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John Meacham: I'm John Meacham, and I've been a supporter for 40 years this year. Usually I stand in the north end, but recently, as I've got older, I've started to feel the cold. I'm fortunate that I manage to get tickets to come in the stands now, and so I'm enjoying it just as much.

Interviewer: Could we start 40 years ago, with how you..? Can you remember the first game you came to?

John Meacham: I can indeed. I have the programme here, the first one I went to.

Interviewer: Oh, brilliant.

John Meacham: That was Stevenage Athletic versus Dunstable Town in the Southern League First Division. It was an evening game. We have the team right here.

The manager at that particular time was a certain Tony Gregory. [Mr Bernie Ward 0:00:56] was general manager. I don't know what the difference was, but that was it.

Only one substitute, of course, in those days. Yes, it was a good floodlit match.

Interviewer: Do you remember the result?

John Meacham: No, I don't. Somebody has just said to me did I know the result. I didn't even write the result down. I don't know why.

Membership of the supporters' club was 60p, or 12½p for OAPs. (Laughter)

Yes, it was quite good. I can remember the floodlights were a bit watery, but there we are.

The clubhouse was behind the north end. We used to have live music every Saturday night, and some live entertainment, comedians, etc.

Yes, it was very good. A nice friendly club.

Then I started up Stevenage Athletic Ladies, which then changed to Stevenage Boro Ladies, which I used to run first of all with Bernie Ward. He used to help me out. Then ___[0:02:20] father, who unfortunately has passed away, him and I ran it for quite a number of years.

Interviewer: How did that come about, and when did it come about?

John Meacham: Well, it started off I was manager of Martin's newsagents in Stevenage when I first came here, and I was asked to start up a five-a-side ladies team for some sort of function in what is

now the Mecca. So we got a five-a-side girls team together, which we called the [Martinets 0:02:49].

As a result of that I was asked if we would be interested to get a full team together, to go into the Home Counties ladies league. Which we struggled, but we did. We managed to.

We got some awful beatings, because there were teams from Northampton, Luton, Dunstable, [Walken 0:03:13], Western. Quite a few local teams.

Gradually, as we started to get one or two better girls, we started to improve. In fact, one year we won the cup final played at Hitchin Town's ground, and we won 1-0. Won the local cup. Won the league several times.

Ladies football has changed beyond all comprehension these days now, so unfortunately I had to get out, because I've got older, and a bit wiser, and had other things to do, [and that was it 0:03:51]. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Did the women train here and play here?

John Meacham: No, we used to train in a school, and our ground was over the other side of Stevenage. Because it was the only place where they had a changing room where the door opened inwards, so nobody could see the girls getting dressed and undressed. (Laughter)

We played there for years, despite local clubs trying to get us off it, but that's where we played.

We played one or two games down here. They were only more or less exhibition games, or friendlies, because we needed to

play better opposition, because a lot of the teams from London were exceling themselves.

We used to play a five-a-side tournament every year down in Brean Sands in Somerset.

Unfortunately, we never won anything down there, because even then a lot of the girls from some of the provincial sides were a lot stronger than us, and they had been going a lot longer, but nevertheless we enjoyed it. Yes, it was good.

Interviewer: It was local Stevenage players?

John Meacham: Oh, yes. Mr [Treble 0:05:11] carried on with it a long time after I finished with it, because I was tied up with the entertainment thing I was doing, and I just couldn't spend the time. He carried on with it and did quite well by all accounts. I still run into some of the girls in the town now, but they're not playing now.
(Laughter)

Interviewer: You mentioned that when you came to Stevenage you started with the news agency. Did you start following the football team about the same time, or did it take-?

John Meacham: Yes, I did, exactly the same time, 1971.

In fact, we actually promoted the club. We had a dummy in the window dressed in the Stevenage kit. We had pictures of the stadium, and all bits and pieces, all in the window.

It was a bit embarrassing, because to get a dummy I had to go into town. I borrowed one from the Co-op. I had to walk

through the town with this dummy under my arm, (Laughter) and get it all the way back home, back to the shop.

