

C & G interviewing Sarah and Yonatan about Sheffield's Harcourt Road

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Clara (C): Yeah, so we are here on Harcourt Road. Gum and I are here on 7th August. Thank you. Thank you, Sarah and Yonatan for talking to us today. Can we begin by asking you when did you move to Harcourt Road? How did you choose to live here on Harcourt Road? Why?

Sarah (S): We moved to the UK in January of 2005 and first lived in the home of one of Yonatan's colleagues for a month or a few weeks, and then we moved into a house on Springvale Road, and then decided to buy something, and started looking around and Yonatan.... Well, you, you...

Yonatan (Y): It was just lucky. We didn't have a lot of money, and the university was selling these houses. These were student houses. A lot of the houses on the road were student houses. The university, the site was financially not efficient to keep owning. They decided they're going to build big buildings for students. It's much easier to maintain the whole building, instead of having to deal with individual houses. So they sold all these houses, and they were in terrible conditions. They decided that instead of renovating them and then selling they'll just sell them as they were, and students lived in them, I think, for, I don't know, 30 years before. So they were all just trashed. Every room was a bedroom. Every bedroom had a sink. So these were two separate rooms, each one had a sink, and all the carpets and the floor, the floorboard was drenched with beer. Everything was. So a lot of these houses required a big renovation, but they sold relatively cheap, not very cheap, but cheaper than the market. These are big houses, and they would have been very hard to buy otherwise.

S: When we moved on, there were probably 20 houses in this game, for, sale, maybe 15. And we looked at a lot of them, and we liked this one because of the lake view. But then slowly, people, I think we were one of the first, if not the first, to buy the scheme. Maybe a couple others had. But soon, I mean, soon, about 12 other houses were filled with people renovating and fixing them up, families, mostly.

Y: Yeah, and a few, two or three bought them just to fix up and then moved on. So they stayed here for a year. There was a neighbour here across the street that did the whole work by himself: renovated, sold it and moved somewhere else. Most of the people stayed for at least a few years. It's not, it's a slightly bizarre street. There are a lot of students on the street. Half the houses are student houses, which means that it's much more than half the population, because each student houses eight students in them, or seven or eight students...

S: So something like 500 students on the street, which seems unbelievable, but yeah....

Y: So there's a lot of students, which means a lot of party and a lot of noise and a lot of late night activity. So the families here are kind of middle class families, but it's very different than other middle class neighbourhoods.

S: But that was part of what the city and the university want. The city wanted to make it more of a mixed street. So that's why they wanted more families coming on and some non family professional people also.

Y: And you should ask Nic about it, the street apparently has a very interesting history that I don't know very well. But this house, and I think a lot of the houses, were built around the turn of the century, of the previous century, so they're more than 110 years old.

S: This was 1860s, this house.

Y: I don't think so but I think the land partition was from then, but I think the house was built around the turn of the century, but I'm not sure. You can look at the deeds. And then the street, I really it's worth asking Nic, I think, for a while these houses were divided into much smaller units for working class people. And then there was a period, apparently, in which the street went ...

S: Really degenerate...

Y: Downhill, at least in some according to some standards, there was a lot of prostitution and a lot of crime.

C: So when you bought the house, did you know about the covenant in this selling contract?

Y: Yeah, it was very clear. The covenant was very clear, so the role was really to make sure that these houses don't become student houses again, because they wanted to get this mixed... I guess I'm actually not quite sure what the motivation of the university is. Maybe they just wanted to make sure that their students are buying their accommodations because they spent a lot of money on building these big accommodations, why did they care if it was a student street? And so there's still a lot of students, because a lot of the students houses are privately owned, so only some of the students houses were owned by the university. These are the ones that were sold. All those that are owned by landlords, private landlords are still student houses, and I think it's a good deal because they're keeping them, not they would have sold them.

S: A couple of them got sold off. Also, like some of the ones up there that were student households...

Y: They were but were they sold off to private I think, to families?

S: I remember when we first moved here, sometime in the first few months, I remember driving around Sheffield. We were looking for places to live. And I remember driving up Barber Road and seeing the back of all these, this row of houses on Harcourt Road, and seeing the lake. We were driving up past the lake and seeing those, and I thought, wow, that must be so posh, like Central Park West, right over the park. And then it was really a surprise to me when we really ended up being here, and it was not, it was not out of reach, luckily for us.

