

THE ROUGH GUIDE TO
Pink Floyd

by
Toby Manning



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Introduction: Wish You Were Here?

If ever there was a band that resisted biography, it is Pink Floyd. They have sold over 200 million records, and their album sleeves are iconic and instantly recognisable. Yet the band can walk through the crowds at their own concerts unmolested and their solo records struggle to sell a fraction of the parent band's worst-sellers.

This anonymity, this enigma, has been, to an extent, deliberate. All the members of the Floyd are inclined to be reserved by nature – or rather, English, middle-class nurture. And lights, projections, props and inflatables have long eclipsed the band as performers at live shows. **Rick Wright** said in 1987, “A Pink Floyd show is not the individuals, it's the music and lights”. Indeed, enormous cheers greeted non-member Snowy White as the first musician on stage during the *Animals* tour, while the Surrogate Band of session musicians that opened the *Wall* shows put this confusion at Pink Floyd's conceptual centre.

Then there's the fact that, until the 1986 split between the band's guitarist since 1968, **David Gilmour**, and its bassist, **Roger Waters**, Pink Floyd gave few interviews. “We don't really need the music press and it doesn't need us,” a politely bored Gilmour told the *NME* in 1973. Add to that their decision to absent themselves from their own album sleeves: their 1967 debut, *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn* and 1969's *Ummagumma* are the only albums

to feature the band on their front cover, and even then, the photographer on the former, Vic Singh, described them as “there, but not there”, while the latter deliberately confuses the eye as to which member is which. When *Dark Side Of The Moon* appeared, Pink Floyd featured only on the poster included with the album; from *Wish You Were Here* onwards they might as well have not existed. Indeed, drummer **Nick Mason** and keyboardist **Rick Wright** weren't even mentioned anywhere on 1979's *The Wall* package, while Wright's sacking before *The Final Cut* wasn't even perceived as worth mentioning to the public. There but not there. Wish you were here.

But in these attempts to counter the cult of personality that had such a negative impact upon original leader **Syd Barrett**, Pink Floyd have been almost *too* successful. After Barrett was replaced by **Dave Gilmour** with barely a commercial ripple, manager **Peter Jenner** said, “Dave could play better Syd guitar than Syd”. Then history repeated itself when the Floyd reconvened in 1986 without Roger Waters.

Introduction

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgements for quotes used herein to all the books, films, programmes and websites either mentioned in the main text or listed in the Books and Websites section, plus the following sources (with apologies to anybody inadvertently omitted): *Days In The Life: Voices From The English Underground 1961–1971*, edited by Jonathon Green (Heinemann), Ian McDonald's *Revolution In The Head: The Beatles' Records And The Sixties* (Pimlico), *Q*, *Word*, *Mojo*, *Uncut*, *Rolling Stone*, *Penthouse*, and *The Amazing Pudding* (Floyd fanzine). The book also draws upon the author's interviews with Peter Mew, Barbet Schroeder, Alan Parsons, Nick Mason, John Leckie, Andrew King, Ron Geesin, Gerald Scarfe, Andrew Bown, Mike Butcher, Mike Leonard, Nigel Gordon, Roger Quesada, John "Hoppy" Hopkins and Bob Ezrin.

About the author

Toby Manning grew up in North Wales and Manchester, before regressing to adolescence in London. He has written for *Q*, *NME*, *The New Statesman*, *Arena*, *The Guardian*, *Select* and *The Word*.

Part 1:

The Story

The Early Years

Cambridge beginnings

Middle-class has never been a very rock'n'roll thing to be. Despite the fact that Britain's art-school bohemian nexus has been rock's crucible since the 1950s, rock's rebels like to present themselves as working-class heroes, even when their street credentials don't withstand much scrutiny (John Lennon, Joe Strummer, Pete Doherty). Musicians that are unabashedly middle class, meanwhile (Coldplay, Keane, Pink Floyd), tend to be sneered at by rock's gutter-snipers as somehow inauthentic.

In the case of **Pink Floyd**, their middle-class background isn't just an incidental biographical fact, it's integral to their music. It's not just that the Floyd sang for much of their career in pronounced Home Counties accents, or that they have a propensity for artsy, highfalutin concepts ("Pink Floyd has always been the thinking man's rock'n'roll," says *Dark Side Of The Moon* engineer Alan Parsons). Pink Floyd's middle classness informs their music through the genteel glide that typifies their sound (there are barely ten rockers in the entire Floyd canon) and their glacial delivery, both of which are coolly, infinitely removed from the dirt-and-rattle, Sturm-und-Drang end of rock'n'roll.

