

C & G interviewing Simon Ogden about Sheffield's Harcourt Road

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C: Clara Cheung, G: Gum Cheng, S: Simon Ogden

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Clara (C) : Today is July 26th 2024 and Gum and I, Clara is with Simon. Now we're going to begin this interview about Harcourt Road, its history, and community organizing. Yeah. So Simon, when -- do you still remember when you moved here to this street, or you've been here since birth?

Simon (S): No, not anything like that. I moved here with my then wife in to in 1985, it was the first house we bought together. And yeah...

C: So then, yes, cool...

Gum (G): The same house?

S: Yeah, the same house. Yes, yeah, I had actually, funnily enough, I had actually slept on Harcourt road before, because a previous partner of mine had been involved in starting off a -- something called a halfway home -- which was when they were closing down the big psychiatric hospitals. She was a psychiatric nurse and psychologist, and they were closing down these hospitals, which was kind of a good thing, because a lot of people had been put in these hospitals for reasons that weren't anything to do with medical we just because maybe they weren't married, they had a baby or something like that. They were put in a psychiatric hospital, terrible, and they said they were, they were closing them down, moving people out into the community. But many of these people had lived in these hospitals for most of their lives, or for 20 years, and couldn't just go back and carry on living a normal life because they'd lost all those skills. So she and another friend of mine set up a thing called the halfway house. She was kind of for people coming out of these hospitals to live together with some kind of support. You know, maybe until they got used to living independently. And the first house they had was on Harcourt Road. So in the first couple of years, we volunteers used to come and sleep in the house with the clients. So I had already slept on Harcourt road before I moved in. So yeah.

C: Are those houses still around for it?

S: Yeah, it was actually done with a housing association called Sheffield Housing Association, which was quite new then, and they were open to these kinds of ideas, and they're still one of the biggest landlords on the street. Now we've had all kinds of discussions with them. Sometimes they've done some good things. Sometimes they've done some bad things. Like, for instance, they, at one point, they had a bit like the halfway house, but for people coming out of prison, which was understandable, it is a good idea. But then they cut the staff so there was nobody, no member of staff, staying in the place. And then these houses got very disruptive. And it wasn't often the people who lived there, but their friends would come round, often drug dealers and criminals coming out of prison. So they might have liked criminals and we had some very nasty experiences where some, on one occasion, somebody challenged me. These guys, because he was, I forget what he doing now, but he got on a motorbike and chased somebody off the pavement. Another guy brought a dog, and particularly let his dog, one of these big, you know, nasty dogs and set it off against people. So we had a big fight with South Yorkshire Housing, about that, because we said, we don't, we don't object to what you're doing, but you have to staff it properly. You can't just dump these people on the street and then just leave them, forget about them. That's wrong.

C: When was that?

S: Maybe about 10 years ago.

C: Is it better now? The situation?

S: Yeah, we won that argument. They don't put those people unaccompanied in these houses anymore.

C: That's good.

S: I mean, in a lot of ways it's good because it's social housing, and you know, it means that you get a mix of people on the street, but yeah, when they were putting people who were criminals, some of them had some very nasty friends, on the street. That wasn't so good.

C: How was it? Was it difficult, or long, a long process to like to talk to the housing authorities?

S: Yes, it was. They were very defensive at first, and I think they thought we were kind of middle class people who just didn't want to have social housing neighbours. And we had to explain, no, it's not that. It's more, more specific than that. And when you set this project up, it was good, and now you've made it

C: Not manageable...

S: Taking resources away, yeah, yeah. I think that's kind of happened in lots of public services since 2008 since the financial crisis, austerity. I'm sure you know that.

C: Thank you. So besides that, so generally speaking, yeah, maybe too general today, today is 2024 compared with mid 80s, 1980s I mean, what do you think the main difference is between now and then? Before you can...

S: Yeah, the street was a lot poorer then, yeah..

C: Okay...

