

[00:00:00] **Jarek:** OK, uh, right. Uh, yeah. So this is Jarek Zaba with the AMP project from Creative Youth. It's the 11th of December, 2023. And I'm with Jamie O'Grady, former owner of the Fighting Cocks jamie, do you mind just, uh, confirming your name and your date and place of birth, please?

[00:00:16] **Jamie O'Grady:** Sure. Jamie Paul O'Grady. Uh, I was born in Adelaide, South Australia, Australia, uh, on the 21st of February, 1973.

[00:00:26] **Jarek:** Very good. Um, yeah, Jamie, I wonder if we could start prior to your history with the Fighting Cocks. Just, um, were you, were you in the pub bar venue ownership game prior to that? Um, and were you, were you sort of Kingston based or was- is Fighting Cocks your first sort of involvement there?

[00:00:43] **Jamie O'Grady:** So my introduction to the Fighting Cocks was off the back of some people that I knew that were involved in a band that had a resident residency at the Grey Horse, um, a band called Objects of Desire.

[00:00:56] **Jamie O'Grady:** And That was, um, uh, [00:01:00] which, which then morphed into, uh, a few years later, morphed into Kula Shaker. Um, so I was, when I first got to the UK, I, uh, through a couple of people, a guy I knew in, from London, who was, uh, sorry, beg your pardon, n- yeah, a guy I knew from Australia who was living in London and who knew this girl who knew this band and it was in Kingston and we were in Central at the time and we started going to see them.

[00:01:28] **Jamie O'Grady:** They used to play at the Grey Horse every fortnight, started making a bit of a Kingston crew that way and then right- you know, and back then, um, this is, late 80s, you know, the, the, um, there was pretty strong sort of goth scene, alternative scene. Um, and so on the weekends that they weren't playing the Grey Horse, we had, you know, there was nowhere to go.

[00:01:52] **Jamie O'Grady:** So we used to go to the Flamingo, the Flamingo Brewery, which I think now is called Number One Hotel, um, in Kingston, formerly the Tup. [00:02:00] Um, and, uh, so they used to do DJ nights there and That was a big alternative clique there, but also, um, on the, on the, on the, um, Saturday nights that, uh, the Objects weren't playing at the Grey Horse.

[00:02:16] **Jamie O'Grady:** They were doing Rock the Cockpit at the Fighting Cocks, which was a, um, sort of punk goth um, alternative DJ night, um, that was really well attended and went for years and years and years. And so that

was my introduction to the Fighting Cocks, going to Rock the Cockpit and, uh, meeting a lot of people there and drinking in the bar there.

[00:02:38] **Jamie O'Grady:** But it was really interesting because you had Rock the Cockpit with all these mad looking dudes with huge makeup and hair and piercings and all the, all of it. And then the front bar was like just dead traditional, very much a Chelsea pub. Um, just bizarrely, it kind of did work harmoniously. You know, there was rarely any [00:03:00] drama.

[00:03:00] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, and then fast forward a few more years, I actually ended up living in a flat. Um, in the, the block of flats next to the Fighting Cocks called Chalmers House. And that's when I, I, I was in there four nights a week, five nights a week. And at that time I was working, I juggled around a lot between, uh, working in film and TV production and also working with bands, putting on shows, a little bit of tour management and that sort of thing.

[00:03:33] **Jarek:** Right, right. So, but you hadn't sort of ran, ran, ran a pub or a bar, uh, as such?

[00:03:40] **Jamie O'Grady:** When I, when I got the, when I got the Fighting Cocks I'd never poured a pint in my life, I had drunk millions of them.

[00:03:50] **Jarek:** It's so funny. Ali said the, uh, said the exact same thing, that she'd never poured a pint in her life prior to, uh, she said she still hasn't actually, she said she still hasn't.

[00:03:58] **Jamie O'Grady:** Well, it's, it's, it's, [00:04:00] I, I, to this day, I remember the first pint that I poured in the Fighting Cocks, um, we'd been open about 18 minutes and, um, as you often do, you in, well, I say you inherit, you have to pay for the outgoing people's, uh, stock, alcohol, beer that's on site. You have to, you have to buy that on the day when you do the exchange.

[00:04:24] **Jamie O'Grady:** It was a bit of a, the people that we were buying it from, the staff that they still had living on site, were quite unhappy about having to leave. And, um, made things fairly difficult. I won't go into too much detail, but it just real, real sort of sour grapes. Um, I think that the, the guy that- I didn't have anything to do with them.

[00:04:50] **Jamie O'Grady:** I had no responsibilities to them. Um, but the, the, their boss was the guy that I was buying it from. And I think he had [00:05:00] mistreated them and misled them. Um, yeah, so the first pint I ever poured, um,

and this, uh, this elderly chap, uh, comes in and I'm all excited because he's my first customer and everything.

[00:05:14] **Jamie O'Grady:** And, um, being from Australia, I'm not, it took me a long time to get my head around real ale. Um, and my first day was not a good day for real ale. Um, And so he's asked me for some point of whatever, uh, ale we had on tap. And, um, he, he was, uh, really engaged in telling me how he's part, uh, he's a member of CAMRA, the, uh, the Real Ale Society.

[00:05:42] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, and, which is just further making my anxiety go through the roof. Anyway, I pulled him a pint, he's taken a sip, he's put the glass down and he's walked out. And I'm like, what the fuck? What have I done? And I tasted it, and I mean, I should have known [00:06:00] better, but this is a classic case of not knowing your arse from your elbow.

[00:06:03] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, and I served him what I believe to be was probably half a pint of line cleaner mixed in with half a pint of stale beer. But I never did that again.

[00:06:16] **Jarek:** Yeah, well, uh, yeah, I'm, I'm, yeah, I guess I'm not surprised that, uh, a CAMRA uh, member wasn't, wasn't too impressed by that. Um, and tell me about

[00:06:25] **Jamie O'Grady:** I'm surprised, I'm surprised he didn't spit it in my face, but yeah, anyway.

