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R = Respondent/Interviewee (if more than one respondent, use R1, R2, etc.)  
I = Interviewer

I: I'm Gemma Bailey, I'm interviewing John Helm on the 14th August 2024, on behalf of the Yorkshire Cricket Foundation. So hello John.

R: Hi, how are you Gemma?

I: I'm good thank you, how are you?

R: I'm okay, I'm looking forward to this! Because as you know, Park Avenue has been the love of my life.

I: Brilliant! Well I can't wait to hear what you have to say! To begin with, can you tell me what your connection is with the Park Avenue ground?

R: Yes, well as a Cricketer playing in the Bradford League, mostly a second teamer for Baildon. One of my dreams was to play at Park Avenue, because in 1953, I was 11, Saddle School where I was, my teacher Mr Johnatan made my day, and everybody else's day by telling us that instead of lessons we were going to go to Park Avenue to watch Yorkshire play Australia.

Now as a devotee of Cricket, I thought that this was absolute heaven. The Yorkshire team at the time included Len Hutton, who was my idol, who was the greatest batsman at the time, Fred Trueman, great fast-bowler. Australia had a chap called Keith Miller who made 153 that day, Ray Lindwall who was an incredibly good fast-bowler, and clean bowled Hutton at the end of the day- so Yorkshire didn't have a very good day. So that sort of spawned my interest in Cricket at Park Avenue, more about that I'm sure to come.

And then the following week to my total astonishment and credulity, Bradford Park Avenue Football team were playing at home to Accrington Stanley and they won 4 nil and I was [\*\*

0:1:38] my father was a Bradford City fan and he'd take me to see one game at Bradford, he'd pass me down as a little boy over the heads of everybody so I got a good view at the front. But then I went to Park Avenue and this team, they had a full back called Milburn who got a hat trick and I thought "this is just astounding!".

And what was really...the biggest selling point t'me in a way was a beautiful stand, main stand, but it served both Cricket and Football. So you could go to the Cricket and say watch Yorkshire play Essex or somebody like that from 11 o'clock in the morning until 10 to 3, then you just had to turn round in the stand and virtually take 2 or 3 steps and you were into the Football stand. Watch the Football, Park Avenue from 3 o'clock until quarter to 5 and then pop back to the Cricket. What sort of a day is that for a daydreamer like me, so I'd be there from like 10 in the morning with my bottle of pop and my sandwiches and I would be leaving at 6:37 or something like that. And to me that was just the most idyllic day.

So I fell in love with Park Avenue and I've been involved ever since, not so much on the Cricket side because Park Avenue doesn't now host any County Championship matches, but I've been the Vice-President of the Football Club for... oh I don't know... 20-30 years and oh my goodness, I go through agonies for 9 months of the year, every Saturday is a nightmare "How have Park Avenue done today?" it's not been very good the last couple of years, so I reckon that's a true love affair.

I: Yeah, brilliant. And so when you went with your teacher was that your earliest memory of the ground?

R: Yes it is, that was the first time that I'd been and I can remember the scorecard, y'know the man, Mr Arthur Smith who shouted out "YORKSHIRE SPORTS" and "PROGRAMMES, PROGRAMMES" and so you got a scorecard, the names as I say were legendary names and it was exciting to me and at the end of the day you would queue for their autographs Freddy Trueman would never sign, [laughter 0:3:37] and yet he became a good friend of mine in later life.

I: (laughter)

R: And it was just the most exotic day out, and because I was only 11 my mum realised how much I loved it so she used to take me sometimes on a Saturday. And if she wasn't available, somebody else knew how much I wanted to go, so there would always be somebody willing to take me along. But that was my first memory. Absolutely. And then my Uncle at Baildon where I've been involved since the age of 8, reached the Priestley Cup Final and we played Keighley and we made 233 for 7 and bowled them all out for about 105. A chap called Wilf Birkenshaw got a hat trick, I've still got the pictures of that by the way, and so we won the Priestley Cup and that is another memory that is just engraved in my brain, it'll never go away.

