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Images of England Through Popular Music

Class, Youth and Rock 'n' Roll

1955 - 1976

Keith Gildart



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Also by Keith Gildart

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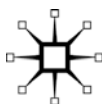
Images of England through Popular Music

**Class, Youth and Rock 'n' Roll,
1955–1976**

Keith Gildart

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vi
Introduction	1
Part I Teddy Boy England	19
Soundcheck: Buddy Holly and the 'Lemon Drop Kid', Wigan, England, Tuesday 18 March 1958	21
1 Coal, Cotton and Rock 'n' Roll in North West England	26
2 Exploring London's Soho and the Flamingo Club with Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames	44
3 Liverpool, the Beatles and the Cultural Politics of Class, Race and Place	62
Part II Mod England	87
4 My Generation: Pete Townshend, the Who and English Mods	89
5 Mods over England: Local Experiences and Social Control	108
6 Class, Nation and Social Change in the Kinks' England	128
Part III Glam/Punk England	149
7 Aliens in England: Slade, David Bowie, Ziggy Stardust and Glam Rock	151
8 Darkness over England: Punk Rock and the Sex Pistols Anarchy Tour 1976	174
Encore: On the Road to Wigan Pier to see Georgie Fame and Billy Boston, Sunday 2 March 2003	194
Conclusion	198
<i>Notes</i>	200
<i>Bibliography</i>	256
<i>Index</i>	277

Acknowledgements

This book has been a long time in the making. My interest in the continuities and changes in twentieth century working-class culture was initially sparked by research on the politics of trade unionism in the British coal industry. Much of my early work in the field of labour history had an institutional focus on organisations, parties and industrial conflicts. Yet through my involvement in a number of oral history and ethnographic projects in coal mining communities, it was apparent that labour politics and trade unionism represented just one facet of class-consciousness. My interviews, discussions and informal conversations with coal miners and other industrial workers showed that the post-1945 cultural life of the British working-class reflected, reinforced and sometimes challenged occupational, political and social identities. Far from undermining collective identities in working-class localities, aspects of popular culture such as affluence, consumption, music and fashion played an essential role in reinforcing them. This realisation allowed me to move out of an institutional framework and to explore the creation, consumption and absorption of working-class culture. I was especially interested in challenging the notion that a particular type of working-class culture was being diluted by affluence and de-industrialisation in the 1960s. It seemed to me that the arbitrary distinction made by many sociologists, historians and contemporary observers between a pre-war working-class culture of trade unions, working mens' clubs, pubs, brass bands, folk music, dance halls and new forms of youth culture that emerged in the post-war period was problematic. The result of such an excavation of working-class culture, youth identities and popular music is contained in this book.

This work is the outcome of many years of thinking about the relationship between class, youth and popular music. The project has taken me through council estates in North West England, the suburbs of Liverpool and the coffee bars and clubs of Manchester and London. I have spoken to coal miners, factory workers, migrants, American servicemen, Teddy Boys, Mods and glam rockers who allowed me to take them back to their youth of home, workplace, dance hall, record shop, café and concert hall. In particular, I would like to thank Ronnie Carr (the Lemon Drop Kid) for the many hours talking about his exploits in the coal mine, on the dance floor and on the concert stage, while poring over his diaries, photographs, music industry ephemera and for providing the cover photograph of him on stage with the Beat Boys at the Bolton Palais in 1960. Many others such as Mike O'Neil, Terri Quaye, Lloyd Johnson, Jimmy James, Count Prince Miller, Linden Kirby, Eddie Amoo, Richard Barnes and Bill Harry were gracious with their time and

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The material for two chapters has been published in earlier versions as journal articles. Chapter 6 appeared as 'From Dead End Streets to Shangri Las: Negotiating Social Class and Post-War Politics with Ray Davies and the Kinks', *Contemporary British History*, 26, 3 (September 2012) 273–98 (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis), and I acknowledge Taylor and Francis for permission to reprint this material. Chapter 8 appeared as 'The Antithesis of Humankind: Exploring Responses to the Sex Pistols Anarchy Tour 1976', *Cultural and Social History*, 10, 1 (2013) 129–49 (London: Bloomsbury), and I acknowledge Bloomsbury for permission to reprint this material. I would also like to thank the following for permission to reproduce the extracts for the epigraphs that appear in parts 1, 2 and 3 and subsequent material contained in particular chapters: Margareta Berger-Hamerschlag, *Journey Into Fog*, Victor Gollancz, 1955 © Raymond Berger; John Townshend, *The Young Devils*, Chatto and Windus, 1958. Reprinted by permission of The Random House Group; T. R. Fyvel, *The Insecure Offenders*, Random House, 1961. Reprinted by permission of The Random House Group; Sid Chaplin, *The Day of the Sardine*, 1961 © Michael Chaplin; Ray Gosling, *Sum Total*, 1961 © Pomona Books. Extracts from *Jackie* © DC Thomson & Co. Ltd. 2013; extracts from *Mersey Beat* © Bill Harry; extracts from *Daily Mirror* © mirrorpix. Material from Mass Observation reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Group Ltd, London on behalf of The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive. Copyright © The Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive. Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders, and the author and publisher will be happy to correct any mistakes or omissions in future editions.

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Introduction

This book explores the relationship between English working-class youth and popular music between the years 1955 and 1976. It analyses the development of popular music and its reaction to and impact on the economic, social, cultural and political aspects of English society. The text is not a comprehensive history of the music business or an overarching study of youth in the post-war period. The primary aim is to provide a historical reconstruction of the way in which a selection of mostly working-class performers and consumers used popular music to experience, explore and construct notions of continuity and change in English society. The book presents the reader with a selection of episodes, impressions and images of England that capture the importance of popular music in the 'everyday life' of working-class youth. The conception of popular music used is narrowly defined referring to American 'rock 'n' roll' and 'rhythm and blues', which emerged in the early 1950s and the associated sounds that grew out of those genres.¹ Arguments can be made for a more general conceptualisation of 'popular', but the approach taken throughout the text is that American 'rock 'n' roll' and 'rhythm and blues' had a more significant social, cultural and political impact on working-class youth than other forms of popular music, in terms of defining aspects of their culture and reflecting, shaping and sometimes challenging a particular sense of individual and collective identity.

