

Northern Soul Scene Project

Simon Child (SC) interviewed by Jason Mitchell (JM) on 21st March 2020

JM: And I'll press record now, so we should be getting it. And can you hear me nice and clearly?

SC: Yes, yeah.

JM: Yeah, good. Okay, great stuff. So the first thing I'd just like to just run over just quickly, obviously, you've got two forms which I've sent you, which I sent you by email. One is the one that you're agreeing to participate into...in the project.

SC: Yes.

JM: And the second one is once we've kind of done and dusted and we've finished talking, I kind of will take it as read that...that unless you say to me, "Actually, I don't want you to use this," we're able to use it, and the intention is that it will go into the archive at the city. And obviously, the only tricky thing, I suppose, with that is that...that it's a phone interview and whether they...whether that's a bit odd, but that's a bit...that's a bit past my knowledge of archiving.

SC: Yeah.

JM: Um, okay, so the first thing I'll do I'll just...today's date is the 21st of March 2020. I'm interviewing you and my name's Jason Mitchell. And if I could have your first name, if that's possible?

SC: Simon.

JM: And could you spell it?

SC: S I M O N.

JM: That's perfect. And your surname?

SC: Child. C H I L D.

JM: Perfect. And it's...it's a telephone interview and it's for the Northern Soul Peterborough Project, which is being run by Jumped Up Theatre. And, first of all, where were you born?

SC: Pudsey, Leeds.

JM: Oh, right. And...and if you don't mind me asking, when were you born?

SC: 1959.

JM: Okay, that just helps us, obviously, get some context in terms of the, sort of, rough age you were when you went to these places etc.

SC: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, exactly.

JM: And just...were you...have you been known by any other previous names?

SC: No.

JM: And on the Northern Soul scene, did you have a nickname?

SC: No.

JM: [Chuckles]

SC: Simon. Simon were quite a rare name then.

JM: Oh, right.

SC: There were only a couple of Simons. So yeah, it's just Simon.

JM: Yeah. It's just sometimes... 'cause obviously if we do an interview, and then someone refers to someone and it's a nickname, then unless we, kind of, asked that question we don't, kind of, link the two together.

SC: Yeah.

JM: So what I'll do is, we'll just...we'll just set off with a kind of very broad question, and then...and then, sort of, I just sort of make notes and actually, I'm just reaching... I'm just gonna...be a rustling 'cause I'm just gonna get myself another piece of paper. I just make notes and I just sort of pick up on things you say. And then kind of, yeah, we'll kind of just get through it in that way. That's perfect. So, erm, d'you want to...could you just start by just telling me about - I'm going to call it a relationship – but, sort of, your...your relationship and experience, telling me about your relationship and experience with Northern Soul.

SC: Yeah. Well, with...it's always with me all...all me life, it's part of me...me psyche, it's always with me. But it started off – d'you want me to tell you how it happened?

JM: Yeah, go for it, yeah, yeah.

SC: Yeah. I were brought up in a large... with a large family with older brothers and sisters. So when I was about seven, I 'ad a sister who was a mod - this was in the late '60s. 'Ad a brother, two sisters - one was a mod – and I 'ad an older brother, and 'e was a rocker, as they called 'em then, which were like a biker boy. Every...every bedroom had music coming out wiv' it. Me sister, I favoured their music, which were Tamla Motown. Me sister also 'ad other recording artists, very commercial stuff, like Felice Taylor - she were popular. And then when I 'eard this music I just absolutely...it just elated me and just filled me...I can't tell you, I just loved it. And so me sister would invite me into 'er bedroom and sit me on the floor and she 'ad an old fashioned record player with a lid that you lifted up. She 'ad a big pile of Tamla Motown records, two foot high, and she would say to me, "Always play the B sides, Simon. The B sides are as good as the A sides." And then she'd, like, sometimes there'd be an instrumental on the B side of a track and she'd make me play that. And so she let me listen to 'er music, so...and I loved it, and I can remember the tracks I liked to this day then, and there would be, like, the sort of catchy ones, like, the very popular woman then was Felice Taylor *I Feel Love Coming On*, which had an instrumental on the B side. So that was absolutely played to death in 'er bedroom. And I also liked a lot of The Supremes tracks but they weren't really the commercial stuff, she often played the B sides, like...like I say.

[5:00.0]

So that was me first introduction to soul music, really. But I also liked me brother's records, 'e liked The Ronettes and The Crystals, and Sonny and Cher. Oh, lots of stuff me brother liked. And I also liked that, as long as it 'ad a beat. And I always wanted to dance and me sister she used to say to me, "I'll teach you how to dance," like mods did. And I can't...I can't remember much about that. I can remember one dance she taught me how to do, but apart from that I don't remember much about the dancing part of it. So that was as a child, that's

what it were, and then when I got to high school...secondary college...secondary school then, and I'd be about 10 or 11 when I started. So I were very aware of the music of the '60s being very exciting. And also, I was aware of music from possibly the late '50s as well, which was still around in the '60s, and I found that exciting. I found 'ow me aunties and me uncles danced. I liked rock and roll. I found that exciting. And then when the '70s came, all of a sudden there were like a vacuum, and things went very dull in the charts, and...and I wasn't at all excited by anything that were coming out, you know, on Top of the Pops.

JM: Yeah.

