

File: BMD John Mackenzie complete

Duration: 1:10:40

Date: 04/08/2016

Typist: 685

START AUDIO

John Mackenzie: John Mackenzie, I have been connected with the club approaching 49 or 50 years both as a fan and as a volunteer. In the early days of Stevenage Town I was actually on the management committee of Stevenage Town.

Interviewer: Can you talk to us about the beginning of the football club, what was that like?

John Mackenzie: The beginning I moved to Stevenage from Scotland because of my father's work back in 1962, as far as I can remember that was the date. I remember Stevenage hadn't moved from where the station is now to Broadhall Way. I remember coming to the very first game here I think it was against Canterbury City in the Southern League, I believe that was in about '63.

I have been connected and coming to the games ever since apart from the obvious seasons when there was no club here because Stevenage Town and Stevenage Athletic both went bankrupt. Mr [Revolver 0:01:18] dug the pitch up, so for X number of years the ground lay derelict until a group of fans started up Stevenage Borough and took up Stevenage Borough. I have been coming from the very beginning when we played on King George's playing field until today.

Interviewer: Can you remember the old ground next to the railway station, can you describe to me what that looked like?

John Mackenzie: I can vaguely remember it. When I moved to Stevenage the new ground had been built, but obviously nobody played on it until the ground settled down. It had some corrugated stands, certainly the pitch of the new ground was always a problem in the early days. The one where the station is now that used to have a very good pitch, but I never actually saw any Stevenage team play on the old ground.

Interviewer: You remember the move to the new ground.

John Mackenzie: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you remember the first match?

John Mackenzie: The very first match I came to that I can remember was in the Southern League and we played Canterbury City. I think we won, but I am not 100% sure.

Interviewer: You talked about the playing surface at the new ground not being as good as the old.

John Mackenzie: We did have all sorts of problems with the playing surface. Lots of stones, we used to have bucket loads of stones that we picked off of it. The drainage was pretty poor, if you got a shower of rain the pitch flooded. The pitch was a problem for years and years and it is only in fairly recent times that the drainage and the problems with the pitch have gone away.

Interviewer: Can you remember how many people were watching Stevenage at that first game? Was there excitement in the town, can you describe the atmosphere?

John Mackenzie: I remember the first game. You didn't have the facilities then that you have now. You had one little corrugated iron stand on one side, a little stand on the other side and apart from that it was basically all the covering you had. The changing rooms were in the corner of the ground.

Interviewer: What were the changing rooms like?

John Mackenzie: The changing rooms were very good. It was a prefabricated wooden building, but the changing rooms were very good. The facilities compared to now were what I would describe as primitive. What kind of crowd was there? I can't remember, I know people were all the way around the pitch. Off the top of my head, I don't know, 700 or 1000, something like that off the top of my head but you are talking about 1983.

Interviewer: So that many at the beginning?

John Mackenzie: That many at the beginning, yes.

[0:04:55 – repeated section]

Interviewer: My name is Steven and I am here today on Boro' Memories day with...

John Mackenzie: John Mackenzie, I have been connected with the club approaching 49 or 50 years both as a fan and as a volunteer. In the early days of Stevenage Town I was actually on the management committee of Stevenage Town.

Interviewer: Can you talk to us about the beginnings of the football club, what was that like?

John Mackenzie: The beginning I moved to Stevenage from Scotland because of my father's work back in 1962, as far as I can remember that was the date. I remember Stevenage hadn't moved from where the station is now to Broadhall Way. I remember coming to the very first game here, I think it was against Canterbury City in the Southern League that would be back in I believe it was about '63.

I have been connected and coming to the games ever since. Apart from the obvious seasons when there was no club here because Stevenage Town and Stevenage Athletic both went bankrupt. Mr Revolter dug the pitch up, so for X number of years the ground lay derelict until a group of fans started up

Stevenage Borough and took up Stevenage Borough. I have been coming from the very beginning when we played on King George's playing field until today.

Interviewer: Can you remember the old ground next to the railway station, can you describe to me what that looked like?

John Mackenzie: I can vaguely remember it. When I moved to Stevenage the new ground had been built, but obviously nobody played on it until the ground settled down. It had some corrugated stands, certainly the pitch of the new ground was always a problem in the early days. The one where the station is now that used to have a very good pitch, but I never actually saw any Stevenage team play on the old ground.

Interviewer: So you remember the move to the new ground.

John Mackenzie: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you remember the first match?

John Mackenzie: The very first match I came to that I can remember was in the Southern League was when we played Canterbury City. I think we won, but I am not 100% sure.

Interviewer: You talked about the playing surface at the new ground not being as good as the old.

