



« Steve Davies  
Drums/congas, 1980  
Now: does music workshops in schools and prisons  
'I refused to tour with a rock band ever again'



» Una Baines  
Keyboards, 1976-78  
Now: singer  
'Mark is certainly not just an ogre'

» Simon Wolstencroft  
Drums, 1986-97  
Now: musician  
'I learned so much about life, just listening to Mark'



» Ed Blaney  
Guitar/tour manager, 2000-04  
Now: 'free man'  
'My duties included keeping ex-members out of the dressing room'



» Julia Adamson (then Nagle)  
Keyboards/guitar, 1995-2001  
Now: works at a publishing company  
'I was quite poorly after dating Mark'

« Karen Leatham  
Bass, 1988  
Now: Designer/carer  
'Looking after gentlemen with mental needs is not unlike being in a band'

» Brix Smith  
Guitar, 1983-89, 94-96  
Now: runs a boutique  
'Mark fired a soundman for eating a salad'



» Dave Milner  
Drums, 2001-04  
Now: taxi driver  
'The Fall is the band to be in if you desire extremes'



» Kay Carroll  
Backing vocals/management, 1977-83  
Now: doctor's assistant  
'Mark never let anybody feel part of the Fall'

« Simon Archer  
Bass, 2003-04  
Now: musician  
'All the stories and myths about Mark were true'



» Ruth Daniel  
Keyboards, 2002  
Now: researcher/record label manager  
'Mark would bark like a dog'

» Dave Tucker  
Clarinet, 1980-81  
Now: musician  
'Mark brought in people like me to make the other guys nervous'

» Tommy Crooks  
Guitar, 1997-98  
Now: artist  
'The Fall are the best British band ever, including the Beatles'



# Excuse me, weren't you in the Fall?

Mark E Smith's band is legendary for its ever-changing line-up. **Dave Simpson** made it his quest to track down everyone who has ever been a member

It's a Tuesday morning in December, and I'm ringing people called Brown in Rotherham. "Hello," I begin again. "I'm trying to trace Jonnie Brown who used to play in the Fall. He came from Rotherham and I wondered if you might be a relative." "The Who?" asks the latest Mr Brown. "No. The Fall – the band from Salford. He played bass for three weeks in 1978." "Is this some kind of joke?"

This has been my life for weeks. I've become an internet stalker and a telephone pest, all because of an obsessive drive to track down everyone who has ever played in the Fall. That's 40-odd people, including drummers abandoned at motorway services, guitarists left in foreign hotels and various wives and girlfriends of the band's provocateur-ringmaster, Mark E Smith (right).

The Fall lend themselves to obsession. In John Peel's Record Box – which contained the late DJ's favourite records – Fall records had an entire section to themselves. Peel called them the Mighty Fall: "the band against which all others are judged". More than 25

years after the band first formed, their audiences still include fans who don't follow other bands. Smith's inspired, social sci-fi songs are revered by everyone from comedians Frank Skinner and Stewart Lee to the designer Calvin Klein, artist Grayson Perry, and authors Irvine Welsh and Philip K Dick. Musicians and music critics love them, too: David Bowie, Bo Diddley, Thom Yorke and Alex Kapranos all claim to be fans, and the band's latest album (their 26th), Fall Heads Roll, won a five-star review in the Guardian for its "paint-stripping riffs, hail of one-liners, withering put-downs and bewildering images".

My own obsession with the band has been a long time in gestation. I first saw them play at Leeds' Riley Smith Hall in 1981: the fact that the singer was called Smith and the guitarist (Marc) Riley seemed to give this some weird significance. As the band approached their 30th

year, I began to wonder if the Fall's continued relevance could be attributed not only to Smith's genius way with splenetic observations, but to the trail of havoc left by the revolving line-up. At the very least, I wondered where all these people were. As Peel had said, noting that most former Fallers simply disappear: "I don't know if he's killing them or what." So I resolved to track them down, not realising that this would involve afternoons writing letters to defunct addresses in Doncaster and eight-hour sessions searching for a single person.

