

C & G interviewing Marcus Smith about Sheffield's Harcourt Road

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Clara (C): So today is the 15th of September, 2024 and this is Clara Cheung, and I have Gum with me: Gum Cheng and also Marcus, Marcus Smith, we are actually on Harcourt Road, Crookes Valley Road, next to the Harcourt Road Mobile Museum. And yeah, Marcus: actually around two years ago, when I first joined a panel discussion at Sheffield Hallam University, I was inviting different participants, including you, to write down your memories of some of the roads that happen to have the same street names as we do in Hong Kong. And I remember receiving your message saying that, 'Oh, I used to live around Harcourt Road', and so you were sharing some of those happy moments with us on this message on this postcard. Can you tell us more about your childhood memories around the neighbourhood?

Marcus (M): Yeah, of course, my whole family lives around this area where Harcourt Road is. So we've been here since, gosh, maybe the early 80s. So we've seen a vast amount of changes. What it tends to remind me of is my childhood. Harcourt road was always quite a vibrant, busy road. It had people from all cultures. Well, not all cultures, but it had a mix. It was like a mixed community. I believe that it was the place for the Windrush generation when they first came to Sheffield, it was a place where they settled. And then as time went on and the community developed, I think we started to see more white residents and more residents of colour. I always remember it as an adventure, with it being the road directly connected to Western Park. It would sometimes be our like, we would call them catwalks. So we would be garden hopping, and we would find our ways from through the gardens and into the park when it was always like an adventurous place for me as a child. Across the road, you've got Ponderosa, again, different in its landscape, with it being forest and trees and grass, but again, a lot more adventure. And one thing I realised on my way here today is that as a child, you tend not to follow time the same way you do when you're an adult. So when you're an adult, you know it's the 15th September, you know it's the 13th of July. We just know. But I think when you're a child, the community events kind of tell you what time of year it was. And as I said before, I have a great memory of the bonfire season, where the community worked together to build this incredible event. But nobody actually ever spoke about it between each other. It just happened. And I realised that that must be a kind of -- that's quite a nice, beautiful magic, so that the community doesn't even need to tell each other that this is what we're going to do. And I only just realised that today, we never spoke about it. The Bonfire would just grow. You would just see three weeks leading up, you'd see a chair there, and then you'd see a broken down wardrobe, and then you'd see loads of old blankets. And it would just keep building, building, building. Until we reached the fifth of November, and then we'd set it alight. So Harcourt Road for me is a, it's a revisit into my childhood memories and my childhood activities.

C: And I know recently, because of this mobile museum project, you also begin to talk to your family members, yes, more about their memories of this neighbourhood, Harcourt Road, or, you know, the different parks around here. What have you got from them?

