

The Cambridge University Jazz Club

Part 1. The 1950s



Cambridge University Jazz Club Ball, 11th June 1954

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A Rumble From Below

The contemporary photo above, taken at the Summer term Jazz Band Ball in 1954, gives a clue to the atmosphere of live jazz events in 1950s Cambridge. Clearly there was dancing but the gender imbalance in a predominantly male university meant that a lot more of the patrons were standing around drinking, smoking and listening.

Michael Winner, Downing College undergraduate and Varsity editor, in his 1955 article in *The Spectator* [1.] describes a jazz session in the Union Cellars, elaborates on the local and University jazz scene, and stresses the popularity and earning potential of the music. So, it is worth reproducing in full:

“THE sound of a jazz band, loud and irrepressible, cut through the drizzle of a Cambridge night and echoed round the cobbled corners. In the cellars of the Cambridge Union, for years a stolid debating society, the bespectacled President presided in red sweater and blue jeans over a jiving, breathless throng. And an ever-changing University had witnessed another change.

It happened last week when the Union Society's cellars, long inhabited only by bound periodicals, were opened as a sort of nightclub. True, Oxford has done much the same thing a term earlier, but Cambridge's effort was informally different. There was no Lady Docker, no evening dress, no formality. 'Much more go-ahead really,' muttered the President. Instead, the lights fused, the band turned up half an hour late, and everyone had a thoroughly good time.

But behind the drain-piped wriggling couples a more permanent metamorphosis was taking shape. Spearhead of the new trend is quite simply jazz. It has become so popular among University students that the very word ensures success. At Cambridge the Jazz Club crams over 500 of its members into weekly sessions and turns many more away. Occasional Jazz Band Balls, sporting name bands from London cellars, swing to capacity crowds at one of the city's biggest ballrooms. Over 1,000 people crammed into a recent ball to slow-handclap the Proctor when he appeared, and later reach the centre pages of a Sunday newspaper.

Neither is jazz at University 'confined to dance halls or associated exclusively with dances. A local publican found an easy way to fill his pub was to have an undergraduate dance band play there. No jiving even; but the music packed the place with eager-listening students who stood crushed together, beer-glass in hand, to hear a spirited, if inarticulate, performance.

And thus, it was that the red-brick Union Society fell under the onslaught too. 'We've just got to get more members, as we haven't raised our admission charge since 1890. And as jazz is obviously the most popular thing in the University, we must have it,' explained the President. So, the walls of the table-tennis room have been luridly decorated with jazz bands and jiving couples, the shelves containing the archives of national publishers covered with red and blue cloth, and three chilly rooms converted expertly enough to please the most fastidious addict. For the opening, a bearded guest celebrity from London played the clarinet, supported by the University Jazz Band, which has so many commitments it cannot hope to fill them all. With double tickets at two shillings all sold out days before the opening, the President firmly turned would-be gate crashers away. Behind him on a seat once used as the Front Bench in the Debating Chamber a couple carried on in a manner which would normally have raised more than one point of order.

The only occupant of the room not emulating the semi-existentialist dress of the jazz-fiend seemed to be the Union's Chief Clerk, who beamed delightedly at the proceedings from his usual dark-grey double-breasted. If there were any Conservative Union members who regretted the invasion, they were either converted at the last minute or stayed away. As it was, the seventy-odd pounds spent on converting the cellars were made back in one night from sale of tickets and drinks. Only worry was about complaints from the neighbours.

As at most Cambridge functions, the men outnumbered the women by four to one. And here, perhaps, is one of the clues to the current popularity of jazz. It is very much a form of music which the undergraduate feels he can listen to without actually doing anything.

Always the band is faced by four or five rows of stolid listeners, who stand drumming their feet - seldom in time with the music. Yet they are eager to learn, for jive teachers in the city have full timetables.

Above it all, in the Union Debating chamber, the Bishop of Brentwood was talking on State Education. In the reading rooms and lounges of the aged society less agile members were reading and lounging—perhaps hoping that the noise from below, which shook the building, would be only a temporary evil. If so, their hopes seem doomed to disappointment. For, delighted by the three spacious rooms at his disposal, the Secretary of the Cambridge Jazz Club has moved his weekly meetings from a small school hall to the Union cellars; and the President, working in close conjunction with the Club, plans weekly sessions for his members on another day. Jazz bands in Cambridge are a valuable commodity indeed. By adopting them for his Society, the President of the Union has turned them into an institution - unless, possibly, he has turned his Debating Society into a jam session!”

Whilst the article is full of information about the Cambridge scene, Winner’s contemporary Peter Batten takes issue with the details saying that, although The Union did set out to attract jazz events and parties, the Cambridge Jazz Club “never met at the Union Cellars”; after leaving the school referred to in the article, the weekly jazz club meetings moved to the Rex Ballroom (see below). However, he thought Winner when right “when he quotes 500 plus for the end of term Balls and he is also right about the serious fans. I do recall two or three lines of them standing just below the bandstand.”. [2.]

Peter remembers that the special event referred to by Winner was a visit by “the great clarinettist Sandy Brown with trumpeter Al Fairweather”. They took part in a jam session in the Cellars with some of the university jazz band, including Derek Moore and Dick Heckstall-Smith, and “some very fine music was played”. It was “poorly recorded” but, even so, he says it has been issued on CD.

The Sandy Brown website points to a discussion initiated by Bob Weir in Jazz Journal International (JJI) between August and December 2007 on the question of a “Missing Sandy Brown Recording” puts forward several candidates for this honour, of which “a Deroy Private 10" LP by the Cambridge University Jazz Band with Sandy and Al Fairweather as guests” is one. In the February 2008 edition of JJI, Bob says that he has heard from Tony Gent in Devon that the Deroy LP was produced from his own recording at his 21st birthday party in Cambridge's University Cellars. [3.]

A Cambridge University Jazz Club?

Early years

The Janus record in the Cambridge University Library states it “is not known at what date the Cambridge University Jazz Club was formed but it was certainly in existence by 1940”. The records were deposited by Trinity’s librarian J.P.W. Gaskell who came up in 1947 and as Pip” Gaskell was active in the local and London jazz scenes in the late 1940’s. So, the 1940 date could well be correct. However, whilst the coverage of the sub file SOC.77.1 of “Officer's correspondence and papers” is stated as 1940 - 1979, the record coverage is only from 1957 - 1977. [4.]

The earliest reference in the records themselves is in a Letter from HM Customs and Excise dated 31 January 1959. This confirms that on 15 January 1953, Cambridge Jazz Club registered under Section 143 of 1953 Licensing Act – which requires that “at the end of each year form LL8 be submitted to the Customs and Excise Officer bearing a record of all purchases of intoxicating liquor made by a club for sale to its members” (see later for a discussion of licensing issues). The letter is headed “Cambridge Jazz Club”, which was the name the club went by until the mid 1960s, when its constitution was changed and it became formally the “Cambridge University Jazz Club”, to distinguish itself from local “town” clubs.

I have found no evidence that a CU jazz club existed as early as 1940. However, Peter Batten has provided some clues on student jazz activity in the 1940s. He was at Cambridge in the early to mid 1950s but from 1944-52 he had attended St Olave’s and St Saviour’s Grammar School in Southwark, south London. In the Autumn of 1948, he entered the 6th form where his teacher for HSC English Language and Literature was someone new to the school, Harold Kenneth Whiting, who like to be addressed as “Kenny”. He was a very lively and charismatic teacher who inspired Peter to take up the trumpet.

Kenny had studied English at Cambridge (Fitzwilliam) and in July 2004 he was mentioned in the Cambridge English Faculty Newsletter, so Peter obtained his address and wrote to him. Kenny’s reply was full of information but short on dates, so some assumptions have to be made.

He said he had played the trumpet in a jazz band at school, but he did not reveal which school or the dates he was there. Peter says that when he turned up at his school in 1948, he might have been about 30 years old and would have been at Cambridge immediately after the war. He probably did a teacher training year after his degree and St Olave’s may have been his first teaching job.

Kenny joined the “Cambridge University Band Society” and played in the band known as the “Swing Cubs” [a play on words, C-U-B-S]. Also in the band were Tim Moore, piano, who subsequently inspired Dick Heckstall-Smith at Dartington, an excellent bass player whose name he could not remember, but who went on to play professionally with Harry Parry and then with a symphony orchestra, and Ken Sykora, on guitar, who became one of the best players in London and was for some years the host of the BBC’s Guitar Club.

Among the “Swing Cubs” high spots was playing at a May Ball opposite Geraldo’s Orchestra and at another opposite Johnny Claes and his Clay Pigeons. Carlo Krahmer, later of Esquire Records, and Bruce Filo were in that band. They also did a guest spot at the “Number One Rhythm Club” in London. He thought this was at 100 Oxford St. and was a meeting place for early British Boppers. He felt they had played very badly!

He also recalls playing a gig alongside, and sitting in with, a 12-piece band of African American musicians from the US Army and he was very impressed by their swing. He had a similar experience with Buddy Featherstonhaugh’s band for a gig at the Guildhall [presumably Cambridge Guildhall. [5.]

Peter Batten guessed that Kenny Whiting’s time with CUBS covers the years 1945 or 6 to 1948. However, uncertainty is introduced by the fact that Whiting said in his letter to Peter that Jack Parnell was playing at the Rex Ballroom and making a big impression with his drumming. But we know that Jack Parnell was only at the Rex in 1940, with the Sammy Ash band, before volunteering for the RAF in the same year. [6.]

Kenny confirmed that, apart from a few lessons, he was self-taught as a trumpeter – what Peter Batten referred to as “a capable classical trumpet player”. However, it appears he must have reached a high standard on the piano, which became his main focus. He began to play the piano in bands, and when that ceased, he continued to play alone “experimenting with different styles from Meade Lux Lewis to Lennie Tristano, with Wilson, Bob Zurke, Basie, Mel Powell and so on, in between”. [7.]

Collaboration for Kenny Whiting’s reminiscences is provided by local resident Timothy Moore in 1998, for Mike Petty’s weekly column “Memories”. Moore is quoted as saying:

“From various programmes, press cutting and posters and the “Life History Album” started by my father (Prof. G.E. Moore) at my birth and later continued by me, I’ve dredged the following information. In 1943 I played piano frequently with Wally Scott’s dance band. From October ’43 I played with the Ambassadors Swing Band (reformed in Nov 1944 as the New Ambassadors Band)”.

Mike Petty continues:

“His album includes a souvenir programme of the Melody Maker Cambridgeshire Dance Band Championship in the Guildhall in August 1945. Competitors had to play first a foxtrot, then a waltz and finally a quickstep. At that time he was in the “Cambridge Rhythm Club Quintet” which came third. The winning band was the Downbeats which he then joined, playing with them in “Re-Vaudeville” at the A.D.C in January 1946. Of that band at least three people are still playing in Cambridge he believes. By the next year’s competition, he was in another band, the Calinesen Quintet and judged the best pianist in the contest.

Some indication of the wealth of music at the time is contained in another of his cuttings. On 17th May 1946 at the Dorothy Cafe, Cambridge University Rhythm Club presented a May Ball from 8 to lam. Playing were the Augmented C.U.R.C. Dance Orchestra, Percy Cowell’s Band and guest bands “The Downbeats” (featuring Percy Seeby), The Cambridge University Swing Cubs and Tim Moore’s Jazz men.” [8.]

This suggests that the post-war Cambridge swing band and jazz scene was pretty vibrant and that there was a degree of interchange between “town” and “gown”.

A specific early reference to the existence of the club appeared in the Portsmouth Evening News, 1949, where it stated that “Mr. P. Gale, a co-founder of Cambridge Jazz Club, entertained members of the New Hot Club, Portsmouth, with a record recital based on the life and music of the late Johnny Dodds, the veteran New Orleans clarinetist.”. [9.]

The next year, 1950, there was an interesting article by James Asman in his “Through The Swing Door” column in the Daily Mirror. This refers to Cambridge Jazz Club by name and confirms that club meetings were held on Tuesdays during term time, although it does not say where they were held. The story is about local jazz enthusiast Cyril Lucas sitting in with Tony Short and his Original Varsity Sack-droppers, playing “the only hot Tibetan Praying Trumpet in the world”.

Asman claims that the Cambridge jazz club itself is also somewhat unusual in that membership is entirely free, the band playing “purely for the love of it.”. Tony Short, the leader of the group, “well known for his B.B.C. broadcasts, and for his recordings” on various labels, is an undergraduate and the rest of the band come from Cambridge colleges...

“And their work doesn’t interfere with jazz at all. You’ve only to listen to their lusty Dixieland music to realise that!”, Asman continued, somewhat tongue-in-cheek. Stressing that they all passed their recent long vacation examinations with honours, he concluded that “... maybe there’s a lot in common between jazz and advanced education!” [10.]

Tony Short, then an undergraduate, was an established musician. According to Jim Godbolt he had been “discovered” by the Jazz Appreciation Society run by James Asman and Bill Kinnell. In one of the society’s booklets the two boasted:

“Our recent efforts to promote British jazz received a tremendous boost on the morning of May 5th, 1945 when the editorial staff of the Jazz Appreciation Society brought Tony Short, their pianist discovery, and George Webb’s Dixielanders to Decca’s studios.” [11.]

Peter Batten, first went to Cambridge in 1952, whilst on National Service, studying in the Department of Slavonic Studies to develop his skills as a Russian interpreter. He talked of hearing Tony Short and other bands but said he had no idea when the club started; it may have been “possibly from 1948”.

In the early 1950s it appears that weekly Cambridge Jazz Club meetings were held at the Brunswick School, in Newmarket Road; an undated poster advertised on the internet confirms this and Batten said that “when I came up in October 1954 the jazz club met weekly at a school hall off the Newmarket Road”. The school served Barnwell and the Kite, then poorer areas of predominantly terraced housing. After many physical and social changes which affected its catchment area, resulting in falling roles, the school closed in 1982 and became part of Cambridge Regional College. It was demolished in 2011 to make way for a residential development. [12.]

