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# The Season of the Witch

Women, Parties and Pop Culture in 1960s St Ives

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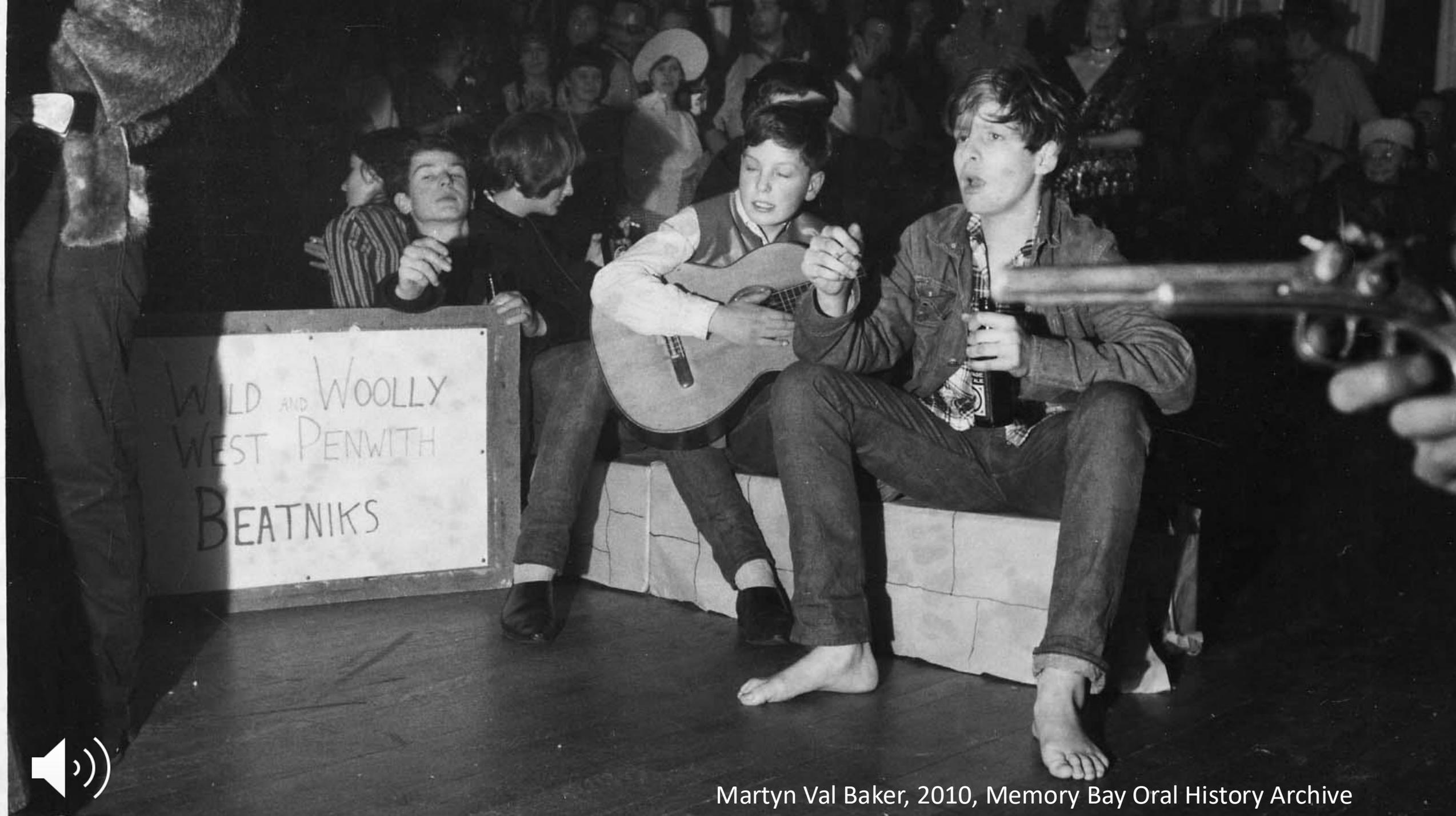
# Beatniks of St Ives

Clive Gunnell wanders around St Ives and ponders the Bohemian lifestyle of the beatniks.

