

MBL 018

Evelyn Archer (nee Moreland) was born in Morecambe in 1940 - where she still lives today. Evelyn is a founder member of the Winter Gardens Trust and was pivotal in saving the Winter Gardens Theatre.

(The interview was cut short due to the cold.)

	<p>What was it like being a child in Morecambe? Evelyn was born in her Gran's guesthouse in which RAF men were billeted during the WW2. She recalls starting school and being asked to return all the RAF gas masks still at the guesthouse. At school she used to ring the bell for end of break, set up the lunch time table for teachers and serve their dinners. She had her lunch with the dinner ladies.</p>
2.02	<p>Her Gran died, and her house was sold so Evelyn's family moved to a different district of Morecambe. She had to move to Euston Rd school. Her Auntie Liza owned a guest house on Albert Rd. Evelyn would go and help her. Evelyn always wanted to run a guest house.</p>
2.54	<p>The Winter Gardens was part of Evelyn's childhood. She went to see Cinderella there when she was 7. The theatre had been refurbished in 1933. She fell in love with the building. At school she had to 'interview' for the music festival to see if she could sing in the choir.</p>
4.11	<p>Morecambe had 'so many visitors after the war'. The old band stand at the battery was demolished in 1957. There were once 8 cinemas, 5 theatres and two piers in Morecambe. Evelyn couldn't afford to go to them as a child, but she did go to the Odeon on a Saturday morning. Evelyn remembers the song from the cinema screenings 'We come along on a Saturday morning greeting everyone with a smile'.</p>
5.06	<p>She had 5 sisters and a brother. Their playground was the beach. If they went out in the 60s in Morecambe they would walk down the back streets to avoid the holiday makers. Her dad made her brother a trolley with wheels and her brother used to stand at the railway station and wait to take the visitors to their hotel making himself a shilling in the process.</p>
6.08	<p>Evelyn talks of the new childhood home. There was no central heating, but they used to have a fire with an oven and her mum used to roll up their nighties and pyjamas and leave them in the oven to keep them warm. She talks of the gas works in Morecambe and her mum sending them with her brother's trolley to pick up a bag of coke 'just happy memories we never went short'. She used to go to school with cardboard stuck in the bottom of her shoes because they had no soles. She reflects that it's sad that you don't appreciate your parents at the time.</p>
8.00	<p>Morecambe amalgamated with Lancaster in 1974. Evelyn says that It's said that at that point Morecambe started to go down-hill but realistically it was that people started to go on foreign holidays. Lancaster was renowned for being a factory city and Morecambe a seaside resort. She had the best of both worlds as her dad came from Lancaster and she used to go and stay with her grandparents for six weeks each year, near to Williamson's Park. Williamson's park was her playground. Her uncle was cripple and had trained himself to cobble shoes. There was always a smell around Lancaster which came from Storeys factory.</p>

10.36	Evelyn comments that things started to decline in Morecambe but that you couldn't blame it all on Lancaster. The factories started closing and the city was fortunate to get the university. People stopped going to Morecambe, so it wasn't worth while keeping attractions open. During the storm, that destroyed one of the piers, her mother in law, who lived on Bow Street, was flooded. The water had come down Bow Street like a river. Next morning every household was throwing things outside and the front end of the pier had gone. Children were on the beach collecting the money from the slot machines destroyed in the storm.
12.46	The Winter Gardens closed in 1977 but there wasn't a lot of fuss. Evelyn has looked back in the records and there was very little in the papers. She did find a letter from the time to say that for the last performance Carnforth Rotary Club had put on a RAF band and there hadn't been an empty seat in the house. Martindale the leader of the band had told everyone that it was the last night of the theatre. Most of the audience left in tears as <i>Land of Hope and Glory</i> played.
14.01	Do you remember anyone making a fuss about things disappearing in Morecambe? No not really. Evelyn had worked as an auxiliary on the Maternity Ward at Lancaster Infirmary, but her one ambition was to run a guest house. She and her husband bought an 8-bedroom house in Morecambe and converted it to a guest house when their children left home. She ran it for 13 years. She noticed that things were disappearing in Morecambe not through neglect but because people weren't using them. For example, she came to a play at the Winter Gardens (plays were often brought there before London runs) called <i>The Legend</i> starring Sandra Dickinson, but there was only 6 people in the circle.
16.03	Evelyn talks of summer in 1958 and looking out of the window, in the garden opposite were Morecambe and Wise - they had rented the house for the summer season. She talks of the Sunday concerts at the theatre. The top stars of the day came to Morecambe such as Tommy Steele, Cliff Richard and The Shadows. Every Sunday night there were 2 shows - one at 6.15 and one at 8.30. She would sit in the 'gods' and afterwards go downstairs to wait for the stars in order to get their autographs. The last person she saw there was Shirley Bassey.
17.50	In 1980s the Winter Gardens was sold to the people who owned Pleasure Land (next door) who applied for the attached ballroom and theatre to be demolished. The ballroom was dangerous so had to be taken down, but a small group of local people got the theatre listed as a grade 2-star listing. The group then disbanded. A small group of people, including Evelyn, then met and decided that someone would have to try and keep it open, so they formed 'The Friends' in 1986. They acted as a pressure group to petition the council to do something with the theatre. The building was an eyesore and was disintegrating.
19.44	The Friends decided that they should get on to the council and fight from the inside. Evelyn stood as an independent and won a place on the council. In 1995 the council decided to do something and worked with the Buildings at Risk Trust who bought the theatre. Evelyn describes where the finances were raised and the building

