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*Okay this is Claire Days interviewing Anthony Richards on the sixteenth of August 2011 for the Barking Park Project.*

*If I can ask you to introduce yourself, say your full name and date of birth for the tape please Anthony*

My full name is Anthony John Richards, I was born on the eleventh of August 1936.

*Just had a birthday*

Well just a few days ago yes

*Happy birthday for a few days ago! [laughing]*

Thank you, thank you.

*And can I ask where you were born please?*

Where? In Coventry

*In Coventry, was that in hospital or was that a home birth?*

Yes, hospital birthday, Coventry and Warwickshire hospital

*Ah, okay. Lovely. And were both of your parents from the Coventry area as well?*

No, my mother was from Coventry area my father was from XXXX XXXX in South Wales.

*I’m not going to try and spell that, I’ll just write South Wales I think for that one.*

*And what did your parents do for work if you don’t mind me asking?*

My mother was a secretary my father was, well he worked initially on leaving school at fourteen he worked in a shoe shop, but this was during the time of the depression and there was hardly any work to be had in South Wales and he moved to Coventry and he took various jobs, driving vehicles, new vehicles and so on. His father warned him when he moved to Coventry that he was to avoid the four Ps; the police, the politicians, the parsons and the prostitutes [laughs]

*It sounds like good advice*

It was good advice

*So what did his father do in South Wales?*

His father was a master tailor

*Okay*

He made suits for most of the men in XXXX XXXX but of course came the depression and they hadn’t got the money to pay for them.

*Of course, yeah. Was that quite a difficult period for your father then? Did he ever talk about it?*

Very difficult yes

*How did he find the move from South Wales to Coventry because obviously it would have been quite a big distance for a young man in that time*

Well yes it was. He eventually got a job working with a pork butcher, um, killing pigs and draining off the blood for black pudding and herding newly arrived pigs from the station to the slaughter house and I think that was his main job then. His boss was also chairman of the magistrates so my father picked up a summons for some traffic offence and his boss said “you should of told me, I’d of got it struck out for you”

*[laughter] friends in high places, it’s nice if you can get it isn’t it?*

*Lovely, so how did he meet your mother then? Was that in Coventry?*

They met in Coventry, yes. How or when they met I don’t know but they live there.

*And do you have any brothers or sisters?*

I have two sisters, yes.

*And what schools did you go to in Coventry?*

In Cov I went to weobley school. I started off in the village school in Burton Green very small school indeed, it had slates on the roof and in the school, you know slates on the school and in it. And we used to write on chalk and slates. Then we moved, my sister Susan and I, to Weobley School in Coventry, well on the outskirts of Coventry in Tile Hill. Until age eleven [dog barks]

*So what year would that have been?*

I was eleven in 1947

*1947, okay. So that would have been just after the war, can you tell me a little bit about your war time experience, can you remember any of the war?*

Oh yes, vividly. Yes. In Burton Green we had salvage collections, you had to take all of your old pots and pans and any other bits of metal to be piled up and clothes to all be collected up for salvage. I remember that because one of my school friends picked up a kettle and threw it and I had a gash on my forehead for years afterwards.

*Was he a close friend?*

Well yes, no malice in it, just accidental.

*Childhood hi-jinx*

Yes, yes hi-jinx. [dog barks]

*Did you experience much bombing or anything like that in the area you were in?*

Well in Coventry of course. Uh. So many of our relations from Coventry moved out, we lived in a place called Burton Green which is five miles out of Coventry and they all moved with us during the bombing, and it was a very over crowded house of course, some of them got the indication that the Germans were coming and they stayed with us for a while. Fortunately their houses weren’t bombed, the houses near to them were bombed but theirs wasn’t. I actually contributed to the German war effort

*Did you? In what way?*

I left our garage doors open with a very high wind and it lifted our garage to the bottom of the garden. Helped add to the destruction caused from the bombing.

*Crickey, how did your parents feel about that, about the garage ending up? not very happy?*

No, not at all, no.

*so what age were you when you left school? [dog barks]*

do you mean when I left primary school or when I left

*when you left your second school in Coventry*

well I was eleven, just coming up to eleven.

*So where did you go after there?*

I went to Warwick School. Actually I sat the eleven plus is Coventry but made a mess of it but any way was offered a place at John Gulson and my mother was particularly outraged at that, she wasn’t going to have her son go to John Gulson School, so they arranged for me to go to Warwick school, they paid for a year for me to go to Warwick school, it was a time when my father was just building up his business as a greengrocery round and could ill afford to do that but they insisted on paying for me to go to school. At the end of that year, by virtue of the fact that we lived outside Coventry I was also eligible to sit the county eleven plus so from then on I got a free place at Warwick School. It was a public school, a very nice school.

*What do you remember of those school days was it quite a strict school, was there strong discipline?*

Yeah, oh yes, discipline was very strong.

*Do you have fond memories of the school any anecdotes or any teachers that were particular characters you’d like to describe?*

Uh. Most of them were very likable characters you know, there was one, everyone there had a nickname, all of the teachers had a nickname. One chap had a nickname of Rotten Guts as you can tell from that he wasn’t very popular.

*[laughter]*

*Yeah, I’m fine with water thank you, trying to lay off the caffeine too early in the day [laughter]*

But other names Pin and Beeswax and XXXX and XXXX they were all affectionate nicknames, we liked them yes. [phone rings] sorry, one moment.

*I’ve blocked your route here haven’t I?*

*[woman answers phone in background]*

*Wasn’t worth getting up for was it?*

No not really

*So what were your favourite subjects when you were at school then?*

Oh, German and French

*German and French, was there a particular reason why you liked languages?*

I suppose you take to some things more easily than to others, you like the things that you, and also you like the teachers of it as well you know? I think I take an interest in history now and I think I would have taken much more of an interest in history if I hadn’t got Rotten Guts teaching it to me.

*So how old would you have been when you left grammar school then?*

Um, seventeen approaching eighteen. I left in the july and was eighteen a month later.

*Okay, and what did you do after school? Did you go straight into work or did you go into further education?*

I uh, first took a gap job working for the local council as a dustman / sewer man you know helping the sewer man uh, helping the rat catcher and also the DIY man who did repairs on council houses, I went around with him as well. Quite a variety of jobs working for the council for four months after leaving school. Then I joined the army, I had by this time been accepted for the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, but it turned out to be a disaster I am afraid.

*[laughter] in what way was it a disaster? If you don’t mind sharing obviously.*

Well I became medically discharged from them

*Oh right, okay. So it wasn’t a pleasant experience for you?*

No well it wasn’t my cup of tea

*And what did you do after that point? Is that when you started to get into …*

I was looking for a job, I took a job at a public schools appointments bureau and they recommended me to work for XXXX XXXX in Coventry who were overseas sales people I just didn’t take to that from the word go. But I wanted to get into journalism during our basic training we had to write, we were required to write essays and the captain had marked them and said that mine was journalise and that gave me the idea that yes, I wanted to be a journalist. So then I wrote to newspapers up and down the country uh trying to get a job. In most cases I didn’t even get a reply eventually I got a reply from Chelmsford where they were looking for a reporter on the Barking, Ilford and East Ham advertiser Upton Park and Dagenham Gazette that was its full name anyway they wanted a reporter in Barking so I went to Chelmsford for this interview and got the job.

*And what year was that?*

That would have been 1956

*And during the application process was making the move obviously from Coventry down to Chelmsford was that daunting for you or was it something that you were just happy to do?*

Sorry I don’t quite follow, making the move?

