



7. PAT DANIEL: Raven Yard, red light district, unemployed workers' centre, oral history project, 'Hard Up Street'.

I moved to Norwich in 1968 to work for Norwich City Council. At that time the King Street area was very run down, you could see it had suffered a lot of bomb damage during the war but only the top end, the Cattle Market end, had begun to be renovated. I was offered a renovated half-timbered house, part of the development called Raven Yard, which is next to Stepping Lane and looks straight down Mountergate. It had previously been divided into many shops and houses. I believe mine was formerly a second-hand shop. You came in from King Street through an archway. On the right, coming into the courtyard, were two houses or flats. To the left were two houses, mine was at the far end of the walkway. Opposite there were two modern garages with flats above. Inside the garden gate was a little pocket handkerchief of a garden, and a short walk to the front door. As you entered the hallway, to your left was a rather nice large kitchen, well-appointed, then you came out of there and turned left to an enormous lounge. They took up all the ground floor. Up a pine staircase were two bedrooms, a box room, bathroom and toilet. It was all well-appointed and really rather nice. All the houses had a small garden. We got to know the neighbours because all of us were new residents, the houses being on the City

Engineer's List for doing up old buildings into living accommodation. We did not do anything together but I do remember my next door neighbours, Rita and Walter, belonged to the Salvation Army and it was really lovely at Christmas time because they used to bring the Salvation Army band into the courtyard to play carols for us on Christmas Eve.

As I came to gradually realize, King Street was a red light district. There was one pub at the far end of the street, past Wensum Lodge, [the Ferry Boat] which was where the prostitutes used to foregather in the evenings, and probably their customers too, and because the street was still two-way traffic, cars used to do a circuit up Rouen Road and down King Street to see if there was someone to pick up. My bedroom at Raven Yard overlooked King Street and Mountergate, at the corner of which two ladies used to stand, which could get quite interesting, although I only looked out when they were making so much noise that I couldn't sleep. Because of this problem, although I was aware that the city was going to redevelop, it all seemed very slow; the future Riverside development site was still railway shunting yards and closed factories, all derelict and run down. Watneys Brewery had built a huge bottling warehouse plant on the Mountergate side of King Street which was joined to the brewery side by an enclosed bridge, so because of the big tall buildings on either side and this bridge going over the top, I used to refer to it as "Watneys

Canyon". So that was all very depressing, but apart from that, because I had my teenage son and daughter living with me, I didn't really like a car stopping by me as I walked home - or it might have been my daughter - and asking if I "wanted any business".

In 1984 I got involved with some people who were starting up an Unemployed Workers Centre. They were mainly young UEA graduates who were not employed. Some worked on the buses, some were dropouts, some were squatters in Argyle Street, which was still undeveloped old terraced houses. They had got hold of St. Julian's Parish Hall, rent free, with the permission of the Diocesan Board. They had got hold of some TOPS funding (Training Opportunities Scheme) and I was invited in as part-time paid administrator. The hall was in Music House Lane; it had been part of the old Horns Lane Junior School on Mariners Lane, which was bombed during the war. You could see where the headmistress's study had been and the scullery, kitchen and stove with a chimney to the roof. Past that was the former school hall. We managed to get some money to put in a first floor and stairs. At the back was a tiny piece of garden with a large tree which had a tree preservation order, so you couldn't do anything but look after it. There was also a store.

We didn't want it to be just a place where people sat around depressing each other over fags and coffee. It had

to have activities. "Tools for Self Reliance" collected old rusty tools, renovated them and shipped them off to Africa. There was a bicycle workshop and a silk screen printing workshop. My work there as administrator was mainly to drum up volunteers; people complain and call it "bureaucracy", but someone needs to do the organising and the record keeping and the money collecting and the fund raising. It was run as a co-operative, a registered industrial & providential society, and all the people who worked there became co-operative members. Then a charity was set up to be a fund raising body as about £750 had been collected through street collections and jumble sales and other fundraising events. Trustees were appointed, so there was a fundraising arm and a working arm. Over the years this did get a bit complicated but with considerable diplomacy it did work in the end. My TOPS contract was for one year and after that I became a volunteer and I have remained there ever since.

It is always difficult to raise money when you cannot foresee or demonstrate what the outcome is going to be and who the beneficiaries are. I cannot pay enough tribute to all the volunteers over the years. You had people with skills like carpentry, arts, pottery, sewing, stained glass, then we got computers and IT specialists, so gradually we built up the number of workshops and skills that could be offered, but the biggest problem was that it was such a small building so you couldn't have more than 15 to 25 in at

one time. We were very lucky to get a development grant from the National Lottery to build an extension and some indoor toilets, because all the toilets were outdoors, as they had been when it was a school. So we had an entrance lobby and new toilets including a disabled access toilet. The Getty Foundation paid to re-roof the building and deal with dry rot. The building was in a hollow so we had to pay for a licence to build over land towards Rouen Road and make a first-floor level fire exit. We had hopes of a long occupancy so we asked the Diocesan Board if we could buy the building. They wanted £25,000. We got half the money from a local charity, the Anguish Trust, and matching funding from the National Lottery. We were struggling to keep going; we had about 25 volunteers but of course the problem is that volunteers do not commit themselves for long periods of time, because obviously they are volunteers and there are going to be times when their own personal lives will take priority, so you have to keep recruiting. It is like a continual wave, coming and going. We were lucky that in the final years from 1996 to March 2010, we had a paid administrator but there were continuing problems with funding the sort of services we aimed to provide. I think the final blow was the decision of Norfolk Social Services to switch to personal budgets for their clients rather than contracting us to provide placements. This made it impossible for us to budget for the year ahead.

We ran a community outreach project

and got someone to run an oral history project, following on from something I had started as a volunteer, to talk to people in King Street who lived there and remembered it from the past. One of these was Agnes Davey, who was a former cook-housekeeper for the Colman sisters and was known locally as a writer of cookery books. Her widowed mother had moved into a brewery house opposite the present Wensum Lodge, which was then Youngs brewery, where her grandfather was a drayman. The tapes I recorded are in the County Sound Archive. Andrew Cowan ran the project; he made a video about Agnes's experiences and got a book printed "Hard Times - Growing up in King Street".

I also interviewed Ben Burgess. His company manufactured agricultural machinery and they were based at the Cattle Market end of King Street. Their office was behind a chemists shop on the corner of Rose Lane and he had stories of how the prostitutes used to go in there, and ladies who had been "unfortunate" - I forget exactly how he phrased it, but what he meant in his gentlemanly fashion was that they had got themselves into trouble and they came to the chemist for a little help.

Pat Daniel