I: Hmm (laughter)

R: And I'm proud, I'm proud of the fact that my club has played there, I got to play there as well and that I have been connected with an iconic stadium.

I: Hmm.

R: It really is iconic.

I: Yeah. And do you think that those early memories of Park Avenue inspired your career?

R: Oh without question! There is absolutely no question. As I said to ya, I've loved sport from the day I was born I'm convinced but at the age of 8 I had a massive incident in my life, which has affected my life because I broke my leg in 3 places in a bicycle accident near home, I was going round a bend and the breaks failed and the only way I could come off was going round the bend and I smashed my leg all over the place. I was in plaster 12 months.

I: Wow

R: And in a way, it put a stop towards any aspirations to play Football. Wearing glasses didn't help at 8 either. England didn't pick too many bespeckled centre forwards, but it didn't affect my Cricket so I still had that ambition, that love, that desire to play for Yorkshire. I wanted to play for Yorkshire, I was a decent bowler and the biggest irony is, that my best friend now Geoff Cope became a great Yorkshire and England bowler, he probably nicked my place. No I am joking, because I wasn't as good as 'im, but yes it definitely nurtured and helped shape my career because I had something to relate to.

And I got to know all those great players, and I think when you have been as fortunate as I have throughout my career, to be involved in sport without actually playing it, I do...I play golf and I play 1 or 2 other sports, but I've always cherished what they've got. I've always thought what a wonderful life it must be to be a top sportsman and yeah, I know that some in a way envy me because of longevity.

I: Hmm.

R: And I've been involved [sigh 0:6:22] 82 now... since the age of 17, professionally. So how incredible is that? 65 years involved in sport. But no sportsman on Earth can possibly achieve just as a performer.

I: That's true, definitely. [0:6:39 laughter] and could you tell me a bit more about your career?

R: Yes, I mean it started on... it's amazing that you're interviewing me today which is August 14th 2024, on Saturday I will have been working exactly 65 years. August 17th 1959, I left Salt Grammar School here in Shipley, where a certain Cricketer named Jim Laker went, who went on to play for England. And I started work at the Shipley Times and Express. In those days, 1959, there was 2 weekly newspapers in Shipley, now there are none. I joined the Shipley Times and

Express and also the Shipley Guardian. And my remit then was to do anything, I used to cover the local councils, and the court meetings. I used to get drenched walking through the streets on a Monday getting the local derby and [\*\* 0:7:28] results and things like that. As all juniors did.

I: Hmm.

R: That was your upbringing. That was your training as a journalist, junior reporter. And I was there 7 years. Which is probably... People might think "that's a long time" but I was really grateful for every second of that. And my first sport for them was covering the local Football team- Salt's from the Mill, in the Yorkshire league and I was so excited when I got to find out that I was travelling with the team, cos even though they were amateurs, heroes again to me, I'll even name you the team now.

Dixon was the goalkeeper, Murray and Ormondroyd the 2 full backs, Stables [\*\* 0:8:08] and Johnny Holdsworth were what were called half backs, Sid Holdsworth, Geoff Dean, Jo Nunn, Terry Regan, Lorry Hardy. That's the first match that I ever covered, that's the team. That's how much it means to me, the fact that it's retained in there. So I was 7 years and then in 1966, good year that, a certain England won the World Cup.

I: (Laughter)

R: I was asked to join The Yorkshire Post and I had 4 years on the morning post and the evening post and strangely enough that's where I met Geoff Cope. I was the one that had to gently break the news to him that he'd been banned from Cricket and we have been firm friends ever since. And after 4 years at The Yorkshire Post, doing a bit of sport, but still as a general news reporter the BBC approached me and I couldn't believe it because I was such a devotee of BBC radio in particular, I used to listen to all the great commentators of the time, oo y'know Raymond Glendenning and John Arlott. These names will mean nothing to you because you are a young lady, but they were true legends in sport. Every sport had one great commentator in those days, now there are hundreds of 'em.