SC: And then what happened were they started re-releasing Tamla Motown in the early '70s, and soul tracks, in Britain, for the mods to dance to – what was going to evolve into the Northern Soul boys, really. So what were happening were the music they were playing at the all-nighters and the soul clubs, some of them tracks were getting filtered down into the charts. I wasn't aware of this at the time. This is what I know looking back, but as these records were being released and getting onto Top of the Pops, I thought, "Wow, that record sounds a bit like Tamla Motown, but a bit more exciting." And so I were buying all these records what were coming out. I'd only be about 12, 13, and you also...you 'eard 'em at the fairgrounds you went to, and the skating rink. And there were a roller skating rink in Leeds, in Kirkstall in Leeds, and they played a lot of this soul stuff there as well. And so we're hearing it not necessarily on the radio so such, but in these sort of places. So every time one of these records came out I just had to have that record. And it often meant ordering them from a local, er, it were an electrical shop in Pudsey that sold TVs and hi-fis and things like that. And a man got from behind the counter a big book, and 'e'd flick through all the pages and say, "Oh yes, I've found that record. I can order yer it." And 'e would order the record for me. And I'd 'ave to wait sometimes a week for it to come, or two week.

JM: Yeah

SC: And I couldn't...I couldn't wait for it to come and arrive. So that was then me next step into getting onto the Northern Soul scene.

JM: So did you...did you sell records? Did you start to sell them, then?

SC: At that point...not at that point. That were when I went...started going to Wigan.

JM: Oh right.

SC: But before that I became known for me record collection. Me and a female friend, she were known for 'er record collection as well. And it would be all sorts of stuff we'd 'ave, but mainly soul and Tamla. Reggae. And so I started to hoard records. I would buy 'em up... I would buy 'em from people at school. I would go to, like, places in the market and you could get cheap records there. The local newsagents used to sell cheap LPs - MST was the label - and they would 'ave sometimes things like The Isley Brothers, and it would 'ave obscure records on by The Isley Brothers. So I started buying everything obsessively. But at that point I didn't sell any records. I might swap one occasionally, but I wouldn't let anything out of my hands.

JM: [Chuckles]

SC: [Chuckles] But I did...I got deeper and deeper into it as time went on. D'you want to ask anything?

JM: Yeah, no, no, no. Yeah. Just, it's...it's...it's great. It's...so when you, um, you just mentioned Wigan there. So I just...

SC: Yes.

JM: Talk about...so did you...I take it you went to Wigan?

SC: Yeah. Right, what 'appened were...what 'appened...lots of the youth clubs started playing Northern Soul.

JM: Yeah.

SC: My school which I went to, me secondary modern school, we used to dance at break time and dinner time - we 'ad a youth club at dinner time, can you believe it? – and...and it 'ad a little dance floor and it 'ad a lad who put...well, we'd just go 'n put records on ourself.

JM: Mmmmm.

[10:07.0]

SC: Quite a good sound system, actually, and they used to be, like I say, Tamla Motown and Jimmy Mack were very popular, and the girls'd dance in a line - they 'ad a routine, they did. And I used to get on t' end, you see. I weren't bothered what anybody thought, although I did get a lot of mick taken out of me. So from that, at our school they opened a state of the art youth club which 'ad a big dance floor. It were really quite something, and possibly one of the best in Leeds at the time. And what that did is, on an evening we 'ad a youth session, it started about seven at night 'til about, I don't know, nine 'alf past nine, I don't know. But what 'appened then, the local scooter club, the Gemini Scooter Club, started coming to these youth...this youth club of ours at school because they were going out with some of the girls who I were at school with.

JM: Oh, right.

SC: Some of the girls who were in the fourth and the fifth year, they'd only be 15 – 14, 15 - were going out with older scooter boys. That were quite common, and it were quite accepted. And so these boys started coming in the youth club and bringing their records, and then so my...these girls'd come with 'em, some of the girls I knew from school, and they'd all put Northern Soul on then, you see, and that's the first time I saw anybody dance to Northern Soul, and it were one lad – 'e were called something like Degsy - an' 'e were a scooter boy, and then 'is girlfriends, who at the time all wore big platform shoes, they all danced as well, and I'd never seen dancing like it because at that time yer average person danced like a plank. And so...so when I saw this dancing it were almost like a stage performance, like a ballet thing, I were just blown over, really. So I knew then I wanted to go to an all-nighter, you see, so two girls who I... were in the same year as me – I can't say their names, can I? – but they'd said to me – they were going out with these older scooter boys – “Ooo,” they said, “we go to t' Central Soul Club in Leeds, and we go to Wigan Casino. And we stop out all night on a Saturday.” And so I'd only be, now, 15 and they were 15.

JM: Yeah.

SC: I said, “How d'ya stop awake all night?” She said, “Oh, they give us tablets, and they...and they make back of us neck tingle and we stay awake all night.” And I couldn't believe it. And I didn't think at the time, “Oh my God, they're drug addicts.” I just thought they're doing

something to aid...something to, you know, help 'em stay awake. And that's not,"Oooo, I want to do that." I didn't think I wanted to take drugs. I just thought, "I want to go to Wigan."

JM: Yeah.

