

Blues Unlimited was published from the cellar of 38a Sackville Road a place where I spent several hours listening to music and sharing stories with Simon, Mike, fellow blues fans and musicians from the USA.

Travelling the US Southeast States in the '60's and 70's with Pete Lowry we interviewed and recorded many blues artists and when I did a master's degree at the University of South Carolina I was heavily influenced by the blues and Cajun music from this area. This interest was shared by Simon and Mike who published my discographies and articles in BU. We later created record labels Flyright and Magpie to release blues and Cajun music.

Simon and Mike were both taken before their time and Pete has now passed away, but the legacy of Blues Unlimited remains and the plaque is a great reminder of those days.

**Bruce Bastin**, *Flyright Records*

Before the early 1960s there were just two books (by Paul Oliver and Sam Charters), a few Jazz magazines with snippets on blues music, the occasional page in Jazz Journal and Melody Maker - that provided information on blues music. So in 1962, blues starved fans were excited by an advert in Jazz Journal exploring the formation of a Blues Appreciation Society. There was an avid response. The Society was soon abandoned in favour of a monthly magazine, Blues Unlimited - the first dedicated blues magazine in the world.

Others were soon to follow in the 1960s when amateur R&B bands appeared in art-colleges, schools and village halls. Specialist blues and R&B record companies were born and fanzines proliferated. Blues Unlimited was always first and foremost a testament to the enthusiasm, energy and knowledge of its founders, Simon, Mike and John - ploughing an iconoclastic furrow of blues lore, research and criticism. It was to last over 50 years.

**Mike Rowe**, *Blues Unlimited*

Blues Unlimited was an amazing source of information for blues enthusiasts worldwide and an inspiration for us in the USA to recognise and document the great musical and cultural tradition that the blues embodied. To join in and complement BU's groundbreaking work, Living Blues magazine was founded in Chicago and subsequently published in Mississippi. The late Mike Leadbitter and fellow Bexhill blues mates Simon Napier and John Broven, left a marvellous legacy of blues literature and generously shared their research with us and the world.

**Jim O'Neal**, co-founder, *Living Blues magazine*



In the late 1960s Blues Unlimited was honoured with a record label which released two 45s by Juke Boy Bonner. Juke Boy also recorded 'B.U. Blues' on his Liberty album 'Things Ain't Right' in 1969. Record producer J.D. 'Jay' Miller in Crowley, Louisiana also created a label that was named Blues Unlimited in honour of the magazine. Miller's BU label operated from 1970 to 1984 and covered Zydeco and R&B.



*Essential Interviews published in Blues Unlimited.*

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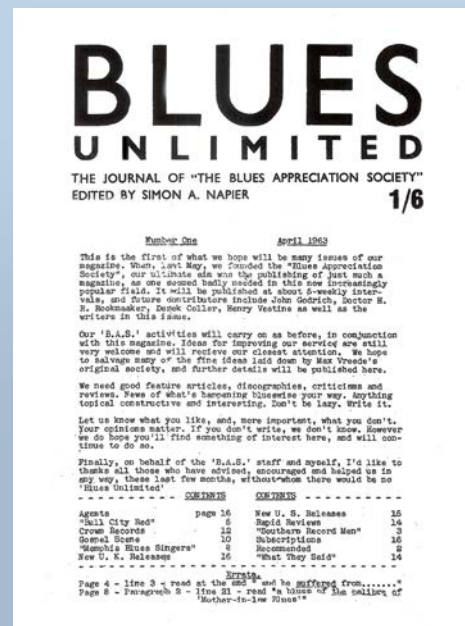


## Special Blue Plaque Edition

OCTOBER 2025

It is wonderful that the life's work of Mike Leadbitter and Simon Napier with Blues Unlimited is being recognised with a Blue Plaque on the site of the magazine's former office at 38a Sackville Road, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex.

In April 1963, when Mike, Simon and myself were gathering together the crude stencil-machined pages for about 180 copies of Blues Unlimited 1 (price 1s 6d), who knew that the magazine would quickly achieve fame as the first, most influential blues journal at home and abroad.



*Blues Unlimited Issue No. 1. Courtesy Bill Greensmith*



*Simon Napier and Mike Leadbitter, June 1965, 38a Sackville Road, Bexhill. Photo: Diana Napier.*

It was a happy partnership between Mike, who specialised in postwar blues, and Simon, who homed in on prewar blues and gospel music. All the bases were covered.

As well, Simon used his business knowledge as an antiques dealer from these same premises to see that Blues Unlimited made a profit on each issue to ensure its survival and prosperity.