Peter clearly remembers his attempt at setting up a second University band involved them playing at the Newmarket Road School in the autumn of 1955. The only time that the band played at the Rex ballroom was for the Jazz Band Balls. Meetings at a school are referred to by Michael Winner in his 1955 article (see above) and he suggests that Cambridge Jazz Club moved to the Union cellars in that year. This was contradicted by Batten who confirmed that the weekly club meetings were very popular, and, because of increasing numbers, they were moved to the Rex Ballroom in January 1956.

Furthermore, Batten remembers enjoying the atmosphere in the ballroom and when “I became the main CU bandleader in October 1956, the weekly sessions at the Rex had become quite a big affair. In fact, there was little difference between a weekly session and a ball”.

Running the club

The poster names J Abbott of St John’s as Hon. Secretary of the club; Peter Batten confirmed this to be Jonathan Abbott, or “Jonty” as he was known, and he pops up later in our story. The academic year or years he held the role is uncertain but would have been between 1955 and 1957. During Jonathan’s tenure it appears that the club met at the School every Thursday from 7.30-10.30pm. Membership was 5/- (presumably for the academic year) and guests 2/-. “Jonty” is named as the contact for prospective band members. At that time, and for some years, emphasis in the running of the club was on providing opportunities for student players, as well as supporting the Cambridge University Jazz Band.

1957 to 1958 is the first academic year for which we have records in the Jazz Club archive. It gives us a flavour of the administrative workload of running the club at that time. This involved:

- a. Organising weekly performances for club members and opportunities for student musicians.
- b. Two “jazz band balls” a year, with professional bands contracted to play.
- c. Maintaining and promoting the University jazz band which played at the weekly sessions as well as other gigs and occasional tours.
- d. Participation in the annual inter-university contests.

Obviously, the Secretary (at this time officially “Honourary Secretary”) bore the brunt of all the administrative tasks associated with these activities – finding premises, University permissions, negotiations and contracts, correspondence and record keeping. The person that who took on this substantial task for 1957 to 1958 was Geoffrey D. Clarke (St John’s). This workload continued through to the end of the 1950s under two subsequent Secretaries – Brian Bates (Trinity College) for 1958-59 and Graham Gent (Gonville and Caius College) for 1959-60.

Resignation of President

The President of the club is rarely mentioned in the archives; essentially, they were figureheads who often had been the Secretary of the Club the previous year. Peter Batten came back to Cambridge as an undergraduate from 1954 to 1957, studying English at Jesus College. During this time, the President was Philip “Pip” Gaskell, a don at King’s and a clarinettist who had played and recorded with Tony Short; more on this later.

Also, according to Peter, his great friend Derek Moore was a member of the committee, probably from 1951 until sometime in 1957 when he took over the Presidency from Pip Gaskell. According to Peter’s *Guardian* obituary (22 Dec 2008), Derek Moore had, during the 1950s, “been an influential member of the Cambridge University Jazz Club”. He went on:

“Already a jazz fan, he had taken up the clarinet during national service, and when he arrived at Jesus College in 1951, he joined the jazz band led by the pianist Tony Short, then a leading figure in British traditional jazz, who became a lifelong friend. Derek played in three further university bands, the last a fine quintet with Dick Heckstall-Smith, who would later be a tenor saxophonist in British jazz and blues bands. They took university jazz to a new level and won the British universities' jazz contest in 1956.” 13.]

However, Derek Moore did not last long as a President. In a hand-written and undated letter to Geoffrey Clarke, Derek refers to a “real difference of attitude” between himself and the majority of the committee as to the future of a university jazz club.

He went on to say he was certain the committee would function “more smoothly with a President who believed in the aims of the club”. He concluded that the differences were not personal and that it was one of the “pleasantest committee” he had served on being, adding in typical forthright Moore fashion that it was, for once, “free from obnoxious careerists”.

What exactly lay behind the Derek Moore’s resignation we do not know. Peter Batten said “I was not aware that he had been President. What sort of problem arose I have no idea. Certainly, some very ambitious people became involved ...”. Could it have been a manifestation of the traditionalists vs the modernisers antipathy that was prevalent in the wider jazz community? This seems unlikely as Moore had developed an interest in a range of jazz styles, including bebop, as supported in an interview with writer Richard Carter:

“In the mid-1950s, when I was in University, a Lecturer friend named Derek Moore (a mathematician who followed a distinguished academic career, later becoming

an FRS, a Fellow of the Royal Society) used to play records for me, and he'd test me to see if I could recognize the performer (he once threatened to throw me down stairs if I didn't recognize Bunny Berigan. Luckily, I did) [Laughter]. Then he played a record of a tenor saxophonist whom he said I wouldn't recognize but ought to hear; it was Wardell with a small group in a 1947 concert recording of "Blue Lou". I felt it was wonderful. I immediately loved the relaxation and fluency in his playing. After that, I was hooked on Wardell." [14.]

So, maybe it was something else that brought about his disenchantment with the jazz club, although it appears not the effectiveness of the Committee itself. According to his Royal Society memoir "It is well known to his many friends that Derek had a sharp tongue and a caustic wit, coupled with humour but not with spite". This lack of spite appears to be present in his letter. [15.]

Playing Jazz

Student players

One thing that is clear from even a cursory look through the earlier library holdings and other material, is that the emphasis in the jazz club was playing the music. To quote the University Library synopsis, it was a student body intended "to further the appreciation of jazz, and to give amateur musicians the opportunity to play together in public.". Over the years there must have been many students trying to develop their technique and apply their skills in bands. Most of their efforts have been lost in the mists of time but in the 1950s there were a few players who developed a reputation through playing in the University or other bands, as discussed below.

Tony Short's band has already been mentioned. Peter Batten shared with me his recollections of Tony Short, with whom he played in the 1970s and 1980s, including the transcript of a tribute of the pianist which was published in Just Jazz magazine "some years ago", from which the following is extracted [16.]

Tony went up to Magdalene College in the autumn of 1948. He quickly established a very successful partnership with clarinettist Pip Gaskell who went up to King's in the same year. They formed a trio with Hugh Wallace, whom Tony had known at Marlborough College, on drums. Soon the trio began to appear outside Cambridge and to broadcast for the BBC. This was a high point in Tony's jazz career. In September 1949 Tony and Pip, with Dave Carey on drums, recorded for Carlo Krahmer's Esquire Records. Of the four titles, two were issued - *I Never Knew* and *Apex Blues* [Esquire (E) 10-006] – and Peter Batten said they have been re-issued on CD by Lake Records. The other titles were *Sister Kate* and *If I Could be with You*. Sinclair Traill, in *Jazz Journal*, July 1950, recommended the Esquire 78, enthusing that "Short is far and away our best jazz pianist".

John Philip "Pip" Wellesley Gaskell (1926-2001), mentioned above, was Humphrey Lyttelton's brother-in-law and had played in Humph's first band. [17.] He had also gained valuable jazz experience on the London scene including making a series of recordings with Carlo Krahmer's Chicagoans on 13th May 1949 which featured both Jimmy and Marian McPartland [18.]. "The Times" obituary (13 August 2001, p.15) said that

" ... Few examples of Gaskell's light, Dixieland clarinet style exist on record, but the best of them is undoubtedly his session with the Chicagoan cornettist Jimmy McPartland for Krahmer's Esquire label in 1949..." [19.]

According to Peter Batten this excellent Short/Gaskell trio had a very short life “as Pip Gaskell completed his studies at the university and Tony was left to start again”. In fact, Pip stayed at Cambridge until 1960, after becoming a fellow in 1953, and after that he went on to other academic positions. This included teaching English at his old school Oundle (1960-62) where he appears to have made quite an impression on a young Peter Conradi:

“.. he now founded a jazz club at Oundle, where he introduced us to the music of Miles Davis and Charlie Parker and arranged showings of John Cassavetes’s brave film about marginal New Yorkers, “Shadows”. We accordingly thought Pip super-cool. Dapper, short, wearing brass granny-specs, he seemed effortlessly inquisitive and venturesome. He had learned the alto saxophone, studied protozoa under his microscope, become a good photographer, set up the Water Lane Press and lodged his own ancient hand operated printing press in the art rooms. [20.]

Conradi said that he read Russian literature, which he introduced his pupil’s to, and later he learned to fly, buying a small aircraft for £400, in which he journeyed to Holland. He was a devout Christian “in a silent way that was lived, never preached”.

Pip returned to become Fellow and Librarian of Trinity College in 1967 and established a notable academic reputation in English and Bibliography. He retired in 1986. Whilst he appears to have given up active playing after the 1950s, he kept in touch with the university jazz scene and was the Senior Treasurer of the CU Jazz Club when it was wound up in 1977.

After parting ways with his clarinet partner, Tony Short formed the aforementioned “The Original Varsity Sack Droppers”, which, according to Peter Batten, was “a rugged, but enthusiastic, undergraduate band”. In January 1950, the band recorded four titles in Sheffield for an obscure label. Two titles were issued on a 78: *Tishomingo Blues*, by the band and a piano solo, *Mamie’s Blues*. Batten says that although he has heard of people who once owned this record, nobody has been able to produce a copy. Later that year another recording session took place at the studio of John R.T. Davis, on which he played trombone, but there is no evidence that any titles were ever pressed or issued. Tony remained in Cambridge until the summer of 1952, presumably, suggests Batten, to complete a course of teacher training.

In April 1952, the *Jazz Journal* carried a report of a jazz piano contest organised by the University of London Jazz Federation. Tony took part, along with such familiar names as Ray Foxley, Johnny Parker, Dave Stevens and Seamus O’Brien. The winner was Roy Sturgess, a quite unfamiliar name. Pianist Dill Jones, who was one of the judges, described Tony’s performance as, “Sensitive and quite beautiful in parts”.

Soon Tony had joined the Army Education Corps but was not happy; within a year he transferred to the Royal Air Force. In the Spring of 1953, he appeared as a guest at a concert in Cambridge, along with clarinettist Monty Sunshine.

Derek Moore, who was to become a strong influence on the University jazz scene in the 1950’s, played clarinet with Tony’s university band in this final year. Born in South Shields, Derek attended a local grammar school and won an exhibition to Jesus College, Cambridge. After getting a First in the Mathematical Tripos, he began research at the Cavendish Laboratory in 1956 and, under the supervision of Dr Ian Proudman, he gained a doctorate in theoretical fluid dynamics, the launching pad for a distinguished academic career, primarily at Imperial College, London. [21.]

Peter Batten told me that Derek Moore’s influence in the University Jazz Club went far beyond his clarinet playing, as he had alluded to in his obituary:

“Early in the 1950s Derek began to appreciate the great musicians of the 1930s and the bebop style of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Lester Young and Wardell Gray became particular favourites. He assembled a very substantial record collection and was always ready to discuss the way jazz had developed.” [22.]

Derek’s record collection, which he assembled from the beginning of his years in Cambridge, was an important proselytising tool. His tastes moved on quickly from his first enthusiasm for early jazz to embrace many styles and he was always ready to play the records for his friends:

His enjoyment and deep understanding of jazz influenced Dick Heckstall-Smith ... (and) ... many others benefited from hearing selections from his outstanding collection. He also gave several talks about his favourite musicians, but these were sadly far too few: his insight into jazz performance deserved to be more widely shared.”. [23.]

Dick Heckstall-Smith was one of the few players in the Cambridge undergraduate jazz scene of the 1950s to have built a solid career as a professional jazz (and later blues) musician and to have garnered a worldwide reputation. Dick was a product first of Gordonstoun and then of Foxhole School, Dartington Hall; “it was like going from Darkness to Light”, he admitted. [24.]

At Gordonstoun, Heckstall-Smith had clarinet lessons with Frau Suzanne Lachmann and Mozart’s 39th (Trio of Minuet and Trio) was the first music he played. However, Dick admits in his autobiography that he was seized “with [a] passionate illicit interest in (a) Pee Wee Hunt’s ‘12th Street Rag’ and (b) Benny Goodman’s ‘Bach Goes to Town’.” In the summer of 1948, Dick managed to get hold of an old alto sax “because I was fascinated with the sound”.

Heckstall-Smith went to Foxhole School in September 1949, the move of schools accelerating his development, as “unfettered music making was encouraged at Dartington”. He had clarinet lessons with William Wraighty and also upgraded his second instrument by persuading his father to buy a Boosey & Hawkes alto saxophone for £25. A fellow pupil was an Afro-American named Kaye Dunham (nephew of Katherine Dunham, the dancer). Kaye thought Dick had a feel for jazz and persuaded him to play at informal school get-togethers. [25.]

Then, Dick discovered Sidney Bechet, ordering his first four Bechet records from London:

“I waited a dream-like detached week for them to arrive - would they arrive? When they arrived, they were the revelation I had hoped for. Instantly I became Sidney Bechet and, as Sidney Bechet, I led the Dartington School Jazz band...”

To achieve this, he persuaded his father to buy him a Maltese soprano saxophone for £10. He became “leader of the school jazz band, upholding Bechet against Bunk Johnson and George Lewis, Johnny Dodds against Jimmie Noone etc.”.

It was this experience and enthusiasm that he brought to Cambridge on his arrival in September 1953 to take an agriculture degree and it was not long before that he became co-leader of University Jazz Band, in 1954. He summarised his approach thus: “Did minimum of academic work, maximum of jazz”. A high point for Heckstall-Smith was:

“1955 when I won the silver cup, believe it or not, for playing a good solo in the Cambridge University Jazz Band Competition. Success in the competition secured me

more than a trophy for the mantelpiece. Sandy Brown, already a hero within the jazz fraternity, was judging the Cambridge Competition. [26.]

