



HAPPY YEAR OF JIVING, JUKEBOXES AND TEDDY BOYS

According to a recent survey, British people think 1957 was the happiest year of the 20th century. So DAVID LOWE turns the clock back 60 years to recall events in Nottingham and nationwide in an era when Prime Minister Harold Macmillan declared 'we have never had it so good'

ON the face of it, 1957 might seem an odd choice for most people's favourite year.

Certainly there was plenty happening... skating star Jayne Torvill was born in Nottingham on October 7, 1957; Paul McCartney first met John Lennon that year; Elvis had his first UK No1; Stanley Matthews played his final game for England; and Patrick Moore first appeared

on British television.

But it was not one of modern history's iconic years. No-one has ever written a book celebrating the events and achievements of 1957, as they have with landmark years such as 1914 (the beginning of the First World War), 1945 (the end of the Second World War) or 1989 (the end of the Cold War).

The main story dominating the national news was the Cyprus troubles.

By the end of February 1957, the religious and factional differences on the Mediterranean island had claimed the life of the 100th British serviceman.

Around this time Nottingham was also experiencing more than its share of dramas.

Heavy snow at the end of February threatened to disrupt Forest's home game against Sheffield United. In the end it went ahead with



Forest losing 2-0.

But 1957 turned out to be a very happy season for Forest fans. Reds supporters turned up in their thousands at Bramall Lane on April 27 to see their team clinch

promotion to the First Division with a 4-0 victory over the Blades.

It was a year of bizarre happenings. An earth tremor was page one news in the Nottingham Evening Post on Monday, February 11.

"Buildings were actually seen to move backwards and forwards," reported the Post. "In the Evening Post office, work was proceeding normally when a general movement was seen.

"Panic seized a Nottingham cinema. A Post reporter told how people had started running in all directions. Women screamed and several people were knocked down in the rush to the exit.

"The tremor was felt throughout the south and western part of the Post's circulation area, in Ilkeston and Loughborough, and also beyond, in Derby and as far south-west as Birmingham."

Three days earlier, the River Leen burst its banks in Basford following prolonged rainfall.

So where were all the happy stories?

The jive was the dance craze in 1957 and it was sweeping the East Midlands. The Guardian Journal newspaper reported that girls at St Helena's School, Chesterfield, "gathered around a record player after lunch for one o'clock rock to "get hep" to the music of Elvis and Bill Haley."

Borough education officer Arthur Greenough did not foresee any problems.

"The girls are taught folk dancing. So why shouldn't

they jive?" he reflected.

Elvis Presley had his first UK No1 in 1957 but the best-selling single of the year was Paul Anka's Diana.

The first "espresso bars" were spreading across southern England and the first skiffle groups were finding an eager audience.

An application for a juke box at the Bulwell Café, in Cinderhill Road, was rejected by Nottingham Transfer Sessions on the grounds that

it would attract undesirables.

But Nottingham's well-established milk bar, the Farmer Giles, in Chapel Bar, was granted a licence for a record player.

Teddy boys were big news in 1957 and fashion reflected their passion for Elvis Presley, rock 'n' roll and jive dancing.

They enjoyed wearing drape jackets, drainpipe trousers, crepe-soled shoes and Brylcremed hair with a quiff.

Girls wore flared skirts with a wide waistband and sported pony tails.

One of the best-selling books of the year was Bert Weedon's guitar guide, which helped the careers of many rock legends.

It was an era when children enjoyed simpler pastimes – the most popular gifts for youngsters were yo-yos and I-Spy books.

The frisbee was invented in 1957 and the hula hoop was the biggest-selling toy.

Although television was having a big impact on the world of entertainment, cinema going was still popular. Around the World In 80 Days, starring David Niven and Shirley MacLaine, won the 1957 Oscar for best film.

So why were people so contented in 1957?

Researchers at the University of Warwick, who carried out the survey, put their findings down to more

realistic expectations about a happy life.

After living through two world wars, it is believed people had learned to count their blessings.

Dr Daniel Sgroi, co-author of the report, said: "In 1957 memories of the Second World War and the period of austerity that followed were still fresh in the mind of the nation, perhaps helping people to appreciate what they had.

"It may be that people in the 1950s had a greater sense of realism about happiness."

Rationing was over by 1957. The space age had begun with Russia launching Sputnik 2, carrying a dog named Laika.

Technology was coming into the home. By the end of the decade three in ten working-class families owned a washing machine and eight in ten owned a television. At the beginning of the 50s virtually no-one owned either.

Traffic jams barely existed, with only four million cars on the road, compared with 37 million today.

British motorists breathed a sigh of relief on May 14, 1957,

when petrol rationing ended. It had been in force for five months following the Suez Crisis.

Two of Britain's best-selling cars in this era were the Ford Popular and the Ford Anglia. Simply engineered, these robust models sold in huge numbers.

But millions still went to work by bike. Field Marshal Viscount Montgomery visited Nottingham in September, 1957 to open Raleigh's No 3 cycle factory. Three thousand dealers were invited to the ceremony at the £5m plant.

Football pools were big business and 1957 was certainly a happy year for Ivy Howkins, a 51-year-old grand

from Nuthall. She won a fortune on the pools, scooping £51,000 (equivalent to £1,151,000 today).

■ If 1957 was your happiest year, tell us why by writing to Andy Smart at Nottingham Post, City Gate, Tollhouse Hill, Nottingham, or emailing andrew.smart@nottinghampost.com



A charming picture of Bert and Mary Elliott sitting in the back yard of their home in Dryden Street, Nottingham, in 1957. The terrace houses were later demolished and replaced by modern housing in the 1980s and 90s.



The jive craze that began in 1957.



King Street and Queen Street, Nottingham pictured in 1957.



No sign of any traffic in this 1957 picture of Wilford Lane and Main Street, Wilford.