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Interviewer Joshua Adams

Interviewee Graham Howett

Interview Details

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Erm, so my name is Joshua Adams and I'm recording for Eastside community heritage on the Stadium of Stories Project, could you maybe just introduce yourself?

Yes, my name's Graham Howett, erm... What do you want to know, my, my, what I do?
Erm...?

What was your...? What's your date of birth? To start off with...

Well, I'd rather not say that publically, err... I was born in 1969, in Barking in Essex...

Hmm... Do you remember which hospital you were born in?

In Barking, yeah Barking hospital...

Erm... I think we can maybe start with erm... A bit about your grandparents and... What do you know about your grandparents, where did they live? What were their jobs?

Okay well, one side, my Mother's side of the family hails from Manor Park in East London, and my Grandfather was there and worked at Billingsgate Fish Market pretty much all his life, erm... Under company there... And my other grandparents came from East Ham which is err... A little bit closer to the football ground erm... My Grandfather was a Docker at West Ham Docks pretty much all his life, erm... My Grandmother was I guess what you'd call a housewife these days, err... Didn't work outside her home but, erm... Had a busy home life, erm... So err... Everyone, you know? The family comes from East London, erm... Has kind of always lived around there...

Hmm... So it seems like your grandparents were involved in like traditional, East London jobs I think...

Very much so... Very much so, I mean very, very much working class stock, what you'd consider traditional East End working class stock really, erm... You know, working at err... Working at Billingsgate, you know? Which was at the time, probably one of the hubs, you know? Of, of community life in, in I guess that time, along with you know? XXXX

Smithfield's and other places like that which are obviously dwindled and disappeared largely with the introduction of supermarkets erm... Since erm... I mean very, very traditional family, very traditional working class family on both sides, erm... Although Manor Park was of course considered erm... Reasonably posh, sort of fifty years ago, erm... Compared to East Ham, erm... Which you know? I guess isn't the case these days but err... So very much working class stock

Do you remember erm... roughly when your grandparents were born or...?

Yeah, erm... both sets of Grandparents would have been born towards sort of... Just after the end of the First World War, so... You know? In the late 1910s, early 1920s, erm... All very similar age, so they you know? They obviously grew up with very, very little erm... You know? So obviously you know? There wasn't any money around at the time, erm... But err... I particularly remember in East Ham the family sort of, when I was around, so sort of going forward to the 1970s really when I was growing up as a child, and spent a lot of time up there, erm... You know? The entire family used to live in one street, so... Obviously that's something else that you don't see much these days either...

Yeah again, that seems like quite a traditional thing as well that everyone was kind of one street, all in one small community... Erm... So your parents erm... Do you want to maybe talk a little bit about them? What their names were and, and what they done for a living...

Yeah, as I say, my Father erm... He worked in various jobs initially as a, as a younger man but settled at Billingsgate Market, eventually working with my Granddad, so that would have been his Father-in-law and also my Uncle, so that was err... His err... His Brother-in-law, so... Because my Mother's family, predominately, my Father went to work with them, erm... And they, yeah they used to run a, a company in Billingsgate which they sold up, wow must be over thirty-five years ago now, erm... When they, when they sold out because of the err... Because of the supermarkets coming in and, and essentially taking all their business away from the market, erm... I think they went to the new, the new market, erm... Which I believe that when my Dad moved there it would have been probably '77, '78, when the new Billingsgate Market opened, erm... So I, you know? I, I personally I didn't spend a lot of the new one, I remember the old market, erm... More, which is now like a conference centre I think, isn't it? Down by the Thames there, used to pop in there occasionally when I was working up in the City, erm... So, yeah, so Dad was, Dad again was, was involved in Billingsgate and in the fish market erm... Obviously in the 1980s, Mum, my Mother didn't work as such, but erm... I've got two brothers so she, you know? She was very, very busy bringing up the three of us, but you know? This isn't, we were brought up down here, we were brought up in Essex, so... You know? I've never actually lived in the East End as such, just used to spend a lot of time there as a kid you know? When we'd go back with the Grandparents or my Dad would go to West Ham, and before I was old enough to go with him you know? I'd be left at the Grandparents house so, erm that's really my links, you know? And such...

When were your parents born?

Parents were born err... Late 40's, after the Second World War, so... Part of the Baby Boom I guess, and...

Did they ever share any stories of what it was like living in post-war Britain?

Gosh! Now you're asking... Erm... The over, the over... I think a couple of very specific stories Joshua, but I think the overriding impression I got again, was that not much changed in sort of the last thirty or forty years, and it was a very, very deprived area, I mean I remember, I remember the East End as a kid, travelling up the old A13, and you know? You come through Beckton and it was essentially a shithole, it was a bombsite, do you know what I mean? And not much really changed since the Second World War, there was still enormous, you know? Brownfield site clearance and you know obviously Canary Wharf, and though that existed at the time it was all still pretty much as it had been since you know? It'd been bombed by the Nazis thirty years earlier so... It was pretty grim, you know? In those times, and I don't think it'd been any, you know? For most of the last century up until perhaps the last twenty years of it, it was you know? The East End didn't really change an awful lot; it was pretty much just a, you know? Pretty horrendous really, erm... As it probably always has been, so...

Hmm... And you said that you grew up in Essex...

I grew up, yeah we... I, I was born in Barking and we moved to South-East Essex in the early 1970s, so you know, I've never actually lived in what you'd traditionally call as, as the East End if your taking into account that Barking is in Essex, erm... So... Yeah, so you know? My, my experience of the East End really consisted to driving up there on a weekly basis to visit me' Grandparents you know? So my Dad could go to watch West Ham, before I was old enough to go with him, I'd stay at the parents, err... Err... My Grandparents in East Ham, erm... Which is where I sort of you know? Really learnt a little bit more about the area and you know the people and sort of what had gone on there and, err... I guess, you know? I guess, its things like that sort of stay with you throughout your life really...

Yeah, so you said you grew up in Essex what was Essex like to grow up in...

A far-cry from the East End of London I think, it was very kind of err... Relaxed, much more peaceful, erm... Much quieter, err... Much cleaner, erm... You know? Just, just, although I think at the time you know? As I say we came down in the early 70s and my, my early memories of Essex at that time was pretty much just that it was fairly quiet really and that, you know? You don't see the same volume of traffic and people that are around now with you know? Since then I guess an awful lot of people have left the East End and, and come down here you know? Or to the other Home Counties and that... So it's obviously got a lot busier but no, I mean there, there I think the main difference was just that at the time the East End appeared you know? Looking through a child's eyes I think, you know if you're looking in very simple terms it would be that the East End was quite a dirty, smelly place and Essex was kind of quite the opposite, sort of more lush, green, and you know? Less factories, less cars, less pollution, less people, just generally less of everything really, erm... Apart from green space...

Do you think that's why a lot of families from the East End of London went to Essex, for those reasons?

Yeah, yeah absolutely, I mean my family were originally Huguenots, erm... They arrived in East End in the 1700s coming from France when they were expelled, erm... Well I always think that err... You know? I think you've seen this, the East End had always been err... A place that's been enriched by immigration you know, even in, obviously today you know there's a, as we know we've got a big Poll next week looking at that, but you know? The East End has always been first port of call for immigrants whether its err... Huguenots, Poles, Jews, erm... The, erm... Erm... You know the... The Africans or people from the Caribbean that came in the 50s, Idi Amin's expelled Asians in the 70s etcetera, etcetera... it's constantly erm... Refreshing itself with people who get to a certain level of affluence I suppose, or, or you know? Get to a point where they can move on to err... Somewhere a little bit nicer, the East End has always been thus, it's, I think it's always been like the err... The least affluent part of the South probably, or of London anyway...

So what was the area like then that you grew up in? What was the shopping like? What was the general area like?

The East End...?

No, in Essex...

In Essex, What was the area like?

Yeah.

Erm... Just as I say you know? Just pretty quiet, I mean, I, I unlike a lot of people that have moved down from the East End I, I don't really have anything to compare it with because I don't really have any memories of, of Barking, or, or you know? Dagenham, and there at all, because I was so young when we moved down here, so I didn't really know any different as such but yeah, as I say it's just you notice that, the differences when you know? As I say when I went back up at err... A few years later to visit my relatives and my Grandparents on a regular basis, you'd notice it then you know? As I say it just seemed more dirty in the East End and you know? There was obviously a lot less money about, people didn't have you know? Two pennies to rub together, erm... As I say, my Grandad was a Docker all his life, you know? They, they lived on a week to week basis pretty much, and never owned their house, it was always rented off the council, yeah it's a very tough existence I think and there's certainly, you know? We've, we've never experienced anything like it down here since, us, us settling here... Experienced the hardship that they would certainly have, have had to go through...

Yeah, so when you were growing up as a child, what sort of things were you involved in? Where you part of any clubs? What were your...

Sorry! Can you just say that again sorry...?