Yes, we did. We used to do quite a lot of different ways for the club. There was a chap here doing promotions who had come from Leicester, and we had scratch cards which we used to sell in the shop.

After the games some of the girls used to sweep the stands out, as were then, after the games.

We had open air wrestling here. We used to have open air wrestling, with a lot of the top wrestlers, and they used to sell programmes and all that sort of stuff.

We helped the club in lots of different ways. We tried to keep our finger on the pulse and the connection indeed with the club.

We did get permission from the council to use the Boro logo on our shorts. Which we didn't think we would get, because they're a bit fussy who they give it to, but they allowed us to use it. So that was quite good as well.

Interviewer: Did other businesses also support the team, or was yours particularly..?

John Meacham: What, you mean support Stevenage football team?

Interviewer: Football, yes, by having displays in the windows and things like that.

John Meacham: Not as far as I know. I don't think so. I always feel it's a shame that the team is not better supported by the town, because there are so many new estates around.

Surely it's better to come down and watch a decent game of football here, at a reasonable price, than spend hundreds of pounds going up to London to watch it, but there you go. I suppose in time it may draw people in, but football supporters, I'm afraid, are fickle.

Interviewer: What about in the 1970s? How much local support was there for the team then?

John Meacham: I think it was quite good, but you're talking about four or five hundred people, if you were lucky, because we never got any big sides coming down here, because we weren't a big club then.

I suppose it's like everything else. It all grows. If we were a Premier League side I suppose we would probably be getting about thirteen/fourteen/fifteen thousand, but we aren't, so we've just got to wait until it happens. (Laughter)

Interviewer: What about memorable games from your early days of supporting?

John Meacham: I think one of the most memorable games was strange to relay. I can't remember who he was now. We were playing Hayes, I think it was, in the Trophy. This particular player never scored goals, and he scored a hat trick in the first half. Came out for the second half, and the referee called the game

off because the pitch was frozen. That's one that really sticks out.

Apart from the Newcastle games of course. And it's always nice to see real top clubs down here. We can match them, obviously. We showed that last year in the Cup.

Interviewer: What was the atmosphere like when Newcastle came the first time?

John Meacham: Oh, it was fabulous, really, because we had a big stand built down that far end. I don't think the manager was very happy with the situation, but unfortunately he had to put up with it. Yes, it was good. I thoroughly enjoyed the game. I didn't go to the replay, but, by all accounts, we did very well.

The funny thing was about this year I actually said to my son-in-law, "We're going to win 3-1 today." He said, "No, [you must mean 0:09:55] lose 3-1." But we didn't. I wish I had put money on it now. We actually won 3-1. Very deservedly too.
(Laughter)

Interviewer: You talked about where you used to stand, where you started off being a supporter and where you stood on the stands. Did you get to know the same people around you? Did you meet the same people week after week?

John Meacham: Yes, you do. As I say, I've been standing down there ever since I started coming, really, and I've got friendly with several fellows there, but they've got a young lad and he wants to go

in the east stand with his friends, so they've all moved in there. So the people that I knew I now don't know.

Fortunately, my granddaughter's fellow, he works for the company that sponsors Stevenage, so we get free tickets. (Laughter) So that's rather nice. So wherever I've gone I've always...

I'm also a Watford supporter, and I have always stood in the same place when I used to go to Watford.

Incidentally, I could have gone there today, but I turned it down. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Are you ever torn between a game at Watford and a game here?

John Meacham: No, not really. No, Stevenage is first.

It was rather funny, actually, when we played Watford a few years ago, in the FA Cup I think it was, something like that. I had a Stevenage shirt on and a Watford scarf. (Laughter) So whoever won I was on the right side. Yes, I've got...

It's rather strange, actually, because my grandson's fellow is an ardent Watford supporter. He was a season ticket holder, but he comes here more than he goes to Watford now.

Even my little great-grandson, he's got a Watford football kit. And she's just expecting another little boy, and she's got two baby grows, one in Watford's strip and one in Watford's [second strip 0:11:58]. (Laughter)

In the back of my car I've got a big mat, and it's a Watford Football Club mat, and he keeps trying to scrounge it off me, but he's not having it.