I started with Smith, who sank pints of lager in a Manchester hotel as he explained his policy of successively "freshening up" the band. "It's a bit like a football team," he said. "Every so often you have to get rid of the centre-forward." Smith has based his career on looking forward, so he was unlikely to give me numbers for clarinet players who left in 1981. The numerous



» Nick Dewey  
Drums, 1999  
Now: Band manager  
'It was like a childhood dream'



» Marcia Schofield  
Keyboards, 1986-90  
Now: doctor  
'The Fall was like a medieval Italian principality, with sycophants and mandarins'

» Marc 'Lard' Riley  
Guitar, 1978-82  
Now: broadcaster  
'I'm most proud of being in the Fall. It was a start in life'



» Paul Hanley  
Drums, 1980-85  
Now: works in computing  
'It's a crazy band to be in, but that's why they're so good'

» Steve Hanley  
Bass, 1979-98  
Now: caretaker  
'After a while in the Fall, you're no longer normal'



» Keir Stewart  
Guitar, 1997  
Now: runs a recording studio  
'When a friend died I saw a different, humane side to Mark'



◀ record companies the Fall have had over the years had only ever dealt with Smith. The Musicians Union claimed to have “no information relating to anybody who was ever in the Fall”.

I did have another lead, however. Sixteen years ago I interviewed a man called Grant Showbiz, and remembered that he sometimes produced the Fall. He gave me some numbers, though sadly, most of them were dead – the numbers, not the ex-members. But I did reach former guitarist/sleeves man Tommy Crooks, now an artist in East Lothian. He'd been a part of the Fall's most notorious implosion, when the band (bar Smith) had disintegrated following a punch-up on stage in New York in 1998.

Over a crackling phone line, Crooks recounted what was to become a familiar theme. He describes being in the Fall as “the pinnacle of creativity” but with “a lot of madness”. His first day in the band was spent rehearsing in a room where the lights kept going out; Smith would “unplug my amplifier and hold the microphone up to the strings, just to freak me out”. The New York punch-up kicked off, Crooks recalls, after Smith had arrived in a particularly bad mood, having just been held at gunpoint by a taxi driver. Things were said on stage and “everything just went apeshit”. Crooks saw Smith being bundled into a police car, and hasn't heard from him since. “I remember the band's bus driver asking, ‘So what are this lot like, then?’ The soundman said, ‘This is as weird as it gets.’”

After a few days of trying to track down 43 former members of the Fall, things were getting pretty weird for me, too. Searching on the internet for “Mike Leigh”, the band's 1980 jazz-cabaret drummer, was a nightmare: Google offered me 4,500,000 entries relating to the film director. I sent an email to Manchester University asking: “Are you the Ruth Daniel who used to play in the Fall?” and discovered a keyboard player who lasted a day in 2002. She revealed that Smith liked to warm up for gigs by “barking like a dog”.

The more people I found, the more punch-ups I heard about. Marc Riley – now a DJ but a Fall guitarist from 1978-82 – says he was sacked for hitting Smith back after the singer punished the band for an “average” gig by slapping each musician in turn.

“Smith doesn't do average,” says bassist Steve Hanley, who met me in a Manchester pub. “He'd rather do 10 great gigs and 10 rubbish gigs than anything in the middle.” Hanley's fearsome bass defined the Fall from 1979 until he, too, exited following the New York rumpus. After taking “two years to calm down”, he became a school caretaker. He remembers post-gig inquests that would go on for hours as Smith – seeking a reaction – accused his bandmates of: “‘Playing like a fookin' pub band.’ Chairs would fly. It was like guerrilla warfare.”

Some of this was tongue-in-cheek. Smith confessed to me that he used to

fine drummers £5 each time they hit the tom-tom, and that on tour in Europe he would employ the “European phrase-book”, sending guitarists to say things like “I am a flower” in German. Hanley's brother Paul, a drummer, remembers how one of Smith's favourite jokes was to “take new members abroad just so he could send them home”. Another was to dismantle the band's equipment in the middle of a gig. “When you're playing five or six nights a week the group get slick,” Smith said in his defence. For him, routine is “the enemy of music”.

For all that he can be surreally funny, Smith's intent is deadly serious. As a man called Eric the Ferret – the band's bassist in 1978, and one of the people at whom Smith threw a chair – comments, sagely: “The Fall don't cruise.” Among Smith's tactics for instilling the required creative tension, the trump card is threatening the sack.

**I** was curious to discover how long the Fall had been in Smith's control, so met Tony Friel, who founded the band with Smith, Martin Bramah, Una Baines and a drummer usually called “Dave”, whose surname no one can remember and who was sacked for being a Tory. Now living in a terraced house in Buxton, Friel, about three years ago, played in the Wood-bank Street Band; it was thanks to their website that I tracked him down.