I: (Laughter)

R: So I got approached to become the sports editor of BBC Radio Leeds, which I accepted and I was there several years and the biggest break I ever had was in 1974 when I was asked to represent the whole of the local radio stations, 20 of them in the country, at the Commonwealth Games at Christchurch in New Zealand. And as a result of what I did there, I did 275 reports, interviews, commentaries, I was offered full time work at the BBC in London and I went down there to present the Saturday afternoon show, which is now 5Live and to produce as well and to cut a long story short, they were the best years of my life.

I was working with some of the most talented broadcaster's ever. The aforementioned John Arlott and Brain Johnstone, Desmond Lynam, Jim Rosenthal, Alan Parry, Christopher Martin

Jenkins. The names roll off the tongue, and that was the real making of me I think. Cos you had to aspire to be as good as they were.

I: Hmm.

R: And I was there for 6 years, and then I was made Head of Outside Broadcasts for the BBC in Manchester, which I did for a year and at the completion of that year, Yorkshire television came and asked me to become their chief commentator and sports presenter, which I did until...Ooo I dunno, about 2012 or 13. And since then, my work has mostly been with people like FIFA, a company called HBS which is the broadcast arm of FIFA. And basically, this sounds terrible but they've sent me all around the world commentating on football matches.

I: Hmm.

R: Golf, other sports and in the last few years I've done a lot of work in Asia, particularly in Japan, China, Malaysia, Singapore- covering Asian games, Asian Cups, so I'm very proud to say that I've done 10 Football World Cups.

I: Wow.

R: 6 Olympic Games, plenty of Asian games, Asian Cups, 39 different sports in 90 countries.

I: Wow.

R: So if that covers it, I hope I've not bored you. That just about covers it. I don't think that anybody could 'ave anticipated a career like that.

I: No, that's amazing!

R: Hmm.

I: That is a fantastic career.

R: Yeah, and a long one! And still going if anybody is out there wanting a football commentator, I'm ya' man.

I: Yeah, brilliant!

R: No seriously Gemma, I'm still as enthusiastic today as I was August 17th 1959. I did a tournament at Newcastle United at the weekend. I did... People don't realise I did 3 matches in 2 days, that's an awful lot of preparation and a lot of hard work and climbing gantry's and things like that. You'd have to keep fit, mentally and physically. But there's no looking back, it's just been amazing.

I: Wow.

R: Nothing to go back for.

I: Yeah.

R: Even if I don't work ever again, I couldn't complain.

I: Yeah. And did you get to commentate on anything at Park Avenue? Or wait was that too...

R: I've done some commentaries at Bradford Park Avenue, yes I did. In terms of football, I've done a few matches- one where we got promoted. I did the match, I think I burst into tears when a lad called Tom Greaves scored the winning goal against FC United. And Bradford were promoted into the National League North. But Cricket wise, I did. When I joined Yorkshire TV in 1981, part of the remit was that we did do County Championship Cricket matches, and I got the opportunity just once, Yorkshire were playing Nottinghamshire.

And this was in the days of Geoffrey Boycott, who had a century opening partnership with Ashley Metcalfe, in the days of David Bairstow. Phil Carrick- people like that and I was commentating on the match all...I can't remember 3 or 4 days, probably a 4 day game. And that was another dream come true. Here I am, in my dream home, actually getting the chance to talk about what's going on here in the company of Fred Trueman. Who played in that very first game, and a fella called Peter Parfitt, who was a former Middlesex and England left handed batsman. They were my co-coms and I'd to interview the players and trot up and down the dressing room.

And by the way, when I played at Baildon, that's where I practised at Park Avenue at the nets Tuesdays and Thursdays. And I used to go and bowl in the nets and bat in the nets of Park Avenue. And I've got dozens of memories of matches, there's always one that makes me laugh.