S: There were a lot of, a lot more working class families, you know, people who worked in coal mines or steel works, something like that, so that. And also there were, I think I wrote about it here, that since the 1950s there had been a lot of people from different parts of the world living here. So first of all, Eastern Europeans, this house that we're in now was lived in by Polish people until the 1980s and there were quite a few Polish and Hungarian people on the street. Then there were also people from the Caribbean and from India as well, or South Asia. And so it was kind of multi, multicultural, but, but mainly, mainly working class people. There were always one or two lecturers or professors from the university, but much more working class. And also, there were not many students, but there were lots of people living in flats, but they were mainly working people. So for instance, there were two or three houses with Irish men who lived here, kind of because up until maybe the 2000s Ireland was very poor country, and lots of people had to immigrate to work, and lots of men came across to Britain to work on construction. And often they came from like, farming families, like that. And they, they never married, and they they lived in houses, just all men. And some time we lived here, they were, a lot of them were quite old, and they always seem to have, like, quite sad lives. You know, they worked very hard. You saw them coming back from the building site all covered in and then they would go to the pub and just drink, and then they go to the church on Sunday. That was the only time you saw them with a suit and tie on. Then they still go to the pub, but just seemed like they didn't have much in their life except for work and drinking. So yeah, it was much a much poorer street.

C: And when did it begin to have a change? Do you think? A process?

S: Well, in the 90s, the university numbers increased a lot. So a lot of the houses that had been used for people like these Irish guys went over to student housing. The University also bought a lot of houses on the street, and at one time, the University had a plan, a plan to knock it, knock the whole street down. So they were buying houses, really, just to acquire the whole street. But people resisted that, and there was quite a big fight, more before I lived on the street, really, in the 70s and early 80s, to stop the university's plan. And there was some, not just Harcourt Road, but Marlborough Road, and some of the streets around Moorocks. There was quite a big campaign, and there were a couple of people who were actually councilors, who went on to the council partly for that reason, and they won that fight. And so the university had a lot of houses on the street that they owned, so they just obviously let them to students. So that increased the number of students as well. So in the 90s, you've got more and more students, less and less other people. And that kind of reached a peak point in 2010 when the university decided to sell it to all its houses. And so we said, Ah, okay, this is a great opportunity. You can start to rebalance the streets again. And so they agreed to sell them with this covenant, a legal covenant that says that they can't be occupied by landlords, and that made a massive difference to the population of the street, because 20 or so new families moved onto the street, nearly all with young kids when I was growing, no when my son was growing up there was only one other kid on the street.

C: Yeah, we heard of this campaign, the local campaign of the residents before, yeah, what would be the best way for us to, to find even more like materials about this to be shown in the Mobile Museum do you think?

S: I know that there's a newspaper article about it.

C: Okay. And were you also involved in this campaign?

S: The campaign for the university? Yes, I wasn't the main person. I would say that Nic Ralph is much more the main person for that.

C: We will talk to him. Yeah, in August...

C: I think this is quite important, so for example, at the beginning, for someone on the street to know about this -- it's not so easy, or was it a big news already? Like, how do you find out at the beginning that the university is selling?

S: Yeah, oh, the university made quite a big thing about, because it was, it was quite a, it wasn't just on the street. It was all over Crookes and Walkley. Okay, so they, they advertised it quite a lot. .

C: Okay, that's why, okay...

G: And do, do you know why they will sell all the houses?

C: Because they wanted to raise funding?

S: It wasn't so much. I mean, I'm sure it was about money, but it was more about -- they decided that they, the private sector, could do student housing. So they sold a lot of their, kind of like, halls as well. You know that it was just a time when student housing suddenly became this very popular thing to invest in. So the university thought, right, okay, you don't need to worry about it anymore. Some company can do it. We'll step away and we'll put our money into the academic side. But yeah, I'm sure they just wanted to get the most money for the houses, and by putting covenants on, probably they got less money, and that was a good opportunity for us.

C: Did the other streets also follow suit?

S: Yeah...

C: That's great. Yeah. That's great.

S: Somewhere in here. I'm sure I got a copy of this. It's a bit dodgy. It keeps on.

G: Yeah, and I want to ask, at the beginning, why would you choose Harcourt road? Is it because of the beautiful scene? Or?

S: Yes, that was definitely one reason, is the view. Another one was that it was close to the city centre, so we could walk or cycle to work, and we like this neighbourhood. My wife then was working at the university, I think so... I should... no, she wasn't, but she did work in the university afterwards. But yeah, it was the fact that it was close to the city centre, and yet you got this beautiful space with water, which is important to me.

G: When you moved in, were there any activities on the water? Yes, I think there were

S: Yes, oh yeah, there were boats on the, on the, on the lake, yes, and not when we lived here, but before, there used to be a little motorboat that went round, took people on, on trips around here. But, yeah, the boats were, were really popular, actually. But, you know, it's an old reservoir. It's the water supply for drinking for Sheffield, so it's very deep, and the council eventually decided it was too dangerous and too expensive insurance. So they stopped the boats. We've always been trying to get them back, but now the main thing that happens in that lake is swimming.