SC: Which was THE place to go. The other place I saw people dancing to it were I started going to the Mecca Ballroom in Blackpool, that was a big old fashioned dance hall, it were quite big. And there again it was all soul music, but mainly modern chart music and, again, some Northern Soul. And when they put the Northern Soul on there a group of people'd get up, and again I we're blown away. So by then I were 15, yer see, and about to start work. So once I started work and I were 16, me mom says to me...I said, "Can I go to Wigan, Mother?" 'Cause I'd been going to, like, these places where they played the music. "Yes, you're 16, you can go."

JM: Yeah, yeah.

SC: So that were it then, it were a case of getting somebody to go with, 'cause it was a very hard scene to infiltrate. I knew nobody, apart from them two girls who didn't wanna take me to Wigan with 'em. I didn't know anybody who went to Wigan. So then it were a case of finding somebody to go with me, you see.

JM: Right. When...can I just ask you before we move forward, what did you do as a job? What was your...where did you work?

SC: I were a window dresser. I left school with no job and me mother...I'd been working at Debenhams in Bradford, in the food hall, the year before...what I shouldn't 'ave been doing, 'cause people did things like that then. And the year after me mom says to me - because me mother worked in the same food 'all, it were a vast department store in Bradford, a bit like 'Arrods - "Oooo, Simon, there's a job coming up as a window dresser." So I took a job as a window...a trainee display assistant, which I loved.

JM: Yeah.

SC: So that's what I did.

JM: And when you say it was a hard scene to infiltrate.

SC: Oh, terrible.

JM: Tell me about that.

SC: So, you wouldn't survive...'cause I lived in a little village between Leeds and Bradford, so there wasn't many people into that sort of scene. As I got onto the scene, the lads who were coming from Bradford, and they'd gone to Catholic schools, it was...it was very popular at their school, was the music. So these lads were already at 13, 14 into the music and they'd got older lads who they were friends with at school who took 'em to all-nighters. So for them it were easier, for me it were harder.

[15:17.1]

JM: But do you mean hard to get into as in to physically get there, or do you mean hard to get into as in...?

SC: No, not to get there. To be accepted.

JM: Ohhh.

SC: Because once you actually became part of that crowd, a lot of them really didn't want to know yer. 'Ow... 'ow I eventually got to goin', besides goin' with people from school, some people 'ad said to me "Ooo, I'll come wi' yer this weekend," and I went to Wigan with 'em. This weren't at school, I apologise, it was in the year I left school and started work. I was still knocking about with people from school, and some lads in our gang 'ad come to Wigan wi' me, but then after they'd been once or twice they didn't wanna go again. Because it weren't for them.

JM: Yeah.

SC: So then when I got...what happened were...oh, that's what happened, I remember it distinctly, I was coming 'ome from work on the bus - because the bus ride home to where I lived took me about 20 minutes, 'alf an hour - and a girl got on at the next stop after me in Bradford city centre, so I were on the bus, upstairs, and she came walking up, and the way she were dressed I thought, "She's a soul girl." And she sat in front of me. And as she got off, I thought, "She's getting off at my stop." So she got off at my stop in t' village and I thought, "I've never seen 'er before." Well I've always been a chatty person, talk to anybody, so I broke up into conversation with her. And it turned out she'd moved on to our street where I lived, about three doors up.

JM: Huh!

SC: And she were from Bradford but 'er fam... 'er mum and dad 'ad split up and she'd 'ad to move in with 'er dad, or 'er mum - I can't remember - two doors up from where we lived. So then we got talking on the bus on an evening and I found out she were into Northern Soul - well I knew she were, I could tell by the way she dressed, because then they had a unique way of dressing, you see, because in the '70s skirt lengths for girls were very much dictated by what they could buy in the shops.

JM: Yeah.

SC: And at that time it were just below the knee, the skirts had gone to just below the knee, and if you saw a soul girl she often 'ad a skirt on which was mid-calf, so it were...it were longer. The skirts 'adn't got completely nearly to the floor by that point.

JM: Yeah.

SC: They got lower and lower as the years went on. But even if you saw a girl with a skirt on four inch lower than yer average one you'd get in Chelsea Girl, say, you knew she were a soul girl - it were as simple as that. And...and they just 'ad a style about 'em, it were just something...they often 'ad their 'air cropped short, which were very unusual.

JM: Oh, right. Yeah, yeah.

SC: So you also knew, by the way they looked. So I got talking to this girl called - I'll call 'er Julie Brown - and...and she started taking me to soul dos with 'er. Cleethorpes Pier, Cleethorpes Winter Gardens - I went all over with 'er. But she would all of a sudden drop me if she didn't want me to go with 'er, so...but that's 'ow I started to infiltrate the gang. It took a long time.

JM: Because...it's interesting because some people have had, you know, I've done a few interviews, and some people talk about how accepting Northern Soul is and how friendly it is.

SC: Yeah.

JM: And some people do talk about this kind of, um, I'm going to say this in a polite way, don't mean cult mentality, but this kind of slightly secretive club that...

