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| **Project: ‘Glasgow’s Highstreets: An oral history…’**Respondent: Billy FerrieYear of Birth: 1960Age:Connection to project: RespondentDate of Interview: 14th of July 2023Interviewer: Will SysonRecording Agreement: YesInformation & Consent: YesPhotographic Images: Yes (Number of: 2)Length of Interview: 1hour, 29 minutes and 20 secondsLocation of Interview: Billy’s home in GlasgowRecording Equipment: Zoom H4n (internal mics) | **Glasgow Story Collective** |
| Time(from: mins/secs) | Description | Transcribed Extract(from- to:mins/secs) |
| 0.41 | Interviewer asks the respondent what his first memory of Glasgow’s high streets is. |  |
| 0.45 | Brought up in typical tenement in Glasgow. Was about to be condemned as a slum. Remembers corner shop with lots of sweets in sweetie jars. Glass case at front with sweets. Could just see over counter to ask for what he wanted. |  |
| 2.15 | Was with his mum going shopping. Shops in Camlachie area of Glasgow. Went to old fashioned bakers and butcher shops. Sawdust on floor of butcher shop. Carcases hanging from ceiling. Cow’s tongue. Butcher chopping things. Whole chickens. Mainly went to these shops when young. |  |
| 4.51 | Was exciting going to the local bakeries for cakes. Smell of freshly baked bread and cakes. |  |
|  | “Bakers shops as well. Bakery shops. I remember those. And that...Because, again, you’d be going there for cakes. And that was always exciting for a five year old or whatever. And the smell...the smell of bread and freshly produced cakes. And, again, the counter you’d see all the various cakes and cream cakes and chocolate éclairs and donuts. These were all very exciting for me as a young kid. In my generation and my mother’s generation as well. Sweets...confectionery was a big, big thing. In fact round this area (near Glasgow Green) there used to be sweet factories.”  | 4.53-5.47 |
|  | “There’d be other shops further in town. There was a shop on the corner of Duke Street and the High Street. And it was called The Economic Stores. And it was a place where you could get anything really. Like today’s Pound Shop type thing. So, there’d be all sorts of things from tools to cushions to toys. I used to love going in there because there’d be all sorts of weird and wonderful things just to touch and pick up and look at.” | 5.59-6.43 |
|  | “But, in terms of the big stores, I came from a kind of poor family. So, the shops, stores and stuff weren’t such a big deal for us. So, it was mostly, kind of, where can we find the bargains sort of thing. The Barras, just here… That was another place we’d go to. My mother would take me there on a Sunday. And also there was a place called Paddy’s Market or The Briggait. Which is, like, a market adjacent to a British Rail tunnel or arches. So, originally it would be, kind of, a railway track that was no longer there. But there’d be these arches and inside the arches there’d be these, kind of, big stalls. And loads of clothes. And it was really, really, kind of, depressing. It would be old clothes. It would be clothes that people had died in. Things like that. And because it was railway tunnels it was all, kind of cobbled. I remember the cobbles. And people would be selling stuff outside the arches. But inside the arches it was very, very dark. There would be, kind of, just one lamp every two yards or something. And the smell of dampness and the smell of moth balls...And I can remember the stalls were quite high. So only my mother could, sort of, pick at things. Look them over. So, I was always looking up. Getting bored. When are we going? And also in these tunnels, in these arches there’d be, like, a cafe at the end. Where they would have things like boiled ribs. So, these would be, kind of, pork ribs but just boiled essentially. And cabbage and bacon and potatoes and hot peas. So, very, very basic food. And sometimes the smell could be just too much. A bit sickly. So, that would, kind of, waft through the arches. But normally my mother and I would have a cup of tea and a cake or something in there.” | 6.45-9.32 |
| 9.35 | Paddy’s Market was depressing as it was where poor people went.  |  |
| 10.33 | Would sometimes go to Lewis’s, Arnotts and Goldbergs with his mum. Remembers a doorman. |  |
| 11.45 | Interviewer asks the respondent to go into more depth about the big stores on Argyle Street. |  |
| 11.58 | Talks about the several levels in Lewis’s store. Mentions sitting on Santa’s knee. Remembers horse that some kids would get photographed on. |  |
| 13.15 | Lewis’s later on just represented a shop where if you had money you could buy things. |  |
