

Northern Soul Scene Project
Andy Smith (AS) interviewed by Jason Mitchell (JM)
Date: 6th August 2020

JM: And that kind of gives us a level and then I sort of move it around a bit so I can hear your voice.

AS: Alright, okay

JM: And so the date is the 6th August today.

AS: Yeah, yeah.

JM: And my name is Jason Mitchell, I'm the interviewer and you are

AS: Andy Smith.

JM: Smudge, could you spell spell that for me?

AS: SMUDGE

JM: Okay. And Andy Smith is just ANDY SMITH?

AS: Yeah, common or garden.

JM: And Smudge, is that the name you're known as?

AS: Smudge, everybody calls me Smudge.

JM: Oh okay, we'll get to that later, yeah?

AS: Yeah.

JM: And where were you born?

AS: I was born in Peterborough.

JM: Yeah.

AS: On 10th May 1958.

JM: Perfect, great stuff. So, what I'd like to start with is ... um ... just sort of like ... it's a really broad question and as you speak, what I do is I make notes and I'll come back to things and occasionally, if you mentioned someone, I will ask you just to spell their name because obviously, that's quite important that we get their name clearly. And

AS: Yeah.

JM: So just tell me a little bit about your introduction to northern soul?

AS: Well, I think everybody's got the same format, as the same background is that you don't get into northern soul, you start by taking baby steps into Tamla Motown and basic soul records and you sort of progress into northern soul. I've always been a big Motown fan and still am, then you're ... you're introduced to obscurities, that are records that are Motown sounding, they've got that same beat, you can understand the words, you can sing along to them. They make you tap your feet, click your fingers and the first time that I was really introduced to that was via a guy that you've already interviewed, Steve Allen.

JM: Yeah.

AS: Steve Allen used to do lots and lots of gigs around the around the town round Peterborough at the time, and one that was local to me in Stanground was the Whittle Way pub.

JM: Right.

AS: Which he used to do on a regular basis. And there was a few older guys there that were sort of more into the soul music than I was at the time and, and one in particular came up to me and he mentioned three records. He said, I've just asked Steve Allen for three records. He said you'll never get them. And that was ... that was the impetus really, and I made it a point to track down those three records at the time and within a week to 10 days, I'd got those three records and just out of interest, it was Sam and Kitty, "I've got Something Good", "The Right Track" and the record by the Poets, by the American poets, "She Blew a Good Thing" and I suppose that was the start.

JM: Yeah.

AS: And it just became infectious.

JM: So it was ... sorry, the name of the pub was?

AS: It was the Whittle Way. That was WHITTLE WAY in Central ... Central Square in Stanground.

JM: And how old were you when you went to this event?

AS: Well, of course, you're not supposed to go into pubs until you're 18, are you? I was probably about 14 or 15.

JM: Fourteen, fifteen. Did you go ... I mean ... so, when you say you sort of just turned ... you went to this pub, The Whittle Way, I mean, did you go with friends ... how did it come about?

AS: Yeah, yeah, no, no, it was ... it was a regular do that Steve Allen used to put on and I went with a group of friends. I was probably the youngest, actually, because some of the older lads had already been going to regular soul dos. Again, Steve Allen will tell you, or from past interviews, he put on people like Jimmy Ruffin and that sort of thing in the town. And ... and these older guys had attended those and I was keen, you know.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: So, I was hanging around with guys that that were older than me. And to be fair I did at the time, I did look older than I was. So getting into these places wasn't too much of a problem. As I say, that was the start of it but then I started to delve deeper and find out more, more of the records and then I was sort of put in touch with a ... probably the country's leading record dealer at the time, a guy from King's Lynn called John Anderson, a Scottish chap who sadly passed away about a year ago. And my older brother used to do a wholesale breadround for the Co op.

05:27

JM: Right?

AS: He ... he ... his routes was through Peterborough, Thorney, yada, yada, yada and ended up in King's Lynn where John Anderson had his shop. So every ... every Saturday morning I used to get up about half-past three, four o'clock. I used to go with my brother, end up at King's Lynn while my brother was in the car across the road in Norfolk Street in King's Lynn, I used to go and see John Anderson and I got very, very friendly with John Anderson, and he supplied me with an awful lot of records and

JM: Ah, I'm just gonna ...

AS: Not ... sorry?

JM: So yeah, I'm just gonna ... that's gonna ... I'm just gonna bring you back to that point there. So I just want to do two things, so first of all, it's just intriguing. You went on this milk round ...

AS: No, no, it was a bread round. He had a wholesale bread round so it was taking bread to the shops as opposed to people's houses. He was taking them to shops. His route was from Peterborough ...

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AS: Into Eye, into Thorney then to Sutton Bridge, Terrington, Terrington St Clements and his last drop was the Co-op in King's Lynn in Norfolk Street.

JM: What did you travel in?

AS: Sorry?

JM: What did you travel in?

AS: It was an old ... it was an old BMC van, a Luton ... a Luton style van.

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AS: Three and a half tonne van, it was a bit antiquated, rickety and, but it was Saturday morning, I'd got no school and I was gonna get some records, you know.