The chronological narrative and analytical framework engages with key aspects of English social history such as de-industrialisation, affluence, consumption, working-class identities/experiences and shifting conceptions of locality, race, gender, sexuality and nation. The book explores the ways in which popular music and associated youth subcultures such as Teddy Boys, Mods, Rockers, Skinheads, Glam Rockers and Punks impacted on individual and collective responses to continuities and changes in the realm of leisure activities, personal relationships, politics, social class and ways of reading and understanding England and Englishness. Each of the eight chapters examines the ways in which the creation, performance, consumption and absorption of popular music formed part of a working-class culture that

remained a significant feature of English life through to end of the twentieth century.²

What follows is a history of post-war England with popular music and youth culture at its centre. First, through a biographical focus on a selection of artists/writers/performers, the book examines the ways in which major emblematic figures in the field of popular music understood and engaged with social change through their personal, musical, geographical and intellectual journeys. Second, the study considers how popular music had a specific impact on English working-class youth through the reinforcement and transformation of particular social identities linked to locality, race, gender, sexuality and nation. Third, there is an emphasis on how popular music was crucial in transforming public spaces in particular localities and defining and constructing new ones through the creation of musical genres, youth subcultures and social scenes. Fourth, the book highlights the experiences of working-class youth in their consumption of popular music through performance, concert attendance and identity construction. The primary argument presented here is that popular music made a significant contribution to the 'everyday life' of English youth and represents an underexplored facet of the resilience of class in the post-war period.

Popular music and youth culture is an area that has remained stubbornly resistant to the focus of academic historians.³ Straw has argued that it is 'among the most ubiquitous, easily ignored and trivialised of all cultural forms'.⁴ Yet throughout the post-war period popular music permeated diverse forms of media and provided a daily soundtrack to a whole generation of English working-class youth in the home, the workplace, coffee bars, pubs, clubs, dance halls and theatres. The last few years have seen a whole array of commercially produced books, articles, magazines, films and television programmes on popular music produced outside of the academy and primarily for the consumption of the general public.⁵ Yet the historians' gaze has bypassed the development, impact and experience of popular music on the individual and collective identities of working-class youth.⁶ The few who have noted the significance of its arrival in the 1950s have either sought to downplay the claims that have been made for its perceived role in social change or simply made passing reference to it in their more general surveys of the period.⁷

The parameters of the historical debate on the social impact of popular music and youth culture were set by Marwick's extensive examination of the 1960s and the subsequent revisionist critiques of his work.⁸ Marwick claimed that the decade was a significant period in unleashing new social and political forces in which popular music played a key role. In contrast, Sandbrook and Fowler point to the continuities in youth culture from the pre-war period and argue that popular music had only a marginal impact on social and political developments. Both positions created 'myths' and 'counter myths', but ultimately fell short of problematising the complex

interaction between locality, class, race, gender, sexuality, nationality, creativity and consumption that this book seeks to explore.

The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS)

The CCCS established in 1964 casts a long shadow over much of the literature on popular music and youth culture. The CCCS produced a range of books and articles suggesting that elements of working-class youth culture and popular music could be read as forms of resistance posing a challenge to particular aspects of capitalist society.⁹ Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall laid a methodological foundation for linking developments in popular culture to changing aspects of work, locality and economic transformation. Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) remains the first port of call for scholars in gauging the intellectual reaction to the popular music and youth culture of the 1950s.¹⁰ Famously scathing about the impact of jukeboxes and coffee bars, the book is compelling in its construction of a 'near mythical' working-class culture being swept away by the forces of affluence, consumption and American popular culture.¹¹ In contrast, Stuart Hall and the Marxist literary theorist Raymond Williams were far more sympathetic to developments in 'popular' forms of consumption and their work on class and culture informs the themes explored in the following chapters. According to Williams, the 'working class does not become bourgeois by owning...new products, any more than the bourgeois ceases to be bourgeois as the objects he owns changes in kind'.¹² This book is deliberately light on theory and concentrates more on reconstructing individual and collective experiences through archival sources, oral testimony, song, performance and concert attendance. Primarily the aim is to historicise the claims made by the CCCS by providing examples of meeting points between class, race, gender and musical genres and their impact on social, political, sexual and national identity.

Much work on youth culture, class and popular music has tended to 'centre' theory at the expense of narrative, empirical detail and the reconstruction of significant episodes, genres and interventions. The organising theoretical concepts applied in this text are applied quite loosely and owe much to the CCCS tradition and a Marxist history that views culture as an important aspect of working-class identity, experience and struggle. Although its meaning, utility and applicability is much contested, Williams's conception of 'structure of feeling' is adopted to highlight aspects of youth culture and suggesting that a sense and experience of class could be felt through both economic and cultural activities. The concept of 'structure of feeling' appears in a number of Williams's writings and is often presented in a complicated and convoluted manner. However, I take its meaning in its most basic form as a way in which the working class experienced economic and social life in cultural terms or, in the words of Williams, 'thought as felt and feeling as

thought'.¹³ Such a conception of a sense of class perhaps encapsulates the power of music to generate individual and collective responses to the sound, tone and rhythm of particular songs and how they articulated a reinforcement of, or flight from, a feeling of class. Williams's notion of a 'structure of feeling' was concerned mostly with the creation and consumption of particular types of literature, but I would argue that it has some utility when exploring the relationship between working-class performers and consumers of popular music. In the same way that Williams claims that novelists attempted to make sense of a changing England in the nineteenth century, an influential group of emblematic performers in the post-war period also expressed a 'structure of feeling'.¹⁴ This emerged in the form of popular music and youth culture in response to the changes taking place in the industrial sector of the British economy and the pressures brought to bear on working-class communities.

