

Date: 24 February 2009

Interviewer: Eoin Dunne, King's College London

Interviewee: David Hyams

Venue: 25 Mulberry Court

Purpose: Part of the One history, EC1 in the making oral histories.

E: If you don't mind me asking where and when were you born?

D: I was born 1944 in Bart's Hospital, born in Bart's because of Hitler's changing bombing plans, he was bombing London so we moved everybody up to St Alban's then he changed his bombing plans and bombed St Alban's so we moved everybody back to Bart's, so I was born in the crypt of St Bart's in September 1944.

E: Do you think you could tell me a little bit about your childhood? Where you grew up? Where your parents are from?

D: I lived in this area I lived just off of Goswell Road in a place called Rahere Street which is sort of upper side because Rahere founded Bart's Hospital and I lived there for 7 years, my father is in the house it was where my father was born and lived. My mother came from Islington. When you look back at it you see that it was so packed it really was poor housing, my parents were desperate to get out to try and get their own place, we lived in just two rooms. It was two rooms, 3 flights down across the yard out to the toilets no water actually in the flat you had to go up half landing.

My parents desperate to get out and in about 1951 they moved us to Harold Hill, Essex on a big GLC estate. We lived there for three years and my parents weren't terribly happy there because my father had to commute to London, and they were out of an area which they really knew. Then in 1955 we came back to London I went back to school where I started which was Moreland Street School. Moreland Street School used to back onto Rahere Street anyway.

So I was there for another year did my final year there and then I went off to William Wallace School which is up at Parliament Hill Fields.

E: Had your parents always lived in this area or did they move to the area from elsewhere?

D: No my parents lived here the whole time. My father was born 1917 and he lived in Rahere Street, he lived in 52 Rahere Street. My mother was born in Islington just off of Essex Road and lived in here all her life. She went to Queens Head School, my father had gone to Moreland School as well.

E: Can I just ask you a little bit more about the house that you lived in, in this area? You said it was just two rooms, was it part of a larger house?

D: It was a street of housing, you wouldn't call it a terrace and all the houses there had two or three families in them and you lived in the basement as well. I was reading the Road to Wigan Pier and Orwell gives you these pictures of these slum places and just look at this, and I thought that carried on in Rahere Street right up till 1960. Until you got the slum clearance programmes here it was going on till 1960. These places were if you looked back really were poverty stricken housing, you never think of it as that at the time you live there and that's it and I knew all the people and all my friends lived there and we went to school together, you never thought how poor it was. But when you look back you realise how bad the housing was. How narrow the streets were. Two or three, four families in a house use the basement toilets out the back and at the back of the yard were all little workshops - workshops which had actually 19th Century aspects about them. Blacking factories, ice-cream places, it was just a very crowded and in a sense I suppose very poor area.

E: You say you moved out of the area then you moved back again? Did you move back into the same kind of housing?

D: No, we moved back in and I moved just across the road from where I live now. I moved into Tonkin House and I lived in Tonkin House from 1955 until 1983 and from 1983 I have lived here. Again Tonkin Housing is GLC housing and I think actually it is a good example of Local Government housing well done solidly built. Then my sister got married she left home, my Nan was living with me she died, my father died so the place was too big for my Mother and I, so we moved over here to Mulberry Court and I have been here every since.

E: You were at School in the area what was it like being at school in this area?

D: Well Moreland School was full of character and full of people. It was one of those three decker London board schools. Very solidly built, it was knocked down and replaced by a pre-fabricated building which is there now. It was far better, it was more solid and it had far more space, it had an underground playground. You didn't have to miss out on play times when it was raining, the present building is hopeless - it's too hot in summer and too cold in winter because it's all windows. Moreland was full of characters and people absolutely full to the gills about 800 people or more. It had characters in there like a chap called Hodgkinson who was my teacher, and he taught in the area since about 1921. Originally he was up by Chapel Market and then came here during the war, just about any one who went to Moreland Street would know the name of Hodgkinson if you said the name 'Hodgie' everybody knew him, fearsome character but when I looked back, how much hard work he put in, he was telling story just after the war when the area was fairly derelict and there was lots of bombing, he and the headmaster went down in their car and visited every primary school in Finsbury and Holborn to form the Finsbury and Holborn School sports association and so they ran that. He did football, music, swimming. This the days before you go the extra pay or anything else he just did this all free of his own time and enjoyed it. I still run swimming gala's here and it's a continuation of what he did - a well known character.

I still keep in touch with a lot of people who went to Moreland, we still know each other and still see each other. He did a very solid job he had 46 in his class he really had to teach yep that was Moreland School.

E: Do you remember any particular events or days that stand out from your school days?

D: I remember playing for the School football team and I remember going to places like Finsbury Park to play football and anybody will tell you then it was a cinder pitch and I mean literally crushed cinders on a slope. If you cut yourself there you really knew about it. I can remember going to Coram's fields and playing football there which is entirely different kettle of fish that's closer to Camden and I still keep in touch with one of the chaps I played against, he was at another School at Thornhill School and I still keep in touch with him so that's 50 odd years later. He went off and played Rugby for England School and boxed for Cambridge.

I can remember old Hodgkinson as fearsome as anything keeping controls and disciplines. One day, he had us in assembly or in music and people had been doing pea shooters. "Right who is doing pea shooters, right stand up out there all of your, 9 of 'em, right I'll cane the lot of you". I never got the cane but he was quite fearsomely prepared to do it. I met up with him years after because I came back to this area to teach and I met up with him and he said, "I wasn't that fearsome", ah well different perspectives, different views.