Sorry the lines a bit fuzzy isn't? erm... What was your childhood like, what did you get up to as a child? Whilst living in Essex...

Erm... Made a lot of tree houses, spent a lot of time in the woods, playing football mostly, I mean I was always, I've always been a huge football fan, hence, hence the job, erm... So...

Yeah I mean it was really just, as a child of the 70s, erm... As anyone who's born in that era will tell you, you know? You, you would spend every possible waking moment outside playing, whether it was football, whether it was building a camp, or you know? You would be, you would be out, there just wasn't the opportunity to, to stay indoors and, and keep yourself entertained as there are now, you know? Growing up in the 70s there was, I think initially there was only two channels on TV, I think it was only erm... Was it BBC and BBC Two, or BBC and ITV? And did BBC Two come later? And I mean anyway when I was growing up it was only the three channels, you know you had BBC One, BBC Two which was just Open University, Songs of Praise, and stuff that would never erm... Register on the brain of a seven or an eight year old, you know? Child, err... And ITV, so... You know there wasn't a lot to stay in, for a while we didn't have... I say we didn't have computer games and PlayStations; we sort of did in the mid to late seventies, I mean I, again that was another one of my erm... Pleasures as a child and even still now, I've never really grown out of it, but playing computer games, so I mean you know we sort of had that, a little bit coming in, sort of in 75', 76' erm... But generally speaking most kids would just be out you know? You'd hear people talk about summer holidays and were talking now about my childhood, we're talking about 76' as well which was one of the hottest summers ever I think on record, the Great Drought, erm... And you know I've still got memories of that summer and just, you'd wake up and you'd go out over the park and play football and you wouldn't come home until, until it was time for tea and, and it is a cliché but it's true, you, you would go out in the morning and, you might, you might pop home for lunch if you was hungry but otherwise you'd just be out playing football, or playing, you know...? In the woods, erm... All day, and it's funny because everyone was XXXX, and I guess it's strange that you know? We didn't have any means of communicating with home then, if you were out; as you do now if you're a child. I mean most kids have got mobile phones these days but yeah, we were given a lot more, more of a free reign I suppose, erm... Which is odd really, you probably think it will be the other way round, erm... But err... So, so generally it was you know, it was happy memories overriding memories are just, just of playing football and Summers going on forever and cricket and whatnot and doing a lot of swimming over the local swimming club, but just really generally being active and very sporty and, and very outdoors... Erm... So happy times really, it was all very you know? It was a far cry away from the City, the East End, where you know? I mean I used to spend, as a kid, I recall waiting for my Dad to come home from football on the Saturday and I, I you know? I'd just be playing out in the street, maybe kicking you know? As I say people just wiped dog-shit up and down the street, but you know? That's what you did, those days as a kid you'd just use anything you could find as a football, so you know there was, we were quite lucky in that sense that we had the space where we were you know? We weren't err... Erm... I wasn't brought up where my parents were, especially my Father, you know? In such a confined area really with, with, with no green space.

Yeah. You were just saying there as well that you erm... You know? Like sporting clubs and leisure centres and parks, do you know the names of the parks? That you went to...?

Yeah erm... Funnily enough we went to I used to play for a club down here called Thundersley Rovers, and... It just so happens that I'm the chairman of the club now so it's sort of gone full circle, erm but, you know? We'd spend, you know? That's who we'd play for as kids and that would be our local football club so we'd spend a lot of time training and playing with them but really you know? I mean it was err... It was just more about a group of mates just getting together, and you'd play in the streets, you'd play over the park, I mean,

I'd went to a school which unusually I think at the time didn't have any erm... Teams, didn't have any teams in sports, erm our, our head teacher was a guy called erm... Mr. Moss I think his name was he was, erm... Quite, like very, very left-wing and he didn't, you know? So much so that he didn't believe in competition erm... He felt that it would have an adverse effect on those children who weren't you know? Proficient in sports and so consequently he banned all sporting teams, which was a little bit unfair on the rest of us really I guess but err... That, that was what he thought was right and so that was what he did, so our school in itself was quite unusual, I think most other schools sort of, played football and cricket and stuff but we didn't... So, it really was down to the local football club to provide us with that opportunity and, as I say the err... The fields and green space around us that we could find to play in, you know? To play in at the time...

Yeah, so you were just saying that you played for a local football club, what position did you play in and, did you have much success?

I was, yeah... I, I was okay, as a kid basically, I think I got scouted once by Southend, a scout from Southend, erm... I used to play, I was more like a, a, a left winger, which is quite ironic really, I suppose... Erm... At, at the time, my idol was err... A guy called Steve Coppel who I'm sure you've heard of, erm... Who was, I mean he used to play for Manchester United at the time actually he was a... Wasn't particularly, I suppose you know? If you're looking at idols at the time, people would go for peop... Players like erm... Especially West Ham fans would be choosing players like Billy Barnes and Alan Devonshire... But I think because I was quite small and, and at the time, he sort of appealed to me, a lot, I liked the way he played XXXX, I mean my, my, my biggest idol was, really as a boy was Trevor Brooking, erm... And you know I was fortunate enough to, I still, still recall getting the opportunity to play with him once, we were... And this is all through the football club, we were... Back in those days they used to send us on week-long, kind of like training camps I guess you'd call them, and we used to do these at Colchester University which I think is... Is it called Essex University? I think it's changed its name now but, used to be the Colchester University, anyway... And, West Ham had a deal with the Universities whereby they'd send first-team players along for the day err... To work with the kids, so you know? You can imagine, I mean I was, I remember, I was ten years old and all of a sudden finding out that you're going to get the opportunity to erm... Show what you can do to you know? Your idol, it, it was an incredible experience, I can still remember actually rushing the ball in from the edge of the penalty box in front of Trevor and him turning round and telling me what a great shot it was, erm... Which I'm still proud of to this day, actually, I, I interviewed him about twenty-five years later and asked if he remembered and was actually absolutely mortified when he couldn't remember, obviously I was only half-serious but, erm... Yeah, so you know? Things like that really, it was erm... I think that's another thing, I think football players were a lot more approachable and football clubs especially in those days which isn't the case again, you know? These days, as you all know I'm sure, erm... If you're trying, to get hold of these people, it can be quite difficult, erm... But yeah so, erm... So football, I mean really football was always my thing as a kid; I loved playing it, erm... Even, even as a, I can still remember sitting there... When did Aston (Villa) fiddle in the European Cup? Was it 1980, or '81, but whenever it was, I mean I can remember, I used to sit and listen to the radio commentary, I mean this is obviously, you know? I'm talking about the days when you know? The only football you'd get live on TV would be the FA Cup final, and occasionally the League Cup Final, and if a British team were in it you'd get a European Cup Final, apart from that there was no live football on TV, and so, you know? I, I still vividly recall sitting round an radio

and writing match reports, for matches in the Aston Villa's European Cup, and I don't know why because I wasn't an Aston Villa fan, but maybe it was the colours, maybe, it's claret and blue, erm... But that, again that's really where my pretty much what I do now, that's how it started, erm... that's how I got into it, that's how I became a writer and a, a journalist involving football, it all really stems from those days, they're sitting there listening to erm... BBC Sport or whatever it was called, and it might have been the World Service in those days, erm... And just err... writing reports back based on those...

Yeah, so you were just saying as well there that you spent most of your time outdoors but you did spend some time indoors playing, you know? Video games and stuff? Erm... Do you remember any particular video games for you that stand out or...? What console you...?

My God! I, I can remember, yeah I can suppose, probably most relevant sort of to what we're talking about, it would probably be erm... There used to be a game called Football Manager, which was, which is written by a guy called Kevin Toms, who now lives in New Zealand. Funnily enough but err... Yeah, so I mean you know? I don't know if you've played the Football Manager games but essentially this guy, this guy was the, sort of made the first ever game of that ilk, erm... And so, you know? I, I, I would spend hours and hours and hours on my, God that would have been the ZX81, I suppose at the time and then later, later, A Spectrum, playing, playing Football Manager erm... And I still do now, erm funnily enough I can still sit here, there's a few hours to play, not, not the original ZX81 version but obviously the newer version which is published by erm... Who's it published by? Sega do it, erm... Anyway, whoever it is, whoever it is, but, that, that, so that's something but you know I mean I was a child of the late seventies that, so... You know? Atari was very big at the time, we'd be playing you know? Basically the arcade ports, you know? My love of that sort of stuff started erm... In the arcades, I can vividly recall seeing my first ever Space Invaders game and just being absolutely overwhelmed by, by what was going on in front of me, erm... You know? Which seems ludicrous now when you look at the, you look at it, but it was ground-breaking at the time and you know? That, that was, they were the two things I was really into as a kid, was football and, and err... I suppose computers really, it wasn't just gaming because we were, you know? That generation were very, very involved in computing in school, this was the time when erm... XXXX got into the schools with the BBC Computer erm... You know when they thought of Clive Sinclair to get the computers in the schools, and so it was very, very much a computing revolution at the time, erm... And obviously you see, now you see erm... So many Brits out there, especially in the US that started messing about with VIC-20s (Commodore VIC-20s) and ZX81s and Commodore 64s and the like, and you know? They've made a career out of it now and it's, it's very, very strong industry and it's all as a result of that... It was an exciting time to be around you know? As a kid, it was you... Erm... And so, that was probably the first thing that, that you would be back indoors I guess after, after playing football and, and you know? Making cabins and stuff you know? In the woods...