Between 1955 and 1976 popular music provided many working-class youths with a 'structure of feeling' that connected them to a culture that was in decline, but one that continued to leave traces in the individual and collective memory.¹⁵ To many of the performers and consumers examined in the book, class remained important, shaped the way in which they looked at English society and provided both an 'imaginary' and, in many cases, a 'real' experience of collective identity. A sense or feeling of class was both maintained and transformed through involvement in music making, consumption and youth culture. In Williams's view, culture was one dimension of social life where the working-class could make sense of their position in the workplace, community and wider society.¹⁶ To Hoggart, this relationship between identity and culture was beginning to fragment in the middle of the twentieth century. The examination of popular music that follows suggests that such a characterisation of the fragility of class is problematic. For Williams, working-class culture was rooted in and emerged from particular social experiences. The images, impressions and episodes that form the basis of this book shed light on such working-class experiences and how they were lived and expressed through popular music and youth culture.

A seminal text that came out of the CCCS tradition that sought to theorise the relationship between class and youth culture was Dick Hebdige's, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*.¹⁷ Hebdige saw popular music and the creation of working-class youth subcultures as emerging from the experience of economic instability creating 'symbolic resistance' to the particular contours of capitalist society.¹⁸ Through this framework, he explored the connection between youth subcultures and West Indian migration and how this axis formed the basis of particular youth styles, scenes and sources of identity in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet as with many of the sociological texts of the period, the source base that Hebdige and others utilised was very narrow, rendering much of the work theoretically innovative but empirically weak. Historians can now re-examine some of the periods, genres, and youth subcultures

uncovered by the CCCS with the benefit of a much broader range of sources and a critical distance from the then contemporary debates within the discipline of sociology.¹⁹

The work of the CCCS has been critiqued from a variety of theoretical positions and through the utilisation of more sophisticated social science methodologies. Feminist scholars have argued that the CCCS focus was predominantly on young men and neglected the position of women and their role in the production and consumption of popular music and the creation of subcultures.²⁰ Others have been critical of the way in which the CCCS utilised a much too narrow focus on particular youth experiences and tended to concentrate on the 'spectacular' and the 'atypical' in order to theoretically embed and reinforce the more mythological aspects of English society in the 1960s and 1970s.²¹ More recently there has been a re-appraisal of CCCS methodology leading to a small number of historians re-visiting its initial research questions and assumptions regarding the relationship between class, youth and popular music.²² This book forms part of such a re-appraisal and suggests that the theoretical framework promoted by the CCCS, although problematic, still has much to offer in terms of providing particular insights into the relationship between popular music, youth culture and social change. The chapters that follow critically engage with the work of the CCCS through detailed empirical studies of particular performers, musical genres, working-class consumers, youth cultures and specific localities.

The marginalisation of popular music in the historiography of post-war England

According to Frith, 'academic historians have not been drawn to the field of 'popular music'.²³ Such marginality can be partly attributed to the overall 'conservatism' of the profession and an orthodoxy suggesting that the role ascribed to popular music and its impact on post-war England owes more to 'myth' than 'reality'. This has been no doubt partly driven by the fact that many academic historians are solidly middle-class and have benefitted from an elitist education that has tended to neglect or belittle aspects of popular culture.²⁴ Critically acclaimed books on post-war England by Hennessey and Sandbrook²⁵ bear the stamp of an Oxbridge view of an embedded cultural hierarchy that is dismissive of the role of youth culture and in the case of the latter an almost sneering condescension towards the seriousness in which some writers 'read' popular music.²⁶

Sandbrook's aim in writing his expansive histories of the 1960s and 1970s was to reconstruct 'the lives of the kind of people...in Aberdare or Welshpool or Wolverhampton...for whom mention of the sixties might conjure up memories not of...the Rolling Stones, but of bingo, Blackpool and Berni Inns'.²⁷ Yet in all these localities in the 1950s/60s/70s large numbers of working-class-youth *were* embracing American rock 'n' roll, 'rhythm and

blues' and English pop music.²⁸ The industrial communities of Northern England and the seaside resorts that relied on their patronage were positively buzzing with new soundscapes, fashions and forms of expression.²⁹ The old 'industrial world' and its attendant lifestyles were not being completely swept away by affluence and modernity but were affected by American popular culture, new discourses of class identity/anxiety and individual and collective experiences of social change. The embrace and consumption of popular music played an essential role in this process as miners, factory workers and retail employees have attested in diaries, letters, autobiographies, oral testimony and personal recollections presented in this book.³⁰

Both Sandbrook and Hennessy fail to fully take account of Hall's claim that popular culture 'yields most when it is seen in relation to a more general...wider history'.³¹ Yet in much of their work they seem to prioritise particular social and cultural categories as somehow being more worthy of the historians craft and reduce popular music and its attendant subcultures to the margins. Similarly, Hewison who claims that 'culture...is not merely an expression of personal, collective, or national identity, it is that identity' devotes little space to an exploration of popular music.³² Those like Sandbrook who seek to explode the 'myths' of popular music and youth culture fail to recognise the legitimacy of a multiplicity of sources that suggests that it *did* reflect, inform and shape the experiences of a significant number of working-class youths. Academic historians remain reluctant to recognise the plethora of 'amateur' research projects, autobiographies, reminiscences and the more popular types of regional history.³³ Yet it is in this literary genre where a richness of personal and collective experience of popular culture can be located and critically assessed.³⁴