M: Well, I think my uncles and my mother were in their adolescent and young adult years, so their memories of Harcourt Road were a lot more vivid. The postcards that we have written on our short memories: I have three from my uncle, my uncle Brenton. The first one said the Ponderosa was the bottom half of the grass and the tip being the top half as a result of the houses that were demolished there. If I remember correctly, Cuneo's Ice Cream started there, too. The three prefabs on the tip: one was the West Indies Social Club. The middle one was the youth club run by Cactus, who is still alive, and Sue, who is still alive. They both facilitated a space for the Jamaican youth to run a sound system on a Friday before heading down to Havelock square. I just kind of realised that like even then, this community was welcoming its immigrants and its people of colour, and if we look at what's happening now, that community spirit of acceptance seems to be disappearing a little bit. So I don't know. I think I'm kind of proud. I think I'm proud to come from around here. I think that the people who are from round here represent a good and a right side of morality. Of course, I know the news is twisted a little bit different nowadays for the immigrants and the people that find their way to England, but I believe that Sheffield... Well, I believe that this little, small hair area here Crookesmoor, Upperthorpe, Walkley, I feel like the people here and their spirit really is one of community. And I think when we hear stories like this of acceptance and a time where they probably had less information and may have felt less safe. But if we carry on, he's given me, he's given me another postcard memory, which is the Jamaican youth used to hang out in a house two doors up from the petrol station, and Reggae was played all summer long. Sue, who was very butch, could sing along well to the tunes. She was the person who rented the flat on Harcourt road. Again, this space that facilitated these cultures of young Caribbean men and women. I just think it's such an amazing thing, and I feel like we need to get back to this, this willingness to accept and this willingness to embrace the culture of others. I feel like sometimes we hear people say, 'Oh, if you come to this country, you need to learn this language.' And I don't think that's true. I think we're reading here now where this lady named Sue seemed to be embracing the language of the Windrush generation. I just think that's beautiful. I mean, it's a beautiful thing. And do we have, oh, one more memory? At the mention of an old petrol station my uncle Brenton said, We bought 50p worth of petrol from that station, and we put it in a stolen motorbike, which we would then ride on the tip / Ponderosa all day long. We would also go into the boating lake from Harcourt Road when the park was closed. Even there, my uncle was doing the same childhood stuff that I was doing, and then he would go to the Dam House Restaurant, jump over the wall and steal a keg of beer. That part I didn't do, but yeah, still brilliant to read of this place as like this gigantic adventure playground, which, by the sounds of it, was a safe place to be. I remember feeling really safe as a child and just knowing that I knew everyone. I just knew the people that were around me in the faces that I saw and my friend's mum passed away a few days ago, and it reminded me again of this woman who cared for me just because I was her son's friend, and she didn't need telling. It wasn't like her and my mom had this massive close relationship, yeah, it wasn't even that. It was just like they knew each other and we lived in the same environment, and it was the same for when her son came to my house. And, yeah, community, that's the one thing I've really taken from this little exhibition, actually, is the stories we've been getting. It's about community. It's always a reminiscence of this wonderful time. I don't think we've had any bad stories from what I remember.

C: That's lovely. Yes, can you tell us a bit about where the petrol station...

M: Oh, so the petrol station was on the corner of Harcourt Road and Crookes Valley Road. What you see now is, I think, is shared apartments...

C: With the NHS?

M: Yes, yes. We see these places, and we sometimes think that, surely a petrol station can't fit there, but they find a way, don't they, but yeah, it's just, I remember going there before school. This was, like, our way to school. We would drive this way, so this petrol station -- and again, another memory -- they would allow, like, sometimes my mum would be like, do you mind if I pay you tomorrow? And the petrol station man would be like, Yeah, of course. And again, back to that sense of community and looking

after each other. I don't think you could go to a petrol station now and say, Can I pay you tomorrow? I don't think, I don't think people are all that trusting anymore. So I feel like I'm made from this, I feel like I carry this spirit of this community, because my brother and my sister that they're kind of the same in the sense of how they treat others. They're very accepting. We're very open, and I feel that's because of living in this area, definitely.

C: That's lovely. Oh and mentioning the old days, I remember you mentioned the boathouse in the lake. Can you tell us more about what happened at Crookes Valley Park? What were the memories there?

M: Oh, wow. So I think again, Sheffield being this amazing place for green space. How many people get to say there's a boating lake on the doorstep to your house? So we never had to go far if we wanted to have fun or if we wanted to go and do something quite exciting. And I remember we were there regularly, so the prices must have been quite easy. They must have been manageable. It was never something that I remember saying.. It might have even been free... but I never, ever remembered being told I couldn't go on there because it was too expensive, or we didn't have money. And again, community and we keep leading back to this, this spirit of, well, just less capitalism, I guess, and less capitalism, more community. I'll never forget these memories. Ever. I feel like when you're a child steering a boat, you feel like an adult. You feel like a bit of a grown up, you know what I mean. And I'll never forget those memories ever. I feel like, like, I wish my daughter could experience the same type of stuff. So, yeah, I'm very grateful to have had the boating lake. Definitely.

Gum (G): You said that there was a petrol station. Were there so many cars around there? Was it dangerous?

