

C & G interviewing Jess about Sheffield's Harcourt Road

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Clara (C): Today is the 15th of October, 2024. We are on Harcourt Road talking to Jess and Robyn. I was asking Jess, how long have you lived on Harcourt Road, Sheffield?

Jess (J): I think we moved in 2015?

C: Wow, almost 10 years.

J: Yes, yeah, after Max and I got married, yeah, we came to view the house, well, we saw it online before we got married, and then we had the wedding, and then we came to view the house. It was still on the market, I think the market's very different nowadays. So the view of the lake outside was very, very nice. And I think we just sold a house first. And also it's very close to where we work. And we are very familiar with surroundings, yeah, because we were students here. And we, in fact, lived higher, further up the road, in Harcourt Apartments, the one right at the top of the road.

C: Oh, really?

J: We lived there for two years. So when I first started working... at the other end of the road, yeah, the one where the apartments, Crookesmoor Road...

C: So you liked the neighbourhood?

J: Yeah, we already knew the area. I don't think we really went down the road when we were living there in the apartments. But I think we just like the area, it's very near the park. Didn't have any children, but now I realise the park is very important for the children.

C: So what do you usually do with the children at the park?

J: In the summertime, they just love to go there, even if it's not that nice weather sometimes. And because there's a short wall between the park and the back garden, Elliot can quite easily climb over. So he's not supposed to, but he can actually go to the park himself and come back. So it's very, very convenient, because otherwise, like, there's no other park where you can just let children just, you can still see him from the house, yeah. If he needs to go to the toilet, he'll just come home himself, use the toilet, come back out again.

C: What was that the moment when the University of Sheffield was selling all the, some of these houses, because we, we learned from Nic and Simon in around 2016 but that was before you came here?

J: No we bought it from a family and they bought it from someone who used to be a jeweller making jewellery. The area here, on the lower ground floor was her workshop. So that made it interesting, so it was not part of the university.

C: But you witnessed that part, the changes then, like, more families moved in, after 2016 and do you remember some of those changes?

J: I don't really remember because, because we didn't have children. I didn't really think about that. When we got children, then we started becoming more involved in the community.

C: So what was the first impression that you had when you moved in or even before you moved in? What did you think about the neighbourhood? And then before you moved into this house, you were students living on this street. Are there any differences between living here as students and living here as a homeowner?

J: So we used to live behind Crookesmoor Road. I think my first memory of Harcourt Road was when I got driven home from a house party. Probably shouldn't really have been driven home by someone who has been drinking. Yeah, but this road seemed really quite big, and then the houses were quite big on the other side of the road, especially because they were big student houses with a lot of rooms, so it seemed really fun. And then later on, because of the proximity to where we work, then. Harcourt Apartments were very convenient, and they were new, so it was quite comfortable, rather than living in a student house. So the student houses, they're nice, big rooms. The apartments nowadays, the rooms are really small. So the houses here with big rooms, and you know, you have good group of friends, it can be quite nice. Yeah, I don't think we really thought about the neighbours when you enjoy yourself in the house.

C: And then after you moved in as homeowners, was there any difference immediately in terms of how you look at the street and think of the street, or it doesn't make a big difference until you have children?

J: Well, I think, I think we just started realising there's a lot of students, and when you're no longer a student, you start finding them a bit of a nuisance, sometimes when they make a lot of noise, but then it keeps the area vibrant. And it's always busy, and you get kind of differences during the term time and the non term time. It gets really quiet during the holidays, back to school, and everybody is out and about. So it's quite nice. It feels safe to have people around, not very deserted.

C: So when you first moved to this road as a homeowner, then how did you begin to know about the neighbours? Do you remember how that happened?

J: Someone who lived previously in XX I think, they had newly moved in. And previous to that, when we first moved in, they let us know that there was a shared email address for some of the activities on the road. Then more people started, I suppose, moving, and then leaving and everything. New people moved in, and then there's a street party, I suppose. I think the first few years, we didn't really make it a point of going and spending a lot of time to get to know people, but later on, especially with Elliot, then he was just very interested to go onto the road when it was closed and just play on his bike and stuff. And then started to know more of the neighbours that we played with quite a lot. She as well. Yeah, number XX so it's all very familiar, and because they go to the same school, some of the other neighbors go to the same school. Sometimes we walk together.