E: You were talking about your family was it just you and your parents?

D: No, also my sister and my sister went to Moreland School as well and she was born in Rahere Street where as I was born in Bart's Hospital. So our connections with the area are as close as you can get and as long term as you can get. There are still families around here who are like that I mean the next door neighbour but one further down the balcony her sister was at Moreland and my sister still knows her and still talks to the lady who was there. Connections are still there.

E: What was the area like when you were a child?

D: If you went down towards the city -bomb damaged completely bomb damaged. The area never had much in the way of open space and play space. You played in the street, you were able to play in the street and it's interesting at that time they had just built the Finsbury War Memorial Centre but Finsbury War Memorial Centre was built at Sterling Corner, Barnett a long way away, it was built there because there was no room here. In about 1975 they cleared some land locally and built the Finsbury Leisure Centre and that took over from the Finsbury War Memorial site. So now you have football pitches and Finsbury Leisure Centre itself for sports as well, but that was never available then if we ever wanted to do football or anything we had to Coram's fields which is in Camden or we went to Finsbury Park in those days. The buildings they were all houses, streets of houses, basement, ground, first, second. All of them were like that. If you look at the pictures now if you look at old pictures you might get sort of nostalgic about them and say what horrible houses they were, they had their day. My theory was that

when they came to knock them down they got everybody out and got a workman to run along and slam the doors and they all fell over. They were that bad and some of the pictures, I mean if you look at the pictures its real Dickensian it was just closed in. *But* if you talk to people about it they look back on it fondly, nostalgically and I suppose it was because everybody was relatively poor so you were all in the same boat, whereas nowadays there are lot better facilities, the flats are much better, indoor baths, indoor toilets everything else is provided. But somehow there is that element missing, that element of happiness about this, I don't know.

E: If we can move on a bit from your childhood, why did you stay in the area? When you had gone through your childhood years?

D: I went to a grammer school up at Hampstead or Parliament Hill Fields so you pick up a new set of friends up there so I went up to Palm Hill Fields and did 7 years there I then went to LSE and did a degree there and went to University of Wales and did a year. The University of Wales was really enjoyable it was such a complete contrast of getting away from London which made me think, maybe I should have done my degree out of London it might have given me a wider perspective of how life carries on. But I came back mainly because I lived here and I had a place here. Every student I knew, must get to London, must get a flat in London, well I was living here I've got a flat here already I don't need to go charging off. You wouldn't have got a job in Wales anyway I went to Wales to do a bit of teaching training up there. You wouldn't have got a job up there because you couldn't speak Welsh, yes it was tightly bound that was. When I came back I went to teach at Clerkenwell School and I taught there for 30 years and I was intimately connected with the area. I was not only a teacher in the area I was a councillor for the area for 16 years so my live has been very much bound up with Clerkenwell and Finsbury.

E: So when you were working where did you live in this area?

D: I lived with my mother over in Tonkin House and here at Mulberry Court.

E: Did you notice a difference between Tonkin House and Mulberry Court?

D: We came to Mulberry Court because the flat got too big for us as people moved off and moved out and died the flat got too big and the top floor means you would have to walk up 5 or 6 flights to get there, my mother coped with it but you could see the potential problems arising. We could get the move and they were anxious to move us out as there was 4 bedrooms and as we didn't need 4 bedrooms so we moved across to Mulberry Court which my mother liked so we moved across here.

E: You spoke a little bit about your work, what was your degree in?

D: It was BSC and I did International Diplomatic History. I look back at those times when I did it and I just thought you could do with better advice about what subjects you could take. It was far more restricted in those days as you look at it as to what was available and what you took. I remember the professor

saying perhaps we could introduce a degree of English History into this course and you think yeah you should look at it carefully to see what you actually do I mean when I was at LSE they used to say this is just another office block in London. When I went to the University of Wales that was at Swansea, slightly different feel but I was teaching so I didn't always spend time on campus, the day included going off to various schools. I taught at the school which was 90% welsh speaking and that was interesting. I think it was Barry John's Old School so rugby was a big thing up there. Then I came back to London I got a job teaching you apply to ILEA . I looked at Clerkenwell School it was small friendly you felt you could do work there which you could. Actually one of things that got me interested there one of the parents came to me and said is your Dad's name Fred? and I said yes. Oh well he went to school with my Uncle Billy. The person who spoke to me was actually the mother of Tony Hadley the lead singer Spandau Ballet who I taught for 3 years – I now see they are reforming.

E: So teaching was your main profession?

D: Yes

E: Why did you decide to go into teaching?

D: Because I didn't know what else to do (laughs). Which often seems to be the case and when you look back you realise your opportunities were really restricted. When you are given career advice it was a civil service or you can teach that was about the base bit, unless you really wanted to go into the city and opportunities in the city, it wasn't really open, the big bang and all that hadn't occurred you had to have a good intro to get in there. So that was the sort of advice you were given, you can do this, civil service or do teaching. It's changed a little since then (laugh).

E: You said you taught at Clerkenwell School?

D: Yes

E: What was it like as a school? When did you start there?

D: I started there in 1968 it was just a small friendly school the building was built in 1828 it has a tremendous history it goes back to 1700, in this area. It's the third building in the area. Unusual looking school you might think so now but it's fairly pre functionary it was two big rooms built and then they divided up inside over a period time it's in Pefsners History of London British Buildings is in there as well. Full off character and it was very much a community school very much attached to the area people went there because their parents went there and it continued and continued. That gave it an advantage because you thought you were able to do work with them and it wasn't just a continuously changing school. If people came there you could integrate them into the school because of the solid base of community.