[00:06:30] **Jarek:** I mean, tell me about the, uh, prior to you acquiring it, the sort of character of the Fighting Cocks. I mean, we, we know that sort of going way back when it was a, it was a jazz venue. Um, but then, am I right in saying that up until that point, was it 2000 that you were, that you, that you were there?

[00:06:47] **Jamie O'Grady:** It was, yes.

[00:06:48] **Jarek:** Yeah.

[00:06:48] **Jamie O'Grady:** Yeah, it was 2000.

[00:06:49] **Jarek:** Yeah. So in the 90s leading up to that, what was the sort of character of the place there? Was it going as a music venue? Was there much going on?

[00:06:56] **Jamie O'Grady:** Right. So it was um, a [00:07:00] very traditional pub. Um, they, at the, at the time, so I, I first got in there, I reckon, maybe 89, 90, um, as, as a customer. And at that time, it was a very traditional, uh, pub, you know, the, the, the pattern carpet, the dark wood bar, you know, um, everything was pretty textbook.

[00:07:22] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, something that we, we take for granted enormously now, um, because, you know, that was largely, you know, in, you know, other pubs, all of that gets ripped out and everybody wants to put shiny chrome in, but it was, um, very much traditional pub for a number of years, um, when it was, uh, the, the, the landlords were a couple called, uh, Daryl and Tanya, um, um, Darryl went on to, uh, run Bacchus nightclub for a long time, um, and Tanya went back to Denmark, um, [00:08:00] and so, but I actually, uh, Tanya came and worked with me for a while, um, because I wanted some familiar eyes on the place to come in and get it up and running.

[00:08:12] **Jamie O'Grady:** So, basically, it was a very traditional pub, um, and then for a period of, I think, before I got it, so after Darrell and Tanya, the people that Darrell and Tanya, uh, were working for, those owners sold it to a new owner, who is the chap that I purchased, bought the lease from, um, they had a crew from, uh, a team from, uh, that were based out of Luton, um, weren't that familiar with the area, came down with a, with a, a formula, a plan, um, a design, and it was sort of, they tried to make it a bit of a sports bar, but with this real focus on, um, shooters, you know, like [00:09:00] mixed shooters.

[00:09:01] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, so their, their shooter menu was 30 odd long. Um, and the, the decor, it was, to me, it just never really gelled. I mean, I was a regular in there. I drank all the time in there and they were really nice people and I, they became good friends, um, but they weren't from the area. And, and so, because the passion of the customers, which was primarily alternative, um, sort of swayed them into, you know, I remember in the early days, you know, some of the, some of the, some of the tougher looking, heavier looking skinhead guys.

[00:09:36] **Jamie O'Grady:** You know, um, having trouble getting served and things like that because they were being misunderstood because these guys had come from Luton, they didn't, they didn't get what was going on. Um, but they learned. And I like to think that, I mean, cause I was good mates with, with the, the, uh, the head honcho at the time, a fella called Rob.

[00:09:57] **Jamie O'Grady:** And I was just like, Rob, look, I know this guy from the old days. [00:10:00] He's absolutely sweet as. You just, you know, just

back, you know, give him a chance and he would and he did and it was fine and everything and all of a sudden they started getting all the alternative crowd back. Um, and, um, but I, I think the writing was on the wall a little bit, um, because what they were trying to launch was just, you can't- you know, it had been an alternative venue or a traditional pub for a very long time. I don't think you can go in there and change it overnight unless you've got a huge bank balance and more importantly, a really strong network that are going to follow whatever you're planning on putting in there.

[00:10:39] **Jarek:** Um, do you know much about, uh, the sort of, that old history, well, the history of the building, you know, when it was built, and when it first became a pub, and, and that, and that early history as a, as a, as a jazz venue, and that, that sort of real old music history?

[00:10:54] **Jamie O'Grady:** The- okay, so I can tell you that, um, it burnt down. [00:11:00] Um, not long after being first built. Um, I think it was about 60 or 70 years after it was built, it burnt down. It was rebuilt, I think, off the top of my head, I think it was 1856 in its current guise.

[00:11:14] **Jarek:** Right.

[00:11:14] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um. It was built on the, uh, site of a, um, I mean, we're going back hundreds of years now, but, um, on a, it was, uh, predominantly pig farming, um, and I know that there was a lot of, uh, Roman, um, activity there as well, um, as well as a lot of Roman activity in Kingston, um, and then obviously fast forwarding, um, I, I had, I took a lot of joy when, when we, when we actually purchased the bricks and mortar, uh, back in 2013, we got all of the original deeds, which were all written in quill and, you know, really beautiful old [00:12:00] documents, you know, um, and we had to do archaeological, um, assessments to, um, because we wanted to do some work upstairs and things like that.

[00:12:09] **Jamie O'Grady:** And so they had to prove that there was no, um, serious historical interest. They're not that bothered with Roman stuff because it's so prolific. Had there have been Saxon, then it would have been, they would have built a fence around it. Um, so that side of it's fascinating, but the documents is, they're inches thick, you know, if you want to take the time, but moving into the sort of 20s and 30s, Um, There's not a huge amount kicking around.

[00:12:39] **Jamie O'Grady:** There is, um, I've seen some, I've found an old, uh, ticket stub. And which I think was dated early 40s, um, for a jazz show. And I

also, we also found some black and white footage of a pa- there's no audio. It looks like it's [00:13:00] dated probably mid 40s, and it also looks like, to me, it was shot upstairs in what was my old living room, um, of a party and people are having a great time and dancing on tables and smoking inside and everyone's wearing suits and got short back and sides with Brylcreem side parts and the girls are all, you know, glammed up with puffy skirts and stuff.

[00:13:28] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, and, um, it, I, it has been posted on our Facebook page. So, I mean, it's, it'll be there somewhere. Um, but other than that. It's 'cause 'cause I, I, I think everything so much was, was kind of lost. And then you straight into World War II, excuse me. Um, and so I, um, you know, I think World War II was probably, you know, reflective of our [00:14:00] experience of Covid.