In fact, the competition was that held by the Inter-University Jazz Federation (IUJF) in which the Cambridge band gained first place for the second year running. The following year Dick left Cambridge with a degree and led the University Jazz Band on a tour of Swiss jazz venues. Thereafter, he moved to London to do National Service which, as a conscientious objector, meant becoming a hospital porter. It was IUJF competition judge Sandy Brown who gave Dick the break he wanted, as he told Peter Brown:

“Sandy also gave me my first professional job. I remember his call; I had just clambered out of the bath and was struggling to understand his broad Scottish accent. "You know I don't have a Tenor!" I said when I realised that he was offering me a job with his band. "Dinna wirrie 'boot that!!" he shouted comfortingly down the line, and within 3 weeks I was in the band playing Tenor Sax and remained with him from December 1957 to May 1958”.

And echoing the comments made about Derek Moore's influence Dick he confessed, in the same interview:

“I didn't actually own a Tenor until a year after leaving Cambridge in 1956. I borrowed one for a while at Cambridge. By this time my influences, beside Bechet, were Lester Young and above all Wardell Gray. It was Bechet's sound that mattered most though. It never failed to amaze me. He was twice as strong as any trumpet player I knew, with the exception of Louis Armstrong. Having said that, it was Wardell Gray's playing that persuaded me to take the tenor sax seriously. I suppose, since we are talking about musical influences, that if mothers come first, then Sidney Bechet was my mother and Wardell Gray was my father!” [27.]

Auditions

Not all student musicians were as accomplished as those above and to get a chance to join a university band they had to audition. Musician auditions were held at the start of the year, usually in October, and the practice would continue until the final years of the club. There is very little on auditions in the records for this period but on 7th. October 1959, Rodney Dale wrote on POLYHEDRON Design & Publicity headed paper “please let me know where and when this year's auditions for the University Jazz Band are to be held. I enclose a Stamped, addressed envelope for your convenience.”

This reference is interesting because of the role Mr Dale would go on to play in the development of Cambridge's technological research development. POLYHEDRON was the company Rodney set up on graduating from the University in 1957 and, then, in 1960, Rodney with two Cambridge University graduate friends - Tim Eiloart and David Southward – founded Cambridge Consultants to “put the brains of Cambridge University at the disposal of the problems of British industry”. One of their first relationships was with Clive Sinclair helping in his early product development. [28.]

This product development and technology consultancy firm provides outsourced research and development services and many high-tech companies within the Cambridge cluster (“Silicon Fen”) can trace their roots back to this now global company. [29.]

There is nothing further in the archive on Rodney Dale but apparently, he played piano in a number of bands. In 1976 Dale left Cambridge Consultants to become a full-time writer. He

has only recently died (March 2020) after publishing sixty or so books, including several on jazz.

Cambridge University Jazz Band

Evolution

As has already been observed, at that time, and for some years, emphasis was on providing opportunities for student players, as well as supporting the Cambridge University Jazz Band, membership of which represented the pinnacle of achievement for the few players lucky enough to be invited to join.

As we saw above in 1950 the University band was Tony Short and his Varsity Sack Droppers. Peter Batten believes the band's names arose because Tony had been impressed by the Armstrong Hot Five record, "Drop That Sack". Derek Moore joined the band in the 1951-52 academic year and Tony Short left Cambridge at the end of that year.

For 1952-53 the University band was reformed as a two-trumpet outfit, which Peter Batten heard whilst in Cambridge studying Russian. He had not started to play at that time but was impressed by both the trumpet players. He said that the one who he believed was the leader was a very good jazz player with a very confident technique and a pleasant, relaxed style. The other was a player with an outstanding technique, but without much background in jazz. Derek Moore was again the clarinet player (doubling occasionally on alto sax) and was very impressive. Apart from the fact that the band was playing traditional jazz tunes, Peter felt the band seemed to have "no sense of style".

Peter attributed the same weakness to the band led by Pete Roberts-Arnold for 1953-54. The leader was "an excellent cornet player [he had bought a very fine King cornet]" but, like Batten, "he suffered a little from the embouchure problems self-taught players can end up with". He had to assemble a band from whatever talent was available, which meant that there was a very weak rhythm section.

Peter Batten said things improved with the arrival in the autumn of 1954 of Dick Heckstall-Smith playing clarinet and soprano sax. This seems to square with the chronology in Heckstall-Smith's autobiography where Dick says he arrived at Cambridge in 1953 and became joint leader of the university band in 1954. Peter confirms that "he was excellent on both instruments, but the soprano made a big impression. He was continuing to improve and had already mastered the Bechet style better than most European players". He quickly became friendly with Derek Moore and they brought "a new seriousness and more ambition to the band, but they could do nothing about a weak trombone player and a pleasant but technically very limited [American] pianist".

1955-56 was a big step forward with Moore and Dick Heckstall-Smith co-leading the University band as a five-piece, sometimes six-piece, with clarinet and soprano as the front line. According to Batten, this was a band "in the style of the Mezzrow-Bechet quintet, or the Bechet-Albert Nicholas recordings." Derek's Dodds-based style was now fully matured by time spent listening to Chicago style players like Pee Wee Russell and Rod Cless.

Dick was now "a very powerful player with a full command of the Bechet style". So, Peter said, the soprano and clarinet combination predominated, although they did sometimes play a two-clarinet number. They had found a much more versatile pianist in Geoff Jackson. Bass was still a weakness although the player did improve during the year. Trevor Tyson was on drums, as he had been since the start of 1956. He was a very competent dance band drummer

but had only a limited feeling for jazz. Mike Oakley often joined them and his guitar playing improved rapidly.

Peter Batten took over as leader of the Cambridge University Jazz Band in 1956-7, but Derek Moore did not continue; perhaps this was because of the work commitments entailed in his move to the Cavendish Laboratory. He made occasional appearances with the band, though, filling in for regular clarinet player Joe Boerema, who disappeared back to his native Holland as soon as the terms ended.

The Cambridge University band at the start of the 1956/57 academic year was:

Peter Batten, trumpet and leader
Robin Hastie, trombone
Joe Boerema, clarinet
Tony Coates, piano
Mike Payne, bass
William ("Bill") Hartnoll, drums

Peter said that fellow Jesuan, Robin Hastie, was very musical but a beginner on the trombone. Guy Playfair, who later became a famous "ghost-hunter", had come up at the same time and, as a very accomplished trombone player, replaced Robin in January 1957. He was "no slouch on the instrument" and *We'll Be Together Again* became his solo feature.

There were three clarinet players potentially available to Peter when he formed the 1956-57 University band: Derek Moore, Andre Beeson and Joe Boerama. He hesitated to rank them for ability. Andre had had the most clarinet lessons and some outstanding teachers and Derek, like Peter, was someone who had taken up an instrument in order to play jazz and used his intelligence to make the most of his musical ability. By 1956 Derek felt it was time he left his place in the band to someone else. He expected that person to be Andre Beeson but the latter did not like Peter Batten's choice of style, unlike Joe.

Peter remembers Joe as a most naturally gifted musician, a fine player and very enthusiastic. He had spent many years playing classical violin and made rapid progress when he started to play jazz clarinet. He had a very good musical memory and may have had perfect pitch. Peter thought Joe went on to study medicine at St George's, London University, and played in a quartet for a time with John Bancroft, who was on the 1956 Swiss tour. What happened to Joe after around 1960 Peter did not know.

He went on to say that Anthony ("Tony") Coates was a fine pianist, probably the best to play with the University band after Tony Short. Two days before his wedding in December 1958, Peter had a drink with Alan but has never heard of him since. He came from Malvern and may have gone back to work in that area.

When it came to the annual IUJF contest, Mike Payne was not eligible as he was not a student, hence his place was taken by Colin Purbrook. Peter said that Colin was delighted to step in on bass to replace Mike and that he had already started to give Mike advice. He got the impression that Colin could play almost any instrument very well from scratch:

"I saw him play guitar once or twice and he was very fond of the trombone. He could probably have taken my place in the band on trumpet and won the contest. After Cambridge he tried to make it as a bass player but had serious problems with septic fingers and had to give up. He went back to the piano and the rest is history.". [30.]

Peter said Colin Purbrook was about to be sent down at the end of the year (1957). Whilst he was a wonderful musician, and became a world class jazz pianist, he was not very good at the non-musical written requirements of a music degree. Before he came up, he had already made an impression as the resident pianist at his local jazz club at Seaford, Sussex. For some reason he had decided to become a bass player and was working at that ambition during his time at Cambridge. Several of his friends were horrified because he was already such an outstanding pianist. Peter and Colin often bumped into each other in the 18 months he was in London until his marriage, when he moved to Peterborough. He met Colin again several times in the last ten years of his life, particularly at gigs where Colin was accompanying the American clarinet player Kenny Davern, who loved Colin's playing and employed him regularly.

Bill Hartnoll remained a close friend to both Peter Batten and Derek Moore. Bill and Derek had lived close to each other in West London. For many years Bill had a regular gig at a London club and worked as a drummer from time to time in Colin Purbrook's trio; Colin admired the drummer's excellent sense of time. Peter said he was a very fine drummer and a great fan of Philly Joe Jones. Unfortunately, he died in 2003 from prostate cancer.

Promoting the band

The records from 1957 to 1960 do not shed much light on the make-up, style and activities of the Cambridge University Jazz Band other than at the IUJF contests (see below). However, the "University Jazz Band", as Brian Bates called it in a promotion circular produced under his secretaryship in 1958-59, continued to thrive and was always on the lookout for bookings:

"Should you be organizing a ball, party or any other form of entertainment and require a jazz band of any sort traditional, mainstream or modern – you will find the 'University Jazz Club' can supply your needs better than any other organization...."

He stressed that it is a well-rehearsed unit and with an extensive band-book "... necessary for a band which plays every Tuesday at the 'Rex' to some 500 people". So, was this one band able to cope with the full gamut of styles or was it, in fact, a core band with augmentation of players to suit the customer's requirements?

There are some clues in the text which stresses the positive reasons for choosing the band:

- It was "dependable - as opposed to 'scratch' groups which may disband or reorganize in between the booking and the actual fulfilment of an engagement".
- The band "as it is now" had "a purpose in keeping together - the 'All Britain Inter-Varsity Jazz Competition, 1959', which we hope to win for the fourth successive year". Presumably, Brian meant the Inter-University Jazz Federation contest.
- It was flexible "Smaller groups, such as quintets, quartets, trios etc. can be arranged".

As was the tradition, terms were to be negotiated with the bandleader, but Brian assured potential customers that "they will be very reasonable" and to remember that "whatever size group you hire you know you will be getting the best available musicians at reasonable terms" and that "the success of your ball or party may depend on our choice of band, so book the "University Jazz Band".

He invited those with queries to "call on me or leave a note in my rooms at any time". No mobile phones in those days!

Touring

Peter Batten reckoned that before 1956 no Cambridge band went on tour. If so, then Dick Heckstall-Smith and Derek Moore and their fellow players broke the mould by undertaking a short end-of-year tour of Swiss jazz venues. This tour is referred to by Dick Heckstall-Smith in his biography "Blowing the Blues":

"1956. Left Cambridge with degree. Led University Jazz Band on tour of Swiss jazz venues. Moved to London to do National Service, portering in hospital." [31.]

Peter Batten said the line-up for this tour was much stronger than the regular band, with Mike Oakley on guitar and John Bancroft on piano. Bancroft had made great strides as a pianist, thanks to listening closely to Sir Charles Thompson; in later life he developed a career as a psychologist and the director, for a time, of the Kinsey Research Institute but remained a close friend of Derek Moore. Sid Barrett an older local man, was on bass and on drums was Bill Hartnoll who Peter Batten had introduced and who subsequently become the drummer in the 1956-57 band. Peter said it was an excellent band and proved very popular. Peter did not know how the tour was arranged but a later letter in the jazz club files suggests a Mr Kuhn was instrumental in bringing it to fruition.

A curious story was reported in a number of British papers about a dance in Lucerne at which "a Cambridge University Jazz Band" played and for which the cost of admission was proportionate to the patron's weight at the rate of around one half-penny per pound. This was calculated with a weighing machine placed at the door. The most expensive tickets were 9s 2d (female) and 10s 7d (male). It is probable that this was the touring Moore/Heckstall-Smith band. [32.]

The following year it was Peter Batten's turn to take the University band across the Channel. The three-week tour of Holland and Germany was all thanks to the hard work of Jonathan (Jonty) Abbott, who later went on to work in PR and for a time was with Jazz FM. He made all the contacts, arranged gigs, sourced accommodation, and did the driving in an old van he had purchased for the band to travel in.

The tour began at the end of June 1957 in Leiden where Pye Ltd was promoting Cambridge Week. The CU Jazz Band stayed there for six nights playing at various events. The week appears to have been widely covered in Dutch press [33.] and Bernard Levin wrote it up for the Spectator. [34.]. Also, at Leiden was David Hartsilver with whom Peter Batten had played a couple of years ago. He was 25 years old, having spent three years in the RAF, and had just graduated with a first in English. According to his home-town newspaper Mr. Hartsilver "has been awarded a travelling scholarship from Cambridge" and he "is a talented clarinetist at both classical and jazz music and recently took part in the Cambridge Week at Leiden, Holland". [35.]

This was followed by other dates in Holland for which Jonty arranged for the band to stay for two weeks in "excellent accommodation in student hostel on the North Sea coast". Peter said:

"I am a little confused about our second week but i know that we played for a Teenagers' Club somewhere in Holland. We did a promotion evening in the Hague for a concert on the Saturday evening in the Circus Hall in Schevenigen, where we topped the bill in the Dixieland section and Stephane Grappelli was the Star of the show, plus a lovely Sunday afternoon at a town called Hoorn, for a summer festival." [36.]