Everybody knows Dickie Bird, who's the most famous Umpire there has ever been. And I was there once as a small boy when Dickie made 181 against Glamorgan. He was only in the team because somebody else had been picked for England and he was...the back-up. He waved his bat as he walked off having scored 181. And he looked up and there were the committee, sitting to pick the team for the next match. And he thought "I've got 181 I'm in the team" and as he got there they said " Well done Bird, you're in the second team tomorrow". HA! They dropped him after scoring 181, because the other player was back and Dickie has never forgotten that, and never allows anyone to forget it either.

I: (Laughter)

R: It was a magical moment. And there are so many magical memories as well. I mentioned Fred Trueman there, he bowled in what we call an 'arc' his run up was in an arc, but boy was he quick! And he terrified the opposition batsman. And I actually did radio commentary there. I got

the opportunity when I was at 5Live. I made sure they kept sending me up to Bradford, to work on Sunday Sport or things like that. So yeah, it was home from home as I say.

I: Hmm, and you, I mean, you mentioned some already but are there any other special memories or stories to do with the actual ground at Park Avenue that you can think of?

R: Yes, my worst memory was in 1970 when we got kicked out of the Football League. So, I was the sports presenter of Radio Leeds at the time. And so it was my job to go to Park Avenue, to find people to talk about Vox Bops, in a way the chairman of the club, the manager Laurie Brown at the time. Other people and I was obviously in tears again when I went back to the studio to present this story of the demise of my club, dropping out of the Football League after all those when I supported them, they'd been a top team. They'd beaten Arsenal, they'd beaten Manchester United and Manchester City and now all of a sudden we'd been kicked out of the League.

And then when it came to demolishing the ground, which happened a couple of years later, they played there for a couple of years in the Northern Premier League. And then it was decided that they were going to demolish the ground, which again broke my heart. And there was a centerpiece of the main stand, which was absolutely iconic- which is the right word for it. Very similar to the one at Fulham at Craven Cottage and we had a dolls house in the corner. And I asked to grab some memorabilia from this centrepiece, and I was promised that I could have it. And I never got it, and I won't say that broke my heart, that's a little too dramatic to say, but it would have been a wonderful reminder for me of so many great times and so many happy memories.

Great player's y'know? And wonderful people. The spectators, y'know I can still see now the faces of some of those spectators. There was a big, thin lad called. Think he was Ted, he was either Ted or Eddie, and he always stood in the same place on the terracing behind the goal, and woe betide anybody who came across him. And then we had a group of supporters, who again always took the same spot, people always have their favourite vantage point. And I used to, at one time I was always below a wall, peering over the top of the wall.

And then years later, after the ground had closed, I was filming for Yorkshire Television and took 2 or 3 old players Bill Barnes, Malcolm Lawton I remember. And we went back to see what was left of the old ground. There was now a Cricket School there. But they had a key and allowed us through, the old turnstiles were there. And there was a lot of grass, it was getting very overgrown. We could see the penalty area, and you could see the...the barriers that people used to lean on. And just, I don't know. There was just something about it that sent an eerie shudder through ya, thinking "this is where Stanley Matthews, one of the greatest footballers of all time played". "There were 32 thousand people who once watched a match". "This is where we beat Manchester".

Y'know and it is heartbreaking. It really is heartbreaking. And yeah, you move onto a new home, but you never lose that sense of love. For your first home.

I: What do you think it was about the Park Avenue Ground that was so, you know, so special to people?

R: It was...Easy on the eye. We had the dolls house in the corner, and I've just given you a little programme that which you can. You can see, as I say it was very similar to Fulham, people love Fulham's ground which is the side of the river Thames, because of the doll's house and the dressing rooms and this wonderful stand was part of the reason, this two sided stand where you could watch the Cricket and the Football. And a wonderful score box, it was green and white, and you had the numbers for how many runs each batsman had scored and the total in the centre. The number of the wickets, the number 9 and number 11 or whatever it was and the last wicket. It was just... I dunno. And the fact that it was a bit of a bowl- so no matter where you sat in the ground you had a wonderful view.