*Yeah obviously because it was quite a large move distance wise obviously from your family in Coventry to back down here*

Yes to travel to Chelmsford yes, I went to the interview in Chelmsford and got the job and so I went back to Coventry to pick up my good and XXXX and travelled down to Barking.

*Okay, so where did you live when you first moved to Barking then?*

I lived at a house in Marlborough Road, Dagenham. When I got the job I placed an advert, free of charge of course, in the Barking Advertise for that week, young man seeks accommodation etc and I got replies to it and picked these digs in 105 Marlborough Road, Dagengham, with Mr and Mrs Staines.

*How many people lived in that house then, was it just this couple and yourself or*

The couple and their son, their unmarried son, Eddy and I yeah.

*And how did you find that were you kind of welcomed in as a member of the family or did you feel*

Oh yes yes it was very good, they treated me almost as a member of the family

*And what was rent prices like in comparison to your wages at that time, were your wages quite good or..*

My wages were, it was a net wage of five pounds something for the week

*Okay*

And the uh rent was two founds five shillings per week

*Was that quite a reasonable wage for the time it sounds like quite a lot for the period?*

Well it was about the lowest wage you could get as a junior reporter, I think the national average was double actually

*Oh okay, so for a first job for a young man it wasn’t too bad?*

No it wasn’t. a young man and in-experienced. When they ask what is your experience and you have to say none. So I think a lot of people were going less than that trainees in various jobs were XXXX no it wasn’t bad at all. Enough to live on anyway survive on.

*And what were your first impressions of the area?*

First when I came to Barking they I had to report to the Barking Advertiser offices that were in North Street, first impression was “what a dump” because all these old buildings used as shops and um, they’ve all gone now of course, all along North Street and beyond it was the North Street school the Church of England school which again was a bit of a dump in those days you know, it all looked very shabby and our office was pretty shabby looking but the people were very nice you know you settled down and got to know people on the council, very nice. Didn’t always like what I wrote but good relation with them.

*And is there anything in particular about that period of time, did you ever feel nervous or did you ever feel kind of homesick or anything*

No, no. I didn’t feel at all homesick no.

No I was really well happy and well settled when I came to Barking you know.

*Did you kind of feel that you were quite proud that you had made this big move by yourself and you had got this job that you really really wanted?*

Yeah

*Okay, and what was what kind of work were you doing when you first started then, was it kind of small local interest stories or were you working on you said you had relationships with the councillors and things in Barking was it kind of political or…*

Well it was a bit of everything. The editor, if you can call him that, of the Barking Advertiser was a chap called Jack Stockdale who lived in Hurstbourne Gardens and the first job I did, I arrived on the Monday and most of my time was devoted to finding accommodation which I did on the Monday so my first working day was on the Tuesday and I was sent to these people these handicapped people who were going out on a days outing to Clacton and there was a story on their departure to Clacton. Then I was given various stories of one sort or another one was a couple who were celebrating their silver wedding anniversary.

*So quite sort of nice local stories?*

Yes local stories of that sort

*And when was your first visit to Barking Park? What was your first experience of Barking Park?*

Was on the first Saturday I was here you see, Saturday the 11th June 1956. I had to go to a meeting in Barking Park, it was a trade union meeting some left wingers holding this rally in the bandstand of Barking Park and I was sent to cover that, it was proceeded with a recital by a silver band from the bandstand, it was very nice. It was a nice impression the park gave me, yes.

*So your first impressions as you walked through the gate, obviously there were probably quite a few people around for this meeting but were you quite surprised that there was this quite lovely space in the middle of what you described as you know “some parts of Barking were a bit of a dump at that time”*

Yes, well yes, really nice park. Seeing the gates for one thing they seem to be inscribed with the opening of the park and so on. There were no motor vehicles driving in the park and there was no indoor bowls centre there like there is now spoiling the look of it. There was a bandstand, now that bandstand was very important.

*Could you describe the bandstand to me if that’s okay*

Well I think it had a brick base but a timber structure otherwise they railings etc and the steps and um you know they’d have bands playing in the bandstand and people sat in deckchairs listening to it, on a suitable, warm, afternoon in the sun. and I suppose the major event there was the crowing of the carnival queen. They had a carnival every year which they don’t have any more and our church were going to put in an entry one year and lorries, dressed up lorries and so on. XXXX and fancy dresses on bikes and things like that but they crowning glory was always the carnival queen, always the major competition to be selected as the carnival queen and one of her attendants and they would drive on their chariot, if you like, and into the park and then the queen would be crowned by as big a celebrity as the carnival comity could find and of course it was always a major event this was the end of the bandstand was the end of the carnival. Nowhere for her to be crowned so no more carnival queen and then no more carnival.

*That’s a real shame*

So they got rid of that bandstand and built another one in the town centre and that was as big a disaster as the old one had been a success. All they had was a few people who go there and make a row and get religious XXXX from there otherwise it didn’t serve a purpose at all the one they built in the town centre at great expense and they knocked it down at more expense. They desperately wanted one in Chadwell Heath they didn’t re-errect it there they just dumped it and Barking Park lost its bandstand and that was a very major loss, I’d like them now if they can’t build another bandstand to have a bandstand on a lake, on an island in the lake

*Um, that would be a lovely idea wouldn’t it*

Well it would, my son lives in Worcester and we went there and in the they’ve got a similar thing there the band play on the lake side there and you can side on deck chairs and it was really nice.

*That sounds lovely*

Put the bandstand on an island in the lake that would be really welcomed by a lot of people I think. More so than some of the crazy ideas they’ve got anyway

*Okay, going back to obviously your first time in Barking Park for that trade union meeting I wondered if you could talk a little bit more about that because I’ve been trying to find out information about big events that happened in the park during that period and it’s quite hard to find information and so I was wondering what with it being a political sort of meeting, which is quite rare, can you describe the number of people there, the things they were saying?*

Well it was quite large, it was a pro labour anti tory meeting, this was at the time that the conservatives won in 1956 and Eden might have been prime minister then XXXX subject to correction. I tell you what if you go to the Barking Library and get a copy of the piece I wrote on that. they were all saying kick the tories out and let’s have labour in and all the pro labour speeches and all cheers XXXX

*One would assume only the supporters turned up to that meeting*

Of course yeah

*So were there hundreds of people would you describe it as…*

Perhaps a hundred, yeah.

*And the people that spoke do you remember who it was that actually spoke on the day or was it a range of people or…*

Several, I think mostly from different trade unions, general secretaries of this or that trade union and regional organiser and so on of trade unions.

*And how would you have described the atmosphere of that event, was it quite a positive event or an angry event or…*

I wouldn’t say it was angry they weren’t sort of throwing things or anything but you know they were obviously pro labour supporters anti tory and they wanted the tories out and just a meeting to express their feelings about that

*And you say it was proceeded by a silver band playing um do you know who that band were or were they associated with a particular company or were they a private group?*

I don’t know, we used to have various bands playing there. As I say look up the local paper for that week, I remember writing it was proceeded by this or that band and that will give you the name of it.

*Okay I definitely will do, I’d already found the details for it online so I was planning on going down there some time maybe next week or the week after so I look forward to seeing your words in print.*

Yeah, on microfilm you know, you need to have a good pair of glasses to read it, it’s a bit small

*I best take my glasses that day then shouldn’t I?*

The Barking Advertiser for June I think they have the whole year but June 1956 and if you scroll down

*I look forward to looking it up*

*Going back to you personally obviously that was your first week in Barking pretty much like you said you came down on the Monday on the Saturday you covered the story in terms of you personally how, for example, did you meet your wife. Was that something a dance or something that was associated*

It was a dance, yes.

