

*You have no real control over your life, over your mind, over your culture, so what are you going to do about it? Do you care? Do people around you care? Have you asked them? You have the power to control your lives smash the system and ultimately create a society that exists for us and not for them.*

HANDOUT AT THE FREE CONCERT HOSTED BY THE ROLLING STONES IN HYDE PARK, LONDON 1969.

Each new environment makes the old one visible: what is psychic becomes explicit only after it becomes obsolete. The present environment is never seen. We respect its laws without being conscious of them. We are conscious only of the obsolete and we value it because it appears manageable, subject to conscious control this makes it splendidly attractive. (*Carpenter, 1970p.*).

This bohemian artistic ambience was very different from a neighbouring area like Kilburn with more of a dash of lyrical-talking Irish and a proper respect for the Irish poet. Their work was looked on as a central, inescapable necessity: the curse of Adam which even rivers of Guinness after work could never cleanse the memory of. And where laid-back Notting Hill, trying to do as little as possible, was simply a stop on the number 31 and 28 bus routes where engaging weirdo's hung out. (Author, 1988 p.).

Throughout the sixties and up until the eighties the ongoing traffic to England, with its associated social rituals, confirmed a reality that the population of Ireland, outside Dublin, was one shaped by emigration (Foster, 1988). This was the normality that was acknowledged by Sean Lemass when he addressed 'the historical task of this generation' The release of the 1956 census figures confirmed that 'in no other European country was emigration so essential a prerequisite for the preservation of the nature of the society' (Foster p.774). By 1968 the post-war rebuild of London processed a steady amount of Irish youth as labourers on its sites and hospitals. However, in the sixties this generation was to appreciate the English capital in a relevant cultural capacity and this included the city's alternative culture, which existed in outlying communities. As the decade progressed, directions to these would be made in the official and unofficial media in articles that referenced both straight and alternative scenes.<sup>12</sup>

The most radical cultural opportunities presented to the Irish would be engaging with self-defining communities. Word of mouth orientated the committed to seek out spaces that had no Irish equivalent in Ireland. Independent spaces populated by dissenters represented an environment that was doubly progressive in regards to anything regarding Irish socio-cultural progress (Savage, 1966). Spaces such as Notting Hill represented a commitment by alternative communities to provide communal examples to accelerate the ambition suggested by official progress. In the sixties, the English Labour government had undertaken abortion law reform, homosexual law reform, and presided over the end of capital punishment, yet the Establishment still provided many opportunities for protest. Still, the communes of Notting Hill asked more of the structures of reform. But for the young Irish arriving in London exposure

**12 In England, at the time of the branding of London as 'swinging' in 1966, it created a demand for information on jobs and accommodation as the English youth sought to participate in the ideal portrayed; the media provided this on occasion.**

to a modernism that addressed the likes of homosexual law for example was immense. Throughout the sixties the existence of this socio-cultural gap in itself fuelled non-conformity for transient Irish youth.<sup>13</sup>

An essential rebel destination in London to practice unconformity was Notting Hill. It was close to the main Irish enclave of Kilburn but possessed a much more diverse cultural mix.

In Powis Square in the 1920s, the first Black members of the community settled' amongst the existing multi-ethnic mix of Russian and Polish Jews, Irish and British immigrants from "depressed areas": "people who made their names folk myths; eccentrics, madmen, political radicals, poets and artists; Chicago Kate (who lived in Basing Road – now street), the Englisher (a British born Jew), the Presser (the quiet communist theoretician), Schmooser, the best dancer in Notting Hill. Stallholders in Portobello Road for generations, many of them still represented; Rosie, an Irish woman who kept a vegetable stall and who spoke fluent Yiddish... (International Times Issue 30).

By 1967, activists promoted the area as a multi-cultural environment, a space where cultural outcomes centred communally on themes of resistance in a variety of overlapping situations.<sup>14</sup> Unconformity in a host of transient acts collectively represented attempts by the English underground to solidify the practice of alternative modernism. Concrete outcomes that arose from this activity resulted in the likes of the London Free School (- 'not political, not radical, not intellectual, not religion, not a club' (Grunenberg and Harris, 2005 p.77)<sup>15</sup> which was founded and managed by activists who had decided to channel the ethos of the American concept of free universities in an area of London, within, yet conceptually outside the city and its post-war re-imagining.

