

NUALA NAUGHTON



'At night this room is transformed into both castle and cathedral . . . Legends are born in the Barrowlands'  
Shirley Manson



# BARROWLAND

A Glasgow Experience

Nuala Naughton



EDINBURGH AND LONDON

To my lovely mum, Cissie Smith, who always encouraged me to follow my dreams and never told me to get a 'proper' job.

## **THE LINE-UP**

Big thanks to the bands and artistes who agreed to exclusive interviews that I have used to construct 'conversations' throughout the book with contributions from and anecdotes about:

AC Acoustic, Dave and Zack; The Almighty, Ricky Warwick; Anthrax, Steve Hall; Beastie Boys; Belle and Sebastian, Stevie Jackson; The Charlatans, Tim Burgess; Del Amitri, Andy Alston and Justin Currie; The Enemy, Tom Clarke; Fairground Attraction, Eddi Reader; The Fratellis, Baz; Frightened Rabbit, Scott and Grant Hutchison; Garbage, Shirley Manson and Butch Vig; Gomez, Tom Gray; Glasvegas, James Allan and his mum; Echo and the Bunnymen; Embrace; Horse (that really is her name) McDonald; Hawkwind, Dave Brock and Kris Tait; Hue and Cry, Greg Kane; Inspiral Carpets, Tom Hingley; James, Tim Booth; JD and the FDCs, Jamie Derelict; Kaiser Chiefs, Simon Rix; The Levellers, Jeremy Cunningham; Lulu; Malice, Dougie McCann; Amy Macdonald; The McCluskey Brothers, Ken McCluskey; Public Enemy, Chuck D; Runrig, Donnie Munro; Shed Seven, Rick Witter; Stiff Little Fingers, Jake Burns; The Stranglers, JJ Burnel; Simple Minds, Derek Forbes, Mick MacNeil; Spear of Destiny, Theatre of Hate, Kirk Brandon; Then Jerico, Mark Shaw and Jasper Stainthorpe; The Vatersay Boys, Donnie MacNeil; The View, Kieren Webster and Kyle Falconer; The Zutons, Boyan Chowdhury

## **PRESENTED BY AND WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO**

Regular Music, Barry Wright and Mark Mackie; DF Concerts, Geoff Ellis and Dave McGeachan; CPL Entertainment Group, Donald MacLeod; Triple G, Duncan Gray

## **SPECIAL GUESTS**

Tom Joyes, Barrowland general manager; Willie Florence, Barrowland manager; John Giddings, CEO Solo; Alan Edward,



CEO Outside Organisation; David Cox, Outside Organisation; Steve Lillywhite CBE, producer; Alan McGee, Creation Records; Billy Sloan, radio presenter Radio Clyde 2; Tom Morton, radio presenter BBC Scotland; Stan Riddet, Barrowland company secretary; Alan Parker, A Geezer and a Blonde Productions Ltd; Raj Gill, Gill Media

## **SUPPORT**

Monty Bryden, researcher and best friend in the world; Alec Downie, fan and website manager; Angela Austin, NUJ and my lovely sister; @TheBarrowlands twitter guru Andy Dickson; @musicscramble OCD Gareth Fraser; @Gordy\_Smith, iBounceTV; @fruitbatwalton; Campbell Stewart, fan; Helen Lonsdale Robinson; Sue Ashcroft; Aarti Josh, DF Concerts; Anne McGlashan, fan; John McAlinden; Tony Gaughan; Eddy Cavan; Derek McKenzie; Murray Easton; Mike Wheeler; 'Kitty' Bowen; David Baird; Rab Fenton

## **CREW AND TECH**

Billy Coyle; Scott Fyfe; CAVA Sound Studios, Brian Young and Geoff Allen; Demus Productions, Nick Low; Fiona McKenzie, catering; Mike Higgins, producer

