

[00:00:00] **Jarek Zaba:** Uh, this is Jarek Zaba for the AMP Kingston project from Creative Youth, exploring art, music and pop fashion in the Kingston borough and beyond. Today is Tuesday, May the 16th, 2023, and I'm with Keith McMahon. Keith is a former student at Kingston Poly, and was involved in the SU's organisation of gigs and music nights there.

[00:00:22] **Jarek Zaba:** Uh, Keith, do you mind stating your name for the tape, as well as your date and place of birth?

[00:00:27] **Keith McMahon:** Uh, Keith McMahon. Born on the 1st of July, 1959, uh, in Kingston Hospital.

[00:00:33] **Jarek Zaba:** Lovely stuff. Um, well, that, uh, immediately brings me to sort of the first, the first question I was going to ask was about your link to Kingston.

[00:00:40] **Jarek Zaba:** So, born and bred, essentially.

[00:00:42] **Keith McMahon:** Born, born and bred. I've lived in Kingston all my life, apart from six months down in Bristol. Um, so yes, um, primarily Sur-Yeah. Surbiton

[00:00:51] **Keith McMahon:** Yep. Yep.

[00:00:52] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, so when did you make the decision to study here? Was it just a case of, uh, you just wanted to stay local?

[00:00:59] **Keith McMahon:** Um, [00:01:00] yeah. It, it was a question of a what was available.

[00:01:03] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and I decided that the, uh, production engineering course at, uh, Kingston Polytechnic was the sort of course I wanted to do. Uh, it was nice and easy. Kingston Poly were very, very keen to have local students because student accommodation in the 70s was really, really difficult. So, um, so I got a place at, um, at Kingston Poly, uh, in the days when the School of Engineering was based in the old Sopwith Aircraft Factory in Canbury Park Road.

[00:01:34] **Jarek Zaba:** Oh, what an amazing place to study that sort of thing.

[00:01:36] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, it was a, it was a bit of a fire, it was a tinderbox, it really was. I mean, it was soaked in 50 years of, um, uh, engine oil

and, um, you know, it had been an aircraft, it had been an aircraft factory from the, from the First World War. Um, and, um, it really wasn't designed as an educational establishment, but I mean, there were, there were workshops and, you know, lecture [00:02:00] theatres and drawing offices and things like that.

[00:02:01] **Jarek Zaba:** Where's that located?

[00:02:02] **Keith McMahon:** In Canbury Park Road, if you go into Canbury Pa- it's, you can still see the old red brick building, which was, so some, some of the buildings have been retained. Some of the old factory buildings, which were pretty insignificant, were all demolished. Crikey, I'm trying to think now, at least 20 years ago.

[00:02:21] **Keith McMahon:** Um, but there are certain roads there, I think there's Sopwith Way, uh, well there's Sopwith Way in Kingston, um, and a lot of the roads around there are named after, um, things to do with the aircraft industry. Um, it's also the building in which the Hawker, the very first Hawker Hurricane from the Second World War was designed and built.

[00:02:45] **Keith McMahon:** It's still there. And, um, I don't know whether they're still there. Ballet Boys? Wherever Ballet Boys had their studio on the right hand side of Canbury Park Road, backing onto the railway, was also part of, [00:03:00] um, the Polytechnic in those days. Right. Um, and that's where the very first Hawker Hurricane was designed and built in the, in the Second World War.

[00:03:07] **Keith McMahon:** So I, so yeah, so I, I went to Kingston Poly in, um, yeah, September 1977.

[00:03:14] **Jarek Zaba:** September 77. And what was the course again?

[00:03:16] **Keith McMahon:** Uh, I did production engineering. So there was a school of mechanical, aeronautical and production engineering. Um, uh, As I say, and they, what it, what it says on the tin, uh, so, uh, there was a big emphasis on aeroengineering.

[00:03:33] **Keith McMahon:** There was a very strong connection with, um, British, well, Hawker, Hawker aircraft, uh, who were out on the Richmond Road, um, towards, uh, just at Ham Common traffic lights. And, uh, also links with, uh, Rolls Royce. And a dozen of us went down to Bristol for six months to do our basic engineering training at the Rolls Royce Technical College.

[00:03:57] **Keith McMahon:** So that was my six months out of [00:04:00] Kingston, uh, working for Rolls Royce. Um, being trained at, you know, a week on a lathe, a week on a vertical mill, grinding machines, drawing office, uh, just to give you some of the understanding of the basic skills of, uh, of engineering.

[00:04:13] **Jarek Zaba:** Great. What was your sort of perception of...

[00:04:16] **Jarek Zaba:** The Polytechnic at the time, um, prior to being there and then when you went there, what were your first impressions?

[00:04:21] **Keith McMahon:** Um, I didn't really know, an aw- I'd, in the year prior to, sort of last year of taking A levels and things like that, I'd been round a few universities and, um, a few Polytechnics, uh, to, to understand what it was all about and things like that.

[00:04:38] **Keith McMahon:** Um, Obviously Kingston wasn't a campus university, and there were bits and pieces dotted all over the place. Um, although Knights Park was primarily fashion, art, design, architecture, surveying I think was over there, maybe. And, um, Knights [00:05:00] Park was, uh, sorry, Canbury Park was primarily mechanical engineering, production engineering, civil engineering, those sort of, so they kind of grouped things together, but it was all a little bit dotted all over the, all over the town.

[00:05:11] **Keith McMahon:** There didn't seem to be any, um, cohesion between them. Um, but as soon as I got there... Suddenly you find out that there are A: lots and lots of people who are away from home for the first time and therefore they're looking for something to hang on to, if you like, to become part of. Looking to make new friends.

[00:05:41] **Keith McMahon:** Very, very strong social scene and very strong sports scene. In the first, first two weeks of the autumn term, maybe even the first week, there was a Freshers Fair, um, in the, in the [00:06:00] main hall in Penrhyn Road, um, where every student union club and society was invited to have a table and everybody could just go around and sign up.

[00:06:10] **Keith McMahon:** You could become part of the rugby club, the hockey club, um, there were religious, there were political clubs, um, pretty much everything. Um, and a lot of it, in fact most of it, was funded by, uh, the student union. So, it wasn't a question of people being asked to pay large amounts of money. It was, oh, come along, it's, you know, it's only 50p to join.

[00:06:32] **Keith McMahon:** Uh, so I think I, I joined the mountaineering. I'd, I'd been involved with scouts and venture scouts and things like that. So I joined the mountaineering club because they did weekend... Trips away to North Wales, you know, walking and climbing and things like that. That was great fun. But primarily, they met on a Sunday night in a pub in Surbiton, which was the real thing that you really wanted to do.

[00:06:54] **Jarek Zaba:** That's what mountaineering is all about.

[00:06:55] **Keith McMahon:** That's what mountaineering is all about. Um, [00:07:00] uh, and I joined, and that was where I got... Uh, introduced, or I, I understood that there was this group called Technical Services within the Student Union. And there was a full time paid employee of the Student Union, a chap called Wink Hackman.

[00:07:22] **Jarek Zaba:** Wink Hackman, that's a great name.

[00:07:24] **Keith McMahon:** He's married, I don't know if you know a lady called Sue Hackman, who's a Labour Politician or something like that? He's married to her. Anyway, um, so anyway, yeah, Wink Hackman was a full time technical officer, um, and it was his job to make sure that all the audio visual equipment that the student union owned, operated, hired, borrowed, used, um, was in good shape.

[00:07:56] **Jarek Zaba:** Right.

[00:07:57] **Keith McMahon:** Um, he was also involved in... [00:08:00] Helping with the booking of bands, um, but the booking of the bands was all done by, um, the entertainments committee, who were just a bunch of students who got together and formed the entertainments committee.

[00:08:18] **Jarek Zaba:** So would, uh, you know, I mentioned Michael, Michael White-

[00:08:22] **Keith McMahon:** Mike Whiteside.

[00:08:22] **Jarek Zaba:** Whiteside, yes. Would he have been on the entertainments committee?

[00:08:24] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, kind of. I mean, over the, I was there for, I was at Kingston Poly for six years. And, um, it's, uh, the situation evolved over those six years. So in the, in 77, it was, how can I put it? It was, it was really

quite amateurish in that there was this one person, um, who was the, uh, technical officer who controlled and organised, you know, a lot of the technical side of the events.

[00:08:53] **Keith McMahon:** And then, um, that evolved over those six years and there was, by the end of [00:09:00] the sixth year, there was a full time, um, entertainments manager, whose job it was to hire and promote and things like that. And there was no longer a technical, um, officer. The technical side of things was done by students. Um, And I think Mike Whiteside was part of that, sort of that bridge between entertainment and technical.

[00:09:24] **Keith McMahon:** Um, from memory. Uh, cause I think Mike probably didn't come along until, I don't know, 80 ish? 1980 ish? Something like that. So as I say, I joined this group, Technical Services, and

[00:09:39] **Jarek Zaba:** Was it like a kind of club, like a student society that you could sign up for in the same way?

[00:09:43] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, absolutely. And it was just a bun- a berry-

[00:09:46] **Jarek Zaba:** Were they at Freshers Fair?

[00:09:47] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Absolutely. They were at Freshers Fair, and I said, well this is just what I want to do, because I'd done, um, um, a lot of stage lighting, amateur [00:10:00] theatrical, amateur am dram sort of stuff before going to Kingston Poly. Um, at school we'd put on what was, um, humorously called a pop concert.

[00:10:10] **Keith McMahon:** Um, with some, you know, some school bands and things like that. So I knew one end of an amplifier from another and I knew how to light a show and things like that. Bearing in mind it was all pretty, pretty basic stuff. Back in the, back in the mid seventies. Um, so I joined technical services. There were a group of, oh, I suppose, 15, a dozen, 15 people, something like that, that, that, that magnitude, uh, of people that, who were prepared to drive equipment around, who were prepared to act, you know, uh, to hump equipment, to, to act as a roadie.

[00:10:51] **Keith McMahon:** We then had a, another bunch of people who were, Uh, associated with that, who were DJs. Um, and there were [00:11:00] probably half a dozen of good, good... There were probably a dozen people that were prepared to, you know, spin the discs.

[00:11:10] **Jarek Zaba:** Yep.

[00:11:10] **Keith McMahon:** And they were discs. Um, so there were about a dozen that were prepared to do that.

[00:11:15] **Keith McMahon:** There were probably only about four or five that were really good. Um, there was a chap, sadly passed away a couple of years ago, Bill, uh, Bill Pearson, who ended up as a highly respected model maker in the film industry. Um, worked on Star Wars, Alien, he made, he made the Alien egg.

[00:11:33] **Jarek Zaba:** Oh wow.

[00:11:33] **Keith McMahon:** Um, he worked on Blake's 7, Doctor Who.

[00:11:37] **Jarek Zaba:** Okay.

[00:11:37] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and all those sort of things. Um, Bill, Bill was a six foot three ish, uh, Glaswegian with a very, very deep guttural voice. Um, and he did a fantastic double act with, uh, a girl called, um, Barbara Moore, Babs Moore. Barbara was about four foot ten. Um, and, um, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, [00:12:00] I haven't seen her in forty, forty five years, so, but I would equally say if she was standing here, she was quite rotund.

