

A very quick guide to the 1980s

If you're young enough to think of 1984 as the unimaginably distant past, there are some things in those chapters that you probably didn't understand. The best thing is to ask a significant adult in your life – preferably one in at least their mid-thirties – who will probably jump at the chance to bore you by talking about the past, the way older people tend to do.

Alternatively, here is a very quick and non-alphabetical guide to some of the 1980s stuff mentioned in this book. If you want to find out more, ask that significant adult – or of course there's always the Internet (which there wasn't back then). (This will also help if you're not British, as many of the people and things mentioned below are UK-specific.)

Daniels, Paul: Short, chirpy TV magician. Famous catchphrase: 'You'll like this – not a lot, but you'll like it', or something like that. Married his TV assistant, Debbie McGee (who was much younger but categorically did not marry him for his money, despite what Mrs Merton said – and if you don't know who Mrs Merton is you can look her up too, though she wasn't from the 1980s).

Hill, Jimmy: Bearded TV football pundit. Used to present Match of the Day (yes, that was on TV in the 1980s – along with Doctor Who, Mastermind, Eastenders (from 1985), Coronation Street and probably a few others I can't immediately recall). Once tried to buy Coventry City for £1. (They said no.) It was popular among kids in the late 1970s and early 1980s to use his name as an expression of scepticism – e.g. 'Oh yeah, Jimmy Hill!' often accompanied by a vigorous chin-rubbing. Exactly what Mr Hill had done to deserve this apparent slur on his character, I'm not at all sure.

Thatcher, Margaret: First (and so far only) female Prime Minister of the UK, 1979-1990. She died in 2013, as you may have heard. She did quite a lot of things which many people loved and many others hated. In fact, if you ask your significant adult about her, they are very likely to tell you either that she was the saviour of the country or the spawn of Satan. You might be quite surprised at the strength of the passions she still arouses, and may therefore quickly change the subject and guide your significant adult back to safer ground like Kajagoogoo.

Kajagoogoo: I can't really add to what Rob said about them – pretty-boy pop group who had a few hits, kind of like a very early One Direction but with much worse haircuts. And I honestly don't know more about them than that, but feel free to look them up and laugh at the hair. (And if you think that's good, look up the **Thompson Twins** while you're at it. They're not mentioned in this book, but what the hell. I promise you, you'll be amazed. But don't worry, most ordinary people in the 1980s didn't go around with things like that on their heads. At my school they'd have got beaten up, trust me.)

Milk Bar Kid: Blonde boy with round glasses who starred in adverts for the white chocolate bar, usually as a cowboy. Played by a number of different child actors over the years. Catchphrase: 'The Milky Bars are on me!' Accompanied by the classic song, 'The Milky Bar Kid is strong and tough, and only the best is good enough ...' etc. Still occasionally pops up on TV, but much more a fixture in the 1970s and 1980s.

Dungeons & Dragons: Fantasy role playing game, invented in the 1970s and became very popular during the 1980s, mostly with boys. No computers involved, and least not originally. Some people, even grown adults, became totally immersed in the fantasy worlds they created, and games could last for hours, days or even weeks. (Not continuously I hasten to add – players did eat, sleep and go to the toilet in between – well maybe not the hardcore ones.) Imagine a bunch of boys sitting

around pretending to be wizards, elves or dwarves for example. Or on second thoughts, best not.

CB radio: CB stands for Citizens' Band. A type of two-way radio communication (bit like big walkie-talkies) originating in the US, it became very popular in the UK after it was legalised in 1981. Users had on-air names called 'handles', and used their 'rig' (radio equipment) to say things like, 'That's a big 10-4, good buddy'. (Look up the slang if you're curious – betcha can't guess what a 'cheese wagon' is.) CB was all the rage for a while, often with young males who thought it would be cool to sound like American truckers.

Saturday Superstore: Saturday morning kids' TV show on BBC1, presented by Mike Read (who was also a radio DJ). Mix of interviews, games, cartoons and other stuff. Made getting out of bed on a Saturday just about worthwhile, even though it wasn't – in my opinion – quite as good as its predecessor, Swap Shop, which was presented by Noel Edmonds (of Deal or No Deal fame) who still looks the same now as he did then but with a greyer and slightly less pointy beard.

Chegwin, Keith: Hyperactively enthusiastic roving reporter on both Swap Shop and Saturday Superstore. Had a laugh that was generally regarded as either highly infectious or massively irritating, possibly depending on how long you were exposed to it. Also presented a classic piece of TV called Cheggars Plays Pop. Still occasionally turns up on TV. Has calmed down a bit.

Cassette tapes: Or to give their full name, compact cassette tapes. Invented in the 1960s, from then until the 1990s they were one of the main music formats, along with vinyl records, until they were replaced by CDs (and more recently by digital formats like MP3). You could also buy blank ones that could be recorded on very easily, and many a teenager spent hours creating 'mix tapes' of their favourite music,

whether for themselves, their mates or their boyfriend/girlfriend. In the 1980s cassettes were also the main way that software for home computers was sold. You had to connect a cassette player to your computer and load the game (it was usually a game), a process that typically took several minutes – and sometimes didn’t work at all. But on the plus side, the format meant that software could easily be copied onto blank tapes and shared – or, if you were a software writer or company, the word you’d use would be ‘pirated’.

Parka: Type of waterproof, hooded boys’ coat very popular in the late 1970s and early 1980s – particularly the ‘snorkel’ type in which you could zip up the hood to the point where it was like peering through a tunnel. Which meant your face was protected from the cold, but it had the drawback that you could see and hear very little. Still, at least you were nice and warm as you wandered into the traffic. At some point in the mid-1980s the parka became very uncool (probably about the point I got one).

Yuppies: ‘Young Upwardly mobile Professionals’. People who got rich in the 1980s economic boom; often worked in finance in the City or Wall Street. The men had an alarming tendency to wear brightly coloured braces. I’ve no idea why. (Well OK the braces probably kept their trousers up, which was undoubtedly a good thing, but I ask you, what was wrong with belts?)

The Internet, more than four TV channels, mobile phones: Didn’t have them in the 1980s. Actually a few yuppies were starting to pose with the first mobile phones, but they were hugely expensive great big brick-like ugly things that could barely be held with one hand. (The phones, not the yuppies.)

So there you go. In the words of Neil Turner, the past truly is a foreign country. Actually he nicked that quote from somewhere else, and if you

want to be really clever you can look that up too. Come on, don't be lazy. You've got Google haven't you? Which was more than they had in 1984.

And if you find out why Al said 'Language, Timothy!' to Cal in chapter 8, when Cal's name was clearly not Timothy, I'll be really impressed.

One more thing: many of the names (people, places, streets) in the 1984 chapters are borrowed from famous people from about that time, mostly pop stars. Ask your significant adult if they can spot them all. May as well get them to do some work too.