SC: Oh yeah, definitely. It were definitely like that. And I think, 'cause I weren't like yer typical laddy laddy type lad, possibly I found it 'ard to mingle and talk to people - I don't now, but when I were younger - so maybe it were partly were me, you see. But I 'ad this incident what 'appened which really...it sorta brought it all 'ome to me. This girl I'd met on the bus called Julie Brown, I'll call 'er, said to me, "Oh, I've got a lad you can go to Wigan wi' regularly. They call 'im..." I'll call 'im Gary Smith. "If you meet 'im in Bradford bus station we're all goin' to Wigan on Saturday." And at that time they used to get sometimes an old fashioned bus from the old Bradford bus station, and that would go to Manchester from Bradford, it were quite a way, and on the way it would stop at all these places - 'Alifax, 'Ebden Bridge, you name it it stopped at 'em. But before all that 'appened I got to t' bus station to meet this Gary and there were a queue of people waiting to get on this bus to...to...to Manchester, then on to Wigan, you see, so the whole of this old fashioned sort of coach it were, were taken up with people goin' to Wigan. And as I met this Gary it were...it were plain he didn't want owt to do wi' me. So I got on the bus, and all the way to Manchester, and it were stopping at all these places and more people were getting on goin' to Wigan - quite fascinating, really, and fabulous - nobody would speak to me. Nobody came over and said, "Who are you?" and they left me sat by meself all t' way to Manchester. So what I did, when we got to Manchester we 'ad to walk across the city centre to get on another old banger of a bus to go to Wigan. So we 'ad to change buses, really, but walk across the city. So when I got on the next bus I thought, "I'm gonna just go sit next to somebody. I'm gonna...I'm gonna push me way in."

[20:34.8]

JM: Yeah, yeah.

SC: And I did, and I got talking to two lads who were 13, they were from 'Ebden Bridge, which is about 14 mile from Manchester, 20 mile from Manchester - so a lot nearer to Manchester than I were - and they'd come, at 13 year old, to this all-nighter. And when we got on the second bus to go to Wigan it were parked up under an old, like, er, bridge-type viaduct, and a lad got on, 'e 'ad a long cream...it were like an overcoat, a bit like a gangster'd wear.

JM: Yeah.

SC: And 'e 'ad...and then when I look down 'e 'ad these big flared trousers on and 'e'd big platforms on, 'cause sometimes then it were a time when platforms were just goin' out, and still at Wigan some people wore 'em, you see, but not many. And what the girls were doing, they'd arrive in platforms and they'd take 'em off when they got there and change, you see. Anyway, this lad got on and as 'e opened 'is coat at 't back of bus 'e'd two big bags full o' tablets. And so...so 'e said to these two young lads, "D'you want some?" "Yeah, we'll 'ave 'em," and I think they bought about eight each. Anyway, they took 'em, and I didn't...I didn't at the time. So I sat next to these lads who took these tablets, and then we chatted away

and the nearer we got to Wigan the more chatty they got. I remember 'im saying to me...I said, "'Ow d'you feel?" They said, "Me legs feel like they're very light." And that's the only thing I can remember 'im saying. And at the time I thought, "That were a little bit shocking, really."

JM: Yeah.

SC: Yeah, so that was really... after that, what 'appened were I never really infiltrated the gang until the following year. I started working '75 - in 1976 a girl started in the canteen, the staff canteen, she served food. And she were into soul music and she started going to Wigan wi' me every weekend then, you see. So I knocked about wi' this girl who were 'ard as nails. She didn't let anybody mess 'er around, so I felt very safe with 'er. 'Cause Wigan were quite a scary place.

JM: Yeah.

SC: People go on about 'ow wonderful it were, and 'ow friendly. I...I were, sort of, not mugged but threatened quite...twice at Wigan, where somebody got me in t' toilet and wouldn't let us go out o' toilet, and just intimidating us and frightening us, and...so it could be a very scary place, you see. And...but when I got knocking about with this girl, I'd...I'd...I'd go down to Wigan with this girl - went every weekend - and...and...and we, sort of, acted like we were a couple and we weren't a couple. We were just friends.

JM: Yeah.

SC: But that's...from then on, and then slowly, slowly people got to really like me. I were well known for being talkative and friendly, and for me dancing, really. And that was...so great... then I were accepted. It took about a year, you know.

JM: What was your dancing like?

SC: Mine?

JM: Mmmm.

SC: Well, I didn't like any of the acrobatics, because I don't remember...you see, when you see the footage o' Wigan, there's only two films were ever taken at Wigan. The second one we took isn't shown as much, although me friend - I'll call 'er Julie Smith - me friend Julie Smith is often featured on a lot of the footage of Wigan, and she's often spinning round and she's, you know, they seem to use that a lot. But the first Wigan film you see of people dancing, all that acrobatics and that, I don't recollect it being like that. What 'appened on the night they filmed Wigan in 1977 a lot of people went who weren't regulars, a lot of people went who thought that were what Northern Soul dancing were all about, but I don't remember Wigan being about lots of acrobatics. For me it were a lot about the footwork, and, I don't know what it were, you just heard the music and you were expressing yerself to the music. It were almost like you were interpretating how...and different parts of the music, you know, with yer arms, and...so I used to look at people who'd gone to the Twisted Wheel and the Torch, which was prior to Wigan.

JM: Yeah.

[24:52.8]

SC: And 'ow they danced were quite...was quite good. They shuffled their feet and various...and I could never shuffle both feet, and I used to go up into me [*cuts out*] practice and practice. I could do the right one, I could never do the left one. And it took me about two week of solid practice, and then once I got the other foot going, you see, then if you could do that dance where you could shuffle both yer feet you were sort of known, as that were like the...the crème de la crème of dancing. So that's just 'ow I danced, really, and I copied a girl called Sue Bush Beales, still friendly wi' me now. I copied 'er dancing, and I copied a lad called – I'll call 'im Steve...oh, I'll call 'im Steve Brown 'cause 'e's still on the scene. But Steve, I liked 'is dancing.

