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| **Project: ‘Glasgow’s Highstreets: An oral history…’**Respondent: Billy FerrieYear of Birth: 1960Age: Connection to project: Local knowledgeDate of Interview: 22/09/2023Interviewer: Rachel KellyRecording Agreement: Yes/ NoInformation & Consent: Yes/ NoPhotographic Images: Yes/ No (Number of: )Length of Interview:Location of Interview: The Marie Trust, GlasgowRecording Equipment: Zoom H4n (internal mics) | **Glasgow Story Collective** |
| Time(from: mins/secs) | Description | Transcribed Extract(from- to:mins/secs) |
|  | *Where were you born?* |  |
|  | I was born and raised in Glasgow. |  |
|  | *What were your first memories of Glasgow’s highstreets?* |  |
|  | The first shop I can remember was probably when I was about 4 so round about 1963. It was a corner shop in the kind of slum tenement my family lived in. This corner shop sold I think mostly sweets because I can remember looking at the glass counter and all these lovely sweets and also behind the counter there was all these shelves with glass jars full of lovely gorgeous sweets. The place where I grew up was Camlachie, just off the Gallowgate. So in the Gallowgate were all sorts of small shops like butcher, baker, book shop, and almost on every corner there would be pubs. There were tons of pubs. There was the occasional funeral parlour and tailor shops where you could go in and get your trousers taken up, that sort of thing.  |  |
|  | *Did you go into town for shops?* |  |
|  | Now and again my Mother dragged me into town to go shopping with her. So I remember mostly Argyle Street, I don’t remember much of Sauchiehall Street, but certainly Argyle Street. At the time it was Lewis’s, Arnott Simpson, Trerons and also at Glasgow Cross there was something called Crazy House or something like that which was kind of wacky and weird, but mostly Argyle Street shops but generally we wouldn’t spend a lot of time there because it was quite expensive for our family but I do remember going to the Barras and Paddy’s Market or the Briggait. So in terms of shopping it would be mainly the Barras or the Briggait and occasionally Argyle Street.  |  |
|  | *Could you describe the Barras?* |  |
|  | The Barras was this amazing bustling thriving place with people all over the place and stallholders shouting and trying to grab your attention whether it was selling life-size dolls or whatever, curtain material or pots and pans and there would be all sorts of characters at the Barras. People playing instruments or dancing. So I remember the Barras, I remember going in and out the stalls with my Mother and sometimes my Father would come with us but he would go into the pub at the Gallowgate, while my Mother and I and my sister would go round the Barras. I think the tradition was the man goes into the pub next to the Bookies and just goes in between both while the Mother and the weans would be kind of running about the Barras.  |  |
|  | *Can you tell me about Paddy’s Market?* |  |
|  | Paddy’s Market was really interesting because it was for the poor people, you know. So I can remember the cobbled stones, next to the railway arches, the damp smell and the drain pipes would be broken and there would be water gushing. I remember there would be a blanket on the ground and loads of stuff like clothes just piled on to the blanket so my Mother would have to rummage through layers of kind of tangled clothes and stuff and occasionally there would be a bit of excitement when you saw a rat running across the stones. There’d be characters like old women with coats on to cope with the wind and the rain, they’d be sitting on their wee deckchairs trying to entice you to buy whatever their wares were. Within these long arches they’d have stalls inside, wooden kind of stalls with one bulb to light up the whole stall and again just layers of clothes and the smell of mothballs. At one or two of the arches there would be a cafe so you’d get the waft of boiled cabbage, potatoes and ham or ribs and peas and vinegar, that sort of thing. The really kind of basic cooking smells, so the aroma of that would be wafting along the arch. They were quite dank, dark places with very little lighting. |  |
|  | *Do you remember any processions, parades or carnivals in the highstreets?* |  |
|  | Not really, we didn’t really go into town that much and even when we went into Argyle Street, me and my Mother made sure we were decently clothed because we went into big stores so we had to look really good. Sometimes I’d be wearing my school uniform because that was the only nice clothes I had. To be honest, it was mainly Christmastime where there’d be lights going across the streets and George Square, that was all lit up with decorations and the big stores with big shop windows, they’d be all done up with lights and decorations.In terms of marches and carnivals, I don’t recall. I do recall going along to the Kelvin Hall and they had a carnival inside, that was good. I do remember there were Orange Walks, that used to terrify me. |  |
|  | *Can you tell me about the Kelvin Hall Carnival?* |  |
|  | It was just a massive hall and there were all sorts of funfair rides you could go on and could get candy floss and it would be very very noisy because the rides had music and things like that. So it would be full on overwhelming. You could get hot dogs. You could go on the rides. I think my favourite was the horror thing, the ghost train. So you’d go on the ghost train and hear screams and things like that. So just going on the various rides and eating candy floss and the hot dog and things like that. |  |
