



SEX PISTOLS CHELMSFORD PRISON



Sex Pistols Flyer 'Castrated' includes Chelmsford Prison review 1976.

PISTOLS in PRISON

Chelmsford maximum security prison isn't no council tenancy, but it is in the suburbs, right next to some office buildings and a service station on the corner (quick getaway). The prisoners are in for ~~three years~~ ^{and up} ~~three years~~. To while away the hours they can join inter-prison weightlifting, join the film society for 11p a week (mostly recent releases), rent a colour tv for 3p a week, and see rock bands once a month.

Any band that cares to can play, ~~except~~ ^{except} for Hawkwind. Everyone was on acid—

"Uh, you mean Hawkwind?"

No, I mean the prisoners. Anyway, Hawkwind ^{i.e., they won't be asked back} started yelling 'Kill! Kill!' and there was a minor riot. So no encores for them. Tonight it's the Pistols. Most of the lads will be digging them behind a variety of chemicals. ^{the group came in the van}

It was Paul's last day at the brewery, so he came down separately, ^{walking through} the front door, talk to the screw sitting behind an inch thick sheet of glass, walk through a noisy, dull grey sliding door into a small, dull grey room with a low ceiling, table with chair at each end, the door slides shut, instant claustrophobia, the metal grey door in front noisily slides open, walk into a puke green room and sit under the bulletin board—'Charlie Smith is having a leaving party (at his request) after 28 years of service. We are presenting him with a silver cup'—to wait for a screw to take you into the prison's innards. Upstairs in the mess, the band wait for Paul, sitting at a table devouring sandwiches and tea. John has dressed for the occasion: NO FUTURE FUTURES down the front of his shirt, ANARCHY dripping across the back. Through the barred windows, across the courtyard, a cell block, the rows of windows criss-crossed with three sets of bars, turns golden in the afternoon sun. At a table at the other end of the room a group of screws have afternoon tea, all in blue & uniforms with large, thick silver chains hanging from their belt, looping to their knee and ending in a fistful of keys. It really needs Godard, camera slowly tracking from one end of the room to the other, from Pistols to Police, to get the full effect.

Screw (incredulous): 'Is that the pop group?'

Other Screw (superior sneer): 'Well. They're supposed to be.'

The small theatre echoes a lot. There is a backdrop behind the equipment, a cityscape with lots of billboards, in between the Coke and Cinzano ads the simple messages POT and LSD. The band warm up with a diamond hard 'Wham Bam Thank You Maam', then a few of their own. When the sound check finishes everyone except sound wizards Dave and Kim have to go backstage, and the audience are let in.

They run. Long hair, short hair, young, middle aged, their clothes a jumble of jackets, sweaters, slippers, boots. Six blacks stroll in; five of them walk out after ten minutes. Some guys have sewn flares into their levis.

"God, there won't be any girls in the audience," says Steve.

"That's alright," jeers Nils, "You'll still be able to play."

They walk on one by one. Steve gets a few wolf whistles, John gets a lot. He welcomes them with a greeting from the Queen (cheers and whistles) and a message from the recently released Ron, who would have loved to come, but he's been banned. Dead silence.

John enunciates 'Anarchy' very clearly. There is wild applause. 'I Wanna Be Me' gets a little less approval, the third tune a little less, and so on. And they are playing great. In the short breaks between songs John taunts them. You're like a bunch of fucking statues! I bet you've all got a good case of piles! Move!

"We're not allowed to."

I don't care—tear the fucking place apart!

The audience loves it, yelling back with no hesitation. They even warm to

AND WHERE WAS MALCOLM?

some of the songs; 'Sub Mission', 'No Fun', 'Stepping Stone', 'Problems', 'Liar', all get heavy cheers and whistles. Steve is exploring clean country, lots of clear, precise notes. Middles and ends have been altered, tidied up. John is enunciating what he considers the important lyrics very clearly. Paul and Glen hammer it all home mercilessly. A beat for the feet.

"We try to keep it down to five chords a song," Steve confesses afterwards.

In 'New York' he breaks two strings. While new ones are strung the ~~audience~~ audience want John to tell a joke. "No, you tell me one." "Okay," replies the Captain. He sits in the Captain's Seat, front row centre. He is big, tanned, middle-aged. He always sits in the Captain's Seat. "There was this guy, see, and he didn't have a dick. So when he got home at night he gave his wife a good bollocking!" Laughs.