Then the band drove into Germany where Jonty had fixed a series of dates “with a very nice German promoter, who ran the New Orleans Bierbar in Dusseldorf” and who arranged hotels for the band. Starting on the Monday after Leiden, Peter believes they appeared in Essen, Krefeld, Cologne and finally Dusseldorf, “where we played all night for the summer ball of the Academy of Arts and Sciences, opposite the Feetwarmers from Hamburg”. He said, “it was the regular band, me, Joe, Guy. Tony, local lad Mike on bass, Bill, and Mike Oakley on guitar”. However, for one member of the band crossing the border into Germany was less fun, as Peter recounts:

“One of our members almost had a nervous breakdown. He kept saying, ‘The Germans killed my uncle’ ”.

The van that Jonty bought is referred to in correspondence in the University archive. He must have bought the van many months before the tour as it was five months earlier, on 20th January 1957, that he wrote to “Geoff” referring to a letter from “Bill”, treasurer of the Cambridge Jazz Club asking for the original insurance policy for the “wagon”. He claimed to have given Geoff this item “long, long ago” but said he had written to the insurance company.

In closing, Jonty added that he may be up in Cambridge the weekend after next. This, and the fact that the letter was sent on J Walter Thompson headed paper but with a residential address in London NW1, suggests that the author had left Cambridge at least at the end of 1955-56. The recipient of Jonty’s letter was Geoffrey D. Clarke (of St John’s), who became Hon. Secretary of Cambridge Jazz Club for 1957-58.

The matter of the “wagon” dragged on. Jonty had to write again to Geoff in October, obviously disappointed that that he had had no response. He wanted Geoff to confirm what he intended to do with the vehicle as “my people are getting bored with it on their premises”. Jonty was not using it and it was not taxed for the quarter. This must have prompted some action for, exactly one year since the original letter, on 20 January 1958, Jonathan Abbott confirmed that he had formally relinquished ownership of the Ford V8 utility and wished for the insurance policy to be transferred to J S Lawton of Queen’s College.

Before the 1957 CU Jazz Band tour, a letter was received from the Student’s Union at Warsaw University. Dated 31 January 1957, it is a reply on behalf of Mr. Michalczuk to an approach from a Mr. Wilson at Cambridge expressing enthusiasm for student exchanges. This letter is a fine product of the then Communist bureaucracy with official stamp and signed jointly by Wladyslaw Nowak, Chairman of the Students Union and Michal Brember, Manager of the Students Foreign Office.

There is no mention of jazz but, maybe, the original letter from Cambridge did suggest such a cultural exchange. The prospective hosts proposed an exchange of five students in the Spring. At the height of the Cold War, only two months after Soviet Union tanks rolled into Budapest to put an end to the Hungarian uprising, the respondents were keen to reassure Mr. Wilson that “there is a peaceful atmosphere in our country and there are the best conditions of enlarging and international cooperation”.

However, this view was not universal and the idea of a tour of Poland firms up the next year in correspondence between Andre Beeson and the Polish Students Association. It appears that Andre wrote to the Association on 12 March 1958 suggesting an exchange of jazz bands for a two-week period and the association President, Wojciech Blomberg, responded enthusiastically on 2 April 1958. The letter was addressed to Andre as Leader, Cambridge

University Jazz Band c/o Cambridge Jazz Club, King's College.

In fact, they rather jumped the gun with detailed proposals on band size, timing, organisation and financial affairs, to the extent that they had “already started to settle the passport – and foreign currency - matters.”. Within the letter there is a lot of information on their set up (“our Traditional Jazz Group”) and the organisation of jazz in Poland, including reference to the Lodz jazz circle.

A handwritten draft reply from Andre makes it clear that “there has been a misunderstanding as you seem to have attributed to us the idea of an exchange. The organisation of British Universities is such that it would be quite impossible for us to arrange a tour for a foreign band, although a musical agent might find this possible.”.

Citing the success of the Bruce Turner and Dave Burman bands, Andre goes on to reiterate that they had envisaged a tour that makes enough money to pay costs of travel, accommodation etc. and that “we are, basically, interested in a tour of the university towns and holiday resorts of Poland”. Andre asserts that the CU Jazz Band is of an equivalent professional standard to British bands that have gone before and would be “an attractive proposition for the Polish jazz public”.

A follow up draft letter thanks Mr Blomberg for introducing Andre to the President of the Lodz jazz circle with whom he is in correspondence. Also, he returns to the question of the tour and information that the recent tour by Dave Brubeck was arranged by two agents - Pagatu and Estrady. Making it clear that “we feel that the Student's Association may not be in a position to organise the kind of tour we envisaged”. As in the first letter, he stresses the high standard of the Cambridge band and the desire to make the tour financially viable.

There is no further correspondence between the Beeson and Blomberg and whether or not the tour went ahead is unclear from the file. However, we know the idea of touring Poland was still live the following year. A letter from the National Union of Students Travel Department, on 13 May 1958, responding to a letter from Geoffrey Clarke on 3 May, states:

“We shall be glad to assist you in the arrangements and point out that there are greatly reduced rail fares for student parties numbering 10 or more. The second class return fare from London to Warsaw for such a student party is between £17 and £18. Each member of the party would be allowed free baggage allowance of up to 100 lbs so that there should be no great difficulty about the transportation of the instruments.”

It sounds as if Andre Beeson was fairly sympathetic to a tour behind the Iron Curtain, if properly organised, reflecting a left-wing tendency amongst a sizeable portion of the UK student population. However, Peter Batten said that his band had no interest in touring behind the Iron Curtain – “remember Hungary 1958”. Also, my job and training on National Service (as a Russian interpreter in the forces) “made it rather unwise for me to travel into Eastern Europe.”. [37.]

There is an undated draft letter, initialled “A”, most likely from early 1958, to a Mr Kuhn who apparently helped organise a tour by the CUJB of Switzerland “two years ago”. Based on their popularity then and the continuing high standard, “A” wonders whether Mr Kuhn could help again with a tour around August of that year. The detail in the letter is interesting:

“The University Band is still a very flourishing institution, having just gained first 1st place in the Inter-Varsity Jazz Band Contest, for the third time running The band

plays in a trad/mainstream style, not unlike the past Humphrey Lyttleton band, with a line-up of trumpet, alto/clarinet, piano, bass, drums and we also have a female vocalist.”

The draft sends the regards of Bill Hartnoll, drummer in the band.

We have no reply from Mr Kuhn but we do have from I.S. Dansk Grammofonpladeforlag, a letter of 16 May 1958 to Geoff Clarke, in response to his of 26 April asking them to help in a tour of Denmark. In a reply which leaves no doubt of their commercial imperative, Karl Emil Knudsen says that they do very little booking “only when we feel it is an advantage for our record-company or if the artist is so well known, that we can count on making money for ourselves”. He regrets that “we have no more time to arrange a tour of the proposed type” but provides the name of a contact.

It appears that at least one continental tour happened in 1958. A letter from Reading University on 14th January 1959 suggests “that one of the Cambridge University Jazz Bands, led by Keith Elkington, toured the continent last year” and, as the Reading University band had similar plans to tour this summer, requesting “any helpful information you acquired, or any suggestions you may have in the light of your experience”. The author did get the bandleader’s name wrong, though; it was Christopher Elkington who, according to his Guardian obituary, “distinguished himself as a drummer with the Cambridge Jazz Quartet and played around the London scene” [38.]

Musicianship

I asked Peter Batten how active the scene was the mid-1950s and what styles of jazz were being played. I was interested how university bands sounded in the flesh, especially as there are a lot of references in the literature to an appreciation of bebop and more modern ways of playing, what professional bands or styles they took their cue from, whether or not there was much variation in style and how it developed as the decade went on?

Peter Batten tried to tackle this although he felt it was “difficult to answer your question about styles”. Also:

“One thing that has irritated me over the years is how little some of the musicians I have met in bands knew about jazz. They had been attracted by one or two records and did not explore much beyond them. Worst of all were those incestuous British Trad musicians who had heard Chris Barber or Ken Colyer and never bothered to listen to much American jazz.”

He continued:

“Looking back, I can only remember having contact with a very limited group of would-be jazz musicians. In the summer term of 1955, I was invited to play in a band led by Dave Hartsilver, who was reading English. He was great fan of Johnny Dodds and a quite proficient but rather stiff clarinet player. We appeared a few times at a pub near the Arts Cinema. He chose to try to imitate the style of Dodd’s Chicago washboard bands”. [39.]

Derek Moore joined the front line of this band playing his battered alto sax and the rhythm section comprised just piano and washboard. The repertoire was tunes that they knew – Peter remembers one or two King Oliver numbers like *Dippermouth [Blues]*, *Just Gone*, *Riverside Blues* and, probably, *Shine*, which he played a lot about that time.

Peter Batten said that Pete Roberts-Arnold “was caught betwixt and between, style wise”. He was an admirer of Humphrey Lyttleton and his bands of the early 50s, but “Humph was already moving on”. He soon became friendly with the Scottish musicians Sandy Brown and Al Fairweather when they arrived in London, but they were also moving on. When he went down, Roberts-Arnold soon got a job with Cy Laurie’s band playing the Hot Five, Hot Seven repertoire, which was about where he was at style-wise. Unfortunately, his embouchure problems (a problem he shared with Batten) became a limitation, and he gave up.

The new term (autumn 1955) saw the number of musicians begin to increase and so did the quality. Peter highlights Andre Beeson, “a fine clarinet player who had played in West London with Steve Laine’s Southern Stompers”. But he thought more significant for the future was the arrival of Colin Purbrook, “already a pianist of professional standard, who seemed to be able to play any instrument and certainly raised the quality of university jazz immediately”.

Then there was Tony Tanner, a Brubeck fan and himself a very capable pianist, later to become a fellow of Kings and a Professor of American literature. His academic ambitions limited his time for jazz, but “he certainly raised the quality of debate about what music we should be playing”.

Peter Batten says that in the 1955-56 academic year the Cambridge jazz scene took a big step forward when Derek Moore and Dick Heckstall-Smith decided to form a band in the style of the Mezzrow-Bechet quintet, or the Bechet-Albert Nicholas recordings. Derek’s Dodds based style was now fully matured by time spent listening to Chicago style players like Pee Wee Russell and Rod Cless. Dick was now a very powerful player with a full command of the Bechet style.

So, it was a soprano and clarinet line up that predominated, although Peter says they did sometimes play two clarinet numbers. They had found a much more versatile pianist in Geoff Jackson. The bass was still a weakness although the player did improve during the year. Trevor Tyson was on drums from 1953-6. He was a very competent dance band drummer in the style of those days but had only a limited feeling for jazz. Mike Oakley often joined them and his guitar playing improved rapidly. In the 1956 Inter-University Jazz competition they were by far the best band, says Batten.

Things continued to improve. From the first term of 1956/57, “although I did not get to know many of them, there were certainly more players of quality around”. For instance, when Andre Beeson was unwilling to join Peter Batten’s university band, he was able to turn to Joe Boerema, a medical student from Holland who had come up in 1955.

Peter said “I would be reluctant to choose between Andre, Derek [Moore] and Joe, they were fine players of a professional standard with quite different styles: Andre with a definite Goodman technique, Derek with his original Dodds style, now influenced by Chicagoans like Pee Wee Russell and Rod Cless, while Joe was rooted in Ed Hall”.

When he came to decide on a style for the university band, Peter said he had to take account of the players available:

“I chose to go for an Eddie Condon Chicago style Dixieland band, somewhat modified by the blues-based style of Art Hodes’ band recordings. Joe was a perfect fit. Trombone was more difficult. We began with Robin Hastie, a fine musician but a beginner on the trombone, and soon switched to Guy Playfair, a very accomplished player who had just come up. Tony Coates on piano was an asset because he liked the music we were playing

but was able to offer a much wider repertoire. Although not in the class of Colin Purbrook, he benefitted from some tips from Colin. We found a wonderful drummer in Bill Hartnoll, who enjoyed the music we played but had such perfect time that he could easily have become a professional in the modern jazz of those days”.

However, Peter Batten “was not happy with the one or two bass players in the university, so I took on a local photographer, Mike Payne, who was starting out on bass and soon became a fine player.” He also got lots of help from Colin Purbrook. There was also another local man Sid Barrett, who had a long association with university jazz. He was a banjo player, but also a very useful bass player (“banjos are not allowed in my bands”) and he often sat in or depped with the band. Mike Oakley, a friend of Derek and Peter, sometimes joined on guitar.

The repertoire of Peter Batten’s 1956/57 band was quite extensive, starting with Dixieland favourites like *At The Jazz Band Ball*, *Jazz Me Blues*, *That DaDa Strain*, Condon standards like *Indiana*, *Nobody’s Sweetheart*, *China Boy*, *There’ll Be Some Changes*, *Big Butter and Egg Man*, *Sugar*, *Someday Sweetheart*, *Mandy* and Fats Waller tunes like *Black and Blue*, *Squeeze Me*, *Ain’t Misbehavin’*, etc.

When they were on tour Joe’s feature was *Bluesology*, Peter’s was *All of Me*, while Guy chose *We’ll be Together Again*. The aim was to sound like the contemporary Eddie Condon Band but with a blues influence coming from the admiration Derek and I shared for the recordings of Art Hodes.

Weekly meetings and Jazz Band Balls

Dancing

At this time, jazz coexisted with the emerging rock-and-roll phenomenon and was still attractive to the student population. Apart from the inherent draw of foot tapping music, it provided a medium for dancing. This continued to be the case into the early 1960s until it was largely overwhelmed by the British pop explosion spearheaded by the Beatles and others. In the mid-1950s Jazz Band Balls were popular events put on by student societies such as the Cambridge Jazz Club, which at this time was holding two or three balls a year, and by other promoters such as the Rex Ballroom.