No, I think that your loyalty stays at home really.

Interviewer: Given you go to Watford and to Stevenage, how would you compare the crowds or the atmosphere of the two clubs?

John Meacham: Well, it's a lot different, because with those bigger grounds, with the bigger stands, you're in a more confined atmosphere, and it seems...

I think when we eventually get all this ground all closed in the sound echoes around and it sounds more. Here it's nice to hear everybody shouting and cheering and everything, but it seems isolated from that end and isolated from that side.

I think with these bigger grounds, because they are all sort of closed in, and got heavy roofs on the stands, it echoes around and it makes it a lot more of an atmosphere if you like.

It's a good atmosphere here, don't get me wrong, but it's what I call a local atmosphere. It's good, but it's certainly different going to bigger grounds than what it is here.

Interviewer: Did you see Stevenage at Wembley?

John Meacham: Oh, yes. I've been to all the ones up there. Three, isn't it? Is it three now? Yes.

The Kidderminster one, the first one, I've actually got it on tape, but now I haven't got a television that plays tapes, (Laughter) but my son said he can get it put onto DVD.

Interviewer: You taped it, did you, when you were there?

John Meacham: Well, I didn't, no. My daughter's friend taped it for me, but I still keep watching it. I have been watching it from time to time, but I've got to get it put on DVD now. Yes, I've been to all of those.

I went to Aston Villa when they played at Aston Villa in the final there. I've been to Birmingham. I've been to a lot of the [away games 0:14:13].

I don't go to many away games now, like I used to, but being a pensioner you can't always afford the coach fares. (Laughter)

Interviewer: What's the furthest you might have been to support them?

John Meacham: I suppose Aston Villa. Birmingham is probably about the furthest, I suppose.

Interviewer: What's it like being on the coach and going-?

John Meacham: Oh, it's great fun, yes. It's good fun on the coach. It's a good atmosphere on the coaches.

We went to Birmingham and I think we had about 20 odd coaches. We had a police escort and everything. It was really good.

They told us not to go in the pubs, because a police escort was booked to take us back, but unfortunately two fellows didn't hear very well. We got to Hitchin, and a fellow on the coach his phone rung. He said, "Where are you?" He said, "We're at Hitchin." He said, "Where are you?" He said, "We're at King's Cross. We missed the coaches. We had to get on the train."

Oh, no, I've been to Manchester as well. We went to Hyde. We played Hyde in the FA Trophy. Yes, I've been up to Hyde as well. That's a bit further, isn't it?

Interviewer: Yes, I think so.

John Meacham: Yes, it must be. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Memorable games from memorable goals?

John Meacham: I think the first Trophy final, where we were 2-0 down, has got to be probably one of the most outstanding games we've been to. After being 2-0 down, and then winning 3-2, it was really, really good. So I think that's probably got to be one of the most memorable games. There have been several games too where...

I think when we won the Conference two or three years ago. We went up to Kidderminster. That was good as well. That

was quite memorable, because it sealed it then that we had actually won the league, so that was rather good as well.

(Laughter)

Interviewer: What about the players? Is there a player that you associate with Stevenage who you thought was particularly good, or the best player you've seen?

John Meacham: When I think of later years I think George Boyd has got to be one of the most outstanding, because he's doing so well at Peterborough. He's scoring well, and he was always a live wire when he was down here, even when he was quite young. So I think for me George Boyd has got to be one of the best.

Oh, I've forgot his name now. Oh, Hayles. He was good. Top scorer. He was very good. He won the golden boot. Yes, he was an outstanding player as well, Barry Hayles. I think he would probably stick out in most people's minds.

[Morison 0:17:19] was good, but I still think as a player George Boyd stands out more, as far as I'm concerned anyway.

Yes, it's a job to pick out certain players, especially some of these old ones. I couldn't even remember the names of them.

