Fifty years on from their formation, to many, Judas Priest remain Britain’s quintessential heavy metal band.

Formed in 1969 in Birmingham, England in the five decades that have followed -singer Rob Halford, guitarists Glenn Tipton and KK Downing and bassist Ian Hill formed the nucleus of one of the genre’s Founding Fathers. Taking their name from the Bob Dylan song ‘[The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ballad_of_Frankie_Lee_and_Judas_Priest)’ (from The Bard’s 1967 album ‘[John Wesley Harding](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wesley_Harding)’) alongside friends and cityfolk Black Sabbath the group are surely the first of faces to be carved on metal’s Mount Rushmore. And yet they remain a group with their eyes fixed ever forwards. Despite being their 18th studio recording 2018's ‘Firepower’ delivered the group’s highest ­charting album of their career.

It wasn’t until 1973 and the recruitment of Halford that Judas Priest as we know them began to take shape. Tipton joined the following year shortly before the recording of debut album ‘Rocka Rolla’. Despite these sessions producing future live staples like ‘Tyrant’ ‘Genocide’ and ‘The Ripper’ creative friction between the band and producer Rodger Bain saw the aforementioned songs left off the tracklisting. Better – much better was to come.

Because by 1976 and the release of second album ‘Sad Wings Of Destiny’ Priest had arrived at their signature sound. Big riffs, bluesy groove with Halford’s distinctive scream are present throughout. Released at the very onset of Britain’s punk rock explosion the record initially struggled to find an audience. And yet this strong and punchy record brought the band to the attention of major label CBS. A year later they released album three ‘Sin After Sin’ for that very label - the first of eleven consecutive albums to be certified Gold or higher by the RIAA. A year after that came ‘Killing Machine’ and the leather and studs that would become synonymous with the band’s image. The record was entitled‘Hell Bent For Leather’ in the USA. This would be the first of the band’s albums to register Platinum. And then came the band’s first true classic…

‘British Steel’ was recorded in December 1979 at [Tittenhurst Park](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tittenhurst_Park%22%20%5Co%20%22Cue%20stick) originally owned by Beatle John Lennon before becoming the home of [Ringo Starr](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ringo_Starr). Produced by Tom Allom the classic rock-tinged record bore forth some of the band’s most beloved songs - ‘United’, ‘Breaking the Law’ and ‘Living After Midnight’. The band decamped to Ibiza and delivered the bewilderingly underappreciated ‘Point Of Entry’ the following year. They stayed on the Spanish island for 1982’s ‘Screaming For Vengeance’ - the single ‘You’ve Got Another Thing Coming’ took them onto American radio and a new realm of opportunity opened up for the band. 1984’s ‘Defenders Of The Faith’ kept the band’s profile high and the following year Priest turned out at Philadelphia’s JFK Stadium for Live Aid alongside Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, Madonna and Neil Young.

1986’s ‘Turbo’ added the use of synthesizers to the band’s already rich arsenal and over a hundred gigs took the band into arenas across North America, Europe and Japan. 1988 saw the release of the band’s eleventh album ‘Ram It Down’ – a companion piece to ‘Turbo’. But Priest’s extraordinary creative run didn’t come without consequence and after an exhausting schedule and emerging creative divergences, 1990’s very heavy ‘Painkiller’ became the last Judas Priest album to feature singer Halford until 2003. The band performed at Rock In Rio in front of over 100,000 fans before a cruel and bizarre court case that levied charges at them that subliminal messages were hidden inside one of the band’s songs resulted in two fans shooting themselves – these charges were totally dismissed and the band won the case.

Rob Halford decided to leave the band and pursue a solo career – the rest of Judas Priest remained relatively quiet during the nineties - eventually the band recruited vocalist Tim ‘Ripper’ Owens - and released ‘Jugulator’ in 1997 and ‘Demolition’ in 2001. Demand was high for a reunion of the band’s classic core and in 2003 Halford re-joined the band. A rapturously received headline slot at the 2004 Ozzfest followed. A new studio album, ‘Angel Of Retribution’ arrived the subsequent year.

The band refused to play it safe - churning out the hits on demand wasn’t an option for this ever-vital band. The band’s first double album and their first concept piece ‘Nostradamus’ was released in 2008. Two years later the band won the 2010 Grammy Award for Best Metal Performance for the blistering performance of ‘Dissident Aggressor’ lifted from the 2009 album, ‘A Touch Of Evil: Live’. A proposed end to the band was touted at the end of the decade. Thankfully the band decided otherwise.

Guitarist KK Downing retired from the group in 2011 with [Richie Faulkner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richie_Faulkner) taking his place – Richie’s amazing stage presence, showmanship and playing soon won the fans over andhe remains a core member of the group to this day.

‘Redeemer Of Souls’ followed in 2014. The excellent ‘Firepower’ arrived in 2018.

That same year legendary guitarist Glenn Tipton revealed he had Parkinson’s Disease. He announced he wouldn’t be touring fully with the group going forward but would appear at various shows to perform encores with the band. He remains and always will be an integral part of Judas Priest…

50 million albums sold - 11 top 30 UK albums - creators of a music that remains beloved by billions; Judas Priest have no intention of stopping 50 years on. What does the future hold? You might take a stab at invention, new milestones, melody and might. But one thing is assured **-** it will be filled with very heavy metal!