

PROFILE OF :- James "Ken" Pritchett

I entered the world on the 9th October, 1943, at an address in Bulwell. I was the third son, (Mum and Dad were quite happy, although they would have preferred a girl) My two elder brothers were Alan, 7 years and Gordon, 12 years.

My education began at the age of 3 1/2 years, at the "Springfield School" nursery on Lawton Drive, Bulwell, then progressed to the Infant and later Junior Schools, on the same site. Discovering music quite early, I was an avid listener to the radio, often singing along with the records that were played. When only 4 years old I was lifted on to a table by my mother and asked to sing a rendition of :- " I wonder who's kissing her now" (by an unknown artist), for which I received a shilling [5p] and a bar of chocolate. Around this time, my brother Alan contracted polio and spent the next seven years in and out of hospital so I only saw him mainly at week-ends and when Dad took us on picnics into Derbyshire.

At the tender age of 8, I was conscripted into Bulwell, St. Mary's Church choir, where I remained until reaching the ripe old age of 13, having worked my way up to being joint 2nd chorister with my pal Ken Williams, with whom I won several trophies, singing duets for Highbury School choir [see later]

My pre-teen leisure times were spent playing in Bulwell Hall Park, just across the road from where I lived, or helping my eldest brother Gordon on the family-run poultry farm behind our house. Our brother, Alan, died from pneumonia two weeks after his eighteenth birthday, in December 1953.

Having, like so many others, failed my 11 plus, I was sent in 1954 to the then notorious Highbury Secondary School for Boys in my new school uniform of short grey trousers, white shirt, green and gold striped tie and black blazer with the school's "H" sewn on the breast pocket. Because of my "older friends" in the church choir, I was protected, somewhat, from the "happenings" that the first year students had to endure..... A big relief I can now tell you!

Through my involvement with the said church choir, I was immediately sought out by Highbury's distinguished choirmaster, Mr. Les Banham, and installed as soprano from day two. A few terms later, along with the aforementioned Ken Williams we soon got the reputation of being the best singers in the school and, in the summers of '56 and '57, Highbury Choir walked away with most of the prizes in the Music Festivals held annually at the Albert Hall.

This was the time of Skiffle and a few of my pals, and I, started messing about with tea chest bass, washboards and the like, trying to emulate our favourite singers. My favourite was the "king" of skiffle Lonnie Donegan. Also about this time, there was a new sensation, sweeping the nation (*good at poetry too!*) and everyone in our age group were talking about a film called "Blackboard Jungle" and the "Teddy Boys" who were dancing in the aisles and ripping up the seats at the " Adelphi" picture house, to a film called "Rock around the Clock". Bill Haley records were played constantly on the radio. A little later everyone seemed to be buying Heartbreak Hotel by a new American singer named, Elvis something or other. Then there was Buddy Holly, the Everly Brothers, Little Richard and a whole host of new singers, too many to mention here.

The days were now numbered for my old heroes, Johnnie Ray, Guy Mitchell Frankie Laine and Pat Boone etc.

Here was a new sound that was aimed right at the heart of the newly named "Teenagers". But I digress.

I had taken my leave from the Church choir to spend more time at the Co-operative Arts Theatre on George Street in Nottm., where I had aspirations of becoming an actor. For a couple of nights a week and most week-ends, I rubbed shoulders with the likes of producer John Wills and a few very good budding actors / actresses who's name's escape me now. I appeared in a few of the Theatre's productions but my best memory was appearing as the "boy king" in Nottingham Operatic Society's production, of Ivor Novello's, King's Rhapsody at the Theatre Royal.

I ceased seeking a career in acting shortly after my sixteenth birthday. I just could not get used to calling everyone "Darling" but I did enjoy the stage management side of the industry especially the use of lighting effects and the creativity that went into everything..... *The applause was good too!*

I got my first long trousers when I became a Prefect in January 1958 and left school at Christmas that year, with Cliff Richard's "Schoolboy Crush" ringing in my ears, having spent the last term in the coveted position of Head Prefect and School Captain (*and I wasn't a creep!!!*) In the last year at Highbury I had studied playing the cello for the school band, but to be quite truthful was not much good at it, though I could get a mean tune out of the violin, on some occasions.

The day after I left school, I started work on the farm, for my brother. My wage was to be £4.00 per week but I had to give it to my Mum for my "board and lodgings" though I did get 10 shillings [50p] spending money, rising to 15 shillings [75p] after six months.