[00:14:00] **Jamie O'Grady:** I think, you know, there was a lot of shutdown. There was a lot of, let's not make any noise in case someone hears us, you know, so it really went into a, um, a period of, of, um, gestation, um, only to arise again in the 50s. There's, there's, again, there's very little existing evidence that I've been able to find other than brief mentions of, uh, on, on historical websites of people who have been doing research, um, on live music in the area at that time, a lot of which was centered around Eel Pie Island. Um, and again, that was posted, um, on our Facebook page as well. So that'll be there somewhere historically. Uh, I don't know if, uh, Zuckerberg, you know, how far back he goes to delete stuff.

[00:14:47] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, so it's, it's very bitty, unfortunately. Um, I did, we did go to the, um, Kingston Library and, um, try and find some stuff there. I have been approached on a number [00:15:00] of occasions over the years by, by various um, researchers, um, interested parties, students doing projects and things like that. And given them everything I can and pointed them in all of the directions that I know of.

[00:15:17] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, but there's, there's just not a great deal out there.

[00:15:20] **Jarek:** Yeah. Yeah. But, uh, yeah, those, uh, those documents sound fascinating though. Are they, are they still with the pub now? Do Ali and Matt have them?

[00:15:28] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, they won't have them because they're deeds.

[00:15:33] **Jarek:** Right.

[00:15:33] **Jamie O'Grady:** So, we, because, um, my, my company actually owns the bricks and mortar, so therefore those deeds are, they belong to us.

[00:15:42] **Jarek:** Yeah.

[00:15:43] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, I can, I'm not sure how much I brought with me and how much is in storage.

[00:15:49] **Jarek:** Yeah.

[00:15:49] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, but I'd be happy to share with you some of the more interesting stuff if I can find, if I can lay my hands on it.

[00:15:56] **Jarek:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, just, just, just a photo or anything that, that we can, that [00:16:00] we can, because, because, um, we, we've agreed with, uh, with, with Ali and Matt and Tash that we're going to have some, some sort of display within the pub as part of the, as part of the Heritage Trail we're doing.

[00:16:10] **Jarek:** Um, it might, it seems it might be covering up the, uh, the ladies by the pool table. Uh, you know, that wall. Um,

[00:16:18] **Jamie O'Grady:** I'm sure, I'm sure, uh, cultural, cultural re appropriation is, is, uh, a far more, uh, valid, um, venture.

[00:16:27] **Jarek:** Yeah.

[00:16:28] **Jamie O'Grady:** Look, every, all of the old photos I've got of the pub were posted on our Facebook page at one time or another.

[00:16:34] **Jarek:** I'll do some social media scouring, yeah, yeah, yeah. Um, but yeah, so going back to sort of when you take over the pub, I mean, you were saying it's, it's not, you can't change the culture overnight, that sort of thing. I mean, it sounds like live music wasn't a big part of it at the time that you acquired it.

[00:16:52] **Jarek:** So, so when, where, how did you sort of, uh, start to engender that culture? How did you go about things? [00:17:00]

[00:17:00] **Jamie O'Grady:** So, at the time, um, they had a thing, um, in place called an Entertainment Licence, which is where you get your area, or your room, or your venue, um, up to code to be licensed for live music. And that was

always, um, even in conversations that I had with, you know, Daryl and Tanya, and then later with the owners, or the operators that were working on behalf of the owner that I purchased the lease from, everyone constantly said it's, you know, it's going to cost- it's not cost effective Um, you know, we've got to put fire doors on, we've got to do fire escapes, we've got to do, you know, all this sort of stuff.

[00:17:44] **Jamie O'Grady:** And they're really drumming it into me about how, how, how it's too expensive to be done. And, um, I was like, right, okay, um, I'm not very cool with that, but it's potentially a work in progress, and I want to do my own research rather than [00:18:00] third hand information, um, from people who have been told from their managers, from their bosses who don't want to invest in the property, um, why they're not doing something.

[00:18:09] **Jamie O'Grady:** And so um, so as far as live music went, um, in, in the prior to my, my getting there, there really wasn't much, uh, recently. I know when Daryl and Tanya had it, um, they used to have a couple of mates who played some pretty fast, heavy jazz. They would actually do that in the front bar. Um, and it would go off, like it would fucking go off.

[00:18:35] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, I mean, people jumping up and down on the bar, on the tables. It was fuck- and it was, this is a Sunday afternoon, right? Um, it was, it was sick. It was- and I'm, you know, I love, I have a very broad appreciation of music. Um, but, you know, this is not the kind of music that I would put on in my car when I'm driving to work.

[00:18:53] **Jamie O'Grady:** You know, and, but next thing you know, you're just jumping up and down. You're rocking out. It's, it was just, it was sick.  
[00:19:00] But as far as I'm aware, it was also completely illegal what they were doing. Um, which it was very sporadic and they only told, you know, you only sort of, it was almost like an illegal rave, right?

[00:19:09] **Jamie O'Grady:** You know, it'd be like, yeah, don't tell anyone, but next week such and such is going to play on the front bar. Um,

[00:19:14] **Jarek:** An illegal jazz rave.

[00:19:15] **Jamie O'Grady:** Excuse me, exactly. Um, and then the next lot, the, the guys from Luton, they tried to do kind of acoustic y stuff and all the rest of it, which was, It just, you know, in the nicest possible way that their intentions were good.

[00:19:32] **Jamie O'Grady:** But again, it just missed because I don't think they understood the market. Um, and, um, so anyway, when I, when I got in there, I'd been drinking in there. So I got in there in 2000, I'd been drinking in there since about 88. So I had a pretty reasonable understanding of who was going there. I had a good understanding of what they were into, uh, which aligns me with my own personal, um, you know, uh, favourites.[00:20:00]

[00:20:00] **Jamie O'Grady:** And, um, and I thought, right, what we need to do when we go in here, we need to do a colour scheme that basically says, right, just all this kind of awkwardness that's been over the last four or five years, it's gone. This is, we're refreshing and we're doing and, and I must admit, I was so anxious about success.