*Where was that?*

It was in East Ham town hall in the Winter Hall, it used to be the indoor swimming pool and in the winter they used to put boards across the pool and use it as a dance floor.

*Okay, and what year was that if you don’t mind me asking?*

In 1957

*1957, and were there a lot of things going on like that at the time like local dances and*

In East Ham I think, one in little road. I think the biggest one was East Ham.

Mrs Richards: there were two every week

*Oh there were two every week were there?*

Mrs Richards: two one in the main hall and one in the Winter hall in East Ham town hall, on the Saturday there were two dances, one was in the Winter Hall and one was in the main town hall

*So did you go there quite regularly then?*

Mrs Richards: Every week.

*So are you local to Barking or are you local to East Ham?*

Mrs Richards: East Ham

*Okay, you were born and raised there?*

Mrs Richards: yes

*So what did you think when you met this young Coventry boy?*

Mrs Richards: Very handsome [laughs]

*Isn’t that lovely. Did you kind of, I don’t want to be as corny as saying love at first sight or anything, but was it a case of you know you asked her to dance and then you got to know each other?*

A.R: yeah, that’s about it yeah.

*Lovely, it’s a real shame they don’t still do things like that really isn’t it? I mean modern discos aren’t quite the same; they don’t have quite the same sort of ambience about them.*

Rose was there with a friend of hers

*Okay*

Joan Joan Davies, yeah

*And were you there with a group of friends?*

No. no

*No, okay*

I was there on my own.

*To meet lovely ladies. [laughter]*

Mrs Richards: there were several ladies there [laughs]

*And did you ever go to Barking Park as a courting couple together to sort of spend time in the park*

Oh yeah, yeah. And Valentines Park in Ilford as well and Mayesbrook Park and Central Park, East Ham.

*Going back to Barking Park for a minute if that’s okay, did you ever sort of um obviously using it for recreation or just a little bit of down time or whatever in your spare time, did you ever do activities there like did you ever go boating? Or play sports there?*

I used to like swimming there, I’d go swimming there.

*Oh okay*

Quite often, and rowing I even had one session at the rowing club, there used to be a rowing club active in Barking Park

*And you were a member of that were you?*

No, no I just went down there and saw them and got talking and they said well have a go and skiff lightweight boat, they say they’ve now found one in the old boat house

*Yes*

Well that may have been the very one I rowed, certainly I rowed one very much like that, under tuition.

*Could you describe a skiff to me? Could you describe it for the tape if that’s okay?*

Well it’s a lightweight boat with a seat that moves on rails a seat that moves, in most boats you know it’s still you just sit there and row but this was built for more speed and so your bottom is moving backwards and forwards all the time with every stroke, as in racing XXXX built as a fast boat anyway if not a racing boat.

*It sounds like it was possibly quite physical, quite hard going, was it?*

Well I mean rowing is quite hard I mean years later I took park in whaler racing on the Thames which is quite an exertion, yes. Especially when you’re rowing against the London Fire Brigade

*[laughing] were they quite good then were they?*

Good!

*I would say did you see their dust but obviously on water you don’t really get a lot of dust do you, it’s probably more splashing*

No. just a spray.

*So was this, were you a fan of the water then? Did you kind of enjoy sort of…*

Not an ardent fan of it no, I only came to rowing and whaler racing because somebody in our club, the press club, in a state of drunkenness took on the London Fire Brigade as a challenge then somebody had to fulfil this challenge so some of us did. We were no match for any of the London Fire Brigade.

*But did you enjoy yourself?*

Oh yes, it was enjoyable yeah yeah

*I should imagine it probably wasn’t just the rowing it was more the social atmosphere*

Oh yes, very much so, yes definitely. There was a session afterwards in the press club downing large quantities of drink yeah.

*So a good day out*

A good day out, yeah.

*Going back to what you said, you went swimming in Barking Park do you remember the very first time you went to the lido in Barking Park?*

The first time I saw it was on this the first time I went to Barking Park there was a large crowd of people there I can’t think of the date of the first time I went there it was soon after that, that I went swimming in Barking Park but they have the council now has a picture which I took of old Barking Park I went up the diving board to take this picture, looking across it swimmers in the pool. Masses of people in it then I wanted to come down having got this picture and other people were coming up and they said “well jump off” I’m not going to jump off with my camera so they had to get off while I came down having taken the picture, it was worth it though because they’ve got this picture which is otherwise the only recollection they had of what the pool was like in those days.

*Yeah, I’ve heard it was a very, very busy place to be on a summer’s day*

On a warm summers day it really packed out yeah. Of course one nice thing when we moved here in 1964 it used to be nice to go on a warm summer’s morning at seven o’clock when the pool opened and you could have a swim before breakfast, there would perhaps be about half a dozen people there at that time.

*So even at that time of the morning there were still people at the lido?*

Well I say some of us, about half a dozen of us, would go down to the lido yeah at that time.

*Was it a little bit chilly at that time in the morning?*

Sometimes a little bit but not much you know, of course they had to have a woman on to take the money in the office and they had to have a lifesaver on even if you were a champion swimmer you’ve got to have a lifesaver on for members of the public in the pool XXXX

*Do you remember much about the staff in the pool do you remember any particular characters or any particular lifeguards?*

I don’t think I ever got to know any of them, no.

*I’ve heard that the lifeguards could be a little bit strict about certain things in the pool do you remember that, them sort of shouting at people?*

No, I don’t. they just sat there on a pedestal there was never any incident I can remember where he was called upon to intervene he just had to sort of be there in case he was needed.

*And was there only ever one or was there sometimes during busy periods more than one?*

I can only ever remember one, maybe more but.

*In terms of you saying it obviously just to get quite busy obviously in the summer are we talking in terms of sixty people, seventy, eighty? Because I know it was quite a bit pool wasn’t it? It was quite large*

I never counted of course, if you look at the number of people in that picture I’d of thought it’d have to be in the hundreds, well over a hundred I would have thought. But I just don’t know, have a look at the picture and see how many people you see in that.

*I could be a little game at my next session couldn’t it? Count the number of people in the picture, keep people on their toes.*

*And in terms of features at the pool I know the two fountains are obviously something that a lot of people talk about I was wondering if you could describe those for the tape?*

They are being persevered for the new pool, they were quite an attraction for visitors to the pool so at least we’re having those not in the new pool in the new wet area. Hmm goodness. Fairly large fountains, I’d of thought about twelve foot diameter something like that with a spout coming up in the middle yes.

*I’ve heard that some children used to climb up and play in them when they weren’t supposed to. Is that something that you remember?*

I think so, yeah. Not by doing any harm or anything and people were quite happy to let them.

*Um I’ve also heard that there was kind of like an ice cream shop in the lido, do you remember that at all?*

No, I don’t. I don’t remember any retail outlet there at all

*Okay, what about in the park in general because I’ve also heard that there was a café actually in the park, do you remember that?*

Yeah, yeah.