Y: Which, I guess, in relation to the question of community, we didn't buy it because we knew there was a great community.

S: There wasn't yet.

Y: If there was, we didn't know about it, something that, I think, but we were reflecting on it a bit of why there is such an active community here and not in other streets. I think it was in part because a lot of families came in at the same time, suddenly a lot of new families came in, and there's a lot of energy of trying to make something new. And people had young kids, young kids that helped make a lot of difference, but there wasn't, in one sense, the tradition of a community helps, because it perpetuates. But if you want to start it, it's very hard to start in an existing Street that doesn't already have that

tradition. So I think the fact that there was this sudden change, 20 families arrived in the same two years suddenly.

S: And to be fair, I mean, I think there was a community of sorts before. I mean, Nic would speak to this, in the sense that there were a few people who were very active going to the city council, advocating for things on the street so that it wasn't overrun by student interests. And in fact, one of the first days that we came here, remember we were walking, and we saw Nic and Penny working in the garden, and they were the first people that we met. And Nic really is a pillar of this road, in terms of what he's done, sort of politically and with the council, and he knows a whole lot. So that was also one of our early, early encounters with what... it was a small community then, but there were obviously people on the street who really cared about the street that we could tell that early on.

Y: Yeah, I was, I don't know if it's part of your project, but I think there would be an interesting hypothesis to test the connection between strong local communities and more global political activity, really. I don't know if you talked to, you know, Alex and Laura. So Laura is doing a PhD, that kind of also involved the street, involved leadership, so she might have some thoughts about that.

C: We will talk to her after this. She's back from the summer break, yeah, asking her to be our history consultant. So can I ask about this book, swap library, like, how, when and how and why, you build it?

Y: It wasn't our idea. I mean, it's a very big movement in the US, in America, and I don't know the history of it in the US, but there, at least in the city where we lived, Berkeley in California, every street has at least one, if not two. So plenty of them all over the place. Very creative. In fact, there's one that I hope I took a picture. Somebody tried to expand the idea there, yeah, and go beyond books, and created a small one that's for design. So it's a bit like your Mobile Museum, it's this big box, and they change the design all the time. Every few weeks, they have a different design on this plate inside the box. It's really, really cool, but most of them are books, library, and in the US, it's also supported by this non for profit organisation that's called littlefreelibrary.org.

C: What do you mean by support?

Y: That's a good question. On their website there are a few designs that you can download for how to build these.

S: There are maps where you find them in various cities that you're going to.

Y: So everyone who has one of these, if you want, you register with them, and they put you on the map, and then they send you news, and they send you ideas about the libraries. Would be interesting now, given, yeah, sorry, that's how we got the idea. I'm digressing, but I don't know if you've been following the news today, Utah has decided to limit certain books from being allowed in school libraries and school instructions. So this is a whole fight in the US about limiting or censoring books in libraries, but Utah is going to step further, and it's now not just censorship by the schools themselves, but by the state of Utah, and you wonder whether this kind of libraries are might be a bit of an antidote to that kind of state censorship. But anyway, so that would be interesting to see what littlefreelibrary.org is active there to say about that. So people build whatever they want, yes, and anyone designs it however they want. They're very simple and they're extremely elaborate. I should look on my phone at some point, I took pictures of a variety of libraries in Berkeley, because I got so excited by how many there are. And then they also sell, I think, a kit. If you don't want to build it yourself, you can buy from them a kit and that's where the idea came from.

C: When did you build it here?

S: Not very long ago, a year and a half, no two summers ago. Maybe it wasn't. It in the summer, was it in the spring? I'll find out.

C: Because I was wondering as you like doing a lot of things for the community if that's why the other children in the houses would be like, you know, we would like to do community newspaper?

Y: I don't know. I'm really excited about this. Not that I'm doing so much, it's not we're actually doing very little, but I'm really excited about the fact that there's an active community here, yeah, maybe because we're immigrants. And it feels like we need a home away from home, because our families are not here. So that's maybe one function that it serves. But I do think there's something interesting politically about it, and these global changes that are terrifying, and as you guys have experienced, you feel like you can't do anything about it. You're powerless. You can't change it, not only you can't single handedly change it, even when organised, you can't change it. It's just stronger than you. And then you think, okay, what can I do? You can do something locally.