C: Westways?

J: Broomhill Infants. Because I think a lot of people move when their children are already in primary school. So there are a lot of families here where the children all go to different primary schools, so we don't necessarily go to the same school. Yeah, we kind of walk similar routes sometimes. Yeah, you can see them leaving for school, and then you're leaving the other direction.

C: Besides street parties, do you remember what other community related activities you joined? Like the first experience to join the community action, for example? And they sometimes would advocate for, like, community parking permits, I think. But I think maybe that was earlier than 2015 and then later on, some of them also come together to protest against the development of the Harcourt hole, for example, something like that.

J: I see some of it on emails. Yes, because some of the students cause the problems with their rubbish, when they leave at the end of term, there's always some sort of movement from someone to say, you know, get their act together, to students and make sure they keep, they tidy up the rubbish and the landlord's responsible, trying to keep the area nice for everyone. Yeah, because the students move in and out, they don't really care about people. No, not really that they don't care. They're not here as long term residents. The residents are so they have to maintain some sort of standard for the street.

Gum (G): When you moved here did you find any problems with the students being too noisy?

J: I think they're better over the years. I think that in the past they were really bad, not bad, but really noisy student parties with very big crowds. After COVID, you can't really have such big ... I think the tone is different. University fees are also very high nowadays, so they can't just waste away their three years here. In the past, the university fees, they just play away for a few years as an undergrad, and then maybe start to think more seriously later on, because they don't incur such a big debt nowadays. If I were a parent, paying for the three years... You can't play it away, it's very expensive, a bit more serious nowadays. But there's still parties. It's natural for them to want to socialise, enjoy themselves. Of course, house parties are the way to do it, they are the cheaper way, informal party at the house, right? Everybody is familiar, and then you can stay as long as you want, rather than booking a big hall...

C: Did you join some of those parties, after you graduated?

J: No, usually student parties would just be students, but I remember on Crookesmoor Road there were big parties that we used to go to and there would be strangers who would be going too.

G: If you ever had any problems about anything would you seek help from a neighbour?

J: Yeah, I mean, childcare sometimes, yeah, so sometimes, like, I can go pick someone up or Elliot doesn't want to come with me or whatever, and then I would just knock on someone's door and see whether someone can just watch him for a bit, and then, because we have, I guess different people have different gardening tools. So yeah, so sometimes I think Max helps cut the hedges. Yeah, I think there was once someone was burning something at the back, like leaves, garden waste, and the fire got a bit out of hand, and we can see we could help, yeah, with the garden hose.

C: So do you know most people, most long term residents on this street? You all know each other?

J: We do know, yeah. I think we're not very, very close. We're not close to everyone. There's some people that we're closer to, but I think we know that we are all long term residents.

C: We've seen you at most of the street parties. I think every street party, when we come, you basically join every one, like, twice a year.

J: Elliot loves it, and Robyn also, yeah. So when there's a flyer, he's very attracted. And he's like, always saying, can we stay for this? Yeah, yeah. I think he really likes to play informally, in an environment that he's comfortable in, which is the street.

C: So, because we saw every time I see Robyn, she also participates in painting,

J: She just tags along to everything. But I think she's also very comfortable, yeah, yeah. And I think because Elliot is comfortable, he's not very extroverted, he's more introverted, but because he's very comfortable in the surroundings, he starts to make friends with other people, like the students

C: Like the youngsters, the university students...

J: And he will always go on the bench there and talk to the people next door, not sure they want to speak to him for such a long time, but... And so I think it's good for him, yeah, otherwise, it gives him a sense of university, what it could be like.

C: A different perspective of the world.

G: Do you work around here?

J: Yeah, I work. I work at the hospital, Western Park, hospital, so it's very close. It's seven minutes, and I walk fast. The closer you live, the later you are for work.