## **PAPARAZZI**

Martin Gray; Iona Shepherd; Monty Bryden; Neil Henderson; Martyn Goodacre; Rachel Parker; Frederica Agamennoni; Stuart Westwood; Angela Nicholson; Davy Ellis; Andrew McColl; Stephen Booth; Andrew Benge; Steven Anthony Hammock; Daniel Boyd; Ron Cowan; William White; Lucien Berezowski; Matt Booy; Marika Hyldmar; James Arnold; Per Ole Hagen; Kirsty McKillop; Iain 'Mosh' Purdie; Stephen Hughes; Henry McInnes; Mirrorpix; Shannon McClean; Peter Copeland; Warren Christmas; Dougie McCann; Cathryn Ellis; John Kilbride; Duncan Bryceland; Chris Butler; Stuart Westwood, Brian Sweeney

*Special thanks to all those photographers, pro and am, who sent in pix for the book. And apologies to those whose pix didn't make it into the book. Space was at a premium.*

## **VENUES**

Barrowland 2; Barrowland boardroom; Backstage dressing room; Bairds Bar, Gallowgate; Bar 67, Gallowgate; Bobar, Byres Road; Oran Mor, Byres Road; St Louis cafebar, Dumbarton Road; La Bodega, South Street; The Rio Café, Hyndland Street; Stereo, Renfield Lane; Maggie May, Trongate; Solid Rock café, Hope Street; King Tut's Wah Wah Hut, St Vincent Street; Crosslands bar, Queen Margaret Drive; Glad Café, Shawlands; The Griffin Bar, Bath Street

*Thanks to the staff of these bars where I have spent many an hour getting drunk and having belly laughs with fans, bands, promoters and crew in the interests of research for the book.*

## **STAFF**

Linda Craig; Carol Riddet; James Dale; Douglas Forster; Geraldine McAdam; Karen McCallum

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## **ENCORE**

Hats off to the stats

Copyright



FIRST SET

## **Foreword by Tom Joyes, Barrowland general manager**

**IT IS AN HONOUR AND A PRIVILEGE TO BE GIVEN THE** opportunity to write a few words about the iconic Barrowland Ballroom. As manager, I consider myself very fortunate and I think I have the best job in Scotland. I liken myself more to a curator of a museum than manager of a fantastic rock venue.

The publication of this book is long overdue and my thanks go to the author Nuala Naughton and the publishers, Mainstream Publishing, for making it possible. As well as all the contributors to the book, I would like to thank Andy Dickson and Gareth Fraser for their tireless efforts in putting the gig history together and, of course, Alec Downie, our webmaster. These people have a genuine love for the place, gave their time 'free gratis' and, when it comes to music, they know what they are talking about.

As for me, what I know about music you could write on the back of a postage stamp. We rely on promoters to book the hall and put the bands in - special thanks to Dave McGeachan of DF Concerts, keep them coming. It's a struggle being one of the few independents up against the 'big boys' but, fortunately, a lot of bands are strong enough to put their foot down and insist that a Glasgow date must include Barrowland.

Despite my self-confessed lack of knowledge in music, I do have my special preferences. No. 1: David Bowie, the only artist I have ever asked to meet, and his words to me were 'Great gig' - not a lot of words but memorable. No. 2: the

Barrowlands Project by the Michael Clark Company. My pet hate is when people call it Barrowlands with an 's' - it's singular not plural - but I forgive Michael. The hall looked fantastic, lights and sound superb, and the project got me into Scritti Politti and Relaxed Muscle. Other favourites include Crash Test Dummies and that great voice; Basement Jaxx, who did a great show; and Paul Weller - my daughter Jennifer got a chance to play his piano before he did. Don't tell him.

Favourite moments are when I stand at the back of the hall and watch the reaction of the audience erupting when their favourite band comes on stage. It makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up.

Another is showing people around the hall for their first time. It sounds like a cliché when people talk about the Barrowland Wow! Factor, but when they walk in and see the floor for the first time, their jaw just drops and they always say, 'WOW!' It never misses. Love it!

Finally, Nuala, the author, postponed her wedding to complete this book in time. That's dedication. I intend to apply for a special licence for her to have her forthcoming wedding ceremony in the Barrowland.

