

## **AN ORAL HISTORY OF BRENTFORD FOOTBALL CLUB**

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| INTERVIEWEE:         | Ron Cooper  |
| DATE OF BIRTH        | 1947, Perivale, Middlesex                                   |
| PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS | Father: printer<br>Mother: housewife, doctor's receptionist |
| INTERVIEW LOCATION   | Griffin Park, Brentford                                     |
| DATE OF INTERVIEW    | 24 Feb 2020   |
| INTERVIEWER:         | Eshan Puri  |
| SUMMARISER:          | Celia Holman  |

Ron Cooper has been supporting Brentford since the late 1950s, having been introduced to Brentford by a Scout leader (Ron's involvement with the scouts has spanned some 60 years). Initially, he was "a bit embarrassed" to admit that he supported Brentford, but now all his friends "realise his commitment to the team." Ron has been a board member of the supporters' organisation Bees United for several years, and has had certain insights into challenges and changes that the club has faced over the years accordingly.

Ron attended his first game in 1962, parking his bike in the front garden of a neighbouring garden for "thruppence". His two younger brothers soon joined him, and now his son and two of his grandchildren are also supporters.

In the early days, you could "move around the ground", swopping location at half time depending on which way the team was playing. The stadium was for the most part not very full. 30k attendance would only be for the biggest games. He remembers the smell of the liniment on the players' legs.

The quality of the pitch: it could be like a "quagmire" and the "ball would get stuck in the mud". At times, there were "more puddles than grass". When a ball landed on the tin roof of the old New Road stand, rust would be showered on the supporters below.

Over the years, Ron has collected match-day programmes. Now they are a lot thicker, and storing them is an issue.

Pitch invasions - much less frequent now that illegal. He remembers the time a dead hand grenade was thrown on the pitch during a game against Millwall. A steward ran out with a bucket of sand.

Fellow supporters: Ron remembers a supporter called Charlie, who had a scarf covered in Brentford badges. He would shout "get it out" / "keep it out" "quite passionately".

"Everyone smoked" during the game in the early days.

Bees United: Ron is a board member. He recalls a fundraising idea - "Spare Change for Brentford". Fans could collect and then drop off special tins in the stadium shop. Over 4 years, raised c. 10k.

Further fundraising: buying a brick slip to be put in the new stadium. Could be 'engraved' with supporter's name/length of supporting etc. Sold about 150.

Challenges over the years:

proposed QPR takeover in 1967 - Ron was "quite miserable for several weeks"

Ron Noades: when he arrived "everyone thought he's got money, he's going to be good for the club", but it soon became apparent that he had "delusions of grandeur" about being able to own and manage a club at the same time.

The club was eventually sold to Bees United (supporters' organisation) for £1. Bees United had to raise a lot of money to save the club, and many "put their hands in their pockets" accordingly.

Racism/homophobia: "I don't know that it's been a big problem at Brentford."

How fans have changed: they are much more knowledgeable about the technical aspects of how the game is played.

Ron also talks about near misses with promotion/relegation, and that "we just don't seem to be a cup team."

Leaving Griffin Park: Ron will be "sad to see the bulldozers come in, but people will quickly forget Griffin Park."

His time as a Brentford supporter has been "a lot of fun, a lot of pleasure over the years, and I am grateful for that."