|  | *Can you describe the Orange Walks?* |  |
|  | I can probably remember one, somewhere near Argyle Street but it wasn’t on Argyle Street. At that time Argyle Street was fully accessible for buses and cars, but yes, this kind of loud banging drum. It didn’t seem like a fun thing. It was quite a serious thing and these people in like soldier uniforms and that was a bit scary. I was with my Mother again. We watched it for a bit and she dragged me away but I just found it very threatening and scary. |  |
|  | *Have you ever worked in Glasgow’s highstreets?* |  |
|  | I’ve worked in a cafe that’s still there, called Cafe Candolfi near Merchant City. I used to work in the kitchen there when I was a student. When I was a student I had three part time jobs to survive and one of them was being in the kitchen making cheesecake or caramel shortcake or making garlic bread and pate with liver and other stuff that went into the pate. So I remember working there and I enjoyed that because it was a nice kind of trendy place to go and it was nice to be associated with working there and you got nice people in there as well, nice clients, customers coming in. So I worked in there.I also worked in a bar called Squires on the corner of West Campbell Street and West George Street. It was a basement pub and it was also a gay pub because when I was 21 I came out as gay. So I worked in a gay pub, that was good. Again a great crowd, a great team to work with and the customers who came in were fabulous as well. I worked in another place called The Cue Ball. So this was in a leisure centre in the south side, I think it was Calder Street just near Pollokshaws Road and I can remember the uniform it was a kind of pink and white stripped shirt with a white collar and a grey bow tie and a little waistcoat and stuff like that. The leisure centres had spa type facilities but also snooker tables, pool tables, a bar and a restaurant, so I was a barman in the Cue Ball at the time. So I had different jobs but it just gave me a wonderful experience of dealing with wonderful people which I loved.This was the 1980s so you had a mix of people going into the Cue Ball. So you’ve got your want to be trendy people, couples and things like that, and then you’ve got your kind of riff-raff as well from the south side who’d never been to a place like that with cheap booze, but you didn’t really get money people, it was mostly geared towards people who wanted to look good and appear to be good, that kind of thing. All sorts of weird and wonderful people. |  |
|  | *When you started in Cafe Candolfi, did you get any training there?* |  |
|  | Very basic training in the sense that the supervisor or the person who had been doing it, just showed you what to do. The things I did were fairly basic so there weren’t a lot of complications to it. The one thing I loved was making the caramel for the caramel shortcake because it was so easy. It was a big pot with boiling water and you’d puncture a few tins of condensed milk, put them in the pot and eventually it became caramel.  |  |
|  | *Can you remember any characters from your different jobs?* |  |
|  | In Squires the gay bar there was a kind of head Emerson called Glen. Glen was very tall and he kind of pre-dates the kind of drag queens you get today and he was so intelligent and so quick and if you gibed him, he was right back at you and he’d cut you to pieces. So he was a bit of a character, no-one could get anything past him and he was quite with it as well. So Glen was a bit of a character.  |  |
|  | *How many gay bars and clubs were there in Glasgow in the 1980s?* |  |
|  | I’d say about four or five. One of the main things about working in Squires was the staff. When you’d finished cleared away and locked up, you’d then get free entry into the gay clubs. Bennetts or Club X were the two main ones and because you were well known because a lot of the customers would come to Squires for pre club drinks and then go to the clubs, so you’d see them again in the clubs and they’d buy you drinks and try and sort of chat you up, so I was never short of drinks or a lumber.  |  |
|  | *Did you ever go anywhere else in the U.K. to the gay scene?* |  |
|  | Working in the gay scene you become a well kent face so sometimes it’s good to go somewhere else. So we’d get a friend who didn’t drink or didn’t want to drink, to drive us through to Edinburgh and there was a club there called Fire Island in Prince’s Street. So we’d go there now and again because it was a whole different kind of person in Edinburgh. So that was always good. There would be a pub called Laughing Duck and various other places we’d go to in Edinburgh.Occasionally I’d go to Manchester to the gay scene as well. Manchester was a bigger gay scene than Glasgow, more developed in terms of bars, clubs and gay restaurants that you could go to. |  |
|  | *Could you tell me about the other gay bars in Glasgow?* |  |