## **Foreword by Shirley Manson, songstress, Garbage**

**THEY SAY THE PLACES WE LOVE THE MOST ARE THE PLACES WE** love together. This is especially true of the Barrowlands. It is only when people, all the people, come together within her walls that something truly magical occurs.

The atmosphere inside the building becomes electric. The performers feel it and the crowd feels it. Whether or not it is due to the famously sprung floor, it is undeniable that the room hums and vibrates with a forceful, tangible charge which invariably leads to the kind of show that performers and audiences never forget.

Looking out from the stage across a packed Barrowlands, it is resoundingly clear that people come here to give in to their joy. There is a genuine commune that takes place in this room. The crowd moves as one big sprawling, laughing, singing, yelling entity as steam rises from their collective body like a spectral mist.

Yet, in the cold light of day, this scruffy, somewhat decrepit building gives nothing of itself away. Anyone walking into the Barrowlands for the first time might be forgiven for thinking they have found themselves inside a bit of a dump. The magic that it is known to house or conjure is a no-show, hiding somewhere unspecific and unknowable.

The venue's long history dating back to 1934 remains a well-kept secret. Maybe it is, indeed, a little shabby. Maybe it's a little rough around the edges, but at night this room is



transformed into both castle and cathedral, and everybody, always, has a good show.

Having played this hallowed hall a few times myself, both with Goodbye Mr. Mackenzie and Garbage, I know the magic of the place first hand. I've been lucky enough to play all over the world. From Santiago and Taipei, Jerusalem to Novosibirsk and everywhere in between. We've met hundreds of musicians and literally thousands of punters alike who upon discovering I am Scottish will grin, nod their heads in knowing approval and bark out the words 'Glasgow Barrowlands!' as I feel my chest swell with a little national pride. 'That place is AMAZING!'

Every band you talk to has their own unique story about playing in this room and they invariably mention both the atmosphere and the incomparable crowd. I have often been regaled with wild and hysterically funny stories of visiting Scotland that all pertain somehow, in some way, to the Barrowlands itself. Amongst the global musical community, whether we Scots like it or not, the Glasgow Barrowland Ballroom is as synonymous with Scotland as haggis and Irn-Bru.

It is also impossible to write about this venue without mentioning the valiant people who keep her running. Those who keep the place clean. Those who feed and water the guests. It would also be remiss not to mention the outstanding calibre of the Barrowlands Crew, against whom all other crews must be compared. A load-in can often leave grown men heaving for air and crying for their mothers after carrying performers' equipment up just one flight of stairs. The Home Crew, by comparison, can run an entire artic truckload up half a dozen flights with rarely a complaint to be heard. The Barrowlands, it seems, brings out the best in everyone.

Recently voted as the best venue in the United Kingdom to play and hear live music, it is dismaying and somewhat surprising that this truly special place is constantly being

threatened with impending closure. Out of thousands of concert venues in dozens of countries around the world, there are very few rooms that stand out in a musician's mind as unique and memorable.

Halls like this one are dying out. They are being closed down, bulldozed and destroyed. Once they are gone, so too is their long and rich history. In their place, sanitised and homogenised venues are springing up the world over, utterly indistinguishable and eminently forgettable.

We need to take pains to protect this small jewel in Scotland's crown. Thanks to Nuala Naughton's lovingly and fastidiously researched book, we now have a record of its history up to this point in time, and what a magnificent role it has played and continues to play in the British music scene. God bless you for doing this and I look forward to the book's release.

Legends are born in the Barrowlands but none have or ever will surpass that of the venue itself. So continue to enjoy her and protect her. For wha's like her? Damn few. And, when she is gone, there will be none like her again.

## **Foreword by Alan Edwards, CEO, Outside Organisation**

**BARROWLAND WAS PROBABLY ONE OF THE UK'S BEST-EVER** rock gigs. It had the size and scale to feel significant but also the intimacy of a club. The atmosphere was never less than electric. Audiences were deeply appreciative of bands appearing there and were to a man and woman music lovers who knew their music. They also knew how to party big time!

I recall what seemed like an annual pilgrimage to Barrowland to participate in the Hogmanay celebration where Big Country regularly played in the New Year.