For my sixteenth birthday, Mum bought me a Philips tape recorder for 39 guineas and opened up a whole new world for me. From now on every top twenty program, every record review, all the top D.Js. shows, T.Vs. "Oh Boy" etc. for the next five years would be avidly recorded on to tape, then dubbed and edited, using a pal's recorder, to make a compilation of favourites of that time. Each tape was lovingly catalogued with song, singer and date, though, unfortunately, some of them have gone missing over the years.

In June of 1960, I was taken on as an apprentice to a firm of electrical contractors and until August of '61, slogged away chopping boxes in walls, chasing walls for cables, pulling wires through conduits and so on, but I really longed to be outdoors, especially in the summer. These were busy times for my brother who had now diversified into the grocery business, but was still trying to run the farm. He said that he would be pleased for me to take over the running of the farm, so I handed in my notice and returned to poultry farming. I was now in my 18th year and I now only had to pay £4.00 a week board [not quite half my wages]. The music of this period was tremendous, and most of the performers were British, i.e. Cliff Richard / Adam Faith / Marty Wilde / Billy Fury / Johnny Kidd / Helen Shapiro.....the list is endless, But the Americans still dominated the

charts with Elvis / Everly Brothers / Sam Cooke / Eddie Cochran and etc. I took my tape recorder down the farm and played the records constantly.

In the long Summer, and later, Autumn evenings of this period, you would find me on Bulwell Hall Park, along with my pals, and an assortment of lady friends, and as night closed in, it was back to our house to put the old tape recorder on and dance to the records. *We had some parties on Camberley Road!!*

Tuesdays and Saturdays, were the nights when we were all off to dance at the "Old Vic" a.k.a. the Locarno, looking "ever so smart" in our Italian suits, matching tie and pocket handkerchief and Winklepicker shoes. First though, it was customary for the gang of us to call at the "Dog and Partridge" and "Newmarket" pubs, or it might be the "Corner Pin" for a change, because they didn't serve drinks in the dance hall, and we needed our "fix" of Rum and Blacks, plus we wanted to make sure the girls had gone in before we arrived.

My favourite time of the evening was "Dream Time" when one could dance "chest to chest" with some pretty girl. At 10.30 it was back on the trolley-bus and a sing-song all the way up Squires Ave.

The Beatles exploded onto the scene early in 1963 and in November of that year, Gordon arrived on the farm with a bunch of lads who were looking for a place to practice their instruments. We installed them in the "Incubator House" and left them to get on with their singing and playing. I couldn't help but eavesdrop on their performances and when they asked me inside to watch, and make comments, one Sunday in December, I was delighted. They had been practising the latest Beatles number "I wanna hold your hand" and was finding it quite a strain to reach the top notes. I was asked if I knew it.? I told them that not only did I know it but that I could also sing it. They gave me an audition there and then, and I left the room while they talked about me between themselves, a while later I was asked if I would like to do a "gig" with them, *just to do this one song!* On Saturday Dec., 7th, I met Don and Doug outside the Elite in Nottingham and was taken to meet Geoff and Bryan Wilkinson, (rythmn and bass respectively,) and Roger Bailey, the drummer, at a pub in Wollaton where I sang with the "Talismen". The next day I was practising with them songs such as :- "Glad all over" / "Money" / " Need a shot of rhythm and blues"

I had joined the "Talismen" but lost my girlfriend.

Throughout the next two years there were many changes to my life. In the first half of 1964, Don, (piano) and then Doug, the lead guitarist, left the Talisman. We found a superb replacement for Doug in Mick Griffiths. We also changed the band's name and became "**The Beatstalkers**".

On the farm 80% of the livestock went down with Fowl Pest and had to be destroyed, so I had to find employment elsewhere. I found a job immediately at Percy Andrew & Son's Dying and Finishing works and over the next few years made many friends. The band went from strength to strength and had built up quite a good following throughout Nottm and Derbyshire. Our main "stomping ground" was the Coronation Hall at Toton and a typical week-ends schedule went something like this:- On Friday, after finishing work at 5pm, run all the way

home, get a quick meal, bath, shave, change and run all the way to Bulwell market, to catch the Bartons bus to Stapleford, leaving at 10mins past the hour. Then catch another bus into Toton to be at the "Wilkinson's house" by 7pm. Drive to the venue, set up, play, (usually until midnight), clear the equipment back into the van and drive back to Nottingham often calling at the "Tally Ho" cafe on Ilkeston Rd, for egg, sausage, chip and beans. After having our meal we could possibly, and often did, go Ten-pin bowling at the newly opened centre behind the Ice Stadium. Catch early bus home, about 5.30am, nod off, (but get to Percy Andrews for 8.00am), work until 12.30pm, call at the local for a couple of pints, go home to feed the fowls, collect the eggs and check that the livestock was all OK, get as much sleep as I could, then get ready for the Nights gig and do it all again.....I usually slept in Sunday mornings, but still had to feed and water the fowls and collect the eggs when I got up.