JM: Brilliant, so you were in this bread van, going off and that's brilliant.

AS: Yeah.

JM: Now, I'm just gonna hold you back so the Whittle Way pub ... can you remember... can you ... because obviously I've ... I've heard about that from Steve Allen from one side of it? Can you remember what it was like to go in there? What was the atmosphere of it like?

AS: Well, the ... the atmosphere ... it was always full, it was always packed and it wasn't necessarily packed with soul people, it was ... it was packed with anybody that wanted a Saturday night out, a good time. And there are a lot of people that appreciated the soul side of it, Motown etc and Steve Allen was a very good advocate of that because with Steve Allen, solo and reggae is his passion anyway.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: And Steve Allen's a very, very good DJ and obviously well-known promoter. It was always full, it was always difficult to get a drink at the bar. The bar staff were overworked. And it was ... it was just a good night out. But one thing that I do recall is that dancers, because it had a dance floor, dancers were predominantly the girls.

JM: Oh really?

AS: Yeah, at these ... at that type of that ... that type of do, later on it became more male or more integrated, but at that particular time, it was guys were more standing there staring at the girls, drinking and having a laugh. And it wasn't until later in the night when I suppose people were more well-oiled for want of a better term that the guys then ventured onto the dance floor. They ... they plucked up courage to speak to a girl and actually dance with a girl because the music would then turn to smooches and guys could do smooches.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: But that's just soul, that's not the northern soul. When the northern soul started to kick in, then things became a bit more vibrant and ... and guys used to dance as well, and they weren't bothered what they ... what they looked like on the dance floor as long as they were into the music, as long as they were feeling the vibe I suppose.

JM: So at this time, would you say that you were more of a participant? Were you a record collector or a person that went.....?

AS: Well, at the early days, it was ... it was a bit of both. I was more interested in the records generally and then as time went on, because at that particular time as well, I was DJing. A friend and myself, we had a mobile, a bit like Steve Allen really and we used to do various schools and parties and weddings and various functions so buying the records, not necessarily soul records, but records generally was ... was what I did. But then as I got more into the soul music via Tamla Motown and Atlantic Stax, and then it got more into northern soul and that was predominantly in the direction that I went, hence travelling to see John Anderson at King's Lynn because that guy was supplying all the ... all the better northern soul records. He was one of the first guys to go over to America and find unknown records. As I say, he was ... he was a really nice guy. Once you got to know the guy, he was really nice.

10:49

JM: Yeah.

AS: But he took a little bit of getting ... getting to know and getting his trust before he would start to bring out the tunes.

JM: Describe it. If I first met him, if I had first met him, how would I ... how would you ... what would it be like?

AS: If you'd met John for the first time in those early days in the '70s, John was ... his appearance was far and away removed from a general conception of a soul person. John had bell-bottom trousers, cheese cloth shirt, open ... open half-way down to the waist, long hair, a droopy tash, a bit like ... who was that private eye on the television drove the red Ferrari?

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JM: Oh Magnum.

AS: Magnum yeah, very, very much in the Magnum mould but skinny ... skinny. He was very tall and thin and he chain-smoked Benson and Hedges and he had josticks burning in the shop. Not the sort of guy that you would associate with soul music but he'd moved from Scotland, he'd moved from near to Glasgow. Why he came to King's Lynn I never asked the question, but the first time I ever met John, he hadn't actually been to America at the time. He was, from what he told me and this ... these are his words, he was saving up for his first trip to America.

JM: Right.

AS: So ... so this this would have been probably about '72 to '73ish something like that, yeah.

JM: Yeah, yeah, nice.

AS: Yeah, a long time ago.

JM: So ... so where to next then? So you've met ... you're on the bread round, and what ... what happens next in your journey?

AS: Well, from ... from my point of view, I started to collect the records as I said earlier, and we, we that's myself and a guy called Gary Spencer and a guy called Steven Jones who were also for Stanground in Peterborough. We decided that we wanted to put a do on in Peterborough.

JM: Yeah.

AS: So what we did is we ... we put on an all-nighter at Stanground Youth Club.

JM: Right?

AS: And we called it The Soul 'Ole.

JM: Yeah.

AS 'ole. The Soul 'ole because on Monday at the youth club, there was a cellar in this youth club, and we used to play our soul, northern soul music there but we decided to expand it. So with ... with the licencing laws and the local education authority and one thing or another, there was no way that they were going to let anybody have an all-night northern soul dance, so we persuaded the youth club leader, a guy called Paul Howard, to help us out and we billed it as far as the Council were concerned as all-night charity dance.

JM: Yeah.

AS: We, we printed the tickets to say just that and we sold all the tickets. I would imagine that there was probably 120, 130 people in the place, which was a lot in that youth club and that youth club at the time had a proper sprung maple dance floor.

JM: Right, lovely.

