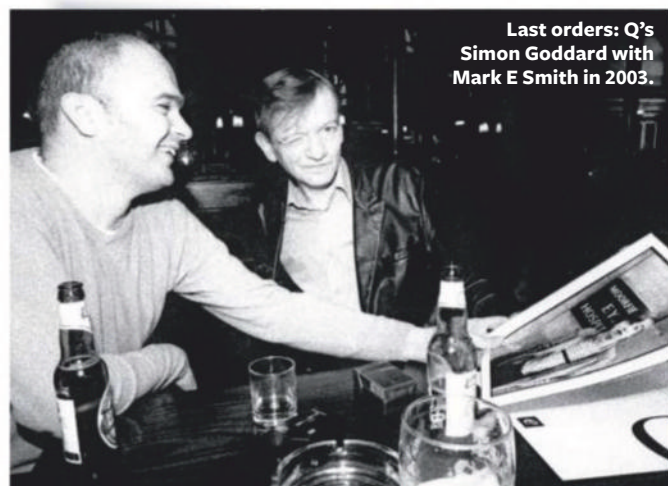


# The Indelible Mark

On the first anniversary of **Mark E Smith** of The Fall's death, **Simon Goddard** travels to Manchester to speak to the singer's sister, ex-wife, best friend and long-serving bandmates to discover that MES's reverberations are still unbelievably powerful.

**M**ark E Smith ran his group like a factory shop floor and, so, at the end of every year, same as any other workplace, The Fall had their annual Christmas do. The venue changed, but Smith's criteria was always the same. The restaurant, or pub, had to be "the shittiest place" with "the crappiest food" and "the worst atmosphere." The point of the exercise was to have as miserable a time as humanly possible. And just in case the invited few – strictly blokes, being those in the group and his best mates – assumed otherwise, Smith gave this festive get-together its own name. "Sad Lads."

"That was Mark's sense of humour," says last Fall drummer Keiron Melling. "The whole joke was you weren't supposed to have a good >>



Last orders: Q's Simon Goddard with Mark E Smith in 2003.

TOM SHEEHAN, SHUTTERSTOCK

Still looming large: the mural of Mark E Smith near his old home in Prestwich.





CHIPS

When I'm dead  
In riffs or vinyl  
and my  
through

Handwritten signature or graffiti.

time but Sad Lads was always brilliant. The shitter, the funnier. Pure belly laughs.”

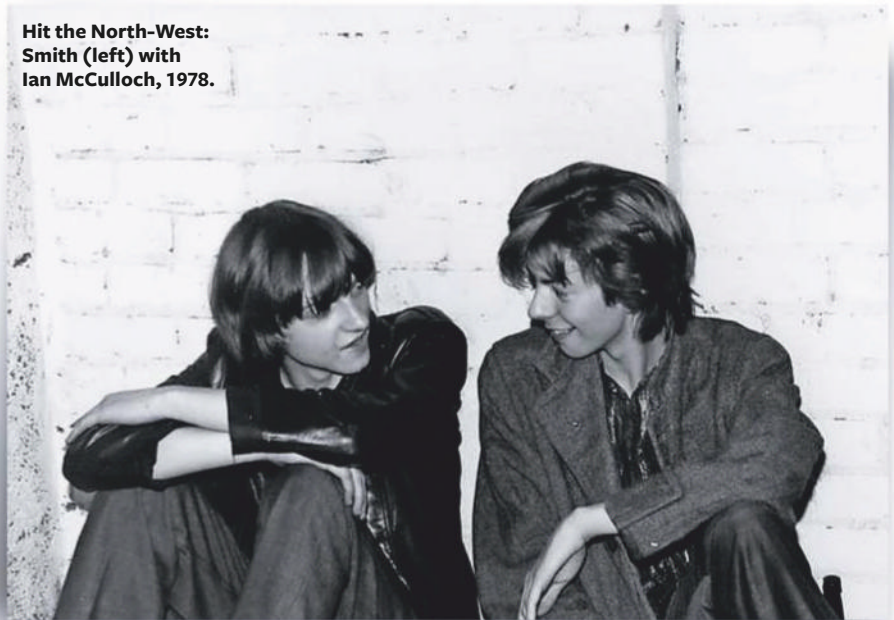
It’s Friday, 1 February, 2019: one year and eight days since we lost the unmatched mind of Mark Edward Smith. Melling and his bereaved Fall brethren, guitarist Pete Greenway and bassist Dave Spurr, are savouring a pre-gig pint in London’s Troubadour where tonight they’ll unveil Imperial Wax, their new band acknowledging their first Fall LP together, 2008’s Imperial Wax Solvent. While careful that new singer Sam Curran avoids the sacrilege of Smith mimicry, in punchy riffs, taut rhythms and debut album title, *Gastwerk Saboteurs*, they inevitably echo their titular ancestry. “Mark’s thing was all about moving forward and he instilled that in us,” says Melling. “A new band, new songs. We’re not trying to be The Fall. Without Mark there can never be a Fall.” The main motivation, he confesses, couldn’t be more personal. “This is all part of our grieving process.”