[00:12:05] **Keith McMahon:** So, uh, and the two, and I don't know where she came from. Home counties somewhere. Um, but the two of them put on a great act. Uh, and there were a few others. There was a guy, Charlie Hayward, um, who was a, um, a Thames TV cameraman. Um, and these guys would just, they would turn up five minutes beforehand, do the show, and then disappear afterwards after having had a beer.

[00:12:28] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:12:28] **Keith McMahon:** Um, whereas the technical guys would put all the kit together and make sure it worked, and then take it all apart, put it in the back of the van, and take it home again.

[00:12:36] **Jarek Zaba:** I was curious about, um, the, the, on the technical side of things, this Wink Hackman and his, did he, did he essentially have a storeroom that he'd loan equipment out of?

[00:12:47] **Jarek Zaba:** And how much gear did you have access to?

[00:12:48] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, so, um, uh, right. In 1977, there was a single story timber building on the corner [00:13:00] of Grove Crescent and Penrhyn Road. Which was a World War II Nissen hut. It had been a civil defence hut, right? The whole, I mean, how it ever, how we ever got licenses for it, how it ever stayed up, God knows.

[00:13:18] **Keith McMahon:** The, what is now Town House, is the third, so in between there being a wooden Nissen hut there, and Town House there was another building which was a temporary building made out of, um, Portakabins?

[00:13:29] **Jarek Zaba:** Yes, yeah, that was still there when I was studying at Kingston myself.

[00:13:32] **Keith McMahon:** Right, right.

[00:13:33] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, I heard that it was the longest standing temporary structure.

[00:13:36] **Keith McMahon:** Absolutely, and it never had planning permission.

[00:13:38] **Jarek Zaba:** Right.

[00:13:38] **Keith McMahon:** Because it was, because there was a, one of the deputy directors of the Polytechnic in, I don't know, in the 70s and around about 1980 was a chap called Ken Barker and Ken said we don't need planning permission because it's a temporary building. And they put up this three story building complete with student union, bar, offices, the whole lot.

[00:13:58] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:13:59] **Keith McMahon:** And it was a [00:14:00] temporary building.

[00:14:00] **Jarek Zaba:** I used to have classes in there and it was called Town House back then and it's kind of, it's kind of remarkable to compare.

[00:14:05] **Keith McMahon:** So before that Portakabin type building, um, there was this wooden building and that was the student union bar. So It was a, essentially a T-shaped building. The, the, the long, the, the vertical bit of the t the long bit, um, was a, uh, student union bar.

[00:14:24] **Keith McMahon:** There was a branch of NatWest in there. Um, and basically they turned, I think it was only open two days a week, maybe a Tuesday and a Friday or something like that. And they would turn up with essentially a bag of money and, um, a computer and, um, and set up a bank behind, in a little cubbyhole, in a little room.

[00:14:46] **Jarek Zaba:** Is this specifically for students?

[00:14:48] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, because NatWest were, NatWest were the bankers to the National Union of Students.

[00:14:55] **Jarek Zaba:** Right, okay.

[00:14:55] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and they were doing their best to try and promote themselves amongst the student [00:15:00] community. Uh, we had a, um, there was a shop there that sold, um, health foods and, well, it wasn't called health foods in those days, I mean, it was like bags of rice and nuts and pasta and things like that.

[00:15:15] **Keith McMahon:** Um, there was a little, um, cafe snack bar. There was a snack bar which had some very basic cooking equipment in there that turned out pasties and chips and sandwiches and things like that at lunchtime. There was a student union bar which was, well, it was just a... you know, just a big beer drinking hall. Um, then, if you like, the horizontal bit of the T was, uh, an extension to the building.

[00:15:43] **Keith McMahon:** It was called The Extension, and that's where we held, um, Friday night. There was a disco there every Friday night. Um, which was 50p to get into, something like that. Um, and we put on the occasional bands there. And [00:16:00] part of that building, there was a storeroom. Dunno. 25ft long, 6ft wide, something like that.

[00:16:09] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and that was where we stored all our equipment. Equipment, what did we have? We had 3 complete sets of disco- we could run 3 discos in 3 different locations at the same time. So, twin decks, amplifier, decent speakers, um, uh, microphone stands, et cetera, et cetera, some basic stuff. Uh, for the audio side of things, there were three complete sets of, um, records of 45s.

[00:16:40] **Keith McMahon:** Um, in the, uh, in the, in the classical orange Schweppes uh, wooden boxes that everybody stored their seven inches in, in those days. Um, and we also had a very modest PA system. I think, I don't

know, six channels, something like that. [00:17:00] Nothing very powerful, just if there was a small band in a corner of a bar that needed a bit of PA, then we could do that as well.

[00:17:07] **Keith McMahon:** Um, HH or High Watt or something like that, can't remember. And, um, we also then had, um, some lighting. Um, again, this has all been, I'm sure it's all been acquired second hand during the 70s. Um, and there was all sorts of bits of lighting and, um, power stands and things like that. But I mean, not, not genie lifts or anything like that.

[00:17:33] **Keith McMahon:** It was all, you know, very manual stuff. Um, And we gradually acquired bits and pieces, bit more and more stuff, but I mean an awful lot of the budget was taken up buying records because if you had to maintain three, three, you know, you were spending like 40 pounds a week on, on singles.

[00:17:49] **Jarek Zaba:** Yes.

[00:17:49] **Keith McMahon:** Just to, just to stand still really?

[00:17:51] **Jarek Zaba:** Yes. To stay relevant.

[00:17:53] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah. And to, and to stay. And to stay relevant.

[00:17:55] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah. I mean, I was, I was gonna ask about, uh, yeah, I could, to [00:18:00] get a sense of your music tastes at this time. So around 77.

[00:18:03] **Keith McMahon:** Oh,

[00:18:04] **Jarek Zaba:** what, what, what, what, what, when you arrived at the Poly, what were you listening to and how did your tastes evolve over this time?

[00:18:09] **Keith McMahon:** Um, well, Aladdin Sane was one of the very first albums I ever bought.

[00:18:12] **Jarek Zaba:** Mm-hmm.

[00:18:13] **Keith McMahon:** but I was sort of Aladdin Sane maybe Eagles, um, Uh, I would say American. I wouldn't say necessarily soft rock, but

[00:18:24] **Jarek Zaba:** yeah.

[00:18:24] **Keith McMahon:** Um, that's, that's that sort of stuff.

[00:18:26] **aa:** But you were the, you were into guys with guitars kind of,

[00:18:28] **Keith McMahon:** but I wasn't, I ce- I, I wasn't in the, um, uh, the avant-garde side of things by any means.

[00:18:34] **Keith McMahon:** As, as, and, and that was just me as an individual.

[00:18:36] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:18:36] **Keith McMahon:** I, I never was that on, on that. Whereas when I suddenly, when I, you know, by 1978. You're starting to see, you know, some of the punk stuff kicking around and things like that. You're thinking, whoa, how can somebody wear plastic trousers and, you know, um, safety pins in their ears and, and, and things like that.

[00:18:55] **Keith McMahon:** I've managed to get to the age of whatever, you know, 60, 63, and I still haven't got a piercing. [00:19:00] So, um, so, uh, so no, I was, I would say middle of the road.

[00:19:05] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah, you weren't, you were into the disco side of things either?

[00:19:09] **Keith McMahon:** Um, a little bit. A little, little bit, but, um, um, I was, I was quite happy on the technical side of things.

[00:19:17] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and that was, that was more my, more my scene.

[00:19:20] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:19:20] **Keith McMahon:** Um, so as far as the, so the, so that was what the student union owned as far as equipment. Um, and we also had a, um, a Luton van to shift stuff around in. And, um, so we could. You know, move everything around ourselves. And the days when all you had to do was show a driving licence and suddenly you're on the insurance for a a van and things like that.

[00:19:45] **Keith McMahon:** There was nothing to pay. Um, then, in addition to that side of the technical equipment, the Polytechnic also had their own technical side of things. And they had a theatre technician. [00:20:00] Um,

again, fully, you know, full time paid employee of the Poly. And his job, um, a chap called Ray O'Neill. Um, and his job was to maintain the technical kit for the main hall in Penrhyn Road, which is on the first floor, which is now a lecture theatre, I think.

[00:20:21] **Keith McMahon:** Is it called the Jacqueline Wilson Theatre?

[00:20:24] **Jarek Zaba:** Oh, it might well be, yeah.

[00:20:25] **Keith McMahon:** I think they converted it.

[00:20:27] **Jarek Zaba:** There is a Jacqueline Wilson Theatre there somewhere, yeah.

[00:20:29] **Keith McMahon:** Anyway, so there was a, it was a first floor, um, and there was a, it was the main hall, uh, which had a stage. Um, which had, um, some very basic sound equipment, um, but had a big 60 channel lighting desk, and a considerable amount of, um, theatre lighting designed for, um, theatre rather than, um, live music.

[00:20:59] **Keith McMahon:** Then there was [00:21:00] also a venue at Kingston Hill, which in those days was called Gypsy Hill because it was part of the old Gypsy Hill teacher training college. Um, and that was called the De Lissa Hall. Now I haven't been up to that part of the campus, that campus for a long time. I don't know what's there. I know it's been, it's been huge development up there.

[00:21:19] **Jarek Zaba:** I think it's now where engineering is, right?

[00:21:21] **Keith McMahon:** No, engine, I, ah, no, I thought engineering was... If you go past Kingston Hill, go down to the Robin Hood roundabout.

[00:21:30] **aa:** Yeah.

[00:21:30] **Keith McMahon:** Go up through on the other side, heading up towards Asda.

[00:21:34] **Jarek Zaba:** Oh, is it

[00:21:34] **Keith McMahon:** On the right hand side. There's a green and gray building.

[00:21:37] **Jarek Zaba:** Is that, is that called Roehampton Vale or something like that?

[00:21:39] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, something like that.

[00:21:39] **aa:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:21:40] **Keith McMahon:** And that's where the,

[00:21:41] **Jarek Zaba:** that's what

[00:21:41] **Keith McMahon:** there used to be KLG spark plugs factory there.

[00:21:44] **Jarek Zaba:** Right.

[00:21:44] **Keith McMahon:** And I think that's where engineer, I may be wrong.

[00:21:47] **Jarek Zaba:** No, I think you might be right. I think I might be confusing Kingston Hill and Roehampton Vale.

[00:21:49] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah. So, so on Kingston, on the Kingston Hill site, um, it was, uh, there was law.

[00:21:57] **Keith McMahon:** Um, there was a business school [00:22:00] and there was teacher training. So, Friday night, again we did a Friday night disco up there, the student union bar, I think the student union bar is still the same building as it was 40 odd years ago.

[00:22:13] **Jarek Zaba:** Sure.

[00:22:14] **Keith McMahon:** Which is a, again, World War II, um, corrugated iron, um, it looks like a, it's, it's, it's arched.

[00:22:25] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and it looks like a, an aircraft hangar, and it's now called Hannaford's, um, after a chap called Ivan Hannaford, who was a deputy director of the, uh, Polytechnic in the seventies and eighties, and who coinc his son coincidentally lives next door to my mum, so I know his son now. Um, so. There were, there were, so Ray O'Neill, the theatre technician, had to look after the De Lissa Hall up there as well and that was used by a lot of the, um, uh, teacher training fraternity, uh, when they were, [00:23:00] um, uh,

learning how to do theatre work with, with students, with, with kids and things like that, um, and again that, we did, we did live music in there, but again, there's, the university, or the Polytechnic had, a considerable amount of equipment, um, that was up there, which was designed for, again, theatre work and things like that.