Yeah. So just moving on a little bit there with your childhood, erm... What was your first school and what was your school subsequently after that?

My, school was, we went to the, I went to the err... Hadleigh Junior School, erm... And you know? These were the days when you know? You'd have, you'd have one car in the family, and so with Dad working err... In East London, working in Billingsgate and travelling there every day it would mean that my Mother would have to walk us to school and my school was

about, I'm trying to think what it would be, it was probably about a mile away... So you know? Not a huge distance, but you know I sort of look back now and think how me' Mum was, you know I had two very, very young brothers when I started school who were sort of, you know? Still in the pram, so twice a day she'd walk me to school and back with my two brothers in the pram so... She'd do four miles a day, that's not bad going really with, with three kids, and... So... She certainly had to work to get us there, erm... And then after that we moved to a secondary school which was fairly local, erm... They did have a football team which was great, erm... So... so, I became a member of the football team, and you know had, had a couple of good years playing in that, which was pretty good, erm... And then, erm... And then when I was sixteen, like a lot of kids back then, I left school and went straight into work...

Yeah. So did you enjoy your time at school, or not?

Hated it, absolutely hated it... I, I it was partly, I didn't like the authority, and... I just didn't like it, I think I've always maintained that they send people to school too young; I think they should give you another ten years or so when you're actually interested in learning about, you know? The Industrial Revolution, etcetera, etcetera... But erm... No I hated it, at the time and, you know? I was very fortunate to have two very, very good teachers, erm... One especially in Geography, he was very, very good... Sorry! Geography and History, a guy called Mr. Harper, he was an excellent teacher, really, really good, erm... And, I subsequently became interested in History because of him, but no, I mean generally speaking, I, I hated school, I didn't like the you know? It was very, very, a very tough environment I think, even though, you know? We, we weren't in a particularly difficult area, erm... You know? It was a tough... I, I, I just hated it, I hated the authority, I hated erm... Just didn't really get on with it, didn't really get on with it I think, so not the happiest time of my life, definitely...

Do you think the teachers were a lot different then as they are now?

Well, funnily enough I went back there a couple of years ago, erm... To erm... Take my daughter for a trip round with my... And one of the teachers was still there, erm... Used to be our, our, our old Economics teacher, and it was quite sad in a way because erm... Back then when we were kids there she was like late 20s, and you know you get a teacher at school that all the boys kind of, that just go silly over? And this was her, and when we went back to see her a couple of years back she was, you know? As you'd expect, she was sort of sixty odd now, and it kind of destroyed a myth a little bit, but... One of the teachers, yeah very much so, I mean we... You know? I, when I went to school you could still, there was still erm... The cane, erm... Was, was erm... You know was used on kids, I got caned a couple of times, erm... had absolutely no effect whatsoever; apart from making you more determined you know? Not to do what you had been told to do, erm... So you know? You had that threat I think that doesn't exist now, and, and I think that, God, it sounds terrible but you know? That it, you know? I'm viewing down the old XXXX, but you know I think that we had discipline, which perhaps doesn't exist in schools these days, whether or not erm... Physically threatening and abusing children is the way to install discipline I'm not quite sure, however you know the fact is it did work, erm... And you know it was very different, you know you had probably not so much respect for your teachers, but you probably had less respect if they was going around whacking you just because you didn't do what they say, erm... But you know? You certainly, erm... You did what they said, because that would be the outcome,

erm... And err... So I think, I think that really is a great difference between schools then and now, is, is the discipline issue, and the, the you know, the... You know? It's just very strange, its changed an awful lot, I think things like, you like we would get pulled out of a class, and sent to the headmaster, and we'd be kept behind for a couple hours after school, I'm not sure things like that even happen so much these days because you have to get permission from parents, or guardians, whatnot these days, it's a very different way, but as I say you know? We get a bit of this at the football club as well... You know? When I used to play for a football club you'd turn up at the start of the season and sign a sponsorship form, pay it... Signing on form, pay your fees and that'd be it... These days you know we need forms for schools erm... Sometimes erm... You know if there's kids with particular problems we have to know about it, we have Child Welfare Officers, none of these things existed back then, It's a very, very different world today, and better, better for it, but erm... It is I think it is very, very different, yes there are very, very marked differences,

Yeah. So what did you do then immediately after school?

I left school on the Friday, did my last exam on the Friday and on Monday I started working in a record shop, err... Which was... an education... So you know at this time I was getting into music, erm... So this was the perfect job for me you know? Now unfortunately I've never been particularly career minded and always gone for a job that I want to do, so this was an ideal introduction to working, err... Six days a week, so... I worked in a place called Adrian's which is, still there, I think it's, it's still one of the biggest independent record shops in the country, and err... It was just like heaven to me you know? Erm... I would, I think I worked six days a week, I worked Monday to Friday, err... Monday to Saturday and we had half an hours lunch break and we'd work till, eight thirty till six I think it was, erm... Probably quite illegal now, erm... But I worked in the mail order department, so you know it was just heaven to me as a sixteen year old who's just getting into music and learning about all these different bands and genres erm... To be working in this, this vast erm... Department where you know, my role was simply to take the letters from the clients, go out and pick the records, erm... And, and send them off and it was, you know? That to me was heaven at the time, unfortunately the forty quid a week or whatever it was they paid me didn't go for very far and certainly wouldn't have paid for my mortgage, so err... It didn't last very long but err... I think that's, that's the way it was then Joshua, it was... You know so I'm going back to 1985 I think it was when I left school but, you know? This was what it was like at the time, you could go, you could leave work on a Friday and get a job on a Monday if, you didn't like it you could get another one the following week, you know? There was still, you know? Even though there'd been a lot of problems, I think it was predominately up North wasn't it, because obviously you had the miner's strike, etc. going on, erm... We'd had the riots in Toxteth, Brixton a couple years before that, erm... But we were in you know? The South-East, and as, as now it was always in a little bit of a bubble, I think, so I don't think that really affected us, erm... So much as well I'm guessing you're from, you're from... The North-East I'm guessing, just going by your accent, would that be right?

Yes, I'm from Newcastle-upon-Tyne...

Of course! Proper Geordie, yeah so, I, I, I know Newcastle fairly well erm... I had a girlfriend who lived there in the late 1980s when erm... And spent quite a bit of time up there, got a lot of very fond memories, like the Old Princess moored up on the Tyne there and XXXX and places like that, that probably don't exist any longer, but erm... You know? Even,

even then it was a, Newcastle kind of reminded me of a bit like the East End ten years before, before it was very, very different... I mean I can remember my Girlfriend's Father saying how... I'm not sure when it was, probably would have been late 70s, early 80s, but saying how he bought his house for £7,000 and it kind of stuck with him because it, you know? It seemed crazy compared to the prices erm... Well, where we were coming from in Essex it was very different, so there's a... I mean, yeah very, very, very, very fond of Newcastle, erm... And because I think, and also with the football teams there's, there's a lot of similarities between West Ham and the Newcastle fans, it's sort of really the same working class stock, you know? Obviously the docks, erm... The employers from both, but they're both very much working class communities, erm... And very similar you know? Despite being three-hundred miles apart I think, erm... But erm... Sorry, I'm, I've wandered off a bit haven't I...

That's perfectly fine; I enjoy hearing someone talk about Newcastle-upon-Tyne because it doesn't happen that often...

I, I, I, it was a thoroughly enjoyable time, I mean I've never, ever saw any trouble there, everyone you know? I mean there's, this was kind of the last remnants of the real hooligan era, sort of the late 80s, but I never got any trouble off anyone up there, everyone was always dead friendly and you know I had a fabulous time, I'd always, I would always speak highly of the Geordies anyway, erm... They've always been good to me anyway; you know it was a good time...

Yeah it sounds great, so you said you were working at a record shop that was your first job, erm... When you were at work did you ever get the chance to listen to any records? Presumably you would have been vinyl back then?

Yes, yeah this was err... Erm... I wish actually I'd spent a bit more money because actually, at, at the time, well when I was there, there as big I don't know... How old are you Joshua if you don't mind me asking?

I'm twenty-five...