News / 1963 / 2 mins / Silent

<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-beatniks-of-st-ives-1963-online>





Martyn Val Baker, 2010, Memory Bay Oral History Archive

**“bohemian community dominated by art,  
alcohol and sex”**

**Chris Stephens (1997)**

“But you knew that Cornwall had a reputation as an artists’ colony? Didn’t you?”

**“Tom, I’m much more ignorant than that I tell you! I came down to Cornwall because I thought it was very cheap...”**

“This is the reason that many artists heard...”

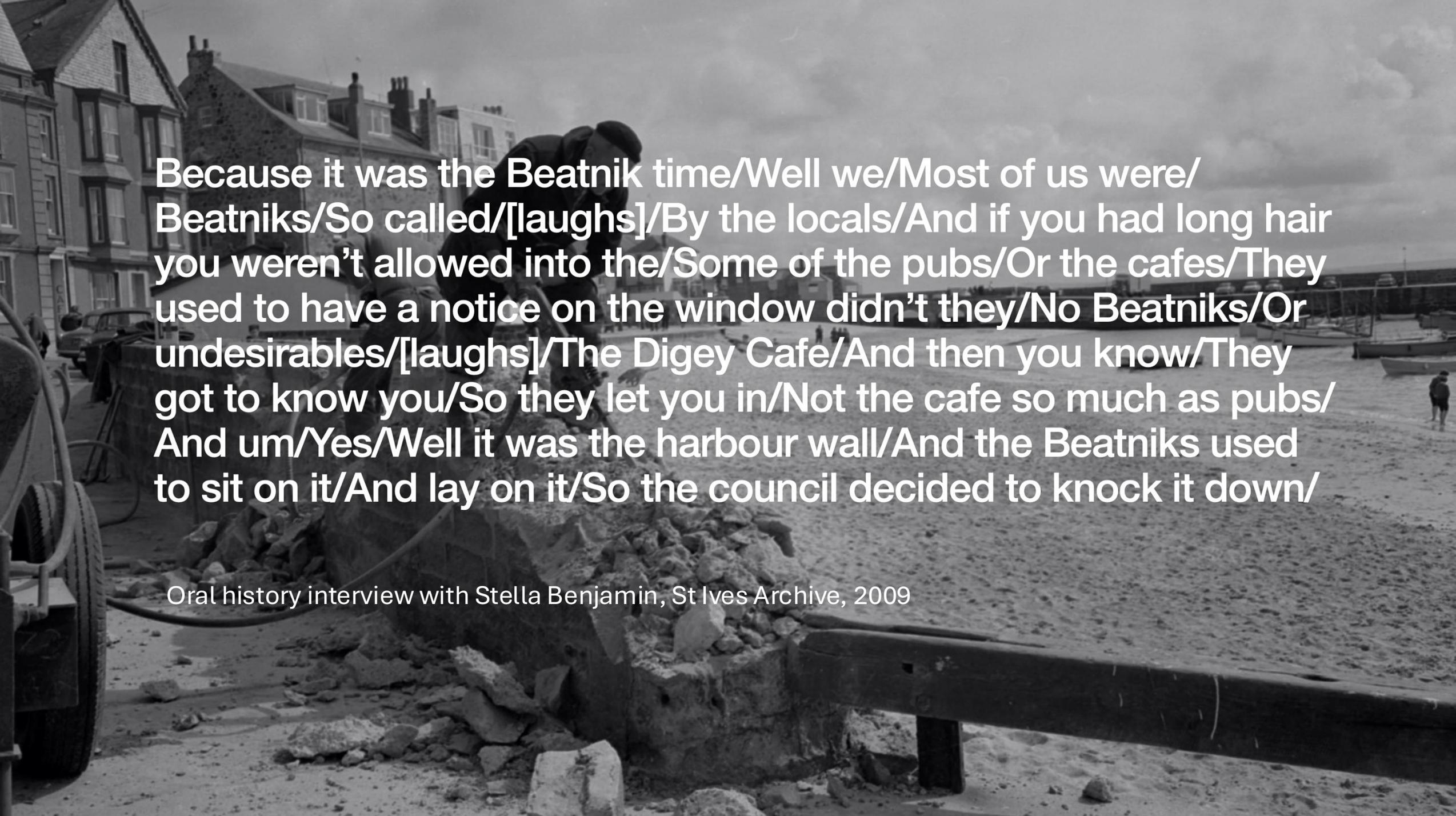
**“...and again it was romantic, it was full of wild women and wild parties.”**

