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**EMA for A329: The Making of Welsh History**

**Was the birth of the Welsh teenager between 1950-1970?**

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# Contents

# Introduction

The subject of youth culture is one that has only begun to be addressed relatively recently, emerging in the 1960s and 1970s (Holt, 2009, p. 316). Very few historians have written specifically about youth culture in Wales, so Wales has been largely missed out of this research or combined with England. This dissertation is going to look at the Welsh experience of youth culture and see whether it began to change between 1950 and 1970. It will consider whether these teenagers really were so different from their parents by looking at previous generations, and then investigate what made the older generation treat them with fear and suspicion. It will also look into the possible reasons for acceleration in change during this period. Due to current circumstances, it is inevitable that many sources have been impossible to access due to Covid restrictions, therefore the bulk of sources used in this dissertation will be researched online.

The post-war period was a time of great change across Britain, and by 1950 a new sub-culture had appeared in the form of 'the teenager'. Although the word 'teenager' had appeared in print in newspapers since the 1940s, it was the 1950s which saw a change in the way teenagers saw themselves and were viewed by others (Staveley-Wadham, 2020a). Previous to this, teenagers were not seen as a sub-culture, and it was in this period that teenagers began to form sub-groups, and these gave rise to worry and fear among the older generation. Press reports of the period rarely included teenagers unless they were causing trouble, and a new sub-culture, 'The Teddy Boy' was placed at the heart of it. There were scare stories of out of control teenagers in the newspapers, and when Bill Haley's film, *Rock around the Clock* was released in Wales, many cinemas had it banned, due to reports of vandalism (Johnes, 2012, p. 96). New styles in clothes, hair and dance appeared with astonishing speed. This was as true for Wales as it was for the rest of Britain, and between 1950 and 1970, Teddy Boys along with other youth groups known as Mods and Rockers all appeared on the scene, causing alarm. The questions this dissertation seeks to answer are, were teenagers, both male and female, in this period really behaving differently, and if they were, was their behaviour such that the older generation were right to be concerned about it?

The historiography of youth culture is extensive, but focused on Britain, neglecting the experience of Welsh teenagers. Martin Johnes is the key historian who has written the most about this aspect, and this dissertation will add to the social history of Welsh teenagers. However, what applied to England also applied to a certain extent to Wales and for this reason, many secondary sources on the subject write about Wales as though it is part of England. Bill Osgerby believes that a distinctive youth culture can be traced back to Victorian Britain, but that the mid-twentieth century saw a number of factors come together to increase the pace of change, one being a rise in disposable income (Osgerby, n.d.). Certainly, previous generations had tough lives compared to the children of the mid-twentieth century. Geraint Jenkins describes the beginning of the twentieth century as a challenging time for most working class Welsh people. Overcrowding, poor sanitation and outbreaks of disease were common. There was no sickness or unemployment benefit and there were few jobs . The Great War had left a generation without fathers and husbands, through both fighting, and a flu pandemic (Jenkins, 2007, pp. 234-249). With circumstances being so challenging, it should come as no surprise that this generation, with hard lives, had less time or money to spend on themselves, but they still came under criticism from their elders. During the Second World War, young women working in factories had disposable income for the first time and incurred moral judgements by spending it on make-up and silk stockings and going out with American soldiers (Jenkins, 2007, p. 255). Peter Stead says there were already concerns that young people were not as religious as they should be, and some Welsh churches launched a campaign to keep the sabbath devoid of secular entertainment in an effort to control the young (Stead, 1995, p.108), so clearly behavioural change was being observed. The older generation found it difficult to know how normal teenagers should be behaving, causing confusion and anxiety. This lack of understanding may have been due to their own disrupted teenage years during wartime. By the 1950s there was a very different group of youngsters emerging who did not want to spend their free time doing things that their parents deemed suitable. They were portrayed as problematic, and Johnes says this was a youth culture '…which both delighted and horrified people.' (Johnes, 2014, p. 96). It was believed in many quarters that it was also a culture which encouraged criminal behaviour. Johnes and Stead both agree one reason for this change was the influence of music coming from America, and the historian Adrian Horn believes that wider access to portable radios meant access to new stations like Radio

Luxembourg (Horn, 2009, p. 77). He also believes that it was the influx of juke boxes spreading music which helped to create the teenagers of today, however the modern media were a more likely culprit, not only spreading music and fashions, but manipulating facts to make teenagers seem more dangerous than they were.