	renovations. The dressing rooms were demolished and rebuilt and the building was then 'enveloped'. The Buildings at Risk Trust sold it off to the construction company who had done the renovation. They sat on the building as well. Evelyn went to see the construction company in 2003, she was passed the keys and told 'to see what she could do with the building'.
22.24	The Friends opened the theatre for one weekend and had 2000 visitors. They continued to open at weekends and gave guided tours of the building. A developer came along in 2005 wanting to buy the theatre. Evelyn went back to the construction company who gave the Friends three years to buy the building for ¼ of a million pounds.
23.47	They created a trust. The following year Evelyn received a phone call from woman in Germany, who used to be in the Ivy Benson All Ladies Band. She explains how she left £147,000 in her will to the Trust to the theatre. Evelyn visited her in Germany. The lady's ashes were thrown off the end of the jetty.
26.34	What are your plans now? Evelyn talks about the theatre volunteers and friends and what they do, the paranormal groups and that the theatre is free for children to visit. A previous owner sold all the seats, but they still have groups such as the Drifters and put on a pantomime at Christmas
28.37	Evelyn talks about refurbishment of dressing rooms and about how they use the theatre now.
29.39	Evelyn talks about the Northern Powerhouse Minister Jake Berry visiting the theatre. He has helped Evelyn to look for grants towards installing heating. The ballroom next door used to generate electricity for both buildings. Evelyn talks of the things they have needed to add to the theatre.
31.15	Can you describe what the Ballroom looked like in its heyday? Evelyn talks of dancing in her youth. The programme 'Top Town' looked for talent in Morecambe and Evelyn auditioned for the show in the ballroom. She mentions that her mum told her about the RAF dancing in ballroom during the war. She went to Tuesday night dancing classes at the Gaumont (now bingo hall next to town hall) and her mum made all of the costumes for the dancers. They were chosen to do a pantomime at Alhambra (burnt down in 70s when Moby Dick also on fire) which meant a fortnight off school
33.27	She talks of the Alhambra being used for the film The Entertainer (end scenes filmed at the Winter Garden). She talks about the film.
34.25	What was it like in Winter? Used to run down backstreets as it was so cold on prom. Things closed down in the winter but she still went to the pier to dance.
36.10	Can you describe what it was like to run a guesthouse? Lovely. There were different times when visitors from Edinburgh, Glasgow or Yorkshire came. She started the guest house from scratch. After the first two years of running the B&B she started to offer an evening meal. She talks about the guests doing the washing up for her on the day of Charles and Diana's wedding. They made lots of friends. Her two-year-old granddaughter used to sit with guests in the dining room. In 1992 she sold the guesthouse. Visitors were older people who had come to Morecambe in the past for the attractions and younger

	people were no longer coming to Morecambe. She tells a story about issues with old guests with the new owners.
40.27	Evelyn talks about her job on the maternity ward during which she joined the Morecambe Warblers and performed in Oklahoma. She did a few shows with the Warblers.
41.42	She talks generally about the Winter Gardens and film crews and photographers using the site. She talks about Roy Castle.
43.39	What sums up for you how special Morecambe is? Evelyn could never leave Morecambe. - nowhere else is there such a sight as Morecambe Bay. She reflects on Morecambe. She remembers that it was once so popular that loud speakers broadcast around Morecambe for spare places to stay. She will stick up for Morecambe and be positive.
	Interview by Emma Aylett Summarised by Emma Aylett
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