*Oh lovely. Okay could you describe that to me if that’s okay?*

Well it was an old building which has long since been demolished that served light refreshments, coffee and biscuits and a packet of crisps and things like that, you wouldn’t get any sort of a meal you see. And they’re going to have a café now, I hope what they have isn’t going to serve anything more than light refreshments otherwise people will go there just for a meal, the idea was that you have somewhere that people can go and if they feel a bit peckish okay they can have a cup of tea or something but they don’t go there for that purpose they go to enjoy the park and the refreshment is there if they need it

*Do you think that’s quite important then, that people don’t think of the park as sundry to the to the sort of facilities?*

Well yes, about ten years ago we had this proposal to build a family restaurant they called it, we called it a pub in the park and uh the public enquiry that arose from it the inspector said well they won’t go there to enjoy the park they’ll go there to drink and so the council argument was that it would attract more business to the park but it won’t it’ll attract them to the pub and then they’ll go home again. They won’t be visiting the park to enjoy its facilities. So if it’s something more than just a café people may go there for just a meal and that’s not the reason for visiting the park, you visit the park to enjoy the park and the refreshment is ancillary to that.

*Okay. It’s an interesting point isn’t it because I know that obviously some people would like a place to stop and buy their children a drink or an ice-cream but I wonder how many people want to go down for a sit down meal because it just doesn’t seem like the right sort of setting does it?*

Well that’s the point isn’t it

*Parks are for picnics I think. Talking of picnics actually did you ever sort of go down there for picnics with friends and family.*

No, I can’t remember us doing that no. quite a lot of people did but I didn’t, no.

*What would be your kind of most enduring or strongest memory of the park how it was in the sort of fifties and sixties? What would it be that you would say that stood out the most in your mind?*

It was a lovely wide open space with greenery with trees and the lake was featured very much in it and such a lot of activity, sporting activity and the lido that I remember of the park in the fifties.

*You mentioned then about the sort of open space and the green and the trees was that something that was important to you as someone who was sort of living in quite an urban area?*

Yes that’s right because when you’re used to living in a rural area or a semi-rural area anyway and I, it really was refreshing to come out of a concrete jungle into the nice greenery.

*Would you say that the same is still true today obviously because the area is even more urban now than anything?*

That’s why I say it’s all the more important to preserve parks and open spaces

*Of course*

That’s why I am opposed to any building on park land, like that indoors bowls centre they should have cited it somewhere else. I think they’re doing more building there than is necessary and there’s the visitor centre and the educational centre and so on and they were planning to use part of XXXX Park as a cemetery, opposed to that you know. We’ve got to hang on to every square yard of open space and of course they want to have more and more affordable housing so you see what they’re doing in the park now they’re pinching more and more of Mayesbrook Park for the £400000 grant from Boris Johnson thanks to us voting for it and you should see the mess they’re making of Mayesbrook Park now, it’s terrible.

*Really? I don’t know much about Mayesbrook Park*

I only saw it yesterday and I thought ergh heaven forbid!

*You’re not happy about it*

No, not at all. It’s ceasing to be well there’s this big. Well the football club they allocated this park part of it to the football club and they’re having this XXXX great stadium there you know, sorry but parks are not there to be built on.

*So how do you feel about the current renovations going on at Barking Park then because obviously they are building a new café, a new classroom, are you okay with that?*

I think it’s. well you’ve got to have a café okay and they demolished one so we’re going to have another one um the education centre, okay I think so long as it stops where it is uh I raise no objection to that, the wet area okay they’re preserving the old facade of the old lido so long as there’s no further building, see I joined the, as did my wife, joined the friends of Barking Park not that I agree with what the council are doing, I disagree with a lot it but I wanted to make sure they didn’t commit any more disasters like having a pub in the park and having an indoor bowls centre in the middle of it. To be friends of the park and protect it from disasters like that because quite honestly with friends like Barking and Dagenham council the park doesn’t need enemies does it?

*Is that one of your biggest concerns then being a local resident in the area that you’re worried that you know…*

I want to preserve the park as it was when we first moved here, well we can’t do that as they put up the indoor bowls centre and they’ve allowed driving in the park which we never used to have.

*The driving seems to be quite a contentious issue, obviously with the car parking things as well.*

Yeah,

*Could you kind of explain some of your concerns about park driving*

Well when we first moved here driving in the park was an offence, bi-law offence, and apart from service vehicles which are obviously essential no motor vehicles were to be driven in the park. Then they built the indoor bowls centre, well that was a hell of a cause of contention especially as it was right plum in the middle of the park and uh the council made this enormous loan very low interest to a company called the Barking and District indoor bowls club limited uh two of whose members were leading members of the council. The leader of the council and the chairman of the parks committee and they didn’t declare their interest when it came to vote on it and we were strongly opposed to that all along and because they had this new bowls centre with VIP members who were members of the council they had to provide parking for them they couldn’t park as people had done hither to, people were not allowed to park there so they would either come by public transport or they’d park in nearby roads or whatever but no they had to have a special car park and cars driven in the park to serve this indoor bowls centre, so all together that caused a lot of anger, anger particularly though that two leading members of the council were members of it and never mentioned it at council meetings.

*Do you kind of feel that their own agenda was pushed through*

Yeah well you’ve only got to look at the minutes all the difference to the Barking and Dagenham indoor bowls club and they said “yes must build the duh duh duh” they wouldn’t of done that had it been any other company applying to “can we borrow £100,000 at low interest” oh yeah you keep that under your hat. A company which two members of the council have an interest “oh yes of course you can”. The whole thing smelt and it still does.

*In terms of obviously people being able to drive in the park now do you think that that has effected um because obviously Barking Park is supposed to be a haven for local wildlife do you think it’s had an impact on the wildlife either positively or negatively?*

Well certainly not positively, I don’t think it’s had much of an impact, the squirrels are still there and

*There’s hundreds of them isn’t there?*

Yeh yeh, well foxes yeah but it doesn’t affect them, I’ve never seen badgers or anything like that there. Water fowl, it doesn’t go close enough to the lake to affect that. I don’t think it’s affected much of the wildlife no.

But you know previously you could go into the park and let your kids run around, you had to keep an eye out of paedophiles but you know there was no danger from motor vehicles but now there is. I complained about this when it was first introduced but the council then put up speed humps to reduce speed all the way up to this indoor bowls centre car park.

*So before that would people sort of go at speed down it.*

Yeh yeah, I complained about it

*Do they, they just fly over the bumps instead*

Well they still do but at least they’ve got to slow down a bit for each bump so that reduces it a bit, they eliminated the speed bumps now at this end of the park. I don’t know why, I think maybe the contractor was saying it was upsetting their heavy vehicles. No I think it was a mistake to ever allow motor vehicles inside the park, or if they were ever going to have one they should have had it at the South Park drive end where they’re having it in the park now and you can park there and walk. They were complaining at the time that I was objecting at the time of introducing the cars into the park.

*Sorry when did they start with the cars in the park, was that in the early seventies?*

1971 yeah. They were saying all these old people they need their cars to take them to the bowls centre well my answer was that if they’re fit enough to bowl a set of woods then they’re fit enough to walk about two hundred yards to the bowls centre.

*What was the reaction to that statement?*

Well they just dis… shrugged it off if they don’t like what you’re saying they just disregard it and a friend of mine is a member of the bowls club, the outdoor bowls club he’s complaining that this car park that they’ve now set out provides fifty-four spaces which is not enough, it means that a lot of bowls people won’t be able to park, well he seems to think that if they can’t park then they won’t go, I don’t see why they can’t go on public transport get on the bus especially as a lot of them have freedom passes anyway so they travel for nothing why they can’t get on the buses and get off at Faircross Avenue and just cross the, walk about two or three hundred yards.