The 1950s had seen a rise in employment, school leavers had more disposable cash than their parents did at the same age. They could easily find work and were being recognised as consumers in their own right. This dissertation will not only look at what has been written about youth culture in this period through newspaper reports, but also look at what was said by the young people themselves, through personal reminiscences. These will come from a combination of written memoirs, oral history interviews and filmed interviews.

In order to investigate whether 1950s teenagers were different from their parents, chapter one will look extensively at previous generations. This will mean looking at attitudes to young people in the popular press to see whether their life-style choices came under criticism. It will look at the factors which possibly influenced these choices, such as cinema and new styles of music, to see the extent of that influence. Chapter two will concentrate on the period after 1950. It will examine the activities teenagers engaged in away from the home, to see if this led to more delinquent behaviour, leading to fear of youth. It is well documented that the 1950s London Teddy Boy had a bad reputation for fighting and carrying weapons, but was this true nationwide, or was it skewed by press reports? What other factors may have been involved in making this generation different? The Teddy Boy was followed by Mods and Rockers, two other important sub-cultures. Finally, the conclusion will summarise the previous chapters to argue that there was indeed a change in Welsh youth culture and show that although they attracted negative attention, the majority of Welsh teenagers were not delinquent or anti-social. They were as diverse as every other age group, and although the newspapers reported rising moral panic, most teenagers were as well behaved as previous generations. They were ordinary young people enjoying their youth.

# Chapter one. The rise of the teenager?

The word 'teenager' only became common in the 1940s (Staveley-Wadham, 2020a), but clearly there have always been people between the ages of thirteen and nineteen. Social historian Selina Todd believes that teenagers of the past are remembered for the more affluent and visible teenagers, such as hedonistic flappers and trouble-making Teddy Boys (Todd, 2007, p. 57). Historians often have different ideas about when youth became noticeably different from the generation before. In 1853, Mary Carpenter wrote the book, *Juvenile Delinquents. Their Condition and Treatment,* the fact that this title appeared at all, would imply that offenders in this age group were already seen as different from other criminals. Young people of this age were believed to have a different attitude to life and were seen as less risk averse. In his 1883 book, The *Nation in Arms*, Baron Colmar von der Goltz wrote that young men between eighteen and twenty-four years old were best suited to military service as, 'Their love of adventure rouses their eagerness for battle.' (Savage, 2007, p. 18). Jon Savage believes that the Great War was a turning point in the behaviour of British people, saying it precipitated a social and moral revolution, war tended to make people think about the moment rather than the future, leading to various problems including drug abuse and juvenile delinquency (Savage, 2007, p. 160). He points out that in seventeen British cities, the number of youths below sixteen charged with offences went up by thirty-three percent during 1915, to the concern of the authorities. The reason given was lack of parental control, due to fathers in military service and mothers employed on the home front (Savage, 2007, P. 261). It was not only cities which had problems with youth behaviour, in the village of Nantyglo in South Wales a fourteen year old boy was charged with damaging a car and throwing stones at the driver. 'The Chairman said there was a great deal too much of that kind of thing going on in the streets. Boys seemed to have lost all sense of propriety and if spoken to about their conduct they became abusive.' (South Wales Gazette, 1917, p. 16). Not all leisure activities were thought to be healthy for the young. Historian Julia Bohlmann says, 'Without the unity of the family home, children were thought to be exposed to potentially immoral and harmful influences. The cinema was identified as one of these influences.' (Bohlmann, 2014, p. 6). Everyone enjoyed the cinema, it attracted all ages and social classes. But as the rate in juvenile criminality increased, the authorities began to wonder about the effect of the cinema, a dark,

crowded, unsupervised place, showing films which were seen as inappropriate for young people. This led to the National Council of Public Morals, forming a Cinema Commission '…to investigate the cinema as a new cultural institution potentially compromising the physical health and the moral standard of British citizens.' (Bohlmann, 2012). However, although juvenile delinquency did increase during the Great War, the public believed it to be much worse than it actually was, due to scare stories in the newspapers (Savage, 2007, p. 62).