Indeed, when rock'n'roll exploded in the five

future Floyds' 1950s teenage years, it must have seemed a long, long way from leafy Cambridge to Memphis, from their conformist prep and grammar schools to gritty Sun Studios. And yet these typically middle-class boys felt rock's call as loudly as anyone of their generation. In the sixties they came to epitomize society's changing attitudes, and they went on to become five of rock's most famous exponents.

It may not exactly *rock*, but Pink Floyd's is a music of unique power: comforting yet challenging, laid-back yet thoughtful and – in the darker Roger Waters years – a music with plenty of danger too. But it is music whose essence is perhaps that English reserve, that enduring sense of mystery – one that has sparked the imaginations of several generations.

Roger Waters

George Roger Waters was not actually a native of Cambridge, but was born in Great Bookham,

Surrey, on September 6, 1943. Waters was the youngest of two boys. His father, Eric Fletcher

The Story

Waters, a PE and RE teacher (and, in the early years of World War II, a conscientious objector), was killed during the ill-conceived Allied attack on the beachhead of Anzio, Italy, in January 1944. He was 30; Roger was barely four months old. This biographical fact would assume enormous importance in the work of Pink Floyd, influencing *Dark Side Of The Moon* and *The Wall* while utterly dominating *The Final Cut*. As he recalled in both “When The Tigers Broke Free” and the film of *The Wall*, the young Waters was traumatized after he stumbled across his father’s uniform and a standard letter of condolence from **King George VI** in a drawer.

After her husband’s death Mary Waters moved to Cambridge with her sons, of whom she was fiercely protective in her widowhood – as Waters’ song “Mother” attests. She was Scottish (the source of the comic Scottish accent Waters employed on *Ummagumma* and *The Wall*) and believed passionately in the left-wing spirit of the postwar dream in which, having lost so much, she had so much hope invested – political convictions that were to influence her son profoundly.

Waters passed his eleven-plus exam and went to nearby Cambridge County High School for Boys, where he excelled at rugby but not much else. Neither *The Wall*’s “The Happiest Days Of Our Lives” nor “Another Brick In The Wall Part II” present a particularly rosy view of schooldays. Waters later said of his teachers: “Some were just incredibly bad ... just trying to keep [the children] quiet and still, and crush them into the right shape, so that they would go to university and ‘do well.’”

Despite his later reputation as a rock intellectual, Waters was never much of a scholar. “As a child I never got into the habit of reading. I find it very difficult to read,” he has admitted. When he was 13, Waters would lie in bed at night at Rock Road, listening to American Forces Network radio and pirate station Radio Luxembourg, the main source for rock’n’roll in the mid-1950s. Via the station’s star DJs – Jimmy Saville, Jimmy Young and Alan Freeman – he absorbed the music of **Bill Haley** and his British counterparts **Tommy Steele** and **Billy Fury**, and, in time, **Elvis Presley**. The experience would feed into the storyline of Waters’ 1987 solo album *Radio K.A.O.S.* Although there were no musical influences from within his family, Waters remembers listening to Gilbert and Sullivan’s operettas (see *The Wall*’s “The Trial”) and to balladeer Frankie Laine (also audible in Waters’ work), as well as trad jazz (which isn’t). At 14 he was given a Spanish guitar by his mother and although he took a few lessons, by his own admission he never pushed himself to practice (a lifelong attitude), only really gaining interest in playing music in his late teens with the advent of **The Beatles** and **The Rolling Stones**.

