as a style has been central to the development of cultural and subcultural studies in Britain, then *Quadrophenia*—the album and the film—is Mod's canon. *Quadrophenia* brought Mod to the consciousness of the greater public and the world, and the cult status of the film means that it continues to introduce Mod style to subsequent generations. From Paul Weller and the Jam's influence on the late 1970s' Mod revival in Britain that was already in train when the film was released, to Mod's more recent and continuing influence on subcultures in Germany, Sweden, and Japan, Mod revives and persists.[7] If you tap "Mod images" into a Google search you find a plethora of photos of contemporary scooters and rallies and advertisements for Mod all-nighters, as well as the old photos, target signs, stills from the film, early photos of the Who, and shots from the album's evocative photographs. Mod identity and *Quadrophenia* continue to work together. *Quadrophenia* has escaped its moorings in the album and film, and has become, as the film's tag line suggests, a way of life.

This collection of essays, then, returns to the album and the film to uncover a contested canon of Mod history. The legendary persnicketiness (or perhaps we should say, attention to detail) of Mod devotees has assured that both Pete Townshend's representation of the trials and tribulations of the every-Mod Jimmy, and Franc Roddam's filmic version, have been subject to unstinting criticisms about their authenticity and faithfulness to their source material.[8] The contributors to this volume are, on the whole, less concerned with some ideal of authenticity than they are with the ways Mod history interacts with its fictional representations, and with the ways in which *Quadrophenia* has created new ways of telling and retelling Mod myths and truths. *Quadrophenia* is, of course, about topics beyond Mod as well. Contributors to this volume analyse the film and album through numerous contexts: the history of the Who's reception and influences, the 1970s' cultural and social landscape into which the album and film emerged, the adolescent novel of development (the *bildungsroman*), adolescent angst, 1970s' socialist politics, trains, glam rock, Brighton, and Bruce Springsteen are but a few topics that arise alongside Mod stories here.

There is also another story running in a subterranean way through many of the scholarly essays in this book—the story of what it means to

be a fan and critic together. My own history with *Quadrophenia* began in 1978, when I lay on a couch for three years getting through the worst of my adolescence by never having it off the turntable. *Quadrophenia*, the Who's dark, elusive, 1973 conceptual double album, was the follow-up to *Who's Next*, the record that introduced me to the possibility that my own teenage waste land could be made bearable by turning the music up loud. I loved the fact that *Quadrophenia* told a story. Jimmy, the pilled-up, emotional, occasionally violent, Mod teenager, seemed both representative of every adolescent in his ur-teenage activities (like fighting with his parents) and—a very specific case—a kid with bipolar disorder enmeshed in the exacting style and requirements of his demanding Mod subculture at his specific historical moment. Jimmy's dilemmas spoke to me through all the paradoxes of adolescence: desperately wanting a crowd of friends to ratify you, to shelter you, but also desperately needing to be an individual, a unique identity. As Jimmy says in the line in the film that makes everybody laugh: "I don't want to be the same as everyone else. That's why I'm a mod, see?"[9] The album played out as a wailing plea for love and understanding, from the younger to the older generation, from the young to anyone who will listen, from the young to the crashing sea. Set against the remote (for me) historical and geographical backdrop of the Mods and Rockers' encounter in the locale of Brighton, England, 1964, it was impossibly exotic and absolutely familiar. I fell in love with it.

This collection is in part dedicated to the ways in which an artwork gets under your skin and lodges there. As a teenager I examined the album in detail. The cover of *Quadrophenia* shows the brooding back of a boy on a massive scooter with multiple side mirrors each reflecting the face of one member of the Who. Open the album and you find the story Townshend wrote for the inside cover along with Ethan Russell's compelling book of black-and-white photographs depicting, in what seemed like brutal realism, the hero's (or anti-hero's) life. *Quadrophenia* was a treasure trove of information from a world I didn't recognise; it was smoke signals sent up from somebody else's much more interesting adolescence. I remember wondering what a parka was. I couldn't believe there was such a thing as an Eel and Pie shop. *Quadrophenia* might have been the first time I genuinely became interested in history; listening to "The Punk and the Godfather" was the moment I remember first trying to interpret a text. When Franc Roddam's glorious, sad, and funny film of *Quadrophenia* came to America it fleshed out the story for me;

it felt at the time like a documentary of a way of life I needed to know more about. Phil Daniels seemed lifted from his life as Jimmy and parachuted into the film.[10] With its gritty realist feel, and punk-related stars, such as Toyah and Sting, it brought the earlier story of the album into the now of late 1970s punk. *Quadrophenia* was then, and has remained, a rich text, much like *Middlemarch* or *The Golden Bowl*. It bears repeat listenings and watchings; it is worth thinking with and through. The chapters in this book have helped me see *Quadrophenia* as a window into late twentieth-century British social history including subcultural styles and sexualities, the history of Brighton, and class politics, amongst many other topics. I hope they will help you as well.

