

NEGATIVE INSIGHT

To begin, I'd like to thank Steve for allowing us the opportunity to participate in this project. Ripping Thrash is a zine I have the ultimate respect for, as it embodies the best aspects of DIY punk culture. At the time I got into DIY punk, zines were still the predominant medium for learning about new bands, and the U.K. had a thriving and dedicated group of folks churning out high quality A5 (half sized in the US) zines. Hell and Damnation, 666 1/2, Attitude Problem, Gibbering Madness, Why, and of course Ripping Thrash itself, were just a few that I fondly recall poring over. Like so many other teenagers, zines were the gateway to an entire underground world that existed outside of my boring suburban town.

This interest in U.K. A5 zines led to discovering the rich tradition the United Kingdom scene had with this format going back years. In the 1980s, there was Problem Child, Skate Muties from the 5th Dimension, Be Bad, Be Glad, Raising Hell, Final Curtain, and so many more. These sporadic periodicals cozed personality, enthusiasm, and DIY righteousness. They also had the brilliant graphic design that epitomized the '80s: cut 'n paste layouts, typewriter text shrunk down to barely legible size, grainy photocopied photos, and the glorious inconsistency of Letraset transfer letters.

The following pages of Negative Insight are our way to pay homage to those great zines of the '80s. It is with that in mind that we have focused these pages on the "Scum" era of Napalm Death. It seems like nearly every issue of the zines back then had some coverage on Napalm Death, Ripcord, and/or Heresy, so it seems only appropriate to do the same here. I'm sure that some would argue that Napalm Death has been dissected and exposed to the point of over saturation, but Jim Whiteley's interview here represents one of the lesser told stories in the band's history. It contains a wealth of anecdotal information and interesting tidbits on the UKHC scene during that time period.

I took great pleasure in laying these pages out in the same A5 format as so many of my favorites, and I am humbled and appreciative to be featured along side such a great group of zines, some of which have inspired me going back years. Thanks for reading this,
-Erik SN

Photos by Nicolas Royles and used with permission.

Thanks to Max, Tom General Speech, Jim Whiteley, Nicolas Royles, and everyone who participated.

Next up is the "From Gluesticks to Glowsticks" issue focusing on the early '90s U.K. rave scene, featuring interviews with all your favorite ex-punks rolling on E. "My brain is on FIRE!"

NAPALM DEATH

JIM WHITELEY

Jim Whiteley's fingerprints and basslines are all over the U.K. hardcore scene; yet his name is not as well-known compared to many, as he instead chooses to mostly remain out of the limelight. His resume speaks for itself though having played in such bands as Ripcord, Doom, Filthkick, Cracked Cop Skulls and Squandered, as well as Dumbstruck, Cruelty and Warprayer in more recent years. He can currently be found playing bass in Extinction of Mankind, but he first cut his teeth as the bass player on the B side of Napalm Death's seminal "Scum" album. Notably reluctant to grant interviews, we were honored that Jim was willing to share his thoughts with us, and his replies go into vivid detail on his time in Napalm and the chaos that was the U.K. hardcore scene of the '80s.



POINT OF NO RETURN

NI: How did you first come into contact with Lee Dorian, Bill Steer, and Mick Harris?

JW: I knew Lee before the others; we met on an anti-vivisection rally in Oxford sometime in 1985 - he saw that I was wearing a (home-made) Icons of Filth t-shirt and a conversation was struck up as they were one of Lee's favourite bands. We henceforth used to meet at gigs and then inevitably go out socially on drinking binges for a period afterwards if our giro limitations held out (preloading Skol 1080 and QC sherry perhaps wasn't a good mix but it did the job, haha). Good times as I remember. Mick used to live a couple of miles from where I was living, but I didn't know him at all. In fact, the first memory of him was recognising this really young kid getting on the 35 bus going to a Stiff Little Fingers gig at Birmingham Odeon sometime early 1980. In the ensuing years, he'd get on the 35 if I was going out to sign on (get social sustenance money), but as I'm pretty antisocial and like to keep to myself then we probably didn't actually engage in any kind of conversation until the Mermaid started having regular

punk evenings sometime in late 1985. I'm certain I transpired that he liked obscure faster hardcore punk bands, so we had something in common at least. I didn't meet Bill until the ball was rolling for the "Scum" B side recording.