E: What age groups did you teach? What subjects did you teach?

D: Primary School up to age of 11 so you taught just about everything. I still keep in touch with some of the pupils, some do very well, some do poorly. Some have done exceptionally well. It's gratifying to see them move on. In fact just before you came I was reading letters from one of my ex pupils, you got remember my ex pupils are now about 50. Some of them are (laughs) I don't like being reminded of that but they are (laughs). The only one I had who reached celebrity fame is Tony Hadley Spandau Ballet.

E: How did you teach? Now we have the national curriculum and you teach to very strict guidelines. How did you teach the subjects- was there strict guidelines?

D: No, no strict guidelines first 13 years do what you like, teach what you like how you like virtually. Although the head teacher was very good and I got on well with him. That was good he was quite keen to cultivate relations with parents in the area and that worked very well. Nobody gave you much idea of what to do, the ILEA which was the controlling body for London was a generous, innovative body, but was taken for a ride by a lot of people who saw the opportunity of getting out of the classroom. I was told at one stage that the teacher, pupil ratio is 1 teacher to 19, and I sat there looking at the 30 or 32 or 35 children thinking how does it work.? Then you realise that those teachers who had gone to take advantage of it all, by going off to teacher training centres in the borough and teachers centres to get away from the children and they were counted as teachers as well. I interested in sports and involved with school football and school swimming district football for Islington. When I first started doing it Charlie George was playing for Islington and that was fine that gave an added strand to your teaching and I've kept up the swimming business I still do even though I retired, I've still been organising Islington Primary Schools swimming gala's and one of our swimmers has been picked for England Schools this week so quite pleased with that.

E: You started in Clerkenwell School did you stay there for your entire teaching career?

D: Yes my entire teaching career, it was a school which attracted people and people stayed there was stability there, I think teachers felt they could do things at school. In the last 8 years there have been no changes in staff. Because people think they could do things. London is a difficult area to teach because the change over of population, you don't get an attachment to the school and here you have a school with a sense of community, a sense you could do things, a sense that you could keep in touch with parents and you could do that bit more. I am not saying we produced geniuses or anything like that it just helped. I think this is why you get 8 years of no change and teachers often I stayed 30 years other teachers there had done 30, 21, 17 people stayed because they felt they could do something. Other schools can be difficult because of that changing element all of the time.

E: You were at school 30 years did you notice a changing population of the children? Was there more ethnic roots?

D: Oh yeah you have different ethnic groups into the school, interesting that some of those came into the school, Muslim children came there why? Religious education we are nearer to you then we are the atheist I thought that really said something, like I want pray, I want belief in God, it may not be what you

want but there are common elements of Religion in that as well. I got two children they came from Afghanistan, my Parsee is not very good so I sat them next to each. Their father was into me the next day 'I do not want them to sitting next to each other, they must be speak English my brother, he was shot by the Russians.' It teaches one that these parents are all looking for the same things for children no matter if they are Muslim or Afghan we want them to get on, we want them to do well and they will accept that the basis this is a Religious School. Clerkenwell was attached to the Holy Redeemer Church for along time, the Holy Redeemer is a very high Anglo-Catholic, very high Anglo-Catholic so the priest always wears the Cassock, broad brimmed hat or the beretta and everybody comes into school this is what you are getting. So if you send your child to school the head would explain this is the church and you would see ethnic children coming in. We say ethnic some people tend to think that Muslim but some of the African and Caribbean children are very much into religious education, very much into and know it better than the locals do in fact some of the Muslim students knew the Old Testament better than me and the local people. That was fine and because of the stability in the school there was chance to accommodate people and bring them in and work them through and that was like teachers coming to the school, you didn't have to be burdened down immediately with all the problems that you get when you start teaching you can work your class and they would work you in and as I say you could do that with children coming in to the school - you knew what you were getting at Clerkenwell.

E: So you taught at the school for 30 years so then did you retire from teaching and move onto something else?

D: In parallel with my teaching I was a councillor for 16 years and noticeable when I was on the council you would get lots of teachers. Why would you get lots of teachers? They were the ones with the time - no national curriculum no filling out all these huge rings of reports that you have to do. Teachers had plenty of time so you saw plenty of teachers on the council. So I was on the council from 1974 to 1990 I was a Labour councillor for half of that time and then I joined the SDP. I was chair of planning or had responsibility for planning for 6 or 8 years as well and you did have time to do that so I was much involved with the council it went into a lot of politics from about 1981 onwards, with the formation of the SDP and Thatcher Government and Islington got this high reputation of being the looney left council and in 1982 that about summed it up, when there 51 Labours councillors and myself as the sole member of the opposition that lead to some very interesting times and the publicity and everything else I was much involved with the press and media in those days. Interviews with just about everybody.

E: You went into the council as a Labour councillor why did you decide to become a councillor? And two why a Labour councillor?