To the enlightened who agree Smith was the most singularly original voice in British pop, the shocking news of 24 January 2018 confirming he’d succumbed to cancer at the age of 60 was a cultural Hiroshima every megaton the equal of a Bowie or Prince. Echo And The Bunnymen’s Ian McCulloch recalls being thunderstruck first witnessing the young Smith onstage in Liverpool. “I could see his brain from the back of the room,” says McCulloch. “He was so different from everyone else, so much cleverer. I took one look at him and thought, ‘Yeah, obvious genius.’”

That was 1978. Smith’s brain blazed ever different, ever cleverer for another 40 years, leaving behind a musical legacy incomparable with any group active during the same time period: the discography equivalent of a series boxset demanding to be binge-watched en masse. The odd duff episode (*The Frenz Experiment*, *Cerebral Caustic*) but otherwise overwhelming in its sustained plot twists regardless of decade, producer or supporting cast (*Grotesque*, *Extricate*, *The Unutterable*, etc, etc, etc), an enigma of myriad riches best summarised by their greatest champion, John Peel. “People write to me and say, ‘I’ve heard The Fall, which record should I get?’ And I never have any hesitation in telling them, ‘You must get them all.’ In fact, I’ll go further and say that anybody who can tell you the five best Fall LPs or the five best Fall tracks has missed the point, really. It’s the whole body of the work that is to be applauded.”

“There’s some not so great, but there’s a *hell* of a lot of great stuff,” enthuses former bassist Steve Hanley who joined The Fall in 1979, lasting a record-breaking two decades in Smith’s service as musician

Hit the North-West: Smith (left) with Ian McCulloch, 1978.



**“I could see his brain from the back of the room. He was so different from everyone else, so much cleverer. I took one look at him and thought, ‘Yeah, obvious genius.’”**  
**Ian McCulloch, Echo And The Bunnymen**

and co-writer on 18 of their 31 studio albums (or 19 of 32 if you include 1981’s *Slates* EP, and since it’s a masterpiece, who wouldn’t?). “I probably stayed a few albums too far,” he muses. “I’d say [*1993’s Top 10*] *The Infotainment Scan* was my last really good one. But when you look at the amount of work with all the different line-ups, it really is incredible. I was in The Fall 20 years and that was only the *first* half.”

