



Brian Jones: The Making of the Rolling Stones

By Paul Trynka

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Editorial Review

Review

“*Brian Jones* . . . is revisionist history of the best kind—scrupulously researched and cogently argued—and should be unfailingly interesting to any Stones fan ”

—**Larry Rohter, *New York Times***

“*Brian Jones* . . . is the first serious, thoroughly reported biography of the ill-fated Stone, with extensive new research into Jones’ privileged but difficult childhood and his transformation by the exotic language and vitality of American blues.”

—**RollingStone.com**

“[A] thoughtful, thorough bio based on lots of new interviews that shed light on his neglected life and controversial death”

—**Hollywood Reporter (Top 10 Music Books of 2014)**

“In all, this is a must-read for Stones fans. If as the years continue to go by and Brian Jones becomes more and more a mere player in the tale he created, this book should bring him back into the position he belongs.”

—**Glide Magazine**

“Paul Trynka gives us a balanced and compassionate portrait of a guy who has been slagged off and diminished a lot in Rolling Stones history. The fact is there would have been no Rolling Stones without him. He at least deserves some respect for that. *Brian Jones: The Making of The Rolling Stones* delivers it.”

—**Mike Segretto, *Psychobabble***

“Trynka has forged what may be the last great Stones book.”

—**Kris Needs, *Shindig Magazine***

“Magnificent and controversial . . . a monumental book”

—**Paul Gleason, *Stereo Embers magazine***

“Impeccably researched, it will overturn all you’ve been spoon-fed by ‘the victors’.”

—**Ian Fortnam, *Classsic Rock***

“A fantastic piece of work, and a great counter balance to Mick and Keith’s revisionist history.”

— **James Marshall**

“An impressive undertaking and a consistently interesting read. Stones fans owe it to themselves to get a new perspective on [this] anti-hero.”

—**Jake G Rascoff, *Dartmouth Review***

“Paul Trynka?as he did in his biographies of David Bowie and Iggy Pop?does a masterful job in presenting a life that had a profound effect upon kids on both sides of the Atlantic. “

—**Mike Greenblatt, *The Aquarian***

“A great, cautionary tale”

—**George Byrne, *Irish Independent***

“Thorough and well researched”

—**Craig Brown**, *Mail on Sunday*

“Fascinating . . . wonderful at evoking that very non-modern age of the 50s and 60s”

—**Mark Blake**, *Mojo*

“By many accounts, Brian Jones was the visionary of the Rolling Stones, though he gets little of the credit. Paul Trynka puts the multi-instrumentalist at the forefront in *Brian Jones*.”

—**Publishers Weekly**

“A lively biography of the enigmatic founder of the Rolling Stones, who was dethroned and died just as the band approached its artistic peak . . . Trynka’s portrait is that of a young man determined to get what he wanted, flaunting conventions and consequences and exhibiting little conscience as he cemented his ambition to become a professional musician . . . An intimate portrait of the multifaceted and beguiling Jones, who forever changed popular music and culture.”

—**Kirkus Reviews**

From the Hardcover edition.

About the Author

Paul Trynka is a respected music writer known both for his groundbreaking role as editor of *MOJO* magazine and as author of *Starman* and *Open Up and Bleed*, biographies of David Bowie and Iggy Pop, respectively, which attracted laudatory reviews worldwide. *Portrait of the Blues*, his collection of oral histories with more than sixty blues musicians (in collaboration with photographer Val Wilmer), is regarded as a landmark work. Paul was also editor of the widely respected *International Musician* magazine and founding editor of the *Guitar Magazine*, for which he first interviewed Keith Richards more than twenty years ago. Paul lives with his wife, Lucy, and son, Curtis, in Greenwich, London, just down the road from Mick and Keith’s old stomping ground of Dartford.

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IT WAS ONLY a raggle-taggle bunch of musicians, kids really, and the way history normally unfolds, there should have been no way any witnesses would have spotted that something world-changing was happening. Yet, the leader of the band did have something special about him – the way he sneered at the audience, getting in their faces, coaxing out shimmering glissandos from his guitar in a style no one had ever seen before, or switching over to an amplified blues harp, still a radically new instrument for most of the teenagers who watched him and his companions intently. Elmo Lewis, as he called himself, introduced several of the numbers and ministered to the rest of his band lovingly, like a mother hen, checking that the singer Mick had got the beat, and keeping a close eye on his fellow guitarist’s fretboard. Occasionally, when the riffs cohered into something stirring and electrifying, he and the piano player – the other more obviously experienced musician – would look at each other and smile in satisfaction.

Truth is, though, that some people in that decent-sized crowd watching the Rolling Stones, crammed on to the Marquee stage, in July 1962 – and some among those at other little clubs around London over the next few weeks – did spot that something unique was happening. One girl felt the ground beneath her shifting as

the band ripped through twenty songs, picked out and overseen by the blond guitarist. At her London grammar school, Cleo Sylvestre had been taught that the role of black people in culture was as 'heathens and savages'. Now, as the band hot-wired this obscure music from deep within the black ghettos of the Chicago Southside and the Mississippi Delta, a new world opened up – a world in which black people like her would have a voice, a role.

Some musicians spotted it, too. Ginger Baker, an aggressive young drummer who had cut his teeth in the trad jazz clubs and was being persuaded into the blues scene by the silver-tongued club owner Alexis Korner, was dismissive of the Stones' upstart singer. Yet still he reckoned that the band's exuberant, snotty, teenage take on this deep, resonant music was something radical and new.

Businessmen got it. Harold Pendleton, manager of the Marquee and a mainstay of the jazz scene, was likewise unimpressed by the band's music yet still noted something powerful about their attitude – a challenging of authority, a disregard for convention that emanated principally from Brian Jones, the twenty-one-year-old who styled himself Elmo Lewis. Jones was a visionary, Pendleton reckoned, although there was something he didn't like about him. He used the term 'evil genius'.

As for Brian himself, the momentary satisfaction he felt as the band he'd masterminded took to the stage was itself world-changing. The music was the one thing that gave meaning to a life that was fractured, restless and unhappy. Now, over fifty years on, that situation endures. Brian Jones got many things wrong in his life, but the most important thing he got right, for his music was world-changing.

History is written by the victors, and in recent years we've seen the proprietors of the modern Rolling Stones describe their genesis, their discovery of the blues, without even mentioning their founder. We've seen Brian Jones described as a 'kind of rotting attachment'. This phrase in itself gives an idea of the magnitude of this story. The dark power of the Stones' music derives from their internal battles, a sequence of betrayals, back-biting, sexual oneupmanship, violence, madness and mania.

The aim of this book is not to gloss over the many flaws of Brian Jones, for if ever a man was driven by his flaws, it was he. His contrariness, his vulnerability and his unhappiness prompted his estrangement from the establishment, and ultimately would underpin the values of the band, which challenged that establishment so provocatively. There was a darkness in his heart that inspired his exploration of the Devil's music, of the story of Robert Johnson, the man who traded the secrets of guitar playing for his immortal soul. Brian sought out those secrets, and was the first man to communicate them to a new generation. It was he who opened the doors to that new world, unlocking its secrets both for his bandmates and for us.

In the course of writing this book I've travelled far, and plumbed deep. It's a sad story – of messy lives, unwanted children, ruthlessness and misogyny, of feuds both petty and profound. But great art can come from messy situations. As we shall see, right from the start there was something of the Devil in Brian Jones. And as we know, the Devil has the best tunes.

NEW WORLDS ARE often dreamed up in the most mundane locations. Few people would have imagined the genteel, manicured spa town of Cheltenham as a cradle for a radical new musical manifesto. But the place turns out to be funny that way, countless secrets having been harboured behind those deceptively staid facades. Brian Jones was in fact a typical Cheltonian. By the time he left the place he'd discovered more musical secrets than were ever supposed to exist, as well as amassing more secret children, and heartbreak, than can ever have been imagined.