[00:20:26] **Jamie O'Grady:** And by success, I mean survival. Um, that my attitude was, let's do a colour scheme. Let's do a theme that is going to attract attention and not offend anybody and not be too aggressive and put anybody off. Um, because obviously being an alternative venue, it's much more, you know, punk rock, heavy metal. You know, that side of stuff, which can be- incorporate lots of skulls and lots of angry and stuff like that, which not everybody gets.

[00:20:57] **Jamie O'Grady:** Right? And I, I understand that. So I thought I'd start [00:21:00] gently. So we ended up doing this in, I mean, I look back at it now and it looked like a fucking fruit salad. It was like blue and yellow and orange and pink and all sorts of shit. And, um, the jukebox, which was always the hub, right? Um. The jukebox, I made sure that we had an equal amount of kind of cool underground dancey stuff to kind of offset the amount of heavy stuff, heavy guitar stuff that we had, because I was trying to appeal to the broadest possible audience.

[00:21:39] **Jamie O'Grady:** What became pretty evident fairly quickly is that people that were into- the people, the people, majority of our customers were far more into the guitar stuff. And so, bless them, um, you know, they kept, I remember the first night we reopened, [00:22:00] absolutely slammed beyond words. Like, ludicrous, like, it was like three New Year's Eve's and a Halloween in one.

[00:22:08] **Jamie O'Grady:** It was insane. Um, and, and I was just like, well, this is all right then, isn't it? This is pretty good. You know, um, and was extremely excited and then immediately started painting over some of the more offensive colours, um, and working on redesigning our logos and stuff like that.

Like I did that within six months of opening after putting all this time, money and effort into logos and all the rest of it.

[00:22:34] **Jamie O'Grady:** I'm like, right, because what was happening is it was just much more aligned with what I loved. You know, I was trying to look after everybody and what I, what I, what I got wrong is I should have just straight off the bat, I should have just done what I love, which is basically how you see it now.

[00:22:52] **Jarek:** Yeah. And it's, uh, you know, it's such a strong identity, you know, it's such a, to use a horribly capitalistic word, it's a strong brand as it [00:23:00] were.

[00:23:00] **Jarek:** Um, um, and, uh, yeah, it's, uh, it's clearly a culture that you've, you've sort of engendered over time. I mean, what, what, what, um, yeah. How would you describe your clientele, your customers, uh, uh, over this time period, will they be, you know, alternative is a word you've used, um, I mean, what's the sort of spirit of the, of the people who inhabit the Fighting Cocks?

[00:23:23] **Jamie O'Grady:** Do you know what? I, I, something that I always, um, talked about when I was bringing in new staff as sort of part of training and stuff like that is, don't just turn up and think that this is just a place for people with tattoos and piercings and, and, you know, want to put screamy shit on the jukebox, right?

[00:23:46] **Jamie O'Grady:** This is a safe and welcoming space for anybody who wants to be here. For anybody who wants to not be [00:24:00] surrounded by a Weatherspoon's environment and not be surrounded by another blue chip pub environment, textbook kind of McDonald's, fucking, do you know what I mean? You know, um, and so my thing, I always used to use this example of, you know, there'd be a guy at the bar with a mohawk and a bolt through his nose, having a highly intellectual debate, political debate, with an accountant in a pinstripe suit who's just got off the train from London, and they're going for it.

[00:24:33] **Jamie O'Grady:** They're, you know, they're knocking it, they're cheersing on each other. And they're enjoying each other's banter. And that's what the Fighting Cocks has, for me, was always about. Yeah, the music is loud and it's rock and roll and it's punk rock. Call it what you will, right? Um, the music was always you know, it's all about being welcoming, because in order for your scene to survive, it needs to be populated, right, and most [00:25:00] scenes, you know, people go through them, they get into them, they're

passionate, they go to all the shows, they go to, they go to all the venues, um, they support all the venues and all the rest of it, and then eventually they start having families and kids, and they get older and older and older, and they are able to do this less and less.

[00:25:16] **Jamie O'Grady:** So if you're not ingratiating a new generation every year, um, and making yourself open to a broader crowd, um, then you're doing yourself a disservice. And it's just not fucking cool, man, because just because you're in a suit and you've got a corporate job, doesn't mean you don't like rock and roll.

[00:25:39] **Jarek:** Yeah, yeah, very true, very true.

[00:25:41] **Jarek:** And, um, and yeah, speaking of rock and roll, I mean, um, so was that, was that, uh, downstairs venue, was that there when you, when, when you acquired it, was, was it, was it being used or was that something that you developed?

[00:25:53] **Jamie O'Grady:** Okay, I, I love the way people talk about the venue at the Fighting Cocks being downstairs.

[00:25:59] **Jamie O'Grady:** It's not, [00:26:00] it's on ground level. It's just fucking dark and dingy, so it feels like going into a dungeon, which I love. Um, the- yes, it was always there, um, but for a long time it was used as, you know, it was, when Daryl and Tanya left, Rock the Cockpit disappeared for a while, then they tried to bring it back.

[00:26:21] **Jamie O'Grady:** It was a little bit too little, too late, um, and the crowd that really dug it had, a lot of them had moved away, again, had families and, you know, because it was an 80s crowd that used to do that. Excuse me, um, so the venue was still there, but it wasn't a venue, it was a space. And, um, I think it was in about my second year, uh, there, as an operator, um, I met some guys from, um, that had been in some bands, uh, punk bands, and so I met the guys from, um, Fletcher, I [00:27:00] met the guys from Jerry Bill, I met the guys from Beyond Reasonable Doubt, And a, a, uh, ah, Brendan's going to hate me for saying this.

[00:27:10] **Jamie O'Grady:** A fledgling, uh, Lagan in the making, but were known as Doing Time. Um, were knocking around as well. Right? Um, there was a bunch of other bands that their names escape me right now. We're going right back. And I remember sitting down with the guys from Fletcher and the guys from Jerry Bill and them going, listen.

[00:27:28] **Jamie O'Grady:** There's a, there's a, there's a hardcore scene that's going off and it's all happening in central London and you've got this venue and I'm like, what do you mean there's a hardcore scene, you know, because I, I had been out of it because I was working with bands that weren't in that. And also, um, I had taken a bit of a sabbatical to try and raise some money to buy a flat.