C: Is it allowed?

S: No, but people still do it. I mean, the councils, they don't allow it, but they don't stop it. So, yeah, there's lots of people swimming here, quite seriously, you know. And then on, on sunny days, you get lots of kids swimming here as well, which is a little bit worrying. But, you know, I mean you can swim in the sea, that's deep, and this is a lot safer than the sea.

C: Sure, yeah, I agree.

S: I'd be surprised we don't see someone swimming before we...

C: Yes it's a good day, sunny day.

S: So, yeah, the park is definitely an important factor.

C: Are you ... Did you also join that ... Friends of this park?

S: Yes.

C: What's the name of that...

S: Yeah, Friends of Crooks Valley Park. So you all plant some flowers there. That's right, yeah, yeah, we were doing that for about six years now, five or six years, because those planting beds were, the Parks Department weren't doing anything with them, and so we thought it were nice to do something, and the seeds come from a social enterprise in Sheffield called Pictorial Meadows, which is based up on The Manor. And so it was kind of something that, I wouldn't say it was started in Sheffield, but Sheffield has made a bit of a name of it, you know. And the, this mix of flowers was designed by a professor at the University called Nigel Dunnett. So it's quite nice that it's just near to the Landscape

Department. And we it's not just for Harcourt Road, but probably about, maybe half or two thirds of the volunteers are from Harcourt Road.

C: Okay, yeah, it's so close by, yeah. So you, your group, just initiate to the park manager, managing team, I guess, and then just volunteered?

S: We started a long time before that, because the park, again in the 1990s, got very run down. The Parks Department lost a lot of its funding, so they weren't maintaining very much, and so we started to clear up the park and to raise money to do things in the park. So we replaced all the seating and repaired the walls. We used to clear up when people put rubbish in the lake. It's much better looked after again now, so we don't have to do as much of that kind of thing. But one time we were just really keeping the park clean. And then there was a time when the university, again, had a plan to take Western Park off the city, and run it themselves, because, again, Western Park is one of the, kind of, most historic parks in the city, and it was getting very untidy. So the university said, Why don't you let, to the council, why don't you let us look after it, you know? And then we found a secret plan ...When I say secret, it wasn't that secret. They'd sent it out to everyone in the university, but they hadn't told us -- showing that they had plans to put a car park on the on the on the park. And so we showed that to the leader of the council, and he said, right, okay, the deal's off. And then we worked with the council to get money from the lottery, to repair the park.

C: Western Park?

S: Western Park, yes. So the bandstand, you probably noticed it. That was all ruined, you know, you couldn't use it. It was dangerous, and all the planting beds had got very overgrown. So we got 3 million pounds from the lottery, and they restored it all. Now they look after it really well.

C: So now Western Park is looked after by the council?

S: Yes, mainly by the Council. We worked with them on... in the summer, we had their music concerts in the bandstand. And they, that comes through our account, we pay the bands.

C: Oh, so nice. Wow.

G: About this is it? In May?

S: It's Mayfest. This is a May festival, yeah, but, but the bands play on Sunday afternoons, most Sunday afternoons in the summer.

C: So I think it is really amazing for us to find this really strong community spirit and people come together to not just, you know, take care of your own home, but also the neighbourhood. How, like, what do you think can facilitate this coming together, working together for the whole, the good of the community?

S: Well, I think one thing is having a common problem, a university or housing association or council, so something that's annoying people, that brings them together. But then also, I think having a certain number of people who maybe have some experience of organizing, you know, maybe the trade unionist or, you know, some kind of political activist, and, you know, with a certain amount of time as well...

C: Knowledge, expertise, yeah, yeah, time, passion?

S: Yeah, yeah, all those things.

C: And you have, you have all of these? You're one of those who...

S: Yes I guess I'm one of those, and we're very lucky we've had... We've had quite a lot of those people on the street.

C: Interesting.

S: And I think you need some, some kind of, it sounds a bit cynical, but you need a common enemy to kind of to get people interested, yeah. And then once you've done one thing, yeah, maybe quite a small thing, and building something else, yeah...

C: It works..

S: So really, the two things that started it off were... have you heard of the poll tax?

C: Poll tax?

