

14. Leisure, rowing, US servicemen, flying group, Kingsway pub, ATC, Ber Street, Jolly Butchers & Black Anna

Sundays? that was dead. But we were walkers, and bicycle riding, that was wonderful, my dad was a Freewheeler, you wouldn't think on it to look at him, but he used to go miles and miles, he had a racing bike, he did. Biking, and - did they allow me in the pub? Well, I used to have a mineral water - we used to go to the Broads and places. Of course, things were quieter on Sundays. We used to go to the pictures - there were two cinemas on Prince of Wales Road. Saturday pictures and of course we weren't far from the coast, and living here, you could walk to the railway station or you could walk up the hill to the bus station and get a bus to the coast. We lived in the city and everything was central, then they had a grand idea and moved everything out to the outskirts.

Tony Grey

Brewing was a big industry - before the war there were Steward & Patteson's, Lacon's, Morgan's and Bullard's. Bullard's beer was considered best, then S&P, Morgan's and Lacon's, in that order of preference generally. Morgan's was a large brewery in King Street and very forward looking. I became secretary of a flying group at Little Snoring - we bought a Tiger Moth aircraft for £325, you wouldn't get it for forty thousand today! - and I approached Morgan's to see if in return for our stocking their beers in our clubhouse, they might accommodate us with bits and pieces. One of the directors came out to see us and they were very accommodating indeed, they not only supplied lino for the clubroom floor but a diesel-powered electric generator for lighting.

In 1948 I was secretary of a rowing club with the Norwich Union. There were two other rowing clubs, the Yare Rowing Club and the Norwich Amateur Rowing Association. They used to meet regularly at the Ferryboat Inn, where there would be talks on rowing, etc. These meetings were always convivial, the three clubs worked very well together and we took part in a joint venture in the London Head of the River. We would have two or three fours from the Norwich Union Rowing Club and the other two clubs would have a couple each, on Monday or Wednesday evenings or Sunday mornings, and you would row down river towards Surlingham Ferry and Coldham Hall rather than coming up towards the Port of Norwich. The Ferryboat was a much seedier pub and a much older building. The interior of the Kingsway was light; the Ferryboat dark brown, old furniture, and I would not expect the glasses to be as clean! It had a big bar and the pub buildings went back to the river, there was what ought to have been a rather presentable back garden but it was a bit of a mess, similar to the boats that are moored there now. They managed to keep a rowing four - a rowing boat - in the back sheds, which were rather like old fashioned allotment buildings made of all bits and pieces.

In 1948 I was demobbed from the Fleet Air Arm and I and a number of other young men would meet up in a pub called the Kingsway - now long gone - which was at the end of King Street where it abuts Carrow Bridge. It was very popular pub, probably because the landlord, Bob Young, was an ex-Norwich City footballer. You would spend the whole evening in the Kingsway, get there by bike or motorbike about 8 or 8.30 (young men couldn't afford cars in those days). It was our social club, a pretty wide social mix with the lounge and the bar (we tended to go in the bar). We weren't the only

group to settle on a particular pub as our social headquarters where you knew your friends would be there. It was weekends mainly - Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Saturday was the big night. You were drinking half pints mainly but it wasn't like today, nobody went out to get drunk and you were a damn' fool if you did get drunk.

The atmosphere was very friendly. It was a group of ex-servicemen who had been used to foul language on board ship, certainly, but there was no bad language, it was just a very civil social event. You'd be leaning on the bar most of the time, with the girlfriends sitting down, or up and down playing darts, having a bit of a mardle, then when the pub closed, which was about 10 o'clock, on the bike and up King Street to the fish & chip shop to round off the evening with six penn'orth of fish & chips. We'd stand in the street and eat it; it would be in a bit of greaseproof paper then wrapped in newspaper so you had a little parcel and if you wanted to keep the heat in you would claw the middle out and eat the fish and chips from a box of newspaper. If you opened it up it would soon get cold or the wind would blow them away! The fish & chip shop was quite a social gathering. There used to be an elderly grey haired man who would come across first to complain about the noise we were making (we went up on our motor bikes) and then become quite friendly and join in the conversations. The Americans soon cottoned on to fish & chips too.

During the war the pubs the Americans used were mostly the Bell Hotel, which had a reputation for "ladies of the night", and the Blue Room [now the Compleat Angler] by Foundry Bridge. Norwich was full of American servicemen; there were so many bases, Rackheath, Seething and so on. At that time, Ber Street rather than King Street was where the prostitutes were so the Americans would

tend to be at the Jolly Butchers in Ber Street, run by Black Anna, a large Italian-looking lady with dark hair, who also used to have a jazz club there. So the Americans would be there for those reasons, and would gravitate down to King Street occasionally to the Ferryboat, but not the Kingsway, which was more settled, and the Americans tended to look for a bit more "life", as you would, if you were likely to be dead tomorrow, you probably would be more concerned to enjoy yourself.

I was in the Air Training Corps and we would have official flights organised by the RAF and then a few of us, who were really keen, found that if you cycled out to an American base - Seething, Attlebridge, Wendling, Hethel - you could cycle out, dump your bike in a ditch, walk on (the Americans were very lax), get to know a crew chief, the man who was responsible for maintaining a particular aircraft - they were 24 Liberators most of them, 2nd Air Division - and if you put your ATC uniform on you could always scrounge a flight in them, which was what we did.

Denis Kirkham