14:45

AS: It's ... it's been pulled down now, unfortunately it's gone. I think it went. I think they pulled it down about five or six years ago. It's ... it morphed itself in from a youth club because they closed it into a library yada, but they've now pulled it down. Anyway, so we, we employed a couple of other DJs, a guy called Poke, Blair Hayden, who was DJing at Cleethorpes all-nighter at the time and a guy called John Manship, who is probably now the premier record dealer in the country. He wasn't then, he was just one of the boys and when we ... when we needed to pay them at the end of the night, we ... we couldn't go to the youth club leader and say I will need some cash to pay the DJs because as far as he was concerned and everybody else was concerned it was a charity do.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: So what we did was we passed a glass round, and we managed to collect about £10, so we paid Poke £10 and we paid Johnny Manship 10 ... £5, sorry £5 each. And the other thing I did was that whole night, I've got a Philips reel to reel tape ... tape recorder.

JM: Oh, wow.

AS: And I taped the whole night. And it is actually on Mixcloud.

JM: Oh, is it?

AS: Yeah, it is. Yeah. I can ... I can send you a link to it at some point.

JM: Oh, perfect.

AS: If you wanted to hear it because it's got ... it's got some ... it's got some very strange ... some very strange things in it. One that springs to mind and it's probably been mentioned in the past, though it's got no relevance as far as I'm concerned, but I would imagine that you've heard that the northern soul had a big presence of drugs.

JM: Yeah. I like the way everyone, everyone in these interviews ... I absolutely know what's coming because I can hear them. They're filtering in their mind, do they just say it straight out or do they kind of like yeah, yeah, absolutely.

AS: Well I say that because I can say that hand on heart, I never got involved in it. I know lots of the guys that did, a lot of my friends did, but ... but what I was gonna say on this particular night, the youth club leader made piles and piles and piles of sandwiches. Now, anybody that knows anything about anybody that takes speed, the last thing they want to do is eat.

JM: Hmm.

AS: So as a consequence of that, all these sandwiches went into a skip outside. And then in the early hours when people were leaving, they would get dive-bombed with seagulls because the seagulls were mucking about. But on the tape, Poke, I think it's Poke, says sandwiches are now available at the bar. Well, that's not the sort of thing you hear at an all-nighter, you know, just things like that stick in your mind and do make me smile.

JM: Sorry, Poke. Just spell Poke's actual name.

AS: It's Blair, BLAIR

JM: Yeah.

AS: Hayden, HAYDEN.

JM: Thank you for that, perfect.

AS: He's actually comes from Stamford originally. He now lives in Hunstanton.

JM: Oh right.

AS: And you say you've got a recording of that. I mean, I imagine Kate might be in touch with you about possibly being able to use a bit of that on something.

JM: Yeah, that won't ... that won't be a problem. What I'll do is ... is right, basically what happened I lent ... I lent the whole machine to a guy called Mick Cooper who lives in Skegness. Mick Cooper is a radio broadcaster in the area, and one thing and another, and he was ... he was keen to hear it. So I lent him the reel. He then tidied it up a little bit and he put various bits of it on Mixcloud.

JM: Perfect.

AS: So he has sent me the link in the past, but I mean, I can send you the link, but I mean it's my recording, so if you want me to say yes, you can use it, I don't have a problem doing that because it'd be great to hear that because there's obviously a lot of people that haven't heard it.

JM: Yeah.

AS: They've heard about it, but they've never heard it.

JM: That's great. What I'll do is I'll just intervene on this. What I'll do is once we've done this interview, I'll probably send Kate an email just saying that that's a thing because that's a lovely thing. And that's such a brilliant story about the sandwiches, that's just great.

AS: I thought that was unreal.

JM: So how old are you around this time?

AS: While I was still at school, I didn't leave school until I was 16. So I would be about 14 or 15 something along those lines, probably 16. I was still at school, grammar school, so I didn't leave until I was 16 because a lot of the others left a year earlier.

20:02

JM: Yeah and what's really interesting is that, like Steve Allen in his interview, you know, both of you doing quite, I mean, they wouldn't call it entrepreneurial then but, you know, these quite ... these events where you're clearly doing your own thing and making your own events at quite a young age really?

AS: Well, I think ... I think it stems ... it stems from the fact that we, Steve did it in a bigger way than me obviously but ... but we did a mobile so ... so we had all our own equipment and, and it was ... it was just something that we did, but a lot of guys hadn't done it, you know, we sort of like served an apprenticeship because I mean, I ... I started DJing at an early age of 14, probably and I'm still doing it now.

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JM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: You know, so that's ... so we've done ... we've done the all-nighter in Stanground.

JM: Yeah.

AS: Which ...which was quite a ... quite a success and at that all-nighter Poke was there obviously, and quite a few others and one of the places that used to put a record list out was actually Russ Winstanley who started the Casino Club.

JM: Yeah.

AS: And the lists that he put out were from his ... his market stall and how old are you, Jason?

JM: Fifty three.

AS: Right. So, right so you ... you remember the old photocopy thing that used to smell of ether, alcohol, but we used to do ... turn a handle at school and it come out like ink?

JM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: I can't remember the name of it but it's got a particular name, hasn't it?

JM: Yeah.

AS: I can't recall. Well, anyway, that how Rusty's lists used to come and so they was like semi-rolled up and they were pushed into a brown envelope and sent out. Well, the first list I received, actually had a membership coupon to join the Casino Club.