I asked Peter Batten whether playing for dances influenced the style of music played. He did not think it had much effect at all. He continued:

“British Traditional Jazz clubs from 1945 to the end of the 1950s seem to have fostered a strange prancing, rather clumsy, style of dancing which almost anyone could adopt. A few ballet dancers occasionally stood out with a much more relaxed, elegant style - Ken Colyer’s wife was one - but they were very few. In the “Modern” clubs there was less dancing, but the style was very slick and only those who could perform with some style took to the floor. Also, the Trad clubs were very much boy-meets-girl places, so whatever music the band played the dancers would get on with their own form of dancing.”

Also, he thought that it took time for the arrival of rock music to sink in as the adherents of jazz “were so arrogantly convinced that jazz, whether trad or modern, was the supreme music”. But the change came rapidly in the early ‘60s. Peter illustrated this with a personal recollection:

“Sometime early in 1961, when I was living in Peterborough, I went with the local trad band on a gig at a village in the Fens. As we left the stand for the interval the DJ began to

play a record by one of the Liverpool bands. “What on earth is that?” I asked. When I was told I said, “That will never catch on”. But within a year Trad was out and they were in. So, the change when it came was very quick and left the out and out Trad bands in shock and out of a job.”

Moving to The Rex

We saw earlier how the Cambridge Jazz Club moved from holding its weekly meetings at the Brunswick School to the Rex Ballroom in 1956. Peter Batten said he remembered enjoying the atmosphere in the ballroom. He was a bit vague about the numbers at meetings and balls, but he thought that in his year weekly attendance would have been about 200, with more at balls. But he emphasised that there would be quite a few people who were just there to listen. Given the gender imbalance at the University this would not be surprising.

For the academic year 1957-58 we have records that illustrate in some detail the running of CJC meetings and dances. On 5th September 1957 Geoffrey Clarke wrote to R. Lewis, Manager of the Rex Ballroom, about the possibility of hiring the venue for Thursday nights in the coming term. The Rex was a long-established entertainment venue owned by local haulage contractor George Webb (not to be confused with his namesake of George Webb's Dixielanders fame, who was also a promoter). On its letterhead it claimed to be “Britain's largest specialist hall”.

Mr Lewis replied two days later offering to hire the ballroom at “terms the same as before” i.e. £12-10-0 per evening with the proviso that he had already booked Cy Laurie and his Band for the Rex's own Jazz Band Ball on Thursday 31st October. He also enquired whether the club needed the 3rd October (corrected to 10th October in a letter two days later) and asked for confirmation that the club would be booking a band for its own Jazz Band Ball which he presumed would be on Thursday 5th December 8p.m. – 2p.m.. He was concerned that Geoff would “be applying for Proctorial Permission for the term.”

There was further correspondence on 9th September about an error in dates, then on 26 October Mr Lewis confirmed the engagement of the six-piece band for their Jazz Band Ball on 31st October at a rate of 30 shillings each. This suggests that the jazz club was providing a band for this function, most likely the CU Jazz Band.

On 6th December Geoff wrote requesting hire of the hall for the Lent term, including for its Jazz Band Ball on 13th March, and queried when the Rex intended to hold its mid-term Jazz Band Ball. Lewis replied on the 12th granting the hire on the same terms and confirmed that the Mick Mulligan band had been booked for their Jazz Band Ball on Thursday 30th January 1957.

Organisation of the club's Jazz Band Ball required negotiation with the Lyn Dutton Agency who, in a letter on 30th October, confirmed that Sandy Brown was available for 5th December and happy to play. The cost would be £60 for three hours. Mr Clark obviously replied accepting the terms as on 4th November the Lyn Dutton Agency sent a contract confirming them. This booking set off a chain of correspondence with the Rex over the organisation of the event.

On 7th November 1957 Geoffrey Clarke put forward a set of proposals to the Rex:

- the club pay the main band as it had signed the contract, which in the past normally had been undertaken by the Rex;
- they hire the hall for the sum of \$15;

- nett receipts (i.e. ticket sales, minus CJC liabilities of around £120) be split equally between the club and the Rex, an estimated £75 including the hire fee;
- the number of complimentary tickets be restricted (there had too many in the past).

This was a variation in the cash payments previously made to the Rex for such balls. Mr Lewis replied on 11th November that he had put the matter to George Webb and he was “emphatic they shall not be changed from the arrangements made with the Jazz Club last year.”. A meeting with Mr Webb was proposed.

The meeting took place between Messrs Webb and Lewis and the Club President and Treasurer and terms were hammered out as reflected in a letter of 17th November from Geoffrey Clarke asking for confirmation of their correctness:

- the Jazz Club agreed to pay the Rex Ballroom the sum of £100 if 600 tickets were sold, and £80 if 500 tickets were sold;
- the Rex Ballroom pay for the cost of publicity and the printing of the tickets.

The next Jazz Band Ball was planned for 5th June 1958 and, again, it was to the Lyn Dutton Agency that the club turned, this time for Humphrey Lyttleton. The initial response, on 30th January 1958, was unpromising; Humph could not accept as it “fell in the middle of a very heavy period” and he didn’t think he could add any further engagements. Not to be deterred Geoffrey Clarke wrote back on 3rd January. It was persuasive; according to Lyn Dutton (5th February), Clarke’s “powerful pleading therein had the desired effect”. Lyn warned, however, that he would have to raise Humph's fee yet again because “apart from any general economic reason” he had since last year increased the size of the band to an eight piece. If the club could manage £120 it would still be below his “out of town quotation” of £150.

Clarke confirmed the booking of Humphrey Lyttleton on 19th February 1958 and the agency confirmed in their reply on the 27th of February that the contract had been sent to Mr. Webb at the Rex Ballroom.

Back at the Rex

The club continued hold regular meetings and balls at the Rex Ballroom during 1958/59. Brian Bates wrote to Mr. Lewis at the Rex on 4th Nov 1958 “proposing to carry on meeting every Tuesday evening and are prepared to pay the usual £1:10:00 per night with the same arrangements about Jazz Band Balls.”. The wording used suggests the club was already using the Rex in term one and were asking, formally, to continue the arrangement. There would be eight meetings in all, starting on Tuesday 13th January, plus the end of term Jazz Band Ball on Tuesday 10th March.

Clearly Brian felt this was a mutually beneficial arrangement, finishing the letter by hoping “that we shall both enjoy good business in the New Year”. The letter is endorsed by the signature of R. Lewis, Rex Ballroom 4th December, suggesting his agreement to the arrangements.

Apart from the weekly meetings, a Jazz Band Ball again was featured each term. The balls featuring Sandy Brown and Humphrey Lyttleton last year must have been a great success as they were repeated in 1958-59.

The Al Fairweather/Sandy Brown All Stars were available for 2nd December as confirmed in a letter dated 20th October, from Colin Hogg of the Lynn Dutton Agency. Brian Bates confirmed the acceptability of £65 for a maximum playing time of three hours, stressing that “the contract should be sent to Mr. G. Webb, Rex Ballroom, Cambridge.”. The contract between Al Fairweather and Brian Bates finalised on 24th October 1958 had four additional requirements:

- Management to be responsible for provision of microphones, amplification equipment and piano.
- Al Fairweather/Sandy Brown All Stars to play for a maximum of three hours undertaken in a minimum of two separate sessions.
- Al Fairweather to appear in person with his band.
- Cash settlement for this engagement to be made on the night of the performance.

As for the post exam ball, in his letter to the Dutton Agency on 27 January 1959, Brian Bates reckoned “it is becoming more or less an institution that we should have Humphrey Lyttleton for the last Jazz Band Ball of the scholastic year”. However, there appears to have been some drop off interest in the jazz club since the previous year as “we are not having the exceptional business we had that year”. This was a prompt for him to ask for the fee to be pegged at the same as last year - £120, being “just about the amount we can afford to pay this year”.

Lyn Dutton confirmed on 30th January that Humph would accept the suggested fee but wanted the total playing time reduced to two and a half hours, divided into two sessions, terms that Brian Bates accepted in his reply of 6th February, suggesting the two sessions be 9.30pm to 10.45pm, and 12.45am to 2.00am. These times were accepted in the contract, dated 10th February 1959, which imposed similar requirements about equipment and cash settlement as with the Al Fairweather contract. The ball was to be held on 9th June.

The Liquor Licensing Muddle

However, the organisation of Jazz Band Balls was not without hassles. On 28th Jan 1958, J.H. Allsopp, an Officer of Her Majesty’s Customs and Excise at the Cambridge office, wrote to Geoffrey Clark querying the club’s liquor purchase return for the year ended 31st December 1957 (Form LL8).

Clearly Mr. Allsopp’s suspicions had been raised by the fact that he had been “informed by a previous official of your club that intoxicating liquor was purchased for the use of club members and of visiting bands on the occasion of Jazz Balls organised by this club”. He was aware that “that several such functions are held each year, and the club’s return on Form LL 8 for the year ended 31st December 1956 showed several purchases on different dates amounting to \$10-18-0”.

He went on to assert that he believed “that there have been a number of similar functions during the year ended 31st December, 1957” and asked the Honorary Secretary to “be good enough to confirm that no liquor was in fact purchased by the club other than this single item shown on the form LL 8 enclosed” and to date the form. There is no record of a reply from Geoffrey. He may have settled the issue for the year ending 1957 but it surfaced again a year later.

Brian Bates wrote on 28th January 1959 about the “long-standing misconception that we sell intoxicating liquor at our club”. He explained that the only time there was a licensed bar was at the Jazz Band Balls which occur once a term and then arrangements are made between Mr. George Webb and the caterers.

Brian insisted that no member of the Cambridge Jazz Club had anything to do with either the purchase or sale of liquor and offered to provide any information that would “clear up this muddle once and for all”.

This offer elicited a lengthy reply two days later from Mr. Allsopp. He explained that any club where intoxicating liquor is supplied to the members requires to be registered under

Section 143 of the Licensing Act 1953. The CJC had been registered by the Club Secretary on the 15th January 1953 with the Clerk to the Justices at The Guildhall, Cambridge. Once registered the club remains on the register until struck off by an order of the Court.

The letter confirmed that the Clerk to the Justices had advised that no notification had been received since 1953. So, the club remained registered which made the Secretary legally responsible to provide an annual return, even when no alcohol had been purchased. Failure to comply meant a fine of £20.

Mr Allsopp said that the Club could “clear up the muddle once and for all” by making a written application to Cambridge Justices for the Club to be removed from the register on the grounds that intoxicating liquor is no longer purchased for supply to members. He advised this to be from 31st December 1958 to avoid further paperwork. A handwritten draft of just such a letter to the Clerk to the Justices exists in the file and we can only assume that deregistration happened, and the muddle was cleared up.

More Balls

We do not know what Jazz Band Balls were organised in the academic year 1959/60, nor where they were held. But we know at least one was being held, from a letter dated 6th May 1960 from Edwina Cracknell, on behalf of the newly formed Bedford Jazz Club. Miss Cracknell wrote [to the “Cambridge University Jazz Club” Secretary] proposing to run coach party to the Jazz Ball in June and enquiring whether there would be a party discount on tickets. She said her club “appears to be very popular and as a Cambridge person myself I thought this would be a good outing for regular Club attenders”.

Written on the reverse of the letter is a note of Graham Gent’s response:

“Tickets offered at 8/6. Promise of similar reduction (i.e. 1/6) on subsequent Jazz Club Balls.”

Inter-University Jazz Band Competition

The competition

It was not just at dances and other gigs that Cambridge musicians’ skills were displayed but also at the annual inter university competition held to present student jazz talent and find the best bands within the student fraternity in Britain. The first contest was in 1955, run for the first three years by the National Federation of University Rhythm Clubs and from 1958 by the Inter-University Jazz Federation (IUJF).

The contest was coordinated each year by a committee drawn from a range of universities. Normally a specific university jazz club or rhythm club administered the contest in a single year and heats were held on a regional basis. Semi-finals and finals were held in the second term of the academic year, between January and April.

Competing in the inter-varsity contest became central to the Cambridge jazz club’s activities as the CU Jazz Band dominated, coming first in most years between 1955 and 1962. There are no Cambridge records covering the first three years of the competition, but we do have Dick Heckstall-Smith’s biographical note about the first competition:

“1955. Won silver cup (!) for playing solo in front of judge Sandy Brown at Inter-University Jazz Contest; performance” later issued on LP.” [40.]

The 1956 Final

For 1956 we have a report on the final by Les Page from Jazz Music magazine [41.]

Held at Leeds and attracting a student audience of 600, the final competition was judged by a panel of five, including jazz personalities George Webb. Sandy Brown and Lyn Dutton, evaluating “on a score of musical ability, impression and presentation”. And Les Page noted “every band had at least one bearded player”!

He continued:

“In an age when the newer universities of Great Britain and Northern Ireland are constantly rivalling the ancient Oxford and Cambridge in all fields, traditionalists in general will be pleased to hear that Cambridge won, followed by Oxford in second place and Leeds were third.”

Page was disappointed that his own universities - London and Birmingham - failed to get a place, and “since they were third last year, the Birmingham University Jazz Band (led by Allan Dandy) had high hopes for a win but were unlucky.” He was consoled by the fact that Birmingham won an award for the best instrumentalist - M. Smith in the trumpet class.

Apparently the B.B.C. devoted only “some few minutes” with only “snatches of one record played” to the event. Page said, however, that “it is sufficient to record (for me, Bechet fan) that Cambridge had a soprano-sax superbly played. They deserve much credit on that score alone!”

He believed Oriole “will probably issue a LP record of the contest” which it appears that they did as a copy of a recording from this year has now found its way to Dick Heckstall-Smith’s alma mater Sidney Sussex College:

“The publication of Richard Humphreys' history [of the college] prompted John Sennett (matric. 1953) to donate a rare recording of the 1956 Inter-University Jazz Competition, which was won by Cambridge, with Dick Heckstall-Smith (matric. 1953) on tenor saxophone.” [42.]

Whether Heckstall-Smith played tenor saxophone, rather than soprano as indicated by Les Page, would need to be verified.