*Is that what you would like to see happen then, more people use public transport?*

Oh yes. They’ve got rid of a bowling green in order to provide this car park

*Of course*

Well they say they only need one now well that’s rubbish. I produced a video in the nineties for friends in XXXX Germany and it showed the bowling greens, each of them with a men’s match in one with a ladies match in the other but now they say that they only need one bowling green. Well frankly I don’t accept that, there’s lot of interest in bowling and always has been ever since, almost since the park first opened in 1898 bowling has always been. I mean Drake was bowling when the armada arrived, it’s always been a major attraction and to have an active men’s and women’s section of the club and now they say we only need one green. We only need one green because they want to convert one green into a car park.

*I saw a fabulous photo actually, I think it was from 1921 or something of the old bowling green of men in their straw boaters and things and it just, nostalgia just floats off it doesn’t it*

And the ladies as well as I say there were two matches going on, this was in the nineties there were two matches going on in the two greens and now they’re told they only need one green. They’re very good at putting out twaddle this council, they really are.

*You don’t look best amused by it though*

No. well I mean we’ve had some much twaddle over this development in the park you know.

*Are you comfortable with the current development now though, are you kind of…*

Not entirely, they’re dredging the lake or have dredged the lake or part of it. That’s jolly good, it really was filthy, it needed it to get the silt out of it. And they drained the lake XXXX until the lake was empty then, free of water and they bought in these heavy machines digging out silt, 13000 tons of it. But they stopped short about eighty or ninety yards short of the end of the western lake and I asked why “oh we’ve decided it’s unnecessary to dredge the rest of the lake” well why dredge any of it then if you’re going to leave some of it undredged “oh no we’re going to, it’s been decided that we’re going to remove the quantity of silt as was laid down in the contract and that’s it” well somebody got there sums wrong didn’t they when calculating how much silt needs to be removed, you’d better dredge the rest. So anyway I got a letter in the post last week and the week before the Hogan, the chief of the dredging he replied to my previous letter saying you know, if a child falls into the lake in that part they’ve got about twelve inches of silt to fall into because while the water was out of the lake, I went over the wall from Ilford Lane into the undredged part of the late and dug out a bucket full of silt, about twelve inches, I haven’t put it back I’ve still got a pot of it out there. I produced it at a meeting of the friends of Barking Park, “look this is what your kid is going to fall into if they don’t dredge that lake” I got an angry letter from Mike what’s it name the man in charge of the HLF grant saying “you should not trespass on that part of the lake it’s in the hands of the construction company” I said “well if anyone’s going to complain they’ll complain, I had to dig this out to show what a load of twaddle your councillors are talking, there was the evidence. I’d have produced a copy at our meeting if I hadn’t dropped the thing and lost it.

*I was just wondering, how did the lake get that dirty? Do you remember it being that dirty in the fifties and sixties?*

No, they used to drain it

Mrs Richards: they’d drain it every year or every other year and dredge it

A.R: yeah quite frequently they used to drain it and it never got that dirty, I think it was the use of motorboats, see there were no motorboats when I first came to Barking and they introduced motorboats, which they’re not going to have anymore. I think they played a, quite a part in it getting so dirty. There is filthy horrible gooey stuff in it though and you know a kid could sink up to his knees in it or beyond that, when you get stuck in that stuff it’s difficult to move.

*So it is kind of a thick muddy type stuff is it kind of gloopey, is gloopey a word I’m just making up words now aren’t i?*

It’s just all gooey and

*I think it’s quite interesting what you said about how the lake wasn’t really that dirty until the introduction of motorboats, so hopefully now with, as you say, they’re not putting motorboats back on it maybe it won’t get so dirty.*

Won’t get so dirty no, I can’t think of why it otherwise will. As I say they used to have rowing boats and sailing boats now they did have these mock paddle steamers the Phoenix the second but that was about the only mechanically powered vehicle on the lake.

*Did you go on the Phoenix?*

Mrs Richards: yes

*Oh you did, could you describe that experience of travelling on the phoenix paddle steamer*

Mrs Richards: I don’t think you ever travelled on it did you?

A.R: I think we did yes

Mrs Richards: I did when I was younger, it was lovely. It was like being at the seaside.

*Oh really, because it’s really quite an iconic image. Whenever I show that image to anybody they’re always kind of like “oh wow I remember that” would it be okay if you could just describe your experience of going on it as a child if that’s alright*

Mrs Richards: well I was very young, I’ve got to rake my memory but it was quite an outing, we used to live at East Ham and to come to Barking Park was an outing, this was just after the war really when things were and we had a trip on the railway and a trip on the phoenix and it was a real like a day out it was a day out, it was lovely to see the water and the things going around and around and the water splashing

*I think I’ve got an image of it here actually, let me just get it out a second. Here that might bring back some memories for you*

Mrs Richards: yeah

*Is that how you remember it?*

Mrs Richards: yes, yes to see this wheel at the back going around and splashing the water, used to look at it with amazement.

*Do you used to sit there and just watch it did you?*

A.R: I asked the council for permission to use the Phoenix to hold my twenty first birthday party

*Oh really? Did you?*

They refused it you know

*Oh, why did they refuse it?*

No they recorded in the minutes that they would refuse any similar application they did not think it suitable

*Oh right, they didn’t think it suitable for the twenty first birthday*

You’d give the boatman a slice of cake of course you would

*Do you remember the staff that worked on the lake at all?*

Well not personally, you saw them you met them.

*What were they like?*

The people in charge of the boats and so on, they knew their job and they were nice people and the chap who until a couple of years ago ran the boating and the well he ran the boating up until about four years before that he ran the railway as well a chap called Alex, I don’t know his surname

*Okay*

*That’s interesting, I’ll see if I can find out some more about him*

As my wife said you’d go on the railway and then on the boats until they shifted the boat house from its previous position to the new one about 400 yards away when the railway was running you could go off the train walk a couple yards to the boat house and get on a boat from train to boat. Of course you can’t when the boat house is 400 yards further along the lakeside. So that rather spoils that, the connection between train and boat.

*So can you remember sort of stepping off the train and getting onto the boat pretty much*

Don’t distinctly, I went both on train and boat but I don’t remember going off one and on to the other, the thing is people could do and people did.

*Can you describe the train for me if that’s okay because I know the train have recently started up again but I was wondering if they were the original trains because they had to narrow the gauge.*

Yes the old gauge from 1937 was a nine and a half in gauge from the lodge to the lakeside called the lakeside halt now. They were open carriages of course with a steam locomotive, it was all owned by the council in those days and the council owned the locomotive as well and they used to maintain it, they’d off load the locomotive onto a council vehicle and take it to a council workshop for it to be serviced. It was very nice. I remember in 1959 I did a story for the local paper and I was interviewing this chap who was the driver of the steam locomotive because he had just retired he used to drive mainline trains out for Liverpool Street to Norwich and so on. And his retirement job was driving a much smaller locomotive, much slower. And yeah it was a nice story, there is one chap I met who worked on the railway.

*That’s really interesting that it was a retired sort of real train driver who ended up working on the miniature railway, that’s really interesting.*

Yeah that’s right, that was the story about it you see. Used to drive real trains at seventy miles per hour from Liverpool Street to Kings Lynn then driving this at five miles an hour a much smaller thing, the loco was housed in the brick worker shed, of course that all came to an end and the line was taken over by this chap Alex and he used to keep the carriages in the lakeside station of course they were a target for vandals and graffiti artists. You see now there’s only part of this railway in operation and we’ve got the workshop which holds four locos now XXXX together with the carriages.