M: Oh, good question. I don't remember. I mean, when you're a child, nothing's dangerous. Is it? Everything is the same. I don't remember like, because I don't think it was like a petrol station that sold anything other than petrol. So it didn't have sweets, so we weren't going in there as children. I think it was a bit of a petrol station, but it had a little mechanics place, so people would come there to get their cars fixed as well as getting fuel. But I think because it was just for cars, it wasn't a place where we would go in to buy sweets or something. We would go around the corner onto Barber road. So I think, I mean, I'm guessing being a mechanic and a petrol station and fuel it would be dangerous. And even now, when I think, wow, what a place to have a petrol station. Maybe they moved it because it was maybe in, in too much of a public residential space, because I've noticed that we don't have petrol stations in these areas anymore. There was another one up the road on Commonsides, so I'm guessing they just took the petrol and the fumes, maybe, maybe there was, I never thought about that. That's actually a really interesting subject.

C: How about any other changes around the area, like for example, standing on Harcourt Road, Crookes Valley Road, we see the architecture of a church, but it's no longer a church anymore. It's also shared like an apartment, basically. How about this change? Are there any other really significant changes that you recall and that are memorable?

M: Yeah, I feel like the identity, and this is not, this is not a resistance to the change, because I accept change happens regardless. But what I have noticed is, because we're so close to the university, this has become a student environment. This is where the students live, and I feel like that's taken, maybe taking a touch, a tiny bit of the identity away from what it originally was, and has now given it a new identity of again, acceptance and embracing of different cultures, even though they're here for different reasons. So I feel like it represents the same thing, but it's different. Different personality, a different, a different, a different spirit, definitely a different spirit. But I feel like the student influx has really changed the living arrangements. Now we see a lot more flats, the church maintaining some flats, and also the amount of people that walk up here now -- there's so many faces you don't know, whereas 20 years ago, you would know everyone. So I think the change here has been -- it's not a negative change, it's definitely a positive change as because education is key to the world, but I do believe that it has

changed the identity of the neighbourhood due to the change in the use of the area, which I don't think is a bad thing. I just think it's quite interesting that this, this area, has become another area. It's become an area of acceptance for another social group, so to speak. I think that's kind of, it's kind of magic. Think it's a nice thing, yeah, definitely. And luckily, we've got a lot of green space still. So as long as the green space stays untouched, I think it'll be all right.

C: That's a good point.

M: Yeah, it'd be interesting to see in another 20 years, when the students that are here now maybe have families, or maybe, maybe they live around here. Do they adopt the spirit of this community, or does it change over time? But I'm very happy that this is where I live, or this is where I'm from. I feel like this is one of the best sides of Sheffield, 100%

C: Actually, it's interesting. The other day, another visitor to the Mobile Museum actually told us -- I think she was maybe from a newspaper. She got the data that Sheffield is the one of the cities where most university students stay behind. You know about this?

M: Yes, I think we're number one. I think we have the highest percentage of I don't know what they call them, but yeah, apparently this city is the best city to live in if you studied in it, which is quite surprising, because we have all these hills, which makes life quite hard if you don't have a car. I would love to know what it is, you know. Is it the people? Is it the place? Sheffield is a funny little world, but yeah, that is true. I think that's quite another magical thing - is that the spirit of being embraced - we I think we stay where we feel safe. And does Sheffield do that? Could we say Sheffield makes people feel safe? Do we respond? For instance, the traffic lights? Yeah, when the people spoke, the community seemed to respond, which is quite nice. And again, the city keeps growing when people stay so the economy gets better. But of course, the identity has to change, so we have to give something to get another thing.

C: Oh, and, and, I know you also have spoken to your mother, who also has a lot of lovely stories about the area. Can you share a bit about those stories with us today?

M: Oh, wow. So we're constantly talking stories. So my mom always speaks of her childhood, it's quite parallel to mine, the adventure, the big groups of children. That's another thing I remember she always spoke about. It was always big groups of children. Now you see children, one or two or on their own, looking at a screen... It was nice.

