

MAN

21 May to 25 May 2012

John Yeowell works in the glass-fronted building across the road from where you are now.

Every day this week, at 1pm, he will stand at the window next to his desk on the sixth floor. He will stay there for fifteen minutes, looking down at you.

Who is John Yeowell?

John is the facilities manager for a firm of solicitors at 1 London Wall. His job is to make sure the office is a good place to work: that post arrives on time, that the building is secure and that staff know how major events in the city, like the Olympics, will affect their work.

John is 46 and lives near Gillingham with his partner and their two children, Grace and Henry. Each morning he cycles to Gillingham station on a bike he bought through his company's bike-to-work scheme. All being well, he catches the 7.05am train and arrives at City Thameslink station at 7.55am. His working day lasts from 8am until 4.30pm. Outside these hours people get hold of John on his Blackberry, on his "ball and chain".

John grew up in Brockley, South East London. He often thinks back to riding go-carts on Telegraph Hill and using "jumpers for goalposts" in Hilly Fields. On summer evenings, John and his friends organized 20-a-side football matches; they would play out until their parents came to find them. When he caught sight of his dad approaching, John would scram-

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ble up a tree. His dad, who ran a shipping company on the Old Kent Road, would not wait around for him to climb down. He knew John would come home when he got hungry.

John feels privileged to have grown up in an area influenced by so many different cultures. He especially enjoyed living close to the black community in and around New Cross. As a teenager he discovered the music of the Caribbean. He still listens to Bob Marley and Jimmy Cliff. He also remembers witnessing the community's pain after the Deptford Fire. On 18 January 1981, thirteen young black men and women died in a house fire; the cause remains unknown. John recalls the difficulties people faced raising money for the relatives of those who died, and the unrest that followed the investigations into how the fire started.

John left school in 1983. His first job was in the archives of a barristers' chambers in Lincoln's Inn, just off the Strand. He had always been interested in the legal profession; his mum worked for many years as a court stenographer at the Old Bailey. He remembers once being told off for not running between the Inn's red-brick buildings. The senior clerk said it showed he was not working hard enough. John thinks if you plan your day properly, there is never a need to run. He left to work for firm of solicitors. It was here he met his partner. They were friends for a long time before they started seeing each other. They have been together for 18 years.

John loves cars. His first car was a snot-green Mini. He bought it for £250 when he was 18. According to the mechanic who did its first MOT, it had more holes than floor. John regards the cars he has owned as part of his identity. He now drives a BMW. His dream car is an Audi A8 Spider -

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one with a finger-switch gearbox and cream leather upholstery. Last year he got to drive one at Silverstone. He had a smile on his face the whole way round the track. His son, Henry, drives a Ford Fiesta Ghia. It's newer than John's BMW.

John likes his job. He enjoys sorting out colleagues' problems and being known as "the man who can". But at the weekend he needs to find ways of having time to himself. Most Saturday mornings he goes for a bike ride. Dressed in lycra - "the full works" - he cycles for an hour on a route that steers clear of the railway station. Ideally, he does not see another soul. Sometimes he will go for a drive instead.

This summer John is hoping to spend as much time as possible in the garden at the back of his house. His family enjoys having barbeques out there when they can. It's a garden with roses and a tall Tasmanian tree fern. The fern is called Fred after John's grandfather who died five years ago. Fred lived most of his life with polio. He was a great gardener. Like John, he could grow roses. When Fred died he left John some money. John used it to buy the fern.

'Man in Window' is an artwork by Svein Moxvold and Guy Atkins.

The purpose is to direct attention to the so-called anonymous personalities that surround us every day and which the majority of us are a part of. Those who aren't celebrities, but who (as it turns out) have more than equally interesting stories to tell as we get to know them better.

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