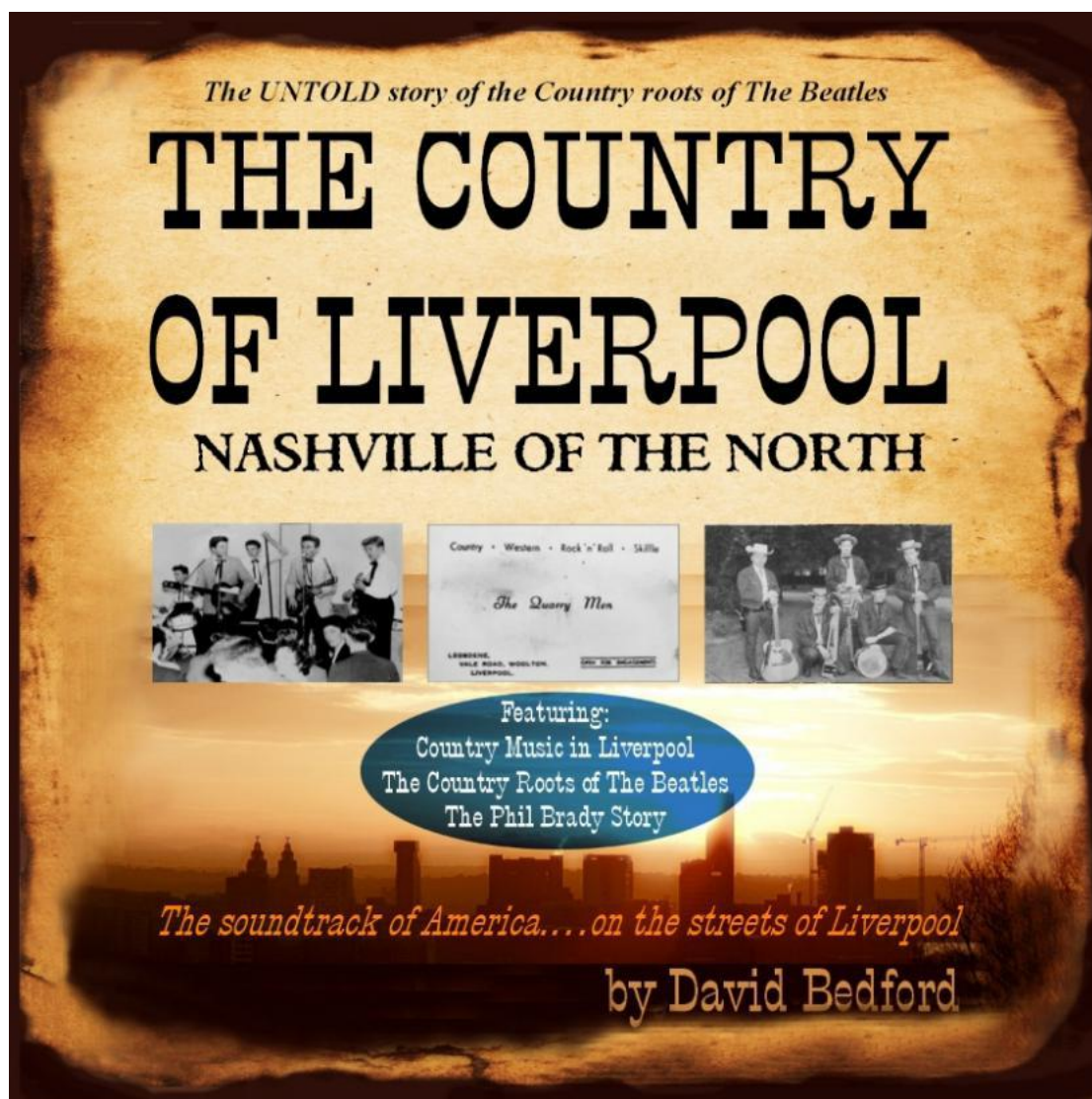


THE COUNTRY OF LIVERPOOL: NASHVILLE OF THE NORTH



The Soundtrack of America.....on the streets of Liverpool

The Country of Liverpool

Welcome to this FREE excerpt from my book, “The Country of Liverpool: Nashville of The North”.