John Mackenzie: We did have all sorts of problems with the playing surface. Lots of stones, we used to have bucket loads of stones that we picked off of it. The drainage was pretty poor, if you got a shower of rain the pitch flooded. The pitch was a problem for years and years and it is only in fairly recent times that the drainage and the problems with the pitch have gone away.

Interviewer: Can you remember how many people were watching Stevenage at that first game? Was there excitement in the town, can you describe the atmosphere?

John Mackenzie: I remember the first game. You didn't have the facilities then that you have now. You had one little corrugated iron stand on one side, a little stand on the other side and apart from that it was basically all the covering you had. The changing rooms were in the corner of the ground.

Interviewer: What were the changing rooms like?

John Mackenzie: The changing rooms were very good. It was a prefabricated wooden building, but the changing rooms were very good. The facilities compared to now were what I would describe as primitive. What kind of crowd was there? I can't remember, I know people were all the way around the pitch. Off the top of my head, I don't know, 700 or 1000 something like that off the top of my head but you are talking about 1983.

Interviewer: So that many at the beginning?

John Mackenzie: That many at the beginning, yes.

Interviewer: What was your greatest memory of Stevenage Town then at that stadium at that ground?

John Mackenzie: I think probably Stevenage Town the best memory I ever had was when we played in the East Anglian Cup against Norwich City. It was the first honour that the new club ever won and we beat Norwich City 2-1. Off the top of my head there were certainly 2000 to 3000 people here that night. When I say Norwich City we are talking about a Norwich City team which was probably in that day their first team and we went on and won 2-1. If my memory serves me right that was the first honour that Stevenage Town in its professional form had won. It was the first honour that Stevenage Town ever won.

Interviewer: Can you remember how you celebrated that night?

John Mackenzie: A long time ago. As happens with all these things you win now I know there were lots of people on the pitch and I am sure I was probably one of them.

Interviewer: Was there an invasion after the game?

John Mackenzie: Yes, in those days everybody went on the pitch. It was a pretty low-key celebration compared to what would probably be done these days. That was the main honour that I remember Stevenage Town having won. Most of the days they were in the Southern League were a bit of a struggle.

Interviewer: Struggle as in, did they..?

John Mackenzie: We had a very good team. We had people like Johnny Brooks, Tommy Watson, Dickie England, Ray Peacock and people like that, absolutely brilliant team in those days. Through money problems and one thing and another Stevenage Town became defunct, but not before we had one or two very good years. Back at that time we had probably the best set of floodlights outside the Football League.

That was another job I used to have to do which was to climb up the towers and replace the bulbs that used to go fairly frequently. I am not sure I would have the bottle to do it now, but in those days being young and stupid climbing 100ft tower was not a problem so that was another job that I had to do. I am 65 years old coming up for and a lot of water has gone under the bridge since then. My memory is not what it used to be, but certain things I can remember.

Interviewer: I was intrigued that you remembered names of the players from back then.

John Mackenzie: I can remember most of them. Terry [Innes 0:13:06] was our centre forward he was a bit of a battering ram, his dad was the

physio. Peter walker, Johnny Brooks I have mentioned, John [Hyner], Hughie Pratt and people like that. A brilliant team back in those days.

Interviewer: What was special about that team?

John Mackenzie: They were all good players. Tommy Watson was Scottish, he went on to become I think the first player that Stevenage Town sold. I think we sold him to Peterborough for peanuts compared to what people would be sold for today. It was just a good side. Probably if you put that side up against today's side and you could have them the same age I would have to say that side would probably wipe the floor with the current side as good as they can be at times. That is just my personal opinion.

Interviewer: Can you remember a particular great player out of all the ones that you named that could perhaps compare to a player of modern time?

John Mackenzie: Johnny Brooks was probably the best player that ever played for the club, he was an ex-Tottenham player and he was just class. Who would I compare him with today in the current Stevenage team? I don't know. The only person who has ever come close to being the midfield type of player that Johnny Brooks was is Steve Berry. Steve Berry was in the championship winning team that Paul Fairclough managed when we first won the Conference. The only person I would compare him with in today's team is probably Michael Bostwick.

Interviewer: Can you remember a particular match when he particularly stood out?

John Mackenzie: Yes, I can remember an FA cup tie when we played at Wealdstone. I am not sure whether he got a hat-trick or not. I do remember that we lost, I am not sure if it was 6-5 and Johnny Brooks got sent off. I think that was the first time in Johnny's playing career that he had ever been sent off. That was against Wealdstone in an FA Cup tie. Sadly we lost and Johnny got sent off that is the one game that sticks in my memory. He was just class.

Interviewer: The FA Cup, do you remember a particular year or a particular run for Stevenage Town?

John Mackenzie: No, I think the Wealdstone game was probably... I can't remember what year it was. That was probably the best run that we had in those days. You didn't get the chance to play league teams like you do now, but that was the one game that stood out in my mind. I am not very good dates I am afraid.