G: Is it one of the reasons you moved here?

J: Yeah, because the parking around there is really bad, yeah, yeah. And then it's nice here so I might as well live here, but sometimes I feel like I don't really want to be so near. So I can look out, I can see it, get reminded of it again, but it gives me a lot of time because I don't, I'm not spending it on traveling. And then I can, like, I can finish up all my work, and I still can go and pick them up, and then I'm not stuck in traffic. So it's always predictable. Five minutes I can get them as long as I walk fast, I'm never going to be held up by traffic.

C: We actually heard some visitors of the Mobile Museum saying that, Oh, actually, Sheffield is a special city because many students who come to study at the university stay afterward, and this is your case as well. Do you also have other schoolmates doing the same or what do you think of this statement?

J: A lot of people just like Sheffield as a city. And then once you stay for many years, I think once you put roots down, then I feel like you stay rather than leave. But people do leave, a lot of my friends have left as well, but it's always nostalgic for them to think about Sheffield.

C: What would the most memorable thing be about Sheffield for them?

J: In the past as students, we're not like rich students, so we didn't go out to restaurants and things like that. So it's more like the memories of the cheap takeaways on West Street, places that like apartments, people will just go to each other's apartments and parties and things like that. And then I think in a lot of Asian countries, the city changes very, a lot, very quickly. You know, there's new developments, new buildings, all that. But Sheffield over the past decade, it's not really that much of that going on, although recently there are some more new buildings. But you know, if someone comes here, it's going to be quite similar to how it was 10 years ago.

C: Because, also over the past 10 years, you lived around Harcourt Road and then on Harcourt Road, so did you see? Well, besides, the buildings haven't changed much -- but how about the people, the neighbourhood, or, yeah, the involvement so far? Like any, any significant changes that catch your attention?

J: In the past ten years? No, actually, I don't. I mean, I didn't really think there were a lot of families with children living on this road, especially when I lived in the apartment, I didn't really think this was a road for children.

C: Yeah, there probably were not as many families...

J: Yeah, and so I didn't really feel a bit weird buying a house like this, because I think if I were to buy a house, I didn't have children, and I bought a house in the suburbs where there was a lot of children. If every house had children, I'll feel a bit... because we didn't really think we would have children, but it was quite a big house for just two people at the same time, so I never really thought about living in the suburbs just to be near families. This did not really, I did not really regard this road as a road for families, but it is nice that there are families here.

C: You mentioned Asia, and a lot of changes, I think also happened in Singapore in the past 10 years or two decades. And how about, how about the community bonding here on Harcourt Road compared with your previous experience in Singapore? How are communities? How are communities like in Singapore? Because I've no idea...

J: Well, my community in Singapore, it wasn't very close knit. I lived in a condo, and then I knew some of the immediate neighbors. And when I was younger, I think I did play with them, but I don't know whether Singapore parents are stricter or whatever, more particular, and I know some people don't like their children to play or stay out late. And then I think it just slowly diminished over time. But here, like, I'm very happy for the children to all play together, and they come over, we go across, and I think in like here, there's the street party, and, you know, we see quite a lot of the neighbors every morning, but in Singapore, everybody just rushes off to do their own thing, because there wasn't really a sense of community within the condo. And in the condo, I think a lot of the residents were expats, so they come for a period and they leave. So we don't tend to stay for a very long time. There are some long term residents, but Asian communities, I don't know you're not friends with your neighbors, unless you're already friends, and they become your neighbor a lot of the time, especially in that kind of setting, maybe where you look at people's car, someone's nicer car than you or whatever, yeah, comparing, yeah. I don't know whether it's different in the government housing where there's a lot more residents, yeah, because ours is not really that many residents. Yeah, I think we did have, we did have a small community where everyone had swimming lessons together in the swimming pool, because it's not a big condo. Some condos are really big. Then I think it's even more difficult to have that sense of community. I think in Singapore everybody's just busy with daily life.