Oh okay, so this'll be well before your time then but, erm... Back, sort of, when, when I started working there, there was a... There was a huge thing about picture disks, so erm... You know, you know? Essentially coloured vinyl that would have images printed on, erm... And so like, sort of even better than picture disks would be shaped picture disks, so... Erm... For example the Police, I'm sure you're aware of Sting's band being from up that way, erm... They err... They used to do, a lot of their singles using like a New York, NYPD badge, and these things would be going for like fifty or sixty quid at the time which was an awful lot of money, you know thirty years ago... Erm... So... You know? I was in my element, you know? I learnt an awful lot about music, erm... I remember the Sex Pistols singles were, err... very, very expensive as well, now who was it they left, was it EMI they left, I think it was EMI, it was one of the singles that was released on a label that only produced a couple of thousand, and then they, they changed, erm... So those things like this you know? That, that were worth fortunes, so it was, yeah it was great, I mean I got to listen to a lot of new music there, and it erm... Erm... It really sort of opened my eyes, erm... But you know as a sixteen year old, you're like a blank canvas aren't you? You know? You, you love soaking these sorts of things up and had someone, you know who's really getting into music was err... It

was just the greatest job in the world, but yeah so I think I did get to listen to a lot of new music, and erm... Even like some of the albums I still listen to now, you know? That I first picked up then. Erm... So, happy times, really, really happy times, really enjoyed the job, unfortunately, it only lasted six weeks, erm... Because, I got offered a place at College, in an IT College, erm and I was told that it would be better for my career prospects if I were to go there so foolishly I listened to erm... To that advice and, and left erm... My erm... Dream job (laughs), but yeah so... It was bittersweet...

So erm... What were your favourite bands then at the time?

Oh God, I was very much into, sort of electronic music really, erm... I mean in Essex there's a, in this area had been sort of at the forefront of, of that post kind of punk era, erm... Electronic Pop really, I mean we had Depeche Mode, who obviously went on to be one of the biggest bands in the world in the 80s, used to play in a club called The Foxy Lady, which is now called the Pink Toothbrush, which is about three miles from where I live, erm... They started out in Basildon, which is just up the road, again three or four miles the other way, erm... You had bands like Yazoo, erm... Coming through which obviously spawned Eurasia and erm... You know Alison Moyet's successful career, there's other lesser known bands from round here like the pinkies and the, erm... Then you got the, bands like Dr. Feelgood who were completely different but then, the pub circuit XXXX, so it's always been a very, very erm... active area for music, but you know? At that particular time, erm... It was very, very strong in that field and, you know? I was really into that, erm... bands like err... Soft Cell, erm... I loved all the New Romantic stuff, err... You know? XXXX, erm... Bands like that, even Spandau Ballet, Duran, Duran, I used to love that stuff, erm... Human League, Heaven 17, and all those, Kraftwerk even a bit, basically everything that was Kraftwerk inspired you could say, erm... So you know and that was really great, and obviously because it was being produced here locally as I see with Depeche and Yazoo, and people like that, so it was err... It was an exciting time to be around...

...

Yeah. So during that time, you said you're kind of listening to a lot of you know? Kind of Electronic Music, err... New Romantic stuff, oddly kind of harked back to Kraftwerk as well, erm... Did you dress in a certain way during that time?

No, I was still; I think I was still largely dressed by my Mum at that time, erm... But err... I think it was, trying to think when it was, I think it was, I can still remember sitting in the barbers, as they used to be then, erm... Listening to erm... Upstairs at Eric's which I think was erm... Yazoo's first album, so... That was when I got my first wedge haircut, which... Was kind of, it's funny because, if you wanted me to describe a wedge haircut, I'd probably say look at Justin Bieber, and you know? The side parting, it was very, very similar, I suppose it's like the twenty year cycles of fashion and music, it was probably a bit like that, so... I did probably start becoming a little fashion conscious just before leaving school, you know? Before that it was primarily football and just listening to music, it was only kind of when we started going out that we sort of really developed, sort of you know? A desire to take on different fashions, again the mid-eighties was a very, very interesting time for fashion, because you had, there was a lot of sub-cultures emerging, like you had the Goths and people like that, erm... You know? But again on a football related note you had the casual, the huge massive casual thing going on and... You know I can remember going on holiday with the family to Italy in 1984 I think it would have been and coming home with a Fila Jacket, that

was err... Probably would have cost about £150 over here that we got for £50 and I remember my Dad buying in for me and it was beautiful, it had detachable arms and everything, so you could turn it into a kind of tank-top, Oh it was the Mutt's Nuts for the 80s, so yeah I think probably around the mid-eighties was when I started developing that kind of, you know? Fashion sense, there was just so much out there, there was an awful lot of different trends and things, you know if you wanted to be, you know there was an awful lot of mobs kind of going around at that time, you know? You had that as well, if you want to be into that... Erm... There was still a lot of skinheads, erm... Still going around and even the punks hadn't completely died out, erm... So... You know you had an awful lot of different fashion styles and ideas, you could, you could select from erm... Back then, so in a sense it was a very, very interesting time, I'm not sure it's quite as varied these days, but err... Yeah... it was good fun...

So yeah, there was obviously a lot of different kind of subcultures and fashions going on, erm... I find the case of the sort of casual look quite interesting, why do you think that kind of, you know? Became associated with, with football hooliganism, and you know? Obviously West Ham have the famous ICF, so I was just kind of wondering you know? Why that sort of style was more aligned with you know football fans and...

Yeah it's a good question actually, I, I, I... I'm not really sure Joshua, I mean if you wanted to look more into that, it would be a chap called Cass Tenant, who you may, may or may not have heard of, but erm... Obviously he was very heavily involved in the ICF and, I think he describes himself as a 'Hooliologist' these days, he was on a podcast not so long ago, but he's a fascinating guy Cass, erm... You know? If you ever get the, have you met him before? I don't know?

I haven't met him, but I think I've seen a film like a couple of years ago or something that was about him I think...

That's right yeah, the guy who was in Game of Thrones played him didn't he and actually really, really but Cass is a lovely guy, I mean you know? I think like most people from that area he's grown up a bit now, and you know he's very, very interested in history, because he did a, he did the documentary called Casuals a couple of years ago, which you might be able to find on, on err... You know one of the torrent sites or something, like that if you don't want to spend a tenner, I'm sure it's in video shops as well but that actually covers the whole Casual thing quite well, it talks about how... A lot of it started in the XXXX early eighties with Liverpool fans doing a, a lot of travelling around Europe, because they were obviously you know? They were, the biggest club side at the time, so they had the opportunity to travel, and you know? Quite often they would come back from trips to Europe with swathes of these you know? Clothes, and shoes and trainers and stuff, predominately Italian I'd say, you know? Fila again, Sergio Taccichini brands like that, erm... You know? How they acquired them, probably not legal most of the time, erm... Not that I want to have a go at Liverpool fans, but erm... XXXX you know? They would quite often go mob-handed into a sports shop and just strip it, erm... That, that wasn't unknown back in the day, I, I don't know why it became the... I really don't know...

It's just quite interesting because you know? Brands like Stone Island and, well particularly Stone Island are expensive and to kind of know that you're wearing all this expensive

clothing but you're going to go out at the weekend and you're going to kind of... You know? Get into a fight with someone...

Well that was it, that's exactly what I could never understand, how you would spend £100 on a Lyle & Scott jumper, only to go and get it ripped to pieces at the weekend, I mean there was, there was of course I mean back in the day there was a common, erm... Theme erm... They used to call it taxing; I don't know if you've ever heard of its use in that context before, erm... But erm... A lot of firms would go and tax gear off of other firms, which basically means they would, they would you know? They would give them a good hiding and then 'nick their clothes, quite often leaving people you know shirtless, erm... And erm... T-Shirt less in the street, so that was quite common back then but nah... It really is, it really is a good question, I'd be interested to get to the bottom of that, I've often wondered why, why that was the case, you know? The few bits I had, you know? I could never afford Stone Island or anything like that, or Aquascutum or even Burberry which was incredibly expensive at the time, we were sort of more XXXX or Pringle, erm... Sergio Taccichini, Fila, Elise, you know? Those sort of mid-brands, XXXX erm... But, yeah, yeah it's a funny thing, I could never understand... I, I, I don't know if it was maybe a point of just saying that this is what we are, this is what we can afford, maybe it was just like a status thing with firms, I don't know, I'm really not sure but erm...

Because a lot of these people had very respectable jobs as well didn't they? You know? They were lawyers and civil servants, they were... Doctors or whatever else...

Absolutely, absolutely, and you know? This is a whole 'nother conversation we could have about the XXXX and why young people, why young men like a tear up, erm... But yeah it was very much people from, especially at West Ham, people, pretty much people, you know a very broad church erm... Of people that used to get involved... You know I was never...? I'm quite happy to admit that I was never really into hooliganism; I was a bit young at the time I didn't have very good sight and I was very small which didn't help at the time erm... But erm... You know? I remember seeing a few things we, we tried not to get involved in it, me and my particular group of friends, but erm... It did get, it did get very naughty, I did see some very naughty things back then...

Yeah, so you're saying erm... Obviously you have your own website and blog and that you were a writer?

That's right.

Do you want to maybe tell us a bit about that and what you're involved in now?