[00:23:24] **Keith McMahon:** But we also, the, the student union also put on a Friday, every Friday night we used to put on a, uh, a disco in the student union bar at Gypsy Hill. And this is where we're going to get politically incorrect because, I mean, it was, the teacher training was all women. .

[00:23:40] **Jarek Zaba:** Right.

[00:23:40] **Keith McMahon:** So on a Friday night there was a mass exodus of engineers and, um, all the, all the blokes from Penrhyn Road and Canbury Park going up to, um, up to, up to Gypsy Hill for a few beers and, um, and, and let's see what happens.

[00:23:55] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:23:55] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and it was also, it was also, it was also residential up there. [00:24:00] The rules were in the 1970s that you weren't allowed to have anybody to stay overnight. Um, but there were some fairly evil people up there who would, you know, on a Saturday morning set the, set the fire alarm off at 7 o'clock, 7 o'clock in the morning and just stand there and, and watch to see what came out.

[00:24:19] **Jarek Zaba:** I remember a very similar thing happening in my halls of residence actually. I remember the fire alarm going off on some, some morning after a very big night out. And you went, oh, you two are together, right?

[00:24:29] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, absolutely. So, uh, so yeah, so that was... So, there were the kind of two parts. There was the student union.

[00:24:37] **Keith McMahon:** We had quite a lot of equipment, but it was all focused around discos, a little bit of PA, lighting for bands and things like that. Um, and it was all... We had one... We had Wink Hackman. He was a salaried member of staff from the student union. Everything else was done, um, by... Um, by students.

[00:24:57] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah. Volunteers essentially.

[00:24:59] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, and we [00:25:00] got, I think we got paid 50p or a pound a, you know, every time we went out and, and in those days 50p would buy you a pint of beer or two pints of beer or something like that.

[00:25:08] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:25:08] **Keith McMahon:** So, uh, so that was absolutely f- so if you got you, if you got your beer money, that was absolutely fine. If you did a full day, I mean, some of the when we did big gigs in the main hall in Penrhyn Road, sometimes you'd start at two o'clock in the morning. Two o'clock in the afternoon when, you know, the band would tur- or

[00:25:24] **Keith McMahon:** the band would turn up with, uh, you know, their, um, their PA and things like that. So you've got to get all the gear in, then you've got to do sound checks, you've got to do lighting and things like that. And then by the time the gig finishes at 1030 or 11 o'clock at night, and then you've got to take it all apart again.

[00:25:39] **Keith McMahon:** And, you know, you've got to get rid of the band. And suddenly it's, you know, one o'clock in the morning and you've done 12 hours. You might get a couple of quid, couple of quid and a burger or something like that.

[00:25:48] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:25:49] **Keith McMahon:** And that was, uh, that was about it. So that's how it was set up. But I mean, it was all set up, I mean, in those days, the student union was funded by [00:26:00] the Polytechnic.

[00:26:01] **Keith McMahon:** The student union got a capitation fee. The more students there were at the Polytechnic, the more money the student union got. We got, I can't remember, 30 or 35 or whatever it was per student. And that was to provide the social, sporting and cultural side of a student's time at the Polytechnic.

[00:26:23] **Jarek Zaba:** Mm-hmm. .

[00:26:24] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and we, the student union had a, a permanent staff of, I dunno, 20 or 30 people.

[00:26:31] **Keith McMahon:** I mean, there was a whole fi- there was a whole finance team, there was an administration team. Every, we had, uh, a student

union, site secretary, um, at a, at Canbury Park, at Knights Park, at Gypsy Hill. Um, we ran five, I mean, there was a whole commercial side of things running the bars. Um, And we had five bars.

[00:26:54] **Keith McMahon:** We had Canbury Park, Knights Park, Gypsy Hill, Penrhyn Road, and also a bar at the sports [00:27:00] pavilion at Tolworth Court.

[00:27:02] **Jarek Zaba:** Oh, right okay.

[00:27:03] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and that was run by the groundsman as a part time, you know, part time job. Um, so I mean, the whole thing around the student union was... It was a, it was big business. And then, so, the other thing that I haven't mentioned is that between 81 and 82, I was also sabbatical treasurer of the student union.

[00:27:28] **Keith McMahon:** Um, so in those days, we, the, the student union had a turnover, the commercial turnover of the bars was a quarter of a million pounds. Um, and probably about the same again, probably about 200,000, 250,000 as far as the, um, the capitation grant from the Polytechnic and income from, you know, various sports societies and things like that.

[00:27:55] **Jarek Zaba:** So, would that, uh, would those funds be used to [00:28:00] then book bands?

[00:28:01] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah.

[00:28:02] **Jarek Zaba:** And, and, and, yeah, just talk a little bit about how the touring circuit would work with the student unions.

[00:28:08] **Keith McMahon:** Two, two aspects. One, it was... The Student Union had to keep its commercial business and its social, cultural, sporting business very clearly separated.

[00:28:22] **Keith McMahon:** Because we were not allowed to use the capitation money for, to pay for bands. We weren't allowed to use the capitation money to subsidise the price of drink. Or anything like that. So the bars had to be self financing and as did the entertainment side of things. Although that was always a bit of a grey area because sometimes we'd lose money onto.

[00:28:54] **Jarek Zaba:** And the capitation money was for the staff essentially, and

[00:28:56] **Keith McMahon:** capitation. Yeah. So capitation

[00:28:58] **Jarek Zaba:** buildings or

[00:28:58] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah. Capitation money. [00:29:00] Yeah. I mean the stu the the, um, the Polytechnic gave us a building, right? We had Grove Grove House or, or Crescent. One of the hou, one of the big Victorian houses in Grove, Crescent was the, um, I can't remember number 10 or number 12 or something like that.

[00:29:15] **Keith McMahon:** Um, was the student union offices. And that's where all the permanent staff, uh, the, the non-bars permanent staff were, were based, um, and where the sabbatical officers were, were based and, and things like that. Um, so we had to keep the two sides, two sides separate. So let's forget about the capita- the capitation money comes in, that pays for all your permanent staff and, um, and helps with, and, and gives you a bit of money to help run some of your sports clubs and, and things like that.

[00:29:47] **Keith McMahon:** The commercial side, let's put the bars to one side, because that's just buying and selling booze and all the ancillaries that go with that, but also the staff. So, the profit, so whatever profit you made from the bars [00:30:00] had to pay all your full time and temporary staff. So, whilst we might have had, I don't know, probably eight full time permanent staff or at least salaried, there was probably 50 or 60 students who work behind the bar.

[00:30:19] **Keith McMahon:** Who might have done anything from, you know, a couple of shifts to five, seven shifts a week or something like that. Um, when you come to the entertainment side of things, again, that had to be self financing. So, we were allowed to use capitation money to buy new um, lighting equipment or sound equipment or records and things like that.

[00:30:39] **Keith McMahon:** That was out of a budget. But when it came to, we weren't allowed to book a band for like, 200 quid or 300 quid and that's all it was in those days. Um, we weren't allowed to book a band and then not charge any entry. So, whatever, we had to say, right, we're going to have a band and it's going to cost 300 pounds.

[00:30:59] **Keith McMahon:** And [00:31:00] we're going to need some bouncers. Um, and the band have got a rider. So we're going to have to, a bit of cost there, etc, etc. So the whole night's going to cost 500 quid. Yep, right. We reckon we're going to have... Let s make the numbers easy. 250 people there, so 2 a head. Well, I tell you what, let s charge 3 a head, and hopefully, if there s

less than 250 people, then we still cover our costs, or if there s 250 people, then actually we made a bit of profit, which we can use to offset any potential losses.

[00:31:33] **Keith McMahon:** So, the, that, that little finance organised, finance set up had to be self financing. So we couldn't just go out and say, Oh, we're going to have the, you know, the biggest band and don't, Oh, don't worry about it. You know, we'll, we'll only charge two quid to come in and, um, and everybody have a great time. And, and, you know, we'll, we'll pick up the cost from another budget.

[00:31:54] **Keith McMahon:** We weren't allowed to do that.

[00:31:55] **Jarek Zaba:** What if you didn't make the money that you had spent on that?

[00:31:59] **Keith McMahon:** So [00:32:00] you. Nobody ever did the analysis of you had to make a profit on every band, right? In the course of a year, right, your income and expenditure had to balance, right? Um, uh, so the, if you sort of wind forward to my time as treasurer, working with the general manager of the student union at the time, an Irishman called Hugh Cox, um, who's, back over in Northern Ireland now, ex Queen's, Queen's Belfast man.

[00:32:33] **Keith McMahon:** Um, so I worked with him and also the finance officer of the student union. And we'd sit down and we'd, we'd constantly be monitoring. And so we'd, if we thought that the Entertainments Committee were getting a little bit out of control, you'd call them in, say guys, you know, guys, girls, we've got to, um, sort this out because...

[00:32:55] **Keith McMahon:** You know, you're supposed to make all your money in the first term and therefore you've [00:33:00] got some money in the kitty that you can use to subsidise activities in the second and third terms. Um, if you take the, if you take the bar income, 50 percent of the total income for the student union bars was in the first term.

[00:33:19] **Keith McMahon:** Right? And 50 percent of that, first term. Turnover was done in the first four weeks of term. So 25 percent of the entire year's sales of beer were done in the first four weeks of term. Why? Because in those days everybody got student grants.

[00:33:38] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:33:38] **Keith McMahon:** Even if you're living at home you've got a maintenance grant.

[00:33:41] **Keith McMahon:** You've got a couple hundred quid.

[00:33:42] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:33:43] **Keith McMahon:** But the vast majority of people, they were away from home for the first time, it was the first time they'd had any significant amount of money. Um, crikey, I've got money in my pocket, the bar's open and it's really, really cheap beer, well there's only one thing to do.

[00:33:54] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah, and you're not worried about exams and coursework at that stage as well.

[00:33:57] **Keith McMahon:** By the time it comes through to uh, [00:34:00] Easter... First of all, the money's run out, right? Secondly, somebody from your course is knocking on your door saying, you know, are you going to do any work? You've got the exams. Et cetera, et cetera.

[00:34:10] **Keith McMahon:** So you're, you're, that pincer movement. It came to the point where there were some nights, uh, you know, in the, in the bars, uh, uh, during the summer term. Particularly if it was a nice, sunny evening where people, you know, if they're going to go out, they're going to go out drinking, whether it's a pub garden or something like that.

[00:34:26] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:34:27] **Keith McMahon:** Um, where we, you know, it was so deathly quiet. But equally, I can remember some absolutely outrageous nights, you know, in October 77 and October 78 and things like that. Where... It was just absolute mayhem and you just couldn't change the kegs fast enough.

[00:34:46] **Jarek Zaba:** Are these the disco nights? These,

[00:34:48] **Keith McMahon:** yeah.

[00:34:48] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:34:49] **Keith McMahon:** I mean you,

[00:34:49] **Jarek Zaba:** yeah, what, what kind of numbers are we talking in attendance at these discos?

[00:34:53] **Keith McMahon:** So the discos, we probably couldn't get more than about three or 400 people in the building.

[00:34:59] **Jarek Zaba:** Mm-hmm. [00:35:00]

[00:35:00] **Keith McMahon:** I, I, I can't remember what the legal restriction was.