Friel had been “best mates” with Smith and even coined the band's name (from the novel by Camus), but hadn't lasted long, quitting over Smith's decision to bring in then-girlfriend Kay Carroll on management and backing vocals. “I thought she muscled in,” he says, “although Mark asked me to stay.”

I found Carroll, too, in Portland, Oregon. After emailing to ask if I was “a stalker”, she mailed me an hour of taped Mancunian vitriol. “I knew that Mark got me in to fuck off Friel, and it worked,” she says. She believes Smith is a natural manipulator who knows when people have outlived their usefulness. Carroll – who masterminded the early Fall's headline approach to the music industry – was herself abandoned in a US bar in 1983.

The more people I found, the more I'd hear how they were recruited from the road crew (Riley, Hanley) or from support bands. Smith told me how once, when the rhythm section were late for a gig, he brought on players from the support band and was delighted when the errant pair walked in to see their replacements. In 2001 he drafted in the whole of Trigger Happy to be the Fall, giving them only eight hours' notice before they had to play a gig.

Brix Smith joined the Fall – and became the first Mrs Smith – after she met Smith in America. Remarried, and with the name Smith-Start, she now runs Start fashion boutique in London. She tells how, the night they met, she played Smith a demo of her band. “He

just said, ‘I like your songs. Can we use them? Can you play on them?’ He's so fucking smart I can't tell you,” she sighs. “He wasn't educated, but he was extremely well-read. The way he looked at the world was so different. Because he wouldn't see things the same way, he wouldn't speak the same way.”

A bizarre number of Fall members seem to have come from the same 500 square yards in Prestwich/Salford, or Smith's local, the George, before it was knocked down. Guitarist Adrian Flanagan recalls how, when he was 15, he would “put notes through Mark's door saying: ‘You're my hero. Everyone else is rubbish. Maybe when I'm of legal drinking age, we could go for a drink?’” He soon ended up in the band – “He'd always give local kids a break.”

One of the strangest entrances is that of Nick Dewey, who attended the 1999 Reading festival as the manager of the Chemical Brothers and ended up on stage with the Fall. “This drunk man [guitarist Neville Wilding] came backstage asking if anyone played drums,” he says. “The band had had a fight and left the drummer at motorway services.” Dewey hadn't played for 10 years, but once a Chemical Brother put his name forward, Wilding refused to take no for an answer. Dewey was led to a darkened tour bus to meet Smith, “passed out with his shirt off. The guitarist had to punch him in the face to wake him up. Then they began fighting over whether or not they should teach me the songs. Mark said no!” With a blood-covered Smith offering occasional prompts, Dewey pulled it off.

I tried to ask Wilding about this incident but his neighbour said he was “in Guadalajara”. The neighbour is Adam Helal, who also appeared in the Fall, playing bass from 1998 to 2001. Perhaps Smith really can take any member of the public and “mould them”.

“I was a terrible guitarist when I joined aged 17,” agrees Ben Pritchard, who has survived in the guitar hot seat for the past five years. “Maybe that's why Mark wanted me in the group. The challenge is to take someone wrong for the group and make them right.” He compares the Fall frame of mind to that at “Boot Camp”. He has been abandoned at airports to make his own way to gigs; the band's last tour was so stressful that, at 22, he is losing his hair. Why do it? “The Fall are making history,” he says. “I have nightmares, but it's never boring. It's not Coldplay.”

As the search continued, ex-Fallers started suggesting there should be “some sort of support group”, while others asked to be put back in touch with people dumped in foreign climes, making me wonder if I should set up a Fall Reunited website. Equally, I was worried by the fates of the disappeared. In particular, Karl Burns – who was hired and fired nine times between 1977 and 1998 – seemed to have vanished after punching Smith on stage in the New York meltdown. Several former



◀ **Mike Leigh**  
Drums, 1979-80  
Now: ‘selling insurance’, according to Steve Hanley, who bumped into him in PC World



◀ **Dave Bush**  
Keyboards, 1991-5  
Now: studying web design  
‘It was really tense; absolutely hilarious’



◀ **Jim Watts**  
Guitar, 2001-04  
Now: musician  
‘You'd get credited for songs you hadn't written and not credited for ones you had’

◀ **Craig Scanlon**  
Guitar, 1979-95  
Now: ‘top secret government work’  
‘It was a very strange upbringing’



◀ **Tony Friel**  
Bass, 1976-77  
Now: engineer  
‘We were best mates who fell out’