My name is David Bedford - I hope you enjoy this glimpse into my book and the unique subject of country music in Liverpool.

Nashville of the North?



It is generally accepted that the epicentre of country music is in Liverpool, a city better known for its association with The Beatles and the Merseybeat sound that put Liverpool on the international musical map. Many of the groups that emerged in the ‘60s, including John Lennon’s first group, The Quarrymen, had their roots not just in skiffle music, but in country music too.

Musicologist Alan Clayson wrote: “Within the area abounded more such artists than anywhere outside Nashville. On a given weekend, you could guarantee that plenty of the three-hundred-odd venues affiliated to the Liverpool Social Club Association had booked The Dusty Road Ramblers, the Hillsiders, The Ranchers and any others from a legion of outfits playing the kinda music folk liked tappin’ a foot to.”

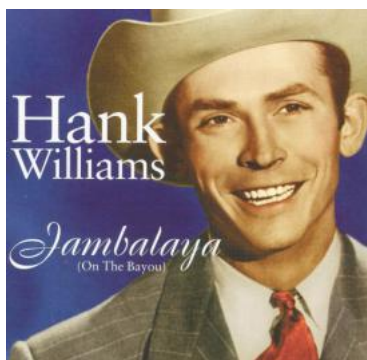
In the 1950s, it was very much a white, working-class movement of groups, predominantly male, and semi-professional or amateur. Only a few, like the Hillsiders and Phil Brady and the Ranchers made it out of Liverpool and were signed by record labels. Records were available across the city, though the most famous country specialist record stores were owned by Pat and Gerry Allen, who had stores on Lodge Lane, and Aigburth Road, Liverpool. Frequenters of the Lodge Lane shop were Alec and Vera, my in-laws. They were big fans of country music and had many records by artists like Jim Reeves, Hank Williams and many others.

The country scene was more predominant in the north of Liverpool, in the working-class pubs on the dock road and surrounding areas. The groups that would come out of this music scene were Hank Walters and his Dusty Road Ramblers, The Hillsiders and Phil Brady and the Ranchers.

Brian and Rita O'Connell were country fans in Liverpool and ran the Hillsiders' fan club for twenty years. "Rita and I have always loved music. My dad played accordion round the clubs, and he taught me to play the accordion. So I used to go into school with it, and me and my mate would do the Goon Show with all the voices, with me playing the accordion to whatever song Ray Ellington had played that week. I never played in a group - almost played in one on piano but nobody had the piano in a group, so I never got to do it."

"I could never play guitar, but I used to put one on my back and go out to meet my mates. I looked good, but never got asked to play it, thankfully. I used to hang out in the clubs and the dives around Upper Parliament Street. We used to go out with two belts on; the second was over your shoulder with a big buckle in case there was any trouble. It was tough round there; a lot of fights."

Hank Williams



Why did Brian like country music? "Like everyone else, I discovered Hank Williams in the '50s," said Brian. "When you see his album covers and looked at his face, he just had the most amazing face, with the cowboy hat. I followed all the top artists, like Johnny Cash and George Jones, Waylon Jennings, but not Slim Whitman."

Cunard Yanks

“Radio Luxembourg and AFN were very important to the country scene. The ‘Cunard Yank’ thing has been exaggerated, I feel. I bought every London American record that came out from NEMS. We always had them; they weren’t scarce in Liverpool. There were so many record shops and record departments in other stores. I can remember going into those booths in NEMS and the records sounded so great in them, but when you got the record home it sounded nothing like it did in the shop! The difference was incredible, and never sounded anywhere near as good at home. We had a big radiogram in those days, with a bass sound, as opposed to the tinny sound on a Dansette. But never quite as good, but that didn’t matter.”