JM: Yeah.

SC: I got the two styles of dancing and I took parts from each of the styles, and I...and I created me own sort of...I was known for throwing meself around a lot and some people just dance from side to side, and some people...I were known for quite an expressive dancer and I went to a Unity Hall reunion last year – it were an...it wasn't an all-nighter but it was a reunion of the Wakefield all-nighter which started in 1977. And me friend said to me, Denise, who I've known since I were 16, that, "You're still very good, Simon, at dancing." And I once went to t' Ritz Brighthouse Ballroom when that first opened, there were...the Ritz Brighthouse Ballroom – I think it started about 20...2007. And when I first went to that I'd not seen a lot of people on the scene for some years, and...and a little girl came up to me, called Karen, who used to go to Wigan with me every weekend, and she said, "I could tell it were you, Simon, by yer dancing." So that was...I loved that because I could never fight, and I couldn't play football or rugby, but I could dance. And once I'd found me little way to express meself I got to Wigan and I found after all these years of misery of not being like yer typical lad I'd found this place where lads weren't like yer normal lads, you know, from like me school. They talked about music, they talked about fashion. I'd never seen owt like it, or 'eard owt like it to be honest wi' yer. It were quite, er, it were quite an experience. It were...it were wonderful.

JM: Yeah. And so did you...you went to Wigan, and what about some of the other places? What was it? What was it like you know, walking in there, what was the atmosphere like? What did it...

SC: What, Wigan?

JM: Well, just generally though, the feeling of going to...

SC: yeah, 'cause I did...I did go to The Fleet. I'll tell you about that in a minute, but Wigan was very much the loudest place of all the all-nighters, it were booming. So when you walked down the street and you approached the dance hall - which were dilapidated, it were filthy [*chuckles*] – it were boom, boom, boom. You didn't get the boom, boom then in nightclubs, but you went into Wigan and before you got into Wigan you could queue and take yer life in yer own 'ands, you were crushed within an inch of your life. You were often jostled about by bouncers, who were foul. They were the nastiest men I've ever come across, you know, I'd never seen that before in me life. Just...just bullies.

JM: Mmmm.

SC: But once you got into Wigan, you...you 'ad to go up two flights of concrete mucky stairs. That was just to get to the first level, and that was a ground floor. Yeah, and then if you went up another two flights you came onto t' balcony level. Now I can't remember which level I

first went in to because...the big...but I did eventually, I can...I can remember this – and I'll tell you why I can't remember the first time I walked in, because the first time I ever went to Wigan I went with me older sisters and brothers 'cause they used to go to Wigan to the Heavy Rock night, which started at about six...six o'clock on Saturday night, and it finished at midnight. And me sisters used to go to that 'cause they were 'Ells Angels. And they started knocking about with 'Ells Angels from Southport. So they took me to me first ever trip to Wigan, and I'd got into the Heavy Rock night with them first of all, so I never - for me first visit to Wigan - never experienced what it were gonna be like when it got going. But as I were sat on the...we were sat downstairs, I think...no, I were sat on the balcony with me sisters, at this Heavy Rock night. So bear in mind it's first time I've been to Wigan.

JM: Yeah.

SC: And towards the end of the night, about half 11, these girls started coming in with long 'air and big Falmer jeans on, big Sacha platform shoes – which would be THE shoes to 'ave if you were a girl. They were 14 pound in 1974, Sacha shoes. And they were bigger and clumpier than any other shoes you'd see. So if you saw a girl with a pair o' them, you knew what they were like, you know, they meant business. So these girls were coming in dressed in jeans and platforms and going into the ladies toilets. And then when they came out about 15 minutes later they'd got their 'air in bunches wi' ribbons in – I'd never seen that in me life. You wouldn't've seen a girl with bunches in their 'air, you'd've thought they were being silly, but they came out with these bunches in their 'air and they'd taken their platforms off and put flat shoes on, taken their jeans off and put either a dress on or a skirt.

[30:21.5]

JM: Yeah.

SC: But the first time I actually walked into Wigan when I'd got...I can't remember how I got there or who with, but the heat and the smell. It smelt of sweat. It were dark as I don't know what. It were pitch...almost pitch dark, so it wasn't like on the videos you see where it looks light.

JM: Yeah.

SC: It were dark except for one fluorescent light above the DJ, and what that did were it give everybody who 'ad anything white on a glow, as you'd know, wouldn't yer?

JM: Yeah, yeah.

SC: So people...people at Wigan glowed. The T...the T-shirts...it 'ad a strange feel about it which I'd never felt. It smelt of drugs, aftershave, sweat. It were dripping wi' water off the ceiling, it were a big, ooo, a big dance 'all ceiling which were crumbling, and...and that used to, with the heat, used to...used to run down the walls, the walls were wet through, the mirrors were always steamed up. I've...I mean you can't imagine, can you? [Laughs].

JM: Sounds a bit, er, yeah.

SC: So, that wasn't all clubs. Other clubs weren't as...and that's another thing, the loud...the sound system at Wigan was loud, muffled, booming and speeded up.

JM: Right.

