

# MASTERWORKS

REASSESSING TREASURES FROM A BYGONE ERA...

## Barclay James Harvest's Once Again

Later recognised as perhaps their greatest work, the sessions for Barclay James Harvest's second album were awash with tension and acrimony. **Malcolm Dome** investigates...

**B**and infighting. Miscredited songs. A mounting debt. We are, of course, talking here about... Barclay James Harvest?! Surely some mistake! After all, BJH are one of prog rock's most low-key names. But, as they worked on what would become their second album, 1971's *Once Again*, they faced exactly these dramas.

Recorded at Abbey Road Studios from October 9 to November 25 1970, the band – guitarist/vocalist John Lees, keyboard player/vocalist Woolly Wolstenholme, bassist/vocalist Les Holroyd and drummer Mel Pritchard – weren't exactly high on the list of priorities for their label, Harvest.

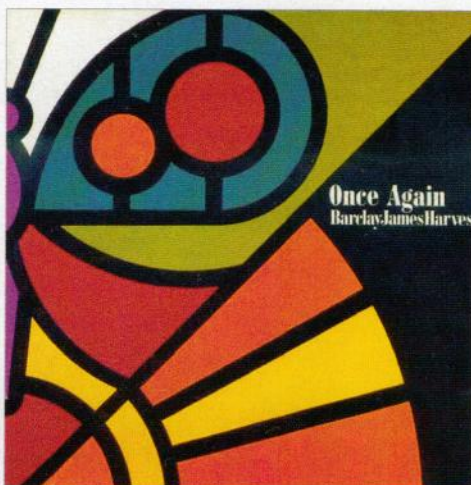
"We had to record the album at night, when there was nobody else around," recalls Wolstenholme. "Because it was cheaper to do it that way."

"Actually, making the album that way did have one advantage," insists Holroyd. "It meant that we could take our time, which might not have been the case if we'd done it during the day."

But while that might have been the case, nevertheless the quartet were working with an orchestra (as they did on their self-titled 1970 debut), dubbed the Barclay James Harvest Symphony Orchestra, with musical director Robert John Godfrey. And it was his presence that, in time, was to cause more than a soupçon of controversy.

"On the first album, it was actually a joy to work with Robert," says Lees. "His arrangements were great, and we all seemed to be getting along pretty well. But then things started to go wrong on the second album. We were all living together for a time, and that includes Robert. But then I moved out, and had a room at the house where my girlfriend's parents lived. So I was a little removed from it all. But I could tell there was a certain tension developing between Robert and the other three guys."

"The trouble was that Robert believed he was part of the band, when he most certainly



was not," adds Wolstenholme. "However, I was upset when it all went wrong, because there's no doubting his talent and what he'd brought to Barclay James Harvest. What happened in the studio on the second record was that his arrangements started to become too complicated and sophisticated. They just didn't fit the songs at all. Frankly, there were a few that were plain rubbish. But he never saw things the same way as us, and refused to change anything. So we got Norman [Smith, producer] to revamp a lot of them."

**"Robert John Godfrey believed he was part of the band. He certainly was not."**

**Woolly Wolstenholme**

That's when we fired Robert.

"I'm still disappointed our relationship with him ended the way it did, but what you have to understand is that we needed to move on, and he was holding us back."

"Sometimes the group had to wait unnecessarily, while Robert re-wrote some of his arrangements," shrugs Holroyd, when discussing the conflict in the studio. "This caused bad feelings between Robert and the

band, especially when Norman Smith redid some of those arrangements, so the orchestra musicians could play them." (For Godfrey's own perspective on the end of his collaboration with BJH, see the side panel on page 55).

There were also some problems with producer Norman Smith, brought on by his own burgeoning musical career.

"It had been great to work with him on the first album, because he had a lot of experience in the studio, which clearly we didn't have," explains Wolstenholme. "But by the time we got back with him for *Once Again*, he had ambitions to become a pop star in his own right. He was already working on his Hurricane Smith persona [he'd have a big hit in 1971 with the single

*Don't Let It Die*], so he was rather distracted, which didn't do much for us. He'd even fall asleep during recording sessions. But his greatest strength was that he was an enabler, and he certainly encouraged us a lot."

In spite of these tensions, Holroyd is quick to praise Smith's impact on the band.