C: Did she grow up here? Where did she grow up?

M: She grew up on the top of this hill, not Barber Road, the next one, but she lived at the top of Barber road, and then they moved further down into Springvale Walk. But the majority of her childhood from around two, I think, is here. Okay, so, yeah, my whole family has grown up around here, and now my daughter's around here. My sister and her daughters are just around the corner there. It's hard to leave. It's a hard place to leave. I currently don't live around here. And like, I can feel it, but yeah, like when, sometimes when I leave this area and I have to go back to mine, it's like, oh, I have to go so far. And I'm leaving my daughter, and I'm away from my mom. So, yeah, community, big communities, big groups of people are the definite parallels between my childhood, my mom's childhood and so many stories about being outside and playing things like Robin Hood and taking the tree branches and making a bow and arrow, just things like that. All the things I did I got from my mother, she would teach me things like this. She would teach me how to make, oh, we would call them a peg gun, which would be a piece of wood, and you would have a peg sellotaped this end, just with an elastic. And we would just play. But these were the things that would be like, we'd spend hours. We'd be in one of our gardens, and we'd have hammers and nails, and we'd be fixing and breaking and taking apart and putting back together. Do

kids still do this nowadays? Do they go outside? I feel like kids miss out on so much adventure these days. So, yeah, definite outdoors that were the type of childhood my mother had, definitely the type of childhood that I had.

C: So yeah, adventure and outdoors?

M: All the time. Yeah, definitely. I mean, there's such a labyrinth of a place to have this big, massive forest with this open grass, being a child it seems so vast at the time, and to be here again,

C: At Crookes Valley Park?

M: Yeah, it's like so much adventure, whether you was participating with the bowls, whether you was on the boats, whether you were just playing on The Park, or whether you were just in the bushes and the trees, climbing the trees, we would always build what we would call Tarzan swings, climb the tree, tie the rope down, and then tie a stick across. And hopefully we could do it on a hill so we could swing out into the - ahhh ahhh - it would be really quite scary. So, yeah, it was always an adventure. We always had rope, we always had a football, we always had a basketball. We would always be on our bikes. That was another thing. Big groups of people on our bikes. So we might, that might be the only time we left the area, is if we was like, let's go on our bike rides, then the hills would be of a benefit, because we would drive right over to Stocksbridge and Stannington, which is far when you're a child, right to the top of the hill, and just fly all the way down, all the way down, all the way down to Penistone Road, and then back into here, back into this area where it was safe, where we felt safe.

G: When you were young did you meet, or did you see many university students?

M: Oh, no.

C: Around which year?

M: So if I think back to, if I think back because we had it, we had the Student Games here. So the Student Games was like, uh, Olympics for the students. So in 1990 I think, that's when they had the student Olympics here, and that's when, all of a sudden, we got new facilities, we got a Don Valley stadium, we got Ponds Forge, we got the Supertram network. And that's when the city started to change. So around, maybe around the mid nineties, because I remember, right up until my teenage years, my mother would all but was still pointing out the the dangers of the streets and the older people who were, who were who were living well, they was up to no good, really, but my mother, they were still around the streets, and I remember the change coming from being quite rough, safe for me, but rough if you was an outsider. And as the rough disappeared, the students started to come in, and the buildings started to change, things like that. So I think the area needed a clean - well, I don't want to, I don't want to say a clean up, but I think when, when a council has plans to change an area, I think they try to again, they gentrify it to a certain extent. So I feel like maybe around 16, 17, I started to see a change. Yeah, definitely. I never thought about that as a kid. You just play out. You're just on the area, but yeah, now the faces that I see are strangers. They're not people I know. I have to go right into my estate to see people. So, yeah, I feel like the mid nineties is, there was a bit of a change, and I'm gonna, I'm gonna check that myself and see when the university, because Sheffield University, all of a sudden, just went boom. And it was this amazing place to be. And we saw big influxes of different cultures coming in. Yeah, I feel like around maybe as I was 16, 17, that's when the change started to take place. And I don't think I paid attention to it. I don't think I was aware of it. And only now when you ask, you start to realize, like, Oh, this is quite new. This whole student hub, because it is quite nice, to a certain extent, to feel like we are a place of education and a place of providing that this safe space here allows these students to travel from here to there and it be part of their daily routine. That wouldn't be so nice if he was walking through a dangerous area. So it's quite interesting. I think I've got some other research to do myself to kind of look into that. Good question!