C: Things like this also change over time, I don't know, like in Hong Kong, I think we always heard the previous generation who grew up in the 60s, 70s, they would emphasize that community bonding was stronger, people help out each other and look out for each other. But then maybe people get really busy over time. And that kind of the sense of community belonging fades away when people are really busy, like, going to work, like, from not just nine to five, but even longer, when you go home you just need to take a rest.

J: I think in Asian communities, you have a lot of paid help. You can outsource something. If I need gardening, someone's very easily going to come and mow my lawn or whatever for a small fee. Whereas here it's very difficult. If I want a specific thing doing I need to book in advance. I need to do all those things and then, like, babysitter as well. It's like, it's not that easy. You don't have a helper, you know. So I think people are more independent, and you don't have to rely on other people.

G: In almost 10 years, when you moved here were there any Asian, South East Asian or Asian people who lived here? You are the only one?

J: No, I'm not aware of any... Like there were students. I would say that they come and go. Kind of students? I don't know any long term ones. There's a family that's moved in from India, but apart from that, I don't think...

G: If you had a friend from Singapore, or an Asian friend, would you recommend them...

J: To live here? Yeah, yeah. It's very nice. I mean, we want to move, we want to have a nicer house, but I don't want to leave the road. I want to change the house and put this house on the road. Yeah, like I'm struggling to find anywhere to move because I don't want to move away from the road. No, I don't want to move, I'm quite happy to move away from the house, but I don't really want to move away from the road.

C: There are so so many episodes about renewing your houses on TV.

J: Oh, yeah, I think we've maxed out this house already. We just regret not buying some of the bigger houses on the road when we were younger.

C: How about the Western Park Museum? Do you and the children visit that often?

J: Before COVID, I used to go very often, especially as the museum used to have, like a wall where you got stickers, and then you can pay a donation, and then you have a sticker that you can write something. Western Park Museum, Elliot used to go there. We used to go there a lot because when he was learning to walk, there was a big open space indoors.

C: Regardless of how the weather is, it's a good place to visit.

J: I think now we just have too many activities, so we don't schedule these activities. So we don't really go to the museum as much.

C: Because I'm just wondering if the infrastructure around this road, like the parks, well, the museum as well, and some other facilities would that help the community building together, yeah.

J: I mean, in the summer, we always have, like, a WhatsApp group at the park, you know, if anyone's going to the park, then someone messages, and then everybody goes to the park together. They're all just free play at the park. You know, I'm going to a park to have a picnic. If anybody wants to come, then, yeah, then there'll be a big group of people.

C: So you really make good use of Crookes Valley Park. We saw Elliot and his Dad going fishing the other time.

J: Yeah, they like to go fishing, yeah. He's made, like, little fish. Like, you know the things, the bait, yeah, like, wooden bait. The way he's kept it, painting it with glitter so that it sparkles in the water, even articulates it, so it can move.

C: Does it work?

J: I can show you.

G: Do you know about Penny's crossing?

J: Penny's Crossing?

C: The pedestrian crossing outside Beanies. The traffic lights. Penny was Nic's wife. She was the one who really advocated for road safety at that crossing.

J: To put the traffic lights in?

C: Yeah, to put the traffic lights in to put pedestrian safety first before the vehicles. Actually a few months after she passed away it was established. Finally, in 2016 or 17.

J: Before that there was no crossing, right? You just had to look at them, although now, because of the pedestrian crossing, how the traffic lights work, a lot of people walk diagonally.

C: Maybe it's meant to be like that, yeah. Maybe they designed the green lights to let people cross diagonally.

G: We would like to make some plaque to acknowledge people's efforts. One will be for Penny's crossing. And do you have any person you would like to recommend, or a story that, or it can be a person, or can be something really important on Harcourt Road that you want to acknowledge or let people know. When they come, they see this plaque, they understand, oh, this is important. Or a family?

J: I don't really know, but I know James at XX, he is very involved with getting the university to have good sort of input with the students who live here, you know, like the rubbish, the parties and things like that, so that they have a good relationship. So there are a few talks, I mean, Laura probably also goes to that, those type of meetings where there's a representative from the university to talk about, you know, how the students are behaving on this road, yeah, so they're more involved, and they give the residents here a voice, because I don't go, I don't think Max goes. And then when there's a party, usually we just put up with it. But James and I think usually someone, Simon, will go and tell them off, and then they stop. So yeah, they're more vocal to maintain the, you know, the nice living on this road.

