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Interviewer

Interviewee

So my name is Joshua Adams and I'm recording for Eastside Community Heritage on the Stadium of Stories project do you maybe just want to introduce yourself?

Yeah my name's Richard Ross

And how do you spell that?

R-O-double S

And when were you born?

I was, where or when?

When

When I was born, in nineteen fifty so I'm sixty six

Mmm and whereabouts were you born?

I was born, actually I was born in Mile End General Hospital but, uh, my parents had moved from the east end of London and were living in Gants Hill in Ilford and so I grew up in Gants Hill

Yeah, so I thought we could maybe begin then by talking about your grandparents

Right

Um, whereabouts were your grandparents born?

I don't know much about my grandparents I mean they, they kind of, they came from Eastern Europe so I think they were Jewish, or that's the label that would've been pinned on them

Yeah

So they came at the beginning of the twentieth century from what is now probably Russia, Poland and lots and lots of people came from the east, Eastern Europe, uh, as refugees from the Pogroms and they came over at the beginning of the twentieth century

Do you know what sort of jobs they done in east London?

I got very little idea I think one of my grandparents worked in either making cigarettes or making the machines that make cigarettes it was something like that but I don't have much of an idea really and I never knew most of my grandparents I didn't know my grandparents on my father's side and I only knew my grandmother on my mother's side

Mmm it seems like quite a typical thing for, um, people who come from places like modern day Russia to

Yeah

To, to east London it's quite a common theme

Yeah like at the beginning of the twentieth century loads of, thousands came into London

Xxxx and that kind of thing

Yeah exactly yeah

So how about your parents then?

Well my parents, I mean both my parents are dead now but, um, my father, I don't know what they did in the Great Depression, the twenties and thirties I really don't know I'd like to know but my father when I was, I dunno, ten or so in the sixties my father worked for a toy manufacturer so he sold toys and he worked in a, think in the show room in London eventually although he did get made redundant and then, um, eventually he, he carried on working as a clerk on a shipping line my mum had been a, uh, typist, secretary and she worked for the, what's now called Chatham House I think today and I've got pictures of her during the war, they were evacuated to one of the Oxford Colleges and I've got a picture of her cycling around with a bicycle in Oxford and then later on she worked, uh, she did all sorts of things like cleaning, she was a cleaner, typist anything to earn money

Mmm so for your father do you remember what the toy company manufacturer was called?

It was Chad Valley, um, and I think the factory was based in Wales and, um, it got taken over and I, and I think it was swallowed up by a bigger company I don't think it exists anymore

Yeah so what were your parent's names?

Um, my father was called Charles and my mother was Lily

Do you know how they met?

[Laughs] Again I don't actually you're asking very good questions and I do wish I'd known, if I had a time machine I'd go back over their lives and my life but I don't know how they met no I don't, I think they might've, in some way be related or somehow, some of their antecedes [sic, means 'antecedents'] might've been related that's the story we were told but we haven't got any evidence for that so I just don't know

So did you father live in Wales then for...?

No, no I think he used to go there, no as I say we, they, they lived in Gants Hill when I knew them I mean they'd moved out of the east end and they'd moved to Gants Hill they'd bought a house just before the Second World War in Gants Hill and then lived there until my father died and my mother died as well in the same house, um, but I sometimes think he went to this factory in Wales, I think

Yeah, do you know what prompted the shift from moving from the east end to Gants Hill?

I've...

'Cause again that's a...

It's a very traditional...

Common theme

Absolutely I think it's moving out of probably shared housing, you know, poor housing conditions that when you have enough money you can go and buy a house and, you know, when the kids came along, 'cause I've got two brothers and, five of us in the house, you know, so it was that and it was a much nicer area than the kind of slums of the east end which is what they would've in the, you know, we're talking about, they moved, they bought the house I think in nineteen thirty nine so just before the war so, you know, the twenties and thirties in the east end of London the housing conditions weren't wonderful so I think that, I imagine that's why they moved out, yeah absolutely

Yeah it's definitely a common theme

Yeah

Um, people moving to places like Gants Hill or...

Yeah

Ilford, um, for example

Yeah, yeah absolutely

So how about yourself? Uh, whereabouts did you grow up?

Well I grew up in Gants Hill, um, I went to school, Gearies, which is, uh, still there I think, infants school and then I went to, we had the eleven plus in those days although in Redbridge which is now the Borough of Redbridge, in Ilford they still have the eleven plus, um, had the eleven plus and I went to, passed that and went to Ilford County High School which is in Barkingside I think is also still there, um, yeah

What was your time like at school?

Um, I did ok I found school boring [laughs] I don't think the teachers were very good I mean I don't think many of them were properly trained as teachers, uh, I think there was a sort of,

after the war they, there was a very quick way of getting more and more teachers trained so they just had a few months training or something that's my understanding, uh, but I was ok I, I wasn't brilliant but I wasn't bad I was sort of in the middle, um, and I just got through it really I suppose

Was there any particular subjects that you enjoyed at school or?

I, the, by the time I was in the sixth form the, the subjects I enjoyed were English and Economics and when I left school I went to university to study Economics so that had been something, but that was only something I got through, into the sixth form because we didn't learn it before

Yeah, so you were just saying you grew up in Gants Hill

Yeah

Um, what was the area like back then, you know, growing up?

It was quite a, I suppose you would call it a middle class area it was quite prosperous, um, it was a nice area you had Valentine's Park which as kids was great, um, there was a wide range of shops transport, you know, you had the central line because that had been, um, during the war the, the central line had been ex', well the central line had been extended before the war as I understand it but during the war it was used as factories, Plessey's which was based in Ilford had a factory, um, I think in the, that central line Wanstead, Redbridge, Gants Hill, um, but after the war the central line operated so it was very easy to get into London and also you had Ilford station as well so yeah I, I enjoyed it I had a great time and we used to cycle around it was the days when you, as kids you ran around and at the back of our house was a, a sort of derelict site which was I think, we thought it was a bomb site but I don't think it was I think it was just a site where they hadn't yet built houses and we used to love playing on there cycling and so on, yeah

So what else did you do then as a child growing up? What did you do for fun?

