

It's nearly the 40th anniversary of the day the Rolling Stones didn't perform in Pembroke Castle. BB Skone ponders the reasons why

The non-event

IN THE summer of 1973, Pembrokeshire people went about their business very much in the way they always had. The 'Pembrokeshire Promise' was as near one could get to certainty and 'change' was something one needed to fuel the cigarette machine.

Pembroke was a place where a young, innocent BB Skone could be threatened with physical violence in a hostility merely because he had long hair (though the kaftan and lime green loon pants also may have had something to do with it).

According to Deke Leonard, rock music author and member of the Man band, 'Pembrokeshire was the land that time forgot'.

The generation gap was as wide and seemingly unbridgeable as the Cleddau itself, and an announcement that the Rolling Stones were to perform in Pembroke Castle exploded in the community like a powder keg strong enough to have blown the Cleddau King clean out of those calm waters.

Pembroke became a community divided between those who couldn't even contemplate those decadent advocates of 'sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll' performing in their beloved castle and those who believed the show would bring excitement and a vague notion of cool into their lives.

Today it is hard to imagine the strength of feeling and passion displayed by both sides, now that rock and pop music has lost its power to shock, and if Sir Mick Jagger were to visit Pembroke today he would probably be feted by the bechained and the berobed and awarded the keys to the castle.

Despite the opposition, the show looked like going ahead in 1973, promoted by a Welsh consortium that included actor Stanley Baker and music entrepreneur John Long (he of the Milford Haven furniture emporium).

Tickets were printed. Adverts were taken out in the music press. Support acts were announced – which included Deke Leonard's Man and the London Welsh Male Voice Choir.

And posters were printed – which featured the Rolling Stones' provocative and lascivious tongue logo protruding from a dragon roaring beneath a fairy tale castle (opposite, bottom).

However, all this was rather premature, the Rolling Stones and their agents had not taken into account the wrath of the mighty Pembroke Borough Council which, like some omnipotent Roman emperor, had to give the show the thumbs up or the thumbs down.

Debate was fierce. It took place in the press, on the streets, and in the council chamber.

Rumour had it that Mick Jagger himself visited the town to check out the venue. Then the great man spoke.

Yes, Alderman Ernie Morgan was reported in the press as commenting that 'to have 10,000 people in there, the castle will not have seen anything like it since Oliver Cromwell forced its surrender. Talk about the Rolling Stones, there would be stones flying everywhere'.

Alderman JR Williams chipped in to add: 'Henry VII would be turning in his grave'.

Thus was born the legend that a load of old fogeys – 'none of whom was under 40' wrote journalist Vernon Scott – were responsible for banning the event because of their fear of this new fangled 'rock n' roll'.

Vernon also wrote at the time of the special council meeting called to approve or veto the event: 'Many youngsters waited outside the town hall for the decision. When it came there were cries of disbelief and one young man shook his fist and shouted 'You bloody old fools' before the waiting crowd burst into their own rather naughty rendition of *We Can't Get No Satisfaction*'.

The truth was rather more prosaic and is hinted at in the comment of Ernie Morgan. Ten thousand people would never

have fitted into Pembroke Castle safely where the only access and egress is through a narrow gateway. That's the principal reason why permission was refused.

Ironical that the so-called backward burghers of Pembroke appear to have been at the cutting edge of the Health and Safety revolution that can be said to blight many aspects of 21st century life.

Indeed Pembroke Castle had previously hosted music events – Julie Felix and Hot Chocolate had both appeared there earlier in the decade. Maybe because one of the two scheduled days on which the Stones were due to appear was a Sunday might have had something to do with it.

The *Western Telegraph's* Teen Topics column (co-written by Keith Johnson – I wonder what became of him?) suggested a more sober view could have been taken and fewer patrons catered for, before concluding: 'the dice was heavily loaded against the Stones right from the start'.

Whatever the truth of the matter, the dice are tumbling again, and plans are afoot to celebrate the 40th anniversary of this non-event.