Interviewer: What do you remember of Stevenage Town coming to an end?

John Mackenzie: I think it was a struggle. We were still playing in the Southern League. We were going to places like Merthyr Tydfil in minibuses because we didn't have the money. It was just a case of in those days getting people to make up the team. We were getting some awful hammerings in those days. That was in the days of John Duff and people like that. I think probably the cost

of floodlights, the cost of the team and one thing and another we just ran out of money. I know we had a march to the council to try and get them to save the club. That didn't come about and the club folded.

Interviewer: How many people were part of that protest?

John Mackenzie: Quite a few hundred.

Interviewer: Is this like a standing outside the council?

John Mackenzie: Yes, it was a march from the ground to the council offices, but they weren't prepared to do anything so the club folded.

Interviewer: Can you remember any of the banners, any particular chant on that protest?

John Mackenzie: No, it is so long ago now.

Interviewer: Do you remember the councillor of the day and why they didn't want to help?

John Mackenzie: No.

Interviewer: What was the feeling then your football team, a big part of your life, closing its gates for the last time?

John Mackenzie: The thing is when I started following Stevenage Town like many people a lot of them who sadly are no long with us. Our dream was that we hoped one day we would get in the football league. When you see your team dissolved that dream goes out of the window. We just hoped somebody would come along and start up another team, thankfully that happened.

Interviewer: At that time did you think another team would start and play at Broadhall Way or was there a feeling that could be the end of football in Stevenage?

John Mackenzie: No, I think we all thought there would be somebody out there come along and start up a new team. We knew it wouldn't be Stevenage Town because once a team goes bankrupt then you can't start up using the same name. Hence Sid Stapleton who was the guy who owned Stapleton Tyres he came along and he started up Stevenage Athletic.

Interviewer: Stevenage Athletic, was it much of the same place, the same stadium and the same crowd? Did any of the players from the previous team continue?

John Mackenzie: No, in those days we started off from scratch, new management and some of the players were here but not very many of them. A lot of Stevenage Athletic I have to say seems to have gone by the wayside. My brother played for Stevenage Athletic as

goalkeeper, Jim Briscoe signed him. He was playing in goal for the Hertfordshire county team and Jim was a manager at the time and he played for Stevenage Athletic.

Interviewer: Was Jim one of the more popular managers of the time? Would he be one of the great managers in your category?

John Mackenzie: Jim was always popular. I have to say with my brother playing for the team Jim and I used to cross swords and I am sure he would tell you the same. I was probably in those days a little bit more upfront than I would be today. I am a bit long in the tooth now to start ranting and raving, but I had my moments back in those days and Jim and I used to cross swords on numerous occasions. I was looking after the ground back then, looking after the pitch.

Interviewer: When did you start looking after the ground back then?

John Mackenzie: I helped on the pitch back in the Stevenage Town days because it was such a mess. There were lots of individuals who were involved in it basically just to get some sort of playing surface to be able to play on. We used to have one guy, I can't remember his name now and he used to have a little three wheeler Del Boy type car. He used to drive that up and down the pitch pulling rollers, harrows and one thing and another. Some of the things that used to happen to try and make the pitch... We weren't as modern with equipment back then as we are now.

Interviewer: What sort of equipment did you have to use?

John Mackenzie: The only things we had were probably a mower and a great big roller that looked as if it had been drawn behind a horse. Believe you me that was about all the equipment that we had back in those days. We didn't have ____ [0:23:10] drain machine like we do now.

Interviewer: How many people were part of the team if you like then volunteering?

John Mackenzie: How many people? There would probably be half a dozen or eight people who would be involved in doing bits on the pitch.

Interviewer: What was involved in making a good pitch then?

John Mackenzie: Everything, trying to put new drains in and picking up stones. Sand, come October there used to be more sand on the pitch than there was blades of grass by the end of the season there was no grass. It was a pretty ropey pitch way back in the Stevenage Town days and to a lesser extent in the Stevenage Athletic days.

Interviewer: Do you remember the ground now here the same place, different surface, is that for you down to the change in technology?

John Mackenzie: A lot of it is down to technology, a lot of it is down to the work that people have put in over the years and a lot of it is to do with improved drainage. To be honest it has probably had more money spent on it in Phil Wallace's time than it did previously. It is renovated properly now whereas back in Stevenage Athletic and even the beginning of the Stevenage Borough days our renovation was some buckets of seed, a spring rake and walk up down, throw the seed on and rake it in. There was no mechanised seeding in the early days like there is now. Mechanisation has taken over and that is why we end up with this superb surface that we have now.