As I say, on a Saturday morning when Fred Trueman ran in to bowl the first ball, the crowd would rawr him in. "OOOOOOOOOO", you never forgot that. And the wickets he took, and the characters that played there from the other Counties as well, they all loved playing at Park Avenue. Because it was a very, very good cricketing venue. And it was just different to anywhere else, different to Headingley, which with all due respect is more corporate. Different to Sheffield, which is more open at Bramall Lane. Different to Hull- the circle. It was, it's always hard to describe, the individuality of a stadium, but Park Avenue was just special. And you could get there by walking there from the Chester Street Bus Station.

There was a train station right next to it as well. There was a low stand where you could see all of this behind the stand. Which was the least popular viewing stand, by the way. And it was, it was the hub. We used to travel on the bus with the players, y'know? You used to get t'Chester Street or somewhere or there'd be a bus coming or at Horton Park Avenue. And there'd be players! Goalkeeper Brain Taylor, "can we have your autograph Brain" "of course you can" y'know. Then after the game, standing outside the dressing rooms by the dolls house. All the players would come out, and all sign their autographs for these eager little lads all in our school caps.

And it just had a different aura to anywhere else. And it was...They won't mind me saying this, a much nicer ground than Valley Parade. Even though my dad was a Bradford City fan, as soon as I said "sorry dad I'm Park Avenue", he went "that's fine, no problem" and it was easier on the eye than Valley Parade, always has been, always will be.

I: So, you spoke quite a lot about the Cricket side, what about the Football side? Do you have, well can you tell me about how that looked and felt?

R: Well that was the Football side.

I: Oh! Okay.

R: That was sort of, well that was the Football side. Well it was a combination of the two.



I: Yeah.

R: Yeah. Yes I mean I'm sorry I probably didn't relate it as well as you would have liked. The Football side, as I say had this dolls house.

I: Yeah.

R: And the big stand. Whereas the Cricket side had a Pavilion from which the players used to walk, coming down to take... To go onto the pitch. They had to open a gate to go out and take a step down, to then walk out to take the crease to have a bat. And that was more oval, which conjures up images, I can show you pictures. Where the Football pitch was obviously more rectangular. But the dolls house absolutely dominated it, and the centrepiece of the stand. But it was just that double sided stand, and every now and again somebody would hit a 6 at the Cricket, right over the stand into the Football. Could, could be running down the wing and a cricket ball is coming at ya.

I: (Laughter)

R: So y'know, the memories are just to be cherished. And to be never forgotten, it's in your mind's eye. And there's a guy called Paul Town, who's very good, who's an artist and he painted for me, a picture of Park Avenue. And it depicts my early life really, and it just sums it up. It's so finite, the colours of the players, the turnstiles as I say, the terracing, the spectators with their flat caps in those days.

I: Hmm.

R: And maybe a fag hanging out of their mouths. Yeah it's just something that lives with you forever.

I: Hmm. And you have touched on this a little bit, but because you went there when you were so young and you've obviously had such a long career. But how do you feel about the changes to the ground over the years and also kind of the community around it?

R: Well community is a very interesting thing, because there is a very large immigrant population in Bradford and obviously many, many people live in the vicinity of that ground and many have got involved, which is great! How it's changed, is sad in terms of both Football and Cricket. I mentioned the last time I went inside the Football Ground- as it was, virtually unrecognisable now and y'know there was just the odd semblance of a turnstile, a bit of terracing, but it's so overgrown. Which is tragic, from my perspective. Absolutely tragic as it was such a wonderful viewing theatre, if you like.

Cricket is at least still being played at Park Avenue. And I think maybe they have had a 20/20 match or something like that but there is a team that plays there on a regular basis. And many

of those players are now Asian, which of course, there were none in those first days when I played there, apart from when England were playing India.

I: Hmm.

R: So, it reflects the way that culture has changed in the city as well. There's no question about that. The majority of Bradford League clubs now do have Asian players. We have 2 or 3 at Baildon and, y'know, there are some which are totally Asian. That region in particular in Bradford is massively populated by Indians, Pakistani's, people from Bangladesh. All over. All over that continent.

