

**File:** BMD Don Gentry

**Duration:** 0:29:08

**Date:** 03/08/2016

**Typist:** 724

START AUDIO

Interviewer: Can I ask you your name please?

Don Gentry: Yes, Don Gentry.

Interviewer: Thank you, and Don in what way are you linked with Stevenage football club?

Don Gentry: Well when I left school in '57/'58 I was already playing for the Barclavians and Stevenage youth side and it was really a natural progression if you like to go to the town football club. Which of course was then in the old London Road ground and soon after I left school playing for Barclavians I played for the county. I think I was the only chap in Stevenage who actually played for the county; there were three others from the surrounding towns and I think my first game for the senior side at London Road was when I was 18 and a bit. And I played on and off for the senior team from that time until they left that ground. I've got dates of that somewhere.

Interviewer: Okay.

Don Gentry: But I did play in the last game at the London Road ground. That was in April 1961; that was the last game against Hertford Town. And I played in the first game at Broadhall Way I think which was in August '61. And then continued playing all of them, right up until the last amateur game at Broadhall Way which I think the game was on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 1963.

Interviewer: Fantastic. So you said you played at both London Road and at Broadhall Way.

Don Gentry: Yes.

Interviewer: Can I ask you to describe the old ground at London Road?

Don Gentry: Oh yes, it was a fairly small ground although it was a nice ground, very good grass. It was adjacent to the railway and it faced the big factory, King's, the other side of the railway. They had a wooden stand on the London Road stand, fairly basic I suppose although I think they had a covered corrugated tin cover on the other side. And it was very basic obviously, the changing rooms were basic; it was a brick building. I'm not sure if we had a shower but we certainly had a bath, a big concrete bath and that was the way you did it in those days. But it was a good ground, it didn't get anything like the crowds you get now of course but it was well supported. It really was.

I think the team sin those days were older; I came in when I was 18 and I'm sure there were people playing before I got

there in their late 20's/30's; that seemed to be the norm, rather than you know 17 year olds coming in. But yes it was good.

Interviewer: So in those days of more amateur or semi-professional level were the players/your team mates, did they have a wide range of jobs and did you yourself work as well as playing football?

Dom Gentry: Yes of course. When I first came into the team a lot of them were a fair bit older than me and I didn't know them that well until I'd played them a few years of course. But no, I had only been working a year or two obviously and I worked in Hitchin for an architect. A lot of my school mates at the time, although only one or two played at the Stevenage level most of them worked for English Electric or British Aerospace or Saunders, and they were able to get apprenticeships easy in those days and they worked locally in Stevenage.

Interviewer: Can you remember any of the characters that you played with?

Don Gentry: Oh yes, I mean there was the captain Dennis Hall was an established amateur player; I think his claim to fame was playing for Walthamstow at Wembley in the amateur cup final. I think he scored the winning goal. He was a left and right foot player but very good, very strong bloke. But there was – and the goalkeeper, Alan Freestone, I think he lives in Welwyn. Garden City. Then there was Ken Lusty, inside four, very tricky, very wiry player. I think his brother played for Hitchin Borough at the time, a more established side and Alan Douglas, one of the wing halves, he was made of iron, I think;

really, really lovely bloke. Yes, there were some characters. They were all a little bit older than me but good fun.

Interviewer: Who was the manager at the time you first came to the club?

Don Gentry: I believe it was certainly Tom Ince at the latter days at London Road, and he carried on into the new ground at Broad Hallway. Yes Tom was a northerner, a lovely bloke, and because his son Terry played at the London Road ground and he played at the new ground and I think he carried on and played in the metropolitan league for a few games when they started here; one of the few that stayed on if you like.

Interviewer: Did you find that there was much continuity or relationships between managers and players and say for arguments sake a player may have a younger brother or a cousin; was there anything like that in the club where players would be recommended and then maybe get trials?

Don Gentry: Not really, I suppose any new players to the club came via the Barclavians and Stevenage Youth Club and I think continued like that after I left of course. That club brought together old towns and new towns if you like, because you realised that Stevenage was quite a new town and there were new people coming in so the new people that came into the schools weren't people I'd grown up with, they were new. But it brought a lot of new blood into the town and developed like that.