C: The harmony?

J: Yeah.

C: You know how everyone's calling that the underdeveloped piece of land at the end of the road The Hole, Harcourt Hole?

J: Oh yeah.

C: What do you think if we have signage about this is to officially name it Harcourt Hole?

J: Oh no, it sounds a bit like a slum. It sounds a bit slumpy. I think we don't want to make the property prices around here go too low.

C: I didn't think about it. I just thought it would be funny.

J: Yeah, it's a very good location, because it's like everyone walks past there. So if you put, I don't know, cafe or whatever, that'd be supermarket, you know, everybody walks past that.

C: I think it is owned by a really famous boxer, I think he previously proposed to build something really big. That's why it was turned down. Yeah, it couldn't work out.

J: Yeah, the foundation, I don't know if it's good enough for something big.

C: Maybe a cafe would work.

J: Maybe just a car park, because it's like so many cars trying to park somewhere. Even if you make it into a car park, you'll make money from it rather than just wasteland.

C: Yeah, depending on how this private owner wants to deal with it, within the constraints.

J: Expand the gym?

C: Sell it to the university?

J: yeah, a bit more sports stuff there, because..

G: About nine, nine years ago, you moved here, and at that time, is the condition or the situation in comparison with nowadays any different?

J: Well there's a lot more cars. I think we never really thought about the car parking when we bought the house, I think we were told that there's always car parking. Don't worry, there's always good days, because it's permit parking. But I think after COVID, especially, a lot of students had cars. So one house with nine rooms, if everyone has cars and they all park on the road, that is not enough for all the residents to have multiple cars and park on the road.

C: Is there a limit of how many permits?

J: I don't know whether there's actually a limit, because some of the houses have been converted into flats, right? So they have a different flat address? Yeah, I think you can have two or three, but, yeah, once you have the flat, I'm not sure whether that really applies. Yeah, I think a lot of residents, especially families, have two cars. Not many people have driveways. That's why I want another house. My driveway, underground. Because I don't drive. But then the times that I drive, I get very annoyed when I cannot find a space.

G: Do you remember what year or you first joined the street party or street cleaning?

J: I don't know which year. Maybe, like 2018 maybe, and then it was one year old, maybe. Yeah, I think it's only been happening for like 10 years. Is it 16 years? 16 years? Laura was telling me how many years ago, but I forgot, yeah, I think, I think maybe there was one. So I tried, I tried to go out, and then I think it's just a lot of children playing, right? So then, and then the next batch of people are the older generation, yeah, so people our age either had children or then it was the older generation, yeah, but I did go out and speak to some of them, yeah, because I think that's how I knew the house here was owned by a person making jewelry. Because the older neighbours knew.

C: Would you say it is like, because of children... Actually, children can be a really important element for community bonding?

J: Yeah. Otherwise, I don't think... it's not that I'm not bothered, but like, I'm not someone who is like, there's a party I have to join it.

C: I just wonder why? Maybe it's because kids can easily hang out with each other, and then they will begin to connect?

J: Yeah, they just like to play and if it's on the road, and then it's like, familiar, and then they can just go in the house and come out and go in and get some stuff and go out. Yeah? Because even though it's not a street party, they often play on the pavement outside, because it gets the evening sun. So they'll stay outside and play for quite a long time. And then eventually some of them come in the house to play. And then sometimes we go into someone else's house to play, or, like, at the back. You know, we have a shared garden thing, so it's very nice.

C: So the space that would facilitate play or play for moments, would actually bring especially the kids together?

J: Yeah, maybe this happens a lot in the suburbs, but I don't know. So like here, the proximity to the city center and the parks and the hospitals is so good. I don't know whether in Crookes or streets that are higher up, whether there are streets like this, that are big enough, you know, to have a street party. I

know in Broomhill, Beech Hill Road also had a street party that week that we had one. Yeah, they also closed the road and handed flyers out. So there are streets that also

C: Do similar activities?

