

## **1900–2000**

### **What was seen as radical in society at this time?**

The twentieth century can be easily split into two significant forms of radicalism: political and cultural radicalism. It can also be split into two distinct time periods: 1900–1960 and 1960 onwards. The first period was characterised by very significant political changes and policies being implemented, which at the time were radical, but in a twenty-first-century society seem so normal:

- In 1900, the Labour party formed and began to give a voice to the working class of Britain.
- In 1903, the women's suffrage movement was first implemented, and in 1928, all women over 21 were allowed to vote.
- King George VI became king in 1936, after his brother, King Edward VIII, chose to marry an American divorcee, which sparked significant problems in Parliament.

These three and many more changes took place and were seen as very radical and sometimes wrong. The abdication of Edward VIII, for example, was seen as a scandal, and there was international outcry for the seemingly 'treasonous' act of choosing love over his own nation.

Cultural change didn't happen drastically during this time; the UK was still a very conservative country (and not just politically). Men still usually wore smarter attire and women still wore timid and old-fashioned clothing, very different to today's clothing. This thought did seem to change almost overnight, with the growing 'teenage' culture of the 1940s and '50s. This new culture was mostly fuelled by a new American music genre: rock and roll. In the UK, a significant landmark date – or turning point – for teenage culture came on 19 July 1954, the day when Elvis Presley released his first single, 'That's all right'. While the song didn't see much commercial fame, among young teenagers the music and appearance of Elvis were so attractive that they quickly turned him into a household name and international star, later dubbed 'the King of Rock 'n' Roll'. However, this was still seen as very radical music, and later led to mass burnings of Elvis records across much of the Western world, as parents believed that his lyrics 'came from the devil'.

What followed Elvis was an influx of bands and artists adopting rock and roll in the UK – for example, The Beatles and the Rolling Stones. And through the decades, music has been at the forefront of cultural change in the UK. Bands and artists such as The Who, The Jam, The Smiths, The Stone Roses, the Sex Pistols, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd and, more recently, Oasis and Arctic Monkeys were all influenced by the rock and roll of the '50s and '60s, and have helped to change Britain's cultural identity significantly through music since the 1900s.

## **What was radical in Stroud?**

### **Industry**

In 1933, the Thames and Severn Canal was forced to close due to water shortages, followed by the closure of Stroudwater in 1952. Beeching's rail cuts ended the popular stopping valley rail service, keeping only the stations in Stroud and Stonehouse, as we have now. Some of the mills have been repurposed for offices and residential accommodation, such as Ebley Mill and Dunkirk Mill. Now only Lodgemore Mill in Stroud remains in cloth manufacture.

### **Protest**

Stroud has a strong history of activism. In the late 1970s, Stroud High Street Action group protested on rooftops against attempts to demolish eighteenth-century buildings. This campaign led to the formation of the Stroud Preservation Trust, which has been instrumental in saving many of the town's oldest buildings, such as Withey's House, the Brunel Goods Shed and the Hill Paul building.

In 1989, Stroud District Council attempted to cut down 13 trees at midnight in Stratford Park, but local 'Save the Trees' campaigners arrived first and occupied the trees for six weeks. They worked with Friends of the Earth to help to negotiate the traffic plans that had threatened the trees at first. The trees still stand to this day.

### **Social**

An annual horticultural show was established in 1932 and an annual festival of music and literature was established in Stroud in 1947. The town has the largest and most diverse number of creative artists, musicians and authors outside London.

The first cinema to open in Stroud was the Electric Photoplay House, which functioned for a few years from around 1910 in the former Unitarian chapel in Lansdown. By 1917, there was also the Stroud Picture House in King Street Parade; this was apparently replaced by the Ritz, which opened in the Parade in 1939 and closed after a fire in 1961. In 1971, only the cinema in London Road, then called the Classic, remained.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, a local art and craft college was built by public subscription, furthering the art and craft impulse native to the area.

### **Significant events**

The Beatles played in the Subscription Rooms in March 1962. It was their first ever gig outside Liverpool and Hamburg, and it went very badly; they got pelted with coins and only three people showed up.

There was a meningitis outbreak in the 1980s, which led to the establishment of the Meningitis Trust in Stroud; the numbers of those with meningitis in Stroud were 17.5 times

the national average. Steve and Gloria Dayman lost their 14-month-old son Spencer to meningitis in 1982. There were no organisations to help to research the disease and no vaccine. They started the Meningitis Trust in 1985 and have funded over £12 million of preventative research and supported over one million people through calling their helpline.