[00:27:50] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, so I was living out in, um, Hampshire and so just not in touch with the scene at all. [00:28:00] And so I went, I went up to, up to, um, Central with these guys and went to some shows and was just like, holy fuck, why has no one told me this is going on? This is sick. This is awesome. And so, um, we, I immediately set about, so I come back to the entertainment license that we had to get.

[00:28:20] **Jamie O'Grady:** And I'm like, right, so all of a sudden, you know, I put my application in, and like all of these things that I do, I've researched the shit out of it, so I've become an expert in, um, what you need to do to tick all the boxes to get a, uh, an entertainment license. And it's just yet another thing that the council makes you jump through that's really expensive.

[00:28:42] **Jamie O'Grady:** So anyway, I was like, fuck it. So we did it. So we, we, we did everything. Um, and it went nuts. And all of a sudden we had a mental hardcore scene in Kingston. And it literally, within two or three months, it was slammed. [00:29:00] And, you know, I, I, you know, and, and the shows three nights a week were packed, you know, and this is hardcore bands.

[00:29:08] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, it was fucking, that was, that was awesome. And that was where live music at the Fighting Cocks really restarted. That was what, that was the springboard, you know, so it was those guys in those bands kicking me up the ass, making me aware of what was going on. Um, I, I, I take no, uh, you know, it, it was all down to them and their aggression, um, in getting me to do it.

[00:29:33] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, and I'm trying to think of some of the band names, because I tell you what, if some of these guys hear this and I haven't mentioned their band, I'm gonna be on a fucking hit list.

[00:29:40] **Jarek:** Well, I was gonna, yeah, I mean, I was just gonna say, were there any, like, particular favourites of yours that you're like, oh, when these guys come into town, I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm always, I'm always there, I'm always loving it.

[00:29:51] **Jamie O'Grady:** Well, every, well, to be honest, at those days, we weren't really getting much in the way of touring bands. It was all predominantly local stuff.

[00:29:57] **Jarek:** Yep.

[00:29:58] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um.

[00:29:58] **Jarek:** But even among the [00:30:00] local bands did you, did you, did you have any sort of stand outs?

[00:30:02] **Jamie O'Grady:** Oh yeah, I mean, oh yeah, I mean, uh, yes, um, okay, it'll come to me.

[00:30:10] **Jarek:** I mean, you don't, you don't need t-

[00:30:11] **Jamie O'Grady:** so, Jerry, Jerry Bill, Fletcher, Ragweed, who you must know, who weren't a hardcore band, they were a rock and roll band, they did most of their, most of their thing was at the Peel, um, but, um, those boys were nuts. Um, oh shit.

[00:30:27] **Jarek:** That's all good.

[00:30:33] **Jamie O'Grady:** Lead singer's name was John Gurlis, can't remember the name of his band because it's not in front of me and I haven't mentioned it for ages, but they were, they were sick. Um, yeah, I mean, dude, we're going right back into the vaults, yeah?

[00:30:46] **Jarek:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course, of course. Um, I'm just conscious that Zoom is telling us I've got three minutes left, so, uh, what I might do is stop the recording.

[00:30:55] **Jamie O'Grady:** All good.

[00:30:57] **Jarek:** Cool, um, alright, well, we were just talking about the music side of [00:31:00] things, but I actually wanted to also, uh, get your take on, uh, comedy as well, because over the years, Fighting Cocks has hosted quite a lot of high profile comedy acts. How does that, how did that start becoming, um, a sort of thing at the Fighting Cocks?

[00:31:13] **Jamie O'Grady:** I was approached, um, it wasn't something that I'd had any experience with. I was approached by a fella called Matt from Outside the Box Comedy, which was, I think, at that early stage, probably a name that he'd made up in his head whilst he was walking in the door. Um, and he came in and he said, um, I want to do a comedy night, live comedy every Monday.

[00:31:45] **Jamie O'Grady:** I was like, you're on drugs, right? And he's like, no, no. Um, and so he had, he was a ex professional footballer [00:32:00] who was, who was playing football in Singapore. Um, and had just decided that he was, he wanted to become a comedian and he thought that the smartest way to do it was to start up a comedy night and to, um, pay the money to get decent size artists.

[00:32:24] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, and then he would either open for them, or he would PA the event. And I'm like, you know what? That makes a lot of sense, you know? So I was like, okay, um, we made it as, as you know, as, um, non cost prohibitive as we could, um, for him, and it didn't take very long before we started getting some acts that were really, you know, really had some traction, [00:33:00] um, not talking superstars at that point, but, um, you know, guys that would be appearing on screen.

[00:33:06] **Jamie O'Grady:** Late night TV shows and things like that, you know, this is back in the day when the word was still kicking around and other, other really good TV shows like that, you know, after the pub shows. Um, and it, it just, it went from there and, um, it was great. He's a great guy. Still is a great guy. Um. And he created the, and it is, again, I take zero, um, credit for anything other than, um, having the space from which they, they could arrive and operate.

[00:33:42] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, and, um, Outside the Box Comedy turned into this over the years, which I think is probably it's got to be over, it's got to be nudging about 15 years, I reckon. Um, this absolute powerhouse and he now has multiple, you know, uses [00:34:00] multiple venues. Um, his, his method of promoting shows, I think is, is quite unique, but what, what always really drove it was the success of his own career.

[00:34:12] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, which gave him a different motivation to a lot of other promoters who were doing the same thing. And so, I think there were different levels of passion driven by different, um, reasoning, you know? Um, and, um, and he, he's, uh, I, you know, I, I believe he's, he's done reasonably well out of it. He's, you know, he's been doing it full time for a number of years now.

[00:34:36] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, and so what happened was this kind of comedy scene sprung up out of nowhere, which was, it was, it was also partially, so the Fighting Cocks has always benefited from both with live music and with comedy, um, bands and, and comedians that are playing Central London normally [00:35:00] have to sign contracts that will have a, um, you can't play within a certain area of the venue, um, arrangement, right?