Since having fowl pest, my brother decided that we would just concentrate on egg production and he and I would share the work. All the stock were now in battery cages and was easily managed. It was just a case of making sure they had ample food, water and that they were cleaned out regularly. This was done before I went to work and after, when I got home.

Throughout 1965 the band could do no wrong. We packed places wherever we went. Suddenly, with Geoff's wedding on the horizon we all decided to call it a day, and just before Christmas 1965 we did our last gig at the Coronation hall. Although only two years had passed, it had seemed like five.

Now I had more time on my hands, I started night school to study electrical circuits and the principles of electricity two nights a week and I was nominated for the committee, at P.A. Social club and at week-ends, helped run the bar.

Both these experiences, doing bar and cellar work and electrical studies, helped me in the future....read on!

I still kept in with my regular friends and every other night we would all meet at the local pub, to play cards, darts or just talk. We had two "locals", though of course didn't just frequent them, but if we were to meet up at any time one would be deemed the meeting place.

These were either the "Red Lion" or the "Robinson's Hill Club". The latter was most favourite because the steward there often let us stay after hours. We spent most of the night there in '66 when England won the World Cup!

The club started going downhill (not our fault) and in 1967 changed hands. A group of students ran it and changed the name to Tabla, and played psychedelic music in a dimly lit atmosphere. Jimi Hendrix was on the scene now. One night while I was there, a very close friend of mine called in with his girlfriend and another young couple, They all came over and sat with me. The attractive young lady offered me a cigarette and we talked. I was smitten. I didn't meet the couple again until the Christmas of that year at party in my friend's home. We chatted again.

Tabla lasted until just before Christmas when the Kimberley Brewery decided to close them down. In January, the following year, my brother bought

the lease and licence and asked me if I would run it as “Robinson’s Hill Social Club”. I readily agreed, so once again I packed in my job and through in my lot with my brother.

Much hard work stripping, painting, and renovating the clubroom whilst building the membership back up. By February we were all systems go with three artists booked and the obligatory Bingo. At the beginning of March my close friend told me that the couple that I’d met at his party were no longer a couple and would I like to make a foursome up on my next night off? **The answer was Yes**, and on March 7th, 1968, I had my first date with my future bride. Gordon now had a new business opportunity for me. He was thinking of setting up a business operating fruit machines / pin -tables and juke-boxes, we already had them installed at the club, and he had been asked to supply some for a friend. I agreed to maintain them and so started “Nottm Fruit Machine Co”. Pretty soon I was working all hours again, we still had the poultry, the club took care of the nights and I was on 24hr call out on the machines. At the age of 25, I could completely strip a Jennings fruit machine a.k.a. (a one armed bandit) and assemble it without having any parts left over.

In 1969, on the anniversary of the day Maureen and I had our first date, we got engaged and a year after that on April 4th 1970, we were married.

1970 was the year Nottm City Council decided to “compulsory purchase” the land that the farm was on, they required it for building houses. Dad had retired from his grocery shop in ‘69 and had been working the farm because the machine business and club was then taking more of my time. 1970 too, was when Gordon sold the club to the “concert secretary” although Maureen and I were kept on as Stewards.

I was getting busier and busier with the machines now and with being on 24hr call, couldn’t manage to look after the bar sufficiently, so I gave in my notice.

Gaming machines were now my life. I had a vast knowledge of the workings of many popular machines of that time. I applied for and got a job at Naylor Automatics of Beeston. They operated all the Home Brewery, John Smiths, Holes Ales and more, sites, throughout the Midlands A total exceeding 240 sites in 7 counties. It was my intention to work for them and still pull in the calls to our machines, but that didn’t quite work. With a new company car and my box of tools and spares, I careered around the country, clocking up an average of 1000 miles a week, mending Fruits, Jukes and Pins.

