

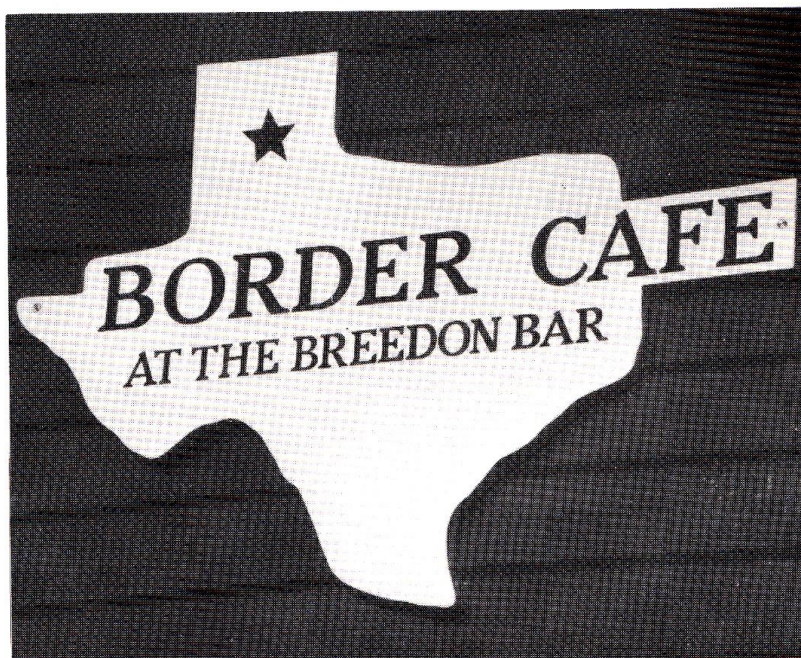
# FEATURE

At the southern end of the Birmingham suburb of Stirchley, on the Pershore Road, lies the Breedon Cross Bridge which, for the last century or more, has spanned the Worcester & Birmingham Canal. Adjacent to this piece of canal history, atop a small rise, stands the appropriately renamed "New Breedon Bar and Border Cafe". At night, the red fluorescent Ansells logo which crowns the building shines like a beacon calling the faithful to the second city's most vital and best new alternative music venue. Which buffoon just whispered 'roots' music?

Since taking over the premises in May last year, proprietors Bob and Ann Moore have added to and enhanced the city's already rich musical heritage. Long may they prosper and continue on their pilgrimage. The walls in one area of the main bar are covered with photographs of musicians (many autographed), concert posters and other mementos—all of which attest to Bob's 30 year long dedication to being, on the bottom line, a music fan. Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins rub shoulders with Steve Earle, Butch Hancock, Flaco Jimenez and John Stewart. The other section of the bar is a shrine to film stars, Marilyn Monroe and James Dean. To the careful observer, it should soon become obvious that Bob and Ann's hearts really lie deep in the heart of Texas. Specially commissioned brass plaques of the Texas State, with a single red star and the words "BORDER CAFE" adorn many of the walls. The Union Jack and Stars and Stripes may hang alongside each other, centre backstage, but cast your eyes stage left and you'll find two Texas State flags in a T-formation. Furthermore, the floor plan of the main bar is a T-shape.

Considering the foregoing, there should be little wonder that Joe Ely should dub the Breedon, "the best honkytonk East of Austin", following his first concert at the venue. Far from being a pub dweller, the writer wishes to add to the latter accolade by simply adding that it is a place where great music is regularly made. A home for good music, owned by people who care. Names, tags and labels and other paraphernalia are simply irrelevant.

Prior to taking over the Breedon, Bob and Ann had spent eight years in charge of the Radcliffe Arms in Oxford. During that period, the venue established a reputation as a place to see American visitors such as Steve Young, Guy Clark, Sleepy La Beef, Terry Allen, Peter Rowan and Jerry Jeff Walker. In fact, tucked away in one corner of the Breedon is the old Radcliffe pub sign which proudly proclaimed "the smallest honky tonk in the world". With a "house full" sign posted, the Oxford venue could only cope with about 80 paying customers. Although the Moores set about trying to renovate the premises, a distinct lack of co-



## "Somebody said there was this Texas honky tonk bar in Birmingham"

Arthur Wood investigates . . . .

operation from the city fathers with regard to planning permission and music licences eventually led them to search for new larger premises. That search covered London and the south coast, as well as the Midlands. Birmingham is the lucky beneficiary of this talented and enterprising couple.

And what of the musical fare which Messrs. Moore and Moore present at the Breedon, I hear you ask. Well, let Bob Moore tell you about the Breedon vision:

*"The most important thing really was to get a forum for all sorts of music, of a consistent quality, the main idea being to generate the situation where eventually people would think, 'We're going out on a Friday or Saturday night. Where can we go?' They won't even bother to look in the papers to see who is on because they will know that whoever it is it will be of reasonable quality. And, hopefully, they will come here. The basic common denominator is what I call beer drinking music. Where you can tap your feet or click your fingers even though it might not necessarily be the music you would choose to put on your turntable."*

Based on that formula, the Breedon spectrum covers rock'n'roll, blues, folk and country music. Bob added, "The term 'roots' has become a bit overdone" and Amen to that is all I would add.