"Because he'd worked as an engineer with the Beatles – alongside George Martin, of course – and had also been close to Pink Floyd in their early days, Norman knew how to experiment with different sounds, which

was important to us. And he also knew about orchestration. So he was very important to us, and when things began to go wrong with Robert he helped to salvage the situation."

Despite the problems with both Smith and Godfrey, all three surviving members of the band agree that there was a smoothness to the recording

sessions, which hadn't been entirely the case with the debut. Much of this was down to the fact that BJH were finally finding their own niche and sound.

"At the time. We were definitely trying to forge our reputation," says Lees. "We already had a large following, which helped our standing with Harvest Records; we didn't have to go cap-in-hand to them. Our experience on tour had meant we were

▲ **Released:** February 5, 1971  
 ▲ **Label:** Harvest  
 ▲ **Producer:** Norman Smith  
 ▲ **Highest Chart Position:** Did not chart  
 ▲ **Personnel:** John Lees (vocals, guitar, recorder), Les Holroyd (vocals, bass, guitar, keyboard), Stuart "Woolly" Wolstenholme (vocals, mellotron, keyboards), Mel Pritchard (drums, percussion), Alan Parsons (jaw harp), Gavin Wright (orchestra leader), Robert John Godfrey (conductor, musical director)  
 ▲ **Recorded at:** EMI Studios, London  
 ▲ **Influenced by:** Moody Blues, Beatles, Pink Floyd  
 ▲ **Influence on:** Horslips, Pendragon, Eddie Vedder, Manning, John Mitchell, Wolf People  
 ▲ **Other info:** The front cover of *Once Again* comprises an enlarged part of the artwork from the band's 1970 self-titled debut. Later versions were not gatefold sleeves and thus the intended effect was completely lost.





Barclay James Harvest,  
1971: The inspiration for  
*Once Again's* aborted  
sea shanty *White  
Sails*, perhaps?



beginning to find our own sound, and if you listen back to those early albums—especially *Once Again*—then you can hear a definite Barclay James Harvest style. The problem is, I can't actually describe what our sound really is! Sometimes I do find it hard to put my finger on what made us different to everyone else. But it's certainly there."

"It wasn't as hard to make *Once Again* as it had been to make that first album," agrees Wolstenholme. "By now we'd found our musical direction. But in those days things moved so fast. If we weren't on tour, then we were writing songs, and then we were in the studio, and then back on the road. It just seemed we were shunted from one bus to another—always on the move."

But Holroyd feels that all talk about a BJH sound is misleading.

"I've never thought of a particular BJH sound. All our songs are different. Maybe people thought of a BJH sound on *Once Again* because we were experimenting with orchestras and Mellotrons, and early synthesizer music. On albums after this one, we obviously used the same instrumentation for a while. But that still doesn't mean we had an identifiable sound."

Another controversy surrounding the album is the fact the wrong person appears to have been credited on some of the songs. One instance is in the case of *She Said*, where Lees is down as the writer, when in fact it should have been Holroyd. The latter is surprisingly sanguine about it.

"It was down to a mix-up at the label," Holroyd says. "These things can happen when you have more than one person in a band who writes songs."

Lees, though, is a lot more forthcoming on how something like this could happen.

"You get a lot of paperwork through from the label about who wrote what songs, and

the way we sorted this out was that whoever was around at the time would just sign them off. That's how it happened. There was certainly no malice on my part, or attempt to hijack a song from Les."

*She Said* itself is actually a combination of two Holroyd compositions: *And I Will Always Love Her* and *Miss Bailey*. It was Wolstenholme who suggested the pair should be merged, with the *She Said* title coming from a verse in the latter.

"They were both folky songs," says the keyboard player, "and I just felt it would work better when those songs were put together. I suppose it should be credited to Holroyd/Wolstenholme, or to the band. But the fact that John has the credit never affected anything. It's not as if he was getting money owed to Les or me because of it."