An entire book, Dave Simpson’s *The Fallen*, has been written about the virtual coachload of ex-members, theirs not so much a family tree as a dense arboretum of around 70 line-up combinations involving approximately 50 musicians whose survival depended less on technical skill than the humility to accept the one very simple group tenet: Mark E Smith *was* The Fall. His spontaneous quip in 1998, “if it’s me and your granny on bongos, it’s a Fall gig” (more commonly misquoted “...it’s The Fall”) became Smith’s personal “let them eat cake”, the perceived despotism of a man who reportedly once sacked a sound engineer for ordering a salad all part of the cantankerous cartoon mythology. Less celebrated is the reality of The Fall’s last quarter when, as of 2008, the group stabilised with its longest consistent line-up: the trio of Greenway, Melling and Spurr alongside Smith’s Greek-German wife Elena Poulou (preceding them as keyboard player since 2002, leaving prior to 2017’s unintended swansong *New Facts Emerge*). “I think we realised that none of us are >>



(From left) Imperial Wax, featuring the last Fall line-up; long-serving bassist Steve Hanley; Smith with ex-wife and Fall member Elena Poulou.

DANIEL SCANLIN/GETTY



**Suited and booted:**  
Mark E Smith  
cuts a dash in his  
mid-'80s pomp.



famous, it was *Mark*,” explains Melling. “He was the guy and it was his band, so it was our job to make him look the best that we could. And that pretty much served us right.”

Hanley’s theory that Smith reached a stage where “he worked best with younger musicians who were slightly in awe of him” is borne out by the Imperial Wax chaps who reminisce about their late gaffer with the affection of three grandkids discussing their eccentric old pops. Like Smith’s trick of ordering “the most disgusting thing on the menu” says Greenway. “We’d go for a Chinese and he’d order chicken’s feet only to pile it on your plate. ‘Ere, try summa that!’ Then sit back with a big smile on his face.” The time he once shooed aside a child blocking the entrance to a hotel lift in France. “The way someone else might go, ‘Run along you little scamp,’” giggles Melling, “well, Mark bends down and goes, [friendly voice] ‘Come on, now. Fook off.’” The country music CD he played with such Groundhog Day zeal “we had to hide it.” And his “German jokes” lasting 45 minutes with no punchline. “So shit but you’d still be laughing,” smiles Melling. “Mark was the funniest person I’ve ever met. Easily.”

But there are other times when their eyes fog over with a palpable sorrow. Melling says he still can’t believe Smith’s gone. “I genuinely thought he was bomb-proof.” When Spurr remarks how he hasn’t “cried with laughter the same since Mark died” he doesn’t appear to be exaggerating. “I think about Mark every day,” he adds. “Every hour of every day. Every time I see something on TV I’ve got Mark in the back of my head.” The others silently cradle their pints. The Sad Lads, looking only too genuine.

For their old bandmate Elena Poulou the past 12 months have been even tougher. She first met Smith in 1995. They married in 2001 and, despite separating in 2016, were never divorced: theirs was the longest marriage, and relationship, of Smith’s life. Speaking to Q on the phone from Germany, while Poulou booms many a throaty infectious laugh down the receiver, she often sounds tearful when painting a portrait at odds with Smith’s misanthropic media stereotype. “He could be very cute, you know.”

Poulou mourns an “endlessly creative” and “sensitive” man of simple pleasures: eating Wigan butter pie and Battenberg; amusing himself writing sci-fi film scripts such as “WORLD AGE 4” about a global takeover by animals; cackling at *Private Eye* and the Marx Brothers’ *Duck Soup*; watching *Zulu*, *Columbo* and corny *True Entertainment* biopics; posting hysterical letters complaining about the local drainage system under fake names to the *Prestwich Advertiser* (which they invariably printed); giving away \$100 bills to a



**“In private he was a very sweet person. He loved to feed the birds in the garden every morning. He’d speak to them, then come in and tell me what they’d been saying to him.”**

**Elena Poulou, ex-wife**

New York bag lady and befriending a homeless man in Manchester whom, to Smith’s anger, had been told off by council workers for feeding pigeons. “He had his public persona,” says Poulou, “but in private he was a very sweet person. He loved to feed the birds in the garden every morning. He’d speak to them, then come in and tell me what they’d been saying to him.”