*Are they the original locos then?*

No, no because they original were nine and a half inch gauge these are seven and a quarter gauge, a narrower gauge. And all the rolling stock, the locos and all the rolling stock are housed in the workshop. There’s a hoist to lift them up on to a two tiered mounting, you know. It keeps them out of the way of vandals so yes, for a couple of years now we’ve had the railway running.

*It’s lovely, I can’t wait to have a go on it.*

Oh yeah you must

*I really must have a go*

Definitely yes, well unfortunately you can’t get off the train onto a boat now and you won’t be able to even when the boating is back in operation

*No that is a shame, I’ve heard that the railway used to go right down by the other side of the lake as well, is that anything that you remember?*

No, people say that a railway used to run on the north side of the lake but I’ve not seen any picture of it and certainly not in my time.

*And it’s quite interesting because you actually say to them in that piece that you wrote that you gave to me at the session that we had I think you actually had a opening date for the railway which is 1937 I think you said which is really interesting because no one else seems to remember when the railway actually opened so it’s really good that we’ve managed to pin that down a little bit more so it was late thirties that it opened.*

On its present course, yes.

*So do you think it existed but on a slightly different route or something?*

Well as I say the previous route, or so I’m told, although I have no knowledge of it myself was on the north side of the lake.

*Mmm that’s really interesting, it’d be wonderful if we could find out wouldn’t it?*

Yeah if we can

*There doesn’t seem to be any documentation supporting it*

I’d like to see a picture of it, quite a few people have said to me there used to be a railway running along there, people who seem fairly reliable.

*It’s one of those memories isn’t it, memories of a funny thing*

Mrs Richards: they’d know the other side of the lake, I’ll ask Jean when I see her

A.R: you’ll ask Jean? Rose’s friend Jean, she’s a bit older than we are.

Mrs Richards: She’s eighty something and she used to live in Park Avenue she remembers quite a lot about the park

*Does she still live locally?*

Yes, she lives in Cecil Avenue

*Oh right okay, if she does want to get involved in the project please give her my number won’t you?*

Yes I will, I will

Someone tried to persuade her to come to the park meeting and talk about it once but she wouldn’t, she’s not all that well but she might speak if you went into her and spoke to her.

Another thing in the park just after the war, whether it was to celebrate the end of the war or not I don’t know, they had a hog roast. I was only small, I vaguely remember but I know there were crowds of people and we came from East Ham because it was such an event when food was on rationing to have this

*Of course*

A.R: I bet you had to give up your food coupons to get anything from that though

Mrs Richards: I don’t think so, I don’t think so. You had to pay of course but I don’t think so.

*Well I heard that the area was quite famous at one point for pig farming wasn’t it, and apparently the pub used to be called something the fly…*

A.R: Oh the Fly House that is now the royal oak

*So maybe they were local piggies that they managed to liberate from a farm.*

I’ve never heard about the pig farming

Mrs Richards: it was such an event

*So was it just a hog roast or was it a carnival atmosphere as well*

Well I think it was a celebration, I think it must of been the end of the war I can’t remember that much. And there was just the pig, no there wasn’t a carnival and it was in the evening I remember that but that’s about it.

*It does seem like the park was used for quite a lot of events we were talking about the fairs and the carnivals earlier I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about that if that’s okay because I remember in that piece you mentioned someone’s name who used to run it?*

A.R: oh yes, Tom Holland

*John Holland?*

He was a real character.

*Could you describe him to me, in what way was he a character*

He was a jovial character I’d of thought in his sixties when I knew him, he’d be long since dead now of course

*And what kind of time frame was this was this in the sixties, seventies?*

This would be in the late fifties and when we moved in to this house in the sixties as well yes. Tom Holland’s funfair. And he had this luxury caravan he’s invite you in for a refreshment and get the gin bottle out. He was a business man, he ran the funfair everyone in the funfair liked and respected him and the public did as well, he was a very charismatic man.

*And what about sort of physical characteristics was he kind of, I don’t know, maybe it’s me but in my head I’ve got some sort of image of because as you say he was the funfair and he was a charismatic figure I’ve heard a little bit from other people about him but I imagine this very tall man in a very proper suit and was he kind of like that?*

No

*Obviously because I’ve never met him I’m just making up my own mental image of him so I was just wondering if you could*

Well he was always wear dress in as much as he could welcome the mayoral party and he installed good order, I wouldn’t of liked to have crossed him or got on the wrong side of him. But people didn’t get on the wrong side of him they just respected him and worked with him.

*Okay*

Very good business man, he ran the fair and had a business.

*People also seem to talk a lot about dances taking place within the park did you guys ever attend a dance in the park at all?*

Dance in the park?

Mrs Richards: I think we did once didn’t we? Someone you knew was doing a western or something like that and we came

A.R: Country and Western?

Mrs Richards: Country and Western, I may be wrong it may not have been Barking Park it could have been

A.R: at the time that I met the wife I was associated with a group of country and western performers, The Mavericks, they used to perform in various places maybe they did perform in the park, I don’t recall it but maybe they did.

*And what about the, I know we’ve talked about the staff and you said you didn’t really know any of the staff personally, but what about the sort of park keepers and the park wardens do you have any sort of memories of them or their characters or their dress or could you describe any aspect of them?*

Well the park superintendant, Gordon Curry, I knew well. He received me as a guest into his house in I think it was XXXX begins with an F, anyway he lives in that part of Barking.

*Sorry, his name was Gordon…*

Gordon Curry, curry as in curry and chips

*And what was he like?*

He, in many ways was like Tom Holland, he really commanded respect of his staff and he knew, oh he knew plants. He’d done his apprenticeship at Kew Gardens, he was a broad Cornish man. If you went and saw him in the park “you want to know the name of all the plants” there was about 300 plants and he knew the Latin names for all of them and there was nothing about plants that he didn’t know.

*Wow*

One really nice thing that he used to organise, if there was a celebration of some sort and anniversary of somebody he would lay out their coat of arms on that mound as you go into the park now all in the plants, very precise coat of arms. The British legion or the Boy Scouts or something like that. there’s a nice display of flowers there now but as I say this would be an all floral display of the coat of arms of a particular body.

Mrs Richards: he had the borough coats of Barking once didn’t he, the coat of arms of Barking.

A.R: oh of Barking Town Council yes. That may have been when it ceased to be when it was amalgamated with Dagenham.

*That’s a really lovely thing to do to sort of…*

Yes it was.

Mrs Richard: it was beautiful.

*Was he a quite a generous man in general do you think?*

Yes, I think so. He took me down to Blackfriars rugby match once, he was a keen rugby fan, come along and see Blackfriars rugby club.

*So how did he end up in this part of the world then, did he move up to go do his apprenticeship at Kew Gardens and then stayed?*

I don’t know, I don’t know how he. Certainly he was born and bred in Cornwall and he did his apprenticeship at Kew Gardens perhaps how he moved to the London area he’d married and settled down in the drive, in the drive way there.

*I’m sorry did you say you’d had children?*

Yes, we have one son and one daughter yes

*And when were they born?*

John, our son, was born on the eleventh of December 1968 and Mary, our daughter was born on the fifteenth of March 1978.

*And do you have memories of, obviously being in such close proximity to the park here, do you have memories of sending them off to the park in the summer holidays*

Well not sending them off, we used to take them especially when Tom Holland’s fair was there. We used to go. I don’t know if it was still Tom Holland’s by that time. The fair anyway. John always wanted to go on this same round about a woman with a child ran it, used to come every time and we always went on that and on various, oh yes we used to go on shooting galleries, you know. Oh yes they enjoyed going, not just to the fun fair but to the park generally XXXX on the train. Yeah.