My partner at the time, Ian Grant, and myself managed the group, so we'd never fail to be there every 31st December for many years. It was never less than a memorable night. For the band, it was something of a homecoming and the audience knew every single word of the songs and usually sang along so loud they almost drowned out the band.

Stuart Adamson's distinctive Gaelic-tinged guitar struck an incredible chord with the audience and ensured the evening was really just a great Scottish rock 'n' roll party. The band had no airs and graces, so it was one of those very special occasions where the audience and performers merged into one, creating a very unique celebration of music, culture and attitude - probably could only have happened in Glasgow.

The drinking was legendary and usually followed on through 'til dawn the next day. The amount of alcohol

consumed within Barrowland itself must have been in the millions of gallons, half of which seemed to end up on the floor. At times it felt as if you were ankle deep in Tennent's Extra, and that, mixed with the sweat and energy, made it like no other venue. As one of the few Englishmen in the hall, I wasn't always overly vocal but enjoyed being wonderfully submerged in the amazing atmosphere.

I also remember a visit to Barrowland with David Bowie on a long hot summer night in 1997. Front-of-stage crush was scary; security were dispensing water where possible and Bowie was on fire with a set that included 'The Man Who Sold The World'. Newer material included the menacing 'I'm Afraid of Americans', the pop energy of 'Hello Spaceboy' interjected with classics such as 'The Jean Genie' and 'Under Pressure'.

The crowd wouldn't let the man who fell to earth go after waiting so long and were duly rewarded with encores galore, notably a red hot 'White Light/White Heat' that left the Velvets' original in the shade. I remember, unsurprisingly, ecstatic reviews in the next morning's papers. Truly a Glasgow night to remember.

I'm sure this book will bring back many happy memories for those who attended gigs there and will cement Barrowland's place in the cultural history of Glasgow.



## **INTRO: Ramblings of the author**

*Where to start? That was the big question. There are so many suitable intros to the book, with such a rich pool of stories, anecdotes, rumours and some outright fairy tales from which to select.*

*In the end, it was the wonderful Shirley Manson who made up my mind for me: 'Oh, wow! That's got to be your intro!' she exclaimed during a transatlantic phoner (that's rock-speak for telephone interview, by the way) from her home-from-home in sunny Los Angeles. So here it is, a delayed intro, in true rock 'n' roll style.*

'Hello, Barrowlands!' came the call from Tim Booth, who had just come onstage to rapturous applause with the band James, sharing the bill with Ian McCulloch and Echo and the Bunnymen.

The thing is, they weren't at the iconic Glasgow concert venue Barrowland Ballroom. They were, in fact, playing at Glasgow's SECC. During the show, Booth made a number of affectionate references to the rock world's favourite gig in the city's East End.

Two days later, Chuck D, Flava Flav and DJ Lord storm the stage at the ABC on Sauchiehall Street and immediately pay tribute to their favourite venue: 'This is dedicated to the Barrowlands. The Barrowlands!' is the call from the Public Enemy frontman, who actually never shuts up about the place no matter where he's playing, and fans love him all the more for it. During the ABC concert, Chuck D wants to

get the crowd really wound up. He takes the mic and shouts at the fans, 'C'mon! Act like it's the Barrowlands!'

Such is the love for the place that fans, bands and artistes around the globe have openly declared it their favourite venue in the world - ever.

And therein lay my first big challenge in writing the book, because everyone who loves the place - and I did meet one or two who were kinda 'meh' about it, I have to admit - loves it in the same way for all the same reasons.

So, the place could probably be summed up for the fans by a post in the Facebook group Barrowland Ballroom Memories by Tony Gaughan: 'I went to see [bla bla bla]. They were amazing! Really loud.'

Similarly, band members and techies will wax lyrical about the sprung floor; the low ceiling; the acoustics and the unique Barrowland audience; the sweat running down the walls; the ghosts of gigs past; the legendary Glasgow crew and the chintzy dressing room with its mirrors framed with a multitude of bare lightbulbs harking back to its heyday as a 'proper' ballroom with resident big band and glamorous female vocalists.