**Tom Cross and Karl Weschke (1983)**

## Ives and the Beatniks: Giles gives the bare facts

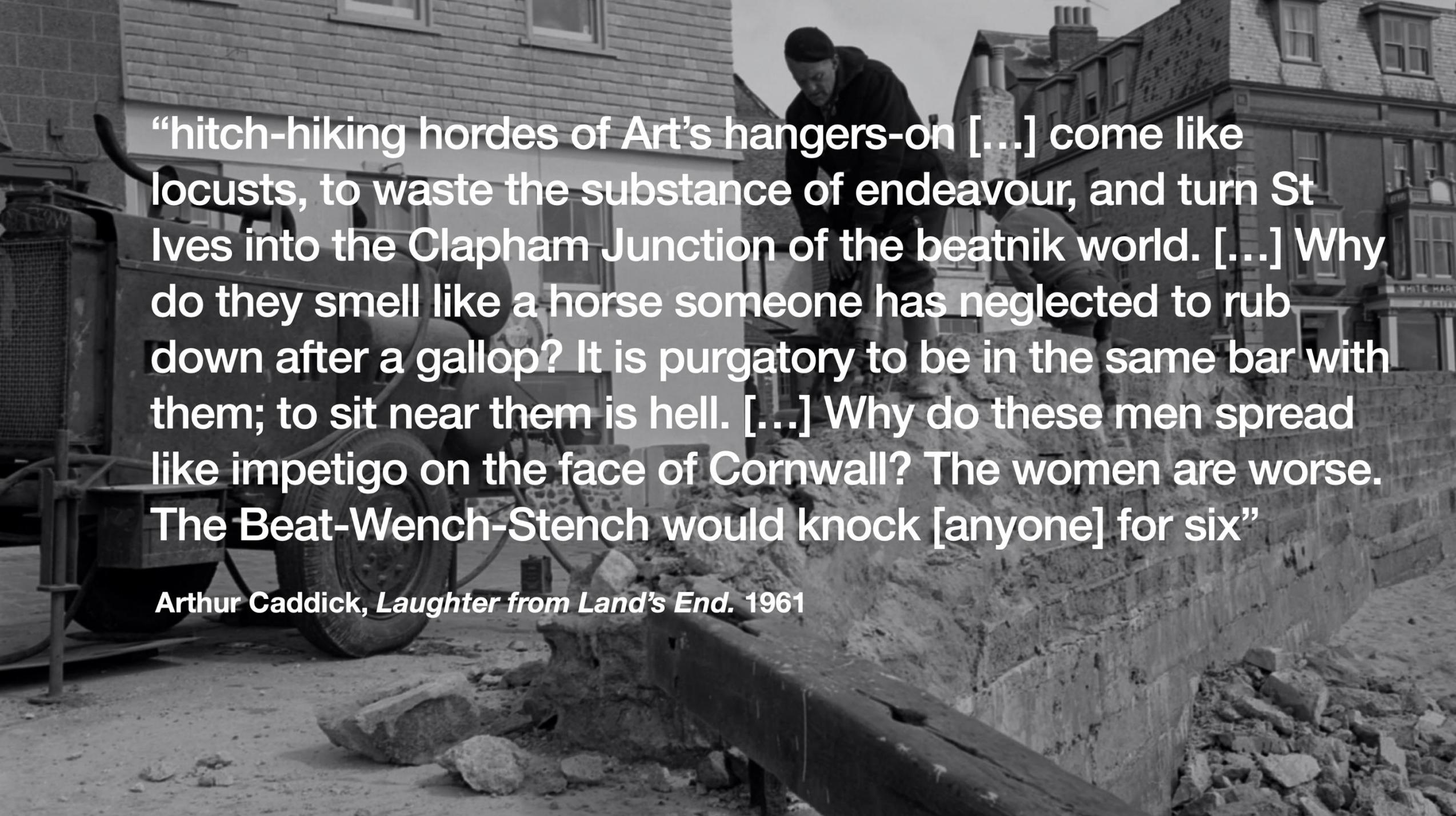


"I assure you, sir, that I am a very genuine artist."



Because it was the Beatnik time/Well we/Most of us were/  
Beatniks/So called/[laughs]/By the locals/And if you had long hair  
you weren't allowed into the/Some of the pubs/Or the cafes/They  
used to have a notice on the window didn't they/No Beatniks/Or  
undesirables/[laughs]/The Digey Cafe/And then you know/They  
got to know you/So they let you in/Not the cafe so much as pubs/  
And um/Yes/Well it was the harbour wall/And the Beatniks used  
to sit on it/And lay on it/So the council decided to knock it down/

Oral history interview with Stella Benjamin, St Ives Archive, 2009



“hitch-hiking hordes of Art’s hangers-on [...] come like locusts, to waste the substance of endeavour, and turn St Ives into the Clapham Junction of the beatnik world. [...] Why do they smell like a horse someone has neglected to rub down after a gallop? It is purgatory to be in the same bar with them; to sit near them is hell. [...] Why do these men spread like impetigo on the face of Cornwall? The women are worse. The Beat-Wench-Stench would knock [anyone] for six”

Arthur Caddick, *Laughter from Land’s End*. 1961



Giles, *Daily Express*, 1951



# HOW TO SPOT A BEATNIK

By CEDRIC ROGERS



If you think this is a heartick, you are mistaken. She is the Mrs. Pamela Pilkington-Featherstonehaugh, down from Gipton for the holidays, incognito. She walked here from Truro, where she left her Bentley...



This person is genuinely untalented. His mother does not love him, failed his piano-lesson, can't even play a guitar. — Let someone else worry about him...

