

Smashed Windows in the Squat! Conflict, Icons of Filth, Exit Stance + Toxic Waste. Oldham ‘Oddy’s’ Tower Club December 1984*.

*NB. Some of the memories contained below are fucking blurred and may relate to more than one Oddy’s gig!

Alastair ‘Gords’ Gordon

The cold and bleak winter of 1984 seemed cold and bleak back then. At least the glue, cider, fingerless gloves and donkey jackets kept, us young punks warm! Thatcher was booting the Miners with her bullyboys on the picket lines and I’d left school and now an official ‘victim’ of government schemes’. Me and my mate Tim had landed a ‘Training Scheme’ place at a local windsurfing board manufacturer, for £25 quid a week. Fucking rubbish, but bearable! Anyway that place is another story. This measly amount at least allowed us to buy a few records and travel to gigs.

Over the summer and Autumn, we’d been going to loads of anarcho gigs in and around Nottingham. Chumbawamba, Iconoclasts, Desecrators and Toxic Reasons, Varukers, Instigators and loads of others. Since seeing Crass earlier that May we were definitely getting more into that scene: animal rights, going on demos and being ‘active’ were firmly on our agenda. We’d also been up to the infamous ‘Oddy’s’ Tower Club in November to see Conflict play there. They’d just put out the *Increase the Pressure 12”* and the songs on the side one of that record really spoke to me. The lyrics summed up the urgency and anger that our generation was feeling under attack from the Tory government and her paid police bullies, battering us on animal rights demos (this would get much worse with the battering of the ‘Peace Convoy’ in June ’85). Unlike Crass they held a much more direct and confrontational line, advocating direct action (read violent protest) against her majesties forces of law and order. We travelled up to Manchester on the trusted ‘252 Trans-peak’ cheap bus that allowed us basic travel up to Manchester. We got the bus over to Oldham, saw conflict who were amazing and full of anger, headed back to Manchester to ‘doss in an all night cafe, making a cup of coffee last all night. That place was full of other undesirables of that nocturnal city and we were frequently woken up by the pissed off proprietor insisting that it “wasn’t a doss house”. We got back to Notts exhilarated but totally knackered. We’d found out Conflict were playing another Oddy’s gig in December and we’d be back for sure! This time it was with the awesome Icons of Filth.

The exact dates for these events is lost in memories now, but the events that took place at the next conflict show will stay with me forever. The usual bunch of friends met in Beeston bus station on a Sat Morning. I remember us laughing at the badly spelled yet ace graffiti on the side of the multi-story car-park: ‘Religon Instigates a State of War’. Oh well, it was the sentiment that counted! We all had out doss-bags with us except for Tim. He sneered we were posers and all he had with him was a Donkey Jacket and a two-litre of cider for the journey. We got to Oldham whilst the evening was drawing in. One of the Newark punks, Mark, had managed to find a squat for us to stay in. This would sure beat the previous visit’s bus-station cafe dossing. We met up with a couple of Oldham punks and were taken to the squat. This place was on roughly the tenth floor of an old mill building a short distance from the venue. I’ve memories of us all traipsing up the seemingly endless stairs to be greeted with a grubby, yet warm sleeping area. There were a couple of punks, sat warming themselves by a makeshift fire in the chimney grate. The stark memory here was the Zounds track ‘Dirty Squatters’ blasting out of a battery power tape player. I couldn’t have suggested a better soundtrack to this myself. Perfect. We arrange sleeping bags out in some sense of punk order, before heading off to a pub before the gig. Excitement was rising. The name of the pub escapes me though the cider was cheap and strong. I got chatting to this toothless, aging skinhead who told me he’d got some magic mushrooms for sale. Fifty pence exchanged hands in the bogs and I was presented with a

Nat West money bag with around thirty very sweaty mushrooms inside. Looking back I think I bought the things more out of intimidation than enthusiasm, so there you go. I'd no intention of taking 'em.

Suitable tanked on cider we vandalised a Rolls Royce on the way to the gig with one of our number taking a shit on the bonnet whilst standing just in front of the windscreen, arse bare and brown cable spewing forth. We pissed ourselves laughing, sprayed Notts Chaos Punks on the pavement and cleared off before the 'toff' owner returned to find his early Christmas 'present'. Paying into the venue, the place was full of punks. From what I remember Oddy's was an old music hall with a large stage, balcony, high ceiling and a faded proscenium still framing the stage. It was in a serious state of disrepair, walls stained with peeling paint and smoke stained brown. The place stunk. There was a punk DJ blasting out tunes through the sizeable PA system, Dead Kennedys, Partisans, Blitz and Antisect. Bloody ace. A couple of memories stay with me here. The first was us as a group laughing at this old dude, partially balding with spikes dressed head to foot in leather with the words 'Spud Spunk' written on the back of his jacket in studs. The place was definitely full of characters. The other memory is buying a live MDC tape of Mark, (later of the Bands ENT and The Wankys). We lost touch for decades but ran into each other a good few years back and still occasionally trade punk stuff. The gig was ace. I can't remember that much about Toxic Waste aside from them being an Irish band. Exit-stance were ace. Full of passion and integrity. Their *While Backs are Turned 12"* record came across clear and angry. I remember jumping about to the track 'They Kill Dogs'...good times. Next up were Icons of Filth. I loved this band. Their LP, *Onward Christian Soldiers* was nothing short of brilliant, really summarising the anarcho spirit of the time. All I remember of them visually was the guitarists having short mohawks and them being really fucking tight. I knew all the words, jumping about in the crowd getting bruised to fuck but not giving a toss. That was a moment. Finally Conflict took the stage. They were fucking ferocious and like Icons, tight, rehearsed and focussed. Colin had the regulation spikes with a skull and crossbones t-shirt reading 'hardened Cynical Bastard!'. The band totally nailed it and the whole place bounced around to them. *The Serenade is Dead 7"* was a great record at the time, while the stuff of the new 12" totally tapped into the climate of cold-war fear: the crowd got this and we certainly felt part of a movement that night. Crass were over as a live act but these bands were certainly keeping the feeling of anarcho punk very much alive at that time. The gig was over and some of my mates were with some of the Mansfield punks (Skum Dribblerzz people) who were also staying at the squat. Numerous cider drinks had took their toll on us and we were the worse for wear by this point so memories are certainly hazy.