In early 2009, just as Poulou and the newly shipshape Fall F.C. of Greenway, Melling and Spurr were about to start work on their second album together, Smith was diagnosed with kidney cancer. In spite of his cult status as the post-punk Alex Higgins who likely bled *Holsten Pils* and chewed *Marlboro* butts for gum, Poulou maintains his specific illness was “non-lifestyle related”. Smith was nevertheless “failed by the NHS”, she claims, instead seeking medical attention in Germany where an infected kidney and surrounding tissue was successfully removed. “And he was fine,” says Poulou. “He didn’t need any chemo and he was five years clear. But he didn’t want to tell anybody because he didn’t want to be ‘poor me’. He went straight from the hospital and continued recording in a wheelchair. Mark was so, so strong.”

By the time his cancer resurfaced with a vengeance in 2017, Poulou and Smith had already separated. “But we remained friends,” she stresses, “we kept talking and seeing each other.” Smith would spend his final year settled in a new home with his last life partner, photographer and Fall manager Pamela Vander. Poulou returned to



**Up close and personal: photos from sister Caroline's archive (from far left) Smith on holiday with sisters Suzanne and Barbara; enjoying a tipple; onstage in the '80s; in a rare moment of rest.**

Germany where she continues to write and perform, including a new song called Crows about Smith feeding the birds. She recently played it live in Berlin. "The first time I've been able to do it without crying," Poulou says. "It's been very hard. *Very hard. It doesn't really matter to me about one year passing. Every day is another anniversary without Mark. But you have to go on. That's what Mark would say. 'Keep going.' He was all about looking to the future.*"

**T**he future is still a difficult concept to grasp for Smith's grieving family, survived by his three younger sisters Barbara, Suzanne and Caroline. Two days before she meets Q, Caroline Smith was at home in the Salford flat she shares with her six cats, enjoying a cup of tea listening to Lauren Laverne's breakfast show on BBC 6 Music when her brother came on air. The track was not only one of his best but, an adjective not commonly associated with The Fall, most *beautiful* songs, 1990's Bill Is Dead: as close as Smith came to a Lou Reed Perfect Day ("These are the finest times of my life"), written in the wake of, if not strictly about, their

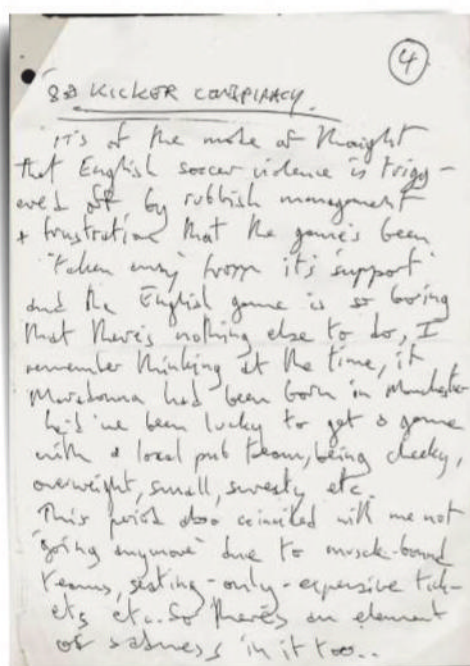
father's death. "I just fell on the floor," says Caroline, re-enacting the moment Laverne played it. "My whole body crumbled. Some days you think you're getting over it. But you're not."

A friendly, uncomplicated soul of surface emotions, Caroline Smith has something of her brother around the eyes. "I think we've all got the Smith nose," she says, giving hers a pinch. We sit in the back of one of Mark's favourite central Manchester pubs, leafing through the plastic wallet of old photographs she's brought along: her brother as a boy on a family outing (the sprightly charmer's grin already unmistakable), onstage through the years at some of the "hundreds" of gigs she attended, and looking blissfully relaxed on holiday. "Doesn't Mark look handsome?"