NI: Were you a fan of Napalm Death before joining?

JW: I was aware of them via their contribution to the Grass Records compilation LP "Bullshit Detector 2" and I had picked up an issue of Miles and Nik's zine Twisted Nerve via the Peace Centre which was a countercultural outlet in the centre of Birmingham, so I knew the name and that they were a locally-based entity. I didn't actually stumble across them playing live until sometime late 1985 at the Mermaid which was by then the Nik/Justin/Rat line-up. I liked what I heard as it happened, primitive Killing Joke rhythms and a darker, driven edge.

NI: Were previous members Nic Bullen, Justin Breadriak, or Miles Ratledge acquaintances or friends of yours at all?

JW: No, I didn't really frequent the places that they seemed to socialise in, and I had a different cluster of acquaintances.

NI: Do you remember how you came to join ND? Can you please recount the events that led to you being in the band?

JW: I was present in the studio when they were making the recording that eventually became the "Scum" A side. I think I was invited along as Nik needed to borrow the distortion pedals that I'd just gotten off Tony May. Plus I was familiar with the studio as I'd been present when Heresy had recorded their side of the split LP with Concrete Sex; I'd been writing to Kalv for years and buying hard to find foreign hardcore vinyl from him. So it transpired that there were tensions within the band. In fact Nik disappeared for a couple of hours during the session before tracking the vocals which, given that it was the middle of the night, seemed unhelpful, but things seemed to get back in the saddle once he'd had space to breathe, I summarised. Things had soured somewhat and some weeks



later on it became common knowledge that he'd quit the band. I guess Mick and Justin still wanted to carry things forward. They must have been clutching at straws, so somehow I got asked if I'd be the bass player, despite them both knowing that I'd only recently acquired a bass guitar and I wasn't exactly familiar with actually being able to 'play' it and had no money for amplification at all. I had to plug it into my music system via a 1/4-inch jack to 5 pin phono adapter, as that was the only way that I could make something audible occur. My friend Tony May had stepped down from Sacrilege and playing music, so eventually I bought most of his old gear over the course of several giros.

NI: What made you want to be an active participant in punk rather than just a fan?

JW: It just seemed an obvious aspiration and something that I felt that I 'had' to do despite being naturally shy and reserved. I hoped that, given time, my lack of experience or capability would somehow catch up with my naive enthusiasm and sense of purpose.

NI: How old were you at the time, and was this your first band?

JW: I was 22. Quite old I suppose but I'm sure had I actually not been a southpaw and had any form of disposable income during the early part of the 1980s then I'm certain I would have picked up a bass earlier (and even then with the notion "it's got two less strings than a guitar so it must be easier to play"). I'd wanted a bass since I left school in 1980, and I'd have had plenty of spare time to doss around trying to 'learn' it on account that I had no employment. Even so, left-handed guitars seemed elusive and that first bass that caught my eye after spying it in the window of a second-hand shop between Coventry railway station and one of Lee's Hand & Heart pub gigs required weeks of saving to secure the deposit and then more saving to pay it off... and that was only 95 pounds! I've still got it to this day. Yeah, Napalm was my first 'real' band insofar as being established outside of a rehearsal room or mental concept.

NI: What was it like joining the band after they were somewhat established?

JW: Quite nervy, well VERY nervy as it happened! My first live gig with them was supporting Amebix at the Hand & Heart. I hated it and felt overwhelmed and under-prepared, but somehow the rest of them didn't give me the elbow. Fuck knows why?!

NI: Were you excited to join a group that was already playing shows and had recorded demos?

JW: Not excited, more a feeling of dread actually, precisely because they'd got a small but rapidly expanding notoriety and I didn't want to restrict them by being a weak link. Again, I hoped I'd grow into it somehow...