Well... Yeah I mean in, this all really started out, the website, XXXX came in 1997 and it began because I'd been doing a series of dead-end jobs at the time, and I wanted to, I wanted a career and you know? As I said I came straight out of school and gone to work because I liked the idea of having money in my pocket erm... And I never really did plan for the future, but there you go, erm... And so, I was looking for something to get into as a career, erm... And I've obviously been involved in computing since I was a kid, erm... XXXX did a bit of programming as kid, I was interested in it and I've dabbled in it over the years but never really used it so... Erm... I remember reading about the emergence of the World Wide Web, sort of 95', 96' erm... It just seemed like it'd be something that'd be really interesting and, I

kind of had this idea that certain things were very, very right at the time, erm... And at West Ham the most famous standing was XXXX as run by XXXX, erm... And so the idea really was to do something based on that so... And just try and sort of you know? Ride the wave of, of you know? Getting, getting online, erm... So, it was a case, I know I was sharing a flat with someone at the time and I went to the library and just got a few books on programming and developing websites, and just basically taught myself how to do it, erm... And you know? As I say, obviously having been involved in programming before, as a kid, but not in a professional capacity just sort of had, it was second nature almost in a sense, so it was quite easy to get into, and I can remember XXXX going online in August 1997 and I can recall being absolutely delighted at receiving twenty-six visits in its first week, erm... You know that was fantastic for me, I, I was over the moon, I thought that I'd kind of 'made it', and so yeah... Yeah so, the idea was really just for it to become a project and just to take it from there and, and go on, and that, that kind of temporary project has lasted twenty years now and you know? Here we are now and its now my full time vocation... So I didn't envisage it going this far, but I'm really quite glad it has in the end... Yeah...

So how many people do you get erm...? Actively using your website? Do you know? From month to month, or week to week?

So we've gone from twenty-six in the first week to around a quarter of a million unique users now on a regular basis, err... It is, it is one of the most visited independent football websites I think on the web, erm... Quite often XXXX the clubs own website for traffic so, so it's been a, it's been a real success, erm... And obviously I'm delighted to be involved and people have often said to me, it's quite funny isn't it, people have often said to me, well what, what is the secret, and I always say to them there isn't really any secret, it's just I've done it for twenty years and you know? I s'pose the secret is longevity, which is just... sticking at it for all those years, and you know? And hopefully eventually it will pay off, but there isn't really secret, I'm just really, you know? I'm just very happy to work on it now, it's... You know? I've got a job that I enjoy doing; I get to meet some fantastic people from the world of journalism, from the world of sport and from other fields, erm... And it's just been a privilege to, to do over the last twenty years, and to work with you know? Like-minded people really, people like myself who've just always been into football and still love their football, erm... And you know? The thing about football you know? It breaks down all sorts of barriers you know? It's a, it's a really, really interesting field to be involved in, erm... And so, I'm glad that it's been here for twenty years and didn't carry on with a career in the city, it was boring, boring jobs...

It's certainly something to be proud of to see how the traffic has kind of really, really increased because for this project I've interviewed a few people who, who run erm... You know? Blogs, or they run Facebook groups but they're you know? Nowhere near the numbers erm... That you've just mentioned so...

I think we're quite lucky in the sense that certainly that the club has developed to become, you know? One of the top, probably one of the top six clubs in the country, well top ten at the very least, and the move to the Olympic Stadium will make them more popular, err... So... We will, you know? I've probably picked the right club in that sense, for looking for sort of, signs to go with but then again I know guys that have, who have been running Liverpool and Man United sites for twenty years and they've, they've been making a living out of it for as long as that, you know? I mean, I've only been running it full time since 2008, erm... Which

is when it became viable, as, as a vocation, erm... But yeah, it, it's err... And you know? I think if I was, if I was, say I was working on the Southend site, or a Leyton Orient site, the chances of me working on a full time basis would be fairly, fairly slim... So erm... I'm quite fortunate again, that's something else to thank my parents for that they supported this wonderful football club that err... Allowed me this opportunity, but yeah, yeah it is fun and I enjoy it...

Yeah, that's great, so obviously, the, the project's about West Ham Football Club, erm... You're obviously involved with the club in some way through your blog, and through your website, erm... I think we should maybe start at the beginning, so how did you very first get into West Ham football club?

Via the website you mean? As a result of the... XXXX or just...?

No, as a fan, as a young boy...

Oh okay as fan, well... You know so the family... I don't know what generation supporter I am but I, I am aware of at least three before me that, so at the very least that... I'm a fifth generation supporter, erm... So you know? There really was no choice, err... But as for, I mean, my first memory, memory of West Ham is watching the err... 1975 FA Cup, erm... When West Ham beat Fulham and it was the game, it was the game which Bobby Moore was playing for Fulham, he'd signed for 'em the year before, so that was quite a, quite unusual, and... My Father had attended the game, I hadn't gone because I was too small and he probably couldn't get a ticket at the time, these were the days when you'd have to XXXX Queue up outside the ground from about two o'clock in the morning to stand a chance of getting a ticket you know? So... It was probably difficult to get more than one, but err... I can remember Dad coming home, err... From the game and just relentlessly badgering him to take me to the err... To East Ham the following morning where they were doing the err... The team would waive the cup on the balcony, erm... And so, after much harassment, he eventually decided to give in for a quiet life and I can remember sitting there at the town hall on his shoulders XXXX Or whatever that would have been, erm... Just watching Alan Taylor and Billy Bonds and Trevor Brooking parade the trophy you know? From the town hall itself, erm... The next game I can remember seeing was the following year when we played in erm... The XXXX Cup Final which we lost 4-2, against XXXX, my grandfather had attended that one, my Dad didn't go, my Grandad went to that one, and then... I think it was shortly after that, I can remember my very first game which was err... My Dad took me to see us Derby, erm... And, I was kind of, you know? It, it, it was a good first game because we lost at home to a middling Division One team at the time so it's perfect you know? That, that set me up for the rest of, my life as a West Ham fan really, you know? That sort of, eternal disappointment that you get when you support a club like that, erm... You know? So, err... Yeah, so... That was 1976, was my first game and, my Dad stopped going shortly after that he'd basically had enough, erm... Of all the, all the hooliganism, he was never really into it, and obviously he had a young son so... The last thing he wanted was to be involved in that, erm... And so, you know? After that I started going on my own, you know? Slowly but surely, and with friends.

Yeah. So what have been some of your favourite games then, and some of your favourite footballers that you've, that you've seen on the Boleyn Ground over the years?

Gosh that is a, that is huge question.

I know!

I, I, actually I did this for someone recently when we were talking about doing a piece for the end of the last game, the Boleyn, I did a piece for the Newham Recorder, down with Dave Evans over there, and er, my, my [laughs] favourite moment ever I think at the Boleyn was, now it probably, you would have to check this just to clarify, but I think it was 97/98 and it was the quarter finals of the league cup, now what would it have been, I can't remember what it'd be but one of the variations of the league cup anyway, whatever its known as, XXX (56.36) er, and it was the game where, West Ham a young player called Manny (Emmanuel) Omoyinmi, who earlier in the season had been sent out on loan to Gillingham, now unbeknownst to manager Harry Rednapp at the time, er young Manny had actually played in the league cup, Gillingham, erm, so, he'd come on as a sub in a game, obviously not 20 minutes, but hence he was ineligible to play for another side in the cup that year. Erm, information which didn't get passed to West Ham, erm and Harry Rednapp brought him, the end of this time we were forced to replay the game in the end, and, and we lost the replay. Erm but the original tie it was against Aston Villa, 'cos as I say it was a quarter final and it was a draw, it went to penalties. And this wasn't too long after Euro 96 so, would have been a season or 2 after that, and at the time Gareth Southgate, I think he was captain, I think he was the captain, anyway was in this XXX (57.37) and, the penalty shoot-out was poised at whatever it was, 2 all, 3 all, it was close, you know, it was even, er. The announcer announced, erm, Gareth Southgate's name as the next Villa penalty taker and it's the first and only time in my life I'd ever heard er, supporters cheer an opposition penalty taker. And so Southgate, set- and it clearly put him off you know.

Yeah

It clearly put him off, and he lashed it into row z, this penalty and XXX (58.08). And I think you know, for individual moments that would probably be my favourite bit of a moment and certainly the funniest thing I've ever seen at the ground. Er players? Trevor Brooking, It has to be Trevor Brooking he was my idol as a kid, you know I, apart from Stevie Coppel, I you know I just wan'ed to be like him. Erm and obviously Billy Bonds would be the other one, erm you know I think if you're looking for two men that would uphold the standards of West Ham off the field as well as on the field you would have, ever have to look further than Billy and Trevor, two absolute gentlemen who, you know, would give their time and to anyone within, especially West Ham fans. So I think probably those two erm, out the West Ham players, er over the years, I think definitely, definitely be Trevor I think.

Um. Have you ever met any of the footballers who have played for West Ham over the years in person or-?