My first mission, therefore, was to keep my interviewees engaged with questions that would elicit a variety of responses or the book could pretty much end right here with a list of performers' names followed by 'ditto'. That said, I make no apology for repeated plaudits.

The old Apollo rock venue was immortalised in print by Martin Kielty, who wrote its chequered history in the book *Apollo Memories*. A great book about a great venue but, naturally, I wanted to trounce the trousers off it. And I mean that in a caring and nurturing way, of course, in that we always want to better the best efforts of those who have blazed a trail before us.

Where I think we may have managed this is in the extensive gig history, which also lists, wherever possible, the support bands alongside the headliners. Finding the

supports was no mean feat, as they are rarely named on the ticket stub and often changed at the last minute.

This gargantuan task was carried out by the self-labelled 'anally-retentive, obsessive-compulsive' human gig database Gareth Fraser and our equally fanatical Twitter king Andy Dickson, but even their job was greatly enhanced by the plethora of information that abounds among veteran gig-goers such as 'Kitty' Bowen, Campbell Stewart, David Baird and many more late-night residents of the post-gig social-media universe. They were helped immensely in their task by the lovingly collated gig-list history maintained and updated by the inimitable Alec Downie, who created the original website. It has served as a point of reference for bands and fans worldwide.

I'd like especially to thank editorial coordinator Graeme Blaikie for his patience and guidance throughout this process; editorial director Ailsa Bathgate for her pedantic semantics expertise; Mainstream Publishing MD Bill Campbell for his patience and insight; and the legendary Fiona Brownlee, whose reputation and marketing genius was a key factor in my decision to place this book in the hands of Mainstream Publishing.

I'd also like to thank agent Jenny Brown for her advice and support, and, in particular, author and book editor Edwin Moore for his invaluable advice and encouragement.

Most of all, my very special thanks and gratitude to my best friend and researcher Monty Bryden, without whose untiring work on pictures this book would never have made the deadline.

Love it or loathe it, social media has played a huge role in putting this book together. And special mention has to go to all those who contributed to the Facebook group, not least Alec Downie, who created the group specially for the book. And to our Twitter followers who have contributed stories and pics. I'm sorry that I couldn't include everyone's contribution. Space just wouldn't allow it.

I also have Facebook to thank for introducing me to a whole new set of friends – no, not ‘friends’ – who generously shared their star-studded network with me and put me in touch with their famous and notorious mates. Thanks go to Tom Cornwell, Linda McKellar, David Shepherd, Helen Lonsdale Robertson, Sue Ashcroft and to Alec again, for introducing me to their extensive network of rock ‘n’ roll worthies, journalists, DJs and ne’er-do-wells who were such a great source of mental stories and invaluable resources and introductions.

While I acknowledge there are some omissions and gaps in our gig history, I will refer you to the introduction to the chronology section of the book, where Gareth and Andy tell their sorry tale of nocturnal meanderings through Twitter, Facebook, et al., and weekends spent poring over old record books and bar-takings ledgers with Barrowland general manager Tom Joyes to check and crosscheck details that helped fill in as many gaps as possible.

This exercise alone threw up some interesting anomalies, which were duly clarified, and some surprising revelations such as who holds the record for stage appearances and other juicy titbits to satisfy the detail-obsessed among us, including the fee and ‘rider’ for the Rolling Stones’ 1964 gig – I bet you’ll be surprised.

Antics and anecdotes with a common thread have been put together in the form of ‘conversations’ between fans, bands, promoters and crew, reconstructed from dozens of exclusive interviews.

While all efforts have been made to confirm the accuracy of gig info, the storytelling chapters rely on the sometimes selective memory of the many contributors but, hey, that’s rock ‘n’ roll, isn’t it?

Any flaws or inaccuracies are entirely my own, other than the hazy memories of some of the rock stars who now tend to drink Coke but who admit that in their heyday they were usually snorting it.