Young women could be rebellious too. Inner-city girls could find plenty of well-paid work in the factories at this time, as so many men were at war. Savage recounts that Robert Roberts,

> …remembered that his eldest sister, who worked in engineering, "used cosmetics surreptitiously until one evening the old man caught her with a whole 'dorothy' bag full of the stuff. He threw the lot into the fire. The house, we understood, had been defiled. Hadn't Joe Devine (a neighbour), he thundered, 'turned his daughters into the street for using this muck'. Never again must she dare … Jenny stood unperturbed, 'I either go on using it,' she said, 'or you can chuck me out too. (Savage, 2007, p. 164).

It is unsurprising that her father was angry, the excessive use of make-up had connotations with loose morals, but during the Great War period, Savage says that '…many girls of all classes were assuming the fashions previously associated with prostitutes: cigarette smoking and the public wearing of thick make-up.' (Savage, 2007, p. 165). By the time the war ended, Britain was a different place, young people had been changed by its brutality, losing loved ones and taking on adult responsibilities. 'The Great War forever destroyed the automatic obedience that elders expected from their children.' (Savage, 2007, p. 168). If the older generation expected life to return to the way it had been pre-war, they would be disappointed.

The cinema was still popular and would have been affordable to young people in the inter-war period, and again, newspapers reported on the behaviour of teenagers. In 1921, the *Brecon County Times* reported vandalism in the Crickhowell Cinema. Seven teenagers were fined ten shillings each for the offence at the Petty Court. The secretary of the company said that the cinema had been having trouble with unruly boys, and the

Chairman said the Bench were 'determined to put down hooliganism in the town.' (Brecon County Times, 1921, p. 7). What the younger generation saw as fun, such as cinema and dancing, brought disapproval from their elders, as fears grew about a '…tidal wave of immorality.' (Savage, 2007, p. 188), and influential to this new youth culture was American Jazz. As would happen with Rock and Roll in the 1950s, Jazz introduced a fresh mix of music, dance and fashion, lapped up by the 'hip young things' (Cartwright, 2020). The new styles of clothing for women included the flapper'.

> Not only did the flapper turn on its head traditional notions of femininity – she was arguably the first incarnation of youth culture in Britain and beyond. She was a good time girl, she drank, she smoked, she drove, she partied, she wore the latest outrageous fashions, she came home late – and in doing so, she pre-empted the youth culture movements of later decades (Staveley-Wadham, 2020b).

During the 1920s, American films dominated cinemas and spread these new looks and music to the public. Young people of all classes were particularly enthusiastic about these styles, and Savage points out '…they unwittingly acted as the spearhead of American-style mass consumption…' (Savage, 2007, p. 240). Young cinema goers would have been influenced by the famous American actress, Clara Bow, who appeared in films in the latest flapper styles. Seen as the original 'it girl', she displayed a new kind of young woman, who was independent and sassy. Her clothes and short hair style had a huge impact on girls looking for fun after the depressing years of war in what Savage describes as 'young emancipation' (Savage, 2007, p. 240). This would have been a shock compared to the demure, feminine look of the Victorian era. The flapper generation also had their own trademark dance, the Charleston, which was seen by the older generation as outrageous, as with its wild moves, it would show a lot of a girl's legs in her short skirts. As in later decades, these modern girls came in for criticism for the way they dressed and acted. A letter to the editor of the *Neath Guardian* in July 1929 expressed the feelings of one of its readers,

> …Saturday and Sunday nights at Port Talbot are the promenade nights of these misguided maidens. I have thought that perhaps the churches could help in the problem, but I find that the flappers even parade their cosmeticised

countenances in the house of worship. The problem is one which the girls themselves must solve. I am sure if they saw themselves as we see them they would soon remedy matters. Personally, I never fail to let a girl know that I despise the powdered faces, brilliantined hair and nicotined fingers of the modern flapper. I think if we men banded together in an anti-flapper movement we would soon cure these foolish misses. Yours, etc., R. S. (Neath Guardian, 1929, p. 2).

There is nothing to indicate the age of 'R. S.', but it is safe to assume he is not in his teens. He shows no indication that flappers are to be feared in any way, more that he sees them as rather ridiculous. However, it may have been seen as the tip of the iceberg, as Savage argues that some American culture, so eagerly consumed by the young, was responsible for fuelling fears about youth crime, saying, it went hand in hand with the new values that they sought to live by, they wanted more personal freedom and less parental control (Savage, 2007, p. 242).