"Tuckin' 'ell! That's twenty years old!" John's choice of a first word cracks the place apart.

As the intro to 'Seventeen' winds up Paul leans back, both arms in the air. Only instead of crashing down into his skins he just keeps on going ~~back~~ over backwards, stool and all. "Pissed!" yells John, pointing an accusing finger at the culprit lying on the floor helpless with laughter. "Sorry," he waves when he finally regains his seat.

The prison hippie—long hair, flares, beads, bare feet, ultra glazed eyes—throws his denim coat on stage. John stands on it, then ignores it. The owner asks for it back. With great effort John lands it three feet short. With a nervous look around the hippie gets up and grabs his jacket. During the last-song reprise of 'Anarchy' he leaps to his feet and starts ~~shaking~~ dancing. Nobody stops him. Afterwards, two of the cons say that the first couple of times he did that he got beaten on. The pipes just bent on his head.

As they walk off there's dead silence. For five minutes it's quiet, then a sudden eruption of applause and yells for more. After the encore there is another eruption. The longer the band play, the longer they're out of their cells. "Go on," says a screw. "Give them another one." John refuses. "I'm selfish," he smiles. It is 7.45.

The cons leave, some whinging their ears. Three stack chairs while the band pack equipment. "Jesus," says one, surveying the stage. "We were going to try and scive some clothes off you lot, but you're all dressed in rags!" They help load the van; three guards stand and watch, the Alsatian at their feet periodically howling. One guy ~~is~~ sits in the front of the van, talking to the band. A joke is made about hiding in the van on the way out.

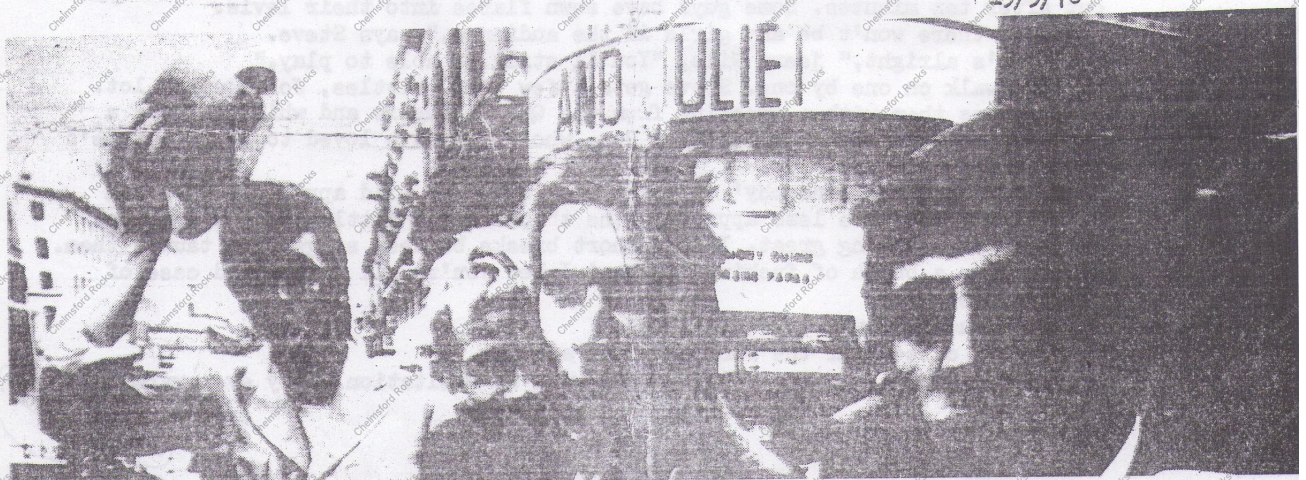
"No thanks. I'm out in a month."