Um, I was in, I mean it's difficult to remember going back all those, those years I mean, as I say I had two brothers so we were often out cycling around or playing with other kids in the street I was into aircraft and made model aircraft and went to air shows and things like that in fact all I ever wanted to do was be a pilot, um, but when I was eleven I became short sighted and knew I could never fly a Spitfire which is what I wanted to fly in those days so that completely changed my life I s'pose really, um, but I don't remember much other than just playing around in the street or cycling, we used to cycle everywhere that was something we used to do cycle out into Essex into the countryside and so on, yeah

Do you remember where else you used to cycle or maybe any particular locations that were your favourite places?

Um, just, I mean we used to cycle, I used to cycle to school regularly up to Barkingside but we also would cycle out round Weybridge and out into the Essex countryside I s'pose that's really where we went and we didn't have a car until, no I would've been sixteen or something

before we had a car so after that we used to drive out to the Essex countryside and so on but as kids yeah we used to, oh and get buses I suppose we must've got buses out, yeah

Was transport quite busy in Gants Hill back then?

No not like it is now

Almost every hour sort of thing?

Oh no there was a regular bus service 'cause it was on London, you know, as I say London Transport buses although there were greenline buses which we don't have now which were the buses that would go out into the countryside, um, but it wasn't, you know, the tubs and the buses weren't as packed as they are now and I don't remember ever having to stand on a tube there were always seats and so on same with buses even in the rush hour they weren't that bad, yeah

So obviously growing up in Gants Hill, um, it would be interesting if you could maybe talk a bit about, um, oh sorry, a bit about your home and, um, what your home was like in Gants Hill

Well it was, um, a three bedroom terraced house, um, as I say it had been, it had only been bought, uh, built in nineteen thirty nine and so, and I was born in the nineteen fifties so it wasn't that old when I was born and you're not really conscious until about ten or eleven, um, and what else can I say about that? It had a nice garden we used to play in, um, thinking back on it I mean given that I had two brothers and we used to fight all the time 'cause we were quite close in ages and probably very competitive I would've thought it was a nightmare for my parents a lot of the time but it was a nice, again it was a nice area because there were other kids down the road who went to the same school as we did and so we would play in the streets with them and out the back on this sort of wasteland as well, yeah

So what else did you used to do in the area then? Particularly when you came up to, say, your teenage years did you go out to music venues or to the, I know there was a cinema in Gants Hill at one point?

There was a cinema the Odeon cinema. We never really grew up going to the cinema I do remember going to see Mary Poppins [laughs] that's the first one I can remember and I think there was a cinema in Barkingside as well which the Re', the xxxx or something I can't remember the name and we used to go there we did go to the Odeon occasionally, um, but when I, as I sort of got into my late teens, sixteen, seventeen used to go to pubs with friends and all that sort of stuff we started to do, or I started to do that with friends, yeah absolutely that was the thing

Can you remember which pubs you went to?

Again I had a particular friend who had a car so we would drive out into, again into pubs around Essex there were also pubs round Beehive Lane I think we went to one and another pub that comes, near Barkingside but I've forgotten the name of the pub there, yeah

So do you think Gants Hill and the surrounding area has changed over the years?

Oh I think so def', I mean I haven't been back, I don't go back regularly I haven't been back for a while but it looks very down, it's gone down like some areas go up and some go down and I think Gants Hill has gone down a lot of the shops had moved out and, uh, I noticed closed shops and last time I was there it just seemed to have gone downhill

So obviously you went to school in the area and you said you went to university

Yeah

Do you maybe wanna bridge that gap between leaving school and going to university?

Well I went straight from school to university so when I was eighteen after A Levels I didn't know what I, well actually that's not quite true 'cause I didn't know what I wanted to do all I knew was I wanted to leave school [laughs], uh, and as I say the school was boring and I just wanted to leave and after the A Levels, uh, we had nothing to do and so I actually got a job, um, um, in a, working in a bank, um, and I didn't know I was gonna go to university so I worked in this bank as a bank clerk, um, and then I did go to university so I only worked in the bank for a few months before I went off to university although I then, the next summer needed a job and so I went back and got a job at the bank

Which bank was it?

Um, it's, um, probably when I first went there it was, um, National Westminster, NatWest, National Westminster Bank it might've been the Westminster Bank and then it merged with the National to form the National Westminster Bank, uh, NatWest and it was, the branch was in Moorgate just up from the bank of England, um, and my dad knew the bank manager I think his firm had an account there and therefore he asked them if they had any jobs and these were the days, this was nineteen sixty eight these were the jobs were there was full, proper full employment and it was easy to get jobs and so they needed someone and I went and worked, um, as I say just after I left school as a clerk, um, I was hopeless 'cause I was very shy and so I would never ask anyone and so I would make lots of mistakes and then the next year when I went back because I was at university the manager who had all supreme power thought that as I was university I would, at university that I was intelligent this was a terrible mistake he made so I became a bank cashier I watched someone for a day and then I was a bank cashier and I made loads of mistakes as I wasn't properly trained it was ridiculous, um, but anyway it enabled me to earn some money so that was the main thing about it

So how was your time then working at the bank? Did you enjoy it at all or?

I enjoyed bits of it the second year when I was a cashier I didn't really enjoy it much at all, uh, 'cause I found it really stressful 'cause I didn't really know what I was doing so people would shove things under, over the counter and I wouldn't know whether they were trying to pay some money in or wanted something out

Yeah

Yeah so that was rather, that was rather stressful, um, and at the end of that second summer they asked me if they thought I would make a career in the bank and I said no way would I ever dream of doing that so that was the end of that

Do you know what sort of, um, wages they were paying you at the time?

Um, what I remember, not really it was probably something like eighteen pounds a week or something but the thing I do remember is that I knew nothing I mean I was just doing this as a summer job, as a holiday job certainly when I was a cashier but this was before the days of equal pay and I knew I was getting paid more 'cause I was a man than the women who knew what they were doing, were proper trained cashiers so even then I knew this was utterly wrong but, uh, that was how it worked

Still goes on now unfortunately

It still goes on now yeah, yeah absolutely yeah

So you went to university, um, do you wanna tell us a bit about your course and what you done there?

