



Plastic Dog in Malvern and Bristol

Transcription of excerpts from an interview with Al Read, who recalls promoting bands at Malvern Winter Gardens in the 1970s

Al: We're talking late '60s then, '68. I joined a new band called, for a while it was called Picture of Dorian Gray, but then a singer came out called Dorian Gray, and they changed it to East of Eden. Very progressive, quite psychedelic at times. I was only with them for about nine months, but during that time we played the Roundhouse, played the Marquee, made a record. We were in a major film, and generally, you know, things were going great. But not an easy band to be with, we didn't knit together very well. So after one huge argument, which lasted from the Isle of Wight back to Bristol, we split up.

There was a Monday night club at The Dug Out in Park Row in Bristol, a gig that you could do every week. When we broke up, East of Eden kind of moved off to London, leaving this Monday night free at The Dug Out, so we played there as a trio, then invited other local bands to play. And then slowly that built into us having to book bands. And then while we were booking bands there, several other colleges said, "Oh, could you book a band for us? Could you book a band for us?" So we then started forming an agency and we moved to The Granary, for a much bigger venue, more bands, bigger bands. More contact with London agencies. And so we, Terry was an artist, well I was an artist as well, but not as good as Terry, so Terry started a graphics studio doing posters, and then got into record labels as we got to know the London agencies and management well, and produced album covers for Nazareth, Thin Lizzy, and also management of several bands. We were

booking big names, but it was for Bristol University, erm, Bragborough, or for, you know, Redland College, end of term concert or something. So we were already booking The Granary, but we'd book, say Slade played The Granary, we thought, gosh, they're a good band, they get everyone going, we'd book them into Redland College. So we were getting this process going, and then one of the agents said, "Look, can you put on a big one? We've got a big name, we want a gig in your area for a specific tour." And we said, well we'd love to do it. We tried to book the Colston Hall in Bristol, it was booked solid and we couldn't get a date that matched the tour date. So we started looking at other venues, and I cannot remember for the life of me how we finished up at Malvern. I remember going up there to look at the venue, and saying, well that's fine, you know, a good sized stage, we can get, whatever it was, 1000 people in that will pay for the band. So that was agreed that we should Malvern. And the agency agreed, and we had a date on the Derek and the Dominoes, Eric Clapton's new band, on their tour. So that was great.

I remember on the day we went up in the afternoon to, obviously, see the layout and make sure all the band's gear was gone in properly, and all that kind of thing. We got to Malvern and we'd forgotten where it was, so we asked a policeman on the street, do you remember those days when there were policemen on the street? And said, "Where's the Malvern Winter Gardens please?" And they said, "Well you go down the street, round the corner, and then follow the queue." Oh, we've got a queue. And it literally was a queue that just went round one road, down the other road, and finally finished up at the Winter Gardens. 'Cause it wasn't a ticket event. I don't think we did a ticket event. We certainly had sort of raffle tickets type things printed. Anyway, it was £1 to get in, and it was just £1, £1, in you go, in you go, in you go, until we had sort of mountains of pound notes [laughs].

I think it was a good size, you know, you could get to the front and you could see the people, and mingle as well, so that was good. So, yeah it was a close atmosphere, so yeah, I think, er, no, I've just got good feelings about it, I can't think of anything that was bad, there was never any trouble. The audiences

were so different, you know, I remember saying, oh, we've got a sort of folky band, or someone's decided to come up and play their folk guitar, could you all sit down on the floor to, you know, so you can be quiet? And they all sat down on the floor and were quiet, you know, it's terrific.

*A transcript of the full interview with Al Read is available from Rock Around the Hills
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