J: Yeah, because Beech Hill Road is very near the hospital and the uni as well. So they also have student houses. They also have a similar issue with many long term residents with children and then student houses.

G: After 2018 when you joined the street party for the first time, did you join it every time?

J: We try to, it depends on whether we're around, but nowadays because of the school holiday, if it's not school holiday we are around yeah. And then if it's a Sunday, then we're usually around. Yeah, so we usually can make it -- the priority for Elliot, I think.

C: He sees the poster?

J: Yeah, he will see the one from the previous one. He will forget that he already saw it from last year.

C: So the street party and community organizing on Harcourt road, and also you mentioned nearby the hospital and Broomhill, they're all more like, I would say, bottom up, like, really self initiated by people living on here. But, so it doesn't seem to need a lot of government funding or even Council led agenda to put people together.

J: If the street doesn't want to do it, even if you can give them funding, nobody's going to participate. That's quite a good mix of people, international people, university, I know I said there's no Asians, but yeah, people from different backgrounds and various stages of life. But a lot of them have been students here as well, or they work at the university. So there are strong ties to the university, although we complain about students, we understand the university and we kind of like it in a way. Otherwise, who's gonna live here, you're not gonna want to live here if you don't really like to be around the university students.

C: Because in this whole project, we try to look at community organizing and try to understand how this self initiation sort of happens, but so it's definitely not state led. And we know about how people want to both care about each other and help each other.

J: And I think maybe we have a common not enemy, but like, you know, like that is just residents, and then you have a student population, and then it sort of binds people together to say, you know, that student issues that we kind of have to tackle. And then maybe, maybe that gives us a common goal, yeah, because, I mean, in a suburb, they don't have that problem. Everybody goes about their own life, right? And then, I suppose it then depends on whether they get along, and maybe they will all have a street party as well. They all get along, added incentive of no students.

C: Do you have anything you want to add? Is there anything you want to improve on Harcourt Road, on, or oh do you want to bother having a bigger house? I I don't know, in terms of the pro neighborhood environment?

J: There's always an issue of people using this road as a drive through shortcut, and then some people drive very fast down the road and then it's not, yeah, it's not very safe, is it? So I think that is one thing that is on the agenda, I suppose, yeah, to have a speed limit on the road that people actually stick to. People don't stick to it, although some time ago, I think Isla drew a hump on the road, a traffic hump, just in chalk, and then people slowed down.

C: Really? How interesting, a three dimensional perspective.

J: Yeah, you see in front, you can look at the colors, you think there's a hump. And then I think this, there was a proposal to shut one road, or something like that, Northumberland Road. The council wanted to make something one way. But I don't think people wanted that. Traffic can be really heavy, especially when it starts to rain. Everybody drives, you can really see the difference.

G: Are there any problems on the roads in the heavy rain?

J: Oh yeah, flooding on the other road, Northumberland Road, the road on the road opposite The Wave, between The Wave and the gym, that one gets flooded, although it's better now. When I was a student, they let everyone go home early.

G: Does Harcourt Road get like this?

J: No, maybe because we clear the leaves. It doesn't usually. I mean, there'll be certain areas, like dips, there's a bit of water.

G: How about landslides?

J: No. I don't know what's happened to the lake. You know that part where the pavement has broken a bit? Yeah, so I don't think it's a landslide. Yeah, it wasn't. We bought the house and we had to have a survey, although it was a radiation risk, because the hospital is there, radioactive source, it's a radiation risk.

G: Yes it's a good street.

J: Do you want to buy a house here?

C: We need to think about it. It's rare to see houses.

J: You can buy this house!

C: You are a good agent!

J: It's very nice: they're big houses, and actually, they're very good value for money, because to get a similar size house somewhere else, that's not as convenient. It's even more expensive. These houses are quite big. That's why I don't want to leave.

C: Okay, then maybe we will stop the recording. Thank you Jess!