The 1957 Final

Les Page was again reporting on the 1957 final:

“The Birmingham University Students Union was the enthusiastic scene of the Third Annual Inter-University Jazz contest on 20th February last. Organised by the National Federation of University Rhythm Clubs, this was the event of the month and six bands fought for the honour of becoming No. 1 University Jazz Band of Britain.” [43.]

American ex-patriot Bruce King was also reporting the contest for “*The Record Changer*” magazine, a copy of which has been kindly provided by Peter Batten. King reckoned the competition “will soon threaten the Oxford-Cambridge boat race for popularity.”. [44.]

Northern and southern semi-finals had been held at Liverpool and at Oxford, to whittle down the thirty bands that were entered. Only three bands from each preliminary moved through:

- South: Oxford University Jazz Band, Loughborough College Jazz Band and Cambridge University No.1 Jazz Band.
- North: the Ron Raybould Group from Leeds University, Manchester College of Technology Jazz Band, Liverpool University Jazz Band.

Also playing, as the semi-final runners-up, were the Mermaid Jazz Band of the 'host' university, Birmingham, and The Russell Squares from London University.

As stated earlier, when the Cambridge band played for the jazz contest in 1957, Mike Payne was not eligible and his place was taken by Colin Purbrook, who “easily impressed the judges as the best bass player by miles”, according to Peter Batten. The tunes they played were, in the semi-final, *I've Got a Feeling I'm Falling*, a blues featuring Colin Purbrook which was heavily influenced by Hodes' *Liberty Inn Drag*, and the Bix tune *Sorry*.

According to Les Page, the event organisation was very good, coordinated by the Rhythm Club Committee of Derek Horton, Alan Dandy, Geoff Robson, Ian Martin, Ian Bradley, Les Grove and Brian Sealey. The National Committee had Alan Dandy as President plus John Higham, Dennis Smithson, Phil Wade and Derek Moore. He was pleased “that both the older Oxbridge' and newer 'Redbrick' varsities took part with equal enthusiasm.”.

The Birmingham Mermaid Jazz Band featured “*Black Friday*”, composed by trumpeter Murray Smith. According to Page, he and Alan Dandy were among the outstanding individuals of the evening.

The competing bands were allocated twenty minutes each to play three numbers. In between sessions various pick-up groups entertained “the large and vocal audience”. As well as the Mermaid Band, there was Alan Dandy with a modernistic trio. Les Page made special mention of a Skiffle Group largely made up of Loughborough players - Lewis Garrett (banjo), Mich Bell (bass). Mac Maclean (drums) and Barry Lane (guitar) and he reckoned never had four men seemed less worried than when they were singing Guthrie's “*Worried Man Blues*”.

Cambridge, who played last, were according to Page “worthy winners; it appears that they got considerable support and help from the music faculty types in the ‘Fen City’” Peter Batten took issue with this suggestion. It was a little exaggerated, but

“several of us did benefit from advice from Colin Purbrook, especially Joe and myself, and our local bass player Mike Payne. I also had one or two tips about harmony from Gerry Brindley an Organ Scholar at Selwyn [who] specialised in early music, playing the virginals with Thurston Dart. He was also a very capable jazz pianist and I played with him once or twice.” [45.]

In the Les Page article the full Cambridge personnel is listed, and this has been checked with Peter Batten and updated to provide correct spellings and given names:

Peter Batten, trumpet and leader
 Guy Playfair, trombone
 Joe Boerema, clarinet
 Tony Coates, piano
 Colin Purbrook, bass
 William (“Bill”) Hartnoll, drums

Les Page singled out Joe Boerema, the Dutch medical-student who arrived in Cambridge a couple of years before, and who “could really blow a jazz-reed, although he modestly said that he thought Andre Beeson was better (Andre has played with the Southern Stompers when on vacation).”. Peter Batten did not necessarily agree with Joe’s self-assessment, as we have seen in his comments on the competing clarinet players available to the 1956/57 University band.

Commenting on Cambridge’s win Bruce King was more sanguine saying they were more competent than other bands and were “well organized, sound in each department, swung reasonably well, and stand up equally well in ensembles and solos.”. The four musicians judged the best individuals of the night were all from the Cambridge band. Bruce King said Pete Batten (tpt), whose style was similar to Wild Bill Davison, was outstanding and he could be soon good enough to turn professional. However, he felt that he and the band lacked imagination compared with some American college players, so that the numbers they played – *Rosetta*, *Yellow Dog Blues*, *Easy Rider* – “generally sounded like a dull night at Condon’s.”.

Overall, King felt the Leeds group, which came second, was the best, but it was poorly organized and suffered from too many contrasting styles. However, he thought their pianist Shemph Wood was the best musician in the contest, displaying some “ironic and biting witty” solos. The Loughborough band, in third place, apparently played some good New Orleans style ensemble on *Wild Man Blues* and *Willie The Weeper* but suffered from an “impossibly bad rhythm section”. [46.]

Peter reckoned that Loughborough had the best trumpeter on the night - Ray Crane - who soon became “a brilliant player”. Peter knew him quite well in the 1970s and 1980s, when they both worked for the London Borough of Sutton and lived quite close to each other. In fact, they played together two or three times in a nine-piece band. Sadly, Ray died from leukaemia about 15 years ago.

Les Page said the jam-session in the band room led by Boerema, with Liverpool's Higham and an unidentified guitarist on a borrowed instrument, was enjoyable. A jam-session also caught the attention of Bruce King, but it was a vehicle for modern jazz which he felt provided the best jazz of the night. The contest rules at this time made no provision for modernists so the musicians that participated were same ones that played in the traditional or mainstream bands.

Again, Shemph Wood stood out for his “unsettled” style, “a cross between Brubeck and Silver - but seems to have funky roots”. Also, Terry Wilson, the Oxford drummer, was better playing modern jazz than Dixieland. In general, however, King reckoned that none of the musicians, except Wood, “seem to have learned to think in terms of the divided beat, and therefore have more tools in swing than in bop.”.

The judging panel included Paddy McKiernan, Lyn Dutton, Dill Jones and Bix Curtis. According to Bruce they all enjoyed the evening, and all the musicians would benefit from the panel’s advice and criticism given by the panel at the end, in particular Lyn Dutton's remarks on rhythm sections.

From tape-recordings made during the concert, 25 minutes of music was broadcast in B.B.C. Midland Region on March 13th, confirmed by the BBC genome project [47.], and an L.P. record of the contest was planned.

Les Page’s general impressions include those of “a crowded bar, a comfortable hostelry nearby called the 'Gunbarrels', the enthusiasm with which a Jazz audience still prefer straight numbers like the 'Eagles Which Fly High in Mobile' when they are in the bar, bags of hard

work and excellent results on the part of the organisers, and terrific enthusiasm". He reckoned that "over 800 fans were in the audience, and up to two coachloads of supporters accompanied each of the competing bands - whence the college cries which from time to time rent the jazz-laden air".

Peter Batten's memory of this 1957 contest (when he was leader of the winning band) was of one of the organisers, Alan Dandy from Birmingham, being a very accomplished pianist:

"Both Derek Moore and I had contact with him later and played with him in bands several times in the 70s and 80s, when he was still playing in an excellent Modern/Mainstream style. More recently he played and recorded with a much older style band led by one of my friends, the New Orleans style trombonist, Geoff Cole.". [48.]

Page said that both the programmes and the bands were varied and that unusual numbers were attempted. He singled out the London band's 'A Smooth One' without noticeable clarinet predominance and carrying both guitar and banjo in the rhythm section. Manchester made a fine job of "*Bourbon Street*"; many of the audience wondered why this band did not reach at least third place in the final placings.

The Bruce King article was written from the perspective of an American ex-pat and his overall assessment was that British jazz was derivative of the American music:

"British musicians can play written out bop ensembles fairly well but once left on their own they tend to fall back upon swing period phrasing for their solos. The only exception I can think of are Joe Harriot (sax) and Dizzy Reece (tpt). It will probably be some time before professional British jazz, let alone university bands, reach American standards.". [49.]

Peter Batten told me that, as one who spent a lot of time in the 1950s in London's modern jazz clubs, that he felt that King was being a little unfair:

"I do agree with him that Joe Harriott and Dizzy Reece were probably the best players around. Also, the great Canadian bass player Major Holley was in town for about 3 years and gave a great boost to the quality of the jazz being played."

Whilst Bruce King's assessment about British modern jazz player's technical ability might have been a little unfair, given the likes of Ronnie Scott, Tubby Hayes and Don Rendell, it was a period when British jazz was somewhat derivative and had not yet developed a distinctive style. This is a point made by Dave Gelly in the slim but enlightening book "*An Unholy Row*". [50.]

Bruce King also refers to the Wild Bill Davidson influence in Peter's trumpet style. Peter said that from 1955 onwards he had spent a lot of time trying to learn from records by Buck Clayton, Ruby Braff and Roy Eldridge. His Cambridge Band chose to play in the Eddie Condon Chicago style, so he did try to learn from Wild Bill. Later in life he met Davidson and played a duet with him only a few months before he died.

The IUJF competition was not the only competition which Cambridge won that year. In the same month, the Daily Mirror reported, in excruciating mock "jive" language, Cambridge's triumph in the All England Universities Jazz Band Contest. Dick Whittington and his Katz, with thirty other jazz musicians, were down in the Union Cellars "to jive it up". The photos showed fans packing the streets and dancing wildly in the cellar. The report's conclusion was "Yes, it's fun at the end of a tough day of studies to say: See you later, Alma Mater"! [51.]

1957/58

For academic year 1957/58 there is not much information in the University Library records except for two brief letters from the contest organisers.

On 27 Jan 1958, the Hon. Secretary of the University of Bristol Rhythm Club, A.J. Dawkins, wrote enclosing one poster and 50 tickets for the Jazz Band Semi-final at Bristol and requested the money and any unsold tickets by Friday 14th February, at the latest. In a PS he stressed that band members receive tickets free of charge.

Just three weeks later, on 19th February, with the semi-finals decided, T. C. Conan from the University of Nottingham Rhythm Society wrote asking for an estimate of attendees at the Finals being held at that institution on the 26th. He enclosed 50 tickets and stressed that the concert begins at 6.30 p.m. It is interesting that Mr. Conan addresses his letter to "Secretary, Cambridge University Modern Club" which might have been indicative of the direction the club was heading!

Articles about other universities do give us a little more information about the competition. The Northern semi-final was won by Liverpool with Manchester College of Technology and Manchester University also going through. The Liverpool University Jazz Band had reached the finals for the second year running. In 1957 leader John Higham (tpt) won a cup for his trumpet playing and Hugh Potter (bass) was voted best musician. After years as a traditional band, they had moved firmly into mainstream "to try and oust traditional jazz from its dominance in the English universities.". They had bought saxes into the front line to aim at "a Basie octet sound". [52.]

The Southern semi-final saw Oxford top the bands with Cambridge second and Reading third. In this contest, at Bristol, the Reading University band "The Brass Monkeys", were placed third and made the trip with a coachload of supporters to Nottingham despite "the snow and bad road conditions.". The Reading band was a five-piece consisting of Don Richards (tpt). Paul Gerrard (trb). John Pattman (clt). Mick Hohdavi (banjo). Colin Whitmore (dms), and Pete Wulken (bs). [53.]

From press reports it appears that the judges in the final placed Liverpool and Cambridge as joint winners with Oxford third and Reading fourth.

1958/59: From strength to strength

For 1958/59 there is considerable material on the IUJF competition in the Cambridge archive. This was the fifth year of the jazz band competition and it was organised by a Committee of students which met on 15th November 1958 at Birmingham University. The President was J.B. Lumsden of Oxford and the other officers were both from Birmingham (A.E. Schofield, Treasurer and G.G. Taylor, Secretary). The Cambridge representative on the committee was Andre Beeson.

Plans

The Federation's 1958/1959 News Bulletin No.2, produced by Gerry Taylor and the Local Organiser for Southern semi-finals, Barry Saunders (The Queen's College Oxford), laid out the plans for the event, with two regional semi-finals for the Traditional-Mainstream contest: Southern semi-final Oxford, 4th February.
Northern semi-final Leeds, 11th February. (date provisional)

The Finals of the contest would be held in Birmingham on 4th March.

Also, the Committee decided it would hold a Modern jazz contest which would be judged at finals only “unless the number of entries greatly exceeds expectation, in which case the committee may decide to hold semi-finals.”

It was decided to ask three judges to adjudicate at each of the semi-finals - Ken Rattenbury, Derek Moore and Rex Harris for the Northern semi-final and Ken Sykora, Steve Race and George Webb for the Southern equivalent. It was proposed to have five judges at the finals of the Trad/ Mainstream contest. For the Modern contest, the Committee agreed the judges would be Johnny Dankworth, Alun Morgan, and Harry Klein.

One Pound A Band

There were detailed instructions for bands being entered in the competition, with the fee of £1 per band (which included membership of the Federation) required with the application form, no later than 1st January 1959.

A receipt in the file from IUJF Treasurer Alec Schofield, was sent on 18th January 1959 and refers to Cambridge's cheque for £2 (presumably for two bands, or one band in two contests) but it also makes reference in a PS to “Cheque for Cup will follow soon”, possibly an award won for outstanding playing by a Cambridge band member.

Three days later, on the 21st, John Lumsden sent 40 tickets for the Southern semi-final on the 4th February 1959 at Oxford Town Hall, exhorting the club to “bring as many supporters as possible” as the “I-U.J.F. financially depends on making profits on the contests to pay for expenses incurred by judges and finalist competitors. If you can sell more tickets, please let us know and they will be rushed to you.”.

He emphasised that no access to the Town Hall would be allowed to non-ticket holders, so clubs should ensure that their band members had complimentary tickets. Also, that cash and unsold tickets, needed for sale "on the night", must be returned to Kenneth G. Mallet, Treasurer, Oxford University Jazz Club, on or before 2nd February 1959. Tickets not returned before this date will be presumed sold.

