

## **Mike Mudway\_1**

### Key:

**I:** Interviewer  
**MM:** Mike Mudway  
**F:** Female  
**E:** Erin

**I:** **Off we go. So if you could start by telling me your name and when you were born.**

**MM:** Right. My name's Mike Mudway and I was born in 1946.

**I:** **Where was your family living?**

**MM:** They were living down the Lower High Street of Cheltenham.

**I:** **On Lower High Street itself?**

**MM:** On Lower High Street itself, yes.

**I:** **Did they live above..?**

**MM:** They lived above the shop which they had. It was a cat and dog meat shop.

**I:** **So you were telling me a bit about the family briefly just beforehand before we started recording. So both your parents worked in this shop, did they?**

**MM:** Both worked in the shop, yes, when they took it on.

**I:** **They were from the area or they moved in?**

**MM:** Mother was from Portland Street. Her parents were plumbers and builders. My father was in the Royal Navy for 33 years. When he was de-mobbed after the war, his brother was already working in Cheltenham at a butcher's shop, which the family came into in about 1905. They all came up from Coldicott in Monmouthshire. When he was de-mobbed he came to stay with a relative of his and his brother said, 'Why don't you open a shop?' and it was only a few yards from where we are now. So that's what they did. The butcher's shop then carried on. My father then became an owner of the cat and dog meat shop.

**I:** **So this is where you grew up?**

**MM:** It all began, yes. 1946 that began, '47.

**I:** **So just after the war then?**

**MM:** Just after the war, yes.

**I:** **What memories do you have of your childhood growing up there? What springs to mind when you think..?**

MM: It was good. People didn't have a lot, but the school wasn't far. I went to Dunalley, which is not far from where Lower High Street is. The shops down there, everybody knew everybody else. It was a community of its own and you could get everything if you wished to live and to do anything else with your life from the bridge as far as Ambrose Street and that community could supply anything for everybody for a family life, from basket ware to cat and dog meat to butcher's to grocery, whatever.

**I: So when you say cat and dog meat?**

MM: Yes, there was a shortage and a person from Gloucester that came across and met my father and said, 'I've got a shop in Gloucester. Would you like to take on a shop in Cheltenham?' which at that particular time my father owned anyway, so he carried on the business but supplied from Gloucester and then opened up in Cheltenham.

**I: So this is pet food?**

MM: This was pet food, yes, but it was all your normal stuff, your offal and all the other strong stuff, you know? Not the tinned stuff. They didn't like tins in those days. They couldn't get the tins after the war.

**I: It took a while before...**

MM: It took a while to get it through, yes.

**I: So you've got very positive memories of that?**

MM: Very positive, yes. You met some characters. There used to be an old tramp, Charlie Welsh, who used to live down there. Do you want this to be recorded?

**I: Yes. I don't mind, whatever you feel comfortable saying.**

MM: If you look at the lower car park in the Lower High Street there by the bridge, there used to be a few vans parked in there, which my father went from cat and dog meat into removals after that, house removals. He had a van. He used to park it there. Another person called Raymond, they both had two big wagons here, who also had a shop down the Lower High Street, and they did house clearances. Charlie Welsh, he had a lot of whippets. What he did, he used to sleep in one of the vans. Normally, my father was in the Luton, especially in the winter months with the wrappers. One particular night, one of the vans caught fire, and if it wasn't for Charlie Welsh sleeping in one of the vans there, there would have been an almighty blow, a big blow-up in fact of two vehicles and in fact he saved both vehicles did Charlie Welsh. He always used to serve his winter-time in prison. He'd go and break a window or go and do something silly to get out of the cold and the street.

**I: That's one way of doing it, isn't it?**

MM: Yes. His whippets, believe it or not, used to be looked after by some of the locals down at Lower High Street, until he came back out again and then he'd have his...

**I: So this was the routine. He'd go inside for the winter.**

MM: Yes. This was his routine, Charlie Welsh. Ex-marine he was.

F: How clever.

MM: A very hard man. Nobody messed with him.

