

Interviewee Details

Name: Maurice Wilkinson

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Interview Details

Interviewer: Torri Crapper /Ian Beesley

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Transcript

Torri: If you could just introduce yourself, lets us know what your name is, your date of birth and where you were born.

Maurice: Yes, Yes. My name is Maurice Wilkinson, and I was born in Albony Road, at Neatheredge on the 23rd January 1921. And I've lived all my life really in the Netheredge Area. We lived there and took another house on **Wosterholne** Road not far away but because it didn't have a garage, we moved yet again and what a blessing because our house, **Wosterholne** Road got a direct hit in the big blitz in 1940. By that time we had moved to Netheredge, to Kenwood Avenue and so then on the night of the blitz, this is might have lost that house because I was taking a girl to a dance and I didn't know of course the blitz was coming along called in town to have a drink to buck my spirits up because I did not want to go to that dance. I told my mother she said you have to go you'd promised Barbara so off I set with a heavy heart. Called in The Kings Head in Change Alley to have a drink, to find there, like the rest of the town exceedingly quiet and so I came home and wasn't home long before my father said there was a smell of burning and we'd got **an incendiary bomb** in one of the attics. Fortunately I had put the bath plug in, and I, Mother was trying on the telephone to get the fire brigade which they were overwhelmed. So I managed singlehanded to get it out with buckets of water.

2.02 Now of course we are thinking now about the market which I remember very well, before this one was built. Rotherham trams started from outside. They, they did a big turn and then went down Waingate. I remember the old market the **Norfolk Market Hall** before the first one was built here. That was a bit, shall I say a bit rough going, I mean the flooring was flag stones like the street and the stalls were not as

nice as they are today. There were cafes and a good selection of shops. Going further back still, in the early days of the Norfolk Market Hall, there was a very big and elaborate gas lamp outside. And that was built in the foundry of my grandmothers brother, he also built the iron, ornamental ironwork under the clock across the road on the old town hall. They had a foundry in Mulberry Street.

3.21 I can't remember, I didn't come to town as much when I was a boy as much as I do now, I come here five days a week and I shop a lot in the market and I've made lots of friends and he reminded me this morning how friendly we are. I also have a very good butcher here and a good fish monger and greengrocer, they all know me by name, and we chat and I'm very happy to come in the market and do my shopping with the friendliness and the quality of goods and of course the new market is going to be at the bottom of the moor is going to be very much closer to my home.

As I said, I didn't come to town a lot when I was a boy, I suppose I was always brought and then when I got older I suppose I would come a bit but of course I didn't do household shopping. I think that is all I can tell you about the market.

4.23 Torri: What is your favourite memory about Castle Market? Is it a recent one or an older one?

M: Its hard to say. They had gas, for an electric light but it wasn't so reliable as today so they had gas in as well at the end of each aisle there would be a gas lamp linked to electrical terms it would be like probably 400 watts but I didn't know anybody in the market in those days.

T: So, do you remember any of the traders in particular? Which were your favourites?

M: I do remember in the corner there was a large bookstall. And my father was friendly with a man who had a jewellery stall and I was given a stone and I said to my mother what can I do with a stone, she said you could have a ring made, I still have that at this stall they made me a ring, and , with this amber coloured stone in it. That's the only real thing I remember buying here, it was a nice jewellery stall.

5.39 T: Which of the butchers, fishmongers and things do you go to now?

M: I go to Bunting the butcher, very friendly in deed there, oh dear I can't remember the names of the green grocers at this top end and the fish monger because they all know me by name, oh dear, I'm sorry I have a very bad memory for names.

T: Don't worry about it. So you have been coming for a long time to the market?