A small number of social historians have made some attempt to map popular music against the broader changes taking place in post-war England, most notably Davis³⁵, Fowler,³⁶ Osgerby³⁷ and Weight.³⁸ This rather limited historiography presents a survey of the period (Davis), an idiosyncratic critique of Marwick (Fowler), a mapping of the dominant trends in youth culture (Osgerby) and the use of particular songs to illustrate aspects of national identity (Weight). Street's work from a political science perspective has been the most ambitious in its claim that 'pop works by reflecting and shaping the relations within society'.³⁹ He argues that popular music 'cannot change the world' but it can 'alter the ways in which people experience the world; it can upset old images and provide new ones'.⁴⁰ Yet Street remains critical of the view that there is a 'causal relationship between the times and their sounds' and that 'music's politics cannot be read straight from its contexts because music-making is not just journalism with a backbeat. The music is the result of the interplay of commercial, aesthetic, institutional and political processes'.⁴¹ This is an accurate reading of the processes of the production of the music, but in terms of consumption, the reality is more problematic. To many of the consumers examined in this book, popular music provided a

'new' way of seeing the world, a discourse of escape, a political manifesto, and an alternative source for understanding locality, culture and working-class experiences.

Some researchers have attempted to bridge the gap between historical and sociological explorations of popular music and youth culture. Harker, writing from a socialist/radical perspective provided a critique of the 'mythology' of popular music and its impact on society claiming that that 'music didn't threaten capitalism one bit'.⁴² His work is both partisan and polemical and he seems to be both a promoter of popular music as a force for social change but also its biggest critic.⁴³ He claimed that the 'people... have been left out of 'popular' music studies' and that sociologists had 'over-theorised' the subject.⁴⁴ This book forms one response to Harker's call to 'bring the people back in', but it departs from his more simplistic views on the production and consumption of popular music. It concurs with the position expressed by Keightley that particular types of popular music created a 'sense of difference, of 'otherness' [which] allowed youth to imagine affinities with cultures of disempowered minorities'.⁴⁵ Many of the individuals encountered in the following chapters were introduced to the racism of the American South, the musical culture of the West Indies and the metropolitan sexual milieu of England's major cities through the performance and consumption of particular types of popular music.

Sociological and literary approaches to popular music and youth culture

The dominant works on popular music and youth culture remain tied to the fields of Sociology (Simon Frith) and Literary Criticism (Greil Marcus).⁴⁶ Frith is a leading figure in popular music studies with his seminal book *Sound Effects* (1983) representing a foundation text.⁴⁷ It is very good on the mechanics of popular music processes and presenting an anatomy of the industry but less convincing on the 'everyday experiences' of working-class consumers. He concludes that 'music doesn't challenge the system but reflects and illuminates it'.⁴⁸ Yet, this claim is difficult to substantiate when related to the individual experience of the performers and consumers detailed in the pages that follow. The experiences of particular performers and consumers explored throughout this book suggest that there was a shared perception that a challenge *was* being posed to particular aspects of social and cultural life. Such challenges could take both a formal and informal shape in influencing the way that individuals thought about class, race, gender, sexuality and nation. Through popular music, relationships, emotions, a sense of self, locality and one's place in the world could be confirmed and in some cases renegotiated.

Marcus has produced a broad range of texts on popular music in the United States and on the punk rock genre in England. Some of his work suffers from

flights of fancy in terms of historical context and causality, but his conviction and intellectual depth as a proselytiser for popular music has ensured that his insights have reached beyond the academy and have found great success amongst the more 'bookish' public consumers of popular culture. Marcus's most influential work remains *Mystery Train* (1975) in which he attempts to construct 'rock 'n' roll' not as youth culture, or counterculture, but simply as American culture'.⁴⁹ Marcus's methodology provides a template for the path followed in this book in placing popular music at the centre of English social history in the post-war period. As the examination of class, youth and nation that follows makes clear, popular music worked in a multiplicity of ways in reflecting, shaping and critiquing notions of England and Englishness through to the late twentieth century.

There is now a canon of non-academic popular music writing that stretches from biographies of Elvis Presley and the Beatles through to edited collections on punk rock.⁵⁰ The literature produced outside of the academy consists of impressive material with the most noteworthy being books by Gillett⁵¹ and Savage. Savage's work is empirically robust, methodologically impressive and remains the benchmark of scholarship that links youth, music and popular culture to key aspects of English society in the twentieth century.⁵² Although theoretically 'light', it offers far more insight to our understanding of the creation and consumption of popular music than some of the more 'knowingly intellectual' treatments found in the more esoteric sociological literature.⁵³ Autobiography has also proved to be a fertile ground for the reconstruction of the role of popular music in transforming the identity of the individual and reflecting broader social changes. One notable contribution is Melly's *Revolt into Style* (1971). Melly concluded that 'there must be few people who would disagree that pop culture has profoundly affected the way we live now'.⁵⁴ The following chapters seek to complement Melly's observations through a more expansive reading of the working-class performance, consumption and experience of popular music.

England, Englishness, popular music, identity and social change

The framing of popular music and youth culture that follows also draws on developments in film and cinema history. This literature has already made significant advances in mapping changing trends through representations presented on screen against the broader social changes taking place in post-war England. According to Richards, film and television 'functioned as propagators of the national image, both in reflecting widely held views and constructing, extending, interrogating and perpetuating dominant cultural myths'.⁵⁵ The examination of popular music and social change in the subsequent chapters borrows from film history the notion of 'contextual cinematic history', in which a particular work is explored within its economic,

social and cultural contexts.⁵⁶ It also complements recent developments in the study of Englishness and how this concept was both maintained and transformed through the economic, political and social forces that impacted on the country in the aftermath of the Second World War. In the popular music produced between 1955–1976, we find elements of an ‘old England’ of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of class and a ‘new England’ of affluence, coffee bars, rhythm and blues clubs and the emergence of youth culture and rock ‘n’ roll as a transnational phenomenon.

