

INTERVIEW: FRED

Q1b. Have you always lived in Milton Keynes? (When did you arrive? What was your first impression? What reasons prompted your move?)

FRED: Since 1981, so no, but a fair few years.

INTERVIEWER: First impression?

FRED:

It was cold because there was two inches of snow on the ground. My first impression was Stony Stratford would you believe? I literally got off a train at Wolverton and was taken in a taxi to Stony. I was in digs for the first year. I was in Stony the first year, in 1981. I got the job at Hanslope Park. To move from Surrey, I was living with my parents; it was the only job I got so I had to come here. I was basically in digs for a year.

Q2. What do you feel has changed the most in Milton Keynes?

FRED:

Definitely, I always thought it was really clever how they thought of the future, so I arrived just towards the end, well middle to end of the development corporation time. I felt like everything had been planned, roundabouts were in place where there were no roads going. Cables were in the ground, water, gas, everything. I thought it was really clever, as I trained as an engineer, I thought it was really clever. So, I felt pretty cool about the place. But the biggest change for me is the population, about four/five years ago we started getting traffic jams. I've noticed that. I always think that the change is the good thing about it though, it's still evolving, and we will be a city one day.

Q3. What, if any, qualities make Milton Keynes unique?

FRED:

I think it's forward-thinking, although I am wondering about that these days. Obviously, the effect of the Development Corporation has gone away I have noticed buildings getting higher than they used to, I don't know if it was a by-law or whatever, but no building should be taller than a tree, that was a development corporation methodology or whatever. But I'm noticing higher buildings. I'm noticing more concrete, whereas it used to be glass. I think its location, halfway between Birmingham and London, every single arterial connection you can think of train, road, canal. I think the module approach to housing, education and services. I don't think it is unique anymore, but I think it was certainly the start.

I know people may argue with that with some of the new town's nearer London, of course. It's very American in its layout. I'm quite used to America; I think that is what makes it unique. The fact you can see a tree in the centre of the city, I think that is pretty cool. I live in Springfield, and I am in such a green housing estate, there are trees everywhere, but leaves are a problem. But I don't mind. The fact you can walk all through the Ousel Valley park, and you are literally in walking distance of the biggest shopping centre in the UK. I think those make it unique. I found the schools really good when my kids were growing up. They had their challenges, too many kids and not enough resources. Don't get me going, but all in all, I thought it was good. It strikes me if you are in city like London or whatever there is no new place to build a new school. Whereas Milton Keynes has that ability to grow, it will be part of Bedford and Buckingham one day.

Q4. What would make you proud to live in a place? (Do you experience some of these elements in living in Milton Keynes? What could improve your pride in living in Milton Keynes?)

FRED:

It would need to have a heart, a culture. And I don't mean any ethnic culture, I mean a friend's culture. Performance, I'm a virtual Stonyite, even though I'm in Springfield, it's got to have a place, a cultural heart, I think. I think a lot of people don't discover it in Milton Keynes, I often speak to people, and they often say they didn't realise there was a good music scene or whatever. Yet we have a stunning music scene, I've travelled all over the world and always come back here, and it's brilliant, I can play music every night of the week if I wanted to. I would like it to be a city. I don't know why it isn't. Come on Queen. We've been calling it a city for thirty years, get with the program. But I am proud of Milton Keynes, I would defend it, I do defend it because people think it's some concrete jungle, yet there is so little concrete, it's all glass, to be honest. I would like it to have city status; I am a little worried about how it's run these days. With all that stupid thing with voting for the Milton Keynes plan which is the most stupid democratic vote which no one knew anything about. I ended up having... can I tell a story?

INTERVIEWER: Yes

FRED:

So, all of a sudden there was this thing on a ballot paper where we had to vote for, the Milton Keynes plan and yet there was no briefing or anything. It is the only time in my life I was escorted out of a polling station because there was this poor lady saying "what's this about? I don't know what it's about". The lady in the polling station, said to the clerk "How can I vote for something when I don't know what it's about?". And so, I started to tell her, 'I've just done some research, and this is what it's

about. Then I was asked to leave because I'm not allowed to tell somebody in a polling station because it's called canvassing. Jesus! The world is screwed.