G: When you were young, were there any places you hadn't been, because they were maybe too dangerous, maybe there was a ghost?

M: Well, they used to. They used to say, my grandmother, oh, my goodness, they used to call her... I don't think it was true. I think it was just something that what started as a little joke and grew into a story, but they used to call her the white lady, the white lady ghost on Ponderosa, oh my gosh. I can't believe I forgot this. The white lady, yeah, so there'll be days, all right, I have a memory. Now I have a memory. Oh my gosh, I have a memory of walking along Ponderosa, very late. I was with a cousin, I think my cousin, Rashida. And obviously, when you get to Ponderosa, you would always say, Oh, the white lady's gonna be... and I remember us walking and seeing something move. And we ran and we ran. And then we realized, when we was looking, it was just a plastic bag. The plastic bag was just blowing in the wind. But again, even knowing, we knew there was no ghost, but because there was a little bit of a seed, but in terms of location, no, I don't think there was. I think there was, I think there were things that... so they might be an abandoned house. There was an abandoned house in a car park down there that was lived in by a man named ...

M: So there was never, there was never an area, but there'd be things like, there's a house down there, big house, and it's, it's obviously been made by somebody who had money back in the day, and a man, a gentleman, called Ebenezer Elliot, ended up living in there. He was a local poet who, yeah, who would, who was a bit of a, how could I describe him a bit of a... He was somebody who would be, he was for the people. His poems were about the people in the area and what they might be going through. He was a bit of a political poet. That house was just a big abandoned house. Now we were not supposed to go in there, but they were the places where we'd be like, let's creep in and go on... this place as well. We would always be trying to get inside. Yeah, always, I feel, I feel like we only ever used to get in this bottom bit there. We never got into the top bit. But there was always a little bottom bit down there that we could just be inside. And it would be just a room, a dirty room, a forgotten room, where they left a back door open, and then one day you just don't get in, they started changing all the windows. Once we saw the windows start changing.

It's crazy to think that that's actually now student houses. It's a beautiful building. I. So, yeah, there was never an area, but there were things that we shouldn't do, but we would always do them, being a child, I think is just curiosity. Yeah, definitely curiosity. And I feel like this, the city was a nicer place. Obviously, there was no knife crime. I mean, there was always crime, but I feel like there was, there was... Street life is quite intense at the minute. What the kids are dealing with right now is a lot worse and a lot more dangerous, and a lot more, not, not more dangerous, a lot more exploitative. I feel like today people exploit children like that. They don't really have... I don't want to say less morals, but when I was a kid, people would never dream of exploiting the children. They would never use the children for crime. Whereas now, children are facing so much more adversity and so many more hurdles that it's a hard place to be a child. I think it's quite hard to be even now, it kind of just made me swallow to say this. But even now, I don't think I'd let my own daughter, I wouldn't be able to relax. You know, I mean, whereas, I think the difference with my mother is she could say Marcus and Tyra, go and play all day and know we'd be all right, and we knew we'd be all right. I think that's kind of, I think, in answer to your question about where we could we not go then, I feel like now is the time where children have to be a bit more wary of the environment, which is a sad thing. It's quite sad. Do we lose that opening up, embracing students? It's like Catch-22 Is it because they're both, they're both good things. So it's like, maybe, maybe sometimes we are always sacrificing one thing for another thing. Because this is definitely changed, and this is definitely changed. Do you know what I mean? So it's interesting. I've never paid so much attention to it. It's nice to ask these questions and have these discussions, and I get to really think about the changes that have happened. Because we were so quick to complain, Oh, this is happening. No, it's so bad around here. Oh, there's no jobs. It's like, well, actually, things change, and we maybe have to adapt and change with it. Maybe...