Yeah, I mean quite a few, erm. More so, more so recently. I, I started briefly when we were talking about school and stuff a while back, when, when I interviewed Trevor Brooking it was one of the first ever major interview I've done Knees Up Mother Brown and this was back in 2000, and Trevor at the time was, was the chair of Sport England and er, this is when I asked you if, chap who remember, the goal 21 years earlier or whatever it was. Erm but it was a, all I can remember about it going in there I think I had an hour booked for the interview and we got to the end, I went in armed with a load of questions from our readers,

readers of Knees Up Mother Brown, for Trevor, you know, so quite a lot of research had gone into this, erm and we got to the end of an hour, and Trevor, I remember Trevor saying to me you know, have you asked all your questions? I said well no, I've got through half of them and he insisted we stayed there until we got through all the questions. In the end we stayed for 3 hours, he'd cancelled every appointment he'd had that day erm just to accommodate me and things like that, which I, he probably thought I was a real pain in the ass, I probably wouldn't do it these days being a little less nieve, and you know, it was just a mark of what Trevor was and is like, specially where West Ham fans are concerned. He's absolute gentleman, really lovely guy and you know nothings ever too much trouble for him, specially where West Ham are concerned, so, erm, that, that was, there's still some, to this day that was my greatest moment. Er Er er, we've been quite fortunate to interview a lot of players over the years, not just players but people associated with the club, I mean one of the most fascinating things actually was Eggert Magnusson, I interviewed him in 2007, it was around february, it was the year now, you may or may not remember this but West Ham in big trouble 2006, 7, we, we were on, Alan Pardew had lost eight game in a row, the XXX (1.01.20) had come in and sacked him and appointed Alan Curbishley, I think prior to interviewing Eggy we'd just been smashed 6-nill at reading and 4-nill at Charlton so, you know, it really didn't look like we were, we had any chance at all, but I remember beign struck by how convinced he was when I asked him are West Ham gonna remain in the Premiere League, he was absolutely certain that they would stay up and you know I remember walking out thinking this blokes some sort of idiot if that's what he thinks, but he was proved absolutely right at the end of the day. Erm and he was a very interesting character and he certainly wasn't like the character Benny Hills like character you'd see on TV, he had a really steely determination did Eggert and I think he's, it's a real shame what happened with the, the the financial crisis. But obviously they were slightly responsible for it being Icelandic so, but I, I I think if he'd stayed a couple, bit longer he would have been a real success. Um but obviously he didn't, he went and then we suffered years of turmoil. But, you know, we interviewed people like Paul Aldridge who was the er er the CEO before, he wasn't called the CEO then he would've been called somin' else, but Scott XXX (1.02.30) was agin a very interesting interview we did, who, who succeeded Eggert as the CEO. Erm some of the managers, er I don't know, Sam Allardyce is a very interesting character, erm, its nothing really like the sort of brash personality that the sport of portrays sometimes on TV, was very interesting. So you know we, we've interviewed a lot of, and now we, we do the podcast on Knees Up Mother Brown whereby we try and get a current or former player back each week, so although I'm not directly involved with the podcast most weeks, but I generally feedback to the professionals. Erm, which is Chris Scull and Bianca Westwood, erm do that for us, erm you knw we, we do get an awful lot of ex footballers come on the show, er our live show this year, we do, we do an awards thing at the end of the year and we do a live show for that and we had Marlon Harewood and Anton Ferdinand erm on this year's one, so you know, you do, I think its really, as the websites got bigger and bigger the more sort of people have become involved a bit an an we've got to meet more people so it's just been fabulous really, it's just a real, an, an the thing is footballers get such a terrible name but the end of the day most of 'em ar just like you and me there just people, they just wanna get on in life, they're decent people, erm. But er, very interesting anyway, done some very interesting stories truth be told.

Um. So just on the matter there of footballers I know you mentioned it very very briefly earlier do you think that footballers from say the 60s 70s 80s are a lot different from footballers now?

Well I think I think they have to be. It's just the sheer amount of money involved in the game these days. I mean you will talk to footballers from the era you mentioned and they would feel a completely different story about their retired career. I mean those lad would come in at 16, 17 on apprenticeships and they would be cleaning toilets, painting walls, cleaning other players boots, players there, kids these days don't do that they all on XXX (1.04.41) for example I mean they wouldn't demean themselves to do anything like that they're already on vast contracts where they're probably be earning in comparison more than a lot of the footballers were earning then when they were at their you know their peak. Er it's a vastly different game and I think as in most things money tends to spoil it a little bit. Erm it is different but you know, then the players themselves have also go this added pressure. There's so much more football on TV, as I mentioned it earlier, you know you'd get the cup final and the occasional European cup final on TV back then and maybe highlights from the European Championships, but you know, its wall to wall now isn't it, you knows there's football on 24/7 on several channels, you cant get away from it so. The., you know these people are like, they are modern day celebrities, erm, and I suppose players were back then as well but it just, just wasn't as, I don't know, it, you know the coverage wasn't as intense as it is now. Erm and so, erm yes I would certainly agree, er er er I would say they are very very different. And the game itself is very very different as well.

There's obviously the footballers back then you know, were, not saying they're not now, but they were predominantly working class and they were very engrained within the community

Absolutely, yeah

And obviously now with the rise of TV revenue and constant kind of commercialisation of football it kind of seems footballers are becoming little bit less- detached from their fans, do you feel?

Yes also- no I would agree 100 percent with that, it's you know, you can look on YouTube and you can see some of the old adverts for Booby More for example advertising the Boleyn Pub

Yeah

And he, you know, it seems ludicrous notion to suggest that you know you might share a drink with James Tomkins or Aaron Cresswell after a game in the Boleyn, you know, it just wouldn't happen. Or you know you could see them on the bus after the game [laughs] travelling home. You know I think like everything societies changed hasn't it. You know we're more affluent there's a lot more material things around, I mean everyone's got a car these days so erm, it, it's just, life is, and football just echoes life really, its, its things change, move on, er, and footballs no different really.

Yeah. So just maybe getting on to you know match day, do you have a pre-match ritual, you know do you go to Kens caff or do you go to the Pie and Mash shop

[Laughs] yeah my, my, for the last 10 years or so my pre-match ritual is rolling up 45 minutes to an hour before the match going straight to the press room of the Boleyn Ground and er having something to eat in there, running over the days stories really with the guys in there, erm, and er then going out to the game. So yeah it all sort of changed when we started be accepted as a, as a proper you know news source by the club and so that was, that was around

10 to 12 years ago. Erm so, my match day experience now is much less that of a fan and more of a, as a, as someone working in the industry, although I, you know hope that I- I still like having both you know it's nice to be a bit partisan, I still wear my club colours into the press room occasionally. Erm but er, but it's a bit boring really. No, I just go in the press room, I'll have pie, have pie and chips from Millie have a chat with Millie who worked there and some of the other boys and that's it go out to the game.

Yeah. So how does the, is there a large difference then between spectating as a fan as opposed to kind of being part of the press there, is there a large difference in doing a game?

I don't know, it's a good question actually, I, I think for the, for the 90 minutes when the games going on, you kind of forget, you know what, what you do for a living, its, your, you know, I'm a fan when I'm out there, I'm just the same supporter I was 20 or 30 years ago when we'd be doing Knees Up Mother Brown on the terraces, erm hence, hence the website name. So, but you know, it's very different after, and obviously you know, you can't walk into a press room and ask Slaven Bilic you know, why was that fall back so shit today, you know, you don't have the conversations you have in the pub with your mates its quite a difference. Erm so you know, you sort of, yeah your journalistic head goes on straight after the game, but no I think before the game I'm very much the same pain in the ass I've always been, shouting at the referee, screaming for handballs that didn't happen, and er just generally being loud and supporting the team, so, yeah. Probably pretty much the same as far as that's concerned, yeah.

Its interesting hearing it from that perspective, cos just the other week I went on one of those stadium tours of the Boleyn Ground, so we got to go to the press room and Slaven Bilic's office, and things,

Right

and get on the pitch, it was interesting

Who did you go with Joshua? Who did the tour?

Erm it was a group tour, but it was ran by the club historian I think, John

John Hellier?

Yeah

Gold glasses?

Yeah. I've got an interview with him next week actually as well.

Yeah he's, he's brilliant. John charming if you want to know anything about- Johns the man, he's pretty much the only fella at the club you know now, erm but he's fascinating, he's quite often in the press room, and he's a, he's got that job will, he'll be sitting there talking about something, he'll come out with a random stat from 1947 or something like that you know he's, he's absolutely steeped in history and his fathers, I don't know if your aware, his father's company used to print the programs, Helier and Sons, on Barking Road, so I think that's where his association with the club comes in. but erm, yeah, he's a lovely guy John.

Yeah I'm going to talk to him next week

Now that'll be good yeah

Barking Road at his, at his printer. Which'll be interesting

Oh right, yes. Yes that'll be- That'll be fascinating, he'll be great, John

Yeah. So obviously you know, you're part of the press there and, and you know you're talking a bit about the atmosphere, has the atmosphere [cough] changed over the years? At the Boleyn Ground?