It must not be assumed that all young people followed these trends or behaved badly. Many working-class girls would not have had the money for make-up and clothes, and many Welsh teenagers in the inter-war years lived at home, got jobs and pursued simple pastimes. Todd says that most young working people, handed any wages over to their mother, getting an allowance back to spend on themselves (Todd, 2005, p. 793). Parents worried about their children's moral welfare, with daughters in particular having their social lives under scrutiny. The power over both their spending money and leisure pursuits would have been a good way for parents to keep some control over their children. Teenagers pursued many pastimes, and these might vary depending on whether they lived in a rural or urban environment. Those living in towns would have better access to cinemas and dances, whereas teenagers in small rural villages would have fewer other youngsters around them, making them less likely to form large groups. Pastimes such as cycling, collecting cigarette cards, playing sports and reading were widespread. They could join clubs which their parents would have approved of, and youth clubs did their best to provide organised activity for teenagers. The Urdd, a voluntary youth organisation in Wales, saw the need to set up clubs for teenagers. An article in the *Western Mail*, talks of the importance of having clubs for teens over the age

of fourteen years, particularly if they had left school. It points out that the Urdd is lacking, 'A new-born conception of the needs of modern youth…' and that this is 'sadly in need' (Western Mail, 1937, p. 9). This would imply that teenagers were being seen as a new social group with unique requirements. The article also goes on to say that young men and women under the age of thirty are needed to run these clubs, a generation gap was apparent, and these clubs would have been a way to let teenagers escape from the eye of their elders, while still doing supervised activities with responsible young adults. The outbreak of war in 1939 presented new challenges, and historian Paul Addison notes that in England and Wales, convictions for juvenile delinquency rose by thirty-nine per cent between 1939 and 1945 (Addison, 2005, p. 4). This could have been due to the general disruption of family life during this period. The *South Wales Gazette* reported that gangs of young men were reported to the police. They were '…not playing the game…', as they went around Abertillery at night shouting and throwing stones (South Wales Gazette, 1940, p. 3). Pontypridd also reported problems with hooliganism, and this time, too much money was blamed.

> 'These youths are earning more money than they or their predecessors have for a considerable time and there is a considerable outbreak of hooliganism at the Pontypridd station and on the railway generally, particularly on Saturday nights' (Pontypridd Observer, 1943, p. 2).

Indeed, Savage points out that in the early 1940s, Britain's adolescents could hardly do anything right, saying that if they did not help the war effort, they were damned, and if they did, they were criticised. A Justice of the Peace in 1941 wrote,

> Since the outbreak of war high wages paid to boys for unsuitable and unskilled work have led to gambling and then to delinquency. Cases brought before the juvenile courts have revealed that lads of 15 and 16 are earning £4 or more weekly. (Savage, 2007, p. 352).

With so many reasons for delinquency being proposed, it is clear the authorities had little idea what was at the heart of it, and this may have been another reason to be worried. However, much of what was printed in newspapers was untrue, a 1941 survey

showed that adolescents up to twenty-one years old, earned on average about two pounds per week for long hours in poor working conditions (Savage, 2007, p. 352). Teenagers in the workplace brought new fears, and there were worries about the moral corruption of working teenage girls. The Reverend Richard Rees called on the Government to do something about the alcohol available in factory canteens. He said that young girls were being sent to work in Government factories where, 'Promiscuity and immorality were greater than he had ever known.'. Teenage girls were '…going to the devil…', as they were earning money then spending it on strong drink (South Wales Gazette, 1942, p. 1).

More sinister was the 'sexual delinquency' that some teenage girls were accused of. Called 'Camp Followers', headlines told of young women moving from place to place with army camps, trading sex for money and food. The *Western Mail* reported that girls between fifteen and twenty were sleeping rough and spreading disease and immorality, one of the black spots being Maindy Barracks in Cardiff. The article blamed the girls entirely for their promiscuity and lack of self-respect, while residents were horrified that they could not let their children out, for fear of what they might see (Western Mail, 1945, p. 3). There is no doubt that the American GIs were a magnet for some impressionable teenagers. Horn reports the findings of a 1945 Home Office report into concerns of teenage promiscuity, which said that the arrival of Americans, speaking like Hollywood film stars and generously spoiling the girls, made them attractive boyfriends (Horn, 2009, p. 23). There may have been some cause for their concern, as Savage says that 'During the war, one-third of all babies born were illegitimate. With up to 80 per cent of all American troops being sexually active while stationed in Europe, the arrival of the G Is had a strong impact on the figures.' (Savage, 2007, p. 419). Journalist Michelle Hanson says a couple of her friends became pregnant, '…it was just very exciting for young girls to…see these handsome young men with flattops, sneakers and jeans.' (Tom Jones's 1950s: The Decade That Made Me, 1997).