D: well I have been a member of the Labour party for a number of years my father was a Labour party member. I knew some Labour councillors on the Finsbury Council when I was at school with the son of one of them who was a deputy leader of Finsbury Council. I worked on the local council as a summer holiday job at one stage that's Finsbury Council at that stage. So I had some interest, lets go back to 1968 in 1968 Labour lost a number of councils in London and I knew one of the local councillors who had

just joined he was friend of mine so I got to learn a lot about it then and then in 1971 Islington Council went back to Labour and he became the leader of the council. So I had an interest in the affairs that were going on, one of my interests was just the planning sphere and I went into it. In 1974 I'd always had an interest you go to LSE you can't not know something about politics and the School I went too had an unusual theme in the sense its interest in Social Sciences which in those days was really different. I mean we did British Constitution in the early 60's we didn't have that. It might be normal now it wasn't then and so I had an interest in politics and local politics. In 1974 in with Labour, then you get all the oral machinations or the in fighting of labour during those years. Talk about all comes round in time I joined the council 1974 in 1976 Dennis Healy had to go to the IMF and beg for money because country was going broke and big recessions- are going to the IMF at the moment to borrow money? It all seemed to turn around then and then there were the clashes within the Labour party was I disagreed with the direction it was taking and so I joined the SDP. The SDP actually took over the council for a while because of a number of defections that was in late 1981 early 1982 and in 1982 the SDP was virtually wiped out except for myself there was 51 of them and me. The leader of the council then Margaret Hodge went on to become Government Minister and you had people like Chris Smith who became Minister of Arts he was on the council. When I first joined the council Jack Straw was on the council the minister of Justice and Minister of everything nowadays he was on the council when I first joined in 1974. Yeah you meet a fair number of people. I suppose my biggest education when I was sole member of the opposition, oh boy was that different.

E: As the sole member of the Opposition, did they listen to you at all?

D: No they didn't listen at all the first thing she said, "Out! You're not having the leader of the oppositions office go wherever you feel like". They offered me the CND Bunker or the rat catcher's office etc. They wouldn't talk to the press or anything the Labour party 'scum of the capitalist press' so they wouldn't talk to a local newspaper and the funny thing was the senior reporter on the local newspaper was a senior Labour councillor in Berkshire so they wouldn't talk to him which I thought was quite amusing and when went to council meetings, full council or policy committee, nobody would talk to him except me. After the first policy committee I went for a drink with him and I said this is what they have done, he says oh great that's a great story I'd love that for the paper I will have that. No, no don't put that in they will think that's absolutely barmy. No he put it in there that I'd got the rat catchers office. I got mentioned in the Peter Simple column it went on from there absolutely barmy. I remember the first policy committee meeting I went to I was sitting with the deputy bar planning officer in walked this chap wearing a brown bomber jacket a red shirt, green trousers, open toed sandals and he had blonde Cleopatra hair style and I said to him who's that, he said that's the Vicar he was the Chaplain at the Metropolitan University. He is now the bishop of Wilesden. They wouldn't talk to a lot of press and they wouldn't put adverts in the local press so we took the council to the ombudsman and the ombudsman found in favour of the case that we put to him on the basis, the funny thing on it was Maggie Thatcher who had saved council, because when she first joined Parliament she put through a private member whereby local authorities have to provide facilities for the local press in giving press

releases and giving them a table to sit at as well. So the case was won by the local newspaper, which is all very good because the editor of the local newspaper and I went to school together so I could always ring and say hello I have another story for you but there are hundreds of examples. It was day after day of interviews for American radio, French radio I did TV programmes and the local reporter would phone me up and say you haven't spoken to me for two days, because the thing was I had complete access to the press because the council wouldn't talk to the press. So my side of the story was put forward all the time. I remember once The Sunday Times or The Observer went along to do a sympathetic article as these press people are likely to do. The Islington council was getting all the stuff about me and the Sunday Times sent somebody to do an article which would be sympathetic to the council, well the council wouldn't talk to them. They would talk to me instead of them getting a nicely sympathetic article they got a very acid 4 page Sunday Times article which was really sympathetic to me (laughs) you get 4 pages in the Sunday Times and see how much you think that's worth.

E: Being the only SDP councillor did you find that you got a lot of support from the SDP?

D: I got loads support from them, and there were people in the borough who were. The first thing the council did just to make sure they made me even more popular they were thinking of putting 77% rate rise well that certainly turned people's heads back quickly. I got lots of support from the SDP itself because I was getting all the publicity. The press were coming to me all the time. I would get phone calls asking what's going on so I would get lots of support. Then 1984/1985 I arrange a meeting at the Finsbury Town Hall for David Owen to come and speak for a general election and we had 400-500 people in the Finsbury Town Hall to listen to a great leader and then you have the City University School of Journalism sent all their reporters along to that and the Guardian was just around the corner. No the SDP were fine at the time, we changed that from, to give an example, in the election in 1986 we got 16 seats it went from 1 to 16 and interesting in this area the EC1, in 1974 election the Labour party won the seat for the local area with 81% of the vote and in 1986 SDP took the seat they took 50% they had a huge swing around from 81% for Labour to 56% going to SDP. Labour lost its way.

E: So when you were a councillor did you run as a councillor for the SDP until the end or did you finish after the end of the SDP?

D: In 1990 the ILEA was disbanded by the government and the education authority I had a conflict of interest and that was time to go and I left the council in 1990. I left the political party, I haven't been a member of a political party since 1990 when the SDP faded so that was that.

E: Since then have you followed the politics of the area?