S: You sort of feel like you have to.

Y: That's a function of these things.

S: Well, it's really to find your kindred, your group, your kinship group. Because if you just think about how things are at large, you can feel disconnected, alienated from how things from the big movements, and when you have people that you're going through it with, and it's very important.

Y: I should limit how much I talk about politics in general. If you reflect on what's going on both in Israel and in Palestine, you see that the strongest political groups are actually groups that started not as political groups, but rather as community building groups. So both the Hamas started not as a political group, but as a voluntary organisation that helped people with education and with food and with and, of course, with religion and the settlers and the right wingers are the same thing. They really started with strong community building before they became powerful and influential groups, and these are both groups that I can't bear. I hate their politics, but this, I think that's the right strategy. It's started, starting from the ground up.

C: Yeah, no, I agree. I agree. That's why we also want to cherish what's going on in Harcourt Road here and well, and once upon a time, Harcourt Road in Hong Kong.

Y: So we saw these libraries, and I got really excited about that also. The other thing is that we have too many books, and we don't have anywhere to put them. So we thought, okay, that's a good way of getting rid of books. Instead of, yeah, we'll just put them in the streets.

S: That's a fact I'll have to get back to you on because I don't know, so I'll look in my phone and let you know. Looking at summer 2022 but maybe...

C: So the Harcourt road community newspaper done by...

S: So our son is Ilya and Francis the neighbour.

C: Do you still remember how this came about? How did they begin?

Y: I have no idea.

S: You will have to ask him. He has a very good memory. I'll ask him.

C: Because I think is really special, for a street.

S: Maybe I could even get him to give a little video for you talking about it. But they were inseparable for a while, and they came up with the idea. I don't know how they came up with the idea of it being Harcourt News. But I'm going to ask him for you, rather than risk...

Y: He was always a writer. He would write things all the time, write stories, write creative books. Sarah is a bookmaker, so very early on, you taught him how to make books physically, and you'd make books with him, and he'd write...

S: Yeah, he was writing, and Francis was into history. They were very dedicated to it for, you know, they'd interview people, and they were collecting things. And so for a few years...

C: I think the whole community being quite positive about it, people would really respond to it. They do the interview. This makes it possible. It's only because you have this community, then it would actually make something like this possible, because I also see recipes shared by the neighbours, right?

S: It was early, the fact that they started that in 2008 I mean, I don't think it's overstating to say that it really helped give the fledgling community a sense of being a community. And, you know, just that, they called it Harcourt News, and they included everyone, every generation, every interest. And, you know, they didn't intend to do that. They were only 10 and 12. They didn't say, oh, let's, let's do some community cohesion now. But it really did, yeah, they did. It gave, it started giving the street and identity. I mean, not that it didn't have one before, but the newcomers, and especially the people with kids, saw it as something that their kids got involved with.

C: Oh, do you still remember the first time you joined a street cleaning party?

Y: It wasn't at the beginning.

S: No, it was a few years in. I think that there were Harcourt Road action group meetings before there were street parties and, and the idea of having the cleaning evolve into a party in the same afternoon. That was also not right at the beginning, but...

Y: 10 years, maybe... I think at some point. So this was also inspired, at least as far as I remember. It's worth asking Laure, but we read some articles. I think that was the right order. We read some articles about some cities in the south that are closing streets in order to have parties and community activities,

S: Yeah, Laura got into that earlier and...

Y: And once we realised, I think that that's feasible, then I think Laura got in touch, or whoever got in touch with the city and asked, well, could we close? And that made a difference. But there was another way in which community organising somewhere completely different. I can't remember if it was Bath, or do you remember which city was in the south?

S: But the other person, I do remember emails from Laure about it. I don't remember when, I could look those up. But the other person who has been very involved in the Harcourt Action Group, specifically the communication and the shared email is Suvash. Have you met Suvash and Lorraine?

C: Did they make the website?

S: Yes, he's in charge of the website. So you would have all the, you know, the chronology of...

C: We saw the website, but I think now the website is not activated. We want, we hope, to talk to him.

S: Website is not there, that's right, but the the email chain is and he's just, he's been behind all of that, as far as creating it and maintaining it and changing it when it one point, it changed its name, and he had to, so he would, you know if you had technical questions like, when did the email begin?