One fellow here had his arm off, and he played a few times with one arm, [Ray Dingle 0:17:47]. He's still about apparently, so I've been told, but yes. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Have you saved all your programmes?

John Meacham: No. Luckily I just saved the first one I came to, and all the programmes I did have...

I've got all the Trophy programmes, Trophy final programmes, the Newcastle programmes. I forget what other ones I've got.

Your normal league programmes I don't always bother to buy one, to be quite honest, because to me £3 is a lot of money when you're a pensioner. (Laughter) So I don't always buy one.

The rest of the programmes I did have I actually sold to a programme collector years and years and years ago.

My granddaughter's fellow, who brings me here, he's got all my old Watford programmes, because I've got a Watford programme from – the funny thing is I've got one from the day that my wife was born, 1945.

They were just a sheet of paper then, and most of the players were from other clubs, because it was just after the war, so they used to have loaned players from other clubs.

We used to go there and find you had only got three players. All the others were A.N. Other. Yes, it was good.

I used to cycle to Watford. I was a ball boy there. I played for the youth side and had a couple of runs out for reserves. I played for [Wealdstone 0:19:21] in the old days of course.

Interviewer: Oh, so you were a player? You played football? You were keen-?

John Meacham: Oh, yes, I used to play as well.

Yes, it was rather strange, actually, but we had a couple of Poles in the Wealdstone side that had been prisoners of war, or they had come over to help the English and they stayed, and they played for Wealdstone.

The goalkeeper I always remember used to wear glasses. He wore steel-rimmed glasses taped to the side of his head.

(Laughter) He was absolutely mad he was, but there we go.

We're going away from Stevenage now.

Interviewer: It's interesting in the sense of what football was like then and the comparison between then and now. I don't know if that's something that would interest you to talk about.

John Meacham: When you think of the heavy leather balls that you used to have to play with, with the lace. You used to head it, and if it was wet then you had the mark of the lace on your forehead for days afterwards.

In those days, goalkeepers never used to wear gloves, only if it was wet, to stop the ball slipping out of their hands. And big polo neck jumpers. [It was strange 0:20:30], (Laughter) but there we go. It was all good fun at the time.

Yes, we never played on pitches like this. I think if we played on pitches like this now, and played with the kit and stuff that they've got, the balls, I'm sure we would be lost, really, us old footballers. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Quite a few people have commented on how the pitch has changed since the days when they first started to visit, and seeing it now.

John Meacham: Yes, well, I remember we had a manager here, or chairman, and he wanted to take over the bowling alley in town. He was in charge of the England tenpin bowling team, and he wanted to buy the Mecca, as it is now, and the council wouldn't sell it to him.

Stevenage Boys Youth were supposed to be playing Hitchin Youth in a cup final, and he got diggers in and they dug lumps out of all the pitch, all over the pitch, and it was left. It went into...

Well, it was terrible, [when you look at it 0:21:49]. Buildings were falling into disrepair. The grass was up here. It was awful. It was right at the end of the season, so of course nobody was too worried about anything to do with the pitch.

Eventually we used to come down Sunday mornings, and some of the girls from the football club, we used to come down and we helped them put new drainage and stuff in. We used to do other little things, anything we could do to help the club out, because we felt we were part of it.

Interviewer: What sort of things did you do?

John Meacham: Well, the girls used to sell programmes, and after the games we used to sweep the stand. Well, it was only a little stand over there then, [a little one over this side 0:22:27]. We used to pick any litter and stuff up, just to keep the ground tidy.

Yes, so that was what we used to do, really, anything [they wanted to do]. I used to say, "Well, give us a ring if we can do

anything.” I used to sell these scratch cards in the shop and all sorts of things like that.

Interviewer: [That was 0:22:51] fundraising was it?

John Meacham: Yes. Actually, it was a good idea, but I don't know where this fellow got the idea of having a donkey derby.

We had a donkey derby on the pitch, would you believe, and he had thousands and thousands of these programmes printed. It was quite a fair atmosphere really. There were stalls out here, and all that sort of thing, and people selling hot drinks.