JM: Could I just interrupt you, when you say lists, what do you mean by that?

AS: Record lists ... the record lists ... a record list.

JM: Oh, okay.

AS: Yeah. Because people started to do record lists then round about that era, but obviously, there was no internet. So there were a few magazines, you could buy [] they advertise in there, but they ... they would advertise that they would send you a record so you send them a stamped addressed envelope or whatever or send them stamps. They were forward them.

JM: And those are the records that they've got that you could buy.

AS: Yes.

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

AS: Spares, extras.

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

AS: Spares, whatever, but on the ... on the ... on the bottom of one of these lists, there was this application for membership of the Casino Club and I mentioned it to Poke and Poke said, "Oh, see, we ought to go to that. That would be good, wouldn't it?" So I said "Yeah, I should

think so.” So Poke actually sent away for all the memberships for about eight to 10 of us I would imagine.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: And the ... when the memberships came, because you wouldn't get in if you haven't got a membership, and we didn't know what to expect so when the memberships came, we all sort of got together. That was very difficult because there was ... there was no mobile phones, it was use a call box or ring the house or do whatever, but we ... we arranged it so there was a, I think Poke hired it, a small bus, and eight of us went from Stamford, to the Casino Club. That was my first trip to the Casino Club and I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know what was going to happen. When we got there, that area of the country everything is black. All the stonework, the properties is black. It's ... it's not very ... it doesn't look very welcoming. The street was full of, “Soulers” in their long leather coats.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: And bags and bags with their badges on and there was a plethora of accents. People had come from all over the ... all over the country and we were thinking, are we going to get in ... are we going to get in? Because it didn't open till 12 o'clock.

JM: Yeah.

AS: But they had an early session on and because the queue was building and building and building and the pavement was probably only about six feet wide and obviously the police are sort of ... are interested now because they don't know what ... they don't know what's going on.

25:05

JM: Yeah.

AS: And they were sort of patrolling up and down and if you stepped off the pavement, they sort of reprimand you “Get back on the pavement, get back on the pavement”. The queue was building ... building ... building and then they opened the doors to let the people out that were in the early session, whatever may have been on.

JM: Yeah.

AS: Probably nothing, nothing, probably nothing associated with soul whatsoever. Of course, there was a mixing of different people and ... and there was scuffles. I wouldn't say they were fights but there were scuffles. There was definitely some interaction there.

JM: Yeah.

AS: But once all that had calmed down, the doors open for the soulers to go into the Casino, it was two ... two doors that opened. I suppose about six feet, I suppose the opening and ... and this queue was coming from both sides and, and you were squashed. So if you've got a bag and you've got it by your side, chances are you would lose it.

JM: Yeah.

AS: Then you would have ... you would have to wait inside for it to appear at some point. So, as a consequence of that a lot of people used to put their bags on their heads as they walked through and there was a little old lady at the counter and used to give her the money. I think it was a £1 to get in or £1.20 or £1.50 or something like that. And she would give you like a ticket, a cloakroom type, and then then the guy would tear it in half and his feet were sort of ankle deep in torn off stubs. I always remember it was ... it was a very heavy duty, patterned carpet going up the steps and then you went round some more steps to actually go through to the double doors that were on the corner of the dance floor and once you opened those, whether it was minus 10 outside or whatever, once you opened those doors, the heat just hit you, it was ... it was phenomenal and ... and the ... the odour of, I wouldn't say it was sweat but there was a body odour.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: Because there was a ... there was a right conglomeration of different aftershaves and things and people were dancing, they've got like vests on and ... and the music and it was just ... it's difficult ... it's difficult to explain to anybody what the atmosphere was like. And it seemed like within 20 minutes to half an hour that ... that place had 2-2,500 people in it, that dancefloor was full. I don't know if you've seen any films of the Casino

JM: Yeah.

AS: Well, they came later, much later, probably in the '80s when filming cameras were more abundant. In the early days it was ... there were very few pictures taken and I don't think when the cameras were there, it gave a proper reflection of the numbers of people that were actually in the place.

JM: It was said to me that those interviewed those ... those films, made it ... cleaned it up a bit made it look ... it was

AS: Yeah, they did, yeah, they did. It didn't ... it wasn't a reflection of how it actually was, I mean, those films don't show people falling asleep, laying all around the edge of the building inside. With rolled up sheepskins asleep, they don't show you the record bar at the end because they never sold alcohol there. At the start of the night there was ... there was like a bar area which was where you bought your drinks, but it was also the bar where all the record dealers were. And ...and they were all ... all the wooden boxes were the mixers and you know like lemonade and coke and orange juice and ... and you ... you could ... you could buy a cup of tea as well but that was a bit of a joke really because the ... the counter was awash with tea or drink and the sugar bowl was like a massive mixing bowl with a spoon in it and when you put the spoon in, it was like getting a toffee apple, it was an apple on the end of the spoon, it was like getting a toffee apple, it was like an apple on the end of a spoon because it had been used over and over and over again. It didn't show any of that, it didn't show any of the realism. It just showed highlights of people dancing really it did. It's not a true ... and we used to go on a regular basis and I used to travel mainly by car with a guy called Johnny Carroll who was one of the, for want of a better word, one of the men about town. If you knew Johnny Carroll then you was somebody, bless him. He's still alive, I still see him on a regular basis but he's not well now. John had a Cortina, Cortina 1300 that we used to travel to the Casino in and it was ... it was a place where firstly everybody was the same, of the same ilk, it doesn't matter where in the country you came from, we were all in the same boat, we'd got nothing, if that makes sense.

