

Interview with Neil, 06/04/20

N: My brief history, I was born in 1959 in a place called Burnley, Lancashire. I left home at 19 to go to art school and trained as a theatre designer. So I did that for four years, and then went to work in various theatres around the country. And then, I think it was late 1988, I was 29, I ended up getting a really good job of head, head of design at Harrogate theatre. And originally I went there on a nine month contract, but ended up actually staying there, working at the theatre, for about five years. And then after that stayed in Harrogate for 30 years, so that was completely unexpected.

So that's the history of that. When I first went there. I met this young guy who was a fashion designer through friends at the theatre, and we ended up going out together. And he was my first serious boyfriend, we ended up living together for two years. And he made quite a lot of my clothes. So, he used me as a sort of experiment for his various designs.

And so, the object I've chosen to give on loan to the museum is a shirt that he'd made me that I've kept. So, I've had that 30 years now, and I still wear it occasionally. It's a lovely thing. It sort of reminds me of an awful lot of people and an awful lot of happy times, and as I say I've worn it over the years.

'Cause in those days, when we were, in the end Jake ended up working at the theatre as well for a while, so we all ended up socialising together, because there really wasn't anywhere to go. So, because it was quite an insular world, because we all had to work so hard and such long hours, we all socialised together, basically within the theatre itself. And so that's my story really.

I: You mentioned in the email that you, or people used to go to Hales bar?

N: Yes, they did. That was one of the few places where I, oh it was a brilliant pub because it was really really social, it was a listed building, it still has, it still is listed, it's there today, it's a fantastic place. And in those days, it was where a lot of gay people went to. And so if we did ever have an evening off, then that's where we'd all go, so you'd meet other people from all walks and shades of life from, oh I don't know, bus drivers to accountants to secretaries to all sorts of stuff.

And it was just a really accepting, genuine place to go, because there weren't any other - well it wasn't a gay venue - but there weren't any other venues like that in Harrogate. I think the nearest you had to go was to drive to Leeds, and most of us in those days didn't have cars. So that's where we went. And that's, I think sort of about it really.

L: There's something, you very briefly mentioned the Turkish Baths, I don't know if there was anything worth saying about that?

N: Well, they used to do, because I knew quite a few people who worked there, men only sessions where I think a lot of the, I never went, but I think a lot of the gay guys did go to. But, eventually, and I don't know why, but they stopped the men's sessions, the men only sessions. And so that as a meeting place was taken off the radar. Now, I know that there were gay saunas in Leeds, that people used to go to. So, I suppose. When that option was taken off them in Harrogate they just used to go over to Leeds.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai> and Lydia Kingston