I always remember the manager. I was booking the referees I think at the time. I can't remember now. Anyway, I was always in and out of here.

The manager said to me, “I don't know what he's doing. He's ordered boxes and boxes of these programmes.” He said, “What are we going to do with them all? We're not going to get all those people.” There were about 20,000 of these programmes. (Laughter)

Anyway, he was a willing horse, this guy. As I say, he was a PR man. He came down from Leicester City, and he had all sorts of hare-brained schemes for raising money for the club, bless him. (Laughter)

Interviewer: What happened at the donkey derby then?

John Meacham: Oh, it was quite well-attended. I came down with my children and my wife, and it was quite well-attended. It was a bit of a laugh. You could have a bet on a donkey. (Laughter)

Interviewer: The donkeys actually raced around the pitch?

John Meacham: Yes. They would go over these straw bales [or whatever 0:24:19]. (Laughter) Amazing, yes.

Interviewer: What other sorts of fundraising did they..? You said you had a number of schemes.

John Meacham: Yes, all sorts of schemes. He used to have...

Oh, the other thing was, which I think they still have now, is the chairman's dinners. I think they were called chairman's dinners. You could only get in by invitation, obviously. Because I was connected with the club, and I knew him quite well, and used to sell loads of these tickets, he used to manage to get me in.

In the old place we used to have an evening meal, and we used to have a guest speaker. I remember one year we had the Cup Final referee. He was giving a talk. We had an ex-footballer. He came. He was a bit of a comedian.

Yes, so they were quite good. Sportsmen's dinners they used to call them. That's right. They used to only have them about every six months, something like that, but it was all a fundraiser, because then they used to have an auction or a

raffle, that sort of thing, just to raise a bit of money. So it was all quite interesting.

Interviewer: What sort of things would they raffle or auction?

John Meacham: It was usually a bottle of champagne, and a bottle of scotch, and something like that. If you were teetotal ___[0:25:45] give it away for Christmas. (Laughter)

Yes, a friend of mine, we used to run an entertainment agency, we put one or two acts on down there, a couple of stag nights we put on down there. Yes, it was quite good.

Yes, he was forever coming up with hare-brained schemes, which the management [would say 0:26:16], "That is going to cost us too much money." Bless him. His heart was in the right place. (Laughter)

Interviewer: You talked about bringing your children down. Do you think there's quite a sort of family focus around Stevenage?

John Meacham: Yes, there was. Well, [unfortunately 0:26:36] my daughters have been brought up in a football environment. (Laughter)

When Stevenage ladies played Hitchin in the final I've got a photograph at home with my twins and the other daughter, who is only a year behind. They've got a football strip on, and I don't know how I managed it but I managed to get a blue pair, a red pair, and a yellow pair of football boots.

They've got these little football boots on, and they've got this great bit teddy bear, which one of the girls who played for me her father made these stuffed toys.

We had this big teddy bear, and we raffled it. No, we didn't. We gave it to Lister Hospital to raffle for the children's ward afterwards.

What happened was we started another team up called Ridlins Rowdies, because we used to play at Ridlins End.

We had so many girls wanting to play, so we decided to start a younger side up for 12 years old and under, 14 and under, and we called them Ridlins Rowdies.

We gave them an American look. We had bright orange shirts, with a big black and blue stripe going across here.

It was quite funny, really, but they didn't last all that long, because a lot of the parents said, "Oh, we're going out this Sunday."

We never actually got them into a league as such, like we were, but we used to get them friendly matches to get them used to it. Yes, that all fizzled out.

Interviewer: How many girls do you think support Stevenage? Is it a male sort of..?

John Meacham: Well, I'm surprised really the number of ladies and women that actually come to the football. Which is good. I'm all for it.

I've noticed on television too, a lot of the games there are loads and loads of girls and women go, which is really good.

I usually obviously watch women's football on television, if it's on, and I just wish that would be better supported. We never used to get much support, obviously, but now the bigger teams, like Arsenal, West Ham, and all those ladies teams, they get good support. Because they're paid now, aren't they?