◀ **Simon Rogers**  
Multi-instrumentalist, 1985-86  
Now: composer  
‘Mark told me to play “like a fookin' snake”’

◀ **Brian Fanning**  
Guitar, 2001  
Now: minstrel  
‘He makes demented suggestions’

◀ **Neville Wilding**  
Guitar, knuckle-dusters, 1998-2001  
Now: reportedly in Guadalajara



◀ **Charlotte Bill**  
Oboe, 1990  
Now: documentarist  
‘I was only a guest, so neither left nor got sacked’

◀ **Adam Helal**  
Bass, 1998-2001  
Now: musician  
‘Mark has a PhD in manipulation’

◀ **Martin Bramah**  
Guitar, 1976-79, 89-90  
Now: musician  
‘It's all too personal for public consumption’



◀ **Karl Burns**  
Drums, 1977-98  
Now: whereabouts unknown, despite much speculation



◀ **Tom Head**  
Drums, 1998-2000  
Now: TV extra  
Was allegedly left at a motorway service station. Not answering his phone.



◀ **Steve Evets**  
Bassist ‘in emergencies’  
Now: actor  
‘Being a mate, you can tell him to fuck off’



◀ **Eric ‘the ferret’ McGann**  
Bass, 1978  
Now: musician  
‘You've got to be a hard-case to be in the Fall’



◀ **Yvonne Pawlett**  
Keyboards, 1978-79  
Now: biologist  
‘I never really fit in’



◀ **Stuart Estell**  
Played guitar from audience, 1998  
Now: folk musician  
‘Mark just handed me a guitar. It had five strings’



◀ **Adrian Flanagan**  
Guitar, 1996-97  
Now: musician  
‘Like Mark, I'm from a building family. You get shouted at’



◀ **Kate Themen**  
Drums, 1998  
Now: thinking of a PhD  
‘When Mark walked on stage, I shit myself. You get on with it’



members worried that he was dead. Some suggested he had “moved to the hills” in Rossendale, Lancashire, but appeals to the area's local papers produced nothing. Riley suggested I “try the prisons”, which led me to Ed Blaney, who indeed left the Fall because he was sent to prison (“Dangerous driving,” he says). He hadn't seen Burns either.

When I caught up with former Fall/Elastica keyboard player Dave Bush (now studying web design in Wiltshire), he told how Burns once turned up for a US tour armed only with sticks and a hat, was fired, spent two months riding around on a motorcycle before taking the same flight home as the band. Bush cleared up one of the Fall's biggest mysteries, the fate of founding drummer “Dave”. Bush knew him on the Manchester party circuit as Steve, and says he became schizophrenic before throwing himself under a train.

Original keyboard player Una Baines had a lead for Burns – “My friend Barbara says she thinks she saw him a year ago. I'll ask around” – and her own moving story. Over herbal tea in a Chorlton cafe, she recalled how her time in the Fall ended in two drug-induced nervous breakdowns and hospitalisation as a result of “wanting to break down every barrier. Musical. Personal. Mental. But contrary to what Mark says, he never sacked me. I was just too ill.” She recovered to make a classic album in Blue Orchids' The Greatest Hit (with former husband and ex-Faller Martin Bramah) and is now a singer with the Procrastinators.

There were just two names left. Guitarist Craig Scanlon – Fall fans' favourite – hadn't given an interview since being sacked in 1995 and was rumoured to work in the dole office. Contacting him involved negotiations with a mysterious go-between called “Moey” before an email claiming Scanlon is in “top secret government work” arrived from the Department for Work and Pensions.

“Steve [Hanley] rang and said Mark had sacked the whole band,” Scanlon says. “Then it was just me.” According to Scanlon, Smith – who revealed in a 2001 interview that firing the veteran guitarist was his “biggest mistake” – later invited him to a gig, something of an olive branch, but “after three hours in the pub with him I realised I was better out of it”. Tantalisingly, Scanlon had actually seen Burns, a “while back”, when he'd been “scruffy, big beard . . . I thought he was a tramp”.

It reminded me of something Hanley said a month before: “Mark's had all these talented people in the band, but not many have done anything without him. He must have something . . .”

Fall Heads Roll is out now on Sanctuary. The label continue reissuing the Fall back catalogue this month.

**Anyone missing?**  
If you have been in the Fall and we failed to contact you, email [culture@guardian.co.uk](mailto:culture@guardian.co.uk)