Suvash was, has been, and still is managing and maintaining both the email chain and the website, which is, like you said, it's down now, but there was a sort of a five year period when a lot, there was a lot of activity, things were starting and forming on the website.

Y: I think WhatsApp completely took over such a useful tool.

S: So many things stopped happening during covid. And then WhatsApp and online meeting...

Y: I think the email still works, though.

S: It absolutely does.

Y: So it's a Gmail. What is it, Google Groups? Or something like this? The other thing about the library, but I guess you know that already, that once we finished building it, we had this event for inaugurating it. The whole street came, and there was some readings. People read books outside.

C: That's beautiful.

Y: And we had some champagne, or, I can't remember, whatever we had. All the kids came, and that's how the this, the readings inside, started...

S: Storytelling...

C: How did you make this design? Like the red colouring and...

Y: I looked at a lot of pictures. A lot of the ones in North America are with wood on the roof. I thought that's too complicated. I found this roof in one of the DIY shops. And we put it, but I think the basic design is from their website. Although we did some, we did some changes, because I was also trying, you see the cost, some people put hundreds of pounds or dollars into building these things, but I just tried to build it from all the wood that I had. So I had to modify things. So it works. And then I remember my mom painted one of the decorations. Everyone in our road donated, and I painted one.

S: We can't tell... the books change. For sure, people are using it. We can't tell what rate or who or... but they, you know, the books will just all be different. So we know that...

Y: yeah, even from this morning, the books changed, two CD albums. Yeah, for a while I noticed some pizza vouchers were put in and then some Jehovah Witnesses trying to put some material inside. At some point, they put a totally new Bible, and with its pamphlet, it's gone. Everything is going even the thing. Sometimes I look at the things like, who would want to read that, but someone does. It's also very useful that we have some neighbours that have way too many books, according to them, and so they constantly put new books in whenever the library gets low. But you see that it goes in ups and downs a few days in which there's only five or six books...

C: So other people actually help to manage it?

Y: Yes constantly, we barely do...

S: We're not doing any books stockage or anything like that.

Y: No, sometimes I kind of organise them so they'll be in the front. But no, it's totally a community, right? It became a community project.

S: We put some in at the beginning, but then people, on the day of the inauguration, we invited people to bring books. And there were actually quite a few kids books right at the beginning. Yeah, and, and it's kind of evolved and constantly changing. And not too many kids bring books anymore. But sometimes ...

Y: But we constantly see people stopping, people, not from the street. So there's a lot of traffic on the street, both because of students and I don't know, I guess it's a path from the university new building to the to the city center, and parents that... a lot of people just... it's a stopping...

S: Sometimes just curiosity makes people stop.

C: And I have a question about the hole, the Harcourt hole. Do you recall in the past 17 years how the hole has changed? And do you remember encountering any construction work?

S: There's been so much discussion about that. There's been so much at Harcourt Road meetings on, yeah, a lot of discussion. It's changed completely, it's actually beautiful now, I think just all grown. You know, there was a period when there was a developer interested in it wasn't there and and they started digging more and then stopped.

Y: Yeah, so it was a hole and the developer... again, Anne might know better, but I think a developer body started building foundations and ran out of money, and so the bottom actually has quite a lot of foundations built in that won't be able to be used, I think, by anyone. And then it went to a few cycles of a few years that it wasn't touched, and trees were growing like crazy. It was a bit of a jungle. Then somebody complained that it was a fire hazard or something. So I think the city came in and cleared all the trees, and then they grew up again. I can't remember if that happened early, twice or once. And then there were a few periods where people used it, just to dump stuff.

S: Yeah, it was pretty unsightly at different times.

Y: So the city then built the fence. Now, the fence was taken off. Nobody quite knows. So did you remember if, in Harcourt News, there was at some point a competition of ideas for what to do with the hole? But there's definitely the idea that we thought maybe everybody will suggest and maybe we'll come up with an amazing idea, and the city will manage to convince the city to do it. The problem is that it doesn't belong to the city.

C: Then, about planning?

Y: We wanted a swimming pool, an open swimming pool.

C: Although you can also swim in the lake. About planning, were you involved in the BBEST neighbourhood planning?