D: Always, I still know the politicians it's knowing how the system works if you want something done who you have to approach and how it has to be done. If any planning applications come up or you have an interest in planning and through schools work as well. Even like simple things like school sports if I want something done I know who to approach and which direction to go. I don't call that politics in the pure sense it's the way the system works which is why I have always kept in with that. With housing,

planning, sports and schools I know what to do not saying I can always get through the system but I know which to approach the system or who to write to, or which departments to write to and how things actually work and then after I finish teaching I was on the board of EC1 New Deal for Communities and I spent a lot of my time working for EC1 NDC . That was very interesting because the people who came together there was only one with any council experience sitting on EC1 NDC board. I was used to a sort of culture and structure of working – even if it's just committee working, they weren't used to that. And then they thought they couldn't work with the council. Who could oppose them? The council is just about everything here and if you don't work hand in glove with the council they can make life awkward. They need not work with you, they could just do a little of the perfunctory bits and you are frustrated like mad you have to work with these people.

E: Currently the councillors for Bunhill & Clerkenwell are Lib Dem aren't they?

D: Yes

E: Do you know much about why the change happened from Labour Councillors essentially?

D: Labour lost it in 1986 and have never regained it, they lost it in Clerkenwell. I think it's the change in character of the composition of the Labour party. One of the great frustrations for a lot of the Labour Councillors they just can't move the area on. As I said to you before a lot of the work is already done you can't move it on. One of the reasons it stays as is, you just do not get too many liberal politicians who know how to work the area. They are very bad at doing that, they want to make a quick impact at the expense of people who live here, and if the people who live here are terribly conservative with a small 'c' they find it very difficult very strained. It may be that, in reflection, your ignoring people who they thought would be a base their rock bed, the working class, they haven't cultivated them.

E: Talking about the working class, do you know much about the independent working class? That group in this area as they quite strong in this area aren't they?

D: Well they think they are, they are another group marching backwards to the future. It's an inability to go forward and see change too many of them just cannot see the element of change that happens in society. So many want to preserve everything that's here, oh it's got to be exactly the same. Too much of Finsbury, now if we are not careful begins to look like East Germany 1960, and that's my view of King's Square Estate it looks like East Germany 1960. You only need the watch towers on each corner you would be made its always been one of my fears that change happens, but you have to take advantage, see if you can nudge change to see what you can get out of it. If you throw your hands up and say no we don't want any change at all we want it to stay exactly as it was. It just doesn't work you have got to be able to take advantage of it and too many of them don't. I mean too many of the people I sort of associated with, Islington working class, have forgotten, since they moved in, we have had computers, you have mobile phones you had all the great technological developments which will just pass you by. Things do happen in the area my interest in looking at history in the area a flow of history happens and if you are not perceptive to it, we might be little islands and (47 mins???) but the other

things are happening. I've have seen changes in employment and changes in cultural character of the area and just can not sit there and ignore and throw your hands up and hope it doesn't happen. One of the things I did when I was doing planning people were saying, 'oh these terrible developers', in fact half the time with developers you could get your 15% out of them without even thinking 'oh yeah we will help you' instead of trying to take advantage of that and saying alright things will have to change we will grab what we can, no we don't want anything. I think you will end up sadly backwards and I think I.W.C.A. is that I.W.C.A. as far as I am concerned hasn't got a positive programme it's retain, retain, retain. I spoke to one of the people who stood in the last election and he said 'Yes that is the criticism that you can focus on'. What are you going to do? What's your policy for sport? What's your policy for developing the Leisure Centre? What's your policy for developing Social Services?

E: If you don't mind me going back a little bit to talk about your planning role in the Council? Were you in the Planning Department?

D: No I was Chair of the planning committee. We determined planning applications. Behold my mighty work . You put your hands to head at times but I was much involved in the Angel. If you want to know why there is Sainsbury's at the Angel well I was one of the people on the planning committee we voted for Sainsbury's to be there. You can make all you criticisms of it but there were land determinations on Sainsbury's that stopped it being as big as it wanted to be etc. The building which they are revamping on the corner of St John's Street and Pentonville Road I was much involved with that. Royal Agricultural Hall again I was much involved with that Michael Hessaltine comes on tells everybody sell it for a pound get rid of it you are not getting any money out of us. Along came a chap called Sam Morris who turned it into the Business Design Centre. We worked through him and with him for a long time. I mean one of the reasons I went to planning was I felt this area, Islington wasn't going to pay too much attention to the housing because they say all your housing is relatively new, compared to a lot of the problems we have in the rest of Islington. I thought you are not going to make that amount fit in and housing will always be a problem come what may. Planning will be here for some offices and the rest of it out there, people might see scale office developments here and I wanted to see whether we could have an influence so I took that interest in planning. The Angel I suppose we saved it from having a big roundabout a huge underpass and roundabout and everything else, we saved it from that. I take no responsibility for the building on the corner of City Road and Islington High Street, I am not too upset with the design of it but the Road configurations that I thought were wrong but then again I think it was the Bishop of Wilsden he can answer for that. Planning can make its differences to stop some really awful things happening and planning by the way was also to do with Lorries coming into London. We had lots of problems with juggernauts coming down St John's Street into Smithfield Meat Market and leaving their refrigerated units on all night. All that's changed now those things have happened and gone, European Regulations stopped that and I don't think people have realised it till you come back to see it. There are changes that have happened, also the other planning things in the area which New Deal for Communities and I.W.C.A. had to look at was. The day time population is four times greater then the night time population, that is quite a problem because lots of services are provided around here to

cater for the day time population without the daytime we wouldn't have those services and the local people wouldn't. I mean Finsbury Leisure Ironmonger swimming pool would not exist without those people. If you didn't have them here they would close, they just wouldn't generate enough business and I think that some people in EC1 NDC when I first started didn't realise that. I.W.C.A. certainly don't realise it. I mean one of my friends who I said became leader of the Council they couldn't believe how many people lived in this area because he had never been here after dark and at the weekends. It's that sort of problem which is interesting to me as well.