| 13.45 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he has any memories of events on the high streets. For example Christmas. |  |
|  | “Well, certainly for Christmas they had the, kind of, decorations up in shop windows. Lewis’s and Arnott Simpson’s would have, you know, Christmas trees. Or they may have some animated thing. I don’t know. The Seven Dwarves or whatever. Doing jobs. Chopping wood or whatever. So that was fascinating. There’d usually be loads of people just looking in the window, you know. At the animations, or whatever it was, the decorations. And I can remember the...Across the street in Argyle Street there’d be the decoration. Lights. Christmas lights. And in George Square as well. Yeah, the one thing, at Christmas time, you would walk up from Argyle Street to George Square. And they would have the decorations there and they would have, again, animated things. And they had the baby Jesus and the crypt and all that kind of thing. So, again, that attracted a lot of people. And that was quite exciting. So, in Glasgow, at that time of year, when its very dreich and dark and miserable. All these colourful lights and there’d be music as well; just, sort of lifted everybody up. And there’d be a lovely, lovely atmosphere.” | 14.05-15.38 |
| 15.39 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he remembers any decorations at his local shops as a kid. |  |
| 15.48 | There were some kinds of efforts made with tinsel or paper decorations. Might be homemade. |  |
| 16.39 | Interviewer asks the respondent if there were any fairs at that time. |  |
| 16.49 | They had fairs in the Kelvin Hall in the West End. |  |
|  | “The British Homes Exhibition which was kind of...And exhibition where they would have modern appliances. New modern appliances for your home. Like new washing machines or vacuum cleaners. Or, they might build a new home inside the Kelvin Hall. And you’d be able to go inside it and see all the modern furniture and all that kind of stuff...”  | 17.38-18.03 |
| 18.31 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he ever visited any museums. |  |
| 18.42 | Went to the transport museum and Kelvingrove but mostly on school trips. Enjoyed the old fashioned street in the transport museum. Has a vague memory of being on tram as a child. Fascinated by dinosaurs at The Kelvingrove Museum. |  |
| 21.12 | Interviewer asks the respondent for a description of his old high street. |  |
| 21.33 | High street is called The Gallowgate. Was in a tenement in Comely Park Place. On the Gallowgate a tunnel of tenement buildings. On the ground floor there would be mostly shops. Would be butchers, bakers and a pub on every corner. Ex cinema which was a bingo hall. Neighbours would look after kids while Mum went to Bingo. |  |
|  | “Where I lived there was a…it used to be a cinema. An old-fashioned cinema. But it got turned into a bingo hall. And my mother used to go to the bingo. And I remember she’d leave me my…I have a sister. With either neighbours. You could do all that sort of stuff in those days. A lot of people get sentimental about this. But, there was a kind of communal connection. People did look after each other. Especially the kids, You know, if you’re…If you had to go somewhere and you’ve got kids the neighbour would reassure you that they would be looked af…anyway, neighbours would look after my sister and I while my mum went to the bingo. She was only three minutes away from where we were.”  | 22.45-23.35 |
| 23.50 | There was an abattoir near where he lived and Bellgrove Train Station. Travelled back and forth from Easterhouse to there and to visit old neighbours and shop. Heard and smelt the abattoir animals. |  |
| 25.43 | A few chain shops in the local shopping area. Galbraith’s was one. Camera shops. Fishing shops. Lots of funeral parlours. Not really any charity shops. |  |
| 27.16 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he was taken into pubs when young. |  |
| 27.25 | Didn’t go into pub. Remembers going to get haircut in the Gallowgate. Describes the barbers. Pubs in Glasgow where his dad went were very much male environments. There were bookies too. |  |
| 31.07 | Going to the cinema. Went to The State matinees on a Saturday. Kids would throw frozen drinks. Was dragged to see The Exorcist when that first came out. Was probably not old enough. Kids of all ages in back courts watched by neighbours. |  |
| 35.35 | Interviewer asks the respondent about getting dressed up to go into town. |  |
| 35.44 | Mother made sure he had his best jumper on etc for big shops like Lewis’s and Goldberg’s. |  |