SC: They speeded the music up. And then what happened were Wigan started going down t' pan. About 1978 it got very, very commercialised and everybody who were everybody were comin' and the fashions got ridiculous, the skirts got longer and dancing got dafter. And that's when we ventured to other ventures...other...other venues. And that's when we went to Peterborough.

JM: So tell me a bit about the Peterborough...coming to Peterborough.

SC: Yeah, I only went once and I'll tell you for why. We went in a transit van, about eight of us, maybe more, and we set off and we went down in this van, and it seemed like it were a lot further than Wigan. 'Cause it were for us.

JM: Yeah.

SC: Wigan were only about 60 mile from where we lived, I think. And Peterborough were probably about 90. So it seemed like we were going a long way. But by that time we were well into taking slimming pills before we got to any all-nighter. So the distance never bothered us, we were just in a good mood.

JM: Yeah.

SC: But what happened were, a lad – God bless 'im, 'e's just died recently – 'e were a character, 'e rented this van and drove us all down to Peterborough. And as we got to Peterborough, because we'd all 'ad these slimming pills which kept you awake and...I...I would've said 'e were more [*indistinct*], and I don't know why 'e did this, but 'e drove...'e was gonna go down a subway, and I don't know 'ow 'e got to this subway, 'ow 'e got off the road, but I just remember somebody...I was shouting...somebody shouting to 'im, "You're gonna go down a subway." So 'e reversed out and we...oh God, 'e could've killed us really. So we came down, we got to T' Fleet Leisure Centre. And I remember thinking, "This is very modern, er, compared to Wigan." From the outside, I remember, it seemed to look modern, which a leisure centre...leisure centre would be, wouldn't it?

JM: Yeah.

SC: And when we got there we were queuing to get in. Not like Wigan, not as...not as...not as hard, you know, queues weren't as bad but there were still a lot of people there. And...and as I were queuing to get in somebody stabbed me in the...in the buttocks, er, with compass. Er, didn't know who it were, couldn't find out who it were but that, sort of, were the first time anything like that. Now something else 'appened that night and it put a bit of an awful feeling on the evening. But I remember I walked in and there were a classroom to the left-hand side as you walked in, and they'd cleared a classroom where – I don't know what they'd've been doing in there normally - and they 'ad, like, old music playing in there, but I went in, and they 'ad...they 'ad a bigger, like a hall, might be like a sports hall.

JM: Mmmm.

SC: That was in the end hall. I can remember going in there and thinking it seemed a bit lacking in atmosphere compared to Wigan.

JM: Yeah.

SC: And so I spent the evening in, er, this room where they were playing tracks from years gone by, and I don't mean to be insulting but I wasn't that impressed with...er...er, I...I never went back to The Fleet Centre.

JM: Yeah.

SC: But that was when it first opened, and I think it were '79. And...and I don't know what 'appened after that, if it became popular, or... So that was me only experience... the pictures I sent yer. 'Ave you got them?

JM: Yeah, yeah, I did. Why...why did you...why did you decide to go to The Fleet? What was that about?

[35:05.6]

SC: Well, Wigan started, like I say, going down the pan, and there were one in Rotherham – I think it was...I can't remember now, but that were like a big hall, a dance hall. That were Rotherham, Parr Hall, I think it... there were one at Rotherham, one at Sheffield we went to. One was Samantha's. Samantha's was closed by then. So we went to Rotherham, went to Sheffield, we went to, er...oooo, now then...other places started doing all-nighters so we tried them - all around the same time. So we were basically looking for a place like Wigan, and none of them ever, ever replaced it. And, er, a lot of them were very much like Wigan and they were dance halls but they didn't 'ave...er...although they were cleaner and newer, and not falling down, I just didn't like 'em. And...and...and I didn't like The Fleet Centre and...and it were about then, 1979, when I started thinking, "I've 'ad enough of taking tablets every weekend. And I want...and I'm going to, basically, stop the all-nighter scene." I'd gone from 1975...

JM: Yeah.

SC: '75,'76, '77,'78, for five year – virtually every weekend - and so then I decided just to go to...I still went to Wigan 'til it closed in '81, now 'n again, but never enjoyed it the same ever again. And I...I kept going to local soul clubs, 'cause there were hundreds all over Bradford and Leeds.

JM: Yeah.

SC: I wouldn't say...I wouldn't say hundreds, but lots. And then I carried on, like, through me 20s and 30s, me 40s, I went to, oh, Warrington Parr Hall, Blackburn, Stafford. Top of the World at Stafford – I quite liked it there. Er, so I kept on right up until, er, I were 50.

JM: Yeah.

SC: Yeah.

JM: And did you...did you hear of, like, the Wirrina in Peterborough, or...?

SC: The what, sorry?

JM: The Wirrina. So, basically...

SC: No.

JM: ...the other place where there...where people talk about were their experiences in Peterborough was the Wirrina. It was a...it was a club, um, in, sort of, in the middle of Peterborough.

SC: No, I've not 'eard of that but, you see, most places did 'ave them sort of places, didn't they?

JM: Yeah.

SC: Like every town. Yeah, that is the only experience really, of Peterborough. And at the time it did seem, er, not that people didn't come to Wigan from farther...farther than we travelled, they came from hundreds of mi...they came from Aberdeen.

JM: Yeah.

SC: You know, but...but to me, Peterborough, er...er...was just a bit...that little bit too far. And I never went again.