**I: So as a child, one of the things that a lot of the other people we've spoken to remember playing outside a lot.**

MM: Yes. You did. Of course, the roads then weren't too busy. White Hart Street was a dead end street, of course, you could play in there. King Street you could play in because there was hardly any traffic up there. High Street wise it wasn't that busy at all. In comparison to now, well we don't want to do comparisons do we? We want to talk about the '50s and the '60s.

**I: Well, you can always compare it if you like. We might talk about what it's like now a bit later.**

MM: About then, no, there was a lot of families living there and a lot of friends and in the St Mary's Mission there, which is just off the high street; there was a little Sunday school there. There was a little cub troop. It ended up where the scouts from there went into Synagogue Lane, which is another part of the high street really, not far off. The mission hall there was reputed to have a tunnel. This is only hearsay, but a tunnel from there to the parish church at St. Mary's in the middle of Cheltenham. How true that is nobody knows. Nobody's gone down and found it, but there was a building there which was very creepy when we were kids with all the ivy over it. They had a very big monument to a Labrador dog and you used to have the coffins on the lines either side which would keep six coffins in there.

There used to be a big pit and down this big pit you could find this... we went down it but we never found it as kids, but it was full of graves, of course in those days. It used to catch fire every summer with the trains, with the old ashes coming off the trains when they're going along and set fire to the graves. That was every year. That wasn't just now and again, because it was never kept up. It wants a good repair really that graveyard. It was just left.

**I: St. Mary's Mission, so our students have been working on that part of... they've been talking about examining how that part fits in to this area. So you remember that kids used to go and play in that area?**

MM: Yes, they used to play in the graveyard. That was a place where a lot of the kids used to go to, which are the families of the local people with the shops there. That was one of the creepiest places as a kid.

F: At the bottom of the garden at 446 High Street, I think I remember you saying there are graveyards. That's why you couldn't have an entrance at the bottom of the wall the other side because you wanted to open up so you could drive round. The council wouldn't let them because they wouldn't move these graves, would they?

MM: Nobody owns... There's a covenant somewhere in the history, going way back, some of the properties down there, the one that we were in, which is now into three little shops. There's one building but it was a market garden in

1800, beautiful ground. With five acres of ground, which of course included where the admission hall's being I suppose investigated now, but that was part of it. There was five acres and it was bought for £23 in those days. Then of course it came on from there and then it was sold off, parts of this large cottage, and you had three different places there and three different shops but one building.

F: In his shop he's the only one that's got the original Cotswold stone wall. He wouldn't have it taken down.

MM: Other than that, do carry on.

I: **So obviously again your memories of the childhood are very similar to some of the others we've heard from. You also said that people in this area felt like a community, everyone knew each other you had everything you needed on your doorstep, so you didn't need to leave very much from the area.**

MM: That's right.

I: **Do you remember or maybe your parents talking to you about people from other parts of the town when you were young? For instance, if you went outside of your area, you went towards the promenade?**

MM: There was a time where I can remember back when I was about seven or eight if you walked up through the promenade without a tie on you'd be stopped to ask, 'Where's your tie?'

I: **Who would stop you?**

MM: That would be the gentry or anybody who's living in that way.

I: **So they used to police it themselves?**

MM: It wasn't the police themselves.

I: **No. They used to police it themselves.**

MM: Oh yes, sorry, indeed. The gentry used to police that part themselves. That's very true.

I: **They didn't want any riff-raff?**

MM: No riff-raff up there whatsoever.

F: You were riff-raff.

MM: I was, yes. Other than that, no. The Lower High Street really supplied and helped everybody from that end of town, which included Dockem. If people would come in and say, 'Oh, can I pay you for this next week?' people would do that.

I: **If they knew them?**

MM: Yes, if they knew them, they would do that.

