

During the late 1960s the Queens Hall in Narberth, Pembrokeshire, gained an unlikely reputation amongst pop and rock music fans as a venue that attracted some of the biggest names in the business.

Now, a grant from the National Lottery means the hall will house a permanent exhibition to its rocking past using memorabilia and stories from the time, gathered by a group of volunteers.

From football social club to rock band royalty

What began as a fundraising initiative by two local men for their football team's social club, ended up with a stream of up and coming bands heading to West Wales to play at Narberth’s Queens Hall.

Richard Fanus was on the Narberth football club committee in the 1960s and 70s: “Narberth really was where it was at. Kids would descend on the town and the Queens Hall was packed out every time. The gigs made enough money for the committee to build a brand new football club.”

Amongst his favourite memories are when the Alan Price Set ended up drinking tea in another committee member’s front room after their gig, and when Freddie and the Dreamers arrived into Narberth ahead of schedule: “So they gave an extra early show for the boy scouts – the hall was packed with youngsters!

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“Another time Hot Chocolate was due to play on Boxing Day, 1969, but it was snowing heavily and we realised that they wouldn’t be able to get into town. We sent a message up to the Severn Bridge and they placed a hand-written sign on the bridge telling Hot Chocolate that the gig was cancelled. However, they didn’t see it and ended up driving into Narberth in their Cadillac through 12 inches of snow!”

Making teenage dreams come true

Musicians that later became household names - Elton John, Status Quo, Deep Purple, Dave Dee, Alan Price, the Mindbenders, Desmond Dekker, Hot Chocolate and Average White Band - all strutted their stuff on the Queens Hall stage to audiences of up to 1,000 people.

Check out some of the bands who played at Queen's Hall in Narberth.

Janet Mason recalls seeing pop band Amen Corner as a 14 year old at the Queen’s Hall: “It was simply amazing. The hall was packed; it was so hot that condensation was dripping off the ceiling. There were about 1,000 people in the hall – no health and safety then of course. We just couldn’t believe our luck that these bands which had been playing in London were playing here in Narberth!”

Over the next few years Janet took advantage of the roll call of rock bands that graced the Queens Hall stage, compiling a scrap book with tickets, flyers and autographs plus mementos such as Rick Parfitt’s guitar string.

One of her favourite memories is Ivor Badham from the football club committee popping into the accountants where she worked and asking which band she’d like to see play at the Queens Hall next: “I said Love Affair, and a few weeks later Ivor came over to see me and said he’d got them! I was so excited but when they came to Narberth I was ill in hospital and couldn’t get to see them. Ivor came to see me in hospital and gave me a picture with their autographs – I was thrilled.”