|  | So there would be Squires, the Court Bar in Hutcheson Street, The Pot Still in Hope Street, even though it wasn’t officially a gay bar, a lot of people went there. There were quite a few places like that. There was Austin’s as well which was a basement bar again and that was a fairly well established gay bar. There were kind of older establishments as well, The Waterloo and across from that The Duke of Wellington and again not officially gay but gay people went there. These bars had been popular for all sorts weird and wonderful people, so they had sailors come in from the ships that were tied up in the docks, who would go these bars, for them a lumber is a lumber, it didn’t really matter. You had prostitutes going to especially The Duke of Wellington, married men going there all sorts of weird and wonderful characters.In fact there was one guy Betty Hutton was his name and again this is pre-drag. He was like a hostess in The Duke of Wellington and he’d be dressed up and he’d float about just chatting to the clientele and stuff like that. Again a very intelligent man, spoke about 7 languages, he was also an alcoholic, but he was a bit of a character so a lot of people would just go to see Betty Hutton do her stuff sort of thing. I think he would occasionally sing as well.So there’s a whole history of people who didn’t necessarily have to be gay, they just didn’t fit into the mainstream and that would be a kind of safe refuge to go to. Although it was terrifying as well, some of the sex workers were terrifying, the ones I met anyway. |  |
|  | *Do you think Glasgow’s gay scene changed over time?* |  |
|  | Absolutely yes, certainly from my experience. As an elder gay person I’ve noticed a change. I don’t really frequent gay places as much because I’m so confident in my own skin I can go anywhere and again a lot of places, non gay places, are gay friendly anyway. It’s no longer such a big deal to identify or categorise yourself as someone who’s only going to be welcomed or feel comfortable in a certain venue. I think it’s a lot easier now if you’re a younger person to go to these places, I think there’s been far more support over the years to come out and to go to these places and join sort of support groups and all that kind of thing.So it’s definitely changed, I can’t tell you the last time I was in a gay bar. |  |
|  | *Do you think Glasgow’s highstreets have changed generally?* |  |
|  | The shops in terms of shop fittings and atmosphere, look the same, its all very ‘samey’ if you ask me. I think one of the big changes is a lot of us do our shopping on line now. Some of us still like going into a store and touching things and trying things on but for me I’m happy just to order online and if something doesn’t fit, just send it back. So my experience of shops on the highstreets is I’m not a consumer any more in that sense. I go to coffee shops. I take my book and my headphones and I can enjoy a coffee, that sort of thing.  |  |
|  | *What is the best place to people watch in your opinion?* |  |
|  | I regularly go to a place called Brew Dog in Hutcheson Street, Merchant City. I’ve actually got a discount card, I’ve actually got shares in Brew Dog as well, and part of that discount is I get a free coffee. So I can go in there every day, get my free coffee, have my book, check my messages on the wifi and I can look out the window and see all the people going up and down Hutcheson Street and just ponder on what are they doing, where do they come from, what’s going on in their life. |  |
|  | *What do you think of Merchant City?* |  |
|  | I’m a frequent visitor to Merchant City, I love the architecture there and even the new student accommodation there is quite exciting, it was just waste land previously. There’s a kind of buzz, vibe and energy and it’s enjoyable to be around, so that’s a positive thing for me in terms of the highstreet experience. |  |
|  | W*hat’s your view on Glasgow highstreets today?* |  |
|  | A bit depressing, a lot of boarded up stores. I was in Sauchiehall Street the other night and it looked a wee bit depressing. I think for me in terms of what would get people to go in and enjoy the highstreet again is rather than just to buy things, but for people to have experiences, whether to sit and relax and people watch or meet up with friends for a catch up, maybe watch something going on in the streets, street theatre, musicians. Those are experiences that don’t involve a lot of money but nevertheless satisfying. They take you out of your routine and your usual sort of lifestyle and you can enjoy something a wee bit different. Going to the highstreet to buy is not really a motivator for me.  |  |
|  | *How do you imagine the future of Glasgow’s highstreets?* |  |
|  | Probably designed to create experiences for people. I’ve been researching Glasgow’s history over the years and it would be nice to recreate some of that. There is a big reminiscent market and I think people would like to visit the old days, imagine the stores they went to, so I’d like the idea of going to a shop and they’d have a ‘70s theme for a week, so it would be the kind of clothes that people would wear, the staff would wear, the shop fittings, the cafe in the store would be the things they had in those days, the uniforms they would wear, the music they played, you might be given a wee purse with pennies and notes and that was what you would’ve used. So it would be a way of people going back in time and experience something they don’t usually experience.So I’d like shops and stores to be creative taking people back to decades and I’d like the Macintosh Tearoom should do some of that, so to have stores be creative that would attract people in. It could be any decade, but people would all be sort of reminiscing in these shops and cafés.  |  |
|  | *Thank you very much Billie* |  |
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