The word 'genteel' seems to get applied to Cheltenham with monotonous regularity. And yes, perhaps it is

an appropriate adjective, as long as you bundle in alongside it the following words: secretive, exotic, futuristic, sordid, elegant, decadent and artistic. Nearly all of those terms capture the early life of Lewis Brian Hopkins Jones, a boy whose destiny seemed more than any other dictated by his surroundings and upbringing. He was the son of an ambitious man who worked at the cutting edge of a world-changing technology. Lewis Blount Jones was, like the son who carried his name, a genius; yet his life was defined by secrets, repression and the traditional British stiff upper lip. This legacy would also define the life of Lewis Jones Jr, for better and for worse.

Any visitor who's new to the town would be instantly struck by the serene beauty of its gleaming white Regency buildings. A long, wide promenade runs south from the high street (location of Brian's grammar school) down to a group of buildings around Lansdown Crescent and Montpellier Walk, all airy shops and coffee bars, framed by caryatids – pillars in the shape of serene women, like those of the Acropolis. Over the road lie the fine green lawns of Imperial Gardens, with the Queens Hotel just in front; a little further down is the Pump Room, another jewel of Georgian architecture, based on the Pantheon; Regency terraces stretch in every direction, the very model of taste and discretion. But as Barry Miles, founder of counter-culture journal *International Times* and the Indica Gallery, who fled Cheltenham in 1962, points out, 'it's all a facade'. The elegant stone frontages of many buildings are in fact cheap painted stucco; the interiors are rickety and damp, thrown up quickly by speculative builders. With its exclusive Ladies' College, arts and music festivals, and well-heeled populace, many of them ex-colonials, post-war Cheltenham was indeed a centre of decorum and conservatism. But behind that lay a hotbed of intrigue and vice.

This secretive character became more formal, more acknowledged, from the early fifties, when Cheltenham became the capital for the nation's spooks after GCHQ, the centre of the British eavesdropping and intelligence community, moved from Bletchley to two government-owned sites in the town. Modern apartment buildings started to spring up and then to fill with mysterious people, many of them European and multilingual; sometimes, if you spotted them drinking at the town's exclusive wine bars, you'd glimpse a security pass.

The James Bond vibe was intensified by the Gloster Aircraft Company, builders of Britain's first operational jet fighter, the Meteor: its top-secret prototypes were assembled at a building on Cheltenham High Street. By the mid fifties Gloster were producing the Javelin, a glossily futuristic delta-wing interceptor. Gloster and Rotol, a part-owned subsidiary of Rolls-Royce launched as a joint venture with the Bristol Aeroplane Company, were the town's leading employers, drawing scientists and engineers like Brian Jones's father from around the country.

Alongside the world's modern secretive industries, Cheltenham was a centre of the world's oldest secretive industry. The town hosted several US Air Force bases, and the presence of US and British military personnel encouraged a bounteous supply of prostitutes: according to one count, those elegant Regency facades hid a total of forty-seven brothels. Right up to the 1960s, Bayshill Road, two blocks down from the Promenade, was a haunt for streetwalkers, who'd cheekily ask any passing men if they were 'looking for business'. The Queens Hotel dominated the town's main drag and became a regular haunt for the teenage Brian Jones, all shirt and tie, formal and correct. Yet during the Cheltenham Festival horse-racing week the old colonial types were cleared out to make way for hard-core gamblers and intimidating Irish gangster types who'd play cards until dawn surrounded by high-class call girls who regarded the festival as a cornerstone of the year's working calendar. Even the political establishment had its louche side: the town's most popular mayor, Charles Irving, who became a favourite of Tory icon Margaret Thatcher, drove around town in a white Ford Thunderbird alongside a chauffeur who was dressed in mauve – a spectacle 'so gay it was unbelievable', say witnesses.

Perhaps the best evidence of Cheltenham's Jekyll and Hyde character can be found in the pages of the

refined, stately daily newspaper the *Gloucestershire Echo*. The *Echo* majored on issues military and religious, its attitude proudly High Church of England. Its readers were often subject to shocked homilies berating the town's lax morality. In 1956, the Reverend Ward bemoaned 'some innate tendency, a particular evil, that is more marked in Cheltenham than in most places in this country', namely the town's rate of illegitimate births – the highest in the country outside London's inner city. Concerned burghers commissioned further research to establish whether Americans or Irish were responsible for this appalling statistic; the figures revealed it was the English. In later years, Brian's fellow Stones wondered how someone so sexually voracious could have come from a town like Cheltenham. Little did they realize that he was Cheltonian through and through.

Lewis Blount Jones, a talented graduate in engineering from Leeds University, scored a prestigious job at Rotol in 1939, and soon after that married Louisa Simmonds. The couple set up home on Eldorado Road, in a somewhat gloomy red-brick house near the town centre. This was where the young Lewis Brian Hopkins Jones, born in Cheltenham's Park Nursing Home on 28 February 1942, grew up. Brian was soon joined by a sister, Pamela, who was born on 3 October 1943. Just over two years later, on 14 October 1945, the family was touched by tragedy when Pamela died of leukaemia. Lewis and Louisa never spoke about their child's death – it became another of Cheltenham's secrets. The following summer, on 22 August, another sister for Brian was born – Barbara, who would always resemble him.

Around 1950, the family moved to Hatherley Road, in what we'd describe today as quintessential suburbia. In the austerity of the immediate post-war years a new home in a leafy location, complete with garage and modern kitchen, was a badge of high status. 'It was a prestigious place,' remembers next-door neighbour Roger Jessop. 'Those houses were built as special one-offs, much sought after, and the people in our area were eminently middle class. And of all of them, Lewis Jones was about as middle class as you could get.'

Lewis Jones would become a symbol of the Generation Gap – the fault line that opened up when boys like Brian Jones reached adolescence. Brian's life was lived in flagrant opposition to the values of his father, who was repressed and domineering, and who never, ever used the word 'love'. Yet Lewis was anything but an old fogey. Just as Brian became the embodiment of a cultural revolution, Lewis was the embodiment of a technological revolution: his duties at Rotol included work on the most advanced propellers and turbines of the day. Not only did he own a desirable suburban residence, Lewis also owned a car and a phone, both of them rare possessions in the early fifties, and was typical of the new wave of modern British engineers who'd led the world in the development of radar, the jet engine and military electronics. 'He was far-sighted, concerned about the future of British engineering, and would write well-argued letters to the newspapers suggesting it should be given higher priority,' says Roger Jessop.

The young Keith Richards witnessed Hurricanes and Spitfires chasing lone Dorniers out of Kent – there's a good chance their propellers were made by Rotol, as were vital engine parts for Britain's pioneering jets. Like GCHQ and the Dowty company (with which Rotol later merged), Rotol was a prestigious Cheltonian workplace. Lewis commanded huge respect and eventually became head of the crucial airworthiness department. 'He was a learned gentleman,' says colleague Robert Almond, 'formal, as people were in those days.' Linda Partridge, another Dowty Rotol worker, calls him 'delightful; a very nice, gentle sort of man'. Linda's brothers knew Brian well, and thought Lewis and his son were pretty similar, in looks and size – small feet, delicate musician's hands, modest height – and a certain shyness.

Louisa Simmonds had met Lewis in South Wales and shared with her husband a Welsh 'chapel' background: both were brought up in the traditions of the Welsh Methodist Church. Most surviving accounts of her come from Brian's teenage girlfriends, like Pat Andrews, who remember Louisa's household as 'a morgue', gloomy and oppressive – but by this time, of course, Brian's wilful behaviour was already causing crippling tension in the Jones family.