Interviewer: Back in the day would you see games go ahead that perhaps wouldn't these days... The cold frosty night, did you have the pitch covers?

John Mackenzie: We didn't have pitch covers, no. We hardly ever lost a game. We used to play on the pitch covered in snow. We used to get people in, we used to drag the snow flat, we used to uncover the lines, put down coloured marking and we got on with the game. While everybody else's game was off and this was in the early Stevenage Borough days we hardly ever lost a game because of poor weather, particularly snow. That certainly wouldn't be the case now all you need is a little bit of frost and nobody wants to play on it. In those days we just used to flatten the snow out, mark the lines, the game went ahead and we played the game. People were harder in those days than they are now.

Interviewer: We talked about Stevenage Town's great players and teams. Stevenage Athletic which we have moved onto a particular team or a particular year?

John Mackenzie: Jim always had pretty good teams. One player who stands out for me that Jim signed was Bobby Samuels. I used to work with Bobby at my place of work, he was a welder. He came down from Scotland with another Scottish player Bernie Cullerton. Bobby Samuels was a bit of an enigma, he could be absolutely brilliant and he would do things with the ball that in those days you would probably see Ronaldo do. He was a stunning player, but a bit of a lunatic as well. Of the players that Jim signed he was probably the star in my book. He had some good players, but Bobby Samuels was a brilliant player. He is the one that I remember. I used to work with him and he was a head case, but a nice guy.

Jim won lots of honours in those days. I can't remember what division we played in those days, but we played in the Wallspan League. I have tried to dredge the back of my mind to come up with things. I think it was the Wallspan League we played in those days, but I could be totally wrong. You think you can remember all of these things, but when it comes to the day and sitting talking about them a lot of it goes out the window.

Interviewer: Can you tell us about the development of the stadium before Stevenage Borough?

John Mackenzie: The stadium before Stevenage Borough it was always fairly basic, most of the terracing was grass. We had a lot of volunteers in those days who weren't averse to making up terracing. We did areas of concrete terracing, we put up corrugated iron stands where the east terrace would be now. The changing rooms and that were still in the corner. There were minimal improvements made, but it was certainly an

improvement on what we had in the very early Town days. This was all work that was done by volunteers. We didn't have the benefit of what the club has now of getting grants from the Football Foundation and things like that. The money that we used to make the improvements was fundraising basically and donations.

Interviewer: What sorts of fundraising activities were undertaken? Is it the sort of thing you would find at a local football club these days, a children team sort of effort?

John Mackenzie: It was all sorts of things. We got donations, raffles, Christmas draws, raffles on match days etc. Just the basic raffles.

Interviewer: Was that fundamental to keep the football club alive?

John Mackenzie: Obviously we had the bar which was bringing in money. We had functions in the clubhouse, quiz nights, darts and those kinds of things. The normal football club type activities outwith football.

Interviewer: How much was it to watch Stevenage?

John Mackenzie: I don't know.

Interviewer: Was it possible to get in for free?

John Mackenzie: I know a programme cost 6p because I have still got one from the Stevenage Town days. It was probably shillings rather than pounds in those days.

Interviewer: Was it the same sort of atmosphere on the terraces then as it is now? Were there the fans chanting and singing or was it a different style of the terrace in those days?

John Mackenzie: I wouldn't say it was a lot different. There were probably more loonies around in those days, me being one of them because I have been turfed out of more than one ground in my young and foolish days.

Interviewer: Ever turfed out of Stevenage?

John Mackenzie: No, I have never been turfed out of Stevenage. I got turfed out of Barnet, but got back in. I used to get banned from going on the coach by Ken Thomas. Ken ran the coaches and was somebody I remember fondly from Stevenage Town days, he and his wife they ran the coaches. I remember going to Gloucester City once and someone in their ultimate wisdom decided to take the flag down and set fire to it.

Interviewer: While the game was going on?

John Mackenzie: We were all banned the following game from going to any of the away games. Ken's ban didn't last very long. It was pretty hairy back in those days. We used to go to Kent a lot, we used to go

to the services on what is now the M2. There was more than one battle between Stevenage Town and other supporters. Nobody should think back in the good old days that it was all sweetness and light because it wasn't I can assure you.

Interviewer: Can you remember a particular chant from those days?

John Mackenzie: No.

Interviewer: It wasn't, "Come on Borough."?

John Mackenzie: No, it wasn't, "Come on Borough." We weren't Borough back in those days. It is no different to now it was, "Come on the Town." Or, "Come on Athletic." Whatever it might be. I think people were these terraces make a fair bit of noise now, but as I can remember it back in those days so did the two previous clubs.

Interviewer: Was the red and white stripes prominent through both of those teams?

