



Roger in 1965

Bringing on back the good times

Lynne Dixon talks to Roger Smith about his recent novel,
a nostalgic look at teenage life in early 1960s' Derby

There's a popular saying that if you can remember the Sixties, you couldn't have been there. But Roger Smith can remember it all vividly. And he was most definitely there!

'The fun and the freedom I experienced in Derby as a teenager in that era was magical. It was an innocent, unsophisticated time, with no

haze of drugs to blur my memory of life in an exciting new decade. Everything seemed so much more vibrant after the rather dull, drab days of the Nineteen Fifties,' he smiles when we meet to talk about his recently published novel, *Rum 'n' Coke*.

Today a successful marketing consultant based in Derby, Roger has incredibly fond memories of the early Sixties in Derbyshire,

when as a fifteen-year-old lad from the village of Borrowash, he left school to immediately land a job (much to his amazement) as an apprentice compositor at the now defunct *Derbyshire Advertiser* weekly newspaper.

From within that stately Georgian red brick building that still stands today in a commanding position overlooking Derby Market

Place, Roger trained to be a type setter in the printing industry. 'It was the era of hot metal. I doubt any teenagers today could ever begin to comprehend the old-style methods of newspaper production at a time when there were no computers, no websites and no digital publishing.'

'Running all through the novel like a thread is the rhythm and drive of those old vinyl 45s and the era's rocking dance halls'

Roger loved his job, the characters he worked with and the pranks they got up to at work. 'They were very happy days, especially being in the centre of Derby close to all the trendy places like the Boccaccio coffee bar, the Khardomah café, the fashionable Midland Drapery department store and the Locarno ballroom in Babington Lane. As teenagers we used to go there from work at lunchtime and dance to all the latest pop hits. At the time the Locarno was truly the centre of Derby's youth culture. Imagine teenagers spending their lunch break dancing in a ballroom today!'

Most imprinted on Roger's mind are the first two years of the Nineteen Sixties. And these are the years that figure in his novel, a nostalgic homage, laced with huge dollops of humour, to teenage life in Derby between 1960 and 1962.

Rum 'n' Coke, it has to be said, is a rattling good read, a real page turner for anyone fascinated by the brave new world of the early Sixties, a world defined, as far as Roger was concerned, by American rock 'n' roll music from the likes of Elvis, Buddy Holly, Little Richard, Roy Orbison, Bobby Darin, Ricky Nelson, Eddie Cochran and the rest.

'We also liked hits by British groups like The Shadows. This was all before the Beatles and the Mersey sound exploded onto the scene, creating a British beat boom that was to dominate pop music the world over.'

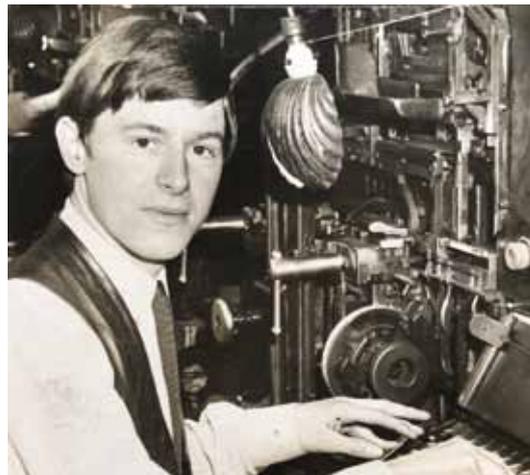
Many of Roger's youthful exploits, both at work and with his pals in Borrowwash, inspire the story, although mostly heavily fictionalised for dramatic effect. 'A lot of the people I worked with

and mixed with have a basis in the book, but names have been changed of course,' he laughs.

The central character of *Rum 'n' Coke* is one Joe King, a typical teenager in a typical town of the day. Growing up as the exciting new Sixties decade dawns inevitably promises much more fun, excitement and opportunity for Joe and his pals than the previous drab, war-scarred Fifties could ever have offered.

Joe leaves school in 1960 and begins the rites of passage of a young man making his way in this fresh new era. The important issues of work, play, romance, fashion and music bring with them fear, danger, intrigue and a large measure of teenage angst. Especially when Joe and his friends become inadvertently involved with the imaginary McBride brothers and their dodgy dealings at a fictitious Coca Cola bottling plant!

Running all through the novel like a thread is the rhythm and drive of those old vinyl 45s and the era's rocking dance halls. Almost inevitably, Joe and his friends form a band – or beat group in early Sixties parlance –



ABOVE:
Roger at work in the printing department of The Derbyshire Advertiser in the early Sixties

BELOW:
The Rapids 1963. Back, l to r, Roger Smith, David Whysall, John Benniston. Front, Tony Beardsley, Terry McCleod

and call it The Rapids.