NI: How popular was Napalm Death at the time you joined? Obviously "Scum" hadn't been released, but it seems like they were playing many shows...

JW: There seemed to be a buzz more on the tape-trading circuit than anything. Mick must have been writing to hundreds of people. If not, then it certainly was the impression I'd gotten. Bands like Heresy were spear-heading the UK hardcore effort further afield as they were touring and releasing material. I don't think that any of us felt

that anything of any magnitude was on the horizon at the time.

NI: Did you feel like an outsider in the band since you were joining after they'd been around for a while? Did all the members have an equal say, or was there a leader or 'owner'?

JW: I only felt like an outsider in terms of playing capability. I wasn't involved in the writing process, as it was quite enough for me merely to learn to play the songs. When we initially rehearsed as a three piece (Justin, Mick and I), we had limited rehearsal time available as we were all on the dole (receiving state handouts) and thus had very limited funds meaning that we primarily concentrated on getting the established songs honed. I seem to remember only one rehearsal with the three of us plus newly returned Nik actually writing new stuff, but Justin quit soon after to prioritise Head of David so nothing came of it.

"Preloading Skol"

1080 and QC Sherry



NI: I never knew Nik quit and came back. Was he just on vocals? Was the stuff written when Nik returned ever used? How long did he return for? I know you said it was one rehearsal with Justin/as a four piece, but how long in total?

JW: Yeah, he came back as solely the vocalist. We played two gigs at least, Leeds and Birmingham with Sacrilege in November 1986, but it was very short-lived. I can't actually remember 100% whether my first ND gig in Coventry was with Justin doing guitar/vocals or Nik... I'm guessing it must have been with Nik as we stayed at his parents' place after (only time I ever went there). I know a local girl was at the gig, she definitely has photos (never seen any others). I'll try to get scans as I wouldn't mind having them myself. At least it'll answer that question for sure; my memory has failed me there. Twenty-seven years later it's difficult to be precise, especially if I was drinking...

We did jam one or two new songs with Nik although none were ever recorded latterly (one was called "Greedfeeder" insofar as I remember) and musically the end riff of "M.A.D." was one that Justin wrote so we kept that.

NI: How did you come to be the one who wrote the lyrics on the side of "Scum", and what most inspired you lyrically?

JW: Simply because Mick was content with his perceived role as writing the music (which in actuality meant reinterpreting Repulsion songs).

I think he knew that he had limitations in terms of 'intelligent' or meaningful forms of lyrical creativity, and so I had the dubious honour of trying to write something other than death/zombies/death/decomposing corpses/death... Not that I ever produced anything other than artless diatribe and myopic bile, but I felt that if I was going to spout anything that it may as well be honest and relevant to my environment and world view of the time. Most of the words that accompanied that B side came from one or two trips round the 11a/11c Outer Circle. For those that live outside of Birmingham, there's a bus service that

operates around the A4040 ring road and until recently was widely renowned at the longest local municipal bus service in any European city. Because it runs on a circular as opposed to a start/finish route, it's possible to travel the 26 miles, 2+ hours duration from where you boarded back to that point without interruption - sometimes there's a shift change of drivers but that's about the only break in the journey. I'd spend a great deal of my unemployed hours sitting on the top deck of a bus not going anywhere in particular but getting me away from the dismal apartment that I lived in whilst not spending money. I had a cheap off-peak travelcard that was valid for a fortnight and I'd renew each time my fortnightly giro arrived. I think it was 5 pounds each time, bargain!

NI: How many people would be at a typical ND show when you were in the band? What were your favorite bands to play with?

JW: Pretty much the usual 50 to 100 that's standard for UK gigs anywhere even to this day. I was happy playing gigs with any band, no real preferences, just enjoy the moment.

NI: Did you play any shows outside of the UK during your time in the band? How was the reaction?