In my head, I carried, many circuit diagrams of the workings of Rock-Ola, Seeburg and Wurlitzer Juke boxes; A.C.E., Carfield, Maygay etc Fruit machines and Williams, Bally and Gottlieb Pin-tables.

Gordon had been working hard finding new sites for Nottm Fruit Machines, it was now quite a thriving business, and loyalty to our own sites was paramount. I found it impossible to give good service to *our* customers if I was in Peterborough, Skegness or Burton on Trent, so in March 1973, I left Naylor’s, handing back my company car.

In April 1973, Maureen presented us with our first son, Christian James.

Three years later, in the summer of the hottest year on record, Jason Alan was born.

N.F.M.co. were now manufacturing our own design machines and with my nephew's help, business in '76 was looking good.

The government started making it tough for the small operators of gaming machines around 1978 and it looked like we could soon be out of business, so I diversified into mending appliances:- Cookers, Washing machines etc. and installing showers and doing the odd rewire or two. "Claremont Electrical" was up and running.

Dec. 1980, I cried when John Lennon was assassinated. I never personally knew the man but we shared the same date of birth, albeit three years apart, and both had a passion for music. N.F.M. finished the same year.

By 1982 I was sub-contracting to 4 small Building firms, 3 Plumbing / heating firms and also working for my private clients.

In 1983 our daughter Emily Teresa was born 4 days before my 40th birthday. Our family was now complete, and as true to the saying, for us "Life had just begun".

I received a telephone call, in Dec 1989, from someone I had not seen for twenty-odd years. Bryan, with Geoff on the extension, was asking me if I would be interested in singing, for just one gig, to raise money for their local church, sometime the following March. They were trying to form a group for the "one-night-stand" and immediately thought of me. (*is history repeating itself?*) However, I had no hesitation in accepting. So on a cold January evening in 1990, I drove to a school in Woodborough and met the Wilkinson pair, plus Geoff Ellis, who was to play Lead Guitar, Richard Marsden, a keyboard player and Evan the drummer. *I was very nervous.* We discussed a total of twenty-odd songs that we were all familiar with and got down to some hard practising. Many rehearsals later we put on the show at St. Marks Church Hall in Woodthorpe..... It was well received.

The invites to do more shows were coming in quite fast, so to carry on, we had to have a name. **"REVIVAL" was born!**

We were shortly destined to acquire a new drummer, Allan Woolley, and a sound engineer, who also played rhythm and bass guitars and saxophone, Steve Potts.

My brother and I lost our mother in November of that year just 5 weeks short of her 88th Birthday. She and dad had celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in April. *I was very sad.* Dad gave in to loneliness and died in June 1994, his 94th year but our blackest day was in March the year later, when our son, Christian, had an accident whilst working in London, and after spending ten days in intensive care in the Royal London Hospital, lost his battle for life and passed away on Mothering Sunday. Maureen never left his side. He was laid to rest on April 3rd, the day before our 25th Wedding anniversary and 24 days before celebrating his 22nd Birthday.

With the love and support from Jason and Emily, and the help that belonging to Revival has been, Maureen and I have managed to struggle through these last few years.

We now find ourselves at the dawn of a new Millennium.

Next year, Revival will probably say "that we play some of the best music from the last thousand years". We do! As far as I am concerned, the music from my youth, the 50s and 60s, was, and still is, the greatest.

I am convinced that my generation had the best years. We were there at the birth of Rock and Roll, 45rpm Single records, the Beatles, the Stones, we watched man first set foot on the moon, television became popular, we watched Cassius Clay become Muhammad Ali, (*the greatest boxer ever?*), motor cars became affordable, crime was low and a pint of bitter only cost 1/6 [8p]. But then, I suppose each new generation will say that their time is the best, and, no doubt for them, it will be.

Looking back at the last half of the final century, of the 2nd Millennium, many of my music heroes are sadly no longer with us. Gone are Elvis, Gene Vincent, Buddy, Eddie Cochran, Sam Cooke, Ricky Nelson, Marty Robbins, Bobby Darin, Roy Orbison, Billy Fury, Del Shannon, John Lennon, Freddie Mercury etc. and I am sure that You, dear reader, can add your own personal favourites to an ever growing list.

I am certain that whatever happens to music in the future, Rock and Roll will have a place and **Though our heroes have gone their songs will live on.....**

(Hey, what a great line for a song.....must get to work!!!see ya around!

Thanks for being in my life,

Ken.

Excerpts from "A Child of Bulwell"
by J.K.Pritchett. 1999