I've tried to make this book as inclusive as possible in the time available, so there are many single offerings - indeed, seeming minutiae - from individuals that may seem unnecessary to include but are actually very specific to a particular gig, so I've included them because I'm sure they'll resonate with many of the wider readership.

I deliberately resisted going for the glossy and glamorous 'coffee-table'-style tome that holds itself aloof from the kind of book I wanted to write: one that you don't mind dog-eared, one that can be picked up a thousand times and used as a reference, as well as one that includes arty professional pictures by some of the country's most renowned rock journalists who are afforded coveted pit access for sweaty close-ups, alongside the out-of-focus amateur pics taken whilst bouncing up and down at the back of the seething room with a pint in one hand and a mobile phone in the other.

In true rock 'n' roll style, the beginning comes at the end. While for many gig-goers Barrowland Ballroom began its concert-venue career with the Simple Minds 'Waterfront' video, the old place did have another life as a palace of fun and frivolity when the original market owner and founder of Barrowland, Maggie McIver, built the hall to hold social dances for the Barras market stallholders in 1934. So, the final section tells the story of the origins of the market and ballroom.

This book is about the good, bad and the ugly aspects of the venue, so it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge some of the incidents that have blighted its reputation over the years.

While I make no apology for concentrating on the joy, the love, the fun and, yes, the beauty of Barrowland, it's impossible to ignore the heartache, the violence and the darkness that forms part of the venue's history. To ignore the ruthless killings of women who were stalked by the notorious and as yet unidentified murderer nicknamed Bible

John, and the murder on the dance floor at the Ice Cube gig in 1994, would, in my opinion, be an insult to those who have lived with the memory of these tragedies ever since.

To omit concerts in the gigology by performers who have later been publicly exposed and disgraced would amount to the Stalinisation of history. No mention of these events is in any way intended to glorify the perpetrators.

\*

Doors Open days are annual weekend events that allow members of the hoi poloi to gain access to parts of public and commercial buildings that would otherwise be out of bounds.

Barrowland Ballroom opened its doors for this event for the first time in 2012, with more than 2,000 visitors getting a sneaky peek at the behind-the-scenes areas that, besides the staff and crew, only bands and their guests get to see.

The book was initially planned to launch in time for the 2014 80th anniversary of the opening of the ballroom. As word got around that, finally, a book about the venue was on the go, more and more requests came in to launch the book in time for Christmas shopping, so my deadline was brought forward. Then, Barrowland general manager Tom Joyes had the 'inspired' idea of launching during the Doors Open weekend in September 2013, thus bringing my deadline forward again to a nightmare past midnight.

I'm telling you all this as my excuse for not getting all the interviews I'd have liked for the book due to bands being on tour or locked down in the studio, or so well protected that their 'people' at times refused to even pass on my request for an interview, or some who were just up their own arse and required me to go so far along the begging trail that I just got fed up asking. Only a couple of artistes politely declined.

I did, however, manage to get interviews with many wonderful people and, truth be told, there's no guarantee that with more time on my hands I would have fared any better.

The people who have allowed me so much of their valuable time have done so because they love the place. Many bands, promoters and other rock stalwarts set aside time for the Barrowland book that I'm pretty sure they would never have done had this been a normal press enquiry. Some have trawled through their personal files, ticket stubs, photos and other memorabilia to help with illustrations. Fans have pored over thousands of ticket stubs to prompt stories of memorable gigs. I have to admit I was at first confused by the number of times UB40 had played as support before realising that the words 'Ticket £2.50 - with UB40' actually referred to the 'dole' card, the UB40 unemployment benefit ID card that allowed unemployed people a discount. But at least I wasn't daft enough to believe that Doors Open was a regular support band, as in 'Doors Open 7.30 p.m.'

I've really enjoyed working on this book. There were many surprises lying in wait for me while working on it, though. Not least the reverence in which people hold their prized gig trophies: a setlist, a plectrum, and the jewel of all glittering prizes - one of the stars from the ballroom ceiling.

I remember, in particular, Andy Dickson, who runs the Twitter site @TheBarrowlands, going totally off track over a setlist from The View that he wanted to offer as a prize to his Twitter followers.