Rumours were that Conflict were also staying back at the squat before heading onto their next gig. We headed back there and the place was not full of around twenty off punks. I was knackered and climbed into my sleeping back ready to get a night's kip in. The usual banter and pisstaking took place and I fell asleep looking at the shadows of the fire dancing patters onto the grubby wall. I disappeared off to the dark place of sleep, fed and fuelled with loadsa cider...

I was woken a few hours later to the sound of absolute chaos. One of the squatters said that the cops were trying to bust their way into the squat though it was barricaded so that would take them some time. The next thing I knew was firemen and coppers at the window: we were bloody ten stories up for fuck sake! There were loads of blue flashing lights, coppers and Black Maria police vans in the street below; two fire trucks, with extended ladders brought cops and fire brigade officers swiftly up to the squat window. Suddenly there was a loud shout from outside "everyone back from the windows!", which were promptly smashed through with truncheons. Glass showered us all, chaos broke out and we were all ordered to get against the wall, hands above our heads. Thatcher's police

state was in full effect on us. One of the coppers had cut his fingers on the broken glass with his mate saying that it would need stitches. Conflict were not staying there but I'm pretty sure that was why the raid had taken place. The squatting laws at the time should have protected this sort of invasion, though we were told as we were frog-marched down the stairs that having a fire in an old building put us all in danger and the raid was to save both us and the building from a fiery end. Bollocks! This was political.

We were herded into two or three Police vans and ensconced firmly into the sharp electric light of Oldham police station. We were under arrest, I still don't know why to this day! We were all made to remove boot laces, belts and all our belongings were searched. Me, Tim and Steve were towards the back of the queue as each half asleep and startled punk was 'processed' before being shipped off to the cells. Both me and Tim had Stanley knives on us. There were a work tool we used to finish off and cut back the filler in fibreglass windsurfing boards on our government scheme. Now we were both crapping ourselves as they were innocent but could have been deemed an offensive weapon though luckily we both had some work identification to prove this. We also had hardened patches of grey filler on the front of our combat trousers (well advance of the crust thing, but we thought it looked ace). Tim went first and managed to tell the coppers that these were work tools and not weapons and for some miraculous reason they believed him, he said I had one too and they were more than welcome to check with our work for the truth: they took the address down. I got a shiver of fear down my spine....my turn was due at the desk. I'd bought those fucking mushrooms earlier in pub and they were still in my pocket: shit! I was in the shit and had to do some quick thinking. I scrunched up the bag so it became a black goo, with one hand, luckily they became unrecognisable as mushrooms. Thank fuck they were freshly picked and wet. If they were dry I'd have been looking at a drug charge. When requested by the officer, who stunk of BO and carbolic soap, to empty my pockets, the Stanley knife 'donked' on the counter as well as a few pound notes, change and keys.....plus the bag of mushrooms. He went through the sad display with the end of a pen and asked what the bag was? 'It's herbal hair dye mate, the last of it, best to bin it. To my massive relief I was chuffed to see him put it straight in the bin! What a fucking horrible night. My 'processing finished, knife cleared and I was shipped off to a cell!

I was put in a cell on my own with walls covered in dried excrement, graffiti and a large 'floater' left in the toilet bowl by the previous inhabitant, classy! The place stunk of piss, bleach and depression. The cell buzzer had some graffiti drawn around it. Female legs were spread-eagle with the buzzer button taking the form of the clitoris. The caption "Do you like sex? Press this buzzer and a cunt will appear!" I lay on the concrete bench and managed to get another hours kip. We were all released shortly after. All our belongings returned and no explanation about what the fuck had happened or why we'd been arrested offered by the boys in blue.

The light of day outside the cop station was stark. We managed to get the first bus back to Manchester, then onto Notts. We slept all the way back to Notts, now totally clear of the consequences of being into anarcho punk.

RIP Stiggy Stig, singer of Icons of Filth; Kev, guitarist for Conflict; Adey, madman in Skum Dribblerzz & Mark 'Kamph' Kampher, old mate. All present and involved that night but now sadly gone but never forgotten!

Gords November 2014.