

Castle Markets Project - Oral History

Transcription

Interviewee Details

Name: Peter Courtenay

ID Number: CM_019_Courtenay

Place of Birth: Broomhill, Sheffield

Year / Date of Birth: 2nd October 1944

Interview Details

Interviewer: Mark Sheridan

Date / Time: 21/02/2013 11:39

Place: Castle Market

Audio File Nos: CM_019_ Courtenay

Summary

Time	Description
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0.48	Potty Edwards
0.56	Turner's tool store
1.12	Weighing machine
1.29	Herbalist
2.10	Potty Edwards banging plates
3.08	Shops around the Rag 'n' Tag
3.30	Sweet stall
4.04	Commercial Street
4.023	Pet shop
5.15	Atmosphere
5.45	Banter
6.10	Cold weather
6.56	Water on the top of the stalls

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7.36	Appeal of the Rag 'n' Tag
7.49	Razor blade millionaire
8.17	Poor people, rich people
8.35	Smells of meat and fish
9.14	Dragged down to the market
9.38	Working close to the market
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10.28	Clientele
10.34	Buses
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11.26	Sympathetic redevelopment

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Mark: Right, if you'd like to tell me your name, your date of birth and where you was born please.

Peter: My name is Peter Courtenay. I was born on the 2nd October, 1944, in Broomhill, Sheffield.

Mark: What do you remember about the markets?

Peter: I remember going to the Rag and Tag with me mother when I was a very small boy. She was - made all the family's clothes, things like that. She used to buy lots of material down at the old Rag and Tag and bits and pieces [loud bang] lace and all sorts of things like that - wool. My memories of the Rag and Tag were, er, someone used to be called Potty Edwards throwing the pots up in the air. I remember the Turner's tool stall, 'cos I'd just started putting a bit of tool kit together, for mending my trolley and me bike and things like that, bits and pieces at Turner's tool shop. And I remember the old big weighing machine that people used to sit on and get weighed. And then there's misty memories of somebody who used to do sort of patent medicine type things, I suppose it'd be herbal remedies that'd cure... everything [laughs] all of everything.

Mark: See I've heard about the herbalist. Can you remember what, there was a certain feature he had in his stall, can you remember what that was?

Peter: Erm, no.

Mark: People inform me there was an old skull, old yellow skull.

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Peter: I remember something but I don't remember actually, skull, I don't think.

Mark: So you talk about Potty Edwards. Did a lot of people go and see him? Were there crowds around him?

Peter: Oh, he was amazing, yeah, absolutely. He used to bang the plates together to show there were no cracks in them, cracks [unclear] and he used to spread them down his arms, fling them up there, catch them behind his back and - he never dropped them mind. And then there was one of these things that 'I'm not asking five pound, I'm not asking four pounds' until the price got down to something that people could afford. And there were some quite clever customers who knew just when to buy and, er, but that's one of my fascinating memories of the old Rag and Tag was this fella.

Mark: And that was based, all that was based outside?

Peter: Yeah, oh yeah. From my memory, there were sort of shops around the edge. There was Turner's in a building but a lot was just open stalls.

Mark: A lot of people that come down tell us about treats they had. They used to have treats. Somebody used to come down, they'd get a treat like, erm, bag of sweets or-

Peter: Oh! Yeah, yeah, yeah. There was a sweet, the sweet stall there, yeah. Used to sell all the old type of things; aniseed balls, fishes, all sorts of, sweet fish and liquorice, all that type of thing yeah. There was a sweet shop. We used to get something if we were lucky [laughs].

Mark: Did you come into this part of the market much as well?

Peter: Not that I remember, no. We used to get off the tram at, on Commercial Street and go in the Rag and Tag at the very bottom of Commercial Street. Right down to the bottom and turn left, and most of the stalls we visited seemed to be in that area around there.

Mark: Were there any pet stalls?

Peter: Yeah, yeah there was a pet, there was a pet shop yeah there was.

Mark: Was that the- was that Mace's or was it separate?

Peter: There was Mace's but I think there was another one as well. Yeah, there was, yeah. Yeah there was another pet shop. Lots of animals in cages, rabbits, yeah, yeah, there was a, yeah, another one. I think that was sort of perhaps towards Dixon Lane. I'm not, not sure. I think that was right of the, right of the far end, from where we went in, it was at the end, the far end.

Mark: What kind of atmosphere would you say that the market had?