Interviewer: If I may ask you about the relationship between the old town and the new town that sprang up in the aftermath of the Second World War, how did established locals, if you like, old towners, feel about the influx of people from London?

Don Gentry: Yes it's very interesting, we lived at the back of the old high street and the high street was the A1; that was where all the traffic came obviously. And I mean \_\_\_[0:08:21] Lane wasn't there or it was a lane. It was so small Stevenage and obviously people didn't want the new town; they didn't want anything like that, obviously. And I can remember that feeling; I was quite young obviously, but I lived at the back of the high street behind Fishy \_\_\_[0:08:43] which is a well-known fish shop there. I don't know if you want this but it was a cottage with no electricity, gas lights and all that and an outside toilet. Nobody really wanted the new town because it was going to be this massive influx of people.

But saying that, I think once it got going it brought so much new blood to the town and some of my best mates are people that came from the London overspill into the town. And I still meet them and even now, they've moved away. A lot of them have moved up to \_\_\_[0:09:25] and all of that but people that come in with the new town I still meet.

Interviewer: At the time the new town people as I understand formed the Stevenage Town Rangers Club shortly after, which merged with Stevenage Town Football Club, can you remember any rivalry between two sets of players at any time or anything?

Dom Gentry: I don't know about the Stevenage Rangers; I've heard of them but I'm not really knowledgeable over that at all, so I wouldn't know that.

Interviewer: No. Can I ask, you sort of spoke about a manager that brought you to the club; what was the training like? Did the manager himself conduct the training or did he have coaches to do that for him?

Don Gentry: No, I think Len Bayliss' name comes up; he was a trainer at the old ground and I think he came over to the new ground but I'm not sure, maybe, maybe not, certainly at the old ground very good training. I'm not sure that we had the benefit of floodlights and things like that; we might have had one light up somewhere you know, but it was as training was in those days. Nothing like the technology and the focus that there is now, but it was alright. And then we came up to the new ground and they tried to move with the times, move with the ground and improve things in that respect I suppose.

Interviewer: How was the ground that we're in now, Broadhall Way, The Lamex Stadium, what was that like when the club first came to it?

Don Gentry: It was a very large ground, one of the largest in the area it was huge compared with a lot of the – certainly the Delfin league teams, but the surface was diabolical; it was stoney, we were getting time – from memory we played a few games on it and people were cutting their knees and getting gashes. And it was a new ground and the stones were everlasting coming up. And

we had sessions where they organised rows of people with buckets walking across the field picking the stones up, and it did settle down but obviously it wasn't an established ground. In those days I don't think it was even turf, I think it was seeded or something, you know. Anyway I'm not sure about that but it was a problem when it was first opened.

I think there was a time when they were treating it and looking at it and they didn't have any games at home for about four or six weeks. I can't remember exactly but it was problematical the ground to say the least.

Interviewer: When you moved to the ground, when the club moved to Broadhall Way and you say it was a big ground, did the attendances reflect that? Did you get more people coming to see you play?

Don Gentry: Yes they did, here we are, I've got a report here, this is when we started in August, this is a game in September '61 and I've highlighted these and they actually say, "Encouraging start to the season, both from the playing and the attendance point of view. Approximately 600 people made the journey to the new ground with the extra and modern facilities now available this figure is likely to increase. The stand is expected to be ready by the end of September and this will mean that 240 people can be seated under cover." It ends up saying the gate receipts were £28 and it's a very long time since Stevenage were able to record such a figure; signs of better times ahead.

The club certainly deserves them. I thought that was quite ironic, I'm glad I highlighted that. There you go.

Interviewer: That's great; can I ask you about the opposition teams you came up against? Did you have any colourful local rivalries?

