

PROLOGUE

About Ten Years Of Worry

“Is it true you used to sleep in a coffin?” At almost ten minutes to eight on the morning of Monday February 24, 1986, presenter Anne Diamond has asked the question she has been itching to pose for the last couple of minutes.

In front of her, The Damned’s singer David Vanian is sitting next to Barry Ryan on the sofa on *Good Morning Britain*, the nation’s breakfast television mix of chit-chat, exercise tips, news updates and weather reports. Ryan had recorded the original of the baroque pop classic ‘Eloise’ in 1968 and, as the programme goes out live, The Damned’s version sits at three in the charts. Their biggest hit has reached its peak position. Yet David looks ill at ease. Although arresting in his frock coat, cravat, high wing collar and swept-back hair, on-camera informality doesn’t come easily.

Addressing the question about the unconventional bed, David considers his words. “Very uncomfortable. No, not really.”

“What do you mean, not really?” counters Diamond.

“They’re a bit small, cramped,” says David.

“But you have, haven’t you, you have slept in a coffin, haven’t you?” Diamond’s co-host Nick Owen won’t let it go. “We’ve heard all these funny things about you.”

“You used to be a gravedigger,” interjects Diamond. “Is that true?”

“That’s true,” concedes David, who goes on to explain he enjoyed the job as he liked the isolation, being in the country and that he could get the work done quickly, leaving time to get into London and work with the band.

Finally, the awkward four minutes in the hot seat are up and The Damned are seen miming ‘Eloise’.

Earlier in the encounter, Diamond was drawn to the broad grey streak in David’s hair and wondered if it meant he had worry in his life. “About ten years of worry,” was his response.

Ten years of worry indeed. The Damned had played live for the first time in 1976 and were instantly hailed as one of Britain’s pioneering punk rock bands. This, though, was of no concern to *Good Morning Britain* a decade later. They were high in the charts and their singer was an individual sort of chap, just the type of pop star to subject to a gentle grilling as the nation readied itself for household chores or work.

And The Damned themselves were working hard. Later that week they were off to America. On the Friday, they played New York’s Ritz. After that, coast-to-coast US dates, then New Zealand, Australia and Japan: two full months away from the land of *Good Morning Britain*.

In 1976, any suggestion that a decade later The Damned would be helping Britain ease itself into the week, sitting high in the charts and then jetting off for a sustained crack at the world market would have been scoffed at. However, British punk’s most unruly and unstable band had long outlived the Sex Pistols. The Clash were gone too – fizzling out after November 1985’s *Cut The Crap* album. The Damned were the last of the first three British punk bands standing. They were still around despite themselves.

If this was the punishment their name demanded, The Damned took it on the chin and soldiered on. Getting up early to be asked whether you slept in a coffin was a small price to pay.