S: So when Margaret Thatcher was the prime minister in the 1980s and 90s, she brought in this new tax that was -- every house had to pay. And it was very unfair, the way it was... It was much more of a burden on poorer people than on wealthy people. When they call it poll tax, that's kind of like the states, when every house has to pay tax, and there was a campaign against that, a national campaign, where people refused to pay this tax, and then we'll have to go to go to court, and there was an anti Poll Tax Group on every street, almost. So we had an anti Poll Tax Group on our street, and that's how we started meeting together and got to know people. And then out of that, we started talking about, well, you know, the street is always dirty, you know. What can we do about that, you know? And we've got the landlords, you know, don't care. And so it kind of grew into a local street Action Group. And also around that time, there were some robberies, quite frightening events, actually, where someone just came and smashed the front window and got in the house and stole stuff, and that was quite frightening. And so we also started up a little... we didn't, we didn't call it Neighborhood Watch, but that was kind of what it was...

G: And when, when was the...

C: Poll tax?

S: The poll tax 1990s already? Yeah, okay, and we actually got quite a lot of publicity about this, because it was picked up by The Star, the local newspaper. I think I've got a picture of it.

C: Well, we also, yeah, I mean, the Hong Kong people are also, of course, know Margaret Thatcher so well because her signature on the treaty with China actually affected us somewhat, yeah, yes, yeah, 'The Lady'...

S: This is a picture of the, some of the group. Yeah. There were a lot more people than this.

C: Can we just take a picture of this?

S: I can send it to you. What this point about this is, actually, this is the front page of The Star, on the top here. The headline was, 'Vigilantes'.

C: I don't get it.

S: Definitely, because they said we were walking the streets at night, and it was good to reassure these older people that they were safe. But they, The Star, made it out that we were some kind of like vigilantes, you know, going around with guns and you can see it was nothing like that. Yeah. And we wrote to the paper and said, you know, you completely misrepresented what we're trying to do. So that was kind of the start of getting the street organized. And then after that, we organized lots of well, we

used to organize street cleanups because, I think a lot of people on the street were trade unionists. And originally we thought, you know, the council should be doing this. The council should be paying people to do it, you know it's someone's job. So, so, we should make the council do it. We shouldn't do it. And then we thought, actually, you know, our kids are growing up on this street. You know, how long are we gonna have to wait before the street is cleared? So in the end, we thought, no, actually, it's more powerful to say we're gonna do it and then we're just gonna tell the council that we're doing it and kind of apply moral pressure, rather than just saying we're gonna live in a shit heap until you come and clean it up. So that was kind of a bit of a change of attitude, from just saying we're just going to complain, to no, we're going to do it, and we'll feel stronger for doing it.

C: Then logistically speaking, how do you, is it easy to just apply to close the street? Do you need to apply to do that? Do you apply to the council? Or?

S: First time we didn't?

C: Okay, that's good. That's good.

S: First time we just did it. Yeah, we just put bins across in the street. But then when we'd done a few times, we thought, you know, what happens if someone comes, drives down here and knocks over a child or something like that? So after that, we started to do it officially. And also we kind of wanted the council to know we were doing it to make the point.

C: Right, has anything changed about the cleaning management from the council since then?

S: Well, yes, it goes up and down, but actually, I don't think the council do a bad job, but...

C: There's limitations.

S: Yeah, and the kind of sociology has changed, so, with so many students living on the street, there seems to now be a attitude that when you come to end of the year or whatever, you just throw everything away.

C: I can see that.

S: Yeah, I can understand if, for instance, you're from China, you know, you're not going to want to go back to China with a whole box of pans and cooking stuff and duvets and things like that. But it seems to be British students as well who seem to have the attitude that, basically you just leave everything behind. So that means that there's lots and lots of garbage. Sometimes the students throw it away, but sometimes landlords just throw it away. And now there's a whole community of people who know about this and come around the streets and basically take stuff away, which is not a bad thing except that what they do is they just empty the bin out on the street, take what they want and leave the bin, leave everything in the street. So that's become a really big deal now in all the student areas, is how do you deal with this phenomenon of so much useful garbage being left on the street, and then people just coming round and, and taking what they want and throwing the rest of it about on the street. And actually, the Council have tried quite hard on this, but really what we need to do is to take say to students, look, just take it home. Or take you to a charity shop, you know, give it to somebody, yeah, don't just throw it away.

C: You know, don't put them on the streets. It is difficult... young people...

