

Investigating Oral Histories of the Barbican Building on St. Mary's Street, Lincoln



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The credit of the sources goes to the participants involved in this project. This can hopefully be utilised for future projects when the Barbican re-opens as a creative hub in 2024!

Introduction

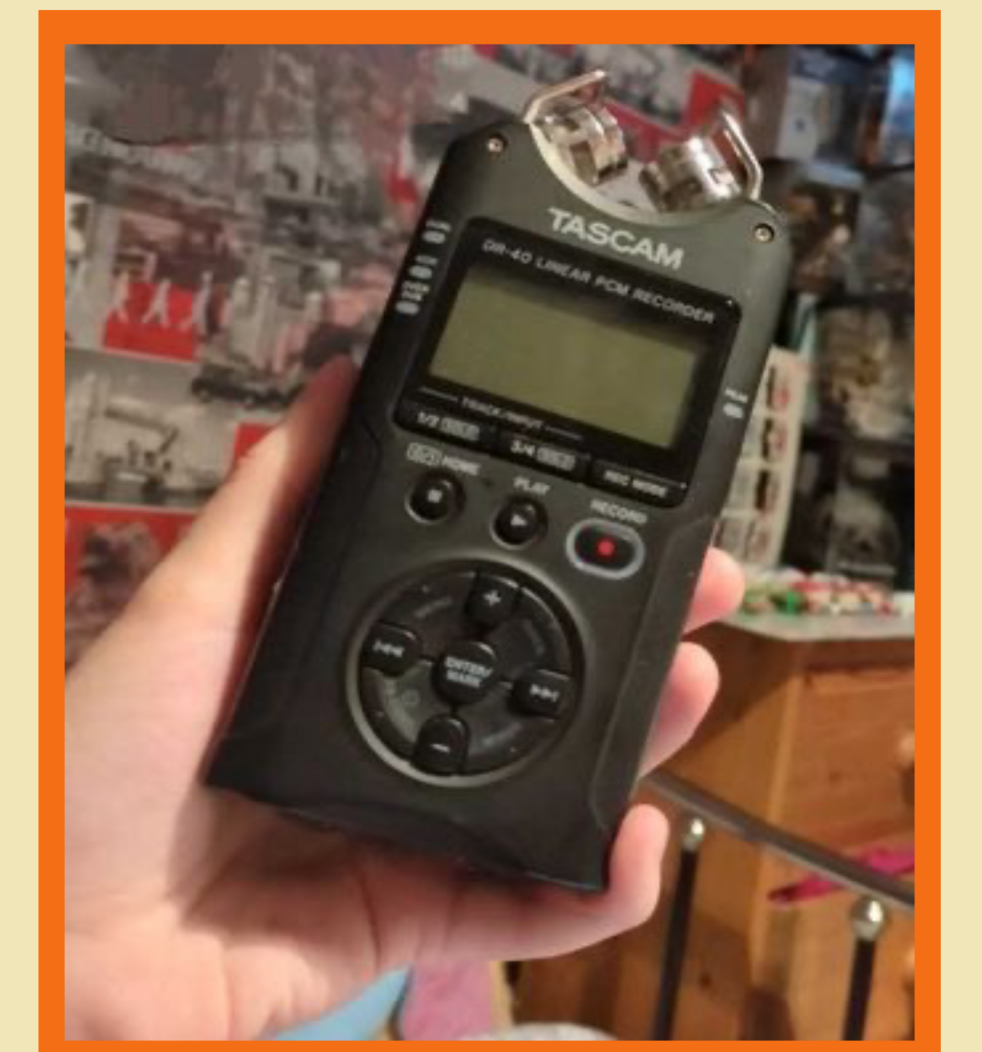
In 2023, Lincolnshire Co-op and the University of Lincoln announced a partnership to transform the Barbican Building in central Lincoln into a Creative Hub. Sited adjacent to the recently completed bus station and on the edge of the Cornhill Quarter regeneration scheme, the Barbican is symbolic of the changing fortunes of Lincoln and urban Britain since the Second World War.

By collecting oral histories of ordinary people who know of or visited the Barbican, this project reveals how notions of belonging, local identity and social change are attached to the built environment. In doing so, it expands areas of research associated with leisure and pastimes, such as music and pub going, and investigates the importance of these activities' locations in people's lives.

Methodology

The results of this project were based on an analysis of the interviews conducted by the student researcher. These interviews were recorded using Microsoft Teams or a recording device specialised for interviews, and then transferred onto a transcript using Otter.ai and proofread to ensure that the transcript is as accurate as possible.

The questions were a typical oral history schedule with open-ended questions for the interviewee to narrate their own story. The interviewer firstly provided questions about the interviewee's personal life such as 'when and where were you born?', 'what kind of place was X when you were growing up?', and 'Did you enjoy growing up in x?' The primary aim of these types of general, but open-ended questions are to allow the participant to formulate their own experiences and sense of self against the subject (the Barbican) at hand without too great an amount of intervention from the interviewer (Ritchie, 92-94).



Recording device used for in-person interviews

Results

The Barbican as a Space and Place through Narration

Sue narrates her own life events through her recollections of her mother working as a barmaid at the Barbican, with Sue occasionally helping. She also states that the Barbican is a significant part of her memory. Notably, Sue imagines her mother behind the bar with a 'big grin on her face,' 'having a natter and banter with everybody.' These attitudes contribute to the bar's and the Barbican's sense of belonging.

Community

Roderick argued the Barbican 'stood as a symbol of otherness' in the 'downhill' section of Lincoln, in which there he perceived a distinct socio-economic divide between 'uphill' and 'downhill'.

Katy expressed a desire that many city centre pubs that had closed were an 'important part of the fabric of the city', locating a sense of nostalgia within Lincoln organised around pubs and sociability.

Pub and Music Culture

Pub culture

Clive recalled how he and his father used to go to the Barbican every Saturday for lunch, generally a chip butty and a couple of 'pints', evoking a certain pub culture that was distinct in his generation, primarily from the late 1970s to the 1990s. According to Clive's perspective, the Barbican was a popular pub among the locals.

Music culture

Paul remembered that he was part of 'the Northern Soul, sort of Mod' and 'a lot of Mods and Northern Soul fanatics used to meet up at the Barbican'. Paul remembered it as a place where a sub-culture flourished.

Conclusion

The research demonstrates there is a larger cultural and historical context that separates Lincoln, but the Barbican is positioned as a nexus to situate the city within much broader narratives of community, leisure, and the uses of nostalgia in twenty-first century Britain.

Using ordinary people's oral testimonies connects their stories to greater cultural narratives. Therefore, the future of the Barbican could contribute to pertinent discourses of heritage and local placemaking.

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