|  | “The interesting thing about Marks and Spencer’s and Goldberg’s and things like that…My mother made clothes for them. She was a machinist by trade. So, industrial machines. She made clothes. And she worked in a clothes factory. Or, several in the city centre. So, in some of the narrow lanes there’d be factory buildings. With doorways and it leads up to a factory…Kind of, machinist type factories, tailor shops and things. And she’d make things for Marks and Spencer’s. And sometimes if I went into Marks and Spencer’s I’d wonder-I wonder if my mammie made these trousers? So, there was a connection even though no one was in the shops as a worker. Behind that my mother supplied the clothing that went to the shops. And also my father was…For about thirty years he worked for a sewing machine company. Singer’s based in Clydebank. In fact it’s a place called Singer. Because the factory was built there. So, he supplied and my mother used Singer Sewing Machines. So, there’s a connection, in terms of…That was the connection between the highstreet in that sense… And I think that that’s the big difference between…Between then and now. Whereas we have, you know, big multi-national corporate chains with businesses all over the world. In those days, that I’m talking about, it was very much local. I think the Co-Op was probably the most British kind of national shop.”  | 36.21-38.35 |
| 38.57 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he grew up in any other areas of Glasgow. |  |
| 39.12 | Moved to Easterhouse when he was about four. There were not many amenities there. Stayed there till he was nineteen. Moved to Lawrence Street in The West End when at university. Shops reminded him a little bit of the Gallowgate. |  |
| 41.25 | In the West End there was The University Café. There were charity shops were he got clothes as a student. There were delis and other middle class food establishments. |  |
| 43.40 | Interviewer asks the respondent about night life in the West End when he was a student. |  |
| 43.45 | Because of where he was on Lawrence Street he went to pubs in Partick. But mainly went into town. Came out as gay at 21. Most of the gay pubs in the city centre. E.g. Club X and Squires. Didn’t finish his degree as was too busy enjoying himself as the weight of his sexuality was lifted after leaving Easterhouse. Went to Curlers on Byres Rd too. |  |
| 45.59 | Interviewer asks the respondent about the clubs he used to go to in the centre of town. |  |
| 46.04 | Club X in Royal Exchange Square. Bennett’s, which is now AXM in Glassford Street. Basement pubs on either side of the riverside. The Waterloo. The Duke of Wellington. |  |
|  | “The Waterloo. And you had another bar next to it called The Duke of Wellington. And these were…They weren’t gay bars as such. But, they were understood to be place where gay people went to. And there’s a lot of history there. The Waterloo. You’d go in there and be fascinated because you’d get all sorts of weird and wonderful people. You’d have, essentially, prostitutes. Female prostitutes coming in. Because it was a safe place to just relax and chill and socialise and not get hassle from…from men. You’d get married men. Straight married men going in these bars. Because they weren’t that straight (laughs). You’d get…It was just before my time there but apparently there’d be, kind of, ships coming in. Merchant ships and Navy ships coming in with sailors. And they would go into the Waterloo and socialise and also pick up. And the Duke of Wellington next door was similar as well. And apparently these bars since 1930s were…That was the place you’d go to for that sort of environment. So there’s a whole kind of history. Which is something I’m interested in doing before too many people die off. But just to interview people and ask them about what was it like in those days. Because certainly in terms of homophobia and stuff and legality; people would be arrested for just being gay. So you would go to these bars and you’d just meet these weird and wonderful people. And there’d be characters like…There was a guy called…What was he called? Betty Hutton. And essentially this guy would drag up. But he was such an intelligent man. He could speak six languages I think. But he’d be like a MC type person. So he’d float about the bar and just chat to people and occasionally he’d make comments. This was all pre drag and all that kind of thing. It was fascinating going to these venues and being introduce to all these weird and wonderful characters.” | 47.02-49.44 |