Yeah, ab- oh absolutely. Erm it's not so much that, you know in Upton Park it's, it's everywhere, every grounds different now and this is, this is a result of the Taylor report and the all seating, erm, thing that happened in the early 90s. Er you know, prior to that, I mean I can remember going down to Southend on a Friday night when they used to play and you'd congregate with your pals, your find a little corner of the terrace, er specially at Southend where it was a bit, bit more room. But, but at West Ham you'd just gather with your mates, you'd find yourself a little crash barrier to stand behind, and er you'd all stand together, you know, and, you'd, well I wouldn't, but some people might be, you know, we'd rarely stand in the same place twice, we'd be in different areas or different seats, you know, we didn't have season tickets then, we didn't need them, you know, you could, back in those days West Ham was never full, er when I started going, it was never, never full house, so I can't recall ever turning up trying to pay on the door and being turned away. Erm and, an of course, now since the Taylor report, since everyone's designated their own seat so they can be controlled by the authorities, you know so they can basically check everyone's movements, erm that's gone, er, an, an' I think it's really sad and that's why I thoroughly support any attempts to bring back some kind of safe standing. You know even if- I think Celtic have done something 'avent they this year, I think they've got an area of of, of erm, Celtic Park which is gonna be erm safe standing next year, but erm, yeah, you XXX (1.13.0) the whole thing about the XXX (1.13.05) and the XXX (1.13.07) and you know I talk about this fondly that, that's sort of thing generally was, but you know it was all part of it, it was all part of the day out, you know the surges you'd get when, when the team scored,, you'd invariably end up 40 or 50 feet from where you'd been standing seconds before, erm 'cos you may have become part of a huge tidal wave of humanity. [laughs]

Yeah

Cascading down the terraces to the bottom. Erm but you know it was, but I wouldn't wanna do it now, this is the thing, you know if someone said to me do you wanna dive in its great, and I think people your age and you know maybe even kids, younger kids sort of in their teens, erm, you should be experiencing that 'cos that is when football is, you know its best, it's really tribal and you know, when you've got terracing I think it's a lot more- And it's just very very... It's just controlled I think would be the word now, it's very, very controlled, erm, you know, I, I, I get pulled up occasionally by the stewards at West Ham for ranting, you know for ranting at the officials.

Yep

Erm, and it's just, I'm not attempting to be nasty or anything it's just part, part of the day and its very, you know people use the phase, use the word sanitised a lot an rightly so really cos the whole thing has been sanitised. Erm whether its political or not I don't really wanna go in, that, that again is a whole other conversation whether., you know, it's being politicised and you know the whole working class element been sort of taken out of the game I suppose, what with rising prices, seating etcetera, erm, you know, er, so, I, I don't know but it's very very different. But you know, I'm, I'm not saying it's all bad I mean there're very good things about it I mean, you know obviously, the obvious examples of Hillsborough and, and er Ibrox and you know, even when, when we were at QPR a year before Hillsborough happened and it was a XXX (1.15.08) game and exactly the same thing would've happened to us on that day bar the fact that er Loftus Road never had fencing round it, so when we we're involved in that particular crush which was the consequence of, largely forged tickets unfortunately but er you know when that happened to us we all ran out onto the pitch and just nipped over the barriers. And like the, the poor buggers a year later in Sheffield erm they didn't have that opportunity. Erm so you know, it's safer which is good, I like the fact that families go now. I can take my son who's seven and have no fear of him, you know, being caught up in a tear up somewhere or whatnot, er because most of that generally takes place away from the grounds doesn't it?

Yep

These days, and its more organised, unless you're Russian I suppose, erm, but you know, it very different, there are good things and bad things, West Ham is completely different, in terms of the, West Ham's very different from what it was 25 years ago but you know, the thing about the Boleyn Ground is that, what you've gotta remember is, through the four stands there, are XXX (1.16.20) years old, you know the only ground, er stadium that's been there more than 25 years is the chicken run, and that itself was only built in 1969 so, you know, the ground as such doesn't resemble the Boleyn Ground or Upton Park as many call it, you know, in my youth it was completely different, the whole, you know, you, you, you, I'm sure you've read players and people talking how, how the chicken run used to, you know, you could touch players from the chicken run, when it used to be right next to the pitch. I mean they built the new West Stand in 2003, whenever it was, erm and they moved it back sort of 30 or 40 yards or whatever and they've left a gaping hole on the other side, so you know, players don't feel that intimidating atmosphere that they used to feel, erm years ago, so that's all different, you know and, it's very, very different. Erm as I say some of it is positive, some of it isn't so positive, but you know, it is very different, but you know 30 years have passed, it's a long time, it bound to change, you know everything changes doesn't it.

So there's been obviously a lot of changes within the stadium, erm what's the, or has there been any changes in the atmosphere on Green Street or on Barking Road on match day?

Uhum. Erm.... It, its kind of funny now because obviously with the influx of you know, er Asian families and East European families in recent years the areas very, very different, and it is kind of a white flight in reverse on match day you know, 'cos I think Newham's got the smallest erm population of, of whites in the, you know in the borough in the country, I believe I saw a statistic recently that supported that, and so, [laughs] every match day, all of a sudden there's just thousands of white faces coming back to the XXX (1.18.19) you know. So erm, that's all stuff, that's probably the most obvious change is that, it, you know, people have largely moved on and that generation of Hammers fans no longer live there, but I don't

think there's many people that support West Ham now that actually live in the area. I mean a lot of the local youth, particularly a lot of the local black youth tend to support Arsenal, erm a lot of the Asian families just generally don't really follow football, erm some of them are more into cricket etcetera, erm, and so, you know, again you see, but, it, it's coming back a little bit again now, because you've got, you know a lot of Eastern European erm people coming into the area and they're more traditionally involved with football, and, so it's, swings and roundabout I guess at the end of the day, but erm, I think it doesn't feel you know, these things don't, I wouldn't say it doesn't feel like home, it doesn't feel the way it did 30 years ago, erm it's a different area. The people are different, you know, that's not a slight on those people its just, that's just the way it is. Erm, but as I said before that is the East End its always been that way, you know it's always been first port of call for immigrants, erm you know try to better themselves after and move out to Essex or Hertfordshire or Kent, erm, you know, I mean, I'm sure we'll be a bit like the old East End here, you know in years to come, you know everyone moves on. Erm but yeah, so really it is quite different, but you know, there's a lot of things, you mentioned Kens Cafe, the pie and mash shop, you know, the Boleyn Pub, the Queens, opposite the market and the market itself, these sort of staple things that've been there for, you know forever and a day and probably always will be. May- Maybe not so much the pubs, erm but certainly the market and places like that. Erm so you know, some of it is very familiar, and again, some of it not so.

So do ya think, do you still think that football culture then is still going strong in East London?

How, how are you defining culture as such?

[sighs] You know, going to games, erm just general involvement in the sport really

Ok. Yeah, yeah, ok. I, I I think, as I said a lot of the non-white community that are now residing in Newham, in the Newham for the last 10 or 20 years, don't particularly follow football so much so it, you know, the whole, you know, that whole cockney thing, I mean there was a really interesting program on the BBC recently, I don't know if you saw it, talking about the last whites in Newham, was called something like that, I think it's still on iPlayer if you haven't seen it, it's very interesting, but they were basically following 2 white families that were still there, and you know they were all saying how much its changed over the years, but you know, they've got affinity to the area, cos that's where their families sort of grew up so that's where they've stayed, erm so no, I I think, it's like everywhere, everywhere changed, but nowhere more so than the East End which as I said has always been the first port of call for immigrants, er you know, as I say my family came over here, we, we were immigrants 300 years ago. My other lot came from Ireland so you know, we've all immigrated at some point. Erm and it's just that the East End has always been that area. I think cos it's a very prior area that's generally where people, you know, tend to get chucked when they arrive in the UK.

Um

But erm, yeah, so, you know, it has changed, it has changed. Erm much of the local population don't, don't follow the football, but it is good to see., you do see more and more non-white faces at West Ham these days than you ever have before, even on the site like that, Knees Up Mother Brown we get a lot more er footballers form minority, you know minority- or women are coming, or kids coming to the game 'cos people are going as families. So again

that's changing but that, that's probably down to the, you know the tailor (? 1.22.30) . Erm rules and all that, and also seating, so- Yeah it is all very different, erm very, very different

Its great you say that the clubs becoming more inclusive

Yeah

I've interviewed a few people on the project and they talk of a West Ham family really

Yeah very much

where footballs the religion and nothing else really matters.

Yep. Yep.

Anyway, I thought the next thing we can probably talk about is Stratford

Right

Obviously the big erm story at the moment is of West Ham moving to the stadium there

Yeah

What are your general thoughts on that?