Peter: Oh it was really, really bustling, lively, lots of people, quite a lot of noise, people milling about all, it used to be quite busy. Can't - I think it was open for two days a week, I'm not sure but, I think probably a Friday we used to go. But not, not dead certain that it was open every day, whether it was just two days.

Mark: Was there quite a lot of banter then between the market holders?

Peter: Yeah, yeah. I mean, er, there was banter, like I say, with this Edwards bloke all the time. With other stall holders, well, I can't remember, I was only quite small really. I'd have probably been about seven or eight or nine years old, something like that.

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Mark: Was it, taking the cooler climate into account, was it as popular in winter as what it was in summer?

Peter: I think it was, yeah. You had to wrap up warm. Weather didn't stop anybody in those days doing anything, you know, if you'd got a job to do or something to do you just got on with it, you did it, and I think people used to dress more for the weather. You had a, you'd have winter coats and clothes and great woolly hats, and gloves, and scarves and you'd just carry on. It is England!

[Laughs] I mean if you're going to wait for good weather in England you're going to wait forever, you just have to, it's one of the rules I've always had, if you're going to do something you just do it, don't wait for the weather you'll wait forever! [Laughs] Well I seem to remember, yeah, I mean going down there in the winter when it was cold and raining and the water used to collect on the, in these er, they were cloth or canvas the tops of the stalls and they'd get a brush and hold brush up with water'd come off, you know what they're like - the ones down the Moor they used to be the same. I can remember water trickling off these things. Yep it were you just got on with it.

Mark: What would you say the appeal of the Rag and Tag was?

Peter: I don't really know, I mean, it were just part of Sheffield, everybody shopped at the, the Rag and Tag. I suppose it was cheaper and there were lots of different stalls and almost one stop shopping, early doors.

Mark: There was no snobbery then?

Peter: Ha! Well I know somebody who was, who used to shop at the Rag and Tag but, so they tell me, who was, did the single edged razor blades and he ended up a millionaire! And I used to buy shoes from there. But yeah, I think everybody shopped there, don't think it had any boundaries as to whether poor people or rich people, everybody. They might put their old clothes on for Rag and Tag but yeah.

Mark: What erm, any sights and smells that you used to remember about the market?

Peter: Oh aye they all used to have their unique smells. Particularly where they used to sell meat in one part of the market and fish but I can't literally remember what part of it that was but it was in the Rag and Tag or the other part of the market further on, I don't remember. 'Cos we didn't use to buy fish in there we used to buy it locally, at Broomhill, so it wasn't the stalls we particularly visited, no.

Mark: So how often would you come down to the Rag and Tag?

Peter: Well I think, probably about least every fortnight or something like that. Me mother would go down, I used to be dragged down if you like so if there was me Grandad or anybody that would look after me then I used to go and play but if there was nobody to look after me then I'd get me face scrubbed and off I went down to the Rag and Tag. [Laughs] On the tram!

Mark: What do you think about coming down to the market today?

Peter: Well I used to work quite close to the market here, on Bridge Street so I did come and do quite a bit of me shopping when I worked in town. I used to go to the fruit market and I used to get me butchers when erm, a butcher in the market but recent years I've not shopped in the market very much at all.

Mark: What do you think about the new market?

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Peter: I don't know an awful lot about it but it seems strange in the way that they're putting it where it is where this has been traditionally the market area for many, many years but times change.

Mark: 700 apparently.

Peter: 700 years it's been here and now it's being moved? It'll take a bit of getting used to I think. And I think they'll have a different type of cliental because I'm not sure, unless the buses actually run to the market, people aren't going to get off at the familiar bus stops outside here and then jump on another bus. This area's also served by the tram. Another thing that seems quite strange is moving the centre of the market away from the busy area down the Moor. But the planners must know best, or do they? I think it's a great shame that that area at the bottom of the Moor wasn't allowed just to be a big open space like other cities have like Manchester or Leeds probably, just big open areas it would have been nice to have a big open area somewhere but that's been closed in by huge market. I'm sure it'll be successful.

Mark: What would you like to see happen to this area now, once the market closes?

Peter: Well it needs to be redeveloped but it wants to be done sympathetically probably with the castle, whatever they're going to do. I've not really looked at what the plans are, for the area, but it'd be nice to keep some sort of market I think in this area or be it an open market or whatever you know. It would be nice for the tradition to live on, I would say.

Mark: Ok, right, thank you very much Peter.

Peter: Ok.

Mark: Thank you for your time.