



MYSTERY BOY: Robin Gunningham, circled, in 1989 when he was a pupil at Bristol Cathedral School, above

He was great at art. It's no surprise that he's Banksy

ART ATTACKS: 'Vandalism' that's worth millions



Banksy's sandwich board-wearing monkey sold for £228,000 this year. He has also painted murals – a Mona Lisa with a rocket launcher and a huge yellow flower in London, and another Mona Lisa in Glasgow



he said the man in it was Robin Gunningham.

In 1984, Robin, then 11, donned a black blazer, grey trousers and striped tie to attend the renowned Bristol Cathedral School, which currently charges fees of £9,240 a year and lists supermodel Sophie Anderson as a former pupil.

It is hard to imagine Banksy, the anti-authoritarian renegade, as a public schoolboy wandering around the 17th Century former monastery, with its upper and lower quadrangles and its prayers in the ancient cathedral. But we then found a school photograph, taken in 1989, of a bespectacled Robin Gunningham in which he shows a discernible resemblance to the man in the Jamaica photograph.

Indeed, fellow pupils remember Robin, who was in Deans House, as being a particularly gifted artist. Scott Nurse, an insurance broker who was in Robin's class, said: 'He

was one of three people in my year who were extremely talented at art. He did lots of illustrations. I am not at all surprised if he is Banksy. He was also in the house rugby team and I think he played hockey as well.'

In the rare interviews Banksy has given (always anonymously), the artist has acknowledged that it was while at school that he first became interested in graffiti. In 1983, the New York hip-hop group the Rock Steady Crew toured Europe, appearing at the Royal Variety Performance with a number of graffiti artists. This performance was the inspiration for artists such as Massive Attack's 3D and Nick Walker, now an equally high-profile artist and designer who did the backdrop for the films *Eyes Wide Shut* and *Judge Dredd*.

But Banksy's interest in the art is said to have caused a family rift. Former neighbour Mr Hallett said: 'The family was always very nice.

I don't know for sure but I think Robin was working as a graffiti artist. He worked for other people and would disappear for months on end. He was quite nomadic. I would not go as far as to say he went off the rails, but there was some sort of rift in the family, probably because he didn't turn out quite as they hoped. He just disappeared after he left home.'

In 1985, Bristol's Arnolfini Gallery hosted an exhibition called *Graffiti Art In Britain*, at which artists sprayed paint directly on to the gallery walls and the hip hop band The Wild Bunch, which later became Massive Attack, played.

In an interview in 2006 with pop-culture magazine *Swindle*, Banksy said: 'I came from a relatively small city in southern England. When I was about ten years old, a kid called 3D was painting the streets hard. I think he'd been to New York and was the

first to bring spray painting back to Bristol. I grew up seeing spray paint on the streets way before I ever saw it in a magazine or on a computer.'

'3D quit painting and formed the band Massive Attack, which may have been good for him but was a big loss for the city. Graffiti was the thing we all loved at school. We did it on the bus on the way home from school. Everyone was doing it.'

Robin Gunningham left school at 16 after doing GCSEs and began dabbling in street art.

The following year, as part of Operation Anderson, undercover police arrested 72 artists across Britain on criminal damage charges. Those arrested included Tom Bingle (aka Inkie), the graffiti artist acknowledged to be Banksy's partner in crime, who is now head of creative design at the computer games manufacturer Sega. He was tried but acquitted.

Robin Gunningham was not

arrested. Nor is there any record of Banksy being apprehended. But the artist has confessed he had by now become expert at evading police.

In his book *Wall And Piece*, he said: 'When I was 18, I spent one night trying to paint LATE AGAIN in big silver bubble letters on the side of a passenger train. British Transport Police showed up and I got ripped to shreds running away through a thorny bush. The rest of my mates made it to the car and disappeared so I spent over an hour hidden under a dumper truck with engine oil leaking all over me.'

'As I lay there listening to the cops on the tracks, I realised I had to cut my painting time in half or give up altogether. I was staring straight up at the stencilled plate on the bottom of a fuel tank when I realised I could just copy that style and make each letter 3ft high.'

'I got home at last and crawled into bed next to my girlfriend. I told her I'd had an epiphany that night and she told me to stop taking that drug 'cos it's bad for your heart.'

As our investigation continued, our inquiries demonstrated again and again that the details of Robin Gunningham's life story dovetail perfectly with the known facts about Banksy.

By 1998 Robin Gunningham was living in Easton, Bristol, with Luke Egan, who went on to exhibit with Banksy at Santa's Ghetto, an art store which launched at Christmas 2001 in London's West End.

However, when we approached him, Egan initially denied knowing and living with either Banksy or Robin Gunningham, even though he had exhibited with the former and the electoral roll had showed him living with the latter. He eventually said: 'I lived with a guy, with Robin Gunningham. But...'

'But you're saying he wasn't Banksy?'

'Well, he wasn't then. I lived with him ages ago. I don't think Banksy was around then anyway.'

Egan and Gunningham are believed to have left the house when the owner wanted to sell it.

Camilla Stacey, a curator at Bristol's Here Gallery who bought the property in 2000, said that Banksy and Robin Gunningham are one and the same person. She knew the house had been inhabited by Banksy because of the artwork left there – and she used to get post for him in the name of Robin Gunningham.

'I bought the house that he used to live in,' she told us. 'He had rented out a room but I think there had been problems with the tenants and the landlord had to sort of repossess it or whatever, so he was just selling it.'

'When I moved in, the place had been covered in graffiti and stuff like that. I threw things in the bin. At that point Banksy was just someone putting up stuff around Bristol. He was just another artist who had graffitied around Bristol. It keeps me awake at night sometimes thinking about it.'

Indeed, who wouldn't regret throw-