As a Perfectly Foolish Young Man I Wanted 17

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As a Perfectly Foolish Young Man I Wanted - Book Five - Where the Halling Valley River Lies - Chapter Three - And So the British Blues Explosion

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(r. The Rolling Stones)

The Riddle of the British English

The first son of Patrick and Ann Halling was born Carl Robert Halling at the tail end of West London's Goldhawk Road, which is the sole and only section not to bisect the traditionally working class district of Shepherd's Bush. And while officially in Hammersmith, is far closer to the more bourgeois area of Chiswick. My first home was a little Victorian cottage in Notting Hill, but by the time of my brother's birth, the family had already moved to Bedford Park, which while also in Chiswick according to its postcode, is nonetheless part of the Southfield ward of nearby Acton. And presumably was then too.
One thing is certain is that it was part of the obsolete Borough of Acton; and along with the County of London, which paved the way for the contemporary Greater London Council, it was scrapped in 1965.
Carl was the name of my paternal grandfather, and Robert that of my mother's brother Bob, and technically speaking, I came into the world very much a Briton as opposed to an Englishman. Which is to not to say I don't consider myself English, because I most decidedly do; but my origins lie not just in England, but three of the four constituent countries of the United Kingdom.
Thence, I'm Scottish and Scots-Irish and - possibly also - English Canadian through my mother, and English and - again possibly also - Danish Australian through my dad, with a further feasible Cornish admixture coming courtesy of my paternal grandmother.
For her maiden name of Pinnock is a common one in Cornwall, and therefore of conceivable Brythonic Celtic origin...the word Brythonic having served as the origin for more modern terms such as Britain and Briton, as well as British.
To explain...there have always been two distinct strains of Celtic people, which is to say, the Brythonic and the Goidelic, or Gaelic. And while the Welsh, Cornish, Manx and Breton peoples are of the Brythonic strain, the Scottish and the Irish are of the Gaelic.
It could be said therefore that I partake of both Gaelic and Brythonic Celtic ancestry. Confused? You should be.
Whatever the truth, I'm proud of my roots in Ulster and Glasgow, both of which possess long-established proletarian traditions, and the same applies to Wales and the North and Midlands of England. The South, on the other hand, is widely seen as an affluent, middle class region, and that's especially true of the so-called home counties, which are those adjacent to London.
Needless to say, though, poverty does exist in these regions, and even the great metropolis of London contains

no less than fourteen of the nation's most deprived twenty boroughs. Yet it remains one of the most powerful urban centres in the world.
And according to certain authorities, it's easily the most powerful, being the financial heart of a still existent British empire.
Others would refute this theory out of hand, but it attracts strong support nonetheless. For my part, I view it with a characteristic mix of open-mindedness and scepticism.
What's more, while Glasgow is home to a massive urban working class, with clearly defined Catholic and Protestant communities, Scotland's capital city of Edinburgh has a reputation for great gentility. Yet, in common with other affluent cities throughout a nation of striking extremes of wealth and poverty, she also contains areas of enormous deprivation.
One of these, Leith, is the setting for the controversial novel *Trainspotting* by Irving Welsh, which was made into a successful movie in 1996.
I'm also proud of more overtly Anglo-Saxon ancestry coming through my father, who although born in Tasmania and raised by a Danish father in Sydney, New South Wales, is English through his mother Mary.
For having established my quintessential British credentials, England is the nation I identify with in spirit.
Indeed if anyone incarnates the riddle of what it is to be both British and English, it's me. For lest we forget, Britain is less a nation than a sovereign state of four nations, four countries, four peoples...England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
Yet, for all this talk of earthly nations, in the end there will only be one state remaining, another country, to quote from the famous British hymn, *I Vow to Thee My Country*, another country in which all distinctions of ethnicity and class will be a thing of the past, and all conflict consigned to the Lake of Fire to burn forever and ever.