- F: You used to do it with the (ph 0:10:25) *hair case*.
- MM: Yes, okay, whichever, love. That's the later years anyway.
- F: I know but you still did it.
- MM: You'd find that people down there were very poor down Dockem, below the bridge. The shopkeepers above really kept those people alive during the slum times as well.
- I: So you mentioned Dockem. For you, Dockem is after the bridge and where the gas works were?**
- MM: Yes. Dockem starts from there. Now then, you're getting Dockem and Lower Dockem, aren't we?
- I: Yes because people have said different things about this.**
- MM: It wouldn't surprise me.
- I: Well, some of the older interviewees have said that all of that area from Dixie's Corner to the gas works was all Lower Dockem. Some people have said Lower Dockem was after the railway bridge.**
- MM: Yes.
- F: Yes.
- I: So you have another take on it?**
- MM: Well, Dockem, all the employees from below the bridge worked either at the Lea at Coombe Hill, which was where the canal was, and where the barges used to come up with the coal and they docked there. Then the coal was brought up there by horse-drawn whatever and then into the wharf, which is now behind Range, where we are, and that's where all the people used to work, and that's where they were called the Dockem-ites. They used to go to the docks over at the Lea.
- F: That's all I can remember. That was Dockem and you never went... my father would... if I went near there.
- MM: Dockem would never go up as far as Ambrose Street, to be honest with you. I think that's a bit of a fallacy, because the slums did start literally from Whitehart Street all the way down.
- I: So that area was even poorer?**
- MM: That was even poorer than where the shops were.
- F: Does that include Townsend Street and Charles Street and all round there?
- MM: Townsend Street and Charles Street weren't too bad because they were built for the railways there. That's why the cottages were built. Of course the railway came straight through there. It was north of the high street. So that's

where Dockem started. The shops weren't known as Dockem. They weren't known as part of Dockem. The shops supported Dockem.

**I: So not even the streets coming off like King Street or Devonshire Street?**

MM: Not that I know of. I'm with you. Not that I've known in my lifetime, no.

F: Never heard of them.

MM: Those people, they could well be right but I was always brought up to believe that the Dockem was north of the bridge.

**I: It's interesting that there are slight differences of opinion about that, and everyone says the same thing, 'This is the way I was brought up to think about it.'**

MM: That's right, yes.

**I: It's interesting. One of the things actually I wanted to show you, Erin could you pass me the poem?**

E: Yes.

**I: I don't know if you've seen this. One of the things, we had an ad in the paper about a month ago or six weeks ago telling people in Cheltenham about the project we were doing and we were sent anonymously this poem on the Lower High Street. We don't know who wrote it.**

F: I think I saw it online on Facebook.

**I: That's right.**

F: Because I'm friends with the three people who admin Cheltenham Social.

**I: Days Gone By in Cheltenham?**

F: Days Gone By. Well, there's Days Gone By, and then there's Cheltenham Socialising and Years Have Gone By. There's three of them and one is (ph 0:14:12) *Loubie and Nisha*. I went to school with both of them. They tend to put, on their site, fabulous pictures, and especially the (ph 0:14:24) *lower end* one, which I couldn't print it out because I had no ink, but he's got it, and on this 1900 picture you've got the train going across.

**I: Oh, I've seen the one.**

F: It's a little picture right in the corner of a little girl right outside his shop.

**I: I've seen the picture. Yes. I know the one. In fact, a lady called Virginia who lives in America now but she lived in that area and worked in that part of town during the war. She got married to an American soldier and went to America. She commented on that photo where it was posted somewhere.**

F: One of the admin blokes, Loubie, he put it on. I then emailed and said, 'Can I have the original?' because it was part of his heritage there. It goes with the family tree he's got.

MM: She made a mistake there.

**I: Or he. We don't know who wrote it.**

MM: Where did I see it? Dinky Dave. (Unclear 0:15:33). Yes, that's fine. (Unclear 0:15:36). Yes, that's fine. Now then, Whittings was literally where the brewery is now. It's that far up. So that was way out of Dockem. Still, it's a lovely thing to read.

F: I suppose it's trying to bring it all in, isn't it?

MM: That's the corner of King Street.

F: I did 21 years in the brewery before it all got pulled down. There's so much history there that brought in the Lower High Street because my boss used to work with the Lower High Street committee. So I got involved in that with him because of this one as well.

MM: That barber there was Williams. The shop on the corner of Devonshire Street I can't remember his name but he was a wig maker. He was a Frenchman, I believe.

