**Rufus extracts joined**

**Rufus:** It was a much, different place . There was an awful lot of, I dont know... you would call them clones at this time. You would see big handle bar moustaches and erm, check shirts and erm, bleached jeans. It’s exactly how people would probably like to remember how the gay scene was. I remember that Clone Zone used to have a trestle table selling their wares inside as well. Um, my visits were kind of sporadic from there on, but at the time the gay scene was almost entirely in Earls Court whereas I believe, beforehand, it had been centred on Kensington High Street, places like The Sombrero and um, other places where you could dance but not touch and they weren’t licenced, so they really were tea dances in the proper sense of the word … um yes, so there were a couple of places in … in Earls Court including the infamous Colherne, which really does deserve its reputation. How they got away with it in the last ‘70s with … with um, kind of gay being an underground thing, I don’t know. Then the scene kind … next time I came down which was the early to mid-‘80s when I was staying in a squat in Covent Garden, it has kind of moved again to North London. I mean it was mainly centred around Camden who had at the time the only gay shop in London at the top end of Camden High Street. I can’t remember what it used to …what it was originally called?

**Interviewer:**  It was near the canal, up by the canal.

**Rufus:**  But quickly became the Zipper store erm, which in itself was the proper type of sex shop as in it had paint board walls and magazines in bags held up by curtain wires so that they all kind of would limply hang over and just throw themselves onto the floor. And it was … there was so much …

seemed to be so much more going on. You looked in the back of things like Time Out and there were literally dozens and dozens and dozens of pubs and drag clubs for you to choose from, all the way round London specially lots in North London, lots in South London, um, Camberwell I think, there were three gay pubs all at once here. There was The Union on the Camberwell Road which used to have drag acts performing on the bar um, there was one … a little one a bit further upon which is now a trendy, trendy pub

**Interviewer:**  Not the Skinner’s Arms?

**Rufus:**  No, I can’t remember what it was. It has completely blacked out windows and the last time I went, which would have been early ‘90s um, they were still as a DJ that was playing records and talking between them and when he got bored you’d hear the needle kind of scratch off, which of course wasn’t as bad as um, oh it’s Thought in Borough, which was possibly one of the most disgustingly dirty places I have ever been in. Not dirty in the traditional sense but the fact that your feet would stick to the floor as you walked in, and you looked at the lovely brass bar fittings that hadn’t been cleaned for … for years, and so you wouldn’t ever buy anything that wasn’t in a bottle already um, and the music was on a tape deck and would come suddenly to the end until the barman went over and turned it over. Oh those were the days!

As I say there were lots and lots of erm pubs and clubs. Lots of drag which at the time was an awful lot of miming and not so much quick comedy which kind of came on a lot later on um… Where else? There was The Vauxhall Tavern of course, but not too far away was the even more notorious Market Tavern which I believe was the first pub I went in on my own… up the side it was part of kind of a late ‘60s housing….

**Interviewer:**  Market Towers I think the building was.

**Rufus:**  Yeah, and you had to go … the entrance was up the stairway at the side, and I went in, and I would have been around sixteen, seven… well no, sixteen at the time, and I was the youngest person there by a good forty years um, I probably looked like a rabbit caught in the headlights, and it was a, you know, a sea of mew cats and big moustaches. It was exciting and terrifying at the same … same time as um, you know, most like most people were at the time that didn’t live in the big city, you really did believe that you were the only gay in the village and that was quite possibly true um,

**Interviewer:** Can you recall a particular experience of a pub of a place being raided while you were there?

**Rufus:**  Um, Vauxhall Tavern yes and being lined up against the wall and every … everybody trying to slip out the side and the back exit before um, you’d be frisked and they’d take your name and address um. It was more of a threat rather than anything coming of it um, but it was very much a deterrent to … to people at the time, and there really didn’t seem to be any um, particular reason for them to be raiding places um. I … um, you know, at the time there was a lot of homophobic police um, who were just out to um, make people’s life as difficult as possible um, where did we get to? We did the sauna and we’ve done the pubs and the clubs, what else?

I think, when … when the gay epicentre moved to Soho it started coming to the surface a lot more um, although AIDS arrived here in about ‘82 um, nobody really knew about it and even when Terry Higgins died in what was it? July ’84? Even still at that time they weren’t writing HIV or AIDS on the … on the death certificate but that’s when people … well, no, even then, it took it took a good couple of years for people to start taking any serious notice of it. ‘88 you’d still get um, little skinny queens in … in cropped tops wandering up and down Old Compton Street, and they’d shout to each other instead of saying hello they’d just go “Got AIDS yet?”

And it all seemed to be … because I think it seemed very unreal because nobody knew what it was, why it was or, you know, how they were going to deal with it. I think natural instinct was to make a big joke out of it until we got to about 1990 I suppose. ‘89 ’90, where it just seemed to be that all you ever did was go to funerals um, people were literally dropping like flies and … and dying in front of you. An awful lot of people committed suicide because of the shame, the amount of pain they were in, how they looked. They didn’t want their families to find out um, it was a horrendous time. I mean the hospitals were just not coping with it. They were … the nurses and doctors seemed afraid to deal with the patients. They were put into general wards and you’d find that there’d be somebody else in the ward with, you know, flu or a bad cold and you just thought “Well, it’s going to finish him off” and generally it did and they just put on the death certificate “pneumonia” and that would be another one.

But I think it was probably the end of the gay community as it used to be just because it was decimated. It really, really, was um, because again nobody knew how it was being transmitted.

Nobody was talking about safe sex or protecting yourself. I remember it …. at one point they were … it was all blamed on poppers. There was a direct correlation between poppers and Kaposi’s syndrome. I don’t know who was making all this rubbish up but it was … it was terrifying, and for the ones left behind it was such a high proportion that felt guilty that they weren’t infected because if you’ve got, you know, all your friends … at that time it was a death sentence, and you think “Well, I’ve done the same things, possibly with the same people and I haven’t … and I’m not ill.” Quite a few people I know were going to the doctors month after month for test after test and they were still negative and they were just “I don’t know how I managed this” and it’s so much different these days that … with it not being a death sentence any more, that people don’t treat it with the same caution, even though really it does still carry the same kind of stigma, and then of course things like the tombstone adverts on TV really um, didn’t help.

**Interviewer:** Interviewer Don’t die

**Rufus:** ofignorance