S: Personally involved in BBEST, no...

Y: I mean indirectly, yes. So from time to time, Anne is sending us surveys, news about things that are going to happen, and then, if we have objections, then we submit them online.

S: But we haven't been to any of their meetings.

Y: I haven't, no.

S: I haven't in person.

Y: No, I've been to some of the meetings with the university that were involved.

S: Yeah, I think BBEST had other meetings that informed it, and they went but I think they meet once a year.

C: But the meetings with the university were also related to BBEST?

Y: No, I think there's three bodies that somehow are involved in designs around the neighbourhood. So there is BBEST There's the city council, and then the universities, and each one of them... the university is more interested in the question of regulating, I'm not sure that's the right term, the student activity on the street, monitoring, but they're also involved in development, because the university has a big interest in development here, this whole big, huge project of the social sciences, The Wave, of course, is a university project. And the new plans for the swimming pool. I don't know if you heard - so they closed the old swimming pool and the Goodwin centre was closed for a year now. In the beginning they said it's temporary, and now they're saying it's permanent. And they claim that there's a plan to open a swimming pool. The current plan says 2028 but it's very unclear whether it's going to happen.

S: So we need to build that swimming pool in the hole.

C: Because when, when I look at the BBEST website, I think it's amazing, because it's one of the first in this so called National neighbourhood planning, BBEST Sheffield is one of the first. There was this referendum, people voted to go for it. And then the council officially also endorsed it. Although, after 2021, I don't find much more information about how the council is really adopting the vision... another thing that really, really caught my attention was this green space survey. At the beginning of this discussion, it was not only about how to deal with human beings, but also to look at nature, how the natural beings around. And I think that's really important. That's really good.

Y: And even before that, when the city had some money, the city collects money from businesses on a regular basis, and a certain percentage of it has to go back to the neighbourhoods, and usually go back to green spaces. There's a point in which there's quite a lot of money, and we were consulted. There was a big planning for all these three parks and a few other parks. There was also about 10 years ago, I think, and they implemented it, one of the things they did, they did quite a few things, but I think that playground was renovated, the medium sized playground and outdoor gym on the Ponderosa... Have you seen it? So that was built as part of it. So there was a way in which the city was consulting, and the Friends of the Parks were involved in that. But I must say, I haven't seen a lot recently, in part because it sounds like the park services are losing a lot of their budget.

S: Have you seen down by the lake, the fencing off? I think they're waiting for that to be prepared.

Y: It looks like, well, let's see, Simon also will be able to tell you about that. But it looks like one of the new suggestions is to turn it into a soft bank.

C: So the birds, the baby birds, can easily go to access the water?

S: So that was another, the duck Island at the other end of the lake. That was another project of the Harcourt Action Group, and then also the planting of the flat... you know behind the area that's fenced off now there are four plots of earth where flowers are planted. And that was, who was?

Y: That's the Friends, but that is Simon who is organising.

S: He got people on Harcourt Road to go and to go and plant and so we were each given, several families were given, plots to seed to plant, and that was years ago. That was maybe every year. It's just we haven't done in the last few years. I think it started in 2018, 17 or 18, maybe 16, because he was still living here, maybe 16. Lots of little projects like this on this road, just anything that kind of needs a larger number of people. Often, you know, someone mobilizes the Harcourt Road.

Y: There's actually another project that was unrelated to the Friends. It was Keith and Susie. They were trying to give everybody pots to have flowers in their front yard so we create a bee corridor. So they were really concerned about the fact that bees are disappearing. I'm not sure it worked so well. We still have the pots, but I must say they're not a lot of flowers coming out.

S: Nope, not a lot of bees.

Gum (G): How and why would you join the friend friends group?

S: The friends of the park or action?

G: Oh, maybe both.

S: The action group, I think we, I think we heard about it, and there were all these new people, and there, so there was sort of a mumbling, rumbling, of people talking about it. And I think we actually said we'll have a meeting here. And so one of the first meetings was here. And then people just started saying, the next one can be mine, and the next one could be mine. And then I think the more people that came, more people realised we can maybe do things that make a difference. Yeah, we can organise. And it wasn't, rather than just sort of getting together and saying, Oh yeah, I don't like this, or complaining about this or that. There were people who were given tasks, and I don't know who... I think Laura was taking the minutes of these meetings, wasn't she? Someone was taking the minutes, and might still have...