30:39

JM: Yeah.

AS: There no wealthy people, there was ... everybody was ... was the same and it showed ... it showed when you get a venue like that, that ... that that caters for 2,000 people on a Saturday night with a big car park on the side of it and there's probably six cars in there.

JM: Yeah.

AS: You know, nowadays a situation like that, you go to Milton Keynes Bowl or somewhere like that and you get 70,000, but that car park and all the streets around it would be full of cars because everybody's got cars, but people just didn't have cars then. They ... they sort of clubbed together and hired a coach whether they came from Cornwall, Edinburgh, Manchester or they caught the train and they ... they sort of jumped off at stations and didn't buy tickets or, or they hitched a lift because that's ... that's all that they knew. You know, they're paying probably £1.50 to get in. They probably only got three quid in the pocket to start off with.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: So from those times when you went there, can you describe one memorable moment ... time, memorable for all the right reasons and one memorable time which is memorable for maybe reasons you want to forget?

AS: Well, one memorable time was they used to have some live acts on at the Casino, Jackie Wilson, Edwin Starr was a regular but the one night that sticks out in my mind was ... I think it was Betty Wright.

JM: Yeah. Oh yeah.

AS: And that night she came on and the place was absolutely rammed, you ... you could not ... you had to put your arms by your side, you would struggle to pick your arms up and clap. And she was not known as a particular northern soul act. She'd had an album out that got a couple of tracks on that got played for a short time, but she was not like Major Lance or Billy Butler or Eddie Parker or The Chandler's. It was ... she was more of a soul artist, but she was phenomenal that night. And if you speak to anybody that went to the Casino in the early days, they would ... they would either say her or Jackie Wilson.

JM: Yeah.

AS: I didn't ... I didn't see Jackie Wilson. We went to the Casino on the day ... on the night Jackie Wilson was supposed to be on which was May 10th which is actually my birthday, but Jackie Wilson died previously.

JM: Oh well.

AS: So I didn't ... I didn't see Jackie Wilson, and that hurt, I really wanted to see Jackie Wilson. So that's one ... one memorable. I can't ... I can't really associate a bad ... a bad time. There was some strange incidents that occurred.

JM: Like?

AS: Well, as I said to you earlier, we used to go in Johnny Carroll's car and on this one occasion there was more than ... there was more than John and I. There was ... there was Jonah,

Stephen Jones from Peterborough. And another lad, I can't ... I can't recall who the fourth person was and this particular night because Johnny Carroll liked his drugs.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: So John used to take his drugs on a Saturday and he was still at the party on Wednesday, but this particular time he hadn't so he was ... he was feeling a little bit wary. So we were on the way home and this is in the days before satellite ... satellite navigation or anything like that. It was like as the crow flies or follow your nose and we'd pulled on the entrance or pulling on to the M6 I believe. It was near Stoke. What we was doing this Stoke I don't know because we shouldn't have been there, but we pulled down to go onto the motorway and John, he decided that he was tired and we would stop. Now we stopped on the hard shoulder on the slip road and as I said to you earlier at that time, that weren't a lot of cars on the road because people just didn't have the cars, there wasn't that the number of cars on the road, but we stopped. And obviously we all dozed off and the next thing there's a knock on the window and Jonah, opened his eyes "Who is it?" And it was ... it was the police obviously. "What are you doing, what are you doing here?" So, John, John could get points here quite easily so I said "Look, I'm ever so sorry. We've been to the Casino Club, we're travelling back to Peterborough which is about 140 odd miles. We were feeling really, really tired and we thought the safest thing to do was to stop and get some rest." And he took it in, the police officer, and asked us to drive down to the service area, which ... which we did. And everything was okay. So that was another incident which could have turned ... But one thing which has just sprung to mind, when we used to go to the Casino down the M6, we always used to stop at Knutsford.

JM: Yeah.

AS: And on this particular occasion, Knutsford has now changed because they've got a cafe, both sides. But when we used to go to the Casino on the northbound, that was only a car park so used to have to go up the steps across the bridge to the cafe on the southbound side. So we've gone up and over and as we've walked into the cafeteria, who's sitting there, but the whole of the Manchester United Football Team?

JM: Oh wow.

AS: All except Georgie Best though, there was Denis Law, Pat Crerand and Morgan was there, Alex Stepney, Nobby Stiles. They were all there except George Best. And they all spoke to us.

JM: Wow.

AS: So that was quite memorable as well.

JM: Yeah. So that's brilliant, that's all brilliant. And can we ... let's ... let's ...let's ... let's move ourselves back to Peterborough in terms of

AS: Okay.

JM: And you're out and about, you're going up to the Casino, what's happening in Peterborough at this time and when do you start to interact with the Peterborough scene?