Q5. In your opinion, what element of Milton Keynes is: The best. The most exciting. The hardest. Lacking. The most culturally significant. The richest in heritage?

INTERVIEWER: Best?

FRED:

Stony Stratford. I love the music, I love the performance stuff, I think we can do amazing things, we've done amazing things, so there is that aspect it. There is a great variety. Sorry if this is drifting off. I don't know the name of my next-door neighbour, yet I can't walk down the street in Stony without seeing someone I know, and yet I live 7 miles away. So, there is a different form of community, we've got our little boxes, and we've all got an internet connection. However, we're all separate, and yet we go to a place where there is our community rather than living next door to it. I've noticed that. I don't know if it's wrong or right, but we're in it. So, I think this is the best of what we do. Like I'm involved with you guys, like the very fact that at the age of 55 I was in the Merchant of Venice, I mean would I have got that in Surrey or Petersfield? No, perhaps I wouldn't. I just happened to be here.

I have travelled the world, it was my job for a long time, but it's always a good place to come back to. That's one culture I'm part of. But there are others like the keep-fit community. Round the gym, for example, I have some great friends, and then the very fact that there is so much parkland, I can walk, I can cycle from one end of the city to the other without touching a road. Actually, I've cycled to York House without going on the road. Although I always find it hard. Because when I was a kid we were always told not to ride on the path, but you're allowed to here. I love the fact it has a brilliant theatre and a brilliant music venue in the stables. And the stadium. There is just so much to do, so it's good.

INTERVIEWER: The most exciting element?

FRED:

I think I get excited at the opportunity, for example, the I.F. Festival. I don't know if you were anything to do with that. I feel quite guilty about not going to see some of it. I got involved with this film, this Australian film company, so Cabarrosse and Stony Stratford theatre society all fielded stuff. I love the fact we all turned up there with our bits and pieces of theatre, and then we were all made to do something different, and that's what's in the film, and then to have the premiere of the film at the IF festival in a big tent with Pete Winkelman. There's me I'm briefly in it for two seconds! The wonderful thing about it was like WOW. These Australians came over to the UK to do this film, they were commissioned to do it, and they managed to capture the essence of Milton Keynes in that film. It's Milton Keynes. So very multicultural, they captured that, very artistic, they captured that, very funny, they captured that, and it was all in this little film they made. I thought 'Oh wow!' and it was wonderful. So that sort of thing gets me excited that I'm given that opportunity to take part in that.

INTERVIEWER: The hardest?

FRED:

Homelessness. It upsets me. It is that sense of guilt you have when you walk pass and not give something, but you know it's going to go on drugs or something perhaps, or maybe that is the wrong assumption, and I'm guilty of that assumption. But Homelessness I find terrible and we should do something about, and I commend and support any of the charities that do something. There is the bus charity which we've done stuff for. I would rather put money into those sorts of things than give someone 50p and think - well, you know. I find it quite a problem in this town, a severe problem. The

very fact you've got John Lewis within 100 yards of someone living in a tent under an underpass. Just those two diverse positions, it does my head in. I wish I could do more; we've got to change the government to do that.

INTERVIEWER: Lacking?

FRED:

It's not too good on sailing! Saying that there is Haversham sailing club which I used to be a member of. We've got a football team. Not enough antique shops, but that's a personal thing. I'd like to know the name of my next-door neighbour, the physical community maybe. I chose to live here, I can do my job anywhere, but I chose to live here. I did actually have a party 20 years ago and invited everybody in, and that was very successful, but people have moved on. There is a new set of houses. There are only three houses in the whole estate which have the original occupants. I'm one of those. I can't think of anything else; I wish I could think of a brilliant answer but when you have things like the IF festival.

INTERVIEWER: The most culturally significant?