"Free communications" and counter-media; anti-universities – all attack major ideological institutions of this society. The assaults are specified, localised and relevant. They bring the contradictions out into the open. (Mitchell, 1971 p.32).

In Notting Hill forms of agitation theatre merged with workshops and music-based events that were designed to create a space described, by the activist John Hopkins, as an 'interzone' (Hopkins.). Engaging with the space of Notting Hill in this alternative manner, participants and visitors accepted the responsibility manifested in the links between community projects; music-based scenes and the anarchy hinted at a new art-led practice of the happening.<sup>16</sup> The situations featuring freeform music, poetry, and light shows were designed and owned by the participants and developed as outsider practice. Gillian Whiteley refers to the 'complex politics' created by these new situations, 'whatever their limits, they benefited from emerging at a time when it was greatly more possible to operate "outside" or on the fringe of society and create radical alternatives which resisted institutional incorporation and com-modification' (2011, p.115).

Alongside these alternative (utopian) endeavours were the long-standing unregulated activities that operated in the illegal drinking dens that hosted 'blues' dances. In existence since the fifties, these social spaces were mainly run by the Jamaican community but in structure had much in common with the Irish sheebens as an apolitical after-hours space where outsiders gathered to socialise around music. Reminiscing in 1996, an Irish psychedelic traveller, the musician and artist Tim Goulding, Notting Hill sound tracked by the music of the San Franciscan Steve Miller, said,<sup>17</sup> '1968. Notting Hill Gate. Smoke filled rooms. Vestal virgins on their way to the

13 See *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground 1961-1971*. Jonathon Green.

14 Radical elements of alternative education were embodied in community spaces such as the London Free School founded in 1967. Founders included Black activists Courtney Tulloch and Michael X, the poet Michael Horovitz, John Hopkins, and the psychiatrist, R.D. Laing.

15 LFS 'more of an idea than a school' (Grunenberg and Harris, 2005 p.)

16 The practicalities of fundraising for projects such as the LFS and its newsletter *The Grove* necessitated events that, due to the interdisciplinary nature of those involved, generated art-based performative outcomes.

**Figure 2**

Powis Square, London 1968.



**Notting Hill 1968** The People's 'Centre Open the Square' graffiti.

**17 Note:** specifically 'Song for our Ancestors.' (Miller, 1968).

coast etc., although some stayed behind. Was it just the bright eyes of youth that made the present so present, that identified the B flat of the taxi horn and its perfect counterpoint in the 'd' of the bat-winged American matrons call of "you betcha" (1996 p.139).

The critical reception accorded to Goulding's progressive folk band *Dr Strangely Strange* in the UK (1967) exemplifies the commonality that existed when the youth fashioned tradition on their own terms (folk being regarded then as authentic as a form of contemporary expression that recognised no borders). Generational issues were also evident in another example to be found in the sleeve notes of a 1969 Irish record album produced in London. This was as a compilation of Irish beat bands titled *Paddy is Dead and the Kids Know it* (Trend Studios, 1969). 'Paddy is Dead,' was an attention grabbing title that was backed up with a photo of a young boot boy sacrilegiously leaning up against a Celtic cross, an uncompromising design that encapsulated Irish unconformity at its strongest. Conceptually it challenged the double standards of an emigration-based state by pressganging the image of an English boot boy and placing him in sacred Irish Ground, the graveyard with its Celtic cross.

The sleeve notes state, For far too long the Irish image has been one of donkey carts, pigs in the kitchen and Paddy's. Today a new scene is happening so Paddy is gone... a new generation are making the scene in Ireland. Young people who want to hear and sing the songs of to-day, and not the songs their father's (sic) sang. (Trend Studios, 1969)..

**Figure 3**

Paddy is Dead and the Kids Know it.

*A Compilation of Irish Beat/ Psychedelic bands 1969.*