JM: Yeah. And what was it about...I mean, if you think about...I mean, it's obviously played a very big part in your life.

SC: Yeah.

JM: What, I mean, what are some of the, sort of, words that, sort of, describe the part it's played in your life?

SC: Ah, well, the music is, to me, uplifting. It's almost like a spiritual type of thing. Errr, there were a camaraderie between everybody because there were 20, 30 of us in the gang in Bradford, once I got, you know, well known with 'em. We'd go to places - not just at Wigan, I didn't just go to Wigan. I'd go out on a Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday - you name it, I were out at drop of an 'at. And we just went out to dance. Didn't...we didn't wanna drink through t' week.

JM: Mmmm.

SC: I'd 'ave...I'd 'ave...I don't know what I used to drink, whether I'd 'ave 'alf a lager, if that. So there were a friendship. I liked the fashion, I liked how, er, me girlfriend would go to a tailor's in Wibsey in Bradford and she'd 'ave a skirt...she'd 'ave a skirt made that she'd 'ave it done so she knew it were 'ers and people in t' gang knew she'd 'ad it made, and she'd 'ave like a pocket put on t' back and...and just...just tailored, customised to 'er style, you see. So I liked the fashion, I liked the friendship, I loved the dancing. There's something about when a track came on, and...and especially some of the girls would, er, interpretate the music and go into a spin at a certain time, and it got to where some girls could, like, spin eight revolutions, and...and then, like, lads and lassies span differently. Lads spun in a certain way, girls spun in a certain way.

JM: Yeah.

SC: And then you'd get girls who could then spin like lads, so I loved the dancing, I loved everything about it. Yeah, that's what...I 'ave to listen to it every single day before I go to work, I 'ave it on. I 'ave it on at work, if I'm by meself in a warehouse. I've gotta 'ave... I've gotta listen to it every day.

JM: Yeah, yeah. So you say spiritual. Do you mean as in...?

[40:00.7]

SC: It makes me fill up and feel so emotional, don't know what it is. It's the lyrics, it's er...maybe because, wi' me being weaned on Tamla Motown, I always like the strings and the percussion - I like percussion. And there's something about, er, the percussion and the strings, it...that sort of mu...well, all of it 'cause a lot of it were not like that, a lot of it were...a lot of it were modern when I started going in '75, '76. A lot of the stuff were modern - they called it New York disco music. When at Wigan downstairs they'd play about a quarter of the tracks'd be New York disco music, and that was stuff like what...what they'd've played in discos in New York, not...not chart music but disco records, rare disco records. So it were very much modern as well, at Wigan, when I started going. But I always liked the strings and the percussion of the rare black stuff like Ben E. King, who sang with The Drifters, when 'e went solo. I liked a lot of the Latin type, er, they 'ad a lot of percussive Latin type music what just made you wanna dance, it 'ad an infectious beat which, er, I mean to 'ear a record in a dance 'all, which were vast, and loud and booming and just wonderful, really.

JM: Yeah. Erm, what records...so your records that you've got, how many...have you got lots?

SC: Yeah. Well, I became obsessed with obscure female vocals from the '60s and girl groups.

JM: Yeah.

SC: And I became an obsessive collector of them, and I...I...I became quite known for my style of music, and I wrote for a magazine - well, it were a fanzine.

JM: Yeah.

SC: And I can't remember the name of it, but I did...I wrote for that for a few month. Er, so I became particularly interested in obscure girl group tracks because, say in America in the New York area I think there were something like a thousand girl groups. Where most people'd probably say...if you said, "Ooo, name a girl group from New York," they'd say, Shangri Las or summat like that. But there were at least a thousand.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

SC: So I started collecting all that stuff, I liked Latin stuff like yer Drifters type music, 'cause when we were 'aving The Drifters when I were at school, 'cause a lot of The Drifters records which were re-released, like *Saturday Night At The Movies*, I didn't know at the time that there were hundreds of records in...in...in America released at the time of The Drifters records which were Latin American soul, it 'ad that...they called it, er, were it Tin Pan Alley?

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SC: Yeah, that...I loved that style, I loved the saxophone, the castanets, I particularly liked instrumentals by...there were a group called The Marketts and they were like a session group for the, er, people like Phil Spector.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

SC: I collected instrumentals, but I...I liked a lot of the...but then I'd like things very different, like the white...sometimes at Wigan they'd just bring a record out like, you'd think, "Why the hell would anybody think that were...be by a white woman?" Jackie Trent, or...it just 'ad the right ingredients. Kiki Dee *Magic Carpet Ride*, you 'ad...they'd say to me, "This is Kiki Dee." And

another one...stuff which were just not deemed as black music but just 'ad the right ingredients, and just uplifted and beautiful, really.

JM: Did you do any DJ-ing?

SC: No I didn't, no. No, me friend Adie did. I never 'ad the nerve to...I were asked to do it often. "Simon, you ought to DJ 'ere, you ought to DJ there." But, no, I never were brave enough to stand be'ind...I know if I 'ad o' done I'd've been very good, because even today on YouTube, what I do I search obsessively for tracks which are either unreleased or, I don't know, like overnight I found one and it were by, er, a woman called Donna Lynn, an American singer, and it were a track called *Don't You Dare*. And Donna Lynn did some awful girl group records - when I say awful, I like 'em [giggles]. A lot...a lot of soul people wouldn't like 'em. But then, Donna Lynn, out of - say she released 30 tracks - there were just one that 'ad that Northern Soul element and criteria, and I found it of a night on YouTube and I thought, "Well, this is one I've never 'eard of in me life." So what I do is, I then put 'em on Facebook.