[00:35:10] **Jamie O'Grady:** And nine times out of 10, the Fighting Cocks would fall just outside that. So it'd be like you can't- so if you're on a tour and you're doing central London shows and then you're doing a show in Brighton, there is, there is a radius either end that you can't play within and the Fighting Cocks falls slap blank into the middle of it.

[00:35:30] **Jamie O'Grady:** So what was happening is a lot of comedians who wanted to try out new material who were headlining the comedy store or, or doing live at the Apollo, um, at Hammersmith, you know, and other big stages and big venues. Um, they were like, well, there's this really cool scene with lots of familiar faces, um, that have been, that's been happening in Kingston for a while, it's established, so we know that it's not being run by fucking amateurs, um, but it's an intimate space, [00:36:00] intimate crowd.

[00:36:02] **Jamie O'Grady:** Let's, let's hit it. And we can, we can contractually, we're not, we're not, uh, impact- negatively impacting on anybody. Um, so we, you know, again, it's not, you know, it has nothing to do with me, man. It was just right place, you know? Um, and it was very similar with a lot of the bands that, um, were doing stuff outside of their touring schedule, or they were just doing it and just not telling anybody about it and doing it very quiet.

[00:36:30] **Jarek:** Yeah. Yeah, I mean, were you in the room for the likes of Robin Williams or people like that? I mean, it would have been amazing.

[00:36:38] **Jamie O'Grady:** I always get asked that, I always get asked that question, and I have the most disappointing possible answer. No.

[00:36:47] **Jarek:** Fair enough. Fair enough. Um, but I wonder if you could reflect on any, stand out, just highlight any, any nights, any, any, any, any particular moments that you, that you reflect on.

[00:36:59] **Jarek:** That you [00:37:00] just think, what a, what a awesome

[00:37:02] **Jamie O'Grady:** Yeah, um, what, comedy, just comedy?

[00:37:07] **Jarek:** No, no, no, no, no, comedy or music, just in terms of your time at the, at the Cocks.

[00:37:13] **Jamie O'Grady:** So, firstly, you know, huge shout out goes to Jon Tolley from Banquet Records, who, some of the biggest bands Kingston's ever seen into the Fighting Cocks and into other venues in Kingston, um, and like, but for me personally, you know, we've had some absolute belter shows and some of them were for all the wrong reasons, you know, like some of them absolutely went tits up monumentally, um, and had to be stopped halfway through, or we had blackouts, or they set off the fire alarms, or the, you know, so you know, what are they sticking in my mind for doing, like [00:38:00] the ones that caused me the most stress and aggravation, um, or the ones that I enjoyed the most, because the ones that I enjoyed the most, I almost don't want to talk about because they're the ones where the guy that was supposed to be obeying all the rules and being in control and being a really good licensee was in the front row shit faced going absolutely fucking ballistic.

[00:38:24] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, and, um, but Gallows was brutal and epic and amazing. Um, And it was one of their final shows. Um, I, I, you know, I actually saw, recently saw The Bronx over here in a local venue to me over here, but a much bigger venue, which made me think those dudes played the Cocks man. Like, you know, and they're playing, you know, and it was just, I couldn't hear for three [00:39:00] days.

[00:39:00] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, Fucked Up. I saw Fucked Up play. I reckon it was maybe a support slot at Brixton, I think. Or possibly Hammersmith, um, and they fucking trashed the place, like the crowd ripped the place to shreds. And when I saw them arrive, and they were playing ours the next night. And I saw him arrive, and I went up to the lead singer, who's this gigantic, hairy, bearded guy.

[00:39:35] **Jamie O'Grady:** Looks like a WWF wrestler or something. And I was like, oh man, I saw your show last night, it was fucking ace, you know. He's like, oh thanks man, I really appreciate it. I said, listen, if there's any way at all you can not destroy my venue, that would be um- and he's like, look, I'll do my best, but I can't guarantee anything.

[00:39:53] **Jamie O'Grady:** And I'm like, you know what, I'll take that. That's good enough. Um.

[00:39:56] **Jarek:** And did they?

[00:39:57] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um. [00:40:00] Well, the venue's still standing, so I guess it's, it's, it's a robust space. Uh, it was built as a, as a, um, it, it was built as a stable at, you know, 250 years ago or what have you. So it's made a pretty strong stuff.

[00:40:14] **Jarek:** Mm-Hmm.

[00:40:15] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um,

[00:40:16] **Jarek:** it's funny how that-

[00:40:17] **Jamie O'Grady:** but, um, it's, it's, it's survived.

[00:40:20] **Jamie O'Grady:** I think we went through about 12 mic stands and four or five mics that night.

[00:40:23] **Jarek:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah, amazing. Um, I just wanted to pick up on your point about Banquet and the importance of that partnership. I mean, um, I mean, how, how do you see sort of Banquet and Fighting Cocks, how do you see their sort of role within the wider kind of ecosystem of Kingston, if you like, the culture of Kingston?

[00:40:45] **Jamie O'Grady:** Well, I think having, um, you know, what Jon Tolley's done with, with, um, Banquet, um, over the last decade or so, is, is, is profound. You know, the guy is a [00:41:00] seriously talented, seriously passionate, um, and, and equally, you know, commercially minded guy, and has brought acts to Kingston that would never in a million fucking years have played Kingston.

[00:41:17] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, and as far as that, you know, works with the Fighting Cocks, I mean, it's you know, the stuff that John puts on varies greatly in genres and capacities and things like that. And for lots of different reasons, which I won't go into here, certain acts are a better fit for certain venues, which I completely get.

[00:41:45] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, and so you know, what happens- you know, for the Fighting Cocks, right? It's a venue, but it's, it's also a drinking established, establishment. It's a pub, right? And it, in order for [00:42:00] it to keep its doors open, people need to go in there and buy a pint, um, and buy a pint and then go and see a show on a Saturday.