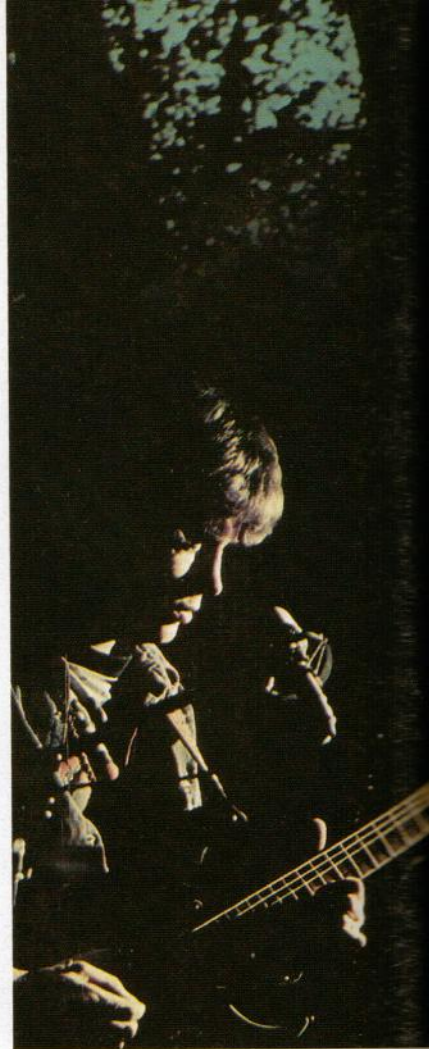
On *Galadriel*, Lees actually got to play a guitar owned by John Lennon.

"It was lying around in the studio," he laughs. "It was Norman who encouraged me to pick it up and play. It's the same Gibson Epiphone that Lennon used when the Beatles were filmed on the rooftop playing *Let It Be*, so it does have a history."

This incident would later (much later) inspire the band to write a song called *John Lennon's Guitar* for their 1990 album, *Welcome To The Show*.

*White Sails*, a track that didn't make the final album [it appears as a bonus track on the new CD/DVD reissue], is worth noting because this track summed up the problems the band were having at the time with Robert John Godfrey, and, indeed, might have been the final nail in his coffin as far as his connection with BJH was concerned.

"It's a sea shanty type song that I wrote," reveals Wolstenholme. "I suppose it was a 'Moody Blues' type of track. I gave it to Robert for orchestration. Initially, he added a slow piano preamble, which I loved. But then he went crazy and did a piano concerto around it that rambled on for what seemed like hours and hours, which was totally incomprehensible, and had nothing to do with the song at all."

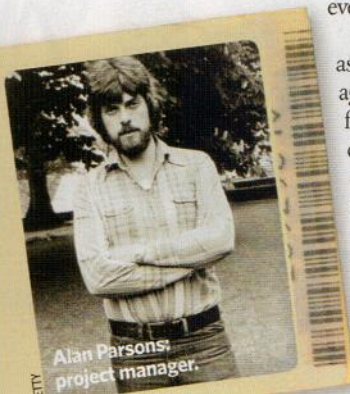


In the end, the band decided to ditch what had become a monstrosity.

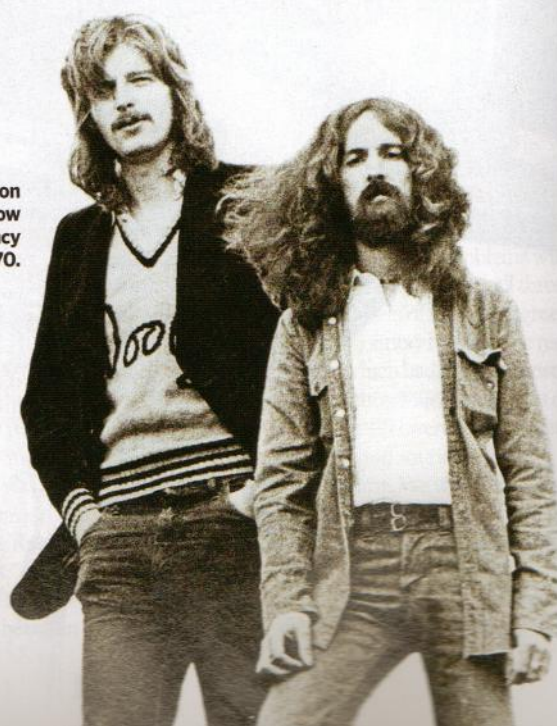
"We had no choice but to abandon it," sighs Wolstenholme. "I had this shitty Led Zeppelin style rocker called *Ball And Chain*, which we put on instead."

This is one song the band were never to perform live, because there were certain effects used on Wolstenholme's voice to get the song's particular sonic contortions. If he'd attempted this onstage, it probably would have shredded his throat!

Inevitably, the stand-out track here is *Mockingbird*, a BJH classic with a history going back to 1968, when Lees first came



Notorious fashion plates BJH show off their fancy threads, 1970.