Rather than Hebdige's argument that subcultural styles are always brought back to the mainstream either through fashion or being defined as deviant, Gluck argues that both of these processes are happening simultaneously (Gluck, 2000). Bohemians became 'objects of satire in mainstream journals, which both exaggerated their eccentricity and deflated their seriousness' (Gluck, 2000:54). In St Ives, the bohemian, later beatnik, is satirised in the mainstream media, framing the bohemian/beatnik identity as 'not-artist', as a fake and pretender, but also as anomaly, often framed by opposing gender norms.

**“Friend of mine in London...Packed up and came down here. John wrote me a letter saying that they’ve got the most fabulous parties...John Milne and all was still alive”**

**John Emanuel (2011)**

“overlook lesbian possibilities that are more subtle, obscure, or awkward. Most of us still see the past in heteronormative terms, closeting our thinking by failing to consider that the dead women we study might have been other than heterosexuals, other than wives, mothers, and lovers of men”

Bennett (2006)

**“the age-old squelching of our words and desire can be replicated over time when we adhere to ill-suited and unbending standards of historical methodology”**

**Howard in Boyd (2008)**

**“Oh yes no word a joke...Miss Heath...Oh my g...  
Isobel Heath...No she had a studio in Custom  
Lane...Custom House Lane...And she was very  
masculine...She got married after...Yeah...She was  
masculine...And she did paintings...Isobel Heath...  
Yeah...She lived at the Bosun’s Nest...Yeah...I know  
her as well...Bosun’s Nest...I know her as well”**

**Rebecca Craze (2009)**

“She married Bernard...But it’s none of my business...Fair enough...No she came later...Then needless to say he died...Then she eventually died[...]