And so the British Blues Explosion

My first school was a kind of nursery school held on a daily basis at the home of one Miss Pierce in Bedford Park.
But as the sixties were about to dawn, I joined the exclusive French LycÃ©e in South Kensington, where I was to become bilingual within a matter of months. While it was early in the totemic decade of pop and youth culture that Pat Halling moved into the tough London session music world...where he was to record for film, television and the new popular music that had been recently sired by the Rock and Roll revolution.
And for much of the time he spent within this lucrative sphere, his main role was that of principal violin, or leader or concertmaster, traditionally in charge not just of the string section but the entire orchestra, and so answerable to the conductor alone. But he also served as the fixer contracted to recruit the players for a particular session.
In the meantime, Miss Ann Watt's musical life was put on hold while she concentrated on being the mother of two small boys, while supporting her husband in his various passions.
For example, she faithfully crewed for him for many years at the Tamesis Sailing Club in Teddington, West London, where he was a member for much of the sixties, winning several racing trophies initially in Firefly number 1588, while his career as a session player thrived.
According to what Pat has told me, he worked on early sessions for British musical sensations Lulu, Cilla Black and Tom Jones, as well as with superstar producers Tony Hatch and Mickie Most.
Hatch wrote most of Petula Clark's hit singles of the sixties, some alone, some with his wife Jackie Trent, and she went on to become a major star in the US as part of the so-called British Invasion of the American charts.
And the same was true of several acts produced by Most; such as Herman's Hermits, whose angelic front man Peter Noone ensured his band were briefly almost as popular as the Beatles stateside.
Pat became close friends with both Most and composer-arranger John Cameron, the two men who helped turn Scottish singer-songwriter Donovan into an international superstar. And among those session musicians who played for Most in the early to mid '60s were Big Jim Sullivan, Jimmy Page and John Paul Jones, who also arranged for him.
And guitar virtuoso Page went on to join seminal British Rock band The Yardbirds, which had been initially

managed by the impresario Simon Napier Bell, before being taken over by Most's business partner, Peter Grant.
When the Yardbirds collapsed in 1968, the two remaining members, namely Page and bassist Chris Dreja, set about forming a new band, the New Yardbirds, also to be managed by Grant.
While the super-talented Terry Reid, who was among those constituting what could be termed Page's first team of potential lead vocalists, turned him down, he yet recommended a 19 year old from the Midlands of England by the name of Robert Plant for the job.
Page duly travelled to Birmingham with Dreja and Grant to look the youngster over, and was impressed by what he saw. He then invited Plant to spend a few days with him at his home, the Thames Boathouse, in the beautiful little Berkshire village of Pangbourne for initial discussions related to the band.
And all this took place in the summer of '68, just months before I joined the Nautical College situated a few miles from the village itself.
So the New Yardbirds were born, but before long they'd mutated into Led Zeppelin, one of the most successful Rock bands of all time, and perhaps second only to the Rolling Stones in terms of legendary darkness and mystery.
It seems incredible that a force of such seismic power and influence as Led Zep should emerge from the relative innocence of the London Blues and session music scenes of the sixties, but then a similar thing could be said of British Rock as a whole.
So what was it that transformed an interest among young men of largely middle class origin in the bleak brooding music of the Blues into a musical movement that took the world by storm all throughout the '60s and beyond? That's not an easy question to answer, but I'm going to give it some sort of a go.
The Blues themselves may provide something of a solution to the puzzle, for in the shape of the British Blues boom they constituted one of the dominant tendencies within the Pop explosion of the 1960s.
Yet, far from proceeding from the Pop revolution inspired by the Beatles, the British Blues came long before it. In fact, they emerged from the Traditional Jazz revival of the late 1940s, although most Trad devotees decried the Blues as simplistic in comparison to Jazz.
The most beloved and fearful form of the Blues was the Delta Blues, whose spiritual homeland was the Mississippi Delta, a region lying between the Mississippi and Yazoo rivers, and stretching all the way from Memphis in the north to Vicksburg in the south.
With lyrics reflecting the sensuality, isolation and anguish of lost souls victimised by life and alienated from God, she found fertile soil in the still repressed United Kingdom of the late 1950s and early sixties. And especially in the affluent south among such passionate young men as Brian Jones from the spa town of Cheltenham in Gloucester; Eric Clapton from Ripley in suburban Surrey; and Jimmy Page from nearby Epsom, also in Surrey.
However, it's none of these legends, so much as a certain guitarist of Greek and Austrian ancestry by the name of Alexis Korner who's been called the Founding Father of the British Blues. And justifiably so, for more than anyone, he was the incubator of the British Blues Boom which was one of the great cornerstones of the entire Rock movement.
Korner began his musical career in 1949 as a member of Chris Barber's Jazz Band, but his love of the kindred but then lesser known music of the Blues led him to form Blues Incorporated in 1961. And he did so with several future Rock superstars, including Jack Bruce, most famous for his tenure with Blues-Rock legends Cream, and Charlie Watts, future sticks man for the Stones, both from a Jazz background. As was Brian Jones; for this was not unusual for the first generation of British Rock artists.
And in addition to those already mentioned, the list of future Rock and Roll stars who were drawn to Korner's regular Rhythm and Blues night at the Ealing Jazz Club in the early '60s included Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Brian Jones, Ginger Baker, Jimmy Page, Rod Stewart, and Paul Pond.
Pond, a tall, elegant Oxford undergraduate with the chiselled good looks of a Greek god, had been Brian Jones' first choice as lead vocalist for a projected Blues band, but apparently convinced the Blues had no future, he turned the young Cheltenham Welshman down.
He later resurfaced as Paul Jones, front man for former Jazz outfit Manfred Mann, one of the first generation of British Blues bands to achieve mainstream Pop success. And alongside Jones and Mann were Mikes