Back in the 1950s, though, Louisa – a slim, neatly dressed woman with practical mid-length hair – was well known in Cheltenham middle-class circles. She and her husband were social in that earnest, self-improving, almost Victorian way. The couple were proud of their Welsh roots and were key members of the local Cymmrodorion group, which organized talks on Welsh literature and history. The Welsh Church, says family friend Graham Keen, had a strong presence in Cheltenham: ‘there was a lot of Welsh economic migration from 1917, after the coal bust’. Graham’s parents, Marian and Arthur, knew the Joneses well from Welsh and musical circles, and shared the same ethos of self-improvement, with one crucial difference. ‘The chapel beliefs were that you didn’t drink, you didn’t smoke,’ Graham explains. ‘But there was a certain flexibility – it was mixed with common sense.’ Graham’s dad Arthur enjoyed a drink without believing it would condemn him to Hell, but the Keens reckoned the Joneses’ attitude was ‘fairly fundamental’.

Louisa boasted one undeniably positive character trait: her enthusiasm for music. Although a busy housewife, she gave piano lessons and got involved with the local arts scene. By the late 1940s she was a member of the Cheltenham Townswomen’s Guild, an urban, artier version of the Women’s Institute. She was also a mainstay of the Guild Choir, conducted by Marian Keen. They’d work on Elgar, Vaughan Williams and choral pieces by other modern composers at the Keens’ house on Old Bath Road, or at the Congregational Church on Priory Terrace. The little group became a regular attraction at Guild events and local arts competitions. When Louisa’s choir won a cup at the Cheltenham Festival of Performing Arts, judged by a professional panel, the triumph was a source of pride for months.

Music was at the heart of one of Louisa’s closest friendships, with next-door neighbour Muriel Jessop, Roger’s mother: both families owned pianos, so Muriel and Louisa spent many hours at each other’s houses practising light classical music and vocal duets (Debussy, Gilbert and Sullivan) with which they’d enter competitions at the Cheltenham Music Festival and other events. ‘They would be outperformed by the professionals, but they would always put up a very creditable, educated, middle-class ladies’ performance,’ says Roger. Louisa owned a gramophone – again, like the modern semi, the car and the telephone, fairly unusual in early fifties Britain – and there was always music around the house.

So, for all the generation divide, the young Brian – softly spoken, with an impeccably middle-class accent, fascinated by music from an early age – was recognizably his parents’ son.

The Joneses were, say their neighbours, quiet and punctilious; they kept their drive swept, and were the first to take action if there was a problem with noise or minor vandalism in the area. ‘You couldn’t have a more conventional English middle-class family than that,’ says Roger Jessop. ‘I don’t mean that in a snide way.’ The Jessops were close with the Joneses and found them ‘reserved but friendly’. They didn’t socialize in the way we would today – no dinner parties or trips to the pub – but Roger’s dad Frederick, a geography teacher at the boys’ grammar school, helped the ten-year-old Brian out with homework, while Lewis assisted Roger with maths and engineering-related problems. Lewis was a patient, logical teacher – he’d work through a problem methodically, enjoying the elegance of the correct mathematical solution.

The young Brian Jones certainly looked like the son of a science geek. He was well spoken and confident but looked gawky, with his horn-rimmed specs and gap-toothed smile, and was a serious, earnest boy, ‘almost priggish’ according to one of his teachers. ‘He was quite nerdy,’ says Roger, who remembers Brian disappearing for long trainspotting sessions at a vantage point close to the nearby private school Dean Close, which Brian attended.

Yet a couple of people noticed the sensitivity that set him apart from his dutiful, conventional parents. Trudy Baldwin’s family attended church with the Joneses, at St Philip’s and St James, where Brian, wearing crisp white robes, sang in the choir from around the age of ten. The two families grew fairly close, and Trudy, a few years older than Brian, became a regular babysitter for the Jones children. She remembers the young

Brian well, in particular his revelation about a sister who was completely unknown to the Baldwins: 'Brian told me there was another child in the family – a sister who died. He showed me photos of her. He seemed to need to let me know, as if it was something not talked about – my parents were quite close friends, but I don't think they ever knew. It must have been awful, to hide something like that away.'

Trudy Baldwin, like many Cheltonians, looks back on her upbringing and marvels at how strict, how grim it was, bound by deference and repression of emotion. Happiness and approval came from pleasing your elders. These were also the rules for the young Brian Jones, at home and at Dean Close, all tall gothic buildings in sprawling grounds, where he was easily one of the brightest kids in his year, exceptionally adept at English and French, but good at maths, too.

Brian's conventional, slightly nerdy look was complemented by the many interests he shared with his dad, particularly a fascination with engineering. Around the age of ten his parents bought him an expensive, finely engineered green mini steam engine, which he'd tinker with in a state of rapt attention, fuelling it with methylated spirits. His interest in machinery survived well into his teens: he could often be seen examining the shelves of toy trains in the model shop on the high street, or cycling off for an afternoon of trainspotting with his friend Tom Wheeler; while in his later teens he shared an interest in Derbyshire's tram system with friends John Appleby and Tony Pickering, spending hours sanding tram bodywork or shovelling cinders for the track.

This dutiful schoolboy was also good at the traditional sports practised at Dean Close, especially cricket. Lewis often moved his dark-coloured Wolseley out of the drive so Brian and Roger could practise batting and bowling against the garage door. Brian spent a fair amount of time at the Jessops', too, especially around the time when he was preparing for the eleven-plus, the traditional and, for some, intimidating exam that decided a child's eligibility for Cheltenham's ancient grammar school – which, with distinguished alumni like Handley Page, founder of the famous aircraft company, was arguably a more prestigious educational establishment than Dean Close. Active and intelligent, Brian seemed the epitome of the grammar school boy who was likely to achieve. But Roger saw the first problems behind the middle-class facade: 'He was a good spin bowler. We'd play cricket down the drive. But then he'd start to wheeze and splutter: he was asthmatic, extremely asthmatic. He was good enough to play in the school team – for two overs he'd be good, but he didn't have the stamina to play in a match. And always, I think, he resented that.'

It was probably Brian's asthma that inspired his parents to pick out a clarinet for him: playing a wind instrument was standard therapy in the fifties for British kids suffering from this condition. Otherwise, treatment was rudimentary, and relied on blowing a pingpong ball around, or inhaling water vapour from a pan of boiling water – more or less placebos. The clarinet-playing was the one positive aspect of an illness that was at that time rare, sometimes terrifying, and above all isolating.

Brian sailed through his eleven-plus, and on 8 September 1953 enrolled at Cheltenham Grammar School, an intimidating edifice whose Victorian spires and crenellations dominated the high street. It took kids from Cheltenham and the suburbs, and there was a strict pecking order: older pupils were more important than younger pupils, and top streams – once the boys were tested for academic ability at the end of the first term – were more important than lower streams. It was repeatedly drummed into new arrivals how the school's origins harked back to Elizabethan times; a couple of days after starting, the nervous new first years would be 'ducked' under a tap in the central courtyard in an ancient bonding ritual.

The eleven-year-old Brian was one of a small group of boys who seemed unfazed by such things. He was well turned out and at ease in this sort of company, one of just two boys in his form who'd arrived from Dean Close. Indeed he stood out: blond-haired, relaxed, academically ahead of most of his peers and looking 'like a cherub' says one friend from Year 7, Philip 'Pip' Price, who sat at an adjoining desk. 'That was my

first impression, with his blond hair and smiley face.’ Many kids struggled with new subjects, but for Brian it seemed ‘like plain sailing’. He actually seemed to enjoy lessons, and although Dr Arthur Bell, who joined the same year, later described Brian as ‘essentially a sensitive and vulnerable boy’, Pip and others thought the opposite. ‘I couldn’t describe him as a shy person. Not the way he was around town, and with the people he knew.’ Compared to most of the Cheltenham kids he was confident, put his hand up often, and ‘helped other kids’.