In later years Waters was anti-militarist and anti-authoritarian, but as a youth he served as a naval cadet-spending weekends at HMS Ganges, a cadet-training base in Suffolk, and attaining the rank of Leading Seaman. He has never been a pacifist and he has a lifelong fondness for bloodsports. “I liked guns ... I used to shoot for the school,

Floyd's Cambridge

Cambridge appears the consummate middle-class town – leafy, largely white-collar, and centred upon one of the country's oldest and most prestigious universities. Pink Floyd have maintained a lifelong connection with Cambridge, where their three leaders – **Syd Barrett**, **Roger Waters** and **David Gilmour** – all grew up. Even Londoner **Rick Wright** bought himself a country pile near Cambridge with his *Dark Side Of The Moon* millions. Cambridge's ancient university makes for a dominant student population that contributes to the town's aura of comfortable bohemia. Crucially, compared with larger or more industrial conurbations, Cambridge remains close to nature. The leafy river Cam runs through it, the unspoilt Grantchester Meadows is a short punt-ride away, and the inhospitable marshland of the fens is nearby.

The Floyd remained Cambridge boys long after they became part of the hip London underground or even after joining the international jet set. Most of their cohorts came from Cambridge: **Storm Thorgerson**, their future designer and the director of several 1990s Floyd concert films, was at school with Barrett and would later utilise a Cambridge scene on the cover of Floyd's *Division Bell* album; **Aubrey "Po" Powell**, Thorgerson's partner at the design company Hipgnosis; future second guitarist **Tim Renwick**, who was also at school with Barrett; roadie **Alan Stiles** (of "Alan's Psychedelic Breakfast" fame); *Dark Side Of The Moon* sax-man **Dick Parry**; and scenester **Ian Moore** (Emo), who would be employed by David Gilmour as caretaker for decades. "Most of our friends are people we've known from before the time when we were successful," Gilmour has said.

Many of Syd Barrett's songs referred back to Cambridge. "Arnold Layne", for example, concerns a local sixties underwear thief and "Flamingo", "Scarecrow" and "The Gnome" hark back to more innocent days frolicking in Grantchester Meadows. Barrett himself long ago returned to Cambridge, never to leave again; Waters and Gilmour have carried their Cambridge heritage with them to London, Hampshire, Greece, New York and beyond. The town's influence is most notable in Pink Floyd's post-Barrett pastoral songs such as "Grantchester Meadows", "Cirrus Minor" or "Fat Old Sun" (all of which relate directly to Cambridge) and the later, more edgy wartime pastorate of "Goodbye Blue Sky". Apparently, for Waters, the lines in "Brain Damage" about the lunatic on the grass refer to Syd Barrett and the lawn behind King's College Chapel, while Gilmour's lyric for 1994's "High Hopes" – at the time of writing, the last song created by Pink Floyd – again recalls the fenland scenes of his youth.

Pink Floyd's Cambridge comes wreathed in a hazy nostalgia. Stories about their early Cambridge years are vague, incomplete and often contradictory. Obviously, these events took place a long time ago, and although a surprising number of the Floyd's clique are alive today (by comparison with, say, the **Rolling Stones'** circle), the communal laboratory of drug experimentation of the 1960s has fuzzed a few memories – if not eradicated them altogether. All this, combined with a veneration of childhood typical of the acid generation, makes Pink Floyd's Cambridge something rather magical: an arcadia of music, games, picnics by the Cam and lazily strummed acoustic guitars ... there but not there. Wish you were here.

What Roger did on his year off

During his year off in 1962, Roger Waters hitchhiked across Europe and into the Middle East. This, he has since claimed, was a formative experience for him, and formed the basis for a 2003 song, "Leaving Beirut" (released only on the Internet). Invited to stay with strangers – a one-legged man and his hunch-backed wife – the young Waters was given the only

bed they had. "They were unbelievably hospitable," he has said. "It's only through those chance encounters that we are truly able to live even momentarily in the skin of another human being, by something so shocking happening as somebody being that poor, that deformed, and that kind. It's those moments that shape our lives."

small-bore shooting ... I think there's something in me that makes me want to kind of dominate people anyway..." He was considered haughty and overbearing by his peers, as he would be throughout his life, and, after becoming intolerably rebellious and truculent, was eventually given a dishonourable discharge.

Upon leaving school in summer 1961 (the only sixth-former not to become a prefect), Waters attended Manchester University to study mechanical engineering. Unenthused, he took a year out, becoming chairman of CND's local youth group in Cambridge in

1962. An acquaintance of his, Roger Barrett (another alumnus of Cambridge County High School for Boys), was by this time playing guitar with singer **Geoff Mott** (apparently not his real name), a gangling youth some years senior to Barrett who had a rebellious reputation as a result of having been expelled from school. Waters regularly attended the **Mottoes'** practices and gigs, even organising one – a CND benefit at the Friends Meeting House on March 11, 1962. Although Waters claims to have played with the band at other times, there is actually no evidence he did.