Caroline very evidently worships her brother, not just as his baby sister but equally a Fall devotee. During the last year she's taken great comfort meeting his fans and passing on mementos such as vintage badges and photographs, most recently to a couple from New Zealand who'd made the pilgrimage to see the new mural of Smith painted on the side of a fish and chip shop in his local Prestwich. Some things, though, are much too precious to surrender to strangers. The family are still in the process of clearing Smith's house, including his many

notebooks dating back to the '70s. Q's inner Indiana Jones blurts out that the journals of Mark E. Smith "belong in a museum." A potential curators' committee of John Lydon, Frank Skinner, Jeremy Vine and Irvine Welsh – all fans – would surely agree. So too the fall.org webmasters Conway Paton and Stefan Cooke for whom Smith was no less than "the James Joyce of pop music"; a linguistic atom-smasher whose "versatility with language and vocal timing was second to none."

From the first couple of Fall albums it became apparent that were Smith not so pricelessly rare a rock'n'roll spirit shaken to the surface by UK punk, in another time and place he could have easily succeeded as a scriptwriter or author of sci-fi and horror fiction. As it was, he fashioned the primeval energy of rockabilly, garage and Krautrock into a bespoke sonic receptacle to harbour simultaneous aspirations of being both Iggy Pop and HP Lovecraft, his rich Salfordian wit stretching further still to Shakespeare-sharp invectives ("grotty spawn") and the detached observational poetry of Larkin: "Down pokey quaint streets in >>



**(Above) The cover of Smith's sci-fi script, World Age 4; (right) a letter he wrote to Q's Simon Goddard in 1997 explaining the words to Kicker Conspiracy.**



**“I miss him. Even the arguments”:** (above) Smith with tour manager Ed Blaney in New York, 2001; (right) Smith and Blaney enjoy a swift few, 2014.



**“Mark felt he was under attack, like everyone was ganging up on him. And the worst of it was these people had no idea about Mark’s condition because he didn’t want anybody to know.” Ed Blaney, tour manager and friend**

Cambridge/Cycles our distant spastic heritage.” Beyond music, Smith was a modern literary icon, in memoriam surely deserving of blue plaques, British Library retrospectives and the national curriculum. Except to Caroline his notebooks, like his ashes, are a part of her brother she isn’t yet ready to part with. “All that stuff’s for the family.”

But did Smith himself, a man who blew many a fabulous kazoo solo but never his own trumpet, realise just how gifted he was?

“No,” Caroline shakes her head, “I don’t think he did, really.” She describes the time she went round to his house with their mum to find Smith throwing an award he’d received from a music magazine out of his bedroom window. “We said to him, ‘Mark! What did you do that

for?’ So we went and picked it up and put it on his mantelpiece.” Two days later, Caroline went back. The award was still on the mantelpiece, only now emblazoned with Smith’s marker-pen messages about her cats. “We love you, Fudgie, you are the best.” She shakes her head again. “No,” she repeats, “Mark had no ego. He just loved doing what he did.”

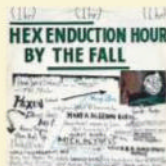
Her ciggie fingers twitching, we shift out back to the “beer garden”: a square yard with a few rain-soaked benches, the surrounding walls plastered with flyers for local club nights. “There’s Mark!” squeaks Caroline, spying his face on a sticker quoting a lyric from 1980’s *Totally Wired*. The coincidence leads to discussion of Smith’s fascination with psychics, spiritualism and the occult which often

## THE SEVEN AGES OF FALL Q’s era-by-era guide to the art of Mark E Smith



### 1 PUNK FALL (1976-79)

Smith finds his voice “crap-rapping” over cheap organ, scratchy guitar and bumbling tom-toms. Songs about bingo, industrial estates, teenage gangs, spiritualists, Valium, Cadbury’s Chocolate Animals and MR James-style ghost stories. **Defining album:** *Live At The Witch Trials* (1979)



### 2 CLASSIC FALL (1980-83)

Smith’s unique lyrical syntax now perfected over savage riffs, bold-outlining bass and double drum-kits. Songs about speed, Northern soul, truck drivers, Iceland, Nazis, CB radio, Shakin’ Stevens, football, time travel and Kellogg’s All-Bran. **Defining album:** *Hex Enduction Hour* (1982)