Don Gentry: There were of course because there was Ware, Hertford, Bishop Stortford are always a hard team, but yes, Hertford and Ware of course were local derbies. We played teams like Hitchin in cup games. Hitchin were – I don't know if that was a senior Athenian league then. Eventually it was the Isthmian league but we played teams like Hitchin, Enfield, Hendon and Barnett, they were the cream of the amateurs in those days and we played them here; we played Enfield here in the FA cup. We only lost 2-1 I think. I've got a picture of that somewhere. I think it's against Enfield, that was in September '62 against Enfield, the FA Cup. That's the team there.

Interviewer: So, looking at the team sheet there you played outside right.

Don Gentry: I did. I always played on the left side, my position was left half really but that's where the captain plays so I didn't displace him but I also played inside left and left wing. But obviously – I'm left half there; I was on the right then.

Interviewer: Did you come up against any particularly hard defenders during your days?

Don Gentry: Yes, all the time because I was quite small. I was rough and tough for my size; I'd run into a brick wall. Not nowadays. Yes we did, I can't particularly name any of them, but there was local rivalry. But this was good to play teams like Enfield and



Hendon. I think Hendon were the cream in those days as well. They used to arrive in this car park here and all their flash cars, used to be noticeable, if you like.

Interviewer: Can you think of any great games which you played? You mentioned the FA Cup and it's often said that the cup has a certain magic.

Don Gentry: Yes, I know that in the old ground there were games; one that sticks in my mind, I didn't play; I was too young to play but I think it was against Pegasus or somebody like that. And I don't know how many were there but the ground was heaving; probably had a good few 100 there. But that was a memorable game. I can't remember others particularly. I mean we weren't here long really, only a couple of years.

Interviewer: And the players, did you often socialise much off the pitch after the games?

Don Gentry: Yes, we always had a meal, even in those days, wherever we went and whenever they came here we always had a cooked meal afterwards and that was a good bonding thing of course.

Interviewer: And your time at Stevenage, did you go on to any other clubs after you played?

Don Gentry: Yes, once they turned professional if you like, I think they'd started in the Metropolitan league didn't they. Yes I didn't stay

around and not many people did. I don't really know why, but I with a lot of others played for Ware, I think Len Bayliss the trainer went to Ware and a few of the other players from here. I played for Ware for a few years and I played for Hoddesdon in the '60s, I played for Hoddesdon in the Spartan league; they were a very keen side for such a lowly league. Mind you, saying that, there was some fairly familiar names in the Spartan league then, but yes, I played for them I suppose; Ware and Hoddesdon.

Interviewer: Did you ever come up against playing against Stevenage for any other clubs?

Don Gentry: Not really, no, I think not, because I mean they were amateurs and Stevenage were supposedly pros. I mean there might have been a friendly or two, I'm not sure.

Interviewer: How did you adjust to life after your playing career finished? Did you stay in footballing capacity?

Don Gentry: It probably coincided because I got married in '66 when I think I was 24. People used to get married a lot younger in those days. That was coming up to the end of my serious career I suppose, although I played football afterwards, but certainly not here. That was probably when I was playing for Ware and Hoddesdon and I finished playing serious football late '20s I suppose. Then I did other things; I did a bit of karate, I was very fit, I was always fit; I was lucky I was always fit, and I wanted something to keep fit with and I took up karate for a couple of years which I enjoyed.

But obviously I was getting a bit long in the tooth to take anything really seriously, but I played squash and that sort of thing as you do. And now it's gardening. I swim and cycle nowadays, but yes, I like to keep fit.

Interviewer: Moving back to the development of the new town, you spoke about originally the old town residents weren't too keen on it; how would you say that the club and the new town developed together? Did you ever see any parity between, for example, attendances and more people coming in?

Don Gentry: I don't remember the – because I suppose the new town was getting established when we moved to the new ground but I can't remember. I mean obviously from that thing there they said that once this ground was going the attendance increased according to that, but I can't remember a big influx one way or the other, because I suppose when I was playing at London Road I was just out of school, I was 18. All I wanted to do was play football; I wasn't switched on to what was going on around me too much and even when I came here I became a bit more mature here obviously but there were good crowds here. I mean I can't remember that much but it was a good ground.