E: You mentioned you are part of the EC1 NDC Board can you talk a little bit about how do you see the work they have done? Or what they are doing in the area how do you see that?

D: When I first joined the Board I thought they were going to get nowhere I thought this is hopeless, nobody could see how you had to get together to improve things in the last couple of years when the council helped us get to grips with it and structure it and organise it. We've done apparently what people are asking which was security on the estates we have done other planning and regeneration. I mean Spa Fields has been regenerated, I know Spa Fields very well as they used to have a football pitch there and I played Football in the Finsbury and Holborn cup final in 1956 it's changed a lot since then. I think that's a good development is very interesting. One of my friends who used to Mayor of the borough he used to live down by the Spa Fields and I thought he might be a bit against it, 'Its really good that is, its really good the number of people in there its doing really well.' Then you get Radnor Street Garden's which is a development. There have been a number of other developments who I am not sure people would recognise totally as being EC1 NDC but they are; Parade of Lights in Old Street, the bit in St John's Street where they improved the Gardens they have come along and we've have made differences you can see the differences being made and I think the other things is as well they have to come along and not see this area where everybody is walking around with slumped shoulders they're all poor and its poverty stricken etc and they've brought a bit of joyfulness into what they are doing to try add a bit of joy. Even just if we are doing this History project now it's something different from 'all these people are poor people'. They have produced their magazine which comes out which helps and we have the yearly festival. You've got to make joyful - not everybody who is below the line there are people here who are above the line or just above the line, you need to make it just a bit happier for them to participate and take part and people notice it. I was able to do little bits and pieces, I encouraged the EC1 NDC sports, extra swimming in Schools and we gave them certificates and it actually happens. I know because I go back to the swimming pool and actually teach it. You are able to do things like that as well rather than just patting them on the head and say what poor people in this poor area. It's not poor area actually according to Government statistics, but never mind. But I think EC1 NDC in the last couple of years has got to grips with it and then began to make that positive it's just a pity it missed out on some of the earlier years. Another thing is very important, their support of Finsbury Leisure Centre and revamping of Ironmonger Row pool, the fact that they said they will support it and add money to it then gives impetus to the council's. If you take that away oh what a hole you would have in the centre of Finsbury I mean

man does not live on housing estates alone you have to something else to do it and a bit of imagination, I really think you can make a big difference.

E: More recently they look like they are concentrating on the green spaces and the estates and the pools and the Leisure things, do you think that's the way regeneration in an area should work? For this area does it work?

D: For this area, if I had my way I would have knocked down King's Square Estate my big way of revamping. I knew the chap who built King Square and he thought it was a 30 year project and they got a short mortgage on that and I would like to see housing just a bit more humane than tower blocks. I am not in great favour of these identi-kit tower blocks they do. You have to add in something else that you can do and you can make the area softer instead of being one big harsh architectural thing, the parade of lights, the gardens it softens it out and makes people want it. I am always interested to see when we went round to open Radnor Street how many people come around talk about ethnicity and diversity you see the people there. Talk about this are one of the things I thought I am not conscious of great big race relations conflicts here it seems to be, that may be because we don't have too many middle class white Liberals who tend to be not so helpful. In fact I am not conscious of great conflict there is always difficulties how do you assimilate - language and cultural bits, but I am not sure it's been like great clashes you've had in other areas you know. Here it seems I am not saying its brilliant maybe just indifferences to each other we get on because we are indifferent to each other. In fact it seems to have gone along okay. EC1 NDC can marry that in with out making it a bit antagonistic affair. These race relation involved in things like that too often its big antagonism rather than gently melding people in. You only have to look at the annual fair every year, you get a whole mixture of society here it seems to be okay 'touch wood'.

E: You have essentially lived in this area your whole life?

D: Yes

E: How have things changed from when you were younger? You will have seen quite a lot of the Estates go up and the Street plan change, how has the area changed?

D: The area has changed I mean people lived in very poor housing we have got much better facilities. Finsbury Council had a problem and swept away in the big slum clearing programmes and they were encouraged to build tower blocks on the basis the higher you go the more subsidy you get, right we haven't got much money so we'll do what you ask. You build those places and yes it has people are better off, people are wealthier they have more goods more consumer orientated. I am not sure how much schooling is done I am not sure that, that has been a successful element, I also think that the council in one sense has to be very careful in the way it directs policies. Its most dynamic people they want re-housed 'off you go'. The people who might add that big of dynamism to the area- 'out' council won't have anything to do with them. Its 73% Social housing. That is just a ghetto, so that reinforces times passed conservatism that don't move on etc. I know from my teaching experiences and the people