Of the early days at the Radcliffe, Bob recalled, "We put on local bands initially. Steve Young was the first person I ever went into an international situation with. Then we did Peter Rowan and that was around 1981. It just sort of grew from there. The international acts were few and far between at that stage." It may be relevant to point out that Bob was actually bringing those people over from the States and getting them enough gigs to justify the air fare. During 1986, Bob was the prime mover behind the two Butch Hancock UK tours, the latter featuring Marce Lacouture. Hancock had visited these shores from the late '70s onwards, sticking rigidly to London-only venues. Bob Moore deserves our neverending thanks for breaking that particular mould.

The musical predilection of *Country Music People* readers being fairly obvious, it may be worthwhile mentioning only some of the names who have passed through, and will be passing through, the portals of the Breedon since that hallowed day in May last year: from the States, Kimmie Rhodes, Hugh Moffatt, Robert Joe Vandygriff, Butch Hancock, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Lore & the Legends, Pinto



Bennett, Ed Bruce, Larry Gatlin, Michael Johnson, Charlie McCoy, Narvel Felts, Rockin' Sydney, Bobby Bridger, Santiago Jimenez, Joe Ely and Gary P. Nunn, while local independent radio station BRMB recorded concerts by Tompall Glaser and Dan Seals for subsequent broadcast. Furthermore, Pinto Bennett returned to the Breedon last September to shoot a video. As far as British artists are concerned, Wes McGhee (squeezed in two appearances between cricket tours), Balham Alligators, Los Pistoleros (all London based) plus Shropshire-based bluegrassers Wrekin

Music Festival in Austin, Texas over the Easter Bank holiday weekend this year. In fact, Terry's latest US visit lasted some four weeks during which time he played dates in Austin, Houston and Dallas with Butch Hancock, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, David Halley, Freddie Krc (including laying down some backing vocals on Fast Freddie's next solo disc) and J.D. Foster's Barnburners.

Towards the end of last year, local promoter John Atkins (author of the *Country Music People* column of the early '80s, "Acoustically . . .") and the Moores co-presented Albert Lee at the Irish Centre in

content with simply painting from a wide musical spectrum and standing still, the Moores have already run a series of Music Festivals, 3 and 4 day events, dedicated to the fields of country and blues music and the multi-faceted art of the singer/songwriter. They deserve to continue. Tom Martin and Sam Cornwell from promising local band The Outsiders have begun a Monday night showcase club for, for the want of a better term, acoustic musicians. Based in the upstairs room, some of these performers will no doubt, in time, graduate to the main stage. They're even nurturing their own crops here.

On a hopefully flippant note, Bob viewed the future with the comment, "We'll give it two years and then head for Austin. This is as close, I reckon, to my original idea as it's likely to be. I don't really want it to get any bigger. I think that once we establish the reputation of this place, on a national basis, then we should be able to get the acts we want without any problem. People are already coming here from as far afield as Doncaster and Brighton. We haven't quite achieved 'house full' signs yet. I think it will probably be another twelve months before we do. I've always been a party giver rather than a party goer."

Personally, I'd prefer to see those 'house full' signs go up sooner than a year from now. The Breedon Bar and Border Cafe held its first birthday party on Wednesday 10th May 1989 with Rodney Crowell and his Dixie Pearls providing over two hours of solid country music with a decidedly rocking beat. Visits by Mac Curtis and Carl Perkins have also been rumoured. The future's so bright, you gotta shuffle on down to the Breedon Bar and Border Cafe. If the music doesn't make you return there on a regular basis, Ann's Tex-Mex cooking surely will.

And in closing, a few vital and relevant statistics: 1652 Pershore Road, Stirchley, Birmingham and 021-459 6573. Just ask for Bob. Tell him a faded old hippie said you should call. It's as easy as ABC.

*The C is for Country music.*

*The B is for Breedon Bar.*

*The A is for Audience (large ones).*



Bob & Anne Moore with Joe Ely (centre)

Havoc, are among the many who have taken the Breedon stage. On a personal level, the highlight of '88 was the regular appearances by Reading based singer/songwriter Terry Clarke. His first album, recorded in Austin and Nashville over the period October '87 to April '88, is a classic (nothing less) and should be released by a British label in the near future. If it isn't, I can foresee a situation where he will soon be snapped up by our American cousins. Such is the buzz which already exists Stateside about his songwriting ability that Terry was invited over for the 3rd annual South by Southwest

Digbeth. "John and I have been friends since the John Stewart days and I have done a few outside gigs before. Alvin Crow at Oxford Town Hall. Sleepy La Beef at the Oxford Caribbean Club. It is not something that I am comfortable doing, to be honest. It's just that we couldn't get the finances right to put Albert on here. It's really hard to generate the same atmosphere in another venue. If it wasn't for John, I wouldn't have gone for it. There isn't really anybody that I would want to promote that I couldn't do here."

Live music is, in fact, available at the Breedon most nights of the week. Not



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