S: So, yeah, that's, that's a more recent kind of phenomenon. And it's, it's sad, really, because it's just such a waste of resources and..

G: And when was the thing about throwing out? Yeah, because we want to know the timing.

S: It happens every year. In June.

C: Okay, yeah,

G: Even now?

S: Yes, oh, more and more every year it gets more and more of an issue every year. I think it was something in there, in the papers about it, just about three weeks ago. So I mean, we have about half a dozen bin collections in that in that period, they just have to keep coming around and picking up stuff, and then that's why we had the street party that you came to, yeah, that was kind of at the end of that period to try and clear the streets up, after, after all that which had been going on,

G: Is it, is it possible to tell the council to send a big, bigger bin or like...

S: Yeah, that's, that's what we've been doing, not not just for this street, but for, for all the student areas...

C: But if they use useful things, can go to the charity shop. That will be better.

S: That's right, yeah. I mean, I've got kitchen stuff here, though, I've picked up out of just the bins next to, next to my house, you know, all kinds of useful, useful stuff.

C: For the environment.

S: I mean, this is, actually, isn't, isn't in Sheffield, but this is horrible. This is in Birmingham. It's just as bad.

C: Oh, but it's just something similar. In June, every year. Yeah, okay, we do see some things like that at the edge of the hole, Harcourt hole. Oh, yeah, that's also bad, because we cannot go into clean up. And I don't think the landlord of that hole would clean it up.

S: Prince Naseem, no, he doesn't.

C: Does he still own that land do you think?

S: Yes, he does. Yes.

C: Okay, yeah, right.

G: Oh, I know. Because maybe in the, in the contract, if the student returns, returned the house with some, with a lot of items, it's nothing.

S: I think that's part of it. Yes...

C: But still they should take care of those objects or items before they leave, but not on the street. And then when it rains, everything is like, damaged, basically. Okay, yeah, it's bad.

S: Here we are. This is from The Star.

C: Yeah, and I have another question about, like, community...

S: 'Student Trash.'

C: Oh, okay, the student is explaining. Yeah. That was difficult,

S: Yeah, oh yeah, this is, this was the article. Yeah, 'little patrols to tackle dumping that students as students leave.' So, yeah, I mean, it's a first world problem, but it's a, again, it's the kind of thing that gets people, if there's a, if there's a willingness to, then it gets people to organize together...

C: Together, action together, and how about the BBest neighborhood plan? I think it's really amazing for me to look at the website of BBest, and I still see, you know, like all the meetings and really well organized minutes. And I'm really impressed by the Green Space survey in 2015 introducing about the all the connected green space in the neighborhood and the animals and the plants and such and such. And then I found, and I think it's also great, that in 2021 there was a referendum for the people here to like give the consensus about it. And then the Council endorsed it. But then what happened after? Do you know how it can be picked up, the older visions and ideas?

S: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think the neighborhood plan is a great idea. I'm a town planner. That's my profession, but I don't think the council have used it very well. So the people who wrote the plan put so much work into it, an unbelievable amount of work. And I don't think they feel that it was taken very seriously at the end of the day, because unfortunately, there is also a kind of official plan-making process going on, and that kind of overtook the the neighborhood plan. And I think although it's a great idea, the amount of work and commitment that is required from people whose job it isn't, that isn't their job, doesn't measure up with the amount of influence that the planner actually has afterwards. So I'm not sure that those people would do it again unless they were given a lot more acknowledgement and promise that the plan would be, become part of the official planning policy. So a lot of what people were talking about was about trying to protect the area from becoming taken over by landlords, and that really hasn't worked. Probably the most successful bit was the green space plan.

C: Okay

S: And you can see that happening in this park. So the, behind this wall where our gardens are, there's a whole, whole area of the park now that's left to go wild as a wildlife corridor. And actually, you may notice that at the edge of the lake, the lake, the bank has collapsed, and instead of repairing it, ow, what we've persuaded the council to do, we think they're going to do it is to actually take that wall out and re-naturalize the lake so that they will actually be like a ... because at the moment, it's like a stone wall because it was for boating. Yeah, and that's very ... not natural and not good for bird life or wildlife, because small birds and that, can't get out, which makes them very vulnerable to being taken by predators. So what we've argued with the council is they should let that re-naturalize and become just a kind of soft, soft bank, if you like. I think they're going to do that. So that kind of principle of a green corridor that goes through the neighborhood, I think, is probably the main thing that's going to come out of it. That's good, but, yeah, I don't think the neighborhood plan process is given enough... is not taken seriously enough, by the council, Sadly.