JW: We undertook a European tour with Ripcord during mid-1987 just as both bands' debut LP records were made available. I found the reaction generally a lot more encouraging and lively than what was usual on home turf, plus the organisational structure was leagues ahead of our domestic arrangements. On mainland Europe, they had a network of active, likeminded people that would go the extra mile in terms of not only arranging a date and venue, but also take care of other luxuries like food, beer, sleeping accommodation and money to put in the tank to get us to the next gig. In the UK, you were lucky to get mild applause and enough money for a bag of chips. Things are thankfully somewhat more developed now in the UK...

NI: By 1986, bands like Heresy, Sacrilege, Extreme Noise Terror, and more were pushing the speed and heaviness of hardcore punk. As Napalm Death were pushing



those boundaries as well, did you feel any competition with the other bands?

JW: I didn't really detect any 'competition' as such; we were all pretty much punk ghetto underdogs and whilst the music was important, I think there was more of a common cause of us pursuing our own identities but under a mutually understood collective framework which was the DIY principle, left-of-centre politics, vegetarianism and associated fundamentals. I don't think any of the aforementioned bands saw anything like the influence and resonance that would lay in their wake all these years later and on different continents amongst folks that weren't even born when all of this was happening. It blows my mind that it's revered as much as it is.

NI: I've read that you were also in a band with Shane Embury and Andy Whale (Bolt Thrower) called Drop Dead. Can you please talk about this project, what year it happened, the sound of it, and why it ended?

JW: Drop Dead was just a short-lived project that maybe lasted two or three rehearsals only probably around July/August 1986.

Whale drummed, Shane played guitar, Harris yelled and I tried to work out how to turn the bass amplifier on. Just basic hardcore punk, maybe a little like early Poison Idea (though not as good obviously). I seem to remember one song - "Mass Mutilation" - being essentially the Varukers' "Led to the Slaughter" in all but name, otherwise I don't actually remember too much about it. I'm guessing it fizzled out because the individual members prioritised other stuff. I don't remember if Andy Whale had joined Bolt Thrower at that time; Shane was doing Warhammer and Unseen Terror and Harris was obviously in ND.

NI: Were you at all involved in getting Shane in Napalm Death?

JW: No, not at all. In fact I'm sure Mick and Justin had approached him before I was asked. I guess I was responsible for Andy Whale joining Bolt Thrower though if I'm to go down the name-dropping route, haha...

NI: How'd you get Andy in Bolt Thrower? I did an interview with Tony May some years ago and he mentioned he was offered a position in Bolt Thrower after he left Sacrilege that he turned down.

JW: Well, as I mentioned, I'd go on the piss with Lee fairly often in Coventry (it's less than 20 miles from Birmingham, and I could use that magic off-peak bus pass to get there). Most of the Coventry punks would frequent one particular pub... Baz Thomson was a regular, and I'm sure that he was trying to start a band but was struggling for a drummer and I suggested Whale as he wasn't doing anything. I'd known him since 1982, although I've not seen him for around 20 years now I'd guess. I'm sure he moved to Manchester or something? I'm pretty much out of the loop with my Birmingham past. Most have 'moved on' and I burn bridges quite easily...



I'm perhaps too often quoted as saying the best two things ever to come out of Birmingham are Black Sabbath and the M5 motorway. Yeah, it's strange how things pan out; the day after I'd sent Baz (Ballam/Ripcord) the letter saying I'd go down to Weston to see if I fitted in with them I went round to Whale's place and he said "Oh, we were going to ask you." I'd never been in such demand, haha... I didn't know that they asked Tony, though it's not a surprise at all.

NI: What led to your departure from ND after only a few months in the band? Did you immediately join Ripcord upon leaving?