I: Yeah.

R: So, the change is one that reflects our age. I think that's fair to say, because growing up I know in Baildon 'ere we had one black gentleman, he played rugby for Bradford Northern, wonderful fella called, I think George Bennett was his name. Lovely man, my mother loved him as guy, he was a lovely guy. But literally that was the only black face you saw. I don't mind talking about that. So Bradford now clearly has thousands, y'know we've had goodness knows how many Lord Mayors have been from Pakistan and India. Absolutely fine, no problem with that.

So Park Avenue had to go through changes, because the Football side in 1970, when I mentioned us dropping out of the league, had been very poorly run, very amateurly run. A chap called Herbert Metcalfe took it over and he actually appointed his postman as manager, which was, it was the beginning of the end for us because the Football League at that time used to be an old palsack, whoever the 2 teams at the bottom were had to seek re-election into the Football League. And everybody voted for everybody else because it could be them the following year. Then when these sorts of things happened at Park Avenue, and we finished bottom 3 years running, the rest of the League said "enough is enough, I'm sorry but you are out of the league".

And from that moment on, the ground, which is what you are interested in, obviously deteriorated because there weren't as many people coming to watch, the revenue wasn't there. Eventually we moved to Valley Parade to play in Bradford City's stadium. Park Avenue as a Football venue, just got lost, it just had to come down. It was a crumbling edifice. So they moved up to Horsfall Stadium where they have played for many years now. They didn't move there initially they moved to Bramley Rugby League ground, McLaren Park, McLaren Field. Then they moved to Mount Pleasant at Batley, won some promotions there as well.

Then eventually to Horsfall where we have been for quite a long time now. And it's got a running track and I mean it's perfectly fine for the level of Football that we're playing at. But it will never ever replace Park Avenue in the hearts of the devotees. And there are still, by the way Gemma Many, many fans who went to the old Park Avenue back in the 50's and 60's, who are still going

to watch Park Avenue at Horsfall because we, that's our club. Just because it died as a Football League Club doesn't mean to say that you stop supporting them.

And we've had to go through such tough times, over 10 or 11 promotions. We started back out as a Sunday League team. But got up to within 2 divisions of the Football League again. But sadly we've not made those last two steps.

I: Hmm.

R: But there are still many people going. As for the Cricket, I think it's used on a Saturday and a Sunday, Yorkshire themselves have plans for it. Which I would like to see. It did have a revival, don't ask me when. And I remember going there too, it was in Michael Bevens era, he was a player there and Martin Moxen was the Captain, and Yorkshire played a few more County Championship games there, put up a marquee and it was perfectly acceptable. But eventually, because of the need of more revenue at Headingley they dumped Avenue again [phone sound 027:41]. Now there's always been somebody who wants to revive it.

I: Hmm.

R: It used to be Bob Appleyard, a great player, and they're well, as you know there's a lot of talk about them going back to Park Avenue now at some level, but it won't be County Championship level because the facilities are just not there for that. But it has been sad to see it deteriorate.

I: Yeah. And do you have any memories from the ground that isn't Football or Cricket? So any other events or anything that you kind of, special memory of anything else?

R: Well I mean in terms of yes, with the Football, because in 1962 did I say...63? 60, 61, 62, 63, they opened the floodlights and of all teams to play, Park Avenue played Czechoslovakia who went on to reach the World Cup Final and it was a fantastic night. I mean floodlights were very much new on the Football scene at that time so for Park Avenue, being one of the first clubs that got these floodlights it was amazing. For us to play a team of the standing of Czechoslovakia was amazing as well. And we only lost 3:2, a guy called Ian Gibson, who was one of our best players scored for Park Avenue, there was an own goal as well a fella called Popluhár. And Czechoslovakia beat us 3:2 and went on to play in the World Cup Final. So that was a night of great moments. Great joy. Because we were playing one of the most famous teams in the world.