After interviewing Kieren and Kyle in Tut's, hot off their bus-top T in the Park promo gig, I steeled myself and asked if I could have a Barrowland gig setlist.

'Sorry, Andy,' I texted later. 'Couldn't get you a setlist.'

'That's OK. Never mind,' he texted back, not betraying the depth of his disappointment.

‘Only joking,’ sez I. ‘I got you four and they’re signed by the whole band.’

‘FUCK RIGHT OFF!!!!!!!’ came the uncharacteristic response of this normally level-headed and polite young man.

For a while, I had my own glittering prizes. Before I deleted them all from my SIM, my mobile-phone contacts list looked like a fantasy rock festival line-up, but among them were the telephone numbers of fans whom I now consider to be friends and who tell their stories with the kind of witty candour for which the Glasgow Barrowland audience is renowned.

I’m grateful, too, for those who have that enviable knack of remembering exact dates and details, not least Radio Clyde presenter Billy Sloan and the adorable Dave McGeachan of DF Concerts, who, I’m sorry to say, probably thinks I’m a right twat but that’s another story.

I hope you like the book, with all its gaps, flaws and imperfections, but for those who hate it, I’m reminded of Mark Shaw of Then Jerico who revealed to me the band’s pre-show mantra (which they admittedly stole from Anthrax): ‘Attitude Change – Fuck ‘em!!!!!!’

## Chapter One

### **Name check**

**I THINK I SHOULD CLEAR ONE THING UP BEFORE I GO ANY** further. The venue is known by many, affectionately, as the Barrowlands or the Barras. Now, this has long been a bugbear of general manager Tom Joyes, without whose support, advice and guidance this book would not have happened. ‘Just look at the sign,’ he tells people, with the patience of a sage who refuses to give in to popular idiom. ‘It says “Barrowland”. There’s no “s”. And it’s not the Barras: that term specifically identifies the marketplace. Just as the neon sign is associated with the ballroom and gig venue, the arched gate is another iconic image that represents the market itself. The two are different entities.’

While no one disputes the fact, there is a distinct divide when it comes to the question of ‘s’ or no ‘s’. The debate continues on the Facebook group Barrowland Ballroom Memories, with Felonious Munk warning: ‘You’ll piss so many people off if you insist on having an “s”.’ Mark G and Robert Bryden say: ‘Keep the “s”’, while Andy Dickson insists: ‘The Twitter page is @TheBarrowlands; it’s all about the “s”.’ I point out that the neon sign simply says ‘Barrowland’, to which the succinct Tam Coyle pronounces: ‘That’s its effin’ name, then!’

This is more than just a moot point. People feel strongly about it. Others couldn't care less, but it did represent something of an issue when it came to the title of the book. It is testament to the skills of the design team that they settled on letting the neon icon itself dictate the book's title, from a picture by the frustrating but lovable photographic genius Martin Gray.

Again, on Facebook and on Twitter there was much debate over what the cover pic should be and, again, it came down to two distinctive images. The iconic neon sign - I swear when I finish this book, I'm never going to use that 'i' word again - and the equally iconic (oh, gawd) view from the back of the room, usually beside the sound deck, with lots of backs of heads and hands silhouetted before the statuette figures of the band on stage, illuminated and at times obscured by the showers of light streaming down from the gantry.

'Neon!' sez Leigh Reid, which gets a thumbs-up from Stevie Boyd and Barry Booth. 'A bit of a cliché,' sez Gareth Fraser. 'Much prefer the back of the crowd with arms in the air swathed in stage lights.' For a change, Pete Gallagher suggests a popular photo collage by Adrian Brannan. But the design team cut through all the fug with a montage that includes a fabby pic by photographer Iona Shepherd taken from side stage at the 2013 Stiff Little Fingers annual Paddy's night shindig, with entranced fans bathed in acid-green stage lighting.

The verve, excuse the rock pun, with which this is discussed serves to show the extent to which the punters and the bands have taken ownership of the place. It seems that it no longer belongs to the McIver family other than in name and legal deed only.