Yeah well I went to Ke', University of Kent at Canterbury and I studied Economics and Kent, Kent was a new university it'd only been open three years, it opened in sixty five and I went there in sixty eight and it was kind of based on colleges so I went into a college called Keynes College which was new, we were the first lot in there and I loved it I had a wonderful time and, um, made some friends who are still frie', I'm still friends with and it was exciting because, um, it was new so we were kind of creating it, this was also nineteen sixty eight so this was the time of the, um, Paris, uh, events and they spread around we were kind of slow at Kent it got round to us in nineteen sixty nine and we had an occupation where we occupied a lot of the administrative buildings I think because we were looking for secret files which I don't think we found but there were also protests against the Vietnam War and so on and so it was a very, oh a wonderful time to be a student

Were you very politically conscious at university?

I became politically conscious I mean again looking back on my school it was so dull I mean it would, it would've been kind of very conservative probably in a big C and a small C way but I was unconscious of that 'cause we never discussed politics at school, um, but when I went to university all these things were happening and then I became politically aware absolutely, yeah

So what was it then say about the Paris student revolts or other countries like Germany and Italy where it was also happening, what was it that kind of inspired you?

Well I think, I think what it, it was a number of things I mean one thing that was significant was part of the studies...we did sociology and the guy who, who taught was actually a Anthropologist and I just remember one thing he did which was to tell us the make-up of the British establishment that whatever percentage of judges came from public schools, cabinet and so on a bit like it is now

Yeah hasn't really changed

Hasn't changed, well it changed and now it's gone back the wheel has turned, and I just thought this is completely unfair I didn't know anything about this because the school was so

appalling but, um, uh, I just opened my eyes and I thought this is wrong, you know, I think I got, partly my background, my mother had a, a great sense of fairness and justice and I just thought when I learnt about this, this is utterly unfair and so I sort of became quite, well I am really left wing and, um, my politics were formed by, quite intellectually I would say not through experience but by, intellectually yeah, yeah

So what sort of, uh, books did you sort of read then during the time if it was intellectually?

Well, uh, Marx of course *Das Capital* and, amongst other things yeah, um, yeah those kind of, yeah particularly Marx, Marx was a very great influence and in those, you know, in, in the sixties and the seventies politics was moving left I think and you just also felt that, I mean it was partly 'cause of full employment, full employment gives a lot of, obviously it gives power to workers and so there was this idea that we could change society for the better, yeah, could push things and things did change particularly socially, um, but then economically there was, if you like a counter-revolution which brought in the current neo-liberal thing but, uh, in the sixties we just felt the current of history was moving in the direction of socialism how wrong we were [laughs]

[Laughs] Just a little bit, so was there any other, um, issues, um, that you demonstrated against?

Well I remember, as I say, the Vietnam War we, what partly the stuff about universities was up until then universities were very restricted, um, you know, if you look at pictures of people in universities in the fifties, you know, people then would've been wearing suits and ties well that, all of that changed what we were wearing changed like hippydom came in as well, uh, we were chaffing against, like, restrictions about, uh, if you lived on campus, you know, where you, where, I don't think it ever happened at Kent but other universities sort of men and women were meant to stay in separate residences, uh, there were hours things when we weren't allowed to have visitors thing like that I don't, I'm not sure that ever happened at Kent 'cause Kent was a new university but those kind of restrictions that was generally what students were sort of rebelling against, those kids of restrictions

Yeah

Um, other things that changed were music of course so there were kind of this, rock music was in and so on and I can remember dru', drugs as well that was the other things so I dunno how many people smoked dope, a lot, a lot did you know it was just there and so it was a cultural, a cultural shift really from, you know, being very conventional looking and behaving conventionally to more liberal attitudes I suppose

Did your university at the time have a student union?

We had a student union but the university had been based around colleges it kind of followed an Oxbridge model and what you had in each college was a separate organisation I think it was called the Junior Common Room, uh, one of the things that I got involved in was trying to change that so we had a proper student union which I think did happen so it was more like a, a university wide organisation of students rather than something that was more a social thing in each college yeah

So you just said as well there, um, that there was a large social shift alongside a political one in the sixties

Yeah, yeah, yeah

And part of that was obviously was sex and music and drugs

Yes

Um, what sort of bands and what sort of music were you listening to at the time?

Well I suppose, you know, I'm a child of the Beatles really so the Beatles were just my favourite I suppose but I can remember Led Zeppelin, big concert and Led Zeppelin came long and played, um, so that that was, but then, funnily enough I then changed and got into classical music which I hadn't been I didn't grow up listening to classical music but while I was at university suddenly I found I was listening to Radio three, started listening to classical music so I moved away from, uh, rock music into classic music while I was there, yeah and that was a very great influence of me as well, um, and there was a lot of music around I mean of all sorts not just rock music but, well you could also listen to classical music

So what is it about classical music that you, that you like?

I just, well I, I s'pose I just found it richer, you know, a kind of, you know, pop songs and rock songs have an immediate emotional impact, um, whereas classical music has a deeper impact that you can listen to over and over and over again and get different things, yeah I think that would be the difference

So after your time at university, was it three years you studied for?

I was there for three years yeah

Three years, so what did you do after university?

Well after university I didn't know what I was going to do I did think of doing postgraduate work, going on doing a PhD but I didn't actually get funding for that so I needed a job and I came back to London and again it was the days when you could just get a job so you went to the la', what were called the labour exchange in those days and say what have you got? You know, have you got a job? And I got a job, um, I think the first one I got a job was working in Ilford, um, a place called Folidisk [sp?] which, uh, was a, uh, record distributor it was owned by Dodge Gramophone and Philips [?] I think and, uh, I worked on the evening shift so orders would come in from shops and each, like a warehouse, went round and picked the records off the shelves and then parcelled them up to be sent out to the shops, yeah and then I did that for a few months and either, I think the shift might've ended or something and I went back to the labour exchange and said what have you got? And they said "Oh well there's this, this and this" and I think the job I ended up doing was, um, working on a transportation survey for the Greater London Council, um, and then sub-contracted to this organisation whose name now escapes me but, uh, we were based at Newbury Park and, uh, I was, uh, in an office where, um, interviewers, people would be interviewed, sixty thousand households were interviewed about their travel arrangements how they got to work and then we had to,

this was in the early days of computers so we had to code these responses and then they were sent to a data processing centre, uh, to be processed and there were also transportation surveys like counting cars which we earnt [sic] a little bit of extra money by doing as well and I remember sitting in a car in the early mornings on the North Circular road outside of the GLC refuse and incineration plant trying to count lorries and cars and motorbikes as they went by which was one of the most boring jobs ever [laughs] but yeah

So with your Economics degree did you not ever think about going down a specific route...