While it was recognised that teenagers could be a problem, there were also efforts to address this. At the annual conference of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, a Ministry of Youth was proposed to '…grapple with the problems of youth…'. Four-hundred delegates, got together to discuss the ill effects of the war on the young. It was noted that although churches did their best to address the needs of the young with Sunday Schools, after the age of twelve, children drifted away from this, preferring to

spend their time in billiard halls, dance halls and cinemas, especially in industrial areas. Part of the problem was also education, or the lack of it. Out of an estimated two-hundred and ten thousand young people between the ages of fourteen and twenty, one hundred and sixty thousand were receiving no kind of educational instruction. Those in work '… received nothing more invigorating for the mind, or more enriching for the soul than their pay packets…' (Western Mail, 1940, p. 4).

Whatever was implied, young wage earners were more likely to spend their spare time on films and dances than causing trouble. Savage found that a Mass-Observation youth survey of Paddington and Bermondsey in January 1941, found that half of the young people who took part pursued 'serious' pursuits like reading, sewing, and Air Raid Precautions work. Others spent their money on dance records, entertainment, books, cigarettes, pictures, and clothes. Savage notes that, 'The observers' tone indicated that this was thought to be rather frivolous and selfish.' (Savage, 2007, p. 352). They may have been frivolous, but they were hardly problematic. There is no reason to believe that teenagers in Welsh towns were any different, and there were plenty of dance halls for teenagers to go to, such as Sharps' Ballroom in Halkyn, which advertised dances every Friday (Flintshire County Herald, 1942, p. 1).

By the end of the war Savage believes Britain's youth had become accustomed to the American consumer products brought over by the GIs and were '…completely Americanised.' (Savage, 2007, p. 421). Teenagers of the 1950s would have a better chance to enjoy life to the full.

## Chapter two. Fear of youth.

If therefore, teenagers had always worried previous generations, why is the birth of the teenager still perceived to have happened in the 1950s? Firstly, Osgerby would argue that due to the post-war baby boom, there were many more of them. Adults under twenty grew from around three million in 1951 to just over four million by 1966. He adds that in 1947 the school leaving age rose to fifteen, helping to 'formalise' the idea that teenagers were an identifiable social group (Osgerby, 2005, p. 128). They certainly were more visible than previous youth groups and their increasingly recognisable style carried connotations of danger. They were less likely to speak Welsh, which may have worried parents that their children were abandoning their heritage. The census returns for 1951 reported a downward trend in Welsh speakers by nearly one hundred thousand, native speakers tended to be in the older age group (Morgan, 1999, p. 336). Stead believes that for a few years after the war, Welsh teenagers had carried on doing pretty much what they had been doing for years before, going to youth clubs, dances and cinemas, but the release of *Blackboard Jungle* in 1955 was a turning point in their lives (Stead, 1995, p. 112). Presenter John Peel would agree, saying that the film made him suddenly aware of options for dress and music. 'Being a teenager really gave me an identity of my own…all of the ideas I had up until then had been implanted by my parents and teachers…it was nice to have something which was wholly my own.' Having watched *Blackboard Jungle* and heard 'Rock Around the Clock' for the first time, he says he felt as though it was about him (BBC Sounds, 1994). He, and thousands of other teenagers in the 1950s now had something completely different from the music and style their parents enjoyed, and the rapid change worried parents who may have felt their children's lives were just so different from their own wartime experiences.