The Liverpool Music Scene

The Liverpool music scene was very much based in the pubs and clubs around the docks and local areas in North Liverpool. “The pubs on Dock Road were incredible,” said Brian. “You could walk into any of those pubs and there would be a band on. The pub was more suitable to country music, as it was mainly acoustic, because electric groups with amplifiers would drive the customers out. This way, it was often one man and his guitar. They would lead a singalong in the pubs. The audience would know the songs as they were steeped in the traditional songs.

“My brother-in-law, Frank, used to work on the docks and he could get records by Hank Williams, Don Gibson, who was another favourite of mine, and many others. Glen Campbell was another I liked, in the late ‘60s.

THE BLACK CAT CLUB

THE BLACK CAT CLUB, situated above Sampson and Barlows Restaurant in London Road, is the largest Country and Western club outside of London. Soon to be open seven days a week, the club offers many facilities to its members. The top floor lounge has a bar and a nice roomy dancing floor in front of the stage. The floor below also has a bar for members, and plans are being finalised to open further floors. Country and Western music provided by Hank Walters and his Dusty Road Ramblers is the finest of its type available in the city, and the club is therefore the ideal meeting place for Country and Western fans. On Trad. nights, Alf Tweedle and his Dixielanders provide the beat, and further news of this promising new group will appear in future issues.

<p>Country & Western</p> <p>THE BLACK CAT CLUB</p> <p>Traditional Jazz</p> <p>Big Beat</p> <p>One of</p> <p>England's biggest</p> <p>Country & Western clubs</p>	<p>Sampson and Barlows Restaurant</p> <p>London Road</p> <p>Membership enquiries to the Club Secretary</p> <p>Watch out for the date of our seven days a week opening!</p>
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The Black Cat Club

“In Liverpool,” added local musician Barry Flynn, “you could listen to all of the influences; country, Irish, rock ‘n’ roll or calypso and just pick out the style you liked and just go with it.”

As the Beatles had the Casbah Coffee Club and then the Cavern as the clubs forever linked to their early years, so it was with country music. The Black Cat was run by Hank Walters and his band and opened on 12th February 1957, running for ten years. That was just a few weeks after The Cavern opened its doors as a jazz club, which was on 16th January 1957.

Originally called The Country Jamboree Club, it was situated above Sampson and Barlow’s in London Road, Liverpool. It would later become the Cassanova Club, where most of

the top beat bands, including The Beatles, played. Capacity was about 200 people at a squeeze.



Hank Walters and The Beatles

As Hank Walters said: Although the country music scene was developing at the same time as the skiffle/rock 'n' roll explosion, they weren't mutually exclusive. The beat groups included country songs in their repertoire, and you would often see country bands on the same bill as the beat groups. Hank Walters remembers talking with The Beatles at the Black Cat. "I used to tell them that I could hear bits of country in what they were doing. They were listening to us, so we must have influenced them."



Kenny Johnson and The Hillsiders

One of the great country groups to emerge from Liverpool was Kenny Johnson's Hillsiders, who recorded in Nashville with country legend Bobby Bare and appeared on TV regularly with George Hamilton IV. Kenny presented "Sounds Country" on BBC Radio Merseyside for years.

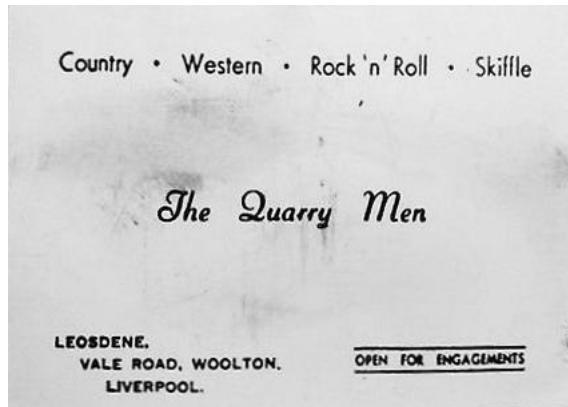


Phil Brady and the Ranchers

The book focuses on the career of Dingle-born Phil Brady who became the #1 country artist in the UK. With exclusive access to his scrapbook, Phil played with and backed Buck Owens, Hank Snow, Willie Nelson, Slim Whitman and many more.