Um

...that was related to it?

I did later what, what then happened was after I'd, a couple of years, I also worked in Foyles bookshop in London as well and then I decided I did want to go and do postgraduate research and I, I had been interested in multi-national companies and these are companies that are based in more than one country now we take that for granted these days but in those days people had just started to notice of this phenomenon that companies rather just be based in one country were moving abroad and people started to write about this and, um, particularly, my interest was particularly, I had become very interested, become active in trade unions and this, these companies, these multi-national companies prevented lots of problems with trade unions, um, and so I went to Keele University in Staffordshire, um, originally to do a PhD in Economics but ar', around that subject of trade unions and multi-national companies although I never finished the PhD I kind of got sidetracked into, um, doing a lot of teaching and, um, Keele University is next to the potteries, Stoke on Trent which is, was the centre of the world's ceramics industry but is now rather desolate, um, and so I got involved in co-authoring a history of trade unions in the pottery industry and doing some consultancy work, research for, um, the trade union in the pottery industry as well, um, so that was how I kind of got back into a specific aspect of economics, yeah

Yeah, so were you actively involved in trade unions or was it just from a research point of view?

I had become, um, I had become actively involved I think I, probably when I was at the bank, joined the banking union but I don't know, uh, remember that, um, but when I got to university it, although we, we couldn't really be the union you're not working you're a student even if you're on a grant but the Association of University Teachers had set up a postgraduate section so you could actually join, uh, which we did, I and some others did and I remember going to meetings and so on although I don't now remember the details of that, uh, but then as I say I worked closely with the, what was called the Ceramic and Allied Trades Union which is a union ion the pottery industry, yeah

So where did you go after that then?

Well I stayed, I mean I lived the area, um, although it's now very desolate I've been back a few times and the potteries, you know, it's a wasteland really, uh, when I was there the kind of like, must've been a hundred thousand people working in the pottery industry in Stoke but now maybe a couple of thousand, um, and I like the area so I stayed there for about four and a half years and I, I really liked it and I got quite a lot of t', again it's a completely different era

so there was a lot of teaching that you would do at the universities, in the various colleges nearby, Workers' Education Association and so on, um, but then after a while I had, um, uh, run out of money I think [laughs] or the money had started to dry up and I needed, I needed, uh, a kind of proper job as it were, you know, uh, a permanent job I suppose you would say and so I applied for various jobs and I got one working at the Trade Union Congress in London at Congress House and, um, I stayed, stayed there, so I moved back to London and that's when I moved into Tottenham actually which is where I live now and, so I worked in the education department of the Trade Union Congress for twelve years I think it was, yeah

So when you moved back to London, um, why did you pick the area of Tottenham?

That's a very good question, I think it was that I asked people [laughs] and some of the people I was working with at the TUC lived in north London and I didn't know north London, um, at all but I, um, asked around and I dunno they, I went and looked at a lot of places around Enfield and Haringey and I think it was, I found a flat that I could afford I think and it, and it also it was, I was working at Congress House which is near the British Museum and I needed to be able to get there quite easily and I could cycle there from where I lived, um, or get a bus or tube but cycling I did quite, quite often, yeah

So where did you go after Congress House? Or was that your last job?

No I was there, no I was there for twelve years and then I, um, things had changed and we'd actually moved up to Hornsey, the TUC opened a National Education Centre in Hornsey, Crouch End and I worked, so I worked there for a few years and then, so I had been working for the TUC for twelve years and I, um, got sick of it and, uh, you know you often leave a job because of personalities so that had happened there had been reorganisations that I didn't like and I got a job as National Education and Training Officer of the Workers' Education Association, um, which was based at, when I first went there, just off Oxford Street near marble Arch and then we moved to Bethnal Green, um, and so I worked there but I was only there for, for just two years because, I should never have gone there because it hadn't got any money it was in a terrible state this was, we're talking about here nineteen ninety when I went there and this was the height of Thatcherism there was no money for organisations like the WEA and, um, so they ran out of money and I got made redundant, um, which was a bad time for me, um, and then I kind of changed careers and after a few months I was free-lancing really in workers' education but then I got a job in...what's? Dunno what it's called now but it was called the College of North East London at the time and, um, that was in, um, working with literacy and numeracy which had become an interest in mine but I'd never really, I'd done vol', I'd worked as a volunteer literacy and numeracy teacher but this was a permanent job well at first, at first it wasn't it was a contract on, uh, literacy and numeracy for people in work project so I did that, um, and then I got back into kind of trade union education I got a job at Southbank University working in the Centre for Trade Union Studies there and, um, I was at some, at one point half-time there and half-time at the College of North East London so I was literacy and numeracy then I was doing this trade union studies so it was quite a difficult time eventually this Southbank job we, we moved the Centre for Trade Union Studies up to what was then the University of North London which is now London Metropolitan University and eventually I went full-time there and that was when I, I, that's where my last job was, sort of heading up the Centre of trade Union Studies at London Metropolitan University and I retired from there two years ago

Mmm so obviously you work a lot with trade unions over the years

Yeah, yeah

Um, is there a large difference between when you first started working with trade unions to now with trade unionism?

Oh yeah, absolutely yeah 'cause when I worked for the TUC which was in nineteen seventy eight, um, first of all there was the Labour government and there was a thing called the Social Contract so the Labour government's quite close to the trade unions, half the working population was in a trade, were in trade unions and trade unions were seen as having some influence they never had any power but they had some influence and, um, so fifty percent of the population were in trade unions it's now down to something like twenty three percent so a complete decline, um, and so when we went there we had, you know, had some influence with the government by the end, there was very little and now there's virtually none

Yeah

Um, yeah so a change from...as I say at the end of the sixties it looked like there was a push for socialism although it never came but you could call that period in the fifties, sixties, seventies social democracy and now we're in a period called neo-liberalism so that change, you know, that, that's my life I've seen that change, um, which is quite depressing really

Mmm so in your opinion what's prompted the shift then, um, with trade union membership numbers?

