

Notes for Podcast 3

'Holyground' at 5 Cass Yard, Wakefield, A-Austr released 1970

Mike rented other rooms in shared houses before an opportunity to rent an unfurnished 'maisonette' came up. This was 5 Cass Yard, which was off Kirkgate, where the present Marsh Way roundabout is. It was cheap to rent because it was in poor condition with no modern amenities. It was above a shop that fronted onto Kirkgate with an entrance up a flight of stairs in the yard. On the first floor was a lounge, kitchen and bathroom, and up a further flight of stairs two large bedrooms. Furniture came from second hand shops, and was begged from buildings that were due to be demolished on the opposite side of Kirkgate. A piano had been left in the flat by a previous occupant.

Plans to make Holyground into a business continued, but Bob Hart moved away, so it was left to Mike and Dave Wood, with Dave primarily responsible for making new contacts with bands. Mike and Shirley got married in 1970, choosing 'Levon' as a new surname. The flat became an open house; the door into the yard was left open and friends would drift in and out, sometimes staying for longer times. The bedroom at the back was kitted out with polystyrene tiles for sound absorption, and shelves were added at the top of the stairs outside the bedroom to house the tape recorder and other equipment as a control room.

Mike and Dave offered bands and individuals recording sessions to be paid for by the hour, plus the cost of the tape, but the interest in writing and recording their own music continued, with Chris Coombs becoming more involved. An idea to make an album based round the Arthurian legends evolved, with the title of A-Austr - the first volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Mike and Dave also advertised in the local newspaper for a session guitarist, and Brian Calvert got in contact. Brian had played in a band locally, and had written his own songs, which he describes as 'pop'. Mike asked him to write music and arrange it for his lyrics, and the collaboration worked well, with Mike appreciating Brian's ability to interpret his words, and Brian appreciating the challenge of writing music to some of Mike's lyrics. It was also at this time that Bill Nelson became involved and added electric guitar to tracks such as Chris's 'Grail Search'.

Mike was experimenting with effects. He was bouncing tracks from one tape machine to another, and on 'Essex Queen' he reversed the tape so that it was playing backwards and also faded the music out and then brought it back up, claiming it was his idea before the Beatles used the same effects on 'Strawberry Fields'. Other sound effects were used by making DIY instruments, for instance using the strings on the piano with drawing pins in them. Sessions were sometimes partly planned, but often it was just whoever happened to be there jamming together.

More information: <https://holyground.co.uk/austr.html>

Please note that this information is about the CD which was released as part of 'The Works' series and may differ from the original vinyl release.



The original photo used for the cover of A-Austr, with Mike Levon on the left, Chris Coombs on the right, Bill Nelson in the background holding his Gibson guitar, Shirley Levon behind Mike Levon, Yvonne Carrodus behind Chris Coombs, Gail Carrodus and her friend Denise.
Photograph by Mike's brother Kevin O'Connor (later Young) 1970