G: It was serious, even taking minutes?

S: No it was serious. It was serious. And we all got them on the Gmail so that would be something that would be easy to find. If you wanted, you know, I can, I'm happy to look through my like, if you said, can you find this or that, I might be able to look through my email.

C: So was there a particular agenda at the beginning to to call a meeting, I mean, to address something?

S: There were usually two or three or four items that were: so we're going to talk about this. And if anybody has anything they want to talk about...

Y: I'm trying to remember what were the first issues.

S: So one of the first... well, no, the church was later, wasn't it?

Y: The church was later. Cleaning was always on the agenda. Student noise was always on the agenda. The garbages were early on on the agenda. So the garbage here is unbearable, at least on the other side. Just the whole sidewalk is full of garbages, in part because these houses are uphill, so it's hard to pull them up. So people leave them on the street. So on this side of the street, most people take them away, and the other side, it's kind of hard to lift them. So there were a few suggestions for a while, maybe even again in the Harcourt News... Definitely, for a few years, there was a lot of designs Anne will remember, because she had some of the suggestions of maybe making small islands, for bigger garbages instead of those small ones. And then we thought, maybe we can cover these with some wood so they're nicer. It turned out that that wasn't feasible, because the city has some rules that once

you cover them with wood, it's a permanent structure, and you can't put the permanent structure on the side. So kind of complicated regulations. We were looking at designs from, I think, from Holland, how to make it beautiful, how to make these kind of garbage islands more beautiful. At the end, nothing happened. But that was a big topic for a while that was discussed. But I think answering your question: part of what made it, I don't know if that's why we joined, but one of the things that made it sensible to join was the sense that it was very democratic, and that was related to the fact that it was new. There wasn't any establishment. There wasn't anyone that was already governing anything, it was just people coming together to talk...

S: And shared, kind doled out, share tasks. That was a big one: like you do that, you do that, you do that, you do that. I just checked my email and on them right now, the furthest, the oldest one, is 2016 but there'll be earlier ones, so I'll look more, just to see what some of the topics were. So there the South Yorkshire Housing Administration Association had a couple of houses, yeah. And there were often issues with that. And these were protected houses, so a lot of it were health or rehabilitating...

Y: There was a women's shelter here. There were a few shelters...

S: And there were a couple houses...

Y: That were problematic. Some of the women's shelters actually attracted... some of the violent husbands would come. And there was also a house that would be the sort of a reassimilation, you know, like trying to reintroduce people who had been out of society, either from being formerly in prison or mental institutions, and they were coming back to try to... And so there was one on Harcourt Road for a long ...

Y: I think they all disappeared. I think they're no longer using these houses as shelters anymore.

S: I think we would know if they were. So that was often an item, just and planting and, gosh, I'm, yeah, I'm forgetting what some of the, I mean, there were some very passionate discussions that I'm not remembering what all of them were about, but often just struggles with the City Council, with planning. And one was often, was about somebody wanted to buy a property on the street and develop it in a certain way, and people objected, because that wasn't ... we were trying not to have as many multiple What do you call them?

Y: Multiple occupancy,

S: So there were all sorts of struggles of that kind with the planning commission. And there were even meetings that, you know, people would go down to the city council meetings and speak and ...

Y: Yeah, and I guess, even though....

S: And friends of the park, I don't know you, how that started?

Y: That's an odd so I think I told you, before Sarah came, there was a Friends group that's been running for 30 years, I think, or maybe even more. And we could know those friends of of Western and this park, and then we expanded it to cover another park, but, but it's an old group that went through a lot of periods. Some of them were less active, some more. But there was always kind of an existing institution that it was easy to join. And at some point somebody said, oh, we need new members who joined. Not that the members should change much over the years. We actually need a meeting urgently.

C: Do you need to pay?

Y: No, no, you don't need anything.

S: Sometimes a member from the city comes...

Y: So we have some meetings with mainly the parks people from the city join us, and we have some discussions. It's not a very active group. There isn't much to do on a regular basis. So it's kind of a dormant group. It arises when some urgent need comes up, but this change to the park might be something we'll be involved in. And then there's some regular activity. It doesn't require any discussion. It just happens. Yeah, the bandstands run every year. The concerts....