Historians have examined aspects of Englishness through art, literature and film but the material on popular music is sparse.⁵⁷ Russell has perhaps been the most ambitious in synthesising music and English national identity, but his work has concentrated mostly on the pre-1950s period.⁵⁸ Colls in his book *Identity of England* (2004) has very little on music but does contend that migration and American popular culture were redefining tastes in the 1960s.⁵⁹ The most insightful account of the relationship between notions of Englishness and popular music can be found in the work of Cloonan although he tends to concentrate on the so-called ‘Brit-Pop’ era of the 1990s. The collection of essays edited by Bennett and Stratton are also useful as are the sections in Weight’s *Patriots* (2002).⁶⁰ Mandler is suspicious of the impact of popular music on national identity claiming that aspects of the 1960s were ‘very partial – regionally and class specific, and probably more effective in the imagination than in practice’.⁶¹ Yet to Bracewell, by the 1960s, popular music had become the ‘cultural currency of Englishness’ and a specific working-class response to particular challenges faced by youth in the post-war period.⁶²

Gilroy’s characterisation of the link between music and national identity also informs the examination of music, race and class that is explored in a number of chapters. Gilroy’s notion of a ‘black Atlantic’ that transcends ‘both the structure of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity’ is an aspect of the working-class experience that found its place on the dance floors and theatres of English towns and cities.⁶³ Yet as is clear from some of the images, episodes and events covered in this book, the nation state and its attendant identity and sense of collective values remained a source that was tapped by musicians, consumers and purveyors of youth culture. Through an exploration of coffee bars, rhythm and blues clubs and connected youth subcultures there is an attempt to reconstruct points of contact between West Indian, African American and white working-class youth.⁶⁴ The argument presented here is that for many performers and consumers the nation state remained a point of reference and source of inspiration.

The fragmentary message of popular music in the post-war period ensured that consumers could use it in a number of ways and define their own meanings from the lyrics, style and related subcultural affiliations. As Carey has argued, ‘it is precisely being empty of meaning that makes music good ... music

leaves listeners free to make up their own meanings as they go along'.⁶⁵ The performers and consumers explored in the following pages adopted a range of meanings as way of negotiating their way through the economic, political, social and cultural worlds of post-war England. The complexity of 'meaning' in music has ensured that attempts to map and make sense of the relationship between politics and popular music have been fraught with difficulty. As a result, academic writers have tended to concentrate on examples of the 'explicitly political' in terms of performers, songs, genres and movements. Yet such a focus has tended to conceal more than it has revealed in terms of exploring and explaining the working-class response to popular music and youth culture.

The politics of popular music: class, race, gender and sexuality

The literature on the politics of popular music⁶⁶ has tended to operate within an institutional framework of parties, organisations and formal political campaigns.⁶⁷ The 'new political history' which has attempted to extend the focus of political affiliations and their relationship to class, locality and community has so far neglected popular music and youth culture. Moreover, there has been a tendency to locate a strict division between the more overtly political forms of music such as folk and the more commercialised popular music, which, according to Black, marked the 'distinction between genuine and phoney socialists'.⁶⁸ Yet in a more informal sense rock 'n' roll music did offer a particular type of radicalism to English working-class youth. This might not have led to party activism and political engagement, but at particular moments, which are covered in this book, it clearly had an impact on the thought processes, emotions and sense of self projected by a significant number of young music creators and consumers in the post-war period.

The 'new political history' builds on the work of economic historians such as Benson who examined affluence in relation to a process of weakening class-consciousness.⁶⁹ Cashmore writing more specifically on youth culture also claims that particular subcultures were 'classless'.⁷⁰ Yet Osgerby has noted that 'classless youth was one of the greatest myths of the post-war era'.⁷¹ What follows in this book is a detailed examination of the complexity of class and how it was confirmed, negotiated and challenged by working-class youth through popular music and specific subcultures. Blackwell and Seabrook alluded to the transformative power of popular music, but merely as providing a 'model for a perpetual escape ... from the prism of class'.⁷² The subsequent chapters suggest that a 'discourse of escape' was just one facet of the relationship between popular music and working-class youth. Class identity remained a constant in the sense of self, place, and nation and manifested itself in the songs, performances and public discourses of a broad range of working-class musicians and consumers. In essence, affluence did

not weaken class-consciousness, but merely moved it in different cultural directions.

The examination of youth and culture explored in the following pages highlights a more complex relationship between politics and popular music that attempts to go beyond the organisational, institutional and formally political. Nehring has argued that consumers 'do not have to be aware, of any express politics for a music or song to be politically effective, particularly in the everyday contexts in which they use music'.⁷³ To Wicke people use songs in particular ways and 'integrate them into their lives'.⁷⁴ Yet he also argues that there is a disconnection between performers and their audience, stressing that 'most rock musicians come from the *petit bourgeois* middle classes and have never experienced the everyday life of working-class teenagers'.⁷⁵ This is a partial and problematic view of the class connections and disconnections between performer and consumer. The majority of musicians selected for this book are almost wholly working-class or lower-middle class with wider family networks that offered an entry point into some of the more esoteric dimensions of working-class culture.

A further aspect of this study is to trace the complex relationship between class, race, and ethnicity and how these identities and social categories were reinforced, challenged and transformed through the production, consumption and participation in aspects of popular music and its attendant subcultures.⁷⁶ Much sociological work has been done in this area, but it is still relatively neglected by historians.⁷⁷ The work of Hebdige, Gilroy and Oliver⁷⁸ set the research agenda and continues to provide entry points into further explorations. The book also makes a contribution to the growing literature on gender and masculinity.⁷⁹ To Heron in an early intervention on the relative invisibility of women in the study of popular music and youth culture the 'experience was neither examined from a woman's point of view nor looked at in terms of what it meant to be women'.⁸⁰ The following chapters reconstruct the lives of working-class women through various newspapers, magazines, documentary sources, songs and oral testimony. More recently, the link between aspects of popular music and in particular the subculture of homosexual lifestyles in London has been explored by biographers and popular historians and this text also builds on such research through an analysis of the sexual and gender politics of popular music and youth culture.⁸¹

Davey has argued that 'it is our cultural outriders, rather than our politicians, that have been, and remain, more responsive to the challenges of the world in which we now live'.⁸² Through the career trajectories of Georgie Fame, the Beatles, Ray Davies, Pete Townshend, Slade, David Bowie and the Sex Pistols, particular images and impressions of England appear that were shared by sections of working-class youth whose attachment to popular music provided them with an oppositional soundscape, a discourse of escape and a mental flight from the drudgery of their workplaces, domestic situations and their place within the constrictions of the English class structure.⁸³

The subjects of this book and the consumers who responded to their music and performances provide particular images of England that illustrate the complexity of notions of continuity and change in the lived experiences of working-class youth.