**I: There's more on the back.**

MM: Is there? Sorry.

**I: Yes, 'For the travellers, the Wembley provided a bed.'**

MM: Yes. Wembley (ph 0:16:38) *Cafe*. 'A drink and a meal.'

**I: (Unclear 0:16:42).**

MM: '(Unclear 0:16:43-0:16:45) shop.' I believe that was literally...

F: Was that the chemist, was it?

MM: No. It was two shops down, I think, from the Wembley, if I remember rightly.

F: It will be interesting to know who wrote it, wouldn't it?

**I: That's one of the reasons we posted it online, to try and find out...**

F: That's where I picked it up, then. No one's come forward? Ah. I've got a list of all the pubs from Tewkesbury Road all the way up to the brewery. I've got a list of them, A-Z of all the pubs, and he'll say, 'You've missed out so-and-so,' because how many were in the high street?

MM: Oh, I don't know. I can't remember.

F: There were so many.

MM: This is quite right when it says here, Chris, about this.

**I: The last one, yes?**

MM: Yes. "(Unclear 0:17:37) shared, and the shop was a pleasure and did leisure when the shopkeepers and customers cared." That really was what the Lower High Street was all about. The people in the shops cared about the people that lived around them. It was a community in its own right.

**I: We've had people write in and say that it was very much like a self-contained village in a way.**

MM: It was indeed.

**I: If that's right, and I completely believe it, this area, even back then you said at the start had a reputation for being a rough end of town, a poor end of town.**

MM: Yes.

**I: Was it as rough as people from outside believed it was? Was it dangerous? Say someone who lived on the promenade came for a walk.**

MM: It was dangerous.

**I: Really?**

MM: Yes. You could say it was dangerous.

**I: In what way?**

MM: There were a lot of houses that were let for people to have rooms in. No disrespect, there were a lot of Irish there. There was a lot of booze in there in The Shakespeare. There was a lot of fighting down there. That would be a Saturday night. It wouldn't be every night.

F: You had a lot of conflict between the Nags Head and The Sun, didn't you?

MM: No. It wasn't conflict between the pubs. It was about the people that went in there. I would say 'dangerous' is a bit too strong a word. I would say unsafe at times.

**I: Any more unsafe than any other parts of the town on a Saturday night?**

MM: It's difficult. You're talking about the 50s.

F: Let me put it this way, at my age, my dad would say, 'You don't go down as far as... gas works is your limitation. You never go anything lower.'

MM: That's Dockem, dear. That's not Lower High Street.

F: And to the bottom end of town. You've always got to go up and catch the bus and go to the prom.



MM: The middle of town. Unsafe at times. Yes. I'm not going to be more derogatory than that, I don't think. I'm not going to say it was violent.

**I: It was just the result of people having a few too many?**

MM: Yes.

**I: A lot of people have said that there were a lot of punch-ups and drunken fights.**

MM: There were a lot of pubs down there as well.

**I: That's another thing I've heard that nearly every street having a pub either end nearly.**

MM: That's dead right.

F: I can always email you the list.

**I: That'll be good to see, actually.**

MM: Other than that, I think people got along with it, you know? People knew their limitations in respect of you didn't argue too much down there.

**I: Also, because I suppose you had a lot more people living in the area, there were always eyes on the street.**

MM: That is perfectly right. There were always eyes on the street. Yes. There was never any vandalism to the shops.

F: You were never allowed out. Your dad wouldn't let you out late at night, though, would he?

MM: Well, no, that's usual, that is, love, being brought up as a kid. Other than that, I wouldn't go as far as to say anybody would be frightened to go out. They would go out but they'd be careful.

**I: What about when you left the area then? Did you feel that you were treated differently for being from that part of town?**

MM: Not at all. No. The people that I've met since that were moved on from there, and the '60s was a big time then because they literally flattened Tewkesbury Road, which was Dockem, and they put all these other places up which you see today. They moved on from there and they've never felt that. They've never felt, 'Ooh, I came from Dockem,' whatever. A lot of people are proud to come from Dockem.