This is where fact meets fiction as in 1961, sixteen-year-old Roger did indeed form a group called The Rapids with three other pals from Borrowwash. 'I was bass guitarist and I can recall our very first gig at Borrowwash Ex-Servicemen's Club. Then it was on to regular gigs at Belper Over-60s Club, where all the teenagers went to dance on Saturday nights. It was a great venue and we were one of the most popular bands. ▶



'At the start we were Borrowwash's answer to The Shadows but after the Beatles came onto the scene in late 1962, like a lot of other local groups we morphed into the Mersey sound. Eventually we moved into another phase inspired by the more jazzy, bluesy music of Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames.'

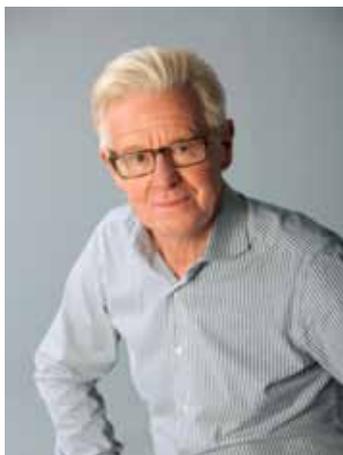
Today Roger retains his huge love of Sixties rock 'n' roll, pop, r & b and soul and still plays bass guitar locally in Godfrey's Grit 'n' Soul Band. John Colley, a one-time member of The Rapids, is also in the line-up, along with Roger's brother Doug on keyboards and lead vocals.

In honour of his love for early Sixties pop, Roger has headed each sub-chapter of his novel with a hit from the era that's relevant to the content. 'The two years in which my book is set is a very special and unique time, the era between Teddy boys and Beatlemania. I can recall that in those days Derby had a pub on almost every street corner and they would often have a juke box or live music.'

'It was all before Carnaby Street and Swinging London. Just three or so years later, Derby would become a very different place with trendy boutiques and the mod culture.'

After completing his printing apprenticeship at the *Derbyshire Advertiser* – which sadly closed in 1974 after a long and illustrious history – Roger moved into the advertising department, eventually becoming its manager.

He worked in that sector



Roger today



ABOVE: Roger, fourth from the right, in his current band, Godfrey's Grit 'n' Soul Band

for several years and in 1977 launched his own advertising agency in Derby with business partner Trevor East. Smith East Associates went on to become one of the region's leading agencies.

Married to Maria and father of two grown-up sons, Roger today lives in Mickleover and is a marketing consultant with his own business, The Tap Marketing and The Tap Publishing. Last year he brought out his first book, *When the Stars Came to Town*, chronicling over 40 pop 'package' shows which came to The Gaumont in Derby between 1959 and 1966. The shows featured stars like the Everly Brothers, Little Richard, Cliff Richard and The Shadows, Billy Fury and new kids on the block The Rolling Stones. His book shares the memories of people who were there, along with a previously unpublished collection of photographs taken of some of these stars in Derby by Roger's *Derbyshire Advertiser* colleague Eric Chapman.

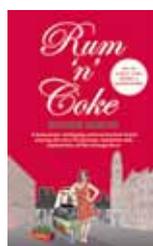
Of his new novel, Roger says: 'I'm proud of my home city of Derby and very nostalgic about my formative years in the early Sixties. So much has since disappeared – there's no Boccaccio coffee bar, no Khardomah café,

no Locarno ballroom, no Cockpit Hill with the legendary Mad Harry market stall, no Dalton's record shop at The Spot. These were all iconic venues that influenced the lives of teenagers then. Sadly, too, there's no *Derbyshire Advertiser*, which I have very happy memories of.

'There are many books available about Derby's history, architecture and so on, but I felt I wanted to document a precise era of Derby's life. In a way, my book is a social document of 1960-62 when Derby was coming out of post-war austerity into a bright, shiny new era.'

'I felt that unless somebody put it into writing, all those memories might be lost for good.'

Roger is now planning his next book, *We Danced in Derby*, which will chronicle all the dance venues in the city across the generations, from the Fifties to the present day. ♦



Rum 'n' Coke by Roger Smith (£8.95) is available at Poynton's in Derby Market Hall or via enquiries@thetap-publishing.com It is also shortly due to be in Waterstone's, Derby. When the Stars Came to Town by Roger Smith is also available from the above outlets, price £15.99.