[00:35:04] **Jarek Zaba:** This is the Penrhyn Road?

[00:35:05] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah. Pen Penrhyn Road. Yeah. Penrhyn Road, student union bar.

[00:35:08] **Keith McMahon:** 400 people.

[00:35:10] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:35:10] **Keith McMahon:** Absolute mayhem. Right? You just couldn't move. Um, and of course, in those days, the bars closed at 10 o'clock at night, you know, and that was it. And you had to make sure that you had everybody out, but you only get 10 minutes drinking up time. So you had to have the doors, everybody out and the doors locked by 10 past 11.

[00:35:31] **Keith McMahon:** Um, it was, um, it was difficult. It was, it was difficult. So yeah, we'd have about 400 people there. Um, Knights Park bar. Um. On a night when there was a band there, again, we might get 250 people, something like that. We had a, um, kind of moral obligation to put some form of entertainment on at each site.

[00:35:55] **Keith McMahon:** Trying to put on entertainment for a bunch of civil and mechanical [00:36:00] engineers, quite possibly one of the most difficult things I've ever come across. Um... Added to which, the only place that was suitable for putting on any sort of entertainment was the refectory, which is on the third floor, second or third floor, top floor anyway, of this building.

[00:36:22] **Keith McMahon:** It had, I don't know, it had the acoustics of a dustbin. It had steel girders, glass windows, it was just totally dreadful. And access was by a six foot square goods lift. And that was it. And if you hadn't

spoken nicely to, you know, the caretaker for the night of the building, he'd lock the access to the goods lift and, oh, it was just a complete nightmare.

[00:36:49] **Keith McMahon:** And the bar there was tiny. Um, and so what we ended up doing was we might put on the odd disco there. [00:37:00] Which didn't cost us anything because we did it all ourselves. Um, we'd get the odd band, and they were very odd bands. That would, that would go there. Um, but it, but then you'd have to, somehow you'd have to put a stage up.

[00:37:15] **Keith McMahon:** You know, if you, you know, portable staging doesn't fit in a six foot square, um, goods lift. Um, so, so yeah, so Knights Park, uh, if you put on the right band. And, uh, so the right, the right night of the week, Tuesdays and Thursdays were always really good there. Uh, Wednesdays were always sports days, right? So you've gotta be careful not to clash with that.

[00:37:41] **Keith McMahon:** Um, Tuesdays and Thursdays at Knights Park were really great if you put the right band on. Um, gypsy Hill, we did, we did some, I'm sure The Cure played at Gypsy Hill,

[00:37:51] **Jarek Zaba:** right.

[00:37:51] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and if they did, then I quite p- but that was in the student Union bar. So they would have only played to 150 people or something like [00:38:00] that.

[00:38:00] **Keith McMahon:** Um, but we also ran a folk, a Sunday lunchtime folk club up there as well. So there's all sorts of bits, there were all sorts of bits and pieces, um, going on.

[00:38:12] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah, um, and you mentioned about how a lot of the lighting equipment you were using was actually theatre equipment. Um, does that make it difficult in any way or did it fall off-

[00:38:21] **Keith McMahon:** well it was before the date, if you think, um, so, I'm not, uh, so I haven't done any serious theatre lighting for a long time now, but I, I, I, I look with interest at what I, what I see and it's all LED. It's all very light. It's all, you know, fairly, you know, cutting edge technical, um, equipment. Um, the vast majority of the, of the lanterns, the lamps that we were using were Uh, white incandescent bulbs in a, you know, in a, in a tin can with, um, coloured gels in front of them.

[00:38:57] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and once it was set up to be [00:39:00] a 500 watt yellow light, you couldn't, it was going to be a 500 watt yellow light all night. It wasn't going to move and it wasn't going to change colour. Um, so that was very much how it was. Then in, probably around about, it was the mid seventies, something like that.

[00:39:20] **Keith McMahon:** Suddenly people started using what they called par cans, which were these parabolic, um, um, self sealed bulbs, which were like, um, like big headlamp bulbs, or like big aircraft landing bulbs. And the first ones were 120 volt ones, right? So you could only use them in pairs with a special wiring and wire them in series.

[00:39:46] **Keith McMahon:** So that you didn't blow them when you hooked them up to 240 volts in this country because they were imported from the States. And one of the first companies to import them was a company called Cerebrum Lighting, um, who were based at Berrylands Station. [00:40:00] Um, a guy called John Lethbridge, who Tim Harrison interviewed for, um, for the Toby Jug book.

[00:40:10] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and John was a... Tiffinian, he was an ex Tiffin's boy and he and his brother set up, they'd set up Cerebrum Lighting, they'd done lighting for Pink Floyd and things like that and started, the only kind of moving stuff we had in those days was, um, like slide projectors that had oil wheels, um, that moved in front of them.

[00:40:32] **Keith McMahon:** Google something, rank, rank oldest, tutor to... Um, projectors with um, rotating wheels and colours and, and, and things like that. There were all sorts of things like that that we could do. Um, but the, the vast majority of lighting was, you know, you, you, you've got a, a lantern. It's either a, um, it either has a narrow fixed beam or it's a wide flood beam.

[00:40:57] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and it had a coloured gel in [00:41:00] front of it. And once it was set, that was it for... You know, until it was, until you changed it, you couldn't, you obviously couldn't change it mid, mid production. Um, which was why, as I mentioned, we had this 60 channel desk in the, in the main hall at Penrhyn Road. So you could have 60 lanterns all hooked up to the same desk and you could adjust the levels and which lanterns were on and which were off and things like that.

[00:41:29] **Jarek Zaba:** But the lights themselves are static?

[00:41:30] **Keith McMahon:** Absolutely, absolutely. So I mean, when Genesis first came out with the Vari-Lite, I think Genesis were the first ones to use Vari-Lite.

[00:41:40] **Keith McMahon:** It was like, oh my, you know, how does this work? You know, and, um, and I remember, you know, over a few beers chatting to somebody, how on earth do they get the colour, how do you get the colour to, how do you get the colour to change? How do you get the thing to move? And, and the thing's moving in three directions. Oh and the shape of the beam is changing.

[00:41:56] **Keith McMahon:** And it was, this was like, oh, wow, this is just
[00:42:00] stunning.

[00:42:01] **Jarek Zaba:** So was that, that would have been around in the 70s?

[00:42:02] **Keith McMahon:** No, no, no, no, that was in the 80s. That was in the 80s. I can't remember when Vari-Lites came out. Way after my time. And, you know, it was only bands that were doing super stadium tours that could afford them because, you know, they'd still be using...

[00:42:18] **Keith McMahon:** If you look at some of the concerts that people like Queen did in the 80s, there's just hundreds and hundreds of individual lamps on the stage. And they're all, but once a particular lamp is a red, a blue, a green, or a yellow, or whatever it might be, and there was a lot of use of primary colours. Um, that was it.

[00:42:43] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and there might be a dozen of these very lights. Now... Everybody's got very nice, everybody's got movable, or lanterns that change colour, that change shape, change focus, um, and all that sort of thing.

[00:42:58] **Jarek Zaba:** What was your, just out of interest, [00:43:00] what was your original sort of reason, how did your passion or interest develop in lighting?

[00:43:05] **Keith McMahon:** Oh, at school, um, at school we had a, uh, Monday afternoons were a time when, um, Uh, you did extracurricular activities, so you either joined the Cadet Force, which really didn't, that just, that wasn't my, my scene at all, or you did other things, and one of the other things was, um, what, what was called stage staff, um, and, and bearing in mind

we're, we're going back to the, yeah, early 70s, I mean, it's, it's a very odd, odd nomenclature, um, and, um, again.

[00:43:44] **Keith McMahon:** At my school it was, uh, you know, there were a couple of teachers who coordinated things and obviously the school paid for everything. And it was our job to, um, build sets for, you know, school plays, um, to [00:44:00] do the lighting for school concerts and all those sort of things. Um, and we just, a bunch of us got together for a couple of hours on a Monday afternoon and, and played around and we learned how to- and everything again was second hand.

[00:44:14] **Keith McMahon:** So we learnt how to, you know, run cables and rig lights and build, you know, sets for plays, things like that. So I'd been involved at school and then I'd been involved with a couple of dram companies, purely on the technical side. Absolutely nothing to do with the dram bit.

[00:44:36] **Jarek Zaba:** And you just found yourself enjoying the lighting side of things?

[00:44:39] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, and it was just...

[00:44:40] **Jarek Zaba:** Is there anything in particular you enjoyed about it?

[00:44:42] **Keith McMahon:** Well, funny enough, as a 16 year old, I had thought about a career in lighting. I thought being a lighting tech, lighting engineer, um, or a lighting designer would be really, really good. I'd written a, I'd read a couple of, there's a, a very, [00:45:00] quite a, quite a fam- in, in, in the, in his field, quite famous.

[00:45:03] **Keith McMahon:** A guy called Richard Pilbrow, um, had written a book, um, about it, so I'd read that. My father, um, who was a quantity surveyor, but had done a huge amount of work with, uh, independent television, independent radio, building, as, as a, building studio complexes, um, Shepperton Film Studios, Capital Radio, LBC, BBC and I, as a kid, I'd got to go around, you know, television studios and film studios to, you know, and have a look.

[00:45:33] **Keith McMahon:** And I remember, and my dad had, you know, encouraged that and I'd even looked about going. You couldn't, at that time, you couldn't do, uh, there wasn't a course in the UK where you could get a qualification. Um, as a lighting designer or a, or a sound engineer or anything

like that. You had to start at the very bottom and the very bottom was making cups of tea and, you know, um, running cables and, and [00:46:00] things like that.

[00:46:00] **Keith McMahon:** And, um, I was, uh, my parents were encouraging me to, you know, I think you can do a little bit better than starting at that point, you know. Um, so the only option, uh, you could actually go over to, um, the States, go to UCLA. That's what UCLA were doing. Um, courses by that time. Um, and I kind of looked at it, and I don't know, just one thing and another, it just didn't happen.

[00:46:24] **Keith McMahon:** Um, so I'd, I'd, yeah, I'd been involved in, um, and I'd had a couple of friends who, um, have been involved in more the sound side of things. And in the 70s we all tinkered around with little electronics kits and we all built our own transistor radios and we all knew how to build an amplifier and things like that.

[00:46:47] **Keith McMahon:** It was all sort of a hangover from the 50s and 60s when electronics were just beginning to come in. So there were a bunch of us who just, it was just a hobby I suppose. [00:47:00] One of those guys has actually got a very successful business up in Manchester now, a guy called Martin Pedder. Um, who, who now supplies a lot of sound equipment to radio stations and, and things like that.

[00:47:11] **Keith McMahon:** Um, so yeah, it, it, it developed, it was a hobby, it was something I'd done at school. Um, and it was just kind of, when I, when I found out I could play with, you know, big toys. Uh, at the Poly, then it was, it was great.

[00:47:25] **Jarek Zaba:** And now, of course, as a result of that, uh, you can say that you did the lights for U2.

[00:47:29] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah.

[00:47:29] **Jarek Zaba:** Uh, so tell us about that gig.

[00:47:31] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, I stupidly haven't written the date of it in front of me. I think it was 81.

[00:47:34] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, I think it was, yeah.

