

Interviewee: Brian Burgess
Born: Chiswick Hospital in 1951
Father's occupation: Draughtsman/Engineering Manager
Mother's occupation: Administrative work
Date of interview: 9th March 2020
Location of interview: Griffin Park
Interviewer: Chris Conway
Summary: Ioana Constantinescu

Brian Burgess was former Chairman of Bees United. In this interview Brian explains in detail how Bees United and Brentford supporters saved the club. His love for the "friendly, family oriented" club shines through this interview.

In his early years as a Brentford supporter, Brian's father used to take him to Griffin Park. It became like a second home. They went to some away games and saw some "legends" of football.

Brian talks about how his father saw Brentford play Arsenal in 1938 to a crowd of 38,000.

Vivid memories for Brian were when Brentford scored a late winner against Portsmouth in 1962 and walking up Clifton Road to the Royal Oak stand and seeing all the queues through the turnstiles when Brentford had a record 9-0 win against Wrexham.

He describes how going to a match was "pure escapism". "All the frustrations of the week came out". Brian recalls how becoming involved in Bees United changed his experience from being a social and family event to one of "trials and tribulations".

Brian goes on to relate how the world of football was part of the social fabric of life and one of the few forms of live entertainment; now changed due to TV and social media.

When he was first attending football matches Brian remembers "being packed in" you "had to get in early".

He believes it's essential to have safe standing areas as well as seating for older or infirm people.

When Brian attended with his dad they stood on New Road with several friends. Three generations worked on the same site in Brentford. "One chap stood in the same place for 67 years". The Griffin Park experience was a "friendly, family atmosphere" which often surprised his visiting friends.

He recalls how at University in the 70's he met people from other clubs and went to other grounds which he said could be quite intimidating.

He talked briefly about the food and on chants as a kid growing up in Hounslow: "we

really were just a bus stop in Hounslow”.

Brian remembers the QPR rivalry which started with the 1967 proposed takeover, but also a great start to one season when Brentford beat QPR 6-1.

He describes the excitement and anticipation of evening games and “the spark of electricity” and memories of away games, including how ecstatic they were when winning and the “unbelievable feeling” of being promoted up at an away game to Peterborough.

Brian describes how Bees United was his introduction to his active involvement in the club. He became Brentford FC trustee of the Community Sports Trust. He describes how the 1967 proposal to offload the club to QPR led to the idea of supporters owning the club. The fans “were in uproar”.

Over 40 years the club was bought and sold by various consortia of businessmen and Brian said I “always remember the idea supporters should own the club”. Brian recalls that in 2001 Bees United was set up as one of the first examples of a supporter’s trust which were being set up as co-ops as part of the Football Task Force Government initiative.

Brian goes on to explain how Ron Noades came to the end of an overdraft that he was guaranteeing with his company and gave Bees United the option to buy his shares. Brian recounts how the supporters rattled cans, ran a jazz club and all sorts of imaginative fundraising events raising a million pounds. With matching funds from Ron Noades, Brian then persuaded two anonymous people to pay money in advance of the deal so that staff could be paid. He announced the good news on the pitch at the start of a home game. He recalls how “there was a bit of a hush” at the mention of the word “administration” and was told off after by Martin Allen who blamed him for the fans being so quiet at the start of the game.

Brian describes meeting Matthew Benham and how he saved all the club interest payments. Brian was impressed with the technology that Mathew Benham had and with his expertise: ‘Matthew really understood football’, but it was a while until Matthew Benham had the time to finally take over the football. Brian believes that his “playing philosophy and strategy has transformed the club”.

Brian believes that the supporters were the saviour of the club. “Voluntary supporters should take the credit” as they made sure that Brentford at Griffin Park stayed alive.

Brian recalls the first match when the Rainbow Laces Initiative was picked up; how the club has gone from an ageing supporter base to a noticeably younger one. He’ll miss Griffin Park but feels pride in the work that the club does through the Community Sports Trust. Brian believes in the power of football to engage young people. He describes the brilliance of Lee Doyle who built up the CST and set it up as an independent charity.

Brian’s proudest moments were the day Bees United took over the running of the

club: “It’s home really” and the night Hounslow Council granted planning permission for Lionel Road. Again, Brian sings the praises of the supporters on this initiative and how a commissioned independent analysis helped persuade the councillors to grant planning permission.

On working for Martin Allen, Brian recalls a story of being at a board meeting at which Martin was present: “lovely man, but hyper”.