Oh well I think it was, I mean there are many different ways of reading history, if you studied History you'll know, yeah obviously you know this, but, you know, the, the fifties and the sixties are often called the long boom after the Second World War so the economies grew, you know, faster than ever before or since and then it hit a crisis in the nineteen seventies for all sorts of reasons I mean the oil price rise rose three, three-fold in nineteen seventy one I think it was, um, and just that, you know, you have cycles in economics, uh, in, in economics so it all crashes in the nineteen seventies and out of that comes a kind of new paradigm called monetarism at the time with Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in the US and, um, unemployment rose so when Thatcher comes into power, um, sorry between, I think it was probably between nineteen seventy nine and nineteen eighty one unemployment goes from half a million to three million, well four million, three million on the official figures but say four million so it's just enormous and unemployment knocks the stuffing out of you and workers and then you had anti-union laws and then you had privatisation so union membership just declined and the main thing was the closure of the industries where unions had been strong so shipbuilding, engineering, um, coal mining all these big industries they employed hundreds of thousands of people who were unionised well that all declined and unions have failed to sort of recruit in newer industries like IT it's very difficult to do it I mean it's, mainly because people are isolated and often self-employed and working for small organisations, yeah

Yeah so said you've retired now, two years ago?

Yeah

Um, what have you been doing with your time since then?

Um, I've been, I mean one of the things I do at the moment is learn German [laughs] I've got some German friends and I thought it'd be nice to be able to speak to them in German so I've done that and I've done a few courses, I'm learning by studying in London and also I've done a few courses abroad as well so, yeah, well I go to International House which is in Holborn at the moment which is evenings and it's good, it's good

Something I'll have to look into to be honest I think I prefer the practical, um, side of it, um, rather than sitting in front of a laptop, um, which you do with Rosetta Stone

Oh right

And you have a headphone on and you

Oh right yeah

Try converse in German, um, so what else have you been doing then aside from

Um

Learning German

Well I, I've become a man who lunches so I regularly meet people for lunch either people who like me have retired, friends who have retired or I still go back, for example, meet some people from London Met, London Metropolitan University a couple of times, uh, a month, um, and I've got, you know, I've kept in touch with people from my TUC days and, uh, from the College of North East London so I'm, for example go walking quite often as well

Yeah whereabouts do you like to go walking?

Well, um, either, sort of round here there's some decent walks, here or we go out and, um, for example I've got a friend who's tried to do the Essex Way which is a path, uh, a path through the Essex countryside and he's done most of the stages and I've done at least one stage with her so those, those kind of things yeah or along the Thames there are various paths along the Thames as well

Hmm

Yeah, so obviously the project is about West Ham

Yeah

Erm how did you start supporting West Ham and how did you get into the club originally?

Well erm my memory is that erm my dad supported West Ham and I can remember at school erm this is at Gants Hill, I think it was probably at primary school somehow we lined up and had to choose which team to support and it was either Tottenham or West Ham and I chose West Ham

Yeah

Because my dad had and so I think it was from very early days you know, I can't remember how old I was maybe 7 or 8 or something and I started supporting West Ham

Did your father go to the games?

Well I think so but again my memory plays one false erm and my I have a memory of erm going to watch West Ham play Man Utd and I was sat on the West Stand and I think I was with my dad and I think I was with my brothers and its significant this match because West Ham had just been promoted in 1957/58 so this was in 1958 and I think this match well was against Man Utd and er if so it was Bobby Moore's first match in the first team for West Ham and what had had happened was Malcolm Allison who'd been so influential with West Ham had had TB and had an operation and lost a lung. And he fought back to full fitness and all he wanted to do was play one game in the 1st Division then retire but the manager Ted Fenton picked the young Bobby Moore against Malcolm Allison and Malcolm Allison then says he went off on a 2 week gambling spree and that was very sad really, but that's my memory of going with my dad to watch that match. Now I don't remember other matches I went to watch with my dad but it is possible that I don't really remember and I don't remember much about that until going to watch West Ham regularly until probably about 16 and then I went with friends from school and he we used to stand on the North Bank erm and so I would have gone regularly then yeah.

Do you remember how you used to get to the games when you were 16?

We would of. Well I was still living at home so we would of I would of got a bus I suppose and then yeah got a bus to the end of Green Street and then just walked up Green Street

Did you ever a pre-match ritual so to speak?

Erm...not in those days because then I went off to university and I would only watch West Ham when I came back and then I was living in London for 2 years and then would of gone regularly and then I went away again to Kiel University then I came back and it was then erm when I went to work for the TUC erm then 2 of the other people that worked there we realised we supported West Ham, so I went with them and and generally might have been 1 or 2 other friends as well and then we would generally meet up in a pub before the match and have a drink and talk about what's going to happen. So that became a kind of ritual yeah

Hmm do you remember which pub?

I can't remember the name of the pub, it was erm sort of around Plashet Grove area but I just can't remember the name of it, I can picture it I can take you there but I can't remember the name of it

Yeah, did you ever go to other local businesses obviously there's the pie and mash shop, Kens Café, there's the fish and chip shop. Did you ever go to any of those places?

Yes I might of bought a sandwich or something from one of them but generally we would meet at this pub

Yeah

That's what we would do, that's kinda the ritual I suppose yeah yeah

So did you have many highs and lows then when you were drinking with West Ham?

[Laughs] Lows as you know lows erm yeah I mean I don't it's difficult to remember yeah I mean sometime after the game we would all together have a drink as well and if we'd won obviously we'd be on a high and if we lost we'd be on a low. I mean thinking back to those days I don't have a very good memory for matches I don't have a very good memory for goals or anything like that, but I remember one of the lowest was...it was in the 70's it might have been about 73'' I can't remember but erm when West Ham played Stoke and I had er when I lived in erm when I went to Kiel University I had watched Stoke a lot and they had become my second team as it were erm but I remember a game at Upton Park where we were 3 nil up at half time and lost 4-3 which was one of the most sickening and I've got a feeling the following season all most the same thing happened but we drew 3 all so I do remember that as a particular bad time yeah absolutely

Hmm, do the atmosphere was like on Barking Road and on Green Street going towards a game?