[00:47:35] **Jarek Zaba:** November 81. October or November 81,

[00:47:39] **Keith McMahon:** I think it was. Yeah, I, I, I seem to recall it being booked by a guy called Dominic McCartan. At the time, Dominic was either... I think Dominic was, was Entertainments Manager or something like that.

[00:47:51] **Jarek Zaba:** That's the Entertainments Committee that you mentioned?

[00:47:53] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, yeah, so he was a student. Can't remember for the life of me what course he did. Um, but, uh, but [00:48:00] Dominic was heavily involv- um, is an Ulsterman. Um, uh, heavily involved in, uh, in the music scene. Um, and the, and the, uh, I would say the punk scene.

[00:48:13] **Keith McMahon:** Um, but not as... Sort of, um, off the wall as some of them. Um, Dominic, lovely bloke, lovely, lovely chap. Um, he's got a pub down in Sussex now. Um, and I'm pretty sure it was Dominic that probably booked U2. And it was their second UK tour. And again, they were just out on the college circuit. I had never, I'd never heard of them.

[00:48:39] **Keith McMahon:** Um, But they were a, they were a big band and, um, and you know, I, they, they, they played the music that, I mean, U2 are over, over 45 years or whatever, maybe probably longer, maybe 50 years that they've been going. Um, they've obviously evolved, but if you go back and listen to [00:49:00] their first few albums, it was, it was really quite sharp, you know, in your face. music. I can remember, I mean, I didn't know him as Bono at the time, but I can remember their lead singer, uh, you know, bouncing around the stage and being very, very animated. And, um, and, and, and yeah, the guitarist just standing there just playing. And that was The Edge. Um, so it, it, it's quite odd talking about it now because at the time it was just another band.

[00:49:33] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:49:34] **Keith McMahon:** And, and. People didn't, you don't, there was this college circuit and that's how, um, that's how the bands all promoted themselves and, and how they, you know, they, they, they promoted themselves, they promoted their music, uh, and then their, their source of it, they didn't generally make a huge amount of money out of it.

[00:49:53] **Keith McMahon:** Um, And it was, you know, fine, we're playing Kingston on Thursday, we're playing Nottingham on, [00:50:00] uh, Friday, we're playing Sheffield on Saturday and we're back down to London and da da da da da da da. Um, uh, and unless they got a residency at somewhere like

the Hundred Club or the Marquee or, or, or some of the other clubs, then they, they really hadn't made it.

[00:50:17] **Keith McMahon:** They were, they were just going around just, you know, journeymen. Um, going, going round. Um, so it's, it's quite odd when, when looking, looking back at what the. the bands that played the college circuit, and you think, oh yeah, crikey, yeah, they were there, and they were there, and, you know, and, um, you know, yeah, did we do Dexys Midnight?

[00:50:41] **Keith McMahon:** I think we did Dexys, yeah, I think we did Dexys, and, uh, oh yeah, and Sparks, yeah, Sparks were there twice, and, and, and, suddenly you come across all these, all these bands.

[00:50:50] **Jarek Zaba:** And it wasn't like they were unknowns at this time, they'd already released records.

[00:50:54] **Keith McMahon:** They were kind of known. , they were on the radio. They were, they were on the, they were on the radio.

[00:50:59] **Keith McMahon:** It was their second [00:51:00] tour. They'd released a couple of albums, but they were, I mean, the concept of a mega band. Really... hmm. I suppose they, I mean, I suppose there were mega bands. I mean, there were the Rolling Stones and, and things and, and, and Zeppelin and, and, and things like that.

[00:51:15] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:51:15] **Keith McMahon:** But U2 certainly were not in that league at that time.

[00:51:20] **Keith McMahon:** Um, so, uh, so yeah, I, I can just remember it as being, being quite a, I, I, I'm pretty sure it wasn't a sellout. I think it was probably, I think we probably only had 250 people there in the main hall. Um, uh, so, and I can't remember, there must have been a, well, there may have been a support band, but, but possibly not.

[00:51:43] **Keith McMahon:** We'd, a lot of these bands just didn't, they didn't have support bands. You know, they, you'd put on some kind of... Somebody would be playing records in the background, there'd be some sort of music from 8 o'clock until 9 o'clock, and then the band would come on about quarter past 9, they'd do an hour, [00:52:00] um, or whatever their set was, and then if you're

lucky you'd get, you know, 15 or 20 minutes as an encore, um, by which time, you know, you're through to, um, 20 to 11, and it's time to get everybody out.

[00:52:16] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:52:16] **Keith McMahon:** And, and that's, that's, that's how that, it was as it was as mechanical as that.

[00:52:21] **Jarek Zaba:** Sure. I- I've looked up their discography as, uh, they released their second album October, in October 81. So the, the album was called October and it was released in October. So therefore, so they would've been promoting that.

[00:52:33] **Keith McMahon:** So, so therefore they're out. But the, so nowadays you've got, uh, as, as part of, um, part of a band's appearance, there'll be a merchandise stand. Right? Where they're selling CDs or, you know, in those days it would have been cassettes or vinyl or whatever. There'd be t shirts, there'd be memorabilia, there'd be all sorts of things.

[00:52:55] **Keith McMahon:** Um, absolutely zero. Nothing. [00:53:00] I do not, in the 70s and 80s, I do not remember anything, any merchandise at all in the student. In the college circuit at all. I mean, I can remember going to, um, yeah, Queen concerts and, uh, Queen, Genesis and things like that at Wembley, um, in the, in the eighties. And, yeah, you might get a t shirts.

[00:53:24] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, you get t shirts and satin jackets and, um, and a programme. That's about it. Um, certainly not the way that it is merchandised now. So, yes, they'd be out there promoting. Um, the, the new album, but the only promotion it would get would be the lead singer saying, we've got an album now, and here's a song from our new album.

[00:53:49] **Keith McMahon:** Boom.

[00:53:50] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:53:50] **Keith McMahon:** And that would, and that would be it. Um.

[00:53:53] **Jarek Zaba:** And it looked like the second album got to number 11 in the UK charts and the first was number 52. So they were getting bigger.

[00:54:00] They were getting bigger.

[00:54:01] **Keith McMahon:** So it's worthwhile doing kind of thing, you know, um,

[00:54:03] **Jarek Zaba:** yeah.

[00:54:05] **Keith McMahon:** So yeah, it, as I say, um, it's not, I mean I, yes I remember, I remember the, the evening, but I don't remember it, it, it, it wasn't one of those seminal moments, oh my god, I've got to remember, I've got to remember this for the rest of my life because it's going to be so important in 40 or 50 years time.

[00:54:23] **Keith McMahon:** But that's, that's life, isn't it?

[00:54:25] **Jarek Zaba:** And presumably, you know, the lighting was pretty unremarkable from your point of view, the standard, standard. Did you just have a standard that you just give most acts?

[00:54:34] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, I mean, you would, what you would do is you would, um... When the band arrived, you'd find the manager or whoever was in, I mean the manager may or may not be there, or the road manager, or somebody like that, and say, Right, okay, what are you setting up?

[00:54:48] **Keith McMahon:** And they're going to say, Alright, fine, we're going to put the drum riser over there, and, um, you've got a lead guitarist there, and, um, however the band was all set up, we're putting the PA up there.

[00:55:00] So you'd have that understanding, and you'd say, Okay, fine, uh, any colours they like and don't like? For God's sake, don't use pink or, you know, forget about magenta or, you know, cyan makes them look sick or, you know, whatever it might be.

[00:55:15] **Keith McMahon:** And it was that sort of conversation. And it'd be like, okay, fine. Um, you know, is there anything they particularly like to do? Or, oh, well, you know, for this particular song? But I mean, you, it, oh, crikey. I can only remember two or thr- I don't remember getting a, um, uh, a playlist. for the U2 concert. I can remember a couple of bands that actually gave us a playlist and said, um, Oh, for this song, right, can you, can you just have a single spotlight on the lead singer's, um, microphone or something like that?

And, um, can you turn, can you make the rest of the stage like a really deep red or something like that? And that's about as technical as it got. Um, we kind
[00:56:00] of knew what worked. We knew what. What lamps, what lanterns, as in, you know, physical bits of kit, what we had, what we could do.

[00:56:08] **Keith McMahon:** We knew what we had to do. We knew we had to have some sort of lights on the audience, you know, for, um, for getting people in and out. Um, and we knew we had to light, you know, we had to light the drummer and you, but you, you, you winged it. You know, if you realise that the drummer was doing a drum solo, then you put the lights on the drummer, and you wound everything else down.

[00:56:35] **Keith McMahon:** Um, but it was, but you got to know, and in general, the person that was going to be operating the lights, would have been there from the very start of the day, would have had these conversations. So I would have, I'd have been there, I'd have had the conversations with the band, I'd have said, right, what do you want to do in that?

[00:56:54] **Keith McMahon:** And from memory, I seem to recall they liked yellow. [00:57:00] Uh, which, which again is a, I, I'd never, I'd, I'd done lots of theatre lighting, but you never use a bright yellow in theatre lighting, very rarely do you use a bright yellow in theatre lighting. There's lots of pastel blues and pastel pinks, which you can use to balance and, and, and things like that.

[00:57:15] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and I got introduced to this really bright yellow gel when I went to Kingston Poly and it's, it's like a stunning colour, it really is. Um, so I seem to remember that and it was, We might have had a moving follow spot one, I don't know, maybe, but that was about it. And that, so I would have been there, I'd have had those conversations, and then I said to, you know, put it, there'd been myself and a couple of other guys probably, um, setting it all up, and I said, alright, let's put one of those lights up there, let's put a Pattern 23 over on the left hand side, and if we have, um, a couple of big Fresnel floods coming back onto the audience, you know, we can, we can use that.

[00:57:57] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and you just work with what you [00:58:00] had. Um,

[00:58:02] **Jarek Zaba:** and did you work directly with, with U2, uh, as people or, or no,

[00:58:07] **Keith McMahon:** no, no, no, um, and you very rarely, I mean, you, you generally speak with either the, you know, tour manager, the road manager, the head roadie, somebody like that. And that- because the, the band, so the, The technical guys would arrive at two or three o'clock in the afternoon.

[00:58:27] **Keith McMahon:** The band would turn up at six o'clock or whatever, half past six, do a quick sound check, disappear backstage with a couple of cases of beer and a bottle of vodka, and say, can somebody pop out and get half a dozen burgers? That sort of thing. And then we'd do the show. Um, so no, I don't... No, I don't recall, I don't recall actually.

[00:58:54] **Jarek Zaba:** You can't speak to how personable Bono was.

[00:58:56] **Keith McMahon:** I can't say, I can't say whether he was a nice guy, I can't say. Oh yes, I [00:59:00] had this deep meaningful conversation with The Edge or anything like that. Um, no, no, I'm afraid I can't, I can't do that one. I'm not gonna, not gonna do that one at all. Um, the only part, I remember having a long conversation with George Melly once.

[00:59:15] **Jarek Zaba:** Okay, yeah.

[00:59:16] **Keith McMahon:** Um, George Melly had a band called... Was it George Melly and George Chisholm's Foot Stompers or something like that. And it was a bit of a, a, a jazzy, kind of 1960s jazz, jazz band, something like that. Um, and he played at Knights Park several times over the years. Um, and always went down really, really well.

[00:59:41] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and there was one time for some reason he was coming late and he had to be... Picked up from Kingston Station and I had to go, I had to, I had to borrow a car, borrow a, a decent car, you know, not on some sort of beaten up Mini, so I think I could borrow the, the bar manager's, Granada or something like that.

