

Early Bohemian Encounters

1963. Winter. London. The Henekeys pub on Portobello Road. Saturday Evening. In those days Henekeys consisted of a conventional bar where drinks for the whole pub were served and a large back room with an equally large, rectangular table placed at its centre.



When you went into the back room, on a Friday or Saturday night, it was exceedingly noisy, something achieved without the help of live, or recorded, music. Seated around the table were a group of mainly men who seemed not only to be acquainted with one another but were also in some way similar. Many wore, what to me, were eccentric combinations of clothing. There was an absence of ties. Their hair was a long way away from the accepted male styles of the day. Many wore jewellery. (Rings and earrings.) There was a middle class quality to their speech whilst the ease of their gestures as they spoke to one another announced that they were all taking part in some sort of collective performance. Women too were present but they were unlike the mothers and sisters that an 18 year old would have been familiar with. They were definitely concerned with their dress but it was not a striving for chic, or a muted respectability. Their 'look' approximated to such characters as ballet dancers, Spanish gypsies and, most peculiar of all, American teenagers. As startling as these women were to a teenager, fresh from the provinces,

they took root in one's sub-conscious only to surface when, a few years later, one began to make serious choices as to a suitable mate.

To be seated at the table was clearly by invitation only so the rest of us were pressed against the walls of the back room with our drinks perched on very narrow shelves that ran along the walls. We were the audience.

It was only later that I learned that the 'Rectangular Table' was occupied by the artists and antique dealers who had workshops and studios close by.

At the weekend, there was an additional 'Ardizzone' moment. At closing time an elderly gent, dressed a bit like Chaplin, and called Uncle... would wait by the main door as the drinkers left. He had an old fashioned pram with a wind-up gramophone and a selection of records that he would play. Invariably, groups would form to sing along to his collection of popular favourites.