I just remember he was there and it did take a while to work out that this chap, who was slow and fat and bald and didn’t look a bit like the slim, curly-haired Syd we knew, actually was him. We talked. I don’t know what we said.

Of course following Dark Side Of The Moon was no easy task. Having gone from cult to icon suddenly, what was your take on your relationship with your fans back then? We would not give any consideration to what fans or anyone else thought or liked. We were strictly insular. Pleading yourself is the only way, artistically, to move forward I think. Otherwise you trap yourself in second-guessing and trying to be popular.

You discussed this? It was band policy? Definitely. Do what you think is right. Take no notice of other people’s views. Which is tricky in a band!

Ah. Between yourselves, you mean? Yes, that ethos is going to cause some problems within a band set-up, which is of necessity a compromise. As you know, there were many problems, constant problems. But they were all overcome.

Speaking of which, how do you react to this shot from 1975? (A picture from the current Wish You Were Here CD booklet: Waters with his arm round Gilmour, both suggesting something long forgotten.) Nice picture. Must have been a good moment, mustn’t it? It’s easy to think that with all the bile and the gravel that’s gone on in the last 20 odd years that there was never any companionship or joy. We had very good times quite a lot of the time. All of us. We fired and breathed Pink Floyd and we were... pals... in a way.

As if to restore his emotional equilibrium, Gilmour gives the subconscious a quick plink. The steely-grey afternoon darkens a shade and we stare down the barrel of the worst time of his life. He mutters unease about discussing it. Old scars, the hazards of reopening them...

The making of the bilious Animals (1976), passed with only the normal tensions, the creative kind of rows about passionate beliefs in what we were doing", as Gilmour once put it to MOJO.

But at the end of that tour, Waters ran into the notorious Damascene moment that proved the beginning of the end for the foursome. It arose from his growing "despair" at the way stadium gigs crushed "the intimacy of connection" he’d previously perceived between audience, music and band. It came to a head at Montreal Olympic Stadium on July 6, 1977.

When John Harris asked him to discuss it last year, Waters said that what he had written on the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame’s The Wall exhibit was his best summation: "I found myself increasingly alienated in that atmosphere of avarice and ego until one night... the boil of my frustration burst. Some crazed teenage fan was clawing his way up the storm netting that separated us from the human cattle pen in front of the stage, screaming his devotion to the demi-gods beyond his reach. Incensed by his misunderstanding and my own conscience, I spat my frustration in his face. Later that night, back at the hotel, shocked by my behaviour, I was faced with a choice. To deny my addiction and embrace that comfortably numb but magicless existence or accept the burden of insight, take the road less travelled and embark on the often painful journey to discover who I was and where I fit. The Wall was the picture I drew for myself to help me make that choice.”
From Waters' purposeful and coherent — though certainly inmoderate — reaction to this incident sprang a need to take total control of Pink Floyd so that the band would say what he needed to say. Over the next six years, through The Wall and The Final Cut, this inevitably involved, by stages, pushing his friends/colleagues' creativity aside. Further, the self-loathing aspect of his philosophical and emotional alienation would often erupt into contempt for those erstwhile bandmates. Naturally, wounded-ego wars ensued. Looking back on this period years later, he reckoned, “There was nobody in the band you could talk to about this stuff” and “There was really only one chief and that was me”.

First to get the elbow was Rick Wright, then adrift in a sea of personal troubles and artistically inert. He was moved out of band membership and onto wages for The Wall tour. Even mild-mannered Nick Mason, who has lately built his own bridge back to friendship with Waters, reckoned that back then, “Roger made Stalin look like an old muddle-head” and that “he was deliberately keeping Dave down and frustrating him”.

Essentially, the battle of Gilmour versus Waters developed into the championship scrap for the soul, and brand name, of Pink Floyd.

Meanwhile, as if to ensure that sweet reason would never get a look-in, events beyond Pink Floyd's musical lives only raised their anxiety levels. With work on The Wall just starting, a complex financial crisis frayed their nerves. An adviser, later jailed for these and similar activities, had invested pre-tax millions in an illegal attempt...

— unknown to the band — to evade the Inland Revenue's attentions. Many of the chosen companies, as Gilmour puts it, "went tits up". This left them with a huge tax bill to pay on the £3.3 million they'd already lost.

In consequence nomadic tax exile, Pink Floyd's The Wall sessions became ever more agonising, as Canadian co-producer Bob Ezrin told me last year: "We'd have these bash-'em-ups that would go on for weeks — as they're English and I'm Canadian we were very gentlemanly about it, but no one would budge." Gilmour calls Comfortably Numb, one of only three tracks that he co-wrote out of 26, as "the last embers of our ability to work collaboratively".

During this period, Gilmour threw himself into solo albums, played with a plethora of other artists (including Roy Harper, Wings, Propaganda and Doll By Doll), and helped Kate Bush through the door at EMI. But as The Wall was succeeded in 1983 by The Final Cut — often described as Waters' first solo album — there was no avoiding the torments of Pink Floyd.

Was your first solo album, David Gilmour, in 1978, a retreat from Pink Floyd's "creative tensions"?

No. I was reacting to us taking so long, maybe a year, to write and record...