Vickers and Hugg, and bass man Dave Richmond...soon to be replaced by Tom McGuiness, who'd begun his career in the Roosters with Eric Clapton.
While Clapton himself found fame with the Yardbirds which, like the Rolling Stones, the Kinks, the Who and the Spencer Davis Group surfed the first wave of British Blues and R&B all the way into the Pop charts.
But British Rock was fuelled not just by the Blues, but an effervescent fusion of Rock and Roll, Skiffle, R&B, Doo-Wop, Motown and Tin Pan Alley known as Beat. And Beat emerged principally from the tough industrial North and Midlands of England to form part of the great Pop revolution of '63 to '64, although it's doubtful the great record buying public had any notion of the difference between Beat and the Blues.
Yet there were those Pop musicians who clung doggedly to the Blues ethos, despite spectacular chart success. Such as Brian Jones of the Stones; and Eric Clapton, who forsook Pop stardom to seek refuge in Blues purist band Bluesbreakers...whose leader John Mayall played host to a veritable plethora of future Rock superstars at various stages of his career.
Another vital component of Pop that threatened to subvert Rock's evolution as an exclusive offshoot of the Blues was melody; which was the very element the Beatles made central to their music. And as the Rock revolution proceeded apace, it came to play as important a part in its music as rhythm.
And this was significantly attributable to the Beatles, who, in thrall to the nascent sounds of Motown, a form of R&B that had been heavily infused with a Pop sensibility, sought to emulate its exquisite romantic tunefulness.
They also imbued their early music with the sentimental sweetness of both Vocal and Latin Jazz and *Canzone Napoletana*; while all three songwriters were admirers of Classical Music.
Thence the Rock explosion emerged from several incredibly divergent areas to produce a veritable musical Babel. But lest we forget, it did not begin with the Beatles, for even the term Beat was first used in relation to Pop music as early as 1961.
For instance, in *The Big Beat Scene* by poet and writer Royston Ellis, Beat is used to describe the music of the first British Pop stars to emerge in the wake of Elvis. While the term Rock is used as shorthand for Rock and Roll in the selfsame tome.
In fact, by the time of the Beatles' first hit record in 1962, Rock had existed in Britain for at least five years, birthing a host of early superstars. Among these, song and dance men Tommy Steele and Joe Brown had brought a music hall element to the music; while Cliff Richard and the Shadows had preceded the Beatles as the quintessential British guitar band.
In other words, an entire spectrum of British Rock and Pop music had been established even before the Beatles had recorded their first hit record. But this is a truth that history has failed to sufficiently emphasize.