John Mackenzie: Red and white stripes were always part of both teams and should still be part of the current team. That is what we were called, back in the very early days Stevenage Town were called The Tigers. Probably people wouldn't remember that, but we were that is where we got the stripes from. I never understood...

Interviewer: The Tigers it was red and white, but just known as Tigers for a particular reason other than just the colour?

John Mackenzie: I don't understand why the stripes were dropped. I can't ever imagine Man United would change from red shirts and white shorts. There is the philosophy that striped shirts are not lucky and there is probably something to be said for that. If you look back who wins anything wearing red and white shirts? I will concede on that one and say probably the change was the best thing, but I still like the stripes.

Interviewer: Were the badges similar on the shirts of today, the town crest?

John Mackenzie: No.

Interviewer: Was the shirt a big deal to supporters back then? Could you buy a replica shirt?

John Mackenzie: No, not that I am aware of. There weren't club shops. You could buy shirts, but I don't think you would see people back in those days. You might see people wearing red and white scarves, but I don't remember back in the Town days too many people wearing the shirts.

Interviewer: We talked about the great game and the run. It all came to an end the second football team in Stevenage shutting down.

John Mackenzie: Unfortunately we had a guy, Mr Revolter, I believe he was some businessman from Brighton or somewhere he took over the club. Jim Briscoe would probably remember more about him than I do. He took over the club with all of these great big ideas. Sadly the one thing that doesn't happen now, he owned the lease for the ground which meant he could basically do what he liked with the ground.

Stevenage Athletic folded, we wanted to play games on the pitch. Keith [Burners 0:37:18] and other people who were trying to form a club in those days they thought they would be able to use the pitch. Mr Revolter got wind of it and decided to send a JCB in and dig a trench down the middle of the pitch. He basically stopped anybody from going on it because he held the lease. For years, I can't remember...

Interviewer: Can you describe the trench that he dug with the [revolver 0:37:48], how wide was it?

John Mackenzie: Basically he got a JCB on here. He dug from one goalmouth at the Broadhall Way end up the centre to where the centre circle is and a couple of ones off to the side if I remember rightly and that was it.

Interviewer: His determination was?

John Mackenzie: He owned the lease and nobody was going on the pitch while he owned the lease. I think what he thought was he could develop the ground and build on it. To my knowledge this ground and the lease to it, my understanding has always been that the lease for,

the ground and the piece of ground is only for sporting facilities not for development or building houses on.

Interviewer: What was the feeling in the town when basically the pitch had been dug up, was it a surprise?

John Mackenzie: It was a surprise to everyone. Knowing Mr Revolter that was just about the kind of man he was basically.

Interviewer: His popularity or not popularity was that shown before the end of Stevenage Athletic or was it very much that people lost trust in him when the team folded?

John Mackenzie: People lost trust in him when the team folded. I don't remember an awful lot about him, I know he wasn't everybody's favourite person at the time having folded the football club. Then when you try to start up another team, we tried to start up a youth team, he got wind of it and he dug the pitch up to stop us basically doing it. That was the end of Stevenage Athletic.

Interviewer: How did people react to this statement that no football will ever happen here at Broadhall Way again with a dug up pitch?

John Mackenzie: I think at that time people were resigned to that was the end of football in Stevenage. For my sins I ended up going and watching Luton. I wouldn't go and watch Luton now, but in those days I loved my football. I had a friend who was a Luton supporter and I ended up following them home and away. As

soon as Borough started up at King George's playing field even though I wasn't one of the ones who started the club Stevenage was always my team. I came back, watched them at King George's and I have watched them ever since. Basically while there is a Stevenage football team in existence I will be here.

Interviewer: You said you switched to following Luton.

John Mackenzie: Don't tell everybody.

Interviewer: You had the personal connection with the stadium, the ground and the pitch from your volunteering. Obviously you were cross, was there protest and demonstration from people in Stevenage? Was there a determination to get the team going? You said then that you felt that was the end of Stevenage and football.

John Mackenzie: The people who started the club were obviously involved with Stevenage Athletic. It was Keith Burners, Ron his father, his mum and there was Jackie Burners. I am trying to think who else was involved then. They were the names that I remember because they had been with Athletic. There were various other people, but they are the ones I have always known.

Interviewer: The beginning of a new team Stevenage Borough what was the start of that like? Were they called Stevenage Borough to begin with?

John Mackenzie: Yes, they were called Stevenage Borough. They were made up of a youth team playing at King George's playing field. I have to say I can't remember what league we first played in.

Interviewer: Did Stevenage Borough, the move from Broadhall Way stadium empty with nothing going on at it, was there frustration at the time when it started that you couldn't be straight back here?