C: Well, talking about green space and animals, what kind of animals appear in, around your house. What kind of neighbors do you have?

S: We have... We have foxes, badgers, yeah. What else do we have? We have heron. We come to the big, big birds, look a bit like prehistoric birds. Really, big. They come to fish here.

C: Really? Yeah, early in the morning mainly, and then quite a lot of bird life. Again, Nic will tell you all about this, because he's much more of a bird watcher than I am. He'll tell you in detail. But again, if we can make the lake more naturalistic, then we'll get more more birds. So the little island you can well, you can't quite see it, but there is a little island in the lake that was something that the Friends of the park campaigned for and raised money for, because it's somewhere where the birds can lay. They can have nests away from foxes and other predators. And, yeah, there's a lot more that could be done to

make the, that lake richer. Water is such an important ingredient in biodiversity. So yeah, we're trying to encourage that. Um, yeah, lots of bird life. Nic. Ask Nic about that.

C: I will. We will do that. Yes. So, talking, speaking about the neighborhood plan, would it be worth it to speak to some of the current councilors to advocate more to, for the council to endorse it, or does...

S: The, the council is in the process of passing a plan for the whole city called the Local Plan. It's been a long, long time in coming. It's been very controversial, and it's been stopped lots of times and started again. I won't bore you with all the, all the politics behind it, but at the moment, the council's very focused on getting this plan approved, so all the resources that they have are going into getting that. It's going through a public inquiry at the moment. When that's finished, probably around Christmas time. Maybe there'll be some more resource to, to look at these neighborhood plans. Okay, but I think most of the people that I know who have taken part in the neighborhood planning process have ended up feeling a bit ...

C: Tired?

S: A bit cheated.

C: It is a national scheme?

S: It's a national scheme, yeah, brought in by the Conservatives, but I think it was kind of a bit of a gimmick. I don't think they ... do you know what I mean by gimmick?

C: Yeah, slogan?

S: Yeah, yeah. It was kind of, it sounded good, but they didn't really embed it properly in the planning process or resource it.

C: Did the neighborhood planning process get any funding at all to help?

S: Not really, no.

C: But then you, I mean, I see that the group actually hired, like a professional to do a survey, and that's nice of all of you.

S: Ann, have you met Ann?

C: We we've spoken to Ann, yeah.

S: So, I mean, she put a lot of work into it.

C: I can tell by, yeah, looking at all the material on the website, it's a lot of work. And everything is voluntary. And we also, well, we will speak to Nic. But then we also want your advice about, how would, would it be -- how would it be a best way to to show in our Mobile Museum about the development of Penny's Crossing? So well, we found some consultation minutes online from the, you know, like earlier on there was this community assembly meeting, but this kind of consultation platforms ended already, but I saw some public question by Nic and Penny earlier on about that a follow up so and yeah, I don't know if there can be even more evidence. I think my purpose is to, one day take the Mobile Museum to somewhere close to Beanies, and then tell people, oh, you know what? On Google Map nowadays, you can see in 2008 2009 there wasn't any crossings, and only until 17 we see something pop up, and then we want to also let people pass us by, to know is, you know, don't take it for granted. It has been, you know, advocated for such a long time again.

S: Nic will tell you all about that. Okay, he's got it all documented because Penny was his partner, yeah, yeah. We wanted to actually put a plaque on the, on the traffic lights to say, Penny's Crossing. But it became too complicated. So in the end, we named a meadow after her in the park instead.

C: Oh, really, there is one in this park?

S: Yeah

C: Okay,, yeah, yeah. Because part of this project, in the proposal we wrote about that we want to put a plaque around the area. Would it maybe, if we talk to Beanies, it may be because it is a private property it might be easier?

S: Yes, we were trying to get it on the actual, the thing where you press the button. And it was just becoming very complicated. There were all kinds of national rules about what you can and can't put on a controlled crossing.

C: Oh, really?

S: That's what we we named a meadow after her instead but, yeah, I'm sure you could put something on these walls.

C: We will talk to them. What was the design like previously? Do you remember? Oh, you have it?

S: I think we might have done something. I'm not sure if we actually designed it or not, but we certainly had an idea for it.

C: We should go to the park to look for that meadow. meadow for Penny, to take a picture of it and where is it?

S: It's on the path going up to the car park by the Dam House.