JM: Yeah.

SC: And me friends'll say, "I like this, Simon," or, "This'd've gone down well at Wigan." So I'm very much still...er, I...I can listen to modern - not modern as in today's music but, er, not...the modern stuff they're playing at Wigan and Stafford - there's one called *Pyramid* by somebody, and that's just a very strange black man singing a lovely moving song which 'as got no big beat to it -well that just does to me something, I don't know, I love it. Me daughter got me for Christmas, er, she got me the words to *Time Will Pass You By* by Tobi Legend, which 'as the most wonderful lyrics.

[45:22.6]

JM: Yeah.

SC: And she'd 'ad it printed out, she'd 'ad it framed fer me.

JM: Ahhh.

SC: [Chuckles]. And I sit and I look at it, because, yeah, it's...it's part of me life and it always will be.

JM: So just, lastly, when you say it's got that Northern Soul element, what is that feeling?

SC: Yeah.

JM: What is the actual element in the mu...like?

SC: Well, originally it started off with, didn't it, like when Tamla Motown commercialised black American dance music, then thousands of groups were coming out in America doing their own version of that Tamla music. So originally when I started goin' t' Wigan it were like it 'ad a basic Tamla Motown beat but it were better, it sounded rawer. It, er, and it 'ad the strings in but the strings often sounded a little bit amateur.

JM: Yeah.

SC: But, off... some...sometimes they were off tune. Some songs like [*indistinct*] *I Hear a Symphony* by The Supremes, but they started playing the instrumental version, and it were...it were by an American session group, The Carmel Strings - from California, they were

- and that...then they're playing the violins , or whatever they were playing, they were off key...they sound like they were all drunk. But for some reason, it went...it sounded fantastic at Wigan. It 'ad...it 'ad the strings, it 'ad the beat.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

SC: Yeah. So that were originally what...what...what epitomised Northern Soul, but as the years went on it became so complicated and, er, I don't know. Very 'ard to analyse 'cause it's...it's such a mixture of music now.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

SC: And...and what's then...as it went into the '80s, and Stafford, the Top of the World at Stafford – or that's where I went – started playing slower tracks, which weren't so popular at Wigan. For a start, they played one by Tony Middleton called *Paris Blues* at Wigan. And I can see Dave Everson, who were a DJ, now 'is wife Mary Everson - 'e...'cause 'e were playing a record nobody liked it. It were too slow, they said it sounded like Tom Jones. But I absolutely loved it, and that style of slower music then started to become popular as Wigan were closing down.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

SC: And the staff that took over, staff that were brave enough to play slower stuff, er, and...and so from then on Northern Soul, in the '80s and onwards, very much embraced the slower '60s, sometimes moderner, music, you see. That's 'ow that happened.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Okay, that is really good. That's, er...yeah, no, it's great. Really, good, I mean, we've covered everything there.

SC: Oh, thank you.

JM: Erm, it's...it's really intriguing to get the perspective of someone that...that just popped in, 'cause obviously some of these that I do, 'cause we're Peterborough based...

SC: Yes.

JM: ... they're...they're...they talk a lot about the Peterborough clubs, but actually it's quite nice to get a view of someone who just...who's...who's come from outside to...to Peterborough to The Fleet, and obviously is...is looking at The Fleet in relation to other clubs that they've been to which weren't in Peterborough.

SC: Yes, you see, if they'd've gone to Peterborough as their first club, they'd o' probably – The Fleet Centre – they'd probably like it.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

SC: But because I'd 'ad that to compare it with something else, to me...and I think because of that time in 1979, I were winding down.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

SC: So that were probably part of it.

JM: Yeah, yeah. So that's brilliant.

SC: [*Indistinct*] Go on.

JM: Your...your photos that I've got, your email, they're not coming up, they've just...all I've got is a little...a little image thing, it just says "image" and I can't get 'em to download.

SC: Well what I'll do is I'll do it from me computer later on.

JM: Yeah, that'd be great.

SC: I did it from me phone, yer see.

JM: And are we alright to take...use those, to give them to...

SC: Yeah, 'course you can.

JM: Perfect, perfect.

SC: 'Course you can.

JM: So let me just give you a quick overview. What's happening with this is obviously with everything that's going on at the moment, the idea was that we were going to be looking at these interviews and making something that was interactive with the public. And that was going to happen in Peterborough at a festival in June.

SC: Yeah,

JM: So what...obviously things've just, we're stuck...Kate has been in touch with the Heritage Fund and they've basically said, "We still want you to carry on, just, obviously, just put everything back."

SC: Yeah.

JM: So what'll happen is that...is that Kate will probably be in touch with everyone that's...'cause I download this onto her site, and then she's got a list of everyone that was interviewed, and then what'll happen is she'll keep particularly the people that we've actually interviewed, um, up to date with where we're at and what we're doing.

SC: Yeah.

JM: It's really useful.

SC: Yeah. Shame, i'n't it, what's 'appening, but...very odd.

JM: Yeah.

SC: Let's just be positive, and it's been nice...

[50:16.2]