Methodology, scope and structure

Methodologically the book utilises a Thompsonian framework of 'history from below' and Williams' conception of a 'structure of feeling' in examining the ways in which aspects of working-class experiences can be found in particular cultural forms creating what Colls has characterised as an 'oppositional Englishness'.⁸⁴ Both Thompson and Williams were clear in their advocacy of the cultural articulation of class in creating and sustaining a collective identity and sense of ones place within economic and social relationships.⁸⁵ For many of the musicians and consumers examined in the following chapters, social class remained a firm source of identity. Class often determined musical choices, access to public spaces, leisure venues and meshed with particular youth cultures. Popular music was an important cultural phenomenon that soundtracked the lives of youth in the workplace, the domestic sphere and on the street. Performers, songs and recordings complemented many episodes and experiences of happiness, sadness and reflective contemplation.

As a social history, the book avoids the tendency to fully engage with the kind of theoretical sociology that has informed many studies of popular music and youth culture. Nonetheless, it draws on particular aspects of Marxism in its examination of class and culture. Perhaps its most controversial position is the suggestion that particular performers/artists should be viewed as 'organic intellectuals'. According to the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, 'organic intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong'.⁸⁶ For Gramsci, such intellectuals had to be rooted in the working-class and be familiar with their habits, customs and traditions. As such, they played a crucial role in both reflecting and shaping aspects of working-class life, culture and politics.⁸⁷ This is not to say that the musicians selected for this book fit the template of the archetypal working-class autodidact tradition that produced socialists and associated radicals who created and sustained the British labour movement and dissenting tradition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moreover, they were never fully able to create a successful counter-hegemony that would challenge the foundations and power structures of contemporary capitalism. They operated outside of institutional frameworks, but their music, image, discourse and performance can be shown to have had a particular impact on the consciousness and experiences of working-class youth in the realm of national identity, class, race

and sexuality. Pete Townshend, Ray Davies, David Bowie and John Lydon are perhaps most indicative of a generation of musicians who in the post-war period grappled with the nuances of class, social conventions, contemporary economic problems and attempted through their music and performances to direct working-class youth towards both real and imaginary sites of transgression, escape and social radicalism.

Drawing on a range of primary sources including archival papers, diaries, letters, newspapers and oral testimony, the book is a social history of popular music that seeks to make a sophisticated and nuanced contribution to the still limited literature on post-war youth culture.⁸⁸ There is a recognition of Samuel's view that '[h]istory has always been a hybrid form of knowledge, syncretizing past and present, memory and myth, the written record with the spoken word'.⁸⁹ In this sense, the book charts things that *did* happen to working-class youth in the post-war period but also, just as importantly, experiences and changes that they felt *had* happened as a result of participation in and exposure to particular aspects of popular music. As such it attempts to forge a path through the mythologies of popular music and youth culture of post-war England and the partial and problematic approaches adopted by historians such as Marwick, Sandbrook and Fowler.

The relationship between the national and the local is also explored in some detail suggesting that particular soundscapes were crucial in determining the development of popular music in a number of English cities and towns. Soundscapes were affected by new technology, mobility, militarism and migration. Picker's work on sound in Victorian England is particularly informative here in stressing the importance of the changing social and cultural meaning of sound. The excavation of the transmission routes of popular music also points to both local peculiarities and national projections and constructions of popular music.⁹⁰ Radio, cinema, television, fairgrounds and local musical cultures were all important in the period under scrutiny.⁹¹ Moreover, even in a period of affluence and technological innovation places like fairgrounds, fetes and carnivals continued to provide a space for transgressive forms of popular music such as rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues. Particular transmission routes had an impact on domestic and public spaces and played a crucial role in the career trajectories of the performers who form the basis of this study.

The book explores the spatial dimension of popular music in the industrial North and London, sharing Bennett's contention that 'music and style highlight rather than obscure localised distinctions between young audiences'.⁹² According to Stokes, 'amongst the countless ways in which we 'relocate' ourselves, music undoubtedly has a vital role to play'.⁹³ This was a process that was certainly true for the subjects that make up the following chapters. Similarly, Chambers has argued that at 'dances, at youth clubs...in draughty church halls and rural community centres, pop music...found a privileged space'.⁹⁴ Connell and Gibson have also noted how popular music

is 'bound-up in our everyday perceptions of place'.⁹⁵ They stress that 'place in popular music – nostalgia for lost or distant places, dreams of 'making it' elsewhere ... are all part of the ability of music to transport listeners away from their ordinary lives'.⁹⁶ The stance adopted in the following chapters is that not only did popular music mentally and physically transport performers and consumers from the drudgery of their everyday lives but provided them with new ways of looking at their position within their own localities in particular and English society more generally.

