

Radio Essex Interview (7 mins long – 23:56 mins into the programme)

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Alex Lester at Radio Essex interviewed Neil Churcher - Chairman of Frinton Residents Association on Friday 6 September 2019.

Alex: I'd like to talk about Frinton now. Back in the 80's Frinton was well-known for not having any pubs. The first one, The Lock and Barrel, didn't open until the year 2000 and, of course, there's the famous Frinton gates - the wooden gates of the railway line which effectively sealed off the town when the gates were shut. Like a curfew.

It's a lovely town, of course, but I wondered how much it's changed since the 80s, especially with regard to its reputation.

Well, joining us this morning is Neil Churcher, Chairman of Frinton Residents' Association.

Neil, A very good morning, welcome to the programme.

Neil: Good morning Alex, nice talking to you.

Alex: Thank you for joining us. Now, it was a long time coming that pub wasn't it. So what's Frinton like nowadays? Tell me what it's like today?

Neil: I don't suppose it's changed an awful lot. As you said, the pub didn't open until 2000 and the gates got removed in 2009. So we let all the riff raff in after that, of course, including people, maybe, from BBC Essex!

Alex: You had to show identity cards to be allowed in?

Neil: Well, these are advisable because as it happens there's only the one really main route into this part of Frinton still. I mean, there are barriers now put in across the level crossing as the gates have gone, but as you probably remembered, the railway line actually cuts Frinton in two so you've got the north part, which is the more modern part and the south part which was the original Frinton, which I think was mentioned way back in 1086 as a farm with a population of about 31. There's a couple more people than that here now, but it's moved on and there are pubs there now (there are two pubs one in the north part and one in the south part).

Alex: Well they don't have to travel too far for the darts match then do they?

Neil: No, that's fine; that's good, and it's developed there are loads of restaurants, cafés, coffee shops, wine bars even - a real den of inequity. But what we've done, I think, ... not we ... but the Residents' Association and the Counsellors over the years - have tried to retain some of the essence of Frinton. Frinton, I mean really is a town by the sea it's not a seaside town. So down in the front we've got the beach and the

Greensward and we've got about a mile of smooth sandy beach and a mile of roughly 50-meter wide greensward and then houses. I mean there's nothing commercial down the front. There's no arcades or anything like that. But the main road, the main high street in the south part of Frinton, which is Connaught Avenue, has got loads and loads of shops all individually owned and somewhat different.

Alex: It certainly sounds idyllic actually. Is there ... well, thinking about it Neil, because when I was there last, there weren't any pubs and the gates were there etc and Frinton was a town apart. Do you think that there's pressure all the time? Obviously there must have been some pressure to open a pub, the gates, as you say, weren't there in 2009. Is there pressure to develop that wonderful seafront you've got. Well one amusement arcade wouldn't be too bad would it? A couple of fish and chip shops and kiss me quick hats.

Neil: It's not going to happen! There's a sort of conservation area established, so you'd need quite strict planning permission for anything like that. All of us want the Frinton we want and welcome visitors. For six weeks of the year it's pretty hectic because it's ideal for families because they can come because it's a lovely safe beach which gets washed twice a day by the tide and when the tide's in there's all the Greensward - like a lovely big long field so it's great for families, free parking etc, etc so it's actually very good for visitors and if you do want a good meal or want to go and have a decent cup of coffee or glass of wine you can toddle off to Connaught Avenue which runs at right angles to the beach.

Alex: Like I say, you are the Tourist Board. By the sound of it you're doing a fantastic job there. You see I first became aware of Frinton when it appeared on television as a sort of joke. When Frinton... as a kid...I remember watching "All gas and Gaiters". Yes, I do remember that. It was on even before you were on Radio Two. Exactly. That was a very long time ago that was. And then there was "Oh Brother" after that which starred Derek Nimmo and there was always a question in practically every episode: You going on holiday. You going to Clacton? No, Frinton actually, and everyone would laugh! What was it like living in Frinton when people, if you just said Frinton, you would get a smile?

Neil: Well you still do get a bit of a smile actually. People still think it's the same as it was but really that was the sort of 1920s, 1930s when, you know, it was very posh to come to Frinton and you had people like the Prince of Wales who used to come here and Winston Churchill etc, etc. But I haven't been here that long, but I happen to be the Chair of the Residents' Association so I've picked up the gauntlet, if you like, of trying to keep Frinton reasonable. Obviously it's got advanced we've got hot running water, we've got Wi-Fi, we've got everything now.

Alex: Aright. You can make it into a sort of modern, and rather benign version, Royston Vasey ?? can't you? So you can have "Welcome to Frinton you'll never leave" written underneath the town sign.

Neil: Well, the people who come here, sort of want to come here if you like. There's no industry, as such, here apart from a little bit of tourist industry I suppose, but if you come here you want to come here to live. You want the peace and quiet and this is what you are buying into when you come here and if you come here as a visitor and most visitors that I've spoken to buy in to that as well. That's what they've come here for, they don't want flashing lights and all the rest of it they just want to walk along the beach and enjoy the sunshine, fresh air and use the amenities that are in the town. I think to develop it any further would be terrible really. Would reduce the character of the place.

Alex: Certainly. Certainly. When you talk about the sort of people who want to come there, because it does sound absolutely idyllic Neil - does that mean that (how can I put this politely) a senior population.

Neil: Rather, yes. It's certainly, as the Americans put it, Snowbird country*.

Alex: Snowbird. What a great expression that is!

Neil: You've never heard it before?

Alex: Neil - no, I haven't. I've never heard Snowbird country! I love it.

Neil: People with snowy hair. It's nice. It's a very low crime rate, people are polite, friendly, there's very little hassle really, and we all want to keep it that way or most of us, I think, and so Frinton, if you like, it's still an image of maybe ... I don't know what you'd call it ... maybe quiet 50s, 60s Britain, whereas it's just quiet and peaceful.

Alex: Well fantastic. Are sweets off the ration in Frinton yet?

Neil: Yes, but some people still have a little stash of coupons!

Alex: Neil, it sounds fantastic. Lucky you for living there. Neil Churcher, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us on the programme this morning.

Neil: Thank you

Alex: A pleasure. Neil Churcher, Chairman of the Frinton Residents' Association. It does seem like a fun place to be and being a beer-faced life form, as a friend of mine once described himself, Frinton's great, but it didn't have a pub and now it's got two. Also I am heading to Snowbird territory myself. What's not to like!

* The word snowbird was first used in 1923 in the United States to describe seasonal workers who moved south for the winter months, and by 1979 it was commonly used in reference to the large number of retiree tourists who flocked to the south. The majority of international snowbirds came from Canada.