AS: Right, well ... well, Peterborough has always been pretty vibrant on the soul scene and most ... most of the pubs in the town did play soul ... soul ... soul music. There was the Great

Northern Hotel. There was the Carousel, which was the Wirrina, which was on a Tuesday night. Strange it was half past six till 10 o'clock. That was packed, rammed. Everybody had to be out by 10 and then Paul Donnelly that you interviewed earlier, he put this idea about having an all-nighter. Said "Yeah, yeah, but ... but we're not going to get it, Paul, because the licencing laws will not allow you to have an all-night do within two miles of the Cathedral".

JM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: So you have to go to court to get a licence and anyway, so he's ... he's got quite friendly with another mobile roadshow called Rockhopper Roadshows, which was a guy called Dave Mindham. And they, how they did it I don't know, but they got round the manager of the Wirrina, a guy called Andy Giles and he allowed them to put this all-nighter on. So the DJs for the first night were myself, Paul, Jonah, Gary Spencer, might have been John Venson from Sheffield, I can't ... I can't remember the exact line up, you know, it was and I said, I said to Paul, "How many people do you think we're going to get in Paul?" He said, "Be nice to get a couple of hundred in wouldn't it?" Eleven hundred people that first night.

JM: Wow.

AS: There was coaches outside. We thought that this queue of people when we got off the bus and walked across, down towards the Wirrina, we thought they were queuing up for the ... for the wrestling you see, because next door used to have wrestling matches, didn't they?

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AS: But no, they were for the soul night. I think ... I think Paul, if you have spoken with Paul ...

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AS: ... he would probably tell you the same thing. I think they turned ... I think they turned away about 200, but, yeah, and that's ... that's how it went, but I think the local licencing authorities cottoned on to it because Paul and Pete only put five on and then they were stopped. Somebody did take it on afterwards and carry on but they were ... they were never as successful.

40:10

JM: Right.

AS: A couple of ... a couple of times we had to overspill into the ... into the like the sports arena, where they used to do the five-a-side, but that had got a stone dance floor, so it wasn't as good atmosphere. But there was ... there was probably ... probably 15 or 1,600 people in there. And again, it's ... it's on the map as part of northern soul history, like the Casino like Cleethorpes, St Ives, Peterborough is there.

JM: And you were DJing predominantly on these events?

AS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. As I said to you earlier, because I got quite friendly with John Anderson, I used to, I wouldn't say I got preferential treatment, but I got better treatment than a lot and I had access to most of the tunes and from my point of view and fairly mercenary, a guy called Ken Cox was a promoter, a bit like Steve Allen, he used to put anything and everything on but he got involved in northern soul and he started putting soul dos on at

Kettering and Bourne and St Ives and John and I went to Bourne one night to attend one of these dos and the doors opened and John and I were near the front of the queue and Ken Cox said, "Has anybody got any records because the DJs haven't turned up yet?" So John said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, Smudge has got some". So I went in and played the first hour at Bourne and Ken paid me and that was my first acquaintance with some of the country's top northern soul DJs at the time, John Vincent who was at the Casino Club, a guy called Frank, Ian Dewhurst who was also at the Casino Club and Soul Sam, Martin Barnfather, who has been life-long friends since.

JM: Yeah.

AS: But ..

JM: When were

AS: Shortly ...

JM: Go on, sorry.

AS: No, you carry on. What were you going to say?

JM: I was going to say, what was it like, I mean, just really ... 'cos I'm thinking about Peterborough really. When you were up there, at the Worrina, in these first events, the ones you say ... suggest were the kind of core events, what was the atmosphere like, what was it like ... I mean, I know it's not the scene now and it's a different environment but

AS: It was ... it was very ... it was very much of that ilk, Jason. It was a packed atmosphere, the records ... that's what I was getting to, the records ... about the records because northern soul has got a sort of a hierarchy and if you've got original vinyl and you've got the best tunes, you attract the best audience.

JM: Yeah.

AS: Yeah. And that's what we were doing at Peterborough. We were playing records in Peterborough before they even got to the Casino.

JM: Oh right.

AS: We found some of them, not so much found that's the wrong word, we broke the records on the scene. You know, we introduced them on to the ... to the masses as it were and that's what Peterborough was like. It was ... it was one of the front ... it was one of the first soul dos out there to play a lot of these records. It's a job to explain, it was an exciting era, it was an exciting atmosphere, everybody was coming up to the stage trying to see what the records were and "Cor, that's brilliant, Smudge, where did you get that?", you know, "Is it rare?", you know. That's ... that's ... Paul will tell you the same, that's just how it was. It sort of gave you a feeling of euphoria really, it was unreal, absolutely unreal and if you talked to anybody that went to the Peterborough all-nighters, I don't think anybody would give it bad press.

JM: Yeah. I mean obviously when you went away to other venues ... I suppose one of the things you're saying if I'm right is that maybe people think of Peterborough northern soul as a sort of, you know, a small chain carefully attached to the much bigger chains of the things, you know, that you see ...

AS: Yeah, yeah.

JM: But actually you're saying it was actually more instrumental in the development of northern soul.