The Country Roots of The Beatles

John, Paul, George and Ringo: Country, Western, Skiffle, Rock 'n' Roll



When John Lennon started his first group, The Quarrymen, back in 1956, their musical influences were many and varied. There is no doubt that, without Lonnie Donegan, John Lennon, Paul McCartney and George Harrison would not have formed a group; the same goes for those Liverpool groups, and numerous British groups, who became famous.

When The Quarrymen's first manager, Nigel Walley, had business cards printed, they stated their musical specialities: Country ... Western ... Skiffle ... Rock 'n' Roll. We know that they became the greatest rock 'n' roll group in Liverpool and Hamburg, and the greatest pop act of all time, but their roots were firmly in skiffle, folk and country. Those roots never left them, and are there to see in the artists they covered, those that influenced them, and in many of their most famous songs.

Among The Quarrymen's repertoire were:

"Rock Island Line", "Puttin' on the Style", "Railroad Bill" and "Worried Man Blues" as recorded by Lonnie Donegan, which could all be classed as country/ blues/ folk or bluegrass.

"Lost John" and "Cumberland Gap" by Woodie Guthrie, which were American folk/ country.

"Blue Suede Shoes" by Carl Perkins, which was classic rockabilly from 1956.

"Blue Moon of Kentucky" by Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys, a bluegrass song. Recorded and released by Elvis Presley in 1954.

Elvis was a great country music performer in the early Sun Records days, and released "All Shook Up", "Don't be Cruel" and "Mean Woman Blues" with strong rockabilly roots. "All Shook Up" topped the country chart. "Don't Be Cruel" went on to top all the charts, coupled with "Hound Dog". It was the biggest seller for Elvis in 1956, and over time sold over 6 million records.

John Lennon and Hank Williams

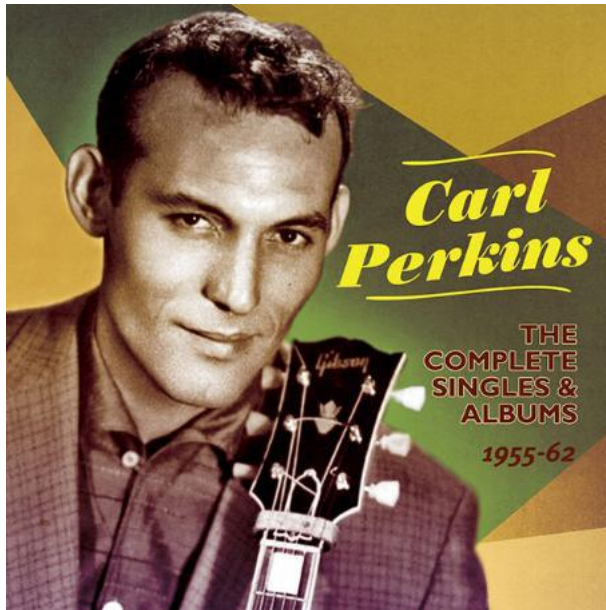


Michael Hill, friend of Lennon, explains John's love of Hank Williams. "John, as an adult and a successful performer, treasured fond memories of the musical foundations of his life, for which he was much in my debt. John told an interviewer 'I listened to country music. I started imitating Hank Williams when I was fifteen, before I could play the guitar. I used to go round to a friend's house, because he had the record player, and we sang all that Lonnie Donegan stuff and Hank Williams. He, Mike Hill, had all the records'.