### 3 POP FALL (1984-89)

The production sparkler, the choruses catchier, the tunes brassier. Songs about The Twilight Zone, middle age, Cadbury’s Curly Wurlies, Satanism, Muslim air hostesses, William Of Orange and chart-knocking covers of R Dean Taylor and The Kinks. **Defining album:** *This Nation’s Saving Grace* (1985)



### 4 TECHNO FALL (1990-94)

Smith rants while his group rave, a new decade ushering in a fancier electronic Fall. More songs about The Twilight Zone, plus others on wiretapping, Richard & Judy, students, Ian McShane, and ingenious revisions of Lee Perry and Sister Sledge. **Defining album:** *The Infotainment Scan* (1993)



### 5 SURVIVAL FALL (1995-2001)

Their most inconsistent album run bearing the scars of false starts, line-up mutinies and hasty pressgangs: the lows poor, the highs intoxicating. Songs fit for Vauxhall Corsa ads and others concerning ketamine, Twix and IRA bomb prophecies. **Defining album:** *The Marshall Suite* (1999)



### 6 RENAISSANCE FALL (2002-06)

The door still revolving but the dust settling, Smith galvanises a 21st-century Fall merging all punk, pop and techno pasts into a defiant new whole. Songs fit for BBC1’s *Final Score* and others about Neighbours, Dolly Parton, U-boats and Hunter S Thompson. **Defining album:** *The Real New Fall LP* (2003)



### 7 NEO-CLASSIC FALL (2007-18)

Smith’s last decade with his loyalest/longest core line-up; the old master tutoring his young blood in the fine art of primitivism. Songs about Pierce Brosnan, iPhones, Murder She Wrote, online trolls and wanking the cat to feed the dog. **Defining album:** *New Facts Emerge* (2017)

“He just lived life on his own terms”: Mark E Smith, the man whose legend expanded.



crept into his songs. “Oh, Mark *did* believe in the afterlife,” nods Caroline, alluding to various “strange things” that have happened to her this past year. “But, you know what it is,” she continues. “The problem I’ve got...” Her body begins to slump, the voice softening to a staccato whisper. “I’m... never... gonna... see... him... again.” Then she sobs like a child, grabbing Q’s hand, the cheerless Manchester clouds threatening rain above as her dead brother gazes at us helplessly from the sticker on the wall. Life probably does get sadder than this, but right now that’s hard to imagine.

The gloom eventually subsides and we step back inside for a refresher when the instant our backsides touch our seats the pub speakers buzz to life with The Kinks: of all songs, Victoria, which as covered by The Fall provided one of Smith’s biggest chart hits in 1988. “That’s a bit weird,” Q tells her. Caroline giggles. “Is it?” Then calmly sips her wine with a queer grin on her face.

**I**t’s a short walk back towards the station to our last Sad Lad rendezvous, two floors up in a Victorian warehouse currently being transformed into new Manchester venue, Yerrrr Bar. Owner Ed Blaney started tour-managing The Fall in 2000, soon playing and writing with Smith both in The Fall and Blaney’s own band projects, ultimately becoming his chief consigliere. Or as Blaney puts it, “mopper-upper when the shit hit the fan.” Mixing business and pleasure as Smith’s employee and “best mate” wasn’t always easy. “Mark could be fucking hard work, especially when he was

pissed,” Blaney smiles. “We had some stressful moments and a lot of arguments. But they were always positive, productive arguments. We wouldn’t speak for a few days but then I’d ring him or he’d ring me. ‘I’m sorry. Let’s crack on, cock.’ And it’d all be sorted.”

He regales Q with priceless war stories of life on and off the road with Smith, in Blaney’s estimation “just a normal bloke, like a plumber or a builder who you’d meet in the pub”: the pub being central to most of those stories. If Smith and Blaney invited one another out “for a pint” it could last anything from one night to several days. “But it was all good,” he reassures, “so long as he told Elena he was OK. ‘Phone the wife, cock, let her know I’ll be home in an hour.’ And we might have gone on for another day. If Mark was ever down about something, I’d take him out for a pint, and vice versa. We were always there for each other.”