AS: Well it ... it was in the ...in this area, in East Anglia I suppose and as far as the Midlands, because there was ... there was a void between Cambridgeshire, East Anglia and the Midlands because then it was ... it was the north. I mean having northern soul dos in the south and in London was unheard of at the time because it didn't happen. I mean it's now infiltrated everywhere throughout the country and abroad, everywhere but, yeah, Peterborough was ... was a link in the chain at the time.

45:19

JM: Yeah.

AS: And I suppose realistically you've got to thank Paul for his insight there, his stubbornness and going against the grain which again is Paul, that's what Paul does, you know. Nice guy, well-mannered and he's got a lot of ideas and he generally puts them into practice.

JM: Where did the term northern soul actually come from in terms of ...?

AS: Well, that's ... that's debatable as well because if you read ... if you read the books, the northern soul history books, a guy called Dave Godin who was a record entrepreneur, dealer, producer, finder, the original member of the Motown Appreciation Society, he's from London, Soho area somewhere like that, he actually went up north whether it was the Casino or wherever and he used the term northern soul and allegedly it stuck. Whether that's true or not I don't know. Dave Godin's not about to ask now so ... difficult to know. Where ... where do any nicknames come from?

JM: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

AS: You know, there's a lot of hearsay about a lot of these things so I really can't say but I've always known it as northern soul.

JM: So the Wirrina and you're doing the five events and they happened, where to next?

AS: Where to next? Well I was ... I was actually doing St Ives as well which I was leading up to. This guy, Ken Cox, asked me to play some records at Bourne, the following week I was due to play in King's Lynn. Johnny Carroll came round to pick me up because as I said I didn't drive at the time, wasn't old enough to have a car and we set off and we're not going to King's Lynn. "No" he said, "Ken Cox has rung, he was impressed with you at Bourne and he wants you to do Kettering for him". So I do this do at Kettering for him, great success and then Ken Cox started to put on the all-nighters at St Ives at the Burgess Hall and I did that for Ken Cox for nearly two years and Ken Cox used to pay then so this would be during that time I actually left school, passed my test and got a car so it would be '74, '75. Yeah?

JM: Yeah.

AS: I passed my test on the 11th of the 11th '75. I failed on the 10th of the 10th and passed on the 11th of the 11th. And he used to pay £25 an hour. If you put that into real terms, my Dad at the time was an engineer/storeman at Newells, the toolmakers, and his basic pay for a week's work was £18.

JM: For a week's work?

AS: For a week's work so 25 quid an hour and when you did the all-nighters for Ken Cox you did two hours, not straight off, you did an hour at the start and an hour at the end. We mixed it up. I was a resident with a guy called Brian Ray and then he brought in guest DJs, Ginger ... Ginger and Eddie, Soul Sam, John Vincent, Tony Dellar but I did every ... every one of them for two years so as a consequence of that I was loaded. And I was able to buy more records and everything I earned went on records until about 1978,'79 and then what happened is that the bootleg scene got really, really bad. Every time you would find an unknown record and you would play it out, the bootleggers would get hold of it, some way, shape or form and they'd bootleg it so something you'd probably paid £8 for which doesn't sound much now but £8 then was a substantial amount of money.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: You could go and buy it for 60 pence and I thought I'd had enough of this, you try to keep the top of your game and spending every penny trying to do that and somebody's spoiling it every week so I came out of St Ives and went into the foyer and I opened my record box and I said "Right, everything's for sale" and I sold every record I had in that box and I sold the box that night as well. And I never set foot into a northern soul venue again until about 1984 and then we start all over again, don't we?

50:15

JM: Well, that's quite dramatic, I mean in a sense it's a bit like similar in terms of like what Paul talked about his leaving the northern soul scene quite abruptly after, you now, and that's quite ... it's a similar sort of ... it's like a relationship isn't it?

AS: We just packed each other in, yeah, yeah, we just got divorced, yeah.

JM: Did you make a lot of money selling your records?

AS: Well, in real terms then, no. If I'd still got those records now

JM: Yeah.

AS:then, yes, making a lot of money I would have. Records are going for thousands of pounds.

JM: So on reflection you now go it was a slightly hasty decision?

AS: Well, yeah, it's all hindsight. If everybody had the gift of hindsight then everybody would be wealthy, wouldn't they?

JM: Yeah.

AS: We'd have a cure for cancer and everything, you know what I mean so, yeah, it's, as I say I started to get involved again. Again it was quite by accident and it revolves around John Anderson. I got married and I got a couple of young children and on Sunday mornings I used to take the boys out in the back of the car and I used to go and see my friend, Gary Spencer, who I mentioned earlier. He lived in Yaxley and this one particular day, I managed to get hold of John Anderson's latest list and I took it there just for old times' sake and I showed

Gary, “Cor blimey, I’m gonna buy that, I’m gonna buy that, I’m gonna buy that” and he did and within a few months Gary was one of the premier DJs on the northern soul in this country and I used to accompany him up and down the country. It was nothing, it was nothing to go to Carlisle for a night out.

JM: Where did you go ... so northern soul has moved on here ... Casino’s not happening am I right in thinking that?