In Part 1, "*Quadrophenia* in its Histories," Bill Osgerby's "Brighton Rocked: Mods, Rockers, and Social Change During the Early 1960s" sets the stage by unpacking the 1960s' mythologies of youth, affluence, and social change that underpin the storyline of *Quadrophenia*, showing the ways in which the furore that surrounded the Mod "invasions" of British seaside resorts in 1964 was indebted to the growing social significance of youth culture after the Second World War, together with the profound transformations taking place in working-class life as a consequence of shifting patterns of employment and the growing impact of consumerism. National angst about youth culture was given an especially sharp inflection in Brighton as the town navigated its way through a period of change in its economy and social make-up. Ben Winsworth's "Who (the Fuck) are You?: Out with the In-Crowd in *Quadrophenia*" considers the ways in which *Quadrophenia* reflects, anticipates, and interacts with some of the key theoretical work on subcultures published in the 1970s. Considering the historical and cultural context of the album's release, including glam and punk, it looks at how Pete Townshend's revisiting of the past was also an attempt to carry the Who forward and show the pre-punk generation how subcultures had—and still have—the power to effect significant changes within both individuals and society at large. Christine Feldman-Barrett's "Discovering the Who's Mod Past: The American Reception of *Quadrophenia*" argues that the Who's arena rock band reputation in America was changed by the release of the film *Quadrophenia* in 1979, when for the first time, many of the Who's American fans learned about the band's Mod past. This chapter chronicles the Who's initial reception in the United States, their hard-rocking reputation there throughout the 1970s, and the way in which *Quadrophenia* helped American fans reimagine the band. It also

considers how the film became the catalyst for a new Mod scene in the United States. Sam Cooper's "Heatwave: Mod, Cultural Studies, and the Counterculture" considers the history of Mod's reception by two different activist traditions in 1960s Britain: the counterculture, focussed on West London, and Cultural Studies, developed in Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). It considers how underground, proto-Situationist avant-garde groups, as well as Birmingham School academics (including Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, and Dick Hebdige), recognised that Mod was a measure of epistemic shifts in class and social relations in the post-war period, arguing that Mod, perhaps more than any other movement within the youth revolt of the 1960s, was a product of its historical conditions and simultaneously a critique of those conditions.

Part 2, "The Mobility of Mod: Class, Culture, and Identity" opens with Keith Gildart's "Class, Youth, and Dirty Jobs: The Working-Class and Post-War Britain in Pete Townshend's *Quadrophenia*," which examines the way *Quadrophenia* depicts continuity and change in the lives of the British working class in the period that the album documents (1964/1965), the political milieu in which it was written (1972/1973), and the legacy of the concept that was later depicted on screen (1978/1979). The album is both a social history of an element of youth culture in the mid-1960s and a reflection on contemporary anxieties relating to youth, class, race, and national identity. It argues that *Quadrophenia* is a significant historical source for reading these pivotal years providing a sense of how musicians were both reflecting and dramatizing a sense of "crisis," "continuity," and "change" in working-class Britain. Suzanne Coker's article "Quad to Run: The Crucible of Identity as Represented in *Quadrophenia* and *Born to Run*" explores a fan's relationship to two favourite albums of the 1970s. The similarities between Bruce Springsteen's and the Who's albums are striking, both focusing on young men's journey toward adulthood. Both centre on the fantasies of place and escape they engender, the bikes they use to get away, their relationships with women, with male friends, and with work. Each paints a portrait of a particular group identity, London's Mods of the 1960s and New Jersey teens of the 1970s, whose differences only underline their similarities. Tom F. Wright's "Taking the 5:15: Mods, Social Mobility, and the Brighton Train" explores *Quadrophenia*'s powerful theme of mobility, both literal and social. By considering the key song "5:15" and moment in the album and film's narrative that it

dramatizes, it argues that the image of Jimmy aboard the Brighton train is a symbolic moment that lets the album, film, and Alan Fletcher's novel explore the connections between transport, identity, and the meanings of Mod. Initially contextualising these themes of mobility within ideas of the post-war affluent worker, the chapter proceeds to pick apart the things that each medium does with this train scene, relating this to the broader literary and cinematic history of the railway carriage as arena of class drama and broader debates over youth subcultures and social mobility.