They were better off than their parents. After the Second World War school leavers were able to find work easily. In 1951, seventy-five per cent of young women aged between fifteen and nineteen and eighty-four per cent of young men of the same age were in full-time employment across England and Wales (Todd, 2007, p. 78). Traditional industries in South Wales were now working to full capacity, which was good for youngsters in the area (Morgan, 2010, p. 336). The ability to earn gave teenagers a degree of autonomy in what they spent on leisure, and this may have

worried parents who now had less control over them. 'We were a fun-loving generation…', says Muriel Hughes, '…who had more money to spend on clothes and cosmetics than our wartime mothers ever had.' (Beddoe, 2003, p. 98). Quick to cash in on these young consumers were magazines which helped to spread the latest styles. There was also new affordable technology. Teenagers could buy transistor radios and listen to them in the privacy of their rooms or when out with their friends. The days when families sat together to listen to the radio were disappearing. The BBC would not play the kinds of music they wanted, highlighting the generation gap, and so they were less likely to want to sit and listen with their parents anyway. Singer Tom Jones remembered his teens in Pontypridd, saying that the music he enjoyed was hard to find on the radio in 1952, but if you could get Radio Luxembourg, the best show was 'Pete Murray's top 20' which played a lot of American music (Tom Jones's 1950s: The Decade That Made Me, 1997). Young people began to meet in cafes with juke boxes to listen together, and Adrian Horn believes that juke boxes were an important way of spreading American music (Horn, 2009, p. 50). The problem with this music was it became linked with reports of bad behaviour. Horn puts this down to the perceived link between rock 'n' roll and delinquency in America (Horn, 2009, p. 78). This was not helped by the reaction of young cinema goers in Britain. When *Blackboard Jungle* was released in Cardiff in 1955, there were scenes which had never been seen before, with teenagers singing and dancing in the aisles. Seats were broken and the police were called in (Stead, 1995, p. 112). An article in the *Western Mail* saw this film, with its uncontrollable teenagers, as a '…timely, salutary warning.' as conditions in urban schools and youth clubs showed '…indiscipline, illiteracy and a couldn't care less attitude of the pupils.' (Onlooker, 1955, p. 7). The fear of losing control was clearly a major concern for the older generation.

A new youth culture, the Teddy Boys, emerged from this new music, and with a distinctive style of hair and clothing, they stood out. This was seen as gang culture. The film *Rock Around the Clock* was released a year later, and again, there were reports in the media of vandalism and violence across the country, sparking what Horn describes as the beginning of a 'moral panic… fuelled by an eager press.' (Horn, 2009, p. 78). Teddy Boys were blamed for much of this trouble, and in Sketty, two teenage Teddy Boys were fined for carrying dangerous weapons into the Odeon (Morgan, 1999, p. 46).

Girls came in for criticism too. The Plaza Cinema in Maesteg had to stop the film and switch on the lights as so many of them were jiving in the aisles in what a witness called, 'pandemonium in the cheap seats.' (Western Mail, 1956, p. 5). There were many cinemas who saw no need to ban this film though. Castle Cinema in Caerphilly was pleased that the local council ignored pleas from Caerphilly Free Church Federal Council that the film should be banned, and even the president of the Free Church Council himself said that he had '…every faith in the young people of Caerphilly.' (Western Mail, 1956, p. 5). Clearly his experiences were different from the media hype.

The style of dress went with the music. Author Francis Beckett recalls that '…in the early 1950s, clothes were grey, boring and flat and it was unmanly to wear anything else.' (Tom Jones's 1950s: The Decade That Made Me, 1997). The same applied to hair, and new haircuts with names like 'duck's arse' and 'pompadour' emerged. Pathé News reported on a new style called 'The Elephant's Trunk'. In the film, older men look on with a mixture of amusement and confusion as the teenager has his hair styled. Although not all teenagers would have taken hairstyles to such extremes, the film establishes teenagers as consumers, and implies that they were seen as incomprehensible to the older generation (*The Elephant's Trunk?: 1950's Men's Hair Styles (1956) | British Pathé,* 2014). Jones says fashion changed radically with the arrival of the Teddy Boy, '…it was the first time we had an identity and a look that was different from our parents.' They went for a look which was completely opposite, and more attractive to the opposite sex. When asked in an interview, 'Would you rather go with a Teddy Boy than an ordinary boy?' the teenage girl answered, '…a Teddy Boy any day!' (Tom Jones's 1950s: The Decade That Made Me, 1997). Boys wore long jackets, tight drainpipe trousers, crepe soled shoes and narrow ties. This look which had influences from American films and Edwardian Dandies, was uniquely British, and became synonymous with rebellion, whether deserved or not. Jones says his mother wanted to take the velvet off the collar of his jacket when she realised he had '…become a Teddy Boy.' Jones says that dancehalls hated their music, and to adults, Rock 'n' Roll was as bad as being under attack during the war. (Tom Jones's 1950s: The Decade That Made Me, 1997). Girls were part of these gangs too, and director Ken Russell published photographs of Teddy Girls from the London area in 1955, and although, unlike the boys, there was no moral panic attached to them, they did cause trouble (Horn, 2009, p.

