

MERTHYR TYDFIL 1955-75

MEMORIES OF POPULAR MUSIC
ATGOFION O GERDDORIAETH BOBLOGAIDD

THE DANCE BANDS OF MERTHYR TYDFIL



The Pathfinders at the Cyfarthfa School reunion 1949 (Courtesy Old Merthyr Tydfil)



The Skymasters at the Miners Hall (Cyril Cerana (3rd Trumpet), Bernard Thomas (Drums), Terry Lyons (Sax on Right) (Courtesy Janet Thomas)



The Quartet Band (Courtesy Steve Brewer)



Bill Evans and his Band Performing in the early 60s (Courtesy of Old Merthyr Tydfil)

The early 1950s was a time of mass entertainment in Merthyr Tydfil, a mix of cinema, variety entertainment and live music of various types, featuring nationally known visiting artists such as Ted Heath and Eric Winstone, but also local bands and ensembles performing regularly in the town.

The two most prominent local bands during the early to mid 1950s were The Skymasters Dance Orchestra and The Pathfinders, both of who are seen to be performing regularly in the town, having residencies at The Miners Hall and New Drill Hall respectively. The Skymasters can be seen to be performing in The Miners Hall every Wednesday and Saturday night from the very early 1950s, featured in the Merthyr Express as 'The New Merthyr Band Sensation', led by Ken Rees, described as "Wales' youngest bandleader". Likewise, in an edition of the Merthyr Express in October 1950, Merthyr can be seen to feature The Pathfinders (with vocalists) at The New Drill Hall, billed as "Merthyr's Premier Dance Orchestra", costing 2 shilling to get in and billed as playing "every Saturday night". In addition to the local bands, a number of 'celebrities' visited Merthyr in the early 1950s, all using local cinemas as venues. For example on Sunday Nov 23rd 1952, one of the most famous bandleaders from the 1930s, Geraldo and his Orchestra played at The Theatre Royal – featuring drummer Eric Delaney. Although not used specifically as a popular music venue, The Temperance Hall is also seen to feature 'variety' acts from the early 1950s – such as Mabel and Stanley Somers, the 'Ventertainer' Harry Benet, actor Archie Glen and The Rexanos. On 13th November 1950 Hughie Green's Opportunity Knocks (then just a radio show) also performed there, as did Alex Afrique, who is proudly associated as being "from the London Palladium".

Despite a 'tug and war' battle with other venues outside of Merthyr to attract local bands, the widely acclaimed Ted Heath and his Orchestra played at The Castle Cinema on Sunday February 17th, 1952, followed by Eric Winstone playing there for the 2nd time in two years on Sunday April 13th 1952. This was obviously the start of the venue being used as a 'temporary' performance venue. For example Harry Roy and his band played there on April 27th 1952. Billed as a 'Dixieland group', this was another instance of a well known 'pre rock 'n' roll artist frequenting the town.

Shown here are a selection of local dance bands playing in Merthyr during the late 40s, through the 50s into the early 60s.