The geographical trajectory of the book takes us from towns built on coal and cotton such as Leigh and Wigan, the waterfront culture of Liverpool and the urban metropolis of post-war London. Particular urban conurbations became magnets for working-class youth, where they could subvert the social conventions within which they had been centred. Houlbrook's work provides a template here as a way in which the capital provided points of 'incursion into the defining spaces of Britishness'.⁹⁷ One interesting aspect of such incursions is the involvement of journeys both individual and musical. English popular music was dependent on the appropriation of a variety of musical genres through both external and internal migration. The link between the Caribbean, Ireland, the United States and the industrial North is crucial in this respect and provides a running theme throughout the following chapters.⁹⁸

The book is divided into three parts, which anchor the chapters in particular aspects of popular music, youth culture and working-class experiences. The chronology captures the arrival of rock 'n' roll in England in 1955 with the release of 'Rock Around the Clock' by Bill Haley and the Comets, Elvis Presley's hit single 'Heartbreak Hotel' in 1956 and the national concert tour of Buddy Holly and the Crickets that followed two years later.⁹⁹ To Chambers, and a number of popular music historians 1956 was 'the year when it begins'.¹⁰⁰ Yet as the following chapters highlight, there was no specific year-zero for developments in popular music and youth culture and both were connected to longer term trends. Nonetheless, the symbolism and transformative impact of Bill Haley, Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly on the individual and collective identities of working-class youth *was* significant.

Chapters 1 and 2 explore youth culture and the arrival of American popular music in the northern industrial towns of Leigh and Wigan. They reconstruct the journeys taken by a group of working-class boys in search of metropolitan excitement and possible stardom charting their experiences in local dance halls, coffee bars, pubs and the rhythm and blues clubs of London's Soho. Through a biographical focus on Clive Powell (Georgie Fame) and his contemporaries, they provide an image of a working-class England of coal mines, cotton mills, a vibrant consumer culture and the role of popular music in expanding the mental possibilities of difference and escape. In these towns a traditional working-class culture remained very much in place. Far from diluting a particular sense and lived experience of

class, American rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues proved to be complementary. Fame's career connects with particular aspects of youth culture and bears testimony to the interconnections of class, race and nation and how such concepts were negotiated through popular music. Fame's involvement in music making in the industrial North West, the peculiarly English pop world of the Larry Parnes 'stable of stars', and the subculture of the rhythm and blues clubs of London's West End provides a bridge between different yet complementary forms of popular music and youth culture. His involvement in the 1965 Motown Revue Tour is indicative of the ways white English musicians and working-class youth were engaging with black American culture. The musical worlds and cultures that were traversed by Fame are explored through national and local newspapers, magazines, oral testimony, the records of the Metropolitan Police and London County Council.

Chapter 3 also examines youth culture and popular music in North West England through the city of Liverpool. It contextualises the development of Merseybeat and the career of the Beatles (John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Ringo Starr) from the early years of their personal and musical trajectories from the late 1950s through to the advent of Beatlemania in 1964. There is critical discussion of Beatles scholarship and an emphasis on the relationship between class and race in developing particular aspects of the popular music scene in Liverpool. Of particular interest here are the class dynamics of the group and the way in which the Beatles reflected particular working-class cultures and experiences in 1950s Liverpool. The chapter also contains, through the use of oral testimony, an in-depth examination of the impact of Burtonwood, the American airbase, which was crucial as a transmission route for American rhythm and blues into the city of Liverpool and North West England more generally. The relationship between the local and national is also explored through experiences of consumers of the group's recorded output and live performances and the internationalisation of the Beatles that to some undermined their connection to the city. Using the records of Liverpool City Council, unpublished texts, fanzines, oral testimony and an array of documentary sources, it shifts the focus away from a conventional narrative of a group. The chapter 'centres' the individual Beatles as both reflecting and informing social changes impacting on working-class youth culture in the city of Liverpool in particular and England more generally.

Chapters 4 and 5 consist of a detailed examination of mod culture of the early to mid-1960s. Drawing on previously neglected primary sources and oral testimony, they explore the tensions between class, locality, race and gender implicit in this most mythologised subculture. The focus moves beyond London and also charts the mod experience outside of the capital city. Running parallel to this excavation is an analysis of the music of Pete Townshend and the Who. Townshend was a critically and popularly acclaimed songwriter and performer, but also someone, who as an 'organic

intellectual', was keen to both document and attempt to explain the changes that were taking in place in youth culture and English society. From the late 1960s through to the release of the seminal concept album *Quadrophenia* in 1973, Townshend was presenting his own variant of the recent social history of England. The chapter forms a link between the youth culture, popular music and broader social changes of the 1960s to the continuities and ruptures that were a feature of the everyday lives of English working-class youth in the early 1970s.

Chapter 6 navigates the working-class world of Ray Davies and the Kinks through a critical reading of their songs and making the claim that his work should be read alongside the contemporary sociologists of the 1960s who were also trying to make sense of the changing working-class. Davies's background and song writing presents an addition or indeed an alternative to some of the contemporary social investigators of 1950s/60s England. His songs complement the work of social scientists such as Willmott and Young and their research on class, community and suburbia. Unlike many of his musical contemporaries, Davies was a critic of the popular perceptions of 'swinging London', 'affluence' and 'political consensus'. He drew on multiple working-class political identities to negotiate his way through the changing geography and culture of London, in particular, and England, more generally. Particularly noteworthy here is Davies's engagement with slum clearance and the limitations of a particular type of socialist politics that simultaneously liberated and constrained the English working-class. As with the career of Georgie Fame, Ray Davies bridges the world of the working-class of Edwardian Britain with the experiences of youth in 1960s England. The central argument of this section suggests that Davies's songs provide a significant historical source for making sense of economic, political, social and cultural change in post-war England.

Chapter 7 focuses on the development of glam rock and the impact of the image and music of Slade and David Bowie in his guise as Ziggy Stardust between 1972 and 1973. It contrasts the working-class appeal of Slade with the more futuristic and cross-class appeal of Bowie. Bowie's growing popularity led to a number of working-class youths challenging the boundaries of class, masculinity, femininity and sexuality. The fashion and music is contextualised within the development of feminist politics and the growth of campaigns for sexual equality and the challenge to the discrimination of homosexuals in English society. Drawing on a range of primary sources, newspapers, letters, fanzines and oral testimony it goes beyond the more superficial readings of glam rock. As with previous chapters the geographical focus moves beyond London to chart the impact of glam rock on social identities in archetypal working-class communities.