In those post-war years, grammar schools took boys from a wide range of backgrounds, hence Brian and his classmates embodied a new social mobility. But before they came to define, or subvert, the system, they had to conform to it. Grammar school boys from working-class Cheltenham families frequently ended up as doctors or professors, and there was heavy emphasis on how many boys achieved scholarships to Oxford or Cambridge. There was a large contingent whose fathers worked at Dowty, or GCHQ – an elite crowd who seemed destined for success, bright boys of whom the teachers approved.

In those first years, L. B. Jones, too, made a powerful impression on his teachers. ‘Very able,’ one of his internal report cards notes, ‘with signs of brilliance.’ In a school that relied on rigorous county-wide selection, this was a significant accolade. ‘He was a clever bloke,’ confirms Colin Dellar, who became friends with Brian around the beginning of 1954, ‘and confident too, there’s no doubt about that.’ Roger Jessop, whose father was by now Deputy Head at the school, regarded Brian as one of the group who studied in ‘an intellectual, rigorous way. He was the top of an A stream in which there were some very bright people, who later got starred entry to Oxbridge. You could see he had the ambition, too.’ Frederick Jessop approved of the boy who lived next door, thought he had the kind of ‘striving ambition’ which the school aimed to foster. In those first couple of years at the grammar school, says Roger, ‘my father was very pleased with him’.

It wasn’t to last.

*

Many years later, Lewis Jones would speak to the BBC about Brian. There was much puzzlement in his account, for Lewis seemed to know little of the internal life of his son. The pair, alike in some key ways, were separated by a generation gap that in their case was a yawning chasm. It opened up in 1956. The cause was jazz – or, more accurately, jazz and sex.

The broadcaster Alistair Cooke once recalled the day his mother first heard him listening to a Louis Armstrong record: she burst into tears, mortified to hear what her contemporaries regarded as ‘degraded, negro depravity’. For boys like Brian and his friends Graham and John Keen, this music was ‘a revelation’. But even the Keen brothers, with their comparatively enlightened parents, ‘just had to keep quiet about it, for the time being. It was considered a bad influence.’

Brian didn’t keep quiet about it. Jazz, and the other black music forms that exploded into British teenagers’ consciousness that year, would become the major focus of his life from that moment on. Ultimately, the way his parents dealt with this dreaded new phenomenon would come to define his life.

Plenty of British youngsters discovered jazz, or rock’n’roll, in 1956, the Year Zero for teenagers, symbolized by the cinematic release of *Rebel Without a Cause*, the James Dean movie which defined the iconography of youthful rebellion. That year, according to Brian’s future bandmates, there were also seismic changes in Dartford, Kent: ‘it was the start of teenage culture, and from that time on our class was divided into musical sects,’ says Dick Taylor, a future Stone. Dick’s A-stream classmate Michael Jagger was already a Yankophile, famously obsessed with baseball, and seized on to this music, as did friends like Bob Beckwith. But Dick and Mick’s parents were indulgent of this new obsession, happy to see their sons’ friends turn up

with a guitar and make a noise in their living room. The same turned out to be true of Keith Richards, whom Dick met at Sidcup Art College three years later. But for Brian and his parents, the advent of 'degraded' music opened up a rift that would within three years become unbridgeable. Plenty of people have heard second-hand reports of Brian's affection-free upbringing as a child; by the time we reach his teens, they become first-hand reports. If they did have affection for Brian, it was conditional on his adhering to their rules. 'It's difficult to pinpoint this with psychological accuracy,' John Keen comments, 'but my mother knew his mother quite well – and I don't think his parents treated him with the love most kids get.'

Cheltenham Grammar tracked the progress of its pupils year by year, and there is something poignant about their judgements on Brian, how the brilliant, confident child who's singing in the church choir at the age of eleven, keeps a rabbit, is a keen scout and a member of the Gloucester Youth Club (Railway Section) becomes estranged. His form teacher, Jim Dodge, noticed a change in Brian's behaviour as early as the summer of 1955, commenting that Brian 'suffers from a dominating father, and has to show off to compensate'. Mr Dodge was, his pupils remember, a shrewd, worldly man, and he'd hit on a key element of the young Brian's psyche. 'It was a tension-ridden family,' Roger Jessop recalls. 'I would have hated to have Lewis as my father. Whatever [Brian] did wasn't right for him.' Compared to the anodyne lines in other boys' reports, Mr Dodge's venture into psychology in Brian Jones's case is hugely significant; it's followed, year on year, by reports that Brian is clever but 'needs careful handling'. Ultimately, his teachers would never learn to handle him.

There was another factor to add to the music and the rush of teenage hormones: Brian's asthma. It was this that became the final nail in the coffin of his future as a grammar school high-achiever. For the first year or two he'd held his own at sports. Then, says Roger Jessop, who cycled to school with him most mornings, he simply dropped out of the sporty set. 'Often he wasn't fit enough for proper games. And I think he resented himself – gave himself a complex. He didn't have the physical well-being to overcome what were nature's blockages.' Brian's teachers remarked on his health problems: there were fifteen days of absence from school in the summer of 1956, and comments that he was sleeping poorly.

At Cheltenham Grammar School, boys who got ahead played rugby or cricket – they were the only ones worthy of mention in the annual school magazine. So Brian's health alone marked him as a boy apart. Roger Jessop was one of many grammar school boys who stayed in touch with each other and went on to make their mark in respectable professions. But after the first couple of years cycling to school with Brian, he and Brian began to take different routes – in their lives, too. 'He was popular in the early years,' says Roger, 'in the way that young boys who were good at classes and could help with homework would be. But very quickly he lost street cred with the mainstream. So he wasn't popular, I would say, when he left.'

If Brian's parents ever read the rush of British newspaper headlines from the mid 1950s on that fulminated against the corrupting influence of rock'n'roll, jazz or the 'Beatnik horror', as the *Sunday People* put it, they would have felt they were living through a case study. Their inflexibility was, it seems, the downfall of the Jones family. Louisa occasionally confided in her choir friend, Marian Keen, telling her that Brian was out of control. Marian, once she was told her sons were obsessed with Louis Armstrong, bent with the wind, letting them listen to jazz. 'My parents were adaptable,' says John Keen. 'I got the feeling Brian's parents were rigid, quick to reject anything outside what they were comfortable with.' The result of this was that Brian Jones turned into a wild child, in Cheltenham terms, within twelve months. When his schoolmates talk about that period, they start to use the same words and phrases, many of them ones that recur through his life: 'chip on his shoulder', 'rebellious'. From that point on, too, everyone starts to talk of him as a musician, almost exclusively, always seen with a clarinet or a guitar. One person uses another term that also crops up later: 'the devil'.

When the music first hit Brian, it all came at once. It's likely that Bill Haley, whose Rock Around The Clock

streaked to the top of the UK charts in November 1955, was the first harbinger of a new way of life. Immediately, Brian started to work out where this music had come from: he investigated all the rawer country records that had fed into rock'n'roll, including Johnny Cash and, as we shall see, Tennessee Ernie Ford. Along with a younger music fan, Phil Crowther, he got into skiffle in 1956 when Lonnie Donegan enjoyed a string of hits and inspired thousands of British kids – including, of course, John Lennon and Paul McCartney – to try their hands at this defiantly DIY genre. Via Donegan, Brian learned about Leadbelly, whose music was also being spread around the Cheltenham coffee bars; this was probably one of the factors that inspired him to acquire a guitar, around the winter of 1956. In the coffee bars, from the new set that he started to hang out with, he learned more, about trad jazz and more modern jazz from Count Basie and Duke Ellington through to Charlie Parker and, by the late fifties, Cannonball Adderley. He devoured all this music, obsessively, as if it were a code to a new way of existence. Which of course it was.