JW: Sharing the confines of the back of a hire van during the aforementioned European jaunt with no windows, summer heat and long journeys for hours on end inevitably amplifies the otherwise minor irritable quirks of someone's personality into monstrous realisation. Fair to say I found myself at odds with Mick's general demeanour during the whole adventure and realised that this kind of thing wasn't for me - I could only see further issues ahead, so I decided that better I step aside and let someone else do it. Once the tour was done, I honoured one last gig in London sometime in July 1986 (with Larm, Heibel and Heresy) and then walked. I got a letter through the post a few weeks later (August 1986 - hard to imagine the pre-internet world, isn't it?) from Baz saying that Steve had quit bass duties in Ripcord to go and live in Milwaukee and that they needed a bass player. I guessed that they must have been desperate seeing as I lived about 90 miles from them but I wasn't doing anything else. No job meant plenty of spare time. They were nice chaps --still are--and I liked what they were doing, so I immediately accepted.

NI: When "Scum" came out, what were your impressions of it as a finished product?

JW: I still say that the A side of the record is worth the price of admission. I was disappointed with the B side of the record to be honest and I still am. It was inferior to the recording on the other side on every level, but I just had to live with it.

NI: Were you at all surprised by the reception it received? How did you feel about its popularity?

JW: I expected John Peel to perhaps acknowledge it in a small way and maybe give it some token airplay over the national airwaves, but it seemed to develop a momentum that caught everyone by surprise. I started getting mail on a daily basis which felt odd, as I'd left the band by the time it all kicked off...

NI: Did you ever second guess

your decision to leave the band?

JW: No, I had no regrets, only relief. In hindsight, I regret being naive in the whole process of trusting people to do good deeds by good fortune. Perhaps if I'd have gone down the 'correct' path of copyrighting songs and all of that litigious bullshit then I would not feel slightly aggrieved that I was sold short in terms of getting any cut of the financial returns but you live and learn, eh? It's quite laughable how Earache keeps seeing fit to launch 'anniversary' editions of the record. I guess Digby must be desperate these days?

NI: Coming from a DIY punk background and continuing to play in DIY level bands through today, were you disappointed by the road Napalm Death took into the '90s and their commercialization and immersion into the metal scene?

JW: I moved away from Birmingham in 1990 and thus the little media coverage I came into contact with merely reinforced my hunch that in quitting then I'd done the right thing at the right time. I'm guessing that Digby (Earache) had seen which way the wind was blowing and saw where the gold was located.

NI: In 2004, you reunited with ND as a guest on the "Leaders Not Followers: Part 2" album on a cover of a Discharge song. How did this come about?

JW: Occasionally I'd go to Birmingham to gigs or to drink socially and maybe Shane or Jesse would roll up and we'd share a few drinks. And so when "LNF#2" was being sorted, I guess they thought it would be a fun idea to have some connection with their history in the same manner that the songs covered were a throw-back to times gone by. I was happy enough that Earache wasn't involved so why not?

NI: Do you know if they asked any other former members to appear on the release?

JW: I'm sure they'd asked Nik at some point too, but perhaps he viewed things differently?

NI: Was there ever any talk of guesting at live shows or doing additional recordings? Would you be open to it if asked to?

JW: I did turn up at a Bristol gig some years ago and perform the Discharge cover but that was

it. I still get on their guest list occasionally so it's good to catch up, but it's very unlikely I'd do anything again, certainly in terms of recording.

NI: What are your thoughts on ND today, and have you followed their music since you left?

JW: I'm pleased that they are able to sustain themselves by doing something that they enjoy doing and are still 'nice guys,' unfettered by the egotistical crap that seems to prevail with some of their contemporaries. I'd say that they're still representing a form of conscientious discourse in a largely indifferent musical environment. Actually it's funny, sometimes that whilst I'm listening to my personal DAB radio pounding the streets whilst doing my job (I'm a postal worker), it's not uncommon to hear Barney giving his spin on the morning current affairs discussion on BBC '5Live'. I'm sure 99.999% of the listenership don't get who "Mark from Birmingham" is, but it's good to know that he walks the walk in terms of his opinions and doesn't just pay lipservice to spokesperson in the 'socially aware band category' and leave his spiel on the tour bus until the next show. I'd be disingenuous if I said I'd listened to every record that they'd made in the last two decades, but really I'm quite indifferent to a lot of music these days. I think my attention span is perhaps even more limited.

NI: Thanks for sharing all that, Jim!