"Best of all for singing along were the Hank Williams records," continued Mike. Like Hank Williams fans everywhere, we struggled to decipher the lyrics he was singing in songs, such as 'Jambalaya', with its Creole words and idiomatic language, and in 'Settin' The Woods on Fire'. Some of the words were totally unintelligible to us, but we thought the tunes, the accent, and the rhythm were all great."

George Harrison and Country Music

George's first exposure to country and western was through his father who, as a "Cunard Yank" (or White Star Yank to be precise) had purchased a gramophone and several records in New York, which he brought home. In among those records were "Waiting for a Train" and "Blue Yodel No 4 (California Blues)" by the father of



country music; Jimmie Rodgers, the “Singing Brakeman”, as well as the country star who influenced many Liverpool artists; Hank Williams.

As well as admiring Carl Perkins’ guitar style, another of George’s guitar heroes who influenced him greatly was Chet Atkins, the “Country Gentleman” and acknowledged creator of the country music known as the “Nashville Sound”. The way Atkins created his picking style was admired by Liverpool guitarist Colin Manley, a

school friend of George at the Liverpool Institute, and Manley demonstrated the style to George, teaching him the essentials of recreating that Chet Atkins style. Manley was one of Liverpool’s greatest Merseybeat guitarists, playing with the Remo Four. You can hear George’s “Atkin-esque” picking style underpinning so many of The Beatles songs. Just listen to Chet Atkins playing, and you can hear where George was clearly influenced by him.

Paul McCartney and Country Music



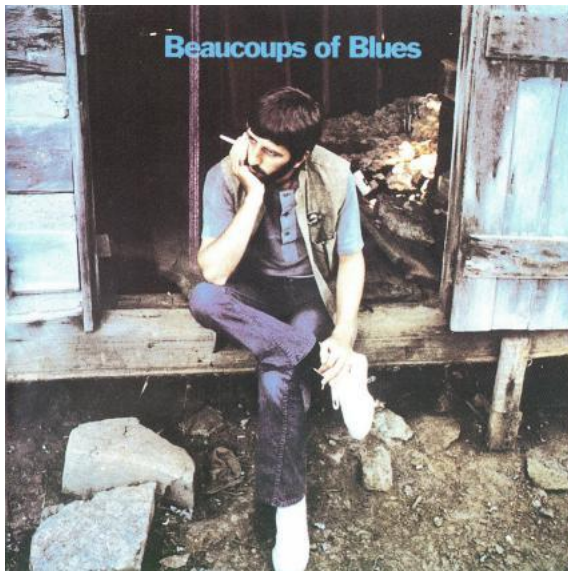
“Country had a huge following in Liverpool, again, I suppose off the travellers, mainly a lot of sailors shipped out of Liverpool. An Irish influence, with the Irish folk music, a little like Indian music; very rich thing to draw on, all of that, so put it all together and you find all of my influences in there, from Fred Astaire to Big Bill Broonzy: quite a way!”

Paul headed out to Nashville in 1974 and Dan Ealey spent 2 weeks with Paul and Wings.

Ringo and Country Music

Of the four Beatles, it was obviously Ringo who had the strongest roots in country music, as Paul recalled. “Ringo was very into country and western and blues as he used to have a lot of mates who were seamen, who would come back from New Orleans, New York and all the big ports in America; they would bring back these great records. Ringo used to have a lot of country and western and he did ‘Act Naturally’ and stuff. We were all quite big country fans and we were fans of people like Carl Perkins, whose roots are in country; Buddy Holly whose roots are in country; Eddie Cochran who was probably country, Jerry Lee; they’re all really country singers gone rock ‘n’ roll.”

Richy Starkey joined a group called The Raving Texans, led by Alan Caldwell, who would become Rory Storm. When they adopted cowboy monikers, inspired by the rings that he wore, as well as the cowboy Johnny Ringo, he became Ringo Starr. “I



always loved country and western,” he said, “a lot of it was around the guys from the navy. I’d go to parties and they would be putting on Hank Williams, Hank Snow and all those country acts. I still love country music. Skiffle was also coming through and I was a big fan of Johnny Ray. Frankie Laine was probably my biggest hero in 1956 - and I also liked Bill Haley.