*It must have been quite convenient being in such close proximity to take them over of an evening.*

Yes that was one of the attractions of living here you know the proximity to the park yeah.

Mrs Richards: I used to take Mary to the paddling pool, she loved it, the little paddling pool there

A.R: that’s not there anymore. And there’s no plans to have another one.

*Was the paddling pool free then?*

Oh yes. Yes.

*Oh right okay, lovely.*

Open air.

Mrs Richards: and it wasn’t fenced you could just go, no fence up it was all open

*So it was a nice sort of you know…*

Yeah.

*I’m kind of thinking it was quite an economical sort of way of amusing you children, because you know children love water don’t they.*

Oh yes, and you could sort of change your mind and you could stay a little while or a long time

*Depending on how much fun they’re having*

Yes, and we used to take the dog sometimes with us.

A.R: and the putting green was quite near used to go and play on the putting green.

*Oh right, where was the putting green?*

It was just opposite the paddling pool. You came down the central drive, well Prince George’s avenue and when you got to the bottom of it it was on the right.

*I’ve heard there was giant chess set by the paddling pool as well do you remember that at all?*

No I don’t, Norma does, our friend Norma Smith, she well remembers it but I don’t.

Mrs Richards: I’ve got a vague memory of it but I couldn’t tell you where it was.

*I’m surprised there aren’t pictures of it because I did go through the archives looking for it because it strikes me as the kind of thing that people would want to take pictures of but maybe that’s just me but it certainly sounds like there was a lot to do*

Well things were just always there so you took them for granted

*Yeah, of course, of course.*

*So did you often take pictures in the park yourself with your family*

No

*No, it’s like an extension of your back garden I suppose, isn’t it?*

yes, yes.

*And what would you say your children enjoyed most about the park growing up?*

Freedom I suppose, freedom to run around.

A.R: run around. They used to take the dogs, I’ll shut up now you’ve already heard that didn’t you.

*That obviously meant cuddle didn’t it [laughter]*

*Like you said your daughter particularly enjoyed the paddling pool, was your son a fan of the paddling pool?*

Mrs Richards: No, he wasn’t so keen on the water. He, no.

*What about things like climbing trees or sort of made up games, no?*

the fair was his particular XXXX he loved the fair.

*That sounds like boys though doesn’t it, they like a bit of danger.*

You went on so many with him once that you came home feeling sick did you?

[laughter]

A.R: the Mexican hat.

*What was the Mexican hat?*

Well it was a thing they rotated and gyrated and it went all over the place in different planes and you came out feeling sick at the end of it.

Mrs Richards: John didn’t, he was fine.

A.R: no but I’d had a couple of pints of beer before it.

Mrs Richards: oh well there are you are, you didn’t say that!

[laughter]

*You’ve caught yourself out now look, she never knew. So would they sell sort of would there be food stalls so you could get candy floss or buy a beer.*

Yeah there was candy floss there, I don’t know, did they sell beer?

A.R: no, I don’t think they had any alcohol,

Mrs Richards: no, alcohol wasn’t allowed.

A.R: Well they wouldn’t now because they’ve abolished it.

*Yeah I know alcohol isn’t allowed in the park now is it at all?*

Mind you they were going to have a pub there at one stage.

*Seems a little contradictory doesn’t it?*

Mrs Richards: Candy floss and hot dogs.

*The whole sort of carnival atmosphere. And I’ve heard that the people who actually used to run the rides where gypsies did you hear anything about that?*

A.R: manned the what sorry?

*The people who ran the rides*

Rides, oh maybe.

Mrs Richards: I think some were because we used to have people come knocking at the door trying to sell us heather and tell our fortune always when the fair was here.

*Did you ever take them up on the offer of fortune telling?*

A.R: Maybe we’d have had a different fortune if we had.

*So where do your children live now? Do they still live in the Barking area?*

Mrs Richards: yes, Mary does, John lives in Worcester

*So he’s sort of moved up and out sort of thing?*

He has yes.

*Do they still come up and go to the park often?*

No, Mary does but not John no.

*And how about you guys do you go down there often? I know you said you were the members of the friends of barking park now.*

Sometimes

A.R: yes, well I also take part in the running of the railway so I go over for that

Mrs Richards: and you take the dogs over there

A.R: and almost every day I take the dogs over there

Mrs Richards: I don’t go so much I feel a bit intimidated really, it’s a shame that I do.

*Could you describe why you feel intimidated?*

Well I’ve had, last time I went was last Wednesday I took the two dogs with me and I walked along, it may have been nothing it’s just the feeling I walked along what is the cycle path from this entrance to the entrance in King George avenue, a man came in riding his bike straight along the path, fine, then he turned and rode right the way back and then went out. And I thought that was a strange thing to do and I think I don’t know I wasn’t carrying anything apart from the dogs and I thought perhaps he’s looking to see if I’ve got a handbag or a phone and the time before this was when the old bowls club was there and I had our old dog the bowling green the one that’s been knocked down and man was sitting there looking at the bowls and he saw me walk with the dog and he came straight out and started talking to me about the dog and I thought well this is strange and he said “oh what a lovely dog” yes I said “he doesn’t bark he just bites” and with that he went

*Right okay*

But previously about 3 months ago I was walking in there with the two dogs again and this man came, black man this was, came straight across and started talking to me and I just ignored him and he went walking off and I thought “why, why pick me out”

I wouldn’t go, well I would go there on my own but I don’t enjoy it so much.

*Okay, do you feel with the introduction of park keepers and park wardens that would make it more of a safe environment for people to go and enjoy without the fear of being accosted.*

Yeah, yes.

*I know that’s something they’re planning on.*

Well they’re there now but you don’t see them very much.

A.R: you see they’ve got their own police squad now.

[phone rings]

Sorry.

[tape paused]

She’d like to see it a bit safer, some of the people hanging around there are, which of course we have a residents association XXXX and we have a report from the police each time and they , a lot of drug, mostly lower case drugs, cannabis. We’ve had some heroine though you know, class A drug. A lot of drug taking and pushing and they always do a lot of cautions and arrests in Barking Park.

*I’d heard a lot of that had been cleared up in recent years.*

Yeah it had, more and more patrols and they’re picking up more and more offenders. It was not long ago there was a bunch of Albanians who claimed that a part of the park belonged to them and no one else was to go there.

*Crikey, when was that?*

Oh, only a few months ago. As a result the police set up a dispersal order well the council set up a dispersal order enabling the police to rather like reading the riot act and say “right you disappear and if you’re still here in ten minutes time you’ll be arrested”

*They all cleared out pretty quick did they?*

Dispersal, yes

So certainly there are a few characters that are not exactly welcome in the park, I think that’s what Mary was referring to.

*I think it can be quite intimidating I think people in general if you see a group of young people on bikes it can be a bit intimidating especially if you’re on your own or a woman or on you’re a little bit older but I have heard that they’ve done great things to try and improve the park*

Yes an enormous amount, some of the Albanians were aggressive with it. Saying why are you here this is our place you get out. People walking their dogs were complaining about them

*No one wants to be accosted if they’re just having a nice day do they?*

*It’s a shame really that it’s a small minority who ruin it for other people, but there are some*

But I suppose one danger is really if you get one group who are dangerous and they go up in a group to take on these Albanians and there’s warfare in the park

*Crikey*

Anyway I think the Albanians have been calmed down, they’re still there but I think they’re behaving themselves now.