If this sounds like mutual enabling, Blaney insists that when it came to alcohol Smith did know his limits. As an example he cites one of his first Fall gigs as tour manager where, mid-set, Smith hit the deck and stayed there till Blaney scuttled on and hauled him up again. “Mark said it was the drums, they were so powerful they knocked him over,” he chuckles. “But I went, ‘Right, that’s fucking it! The whisky’s off the rider!’ And he agreed. Even he knew it had gotten out of hand. He could’ve told me to fuck off but he worked with me. Same as speed, that was limited too. We kept it in an area that was manageable and containable. At the end of the day Mark ran The Fall like a military operation. The work always came first and he didn’t want himself or anyone else to fuck that up.”



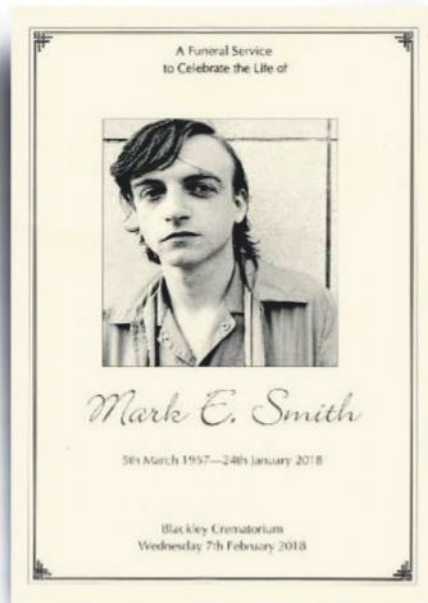


**This nation's saving  
grace: Mark E Smith,  
Manchester, 2015.**

For Steve Hanley, Smith's artistic brilliance and bridge-burning obstinacy were two sides of the same impregnable self-belief. "Mark did absolutely anything he wanted to his whole life. If he wanted to work, he worked. If he didn't, he sat in the pub. He didn't answer to record labels, any bosses, nobody, really. He didn't care what anybody thought. Mark just lived his life on his own terms." Hanley says this with genuine admiration, though his 2014 Fall chronicle *The Big Midweek* isn't quite so endearing: a sitcom of petty grievances with Smith as its tyrannical rock'n'roll Rigsby baiting band members to violent retaliation, climaxing with 1998's famous onstage fist fight in New York, the credits rolling as Smith is driven away by police in handcuffs. "All already public knowledge," Hanley reasons, though if Caroline Smith's reaction is anything to go by it's still secured him a place in hell alongside "the other bastard": ex-wife and former Fall guitarist Brix Smith Start whose own 2016 autobiography *The Rise, The Fall, And The Rise* was sufficiently more gratuitous in its settling of scores. "If it wasn't for Mark she'd still be waitressing," fumes Caroline. "And her singing's shite."

Dealing a final insult to Smith's injuries, both memoirists joined forces to tour their heritage Fall resurrection act, Brix & The Extricated. "Looking back, I can see it now from Mark's point of view," concedes Hanley. "If you're ill and sitting at home and your ex-wife is going round the country with your old band members playing your songs then, yeah, I'd be genuinely miffed." Smith was. The breaking point, says Blaney, came when Hanley's old school friend and fellow Fall veteran Marc Riley began plugging *The Extricated* on his 6 Music show. "Mark felt he was constantly under attack, like everyone was ganging up on him. It just became really fucking offensive. And the worst of it was these people had no idea about Mark's condition because he didn't want anybody to know."

Ever the damage-limitation specialist, Blaney dangled "an olive branch" on Smith's behalf when he bumped into Riley in a Manchester pub: the offer to book *The Fall* in session for his programme. "Mark was up for it," says Blaney. The other Marc declined. Though Riley tells Q he doesn't remember this conversation, he speculates: "considering Mark's deep lack of love for both myself and the BBC I can't think for a minute it'd have been a productive – or likely – move for either of us." Smith could at least console himself with his own poster design for his nemeses' forthcoming gig at Manchester's Ritz. "6½p Music and Marc E Riley presents Bricks & The Ejaculators," laughs Blaney. "Mark was really buzzing off that one. He wanted to print loads up and stick them all over town."