Music was a means of escape, as well as a form of therapy. For there's another word that describes Brian from that period on: lonely. Pat, Brian's girlfriend of 1960, remembers his loneliness. But that sense of isolation, the claustrophobia he felt at home, was a spur to get the young Brian out of the house. Mick Jagger, Dick Taylor and others played their music in the living room; Brian would strap his guitar to his back and get on his bike. The gulf between Lewis Jones and his son meant that over the next few years Brian would amass playing experience far beyond his fellow Stones, and possibly any aspiring blues guitarist in England.

Cheltenham, boring, staid Cheltenham, was now a hotbed of musical experimentation. A little jazz coterie had begun to coalesce at a celebrated building, 38 Priory Street, where an indulgent mum, Mrs N. E. Filby, had allowed her daughters Jane and Ann to open a basement coffee club. 'It started with four grammar school boys, a band led by John Picton,' says Jane. 'All my sister's friends, basically. They'd do their homework upstairs first. Then it was friends of friends – it was never open to the public.' Within a year or so, visiting musicians like Lonnie Donegan and bandleader and trombonist Chris Barber were dropping by when they came to play the Town Hall; by late 1956, the little club had become a second home for Bill Nile, whose Delta Jazzmen were the town's hottest ticket. Brian was a regular at the club by the age of fifteen. 'I saw him at Filby's by early 1957,' says Graham Keen, who was going out with Ann Filby. 'He'd brought a guitar with him, although I can't remember much about his playing. But I do remember he was really worried about getting home on time, cos his mum and dad wanted him in around ten o'clock.'

Brian's interest in being the top kid in class may by 1957 have completely evaporated – 'an awkward attitude', his teachers noted – but he'd turned that formidable focus on to music. At home, he'd spend hours playing records on the family gramophone, obsessively working out riffs and chords and sounds with a devotion that would soon make him stand out. At the grammar school, a small bunch of boys had started to arrange lunchtime music sessions under the supervision of teacher Bill Neve. Neve brooked no nonsense – he'd cuff Brian around the ear if he talked back – but was open-minded musically, and allowed the boys to form a jazz band, led by clarinettist Colin Partridge. The bandleader got on reasonably well with Brian, who turned up with a guitar for the sessions, and it was immediately obvious to Partridge that he'd been practising: 'He'd clearly been playing a while and had been listening to the right music, although I felt there was more to his vision than strictly jazz.' Or at least Partridge's version of jazz, a purist New Orleans revival style in the vein of Bunk Johnson. 'It was rigid, not Brian's style at all,' says the band's singer Dave Jones, who would continue to play with his near namesake. 'My impression,' Partridge states, 'was that he was a loner.'

That is indeed what he was as far as the establishment kids went. As he built new relationships through music, Brian's old friends fell away – or rather he pushed them away, keen to shock those he considered bores or jobsworths. One friend turned enemy was Colin Dellar, who'd sat next to him in the A stream. 'We were friends for two years. And then we were not friends. In the end it was like two gangs, the Jones Gang

and the Dellar Gang. And I used to say that the Dellar Gang used to represent good, and the Jones Gang represented evil.’ The pair started to fall out, says Dellar, when he visited the Joneses’ semi-detached home. It was neat and prim inside but Brian used to delight in leaving a mess for his mum to clean up. ‘He’d say, “That’ll give her something to do!”’ Some of Brian’s other friends put this down to a typical schoolboy showing off, aiming to shock. If so, it worked: it was Dellar who thought there was something of ‘the devil’ about Brian Jones.

Their feud didn’t quite descend into violence but there was constant sniping. One time Dellar pulled off a particularly satisfying coup when groups of kids were marking each other’s history essays. His group managed to get hold of Brian’s to assess. ‘It was a very good piece of work because he was a highly intelligent boy. But we managed to get the history teacher, Mr Campbell, to give him a low mark. That was fun.’

Brian’s counter-attack was devious, and effective. At some point during their fourth year, Deputy Head Frederick Jessop was walking along the school hallway when suddenly he heard a string of obscenities being shouted at him. He hurried up the stairwell in search of the offender, but whoever it was had disappeared. Mr Jessop was certain he’d recognized Dellar’s voice, and questioned the pupil. ‘He was really annoyed with me, but it wasn’t me who’d shouted at him – it was Brian Jones.’ The Deputy Head didn’t believe Dellar. A full year later, Dellar was shocked to find that having joined the sixth form he wasn’t appointed a prefect. Later still he learned that the Head, Dr Bell, ‘had heard all these stories from the Deputy Head about me, that I’d been saying all these things. Which was Brian Jones getting his own back. In the end they realized it was Brian imitating my voice and I did become a prefect – a year later than all my friends. And Brian did that to me.’

Dellar was exceptional in his detestation of Brian Jones, but plenty of other boys noticed his total lack of respect for, even hatred of, authority. ‘He’d lampoon the establishment,’ says classmate Ian Standing. ‘There was always this aura of slight aggression, or obstinacy. It would all have been a big front, but it was very noticeable. He resented authority, no question.’ One or two others in the year also challenged the teachers, but as classmate Robin Pike points out, ‘there would be misbehaviour but not being directly rude to a teacher. Because this was the fifties there was still corporal punishment, hence that certain amount of fear.’

Brian Jones courted punishment openly, most conspicuously in February 1957, when Bill Haley, the chubby kiss-curved rock’n’roller who’d been adopted (for the want of anyone better) as an icon of youthful rebellion, announced extra dates for his UK tour, including a show in Cheltenham. On the 22nd, teenagers queued for tickets, causing a stir in the town: the civic authorities were paranoid about troublemaking youngsters, in particular Teddy Boys, who had generated many outraged headlines in the local paper and were banned from the Town Hall. Police kept a close eye on the crowd, and the *Gloucestershire Echo* printed a photo of the rock’n’roll fans lined up outside the Gaumont. Soon, the talk of the grammar school was the boy a few dozen places back. ‘He was in a grammar school uniform, and it was Brian Jones,’ says Robin Pike. ‘The magnitude of the occasion is difficult to explain. I’d been strictly forbidden to go, and of course this was in school hours. It was outrageous, really. This was a pivotal moment.’

Brian got his ticket and ventured to the concert on his own. The show, however, turned out to be a disappointment, with no riots and oddly formulaic stage announcements by Haley, whose band featured, of all things, an accordion.

He was only just turning fifteen, but Brian was becoming completely self-sufficient. He was affable enough: he’d got off his bike to chat with Robin Pike when they shared a post round that Christmas. But the fact he’d done so felt unusual to Pike: ‘he was particularly friendly – and that in itself was striking’. Where there were shared interests, he’d put the effort in – he continued his visits to Phil Crowther’s house to work on songs

together – but in other respects his take on life had diverged noticeably from the mainstream.

There was another distinctive aspect of Brian's life that struck a few people – local girls such as Carole Woodcroft and June Biggar, who cycled a similar route on their way to the girls' grammar school, Pate's Grammar, to the west of the town. Both of them noticed Brian stopping at Albert Road and meeting a Pate's girl with fairish hair in a long ponytail. Hope (not her real name) and Brian were 'all over each other', says June, 'which was unusual. You might meet a grammar school boy at the Gaumont – where it was dark. Because people talk, and you wouldn't want your parents to find out.'

Brian, the geeky ugly duckling, had grown into a muscular, clear-skinned youth. He wasn't too tall but had a fey, puckish charm all of his own which meant that most of the Pate's girls knew of him. The romance with Hope lasted a few weeks or months, remembers Carole. She liked Hope, who was intelligent, pretty and rang the school bell each morning. 'Then Brian moved on, I think, to another girl.'