[00:59:58] **Keith McMahon:** Um, went and picked George Melly up [01:00:00] and, um, uh, and had a chat with him in the car and then had a, had a chat with him in the, you know, uh, over a, over a glass of wine or something in the, uh, in, in the bar.

[01:00:11] **Jarek Zaba:** Very nice.

[01:00:11] **Keith McMahon:** Um, And he was a, yeah, he was, he was a, yeah, really nice, really nice bloke. Um, but, uh, but you didn't, you know, I, I think the, I think maybe the guys on the Entertainments Committee would have had more, would have, you know, that, the interaction with the band.

[01:00:29] **Keith McMahon:** Um, Because they just assumed that the technical side, so the band were doing the PA, the band were doing the audio, um, so that

was all sorted. We were doing the, oh, the students were doing the lighting and everything like that. And all the, the Entertainments Committee would come along and say, is everything okay?

[01:00:45] **Keith McMahon:** Yep, technically everything's okay, fine. And they would go away and disappear and talk to the band and give them their brown envelope with 150 quid in it and, you know, cause everything was cash.

[01:00:54] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[01:00:55] **Keith McMahon:** You know. The, there were occasions when you would actually get a, a one [01:01:00] page contract. You'd get a one page contract and a 10 page rider or something like that,

[01:01:04] **Keith McMahon:** So, and basically it was a contract saying, you know, this band will turn up on this date and they will do a 60, 60 minute set or a 90 minute set

[01:01:11] **Jarek Zaba:** as long as you provide the attached rider .

[01:01:13] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah. Um, but can, can they have, can they have two cases of Brown Ale and, you know, three leases of Liebfraumilch and

[01:01:22] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[01:01:23] **Keith McMahon:** And a. And some sandwiches and crisps or something, you know. There wasn't anything hugely outrageous. I don't remember anything. If ever we got an outrageous rider, I do remember somebody just going through it with a red pen and just sending it back saying, thank you very much, we've signed the contract, but we're not having the rider.

[01:01:41] **Keith McMahon:** Just off you go.

[01:01:43] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, how are you for time?

[01:01:44] **Keith McMahon:** Um, yeah, what's-

[01:01:46] **Jarek Zaba:** we've gone past half past, we're at about 22. I've got just a couple more topics to cover. Um, yeah, it shouldn't be too much longer.

[01:01:54] **Keith McMahon:** I'm fine.

[01:01:56] **Jarek Zaba:** Okay, good, good, good, good. Um, yeah, so, yeah, [01:02:00] uh, I think just one thing that I'd quite like to reflect on is the fact that Um, yeah, you had this culture at the time of bands that did the college circuit.

[01:02:09] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, and it just doesn't exist now. Um, so I just wonder if you have any thoughts as to why that might be. Is it to do with SUs not having the capital that they once might have had? Or is it just the way the music industry works is different, do you think?

[01:02:24] **Keith McMahon:** So, I'm not, I'm not close enough to the way, to the, to the way the music industry works. to necessarily comment. Um, certainly the way that people access music is hugely different now to the way that it was, crikey, 45 years ago. Um, 45 years ago if I wanted music then I would either have to buy a, um, an audio cassette or a vinyl disc. [01:03:00] Those were the only two formats that were available. I remember when the first, um, CDs came out.

[01:03:06] **Keith McMahon:** And I remember when a friend of mine got a CD player. And that would probably be about, hmm, 82, no, 81, 82, something, early 80s, something like that. And I think one of the very first CDs I've bought was Soft Cell. And suddenly you're listening to something, a completely different level of audio. Completely. So, so in 77, I'd, I'd have to, in mid seventies I'd have to go out and buy an audio cassette or, or vinyl if I wanted to listen to the radio.

[01:03:35] **Keith McMahon:** Uh, there was Radio 1, Radio 2, um, the, I don't think local radio really existed, um, because everything was on AM, um, FM was, was just coming in

[01:03:47] **Jarek Zaba:** The pirate radio stations.

[01:03:48] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, there were the odd, there were the odd pirate radio stations. Um, but, um, I mean, or you listen to someone like Capital. Now, there's [01:04:00] hundreds and hundreds of, um, radio stations.

[01:04:06] **Keith McMahon:** You know, local ones, ones that are just operating out of the top floor of a tower block.

[01:04:12] **Jarek Zaba:** Someone's basement.

[01:04:13] **Keith McMahon:** Somebody's basement. Either it's on, or it's online, or it's purely digital. If I want to own the music personally, then I can either stream it, I can have a streaming subscription, I can go onto iTunes, I can buy a download, I can go onto Amazon, I can buy anything and everything.

[01:04:35] **Jarek Zaba:** Watch the video on YouTube.

[01:04:37] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, so there's all- I mean the digital, I, I- so in a, in a previous life, I was a management consultant and I remember having conversations in probably 98, 99 about, um, how the BBC, um, would digitise their assets [01:05:00] because they realised that they had a ton load of, um, old well, celluloid films, um, and, and tapes, and, and music, and films, and all sorts of stuff.

[01:05:15] **Keith McMahon:** And that, actually, if they got it somehow into a, into a digital format, they could actually sell it, and sell it to lots and lots of people, and make lots and lots of money. Um, unfortunately, it took the BBC probably longer than it should have done, and, and... All the commercial organisations were ahead of the game.

[01:05:33] **Keith McMahon:** So, so there's a lot of, so the way that people access music has changed dramatically. At the same time, I think that, um, tertiary education has changed dramatically as well. So when I went to college, um, my fees were paid by the local authority. Um, and I got a, uh, I got a modest grant because I was, uh, to start with I was still living at home with mum and dad.[01:06:00]

[01:06:01] **Keith McMahon:** Um, so, and I, I had a Saturday job, and I, you know, worked, uh, I did technical services, so I got some beer money paid, and I might do the odd shift behind the bar, or I might work in a pub, um, and basically, most people, if they needed money, would go out and, and earn it, because borrowing money, or having a student loan, or borrowing money from the bank.

[01:06:28] **Keith McMahon:** It just didn't, it wasn't possible at all.

[01:06:35] **Keith McMahon:** So um, so there was this, there was a completely different structure. When student, when, when, um, fees came in and when student loans came in and things like that, I think students absolutely understandably took a different view of life at university or college. Um, because suddenly they said, well, hang on.

[01:06:57] **Keith McMahon:** You know, this is costing me like 10 grand
[01:07:00] and I'm having to pay, I've got to pay rent and I've got to buy food
and I've got to do this and this and this. I also think, and this is, this is just a
personal perception, there's, there's less, people are, 18 and 19 and 20 year olds
are less likely to have a Saturday job or going out working part time and doing
bits and pieces than possibly prior generations. I'm just looking at my daughter
and her generation. Um, so I think students are wanting better value for money.
Um, I think students are probably healthier. Well, I don't know whether they're
healthier or not. Um, certainly, I mean, if you take smoking. You know,
everywhere you went in the 70s and 80s, I mean, we all smoked.

[01:07:50] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, the vast majority of people smoked.

[01:07:52] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[01:07:53] **Keith McMahon:** Most of us smoked legal stuff. Lots of people
smoked illegal stuff.

[01:07:56] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[01:07:57] **Keith McMahon:** Um,

[01:07:57] **Jarek Zaba:** and indoors as well.

[01:07:58] **Keith McMahon:** And in- and [01:08:00] indoors. Um, all the
student bars had, um, uh, I mean the two things all the student bars had, and one
was, uh, big cigarette machines. The other one was condom machines.

[01:08:08] **Keith McMahon:** And that was it. I mean, and it, you know, it, I'm
aware that it sounds politically incorrect, but that was the way it. That was how
it was, um, 40, 45 years ago. Um, and I'm not saying whether it's right or wrong.
That's not part of this conversation. Um, so, uh, so I think students have
changed. Student life has changed significantly.

[01:08:33] **Keith McMahon:** Um, I think the way that students, I think because
of all the funding shift within tertiary education, um, the thought of, um, a
university or Um, or college giving a capitation fee to, uh, a student union of, I
don't know, 50 quid a year? Um, or, or 60 quid a year to run, you know, the
social, cultural. [01:09:00] I think there is less, there's less focus now on the
social, cultural, uh, sporting aspect of tertiary education than, than there was 40,
40, 50 years ago.

[01:09:15] **Keith McMahon:** Um, it was, you know, people went away to university to, to, to grow up, to, to do something different from school. I think a lot of, I think, I think kids are growing up earlier, younger now. And I think there is less differentiation between, uh, what you do at sixth form level and what you do in your first year at university.

[01:09:35] **Keith McMahon:** It, it's... Which I think is probably a good thing. I think the quantum shift, you know, suddenly letting 18 year olds loose with a pocket full of money and a bar and no parents to keep hold of them, um, I mean, I saw so many people just go off the rails. Um, and then have to be pulled back onto the rails and, you know, and then in tears in February, saying, I've [01:10:00] spent next, I've spent next term's grant already, you know, how am I going to make things meet?

[01:10:05] **Keith McMahon:** So, so I think there's, there's, there's two things, Jarek. There's, there's

[01:10:11] **Keith McMahon:** technology, because of technology, um, the way that people access music has totally changed. Um. And I'm not sure that people want to go to a loud, hot, sweaty, non air conditioned, um, room with a sticky floor and a grotty carpet and things like that. People's expectations are different now. I mean, if you listen to, uh, there were quite a lot of concerts that were recorded at Leeds University.

[01:10:46] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and one of my, one of my favourite albums is, um, The Who Live at Leeds. Um, and, and I can just picture, I can feel myself, I wasn't there, but I can feel myself in that environment. [01:11:00] Um, and I can, I can still remember waking up on Sunday mornings. Um, or, or Saturday mornings or Sunday mornings and my ears still ringing from, you know, the, the levels of the PA.

[01:11:12] **Keith McMahon:** But, it, occasionally, you know, we'd say, Oh, I think we really ought to put some, you know, earplugs in for this one. Cause it's, it is a bit loud and things like that. But, I, you know, the rest of the time, you know, you're standing next door to these great big Martin, uh, double bass bins. And, you know, you, I wouldn't say your hair's moving, but you can feel the, And it's just, it's just different.

[01:11:38] **Jarek Zaba:** Are your ears still okay now?

[01:11:40] **Keith McMahon:** No, I suffer from permanent tinnitus. But a lot of that is, I can never turn it off completely, but if I'm totally relaxed and I haven't

got a care in the world, then it's an awful lot better. So, I can't remember what the, [01:12:00] is it, is it corsetin or something like that?

[01:12:03] **Jarek Zaba:** Not sure, yeah.

[01:12:04] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, yeah and just the sort of the final thing to reflect on really is I guess the Poly as a as an institution and what it sort of brought to your life. I mean, first of all, after you graduated, did you find yourself, uh, following a route, uh, relevant to your degree?

[01:12:21] **Keith McMahon:** No, not at all. The reason I was there for six years was it was a four year course that I was on.

[01:12:26] **Keith McMahon:** So it was a sandwich course. So I never got summer holidays because I was either- I worked at Rolls Royce to do my basic training, and I worked at British Aerospace in Kingston for a year and a, I don't know, a year and a bit? Maybe 15 months, something like that, as part of my course. So I never got any summer holidays.

