

“Those were the days”

“Once upon a time there was a tavern”

By Alan Miles ([email](#)) – Feb 2013

That old song, sung by Mary Hopkin always reminded me of The Bell Pub. Nights from Wednesday to Saturday were the best. Usually on a Friday and Saturday the place was often ‘jam-packed’. You had to squeeze through the crowd (that smelt of Old Spice, Blue Blazer hair lacquer and sometimes French cigarettes), to get to the bar, and being very careful on the way back, not to spill any beer on any of the regular faces.

In the mid-60s people, dressed very smartly and all the blokes wore ‘whistles’, being that was the style then. I would say to those I knew “Alright” and often the reply would be “Alright”, so you could find yourself regularly saying “Alright”, “Alright”. It could be problematic when you bought three pints of beer, after a long wait at the counter, getting back through the crowd again, and remaining patient. You’d find yourself getting irritated as you said “Can you mind your back please” and “Scuze please”.

The beer was quite limited in those times, as there was only Mild, Red Barrel, Double Diamond, and Holsten Lager. Later in the early 70s and in other pubs, Newcastle Brown arrived, so drinking had improved by then. On warm summer nights, lines of people would be seen outside The Bell, lined on the pavement taking in the lovely evening air, which was 50% exhaust fumes. Sooner or later, the Cops would come along and move everybody back inside again. Once when the police made a visit to The Bell, someone knocked a helmet off one of the policeman, took it and ran into the men’s toilet and piddled in it.

The Bell was where, I first saw The Alexander Patton Group. In those days, the bands played in the Private Bar, and you paid a couple of bob to get in there. This was of course an illegal racket, involving some of the local villains. At that time, Pete Scott was the vocalist and harp player, he was a sexy ba*t*rd; he looked good sang well and could play a mean harp. At the time, I thought Alexander Patton was one of the group members, and I thought Pete Scott was Alexander Patton. When he finished his numbers he went for a drink, and I said to him “Alright Alex” but he just blanked me. It was a little while later, that I learnt that Alexander Patton, was a very right wing ‘hawk’, who wanted to kick off a third world war. I can’t get my head around why, that band named themselves that? Especially in those days of left-wing thinking.

The band I really did like was The Vandals Blues who played some good blues and jazz, they gave a great version of “Water Melon Man”. There is a turning at the back of The Bell Pub; I think it is called Cazenove Road where there was an old garage once. People would creep around to this shady nook and smoke joints, and have a piddle. I shared a joint with Iggy the singer of Vandals Blues. The Alexander Pattons (which I am coming back to), did a few of The Wolf’s (Howlin Wolf) best numbers, such as “Back Door Man” and “Spoonful”. Some of the words to “Spoonful” could be “A spoonful of sugar” and I wonder if this is a blues about Diabetes! But I STILL can’t get my head around why they called themselves “The Alexander Patton Group”.

I joined them when they were "The Pattons", I played for a while with them, but I think they thought, they would do better without me. It hurt me deeply when I had to go, but I don't know where they went either; maybe they were afraid of success. A few years after I left I met Jimmy Mitchell, who played the lead guitar in the group. I asked him "What happened to the band?". He said "they all got married and became extensions of their wives" So perhaps it was a case of their wives being afraid of their husbands' success? I think the group went to 'pot', when Pete Scott left for Canada. The Alexander Patton Group was a great band, but I think their name was sappy.

I worked with The Pattons on several nights, they obviously all got on very well together, and they really did have a good sound. The bass player who previously played with The Honeycombs, and who was a hairdresser, called around for me once (and permed my Mum's hair for her while he was visiting). He wanted to manage The Pattons and have us dressed as gangsters, because of The Bonnie and Clyde fad at the time. With a sappy name like The Alexander Patton Group, we should have dressed like American generals.

On another occasion when I was with The Pattons, somebody wanted us to make a record at Freeman's in Leytonstone. We cut the 'sample disc', it was a crappy song which I couldn't sing because I hated it, and it was called "Babysong". Luckily it was never released, because some singer called Boz covered it .I don't think it went anywhere. I always considered myself a Blues singer, and I didn't want to sing silly songs, or dress up like Al Capone.

Anyway, that's all water under the bridge now, and I still recall The Pattons, as the best around at the time, and it was a privilege that I was with them for a while.