The other one, which is just an individual one was we were drawn against Middlesbrough in the FA Cup and my dad wouldn't let me go. No sorry it was Manchester City! We'd beaten Middlesbrough. And then we were drawn against Manchester City, not quite as famous as they were now, but they were still a top team. And me dad said "Oh you'll get crushed", y'know, imagine that? Getting crushed at Park Avenue, and he wouldn't let me go and it broke my heart. Anyway, we got beaten 5:2.

Many, many matches, I remember one against York City where we were 1 nil down, minute to go, whoever I was with, it wasn't me dad said "come on we're off, we'll get out before the crowd". As we went out there was a big rawr and Park Avenue equalised and by the time we'd got across the road, they'd scored again and we'd won the match 2-1.

I: (Laughter)

R: So that was another one. There are many many football, another where we came from 3 nil down to beat Workington 4-3. Great players like Kevin Hector, who scored the record number of goals in a season. 44 in the whole of England. Went on to join Derby County and from the moment he left the club went downhill. We sold him for £32,500 to Derby and we won again on the following Saturday. I think we beat Crewe, didn't win another match all season. And that's when we went out.

I: Hmm.

R: Went downhill from then on. So there are many individual matches, many individual players. On the Cricket side again, I used to love it when the touring teams came. I mentioned Australia in 1953. But I saw the West Indies play there, I saw... Did I see Pakistan? India! I saw India. So those were just dream moments for a young kid who was a bit of a star gazer I suppose.

I: Yeah. Wow, that's great. I mean I think that's everything that I have to ask, unless you can think of anything else specifically?

R: Well, I mean obviously I know you're keen to talk about the stadium as such, but there's only so many things you can say about a Cricket ground or a Football ground. We all have our iconic grounds. If you're an Arsenal supporter it was Highbury, if you're a Huddersfield Town supporter it was Leeds Road. The modern grounds tend to be a bit more synthetic. And don't evoke quite the same memories as they do for people of my vintage. I think we all had a fantastic adoration for the grounds that our teams played in. We just absolutely adored going there.

There was a different atmosphere because I think the crowd was different in those days, the people were different, people dressed differently. People acted differently, y'know? The teams played differently. Park Avenue when I was a boy, this might not mean much to you, what was called a 2-3-5 formation, 2 full-backs, 3 half-backs and 5 forwards! No team now would dream of putting 5 forwards on. It's either 4-1-4-1 or 4-2 or 4-3-3, so there were more goals scored. It was more of an extravaganza, it was more of a party atmosphere I suppose in many ways. And it wasn't just a social occasion, it was a proper Football match that you were going to watch.

Whereas nowadays it's all about the merchandising, all the kids have got to have tops on with the names of their favourite players. It's a marketing exercise, you can't get an autograph nowadays of top players. Yes Bradford City level dare I say you probably can, but if you go to Manchester United, Manchester City, you don't get near a Footballer. That to me is really sad.

I: Yeah.

R: Because they have lost touch with the people who support the game.

I: Yeah.

R: The genuine fans.

I: Yeah.

R: There's no empathy between the player and fan anymore. So that was one of the biggest differences. And Park Avenue always used to encourage that, y'know, they loved it. Both the Cricket and the Football and they would come and mix with you after the game y'know they'd be at the bar, y'know i'd be a bit young then. But they would mix with the fans and talk to them about the game afterwards and as I say travel on the bus to the game with them. Cricket not quite the same but there again the Cricketers did go into the bar afterwards. They'd always spend half an hour in the dressing room discussing they days play, what had to be done the next day and then they would mingle with all the supporters. And they wouldn't be talking about the Cricket either, they would be talking about them and what their jobs were. Just a different way of life I suppose.

I: Hmm. That's really interesting.

R: Hmm.

I: And it's especially interesting to hear how your experience of Park Avenue and the ground has inspired your career and kind of fueled that passion that you had.