And uh...She...When the second Misses Leach died  
[drops voice]

She left money and that to Boots Redgrave...And uh...I mean Boots...Lived maybe two years...Three years...And she died...And then...She was always known as Boots...I dunno why...Always never known...Never called her anything else but Boots

Mary Dobbin (2009)

**“overlook lesbian possibilities that are more subtle, obscure, or awkward. Most of us still see the past in heteronormative terms, closeting our thinking by failing to consider that the dead women we study might have been other than heterosexuals, other than wives, mothers, and lovers of men”**

**Bennett (2006)**

**“feminist epistemology which does not pursue a broadening of existing categories to include female subjects but revises those very categories, questions the historical narrative structures which produce them and dares to imagine alternative narratives”**

**Irit Rogoff (1996)**

you'd think the tonic was more expensive than  
the gin/Um/Yes/I s'pose/A dozen/ Twenty  
people/I've forgotten who they all were now/I  
mean there was food/And mostly drink  
really/[laughs]/[...]/Occasions/You  
know/Certain occasions

(Daniel, 2009)

Well I thought it was awfully exciting/There were very interesting people around/But there was a lot of drinking going on/if I'm going to be critical now I wasn't critical then/There was a lot of partying and things like that/It was a very different environment from anything I had experienced before

(Lethbridge, 2011)

My friend and I decided in the middle sixties/To have an anti-Vietnam shop/Very naughty I suppose/In Fore Street/We were so fed up with the terrible things that were going on/And there was a shop in Fore Street that was coming up/And of course people thought/Who were these two girls/Well who are they/And I was talking to Patrick about it/And he said/Oh tell them I'll stand guarantor if there's any problem/And Barbara said the same/So Barbara and Patrick/Stood guarantor for Jill and I/While we ran our anti-Vietnam War shop/In the mid-sixties/In Fore Street

(Beck, 2009)

I was a potter/I worked/I went to work with Jess Val Baker/In the Mask Pottery/And eventually when Jess gave it up I took over/And/I used to go to Jess's/And we had parties at Jess's/Because/Um/We were all/Of the same political feel/At the time/And um/When she/She did a bit of pottery/Down at/Um/Porthmeor Studios/Uh uh/St Christopher's/It was called/Um/But then she moved to Penzance/It was the Mask Pottery and I moved/And I started working there full time with her/Um/But also of course in St Ives at the time we had Troika/Benny/And Lesley/All the Troika people/ Who were great friends/We all/Again/We used to go to parties/Because that's what we all did

(Beck, 2009)

'olive oil, duvets, pasta, floor cushions, Pink Floyd, mineral water, salad, vegetarianism, CND, family planning, DIY, yoga, and yoghurt. And just as such lists accumulate, they force out other lists: bowler hats, Rembrandt, cottage pie, boiled sprouts and cabbage, cheap but sturdy reproduction Jacobean furniture, dark sherry, Terence Rattigan, Pools coupons'

(Highmore, 2016:107).

“There was also a Portuguese painter there...Who was very good looking...I don't know what his name was...He was incredibly vain...He was in the same studio...And this chap...Was so vain... And he had black curly hair...Tight curls...But he was going bald... And he was a great one for the ladies...And apparently he used to draw...With charcoal...These little curls...You know...Like you might draw...On a...He used to fill in the gaps with charcoal [laughs] So there would be pillows all over St Ives covered in charcoal...Or so I heard”

Ann Kelly (2009)