Yes, it's nice to see it. Watford have got what they call – well, like here, although the one at Watford is an enclosure called a family enclosure, where you just have mums, dads, and kids.

Yes, I think it's good. There are quite a lot of women come, and it's nice to see.

Interviewer: Do you think that's changed since the 1970s? Do you think there are more women supporters now than in the 1970s?

John Meacham: Oh, yes, I think so. Either because they've got fed up with their husbands going to football every Saturday, so if you can't beat them join them, or else they have seen some on television and thought, "I wouldn't mind going to a live game." Which is rather good. May it continue I say.

Interviewer: We talked a little bit earlier about the extent to which the town supports the football club. I was just wondering what social impact you thought the club might have had on the town. Do you think the club has made a difference to the town?

John Meacham: Indirectly I think it probably has. I think probably a lot of the fast food outlets have obviously benefited by it. Because my granddaughter works in Burger King down the road – not Burger King, McDonald's – and she said when Stevenage are

at home these hordes come from the station and they all go in the one down there on the way in.

I think some of the pubs probably will have benefited from it.

I don't know about as far as any of the other retail outlets are concerned. I wouldn't like to say whether that's made a great impression. Because I can't imagine anybody, if they're coming by train, are going to walk around the town and go and spend money in shops, really, apart from getting something to eat and drink.

Interviewer: Do you think it has put the town on the map?

John Meacham: Yes, I think it probably has. Yes, I'm pretty sure it has really. I've noticed one or two...

I think too what's helped it is the television now on a Saturday night when they do the [league 0:31:31] programme. When they show the goals from the Championship, League One and Two, has also got them noticed on there, especially if they have a good win.

They get a lot of mention on there now. Mr [Claridge 0:31:49], although he won't now because he's playing again, always used to give a lot of nice verbal about them.

Yes, I think probably it has.

Like Mr Wallace says, I think we've got to get a bigger stand at that north end. Maybe [it will bring] more supporters in. I don't know. Maybe more followers in.

I just wish we could get some of these people that spend money going up to Highbury and Chelsea, and get them to

come and watch a game here. Because I feel sure they would just as well go to Stevenage, rather than go all the way up there and spend a lot of money.

Interviewer: Do you think they've ever been or they just ___[0:32:41] what's on their doorstep?

John Meacham: No, I don't think so. I don't think they realise half of them.

I was talking to an ex son-in-law of mine, and he was going on about Stevenage. I said, "Have you ever been?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, how can you say that the ground is rubbish, and the team so-and-so, unless you've ever been?"

He said, "No, I'm a Gooner." He's an Arsenal supporter. I said, "Well, how often do you go up to Highbury?" "Well, I haven't been this year." I said, "How many times did you go last year?" He said, "Well, I never had the time." I said, "Well, why don't you give yourself a treat and go down to Stevenage?"
(Laughter)

Interviewer: Did he?

John Meacham: I don't know. He's a weird fellow. (Laughter)

Interviewer: I suppose you can be a supporter in the sense of saying that's your allegiance, and there's another sort of supporter?

John Meacham: There is. If I was to move away, wherever it was, I would still be a Stevenage supporter, obviously. Even though I might be going to watch, I don't know, Truro Town play, or somewhere like that, I would still be a Stevenage supporter. I would only go because it's football. Anywhere there's football I will go and watch football.

Once upon a time, a few years ago, if Stevenage were away and I couldn't afford to go I used to go and watch another local team. Well, not [Hitchin now 0:34:12] _____. (Laughter)

My grandson, he was playing for _____, and I hate to say he's now doing an apprenticeship with Luton Town. (Laughter) He's at their academy. Yes, so that's where he is unfortunately. I wished I could have got him to come to Stevenage, but he was spotted by Luton Town, so there's nothing you can do about it really.

He won't get a game. [I don't reckon he will 0:34:49] get a game for a couple of years. Well, he certainly won't this year, because he's doing his academic side as well, to pass his exams, as well as all the training.

It cost my daughter a fortune for kit and stuff, but that's the price of success, I suppose, if [you are a 0:35:11] success. Some of these youngsters get chucked on the scrap heap too early, don't they?