142). In Felinfoel, Llanelly in 1956, a gang of Teddy Boys and Girls carrying weapons, vandalised several marquees. A witness said, '…the girls… were as bad as the boys.' (Western Mail, 1956, p. 9). But many youngsters would not have been involved in any trouble. Joan Hilditch from Rhymney Valley remembers the fifties on the whole as, '…an innocent era of Teddy Boys and rock and roll…,' (Beddoe, 2003, p. 105). Most teenagers just enjoyed the music, and when Bill Haley came to Cardiff for a show, there was a queue of over quarter of a mile long for tickets. The manager of a nearby music shop, put on some records for them saying, 'The effect was magical. The queue burst into movement…' (Western Mail, 1957, p. 5).

As the Teddy craze began to wane, a new group emerged in the form of the Mods. Short for modernists, they took their influence from Europe rather than America. They too wanted a style which was completely different from their parents and favoured the new well-cut clothes seen in Italy and France. They could also afford to buy Italian scooters, which were an important part of their image, and was a good way of meeting the opposite sex. Tony Foley, a teenager in the 1960s says '…it was freedom to a certain extent, and it was rebellion.' If you had a scooter, '…you had to be pretty ugly not to pull a bird.' (Mods, Rockers and Bank Holiday Mayhem, 2014). At the same time, another youth group, the Rockers were becoming more visible. With the ability to buy motorbikes, they could travel further from home and caused alarm with their noise, speed and a leather-clad look reminiscent of Marlon Brando in the film *The Wild One*. Released in 1957, this film was banned in Britain until 1967, as The British Board of Film Classification considered it to be a '…spectacle of unbridled hooliganism…', and therefore a bad influence (bbfc, n.d.). As they were frowned on in many places, Rockers began to find their own places to congregate, such as roadside cafes, which must have added to the belief that there were huge gangs of them. Dr Suzanne McDonald-Walker says, 'People were beginning to worry about this new materialism, and the people who epitomised it most were young people.' They could buy what they wanted, and they could get things on credit too. But the scruffy Rocker rather than the smart Mod bore the brunt of the criticism, as it became synonymous with the working classes and the young, two worrying groups to the establishment. Osgerby says this is a new working-class consumerism and hedonism, 'Part of the appeal of these styles was the ability to wave two fingers at conservative authority.' (Mods, Rockers and Bank Holiday Mayhem,

2014). For parents who remembered the deprivations of war, the excesses of their children were worrying.

Although these two tribes were such polar opposites, there was little trouble between them until Whitsun weekend of 1964, when there were violent clashes in Clacton. If the newspapers of the period were to be believed, it seemed like total war had broken out between teenage gangs, and the headlines were terrifying. 'Beach crowds take cover from battling Mods and Rockers' said *The Daily Sketch* (British Library, n. d.), 'Wild ones invade seaside-90 arrests' said The *Daily Mirror,* referring to the notorious, banned film. The *Daily Mirror* reported scenes of an invasion, with, '1,000 fighting, drinking, roaring, rampaging teenagers on scooters and motor-cycles.', it goes on to describe the 'desperate SOS' from the overwhelmed police, as leather clad teenagers attacked people in the streets, turned over parked cars and smashed windows. A local hotelier said '…this was almost mob rule.' (Daily Mirror, 1964, p. 1). However, McDonald-Walker believes these reports were greatly exaggerated saying, 'In terms of the overall vandalism, we're talking about five hundred and thirteen pounds worth of damage… probably not much more than they would expect on any bank holiday.' (Mods, Rockers and Bank Holiday Mayhem, 2014). It was not only Clacton which reported these clashes, resort towns in other parts of the country were reporting teenage gang fights too. Alan Wells, a teenage Mod of the 1960s remembers friction between the groups leading to fights at the local dancehalls, saying '…conflicts continued in Barry and Porthcawl…Mods and Rockers would converge from all over South Wales.' (Mahoney, C. 2018, p. 19). Author, Claire Mahoney also recalls that '…pitched battles were common and, much like in the south coast seaside towns of Brighton and Margate, Welsh mods would make their own Bank Holiday pilgrimage to the South Wales resorts…' (Mahoney, C. 2018, p.12). Savage says, 'There was violence, to be sure, but some of this was simply adult projection…' (Savage, 2014), and some newspapers reported precautions being taken in anticipation of trouble which never happened. 'Extra police were on duty at Aberavon…after a rumour swept the town that "Mods and Rockers" planned to invade the beach…the "invasion" did not materialise…and there were no incidents.' (Port Talbot Guardian, 1964, p. 13). Clearly there was trouble between teenage groups, but the media made localised incidents look like a nationwide crisis, and there were claims that many of these fights were staged by the press looking for a story (Independent, 2011). ). As the Mod look became more mainstream, many of the original Mods moved