M: Mind you I was away from home for well, 4 years I was in the RAF and then for a career I went on stage as a ballet dancer, that career would only last about 6 years nevertheless I was away from home, because prior to that we had 5 theatres in Sheffield and of course people went there and of course there were lots more pubs and churches and that was entertainment then, I can't remember whether it was the Queen getting married or the coronation but everyone then went in for a television set well, it played havoc with the theatres and they were all closed. The Theatre

Royal burnt down but the Lyceum stayed up as it is today but in various forms and it's been a bingo hall and I think its only because of the beauty of the proscenium arch in the Lyceum that that was saved from demolition to which I'll be going to the pantomime in the next week or two. What other memories have I, oh dear

7.30 T: Don't worry about it. Thank you very much for your time so far. If you just want to introduce yourself.

Ian Beesley: I'm Ian, Ian Beesley I'm the photographer taking photographs.

M: Oh yes, good.

I: I'm very interested about your theatrical career in the ballet.

M: Well I went to Drumfield Grammar School, and before, a few years before I left school I was already studying elocution and ballet, and in Paro with the whole idea of making one of those my career. I was not clever at school so there was no question of matriculating that was the big exam of the day, and I'd not the slightest interest in sport and so it looked as though, shall it be elocution or shall it be the theatre. I couldn't see a lot of opening, I can now but I couldn't then see a lot of opening to use my elocution beyond being probably an announcer at the station but where in public, I didn't know where.

8.45 Anyway, a bit of luck the anglo- polish ballet came to Sheffield. Now I was under a **French ballet master in London called Espinoza** and then I was under a teacher in Sheffield. And she said you must go and go give them an audition they might accept you, and I did and they did accept me. So I was first to earn a bit of money in the anglo- polish ballet, but they were very poor financially. And it wasn't long, I think we moved from Sheffield to London but they said, I'm ever so sorry to say this to you to be quite candid with you we can't really afford to support, when we took you on we liked your work, but we find we have taken on more than we can manage so im afraid you'll have to be leaving us.

I: So what, what parts did you dance?

M: When all ballet, classical ballet, but then...

I: But were you a lead or ensemble?

M: No I was never a lead, I was only with them a month or two.

I: Oh right

M: then we went into London, and it was then that they decided they would have to get rid of me.

9.55 I stayed with a friend and I took The Stage, that's the newspaper for theatricals, and I saw an impresario called Emmy Littler, who was a sort of *cough * who financed shows and arranges tours and arranges theatres in England and Scotland. And so he was advertising for 7 male dancers for a show called Brigadoon. That was on at Her Majesties Theatre, in the Haymarket, so I went to Covent Garden to give an audition, you were told to go there, and I did. And then, 1 of two things happens to you at an audition, they'll say to you "Thank you very much. We have your address and should we require your services we will get in touch with you", that

or, "Thank you very much, will you wait at the side we would like to see you again". Well that's very good if that happens, and that happened to me, so they said "will Mr Wilkinson come forward again please?" so I went and they said, will you see the secretary now, so they said, "if you are prepared we would like to take you on" so I said "that would be lovely, what would the programme be?" Well you know Brigadoon is at the Haymarket, at the Her Majesties , well that's finishing and there is going to be another company formed to tour England, Scotland, yes, Wales and Ireland, yes.

11.29 So of course I went to Stow rehearsal room in the Stand where we were rehearsing for a fortnight and then we went on to. Now theatres are graded Sheffield Lyceum was a number 1, but see the theatre we had at Attercliffe, which was a very nice theatre, a lovely theatre but that was only looked upon as a number 2. So lyceum and theatre royal were number ones. And so, ooo how many would there be? There was both singing and dancing, there was 30 singers in the singing section, then we had our own orchestra, then we had the ballet. And there would probably be 12 girls and 7 of us boys.

12.18 And so I've played every number 1 theatre from Aberdeen and Iverness down to Plymouth in the West Country, I've done Dublin and Belfast in Ireland and I've done, Cardiff and where else in Wales and that tour ran for two and a half years. Some theatres we went back, came here twice. We had our own train, our own..... laundry mistress to do our washing and well then of course we were told it was coming to an end. At the same time in The Stage I saw an advert for male dancers for a new tour which was going out call the "Song of Norway" it was a musical on the life of Grebe the composer and so I went into that and there again it ran for two and a half years. And when it was coming to an end we were told it was coming to an end now but if you would like to apply, due to public demand there is going to be another company opened up in the Haymarket in London, and you will probably get into that. And I went then into the West End . So I played Her Majesties in the Haymarket, the Coliseum, I played three theatres in the West end but then of course as I say, television came along and there was only about London and Birmingham with a live theatre and my career on the stage finished.