C: Oh, okay, okay, we'll take a look. Thank you. We will take a quick picture of it. Oh, I see, I see..

S: This is like a technical drawing.

C: Oh, and this is circular.

S: We had some, there's a small business that is located in the live projects offices down on Moorfoot. Live projects is a university project with the architecture department. For some reason, they have as little social enterprises in the back there, and they they do, what do you call it?

C: 3D printing?

S: It is a bit like 3D printing. Yes, it's actually kind of computer controlled... engraving. So they were going to do this in wood. They were going to cut the letters out...

G: Laser cut?

S: Yes laser cut, yeah, exactly, yeah. And they said they would do that for us, for free.

C: Can we ask you to help us to, or, I don't know, maybe Nic or to to help us to draw the text, the sentence like, and then we can, see how we can help you realize it, if not on the pole, maybe on Beanies' Wall.

S: I think we agree with Nic this zebra crossing used by thousands every day came about after a 15 year campaign by local residents, Penny and Nic Ralph and neighbors in Harcourt Road. Sadly, in the week the lights went on, Penny passed away. For her family and friends this will always be called Penny's Crossing.

C: This is lovely, it's like a poem, like circular.

S: Oh, I dug something out. I was clearing my basement the other day, and I found something which I thought I'd thrown away.

C: Should we come after?

S: No, it's okay. Underneath the city downstairs. I didn't realise I'd kept it.

C: It must be five years ago, or six?

S: One of the big, one of the big marches in London, we took a few people down there. Yeah. So, yeah, I can, I can send you that. I mean, have you talked to Laure? Yes. So she's got lots of wonderful pictures.

C: Yes, yes, and she's helping us to actually begin this family portrait project that she also liked to work on. Yeah, so basically she, she is inviting different families on the street to take portraits. Yes, we'll see how it will go. Yeah.

S: I'm sure there's a nice picture that she, she took with all the kids. Maybe she showed you it.

C: Oh, yeah, and then we need to ask about music. A playlist, playlist, one more, obviously,

S: It was a nice picture. Oh, this is quite fun, actually. Did she show you this?

C: Was this last year? Oh that is Laura. We were, we were there, yeah, but we didn't make a video. I think that's lovely. That's lovely.

S: That's what I was looking for...

C: Oh, that's beautiful.

S: So yeah, so many kids on the streets after having only one or two.

C: Yeah, that's beautiful. Yeah.

S: Most of these ones are at university now.

C: Oh, and some of them make the, made the newspaper, yes the street newspaper, that's cute.

S: Yes.

C: Are there any... because you're also a DJ, just wondering if you can recommend some songs, a few, one or a few to, you know, like about this street that you live on related to the stories or...

S: Well, the one that I always play, at the parties, Laure told you this didn't she?

C: No, no, I didn't have the playlist. Yeah..

S: Okay, so, the broadband this house has just gone completely rubbish in the last six months...

G: And about the street party. When? When did this start? 10 years ago? Twenty?

S: Good question... Must be maybe 15 years ago, I should think...

C: After more families moved in?

S: After more families moved in, exactly. After 2007 after 2010...

S: Yeah, we always play this. [music plays - 'Enjoy Yourself'] There's different versions I play... We always play one version of this song at the end of parties.

C: That's good, yeah, important, yeah, that's good, that's good, that's great.

G: This is the ending song?

S: Yes, usually, yes.

G: Maybe for the first street party, Maybe many people will not join the party or...

S: You know what, I really can't remember...

G: A few families?

S: I mean, I suppose what happened was we used, we started off, just doing the street cleanup...

G: Okay...

S: And then someone had the idea, well, when we finished the street cleanup, let's have a party. So the first street cleanups were a lot before that. They were back in the 1990s and it was only like, when more, there were a lot more kids on the street, we thought maybe fun to have a party. So probably, I think the first one was okay, we had, we had plenty of people.

C: And everyone contributes something?

S: Yeah, yeah. And then when we thought about... we were always trying to get the students involved. So we, we thought maybe if we had, like a barbecue, then students... And then we, then somebody thought of the tug of war as well, and that was another way of getting the students to come out and get involved, because it is partly about trying to give the message in a nice way to students: look, there are families who live on the street, people different ages, you know, and we're a community, so please respect that, but also be, feel, welcome, you know.

C: That's nice. And yeah, a lot of a lot of people I know, you know, met later on said, oh yeah, we remember living in Harcourt Road, and those parties that you know, so nice.