who I have taught who have moved out of the area they have got to get some dynamism in the area. The Government's right to buy programme may not have been a bad thing but somewhere about 1982-1986 there are only 31 home owners in the whole of Bunhill, now that cannot be a good thing to have such a concentration of one set of ideas, one way of thinking about things. From my own experience of teaching, the right to buy allowed people to get a foot hold in and have some determination of their own future. I was glad to see revolutionary Communist Party supporting it, IWCA wouldn't but the Revolutionary Communist Party slightly more to the left actually supported the idea of the right to buy, because it gives you that element of choice, that element of thinking that dynamism the adrenalin pumping in the system. 73% just can not get it right. As I say we are going back to ex-pupils of mine who were very, very poor living in this area and they worked hard and got themselves ok, and then no you can't have a flat you have done well out you go. That just doesn't help because you've had a high concentration of one sort of social class you may not have ended up with conflict that you might have had otherwise but you've got to look forward and I think some of that is 73% social housing, we need more social housing you hear them all say, 73% is what you've already got. The pressures you are under in this area are the city and the land values and everything else here put pressure on the area and you are going to be pressured all the time. When I first got onto EC1 NDC 'no we don't want to know local housing, we don't want to know any more housing to be added on within the area', within a year planning application for 1000 private properties had encircled along Old Street and along Central Street, you are being encircled you don't realise it but this is what is going to happen and then you have a big planning application just behind the Barbican City Hotel. You are going to be under that sort of pressure and that's some of the things people refuse to recognise.

E: You said 73% Social Housing but I remember you mentioned earlier when you were child you played with the kids in street a kind of community. Is that still in the area? Or is has changed now?

D: There is a community in the area, change has been perpetuated by the older people because there was this stability in the area, over four years you get a 50% turnover in the area it might sound large but in fact that is a very stable population in London. Other areas in the borough were 98% in the four years. It is changing that degree of continuity then again that may be a reflection of London and everything else that degree of continuity. As I say the school I taught at was very much community orientated people going to school -maybe because it was bounded physically but 3 or 4 main roads and you didn't cross them too often so that added to it. It goes as well and other factors make it go as well I mean we were all on the Streets now you get these tower blocks the sense of community and sense of knowing people is not so great. It can't be whatever they said, 'oh when they built the places it's a street on its side' oh yeah, oh yeah, if the lifts don't work you don't see the person on the 16th floor. There are factors, cultural factors running through and you have to work hard to retain an element community sometimes it gets a bit synthetic cause everybody does these false fairs and also I suppose when there is an element of struggling, people weren't well off for a long time after the war, you were all pulled together. Nowadays consumerism just diverts people off with the accumulation of material goods, that splits it as well.

E: If I could just ask you about certain areas, are there certain places in the area that have changed a lot or that are nicer now or worse now?

D: Well the Ceford?? Street on the council took over the buildings, the houses there and improved them otherwise that could have been downhill trip. When I first joined the council someone wanted to take them over and turn most of them into offices. Areas which have improved as I mentioned the parks etc they have improved there are more open spaces. Now they are trying something on King's Square I will be interested to see what happens there. They've tried to improve King's Square and the buildings there I will be interested to see. There are certain blocks of flats and places like red brick St Luke's always looks pleasant, why I like red brick St Luke's is it's a more humane lower scale rather than up in the air scale. You have put me on the hop now about which ones areas would you say are that much improved.

E: Where there any areas that before were say rough or not nice areas?

D: Where I used to live when it was Rahere Street years and years ago, an 80 year old bloke said to me, I used to live in Lawson Street, but I would never go through Rahere Street because all the rough people live down there and it was all rough and ready.

E: Is that still Rahere Street now?

D: No Rahere Street is gone its part of King's Square now, that went years ago. You don't realise that other people thought you were rough, no we were all gentle folk you just don't realise on that score.

E: Are there any areas that you wouldn't go to?

D: No, I suppose because I lived in the roughest one (laughs) everything else was okay. No, its funny how you don't see things like that when you are living there you just don't see it. When you read back through the history of the area the places are improved. Like Bastwick Street was absolutely the most poverty stricken place in Finsbury in London you look at it now Bastwick Street has now changed from being housing to factories, when I realised that I lived not that far away from there things have improved over all. People live in better housing conditions people are healthier and wealthier and better, they may not always be what you want in cultural sense, you never see BBC reporter or media reporter living on this estate. You never see any of those sort of people, but people aren't all very poor, they are not all very poor it's just that they culturally do their things.

E: Finally now if I could just ask you about St John's Street do you know much about what used to be on the street, any buildings? How it used to be?

D: Well I used to be planning so I will take one or two of them, first you had Nicholson's Gin which used to be down there, gin was everywhere was Finsbury, Finsbury gin Nicholson's booth, Gordon's gin. I didn't realise that gin was actually associated with John Wilks Booth who killed Lincoln. You would go down there, I loved doing this to show off your knowledge. What's the largest private employer in the

Borough? He didn't know and it was Scoll's and they closed Scoll's and the decision for that was taken in Kansas, Scoll's was an important factor and in St John's Street as I say I knew the silversmith down there who used to be one of the top silversmiths in the country call Stewart Devlin. Who its said when Pompedieu entertained the Queen in France, Pompedieu couldn't get the cutlery so he sent to London to get that and I went to see his Fabre display it was quite impressive, quite a lot of jury on the table there.

E: Do you know where he was based on St John's Street?