John Mackenzie: No actually because you didn't want to be playing on a roped off pitch at King George's playing, but you had to start somewhere. What Keith and the other guys did is the reason that Stevenage FC is now in Division One. People shouldn't lose sight of what those people did and what happened in-between is the reason we are now where we are at. Too many people currently connected with the club, I am going to be controversial but I don't care, seem to disregard the history of the club and what went before.

If what went before hadn't happened we wouldn't be playing in Division One of the Football League, fact. That is not fiction. We worked our way up from King George's playing field playing a youth team to now playing in Division One. People need to understand we moved back here. The council got the lease back, they renovated the ground and put in new changing rooms.

Interviewer: The Stevenage Town team starting on a roped off pitch at King George's, did it have the same following as Athletic?

John Mackenzie: No, obviously there weren't that many people. It was a good following considering you are talking about a youth team not what you would call a senior team. We had to start at the bottom and work our way up. When we got Broadhall Way back we became a senior football team and we joined the United Counties League.

Interviewer: When we got back to Broadhall Way perhaps the ground was a bit of a ghost. Athletics still very much around the stadium and it had a number of years without any playing. How much work was involved in getting it ready?

John Mackenzie: The council renovated the pitch, but obviously the pitch still had its ongoing problems which it'd had from the Town days and the Athletic days. It was basic, but they put in new porta-cabins for changing rooms and tidied it up. It is was a neat and tidy ground and it served its purpose for what we required in those days.

Interviewer: Can you describe the new ground? The changing rooms, are we talking about traditional park style changing rooms?

John Mackenzie: No, they were just 20ft porta-cabins, two of them side by side. Basically they were in the corner where the open piece of ground or the open terrace is now. You came out where the entrance is for the guys bringing their equipment onto the pitch and that hasn't changed. Behind it you had another porta-cabin linked and those were the changing rooms. In front of that you had what was basically a small boardroom and that was it.

Interviewer: The growing of the town, did that have an effect on the team and its progress? The development of the new town, can you see a rise in the town growing and the football club getting stronger?

John Mackenzie: I will go back a little bit. I can remember even back in the Stevenage Town days once we got the floodlights we played in the Eastern Professional Floodlit League, I used to work on the turnstiles then for my sins. On particular game sticks in my mind we played Barnet, I can't remember the result. I worked on the turnstiles that night just for an Eastern Professional League game we had 3500 people and that wasn't uncommon. When you think today we are in Division One and some games we are struggling to get 3500 to watch a Division One game.

Interviewer: Why do you think we struggle to get 3500 people today compared to then for a game you could say is nowhere near the show that it is today in League One?

John Mackenzie: If you go back to the Conference days, Paul Fairclough teams and even when we were playing the Diadora League. We were getting bigger crowds in the Diadora League than we are now getting in Division One. People say, "You have to understand you have got the Arsenal and the Chelsea and this that and the other." Yes, but you had the Arsenal and the Chelsea back in those days as well. It isn't so long ago we were in the Conference prior to getting in Division Two. We were getting bigger crowds in the Conference than we were getting in Division Two and we are now getting in Division One. I don't know why it is.

Interviewer: Do you think it is price? Do you think it is the commercialisation of football at a higher level?

John Mackenzie: No.

Interviewer: Do you think it is the attractiveness to other teams? Do you think it is a generation thing?

John Mackenzie: I think part of it might be to do with the price, also part of it is to do with what you are serving up. When I say that I mean the football that you are playing currently is not that attractive. In fact to be perfectly honest at times it is bloody awful being blunt. There are a lot of people who are not a fan of our current manager and I know for a fact because I know people who don't come because of that reason. That is not the total reason, but I honestly believe we missed the boat the first time we won the Conference and we didn't get promotion.

Interviewer: Being denied promotion to the Football League then that was the goal and that must have hurt.

John Mackenzie: I still to this day I don't know who to blame. I don't know whether to blame Victor Green, whether to blame the council or who it was. We started that season like a house on fire. We had a team that would today wipe the floor with the current team. Cloughy had an absolutely brilliant team that would have wiped the floor with most teams let alone the current Borough team no matter what anybody may say. You only have to go through the players who were in that team, but we missed the boat.

The rules in those days were ridiculous. How on earth were you supposed to have your ground up to standard at Christmas when you had no idea whether you were going to win the league or not? How many people had the money to go and spend on a whim, "Well if we win it we need to get our ground up to scratch."? People didn't have the money in those days. The one thing we did do which cost the club a lot of money, not the person who said he was paying for it a lot of money. I have seen the accounts so I know where the money came from to pay for it and it wasn't a certain gentleman's pocket who ran the club at the time. The rules then were absolutely ridiculous. We took the FA to court, we got the rules changed and everybody has benefited since.

Interviewer: Did you have a feeling that football was perhaps against Stevenage?