Syd Barrett

Roger Keith Barrett was born on January 6, 1946 at 60 Glisson Road, Cambridge, the third child of five. His father, Dr Arthur Max Barrett, was a police pathologist and a medical expert on cot death. Max was a music lover, a member of the Philharmonic Society and the proud owner of a grand piano, so there was always music in the house when Roger was growing up, and

the family often indulged in singsongs around the piano. Dr Barrett was also artistic, enjoying watercolour painting, and was something of a naturalist, who wrote several books on fungi. According to Barrett's Cambridge friend **Nigel Gordon**, Max Barrett also suffered from bouts of mental illness. Barrett's mother, Winifred Flack, was a hospital catering manageress five

years her husband's senior. The pair met – family legend had it – atop a haystack on a hot summer's day in the Essex countryside in 1930.

In 1951, when Roger was four, the family moved to 183 Hills Road, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge. By all accounts, Roger was a sunny and good-natured child but was prone to tantrums. His sister Rosemary was his closest companion. “You never knew what he was going to

do next,” she later said, citing him getting lost on Snowdon on a family holiday to North Wales. Roger Waters' mother taught Roger Barrett at Morley Memorial Junior School. He learned piano from the age of eight and, with Rosemary, won a school piano duet competition, although he gave up the piano soon afterwards. Inspired by his older brother, Alan, who was in a skiffle group, he took up the ukulele and, at the age of

The Pinks and the Blues

The blues – the stark, simply crafted music of poor black Americans, with its distinct harmonic vocabulary of flattened fifth and seventh notes (“blue notes”) – underlay the youth revolution that swept Britain and America during the mid to late 1950s and caught the young Floyds up in its wake. From blues evolved first the more driving, uptempo rhythm'n'blues (acts such as **The Coasters**, **Etta James** and **Fats Domino**), which in turn evolved into both soul and rock'n'roll. As such it underpinned the British beat boom spearheaded by The Beatles.

Another crucial ingredient in the beat boom was the advent of skiffle (**The Beatles** began as a skiffle act), an uptempo blues-folk hybrid whose British popularity was concurrent with the mid-fifties advent of rock'n'roll. Played largely on home-made instruments such as broom-handle bass and washboard, skiffle democratized music and – unlike, say, trad jazz, which demanded a high degree of technical expertise – suggested to British teenagers that musicianship was within their grasp.

Pink Floyd mainly encountered the blues via the rock'n'roll that coincided with their teens (Nick Mason reports that **Elvis's** 1956 singles compilation was the first album purchase of “at least

three members” of the band) and by way of the hits of R&B/rock'n'roll hybrids such as **Bo Diddley**, the British skiffle boom and, in time, **The Rolling Stones**. Although Pink Floyd were, of course, named after two Delta bluesmen, **Pink Anderson** and **Floyd Council**, it's hard not to suspect that the young proto-Floyds were not quite the pure blues enthusiasts they later made out. And the Floyd were considerably less blues-based than their American psychedelic contemporaries Grateful Dead or Big Brother and the Holding Company – or even Jefferson Airplane or The Byrds.

Nevertheless, Pink Floyd's patented slide guitar sound has its origins in blues, as does the open tunings Barrett – and Gilmour – would use. Barrett's solo work would often revert to blues (“Terrapin”; “Maisie”; “Bob Dylan's Blues”), as did the post-Barrett Floyd (“More Blues”; the jam in ; the improvised blues they used to end their seventies sets with; and “Young Lust”). Waters claims “the blues is at the root of everything” he does, and that it is what he most enjoys playing, something which would enable him to bond with the similarly blues-orientated **Eric Clapton** during the latter's tenure in Waters' band in 1985.

The Story

eleven, his parents bought him a banjo.

The young Barrett performed unremarkably at school outside his art classes, although he managed to pass the eleven-plus exam, which secured him a place at the grammar school on his street – Cambridge High School for Boys – in the same year as Storm Thorgerson and two years below Roger Waters. Barrett continued to take little interest in schoolwork, however, and was regarded as rebellious by his teachers. Much like Waters with his incongruous cadet career, Barrett did a stint as a boy-scout patrol leader, with future Floyd stunt guitarist **Tim Renwick** as one of his charges.