*That’s good. Progress.*

*I was going to say actually I think we’ve actually covered everything, is there anything you’d like to add that you would like to be recorded for the project?*

Well what I would like to see is the park restored as it was when I first saw it but that unfortunately isn’t possible.

*Would you like to see them perhaps built a bandstand?*

*Would you like to see them perhaps built a bandstand?*

Yeah. I can’t think where they’d put it now, I’d like to see a bandstand built on one of the islands in the lake and people could sit in deckchairs on the bank of the lake, you’d have to have a raft to transport the musicians and their instruments across to the island. I think that would be a big attraction. Because at the moment you’ve got no you used to have music there when I first came to Barking. Which you don’t have any more.

Mrs Richards: we do, we have the mellor

A.R: yeah but I mean regular week by week during the summer anyway performances on the bandstand, I mean the mellor there’s an event for asian people once a year, they have various other things that attract XXXX someone off the council is in charge of events to arrange events in the park okay when they have an event they have music, blared out on loud speakers, blow your ears off and we have to complain about that and have it turned down and have it finished earlier. On one event they’re going to have it on until one o’clock in the morning and have it on loud speakers

*And of course being so close to the park you can probably hear it all can’t you?*

Mrs Richards: you can’t hear yourself talk, or you couldn’t this time we complained about it, you couldn’t hear yourself in the garden dreadful and we’re quite away from the park. Dreadful. But they have stopped it at eight o’clock now, which is a bit better.

A.R: well yeah they have music but only when they have an event, when they had a bandstand they would have different kinds of music, people have different tastes in music some people like classical music some people like r’n’b you have different groups, you can’t please everyone all of the time but

*I think classical tends to cover all basses though doesn’t it classical is so varied so*

Mrs Richards: it is but they wouldn’t like it if their r’n’b or rock

A.R: well I can’t imagine Norma liking r’n’b [laughter] some people wouldn’t be so fond of classical you’ve got to give and take. Have a bit of what you do like and what you don’t like. I think if they had somewhere they could provide live music in the park that would be a big attraction, that would be nice if they could have it on an island in the lake. And have people sitting on deck chairs.

*Every Sunday afternoon or something, wouldn’t that be nice?*

Mrs Richards: even once a month if they couldn’t manage that.

A.R that’s one thing

Mrs Richards: Worcester have it, why can’t we?

A.R: and of course the open air swimming pool, that was a major attraction, I used to like swimming in there. A wet area for kids, well for anyone I think, is just no substitute for an open air swimming pool. And no paddling pool at all and no putting green, these things used to give people pleasure which we’ve not got any more. So I think I’d like to see those restore.

Mrs Richards: there used to be a small section of the lake that was just for children and little paddle boats.

A.R: yes at the far end of the lake it was fenced off, very shallow water with wide low shallow boats, only about six inches of water, kids couldn’t come into any harm in that except to get wet

Mrs Richards: they loved it! Mary went on it and I think John did, to be on their own in charge.

*To be driving, there’s nothing more that children like than feeling like a grown up*

Being on their own

A.R: see what they’re proposing on the lake? No motor boats, they’re all going to be rowing boats where you wind the handle

*oh right*

when they had motor boats and rowing boats you’d see a queue of people to get motor boats but rowing boats you could get straight away. But people are lazy they don’t want to have to go around with exertion

*That’s part of the fun isn’t it?*

They just want to sit and have a motor to transport them around the lake effortlessly so I don’t know how many people they’re going to get interested in hiring rowing boats.

*I think you’d be surprised because I live in Walthamstow where epping forest starts and there’s a boating lake up by whipps cross and that’s really popular on a summer’s day you see loads of people on their row boats I am wondering if the nostalgia of it is what appeals to some people*

Perhaps I am wrong, I hope I’m wrong.

*I’m not saying that I'm just saying I think rowing boats could still work, I appreciate your point about people like the speed and the power of the motor boat but I am a fan of the rowing boat*

They’re just lazy.

Mrs Richards: if there’s no alternative they might.

*Maybe that’s a good thing that there’s no alternative force people to get some exercise*

Well all these obese.

*Like you say they made the lake much dirtier as well didn’t they*

A.R: well if it works it’ll be a good thing, and they’ve got XXXX to have somebody running it, two years ago they said they were confident of finding someone and two years on they’re still looking for someone

*I hope they find one soon*

The railway have to dip into his own pocket a lot to keep that going, it’s only because he’s got quite a large family and several members of his family will work for nothing otherwise he would have to employ them and this chap who is going to run the boating, I am sure he is going to have to dip into his own pocket. Because you’ve got to have staff, either his own family working for nothing or employ people and can you then run boats at a price people are willing to pay, but they’ve got to buy the boats yet for one thing.

*Maybe that can be a little woodworking project for the local colleges to build some rowing boats*

Well they did ask at one of the friends meeting if they can get one of these boat people if they can come around and bring samples of their boats for us to have a look at and see which ones we’d like to have on the lake. But they don’t seemt o have done that.

Mrs Richards: we were supposed to be going to see what kind of seats they had but nothing has happened about that. these people if they’re anxious to sell their wares you think they’d bring them along to show us and let us make our choice.

*A bit of schmoozing would probably be a good idea wouldn’t it, coming round and letting you try it all out.*

Even where we want them we can’t really have them where we wanted them. They’re placing where they think.

A.R: you see that fact is why they stopped the dredging of the lake I said well you’ve run out of money haven’t you? “no we haven’t run out of money we have exhausted our budget” [laughter] some of the budget for that park and they’ve dug out the quantity of silt as required some of it was clay anyway if they spend any more on that then there’ll be no more to spend on seats and boats and things like that so in effect they have run out of money they’ve run out of the amount they intended to spend on that particular part of the project.

*Yeah and they’re just being a bit creative with their words aren’t they?*

*Mrs Richards: as always.*

*[laughter]*

*A.R: [mumbles XXXX]*

*But I suppose if it comes down to the choice between silting the rest of the lake and making sure people have places to sit and boats to row on then they’ve got to prioritise.*

Well somebody obviously got his sums wrong when calculating how much silt they’d have got.

*Maybe they didn’t realise how dirty it was*

Mrs Richards: or they dug out more than they should

A.R: well they dug out a lot of clay down to two metres, they didn’t need to go down to two metres

*So they’ve made it quite a bit deeper as well*

Yes down to two metres so if anyone falls out of the boat and can’t swim I hope there’s a few people around to fish them out.

*Might need a life guard.*

And they don’t think it’s necessary to have life belts around the lake whoever gets the project of the boats is going to take on the cost of the lifebelts. I think the council should provide that anyway wherever you have water there should be lifebelts.

*Well they do don’t they in like if you walk along the thames the southbank or something they’ve normally got sort of like life rings every few yards.*

The funny thing is they got some chap down with his girlfriend to demonstrate how to throw a lifering to someone and this girl was in the lake and various council people not getting anything near her why we have to have tuition when there aren’t any life rings I don’t know.

*Does seem a little redundant, sounds like they were just playing hoopla with her.*

Yes that’s right [laughs]

*The closest person gets a goldfish or something*

It would have been cheaper to jump in and go to her, but you’d have got stuck in the silt.

*Well thank you for sharing you memories with me, I’ve got quite a few notes here to be working my way through*

**END OF TAPE**

**Interview Details**

**Name of interviewee: Mr Anthony Richards**

**Project: Barking Park**

**Date: 16th August 2011**

**Language: English**

**Venue: Interviewees Home**

**Name of interviewer: Claire Days**

**Length of interview: 99 minutes.**

**Transcribed by: Angela Hatcher**

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