14.07 T: What did you do after that?

M: I went and signed on at the unemployment exchange, and I think I would probably go there three times and the clerk said to me, "will you wait a minute Mr Wilkinson, the manager wants to see you." I thought now what have I done wrong. So she said she he said, "what about your theatre career now?" Well I said its very doubtful, I said, television has killed the theatre really, but I said I'm still hoping, so he said well I'll tell you what it is, he said we are wanting a man, he said so if you'd like to join us I'm inviting you to join the staff here. Oh I thought well that would be rather nice, I could live at home, a clean job indoor job, so I said what would it consist of? Well he said, you see for calling up purposes there are 2 classes of young men who are shielded, those working in farming and those working in the coal industry. And he said, you would be given a register with names and addresses of young men who are of call up age but are shielded and you would have to write to farmers and say is Joe Blogs still in your employ or collier manager? And if they

were still employed by them then they were still shielded but if they said oh no they have left us now we have no contact with him then you can let his name go forward for call up. And I was very happy at the employment exchange.

15.53 My father has a residential hotel at Netheredge and he was getting on in years and it was either close the hotel or me go and run it, and all sorts of things with hotels I like, so I went and ran the hotel. Which I ran until I was 70 and then I thought it was time that I retired so er..

T: so you come to Castle Market every day?

M: 5 days a week

T: Do you have a cup of tea in Sallys?

M: Always come here. Yes. I've been to other ones, either gone or they've not been as good. Always friendly here, very nice atmosphere here

16.40 T: What do you think of the changes to the market?

M: Well of course its going to be very much nearer to me, but I don't know really until we see what we have got. I ask them as these people and others I trade with I say, "will you be in the new market" "we don't know we have not been invited yet, we don't know how we're fixed" some say, I don't think really I can, well for instance the butchers I go to said a stall like this in the new market the rates will be £2000 a week, it's a terrible lot of money, you have got to sell some stuff, and then you have got to pay for your electric light and gas and staff you've got to have a very good business. So, they are all very much in doubt as to whether they will be going to the new market as yet, not having had an invitation.

I: Well you've had a very rich and varied life have you?

M: I have really yes. So now I have quietened down a lot as I have got older because of my eyes. I have very very bad eyesight.

17.48 Of hobbies, I'm interested in railways and music. So I've been on the continent a lot by rail, of course it was wonderful for me when the channel tunnel was opened, I think I must have done 10 return trips through the tunnel its wonderful you're in England and 20 minutes later you're in France. You've never stirred yourself. Whereas in the old days you had to get off the train, do a bit of walking, get on the boat then I'd probably be in the gents most of the time being sick, and then get to the other side and get on a French train. But now of course as I say 20 minutes for trains to Paris and Brussels. And then of course to other places. I think my longest run was 800 miles on Sunday. I got on an international train in Interlaken in the middle of Switzerland that train had started at Rome with about 15 carriages on and they would be dropping them all the way and this is what I couldn't tolerate now, is on the carriage windows it would tell you where this train was dropping people, well I couldn't see to read it and I might get dropped in a place where I didn't want to be and on that occasion I was going right through to Brussels to get the Eurostar for London. And as I say it would be about 800 miles. Lovely journey.

19.18 I: Fantastic, so are you here every day? do you come here everyday for your

lunch?

M: No, not for my lunch, no I go to another café in Arundell gate and I go to Atkinsons on the moor, and where else do I go, somewhere else. But this is the most friendly I think and I know them by name and they know me, and it gives me great pleasure to come here, I'm doing to miss it when It closes. I mean they don't know if they are going to be at the new market. Have you found many interesting people:

T: You and lots of other interesting people.