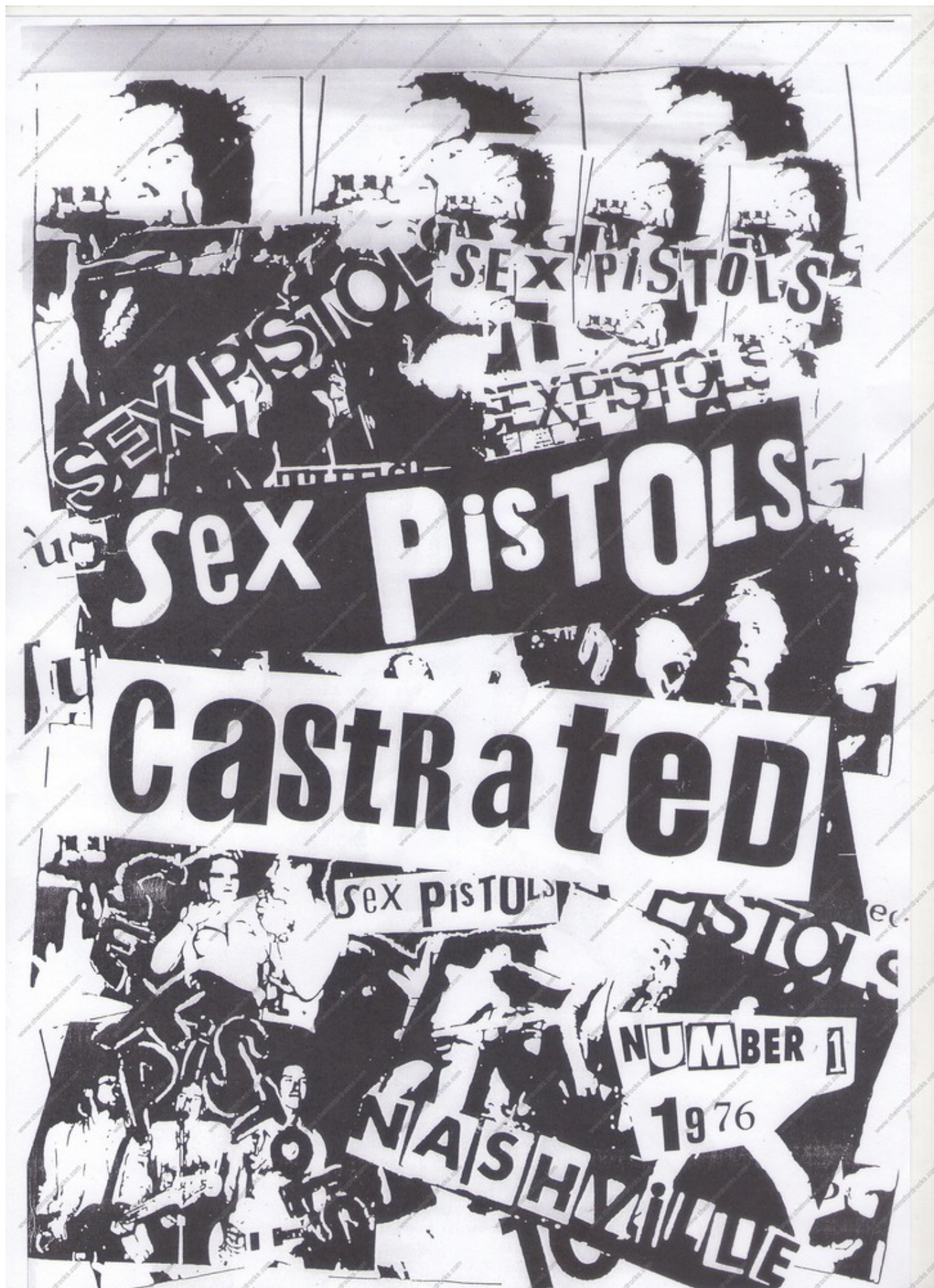
"Not if we can help it," a young guard says with a jokey ~~man~~ smile.

The van crosses the courtyard to the exit gate. It opens noisily, the van rolls in, the gate closes behind it, then after a minute the front one rolls back. It's a few seconds before the shock sinks in: traffic, people walking about, lights; noise.

"That was really strange," says John, "Not having any girls in the audience."

Terry
19/9/76





17th September 1976 - "Red Lion Pub", 249 Springfield Road, Chelmsford, Essex. Pre Chelmsford Prison gig (L-R: Kim Thraves, Steve, John & Dave Goodman. Photo © Jonh Ingham.