It was quite exciting I mean I was young and it was good fun and everything and there were a lot of people going there yes and it was good and exciting. As it was in the ground and when you had before seats before the all seater stadium you were squashed in and everything and we had erm particular spot where we stood on the North Bank and now looking back on it how on earth how you find your way through the crowd to this spot where we meet but that's what we did. But when the all seater stadiums came in we had we go season tickets and got seats but before that it was just standing. But I also remember in the ground it was good fun and there was a lot of humour, although I also remember in the 70's the violence

Hmmm

I can remember you know one match were you watched, oh you must have been on the North Bank and we could see the South Bank and it was against Manchester United I think and there was just loads of fighting and people being led out from half an hour before the game you know with blood streaming down there faces and so on. I mean it was horrible really erm but yes yeah, but that was another thing in the early days you know as a teenager and probably my early 20's if I went to a match we'd get there very early so we would hear the band, which a lot of people get wrong. I think it was the Leyton Silver Band but some people call it the British Legion Band but anyway there was always a band a brass band before the match and so we would get there and there was other things going on like erm goal scoring competitions and so on yeah

Has the stadium itself changed much over your time?

Yes it did yeah absolutely it was virtually all terracing apart from the West Stand then the chicken run got developed re-developed and then the rest of the ground got re-developed and then erm it became an all seater after Hillsborough and erm we had we then got seats in the Bobby Moore Stand that when yeah

Did you every experience the chicken run? I've heard some interesting comments

Yeah my memory of that match against Stoke when we were 3 nil up and lost 4-3 we were in I can remember watching that from the chicken run yeah, we were mainly on the North Bank but for some reason must have been on the chicken run sometimes yeah

I've been told stories about how the chicken run was extremely close to the pitch?

It was that's right yeah it was yeah I mean it was very narrow erm gap between the chicken run and the pitch absolutely it was yeah

Do you think obviously with the Hillsborough disaster erm that the prompt from standing to seating had any sort of effect on atmosphere at all?

Erm it did I was I was quite happy because as I got older I was quite happy to sit down although I do know a lot of people who prefer to stand and there is an active campaign to have safe standing at grounds but I was quite happy to sit down, I am not sure it changed the atmosphere that much. And of the things I remember is that erm certainly in the early days of seating people would stand up quite often, and if nothing exciting was happening people would stand up and sometimes they would stand up and stay stood up which I didn't like really because it meant you couldn't see anything, so everyone had to stand up and we were quite critical of the stewards for not doing anything about this but I think that changed over the years but yeah I wouldn't say it diminished the atmosphere really or made it less exciting no

So when you went to the stadium obviously to watch the game did you wear a jersey or scarf or?

I have got various scarfs it about the only thing I ever wore was a scarf but I didn't have yeah that was the only thing I wore a scarf yeah I think I didn't wear a shirt of anything, yeah no scarf yeah

Do you know what songs you would be singing inside of the stadium?

Well bubbles of course and just various chants you know some which are fairly horrible in hindsight but bubbles was the main one then depending on what was happening I mean he famous one was when we went to we did go away occasionally we saw some cup matches and erm there was a famous match against erm was it Man Utd when West Ham won the cup in 1980 the semi-final replay and when Frank Lampard scored and that great song about when Frank fell over and scored the fucking winning goal, which was a great song [chuckles] so those kind of things yeah I remember that yeah yeah

Did you prefer going to away games as opposed to home games?

Erm no not really, we didn't go to all away games but for a few years we went to quite a few and it was what we liked to do was it was partially a day out so going to see places and we got to like for example Nottingham and Sheffield and they became regular but I remember for example one it was I think it was against Nottingham Forest but it might have been against Notts Coutny and the weather was so appalling and it was er it was er an uncovered

terrace and through the game a freezing cold blizzard blew into your face...well I don't think that was much fun

Yeah

Not even at the time it wasn't much fun erm and so it was er we we would never we would always try and avoid trouble, we wouldn't go on the trains or anything like that. We'd get there to have a look around the town have a meal and so on and yeah a lot of it was about having a day out as well

Hmmm did you ever encounter any violence or trouble whilst going to games?

I can remember I can remember seeing it we got quite good at dodging it not being in the centre of it, I can remember this might have been when I was living in Stoke and I can remember a game I think it was Stoke against Spurs actually and there was a building site and people were just chucking bricks at the opposing fans, we had to dodge these bricks to get across the road, so I remember that I don't remember much around Upton Park but erm erm certainly in the 70's you had fighting in the ground although I don't remember ever being frightened or near to it and then outside the ground you occasionally saw people

Yeah

You know fights yeah

Because West Ham have the famous Inter City Firm

Inter City Firm yeah

I was just wondering maybe what your opinions on why football violence became so prevalent in British football? [coughs]

It's a very good question and I don't know the answer to it erm I know there have been sociologists about it but I haven't read much of it. I don't know it did get really bad it was erm kind of organised one thing that was erm it was exciting

Yeah

And people enjoyed it they didn't have to fight so there must have something about enjoying it and the triable aspect of it and being in a crowd doing things you'd never do on your own

Yeah

Erm but I am sure I don't how to answer why it because so bad yeah

So do you have any particularly stand out memories from not necessarily watching a game but being in the crowd and interacting with people or?

I remember er erm just I just liked the whole atmosphere really and being being there and you know things like just again you mentioned the world ritual which is a very good ritual, the

ritual of things like erm the guy who came around selling peanuts 'peanuts peanuts!' that kind of stuff and I remember for example for one year I think it was only one years they experimented by selling apples they came around the edge of the pitch selling apples but that didn't last more than a season I think so all of that we enjoyed. We enjoyed the announcer particularly when it was Bill Remfry who was the announcer and all of that that whole thing about going to a football match so it wasn't just the football

Yeah

It was everything that went along with it and then there this whole thing which is slightly a myth about West Ham being a family club and about erm the attractive football West Ham played and it was better to play attractive football then to win, that kind of stuff we like that because you become triable and so it was the you whatever the unique selling point of West Ham being a family club and playing entertaining football. Particularly the 60's and 70's erm and of course yeah the great thing about West Ham was erm you know they won the World Cup [laughs] all of that..that period won the FA Cup and erm and the World Cup and the European Cup Winners Cup as well 64'' 65'' 66'' that period was just it was a tremendous period Moore, Hurst and Peters and so on yeah

So on West Ham, I've heard that mentioned several times about West Ham being a family club erm, do you not necessarily think that's the case or?