FRED:

It got to be the public houses in Stony Stratford. It's not which one, there is a bunch of us which turn up and talk stuff on a Friday. The fact I can have a discussion, a debate, over a beer in a pub that doesn't have music blaring in the background. It is wonderful. All such debates should happen face to face, not on Facebook; I know I do it. Come to the pub and have a chat and a beer, and if we don't agree on something, we have a point view, but we're still drinking a pint of beer. I don't mean that like

'oh God! he is an alcoholic' I mean the coming together and we do that so well in the virtual community of Stony Stratford. The meeting of people. I think is wonderful. So culturally, for me, perhaps, I do enjoy meeting my friends in a pub talking rubbish usually and sharing a beer and opinion and sometimes a song, or a story or two.

INTERVIEWER: The richest in heritage?

FRED:

I love to be able to say the multicultural side of things, but it's not true, because I've travelled and met many cultures. I wish there were something I could personally do something about it. I think the richest thing for me that community around the music that we have and what I described as POETS (piss off early tomorrow's Saturday) night we have on a Friday. That kind of ability we have to talk with your friends, and sometimes with strangers who are brought in by others. Can I tell you a story?

INTERVIEWER: Yes

FRED:

The vaults Sunday session, it's been running ... in fact, we celebrated its 39th, 38th year, a couple of weeks ago. And people come from a long way to get there sometimes, they have made a point because they've seen a Facebook post. One day I was in there, and a friend of mine who works on Togfest is the president of the festival. Ian Rowe. His wife's cousin was over from Australia, and he'd brought him along to the vaults, and he is a professional opera singer, a guy called Warwick Olney-Fyfe if you look him up. He is an interesting character, I just hit it off with him, we were chatting away and talking complete bollocks. He was seeing us in the vaults performing, and I said are you

going to do a song, and he said no, no he would clear the place. He wouldn't sing. but the next day he connected with me on Facebook and then the Monday evening he said I'm doing a recital in London; would you be my guest. So, I went from a beer in a pub, to a Tuesday night in the Australian embassy, an incredible building. This guy who was the bloke in the pub is now this incredible opera singer, wonderful singing. I find I am with the world's classical glitterati in the audience, and I'm feeling slightly out of my depth, but I met some interesting people. So that is the discovery and excitement I found in my community, and where else would you do that. It blew my mind. We are good friends now. He is also severely diabetic; he had to disappear regularly to take his insulin. He has an opinion; I love people who have an opinion. Warwick is a professional opera singer and has played at Sydney opera house.

Q6. Has Milton Keynes played a part in helping you gain any achievements which you might not have been successful in if you lived elsewhere? Has it aided any failures?

FRED:

Absolutely, I had never been in a band. I mean I did music before; I had been a musician before, I've always been a musician, but never had an outlet. I was in the Sea Cadet band in Reigate, or Redhill, we always say Reigate because Redhill is like...(shite)

But I was in the Sea Cadet band there and was given great opportunities, such as I played the Royal Albert Hall. It was good, but I don't think I would have ever been in a band like I am now or acting like I am now. Or doing spoken word, I would never have done that in Redhill. Yeah, it's given me that. Also, in my 40s, someone talked me into running the London Marathon, I did it four times in the end. I don't think any of those things would have happened, but they might of done, but they've happened here, so I associate those things with Milton Keynes.

I don't think it has affected any failures here, I am pretty good at making my own failures, but I always think the stadium is a bit of a white elephant, but what I love about it is Mr Winkelman says one day it will be a premier division. He's going to have to wait a long time bless him. But you know

what he put the rugby world cup there. I admire the guy. We are failing on the homelessness front. I don't know enough about what the solution should be. Someone is giving them tents, so someone cares. But when you have this dichotomy between rich and poor and those you have and have not, we should be able to do something about that, I think there are things we could do, but I don't know what.

Q7. If you were in charge of advertising Milton Keynes what view/image and/or tag line would you give it?

FRED:

The DC use to be so good at that, I think our symbol should be a tree, a tree is something that grows, it's there every year, well apart from one poor tree in the city centre, which we won't talk about. I like to; I would love people to have had the opportunity I had, I am not so sure it's there anymore, because obviously my kids have grown up now, so I can't speak about schooling anymore. I am worried about housing because I have young adults living with me, and on a minimum wage, you can't actually get accommodation. My oldest daughter has flown the coup, marriage, children; they were in a two-bedroom flat council flat in Oak Hill, not Oak Hill, the estate next to Fishermead Old Brook. Nice flat, but you know.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you know that area, before Milton Keynes, use to be known as Goblin's Ditch.

