

Title: Lara Latcham Interview

Creators: Rick & Julia Goldsmith

Project: 'The Close in Living Memory: Hereford Cathedral Close oral reminiscences''

Subject: Autobiography, Living and working around Cathedral Close in Herefordshire, Heritage

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Identifier: Lara-Latcham

Interview Date: 2010, Hereford

Interviewee: Lara Latcham (speaker, female)

Interviewer: Marsha O'Mahony & Julia Goldsmith (speaker, female)

Camera & Sound: Richard Goldsmith (male)

Producer: Julia Goldsmith

Language: English

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Type: Video

Width: 1440 pixels

Height: 1080 pixels

Scan type: Progressive

Stereo/Mono: Stereo Mixdown

Duration: 14 min 9 seconds

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Transcript:

(00:00)

Lara was at Cathedral school from 1977 - 1984, and was very much a part of the drama community doing several plays a year - two significantly were outside on the cathedral Close.

(00:26)

Lara recalls that many of the fond memories on the close were of getting away from school at the end of the day!

She would cross the Close every morning to go to the Cathedral for morning service. Lara didn't like school very much and was always very keen to get away and at the end of the day she would cross the Close to leave, though other fond memories were from bunking off school to go into town to a cafe to have a cup of coffee or something. Lara's best friend Liz lived in Deanery, her father was the head of Deanery, she lived there with her mum, dad sister and brother so Lara has fond memories of visiting for Tea and Toast after school.

(01:22)

After they had left school Lara remembers coming back to Hereford and catching up with the family and catching up with Liz and spending time there and if it was a nice day they would go out and sit on the grass.

(01:34)

Other memories of the close include how Lara was very keen on being an actress and they did a lot of drama at school and they had a really inspired English/Drama teacher called Colin Grey and he was always doing interesting things - when they came to the 500th anniversary of the school they decided that they would have a medieval fair to celebrate and this included having traditional stalls but it also included a mummings play. So they chose the subject of Robin Hood and Friar Tuck and their meeting, the battle that ensued and how they became friends afterwards. Lara was very surprised as she usually used to get small parts and never really got main parts but for this she got cast as Robin Hood and couldn't believe it. They did all of the rehearsals and it was fine and then they would go outside and get their voices ready for doing it on the Close, because if you've got the wind and you're in the open air you've got to be very careful about how you project your voice. It was very exciting until about two days beforehand when Lara was shown the costume she had to wear and they had got this from an Nell Gwyn theatre which had been the old swimming baths and it was from their Robin pantomime and it was the shortest tunic Lara had ever seen in her life and she was going to be out in public, not just on a stage in front of an audience, in the shortest tunic ever. They

play involved having a bucket of water thrown over her, it involved mock sword fights and all sorts of things so Lara was having to lift her arms a lot and also get down on to the floor and off the floor and everytime she did she was aware that this tunic was going to ride up and she was only allowed to wear tights underneath. (03:39) When the day came and they were doing this they got quite large crowds watching them on the half-moon of grass in front of the lovely window of the lady chapel, they got them actually coming behind them as well so Lara knew that at every angle she was likely exposing something to somebody, but it was great fun and they did it about 3 or 4 times in the day and it was a great experience.

(04:12)

Lara struggles to remember the dates, but it was probably the following year, they decided to have the goose fair. After the success of the medieval fair where people had been so interested, the Close lent itself perfectly to these events because you have the nice islands of grass and the pathways that go through as well. By this time the chains that used to be on the grass areas had gone, when Lara first came to Hereford in 1973/74 there were chains all around the grass areas and you weren't allowed to go on the grass on the close, and if you were on your bike there was a verger from the Cathedral who used to whistle and make you get off - It wasn't permitted to cycle through the close. So by this time those chains had gone and it was a much more open feeling, having stalls there and they had things like apple bobbing and craft stores etc. During the morning there were about five of the drama students dressed up in pineapple dance studio lime green bodysuits with wispy bits of net and flowers in their hair who were nymphettes to the green man played by David Owens (the 'stud' of their year) and they had to go through the Close dancing and doing fertility rites essentially that was rather embarrassing. (05:49) In the afternoon they had a play which they did 2 or 3 times in that same half moon of grass outside the lady chapel, and Lara struggles to remember what the play was but has a feeling that as it was the goose fair it was the mother goose play, but to be truly honest she can't be sure what it was. All Lara can remember was that they had very stereotypical characters and she has one very small photograph of that play, and Lara is wearing cut off white trousers, espadrilles and this huge blue jumper that was one of the first things Lara ever knitted. Lara has the feeling that she was playing a kind of right on left-wing lesbian - it was a kind of new take on the whole mother goose idea and that's all she really remembers about it but it was great fun because she didn't feel exposed in the way she had done playing Robin Hood so was able to relax into it. There was a lot of singing in it as well but the other details have passed by.