Chapter 8 brings the study to a close with a focus on the Sex Pistols' Anarchy Tour of December 1976. It explores the rise of punk music and its attendant culture and the relationship it had to broader economic, cultural

and social developments. Many books and articles have been written on the Sex Pistols and the youth culture that followed in their wake, but none have provided a systematic account of their attempts to reach a larger audience by taking their music and political message across Britain in 1976. There is a detailed analysis of the reaction of the media and national and local politicians to the arrival of the Sex Pistols in particular localities and a critical utilisation of Cohen's 'moral panic' framework. The analysis of a variety of political and social responses suggests that the politics of punk was not easily decoded by particular institutions, organisations and pressure groups. Moreover, the Sex Pistols and their particular form of rhetoric and imagery also pointed to continuities and ruptures that were manifesting themselves in working-class areas of England's towns and cities. The chapter locates the tour in the centre of a growing sense of economic and political crisis offering a critique of the existing literature on both punk and the Sex Pistols.

The book presents an argument that popular music was an important cultural, social and political force in post-war English society. Between 1955 and 1976, popular music provided the soundtrack to millions of working-class lives. It is in this soundtrack where we can locate a particular aspect of Englishness, social change and the resilience of class identities. The images of England that can be accessed through popular music reflect the continuities and change in working-class experiences. By reaching out to a national audience of young consumers, a number of 'organic intellectuals' were able to use music to make sense of England and articulate the feelings and emotions of a section of working-class youth much more successfully than more celebrated figures in the realms of literature, film and politics. In essence, popular music and its associated youth cultures offers a significant entry point into understanding the resilience and complexity of working-class identities and experiences in post-war England.

Part I

Teddy Boy England

I watched their dances ... How lifeless and dreary they were in spite of the ear-splitting noise of the boogie-woogie music and the jerking about of their young limbs. (Margareta Berger-Hamerschlag, *Journey into a Fog*, 1955)

Can it happen here – the trouble that goes with rock 'n' roll music in the United States? Over there it has been blamed for starting riots, rape and alcoholism amongst the youngsters... This stimulating rhythm of the coloured people is not new. But it has been taken up commercially and is now becoming the White Man's burden. (*Daily Mirror*, 16 August 1956)

He wore thick crepe shoes that added an inch to his height. Out of these his pink dazzle socks climbed in a brilliant blaze of colour; their glory extinguished by the tight fitting bottoms of his blue jeans. His coat, a black well-cut drape with heavily padded shoulders, was almost knee length, its sombre colour offset by a crimson open-necked shirt. A small religious medallion, purely decorative, hung from a thin silver chain round his white neck. (John Townshend, *The Young Devils*, 1958)

From my distant window I could see the small, dark figures of boys and half-grown youths, drifting off in two and threes and larger groups, and all of them, it seemed to me, wearing the identical Teddy suits ... All of them, as if drawn by a magnet, also made off in the same direction, towards the main streets beyond the big railway stations: an untidy area of converging streets and crowded traffic, of shops, cinemas, public houses, and bright lights, aesthetically a God-awful wilderness, but to the boys obviously representing life with a capital L. (T.R. Fyvel, *The Insecure Offenders*, 1961)

I heard the ships hooting and automatically turned to Thames ... Hamburg...New York, New Orleans...Thinking of those exotic names and comparing them with what was around me made me sick: cobbles smeared with filth...neglected gardens as hardpacked as asphalt; tumbling walls; unwashed curtains x-rayed by naked bulbs, and unwashed kids darting about like rats in the dark. (Sid Chaplin, *The Day of the Sardine*, 1961)

Soundcheck: Buddy Holly and the 'Lemon Drop Kid', Wigan, England, Tuesday 18 March 1958¹

The 'Lemon Drop Kid' dragged himself out of bed, grabbed his snap-tin and water bottle, stepped out onto the cobbled street, mounted his bike and cycled to Bedford Colliery to begin the usual routine for the morning shift. But this shift would be different. The 'Lemon Drop Kid' knew that the minutes would seem like hours and the hours like days. He just needed to get to the end of the shift, get up the pit and he would then be in the fantasy land of rock 'n' roll and momentary escape. He had been listening to the music for two years in coffee bars, on record players, in pubs and in the dance halls of Manchester, Leigh and Wigan. He was also finding his own technique of guitar playing, fashion style and attitude to life through his embrace of American popular culture in all its forms. But today was different, today seemed more special. For the price of 8s. 6d today would lead him to the presence of the great Buddy Holly and the Crickets at the Wigan Ritz. The theatre had opened in 1938 and was the entertainment mecca of the town. For the last few weeks it not only had been host to the usual Hollywood fare of big screen adventures, romances and formulaic comedies but also a gritty depiction of the London underworld in *The Flesh Is Weak* and its tale of gangsters, prostitution and vulnerable young women. But tonight the stage, the orchestra stalls and the grand circle would all belong to Buddy.

A week earlier, the Ritz had hosted a skiffle music contest in which the 'Lemon Drop Kid' and his group the Dominoes had performed in the style of the ubiquitous Lonnie Donegan. He came away with dreams of recording contracts, concert performances and ultimate stardom. On that night the 'Lemon Drop Kid' had gazed in wonder at the huge stage and the rows of seats that seemed to go on forever. But tonight he would be back in the audience staring in awe at Buddy, and for that moment, the lives of many of the miners and factory workers of Wigan and Leigh would be transformed. As he cycled to the pit the 'Lemon Drop Kid' was already visualising the scene that would unfold later in the day; the shifts ending, young men and women discarding their work clothes and selecting their best suits and dresses and making their way to Wigan town centre by foot, bike, bus and train. All