FRED:

Well, I didn't know that. Goblins Ditch. My son-in-law is a rather successful landscape gardener, got his own business, small business. Self-employed of course and couldn't get a mortgage, so stuck with three children in a corner flat. By some clever bookkeeping by my daughter who is clever at those

things, they managed to convince someone to lend them the money, and they got a house now in Oakhill over the back of us, we can walk to theirs. So, there is still opportunity, but I had a house when I was 20, they didn't get one until they over 30, so I just wonder how those people do the equations. You need accommodation, and if you have the type of job where you are earning the minimum wage, my youngest daughter works in Tesco's and on minimum wage, and how can you... you are going to have to live with me because I'm a big softie and don't charge them enough rent. I can't see them getting a mortgage. I was made redundant. Well, to be honest, I was fired. And I was out of work for six months, and I tried to start up a photography business, and professionally hire myself out as a sound engineer and stuff like that. I earned money, but it wasn't enough, the irony is I'm a zero burden because everything I had from benefits I had from signing on they took off me because I earned that little bit as a musician. So I found it quite interesting, it didn't bother me, I think I didn't take anything from the state. The housing thing for me, the DC did a great job, and I don't know maybe some of the tactics were wrong, I was considered skill labour coming into the area and went to the top of the list, there was housing list jumping. I don't know if that was right or wrong, but it was certainly a city that was growing and developing and to bring skills into the area and give an opportunity to those skills was a good thing. But I don't know the background to that. I did feel a little guilty jumping the housing list, but heck, you know.

Q8. If Milton Keynes was a person could you describe them and the type of 50th party they might have?

FRED: Dara O'Brien. Smart, clever, little bit quirky, funny, losing his hair.

INTERVIEWER: Party?

FRED:

Better than the 30th I went to that one too. The concrete cows, the concrete cowboys, celebrate the arts, which it does anyway, but have a bigger party. There are 70 community centres in Milton Keynes, I know it's a nice big list as I have been trying to find some rehearsal space recently. And if each one of those could have a party and then we kind of swap, if there was this community centre, and then this community centre, by far the king the of the community centres is [York House]. Then take five from there and take five from there and mix and match. That would be a good party, lots of balloons, fun, maybe the cultural thing a multicultural thing which I wonder if we could better.

INTERVIEWER: Gift?

FRED:

I would give them all the bunting that Stony Stratford has had for the last 1000 years and put it up on every street because you gotta admit that looks good. All the bunting that Milton Keynes could need for every street, let's just celebrate, Arh that's sappy isn't it.

Q9. Please watch this clip from the BFI archives, 8 mins

(<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-milton-keynes-a-village-city-1973-online>). It shows the early days of Milton Keynes. Does this evoke any memories or thoughts you are comfortable sharing?

FRED:

That is where the arts gateway is now. [referring to the factory units on the film]

"Navies" you don't hear that much these days [referring to a comment on the film]

That's the bull yard. Good heavens.

That model still exists you know [referring to the model of the town centre]

There you go Fred Roach, a little bit of a superhero.

You were talking about opportunity earlier, and I didn't talk about it then, but that [film] brought it back. I had a house when I was 20. Do you know I've never put a deposit on a house, ever! I don't think you could possibly get that elsewhere, and the DC which Fred, who was around when I came to Milton Keynes, first a DC council flat and through shared ownership schemes have the opportunity to buy out my share at a severe discount got me on the mortgage ladder and a house which my children are excluded from now. The only way they get a house now is if I die, which is not a very pleasant thought now for either them or me. But it did give me opportunities, so I was able to bring up a very young family easier than perhaps if I lived elsewhere in Surrey or Sussex. I remember the mugs. All of my houses have been new houses, apart from when I came to digs in Stony. So, I always remember having to have a pair of wellies with you at all times.