Pembroke Castle is staging a gig on September 21st themed around the Rolling Stones and if Facebook is to be believed (and we all know everything we read on there is true) interest in the event is running high.

Perhaps the most interesting proposal to be put forward comes from 21-year-old John Lloyd of Pembroke. He is currently studying in Cardiff for his Masters' degree in Film Production and intends making a full length feature film of the events surrounding the aborted concert if he can secure the necessary funding.

John's imagination has been fired by his dad, Richard Lloyd, a school-teacher and musician, who has written a story about the event, entitled 'The Chicken Sandwich'. This amusing and beautifully written tale takes as its central conceit the legend that Mick Jagger, whilst on the aforementioned site visit, stopped off at The York (a pub on the Main Street with its own rich history but now sadly no more) for a pint and a snack. He never finished his chicken sandwich and its remains were allegedly displayed for some time in a jar on the bar by landlady Ruth. It became a source of pilgrimage for the youth of Pembroke.

Whether this story is true or not is neither here nor there. I can't recall Ruth serving food at The York and the source of this tale is local raconteur and amateur actor Ian McDowell who certainly knows how to tell a shaggy dog story.

Nevertheless, Richard has written a fine, imaginative piece of fiction, peopled with a host of fondly remembered local characters, which his son John has now turned into a screen play.

John has been making films since he was 15, having shot a number of films in and around Pembroke. These include shorts about Pembroke Fair, pioneering film maker William Haggart (of whom John is a great admirer), and, er, a film about Daleks in Pembroke. It is with the latter sort of film that John's passion and imagination gets most fired up. He loves the surreal and the absurd.

"I like weird films, that are strange for the sake of it," he told me, "like those of Derek Jarman or John Walters."

"There's no subversion in the media today, too many films are very complacent and boring."

Which is probably why his latest film *Zania*, currently in post-production, is an art house, sci-fi, green screen, exploitation film about what would have happened if the sun had never set on the British Empire. – a film he made with the help of animation students from his university for only £400.



Not wishing to dent his youthful enthusiasm entirely with the remarks of a jaded cynic, I suggested that a great deal more money would be needed to fund the Stones film. John is of course aware of this.

"The film will be like *Withnail and I* or *Local Hero* – a character drama about people in the community and how they deal with this non-event," John explained.

"I am sure there will be interest in funding it. I am applying for public funds and grants and approaching private businesses at the moment as well as considering the distribution opportunities."

"Eventually it's all about money really," John conceded rather ruefully. "I'd love to be able to do this for a living because it's such good fun."

You can find out more about John and his work by contacting his company at www.nuestory.com or by following his film blogs at johnlloyd0791.wordpress.com.

John is a talented, intelligent and determined young man brimming with ideas. I am sure he will succeed. I wonder if he'd like to cast me as Mick Jagger?

Hmm, you can't always get what you want. If I did, Henry VII really would be turning in his grave.

INCIDENTALLY, the story of how I acquired this rare psychedelic poster (left) is an intriguing one.

Peter Swales is the son of the late Joffre Swales – musical inspiration to innumerable Pembrokeshire youngsters, band leader, and founder of the much missed Swales Music Shop.

In the 1970s Peter was helping former merchant banker Prince Rupert Loewenstein manage the affairs of the Rolling Stones and he salvaged some unused posters that were due to be binned. Years later he donated one of the posters, now framed, to a charity raffle held in the county town.

The winner did not want it and brought it to the music shop Slipped Discs that I then ran on Main Street, Pembroke and asked if I wanted to buy it. I did.

Peter went to live in New York where he became the self-styled 'punk historian of psychoanalysis' and a world expert on the life and works of Sigmund Freud. Given Freud's obsessions with sex and drugs (he was allegedly a cocaine user), Peter Swales' intellectual odyssey to him from the Rolling Stones doesn't seem that odd at all.

BB Skone

BB Skone presents the local music show every Sunday at 7pm on Radio Pembrokeshire. Follow the BB Skone Pembrokeshire Music Show on Facebook for all you need to know about the local music scene.