**I: Yes. We've spoken to...**

MM: Yes. I bet they have been. I've had a bit of pride with the people that I've met down there. I couldn't take that away from anybody.

**I: So you mentioned the '60s as a period when things started to change perhaps a bit?**

MM: That's right, yes.

**I: In what ways did it begin to change?**

MM: More people were coming to the area. The building then started to lift off really. I would say that they literally, although the houses and cottages were down in Dockem small but what with the houses and the flats they built, they literally, I would say, put a third of the population onto it, which made the area a bit busier, and it became a little bit easier to shop there because people back in the '50s, I suppose they didn't have the money to buy the stuff into their shops and whatever and to get the people in there as well at the same time, I would think. As it gradually took off, then the Lower High Street started to pick up again. Then, during the '70s and '80s, and of course the transport system has killed it really now, to be honest. It's killed that area. Well, the area from... not to Dixies Corner as they call it, but up as far as... well, you can see the traffic lights that pull away can't you from the bridge up to there and round the back? A lot of character shops went when they did that.

**I: I suppose a lot of people began to move out when the new housing...**

MM: That is right.

**I: You could get a bigger house.**

MM: You've got it.

**I: Some of the houses are really small in that area, aren't they?**

MM: Very small, yes. One and a half up and one down.

F: That's why he's kept the back of the shop and have tenants in. He doesn't want to change anything.

**I: So you still own that building?**

MM: Yes. I still own it.

**I: So what number is it there?**

MM: 446 it is now. It used to be 255 if you want to go back on the history of it a bit more.

**I: Because they changed the numbers, didn't they?**

MM: They did. That was in the '50s when they changed that, I believe. About '58, '59 I think they changed that.

**I: You rent it out as residential now?**

MM: The residential at the back, yes. There are two bedrooms here and a long garden. In 1800 it was a market garden there.

F: It dates back to 1632.

MM: All the rest was added onto it.

- F: And the solicitor lost the deeds.
- MM: No, the bank lost the deeds.
- I: **1632?**
- F: 1632 it said and you can just about kind of read the writing because it's all in old English.
- I: **You don't have this anymore?**
- F: No. The bank lost them, didn't they? It's registered obviously with the Land Registry. It's definitely 1632.
- I: **One of the other things I wanted to ask you about, and this is a more open-ended question that's more your opinion basically because obviously you volunteered kindly to come and talk about your experiences in the area. Why do you think it's important for the history of an area like that to be known or for people to learn about it? Why do you think the history of this area matters?**
- MM: Because it's the oldest part of Cheltenham. I think that's the most important. It was the closest you'll ever get to a community of its own. I don't think you'll ever see a community like that ever again with all these massive stores and whatever.
- F: Was it mentioned in that book you read about Cheltenham?
- MM: Oh yes.
- F: He'd got a book on Cheltenham.
- MM: I had my thought going there.
- F: Sorry.
- MM: My train of thought's gone now.
- I: **You were saying it's important because it's the oldest part and there was a vibrant community there.**
- MM: That's right.
- I: **Cheltenham's not famous for that area, is it?**
- MM: No. It's for regency and the bloody pigeons. That's right, yes.
- I: **And the spas.**
- F: The water.
- MM: That's right.