On the back of this letter there is a fascinating handwritten summary of ticket distribution headed “Trip to Oxford” and noting that the fare was “10/- including bus fare + admission to contest”. Most of it appears to be in Brian Bates's hand and included some well-known names e.g., Art Themen, Dave Gelly, Patrick Gowers and George Walden. Eight free tickets were distributed to band members and 14 were sold at 3/6 with 18 out of 40 tickets returned to the organiser.

Contest rules

The organisational rules set down by the Committee were detailed and specific, in summary:

- Only full-time students could play in the competitions, including “full-time research postgraduates, but not individuals holding full-time salaried and tutorial positions.”
- Clubs would be allowed to enter a maximum of two bands in the Trad/Mainstream competition and any number in the Modern competition; they were asked to state a preference (i.e., the more competent band).
- The Committee reserved the right to exclude second and subsequent entries if there were too many competing bands.

- Personnel of bands could be changed up to three weeks before the performance but after that they would not appear in the programme; otherwise, they could be changed one hour before the beginning of the contest.
- The bands gaining first, second and third places in each semi-final would play in the final, along with one recommended band from each semi-final but which will not compete.
- In both the heats and finals each band was allocated up to 20 minutes and they had to play three numbers, "to include one fast and one slow tune", with "the selection of titles to be the entrants' responsibility."
- In both heats and finals, points were awarded for arrangement, technique, jazz feeling, ensemble work, intonation, and "swing".
- The judges' decision would be final.

Clubs competing in the Finals of the competition would have their expenses met in full. But the Committee stated that "consideration will be given to applications by clubs competing in the Semi-finals if expenses incurred put the club into debt or otherwise imperil its financial position."

In his letter of 21st January about the Southern Semi-Finals, John Lumsden reminded bands of the maximum playing time with "no overrunning allowed - sorry, but there are a lot of contestants.". He also reiterated the rule about three numbers (see above) and asked bands to let the compere know the names of the tunes being played, and any changes or additional details of personnel, etc.

To "ensure continuity", each band had to assemble beneath the stage during the playing time of the previous group. A steward from O.U.J.C would accompany them, find warming-up rooms and the like. In a change to earlier notification he said the judges should be three of Paddy McKiernan, George Webb, Ken Sykora and Jim Godbolt.

Finally, John Rumsden warned that no food was available on the premises, but there were many small restaurants and public houses within 300 yards of the Town Hall and he hoped "some of these will advertise in our programme."

Issues

One issue of concern raised by the Committee was that "at last year's Nottingham finals some 36,000 feet of tape was used" recording bands (!), and the tapes were on loan from Nottingham University Technical Committee at considerable cost to the IUJF. They were loaned to Clubs for disc cutting etc. The Committee complained that "due to the inefficiency of some club secretaries we are unable to trace them" and urged local secretaries to try to track them down.

General News

A piece of general news included in the second bulletin was that Birmingham University Rhythm Club had recently brought about an affiliation with the City of Birmingham Training College Jazz Club, a source of celebration, as "the students at this college are all female we anticipate greater support for our fortnightly Rhythm Club Socials".!

The Secretary requested more general news on club activities for printing in the next bulletin, in mid-January as well as a comprehensive list of correct addresses.

And so, to Oxford

A copy of the Southern semi-finals programme (professionally printed and with advertising) survives in the Cambridge archive. It was introduced by a President's Letter from John Lumsden with a "Welcome to the fourth of our annual competitions and to Oxford for the Southern semi-final" and goes on with a clarion call to proselytise the case for jazz which is worth quoting:

"We are now established as the particular group to encourage jazz in universities, and to show the world outside both that we are not entirely mad in being interested in this sort of music, and that there is something in jazz which is expressive, artistic and enjoyable.

Now we must try to go ahead and show that we can make news not in a scandalous way - and that we are doing something which isn't merely expressed by out-of-date American musicians' slang. There's too much of this getting into social columns and so on, and it becomes ridiculous.

Don't think I'm being pompous. What we need is a crusade - a drive to spread serious interest in trying to improve standards of playing, technique and arranging in particular. But this doesn't prevent us enjoying life at the same time. Far from it! We should get more enjoyment than ever from polished performances.

In this connection, we are glad to notice the greater enthusiasm for modern jazz this year, an increase which I must admit we were not prepared for. We apologise to any bands excluded and promise greater scope next year.

Money is not our end. but it is important. It's up to you to support us as we grow. We represent your club, and in return we give you opportunities like tonight's. Remember that the bigger the movement and pressure from the clubs, the more we can go ahead in the knowledge that we can rely on you."

Appendix 1 sets out all the bands and personnel at the Oxford contest.

The IUJF News Bulletin No.3 of 1958/59 summarises the results of the semis:

- (a) Southern Semi-Final, Oxford (judges - Paddy McKiernan, Ken Sykora, Dicky Hawden):
St. George's Hospital (London).
Oxford.
Cambridge.
Recommended: Reading.
- (b) Northern Semi-Final, held at Leeds (judges - Ken Rattenbury and Rex Harris):
Manchester College of Technology.
Nottingham.
Liverpool.
Recommended: Bangor.

A note clarified that Bangor would proceed to the Final as the recommended band as the Leeds Group (Casey's Hot 14) was not officially entered and, furthermore, not all the fourteen were full-time students at the University.

Musicians receiving a special mention from the judges were, in the Southern semi-final, Don Richards (tpt) of Reading, Doug-Whaley (tpt) and Bryan Marriott (dms), both of Oxford., and Don Hailstone (bass) and Vaughan Coles (dms), both of St. George's Hospital.

In the Northern contest those picked out were Alan Brown(clt) of Manchester University, Mike McCreath(tpt) and Mick Knowles(tmb), both of Manchester Tech., Chris Daniels (bass) of Nottingham, and Tim Kitchener (gtr), Mo Hope (pno) and Len Whitehurst (dms), all of Bangor.

Comments on the performances were that the Oxford contest was unusual in that it was a "Dry do". However, the attendance was fairly good, and everything appeared to go very smoothly and the standard, particularly of mainstream groups, was high.

In the Northern semi-final at Leeds the standard was, perhaps, not so high, but the atmosphere was much livelier, especially with the appearances of "Casey's Hot 14", which combined hilarious clowning with some good jazz. Another pleasant surprise for the large crowd was the top-class performance given by the Bangor rhythm section. The authors added that Leeds deserved a special mention as their success was achieved in face of considerable internal difficulty.

The trend in the competition had "been most decidedly towards mainstream", so much so, that they thought it would be inevitable that they hold separate Traditional and Mainstream contests in future. It was "rather sad to see that the little Traditional we heard was not, overall, up to the usual University standard."

Furthermore, the bulletin noted that "we have the sudden, overwhelming rise in Modern jazz popularity". There had been a huge entry for the modern contest, and in desperation we asked groups to withdraw unless they were first-rate. The authors continued that "the modernists were, however, as 'modest' as ever and so we have had to rearrange the contest". As a result, in the finals the modern groups would only be able to play two numbers and the time on the stage would be limited to 12 minutes (with no over-running!). The only alternative would have been a draw, which would have been "farcical". So, "to avoid chaos" all bands had to arrive in good time and be ready to go on immediately their turn came.

Towards the Finals

The finals of both the Trad/Mainstream and Modern competitions would be held at Birmingham University, in the Students' Union, on Wednesday, 4th March. The order of appearances would be:

Trad/Mainstream:

Liverpool

Cambridge

Nottingham

Oxford

Manchester Tech.

St. George's Hospital

Reading and Bangor, the recommended bands, were play before the contest starts, and first after the interval, respectively.

Modern:

Nottingham

Leeds

London (King's)

Leicester

Oxford

Bangor

Hull
Cambridge
Liverpool
Reading
Manchester Tech.
Bristol
London (University)

Ticket arrangements would be similar to the semi-finals but with a higher initial allocation of fifty tickets. Cash and unsold tickets had to be returned to Alec Schofield on or before the 1st March 1959.

Finally, the Secretary and Treasurer encouraged all to enjoy themselves in Birmingham but warned:

“we will not tolerate such behaviour as exhibited by certain parties at last year's finals. We feel sure that you can enjoy yourselves without resorting to petty pilfering (so called trophies) or wanton damage to Union or personal property”.

The Results

News Bulletin No.4, of May 1959, presented the results of the finals and it was a clean sweep for Cambridge!

In the Trad/mainstream Finals the judges placed Cambridge first with Nottingham in second place and Manchester Tech. third. The cup for the best instrumentalist was presented to “ART THEMER (tnr)” [sic]. Chris Daniels (bass) from Nottingham, received a special mention from the judges.

The Modern Finals produced another Cambridge win, and the accolade “Musician of the Evening” went to P. Gowers, (tuba & arranger). In second place was the University College, Bangor and Liverpool took out third place.

The following musicians received a certificate:

Tony Symes, King's College, London (sax/clt)
Peter Kennedy, Cambridge (tbn)
Gerry Brindley, Cambridge (piano)
Colin de Molyneaux, Bristol (gtr)
Hugh Potter, Liverpool (bass)
Len Whitehurst, Bangor (dms)

The bulletin commented that the Trad/Mainstream contest was a little disappointing in that the “traddies” were not strongly represented. They thought that serious consideration should be given to a division of the two classes because “it seems that mainstream is strangling the Traditional.”.

The authors thought that “despite drastic reorganisation the Modern Contest was a success and merited the write up in 'The Observer'. The standard of musical ability was much higher than last year even though criticism has been levelled at the incessant strumming of the guitars. However, we must consider the possibility of holding semi-finals in this part of the contest.”.

The article and criticism referred to was by Benny Green under the title “The Moderns Are Still Strumming” in which analysed the various band contributions within the context of wider jazz influences. In the end he concluded:

“The final attempt to impress came from the ten-piece entry from Cambridge University. In deference to their victory last year Cambridge were allowed to perform last, and the contemptuous ease with which they brushed aside all thirteen challengers suddenly made the contest appear hopelessly one-sided. For reasons which nobody has been able to explain to me, Cambridge as always had a long jazz lead over the other universities, and the virtuosity of this year's group may be conveyed by the fact that earlier in the evening it won the 'Traditional-Mainstream' section of the competition. Its Modern performance showed real finesse and musical sensitivity. Only in showmanship was it bettered...” [54.]

The 1959/60 contest

On 26th December 1959, John Ingle, President of the University of Bristol Rhythm Club replied to a recent letter from Graham Gent querying his dates [of the IUJF jazz band contest] saying he believed “the final is on Wed 9th, not the previous week. In case I made a mistake in my first letter, the dates are Tuesday 1st March, or Saturday 5th March.

Unfortunately, there are no more archive items on the organization or outcome of the 1960 competition. However, there is a flyer advertising a recording of the Finals at The Battersea College of Technology. A 10" (35 mins.) L.P. record was released by the Queensway Recording Studios which featured selected items from the following groups:

The D. Gelly Quartet (Cambridge)
The Blue Star Jazzmen (Newcastle)
The Cambridge Big Band
The Nottingham Mainstream Group
The ULU Jazz Band and
The John Ingle Jazz Combo (Bristol)

Reproduction was claimed to be very good, and the host college produced a comprehensive information brochure to go with each record which was available for the “rremarkably low price of 25/= [which] also includes the cost of package, postage and insurance”. University College London had already ordered nearly 100 copies.

The Jazz Club's Other Activities

Playing and dancing were not the only activities the jazz club promoted, as highlighted in a 1953 press article. Under the heading “University Models” it reported a fashion show at the Cambridge University Jazz Club Ball undertaken by the “most glamorous girl undergraduates of Cambridge University”. An accompanying picture shows the women, “under the direction of Violet Pretty”, posing against the background of the Bridge of Sighs (St. John's College). Apparently, this initiative was copying Oxford who had held a fashion show recently. [55.]

However, this appears to have been a one-off stunt. Peter Batten says that during his years, the club was mainly a vehicle for promoting the Cambridge University Jazz Band, and some special “live” sessions. Other activities, such as record recitals and talks, commonly presented by other jazz and Rhythm Clubs at this time, were limited. He did say that around 1953 the club did start to develop a record collection but, sadly, when the person who had proposed the idea went down, he took the collection with him.

Sprinkled throughout the jazz club archive are letters concerning the provision of band services for events in Cambridge. For instance, during this period, on 19th November 1958, R.G. Duncan, Honorary Secretary of the Clare College May Ball Committee wrote asking for a quote for them to play between the hours of 11pm and 6am. However, he cautioned that there “was some criticism of your band this last year due to the fact that I believe some of the regular players were not present to maintain the usual group standard. I am naturally anxious to obtain your best performers for this occasion and would appreciate an opportunity to hear the group in action sometime next term when its membership is definitely decided”.

As far as we know, such criticism was unusual, and Brian Bates replied on the 30th with a complementary ticket and suggested Tuesday 3rd February would be “a good choice of night since the band should be well rehearsed by then” and asked Mr Duncan to “work out all details with the leader of the band when you come to the Rex”.

Apart from hiring out the University band, the CJC promoted other concerts. Whilst the jazz club never based itself at the Union at this time, it was involved in presenting occasional events there. For instance, Peter Batten remembers a special session when Bruce Turner on alto sax appeared with the Lyttleton rhythm section: Johnny Parker piano, Jim Bray bass and Stan Greig drums. A poster for this event is also advertised on the poster site referred to previously. Batten remembered it as taking place “about November 1954”. In fact, the poster dates the concert as Thursday, 17th November which, using a calendar calculation site, puts the year as 1955.

Peter Batten also said that in the spring of 1957 the committee “gave me the money to arrange a special session in the “decorated” Union Cellars where Dizzy Reece (a great favourite of mine) appeared with the Alan Ganley trio”, with Sammy Stokes on bass and Derek Smith on piano. He also recalled playing in a group, with John Bancroft, for a party where George Melly dropped in after speaking at the Union – and sang.