For all his defiance and the teachers' comments about his declining academic performance, Brian's results in the O levels he sat that summer were respectable: he got seven, including English, Maths, French, German and two sciences – enough to get him into the sixth form, where for his A levels he took on General Studies plus Biology, Physics and Chemistry. These were notoriously difficult subjects, but the best ones to help him to a career as a vet or pharmacist – two strait-laced professions which Lewis, his neighbours reckon, had picked out for him. When Brian joined the sixth form in September 1957, his teachers pronounced his attitude 'good', although once again there were signs of the inescapable presence of Lewis, who reported an 'awkward attitude at home' to the teachers.

Amid the negativity, the crushing sense of being constantly under supervision, the one meaningful avenue of escape in Brian's life continued to open up. That summer he'd started depping regularly on guitar for Bill Nile's Delta Jazzmen, playing a string of shows at their HQ in a backroom of the grand Victorian swimming baths in Alstone. 'He was a good guitarist, probably better than many on the London scene,' says Nile's singer Dave Jones. 'He wasn't a regular, but he played a lot of times, maybe a dozen.' Then the pair branched off to form Brian's first band, the Barn Owls, with drummer (and twitcher) Steve Keegan. Already Brian was venturing beyond the conventional trad jazz repertoire, exploring the work of guitarists James and Lonnie Johnson and, soon, John Lee Hooker, the most stripped-down and primal of the new electric bluesmen. The little band's set was eclectic – Ain't Misbehavin', CC Rider, Careless Love and a couple of Lonnie Donegan numbers – which they'd strum out at local pubs like the Montpellier Arms, Duke of Sussex and Reservoir Inn. Dave and Brian became fairly close friends, meeting at each other's houses or rehearsing at a garage near Hatherley Road. Dave liked Brian. 'He was easy to work with musically, always turned up for gigs and rehearsals, which was the main thing. He was a worker.'

Dave knew that Brian was trying out other musicians outside their trio, always experimenting and learning; and in the spring of 1958, Brian joined up with two jazzier friends, Mac White and Martin Fry, to open a little club at the Wheatsheaf Inn on the Old Bath Road. Mac's band played there most Wednesdays, while Brian checked tickets on the door.

Brian continued to seek out new songs, in the random ways of kids in the pre-internet age: asking friends for recommendations, using the listening booths in the Curry's electrical shop, poring over the pages of *Jazz News*. He suggested to one school friend, Tim (not his real name), that they start up a record club together. The idea was that Brian would supply the record player, and Tim the records. It was probably early in 1958 when they put their plan into action, catching the bus together out to Gloucester, checking through the record racks at Bon Marche, a big department store, and returning to Brian's house with a copy of 16 Tons by Tennessee Ernie Ford. There was no sign of Brian's parents or sister as they settled down in the neatly tended living room, put the 78 on the little record player, and listened to it again and again. 'It's gritty, real

life,' they remarked to each other. 'The guy's speaking from experience.' It fitted with Brian's diverse tastes. He was absorbing new music, whatever it was, savouring the deep, doleful tones of Ernie Ford and Johnny Cash just as much as he loved the brash energy of Little Richard.

Now, as a sixteen-year-old, Brian attracted more interest around the city. Perhaps it was his recent transformation from an ugly duckling which inspired his oft-noticed narcissism, but with his blond hair cropped short, high cheekbones and fine features, he seemed well aware of his physical appeal. He turned the eye of many a Pate's girl. 'He was very attractive,' says June Biggar, 'with lovely ivory skin and blue eyes'; perhaps adding to the allure, as another Pate's girl, Penny Farmer, points out, he was already known as 'a wild one'. He was one of those people who might come down the street in a mood and walk right past you without saying hello. 'He wouldn't share things,' say other grammar school boys who were mainly still interested in sports, academia and 'normal' pursuits.

Tim, also sixteen, was a fairly shy schoolboy and his friendship with Brian, not to mention their record club, didn't endure. As he describes their relationship, Tim – a pleasant, friendly man who still lives in Cheltenham – pauses for a while before remarking, 'There was something about his personality I didn't feel comfortable with.' The awkwardness was caused, Tim eventually explains, by an incident one afternoon at Brian's house. 'It was one occasion when he and I were together . . . and he suggested we mutually masturbate. It totally threw me. And I never told anybody else about it, not even my wife.'

Now, in 1950s Britain a little mutual masturbation wasn't especially deviant – John Lennon once famously recalled his own youthful circle jerk, while in some private schools it was positively *de rigueur*. None the less, 'It was a precocious thing to do,' says Brian's friend John Keen. 'That kind of thing happened in public schools, but here it would have been beyond the pale.' That was certainly Tim's reaction: 'He did have this dark air about him, from a sexual point of view. I call *that* dark. I think that was why we didn't continue that friendship.'

It was early in 1958 that Brian's sexual explorations had their first lasting consequence, when news spread that the sixteen-year-old Hope had disappeared from Pate's and had given birth to Brian's first child. The matter was hushed up – only Hope's immediate classmates were aware – and the baby was given up for adoption (the normal procedure in what was becoming a common event at the girls' grammar school: Hope's classmates remember at least two other secret births that year). It seems Hope did go on to a fulfilling life, later moving overseas. It appears unlikely that the child ever managed to discover the identity of his father, especially as news of the pregnancy and birth were banished to the arena of rumour and speculation.

Some of those privy to the secret disliked Brian from that moment, such as Carole Woodcroft, who went on to the art college, and took a couple of coach trips to West End clubs with Brian in 1959. 'He was a rogue. But not in a glamorous way, not one of the flirty smiley guys. He seemed very cold, as if he was very focused on what he wanted.' John Keen, later a psychologist, liked and respected Brian, but agrees on the point about coldness. 'It's hard to categorize psychologically, but Brian did have a streak in him which was lacking in conscience. He didn't suffer or act as if anything had happened.' In rebelling against his parents' values, against society's conventions, he gave himself licence to be selfish. Barry Miles, a student at the art college who'd meet Brian often over the following years and who also 'had issues' with Cheltenham, remembers Brian as 'a difficult character to be around, but that's because he didn't belong there – he belonged in London'.

With news of the business with Hope carefully suppressed – the boys' grammar school staff were unaware – Brian remained a popular boy around the area, despite the suspicions of the town's parents. His skills and growing reputation as a musician lent him a certain glamour and – says Penny Farmer, who went out on a date to Filby's with him in 1959 – 'he had a naughtiness about him that made him quite interesting'. The

pair's date was a fun, sparky evening that started out at Filby's; then they took a long, meandering walk up to All Saints, another jazz club on the high street. He was sexy – 'a naughty face, a twinkly face, he had personality' – and a lot of the talk was about music. An acquaintance of Brian's was playing in the band they were going to see; Brian joked about him, did a little mime to poke gentle fun at him. He kept the conversation going, energetically, talking about other friends on the scene, doing little imitations of them. 'He was all about music. Music was him. It was in everything he did.'

The band, it turned out, was forgettable, but many people in Filby's and All Saints saw the pair together and soon word got back to Penny's mum. That's how Cheltenham was. 'She went ballistic. She must have heard things my brother David was saying about [Brian], and told me, "Keep clear of that one!" But he really was one of those kids you didn't want to touch for long, or you'd get burnt.'

In the claustrophobic Cheltenham scene, plenty of girls knew about Brian. He was a regular at the sixth form dancing lessons above the Gaumont Cinema, where Brian had seen Bill Haley (Pate's headmistress Miss Lambrick had banned the joint grammar school dances for a short time in an attempt to curb her school's humiliatingly high pregnancy rate, but relented after a few months). Robin Pike remembers Brian disappearing outside with the odd girl, and making out with some French students who were on an exchange around 1959. Yet most of Brian's school friends remember rather more romantic evenings, when Brian danced with a girl he'd met at dancing sessions, or the Friday afternoon sixth form club held jointly with Pate's.