John Mackenzie: I think football is against Stevenage now because of what we did and took the FA to court I don't think they have forgiven us. I don't think they like us one bit. Whether it was the right thing to do at the time I really don't know.

Interviewer: What was the feeling on the terraces? You said you didn't know who to blame and you had frustrations at the chairman and the council. What was the feeling on the terrace, did you think there was anything you could do?

John Mackenzie: There was absolute disappointment there we are we had won the league by a mile.

Interviewer: When you won the league that day you knew you weren't going to be promoted, was there a feeling perhaps that you thought you could?

John Mackenzie: It was an anti-climax. We didn't know then whether we were going to get up or not because to my knowledge I don't think the court decision had been decided by then. We still lived in hope that the rules would be changed and we would make it, but sadly that wasn't to be.

Interviewer: There was this rapid rebuild of the football stadium. Was there a belief that would make Stevenage get into the league?

John Mackenzie: To be honest at the end of the season as far as I am concerned the ground was up to standard for what was required to get into the Football League. Unfortunately the deadline when we won it the first time was 31st December and on the 31st December it wasn't up to standard. I do have to laugh these days when I look at teams that are in the Football League whose grounds were nowhere near as good as ours was at the time, yet they are still in the Football League. As I said earlier the one thing that we did taking the FA to court was get the rules changed. The rules then benefited Kidderminster, Macclesfield and Morecombe etc. Eventually thankfully ourselves, but it took a lot of years to get from winning it in '95 or '96 to two years ago when we actually made it at last.

Interviewer: Did you believe that Stevenage could win back to back promotions when you were denied the first time?

John Mackenzie: No, I didn't. Basically all I ever looked for we were in the Football League was to stabilise and stay in, whatever it took to stay in the Football League now we had got there.

Interviewer: Winning the league back in the '90s prior to that a big long time and a chain of promotions, Stevenage couldn't stop going up. Is there a particular season, a particular team or a player from right back then that stands out to you?

John Mackenzie: There were loads of players in Cloughy's era who stood out for me, he had some superb players. You are talking about the Martin Gittings, Barry Hayles, Des Gallagher, Steve Berry and Paul Barrowcliff, these were all absolutely superb players.

Interviewer: Martin Gittings, a special player for Stevenage. What was the magic moment for you for Martin Gittings, is there something that he did, is there a game that you can go, "For me that was when Martin Gittings was a great Stevenage player."?

John Mackenzie: No, not any particular game. One thing I would always say about Martin, Martin came from the town, a Stevenage lad and he always gave 110%. He used to go in where people wouldn't go in these days. He was just a Stevenage diehard, an excellent player and a great goal scorer, something we haven't got today.

Interviewer: Is there a goal that you can remember?

John Mackenzie: Too many, but I can't remember any particular one. One thing I can remember and a lot of people probably don't remember. People go on about records, but we had a record here which probably a few people will remember. We went on a 42 game unbeaten run at Broadhall Way.

Interviewer: Was that in all competitions?

John Mackenzie: In all competitions we didn't lose for 42 games. Nobody will get anywhere close to that record. I think we lost at home, I think the game we lost was to Dulwich Hamlet if I remember rightly, I am pretty sure it was. I know I stood behind the goal and we unfortunately had one of these referees who thought, "I am going to break this record." He was absolutely appalling. You knew that night our record was going to come to an end, but 42 games unbeaten here nobody has even come remotely close to that record.

Interviewer: Can you talk about winning the league and rising up to the Conference, the back to back promotions then? When Paul Fairclough arrived at the football club he took us from nowhere. Was there the excitement when he joined that you thought Stevenage were going places? Was Paul Fairclough a big name manager when he arrived?

John Mackenzie: Paul came from Hertford, he was manager at Hertford. Prior to him coming to Stevenage whenever we went to Hertford Paul

always turned us over. We managed to get Paul to come here and every year we won something. I don't remember a year when Paul was here apart from probably the first year we were in the Conference where we did struggle. Every year Paul won something.

Interviewer: Did you feel that Stevenage was going somewhere and that something was being built at that time?

John Mackenzie: Yes, I did because the people who were running the club... You have to thank people like Tony [Soul 1:00:23] who was president way back. There was George Clarke, Alan Rayner, Ken Vale all of these people I worked for and all of these people I have the utmost respect for. The one thing they did that doesn't happen now is they knew how to say thank you. I worked for them, I used to cross swords with them because that bit of grass out there was mine and lord help anybody who abused it or went on it without permission. They are the people who helped get the club to where it is now. There are endless people whose names don't even get a mention. They used to because we had an honours board on the stairs at one time.

Interviewer: The honours board on the stairs, when did that go up on the stairs was that as soon as the main stand was opened that year?