- F: The town hall and the Pump Rooms. That's what you think of Cheltenham as don't you?
- MM: Yes. I've often thought, when the Civil War was on, and they marched through from Old Bath Road for the Battle of Tewkesbury, and when they came down...
- I: **By the way, just to let you know, my colleague there is a Civil War specialist.**
- MM: 1640-1641. They had the Battle of Tewkesbury, didn't they?
- E: Yes.
- MM: The army came down on the old A40, I believe, and they came down through Old Bath Road in Cheltenham here and they had to get to Bollington because the road to Tewkesbury as we know it wasn't there. They had to go round the back end of Bollington to get into Tewkesbury. The population of Cheltenham then was 300-and-something but the army was 3,000-and-something. So what the people of Cheltenham thought, a 300 population seeing 3,000 with these pikes and muskets going down through the town of Cheltenham I haven't got a clue. It must have been absolutely incredible, mustn't it? It's a lovely book. I don't know it might be interesting to you. I'm trying to think of her name.
- F: It's all about Cheltenham.
- MM: If I can find it, what I'll do I'll give you one. I've got two. I was very lucky.
- I: **We could have a look at it. We'll give it back to you.**
- MM: Are you sure?
- I: **Yes. Do you have any photos of your time growing up in the area?**
- MM: None. No. None whatsoever.
- I: **Another thing we're doing is we're trying to collect people's memories through their photographs.**
- F: You can ask your daughter if she's got anything up in the loft, couldn't you?
- MM: I'm sure I haven't got any. Not of that area.
- I: **So when did you leave?**
- MM: I was 20 I think. Was I 21? 22?
- I: **So mid-late '60s?**
- MM: Yes. '69 I moved out.
- I: **So in the years since, it's obviously a long time since you left, how do you feel and obviously you still own property there. How do you feel about what the area is like now?**

MM: Very disappointed.

F: I don't want to get on my soap box.

I: **In what way?**

MM: I think more could have been done with it. I think it could have been saved back in the '60s. From there, I think the transport systems and the other things that came into being, with Cheltenham Borough councils and whatever. I think it was let go and it fell into disrepair.

F: It was cut-off from the (ph 0:29:38) *lights*, wasn't it?

MM: People lost interest and people did move out and the shops that were there, shops that came there are now gone, and it's going into residential, as you know. You see it now in all the other shops now will be coming back into residential. Commercial property's not worth anything anyway down there. I can't see a future. You were saying on the way over regeneration. I don't know where the regeneration will be. I think it's literally a certain point I think you've got to say, 'It should be flattened.' It's a horrible thing to say. I regret saying 'flattened'. I'm going to be honest with you. I think that there's nothing really that can be done to bring it back ever.

F: There are so many eating places of different nationalities.

I: **You can see that it's a shabbier end of town. It does look more run-down. Then again, all you need to do is if you peel back behind that surface and you can see that a lot of the buildings are old shops, because you can see old shop windows. You mentioned how far back, how old some of those parts and some of the alleyways, you can tell that they've got medieval origins.**

MM: That's right.

I: **Like if you look at the alleyway going into Normont Terrace.**

MM: Exactly.

I: **Some of the buildings still have the Corpus Christi symbol. I still think more can be done to preserve it in such a way.**

MM: I hope you're right.

F: So do I.

I: **It seems, from the history, that the area has undergone many regenerations and they've never really kind of taken off. That's why I was interested to ask you about your feelings of it now. It sounds like the reputation it has now, and you're from another part of Cheltenham.**

F: I'm from (ph 0:31:57) *Rome Field*. There's the high street. I'd be over there, wouldn't I? Yes. It was flats. That was the new council house buildings in the late '50s that just got built. That's when Hesters Way got built. I used to walk

across all the rubble to get to school. If he did want it flattened, he would have sold the shop by now. He hasn't sold that shop.

MM: I won't sell it.

F: He won't sell it. I just think it's the anchor for the Mudway family.

MM: It's for the kids as well, isn't it? They can do what they like with it.

F: It was his 54 years of hairdressing. Well, barbering.

MM: That's more like the word, dear. Barbering, yes.

F: He hates the word 'hairdressing'. Yes. And working with his father, with the marquees, wasn't it, down there? I think to myself, if he felt there was nothing left down there he would have sold it. The one person you may need to email, which I think you may get some good rapport from, is Ian, isn't it? Ian Coley. Although he's moved around to (ph 0:33:13) *Oversford*, but he was there how many years with the fishing shop?

MM: About 40 years. He wasn't there in the '50s.

F: Beg your pardon. I thought he was.

MM: He wasn't there until 1970s.

I: **That's alright. We've probably reached our limit for what we can do before this exhibition in June, but there's certainly room to do more stuff. Also, because we're hoping the exhibition is not just that you come and look at something, but we're going to allow people to actually share more stories and memories there.**

MM: Fair comment.

I: **Okay. I'll stop it there for now.**

(End of recording)