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## **Keepin' the Faith – a Northern Soul reminiscence resource**

A presentation at YOHELLNet in York, 13/06/2024.

### **Introduction**

As an NHS library fortunate enough to offer a Health Promotion (HP) service, we support both statutory and non-statutory services across the wider Bradford District. So, as well as healthcare professionals and public health employees, the HP service is accessed by schools, colleges, advocacy groups, carers and many other community-based health initiatives. Each year there is increasing demand for HP resources to support reminiscence activities - mainly used by those caring for people with dementia (PwD) or others for whom accessing long-term memory is challenging: the latter might include older adults with depression or mild cognitive impairment (MCI). Reminiscence activities, delivered either in groups or one-to-one, can help PwD to access long-term memory, enhancing socialisation, increasing engagement and communication, thereby supporting wellbeing. The library's borrowable reminiscence resources come in a variety of forms; e.g. our eight Memory Boxes (each multi-item box linked to a specific theme) have been created by library staff via public donations and purchases from charity shops and car boot sales. There are also 'off the peg' resources such as large format 'accessible' jigsaws, games and printed materials. In creating our own resources, we are guided by family carers, nurses and occupational therapists.

### **New library resources**

Initiatives to raise awareness of early signs of dementia and MCI, especially via screening services, have contributed to the increased identification of PwD, particularly those with early-onset conditions, affecting people of working age. Therefore, we are refreshing our reminiscence collection, looking to create resources from more recent decades, e.g. focusing more on 1970s-90s (*less Vera Lynne more Jeff Lynne! I'll get me coat...*). In addition, we want more resources specifically

about *Bradford*. Thus far, with fantastic support from Bradford City AFC (football club), we have created a new *Bradford City reminiscence resource*, which comprises a large selection of original football programmes and official team photographs from yesteryear; related items such as branded merchandise will be added later.

In addition, and working with our graduate trainee Ethan Crabtree, we have developed a reminiscence resource about *Bradford's Northern Soul movement*. See Ethan's recent *Northern Lights* post.

### **Northern Soul reminiscence**

Since the 1970s there has been a huge Northern Soul fanbase in Bradford. Perhaps overshadowed in public consciousness by venues such as Wigan Casino and Blackpool's Mecca Ballroom, many thousands of young people in Bradford, Halifax, Leeds and Burnley 'kept the Northern Soul faith'.

Our new Northern Soul reminiscence resource is a folder decorated with iconic record labels such as Tamla Motown, Ric Tic and VIP (the idea is to replicate the 'multiple badge vibe' of original bags and jackets). Inside, there are large-format photos of places and people, and a 'word bingo' game (everyone is a winner) in which all words relate to venues, singers, song titles, etc.; the words have been chosen to be recognisable and synonymous with Northern Soul.

We are also offering a generic or bespoke playlist. The songs can be emailed to library service users (often carers of PwD) to complement the images and other materials in the folder. Bespoke playlists can be collated as specified or based on an era/year and/or venue – much of the music only received airtime via the DJs in dancehalls and clubs, i.e. it wasn't heard on mainstream radio or in the charts. As such, there were many tracks which were venue specific. We hope to build an archive of material on this topic, with guidance from several local Northern Soul aficionados (props, good people).

## So, keepin' the faith...

So why is *Bradford's* Northern Soul scene so useful for reminiscence? Firstly, the Bradford scene lives on, it never died. Secondly, notwithstanding the massive appeal of Wigan Casino (1973-1981) and Blackpool Mecca (closed 1979), Northern Soul was what you made of it, which is central to its enduring appeal. Highly idiosyncratic - being part of the scene offered a sense of belonging yet it was intensely personal. There was a huge variety of music - mainstream soul but 'less commercial' - singles were both contemporary imports and re-issues. Northern Soul eschewed so-called commercialism and record industry commoditisation, yet many dancefloor favourites were by artists with serious Motown pedigree. There was no specific 'look' or hairdo and no prescriptive dance style. The phrase '*you had to be there*' was never more appropriate. It was tribal, it was grassroots, it was working class - it was the antithesis of rock n' roll excess. So, whether it was Manchester or Morley or Sheffield or Bradford it was *theirs*. Bradford had many clubs and its own all-nighters at venues such as Queen's Hall (still extant).

Travelling to clubs was part of the Northern Soul experience, too. Coachloads travelled from Bradford to Wigan and Blackpool in the 70s. The same can be said for people from Leeds, Halifax and Burnley. In their holdalls most of the blokes had a bottle of Brut and a carton of talc...!! A pair of Clarks Polyveldt shoes and you could slide and spin the night away.

## Songs

*Do I Love You (Indeed, I do)* - Frank Wilson  
*There's a Ghost in My House* - R. Dean Taylor  
*Out on the Floor* - Dobie Gray  
*You Didn't Say a Word* - Yvonne Baker  
*The Night* - Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons  
*Needle in a Haystack* - The Velvettes

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