It was interesting to see so many places which were the places of the future and now are the slums. Galley Hill for example, and the beautiful shot there of Kiln Farm, where now are mainly charity headquarters and storehouses, and the wonderful arts gateway are now. It is interesting how the life has grown old; perhaps we've all grown old with Milton Keynes.

Q 10. Do you think Milton Keynes has a good reputation a. Internally with its residents, b. Externally with the rest of the country? (Why do you think it has this reputation? How does that make you feel? What could improve it?)

FRED:

Me and Caz were arguing with someone about being a concrete jungle, but there's no concrete. I think people don't understand it. People equate it to; concrete jungle, concrete cows, concrete everything. It an easy thing to ridicule. That's because most people just pass through it and never stop. I think secretly they know and are slightly jealous. Maybe it's a jealousy thing; I don't know.

I feel angry, but not destructive angry, just you're wrong, and I'm going to tell you, I would defend it, I would happily defend the city. I once wrote a song, and I still sing it, it's called River of Dreams and the city was me. I mention one line in it 'the cows of stone and the city of glass', and in the song, if you listen to it, it sounds like I'm dissing Milton Keynes, but actually I'm dissing myself. I realise that now, but I wrote it 30 years ago when I first moved to Milton Keynes.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you see yourself as an extension of MK, or MK as an extension of yourself.

FRED:

I'd like to think I was a part of it, we are, well you are by doing this, the storytelling, the spoken word, the singing of songs, the beer, the talking rubbish on a Friday. All of this is what we are, actually what that guy says in the video, we've forgotten about him, and now we've taken over as the heart, we are the heart. I didn't realise he'd said that.

INTERVIEWER: What can be done to improve it?

FRED:

I had this dream once, well not a dream; it was a discussion with a good friend who is no longer with us. Malcolm Jones and there was a series running on TV called the Transatlantic tapes, and so they took a Scottish musician or an English folk musician, and an American musician stuck them in a cottage and made them play stuff together. And it was wonderful telly. And we do that every Sunday lunchtime in the vaults. Let's make a film. I think if people could see and feel, and there bad sessions as well as good sessions. You go along sometimes on a Sunday, have a couple of beers, you don't

have to drink, by the way, other people drink coffee or tea. That's not the issue you have 25 people in a room that share a song, for a brief moment in time, and leave that room feeling uplifted, and better about themselves. Every week by the way you'll see a post that was a great session, every week, someone will put that up. Why can't we do that on a bigger scale, so why can't we share that experience with other people either through the different media? I try to, I post, maybe too much, I love to do a live thing from the vaults, the number of people who come along and say to me I came along because I saw your video. Maybe that something we could do for Milton Keynes. The trouble is there is a little part of me that also says that would spoil it. Malcolm and I seriously thought about this tv series, because he used to be in the industry; he was a radio producer. It was something we were talking about before he passed away. It would be well within our capabilities.

Q 11. Do you know any stories, jokes, or urban myths about Milton Keynes? Can you share them?

FRED:

So, you know I was involved with the book, the pubs of Stony Stratford. There is a Dick Turpin story about the Cross Keys, but he didn't come here. Ken and I worked on this book together, with a great historian called Bryan Dunleavy, who has moved to Southampton. I did all the photography, and I did the photography for the cover. And Ken did all the door knocking and bless him he [Bryan Dunleavy] credited us as co-authors of the book and split the earnings between us which have been quite considerable. I learned some stories there, but I already knew some stories beforehand like the Cork and Bull story everybody's heard that one. The princes in the tower story, Brian definitely thought that's a load of rubbish, not rubbish but not in the Rose and Crown. It's very highly likely to have happened in Stony Stratford because it was the only town that had enough bed space for a royal entourage. So, there's enough inn space, so that would have been the real problem, and here they were for coaching inns at least. Can I tell your modern story?

INTERVIEWER: Please do.

