

Friern Barnet & District Local History Society

INTERVIEW BETWEEN DAVID BERGUER AND PETE ABBOTT AT 46 RALEIGH DRIVE, WHETSTONE, N20 ON TUESDAY 1 FEBRUARY 2011

DB When were you born?

PA 1962.

DB Where did you go to school?

PA I went to Primary School in East End Lane, Finchley, then I went to a place in Muswell Hill called Norfolk House.

DB Whereabouts in Muswell Hill was that?

PA It was in Muswell Avenue – it was a disaster.

DB Was it like a big house?

PA Yes. Then I went to a boarding school called Haileybury in Hertfordshire.

DB When you started work what did you do?

PA I worked at Owen Owens in North Finchley, working in the record department and then my immediate boss at the time who has since become a very good friend, he got a job working for a company that did street markets, selling records. It was bit of a Del boy scenario. They had a thing in Yarmouth for the summer season, so I went there for the summer and then ended up when that finished I worked for Oddbins for five years.

DB So you're an expert on wine now?

PA Certainly not.

DB Were you doing any radio stuff?

PA Yes I used to do a mobile disco and started at Radio Friern when I was seventeen until I was about twenty two.

DB How did you hear about the opportunity at Friern?

PA Mark Young told me about it. I wanted to get involved with radio for a long time and I thought this would be an ideal start. I'm not sure it was though. It probably did help in some small way.

DB So what was the set up at Friern, did you have your own studio there?

PA It was a tiny little space in assort of attic. You had to go up these very narrow stairs and it was a room that time forgot.

DB In the main central building?

PA Yes. I went in the main door and it was in one of the corridors, I couldn't exactly tell you where. It was a tiny little studio and you could get three people in it at any one time. It did the job and it was quite a popular thing at the time with the patients.

DB So were you responsible for the whole thing?

PA No. I just came in on a Sunday morning.

DB So what did your breakfast show consist of?

PA We didn't have access to a lot of music to be honest. We paid subs every month which went to buying records.

DB So you bought your own records?

PA The station would buy those records – popular tunes at the time, but I would go in with my own stuff as well. And you used to get people phoning up requesting things. It was a combination of all that.

DB So how many other people were involved?

PA Quite a few. Not many when I started because it was just Saturday and ad Sunday when I started. When I first started it was just a handful of people. Pete Hill ran the whole thing by this stage.

DB Was it broadcast throughout the hospital?

PA Throughout the wards.

DB And did you come across the patients?

PA All the time. The less dangerous ones would walk around all the time. I remember there was a guy I used to see quite a lot who would attempt to give me a potato. You got to know certain people and to talk to them. There was a guy who had been a football referee when he was young – he was a black guy – but he was a train driver who had a breakdown because he hit people, not just once but three or four times and a couple of kids towards the end and this was what forced him over the edge. He was very knowledgeable about football. He was in his sixties then, so he was talking about football from the fifties, before my time.

- DB I can think of several referees who should be in a lunatic asylum. Have you got any other memories of the hospital?
- PA I saw Cheryl Holt who used to come in after me and her husband also worked there as well. He is a photographer who will definitely have some photographs but don't get too excited because he has got millions so finding the relevant ones is going to be a bit tricky. One thing I remember about the place is the smell of it. It had a completely unique smell that I have never smelled since, even in hospital. It was a combination of bleach, that kind of sanitised smell that you get in hospitals, but with a strong undertone of food. The two mixed together made this very odd and although I was there four or five years it was the first thing that hit you and I never got used to it. I remember they had Open Days on the big field outside and they were always quite interesting and you never knew what was going to happen. A lot of the patients were mingling around with everyone else and I remember an antique fire engine from Enfield Fire Station and some of the patients scramble on top. They had those once a year and they were well attended. In all the years I was there, I probably never saw a tenth of it.
- DB Did you prepare a script for your Sunday show?
- PA Not really, I would have some sort of idea what music I would play.
- PB How did you get to the studio?
- PA There was a little door that you would miss if you didn't know it was there up some stairs. There was a broom cupboard underneath.
- PB What size records were they – 45s?
- PA Yes, no CDs, it was all vinyl stuff.
- PB Did you get involved with any sport there?
- PA No I never saw any of that but we did some sort of therapy with the patients in one of the big halls. One of the things I remember was that the place was very shiny the interior was that shiny paint that was on everything, ceilings, walls, floors. The other thing was the shops on the other side of the road, the little newsagent used to sell single cigarettes 2p each.
- DB After Oddbins, how did you get into radio.
- PA I was applying for jobs and I got a letter from someone who suggested an organisation called the National Broadcasting School was doing courses in London so I went on that and that got me a couple of football jobs for LBC and that petered out then I got a job in a big place in Marble Arch called Spillers & Lee, huge record store that had its own radio station so I got a job running that. Ten they went bust and I got made redundant. I got a call about a month later from HMV in Oxford Street so I ran their in store radio station. Then I went to the States, in Florida, and worked on a radio station there. It was great fun, although

it's OK for two weeks but two and a half years when it never gets cold ever, it gets on your nerves. Then I came back and got a job with Clubcall the telephone information and one of the clubs was Spurs.

DB Were you a Tottenham supporter?

PA Oh, yes. Then Spurs liked what I did for them. So I do this gig for them for the last 18 years. I do a lot of stuff for Talk Sport.

DB Are you given a free rein at Tottenham? Do you write your own scripts?

PA Not any more. When I first started at Spurs you could talk to anyone. Now the players are more media savvy now. Spurs do keep a tight rein on them now because one wrong word ...the press can't really get to them. The only access is when there is a press conference. Some journalists will have some of the players' phone numbers but certainly not all of them. Players by and large don't like talking to the press because they have all been stitched up.