John Mackenzie: It was something that had always been in existence and it was Tony Soul who put a lot of money into the club in the early days of his own. He had it made and all the names that were on there were put on there, including my own name. Ron Burners and

people like that who had done things for the club over the years. Sadly it is no longer in existence as far as I know. Those are the people who helped get the club to where it is today.

Interviewer: We talked about the denied promotion, if I asked you the question would you have preferred to have gone up then than we did two years ago no doubt the answer would have been yes. The ride under Paul Fairclough and the excitement and the love for working for him that will have been the more romantic fairy-tale to have won the battle and to have gone up. Was there disappointment for Paul that it couldn't be done under him?

John Mackenzie: Absolutely, we deserved to go up then and we had a team that was worthy of going up. I have to say and I said it to someone this morning I was more disappointed that we didn't get up the first time we won the Conference. The second time although I was glad we finally made it into the Football League it wasn't the same, it was not the same.

Interviewer: Is that because of atmosphere in the crowd?

John Mackenzie: No, I think it was more to do with the people who were there at that time they deserved to have made it. The club deserved to have made it. It was a club that I had far more affinity with and it was far more part of my life than what the current club is even though I support them, they were just great people all of them.

Interviewer: Back then you were far more involved in the actual club, did you feel part of the team?

John Mackenzie: Always.

Interviewer: That what you were doing was being recognised. You felt motivated to come back time and time again, why?

John Mackenzie: I held down a full-time job, as did most people including the players and including Paul who was a school teacher. I still found time, god knows I think about it often how I managed to hold down a full-time job traveling up and down the country and looking after out here. Then I did have some good people to help me who did things during the day while I was at work and then I would come down on at night carry on where they left off. People in those days... In my memorabilia I have got tankers and shields and things I was awarded at the end of a particular season for the contribution I had given to the club. That means more to me than anything, but so does thank you. Unfortunately thank you is in very short supply in the club these days sadly. Sorry, I am being controversial.

Interviewer: What do you remember of the FA Cup games?

John Mackenzie: The Newcastle game I was quite heavily involved. I wasn't the head groundsman then because Victor Green and I fell out and Victor got his own groundsman, but I was still involved in it. I just thought it was an absolutely brilliant day. Probably the one day apart from the Wembley FA trophy game, the first one when there was laughably 50,000-odd there and I still think if it holds 80,000 where would the rest of the people have gone? It was

probably the one game that will stay long in my memory. It was a brilliant occasion. A shame about all the arguing that went on, but the day itself and the build-up was just phenomenal. There has been nothing like it since, a great day, robbed.

Interviewer: Was there a real feeling in the town for that game?

John Mackenzie: Oh yes.

Interviewer: It captured the imagination of the world.

John Mackenzie: If you could have got another 5000 or 6000 people in here you would have got 5000 or 6000 people in here. Unfortunately over the two games I thought we were robbed, but then we did get revenge in the end.

Interviewer: We will skip to the second, if you like the most recent Newcastle game that stands out as the other special moment in the FA Cup for the Borough. Did that feel like a revenge if you like for what happened at St James' Park?

John Mackenzie: But there have been others. You can go onto the Swindon game, the Leighton Orient game, the Cambridge United game and the Swindon game. It was the coldest day I have ever watched a football match on in my life and windiest day. The second Newcastle game nobody expected it, but on the night we absolutely murdered them. The better team won on the night,

Newcastle couldn't have had any complaints, but not as good as the first game.

Interviewer: Just finally then promotion to the Football League and up into League One. League One if you like must be dreamland, never expected and wasn't supposed to happen. Finally making the promotion two years ago to the Football League that was on the back of the club almost falling when it had financial problems under Victor Green at the end of his reign. You must have felt then it could again have been the same sort of story for the previous two football clubs. The final clinch of getting there, at the end of the day the people who were there at the beginning that was the goal and you reached it.

John Mackenzie: When I first started following the team I had two dreams. The two dreams were to see my team play at Wembley in a final either a vase or the trophy. The second, which was an even bigger dream was to see us make it to the Football League. I never thought it would happen particularly after winning the Conference and not getting there, I thought we had missed the boat but thankfully we did make it. I can basically die happy because I have seen both of my dreams come true.

Making Division One was a massive bonus. Never ever in my wildest dreams did I think when we made Division Two that the following season we were going to be in Division One. I think Division One is a massive step up, but we just have to try and stay in Division One. We are never going to set the world on fire. I think we have probably hit the ceiling currently. With the basic ground we have got and the structure we have got I think Division One is probably our limit.

Interviewer: Can you see Stevenage going higher?

John Mackenzie: I can see Stevenage going higher, but the one thing that worries me is have we got the support to sustain a team in a higher division? I honestly think at the moment we must be struggling with the gates we are getting to sustain Division One.

END AUDIO

uktranscription.com