Part 3, "Reading *Quadrophenia*: Genre, Gender, Sexuality" opens with Rosalind Watkiss Singleton's "'What are you gonna do tonight?' 'Wait for a phone call I suppose': Girls, Mod Subculture, and Reactions to the Film *Quadrophenia*." Watkiss Singleton argues that the film's portrayal of young women Mods as little more than accessories within another male-dominated subculture, less important than the haircuts, sharp suits, or Vespas—"pillion fodder" is both accurate and inaccurate. The chapter uses autobiographies and oral testimony to examine the reality of the relationship between Mod "boys" and their "girls." Focusing on the testimonies of West Midlands Mods, it attempts to ascertain whether the experiences of the Mods in the provinces were different to those who lived and worked in "Swinging London" and to establish the parameters of female involvement in the Mod subculture. Peter Hughes Jachimiak's "'Poofs wear lacquer, don't they, eh?': *Quadrophenia* and the Queerness of Mod Culture" examines the homosocial and homoerotic nature of Mod subculture in *Quadrophenia* and beyond it. It offers a critical queer reading of *Quadrophenia* that aids our deeper understanding of Pete Townshend's apparently macho opus not only within Mod, but also in wider social and cultural structures.

Brian Baker's "The Drowning Machine: The Sea and the Scooter in *Quadrophenia*" interprets *Quadrophenia* through the image of the drowned scooter on the back cover of the album, comparing the presentation of the scooter in the album artwork and in the film. It offers a reading of the importance of the scooter to Mod masculinity through cultural and historical context, and then develops an analysis of Jimmy's Vespa GS as a form of "armoured" masculinity that defends the masculine subject against the pressures (and pleasures) of de-individuation. Through the work of Klaus Theweleit, Mod masculinity is read as a late re-articulation of a clean, healthy, hygienic male body and subjectivity proposed by modernity and Modernism. Pamela Thurschwell's "'You

were under the impression, that when you were walking forwards, that you'd end up further onwards, but things ain't quite that simple': Time Travelling and *Quadrophenia*'s Segues" argues that through its segues and soundscape, the album *Quadrophenia* represents clashes between its two historical moments, the early 1960s and the early 1970s. If the ending of *Quadrophenia* is notoriously ambiguous in its flirtation with suicide and its unanswered questions about Jimmy's future, it may be that it is instead more productive to linger with the impasses that *Quadrophenia* dramatizes. *Quadrophenia*'s representation of Jimmy's fraught relationship to Mod subculture, class, masculinity, sex, work, and the existential angst of the teenager, creates a dead-end for him in terms of one kind of narrative, the narrative of development, but opens up other possibilities that are enacted through *Quadrophenia*'s sometimes jarring leaps and transitions across space and time, its anachronisms, its nostalgia, its orientation toward a different kind of future.

The book finishes with two interviews, from Franc Roddam, the director of *Quadrophenia*, and Ethan Russell, the photographer of the book of photographs in the original album, who both generously gave their time and assistance to the project.

Notes

1. Simon Wells, *Quadrophenia—A Way of Life (Inside the Making of Britain's Greatest Youth Film)* (London: Countdown Books, 2014), 17.
2. Richard Weight, *Mod: A Very British Style* (London: The Bodley Head, Random House, 2013), 5.
3. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen & Co., 1979), 52.
4. Sam Cooper, "Heatwave: Mod, Cultural Studies, and the Counterculture," 68.
5. See Bill Osgerby's article in this book, and Thurschwell, "Lure of the Mods remains strong 50 years on from the battle on the beach" *The Conversation*, May 19, 2014. http://theconversation.com/lure-of-the-mods-remains-strong-50-years-on-from-the-battle-on-the-beach-25349.
6. Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of Mods and Rockers* (London: Routledge, 2011 (1972)), quoted in Hebdige 96–97.
7. See Christine Feldman, *We are the Mods: A Transnational History of a Youth Subculture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009) and Robin Ekelund's work on Swedish Mod culture.
8. Stephen Glynn's excellent short book on the film *Quadrophenia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014) includes a list of the errors fans

have spotted over the years and a spirited defense of Franc Roddam's anachronisms (57–67).