This Thrilling New Art Form

The Beatles are seen by some as the inventors of modern guitar Pop. While this is of course untrue, they are without doubt the best known and most successful Pop group in history. For it was they who consolidated and perfected British Pop, thereby laying the foundation for the entire Rock revolution.
Yet, while they began very much as a Pop group, in time, having resisted being typecast as mere Pop, they could be said to have birthed a special type of Art Rock founded on a vast variety of genres, including Classical music, Music Hall, Tin Pan Alley, Rock and Roll, Country and Western, Folk, Jazz, Motown, Soul and the Blues. But no less removed from pure Pop than the Blues-based Rock of their chief rivals the Stones.
While this might lead one to conclude that it was largely through their influence that Rock became the ultimate musical smorgasbord, this was only partly true, as I've already made clear.
Yet, during their brief few years of existence, they informed the development of Rock to a greater degree than any other group or solo singer. And that includes the Rolling Stones, for while the Stones' primal proto-Punk went on to constitute the basis of all forms of Hard Rock, even these have arguably benefited from the unrelenting melodic inventiveness of the Beatles.
In addition to those already mentioned, another of its chief sources was the Brill Building Sound, which thrived in that brief period between Elvis's induction into the US Army and the onset of Beatlemania. And during this era, the music's initial threat was neutralised by its co-option by teenage idols who, while heavily

influenced by Elvis visually, had nowhere near the same devastating effect on the moral establishment.
Brill Building was named after the very building in New York City where many of its songwriters were housed and which since the '30s had been a centre for Pop music, a term allegedly coined as early as 1926.
Its music could be described as traditional Pop informed by the Rock and Roll revolution; and as such it exerted a massive if largely unsung influence on the evolution of Sixties Rock, with the Beatles covering several Brill Building songs in the early phase of their career.
Yet, while the Beatles remain indelibly associated with modern Pop, by the totemic year of '66, they were arguably as much a Rock as a Pop group; and their lyrics had started to acquire a marked intellectual dimension. And this was in no small part attributable to Bob Dylan.
For Dylan was a consciously intellectual figure who, in the fallow years immediately preceding the British Invasion, had mined the ancient American art of Folk Music for inspiration.
By so doing, he'd gained an international reputation as a poet-minstrel in the Protest tradition, and largely thanks to him, Pop had acquired a certain gravitas by the mid 1960s. And one which was strikingly at odds with the innocent and sentimental music of the early Beatles. Yet, the Beatles outgrew the Beat era with ease, while Beat itself was rendered obsolete by the depredations of Rock.
This thrilling new art form developed not just as a result of Dylan's influence as the first great poet of Rock, but an increasing musical complexity, possibly allied to a greater spiritual darkness. And while the Beatles led the field in terms of the former, the latter could be said to have arisen from a tougher element introduced into the music.
This came courtesy of such Blues-based outfits as the Stones, the Kinks, the Yardbirds, the Pretty Things and the Who, and the term Rock was somehow perfect in describing their powerful primal sound. However, when this moved in to supplant Pop as the critic's term of choice, it's impossible to say.
One thing is certain is that as soon as it did, Rock became far more than a mere music form. In fact I'd go so far as to say it was a way of life from the outset; a philosophy; even a religion, and as such, one of its prime tenets was rebellion against the traditional Judeo-Christian values of the West. So it's not surprising its spiritual homelands were Britain and the USA, given these are the nations most associated historically with the rise of Evangelical Christianity.
For despite having been inextricably linked to Pop since its inception, Rock is clearly more than just another form of popular music. And while it possesses very little ability left to shock, its rebel spirit, and the sexual and social upheavals it once spearheaded have altered the fabric of Western society, possibly beyond all hope of recovery.

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