[00:42:06] **Jamie O'Grady:** But if they can go and buy, buy a pint on a Tuesday, that's even better. And when John's putting shows on, when John's putting huge acts on at PRYZYM or one of the other, you know, larger venues that he's turned into live music venues. Um, everybody comes to the Fighting Cocks for pre gig drinks. So, that helps the scene that way, you know?

[00:42:28] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, if he's doing a big in store.

[00:42:32] **Jarek:** Yeah, I was just gonna say, because I guess you're, you're not typically the pre PRYZYM drinking post, uh, for, for

[00:42:38] **Jamie O'Grady:** Shit no, shit no. But then, a lot of the, most of the bands that he's putting in there aren't PRYZYM bands.

[00:42:45] **Jarek:** Yeah, exactly.

[00:42:45] **Jamie O'Grady:** Like, he is making, he is, he is making a space that is big enough, has the correct licenses, the correct insurances, a good enough PA, and a good enough backstage area, and he's turning them into mini large [00:43:00] venues.

[00:43:00] **Jamie O'Grady:** I know that's a complete oxymoron, but, um, and, and it's absolutely fucking genius. Um, and, and, and so the Fighting Cocks benefits from that, not only from the shows that he continues to put on at the Cocks but also the shows that he's putting on at PRYZYM and the other shows he's putting on in Kingston, because the Cocks tends to be the pre or post drinking place to go.

[00:43:26] **Jamie O'Grady:** If you've been to one of those shows, if the show wasn't at the Fighting Cocks because there is that close association. So, um. It's very fortunate. I was always very, very, um, grateful to Jon for, for, for kind of choosing to fly with us. Um, and I've got nothing but, but, you know, good stuff to say about the guy because he, what he's done for Kingston, put it this way, there are people in much higher positions in Kingston, who have done far less, and that's a [00:44:00] shame.

[00:44:02] **Jarek:** And, uh, just sort of coming on to the last couple of questions now, and we'll talk about the future a little bit, but just one last sort of looking back question. What was your favourite thing about running the Fighting Cocks?

[00:44:18] **Jamie O'Grady:** My favourite thing about running for the Fighting Cocks was when you had a night and it was like the bands, the bands were awesome, right?

[00:44:28] **Jamie O'Grady:** But for me it was about the community and the people and to have a Friday night or even a Thursday night when it was busy but not packed so that you could. Rather be, rather, you know, you could really kind of embrace what was going on around you rather than be just crazy work mode, cover that, cover that, we got that, is everybody all right over there, you know.

[00:44:53] **Jamie O'Grady:** You can actually take it in and absorb it and a tune will come on the jukebox [00:45:00] and every single person in the bar is singing along and punching the air to it. I got goosebumps just talking about it. It's awesome. It's awesome. And when, you know, people were proposed to, um, people got married there, people met their lifelong partners there, people, um, you know, a good friend of mine who lives in Colorado conceived his child who just had his 18th birthday after a night at the Fighting Cocks. These are the things that it provides, okay? Yes, it's a fucking awesome grassroots venue that has managed to attract and be fortunate enough to be blessed with acts that would never normally play a venue that size. Um, which has helped give it the reputation that it has, and that's down to lots of other people.

[00:45:56] **Jamie O'Grady:** And again, that's little to no credit to me, other than just [00:46:00] kind of being there and going, seeing an opportunity and going, hey, yeah, actually, let, yeah, please, let's do that. You know, we want some of that. Um, the experiences that people have had and, and people, I get, I used to get messages all the time.

[00:46:15] **Jamie O'Grady:** When it was, oh, I remember that place, that's when I met that person, or I did that, or I saw that band. And that shit just warms the cockles, you know? Like, you're, you're responsible for people, you're responsible for, for people's history. Sorry, that sounds a bit arrogant, probably not as well worded as I meant, but, do you know what I mean?

[00:46:35] **Jamie O'Grady:** Like, you've provided a platform for people to have lifelong experiences, you know?

[00:46:41] **Jarek:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, no, absolutely, 100%. And, uh, and yeah, so and looking, looking to the present and the future, I mean, you, your, your time came to an end because you were moving back to Australia, but you made it sort of clear, I guess, in your own mind that you wanted someone to, to

retain the, the culture, [00:47:00] the, the tradition of, of the Fighting Cocks as you'd sort of developed it.

[00:47:03] **Jarek:** Um, so, so if you tell the story of how, how, how the ownership transition, uh, sort of came about?

[00:47:10] **Jamie O'Grady:** Right, well, it's, it's a little- it's sort of- okay, so there's ownership and then there's, then there's operation and, and so we, we still, so my, you know, uh, we still own the, the bricks and mortar, um, and um, uh, Matt and Ali um, have the lease and I approached Matt.

[00:47:37] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, because I've known Matt for a number of years, um, his band, The Resuscitators played there forever. He was very helpful during COVID with, um, helping me keep the business on track. Um, because of what his day to day gig is, um, hospitality, uh, consultancy. And so we, I have a lot of time for him [00:48:00] and I was- it was, it was, it was time for me to at least have a break, a significant break. Um, and, um, COVID obviously flogged the life out of everybody. Um, and so I had a conversation with him and just said, listen, of all the people I know, you're probably the, the number one guy who, can, can take this on and take it to the next level, you know, and he was like, and it came out of- this conversation came out of absolutely nowhere.

[00:48:30] **Jamie O'Grady:** It was actually, um, a mutual friend of ours, um, Tash, who sort of gave me the nudge and said, why don't you mention it? And he was like, holy shit, man. You know, that's, that's, that's epic. That's huge. And I'm like, well, look, you know, my only thing is that just, like, if you get into this, I like to believe that you're going to maintain the, you know, the ethos.

[00:48:57] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, and kind of add to it and build on it and [00:49:00] obviously make, you know, make very much make it your own, which is what it's all about. Um, but there's absolutely no way that I was ever, and I, and I, I turned down some fairly disgusting amounts of money from people who wanted to do completely things that were just completely against every fucking fibre of my being.

[00:49:21] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, and, and I was just, and they're like, oh, we want to do this. We want to do that. And we're going to knock this down and put this. And I'm like, yeah, nah, you're not, you know, this is a rock and roll venue. Right. And, um, as long as, as long as I got those deeds in my hand, it's going to be a rock and roll venue.

