



17. Demolition, Dragon Hall, Magdalene Project, King Street changes, red light district, new housing etc.

.....

When it came time for me to go to school, mother was very keen that I went to the Lakenham Junior School, where she had been, rather than the Horns Lane School, partly because she had been to the other school but partly she thought Horns Lane was a bit rough. Which I think it probably was.

It was quite a poor area between the two roads, which is what resulted eventually in the City Council deciding they would clear the whole area and build the new flats. They didn't have the sophisticated things they have now when they were knocking down the houses; just old excavators and bulldozers and guys with sledgehammers and crowbars. Everybody was moved out, which of course gave my dad a bit of a lean time, and the other shops in the area, because suddenly a large number of your customers have been moved into other areas. Fortunately, he tended to specialise in quality so he had a large clientele who were passing trade - professional people from the city - and on Bracondale, City Road and so on, so he managed to survive during the lean times. I remember a Mr. Lawrence, a property developer, who used to shop at my dad's shop and he turned up in this red Mercedes 300 SL sports car with the gold wing doors and I remember him showing this to us. So Dad had a good clientele as well as the people who lived around and that enabled him to weather the storm.

Most of the people living in houses lived between Ber Street and King Street, which was a pretty poor area. The other housing of course was Surrey Street and that was very posh - doctors and everybody living in these three-storey houses. That then changed and became all flats and quite run down but it has now been refurbished and has gone up market again. So you had the up market bit, the down market bit, and we sat in the middle in the trading bit.

Ray Hannent

King Street was considered very much the sad, forgotten side of the city. People didn't talk too much about King Street because of the red light district, and residents were concerned. There had been the big brewery and that was shut down and it was rather sad. There was Bennetts electrical company, which closed, and then of course they started to restore Dragon Hall when they discovered that it had been this beautiful medieval house which had been divided up over the years, and then the developers came and developed these rather nice houses. Then the other brewery was pulled down and that is all closed off for redevelopment. Dragon Hall itself came into life and started being an attraction centre and it has made a tremendous difference. King Street is now regarded as a very desirable place to live.

Wensum Lodge had carried on through all this - I do remember going to a course at Wensum Lodge in the 1990s and my husband came to collect me and parked nearby on King Street and next thing he knew was this little face in the door - you know - poor Alan was very worried and hoped I'd appear soon, though he scared her a bit by going, "No, I'm waiting for my wife!". Now the red light district has moved down to the development over the bridge - there is very

little left in King Street or Ber Street, it's down where the nightclubs are and one does hear the former Nelson Hotel is being used. Of course with mobile phones the girls can almost work from anywhere.

Doreen Green and Doreen Betts, Magdalene Project

Around 1959-62, nothing was open in King Street on a Sunday, absolutely nothing. Its reputation was not brilliant, because it was linked with Rouen Road, which does not have a good reputation even to this day because of the prostitutes.

It was a bit of a run-down, dingy street, and as I've walked down to Dragon Hall today I have realised there are some very nice old buildings on King Street and I am pleased to see they are still there. There was hardly any traffic on a Sunday because the shops weren't open so nobody came into the city. There were numerous breweries and pubs once upon a time - I remember Watney Mann because as you walked down from the city end you could see the brewery with this big red barrel on the side. Nobody knew about Dragon Hall; everybody thought it was just little shops and houses and didn't realise actually what was inside.

Mary Secker

I'd taken students to see Dragon Hall in the 1980s, shortly after they "rediscovered" it. In 1988 people were asked if they wanted to go to Dragon Hall to train as guides. Chris Barringer, Tony Eggleston and Janet Smith were there. We were let loose in the afternoons to do guided tours - people were not able to come in and look around on their own in those days. We were open all year round. At that time the building had holes in the walls; the floor level of the Great Hall was much lower than it is today.

There was block board boarding over the floor and it looked a bit of a shambles in some respects. Nevertheless, you could see what it was and you could see the ceiling and the roof, that was the important thing. There was no heating and you used to freeze in the winter, the wind used to come howling through the holes. You did shifts, 10-1 or 1-4. In charge was a formidable young lady called Sarah Knights, employed I think by the Friends of Norfolk & Norwich Heritage. Funding came from the City, the Friends and the entrance fee. Tony Eggleston retired as Chairman of the Friends around 1999 and I was asked if I would become Chairman in 2000.