Well I think it was more complicated than that because erm er it it had changed over the years and I kind of feeling alienated from West Ham now because one of the points about it being a family club, because it wasn't it had never the shares weren't available on the Stock Exchange the club was actually owned mainly by decedents of the original founders of Thames Ironworks there's this attempt to stop workers drinking by forming a football club and so erm and some of the original erm the descendants of some the original owners the founders of the club still owned the club and so that gave it a certain it wasn't bought and sold or anything like that and I became very alienated when that did happen they they sold out to Icelandic banks. Well that worked out very well didn't it [laughs] and I stopped going then and I thought that was appalling I was hoping there would be a breakaway like there had been at Manchester United with FC United and we would of as well. Erm but there wasn't and I think my feeling was that most of the fans just wanted someone to come in with a lot of money, because there had always been a lot of criticism from fans that West Ham didn't spend money and again I think that is a bit of a myth because they had world records for buying goalkeepers and so on so it's a bit of a myth they didn't spend money but the fans wanted a Mr Big to come in with lots of money and when these Icelandic banks came in then they really liked that erm and that alienated me I don't like clubs to be bought and sold and then it's got even worse because the current owners have made most of their money from pornography but again this is just appalling

Hmmm

Erm so I've stopped going but erm yeah but it was but I think because that ownership structure and because it was a small ground erm it had been there a long time Upton Park erm it was in the East End of London it had all of those trappings of a sort of a family club and so n yeah, that's how it was seen. And the football they played and the fact they didn't often win

put together, it wasn't the sort of club you just decide to follow because they always won, it wasn't that sort of club at all, yeah

So has it been struggle then not going back to games? Or have you though I'd really like to see that game this weekend?

Erm it was at first you know it was at first but I just felt so strongly that it was wrong that a club could just be bought by an Icelandic bank I just thought this was appalling erm and so I have been back the only times I went back strangely were. Friends from my Stoke day's very fervent Stoke followers would come and Watch West Ham if Stoke played at West Ham and I sometimes went and watched them and that was quite odd because I was then sitting in the away enclosure not in the Bobby Moore stand and that was kind of strange

How did that feel?

It felt very odd just very odd er and also er at er the last time I went you kind of realise the sheer madness of the crowd because the away fans are always the most fervent and so when they started yelling and shouting and swearing, 'what's this? Why am I surrounded by all these mad people?' as it were and I thought I used to be like those so yeah yeah

It's definitely an interesting game, so do you think...you were talking about ownership structures there before

Yeah

Do you think that wider change that happening in football, because it's quite indicative at the moment that lots of clubs are being bought and sold, do you think it's having an overall or general impact on football?

I think it is I think it's terrible I mean and the whole thing has become so commercialised and when I first went you didn't have advertising boards around the ground and the program wasn't full of advertising either and now it either and you didn't have shirt with sponsors names on or anything like that and so its completely changed from that point of view. But I think the ownership is appealing the fact that football clubs in Britain can just be bought and sold and people can and then why do people buy football clubs? Why someone from another country would buy a football club in Britain, well you can think of various reasons one is money laundering [laughs]

[Laughs]

You want to take your money out of some country you feel you might have expropriated why not launder it in Britain as were erm then just taking money out so you know we've got example of clubs which are bought leverage buy outs as they are called mortgages basically, take out the mortgage then you extract the dividends from it an management few and so on and it's just a way of making money out

Manchester United is a big example

Exactly absolutely that's what happened with Manchester United whereas before you know er know one made money out of football before all this happened, this all started really with the Premiership which I was against I thought it was a bad move and I was saddened when West Ham went along with it because before that erm you know money flowed around the 4 divisions it wasn't all concentrated, I some of it still does but its more and more concentrated in the Premiership. And of course you had much more Leicester won this year but you had much more and then there owned by some rich person, but you had much more of a flow up and down the divisions it wasn't like if you went down it was impossible to get back up which it is for a lot of clubs these days. So I think all of that changed with the Premiership and I didn't really like that

There's less of a trickle-down effect

There's less of a trickle-down effect and it's much more difficult for a club to come up and stay up. They might come and go back down again and you know there has been until Leicester won it dominated by these few very rich very rich clubs you know

Do you think with the increasing importance of money in football that football is losing a sense of itself were it originally came from its roots?

I think so I don't glamorise it or have rose tinted spectacles I mean but it has there is something in that and part of it is the players erm you know that erm when you had erm before the Premiership and before just this huge amount of money that came in players were earning they were very well paid but they were well paid as a skilled worker

Yeah

Now they are stratospheric

Hmm

Multi-millionaires erm obviously if you're in the lower divisions that's not the case if your in the Premiership it is and you know if you look back at photographs you'll see photos of Alan Devonshire getting the tube to play a match at Upton Park and things like that were as now its just they are completely divorced from and they would live okay they would have bigger houses than most of the fans but not super sort of castles in the countryside or things like that

So do you think footballers are becoming more and more detached from the community they represent and serve?

Yeah absolutely absolutely and of course they they don't really have any connection with the area so again if you go back to post-war football in Britain I would think the majority of players would have come from the area that the club is in whereas now that's very rare people can come from all over the world. Erm and yeah there's a detachment there's still you get all stuff about players kissing the badge and so on when they first come to the club but you know they're going to go on to another club and do the same thing so that's all changed. And the idea of there are very few 1 club players left who stay in one club all their careers

Very few

Very few yeah

So obviously on the topic of heritage obviously West Hams going through a big move at the moment from obviously Upton Park or the Boleyn Ground

Yeah Yeah

To Stratford erm and there's lots of local businesses that rely on passing trade, do you think with eh move there's going to be a big effect on those businesses that have had roots in the area for many many years?

Oh undoubtedly I mean it's difficult to know the effects until we know what happens to the ground, I mean the area could have a boost because er you know if you had more housing and more businesses I mean you remember a football club doesn't employ that many people and of course it doesn't operate all the time er so you could have a boost to the area, it will certainly change the area I think

Yeah

Yeah absolutely but that's another thing of course I find alienating the fact that the owners of West Ham will sell Upton Park for a lot of money, we know about the contract they got for the Olympic Stadium so they are doing very well out of all which I think is very sad. I mean in other countries we were talking about learning German, in Germany I think most clubs are membership owned clubs erm and they have to be I think

Yeah

And I just wish that would happen here or somehow there have been there are clubs I think there are membership owned clubs in Britain a few of them Portsmouth after being destroyed by a combination of Harry Redknapp and some other people is a membership owned club but also were the local council owns the ground and the club leases the ground that kind of stuff, I think there are different ways of organising football which I would prefer

So what do you think of the overall move to Stratford? Do you think it's positive for the club?