(07:00)

Lara speaks whilst standing on a kind of half circle of grass gesturing just over to this right hand side at the beautiful windows of the lady chapel of the cathedral. This is the part of the cathedral where they did their two plays, the Robin Hood/Friar Tuck and also what Lara thinks is mother goose - so it was actually on this grass that she had a bucket of water thrown over her and a sword fight and various other things. As you can imagine it's in a very open place, even today which is not particularly cold it's quite windy - it's very exposed. So when Lara was talking about wearing a short tunic you can imagine exactly how vulnerable she felt.

(07:48)

Lara recalls there was this young man who used to wear a Cromby coat and he used to stand at the top of church street and busk- playing guitar and singing. He had a voice just like Bob Dylan and he had lovely curly black hair and his skin was kind of demerara sugar colour - he was lovely and looked so exotic and was a bit older than Lara. She worked in the bookshop so on a Saturday afternoon when she was working in the bookshop on church street, her parents had the bookshop there, Lara would listen to him singing, her dad would exclaim 'eurgh it's that busker again, I wish he'd blooming go away and shut up!' and Lara remembers hoping he didn't leave and would stay there. Lara used to finish work at the bookshop at about 2 o'clock or 2:30 and when she'd finished she would go off to youth theatre - what she would hope is that by the time she went out to youth theatre he would still be there and she could just sort of look at him. (08:49) As time went on Lara got to know him and became friends with him, meeting his girlfriend who obviously was older than Lara. In the summer he used to move from the top of Church Street and go into the Cathedral Close and they would sit on the grass and listen to him - his name was Justin. Lara thought he was completely the bee's knees. It was lovely to have that music and if she was walking, she used to live down in St. James' area, and she would walk up across the Castle Green and through the Close into Church Street to her parents' book shop - if she could hear Justin singing then that little journey across the Close was even better.

(09:34)

Lara recalls Dave the tramp. She can't remember what happened to him in the end but Dave was somebody who was always around Hereford and he had little places he would be, including the Close. In those days there were benches on the Close - it was a really nice place to be because you could sit down on a bench and watch the world go by, and if it was a very hot day it was nice in the shade of the trees by what used to be the telephone exchange which is now part of the Cathedral School. Dave was an interesting man, quite an imposing figure and Lara thinks he must have been something quite important before he chose the life that he did - it was very much the life that he wanted, he didn't want to be living in a house or anything. He used to wear lots and lots of overcoats even if it was really hot summer, and he had this impressive head of greying hair that went right around onto his face with a beard and moustache. He never really spoke much to anybody but if he ever did he was really polite and very well spoken. You used to see him sitting on a bench on the Cathedral close, and then there was another guy who's still around actually, who used to hang around on the Close called Barry. Barry, poor man, was very angry and Lara thinks that he has all sorts of mental health issues. He always used to position himself as you were coming off the Close as you would walk across to the Library and Museum - just on the corner there by Knight, Frank and Rutley the estate agents he would stand and would shout and swear at the top of his voice. Sometimes he would stand at the top of Church Street on the Close and swear and shout there, and Lara always remembers as a teenager and in her early 20's watching her mum get her purse out, get a pound or something out of it, and march up to the top of the street stuffing the coin into his hand and saying 'Go and have a cup of tea, we need a break!' because he'd be just ranting and raving non-stop. He'd go 'oh, thank you very much' and go off to the matber (spelling) cafe in Commercial Street and have a cup of tea whilst Lara and her mum would have a break from the shouting.

(11:59 )

On another occasion Lara remembers her best friend Liz who had lived in Deanery - after she had gotten married and gone off to live with her husband and had children Lara was still friends with her younger sister who is ten years younger than Liz. On a Thursday night they would go out to the Crystal Rooms that are now defunct unfortunately - but were a very cool place to go dancing. Thursday night was grunge night. Lara used to walk her back to Deanery, making sure she was safe home, before going on to her house. On one night they got there and she couldn't open the front porch door, there was the front porch and then there was the front door to the house.

There they were standing in front of the little front garden and driveway of Deanery on the Close and she said 'the door wont open?!' and a voice came from inside going 'GO AWAY, LEAVE ME ALONE' and it turns out some poor guy had obviously found a really warm place to sleep for the night and didn't want to be disturbed. They were trying to explain to him that all they wanted was for Kate to be able to get into the house so that she could go to bed and that once they'd closed the door if he wanted to continue sleeping there he could. Anyway he wouldn't move and was being very belligerent about it and they didn't have any other way of getting into the house so unfortunately they had to call a copper in the end to get him to move on - and this was one very disgruntled homeless person. They kept saying 'but once we're inside the house just come back and go back to sleep' and the copper was like 'don't encourage him!' but you can imagine it was an ideal quiet, warm, comfortable place to be - but nevermind.

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This film was made by Catcher Media for the Hereford Cathedral Close project in association with In Our Age and supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Watch the video interviews on the vimeo showcase:  
<https://vimeo.com/showcase/7908663>