Jim Marriage

We did a short course at Wensum Lodge to train as Blue Badge Guides and somebody said Dragon Hall needed guides. Only one guide was needed at a time; there were two administrators, Sarah Knights and Neil Sigworth. Sarah left and it was just Neil and a guide. If you were taking someone round and another person came in, Neil would bring that person to join in your tour. There were sometimes one or two, sometimes three or four. It was very personal. You took them down into the cellars, you took them all round into nooks and crannies, they saw the vicarage kitchen with the sink still hanging on the wall and the wallpaper in the bedroom of the butchers shop, and all kinds of bits and pieces. It wasn't tidy in those days. There were cracks in the walls. There are certain garments I still possess that I only used to wear there when it was bitterly cold. There was no heating in any of the building. We had a little fan heater by our feet in reception, which was in The Old Barge room, people used to come in that door. People felt there was something about discovering something; they were looking at nooks and crannies of history that had only just been

uncovered, so it was very nice and personal. It had to change of course - the fabric of the building would have collapsed eventually. The archaeologists did one dig at the back while we were in that state, which we would look at from the window. You could see where the old Victorian houses were and then they went down deeper. That lasted for about two years, before they started on the actual redoing the building. For the Friends, a lot of the excitement was that it was an undiscovered building, you were learning all the time. We knew a bit about Toppes but gathering bits of the history of it, and also what happened between times, with the butchers shop and the vicarage in the middle. When we first went there the cellars weren't open at all, and the undercroft wasn't open. It was virtually as it was when beer was stored there from the Old Barge. The cellar was completely shut up, you couldn't get down there. That was quite something, when they opened up that undercroft and we were able to get down there. We used to take people through to the butchers shop and there was a little dig underneath, that's still there. Walking round the place was incredible - the number of steps you had to go up, down and up to get to the various levels was quite interesting. At the moment the building is on three levels, but then you were up and down all the time. It couldn't go on like that - it would have crumbled away. You regret some things that have changed, but you realise it has to go on. We always knew the building had to be tidied up, but we were lucky to have been there at that stage. It was nice to have seen it almost from the beginning. In our day some of the building that is now inside was outside - where the glass gallery is was all boarded up - and we used to come out the back entrance. Where the yard is was an old apple tree and a mound of earth. The working girls were around there and they tended to bring their clients round the back of Dragon Hall. Neil and I went

out one day and the poor client must have thought, "Oh my god, what have I let myself in for?" because we invited him, did he want a tour of Dragon Hall!

Jim Marriage, June Marriage

Looking down King Street I was amazed at the changes because as I remember King Street from boyhood in the 1930s it was rows and rows of small rather low value terraced houses. Little houses and the people in them were shabby, because they were poor. Walking from Upper King Street this morning, I was absolutely amazed at the new buildings. I had no idea that there was so much development, not only between King Street and Ber Street but in all the nooks and crannies of where these little terraced houses used to be. There are some quite impressive flats. What struck me this morning, standing on the Lady Julian Bridge and looking down river and up to Dragon Hall, if I was a visitor here this is a scene that I would take a photograph of because it is so impressive, the new and the old. And those houseboats would certainly bring out the artist in me. I am pleased to see the development, although in my mind, King Street is as I described it in the 1930s and 1940s.

Denis Kirkham

The city is changing now but I am not going to say it's for the best. Some of the new developments on King Street are absolute rubbish. These new houses, they're never going to last. Thirty years. People say these buildings from the 60s were all concrete and steel, but at least they're still up. I can't see these things they're making now lasting. Where the main mill building was, that is the only part I like now. I don't like the other buildings. They just look like a shambles.

Robert Kent

Transcript of interview for King Street Community Voices project 2010 by Rita Gallard.

Digital copies obtainable from Richard Matthew: richardmatthew24@gmail.com Copies of the audio recordings are held by Norfolk Record Office.

It's lovely to see all the housing built down here and people living here again, even though some of the housing is pretty grotty if you start looking at it more closely. We did actually wonder about living here again and then realised how cramped most of these places are and how, for example, just across from Dragon Hall, near St. Julians - Kilderkin Way? - they've blocked out the sun, because they are quite tall buildings and very small gardens. Lots of them have no sun at all. I rather fancied living in St. Julians Alley; I thought it would be rather nice, I could go to Mass in the church there, potter into the city, go to the Cathedral, do everything on foot, and then we looked carefully at them and thought, Why would I want to sit in a back yard where you never get the sun? So I do think there's a kind of thoughtlessness about them too. It was like that in my childhood, but they didn't need to rebuild it like that, did they? It's just about house builders making a profit and cramming as many places in as they can. But, it is good to see, and when I think of some of the dereliction around St. Julians Alley ... There used to be a scrap metal merchant there - they called him Tiggy, he's still around - who had a horse and cart and he used to keep his horse on a bit of bombed land across the way from St. Julian's!

Rev.Frank Nichols