... I think if I was the board, and that I'd been presented with the same opportunity as they had, I too would have found it impossible to reject. Erm essentially the club have been give state of the art arena

Um

For free. Which is essentially what it is, the rent is so minimal, you know, it's obviously upset a lot of people, erm, but you know, I mean, as far as I- I think it's a shame the way it's all turned out... I don't like to see West Ham criticised for basically taking the opportunity they've been presented with, and you know, the thing I'd say to any criticism of West Hams move, is you know, it, its fine you criticising the club for doing it, but what would have become of the Olympic Stadium if we hadn't. The sad, the sad thing is because Seb Coe, you know Lord Coe, was, was absolutely determined not to involve any football clubs in the plans, and maybe that had a little bit to do with actually getting the Olympics in the first place, providing a legacy, or being seen to provide a legacy, but the, the long shot of that is that the country has been left with a stadium that's cost 500 million pound to build which would have been a white elephant. Much, much the way that erm the O2 would have been if they hadn't given it to you know the phone company. Er and the City of Manchester's stadium, given that to Manchester City. You know, you've only gotta look at the Birds Nest in China, erm places like that to see what becomes of stadiums when they don't have a good tenant post games, erm, and th, the truth of the matter is athletics is never ever gonna be a viable solution for the stadium. I mean, I enjoy watching athletics but I can't think of more than 3 or 4 occasions a year when you know, you spend a day watching athletics, It's just not, its just not viable and it- The point is, for every day that stadium is sitting there idle it's costing the country money anyway.

Yeah

So you know my view is, yes it's been a complete balls up the way it was done, my, I would firmly place the blame for that at the hands of Seb Coe because, and maybe Tessa Jowell and one or two others within that administration department, determined not to let- I mean Eggert Magnusson and, and Guðmundsson enquired after that, they wanted the Olympic stadium, were told no they couldn't have it, and you know because of that decision now to make it viable for premiere league football the country has had to invest another 200 million pounds to put a roof on it, and you know, I can understand why people are angry at West Ham, but they, as far as I'm concerned they're directing their anger at the wrong place. You know, West Ham are literally taking opportunities that any club, I maintain any club, if this opportunity arose 2 miles from where their existing site is, any club would take that. Erm and perhaps the exception of Manchester United, already got, you know 75 thousand capacity stadium. Erm, Tottenham were trying to get in there, it's not in their borough, Tottenham wanted, Daniel Levy wanted it you know, erm. Obviously Charlton etcetera and Orient are up in arms about it, but, but the fact is, you know, someone, it needs to be used, and West Ham have presented the most viable erm solution and that's what, that's what they've decided to go with. And the fact that Karan Brady is a Tory Lord and you know we have a tory mayor and the club has erm been found to have paid 15 grand or whatever it was to the tory party recently doesn't sit particularly well with me as a traditional left winger, erm, but I, you know at the end of the day there has to be a solution. You can't, you can't sit there, you can't let that stadium, let stadium sit there and go idle. It's just not feasible, we put too much money into it, so, although West Ham, you know, no doubt West Ham have got a fantastic deal, they really have, and I'm sure there's probably something dodgy going on, you know, off the record, between Brady and Boris Johnson, to reach that point. However it can be used now, the country will earn revenue from it, it's not gonna, you know, were not gonna get the 500, 700 million back immediately, but, it is, there will be money going back into the coffers. The club will be earning money, so you know, it's, it's not an ideal solution, erm, but it is the best solution. My own view about leaving erm, the Boleyn Ground is, I'm obviously incredibly sad because all my memories of watching West Ham'll be there, erm but I accept that I'm you know, I'm gonna be 50 soon and it's not about me, it's about my boys generation, it's about you know, people of your age who, who need to go and make their own memories, and they'll be at Stratford, you know. At the end of the day it's just an arena, we don't remember the stand, you remember the players, you remember the goals, you remember the moments, that, that scored, but these are the things straining ahead. Erm, not where they scored, where they're played so much, so erm- I you know, naturally I'm sad because that's where, I used to go there with my dad before he died, etcetera, my granddad at the Boleyn, but as I say, I accept that the clubs gotta move on, so move on. And er it's not about my generation it's about the younger generation, so this stadiums for them.

Um, so obviously the, the Olympic stadium is great for West Ham, erm in a commercial sense it definitely pushes the club forward, erm, how do you think, or how do you feel, erm, about that maybe West Ham could be losing a bit of their heritage or,

Yeah

What the effect would be on you know local traders, like the pubs and the pie and mash shop and places like that, and what sort of effect do you think it might have on the area, kind of moving to, to Stratford?

Well, I think [inaudible 1.29.24] they'll be devastated, you know, as you said the pubs like the Queens and the Boleyn, I'd be very surprised if they're still open once, once West Ham've gone. I was talking to the guy who runs the pie and mash shop, someone Nathan, I can't remember his first name, he was telling me last year he was making something like 30, 35% of his weekly turnover on a match day. You can't just afford to lose that. You know, could you suffer a 35% wage cut, I know myself

No

So I just don't see how these business can be viable, so I think it's the death knell for one or two of them and it's very sad. Erm I would like to have seen West Ham offer these business the opportunity to come to Stratford quite frankly, to pay for their relocation. Erm, but you know, were talking Brady XXX (1.30.17) We're not talking about someone who's socially aware, this is someone who's just trying to get the best she can for the football club, and you know, and that's her er, her only motive. So you know, it is a bit sad, and Kens Caff, that's another one you mentioned, that's another one I think will suffer. Erm but, you know, bar paying to take them all with you, what can you do, what can you do. Actually saying that I think one or two of the pubs are talking about running a shuttle service, are you aware of this?

Yeah, the Boleyn Pub

Yeah, they're gonna bus people from the pub to the ground to try and keep the customers. That's quite innovative, innovative idea. Erm, so erm, may, maybe that'll help, but, you know, it is sad, it's inevitable there will be companies and firms that've been there years and years in the local community, that cease to exist. It's sad.

Um. So are you looking forward then to creating new memories of the stadium in Stratford?

Erm. I'm not looking forward to paying the increased fees, cos we was told we was all gonna be getting you know cheap seats, so you know, [inaudible 1.31.20]. It's quite clever in a way 'cos people like me who paid top dollar for band 1 and band 2 seats are gonna be paying like 25% more.

Yeah

Erm but I'm quite happy to do that if stops the, someone like me who, who's into their football at 6 or 7 years old, they can't normally afford to go, will now be able to afford to go, I think it's brilliant, I think it's absolutely fantastic. And er you know this is one of the schemes where they don't get a lot of credit for. As I say I'm not Karan Brady's biggest fan by a long way, but credit where credits due, they could have quite feasibly charged top dollar for all of those seats in there and I think they would have sold them, erm given the interest that exists for their first season. But the, but they put these cheap season tickets in. And they're also gonna be giving away thousands of season tickets to local kids as well, erm, which, erm it's a great idea, and as I say, before the (inaudible 1.32.26) erm the average age of a season ticket holder at West Ham here is something like 44, 45, it's ludicrous, whereas when I started going it was all, it was all people my age. You know, you'd look on the terraces, you wouldn't see anyone over like, you'd see some but it was predominantly sort of late teenagers, early, people in their early 20s, erm, it was a young persons game, and you know, I think that's why three atmospheres died a bit cos you've got grounds full of old farts like me these days

[laughs]

Who are quite content to just sit there and watch the football rather than jump up and down and tell the referee he's a wanker or whatever. Erm you don't get that *[laughing]* so much. So, they've gotta do it, an' I absolutely applaud what they're doing by trying to get local kids in, and again kids from communities that might not necessarily be into football, I mean, you know we did have a problem with it at West Ham last year where there was a er, a small group of Muslims were praying in the concourse, under the stand, and no one was aware of it, and naturally it caused a bit of a culture clash. Erm, you know, but its good, that the people from those sort of communities that might not necessarily otherwise watch live sport I think are given the opportunity. And if you can get, you know, if you can get 10 of 'em for life then it's a success, its proved itself, so erm, hopefully, hopefully that will pay off, and that's certainly is a good thing that they're doing for local communities and the kids.

Yeah. So I've got one final question for you

Sure

Erm, basically I just wanted you to sum up what, what West Ham means to you more than anything.

Gosh. How would you say, erm... Its, I think it really, probably I'd say the club defines pretty much- that sounds a bit- I don't know. It it it, I mean everything, everything sort of about my professional life revolves around West Ham, erm you know my family come from there, so it's probably just encompasses, it touches every part of my life, it means, the area means the world to me, the team, you know, I could never follow anyone else, I could never have a second team, West Ham are my team. Erm its, it's just become sort of part of my life, it really has the football club, especially now, as I say it pays the mortgage, even more so, erm but, yeah I probably couldn't, I don't really know how to define it other than that, it's just, it really has just become part of my everyday life and, you know, very entrenched in it, and without it I'm not sure what I'd do. Probably watch a lot more cricket I suppose, or rugby. But er

But no one want to do that

[laughs] yeah

END



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