| 49.47 | Talks about the very first gay bar he went to called Vintners and being terrified. |  |
| 51.53 | Interviewer asks the respondent about any jobs he may have had as a student on the high streets. |  |
| 51.57 | Had several jobs as a student to supplement his grant. Worked in Café Gandolfi in The Merchant City. Made things like garlic bread and shortbread in the kitchen etc. Was also a bar man at Squires. Says he was a terrible bar man and only served good looking folk. |  |
| 54.05 | Interviewer asks the respondent what it was like being behind the scenes at Squires. |  |
| 54.44 | Says it was fun. Carol the manager was great. Different sort of people coming in. If someone just coming out you would reassure them they were safe. Tourists. Couples. Straight women. Good tips. Would get into clubs for nothing.  |  |
| 59.13 | Interviewer asks the respondent what the Southside of Glasgow was like when he lived there. |  |
| 59.18 | Was for people who couldn’t afford to live in the West End. Lived near Queens Park. Shawlands was cheaper to buy flats. More settled feel than the West End. Enjoyed living there. Remembered that had chip shops on high streets as a child but no Indian takeaways yet as Indian restaurants just becoming a thing. Were Indian restaurants in the Southside but not in the East End. |  |
| 1.02.00 | Interviewer asks the respondent what are the main differences he has noticed in all the high streets of Glasgow. |  |
| 1.02.18 | Streets busier when he was younger. No pedestrian areas. |  |
| 1.04.20 | Remembers getting a sandwich thrown down from the tenements. Coal in backyards of tenements. Broken pipes. West End back courts were clean. |  |
| 1.08.09 | Interviewer asks the respondent what his view of Glasgow’s high streets is today. |  |
|  | “I don’t know. It’s very samey. For me there’s this kind of loss of soul and excitement. I don’t necessarily go into town to shop. Most of my shopping’s done online these days. Yeah, I mean the only places I really go to would be pubs and cafes.”  | 1.08.41-1.09.09 |
| 1.10.19 | He feels that empty shops emphasise the feeling of despair on the high streets. First noticed that around 2010 after the financial crash. Does most of his shopping online. Shops at Morrison and Aldi. |  |
| 1.11.57 | Interviewer asks the respondent if he goes to The Barras much. |  |
| 1.12.00 | Thinks the Barras is not what it was in the past. Some stolen goods now. Has been gentrified. Quite likes coffee shops etc. |  |
| 1.17.41 | Interviewer asks the respondent about Celtic and Rangers rivalries on the high streets. |  |
| 1.18.12 | Sectarianism has been present since his childhood. Being asked what school you went to is code in Glasgow for what religion are you. Thinks it’s breaking down now. |  |
| 1.20.50 | Interviewer asks the respondent what if anything he would change about the high streets. |  |
|  | “I’ve been doing. Like I said to you before. Family history and stuff. So, I do research and I go online. And I can see these Facebook pages of people who have joined these groups who are reminiscing or reflecting on the past. And for me that suggests there’s a big market for people to reminisce. You know, maybe a kind of naïve romanticism about the good old days when things seemed a lot simpler and easier. I mean, it probably to a large extent is true. But, probably a bit of romanticism around it as well. So, I think for me. If I was to experience what I experienced as a youngster. So, if I went into a butcher’s shop, let’s say, and there was sawdust and there was things hanging from hooks and a big tongue and…It would create a kind of nice, warm glowy feeling of-Oh, I remember this. And the smells and the sounds and the environment. So, I don’t know if there’s a market for say shops to have a day where they recreate, say 1970s. And publicise it. And it could be 1970s prices. That could be a gimmick as well so come on here and buy stuff for…So, you have all these people who are older now. Because people are living longer now. Who have got these memories and who like to reminisce because the world is so chaotic now. So, retreating to the past might be a nice place to go. So, if the retail trade could capitalise on that. That market to reminisce…” | 1.21.05-1.23.15 |
| 1.24.07 | Interviewer asks the respondent what he imagines the future of Glasgow’s high streets to be. |  |
| 126.50 | Thinks more of the same. Thinks experiences would attract people. Like in the past with cinemas and dancehalls. |  |
|  | Interviewer thanks the respondent very much for his contribution to the project. |  |
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