



20. Jennie Downing: Red Light district, Wensum Lodge adult education, Jurnet's bar, The Waterfront

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I came to live at 170 King Street in 1965 after my husband, a journalist with Eastern Counties Newspapers, had been asked by the editor, Stanley Bagshaw, to go and have a look at King Street, which he said was "on the up" and was going to be a very interesting street. John came down here and found that these seventeenth-century houses had recently been given to the city by the Crown brewery opposite - which is now Wensum Lodge - when it closed and the city had just received a grant to do them up. John jokingly said, "Put my name down for one" and we did in fact get one. There were very few people actually living around here when we arrived. The flats in Sherbourne Place, Music House Lane and Normandie Tower were all being built because that had all been brewery land and they had knocked down maltings and so on to rebuild. The original plans were for three tower blocks but they discovered a lot of old chalk workings in that hillside and so the other two were put at Heartsease. There were problems under Normandie Tower recently and they had to move everybody out.

We used to see ships from the Baltic coming up the river with timber for Boulton & Pauls, who were opposite, and lot of scrap for the scrap yard by

the Ferry Boat Inn. Reads Flour Mill was also fully functioning.

We did not know much about the reputation of King Street until we actually moved in. Then we discovered it was the heart of the red light area, which it no longer is because when they cut the street in half, so cars could no longer come up Mountergate, it stopped the circuit. But for years we had the girls on the pavement. My family grew up here and my daughter but it didn't really bother them, I think they gave as good as they got, although if I had to walk down the street at night and cars pulled up alongside it was bothering. A neighbour used to work at Anglia Television and in the winter she'd be walking home in the dark and she used to get very irate that cars pulled up alongside. We had the Vice Squad camping in the attic for a couple of evenings, trying to keep an eye on the girls, and I was running up and down with cups of tea for them. After the street was cut in half they moved up into Finklegate and Ber Street.

Ken and Brenda Davies, who were the wardens at Wensum Lodge, moved in just about the same time as we did. It was originally lodgings for young people from the county who were at City College and needed somewhere to stay in the city during the week. That was why Ken and Brenda were called wardens. Then Southwell Lodge was built beside City College so the students moved there. Ken started one or two classes. I think someone like the WI or Townswomen's Guild asked for

some classes and like Topsy, it just grew and grew. There used to be a sports hall too. In its heyday it was geared very much to older people, because it was the only Adult Education Centre functioning in the daytime, and older people didn't want to go out at night to classes held in schools. Ken and Brenda retired about fifteen years ago and the place has changed totally. With the pinch on funding it is geared to younger people and most of the classes are exam related. The whole of the Adult Education Department has moved into Wensum Lodge and the former maltings, which had been bedrooms, are offices. Diana Lamb, one of the original tutors, still runs daytime classes run in the art studio, down by the river; they are very much in demand.

I was Chairman of the Friends of Wensum Lodge for sixteen years. Our role was to improve the facilities for students. Ken Davies realised that the demand for things at Wensum Lodge was growing, he was surrounded by a lot of semi-derelict buildings, and he heard about a Friends organisation down at Morley College in London, so a group of us went down to talk to them and came back and formed the Friends here. We raised money to convert the buildings and everything that was the stable block and so on is now part of Wensum Lodge. The students were very enthusiastic. We used to have a massive Christmas Fair every year to raise money and we applied to local charities. Ken approached City College Building Department and their students

came and did work at Wensum Lodge, rather than building walls at college and knocking them down again. We didn't touch the historic fabric on the outside. The County built the sports hall and the Friends took out a £60,000 loan with the council to build the squash courts.

I think Jurnets Bar was Ken Davies's bright idea - possibly when some of the youngsters living there wanted a party, somebody saw the potential down there, and later Ken thought it would be a good facility for Wensum Lodge and I was roped in as Chairman of the club for a long time. Again, we had to persuade the County Council to let us have a licensed premises and it has to be a members club and the Friends have to be involved.

There was a lot of local opposition when the Waterfront was proposed, certainly from Wensum Lodge and some of my neighbours thought it would be a big nuisance to the street. I don't really notice it - taxis coming and going, more than anything - but I think youngsters who do come out tend to go back into the city or up Music House Lane, rather than this end of the street. It is possibly the same with the nightclubs over the river and people coming over the Novi Sad bridge. There were worries about noise and kicking cans along the road, knocking on doors, graffiti and so on, which in the middle of the night can be a nuisance and can be frightening. There were also protests about the loud music at the Ferry Boat; I think the

objections came from people in the new flats across the river, because the music was in the buildings at the back of the pub and the noise carried over the water. About 20 or 30 years ago we had the Conisford Group; the council asked for representatives from local representatives and businesses and we used to meet regularly at Wensum Lodge to talk with planners about how the area could be improved. We tried to improve the Watneys brewery "canyon", get rid of the girls and so on, and there was hope of a riverside walk on this side.

King Street has kept its multi-purpose character, which we always thought was part of its charm. There are still little businesses on ABC Wharf and some of the new Hopkins houses have been built around yards, as the old houses used to be.

Jennie Downing