C: And it still works, yeah?

S: With some people, it definitely works.

C: Yeah, cool. I think that's maybe about it.

G: Can I just, just ask, do you know any ghost stories about Harcourt Road?

S: No, I know I can't think of any. No, we have a good Halloween night.

C: Do you ... what expectation do you have for the Mobile Museum? Do you have any expectations at all? You want us to do anything?

S: Well, I think it would be great to use lots of Laure's photographs, because I think they really, you know, sum up... Yeah, definitely ask to look at her, especially of things like the bonfire parties and Christmas parties and street parties and things like that. Do you know about the Christmas windows we do?

C: You told us before? Yeah, is this still taking place every year?

S: I've still got mine, because it was about Gaza, so I wanted to keep it, but so, yeah, that's, that's another thing that she'll have some nice pictures of as well.

C: Yeah, that's good.

S: What else? I mean there are historic pictures as well of the neighborhood...

C: In the archives you mean? Yes, yeah, we saw some about a tree planting ceremony at the United Church. But we haven't all the time to ask the archive if we can, you know, like, sort of reprint it for the museum, but we will, well, although we are activating it on the Mobile Museum on this Saturday, we will build up the collection, yeah, so we will get to those...

S: If you come out here... This is where we are in about 1820, so this is the lake. And all these were also lakes. So Harcourt Road is about here, yes. And there were lots of views of this valley, actually. That's another one there. I think you could probably get most of these on Picture Sheffield, yes. So that's I suppose, if you like a kind of conventional museum kind of exhibit

C: Sure, well, the Mobile Museum is small. Yeah, this is the size. Thank you.

G: I've one last question, it's about how to communicate with the neighbours to tell them there'll be a street party. And, yeah, how So will you just knock on their door and then...

S: Well, like every other street, we have a WhatsApp group, but also we do go door to door, because not everyone is on that group. So we have a flyer, and we go around and knock on the door and say, come to the party. And then we put them up on the street as well. The Whatsapp group came out of covid. And, you know, like, again, like lots of the streets, we did the thing clapping, you know, on Thursday nights, you know?

C: Oh, I don't know about clapping on Thursday night...

S: So during covid, during covid, it became a weekly thing that everyone came out on the street and clapped for the hospital workers, or banged pans together, or cheered. And so we were all meant to be isolating, so we couldn't meet, but we could come out in our gardens. I mean, it was nice to do it for health workers. We had some health workers on the street, but also it was just a way of actually seeing each other and kind of and just reminding ourselves that we were together, together. Yeah, I used to put my speaker out on the top of the window to play some music. Yeah. And yeah. We used to do that every week for about five months. I think.

C: Right, wow, cool, amazing. I never knew, I didn't know about that. Yeah, I was still in Hong Kong...

S: Yes, yeah. I mean, lots of streets do things like that, but we already had the kind of machinery to do it if you like.

G: Why Thursday?

S: Yes, Thursday, every Thursday night. Yes, at, I think it was like at six o'clock.

G: But why Thursday? Do you know?

S: I think somebody just started it and said, you know, we're going to come out and clap for the health workers. And it was reported in the media and became a national thing.

C: Okay, that's nice, right? Oh, wow. But we, we actually, in this small museum, we have one activity, which is to invite a participant to color one weed drawing for us, so that we, in the end, all the drawings will be, will come together to make a stop motion animation about a small weed, like flying in the in the wind, like this, like a drawing in an illustration. Can we invite you? We will give you a drawing later on, yes, and then you help us to color it.

S: Okay, yeah, yes.

C: I see you can make really beautiful banner and, okay, okay, cool. We'll come back. We'll give you a drawing. Thank you.

G: We have two versions, one is Hong Kong, and one is Sheffield.

C: It's a small wild grass, yeah, dancing in the wind, yes, yes, yeah, cool.

S: I was just trying to find a picture. We had some pictures that Laure took... So, yeah, this was during lockdown,

C: All the students at one house, yeah, that was a difficult time.

S: That's all that we could do, is just stand in the garden and say hi to each other, yeah, but these are all those pictures.

C: Yeah, we should ask her for sharing some photos to build a Harcourt Road community photo album for the museum.

S: Yes there's loads, absolutely loads and that's Penny, by the way. Okay, not long before she she passed away...

C: Yeah, amazing people. Yeah, that's great. Thank you. Thank you.