Interviewer: Can you think of any great goals you scored that stick in your memory?

Don Gentry: Not really. It does get fuzzy because this was 50 years ago and I enjoyed playing at Ware and I enjoyed playing at Hoddesdon, I really did, and I scored a few goals. I played

wing half and I think when I played for the county they chose me at inside forward, so I was back and forwards, but I scored goals. We had a game against the – mind you, this is youth football; I played at the town ground and we played against St. George's boys' club which was the top team in London and we played them on the old town ground and we played them one Boxing Day and I was in Ilford staying with an aunt of mine. And I said, "I can't play, I'm in Ilford."

And \_\_\_[0:23:17] one of the organisers, he came and picked me up on the Boxing Day, brought me to the ground, I scored the only goal after about 10 minutes and I think we won 1-0 and that was quite a good one to win. And then he took me back to Ilford, so I do remember that.

Interviewer: Going back to the team sheets that you showed me-

Don Gentry: Yes, I've got a lot here.

Interviewer: Did you have any trouble in adapting to different formations for example the 2-3-5 may have been changed with playing a 4-4-2 or anything like that?

Don Gentry: Never really got into that, I must admit. Whether it was – all this time was always two full backs, three wing halves and five forwards.

Interviewer: Did that sort of formation make for more attacking play and as well as that also more defensive errors having to fall back-?

Don Gentry: Maybe, I mean yes there were always forwards around those days. They all funnel back now but not really aware of that one way or the other.

Interviewer: Can I ask about the most memorable season that you had for Stevenage?

Don Gentry: Probably the last season up to the last game really could be because I was becoming more mature and that little bit older. So this last season up to the last amateur game was probably the highlight really I suppose.

Interviewer: And the refereeing standards; how were they in the days which you played?

Don Gentry: Yes, they were alright, I don't remember a problem with refereeing at all. They were alright.

Interviewer: In regards to the modern game now, the players seem to not have, shall we say, respect for referees; was it different in your day?

Don Gentry: I think so, I think it's so intense now, and it will be because the teams are so psychologically prepared, so well prepared fitness wise, so different to when I played, I mean I do envy the

players now. But at the same time I'm proud of being sort of one of the miniature building blocks of Stevenage if you like.

Interviewer: Do you still have an association with the club?

Don Gentry: No not really, I always look for their results. I watch them occasionally. I was here at Yeovil the other week. I've been to one of their Wembley finals in the Carlsberg Cup. I jump in and out but I'm so pleased that they're doing well now, I really am. I'm so pleased for them.

Interviewer: How do you rate the current manager?

Don Gentry: Well he's excellent; I mean he's really, really brought them on. I think he's brilliant, I can't believe how they've come on in the last couple of years, I really can't. I think they're superb; when you watch them on the field, I mean when I started watching them on the field I came 20 minutes early and they're all out there half an hour before the game kicking the ball around and doing this and doing that, I thought, "Oh dear" it's so different isn't it nowadays? It really is. But it's good; psychologically they've got to be nowadays – they're top in the league and I think they'll go from strength to strength and I'm really glad for them.

Interviewer: It certainly does seem good for the town in general and the local area, you were saying about preparation for the games, how did your preparation differ from how they go about it today?

Don Gentry: Well it was, "Get your kit on" and all that, and five or ten minutes before kick-off come out, kick around in the goal, probably one or two balls to kick; you might have got a kick before the game started, you might not have done, and then you kicked off, and that was it; that was how it was, but so different.

Interviewer: It certainly is. And we've spoken about the opposition teams; how were the grounds that you played at during your time? How did they compare with London Road and then Broad Hall Way?

Don Gentry: Some of them were pretty grim, some were good. Hertford was a terrible ground, it's got a river running around it and it was so heavy; you wouldn't believe. They put sand on it; it was like a bog. Bishops Stortford was a bit like that as well, that was always a heavy ground but some of them were terrible. The London Road ground was a good ground; I think it drained fairly well. But yes, some of them were pretty basic.

END AUDIO

[www.uktranscription.com](http://www.uktranscription.com)