on to new styles or grew up and became part of the establishment they had railed against. This left space for new rebellious teenagers to find their own way to be different. Hippies with their reputation for drug-fuelled promiscuity gave way to Punks with their aggressive anti-establishment attitude. The youth groups of the past had paved the way for the teenagers of the future, who would also become symbols of social anxiety.

# Conclusion

The experiences of teenagers in Wales were similar to the rest of the country and throughout the years, they all had to express their individuality within the constraints of the period they were living. This dissertation has shown that teenagers have always been a cause of worry for parents and society in general, and it had long been recognised that young people were more adventurous than their elders. Not yet adults but no longer children, they were at a difficult age, and the older generation, feeling control slipping from their grasp, worried that they might get into trouble. Young people were believed to need protection from bad influences, and at various points across the years, groups tried to organise and control them to this end. Newspaper reports from the early twentieth century show that many did get into trouble, although there were no headlines to prompt a fear of youth. Reasons given for this behaviour varied from lack of parental control and too much money, to bad influences such as cinema and music coming over from America, with girls as well as boys coming in for criticism. This is seen very clearly during the 1920s, when young women took up the flapper look in what Staveley-Wadham believes to be the first incarnation of youth culture, with a combination of music, dance, clothes and hairstyle which shocked the older generation. The Second World War brought a lot of disruption, and Addison shows an increase in convictions for juvenile delinquency (Addison, 2005, p. 4). Radio, newspaper and cinema all influenced young people across the generations, with each generation of teenagers feeling they were different from the previous one, yet each generation still seemed to worry about the subsequent one.

But it was in the 1950s that the speed of change began to accelerate causing this period to be seen as the birth of today's teenagers. They became headline news, causing fear and alarm, as they became more visible in print, on television and in the streets with their distinctive style. This was due to several factors coming together at the same time. Attitudes to authority changed after World War Two, meaning 1950s teenagers were less likely to choose the lives their parents had. There were more teenagers about. As Osgerby has shown, the birth rate rose in Britain to produce over four million adults under the age of twenty by 1966 (Osgerby, 2005, p. 128). The influence of American music and clothes was spreading through films such as *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rock Around the Clock,* this new style for clothes and hair carried connotations of delinquent

behaviour, as seen from the reaction of Tom Jones's mother when she saw him looking like a Teddy Boy (Tom Jones's 1950s: The Decade That Made Me, 1997). Because of the widespread availability of employment, young people had more money to spend. This made them into teenage consumers, a fact recognised and acted on by the leisure and retail industries, who launched magazines, records and clothes, all aimed at the teenage market. The real cause of worry for parents and authorities was the loss of control. Teenagers in the 1950s and 1960s had more independence from their parents, and the hedonistic lifestyle they seemed to live was difficult to understand by a generation who had lived through the deprivations of war. Many could afford their own transport, giving them the ability to go further afield and meet up with like-minded friends, or antagonise other youth groups. Seeing an influx of unknown teens on motorcycles was understandably alarming to locals, no matter how well behaved they intended to be. But despite the fears of the older generation and the warnings in the press, the majority of teenagers were not out to cause trouble. They just wanted to be themselves, with their own style, which was completely different from their parents, and being different from the older generation was probably as important as being the same as their peer group.

Perhaps the last quote should go to Susan Dorrington, who spent her teenage years in South Wales as she sums up how it felt to be an average Welsh teenager of the 1960s. She says, 'Were we different? We liked to think we were different from the stuffy grown-ups, but looking back from now to then, we were expected to be different and perhaps every generation likes to think they are unique.' (Dorrington, S. 2021).

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