[01:12:44] **Keith McMahon:** So it was a four year course, and at the end of which you're supposed to get a degree. Well, I enjoyed myself too much. And, um, and in my fourth year, I also got elected as Treasurer of the Student Union. So, not only did I, well, I failed my finals in [01:13:00] 81. In 81, 82, I, um, uh, I was treasurer of the student union and ran the bars and, and things like that and had a fantastic time, thoroughly enjoyed it and I think I did a reasonable job.

[01:13:13] **Keith McMahon:** We, we didn't lose, we didn't lose money and, um, you know, we, it was, it was good. And then I went, then I managed to persuade the Polytechnic to have me back for another year. Um, and again. I could go back, I could do a resit year and it was paid for by the local authority. Um, I mean, it's just, life is just, I just, I feel so sorry for, you know, the, the, the generation now who are coming out of tertiary education with, I don't know, £40,000 debts.

[01:13:44] **Keith McMahon:** Um, so, uh, so I finally, finally got a degree in, in 1983. Um, Uh, and we were in the middle of a recession, so I can, and so we're before the days of email [01:14:00] and mobile phones, um, so I can remember sitting down, writing, handwriting, um, dozens of letters, um, to engineering companies to try and get, um, a position as a trainee engineer as a graduate, on a graduate courses and things, graduate schemes and things like that.

[01:14:20] **Keith McMahon:** And even the, you know, I went, I knew a couple of the guys at British Aerospace at Kingston. And I even went back and sort of said, you know, what are the opportunities? And they said, we're just not taking anybody on because, you know, the way, the way the things are. So I didn't, uh, so therefore I, the summer of 83, I got a degree and I couldn't find a job.

[01:14:41] **Keith McMahon:** And I was at home and mum and dad were, were still very supportive. And, um, they said, you know, if you're going to. No, I wasn't, no I wasn't still, no I'd moved out, I'd moved out and I was renting a, that's right, I was renting, I'd rented a flat up in, near Kingston Hospital with a couple of [01:15:00] mates and then I'd moved in, I'd actually moved in with Penny, who's now my wife, and her sister, and another girl, uh, in a flat in Fife Road, um, uh, that's right, so I'd moved out, so I had to pay rent, suddenly, And so I really did need to get a job.

[01:15:22] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and then I heard on the grapevine that because of all my association with running the bars, I knew all the, um, the sales structures of the various breweries. I heard that Truman's Brewery in Brick Lane were looking for a salesman, and I can still remember that. I wrote a letter to Mike Scott, who is the sales manager for Kingston, said, Dear, dear Mike, or might even said, Dear Mr. Scott, dear Mike, um, I, I hear that, I hear that you may be looking for a, and I've probably still got the letter somewhere, I hear that you're looking for a, uh, a sales representative in the Surrey area, um, I wonder if I might be considered. And I got a phone call a week later from, uh, from a chap [01:16:00] called Jerry Valance, uh, who I also knew, who was another sales manager, and said, uh, yeah, Keith, I'm, but yeah, we are looking for.

[01:16:06] **Keith McMahon:** And. Jerry suffers dreadfully with a stutter. So, the conversation was quite difficult. But the bottom line was, What are you doing this afternoon? Can you come up to Brick Lane for an interview? And, um, At that time, it was the middle of the, it was, I don't know, August, September. Um, I had uncut hair. I didn't know whether I had a suit at home.

[01:16:32] **Keith McMahon:** Um, And, um, I said, yeah, of course, Jerry. Yeah, of course I'll be up there. So I went home, had a bath, had a shower, and got myself tidied up. Went up to Brick Lane. Had an interview with Jerry Vallance and a guy called Tony Bryars who was the general sales manager of Truman's. Tony Bryars looked at his watch at twenty to five and said, Good Lord, he said, the bar's open.

[01:16:55] **Keith McMahon:** Will you join me? So, uh, so I got taken down to the Black Eagle Bar [01:17:00] in, in the brewery in Brick Lane. With Tony

Bryars, Gerry Vallance, Mike Scott, Pat Ireland and a bunch of other reprobates. And I got beer poured down my throat. For two and a half hours.

[01:17:14] **Jarek Zaba:** That's one kind of interview I guess.

[01:17:16] **Keith McMahon:** And then, and I remember coming out the brewery, because the bar closed at seven o'clock.

[01:17:23] **Keith McMahon:** Um, because it was purely a social bar, you know, for office staff after work. So, uh, so I, I came out there at seven, quarter past seven, into Brick Lane, part of London, I'd never been east of the city before, in my life. So, um, uh, I remember coming out of there into Brick Lane thinking, oh God, oh no, I shouldn't have got pissed.

[01:17:47] **Keith McMahon:** Oh no, I really wanted that job, and more to the point, how the hell do I get home from Whitechapel?

[01:17:56] **Keith McMahon:** So anyway, I made my way down to Aldgate East and back onto the [01:18:00] District Line and home. And anyway, I thought, well, you know, it was, it was, it was fun. And I got a phone call the next morning from Jerry Vallance saying, Keith, can you start next week? Because I'd really, because that, Two hours was the final part of the interview.

[01:18:15] **Keith McMahon:** It was, can, can we pour beer down his neck and he not gonna make a complete dick of himself, because that's what's gonna, because in those days, when, as, as a, as a salesman, I, and I can, I still, I, I, I can still not reconcile this as a salesman. I was given a company car, I was given an expense account, right?

[01:18:38] **Keith McMahon:** And I was told to go and visit eight, at least eight. Um, pubs or clubs every day, uh, and I was expected to have half a pint of beer in each one. And I just can't reconcile those three things. Um, and, and there were times when I would go and sit in a, uh, social club committee, committee meeting room, a [01:19:00] room not bigger than, I mean, what, what's this room?

[01:19:01] **Keith McMahon:** Four meters square, something like that. That 12 foot, 12 foot square, there'd be a big table in the middle with half a dozen ashtrays on it. And there'd be 15. Li- in all likelihood blokes, um, sitting around it, everyone be smoking, there'd be beer, you know, and, and, and it was just this incredible, really quite unpleasant atmosphere now.

[01:19:22] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and as a salesman, I would just be given, Oh, come on, Keith, have another beer, have another beer, have another beer. And then now we need to talk about the price that you're charging and what discounts you're going to give us and things like that. Um, so yeah, so no, I never, no, I never got into engineering.

[01:19:36] **Jarek Zaba:** Your life went down a more of a sales route.

[01:19:38] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah, so I, I, I, I worked for, yeah, I worked for Truman's and Grand Met and Courage. For...

[01:19:49] **Keith McMahon:** Ten years, something like that.

[01:19:50] **Jarek Zaba:** So your, your, your course may not, you may not have taken your course with you in the rest of your life, but were there other things that, that, that, that you took from your Poly experience?

[01:19:58] **Keith McMahon:** Well, my wife! [01:20:00]

[01:20:00] **Jarek Zaba:** Oh wow! Well, very, very good that you answered that way, because if she heard this and you didn't say that...

[01:20:06] **Keith McMahon:** Well, it was quite, it was quite, quite odd. Um, my wife, Penny's... So Penny did her degree up at Bradford and, um, her sister, her younger sister, Thea, Um, was on the, uh, social committee of the student union, uh, for Penrhyn Road. So I got to know her socially, socially only. There'd never been anything else. Um, uh, through her, through the student union.

[01:20:34] **Keith McMahon:** And then Penny came down to London when she graduated because she got a job as a training accountant. Uh, so she stayed with, um, uh, she shared a flat with Thea. Um, so I got to know, so then she was just part of this, part of the crowd. Because it, you know, where are we all going on Friday night and who's, who's there?

[01:20:56] **Keith McMahon:** And, and suddenly there's this new person and, anyway, that [01:21:00] was it. Um, there's still people that I, I, I, There's a, there's a chap who's a sound engineer in, um, in Berrylands. Andy, Andy Groves. So I was his best man when, when he got married. Um, he was technical committee chairman when I joined tech services.

[01:21:19] **Keith McMahon:** So he was at Kingston Poly a couple of years before me. Again, he did, he did something like... I want to say bioscience or something like that or environmental geography or something like that and ended up working at the Royal Albert Hall and various other things and um, he's now a highly regarded, um, sound engineer outside broadcast and all that sort of stuff.

[01:21:40] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and there's a, there's a few other people that, you know, periodically you bump into. Yeah.

[01:21:48] **Jarek Zaba:** But also I guess it's six, six years of your life, so it's a fairly, fairly, you know, significant chunk of memories.

[01:21:54] **Keith McMahon:** Well it is, it is, and I made contact with, so there are a few of the, [01:22:00] um, permanent members of staff.

[01:22:02] **Keith McMahon:** Um, who I occasionally catch up with and who, um, you know, exchange Christmas cards and what have you. One of the barman, the only bar manager that I still know where he is, if he's alive and where he is, lives in Chessington. Guy called Paddy Sweeney, he was bar manager of, um, Knights Park for many years and then bar manager for Kingstonian Football Club.

[01:22:24] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and he was very much into the music scene and very, very up, you know, he, he, he, helped arrange a lot of bands at uh, at Knights Park. So I saw him at Christmas, um, Mill, the Mill, Mill Street Residents Association get to use the um, Knights Park bar for their Christmas party.

[01:22:45] **Jarek Zaba:** Oh, very nice.

[01:22:46] **Keith McMahon:** As a thank you from the University for all the nuisance that students have caused us.

[01:22:49] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah, yeah, fair enough. Apologies for the other 364 days.

[01:22:54] **Keith McMahon:** The lady that I've just been exchanging texts with over the past couple of days, a lady called Pauline O'Brien, was finance [01:23:00] manager for the Student Union for many years. Lovely, lovely lady, um, and she lives out at Chessington. So I sent her a message saying, Am I imagining it?

[01:23:10] **Keith McMahon:** Or did somebody from the Alumni Association do an article about the music scene? 10 or 15 years ago, she said, no, you're not imagining it, Keith. And it, well, there was an article, and it was written, and it was published in the Kingston Alumni Magazine. So I phoned the Alumni Association yesterday and said, okay, so where can I see all the alumni magazines?

[01:23:32] **Keith McMahon:** Because they, or have they been digitised? No, they haven't been digitised. Oh, right, okay. Any idea where they are? No.

[01:23:37] **Jarek Zaba:** I used to work in these office, the alumni offices of universities. So,

[01:23:46] **Keith McMahon:** so anyway, this, this, this very nice lady has, um, has gone away to try and work out where the archive might be. But if I can find the relevant PST file of all my old emails from 10 or 15 years ago, [01:24:00] I might be able to find the. The information about what was done, but it came, it was actually, it was a, it was a physical publication. It wasn't a digital publication. Um, but somebody did a, uh, an article about all the music. Um, so there's, and then Hugh Cox, who was general manager of the student union at the time is over in Ireland.

[01:24:21] **Keith McMahon:** He's still around. Um, so there's, there are still people, um, but it's quite odd still living in, I mean, I've seen it, the, the, The, the, the Polytechnic morph into the University and how it's evolved and how it's developed.

[01:24:39] **Jarek Zaba:** Yes, so Keith, um, I wonder if you could just reflect a little bit on, uh, the Poly's role within the town, uh, at your time, uh, and then maybe compare that to the, how you see the University and its role within Kingston today.