From the beginning Mike and Simon attracted and encouraged young writers to contribute to BU. Among them were future authors Bruce Bastin, Mike Rowe and Tony Russell (my 'Walking To New Orleans' was published by Blues Unlimited in 1974). And what a coup it was to get the doyen of blues writers, Paul Oliver, to add his name to the BU roster. From the United States, there were record label owners Bob Koester (Delmark) and Chris Strachwitz (Arhoolie), and many more contributors.

The magazine thrived during the British R&B boom of the mid-1960s, and sales would increase to a peak of more than 2,000 by the early 1970s.

Soon after Mike's tragic death in 1974, aged only 32, Simon handed over the BU reins to an editorial committee as from issue 110. The magazine maintained the same high standards until it folded at issue 148/149 in winter 1987.

Simon died suddenly in 1990 at age 51 after a successful career with Swift Distribution and Flyright Records, with fellow Bexhillians Bruce Bastin and Robin Gosden. (cont.)



Credit for the Blue Plaque must go to Bexhill Museum and Rother District Council in honouring Mike and Simon, both former Bexhill County Grammar School students.

Special thanks are due to the Museum's Karen Smith, who once she became aware of Blues Unlimited's cherished history, organised in 2019 an exhibition that still runs today. It is through Karen's dogged perseverance that the Blue Plaque is installed. Thanks, too, to Brian Cope for arranging and funding the installation of the plaque.

Now Mike Leadbitter and Simon Napier — and Blues Unlimited — are rightfully commemorated by their home town after making such a big impact globally all those years ago. It's a legacy that survives to this day.

**John Broven, Blues Unlimited**

Bexhill Museum is proud of the town's association with Blues Unlimited magazine. We would like to thank Eddie England for first bringing it to our attention and we would also like to thank the wider blues community for all your support.

**Karen Smith, Bexhill Museum**

East Sussex, England. I first visited Bexhill as a young boy, with my parents; we intended to spend a week's holiday there. No sunshine and beach for us — it rained endlessly. We soon returned to London.

At some later date I discovered that the comedian Spike Milligan was stationed at Bexhill during the Second World War. Spike described the town as "an above ground cemetery" and his wartime experiences there were immortalised in his scripts for the BBC 'wireless' programme, 'The Goon Show'. Such was my skewed perception of Bexhill in the 1950's.

It was unquestionably the most unlikely of locations for the birthplace of Blues Unlimited, the world's first publication devoted solely to the blues.

Bexhill was the home town to two young and enthusiastic blues fans - Simon Napier and Mike Leadbitter, the founding editors.

Picking up the magazine for the first time in the mid 1960's, I can still recall my incredulity upon seeing its address at 38a Sackville Road. Over sixty years later, Blues Unlimited is recognised as the pioneering magazine in blues and R&B research and its birthplace in Bexhill is now rightly recognised.

**Bill Greensmith, Blues Unlimited**

Blues Unlimited first appeared on my radar in the early 1970s - it had been going for ten years and I had some catching up to do.

There were a number of record and book shops in the Manchester area that sold BU and stocked back issues allowing me to build a collection. By the late 70's I bought missing copies in London at Dobells and Collett's. When a bookshop in London advertised they were selling a large stock of back issues I phoned them with a list of 'wants', collected them when I was next in London. I bought rarer back issues from mail order outlets like Red Lick.

Blues Unlimited's distribution through a network of agents and stockists in Europe, North America, Australia and the Far East, built a community of fans who shared information through the pages of the magazine. I read each edition I found from cover to cover.

The new plaque will be a constant reminder of Blues Unlimited's importance in documenting and promoting blues music worldwide. It sparked countless young blues fans to become blues musicians, record collectors and to start blues magazines including Blues & Rhythm!

**Tony Burke, Blues & Rhythm magazine.**



*Bill Greensmith and Cilla Huggins plotting another issue of Blues Unlimited, circa Circa late 1970s. Photo: Mick Huggins.*

It was DJ and broadcaster Mike Raven on the radio (probably the BBC Radio One R&B Show) who talked about Blues Unlimited on his show and gave the address of 38a Sackville Road, Bexhill-On-Sea. I wrote to Simon Napier at the address and he replied. I subscribed! I got to know Mike Leadbitter in London and, when he died in 1974, I offered to do the typesetting and paste-up the magazine pages. My future was sealed, thanks to Blues Unlimited.

**Cilla Huggins, Blues Unlimited & Juke Blues**