Ringo’s second solo album was *Beaucoups of Blues*, a country album recorded in Nashville.

The Beatles and Country Music?

- At the Decca audition, they played country songs. When they auditioned for the BBC in March 1962, Peter Pilbeam said about them: “an unusual group, not as rocky as most, more country and western with a tendency to play music.”
- John Lennon described *Beatles for Sale* as their “Country and Western” album
- John even called it “Crumbly and Western”!
- The Beatles covered and recorded over 20 songs with a country influence.
- The Beatles played “cowboys” on a ranch at the end of their 1964 tour, with some rare photos taken in Walnut Ridge. A photo of them on horseback appeared on a French edition of one of their albums.

This is just a glimpse into the Country of Liverpool.

To find out more about the book, you can order it as:

1. Limited Edition Hardback, signed by the author
2. Full colour paperback
3. Black and White paperback

The Country of Liverpool: The Film

The story of The Country of Liverpool is being made into a documentary film by Brightmoon Media. Director Roger Appleton and Producer David Bedford made “Looking for Lennon”, which was nominated for a National Film Award and has featured on Sky Arts TV in the UK for the last three years.

The film will feature exclusive interviews with many of those featured in the book, while we accompany Dominic Halpin, a musician from Manchester who has recently recorded in Nashville and been the lead star in the hit musical show, *A Country Night in Nashville*, which has been selling out all over the UK.

Join our exclusive private [Facebook Group](#) to keep getting access to unique and rare photos, interviews and news about the upcoming film.

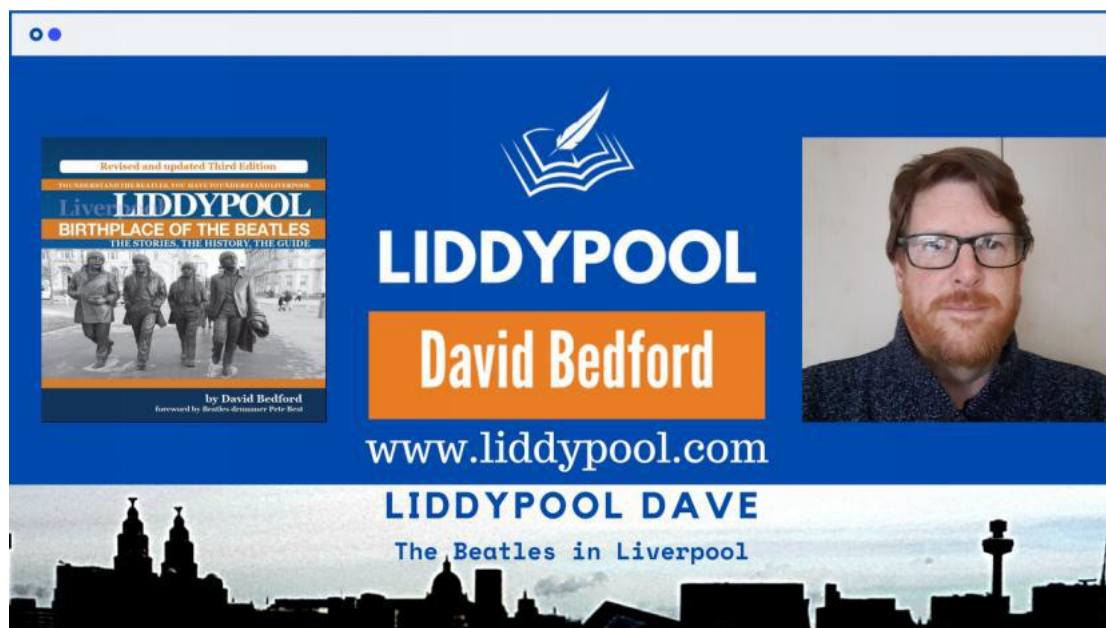
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