It's ours and we'll call it what we want, is the unwritten rule.

And - it kinda is.

It's our sweat that runs down the walls; it's the condensation from our breath, as we sing song after song word-perfect, that drips from the ceiling; and, dare I say, it's sometimes even our piss that spills from cans and plastic cups, and seeps into the ancient sprung parquet floor - the men's toilet, marked 'Gentlemen', is one floor down, after all.

It's our gig. It's our favourite band. It's our memories. It's generations of our loyal patronage that adds to the patina that has insinuated itself, layer upon smoky, nicotine-stained layer, onto the paintwork and up in the rafters.

## Chapter Two

### **New Beginnings**





Simple Minds, pictured before they opened at Barrowland. The band is credited with breathing new life into the old venue, having filmed the 'Waterfront' video there in 1983. (© Mirrorpix)

**BY THE LATE 1970S, THE OLD GRANDE DAME OF BALLROOM** was pretty much on her uppers and the room that was once filled with flappers, ballroom dancers, jivers, jitterbuggers, Lindy Hoppers and twisters had taken on something of a Miss Haversham persona. The bandstand lay empty and the ladies' powder room was as silent and forlorn as a forsaken lover or an old music-hall act that has fallen on hard times.

Barrowland management tried to shake things up by turning the ballroom into a rollerblading disco on Saturdays, but that was shortlived; there was the odd wrestling bout, but the place was losing its *raison d'être*. People just weren't going any more.

The venue had never managed to shake off the dark mantle of the murderer nicknamed Bible John, who stalked women at Barrowland discos in the late 1960s. He murdered three women and another narrowly escaped with her life. He was never caught.

Also, there were sleek new 'nightclubs' popping up to replace the outmoded discotheques, and the lovely old Barrowland Ballroom seemed to give up and hang her head in shame.

It would take the out-of-the-box thinking of a couple of blokes from Edinburgh, who would become the saviours of the venue; and a transitional music video would act as the baton that would be passed to a new generation of rockers and revellers who were cut adrift by the demise of the equally iconic Apollo Theatre, the former Green's Playhouse.

Derek Forbes of Simple Minds tells me, 'When I first saw the Barrowland, it was like a relic frozen in time. But it was a beautiful relic.'

It's tempting to believe that the story unfolds in a somewhat cheesy, old-movie manner, as in the Busby

Berkeley classic *Babes in Arms*, with child stars Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland proclaiming, 'Hey, let's do the show right here - in the Berrow Lends!'

In fact, Simple Minds' manager at the time, Bruce Findlay, tells me the band weren't at all keen on the idea at first. Recounting how the decision to film at Barrowland unfolded, he tells me, 'We were looking for a location to film the video for the single "Waterfront" from the *Sparkle in the Rain* album.

'The band were against it. They had done one of the last gigs at the Apollo after supporting Siouxsie and the Banshees. *New Gold Dream* had gone big and they were on the cusp of really taking off.

'Jim [Kerr] was very much inspired by the Clyde [river], which fed into the "Waterfront" lyrics. He speaks very eloquently about it. He told me he had been visiting his mum and dad one night and went walking along Clydeside. He saw the empty docks with no ships, the polluted water, the derelict buildings - all the hallmarks of decline - and then, he told me, "I was convinced I saw a salmon." He said, "I thought, the city goes up and down but the Clyde just beats on. The river is the hope." Jim's lyrics and how he described it were the inspiration for the song, and the song inspired the video. It was uplifting. And that bass riff of Derek Forbes was the beat of the river running on. The band was being taken seriously and we had big expectations.

'So it was decided that we would release that as the single and we needed a video. The London-based producers, of course, didn't want to come to Glasgow. They were saying, "We'll just do it on the Thames." I mean, the Weegies would spot it right away. They're not daft. They'd go, "Where's the crane?" [A familiar Glasgow landmark that is an integral part of the Clyde riverscape]. It was comical. So I insisted it had to be filmed on the Clyde.

'The original idea was to use one of the empty warehouses on the riverside with cameras on the roofs of