Dark times for the Harvest, 1970: (l-r) John Lees, Les Holroyd, Mel Pritchard, Woolly Wolstenholme.

up with the concept for the song.

"I'd written it about my girlfriend at the time, Olwen, whom I later married," the guitarist remembers. "I'm not sure why it was left off the first album. We'd certainly played the song live for a while, and it had quickly become very popular."

"We did do a demo of it very early on," adds Wolstenholme, "and, in fact, I found a copy of it under the stairs only recently."

*Mockingbird* would later become contentious, when Godfrey claimed he should have a co-writing credit due to his orchestrations. It was part of his law suit against the band in 1984, which was finally resolved 11 years later in favour of BJH.

One other person who should be mentioned at this stage is musician and producer Alan Parsons, who would go on to become successful with his own band, The Alan Parsons Project.

"We gave him his place in history," smirks Wolstenholme. "On the song *Lady Loves*, someone suggested we needed to add a Jew's harp. We didn't even know what the hell that was. But Alan, who was a tape operator at Abbey Road, could play the instrument, so we let him loose on this song. He certainly had the teeth to play it!"

The album was released in the UK on February 5, 1971, but failed to chart. It wouldn't be until *Barclay James Harvest Live* in 1974 that they'd finally make the Top 40 here. *Mockingbird* was put out as single on March 19, 1971, with *Vanessa Simmons* on the

B-side. But again, despite the song's live popularity, the single never charted. The modest sales put the band under some financial pressure, as Lees explains.

"Because we'd used an orchestra, it meant that we got ourselves into debt with the label. But that was okay, because having the orchestra was worthwhile."


For Wolstenholme, *Once Again* was mostly a positive experience.

"It was an era that's unrepeatable. We got lucky I think, because there were so many good bands out there who never had the breaks or the spirit we had. It's not my favourite Barclay James Harvest

album, yet it's one that was very important in our development."

But don't expect the group to reform to celebrate the album's forthcoming 40th anniversary.

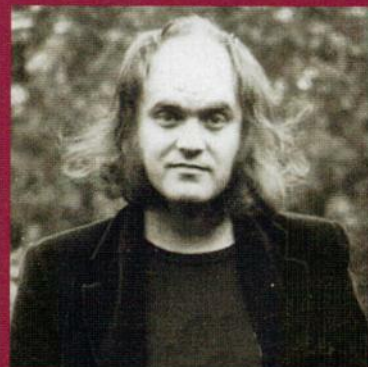
"We're not that sort of band," says Lees. "You won't see Woolly and I getting back with Les [Holroyd has had nothing to do with Wolstenholme and Lees since 1998] and doing the whole album live."

"We'll leave others to celebrate," concludes Wolstenholme, "while we get on with being a relevant band in 2011." 

*As Prog was going to press, Woolly Wolstenholme sadly passed away, see News for our obituary. John Lees' Barclay James Harvest play Buxton Opera House on February 19.*

## "GET THIS STRAIGHT: I WASN'T FIRED. I QUIT."

Robert John Godfrey on the messy end of his time with BJH...



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN Robert John Godfrey and Barclay James Harvest remains an unresolved issue for both parties. And The Enid leader has no doubts as to where it all went wrong for him.

"We were the founding fathers of symphonic rock. Especially me. But I believe things turned bad when John moved out of the farm where we were all living [Preston House] and into the house owned by his girlfriend's parents. At the time I had befriended a young guy. There was nothing improper in it, but tongues started to wag. And John's girlfriend began to poison him against me. What made it worse was that her sister began seeing Les, and the two girls ganged up. They hated my guts, and made my position untenable. And let's get this straight, I quit. I was not fired, I quit."

Godfrey still has strong views on the four members of the band.

"I had a really great relationship with Woolly, which was destroyed by the court case. I deeply regret that, because he was the one man in the band with any brains. I like to think I had an enormous input into his music and his life."

"I also got on well with Mel. He was thoughtful and self-effacing, and a lot better as a drummer than he'd give himself any credit for."

"I didn't mind John as a songwriter. But he was homophobic, so I had no relationship with him."

"Les... I won't even talk about him."

Godfrey insists that there was an attempt to get him into the band as a full-time member at one point, "But Woolly said he'd quit if I joined, so that left me in a kind of limbo."

Ultimately, he feels that his input was never given the respect it deserved.

"I should have been given a lot more credit for what I was doing, because it was groundbreaking. The problem was that none of the band had the brains to realise how huge my vision was." **MD**