Valerie Corbett lived nearby in Hatherley and was a pupil at Pate's Grammar; she and Brian became a fixture on the scene, chatting at Filby's or on the driveway out of Pate's where Brian would wait, leaning against his bike. 'I remember them particularly from the dance classes,' says Brian's classmate Roger Limb. 'There'd be waltzes, quicksteps, the cha-cha-cha, and I remember Val and Brian being there, with Val just gazing at Brian. She had no eyes for anybody else.'

Anna Livia was in Val's class at Pate's, and like most of her schoolmates she found Val 'really sweet and kind, and when she was happy she had a really sweet smile'. Four months younger than Brian, Valerie was a quiet girl with a pretty face and high cheekbones, mid-length brown hair and well-developed breasts; she and Brian, in his slim suit and with his Gerry Mulligan-style cropped blond hair, made an attractive couple. They were omnipresent at Filby's and other trendy haunts like the Waikiki wine bar and the Patio restaurant throughout the spring of 1959, Brian's final year at school. Colin Partridge, Brian's grammar school contemporary, was one of many who thought the pair looked 'blissfully happy. Although I'm sure they had disagreements from time to time, they seemed joyful.'

Back at the grammar school, though, life was anything but joyful. There were many minor incidents during Brian's final year – benzene ignited in the chemistry lab, throwing of mortar boards around the school grounds – that saw him carpeted or questioned. His absences increased, and in the spring of 1959 this 'unreliable development and conduct' prompted his form master to write to Brian's father. Other teachers tried a more personal approach: the head of biology, Ron Bennett, had high hopes for Brian, as did his bluff deputy Fred Dempsey, who took him aside for a man-to-man talk. 'You've had it all cushy, Brian,' he remonstrated with him. 'You haven't seen the world yet, you don't know how difficult it is to make a living!'

'I really appreciate you telling me this,' the seventeen-year-old replied, with fake sincerity, 'I really will make an effort.'

Instead, his behaviour deteriorated further, into open confrontation.

In the almost textbook list of causes for the teenage rebellion of Brian Jones, the grammar school's bias towards conformist rugby-playing types seems especially to blame. The most potent symbol of this

favouritism was David Protherough, prefect and Captain of the Rugby XV, a classic 'jock' esteemed by the teachers and recommended for admission to Cambridge despite the fact he'd not even made the A stream, like Brian. Protherough was popular with the rugby crowd, regarded as 'a bit of a bully' by others, and detested by Brian. This one-man embodiment of the establishment inspired particular contempt, reckon a couple of classmates, because his girlfriend, Glitch, seemed immune to Brian's advances.

The feud – what teachers would later term 'The Protherough Affair' – came to a head during Brian's final term. 'It was a staged affair during the lunch hour,' remembers Roger Jessop. Brian and a friend had arranged a showdown with the rugby captain which 'ended up in a confrontation, a hell of a scrap, with Brian acting as a ringleader'. Teachers broke up the fight and Brian was once again carpeted, but there was insufficient evidence to penalize him without jeopardizing Protherough's prospects too. Despite talk of expulsion, Brian survived his first act of open rebellion. Protherough duly went up to Cambridge, and in his one-man campaign against jobsworths and authority figures Brian Jones dug his trench a little deeper.

SECOND WEEK AT Alexis Korner's club in Ealing and you'd think they would have sorted the teething problems, but no. Condensation dripped steadily on to the stage, the place smelt funky, and the beers were warm. Yet while Keith Scott rippled through the piano parts, Alexis Korner laid down a simple rhythm guitar, and a young drummer called Charlie skipped lightly along a funky path, all led by the grizzled, ornery harmonica of the grizzled, ornery Cyril Davies, no one minded. It was the glorious spring of 1962 and British rock was being hotwired, jump-started, Frankensteined into life, so who cared about being electrocuted?

Mick Jagger was the one who'd sorted the trip, as usual persuading his Yankophile dad to lend him the family motor for the forty-five-minute drive from Dartford. He looked carefully around the room, his usual bounce and cheeky confidence just a little dampened. For the past year he, Keith Richards and Dick Taylor had pretended they were grizzled blues buffs, but really they'd only ever played in a living room. Yet when Mick sidled over to talk to Korner, with his little band's tape in hand, he got a warm Greek welcome. Korner liked the boyish sincerity, and spoke to the skinny would-be bluesman like an exotic moustachioed uncle. Sure, he'd listen to the Blue Boys' tape, he assured him, and there'd probably be a slot free soon.

Someone else had snaffled the guest slot for this week. There was a hurried conversation on the rickety eight-inch-high stage before Korner announced, in a rich, gravelly voice, his special guest for the evening: 'Ladies and gentlemen, I present, on guitar Elmo Lewis, on vocals P. P. Pond!'

As the swooping, glassy, erotic sound of the slide guitar filled the basement, Dick and Keith craned their necks, trying to work out how the hell he achieved it. Korner, one of the first electric blues guitarists they'd seen, was pretty good; Elmo was far better, the way he kept up that loping, clipped rhythm as Pond sang out the vocals, then swooped up the strings with a glass bottleneck for his lead licks. The guitarist, short hair, serious expression, white shirt and houndstooth trousers, looked impossibly cool. What the hell tuning was that? How the hell did he get that sound? Who the hell was he?

Dick and Keith, the two Blue Boys guitarists, didn't bother trying to hide their shock. 'He's not just good,' Dick told his art college mate, 'he's really, really good.'

It was a hell of an evening, as you'd expect of the time when the future Rolling Stones met each other, when the focused, driven Brian Jones so impressed Mick Jagger, Keith Richards and Dick Taylor who in that spring of 1962 were merely schoolboy fans of the music Brian had already mastered. Ideas and thoughts ran through the Dartford trio's minds, and one question above all: How the hell did he get to be so good?

The contrast between the musical development of Brian Jones and his future fellow Stones was obvious within minutes of their first encounter. What wasn't obvious was the tortuous, gruelling nature of the journey Brian had undertaken into the heart of the blues. For the first time we can document that Elmo Lewis, aka Brian Jones, had notched up a hundred or more gigs before he walked on to that stage in Ealing, every one of which separated him just a little bit more from his exasperated parents.

As the 1950s, that grim British decade of repression and conformity, dwindled away, Brian still seemed locked in its clutches. He was treated like a child, forced to comply with his parents' wishes. His three A levels – Physics, Chemistry and General Studies (he failed Biology) – while hardly stunning, were respectable for those days, enough to get him into a red-brick university or polytechnic, so Louisa and Lewis decided this merited a special holiday. But not a family holiday. Lewis couldn't take time off from Rotol that summer of 1959, so Brian was sent to stay with friends in Germany for six weeks. In his future retellings, Brian embellished the trip into a hobo adventure, one boy and his guitar hitch-hiking around Europe. In fact his hosts were elderly, like his parents, and the whole experience was like 'being in an open prison', as he'd tell friends later. The pressure to conform increased on his return, and Brian acceded to his father's wish that he map out a respectable professional career as an optician by enrolling on a course in Applied Optics in London, reportedly at the Northampton Institute (later City University), to start in September.

From what we can tell, Brian missed Val – but not as much as Val missed Brian. 'Her life at that time really centred around Brian,' says Carole Goodsell, a friend of Val's. 'She was quite outgoing, happy and friendly – but he really was her entire life.' In the time Carole spent with Brian and Val she found the aspiring musician 'arrogant and self-centred – but Valerie loved him, which is all that mattered'.

Then, some time in the autumn of 1959, Valerie discovered she was pregnant. As so often happens, the news spread rapidly, but randomly. Initially, says Val's school friend Anna Livia, Val seemed overjoyed. 'She was all excited. I remember her saying, "Oh, I'm going to live in London with Brian." And then there was some incident . . . she broke down in tears and ran out of the room. I suppose that must have been when it had all fallen through.'