9. Townshend says in the BBC documentary *Can You See the Real Me?* "I like to be subsumed in a gang"… "I felt safer in a gang of Mods than I did in the band." (Matt O'Casey (director) *Quadrophenia: Can you see the Real Me?* BBC Four documentary, 2012).
10. Of course this was mistaken. Phil had been to film school in Islington.

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PART I

Quadrophenia in its Histories

CHAPTER 2

Brighton Rocked: Mods, Rockers, and Social Change During the Early 1960s

Bill Osgerby

"That Is Brighton, My Sons!"

Brighton—Britain's popular holiday resort, fifty miles south of London—provides a charismatic backdrop to *Quadrophenia*. The Who's 1973 rock opera and Franc Roddam's subsequent (1979) film adaptation both feature Brighton as a setting for pivotal narrative sequences. But, in the movie version especially, the seaside town also has symbolic importance. Set in May 1964, the film begins as diehard, West London Mod Jimmy Cooper (Phil Daniels) and his friends are building up to the excitement of a bank holiday in Brighton. Jimmy pays off his new, tailor-made suit ("Three buttons, side vents, 16-inch bottoms"), gets a razor-sharp haircut and, with mates in tow, trawls around London for a weekend's supply of Purple Hearts. Then, as dawn breaks, a phalanx of scooter-riding Mods heads south, with Jimmy leading the way. As the ranks of Lambrettas and Vespas crest the Downs (the bucolic hills overlooking the sea), Jimmy pulls up to take in the view. "Look at that! That is Brighton, my sons!" Jimmy crows, as he gazes down at the seaside town. Laid out

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like an alluring, Mod-*esque* version of Shangri-La, the town is a vision of enticing possibilities. Offering liberating escape from the workaday world of drudgery and obligation, Brighton seems to symbolise the Mod ideals of high living and non-stop hedonism (Fig. 2.1).

Indeed, following Whitsun 1964, Brighton has had a special place in Mod folklore. The "Battle of Brighton" that took place that weekend—an episode central to *Quadrophenia*'s storyline—has anchored the town in Mod mythology. Tales of the Mod "invasion" of Brighton, and images of beachside battles between Mods and Rockers, have become key motifs in the popular history of Mod subculture and have seen Brighton immortalised as a Mod mecca. And this enshrinement certainly has some justification. The events that unfolded were undoubtedly spectacular and were a major news story. They also played a significant part in the development of Mods and Rockers as discrete, distinctive groups with clear-cut styles and identities.

At the same time, however, sociologists and historians have pointed to the way the "Battle of Brighton" was exaggerated and distorted by the press of the time. Magnified and misrepresented by a fevered media, the "Battle of Brighton" was presented as emblematic of seismic social and cultural changes that were transforming the nation; changes in which young people and youth culture were configured as the strident

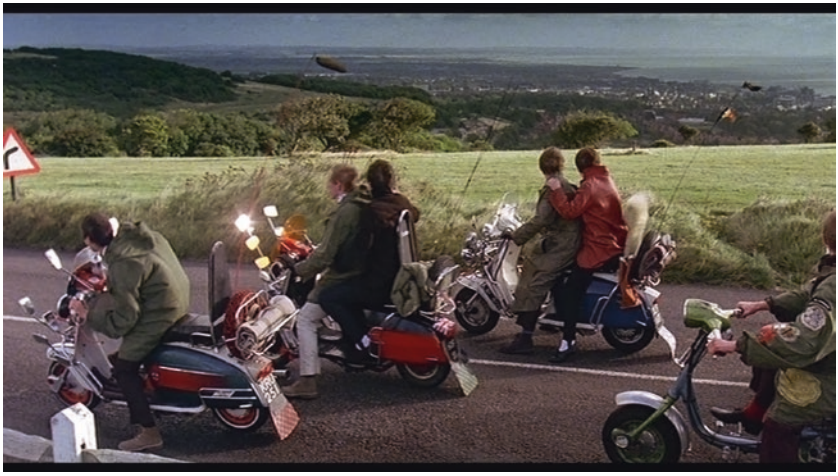

Fig. 2.1 "That is Brighton, my sons!"

vanguard. It is, then, important to recognise the "mythological" dimensions to the Mod bank holiday mayhem; and the way *Quadrophenia* both portrays this process of mythologisation and is, itself, constituent in the myth-making.

