

Wembley's Rolling Stone



The Rolling Stones in 1964, backstage at the State Cinema in Kilburn, with Charlie Watts in the middle.

[Photograph courtesy of Brent Archives]

Although the Rolling Stones did not come to the Stadium or Arena as part of their 50th Anniversary Tour in November 2012, Wembley can still celebrate the band's half century as one of its members since 1962 grew up here. Mick Jagger often introduces Charlie Watts as "the Wembley Whammer", and his drum rhythms, which guide many of the band's most memorable songs, were developed on a Wembley Council estate.

"Pre-fab" homes at the Pilgrims Way estate, Wembley, around 1950.

[Photograph courtesy of Brent Archives]

Charlie was six years old when the Watts family moved into a newly-built aluminium "pre-fab" at 23 Pilgrims Way (by the southern end of Fryent Way) in 1947. The



estate of 114 post-war temporary bungalows was home to around two hundred children, but Charlie soon caught the eye of one of his neighbours, who remembers him at about the age of ten, sitting in his front garden practicing on his drum kit. Like all of the Pilgrims Way youngsters, he attended Fryent Primary School in Church Lane. Then he moved on to Tylers Croft Boys Secondary Modern (now part of Kingsbury High School, beside Roe Green Park), before transferring at the age of 15 to Harrow Art School, to train as a commercial artist.



Two of the Watts family's neighbours, outside their home, early 1960's.

[Photograph donated to Brent Archives, courtesy of Wally Robson]

As a teenager, Charlie also played drums in a local band. In 1960 he was spotted by Alexis Korner, and became a professional musician as part of

Korner's "Blues Incorporated" band. He did not enjoy touring, so returned to live with his parents while working as an artist for an advertising agency. Towards the end of 1962 three other former members of Blues Incorporated asked Charlie to join their new group, The Rolling Stones. He agreed, but would not give up his day job until the band had steady work in 1963. A Pilgrims Way neighbour remembers Mick Jagger coming round to collect Charlie and his drum kit on their way to gigs, in an old van with a stuffed crocodile on top.

A year later, the Watts family moved to a permanent Council house at 4 Holly Grove in Kingsbury, and Charlie married from that address in October 1964. By that time The Rolling Stones were on their way to becoming one of the most successful rock bands in the world, playing at the old Wembley Stadium 12 times between 1982 and 1999, as well as taking part in concerts at Wembley Arena.

The temporary "pre-fab" estate at Pilgrims Way was finally cleared in 1972, and most of the



land was returned to public open space, with the old name reused for a small development on part of the site. While Wembley's "Stone" has rolled on, one last fragment of a concrete "pre-fab" base remains, as a seat beside a footpath in Fryent Country Park, gathering moss.