C: We were, yeah, we saw some of those in July.

Y: Somehow we're involved in them. We're not quite sure why. Some of the money goes to us and these, these plantations down near the lake, but they happen regularly, without much discussion.

C: And do you know about the development, or the discussion, about the pedestrian crossings at that, you know, outside of Beanies? I know it took more than 10 years to get it to be realised. I can see that how the persistence of a group, a community group, and with someone really leading the, say, local activism work, that actually can really come to be realised. I think, on one hand that's good, because I yeah, I think at least something has been changed. But on the other hand, of course, why does, why did it take so long? And yeah, but um, so, so in that process, do you remember how that came about? Were you involved also in the discussion?

S: It came up at meetings a lot, and we would get updates. And Penny was very involved. Nic and Penny were... and we wrote letters. I don't think we, I don't think we ever went down to any city council meetings for that. But it was happening at the same time as the concern about the conversion of the church, and so there were meetings that were about both of those at the same time. So, I mean, we were involved to the extent that we heard about it, and we wrote letters when needed. But we didn't meet. We didn't meet with anybody about it, specifically...

Y: Of the city council? No.

S: But it was very topical for a long time.

Y: And these are complicated decisions. I don't even know that the city fully controls them. Some of it is the, whatever body it is that governs streets...

S: AMEY?

Y: No, it's not AMEY. And they are partly a national body, so I don't know that the city has full say on that.

C: You mean not just a highway committee?

Y: I can't remember. I was actually feeling - around these - I was feeling a bit frustrated. It seemed like a lot of what we say doesn't have much impact, and the decision happens without us and kind of independently of us.

C: I think there has been some influence from the community, because in the final meeting approving this agenda to build a pedestrian crossing, the council actually lists out since 1997 there have been complaints or opinions about this safety issue, and so the community's voices somehow have been incorporated into this planning.

Y: It's a good point. It's sometimes these processes that take a long time and that we're not only not in full control, but have very little influence on. They're worth contributing to. But it does take people with a

lot of vision and persistence, and you feel like you're saying something, and nobody hears you, and then two years later, nobody quite remembers exactly what was said. And there are actually a few people on the streets, and I think that's one of the strengths of the street, that either have a good memory, or keep a good track record of what happened in previous meetings, and that makes, as you say, it makes a difference in the long run. Sometimes in the short run, you feel like, what's the point of even having these conversations? Nobody listens. The city does what it wants anyway, or the university does what it wants anyway, but you're right. Sometimes it does - not always.

S: I think that's one of the things that was most impressive about Nic. I mean, for years, he didn't even use email when he was doing all this work. He was handwriting letters, going to meetings with people in the city council. He was one of these persistent people with a good memory.

Y: And in a way, a much better memory than the city council, because the city council has a huge change of personnel, and every few years there are completely different administrators. They don't remember the project that they had a few years back.

S: I think they remembered Nic though.

G: Before you move to Harcourt Road, when you still lived in your previous address would you also do some community project?

S: No. We were friends with neighbors, quite like the ones next door and across the street, the kids on Springvale. Yeah, there were, and some of these people had lived there a long time and were friends with each other, so there were friendly parties at people's houses, but no community activism.

Y: We had just just moved to the UK, we had two very young kids. We were totally inundated with work. I was trying to understand how the university works, so we didn't do a lot, but also, there wasn't anything on that street in that particular place. I'm thinking of our streets in Berkeley, we lived on a big street, so there wasn't a geographical sense of a community. Martin Luther King is like, seven miles long, or something like this.

S: It was a different kind of community, just of people who had... like our son's school and all sorts of others. But not the street like it is here although, you know, different neighbourhoods worked differently, but we were on a very busy street, so this was really special, is really special.

Y: Yeah, that would be interesting as a research project in the social sciences. But clearly, the shape of the physical shape of the street has an impact on whether it, their community happens or not.

S: We've had a couple, like one of our good friends, has tried to model some street activities on her own street after the ones that she knows happens here. She's come to a couple of street parties, and has actually had a street party on her street. It wasn't as successful partly because of the physical attributes of the street. It's just not completely...

Y: Are you talking about Jane?