D: Yeh he was at the bottom down near Great Sutton Street he had one place that was a workshop and then go across on Clerkenwell Road next to the Art Deco Garage and he had display rooms there. The other troubles we had juggernaught deliveries down to Smithfield Meat Market and that has completely changed, once they got rid of all the cold stores down there, you now have all your fancy restaurants and wine bars and the rest. When the Sainsbury's and supermarkets decide to do their cutting up outside of the Market, that was a blow to the market because the market used to be the price determining mechanism and it lost that role, once it lost that role it meant that, their role was down so the lorries didn't come in, now we never have never lorries come down there which used to give us all problems at 4.00 am. There was Wilkinson's on the corner of Skinner Street and St John Street which was a chromium plating factory that was one of the first problems I encountered when I was there because the fumes which came out of that place, now that's an office block. If you go back and look at some of the old pictures where the library is used to be small houses and a small pub there and if you want to look at that you can look at a thing called 'doctrine in the house' and it shows you how much change coming down from the University down here. Where they got rid of the Smithfield Martyrs Memorial Church that's gone, used to be opposite the Library huge church that has gone and now it is becoming students halls of residence. That's one of the factors of the area people have started talking about students halls of residence. There is such a need for it that they will be able to take over any building. Where Tesco's is above their used to be Allied breweries, you have the brewery next to Canon brewery which will be safeguarded as heritage but next to it you've had the allied brewery. The councillors used to be invited to lunch there to drink Oranjaboom that's gone now its all flats now.

E: Do you remember inside the Canon Brewery before it was turned into the flats?

D: No I never got invited into that bit we got invited into the old bit which was like 60s Allied brewery, 60's bit horrible looking, we got invited into that we never got invited into the Canon brewery. Bottom part of the market go across Clerkenwell Road down there you can see the changing buildings and styles and restaurants and wine bars. Which lightens it up fine it had become a depressing area didn't really particularly want to go down there of an evening. That's moving on.

E: I think that's probably us done really that's fantastic thank you very much. Is there anything else you want to talk about?

D: I can't remember what I have said.

E: Rahere

D: He was a monk who founded Bart's Hospital. This area after the war there were only 440-450 council flats owned by Finsbury Council lots of them were owned by people like Bartholomews Estates and they were not very good landlords I mean Rahere Streets was Bartholomew Estates property and they were not very good landlords at all. They owned Stewart Street as well you had the Bart's buildings down there, great area of ownership by private institutions such as that, that's what a lot of them were and when the council came in to do their slum clearance, you got great municipal ownership and great municipal estates before that it wasn't good it was in the hands of these larger institutions I mean the Finsbury Council had some very progressive ideas. Employing the Lubetkin to show you how the Spar Green estate should be built. Sort of living for the future. He built his own problems -Lubetkin designed these beautiful flats and hid the surfaces behind the walls, which is fine so you didn't have all the pipes running across the wall. In fact you find the majority of the walls when it comes to replacing you have a real problem. But Finsbury was progressive in its day I suppose it's a tribute to it, 3 big things I can think off, Ironmonger Row Baths, Finsbury Leisure Centre and Spa Green are all still working and listed, which a lot of local authorities now days doesn't last 5 minutes really. That's one of the big changes the council was taking over.

E: Do you remember much about the slum clearance process? Were you around when that happened?

D: I saw it happening, when they knocked down streets and I saw the Finsbury Estate been built. I mean they did their job at that moment of time. You see one of the problems which can face this area EC1 NDC the housing which was replaced was built 40 or 50 years ago does that housing now need replacing itself? You know some of the tower blocks how much longer can they go on for? And will some of the housing built say from the 50s, 60s, 70s stand up much longer? Do you need to seriously start rethinking about what you do, I am not sure that people actually want to grasp but there are some deal on EC1 NDC who see that this could be a forthcoming problem it can't last forever you are going to have to renew it. I mean decent home standard is okay, but on some of the estates you might have to think how long it will actually last.

E: When they cleared the slums what happened to the people from the houses? Did they stay near or did they leave the area?

D: Some did and the people who were in Rahere Street were moved over to Pleydell Estate in Radnor Street a lot of them moved over that way, and the people who lived in Radnor Street before moved onto Brunswick Estate, they tried the best they could, if you want to move out you can live in GLC estates if you want to move away we will help you to move away. I mean the population in this area, Finsbury 1900 had 100,000 population but 1970's it was down 23,000 population almost inevitably if you want to rehouse in decent standards it went down and down and down and that's why Finsbury was then amalgamated with Islington. We probably hit, I don't see it going up terribly much higher as much as people say oh no it will be coming back, no it wont if you got a family of 4 children you are not going to

move into Turnpike Tower block on the 14th or 15th floor no matter how much its wonderfully done and secure at the base. You still can't let your children out into King's Square because you won't be able to see them. I think that's one of the problems if you look into the future of this area is what you are going to do for housing, some of it just isn't going to last.

E: What do you think the future of housing in this area is then?

D: Well, I think you could rebuild King's Square much in the style that the housing used to be. All along Goswell Road used to be about 3 or 4 story housing shops and along side them Lever Street. Are the tower blocks going to last as a concept? I don't know it might be fashionable to some fashionable architect to say we are going to do this that or the other with it. But I can see them retraining lots of tower blocks one or two if they wanted to do it fashionably. My friend had this idea that you let top half out to posh people and the bottom half provided for the rest of them. I can't see some of these blocks on Brunswick they had to cover the sides of the block up because the spalding was falling off. Are they are prepared to put their minds to it because it costs money and if not would be patch and repair and things can get worse. See some of the features or technical deficiencies of what they built, they might look good but boy have you got a problem there you are going to have to look if the council cyclical maintenance doesn't continue through you will have problems. Even this block I worry about at times, Mulberry Court you have to meet new gas standards and new electricity standards I think they are going to have to think really hard about what they do. I mean I like to get rid of the tower blocks I think the tower blocks are just an awful way of living. My uncle lived on the 22nd floor of Michael Cliffe and thought it was wonderful so there you go there you go.