AS: The Casino was closed ... the Casino was closed. That closed about 1983 I think it was but I’d stopped going by then because Cleethorpes had started.

JM: Yeah.

AS: And Cleethorpes was in my mind a better venue. It was tidier, I mean, the Casino Club was an old building, the toilets were always flooded, it smelt and the Cleethorpes just seemed a more clinical environment. It wasn’t but it just appeared that way and not only that, because it was nearer home, it was easier to get to and there was more people I knew there.

JM: Yeah. So would I be right in saying that ... no, I won’t say that. In terms of Peterborough, you ... kind of ... you’re DJing at St Ives, you sort of come to a hasty end there and then ... and then ... have you sort of left the Peterborough scene?

AS: No, no, no, no, no, no. About ... where are we now ... I started DJing again and I DJ’d in various clubs down the town here, I did The Fleet a few times.

JM: Yeah.

AS: St Neots, Cambridge, Chesterfield, all the Nottingham venues and then it would be almost 20 years ago on the local radio station I heard they advertised a soul do starting up at the Parkway Club in Peterborough. I didn’t know the guy who was putting it on but I forget whose radio station was on, but there was a competition ... there was a soul-related question to win two passes so I answered the question and I won the tickets. So my wife and I turned up and the guy who was putting it on, I didn’t know, he introduced himself and he said to me, “I’d like you to DJ here for me” and I’ve done that with Martin, the guy was Martin Calderbank, I’ve done that with Martin now for every two months for nearly 20 years. This June during lockdown would have been our twentieth anniversary.

JM: Just tell me about the Parkway Club, tell me where it is and what it’s like.

54:58

AS: The Parkway Club is probably the best function room in the town at this present moment in time. It’s ... it’s the only one I believe that’s got a sprung dance floor, it’s got a proper stage area. It’s a nice club. In the early days we used to get in excess of 300 in there. We don’t do that now. If we get 150 to 180 in there now, it’s a good night. That’s plenty, don’t get me wrong, 300 is an uncomfortable night, 150 to 160 is a good night and everybody has a good time. Martin supplies the sound equipment, all I do is just turn up and play my records for an hour along with a couple of other guests. Again it’s hot and sweaty generally. It’s just ... it’s just a nice venue and it’s a friendly, warm, welcoming venue. Never any trouble. Northern soul dos are not known for trouble or violence or fighting or anything like that, pretty relaxed and I think if you ... if you attended one of the bigger nights and saw some of the animals that get there, you wouldn’t want to start fighting anyway. Some of them are pretty intimidating.

JM: So just as a ... looking at the time and just thinking, we've got about an hour's worth which is perfect ... you've kind of brought it nicely around to the Parkway and so, just describe the atmosphere there when you DJ and tell me a little bit about what ... what you miss about the more, shall we say, compact DJing that you did before?

AS: What ... what ... what do I miss? That's ... that's probably an unfair question.

JM: Oh, okay.

AS: Because, not for any other reason and it's a purely selfish. I shall be 63 next birthday. I've been doing this since I was 14, well just before I was 14 apart from a two or three years break. I'm getting to the point now where a lot of politics have got involved in ... in the scene, in the northern soul scene, not just in Peterborough but across the scene generally. Going back to the early days, if you DJ'd on the northern soul scene, you had real records, they were the first cut records, they were the records you would have bought in the shops at that particular time and over the years it's got predominantly worse. The bootleggers have got involved and you can just ... just to get you an example. If I ... if I went out and did a DJ set wherever, there would probably be about £70,000 or £80,000 worth of records played.

JM: Umm.

AS: In my hour. But you can buy those records from bootleggers at £10 each so say you play 20 to 22 records in an hour, that's less than £200 and everywhere now, northern soul dos are springing up for want of a better word, imitation DJs.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

AS: And it's diluted the scene very, very badly. There's people getting older, there's less and less people going out, people have got grandchildren that they spend time with, people are retiring, moving abroad and spending time taking holidays as opposed to going to soul dos. Don't get me wrong, there's still a pretty good crowd but it's diluted, it's not the same place. Getting back to what I was saying earlier, I'm 63, I'm getting to the point now where I don't know if I want to be involved in it any more.

JM: Umm.

AS: I know that sounds a bit sad but I've had a lifetime of it now and I'm getting to the point now where I think it's time to enjoy life.

JM: Yeah.

AS: Yeah. So that's where we are in my lifetime.

JM: That's good. I'm gonna leave there because I could ask you another question but I actually think that's a nice place to finish.

AS: No, go on, ask me another question, go on, ask me another.

JM: I was going to say will it ... obviously ... I was going to say will you ... were you going to miss it but then it's seems redundant because clearly you will but

Northern Soul Scene Project

Andy Smith (AS) interviewed by Jason Mitchell (JM)

Date: 6th August 2020

AS: Well, I will, yeah but I can't ... I can't say I won't and I'll probably be occasionally envious of people going out there doing it and playing the records. I get a buzz out of playing the records, I really get a buzz and I enjoy doing it.

JM: Okay, great, that's brilliant. That's really brilliant. I'm just going to stop the recording now 'cos we can just chat about what happens now.

The End