

# The Rowbinet Terry Bateman Interview

December 2010

**Rowbi:** Hi Terry, and thanks for agreeing to be interviewed about your Roost Amplifiers experiences.

**Terry:** I have to be honest it was over 30 years ago, and having put Roost to bed in '79 when it went to Leeds, I'm struggling to remember the finer points of what was going on at the time! But I have to say it is rather nice to see the resurgence of interest in the old amplifiers though – they deserve a break.

**Rowbi:** You've been quoted previously saying that you got involved with Roost in 1975, whilst at school. At the time you were given parts to build your own amp(s) in exchange for summer work. What amps did you build for yourself, and do any of those original Terry Bateman amps still exist? If so, any chance of a photo or 2 for everyone to drool over?

**Terry:** Sadly they are long gone. The original project, that lead me to Roost's door was a 40Watt amplifier based on the Mullard 5-20 circuit using EL34's. This project took a different direction after finding Roost as they gave me a couple of surplus transformers and an amplifier chassis they had lying around the workshop, and I used these parts in the amplifier project. The only part I have from this period is a Radio Spares De-Luxe output transformer [as used in the JTM45]. All my [Roost] guitar amplifiers and useful parts were sold in the early 80's to raise money for my first house purchase. This included a 200W amp using a Roost preamplifier and driver stage with a 4x KT88 200W power output stage, there was also a one-off Session Master style 100W amplifier head. I have to say between 1984 and 2003 I didn't have any Roost Guitar amplifiers at all, except for a PCB, which I would occasionally look at and think back to the Roost days. One of the most significant valve [hi-fi] amplifiers I had in my younger days was a Quad 22/II hi-fi amplifier. This amplifier was heading to a jumble sale, and with the help of my Mom it ended up in my hands. This would have been in 1973 a couple of years before stumbling upon Roost. This gave me the taste for real valve amplifiers, which eventually lead me to building my own amplifiers and thus finding Roost.

The following was part of an article I wrote about the closing of a local radio spares shop by the name of The Radio Constructors Centre, which as you'll read brought me to Roosts door:

“For me, the most memorable event was trying, during my school holidays back in 1975, to locate an output transformer for a 40-Watt valve amp, and being sent by Jim Flemming (Bills Son) to a company called Roost, who were building guitar amplifiers in Southend. When I eventually found the place I couldn’t believe my eyes – everything you needed to build valve amps and more. Within two weeks I had a summer job at Roost, and on leaving school they gave me a full time trainee job. This was all down to the Radio Constructors Centre.”

**Rowbi:** Were there any Roost amps that you guys made, that you knew were destined for any well-known artists or for special circumstances?

**Terry:** Sadly I can’t think of any well-known artists, who used Roost, but I remember Alexis Korner [The Father of British Blues] trying a Session Master and liking it – saying it sounded like a Magnatone amplifier – but he decided not to take it in the end. I remember making the amplifiers, which were reviewed in International Musician and Guitar Player magazines. Generally speaking Roost sold to the jobbing musician and semi pro market, but sadly when the first “advance cheque” came in they bought something like an Orange, Hiwatt, Fender or Marshall etc. The mid/late 70’s saw the beginning of the onslaught of the transistor guitar amplifier making – for a short while – valve amplifiers unfashionable and second-class, but In some bizarre way Roost was ahead of the game as we boasted, “valves are best” in the dark days of the transistor amplifier onslaught.

**Rowbi:** Do you have any interesting memories about any amp mods that anyone at Roost discovered, that didn’t make it into production, but that you (or the other Roost employees) thought sounded good or worked well?

**Terry:** Just before Roost was sold we were working on a “hot” combo called the Roost Gold with switchable channels etc. From memory two prototypes were sold and must be out there somewhere. We did develop a “master volume” amplifier with more overload than the stock amp but it never came to market.

**Rowbi:** What was it like working at Roost? Was it just a day job, or were you and the other employees all excited about building these now legendary amps, which at the time may have been thought of as just another amplifier brand?

**Terry:** Good question. For me it was 50/50 as some days it was just another day job and on others it was really exciting. Sad is to say it was just another amplifier brand

with an uncertain future. The legendary status came some 25 years later. If you had told me when I parted company with Roost in '79 [when it went to Leeds] it would be legendary some 30 years on I wouldn't have believed it.

**Rowbi:** Imagine yourself at school today in 2010 (not back in 1975), with all the current technology accessible to kids these days... iPhones, Line 6 PODs, Computers...etc. If Roost had started making amplifiers in today's market, what is your opinion on the sort of features that you would include to satisfy a modern guitarist?

**Terry:** I would keep the core Roost valve amplifier circuits with [microcontroller] channel switching enabling the user to switch between different gain, pre amp and tone settings. This would be a combination of the traditional Roost Rock 'n' Roll valve sound and grunt with modern controls. With the technical skills I have gained in the last 30 years I could quite easily do this now. But saying that I'd also make a standard head much like the ones we made in the 70's to keep with tradition!

**Rowbi:** There's lots of talk about Roost 'copying' HiWatt and Sound City MKIII amps. Obviously back then there weren't many different amp schematic designs to choose from. So I'm sure it's more a case that looking at a schematic, it looks similar to HiWatt and Sound City schematics. Of course Roosts used Sound City transformers, so there's a chance people misunderstand the whole situation. What's your opinion on the similarities, and did Roost strive to get a sound that was similar to these amps, simply because that was the sound guitarists wanted back then?

**Terry:** I have to be honest as I just don't know the exact origins of the circuit and who designed it. The pre-amplifier and tone stack are typical of what was around at the time in British amplifiers. The output stage is not dissimilar to what I would call the Mullard/Brimar circuit. The circuits used in valve guitar amplifiers are based on mainstream valve designs of the 50's and 60's, and were modified to give a sound for guitar use, the best example being the tone stack, passive hi-fi and active Baxandall circuits. The Roost circuit was engineered to give a bright, forward sounding ballsy amplifier. The tone controls were engineered to have a good range.

**Rowbi:** Okay I've grilled you enough now I think, so it's time for a little fun! Is the girl in the photo below someone who worked for Roost (Maybe the girl who covered the amps with tolex)? Or is it just an unknown model hired in for the job?



**Terry:** Sadly it was a model hired in for the job [on second thoughts she may have been a friend of the photographer – I'm not sure].

**Rowbi:** Lastly I'd like to thank you again for agreeing to be interviewed; hopefully the questions weren't too probing. I'd like to take this opportunity to say, if you have any photos of Roost gear, or any other information: Feel free to include it at the end of this interview.

**Terry:** I recently fully rebuilt a 50watt Roost amp, which my Son uses and really likes; doing this made me recall some good memories of the Roost days. I've a late '78 Roost 100Watt head with Drake transformers awaiting restoration – it's in good condition and should require the minimal of work – and when that's done I've a Selmer Stadium combo to restore.

On the whole the Roost days were good, especially the early days as it was an Aladdin's cave of bits 'n' pieces for a young amplifier Tech. I feel fortunate, in some small way, to have been part of the British amp profession in the 70's. I still use to this day some of the things I learnt whilst at Roost.

I'm still very much interested in valve amplifiers and restore valve guitar and hi-fi amplifiers; and I find it quite exciting that valve guitar and hi-fi amplifiers from the 50's, 60's and 70's are seen as the best and so sought after.

I recently came by an early/mid 60's Dallas EL84 5Watt amplifier, this really sings with a OC44 Rangemaster clone, this just goes to show the "modern" Rock 'n' Roll guitar sound was nailed many years ago!