Unpacking the mythologies that lie behind *Quadrophenia*'s storyline requires attention to their historical context. To understand why the Mod "invasion" of Brighton was such a newsworthy event, the episode must be seen in relation to the wider patterns of social change that characterised Britain during the early 1960s. Particular recognition must be given to the way the mythologies surrounding the "Battle of Brighton" were rooted in the growing social significance of youth culture after the Second World War; together with the profound transformations taking place in working-class life as a consequence of shifting patterns of employment and the growing impact of consumerism. But a longer historical context also deserves recognition. Brighton's Mod fracas of Whitsun 1964 and the media uproar that followed were, in many respects, just the latest instalment in a long history of controversy that surrounded the town's "invasion" by raucous groups of working-class youngsters.

"London by the Sea"

Brighton's status as a haven for leisure and pleasure dates from the 1750s when the town was one of many declining fishing ports revived by the fashionable elite's enthusiasm for coastal resorts. During the nineteenth century, gradual increases in disposable income and annual holidays brought more working-class visitors, especially with the completion of a railway link with London in 1841. Initially, rail fares to "London by the sea" (as Brighton became known) were prohibitive; but by the 1860s, third-class travel and low-priced excursion trains had made regular seaside jaunts a possibility for most working people and popular weekends saw nearly 150,000 Londoners descend southwards as "To Brighton and back for three shillings" became a household phrase in the capital.

Renowned as a place where the staid and the serious gave way to the ribald and the risqué, Brighton attracted throngs of working-class visitors out for a taste of fun and excitement. This loosening of restraint, however, was always a site of tension. Fear of the unleashed lower orders plagued respectable Victorians, and high-minded essayists hotly condemned the holidaying crowd's dress, morality and—especially—their

propensity for debauched excess. In 1860, for example, one anonymous author (identifying himself as simply "A Graduate of the University of London") bemoaned Brighton's "scenes of vice and temptation", the outraged writer reserving particular ire for young visitors from the capital. That year, the critic lamented, reduced fares on Sunday excursion trains had seen the arrival of thousands of young Londoners who were responsible for the "disgraceful scenes which were enacted in many parts of the town":

> Towards the evening, the Queen's Road swarmed with drunken and disorderly persons, who set aside all decency, and whose conduct was an offence against public morals. Many of them got too drunk to make their way to the station in time, and were left behind. The carriages were filled with young men and women, in too many cases inflamed with strong drink, whose conversation was disgusting enough to shock every sense of propriety.[1]

Brighton's reputation for licentious leisure endured and, during the inter-war period, was complemented by an aura of small-time villainy. This was largely indebted to the rival turf gangs of the 1920s and 1930s who feuded at the race track and on the promenade, reputedly slashing their enemies with cut-throat razors—events that were the inspiration for Graham Greene's 1938 novel, *Brighton Rock*.[2] Greene's teenage anti-hero, "Pinkie" Brown, was a fictional character, but the aspiring gangster and his cronies were closely based on the criminals that frequented Brighton's inter-war race meetings. The gangs were finally broken up in June 1936 after a fight at the nearby Lewes Races. A thirty-strong East London gang known as the Hoxton Mob descended on the event, planning to attack a local bookmaker; but police had anticipated the raid and a violent mêlée ensued. The Londoners were "tooled-up" with iron bars, billiard cues, and knuckle dusters, but most were eventually arrested and jailed.

After the Second World War, Brighton rode high on a post-war holiday boom, but by the 1960s its prosperity was looking shaky. In 1961 *The Economist* was warning that Brighton was "on the rocks," the town depending on a short peak of seasonal trade centred on the August bank holiday.[3] The 1963 summer season, however, was Brighton's most unsuccessful in twelve years and the local Entertainment Managers' Association lamented "the appalling situation which the whole of Brighton and Hove