G: You said you play around all the all the area, yeah, did you go to the Harcourt hole?

C: Yeah, at the end of this road...

M: So when I was a kid, before it, so this is when it's previously... But down there is where they've done the building. But before then, it just used to be a, oh my, because we used to play football across the road. We would climb over the fences to get into the football yard. But we would walk this way. So we'd go through the park, we'd go into this bit crossover, go to the hole. But I think because this was just land, yeah, not many trees, it was, we had this so we didn't play in it, yeah, but we knew of it definitely, because it was, so when you stood on the street, you looked over it went, sorry, it went down. So it was a bit, I think it was dangerous. Yeah, it was, I think I feel like, I feel like we looked like it was a dangerous place, because I don't remember having memories of being inside there.

And I feel like we have so many things to play with before we got to it, but we would definitely walk through it to get to the football pitches, climb the fences and jump over. And we wouldn't have names for it, so it would just be, just be the we just call it the bucket or the hole. They would call here the tip again, because the houses had been demolished, but then when I got to being a little boy, they'd cleaned it up. So I was given a name for a visual I couldn't see. So my uncle's generation call it the tip because it was a tip.

C: What does it mean a tip?

M: So there's a few meanings for a tip. It's where people tend to tip their rubbish. It's just, you know, if they were to, like, just break all the bricks down and leave the bricks there. Okay, they're just, it's just a tip of bricks. It's a funny word. Is that one of them words like, like "mardy", where there's not really a meaning in the dictionary, it's just like a name, what the community is given tip. So, yeah, we wouldn't have had a name for it, but when you say, as soon as you said Harcourt hole, I was like, Oh yeah, of course. The bucket. And I think it got, I think when the buildings got knocked down there, they put big barriers around it as well. I think there's metal, metal walls around it or something. I'll have to look when I drive past, I'm gonna have to look again enough to get out of the car and have an actual look.

G: When, when you were young did you and your friends have different names for different places?

M: Yes. So we would call this the Ponderosa. We would, we would just call Ponder, this is Western Park. Obviously, we just called it Western. Look at the Western see what the Western. So over there on on Walkley Street, there's a park called Ruskin Park, which is named after John Ruskin, another Sheffield person. We had a little section in the bushes where we would climb, and we would tie branches together so we could go from one tree to another, and we would, or we called that Monkey Island. We just called it Monkey Island because we was just being monkeys. So it was just the name of the football name of the bushes. The concrete football pitch was called the square. I don't know why. Because it wasn't a square. It was a rectangle. Yeah. So I don't know why we called it a square, but see you up at the square. Blake Street, which is the steepest Hill in Sheffield. So we used to meet at the bottom, and we used to just call it Blakey. I'll see you at the Blakey. I don't even know why we call it these days. We just called it these and our area, which is Upperthorpe, we called Uppers. It sounds so silly now. Crazy words, yeah, little, tiny bits of words. But then what you've just reminded me of is the nicknames we would give each other, because you don't choose your name, your friends would choose your name. So we all had, like, really weird, funny names. My name was, they used to call me Beans. And that would be, that was because I'm very light for a mixed race, Jamaican and English person, but they would say I was like an albino. So they would call me Beans for albino. But I wasn't an albino. My other friend, he was skinner. We just called him Legs, just, it was just his name Legs. So everything got a name. I feel, I feel like that's just something you do when you're a child, things get abbreviated, things get a nickname. Yeah, it's quite innocent and quite nice, actually.

C: Mapping?

M: Yeah, it is, yeah, and you don't necessarily choose the mapping. It's chosen for you. Yeah, mapping is a great word for that. Clara, it's really nice. It is a mapping. Excellent? That's a good question.