

The Countdowns recording career was going nowhere in particular but they played a few gigs around their hometown of Hayes. In the burgeoning London music scene Steve met a variety of stars and more than a few aspirants. This included drummer named Phil Wainman who was about to release his first solo single. The Countdowns garnered their first 'real' manager in Phil Jay who also had an interest in a Hounslow club and steered his new band into various support roles. However, the band certainly wasn't enough of a money spinner to sustain Steve and his



mates. He said, 'I left school at sixteen and I got a job in a solicitor's office as an odd-job boy and general layabout! The thing was that I did get on; got promoted from odd-job boy to (conveyancing) clerk. And then the new odd-job boy left and I was put back in my old job.'

*Steve Priest, right of picture, c. 1963. (Photographer unknown)*

Steve confessed, 'Actually, I enjoyed the work, at times, but I was always having time off when things went wrong with the group I was with at the time. As it happened, I stayed there for three years and during that time I did have thoughts about being a lawyer but didn't ever get as far as pursuing it seriously, probably because my heart wasn't in it.'

Steve believes The Countdowns may have morphed into another band during 1964 called Malcolm James and the Callers. The lineup variation included a keyboard player named Ray Thompson and they may have recorded a track entitled *When You Walk By*. Ray told Michael Damkqvist, 'In those early days I played the organ and I remember Steve was an amazing bass player, even then. (He was) also a great singer, with ability to do harmony in a unique way. We would have been about 14 years of age. Our drummer Eddie (Richards) went on to play with Edison Lighthouse. Steve was always a good guy, easy going with a great sense of humour and always cared about music.'

Steve spent most days on public transport such as buses or trains couriering legal documents to London for processing and registration at various offices. As his employer had no real idea of how



long all this commuting and paper-shuffling would take Steve was presented with the opportunity to spend a few moments here and there doing as a young man pleased. He would spend most of this 'spare' time in the studios of Southern Music listening to bands playing and recording. 'I spent hours there. Groups like White Plains were recording there and I'd just sit around and take it all in. They did used to wonder back in the office why I'd been away so long, but no-one seemed to query it.' Steve returned to music, 'I (only) gave it up for six months. I was

pissed off and disillusioned.' It was at Southern Music studios where Steve met session musicians Mick Keen and Robin Shaw. Keen had played with John Carter and Ken Lewis in the band The Ivy League. The group became a vehicle for publishing the songs which stemmed from the Carter-Lewis partnership. Carter was the resident producer at Steve's second 'office' at Southern Music.