Interviewer: You said before something about you came down to help clear the stands, and things like that, because you felt it was something you belonged to. I'm just interested in what it means to belong to Stevenage Football Club.

John Meacham: Well, it was nice, because you used to... Not so much now, strange to relate, though it's more or less open with the players. You see the players. You can talk to them.

Then it seemed to be that because you were staying that little bit longer, and the players perhaps had had their shower and come out, and they used to say, "Oh, are you still here?" You used to have a chat, and you would just see them down the street.

It seemed a closer atmosphere then to what it is now, but it's like everything else, once it gets bigger it does tend to veer away.

It's like when I used to first go to Watford. The players there were all part-timers. Most of them used to work for Benskins Brewery, and they were part-timers.

I think when I played for the reserves a couple of times you just got a ten-shilling note stuffed in your boot at the end of the game. (Laughter) The players were only on about £20 a week in those days.

Yes, so I think possibly it was a little bit closer knit, because I think the players were all part-timers then as well, or else they had got their own businesses or whatever.

It was a little bit closer knit, because you felt that they were the same as you but they were good footballers. So basically they were more or less the same as you.

Whereas now I know they will always talk to you here, if you see them, but there's always that little bit of difference somehow. It's not quite such a...

If you probably went in the pub and [saw two or three of them in there 0:37:21] you would have a chat with them, and they would have a chat with you, but it's not so...

I don't know. The closeness does not seem to be quite the same. It was more of big family atmosphere then than what it is now. But you've got appreciate that things get bigger. You [can't odds it 0:37:43] really.

I expect people up in Manchester feel the same if they see Wayne Rooney down the street. They probably shout out, "Hello, Wayne", and that's about all you get. You couldn't go and knock on his front door, or see him in the pub and buy him a drink, because he would always be surrounded by other people.

Yes, I think the closeness and the family atmosphere. The Saturday nights used to prove that, because we used to have a live band out there, and everybody used to talk to everybody else.

Jim Briscoe used to be serving behind the bar in those days. Yes, I got a great feeling for old Jim really. (Laughter)

Yes, I think it was a lot more family orientated in those days.

Interviewer: Have you got any other Jim Briscoe stories, apart from him being behind the bar?

John Meacham: Not really, no, although when I was cleaning the windows... I cleaned the windows here for a number of years. Mr Green asked me if I would do them and I said yes. He said, "How much are you going to charge me?" and I told him.

I used to do all these inside and out, and I used to go over to the Broadhall Suite and do over there outside. I couldn't do inside. Originally I used to do inside as well, but then they put

a false ceiling coming down, so I couldn't get inside to do them.

Anyway, then I used to do the computer bit along the back there, because that all belongs to the football club as well. So I used to do all those. I did them for a number of years.

When I was here Janet always used to make us a cup of tea. We used to go and sit down and have a chat, because there were several old boys used to do little jobs, and Jim used to be down there, and we used to have a chat.

Yes, so I've known him quite a few years. Funnily enough, when I was standing at the north end his son used to wheel him out ____[0:39:42].

Actually, that's a thing. I [did write] to his son, and he never sent me a reply. [I will have to have a go at him]. (Laughter)

Yes, he was a bit [of old rope] at times, old Jim, but nevertheless a nice enough bloke. [He's done a 0:40:04] lot for this club. They've got a lot to be thankful for.

Interviewer: Any other stories that you think should go in our archive about games, or players, or about the ground?

John Meacham: No, not really. I can't really think of any specifically.

Interviewer: Any message you would want to send about your knowledge of Stevenage Football Club to future generations, what it means to you, or..?

John Meacham: Yes. I would like to say that Stevenage Football Club is your local football club. You support it. Without your support they're not here. They do a lot for the town, and they give a lot in entertainment.

If I were to win £3m on the lottery today I would give them £1m. (Laughter) Not because I want a seat on the board. Just because I want to pay back the entertainment that they have given me.

That's my message.

END AUDIO

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