I don't particularly object to it erm I can understand why given...I don't like the state of football but given the state of football you need to have stadium holding 60,000 or something and the move to Stratford is in the borough and it's not too far away erm yeah I am not got many objections against it no

Do you think you'll ever go to see a game there?

I won't say I'd never go but it's not something I am going to rush to do because as I say I am quite alienated from the ownership of it all and so on

So obviously you've been supporting West Ham for a long time erm and Stoke as well, do you particular footballers that you've enjoyed watching over the years?

Well certainly at West Ham I mean when I was young people like Budgie Byrne, Johnny Bryne, Peter Braybook I remember they were very good players and then Moore, Hurst and Peters, Alan Devonshire, Trevor Brooking who went to the same school I did but he's a year older than me but I do remember the school, John Lyall also went to Ilford County High erm but yeah Moore, Hurst and Peters, Trevor Brooking and more recently Paolo Di Canio was a great player so I remember those and as I say I don't have a very good memory for matches erm apart from the ones I mentioned which were disasters but erm I did go to the 1980 cup final at Wembley that was fantastic as well.

What was the atmosphere like at Wembley?

The atmosphere was great and what I remember most is after the match a lot of us went back to Upton Park to celebrate and erm I then got a bus home there was a bus maybe I got it from Stratford I got a bus from Stratford to Manor House it doesn't run now I can't remember what the number was and what I remember is as I got on the bus I noticed that the conductor was bandying his hand and I looked and I saw a window broken and I said to the guy 'what's all this about?' he said 'I had a little radio with me and I was listening to the match and the bus had got Manor House and West Ham had won' and I started singing I am forever blowing bubbles and someone chucked a brick at the bus well I thought I am not surprised to be quite honest because its Arsenal West Ham Arsenal Spurs territory you're in. So I said 'are we going then?' and he said 'yes we'll go' and he wouldn't take any money off any West Ham fans that's my lovely memory of after the 1980 FA Cup final yeah

So do you have any other memories from inside the stadium at Wembley?

At Wembley not really no I don't erm again no I don't have a good enough memory, I don't have the memory of it I just remember the sheer joy. Well the two things really the thing when Trevor Brooking scored and then can we hang on can we hang on and then there was an incident at the end which has now escaped me ahhh...when one of the players was pulled down I can't remember the names now this is terrible. Anyways an incident towards the end when there was a brutal foul and it wasn't given as a penalty I think but I don't really remember much about the match or the crowd no

Yeah, so how would you come up then being a West Ham fan?

Well I certainly until they got erm sold until they were bought by the Icelandic banks I liked that although I like that idea myths are good can be good that West Ham was seen as a family club a friendly club, a club that played attack football that prefer to go down playing attacking football than grind out a 1-0 win. I liked all of that about it erm and I used to I've read a lot about the history of the club and all of that and I thought it was a decent club and oh the other thing of course that again changed was the fact they rarely changed managers so by the time Ron Greenwood was he the 5th manager? Something like that and its history people stayed there for years and that's changed now and there like any other club and they'll get rid of the manager if they're not successful

Yeah

But the fact that they would keep a manager if they weren't very successful, but obviously you wanted West Ham to win desperate to win the First Division and then the Premiership

that's really what you wanted. But you didn't want it or I didn't want it at the expense of playing football and being an honest and honourable club erm and then that changed when money came in and the Premiership came and it became erm a business because in football clubs aren't businesses they are not. What are they selling really? It's not quite churning widgets to be sold or anything like that erm so that I think has been a big change.

So how would you like to see West Ham Football Club going forward then?

Oh [laughs] what I would like if it went bust and it became a membership owned club you know something like Portsmouth has become or Lewes F.C. is also one and there are other around the county erm yeah I'd love that that's what I'd really like

Do you still keep in touch with football at all now?

No I am becoming less it's not just West Ham its part of this trend of football to become big business and so erm so yeah I am still a member of the Footballers Supporters Federation Football Association now is that right? And I had been to some meetings but I haven't been for a while a couple of years, but I do keep in touch with that kind of thing but my main connection with West Ham now this retro magazine that I was talking about earlier which is called Ex Hammer of which has interviews with old players, former player sorry there not necessary old and managers and staff and that's what I like reading about

Do maybe want to tell us a bit more about that and your involvement?

Well this was started some it comes out of Romford erm people who are publishers and they started producing this fanzine called Ex Hammer and when it first came out it came out month although not necessary over the summer but I don't think it sold enough they couldn't sell enough which I found surprising but I think a lot of fans aren't interested in the host and now and offshoot of that venture they also produced other books West ham like erm they books about managers they've got books about Black players because West Ham has a long history with being one of the first clubs prominent back players for them. And recently they brought out this book called Upton Park memories which erm which they ask people to send in memories about matches or players or erm they ground and erm they've bought it out this year erm because the move to Stratford erm and I think it's a really worthwhile thing to support and I enjoy reading the little fanzine when it comes

Certainly, do you ever engage with West Ham or any of the fans through social media or a digital presence?

No I don't I mean I've still got friends that go to West Ham and so yeah that's how I engage with that's going on at the moment but no I don't know not on social media no

So before we wrap up the interview, do you have any final comments that you'd like to add or?

Erm the lonely things just erm that I I generally feel that football when I was growing up football was different again its obviously when your young you enjoy things in hindsight weren't that enjoyable but I do think football has changed and do think that period after the because again I don't know what football was like before the Second World War all I know is what it was like when I was growing up in the 50's 60's 70's say and at that time erm you felt



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part of a club you felt it was your club and I think that was one of the things that changed you suddenly realise it wasn't your club

Yeah

That they people would just sell your club yeah West Ham was my club and they could just sell it and of course they the perfect...the legal right to do but not the moral right so as I say for me the major change

Yeah well thank you for being interviewed

My pleasure

Thank you

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