FRED:

I've got a story about George Webley too. George Webley thought to this day that the reason he has never been invited to play folk on the green is because one year he played 'so here it is Merry Christmas' there, and he said he never got invited back. Anyway, he invited me to do radio interview about StonyLive! Thinking I was from Folk on the Green he spent the entire interview lambasting me, you should give me a gig on folk on the green. And I said I'm nothing to do with folk on the green I'm StonyLive. It was very funny. Singing Here it is Merry Christmas on folk on the green. So, I think the pub stories are pretty well-known, so I don't think I need to go into those.

I will pull one thing out of the book that really hit home with me when Bryan did his research. Ironically, when the book was being put together Ken was supposed to proofread it, but just at the time when Bryan needed it proofreading, he disappeared to Turkey on holiday, and so a dyslexic banjo player proofread his book. Bryan must be slightly dyslexic because there's lots of spelling. We captured a couple between us, so I was quite proud, and Ken had a quick look when he got back. The thing that really jumped out of the book to me around the great fire of 1742 started by a maid stuffing a burnt ironed blanket up the chimney. The north end of Stony Stratford had to be rebuilt, so there was a lot of fundraising went on. One thing that is little-known was that there was a fund-raising concert. In 1743 or 44, something like that, after the fire. It was a time of great affluence with the coaching trade it was all quite good in Stony at the time some money could be found. But they had concert to raise funds to rebuild, and I like to think that was the first StonyLive. I've no record. So, I proofread the book, and I read it four times, that's the one that really stuck. Some of them didn't. I did have a glance at it last week just to remind myself about the cock and Bull story. But I thought everybody does that one. The great fire concert I would love to have known who was on the bill and what music was played and recreate it. You could guess, I reckon the Stony Stratford mummers were there. Brian was going to try, but he hasn't because he's kind of retiring, but Brian was kind of going to see if he

could find anything like that in the newspapers see if there were any adverts, not adverts or whatever, but it's such a long time ago. I'm just intrigued by it. That was the thing that jumped out the page at me. All these pub names we came up with, great stories like the two Royal Oaks. There were two of them next door to each other there is a story in there, that was one thing that stuck in this brain of mine, that charity concert. I just wonder what it was like. I think it definitely started in the Bull hotel could if you look at the architecture. It was a long chimney as well because they rebuilt it.

One of the things that struck me again from the book was a knowledge thing really. It's not really to do with the pubs. The street was actually a boundary between Calverton Manor and Wolverton Manor, and I wonder if there were any, well obviously there were two churches for a start.

I was there when they found a Roman villa in Bancroft. Just over the other side of the road, they found a mausoleum. A beautiful mausoleum it was I actually saw it. It's covered over now both built on top of it. They found four bodies of a family in there. They found a mosaic which is on the wall, somewhere, it used to be in the city centre. I think it is in the Milton Keynes museum now, isn't it? Those four bodies were one family they tested the DNA. But they reckon they weren't Roman. They were Romanised Britons. There was a swimming pool there, a pond. If you look, there are little holes in the wall, and that's where the little fish used to swim into when people went swimming. I was there at the first dig because my house was on Bancroft and it was a new house. But in the park, they were digging, and they had an open day. In fact, I actually went up and did some digging, not anything serious let me tell you just more have a go. The mausoleum was fascinating. There's actually a building on it now which they reckon looks like it would have looked like. It's a modern building. Somebody lives in it now. But there is a hexagonal building actually built there. Is interesting, isn't it? And this is a modern New Town. Maybe we need to tell them about our history. It's fascinating.

FRED

Date: 29/9/2018

Location: Office Space, York House Centre, Stony Stratford

Observation: Fred brought a great energy into the room and had a jovial but conscientious disposition. He approached the questions in a relaxed and at humble manner (asking if what he'd said was ok). He had a great many stories of his experiences, mostly framing his answers as stories and clarified his points by telling further stories. Fred enjoyed being interviewed this was evident by the length of his responses, his facial expressions and gesticulations when telling his stories (which were open and big, and became more exaggerated the more relish he took in the telling), he also informed the interviewer after the interview was complete how much he had enjoyed it.

The transcription was taken verbatim, the alterations that occurred during the member check was the removal of some names of people in the stories, some further clarification, and some textual tidying in the form of punctuation.