S: No, I'm talking about Kate. The street itself doesn't lend itself to... just it's a hill and it's different. But she did do it successfully. And so the idea sort of spread. At least just have the party... as far as organising for local issues or specifically, street issues or city issues that impact, I don't think they've done much of that yet, but, or maybe they won't, but just the idea of having some cohesion and socialising together and getting to know each other better, which is not just fun and and serving as sort of a kinship group, but also it just keeps the streets safer. You know, people kind of keeping track of each other and know who's around. That was another thing that was in a lot of discussions. The petty crime on the street, the break ins. A lot of break ins earlier on. There were a lot. And so there was, there were even some night watches. Remember going on those night watches organised...

Y: I can't even remember what was the crime peak at that point. But for a few weeks, we would just go out at night and walk back and forth. Completely forgot about it.

S: Historically, there have been a lot of car break ins, but then also break ins into student houses to take laptops and, you know, whatever they can see lying around the front room. And there were, there were...

Y: I forgot the patrols. So Jane and Kate both were impressed by the street activity and tried to organise it. And one of the things that made it much harder is that their streets are very steep, both of their streets, so organising a street party was...

S: setting up a table... doing it in driveways...

Y: Whereas in Berkeley, another friend, which I think in part, he was inspired by what's going on here, Catherine, when they were trying to organise things in their street. They also have an extremely long street. But what made it, I think, feasible, is that there were two junctions, and so they just took that bit of the street. It made sense. It was a kind of a geographical unit.

S: Many also over there are organising for earthquake preparedness, which is, fortunately, not something we have to do here. But you know, which house are we going to go to when there's an earthquake? Who's going to keep all the water? But anyway, that's another world that we don't have to worry about. Yeah, it's a big deal. They are constantly making sure we have fresh food. I wonder how far, how far the idea has been taken off of Harcourt Road. There are sorts of things that people witness here.

C: Have you met anyone outside of the UK knowing about Harcourt Road, besides the friends who know you and your community activities? Because we were talking to David, David O'Hagan and he told us one year in South America, Colombia, yeah, he encountered someone from the UK who knows someone living here.

S: We meet lots of people in Sheffield who know Harcourt Road because as students, they lived even ever so briefly, they had a lot of students. So a lot of students. Almost anyone who's a student at Sheffield University knows Harcourt Road and so in the UK people know.

C: Can you recommend us a book or even a piece of music to be shared at this Mobile Museum? Philipa shared a book, recommended, a book about herbs.

Y: That's really cool. There's one book. It's not specific to Harcourt Road, but there's, I think, a book that was made with Sheffield recipes. I'm almost sure. Now, I can't remember where we've seen it, but yeah, maybe in that store in the Winter Gardens, I'm not sure, when you walk in, there's a made in Sheffield store, I think I remember a book with just Sheffield recipes.

S: For Harcourt Road recipes, I would refer you to Harcourt News.

C: And any music that you think can be nicely associated with the vibe here, or your memory here?

S: So Simon would often DJ those parties. And he plays everything from reggae to American, R and B to British, yeah, all over the place. And then Ed often brings out his keyboard, and plays, plays jazz and improvises. And then every December, Ed and Anne host a Christmas carol singing Christmas party at their house, where in the front room there's always, like, an hour's worth of singing Christmas carols.

Y: And then so that's actually related to that. Some of these Christmas carols that we sing there every year are local Christmas carols. So these are variants of the same tunes, but with words that are from Sheffield and the surrounding...

S: Even some just completely new songs like the Stannington... not even a variation, they're just like...

Y: So I thought the music is traditional and just the words are different. No, I'm not sure, there are pubs all over Sheffield where they do these Carols singing, yeah. So Ed would have a kind of booklet with all the carols that are sung, but in particular with the local ones, there's the Stannington, they often go by where they were, yeah. So if nobody in your interviews mention it, you should definitely ask at least somebody about the Christmas carol singing.

S: It's always a mixture of the local ones and the traditional ones. So there have been sort of two generations of kids here. So our children are now, you know, 20 something, and there are quite a few others who are and but now there are a lot of kids between, one of them was just born a few months ago, and, you know, six, seven, so many years ago, when the first generation kids were still eight, nine, ten, they had them playing their instruments at the carol concert. I think I have some videos. And they did that a couple of times. We would, you know, rehearse, and then they would play there, and that was great. So various ways of involving the kids on the street with things.