The fallen: the remembrance card from Mark E Smith's funeral service in 2018.

**I**n March 2017, his health rapidly deteriorating, Smith was subject to a grimly inopportune dress rehearsal when his "death" was prematurely misreported on a BBC Twitter feed. "We spoke about the end, because he knew it was coming," says Blaney, "but the BBC thing was a weird one. All the people who came out going, 'We love you Mark.' He said to me, 'You wait, when I'm gone it'll be every fucker I hate saying how I was their best mate.' Which is exactly what *has* happened."

The audible fighting spirit of that July's formidable *New Facts* *Emerge* might have convinced fans of a false alarm had there not already been a worrying increase in cancelled gigs and Smith's visible sickness during the few that went ahead. Those who caught *The Fall*'s final rescheduled dates that winter were faced with the distressing spectacle of a wheelchair-bound Smith assisted to the stage, the

**"The first time I saw his body at the chapel of rest he just wasn't there. Then the second time, it was weird. He looked totally different. I mean, he was *there*. It was Mark. You felt him. I swear to God, his face. It was like he was fucking smirking at me."** Ed Blaney

unrecognisably bloated face betraying his by then intensive chemotherapy, sometimes having to finish the show from the dressing room lying down with his mic. "I advised him not to do those gigs," says Blaney. "He looked so ill, he was in pain, but it was his choice. It wasn't a financial thing, more an obligation to his fans. Mark didn't want to disappoint them. And I think he probably knew. That this was him saying goodbye."

Smith's last public performance took place at Glasgow's Queen Margaret University on 4 November 2017. *The Fall* had been booked to play three more gigs that month. The first in Portugal was cancelled the day before. The second, in Bristol, kept to schedule until half an hour before Smith was due onstage when the band knocked on his

hotel room to head to the venue. "Mark was lying down and he just looked up and said, 'Sorry, lads. I just can't do it,'" says Greenway, pained to relive it. "That's when it hit home. He'd been sick before but he'd always made the gig. But even we didn't want him to play it. He looked so ill. It was horrendous." The next day's third date in London was also cancelled. There would be no *Sad Lads* do that Christmas.

Caroline Smith saw her brother for the last time in hospital on 22 January, 2018. She brought a copy of Lemmy's autobiography *White Line Fever*. "I sat and read bits out to him," she says, "and I held his hand." The next day Smith was allowed back home: he died in his sleep the following morning.

In the days prior to his funeral at Blackley Crematorium, Blaney went to see Smith's body in the chapel of rest, twice. "The first time he just wasn't *there*," he says. "Then our friend Rob Lally, who was best man at Mark's last wedding, rang up and said, 'Do you fancy going again?' I said, 'I would, actually, yeah.' And the second time, it was weird. He looked

totally different. I mean, he was *there*. It was Mark. You felt him. I swear to God, his face. It was like he was fucking smirking at me."

The night closing in, Blaney drives Q round to Piccadilly Station, still brooding for his absent friend. "I miss him," he laments. "I miss all of it. Even the arguments." Ten minutes later the first ring pull snaps as the carriage shunts southward out of Platform 6. It's a *Sad Lads* express for one, but the beer tastes good and the tunes from a phone-full of *Fall* even better.

Beyond the window pane there's a world learning to cope without Mark E Smith, and another only starting to discover him. But *that* voice lingers forever as balm to both. The infinite comic energy, the eternal verbal mystery, the sheer bloody-minded defiance daring any bastard to just *try* and grind it down. "I found a reason not to die/A reason for the ride/The spark inside when it hits the mind." The unsilenceable life force reminding every one of us to "crack on, cock." Forwards, into the future. 