R: Yeah, very much. And I have been very fortunate. I think Geoff mentioned Bobby Ham. Bobby's been instrumental in my life in many ways as well. Because I admired him as a Footballer when he played with this guy Kevin Hector, scored a lot of goals for us moved to Bradford City played against Tottenham in the FA Cup. Then, he played for several clubs. And he's always been close with me and he typifies the players of that time and there are a few of them that live in Baildon. There's still some ex-players. More Bradford City than Park Avenue actually, still living in this region. And if ever I bump into them it's fantastic, they have a golf day, y'know ex-park avenue players golf day. And they were just more in touch with the people and the public.

They weren't paid vast amounts of money in those days. But they were still our heroes. That's the amazing thing, they really were our heroes. You've seen that book with all the cartoons of those players in, with the hair parting down the middle. We had a goalkeeper called Chick Farr who wore a flat cap, and he would dribble the ball up to the halfway line. If a goalkeeper did that today, the manager would go absolutely mental with them. But he was a character, they were all

characters in those days which you don't quite get the same. And it's sad, every now and again you see that one has passed away, cos most of those players now are in their 80's I suppose.

I: Hmm.

R: But we, there's still that colossal affection for those names because... Yeah, yeah I will say this, it's not as though I shouldn't say it. But more players of 5-10 years ago, we can't remember those. I can't remember the names of people who played 5, 10, 15 years ago because they come and go so quickly now.

I: Yeah.

R: You used to have testimonials where players did 10 years with one club. There was a greater affinity between player and club. That was their football club, you were Park Avenue, you were Bradford City, you were Leeds United.

I: Hmm.

R: Nowadays, players go. Every season they'll change clubs and hav 10 clubs in their career. So the supporters don't get that opportunity to build a friendship, an association, a link with them like they used to do.

I: Hmm. Yeah that's a shame isn't it?

R: Hmm. As for the grounds, I mean they are different. Football more than Cricket in a sense that most of the new football stadiums are fantastic. A lot of them are fantastic, even the small ones, like York City have just moved into a new one. Very, very nice, but it ain't got that atmosphere that the old grounds used to have. With the smell of Bovril, the Wagon Wheels that you used to eat... And there was all these ladies serving on who everybody knew, it would be Agnes or whatever. Now again back to it being corporate and its, it's just different. It's just very, very different.

I: Hmm.

R: As I say the bottom football stadiums are very nice, they're well appointed, they're clean and I don't know if you know that I was sadly the commentator on the Bradford City fire in 1985. And that changed so many, many things. Not just me and my life I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about the Stadium, because they were, I won't use the word death traps, but they were wooden. Basically, that's what happened at Bradford, they were all wooden seats and the fire started with some paper beneath a wooden seat. Now there are hardly any stadiums anywhere that are just wooden. 1 or 2 still, but people aren't allowed to smoke either of course.

So in those days, you'd look around the ground and the cameras would focus on people and half would be smoking probably.

I: Hmm.

R: But at Park Avenue there was always a good atmosphere between the players and the supporters. Who were so close to them, y'know you could virtually reach out, from when I was saying to you about sitting by the rope against Australia I could have reached out and touched them. They'd come and sign an autograph maybe. Dunt happen in football, absolutely no chance.

I: Hmm.

R: But the old Park Avenue Football Ground was all wooden seats and everything. But thank god nothing ever happened there. But it was just different.

I: Yeah.

R: Little Kiosks, little kiosks with say one person selling you fruit gums and your meat pies and goodness knows what else. Y'Bovrils...

I: (Laughter)

R: Now, it's a bar that's a million miles long and they're doing absolutely everything. From burgers to steak sandwiches to bottles of wine, y'know? They sell alcohol nowadays. Which you would never have got.

I: No.

R: You had to go to a bar to get a drink after a match. You could not have possibly gotten one during the game.

I: Hmm.

R: So I'm sorry but I can't really add much more than that.

I: Nope, that's brilliant. Thank you so much.

R: No, No.

I: That's great!