[00:49:42] **Jamie O'Grady:** And, um, whilst I've, I've stepped right back and I'm merely a, uh, you know, a property landlord now, as opposed to, you know, a pub landlord. Um, it's the Matt and Ali show 1000 percent and what they have done with it already in such a [00:50:00] short period of time is absolutely fucking awesome and a credit to them both and the team that they've got there.

[00:50:08] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, like I said, I watch very closely on social media what they're doing and every time they do something new I'm like, Oh, why didn't I think of that? You know?

[00:50:18] **Jarek:** Yeah. Yeah. And, uh, just sort of looking more generally, uh, I mean, speaking to Ali, speaking to other people who run venues at the minute. I mean, they basically say there's almost no business incentive to do so.

[00:50:32] **Jarek:** It's, it's, uh, you know, if you want to make money, then you become a gastropub. Um, live music is, it's difficult, right? So what do you think, what are the biggest challenges for people running live music venues currently and in the future? And what do you think that means for the future of live music more generally?

[00:50:50] **Jamie O'Grady:** I think what is really important is we need to be constantly, um, on at people about, [00:51:00] you know, we all, we, you know, we have all, everything we need, we have in the palm of our hands now, you know, as far as entertainment is concerned. And we are losing interaction with people, we are losing our venues, we are losing our pubs, we are losing, um, connection, human connection, right?

[00:51:22] **Jamie O'Grady:** So, it's important that we maintain this narrative and keep it high on the agenda, which is being done fantastically well by groups like, um, excuse me, the Music Venues Trust. Um, and associated, uh, groups that like, you know, my boy is 12 and I've taken him to a few shows and he absolutely loves it. It blows his mind.

[00:51:50] **Jamie O'Grady:** And I love that. And he's- just get your kids off their devices, take em to a show, take your kids to a show, [00:52:00] right? Make them fall in love with live ambience, that band that just through the noise that they've worked their arses off to rehearse, perfect and prepare to play to you. The, the, I always used to refer to it as like, when you go to a good show, it's almost like the band is reaching into the crowd and grabbing your soul and making you part of what's going on.

[00:52:25] **Jamie O'Grady:** Get your kids into that, you know? Because Apple's always going to be there, right? And unless you want them to fucking run the world and have Terminators, you know, then what are you going to do? Like, we've, if, you know, we've got to remain active. We've got to keep going to these places and doing these things.

[00:52:47] **Jamie O'Grady:** You know? We're going to lose everything if we don't. And it's fucking dark. Sorry.

[00:52:53] **Jarek:** Yeah, and uh, I just wonder, in Kingston, more specifically, I mean, how did [00:53:00] you see Kingston as a town change in your time, sort of, running a venue there? Um, is it more about developers sort of moving in, places, venues shutting down, that sort of thing.

[00:53:10] **Jamie O'Grady:** Well, I, I, there's a couple of really obvious things, which is basically, um, there needs to be a law protecting live music venues from property developers, where they need to put in their contracts that, um, you know, the venue was there first and that needs to be on it. And so, therefore, if you want to make complaints about people or noise from, you know, the venue itself, music noise, that cannot justify noise abatement orders.

[00:53:41] **Jamie O'Grady:** Um, because this is what's, what's happening. Um, and also. I'm trying very hard not to go into a political rant here, um, but

[00:53:56] **Jarek:** Do as much as you want. Rant as much as you want.

[00:53:58] **Jamie O'Grady:** Oh. [00:54:00] I, I don't know where to start. It's so utterly fucked in the UK at the moment. Um, and Just put people before money, put people before wealth, just, just for five fucking minutes, you know, um, you know, like, you know, what we're now seeing is all these politicians getting almost held accountable for the despicable behavior that they did during COVID.

[00:54:32] **Jamie O'Grady:** That, it's, COVID was just a platform from which they could do despicable behaviour, right? They've been doing despicable behaviour for years. You know, and what it could make, making how expensive they make it to run a venue, which is completely unnecessary. Um, it's disgusting. Fortunately, we have the Music Venues Trust, again, an associated group who are actually shining a light on this and make and [00:55:00] getting traction, which is fantastic.

[00:55:02] **Jamie O'Grady:** You know, they're sort of literally almost taking elements of control back. Um, which is fantastic. But, you know, my, my attitude back in the day was you know, come and tell me face to face so I can throw you out the fucking door.

[00:55:17] **Jarek:** Well, let's uh, let's, let's try and end on a, on a, on a cheerier note than that.

[00:55:20] **Jarek:** Let's, let's, let's, let's, let's, uh

[00:55:23] **Jamie O'Grady:** Sorry, man.

[00:55:24] **Jarek:** No, no, no, no, no, no. I, I, I, I, no, your, your, your passion comes through and I'm not disagreeing with any of your points. Um, but, um, but yeah, let's just, let's just Reasons to be cheerful for live music going forward. I mean, fundamentally, the passionate people are still there, uh, ensuring that these things are still going on, right?

[00:55:46] **Jamie O'Grady:** Absolutely. Listen, just stop looking at everything on your phone, on your iPad, on your screens. Just go. Do it in person. There is nothing better than standing in front of a beautiful painting in an art gallery or a beautiful statue, right? [00:56:00] Or a beautiful band or a beautiful ballet, whatever. Go and see it live.

[00:56:04] **Jamie O'Grady:** Experience it live. Because looking at your phone, that's the same as what everybody else is doing. Trillions of people are doing that every day. There's nothing special about doing that. Okay? Go live. Absolutely.

[00:56:16] **Jarek:** Love it. Jamie, thank you so much for your time, man. That's a, that's a, it's a super, super, uh, brilliant, interesting interview.

[00:56:24] **Jarek:** Uh, and yeah, love your passion as well, man.

[00:56:27] **Jamie O'Grady:** Well, thank you for having me and big love to all the players in Kingston. I miss you guys terribly.

[00:56:33] **Jarek:** Good stuff. Good.