The story shared around the coffee bars and basement clubs in Cheltenham was pretty straightforward: Brian had done a runner. Everyone around the tiny scene knew the couple well and shared much the same opinion as Jane Filby, who declares, 'Brian was a big shit. Or, as my husband says, he was actually a little shit. After all, he wasn't that tall.' But none of them really knew the full story. In the 1950s, the outcome of a teenager's pregnancy was decided not by the teenagers but by their parents. Only years later would Graham Ride, one of Brian's friends, who later married Val, discover what had happened: 'Brian made an offer to marry Val, but it all went wrong. It surprised me, when I found out, but that's what happened.'

In the early weeks of her pregnancy, Val, her mother and Brian exchanged letters; for just a few weeks, Val was happy, indulging fantasies of family life with Brian in London. But her parents, seemingly in collusion with Lewis and Louisa, soon put paid to that notion. They were horrified by the thought of their daughter heading for the bright lights to live with Brian and refused to give the necessary permission for him to marry her. This, it seems, was what caused Val's tears, rather than Brian's cold-hearted refusal.

In the spring of 1960, the messy situation turned tragic. Val's father, whom everyone remembers as idolizing his daughter, died of a heart attack. Ken Corbett had worked with Lewis Jones at Rotol; Brian's father, says Graham Ride, blamed his errant son for the tragedy – another outrage to compound the pregnancies of Hope and Val. It was in the traumatic aftermath of Mr Corbett's death that the decision was made to have Val's baby adopted.

Years later, Graham saw the paperwork on the adoption, including various correspondence which showed

that Brian renewed his offer to marry Val. Some time around June 1960, Brian arrived from London to visit Val and his son, Barry David, who was recuperating following surgery on his stomach after his birth on 29 May. Yet at some point in the weeks that followed, Val received a letter from Brian that persuaded her to have nothing more to do with him. No one knows its contents, but the most likely explanation is probably the simplest one, which is that while Brian had offered to marry Val, he said he'd felt pressured to do so, and that he wasn't in love with her.

Val was forced into a commonplace, heartbreaking routine, and gave Barry David up for adoption. She would, it turned out, see Brian again; but her Cheltenham friends, like Roger Limb, mostly share a similar impression when they encountered her over the following year: 'She seemed a rather defeated sort of person. Certainly not the bright smiling young thing I had known before.' Brian's younger sister Barbara suffered, too: Miss Lambrick, the Head at Pate's, resented her lothario brother and reportedly would only supply a terse, ungenerous college reference which hampered Barbara's ambitions to become a teacher.

Graham Ride would be a good friend to Brian during a defining time in both their lives, and via his later marriage to Val would come to understand some of the emotional carnage Brian had wrought. He uses the phrase 'charming but manipulative' of Brian. Friendship with him had its drawbacks, such as embarrassment when seeing ex-girlfriends, or having to cope with his unreliability. The cause, says Graham, was that 'Brian was a very instant person. He lived in the here and now, so if he wanted to make love, that's what he'd do. He never thought about the consequences. If he hadn't been so fertile it wouldn't have been such a problem!'

Brian Jones was typical of a particular generation of men who'd rejected the repressive morality of the 1950s but retained many of that era's misogynist traits. Barry Miles, who'd define, participate in and document much of the sixties counter-culture, encountered Brian many times and remembers, 'He did have a horrible attitude to women. But that was a very common thing in those days – the way most people behaved. There was a lot of misogyny over that decade.'

Through 1960, then, Brian laid down many of the lifestyle traits of his future band. More significantly, over the next twenty months he built the foundations of their music, too, discovering crucial touchstones from Jimmy Reed to Robert Johnson, Elmore James to Slim Harpo. While his future bandmates continued their studies and played music at home for fun, Brian immersed himself in a journey deep into the heart of the music he loved.

By the late spring of 1960 Brian had given up hope of placating his father – ophthalmology, you might say, wasn't something he'd ever really focused on – and over the summer he returned to Cheltenham. By the autumn, many of the grammar school girls and boys had turned their backs on him, as had his parents. It was the making of him. While scraping together money from a variety of jobs, he turned to music as his only salvation. Here, rather than always giving less than he promised, he was happy, indeed motivated, to give more.

In those first months back in Cheltenham, when he stayed with his parents in Hatherley Road, his income was erratic: he worked in Boots the chemist, did a spot of van driving, and later did a stint in the architects office at the County Council. But by the end of the year a large part of his income was starting to come from gigs and music. As his obsession with the blues grew, he also developed a nomadic, rent-party lifestyle that would have been familiar to the musicians who kicked off the genre in Mississippi fifty years before.

Brian had kept up his friendship with Phil Crowther, and when Phil left school that summer the pair spent hours working on songs at Phil's dad's newspaper warehouse. Phil was more of a rock'n'roll fan; Brian, dogmatic in so many ways, enjoyed working across genres, figuring out songs by Eddie Cochran, Little Richard, King Curtis and Duane Eddy alongside the usual jazz numbers. When Phil teamed up with a local

ex-Boys Brigade turned skiffle band to form what would become the Ramrods, Brian tagged along. Given that the band already had a guitarist, and that was Phil's main instrument too, Brian switched to tenor sax (he'd also owned an alto at one point). He made plain this wasn't his main gig, but he put the effort in. 'He knew what he was doing,' says drummer Buck Jones, 'no question about that.' Barry Miles, then at the art college, remembers he had a greasy rock'n'roll King Curtis or Earl Bostic style 'all figured out'.

He impressed his fellow band members, especially considering the sax was just a sideline; they'd also seen him depping on guitar with Bill Nile at Filby's basement on the odd occasion, and knew of jazz dates over in Bath that he'd played with Harry Brampton, another ex-grammar school boy. Brian remained good mates with Phil throughout his Cheltenham chum's short life (he choked to death on his honeymoon in 1964) and, according to Buck Jones, Brian was laid-back and supportive. But bassist Graham Stodart remembers a perfectionism that sometimes gave way to frustration. 'We all liked him. He was a brilliant musician. But he wanted things to be absolutely perfect. And it's when things weren't absolutely perfect that he would show his darker side. We didn't see it an awful lot but he could get a little moody if things hadn't gone the way he'd liked.' The odd black look, the occasional depression when things weren't moving on, would recur later. But in 1960, such moods were fleeting.

Harry Brampton had bumped into Brian at Sid Tong's Record Shop, where he worked in late 1960, and the clarinettist had persuaded Brian to join him on guitar for a series of Wednesday-night shows in a Bath pub, augmenting a five-piece band every week for four or five months. The material was simple – 'the usual stuff, Just A Closer Walk With Thee, Royal Garden Blues, all that kind of thing' – but Brian was unfazed by being asked to turn up at short notice. 'He was a confident guy,' says Brampton. 'In those circumstances as a musician you encounter your share of jobsworths, but he was always a pleasant guy to be around.' With the regular shows with the Ramrods, and in Bath, plus numerous sessions dropping in with visiting and local bands, Brian was already rated, says Brampton, as a 'serious musician'.

In his music, Brian was applying all the focus that was lacking in his efforts to find a conventional career. Back home his relationship with Lewis and Louisa was at breaking point, but in other respects this period was often a blissful one. Away from the straight kids at school he had a wide group of friends who met regularly at the cinema or at barbecues up at Kemton Hill. Around September, one of his musician acquaintances bumped into a fifteen-year-old girl named Pat Andrews and told her how his friend had lost touch with the Cheltenham scene after stays in Germany and London. A few days later, Pat turned up for a blind date at the Aztec coffee bar on the high street, and in the alcove, behind the Chianti bottles and mugs, saw a striking, golden-haired 'angel. I couldn't speak. I literally couldn't speak. There was this light coming from I don't know where . . . I don't remember what he said, I was so focused on this angelic blond hair, but we agreed to meet again, and started going out for walks.'

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