[01:24:53] **Keith McMahon:** So, in the 70s, uh, the, the, the Polytechnic had... [01:25:00] Um, it was a bit, it was quite a them and us situation in that, um, I don't feel that the Polytechnic was integrated into the wider society within Kingston. Um, we always had a battle with, uh, the residents. There's a part, there's a, there's a route if you go from, uh, Penrhyn Road, um, where the Student Union Bar was and where most of the activity was on a Friday and Saturday night back to Clay Hill, to the hostels there.

[01:25:28] **Keith McMahon:** Um, and if ever there was any problem on that broad route going back there, then students would get to blame. It was always

young people that caused the problem and those young people all in the view, in the eye of, um, residents would always be students. So, Monday mornings, inevitably, we'd get complaints.

[01:25:47] **Keith McMahon:** Um, however, we had a very good relationship with the, um, the licensing sergeant, um, at Kingston Police Station. Um, whereby he said he wanted, he wouldn't close [01:26:00] us down, he wouldn't take away any of our licenses because he wanted to make sure that all the students were in one place such that if anything did kick off, um, uh, he knew where it was going to be, he knew where the students were, he didn't want them scattered over, A dozen or fifteen pubs all the way around Kingston.

[01:26:16] **Keith McMahon:** Um, so we had, there was this constant, um, I wouldn't say standoff, but we certainly weren't integrated. The way that the university, I think, is now better integrated, um, into the life of the borough. Um, I still, uh, so, so there, there is that. Um, but I think you, you've just got to bear in mind that, that... Uh, there is life change, life changes.

[01:26:43] **Keith McMahon:** The, the Polytechnic had been formed out of Kingston College of, uh, Technology, um, Kingston School of Art and, uh, Gypsy Hill Teacher Training College. So they'd all come together to form the Polytechnic. Um, there were lots of people who, um, were living away from home for the first [01:27:00] time. Um, and so the, so, so life had, life had, life had changed.

[01:27:05] **Keith McMahon:** Um, What else were we talking about?

[01:27:10] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah, I was just trying to recall whether there were any specifically good snippets.

[01:27:15] **Keith McMahon:** So I think it's, it's, it's difficult to, nowadays, I think that there are far more activities that, um, the university at, I mean, I think it's driven by students rather than by staff, that, um, are involved in, um, in activities in the borough.

[01:27:33] **Keith McMahon:** Um, so... Um, yeah, it's definitely, definitely changed.

[01:27:39] **Jarek Zaba:** I do, I remember one thing you did say, uh, which was about the, the old, the old folks and putting on the,

[01:27:44] **Keith McMahon:** Oh right, yeah. So one of the, one of the things that we did start to do, um, was to put on a Christmas party for, for the old folks. Um, we'd get students to volunteer to drive minibuses, um, to go around, collect, uh, elderly, elderly folk, uh, from, [01:28:00] either from their own homes or from care homes, and bring them to the student union bar on the first Saturday of the Christmas holidays, the day after we...

[01:28:08] **Keith McMahon:** Term broke up on the Friday. Um, the, the Polytechnic would, um, give us access to the commercial kitchens in the refectory to allow us to cook a, um, a roast dinner. And Christmas Pudd for 120 old folks. Local residents who you're aware of. Yeah, local residents, so we'd start to get some sort of involvement there.

[01:28:33] **Keith McMahon:** Um, then, uh, what we would do is we'd get a couple of music students from Gypsy Hill. Uh, we'd come down, give them an upright piano and, um, and we'd have a right good sing song. We'd get through more Advocaat and Sherry in that one lunchtime than we would for the rest of the t- the rest of the term. Um, but everybody had a, had a really, really good time.

[01:28:55] **Keith McMahon:** Towards, I'm trying to think when it would be, because it was a pal of mine who started it, I would say [01:29:00] probably about 83, we started organising um, children's parties for um, student union, um, permanent staffs families, and also Polytechnic staff families, so we would hire in a couple of clowns or something like that and we'd have a, have a kids party, um, maybe on the Sunday afternoon.

[01:29:23] **Keith McMahon:** So we'd, we'd start to do those things, but if I think about the, the way that, um, certainly the, the art, Faculties of art and architecture and surveying and things like that are involved with all sorts of bits and pieces around the around the borough and in various community events. That just didn't, that just didn't exist, um, and I don't think, there wasn't any desire from the Polytechnic or from the, um, the student body to do it, and I don't think there was any, any, the [01:30:00] The wider community wasn't there to buy it, if you like.

[01:30:04] **Keith McMahon:** I feel that the director of the Polytechnic and the senior management said, were there saying, we are here to educate and to provide an education for these young people. It was still quite an old fashioned mantra, if you like. Um, and I think it was the student union. Try to, um, provide the, you know, the release valve, if you like.

[01:30:35] **Jarek Zaba:** I mean, you know, the, the School of Art has produced some very illustrious, um, alumni over the year, particularly in sort fashion and design architecture.

[01:30:43] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah. I mean, if you look at, you look at the alumni, look at where, where a lot of the alumni are now for over the past 40 or 50 years. Absolutely. I mean, the, the, as, as an academic es- establishment, it is very, very successful.

[01:30:58] **Keith McMahon:** It's very highly regarded, [01:31:00] um, and always has been, um, It's, it's not been one of these, um, I don't know, I don't want to sound derogatory, but pop up colleges, you know, that, um, how can you possibly call yourself a university when you didn't exist ten years ago? Um, I mean, Kingston went through a couple of rounds of not becoming a university, um, when it was a, in the days when it was a Polytechnic, um, and certainly in the 70s and 80s, um, If you take tertiary education, um, there were different levels of tertiary education.

[01:31:37] **Keith McMahon:** Um, there was the Russell Group of universities, then there were all the other universities, then there were the polytechnics, and then there were the specialist, um, colleges. Um, uh, so there were, I mean, there were places like Richmond College, um, Ealing College. Um, so these were all tertiary colleges, very, you know, very good in what they did, but they were treated...

[01:31:58] **Keith McMahon:** Very differently to [01:32:00] the universities and to particularly the Russell Group of Universities.

[01:32:05] **Jarek Zaba:** Do you think it made a big difference to the institution becoming university status?

[01:32:09] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah.

[01:32:09] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah,

[01:32:10] **Keith McMahon:** definitely.

[01:32:11] **Jarek Zaba:** In a good way.

[01:32:12] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah.

[01:32:12] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[01:32:13] **Keith McMahon:** Yeah. So I think that the, you know, the, um, the, the Polytechnic had been very successful and was becoming more and more successful and becoming more and more focused.

[01:32:26] **Keith McMahon:** Um, And that's how it, it became a university. Um, I, my, my final, just, my final year degree, uh, project, um, was a, an analysis of previous final year projects that had been done by Aeronautical and Production Engineering. And I proved that over a period of 20 years, The final year projects that students had undertaken [01:33:00] had moved significantly from theoretical, laboratory based work to, um, much more industry relevant, practical, um, work.

[01:33:16] **Keith McMahon:** So, some, you know, in the 90- in the early 60s. Um, a student could, could sit down and do a final year project and they wouldn't move from their desk or the workshop in the, in their, in their laboratory. And it would just be, well, you know, what, what happens when I bend this piece of metal or, um, you know, the, the relative strengths of ten different steels.

[01:33:39] **Keith McMahon:** I, I don't know, something, something like that. Um, but it was entirely, it, it, it, it was, I wouldn't say irrelevant, but it, it wasn't directly relevant to, um, Industry. By the 1970s, 1980s, the vast majority of the projects were, [01:34:00] um, driven by a, a challenge that the students had found, um, whilst they'd been working in industry.

[01:34:07] **Keith McMahon:** So how can we make, so when I was working at, you know, somebody might say well when I was working at this particular company I noticed that they were having repeated problems, repeated failures with this particular casting or this particular manufacturing process. How can we, how can we make that better?

[01:34:24] **Keith McMahon:** Right. So it was very much more relevant. And I think, and, and if, if I just use that in, in isolation within the school of mechanical engineering, that must have been happening in all the other faculties and making it, it a very much rather than being a completely theoretical exercise of education, of very much more practical exercise, of, of education are much more relevant to, um, to, to work life.

[01:34:48] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[01:34:48] **Keith McMahon:** Working, working life.

[01:34:50] **Jarek Zaba:** And just finally, when you look back at your time at Poly, do you look back with fondness? Did you enjoy it?

[01:34:55] **Keith McMahon:** Oh yes, definitely. Have I covered the bit about my wife?

[01:34:59] **Jarek Zaba:** [01:35:00] Uh, I think that was, yeah, because we talked about your post graduation.

[01:35:03] **Keith McMahon:** Yes, I mean, definitely. I mean, yes, I look back with fondness.

[01:35:06] **Keith McMahon:** Um, there's not that many people that I'm still in, I'm not in daily contact with anybody that I was at, that I knew then. There are, there's still lots of people that are on my Christmas card list that are, you know, my contacts in the phone and things like that, um, that I would happily sit down and have a beer with, um, or, or have a chat with.

[01:35:27] **Keith McMahon:** Um, so, yeah, absolutely, look back at, I mean, yes, definitely, thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed it. Yes, I, and, and whilst it took me a long time to get my degree, um, I learnt a lot. Um, the, the practicalities of my, my course, the rigour of an engineering course. Um, has stood me well, and I, and I'm, I'm, I'm a fairly practical sort of person anyway, so, and, and there are things that I, yeah, there are bits and pieces that I learnt when I, as, as, you know, I never became an engineer professionally, [01:36:00] um, but there are still things that I, I'd learn now, um, and the social side was just, I mean, in those days, it was just great, um, I mean, the only, the only thing that I've always felt Both then and now, is that for, for 36 weeks of the year, the university's in full swing and the students and everything's going.

[01:36:25] **Keith McMahon:** For the other 16 weeks of the year, it kind of closed, I wouldn't say closes down, but I just think there's, there's a huge asset there that somehow should be made to work. And whether that's the university running more Summer schools, um, short courses. They've got, you know, they've got their own internal challenges, their own internal management and financial challenges, and obviously that has to be played into the mix.

[01:36:56] **Keith McMahon:** Um, but I, I've always [01:37:00] thought that, you know, if there's something sitting there, if there's a great big building, and there's lots and lots of people, then, you know, they should be doing something with it.

[01:37:09] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[01:37:11] **Keith McMahon:** I'm not saying that they should, you know, people should be working fi- I'm not saying that the staff should be working 52 weeks of the year.

[01:37:16] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah. But the kind of institutional assets could be, could be used.

[01:37:20] **Keith McMahon:** But the, the asset, the asset belong. The asset. It's gonna sound dreadful. The asset belongs to the community, you know, to the wider community. And it shouldn't be looked there as a, as a white elephant. Uh, or as a, some sort of ivory tower, there's, there's some mixed metaphors there.

[01:37:37] **Keith McMahon:** Um, but, um, it, it, it should be looked upon as, as an asset that can be called upon, um, that can be used by the, by the, by the community. Um, having said which, it all needs to be paid for.

[01:37:51] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah, yeah. Um, but well, Keith, I think you've been most generous with your time, um, unless there's anything that you feel
[01:38:00] like you, uh, you haven't mentioned that is relevant to, to this chat.

[01:38:03] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, yeah. Thank you very much.

[01:38:05] **Keith McMahon:** You're very welcome.

[01:38:05] **Jarek Zaba:** Cheers, Keith.