Finally, when he was 14, Roger's mother bought him his first guitar – an acoustic, with which he would play along to **The Shadows** and **Buddy Holly** records. A year later Barrett bought his first electric guitar and built his own amplifier in the DIY skiffle spirit. Popular with girls for his good looks and wit, he was going out with one **Libby Gausden**, a relationship that would continue intermittently for several years. But in 1961, when Roger was 16 and in his final year of school, Max Barrett died of cancer, aged 52. "His father's death affected Roger a lot," said Rosemary. "They had a sort of unique closeness." In the diary Roger kept, the entry for December 11 was left blank.

Afterwards, Mrs Barrett addressed their now

more straitened circumstances by taking in lodgers, but also encouraged her youngest son's musical activities to distract him from his grief. Barrett began to host ad hoc musical assemblies of friends in the house basement. An aspirant bohemian, Barrett began to take an interest in both blues (Lightnin' Hopkins and Snooks Eaglin were popular with his Cambridge crowd) and beatnik-favoured jazz, and began frequenting the El Patio café and the Riverside Jazz Club in the Anchor Coffee Bar where existential trendies hung out. An ancient drummer (some sources say bassist) named Sid Barrett was a regular player there, and the name stuck to the younger Barrett. Nigel Gordon recalled that "he was a very cheerful boy", with "an Ariel sort of quality – a child-like innocence." From the basement jams, the newly re-monikered Syd formed Geoff Mott and the Mottoes in spring 1962, with Barrett on guitar, performing numbers by **The Shadows** and **Chuck Berry**. Roger Waters was an occasional visitor to these sessions, speeding up Hills Road haughtily on his new motorbike. Shortly after the CND gig in March 1962, the Mottoes split when Geoff Mott joined the **Boston Crabs**, who eventually became the first of a burst of Cambridge beat groups to gain a record contract (their version of the **Lovin' Spoonful's** "You Didn't Have To Be So Nice" gained some radio play in 1965).

David Gilmour

David Gilmour was born on March 6, 1946 – exactly two months after Barrett – in Grantchester Meadows, a well-to-do suburb on

the River Cam. His father, Doug Gilmour, was a professor of genetics; his mother, Sylvia, was a schoolteacher who later became a film editor.

Pink Floyd tributes

Tribute bands

This most anonymous-looking of bands was always going to be one of the ripest for tribute-dom. Hell, Pink Floyd even created their *own* tribute act! No, not the Gilmour Floyd, but the Surrogate Band, who opened the *Wall* shows in 1980–81.

But, in all seriousness, with both Gilmour and Waters casting around for replacements for each other for the last twenty years, punters have been paying top dollar to watch something not far from tribute Floyds since 1985. What's more, since 1995, with no version of the Floyd touring and only a scant few Waters shows, tribute bands have filled a Floydian void. Here's a select few of the hundreds riding the gravy train.

The Australian Pink Floyd

This act actually played at David Gilmour's fiftieth birthday party, being joined onstage by **Rick Wright** and **Guy Pratt** for "Comfortably Numb". Formed in 1988, they're the only world-touring Pink Floyd act. Their website features some amusing Aussie Floyd graphics.

The Surrogate Band

Michigan-based band cleverly taking their name from a lyric in "In The Flesh" and the name given to the fake Floyd who opened the *Wall* shows. Active since 2003.

Just Floyd

Formerly the more amusing **Pink Side Of The Moon**, this British Floyd aren't look-alikes, they just try and recreate the *nineties* Floyd sound. Yes. Really.

Wish You Were Here

Covering the whole era from Barrett to Gilmour, complete with female backing vocalists and ambitious light show, this Cleveland, Ohio, Floyd headlined Clear Channel's 2002 FakeFest tour. Get points for performing the whole of the usually ignored *Animals*.

Which One's Pink?

LA based; active since 1998; status indicated by **Alan Parsons** doing the live mix for their *Dark Side Of The Moon* performance in 2005; have since performed the whole of *The Wall*.

Think Floyd

British cover band which, er, covers all eras of the Floyd. Have done complete performances of *Wish You Were Here*. Confusingly, there's also a US tribute band with exactly the same

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