There were weekly meetings and there were balls. Clearly the focus of the balls was traditional or “mainstream” but there is evidence in the files of involvement on the modern end of the jazz spectrum, as concerts or recitals.

In a jokey undated letter to Geoff Clarke in the 1957-58 year, Allen Ganley promises “As arranged we’ll meet you outside the Victoria Cinema in the Market Square at 7.0 (at night I hope)”. Also, Tommy Whittle sent a letter “as confirmation that I will appear with my quintet at the Lion Hotel in Cambridge on Feb 11th at a fee of \$30 plus expenses. We will meet you as arranged in your letter, at 7pm.”.

Earlier, we saw that the Rex Ballroom was the venue for regular meetings of the club at this time; the correspondence with Ganley and Whittle suggests that the club was also involved in promoting jazz at alternative venues, perhaps forms of the music that were less bound up with dancing. The Lion Hotel in Falcon Yard would feature prominently in the 1960s jazz scene.

Correspondence exists for one recital in the following academic year with Brian Bates writing to Ronnie Ross on 5th Nov 1958 saying that “we want the “Jazzmakers” to give a recital of modern jazz at the “Lion Hotel”, Petty Cury, Cambridge, on Monday, 24th November ’58.”.

As an enticement, Brian was prepared to “offer five guineas per man plus travelling expenses plus a dinner”. He gave some directions to the hotel and suggested meeting in the lounge at 7pm. The recital would be from 8-11 p.m. with a playing time for Ronnie’s group of about two hours. Brian said he looked forward to seeing Ronnie and renewing acquaintances with Allen Ganley “who gave a very successful recital here last year with Joe Harriott”.

From the tone of the Bates letter there would appear to have been some preparatory discussion and Ronnie was quick to confirm the arrangements and also enclosed “our publicity manual for billing and any other details you may want”; he promised to “try to send you some photographs of the band before the 24th”.

He ended “Please give my regards to Colin if you see him.”, a reference to Colin Edwards, a local drummer who was friendly with many London jazz musicians.

A few months after Ronnie Ross played at the “Lion”, another Ronnie came knocking. A cold call letter from his agent David Mason Entertainments, dated 26th March 1959, promoted the virtues of Ronnie Scott’s Jazzmen for “your College Jazz Clubavailable every night from June onwards”.

Most interesting is the “information circular” enclosed with the letter from which we learn that the band was formed in 1957 with only a few changes (in personnel) since then and had, since early this year, been promoting their own Jazz Club in Sutton, Surrey.

For those who appreciate Scott as an iconic promoter of modern jazz, it comes as a shock to read of Ronnie Scott’s Jazzmen as presenting “Traditional, New Orleans Jazz for dancing and listening” and who specialised “in playing to teen-agers, for after all, it is the younger generation who dance and listen regularly to jazz”.

However, “for older listeners, they included in their repertoire many long standing favourites with which they have had marked success at more formal functions, where the not-so-young are in the majority”. The band “present themselves uniformly [sic] dressed – dark suits, white shirt and blue ties – for concert engagements and club work”.

On 2nd March 1960, a letter from Peter King Ltd to Graham Gent confirmed “the appearance of RONNIE SCOTT at the Rex Ballroom on Monday 7th March at a fee of £10.0.0.”. Presumably, this was Ronnie alone to be backed by a local band.

The letter is interesting in that it reflects Peter King’s move from musician to full-time “Theatrical, Band and Concert Agency Personal Management”. His old office address at 39 Great Windmill Street, Piccadilly Circus, is blocked out and a new address typed in. This was, of course, “for Ronnie Scott and Pete King, the dream finally came true on Friday October 30th, 1959” ... “the day they opened their jazz club in basement premises at 39 Gerrard Street, in London's Soho.” [56.]

But the reputation of Cambridge Jazz Club and the university band was not confined to the University population itself and organisations further afield were in contact to ask for activities to be brought to them.

Peter Batten remembered that Jonathan Abbott arranged for the University band to appear at parties or gigs outside Cambridge (and to be paid for them!). There was a trip to a special event in Derby and a private party for a young Lester Piggott in Newmarket, where the very quiet and reserved host told him he was enjoying our music.

In 1958 The Village College, Swavesey, announced that they were starting a Youth Centre “this winter which will meet on Monday evenings fortnightly to carry on individual activities, hear speakers and listen to music”. Margaret Hunter, the Tutor, asked if it would be “possible for the University Jazz Club to bring over some players and give us about forty minutes programme of jazz playing on Monday 2nd November at about 8.30 pm. We would, of course pay travelling expenses”.

Also, activities like talks and performances were being requested further afield. There are several letters on file that confirm this. Two letters represent the importance of military bases in providing opportunities for band gigs as well as, in the case of US bases, the diffusion of jazz trends and ideas.

In a letter dated 16th April 1959, Corporal Michael Batchelor of the Entertainments Committee, R.A.F. Brampton, just up the road in Huntingdon, was responding to information supplied and an invitation to hear the band. He was unsure “whether I shall be able to get over to Cambridge on the 21st. If I am unable to come, I shall write at a later date and let you know on what date we would like the band to play for us”.

The other request, in October 1959, was from Patricia Nolan, Community Relations Officer for the U.S.A.F. Base at Mildenhall, Suffolk wrote to J. [sic] Gent in October of the same year saying they were planning a jazz evening to be held in the Service Club on the evening of Thursday, November 19th. This would be run in conjunction with the base library, which kept records for loan. She went on:

“We would very much like somebody to give a talk on progressive jazz, and wondered whether a member of your club would care to do this for us? If it were also possible for other clubs [sic] members to come out to the base, perhaps with your band, we should be highly delighted. Transport could be provided.”

Patricia ended by saying she was often in Cambridge and would be happy to call on Graham discuss the possibilities, “if you can spare the time”.

The final letter is from further afield, from the David Ambler, Manchester University Rag Jazz Band Ball Organiser, 1959. On 21st October 1958 he wrote inviting participation in their ball, “consisting entirely of Traditional Jazz Groups”, on 7th February 1959 (a Saturday). Although he could not pay fees he could “pay all expenses and provide free refreshments and lubrication for the bandsmen”. He was inviting ten bands and was approaching Cambridge early, learning the lesson from last year when he left it too late.

Brian Bates had to let David Ambler down again. Writing on 5th November 1958 he said that the University Jazz Band would not be able to play at the ball but offered that “there are a couple of boys in the band who are, like myself, from Manchester and who would like to come along for a “jam” if this is possible. More than that I cannot promise”. What he could promise was that “should you be willing to take individual musicians, I assure you that, for my part, I will only send musicians of a high calibre and will do my best to “sell” the idea to as many of the band as I can”.

Talks on Jazz

For the academic year 1958-59 Geoffrey Clark stood down as Honorary Secretary to be replaced by Brian Bates of Trinity College. Brian’s programme for was similar to the previous year – weekly meetings and special concerts, jazz band balls, involvement in inter university jazz contests and opportunities for the university jazz band.

However, it appears that Brian wanted to extend the activities of the club e.g., to include talks about jazz by notable commentators and critics. In January 1959 Brian Bates launched a new initiative for the club, talks on aspects of jazz by prominent commentators and critics.

One “celebrity” approached was George Melly who, apparently, had expressed keenness on his last visit to Cambridge. Brian reminded him:

“In spite of the drink – or because of it – you seemed rather enthusiastic about giving a talk on the “Sexual Imagery of the Blues”. I hope the drink has faded but that your equally enthusiasm remains”.

He asked George to speak on Monday 9th (February) and confirmed that it would be in the Gramophone Room at the Union Society. Expenses would be paid and, if George was travelling by train, the 5.54pm from Liverpool Street, would get him to Cambridge at 7.14pm, “allowing ample wining and dining time” prior to the talk. Another enticement was that the time between the end of the talk and his train back (at 12.54am) “will be well taken care of”.

There is no reply in the file, but it seems that George could not make it because a rather more formal draft letter to Charles Fox on 28th January asks whether he would consider a talk on the very same evening. The offer of expenses and dinner, and advice on travel arrangements, was the same. But Brian, hoping to help Charles decide on a subject for his talk, also gives a helpful insight into “the jazz climate of Cambridge” which he characterised as “very Basie-ish although there is also a strong modern following”. Finally, Brian wondered whether the club could help with records to illustrate the talk or rather Charles would bring his own records.

Charles Fox replied on 30th January 1959 saying he hated having to appear so “hard-to-get” but, once again, he was tied up over the weekend in question. Charles asked for a later date, around the end of March.

One consideration was that he had to move out of this London house so that his “work is going to be considerably disrupted”. But he could always be contacted c/o “THE GRAMOPHONE”. In the meantime, he would think up a few subjects for the club to choose from. He signed off asking Brian to please “accept my apologies for continually having to apologise”!

Unfortunately, Charles Fox’s letter went unanswered as evidenced by an apologetic draft letter on 30th May in which Brian Bates, who was leaving Cambridge that June, admitting “I am afraid I forgot”. He went on to say that the club held a “trial” last term with Benny Green talking on Jazz Vocalists and it was very successful. He promised “now that we know there is an interest in this sort of thing we shall go ahead with a series of talks and my successor as secretary will be getting in touch with you in a couple of months’ time.”

Brian had invited Benny Green in February 1959 and, after having read in Melody Maker that Benny was giving a talk on “Jazz Vocalists”, suggested the same for a Cambridge talk on 23rd February.

Benny Green replied on 16th February confirming the talk and that “the period covered would be more or less the thirties to the fifties, although I do use one example of Bessie Smith”; the rest of the examples would be from “the moderns, Ella, Sarah, Oday [sic] etc.”. He admitted to sometimes slipping in a Louis Armstrong, but “the whole thing is very fluid”. He would be using his own musical examples, “all of which will be LP records no tapes or 78s”.

From the evidence in the files, this was the only talk given in 1958-59 and Brian Bates’ promise that his successor would be organizing a series of such talks does not seem to have been followed through.

Jazz Popularity Poll

A neatly typed single sheet in the records provides the instructions for the “Cambridge Jazz Club Popularity Poll”. The voters were asked to name up to five musicians, not in terms of their supposed importance in jazz, but those who had given them the most pleasure, those that they really enjoyed. They did not have state an order of preference as each person they named would receive just one vote.

The instructions suggest that this process be repeated for a range of instruments (trumpet, clarinet, tenor sax etc.) and for categories of unit (big band, small group), arranger, vocalists, female and male. They could, however, “be specific in some of your choices and list dates showing your favourite period in the works of such people as Armstrong, Ellington, Parker, Holliday, etc., please do so.”

In the 'New Star' section voters were asked to name their favourite two musicians who “had gained recognition within the last two- or three-years e.g., Paul Chambers, Art Farmer, Phineas Newborn”.

We have no evidence the poll was implemented; there are no other references in the files and no results.

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**I-U.J.F. Jazz Band Competition - Traditional – Mainstream: Southern Semi-Final -
Oxford Town Hall 4th February, 1959**

Programme 6p

Comperes: David Webster and David McPherson

Judges:

Ken Sykora, record reviewer and broadcaster, and founder of the B.B.C.'s "Guitar Club".

Paddy McKiernan, jazz agent and promoter in the Manchester area, and long-standing encourager of the I.U.J.F.

Dickie Hawden, ex-Yorkshire Jazz Band, now eminent trumpeter for Johnny Dankworth Orchestra.

BANDS (in order of playing):

BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY JAZZ BAND

Arnold Birtwhistle (Tpt.)

Roy Rubinstein (Tmb.)

Tony Hodgson (Cl./Alto)

Ron Bentham (Gtr.)

John Dowell (Pno.)

Cedric Abbott (Bss.)

Don Yule (Dms.)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY JAZZ BAND

Chris Paradine (Tnr.)

Peter Kennedy (Tmb.)

Andre Beeson (Cl./Alto)

Dave Gelly (Cl./Alto)

Art Themer [sic] (Tnr.)

Gerry Brindley (Pno.)

Ken Reid (Bss.)

Alan Patterson (Dms.)

THE YSTWYTH DELTAJAZZ MEN, ABERYSTWYTH

Pete Williams (Cnt.)

Pete Lenaghan (Cl.)

Roy Seer (Pno.)

Brian Willis (Gtr.)

Keith Saunders (Bjo.)

Paul Hendy (Dms.)

THE NEW BRASS MONKEYS JAZZ BAND, READING

Don Richards (Tpt.)

Colin McNae (Tmb.)

John Pattman (Cl.)

Terry Evans (Pno.)

Mick Birnage (Bjo./Gtr.)

Lyn Burdet (Bss.)

Mike Crowley (Dms.)

----- Half hour Interval -----

ST. GEORGE'S HOSPITAL (LONDON) QUARTET

John Bancroft (Pno.)

Joe Boerema (Cit.)

Don Hailstone (Bss.)

Vaughan Coles (Dms.)

OXFORD UNIVERSITY JAZZ BAND

Doug Whaley (Tpt.)

Peter Gaskell (Clt.)

Bill Saunders (Tmb.)

Robin Baxter (Pno.)

Peter Green (Bss.)

Bryant Marriott (Dms.)

KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON, JAZZ BAND

Ken Cockshull (Tpt.)

John Jones (Tmb.)

Derek Horsfield (Tnr.)

Barrie King (Pno.)

Phil Taylor (Gtr.)

Phil Mendes (Bss.)

Colin Morris (Dms.)

BARBICAN JAZZ BAND, BRISTOL

Derek Fawcett (Tpt.)

Tony Cadwell (Tmb.)

Brian Brown (Clt.)

Dick Tilbury (Bjo.)

John Ingle (Bss.)

Johann-Strauss-Jenkins (Dms.)