

## Review from Neil Hallam

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### *We Danced In Derby*

This review of Roger Smith's painstakingly researched and richly evocative "We Danced In Derby" must begin with a confession. I am to dancing what "Strictly" is to bricklaying and Craig Revel Horwood is to Rugby League.

I do not dance. I have never danced except under duress at weddings or parties. Or, in my days as a markedly unsuccessful amateur Lothario, as a means of gaining proximity to the girls I usually eyed lasciviously from the sidelines of terpsichorean entertainment in the Derby area.

"Terpsichorean" is defined as "relating to dancing." In my case, Terpsichorean would be more appropriate. To get my legs moving, lubrication with strong drink was invariably essential.

It is also necessary to admit that I always regarded chaps who were good at dancing with thinly disguised hostility and suspicion. As they gyrated expertly with the most desirable of the girls, I always found myself asking: "What's his game?"

To claim that I have never danced sober is perhaps an over-statement. On those rain-lashed or snowbound winter days when the weather was too vile for pupils of Herbert Strutt Grammar School in Belper to be shunted outdoors for games, I had no choice.

Football was replaced by compulsory dancing in the gymnasium and when I failed to cry off with an unconvincing limp, I was left with no choice but to submit to refined forms of torture such as the Veleta and the Military Two Step.

Not heard of the Veleta or the MTS? Hardly surprising. They were not much in evidence when local rock groups vied for supremacy at the Locarno or *Family* were belting out "The Weaver's Answer" at Clouds. By not much I mean never.

Notwithstanding my marked aversion to dancing, there are only very few of the venues featured in "We Danced In Derby" that I did not visit occasionally or, in some case such as The Corporation Hotel and Clouds, frequent often. I loved music and was simmering with testosterone so where else was I going to go?

A National Union Of Journalists press pass was usually enough to gain free admission and as the regional correspondent of *Melody Maker* and a music paper called "Midland Beat" I got to meet many of those whose performances prompted local girls to shuffle happily around their handbags in the 1960s.

“The Corp” – Corporation Hotel - was a personal favourite because its popular and personable publican Roger Groom was successful in bringing many top bands to Derby. It was there that I interviewed Rod Stewart in his days with Steampacket and Rod the Mod also appeared at Clouds, whose manager Jim Milton had similarly productive connections in the music business.

“We Danced in Derby” provides exhaustive histories of the dance halls, discos, clubs and pubs that served the town’s appetite for a spot of the light fantastic and the list of venues is illuminated with vivid personal memories from those who were there at the time.

Many of these personal recollections are from those with whom I racketed around these places of entertainment and Roger Smith’s clever juxtaposition of factual text and contemporary photos enables the former revellers to capture perfectly the exciting mood of the age.

It is often said that if you can remember the Sixties you were not really there. These nostalgic and often funny recollections are from people who really were there and had so much fun that their experiences can still be remembered in fond detail.

The author is uniquely qualified to bring together a wealth of information that stretches from the days of the quickstep and foxtrot in dance halls such as the Trocadero and the Rialto, though jive and the twist in clubs and pubs to what the hell they were doing in the discos of the latter part of the decade.

Roger was there more than anybody else, a musician and popular music entrepreneur who knew – and was known, admired, and liked by – everybody in the business.

His other life in printing, advertising, and marketing is evident in the excellence of the writing and lay-out and the accuracy of the research, making his latest publishing venture as visually pleasing as it is compellingly nostalgic for those of a certain age.

The same compliments apply to Roger’s previous volume, “The Stars Came to Town,” a richly illustrated account of appearances at The Gaumont Cinema when it was Derby’s top venue for some of the biggest stars of British and American entertainment.

The stars. The dancers. What next for Roger’s sympathetic, perfectly pitched and superbly entertaining focus on the spirit of this bygone age? “What we Wore in Derby.” Or perhaps a slimmer volume – “Who we snogged.” I can't wait!

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